

“Topic Poetry Is All Ours”: Poetic Composition on Chinese Lines in Early Heian Japan

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A CHALLENGE in reading classical Chinese or Japanese poetry is to understand what is left unstated in the poems yet is indispensable to enjoying them. Echoes from the poet's school curriculum or private library, and from contemporary assumptions or local lore, add a surplus of meaning that the poems do not explicitly state yet that is crucial to our understanding of them. Teasing out these unarticulated meanings is a challenge for the modern scholar who wants to communicate an appreciation of these poems. First, the scholar must confront the practical problem of translation and annotation. How much and what kind of annotations are healthy for the poem itself and for our modern readers? Second, the scholar must be aware of hermeneutical pitfalls created by canonization and literary history. To what extent do we let later concepts of the literary canon influence our interpretations of particular poets and poems?

This article seeks answers to these questions by exploring the particular case of the uniquely Japanese genre of Heian Topic Poetry (*kudai-shi* 句題詩), a regulated *kanshi* on a line from a Chinese poem or on a “topic phrase” (*kudai* 句題). To address the question of annotation,

I would like to thank Satō Michio, Yamada Naoko, Todokoro Kumiko, Wang Yugen, Li Wai-yee, and the two anonymous referees for *HJAS* for comments and suggestions that have greatly improved this paper.

I argue that sprawling annotation can be reduced if we make a clear distinction between the “intertextual” and “intertopical” engagements a poem has with its literary precedents and if we content ourselves with pointing to intertextual engagements in our annotations, but not necessarily to intertopical or lexical overlaps. Such a clarification will also enable us to sympathize more accurately with the creative process through which Heian poets produced their poetry. What I call “intertopicality” is less explicit than a specific intertextual reference to a previous poem but involves more than a random lexical confluence between the two poems. It describes a poet’s reliance on a repertoire of topic clusters, which was determined by the season, place, and occasion of composition, and which the poet acquired by both studying previous poetry and internalizing the categories of topically arranged poetic encyclopedias.¹

Applying the distinction between the “intertextual” and the “intertopical” to answer the question about canonization and literary history, I argue that early Heian Topic Poetry should be interpreted with an eye on Chinese poetry, whereas late Heian poetry needs to be better appreciated than it has thus far been as being in dialogue with *waka* poetry and as developing independently from the Chinese tradition. Early Heian Topic Poems are predominantly written on lines from actual Chinese poems and show specific intertextual engagements with their reference poems. Indeed, some early Heian poets were extremely inventive in appropriating Chinese lines and tailoring them to their own occasion and purpose. By contrast, late Heian poets moved away from using lines from actual Chinese poems and instead composed their Topic Poems on invented “topic lines.” Thus, for the late Heian period, we must shift our gaze from an intertextual engagement with Chinese poetry to the intertopical dialogue between *kudaishi*, that is Sino-Japanese Topic Poetry, and the *waka* tradition.

Assumptions about literary history deeply influence what we expect in the way of a dialogue between a poem and its poetic tradition. In

¹ My reflections on intertextuality in the context of premodern East Asian poetry draw upon: Edward Kamens, *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Haruo Shirane, “Lyricism and Intertextuality: An Approach to Shunzei’s Poetics,” *HJAS* 50.1 (1990): 71–85; David Bialock, “Voice, Text, and the Question of Poetic Borrowing in Late Classical Japanese Poetry,” *HJAS* 54.1 (1994): 181–231.

turn, habits of annotating premodern Chinese or Japanese poetry provide a revealing window on deep-seated assumptions that critics make about a poet's cultural identity and competency, and about his or her place within the later literary canon. In short, allusions are where scholars are trained to look for them. Further, in a vicious hermeneutic circle, scholars look for allusions where they are trained to expect them. In an age still dominated by national literary histories, these assumptions become particularly significant in cross-national contexts. If a Song dynasty poet happens to employ vocabulary that also appears in a poem by the famous mid-Tang poet Bo Juyi, modern commentators are probably less likely to mark it in their critical apparatus as an "allusion" to Bo Juyi than if a Heian poet uses the same vocabulary, simply because Bo Juyi became the most cherished Chinese author in Heian Japan. Due to the curious Japanese enthusiasm for Bo Juyi's poetry, modern commentators more readily expect Heian poets to "quote" Bo Juyi. In contrast, most modern commentators of Chinese poetry would expect post-Tang poets to be in conversation with Li Bai or Du Fu, who came to be enshrined as the most important Tang poets in China itself.

Chinese poets from the Song dynasty onward looked up to Li Bai and Du Fu as the foremost Tang poets, whereas Heian Japanese revered Bo Juyi as supreme poetic master. Although there is historical truth to this divergence of taste, it does not permit the annotator to declare every lexical overlap of a Heian poem with a poem by Bo Juyi to be an adulatory "quote" from Bo's poems. Similarly, just because the Heian elites studied the Chinese sixth-century model anthology *Wenxuan* (J. *Monzen*), it does not mean that lexical resonance of a Heian poem with a passage from the *Wenxuan* necessarily constitutes a "quotation" by a Japanese author awed by the celebrated classic. I argue that translators and annotators must learn to distinguish between shared vocabulary, random poetic convergences, and specific allusions; otherwise, they run the risk of producing an annotative apparatus too exhaustive to be useful.

Kojima Noriyuki's annotations of the early *kanshi* anthologies provide an impressive case in point.² His annotative apparatus displays

² See his multivolume *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku* (Hanawa shobō, 1968-).

great erudition and breadth and is dauntingly exhaustive. Yet his monumental work embodies what we might call a practice of "Adamic philology," a term I have coined in resonance with Mikhail Bakhtin's vision of "speech genres." To fight the deeply engrained but erroneous perception that speakers are "biblical Adams"³ who utter each word with virginal candor for the first time in the history of all humanity, Bakhtin makes us aware that literary and day-to-day communications alike are framed in "speech genres," utterance forms, and utterances that have already been spoken many times before. By analogy, we could call Kojima's monumental critical apparatus a work of "Adamic philology" because it traces every lexical unit to a point of origin, as if it had been "quoted" directly from a Chinese source for the first time in the history of Japanese writing.

Such "Adamic philology" disregards the crucial distinction between poetic lexicon and allusive overwriting. Instead, it produces a hypertrophied, artificially enriched reading in which all dead metaphors suddenly come to life and all etymologies are instantaneously present to the mind of the reader, presumably true to the original meaning of their first use. Such an inflation of a poem is the dream of a mad intertextualist, because all language disappears into intertextuality, but it can also become the reader's worst nightmare, because intertextuality is ultimately significant only if there are intertextual silences, that is, if lexical "white noise" is filtered out.

The lack of a distinction between the directly intertextual and the more generally intertopical is partly due to conventions of commentary traditions. Most traditional commentaries glossed and paraphrased recondite vocabulary with the help of canonical dictionaries or commentaries. One would adduce entries from the Han dynasty dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, from Tang dynasty encyclopedias, or the commentaries on the Confucian classics and the *Wenxuan*. Yet, the lack of the crucial distinction between the vocabulary Heian poets *used* and the specific textual precedents they *alluded to* or *quoted* results in "foreignizing" the Heian poems: much of what modern annotators take to be allusive gestures was a matter of course to Heian poets, resulting from their deep immersion in canonical texts through arduous training from

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 93.

an early age. A clear distinction between lexical explanation provided for the modern reader and textual interpretation of the poets' dialogue with previous poetry would not just improve our reading of particular Heian poems. More significantly, it would represent more faithfully the process of Heian poetic production—"using" versus consciously "quoting"—and would thus help modern readers inhabit that process to the highest degree possible.

If "Adamic philology" is a powerful paradigm for *kanshi* studies and annotation practices, one that constantly throws us back into the arms of Chinese precedent and away from the Heian habitat of *kanshi* poetry, we could say along similar lines that an "after-Babel" approach has prevailed for comparative studies of *kanshi* and *waka*. This "after-Babel" stance shows a reluctance to *expect* interferences between the *kanshi* and *waka* traditions and tends to locate them in two separate linguistic and cultural spaces.⁴

Scholarly emphasis on tracing precise intertextual connections has reinforced the division favored since the rise of *Kokugaku* in the early modern period between the histories of *waka* and *kanshi* poetry. Because intertextuality is defined *textually*, it is difficult to trace allusions between *waka* and *kanshi* on the basis of linguistic and poetic form, even though they are products of the same culture or even of a single authorial mind. In contrast, intertextual engagements between Japanese *kanshi* and Chinese poems share the same poetic form and are linguistically closely related, although they were produced in different cultures. Ironically, most modern scholarship tends to neglect the indigenous chemistry between *kanshi* and *waka* at the expense of overemphasizing the engagement of Japanese *kanshi* with Chinese poetry. Precisely in this situation the notion of "intertopicality" is useful. Whereas intertextuality is, literally, located in specific texts and languages, the notion of "intertopicality" loosens these strictures and allows for a more integrated study of the Japanese poetic traditions of *kanshi* and *waka*. Intertopicality is only liminally textual and it is located between the well-defined matrix of poetic encyclopedias

⁴ Important exceptions include Ivo Smits's study of recluse and nature poetry in late Heian *kanshi* and *waka* in his *Pursuit of Loneliness*; and Honma Yōichi's studies of poetic vocabulary in his *Ōcho kanbungaku hyōgen ronkō* (Osaka: Izumi shoin, 2002), which directs our attention to the shaping of *kanshi* motives in dialogue with *waka* poetry. Honma's studies of poetic vocabulary reveal the intricate patterns of interference between Chinese poetry, *kanshi*, and *waka*.

and the poet's diffuse memory of repeated reading and writing practice of both *kanshi* and *waka*. "Intertopicality" is literally place-bound—*topical*—and highlights the adaptation of topical clusters to the place and occasion for which the Heian poet produced poetry. Stressing intertopical associations over precise intertextual lineations restores Heian poetry to the social and historical realities of its native Japanese habitat and to the particular Heian-period exigencies of poetic performance.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND POETICS OF HEIAN TOPIC POETRY

Topic Poetry became the mainstream genre of official *kanshi* composition after the mid-tenth century.⁵ This genre provides a unique glimpse into the ways Japanese poets appropriated Chinese texts. It is also one of the few genres for which Japanese writers claimed credit as early as the Heian period, proudly presenting Topic Poetry as uniquely Japanese, without Chinese precedent. Topic Poetry became a meticulously codified subgenre of the broader category of poems on set topics or Chinese lines, composed at court occasions in the presence of the emperor and his entourage or at private banquets of the aristocracy.⁶ The occasions of composition ranged from annual observances such as the Rites for Confucius (*sekiten* 稷奠), when courtiers composed on lines from the Confucian *Analects*, to pleasure excursions or seasonal festivals such as the "Double Ninth Festival" (*chōyō* 重陽) or the "Winding Stream Festival" (*kyokusui* 曲水), to examinations at the State Academy.

Like all literary genres, Topic Poetry came to be defined retrospectively. One problem in determining its origins—and its relationship to Chinese precedents—is that by the late Heian period the technical protocol for a well-formed Topic Poem had become so sophisticated and rigid as to eliminate the traces of the genre's convoluted and multifarious development. Medieval poetic manuals define a Topic Poem as

⁵ In this article I use "poetry on set topics" to point to the broader meaning of composition on any kind of set topic; and "Topic Poetry" to refer to the highly codified Japanese genre of seven-syllable *kanshi* on a five-syllable topic line that emerged in the tenth century. For convenience I use the term Topic Poetry as referring to *kudaishi*, not to *kudaiiwaka*.

⁶ For a list of occasions, see Horikawa Takashi, "Shi no katachi, shi no kokoro—Honchō mudai-shi no haikai," *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 72.5 (1995): 117–27.

a seven-syllable regulated *kanshi* composed on either a five-syllable line from a Chinese poem or a generic “topic phrase” (*kudai*). The manuals further prescribe that the first couplet (*shuren* 首聯) must restate the topic (*daimoku* 題目) and include each of the five topic characters. The second couplet (*ganren* 領聯) must “broach” the topic (*hadai* 破題) by means of synonyms, paraphrases, and associations. The third couplet (*keiren* 頸聯) must elaborate on the topic by drawing on apposite Chinese anecdotes and stories (*honmon* 本文). The final couplet (*biren* 尾聯) must “state the poet’s feelings” (*jukkai* 述懷), extending a polite bow of gratitude to the host of the occasion. The poetic manual *Ōtaku fuketsushō* 王沢不渴鈔 includes the following template for a Topic Poem:

□□□□□

(5-character topic phrase)

(7-character regulated poem 律詩):

□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□

FIRST COUPLET (*shuren*); function: “topic statement”
(*daimoku*)

□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□

SECOND COUPLET (*ganren*); function: “broaching the
topic” (*hadai*)

□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□

THIRD COUPLET (*keiren*); function: “reference
anecdote” (*honmon*)

□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□

FOURTH COUPLET (*biren*); function: “stating one’s
feelings” (*jukkai*)⁷

Modern scholars have tended to read this recipe as a fixed definition of the genre of Topic Poetry; and, in focusing almost exclusively on poetry that seemed to fit this later template, they have paid little

⁷ Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan, ed., *Kanbungaku shiryōshū*. Shinpukuji zenpon sōkan, vol. 12 (Kyoto: Rinsen shoten, 2000), pp. 331, 617. The *Ōtaku fuketsushō*, compiled in the thirteenth century, is a manual for the composition of Sino-Japanese poetry and prose. The title cleverly revises the statement that the Han historian Ban Gu (32–92) made in his “Rhapsody on the Two Capitals,” namely that composition of morally proper poetry declined with the exhaustion of the Zhou dynasty’s “royal blessings.” In retorting with its title *Ōtaku fuketsushō* 王沢不渴鈔 (Booklet of royal blessings, unexhausted) the medieval manual promises its users poetic success on equal footing with the morally proper poetry of the *Classic of Poetry* that preceded the decline.

attention to the broad matrix in which it developed: the practices of composing poems on set topics (generic topics not taken from any particular poem); the custom of excerpting beautiful couplets (Ch. *chaōju* 抄句, J. *shōku*); and the experimentation with translation and adaptation, as evident in the late ninth-century fashion of transposing *kanshi* couplets into *waka* poems.

Topic Poetry developed in symbiosis with an increasingly sophisticated discourse on prescriptive technical poetics. Poetic manuals such as the *Ōtaku fuketsushō* did not sketch grand theories about the roots of poetic creativity or the poet's place in the cosmos but simply provided guidelines for crafting becoming pieces. Topic Poems were a great pastime, but, in Heian Japan, they also became an important sociopolitical currency. One goal of male elite education was skill in composing poetry on set topics, a genre that was not just tested in the examinations but was also important in all major court functions celebrated in the presence of the emperor. Thus poetic performance at the Heian court provided an important, albeit indirect means for evaluation, as men composed poetry to compete for aesthetic and political appreciation in front of the emperor and his influential entourage.⁸

Training in how to write poems on set topics began in adolescence. Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) offers a case in point. His personal collection *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文藻 opens with what was supposedly the first poem he ever composed, on the topic of “Looking at plum blossoms on a moon night.”⁹ The autobiographical note preceding the poem shows a father's concern for the proper education of his son. Michizane's father stages a playful “exam situation,” instructing the tutor to “test” the boy. Michizane's decision to include the poem in his collection as evidence for his precocity suggests that he considered it a successful, or at least a promising, sample of the genre:

⁸ This is true both for Topic Poems and for the prolific genre of poetic prefaces that were composed on the same occasions to accompany the poems. Satō Michio reminds us that the prefaces provided the best opportunity for scholar-officials to show off their abilities and erudition, especially when the event happened in the presence of the emperor; see “Shijo to kudaishi,” in *Heian kōki Nihon kanbungaku no kenkyū* (Kasama shoin, 2003), p. 174.

⁹ Michizane compiled his collection in 900 at the behest of Emperor Daigo as part of the *Kanke sandaishū*, which also included the personal collections of his grandfather Kiyotada and his father Koreyoshi. Thus Michizane himself chose this poem as an effective opening to his entire collection.

月夜見梅花

On "Looking at plum blossoms on a moon night"

Written when I was in my eleventh year. My father had Scholar Shimada¹⁰ test me. That's when I composed my first *kanshi* poem. I therefore include it in this volume.

月耀如晴雪	The moon glistens like snow under clear skies.
梅花似照星	Plum blossoms seem like gleaming stars.
可憐金鏡轉	How lovely, how [the moon's] golden mirror turns!
庭上玉房馨 ¹¹	In the courtyard, the perfume of [the blossom's] jade calyces.

Strictly speaking, this is not a Topic Poem, for it is not heptasyllabic, but pentasyllabic; and—perhaps in tune with the boy's young age—it is not a full-length regulated poem, but a short quatrain. Yet, like later Topic Poems, it is composed on a pentasyllabic topic. Shimada tests the boy on the elegant stock image of seasonal transition. Plum blossoms, the earliest blossoms of the year, are flowering among tapering snow flurries. In a variation of this theme the moonlight, another bright white element of the topic, looks like the "snow under clear skies," and the plum blossoms, in reflection of the "snowlike" moon in the sky, become "gleaming stars." Thus, the first couplet treats the two topic elements "moon" and "plum blossoms" and restates them by way of a simile. Using the topic words corresponds to the "topic statement" in the first couplet, although the rule for later Topic Poetry was to include all five characters of the topic line.

The parallelism between moon and plum blossoms continues into the second couplet, which paraphrases the topic words: the moon's "golden mirror" and the blossoms' "jade calyces." This broaching of the topic later became the standard function of the second couplet of Topic Poems. Michizane's quatrain first states, and then paraphrases, its topic. Along with supplying a paraphrase of the topic words, the poet expresses his appreciation for the beauty of the moon. The expression of feelings, opinions, or gratitude toward the host of the occasion became the standard gesture required for the closing couplet of Topic

¹⁰ Shimada Tadaomi (828–891), an important early Heian poet himself, was for some time in the service of Michizane's father. Michizane married his daughter.

¹¹ Kawaguchi Hisao, commentator, *Kanke bunsō*, *Kanke goshū*, Nihon Koten Bungaku taikē 72 (Iwanami shoten, 1966), p. 105.

Poems. Thanking one's teacher for subjecting one to a test was probably not part of the repertoire of poetic occasions, so Michizane chooses to express his admiration for the moonlight-drenched blossoms.

In its lucid simplicity Michizane's first poem reveals some of the most important rhetorical features of the genre of Topic Poetry, which would remain basically unchanged, although the poetry became increasingly intricate, both lexically and syntactically. The genre developed four highly distinctive characteristics. First, Topic Poetry is *occasional* and *panegyric* poetry. Although we do not know exactly when Michizane produced this first poem, it is safe to assume that the actual season matched the season stated in the topic. However, poetry on set topics is certainly not spontaneous and *situational*, but *occasional*, insofar as the actual situation serves only as the gateway to a parallel universe. In that poetic universe, seasonal phenomena are, to be sure, correlates of the actual annual seasons. Heian poets wrote on plum blossoms when they bloomed. But the logic of seasonal associations also followed trajectories prescribed by literary tradition. Poets could write on snowflakes in early spring, even if there were none and the plum blossoms had already bloomed. Thus, although poets liked to present their poems as spontaneous reactions to actual seasonal phenomena, they composed on set topics at highly stylized formal occasions—annual observances, imperial birthday celebrations, poetic banquets, or, as with Michizane, during a test by one's tutor.

Second, Topic Poetry is a strongly *descriptive* and suggestively *visual* genre. Topics are rarely narrative. They are descriptions of the seasonal scenery, of the foil against which human action occurs. Visuality channels poetic creativity, visual sensations create synonyms, paraphrases, similes for the topic words. True, the "reference anecdote," which came to occupy the third couplet in the rhetorical template of Topic Poetry, included *references* to narratives. But even then, not the story but its seasonal associations often informed the poem's overall logic.

Third, Topic Poetry is highly *paradigmatic*, to use Roman Jakobson's useful distinction between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. Topic Poetry is lexically prolix, and rhetorically dominated by substitution tropes such as metaphor, metonymy, or simile. The syntagmatic, or narrative and progressive, dimension gives way to the overwhelming pressure of the paradigmatic, descriptive, and static, which captures a

scene meticulously as if in a picture frame. The most prominent substitution trope in Topic Poetry is of course the substitution of a topic word with a synonym. The poetic manual *Bunpōsho* 文鳳書 lists synonyms and paraphrases. For example, synonyms for “snow” are “whiteness,” “blossoms,” “raw silk,” “brightness,” or “coldness.”¹² The schoolboy Michizane already shows real skill in operating this poetic machine of ever-receding substitutions: the moon is like a golden mirror, the plum blossoms like stars in the sky, and the jade calyces are in turn like the stars. But unlike the stars, they exude delicate perfume.

The substitution trope characteristic of the “reference anecdote” couplet is “*antonomasia*,” the use of a proper name as a shorthand for qualities associated with the bearer of the name. Loyal and virtuous figures at the Heian court were Japanese Qu Yuans, and eager students at the State Academy in the Heian capital were Japanese Sun Kangs.

Fourth, Topic Poems usually elaborate on two topic elements and develop parallel threads of associative substitutions for each of these elements. This results in disjunctive parallelism or partial antithesis. While “moon” and “plum blossoms” share the associative thread of whiteness and brightness—“jade,” “gleaming,” and “snow” could equally apply to both—Michizane’s last couplet exploits their disjunction in the olfactory realm. Only the blossoms, not the moon, possess the delicate perfume. The young Michizane already knows how to play off the two topic elements through disjunctive parallelism.

The inclination toward a rhetoric of substitution prompts us to form

¹² Honma Yōichi, commentator, *Karon kagaku shūsei*, suppl. 2 (Miyai shoten, 1999–), p. 41. The *Bunpōsho*, one of the best preserved poetic encyclopedias for *kanshi* composition, dates to the early thirteenth century and was compiled by Sugawara no Tamenaga (1158–1246), a Confucian scholar under Emperor GoToba. It is arranged by standard topical categories, starting with the heavens and closing with fish, insects, cardinal directions, and colors. Within the topical categories, for example “snow,” it first provides compound expressions for snow, then synonyms for it, followed by expressions that encapsulate anecdotes involving snow. “Sun’s Window,” for example, evokes the famously destitute and devoted scholar Sun Kang, who was too poor to afford lamp oil and thus sat close by the window so as to catch light from the reflecting snow. There are also lists of matching expressions (or expressions compressing anecdotes) ready-made for use in parallel couplets. Thus, manuals like the *Bunpōsho* helped the poet find synonyms for his topic, appropriate anecdotes, and—in a further step of condensation of poetic production—suitable matches of anecdotes for parallel couplets, the crafting of which constituted the epitome of good *kanshi* composition. For the relationship between the *Bunpōsho* and Chinese poetic encyclopedias, see Honma Yōichi, *Ōchō kanbungaku*, pp. 227–50.

some hypotheses about the internal development of the genre. We must ask, what makes a good topic poem or, to bring in a historical dimension, a *new* topic poem? We have hardly any sources to help us gauge Heian taste. The judgments passed at poetic contests are often short and heavily influenced by such extra-literary considerations as the authors' court rank and seniority. But we can certainly say that the genre developed by accumulating and codifying an increasingly fixed set of associations. In order to counter the forces of codification, the poets used synonyms that became ever more remote, subtle, and erudite; and, to breathe fresh air into straitlaced clichés, they manipulated minute variations and lexical novelties.¹³ This process may seem to render Topic Poems increasingly *intertextual*, because poets tended to turn to previous texts to come up with new variations, but we should rather describe the process as "intertopical," because specific engagement with previous poems gave way to the diffuse topical mind-map poets had acquired through years of reading, writing, and using encyclopedias, as well as through their strained search for novel lexical combinations.

Michizane's poem shows that composing poetry on set topics was a prominent tool of elite education and a common playground for winning social distinction. Sasaki Yukitsuna has aptly described *waka* composition on topics as an activity carried out on a common "wrestling ground" (*dohyō* 土俵) that is tantamount to a fictional space removed from the rules and speech of daily life.¹⁴ The sumo metaphor conveys the same thrill of competing before an eager audience that characterized occasions at which Topic Poems were composed. This common wrestling ground was defined by shared associations, synonyms, precedents, and possible allusions pertaining to a certain topic.

The above-mentioned four features of Topic Poetry run the risk of producing bad poetry—indeed much bad poetry. Yet, precisely because the rules for the common "wrestling ground" were so rigid and constraining, truly fresh and sophisticated treatments of a given topic stand out with infinitely more clarity than in a less codified poetic tradition.

¹³ Honma Yōichi describes this phenomenon as an "increasing elaborateness" (*chimitsuka* 緻密化) in *Ōchō kanbungaku*, p. 97.

¹⁴ Waka bungakkai, ed., "Daiei to wa nani ka?" in *Ronshū. Dai no waka kūkan* (Kasama shoin, 1992), p. 14.

THE RISE OF TOPIC POETRY IN JAPAN

Satō Michio has shown that Topic Poetry proper emerged in the mid-tenth century.¹⁵ The poetic manual *Sakumon daitai* 作文大体 observes:¹⁶

Poems by Chinese authors express their intent by following actual things (in nature); they do not use topic lines (*kudai*). Up until the Jōgan era (859–877) it has mostly been like this at our court; but since mid-antiquity, “topic lines” have become popular. A “topic line” is a pentasyllabic title line for a heptasyllabic poem; an appropriate line [from a previous poem] is selected in accord with the season, or new topics can also be selected.¹⁷

This passage proudly claims that Topic Poetry is uniquely Japanese and was not practiced in China. Beginning with the Heian period, writers often juxtaposed Japanese (*wa* 和) and Chinese-style (*kan* 漢) sensibilities for balance or competition. However, it is rare and puzzling to find a writer harping on a difference between Chinese and Sino-Japanese poetic practices. This scarcity has troubled Japanese scholars, who have devoted much effort to trace Japanese Topic Poetry back to Chinese practice, yet arguments for a Chinese precedent are unpersuasive.¹⁸ No doubt composition on set topics goes back to the beginning

¹⁵ Satō Michio, “Kudaishi eihō no kakuritsu—Nihon kangakushijō no Sugawara Fumitoki,” in *Heian kōki Nihon kanbungaku no kenkyū*, pp. 205–28.

¹⁶ The first version of this poetic manual dates to Fujiwara no Munetada (1062–1141), the author of the Sino-Japanese diary *Chūyūki* 中右記. However, it was constantly revised until the Muromachi period, so it is very hard to date individual parts and statements. See Yamagishi Tokuhei, “Sakumon daitai ni tsuite,” in his *Nihon kanbungaku kenkyū* (Yūseidō shuppan, 1972).

¹⁷ *Gunsho ruijū* (Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1959–1960), 9:3612.

¹⁸ Ozawa Masao is most optimistic about a very early Chinese origin of Japanese Topic Poems. He sees their origin in Chinese “imitation poems” (*nigushi* 擬古詩) and Music Bureau Poetry (*yue-fushi* 樂府詩), which use lines or titles of previous poems to create new ones. Yet, the only similarity between Japanese Topic Poetry and these Chinese genres is that they often restate the title or topic line in the first couplet; their rhetorical template and social setting are very different. See Ozawa, *Kokinshū no sekai* (Hanawa Shobō, 1976), p. 277; and “Rikuchō jidai ni okeru kudaishi no seiritsu,” in *Aichi kenritsu jōshi tanki daigaku kiyō* 2 (1951.11): 61–82. Ono Yasuo quotes many Chinese poems that share some characteristics with the Japanese genre of Topic Poetry—e.g., the composition of new poems on lines from previous poetry, the inclusion of the topic words in the first couplet. But he considers Topic Poetry a properly Japanese phenomenon and situates the beginnings of the genre in the Tenryaku period (947–957); see “Heianchō kudaishi no seiyaku—daiji wo hokku ni noseru koto,” *Wakan hikaku bungaku* 12 (1994): 13–26. Most recently Jiang Yiqiao has shown the close relationship between the rhetorical template of “poems on topics” (*yongwu shi* 詠物詩) in the *Li Jiao baiyong* 李嶠百詠, a personal collection of poems on topics by the early Tang poet Li Jiao (644–713). See his “Eibutsushi kara kudaishi e—kudaishi eihō no seisei wo megutte,” *Wakan hikaku bungaku* 35 (2005): 35–49.

of classical poetry in China. But Chinese poems on topics never involved the high degree of prescriptive codification that characterizes Japanese Topic Poetry. Scholars agree now that Topic Poetry came into its own around the time of the Murakami court (946–966). Based on careful rhetorical analysis, Satō Michio distinguishes between poets like Minamoto no Shitagō, whose poetry does not conform to the prescriptive poetics of the genre, and those like Sugawara no Fumitoki (899–981) (Michizane's grandson), whose poetry matches the later standards and who apparently was instrumental in establishing those standards through their poetry.¹⁹

The rise of Topic Poetry in Japan was intimately related to two other literary phenomena: the compilation of collections of poetic couplets, which goes back to the late ninth century; and *kanshi* poetic contests, the first of which was celebrated in 959 under the auspices of Emperor Murakami. This fact suggests the rise of Topic Poetry is closely connected to what I will call “couplet culture.”

“COUPLET CULTURE” IN CHINA AND HEIAN JAPAN

The phenomenon I describe as “couplet culture” thrived in China from the Six Dynasties period to the late Tang Five Dynasties period, and in Japan during the Heian period. “Couplet culture” consisted of interrelated poetic practices that centered on the poetic couplet as the smallest, most significant poetic unit. Collections of “exquisite lines” were compiled.²⁰ Poetic manuals obsessively discussed the crafting of couplets and established the couplet as the major unit for poetic analysis.

The practice of “excerpting lines” was partly a calligraphy exercise, as people wrote them onto personal hanging scrolls (*suishen juanzi* 隨

¹⁹ Satō Michio, “Kudaishi eihō no kakuritsu—Nihon kangakushijō no Sugawara Fumitoki,” pp. 205–28. See also his “Shijo to Kudaishi,” pp. 173–204. Although only a rhetorical analysis enables us to understand the rise of Topic Poetry, Honma Yōichi's numerical assessment of the clear increase of heptasyllabic poems with pentasyllabic topic lines in various poetry collections since the Murakami court is also a compelling rough indicator of the process. See *Ōchō kanbungaku*, pp. 97–103.

²⁰ Ono Yasuo coins the term “consciousness of excerpting lines” (*shōku ishiki* 抄句意識) for this phenomenon, which is part of what I describe as “couplet culture”; see “Heianchō kudaishi no seiyaku,” 19.

身卷子)²¹ that served as inspiration for composing poetry. The scrolls were handy to carry around and could even be taken on the road. Such excerpted couplets also came to be compiled in so-called “couplet charts” (*jutu* 句圖). Kūkai (774–835) was apparently the first to bring couplet charts to Japan. The preface to the *Gujin shiren xiuyu* 古今詩人秀句 by the late seventh-century Chinese poet Yuan Jing 元竟 survives in Kūkai’s *Bunkyo hifuron*. In Japan, excerpting, discussing, and collecting couplets became particularly popular starting in the Tenryaku period (947–957). Not coincidentally, this period saw the rise of Topic Poetry and is the period best represented in the *kanshi* of the *Wakan rōeishū* (1012),²² itself probably the most famous Japanese “couplet chart” of sorts.

Technical manuals focusing on the crafting of poetic couplets were symptomatic of China’s medieval “couplet culture.” The genre of “Patterns of Poetry” (*shige* 詩格)²³ peaked particularly during the early Tang and again in the late Tang and the Tang-Song transition, with a conspicuous gap during the High Tang period, during which poets were less explicitly concerned about craft.²⁴

²¹ See Wang Changling, *Shige*, in Zhang Bowei 張柏偉, ed., *Quan Tang Wudai shige jiaokao* 全唐五代詩格校考 (Xi’an: Shanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), p. 141.

²² Ono, “Heianchō kudaishi no seiyaku,” 20.

²³ There is no single generic term for the technical manuals. But most of them included such expressions as *shige*, forms of poetry (*shishi* 詩式), examples of poetry (*shili* 詩例), secret pointers (*mizhi* 密旨), or essentials (literally, “marrow and brain”; *suinao* 髓腦) in their titles.

²⁴ These popular manuals, though widespread as poetry primers, were held in low esteem in China after the Tang. Only a few titles are featured in the imperial bibliographies in such Song-dynasty works as the *Xin Tang shu*. In general, in the Song we see a shift from the Tang focus on smaller textual units to an interest in the broad meaning of integral texts. Technical manuals for the writing of poetry were despised by the authors of “remarks on poetry” (*shihua* 詩話), members of the Song elite. Song literati saw the technical manuals, which presented poetry as a learnable, accessible craft, as a threat to their cultivation of personal poetic style. Consequently, “remarks on poetry” highlighted the social space of poetry, the anecdotal that had been almost entirely absent from the technical manuals. Technical manuals continued to be used in the Song but were frowned upon as vulgar and pedantic in the highbrowed “remarks on poetry.” Since the Song, the manuals were neglected in elite culture, with the result that our most important source for the Tang manuals is Kūkai’s *Bunkyo hifuron*, followed by *Yinchuang zalu* 吟窗雜錄, a Song dynasty compendium that has survived only in Ming editions. Recently Zhang Bowei has conveniently assembled all extant technical manuals in his *Quan Tang Wudai shige jiaokao*. Chinese technical manuals were extremely popular in Japan. They appear in great numbers in Fujiwara no Sukeyo’s bibliography *Nihonkoku genzai shomokuroku* 日本國見在書目錄 (ca. 891) in the category of “philological reference books,” which has preserved many otherwise lost titles. For a discussion of the technical manuals see the first chapter in Yugen Wang, “Poetry in Print Culture:

Technical poetics in China was at odds with the highly influential vision of poetic creativity outlined in the “Great Preface” to the *Classic of Poetry*. The “Great Preface,” attributed to the first-century scholar Wei Hong, assumed that poets composed poetry in response to external stirrings in nature, and this view influenced much of later Chinese poetics. This psychology of poetic composition as an expressive manifestation of a mind stimulated by outside objects worked well as a poetics for a young emerging tradition. Indeed, except for the decline it assumes from “proper” to “devious” poetry, the “Great Preface” is not concerned with historical depth. Yet, the rise of five-syllable poetry from the Later Han onward, and the codification of its history in the Six Dynasties period (220–589), forced poets to consider the question of how to relate to precedent. Concurrently, poetic composition became increasingly technical, culminating in the development of the tonally determined form of “regulated poetry” (*lǜshī* 律詩). During the Six Dynasties and the Tang, despite continuing lip service paid to a presumably “spontaneous” psychology of composition, discussions in the technical poetic manuals moved away from emphasizing poetry as an unmediated natural response to conceptualizing it as a sophisticated craft acquired through training. Previous poetry, not nature, would now embody proper poetic standards either by example or violation and thus became the major training ground for writing poetry. Since the attraction of the “Great Preface”’s poetics of spontaneous manifestation never really faded away, from the Six Dynasties period onward the poet increasingly had to negotiate the tension between inspiration by nature and response to historical precedent.

Manuals of technical poetics were often preoccupied with the codification of tonal rules and “violations” (*bìng* 病), but eighth- and ninth-century “Patterns of Poetry” broached a whole new range of issues: typologies of “parallelisms” (*duì* 對), lists of “stylistic types” (*tǐ* 體), or of “propensities” (*shì* 勢) of single couplets. The manuals typically consist of long lists of various types of style or rhetorical forms labeled with fancy names and followed by a host of suitable examples from previous poetry. This codification of regulated poetry in the Tang was accompanied by discussions of parallelism that became increasingly sophisti-

Texts, Reading Strategy, and Compositional Poetics in Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) and the late Northern Song” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2005).

cated, shifting the focus away from integral poems to their constituent couplets.

Obsessed with typology, the manuals focused on single couplets, poetic units that would fit a certain heading without undermining the typology, as would whole poems with their irreducible complexity. As the smallest units into which a given poem could be broken down, such fragmentary “poetèmes” could become miniature poetic vignettes in their own right. After the Song dynasty, this tendency toward hermeneutic disintegration came to be perceived as a threat to the greater meaning of the integral poem and led ultimately to the decline of the manuals’ popularity, at least in elite circles.

What was a threat to Song literati became a boon to Heian poets. Because Japanese literature functioned in a biliterate mode and the composition of *kanshi* poetry developed in dialogue with the *waka* tradition, “couplet culture” of Japan radically differed from that of China. From early on, the appreciation of couplet units in Japan was intimately linked to habits of juxtaposing Sino-Japanese and Japanese forms and sensibilities, and of creatively shuttling between these modes. The *Shinsen Man'yōshū* 新撰万葉集 (893), attributed to Sugawara no Michizane, juxtaposes *waka* poems with Sino-Japanese quatrains. Conversely, the collection *Kudai waka* 句題和歌 (or *Chisatoshū* 千里集, 897) by Ōe no Chisato juxtaposes Chinese lines, mostly by Bo Juyi and his friend Yuan Zhen, with their transposition into Japanese *waka* poems. In the context of the Heian cultivation of the couplet, it is helpful to think of these collections as “couplet charts.” The most famous example of Japanese collections akin to Chinese “couplet charts” is of course the *Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集 (1012) by Fujiwara no Kintō, which features *waka* poems, Chinese and Sino-Japanese couplets, and short passages from prose genres by Chinese and Japanese authors. Because they could juxtapose different linguistic modes and poetic forms, the Japanese “couplet charts” developed an aesthetics of their own that is radically different from the monoliterate Chinese ones. Since a Sino-Japanese couplet matched an integral Japanese poem, the couplet possessed a *raison d'être* within Japanese culture that it lacked in China. The coexistence with the *waka* form made Sino-Japanese couplets into something like an integral poem worthy of independent aesthetic appreciation.

This also explains why the critical concepts of couplet-obsessed Chinese technical poetics such as stylistic “types” (*sama*, *tai* 体) or “violations”

(*yamai* 病) became so influential in medieval *waka* poetics, while they dropped out of favor in China. The enthusiastic response we see in *waka* poetics to the world of Chinese technical manuals is first of all obvious from the titles. The earliest treatise of *waka* poetics, the *Kakyō hyōshiki* 歌經標式 (772) by Fujiwara no Hamanari, and the three other *shiki* 式 manuals²⁵ bear the name of the Chinese genre of “forms of poetry” (*shishi*), a prominent example of which was written by the monk Jiaoran.²⁶ The *Shinsen waka zuinō* 新撰和歌髓腦, the *Shinsen zuinō* 新撰髓腦 by Fujiwara Kintō, and, most famously, the *Toshiyori zuinō* 俊賴髓腦 that Minamoto no Toshiyori composed for the daughter of the Regent Tadazane, bear the title of another Chinese subgenre of technical manuals.²⁷ Using the concept of “type” as it applied to a Chinese-style couplet did not prevent Japanese authors from discussing the overall heart (*kokoro*) of *waka* poems. In the Chinese case this overall meaning was instead endangered if poets focused on couplets rather than poems. The discourse of technical poetics in China and Japan met with different fates, and this divergence was arguably a major watershed in the history of poetry in China and Japan.

Although Heian poets received Tang technical manuals with enthusiasm, they must have been puzzled by the manuals’ glaring failure to discuss composition on set topics. As much as the rise of Topic Poetry since the mid-tenth century was inextricably inspired by Tang “couplet culture,” composition on set topics—the major creative rationale for both *kanshi* and *waka* poets in the Heian period—went largely unaddressed in the Chinese manuals. This was certainly one reason why the authors of the *Sakumon daitai* could proudly claim Topic Poetry as uniquely Japanese. How peripheral the issue was for these manuals becomes clear in Wang Changling’s *Shige*:

Thus when settling one’s ideas [in preparation for] composing poetry, one needs to concentrate one’s mind. When the eyes encounter a poetic object (*wu*), it’s best to encounter it with one’s mind and to fix one’s gaze thoroughly on the surroundings. It is like after one has climbed to the very top of a high mountain and the myriad things below seem to be in the palm of one’s hand. If you gaze at objects in this way, you will finally see them in your mind, and that’s the moment to “use” them. When [mind and

²⁵ Although the “Shiki Manuals” presume to predate the *Kokinshū* (905), only the *Kakyō hyōshiki* seems to be genuine. The *Waka sakushiki* 倭歌作式, the *Waka shiki* 和歌式, and the *Iwami no jo shiki* 石見女式 are of later date.

²⁶ Zhang Bowei’s volume also includes *Wenbishī* 文筆式, *Shishī* 詩式, and *Fengsao yaoshi* 風騷要式.

²⁷ The title “suinō” appears first in the bibliographic chapter of the *Sui shu*. See Zhang Bowei, *Quan Tang Wudai shige jiaokao*, p. 112. Zhang’s collection includes Yuan Jing’s *Shi suinō* 詩髓腦.

object] look identical, then you fix the tonal patterns, and thereupon write it out on paper, matching the poem with its topic.²⁸

This passage addresses the issue of topic, but “matching the topic” comes last in the creative process and simply means that the poet writes down the appropriate topic title for the poem. The process Wang Changling describes here resonates with the statement about Chinese poetry in the *Sakumon daitai*: “Poems by Chinese authors express their intent by following actual things in nature; they do not use topic lines.” For Wang Changling, the real challenge of writing poetry is the particular mind-set of introspection, which allows for a detached outside vision that could transform even one’s perception of outside scenery. Through introspection, one distills scenery into “poetic objects” ready for “use” in a poem. Matching the tonal patterns, writing the verse out, and adding the topic-title are mere technicalities; they record the moment of creation but do not constitute it. Wang describes the moment of creation as a felicitous encounter of an introspective mind with scenic “poetic objects,” which the poet mentally refines for use. In accord with the “Great Preface,” Wang is concerned with the relation between the outer stimulus and the poem. In contrast, the main focus for the Japanese authors of Topic Poetry was the relationship between the topic line and the poem.

Despite this fundamental difference in conceptualizing the creative process, Tang manuals resonated with the poetics of Japanese Topic Poetry with regard to the function of single couplets. In the typical Topic Poem, the first of four couplets broached the topic, the second elaborated on the topic, the third alluded to a relevant anecdote, and the fourth concluded on a reflective note appropriate to the occasion at hand. In the *Shige* Wang Changling proposes a typology of fourteen ways to begin a poem with affective images; and seven ways to end a poem.²⁹

Wang further lists seventeen “propensities” of couplets, the first of which precisely describes the function of the first or second couplet of a Japanese Topic Poem: “Beginning the poem with a direct grasp: you enter the line with a direct grasp based on the relevant topic” 直把入作勢: 依所題目, 入頭便直把是也.³⁰ Although some of the examples

²⁸ Zhang Bowei, *Quan Tang Wudai shige jiaokao*, pp. 139–40.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 150–54 and 157–58.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

Wang lists include characters from the title line, the phrase “direct grasp” obviously does not refer to a restatement of the topic words but rather to a paraphrase of the title or a direct response to the occasion of composition. Yet, viewed broadly, his essay discusses the opening couplet’s relationship to the title of the poem, which is the major focus of the first and second couplets of Japanese Topic Poetry.

Of all the preserved Chinese manuals, the *Jinzen shige* 金鍼詩格, attributed to Bo Juyi, overlaps most with the poetics of Japanese Topic Poetry.³¹ It is the only extant Chinese manual that lists and explains the names of the four couplets of Topic Poetry as we find them in medieval Japanese *kanshi* manuals.³² It also has a section on metaphorical substitution, an important feature of the mature genre of Topic Poetry. The text says:

Poetry compares “things” and “images”: “sun” and “moon” are comparisons for “ruler” and “subject.” “Dragon” is a comparison for “the position of the ruler”; and “rain and dew” for the “mercy and generosity of the ruler. . . . The comparisons are based on the size and weight of each type of insect or fish, plant or tree.”³³

A last parallel between Chinese technical manuals and the poetics of Topic Poetry is one of the “ten types” discussed in the manual *Tangchao xinding shige* 唐朝新定詩格, which Cui Rong (653–706) composed for examination candidates. The “essential flourish type” (*jinghuati* 菁華體), which uses elegant synonyms and oblique phrases, and excludes “crude” expression (*cu* 粗),³⁴ is reminiscent of the second couplet of a Topic Poem.

In conclusion we can say that, although some features of Japanese Topic Poetry resonate with bits and pieces of Tang poetic manuals, the similarities are fleeting and certainly do not add up to a Chinese precedent for the genre. Let me reiterate, there is no question that composition on topics was as important in China as it was in Japan, especially during those periods in Chinese history when poetic production cen-

³¹ The *Jinzen shige* enjoyed great popularity in China. Mei Yaochen (1002–1060) even wrote a sequel to it. It was not included in Kūkai’s *Bunkyo hifuron*, but survived in the above-mentioned *Yin-chuang zalu* and elsewhere.

³² Zhang Bowei, *Quan Tang Wudai shige jiaokao*, p. 333.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³⁴ Again, this manual does not appear in any Chinese bibliography, but is listed in the *Nihonkoku genzai shomokuroku* along with other philological reference works. Zhang Bowei, *Quan Tang Wudai shige jiaokao*, p. 112.

tered on the court. To this extent, China and Japan shared a heritage of composition on set topics. Yet, after the mid-tenth century, Japanese court poetry took a unique path, transforming the casual composition on set topics into poetic production regulated by a carefully codified descriptive poetics. One reason why Topic Poetry did not develop significantly in China was that the locus for poetic production changed with the High Tang, despite some exceptions, largely shifting away from the courtly world to the domain of poet-friends and literati. Virtual history could whisper to us tongue-in-cheek that Japanese Topic Poetry is what Chinese poetry might have become without the High Tang poetic revolution, without which, in any event, Chinese poetry would not be Chinese poetry.

Japanese Topic Poetry cannot easily be mapped onto a Chinese precedent. Where continuity breaks down we are forced to give up the intuitive default model that posits simple continuities between China and Japan. Instead, we must look for a broad framework within which one might account for the Japanese reception and transformation of Chinese practices. This and future studies of the genre of Topic Poetry can illuminate the ways in which Chinese poetic practices were appropriated in Japan within the complex triangle shaped by the Chinese, Sino-Japanese, and Japanese poetic idioms.

HOW TO MAKE JAPANESE TOPIC POEMS FROM CHINESE REFERENCE POEMS: SOME CASE STUDIES

The relation of Japanese Topic Poetry to Chinese poetry changed dramatically during the course of the Heian period. Whereas in the early Heian the topic lines were typically drawn from Chinese poems, Topic Poems of the late Heian period were almost exclusively on invented topics. Although these “new topics” (*shindai* 新題) were pentasyllabic topic lines that looked as if they *could* have come from a Chinese poem, they were generic cliché phrases pregnant with seasonal connotations and anecdotal associations featured in poetic manuals.³⁵ This change implied a transition from a largely *intertextual* relationship to a largely *intertopical* one. For this argument we have to ask: were the early poems

³⁵ For late Heian Topic Poems and the issue of “new topics,” see Wiebke Denecke, “Kudaishi no tenkai—*kan-shi kara wa-shi e*,” in Satō Michio, ed., *Kudaishi kenkyū* (Keiō University Press, 2007).

on lines from Chinese poems actually engaging the Chinese poems, or did early Heian poets use those lines only as a good excuse to go off on a beloved topic without much regard for the Chinese reference poem? Put differently, was the relationship between Japanese Topic Poems and their reference poems from the outset a fundamentally *intertopical* one, merely disguised behind a façade of intertextuality? To study the nature of the engagement of Japanese Topic Poems with their Chinese reference poems, I have selected two inflection points in the development toward the mature genre of “Topic Poetry.” First we will look at poems on pentasyllabic topic lines by Sugawara no Michizane, because Michizane’s personal collection, the *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文草, is the best example of a Sino-Japanese collection of a Heian poet. Like Bo Juyi’s, it was compiled by the poet himself, and because it was so exemplary and influential, it is a logical point of departure for investigating the relation between Japanese Topic Poems and their Chinese reference poems.

Next we will proceed to the age of Michizane’s grandson Fumitoki, who was instrumental in establishing the genre of Topic Poetry proper. On the sixteenth day of the eighth month of 959, Emperor Murakami hosted an unprecedented Sino-Japanese poetry competition (*shiaiwase*). *Waka* contests had been hosted since the late ninth century,³⁶ but the *Tentoku tōshi* 天徳闘詩 contest was the first time two parties competed in *kanshi* composition. Half of the twin poems composed by two competing parties in ten rounds are on topics from actual Chinese poems. By comparing poems from these two historical moments, one before the emergence of the genre of Topic Poetry proper and the other constitutive of it, I will examine how Japanese poets engaged their Chinese reference poems; and how they reaffirmed the setting, register, and topic associations of their Chinese material or reshaped it beyond recognition for their own purposes.

Scenario 1: Michizane’s Duo with Han Yu (768–824)

In 873 Michizane attended the *Naien* 内宴 Festival, an annual observance that was usually held in the “Hall of Benevolent Longevity” (*Jijūden*) in the presence of the emperor on the twenty-first through

³⁶ The first documented *waka* contest, the *Zai minbikyō ke utaawase* 在民部卿家歌合, was held between 884 and 887 in Ariwara no Yukihira’s mansion. The most famous early *waka* contest was that held by Emperor Uda’s mother some time before 893, the *Kanpyō no ōnoki kisai no miya no utaawase* 寛平御時后宮歌合.

twenty-third day of the first month.³⁷ The festival featured entertainment by female musicians and composition of *kanshi*. The topic of that year inspired reflection on the commonplace but elegant confusion between snowflakes and plum blossoms in early spring:³⁸

早春侍宴仁壽殿同賦春雪映早梅，應製
In early spring at the Naïen Festival in the Jijūden,
we composed at imperial command on the topic
“Spring snow reflects early plum blossoms”³⁹

雪片花顏時一般	Snow flakes and flower faces—at times just the same!
上番梅榭院待追歡	First-rate plum twigs await their time for pleasure.
氷紉寸截輕粧混	Like icy silk cut in inches snow blends with their light rouge;
玉屑添來軟色寬	it settles down like jade powder, ⁴⁰ making their delicate shades even richer.
鷄舌纔因風力散	[Their fragrance], like cockerel tongue incense, already scatters along wind gusts; ⁴¹
鶴毛獨向夕陽寒	but lonely [snow flakes], like crane feathers, still face the cold of the evening sun.
明王若可分真偽	How can the enlightened ruler distinguish true from false?
願使宮人子細看 ⁴²	He might want to have his palace ladies look more carefully!

Of the five prescribed topic characters, Michizane works only two into

³⁷ The Naïen Festival, literally an “in-court banquet” that the emperor hosted every year to express gratitude toward his officials, had been celebrated in Japan since 813, supposedly based on the precedent of new year celebrations at the court of the Tang emperor Taizong. It had gone out of favor by the late Heian period, as it does not appear in ritual manuals of the period such as Ōe no Masafusa’s *Gōke shidai* 江家次第. See Yamanaka Yutaka, *Heianchō no nenchū gyōji* (Hanawa shobō, 1972), pp. 163–66.

³⁸ The poem’s topic line and topic characters are marked with dots beneath.

³⁹ The topic only says “plum blossoms” but since the poem plays on red color shades, the poem is obviously about the blossoms of the red plum.

⁴⁰ Jade powder presumably had immortalizing medicinal effect.

⁴¹ This means that the blossoms have already opened.

⁴² Kawaguchi Hisao, *Kanke bunsō. Kanke kōshū*, Nihon koten bungaku taikē edition 72 (Iwanami shoten, 1966), no. 66.

his first couplet. Nevertheless he covers the two main elements, "snow" and "plum blossoms," and his combination and juxtaposition of these two elements dominates the poem's structure. The second and fourth couplets include both elements, but the third couplet divides the reader's attention, directing it on the one hand to a vernal line on the scent of plum blossoms (the "cockerel tongue incense") and on the other hand to a still wintry line on the shining snowflakes (the "crane feathers"). As in Michizane's first poem, composed for his tutor, this poem shows that a balanced permutation of the two main topic elements belongs to the tricks of the trade. The two middle couplets broach the topic through similes or implicit comparison, reflecting the "paradigmatic" nature of later Topic Poetry, according to which the poet replaces, restates, or paraphrases.

Another resonance with later rules of the genre is that the closing couplet superposes two different realms. The first realm is the natural scene, featuring the Naïen Festival party enjoying the sight of snow and blossoms in early spring. The second realm is that of the eternal question of political philosophy: How does a ruler rule well? The answer, in good Confucian terms, is obvious: By distinguishing true from false, and reality from appearances. Though aesthetically pleasing when only snow and blossoms are at stake, elegant confusion is a dangerous impediment to the ruler's power of political judgment. As a fanciful solution, the poet suggests recruiting the palace ladies as conspirators in the high business of government. They should look more carefully to distinguish the snow from the blossoms. To reinforce a vision of virtuous governance while providing for good entertainment, the poet playfully has the high realm of governance and the pleasant poetic celebration in female company join forces.

In such poems, the nature of the second realm varies. Sometimes it is abstract like the realm of government in this case, and sometimes it is a concrete place in China. After an excursion to such other abstract or concrete realms, returning to the site of courtly celebration, to the poet's present time and place, is *de rigueur* in the closing couplet. To relate this again to the poetic psychology of the genre, the superposition of different realms is a special case of paradigmatic replacement, in which the present occasion of courtly celebration and poetry composition is the ultimate point of reference from which the poet takes off and to which he ultimately returns in the closing lines.

We do not know from which Chinese poem the topic line was drawn, but several poems on the same line survive.⁴³ Michizane's verse is in a particularly close dialogue with a poem by the famous mid-Tang poet Han Yu 韓愈:

春雪映⁴⁴早梅 Spring Snow Reflects Early Plum Blossoms

梅將雪共春	Plums and snow together break into spring,
彩豔不相因	yet their shadings and grace do not have the same source.
逐吹能爭密	[Snow's] blowing about swiftly can compete with [the blossoms'] density,
排枝巧妒新	And [the blossom's] skillful line-up on the branches makes [snow] envious of the new growth.
誰令香滿座	Someone ordered this fragrant plenary meeting [of blossoms]
獨使淨無塵	and [the snow] alone makes it clean and devoid of world's dust.
芳意饒呈瑞	Their "sweet-smelling" meaning brings out ample auspicious signs
寒光助照人	and [snow's] cool brightness helps to illuminate the people.
玲瓏開已遍	Shimmering brightly, the blossoms are all open,
點綴坐來頻	time and again [snow] settles in dots.
那是俱疑似	All this is just so very similar,
須知兩逼真	for one must know that both are close to the truth.
熒煌初亂眼	First the gleaming brightness confuses the eyes,
浩蕩忽迷神	then suddenly one's mind goes off, lost.
未許瓊華比	Even if a comparison with jasper blooms ⁴⁵ is not allowed
從將玉樹親	ours do seem akin to jade trees.
先期迎獻歲	Previously we had welcomed the new year ⁴⁶

⁴³ One poem is by Bo Juyi's friend Yuan Zhen; see *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, 22 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 409.4542. The other poem is by the little-known poet Yu Jingiu 庾敬休; *Quan Tang shi* 516.5896.

⁴⁴ Alternative character: 間.

⁴⁵ Mysterious trees of imaginary realms such as the Daoist land of immortals or the Buddhist Pure Land.

⁴⁶ Probably a reference to the preceding poem in Han Yu's collection on the topic of "spring

更伴占茲晨 on this day, together again, we stick with it.
 願得長輝映 I wish they will forever shine on each other
 輕微敢自珍⁴⁷ and dare to treasure them despite their
 insignificance.⁴⁸

Many elements of Han Yu's poem are similar to Michizane's treatment of the topic line. The two poems share the same ornate ceremonial diction. They display a metaphysical interest in discriminating between truth and falsehood. They split couplets into lines on "snow" and "blossoms," and delight in playing out their struggle for competitive advantage with regard to brightness, lightness, and auspiciousness. The two poems also differ in significant ways. Han Yu's poem is slightly more solemn than Michizane's; it uses the leap into the metaphysical—a leap occasioned by the seasonal topic of "elegant confusion"—to forward advice from unrecognized scholar-officials. Yet Han Yu's poem is not devoid of a witty wink. In the closing of the poem, faintly proclaiming that he treasures the beautiful sight despite its insignificance, he suddenly shies away from the previous tone of grave, metaphysical significance. Also in contrast to Michizane, he first denies himself the right to conflate the "jade trees" in the present scene with those mysterious flowers the "jasper blooms" of imaginary immortal realms. His initially humble abstention gives him the leeway to proceed and compare them at least to the "jade trees" in his world. Since the metaphorical conflation of the trees in the scene with trees of the realm of the immortals was a standard move, Han Yu is clever enough first ostentatiously to renounce this impulse to make a clichéd comparison, only then to proceed to make the very comparison.

Michizane's poem is close to Han Yu's, above all because both are "topic poems" in a broad sense. This point is significant, because it shows that sociohistorical factors conditioned the poetics of Japanese Topic Poetry: Competitive poetic performance at official occasions en-

snow," which was composed shortly before this one. Thus this is the second poetic welcome to spring snow.

⁴⁷ Qian Zhonglian, commentator, *Hang Changli shi xinian jishi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1984), 1:351–54.

⁴⁸ Under the lightness of the snow and blossoms. The suggestion to go into "hiding" echoes the Han dynasty scholar Jia Yi's lament of Qu Yuan (and his own banishment) in Sima Qian's biography of them. As Jia Yi feels alienated from the world of petty courtiers, he compares himself to virtuous dragons, which have to hide away from petty mudworms. *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975–81), 84.2494.

gendered a predictable poetic protocol that has four elements. First, the restatement of the topic to state the common ground on which fellow poets competed. Then came the best occasion to show off one's poetic talent, namely the development of some creative variation on the topic, exploiting tensions and associations inherent in the combination of the topic words. Third, the inclusion of a reference anecdote is missing in both Michizane's and Han Yu's poems. Fourth, both poems nonetheless conclude with words that "speak the poet's mind" (*jukkai*): Michizane gives tongue-in-cheek advice to his ruler, encouraging him to carefully distinguish between true and false (or flowers, snow flakes, and beautiful ladies respectively); Han Yu pretends to apologize for his interest in trivial blossoms, after having made clear that nothing less than the distinction between true and false is at stake when concerning himself with the blossoms.

*Scenario 2: How to Make Sad Autumn Happy,
or Michizane's and Jiang Yan's (444–505) Clash of Moods*

Heian poets often had to adapt their treatment of the Chinese topic line to the particular occasion of composition. Autumn poetry in particular tended to provoke a clash of moods. Many Chinese autumn poems, ever since the somber-toned *Jiubian* 九辯 (Nine arguments) in the *Songs of Chu*, included lamentations about old age, loneliness, and desperation. Yet this was not the appropriate register for a poem to be composed in the imperial presence on the "Double Ninth" (ninth day of ninth month), an important annual festival that called for writing poems on set topics. True, the poet could lament his low position and advancing age, and because the poet showed how much he wanted to do well in the service of His Majesty, this amounted to extending an indirect compliment to the emperor. But desperate complaints did not befit the panegyric tone the occasion required. How could a Heian poet solve this problem?

An interesting case in point is a poem that Michizane composed on a line by the Chinese poet Jiang Yan 江淹.⁴⁹ Jiang Yan addressed his poem to his temporary patron Prince Jingsu, King of Jianping and member of the ruling family of the Liu-Song dynasty (420–479) who lived in Jingzhou, in the area of the old Southern State of Chu:

⁴⁹ Preserved in Xiao Tong, *Wenxuan*, Zhongguo gudian wenxue congshu edition (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1987), 27.1265.

望荆山 Gazing at Jing Mountain

奉義至江漢 I reached the region between the Yangtze and the
 始知楚塞長 Han River to pay you respects
 and only now do I understand the expanse of
 Chu's barrier.
 南關繞桐柏 The Southern Pass is encircled by Mount Tongbo
 西嶽出魯陽 and from Western Peak protrudes Luyang Mountain.
 寒郊無留影 In the cold suburbs no single shadow [of foliage]
 remains,
 秋日懸清光 the disk of the autumn sun is suspended in crisp
 brightness.
 悲風攪重林 Sad winds warp the thick forests;
 雲霞肅川漲 clouds' purple haze is chilly over flooded rivers.
 歲晏君如何 How do You feel about year's end?
 零淚沾衣裳 My robe is moist from falling tears.
 玉柱空掩露 Jade pegs [of the zithers] are covered by dew in vain,
 金樽坐含霜 Silver goblets catch hoarfrost to no avail.
 一聞苦寒奏 Just hearing the "Bitter and Cold" ballad performed
 更使豔歌傷⁵⁰ makes the "Charms" song even more heart-breaking.

Jiang Yan wants his patron to know that he has done him a favor by taking on the burden of travel through the bleak autumn landscape of a dangerous terrain. Listening to songs about travel's hardships and loneliness does not ease Jiang Yan's lugubriousness, although it heightens his appreciation for the truth encapsulated in well-known songs that lament the hardships of travel. Michizane composes on the most cheerful line of the otherwise despondent poem, sweeping away dark autumn depression with a bright glimpse of imperial splendors:

重陽侍宴，同賦秋日懸清光，應製

At the "Double Ninth" Festival we composed at imperial command
 on "The disk of the autumn sun is suspended in crisp brightness"

天下無為日自清 Non-action throughout the Empire, the sun is
 by itself clear,⁵¹

⁵⁰ Both are Music Bureau Poems that exist in various versions, some of which lament loneliness, hardship, and travel.

⁵¹ Reference to a vision of government in which despite the Emperor's non-action everything would just happen by itself. The *Analekts* described the government of the mythical Emperor Shun in this way.

今朝幸遇再陽並	we are lucky to encounter the lined-up "Two Nines" ⁵² this morning.
深迫合璧龍宮徹	[The sunlight] ⁵³ penetrates deep into the Dragon Palace of Him—who is like both celestial disks;
遠任孤輪鳥路平	and it gives itself from afar to Him, the solitary wheel, under whom birds' paths are at peace.
萬里如逢褰纈望	Over thousands of miles he meets our hopes for "taking out the earplugs" ⁵⁴
黎民欲慰載盆情	and wants to soothe the people's desires for "carts and food."
微臣府仰依明德	We insignificant subjects rely on his bright virtue in whatever we do—
心比秋葵旦暮傾 ⁵⁵	our hearts are like sunflowers in autumn, day and night turning toward him.

Michizane's and Jiang Yan's poems share the autumnal season and the crisp radiance of the sun that it brings. Beyond that, they inhabit radically different worlds. Even after his travels are over and he is feasting with his host, Jiang Yan is unable to cheer up. The sad tunes about other depressed travelers give him some rest. Michizane is also feasting in company, even in imperial company. But if Jiang Yan is anxiously glancing around, encircled by the threatening sights that surround him on all fronts, Michizane speaks as the ceremonious courtier constructing a poem that centers on the figure of a virtuous Emperor Uda. The empire is settled in the center, clear as the sun; the "double ninth" date is auspiciously aligned as the lines of courtiers are for the celebration, and the emperor—the cosmic light-giver par excellence—embodies both "celestial disks," sun and moon. The poem focuses on the emperor as the pivot of the universe, in turn producing a corresponding miniature courtier, the sunflower-poet who is craning his head day and night toward the imperial brightness. While Jiang Yan nervously defends himself in all directions, Michizane centers his poem on the cosmic axis of the all-enlightening emperor and his responsive sunflower-subjects.

⁵² The ninth day of the ninth month.

⁵³ Sun and moon, a metaphor for the reigning Emperor Uda.

⁵⁴ A sign that Emperor Uda will listen to his subjects' complaints.

⁵⁵ *Kanke bunsō*, no. 428.

The two poems differ so sharply as to demonstrate how the Heian Topic Poem can lose sight of the Chinese reference poem. Michizane has excised the topic line from its context as if the reference poem did not exist at all. Topic lines would have been chosen for the occasion at hand based on their seasonal qualities—here the crisp light of the autumn sun—and if the rest of the Chinese reference poem did not fit the ceremonial frame, poets could simply avoid anything in the poem that might have stood in the way of joyful glorification of the imperial court.

The clash of the despondence of Chinese autumn poetry with the needs of Japanese court panegyrics is certainly not due to an inherent difference between Chinese and Japanese literary traditions. Instead, it emerges from the demands of the setting. Luckily, several Chinese poems on Jiang Yan's topic line survive to prove this point. Among these is the only surviving poem by the Tang poet Tao Gong 陶拱, which resembles Michizane's poem as an exercise in allegorical obedience to the Chinese emperor:

秋日懸清光

On "The disk of the autumn sun is suspended
in crisp brightness"

秋至雲容斂	As autumn comes, the clouds break up
天中日景清	and the sun stands clear in the middle of the sky.
懸空寒色淨	Serene is its cold appearance as it is suspended in the void,
委照曙光盈	full its light brightness as its brilliance weakens.
泓泓看彌上	Vast and deep—when you see it on the water expanse;
輝輝望最明	sparkling—when you catch it at its brightest.
煙霞輪乍透	When it suddenly penetrates the wheels of mist and haze,
葵藿影初生	the shadows of sunflowers first appear.
鑒下應無極	Under its round mirror responds limitless space
升高自有程	while it climbs up on its own path.
何當迴盛彩	Why should one turn to lush colors?
一為表精誠 ⁵⁶	Just show your fine loyalty.

⁵⁶ *Quan Tang shi* 779.8812. Although written on the same topic, the various Chinese poems must for chronological reasons be from different occasions, unless they have been misattributed. For Wang Wei's poem on the same topic see *Quan Tang shi* 127.1293.

Tao Gong is less explicitly allegorical than Michizane. He starts out as a careful observer, describing half a dozen ways to look at the sun's particular effects. But the reference to the sunflower that shows its loyalty to imperial authority lends allegorical significance to the descriptive mode of the previous lines. As a sunflower—the flower whose shadow physically appeared when the clouds gave way to imperial sunlight—Tao Gong scorns the cultivation of talent. He opts for humble loyalty rather than for a proud display of personal virtuosity. In his heliotropical adulation, he positions himself even more humbly toward the emperor than does Michizane.

Because the topic line allegorically identifies the sun as the emperor and the object of the poet's reverence, it poses a particular challenge when an emperor composes on it. Fortunately a poem by Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649) shows what happens when the object of allegorical desire suddenly becomes the subject of poetic composition:

賦秋日懸清光賜房玄齡

Composing on "The autumn sun gives crisp brightness"
for Fang Xuanling⁵⁷

秋露凝高掌	Autumn dew congeals on the bronze immortal's palms, ⁵⁸
朝光上翠微	morning light rises over the emerald plains.
參差麗雙闕	The uneven rays fill both sides of the ramparts,
照耀滿重闈	their brilliance flooding the walled gates.
仙馭隨輪轉	The immortal carriage follows the sun wheel's turns,
靈鳥帶影飛	just as the crow in the sun flies according to its shadow.
照波無定彩	Reflected on waves, its colors flicker,
入隙有光暉	while entering through crevices it has bright luster.
還當葵藿志	It just fits with the will of the sunflower,
傾葉自相依 ⁵⁹	which turns its petals toward [the sun], naturally in mutual reliance.

⁵⁷ A famous minister (578–648) who supported Taizong's father, the founder of the Tang dynasty, in the Sui-Tang transition and became a life-long intimate of Taizong.

⁵⁸ During the Han dynasty a statue of an immortal was standing in front of the palace holding up a pan to collect dew. Here it marks the imposing palace scenery.

⁵⁹ *Quan Tang shi* 1.17–18. Taizong's poem is also preserved in an anonymous version; see *Quan Tang shi* 787.8870.

Although Taizong's authorship is not entirely certain, because the same poem reappears in the *Quan Tang shi* (Complete Tang poetry) as by an anonymous author, a twist in the treatment of the topic makes imperial authorship quite plausible. Even the scenery of ramparts, which throws the morning light into characteristic relief, works well for a poem by the emperor directed toward one of his officials. As seen with the birds, nature follows the course of the sun and the immortal, presumably imperial, carriage subjects itself humbly to the same heliocentric regime. The actual sun in the sky has become less than the allegorical incarnation of the ruler; at the same time, it has also become more than him, because it comes to stand for a natural principle to which even the emperor is subject. As the sun becomes distinct from the emperor and is elevated to the level of a natural principle, its subjects, the sunflowers, are also promoted to beings with "will power" (*zhi*) who seem, of their own accord, to choose to pay homage to the sun. The poem's closing in particular emphasizes mutual reliance between plants and natural forces; this again is an allegory of imperial power. The combination of imperial humility—the imperial chariot being distinct from the sun wheel—with the elevation of his subjects to the role of partners fits perfectly with the convention of courtly composition that since the times of Cao Pi (Emperor Wen of the Wei dynasty, 187–226), who had rulers and their courtiers act in the roles of poetic playmates.

Fortunately not just the Chinese reference poem by Jiang Yan, but also Chinese poems on the same topic line from Jiang Yan survive. Even more felicitous is the survival of a poem by, probably, an emperor who had to circumvent the imperial panegyrics required in the poems for the "Double Ninth." Thus Michizane's praise poem for the "Double Ninth" provides a rare glimpse into how occasions—such as celebrating the "Double Ninth"—forced poets or emperors to be creative in adapting their composition on topics to their immediate purposes.

*Scenario 3: Inventing a Counter-Narrative,
or Michizane's Challenge to Bo Juyi*

If Heian poets did not reject any involvement with the Chinese reference poem, as they did in the previous scenario, they could deviate from it through negation or inversion. Michizane, Tao Gong, and

Emperor Taizong suppressed Jiang Yan's autumn lament because it was inappropriate for the occasion. In the following poem, on the Naïen Festival of 885, Michizane uses the Chinese reference poem as a negative foil against which to stage his own performance. Inversion provided the Heian poet with a great opportunity wittily to reshuffle the registers of the Chinese poem. Michizane's poem uses a line from a casual poem by Bo Juyi:

洛中春遊呈諸親友

On a "Spring outing in Luoyang with my friends"

莫歎年將暮	Don't sigh, now that the year is drawing to a close!
須憐歲又新	You should also be happy that a new year has arrived!
府中三遇臘	I have experienced the La Sacrifice three times in the capital district, ⁶⁰
洛下五逢春	and encountered spring five times in the Luoyang area. ⁶¹
春樹花珠顆	On spring trees—blossoms like pearls,
春塘水麴塵	on spring embankments—water like yellow wine yeast.
春娃無氣力	While spring girls lack vigor,
春馬有精神	our spring horses are quite spirited.
並轡鞭徐動	We align the reins and slowly move the whip,
連盤酒慢巡	we line up dishes, and wine leisurely makes the rounds.
經過舊鄰里	We pass through familiar neighborhoods.
追逐好交親	Tracking down good old relations.
笑語銷閒日	Laughing and talking, we pass our days, in idleness,
酣歌送老身	Drinking and singing, we send off old age.
一生歡樂事	The fun and revelry of a lifetime
亦不少於人 ⁶²	Should not be despised by people!

⁶⁰ The La Sacrifice was held in winter in honor of the "Hundred Deities" (*baishen* 百神).

⁶¹ The poem was composed in 833 when Bo Juyi was Governor of Henan Prefecture. He had been employed in the capital area since 829 and as Governor of Henan since 830. Thus, in the spring of 833 he was going through his fifth spring in the area and had witnessed the celebration of three La Sacrifices in the capital.

⁶² *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, 2106–7.

When Michizane composed on the topic line “spring girls lack vigor,” he radically changed the poetic scenery, transposing Bo Juyi’s somewhat rowdy *gaudeamus igitur* into the ethereal scene of a female dance performance:

早春内宴, 侍仁壽殿, 同賦春娃無氣力, 應製
 The Naïen Festival⁶³ was held in early spring
 in the Jijūden and we composed at imperial command
 on “Spring Girls Lack Vigor”

紈質何為不勝衣 Why can their gossamer-like [skin] hardly
 bear the costumes?
 謾言⁶⁴春色滿腰圍 They claim it’s because spring is in their
 hip circles!
 殘粧自嬾開珠匣 Their rouge faded, the dancers are too
 languid to open their pearl boxes
 寸步還愁出紛闌 and mincing away with minute steps,
 they fret over leaving through the
 Powder Gate.⁶⁵
 嬌眼曾波風欲亂 Lovely eyes—like wave crests that the wind
 tries to disturb;
 舞身迴雪霽猶飛 Dancing bodies—like swirling snow still flying
 after the weather has cleared.
 花間日暮笙歌斷 While the day among flowers draws to its close
 and flute songs fall silent,
 遙望微雲洞裏歸⁶⁶ far away we see them retreat into their cave
 like tiny clouds.

Bo Juyi opens on a lively appeal to the prototypical misanthrope who laments the ending of the year instead of enjoying the fresh joys of renewed spring. He has been in the area for some years and claims to be expert in all the beauties it has to offer. As if he wanted to count on his hand the springs he has lived through, he speaks four lines in “spring”

⁶³ The Festival was held on 1/21/885 during the reign of Emperor Kōkō (r. 884–887).

⁶⁴ Alternative rendering 慢言.

⁶⁵ The entrance to the female precincts of the Imperial Palace.

⁶⁶ *Kanke bunsō*, no. 148.

singsong: spring trees, spring embankments, spring girls, spring horses. In this all-spring scenery the poet roams around visiting old friends, drinking, feasting, and enjoying himself. The closing casts another cheeky side-glance at the misanthropic opponent who would scorn such careless pleasures.

The line chosen for the Naïen ceremony from Bo Juyi's light-hearted ballad is rather off-beat. In Bo's poem, the spring girls' weakness—the topic line elaborated in Michizane's poem—is contrasted with the horses' vigor, resulting in a humorously unequal pair. The female delicacy does not lack charm and certainly goes along with the frailty of the early spring blossoms in the previous couplet. Yet, Bo has a stronger predilection for enticements such as wine yeast and horses. Drinking and riding about visiting friends are at the forefront of Bo Juyi's spring scenery. In contrast, Michizane has the dancers faintly breathe erotic innuendos from the stage for which Bo would probably not have renounced the homosocial travel pleasures with his buddies.

One way to describe what Michizane did with the topic line from Bo Juyi's poem is to say that he turned his whole poem into the "broaching of the topic" that usually occupies the second couplet of a topic poem. He gives the girls center stage, in contrast to Bo Juyi's male wild world, where their presence is reduced to a humorous comparison with horsepower. He gives full attention not to the forceful conquest of fleeting spring pleasures, but to the description of their indecisive grace. The girls' lack of vigor translates in each couplet into something that is slightly off: their make-up is charmingly smudged after their performance, and their eyes and bodies are enticingly deranged—waves disturbed by wind, snow flying despite clear skies. Finally, they retreat like "clouds," slender obscurations, into that imaginary cave where blissful immortals dwell, an elegant glorification of the female palace quarters as something more durable and pleasurable.

Michizane suppresses the Chinese reference poem not simply because it did not fit the court occasion of the Naïen festival (which did indeed feature performances by female dancers). To the contrary, he consciously places his dancers against Bo Juyi's horses, his erotic vignette of disarming blandness against Bo's rougher world of male companionship, and a static scene of frail ethereal beauty against Bo's dynamic call to embark on easy spring pleasures.

*Scenario 4: Of Public and Private Erotics:**Sugawara no Fumitoki and Tachibana no Naomoto on Bo Juyi*

For three additional scenarios of how Heian Topic Poems engaged their Chinese reference poems, we turn to the poetry contest of 959, which featured the earliest Topic Poems proper.⁶⁷ The contest was part of Emperor Murakami's policy to revive old festivals or create new ones; it reflected his enthusiastic support of the arts by staging various contests at official occasions.⁶⁸ The contest was played in ten rounds, and the ten twin poems of the two competing parties were accompanied by short judgments that spelled out which party lost and had to drink a punitive wine cup. A short record (*ryakki*) of the event's preparations, participants, and proceedings is also extant. On the left side were the poets Sugawara no Fumitoki and Minamoto no Shitagō; on the right side, Ōe no Koretoki and Tachibana no Naomoto. Supporting the right side were several famous figures, most notably Regent Morosuke's sons Fujiwara Kaneie and Kanemichi. Ōe no Koretoki⁶⁹ also served as judge—a circumstance that probably influenced his extraordinarily successful record of two wins out of three rounds, which easily beat the next most successful poet, Fumitoki, who won three out of seven rounds. Most of the participants held fourth or fifth ranks and were in their twenties or thirties, except for Koretoki, who had already reached the age of seventy-one. Four poems are on lines by Bo Juyi, and one is based on a poem by the Tang poet Zhu Qingyu.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For a translation with ample annotation, and commentary on the preface and the poems of the first seven rounds of the contest see the six articles by Tsuda Kiyoshi, Nakaya Kenji, and Ono Yasuo collectively entitled "Tentoku sannen hachi gatsu jūroku nichi tōshi gyōji ryakki (1–6)," in *Gunma kōsen rebyū* 14 (1995), 15 (1996), 16 (1997), and 17 (1998); and the *Tōkyō kōgyō kōtō senmon gakkō kenkyū hōkoku sho* 28 (1996) and 34 (2002). In the following I rely gratefully on their work. I would also like to thank Satō Michio for providing me with a copy of his Edo manuscript of the contest poems. For an overview of extant manuscripts see Nakajima Tomoe, "Tentoku sannen hachigatsu jūroku nichi daidairi shiawase no kenkyū," *Tōkyō seitoku tanki daigaku kiyō* 19 (1986). For the translation I rely on the version in *Gunsho ruijū*, pp. 134, 280–87.

⁶⁸ Emperor Murakami revived the "Winding Stream" Festival, celebrated on the third day of the third month, which had been initiated by Heizei in 808, then celebrated in 890 and 891 and thereafter discontinued. See Ono, "Heianchō kudaishi no seiyaku," 26.

⁶⁹ Koretoki is also an important figure for Heian "couplet culture," as he compiled *Senzai kaku* 千載佳句, a collection that contains more than a thousand couplets written by 153 Tang poets and arranged topically.

⁷⁰ Five out of ten topics for the contest's rounds have no surviving Chinese reference poem, which might simply mean that the reference poems are lost.

The contest opens with a short quatrain, a complimentary greeting to the emperor. It pits Sugawara no Fumitoki against Tachibana no Naomoto 橘直幹,⁷¹ with Naomoto emerging as winner. Bo Juyi's reference poem, from which the topic was selected, does not easily prepare us for a ceremonious praise of the emperor; it is a casual soliloquy playing with the language of erotic encounter:

對琴待月 Waiting for the Moon in Front of my Zither

竹院新晴夜	In bamboo court on a clearing night
松窗未臥時	while I was still awake at my pine-tree window
共琴為老伴	I took the zither, my old companion
與月有秋期	and had an autumn rendezvous with the moon.
玉軫臨風久	My jade pegs had faced the breeze for a long while,
金波出霧遲	but only late did [the moon's] silver waves come out of the haze.
幽音待清景	With deep-felt sounds I await the clear scenery,
唯是我心知 ⁷²	[the moon] is truly my heart's companion!

Bo Juyi spends the autumn night with rather peculiar activities. Instead of being restless and cast in autumn gloom, as would be the case in many Chinese autumn-night poems, he is both lonely and well entertained. Not only does he have his zither as conversation partner. More strangely, he has a rendezvous with the moon. Despite the line-up of these companions, Bo Juyi's happy solitariness is slightly autoerotic. It is he who pulls the strings of this autumn night show of solitary encounters. The moon ends up being the poet's "heart's companion," an intimate friend who can appreciate his artistic skill on the zither. He plays *for* the moon to have it come out of the haze, a subtle continuation of the rendezvous (*qi* 期) situation intimated earlier in the poem.

How could the two Heian poets transform Bo Juyi's strange rendezvous with the moon into a greeting to Emperor Murakami? Both poets chose a similar strategy. They turned the moon into an allegory for the emperor and played out the imperial erotics of ruler and subject that since the Preface to the *Classic of Poetry* had become a well-worn trope:

⁷¹ Dates unknown. Son of the *Kokinshū* author Tachibana no Nagamori. He became Doctor of Letters and Head of the State Academy.

⁷² *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao* 26.1790.

與月有秋期

On "Having an autumn rendezvous with the moon"

Poem of the left side, by Sugawara no Fumitoki:

何秋與月不相思 Is there ever an autumn without the moon and
me longing for each other?
豈若今秋二八時 But how could it ever compare to our moon
here, this autumn on the sixteenth day?
為向清涼風景⁷³奏 We face the clear scenery and cold breeze [at
the Hall of Clarity and Coolness],⁷⁴ delivering
[poems].
望雲別有萬年期 Looking up to the clouds, we truly wish Him ten
thousand more years.

Poem of the right side, by Tachibana no Naomoto:

金波卷霧每相思 Each time its silver waves seem to dispel the
haze, I and the moon long for each other,
不似涼風八月時 but during the cool breeze of the eighth month
it is beyond compare.
定識聖明鸞殿上 That's certainly because upon our sage and
luminous Emperor up in Phoenix Palace
清光長獻萬年期 the bright moonlight bestows ten thousand
more years.

Neither poet fails to compliment the moon, in other words, the Emperor, who, precisely on that mid-autumn night, is beyond compare. Pre-figuring a practice that would become standard, Fumitoki reuses three of the five topic words in the first couplet. Naomoto, by contrast, uses none of the topic words, unless one considers the word "month" in the second line in its other meaning "moon." Thus, Naomoto skips over restating the topic and already in the first couplet "broaches the topic," replacing the word "moon" with the metaphorical association "silvery waves."

The second couplet in each of the two poems makes a similar gesture in wishing the emperor longevity, but with different rhetorical effects.

⁷³ Meaning also 清景涼風. The syntactic inversion—corresponding to the rhetorical trope of *enallage*—is used here to create a double entendre of the name of the palace compound and the description of the scenery.

⁷⁴ Part of the Imperial Palace where many official ceremonies such as appointment ceremonies and annual observances were held.

Fumitoki looks up to seek the emperor/moon among the clouds and wish him many more years. Both poets exploit the double meaning of 期 as “years/age” and “meeting/rendezvous.” The good wishes for the emperor’s *years to come* are certainly the most natural reading for the closing of this congratulatory quatrain, yet the poets could equally well hope for “ten thousand more” autumn rendezvous with the emperor. Naomoto here changes metaphorical allegiances, and if the moon in the first couplet had been the emperor, in the second couplet its light in turn bestows longevity on the emperor. Thus, Naomoto introduces a triangle between the emperor, himself, and the moonlight, which plays messenger of long life to the emperor in the second half of the quatrain. Even if the introduction of a triangular element into the rendezvous between the ruler and subject reduces the intimacy of their rapport, Fumitoki’s and Naomoto’s imperial erotics is close enough to be equally far from Bo Juyi’s solitary self-enjoyment. Both Heian poets elegantly succeed in transposing Bo Juyi’s autumn-night poem into a charming greeting to Emperor Murakami, who presided over the poetry contest that day.⁷⁵

Scenario 5: Excising the Poem, Expanding the Topic:

Fumitoki and Naomoto Once More on Bo Juyi

In the fourth scenario, Bo Juyi’s reference poem triggered in both contestants similar poetic instincts that led to similar compositions. What happened when the Japanese poems did not respond closely to their reference poems? Would the contest poems turn out vastly dissimilar? Or did forces other than the Chinese reference poem keep them close together? Obviously, the occasion was the strongest factor limiting divergence, for the poems had to respond to the season, the surroundings of the event, and the needs of imperial panegyrics. But there were other factors, too. Already in the mid-tenth century we see evidence of a phenomenon that became ever more prominent in the late Heian period: a topic grid that produces similar poetic responses.

⁷⁵ The judgment says: “After the left poem, the right poem was recited, whereupon the judge declared the right poem to be the winner. Then the support staff of the right party forced wine onto the left party and two wine cups went around. Finally the round ended.” Why Naomoto’s poem won is unclear. Tsuda, Nakaya, and Ono suspect that the judge Koretoki was partial because he belonged to that group. They also suggest that Fumitoki’s opening couplet on two rhetorical questions was deemed awkward. Yet, from the perspective of late Heian protocols of Topic Poetry, Fumitoki’s poem is undeniably superior.

The two poems of the third round of the contest bear little resemblance to their reference poem, yet they are hauntingly similar:

螢飛白露間以書為韻

On “Fireflies flutter amongst white dew,”
using the word “writing” as the rhyme

Poem of the left side, by Sugawara no Fumitoki:

秋風露白卷簾居	Under autumn wind, the dew is white; from my seat I pull up the blinds
閑見殘螢飛漸疎	I look around and see fewer and fewer late fireflies on their flight.
蘭蕙香邊飄不濕	Though sporting alongside the fragrance of orchids, they do not get wet, ⁷⁶
蒹葭色裏亂猶余	even when fooling around in the colorful reed sprouts [their luster] persists.
如珠契火光相映	[Fireflies and dew]—just like pearls in pact with fire, reflecting each other’s brightness
似水浮星影半虛	or like floating stars on water, casting back half the sky.
竟夜垂叢多有點	Throughout the night: so many dots hanging in the bushes.
人言漫照草中書	People would say that they gratuitously light up our study notes—[like Che Yin’s]. ⁷⁷

Poem of the right side, by Tachibana no Naomoto:

露深秋景欲蕭疏	Heavy dew, the autumn scenery is getting sparser,
螢火高飛鶴唳初	the fireflies’ fires fly high up, cranes first cry out. ⁷⁸
林葉受時光不濕	Though settling on forest leaves the [fireflies’] light doesn’t get wet

⁷⁶ Inverting the common trope that the “fire” of the “fireflies” gets wet next to watery elements.

⁷⁷ In the *Mengqi* 蒙求, an important Chinese primer used in Japan, both Che Yin and Sun Kang use ingenious methods to compensate for their lack of money to buy candle oil when studying night and day for the official exams; Che Yin catches fireflies that he releases at night and Sun Kang sits close to the reflecting snow so that he can read and write even at night.

⁷⁸ Around the middle of the night.

野花香處焰猶余 and even when among dewy wild flowers their
 blazes persist.

蘼葭渚誤珠還浦 The reed sprout islets could be [He]pu, to
 which the pearls were returned,⁷⁹

竹葦村驚燭映虛 the bamboo reed village surprises with its sky
 full of candle flickering,

無用木蘭朝墜液 No need for [Qu Yuan's retreat]—orchids
 dropping dew for him in the mornings,

夜垂虫篆照群書 because at night they hang like lamps—
 in insect and seal script—illuminating
 our pages.⁸⁰

Tachibana no Naomoto makes no gesture toward the poem by the Tang poet Zhu Qingyu 朱慶餘 (ca. early ninth century) from which the topic line was chosen. His long old-style poem describes a calm autumn night leisurely spent with a guest with whom he discusses literature while the lamps slowly burn down. Yet the contest poems are identical in more than a third of their words and end with precisely the same anecdote and gesture. On the level of imagery, they share the associative threads of dew-pearls-orchids and fireflies-fire-stars-lamps. Both poets play against the common expectation that the “fiery” fireflies would be extinguished on dewy plants. And “dew” necessarily evokes “orchids,” though in slightly varied poetic shape. In Fumitoki’s poem they are merely part of the autumn scenery in which the fireflies romp about. Naomoto instead introduces his orchids in the form of two exemplary anecdotes—bringing in a “reference anecdote” in accordance with the rules of later “Topic Poetry.”⁸¹ Orchids refer to the tragically unappreciated minister Qu Yuan of the State of Chu. Against the figure of the unsuccessful official who met with an unenlightened ruler, Naomoto introduces in the fourth couplet a protagonist who is

⁷⁹ Both lines refer to periods blessed with virtuous ministers. The first line points to an anecdote about the famous official Meng Chang recorded in the biographies of the *HouHan shu*. Previous governors of Hepu county had greedily monopolized the pearl trade of the region to pocket the profits for themselves. When Meng Chang became governor he returned the pearl trade into the hands of the starving people. See *HouHan shu* 76.2473.

⁸⁰ Again, reference to Che Yin's study technique. The "insect" and "seal" scripts probably refer to old calligraphic styles. But the phrase also puns of course on "insects" in the scene—fireflies.

⁸¹ Both poems include "reference anecdotes" in the third and fourth couplets, thus coming very close to the later form.

almost deterministically called on stage by the topic word “fireflies” combined with the rhyme word “writing”: Che Yin, the poor and relentlessly eager student studied under the “light” of fireflies. His story implies that he becomes an official through a virtuous ruler’s just system for recruiting men of talent.

As a bow to Emperor Murakami, Naomoto states that, thanks to the emperor’s virtuous rule, the “Qu Yuans” are superfluous in the Heian capital. In turn, the “Che Yins” are models for the poet and his like. The “reference anecdotes” are not just a veneer of erudition but provide models with which the poet might identify. In the company of some of the most powerful and best-educated members of the Heian elite, “Che Yin” offers himself as a key to success: ideally, the relentless study by firefly-light of some of the most difficult scripts will ensure a spot at court events like Sino-Japanese poetry contests.

Similar responses by both Fumitoki and Naomoto are triggered not by the Chinese reference poem, but by the coherence of the associative power of the topic word “fireflies” in combination with the rhyme word “writing.” This combination was conspicuous enough to guide both poets down the same topical path.

Scenario 6: Popular Vignettes and Real Court Life:

Fumitoki’s and Koretoki’s Classicist Cast of Bo Juyi’s Song Lyrics

All the Chinese reference poems I have thus far discussed were old-style or recent-style poems of the classical *shi* 詩 genre and thus close in form and register to the Heian Topic Poems. The reference poem for the last round, however, is a quatrain in popular song form. What happens if the line from a popular song genre is expanded in a classical regulated “Topic Poem”? Bo Juyi’s song lyric seems to describe a musical banquet at a thriving imperial court, followed by a lonely lady’s weary days spent in idleness, who faces the “Court of Shining Light,” the imperial palace in Changan. Yet, behind these two innocuous scenes of courtly feasting and idling there looms the tragic story of Emperor Xuanzong, forced during the An Lushan Rebellion of 755 to witness the execution of his favorite concubine, Yang the “Prized Consort.” We know this shattering story from *Changhen ge* 長恨歌 (Song of everlasting sorrow), a piece Bo Juyi had just written in 806, the year preceding this composition:

小曲新詞二首 Short New Song Lyrics. Two Poems

霽色鮮宮殿 Limpid skies refresh the Palace,
 秋聲脆管絃 autumn sounds resound with flutes and strings.
 聖明千歲樂 Pleasure and music for the sage emperor's next
 thousand years,
 歲歲似今年 and year after year it resembles this year's.

 紅裾明月夜 Crimson lapels on a bright moon night,
 碧簾早秋時 Crystal-blue bamboo mats around the time of
 early fall.
 好向昭陽宿 She likes to settle down in the direction of the Court
 of Shining Light.
 天涼玉漏遲⁸² The sky is cool and the jade clock slow.

Various scenarios can be imagined from the juxtaposition of the two stanzas: Emperor Xuanzong is feasted by his courtiers, but he cannot enjoy himself after the execution of Yang the Prized Consort, who, in the second stanza, is sitting in her Palace of the Immortals and looking sadly down to the earth and the imperial palace while time drags slowly toward eternity. Alternatively, the first stanza portrays the happy and endless feasting at Xuanzong's court before the An Lushan Rebellion and Yang's execution. The second stanza—prefaced by the silence between the stanzas that brackets the violent execution of the concubine—sees her suddenly in her new palace among the immortals. The two contest poems elaborate on the topic line of this scenario, which is a predictable choice, because the task of the Heian poets is to celebrate the happy occasion of the contest at a real court, not the happy feasting that is a poetic cover-up for an inconsolable emperor in deep depression.

秋聲脆管絃

On the topic "Autumn sounds resound with flutes and strings"

Poem of the right side, by Sugawara no Fumitoki:

玉管朱絃脆也清 Jade flutes, crimson strings, their sounds gentle
 and clear,
 聲聲是莫不秋聲 tone after tone and not a single tone out of tune
 with autumn!

⁸² *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, pp. 18, 1214.

商風眇眇凝嬌曉	Autumn breeze: lightly, on this dawn of assembled charms.
蜀雨濛濛灑帶晴	Shu rain: fine drizzle that sprinkles, bringing clear skies.
落葉響隨孤竹亂	The echo of falling leaves goes with the lonely bamboo "flutes" in disarray.
長松韻逐七絲輕	"Rhyme tunes" of long pine trees fit the lightness of the seven-stringed zithers.
指忙靜撫仙窗色	Fingers are busy strumming quietly, charms of immortal [palace] windows,
唇忽寒吹礫砌情	lips suddenly blow cold notes, feelings of jade-like tiles.
應雅鶴飛思月後	Flying in response to the elegant music, cranes soar, longing for the moon's backside,
聞韶鳳翥下雲程	Settling down on hearing the Shao music, phoenixes land along the clouds' paths. ⁸³
天時聖日皆同德	Heavenly season on this holy day join their virtue,
萬歲將重奏太平	for ten thousand more years we will repeatedly report/play "Great Peace."

Poem of the left side, by Ōe no Koretoki:

自有素商爽氣驚	Since plain autumn wind and clear breezes surprised us
管絃清脆耳先傾	we first turned our ears to the pipes' and strings' clear sounds.
汶陽篁篠遙分韻	Far from Wenyang's ⁸⁴ bamboo we divide up the rhymes
巴峽流泉近報聲	At Ba Gorge's ⁸⁵ spring we proffer our reports.
銀管吹時鸞發響	When silver pipes play, simurghs respond with echoes,
玉徽彈處鳳和鳴	and where jade frets are pressed, phoenixes join the melody.

⁸³ Legend has it that when the sage Emperor Shun composed the Shao music phoenixes came to pay him homage.

⁸⁴ Wenyang was close to Qufu, Confucius's birthplace, in the state of Lu. It was famous for a type of bamboo that was used to make wind instruments.

⁸⁵ The Yangtze Gorges were famous for their limber used to make good zithers.

咸成一曲羌人思	First a song—full of the longings of Qiang people ⁸⁶
夢斷三更叔夜情	Then interrupted dreams in the middle of the night—feelings for Xi Kang. ⁸⁷
孤竹當昏秋月落	Lonely bamboo touches the lips—the autumn moon descends,
絲桐應指曉風輕	fingers respond to stringed pawlonia zithers, toward dawn the breeze is light.
蕭辰合奏但寥亮	On this wind-rustling morning the music resounds just cheerfully
寶器宜傳萬代名	and it is befitting to hand down the treasured name for ten thousand generations! ⁸⁸

Emperor Xuanzong's glorious court before the An Lushan Rebellion is transported to Emperor Murakami's court in the Heian capital, but of course without the sense of imminent doom that pervades Bo Juyi's song lyrics. The topic line illustrates an old motif in Chinese poetry, the merging of nature with culture, so that autumn sounds *are* tunes of lutes and zithers and vice versa. This harmony is also a proof of virtuous imperial rule, which ensures that cosmic patterns fit perfectly with human governance. In referring to the story of phoenixes paying homage to the mythical emperor Shun, Fumitoki compliments Emperor Murakami on having accomplished such harmony at his court.

Fumitoki masterfully elaborates on the interplay implied by the topic line. In the first couplet, he boldly chooses to reuse the topic word "tone" three times, twice referring to the musical and once to the autumnal "tones." Then in the third couplet, he merges natural and cultural music in the bamboo—already dressed as "flutes"—and the pines

⁸⁶ The Qiang people were famous for making flutes.

⁸⁷ Xi Kang (223–262) was an excellent zither player and described his art masterfully in his *Qinfu* 琴賦.

⁸⁸ The judgment for this last round is the most detailed of the entire contest. That the round was declared a draw might again be due to the fact that Koretoki was both considerably senior than Fumitoki and that he functioned as judge in this context. Fumitoki's crafting of this poem is vastly superior to Koretoki's. The judgment reads:

The clock advanced, but it remained unsettled who won and who lost. The left and right music officials cleared their hearts and pricked up their ears. Strings and pipes slowed down, the clock drumbeat furtively sounded. It was already around the morning hour, when the judge declared it a draw. Meanwhile, the left party sent forth a small child to dance the Nasori dance and to offer compliments to the winning party. After the event ended the emperor retreated.

rustling in “rhymes.” The “reference anecdote” of Shun’s composition of the Shao music and the phoenixes’ homage to his music (and of course his political authority) is a perfect capstone to Fumitoki’s artful praise of Emperor Murakami’s ability to merge the musical, cosmical, seasonal, and political into a blend of sage governance.

In comparison to Fumitoki’s poem, Koretoki’s poem appears as poetic *bricolage*. Certainly, he knows that the best bamboo came from Wenyang and the best zither wood from Ba Gorge. And he instructs us about the best flute players—the Qiang people—and the most famous zither virtuoso, Xi Kang, but he does not bear out the promise of the topic line. Fumitoki’s poem shows us Topic Poetry at its best. And it is clear proof that, if handled by a brilliant poet, the genre did not necessarily stifle creativity with its rigid rhetorical protocol.⁸⁹ Much Topic Poetry is bad not just because of petrifying generic conventions, but because of the circumstances under which it was produced: given that it was massively produced as part of daily education and court culture, only a small fraction of it could be truly ingenious.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

With the exception of Michizane’s “Double Ninth” and the contest poems on “Fireflies flutter amongst white dew,” Heian poems on topic lines engaged deeply with their Chinese reference poems. This engagement has profound implications for understanding the development of the genre and the radical shift from composition on actual Chinese poems to freely invented topic lines in the late Heian period. That the early Heian poems engage with the Chinese reference poems shows the desire of Japanese poets to communicate creatively with the Chinese tradition, while late Heian practice suggests a decrease in that desire. The variety of such engagements speaks to the ability and playfulness of Heian poets to rewrite, overwrite, and transpose Chinese themes, moods, and modes. Certainly, an invented topic line possessed an extensive web of stock associations to be taken into account by the poet. But when composing on a line from an actual poem, the poet had to

⁸⁹ We might object that Fumitoki’s poetry stood at the very beginning of the genre and is thus still unencumbered by the poetological codification that set in toward the late Heian period. Yet, the Topic Poetry by Ōe no Masafusa (1041–1111) is a vivid example of how the genre even during that period still had brilliant practitioners.

respond reflectively to the unique and complex overall meaning of a specific poem. Hence the Chinese reference poems anchored Japanese Topic Poetry in Chinese phraseology and its thematic and stylistic preoccupations. In the late Heian period, when invented topics became the norm, this anchoring disappeared, and the interaction between Sino-Japanese Topic Poetry and the *waka* tradition intensified. By that time, *waka* poetry had developed its own dense world of topics and advanced as a new dialogue partner for Sino-Japanese Topic Poems, which had lost their connection to specific Chinese poems.

No study in a Western language has yet been devoted to "Topic Poetry," even though it is a prominent genre of Heian poetry and has recently been rediscovered in its wide-ranging importance by a group of scholars around Satō Michio. After all, Topic Poetry was such an influential genre that all poems not fitting its formal template were labeled "Non-Topic Poetry" (*mudaishi*). More importantly, Topic Poetry does not just constitute a substantial corpus of Heian *kanshi* production; it is also a social phenomenon whose study touches upon crucial issues such as the place of poetic performance in political culture, the nature of Heian elite education, the logic of public pastimes, and the limitless space for creative adaptation of Chinese practices, texts, and themes to the exigencies of the Heian courtly world.

Beyond its East Asian context, Topic Poetry provides an exceptional case study of a claustrophobically circumscribed poetic tradition of composition on other poems, a tradition that prizes the rhetoric of endless variation and minimalist distinctions. I am tempted to use the term "poetic epistemology" to describe the mindset that the training in the composition of Topic Poetry fostered in the Heian elite. The decorum of topics and relevant associations noted in poetic manuals was not just a literary affair, but echoed encyclopedic categories that were, admittedly, handy categories to organize reference works, but also reflective of a vision of the cosmos. In this sense their poetic training provided Heian courtiers with the knowledge of *what* they could and should know about the cosmos and the place of human affairs within it. The composition of Topic Poetry conditioned a "poetic epistemology" in another sense as well. The courtiers learned *how* they should know. The rhetoric of substitution through associative variation considerably sharpened their powers of perception. The shades of blossom hues, grass colors, reflections of reflections, or innuendos of fragrances

schooled not only the faculty of vision, but also the other senses as well. Topic Poetry trained the senses and the expression of sense perceptions in similar ways as the rhetorical exercise of “ekphrasis”—the prose description of a painting or work of art—educated pupils’ perception and eloquence in Roman schools.

This value of Topic Poetry as a tool of “poetic epistemology” is also a reason for such poetry’s lack of popularity with Western scholars. Topic Poetry has the reek of the pedantic and propedeutic, and much of it potentially disappoints the literary historian looking for good poetry by presentable authors. These factors explain why Western scholars have thus far neglected the genre; but Topic Poetry’s crucial position in Heian literature, its founding role in the counter-formation of the voluminous production of “Non-Topic Poetry,” and its unique relation to the world of poetic topics of *waka* should suffice to make it a more attractive research topic in the future.

This paper has further aimed to explore methodological issues in reception studies. Topic Poetry gives a wonderful example of how indomitable is the academic inclination to search for origins in the reference culture, even in cases where contemporary members of a target culture itself emphasize that a certain phenomenon had no precedent in the reference culture. Scholars have tended to assume that there just *has* to be a Chinese origin of the Japanese genre. But Topic Poetry is uniquely Japanese, just as the Latin rhetorician Quintilian proudly stated that “the genre of satire is all ours,” one of those rare Roman inventions without Greek precedent. Topic Poetry teaches a good lesson. Because Heian writers highlighted the peculiarity of Japanese topic poetry vis-à-vis Chinese practices and nothing suggests that Chinese technical poetics ever developed the degree of codification described in Japanese poetic manuals, or that the Chinese conceived of Topic Poetry as a genre, we have to accept Topic Poetry as an unmistakably Japanese phenomenon. It reminds us that, even when phenomena are based on Chinese precedent, one should focus not so much on the Chinese origins or inflections of practices, genres, and texts, but rather on the transmutations in their Japanese habitat.

The corpus of Heian Topic Poems provides vivid case studies of how lines from Chinese poems were made at home in Japanese *kanshi*. We saw how poets could, first, closely reproduce the Chinese reference poem;

second, readjust the mood of the reference poem to fit the Japanese occasion; third, completely invert or rescript the poem; fourth, change between private and public registers to fit the circumstance; fifth, completely disregard the Chinese reference poem but ground their poem in a readily available topical grid of Chinese and Japanese encyclopedias; and sixth, "reclassicize" it into a *shi* poem, a popular vignette presented in a popular Chinese song form.

The concept of intertopicality has helped me to describe the change in the writing of Topic Poetry from actual to invented lines. It also helps us understand the poetic psychology of a pedagogical and performative genre. In addition, a focus on intertopicality can encourage a practice of annotation that resists the impulses of an "Adamic philology." It would instead distinguish between allusions, topical associations, and explicit twisting of topics. Also it would draw attention to similarity in occasions and context of composition rather than randomly indicating a supposed origin of diction. The concept of intertopicality has already served quite well if it shows the way toward these goals. "Adamic philology" is a dream of scientific philology. "Intertopicality" is the messy reality of the *perpetuum mobile* of the literary practices of Heian poetry. If modern annotators pilot us between the shallows of both, we are in lucky and perceptive hands.