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## The Literary Essence of Our Court (*Honchō monzui*)

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In the history of *kanshibun* (Sino-Japanese literature) it is hard to find another anthology that was so receptive to the practical needs of its times, yet stayed so influential into the early modern period. Compiled by Fujiwara no Akihira (c. 989–1066), *Honchō monzui* (Literary Essence of Our Court) is a repository of model pieces featuring genres that an educated Heian man needed to master in order to participate in court life, perform duties within the court bureaucracy, or draft texts for patrons of religious ceremonies. That Akihira had a complicated relationship to the scholarly world of his time and included pieces that fit his wits – from regretful and reclusive to parodic and graphic – makes for a colorful model anthology. With it he established the fame of the scholarly Fujiwara Ceremonial Branch. He seems to side with, but also to lament and, at times, to parody the contemporary scholarly world, where success was hard to earn, and political and financial reward was meager.

Although a descendant of the *Kaifūsō* poet-official Umakai, Akihira did not come from an established scholar family, such as the Ōe or Sugawara, who feature richly in his anthology. He passed the examinations only in his early forties. His involvement in two examination scandals, where he helped candidates and encouraged a failed candidate to have his examination reassessed, certainly did not advance his career. Only in his late sixties did he receive a significant post in the Ministry of Ceremonial, advancing to fourth rank in the years before his death, when he was appointed Professor of Letters, Tutor of the Crown Prince, and Director of the State Academy in quick succession. Akihira was a talented *kanshi* poet and also composed *waka*. But his fame rests on three model collections that captured the trends and served the needs of his time: *Literary Essence* showcases scholarly genres; *Meigō ōrai* (Akihira's Letters) features models for personal correspondence; and *Shinsarugakuki* (Account of New Monkey Music), on the surface an account of a right palace guard's and his vast family's visit to a carnivalesque

night of popular entertainment, parades portrayals of types and professions, ranging from provincial governors, students, Yin-Yang masters, and monks to sumo wrestlers, prostitutes, gluttons, and gamblers.

Akihira compiled *Literary Essence* toward the end of his life, when his scholarly posts gave him access to many documents. Canvassing about two centuries of *kanshibun* from the Saga through the GoIchijō courts (c. 810–1037), he selected 427 pieces by seventy authors (excluding lower-ranking officials, monks, and women) for a vast panorama in fourteen volumes, arranged by thirty-nine genres, with a special focus on the Engi, Tenryaku, and Kankō eras, high points for courtly *kanshibun*. Genres composed at court banquets – *fu* (rhapsodies) and *shi* (poetry) – make up the first volume, followed by five volumes featuring clerical genres of the imperial bureaucracy, either communicating orders down the imperial hierarchy, such as *shō* (edicts), *chokutō* (imperial responses) or *kanpu* (State Council decrees), or communicating information or requests upwards, such as *taisakubun* (civil service examination essays), *hyō* (memorials to the throne), or *sōjō* (petitions). Volume Seven contains largely samples of *shōjō* (private correspondence), followed by four voluminous books of *shijo* (poetry prefaces), an increasingly prestigious genre written to accompany the poetry composed during banquets or outings. Volume Twelve is a medley of genres from *mei* (inscriptions) and *ki* (accounts), to *san* (encomia) and *den* (biographies); and the last two books provide model texts for religious events, most notably the popular *ganmon* (wishes), detailing the motivation and hopes of sponsors, or also *saimon* (prayers) addressed to deities.

Though it was the first anthology to feature a vast panorama of Sino-Japanese genres, *Literary Essence* took cues from previous collections. Inspired by the central importance of the *Wenxuan*, the sixth-century Chinese anthology of ornamental prose and poetry that was a major textbook for students in the "History and Literature track" (*kidendō*) at the Heian Academy, Akihira may have tried to create a *Wenxuan* for Japan. Ōsone Shōsuke argues that Akihira produced a fourteen-volume "complement" to the sixteen-volume *Fusōshū* – a voluminous collection of predominantly *risshi* (regulated poetry) compiled by Ki no Tadana and offered to Emperor Ichijō – to match the thirty volumes of the *Wenxuan*; that this mainstream genre of Heian *kanshi* is conspicuously absent from *Literary Essence* supports this hypothesis. By featuring thirty-nine genres, just as in his Chinese model, Akihira paid homage to the *Wenxuan*, but his own collection was clearly geared toward the exigencies of mid-Heian Japan. He adopted not even a third of the *Wenxuan*'s categories and filled the roster with genres relevant to Heian reality, such as bureaucratic genres like *iki* ("appointment documents") or

*wakajo* (waka prefaces) written in kanbun prose for the waka produced at poetry events and contests. Except for "prayers" all the genres in the last two books are of Japanese origin.

But even genres with the same name could be two different things: the majority of the nine "prefaces" in the *Wenxuan* are for literary collections and thus not comparable to the 150 "poetry prefaces" in *Literary Essence*, which were testimony to the distinctively Japanese genre of *kudaishi* ("topic poetry"), regulated poems composed on five-character topic lines according to a strict rhetorical template; they provided a prime occasion for Heian courtiers to attract the attention of patrons with their sophisticated parallel prose and their erudite command of Chinese reference anecdotes. Similarly, *sōjō* (petitions) were typically pieces remonstrating against policies; absent from the *Wenxuan*, they appear in *Tang wencui* (Tang Literary Essence, 1011), another model for Akihira's collection, which also inspired its title; but Akihira focused on scholars' petitions for advancement of rank or post, highlighting their unfortunate situation as their career prospects deteriorated with the decline of the *ritsuryō* system since the tenth century. Such a difference in political practices is also visible in *hyō* ("memorials"), which cover various topics in the *Wenxuan*, but are mostly "resignation memorials" from top-level officials in Akihira's collection. Although the custom of repeatedly submitting resignation requests existed in China, it is not documented in *Wenxuan* or *Tang wencui*, while *Literary Essence* includes many memorials of multiple resignations, of up to four times.

Another less conspicuous model for Akihira's anthology that was at least equally important to its success was Fujiwara Kintō's *Wakan rōeishū*, a collection of poetry couplets, parallel prose lines, and waka for chanting: Akihira included the integral texts of 90 percent of its 106 Sino-Japanese prose excerpts in *Literary Essence*. Akihira was an avid collector of exquisite lines, which was popular during his time, but his couplet anthology is lost. With more than a fifth of *Literary Essence* he contextualized favorite lines of his day and thus created, in part, a "deselected" couplet anthology.

In contrast to its Chinese models, dissent, criticism, and parody of court life has a prominent place in *Literary Essence*. Akihira was certainly critical of the scholarly world, but he also disapproved of the low impact scholars had on political affairs. This resonated with disappointment among mid-Heian literati, who were even less likely to make a good government career with the ascendancy of the regency system and the Fujiwara. Most of the leading authors included in *Literary Essence* are evidence of this situation. For example, Sugawara no Michizane died in exile precipitated by Fujiwara intrigues,

and his grandson Furnitoki had a late start to his career, reaching third rank only in the year of his death. Ōe no Masahira, the central figure of the other major scholarly lineage, harbored misgivings throughout his life for not having reached beyond a mid-ranking career. But even royal family members could be victims of Fujiwara power politics: Minamoto no Kaneakira, son of Emperor Daigo, was forced out of his position as Minister of the Left by Regent Fujiwara no Kanemichi and bitterly lamented this fate in the "Rhapsody on Tuqiu," with ominous reference to the assassination of Duke Yin of Lu, who, according to the *Zuozhuan*, built a residence at Tuqiu to retire in old age, but was killed when about to abdicate. He aligns himself with Chinese scholar-officials who suffered grand injustice, such as the Han dynasty minister Jia Yi.

Pieces by Yoshishige no Yasutane and Minamoto no Shitagō show the broad spectrum of tones of dissent Akihira included: Yasutane, scion of a Yin-Yang family turned scholar and later monk, represents a contemplative take on the problem. In "Account of my Pond Pavilion" he envisions a reclusive life guided by moral self-cultivation and learning at his retreat, away from the evils of court politics. Yasutane's account formulates much that Kamo no Chōmei voiced two centuries later in *Hōjōki* (Account of my Ten-Square-Foot Hut), also a confession of reclusion and social disgust, but he is still more ambivalently caught between dreams of political significance (demanded by his Confucian values as well as his personal ambition) and an alternative life, allowing him "a body at court and a mind's ambition set on reclusion." Minamoto no Shitagō, the scintillating scholar-poet and never more than mid-ranking official, illustrates the sting of bitter social satire that also appears in *Literary Essence*. In *Song of a Tailless Cow* he extols the invisible virtues of his seemingly handicapped treasure: it doesn't dirty its behind with a tail when pooping, is not put to hard work, and is never stolen because uniquely recognizable by the authorities, etc. His closing promise to repay his cow once he himself gets promoted is a barely veiled way to say that Shitagō treats his beast better than the emperor treats his loyal scholar-officials.

But parody and satire also appear in less somber tones in *Literary Essence* and show Akihira's interest in playful modes and liminal topics. Structurally, we see this in his idiosyncratic choices for the "poetry" section: even if we accept the argument that Akihira excluded regulated poetry because of other existing collections, he indulges in literary games: acrostic poetry, palindromes, and the only Heian example of *kyōka* ("crazy song"), a kanshi genre that became popular in the Edo period. Stylistically, we see this interest in Akihira's selection of plain prose (in contrast to the officially dominant

ornate parallel prose), which shows the impact of mid-Tang "Returning to Antiquity" movements. Thematically, Akihira included pieces treating supernatural and non-courtly worlds. The sexually explicit pieces are hard to pin down: Ōe no Asatsuna's "Rhapsody on Marriage" articulates not just courtship, as vernacular diaries and tales were doing during this time, but includes a yin-yang physiology of sexual fluids; an anonymous biography of an "iron hammer" (possibly authored by Akihira under the pseudonym "Organ Extraordinary") traces the career of a penis in court service. Did Akihira, who was interested in educational model books, take the opportunity to teach people sex vocabulary while having some academic fun? Or did he include these pieces to mock the repressed literary decorum at court and ridicule bureaucratic structures by viewing them through the career course of a male organ? Such literature must have existed for fun and entertainment (erotic pieces by Bai Juyi's brother Bai Xingjian may have inspired the Japanese poets), but why did Akihira choose them for his model anthology? Without doubt, "Japan's *Wenxuan*" would have alienated Xiao Tong, Crown Prince Zhaoming of the Liang, the compiler of the original *Wenxuan*.

The great number of surviving manuscripts from late Heian on – with favorite books often circulating independently of the entire anthology – and printings in 1629 and 1648 show that *Literary Essence* was a continuous success. It set the tone for subsequent anthologies: The compilers of *Honchō zoku monzui*, the sequel to *Literary Essence*, and the administrative anthology *Chōya gunsai* (Compendium of Texts for Court and Provinces) adapted much of Akihira's framework. Lines from *Literary Essence* are often mentioned in medieval war tales, travel accounts, epistolary collections, and even kana prose, and despite the turn away from ornate parallel prose to Song-dynasty-style Old Prose in the Edo period it still retained its model value for certain genres and occasions. For a collection that propagated the personal concerns and peculiar tastes of a pleasure-loving, if disillusioned, mid-Heian scholar-official, this was a highly successful career.

## Vernacular histories: *Eiga monogatari*, *Ōkagami*, *Gukanshō*

ELIZABETH OYLER

Historical writing in Japan was infused with new life and meaning with the appearance of two significant works casting the life and times of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1027) against a backdrop of dynastic history: *Eiga monogatari* (A Tale of Flowering Fortunes, completed c. early twelfth century) and *Ōkagami* (The Great Mirror, c. twelfth century). The most powerful of the Fujiwara chancellors and regents, Michinaga was also famously the patron of Murasaki Shikibu, who wrote at least some of *Genji monogatari* during her service in the salon of Michinaga's daughter, Empress Shōshi. Thought to have been written by a court lady known as Akazome Emon, *Eiga monogatari* is the earliest narrative account of the splendor of Michinaga's age. *Ōkagami* has not been convincingly attributed to a specific author, though scholars generally believe he was a high-ranking aristocratic male.

*Eiga monogatari* is often cited as the inaugural work of *rekishi monogatari* (historical tales). It is considered a history primarily because of its structure: it traces the arc of Michinaga's rise against history measured in the reigns of sovereigns, starting from Uda. Comprised of a thirty-chapter text followed by a ten-chapter continuation, *Eiga monogatari*'s main body documents the history of the central court, and particularly the Fujiwara family, from Uda's time through the rites following the death of Michinaga in 1027. The second part begins three years later and continues through 1092. Although presented as a dynastic history, the work is written in *kana*, a departure from the tradition of official historical writing found in the *Rikkokushi* (Six National Histories), the primary historical records preceding *Eiga monogatari*. Akazome Emon, who served as a lady-in-waiting to Michinaga's primary wife, Rinshi, seems the most likely author for the first thirty chapters. Arguments for single authorship of the entire work have been made, but scholars generally agree that the final ten chapters were written by someone else, also a woman, who may or may not have had close ties to Akazome