

**Of Poetry, Patronage, and Politics:
From Saga to Michizane, Sinitic Poetry in the Early Heian Court**

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation seeks to explore possible relationships between literature—poetry, in particular—and royal patronage. More specifically, I am here interested in examining the remarkable efflorescence of Sinitic poetry (*kanshi*) during the reign of Emperor Saga (786-842, r. 809-823), as well as some of its later developments in the private poetry collections of Shimada Tadaomi (828-891) and his pupil Sugawara no Michizane (845-903). The history of Sinitic poetry composed in Japan has been meticulously studied; there is certainly no dearth of research, either in Japanese or in English. Even so, the early ninth century remains somewhat of a mystery. A total of three imperially commissioned anthologies (*chokusenshū*) of Sinitic poetry and prose were compiled during this time, along with an imperial history—all of which were the direct product of Saga's personal

patronage. Much of his own poetry has been preserved in these anthologies. Despite the existence of hundreds of Sinitic poems, and a contemporary history (also in Sinitic), scholars tend to shy away from this period. This dissertation is an attempt to remedy that situation.

As a means of facilitating a broader appreciation of Saga, I have included some material on King Alfred the Great (849-899, r. 871-899), the most well-known Anglo-Saxon king, and oft-celebrated father of the English nation, who was a near contemporary of Saga. Naturally, I have also interwoven some material on Emperor Taizong (598-649, r. 626-649) of the Tang dynasty, whose influence on ninth-century Sinitic poetry (in Japan) has been the focus of some past research. Scholars of East Asian literature, whether they specialize in Chinese or Japanese literature, are familiar with the grand literary and political legacy of this continental sovereign. Both Saga's poetry as well as his ideal of sovereignty were influenced by the work of Taizong and his lettered vassals.

A central assumption informs this work: ninth-century poetry was inevitably political, insofar as it served as a tool whereby authors could enforce or manipulate prevalent power relations within the court. Poetry, therefore, was both dominated by and exercised significant influence over hierarchical networks of patronage. Poetry was also

occasional, that is, it was recited aloud on public occasions—royal banquets or excursions—before an audience of vassals and courtiers. Saga, as supreme ruler and patron, composed poetry that sought, through its presentation at these banquets, to repeatedly legitimate his own position, while simultaneously appealing to a number of different audiences. Different audiences harbored different expectations, and Saga, adroit politician that he was, strove to please each in turn by adopting a number of poetic voices or personae. This is especially evident after his retirement, when he found it necessary to adopt a different poetic persona more appropriate to his less prominent station. Tadaomi and Michizane, as recognized scholars, loyal vassals, and influential statesmen, received patronage from both sovereigns and high-ranking noblemen. These complex networks of patronage and varied audiences demanded the creation of ever more subtle poetic personae. This dissertation, among other things, is an exploration of how poets of the ninth century adopted different poetic personae in accordance with their intended audiences. The deliberate mixing of various Sinitic genres to achieve this end receives a great deal of attention.

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CHRONOLOGY

Key Figures, Anthologies, and Historical Events Featured in this Dissertation

- 751** *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻 (Fond Recollections of Poetry), Japan's oldest extant anthology of Sinitic poetry is compiled this year by an anonymous editor
- 781** Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (737-806, r. 781-806) ascends the throne
- 794** The capital is transferred to Heian 平安 (modern-day Kyoto)
- 806** Emperor Heizei 平城 (774-824, r. 806-809) ascends the throne
- 809** Emperor Saga 嵯峨 (786-842, r. 809-823) ascends the throne
Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu 藤原冬嗣 (775-826), previously private tutor to Saga while still a prince, is appointed the first royal chancellor in Saga's newly established royal chancellery (*kurōdo dokoro* 藏人所)
- 810** The Kusuko Disturbance 薬子の変, in which a recently retired Emperor Heizei unsuccessfully attempts to establish a separate court at Nara
- 814** *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Soaring Above the Clouds), Saga's first imperially

commissioned anthology of Sinitic poetry, is submitted to the sovereign

Wang Hyoryōm (J: Ō Kōren; Ch: Wang Xiaolian, ?-815) 王孝廉, an emissary from Parhae, arrives in Izumo, where he presented the presiding Japanese officials with gifts

- 815** *Shinsen shōjiroku* 新撰姓氏録 (Newly Compiled Genealogy of Prominent Lineages), a list of clan genealogies commissioned by Emperor Saga, is submitted to the sovereign
- 818** *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (Splendid Literary Flowerings), Saga's second imperially commissioned anthology of Sinitic poetry, is submitted to the sovereign
- 819** *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀 (The Continued History of Japan), an official Sinitic history commissioned by Emperor Saga, is commissioned; the work was delayed, however, due to a number of deaths, and only completed in 840
- 820** *Kō'nin kyakushiki* 弘仁格式 (Court Regulations for the Kō'nin Era), a compendium of legal regulations commissioned by Emperor Saga, is submitted to the emperor

- 821** *Dairishiki* 内裏式 (Imperial Ceremonial), a manual of court ritual commissioned by Emperor Saga, is submitted to the sovereign
- 823** Emperor Junna (786-840, r. 823-833) ascends the throne; Saga, who retires this year, continues to hold the reins of power at court
- 827** *Keikokushū* 経国集 (Governing the Realm), the third imperially commissioned anthology of Sinitic poetry; while ostensibly commissioned by Emperor Junna, the real mastermind behind this anthology was Emperor Saga
- 833** Emperor Ninmyō (810-850, 833-850) ascends the throne
- 850** Emperor Montoku 文徳 (827-858, r. 850-858) ascends the throne
- 854** Shimada Tadaomi 嶋田忠臣 (828-891) is admitted into the Faculty of Letters at the State University as a scholar of letters (*monjōshō* 文章生)
- 858** Emperor Seiwa 清和 (850-880, r. 858-876) ascends the throne
- 859** Shimada Tadaomi is ordered to serve as official host to an official envoy visiting the court from Parhae
- 862** Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903) is admitted into the Faculty of Letters at the State University as a scholar of letters (*monjōshō* 文章生)

- 866** Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 (804-872) is the first to be appointed Regent (*sesshō* 摂政) to a young sovereign, thereby effectively seizing the reins of power at court
- 872** Upon the death of Fujiwara no Yoshifusa, Fujiwara no Mototsune 藤原基経 (836-891) is appointed Regent (*sesshō*) to Emperor Seiwa
- 876** Emperor Yōzei 陽成 (868-949, r. 876-884) ascends the throne
Shimada Tadaomi is once again assigned to serve as host to an envoy of delegates from Parhae
- 884** Emperor Kōkō 光孝 (830-887, r. 884-887) ascends the throne
Fujiwara no Mototsune is the first to be appointed Regent (*kanpaku* 関白) to an adult sovereign
- 887** Emperor Uda 宇多 (867-931, r. 887-897) ascends the throne
- 888** The Akō Incident 阿衡事件, in which Fujiwara no Mototsune has a serious falling out with Emperor Uda
- 891** *Denshi kashū* 田氏家集 (The Shimada Family Anthology), which, according to extant manuscripts, is actually Shimada Tadaomi's private collection of

Sinitic letters, is completed sometime shortly after this year

897 Emperor Daigo 醍醐 (885-930, r. 897-930) ascends the throne

900 *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文章 (Literary Drafts of the Sugawara Family), a private collection of Sugawara no Michizane's Sinitic poetry and prose, is submitted to the sovereign

901 Sugawara no Michizane is demoted to supernumerary governor-general of far-off Dazaifu (in modern-day Fukuoka), an appointment which effectively amounts to exile

A NOTE ON CONVENTIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Regarding dates, years are given in the approximate Gregorian calendar, either alone or, when following Japanese era titles and years, in parentheses. All months indicate those in the traditional lunar calendar. This twelve-month cycle corresponds, for the most part, to the four seasons, as follows:

First month	Early spring	Seventh month	Early autumn
Second month	Mid-spring	Eighth month	Mid-autumn
Third month	Late spring	Ninth month	Late autumn
Fourth month	Early summer	Tenth month	Early winter
Fifth month	Mid-summer	Eleventh month	Mid-winter
Sixth month	Late summer	Twelfth month	Late winter

Whereas it is the convention of some authors to capitalize these lunar months, thereby visually distinguishing them from the solar months of our modern-day calendar, I have left them in lower

case. An awareness of this correspondence between the lunar months and the four seasons is crucial when reading Japanese poetry, whether Sinitic or vernacular.

The following is a list of some of the more common titles and technical terms appearing throughout this dissertation, along with the English translations I have adopted for each:

<i>chokusen</i> 勅撰	imperialy commissioned
<i>chōyō no en</i> 重陽宴	chrysanthemum banquet
<i>chūnagon</i> 中納言	Middle Counsellor
<i>daigakuryō</i> 大学寮	State University
<i>dainagon</i> 大納言	Grand Counsellor
<i>dairi</i> 内裏	the Imperial Palace
<i>dajō daijin</i> 太政大臣	Chief Minister
<i>dajōkan</i> 太政官	Council of State
<i>fu</i> 賦	rhapsody
Hyōbushō 兵部省	Ministry of Military Affairs

<i>kaen</i> 花宴	flower-viewing banquet
<i>kanpaku</i> 関白	Regent (to a sovereign in his majority)
<i>kanshi</i> 漢詩	Sinitic poem
<i>kurōdo no tō</i> 蔵人頭	Chief Royal Chancellor
<i>kurōdodokoro</i> 蔵人所	Royal Chancellery
<i>kyōen</i> 竟宴	concluding banquet
Minbushō 民部省	Ministry of Popular Affairs
<i>monjōdō</i> 文章道	Faculty of Letters
<i>naien</i> 内宴	inner banquet
<i>naiki</i> 内記	Private Secretary
<i>naishi no kami</i> 尚司	Head of Female Officials
<i>sadaijin</i> 左大臣	Minister of the Left
<i>sangi</i> 参議	State Advisor
<i>seishi</i> 正史	official or imperially commissioned history
<i>sesshō</i> 摂政	Regent (to a sovereign in his minority)
Shikibushō 式部省	Ministry of Ceremonies

<i>shōyū</i> 少輔	Junior Assistant
<i>tennō</i> 天皇	sovereign
<i>udaijin</i> 右大臣	Minister of the Right
<i>waka</i> 和歌	vernacular poem
<i>zuryō</i> 受領	provincial governor

NINTH-CENTURY JAPANESE EMPERORS

Emperor Kanmu	桓武	(737-806, r. 781-806)
Emperor Saga	嵯峨	(786-842, r. 809-823)
Emperor Junna	順和	(786-840, r. 823-833)
Emperor Ninmyō	仁明	(810-850, r. 833-850)
Emperor Montoku	文德	(827-858, r. 850-858)
Emperor Seiwa	清和	(850-880, r. 858-876)
Emperor Yōzei	陽成	(868-949, r. 876-884)

Emperor Kōkō	光孝	(830-887, r. 884-887)
Emperor Uda	宇多	(867-931, r. 887-897)
Emperor Daigo	醍醐	(885-930, r. 897-930)

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First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this piece of work to my dear wife, Midori, whose patience and gentleness have supported me, both spiritually and intellectually, throughout my many years as a graduate student. She alone knows just how hard I—rather, we—have struggled to bring my studies to fruition. She, above all others, deserves my most profound gratitude. Our little daughter, Ichiyō, too, deserves her share of thanks. Born halfway through my time at Columbia University, Ichiyō has demanded of me more time perhaps than my advisor would care to learn. These rambunctious moments of distraction from academic contemplation proved, on more than one occasion, to provide me with flashes of sudden insight, without which, I dare say, this dissertation might not have been completed half so quickly. Teatime with my wife and playtime with Ichiyō—soon to be three years old—provided me with an escape, and it was during these times of intellectual abandon that the Muses, their sonorous voices rising now above the din of squabbling pundits, revealed to me things I could not have imagined while sitting alone in front of my books.

My advisor, Dr. Haruo Shirane, has provided me with no less support, albeit in a different

arena. Despite his hectic schedule—and I am certain it was *very* hectic at times—Dr. Shirane has unfailingly shown himself ready to both quietly listen and offer guidance whenever needed. Both he and I know just how much guidance I required. It was certainly no little amount. His faith, then and now, in my abilities as a scholar far exceed anything I myself could admit. It was he, furthermore, who encouraged me to provide English translations of Saga’s poems. Now, in hindsight, I see that these translations are likely the most valuable contribution this dissertation has to make to the field of early Heian Sinitic poetry. Had I been allowed more time, I should have liked to provide an equally generous helping of translations from the private poetry collections of both Tadaomi and Michizane. As it stands, however, that will have to wait for a later opportunity. Whatever the case, if I am the youthful mother of this dissertation, then Dr. Shirane is undoubtedly its seasoned midwife; if I have been able to push hard enough, it was because he kept encouraging me to do so.

Emperor Saga, to whom I have dedicated three entire chapters, calls out to me from the hoary past, demanding that his name, too, appear here in these acknowledgments for all to see. Let us pray that his soul enjoys now the enlightened leisure he so earnestly desired throughout life. In his own words, then, let us hope that he has become the aged fisherman who is “blithely unaware of the passing of the season, now mooring his little boat, now drifting along with the

waves, plying his oars at leisure.”

INTRODUCTION

A Broad Look at Things:

Sinitic Poetry and the State of the Field

Poetry, Patronage, and Politics

First, an exchange of verses:

Come, tell me now, with what charms does mid-spring announce her arrival? First
and foremost, snow-white blossoms unfurl in answer to the repeated caresses of
a pleasant vernal breeze.

Surely it is the fragrance of these flowers that keeps us all here—why else should we
tarry?—here, where we sing with great men of letters, here where we gather
together to enjoy this lovely banquet.

過半青春何所催 和風數重百花開

芳菲歇盡無由駐 爰唱文雄賞宴來

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3

Thus begins a celebratory poem by Emperor Saga 嵯峨 (786-842, r. 809-823), first presented at a banquet, which he himself hosted, held in the spring of 812.¹ The fragrance of cherry and plum blossoms apparently perfumed the air; bush warblers delighted the ears of all present with their sweet melodies; butterflies of every hue danced amidst the revelers, now gamboling about the flowers, now fluttering over the drinking bowls brimming with rice wine. The venue was none other than the Shinsen Gardens—literally, “garden of the divine spring” 神泉苑—a favorite spot for such banquets, located just outside the Imperial Palace gates. The full title of this poem is “A Poem on the Theme ‘Falling Blossoms,’

¹ For a full translation and commentary of this poem, the title of which I will abbreviate as “Falling Blossoms,” see Appendix, item no. 01 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3). I will have several occasions to revisit this poem throughout the first half of this dissertation. My use of the term sovereign, as opposed to the more familiar emperor, as a translation of *tennō* 天皇—heavenly lord, the term by which Japanese emperors of the Nara and Heian period referred to themselves—is informed by the erudite arguments first put forward by Joan Piggot in her monograph, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (published in 1997). While I have used the term sovereign when referring generally to ninth-century Japanese rulers, I have nevertheless reserved the term emperor when and only when it is being used as a proper title, such as Emperor Saga and Emperor Junna. Just as we would not refer to King Alfred as Sovereign Alfred, so, too, ought we to avoid referring to Emperor Saga as Sovereign Saga.

Presented at a Flower-Viewing Banquet Held in the Shinsen Gardens.” Saga surrounded himself with a hand-picked coterie of highly-lettered, politically adroit men: the great men of letters or *bunyū* 文雄, “heroes of writing,” referred to in the second couplet. One such man, Ono no Minemori 小野岑守 (778-830), who happened also to be Saga’s trusted military general, presented a response to “Falling Blossoms” on this occasion. The last five couplets went as follows:

O, this glorious banquet, with its flowers blooming before us!—there has never
 been a more splendid time than this for a flower-viewing banquet!

Listen to all those jade flutes—what myriad music they make! All playing as one,
 not a single tune amiss. Partake of the wine in yon golden chalice—what a
 bouquet of flavors; what a pure, heady blend it makes!

Gaze at the beautiful maidens perched in yon pagoda, their vibrant garments vying
 with the flowers for brilliance. See, too, how those same flowers, blooming
 there about the balustrades, blush with jealousy!

Come, tell me, who can say for certain which is more fetching, those maidens or the
 flowers? Why, you can barely tell one from the other, so splendid are their
 hues.

Pray, will these blossoms fall? Must our festivities come to an end? Nay, comes the
 reply, flowers shall bloom and flowers shall fall for a million springs to come,

and more!²

待花宴 花宴何太合良辰

玉管千調無他曲 金罍百味自能醇

臺上美人奪花綵 欄中花綵如美人

人花兩兩共相對 誰得分明偽與真

借問花節有期否 花開花落億萬春

Ono no Minemori, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 56

Another attendant at this banquet, a man by the name of Takaoka no Otokoe (or perhaps Otoe) 高丘弟越 (n.d.), about whom we know next to nothing, likewise presented a versified response to Saga's poem. The following is Otoe's poem in its entirety:

Flower petals flutter and fly through the air—and flying they alight at last upon the

² The full title of this poem is “A poem, in irregular meter, on the them ‘falling blossoms,’ presented in response to imperial command at a flower-viewing banquet held in the Shinsen Gardens.” For a detailed commentary on this poem, see Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volume 3, 1635-1646.

regal cinnabar-painted stairs of our sovereign's garden seat.

I had thought, before today, that flowers fell merely in accordance with the whims
of the wind. I see now, however, that even these flowers return to the earth in
harmony with the rhythms of Nature.

Those drifting petals, now fleeing, now returning, are floating atop Our Majesty's
drinking bowl. Those falling blossoms, now in clusters, now scattered,
bespeckle Our Majesty's divine robes.

Even these flowers, supposedly devoid of all human sentiment, respond lovingly to
our most virtuous sovereign. With how much greater gratitude, then, do I, a
lowly vassal, partake of thy most benevolent chalice!³

落花飛 飛去落丹墀

本謂隨風落 方知乘化歸

乍往乍還浮御盞 一連一斷點仙衣

無心草木猶餘戀 況復微臣醉恩卮

³ The full title of this poem is identical to Minemori's, namely, "A poem, in irregular meter, on the them 'falling blossoms,' presented in response to imperial command at a flower-viewing banquet held in the Shinsen Gardens." For a detailed commentary on this poem, see Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volume 3, 1766-1771.

Takaoka no Otokoe, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 80

Now, this is a dissertation about the practice of poetry in ninth-century Japan. More specifically, it is an exploration of a certain style or mode of court-centered poetry, known to modern English-language scholars as Sinitic poetry, a translation of the Japanese term *kanshi* 漢詩, literally, poems of the Han people/dynasty. As the title of this dissertation makes clear, I am interested in looking at poetry not simply as a literary artifact, but rather as a performative art inextricably intertwined with historical issues of patronage and politics. All three of these elements—poetry, patronage, and politics—require some brief clarification.

Saga, host of the present banquet, was, as shall be seen in the ensuing chapters, a tireless patron of Sinitic literature, especially poetry. In response to an unstated hypothetical question, “Why have we gathered here today?” Saga, in the poem just quoted, gives the following conventional reply: “Surely it is the fragrance of these flowers that keeps us all here—why else should we tarry?” To this he adds the pleasure of drinking and exchanging Sinitic verses with his elite cotiric of “great men of letters.” Later, in the same poem, Saga

asks the vernal breeze why she, in turn, has come to attend the banquet: “I come, she responds, with no other errand than to perfume the robes of all who sit at this banquet.”

Here we see two salient features of nearly all ninth-century Sinitic poetry. First and foremost, poetry was a social practice that was intensely occasional, that is to say, composed expressly for the purpose of being presented at a specific banquet, in a specific season, with a very specific audience in mind. Those men who presented poetry to the sovereign were in turn rewarded, not only with social recognition, but with various material goods, such as textiles and, in Saga’s court, (outdated) copper coins. As Steininger explains:

Gift exchange was an organizing principle of both government finance and elite society in the mid-Heian [as well, I must add, in the early-Heian], and homologous structures ordered the production and reception of artistic forms such as literature as well. Numerous events at the palace, temples, and noble households necessitated the performance [that is, recitation] of literary Sinitic documents—poems presented at banquets, sermons recited at Buddhist assemblies, memorials offered up at an imperial audience—and all such scribal production was generally reciprocated with a

material token of some sort recognizing the service rendered.⁴

Saga's verses were not the product of a leisurely exercise in poetic fancy. He composed these lines with this banquet and his vassals in mind. His vassals, in their turn, wrote poetry in precisely the same manner. Together, sovereigns and vassals, through the continued production and public presentation of Sinitic poetry, generated a rigid hierarchy, which was at once conditioned by and, in turn, effectively conditioned the type of literature produced within these courtly circles.⁵ Poetry was a public affair, through and through. All three of the poems quoted above have been preserved in an anthology of Sinitic poetry entitled *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Soaring Above the Clouds), commissioned personally by Saga himself and completed sometime around 814, two years after the flower-viewing banquet in question. In this anthology, Saga's poem appears near the very beginning of the anthology, while that of Minemori is placed more than fifty poems later, with that of Otokoe coming near the end of the anthology. In other words, poems that were once presented as a series within a single banquet have been separated throughout an anthology that contains poems

⁴ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 47. Of course, the bits in square brackets are my own addition.

⁵ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 48.

from a great many such banquets. This fragmentation of poetry was inevitable, considering that the compilers of *Ryōunshū* had decided to arrange poetry by author in order of court rank, and not by occasion, or even by theme. Modern scholars, like me, who tend to study poems as artifacts firmly embedded within anthologies, often lose sight of the original performative nature of poetry. Anthologies, for one reason or another, draw our attention to the written word, the very thing that ensures the promulgation of a literary legacy. This emphasis on the written word, along with its concomitant focus in modern scholarship on detailed exegeses of poetic terms and allusions within a given poem, can blind us to the specific sociopolitical circumstances surrounding the initial composition and presentation of poetry. Simply put, Saga and his men composed their verses with the banquet of 812 in mind. The anthology *Ryōunshū* would come only two years later, and then only as a fragmentary rearrangement of past events.

Along with this first feature—the fundamentally social and therefore occasional nature of Sinitic poetry—we can see also in Saga's verses a second salient feature: a cosmological vision or ideal, whereby the virtuous character of the sovereign is affected by and in turn affects the rhythms of Nature (*zaohua/zōka* 造化). So much has been said about this, both by premodern and modern scholars alike, that I will refrain from all but the

briefest explanation. The idea is quite simple: the actions of a sovereign, when in perfect harmony with the will or mandate of Heaven (*tianming/tenmei* 天命)—a mysterious, all-pervading, eternal principle which governs both celestial and terrestrial affairs—will bring about a harmonious state of affairs within his own kingdom. Bountiful harvests and amiable relations among vassals are a sure sign of a virtuous ruler. This was a vision shared by Saga and his men, and, even when not stated explicitly, one which runs through all of their verses. Furthermore, it was believed that the very act of composing and exchanging poetry contributed in a very real way to the overall harmony of the court, and, through the benevolent mediation of its sovereign, of the very cosmos itself. Therefore, poetry of the ninth-century was both occasional and, for lack of a better term, sympathetic, in the sense of sympathetic magic. When Minemori praises the music presented at Saga's banquet—"Listen to all those jade flutes—what myriad music they make! All playing as one, not a single tune amiss"—he is at once alluding to the harmonious affect his sovereign exercises over all things, music included, as well as offering his own contribution, through verse, to the furtherance of that same overall harmony. Here, myriad music comes to signify the myriad vassals surrounding Saga. See, rejoices Minemori, how we vassals, each with our own verses, all sing to the same tune! Our hearts, dear sovereign, are as one; not a single

soul among us shall betray you! This tendency to employ a sort of double vision, whereby, in the case of Minemori, the music of flutes comes to stand for the sentiments of vassals, is constantly at work in courtly Sinitic poetry. This poetic double vision is itself another manifestation of the aforementioned cosmological ideal, whereby one thing, say, the sovereign, is thought to be mutually resonant with another, quite heterogeneous thing, such as spring blossoms. Otokoe's poem is a textbook example of this. The falling blossoms come to represent the sovereign's harmonious connection with Nature, a concept that is more-or-less synonymous with the will of Heaven.

Objectives and Structure of this Dissertation

Ninth-century Sinitic poetry was, first, intensely occasional and, secondly, cosmologically sympathetic, efficacious, or resonant. These two features, whether explicitly or implicitly, inform my understanding of almost every poem quoted throughout this dissertation, especially the first three chapters. The exchange of verses between Saga and his vassals during the banquet of 812 foregrounds these features while, at the same time, making clear the intimate relationship between poetry, patronage, and politics. Saga was the

patron supreme; the poetry exchanged between him and his vassals sought to harmonize not only the world of Nature but, closer to home, the complex network of relationships in which all courtiers found themselves enmeshed. That poets composed poetry as a means of advancing, or at least preserving, their social standing at court is old news; that poetry in most premodern societies was inherently political is nothing new. There is, consequently, no need for me to demonstrate the validity of such a theory. What I would like to do—and this *is* something new—is explore some of the ways in which poets deliberately employed elements from disparate literary genres in order to develop more complex poetic personae or voices, which were, in turn, utilized to appeal to a variety of different intended audiences. This phenomenon, which is at once poetic and political, will be explored through a series of detailed case studies, focusing, for the most part, on three ninth-century poets: Emperor Saga, whom we have just met, Shimada Tadaomi 嶋田忠臣 (828-891), and Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903). Saga represents the first half, while Tadaomi and Michizane represent the latter half of the ninth-century. Saga's enthusiasm for Sinitic literature was widely recognized from a very early date. The first Japanese man of letters to offer a comparative summary of continental (Chinese) and Heian (Japanese) poetry was Ōe no Masafusa 大江匡房 (1041-1111), with a short essay entitled *Shikyōki*

詩境記 (On Poetic Sentiment). A direct translation of the entire essay would prove tedious.

Allow me instead to offer a simplified, freely abridged paraphrase of Ōe's essay:

Continental poetry began with the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Poetry, reaches its final form sometime around c. 600 BC), each poem therein representing the sincere outpouring of a sagely soul incited to speak out against injustice. This tradition held sway for more than half a millennium. Later, over a period of some four centuries, extending from the middle of the Han 漢 (202 BC-AD 220) to the end of the Liu Song 劉宋 (420-479) dynasty, continental poetry underwent three major stages of development. The first developments took place during the Western Han 西漢 (25-220) dynasty, with the pioneering verses of Zhang Heng 張衡 (78-139). The second stage occurred during the Jin 晉 dynasty (280-420), represented by the verses of Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and his contemporaries. The third and final stage of development took place during the Liu Song dynasty, with the verses of Bao Zhao 鮑照 (c.414-466). Still later, during the reign of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (598-649, r. 626-649) of the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-907), a number of well-known poets came to the fore, including Bo Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831),

who dramatically changed the manner in which poetry was to be composed.

Here in our own land, too, poetry has passed through three stages of development. For us, the tradition of Sinitic poetry most properly began during that period extending from the Kō'nin 弘仁 (810-824) to the Jōwa 承和 (834-848) era [i.e., Saga's active years, both on and off the throne, during which time the three imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic poetry were compiled]. The second stage, when Sinitic poetry reached its zenith, extends from the Jōgan 貞觀 (859-877) to the Engi 延喜 (901-923) era. The third stage brought about a further revival in Sinitic poetry, during that period extending from the Jōhei 承平 (931-938) era to the Tenryaku 天曆 (947-957) era. Later, during the Chōhō 長保 (999-1004) and in our present Kankō 寛弘 (1004-1013) era, Sinitic poetry has again risen to a place of high prominence among men of letters. Even so, there are very few in our own land who can be called truly great poets of the Sinitic tradition: Since its beginnings in our land, Sinitic poetry has, very loosely speaking, been duly cultivated by some thirty men. More strictly speaking, though, only six or seven of

our poets are worthy of special praise in this area.⁶

Three observations are worth noting here. First, whereas the history of Sinitic poetry on the continent is seen as extending from the compilation of the *Book of Poetry*—then believed to have been edited and put into its final form by Confucius (551-479 BC)—to the ninth century, a total of nearly a millennium and a half, the history of this same genre in Japan is relatively young, beginning in the ninth century and extending to the author’s era, that is, the very beginning of the twelfth century. Sinitic poetry in Japan is, according to Ōe, a relatively young tradition, at least when compared to its continental forerunner. Second, both Chinese as well as Japanese Sinitic poetry are seen as having undergone three stages of development. The various salient features of each stage are nowhere detailed. In the case of China, we are at least given the names of prominent poets—a hint that might help the eager student grasp some of the features of a given stage. In the case of Japan, however, we are given nothing but era names. Third, and this is very curious, there is no mention of *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻, compiled in 751, more than half a century before the Kō’ nin era, which

⁶ The text of this essay may be found in the third fascicle of *Chōya gunsai* 朝野群載 (Records from Court and Province, 1116); for a modern Japanese translation of the text, see Kawaguchi, *Heianchō no kanbungaku*, 13-14; for a treatment of Masafusa’s essay, see Denecke, *Classic World Literatures*, 63-65, where she refers to this essay as the “Realm of Poetry.”

era Masafusa sets as the beginning of Sinitic poetry in Japan. Why should he leave out this anthology? Perhaps because it was not imperially commissioned? Perhaps because it was not circulated widely? Or, perhaps because, in his eyes, *Kaifūsō* represented an isolated phenomenon? We have no way of knowing either way. Whatever the case, so long as Masafusa is concerned, the history of Sinitic poetry in Japan properly begins with Saga and his three imperially commissioned anthologies—no earlier. I, too, have chosen to begin my discussion with Saga for more-or-less the same reason. A mountain of scholarship dedicated to *Kaifūsō* already exists. There is no need for me to make that mountain any taller.

In this dissertation I examine a number of relationships that existed between the practice of Sinitic poetry and networks of patronage. A truly remarkable efflorescence of Sinitic poetry was brought about during the reign of Emperor Saga, a man who was both avid poet and patron par excellence. The literary legacy he set into motion, preserved for posterity in his three imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic writing was inherited by a select group of highly-lettered courtiers, such as Shimada Tadaomi (828-891) and his pupil Sugawara no Michizane (845-903), who compiled private collections of Sinitic writing. I will show how the move from imperially commissioned anthology in the early

ninth century to private collections in the latter half of that same century resulted in significant changes in the way poets expressed themselves. Most notably, we see in these later collections an increase in the complexity of the types of poetic personae employed by poets, a development intimately connected to changes in the sociopolitical status of these poets and their relationship to ever more complex networks of patronage.

This dissertation is divided into two major parts. The first part, consisting of chapters one through three, is dedicated to the life and work of Emperor Saga, while the second part consists of chapters four and five, dealing, respectively, with the poetry of Shimada Tadaomi and Sugawara no Michizane. The first part covers the early half, while the second part covers the latter half of the history of Sinitic poetry in ninth-century Japan. Between these two parts I have inserted a brief chapter—what I have called an Interlude—that deals with the life and literary legacy of King Alfred the Great (849-899, r. 871-899), that far-famed Anglo-Saxon ruler who was active only a few decades after Saga. This interlude serves two ends: first, to open up the field of Sinitic poetry to a wider audience, namely, scholars of ninth-century England, and second, to offer a point of comparison between premodern Japanese and Anglo-Saxon poetry. In a similar vein, I have also included, in the third chapter, a discussion of Emperor Taizong (598-649, r. 626-649) of the Tang dynasty,

whose influence on ninth-century poetry in Japan is well known. Scholars of East Asian literature, be they specialists in Chinese or Japanese literature, are acquainted with the literary legacy of this continental sovereign. Saga's poetry, along with his concept of what a sovereign ought to be, were deeply influenced by the work of Taizong and his lettered vassals. In much the same way, Alfred's own literary and political ideals were strongly influenced by Carolingian models.

Ninth-century poetry was political. Poets composed verses in hopes of enforcing or manipulating their social standing within the court. Emperor Saga, enthroned at the apex of his court, composed poetry as a means of enforcing certain ideologies of sovereignty. Tadaomi and Michizane, whose situation was more precarious, and whose networks of patronage were forever changing, composed poetry in hopes of gaining recognition from both peers and superiors, recognition that could potentially lead to the elevation in social standing of their respective families. Whether exercised from above or from below, whether the poet be sovereign or vassal, poetic practice in the ninth century was governed and motivated by complex hierarchical networks of patronage. At the same time, poetry actively exercised a significant degree of influence over these same networks. Furthermore, poetry, as practiced throughout the Heian court, was occasional: poems were, in their first

embodiment, recited aloud during public occasions—royal banquets, excursions, poetry contents—before an audience, the members of which varied with the event. For the most part, these audiences consisted of lettered courtiers of both high and low rank. As already stated, Saga, as supreme ruler and patron, composed poetry that, whether recited aloud at banquets or preserved later in anthologies, sought to repeatedly legitimate his right to rule. It was necessary, depending on the occasion and venue, for Saga, and later for those who helped compile his anthologies, to appeal to a variety of different audiences, each of which could be expected to have a slightly different set of expectations. Saga seems to have been a master of adaptation: he pleased each audience in turn by adopting a number of subtly different poetic voices or personae. This is especially evident after his retirement, when he found it necessary to adopt a different poetic persona, or set of personae, more appropriate to his somewhat less prominent, though no less influential, station.

Tadaomi and Michizane did likewise, albeit from vastly different positions on the social hierarchy. Both men were, during their lifetimes, highly praised scholars, loyal vassals, and, as shall be seen, influential statesmen able to affect court politics even while away from the capital. All of this they achieved through mastery of Sinitic writing. Their networks of patronage were complex, including both sovereigns and high-ranking

noblemen. Ever more complex poetic personae were required if these men hoped to win favor with their many patrons. Tadaomi and Michizane were graduates of the State University (*daigakuryō* 大学寮), members of a class of low-ranking courtiers who traditionally served as provincial governors (*zuryō* 受領); they were subjects whose social standing within the court depended for the most part on imperial patronage.⁷ They had also to deal with their peers, some friendly, some not so. Poetry, aside from praising the sovereign, also served as an often precarious means of social interaction with peers. Tadaomi was Michizane's tutor. The two men got on well with one another throughout life. Tadaomi managed to keep himself away from any political scandals; his career was relatively smooth, and not at all exceptional. Michizane, having risen to unprecedented heights under imperial patronage, got on the wrong side of a powerful political rival and was, as a result, doomed to exile. In the following chapters, I will examine in much detail the manner in which poets of the ninth century adopted different poetic personae in accordance with their intended audiences. Whereas Saga commissioned three anthologies of Sinitic writing, each containing the work of a handful of men, Tadaomi and Michizane

⁷ Just as, in accordance with the work of Joan Piggot, I have chosen to use the term sovereign as a more appropriate translation of *tennō* 天皇, heavenly lord, so, for the same reason, I have thought it best to translate *daigakuryō* 大学寮, as state university, as opposed to the more common imperial university.

compiled private collections, the extant manuscripts of which contain exclusively the poetry of these two men. I hope, by contrasting the imperial, authorial voice of Saga, on the one hand, with the more subdued, more complicated voices of Tadaomi and Michizane, on the other, to present a history of ninth-century Sinitic poetry that captures the vicissitudes of the genre in all its aspects.

An appendix will be found at the end of this dissertation. This contains deliberately lightly annotated English translations of all Saga's Sinitic poems, at least those preserved in his three anthologies. A number of his poems found in other sources have been discussed throughout the dissertation, though they do not appear in the appendix.

State of the Field

It is certainly true, in regards to the study of premodern Japanese literature, especially within Japan, that "...a nationalistic emphasis on vernacular literature has lobotomized the most authoritative half of Japanese literature," with the most authoritative half referring to Sinitic literature.⁸ A fair deal of work has been done by Japanese scholars on Sinitic

⁸ Denecke, *Classical World Literatures*, 14.

literature composed throughout the Heian period. Still, the amount of scholarship in this area is dwarfed by work done in contemporaneous genres of *wabun* 和文 or *kana* 仮名, that is, vernacular literature, especially *waka* 和歌 (poetry) and *nikki* 日記 (diary) literature. Furthermore, comparative studies of the two (*wakan hikaku bungaku* 和漢比較文学) tend to privilege the world of vernacular literature, asking, for example, how early Sinitic poems were adopted into *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Poems Ancient and Modern, 905), the first imperially commissioned anthology of vernacular poetry. Even in this example, Sinitic poetry often refers to poems composed by Chinese authors and not to those penned by Japanese men of letters. Scholarship on early Heian Sinitic poetry may be divided into three groups: first, that which deals primarily with the influence of expressions and images borrowed from continental poetry—most notably that of Bo Juyi 白居易—on Japanese literature; second, work which focuses on the historical and sociopolitical circumstances surrounding poetic activity, including biographical sketches of influential poets, investigations into imperially commissioned anthologies, and accounts of the place or setting of public poetry banquets; third, commentaries and introductory summaries of primary sources.

The most prominent scholar of Sinitic literature composed throughout the Heian

period was the late Kojima Noriyuki 小島憲之 (1913-1998), author, among other books, of a massive multi-volume series of essays and detailed commentaries entitled *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku* (1979). Within this work may be found commentaries to all three of Saga's anthologies. Another prominent scholar of early Sinitic literature to represent the first group is the late Kawaguchi Hisao 川口久雄 (1910-1993). His more popular *Heianchō kanbungaku no kaika: shijin Kūkai to Michizane* (1991), as the title implies, deals primarily with the poetry of Kūkai 空海 (774-835) and Sugawara no Michizane—two figures with whom I myself am immensely interested. Kawaguchi has considered in detail the influence of continental models on both Kūkai's and Michizane's poetry. What Kawaguchi has not done, however, is look at how Kūkai might have been influenced by earlier Japanese Sinitic poetry, such as that found in the above-mentioned *Kaifūsō*, and how Kūkai must have influenced Michizane. In an earlier publication, *Heianchō no kanbungaku* (1981), Kawaguchi deals with early Heian Sinitic poetry in much the same manner, preferring to make comparisons between Japanese and continental poetry. We must not forget that Kawaguchi was the first and, to this date, only scholar to supply a full commentary to the complete works of Sugawara no Michizane, placing him simultaneously

in the third group of scholars mentioned above.⁹ Of a similar bent is Watanabe Hideo 渡辺秀夫, who, like so many others, is interested primarily in vernacular literature. The first section of his *Heianchō bungaku to kanbun sekai* (1991) deals with the adoption of Sinitic poetic imagery in the aforementioned *Kokin wakashū*. In this respect Watanabe belongs to the same camp as Kawaguchi.

Sugano Hiroyuki 菅野礼行 is concerned primarily with the adoption and later adaptation of continental poetic imagery in early Heian Sinitic poetry, especially that of Michizane. His *Heian shoki ni okeru Nihon kanshi no hikaku bungakuteki kenkyū* (1988) may be seen as a collection of case studies relating to the appropriation of continental imagery into Heian-period Sinitic poetry. Like Watanabe, Sugano approaches Sinitic poetry from the perspective of Japanese vernacular poetry. This leads to the almost symptomatic consideration of *washū* 和習, particularly “Japanese” idiosyncrasies of diction and imagery, both in the realm of grammar as well as poetic imagery. Likewise, Shinma Kazuyoshi 新聞一美, in his *Heianchō bungaku to kanshibun* (2003), is interested, on the one hand, with the influence of Bo Juyi 白居易 on early Japanese poets and, on the other, with the adoption of continental expressions or poetic imagery in *Genji monogatari* 源氏

⁹ See Kawaguchi, *Kanke bunsō, Kanke kōshū*, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, volume 72.

物語 (The Tale of Genji, probably completed in 1001). Generally speaking, both Sugano and Shinma are dealing with the reception history of poetic language in vernacular literature.

The second group of scholars is headed by Kinpara Tadashi 金原理, whose *Heianchō kanshibun no kenkyū* (1981) was published in the same year as Kawaguchi's aforementioned *Heianchō no kanbungaku*, and which deals with the significance of Kūkai, along with a number of other prominent early Heian poets, within the larger project of imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic poetry. Kinpara's approach is predominantly biographical, devoting entire chapters to individual poets, and serves as an enlightening companion to Kawaguchi's more textual approach. Kinpara also delves into the world of Shimada Tadaomi's private collection of Sinitic poetry, thereby representing a move away from imperial anthologies. Fujiwara Katsumi 藤原克己 takes this sort of research one step further. His *Sugawara Michizane to Heianchō kanbungaku* (2001) adopts a two-pronged approach to early Heian Sinitic poetry, considering the sociopolitical context of individual poets and various agendas behind the project of anthologization. Fujiwara further includes examinations of historical sources, such as Sinitic diaries and bureaucratic records, in an effort to elucidate the dynamic interactions between literature and history. I

would like to mention also the work of Takigawa Kōji 滝川幸司, whose book *Tennō to bundan: Heian zenki no kōteki bungaku* (2007) goes into remarkable detail regarding public banquets in which Sinitic poems were presented.

The third group is represented most notably by Gotō Akio 後藤昭雄, who has published numerous articles on a wide variety of topics within the field of Heian-period Sinitic literature, both on prose and poetry. His *Heianchō kanbun bunken no kenkyū* (1993) is a collection of characteristically concise investigations of rare or newly discovered documents. Gotō has written a series of commentaries, published serially in the journal *Ajia yūgaku*, on Sinitic preludes (*jo* 序) preserved in *Honchō monzui* 本朝文粹 (Superb Letters of Our Realm, 1060), an anthology compiled during the latter half of the Heian period. He is also the only scholar to write about *shōshikai* 尚齒会 banquets, the first Japanese example of which occurred in 877. Similarly, Yoshiwara Hiroto 吉原浩人, a scholar of Buddhism, has done some pioneering work on preludes and religious banquets, namely, *kangakue* 勧学会. Both Gotō and Yoshiwara seem most interested in textual commentary; considerations of sociopolitical motivations are, for the most part, of secondary importance. The late Ōsone Shōsuke 大曾根章介 (1929-1993) produced a large body of work on all aspects of Sinitic literature, collected in his monumental *Nihon*

kanbungaku ronshū (1998-1999), much of which amounts to introductions to primary sources. He has also produced a number of commentaries, most notably for a selection from *Honchō monzui* (in *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, 1992). Finally, I must mention Satō Michio 佐藤道生, who has done a fair amount of work on Heian-period Sinitic poetry, though most of his own research focuses on the later centuries of that period, and, in terms of texts, on *Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集 (Vernacular and Sinitic Poems to be Sung, 1012). Though my own interests lie in an earlier century, a number of Satō's observations are relevant to Heian Sinitic poetry as a whole.

There is, in a sense, a fourth group, represented by an older generation of Japanese scholars of Sinitic literature whose work, while obviously dated, is of significant value for the broad historical summaries of subject-matter these works offer—something seldom seen these days. Ichikawa Mototarō's 市川本太郎 *Nihon kanbungakushi gaisetsu* (1969) serves as an introductory textbook to the history of Sinitic literature in Japan, covering all of the major authors and anthologies addressed by later scholars. Likewise, Inoguchi Atsushi 猪口篤志 has published a historical survey entitled *Nihon kanbungakushi* (1984) in which he outlines the development of all major Sinitic genres from the ancient age (*jōko* 上古) all the way down to the Shōwa period (1926-1989). Again, dated though these works

may be, such historical surveys, each united under the vision of a single author, offer an instructive alternative to the modern Japanese trend in scholastic writing known as *ronbunshū* 論文集, or collections of short articles. While these latter collections tend towards myopia, Ichikawa and Inoguchi preserve a curative form of panoramic vision.

Most Western scholars of Sinitic poetry, including myself, belong to the second group, considering what appears to be a predominating interest in the relationship between poetry and political power. Robert Borgen's, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court* (1994) is an exception to this: Borgen has provided English-speaking readers with a detailed biography of Michizane's life, along with a selection of English translations of more than one-hundred of the man's Sinitic poems. Volume one of Burton Watson's two-volume anthology of Sinitic verse entitled *Japanese Literature in Chinese* (1975) contains a number of poems from the early Heian period, as well as an entire section dedicated to poems by Michizane. Judith Rabinovitch and Timothy Bradstock, in their *Dance of the Butterflies: Chinese Poetry from the Japanese Court Tradition* (2005), have produced an anthology of Sinitic poems from the Heian period, the majority of which have not been translated elsewhere. Aside from these three books, there is not much to be had in the way of annotated English translations of Heian-period Sinitic poetry. My own appendix to this

dissertation seeks to expand the current corpus of translations by providing English-language readers with a collection of Saga's Sinitic poems.

Likewise, there are not a great number of English-language monographs dealing with the relationship between Sinitic poetry and Heian-period court politics. Thomas LaMarre's *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archeology of Sensation and Inscription* (2000) focuses primarily on the supposedly mutually provocative binary of Sinitic and vernacular poetry, as well as calligraphy, within the Heian court. His focus, however, is mainly on vernacular poetry of the early tenth century.¹⁰ Gustav Heldt, in a monograph entitled *The Pursuit of Harmony: Poetry and Power in Early Heian Japan* (2008), likewise shows a strong leaning towards vernacular poetry. However, the first one-third, or so, of this book gives a truly fine summary of Saga's court and his literary legacy. This book contains an appendix in which may be found, among other things, English translations of the Sinitic prefaces to all three of Saga's anthologies. Heldt's account of the various royal banquets hosted by Saga and his immediate successors, is, so far as I can tell, the most detailed description to be found in English-language scholarship. Still, considering the wealth of English-language research on

¹⁰ Richard Okada's review of LaMarre's book vigorously challenges a number of his arguments. Both LaMarre's book and Okada's review are worth serious study.

and full-length translations of vernacular poetry in Heian Japan, Heldt's additions, as valuable as they are, can not be expected to provide us with anything approaching a detailed understanding of early Sinitic poetry. Fortunately for us, Wiebke Denecke, with her masterful *Classic World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons* (2014), has stepped forward to remedy this disparity. As shall be seen throughout this dissertation, I have consulted Denecke's work on several occasions. She, somewhat like LaMarre, albeit with different results, offers a new framework with which to approach the question of literary reception, especially in the field of Sino-Japanese comparative studies. Illustrative parallels are drawn between Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman modes of literary reception.

Most recently—only a few months before I began my final revisions of this dissertation, in fact—Brian Steininger published his *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan: Poetics in Practice* (2017). This is an extremely informative and inspiring piece of scholarship. I only wish it had been published about one year earlier. I have not yet had enough time to fully incorporate the wealth of information found in this book. Steininger covers the mid-Heian period, that is, the tenth and eleventh centuries, focusing on the sociopolitical environment in which literature was actually produced and practiced. While

addressing the problem of Sinitic versus vernacular, he makes it clear from the outset that his discussion will consider Heian literature as a complex array of interrelated literaracies operating within a “synchronic field of cultural production,” and that:

...the employment of script and literary form [—be it the so-called Sinitic or the vernacular form—] by Heian officials was multivalent and transitory, not susceptible to analysis in terms of an overarching relationship with the Chinese other running through Japanese literary production.¹¹

Heian vernacular literature is, as Steininger asserts, “woven through with threads of continental literary culture.”¹² While my own discussion focuses on the ninth century, a number of Steininger’s remarks regarding the tenth century, especially those relating to the use of primers and glosses, apply without much modification to the time of Saga, Tadaomi, and Michizane. He has included, in the form of an appendix, a partial translation of *Sakumon daitai* 作文大体 (Essentials of Composition, tenth century), a primer for Sinitic

¹¹ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 10. The bits in square brackets are my own additions.

¹² Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 1.

composition, the influence of which has, to my mind, not yet been adequately covered in either Japanese or English-language scholarship.¹³

What this Dissertation is Not

The above overview of the state of the field, especially English-language scholarship, reveals two common trends: First, there is a lingering concern as to how exactly we ought to approach the Sino-Japanese literary constellation, to borrow Denecke's terminology. LaMarre, Heldt, and Denecke have all dedicated a great deal of energy to find new, more nuanced methods of understanding what has become a rather complicated debate. David Lurie's *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (2011), too, offers a number of insightful observations regarding the relationship between different modes of writing, modes which, to the uninitiated, are often conceived of as two fundamentally discrete languages, with Sinitic or "Chinese" logographs, on the one hand, and the *kana*

¹³ Incidentally, there is one (as of yet) unpublished dissertation that deserves special mention here. Jason Webb's "In Good Order: Poetry, Reception, and Authority in the Nara and Early Heian Courts," presented in 2004, provides a detailed account of all things relating to Saga, his court, and his literary project. I am greatly indebted to Webb's research. Webb keeps his eye unfailingly trained on Sinitic poetry, making references to vernacular verses only when absolutely necessary.

syllabary or “Japanese” writing, on the other. This later dichotomy, we now know, is a modern-day illusion. Nothing of the sort existed in premodern Japan. Though much more, I fear, will yet be said in regards to this matter, I, for one, consider the question more-or-less closed. It is for this reason that I have deliberately avoided talking about the Sino-Japanese problem. I have written about ninth-century Sinitic poetry as though it were nothing more, nor certainly anything less, than Japanese poetry, pure and simple. That is to say, I have not given any attention to issues of mutual influence between Sinitic and vernacular poetry. Throughout this dissertation, my readers may, if they so desire, substitute the term Sinitic poetry with Japanese poetry. Consequently, this dissertation is not an examination of the Sino-Japanese binary or constellation.

Second, and this is much more prevalent in Japanese-language scholarship, there is a long tradition in the field of premodern Sinitic poetry of tracing back literary allusions with meticulous detail to their continental precursors. While that sort of research is immensely valuable—I myself have benefited greatly from the work of such earlier pioneers as Kojima Noriyuki, as well as one of my own mentors, Ōtani Masao (until very recently professor of Japanese literature at Kyoto University)—I have refrained as much as possible from including this sort of information in my own discussions. There are times, it is true, when

an awareness of continental sources illuminates the significance of a (Japanese) Sinitic poem. In such cases, naturally, I have included some brief remarks on the relevant source texts. Otherwise, in order not to stray too far from my main arguments, I have kept discussions of sources to a bare minimum. My translations of Saga's poetry, found in the Appendix, may be attacked on this front. Saga, in nearly all of his poems, makes numerous allusions to famous continental figures and images. Japanese scholars, Kojima foremost among them, have diligently pointed these out for us. However, I have found that, in not a few cases, especially when framed within an English-language work such as this, involved discussions of the adoption and adaptation of continental sources in Heian-period Sinitic poetry serves more to distract than to enlighten. Consequently, this dissertation is not an exercise in source studies; allusions to continental models are only mentioned when absolutely necessary.

Mixed Expectations and the Mixing of Genres

Poets of the ninth century (and beyond) incorporated into their verses various elements from a handful of well-established poetic genres as a means of creating complex

poetic personae capable of conveying richly nuanced messages to their often mixed audiences. Michizane went so far as to incorporate into his poetry elements taken over from non-poetic genres, as well: his biographic poetry (*eishishi* 詠史詩) contains features of continental historiography and other prose genres. A great part of Sinitic literacy, both in prose and in poetry, was intimately related to an appreciation of the expectations and conventions attached to each of the various Sinitic literary genres. All writers, be they sovereigns, officials, or ladies-in-waiting, were required to conform to the generic expectations of whatever genre of Sinitic writing they happened to be employing. Saga, when composing Sinitic poetry for his beloved chrysanthemum banquet (*chōyō no en* 重陽宴), unfailingly conformed to similar types of poetry composed in past ages for royal banquets, both on the continent and in his own land. *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (Splendid Literary Flowerings, 818), Saga's second imperially commissioned anthology of Sinitic poetry, contains a large section entitled *enshū* 宴集 (banquets and gatherings), dedicated exclusively to poetry composed for and presented at royal banquets and other celebratory gatherings. The compilers of his first anthology, *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Soaring Above the Clouds, 814), while not organizing poetry into titled categories, nevertheless place all poems composed for and presented at royal banquets at the beginning of the

anthology, thereby showing a clear recognition of the existence of a unique genre of banquet poetry. Saga's contemporaries, when listening to or reading his Sinitic banquet poems, necessarily appreciated them through the lens of that same genre; banquet poems were composed in accordance with and actively responded to a set of generic expectations shared by all who had sufficiently mastered the art of Sinitic writing.

Genres are neither fixed for all time nor clearly delineated at any given time; genres are forever changing and interacting with one another. As shall be seen later on, Saga, especially in his later poetry, presents us with a more complex poetic persona. Instead of the supreme, all-wise and all-powerful sage-ruler, a persona he often assumed during his first years on the throne, Saga speaks to his vassals as one who is at once divine and human, at once a mighty ruler and a sympathetic friend, at once majestic and intimate. The second poem in Saga's third anthology, *Keikokushū* 経国集 (Governing the Realm, 824), is a lengthy rhapsody (*fu* 賦), or proem, entitled "Chrysanthemum Blossoms," composed for and presented at one of his annual chrysanthemum banquets. As a rhapsody, this poem conforms at least in part to that genre, insofar as it offers a virtual checklist of autumn's charms. As a banquet poem, it conforms to the expectations of that genre, as well: by praising the chrysanthemums, Saga, as absolute sovereign, effectively praises his own

reign, and blesses all those fortunate enough to have been born as his subjects.

All things in Nature change with the seasons; all things bloom only to fall, grow
only to decay—this much I have learned from observation.

Tell me, is there a forest whose leaves are not stripped off their branches come
autumn? Is there a field whose grasses can escape the withering frost?

While forest and field yield to autumn's touch, the chrysanthemum—most
miraculous flower!—alone remains vivid and fresh when all other things have
faded.¹⁴

觀物理於盛衰兮 知造化之異時

林何樹而不搖落 原何艸而不具腓

豈若

芳菊神奇 在枯獨滋

¹⁴ The full title of this poem is “Rhapsody on Chrysanthemum Blossoms during the Chrysanthemum Festival” 重陽節菊花賦. For a full translation and explanatory footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 54 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 2). I shall have occasion to discuss this poem at some length later on in the second chapter.

It is in virtue of Saga's divine gaze, capable as it is of penetrating into the depths of all natural phenomena (觀物理), that he presents himself as the ideal sage-ruler, the ultimate medium and sole interpreter between Nature and humankind. This persona is precisely what his audience would have expected in a banquet poem of this sort. However, Sage, now retired, found it necessary to present himself not only as a divine ruler, but also as a sympathetic companion. Later on, in this same rhapsody, we hear Saga speaking in a more subdued tone:

Wild geese soaring through the evening sky pains me: the cold of winter is not far off. The sound of falling leaves troubles my soul: all will soon be naked and withered.

Autumn is drawing to a close—a time of deep sorrow. Even so, let us rejoice in the chrysanthemum flower, the source of longevity and more happiness to come!

感雁序於薄晚兮 傷落葉乎秋聲

時屬長年之多歎 還欣斯花之延齡

Why, in a poem whose central function is supposed to be the laudation of an auspicious banquet, does Saga include such inauspicious phrases as “the sound of falling leaves troubles my soul” (傷落葉)? Why does he portray autumn as “a time of deep sorrow” (多歎)? What we see here is the introduction of a different genre altogether, namely, that of travel or excursion poetry (*yūranshi* 遊覽詩), in which it is customary to associate the season of autumn with decay, separation, sadness, and, in general, a feeling of deep loneliness. Saga incorporates the motif of autumn’s sorrow (*shūshū* 秋愁) or the traveler’s lament (*ryōshū* 旅愁) into an otherwise auspicious banquet poem as a means of appealing to the sentiments of his vassals and ladies-in-waiting, assuring them, by these expressions of sadness, that he is in tune with their hearts, that he is a man of refined sentiment and perspicacity, and that, consequently, he is capable of harmonizing the feelings and emotions of those dependent upon his continued patronage. Here, then, in a single rhapsody, we see the adroit intermingling of two very different genres—banquet poetry and excursion poetry—as a means of providing Saga with a complex poetic persona that is at once divine and human, majestic and intimate, a persona capable of appealing to a wide audience. Here Saga is at once the supreme intermediary between Nature and man, a kind of hierophant who interprets the mysteries of heaven and earth for his loyal subjects, as

well as a deeply sympathetic companion of the people, a man of the heart.

Not all genres discussed in this dissertation would necessarily have been recognized as independent genres by ninth-century poets. In most cases, the genres I discuss had been, well before the time of Saga and his court, codified in continental anthologies, such that each genre had a title of its own: personal complaints (*jukkaishi* 述懷詩), still-life poetry about natural phenomena (*eibutsushi* 詠物詩), farewell poetry (*senbetsushi* 餞別詩), and biographical poetry (*eishishi* 詠史詩). In many cases, these generic titles also served as more-or-less standard category titles, under which the editors of anthologies arranged Sinitic poetry. That is to say, these were genres that contemporary writers would have readily recognized. In a few cases, however, I have discovered what appear to be poetic genres without titles. Otiose or solitary poetry (*dokuginshi* 独吟詩) is one such genre.

While such terms as *dokugin* 独吟, reciting poetry alone, and *dokuei* 独詠, intoning verses alone, do appear in the titles of some Sinitic poems, this type of poetry, in which a solitary poetic persona composes verses in a meditative mood while focusing his gaze on a single natural object close at hand, such as a single tree or sprig of blossoms, was never given a standard title. There is no category in any anthology that bears the title *dokugin*. Despite the absence of a standardized title, poetry of the sort just described, that which I have called

otiose poetry, is not only present to a significant degree in the private collections of Tadaomi and Michizane, but, especially in the case of Michizane, evinces a consistent set of salient features that, when considered as a whole, warrant the consideration of otiose poetry as a truly distinct genre. I shall have more to say about this in the Afterword, where the question of genre is reconsidered in light of reading Sinitic poetry through translation. Whether or not poetic genres were graced with standard titles by poets of the ninth century, so long as they can be recognized as distinct genres, I have not shied away from treating them as such. There are other as of yet untitled poetic genres that await discovery. I have suggested but two.

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PART I:

EMPEROR SAGA

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CHAPTER ONE**Courtly Patronage and Sinitic Literacy in the Early Ninth Century:****Saga as Patron, Poet, and Politician****INTRODUCTION**

This as well as the subsequent two chapters are primarily concerned with a prominent ninth-century Japanese sovereign by the name of Saga 嵯峨 (786-842, r. 809-823), a gifted poet and ruler who brought about the greatest efflorescence in Sinitic learning and literature ever to be witnessed within Japan from the eighth through to the twelfth century. Any serious investigation into the history of Sinitic writing as a court-based practice in premodern Japan ought to include an in-depth study of Saga and his impressive literary legacy. Sinitic learning had flourished before Saga. A large portion of the Buddhist canon, translated from Pali and Sanskrit into various versions of Sinitic, had found its way into Japan sometime early in the eighth century. Official histories of the Nara court, also written in hybrid variants of Sinitic, were completed in the first two decades of the eighth century.

Anthologies of poetry, too, had been completed around the middle of the same century. By the time Saga ascended the throne in 809, the practice of Sinitic writing was well underway. Saga was certainly not the originator of Sinitic literacy. He was, however, one of its greatest promoters, as well as one of its earliest innovators, especially in the area of poetry. Three imperially anthologies of Sinitic poetry—the final one containing prose, as well—were commissioned during Saga’s lifetime. The first two, *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Soaring Over the Clouds, 814) and *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (818, Splendid Literary Flowerings), were commissioned by Saga himself while still on the throne, while the third, *Keikokushū* 經國集 (827, Governing the Realm), commissioned nominally by Emperor Junna (786-840, r. 823-833), Saga’s half-brother and immediate successor, was through and through a product of Saga’s making. It is for this reason that I shall refer to these three anthologies of Sinitic writing collectively as the Saga anthologies.¹⁵ Taken together, these three anthologies contain a total of 1,298 pieces of writing (with some duplication between anthologies): *Ryōunshū* has 91 poems; *Bunka shūreishū* has 184 poems; *Keikokushū* originally had 934 poems (*fu* 賦, rhapsodies, included) and 89 prose pieces. A total of 94 poems attributed to

¹⁵ Japanese scholars also group these three together, referring to them as the three imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic poetry, *chokusen sanshū* 勅撰三集. As will be discussed in detail later on, the precise status of each of these anthologies in relation to one another is still not settled; the term imperially commissioned (*chokusen*) may not apply univocally to all three.

Saga have been preserved in these three anthologies. I suspect Saga's corpus was much larger. Unfortunately, the third anthology, *Keikokushū*, which was by far the largest among the three, has only come down to us in fragments. A large number of Saga's poems have surely been lost. Even so, 94 poems, nearly one-tenth of all the content in the three Saga anthologies, is no mean portion. Kakinomoto no Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 (660-724), one of the most famous *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 poets, is, coincidentally, also credited with a total of 94 (vernacular) poems. The *Man'yōshū*, however, is a colossal anthology containing some 4,500 poems, and 94 poems does not look so big in such a vast ocean of verse. Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (718-785), who died the year before Saga was born, however, is credited with a staggering 473 vernacular poems, about one-tenth of all the poetry contained in *Man'yōshū*, and that is certainly an impressive number. In this respect, when comparing individual output in relation to the total content of extant anthologies, Saga was to the Sinitic world what Yakamochi was to the vernacular world of poetry: both men could claim to have occupied about one-tenth of their respective territories.

Saga's literary legacy is not limited to poetry. In 819, less than one year after his second anthology, *Bunka shūreishū*, was completed, Saga commissioned *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀 (The Continued History of Japan), an imperial history, the third of its kind in Japan.

Due to a number of untimely deaths among its appointed compilers, this history was not completed until 840, just two years before Saga passed away. It is by carefully weaving together the records preserved in this historical document with what fragments we can find throughout his three anthologies that we begin to get some picture, however biased, of Saga as both poet and sovereign. Aside from his *Nihon kōki*, Saga is said to have commissioned at least three other historically important works. In 815, the year after his first anthology, *Ryōunshū*, was completed, Saga had his vassals compile *Shinsen shōjiroku* 新撰姓氏録 (Newly Compiled Genealogy of Prominent Lineages), a kind of official register containing the ancestral origins of a select number of prominent lineages or clans then active throughout the capital and its environs. This was compiled ultimately as a means of sorting out thorny tax-related issues. Lineages whose ancestry could be legitimately traced to the imperial family were not required to submit any tax goods to the court. Fraudulent claimants—and there were not a few of these—had to be weeded out if the court was to receive ample resources from the various clans. The two other works commissioned by Saga were meant to serve as compendiums and primers of court ceremony: *Kō'nin kyakushiki* 弘仁格式 (Court Regulations for the Kō'nin Era) and *Dairishiki* (Imperial Ceremonial) were completed in 820 and 821, respectively. It was through these that Saga at

once incorporated the court ceremonials of his predecessors as well as formulated a series of unique practices expressly for his own reign. Taken together, therefore, a complete list of those works commissioned by Saga, along with their year of completion (not the year in which they were initially commissioned), looks like this:

Ryōunshū 凌雲集 (814): first anthology of Sinitic poetry

Shinsen shōjiroku 新撰姓氏錄 (815): list of clan genealogies

Bunka shūreishū 文華秀麗集 (818): second anthology of Sinitic poetry

Kō'nin kyakushiki 弘仁格式 (820): compendium of legal regulations

Dairishiki 内裏式 (821): manual of court ritual

Keikokushū 經国集 (827): third anthology of Sinitic poetry. While this was in fact

commissioned by Emperor Junna, Saga, by this time retired, was the central

thrust behind its compilation

Nihon kōki 日本後紀 (commissioned in 819, but only completed in 840): third

imperialy commissioned history

As the sub-title of this chapter declares, Saga was at once a patron, a poet, and a

politician. He was a tireless and extremely generous patron of the arts, not only of poetry, but of music, calligraphy, and religion, as well. He was himself a very gifted poet, as his extant verses amply show. While almost all of what we currently have of Saga's literary output is in the form of Sinitic verses, he was, if not gifted, at least proficient in the art of vernacular verse, as were nearly all courtiers, men and women alike, of his time. Finally, Saga was a keen politician, ever eager to engage as wide a network of potential supporters, both secular and religious, high and low, male and female, as possible. Each of these three aspects—patron, poet, politician—will be examined throughout this and the following two chapters. It will be seen before long that no one of these three aspects can be separated from the other two, and that any consideration of one must necessarily give an account of the remaining two. Saga was at once an idealist and a pragmatist. His poems and many banquets reveal the idealizing side of the man, while his political gestures clearly evince a practical turn of mind. The ideal poet and the pragmatic politician merge together in the picture of Saga as an elegant yet domineering, playful yet patriarchal patron. Saga was as much a patron of the arts as he was a patron of court politics; the two, in Saga, were one and the same. I seek, perhaps foolhardily, to present a full picture of the complex reality that was Saga, as patron, poet, and politician. I have decided to place more emphasis on the

political circumstances surrounding and the historical background behind his literary legacy, as opposed to the presumed literary value of his poetry itself.

This chapter consists of three major sections. In the first two sections, I will give a broad historical overview of, first, the late Nara and early Heian period, and second, the life and work of Emperor Saga, the hero of our present tale. In the third section, I will examine the reign of Saga in some detail, posing a number of questions meant to tease out the more salient features of his political regime. The first two sections will paint a picture of Saga and his reign that is more-or-less positive, the sort of picture we find painted in contemporaneous poetry anthologies. The third section, however, will paint a different picture, one which, by looking more closely at contemporaneous historical records, reveals the more precarious, exploitative features of Saga's court. I present both pictures side by side in hopes of revealing the one-sidedness of relying too slavishly on one or the other form of writing, that is, on poetry or historical annals. More specifically—and this is one of the main points I wish to make in this chapter—poetry presented at royal banquets hosted by Saga, and later preserved in poetry anthologies, does not reflect historical realities of the time. An understanding of the sociopolitical environment prevailing in Saga's reign, outlined in the first and second sections of this chapter, will enable readers to appreciate, in

the third and final section, the astonishing degree of disparity between these two representations. Overall, this chapter seeks to adopt a historical approach. Literary issues are introduced and poetry is quoted only insofar as they shed light upon the sociopolitical environment of the time.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NARA AND EARLY HEIAN PERIOD

It is necessary, before delving into questions of Saga's reign and his literary projects, to familiarize ourselves with the historical background. Saga ruled during the early decades of the Heian period. Many of the administrative mechanisms and sociopolitical conventions that characterize his reign were inherited from the earlier Nara court. The following section, therefore, begins with a brief overview of Nara-period politics, which then leads into a summary of early Heian economics and administrative practice. Saga modelled himself after his predecessors, especially his own father, Emperor Kanmu, whose relentless efforts to ensure central, imperial (personal) control over all things relating to the court and statecraft remained always in the fore. Now, our understanding of these decades—the transition from the late Nara to the early Heian period—is naturally limited by the current

state of the historical record. This section, therefore, will continue with a discussion of those contemporary sources available to us, especially *Nihon kōki*, an official history commissioned by Saga himself. This history, along with the three anthologies of Sinitic poetry, likewise commissioned by Saga, offer a rich source of material with which to construct a narrative of this sovereign's life and work.

Political and Economic Foundations: Transformations in Court-Based Government¹⁶

The Nara court (710-794), based in the fertile Yamato (or Nara) Basin, is often described as having been the first to establish a centralized form of state, that is, court-based administration governed by a complex system of written legal codes (*ritsuryō* 律令). Prior to the institutionalization of written laws within the Nara court during the beginning of the eighth century, jurisprudence was necessarily a strictly local affair, carried out in accordance with a whole hodgepodge of different local precedents. Such laws were

¹⁶ Sakamoto's detailed article entitled simply "Heian jidai" is of great value. While I have relied a great deal upon his work, I have only explicitly cited Sakamoto in regards to material that is not commonly included in other introductory articles on the subject. For the most part, the information contained in this sub-section is common knowledge among specialists, and therefore requires no special citations.

transmitted orally, preserved more-or-less ubiquitously within the living memories of their respective regional groups, and, when need be, invoked orally. With the introduction of written laws, however, the gradual process of unification through codification by a centralized power holding a monopoly over the written word was inevitable. Though generally quite successful in their efforts to gain control, or at least some degree of influence, over outlying regions, the Nara sovereigns were by no means absolute sovereigns over a united archipelagic empire. Eighth-century Japan, especially in the earlier decades, embraced a scattered collection of clans, not a few of which were wholly autonomous. Not only were many of these clans of foreign descent, some hailing from the Asian continent, others from the Korean peninsula, each were in possession of their own unique mythologies, religious practices, ancestral lineages, customs, and languages or dialects. During the Nara period, then, there was as yet no notion of anything akin to an ethnically and linguistically unified nation-state. Individual clans vied violently with one another for natural resources, while others banded together in mutually beneficial federations ruled over by powerful chieftains. Nara sovereigns, to put the matter very simply, represented the most powerful such chieftains, receiving as they did tribute from clans all across the western half of the main island of Honshū, and somewhat beyond to northern Kyūshū. The

northern half of Honshū, as well as the southern reaches of Kyūshū, each occupied by recalcitrant clans—the Emishi (or Ezo) and the Kumaso, respectively—remained always out of reach. Hokkaido and Okinawa never enter into the picture at all. Within its limited sphere of influence, however, the Nara court managed to enforce what declared itself to be a unified system of written legal codes. Regional representatives of the court were charged with promulgating and seeing that these legal codes were duly honored throughout the realm.

Regarding the written legal codes of the Nara period, the *Taihō ritsuryō* 大宝律令 (Taihō Legal Codes), first enacted in 702, were later revised into the *Yōrō ritsuryō* 養老律令 (Yōrō Legal Codes), set down in 718, but only enacted in 757. This body of legal codes served as the foundation—if not always in reality, at least in theory—of imperial rule for many centuries to come. These regulations were not merely a matter of empty legality. It would appear that by the end of the eighth century, the majority of regulations codified in the Yōrō Codes were in fact in practice. According to these codes, government revolved around the sovereign, assisted by a coterie of high-ranking courtiers. In order to assist the sovereign, a special committee of courtiers known as the grand Council of State (*dajōkan* 太政官) was established as a means of representing the consensus of high-ranking

courtiers. Decisions and bills would be presented to this council, who would then review and deliberate upon them, before finally presenting a finalized proposal to the sovereign. In the end, it was (theoretically) the sovereign who decided whether a proposal would be accepted or declined. The governance of provincial regions was carried out by middle to low-ranking courtiers, appointed by the sovereign, who took turns acting in the capacity of provincial governors (*kokushi* 国司). As deputies of the sovereign, these local governors facilitated the penetration, in varying degrees, of the central authority into surrounding provinces. Finally, all subjects and all land were considered as belonging to the sovereign. Rice fields were known as public fields (*kōchi* 公地), while those farmers who worked this land were known as public people (*kōmin* 公民), where public was synonymous with imperial property, or, to use a more modern term, state-owned.

Right from its inception, the system of central government espoused in these legal codes seems to have been plagued by certain recurring, subversive practices. The court was moved to the Heijō Capital at Nara 710, and it seems that around this time two interdependent and particularly deleterious things had already become widespread: First, certain regional magnates were amassing large tracts of rice fields and other usable land. This naturally led to vast amounts of concentrated wealth. Second, as a result of this,

farmers who had previously been responsible for working the state's public lands absconded, preferring instead to work for these wealthy regional magnates, who, in turn, provided certain benefits in the form of protection (from the court) and better profits. Despite these ills, we must not oversimplify the matter. Instead of calling this a deterioration of central authority, we ought to think of Nara-period statesmanship as representing a sort of plurality of governmental strategies, each engaged in an ever-changing process of adaptation in response to real circumstances on ground level.¹⁷ This process of transformation, as discussed shortly, was to continue throughout the ensuing centuries.

It is a truism that the court during the Heian period (794-1192), based in modern-day Kyoto, exercised less control over what were then developing into more privatized, more autonomous regional powers. Even so—perhaps even in virtue of this—the court persistently continued to exert an indispensable centralizing influence over literature and the arts throughout the entire period. The Heian court witnessed a gradual transformation in the system of government previously established during the Nara period. This transformation is more often than not referred to by modern scholars, especially those

¹⁷ Seki, et al. [Seki], "Kodai," 2010.

working in Japan, as a dissolution, a disintegration, or a collapse of the Nara-period administrative system of codified law. This supposed disintegration of central authority gave powerful regional families, amalgamations of clans who could trace their ancestry back into the hoary past, an opportunity to exert a greater deal of influence over local government.¹⁸ As already mentioned, Nara sovereigns sustained their courts almost exclusively by means of a system of state-owned land (*kōchi* 公地) allotted to farmers who were likewise effectively property of the state (*kōmin* 公民). This form of complete state ownership of both land and citizens was dramatically transfigured during the Heian period. Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the court's economy came to be powered not by state-owned land, but by a system of (predominantly) privately owned estates (*shōen* 莊園), each with its own degree of autonomy. While early Heian sovereigns did manage to expand their sphere of influence beyond that of their Nara-based predecessors, the nature of this influence had changed. Strictly centralized control gave way to a more flexible, more diffuse form of regional government. So persistent was this tendency that, by the end of the twelfth century, the Taira, one of the most powerful warrior families to have risen from among the regional clans, had managed to amass such wealth and power through their

¹⁸ Sakamoto, "Heian jidai," 2010.

various estates, that they were now able to exert a high degree of influence over court politics.

This gradual decentralization or diffusion resulted in greater social and economic complexity, and a larger variety in the types of relationships possible between the court and all concerned parties. We must, however, guard against an interpretation that was, at one point, all too widespread, especially in Japanese historiography. It is certainly true that most of the reigning Heian sovereigns were not truly the ones in power. The Northern Fujiwara regency (810-877) and the system of cloistered sovereigns (1086-1192) that followed upon its collapse ensured this. Even so, it would be a mistake to interpret this long-term divestment of power from the figure of the sovereign as a sign of general dissipation within the court aristocracy, as though the sovereign's weakened position necessarily implied a degeneration of courtly culture. The florescence of Heian-period courtly literature during the ninth and tenth centuries alone speaks against such a presumed degeneration; court culture prospered despite—perhaps even in virtue of—the reigning sovereign's real lack of power. The Heian court was certainly less dedicated to strict central control than had been the Nara sovereigns. As a result, the Heian court was able to influence, and in turn be influenced by, more and more diffuse sectors of society. Literature and the arts, as

originally fostered through the elitist education of courtiers and noblemen, likewise came to influence more layers of society. While in terms of actual legislation the Heian court exercised gradually less immediate control over increasingly privatized regional powers, it nevertheless remained the greatest centralizing influence over literature and the arts. The centralized system of imperial government did not so much die out with the Heian period as it was transformed into a more diffuse, more complex system of political maneuvering whose center, despite all these changes, remained solidly rooted in and continually inspired by the courtly culture of the capital. The Northern Fujiwara regency as well as the subsequent rule by cloistered sovereigns did by no means destroy imperial rule. Instead, it sustained imperial rule, and with it courtly culture, albeit in a different, less centralized form. Therefore, we ought not think of the Heian period as marking the downfall of centralized imperial rule, but rather as a modified form of that rule: Heian politics represent a continuation of, and not a break with Nara-period politics. The Northern Fujiwara regency, along with the warrior class some two centuries later, were both inextricably linked with and, in one way or another, intimately dependent upon the age-old system of

imperial rule and on the court culture it produced.¹⁹

Emperor Kanmu (737-806, r. 781-806) facilitated the move of the imperial capital twice during his reign: first, in 784, from the Nara capital of Heijō to the Kyoto capital of Nagaoka; second, in 794, from Nagaoka to the Kyoto capital of Heian. The first move of 784 was deeply significant insofar as it represented a deliberate break, both politically and geographically, from the dominant imperial lineage of Emperor Tenmu (?-686, r. 673-686), whose supporters were all firmly based in and around the Nara Basin. Emperor Kanmu wanted to make a fresh start of things. It is in this respect that his daring move to Kyoto marks one of the first watersheds in premodern Japanese politics; things would not be the same after this bold move. It is for this reason, also, that the end of the Nara period, which is often given as the year 794, is sometimes set rather at 784. A natural corollary of Kanmu's reign was his daring appeal to clans only recently risen to power. Those influential aristocratic houses who had formed the backbone of the Nara court and served to uphold its strong central authority had begun to decline around the close of the eighth

¹⁹ Technically speaking, from the tenth century onwards, the court was ruled by a succession of regents and retired sovereigns. The reigning sovereign was more often than not a mere figurehead. I use the term "imperial rule" loosely: the reigning sovereign, whatever his actual role, or lack thereof, in political affairs, remained a symbol of imperial power around which the various powerful factions strove against one another for dominance at court.

century. Emperor Kanmu, perhaps forecasting the eminent downfall of these older, now somewhat outmoded houses, gathered up loyal men from newly-empowered clans and placed them in positions of influence within his private body of State Advisors (*sangi* 参議).

One sign of a decline in strict central authority, or at least in the method of its exercise, comes near the end of Kanmu's reign. In the year 800, a large-scale allotment of rice paddies (*handen* 班田) was conducted by imperial decree. This system of allotting rice paddies had begun sometime during the first half of the seventh century, and was based on state-wide registers (*koseki* 戸籍) aimed at recording the number, ages, and genders of residents at any given household. Rice paddies were then allotted to these registered households by the court. In the event that the cultivators of a given household passed away, these same paddies would then be promptly reclaimed by the court to be allotted to other able-bodied subjects at a future date. A new allotment was supposed to take place every six years, to ensure that the registers were up to date and that the amount of land allotted to each household could be adjusted accordingly. The system of state-allotted rice paddies was a striking example of central authority in action. The allotment carried out in the year 800 was the final such state-wide allotment to take place in Japanese history. After this year, it

is true, there were a number of land allotments, though these were small-scale, fragmentary, and sporadic in nature. State registers, which had once sought to meticulously record the relevant particulars of each and every individual of the realm were, in the ninth century, largely ineffectual. Consequently, the state could no longer hope to allot land in any sort of organized, meaningful way. The fact that no large-scale allotments of land were conducted by the state after 800 is a clear sign of a general decline in the court's ability, or, more accurately, the court's desire, to manage its subjects on an individual level. Still, despite this inability of the court to keep track of its subjects on an individual level, Emperor Kanmu strove to emulate the model of central government laid out during the Nara period, albeit with a number of modifications made necessary by changing circumstances.

The Historical Record: Saga's *Nihon kōki*

The modern practice of referring to the period from 794 to 1192 as the Heian period is based on the historiographical assumption that the capital served simultaneously as both a political and a cultural center. The role of the Heian capital, as well as the provinces immediately adjacent to it, both politically and culturally, certainly does seem to have been

greater than that played by more peripheral regions. More specifically, within the capital, the political and cultural activities centered around powerful individuals working within the grand Council of State (*dajōkan* 太政官) and the Imperial Palace (*dairi* 内裏) played an enormous role. That the capital should appear more prominently in the historical record, while no doubt a reflection of reality, is also a reflection of the sorts of sources that have been preserved. Official histories (*seishi* 正史), that is, those commissioned by a reigning (as opposed to a retired) sovereign, end in the year 887 with the death of Emperor Kōkō 光孝 (830-887, r. 884-887). The last of six official histories, *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (Veritable History of Three Japanese Emperors), was completed in 901. In the case of Emperor Saga, we have *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀 (completed in 840), the third imperially commissioned history.²⁰ After around 901, we enter the world of privately compiled histories (*shisen kokushi* 私撰国史), the style of which tend to be rather simple, and the details of which are prone to inaccuracies. Courtier's diaries may in some cases supply this dearth of material after the end of the ninth century. Even so, these diaries tend to dwell at length on very minute and, to the modern historian's eyes, seemingly unimportant points. Furthermore, these diaries are, without exception, narrow in scope, narrating events that

²⁰ This paragraph, as well as the two subsequent ones, rely primarily on Mezaki, "Heian jidai."

occurred, say, within the Imperial Palace, or within a single household.

Incidentally, not much material remains in regards to the provinces outside the capital. The material we do have covers a period of some three centuries, with documents dating from the Enryaku 延暦 era (782-794) to those dating around the beginning of Retired Emperor Shirakawa's rule as cloistered sovereign (*insei* 院政) in 1086. We have a total of 1,250 such documents, all of which appear in the modern collection entitled *Heian ibun* 平安遺文 (compiled by the historian Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三 (1907-1997) and published by Tōkyōdō shuppan 東京堂出版 in installments between 1947-1980). This is by no means a sufficient body of material through which to view the regional history and economics of this period. After 1086, the historical record becomes considerably more robust in regards to information about regional affairs.

Considering the less than abundant state of historical records compiled during the early Heian period, it is crucial that we enquire into the nature of those few sources that do actually provide us with any relevant information. This is not the place, however, for a detailed overview of all the related material. Instead, I shall focus exclusively on the imperial history commissioned by Saga, namely, *Nihon kōki*. Focusing on this one history provides us with a clear picture of some of the major sociopolitical factors underlying the

compilation of early Heian-period imperial histories. The Saga portrayed in this history is very different from the personality we find in his three poetry anthologies. This very discrepancy in personae—the passive, almost silent ruler, on one hand, and the active, jovial poet, on the other—requires some consideration. Throughout his lifetime, Saga stood at the center of court society. As such, he was not only an object of historiographical activity, but *the* object par excellence of historiographical activity. Accordingly, the entirety of this man's reign (809-823), a total of fifteen years, as well as his period of (evidently quite active) retirement, has been meticulously chronicled in the third of six imperially commissioned histories, *Nihon kōki* (840), which covers the years 792 to 833, that is, the middle of Emperor Kanmu's reign to the end of Emperor Junna's reign. In regards to its structure, *Nihon kōki* originally consisted of forty fascicles. Unfortunately, only ten of those fascicles have been preserved in the various *Nihon kōki* manuscripts:

Emperor Kanmu:	Fascicle nos. 5, 8, 12, and 13
Emperor Heizei:	Fascicle nos. 14 and 17
Emperor Saga:	Fascicle nos. 20, 21, 22, and 24
Emperor Junna:	Nothing remains

Emperors Heizei, Saga, and Junna were all sons of Kanmu. The compilers of *Nihon kōki* seemed to have thought of these four sovereigns as forming a single unit—something we might call the “Kanmu and sons” dynasty. As can be seen from the above table, only four of the fascicles in *Nihon kōki* originally pertaining to Saga’s reign survive, namely, fascicle nos. 20, 21, 22, and 24. Neither does the preface originally prefixed to this history survive in any of our manuscripts. Fortunately, however, the preface, along with bits and piece of the various lost fascicles, including those that deal with Saga, may be gleaned from other somewhat later sources, especially from Sugawara no Michizane’s *Ruijū kokushi* 類聚国史 (892) and the anonymous *Nihon kiryaku* 日本紀略 (late twelfth century). With the help of such sources as these, it has been possible to produce a superbly reconstructed edition of *Nihon kōki*. It is to this edition that I will refer throughout the remainder of this and the next chapter.²¹

According to the preface of *Nihon kōki*, it was Emperor Saga who, in the year 819, commanded four of his most loyal vassals to compile this third official history. These four

²¹ Kuroita Nobuo & Morita Tei, ed., *Nihon kōki* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2003). All references to page numbers for *Nihon kōki* are to this edition alone.

men were Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu 藤原冬嗣 (775-826), Fujiwara no Otsugu 藤原緒嗣 (774-843), Fujiwara no Sadatsugu 藤原貞嗣 (759-824), and Yoshimine no Yasuyo 良岑安世 (785-830). Only one of these men, Otsugu, lived to see this imperial history completed; the other three died before final revisions could be made. A brief note about each of these four compilers will bring to the fore a number of essential features of this work. Whereas we know a fair bit about the first two men, Fuyutsugu and Otsugu, our information regarding the two remaining men, Sadatsugu and Yasuyo, is sadly lacking.

As the second son of Fujiwara no Nakamaro 藤原内麻呂 (756-812), late Minister of the Right, and faithful vassal to Emperors Kanmu, Heizei, and Saga, Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu was a member of the Northern branch of the Fujiwara clan. His mother, Kudara no Nagatsugu 百濟永繼 (n.d.) hailed from a low-ranking family of Korean descent. In 806, Fuyutsugu was appointed to serve as Saga's private tutor, when the would-be-sovereign was yet a crown prince. As soon as Saga ascended the throne in 809, Fuyutsugu was granted a number of promotions, including a place as the first of two royal chancellors in the sovereign's then newly-established royal chancellery (*kurōdo dokoro* 藏人所).²² He

²² For a brief account of this institution, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 22-23.

was appointed Grand Counsellor (*dainagon*) in 818, less than one year before Saga commissioned the compilation of *Nihon kōki*, and would later be appointed Minister of the Left (825). No doubt his political successes were grounded in his ardent support of Saga's effort to assert personal imperial authority in all political and courtly matters. Saga placed exceptional faith in Fuyutsugu, making him leading compiler of *Kō'nin kyakushiki* (Legal Amendments and Regulations of the Kō'nin Era, 820), as well as the *Dairishiki* 内裏式 (Imperial Ceremonial, 821), the latter of which was an attempt at recording both old and new ceremonial customs as a means of regulating ceremonial practices within Saga's reign. As mentioned above, Fuyutsugu did not live to see *Nihon kōki* completed. His influence on the overall direction and content of the work, however, must have been quite significant. Not limiting himself solely to the compilation of historical or administrative codes, Fuyutsugu tried his hand, very adroitly to be sure, at poetry. Samples of his Sinitic verses appear in all three of Saga's commissioned Sinitic anthologies.²³ Moreover, examples of his vernacular poetry appear posthumously in *Gosen wakashū* 後撰和歌集 (951, imperially commissioned by Emperor Murakami), under his pseudonym Minister of the

²³ A total of ten poems by Fuyutsugu have been preserved in these anthologies: *Ryōunshū*, poem nos. 30-32; *Bunka shūreishū*, fascicle 2, poem nos. 75, 83, and 94, fascicle 3, poem nos. 100-101, and 126; *Keikokushū*, fascicle 10, poem no. 31.

Left of the Tranquil Mansion (Kan'in sadaijin 閑院左大臣).²⁴

Fujiwara no Otsugu, born but one year before Fuyutsugu, was the eldest son of Fujiwara no Momokawa 藤原百川 (732-779), late State Advisor (*sangi*) and prominent member of the Shiki branch of the Fujiwara clan. Like Fuyutsugu, Otsugu's career at court began with service to Emperor Kanmu. In the year 805, having been ordered by Emperor Kanmu to share his thoughts regarding the state of contemporary statesmanship, boldly declared that long-term military campaigns and large-scale building projects were to blame for all the realm's current ills. Opposing voices eager especially to encourage Kanmu's ambitious military activities, efforts to which he had already dedicated a great deal of time, energy, resources, and men, were eventually overcome. Otsugu had single-handedly managed to convince the sovereign to call off his military campaigns in the north. This memorable episode in early Heian history, known as the Debate on Virtuous Governance (*tokusei ronsō* 徳政論争), won Otsugu a reputation as a faithful vassal ready to voice his honest opinion. Both Emperor Heisei and Saga held this man in high esteem. He was made Middle Counsellor (*chūnagon*) in 817, and minister of public affairs (*minbu no kyō*) in 818, a year before *Nihon kōki* was commissioned. He would later rise to become Minister of the

²⁴ *Gosen wakashū*, poem nos. 16, 729, 1181, and 1400.

Left (832). Before being commanded to work on *Nihon kōki*, which he alone saw through to the end, Otsugu had completed another work, likewise commissioned by Saga, entitled *Shinsen shōjiroku* (Newly Compiled Genealogy of Prominent Lineages, 815), which detailed the histories, ancestors, and various subdivisions of some 1,182 clans based in or immediately around Kyoto. This genealogy served as a means of assisting Saga in bestowing surnames on members of the royal family reduced to the status of vassals. This last phenomenon will be discussed later. Unlike Fuyutsugu, none of Otsugu's Sinitic poems, assuming he wrote poetry at all, appear in any of the three Saga anthologies.²⁵ No vernacular poems have been attributed to this man either.

Not a great deal has come down to us regarding Fujiwara no Sadatsugu. What we do know is this: Sadatsugu was the tenth son of Fujiwara no Kosemaro 藤原巨勢麻呂 (?-764), late State Advisor (*sangi*) and prominent member of the Southern branch of the Fujiwara clan. He was made Chief Royal Chancellor (*kurōdo no tō* 藏人頭), along with Otsugu, in 816, and later a State Advisor (818), just before *Nihon kōki* was commissioned.

²⁵ Since *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 14, is Saga's reply to a poem written by Otsugu, it follows that Otsugu was at least tolerably proficient in Sinitic versification. Whether he has any good or not is a different matter. The fact that Saga deigned to respond to Otsugu's poem does not necessarily mean that the latter was an exceptionally skilled poet. Saga's reply could have served as a purely political gesture, considering Otsugu's high standing at court.

He was made Middle Counsellor (*chūnagon*) in 821. Whether or not he was skilled in the art of poetry is unknown. None of his poetry, Sinitic or vernacular, survives. The fact that he was appointed as one of the compilers of *Nihon kōki*, however, speaks to his mastery of Sinitic writing, at least in the historiographic genre.

Yoshimine no Yasuyo and Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu were half-brothers from the same mother, namely, Kudara no Nagatsugu. Whereas Fuyutsugu was fathered by the vassal Nakamaro, Yasuyo was fathered by Emperor Kanmu, after Nagatsugu had become a lady-in-waiting at court. Kanmu harbored deep affection for this woman. Due to her humble family background, however, she was never granted the title of consort. For this same reason, Yasuyo was never made a royal prince. In 803, he was granted the surname Yoshimine and, as a means of easing financial pressures on the royal exchequer, officially demoted to the status of vassal. Thereafter, he was appointed State Advisor (816), and later rose to assume the prestigious office of Grand Counsellor (828). Yasuyo was a gifted man, exceptionally proficient at dancing, and skilled in poetry. Like his half-brother Fuyutsugu, Yasuyo's Sinitic poems appear in all three of Saga's commissioned Sinitic anthologies.²⁶

²⁶ A total of fourteen of Yasuyo's poems have been preserved: *Ryōunshū*, poem nos. 49-50; *Bunka shūreishū*, fascicle 2, poem nos. 43 and 63, fascicle 3, poem nos. 102 and 142; *Keikokushū*, fascicle 1, poem no. 11, fascicle 10, poem nos. 44 and 55-56, fascicle 11, poem no. 107, fascicle 13, poem nos. 142-143 and 153.

As will be discussed later on, the role of women in the education of their sons and, in the case of wet-nurses, of their male charges, was likely very significant. That both Fuyutsugu and Yasuyo evince exceptional poetic prowess must, to no mean degree, be attributed to their mother, Nagatsugu, a woman, as has already been said, of Korean descent.

Each of these four men held politically influential positions prior—sometimes just prior—to their appointment as compilers of Saga’s imperial history. As a rule, compilers of imperially commissioned histories (*seishi* 正史) were men who stood at the apex of high-ranking courtiers, namely, those who held the third, second, or first (highest) rank. The head compilers were acting Chief Ministers (*daijin* 大臣), a practice which, incidentally, was later codified in a section of *Shingishiki* 新儀式 (The New Rituary, 963) dealing with the compilation and revision of imperial histories (*kokushi wo shū suru koto* 修国史事). The head compiler of *Nihon kōki* (840) was, at first, Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, then the highest ranking nobleman at court. After his death in 826, Fujiwara no Otsugu, who was himself left the highest ranking nobleman, was appointed the new head compiler. In short, the head compiler of imperial histories, from the eighth to the tenth century, was required to hold the highest political position possible for high-ranking noblemen.²⁷ Naturally, therefore, *Nihon*

²⁷ Takigawa, “Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku,” 175-178

kōki, as with all six imperially commissioned histories, is preponderantly concerned with matters relating to high-level politics. Even seeming exceptions, such as reported sightings of fantastic creatures or rare animals, ought to be interpreted as representing divine omens of virtuous governance, and hence of the highest political importance. Conversely, while banquets in which poetry was presented are duly recorded throughout this history, the compilers themselves need not have been poets in their own right. Neither Otsugu, the man appointed head compiler after Fuyutsugu's death, nor Sadatsugu were poets of any note. This is significant. As will be elaborated upon later, men charged with compiling anthologies of Sinitic poetry were necessarily poets of merit themselves. Furthermore, compilers of poetry anthologies, at least during the reign of Saga, were not required to hold superlatively high court positions. Their skill as poets was of primary importance; political standing was secondary. In the case of *Nihon kōki*, exactly the opposite prevails: these four compilers were selected in virtue of their eminent political standing. Literary proficiency, though certainly necessary, was not in itself enough.

More interestingly, though, is the style of writing found in *Nihon kōki*. Unlike the two official histories that came before it, *Nihon kōki* contains passages of critical commentary and appraisals of certain historical figures, including sovereigns and members of the

Imperial Palace. This change in historiographical technique was possibly introduced by Otsugu, who was the only original member of the compiling committee to survive until the work was completed. Of course, this sort of commentary courtesy of the historian is found in Chinese histories as early as the *Shiji* 史記. Otsugu was relying on precedent. Still, the fact that *Nihon kōki* was the first Japanese imperial history to include moral commentaries of this sort evinces a more liberal, actively critical approach to the practice of historiography encouraged, no doubt, by Saga himself. Even so, however willing Saga might have been to permit critical asides in relation to past sovereigns and men of his own court, no such commentary about Saga himself is to be found in this history. Saga is the assumed focal point of most of *Nihon kōki*, even when the entries pertain to other sovereigns. Aside from the endless proclamations and edicts coming from his throne, the only commentary directed at Saga amounts to such simple phrases as “His Majesty accepted so-and-so’s petition,” or “His Majesty was not pleased upon hearing such-and-such.” Saga remains, from beginning to end, an infallible, supremely virtuous sovereign beyond reproach. Not only is Saga beyond reproach, he appears, from what might be termed his historical persona, wholly unapproachable. That is to say, according to *Nihon kōki*, Saga is a kind of imperial mouthpiece. Vassals seek his approval and advice. He deals

out punishments and rewards, as the situations requires. All this is exercised through the medium of written petitions, edicts, and proclamations. Saga himself is not portrayed as interacting in any personal way with his vassals or subjects. He hosts banquets. Even so, there is no mention whatsoever of his interactions at these banquets. As will become clear throughout the second chapter, Saga's historical persona is very different from his poetic persona. The Saga we see through the lens of poetry anthologies interacts actively and jovially with his vassals. Not merely passively approachable, Saga actively invites his vassals to approach him, even when they might prefer to remain silent in deference to his sovereign presence.

Another point of some interest is the fact that though three of the four compilers were scions of the Fujiwara clan, each of them were from different branches of that clan: Fuyutsugu belonged to the Northern branch, Otsugu to the Shiki branch, and Sadatsugu to the Southern branch. This mixture would have precluded, as much as was then effectively possible, a privileging of one branch over the others. The political and economic fortunes of these various branches were never entirely equal. Each branch eagerly attempted to outmaneuver the others in the struggle for imperial favor. Though all descended from the Fujiwara line, each branch had its own special set of motives. Saga, perhaps in an effort to

please as many people as possible, or, to put it another way, to make as few enemies as possible, saw fit to divide this work of imperial historiography between the rival branches. Indeed, even a quick perusal of *Nihon kōki* reveals a high degree of impartiality. For the most part, events are recorded in a matter-of-fact manner. Even the critical comments mentioned earlier do not, as far as I can see, reveal any real bias against one particular branch of the Fujiwara clan as opposed to the others.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF EMPEROR SAGA²⁸

Having looked, albeit briefly, at the historical and political background of the early Heian period, it is now time to turn our attention to the life and work of Saga himself. This section offers a concise biography of the man, from his enthronement as sovereign to his eventual retirement. As far as I can see, no lengthy biography of Saga has been published in English. Japanese-language scholarship, too, has yet to supply us with a single full-length

²⁸ The following is a patchwork sewed together from a number of sources. Surprisingly, lengthy biographies of Saga are hard to come by. Articles by Japanese experts appear here and there in encyclopedias and the occasional journal: see especially Sasayama, “Saga tennō”; Mezaki, “Saga tennō”; Sakai, “Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku.” By far the most thorough and lucid modern-day biography is Inoue, “Saga tennō.” I have refrained from citing these sources whenever the information gleaned is more-or-less well known to most scholars of the field.

monograph about this most influential figure. This is an odd situation, considering Saga's unparalleled influence on Heian literary culture. If the word renaissance seems too lofty, then at least we ought to credit Saga with bringing about a literary efflorescence, one which would go on to influence not only the development of later Sinitic writing, but also the transformation of vernacular poetry throughout the tenth century.

Saga was born in 786, only eight years before the capital was transferred to Kyoto. He ascended the throne in 809, and remained in power until 823. Even after retiring from the throne, Saga continued to wield considerable political power, right up to his death in 842 at the not too ripe age of 56. He was the son of Emperor Kanmu, founder of the Heian capital, and his primary consort (*kōgō*) Fujiwara (Shiki branch) no Otomuro 藤原乙牟漏 (760-790), daughter of Fujiwara no Yoshitsugu 藤原良繼 (716-777). Incidentally, the title Saga is a posthumous one. In life, the man was known by the name Kamino 神野 (written in some sources as 賀美能). For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the man consistently as Saga, regardless of whether we are talking about him before or after his enthronement, that is, whether we are talking about Prince Kamino or Emperor Saga. It was in 806 when Saga's older brother (from the same mother), ascended the throne as Emperor Heizei (774-824, r. 806-809). Heizei, who was some thirteen years older than Saga, thus

became sovereign at the age of thirty-three, at which time Saga was but twenty-one years old. Only four years later, however, in 809, Heizei abdicated in favor of Saga. Thus began Saga's reign, a reign that was to shape the entire history of Heian Japan, both politically and culturally.

Retired Emperor Heizei remained an active—so far as Saga was concerned, an overly active—participant in court politics. In 810, just one year after Saga became sovereign, Heizei called for a move of the capital back to the Nara-period capital at Heijō. It would appear Heizei was prepared to fight for this cause, as Saga had to deploy military force in order to pacify his rambunctious brother. Saga's forces acted promptly, quelling Heizei's rebellion in short measure. Heizei's plans thus foiled, the capital remained in Heian, where it was destined to remain for the next four centuries. Why was Heizei so eager to move the capital back to Nara? That is a question not so easily answered. At least one possible reason seems rather straightforward: Remember that Heizei made his daring move in 810.

Remember also that Heizei was born in 774. From 710 to 784, the capital had been located in Nara. Between 784 and 794, the capital had been moved to an area in Kyoto, where it was known as the Nagaoka Capital 長岡京. Heizei would have spent roughly the first decade of his life in the Heijō Capital, the second decade in the Nagaoka Capital, and only

the third decade and a half in the Heian Capital. As far as Heizei was concerned, Nara was his place of birth. A return to Nara would have meant a return to his native home. Saga, on the other hand, who was born in 786, had never lived in Nara; he was a Kyoto man from birth to death. This contrast, for whatever it might be worth, is often overlooked.

We ought to look at the year 810 in more detail. One might well ask, why did Heizei abdicate after a mere four years on the throne? The answer most often given is that Heizei was forced to abdicate due to some sort of serious physical, or perhaps pathological, illness. No sooner had he abdicated, however, than he led a band of his most loyal vassals, which amounted to about half of the entire grand Council of State (*dajōkan*), and moved to the site of the old Heijō Capital, where he had spent the first decade of his youth. Once settled in Nara, a Retired Emperor Heizei, supported now by his most beloved consort, Fujiwara no Kusuko 藤原薬子 (?-810), along with her brother Fujiwara no Nakanari 藤原仲成 (764-810), began meddling in court politics, albeit from a distance. Saga was not amused. As a first step in opposing Heizei's attempts at political interference, a well-seasoned military general by the name of Kose no Notari 巨勢野足 (749-817), along with the already mentioned Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, were promptly appointed Chief Royal Chancellors (*kurōdo no tō* 藏人頭)—the first two men to hold this position. Saga created this position

expressly for the occasion. Saga, now victorious, had Nakanari arrested, and saw to it that Kusuko was officially divested of her previous rank. Heizei was forced to take the tonsure. Kusuko soon after committed suicide, while Nakanari was eventually shot and killed by an arrow. All other supporters of Heizei were either divested of any imperial privileges or banished. Nobody was officially sentenced to execution—a point, interestingly enough, which made some of Saga’s subjects doubt his competence as a ruler.

Heizei’s failed uprising is known as the Kusuko Disturbance (Kusuko no hen 菓子の変). To what degree Kusuko was responsible for inciting Heizei’s insurrection is wholly uncertain. It may very well be that the term Kusuko Disturbance is misleading; perhaps she was adopted by historians, contemporary and modern alike, to serve as a scapegoat. It has been suggested that Saga deliberately chose to place the blame on Kusuko as a means of drawing attention away from his brother, who had been, until very recently, an exalted (albeit sickly) sovereign.²⁹ Whatever the case, the fact remains that Kusuko was certainly the catalyst behind at least one potential scandal at court. Kusuko was a daughter of Fujiwara (Shiki branch) no Tanetsugu 藤原種継 (737-785), a courtier who, due to the great respect in which Emperor Kanmu held him, advanced rapidly after Kanmu’s

²⁹ Sakai, “Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku,” 2.

enthronement in 781. It was Tanetsugu who successfully petitioned Kanmu to move the capital from Heijō to Nagaoka. Tanetsugu was assassinated shortly after the move to Nagaoka, in 785. Ōtomo no Yakamochi, a man understood to be the final editor of *Man'yōshū*, and who had died but one month earlier, was suspected of being the mastermind behind this murder. He was, consequently, posthumously divested of his previous rank. Kusuko was one of two daughters born to Tanetsugu by an unknown woman of the Fujiwara lineage. The woman must have been of significant status, however, considering both of these girls—the other was named Fujiwara no Higashiko (or Azumako, or Tōshi) 藤原東子 (?-816)—became members of Emperor Kanmu's rear palace (*kōkyū*), that is, his royal seraglio. Before entering the rear palace, she had been a wife of Fujiwara (Shiki branch) no Tadanushi 藤原繩主 (760-817), to whom she bore three sons and two daughters. The oldest daughter from this union became a high-ranking lady-in-waiting for a yet-to-be-crowned Heizei. Shortly thereafter, Kusuko herself became romantically involved with Heizei. Kusuko apparently also had romantic encounters with Fujiwara no Kadonomaro 藤原葛野麻呂 (755-818), whose own younger sister served as Kanmu's lady-in-waiting. Enraged by Kusuko's illicit romping about, Kanmu had her expelled from the seraglio. It was in 806, when Heizei was enthroned as sovereign, that Kusuko was

summoned back to court, this time to serve as Heizei's Head of Female Officials (*naishi no kami* 尚司). In this capacity, Kusuko would have had a significant degree of power at court: she was responsible for overseeing other female officials, taking messages back and forth between vassals and the sovereign, as well as conveying imperial edicts directly to vassals. Her husband, Tadanushi, was given a post in far-off Kyushu to get him out of the picture; he was, if not officially, at least effectively, exiled. Hereafter, Kusuko and her elder brother, Nakanari, begin to dominate court politics in a way that enraged many. Her reputation was, from that time onward, irretrievably tainted.

As has been mentioned already, the royal chancellery (*kurōdo dokoro* 藏人所), Saga's own invention, was established in the first quarter of 810.³⁰ The consensus among Japanese historians sees the establishment of the royal chancellery as Saga's prompt response to Heizei's attempts at subverting royal authority. This newly organized team, headed by two of Saga's most trusted generals, Kose no Notari and Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, was to serve as Saga's private secretarial cabinet, charged with reviewing all documents

³⁰ Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 2. Incidentally, no mention of this is found in *Nihon kōki*. Rather, *Koji ruien* 古事類苑, quoting an entry taken from *Kō'nendai ryakki* 皇年代略記 (Abridged Imperial Chronology, perhaps late Kamakura), states that Saga established his chancellery on the tenth day of the third month of that year (*Koji ruien, kan'i bu* 官位部 28, fascicle 2, *kurōdo dokoro* 藏人所, 203).

submitted to the sovereign, as well as relaying messages both to and from the sovereign. Until this time, message relay had been the responsibility of the Head of Female Officials, a position, as just mentioned, occupied only recently by Kusuko. Saga, perhaps perceiving the potential danger of having anyone even remotely associated with Kusuko serve as his personal messenger, lest his plans should be leaked out, decided to hand things over to his more loyal generals. It is no doubt for similar reasons that Saga established around this time another organ of state government, namely, the imperial police (*kebiishi* 檢非違使), who were in charge of keeping the peace, escorting exiles, managing crowd control at public festivals and ceremonies, as well as patrolling the city. Saga was well aware of the numerous supporters Heizei had left behind in the capital. It was imperative to keep a close watch on any potential troublemakers.³¹ While it was Emperor Kanmu who gave the orders to transfer the capital to Kyoto, it was Saga who, by quelling opposition and winning support from powerful lineages, ensured the stability of this new capital. For this very reason, Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1155-1216), in his *Hōjōki* (An Account from my Hut, 1212) designates not Kanmu but Saga as the real founder of the Heian capital. That Kamo no Chōmei, and presumably many other twelfth and thirteen century intellectuals, saw Saga

³¹ Sakai, “Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku,” 2-3.

as the founder of the Heian court is undoubtedly related to the flawless success with which he quelled the Kusuko Disturbance of 810.³²

Saga descended from the throne in 823, abdicating in favor of his half-brother, who subsequently ascended the throne as Emperor Junna (786-840, r. 823-833). Junna was born the same year as Saga, though from a different mother. Junna's mother was a high-ranking consort (*bu'nin* 夫人) by the name of Fujiwara (Shiki branch) no Tabiko 藤原旅子 (759-788), who was herself the eldest daughter of Fujiwara no Momokawa 藤原百川 (732-779), late State Advisor. Recall that Fujiwara no Otsugu, perhaps the most influential compiler of *Nihon kōki*, was the eldest son of Momokawa. Junna was born in 786, which would have made Otsugu a maternal uncle to the future-sovereign Junna. It was in virtue of this connection that Otsugu was promoted to such heights and that, consequently, he was appointed head compiler of Saga's imperial history. A decade later, after Emperor Junna retired in 833, one of Saga's first sons ascended the throne as Emperor Ninmyō 仁明 (810-850, r. 833-850), a position he held, unlike the three sovereigns before him, until his death. It must be noted here that the mother of Emperor Ninmyō, a remarkable woman who

³² Murai, "Ōchō no bunka to waka no sekai," 47; see *Hōjōki*, section no. 4, "Transferring the Capital" (Miyautsuri); see also Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 45.

became Saga's first consort or queen (*kōgō*), was named Tachibana no Kachiko 橘嘉智子 (aka Queen Danrin, or Queen of the Sandalwood Forest 檀林皇后, 786-850). She is supposed to have been blessed with an exceptionally beautiful visage.³³ More importantly, she was not of the Fujiwara lineage. Emperor Kanmu's rear palace—effectively his royal seraglio—totaled twenty-six women, ten of whom belonged to the Fujiwara lineage, and three of whom belonged to the Tachibana lineage. Kanmu's primary consort was a Fujiwara. Saga's seraglio totaled more than thirty-one women, two of whom belonged to the Tachibana lineage, and only one of whom was a Fujiwara. His queen, Kachiko, was a Tachibana. Saga's seraglio, in contrast to Kanmu's, shows a very wide variety in terms of the number of lineages it includes. Saga had two Tachibana women, two Kudara women (probably of Korean ancestry), and two Ōhara women. Aside from these three lineages, however, there was no more duplication; each woman was from a different lineage. This tells us two things about the marriage politics during Saga's reign: First, Saga sought to suppress the troublesome Fujiwara monopoly; second, he sought to connect himself to as many lineages as possible, thereby broadening his network of influence. Both of these proved effective.

³³ Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 1.

Upon retiring, Saga and Kachiko took up residence in the Reizei Villa 冷然院, adjacent the eastern side of the imperial compound. Then, in 833, when Junna abdicated in favor of Ninmyō, Saga and his queen moved to the Saga Villa 嵯峨院, located in western Kyoto, in a region known as Saga, from whence the man obtained his posthumous title. Here he spent the remainder of this days occupied with literature and music. These two venues—the Reizei Villa and the Saga Villa—will appear again later on in our discussion. Saga’s death was felt sorely at court. Bereft of the man who had served to unify his court for so many decades, the question of imperial succession once again raised its ugly head. The Jōwa Disturbance (Jōwa no hen 承和の変) of 842, a dispute over who should succeed after Ninmyō, was the culmination of tensions that had been kept at bay while Saga held sway over the court.

Administrative Reforms and Cultural Efflorescence

From the time he ascended as sovereign in 809 to his death in 842, Saga held the reins of power within the court, ruling, as Japanese scholars are wont to say, in the capacity of a mighty old patriarch (*kafuchō* 家父長). His successors, Emperors Junna and Ninmyō,

ruled only nominally, under the shadow of this politically adroit and evidently extremely lettered man. The period of Saga's rule, according to scholars of literature, was one of relative political peace. Whether or not this was really the case—it was not—is an issue that will be taken up later in some detail. Saga's reign saw the compilation of authoritative commentaries on both law and court ritual—*Kō'nin kyakushiki* (820) and *Dairishiki* (821) respectively—as well as the establishment of the aforementioned royal chancellery (*kurōdo dokoro* 藏人所). Administration of the provinces, too, was executed with marked determination. During the reign of Heizei, provincial governors were ordered to serve a lengthy term of six years, as opposed to the original four, in their appointed provinces. Saga reduced this term back down to four, aware that extended stays more often than not led to exploitation and treachery.³⁴ Large-scale administrative efforts succeeded in fostering a major cultural efflorescence, the central participant and patron of which was, from beginning to end, Saga himself. Not merely an admirer of the arts, Saga was and still is considered one of the finest calligraphers of the early Heian period. He is referred to, along with Kūkai 空海 (774-835) and Tachibana no Hayanari 橘逸勢 (c.782-842), as one of the three calligraphy masters (*sanpitsu* 三筆) of his generation. His literary achievements,

³⁴ Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 5.

especially in the realm of poetry, as will be seen, are no less extraordinary.

The cultural milieu that was thus brought into fluorescence is known in Japanese historiography as Kō'nin culture (*kō'nin bunka* 弘仁文化), because it occurred during the Kō'nin years (810-824) of Saga's reign. Various annual court activities, festivals, and ceremonies, which had once formed an integral part of court life, but had ceased to be observed during the short reign of Heizei, were reinstated by Saga. His *Dairishiki* (821) was meant to serve as an authoritative manual, recording precedents prior to Heizei, as well as prescribing how things ought to be done in his own court. Moreover, new events were instituted by Saga: the so-called Imperial Palace banquet (*naien* 内宴, literally "inner banquet"), hosted by the sovereign within the imperial place, and a form of new year's greeting in which the sovereign personally paid his respects to the retired sovereign and his retired queen (*chōkin gyōkō* 朝覲行幸).³⁵ Saga's project of cultural reform was thoroughly Sinitic; in all matters, great and small, Saga looked to the Tang for precedence. In 818, Saga remodeled the system of ritual attire and changed the names of all halls and gates within the imperial compound in accordance with Tang-period precedents; everything in his court

³⁵ Steininger refers to these inner banquets as residential palace banquets (see, for example, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 51).

was, in a sense, Sinicized. I doubt, however, that he or his contemporaries saw it that way. The court was not a nation-state. Ethnic and linguistic homogeneity was not a given, nor is such a notion ever mentioned in contemporary documents. Saga's reforms must have been seen, instead, as a move towards greater unification with a shared Sinospheric identity.

With Saga, too, the rear palace prospered. Saga had at least fifty children from his more than thirty women. One of the more memorable measures Saga instituted as a means of alleviating the staggering fiscal demands of his rule was to demote a number of his children—thirty-two of his (at least) fifty children—to the rank of vassal (*shinseki* 臣籍), granting to all of them the surname Minamoto. The so-called Saga-Genji 嵯峨源氏 lineage has its origins in this very episode. This custom, followed by successive sovereigns, is precisely what happened to the protagonist in the *Tale of Genji*. This decision of the surname Minamoto or Gen, like most of Saga's, had its motivation in continental precedence. The *Weishu* 魏書 (Annals of the Wei Dynasty) contains the biography of a certain military general by the name of Yuan He 源賀 (407-479), in which the sovereign is recorded as having given this general the surname Yuan—the same Gen given to Saga's children—with the explanation: “Though you and I, due to various circumstances, hold very different positions in life, we come from the self-same source. Therefore, from hereon

in, you shall go by the surname Yuan,” where the word *yuan* (J: *gen*) means source or origin. It was for the very same reasons that Saga gave this surname to a number of his children, the fruit of his loins.³⁶ Lest it be assumed that demotion of this sort was seen as a form of punishment, it must be noted that a number of these newly named Minamoto sons played active roles in court politics. Far from ousting royal sons from court life, Saga, by making them vassals, granted them access to a lofty career path unavailable to most aspiring courtiers. Such demotions were primarily economic in nature. This fecund proliferation of the royal household brought with it serious financial strain, as each child, so long as they were considered of the royal flock, had to be generously provided for throughout life. Saga, in particular, faced a desperate situation: royal lands—donations to his many children—had all been very nearly parceled out; the exchequer would soon be empty. Some royal children had to be excluded from what would otherwise have been a perquisite of royal birth.

Even with his royal household significantly pruned, Saga found it necessary to

³⁶ Gotō, “Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu,” 69; Sakai, “Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku,” 5. It ought to be mentioned, too, that even the eponym Saga 嵯峨, which was to become the sovereign’s posthumous title, has continental roots. North of Chang’an lies a mountain known as Mount Cuo 嵯峨, the Japanese Sinitic reading of which is Saga. It was here where Emperor Dezong 德宗 (742-805, r. 779-805), a contemporary of Emperor Kanmu, was buried.

collect exorbitant taxes from his subjects. High taxes took their toll. Whereas some people ostensibly denoted land to temples in order to gain tax exemptions, others went so far as to claim descent from royal bloodlines, a claim, which, if recognized, likewise granted certain tax exemptions. At first, it would seem, a number of such claims were actually recognized. When the number of subjects claiming royal ancestry became too large, however, the court began to take a closer look at would-be tax evaders. Sometime before the sixth month of 814, a number of Saga's vassals presented him with their final draft of an imperially commissioned genealogy of the more prominent families then active throughout the capital and surrounding provinces. The title of this work, which fortunately remains extant, is *Shinsen shōjiroku* (Newly Compiled Genealogy of Prominent Lineages). This work, which sought to clarify once and for all exactly who was of royal ancestry, and therefore eligible for tax exemption, was an attempt at curbing fraudulent claims.³⁷ Confusion had arisen already during the reign of Kanmu as to the ancestral origins of many of these family lineages. Kanmu, it would appear, had requested that some attempt be made to clear things up. It was Saga, however, who finally managed to bring his father's project to fruition. *Shinsen shōjiroku* is a rather large work, consisting of thirty fascicles. Family lineages—

³⁷ Yasuda, "Heian jidai no kōshin shisei," 170-171.

what we would call surnames—are divided into four broad classes: imperial families (*kōbestu* 皇別), lineages who could trace their ancestry back to the gods (*shinbetsu* 神別), lineages of foreign ancestry, either from China or the Korean peninsula (*banbetsu* 蕃別), and miscellaneous lineages whose ancestry remained uncertain (*mitei zasshō* 未定雜姓). The names within each of these classes were organized along geographical lines.

Saga and Buddhism

Saga's attitude towards Buddhism is a topic of some importance. Since the reign of Heizei, certain groups of Buddhist monks had pooled their resources and erected temples. By nominally donating their land to these newly established temples, monks could then claim exemption from land taxes, much the same way modern religion leaders can, and do. What this meant, of course, was that laymen could pose as monks and get away with the same mischief. It was against this backdrop of not so inspired practices that Saichō and Kūkai, two monks thought to be of foreign ancestry, stood out as paragons of religious integrity and continental learning. Saga seems to have held both men in high regard. They, in return, exerted no small effort in returning the favor with gifts of rare books and other

prestigious cultural items, religious or otherwise, brought back directly from the continent.³⁸ Tōji Temple 東寺 (aka Kyōō gokokuji 教王護国寺) had first been erected by command of Emperor Kanmu in 796. In 823, Saga saw fit to hand over this temple to Kūkai as a center of esoteric Buddhist education and practice—and, of course, as a means of ensuring the protection of his realm.

Saga wrote a large number of poems about Buddhist monks and Daoist hermits, as well as numerous verses about the austere, solitary life of a recluse in general. Some of these poems were dedicated to historical monks, such as Saichō, Kūkai, and Genpin, who enjoyed Saga's patronage and received his sincere admiration.³⁹ Other poems depicted what were likely fantastical figures of the sort conjured up in continental Daoist literature and pseudo-historical hagiography. From the apparent sincerity of his verses, as well as the number of official outings to temples, it would seem that Saga, if not a devout believer himself, was at very least a devout patron of the faith, either for its perceived religious and

³⁸ Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 7-8.

³⁹ For a scholarly account of the evolution of Buddhist verses throughout the late Nara and early Heian period, see Rouzer "Early Buddhist Kanshi: Court, Country, and Kūkai" especially 442-447. I have deliberately refrained from incorporating some of the more provocative arguments offered by Rouzer into my own discussion of Buddhist poetry in Saga's three anthologies, for the simple reason that it would take us too far off course.

political merits, or for its intimate connection with continental culture and art.⁴⁰ Saga, especially in the latter half of his reign spent the majority of his time engaged in either literary or religious pursuits of one sort or another. The business of government, therefore, was relegated to his most trusted vassals, most of whom belonged to the so-called *bunjin* (state-funded literati) elite, headed by Fujiwara no Sonohito, whose voice is so often heard throughout *Nihon kōki*.

Saga, in a didactic piece entitled “Expedient Means,” summarizes the doctrine of expedient means (*hōben* 方便)—that the Buddha utilizes an infinite array of teachings and tentative manifestations, each in accordance with the needs of a given individual, so as to liberate as many sentient beings as possible—in the following couplet: “Though tentative divisions are at times introduced, the supreme vehicle of Buddhism remains but one and undivided: all sentient beings are drawn to this great path by means of the ten-thousand expedient means.”⁴¹ The occasion for this poem was a celebratory banquet (*kyōen* 竟宴) held at the conclusion of a series of lectures on the *Lotus Sutra*. Who the lecturer was, and who else attended the banquet, is uncertain. All in attendance, at least those who had

⁴⁰ Inoue, “Saga tennō,” 40-44.

⁴¹ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 18 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 20).

directly participated in the lectures, drew lots, each of which had written upon it one of the chapter titles from the sutra. Saga drew the chapter entitled “Expedient Means,” hence his poem. The important thing to note here, rather than the content of the poem, is the occasion of the banquet itself: Saga and his vassals were expected to attend lectures of Buddhist scriptures, likely held within the court or in imperially-sponsored temples. Now, as far as the historical record is concerned, the *Lotus Sutra* does not figure prominently in Saga’s court. The earliest mention of this sutra in those chapters of *Nihon kōki* dedicated to Saga’s reign occurs in 810, the year after he ascended the throne. Saga was suffering from an unnamed illness, and, as a means of alleviating his symptoms, an imperial order was issued to have the sutra piously copied out in full at Kawara Temple, likely located in modern-day Fushimi, Kyoto, but perhaps somewhere in the old Nagaoka Capital. More specifically, this religious act was meant to appease a number of then notoriously vengeful spirits—the recently deceased Prince Sawara 早良親王 (c.750-785) among them—whose malevolent machinations were thought to have contributed to Saga’s illness.⁴² The sutra is mentioned two more times in Saga’s chapters of *Nihon kōki*, though merely in passing. There is no mention in this source of any lectures given on the *Lotus Sutra*. On the other hand, there is

⁴² *Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 1 (810).7.29, 511.

mention of lectures given on the *Sutra of Benevolent Kings* (*Ninnōkyō* 仁王經) and the *Golden Light Sutra* (*Kongōmyō saijōkyō* 金光明最勝王經), both of which were held in high esteem among the imperial family since the Nara period.⁴³ The practice of holding regular annual lectures within the court on the last of these sutras was officially established in the year 773.⁴⁴ Though Saga must have followed this practice throughout his own reign, *Nihon kōki* contains but one reference to lectures on the *Golden Light Sutra*. Evidently, these lectures, aside from the one cited here, were not worthy of mention in the official history. That the aforementioned lecture on the *Lotus Sutra* should remain unmentioned in *Nihon kōki* is, therefore, no anomaly, but rather the norm.

Genpin, Kūkai, and Saichō each received generous patronage at the hands of Saga.

The first of these, Genpin, was a monk of high renown throughout the early ninth century.

His potent healing prayers had been called upon, in the year 805, in order to heal Saga's

father, the late Emperor Kanmu, and again, in 809, to alleviate what appears to have been a

⁴³ For mention of the *Sutra of Benevolent Kings*, see *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 2 (811).10.20, 583, and Kō'nin 9 (817).4.27, 755. The second lecture was held in the Shishinden of the Imperial Palace as a means of counteracting malevolent forces held responsible for a recent draught; for mention of the *Golden Light Sutra*, see Kō'nin 4 (813).1.14, 639. Note that the first mention of the *Sutra of Benevolent Kings* (811) as well as that of *Golden Light Sutra* (813) both occur before the completion of *Ryōunshū*, offered up to Saga in 814.

⁴⁴ See *Nihon kōki*, endnote 223:6, on p. 1159.

congenital illness of Saga's rebellious brother, Heizei. Whereas Kūkai and Saichō were both markedly cosmopolitan figures who spent most of their active lives in or near the capital, Genpin was a hermit monk who lived in seclusion far from the capital. “Bidding Farewell to Master Genpin,” appearing in *Ryōunshū*, is a tribute to his pure, recluse lifestyle. The first two couplets read as follows:

Many are the moons that have passed, Master Genpin, for you in solitude, away

from the world of man; no attachments to any of our mundane cares binds *your*
soul, fond as it is of profound silence.

Your soul, empty of all those things that bind us lesser mortals, is perpetually cooled

by the waters and the moonlight that chance to visit you. Neither wind nor
thunder—not even these things!—could ever disturb your peaceful
meditation.⁴⁵

賓公遁跡星霜久 萬事無情愛寂然

水月尋常冷空性 風雷未敢動安禪

⁴⁵ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 21 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 23).

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 23

Genpin, a true recluse in Saga's eyes, is at once one with and above nature. The waters and moonlight cool and sooth his soul, while wind and thunder, rant and rave as they might, have no power to perturb his profound inward silence. Strict ascetic discipline, at the center of which is prolonged meditation, fortify his aged body and any dissolve any mundane desires that might otherwise arise in his mind. Indeed, Genpin becomes, for Saga, not only a Buddhist monk, but a proper Daoist divinity "clothed, like some immortal, in clouds and mist," blurring any assumed boundaries between the two religions. Years later, in *Bunka shūreishū*, Saga laments the hermit's death with a rather conventional, but no less sincere, eulogy entitled "Lamentation for the Passing of Master Genpin," wherein the lifework of Genpin is encapsulated in two couplets:

That enlightened bodhisattva, he who from days of old called no one place his
 home, concealed himself deep within that noteworthy mountain, growing old
 amidst the frost and howling wind.

In hopes of leading us lost mortals to salvation it was that you took up the form of
 an earthly man, bound to suffer alongside us in this filthy world. Then,
 without notice, the fated moment came when you should return to the
 Ultimate Truth.⁴⁶

大士古來無住著 名山晦跡老風霜
 隨緣化體厭塵久 歸正真機忽滅亡

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 85

This is an example of the doctrine of expedient means: Genpin, suggests Saga, was in reality a divine being—an “enlightened bodhisattva,” to use the sovereign’s own words—who deigned to descend to our filthy mortal realm.

Here, too, the relationship between the recluse and nature is an exceptionally intimate one: “Moonlight, bereft of your once fond admiration, now shines in vain upon your vine-

⁴⁶ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 37 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 85).

covered hut.” Even the moon laments Genpin’s passing. Pine trees, likewise, grow dark with sadness: “The boughs of pine trees, darker and more densely verdured than before, cast their shadows over your now empty hut.” Interestingly, this last image—darkened pine boughs—occurs several times throughout Saga’s recluse poetry. “Visiting a Hermit’s Remains: In Imitation of Shigeno no Sadanushi,” in which Saga presents a fanciful vignette of the now empty hut of a deceased hermit, our attention is drawn to “a lofty pine extending its shady boughs over your mountain abode,” while within there is nothing but a stone slab that once served as the man’s makeshift bed.⁴⁷ The pine is a symbol of longevity. Its presence so close to the hermit’s hut is meant to suggest that the now absent resident, no longer confined to the mortal realm, enjoys a higher state of longevity, namely, true immortality. Like Genpin, this imaginary hermit has, through decades of solitary practice, undergone the final transformation: “O, divine alchemist, master of metamorphosis! You soared into the heavens, leaving me to grieve alone, mired as I am in the muck of this base world.”

Saga’s relationship with Kūkai was a most productive one: both men were noted

⁴⁷ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 40 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 93); in this vein, see also Saga’s “Seeing Off an Elderly Monk Returning to the Mountains,” Appendix, item no. 57 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 30).

calligraphers and adept poets; both men were deeply interested in Buddhist philosophy; both men shared a love of all things continental. Even before Kūkai had taken up residence in Mt. Kōya, Wakayama, Saga already had his sights set on serving as a patron to the erudite monk. In “A Donation of Cotton for Master Kūkai,” the sovereign speaks of the monk as though he were a transcendent Daoist immortal: “How could those pines—oldest of things—how could they truly comprehend the profound silence that prevails in your lonely dwelling? Not even the mists, sublime sustenance of immortals, can match your simple yearly fare.”⁴⁸ Daoist immortals are continually portrayed as procuring nourishment strictly from the most subtle of mists; their ethereal bellies shun meat and coarse grains. Kūkai has gone a step further, for his diet, whatever it might be, consists of something even more subtle, even more refined than mist. Unbelievably, Kūkai has wholly transcended not only the human condition, but the immortal condition, as well. “O, solitary monk,” sighs Saga in admiration, “how long you have dwelt alone amidst those cloud-covered peaks!” It is, first and foremost, solitude, accompanied by strict ascetic training, that leads to a sort of apotheosis. Saga repeats this same sentiment in “Remembering Master An: A Reply to Fujiwara no Koreo,” which features another Buddhist master whose identity remains

⁴⁸ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 22 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 24).

uncertain:

Having once set his mind upon the true path of enlightenment, that loyal disciple of the Buddha cloistered himself away in some solitary mountain grotto all enshrouded in clouds, where, exposing his mortal frame to all manner of heat and cold, he disciplined his soul through quiet meditation.

Now that he has passed away, the moonlight shines upon his old grass hut in vain, illuminating the vine-entangled branches of his once beloved pines; scriptures expounding the highest truths, once the object of daily study, lay all untouched.⁴⁹

釋子歸真炎涼變 空山獨閉應禪扃

草堂虛駐松蘿月 石室罷翻了義經

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 33

⁴⁹ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 59 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 33).

As was the case with Saga's poetic portrayals of Genpin, here, too, both the moon and the pines lament the passing of their beloved Master An. No less perhaps than those lonely pines, Saga time and again lamented the temporary departure of his favorite Kūkai, who, having come down from his mountain abode to pay the sovereign a visit, had always to return thither. "Tea with Master Kūkai" was composed shortly after one such bittersweet farewell:

Alas, the time for tea drinking is over now; the sun is quickly setting. What can I do but hang my head, forlorn at your departure? What more, I say, can I do than gaze afar as you disappear into the misty mountains beyond?⁵⁰

香茶酌罷日云暮 稽首傷離望雲烟

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 34

The world of the recluse held for Saga an unshakable mystique, one that, unable to explore

⁵⁰ For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 60 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 34).

more closely in reality, he examined repeatedly through poetic flights of fancy.

It ought to be borne in mind that “A Donation of Cotton for Master Kūkai” and “Tea with Master Kūkai” are the only two poems composed by Saga for Kūkai. Furthermore, both of these poems were written before the monk had settled in Mt. Kōya, that is, before he had become a prominent figure in court-based Buddhism. Perhaps more significantly still, Kūkai is only mentioned once in the Saga chapters of *Nihon kōki*, and then only in relation to his helping local residents of Sanuki (modern-day Kagawa, Kūkai’s home province) rebuild a dam that had been washed away the previous year. He is praised not by the sovereign but by the grateful people of Sanuki. Two months after the event, he is generously rewarded by the sovereign with twenty-thousand newly-minted copper coins.⁵¹ This episode occurred in 819, three years after Kūkai entered Mt. Kōya. Kūkai’s religious activities are nowhere to be found in the Saga chapters of this official history. Saichō, on the other hand, receives much more attention—as a religious leader, for that matter—both in Saga’s poetry as well as in his history. “A Reply to Master Saichō” is Saga’s bombastic encomium to the monk, praising him even more highly than Kūkai.

⁵¹ *Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 12 (819).5.27 and 7.23, 799.

Immortals themselves come in droves to listen to your sermons; the spirits of the
mountains, likewise, rush to serve you cups of tea.

Though your monkish cell, so high up in the mountains, remains yet chilly, despite
the coming of spring, divinities rain down upon you petals of heavenly
blossoms, all of their own accord. A most holy springtime, that!⁵²

羽客親講席 山精供茶杯
深房春不暖 花雨自然來

Despite Saichō's rigorous ascetic commitments, he still found time to attend the numerous
banquets and religious events hosted by Saga:

I see how fastidiously you guard your time in regards to ascetic practices, keeping
guests away in order to devote your energies to solitary cultivation. How
remarkable, then, is it to see with what diligence you are able to commit
yourself to numerous annual gatherings.

⁵² For a full English translation, see Appendix, item no. 32 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 71).

經行人事少 宴坐歲華催

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 71

This last compliment is important: Saichō was willing to appear before Saga and his vassals on a number of public occasions. These appearances served to boost both Saichō's and Saga's social standing; Saichō stood to receive increased imperial patronage, while Saga would be able to strengthen his control over the ever-growing Buddhist institutions within his kingdom. Perhaps in order to keep up appearances, Saga, in his poems to Saichō, often adopts an affected humility, referring to himself as a fatuous mortal in need of salvation.⁵³ Similarly, in a petition to the hosts of unseen beings believed to watch over faithful disciples of the Buddha, Saga humbly begs for their divine assistance in healing an ailing Saichō.⁵⁴ This humble persona, one of many Saga adopted throughout his poetic career,

⁵³ See Saga's "Bedridden: A Reply to Master Saichō," Appendix, item no. 35 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 76).

⁵⁴ See Saga's "Petition for an Ailing Saichō," Appendix, item no. 63 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 38); see also his "Lamentation for Eichū: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi," Appendix, item no. 38 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 86).

occurs repeatedly in those verses dedicated to monks and recluses, historical and imagined alike.

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: TENSIONS BETWEEN REALITY AND IMAGINATION

The previous two sections amounted to a general historical survey of, first, the early Heian period, and second, the life of Emperor Saga, in hopes of providing a context for understanding the poetry along with the socioeconomic and religious life of those most intimately involved in court politics. With the preceding summary in mind, it is now possible to refocus our attention more narrowly on the uses of writing—Sinitic writing—during Saga’s reign to create varied images of imperial rule. This present third section, which delves into the nature of Saga’s reign, will consider three questions, each of which involves issues of public presentation, or, more specifically, the deliberate construction of an idealized image via the medium of court-centered writing: First, how exactly did Saga use public presentations of poetry as a means of asserting his right to rule? Second, was his reign truly as peaceful as he and his vassals would have us believe? Third, how did the common masses view Saga? The first question will be addressed by looking at a particular

banquet held near the beginning of Saga's reign. I will emphasize just how adamant Saga was to host this banquet, despite natural disasters and potentially ominous portents, as well as offer a possible explanation regarding his exceptional enthusiasm for this particular banquet. The second question requires a somewhat lengthy investigation into records preserved in *Nihon kōki*. It is my experience that specialists of literature do not dedicate a great deal of time to historical sources. Perhaps this is inevitable; one cannot do everything. In regards to this second question, however, I have found it necessary to momentarily set aside the characteristically romantic accounts of Saga's reign in order to look more closely at those historical accounts currently available to us. My conclusion, quite simply, is that Saga's reign was an awfully chaotic one, beleaguered repeatedly with natural disasters, starvation, poverty, and a fair share of violence. Finally, the third question—how did Saga's subjects see him?—can best be addressed by looking at an account found in the contemporaneous *Nihon ryōiki*. Here the author attempts to prove to his readers or listeners, most of whom would have been part of the non-aristocratic population, that Saga really is a virtuous and sagacious ruler. It would seem from this account that a large swath of society harbored serious doubts about the moral character of their sovereign. No matter how loudly his closest vassals might praise his virtue, there were some who were less convinced.

The Chrysanthemum Banquet and Saga's Poetic Use of Chrysanthemums

Only four months after ascending the throne, Emperor Saga gave audience on the ninth day of the ninth month in the year 809 to an archery display held in the Shinsen Gardens, a favorite venue of Saga throughout his reign. Also, as part of this same event, Saga commanded his favored literati to present Sinitic verses, giving to each a reward suitable to his station.⁵⁵ Displays of archery were annual events, which had, according to custom, been held on the first month of the year. However, considering the hectic nature of this first month—a time in which a number of important New Year festivities and other court events were held—Emperor Heizei had seen it fit, two years earlier, to move these displays to the ninth day of the ninth month (late autumn), when court life was more leisurely and the weather less stifling.⁵⁶ This banquet, held annually on the ninth day of the ninth month, was known as the chrysanthemum banquet (*chōyō no en* 重陽宴, or *kikka no en* 菊花宴). Saga was particularly adamant about holding this particular banquet every

⁵⁵ *Nihon kōki*, 809.9.9, 495.

⁵⁶ *Nihon kōki*, 807.9.9, 407.

year.

Only ten days prior to this banquet, on the thirtieth day of the eighth month, 809, Saga and his retinue paid their respects to a recently retired Emperor Heizei. On this particular occasion it was Fujiwara (Northern branch) no Uchimarō 藤原内麻呂 (756-812, father of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu), then Minister of the Right, who offered up (*hōken* 奉獻) victuals and funded the banquet. During the early Heian period, it was not uncommon for members of the royal family, as well as favored courtiers and heads of official departments, to offer up gifts to their sovereign. These gifts took the form of valuable goods, including rice wine and foodstuffs intended for consumption at royal banquets, which banquets were, more often than not, at least partially funded by these same gift-givers. This practice of offering up gifts and providing funding for banquets dedicated to the sovereign is referred to throughout *Nihon kōki* as *hōken*, literally, offering up (goods and services). Many occasions called for such gift-giving: the construction of a new residence or hall, the move (of an sovereign or other royal luminary) from one residence to another, hunting outings (*yūryō* 遊獵), the birth of a son to the sovereign, decadal birthday celebrations (*sanga* 算賀) held every ten years after the sovereign's fortieth birthday to celebrate his longevity, and even gifts given as a consequence of having lost in some sort of

courtly competition (*makewaza* 負態), including poetry matches, sumo wrestling bouts, archery competitions, and kickball matches.⁵⁷

Drinking and feasting continued throughout the entire day, and, at the end of it all, Saga gave out rewards to his vassals, each according to his merits and contributions.⁵⁸

Note that it was in the twelfth month of this same year that Retired Emperor Heizei, along with his beloved consort Fujiwara no Kusuko, and her elder brother Fujiwara no Nakanari, left Heian and returned to Nara, where they would promptly (but unsuccessfully) begin to establish a new court. There can be little doubt that Heizei had been calculating this strategic move for many years, and consequently, what with the intricate networks of relationships, and the concomitant negotiations and intrigues of court life, that Saga was, at least to some degree—likely to a very high degree—cognizant of what Heizei was cooking up. Saga's visit to Heizei on 809.8.30 must have served, therefore, a double purpose: On the one hand, Saga was asserting his authority as the new sovereign, all the while appealing to a sense of duty to his elder brother, the retired sovereign. On the other hand, Saga must have been quietly evaluating the responses of Heizei and his likeminded crew. Remember,

⁵⁷ *Nihon kōki*, supplementary note no. 11:10, 1058.

⁵⁸ *Nihon kōki*, 807.8.30, 495.

when Heizei left the Heian Capital, he did not go alone. In his wake went no less than half of the members of the grand Council of State. Heizei commanded a great deal of loyalty. Saga, I propose, wanted to sniff things out for himself. What better way than a banquet, where the vassals of both sides—Saga and Heizei—were present, interacting with one another on a most intimate level, to catch glimpses of otherwise hidden sentiments?

Just six days before Saga gave audience to the archery demonstration of 809.9.9, he had given reprieve to those foot messengers (*kyakufu* 脚夫) responsible for transporting tax goods from the various provinces to the Heian capital. The capital was at that time suffering from drought; its residents were sorely exhausted.⁵⁹ This drought was not suppressive enough to stop Saga from hosting his banquet, however. If this drought was not enough, a mighty wind raged through the capital just four days before the archery display, knocking down a house which, in turn, crushed the retired sovereign's (presumably empty) palanquin.⁶⁰ One wonders how this event was interpreted by contemporary Heianites, especially an undoubtedly suspicious Saga. Was the destruction of Heizei's palanquin by natural forces seen as a diviner portent of things to come? We shall never know. Whatever

⁵⁹ *Nihon kōki*, 809.9.3, 495.

⁶⁰ *Nihon kōki*, 809.9.5, 495.

the case, even this was not enough to stop Saga from holding the archery display and hosting his banquet. Indeed, Saga's determination to see the festivities through speaks to the supreme importance he placed on such things. This prospective banquet of his was no mere nicety. Rather, it was to serve as a potent sign of his power, of his legitimacy, as sovereign; conversely, to cancel the banquet could be interpreted as a sign of weakness. In a sense, this banquet, being the first chrysanthemum banquet of Saga's reign, would serve, besides its usual function of preserving longevity, an added inaugural function. Fortunately, a Sinitic poem, entitled "Celebrating the Chrysanthemum Banquet," presented by Saga himself at one of his chrysanthemum banquets is preserved in *Ryōunshū*:

On this fine day—this the chrysanthemum festival!—the autumnal firmament shines
clear and bright!

Evening cicadas, having heard the last leaves fall, cease their shrill chirping; from
afar come wild geese—they who traverse the very clouds—soaring high
overhead.

Lingering flowers seem even now to harbor within their petals sweet pearls of dew;
aged branches rest at ease, unruffled by gust or gale.

Come now! Let us drink of the full moon! Let us partake of the chrysanthemum
 blossoms! This noble banquet of ours harkens back to ages past—what has
 gone before let us now renew.⁶¹

登臨初九日 霽色敞秋空
 樹聽寒蟬斷 雲征遠雁通
 晚蕊猶含露 衰枝不裊風
 延祥盈把菊 高宴古今同

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 4

“See how clear the heavens shine!” exclaims Saga, hinting, of course, that the salubrious weather is no doubt a result of his own virtue. This is a more-or-less straightforward declaration of power. While asserting his right to rule, Saga is careful to assure the older vassals, here referred to metaphorically as lingering flowers, lingering because their proper season (summer) has since passed—men whose loyalty might gravitate more towards his

⁶¹ For explanatory footnotes of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 21 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 4).

retired brother Heizei than himself—that their merits will not be overlooked. “Though your season has passed, though your previous sovereign, Emperor Heizei, has since retired” says Saga, “I discern full well the pearls of wisdom you hold within your hearts. I will not forsake you, so long as you do not forsake me.” This last warning is certainly implied in the rhetoric of the poem. In the same vein he assuages the fears of these same aged vassals, referring to them now as aged branches, saying; “Fear not, my vassals: I shall let no harm come your way whilst I am on the throne. Mine shall be a reign of peace.” The evening cicadas (*kansen* 寒蟬, known now more commonly as *higurashi*)—species of cicada seen in late summer and early autumn—mentioned at the beginning of the second couplet may very well refer to calumniating courtiers or, more generally, to the protestations of those not previously (and likely still not) in favor of Saga’s enthronement. “Tell me,” says Saga, “do you hear the chirping of those shrill-voiced cicadas? Have they not been silenced? Their season is past; the leaves have all fallen. This is my season.” The final couplet, which served, in one sense, much the same function as our modern dinner toast, serves further to remind all present that this banquet symbolizes a covenant made not only between Saga, the new sovereign, and his vassals, but between Saga and his vassals, on the one hand, and past sovereigns and their vassals, on the other. Drinking of the full moon is a rather poetic

way of referring to a drinking bowl in which can be seen the reflection of the moon. The image is especially potent here, where the moon seems to be functioning as a sign of the past visible at once to all (in the) present. In other words, Saga uses this inaugural poem to simultaneously drive home two points: First, his is a new--and of course virtuous—reign; second, despite its newness—and many reforms will take place—it is nevertheless founded on the past. Saga makes an appeal to precedence as a means of legitimizing his planned renewal.

Three days after this inaugural chrysanthemum banquet, Emperor Saga saw fit to host another banquet, of the sort known as *kyokuken* 曲宴, in which a small group of participants compose Sinitic verses while sitting alongside a winding rivulet, upon which floats a cup of alcohol. This same day, Saga sends out a command to the Dazaifu Outpost (near modern-day Fukuoka City), ordering the monks of Mount Tsutsumi 鼓峰 in the vicinity of Ōno Castle 大野城 to perform an esoteric Buddhist ritual dedicated to the four deva kings (*shitennōhō* 四天王法) in order to prevent disaster, increase blessings, and generally ensure a state of peace throughout the land.⁶² This quaint riverside banquet held (I presume) within the Imperial Palace is not wholly unrelated to the esoteric rituals

⁶² *Nihon kōki*, 809.9.12 495.

destined to be carried out in far-off Kyūshū. Both events were geared, first, at demonstrating Saga's power to govern, or at least command, and second, at ensuring peace and prosperity. Banquets ostensibly increased courtly solidarity, while at the same time offering Saga a fine opportunity to make detailed observations of the behavior of his vassals. Esoteric rites, despite their presumed cosmological potency, made certain that Saga's presence was felt, so to speak, on the other side of the country.

Saga used the annual chrysanthemum banquet as a means of repeatedly asserting his imperial authority. In a poem entitled "Chrysanthemums in Autumn," presented by Saga at another of his chrysanthemum banquets, he

The season of autumn has come; the day falls now upon the double *yang*. It is

expressly with the intention of hosting you, my myriad vassals, that these

chrysanthemums have opened their petals!

Their delicate stamens have weathered the crisp morning winds in order to greet you

all with smiling faces; their blossoms, drenched in nightly dew, endure this

chilly season—for whom if not for us?⁶³

旻商季序重陽節 菊為開花宴千官

藥耐朝風今日笑 榮霑夕露此時寒

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 5

This poem appears in *Ryōunshū* immediately after “Celebrating the Chrysanthemum banquet,” quoted several paragraphs earlier. That the series of poems attributed to Saga in this anthology begins—aside from his very first poem (*Ryōunshū*, no. 3), which is about spring blossoms—with two poems composed expressly for and certainly presented at chrysanthemum banquets is significant. As a quick perusal of the Appendix will reveal, the editors of *Ryōunshū*, about whom much more will be said in the next chapter, have not chosen to arrange Saga’s poems chronologically, say, from his enthronement to his abdication. This holds true for the second and third Saga anthologies, namely, *Bunka*

⁶³ For a full translation of, along with explanatory footnotes to this poem, see Appendix, item no. 3 (*Ryōunshū*, no. 5).

shūreishū and *Keikokushū*, as well. Instead, what we see is something akin to a thematic organization, such that poems dealing with similar topics are placed close to one another, anticipating the sort of thematic or topical ordering we see in the imperially commissioned *Koki wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Vernacular Poems, Ancient and Modern, 905) less than a century later. In the case of Saga's poems, the editors of *Ryōunshū* (814) have gone one step further: his poems have been arranged according to theme and, more importantly, according to occasion. The first four poems (poem nos. 3-6) were all composed for royal banquets hosted by Saga himself in the Shinsen Gardens, while the two poems following these (poem nos. 7-8) were composed for royal banquets hosted at the crown prince's (later Emperor Junna) Southern Pond Mansion. That is to say, the first six Saga poems were all presented at royal banquets, and as such, were meant to serve as potent symbols of Saga's imperial powers. When, in the two couplets just quoted, Saga tells his vassals that it "is expressly with the intention of hosting you, my myriad vassals, that these chrysanthemums have opened their petals," he is making a political statement. True, the chrysanthemums, believed to be a magical source of longevity, bloom for his vassals. More strictly speaking—and this is something his audience could not have failed to comprehend—it is in virtue of Saga's benevolent governance that these chrysanthemums, moved by his lofty

deeds, bloom at all. The chrysanthemums bloom for Saga's vassals, not simply for some whimsical admiration of these men, but rather on behalf of Saga, for whom the flowers are willing to offer up their salubrious nectar. While ostensibly praising his vassals, Saga is tacitly, or perhaps not so tacitly, reminding his men of the gratitude they are expected to harbor for their semi-divine sovereign. Note, furthermore, that it is Saga, here playing the omniscient, authorial voice, who enlightens his vassals in regards to the reason behind the blossoming chrysanthemums. The assumption here is that, were it not for Saga's revelation, his vassals would never have known why the flowers had decided to bloom on that day. Saga alone has access to the secrets of nature; he alone understands the otherwise unheard voices of flowers. Vassals must rely upon Saga not only to ensure a peaceful and bountiful existence, but also for a deeper understanding about the inner workings of the nature, and of the cosmos at large.

As should be expected, this same strategy is at play in "Late Autumn Brings a Bountiful Harvest" (poem no. 6), in which declarations of power invite, nay, effectively demand, Saga's readers, and, when it was actually presented at the banquet, his listeners, to see in him an embodiment of both terrestrial and celestial might.

How vast the autumnal sky stretches out in all directions! Ascending the hills, with
 nothing to obstruct my eye, I gaze far out over the surrounding lands.
 Sprawling rice-fields promise abundant harvests. There shall be no more toil for the
 farmers this year!⁶⁴

旻氣何寥廓 登高望悠悠
 大田獲豐稔 從此歲工休

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 6

The act of ascending high places, most often natural hills or mountains, in order to survey the surrounding land has been a set piece within the panoply of Japanese imperial ritual since earliest times, when this public performance was known simply as “land-viewing” (*kunimi* 国見). It was not so much what the sovereign saw while on high—in many examples of *kunimi*, the objects described are either otherworldly or things too far away to

⁶⁴ For a full translation of, along with explanatory footnotes to this poem, see Appendix, item no. 4 (*Ryōunshū*, no. 6).

be seen from the vantage point in question—but rather *that* he saw. That is to say, the physical act of casting the imperial gaze out and over the land was, after the fashion of an incantation or spell, understood to exercise an intense degree of pacifying power. As Torquil Duthie has so elegantly shown, seeing, when done by a sovereign, was in itself a profound representation of power.⁶⁵ When Saga gazes “far out over the surrounding lands,” he is enacting before his vassals an imperial ritual meant to both legitimate his authority and ensure his future power. It is in this light that we must understand Saga’s proud exclamation: “Sprawling rice-fields promise abundant harvests.” As was the case with the chrysanthemums that, according to Saga’s revelation, blossomed expressly for his vassals, so, too, do these rice-fields yield up their harvest for the sake of his loyal subjects. Here, as with the flowers, the implication is that the rice-fields bring forth their fruits in direct response to the sovereign’s benevolent rule. Saga praises the fields—products of his own virtue—as a means of further legitimizing his own rule. Here, continues Saga in the same vein, “chrysanthemum petals, freshly plucked, float in the drinking goblets of every reveler”—a phenomenon that would not have been possible had the blossoms not been

⁶⁵ For a fine description of the practice of *kunimi* and several relevant examples from eighth-century poetry, see Duthie, *Man’yōshū and the Imperial Imagination in Early Japan*, 229-233 and 266.

inspired to offer up their precious petals in the first place. This same point is expressed with lively detail in another finely-crafted couplet attributed to Saga's brush:

It is in answer to our impassioned and lofty fancy for these flowers that we gather
 here today at this outdoor banquet, where, having ascending this mountain, we
 gaze out afar, all the while reclining in a garden of these wondrous blossoms.
 These wondrous blossoms, most deserving of praise—see how they glow vibrant
 yellow! And to think that these flowers are content to blossom here in this
 secluded garden, where the footfall of man is seldom heard.⁶⁶

逸趣此時開野宴 登高遠望坐花院
 翫菊花菊花躡黃 紛葩寂寂無人見

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 138

⁶⁶ These two couplets come from a lengthy poem by Saga entitled “Admiring the Chrysanthemums,” a full translation of is to be found in the Appendix, item no. 79 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 138).

Here, again, we see all of the elements discussed above: the flowers bloom expressly for the sovereign's and his loyal vassals' pleasure; the sovereign, standing atop a mountain, casts his imperial gaze out and over the land; the chrysanthemum flowers bloom despite the fact that all other flowers have since faded. Indeed, for Saga, chrysanthemums are a perennial symbol of sincere obedience, loyal constancy, longevity and youthful beauty:

While all other flowers have since lost their fragrance, the peerless chrysanthemum
blossoms most gaily.

Its leaves, more than any of its neighbors, unfurl now fresh and green, shimmering
like no other beneath an autumn sun.⁶⁷

衆芳彫 寒菊咲

殊翁鬱 獨照曜

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 2

⁶⁷ These two couplets come from a lengthy poem by Saga entitled “Chrysanthemum Blossoms,” a full translation of is to be found in the Appendix, item no. 54 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 2).

As such, these same blossoms came, at his poetic hands, to serve as markers of his supposed divine authority, which embraced not only the more pragmatic matters of military success and agricultural bounty, both of which appear again and again in his poetry, but also the aesthetic and culture spheres. The above discussion of Saga's beloved chrysanthemum banquets and his use of the chrysanthemum as a vehicle for asserting authority amply demonstrates the then very real power of imperial poetry to inculcate and repeatedly reinforce a specific ideal of kingship, albeit over a strictly limited audience.

Saga's Realm All But Peaceful

Saga's reign began with unrest. The Kusuko Disturbance of 810 was truly scandalous. Not only the court but the masses were filled with anxiety. No sooner had this insurrection been quelled than a seemingly endless series of natural disasters, including famine, disease, drought, floods, large-scale insect infestation, and crop failure plagued the realm. Hunger and poverty are attested for on nearly every page of *Nihon kōki*. Aside from the constant threat of northern Emishi, an uprising of some seven-hundred immigrants

hailing from the Korean kingdom of Silla added to the fire in 820. Beneath the excessive pomp and pageantry of Saga's court, his realm and its people were groaning under a regime that was both uncertain and, surely for most, wholly unjustified.⁶⁸ Even so, it is often stated that Emperor Saga's reign was more-or-less peaceful. This is certainly true, so long as one is speaking exclusively of court disputes over imperial succession. The Kusuko Disturbance of 809-810, once quelled by Saga's forces, marked the end of such disputes. When Retired Emperor Saga passed away in 842, the court was instantly troubled with disputes regarding Emperor Ninmyō's proper successor, an event known to historians as the Jōwa Disturbance. In this light, then, it would seem that Saga did a fine job of maintaining order within an otherwise fragmented court. Even so, that succession disputes—which must have been going on under the surface regardless—were not permitted to develop into anything akin to the Kusuko or Jōwa Disturbances while Saga was in charge should not be interpreted, at least not unconditionally, as indicating a thoroughly peaceful reign. Even a cursory perusal of the nearly contemporaneous historical record is enough to cast doubt on the alleged tranquility of Saga's reign. When examining, for example, the numerous entries found in *Nihon kōki* which deal expressly with banquets hosted by the sovereign, one might

⁶⁸ Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 7.

be—indeed many scholars have been—tempted to praise the seemingly prosperous nature of his rule. These banquets were lavish events, funded in full or in part by loyal (or simply ambitious) vassals. Whole retinues of men and women were mobilized: poets, attendants, and cooks, to name but a few. Victuals were provided in abundance; valuable textiles were both worn and presented as gifts. Though I have not been able to discover any concrete figures, the amount of material wealth necessary to compass even one of these banquets was surely significant. The court seems healthy and wealthy. So far, so good. However, and here is my point, if, after reading about one of these banquets, one then takes the time to look over just those entries dealing with events occurring one or two months before and immediately following the given banquet, a slightly different picture arises. Again and again, we find reports of famine, drought, fire, and a whole host of other ills plaguing both the capital as well as the provinces.

Petitions and elegantly phrased admonitions from Fujiwara no Sonohito 藤原園人 (756-819), an able vassal who served first as Emperor Heizei's and then as Emperor Saga's loyal minister of revenue, begin to appear with greater frequency from the year 813. Sonohito and his family, with their intimate understanding of the system of taxation, had deftly assisted Saga in regaining control of the court during the aftermath of the Kusuko

Disturbance. Evidently, Sonohito was something of a poet, as well, at least in the vernacular. In the midsummer of 813, Sonohito, then Minister of the Right, having been invited to attend a banquet hosted by Saga—the venue for which was set in the residence of the new crown prince (later Emperor Junna), beside the Southern Pond (Nanchi 南池) within the Imperial Palace—offered up to his host a particularly auspicious vernacular poem. Saga responded in kind, referring, perhaps somewhat playfully, to Sonohito as the master of vernacular song.⁶⁹ In accordance with custom, this banquet concluded with the sovereign bestowing valuable textiles and quantities of cotton to his vassals. Again, it would appear as though everything was in good order.

Whatever the situation at court, the provinces were not half so peaceful. Less than a month after the aforementioned banquet, we see Saga issuing an edict aimed at regulating the amount of foodstuffs and other resources to be supplied to those provinces suffering from famine.⁷⁰ This entry reveals some of the more notorious strategies employed by provincial governors in order to curtail tax payments and increase personal gain: local residents are being forced to engage in labor out of season to the detriment of agricultural

⁶⁹ Webb, *In Good Order*, 179; for the poems in question, see *Nihon kōki*, 813.4.22, 649; see also the footnotes in Appendix, item no. 5 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 7) for a translation of both Sonohito's as well as Saga's vernacular poems.

⁷⁰ *Nihon kōki*, 813.5.17, 651.

productivity. Some provincial officials secretly engage in private fishing operations in areas that have been designated exclusively as public waters, such that residents are unable to catch any fish for themselves. These same provincial governors deliberately set fire to storehouses, claiming these to have occurred as the result of natural disasters, as an excuse to request more foodstuffs. Saga's solution to these ills is simple: Only those cases in which the petitioning province can demonstrate that its sore predicament is the result either of a natural agricultural disaster or an outbreak of some fatal disease shall be afforded relief. All other cases will be denied assistance. The reason for Saga's edict, besides an injured sense of justice, no doubt, is equally simple: the royal storehouses are nearly empty. Now that is certainly not the picture we come away with upon reading about Saga's numerous banquets, each amply funded in advance, and concluded with generous gift-giving. Banquets, as has already been discussed, were most often funded by high-ranking courtiers, who, in turn, received their income from, among other things, provincial taxes. In other words, those funding the banquets, as well as those presenting poems at these banquets, were inextricably bound up with provincial economies. Courtiers exploited provincial governors just as the latter exploited local residents. The more endemic and heinous this exploitation became, the more frequently the court would be petitioned for relief—relief, it must be

understood, which principally originated in relentless demands made by the court upon its equally relentless tax farmers.

Suffering, whether genuine or feigned, throughout the provinces was rooted in and, consequently, exerted a very real influence over the mechanics of court life. Saga's supposedly peaceful reign can only be so called if one ignores the surprisingly morbid economic reality lurking behind, nay, caused by, the pageantry of court poetry and lavish banquets. Again, Saga's edict is, as he himself admits, motivated by dramatically depleted storehouses. As in almost every instance where *Nihon kōki* records a banquet or royal excursion of some sort, the surrounding entries speak of large-scale famine, provincial disorder, rampant tax evasion, and ghastly human suffering. In short, it must be asseverated that Saga hosted his banquets and executed his grand displays of wealth not because his reign was anything close to peaceful or prosperous, but rather, he did so *in spite of* the persistent poverty, disorder, and suffering that marked his reign. Why, it was less than a week after Saga issued the aforementioned edict that Sonohito, always the voice of reason, presented a petition to the sovereign requesting that it be made illegal to throw away the corpses of servants who had perished of sickness or famine.⁷¹ Apparently, the festering

⁷¹ *Nihon kōki*, 813.6.1, 651.

bodies of these ill-fated chattel could be seen scattered throughout the capital and its immediate environs, strewn haphazardly along the roadsides for all passersby to see. Saga agreed that this practice must stop. Severe corporal punishment for those found guilty, ordered the sovereign, as well as for those who indirectly abate in this foul practice! Post signs at every major highway announcing clearly to the people just how they shall be punished if they dare disobey! This is Saga's conventional, painfully unimaginative response.⁷² No mention whatsoever is made of any need to investigate possible causes behind these deaths. Exaggerated though this may sound, if we are to take Sonohito's petition seriously—and I see no need why we should not—the capital, especially its major thoroughfares, were at this time dotted with discarded corpses. Recall the season, too: summer—a humid Kyoto summer, at that.

The trouble does not end there. A day after Sonohito submitted his petition, the provinces of Iwami (western Shimane) and Aki (western Hiroshima) were both visited with an exceptionally torrential bout of monsoon rain.⁷³ Saga graciously exempted these two provinces from tax duties. Then, on the following day, the southwesternmost provinces of

⁷² *Nihon kōki*, 813.6.1, 651.

⁷³ *Nihon kōki*, 813.6.2, 653.

Ōsumi (eastern Kagoshima) and Satsuma (western Kagoshima) were overrun by locusts, or some such pestiferous insect.⁷⁴ Here, too, Saga exempted these provinces from any as-of-yet unpaid taxes. This done, it was back to gift-giving and feasting: On the seventh day of the seventh month, Saga gave audience in his favorite Shinsen Gardens to the annual display of sumo wrestling, after which he held a banquet, commanding all his vassals to present Sinitic verses celebrating the season.⁷⁵ Less than two weeks later we find Saga hosting another banquet, this time under a silk tree found somewhere within the Imperial Palace.⁷⁶ Here Saga bestows his vassals with copper coins: three-hundred coins apiece to those holding the Fourth Rank, and two-hundred thousand coins apiece to those holding the Fifth Rank.

Another analogous example from the same year should suffice to drive the present point home—the point being that Saga’s reign was far from peaceful, and that his banquets, most of which seem to have included the presentation of poetry, were likely conscious efforts to spread varnish over only speciously sound woodwork. Less than two months after the banquet under the silk tree just mentioned, Saga held another of his beloved

⁷⁴ *Nihon kōki*, 813.6.3, 653; see also Sakai, “Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku,” 4.

⁷⁵ *Nihon kōki*, 813.7.7, 653.

⁷⁶ *Nihon kōki*, 813.7.16, 653.

chrysanthemum banquets, again at the Shinsen Gardens.⁷⁷ We have already seen just how important this sort of banquet was to Saga: his first such banquet, hosted in 809, was held despite a host of natural disasters. Here, as usual, Sinitic verses were presented, followed by gift-giving from sovereign to vassal—this time only cotton is mentioned. Later, near the close of this same month, Saga hosted his younger brother, the crown prince and future Emperor Junna, to a banquet in the Imperial Palace.⁷⁸ Interestingly enough, it is explicitly stated that Saga arranged for the room to be decorated with purely Tang-style décor, by which, I suspect, we are to understand a high degree of refinement and, considering the costs necessary to import such furnishings, an even higher degree of wealth. Here, as with all entries pertaining to banquets, we are presented with a picture of unflinching opulence and tranquility. A lengthy entry from the following day, however, immediately informs us to the contrary.

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, Saga issued an edict giving specific instructions as to how a recent shortage of tax goods coming from the distant provinces of Mutsu and Dewa (both located in the far northeastern regions of the archipelago) ought to

⁷⁷ *Nihon kōki*, 813.9.9, 655.

⁷⁸ *Nihon kōki*, 813.9.23, 655.

be handled.⁷⁹ The details are not important here. What is important, however, is the cause assigned to this shortage: barbarian forces, by which he means the stubbornly resistant Emishi who then occupied the northeastern peripheries. Furthermore, explains Saga, the grand general Funya Watamaro 文室綿麻呂 (765-823) and his soldiers have recently complained of a shortage of provisions. We know from an official report submitted by Funya to the sovereign in 811 that he and his men had been more-or-less constantly engaged in military efforts against the recalcitrant Emishi for nearly four decades, from 774 to 811.⁸⁰ Little wonder, then, that the general was running low on rations. While Funya's own report boasts of having eradicated the enemy down to the last man, Saga states, exactly to the contrary, that a small force of barbarian soldiers yet remains, and that a dangerous situation could erupt at any moment. Four years later, in 815, we read a report submitted by those provincial officials stationed in the northeastern region, asking that provisions of dried meat and salt be provided for two outlying barracks, in case the Emishi should decide to strike again.⁸¹ Though admittedly very far away, geographically speaking, from the court, the threat of Emishi rebellions was a nagging reality throughout Saga's reign.

⁷⁹ *Nihon kōki*, 813.9.24, 655.

⁸⁰ *Nihon kōki*, 811.inter.12.11, 589; see also endnote no. 655:2, 1265.

⁸¹ *Nihon kōki*, 815.11.17, 685.

Military demands had to be met somehow. This meant more spending, which meant more tax farming, which resulted, in the end, in greater exploitation. Incidentally, Saga granted this last request and provisions were transported northward. Thus, we see how here, too, a banquet or two is by no means indicative of a peaceful reign. Far from it. One might go so far as to say that Saga's banquets, when examined within their immediate historical context, were deliberate efforts to disguise or downplay an all too disorderly period. Granted, no succession disputes came to the fore. This much we must give to Saga. What we cannot grant, however, is that his was a peaceful reign. Death, war, and deception permeated the capital and, in a less direct but equally significant degree, threatened the court itself.

The poetry presented at these banquets—at least the bits preserved in extant anthologies—does not in any way reflect these historical realities. One might say that this poetry deliberately mutes or erases the stark circumstances and nearly frenetic exigencies within which it was composed. I should rather say, however, that the world of poetry established by Saga and his courtiers, rather than deliberately mute or erase, outright ignores these realities. So far as the poetic worlds communally conjured up during these banquets was concerned, all was well under heaven; the sovereign was supremely virtuous, and his people, bathed in their lord's boundless mercy, prospered and were right joyous.

The reality, as we have seen, was quite different. Lest I paint a too distasteful of Saga and his court, however, perhaps it would be best to mention some of the more beneficent gestures made by the sovereign in response to pleas for succor. Though my argument regarding the none-too-tranquil nature of Saga's reign should not be confounded with anything akin to a moral evaluation of the man, it behooves us to address not only the negative but also the positive aspects of his reign. Near the middle of the ninth month, in the year 814, Saga made a series of generous donations to various groups of people throughout the archipelago, evidently as a means of preparing for the coming winter months: each monk or nun based in one of the state-designated provincial monasteries or nunneries and over the age of eighty was given a huge quantity of cotton; elderly people over the age of eighty were given varying quantities of rice, depending on their age; widowers, widows, and all lonely souls incapable of supporting themselves were likewise given varied quantities of rice, depending on their age.⁸² Note that these donations were given not only to people within the capital but to people all over the archipelago. This is certainly an impressive gesture. True to his edict of 813.5.17—tax exemptions shall be made only to those provinces suffering from natural disasters or epidemic diseases—the

⁸² *Nihon kōki*, 814.9.11, 681; Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 5.

province of Satsuma is graciously exempted from submitting tax goods—in this case a share of their crops—on account of an attack of locusts.⁸³ Examples of this sort occur rather frequently throughout Saga’s reign.

Saga did not always listen to his trusted revenue advisor Sonohito. The end of the second month of 816 was a busy one for Saga and his courtiers. A banquet held on the twenty-second day in the chambers of the rear palace, the compound that housed his consorts, ladies-in-waiting, as well as the numerous female court officials, was followed three days later by another banquet, this time complete with presentations of Sinitic verses by his favored literati, held in the residence of Ono no Iwako 小野石子 (746-817), herself a skilled poet, as well as Saga’s junior Head of Female Officials. On this occasion, both Iwako and her daughter were granted promotions of rank.⁸⁴ Iwako’s residence is referred to as the Nagaoka Mansion, and was located somewhere near the old Nara capital of that name. Then, at the beginning of the fourth month, officials in charge of the royal stables offered up to Saga a considerable sum of copper coins in order to fund a drinking party, which the sovereign and his generous officials enjoyed the whole day long. Saga, evidently

⁸³ *Nihon kōki*, 815.5.14, 701; 819.11.3, 777.

⁸⁴ *Nihon kōki*, 816.2.22-27, 721.

left with a number of surplus coins, bade his guests demonstrate their archery skills before him, handing out prizes of coins to anyone who hit the target.⁸⁵ It would seem, from this scene of jocund reverie, that the sovereign and his court enjoyed an abundance of wealth. Four days later, however, Sonohito, with his wonted sobriety of judgment, submitted a petition to the sovereign advising him to cancel festivities scheduled to occur on the fifth day of the fifth month.⁸⁶ Though not stated explicitly, one can only assume that Sonohito was becoming concerned with the recent concentration of expenditures on royal banquets and the like. Two years earlier, in fact, Sonohito had made a similar sort of argument, this time in very explicit language: The sovereign, says Sonohito approvingly, had previously decided to temporarily cancel two otherwise annual banquets, thereby significantly reducing court expenditures. Since then, however, a number of banquets, such as the spring flower-viewing banquet (*kaen* 花宴) first instituted by Saga himself, have been added to the annual schedule.⁸⁷ Expenditures have risen and the royal exchequer is again running

⁸⁵ *Nihon kōki*, 816.4.6, 723.

⁸⁶ *Nihon kōki*, 816.4.10, 723.

⁸⁷ It has been argued that Saga's institutionalization of the flower-viewing banquet had been inspired by the then only recently deceased Tang sovereign, Dezong 德宗 (742-805, r. 780-805), whose court had previously been visited by Heian emissaries; see Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 70. For an extremely detailed and well documented account of this mission to the court of Dezong, see Borgen, "The Japanese Mission to China, 801-806," especially, 15-16. See also, Verschuer, "Japan's Foreign Relations, 600 to 1200 A.D.: A Translation from *Zenrin kokuhōki*," especially 24-25.

low. Sonohito, not daring to request the cancellation of these newly instituted festivities, pleads for a compromise. It would seem from this petition, as well as from other entries, that the chrysanthemum banquet was one of the more expensive events of the year. All participants were customarily given generous gifts from the sovereign. Sonohito therefore recommends that Saga limit the number of guests to a handful of selected literati. Less guests means less presents.⁸⁸ This time Saga listened and the chrysanthemum banquet was accordingly downsized.

Returning to a subject brought up earlier, that Saga took the pesky Emishi problem seriously may be shown by a series of edicts aimed at encouraging their enculturation and contribution to state-sponsored agriculture. Granted, these measures were ultimately court-centered: the more cooperative we can get these Emishi folks to behave, urged Saga, the more likely they are to participate in farming, and hence, if all goes well, the more they may contribute to the royal exchequer. Even so, we must admit a certain sobriety in his method of dealing with what we would today refer to as a minority ethnic group. Emishi who, once wholly implacable and rebellious, but who had since become accustomed to civilized ways were to be granted plots of land. Furthermore, these people were not be

⁸⁸ *Nihon kōki*, 814.3.4, 665.

taxed until a period of six years had elapsed, during which time these recently civilized Emishi were to work hard at mastering the rudiments of agriculture.⁸⁹ As a brief side note, one ought to consider the vocabulary used in the original text: These Emishi are described using the verb *kika* 帰化, often translated as naturalized or enculturated, but rendered more properly here as submission to the presumably higher culture of superior overlords. Their submission, in turn, has taught the Emishi to become acquainted with the *kafū* 華風, or civilized culture, promulgated by the court. Now, it would appear that the practice of allotting rice-fields to submissive Emishi people did not originate with the edict of 816. On the tenth day of the ninth month of the following year—the day after Saga had held his cherished chrysanthemum banquet in the Shinsen Gardens—a petition was submitted by the provincial governor of Mutsu requesting that this six-year exemption be extended. A number of Emishi who had been given rice-fields six years previous were, despite, says the governor, the sovereign's boundless benevolence, still in a state of relative poverty.⁹⁰ Saga granted the petition.

Having said this, however, the case nevertheless remains that, considered overall,

⁸⁹ *Nihon kōki*, 816.10.3, 735.

⁹⁰ *Nihon kōki*, 817.9.10, 747.

Saga's reign was one beset on all sides with economic tension and gross exploitation. Acts of kindness and generosity occur, almost without exception, alongside—sometimes only days apart from—court banquets and lavish pageants, the funding of which contributed in no small degree to the poverty and suffering which Saga's little kindnesses were intended to remedy. Just one more example, and we shall have done with this argument. In 818, the archipelago was struck with what seems to be a whole horde of disasters, including famine, earthquakes, and epidemic diseases. In hopes of alleviating the suffering of his subjects, Saga, aside from the usual ritual purifications and incantations, decrees an archipelago-wide moratorium in which all tax debts, reported or otherwise, from the previous year are to be cancelled forthright.⁹¹ This certainly seems like an act of sovereign benevolence. Note, significantly, that this proclamation occurs but one day after Saga's annual chrysanthemum banquet, an event, it seems, which no amount of disasters or diseases was able to halt.⁹² Only days before this merry gathering, Saga hosted another banquet, this time in the Saga Villa—a favorite haunt of his—in which Sinitic verses were presented and gifts of fine garments freely given.⁹³ Here, as with so many other cases, these banquets

⁹¹ *Nihon kōki*, 818.9.10, 765.

⁹² *Nihon kōki*, 818.9.9, 763.

⁹³ *Nihon kōki*, 818.8.28, 763.

seem more like a direct *response* to crises than a sign of their absence. In short, for every recorded royal banquet found in *Nihon kōki*, you are sure to find, if only you peruse those entries coming immediately before after the given event, a series of events indicative not of a peaceful but of a tumultuous reign. It has been suggested, in regards to the poetry presented at these banquets, that verses lauding the sovereign's longevity increase in frequency during those anxious periods when his health has appeared somewhat uncertain.⁹⁴ Concern over the sovereign's physical state prompts vassals to present poems geared at promoting his health; the poems, in effect, become themselves ritualistically medicinal. My own research supports this suggestion. I would extend this suggestion to include the very banquets themselves: the more anxiously Saga, and, from what we can see, his most quoted advisor, Sonohito, fret over economic, political, and military crises occurring throughout the archipelago, the more eager our busy sovereign seems to host lavish banquets and engage in expensive excursions. Perhaps, like poetry, these banquets were themselves seen as a sort of ameliorative measure, presenting, as they did, a façade of tranquility and prosperity, while at the same time giving the sovereign an opportunity to plumb the intentions and loyalties of his vassals at close range. Many banquets had

⁹⁴ Webb, *In Good Order*, 180, footnote no. 90.

obviously ritualistic or religious connotations, and were held in honor of certain deities or buddhas. Saga and his men likely had something of the sort in mind when they gathered together to present and recite verses. The banquet itself became a species of religious offering, a petition on behalf of the realm at large for divine intervention in trying times.

Was Saga Really a Virtuous Ruler?

Very nearly all of our contemporary accounts of Saga come from imperially commissioned works, namely, his three poetry anthologies and the imperial history *Nihon kōki*. The one exception of which I am aware is to be found in Keikai's 景戒 (n.d., fl. c. 795) curious collection of Buddhist tales, *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (Record of Miraculous Events in Japan), completed sometime around 824. For all we know, this collection served as a pedagogical aid to groups of unordained monks (*shidosō* 私度僧) intending to deliver popular sermons in the vernacular to the layfolk. This work is far from canonical, and anything but conservative. Sexual scenes of a startlingly explicit nature are sprinkled throughout. Humor is plentiful. Many of the morals, too, are somewhat questionable, at least to modern readers. The final tale deals explicitly with Saga. Here, at

last, we catch a glimpse, albeit brief, of at least one aspect of Saga's reign that must have been discussed among (likely illiterate) layfolk living outside of the court. While not exceptionally relevant to our discussion, it warrants mention if only because it is so rare, and also because it sheds some light on contemporary concepts of sovereignty.⁹⁵ The gist of this tale may be summarized as follows:

During the reigns of Emperor Shōmu and Empress Kōken, that is, around the middle of the eighth century, there lived an ascetic monk by the name of Jakusen 寂仙. One day, in the year 758, aware of his eminent demise, this monk summoned his disciples, informing them that he would soon give up the ghost, and that he would be reborn in twenty-eight years' time as a prince bearing the name Kamino. In 786, just as foretold, a prince by the name of Kamino was indeed born to the then reigning Emperor Kanmu. This prince would grow up to become Emperor Saga. So much for the tale. We may date the composition of this particular tale around 823 or 824, for the author himself states that Saga, who had become sovereign in 809, was currently in his fourteenth year on the throne. Immediately following this tale is a commentary, about as long as the tale itself, which aims at proving

⁹⁵ Akiyoshi, "Nihon ryōiki ni miru tennōzō," 67, 74: the tale in question appears in *Nihon ryōiki*, fascicle 3, tale no. 39; an English translation may be found in Burton Watson's *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 198-201.

that Saga, despite wide-spread arguments among the masses to the contrary, is undoubtedly a divine sovereign, a true sage-ruler (*seikun* 聖君) worthy of absolute obedience and reverence.⁹⁶

The charges, according to Keikai, brought against Saga by the people were threefold: First, Saga did not sentence convicted murders to death. According to time-honored laws of the imperial institution, murderers were to be promptly executed. Saga, therefore, was acting in blatant disobedience of imperial law. No sage-ruler would disobey laws laid down by his own divine ancestors. Second, Saga's reign saw an inordinate amount of natural disasters, plagues, and famines. A virtuous ruler brings peace and prosperity to his kingdom. Disasters are sent from heaven as punishment for the unjust ruler. Therefore, Saga must be an unjust ruler. Third, Saga, despite all these natural disasters, continues to hunt wild animals. A sage-ruler would have more compassion, both for his suffering subjects and for the animals. Saga seems to have not a jot of compassion for either. Therefore, Saga cannot be a sage-ruler. In response to these three charges, Keikai offers the following counterarguments: First, in regards to Saga's reluctance to enforce the death penalty, this only goes to show how truly benevolent the man is. To withhold death from

⁹⁶ Akiyoshi, "*Nihon ryōiki ni miru tennōzō*," 69.

him to whom it may be rightly dealt is a sign not of disobedience but of exceptional mercy. Surely, Saga is a divine ruler. Second, as regards the prevalence of disaster and disease throughout Saga's reign, surely this, too, is an unjust accusation. Even the two most renowned Chinese sage-sovereigns, Yao and Shun, saw their fair share of wide-scale disasters. Saga, therefore, cannot be blamed any more than these two for natural disasters that happen to plague their reign. Third, regarding Saga's penchant for hunting, it ought to be understood that everything embraced within the sovereign's domain, including animals and people, is, in fact, his private property, to do with as he pleases. If Saga should see fit to hunt, then we, who are likewise his property, have no right to condemn him.⁹⁷

An entry in *Nihon kōki* for the year 812, that is, some twelve years before Keikai composed the story about Saga, seems to corroborate the *Nihon ryōiki* account:

On this day, Emperor Saga pronounced the following decree: Sagacious men do not waste their words on strange and superstitious matters, preferring, instead, to speak only of what is important, such as moral conduct. Our law does not deal lightly with those who seek to confuse the people with obscure prophecies and occult

⁹⁷ Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 200-201.

prognostications. Many provincial governors, credulous of the foolish words their inhabitants so recklessly spread, have sent us countless reports of things beyond imagination. Some of our subjects go so far as to blame the sovereign for the ills they presently face, while others make unfounded predictions about what is to come. Nothing threatens the very fabric of our laws, nothing throws into chaos the tenants of propriety more violently than these incredible fabrications. Let be understood that, from now on, any common subject, man or woman, who professes to act as a mouthpiece of the gods, who claims to have received some revelation from those on high, let each and every one of these base charlatans be duly punished. Exception is to be made for oracles of a truly divine origin, such ones as those which are accompanied by unmistakable and miraculous signs. Let the provincial governors carefully investigate the particulars of such oracles, determine whether they are indeed true pronouncements of the gods, and send us official reports of their conclusions.⁹⁸

恠異之事、聖人不語。『論語』云「子不語怪力亂神」。妖言之罪。法制非

⁹⁸ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 3 (812).9.26, 629-631.

輕。而諸國信民狂言、言上寔繁。或言及國家、或妄陳禍福。敗法亂紀、莫甚於斯。自今以後、有百姓輒稱託宣者、不論男女、隨事科決。但有神宣灼然、其驗尤著者、國司檢察、定實言上。

As can be seen from this entry, it was the opinion of many during Saga's reign that natural disasters were directly linked to the moral conduct of their sovereign. Saga was under fire. It is in this context that Keikai, who, in accordance with mainstream Buddhist doctrine, saw his sovereign as not only a patron of Buddhism, but a truly enlightened being, vehemently defends Saga against the common rabble. He does this, quite simply, by asserting the absolute authority and ownership of Saga over his land and people: "sovereign's land, sovereign's people" (*ōdo ōmin* 王土王民), a concept found in both Chinese and Japanese court historiography.⁹⁹ Indeed, Saga was well aware of the need to justify his costly hunting expeditions.

Do not presume that I hunt for the mere pleasure of hunting, like that vicious old

⁹⁹ Akiyoshi, "*Nihon ryōiki ni miru tennōzō*," 74-75; the entry in question appears in *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 3 (812).9.26, 629-631. Note that my rendition of this entry is deliberately free; I have added several bits, for the sake of clarity, which are not in the original.

King of Xia! Just as King Wen of Zhou returned from his hunting expedition
with that noble duke of Qi, so, too, do I hunt, not for game, but for virtuous
men.¹⁰⁰

不學夏王荒此事 為思周卜遇非熊

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 13

Hunting, he insists, is a matter of the utmost utility in selecting and properly training
vassals in the art of statecraft, an art that, in the long run, is sure to guarantee the peace and
prosperity of the realm. It can be safely stated that not all Saga's subjects looked up to him
as a sagely ruler. Understandably, doubts plagued the minds of those suffering under
poverty and sickness. Just how successful Keikai's efforts were at assuaging those doubts is
something we may never know.

¹⁰⁰ For a full translation of this poem, entitled "A Night Spent at Riverside Pavilion," see Appendix, item no. 11 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 13); for a related discussion of Emperor Taizong's defense of his own imperial hunts, see Chen, "The Writing of Imperial Poetry in Medieval China," 86-87.

CONCLUSION

Saga serves, in ninth-century historiography, as a model sovereign. He was a domineering man from the time he ascended the throne right through to his demise, adamantly set on asserting as much central authority as possible. As was mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, the Heian period, especially near the close of the ninth century, began to evince a number of significant political and economic transformations, all of which centered on a general diffusion of power away from the court and into the provinces. Saga, however, ruled after the fashion of his father, the last of the Nara sovereigns: strong central, court-based control and personal involvement in all things political. He was a patriarch, both figuratively, in his capacity as patron of the arts, and literally, in his role as seemingly inexhaustible father to more than fifty children. Had it not been for his indomitable spirit, the Heian period, which began in 794, might very well have ended less than two decades later, in 810, when his older brother, retired Emperor Heizei, attempted to move the court back to Nara. Recall that Saga's father, Emperor Kanmu, had previously moved the capital from Nara to Nagaoka in 784. This capital only lasted a

decade. The Heian capital, at its inception, was by no means secure.¹⁰¹ Saga not only quelled Heizei and those loyal to him, but who proceeded to lay the foundations for what would prove to be one of Japan's most culturally prosperous periods. Saga, moreover, firmly established the parameters of Sinitic poetry—what themes were to be included and how exactly they were to be interpreted—both for his own as well as for future generations. Saga's literary legacy spilled over into the world of vernacular poetry, engendering the latter with a degree of sophistication and subtlety unknown in previous ages. Whether we speak of Saga the politician, Saga the patron, or Saga the poet—or even, for that matter, Saga the calligrapher—we speak of one who was immanently successful, a man who has left a lasting impression on all aspects of Heian culture, be it literature or politics. Of course, not everyone saw things in such a positive light. Natural disasters plagued Saga's reign from start to finish. Poverty and hunger were rampant. His less privileged subjects, as the precious account from *Nihon ryōiki* reveals, were less than convinced of their sovereign's virtue. How, they chaffed, could a virtuous ruler bring in his train so much suffering? Was it not, after all, the moral character of the ruler that moved Heaven either to

¹⁰¹ For a brief but very insightful summary of the very first years of Saga's reign, especially in regards to the then uncertain fate of the Heian capital, see Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 38-40.

help or to harm the realm? Heizei and his followers—the most notorious of whom was, due most likely to later embellishment, the promiscuous Kusuko—were certainly not admirers of Saga.

Perhaps we ought to consider, by way of contrast, what Saga was *not*. First, Saga was certainly not a military man. Not once, so far as our sources tell, did he ever set foot on the battlefield. Though his reign was peppered throughout with numerous military campaigns against the ethnically different northern Emishi tribes, Saga himself was never directly involved with any of the fighting. It is not even certain to what degree, if any, Saga personally participated in discussions about military strategy. As has been shown, he was always ready to praise the martial successes of his loyal generals, and to shower them with material awards. I suspect that Saga's role in the various military affairs of his realm was limited to these latter functions, namely, praise through the written word, especially poetry, and the presentation of material rewards. Second, Saga was not intimately acquainted with the actual mechanics of taxation. Fujiwara no Sonohito served as both advisor and executor of all Saga's tax-related issues. Judging from what we read in *Nihon kōki*, Sonohito would, according to protocol, submit an official petition, asking for permission to go ahead with a given suggestion he himself had made or a request made on behalf of some unknown

subject. Saga, for the most part, approved the petition. On other occasions, when the petition threatened to curtail spending on royal banquets, Saga refused the petition outright. While Saga certainly seems to have desired to follow in his father's footsteps, cementing the sovereign's power to rule over all things court-related both personally and absolutely, there is no evidence that he himself possessed any degree of working knowledge regarding the practical means of achieving this goal. Yes, Saga was a keen politician when it came to making alliances, wooing potential companions, and playing the game of marriage politics through pageantry, literary prowess, and monetary gifts. This was, however, as far as Saga went. All the complicated groundwork was handled by Sonohito and his team of diligent subordinates.

There was something else Saga was not, namely, a prolific writer. Praise for Saga's poetry is well-founded; his poetry shows both intimate understanding and a high degree of creativity, or at least a willingness to incorporate then new forms and themes fresh from the continent. Still, aside from his poems, along with a number of brief commentaries appended to a few biographies preserved in *Nihon kōki*, there is not much else attributable to Saga. His calligraphy, impressive as it might be, consists mostly of copies of other literary exemplars. The numerous edicts and proclamations issued in Saga's name were, very likely,

not of his own making. Despite his immense influence on later generations, Saga's *magnus opus* of original work was, contrary to the impression left after reading the endless praises poured upon him, rather small. Not only was Saga far from a prolific writer, his work was limited almost exclusively to Sinitic poetry. As will be discussed briefly in the following chapter, he seems to have composed vernacular verse, as well. Examples of this, however, are scarce. As far as we know, Saga did not write any chronicles, nor did he leave us with any fictional narratives, neither in Sinitic or the vernacular. Furthermore, all of Saga's poetry was composed for the express purpose of presentation at royal banquets or on other public occasions. Even those of his verses dedicated to certain Buddhist monks served as public gestures, considering that all of these monks, such as Kūkai and Saichō, were recognized as prominent figures in the religious community and at court. That is to say, Saga wrote poetry for a public audience—a very select, elite one, at that—and for a specific political purpose. This last point is not unique to Saga. I would go so far as to say that all of the poetry, and here I mean specifically Sinitic poetry—preserved from the early Heian period was both public and political. Sinitic poetry in the eighth and ninth century, insofar as it was practiced throughout the Heian court, was more-or-less a public affair charged with very specific political functions. As shall be seen throughout the remainder of this

dissertation, poetry was used either to secure one's social standing or to advance one's current position; poetry brought prestige and wealth. Saga and his vassals composed poetry not for the sake of composing poetry, but as a means to a purely secular end. Saga, or whoever wrote his speeches, gave to this very mundane reality a pretty guise with the famous (borrowed and deliberately reinterpreted) motto: *monjō keikoku*, writing as a means of governing the realm. By governing the realm, what he likely meant was securing wealth for the royal exchequer. In short, Saga was a patron, a poet, and a politician. He was not a military commander, a tax expert, or a prolific writer. These two realities must be taken into consideration when looking at the life and work of this domineering patriarch.

CHAPTER TWO

The Great Efflorescence of Sinitic Literature in Early Heian Japan:

Governing the Realm Through Poetic Personae

INTRODUCTION

The chapter consists of two major sections. The first section deals briefly with each of Saga's three imperially commissioned anthologies, while the second section takes up questions of Saga's literary project insofar as it served a variety of political ends. Whereas the previous chapter focused mainly on the sociopolitical underpinnings of Saga's reign, this chapter includes numerous references to Saga's poetry. As the second half of the subtitle to this chapter indicates, a careful look at his poetry reveals something of importance regarding the use of poetic personae during the early ninth century. Saga, more so even than his contemporaries, portrays himself in a number of guises, depending on the occasion, such that he may appear at times as the sage-ruler, and at other times as a lovelorn woman pining for her absent lover. Now he comes before us as a lost soul in need

of religious guidance, and now he shines forth as a Daoist immortal of profound wisdom.

All of these poetic personae are ready at his command. The combination of different personae within a single anthology, and indeed at times within a single poem, allowed Saga to present himself to his vassals in a more nuanced, and therefore more convincing, manner.

This deliberate interweaving of poetic personae, a complex issue that will have to be revisited in the Interlude immediately following this chapter, becomes especially conspicuous in Saga's third and final anthology, *Keikokushū*. A keen awareness of this interweaving of poetic personae leads the way to another sort of awareness, namely, of the intermixing of different genres within a single poem. While I shall have occasion to touch upon this last phenomenon in this and the following chapter, a more detailed investigation will have to wait until the fourth and fifth chapters, when we will look at the poetry and complex poetic personae of Tadaomi and Michizane.

SAGA'S THREE ANTHOLOGIES

I would now like to focus on what I have termed the three Saga anthologies:

Ryōunshū, *Bunka shūreishū*, and *Keikokushū*, completed in the years 814, 818, and 827,

respectively. For those unfamiliar with the history of Sinitic poetry in Japan, allow me to preface my discussion of Saga's anthologies with at least a cursory summary of the one extant anthology of Sinitic poetry composed before the Heian period. I am referring to *Kaifūsō*, a small anthology compiled by an unknown person, or perhaps group of people, in the year 751, that is, near the end of the Nara period. An understanding of this earliest anthology will prove beneficial when we move on to the three Saga anthologies, the content and history of which are markedly different. An incredible amount of research has been dedicated to *Kaifūsō*. This is certainly not the place to get into anything too erudite. What I have provided here is meant merely to supply readers with a comparative framework, one which, I trust, will make it easier to appreciate the more salient aspects of Saga's anthologies.

Sinitic Poetry Prior to Saga: *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻 (Fond Recollections of Poetry)¹⁰²

First and foremost, it must be borne in mind that *Kaifūsō* was not an imperially

¹⁰² The first half of this summary greatly indebted to two articles: Nakanishi, "Kaifūsō," and Kuranaka, "Kaifūsō."

commissioned anthology. The exact status of this anthology, along with its intended readership remains uncertain. The compiler, too, remains uncertain. A number of proposals have been made: The Edo scholar Hayashi Shunsai 林春斎 (aka Hayashi Gahō 林鷺峰, 1618-1680) suggested Ōmi no Mifune 淡海三船 (722-785), author of the Sinitic prose biography *Eastward Journey of a Great Chinese Monk* (*Tōdaiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征伝, 779); Takeda Yūkichi 武田祐吉 (1886-1958) thinks it might have been Fujii no Hironari 葛井広成 (n.d., fl. first half of 8th century), whose poetry appears in both *Kaifūsō* as well as *Man'yōshū*; Yamagishi Tokuhei 山岸徳平 (1893-1987) puts forth Fujiwara no Yoshio 藤原刷雄 (n.d., fl. second half of 8th century) as a possible author; Fukui Kōjun 福井康順 (1898-1991), a scholar of Japanese Buddhism, supposed the author to have been a Buddhist monk of unknown identity. No consensus has yet been reached.

Kaifūsō, which consists of but a single fascicle, was compiled in the eleventh month of the third year of Tenpyō shōhō 天平勝宝 (751). The sovereign at this time was Empress Kōken 孝謙 (718-770, r. 749-758, and later, as Empress Shōtoku 称徳, 764-770), known for her patronage of Fujiwara no Nakamaro 藤原仲麻呂 (706-764) and the infamous monk Dōkyō 道鏡 (?-772). This anthology is headed by a preface written in Sinitic prose, as well as a table of contents. The poems are arranged by author in more-or-

less chronological order, from oldest to most recent. In his preface, the compiler of *Kaifūsō*, having given a very brief historical survey of learning and letters in Japan, looks back with nostalgic fondness on the great poets of bygone ages. Fearing lest their verses be lost, he has taken it upon himself to preserve some of the choicest pieces in this anthology, which contains a total of 120 poems by 64 different poets. It is for this reason that he has entitled this anthology *Reminiscences of Sinitic Poetry*, where *kaifū* 懷風 refers to reminiscences of past literature. It may be that the final *sō* 藻, which refers to beautiful verses, in *Kaifūsō* is imitative of a now lost collection of Sinitic poems by Isonokami no Otomaro 石上乙麻呂 (?-750) entitled *Kanpisō* 銜悲藻 (*Poems of a Forlorn Man*), compiled sometime between 739-740, when the poet was in exile in Tosa.¹⁰³ If this theory is correct, it might lead to some interesting speculation about the implied relationship—if one indeed exists—between *Kanpisō* and *Kaifūsō*. Four of Otomaro's poems, all of which were taken from his *Kanpisō*, appear in *Kaifūsō*. Could it be that the compiler of *Kaifūsō* was, by taking a title similar to *Kanpisō*, trying to express sympathy for the once exiled Otomaro? If so, what might the political implications of such a gesture be? *Kaifūsō* was not an imperially commissioned anthology, so there would have been more elbowroom for this sort of

¹⁰³ Nakanishi, "Kaifūsō," 2010.

otherwise politically volatile gesture.

The anthology begins with poems by Prince Ōtomo 大友, a man who was, in 1870, granted the posthumous title of Emperor Kōbun 弘文 (648-672, r. 671-672), and ends with poems by Fujii no Hironari 葛井広成 (n.d., fl. first half of 8th century), covering thereby about one century of Sinitic poetry. Aside from poetry, this anthology contains a total of nine short biographies, each written in Sinitic prose. Near the beginning of the anthology we find six biographies, namely those of Prince Ōtomo 大友 (648-672), Prince Kawashima 川島 (657-691), Prince Ōtsu 大津 (663-686), the monk Chizō 智藏 (n.d., becomes head abbot of Hōryūji Temple 法隆寺 in 673) of southern Chinese origin, Prince Kadono 葛野 (669-706), and the monk Benjō 弁正 (?-736, becomes head abbot of Tōdaiji Temple 東大寺 in 730). Near the end of the anthology we find three more biographies, namely, those of the monks Dōji 道慈 (?-744) and Dōyū 道融 (n.d., fl. first half of 8th century), as well as that of Isonokami no Otomaro 石上乙麻呂 (?-750).

While it is true that *Kaifūsō* contains a good many poems composed for and presented at public banquets (*kōen* 公宴), and that these poems do stand out as examples of superb verse, it is nevertheless also true that the ratio of such public poetry, on the one hand, to less formal verses on miscellaneous subjects (*zōshi* 雜詩), on the other, is far

lower in *Kaifūsō* than it is in *Wenxuan* 文選 (J: *Monzen*, Selections of Refined Literature, early sixth century), the continental exemplar upon which so many Japanese anthologies of Sinitic writing were based. That is to say, *Kaifūsō* contains far fewer public poems, proportionately speaking, than *Wenxuan*. Moreover, the poems composed for public banquets appearing in *Kaifūsō* were, for the most part, presented at banquets held at the mansion of Prince Nagaya 長屋 (684-729) during the 710s and 720s.¹⁰⁴ Prince Nagaya attempted to overthrow the then ascending Fujiwara power. Having been outdone by his rivals, however, Nagaya was at last ordered to commit suicide. Is it not significant that a rival of the ruling Fujiwara clan should be thus memorialized—and only three decades or so after his defeat?

It should also be remembered, in relation to content, that those poems in *Kaifūsō* which most embody the more conservative, scholastic Confucian tradition (*jukyō shisō* 儒教思想)—Sinitic classicism, as we might well call it—are those which were composed for the aforementioned public banquets. While it is true that Daoist thought, often referred to as the antipode of Sinitic classicism, is not well represented in this anthology, it does not necessarily follow that *Kaifūsō* is exclusively dominated by the staunch Confucian

¹⁰⁴ Nakanishi, “Kaifūsō,” 2010.

tradition. Quite the contrary. Unlike the three imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic literature to come, as well as the tradition of Sinitic letters that flows on throughout the Heian period, the majority of poems found in *Kaifūsō* were composed by relatively low-ranking men of letters. In most cases, the highest official post held by any one of these poets did not exceed the Fifth Rank, the lowest of those permitted to attend upon the sovereign. Accordingly, *Kaifūsō* ought to be seen not as a product of high-ranking nobility, but instead as that of low-ranking, relatively uninfluential group of courtiers.¹⁰⁵ I would argue that the relatively low status of these poets equates with a less intense preoccupation with, or political need for, strictly classical themes, thereby distinguishing this anthology from later imperially commissioned anthologies.

Regarding those poets most extensively represented in *Kaifūsō*, by far the greatest number of poems included are those by Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659-720)—a courtier who, unlike many of the poets in this anthology, ascended to the very First Rank—along with three of his four sons (all of whom died in 737 due to an outbreak of smallpox): Fusasaki 房前 (681-737), Umakai 宇合 (694-737), and Maro 麻呂 (695-737). Fuhito and his sons fought to gain power from the influential Ōtomo 大伴 clan, many of whose

¹⁰⁵ Nakanishi, “Kaifūsō,” 2010.

most notable poets are represented in *Man'yōshū*, an anthology of vernacular poetry completed (in its current form) sometime shortly after 759. What are we to make of this? Nakanishi Susumu suggests that the presence of so many poems by Fuhito and his sons is somehow characteristic of the literary scene during the mid-eighth century. This would be so if we assume, as most scholars do, that *Kaifūsō* became a central work in its day, shortly after it was compiled. I am not at all certain that this was the case. If *Kaifūsō* was, as I suspect, not a central text in its day, but rather a marginal piece of work, it would follow that the presence of Fuhito and his sons might rather represent a minority, and not a majority, view. Fujiwara no Umakai apparently had a private collection of his own Sinitic poems which filled two fascicles.¹⁰⁶ This is important, for it means there were a number of private collections in circulation before *Kaifūsō* was finally compiled. Unfortunately, none of these collections survive.

Allow me to give here a summary of the chronology of poetry and poetic styles found in *Kaifūsō*.¹⁰⁷ Kojima Noriyuki divides the period covered by the poetry in *Kaifūsō*

¹⁰⁶ Nakanishi, “Kaifūsō,” 2010.

¹⁰⁷ This particular section is based almost completely on a now classic introductory article by Kojima Noriyuki entitled “Kaidai” 解説, in his annotated edition of several Nara and Heian anthologies of Sinitic poetry, found on pp. 3-44 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, volume 69 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1964). Despite the age of this article, Kojima’s remains the standard introduction to *Kaifūsō*. I have inserted my own comments and elaborations throughout, as seemed necessary.

into two major periods, each with its own two sub-divisions, for a total of four stages, as follows:

Early period: 667-717	{ First stage: mid-7 th century-672 Second stage: 672-717
Later period: 717-751	
	{ Third stage: 717-729 Fourth stage: 729-751

That which divides the early from the later period is the literary patronage offered by the aforementioned Prince Nagaya, an influential and extremely wealthy member of the royal family, and who was especially active during the last decade or so of his life, namely, from 717 to 729.

The first stage, beginning in the 650's and ending around the year 672, includes poetry composed up until the end of the Ōmi court (667-672)—so named because the capital was then located in a region of that name corresponding to modern-day Shiga.

These two decades or so correspond to a time when the literary scene revolved around the figure of Emperor Tenji and his eldest son Prince Ōtomo (717-724). According to the

preface of *Kaifūsō*, the Ōmi court produced somewhere upwards of one-hundred Sinitic poems—not an exceptionally large number—all of which were lost during the conflagrations of the Jinshin Rebellion of 672. This same preface informs us that the Ōmi court summoned men of letters to royal banquets, over which the sovereign would preside, and in response to whose poems these loyal subjects would reply in kind. As will be seen below, the courtly practice of poetry exchanges between a sovereign and his (or her) vassals was brought to the fore during the reign of Emperor Saga. The nature of these exchanges, however, was quite different. Whereas, with Saga, we see active, sometimes even playful engagement with his vassals, as though, at least for the duration of the poetic event, the sovereign and his men were more-or-less equals, with *Kaifūsō* we see nothing of the sort. Here the sovereign remains forever absolute and aloof. Vassals present conventional poetic responses to imperial verses, handed down from on high, as a means of lauding their sovereign. These are not so much exchanges, then, as they are strictly scripted responses to set cues. It must be noted here that, for the most part, the preface to *Kaifūsō* is an adaptation of phraseology taken from *Wenxuan*, and as such, is not necessarily a faithful reflection of actual poetic practices within the Nara court at time. More importantly, though, we ought to challenge the general sense of social tranquility described throughout this preface. Was

court life really so harmonious? Was the sociopolitical atmosphere really so relaxed? For one thing, the heated question of how the Ōmi court ought best to deal in their relations with the Korean peninsula was far from settled; foreign relations were far from stable. As has already been shown in the previous chapter, court-centered poetry seldom gives us a clear picture of contemporaneous historical realities.

In a famous episode from this early period, it is recorded that Fujiwara no Kamatari (614-669), scion of one of the more powerful clans based in the Kansai region, and royal vassal to Emperor Tenji, was commanded by the sovereign to compose a Sinitic poem in which he compared the relative merits of vernal flowers and autumnal leaves.¹⁰⁸ This sort of composition seems to be exemplary of the sort of royal banquet held in the Ōmi court. More to the point, however, is a Sinitic poem composed by another of Tenchi's loyal vassals, a man by the name of Ishikawa no Iwatari 石川石足 (667-729). Iwatari's poem was composed in response to imperial command, and is, like all others of the sort preserved in this anthology, written in a lofty, elaborate tone, rife with auspicious allusions to Daoist

¹⁰⁸ While Kamatari's Sinitic poem has not been preserved, a somewhat lengthy vernacular poem composed in response to this was offered up to Tenchi by the famous poetess Princess Nukata (n.d.), who still serves as one of the most representative poets of her age. This latter poem is preserved in *Man'yōshū*, fascicle 1, poem no. 16.

immortals.¹⁰⁹ As Kojima has pointed out, and as so many after him have repeated—I am no exception—the poetry of this first stage is rather monotonous, dedicated as it is to lauding the imagined virtues of a glorified ruler and his peaceful reign. These poems are, to use his word, superficial (*uwasuberi* うわすべり), an example of which is to be found in the first poem of the anthology, composed by Prince Ōtomo. Aside from Ōtomo’s poem, however, nothing survives from this first stage. We might say, therefore, that the first stage refers rather to pre-*Kaifūsō* Sinitic poetry, almost none of which survives.

The second stage (672-717) includes poetry produced from the time of a dispute over imperial succession known as the Jinshin Rebellion (672), in which Prince Ōtomo was forced to commit suicide, to just before the commencement of the Yōrō 養老 years (717-724). According to the preface of this anthology, the most noteworthy poets of this second stage were Prince Ōtsu 大津 (663-686 [poem no. 6]), Emperor Monmu 文武 (683-707, r. 697-707 [poem no. 15]), Ōmiwa no Takechimaro 大神高市麻呂 (surname alternately given as Miwa 三輪, 657-706 [poem no. 18]), Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659-720 [poem no. 29]), and Michi no Obitona 道首名 (663-718 [poem no. 49]). This second stage of *Kaifūsō* poets is represented, therefore, in the first forty-eight poems (considering

¹⁰⁹ ¹⁰⁹ *Kaifūsō*, poem no. 40.

Ōtomo's poem belongs to the first stage). Ōtomo Tabito 大伴旅人 (665-731), famous for his vernacular poems, preserved in *Man'yōshū*, also makes an appearance in *Kaifūsō* (poem no. 44). Though Tabito was active beyond the second stage, the poem in question seems to come from this time.

Regarding content, the poetry belonging to this second stage is primarily courtly, having been composed, like poetry from the first stage, at royal banquets, usually in response to imperial demand. Significantly, many of the miscellaneous vernacular poems (*zōka* 雑歌) found in *Man'yōshū*—at least those composed around 672-717—are equally courtly in content. This is to be expected, considering many of the men who composed Sinitic poetry at this time were also composing vernacular poetry; both poets of the Sinitic as well as the vernacular mode were attending the same royal banquets. Specialization in one type of poetry seems quite unknown in this early period. In seeming contrast to this, Saga himself, along with his lettered vassals, were more-or-less specialized in Sinitic verse. I say “seeming” here deliberately, for, as I shall discuss near the end of this chapter, we must acknowledge the persistent existence of vernacular poetry throughout Saga's notoriously Sinophilic reign. Saga himself composed vernacular verse, as did his closest consort, Tachibana no Kachiko. The seeming specialization of Saga's literary activities is,

therefore, more a result of selective historical memory and a dearth of historical sources than a reality of his own time. With *Kaifūsō*, the simultaneous practice of both Sinitic and vernacular poetry, both by men and women, is much more pronounced.

Sinitic poems on specific objects (*eibutsushi* 詠物詩), usually natural phenomena or types of people, composed during this second stage were heavily influenced by continental models from the lengthy Six Dynasties period (222-586), especially, from the Liang dynasty (502-557)—the third of four southern kingdoms—which is seen as the height of southern dynastic poetry. “On a Beautiful Maiden” 詠美人 (*Kaifūsō*, poem no. 34), for example, is a theme found in the poetry of Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾 (487-551), a poet active during the Liang dynasty. More broadly speaking, the second stage of *Kaifūsō* poetry corresponds to a transitional period between early (618-711) and high Tang (712-765) poetry on the continent. Japanese poets of this second stage were steeped mainly in pre-Tang literature, which came to them in the form of two imperially commissioned anthologies, namely, *Wenxuan*, which has already been mentioned, and *Yutai xinyong* 玉台新詠 (New Songs from a Jade Terrace), both compiled in the Liang period.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ For a full English translation of *Yutai xinyong*, see Anne Birrell, trans., *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry* (Penguin Books, 1986).

Furthermore, these Japanese poets also had access to the poetry and prose of the Han, Six Dynasty, and Sui dynasties in the form of a categorized anthology compiled in the early Tang period known as *Yiwen reiju* 芸門類聚 (Encyclopedia of the Arts, 624). It was for this reason, then, that Japanese poets of the second stage were more greatly influenced by pre-Tang poetry as opposed to the poetry that was then being compiled on the continent. That is to say, there was a slight delay in regards to the importation of anthologies from the continent. Japanese poets could not get their hands on contemporary continental works right away. It was a simple matter of logistics, that is, of trade.

As mentioned above, the transition between the first and second period—that is, between the second and third stage—of *Kaifūsō* poetry was intimately related to the patronage of Prince Nagaya, whose famously spacious mansion served as the venue for many a grand banquet, in which the greatest poets of his day vied with one another to present the finest Sinitic poems. Consequently, the third stage (717-729) of poetry may appropriately be called the Age of Prince Nagaya. It was due largely to Prince Nagaya's influence that early Tang (618-711) poetry began to finally show its influence on the Sinitic poetry composed by Japanese men of letters. It is likely that Nagaya, what with his immense wealth and trade contacts, was able to purchase books freshly imported from the

content before anyone else. This Prince Nagaya was appointed Minister of the Left in 724, whereupon he obtained a remarkable amount of political clout. His success was short-lived. In 729, at the height of power, he was accused of treason; his mansion was promptly surrounded by imperial troops, and Nagaya committed suicide at the young age of forty-six. Prince Nagaya was both a powerful courtier as well as an influential patron of the arts throughout the Nara period. The banquets held at his mansion, known as the Saho Mansion 佐保邸 (also transcribed as 作宝楼), drew together men from both walks of life, politicians and literati alike. On several occasions, official envoys from the peninsular kingdom of Silla were also invited to join these banquets, making them something akin to what we would refer to as international events. *Kaifūsō* contains twenty poems composed for these banquets, a number of which are appended with prefaces (*shijo* 詩序) written likewise in the Sinitic mode. None of the Sinitic poems composed by these Sillan envoys were included in this anthology. It was not until Saga's second anthology, *Bunka shūreishū*, that Sinitic poems by non-Japanese writers came to be anthologized in the archipelago.

Many of the poems composed during this third stage contain phrases found only in early Tang poetry, especially in the work of two famous poets of that age, namely, Wang Bo 王勃 (647-674) and Luo Binwang 駱賓王 (?-c.684). That the private collections of these

two men were indeed available to Japanese poets of the time may be attested by their presence in those documents preserved in Shōsōin 正倉院. Wang Bo's collection, known on the continent as *Wangboji* 王勃集 (*The Collected Works of Wang Bo*), is preserved, albeit only partially, in Shōsōin under the title *Shijo* 詩序 (Prefaces to Poetry), while that of Luo Binwang is preserved, only name, on an index of books, as *Luobinwangji* 駱賓王集 (*The Collected Works of Luo Binwang*). The practice of appending prefaces to Sinitic poems appears first in Japan during this third stage, and it is obvious that Japanese poets were drawing inspiration directly from those prefaces found in the collections of Wang Bo and Luo Binwang. Just as was the case of poets during the second stage, those active during the third stage—all members of Prince Nagaya's salon—did not imitate the sort of continental poetry they did in virtue of any special quality in the latter, but, more likely, their preferences were governed by the sort of collections readily available to them at that time. It just so happens that the collections of Wang Bo and Luo Binwang were being circulated among Japanese poets during the third stage; such poetry formed a new fad, towards which these men quickly gravitated.

The fourth stage (729-751) begins after the death, that is, forced suicide, of Prince Nagaya in 729. It was during this final stage of *Kaifūsō* poetry that Fujiwara no Muchimaro

藤原武智麻呂 (680-737), eldest son of the influential Fujiwara no Fuhito, attained the position of Chief Minister of the Right (734) and then of the left (737). Like Prince Nagaya before him, Muchimaro made it an annual custom, come autumn, to summon the most prominent men of letters and literate courtiers to his stately Suge Mansion 習宜邸, where they would dine together and present Sinitic poetry. Unfortunately, none of Muchimaro's poems survive. Even so, the sort of poetry composed beneath his auspices may be inferred from fifteen poems by his three brothers still preserved in *Kaifūsō*. Like the poetry of Prince Nagaya's salon, these men found great inspiration in the works of Wang Bo and Luo Binwang.

Very broadly speaking, the second period—stages three and four—may be distinguished from the first period—stages one and two—on two grounds: First, while poetry of the first period was composed primarily within and for the court, that of the second period was composed under the auspices of influential statesmen such as Prince Nagaya and Muchimaro. The venue was naturally different: poetry salons moved out of the court and into private villas and mansions. Second, while poetry of the first period drew most of its influence from continental letters from the Six Dynasties period, that of the second added to this the works of such influential early-Tang poets as Wang Bo and Luo

Binwang. Poets active in the Nara court are following, albeit at a slight delay, the literary trends of their continental neighbors. This same desire to adopt and adapt what were then the latest, and hence the most fashionable, literary trends imported from abroad continues unabated throughout the early Heian period. Saga and his vassals, as will straightaway be seen, were incessant in their pursuit of new continental literary forms.

***Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Soaring Over the Clouds)¹¹¹**

Let us now move from the Nara period and back into the early Heian period. Keeping in mind what has already been discussed in regards to *Kaifūsō*, let us now turn to the first of Saga's anthologies of Sinitic poetry. *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (also known as *Ryōun shinshū* 凌雲新集, Soaring Over the Clouds, or, more literally, the New Cloud-Topping Collection,

¹¹¹ This section makes repeated reference to two encyclopedia articles, Kinpara, “*Ryōunshū*” and Ōsone, “*Ryōunshū*,” as well as a brief summary found in Rabinovitch & Bradstock’s *Dance of the Butterflies*, pp. 49-52, all of which, taken together, contain most of the fundamental information currently available regarding this anthology. See also Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, pp. 30-50 for some comments on all three of Saga’s anthologies. No complete English translation of this anthology has yet been produced. Both Watson’s *Japanese Literature in Chinese* (volume 1), pp. 47-48, and Rabinovitch & Bradstock’s *Dance of the Butterflies*, pp. 52-54, contain a number of translated poems from *Ryōunshū*. *Dance of the Butterflies* contains four poems composed by Saga himself, namely poem nos. 10, 11, 12, and 24. Borgen, in his *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, p. 34, has translated one poem by Sugawara no Kiyokimi, Michizane’s father, preserved in this anthology. Not much else has been done.

814) is the first of the three so-called imperially commissioned anthologies (*chokusen shishū* 勅撰詩集) of Sinitic literature compiled during the reign of Emperor Saga. I say here Sinitic literature, and not merely Sinitic poetry, quite deliberately. As shall be seen, among the three anthologies to be discussed here, we find examples of both prose and poetry. Even so, *Ryōunshū* contains only verse literature, and may therefore be rightly called a poetry anthology. The poetry preserved in this anthology was composed between 782 and 814, thereby covering a period of some thirty odd years. Current manuscripts of this anthology contain the work of twenty-four poets, for a total of ninety-one poems.

While the preface tells us that this anthology contains the work of twenty-three poets, for a total of ninety poems, current manuscripts include one extra poem by a poet without any official rank, Kose no Shikihito 巨勢志貴人 (or 識人 c.795-?), raising the total number of poets to twenty-four, and the number of poems to ninety-one. Whether we count ninety or ninety-one poems, it is by no means a large amount when compared with something like *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (completed sometime around the second half of the eighth century), which contains roughly 4,500 poems. The two most famous sixth-century continental anthologies, *Wenxuan* and *Yutai xinyong*, contain some 800 and 870 pieces, respectively. In the world of Sinitic anthologies compiled within Japan, however, *Ryōunshū* is only slightly

below the norm. *Kaifūsō*, the only extant anthology of Sinitic poems written by Japanese authors before the Heian period, contains 120 poems attributed to sixty-four different poets, while *Bunka shūreishū* contains 148 poems by twenty-six poets. Let us say, then, that *Ryōunshū* was not a small but a modest anthology. Regarding meter, forty-two of the poems in *Ryōunshū* are written in the five-syllable meter, while forty-nine are written in the seven-syllable style. It would seem that the popularity of five-syllable poetry was slowly waning, considering that 109 of the 120 poems found in *Kaifūsō* were written in the five-syllable style, and only a very small number in the seven-syllable style. This becomes significant when we move to later anthologies, in which the length of poems becomes progressively longer, allowing a wider scope for narrative freedom. With *Ryōunshū* we begin to see a move in that direction, albeit in its infancy.

This anthology was compiled by three men, namely, Ono no Minemori 小野岑守 (778-830), who, acting as head compiler, convened with Sugawara no Kiyokimi 菅原清公 (770-842), grandfather to the famous Sugawara no Michizane, and Isayama no Fumitsugu 勇山文繼 (773-828), before submitting the final work to Emperor Saga in the year 814. For our current purposes, it is necessary only to introduce the head compiler. Minemori, like his father before him, was a seasoned general. In 810, when the so-called Kusuko

Disturbance was at its height, Minemori had been sent by Saga to Ōmi (Shiga) in order to assure that Heizei's forces would not be able to cross the barrier station (previously known as Arachi no seki 愛発関, but then known as Ōsaka no seki 逢坂関). As rewards for his military success in this campaign, Saga appointed him both head of the left imperial stables (*sama no kami* 左馬頭) as well as head of the imperial storehouses (*kura no kami* 内蔵頭). He would go on, after the compilation of *Ryōunshū*, to achieve no less distinguished successes against the northern Emishi, those recalcitrant, ethnically and linguistically different “barbarians” who so troubled the court throughout the Nara and early Heian period. His military prowess, fantastically enough, was wedded to a degree of poetic genius. In 809, when Saga ascended the throne as sovereign, just months before the Kusuko Disturbance, it was Minemori who served as his private tutor (*jidoku* 侍読), instructing his sovereign in the art of Sinitic poetry. Examples of Minemori's poems are to be found in all three of Saga's anthologies. Naturally, Minemori, being so close to Saga, was also on intimate terms with Kūkai. The three men shared poetry with one another, and, between them, must have done a great deal to promote the literary efflorescence characteristic of Saga's court.

Some work has already been done in the world of Japanese-language scholarship, to

clarify the various types of relationships existing between certain types of literary production and official positions (*kanshoku* 官職) in the early Heian court. When speaking of imperially commissioned anthologies of poetry in general, one trend demands special emphasis: Poets of Sinitic verse, especially those active during the reigns of Saga, Junna, and Ninmyō, generally occupied positions, such as that of Private Secretary (*naiki* 内記), which were intimately bound up with Sinitic literacy. Considering private secretaries were required, among other things, to compose drafts of imperial edicts in the Sinitic mode, most members of this organ were graduates of the Faculty of Letters (*monjōdō* 文章道), then the most prestigious faculty within the State University. On the other hand, poets famous for compositions of vernacular verse held a much wider variety of official posts, most of which bore no relation whatsoever to the world of Sinitic literacy.¹¹² The relationship between literary production and official position was much more pronounced in the case of Sinitic writing; the two spheres, literary and political, went hand in hand. It is no surprise, therefore, that Ono no Minemori, Sugawara no Kiyokimi, and Isayama no Fumitsugu were

¹¹² Takigawa, “Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku,” 167. In regards to the importance of the imperial university throughout the early Heian period, see Denecke, *Classical World Literatures*, 24-25, where she rightly refers to this institution as “the locus of the commitment of the Japanese imperial court to Confucian [i.e., Sinitic] learning.” For a concise English-language introduction to the structure of the imperial university, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 129-138.

all graduates of the Faculty of Letters. This more than anything seems to have been the primary factor in selecting these men as compilers. Fumitsugu occupied the position of what we might refer to nowadays as assistant dean of the State University, in which capacity he exercised a purely clerical function. He was not expected to do much, if any, teaching. Kiyokimi belonged to the ministry of ceremonies (*shikibushō* 式部省), most members of which were engaged in paper work requiring a high degree of Sinitic literacy. As a Junior Assistant in this ministry, however, Kiyokimi would have not had much to do in the way of drafting or revising documents. Minemori, as just mentioned, occupied the prestigious positions of both head of the left imperial stables as well as head of the imperial storehouses. In neither of these capacities was he required to be intimately familiar with Sinitic literacy. Graduates of the Faculty of Letters were not generally assigned to either of these positions. It is obvious, especially in the case of Minemori, that Saga's selection was based not on the official positions of these men at the time of compilation, but rather on the fact that they all hailed from the Faculty of Letters.¹¹³

In *Ryōunshū*, poems are arranged not in chronological order, as they were in *Kaifūsō*, but rather according to official rank, beginning with Emperor Heizei and Emperor Saga,

¹¹³ Takigawa, "Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku," 169-170.

descending down the ladder to the aforementioned Kose no Shikihito, who lacked a rank. This arrangement, which pays only passing attention to the thematic content of the poems, focusing instead on the relative rank of each poet, is a symptom of what Ōsone calls bureaucratism (*kanryō shugi* 官僚主義), and which Kinpara refers to, if rendered literally, as the scent of officialdom (*kanryōshū* 官僚臭).¹¹⁴ This is, of course, nothing more than to say that the compilers of *Ryōunshū* placed great importance on official rank, using it as a central organizational principle throughout the anthology. Why, we might ask, was such an organizational principal adopted in the first place? The Sinitic preface affixed to *Ryōunshū* makes a claim for the eternal value of literature, as well as clarifying the impetus behind the compilation of this anthology, the main purpose of which was to praise Emperor Saga. Seen in this light, the ordering of poets by rank is a powerful way of accentuating the sovereign's role as a supreme and virtuous ruler standing at the zenith, both politically and culturally, of his prospering kingdom.¹¹⁵ This same conviction dictated the number of poems included by each poet. The poetry of Emperor Saga, commissioner of the project, amounts to twenty-two pieces, more than any other poet appearing in this anthology. Next in line, in

¹¹⁴ Ōsone, “*Ryōunshū*”; Kinpara, “*Ryōunshū*”.

¹¹⁵ Heldt sees in this arrangement an effort on the part of Saga to “bind the realm together by marking poets as equal parts of a harmonious whole,” where the whole refers to the anthology; see Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 145.

terms of quantity, comes the poetry of Kaya no Toyotoshi 賀陽豐年 (751-815) and Ono no Minemori, each with thirteen poems. Emperor Junna 淳和 (786-840, r. 823-833), successor to Saga (and born in the same year as him), comes next in line with five poems. Sugawara no Kiyokimi has four.

In terms of content, *Ryōunshū* includes poems composed for royal banquets and processions, for farewell feasts, as well as some composed in response to other's poetry. Furthermore, there are some poems composed on famous continental historical figures (*eishi* 詠史), along with a number of romantic or erotic verses (*enjō* 艶情). By far the more numerous among these, though, are those poems composed for royal banquets and processions, the major venues for which are the Kaya Mansion 河陽, one of Emperor Saga's villas, used as a resting place during royal hunts, and the Shinsen Garden, located inside the imperial compound. It was within this venue that political and linguistic status of Sinitic poetry was negotiated.¹¹⁶ A salient feature of this anthology is the large number of poems dedicated to praising Emperor Sage, poems composed in response to imperial command by the sovereign himself. This sort of literary motif—loyal subjects composing poetry in harmony with their virtuous, and well-lettered sovereign (*kunshin shōwa* 君臣唱

¹¹⁶ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 216.

和)—typifies the literary scene during the Kō'nin 弘仁 years (810-823). A great deal more will be said about this later on. Even those poems composed on historical figures were originally presented at concluding banquets (*kyōen* 竟宴) commemorating a recently completed series of lectures given on Chinese chronicles.

It should be noted that *Ryōunshū* also contains a number of pieces written in a rather elaborate style of prosaic prose, or, if you like, poetic prose (*zatsugontai* 雜言体), in which the number of syllables per line (or, more often, per couplet) changes throughout the prose-poem. As Ōsone himself suggests, the inclusion of such pieces is a sure sign of the superior literary proficiency as well as the creative, more progressive tendencies of these Kō'nin-era poets. Another sign of the progressive spirit of these poets may be seen in their adoption of, first, less sophisticated, more popular modes (*zokugo* 俗語) of the Sinitic language, appearing in some of the more popular Tang-period literature, and, second, attempts at composing verses in a genre of poetry only recently perfected in the Tang empire, namely, regulated verse (*lūshi* 律詩), which was itself a branch of the burgeoning “modern verse style” (*jintishi* 近体詩). It ought to be noted that the *Ryōunshū* poets, while earnestly striving to emulate continental models, did not seem to harbor much concern for the phonetic rules of this new modern verse style: the tonal patterns (*hyōsoku* 平仄) of a great

many couplets composed by Japanese poets at this time do not match those prescribed by continental convention.¹¹⁷

Unfortunately, it is not certain on which day, or even in which month, *Ryōunshū* was presented to the sovereign. This strange lacunae will be touched upon later. In the meantime, let us take a brief look at a number of historical events that occurred throughout the year 814, when, as it is recorded, this anthology was at last presented to Saga. Early in the year, sometime around the tenth day of the second month, the Arakashi Riot (Arakashi no ran 荒檣の乱), which was first instigated the previous year by a band of rebellious Emishi people dwelling in Izumo (eastern Shimane), was successfully quelled. Rewards for those responsible in suppressing the rebellion were dealt out by the court.¹¹⁸ Three months later, in the beginning of the fifth month, Saga, as has already been discussed in the previous chapter, demoted a number of his royal children to the status of vassals, granting them all the honorary surname Minamoto. Shortly thereafter, sometime before the sixth month, Saga's vassals present to their sovereign the completed genealogy of ancient noble lineages, *Shinsen shōjiroku*. Lineages thus organized, Saga sought to improve current

¹¹⁷ Ōsone, “*Ryōunshū*”.

¹¹⁸ *Ruiju kokushi*, fascicle 19, in the section entitled “Prisoners of War” (*fushū* 俘囚), page?

methods of taxation. Near the end of the seventh month, serious attempts are made by the court to enforce the system of officially allotted land (*handen* 班田), which, if carried out faithfully, would result in more tax goods coming to the sovereign.¹¹⁹ At the very end of the ninth month, an official emissary from Parhae (Bohai 渤海) by the name of Wang Hyoryōm (J: Ō Kōren; Ch: Wang Xiaolian, ?-815) 王孝廉 arrived in Izumo where he presented the presiding Japanese officials with gifts from his own country.¹²⁰ Finally, in the middle of the tenth month, thirteen merchants hailing from Silla are washed up on the shores of Nagato (northwest Yamaguchi).¹²¹ These, then, are some of the more noteworthy events of 814. Whereas a few of the Sinitic poems by Hyoryōm, the emissary from Parhae, are found in *Bunka shūreishū*, which was compiled two years later in 816, none are found in *Ryōunshū*. This might suggest that the latter anthology was compiled prior to the arrival of this delegation.

Whatever the case, it is obvious that 814 was a busy year for Saga and the court.

Rebellions were quelled, the royal family was pruned, genealogies were organized, taxable land was reexamined, and foreign delegates were hosted. In a word, Saga, having been on

¹¹⁹ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 5 (814).7.24.

¹²⁰ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 5 (814).9.30; *Bunka shūreishū*, poem 16.

¹²¹ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 5 (814).10.13. The sailors might have been lying, of course: they needed an excuse to land in Japan in order to engage in trade.

the throne for about four years, was instituting a series of major domestic administrative reforms. This alone would surely have warranted the compilation of a new anthology, something auspicious with which to crown his many recent achievements. Or, as the case may have been, this anthology could have served as a means of welcoming in future successes. That Ono no Minemori was appointed head compiler is significant especially when we consider his military background and the then only recently quelled Arakashi Riot. I would suggest that *Ryōunshū* might very well have been compiled in direct response to recent military successes in the northern regions. Recall that Saga's reign had begun with the suppression of a rebellion—the Kusuko Disturbance of 810. Saga, like Minemori, was a man with two faces, one martial, the other lettered. Military conquest was, after all, glorified as a perfectly legitimate vehicle for promulgating the salubrious, civilizing effects of court culture to an otherwise hopelessly barbaric people. *Ryōunshū* would have gone hand-in-hand with such self-aggrandizing missions, if not actually—certainly not at all actually—at least in theory. Saga had as yet no literary monument to his name. Kanmu had nothing of the sort, nor had Heizei. *Ryōunshū* was, for Saga, a concrete symbol of his political and cultural supremacy.

As has already been shown, the voice of Saga as heard through poetry found in

Ryōunshū, especially in the first series of four poems (nos. 3-6) composed expressly for and presented at royal banquets, is one of supreme authority, one able to harmonize both terrestrial as well as celestial forces. Propoganda of this sort must have been especially crucial in the wake of so much military upheaval. A fair number of Saga's verses preserved in this anthology deal with the subject of war, and especially with the loneliness of troops stationed so far away from the capital, and of the long journey to the embattled north. In these poems, Saga assumes a less obviously authoritarian voice. Instead, no doubt as an appeal for ever-increasing loyalty, the sovereign expresses sympathy for his weary soldiers. In many cases, he goes so far as to assume the persona of a young woman mourning the absence of her enlisted lover. Saga's "Wild Geese in Autumn: A Reply to Asano no Yoshimichi" is a case in point. Here the poet sympathizes with a man, likely a foreigner in service at the Heian court, who, having spent the night on duty in the palace watchman's station, and having at that time heard the first cries of wild geese coming from the north, was stirred to sad thoughts of home. Geese, in the poetic diction of Saga and his vassals, nearly always represent troops stationed up north.

Wild geese stationed so far away up north, surprised by the chilly air of this mid-

autumn moon, now fill the sky with these their earliest cries, informing kith and kin to join them here in the south.

Here, to this land so far away, they bring letters sent from the continent: *Stationed along the northern barrier, beneath a crescent moon—that bow-handle in the sky—we soldiers keep diligent watch against the barbarians.*¹²²

涼秋八月驚塞鴻 早報寒聲雜遠空
絕域傳書全漢信 關門表弓守胡戎

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 16

Several verses later, we encounter a couplet that seeks to express the depth of Saga's own concern for his endangered subjects:

It is with deep lamentation that those poor young maidens make their zithers ring with such sadly austere melodies, longing as they do for their men so far away.

¹²² For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 14 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 16).

Sentiments too deep for words are stirred up by those handsome gallants with
their wartime verses.

蔡女彈琴清曲響 潘郎作賦興情融

Verses of this last sort, in which the thoughts of young women and brave men are brought to the fore, are not of exceptional significance, or even originality, in themselves. These verses take on a strange sort of significance, however, when attributed to the brush of a sovereign, whose “every act is supposed to be imbued with significance.”¹²³ Saga the mighty sovereign is neither a mourning woman nor a gallant soldier. It is impossible to say with even the slightest degree of certainty just how far he was able to sympathize with such people. As imperial author of these verses, it matters little whether he sympathized or not.

What does matter is the fact *that* he was said to have authored them. Saga was not required to feel the “sentiments too deep for words.” It was enough that he merely gestured towards

¹²³ Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, 228. While Jack Chen is referring to the writing of Emperor Taizong, his statements can be applied with little modification to the poetry of Saga. Like Taizong, Saga’s words—rather, those words attributed to the sovereign person—were necessarily imbued by his contemporaries and, more generally, those who subscribed to his ideology of sovereignty, with special significance, almost apart from, or rather prior to, their actual content.

them in his poetry. Acknowledgment of his subjects' sorrows was enough when such acknowledgement came from an imperial patron, just as the simple act of seeing during the *kunimi* (land-viewing) ritual was enough to ensure bounty and peace when performed by imperial eyes. A similar gesture of sympathy, followed by a call to bravery is to be found in "Bidding Farewell to Yoshimichi," another of Saga's war poems, presented at a farewell party for one who must shortly travel to the embattled north.

Today, here within our Imperial Palace, we hold this farewell party in your honor,
 loyal vassal, for soon you will off, far away to a distant castle to quell those
 rebellious barbarians who yet linger behind to fight.

[...]

Once you have left us, strive with all your might to perform noble deeds, to excel in
 martial valor. Let not your heart grow heavy, encumbered though it must
 become with toils and tribulations met upon the way, the way of a thousand
 miles.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 20 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 22).

別後卿能應努力 莫愁千里多苦辛

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 22

The inclusion of this poem in *Ryōunshū* performs a twofold purpose: First, the presence of this poem serves to commemorate a farewell banquet, the actual public event during which this poem was first presented. Second, it serves to glorify the military successes brought to fruition under Saga's watch, seeing as how *Ryōunshū* was completed in 814, shortly after the campaign in which the subject of the above poem participated had taken place. For readers of this anthology, the "way of a thousand miles" had already been marched; the battle had since been fought and, perhaps, partially won. As such, this poem, once enshrined in an anthology, potentially served as an eternal encomium to Saga's benevolent character. Look, said his vassals upon reading these verses, how like a father he encouraged our fellow courtier! It is thanks to our sovereign's enlivening words that our brave fellow was able to weather the war and come back to tell the tale! Some such sentiments as these were surely intended when including Saga's poem "The Fur Hat" in this same anthology. Here the sovereign, having presented one of his soldiers with a sable hat to protect his ears

from the northern frost, urges him:

Take this sable hat—the perfect thing to have when travelling far from home—a special present from me, your sovereign, to you, O, brave man, that it may keep you warm during that hard journey of ten-thousand miles.¹²⁵

貂裘暖帽宜羈旅 特贈卿之萬里行

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 21

This mundane couplet, insofar as its diction and imagery is concerned, has nothing much with which to commend itself. In fact, it can hardly be called poetry, save its metrical structure. Its inclusion, like “Bidding Farewell to Yoshimichi,” is meant to emphatically commemorate the benign governance of a sympathetic Saga.

¹²⁵ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 19 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 21).

***Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (Splendid Literary Flowerings)**¹²⁶

Saga's second anthology was no less ambitious. *Bunka shūreishū*, the second imperially commissioned anthology of Sinitic poetry, was presented to the sovereign four years after *Ryōunshū*, in 818. It was Emperor Saga's stated intention to produce an anthology for the sake of preserving those Sinitic verses which had either been left out of the previous *Ryōunshū*, or which had been composed after its completion in 814. This anthology was managed under the direction of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, who, at the time of the project's completion in 818, held the influential position of Grand Counsellor (*dainagon* 大納言), and whom we have already met, in the first chapter, as (first) head compiler of *Nihon kōki*. His team of compilers for this anthology, led by Prince Nakao 仲雄 (n.d., fl. early ninth century), who wrote the preface to the anthology, consisted of Sugawara no Kiyokimi, Isayama no Fumitsugu, both of whom we have also previously met

¹²⁶ This section makes repeated reference to the following two articles: Kinpara, "*Bunka shūreishū*" and Ōsone, "*Bunka shūreishū*". Some additional bits from a brief summary found in Rabinovitch & Bradstock's *Dance of the Butterflies*, pp. 63-65, have also been incorporated. A fully annotated edition of *Bunka shūreishū* is to be found in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, volume 69. The introductory material pertaining to this anthology found in that volume, pp. 19-28, has also been consulted for this section. As with *Ryōunshū*, no complete English translation of this anthology is yet available. Various poems have been translated in those same sources mentioned in the footnotes regarding *Ryōunshū* above.

as compilers of *Ryōunshū*, along with Shigeno no Sadanushi 滋野貞主 (785-852) and Kuwabara no Haraka 桑原腹赤 (789-825). Both Sadanushi and Haraka were graduates of the Faculty of Letters who had, as was the case with promising graduates, both been appointed private secretaries (*naiki*). It is not certain whether Prince Nakao was a graduate of the Faculty of Letters. Kiyokimi and Fumitsugu, as we have already seen, were. As had been the case with *Ryōunshū*, the head compiler of *Bunka shūreishū* occupied a position that had almost nothing to do with Sinitic literacy. The official positions of the remaining men had little to do with their selection as compilers. All that mattered was that they were graduates of the Faculty of Letters.¹²⁷

Regarding the number of poems per author, Emperor Saga comes in first place with 34 poems (compared with 22 poems in *Ryōunshū*), Kose no Shikihito 巨勢識人 (795-?) in second place with 20 poems, and Prince Naka in third place with 13 poems. Interestingly, Kaya no Toyotoshi 賀陽豊年 (751-815), thirteen of whose poems appeared in *Ryōunshū*—second in quantity only to Emperor Saga—finds no place in *Bunka shūreishū*. Was there some sort of falling out between Toyotoshi and the sovereign? The truth of the matter remains unclear. Significantly, there are also poems by the Parhae emissaries, as well

¹²⁷ Takigawa, “Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku,” 171-172.

as a few by female poets. Though the original anthology contained 148 poems, five poems from the final fascicle have not been preserved, bringing the total number of poems in extant manuscripts down to 143. This being an imperially commissioned anthology, it is only natural that there should be a large number of poems composed in response to imperial demand or in answer to a verses by the sovereign himself.

In terms of meter, 47 poems are composed in the five-syllable style, while 96 are composed in the seven-syllable style. This preponderance towards the seven-syllable style had already begun to show itself in *Ryōunshū* four years earlier; *Bunka shūreishū* takes it a step further. Moreover, lengthy poems approaching the scale of rhapsodies (*fu* 賦) are also preserved in this anthology. This tendency towards longer poems is worth noting. What is going on here? Is there a greater desire for more detailed descriptions, or more plot-driven narratives? Is Sinitic poetry taking on the role of a kind of story-telling? I think the answer to these last questions is likely yes, though why this should have been the case is beyond our present discussion. It is safe to say, simply, that Sinitic poetry is becoming more lengthy and more complex with this anthology. Perhaps this has something to do with the opposite trend, at least in terms of length, we witness in the world of vernacular poetry, where the tendency is to compose exclusively poems of thirty-one syllables. While the lengthy,

detailed, complex *chōka* (long poems) found in *Man'yōshū* had become all but outmoded, we see a move in Sinitic poetry towards something imitative of the *chōka*. We do, however, see this same tendency towards a form of story-telling with *Kokin wakashū*, in which poems, each of them short, are nevertheless arranged in such a way as to tell quite a complicated and varied story.

Regarding the internal organization of this anthology, *Bunka shūreishū* is divided into eleven categories, as follows: royal excursions (*yūran* 遊覽), banquets (*enshū* 宴集), farewells (*senbetsu* 餞別), epistolary verses, or exchanges (*zōtō* 贈答), historical verses (*eishi* 詠史), personal complaints (*jukkai* 述懷), romantic verses (*enjō* 艷情), courtly folk songs (*gafu* 樂府, being a rather amorphous genre of poetry based on courtly imitations of ancient folk songs), Buddhist verses (*bonmon* 梵門), lamentations (*aishō* 哀傷), and miscellaneous verses (*zatsuei* 雜詠, usually includes poems about natural objects and people). This sort of scheme seems to have been wholly original to *Bunka shūreishū*. While seemingly based to a degree on the classification of poetry found in *Wenxuan*, *Bunka shūreishū* evinces a number of unique features. For one, the compilers have seen fit to include a category of poems not found in *Wenxuan*, namely, that of Buddhist verses, the presence of which is likely due in large part to the influential work of Kūkai 空海 (774-

835) and Saichō 最澄 (767-822), both of whom were alive when this anthology was completed, and both of whom were close to Saga. Furthermore, the romantic verses (*enjō* 艶情) found in *Bunka shūreishū* bear less resemblance to pieces of this nature in *Wenxuan*, and more to those found in *Yutai xinyong*, a transition which can also be found in the poetry of Shimada Tadaomi and Sugawara no Michizane, a phenomenon discussed in the next chapter. Finally, the order of poems within the anthology may have been loosely modelled on the cycle of imperial banquets and excursions within the annual court calendar.¹²⁸ This certainly requires more careful consideration.

Bunka shūreishū is the first of Saga's anthologies to contain poetry by non-Japanese writers. Wang Hyoryōm (J: Ō Kōren; Ch: Wang Xiaolian, ?-815) 王孝廉, one of the many delegates to visit Saga's court from Parhae, was skilled in the art of Sinitic poetry and, more importantly for us, an intimate lifelong acquaintance of Kūkai, who himself enjoyed much favor at the hands of Saga. It would seem that Hyoryōm must have met Kūkai when the latter was studying in the continental capital of Chang'an. Among the numerous Parhae officials then visiting Saga's court, only the poetry of Hyoryōm is preserved in *Bunka*

¹²⁸ Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 355, endnote no. 47. Here Heldt is drawing on Denecke, "Chinese Antiquity and Court Spectacle in Early Kanshi," 108, where she argues that the internal order of poems in *Bunka shūreishū* serves in the capacity of "a poetic guide to Saga's court."

shūreishū, a fact which attests to the high degree of respect Saga and his men must have had for this man's literary talents. The intimate relationship between Hyoryōm, Kūkai, and Saga would have guaranteed that Hyoryōm, upon returning to Parhae, shared with his own sovereign at least some of the details regarding Saga's court and his grandiose literary projects. In other words, Saga might very well have been known outside of Japan during his own lifetime.¹²⁹

Regarding the various genres of poetry appearing in this anthology, very broadly speaking, poems about royal excursions (*yūran*) center around processions led by Emperor Saga himself. The epistolary or correspondence poems (*zōtō*) include a large number of celebratory pieces composed in the fifth year of Kō'nin (814) expressly for those official envoys from Parhae mentioned above in relation to *Ryōunshū*. This lends further support to my suggestion that *Ryōunshū* was likely compiled before the arrival of this delegation. As was the case with *Ryōunshū*, the historical poems (*eishi*) were, for the most part, composed for banquets (*kyōen* 竟宴) commemorating the conclusion of a series of lectures held at court on the *Shiji* 史記. The category of miscellaneous poems (*zatsuei*) is dominated by verses about scenic descriptions of famous places, composed in response to poems by the

¹²⁹ Morley, "Poetry and Diplomacy in Early Heian Japan," 355.

sovereign. These poems, by painting a beautifully idealized picture of nature, simultaneously depict a harmonious relationship between sovereign and subject. Scattered throughout many of these genres, one is surprised to discover instances of Tang-period vernacular vocabulary (*zokugo*). This as a significantly progressive step forward in the word of Sinitic poetry and expression as practiced in the Heian court. With *Bunka shūreishū*, we find a proliferation not only of poets, genres, but also modes of languages, embracing both the elegant as well as the more popular.

As noted above, *Bunka shūreishū* was completed and submitted to Emperor Saga in the year 818. Like *Ryōunshū*, the exact month and day remains unknown. It is also in this year (day and month uncertain) that Saichō wrote his *Shugo kokkaishō* 守護国界章 (Treatise for Preserving the Realm), being a lengthy nine-fascicle polemic against a religious treatise entitled *Chūhen gikyō* 中辺義鏡 (Exegesis of the Middle Way), written by Tokuitsu 徳一 (n.d., c.760-840), a monk of the Hossō 法相 sect who engaged both Saichō and Kūkai in a long series of heated written debates. Apparently, this Tokuitsu spent most of his adult life in eastern Japan, far away from the capital. His debates, therefore, were necessarily conducted via post. Though most of his works have been lost, lengthy quotations appearing, for example, throughout Saichō's *Shugo kokkaishō*, demonstrate a

proficiency with the so-called *man'yō* syllabary, even to the point of properly distinguishing certain similar vowels from one another (*tokushu kanazukai* 特殊仮名遣), which strongly suggests that Tokuitsu received his early education in the capital. Now, Saga was on intimate terms with both Kūkai and Saichō, and we can safely assume that Saga was one of the intended readers of Saichō's *Shugo kokkaishō*. The inclusion of Buddhist verses (*bonmon*) in this second imperially commissioned anthology, though not written by Kūkai and Saichō, also evince the growing presence of Buddhist themes and concerns, both religious and political, in Saga's coterie. Shingon and Tendai Buddhism, the two sects brought over directly from China by Kūkai and Saichō respectively, were intensely continental insofar as they embodied within them textual interpretations, art forms, and ritualistic artifacts that were markedly Tang in origin. Consequently, Saga's growing interest in Buddhist affairs, as exemplified in the generous handful of Buddhist verses found in *Bunka shūreishū*, simultaneously represent an intensified interest in Tang-style culture and practice.

Saga's intense appreciation of Tang culture and language would come to permeate nearly every aspect of his reign. On the twenty-first day of the third month of this same year, Saga issued an edict demanding that all courtly rituals, along with all costumes worn

at such rituals, were to be altered in accordance with continental Tang-period regulations.

About one month later, Saga goes one step further and declares that the various halls, palaces, and gates found through the imperial compound are all to be given new, strictly continental names, that is, names imitative of Tang-period conventions.¹³⁰ *Bunka shūreishū* was the crystallization, in writing, of a large-scale effort, headed by Saga, to make his court a faithful copy of its continental exemplar.

On the very same day that Saga promulgated his edict to have the names of gates and halls changed into more continental sounding monikers, Saichō completed his *Tendai hokkeshū nenbun gakushōshiki* 天台法華宗年分学生式 (Precepts for Annual Ordinands of the Tendai Lotus Sutra Sect), being a short document consisting of six proscriptive statements for those select monks imperially ordained to enter his sect. This was followed up four months later by his *Kanshō tendaiishū nenbun gakushōshiki* 勧奨天台宗年分学生式 (Encouragements for Annual Ordinands of the Tendai Sect), which consists of eight proscriptive statements for those monks imperially ordained to enter his sect.¹³¹ The Buddhist verses in *Bunka shūreishū* show a strong preponderance towards Saichō and his

¹³⁰ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 9 (818).3.21, 753, and Kō'nin (818).4.27, 755-756.

¹³¹ Both of these documents can be found in *Tendai hokkeshū nenbun engi* 天台法華宗年分縁起 (Origin of the Annual Ordinands of the Tendai Lotus Sutra Sect).

sect. Kūkai receives almost no attention at all. This is indeed odd, considering the close relationship Saga was supposed to have enjoyed with this learned monk. Saga's intention of including these Buddhist verses, therefore, seems obvious: to promote, or rather justify, state support specifically of Tendai Buddhism. Kūkai is given more attention in the third of Saga's anthologies, *Keikokushū*, which was compiled in 827, five years after Saichō's demise. It would appear, therefore, that, at least during the years leading up to 818, Tendai was in special need of court sponsorship. During the early Heian period, competition between rival sects of Buddhism was severe. Kūkai and Saichō, despite later, rather romanticized renditions of their relationship to one another, were rivals through and through.¹³² In order for Saichō to gain the upper hand, therefore, the sovereign would have to employ any means within his command. *Bunka shūreishū* afforded a perfect venue for the furtherance of Tendai Buddhism.¹³³ That the first of Saichō's proscriptions for annual ordinands was submitted to the sovereign on the same day that *Bunka shūreishū* was

¹³² For a detailed account of the relationship between Saichō and Kūkai, see Ryūichi Abé, "Saichō and Kūkai: A Conflict of Interpretations," in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22:1/2 (Spring 1995), 103-137. This is, to my mind, one of the finest examinations of the subject.

¹³³ These observations about the Buddhist verses appearing in *Bunka shūreishū* and Saga's promotion of Saichō are indebted to an article by Ijitsu Michifumi entitled "Chingo kokka to bonmonshi: *Bunka shūreishū* bonmon wo chūshin ni," published in *Fukushima daigaku kyōiku gakubu ronshū* 77 (December 2004) 1-10.

submitted is surely no coincidence; the two documents, at least in part, ought to be seen as sharing in a larger state-sponsored effort to further the cause of Tendai Buddhism.

Promotion of Tendai Buddhism was not the only issue on the table during 818. The minting and circulation of copper coins was now being promoted, as well. In the beginning of the third month, the post of provincial governor (*kokushi* 国司) of Nagato 長門 (northwestern Yamaguchi) was augmented such that it came to include a second title, namely, *jusenshi* 鑄錢使, coin minter; the provincial governor *cum* minter of Nagato would now be responsible for overseeing both the management of the province as well as the minting of currency therein.¹³⁴ Before the year is over, a new currency is minted: this currency, given the auspicious title of “divine treasure of wealth and longevity” (*fuju shinpō* 富寿神宝), being the fifth of twelve imperially sanctioned currencies minted between the years 708 and 958, was yet another effort on Saga’s part to extend his influence beyond the capital. There are numerous entries in *Nihon kōki* which tell of Saga’s generosity when it came to dishing out copper coins to his vassals, especially to those who had presented him with Sinitic poetry. The interesting thing is this: in many cases, the coins Saga was handing out had already become outmoded by virtue of newer coins, such as those just mentioned.

¹³⁴ *Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 9 (818).3.7, 753, and Kō’nin (818).11.1, 765-767.

These coins, each impressed with four auspicious Sinitic characters, represented, more than their material wealth, a degree of imperial presence in every palm and pocket throughout the realm. Unlike the English kings of ninth-century England, Saga's coins contained no image of the sovereign's likeness. A square hole, punched through the center of each circular coin to accommodate a leather or silk cord for easier carrying, precluded the inclusion of any such image. Even so, an image of Saga was not necessary. The four carefully selected Sinitic characters fulfilled the same role. Saga was making his presence felt, both within and without the court. While his poetry would be circulated throughout the court and, in the hands of select vassals, in some outlying provinces, his coins would have enjoyed a much wider circulation. In this respect, at least, poetry and coins can be said to have fulfilled the very same function.

It was in this year, also, that Saga saw fit to institute the official post of royal shrine maiden or priestess (*saiinshi*, or *itsuki no miya no tsukasa* 齋院司).¹³⁵ This post could only be filled by a royal princess, whose duty it then became to preside over the worship of the local deity at the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto. The first such shrine maiden was Princess Uchiko 有智子 (807-847), a daughter born to Saga by a consort (*kyūjin* 宮人) named

¹³⁵ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 9 (818).5.11, 759.

Katano 交野 (n.d.). In year 810, during the tumultuous Kusuko Disturbance, this girl, then only four years of age, was appointed, by means of divination, high priestess (*saiin*) of Kamo Shrine. At this time, the post of priestess was not yet an official one, and so Uchiko would not have enjoyed much in the way of imperial sponsorship. Her position was naturally raised in 818 when this post became officially instituted. Uchiko retired in 832 due to illness, and died the following year. As shall be touched on later, this gifted woman became famous during her lifetime for the superb Sinitic poems she composed during a banquet held at her residence in 823. A total of ten of her Sinitic poems appear in the Saga anthologies.¹³⁶ One might rightly ask why Saga did not send his daughter to the Ise Shrine, which was, already at this time, well established as a center of imperial worship. Perhaps we are to see in Saga's decision an element of the pragmatic mind at work. In the wake of Heizei's attempted domination of court politics, Saga simply could not afford to waste time and resources sending his daughter off to distant Ise. He had far more pressing matters to attend to at home. So, as an expedient alternative, he sent her to the Kamo Shrine, not too far from his own Imperial Palace.¹³⁷ Uchiko, in her capacity of Kamo priestess, had served

¹³⁶ English translations of three poems attributed to Princess Uchiko, all preserved in *Keikokushū*, can be found in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 92 (poem no. 169) and 97 (poem nos. 221-222).

¹³⁷ Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 3-4.

during the Kusuko Disturbance of 810 as a means of securing divine assistance in Saga's efforts to defeat his enemies and pacify the realm. Saichō's sect promised the same salvific effects, namely, protection of the realm (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家). Raising the position of shrine maiden to official status was tantamount to outsourcing divine protection for the realm. The same goes for Saichō and his Tendai sect. It was in the midst of such efforts that *Bunka shūreishū* was commissioned and compiled. Indeed, the very thing for which divine protection was most sorely required was not the well-being of farmers and the common hand, but the so-called civilized literate culture—*bunka*, the first part of the title of *Bunka shūreishū*—promoted almost exclusively by the court. The essence of this literate courtly culture was, as far as Saga was concerned, poetry, and Sinitic poetry, at that. *Bunka shūreishū* was both a vehicle for as well as a perfect crystallization of the sovereign's efforts to ensure peace throughout his realm. Native gods, Buddhist divinities, and Sinitic verses were all brought together for this most prominent end.

We have seen what sorts of poetic voices Saga employed in his first anthology, *Ryōunshū*, the first several poems of which, presented at royal banquets, were meant to convey an image of absolute authority, wisdom, and benevolence. Saga sought, in those early years of his reign, to portray himself as the sovereign par excellence. In the wake of

the Kusuko Disturbance and numerous Emishi rebellions along the northern frontier, editors of the *Ryōunshū* strove to focus their readers' attention on recent military successes. Vassals, many of whom had once been loyal to Heizei, were urged to remain loyal to Saga. In this respect, then, Saga's first anthology was exactly what one might expect of a newly enthroned sovereign. This is not the case with *Bunka shūreishū*, which cuts a very different picture of Saga. Much more secure in his reign, Saga's poetic voice—and I am speaking very generally here—evinces a more inward looking, otiose attitude. While Saga continues to refer to himself in imagery redolent of his early years, imagery that aligns him with a model of conventional continental kingship, he seeks to present a more ostensibly personal, intimate version of his persona. Saga's short "Hearing the Bell of a Mountain Temple" is illustrative of this more intimate, otiose tone:

The evening has come. I hear in my dreams, while lodging in this riverside village,

the sound of a far off temple bell ringing in the depths of the night.

I wonder where that temple could be. It stands, no doubt, atop the highest peak of

yon mountain looming to the east¹³⁸

¹³⁸ For footnotes to this poem, see Appendix, item no. 44 (*Bunka shūreishū*, pome no. 99).

晚到江村高枕臥 夢中遙聽半夜鐘
 山寺不知何處在 旅館之東第一峯

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 99

Likewise, the following two couplets from Saga's "The Autumn Moon: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi" provide an with an especially intimate scene:

Sitting alone in my room on this quiet autumn night, everything bathed in moonlight,

I furl up my beaded curtain halfway to better gaze at a moon which, I now see
 for myself, shines both full and bright.

Only a fool would try to reach out his hands with hopes of taking hold of that

splendid moon. Little better the man who unties his robe and bears his breast to
 the moon, thinking thereby to embrace its incorporeal light!¹³⁹

¹³⁹ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 51 (*Bunka shūreishū*, pome no. 157)

天秋夜靜月光來 半捲珠簾滿輪開
 舉手欲攀誰能得 披襟抱影豈重懷

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 137

Bunka shūreishū contains thirty poems attributed to Saga, not one of which is listed as having been presented at a royal banquet. This is not to say, of course, that none of Saga's poems were presented at such banquets, or that such banquets fell out of use. Several poems in this anthology bear titles suggesting some sort of banquet or gathering held either within the palace or else in one of Saga's mansions. "Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden" (poem no. 139) suggests that this poem was presented at one of Saga's chrysanthemum banquets. "Bright Autumn Moon over Longtou" (poem no. 134), the full title of which is "Having Drawn Lots, I was Assigned the Poetic Topic 'Bright Autumn Moon over Longtou'," as well as "Yon Pine in the Valley" (poem no. 123), the full title of which is "When Composing Poetry in My Reizei Mansion, Having Drew Lots in Order to Determine Which Natural Objects to Write About, I Drew the Topic 'Pines in the Valley',"

among others, suggest that these were presented at public events hosted by Saga himself.¹⁴⁰

While it is certain that Saga continued to host royal banquets, seventeen, in fact, between the years 814 and 818, and that he continued, as before, to present his poetry at these events, it must be noted here that, unlike his previous anthology, *Bunka shūreishū* does not place special emphasis on such events—less still on poetry composed expressly for such events.¹⁴¹

This anthology opens with a poem by Saga entitled “A Spring Dawn in the Riverside Pavilion.” The riverside pavilion refers to his beloved Kaya Mansion, about which he composed numerous poems, and regarding which I shall have occasion to return later on in this chapter. This Kaya Mansion, located in Kyoto, north of the Yodo River, near the border of present-day Osaka, was officially designated as an imperial retreat in 813. *Bunka shūreishū* contains six poems by Saga that deal with scenery seen at or near this retreat.¹⁴²

One such poem, entitled “The Blossoms of Kaya,” is indicative of the otiose mood found in most of these Kaya verses:

¹⁴⁰ For translations of these poems, see Appendix, item nos. 52, 50, and 49, respectively.

¹⁴¹ Saga’s banquets will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter. Figures relating to the number of banquets held each year are from Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, 2007, 441-449.

¹⁴² For translations of the six poems in question, see Appendix, item nos. 23, 41-44, and 47 (poem nos. 1, 96-99, and 117, respectively). For poems by Saga about the Kaya Mansion preserved in *Ryōunshū*, of which there are four, see Appendix, item nos. 9-12 (poem nos. 11-14).

It is the middle of spring in Kaya, as it is in Heyang—that place where peach
blossoms have always been so famous.

The blossoms are falling now: some are red, others white. Winds rushing down from
the mountains make the myriad branches bend and sway.¹⁴³

三春二月河陽縣 河陽從來富於花
花落能紅復能白 山嵐頻下萬條斜

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 96

Even before looking at the content of Saga's opening poem, there are two things to note from the very beginning. First, Heizei has been expelled from this second anthology, and, incidentally, from the third, as well. While the editors of *Ryōunshū* saw fit to crown the first anthology with a poem by Heizei, despite the fact that he had, by that time, since rebelled against his brother and been utterly defeated. Notwithstanding his crime, Heizei was given

¹⁴³ For footnotes to this poem, see Appendix, item no. 41 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 96).

his rightful place in the anthology. With *Bunka shūreishū*, however, we enter a world unquestionably dominated from start to finish by Saga. Second, whereas the first four poems by Saga in *Ryōunshū* were composed for royal banquets held within the Shinsen Gardens, a venue located close by the outer periphery of the Imperial Palace itself, and which Saga had inherited from his father, Emperor Kanmu, the first four poems, by Saga, of *Bunka shūreishū* were composed for events held at various locations throughout Kyoto, none of which were close to the palace complex. His first poem, as just mentioned, was composed during an excursion to the Kaya Mansion. His second poem, “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa” (poem no. 2), was composed while staying in the Saga Villa, which was located in the mountains outside of the palace compound. Saga’s third poem, “A Spring Day at the Crown Prince’s Elegant Mansion” (poem no. 4), was presented at a banquet held in the mansion of Saga’s younger brother and the future Emperor Junna. This mansion, the so-called Southern Pond Mansion (Nanchiin 南池院), was located near modern-day Kōzanji Temple 高山寺, some ten kilometers northwest from the palace compound. His fourth poem, “A Summer Boat-ride” (poem no. 8), was composed for a pleasant excursion on Lake Biwa, a good fifteen kilometers east of the palace. This is to say, while *Ryōunshū* espoused what might be called a palace-bound sovereign, the focal point of which was the

Shinsen Gardens, *Bunka shūreishū*, compiled but four years later, shows us a highly itinerant sovereign, one who, while staying within a fifteen or twenty kilometer radius of his palace, is nevertheless seldom depicted in the palace itself. Numerous entries in *Nihon kōki* bear this out quite clearly: Saga's so-called hunting excursions (*yūryō* 遊獵), more properly understood as royal processions, occupy a great deal of his time on the throne; he is forever on the move.

As to the content of these Kaya poems, it is fair to say that the poetic persona of Saga we encounter in *Bunka shūreishū* is concerned primarily with promoting a life of refined leisure and praising the beauty of nature. Recall what was said about Saga's war poems in *Ryōunshū*, especially in regards to such verses as "It is with deep lamentation that those poor young maidens make their zithers ring with such sadly austere melodies, longing as they do for their men so far away," namely, that the significance of such verses comes not so much from their content but from the fact that it is an imperial hand who authors them. Similarly, the majority of Saga's poems preserved in *Bunka shūreishū*, had they been attributed to low-ranking vassals or poets working outside of the court, would lose much of their sociopolitical significance. That is to say, whereas many of the poems attributed to Saga in *Ryōunshū* are obviously political, those appearing in this second anthology are, at

least on the surface, devoid of such connotations. We are witnessing a move away from explicit pronouncements of power and towards a more subtle, more truly poetic expression of sovereignty, one in which the sovereign doffs his domineering, martial helmet in favor of a softer, more lettered crown. This does not, however, reflect a real change in the manner of Saga's administration of the realm. Entries in *Nihon kōki* confirm this. Rather, this transformation in poetic persona suggests a deeper appreciation, on the part of Saga and his vassals, for the role of a more complex conceptualization of kingship in Heian court life. Saga's opening poem, "A Spring Dawn in the Riverside Pavilion," begins with two couplets that are wonderfully representative of this new persona:

Here, in this riverside pavilion of mine, far away from all the mundane cares of that madding world, I lie awake, elbow propped upon my pillow, listening to the sounds of dawn. All I can hear is the cock's cry coming from that old fort nearby.

My garments have become damp with the moisture of clouds and mist: only now do I realize just how close I am to the caves of those lofty mountain peaks. A bubbling stream wakes me up: only now do I understand how close the valley

lies.¹⁴⁴

江頭亭子人事睽 欹枕唯聞古戍雞

雲氣濕衣知近岫 泉聲驚寢覺鄰溪

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 1

This is an intimate scene. Saga appears before us in his boudoir, reclining upon his bed, listening to the cocks crowing. His garments have become moist with the mountain mists that creep in through his blinds. He is all alone. Saga seems to have taken a liking to this image, for it is found in several other poems, most notably in a short piece entitled “A Night in the Mountains,” preserved in a fascicle in *Keikokushū* dealing with miscellaneous subjects (*zatsuei*):

I have travelled here from the capital to take up lodgings in this distance mountain
hut with its curtains of woven vines. In my dreams I hear the cock crowing,

¹⁴⁴ For explanatory footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 23 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 1).

hailing the coming of dawn's early light.

Upon awakening I notice, to my surprise, that my robes have become damp from the gathering mist: only now do I realize just how close this hut of mine lies to the deep valley rivers running through this mountain.¹⁴⁵

移居今夜薜蘿眠 夢裡山雞報曉天
不覺雲來衣暗濕 即知家近深溪邊

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 141

In both of these poems, though stated more clearly in the first, the poet expresses a desire for the quiet life, a world of solitude and reflection “far away from all the mundane cares of that madding world.” Is it not odd that a sovereign, whose self-declared duty it is to care for his subjects and minister to their health and prosperity, should express a wish to escape from the world of men, to cloister himself up in some distant hut, spending his days in quaint diversions and leisurly meditations upon nature? The answer, in a word, is simple:

¹⁴⁵ For explanatory footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 80 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 141).

Saga has begun to adopt a host of literary tropes intimately bound up with Daoist thought, in which the ideal sovereign is one who, having entered into a harmonious communion with Nature, rules in a mysteriously passive manner, such that his subjects are blissfully unaware of his profound influence over their everyday lives. This point will be taken up in detail when we come, in the fourth chapter, to a discussion of the biographical poetry (*eishi*) of Sugawara no Michizane. It is sufficient at this juncture to understand that Saga's vociferous praises for the solitary life are, as with most, if not all, of his poetry, means to a political or ideological end. By placing himself, psychologically, far away from mundane cares, and, geographically, far away from the capital, Saga seeks to portray himself as the ideal Daoist ruler, one who takes the silent rhythms of Nature as his guide, and who brings about peace and prosperity in the most inconspicuous manner. Such a transformation of his public image would have been necessary, seeing as how, after 814, he was becoming less and less involved in direct governance, and more involved in court politics and literary pursuits.

Saga's second poem, entitled "A Spring Day in the Saga Villa," combines the image of mists creeping into his bedchamber—a Daoist image—with that of the solitary hermit-ruler.

Mist lingering about the mountain peaks drifts, quite without notice, into my villa,
 clinging about the rafters and pillars, while the stream, as is its wont, flows
 always close by my hanging blinds.

[...]

How serene and secluded is this place, far from the chaos of mundane affairs! All I
 can hear is the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, and the mournful
 crying of monkeys as evening falls.¹⁴⁶

峰雲不覺侵梁棟 溪水尋常對簾帷

[...]

此地幽閑人事少 唯餘風動暮猿悲

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2

Again, praise for the secluded life prevails in Saga's third poem, "A Spring Day at the
 Crown Prince's Elegant Mansion" (poem no. 4), in which freedom from mundane cares

¹⁴⁶ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 24 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2).

becomes his main concern:

We poets, inspired by the muses, have gathered here in the crown prince's most elegant mansion, a solitary and serene place wholly hidden away from the chaotic world of outside.

[...]

O, but should one dwell here in silence for a time, admiring the natural scenery surrounding him on all sides, surely such a one, bathed in these exquisitely solitary pleasures, would find himself temporarily removed from all mundane cares.¹⁴⁷

詩家有興來雅院 雅院由來絕世閑

[...]

此地端居翫風景 寂寥人事暫無關

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 4

¹⁴⁷ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 25 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 4).

Many other poems in *Bunka shūreishū* could be quoted to the same effect. In the previous chapter, when discussing Saga's relationship to Buddhism, it was shown how all of the poems the sovereign dedicated to prominent monks contained images of a similar sort. A quick look back at that section will show—I hope, now with more poignancy—that most of those poems are to be found in *Bunka shūreishū*. In short, and at the risk of overgeneralizing, for that is just what I intend to do here, we might think of *Ryōunshū* as an aggressive or martial anthology, and *Bunka shūreishū* as a passive or spiritual anthology. Looking only at the poems attributed to Saga, the first anthology contained but three poems (nos. 18, 21, and 22) dealing expressly with Buddhist themes, while the second anthology contains six (poem nos. 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, and 38), along with another, entitled “Visiting a Hermit's Remains: In Imitation of Shigeno no Sadanushi” (poem no. 40), which, though not strictly Buddhist, is nevertheless of the same type. Far from mere coincidence, this increase in religious poetry, be it Buddhist or Daoist, or, as is often the case with Saga, a mixture of the two, represents a heightened awareness on the part of Saga to portray himself as an enlightened hermit- ruler. Such a poetic portrayal of the sovereign persona was meant to imply two things: first, that he would rule his subjects with a light hand;

second, that he would not cling to material wealth, and hence would not covet his subjects' land. Neither of these proved true, of course. Whether Saga's poetic image corresponded to the reality of his rule is a debate for some other time. That he utilized *Bunka shūreishū* as an effective means of transforming his public image is, I hope, now beyond doubt. Perhaps the quaintest example of this can be seen in his "Dance of the Butterflies" (poem no. 45), a short poem of only two couplets, wherein butterflies become a symbol of the Daoist ideal:

Bevies of butterflies flutter and flitter through the air, bespeckling flowers and trees
with a vivid panoply of variegated hues.

These lovely things do not beat their wings in time to any mortal music. No, they
gambol hither and thither with hearts as light and carefree as the vernal breeze
itself!¹⁴⁸

The "light and carefree" hearts of these butterflies, is, in the original, described using the term *mushin* 無心, literally "without a heart." This particular term has strong Daoist connotations, bringing to mind images of enlightened sages living in complete accordance

¹⁴⁸ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 45 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 110).

with nature, doing nothing in an overly deliberate or presumptuous manner. These butterflies, likewise, dance in accordance with Nature's rhythm, a rhythm in which they are able to fully immerse themselves, precisely in virtue of the fact that they do not stubbornly cling to any artificially imposed harmony, such as the sort imposed by men on the art of "mortal music."

***Keikokushū* 経国集 (Governing the Realm)¹⁴⁹**

The title of Saga's third anthology, *Keikokushū*, which may be translated as *Governing the Realm*, is taken from an influential passage found in *Dianlun* 典論, an essay on the virtues of literary studies written by Emperor Wen 文帝 (187-226, r. 220-226) of the Wei dynasty: "The practice of letters, that noblest work of immortal worth, is the great foundation upon which a realm is governed."¹⁵⁰ Much more will have to be said about this later on. This third imperial poetry anthology was, as has already been stated, commissioned not by Saga, but by his half-brother and immediate successor Emperor Junna

¹⁴⁹ This section contains much that can be found in Kinpara, "*Keikokushū*" and Ōsone, "*Keikokushū*," as well as Rabinovitch & Bradstock's *Dance of the Butterflies*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁵⁰ The original text has: 文章経国之大業而不朽之盛事.

淳和 (786-840, r. 823-833). According to the preface affixed to this anthology, *Keikokushū* was presented to Emperor Junna on the fourteenth day of the fifth month in the fourth year of Tenchō (827).¹⁵¹ As will be made clear, however, both in terms of content and intent, this anthology, like the two others already covered, was undoubtedly a product of Saga and his faithful coterie. The compilation of *Keikokushū* was headed by Yoshimine no Yasuyo, a man we have already met in his capacity as compiler of Saga's imperial history, *Nihon kōki*. His Sinitic poems have been preserved in all three of Saga's anthologies, though not much is known of the man himself. As head compiler of *Keikokushū*, Yasuyo directed a team of five men: Sugawara no Kiyokimi and Isayama no Fumitsugu—both of whom served as compilers for the previous anthologies—along with, Shigeno no Sadanushi, Minabuchi no Hirosada 南淵弘貞 (776-833) and Abe no Yoshihito 安倍吉人 (781-838).

Sadanushi was one of the compilers of *Bunka shūreishū*, while Kiyokimi and Fumitsugu both served as compilers for both of the previous two anthologies. As we have seen, all three men were graduates of the Faculty of Letters. Hirosada was a scholar in the Faculty of Letters who, having been appointed to the usual posts expected of a promising graduate, was eventually (821) appointed private tutor (*tōgū gakushi* 東宮学士) to

¹⁵¹ *Nihon kōki*, however, gives a slightly different date. More of this later.

Emperor Junna, when the latter was still a prince waiting to be enthroned. It was in 825, two years before the compilation of *Keikokushū*, that Hirosada was made a State Advisor (*sangi*). Only one poem by Hirosada has been preserved in *Keikokushū*.¹⁵² It is a laudatory poem dedicated to the sovereign. Not much is known about Yoshihito. Though it would seem from the lectures Yoshihito apparently gave that he was a scholar of some reputation, it is not clear whether he was a graduate of the Faculty of Letters. At least one scholar, however, asserts that Yoshihito had, in fact, become a scholar of the Faculty of Letters in 819.¹⁵³ He held the lower Fifth Rank when compiling *Keikokushū*, which, while giving him certain privileges as a high-ranking nobleman, was by no means a lofty position. Only one of his poems appears in *Keikokushū*.¹⁵⁴ This poem expresses Yoshihito's deep sense of reverence upon hearing an emissary from Parhae intoning a Buddhist prayer. While it does appear that the official positions held by some of the compilers of this third anthology were more intimately related to the world of Sinitic literacy, the major factor in selecting these men still seems to have depended on their relationship with the Faculty of Letters.¹⁵⁵ In

¹⁵² *Keikokushū*, fascicle 14, poem no. 181. This poem is classified under the category of miscellaneous poems (*zatsuei*).

¹⁵³ Takigawa, "Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku," 172-174.

¹⁵⁴ *Keikokushū*, fascicle 10, poem no. 74. This poem is classified under the category of Buddhist verses (*bonmon*).

¹⁵⁵ Takigawa, "Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku," 174.

827, when *Keikokushū* was compiled, both Sadanushi and Fumitsugu served as royal tutors to the prince, a son of Saga who would later ascend the throne as Emperor Ninmyō. As a rule, the position of royal tutor to the prince was occupied at any given time by but two men. That both royal tutors, Sadanushi and Fumitsugu, were selected to serve as compilers for *Keikokushū* is yet another proof of Saga's intimate involvement with this anthology. Saga was at the heart of this anthology, just as he had been with the previous two.¹⁵⁶

Saga personally selected the compilers for all three of his anthologies. Furthermore, Saga himself appears as the central figure in all three anthologies. *Keikokushū*, which was ostensibly commissioned by Emperor Junna, is through and through a Saga-centric anthology. While poetic exchanges between Junna and his men are not to be found in this anthology, exchanges between Saga and his vassals are sprinkled throughout its pages. While the writer of the preface makes it clear that the compilers gathered and selected poems in accordance with a decree from Junna, he is certain to assert the role of Retired Emperor Saga in this monumental project:

The former sovereign Saga has already passed on his imperial seal to our wise

¹⁵⁶ Takigawa, "Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku," 172-174.

sovereign Junna, who accepts its bright glory, exalting his virtue. Together, Your Majesties have encouraged the increased illumination of accumulated learning, and view extensive erudition as an essential aid to the Way of governing the realm. Your Majesties both strive in your wisdom, and Heaven has endowed both of you with great talents.

既而太上聖皇、推玉璽而蹤寂。皇帝叡主、受昭華而德隆。共勉積學之
添明、固要博文之助道。慧性並懋、天才俱聰。

As just mentioned, Sadanushi was at this time serving as royal tutor to one of Saga's sons, the boy who would later become Emperor Ninmyō. Whereas compilers of imperial histories were appointed more-or-less automatically, depending on social standing, compilers of all three anthologies were selected based primarily on their personal relationship with Saga, which seems to have corresponded in some way or another to membership in the Faculty of Letters.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Takigawa, "Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku," 180-181; the English translation of the passage from preface to *Keikokushū* is that of Gustav Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 306-307.

Not insignificantly, the personal relationship enjoyed between Saga and his hand-picked compilers of Sinitic anthologies stands in stark contrast to the relationship between Emperor Daigo 醍醐 (885-930, r. 897-930) and the four compilers of the imperially commissioned vernacular poetry anthology *Kokin wakashū*, completed in 905. In this later case, it is difficult to discover any really intimate connections, either political or familial, between Daigo and the compilers of this anthology. This may have to do with the fact that none of these men held exceptionally high positions, but it may also have something to do with Daigo's lack of enthusiasm for vernacular poetry, rather, with literature in general. Furthermore, we must remember that whereas Saga's compilers were all men trained in Sinitic writing, and hence involved in the larger project of central administration, rooted as it was in Sinitic literacy and philosophy, the compilers of *Kokin wakashū* worked in the world of the vernacular, a world which had very little to do with central administration, at least as it was ideally conceived. Administrators and courtiers were expected to be experts of Sinitic literacy and continental lore. Vernacular poetry was seen as something outside of, or at least auxiliary to, that ideal. Finally, note that while the three Sinitic anthologies contain a large amount of Saga's own poetry, as well as a fair amount by its compilers, *Kokin wakashū* contains no poetry by Daigo, and only two pieces by Fujiwara no Tokihira

藤原時平 (871-909), then acting Minister of the Left, despite the fact that the latter was supposed to have played a central role in compiling this anthology.¹⁵⁸

Unfortunately, *Keikokushū* has come down to us in pieces: of twenty fascicles only six have survived.¹⁵⁹ Speculations about the original structure of this anthology, based on clues found in its preface, give us the following simplified table of contents:

Fascicle 1:	rhapsodies 賦
Fascicles 2-15:	poems 詩 ¹⁶⁰
	Exactly how the poems in fascicles 2-15 were categorized is not clear, of course. All we know from extant fascicles is that fascicle 10 contained courtly folk songs and Buddhist verses, while fascicles 11 through 14 contained miscellaneous poems.
Fascicles 16-18:	prefaces 序

¹⁵⁸ Takigawa, “Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku,” 183 and 193.

¹⁵⁹ The surviving fascicles of *Keikokushū* are as follows: fascicle 1, which contains rhapsodies (*fu* 賦); fascicle 10, which contains courtly folk songs (*gafu* 樂府) and Buddhist verses (*bonmon* 梵門); fascicles 11, 13, and 14, all of which are taken up with miscellaneous poems (*zatsuei* 雜詠); and fascicle 20, which contains sample questions appearing on official examinations (*saku* 策).

¹⁶⁰ It might be worth noting here that Saga’s three anthologies use the word *shi* 詩, poem, to refer to both the conventional, metrically regular verse so familiar to scholars of Sinitic literature, as well as other, less regular verses, such as the *pian/hen* 篇, which, technically speaking, ought not to be included under the category of *shi*-style poetry.

Fascicles 19-20: | examination questions and answers 対策

According to the preface of *Keikokushū*, the writings collected in this anthology included some pieces composed as early as 707, from a total of 178 writers. There were originally 17 rhapsodies, 917 poems, 51 prefaces, and 38 essay answers (to questions posed on the official examinations). In terms of sheer size, *Keikokushū* was, in its original form, many times larger than either *Ryōunshū* or *Bunka shūreishū* combined. This anthology is the first Japanese anthology of Sinitic literature to give significant space to prose pieces, such as the prefaces and examination questions comprising fascicles 16-20. It would seem that the purpose of this anthology was to preserve the finest samples of Sinitic letters, both prose and poetry, produced since the Nara period. *Honchō monzui* 本朝文粹 (Superb Letters of Our Realm), compiled in 1060, fulfills the same role for Sinitic writing, both prose and poetry, from the middle Heian period. Despite the presence of Nara-period writings in *Keikokushū*, it must be recognized that a large portion of the pieces in this anthology was composed by the then retired Emperor Saga, along with his privileged coterie of early Heian-period literati, including Shigeno no Sadanushi, Sugawara no Kiyokimi, and Ono no Minemori, as well as a handful of Heian-period monks. Eight poems by Kūkai are included

here. That is to say, this anthology is much more representative of the early Heian period, especially of Emperor Saga's poets, than it is of the Nara period. Many of the poets in this anthology had already appeared in Saga's previous two anthologies—another fact supporting the thesis that Saga was the real hero of this anthology.

While *Ryōunshū* arranges poems by author, in order of social standing, from highest to lowest, stating clearly the position and rank of each, *Bunka shūreishū* makes no mention whatsoever of the official position or rank of its poets. *Keikokushū* is a sort of amalgamation of these two streams: Within the anthology itself the poets are listed simply by name, omitting any indication of social standing. There is, however, a table of contents appended to most fascicles that lists the names, positions, and ranks of all the poets.

Ryōunshū, as Gotō says, is the most conservative, the most explicitly bureaucratic of the three Sinitic anthologies, taking as it does such special pains to not only arrange poets based on their relative social standing but to meticulously indicate their rank and position throughout the anthology. In this respect, *Ryōunshū* stays closest to the ideal of centralized government enshrined in the *ritsuryō* codes. *Bunka shūreishū* strays away from this ideal, giving no indication of rank or position. While surely not anti-government, this anthology smacks of a more liberal, less bureaucratic motivation. *Keikokushū* offers a compromise

between the two extremes.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, *Ryōunshū* contains poets who are, on average, of the Fifth Rank or lower. The same is true of its compilers. That is to say, this first anthology was compiled and filled with the work of men belonging to the middle-ranking class of courtiers. *Bunka shūreishū* evinces the same tendency. Two of its compilers were of the Fifth Rank, while another held the sixth, and the last man the lowly Seventh Rank. Of course, it is difficult to know the relative ranks of these poets at the time this work was compiled, as their ranks are not listed anywhere in the anthology. What can be said with certainty, however, is the inclusion in this second anthology of poetry by women and foreigners. Neither women nor foreigners were seen as belonging strictly to the central bureaucratic system then in force. It is, perhaps, for this reason that no female or foreign poets appear in *Ryōunshū*. It is, also perhaps, for this same reason that they do appear in *Bunka shūreishū*, the more liberal of the two anthologies. *Keikokshū*, located ideologically somewhere between the two former anthologies, shows two opposing tendencies: While the ranks of its compilers are higher than those of previous anthologies—three of the five men in charge held the Fourth Rank—more poets of even lower ranks than previously found are included within its pages. Saga is even seen exchanging a number of poems with a man by

¹⁶¹ Gotō, “Sagachō no bunjin no ikai kanshoku to bungaku,” 200 and 203.

the name of Koreyoshi no Harumichi 惟良春道 (n.d.), who at the time held the lowest, namely, the Eighth Rank.¹⁶²

As just mentioned, each of the extant fascicles is affixed with a table of contents. The pieces in each fascicle are arranged both in terms of content and, within those divisions, in order of the relative rank of each poet, highest to lowest. Significantly, the names of the various poets are written in a style imitative of continental custom, using one character for the surname instead of two. Thus, for example, the Japanese surname Sugawara, which ought to be written 菅原, is instead written as 菅, and probably pronounced Kan, after the phonetic reading, as though it were a continental surname. Saga's insistence on modelling both his rule and his literary monuments on continental Tang-period culture is perhaps most prevalent in this anthology. In terms of meter, the dominant style is that of seven-character verse, exactly in line with more-or-less contemporaneous Tang-period poetic practices. In short, *Keikokushū* is the product of an age in the early Heian period that witnessed the absolutely highest efflorescence of Tang-style culture. The writings preserved in *Keikokushū* evince a number of strikingly creative developments, including the following six features:

¹⁶² Gotō, "Sagachō no bunjin no ikai kanshoku to bungaku," 203-205 and 216.

1. **New poetic forms:** A number of pieces written in the elaborate mixed prose-verse style (*zatsugon* 雜言), modelled on certain new Tang-period sub-genres, such as the so-called songs (Ch: *ge* 歌), ditties (Ch: *yin* 吟), and the lyric poetry of irregular length (Ch: *ci* 詞), are to be found in this anthology.
2. **Playful poetry:** Here, too, we find a handful of playful poems in which the first character of each stanza must correspond to a predetermined set of characters, and in an established order—a form of poetry popularized by the Southern Song poet Bao Zhao 鮑照 (c.414-466), and known as *jianchu* poetry (Ch: *jianchuti* 建除体).
3. **Longer poems:** Just as *Bunka shūreishū*, when compared with *Ryōunshū*, contained poems of increasing length, so, too, with *Keikokushū*, do we see this tendency carried a step further. A number of poems composed in the longer, twelve-couplet, regulated meter (Ch: *shier lüshi* 十二律詩) are preserved here.
4. **Tonal sensitivity:** The poems in *Keikokushū* evince a much greater attention to tonal patterns and rhyming schemes, matters of poetic decorum brought over directly from the continent. Such attention to tonal conventions is not nearly as pronounced in the previous two anthologies.

5. **Fresh content:** This anthology contains themes and content not before seen in the previous two Saga anthologies. What we are witnessing here is a deliberate expansion of the sort of content deemed appropriate for literary composition and inclusion in an imperially commissioned anthology.

6. **Vernacular (Sinitic) expressions:** As was the case with *Bunka shūreishū*, this third anthology includes poems sprinkled with a smattering of more popular, contemporary expressions, the majority of which have their origins in Tang-period popular narrative fiction, especially that sort written in a more vernacular mode (Ch: *baihuawen* 白話文).¹⁶³

Regarding the sixth point—the inclusion of vernacular expressions—it is impossible to ascertain whether or not Heian writers saw these expressions as vernacular. They could simply have been eagerly collecting what seemed to them to be new and interesting words.

Whatever the case, one thing is certain: aside from the more traditional, conservative poetry—and *Keikokushū* has plenty of that—we also find a number of noticeably modern

¹⁶³ These six features are enumerated in Ōsone, “*Keikokushū*.” I have added a number of my own observations to each.

pieces, such as experimental attempts at composing verses in the then more-or-less contemporary genre of *ci* (song lyrics).¹⁶⁴ This new genre of poetry, having first come to the fore on the continent during the eighth century, would nearly eclipse classical (*shi*) poetry by the tenth. Classical poetry—that which dominates the *Saga* anthologies—consisted of couplets of regular length, most often five or seven characters per verse, with a common rhyme falling on the last character of each couplet. The new *ci* poetry, in contrast to this, contained verses of uneven lines, with rhymes that could fall irregularly, either after the first, second, third, or even fourth line. In this way, the tightly structured, strictly regulated rhythm of classical couplets began slowly to give way to more “fluid and irregular movement between lines,” a freer meter which “seemed to listeners and lyricists alike to provide a better medium for the expression of mood and feeling.”¹⁶⁵ The term *ci* is short for *quzici* 曲子詞, lyrics set to song melodies—a telling term, for it refers primarily not to a style of poetry, but rather to an already popular tune. Like, say, Robert Burns (1759-1796), many of whose poems are to be sung to the tune of much older melodies, Tang (and later) poets who composed *ci* verses did so to the tunes of older melodies well

¹⁶⁴ Gotō, “*Saga tennō to kō'ninki shidan*,” 15.

¹⁶⁵ Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 559.

known to their contemporaries. That this eighth-century genre appears in the Saga anthologies is of some interest. Did Saga's men know the continental tunes to which they were presumably composing *ci* lyrics? To what degree did these men actually sing their poems aloud, and to whom? Just how closely Saga and his vassals were following continental poetic developments is uncertain. Whereas some have seen in Saga's courtly folk songs (*gafu*), especially those preserved in *Bunka shūreishū*, evidence of familiarity with the *xinyuefu* 新樂府 poetry of Bo Juyi (772-846)—a contemporary of Saga—supposed influence from Bo Juyi at such an early date is largely insupportable.¹⁶⁶

Recall that *Keikokushū*, according to its preface, was finally presented to Emperor Junna on the fourteenth day of the fifth month of 827. Only four days prior to this, an ordination hall (*kaidan'in* 戒壇院) was erected within the Enryakuji Temple complex.¹⁶⁷ This temple complex was the base of Saichō's Tendai sect, and the official establishment of an ordination platform—the only place monks could be officially ordained as Buddhist monks by the court—meant that Saichō's sect had come out victorious: the Tendai sect was

¹⁶⁶ Gotō, "Saga tennō no kyūtei bungaku to higashi ajia," 108.

¹⁶⁷ *Eigaku yōki*, Tenchō 4 (827).5.10. The *Eigaku yōki* 叡岳要記 (Summative Records of Mount Hiei) is a collection of documents produced within or in relation to the Enryaku Temple complex on Mt. Hiei, Kyoto. The author of this collection remains unknown, but was most likely a monk residing in this temple complex around the middle of the thirteenth century.

recognized as *the* official sect. It would appear, therefore, that Saga's efforts at promoting Saichō through Buddhist verses enshrined in his *Bunka shūreishū* proved effective. Of course, Saichō was deceased by this time. It was for his disciples to carry on the master's religious work. Kūkai was not out of the picture. As representative of the Shingon sect, one of the benefits of which was a professed ability to manipulate the course of nature through magical means, Kūkai was given imperial commands to conduct a ritual within the Imperial Palace in order to pray for rain. He was successful.¹⁶⁸ This miraculous episode occurred less than two weeks after *Keikokushū* was submitted to the sovereign. This, then, is the religious context within which Saga's third anthology was compiled and presented. That was not all. On another front, Princess Masako 正子 (810-879), one of the many daughters of the then retired Emperor Saga, had been made imperial consort (*kōgō* 皇后) to Emperor Junna near the end of the second month of that same year.¹⁶⁹ This would mean, of course, that Saga had become the prospective maternal grandfather of any future sovereigns that might happen to be conceived betwixt Junna and Masako. I would argue, with some reservations, of course, that Saga's choice for this particular year as the year in which to

¹⁶⁸ *Nihon kōki*, Tenchō 4 (827).5.21-26, 947.

¹⁶⁹ *Nihon kōki*, Tenchō 4 (827).2.26, 941.

have his third anthology compiled had something to do with Masako's installment as imperial consort, the highest possible position for a woman at court. Masako became, in effect, an empress, rather, *the* empress. *Keikokushū* might have served, to use modern terminology, as a sort of wedding gift, a celebratory monument—not to Junna's future prosperity, but to Saga's. Its sheer size, at least in the original, signals it out as being a culmination of Saga's literary legacy. *Keikokushū* was to the world of Sinitic poetry (and prose) what *Man'yōshū* was to that of vernacular verse. Now retired and more at ease, and with his daughter as imperial consort, Saga was at last able to produce a *magnum opus* of courtly writing, with him at its august center. One might well ask why, considering the importance of this anthology, it has not yet been translated into English.¹⁷⁰ The reason, I suspect, is quite simple: It is a difficult text. Another reason lies in the now decades-old practice of equating Japanese literature exclusively with vernacular writings. It is for this very reason that *Man'yōshū* has been translated into English, in more than one rendition, while *Keikokushū* has not. Our scholarly bias should not blind us to the sense of awe with which Saga's third anthology must have impressed his contemporaries. This was truly a

¹⁷⁰ A fully annotated edition of *Keikokushū* may be found in Kojima Noriyuki's *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volumes 4-8 (which corresponds to his *chū-ge I* to *ge III*).

masterwork of Sinitic writing.

It behoves us now to make a few observations regarding Saga's poetic personae, as depicted in *Keikokushū*. Careful examination reveals a rather striking phenomenon, namely, that Saga, in this the last of his three anthologies, is beginning to experiment—out of necessity, as I will argue—with different genres, combining otherwise disparate genres into a single poem. “Falling Blossoms,” the first poem attributed to Saga in *Ryōunshū* (poem no. 2) belongs, as the original title itself clearly indicates, to a type of Sinitic poetry known as *pian/hen* 篇, in which, metrically speaking, a number of verses may be of irregular length. In the case of this poem, which is heptasyllabic—seven characters per verse—we find two verses containing six characters, an alteration which gives some variety to the overall rhythm of the poem when recited aloud. Furthermore, two of the couplets in this poem contain an extra verse added to the end, making these, in reality, not couplets but tercets, or stanzas of three verses. *Bunka shūreishū* opens with a traditional, metrically regular poem in four couplets. Metrically, the only example of a non-traditional poem attributed to Saga in this second anthology is his “Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden” (poem no. 139), which, being likewise a *pian/hen* poem, contains several metrical variations, including some shorter verses, along with an extra verse added on to the last couplet (a tercet). From

the very first poem, *Keikokushū* promises to presents us with a very different poetic landscape, not only metrically, but in terms of content, as well. Considering the sadly fragmental condition of extant manuscripts of this originally magnificently large anthology, it is fortunate for us that the first fascicle has survived in its entirety. This crowning fascicle, in direct imitation of *Wenxuan*, is dedicated exclusively to rhapsodies (*fu/fu* 賦), lengthy prosaic poems which, as a rule, contain lengthy lists, framed always in eloquent language, of related objects or allusions pertaining to a given theme. These concatenations of complex images give to the rhapsody an air of erudition and, more importantly, a sense of inclusiveness, as though we are being given a panoramic, exhaustive view of the chosen theme. Some continental rhapsodies could even function, to a degree, as miniature encyclopedic essays. Ban Mengjian's 班孟堅 (32-92) extravagant "Rhapsody on the Two Capitals," the first piece appearing in *Wenxuan*, contains a descriptive list of birds which, for all I can tell, was inspired by the section on birds found in *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explanations of Written Characters) a dictionary compiled sometime around the early second century, during the Han Dynasty.¹⁷¹ The first two rhapsodies in *Keikokushū*, both

¹⁷¹ A full English translation of this lengthy rhapsody may be found in volume 1 of Knechtges, *Wenxuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, where it is entitled "Two Capitals Rhapsody," 93-180. Volume three of this same work contains translations of all the rhapsodies on natural phenomena.

attributed to Saga, while not approaching anywhere near the length of those found in the first fascicle of *Wenxuan*, are, nevertheless, obvious efforts at reproducing the same sort of inclusive, panoramic vision. Saga's "The River during Springtide" reads like a checklist of all those springtime charms conventionally lauded by Sinitic poets on both sides of the sea.¹⁷² Flora and fauna, along with various recreational activities are described in turn. The rhapsody begins with the coming of dawn and concludes with the moonlit night. Saga offers his readers a comprehensive picture of spring as seen through the sovereign's eyes. The venue, not surprisingly, is his beloved Kaya Mansion. The season, significantly, is early spring, the beginning of a new year:

The New Year brings with it a host of new sights: the banks of the Yodo River are colored afresh in the warm vernal hues of mid-spring; the environs of my beloved Kaya Mansion are engendered with new life.

Mist upon the river shimmers with a radiance that drives away winter's lingering chill; the last remnants of fog have been lifted from the ocean, whose surface

Those on birds and animals (pp. 41-82) are particularly illustrative of the encyclopedic scope of continental rhapsodies.

¹⁷² For full translations of this rhapsody, see Appendix, item nos. 53 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 1).

now smiles beneath a brilliant sky.

Willows trail their pliant branches, bejeweled now with newly opening buds, over
 yon mist-covered river, while peach trees, coaxed by an alluring breeze, effuse
 their fragrance on either side of the embankment.

仲月春氣滿江鄉 新年物色變河陽

江霞照出辭寒彩 海氣晴來就暖光

柳懸岸而烟中綻 桃夾堤以風後香

Renewed colors; a fine, glistening mist; a clear, blue sky; pliant green willow branches;
 fragrant peach trees; and a soft, warm vernal breeze—all stock images of spring in the
 world of Sinitic poetry—are methodically enumerated in the opening lines of this rhapsody.
 After the colors and smells of various flora have thus been introduced, Saga proceeds to
 draw our attention to the animals and people populating his poetic world:

Birds flutter hither and thither; fish bob and dive.

They scurry and gambol pell-mell, now coming, now going.

Some nibble on the tender fronds of seaweed; others munch on the water lilies.

Chirping and trilling, every one, they cast their joyful eyes upon one another.

Boatmen ply their oars between the riverbanks, conversing merrily with those on shore who wish to be ferried to the other side.

Those young boys and girls who dive for fish set up their huts close by the river, taking the very fish as their neighbors.

羽族翱翔 鱗群頡頏

繽紛雜沓 載來載行

咀嚼初藻 吞茹新苻

各各吟叫 處處相望

涉人迴楫 與淵客而為倫

漁童構宇 接鮫室而同隣

Fluttering birds and frolicking fish, both signs of the bounty of heaven and earth; tender seaweed shimmering in freshly thawed waters; smiling water lilies; boatmen and their merry customers; young divers, men and women alike—all of these images serve, in turn,

to emphasize the rejuvenating energies of spring. This, as would have been implied by the imperial authorship of these verses, was to be attributed to the vivifying influence of the sovereign's virtuous rule. Having given us this (symbolically) comprehensive list, Saga then leads us into the quiet of night, accompanied all the while by butterflies and bush warblers, two more classical images of spring:

Flower petals grace the river, and vernal herbs grow tall along its banks.

Butterflies prance and dance to the scattered songs of bush warblers.

The sun begins to set, though this royal procession of ours is not yet over.

I shall spend the night in this riverside Kaya Mansion, enjoying a peaceful slumber.

A bright moon shines in the sky, casting its reflection down upon the waves below.

It is a still, peaceful night, as soft as silk; moonlight shimmers through the clouds, as

clear and pure as the river's waters.

Wind blowing down from the surrounding mountains comes in through my

windows, bringing with it the music it makes when whistling through the pines.

Wild geese returning north leave this quaint waterside for more distant shores; wild

monkeys, their bellies rumbling, cry out in a voice that moves this lonely

traveler.

花飛江岸 草長河畔

蝶態紛紜 鶯聲撩亂

游覽未已 日落西溪

夜在江亭 枕臥矣

江上月 浪中明

靜如練而雲間發 光與水而共清清

山風入於戶牖兮 聽颼颼乎松聲

歸雁欲辭汀洲去 飢猿曉動羈旅情

The vernal night, too, is full of its share of conventional images: moonlight reflected upon the waves; wind whispering down from the mountains; the sound of wind through distant pines; wild geese and wild monkeys—both symbols of the traveler far from home, as Saga inevitably portrays himself when staying at the Kaya Mansion. Saga, through this rhapsody, asserts his position as master of spring, nay, as lord over all Nature, especially insofar as Nature, in virtue of an assumed cosmic resonance, responds to his benevolent governance

over man. Saga appeals to his vassals in the guise of a sage-ruler who embraces all things within his panoramic vision. At the same time, however, he desires to depict himself as thoroughly human, as one whose sympathies are deep and sincere.

The heart of a traveler, of whom I am one, is moved most profoundly by the joys of spring, as he frolics about the banks of this charming river.

What more can be said, save that sentiments grow deeper as spring progresses? Let me gaze upon this river year after year! One look at its waters washes away all my sorrows.

羈旅乘春心轉幽 江南江北事遨遊
總為春深多感歎 年年江望得銷憂

As was seen with *Bunka shūreishū*, one of Saga's recurring poetic personae was that of an ascetic hermit or Daoist recluse. In this rhapsody, then, we hear two voices: the imperial lord of Nature, the omnipotent sage-king, on the one hand, and the solitary Daoist recluse dwelling in seclusion far from the capital, on the other. Put slightly differently, Saga has

succeeded here in interweaving two otherwise distinct genres, the auspicious praise verses appropriate for a sovereign simultaneously lauding and, in virtue of his divine powers, blessing his realm—the so-called *hogiuta* 寿歌 of ancient vernacular poetry—on the one hand, and travel poetry, especially that sort featuring a lonely traveler reminiscing on the joys of his beloved capital. Combining the most salient features of two or more genres into a single piece is a practice which, I would tentatively argue, sees its first attempts during the time of Saga, especially during his later period of retirement. *Keikokushū* was compiled during this period, and it is no coincidence, I propose, that much of Saga's poetry preserved in this anthology—aside, perhaps, from that which, while preserved here, is expressly stated as having been composed while Saga was still on the throne—evinces the combination of various genres in a single poem. Tadaomi and Michizane, as will be made clear in the third and fourth chapters to come, had thoroughly mastered this practice. Like these two men, Saga employs two different poetic genres, along with the two different poetic voices inherit within these genres, as a means of economically conveying two messages at the same time: Saga pictures himself as a virtuous ruler who, despite his lofty state, is yet able to sympathize on an intimate level with his loyal vassals. He is at once divine and human. It is in his divine guise, as one who praises and blesses the realm, that

Saga, in “Chrysanthemum Blossoms,” the second poem in *Keikokushū*, praises the chrysanthemums in lofty tones, thus:

All things in Nature change with the seasons; all things bloom only to fall, grow
only to decay—this much I have learned from observation.

Tell me, is there a forest whose leaves are not stripped off their branches come
autumn? Is there a field whose grasses can escape the withering frost?

While forest and field yield to autumn’s touch, the chrysanthemum—most
miraculous flower!—alone remains vivid and fresh when all other things have
faded.

At a time when all has turned red and yellow, its leaves alone spread out in intricate
profusion, covering the riverbanks and the hillsides with splendid verdure.

White blossoms shimmer forth like so many serried stars, against a background of
stalks and leaves that take the place of nocturnal clouds.

Morning winds carry the chrysanthemum’s fragrance far and wide, while midnight
dewdrops shimmer with reflected light from those ermine blossoms.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ For full translations of this rhapsody, see Appendix, item nos. 54 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 2).

觀物理於盛衰兮 知造化之異時
 林何樹而不搖落 原何艸而不具腓
 豈若
 芳菊神奇 在枯獨滋
 蔓延蠶靡 緣岸被坻
 花實星羅 莖葉雲布
 香飄朝風 色照夕露

While it is in his sympathetic human persona that Saga simultaneously mourns the passing of autumn, and the inevitable approach of winter, thus:

Wild geese soaring through the evening sky pains me: the cold of winter is not far off. The sound of falling leaves troubles my soul: all will soon be naked and withered.

Autumn is drawing to a close—a time of deep sorrow. Even so, let us rejoice in the chrysanthemum flower, the source of longevity and more happiness to come!

感雁序於薄晚兮 傷落葉乎秋聲

時屬長年之多歎 還欣斯花之延齡

This second rhapsody was presented in the Shinsen Gardens during one of Saga's annual chrysanthemum banquets. It is not clear if he was the reigning sovereign at the time of composition, and, I suspect, it does not much matter. Whether on or off the throne, Saga strove to instill in his vassals, and in the court at large, an image of him as both supreme ruler and sympathetic comrade. His war poems, as well as those featuring pining women serve a similar end.

Likewise, a third poem by Saga, not appearing immediately after this rhapsody but after an interval of six poems by various authors, and entitled "The Sorrows of Autumn" is another example of this effective mixture of genres.

O, the sorrows of autumn! How sorrowful that this season should see the herbs and
the leaves all falling to the ground.

Look at the woods in late autumn, and see what a change has been wrought over

them! Listen to the sounds of autumn, and hear the sorrow of those dying
songs.

Even so, look also at yon hill: see the fragrant chrysanthemums blooming there!

Look also at yon streamlet: see the elegant thoroughwort shining there!

The year rolls on, never halting; the end of autumn is soon to come. Nature marches
swiftly onwards; this season cannot linger much longer.¹⁷⁴

秋可哀兮 哀草木之搖落

對晚林於變衰兮 聽秋聲乎蕭索

望芳菊之丘阜 看幽蘭之阜澤

年華荏苒行將闌 物候蹉跎已迴薄

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 9

It is within this larger effort to portray Saga as a sovereign of profound sympathy, and
hence a paragon of cultural refinement and superior discernment, that such evidently

¹⁷⁴ For full translations of this rhapsody, see Appendix, item nos. 55 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 9).

sorrowful verses ought to be understood. “The Sorrows of Autumn” was, like the previous rhapsody, presented in the Shinsen Gardens at one of his chrysanthemum banquets.

Chrysanthemum liqueur was passed around in hopes of ensuring longevity. This poem, however, bemoans the passing of time:

O, the sorrows of autumn! How sorrowful that this season should be visited with
such long, lonely nights.

The wind is biting; the moon is shining. And I, sleeping here all alone, feel nothing
in that wind, see nothing in that moon, but loneliness.

Even the sound of falling leaves outside my window fills me with unbearable
anguish! I toss and turn in my bed, unable to sleep. The night is nearly over.

秋可哀兮 哀秋夜之長遙

風凜凜 月照照 臥對風月正蕭條

窗前墜葉那堪聽 枕上未眠欲終宵

Only by understanding this piece as an attempt at portraying Saga as a sympathetic,

humane ruler can we account for a seemingly forlorn, somewhat fatalistic poem being presented at what was otherwise one of the most auspicious and joyous festivities in Saga's annual schedule. Indeed, the final couplet of this poem resonates with his earlier war poems preserved in *Ryōunshū*:

Though I may not be a man of great sorrow myself, even so, my heart aches with
 many a sad thought. How much more, then, must that lonely maiden grieve for
 her absent lover gone to war?

Alas, the four seasons pass us by all too quickly! Alack, autumn brings us far too
 much sorrow!

不是愁人猶多感 深閨何況怨別離

吁嗟四運易行邁 惆悵三秋絕可悲

More so than in his first two anthologies of Sinitic writing, *Keikokushū* sees Saga experimenting with a more complex array of poetic personae, which corresponds, as I shall attempt to demonstrate later on in relation to the poetry of Tadaomi and Michizane, a more

complex manipulation, a more deliberate amalgamation of disparate genres. As Saga moved from reigning sovereign to retired sovereign—the latter stage being represented so vividly in, and only in, *Keikokushū*—so, too, did he undergo a transformation from a symbolically central figure to one, despite his very real power at court, who was, according to the dictates of courtly tradition, no longer the center of power. It was necessary, so long as Saga desired to maintain his position as literary paragon and patron supreme over his dedicated coterie of vassals, that he reconfigure his poetic persona in accordance with his new status at court. Creative tinkering with various genres tailored to a heterogeneous audience would have proved most effective to this end.

Curious Absence of Two of Saga's Anthologies from the Historical Record

The compilers of imperially commissioned histories (*seishi* 正史), as opposed to anthologies of Sinitic poetry, were, almost without exception, men who stood at the apex of high-ranking courtiers, namely, those who held the Third Rank or higher. As a rule, the head compilers were acting Chief Ministers (*daijin* 大臣), a practice which, incidentally, was later codified in a section of *Shingishiki* 新儀式 (The New Rituary, 963) dealing with

the compilation and revision of imperial histories (*kokushi wo shū suru koto* 修国史事).

The head compiler of imperial histories, from the eighth to the tenth century, was required to hold the highest political position possible for high-ranking noblemen. This is not what we have seen in the case of compilers of poetry anthologies throughout these same centuries. This clear difference in the required social standing of compilers of histories and anthologies is more pronounced during the time of Saga. The head compilers of Saga's three anthologies were not always above their fellow compilers in terms of social status. The head compiler of *Nihon kōki* (840), the imperial history commissioned by Saga, was, first, Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, then the highest ranking noblemen at court. After his death in 826, Fujiwara no Otsugu, now the highest ranking nobleman, was appointed the new head compiler.¹⁷⁵ At least two standards of selection were in practice during Saga's reign, one for imperial histories, the other for imperially commissioned anthologies. In the case of histories, the highest ranking noblemen were automatically appointed compilers, with one of the acting Chief Ministers acting as their head compiler. This seems to have been a routine practice for at least two centuries. In the case of poetry anthologies, however, compilers were more consciously selected: these men were chosen based not on the official

¹⁷⁵ Takigawa, "Chokusenshū ni okeru shijin kajin no kanshoku," 175-178.

positions, but in virtue of their connections with the Faculty of Letters (*monjōdō*), on the one hand, and their closeness to Saga himself, on the other.

This difference in the selection practices of histories, on the one hand, and anthologies, on the other, might be seen as reflecting a fundamental difference in attitude towards these two forms of literacy. *Nihon kōki* contains several passages dedicated to citing precedents from earlier histories, such as *Nihon shoki*, and others relating to the process of compiling imperial histories. The completion of Saga's *Shinsen shōjiroku* is duly recorded in *Nihon kōki*.¹⁷⁶ Information regarding the composition and citation of chronicles as well as authoritative genealogies were seen as appropriate subject-matter for an imperial history of this sort. On the other hand, this history makes no mention whatsoever of the first two Saga anthologies—*Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū*. It was as if, according to *Nihon kōki*, these two anthologies never existed. This is odd, considering the various references throughout this same history to banquets and other festivities in which poetry was presented. If not for the prefaces appended to each of the three anthologies, we would have no contemporaneous record regarding the date of compilation of these works. Even with these prefaces, some of the dates remain vague. The preface to *Ryōunshū*, for example, tells

¹⁷⁶ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 5 (814).6.1, 671.

us only that this anthology contains poems composed between 782 and 814. Naturally, therefore, we are to understand that this anthology was compiled sometime after 814, though how long after we are not told. The preface to *Bunka shūreishū* tells us even less. All we know is that this anthology, aiming as it did to include poetry left out of *Ryōunshū*, was compiled, likewise, sometime after 814. Now, the year 818, which is generally accepted as the compilation date of *Bunka shūreishū*, is gleaned from a remark in the preface which states that this anthology was completed a little over four years after the *Ryōunshū*, the exact date of completion of which, as just said, is not certain. In the case of both *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū*, therefore, we are not altogether certain of the year in which these anthologies were compiled, to say nothing about a possible month or day. Why the strange, maybe even deliberate, lacunae in *Nihon kōki* in regards to these two anthologies? Was talk of poetic anthologies deemed inappropriate subject-matter for an imperial history?

Not so. With *Keikokushū*, and with this anthology alone, we find an exception. The preface to this anthology states that this work was presented to Emperor Junna on the fourteenth day of the fifth month in the fourth year of Tenchō 天長 (827). *Nihon kōki* tells us that the anthology was only commissioned on the twentieth day of that month, which

means that it was, of necessity, completed sometime thereafter.¹⁷⁷ Leaving the question of the exact day aside, it is nearly certain that *Keikokushū* was completed sometime in the fifth month, 827. Whatever the case, *Keikokushū* remains the only poetry anthology mentioned in *Nihon kōki*. Curiously, the editors of our modern edition of *Nihon kōki*, while not explicitly referring to this curious phenomenon, seem to reflect an awareness of it when they refer to this anthology as the first imperially commissioned anthology of Sinitic poetry produced in the Heian court.¹⁷⁸ As far as these editors are concerned, so I presume, the fact that neither *Ryōunshū* nor *Bunka shūreishū* are mentioned in *Nihon kōki* means that they were never actually imperially commissioned. Likewise, Kinpara, in his entry for *Ryōunshū*, does not mention the fact—if fact it be—that this anthology was imperially commissioned.¹⁷⁹ In the face of such a long-held consensus, it is hard to imagine that Kinpara simply forgot to mention this (supposed) fact. Perhaps he, too, had doubts about the authenticity of the anthology's alleged imperial origin. Though this may seem to some an insignificant point, it is, for those interested in the history of Sinitic literature in the Heian period a point of serious consequence. I find it quite remarkable that this odd lacuna

¹⁷⁷ *Nihon kōki*, Tenchō 4 (827).5.20, 947.

¹⁷⁸ *Nihon kōki*, headnote on p. 946.

¹⁷⁹ Kinpara, “*Ryōunshū*,” 1994.

has not been given any attention in scholarly writings.

That the first two anthologies do not appear in *Nihon kōki*, while the third does, is an anomaly deserving some closer scrutiny. It cannot be argued that poetry anthologies were seen as unfit subject-matter for imperial histories. The entry regarding *Keikokushū* appears proudly, listing not only the names of the compilers, but the number of fascicles. Besides, if the prefaces to *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū* are to be taken as authentic, the role of writing—of poetry, in particular—as a central pillar of statecraft would certainly have ensured that any project relating to the compilation and preservation of poetry be included in an imperial history. Perhaps it will be argued that, considering the fragmentary nature of *Nihon kōki*, the entries pertaining to these two anthologies have been lost. This will not do either. The lost bits have been carefully recovered from other sources, all of which appear in our modern edition of *Nihon kōki*. Then, another might protest, perhaps the compilers simply forgot to mention this bit of history. Nonsense. At least two of the compilers of *Nihon kōki*, namely, Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu and Yoshimine no Yasuyo, have numerous poems preserved in all three anthologies. Granted, both of these men died before the *Nihon kōki* was finally completed in 840, and the only man to see the project right through to the end, Fujiwara no Otsugu, has no poems in any of the anthologies. Well, my skeptic

interlocutor might say, there you have it: Otsugu erased the bits about the first two anthologies. Why, I reply, and leave the bit about the third? Remember, Saga died in 842, two years after the history was completed. Surely he would have objected to a deliberate erasure of two imperially commissioned anthologies, purportedly the pride of his reign! None of these arguments will do.

Why is it that the preface to *Keikokushū* alone contains exact dates, whereas the prefaces to the two earlier anthologies tell us nothing? This might be an unfair question. Neither the preface to *Shinsen shōjiroku* (815) nor that to *Dairishiki* (821) give us exact dates. Neither, in fact, even give us a year. Fortunately, each of the three fascicles contained in *Dairishiki* contain colophons containing a precise date of completion: the thirtieth day of the first month in the twelfth year of Kō'nin (821). Oddly, however, no mention of *Dairishiki* is to be found anywhere in *Nihon kōki*. So, now we must ask why not two but three works—*Ryōunshū*, *Bunka shūreishū*, and *Dairishiki* (Imperial Ceremonial, a manual of court ritual commissioned by Saga)—remain unmentioned in the imperial history. In a history that records imperial orders pertaining to courtly protocol, from the way courtiers ought to bow to the manner in which they ought to dress, it is hard to see how a work as important as *Dairishiki*, a compendium of courtly protocol old and new, could have been

left out. As mentioned above, omission, whether accidental or deliberate, should be ruled out from the onset.

Two possible explanations remain. Either these three “missing” works are forgeries of a later generation, say, the eleventh century, or, despite what their prefaces universally profess, these were not imperially commissioned, and hence could not, or perhaps simply needed not, be recorded in the imperial history. A variation on the second tentative explanation might explore the possibility of whether or not there existed varying degrees of imperial commission, such that these three works, while indeed having their impetus in direct orders from Saga, were not commissioned with quite the same degree of authority or prestige as *Keikokushū* and *Shinsen shōjiroku*. The term imperially commissioned is a translation of *chokusen* 勅撰, a word which does not appear in *Nihon kōki*. Rather, this terminology seems to be a modern invention. Modern Japanese scholarship almost universally refers to the three Saga anthologies as *chokusenshū* 勅撰集, imperially commissioned anthologies, and English scholars, including me, are naturally led to look at these three as belonging to a more-or-less homogeneous group. All *chokusenshū* are assumed to be the result of a single type of imperial edict (*choku* 勅), one which admits of no lesser or greater degrees.

A comparison of the prefaces appended to *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū*, on the one hand, and *Keikokushū* on the other, show a few linguistic hints of what might amount to responses to two slightly different types of imperial decree. To mention just one example: the prefaces of the former two anthologies begin with the set phrase “Your Majesty’s minister (so-and-so) wishes to make the following statement” (臣○○言, where the two empty circles—corresponding to the “so-and-so” part—are filled in by the name of a minister). *Keikokushū*, on the other hand, begins with the words “Your Majesty’s minister has heard” (臣聞), where the name of the minister is not revealed. The preface appended to *Dairishiki* is unique in that it contains nothing resembling any of the set phrases found in the above anthologies. There is no formal introduction of the minister in charge of compiling the work; the preface ends as abruptly as it begins. On the other hand, *Shinsen shōjiroku* contains a preface that begins similar to that of *Keikokushū*, having the phrase “Thus have I heard” (蓋聞) in place of “Your Majesty’s minister has heard.” Granted, this is a rather superficial observation, but the fact that only those works whose preface begins with the formal address “Thus have I heard” or “Your Majesty’s minister has heard” (臣聞 or 蓋聞) are mentioned in the imperial history. The others, all of which contain prefaces beginning with “Your Majesty’s minister (so-and-so) wishes to make the following

statement” (臣〇〇言), are nowhere to be found. Not having looked into the matter too meticulously, I would rather leave considerations of this sort for a later opportunity. If, however, I were permitted a tentative guess, I might venture this: When it came to commissioning anthologies and other court-related works, there were at least two degrees of imperial order, one slightly more formal than the other. The more formal decree gave rise to *Keikokushū* and *Shinen shōjiroku*, and hence to their appearance in *Nihon kōki*, while the slightly less formal decree gave rise to *Ryōunshū*, *Bunka shūreishū*, and *Dairishiki*. If that is the case, then we are both right and wrong in referring to the three Saga anthologies collectively as *chokusenshū*, imperially commissioned anthologies: right insofar as they all seem to have been motivated directly by Saga; wrong, however, in assuming that the same degree of imperial authority was enshrined in all three.

There was once compiled a certain anthology of Sinitic poetry by Japanese authors entitled *Nikkanshū* 日觀集 (A Look at the Poetry of Our Land, 944-953). This work, now lost (save its preface), was compiled by Ōe no Koretoki 大江維時 (888-963) at the command of the crown prince who would later become Emperor Murakami 村上 (926-967, r. 946-967). Koretoki, meditating on the origin of Sinitic poetry in Japan, writes:

It was long ago, during the Kō'nin and Tenchō years [810-833, being the reign and retirement years of Saga] that Sinitic writing flourished in Japan. During this time both *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū* were compiled. For one hundred years or so thereafter, however, nothing of consequence was produced.¹⁸⁰

Here, at least, we have a relatively old document that mentions the titles of Saga's first two anthologies. We can safely say, therefore, that Saga's anthologies were still in circulation throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. Note that Koretoki does not mention *Keikokushū*. This is in exact opposition to what we have just seen above. It should be noted, too, that Koretoki does not refer to Saga's first two anthologies as imperially commissioned anthologies; he merely mentions their titles. To completely ignore *Keikokushū*, as though it never existed, to go so far as to claim that "nothing of significance" was produced after Saga's first two anthologies is a bold statement demanding serious consideration. Whatever the case, it is obvious that Koretoki saw Saga's third anthology as being somehow different from the first two. Wherein precisely this difference lay remains a mystery. Even so, the preface of *Nikkanshū* seems to suggest, however ambiguously, that my argument regarding

¹⁸⁰ Quoted from Kumagai, "Sagachō no joryū sakka tachi," 71.

the supposed existence during the early Heian period of varying levels of *choku* commands might be worth further investigation.

CONCLUSION

Saga's three anthologies, while customarily referred to collectively as the three imperially commissioned anthologies (*chokusen sanshū*), were by no means uniform, neither in terms of their perceived importance or prestige nor in regards to their poetic content. In relation to their perceived importance, only the third anthology, *Keikokushū*, receives mention in *Nihon kōki*, the official history commissioned by Saga himself. Koretoki, writing around the middle of the tenth century, on the other hand, mentions only the first two anthologies, namely, *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū*. Court scholars active throughout the ninth and tenth centuries did not see Saga's three anthologies as forming a uniform group of equally prestigious literary artefacts; there seems to have existed a spectrum of varying importance within the world of imperially commissioned works. In relation to poetic content, as has been demonstrated above, these three anthologies exhibit some striking differences from one another. Most striking are those differences in poetic

personae adopted by Saga in each anthology. Let us imagine a spectrum of imperial poetic personae, one extreme of which is marked by a sovereign who is conservative, formal, lofty, and aloof, and the other extreme of which is characterized by a sovereign who is intimate, personal, approachable, and engaging. Let us, furthermore, tentatively refer to the first extreme as the majestic or divine persona, and the second as the intimate or human persona. In such a scheme, the poetic personae adopted by Saga in *Ryōunshū* are predominantly majestic, while those in *Bunka shūreishū* are, for the most part, intimate. *Keikokushū*, the third anthology, stands somewhere in the middle, containing as it does a blend of both majestic and intimate personae.

As already mentioned, I suspect this oscillation between majestic and intimate personae on Saga's part is connected to his status at court when each of the anthologies were compiled. *Ryōunshū* was compiled in 814, some four years after Saga had assumed absolute power over the Heian court by defeating Heizei's rebellious army during the Kusuko Disturbance (810). Saga, understandably eager to legitimize his role as sovereign, speaks here in a decidedly majestic tone redolent of those continental sovereigns after whom he sought to model his own court. *Bunka shūreishū* was completed in 818, by which time Saga had managed to establish himself as firmly upon the throne. In this second

anthology, Saga presents himself in a more intimate light, actively engaging with his vassals, praising the merits of an otiose life, and meditating on the nature of life and death from a religious perspective. *Keikokushū* was completed in 827, some four years after Saga had retired from the throne (823). Though officially retired, Saga continued to hold the reins of power, albeit in a different form. That is to say, so long as he ruled from behind the scenes, he inevitably found himself surrounded by a somewhat different body of men and women. Released from much of the restrictions imposed upon reigning sovereigns, Saga enjoyed a greater degree of mobility; his network of relationships would have changed significantly. This change presented a new challenge to the ever domineering Saga: while he was free to engage more intimately with a wider, more varied audience, it now became more necessary than ever, if he wished to maintain a firm grip on court politics, to reassert his position as central patriarch. In other words, Saga would have to find a balance between the intimate and the majestic. It is for this reason that we hear, in *Keikokushū*, a mixture of different voices coming from Saga's verses, some tending more towards the majestic, others towards the intimate.

Finally, it seems likely that the difference in poetic personae adopted by Saga throughout his three anthologies was, in turn, closely related to the aforementioned

perceived prestige of each anthology. The exact nature of this relationship, however, remains elusive. One could, perhaps, explain away the absence of the more intimate *Bunka shūreishū* from Saga's *Nihon kōki* on the grounds that this anthology was perceived by contemporaries as belonging to a relatively private sphere of activity, and hence not suitable material for an official history. How, on these grounds, could one explain the absence of the predominantly majestic *Ryōunshū*, which surely deserves mention in an official history? Further investigation is required if any meaningful correlation between these two factors—perceived prestige, on the one hand, and poetic personae, on the other—is to be established.

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CHAPTER THREE**Reordering the Courtly Calendar, Reimagining Literary Spaces:****Saga's Ideal of Sovereignty—How, When, and Where****INTRODUCTION**

That rulers should see writing as a fitting means of spreading various ideologies about kingship and loyalty is nothing new. For better or for worse, writing has and still does facilitate this objective. Saga was no exception. His use of the written word, especially the Sinitic word, as a vehicle for projecting an idealized image of himself as absolute monarch, benign and virtuous, was both outspoken and, from most accounts, quite effective, at least within his own court. This section begins with a reconsideration of Saga's most enduring motto, *monjō keikoku*, "governance through writing," the precise significance of which can only be properly appreciated in the context of literary borrowing or adaptation from continental sources. Following this is an overview of the various banquets Saga hosted, for it was at these public banquets that poetry was presented and initially consumed, and it was

through the pageantry of these events that Saga repeatedly sought to reinforce his claims to sovereignty. Finally, this section ends by looking at ways in which Saga and his vassals used poetry as a means of reimagining certain key spaces, be they distant regions of military activity or more local venues for banquets. What they succeeded in thus creating were literary spaces, which, once properly enshrined within the poetic imagination through repeated iteration, became capable of serving in themselves as powerful symbolic loci, wherein Saga could more effectively promulgate his particular ideology of kingship.

MONJŌ KEIKOKU: GOVERNANCE THROUGH (SINITIC) WRITING

Between Emperors: The Competitive Etiquette of Epistolary Writing

Saga was involved from beginning to end in a grand project of what Brendan Morley aptly refers to as literary legacy building.¹⁸¹ Saga took writing seriously. For him, every word counted. While on the throne, a total of seven official delegations were sent from Parhae to his court. Of these seven, two were rejected on grounds of impropriety. Propriety

¹⁸¹ Brendan Morley, "Poetry and Diplomacy in Early Heian Japan," 343.

(礼 J: *rei*; Ch: *li*) in this context, more often than not, took the form of epistolary etiquette. Considering, as Saga himself states in a letter to the king of Parhae, that “there is no way for us sovereigns to meet each other,” what with the sea separating their two kingdoms, it was therefore of utmost importance to “cultivate positive impressions” through the medium of letter writing. In the episode to which the letter just quoted refers, the king of Parhae had opened an official missive to Saga with the relatively informal salutary character *jō* (Ch: *zhuang*) 状, as opposed to the more formal, and certainly more conventional *kei* (Ch: *qi*) 啓. These two expressions, if rendered into English, might look, respectively, something like this: “To Your Majesty” as opposed to the more honorific “To Your Most Imperial Majesty.” In effect, the king of Parhae had, so far as Saga and his men were concerned, deliberately gone against continental precedent. This sort of impropriety, however insignificant it might appear to modern eyes, Saga took as a deliberate affront, one he could not let pass unnoticed:

Our relationship with Parhae is a long and amicable one, and there are established conventions regarding the exchange of documents. To suddenly take it upon oneself to contravene these would be an act of naked self-aggrandizement [...] If decorum

is forsaken, is there any longer a need to value our diplomatic intercourse.

彼國修聘、由來久矣。書疏往來、皆有故實。專輒違乖、斯則長傲。[……]失
之者亡、典籍垂規。苟禮義之或虧、何須貴於來往。

This was not the only instance in which violations of epistolary etiquette on the part of Parhae caused a hubbub in the Heian court. Nor should we think of these occasional slips as being accidental. Quite the contrary. Both courts, that of Parhae and that of Saga, were perpetually engaged in “a mild sort of documentary brinksmanship,” with each side trying to work as closely within the conventions of epistolary etiquette, while at the same time trying to push those boundaries as much as possible. If Parhae could get away with addressing Saga in anything less than the most conventional salutary terms, it would try to do so, simply because succeeding in such an effort would mean that Saga had effectively yielded to Parhae’s gesture. The same goes, of course, for Saga’s letters to Parhae. Each vied desperately with the other to attain as much political prestige as possible by very

subtly demonstrating a degree of superiority over the other party. Every word counted.¹⁸²

It must be noted, moreover, that whereas Saga engaged his vassals in poetic exchanges, sometimes composing poems to which they were to reply, sometimes responding in turn to poems they had written, in no case did Saga ever initiate poetic exchanges with foreign delegates. That Saga was perfectly capable of engaging in such exchanges is obvious from the many superb examples preserved in his three anthologies. His reluctance to engage his Parhae delegates in poetic exchanges is therefore significant. Saga hoped, by this show of deference, to present his own courtiers as superior to those arriving from abroad. Whereas Saga's men were permitted to engage their sovereign directly with verse, the Parhae officials were not granted that privilege. Saga's decision to remain somewhat aloof from his foreign guests was just another way of asserting the superiority of his court over that of his visitors.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Morley, "Poetry and Diplomacy in Early Heian Japan," 351-353; a full translation of Saga's letter to the king of Parhae can be found on p. 352; the original is preserved in *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 6 (815).1.22, 693-697. For a summary of Sinitic epistolary etiquette, which includes valuable references to continental exemplars from such early sources as the *Book of Rites*, see Markus Rüttermann, "'So That We Can Study Letter-Writing: The Concept of Epistolary Etiquette in Premodern Japan,'" especially 57-68.

¹⁸³ Morley, "Poetry and Diplomacy in Early Heian Japan," 358-359.

Governing through What Kind of Letters Exactly?

The whole of Saga's literary legacy has repeatedly been encapsulated in a motto, the most commonly abbreviated form of which is *monjō keikoku* 文章経国, governance through writing.¹⁸⁴ Though this was not an entirely original concept, the fact that Saga elevated poetry, among all the other possible genres of Sinitic writing then available to him, to such a high position is certainly unique. After all, if one is looking for a more practical link between writing and statecraft, surely it is to be found in the Sinitic genre known as *taisaku* 対策, essays composed in response to state examination questions. As has already been stated, the last two fascicles of *Keikokushū* are dedicated to this genre. These essays, at least, profess to deal with issues pertaining directly to everyday governance: military organization, the origin of natural disasters and how best to deal with such calamities, how best to adopt certain inventions, such as the water clock, to regulate the official working day, how to use calendars and interpret astronomical events thought to bear on the life of the ruler and his subjects, and so on. Poetry, in general, does not address any of these

¹⁸⁴ Gotō, "Saga tennō to kō'ninki shidan," 16; Heldt renders the motto as "pattered writing binds the realm;" see his *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 45.

issues. I agree with Ikeda Genta when he characterizes Saga's exaggerated elevation of poetry as something really quite peculiar, at least to a modern thinker. As Ikeda himself points out, intellectuals writing near the beginning of the fourteenth century held very different views from those of Saga and his men on the role of poetry in statecraft. To state just one example: Yoshida Kenkō 吉田兼好 (c.1283-sometime after 1352), in his famous collection of essays *Tsurezure gusa* 徒然草 (Essays in Idleness, c. 1331), says quite explicitly that "a sovereign proficient in many of the arts ought to be ashamed of himself." Though, continues Kenkō, many praise the sovereign who is skilled at both poetry and music, "any attempt in our present age to govern the realm through such means is a sign rather of ignorance than of wisdom." This should not, however, be seen as proof that what Saga was doing was in any way inherently peculiar, but rather that modern thinkers, influenced no doubt by Kenkō and his ilk, tend to find it peculiar. The problem is on our end, not on Saga's.¹⁸⁵

The phrase *monjō keikoku*, "writing [as a means of] governing the state," is an abbreviation of a slightly longer statement, *wenzhang jingguo zhi daye* 文章經国之大業,

¹⁸⁵ Ikeda, "Heian jidai ni okeru 'monjō' no keikokuteki seikaku no henshoku," 315-317; the quote from *Tsurezure gusa* (section no. 122) is to be found on p. 315.

“writing is *the* grand enterprise in governing a state,” the *locus classicus* of which is to be found in a second-century essay entitled *Lunwen* 論文, “Discourse on Literature”. This essay, written by the literary aficionado Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226), better known to some as Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 220-226) of the Wei Dynasty (220-265), is part of a larger, now only partially extant, work entitled *Dianlun* 典論, “Standards of Writing.” Saga and his men would have first come into contact with Cao Pi’s essay through their close studies of *Wenxuan*. Both “Discourse on Writing” as well as two letters, written by Cao Pi to a friend of his, containing comments about literature are contained in fascicle 52 of this once hugely popular anthology.¹⁸⁶ Webb asserts, as do all scholars, Japanese and otherwise alike, that the abbreviated phrase *monjō kekikoku* was used at Saga’s court as an official slogan, a “frequently invoked reminder of the close interdependence of successful political rule (*keikoku* 經国) and written composition (*monjō* 文章), as articulated by the venerable Wei sovereign.” As has been said, for Saga it was poetry that occupied the highest place of honor within the hierarchy of then current written genres.¹⁸⁷ It should be noted here that Cao Pi’s “Discourse on Literature” was the earliest essay within the history of Chinese

¹⁸⁶ Webb, 192, footnote no. 93.

¹⁸⁷ Webb, 159-160.

literature to deal exclusively with the subject of literature—rather, writing.¹⁸⁸ As both Stephen Owen and Jason Webb point out, this essay dealt not simply with purely formal matters, such as, say, meter and genre, but with such broad issues as the supposed relationship between the personality of a given writer and his particular writing style, or the role of writing as a means of securing some sort of cultural legacy: writing outlives its author. It is, in fact, in relation to this last point that Cao Pi delivers his memorable encomium to the art of writing. Allow me to offer two slightly diverging translations, the first by Owen, the second by Webb, in order that I might better emphasize what is really at stake here. First, Owen's translation:

Literary works are the greatest accomplishment in the working of a state, a splendor that never decays. Glory and pleasure go no further than this mortal body. To extend both of these [glory and pleasure] to all time, nothing can compare with the unending permanence of a work of literature.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 335.

¹⁸⁹ Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 361.

Now, compare this closely with the following translation supplied by Webb:

Writing is the grand enterprise in ordering the state, an imperishable glory. There comes a time when life expires. Honor and pleasure cease with this body. For these two things to attain perpetuity, nothing is better than the permanence of writing.¹⁹⁰

The crux of the matter is this: How ought we to translate, that is, how are we to understand the term *wenzhang/monjō* 文章? Where Owen renders the term as literature, Webb uses the word writing. Webb, when discussing the closely-related term *shibun* 斯文 (Ch: *siwen*), refers us, as a possible translation of this, to the title of Peter Bol's book "*This Culture of Ours*."¹⁹¹ This is, to my mind, an apropos observation. The art of writing, both in the time of Cao Pi and, more than half a millennium later, in the days of Saga, was inextricably bound up with ideas—we might even call them religious beliefs—about cosmology, politics, morals, and history. Writing was not, as yet, "an autonomous art, entirely separate from social and political life."¹⁹² The pervasiveness of cosmological imagery found in

¹⁹⁰ Webb, 196.

¹⁹¹ Webb, 189, footnote no. 92. The quotation marks appearing around the title of Bol's book are not a misprint; the original title itself appears in quotations.

¹⁹² Owen, *ibid*, 335.

Sinitic writing can only be properly understood when we realize that such tropes inevitably served to conjure up potent political resonances.¹⁹³ When Cao Pi—and Saga, for that matter—use the term *wenzhang/monjō*, it is not at all likely that they had in mind the sort of thing we modern speakers imagine when we use the word literature, that is, belletristic writing. Rather, these men conceived of something much more encompassing, say, the art of writing, though with the additional connotation of other performative genres, such as music, dance, and various strictly prescribed rituals. In hopes of preserving the same nuances, then, we might opt to render Cao Pi’s phrase as simply the arts. The arts, however, like the term culture, seems too broad a word here. Cao Pi, and after him Saga, certainly saw writing—both the practice as well as the written artifact—as the central kernel of this

¹⁹³ Denecke, *Classic World Literatures*, 51 and 87. A refreshingly clear, and incidentally quite brief, account of the significance of *monjō keikoku* during Saga’s reign may be found in Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 44-48 and 56-57. Heldt’s point is simple: it was not so much the content of the poems that Saga and his men presented that made the practice of Sinitic writing politically powerful—though content is certainly important—but, more broadly, the very practice of having the sovereign engage with his vassals at regular annual banquets that made writing a vehicle for harmonizing court relations. Saga was using the practice of group composition and public presentation to “bind together a broken community” (45)—broken, that is, by the disruptive Kusuko Disturbance of 810. Steininger locates the political function of literary production and public presentation in a need to naturalize an essentially arbitrary network of power relations. “It is,” says Steininger, “the praxis of literature broadly conceived [...] that naturalizes the arbitrary”—an arbitrary power relationship between sovereign and vassal which is “textually represented in documents that praise hosts, mourn rulers, and beg for the recognition of one’s talents” (Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 77). This, too, was surely a part of Saga’s ideology of literary production. Also, for more discussion of the term *monjō*, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 80-82.

concept. Not literature or culture, or even the arts, but *writing*, after all, seems here the most historically accurate rendering. Despite the encompassing nature of the term *wenzhang/monjō*, it was Saga, above all others, who consciously and through his own literary efforts equated the art of writing almost exclusively with poetry.

A Comparative Look at Emperor Taizong

Now, before delving any deeper into the role of writing in Saga's pursuit of power, it will be beneficial, for the sake of comparison, to step back and take a quick look at a towering continental figure, one whose influence upon Saga was of utmost importance. I am referring here to none other than Emperor Taizong 太宗 (598-649, r. 626-649). Very generally speaking, the focus of literary production during the majority of the Tang period tended to move away from the central court and into the hands of lettered individuals working outside of the aristocracy.¹⁹⁴ Insofar as the reign of Emperor Taizong is concerned, however, literary production seems firmly centered within the court, just as it was with Saga. Parallels between these two courts are quite striking indeed. The Tang

¹⁹⁴ Kawai, "Tōdai no kyūtei bungaku," 208.

dynasty, like all other newly founded dynasties before it, launched in upon its lengthy career by means of military success. Its forerunner, the Sui dynasty, which had since outrun its nascent vigor, was overturned in 618 by members of the Li 李 clan, a prosperous aristocratic lineage of military stock with close ties to the Sui sovereign. Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (566-635, r. 618-626), founder of the Tang dynasty, who had previously been known by his less regal name Li Yuan 李淵, had served as a general and local governor under the last Sui sovereign, against whom he rebelled in 617. Yuan was assisted in his efforts by both his daughter and one of his sons, namely, Li Shimin 李世民 (598-649), who was consequently enfeoffed by his father as Duke of Qin (modern-day Shaanxi and Gansu). Less than a decade later, after numerous military victories against local warlords, Shimin, ambitious to ascend the imperial throne, slaughtered his elder brother Jiancheng 建成 (589-626), heir apparent to Gaozu, along with his younger brother, Yuanjie 元吉 (603-626), then the acting prince of Qi, and who had evidently expressed some jealousy in regards to Shimin's rising fame. This grisly episode of fratricide is known as the Xuanwu Gate Incident (Xuanwumen zhi bian 玄武門之變). To be fair, it would appear, from various historical sources, that Jiancheng and Yuanjie initially planned to assassinate

Shimin, and that Shimin was acting in self-defense.¹⁹⁵ Whatever the case, with his two brothers out of the way, Shimin then forcefully deposed his father in the year 626, thereafter reigning as Emperor Taizong 太宗 until his death twenty-three years later in 649.

No sooner did Li Shimin assume the august title of Emperor Taizong than he took for his queen a young sister of Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (?-659), a man who had proved himself a loyal advisor when Shimin had been Duke of Qin. Wuji's sister was given the formal title Empress Wende 文德皇后 (601-636), though she would only enjoy this moniker for ten years. A new reign required a new era name. In 627, Taizong inaugurated the Zhenguan 貞觀 era, literally, the age of manifest constancy, an era name that remained unchanged until his death in 649. Whether true or not, Taizong's reign has gone down in history as being one of the most peaceful and prosperous periods of premodern Chinese rule. It was for this reason that, some fifteen years after Saga's death, the reign of Emperor Seiwa (850-880, r. 858-876) was crowned with the same era name, only pronounced differently: Jōgan (859-877). Taizong, either despite or in virtue of his martial background, was a man of reason. He recognized soon after ascending the throne that, in order to rule

¹⁹⁵ Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, 21-26.

effectively, he would have to institute a number of agricultural and economic reforms, some of which would entail sacrifices on his part. Tax and corvée requirements were dramatically reduced; standardized plots of imperially sanctioned fields were dealt out to farmers; criminal punishments saw a reduction in severity. Taizong formed a standing imperial army, with which he was able to better govern his kingdom, thereby suppressing local uprisings and ensuring general economic stability. Having thus become master of the two most primary factors of feudal rule—land and troops—Taizong set about subjugating the various surrounding tribes. In 630, he conquered the Göktürks, also known as the Blue Turks (Ch: Tujue 突厥). Instead of slaughtering or enslaving them, he decided to take the advice of his closest advisors and establish a number of prefectures to serve as outlying organs of government. The Blue Turks were left under the nominal leadership of their native chieftains, while Taizong kept a close eye on their comings and goings. This victory, along with the magnanimous manner in which the victor dealt with the defeated Turks, won Taizong a high reputation among the northern tribes, among whom modern-day Uygur are descendants, who hereafter referred to him as Tengeri Qaghan (Ch: Tian hehan 天可汗), the celestial or god-like sovereign. A decade later, in 640, Taizong turned his military efforts westward, subjugating the Turkish peoples based around the Tarim Basin (in

modern-day Xinjiang), and thereby opening up the border of his domain to trade with peoples farther westward. It was this victory that enabled him to reopen a vital route along the Silk Road. Just one year later, in 641, Taizong, eager to further encourage trade relations between the various ethnically different tribes embraced within his ever expanding kingdom, married off one of his daughters, a Princess Wencheng 文成 (628-680), to Songtsän Gampo (born sometime between 557 and 617, died 649, r. c.629-649), thirty-third king of Tibet. Taizong's intercultural negotiations proved extremely successful. His kingdom thrived. His rear palace—seraglio—likewise prospered: Taizong fathered a total of thirty-five children, fourteen sons and twenty-one daughters.

Saga had a genealogical history of more than one-thousand well-established clans definitively recorded for posterity in his *Shinsen shōjiroku* 新撰姓氏錄 (Newly Compiled Genealogy of Prominent Lineages, which was completed in 815. This document, employed primarily for taxation purposes, served furthermore to institute more clearly-defined hierarchical relationships between clans. It is likely that Saga had taken a cue from Taizong, who, in 638, issued a similar kind of survey entitled *Shizuzhi* 氏族志 (Register of Clans and Tribes). This document served to promote those newer clans who had agreed to cooperate with Taizong and the court, while deliberately placing the older, less obedient

clans on a lower level in the social hierarchy.

The years immediately following Taizong's enthronement were, to say the least, tumultuous years; the Tang dynasty was conceived with considerable birth pangs. Once successfully birthed, however, the Tang dynasty proved a most robust and ambitious progeny. Though eager to assert independence, a complete break with its forerunner, the Sui dynasty, would have spelled disaster for the Tang sovereigns. Military prowess won for Emperor Gaozu, and after him, Emperor Taizong, a kingdom full of resources and people. Authorial legitimacy, however, had to be established on subtler ground. Manipulation or fabrication of history has always fulfilled this end most readily. Emperor Gaozu commissioned the production of an authoritative imperial history, which would justify his overthrow of the Sui and, consequently, his own right to rule. It was for this very reason that the founders of the Tang dynasty, as occupied as they were with military endeavors, wasted no time in promoting literary production within their court. History had to be rewritten; classical works—mainly Confucian texts—had to be consulted and reworked so as to fit neatly into this new framework. Consequently, we see both Gaozu and Taizong promoting above all these two branches of learning; history (*shixue* 史学) and classical studies (*jingxue* 经学) were rightly understood, at least by those in power, as effective

tools for the manipulation of history and the legitimization of imperial authority.¹⁹⁶

Emperor Taizong established the so-called inner court of the secretariat (*mishu neisheng* 秘書內省) in 629, charging this organ with the duty of compiling an authoritative history of five previous dynasties, namely, the Northern Zhou, Sui, Liang, Chen, and Northern Qi dynasties. This project was completed and presented to Taizong in 636. A decade later, in 646, Taizong commissioned a second project, this time ordering his handpicked team of historians to produce a revised edition of the history of the Jin dynasty (*Jinshu* 晉書), drawing upon the work of numerous earlier historians. Taizong himself added moral appraisals (*lun* 論) to two biographies appearing in this work, namely, those of the noted writer Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and the master calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361).

By the time Taizong came to power, the field of classical studies (*jingxue* 經學)—mainly commentaries and ruminations on the Confucian canon—had come to embrace two previously distinct exegetical schools, the southern and the northern. The southern school of exegesis (*nanxue* 南學) was highly esoteric and characteristically abstract, having inherited the teachings of Daoist thinkers throughout the ages. The northern school of

¹⁹⁶ Kawai, “Tōdai no kyūtei bungaku,” 210-211.

exegesis (*beixue* 北学), on the other hand, was thoroughly philological, dedicated as it was to the historical explication of individual words by means of close textual analysis and comparison. The southern school was led by such scholars as Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) and Kong Anguo 孔安國 (c.156-c.74 BC), while the northern school was championed mainly by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200). It was in 630 that Emperor Taizong commissioned the reputed philologist Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581-645) to produce an authoritative version of the five Confucian classics, the many variant textual transmissions of which had managed to throw the authenticity of these otherwise infallible works into some doubt. Yan did as he was ordered, and his now authoritative editions were promptly circulated throughout the empire. Some years later, in 637, Gaozong commissioned a similar project, this time ordering a team of scholars (Yan Shigu among them) headed by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) to produce a further revised edition of the five classics. This edition, known collectively as *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義 (Authoritative commentary on the five classics), was completed at last in 653, during the reign of Emperor Gaozong. This last edition became the standard text for all students studying the classics within the State University. Alongside his promotion of historical and exegetical literary production, Taizong further commissioned a number of encyclopedic works (*leishu* 類書). The

classicist scholar and calligrapher Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641) was ordered to compile an encyclopedic collection of famous or otherwise noteworthy passages relating to a wide variety of subjects, including cosmology, imperial decrees, music, court ritual, literature, food, clothing, animals, plants, medicine, and magic. This work, known as *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Encyclopedia of the Arts) was completed and humbly presented to Taizong in 624. Taizong had commissioned Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638) to compile an encyclopedia, as well. This work, known as *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (Excerpts from the Northern Hall) was completed in 610. Both encyclopedias have come down to us more-or-less complete, though Yu's work is missing some thirteen of its original 174 fascicles. Aside from these, there were a number of other encyclopedic collections, now lost, commissioned by Taizong, some of which seem to have been of huge proportions, numbering more than a thousand fascicles. Taizong, a man who had raised his father to the throne by means of remarkable military prowess and cunning, once himself enthroned, occupied himself with the promotion of court-centered literary production, be it in the form of histories, exegeses of canonical texts, or enormous encyclopedias; no sooner had he laid down his sword than he drew up his pen—rather, his brush.

Taizong took a sincere interest in classical studies even before ascending the throne.

His father Gaozu, had, in 621, established within his court an academy dedicated to the instruction of members of the royal family. This was known as the Wenxueguan 文学館 or Xiuwenguan 修文館, the Hall of Literary Studies. While still a prince, Taizong used this venue as a meeting place for his own private salon of scholars. (Later, in 626, after Taizong had become sovereign, the name of this academy was changed to Hongwenguan 弘文館, Grand Hall of Literary Studies.) Here the eager prince gathered about him a coterie of scholars in order to engage in discussions on the Confucian classics. This salon, far from being dissolved, was greatly elevated upon Taizong's ascension to the throne. Many of the scholars with whom he had become familiar were now raised to positions of power within the court. Other rulers before Taizong had taken it upon themselves to summon lettered men to their courts. During the Warring States period (403 BC-AD 221), for example, King Zhao of Yan 燕昭王 (?- 279 BC, r. 312-279) gathered a body of scholars at Huangjintai 黄金台, or the Golden Pagoda. There are a number of other examples that might be cited here. We must not fail to note a crucial difference between these earlier salons and that fostered by Taizong. Whereas the scholars summoned to King Zhao's salon were not members of the court, nor did they ever rise to positions of influence within the court, those surrounding Taizong were firmly fixed within the court bureaucracy. Only with Taizong do

we begin to have a privileged group of imperially commissioned literati working in the capacity of official members of the sovereign's court. Only with Taizong do we see the marriage within a single system of political and literary power; men of letters are not merely summoned to the court, they work for it. Moreover, not only do these men work for the court, they perform duties now seen as being central to its proper function; literary production is raised from the position of a purely artistic pursuit to one of great political significance.¹⁹⁷ This is, of course, exactly what he find in the court of Saga.

Like Saga, Taizong was himself apparently quite skilled in composing poetry. While no longer extant, historical sources assure us that a collection of poems attributed to Taizong was in circulation during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685-762, r. 712-756). This collection was thirty fascicles in length. Fortunately, some of Taizong's poems are preserved in an anthology entitled *Hanlin xueshiji* 翰林学士集 (Literary Collection of the Hanlin Academicians), which contains some fifty-one poems classified into thirteen poetic themes or topics. All of the pieces in this anthology consist of poems exchanged between Taizong and his coterie.¹⁹⁸ This last point is significant, for it resembles the poetic

¹⁹⁷ Kawai, "Tōdai no kyūtei bungaku," 214-215.

¹⁹⁸ Kawai, "Tōdai no kyūtei bungaku," 215.

exchanges between Saga and his men. Incidentally, the title of *Hanlin xueshiji* is anachronistic: the Hanlin Academy did not come into existence until the time of Xuanzong. While this text is often seen as an anthology of poems by Taizong and his coterie, it would seem, rather, that this anthology might very well be the lost fascicle of a larger collection of poems written by Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 (592-672), especially considering that the number of poems by this poet (twelve) outnumbered those attributed to Taizong (nine). The next most covered poet, with six pieces, is Shangguan Yi 上官儀 (c.607-c.665), a courtier who, having been quickly promoted by Taizong, rose to become one of the central figures in the imperial academy (Hongwenguan).¹⁹⁹

Taizong, again like Saga, is known to have been intensely interested in the art of calligraphy. Three calligraphers, known collectively as the three great masters (*sandajia* 三大家), served under Taizong during his reign: Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596-658). Taizong, again like Saga, was himself an exceptionally skilled calligrapher, as may be seen, for example, in his *Wenquanming* 溫泉銘 (Inscription about a hot spring).

¹⁹⁹ Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, 238-239.

Literary Orthodoxy: Establishing the Parameters of Writing

Having seen in some degree what sort of ruler Taizong was, and how he used writing as a means of furthering imperial power, we may now return where we left off in our discussion of Saga and his own use of writing as a vehicle for asserting sovereign power. No wonder, therefore, that Saga, both during and after his time as sovereign, strove mightily to control poetic discourse at court. By example, he was able to regulate both which poetic themes were considered appropriate for public banquets, and how exactly certain carefully selected allusions to continental sources were to be employed on such occasions. In other words, Saga effectively dominated both the subject-matter as well as the major interpretive devices of Sinitic poetry.²⁰⁰ For Saga and his court, as well as those sovereigns, with their respective courts, who had come before him, presentation of poetry at public venues, such as banquets or excursions, was, to echo Webb's words, a ritual activity geared primarily at enacting ideology, the ultimate purpose of which was exultation of the sovereign.²⁰¹ That is to say, poetry, at least the sort composed for these occasions, was

²⁰⁰ Webb, 7.

²⁰¹ Webb, 13.

never seen as a spontaneous outpouring of sincere sentiments—nothing of the sort. Courtly poetry, by its very nature, was intended, more-or-less exclusively, to legitimize imperial authority, to make the sovereign appear as though he really were the sort of sovereign he made himself out to be. The ideology is simple: the sovereign is great. The enactment of this ideology, therefore, is likewise simple: make the sovereign look great. The self-aggrandizement inherent in Saga’s poetry has been amply demonstrated in my analysis of the opening poems preserved in *Ryōunshū*. This sort of exaltation of authority works along a vertical hierarchy at the apex of which sits the virtuous sovereign. To this must be added a horizontal element, namely, the complex nature of relationships and negotiations between fellow courtiers. Poetry attempts to enact a sort of ideology appropriate to this axis. Here, too, the ideology is simple: courtiers get along well with one another. Poetry, therefore, is quick to enact this with verses insisting that the courtiers get along well.²⁰² Sinitic poetry, while one element in a larger imperial project to legitimize the sovereign, is unique insofar as it facilitated the enactment of ideology—an expression of sovereignty—in ways which do not appear in other sources from the same period. Historical annals, edicts, official

²⁰² Two fine examples of this may be found in Saga’s “Watching the Ball Dance in Early Spring” and “The Swing,” full translations of which appear in the Appendix, item nos. 69 and 76 (*Keikokushū*, poem nos. 89 and 105, respectively).

prayers, and vernacular poetry all work towards this same enactment of imperial authority, and yet they do so in very different ways.²⁰³

Centralization of power, though practically dependent upon gaining a firm monopoly over taxation and military power, requires, if it is to be thoroughly effective, a further element, namely, control over the semantic parameters of public—i.e., court—discourse. Semantic parameters, metaphorically stated, act as boundary-marking fence-posts in an otherwise unmarked grassland of meaning; they artificially, and temporarily, define the shape of a given patch of poetic sod. Meaning, far from being somehow inherent in things, must be enforced from without. An sovereign needed to set up fence-posts, that is, dictate to his or her subjects exactly *what* it meant to be a vassal, and exactly *how* vassals were supposed to understand both the type of authority inherent in the person of the sovereign, as well as their proper relationship to that sovereign. Court poetry, as a means of manipulating and ceaselessly confirming these semantic parameters—as a means of establishing courtly and, in this case, literary norms and expectations—also served to confer membership. The sovereign, as putative umpire of court-centered discourse, decided who was worthy to enter

²⁰³ Webb, 82 and 127. For an example of the way in which Saga deliberately reimagines historical figures, omitting potentially controversial content, see his “Zhang Zifang,” in Appendix, item no. 29 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 42). While depicting Zhang as a loyal vassal, Saga omits the fact that it was this very man who brought about the downfall of Emperor Qin Shihuang.

his ranks. Just as a shepherd is able to move sheep from herd to herd, so, too, was the sovereign able to take a man from his previous group and place him in a new one. Such manipulation served, to borrow Webb's words, to "extricate an individual from his clan allegiances and integrate him into an affiliation of courtiers," an affiliation whose center was inevitably dominated by the sovereign.²⁰⁴

Webb sees Emperor Saga as having established and actively maintained, through his domination of literacy, and especially of poetry composition and content, a "literary orthodoxy," the three salient features of which he enumerates as follows. First, we continuously see Saga engaging actively with vassals. Previous sovereigns had hosted banquets in which poetry was presented, wherein these sovereigns served more-or-less as passive objects of praise. Emperors did not actively engage with their vassals in these compositions. That is to say, the sovereign always presented himself as a sovereign entity, ruling his vassals from on high. Saga, through his own poetry, presented a poetic persona who was willing, at least for the duration of the banquet, and within the imaginary poetic world conjured up expressly for the occasion, to engage his vassals as equals. There is a sort of playfulness in Saga's poetic exchanges with his vassals. Now pushing, now cajoling,

²⁰⁴ Webb, 97 and 100.

Saga deftly interweaves a stately tone of kingship with what comes across as a more intimate, friendly voice. Saga displays himself as at once sovereign and friend, something his predecessors did not venture to do. An example of this lighthearted interaction may be seen in a poetic exchange between Sugawara no Kiyokimi and Saga. Kiyokimi, having heard the sonorous tones of reed pipes, exclaims; “Hark! I hear the sound of a reed pipe, whose notes conjure up to the mind’s eye images of strange birds and fabulous phoenixes!” to which Saga replies in familiar language, thus: “No wonder, then, that you, a traveler on the road, were so utterly smitten by those melodies.”²⁰⁵ This ostensibly—rather, imagined—intimate exchange of poems between sovereign and vassal is known in Japanese scholarship as *kunshin shōwa* 君臣唱和, the sovereign sings while his vassals respond in harmony. It has been pointed out that Heizei was perhaps the first sovereign to actively engage with his vassals on a more intimate level.²⁰⁶ A poem by Heizei, as preserved in *Keikokushū* (poem no. 82), speaks about fallen plum blossoms. This is then followed by a response in kind from one of his vassals, who makes an appeal to imperial grace. Now, I would like to state very clearly that this example is not at all similar to the sort of

²⁰⁵ For full translations of both of these poems, see Appendix, item no. 15 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 17). Kiyokimi’s poem appears immediately after my translation of Saga’s poem.

²⁰⁶ Aoki & Harimoto, *Tennō bungyō sōran*, 144-145.

exchanges Saga made possible. Heizei's exchange is but one more example of what came before: the sovereign presents a poem, not as an equal, but as a sovereign power, while his vassals, forever humble, respond with glowing words of praise. There are certainly examples of this sort to be found amongst the exchanges between Saga and his coterie. However, far more numerous are those exchanges in which Saga speaks to his men as though he and they were all more-or-less equal—fellow poets cajoling one another and enjoying the pleasure of each other's company. This sort of poetic persona was not employed by any sovereign, either in China or Japan, before Saga. That is my point.

Second, Saga took Cao Pi's famous passage regarding the art of writing and the act of ordering a state, and gave to it a fresh significance more amenable to his own court. I repeat: Saga contracted the then prevalent extension of the art of writing to signify almost exclusively the art of poetry—Sinitic poetry. This second feature leads, in turn, to the third, namely, the practice of selective reading, or, to put it more technically, deliberately constricted textual reception. Saga and his men make use of a number of stock allusions. There is nothing unique about that. What is unique is the way in which Saga established authorized, that is, acceptable, interpretations of these allusions. Any given allusion can take on a number of possible meanings. Saga, somehow or another, seems to have made

decisions about exactly which meaning a given allusion ought to have, at least when appearing in poems presented at public banquets. He was telling his poets exactly how they ought to use this or that allusion—exactly what an allusion would stand for. Once Saga set the tone, his men were sure to follow. I expand here on what Webb refers to as Saga’s orthodoxy of reception.²⁰⁷ Indeed, the concept of reception is of ultimate importance when comparing continental exemplars with their later adoption and adaption in the Heian court. After all, as Denecke stated so succinctly, “we are not in fact comparing cultures, but reception processes.”²⁰⁸ Some illustrative examples of Saga’s deliberate manipulation of allusions and poetic images are to be found in his repeated use of such images as, first, the cock’s crow, which, for him, comes to represent both loyal service and a nostalgia for a bygone golden age, as well as, second, the shrill cries of wild monkeys, which, in his hands, come to symbolize a traveler far from the capital, and hence, a means of invoking the more truly civilized nature of his imperial capital. Take, for examples of these two poetic images, the following verses attributed to Saga:

²⁰⁷ While these three features of Saga’s literary program are summarized briefly in Webb, 161-163, I have expanded this treatment with my own observations and examples.

²⁰⁸ Denecke, *Classical World Literatures*, 13.

No beacon-fires are to be seen here at this old abandoned fort. Only the crowing of
the cocks, now prolonged and low, now short and shrill.

How many ages have passed since the death of Meng Changjun? What passerby now
imitates so deftly the cock's cry?²⁰⁹

烽火不傳罷關城 唯餘長短曉雞聲
孟嘗沒後年代久 誰客今鳴令人驚

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 117

In this season, today, when springtide is quickly passing as by, the atmosphere here
at the Saga Villa, tucked away in the cool mountains, is not half so quick to
adopt that warmth already found in the capital.

[...]

How serene and secluded is this place, far from the chaos of mundane affairs! All I

²⁰⁹ For explanatory footnotes to this poem, entitled “Listening to the Cocks Crow by the Old Fort,” see Appendix, item no. 47 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 117).

can hear is the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, and the mournful
crying of monkeys as evening falls.²¹⁰

氣序如今春欲老 嗟峨山院暖光遲

[…]

此地幽閑人事少 唯餘風動暮猿悲

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2

As may be seen from *Nihon kōki*, Saga was dedicated to both reforming and greatly elaborating upon court ritual. The annual calendar of court-related events (*nenchū gyōji* 年中行事) was expanded to include altogether new types of banquets, including the flower-viewing banquet (*kaen* 花宴). Saga issued several edicts prescribing in detail exactly how courtiers ought to address one another at court, including the sort of prostrations—there were many different variations of these—or hand gestures to be used in a given situation,

²¹⁰ For a full explanation and explanatory footnotes to this poem, entitled “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa,” see Appendix, item no. 24 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2).

depending on the respective ranks of each party involved.²¹¹ In the words of Webb, influenced by the work of Joan Piggott, Saga was dedicated to “marshaling together the entire panoply of cultic activities into the service of the *tennō* [that is, the sovereign],” a project that resulted in an “enormously prolific court-centered literary scene.”²¹² That is to say, Saga was actively engaged throughout his entire reign in a concerted effort to employ various elements of court ritual, including banquets, poetry composition, musical performances, regulations on clothing, prescribed greetings and signs of obeisance, among other things, as a means of, ultimately, aggrandizing the individual figure of the sovereign.

Most, if not all, of Saga’s poems presented expressly for the purpose of drawing responses from his vassals, while ostensibly about one homely thing or another—plum blossoms, old age, autumn evenings—prove, in the end, to be appeals for confirmation. The sovereign calls for responses not simply for the sake of enjoying poetic exchanges, but as a means of enforcing his authority by subtly demanding his men to respond in a way that has already been determined beforehand by Saga’s cleverly constructed system of literary orthodoxy. In offering a refreshingly creative rendering of one such poem presented by

²¹¹ *Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 9 (818).3.23 and 25, 753-755.

²¹² Webb, 163-164.

Saga, “An Aged Pine am I,” Webb has Saga saying to his men; “Assuage my doubts.”²¹³

This is precisely what Saga is doing with his poetic invitations: Saga repeatedly demands, albeit through a seemingly intimate persona, that his men should present the court with testimonies of loyalty, that they should assure their sovereign of their continued allegiance. Make no mistake: behind Saga’s friendly persona, as close as any shadow, looms a domineering sovereign.

Saga’s motto, *monjō keikoku*, brackets his reign. The phrase first appears—at least in the historical record—at the head of a royal edict issued on the twenty-first day of the fifth month in Kō’nin 3 (812), in which Saga, possibly vexed with the poor progress made by many scholars in the State University, decided to emend a previous edict (issued in 806), thereby limiting the number of scholars allowed to attend at any given time.²¹⁴ More than a decade later, on the twenty-eight day of the second month of Kō’nin 14 (823)—Saga’s last imperial banquet as sovereign—a proud Saga praised the poetic prowess of his then seventeen-year-old daughter, Princess Uchiko, lifelong virgin priestess (*saiin*) of Kamo

²¹³ Webb, 170. For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 48 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 120).

²¹⁴ Gotō, “Saga tennō to kō’ninki shidan,” 16; for a full translation and brief commentary of this edict, see Webb, 183-184; the original edict can be found in *Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 3 (812).5.21, 609-611.

Shrine, who had evidently presented her father (and host) with a Sinitic poem of superb quality. After bestowing upon her the Third Rank—a high rank indeed—Saga lauded her skill with a poem of his own:

How grateful we all are that you [my dear daughter] have thought fit to illuminate our realm with your literary works! Suffer not that your honorable legacy should vanish into naught [Surely these verses of yours will assure the preservation of your name throughout all eternity]

Preserve from hereon in, as you have thus far [in your capacity as consecrated priestess of Kamo Shrine], a spirit of the profoundest purity, that, all untrammelled and unperturbed, you may bestow upon future generations the splendid florescence of your [tender] age.

忝以文章著邦家 莫將榮樂負煙霞

即今永抱幽貞意 無事終須遣歲華

We need here only consider the first couplet. Note the language: “our realm” (*hōka* 邦家),

which is synonymous with *kokka* 国家, along with the already familiar “literary works” (*monjō* 文章). Note, also, the twofold message: Literary works serve, on the one hand, to illuminate—embellish, promulgate, legitimate—the grand project of royal governance, while, on the other hand, they preserve the name of their author for posterity. This latter, more personal benefit, is to be found in Cao Pi’s essay, where the very same term for legacy, namely “honor and pleasure” (*rōnglè/eiraku* 榮樂), is also employed.²¹⁵

That Saga and his successors took the role of literary activity very seriously is evinced, for example, in an elevation both in status and size of the Faculty of Letters (*monjōdō*) in the State University. In Kō’nin 12 (821), Saga ordered that the post of scholar of letters (*monjō hakase*) should be raised a full two ranks, from the junior lower seventh to the junior lower Fifth Rank, placing this post within the prestigious Fifth Rank-and-up bracket. Some thirteen years later, Emperor Ninmyō (Saga’s son) ordered that the faculty of history (*kidendō*) be closed, and that an extra scholar be enlisted into the Faculty of Letters. I suspect that Saga, as retired sovereign, played a central role in issuing the edict of 834.

Saga promoted men of letters to the top positions in his court. When Ninmyō ascended the

²¹⁵ Gotō, “Saga tennō to kō’ninki shidan,” 1; the original episode may be found in an entry from *Shoku nihon kōki*, Jōwa 14 (847).10.26. This is an example of one of Saga’s Sinitic poems which, while preserved in *Shoku Nihongi*, was, for whatever reason, not included in any of his three anthologies.

throne in 833, he found himself flanked on both sides by prominent men of letters:

Fujiwara no Otsugu, as we saw in the previous chapter, served as his Minister of the Left,

while Kiyohara no Natsuno 清原夏野 (782-837) served as his Minister of the Right.

Otsugu played a central role in the compilation of both *Shinsen shōjiroku* and *Nihon kōki*.

Natsuno had assisted in the compilation of both *Ryō no gige* and *Nihon kōki*, and completed

a revised edition of *Dairishiki*; at least one of his poems, composed by imperial command,

was included in *Keikokushū* (fascicle 10, poem no. 47). On a more private level, it is clear

that Saga took great pains to ensure that his own children, especially those who had been

given the surname Minamoto and demoted to vassals, were amply supplied with Sinitic

books, and given a thorough education in the Sinitic tradition.²¹⁶

ROYAL BANQUETS AND IMAGINED LITERARY SPACES

Changing Trends in Poetic Practice and Banquets throughout Saga's Reign

²¹⁶ Gotō, “Saga tennō to kō’ninki shidan,” 16-17; the edict ordering the raise in rank appears in *Nihon kōki*, Kōnin 12 (821).2.17, 797, while the edict ordering an increase in enrollment is found in *Shoku nihon kōki*, Jōwa 1 (834).4.20.

Saga was a skilled poet. That, at least, is the image handed down to us throughout his three anthologies. More than ninety poems attributed to Saga appear in these anthologies, three times more than either Shigeno no Sadanushi or Ono no Minemori, the two next most featured poets, with thirty-three and thirty poems, respectively. The following is a table detailing the thematic divisions of poetry preserved in each of the three Saga anthologies. In the case of *Ryōunshū*, which does not divide poems by theme, these divisions have been imposed—rightly, I think—by Gotō, from whom I have borrowed and somewhat adapted this table.²¹⁷ The numbers in parentheses represent the total number of such poems in each division, while the bold numbers preceding these parentheses represent the number of poems in that division attributed to Saga. Note that because *Keikokushū* survives in a pitifully incomplete manuscript, we cannot know the number of poems originally found in each division. The shaded boxes are my own addition. These represent high concentrations of Saga poems within each anthology. In the case of *Keikokushū*, of course, I am merely speculating.

	Anthology
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²¹⁷ Gotō, “Saga tennō to kō’ninki shidan,” 17.

Theme	<i>Ryōunshū</i>	<i>Bunka shūreishū</i>	<i>Keikokushū</i>
<i>yūran</i> 遊覧 imperial outings	8 (14)	4 (14)	Unknown
<i>enshū</i> 宴集 banquets	4 (23)	0 (4)	Unknown
<i>senbetsu</i> 餞別 farewell verses	2 (8)	2 (10)	Unknown
<i>zōtō</i> 贈答 poetic exchanges	2 (7)	0 (13)	Unknown
<i>eishi</i> 詠史 historical poetry	0 (2)	1 (4)	Unknown
<i>jukkai</i> 述懷 complaint poetry	0 (3)	0 (5)	Unknown
<i>enjō</i> 艷情 romantic poetry ²¹⁸	0 (3)	2 (11)	Unknown

²¹⁸ An alternative name for these *enjō* poems is erotic verses. Though this appellation is widely used in English-language scholarship, I fear it might be misleading. Saga's *enjō* poems are predominantly romantic, narrated in the persona of a loverlorn woman whose man is far away.

<i>gafu</i> 楽府 folk songs	0 (1)	3 (9)	1 (11)
<i>bonmon</i> 梵門 Buddhist poetry	1 (4)	4 (10)	11 (49)
<i>aishō</i> 哀傷 lamentations	2 (5)	6 (15)	Unknown
<i>zatsuei</i> 雜詠 miscellaneous ²¹⁹	3 (21)	12 (48)	25 (151)
Total poems attributed to Saga	22	34	37 (known)

As may be seen from the shaded areas on the above table, the thematic content of Saga's poetry shifts dramatically when we move from *Ryōunshū* to *Bunka shūreishū*. In the former

There is no explicitly sexual content. As shall be seen when discussing Saga's relationship to women, however, some examples do exist of poetry that is sexually charged, in which cases the term erotic poetry might be appropriate.

²¹⁹ The category labelled *zatsuei*, literally, miscellaneous songs, is dominated by nature poetry, especially pieces in which a single object or phenomenon, such as plum blossoms, a sparrow, or snow, is being described in detail. On occasion we find here also poems about noteworthy events, such as the recovery of a friend who had been erstwhile bedridden, or the enjoyment of listening to someone playing the zither. These poems tend, on the whole, to be elaborately descriptive, with a poetic persona who observes the scene before him in a quiet, composed manner.

anthology, the bulk of Saga's compositions were presented at royal outings and banquets, while in the latter anthology, we find the sovereign dedicating a great deal more time to poems of lamentation and various miscellaneous topics (mostly nature poems). There is a marked expansion in the thematic scope of Saga's poetry; he is represented as composing on more varied themes in *Bunka shūreishū* than he was in *Ryōunshū*. In particular, *Bunka shūreishū* contains two of his romantic poems (*enjō*) and three of his folk song (*gafu*) poems. *Ryōunshū* contains not even one of either category. Gotō sees this shift as representative not merely of the sort of coverage Saga is given by compilers of these anthologies, but of a shift in the actual poetic activity of the sovereign himself: Prior to the compilation of *Ryōunshū* in 814, Saga had composed little or no romantic or folk songs, choosing to focus instead on more traditional, conservative themes, such as courtly banquet poems. During the four years between 814 and 818, when *Bunka shūreishū* was completed, however, Saga seems to have taken an interest in more innovative and varied themes. Considering that most of the courtly folk song poems found in *Keikokushū* by other authors were composed in response to poems of this same genre by Saga, it follows that most, if not all, of Saga's folk song style poems were indeed composed while he was still the reigning sovereign, and not after his retirement. Gotō mentions this last fact in order to forefend a

predictable but erroneous conclusion, namely, that Saga composed traditional verses while on the throne, turning to more innovative themes only after he was retired. This was not the case at all. The coverage of Saga's poetry in these three anthologies was carefully crafted. Saga himself was consulted as to which poems ought to be included in each anthology. He had the final say in everything related to compilation. Consequently, the increased appearance of romantic verses and folk songs in *Bunka shūreishū* naturally represents a significant change in Saga's poetic practices. More romantic poems appear in the second anthology precisely because Saga was composing more of these poems after 814 than he was prior to that date.²²⁰

The shift in poetic practice—the sorts of themes Saga composed on—from the first to the second anthology may be interpreted as a more general move away from public or banquet poetry, towards compositions that tended to be more meditative in mood, and which contained more intensely detailed descriptions of natural phenomena. As I have previously shown, whether composed expressly for public banquets or for more (ostensibly) private reasons, all of Saga's poetry, being a product of his imperial personage, was profoundly public and always inherently political. Even so, *Ryōunshū* seems much

²²⁰ Gotō, "Saga tennō to kō'ninki shidan," 18.

more bound up with issues of royal governance, court hierarchy, and court pageantry. First of all, the poems in this anthology are arranged in descending order of the poets' relative court ranks. *Kaifūsō* (751) had arranged its poems chronologically, from oldest to most recent, with little consideration of court rank. Both *Bunka shūreishū* and *Keikokushū* arrange their poems primarily thematically; considerations of relative court rank come only after considerations of thematic content. By foregrounding court rank more than any other anthology of its time, the compilers of *Ryōunshū*, it seems, were eager to enforce, above all else, a strictly hierarchical vision of poetic composition. Second, the majority of poems in this anthology were those presented at royal outings or banquets. A large number of miscellaneous poems, likewise, are responses to royal command. *Bunka shūreishū* contains the greatest number of poems composed in response to imperial command (*hōwashi* 奉和詩), making this a salient feature of the anthology, in perfect accord with the phrase, contained in its preface, “the sovereign sings, while his vassals respond in harmony.”²²¹

So much for the shifting content of Saga's poetry. Let us now focus on the actual occasions, the banquets and festivities, in which Sinitic poetry was presented during the early Heian period. The following table shows the reign years and number of banquets

²²¹ Gotō, “Saga tennō to kō'ninki shidan,” 20-22.

(including those that were planned but cancelled) hosted by Emperors Kanmu, Heizei,

Saga, Junna, and Ninmyō.²²²

Emperor	Reign (total years)	Number of banquets
Kanmu (737-806)	781-806 (26 years)	12 (1 cancelled)
Heizei (774-824)	806-809 (4 years)	3
Saga (786-842)	809-823 (15 years)	45 (1 cancelled due to illness)
Junna (786-840)	823-833 (11 years)	21
Ninmyō (810-850)	833-850 (18 years)	35 (3 cancelled)

Seven of the 26 banquets hosted by Emperor Kanmu between the years 784 and 794 were

held in the Nagaoka Capital. On several occasions, the venue is given explicitly as the

Southern Garden (Nan'en 南園), evidently a central venue for such banquets at the time.

The remaining five banquets, hosted from 794 to 804, were held in the Heian Capital. All of

Kanmu's banquets, save one exception, were of the *kyokusui* 曲水, or “winding rivulet”

²²² This is a highly simplified tabulation of material found in Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, 2007, 441-449.

sort, held on the third day of the third month, and which were held more-or-less every other year for most of his reign. These seem to have been the extent of Kanmu's banquet activities. There were only three banquets held during the reign of Emperor Heizei.

Considering he only ruled for four years, this is, on average, more than Emperor Kanmu held. We can see three interesting differences between those banquets hosted by Kanmu as opposed to those hosted by Heizei: First, whereas Kanmu, as a rule, held his banquets on the third day of the third month, Heizei held his either on the seventh day of the seventh month (twice) or on the ninth day of the ninth month. Second, Heizei held all three of his banquets at the Shinsen Gardens, located immediately to the south of the Heian imperial compound for use exclusively by the sovereign and his entourage. Third, Heizei's banquets were all part of more elaborate imperial outings (*gyōkō* 行幸), the culmination of which was either a sumo wrestling match (twice) or an archery demonstration.

The situation with Saga, when compared to that of his predecessors, reveals important differences in regards both to the precise timing as well as the venue of poetry banquets. The following table gives the frequency of Saga's banquets per reign year:

Year	Banquets	Year	Banquets	Year	Banquets
809	1	814	4	819	3
810	1	815	4	820	4
811	2	816	6	821	1
812	3	817	3	822	3
813	6	818	4	823	1

The total number of banquets actually hosted by Saga while enthroned was 44. However, the number of banquets in which he played some role was much greater. Saga died on 842.7.15. This means that the last banquet held at court in which he could have played any part, directly or indirectly, was the inner banquet (*naien* 内宴) hosted by his son, Emperor Ninmyō, on 842.1.20. This was the nineteenth public banquet hosted by Ninmyō. Now, if we count not only the banquets hosted by Saga while he was on the throne, but add to this the twenty-one banquets held by Junna, as well as the nineteen held by Ninmyō before Saga's death, and supposing Saga played some part in all of these, we must conclude that Saga participated or was somehow involved in a total of no less than 85 banquets. That is a remarkable amount; Saga was a busy man.

Speaking only of those banquets hosted by Saga while acting sovereign, and keeping in mind what has already been said with regard to Kanmu and Heizei, we may make a number of telling observations. First and foremost, Saga hosted a chrysanthemum banquet (*chōyō no en* 重陽の宴) nearly every year of his reign, for a total of 11 such banquets (one of which was cancelled due to the sovereign being sick). The venue for these banquets was, with one exception, the Shinsen Gardens, a venue once favored by his elder brother, Heizei. Sinitic poems were presented at each banquet of this sort. Second, Saga hosted a total of only three star festival banquets (*tanabata no en* 七夕の宴), in 812, 813, and 815. Two of these included a sumo wrestling match, while one (the last one) included recitation of Sinitic poetry. The venue, again, was always the Shinsen Gardens. Third, Saga hosted a total of only five new year's banquets, in 811, 813, 815, 820, and 822. In at least three of these occasions, Parhae envoys (Bokkaishi 渤海使) were present. In the 822 banquet, these envoys entertained their hosts by showing off their prowess at kickball.²²³ The venues for these banquets vary. One thing we can say for certain is this: these banquets were never held in the Shinsen Gardens. The significance of this will become clear later on when we

²²³ See Saga's "Watching the Ball Dance in Early Spring," in Appendix, item no. 69 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 89).

look more closely at the nature of these venues.

Fourth, Saga held a total of ten banquets in the second month—nearly one each year—all but one of which occur between the twenty-fifth and the twenty-ninth day of that month. This corresponds to mid spring, and, in many cases, these second-month banquets are referred to as flower-viewing banquets (*kaen*). Seven of these were held at the Shinsen Gardens. The remaining three were held at various other venues: The two flower-viewing banquets which were held only two days apart in 816 occurred, first, at the Nagaoka Mansion (長岡第), which, at the time of this royal excursion, was occupied by Saga's junior Head of Female Officials (*naishi no suke* 典侍), a woman by the name of Ono no Iwako 小野石子 (746-817), and second, to the Saga Mansion (嵯峨院, though here referred to as Saga bekkan 嵯峨別館).²²⁴ On both of these occasions, banquets were held in which Sinitic poems were presented. The third flower-viewing banquet, held in 823—the last of his reign—took place in the mountain villa (*sansō* 山莊, though this probably refers

²²⁴ Iwako was of great importance to Saga. She was to him what Kusuko had been to Heizei, namely, a trusted messenger, acting as go-between for the sovereign and his generals, and often bearing confidential missives. There are two Sinitic poems included in *Bunka shūreishū* (poem nos. 83 and 84) written in response to a poem composed by Saga himself on the death of this woman. This mansion was located somewhere in the old Nagaoka Capital, though its exact location remains unknown (*Nihon kōki*, headnote on p. 720). A set of two poems attributed to Saga, entitled “Lamentations for a Princess,” might have been dedicated to Iwako. I suspect, however, that these were dedicated to some other (as yet unidentified) princess. For a translation, as well as footnotes that explain my doubts, see Appendix, item no. 39 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 87 and 88).

to the *saiin* 齋院 or holy sanctuary) occupied at the time by a seventeen-year-old Princess Uchiko, whom we have already met on several occasions.

Saga's annual banquet schedule shows two peak seasons. The period from the middle to the end of the eighth month, especially the twenty-eighth day of that month, seems to have been a good time for banquets. Saga is reported to have hosted eight such banquets—let us call them early-autumn banquets for lack of a better term—throughout his reign. On two occasions (816 and 820), Saga held two consecutive banquets only days apart, though each at different venues. Sinitic poetry was presented at each. The venues of these is especially interesting: The first two early-autumn banquets (in 813 and 814) were held at the Southern Pond Mansion, which was the residence of Saga's younger brother, who would succeed Saga as Emperor Junna. Of the remaining six early-autumn banquets, two (in 816 and 820) were held at what would later become Saga's first retirement mansion (from 823-832), the Reizei Villa, and three (in 816, only four days after the Reizei Villa banquet of the same year, in 818, and again in 819) at what became his second retirement mansion (from 833 to his death), the Saga Villa. Another prominent time for Saga to host banquets seems to have been from the middle to the end of the fourth month, namely, early summer. There are four such banquets recorded. The venues for each are different: the first

early-summer banquet (813.4.22) was held at Junna’s residence; the second (814.4.28) at the residence of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu; the third (815.4.22) at Bonshaku Temple 梵釈寺 (located in modern-day Shiga Prefecture, Ōtsu City, close to the old Ōtsu Capital); the fourth (in 817.4.16) was held at the Saga Villa. Saga held a banquet at the Reizei Villa on the third of this same month, as well.²²⁵

In contrast to Saga, his immediate successor, Emperor Junna, held most of his banquets either in his own residence, the Southern Pond Mansion, which was located within the imperial compound, or in the Imperial Palace—either in the Shishinden 紫宸殿, a ceremonial hall, or the Jijūden 仁寿殿, located just to the north of the former, both of which faced the Southern Garden (Nantei 南庭), a favorite scenic backdrop for banquets. Junna held only two banquets at the Shinsen Gardens. Following in Junna’s footsteps, most of Ninmyō’s banquets were likewise held in the Shishinden or the Jijūden within the Imperial Palace. Saga’s banquets, especially when compared with those hosted by Junna

²²⁵ The banquet at Junna’s residence is celebrated in Saga’s “The Southern Pond Mansion.” The banquet at Fuyutsugu’s residence is celebrated in “Summer at the Kankyo Mansion.” The banquet at Bonshaku Temple is celebrated in “On Visiting Bonshaku Temple.” Finally, “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa” might have been composed for the early summer banquet at the Saga Villa, though the title would seem to argue against this. Appendix, item nos. 5, 8, 34, and 24 (*Ryōunshū*, poem nos. 7 and 10, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem nos. 73 and 2, respectively). I wonder if “Yon Pine in the Valley,” found in Appendix, item no. 49 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 123) was composed for the Reizei Villa banquet in question.

and Ninmyō, show remarkable variety. While on the throne, Saga held more banquets than Junna and Ninmyō. Of course, if my suspicion is right, Saga was involved in most of the banquets held by both of these sovereigns, too. Whereas Junna and Ninmyō restricted their banquets to two venues within the Imperial Palace—and these were facing one another—the venues of Saga’s banquets varied greatly, both geographically and in terms of the sort of people they housed: his banquets were held in the residences of powerful and lettered women, such as Iwako and Princess Uchiko, as well as powerful men, such as Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu. Saga held very few of his banquets within the Imperial Palace. In fact, 22 of his 45 banquets—that is very nearly half—were held in the Shinsen Gardens, immediately to the south of the Heian imperial compound. Setting aside banquets and speaking merely of official outings, it is a fact that Saga frequented the Shinsen Gardens, whereas Junna and Ninmyō very seldom went there. Neither Junna nor Ninmyō hosted any banquets for envoys from Parhae. Whereas most of the banquets held by Junna and Ninmyō were either chrysanthemum banquets or inner banquets, Saga held a variety of different types of banquets, each with a different theme, and in different seasons. Looking at Emperor Saga’s record of imperial banquets and excursions, it is obvious that he was striving for variety, in terms of venue, season, and content. Junna and Ninmyō, on the other hand, restricted

themselves almost exclusively to the Imperial Palace—and, what's more, only two opposite-facing rooms therein—and to two type of banquets, namely chrysanthemum banquets or inner banquets. Saga was eager to embrace a mixed audience and a wider geographical sphere.²²⁶

Banquet Venues as Imagined Literary Spaces

Saga brought about a court-centered—properly speaking, Saga-centric—literary renaissance by means of significantly increasing both the *variety* of venues wherein literary production, mostly in the form of Sinitic poetry, could be presented and appreciated, as well as the sheer *number* of occasions—public banquets, royal outings, and so on—where such presentations could occur. Newly instituted flower-viewing banquets held in the second month (mid-spring), festivals in honor of the Weaver Maiden held on the seventh night of the seventh month (early autumn), as well as the highly-favored chrysanthemum banquet held on the ninth night of the ninth month (late autumn) all became regular annual events in

²²⁶ Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, 2007, 442-445.

Saga's court. Each of these events featured presentations of Sinitic poetry.²²⁷ As has already been seen, Saga's reign, despite repeated claims, both during his time and our own, of its supremely halcyon nature, was more-or-less constantly pestered, if not at times more seriously vexed by the problem of irascible Emishi concentrated within the northernmost reaches of the archipelago. This distant region, known during the premodern period as Mutsu 陸奥, the Sinitic characters for which could be rendered something like the interior land or, more poetically, Ultima Thule, served as the final outpost for these beleaguered tribes, about whom we really know very little of substance, save the fact that they were ethnically unrelated to the majority of people living throughout the archipelago. As far as the court was concerned, these were a people to be subjugated, or, to use phraseology Saga and his men would have preferred, civilized. As mentioned earlier, *Nihon kōki* is rife with entries concerning these northern tribes. We read a number of lofty reports submitted from noteworthy generals imperially ordered to subdue rebellions throughout the region. Alongside these we find more subdued petitions from officials requesting tax exemptions for those barbarians who, having been duly converted—thanks to the sovereign's all-pervading virtue and mercy!—to the more civilized way of life, have yet to master the art

²²⁷ Gotō, "Saga tennō no kyūtei bungaku to higashi ajia," 91).

of farming. It is obvious from the historical record that, during the reign of Saga, concerted and ongoing efforts were being carried out in order to subjugate and enculturate these northern outsiders. Consequently, there was no shortage of soldiers stationed at strategically positioned fortifications along the border of these distant northern regions. The poets in Saga's coterie were well aware of this, as may be seen by the number of poems depicting events in those reaches.

When versifying about the northern region of Mutsu, Saga's poets characteristically resort to a sort of double vision. Depictions of the region are never straightforward. Instead, Mutsu is inevitably described as though it were a continental peripheral outpost, after the manner of well-known Tang exemplars. Mutsu, in the hands of these poets, is transformed into what Gotō refers to as an imagined literary space.²²⁸ It was in Kō'nin 6 (815) that Ono no Minemori, one of Saga's most trusted generals, was appointed provincial governor of Mutsu. Minemori, in a poem entitled "Listening to the First Warblers of Spring" (*Shin'ei wo kiku* 聽新鶯), composed in response to one presented by Saga, contains the following verses:

²²⁸ Gotō, "Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu," 64.

I [Minemori], thy humble vassal, having received His Majesty's imperial mandate,
 set off now to distant climbs, waving a general's banner of war before me. Off
 [my troops and I] must go, heavy hearted, leaving the capital behind us—off to
 the desert plains ten-thousand miles away.

Those distant hinterlands, with her blossoms and birds—each thing in its season—
 all unfamiliar to us. What shall we homesick [troops] do but harken to the
 trilling of our own flutes, hoping there, at least, to catch the notes of warblers
 back home?²²⁹

小臣授命戎塵遠 万里沙場欲傷離

辺亭節物花鳥異 料得唯門笛中吹

Ono no Minemori, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 116

The imagery here, for those familiar with Sinitic poetry, especially of the sort dealing with

²²⁹ Gotō, “Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu,” 64; the poem in question appears in *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 116. The poem by Saga to which this is a response is not preserved.

troops stationed along the northern deserts, is wholly continental, both in terms of vocabulary as well as sentiment. Another war poem by Minemori, likewise composed in response to verses by Saga, serves as a eulogy to the recently deceased Sakanoue no Tamuramaro 坂上田村麻呂 (758-811), the veteran general who had been instrumental in subjugating bands of northern barbarians during both the reigns of Emperor Kanmu and Saga, as well as serving as Saga's main military commander in the defeat of retired Emperor Heizei. In this poem, Minemori compares the late Tamuramaro to two continental generals of high renown, namely, Li Guangli 李廣利 (?-BC 88) and Wei Qing 衛青 (?-BC 106), both of whom were most famous for their subjugation of northern barbarians. This is just one more example of the sort of double vision, or imagined literary spaces, created by Saga's poets in relation to the northern periphery: Mutsu became China's northern desert; the Emishi or northmen became China's Xiongnu (J: Kyōdo 匈奴); even Saga's generals were portrayed and remembered as continental-type heroes.²³⁰

²³⁰ Gotō, "Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu," 64; the poem in question appears in *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 64. Saga's poem, to which this was a response, has not been preserved. To borrow LaMarre's terminology, poetic transformation within metaphorical spaces is a conscious "complication of vision," one which facilitates the simultaneous emergence of various patterns and rhythms. Once our vision has been amply complicated, once we are able to see a number of images superimposed atop one another, we begin to sense the "resonance between terrestrial and celestial forces." See LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan*, 172 and 179.

Saga himself seems to have been eager to encourage this double vision, especially in relation to the subject of war. *Keikokushū* contains a series of three poems dealing with this subject, the first by Saga, the second and third being responses by Sugawara no Kiyokimi and Kose no Shikihito. These poems are classified under the broad category *gafu* 樂府 (Ch: *yuefu*), a genre of poetry which, like *ci* 詞, originated in folk melodies. On the continent, *yuefu* poetry seems to have become popular during the early Han dynasty. Many fine samples of such poetry—perhaps lyrics is the better word here—have come down to us through the ages. These lyrics are, as a rule, anonymous; the poetic persona almost always takes the form of a general character-type, most notably, the war-weary soldier stationed along the border, or the forlorn but patient lover waiting back at the capital. As a body of lyrics to preexisting and presumably very well-known folk melodies, *yuefu* poems were originally performed with musical accompaniment. The flute seems to have played a prominent role. One such flute melody which, no doubt in virtue of certain languid cadences now lost to us, lent itself most readily to songs about the soldier's life along the embattled frontiers. This genre, known during the Tang period as border or frontier songs (*saixiaqu* 塞下曲), attained a high level of popularity. Li Bo (701-762), whose poetry had just begun to enter the ken of Saga's lively coterie, composed a number of original lyrics to

this age-old melody. One such example, entitled “South of the Walls We Fought” (Zhan chengnan 戰城南) placing the action near the northern extremities of the Great Wall, is illustrative of the genre:

We fought last year at the Sanggan’s source,
 This year we fight on the Cong River road [...]
 Thousands of miles ever marching and fighting:
 Until all the Grand Army grows frail and old.

去年戰桑乾源 今年戰葱河道

[...]

萬里長征戰 三軍盡衰老

The narrator of this poem later depicts the northern barbarian tribes, the Xiongnu, as bloodthirsty bandits who “treat slaughter as farmers treat plowing.” Interestingly, Li Bo takes a negative stance towards war. He concludes this poem with the admonition “Now I truly see that weapons are evil’s tools,” adding the pragmatic caveat: “the Sage will use

them only when he cannot do otherwise.” War, because of the obscene bloodshed it necessarily entails, is to be avoided at all costs by the virtuous ruler. Li Bo’s poem, as the title reveals, is based on an older Western Han (202 BC-AD 8) *yuefu* bearing the same title. That is to say, they were both written to the same melody. Their subject matter, too, is nearly identical:

South of the walls we fought,
 North of the ramparts we fell,
 Fell in the meadows, left unburied,
 Food for the ravens.

戰城南 死郭北
 野死不葬 烏可食

The narrator of this Western Han poem calls out to those of his kinsmen slain in battle, crying “We think on you, good liegemen [...] At dawn you went forth to battle, and at evening did not return.” Here, too, war is treated, so to speak, in the aftermath, not as a

conqueror of barbarian tribes but as a reaper of countless lives. This fatalistic, remorseful tone runs through most border songs, from the Han to the Tang dynasty.²³¹

Now, Saga's own poem—the first in a series of three mentioned above—bears the title “Song of the Frontier” (*saika no kyoku* 塞下曲), thereby announcing its continental pedigree and subject-matter:

What glories have our soldiers gained—one hundred battles fought and won! O, but
 what hardships they do face along the distant hinterlands! Upon those
 [embattled] desert sands, ten-thousand miles from home; spring comes not to
 these men.

The benevolent favors of their mighty sovereign—son of heaven, lord of the Han
 people!—is not easily repaid. So long as one Xiongnu barbarian yet stands [in
 opposition to the sovereign], what thought give these soldiers for their own
 welfare?²³²

²³¹ Li Bo's poem, as well as the older one from which Li got his title, are translated in Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 244 and 228, respectively.

²³² For footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 56 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 18).

百戰功多苦邊塵 沙場萬里不見春
 漢家天子恩難報 宋盡兇奴豈顯身

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 18

The imagery is immediately reminiscent of continental border songs, what with its northern desert hinterlands, its ten-thousand miles of marching, and its general attitude of martial suffering. What we do not see here, however, is a lamentation for the atrocities of war.

Quite the opposite. Here, as in modern nationalistic narratives of war, soldiers are called to view their trials as the noblest way to serve their sovereign, to repay the many benefices bestowed upon them in earlier days. Saga champions the war effort, and his vassals follow suite. Not only that. Saga asks—demands, rather—that his troops envision him as a Han-dynasty ruler, a regular continental son of heaven, for whom they ought to be willing to fight and, if necessary, perish. Saga's war poems never call his audience to mourn the victims of war. War, for Saga and his men, is a noble deed, duly justified by imperial authority, itself legitimized from on high by heavenly mandate. As Gotō has pointed out, war poems of this nature are sprinkled throughout both *Bunka shūreishū* and *Keikokushū*,

forming, he says, one of the more salient features shared by both of these anthologies.²³³

Ryōunshū does not contain as many poems about war. As mentioned above, the death of Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, Saga's favored general, is lamented in this anthology by another prized general, Minemori (poem no. 64). Minemori, in fine continental fashion, also wrote about the homesick soldier stationed so far away from home (poem no. 67). The death of all generals, generally speaking, who toil against the northmen is lamented by Kaya no Toyotoshi, a sickly man of letters who never fought a day in his life, though highly favored by Saga for his unflinching loyalty (poem no. 48). As far as I can see, these are the only three poems in *Ryōunshū* that speak expressly about war. This is not to say, of course, that *Ryōunshū* is less militaristic than the other two anthologies. As I have said, generally speaking, *Ryōunshū* is actually more martially oriented than the other two anthologies.

While *Bunka shūreishū* and *Keikokushū* contain more poems about war-related subject-matter than *Ryōunshū*, the latter contains, on the whole, more indirect or couched allusions to military campaigns and northward marches than the other two. Beginning with *Bunka shūreishū*, Saga and his faithful coterie composed numerous poems dealing with the court's

²³³ Gotō, "Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu," 65-66; the poems in question appear in *Keikokushū*, poem nos. 18-20.

ongoing military efforts against the northern barbarian tribes. To this end, they unfailingly adopted continental imagery, conjuring up half-real, half-imagined literary spaces in which Mutsu became the northern deserts of the Han empire, Saga became a Han-period sovereign, and the Emishi became Xiongnu. The ubiquity of such military poetry in Saga's coterie is attested by the presence of related themes in genres one might not otherwise expect of harboring such things: both romantic poetry (*enjō*) and nature (aka miscellaneous) poems (*zatsuei*) become vehicles of expression for Saga's double vision of northern conquest.²³⁴

Let us now turn our attention to a second venue much closer to home. There is an area in Kyoto north of the Yodo River known nowadays as Ōyamazaki 大山崎, which lies near the border of Kyoto and Osaka. Ōyamazaki is derived from the name of a prominent eighth-century way station called Yamazaki Station 山崎駅. This station, aside from its scenic surroundings, served as a strategically situated depot for overseeing trade via the Yodo River. A number of the more prominent hunting grounds, such as the wilds of Minase 水生野 and Kata 交野, repeatedly found in entries in *Nihon kōki* pertaining to Saga's reign were located within a short riding distance from this station. One spring day in 813,

²³⁴ Gotō, "Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu," 67.

Saga, having stopped at this station after a hunting party, as he often did, decided to turn this scenic spot into a countryside villa for his private enjoyment. The name by which he designated his new retreat was Kaya (or Kayō) 河陽, that is, north of the (Yodo) river.²³⁵ Thus was born the Kaya Mansion, of which we have already heard a good deal.

Saga's choice of the Sinitic title Kaya for his new villa was deliberate. The same eponym, though pronounced (in modern Mandarin) Heyang, is to be found in Henan 河南 Province, China, where it signifies a region just north of the Yellow River. During the Jin dynasty, a certain man of letters by the name of Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300), who had just been appointed governor of Heyang, saw to it that a large number of peach trees were planted throughout the region. Thanks to the literary legacy of Pan Yue, along with the scenic beauty of the region, the name Heyang became a symbol of idyllic splendor and poetic inspiration. It is no wonder, then, that Saga, who used his Kaya Mansion to host numerous banquets in which Sinitic poetry was presented, chose to adopt the name of such a famous continental site. The third and final fascicle of *Bunka shūreishū* is dedicated solely to miscellaneous verses (*zatsuei*), the majority of which are nature poems. Significantly, the first fourteen poems in this fascicle were evidently composed for a

²³⁵ *Nihon kōki*, endnote 769:11 on p. 1282.

banquet (or banquets) held in the Kaya Mansion. This series is headed by four poems, composed by Saga, from a longer set of ten entitled collectively “Ten Scenes from Kaya” (河陽十詠): Saga writes lovingly about vernal blossoms, boats on the Yodo river, riverside grasses, along with a distant temple which, though not visible from his villa, can nevertheless be heard—its bell, that is—at night.²³⁶ In praising the flowery gardens about his villa, Saga, in a poem entitled “The Blossoms of Kaya,” alluding to Pan Yue’s famous peach blossoms, remarks joyously; “It is the middle of spring in Kaya, as it is in Heyang—that place where peach blossoms have always been so famous.” Here, then, is another example of what Gotō refers to as the imaginary literary spaces so crucial to Saga’s poetic project. The remaining ten poems are all responses to Saga’s poems, some taking up the theme of flowers, others of boats, and still others of seagulls. These response poems, likewise, make vivid allusions to Heyang, superimposing the continental ideal onto their local site.²³⁷

I have already shown how Saga held banquets and other festivities at a wide variety

²³⁶ For full translations of these four Kaya Mansion poems, see Appendix, item nos. 41-44 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem nos. 96-99).

²³⁷ Gotō, “Saga tennō: sōzōteki kūkan no zōritsu,” 68-69; the Kaya poems appear in *Bunka shūreishū*, fascicle 3, poem nos. 96-109; see also Ijitsu, “Shoki heiankyō no bungaku kūkan,” 13-18.

of locations. Among these, three stand out as being of exceptional importance: the oft-encountered Shinsen Gardens, which Saga inherited from his father, as well as two villas or mansions, which Saga himself had newly erected, namely, the Saga Villa and the Reizei Villa. By looking at the poetry contained in the three Sinitic anthologies, it becomes clear that Saga deliberately orchestrated how each of his three favorite venues ought to be imagined by his vassals. This is another example of Saga's deliberate program of selective reading and contracted interpretation. Generally speaking, each of these three locations were to serve as places where he and his men could exchange poetry and thereby repeatedly reenact the ideal harmony supposed to exist between sovereign and vassal. More interestingly, though, Saga ensured that each of his three venues was endowed with a unique character all its own, such that each venue called for a different sort of poetry. Even the same poetic theme would have to take on different forms, it would have to be treated differently, depending upon the specific venue in which the verses were presented.²³⁸

The Shinsen Gardens first appear in historical records in the year 800, when Emperor Kanmu is said to have visited this venue. While Kanmu gave the order to move the capital

²³⁸ Ijitsu, "Shoki heiankyō no bungaku kūkan," 13. Ijitsu has done the best work in regards to Saga's banquet venues. The following discussion is based primarily on his research.

to Kyoto in 794, the new palace compound only became serviceable about a decade later, sometime around 805. It would appear, therefore, that the Shinsen Gardens were constructed as part of the original plan of the compound, and therefore an integral symbol of Heian court life and power.²³⁹ These gardens, located near the outer periphery of the Imperial Palace itself, approaching the southeastern corner of the larger palace compound, originally served as a venue in which, at least within the literary imagination, a virtuous sovereign was to benignly enculturate and amiably harmonize with his loving, loyal subjects. With the compilation of *Bunka shūreishū*, containing as it does allusions to the more mystical themes, such as heavenly journeys, inspired by the poetry in *Chuci* 楚辭 (The Lyrics of Chu, containing verses written between the fifth and third centuries BC), these gardens took on a more rarified air: the unadulterated, primordial, creative forces of Nature (*zōka* 造化) itself were seen as enduing the rocks and rivulets with their superlative beauty.²⁴⁰ What was originally a more-or-less this-worldly place of enculturation became, through the vehicle of Sinitic poetry, a crystallization of Nature's most splendid works. At

²³⁹ Murai, "Ōchō no bunka to waka no sekai," 39-40; Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 251.

²⁴⁰ For some superb translations of poetry from *Chuci*, see Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 176-197. Sun Chuo's "Wandering to the Tiantai Mountains" (You tiantaishan 遊天台山賦), also found here, would provide readers with a perfect example of a typical heavenly journey—the very sort we see in Saga's "Verdured Mountains," a full translation of which appears in the Appendix, item no. 83 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 209).

this juncture, geographically speaking, the Shinsen Gardens were consistently pictured through allusions and direct references to the famously scenic Jiangnan 江南 region. Lake Dongting 洞庭湖, situated in this region, was a favorite theme for Saga and his men. Poetry presented at the Shinsen Gardens routinely compares its waters to those of Lake Dongting.²⁴¹

The Saga Villa, erected by command of Emperor Saga himself, was located outside of the imperial compound, where it served both throughout and after his reign as a temporary residence or retreat. This villa, located as it was amidst the mountains, was noticeably cooler than the imperial compound below. Consequently, spring came later to this secluded retreat. At a time when the progression of the four seasons was carefully measured in accordance with environmental changes occurring within the imperial compound, this slight delay in the coming of spring gave to the Saga Villa an added air of distance, aside from its more obvious geographical distance from the court. That this sense of distance was half created may be seen from the fact that the Saga Villa was located a mere seven kilometers west of the imperial compound, hardly a great distance, especially

²⁴¹ Ijitsu, “Shoki heiankyō no bungaku kūkan,” 13-15, 20. See, for example, the sixth and seventh couplet of Saga’s “Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden,” a full translation of which appears in the Appendix, item no. 52 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 139).

by horse-drawn carriage. Even so, once the literary imagination had taken hold of this venue, the Saga Villa came to be depicted, at least in poetry, as a world unto itself, transcending the mortal world of dust and decay, wholly separate and distinct from the imperial court.²⁴²

While the tender sprouts of new mosses are already working their way up through the older moss patches, the new branches of willows growing along the riverbank have yet to stretch out their lithe fingers.

How serene and secluded is this place, far from the chaos of mundane affairs! All I can hear is the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, and the mournful crying of monkeys as evening falls.²⁴³

莓苔踏破經年髮 楊柳未懸伸月眉
此地幽閑人事少 唯餘風動暮猿悲

²⁴² Ijitsu, “Shoki heiankyō no bungaku kūkan,” 16-18, 21.

²⁴³ These two couplets have been taken from “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa,” a full translation of which appears in the Appendix, item no. 24 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2).

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2

Similarly, the Reizei Villa, located in the southeastern corner of the larger imperial compound, seems to have been constructed not much earlier than the year 816. This venue became a favorite subject of the literary imagination during Saga's reign—more so for his vassals than for Saga himself. Its gardens were transformed through poetry into an idyllic grotto, a Daoist den of immortal sages, inaccessible to the uninitiated. Much of the poetry composed for banquets held at this venue resemble, in one way or another, imagery found in Sun Chuo's 孫綽 (320-377) enormously famous rhapsody entitled "A Journey to the Tiantai Mountains," in which the scenery of this mountain range is painted in divinely surrealistic hues.²⁴⁴

Saga was acutely aware of the value of embellishing space. From the farthest reaches of northern Mutsu, to the more homely region of Kaya, along with the three venues just discussed, Saga artfully endowed each of his imperial spaces with literary imagery geared at furthering both his literary as well as his political legacy. It was, in fact, Saga who first designated within the Imperial Palace a special chamber, known thereafter as the Seiryōden

²⁴⁴ Ijitsu, "Shoki heiankyō no bungaku kūkan," 18-21.

清涼殿, literally, the hall of purity and coolness, dedicated to court festivities and banquets.

Aside from this he established a second chamber, the so-called Ninjuden 仁寿殿, hall of benevolence and longevity, in which he spent the greater portion of his private hours.²⁴⁵

This last, in particular, would come to serve Junna and Ninmyō as a frequent venue for poetry banquets. It seems, however, that Saga had more in mind than a simple distinction of private and public life. When Heizei began to cause trouble in 810, it became obvious that the palace was simply not big enough for two sovereigns. In hopes of avoiding uncomfortable cohabitations of this sort in future generations, Saga intended these two halls to act, should the need arise, as rotating residences: the retired sovereign would betake himself to the Ninjuden, while the new acting sovereign would spend most of his time in the Seiryōden. This would serve to alleviate some of the tension between two sovereigns, one retired and one on the throne, both eager to keep his hands on the reigns.²⁴⁶ Saga seems to have possessed both a literary as well as a pragmatic imagination.

A SELDOM SEEN SIDE OF SAGA: VERNACULAR POETRY, WOMEN, AND ROMANTIC

²⁴⁵ The Shishinden 紫宸殿, a hall reserved for grander ceremonies, served as a venue for his beloved chrysanthemum banquet; see Takigawa, “Tennō to bundan: Heian zenki no kōteki bungaku ni kansuru shomondai,” 16.

²⁴⁶ Murai, “Ōchō no bunka to waka no sekai,” 53-54.

VERSES

Saga's Vernacular Poetry: *Saga gyoshū* 嵯峨御集 (The Saga Collection)

Much has been written about Saga's anthologies, and about his love of Sinitic literature, especially poetry. Something has yet to be said in regards to the practice of vernacular poetry during Saga's reign.²⁴⁷ Some mention, too, has been made throughout this chapter about certain women in Saga's life. Here, in this regrettably cursory discussion of vernacular poetry during the time of Saga, I would like to delve deeper into the related issue of women, especially the figure of Tachibana no Kachiko, Saga's primary consort. There is an anonymous anthology of vernacular poetry, supposed to have been compiled sometime around the ninth or tenth century, which goes by the rather unrevealing title *Nara gyoshū* 奈良御集 (Nara Anthology). It is very likely that, first, this anthology represents an amalgamation of several shorter, earlier collections, each preserving poems by a single

²⁴⁷ For a brief discussion of the social standing of vernacular poetry during the ninth century, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 70. Steininger has rightly stated that vernacular poetry was, during Saga's reign, treated as "a form of occasional entertainment, equivalent to a music performance, rather than a composition whose specific contents were worthy of record." The proof of this is in the pudding: only a very few of Saga's vernacular poems have been recorded for posterity.

sovereign, and, second, that one of these original collections contained vernacular poems by Emperor Saga, which Yamaguchi Hiroshi tentatively calls *Saga gyoshū* 嵯峨御集 (The Saga Collection). As he himself admits, there is no historical record of such a collection; the title is a convenient fabrication.²⁴⁸ Having looked over the evidence in support of Yamaguchi's argument, I am more-or-less confident that his conclusions are in line with the facts. We know for certain that Saga composed vernacular poetry, or, if we wish to split hairs, that vernacular poems were attributed to him. Saga's famous poetic exchange with Fujiwara no Sonohito bears ample witness to this.²⁴⁹ That his vernacular poems should have been gathered and duly arranged in some sort of collection fits neatly into poetic practices of his day. Extant manuscripts of *Nara gyoshū* contain a total of but twenty-four poems. Only the final portion of this anthology, namely, the last seven poems have headnotes describing the circumstances surrounding the composition of each piece. It seems most likely that the first portion of *Nara gyoshū*—seventeen poems—is in fact a collection of verse by Emperor Heizei, the “Nara Emperor,” while the last seven poems are by Saga and his consorts.

²⁴⁸ Yamaguchi Hiroshi, “Saga gyoshū no sōtei,” 25 and 30. I have had to rely on Yamaguchi for much of this discussion. Not much other research has been done in this area.

²⁴⁹ See the footnote to Saga's “The Southern Pind Mansion,” in Appendix, item no. 5 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 7); see also Webb, 175-177.

A dearth of vernacular poetry from Saga's reign need not preclude the practice of that sort of versification by the sovereign and his court. The interpretation, famously—or rather, infamously—put forward by Kojima Noriyuki that Saga's reign was a dark age for vernacular poetry is, at very best, a tentative one. Yamaguchi argues, to the contrary, that the practice of vernacular poetry, while not nearly as well covered in historical sources as his promotion of Sinitic verse, was nevertheless alive and well.²⁵⁰ Headnotes found scattered throughout the entire anthology make it clear that these poems were understood as having been authored or at least enunciated by ninth-century sovereigns. Scholars active around the twelfth century, near the end of the Heian period, certainly thought this to be the case. Fujiwara no Kiyosuke 藤原清輔 (1104-1177), the author of a manual of poetics and related court ritual entitled *Fukurozōshi* (Poetic Miscellany, 1157-1158), who was familiar with the anthology, said as much. Kiyosuke's younger (adopted) brother, Kenshō 顯昭 (c.1130-c.1209) concurred, though he harbored serious doubts as to exactly which sovereigns the poems in this anthology ought to be attributed. Not convinced by the then common view that Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701-756, r. 724-749) had composed these

²⁵⁰ Yamaguchi, "Saga gyoshū no sōtei," 25 and 35; see also Sakai, "Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku," 9.

poems, Kenshō, and many scholars since, deemed it more probable that these poems were authored by Emperor Heizei. Yamaguchi, in quoting Kenshō, calls for a reconsideration of the facts. He mentions a number of curious phenomena that seem, when taken together, to point squarely at Saga. We see, for example, in some of the headnotes, mention of *nyōgo* 女御, junior consorts of the sovereign. Saga's father, Emperor Kanmu, seems to be the first to have appointed junior consorts, notably such women as Ki no Otouo 紀乙魚 (?-840) and Kudara-no-konikishi Kyōhō 百濟王教法 (?-840), though the term *nyōgo* does not appear during his reign. This term first appears in the historical record with Saga, in an entry from *Nihon kōki* for the year 815.²⁵¹ It follows, therefore, that this anthology of vernacular verse must have been compiled shortly after the reign of Kanmu. One could argue, and rightly so, that the headnotes are necessarily later additions added sometime during or even after Saga's reign, while the poems themselves were first presented sometime before. It should be noted, though, that Emperor Heizei appointed no junior consorts, wherefore he is not a likely candidate for the authorship of these poems—at least not those whose headnotes refer to a junior consort.²⁵²

²⁵¹ *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 6 (815).10.25, 713.

²⁵² Yamaguchi, "Saga gyoshū no sōtei," 27.

At least one of the vernacular poems in *Saga gyoshū* only makes sense when attributed to Saga. The poem in question, according to Yamaguchi, was composed sometime between 810 and 812. Considering, however, that one of the princesses mentioned in this poem passed away in the year 809, this poem must have been composed sometime before that date. If so, the voice of this poem is that of a soon-to-be Emperor Saga. Significantly, it is a poem in which Saga—still as prince—is comparing the relative beauty of two women: one, referred to here as the eighth princess (*onna hachi* 女八), was a consort of his elder brother, Emperor Heizei, while the other, here referred to as the fifth princess (*onnago* 女五), was a consort of his younger brother, the future Emperor Junna. A headnote to this poem reads: “Having heard that the imperial consorts [of his two brothers] were exceedingly comely, [Emperor Saga] composed these verses.” If I am right in assigning this poem to a date sometime prior to 809, the royal appellation of sovereign was a later addition of the editors of this anthology. Whatever the case, the poem itself reads as follows:

I wonder, were we to compare the lovely faces of the eighth and the fifth princesses,
could we say [with any confidence] which of the two shines the more

radiantly?²⁵³

女八と 女五の宮と くらぶれば

いづれか顔の 光まされる

All three men—Heizei, Saga, and Junna—were sired by Emperor Kanmu. The consorts of all three men—those two referred to in this poem, and Saga’s primary consort at this time—were likewise fathered by Kanmu, though each of different mothers. That is to say, all of the people involved in this poem, both the men and their consorts, were all children of a then retired Kanmu.²⁵⁴ What is important to note here is, quite simply, the fact that Saga is using vernacular poetry as a means of praising the beauty of his brothers’ consorts: vernacular poetry, for Saga, could serve as a means of navigating through the courtly world of erotic

²⁵³ The proper reading of this poem, especially of the first two verses, is problematic. I offer the following tentative reading: *Onnahachi to onnago no miya to kurabureba / izureka kao no hikari masareru*. The assumed answer to Saga’s hypothetical question is, of course, that we would not be able to say who was more beautiful; they are both exceedingly radiant.

²⁵⁴ Yamaguchi, “Saga gyoshū no sōtei,” 31-33. Yamaguchi’s argument is very involved. I have deliberately simplified things a great deal here. Though not of consequence to our present discussion, some readers may be interested to learn the proposed identities of the two princesses mentioned in this poem: The eighth princess, consort of a Emperor Heizei, was likely Princess Ōyake 大宅 (?-849). Incidentally, she was among those who did *not* follow Heizei during his move back to Nara. The fourth princess, consort to the future Emperor Junna, was likely Princess Koshi 高志 (789-809). Saga, likely still prince at the time of this poem, had as his consort a lady by the name of Princess Takatsu 高津 (?-841).

power. He does not praise the beauty of his own consort. That would have been in very bad taste. By thus praising the consorts of his brothers, Saga is making two simultaneous gestures. On the one hand, he seeks to maintain, at least on the surface, an appearance of harmonious relations between himself and his brothers. In this respect, his poem may be interpreted as a gesture of humility. On the other hand, by speaking in the voice of one who has the aesthetic discernment with which to potentially pass judgement upon the relative beauty of court ladies, Saga portrays himself, as he does in several Sinitic romantic poems to be discussed below, as a master of the rear palace, that is, the imperial seraglio. An intimate acquaintance with women, and an ability to judge their relative virtues, placed princes and sovereigns in a superior position in relation to the complex world of marriage politics. For better or for worse, in the ninth-century court of Heian Japan, a woman's beauty, along with a man's ability to discern and pass judgment upon it, was synonymous with political power. Here, the erotic and the political are united.²⁵⁵

Tachibana Kachiko, Queen of the Sandalwood Forest

²⁵⁵ In the year 807, Saga, while still but a prince, presented a vernacular poem of praise to Heizei, then the ruling sovereign. This poem, which is preserved in *Ruijū kokushi*, 31 (Teiōbu 11), is translated and discussed in Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 38-41.

Not all of the poems in the so-called *Saga gyoshū* were by Saga. At least one, as Yamaguchi quite convincingly argues, was by his future queen, Tachibana no Kachiko, who, at the time the poem in question was composed, was yet a junior consort.²⁵⁶ A headnote to this poem reads as follows:

During that time when [Tachibana no Kachiko] had not yet been appointed primary consort [of Emperor Saga], she suffered greatly [on account of the exceptional favor she received] from the jealous looks of her fellow ladies in waiting. One night, when His Majesty [Saga] had come secretly to the entrance of her bedchamber, she [fearing the jealousy of her rivals,] humbly declined his visit, presenting him instead with the following poem.

まだ后になり給はざりける時、かたはらの女御たちそねみ給ふけしきな
りける時、みかど御曹司に忍びて立ちより給へりけるに、御対面はなく

²⁵⁶ Yamaguchi, “Saga gyoshū no sōtei,” 29. This same poem, along with its headnote, has also been preserved in *Gosen wakashū* 後撰和歌集 (955-957), fascicle no. 15, under the category of miscellaneous poems (*zōka*), poem no. 1080.

て、たてまつり給ひける。

The vernacular poem reads thus:

Gossip spreads like wildfire! Wait there, I beg you, at my curtain but a little while longer. Do not rush in just yet. The dew is bound to fall come nightfall, and when it does, I shall come out to wipe it off the grass.

言繁し 暫しはたてれ 宵の間に
置けらん露は 出でて払はむ

Kachiko, fearful that Saga's rather early visit will be detected by her jealous rivals, bids the man wait until the night has grown somewhat older, when, she hopes, her fellow ladies in waiting will have gone to bed. Then, like one who wakes up long before the sun rises and quietly brushes the dew away from the grasses, Kachiko, just as quietly, promises to rise from her bed and greet the sovereign. Kachiko was appointed Saga's primary consort in 815, when she was thirty years old. This poem was likely written shortly before that date.

Saga is depicted here as the all-too-eager lover calling upon his beloved lady. Kachiko is able, through the medium of vernacular poetry, to at once temporarily postpone the sovereign's visit, thereby forcing him to wait outside, as well as offer a promise to meet at a somewhat later time. Kachiko is in control here. Even so, by assenting to Saga's amorous entreaty, she simultaneously succeeds in portraying the sovereign as the consummate lover, one whose advances simply cannot be refused. Here, too, then, Saga is portrayed as erotically, and therefore politically, powerful.

Remember that, like Saga, Kachiko was also famous for Sinitic poetry. She, like Saga, was evidently skilled in vernacular poetry, as well. Kachiko was also known by a Sinitic moniker, namely, Queen Danrin (Danrin kōgō 檀林皇后), or Queen of the Sandalwood Forest, which latter term refers to Buddhist temples or the world of Buddhist learning in general. She has gone down in history as having possessed exceptional comeliness coupled with remarkable literary talents. Her father, too, is attested as having been blessed with these same virtues. Kachiko's father died when she was but three years old, leaving her with little support.²⁵⁷ Kachiko's beauty was preserved for posterity in this wise: "The queen had a sympathetic, warm heart, along with peerless beauty. Her hands

²⁵⁷ Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 63.

reached below her knees; her hair flowed down to the very ground. All gazed upon her with wonder.” It is thought that this exceptional beauty might have played a significant role in Saga’s choice, while he was yet a prince, to appoint her—a woman who, having lost her father, could have afforded little significant political advantage—as one of his consorts.²⁵⁸

Kachiko, as just mentioned, was appointed Saga’s primary consort in the year 815, just six days after the Tanabata Festival, which occurs on the seventh day of the seventh month. This is significant, for it serves to symbolically portray Kachiko as the Weaver Maiden, Orihime 織姫, one of the central figures of the Tanabata legend. This characterization would stick with her throughout history. She is recorded as having been granted intimations of key future events by means of her own dreams. She seems, furthermore, to have been associated throughout her career at court with a Buddhist divinity. Her title, Queen Danrin, with its Buddhist associations, was deliberately suggestive. Her beauty, seen itself as a sign of unearthly influence, coupled with her mysterious prognostications, must have convinced all who associate with her that Kachiko possessed a touch of the divine. The description of Kachiko, quoted above, depicts her as

²⁵⁸ Inoue, “Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko),” 64; the original text is to be found in *Buntoku jitsuroku*, Kashō 3 (850).5.5, where the passage translated above reads, in the original, as follows: 后為人寬和風容絕異手過於膝髮委於地觀者皆驚.

having hands that reached down to her knees. Interestingly, this same feature is listed as one of the thirty-two distinguishing characteristics of a fully enlightened Buddha. Now, the same source that has immortalized Kachiko's beauty also preserves a quaint legend about a nun who predicted the girl would one day become queen. This nun is said to have been based in Hokkeji Temple 法華寺 (in modern-day Nara City), which then and still now contains a statue of the Eleven-Faced Avalokitesvara (Jūichimen kannon 十一面観音). A quick look at the statue currently housed in Hokkeji Temple, a statue supposed to have been carved sometime in the early ninth century, shows a divinity whose right hand does indeed extend below the knee. Regardless of whether or not the episode of the soothsaying nun is historically accurate, the fact remains, as Inoue argues, that Kachiko's contemporaries certainly associated her with Hokkeji Temple, and especially with the figure of the Eleven-Faced Avalokitesvara. Moreover, this statue, in turn, was said to have been a faithful likeness of Queen Kōmyō 光明 (701-760), queen of Emperor Shōmu, and the woman credited with commissioning the building of Hokkeji Temple. Kachiko was, in all likelihood, seen by Saga and his immediate associates as somehow reminiscent of Kōmyō. Saga went to some trouble to emphasize this imagined likeness to the fore, while at the same time associating himself with Emperor Shōmu: Shōmu had his Kōmyō; Saga had his

Kachiko. Both women were ardent devotees of Buddhism; both commissioned the building of temples; both were associated with the Eleven-Faced Avalokitesvara.²⁵⁹

Kachiko's moniker, Queen Danrin, is derived from a temple of that name, Danrinji 檀林寺, which she herself commissioned sometime before 847. Present-day Danrinji Temple, completed in 1964, bears no relationship whatsoever to the original building, aside from that fact that it is in western Kyoto, where Kachiko's Danrinji Temple was supposed to have been located. Kachiko took this project very seriously. A monk by the name of Egaku 惠萼 (n.d.) was sent to Mount Wutai 五台山, in modern-day Shaanxi Province with the express mission of bringing back a Chinese monk capable of running her prospective temple. Egaku returned to the court in 847 with Yikong 義空 (n.d.), a monk who belonged to the Chan (Zen) school. Once installed, Danrinji became the first temple in Japan to propound the teachings of Zen Buddhism. This temple was originally erected in a corner of the Saga Wilds, a place most dear to Saga himself, and from whence his posthumous name was derived. Thus it was that Emperor Kamino became Emperor Saga of the Saga Wilds, and Queen Kachiko became Queen Danrin of Danrinji Temple.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 68-69; the passage mentioned here appears in the same section mentioned above, namely, *Buntoku jitsuroku*, Kashō 3 (850).5.5.

²⁶⁰ Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 70.

Like Saga, Kachiko's enthusiasm for Sinitic learning was exceptional. She even went so far as to establish a private academy, known as the Gakukan' in 学官院, in which her relatives and descendants could study the Chinese classics. So intimately was Saga bound to Kachiko that a legend grew up around the pair, in which Saga is said to be the reincarnation of a Buddhist ascetic named Jōsen 上仙, literally, Elevated Immortal, while Kachiko, for her part, is the reincarnation of an old woman who, despite her poverty, ceaselessly supplied Jōsen with sustenance. Another similar legend, included in *Nihon ryōiki*, and therefore circulated during the lifetime of Saga, states that the sovereign was a reincarnation of a monk by the name of Jakusen 寂仙, literally, the Solitary Immortal. This legend says nothing about Kachiko, however.²⁶¹ There were, therefore, during the lives of both Saga and Kachiko, stories circulating that associated the two with saintly Buddhist figures. When considering the career of Saga, and the sway he exerted over courtly culture, especially his encouragement of Sinitic learning, we must not fail to take into consideration the role of some of the more obviously influential women around him. Kachiko is an example of one such woman. This queen seems to have been in no way inferior to Saga in

²⁶¹ Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 73-74; for the legend about Jōsen, see *Buntoku jitsuroku*, Kashō 3 (850).5.5; for the legend about Jakusen, see *Nihon ryōiki*, fascicle 3, tale no. 39, an English translation of which may be found in Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 198-201.

terms of her enthusiasm for the promotion of both Buddhism and literature, especially those sorts imported more-or-less directly from the continent. To this end, she was responsible for establishing a number of Buddhist temples, along with one private academy for the study of Sinitic classics. She was skilled both in vernacular as well as Sinitic poetry, engaging on more than one occasion in poetic exchanges with Saga.²⁶² Saga, when still just a prince, took Kachiko under his arm. Without a father behind her, she could have offered little in the way of political advantage for a young, aspiring Saga. Inoue and others suspect Saga was moved by her extreme beauty. Surely he was not insensitive to her charms. Saga, after all, had more than thirty consorts. I would suggest, on top of this, that Saga, considering his lifelong promotion of Sinitic learning, would have been attracted likewise to her literary talents. It is not at all far-fetched to imagine Kachiko serving as a sort of tutor to the young prince, especially considering the prominent role women of the court played in the education of fledgling men.

Parallels have already been mentioned between Emperor Saga, on the one hand, and Emperor Taizong of the Tang empire, on the other. Something similar exists in the case of Kachiko. A granddaughter of Shangguan Yi, one of the more central courtiers of Taizong's

²⁶² Yamaguchi, "Saga gyoshū no sōtei," 29

court, whose name was Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (c.664-710), occupied a privileged position in the literary salon of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (c. 624-705, r. 690-705), a woman who had been primary consort (*huanghou* 皇后) to Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628-683, r. 649-683), immediate successor to Emperor Taizong. Later, upon the second ascension of Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (656-710, r. 684 and again in 705-710), Wan'er was promoted to the position of imperial consort with a corresponding rank then known as *zhaorong* 昭容, for which reason she is often referred to as Shangguan Zhaorong. Wan'er, who composed poetry by proxy (*daizuo* 代作) for Emperor Zhongzong, as well as other imperial luminaries of that boisterous age, was a central figure in the court literary salon. She was later condemned to execution by Emperor Xuanzong. Political bloodshed aside, Xuanzong did see fit to have the woman's poetry preserved for posterity. Her collection, it is said, amounted to no less than twenty fascicles. Unfortunately, only thirty of her poems survive.²⁶³ Kachiko, as Saga's primary consort, seems to have enjoyed a similarly central role in the courtly literary salon, though we do not have any of her Sinitic poems. What we do have is at least one, if not more, of her vernacular poems, as cited above.

While Saga's reign is so often spoken of as the zenith of Sinitic learning, it must be

²⁶³ Kawai, "Tōdai no kyūtei bungaku," 222.

noted that the rear palace remained, as it had before the Heian period, a bastion of vernacular poetry. Vernacular poems composed by Tachibana no Kachiko, prior to her promotion to queen, show ample evidence of the robust, conservative nature of this mode of versification. Vernacular poetry, at least its more refined, more elaborately developed form, has been credited in part to the poetic innovations brought about by Saga and his literary legacy. The Sinitic preface to *Shinsen wakashū* 新撰和歌集 (compiled sometime between 930 and 934), written by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (868-945), traces the origin of that variety of sophisticated vernacular poetry found in *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (914) back about one century to the Kō'nin years, that is, to the reign of Emperor Saga. That is to say, the renaissance in Sinitic writing, especially poetry, brought about by Saga and his coterie was seen, at least throughout the early Heian period, as having in some way fostered a revival in vernacular verse as well. Similarly, the so-called Japanese (six-stringed) zither, or *wagon* 和琴, also enjoyed exceptional prestige during Saga's reign. Whether or not the sovereign himself was skilled in the use of this instrument is, so far as I can tell, not wholly certain. It would appear, from a number of later sources which regard Saga as the founder of a musical lineage for the Japanese zither, that he must have exhibited some talent. Either that or, what is more likely, he acted as generous patron to a close-knit group of skilled

court musicians. One of the most prominent such musicians was a woman, serving in Saga's rear palace in the capacity of the Head of Female Officials (*naishi no kami*), by the name of Princess Hiroi 広井女王 (?-859).²⁶⁴ Just as Kachiko might have acted as Saga's private tutor, instructing him in the art of Sinitic versification, it is likewise possible that this Hiroi taught Saga how to play the zither.

Romantic Poetry, Male Sexuality, and the Emperor's Seraglio

Returning to Saga's poetry, it is no surprise to see numerous verses dealing with women, or the subject of romantic love between man and woman. The romantic verses serve as a means of emphasizing Saga's sexual power, which in turn signifies his dominant position as the focus of all court-based marriage politics. It must not be forgotten that Saga housed within his rear palace no less than thirty-one women, by means of whom he fathered some fifty children. Women played a crucial role in Saga's political life, not only as bearers of potential heirs but also as private tutors, both to their own children and to Saga himself. That Saga's poetry should contain numerous erotic references, some more obvious

²⁶⁴ Kumagai, "Sagachō no joryū sakka tachi," 71, 78-79.

than others, is to be expected. A fair number of these women, among whom Tachibana no Kachiko was the most celebrated, were accomplished poets, both in the vernacular as well as the Sinitic tradition. Saga was writing as much for his male vassals as he was for his bevy of female consorts. In the sovereign's able hand, verses charged with sexual connotations are simultaneously pronouncements of political mastery as well as declarations of superior cultural refinement. Sexuality—male sexuality—is expressed not so much as a mastery over women, though that is certainly implied, as a form of aesthetic appreciation or sensitivity. It is for this reason that so much of Saga's erotic or romantic poetry is couched within the suggestive language of flowers, the supreme objects of aesthetic admiration in Sinitic poetry. Furthermore, as this aesthetic appreciation of the erotic is meant to convey a sense of real political power, such an experience is necessarily meant to be admired or consumed publically. Saga's romantic verses, for the most part, appear in pieces that were composed expressly for and presented at public occasions, such as royal feasts and official outings. That is to say, male sexuality, while always tastefully obscured beneath the niceties of poetic convention, was by no means a private matter. Quite the opposite. Saga's sexuality was something to be intoned for all to hear, at least all those in attendance at his banquets, as well as those who would later read his anthologized verses.

One of the sovereign's very earliest poems, "Falling Blossoms," which was likely presented at a flower-viewing banquet held on the twelfth day of the second month—mid-spring—in the third year of Kō'nin (812), being the first such banquet of Saga's reign, is a revealing example of Saga's desire to publically announce his sexuality.²⁶⁵ This poem, as was touched upon during our summative review of *Ryōunshū*, appears near the beginning of that anthology, the very first two poems of which are by Retired Emperor Heizei: the first is about peach blossoms, the second cherry blossoms. As far as Saga's poetry is concerned, therefore, "Falling Blossoms" is the first of his poems to appear in anthologized form. As such, it would have been engendered with a great deal of extra prestige. "Falling Blossoms," presented in the Shinsen Gardens, was part of a thoroughly public performance.²⁶⁶ Saga adroitly dresses the beautiful vernal blossoms immediately before him in language suggestive of comely maidens. This is not mere metaphor. Some of his consorts, as well as a whole host of colorfully clad dancing girls, were in attendance at this regal banquet. We must approach his verses with double vision; we must see at once both flowers and women:

²⁶⁵ The banquet in question is mentioned in *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 3 [812].2.12, 601. For a full English translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 1 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3).

²⁶⁶ For a provocative comparison between the thoroughly performative aspect of Heian poetry and that of Roman rhetoric, see Denecke, *Classic World Literatures*, 57-58.

My eye, roaming far over this vernal garden, seems to catch sight of bands of beautiful maidens. What are these—now I see more clearly!—but the rich hues of pliant grasses and smiling flowers, each reflected in the other's brilliance.

Flowers that look more like pearls glitter amongst the leaves; blossoms resemble the elegant topknots of our courtly maidens.²⁶⁷ A gentle breeze finds its way into those floral gowns—what lovely forms, so tranquil are there.

In the early morning we draw those blossoms towards us; in the evening we break off a spray or two for ourselves. Though weary with all this pulling and plucking of blossoms—my sash is overflowing with the many-colored floral treasures I have found!

Still, I cannot help but linger aimlessly, fondly, amidst these fragrant bowers. The sun is beginning to set as we, oblivious in our revelry, frolic alongside the woods:

²⁶⁷ The idea here is simple: the grasses and flowers are as fresh and beautiful as young maidens. However, this description is not merely metaphorical. Banquets of this sort were almost always graced with a performance of dancing maidens. Saga is likely referring simultaneously to both the natural scenery as well as the young ladies dancing before him and his vassals. This double vision is carried throughout the remainder of the poem.

What delicious pleasures we have found gamboling about with these comely
 maidens! True, these vernal breezes may at length strip the trees bare. Fret not.

春園遙望佳人在 亂雜繁花相映輝
 點珠顏 綴髻鬟 吹入懷中嬌態閑
 朝攀花 暮折花 攀花力盡衣帶賒
 未厭芬芳徒徙倚 留連林裏晚光斜
 妖姬一翫已為樂 不畏春風總吹落

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3

This last couplet is exceptionally provocative. Of course, one might find umbrage with my translation, especially the phrase “delicious pleasures.” I have taken the liberty of adding the adjective ‘delicious’ in hopes of conveying some sense of the original. Whether or not these pleasures are meant to convey expressly erotic connotations is, in the original, deliberately left unclear. The use of the verb *wan/moteasobu* 翫, frolic, gambol, play with, especially in the sense of turning something (often flowers) over and over in the hands,

however, suggests a flirtatious engagement of some sort. As though to emphasize his commitment to sensual joys, and to encourage the same sentiments in his vassals and consorts, Saga concludes this poem with a carefree petition: “Drink in the beauty now before you; think not of carelessly casting aside these present joys!” The wholehearted enjoyment of pleasure is, for Saga, a sign of his peaceful and peaceable rule.

A similar sentiment is to be found in another verse, also by Saga, which celebrates his favorite chrysanthemum banquet, thus:

Fill up the maidens’ hands—those arms as white and smooth as jade—with the petals of these chrysanthemums, and see how far that fragrance spreads.²⁶⁸

把盈玉手流香遠 摘入金杯辨色難

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 5

Chrysanthemum blossoms, aside from their then popular medicinal use in liqueurs specially

²⁶⁸ For a full English translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 3 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 5).

brewed for the chrysanthemum banquet, were, for Saga, a symbol of female beauty, especially in its most youthful forms. As with “Falling Blossoms,” his very lengthy “Chrysanthemum Blossoms” invites us to turn our attention now to the flowers, now to the maidens gathered about them.

Some of its blossoms are white, others yellow—all of them exuding their sweet
fragrance throughout this garden.

Comely maidens and charming girls, casting those languid eyes here and there, dally
softly amidst those flowers.

Raising their slender arms, stretching forth those delicate wrists, they gingerly pluck
the choicest flowers, decorating their faces and hair.

Behold! Those youthful cheeks, as smooth and pale as pearls, shine with a new
radiance; their hair, arrayed like floating clouds, sport exquisite new hairpins!

Wanting nothing more than to fill our arms with bundles of chrysanthemum
blossoms, we linger on in this garden until the sun begins to set.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ For a full English translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 54 (*Keikoku*, poem no. 2).

或素或黃 滿庭芬馥
 淑媛望兮移步 妖姬歡兮屬目
 攘翮腕而採嫩 擢纖手以摘花
 珠顏俄爾益艷 雲髻忽焉重釵
 期採摘於盈把兮 愛逍遙乎日斜

Saga, *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 2

Significantly, as was the case with “Falling Blossoms,” this poem crowns an entire anthology—in this case, *Keikokushū*. This is a celebratory piece, and as such, provides Saga with the perfect opportunity to assert his sexual powers. Just as with “Falling Blossoms,” this poem concludes with a lighthearted hooray, in which Saga urges his vassals and consorts to “rejoice in the chrysanthemum flower, the source of longevity and more happiness to come!” More interesting, still, is the way in which Saga effectively sexualizes his beloved chrysanthemums. The smooth, pale, radiant cheeks of the maidens appearing in these verses are, at the same time, the pale, radiant petals of the very chrysanthemums they long to pick. The maidens are as beautiful as the flowers; the blossoms are as radiant as the

women. It is little wonder that Saga associates these flowers with youthful women, that is, with sexual energy. Chrysanthemum liqueur was supposed to ensure longevity for the sovereign and his attendants. Fertile consorts, similarly, were supposed to ensure the longevity of the imperial lineage. However, it was not only chrysanthemum blossoms who were poetically engendered with sexual energy. Cherry blossoms, too, could be transformed into symbols of feminine sexuality. In “A Serene Garden Brightened with Early Plum Blossoms,” Saga praises a solitary cherry tree, whose early-blooming flowers are properly appreciated by him alone:

Those ermine petals, content even to shine in solitude, not shunning this lonely
garden where few eyes are wont to linger, send their rich fragrance through my
open window like some ardent nightly visitor.

Her slender, supple trunk, dry from winter’s chill, at last feels the first warm caresses
of spring, while her white blossoms, still shivering, flutter and prance over
patches of last year’s dark-green moss.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ For a full English translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 73 (*Keikoku*, poem no. 101).

純素不嫌幽院寂 濃香偏是犯窻來
 纖纖枯幹知初暖 片片寒葩委舊苔

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 101

Flowers, be they cherry blossoms or chrysanthemums, were not the only objects to populate Saga's erotic landscape. The sovereign devoted a number of poems to a certain famous continental imperial consort by the name of Consort Ban. Known in Chinese histories as Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (c.48-c.6 BC), where the final *jiayu* refers to her official position as consort to the sovereign, this woman was a highly-educated and, from what poetry she has left behind, a gifted writer. In virtue of both her erudition and comely appearance, Consort Ban became a favorite consort of Emperor Cheng 成帝 (51-7 BC, r. 33-7). Eventually, however, Emperor Chen was hopelessly smitten by a newcomer: a lovely young dancing girl nicknamed the Flying Swallow of Zhao, or Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (?-1 BC). Consort Ban, realizing she was no longer the object of Emperor Cheng's affection, humbly requested to be moved to the Changxin Hall 長信宮, the Palace of Everlasting Faith, where she might wait upon the Empress Dowager—Emperor Cheng's mother—

Wang Zhengun 王政君 (71-13 BC), a woman who had managed to establish around her person a palace bureaucracy of remarkable size and complexity.²⁷¹ It was here that Consort Ban spent the remainder of her lonely days, and it was here that she composed her most famous poem “Song of Resentment” (*Yuangexing* 怨歌行), which depicts a concubine who, like herself, though once much beloved by her lord, had been forgotten in favor of a recently appointed, more youthful concubine. In this poem, the narrator, compares herself to a discarded fan, which, come the cooler months, is no longer needed to ward off the heat of summer.²⁷² Saga includes allusions to this fan in several poems, even when its appearance there seems somewhat out of place.²⁷³ While it may be argued that Saga wrote poetry about Consort Ban as a more-or-less playful response to continental models—there is no shortage of Consort Ban poems on the continent—it remains to be explained why he focused on this particular figure. There were many other notable ladies to

²⁷¹ For more on the Empress Dowager and her bureaucracy, see Anthony Barbieri-Low and Robin Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb No.247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), volume 1, 956.

²⁷² A translation of Consort Ban’s poem may be found in Kang-i Sun Chang & Haun Saussy, ed., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 18-19.

²⁷³ In his “Snow in the Old Capital: In Humble Reply to Emperor Heizei,” Saga refers to the beauty of falling snow with an awkward allusion to Consort Ban’s legendary white fan: “Snowflakes glitter like moonlight playing across some fair maiden’s white fan. Falling snow—auspicious sign of a plentiful harvest to come—glistens across a night sky.” For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 84 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 167).

whom he could have turned his literary attention.

Consort Ban was abandoned by her lover—a man, like Saga, who happened to be the sovereign of a vast kingdom. While Saga might very well have felt a sense of pity for, or at least a detached sense of interest in the character of this consort, it seems more likely that his deliberate and repeated reference to this woman throughout his poetry carries a political message. I think, moreover, that his message is rather simple: Fear not, my faithful consorts, I shall not abandon you, as Emperor Cheng so heartlessly abandoned the lovely Consort Ban. I shall remain true to you, so long as you remain true to me. By repeatedly alluding to the tale of Consort Ban, Saga reassures his female audience that he will remain forever constant to his women. This assertion, in turn, is meant to ensure the lasting peace of his rear palace, the center of erotic power (marriage politics) within his court. “The Sorrow of Consort Ban” is Saga’s way of at once showing, or perhaps feigning, a sense of sympathy for the poor woman’s plight, as well as indirectly reasserting his own position of power, for it was Saga, after all, who would determine which woman were permitted to stay and which had to go.

Her sovereign’s affections, once so warm, at last grew cold and distant. Consort Ban

was moved from her splendid chamber to live all alone within the Queen
Mother's residence.

She, like the fan discarded in autumn, sings verses full of sorrow for her wretched
plight. The autumn breeze, usually so inviting, is to her an ever-painful
reminder of bygone happiness.

No more did she hear the sound of eager footsteps coming to visit her—not upon
those quiet stairs. In vain did the moon cast its light upon her cold curtains—no
lover to enjoy the moonlight within that lonely chamber.

All hope of once again setting foot in the sovereign's rear palace, a place she had
once called home, has long since been lost. As the years passed by, so, too, does
her youthful charm. Hope and beauty fade together.²⁷⁴

昭陽辭恩寵 長信獨離居

團扇含愁詠 秋風怨有餘

閑階人跡絕 冷帳月光虛

久罷後庭望 形將歲時除

²⁷⁴ For explanatory footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 30 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 58).

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 58

The final remark—hope and beauty fade together—despite its fatalistic turn, resonates, when coming from the figure of Saga, with a sense of reassurance. He comforts his women, thus: While it was true, for Consort Ban, that her beauty fled when hope was lost, rest assured that, for you, my dears, it will not be so. You shall enjoy my company for years to come. Nurtured by my love, *your* beauty will never fade. He employs this same method of indirect reassurance in another poem, “Flight of the Swallows,” which alludes likewise to the fate of Consort Ban. This time the focus is on the dancing girl Feiyan, Flying Swallow, whose arrival in Emperor Chen’s court led to so much suffering for Consort Ban. The “shameful queen” Feiyan, unlike real swallows who remain faithful to their partners, flying side-by-side at all times, has instead brought about the separation of Emperor Chen and Consort Ban.²⁷⁵ Again, in his lengthy “The Autumn Moon: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi,” Saga describes the full moon as follows: “That snow-white orb looks like the

²⁷⁵ For a full English translation of Saga’s “Flight of the Swallows” poem, see Appendix, item no. 46 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 111).

round fan of poor Consort Ban, who, just as the summer fan discarded come autumn, was slighted by her unfaithful lover.”²⁷⁶ It is likely, what with more than thirty consorts in his seraglio, that Saga would have inadvertently offended some of these women at one time or another. Perhaps these references to Consort Ban were meant to serve as a reminder to those consorts who, deeming themselves slighted by their sovereign lover, might take some comfort in thinking that Saga was at least aware of their situation. Whatever the case, Consort Ban was for Saga a perennial figure, one who he employed, first, to demonstrate a sense of sympathy for the plight of lovelorn consorts, and, second, to indirectly assert his dominance as sole arbitrator of a large rear palace.

CONCLUSION

I would like the Interlude that immediately follows this chapter to serve as a sort of conclusion to our lengthy examination of Saga and early ninth-century Sinitic poetry. Consequently, allow me to say but a few words here in closing. The efflorescence of Sinitic

²⁷⁶ For a full English translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 51 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 137).

literature, especially poetry, along with the more general Sinification of the court as a whole, brought about by Saga was unique, especially in terms of its sheer intensity. Saga, both on and off the throne, proved to be a tireless patron of Sinitic literature, organizing and contributing to three imperially commissioned anthologies of poetry, along with a number of other significant works. Junna, his brother and immediate successor, and (merely) ostensive commissioner of *Keikokushū*, was not nearly so active. Already with the ascension of Emperor Ninmyō, Saga's son and successor to Junna, we begin to see a marked move towards the promotion of vernacular poetry.²⁷⁷ Saga's enthusiasm for Sinitic poetry seems to have been rather short-lived. As shall be seen in the third and fourth chapter, the practice of Sinitic poetry was still very much alive throughout the latter half of the ninth century. Literary luminaries like Miyako no Yoshika 都良香 (834-879), Shimada Tadaomi, Sugawara no Michizane, and Ki no Haseo 紀長谷雄 (845-912) all produced collections of poetry containing hundreds of Sinitic poems and prose pieces. Even so, all of these collections were precisely that—private collections (*shika kanshishū* 私家漢詩集) compiled by individuals and not in accordance with any imperial order. The era of imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic poetry (*chokusen kanshishū* 勅撰漢詩集)

²⁷⁷ Aoki & Harimoto, *Tennō bungyō sōran*, 157; Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 59-60.

began and ended with Saga. During the latter half of the ninth century, in direct contradistinction to the earlier half, it is difficult to find any Sinitic poetry attributed to the sovereign. About half a century after Saga's death, Tadaomi compiled his private collection of Sinitic poetry in 891, while Michizane compiled his in 900. Just five years after this, in 905, Emperor Daigo 醍醐 (885-930, r. 897-930), a great-great-grandson of Saga, ordered the compilation of Japan's first imperially commissioned anthology of vernacular poetry (*chokusen wakashū* 勅撰和歌集), namely, *Kokin wakashū*, which was completed sometime between 913 and 914. This was followed by *Gosen wakashū*, commissioned by Emperor Murakami 村上 (926-967, r. 946-967) in 951, and *Shūi wakashū*, commissioned by Emperor Kazan 花山 (968-1008, r. 984-986) sometime between the years 1005 and 1007. Vernacular poetry saw a revival at court that very nearly drowned out any efforts to promote Sinitic poetry. Saga would not have been happy. Of course, Sinitic poetry was never wholly neglected during these decades. Emperor Murakami, patron of vernacular verses though he was, hosted a poetry match in 957, known as the *Tentoku denjō shiawase* 天徳殿上詩合 (Imperial Sinitic Poetry Match of the Tentoku Era), which featured the presentation exclusively of Sinitic verses. Such events, however, had since become the exception. Nothing like Saga's enthusiasm for Sinitic poetry was ever seen again at court.

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INTERLUDE

Saga and Alfred:

Politics and Poetic Practices in Heian and Wessex

INTRODUCTION

This section engages in something that might seem, at first glance, somewhat out of place, namely, a comparative examination of the court and literary activities of Saga with those of that most famous Anglo-Saxon king, Alfred the Great (849-899, r. 871-899).²⁷⁸

Born less than a decade after Saga's death, the life of Alfred offers a near contemporary glance at court politics and literary developments in ninth-century Wessex, the political and cultural center of Alfred's kingdom. A comparison of this sort, though necessarily cursory

²⁷⁸ English-language scholarship on Alfred and his times is overwhelmingly vast. I have relied throughout this section on a number of excellent biographies and numerous articles. By far the most scholarly, and most recent, monographs dedicated to King Alfred are David Pratt's *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (2007), and Richard Abels' *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (2013). Justin Pollard's more popular *Alfred the Great: The Man who Founded England* (2006), while lacking the usual scholarly accoutrements—extensive footnotes and overly involved discussions—is a reliable and refreshingly literary biography of the king and his times. *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (2013) also deserves special mention, for it contains seminal articles on many key issues of this embattled field.

and regrettably quite piecemeal, should serve at least as a first step towards a more interdisciplinary understanding of ninth-century Japanese Sinitic poetry. There are several features of Saga's reign, which, were it not for contrasts brought to the fore by looking at the court of Alfred, would otherwise remain, for the most part unrecognized. It is precisely in hopes of bringing forth such features that I have ventured somewhat out of my specialization—premodern Japanese poetry—and dared to intrude upon the field of Anglo-Saxon literature. The comparison was simply too tempting. Saga and Alfred, besides being near contemporaries, share between them many remarkable characteristics, both in terms of their ideologies of kingship as well as their grand literary projects. Both, for example, championed literature as a central factor in the proper governance of their respective realms. In whatever way this Interlude is received, it should provide scholars of both premodern Japanese and Anglo-Saxon literature with several potentially fruitful points of inquiry.

This interlude consists of two major sections. The first serves as a general historical survey of the period, introducing such things as the political background, the structure of Alfred's court, the state of literacy in ninth-century England, a short biography of Alfred, as well as his relationship with the church. The second section focuses on Alfred's literary

project and the nature of his poetry. It is in this second section that I will introduce some concrete comparisons between the poetry of Alfred and that of Saga. As will be seen, while there are a number of similarities between the work of these two men, there are two or three striking differences deserving of serious consideration.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF NINTH-CENTURY ENGLAND AND THE LIFE OF ALFRED

Political Background: The Heptarchy and the King's Court

England from the fifth to the early tenth century is traditionally seen as having been divided into seven small kingdoms, known collectively as the Heptarchy. These seven kingdoms are enumerated as follows: Wessex, Sussex, Essex, and Kent in the south, East Anglia, Mercia in the middle, Northumbria in the north. Each kingdom seems to have sported their own king. Bede's (673-735) own list of kingdoms and lands, as they appear in his enormously famous *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 731), more-or-less confirms this arrangement. Contrary to what many scholars of the past generations had averred, however, it appears that the Heptarchy, as

outlined by Bede, refers primarily to political divisions of the late seventh and early eighth century, divisions which were in turn likely based on a reordering of the English Church occurring near the close of the seventh century. Besides these seven kingdoms, Bede mentions a number of other scattered peoples and kingdoms—*gentes* and *provinciae*, to use his own Latin terminology—which, while deserving special mention, did not belong to any of these larger groupings.²⁷⁹ The role of the English Church in fostering a sense of unity, in promoting the notion of a single English people—the *gens Anglorum*—if not practically, at least ideologically, must not be forgotten. Alfred has of old been lauded as the great cultural unifier, the father of the English nation, when, in fact, the church had just as much to do with this move towards national unity. More specifically, it is likely that ecclesiastics serving at the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury from as early as the sixth century, as a result of the Gregorian mission to Kent of 596, were already working towards an ideal of English unification, in the form of a single English Church.²⁸⁰ The church, just as much as Alfred,

²⁷⁹ Ann Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 5-7. The Heptarchy, until recently a very widely accepted scheme, was first made famous by the twelfth-century English historian Henry of Huntington (c.1088-c.1157), who, in his *Historia Anglorum* (History of the English, 1129), provides an account of England's history from its beginnings to the year 1154

²⁸⁰ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 12. The Gregorian mission was led by Augustine (?-c.604)—not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo—who, as the first Archbishop of Canterbury, is celebrated as the Apostle to the English, and founder of the unified English Church.

though perhaps for (slightly) different reasons, was interested in a unified kingdom. As always, a successful kingdom like Alfred's, what with its rich diversity, along with the concomitant violence and tension such diversity entails, with different groups of subjects tottering precariously between loyalty and resistance, produced neither complete complacency nor yet complete resistance, but a dynamic, and mutually provocative form of "contingent accommodation."²⁸¹ The Japanese archipelago of the ninth-century, while not divided into kingdoms as such, did consist of a patchwork of provinces (*kuni*), a word which literally means land, or even kingdom, each with its own respective powerful household or body of households, which may or may not have fulfilled the same function as pre-Alfredian kings in Anglo-Saxon England. The role of state-sponsored Buddhism, especially in the form of Saichō's Tendai sect, approaches something akin to the unified English Church. Tendai Buddhism, like the Church, provided a religious thrust towards unification, promoting the universal inclusion of all people, nay, all sentient beings, whether they be natives of the archipelago or immigrants from the continent, as all alike subjects of an elevated sage-sovereign.

Alfred's father, Æthelwulf, ruled a kingdom the boundaries of which were in

²⁸¹ Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 14.

perpetual motion. Generally speaking, Æthelwulf's court shifted, throughout the first half of the ninth century, southwards from Mercia down to Wessex. When Alfred came to assume the authority of king, the network of power centered in Wessex was yet young, and its future wholly uncertain. Like his father before him, Alfred's court, though centered in Wessex, was essentially an itinerant court, moving from shire to shire, convening now at one of the king's many royal estates, now at one of his palaces or farms, each of which was overseen by a royally appointed reeve. In this way, the king's presence was made to be felt, in one way or another, throughout the entire kingdom, and not merely in a central palace.²⁸²

Saga's father, Emperor Kanmu, had also moved his court, from the Nara basin to Kyoto.

Like Alfred's Wessex, too, Saga's Heian capital was, when first he ascended the throne, young and far from settled. The Kusuko Incident was a tell-tale sign of this very real instability. Like Alfred, too, Saga made his presence felt throughout Kyoto and beyond by means of frequent royal processions and visits. Saga's court, as was emphasized in the second chapter, was an itinerant court. Furthermore, as was the case with ninth-century Japan, in the early middle ages of English history, kingship meant authority over people,

²⁸² Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 26-27, 28, and 30; Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 118.

that is, subjects, rather than over specific regions of land. Authority over people naturally equated with power over the lands upon which those people lived and worked. Even so, at least ideologically, the king was, first and foremost, a ruler of men.²⁸³ This is different from our modern conception of authorial rule: our rulers—presidents, Chief Ministers, mayors, governors—in the general parlance of everyday discussion, govern countries not people. Although this is admittedly a matter of ideological orientation—practically, it makes little difference whether you think in terms of ruling people or ruling land—ideology becomes much more significant when dealing with the literary works produced by rulers, premodern and modern alike. Mighty sovereigns like Alfred and Saga saw themselves as rulers over people, and it is this supposed relationship of a ruler to his subjects that comes to the fore in both their literary works.

English kings—we should rather say Anglo-Saxon kings, for there was yet no England as such—of the eighth and ninth century stood at the center of a large household of advisors, councilors, and servants of various kinds. The precise structure of the king's household is not clear. It is possible, considering the dearth of such references in contemporary historical sources, that these royal households lacked any definite

²⁸³ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 2.

hierarchical structure, or that whatever structure might have prevailed was relatively fluid.

Alfred's men functioned in various capacities, at times as warriors, at other times as servants, in accordance with necessity. Royal charters issued by English kings of this period contain the signatures of several witnesses, some of whom must have belonged to the king's own household. It is rare, however, to find in these signatures anything indicative of a distinguishing title or rank.²⁸⁴ In any event, we do not find among the king's retinue, clearly defined ranks and fixed official posts, as we do in the case of Saga and his elaborate court, whose vassals, as a matter of strictly regulated protocol, included in their signatures their full official titles. Whenever Saga addresses his poetry to a particular vassal, he does so, with few exceptions, using the man's full title, which is only then followed by his given name. Saga's men are, each and every one of them, fixed into a clearly defined rank and post, official titles that are neither easily nor often altered. The terminology favored by Ann Williams is, I think, to the point: Whereas Saga was enthroned at the center of a full-blown court (*kyūtei* or *chōtei*), Alfred ruled over what is rightly called a kingly household.²⁸⁵

Alfred's model of kingship harkens back to the Heorot, that stately mead-hall *cum* kingly

²⁸⁴ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 49-50.

²⁸⁵ I should note here that Williams uses the term household when referring generally to early English kings. When speaking specifically of Alfred, especially in his later years, Williams does use the more lofty term royal court (73).

household of the legendary sixth-century Danish king, Hrothgar, who figures so prominently in the Old English saga *Beowulf*. Saga's court, on the other hand, was modelled upon continental courts, most explicitly, that of the Tang empire, and was therefore designed to function on a much grander scale. This Tang model, which Saga naturally modified as required, was "fine-tuned with annual reports, forecasts, statistical data on supplies, the occupations and capacities (age, health, work, sex) of the population, account keeping, standardized coinage and measures, and performance evaluations."²⁸⁶

Nothing this grand or this intricate was ever put into place by Alfred, nor certainly by any of his predecessors. I mention the hoary image of Heorot deliberately. Archaeological research at Cheddar, a large village in the county of Somerset, has revealed the remains of a royal Anglo-Saxon palace, which seems to have been in continual use for a number of centuries. This site centers around a series of long wooden halls, the oldest of these having been constructed sometime around the time of Alfred. The fact, first, that these wooden halls clearly dominate the site, and, second, that there are only a small number of relatively insignificant buildings surrounding these halls, points to the continuity over several

²⁸⁶ Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 46.

centuries of a hall-centered style of aristocratic life and governance.²⁸⁷ Athelney, also, in Somerset, once contained a fortress, to which Alfred, as shall be shortly explained, temporarily retreated before sallying forth to defeat the Danish invaders. In all likelihood, Alfred's Athelney fortress was of the sort uncovered at Cheddar. What we see with Alfred and his hall-centered royal household is a "highly personalized lordship and intimate association of the members" of his entourage. It is a keen, living awareness of this social reality of a hall-centered kingship and communal service to a personal lord that, according to Magennis, forms one of the most defining characteristics of ninth- and tenth-century Anglo-Saxon readers.²⁸⁸ Saga, despite his numerous banquets and cozy poetry exchanges with his more familiar vassals, was far removed from anything as earthy or personal as Hrothgar's fabled mead hall.

Among Alfred's many vassals and housemen, the position of reeve and ealdorman stand out as being of especial prestige and importance. The actual duties and privileges attached to title of reeve (L: *praefectus*; OE: *gerefa*) is difficult to pin down. Each of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had its fair share of reeves, though the specific functions and

²⁸⁷ Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, 11-13.

²⁸⁸ Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, 13-14.

perquisites of these men seems to have varied from place to place. In Northumbria, for example, the reeves appear to have been intimately connected with particular royal towns. The reeves of Kent were connected more closely with royal estates, urban and rural alike, as well as those surrounding regions dependent upon these wealthy estates.²⁸⁹ The reeves of Northumbria approach the status of Heian Japan's township governors (*gōji* 郷司), while those of Kent might be equated with Japan's estate managers (*ryōshu* 領主). Regardless of where these reeves happened to be, they were, as a rule, influential men who, in virtue of their position, were in possession of great wealth. The nature of ninth-century ealdorman is more certain. Already by the eighth century, what had once been collections of relatively independent client-kingdoms, the rulers of which adamantly maintained the primacy of their own individual, ancestral prerogatives and laws, were transformed throughout the ninth century, by a complex process of attrition, into dependent territories governed from above by an even greater king. This king oversaw the management of his territories by means of hand-picked vassals, known as ealdormen, who acted on their sovereign's behalf as local governors. Eight-century ealdormen were invested with a number of important functions: they were charged, first and foremost, with law

²⁸⁹ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 51-52.

enforcement, and criminal cases could be brought before him.²⁹⁰ In Alfred's time, however, with the constant threat of Viking invasions, the office ealdorman became that of a military commander. Insofar as ninth-century ealdormen served as provincial governors, responsible for certain geographical regions from which they received various dues and services, they correspond more-or-less with Heian Japan's provincial governors (*kokushi* 国司), who likewise served as the sovereign's local eyes and ears. In Saga's court, however, military commanders were a separate class altogether.

The State of Literacy in Ninth-Century England

The following quote, while dealing with the history of literacy in premodern England, could, with a few minor adjustments, be applied to the history of literacy in premodern Japan:

Most literature produced in England up to the fourteenth century was written not in the native tongue of its authors but in an acquired language of high culture

²⁹⁰ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 53-54, and 56.

associated with a distant metropolitan center whose hold on the European imagination long survived that city's collapse as an imperial capital.²⁹¹

The acquired language, in the English context, is Latin, the metropolitan center, classical Rome. In the context of premodern Japan, the acquired language, or, if we wish to be precise, the acquired writing system, was the Sinitic script, while the metropolitan center was the Tang capital at Chang'an. Latin writing compiled by people active within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is known as Anglo-Latin. Sinitic writing composed by people active within the Japanese archipelago is known variously as Sino-Japanese or, now more popularly, simply Sinitic.²⁹² Whereas the Western Roman Empire had fallen in the final decades of the fifth century, the Tang Empire remained strong until the very end of the ninth century. For Alfred, who reigned throughout the second half of the ninth century, classical Rome survived but in his imagination. For Saga, however, who reigned during the beginning of the ninth century, the Tang Empire was a very real and influential entity, both politically and culturally. Of course, while the classical Western Roman Empire had indeed

²⁹¹ Townsend, "Medieval Anglo-Latin Literature."

²⁹² There are a number of cogent reasons why this comparison is not an exact one. I would rather not deal with such thorny issues here. Those interested should consult Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, especially 1-66 and 312-364.

fallen, its Eastern embodiment at Constantinople was very much alive and well during Alfred's time.

In Anglo-Saxon England, after the arrival of Christianity, literacy in both the vernacular as well as Latin had been required of anyone pursuing a calling in the ecclesiastical sphere. It is only from the ninth century that literacy in the vernacular begins to assume greater importance among those more privileged classes of the laity. Precisely how widespread lay literacy in the vernacular was during, say, the ninth century, is impossible to ascertain. Furthermore, we know nothing in regards to literacy among the less well-to-do folks. The same holds true for the tenth and eleventh centuries. Looking at the historical record, it would seem that lay vernacular literacy had become quite commonplace among the wealthy. First, Alfred's lawcode, as well as those issued after him, were all written in Old English. This in itself is significant, even considering the fact that none of these lawcodes was ever quoted in any legal proceedings, at least not so far as the extant historical record is concerned. Second, royal charters, the argumentative sections of which were mostly in Latin, contained a separate section that defined the boundaries of a given estate, which latter section was always in the vernacular. Third, almost all of the surviving wills from this time are in English. Those few Latin exceptions are probably translations

from vernacular originals, or forgeries.²⁹³

Anglo-Latin literature was elevated to great heights by a certain bishop of Sherborne named Aldhelm (c.630-709), who was likely of West Saxon stock. His Anglo-Latin works are written in an elaborate, consciously erudite, archaic fashion. Numerous letters, along with his *De uirginitate* (On virginity), are among his most famous prose works. Aldhelm also composed a body of poetry, including one hundred riddles, and a verse version of his *De uirginitate*. An interesting double prose-and-poetry version of this latter work is preserved, being the first of its kind in England. Aldhelm refers to this work as an *opus geminatum*, a twined or twinned work, being, in his mind, two halves of a single whole. His riddles were widely circulated, as may be attested from their repeated appearance on medieval manuscripts, where the verses contain numerous interlinear glosses, often in Old English. English monastery schools employed these riddles, with their glosses, as teaching tools for young oblates.²⁹⁴ England was in the eighth-century, in virtue of the flourishing Latin literary tradition brought over from Rome by Christian missionaries two centuries prior, an intellectual leader, competing gallantly with continental centers of education.

²⁹³ Gretsch, "Literacy and the Uses of the Vernacular," 281.

²⁹⁴ Townsend, "Medieval Anglo-Latin Literature."

Monastic schools served as the principal centers of academic training and literacy in Anglo-Saxon England. Two writing systems were available throughout the Anglo-Saxon period: the imported Roman alphabet, used for writing both Latin and, in a slightly modified form, the vernacular, and a runic alphabet, known as the *futhork*, of Germanic origin. While all of the manuscripts attributed to Alfred and his coterie are written in a modified Roman alphabet, runes continued to be employed in both artistic and magical contexts. Alfred's monk-scholars worked as his private amanuenses; it was an extremely small-scale operation. Not until the tenth century do we see bodies of professional courtly scribes hired expressly for the purpose of drafting and copying royal charters.²⁹⁵

Monastic schools placed stress on the act of memorization, or conning. Parchment was hard to come by, and monasteries often had but one copy of each text. Everything, therefore, had to be committed to memory. Oblates made temporary copies of the day's readings on wax tablets, which could be smoothed over again and reused the next day. By far one of the most interesting pedagogical strategies developed in these Anglo-Saxon monastic schools was the custom of simplifying difficult poetic passages with an abbreviated prose translation. Prose versions of the Office hymns are currently extant. We

²⁹⁵ Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," 296-297, and 301.

also have a prose rendition of the third book of Abbo Cernuus' (n.d., born mid. 9th century, also known as Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés) extremely difficult Latin poem *Bella parisiacae* (Wars of the city of Paris), which is the sole eye-witness account of the Viking invasions of Paris in 885-886. No doubt this pedagogical technique fostered a fondness among Anglo-Saxon scholars for what Bede refers to as *opera geminate*, paired or twinned works, a form of paraphrasing in which a verse base-text is interlined with a prose counterpart. Aldhelm's aforementioned *De uirginitate*, a fine example of the sort of polished Latin texts composed explicitly for the sake of literate nuns, survives in this mixed form. Collections of glosses, either in Latin or Old English, for difficult words found in set-texts, were also compiled in order to facilitate understanding.²⁹⁶ These glosses are very similar to what we see in the Nara and Heian period, namely, the dictionaries (*ongi* 音義) meant to assist readers of Sinitic texts, especially Sinitic translations of Buddhist scriptures. The Latin texts studied in English monastic schools, and those studied in the contemporaneous Heian court imperial universities, were generally the same as those studied on their respective continental counterparts.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," 303-304.

²⁹⁷ Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," 307. For a discussion of glosses and primers in the tenth-century Japan, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 142-157.

Ninth-century England, the England of Alfred's generation, sported a diverse array of cultural and linguistic traditions: people of Irish, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian ancestry dwelt in close proximity to one another. Bilingualism was common.²⁹⁸ The Celtic region of Dumnonia, corresponding to what is now Devon, Cornwall, and a portion of Somerset, was only annexed to the kingdom of Wessex in Alfred's day.²⁹⁹ The people whom Alfred called his subjects were by no means a culturally and linguistically unified bunch; Wessex was a hodgepodge of different people, customs, languages, and religions. Indeed, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, along with an assumption that different types of people (subjects) are to be treated differently, that is, unequally, are some of the most defining qualities of any premodern empire, no matter the size.³⁰⁰ In Alfred's time, and for some time thereafter, referring to a man as being literate meant, quite specifically, that he was able to read and comprehend Latin. When, on the contrary, one of Alfred's subjects is referred to as being illiterate, it is very possible that, despite his ignorance of

²⁹⁸ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 27.

²⁹⁹ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 8.

³⁰⁰ Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 2 and 8. Empire may be contrasted with our modern notion of a nation-state, in which we harbor the ideal of a single people living in a single territory, bound to one another as a single political entity. Neither Alfred nor Saga saw kingship in this way.

Latin, he was yet able to read the vernacular.³⁰¹ Literacy in Latin among the laity was extremely rare.³⁰² This is comparable to the situation in Heian Japan, especially in the court of Saga, where literature (*bungaku* 文学) referred specifically to Sinitic writing, and lettered men (*bunjin* 文人) to those able to read and write in that mode. Both Alfred and Saga equated literacy with a knowledge of continental, originally foreign languages.

Like Saga, Alfred's educational program was certainly not national in its scope. What he aimed at was not that every man of low and high birth alike should be able to read and write, but rather that the aristocracy, both secular and ecclesiastic, should become proficient in the reading of vernacular texts, with a special emphasis on prose works. Whereas Alfred's prose preface to his translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* famously states that the king sought to translate those books which he deemed "most needful for all men to know," it is obvious that this prose preface is referring exclusively to arrangements within the royal household and the private schools established for the scions of noble families. When Alfred says "all men," what he means is all the noble and aristocratic men of his kingdom.

Literacy in the vernacular was necessary for all who held offices of power, namely, the

³⁰¹ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 63.

³⁰² Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," 297.

king's ealdormen, reeves, and personal vassals or thegns.³⁰³

Alfred's eagerness to have Latin works translated or otherwise reworked into his native Old English was by no means the result of an unprecedented or abnormal private penchant for the language of his forefathers. Bede, in his oft-quoted *Historia*, reports the miraculous tale of an illiterate cowherd and lay brother by the name of Cædmon who, by the grace of God, was suddenly blessed with the gift to compose religious poetry in Old English. When a number of monks came to him with Latin passages from the Bible, Cædmon was straightaway able to render these into rhythmical verses in the vernacular, with "very great sweetness and pricking of the heart." Bede, after offering a Latin translation of Cædmon's famous nine-line hymn of creation, inserts the following caveat: "This is the sense but not the selfsame order of the words which he sang in his sleep: for songs, be they never so well made, cannot be turned of one tongue onto another, word for word, without loss to their grace and worthiness."³⁰⁴ Though on the surface this seems to be an innocent statement regarding the impossibility of a literal translation of verse, upon reflection, Bede's words take on a greater significance. Remember that, in the time of Bede,

³⁰³ Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 115, 120-124. The quote from Alfred's preface is to be found in *Pastoral Care*, 6.

³⁰⁴ *Historia*, 4:24, esp. 141-145.

the vernacular had almost no literate tradition; Old English was, for all intents, an oral language, the runic alphabet being used only sparingly, and in very limited contexts. Latin, on the other hand, had centuries of literate tradition behind it; Latin was both the language of religion and the language of higher learning. Bede's remark, therefore, that Cædmon's hymn, or any vernacular verses, for that matter, could not be sufficiently turned into Latin, a language that was considered to be of the most elegant and sophisticated quality, tacitly places the vernacular on par with Latin. Moreover, it is reported by one of Bede's students, Cuthbert, that the venerable historian spent his last days working on a vernacular translation of the Gospel of John, which, unfortunately, is no longer extant, and that he composed a short poem in the vernacular about his fear of death. Old English, despite its predominantly oral history, and consequent lack of literate tradition, was held in high esteem by such learned monk-scholars as Bede. Aldhelm, preeminent writer of Anglo-Latin prose and poetry though he might have been, was reportedly praised by none other than Alfred himself as being the greatest poet in the vernacular. Sadly, none of Aldhelm's vernacular works have survived.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ Gretsch, "Literacy and the Uses of the Vernacular," 274-276 and 279. Keep in mind that Alfred's praise for Aldhelm may be apocryphal. It is reported in a twelfth-century history entitled *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* (History of the English bishops, c.1125) by William of Malmesbury (c.1095-c.1143), often lauded as nearly the greatest English historian, second only to Bede.

While women in the Anglo-Saxon period never achieved the great renown of, say Cædmon or Bede, there is ample evidence pointing to a high degree of literacy in woman during this period of English history. Boniface (c.675-754), born Wynfrith, and a native of Wessex, led a mission of Anglo-Saxon Christians to Germanic regions of the Frankish empire in hopes of converting the pagans. Throughout his life he was in correspondence with a number of people, two of whom happened to be Wessex women by the names of Eadburg (?-759, also known as Edburga of Minster-in-Thanel), who was a princess, and Leobgyth (c.710-782, known later as St. Lioba or Leoba), who was purportedly a relative of Boniface, as well as a friend of Charlemagne's wife. Both women were fluent in English and Latin. There are a number of English nuns who composed lengthy works in Latin, and for whom Latin works were likewise composed.³⁰⁶ Also, in the memorable anecdote related by Bede concerning Cædmon's miraculous gift of song, it was Hild, abbess of Whitby monastery, who ordered the monks living there to examine the cowherd to ascertain whether his gifts were genuinely inspired, and she who initiated Cædmon's promotion thereafter.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," 302. Regarding Leobgyth, see, but briefly, Thorpe, *A History of England*, 181-182, and a more detailed account in Rudolf of Fulda's *Life of Leoba* (c. 836).

³⁰⁷ *Historia*, 4:24, esp. 141-145.

A Short Biography of Alfred

Now that the basic political background and literary environment of Anglo-Saxon England has been dealt with, it is time to train our gaze squarely on the life of King Alfred, a man renowned for two achievements. First, he was successful in uniting a great portion of what has since become the nation of England. Second, he played a decisive role in first forming and tirelessly promoting the literary efflorescence of that same nation. His fame as founder of what would later become a (purportedly) monolithic English unity, both in the political and administrative sense, was a posthumous development: The image of Alfred as father of the English people only came to the fore in the later middle ages. Elizabethan scholars, through their characteristically erudite investigations of Alfredian works, discovered what they took to be an older, more firmly English origin of their united English Church.³⁰⁸ For the sake of convenience, Alfred's reign of nearly three decades may be divided into three broad periods: the early years (871-878), during which Alfred was faced with a series of Viking invasions, the majority of which he was unprepared for; the middle

³⁰⁸ Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 1.

years (879-891), which was a relatively peaceful interim, marked by literary production; the late years (892-899), during which Alfred was again occupied with Viking invasions, only this time he proved victorious. As can be seen, Alfred's middle years were bracketed before and after by rough spells of more-or-less continual war. Amazingly, he was able to pursue both military and literary projects simultaneously. Consequently, his identity as an author, the personage he assumes when writing, reveals a keen awareness of his role as both ruler and warrior.³⁰⁹ Alfred, like Saga, never wrote for the sake of writing alone; he wrote as part of a larger political and military project.

Alfred was born in 849, in Wantage, Berkshire, then within the heartland of Wessex.³¹⁰ Alfred was the youngest of five boys, all of whom served in the capacity of king sometime throughout their lives. The following is a list of their dates and reign years, from eldest to youngest:

Æthelstan (?-852, sub-king, under the authority of his father, of Kent from 839 to 851/852)

³⁰⁹ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 24.

³¹⁰ Wantage survives to this day as a market town within the Vale of the White Horse, currently administered by Oxfordshire

Æthelbald (?-860, king of the West Saxons from 855 to 860)

Æthelberht (c.836-865, king of the West Saxons, and of Kent, etc. from 860 to 865)

Æthelred (847-871 king of the West Saxons, and of Kent, etc. from 865 to 871)

Alfred (849-899, king of the West Saxons, and of Kent, etc., and later king of the Anglo-Saxons, from 871-899)

In 868, Alfred, having taken over London, married a woman of noble birth (on her mother's side) by the name of Ealhswith (?-903), daughter of Æthelred, then Anglian king of Mercia.

While both her parents were descendants of the kingdom of Mercia, it is uncertain whether Ealhswith herself was a native Mercian. She might very well have been born in Wessex.³¹¹

Regardless of where this woman was born, the fact that she was of Mercian stock is significant. Alfred's marriage would surely have been seen as a gesture of reconciliation between Wessex and Mercia. Indeed, it was shortly after Æthelred's submission that Alfred began to refer to himself by the lofty title of King of the Anglo-Saxons.

When Alfred came to the throne in 871, it was as the king of a middle-sized kingdom

³¹¹ Davis, "Alfred the Great." Regarding Ealhswith's ancestry, see Asser, 16, and endnote no. 90 on p. 221.

known as Wessex, a region embracing the southwestern extremity of England, aside from Cornwall. With such beginnings, Alfred managed, throughout the nearly three decades of his busy reign, to bind together a collection of politically, and sometimes culturally, independent territories against a shared threat, namely, the so-called Vikings. In this way, he laid the foundation for what would eventually become a politically, culturally, and linguistically unified Anglo-Saxon kingdom. It is for this reason that Alfred is often referred in popular modern-day literature as the father of the English nation. His seemingly unprecedented literary achievements have given birth to a companion epithet: the father of English prose. It must never be forgotten that our perceptions of Alfred—of his childhood years, his political policies, his educational reform, his moral character, and soon—are, for the most part, elaborations, unconscious or otherwise, of anecdotal accounts gleaned from a single hagiographical biography, the *Life of Alfred*, compiled in Latin by Asser, a man familiar to modern scholars as one of Alfred's most intimate monk-scholar assistants. The authenticity of Asser's biography came under serious scrutiny around the mid-1990s, and rightly so. If this work should prove in the end to be a forgery, either partially or in whole, many of our narratives regarding the life of Alfred will have to be significantly altered, or cast aside altogether. Indeed, Asser portrays Alfred as being almost neurotically

contemplative. A look at his military and political achievements, however, paints a different picture. Alfred, to be sure, was “a ruthless, shrewd ruler with a keen historical sense, a sensitivity to public opinion, and a genuine sense of duty.”³¹² This caveat is all the more poignant when we consider the biography of Saga, the sole source of which is his imperially commissioned *Later History of Japan*. Both Asser’s *Life of Alfred* and Saga’s *Later History of Japan* were written in what were then respected as authoritative languages of continental learning, namely, Latin and Sinitic, respectively. Interestingly, Alfred never seems to have had this biography of his translated into Old English. Likewise, Saga certainly never had his own history rendered into the vernacular. Perhaps Alfred did not consider his biography to be among those books with which every man ought rightly to be acquainted. Saga, without a doubt, had no interest in spreading Sinitic literacy to anyone outside of his immediate coterie.

Alfred came from a paternal line of rulers: his grandfather, Egbert (771/775-839), had been king of Wessex from 802 to his death in 839; Alfred’s father, Æthelwulf (?-858) had succeeded his father as king of Wessex from 839 until his own death in 858. Alfred’s mother, Osburh (n.d.), was apparently of royal ancestry. It was through her blood that

³¹² Redgate, “Alfred.”

Alfred claimed to have been descended from the Gothic or East Germanic kings, commonly known as the Jutes, who had taken over the Isle of Wight sometime in the second half of the seventh century. Old English poems such as *Beowulf*, deeply rooted as many of them seem to be in an older Gothic culture and language, may have been made familiar to Alfred by his mother. It has been argued that Alfred and his court were responsible for the preservation and wider circulation of Old English poetry. Osburh's possible role in this should not be overlooked.³¹³ Be they secular or religious, Old English poems such as *Beowulf* were stored throughout the Anglo-Saxon period—certainly in Alfred's time—in monastic libraries. Considering that these monasteries were founded and funded by aristocratic families, it follows that the presence of so much Old English poetry in these libraries reflects the literary tastes of their affluent patrons.³¹⁴ Saga's love of Sinitic poetry seems to have been fostered, at least in part, by his wet-nurses. The quiet, almost completely unsung role of premodern women in the promotion of certain courtly literary genres, especially those promoted exclusively by men, such as Saga and Alfred, is something requiring further consideration. It ought to be noted here that Æthelwulf took a

³¹³ Davis, "Alfred the Great."

³¹⁴ Brooks, "The Social and Political Background," 6.

second wife, a woman by the name of Judith, who was a daughter of Charles the Bald (823-877), king of West Francia, then of Italy, and eventually, as Charles II, of the Holy Roman Emperor from 875 to 877. This powerful monarch, who was a grandson of Charlemagne, had hosted a young Alfred during his visits to Rome in 853 and 855. The presence of Judith within Æthelwulf's court ensured that a Carolingian influence—the Frankish tradition of learning—would be felt during Alfred's youth.³¹⁵

Vikings had already begun making inroads into the northern territories of England around the latter half of the eighth century. By the time Alfred's grandfather, King Egbert, was on the throne, Viking bands had advanced into the southern regions, as well.³¹⁶ In 866, Alfred assisted Æthelred, then his only surviving brother, in defending the kingdom against a great fleet of Danish invaders—what the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* refers to ominously as the Great Army (*micel here*). Until this time, Viking raiders had been interested primarily in plunder and pillage. Beginning in 865, however, Viking invaders became less interested in plundering and stealing, and more concerned with establishing permanent settlements or

³¹⁵ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 23.

³¹⁶ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (2006). The term Viking is potentially misleading. Vikings refer, quite ambiguously, to scattered peoples who, during the medieval period, inhabited primarily those regions now known as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Aside from the word Viking, which the Anglo-Saxons themselves did in fact use when referring to these invaders, they were also referred to simply as northmen and heathens.

colonies for themselves.³¹⁷ Alfred only became king of Wessex, in 871, after a complicated struggle for succession was played out between him and his still surviving brother, Æthelred. Alfred's succession was by no means certain.³¹⁸ That the succession of West Saxon kings from 802 to 899 appears to have been carried out with little contestation is more likely than not a result of deliberate erasure on the part of Asser and the compilers of the *Chronicle*. Involved compromises and numerous disputes must have attended the process, considering the presence within the royal household of collateral lines of heirs, each antagonistic towards the other. Only hints of these disputes have been allowed to creep into the historical record.³¹⁹ No sooner had Alfred ascended the throne than he was forced to expend a great deal of energy and wealth dealing with his vigorous Viking invaders. It would appear that Alfred was not at that time sufficiently prepared to deal with these forces, at least not militarily. A tentative peace was obtained when Alfred deigned to dish out generous tributes to the invaders. Those battles that Alfred did initiate were, so far as we know, unsuccessful.³²⁰ According to at least one scholar, the Danish invaders who scourged the English shores and pillaged its various kingdoms throughout the 870s were

³¹⁷ Asser, 13, and endnote no. 61 on pp. 217-218; Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 69.

³¹⁸ Redgate, "Alfred."

³¹⁹ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 72.

³²⁰ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (2006).

“numerous, skilled, treacherous, well led, wanting conquest and settlement, not unattractive as allies or lords to rivals.” These invaders paid no heed to Christian institutions, indiscriminately destroying churches and monasteries during their raids.³²¹

In 878, Alfred was ambushed at Chippenham, in what is modern-day Wiltshire, by Guthrum, a Danish chief. Chippenham, located in the western periphery of Wessex, was a strategically important area, and it is no coincidence that Alfred happened to be there, or that Guthrum chose to surprise him there. Unable to resist at that time, Alfred fled further southwest to Athelney. In the end, however, Alfred came out the victor in a final engagement against Guthrum held at Edington—the famous Battle of Edington. As a result of this decisive battle, Alfred and Guthrum signed the treaty of Wedmore, whereupon Guthrum underwent Christian baptism and withdrew his troops from Wessex, becoming thereafter the king of East Anglia.³²² After the crucial defeat of Guthrum, Alfred dedicated immense resources to constructing a network of permanent fortifications, known as *burhs*, throughout his kingdom, which could, at least in theory, be utilized as both administrative as well as military centers. Each burh, overseen by its own royal agent, was arranged so as

³²¹ Redgate, “Alfred.”

³²² Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 73.

to be within 20 miles of at least one other burh, thus enabling a neighboring burh to come to the rescue of another in moments of crisis, and to facilitate long-distance communication.³²³ Some 27,000 men were enlisted into rotating teams, serving as soldiers within the fortifications for part of the year, and returning home to manage their own homes for the remainder of the year. These preparations proved extremely effective. In 892, when another wave of Vikings invaders, beginning with the army of Hæsten (n.d.), appeared along the borders of Alfred's kingdom, he was able to repulse them with relative ease.³²⁴ The effectiveness of these fortifications, while significant, should not be exaggerated. In 896, when the Vikings were finally driven away, it is probable that hefty sums of coinage—Danegelds, effectively tribute for the Danes—were required of Alfred before any final peace was obtained.³²⁵

Alfred's Wessex was the only English kingdom able to maintain its independence after the Viking invasions. This remarkable fact in itself endowed Alfred with authority

³²³ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 78; Redgate, "Alfred;" Davis, "Alfred the Great."

³²⁴ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (2006). The Hæsten who invaded England may or may not have been the same man, known as Hastein, who led various raids on the Frankish Empire and the Mediterranean throughout the first half of the ninth century. The Hastein who made his earliest raids in Noirmoutier, an island off the Atlantic coast of France, during 834-835, would have been incredibly old by 892, perhaps in his seventies or eighties—an unlikely age to be conducting raids!

³²⁵ Redgate, "Alfred."

over all the Anglo-Saxon leaders still outside Danish rule. Indeed, it is in the 890s that Alfred, thus elevated above his peers, begins to refer to himself in royal charters as king of the Angles and Saxons (*rex Angul-Saxonum*), thereby emphasizing his authority, not only over his own West Saxon people, but over the Anglian inhabitants of Mercia, as well.³²⁶

Thus victorious and universally recognized as supreme ruler of all the English, Alfred chose to deal with Mercia, which had been on friendly terms with Wessex before and throughout the Viking invasions, in a gentle and generous manner. His daughter Æthelflæd (?-918), the “Lady of the Mercians,” was wed to ealdorman Æthelred, who was himself of Mercian blood, and who was thereafter allowed to serve as sub-king of Mercia.³²⁷

Alfred and the Church: His Personal Ecclesiastical Salon

Alfred, no less than Saga, was intimately acquainted with the potential uses of pageantry and propaganda as a means of political manipulation. The untiring attention he paid to the various trappings of kingship amply attests to this. For Alfred, the righteous king

³²⁶ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 71 and 74; Redgate, “Alfred.”

³²⁷ Redgate, “Alfred,” gives the girl’s name as Æthelfleda, while Abels, *Alfred the Great*, has Æthelflæd (see the genealogy on p. 347). I have chosen to side with Abels.

was unquestionably a Christian king, an idealized saint-king, at once supremely holy and militarily adroit. Significantly, Alfred's hybrid concept of Christian kingship was deeply influenced by continental exemplars, primarily through the reputation and career of the Frankish king, Charlemagne, or Charles the Great (742-814), founder of the mighty Carolingian Empire. This empire, founded in 800, lasted until the year 888, that is, to the middle of Alfred's reign.³²⁸ While Alfred was most certainly influenced by Carolingian models, especially in regards to his ideology of kingship, the particular manner in which he chose to manifest this ideology shows some striking differences. For example, whereas the Carolingians had a penchant for pageantry—elevated thrones, extravagant coronation ceremonies, and daunting displays of cultural and material capital—Alfred adopted a more earthly style, depicting himself as a benevolent shepherd leading his flock of loyal subjects to salvation, both in this world and the next.³²⁹ This image of kingship, though developed in a completely different cultural and religious environment, is similar in some respects to

³²⁸ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 57; Frantzen, "King Alfred" (2006).

³²⁹ Davis, "Alfred the Great." Another difference worth noting is the fact that Alfred and his predecessors did not adopt the custom of being crowned when becoming king. The first recorded example of an English king being crowned occurs around the year 900, just after the death of Alfred. Instead, ninth-century English kings donned a ceremonial helmet which signified their elevated royal position as well as their military might. In relation to this last point, see Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 57-58.

that held by Saga. Saga, too, portrayed himself as an idealized sage-king, one who emulated both Buddhist and Daoist virtues, and whose soldiers were ever victorious in battle. Saga's concept of kingship, likewise, was founded upon a much older continental—rather, East Asian—ideology of cosmic sovereignty, wherein the sovereign was the governor not only of his earthly kingdom, but an intermediary working between heaven and earth, ensuring, by means of his virtuous conduct, the harmonious interaction of both spheres, and consequently, the tranquility and prosperity of his own realm. Both Alfred and Saga saw themselves as cosmic intermediaries, saint- or sage-kings divinely ordained to rule over their subjects with absolute authority. In the case of Alfred, this ideology comes through very clearly in a number of prose prefaces he is thought to have authored, or at least had co-authored. Saga expressed his own version of this nearly identical ideology in the form of poetry presented at public banquets, as well as a large collection of edicts and imperial decrees preserved in his own imperially commissioned history.

It is indisputably the case that, as Williams avers, “the fortunes of the Christian Church in England were indissolubly bound up with those of the kings,” and vice versa. It was kings, after all, who supplied churches with the property—usually wealth in the form of land—they required to thrive as growing institutions. Kings, furthermore, assisted in

enforcing the payment of ecclesiastical dues or tithes. Conversely, considering that many of the early English monasteries, some of which later grew into churches, were founded nearby or within royal villas—small administrative units not unlike modern-day parishes—it seems reasonable to assume that these institutions assisted the local reeves in their efforts at governing the town.³³⁰ Historical sources suggest that Alfred enjoyed, at least on the surface, a harmonious, mutually beneficial relationship with the church. This seems to have been the case not only with Alfred but with other ninth-century kings of the West Saxon kingdom, as well.³³¹ Alfred, who had been on two visits to Rome, in 853 and 855, later sent alms to the Roman church on several occasions.³³² The first such instance is recorded in the year 883, when Pope Marinus I (?-884), pope of Rome from 882 to 884, sent Alfred a *lignum Domini*, that is, “wood of the Lord,” likely a wooden relic of some sort believed at that time to have been taken from the actual cross upon which Jesus had been crucified. Alfred promptly had alms delivered to the pope this same year. On all but this first occasion, however, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* explicitly states that these donations, all to Rome, were collectively “the alms of the West Saxons and of King Alfred.” At home,

³³⁰ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 56-57.

³³¹ Redgate, “Alfred.”

³³² Frantzen, “King Alfred” (1994), 23; *Chronicle*, see entries for the years 883, 887, 888, and 890.

Alfred founded a monastery at Atheley, and a nunnery at Shaftesbury.³³³ He placed as abbess of the latter one of his own daughters, Æthelgifu (n.d.). Despite his generosity and apparent zeal, however, Alfred was not afraid to manhandle the church when necessary: the royal exchequer was sometimes replenished by means of annexing lands previously bequeathed to ecclesiastical institutions and individuals. Pope John VIII (?-882, pope 872-882), responding to a letter sent by Archbishop Æthelred of Canterbury in which the latter complained of Alfred's rough treatment of the church, urged Alfred to respect the papal rights of Canterbury.³³⁴ The exact details of this dispute are uncertain, though it is safe to assume that Alfred was taking back church land without the proper papal permission.

Some speculation might be given to the relationship, both in fourth-century Rome, and, in England from the sixth century onwards, between monotheism and ideologies of kingship. Christianity offers a restrictive, unitary idea of kingly legitimacy, such that a Christian ruler comes to view himself as the one-and-only divinely mandated sovereign, governing, as deputy of a single god, over a single, albeit diverse, empire.³³⁵ This was certainly Alfred's view, as inherited from the Romans and Carolingians. Saga, it might be

³³³ Asser, sec. 92, 45, and sec. 98, 48.

³³⁴ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 80; Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 244.

³³⁵ Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 17 and 40-41.

argued, had never been exposed to monotheistic religion. He certainly had never heard of any of the Abrahamic faiths. However, the two most influential Buddhist monk-scholars, both of whom received generous and lasting patronage under Saga—I mean, of course, Saichō and Kūkai—expounded strains of Buddhistic thought in which a single, supreme, omnipotent and omniscient deity plays a central role. In Kūkai’s esoteric teachings, it is Mahāvairocana, the Great Cosmic or Sun Buddha, who, like any monotheistic godhead, represents the deepest foundation of all reality, seen and unseen. Saga, in his own Sinitic poetry, refers to his subjects, or rather the virtuous conduct by which they, thanks to their sovereign’s benevolent influence, are to be distinguished from the backward, fatuous barbarians, as the veriest “flower of culture” (*bunka* 文華). Despite linguistic and ethnic diversity—of which Saga’s court was a miniature example—Saga sees himself, like Alfred, as the heavenly mandated sovereign of a single empire. The major difference, I suppose, is that while Alfred came to see himself as king of the Angles and the Saxons, that is, of the English people as a whole, Saga never refers to himself in such terms. For Saga, influenced as he was by Sinitic ideas and terminology of kingship, saw himself as the ruler of “all under heaven” (*tianxia/tenka* 天下), absolute sovereign of the “ten-thousand people” (*wanmin/banmin* 万民).

Not only was Alfred eager to summon to his side priests and bishops, the most literate class at that time, but he was adamant about summoning to his side foreign ecclesiastic scholars. As the vast kingdom of Mercia boasted a more robust literary culture than Wessex, Alfred, beginning in the mid-880s, had four assistant scholars brought in from that region: Plegmund (?-914 or 923), Wærferth (?-915 or sometime between 907-915), Æthelstan (n.d., not to be confused with Alfred's deceased eldest brother), and Werwulf (n.d.).³³⁶ Plegmund, having loyally served Alfred, was, through the latter's promotion, appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 890. Canterbury, which was (and still is) located in the eastern kingdom of Kent, near its eastern seaboard, had since become a possession of Alfred's. It was Plegmund who, upon Alfred's death, crowned his son Edward as the next king. Archbishop Æthelred (?-888, archbishop 870-888) of Canterbury, as well as Plegmund (archbishop 890-914/923), his immediate successor, were both influential men throughout Alfred's reign. Both of these men were almost certainly eager to see a unified Anglo-Saxon kingdom, not only, as they would surely have proclaimed, for the glory of God, but for the incredible monetary profits such an arrangement would be certain to afford

³³⁶ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (2006).

their leading church.³³⁷ Wærferth, who was consecrated bishop of Worcester—on the southwestern edge of Mercia, within that portion since annexed to Alfred’s kingdom—sometime between 869 and 872, assisted Alfred with translations from Latin to Old English.³³⁸ A certain priest known to us only by the name of John (n.d.) is recorded as having hailed from somewhere within the Frankish kingdom across the English Channel. Grimbald (820-901), a Benedictine monk from the Abbey of Saint Bertin in Flanders, France, was another of Alfred’s hand-picked scholars, highly praised for his refined Latin prose. By far the most widely known member of Alfred’s scholastic team was John Asser, or, less commonly, Asserius Menevensis (?-c.909), Alfred’s biographer, and a monk from the monastery of Saint David’s (known also by its Latin name, Menevia) in what was then Dyfed, a peninsular region in modern-day Wales. Asser, therefore, was a disciple of the Celtic Christian tradition. In short, Alfred surrounded himself with learned monks and priests of Mercian (Anglo-Saxon), Welsh (Celtic), and Frankish (French) descent. As most of these men were eventually given prestigious ecclesiastical appointments within Alfred’s expanded kingdom, it is obvious that Alfred aimed at a greater integration of “foreign”

³³⁷ Asser, “A Tour Around the Manuscripts,” 64; Redgate, “Alfred.”

³³⁸ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 74.

elements into his own realm.

While Saga's court was peopled with men and women hailing from both the continent as well as the peninsular kingdoms of Korea and Parhae, it is not entirely clear whether or not among his more privileged, exclusive coterie of lettered men there were to be found any recent immigrants. True, a few of his favored men, and several of his concubines, were most likely the descendants of foreign ancestors. Still, not a single man within Saga's salon is ever explicitly described as being of foreign stock. All of these men, without exception, however, were selected on the basis of their intimate familiarity with Sinitic writing and continental culture. In that sense, insofar as their utility was concerned, Saga's men represented a distinctly continental element, just as Alfred's scholars represented the apogee of continental, that is, Latin learning and culture. Plegmund and Wærferth were to Alfred what Kūkai and Saichō were to Saga: ecclesiastical scholars in possession of continental learning, both religious and secular, who could assist their patron in his larger project of imperial rule and cultural authority.

THE LITERARY LEGACY OF KING ALFRED

Alfred's Literary Corpus

David Pratt has concisely summed up Alfred's literary legacy in three terms: learned kingship, royal authorship, and inventive translation.³³⁹ Each of these three aspects implies a relationship between knowledge, especially literacy—the written word—and power.

Learned kingship refers to an ideology of sovereignty in which the king, besides his role as military leader, is also the symbolic head and actual patron of literary and cultural ideals.

Royal authorship refers, always ambiguously, to some relationship between a sovereign and a literary work. In most cases, this amounts simply to patronage, as in the case of works commissioned, but not necessarily written by, the ruler in question. Inventive translation includes a variety of different techniques: from slight omissions or additions to significant transformations of the original text. Saga's political and literary legacy may also be summarized using these three terms. In the case of Saga, the third term, inventive translation, should be slightly revised: inventive interpretation or inventive adaptation would be more appropriate, since Saga's poetry cannot rightly be called a translation; he never worked from a single base text, and, so far as we know, he never attempted to render

³³⁹ David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 7.

a Sinitic poem into the vernacular. In the case of Saga, what we see is a great deal of very inventive, highly selective methods of interpretation. Saga masterfully determined, first, which canonical Sinitic texts his vassals were to prioritize, and second, precisely how they were to interpret these texts. His war poems, along with his religious verses, are illustrative of this.

That Alfred pursued literary studies as an end in itself—art for art’s sake—seems unlikely. His enthusiasm for translation, whatever the motive, is beyond doubt. Alfred spent lavishly on these projects. The material costs of bringing in scholars from outside kingdoms, hosting them indefinitely within the palace, all the while endearing them with gifts of land and goods, was extremely taxing. We cannot know the mind of Alfred, or of any man, for that matter. What we do know for certain, in regards to his educational program, is his ultimate objectives: translated texts were to be circulated among his vassals, along with their children, and assiduously studied, as a means of inculcating in them Alfred’s ideology of kingship. By studying and internalizing the content of these imperially authorized texts, Alfred sought to convey to his subjects his most cherished goals, both intellectual and political—these last two being inextricably bound together. More specifically, Alfred insisted that his ealdormen and reeves become sufficiently literate in the

vernacular. Much of his educational reform was aimed at these two classes of men.³⁴⁰

Alfred clearly understood the political value of poetry. His own verse is, for the most part, straightforward and, far from waxing lyrical, predominantly didactic in nature.³⁴¹

Poetry, for Alfred, was a tool of instruction, both moral as well as political. Those late-ninth-century Old-English texts attributed in one way or another to Alfred and his scholarly coterie may be divided into two major categories, namely, translations, and original works:

A. First, we have four texts translated, sometime between 890 and 899, under Alfred's personal direction. Though the order in which these were translated is not yet settled, the more generally accepted chronological order is as follows:

1. *The Pastoral Care of Gregory the Great*, being an Old English translation of Pope

Gregory I's (c.540-604) Latin prose work *Liber regulae pastoralis*, or *Cura pastoralis* (The Book of Pastoral Rule, begun sometime before 591). This

translation is prefixed with two prefaces, one of which is a letter to Alfred's

³⁴⁰ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 74-75.

³⁴¹ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 24.

bishops, the other being a poem.

2. *The Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius*, being an Old English translation of Boethius' (480-524) *De consolazione philosophiae* (Consolation of Philosophy, 524-525).
3. *The Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, being an Old English translation of Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) *Soliloquiorum libri duo* (Soliloquies in Two Books, 386-387), divided into three books and prefixed with an Old English prose preface
4. *The West-Saxon Psalms of the Paris Psalter*, being an Old English translation of an earlier Latin translation of the first fifty psalms.

B. Second, we have a group of original works in both Old English and Latin.

1. *The Laws of King Alfred*, being Alfred's own law code, written in Old English, and containing an Old English preface.
2. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, being an Old English history, was begun at this time.
3. Asser's (?-c.909) *Vita Ælfredi regis Angul Saxonum* (Life of Alfred, King of the Anglo-Saxons, 893), being a biography in Latin of Alfred's life, was probably

commissioned by Alfred.

4. An Old English preface attributed to Alfred appears at the beginning of an Old English translation of Pope Gregory I's *Dialogues* made by Wærferth at Alfred's behest.

No final consensus has yet been reached as to what sort of guiding principles, if any, Alfred might have referred when determining which texts were worthy of being translated. Alfred's belief in the need for literacy, at least, is more certain: Alfred and his contemporaries were, so far as we can tell, devout Christians who believed that victory over their enemies would only come about through the divine assistance of God. They further believed that in order to secure God's favor, they, as faithful Christians, were required to comprehend His revealed message as far their limited intellects were able. Such an understanding, assisted by prayerful contemplation, could only be fully achieved through the studious act of reading. It is likely that Alfred chose the texts he did in virtue of their highly political content. In most cases, the authors he chose emphasize ideas about authorial power, civil obedience, and social cohesion. The king, as envisioned by these authors, rules with absolute authority; his subjects serve as loyal instruments, always

prepared to do the bidding of their virtuous sovereign. Significantly, the sort of wisdom or understanding promoted in these texts—the sort necessary to gain God’s assistance in battle—while ostensibly rooted in religious tradition, is characterized as leading directly to worldly success, happiness, and wealth. Happiness in the next life comes as an afterthought.³⁴² Alfred, whether consciously or intuitively, understood that it was not merely the charismatic personage of the ruler that held a kingdom together and kept its subjects in check. What was needed, aside from a large-scale economy with access to diverse goods and services, along with a dynamic and flexible network of both material and personal connections—what was needed even more than all of this was an all-pervading ideology capable of persuading his subjects to offer their loyalty in exchange for obvious economical and personal benefits.³⁴³ Alfred’s educational project provided both the framework for and the vehicle through which his ideology of kingship could be fostered and promulgated. The same must be said of Saga’s literary project.

With the close assistance of his team of Latin-learned monk-scholars, Alfred began in the early 890s a grand translation project, adapting and reworking Latin texts into Old

³⁴² Redgate, “Alfred.”

³⁴³ Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 34.

English. The question of authorship, whether Alfred himself was the author of these translations, is bound to be misleading: “Works said to have been written by Alfred should be understood as having been produced by the king in close connection with these and other learned men.”³⁴⁴ It is unlikely, in fact, that Alfred actually ever penned his own words; he would have had an amanuensis for that. It is equally unlikely, therefore, that he composed his works in solitude. His writing activity, no matter how self-directed, would have been more-or-less a communal engagement. Consequently, “the texts attributed to him cannot be seen as direct representations of the king’s authorial consciousness.”³⁴⁵

Pope Gregory I’s *Cura pastoralis* is ranked among the most influential medieval manuals for sincere pastors. This book contains copious advice for priests, especially in regards to how they ought to interact with the laity, both in the capacity of preachers as well

³⁴⁴ Frantzen, “King Alfred” (2006).

³⁴⁵ Frantzen, “King Alfred” (1994), 24. Although Alfred likely made use of amanuenses for his translation work, and even for those things he wrote—rather dictated—in Old English, there is little doubt that Alfred himself could write. After all, he is noted as having kept a small pocket-sized notebook, or enchiridion, full of quotations and prayers he himself had selected for memorization. Unfortunately, this enchiridion is no longer extant. For a more in-depth discussion of the question of Alfred’s authorship, see Godden “Did King Alfred Write Anything,” in *Medium Ævum*, 76:1 (2007), 1-23 and Bately, “Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited,” in *Medium Ævum*, 78:2 (2009), 189-215. In answer do the question of whether or not Alfred ought to be considered the true author of those texts attributed to him, Godden, in what proves to be a wonderfully provocative article, answers unambiguously in the negative, while Bately answers in the affirmative. Most scholars side with Bately: Alfred authored the texts in question, though not necessarily in the same way modern authors author theirs.

as confessors. Nearly five hundred manuscripts are currently extant.³⁴⁶ Alfred's translation, in particular, is most often put forward as being the most explicit expression of his efforts at educational reform. Contrarily, his association with the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Soliloquies*, and the *Paris Psalter* is seen to be rather less certain.³⁴⁷ Far from producing a slavishly accurate translation of the original text, Alfred sprinkled the text with a wealth of original, and often revealing, contributions. One telling example is the statement, by Gregory, that "the government of souls is the art of arts," which, in Alfred's translation, is rendered in a less ethereal vein, as "the art of teaching is the art of all arts." Alfred has taken what was meant to serve as a spiritual guidebook for priests and reworked it, "boldly and self-reflexively" into an instructional manual for predominantly secular-minded leaders.³⁴⁸

The Old English preface to the *Pastoral Care* appears in nearly all of the modern anthologies of Old English writing attributed to Alfred or his lettered coterie. After bemoaning a wretched decline in learning throughout the Anglo-Saxon realm, its author enthusiastically portrays Alfred and his vassals as noble pioneers of a renewal of cultural

³⁴⁶ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 26.

³⁴⁷ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (2006).

³⁴⁸ This particular example, quoted in Frantzen, "King Alfred," may be found in Sweet's translation, p. 25.

and educational brilliance. Alfred, as the supposed narrator of this preface, laments a dearth of English scholars fluent in Latin, and that, as a result, despite the wealth of books stored in church libraries, very few men can read Latin. The voice of this preface is a consciously authoritative one: Alfred is portrayed here as the champion par excellence of social and moral reform. In this respect, the preface to Alfred's *Pastoral Care* resonates well with the ideology of kingship echoed in both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of Alfred*. It is in this preface where Alfred, outlining the motives behind his translation project, recommends his coterie of hand-picked scholars to "translate some books which are most needful for all men to know into the language [i.e., Old English] which we can all understand."³⁴⁹ This passage is often cited as though it ought to serve as the motto of Alfred's educational legacy. Alfred ostensibly desired that all free men be literate in English, their native tongue. Latin education was to be made available only for those seeking advancement in religious orders. Alfred has been credited with creating the "framework for national literature in the vernacular," and rightly so.³⁵⁰ All of his efforts were directed squarely at spreading literacy in the vernacular. Like Gregory's *Cura*

³⁴⁹ *Pastoral Care*, 6.

³⁵⁰ Walter Sedgefield's 1900 translation of Alfred's rendition of Boethius, *King Alfred's Version of the Consolation of Boethius*, is extremely helpful, for it places all those bits added by Alfred in italics.

pastoralis, Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* enjoyed immense fame throughout the middle ages. Alfred took wonderful liberties with Boethius' treatise, as well. Philosophical ideas and explanations not in the original, but found in continental commentaries then available to Alfred and his men, significantly influenced parts of this translation. Whereas Boethius was writing from a Neoplatonic perspective, Alfred freely injected explicit references to Christian doctrine, thereby altering the entire feeling of the work.³⁵¹

The *Soliloquies* of St. Augustine were nowhere nearly as famous as the aforementioned works by Gregory and Boethius. Why Alfred chose to have them translated is not altogether clear. One possibility is that the *Soliloquies* happened to be preserved alongside the text of Boethius, both in a single manuscript. Of course, the contemplative nature of Augustine's work might very well have appealed to what Asser has so emphatically depicted as Alfred's meditative nature. Whatever the reason for including this work in his list of translations, Alfred manhandled the original even more dramatically than he had Boethius's treatise.³⁵² It was suggested more than a century ago that the three books of Alfred's translation stand, each of them, in a different relation to the original Latin text.

³⁵¹ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 26.

³⁵² Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 26.

The first book is a more-or-less straightforward translation of the original; the second book is less of a translation and more of a free adaptation of its content; the third book, founded only slightly on the Augustinian text, seems to have sprung from Alfred's own creative imagination. This suggested scheme is necessarily conjectural, considering that we do not yet know the exact content of the particular Latin manuscript used by Alfred and his men. Even so, judging from available manuscripts of the Latin text, and the general writing style of St. Augustine, it seems rather obvious that Alfred intervened a great deal with the original, remolding complex imagery and elaborate analogies with more straightforward arguments, as was generally his wont.³⁵³

The West-Saxon Psalms of the Paris Psalter is an Old English translation of a Latin version of the first fifty psalms. Interestingly, this translation renders the psalms into prose. It is generally asserted that these prose translations were the work of Alfred and his coterie. Alfred has added an introduction to each psalm, in which he adopts a method of exegesis that offers four interrelated, successive layers of interpretation.³⁵⁴ The psalter (in Latin) was the first text young English oblates were commanded to memorize. Psalms formed the

³⁵³ Hargrove, *Soliloquies*, xxxiii; Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 27.

³⁵⁴ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 27.

foundation of the Divine Office, and were recited throughout the various hourly Offices in their entirety once every week.³⁵⁵ Glosses of the psalters, containing interlinear glosses and marginal notes, both in Old English and in Latin, were compiled very early on in England.

The earliest complete manuscript of a glossed psalter dates to the mid-ninth century.³⁵⁶

Alfred's *Psalter*, therefore, was not an original endeavor; he was following an already well-worn path of exegesis and translation focused on the psalms.

Of special interest here are the *Laws of King Alfred*. Anglo-Saxon laws before the time of Alfred were unwritten, being the communal product of centuries of custom and oral transmission. Naturally, therefore, these laws were far from unified: each separate community was in possession of their own unique set of laws. By committing his laws to writing, Alfred was making a deliberate break with Anglo-Saxon tradition. On the other hand, insofar as he envisioned a centralized law to be followed universally by all his subjects, Alfred was following in the footsteps of the ancient Roman and, more recently, a quickly spreading ecclesiastical tradition. Indeed, written law was not merely an incidental byproduct of contact with Christian traditions, but a real expectation of the ecclesiastical

³⁵⁵ Lendinara, "The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning," 303.

³⁵⁶ Gretsch, "Literacy and the Uses of the Vernacular," 280-281.

organization. Augustine of Canterbury (?-c.604), leader of the Gregorian mission of conversion sent to Kent in 596, was an Italian by birth and education, and hence acquainted with the rich tradition of written Roman law. Some sixty years before Augustine's arrival, in 534, Emperor Justinian I, also known as Justinian the Great (c.482-565, r. 527-565), completed a codified version of Roman law, the *Corpus iuris civilis* (The Body of Civil Law). This was the first example of an imperially commissioned unified code of Roman law. Augustine and his fellow Christian missionaries would have been familiar with this lawcode. More than this, however, these missionaries were profoundly influenced by their studies of Mosaic Law as preserved in the Pentateuch.³⁵⁷ Alfred was a firm believer in two things: salvation through Christ and the power of the written word—the divine Word, in Mosaic as well as Christian contexts. His desire to commit his laws to writing reflects both of these beliefs, beliefs which were, in turn, brought over from the continent by Augustine and his lettered missionaries. For Alfred, more so than Augustine, the written word imparted wisdom, and wisdom, especially of a revealed sort, imparted power—secular power, that is, wealth and military victory.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 58-59; regarding Emperor Justinian and his lawcode, see also Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 36.

³⁵⁸ Frantzen, "King Alfred" (1994), 25-26.

Alfred's law codes make repeated reference to the laws of earlier kings, such as those attributed to Æthelbert (c.560-616) king of Kent (c.589 to 616), the first Anglo-Saxon king to convert to Christianity, as well as those issued in 694 by Ine (?-726), king of Wessex (688-726). Alfred also makes reference to the laws of Offa (?-796), king of Mercia (757-796), who was also a professing Christian. By drawing upon laws developed not only within his native Wessex, but also those issued in Kent and Mercia, Alfred aimed at producing something that could appeal to the sentiments of the growing body of subjects within his ever expanding kingdom. Simultaneously, reference to the older laws of Kent, in particular, would have lent his own code an air of historical continuity, and therefore, legitimacy.³⁵⁹ I have used the phrase "appeal to sentiment" deliberately. Alfred's lawcode, like those he cites in the preface, were not intended for practical use. In fact, there is not a single recorded instance of any Old English lawcode being cited in any legal suit held within an English court throughout the time of Alfred. These kings desired to make an ideological statement, to the effect that they were not simply military leaders, that is, conductors of organized violence, but righteous lawgivers, whose business it was to ensure the peace and just treatment of their subjects. These lawcodes, Alfred's included, served as

³⁵⁹ Redgate, "Alfred."

just another of the many symbols aimed at bolstering a king's legitimacy. As such, these laws cannot be seen as giving us a full, or even a realistic, picture of contemporary English legal customs.³⁶⁰

Alfred, while drawing upon these older law codes, made several important contributions. It was Alfred who introduced into Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence laws against treason, as well as the custom of swearing a solemn oath of allegiance to the king, the latter no doubt adopted from Carolingian models.³⁶¹ There is another aspect in which Alfred broke with tradition: whereas other Germanic peoples dwelling on the continent readily adopted the Latin language as the language of their own lawcodes, Alfred, while employing the Roman alphabet—which had eclipsed the runic *futhork* as a result of Augustine's labors—consistently had his law codes written up in his native tongue. For Alfred and his contemporaries, Latin remained the language of ecclesiastics, while Old English served as the language for both literary and administrative needs.³⁶² By having his lawcodes consistently drawn up in the vernacular, Alfred was, whether deliberately or not, tacitly encouraging the development of a unified, English identity, and therefore, a unified

³⁶⁰ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 58 and 75.

³⁶¹ Redgate, "Alfred;" on both treason and oaths, see *Laws*, law no. 1.1, 119.

³⁶² Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 59-60.

kingdom.³⁶³ Alfred's laws depict Alfred as a saint-ruler modelled after both Roman and Biblical exemplars. The preface to his laws, which sees the practice of enlightened legislature as beginning with the Decalogue, suggests that Alfred's subjects are a newly chosen people of God.³⁶⁴

While the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* begins before the birth of Christ, and though it does contain a fair number of entries dating between the second and eighth centuries, it must be acknowledged that this work is concerned almost exclusively with the politics of the late ninth century, that is, with the reign of Alfred and his immediate successors.³⁶⁵ The first sections of this chronicle champion an ideology of kingship that promotes Alfred's ambitious political and intellectual program. The *Chronicle* was likely compiled under Alfred's personal direction sometime between 896 and 897. This single history seeks to accomplish a number of interrelated tasks. First, by portraying Alfred as a central figure of West Saxon history, it seeks to present the kingdom of Wessex as a significant player in a much larger world history. Second, the *Chronicle* promotes Alfred as a virtuous and benevolent ruler, divinely mandated to rule over his subjects. Third, as divinely mandated

³⁶³ Brooks, "The Social and Political Background," 5.

³⁶⁴ Redgate, "Alfred;" *Laws*, prologue sec. 49, 116-118.

³⁶⁵ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 2.

ruler, Alfred, as well as all West Saxons kings before and after him, are envisioned as noble Christian fighters engaged in a ceaseless battle against the perfidious influence of paganism. Fourth, the political and religious escapades of Alfred and his vassals, engaged as they were in dealing with the Vikings—paganism embodied—are very conscientiously contextualized with a contemporary worldview that takes into consideration people and events happening on the continent. Fifth, and finally, Alfred’s successes as king of Wessex and eventual ruler over all of England are seen as the necessary outcome of a divinely predestined historical process.³⁶⁶ This work contains a most revealing genealogy of the West Saxon royal family, one that quaintly encapsulates most of these features: Alfred’s ancient lineage is traced back, first, to the Scylding kings of Denmark, thence further back to the antediluvian patriarchs of the Book of Genesis, and finally, even further back to Adam, who serves as an early model of Christ.³⁶⁷ Naturally, these genealogies are not concerned at all with historical veracity; what is at stake here is a political ideology, an effort at legitimization through the perceived authority of the written word.³⁶⁸

Asser’s *Life of Alfred* is the fullest record we have of Alfred’s reign, written by Asser,

³⁶⁶ Redgate, “Alfred.”

³⁶⁷ Davis, “Alfred the Great.”

³⁶⁸ Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 3.

a clerical member of Alfred's own royal household. It was completed in the year 893, when Alfred was occupied in fending off a second wave of Viking invasions. Unfortunately, not a single medieval manuscript of this work, to say nothing of manuscripts penned during Alfred's own lifetime, is extant. The situation is rather pitiable: all that does survive are reconstructions based upon an early modern transcription of a since lost manuscript. Furthermore, considering the apparently unfinished, and sometimes obviously erroneous state of some of Asser's *Life*, it seems that what has come down to us, if it does represent anything close to the original, is a work in progress. Extant versions of this work may represent not the original, but flawed copies of an incomplete draft, or collection of drafts. Whether we are looking at a faithful reproduction of an original text, or a flawed rendition of an unfinished draft, one thing is blatantly clear: Asser was not interested in preserving an objectively factual account of his patron and king. Asser wrote for a small audience: the fellow monks at his own monastery of Saint David's, the royal court, the king's sons, and Alfred himself. Asser's *Life* is, first and foremost, an encomium to the king. Alfred is portrayed as a lover of wisdom, an exemplar of Christian virtues, and a triumphant warrior in a holy war waged against accursed heathens. Asser was interested in glorifying Alfred; his historiographical standard is not one of factual truth, but of moral edification. Even the

king's hemorrhoids, from which he seems to have suffered from a young age, are depicted as a scourge of God, aimed at chastising the great man that he might become all the more wholeheartedly devoted to his divine duties.³⁶⁹

Alfred's Poetry: A Far Cry from the Verses of Saga

Aside from those works attributed either directly to Alfred or, only slightly less directly, to his lettered coterie—the Alfredian circle, as we might call it—discussed above, there is another work that has not received much attention in the scholarship surrounding this man. This work, previously referred to as the *Meters of Boethius*, and now more commonly called the *Old English Boethius*, is a collection of Anglo-Saxon alliterative poetry attributed, at least until recently, to the quill of King Alfred himself.³⁷⁰ Whether we

³⁶⁹ Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 10-14. Scholarly debates regarding the authenticity of Asser's *Life* are too involved to enumerate here. Abels, to my mind, offers the best presentation of these arguments in an appendix dedicated specifically to this question: pp. 318-326. I am inclined to agree with Abel: Asser's *Life* is most likely an authentic piece of work. For a discussion of Alfred's ailment, see Pratt, "The Illness of King Alfred the Great," in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 39-90.

³⁷⁰ A number of modern English translations of this work are currently available. I have used the oldest translation, namely that by Martin Tupper, entitled *King Alfred's Poems*, first published in 1850, simply because it seems to me the most poetic and most pleasantly readable version. A prose rendering of this work, entitled *King Alfred's Version of the Consolation of Boethius*, by Walter Sedgefield, first published in 1900, has also been of some value. Of course, more recent and more scholarly translations are available: see especially Susan Irvine and Malcolm Godden's translation,

agree with the older consensus or with the new, whether, that is, we see these poems as being the work of Alfred or his helpers, the important thing is that these poems were associated, from their very beginning, with the authority of King Alfred.³⁷¹ The textual culture of Anglo-Saxon intellectuals was primarily one of authority, not authorship; that the *Meters of Boethius* was thought to emanate from the authorial personage of Alfred was enough to make it a canonical work. Whether Alfred actually penned the verses himself would have been of little concern.³⁷² This is precisely the case with the textual culture of Saga and his court. Whether or not Saga was, in the modern sense of the word, sole author of all poems attributed to him in the three Sinitic anthologies compiled throughout his lifetime was, to him and his men, irrelevant. The question of authorship, so far as I can tell, never comes up in early Heian documents. What we do see, as early as the *Man'yōshū*, is the familiar practice of assigning certain poems to famous sovereigns, that is, of instilling certain poems with the imagined authorial presence of a given sovereign. The first poem in

The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred, published in 2012. All translations quoted in this section are from Tupper's 1850 version.

³⁷¹ Earl, in his 1989 article entitled "King Alfred's Talking Poems," 49, avers that there is no evidence that could positively refute Alfred's authorship of these poems.

³⁷² Harbus, "Metaphors of Authority in Alfred's Prefaces," 718, where he is drawing upon the work of Mary Swan and her article "'Authorship and Anonymity,'" in Pulsiano & Treharne, eds., *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

that anthology is attributed by its compilers to the personage of Emperor Yūryaku (dates uncertain, but traditionally given as 418-479, r. 456-479). This poem, which begins with the quaint verses “Your basket, with your lovely basket,” is most probably the remnant of a much older folk song, a rustic love ditty in which the narrator, a young man, attempts to gain the hand of an unmarried maiden who happens, at that moment, to be picking herbs along the hillside.³⁷³ For readers of *Man'yōshū*, it does not seem to have mattered whether Yūryaku was the original author of these verses. This poem (or folk song), once endued, by whomever and for whatever reason, with the authoritative title of Yūryaku, transmogrified them into imperial property. Authority, not authorship, was the currency of both Anglo-Saxon and early Heian textual culture.

The *Meters of Boethius* is a collection of thirty-one Old English poems, imbued with the authorial personage of Alfred, each poem based, oft times but loosely, on a selection of Latin verses by Boethius. In this respect, these Old English poems ought not be considered translations. Alfred, while nominally drawing upon the then unquestioned authority of Boethius, has freely adapted and expanded his original to such a degree that, in many cases,

³⁷³ For an extremely informative discussion of this poem and the reasons for its attribution to Emperor Yūryaku, as well as related verses, see Duthie, *Man'yōshū and the Imperial Imagination in Early Japan*, 229-242.

the voice of Boethius is almost nowhere to be heard. Generally speaking, the *Meters of Boethius* presents us with a collection of highly creative and original poetry of a uniquely Alfredian sort. A comparison of these verses with those attributed to Saga reveals a number of curious differences between the two approaches to literature. For one thing, Alfred translated and reworked Latin verses into the vernacular, while Saga composed all his poetry, at least that which made its way into imperially commissioned anthologies, in the Sinitic mode. As has been suggested in the previous chapter, Saga likely composed some vernacular poetry, and at least one or two of his vernacular poems have been preserved in slightly out-of-the way places. Even so, Saga's literary legacy is firmly Sinitic in nature, while that of Alfred is thoroughly vernacular. This difference, however, is not nearly as significant as it might at first appear. As Lurie has so masterfully argued, Sinitic writing was, for early Japanese intellectuals "as natural, and as automatic, as my employment of English to write this book."³⁷⁴ The practice of *kundoku* 訓読, or reading Sinitic characters in a way more akin to the grammatical structures of the vernacular meant that what appeared on the surface as something wholly continental could, and was, in reality

³⁷⁴ Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, 331.

understood through the medium of a vernacular tradition.³⁷⁵ Therefore, while it might be tempting to think of Alfred's poetry as vernacular, or non-continental, and that of Saga as Sinitic, or non-vernacular, the reality of things is far more complicated: Alfred's verses, while written, to be sure, in a Wessex dialect of Old English, smack of continental themes, allusions, and Latinized terminology. Saga's verses, likewise, while written in Sinitic characters, were consumed and circulated by a body of readers whose practice of Sinitic literature was dominated to a large degree by vernacular traditions, most notably that of *kundoku*. Even more simply put, both Alfred and Saga were writing in languages which, to their highly-exclusive and highly-lettered audiences, had long since been naturalized, and which were, albeit in different ways, sufficiently vernacularized. In this respect, at least, there is really no difference between the poetry of Alfred and Saga.

Another more obvious difference, and one which ought to have more significant consequences for future research, is the manner in which Alfred's *Meters of Boethius* includes within itself repeated references to its own existence as a unified whole, as a continuous narrative. "True Greatness" (poem no. 17) refers to previous poems with the

³⁷⁵ Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, 350-351. See also, Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 173-189.

reflexive remark “the nobleness whereof I spoke,” while in “Of Inward Light” (poem no. 21) the poet bids us “seek till he find that, which I spake of, good endless in worth.” To cite just one more example, we hear, in “Of Evil Kings” (poem no. 25) the poet say, “In this same book before I was speaking, everything living is wishing some good.” The *Meters of Boethius* is bound together from beginning to end with the supposed presence of a single narrator who, by repeatedly reminding us of things said before, simultaneously reminds the reader of his continued presence. The proem or opening poem for this collection begins with an attestation of authority, which serves simultaneously to introduce readers to an imagined narrative voice:

Thus to us did Alfred sing a spell of old; song-craft the West-Saxon king did us

unfold:

Long and much he longed to teach his people then these mixt-sayings of sweet

speech, the joys of men;

That no weariness forsooth, as well it may,—drive away delight from truth, but

make it stay.

The “us” of the first line refers not to Alfred’s helpers, nor yet to some imagined body of loyal readers—rather, listeners—but rather to the book itself.³⁷⁶ The narrative voice, which thus makes itself known in the opening proem, and which remains more-or-less present throughout this collection, appears to be that of the book itself. Of course, one could easily construe the voice throughout the poems as being that of Alfred himself. That is fine, too.

Whatever the case, the fact remains that the *Meters of Boethius* has been framed around the conceit of a single, unifying narrative voice. Saga’s anthologies, on the other hand, evince nothing of the sort. Each poem speaks in its own voice. Whether we are looking at poems by different poets, or only those attributed to Saga, there is not the slightest hint in any of these poems of a narrator referring explicitly back to his own earlier work. The reason for this is at once simple and insightful. Alfred’s poems, despite certain vestiges of a more directly occasion-related sort of poetry, seem to have been originally composed and thereafter consumed as more-or-less self-contained pieces of writing; they are poems that may be recited or read in any season, and in any venue; Alfred’s poems are not event-specific. Most, if not indeed all, of the Sinitic poems appearing in Saga’s three anthologies were composed with the express intent of being presented at specified public events, be

³⁷⁶ Earl, “King Alfred’s Talking Poems,” 50-54.

they banquets or royal excursions. Sinitic poetry, especially in the age of Saga and his immediate successors, was always connected with a specific event or occasion, and consequently with a specific venue and audience. It had a highly oral, or, if that word seems inappropriate given the highly literate nature of Sinitic writing, an intensely performative—event- or occasion-specific—aspect. Even after this poetry was anthologized, and thereafter circulated in manuscript form, the verses of Saga and his vassals retained their performative element. What we see are instances of poetry exchanges, fossilized in print, where two or more men respond to earlier verses presented by members of the royal coterie.³⁷⁷ That, however, is as far as it goes. We never hear Saga saying “as I wrote before,” or, “as my previous poem states.” We certainly never hear any of Saga’s men referring to the anthology as a thing in itself, and this for the very simple reason that the anthology did not exist when the poems were first presented at their respective banquets or outings.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ The word fossilized is, I must admit, potentially misleading. In his discussion of Heian poetry in general, LaMarre argues that poets sought not to fix but to regenerate events and phenomena as a means of ensuring the continual oscillation of various forces, including, of course, the socio-political forces of human interaction. See LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan*, 134. This same argument might be applied to Saga’s anthologies, which, far from fixing—fossilizing—poems that had once been presented in banquets, sought rather to continually regenerate, through an endless series of potential readings (by contemporary and future readers), the original (assumed) power of those poems.

³⁷⁸ In relation to this, Denecke, informs us that “writing interlinear comments to to one’s own poetry was not common practice before Michizane’s time,” that is, before the latter half of the ninth century. This practice of commenting reflexively upon one’s own poetry, and alluding to one’s previous poems, was probably inspired in Japan, as Denecke avers, by the work of Bo Juyi, who

Alfred's *Meters of Boethius* was composed from the beginning as a single series, that is to say, as a self-contained literary artefact. Saga's poetry was only anthologized years after it had been publically presented. If there is anything akin to a unified narrative voice running through the three Sinitic anthologies of Saga's day, perhaps it may be found in the implied presence of Saga himself. As mastermind and patron extraordinaire behind all three anthologies, contemporary readers would certainly have felt his authorial presence behind every poem, whether attributed to him or not. Conversely, the private poetry collections of both Tadaomi and Michizane, as will be seen in the following two chapters, show the beginnings of a more unified narrative voice, with references to previous poems and explicit autobiographical glosses.³⁷⁹

A third obvious difference worthy of quick mention here is the relative length of poems. Alfred's thirty-one poems, when compared to the verses of Saga and his men, are generally lengthy. The longest, "Of God and His Creatures" (poem no. 20) occupies no less than ten printed pages. The shortest, "Of Sinful Pleasure" (poem no. 18), being but seven

was himself one of the first continental poets to introduce this custom into Tang-period poetry; see Denecke, *Classical World Literatures*, 210-211, where she provides a superb translation of a poem by Michizane, preserved in *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 482, that contains interlinear commentary.

³⁷⁹ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 112. According to Steininger, Michizane, through his addition of such interlinear glosses, makes "autobiography the principle validating textual meaning."

lines in length, is an exception. Saga, especially during his retirement, experimented with lengthier forms, as can be seen in his two rhapsodies, “The River During Springtide” and “Chrysanthemum Blossoms,” both of which were discussed in the second chapter.³⁸⁰ For the most part, however, Saga’s poems tend to be rather short, say between four and eight couplets, with some as short as two couplets.³⁸¹ Despite the length of Saga’s rhapsodies, along with those of his contemporaries, however, we do not see anything resembling the plot-driven narratives found in something like Alfred’s “Of God and His Creatures.” This latter poem tells a story; there is a progression of action from one scene to the next; there is an unfolding of content such that readers are led through progressively higher levels of understanding. Saga’s lengthy poems do not tell a story; there is no plot development. Perhaps “The Swing” could be brought forward as something akin to a plot-driven piece.³⁸² Courtly ladies are first shown mounting the swings; they are then shown enjoying themselves on the swings; finally, they are shown scurrying away from the swings. Indeed, there is movement here. However, it is of a superficial kind. Saga presents us with a quick

³⁸⁰ For full translations and footnotes of both of these poems, see Appendix, item nos. 53 and 54 (*Keikokushū*, poem nos. 1 and 2, respectively).

³⁸¹ See, for example, Saga’s “An Old Altar” and “Petition for an Ailing Saichō,” in Appendix, item nos. 62 and 63 (*Keikokushū*, poem nos. 37 and 38, respectively).

³⁸² For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 76 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 105).

snapshot, a single episode of courtly life. No matter how many couplets he strings together, Saga ventures on nothing more than an eloquent repetition of a single, kernel image: lovely ladies on swings. There is no narrative here. This is curious, considering Saga and his vassals had been exposed to any number of story-like poems. One example that immediately comes to my mind is the lengthy poem entitled “Qiuhu” (Qiuhushi 秋胡詩) by Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456), a man whose poetry is preserved in both *Wenxuan* and *Yutai xinyong*.³⁸³ This poem, which tells the story of a husband and wife, engages readers in a tale told scene by scene, complete with climax and resolution. Many more examples of this sort, should they be desired, could be marshaled up to drive home the point. Suffice it to say that Heian men of letters, like Alfred and his men, were no stranger to versified story-telling. The absence of poetic stories in Saga’s anthologies, therefore, must be the result either of deliberate choices or, as I rather suspect, necessity. I say necessity because, as has already been explained, for Saga and his men, poetry was composed with the intent of presenting it at public functions. Story-telling simply would not have been appropriate at a royal banquet dedicated to chrysanthemum blossoms, especially when not one but a

³⁸³ Yan Yanzhi’s “Qiuhu” is preserved in both anthologies: see *Wenxuan*, fascicle 21, and *Yutai xinyong*, fascicle 4.

number of poems were to be presented. Neither the venue nor the schedule would have permitted lengthy plot-driven poems.

Aside from these more obvious differences, which are primarily of style, there are a number of more subtle discrepancies between the actual poetic content of the verses attributed to Alfred and Saga. Most strikingly, we see in the poems of these two rulers two very different images of sovereignty. Saga's motto, *monjō keikoku*—writing (especially poetry) as a means of governing the realm—is well known. I have touched upon this ideology in the previous chapter. Unfortunately, Saga nowhere reveals to us the reason behind his conviction. In what way precisely, we might ask, does poetry assist in governing the realm? What is it exactly about poetry that makes it such a wondrous tool for the eager sovereign? The essay from which this motto was gleaned, namely, Cao Pi's (aka Emperor Wen) *Dianlun*, "Standards of Writing," explains clearly that literature brings fame to the writer, outliving him long after he dies; writers are immortalized through their writing. That reason, at least, is easy to appreciate. Saga, though naturally well aware of Cao Pi's rationale, nowhere explicitly affirms, or, for that matter, denies, this particular philosophy. It would seem that Saga is extolling the virtues of poetry as a means of both gaining prestige as well as cultivating virtue. The age-old continental concept that a ruler, by having

his vassals present poetry, may then be able to discern the inner nature of each man, and thereby determine whether so-and-so is worthy to serve the sovereign, and, if so, in what capacity, is surely present with Saga. Even so, he does not make any clear, explicit statements of his own to this end. The situation is altogether different with Alfred, who repeatedly states in none too ambiguous terms why literacy is so important, not only to the ruler, but to Christians in general. Reading brings revealed wisdom, especially wisdom of God's will, an understanding of which leads to spiritual salvation and earthly fortitude. For Alfred, a king, duly appointed by God, must be at once a successful military leader and a religious shepherd. Poetry, which does not occupy the same supremely elevated seat as that given to it by Saga, is, nevertheless, a highly efficacious means of instilling wisdom, and its fruit, the love of truth, in such a way that it is pleasant to hear and easy to digest. As the opening to *Meters of Boethius* quoted above informs us:

Long and much he longed to teach his people then these mixt-sayings of sweet

speech, the joys of men;

That no weariness forsooth, as well it may,—drive away delight from truth, but

make it stay.

Poetry, for Alfred, is, like his prose translations, a vehicle of instruction in divine wisdom; it fulfills an intimately religious function. Indeed, Alfred's poems are, without exception, didactic or pedagogical, miniature sermons in verse form. Poetry—Alfred's poetry—is meant for those who seek wisdom in its highest form. This same opening proem, spoken simultaneously in the voice of the book itself and of Alfred, concludes with the encouraging line: "To all the best of men I sing,—list, ye that may."

There are noteworthy similarities, as well. Saga presents himself as an absolute sovereign, wise and benevolent, reigning, after the fashion of a Daoist sage, in a most harmonious and inconspicuous manner, Alfred fashions for himself the image of a devout servant of God, sore at heart for his sins, but certain of salvation through his pursuit of divine wisdom. Saga, in his Buddhist verses, repeatedly refers to himself as a fatuous mortal devoid of understanding, a lost soul in need of enlightenment:

Why does the Buddha tarry so in bringing enlightenment to us fatuous mortals? Ah,

but these complaints of mine, I well know, are puerile. All in good time: the

Buddha wishes to save all mankind from this fleeting dream we call the

world.³⁸⁴

莫嫌應化久 為濟夢中人

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 76

As ignorant and lost as he might declare himself to be, however, Saga eagerly aligns himself with the Daoist hermits of old whose spiritual journeys, depicted in such fantastical scenes as that found in “Verdured Mountains,” inevitably led to emancipation from this mortal world.

Be they deities or sages, all who come to dwell in this mountain conceal their tracks,
 preferring instead to live a life of quiet solitude, away from the world of man.
 I ascend those peaks, and see, bathed in the westering rays of a vernal sun, flower
 petals fluttering down the sides of deep, wooded valleys. My heart, too, is

³⁸⁴ This couplet is taken from Saga’s “Bedridden: A Reply to Master Saichō,” a full translation of which is found in the Appendix, item no. 35 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 76).

transported far away from the mundane realm.³⁸⁵

或冥道而宵暝 或晦跡以寂寞

林壑花飛春色斜 登臨逸興意亦除

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 209

Saga at times refers to himself in deliberately humilific language as a lost soul in need of spiritual guidance. However, he is swift to cast himself as one earnestly pursuing the path of ultimate emancipation: “I, too, am aflame with a desire for enlightenment!”³⁸⁶ In this respect, Saga and Alfred are in agreement with one another, though they would certainly disagree in regards to the method whereby salvation might be attained. They would agree, moreover, on the need to turn away from the madding world of mundane concerns and pursue a life of solitude and meditation. Saga longs to release himself from all earthly attachments:

³⁸⁵ This is from Saga’s “Verdured Mountains,” a full translation of which may be found in the Appendix, item no. 83 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 209).

³⁸⁶ This exclamation is from Saga’s “Remembering Master An: A Reply to Fujiwara no Koreo,” a full translation of which may be found in the Appendix, item no. 59 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 33).

The heart of one who cultivates the way of enlightenment is free of all attachments
to this mundane world. Dressed in his monkish robe, begging bowl in hand, he
heads for distant shores shrouded in mist.

Know that the path this monk treads is far, and not for us worldly folk. He dwells
deep within the autumnal mountains, somewhere atop yon peaks, where only
the white clouds play.³⁸⁷

道性本來塵事遐 獨將衣鉢向煙霞
定知行盡秋山路 白雲深處是僧家

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 30

Alfred, likewise, seeks peace and salvation in the inner world of the mind. One especially
fine example, among countless others that might be just as illustrative, is to be found in “Of

³⁸⁷ This is from Saga’s “Seeing Off an Elderly Monk Returning to the Mountains,” footnotes to which may be found in the Appendix, item no. 57 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 30).

Inward Light” (poem no. 21):

Well,—O ye children of men of mid earth! Every freeman should seek till he find
That, which I spake of, good endless in worth; these, which I sing of, the joys of the
mind.

[...]

That [i.e., the mind] is the peace-place, and comfort alone of all that are harm'd by
the troubles of life,

A place very pleasant and winsome to own, after the turmoil of sorrow and strife.

The similarities here between Saga and Alfred are revealing. For both men, poetry acts as a potential, and evidently a very potent, vehicle of spiritual salvation. Naturally, we cannot know to what degree these men actually subscribed to the religious beliefs espoused in their poetry. That is neither here nor there. What we can say for certain is that both men embraced similar ideologies of sovereignty: the ideal ruler must be at once sovereign and sage, king and saint. He must strive, as far as possible, to rule his people in a benevolent and gentle manner, while at the same time leading a cloistered, intellectual life detached

from mundane cares and earthly vexation. In short, the ruler must be at once a public figure and a solitary hermit.

Alfred was inspired primarily by Christian theology, Saga by Buddhist and Daoist philosophy and hagiography. Both arrived at essentially the same conclusions. Both, consequently, were prone to spells of fatalistic or at least deeply melancholic meditations on the fleeting nature of the world and of man's fickle state therein:

Just as autumn draws to a close, so, too, does my youthful beauty quickly fade. My heart moans with despair as I think upon the ways of this cruel world: what the heart desires is one thing; what we receive is something quite different.

Look at all those fallen leaves! How can a heart keep from weeping? Wild geese huddle in droves atop the bare branches of many a riverside tree.

It is with deep sadness that I gaze upon such scenes, harboring secret thoughts within my bosom, though I speak to no one.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ This is from Saga's "Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden," a full translation of which is found in the Appendix, item no. 52 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 139).

容華銷歇為秋暮 心事相違多慘悽
 觀落葉 斷人腸 淮南木葉雜雁翔
 對此長年悲 含情多所思

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, 139

These are Saga's words, albeit in the poetic persona of a lovelorn woman. Autumn, as all students of Sinitic poetry are well aware, is generally a time of mourning, especially for women whose men, for whatever reason, are far away. Alfred, in his "A Psalm to God" (poem no. 4), which is a creative reworking of Psalm no. 149, while enumerating the mystery of creation and the manifestation of divine will as witnessed in each season, depicts the autumn as follows;

Thou givest the trees a south-westerly breeze, whose leaves the swart storm in its
 fury did seize
 By winds flying forth from the east and the north and scattered and shattered all
 over the earth.

This description is immediately followed by a conventional lamentation of man's sinful nature:

On earth and in heaven each creature and kind hears Thy behest with might and
with mind,

But man, and man only, who oftenest still wickedly worketh against Thy wise Will.

Herein lies what I take to be two of the most marked differences between the poetry of Saga and Alfred. First, Saga, whether speaking in the poetic persona of a ruler, a hermit, or a woman, composed verses dedicated to expressing the heartfelt sentiments of his fellow human beings. Often, to be sure, he does this as a means to an end. His lamentations on war, for example, serve to advertise a sympathetic nature, something geared at securing the admiration of his vassals. Whatever the motive behind such depictions, it remains the case that Saga's poetry is only very rarely of an expressly didactic orientation. Alfred, on the other hand, spares no pains in driving home the didactic aim of all his poems. Even a poem dedicated to the deeds of the mythical Circes, entitled "Of Circe and Her Company" (poem

no. 26), ends, after a lengthy four-page account of the manner in which she deceived Odysseus' companions, with a pithy exclamation: "Wonderful is that great and mighty art of every mind above the mean dull body." Here, as always, the king praises the inherently noble nature of the soul, eager, immediately thereafter, to shower scorn upon the sins of the flesh: "By such and such things thou mayest clearly know that from the mind come one by one to each and every man his body's lusts and powers." Alfred, whether in prose or in verse, is a teacher through and through. Saga, on the contrary, is content with depicting nature in all its glory, both the subtle and the sublime. Alfred, in accordance with his religious leanings, depicts man as a fallen creature, one who must shun the body and all its desires. Saga, in accordance with his, accepts, rather, promotes, the enjoyment of earthly pleasures, such as drinking and flower-viewing, so long as they are pure and refined. His romantic verses are ample evidence of this. Both men find in the outward expressions of nature a key to some sort of deeper understanding. Alfred, as seen most clearly in his "Of Heavenly Wonders" (poem no. 28), urges us to meditate on the various celestial bodies as a means of attaining a more exalted appreciation of the harmonious workings of God in the universe. Saga, were he to hear this, would likely approve.

However, I dare say, Saga might very well take umbrage at the wholly otherworldly

nature of such a paradigm. For Saga, the celestial bodies are not merely signs of some invisible hand. Such things are, wholly independent of any assumed supernatural influence, deserving of our sincere admiration solely in virtue of their natural splendor. Alfred's worldview is dominated by a Godhead; it is squarely religious. Saga devotes his attention to the immediate perception and detailed description of natural phenomena; his worldview is intimately bound up with man's ability to appreciate the visible world around him. For Alfred, our appreciation of natural phenomena is, to borrow a Buddhist term, an expedient means (*fangbian/hōben*), a convenient way for us mortals to catch some glimpse of the divine will. For Saga, a refined appreciation of nature is an achievement worthy of cultivation independent of any supposed Godhead. Poetry, so far as Saga and his men were concerned, was a means—indeed, the ultimate means—of both expressing and fostering this appreciation of natural phenomena. Notwithstanding their fundamentally different approaches to the appreciation of nature, both Alfred and Saga are appealing to their vassals as mediators between a higher realm and the world of man. Alfred was deeply conscious of his role not merely as translator, but as a mediator between the wisdom-culture of Latinate Christianity and the vernacular culture of his fellow men. Poems, such as “Of Heavenly Wonders,” are not merely didactic attempts at instilling wisdom in his readers. Alfred,

through these displays of seemingly profound understanding, effectively establishes himself as a wellspring of wisdom, the man who “has the code, the key to the symbolic system of meaning,” the man who “can decipher the marks and process them for the less powerful,” that is, the less wise.³⁸⁹ Saga, as has already been discussed in the second chapter with regards to his “The River during Springtide” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 1), likewise sets himself up as mediator between the profound world of Nature (*zōka* 造化) and his loyal vassals. Regardless, therefore, of how these men perceive nature, whether as a symbolic expression of God’s will or as a mysterious, divine power in and of itself, both men strove to legitimate their rule by appealing to the image of a wise sage- or saint-ruler, a mediator between the divine and humankind.

The second important difference to be noted in relation to the two autumnal verses quoted above, one from Saga’s “Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden,” the other from Alfred’s “A Psalm to God,” is the nature of poetic personae employed by each poet. Alfred consistently preserves the role of saintly teacher throughout the *Meters of Boethius*.

Wherever we look, his poetic persona remains unchanged. Just as we noted the presence of a single, unifying narrative voice running through all thirty-one poems, so, too, are we met

³⁸⁹ Harbus, “Metaphors of Authority in Alfred’s Prefaces,” 721.

by but one persona—the wise but humble saint-king. We have here one story told by one narrator. The exact opposite is true with regards to Saga, whose several poetic personae have been examined in some detail in the previous chapter. The reason for this variation in poetic personae, as might be easily guessed, is intimately bound up with the highly occasional, that is, occasion-specific, character of Sinitic poetry in Saga's court, where each poem was, especially in its first enactment or recitation, bound to a specific event, venue, and audience. Saga's poetry, directed as it is to a specific audience at a specific time, and necessarily resonating with contemporaneous sociopolitical events, was firmly embedded in a concrete historical moment. Each banquet, each outing, called for a different approach, depending on the complex dynamics of court life prevailing at any given time. Appeals and demands to different audiences required the employment of different sorts of poetic imagery and metaphors. Alfred's *Meters of Boethius* was composed from the onset to exist as a single, internally unified artefact, wholly unrelated to an specific season, event, or venue. Saga's poetry, while eventually anthologized and consequently transformed into an artefact, was not initially composed solely for that end.

This more-or-less singular persona of Alfred's, whether it be expressed through his poetry or his vernacular prefaces to other translations, has been tellingly characterized as

that of the Christian writer-king, “honored through the grace of Christ with royal dignity,” which dignity instills in him “powerful comprehension of the text and the authority to translate it.” The writer-king dons upon his regal brow a crown of threefold power: royal, divine, and authorial (textual).³⁹⁰ As argued above, the fact that Alfred strove to promote vernacular literacy, while Saga strove to promote Sinitic learning should not be construed as a dichotomy, such that Alfred is made to represent the vernacular and Saga and continental. Both men were navigating and effectively mediating between two not at all clearly defined realms of literacy, to borrow Lurie’s terminology.³⁹¹ Alfred’s Old English poems, prefaces, and translations are saturated with Latinity, such that it would be misleading to characterize his literary project as essentially vernacular. Saga’s Sinitic poems and imperial history, while written using logographic characters of continental provenance, were recited, comprehended, and consumed through the medium of vernacular-based reading techniques, such as *kundoku*. It would be a brash oversimplification, therefore, to refer to Saga’s literary legacy as strictly continental. Saga’s literary collections are Sinitic insofar as they borrow logographic characters and make

³⁹⁰ Harbus, “Metaphors of Authority in Alfred’s Prefaces,” 723 and 725.

³⁹¹ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 129: “There was not a homogenized standard of ready control of Sinographs, and certainly not of a spoken Chinese language [...]”

repeated use of literary allusions originally of continental origin. When considering the actual reception and consumption of his work, however, it becomes obvious that vernacular culture played a far more significant role than might otherwise be acknowledged. While their worldviews might have been different, Saga and Alfred were both writer-kings, with similar political agendas and remarkably similar strategies of legitimizing their respective rules.

CONCLUSION

Let us turn our attention back to Saga. Reexamining his literary project and political ideology through an Alfredian lens, it should now be possible, by means of review, to discern precisely those features that are truly unique to Saga's poetry. I would like to focus here specifically on the role of nature in Saga's poetry, considering it plays such a central role in all his anthologies. As has been argued above, Saga and his men regarded the appreciation of natural phenomena as a prominent sign of cultural refinement, the absence of which would have been inexcusable. It would be difficult to find even one poem in Saga's three anthologies that does not revolve around some dominant natural image, such

as a flower or a bird, or which does not contain a number of verses dedicated exclusively to the detailed description of natural phenomena. Even ostensibly religious verses, such as Saga's "Bedridden in Kegon Temple: A Reply to Korenaga no Harumichi," which serves as an encomium to the secluded environs of Kegon Temple in the Saga Wilds of Kyoto, is dominated by descriptions of natural scenery:

Kegon Temple stands at the very peak of yon mountain, shrouded forever in clouds,
while the valleys below wind off into the distance.

You, Harumichi, so pure of heart, in your search after the ultimate truth did venture
into those solitary mountains, separated as they are from all our worldly clatter.

In the temple garden stand elderly evergreens who watch over the monks as they
meditate; there, too, grow frail banana trees, signs of the mysterious void.

From that temple rain divine flowers that float down to the deep valley streams
below. From that temple arises a sweet fragrance that drifts through the misty
heavens.

Wind blows through the bamboo brakes only to fall silent soon after, while a temple
bell resounds with the coming of dawn.

What charming solitude your heart must feel upon hearing the monks reciting their
 scriptures on that mountaintop bathed all in moonlight!³⁹²

絕頂華嚴寺 雲深溪路遙

道心登靜境 真性隔塵囂

閱騰禪庭栢 觀空法界蕉

天花流邃澗 香氣度烟霄

風竹時開合 聲鐘曉動搖

轉經山月下 羸病轉寥寥

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 35

This is not so much an encomium to Kegon Temple as it is a tribute to the profound
 solemnity and scenic beauty amongst which the temple is nestled. I would argue that
 nature, for Saga and his men, ought always to be written, or at least understood so to be,
 with a capital ‘n’—Nature—where it is synonymous with the mysterious, all-pervasive

³⁹² For footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 61 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 35).

creative force (*zaohua/zōka*) of so much Daoist literature. This is, in fact, how Saga often refers to Nature:

Lofty is that verdured mountain!—so lofty, indeed, that its peak brushes against the azure firmament above. Nature has spared no skill in that intricately crafted range, what with its mighty pinnacles!³⁹³

青山峻極兮摩蒼穹 造化神功兮勢轉雄

What I have rendered loosely as “Nature has spared no skill,” appears, in the original, as *zōka no jinkō* 造化神功, the divine or miraculous handicraft of Nature. This *zōka*, literally rendered, means that which both creates (*zao/zō*) and transforms (*hua/ka*). To Saga and his men, Nature was precisely that: the manifestation of an ultimately unfathomable source of creation and endless transformation. It was not that Nature served as a temporary key to a deeper understanding of a higher power, but that Nature, in all its manifestations and

³⁹³ This is from Saga’s “Verdured Mountains,” quoted earlier in this chapter; see Appendix, item no. 83 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 209).

infinite permutations, here and now before our very eyes, was that very power itself in action. There was no need to look beyond or above Nature.³⁹⁴ Quite the contrary. Saga's Sinitic poetry invites us to focus our gaze intensely upon the things before us, to cultivate within ourselves the ability to appreciate the subtle and sublime beauty of Nature as it is in this very world:

Fix your gaze upon those vibrant floral pigments that shimmer so brightly against
 their verdured canvas of leaf and grass. How is it that even Nature herself has
 deigned to imitate the painter's art?³⁹⁵

見取花光林表出 造化寧假丹青筆

³⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the way in which poets working in the Sinitic mode, specifically premodern continental poets, understood the role of poetry in relation to an immediate appreciation of nature, or Nature, see Pauline Yu's monograph, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*. As Yu points out, continental poets—and, I would add, Saga, who was working within this framework—were not interested in “making the poems refer to something fundamentally other—belonging to another plane of existence—than what they say [...] the process [of versification] is one of contextualization, not allegorization” (76). See also her article entitled “Chinese and Symbolist Poetic Theories.”

³⁹⁵ This is from Saga's “Falling Blossoms,” a full translation of which appears in Appendix, item no. 1 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3).

Here, too, where I have used the word Nature, Saga uses the word *zōka*. Nature is the thing that must be steadily observed, penetrated, and quietly contemplated by the discerning eye. Neither flower nor bird nor sun nor moon are ever portrayed as being subservient to any greater power; these things, these natural phenomena, are each and every one of them manifestations of Nature, and therefore wholly deserving of our concentrated and continual appreciation. Saga might have reservations with Alfred's homily: "Thro' the Lord's power, the sun and the moon rule as at first by the Father's decree; / And think not thou these bright shiners will soon weary of serfdom till doomsday be."³⁹⁶ If, however, we were to substitute Alfred's "Lord" and "Father" with Laozi's *dao/dō* 道, the Way, perhaps Saga's reaction would be more favorable.

It follows from this that Saga's poetry is refreshingly worldly. Even those verses in which Saga seems to yearn for an escape from this madding world, for the life of seclusion and meditation, what we really hear is a desire to be alone with Nature. In a short poem of but two couplets, entitled "Old Man," Saga depicts the simple life of a Daoist hermit, whose sole pleasures are drinking and observing nature:

³⁹⁶ *Meters of Boethius*, "Of the Stars and Seasons" (poem no. 29).

There was an old man who had little to do with this world. He had never felt a jot of admiration for people of high birth.

Though poor and of low birth, he gave no thought to such things. In a flowery wood, where willows sway in the breeze, he lay and drank his days away.³⁹⁷

世有不羈一老翁 生來無意羨王公
人間忘卻貧與賤 醉臥芳林花柳風

Saga, *Keikokushū*, 104

Here nature—Nature, rather—takes on the form of a fragrant flowery wood (*hōrin* 芳林) and willow branches swaying in a gentle breeze (*karyū no kaze* 花柳風). The image of the old man, a perennial figure in Saga’s recluse poetry, takes on a number of slightly altered forms: the hermit, the alchemist, the monk, and the lone fisherman. Saga, in his “Fishing Songs,” has dedicated a series of five short poems to this last figure. Each of these pieces depicts a solitary fisherman who, living a contented life in harmony with Nature, spends his

³⁹⁷ For footnotes, see Appendix, item no. 75 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 104).

days drifting whithersoever the waves might chance to carry him, blithely oblivious to the madding world without. His is an idyllic world of natural beauty and spiritual satisfaction:

The supple branches of willow trees along the wharf are swaying hither and thither,
 while an aged fisherman sits in his boat, half-veiled in a mantle of languid mist.
 His heart, rejoicing in the charms of springtide, gives not a thought to the hour; he
 lingers on—not a single catch—drifting where the wind takes him.³⁹⁸

江水渡頭柳亂絲 漁翁舟上煙景遲
 乘春興 無厭時 求魚不得帶風吹

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 216

Willow trees swaying in the vernal breeze, cloaked in a veil of gossamer mist—these are conventional spring images. In the hands of Saga, they become more than that. For him, vernal images such as these conjure up tales of Daoist hermits and enlightened recluses. I

³⁹⁸ For translations of all five poems, see Appendix, item no. 88 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 216-220).

repeat: Saga's poetry, for all its talk of hermits and monks, is firmly grounded in this world, and has very little to do with the next. It is, likewise, with an earthly tear that Saga expresses concern for a lady-in-waiting who, having been left behind by a deceased lover, took the tonsure and became a nun:

No doubt she, being a woman of deep sentiment, sought to free herself from the shackles of this mortal world. But how, pray tell, could that frail female frame of hers bear the hardship of donning a monk's coarse robe?

The sound of nuns reciting scriptures on this chilly autumn day is heard over the wind that blows through her mountain temple. It is with sadness that I imagine her sitting by a window overlooking some stream, bathed in the fading moonlight as she engages in her austere practices just before the light of dawn.³⁹⁹

嬌心欲識乖口縛 弱體那堪著草衣

³⁹⁹ This is quoted from Saga's "The Court Lady of the Old Capital Who Became a Nun: A Reply to Fujiwara no Koreo," a full translation of which may be found in the Appendix, item no. 58 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 32).

山殿風聲秋梵冷 溪窗月色曉禪悲

Saga, *Keikokushū*, poem no. 32

As with the previous examples, here, too, the central figure—a nun—is surrounded, nearly covered over, with worldly descriptions of nature. The first quoted couplet, by focusing on the woman’s “frail female frame,” sets the tone of the entire poem. There is nothing otherworldly about these verses. Even the sound of nuns chanting scriptures is quickly redirected with descriptions of chilly autumn air and mountain winds. Her private meditations are accompanied by the image of moonlight reflected upon a stream. In Saga’s poetic world, everything happens within and is intimately related to Nature.

There is one poem, namely, Saga’s “Bedridden: A Reply to Master Saichō,” which might be brought against me as proof that Saga, like Alfred, preached an otherworldly doctrine:

Word has been brought to me that you, Master Saichō, you who dwell amidst the
cloudy peaks, are presently lying sick in bed, preparing at long last to commune

with the ultimate reality, that after which you have striven for so long.

All external phenomena are naught but illusion; having penetrated the interdependence of all things, realizing that nothing possesses substantial existence of itself, how, then, can one help but despise this fleeting mortal body of flesh and bone?⁴⁰⁰

聞公雲峰裡 臥病欲契真

對境知皆幻 觀空厭此身

Saga, *Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 76

The last verse seems especially damaging to my argument. It must be borne in mind, however, that this poem is meant to serve as a note of encouragement to one of his most treasured monks. As such, this verse merely echoes common Buddhist doctrine. Be strong, my dearest Saichō, says Saga, for you are among the enlightened. Surely no mere physical sickness can perturb your soul—you, who has seen through the ephemeral nature of this

⁴⁰⁰ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 35 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 76).

human existence. More telling, however, is the couplet that immediately follows those just quoted:

Verdured evergreens cast their cool shadows over a temple garden bathed in silence,
while vibrant flowers bejewel the temple grounds with vernal hues.

栢暗禪庭寂 花明梵宇春

Is it not remarkable, considering what has just been said about despising the mortal coil, that the beauty of nature should thus be praised? Does it not seem out of place? Not at all. Not when we understand that, for Saga, Nature is a profound manifestation of an eternal reality. Verdured evergreens and vibrant flowers are just the sort of thing we ought to expect from Saga in a poem about the fleeting life of man. When we understand the central place of Nature in Saga's poetry, we begin to gain a deeper understanding of the role a refined appreciation of natural phenomena played in court culture.

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PART II:

SHIMADA TADAOMI

AND

SUGAWARA NO MICHIZANE

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CHAPTER FOUR**The Poetry of Shimada Tadaomi:****Patrons, Peers, and Mixed Genres****INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I would like to do two things: First, I would like to present a concise biography of Shimada Tadaomi (828-891), a skilled poet and middle-class aristocrat born during Saga's period of retirement into a family of hereditary provincial governors (*zuryō* 受領) whose life and work have not been addressed in any great detail in Japanese or English scholarship.⁴⁰¹ This biography will not only provide the necessary historical background required for a fuller understanding of the poet's work, but will also contribute to our examination of Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) in the chapter immediately following this one. The two men were intimate acquaintances, having exchanged a large number of poems, and it is often the case, for example, that Tadaomi's poetic reply cannot be accurately interpreted without referring to Michizane's

⁴⁰¹ English translations of 28 of Tadaomi's Sinitic poems are to be found in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, *Dance of the Butterflies*, pp. 109-120.

initial missive. A good, though incomplete, selection of this man's poetry is preserved in his family anthology, *Denshi kashū* 田氏家集 (The Shimada Family Anthology), probably compiled sometime shortly after his death, and abridged later on. Though the title suggests that this is an anthology, containing the work of several generations of Shimada poets, in reality it would seem that what we have here is a private collection of Tadaomi's poems. It is for this reason that I shall refer to *Denshi kashū* from hereon in as a collection, and not an anthology.

Among the four extant editions of *Denshi kashū*, the one believed to represent most closely the original form of Tadaomi's collection is a handwritten manuscript stored in the Matsudaira Library in Shimabara City, Nagasaki Prefecture. This manuscript is known appropriately as the Matsudaira Manuscript (*Matsudaira bunko bon*).⁴⁰² All translations of Tadaomi's poetry appearing in this chapter are based on this most authoritative manuscript.⁴⁰³

Second—and this occupies the main bulk of the chapter—I would like to explore ways in which Tadaomi uses poetry to invoke different sorts of relationships with various audiences.

⁴⁰² Kinpara, “‘Denshi kashū’ no shohon—‘Matsudaira bunko bon’ wo chūshin toshite,” 189.

⁴⁰³ As far as commentaries of *Denshi kashū* go, the late Kojima Noriyuki (1913-1998) was the first to provide in his *Denshi kashū chū* 田氏家集注 (published in three volumes from 1991 to 1994) a full commentary on the text. In the meantime, Nakamura Shōhachi and Shimada Shin'ichirō produced another, less bulky and, in my humble opinion, more enjoyable commentary of the same, entitled *Denshi kashū zenshaku* 田氏家集全釈, published in 1993, just before the final volume of Kojima's work had been published. Considering the commentary by Nakamura and Shimada is more readily accessible than Kojima's work, poem numbers for pieces appearing in *Denshi kashū* referenced in this chapter are those given in *Denshi kashū zenshaku*. This last commentary has the further advantage of including within its pages numerous references to previous scholarship, especially that by Kinpara and Kuranaka, such that one is able to gain from this single volume a fair picture of the state of the field.

More specifically, I will attempt to show what sorts of pre-existing poetic genres Tadaomi has interwoven into some of his own poems, and how these genres contribute to the efficacy of his poetry as a means of, for example, gaining favor with the sovereign. Issues of patronage are at the fore here. My arguments, as will be seen, are by no means complicated. The premise is simple enough: different genres are adopted for different audiences. What should interest us are the details. How exactly do the linguistic and conceptual conventions inherent in a specific genre contribute to the effects of a given poem? What sorts of relationships does Tadaomi invoke, and to what end? One of the crucial points I wish to make here is this: Tadaomi, whether consciously or not, has succeeded in incorporating elements of two or more genres into a single poem. For instance, in poems composed for foreign envoys, a genre unto itself, Tadaomi has interwoven elements of romantic poetry (*enshi* 艶詩), such that these envoy poems take on a metaphorically romantic undertone. Interestingly, it will be seen that Tadaomi employs conventionally romantic language and imagery to the same end as Saga, though the audience of Tadaomi's verses is not a bevy of female consorts, but a group of foreign male envoys. This combination of genres allows the poet to invoke a type of relationship not possible through either one of these genres taken by itself. What follows, therefore, is an examination of how genres combine to form new types of poetry, and how these new types of poetry are able, in turn, to invoke new kinds of relationships with their intended audiences. Saga composed verses from a position of supreme authority. As

such, his poetry tends to employ easily recognizable generic elements directed at conveying a very specific sort of power relationship, usually, that between sovereign and vassal or sovereign and consort. Tadaomi, along with Michizane, composed poetry from a rather precarious position. Consequently, the verses of these two men contain unique combinations of elements taken from different literary genres, thus enabling them to navigate through a number of less clearly defined power relationships, both with their superiors as well as their peers.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND: FROM NINMYŌ TO DAIGO—833-930⁴⁰⁴

Tadaomi passed away in the year 891, which corresponds to the fifth year of Emperor Uda's 宇多天皇 (867-931, r. 887-897) decade-long reign. Emperor Saga abdicated in 823, whereupon his brother was enthroned as Emperor Junna. Junna, in turn, abdicated in 833, in favor of Saga's son, who then became Emperor Ninmyō. After Ninmyō, who remained sovereign until his death in 850, we see a succession of four sovereigns, namely, Montoku, Seiwa, Yōzei, and Kōkō. Uda, seventh son of Kōkō, ascended the throne upon the death of his father. Tadaomi,

⁴⁰⁴ This section contains nothing that is new; I have merely gathered together the most pertinent facts, all of which may be found in any standard encyclopedia—Sakamoto's article "Heian jidai," 2010, is particularly helpful—or textbook history of Japan. Anything which is not strictly common knowledge is of my own addition. It is for this reason that I have kept footnotes to an absolute minimum throughout this particular section.

who was born in 828, just half a decade after Saga's abdication, consequently lived to see the reigns of seven different sovereigns, from Junna all the way down to Uda. As will be seen, it was during the reign of Uda that Tadaomi's career as a scholar-statesman truly took flight. A full account of ninth-century court politics is certainly not possible here. What I would like to do, however, before delving into the life and work of Tadaomi, is offer a brief summary of court politics from the reign of Ninmyō to that of Uda, that is from the 830s to the end of the ninth century. Considering, furthermore, that the chapter immediately following this one is concerned with the life and poetry of Sugawara no Michizane (845-903), whose final years overlap with the reign of Uda's successor, namely, Emperor Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885-930, r. 897-930), I have extended my little summary to cover the first few decades of the tenth century, as well. In hopes of making what is to follow somewhat more navigable, I insert here a list of all the sovereigns, along with their reign years, from Saga to Daigo:

Emperor Saga	嵯峨	(786-842, r. 809-823)
Emperor Junna	順和	(786-840, r. 823-833)
Emperor Ninmyō	仁明	(810-850, r. 833-850)
Emperor Montoku	文德	(827-858, r. 850-858)

Emperor Seiwa	清和	(850-880, r. 858-876)
Emperor Yōzei	陽成	(868-949, r. 876-884)
Emperor Kōkō	光孝	(830-887, r. 884-887)
Emperor Uda	宇多	(867-931, r. 887-897)
Emperor Daigo	醍醐	(885-930, r. 897-930)

The Fujiwara Ascendancy: Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu and Emperor Nimnyō

As will be recalled from the previous chapters, Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu was a particularly influential courtier throughout the early ninth century. He is credited with laying the foundations upon which the Northern Fujiwara would later prosper. Having won the trust of Emperor Saga, he was placed in charge, in 810, of a new organ of government known as the chancellery or chamberlain's office (*kurōdo dokoro* 藏人所), over which he was appointed Chief Royal Chancellor (*kurōdo no tō* 藏人頭). These royal chancellors (also known in English scholarship as royal secretaries) were in charge of managing all manner of daily court activities, from transmitting the sovereign's words to his courtiers, and vice versa, as well as participating in the organizing of a number of routine rituals. Fuyutsugu was made Minister of the Left in 825. He established the private Fujiwara family academy for Sinitic studies—the only official curriculum

for scholars throughout the entire Heian period—known as Kangakuin 勸学院. A number of his poems appear in both *Bunka shūreishū* and *Keikokushū*. His daughter, Shunshi (or Nobuko) 順子 (809-871) became a consort of Emperor Ninmyō, to whom she bore a son (in 827) who later became Emperor Montoku. Fuyutsugu died the year before this boy was born. Even so, with his daughter a consort to the sovereign, he was a potential—and, only posthumously, actually—a (maternal) grandfather to the sovereign. Fuyutsugu thus set in motion what soon developed into a seemingly irreversible ascent to power for his Northern branch of the Fujiwara clan. Ninth-century court politics, beginning with Ninmyō, is dominated by a constant struggle for power between the imperial household, on the one hand, and the Northern Fujiwara clan, on the other.

Emperor Ninmyō, first son of Emperor Saga and his primary consort Tachibana no Kachiko, reigned for eighteen years, from the age of 24 to his death at the age of 41. The decade within his reign known as the Jōwa 承和 era (834-848) forms a watershed in ninth-century politics. Economically speaking, it was during this decade that the court gave up altogether on taxing subjects on an individual level, finding it more efficient to establish a set rate of tax—in kind, not yet in cash—to be submitted on a provincial level by court-appointed provincial governors (*kokushi* 国司). The unit of taxation was now no longer the individual but the province. Note that the ranks of senior nobles (*kugyō* 公卿) were populated at this time predominantly with men from the Fujiwara and the Minamoto families. It was likely senior

noblemen from these two families who instituted the system of provincial taxation. This is not to say, of course, that the Heian court necessarily lost any great degree of authority, but rather that it was working diligently to maintain this authority, whatever new form that assumed, by means of certain expedient adjustments to a somewhat outmoded model. It was, for example, in the year 833 that the Heian court finally completed an official interpretation of its own legal codes, the very same codes that had been canonized during the Nara period. This authoritative interpretation of legal practice was embodied in a work entitled *Ryō no gige* 令義解 (Commentary on the Legal Codes, 833), which evinces a strong reverence for the past, while at the same time making room for a changing present.

Whereas wealth in the ninth century had been represented primarily by such moveable property—or, less politely, chattels—as slaves and cattle (mostly horses and cows), already by the end of that same century wealth began to take on the additional form of rice and, to some extent, copper coins. Wealthy households began engaging in lucrative business deals with farmers dwelling within their vicinity. These wealthy households would lend out—impose is a more accurate term—rice and coins to local farmers with the express object of extorting interest. In return for their cooperation and incurred interest, the wealthy households would take full responsibility for farmers' taxes, consequently allowing the latter to keep a greater share of their hard-earned crops. These wealthy households naturally had lands of their own. They would turn

the produce of the labor of those servants who worked their own lands into capital and interest, thereby building up vast amounts of wealth and power. By the latter half of the ninth century, these wealthy households began to impose their will upon the central government. By affiliating themselves with various relatives of princes and princesses, as well as high-ranking noblemen based throughout the provinces—known collectively as royal houses (*ōshinke* 王臣家)—these powerful landowners found ways to avoid paying taxes to their respective provincial governors. In essence, these royal houses—wonderful patrons they must have been!—protected other wealthy households from the tax collector in return for a share in the former’s wealth. This was a bad situation for a tax-hungry central authority. The court called for numerous restrictions on these royal households. One such attempt occurred in 902, when Fujiwara no Tokihira 藤原時平 (871-909), a powerful courtier who strove for greater central control over the provinces, called for a systematic reform of private manors (*shōen seirirei* 莊園整理令). It was, incidentally, this same courtier who brought about the political ruin of Sugawara no Michizane, whose exploits and poetry will be examined in the next chapter.

Yoshifusa, Mototsune, and the Age of Puppets: Soveriengs Seiwa, Yōzei, and Kōkō

Passing over the reign of Emperor Montoku, we see, with the enthronement, in 858, of

Emperor Seiwa, fourth son of Montoku, the remarkable degree to which the Fujiwara clan had managed to monopolize court politics. Seiwa reigned for nineteen years, from the tender age of nine to his abdication at the age of 27. Three years later, in 879, he took the tonsure and became a Buddhist monk. Seiwa's mother was Fujiwara no Meishi (or Akirakeiko) 藤原明子 (829-900), who was herself the daughter of Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 (804-872) and Minamoto no Kiyohime 源潔姫 (810-856). Significantly, this Kiyohime, Seiwa's maternal grandmother, was a daughter of Saga's, who, in 814, having been demoted to the status of a vassal and given the surname Minamoto, and thereafter married to Yoshifusa sometime before 829, was the first woman of royal blood to thus be married to a vassal not of the royal family. Put the other way around, Yoshifusa was the first red-blooded man to marry into the ranks of the blue-blooded. Yoshifusa was the second son of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu. He was the first vassal to hold the post of Chief Minister (*dajō daijin* 太政大臣), which he received in 857. Upon the enthronement of the nine-year-old Emperor Seiwa, Yoshifusa, as maternal grandfather, was, in 866, also the first vassal ever to receive the title *sesshō* 摂政, Regent to an sovereign in his minority. Furthermore, Yoshifusa was one of the compilers of *Shoku Nihon kōki* 続日本後紀 (A Later History of Japan, Continued, 869), the fourth of six imperial histories, commissioned previously by Emperor Montoku, covering, in twenty fascicles, exclusively the reign Emperor Ninmyō, that is, the years 833 to 850. It is no exaggeration to say that, from the moment Seiwa

ascended the throne, the court was almost wholly in the hands of Yoshifusa, who had inherited the de facto position of leader of the court from his father, Fuyutsugu. From this time forward, until the enthronement in 897 of Daigo some four decades later, and then only late in his reign, the sovereigns exercised little personal control over court governance, aside from serving as objects of Fujiwara marriage politics. Saga, who strove as far as possible to emulate the Nara sovereigns in their personal domination over the court, would not have approved.

Yoshifusa and Kiyohime had but one child together, namely, the aforementioned Meishi, mother of Seiwa. Unable to sire any more children with Kiyohime, Yoshifusa adopted his nephew, Fujiwara no Mototsune 藤原基経 (836-891), to serve as his future heir. Mototsune's biological father was Fujiwara no Nagara (or Nagayoshi) 藤原長良 (802-856), eldest son of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu. His biological mother was a daughter of Fujiwara no Fusatsugu 藤原総繼 (n.d.), about whom we know very little of consequence. Just as Yoshifusa had sent his daughter to serve as Montoku's consort, thereby giving birth to Seiwa, so, likewise, did Nagara offer one of his own daughters, a woman by the name of Fujiwara no Kōshi (or Takaiko) 藤原高子 (842-910) to serve as Seiwa's consort, thereby giving birth to the next puppet sovereign, Yōzei. This Yōzei, enthroned in the year 876, reigned for nine years, and, like Seiwa before him, was made sovereign at the tender age of nine. Mototsune, who, having been appointed Regent (*sesshō*) in 872, in which capacity he was charged with overseeing the proper governance of the

realm, later turned against his youthful charge, forcing his abdication at the age of 17, and enthroning in his place Emperor Kōkō. This last sovereign was only permitted to reign for four years, from the age of 55 to his death at the age of 58. It is in the year 884, upon the ascension of Emperor Kōkō, a man whom Mototsune had put on the throne, that the latter first receives the post of Regent to a mature sovereign (*kanpaku*).⁴⁰⁵ As had been the case with Yōzei, Mototsune held the reins of power throughout Kōkō's reign. Fujiwara power, which had started in the hands of Fuyutsugu, and then passed down to Yoshifusa, was now enthusiastically taken up by Mototsune, a man who acted as Tadaomi's patron for more than thirty years. Hence, if we wish to get some appreciation of the real source of power during the middle of the ninth century, we ought to momentarily set aside our list of sovereigns and replace it with a list of Fujiwara (Northern branch) Regents, that would look like this:

Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu 藤原冬嗣 (775-826)

Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 (804-872, *sesshō* 866)

Fujiwara no Mototsune 藤原基経 (836-891, *sesshō* 872, *kanpaku* 884)

⁴⁰⁵ Allow me to repeat what has been said, in order to avoid confusion: There were, from 884 onwards, two different types of regent, namely, the *sesshō* regent, who was responsible for taking care of a child sovereign, and the *kanpaku* regent, who was essentially charged with managing all court-related affairs. In the hands of the Northern Fujiwara, these two titles became synonymous with holding absolute control over the court.

If not in title, at least in deed, these three men may be considered the acting sovereigns of their time. Still, the ultimate source of their power, it must be borne in mind, lay in the fertility of their daughters. So long as these young women succeeded in bringing forth sons to their imperial lords, the Fujiwara men, as maternal grandfathers to the successive sovereigns, could maintain their chokehold on court politics. Emperor Uda posed a serious threat to Fujiwara control. Though the seventh son of Kōkō, Mototsune's puppet sovereign, his mother was not of the Fujiwara lineage. Instead, his mother, Princess Hanshi (or Nakako) 班子 (833-900) was the daughter of Prince Nakano 仲野 (792-867), who was, in turn, the twelfth son of Emperor Kanmu, and therefore a half-brother of Saga. Moreover, whereas Kōkō had been an aged sovereign who had, prior to being raised to that position, slowly worked his way through the convoluted court bureaucracy, and was therefore rather predictable, Uda was both young and wholly untutored in the conservative mores of court-life.⁴⁰⁶ Mototsune grew uneasy. Uda reigned for ten years, from the age of 21 to his abdication in favor of his eldest son, Emperor Daigo, at the age of 31, during which time Mototsune retained the title of Regent (*kanpaku*), though now in a much more precarious setting. Perhaps inspired by the personal sort of

⁴⁰⁶ For a detailed discussion of Emperor Uda and Mototsune's tactics in relation to this new development, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, 174-176.

government enacted by his great-grandfather Kanmu, and eager to put an end the stifling Fujiwara dominance over court affairs, Uda willingly invested Michizane with unprecedented authority. He hoped that together he and Michizane might be able to bring back Saga's ideal of an sovereign-centered court governed by the earlier system of Sinitic law codes (*ritsuryō*). Much more will be said about Uda in this and the next chapter.

A Turning of the Tide: Emperor Uda

Uda is remarkable for another reason. It was he who first put into vogue the practice of poetry contests (*utaawase* 歌合), in which vernacular (not Sinitic) verses were presented. Notable poets with connections to the court would be commanded by the sovereign to gather in one of the various chambers throughout the palace, and, having been divided into two teams, one poet from each side would present an official reciter with his or her poem, which the reciter would then read aloud to the sovereign and all in attendance. Each pair of poems would then be evaluated by a specially selected judge (*hanja* 判者), who would offer the final verdict as to which was the better piece, sometimes giving brief comments regarding the merits or faults of each. In this way, vernacular poetry was once again granted a public seat in the courtly circles, and it is through these poetry competitions that the art of vernacular verse begins to gain a great

deal of vigor. One such poetry recital of special note was hosted by Emperor Uda, sometime before 893, in the queen's chamber (*kisainomiya* 后宮). Now, the era name in use at this time was Kanpyō 寛平, for which reason this particular event is known as the Kanpyō Poetry Recital. Another such noteworthy recital—there were several others in between—was held in 913, in the Teishiin Chamber 亭子院, where the sovereign, now a converted Buddhist, was dwelling at the time—hence the title, Teishiin Poetry Recital. I have given special mention to these two recitals for the simple reason that the poems presented before the sovereign and his audience on these two occasions were destined to form the basis of a certain anthology of poems known as *Shinsen man'yōshū* 新撰万葉集 (Newly Compiled Anthology of Ten-Thousand Leaves), which acted as a bridge between the older poetic traditions enshrined in *Man'yōshū*, on the one hand, and the newer, significantly transformed form of vernacular poetry embodied within *Kokin wakashū*. It was in the midst of literary and political developments such as these that Tadaomi and Michizane, along with their contemporaries, struggled mightily for prestige and power.

Uda, along with his eldest son and immediate successor, Emperor Daigo, mark the end of what is often considered the first major period of Heian history. As mentioned, Uda's reign is especially famous for a decade known as the Kanpyō 寛平 era (889-898), while the beginning of Daigo's reign—the much-lauded Engi 延喜 era (901-923), is famous in virtue of a number of legislations brought to fruition by his powerful Minister of the Left, Fujiwara no Tokihira, the

bitter rival of Sugawara no Michizane, and, it must be duly noted, the son of Fujiwara no Mototsune. Both Uda and Daigo, in the spirit of the Nara sovereigns, strove towards an ever-increasing degree of central authority. Daigo, who reigned for a surprising 34 years, from the age of 13 to his death in 46, conducted all court affairs with the intimate and able assistance of Tokihira and Michizane. In the year 902, Tokihira attempted to enact a number of reforms to the political workings of the court, including a call to reorganize and better control (via the central government, of course) the growing numbers of private estates. His reforms seem not have had any immediate effect. Daigo it was who commissioned the compilation of *Kokin wakashū* (905). He furthermore commissioned the compilation of *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (Veritable Records of Three Japanese Emperors, 901), the sixth of six imperial histories, as well as *Ruiji kokushi* 類聚国史 (Categorized Encyclopedia of Japanese History, 892), which latter work was compiled solely by Michizane.

Tokihira's younger brother, Fujiwara no Tadahira 藤原忠平 (880-949), Minister of the Left during the latter part of Daigo's reign, worked hard to succeed where his brother had failed. Tadahira presented the sovereign with the *Engi shiki* 延喜式 (Procedures of the Engi Era, imperially commissioned in 905, completed and presented to the sovereign in 927, but only enacted in 967). The reforms and regulations inspired by Tadahira paved the way for a form of government significantly different from what had come before. Most crucially, the court

retreated from direct involvement in regional affairs, relegating all matters of provincial government to a now more clearly defined class of provincial governors (*kokushi*, but known from the ninth century onwards as *zuryō* 受領). In return for the privilege—often a lucrative one—of serving as a provincial governor, these governors were responsible for collecting from their local inhabitants taxes in kind, which they would then have sent to the court. As a result of this new system of provincial government, not only was the court's sphere of direct influence contracted, the ranks of senior nobles whose livelihood depended upon this court found themselves in a similarly contracted situation: Instead of exerting any real direct influence over regional politics, the senior nobles came to serve collectively as a deliberative body, reviewing and adjudicating claims brought in by representatives of provincial governors.⁴⁰⁷

Much Japanese scholarship has espoused an erroneous view regarding the above-mentioned transformation in provincial government. It has been argued that the senior noblemen active during the Northern Fujiwara regency became wholly uninterested in state politics, directing their attention exclusively to such impractical subjects as the study of court ritual and court precedent. It was, say these scholars, this very irresponsibility on behalf of the senior nobles that led to the court's inability to play a more direct role in provincial politics. In this view, which is fundamentally negative, the court's withdrawal from direct involvement in

⁴⁰⁷ Sakamoto, "Heian jidai," 2010.

regional politics signifies a general decline in court power. Another, quite opposite, interpretation is possible. Namely, that the relegation of regional government to provincial governors meant a significantly reduced workload for those working in or immediately around the court [and hence far greater specialization], and that this adapted form of statesmanship was, far from being deleterious, rather progressive and, in the long-run, actually salubrious to the continued working of court politics. The fact is, court government never did collapse, at least not throughout the Heian (or even the Kamakura) period; it continued in a number of successive transformations. Proof that relegation of regional government to provincial governors in no way hindered the court's ability to deal effectively with regional affairs may be seen in the effective quelling in 939 of two more-or-less simultaneous rebellions: that led in the Eastern provinces by Taira no Masakado 平将門 (?-940), the discontented quondam judicial chief (*kebiishi* 檢非違使) working under Fujiwara no Tadahira; the other led in the Western provinces by Fujiwara no Sumitomo 藤原純友 (?-941).⁴⁰⁸ These rebellions are often understood by scholars as examples of just how far the court's authority had deteriorated; rebellions occurred, they argue, because the regional provinces were not, rather, could not be properly controlled any longer. The fact that these rebellions were quickly quelled is often overlooked.

Despite the fact that Uda strove to suppress Fujiwara domination, and that Daigo did not

⁴⁰⁸ Sakamoto, "Heian jidai," 2010.

appoint any Regents (*kanpaku*) during his reign, it should be obvious, from the presence of such central figures as Fujiwara no Tokihira and his younger brother Tadahira—descendants of Mototsune—that the Fujiwara clan continued to make its presence felt at all levels of court life. Tadaomi owed much of his success to the patronage of Mototsune. Michizane found in Tokihira the source of his infamous downfall. For better or for worse, the Fujiwara were a family to be both revered and feared.

LIFE AND WRITINGS OF SHIMADA TADAOMI⁴⁰⁹

The Shimada Lineage

Before looking at the life of Shimada Tadaomi himself, let us make a brief investigation into his family lineage. Unfortunately, there is not much to be said in this respect. The Shimada clan had its roots in a region bearing the same name located in Owari (modern-day western Aichi

⁴⁰⁹ To say Tadaomi is not as well known as Michizane is a laughable understatement. Whereas entire books have been dedicated to the life and writings of Michizane, Tadaomi has received very little coverage. Among those Japanese scholars who have contributed to our knowledge of Tadaomi, Kinpara Tadashi and Kuranaka Sumi deserve special mention. I have gleaned much of value from their work. Kawaguchi Hisao has also contributed a small but insightful essay on Tadaomi's collection, entitled "Shimada Tadaomi to Denshi kashū," which I have also cited several times. The following biography of Tadaomi is based on the work of these scholars, with a fair smattering of my own research here and there.

Prefecture). While a number of figures bearing the surname Shimada do appear in the historical records, their relationship to one another is not always clear. Most striking, perhaps, is the fact that we do not even know the identity of Tadaomi's parents. Going back a generation, it is surmised that Shimada Tadaomi's grandfather was a contemporary of Emperor Saga by the name of Kiyota (779-855), who succeeded in gaining a seat in the State University as a student of letters (*monjōshō*), during which time he gave lectures on *Nihon shoki*. As was the case with so many university graduates, Kiyota was granted the post of vice-secretary to the grand council (*shōgeki*) in 824—but one year after Saga abdicated—and promoted three years later to grand counselor of the same (*daigeki*). In this capacity, Kiyota would have been responsible for reviewing and revising imperial edicts, composing official reports for members of the grand council, as well as managing a number of court rituals—tasks that required an intimate understanding of Sinitic letters and continental customs. It was in 827, during the reign of Emperor Junna, that he was made vice-governor (*gon no jō*) of Shimotsuke (modern-day Tochigi Prefecture). In 829, at the age of fifty, Kiyota was granted the junior lower Fifth Rank. As Kinpara Tadashi has pointed out, the average age at which successful university graduates were awarded the all-important Fifth Rank—tantamount to being accepted into the ranks of politically active courtiers—fell somewhere in their early forties. Kiyota, therefore, was a late-comer to this rank. Ten years later, he was made governor of Iga (modern-day western Mie Prefecture). Kiyota

died in 855 at the age of seventy-seven, having attained the senior lower Fifth Rank. Provincial governors, to which class Kiyota belonged, were seldom awarded anything higher than the Fifth Rank. These same provincial governors, despite their moderate rank, were sometimes called upon to act as hosts to foreign envoys. One of Kiyota's Chinese-style poems, preserved in *Keikokushū*, describes his astonishment upon witnessing the extreme reverence exhibited by a particular envoy of officials, sent to Japan from Bokkai (Parhae), as they paid obeisance to Buddha.⁴¹⁰ As will be seen later, Tadaomi himself acted in the capacity of official host on two different occasions to envoys arriving from Parhae. It is clear from fragmentary historical records that members of the Shimada clan, insofar as they appear in the public sphere, served as provincial governors. For example, Yoshinaga (n.d.) and Yoshimune (n.d.), both of the Shimada clan, served terms as governors of Izumo (modern-day Shimane) and Wakasa (in modern-day Fuki Prefecture), respectively.⁴¹¹

The Shimada clan was intimately connected with the powerful Northern Fujiwara clan from early on. As evidence of this early connection, it ought to be duly noted that Kiyota's younger sister was betrothed to Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu (775-826), a man whom we have already met in the two chapters about Saga, and who, being greatly favored by Saga, was made Minister

⁴¹⁰ Kinpara, "Shimada uji no keifu," 211-212.

⁴¹¹ Kinpara, "Shimada uji no keifu," 214. Kinpara suspects that these two men might have been cousins of Tadaomi, sharing the same grandfather, namely, Kiyota. See his reconstructed lineage on page 221 of this same article.

of the Left in 825. It was, in fact, one of Fuyutsugu's daughters, a girl by the name of Junshi (809-871), who, having been made consort to Emperor Ninmyō, gave birth to Prince Michiyasu (827-858), later enthroned as Emperor Montoku (reigned 850-858). This connection between the Shimada and the Fujiwara clans remained strong for several generations thereafter.

Unfortunately, however, not much more is known regarding Tadaomi's ancestors. Information regarding Tadaomi's siblings as well as his own children is equally sparse. Tadaomi had a younger brother, Yoshiomi (831-882), who passed away at the age of fifty-two, and who was awarded the junior lower Fifth Rank no later than the end of the second month of 878. It was at this time that Yoshiomi served as a private tutor of *Nihon shoki* for Emperor Yōzei, and composed Sinitic poetry for a banquet held in honor of the sovereign's younger brother. Perhaps most noteworthy is Yoshiomi's role, in concert with such famous courtiers and scholars as Fujiwara no Mototsune, Miyako no Yoshika, and Sugawara no Koreyoshi (father of Michizane), as fellow compiler of the fifth imperially commissioned Sinitic history entitled *Nihon Montoku tennō jitsuroku* 日本文徳天皇実録 (Veritable Record of Japan's Emperor Montoku), completed in 879. Tadaomi composed a poem in lamentation of Yoshiomi's passing, preserved in his *Denshi kashū* (poem no. 97), along with another poem in praise of his deceased brother's poetic genius (poem no. 101). Michizane, intimate friend and fellow poet, composed a similar lamentation, preserved in his own *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文章 (Literary Drafts of the Sugawara

Family, poem no. 93). It should be noted here that Tadaomi had three children: his first child was a daughter, Nobukiko, born in 850 and wed to Michizane sometime around 866, thereby making Tadaomi Michizane's father-in-law.⁴¹² The year of her death is uncertain. Tadaomi's second and third child, both sons, were named Nakahira (852-?) and Nakakata (853-?), though not much is known about them, save one or two references to them in *Denshi kashū*. Tadaomi's eldest son, Nakahira, passed the university exam in 873.⁴¹³ The identity of Tadaomi's wife is unknown.

Tadaomi's Early Years

Now, let us turn to the life of Tadaomi himself. According to the regulations for university students prevalent throughout the Nara and Heian periods, the average age at which a man was permitted to enter the State University was between thirteen and sixteen. The first poem appearing in Tadaomi's collection contains an interlinear gloss, added by the poet himself, explaining that he was sixteen at the time of composition. It is obvious, therefore, both from the content and date of composition of this poem, as well as its crowning position in his collection,

⁴¹² Regarding the possible year of Nobukiko's marriage to Michizane, see Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," endnote no. 13, on page 252. See also Kuranaka, "Shimada Tadaomi nenpu oboegaki," 57, along with endnote no. 13, on page 87. At the time of her marriage, Nobukiko would have been sixteen, Michizane twenty-two.

⁴¹³ Poem no. 173 of *Denshi kashū* was written in celebration of Nakahira's scholastic accomplishment.

that this piece was meant to commemorate the beginning of what would prove to be a fruitful tutelage under Sugawara no Koreyoshi, father of the famously deified Michizane. As Kinpara, drawing upon the still authoritative work of the late Momo Hiroyuki 桃裕行 (1910-1986), reminds us, the State University of Tadaomi's age was an arena of fierce competition in which powerful families, especially the Ōe and the Sugawara, strove to dominate academia, and consequently the political field into which graduates were inevitably placed. While belonging nominally to the university, scholars such as Tadaomi and Tachibana no Hiromi (837-890), handpicked as they were by the Sugawara clan, belonged more properly to the highly privatized scholastic house of that family, the patronage and prestige of which cannot be overstated. Koreyoshi's house enjoyed exceptional prosperity, attracting nearly one-hundred pupils of noteworthy parentage. Tadaomi's relationship to his teacher Koreyoshi as well as to his fellow classmates was not only intimate but, as might be expected, politically charged. Tadaomi enjoyed the patronage of Koreyoshi, just as Koreyoshi would have expected support from Tadaomi. Just how high Koreyoshi's expectations of Tadaomi were may be evinced by a headnote to the first poem in Michizane's private collection. This headnote explains how his father and teacher, Koreyoshi, charged Tadaomi with inculcating an eleven-year-old Michizane in the art of

poetry.⁴¹⁴ Tadaomi would have been twenty-nine at this time. Tadaomi and Michizane remained intimate friends, and, afterwards, in-laws, until the former's death. That the first poem in both Tadaomi's as well as Michizane's private collection serves to commemorate each man's initiation into the world of letters is no coincidence. As will be seen later, the two men seem to have collaborated, at least to a degree, the composition of corresponding sections of their collections, such that certain sections of one cannot be properly understood without reading the other side-by-side.

Tadaomi was married in the year 849, at the age twenty-two, and passed the university exam, becoming a student in the Faculty of Letters in 854, at the age of twenty-seven. This same year, he was granted the privilege of attending for the first time in his life an inner banquet (*naien*) held within the Imperial Palace. Emperor Montoku, then reigning sovereign and host of the banquet, commanded Tadaomi to compose a poem in celebration of the festivities. The result was poem no. 18, entitled "Admiring the Vernal Charms at a Royal Banquet Held in Early Spring" 早春侍内宴翫春景. Poem no. 145, moreover, contains an interlinear gloss pointing to this same memorable event.⁴¹⁵ In 859, five years after being admitted into the ranks of the elite clique of university literati, Tadaomi was ordered to serve as official host to an envoy visiting

⁴¹⁴ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 228. For the headnote in question, see *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, no. 1.

⁴¹⁵ Kuranaka, "Shimada Tadaomi nenpu oboegaki," 53.

from Parhae. Holding at that time nothing more than the lower junior Seventh Rank, Tadaomi would not have been a suitable candidate for such a lofty task. The work of foreign relations was generally left to men of much higher rank. However, Tadaomi's superior literary talents, in combination, no doubt, with his connection to the powerful Sugawara house, won him the position. The court, eager not to offend its overseas neighbors by placing them under the care of a low-ranking courtier, temporarily granted Tadaomi the position of vice-governor of Kaga (in modern-day southern Ishikawa Prefecture)—where the envoy had been directed after their initial arrival—that he might appear all the more noble in their eyes.⁴¹⁶ Tadaomi fulfilled his function as host by exchanging Sinitic poems with the vice-emissary of Parhae, a man by the name of Zhou Yuanbo 周元伯 (n.d.).⁴¹⁷

As mentioned, the Shimada clan had from very early times formed intimate bonds with the Northern Fujiwara. Tadaomi's grandfather became, through his younger sister's marriage to Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, a relative of the Fujiwara clan. Tadaomi, for his part, found in Fujiwara no Mototsune (836-891) a patron under whose service he remained for three decades, from 860

⁴¹⁶ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 230. Kinpara, having made the relevant calculations, informs us that of some eighty men, only seven of Tadaomi's rank or lower were granted similar positions, and none so lofty an official host. See *Nihon sandai tennō jitsuroku*, fascicle 2, section 2, Jōgan 1 (859) 3.13. The original text of the relevant passage is as follows: 渤海國副使周元伯、頗閑文章。詔越前權少掾從七位下嶋田朝臣忠臣、假為加賀權掾向彼、與元伯唱和。以忠臣能屬文也。

⁴¹⁷ I have not been able to ascertain how the name Zhou Yuanbo would have been pronounced in ninth-century Parhae. In these cases, I have resorted to using modern Mandarin pronunciations.

to 890.⁴¹⁸ Poem nos. 74 and 149 in Tadaomi's collection testify to this amicable relationship.

Upon the death of Tadaomi's younger brother, writes Michizane, Mototsune mourned as pitifully as the rest, "his sad heart as cold as autumn grass heavy with dew."⁴¹⁹ In short, it would appear that Mototsune was to Tadaomi more than a mere patron. The two men enjoyed an intimate, nearly familial relationship. Tadaomi was on familiar terms with another prominent member of the Northern Fujiwara clan, a man by the name of Fujiwara no Yoshimi (813-867). This nobleman was the fifth son of Fuyutsugu, and uncle to Mototsune. This Yoshimi, younger brother of Yoshifusa (804-872), who held the reins of power throughout the reign of Emperor Montoku, eventually attained the position of Minister of the Right. Two of Yoshimi's daughters became consorts (*nyōgo*) to Emperor Montoku and Emperor Seiwa, respectively. Tadaomi spent at least one night at the private residence of Yoshimi, where he and a group of fellow courtiers composed historical poems for a concluding banquet (*kyōen* 竟宴) held after a series of lectures on the continental historical classic *Shiji*.⁴²⁰ The relationship between Tadaomi and Yoshimi seems to have been quite close.

Tadaomi's teacher, Koreyoshi, was an ardent believer in Buddhism. In 867, at the age of forty, Tadaomi paid a visit to Mount Hiei, where he entreated Enchin (814-891), who had just the

⁴¹⁸ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 230. Like so many of the dates relating to Tadaomi, the years of his patronage under Mototsune are speculative.

⁴¹⁹ The poem can be found in *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 2, poem no. 93.

⁴²⁰ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 231. See the headnote for poem no. 37 in *Denshi kashū*.

previous year been appointed head abbot of Enryaku Temple, to initiate him into the Tendai sect—a sect, it will be recalled, which had been founded by Saichō, under the patronage of an enthusiastic Saga. Kinpara avers that Tadaomi’s request was refused—a statement based on an unfounded interpretation of a rather ambiguous verse penned by Tadaomi shortly after his visit to Mount Hiei.⁴²¹ Incidentally, the poem in question does not give the full name of this head abbot, calling him simply Abbot En 円座主. Nakao Masaki understands this to refer not to Enchin but to Ennin (794-864), who became head abbot at Enryaku Temple in 854. Moreover, Nakao is confident that Tadaomi’s request was fulfilled and that he was in fact initiated into the Tendai sect.⁴²² Kawaguchi Hisao, too, believes Tadaomi was initiated, though he, like Kinpara, understands the abbot to be Enchin.⁴²³ Whatever the case, Tadaomi was sincerely interested in Tendai teachings.

At the conclusion of a royal banquet hosted by Emperor Seiwa in the Shishinden, Tadaomi was awarded the lower junior Fifth Rank in 869, at the age of forty-two.⁴²⁴ Shortly thereafter he was given a position in the governorship of Inaba (in modern-day eastern Tottori Prefecture),

⁴²¹ Kinpara, “Shimada Tadaomi denkō,” 236. See poem no. 34 in *Denshi kashū*. Kinpara reiterates this interpretation in “Shimada Tadaomi to ‘Sōshi,’” 214.

⁴²² Nakao, “Heian bunjin no bukkyō shinkō—Shimada Tadaomi no baai,” 165.

⁴²³ Kawaguchi, “Shimada Tadaomi to *Denshi kashū*,” 184.

⁴²⁴ *Nihon sandai tennō jitsuroku*, fascicle 16, section 1, Jōgan 11 (869) 1.7. The original text of the relevant passage is as follows: [清和]天皇御紫宸殿、覽青馬。賜宴于群臣、奏女樂。日暮、賜祿各有差 [...] 少外記嶋田朝臣忠臣。

where he worked for a total of four years.⁴²⁵ No sooner did he return to the capital than, in 873, he was given an appointment in Dazaifu (located in modern-day Fukuoka), where he spent a total of five years. Consequently, Tadaomi spent nearly the whole of his forties far from the capital. Having completed his five-year term in Dazaifu and returned to the capital in 878, Tadaomi was promoted the following year, at the age of fifty-two, to the upper junior Fifth Rank. Then, in 881, Tadaomi was granted a post in the royal guard. It was in this same year that Mototsune, Tadaomi's greatest patron, commissioned a prominent calligrapher to copy a series of five-hundred Sinitic poems, composed by Tadaomi, upon a set of folding screens.⁴²⁶

In the spring of 883, Tadaomi was granted a post in the governorship of Mino (in modern-day southern Gifu). It is evident from a number of his own poems that Tadaomi accepted this assignment with some reservation, considering his advanced age and what appears to be something akin to a chronic illness. Perhaps out of sympathy for his dear friend's difficulties, and as a means of bestowing honor upon him, Mototsune gifted Tadaomi with a splendid white stallion on the day of his departure.⁴²⁷ The year 883 was a hectic one for Tadaomi. Spring saw

⁴²⁵ See *Nihon sandai tennō jitsuroku*, fascicle 16, section 2, Jōgan 11 (869) 2.16. The original text of the relevant passage is as follows: 從五位下行少外記嶋田朝臣忠臣、為因播權介。

⁴²⁶ Poem nos. 88 and 89 of the original *Denshi kashū* were written in gratitude of this supreme honor. Unfortunately, these poems have not been preserved in any of our manuscripts.

⁴²⁷ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 243. See poem nos. 105 and 107 in *Denshi kashū*. Both Kinpara and Kuranaka believe that this horse was gifted by Minamoto Masaru 源多 (831-888), though I can see no reason for this. Instead, I rather suspect that *Denshi kashū zenchū* has it right in identifying Mototsune as the presenter.

him depart for Mino, while summer called him suddenly back to the capital. On the twenty-first day of the fourth month, an envoy from Parhae landed on the archipelago. Tadaomi was once again assigned to serve as host to these foreign delegates, accompanied by his younger colleagues, Ki no Haseo and Michizane.⁴²⁸ Whereas his previous experience hosting the Parhae envoy of 859 saw him interacting with the vice-emissary, this second assignment placed him in direct contact with the leader of the envoy. Not only did Tadaomi now belong to the Fifth Rank, he held a prominent position in the governorship of Mino. The envoy disembarked from the archipelago the following month, whereupon Tadaomi once again made the long journey to Mino to resume his appointment. Tadaomi spent a total of four years in Mino, returning to the capital in 887. The ensuing years between 887 and his death in 891 were spent exclusively within the capital.

Tadaomi's Career in the Capital

Tadaomi's return from Mino to the capital by no means signified the end of tribulation for this weary poet. In 888, the court was temporarily scandalized by an event known as the Akō

⁴²⁸ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 243. See *Nihon sandai tennō jitsuroku*, fascicle 43, section 3, Gangyō 7 (883) 4.21. The original text of the relevant passage is as follows: 緣饗渤海客 [...] 以從五位上式部少輔兼文章博士加賀權守菅原朝臣道真、權行治部大輔事。從五位上行美濃介嶋田朝臣忠臣、權行玄蕃頭事。為對渤海大使裴頌、故為之。

Incident. Fujiwara no Mototsune, who at this time enjoyed a position of supreme power within the court, supported the enthronement of Emperor Uda in 887. Thus enthroned, Uda promptly issued an imperial decree designating Mototsune as his Regent. There was a problem, however, in the wording of this decree: the precise title conferred upon Mototsune was *akō* 阿衡 (Ch: *aheng*, literally, dependable scale, that is, one upon whom the sovereign could consult on weighty matters), an old Tang Dynasty title which, according to Mototsune, amounted merely to an empty rank devoid of any real political responsibility. In effect, Mototsune suspected Uda of attempting, by this subtle legal trickery, to denude him of any political power. As a means of protest, Mototsune refused to participate in any court-related business until the decree was revised in accordance with his demands. Uda acquiesced and granted him the title he wished, namely, *kanpaku*, a Regent with authority over all political matters. Duly appeased, Mototsune returned to court life as a bona fide Regent, thus concluding the so-called Akō Incident. It must be noted that Mototsune's suspicion was not ill founded. After Mototsune passed away in 891, Emperor Uda was quick to call to his side Michizane of the Sugawara clan, thereby signaling the end of Fujiwara rule at court. Moreover, no further Regents were appointed during Uda's reign. This Akō Incident nearly caused, in the form of collateral damage, the downfall of a promising man of letters. Tachibana no Hiromi (837-890), who had been ordered to write up the fateful decree on behalf of Uda, was accused by one of his political rivals of having deliberately

attempted to undermine the Fujiwara clan. As a convenient means of pacifying his Fujiwara rivals, a no doubt reluctant Uda temporarily stripped Hiromi of rank and station. Fortunately, this Hiromi was a pupil of Sugawara no Koreyoshi and therefore an intimate friend of Michizane. At the time of this incident, Michizane was away in Sanuki (modern-day Kagawa Prefecture), where he was serving as provincial governor. Unable to personally oversee the defense of his fellow classmate, Michizane did the next best thing by sending a letter to Tadaomi in which he beseeched his father-in-law to exert his influence in clearing Hiromi's name. Tadaomi, backed by Michizane, was successful in defending Hiromi, who came out of the incident unscathed. While no casualties were produced as a result of the Akō Incident, this brief episode did finally bring to the surface a long-time rivalry between certain members of the imperial family and the overly-powerful Fujiwara clan. Tadaomi, despite his involvement, was able to remain neutral throughout: though Tadaomi defended Hiromi against charges raised by Fujiwara rivals, he nevertheless remained loyal to Mototsune until the latter's death.

On the eleventh day of the first month of 889, not more than one year after the Akō Incident, Tadaomi attended an inner banquet (*neien*). Michizane, still working in Sanuki and consequently unable to attend the banquet, exchanged a number of letters with Tadaomi in which the two men wrote poems based on the theme of that banquet.⁴²⁹ Just as Michizane had

⁴²⁹ See poem nos. 133 and 135 in *Denshi kashū*, and poem nos. 285 and 291 in *Kanke bunsō*.

influenced the court in regards to Tachibana no Hiromi through his friend Tadaomi, so, too, on this occasion, did he endeavor to participate *in absentia* in the banquet. Missing an opportunity to offer up poetry, even by post, at a royal banquet hosted by his patron, Emperor Uda, could have proven detrimental to Michizane's future career. As had been the case with Saga and his banquets, presenting poetry at these occasions served as one of the most politically potent means of asserting one's social standing within the court. The year 889 also witnessed the first transplantation within the Imperial Palace of a flower known as the Japanese pink (*nadeshiko*). Lest the significance of this event be lost on readers less intimately acquainted with Japanese literature, it ought to be mentioned that Uda expressly ordered Tadaomi to compose two Sinitic poems in praise of these fledgling flowers. These poems, both of which are considerably lengthy and, in my opinion, of superior quality, were lauded by Michizane, who took the trouble not only of sending a copy to his eldest son, but of composing a poem of his own upon the same theme.⁴³⁰

In 890, at the age of sixty-three, Tadaomi was appointed head apothecary (*ten'yaku no kami*), in charge of both tending the imperial herb garden at Kitano 北野, a site just north of the northern capital wall, as well as concocting medicine for the imperial family. A Kamakura-period document entitled *Kanshoku hishō* 官職秘鈔 (Secret Gleanings of Court Offices, c. 1200),

⁴³⁰ For Tadaomi's poems about the Japanese pink, see *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 126 and 138. For Michizane's comments and poem, see *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 302.

informs us that this was more-or-less an honorary title, devoid of any real responsibilities, granted to elderly courtiers of high standing.⁴³¹ Even so, Tadaomi seems to have taken the position seriously enough to compose a number of poems on the subject of medicine, evincing a more than passing interest in herbology.

The last two years of Tadaomi's life, from 891 to 892, were no less active than his former years. This was also a time marked by great loss for Tadaomi. His long-time patron, Fujiwara no Mototsune, passed away on the thirteenth day of the first month of 891 at the age of fifty-six. Enchin, the head abbot at Enryaku Temple at whose hands Tadaomi had (likely) requested to be initiated into the Tendai sect, also passed away during the winter of that same year. Tachibana no Hiromi, whom Tadaomi and Michizane had defended so earnestly during the Akō Incident of 887, had passed away the previous year. While Tadaomi appears to have refrained from attending a number of royal banquets held throughout 891—most likely as a sign of mourning—he was not wholly absent from public life. He composed poetry for the memorial ceremony in honor of Confucius (*shakuten*) held that spring (poem no. 146), as well as for a banquet held on the seventh day of the third month (poem no. 165). Finally, Tadaomi served as head lecturer for a series of lectures given to Emperor Uda on the *Yijing*, and composed poetry for the concluding

⁴³¹ Kinpara, “Shimada Tadaomi denkō,” 248; Nakakura, “Shimada Tadaomi nenpu oboegaki,” endnote no. 26 on page 92.

banquet held immediately after the final lecture (poem no. 167). Tadaomi's last public appearance seems to have been at a Tanabata Banquet held in 892.⁴³² Though the exact date is uncertain, it would appear, based on a reference to Tadaomi found in a preface written by Ki no Haseo, that the poet was granted a position in the governorship of Ise (modern-day Mie Prefecture) around this time.⁴³³ Tadaomi most likely passed away in the autumn of 892.⁴³⁴ He was admired by many great men-of-letters of his day, especially his close friend Sugawara no Michizane, who lamented Tadaomi's passing with the following words: "Now all that remains is petty shadows of poets; true poetic genius is no more."⁴³⁵ Tadaomi seems to have been a productive poet. An inventory of his work, both extant and lost, may be given as follows:⁴³⁶

A. EXTANT WRITING

1. Family anthology—actually a private collection—of Sinitic poems, entitled *Denshi*

⁴³² Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 250. The poem Tadaomi composed for this occasion is preserved in his *Denshi kashū* as poem no. 212.

⁴³³ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 250, and endnote no. 49 on page 257. The preface referred to here is the one already mentioned, namely, Haseo's "Preface to Poems Written after the Engi Era" (*Honchō monzui*, no. 201).

⁴³⁴ Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 250.

⁴³⁵ The poem referred to here may be found in Michizane's *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 5, poem no. 347.

⁴³⁶ The following inventory is reproduced, with several modifications, from Kawaguchi, "Shimada Tadaomi to *Denshi kashū*," 184. Regarding item B.2 in this inventory, Kawaguchi gives the number of poems composed as 146 instead of 546, considering the gloss in question has merely 百四十六首, "hundred forty-six poems." However, the verse to which this gloss is appended clearly states the number of poems as 半千篇, "half a thousand poems." I am in agreement with the editors of *Denshi kashū zenshaku*, therefore, when they suspect a corruption of the gloss, inserting a missing 五, "five," before "hundred forty-six." Far better is it to suspect the gloss of corruption than the text of the verse itself.

kashū, in three fascicles containing a total of 213 poems

2. Three prefaces (*jo*), one contained in *Honchō monzui*, fascicle 10, no. 270, the other two in *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 136 and 167
3. A number of other Sinitic poems scattered throughout various works, including *Zatsugen hōwa* 雜言奉和, *Ruidai koshi* 類題古詩, *Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集, and *Shinsen wakan rōeishū* 新撰和漢朗詠集

B. LOST WRITING

1. A longer, ten-fascicle version of *Denshi kashū*, as listed in Shinzei's 信西 (aka Fujiwara no Michinori 藤原通憲, 1106-1160) index of books, *Michinori nyūdō zōsho mokuroku* 通憲入道藏書目錄.
2. A grand series of 546 Sinitic poems about historical figures, composed in 856, referred to in an interlinear gloss appended to poem no. 78 of *Denshi kashū*
3. A series of 360 Chinese-style poems in praise of the sovereign, composed in 859, also referred to in *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 78
4. Another grand series of some 500 Sinitic poems for a set of ten folding screens commissioned by Fujiwara no Mototsune and copied by the calligrapher Fujiwara no Toshiyuki (?-901), composed in 881, referred to in *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 88
5. What appears to be a dictionary of official titles, showing both the Japanese and

Sinitic names of each post, entitled *Hyakkan tōmei shō* 百官唐名鈔 (Continental Names of Official Posts), the content of which has been incorporated into *Shūkaishō* 拾芥抄 (Gathered Fragments), a late-Kamakura period encyclopedia written in classical Sinitic prose

Kawaguchi imagines Tadaomi to have been a poet of temperate and somber character, fond of the solitary life, not at all adverse to poverty, a sincere adherent of the Pure Land sect, and deeply learned in Daoist philosophy. My own reading of Tadaomi's collection somewhat supports this view. I would add, however, that Tadaomi, though somber at times, was endowed with a witty sarcasm that shines through a number of his poems, as shall be made clear later on in this chapter. As Kawaguchi points out, Tadaomi's prose—what little remains—is markedly different from that composed by the more conservative poets, such as his intimate friend Michizane. Tadaomi's prose, though duly refined, is free of complex allusions and erudite diction; his is a pleasantly straightforward style.⁴³⁷

Tadaomi's Private Collection: *Denshi kashū* 田氏家集 (Shimada Family Anthology)

⁴³⁷ Kawaguchi, "Shimada Tadaomi to *Denshi kashū*," 184-185.

The structure of Tadaomi's collection, the poems of which are arranged in a basically chronological order, is not nearly as neat as, say, something like Michizane's *Kanke bunsō*. Each of the extant manuscripts of *Denshi kashū* contain three volumes. The first volume begins with a poem composed in 843, when Tadaomi was a mere sixteen. The remainder of this volume is dedicated to a series of poems, arranged in more-or-less chronological order, composed between 860 and 866, that is, when Tadaomi was in his late thirties. This jump from the year 843 to 860 means, of course, that the two large series of Sinitic poems composed in 856 and 859, referred to in poem no. 78, are sadly missing. Judging from those poems whose date of composition can be reasonably conjectured, the second volume of *Denshi kashū* contains poems composed between the years 881 and 883. For nearly the whole of his forties, Tadaomi spent his days away from the capital, serving first as governor of Inaba from 869 to 872, and then as vice-governor of Dazaifu from 873 to 878. Unfortunately, none of the poetry from these years has been preserved in *Denshi kashū*. Furthermore, while volume two does contain poems from 881, it does not contain the large series of Sinitic poems composed in 881 and copied on Mototsune's folding screens, referred to in poem no. 88 of this anthology. The third volume consists of two distinct parts. The first part, from poem nos. 130 to 172, consists of poems composed in the final three years of Tadaomi's life, namely, between 889 and 891. The second part of this volume, consisting of poem nos. 173 to 213, is a collection of miscellaneous poems arranged in no special order, taken

from various years throughout the poet's life. The final poem in the anthology (poem no. 213), composed in response to an imperial order, was composed shortly before Tadaomi passed away.⁴³⁸ Generally speaking, then, volume one consists of poems from Tadaomi's late thirties, volume two of poems from his early fifties, and volume three (not including the miscellaneous pieces) of poems from his final years, that is, his early sixties. Put the other way around, poetry composed during Tadaomi's earliest years, as well as during his forties, along with a number of other periods in his life are not included in extant manuscripts of *Denshi kashū*.

How are we to account for these missing years in Tadaomi's anthology? How are we to account, likewise, for large series of poems, absent from, though referred to explicitly within, the anthology? Why, for example, has the series of some 500 poems composed for Mototsune's folding screens, referred to in poem no. 88, been excluded, even though it was composed during a period of Tadaomi's life which is covered in this anthology? As already mentioned above, Kawaguchi has drawn our attention to an inventory of books known as *Michinori nyūdō zōsho mokuroku*, which contains an entry listing *Denshi kashū* as a work in ten fascicles. This is important, for it points to the very likely possibility that our current editions of *Denshi kashū* are abridged versions of a much longer work, since lost to us. This would certainly explain the various gaps in our current editions. I see no reason to doubt the existence of a longer original,

⁴³⁸ Kawaguchi, "Shimada Tadaomi to *Denshi kashū*," 185-186.

and agree with Kawaguchi, who postulates that the original ten-volume anthology might have contained several volumes dedicated solely to prose pieces, as is the case with many other private collections of Sinitic writing compiled in the early and middle Heian period, including Michizane's, which contains six volumes of poetry followed by six more volumes of prose.⁴³⁹

There is another reason why I believe Tadaomi's original anthology was significantly longer than our current editions. Kawaguchi touches upon this only in passing, mentioning the fact that the arrangement of a number of poems in *Denshi kashū* seems to correspond to that of Michizane's *Kanke bunsō*.⁴⁴⁰ This is a somewhat cryptic statement. As far as I can see, however, the case is quite simple, and therefore convincing: Throughout their lives, Tadaomi and Michizane exchanged a number of poems. In most cases, it would seem, Michizane took the initiative, while Tadaomi was satisfied to respond. We are able, by examining the collections of both poets side-by-side, to read both ends of a few of their poetic exchanges. Looking at the relative numbering for poems contained in *Kanke bunsō* and *Denshi kashū*, it becomes apparent that the relative placement of these exchanges within each anthology match one another. This correspondence is not limited exclusively to private poetic exchanges, but applies also to public banquets in which both men presented poems. A few examples will suffice to clarify my point. A

⁴³⁹ Kawaguchi, "Shimada Tadaomi to Denshi kashū," 186. Kawaguchi furthermore suspects, for reasons undisclosed, that our extant abridged edition was probably created sometime during the Kamakura period.

⁴⁴⁰ Kawaguchi, "Shimada Tadaomi to Denshi kashū," 186.

banquet was held sometime after 871, in which Tadaomi, Michizane, and other disciples of Koreyoshi composed poems on famous figures from Chinese history.⁴⁴¹ Michizane's poem appears as poem no. 63 in *Kanke bunsō*. Tadaomi's poem for this same occasion, appears as poem no. 55 in his own *Denshi kashū*. Both poems, in terms of their relative positioning within each anthology, occur very close to one another. Another banquet, held in 882, was attended, among others, by both Michizane and Tadaomi. Michizane composed a poem in commemoration of this banquet, which appears as poem no. 90 in his anthology. Tadaomi's response to this poem appears as poem no. 95 in his own anthology. Here, too, the two poems, numerically speaking, are very close to one another. A series of private poetic exchanges between these two men can be found, on the one hand, in *Kanke bunsō*, as poem nos. 95, 96, and 97 and, on the other, in *Denshi kashū*, as poem nos. 98 and 99. Another exchange may be found in *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 100, and *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 103. From these examples, it appears that both men made some effort to give to their anthologies a shared sense of symmetry, placing their poems along the same chronological axis, such that the relative position of related poems would appear in numerically the same, or nearly the same, position in both collections. In effect, the two men seemingly expected readers to read their two collections in unison.

⁴⁴¹ The date of this banquet is not certain. I have adopted the date postulated in *Denshi kashū zenshaku*, 99.

So far so good. Now for the interesting bit: The next series of poetic exchanges between Michizane and Tadaomi appears as poem nos. 285, 291, and 302 in *Kanke bunsō*. Contrary to what has been outlined above, Tadaomi's replies to these poems appear in *Denshi kashū* as poem nos. 133, 135, and 136, respectively. Numerically speaking, there is a gap of some one-hundred fifty to one-hundred sixty poems between the two sides of this exchange. Even so, the poems in each set, taken in themselves, have been placed close together. It is possible, so long as we agree that our current editions of *Denshi kashū* are heavily abridged, that the original edition of Tadaomi's anthology had his end of these exchanges placed numerically somewhere around the end of the 200s or beginning of the 300s. This would mean, of course, that some one-hundred fifty poems have been omitted from the original version of *Denshi kashū*. In terms of chronology, the first set of exchanges appearing in *Denshi kashū* as poem nos. 98, 99, and 103 (and in *Kanke bunsō* as poem nos. 95, 96, 97, and 100), appearing as they do near the end of volume two, were probably composed sometime between 881 and 883. Volume three of *Denshi kashū* begins at poem no. 130, and the second set of exchanges between Michizane and Tadaomi, appearing in this anthology as poem nos. 133, 135, and 136 (and in *Kanke bunsō* as poem nos. 285, 291, and 302), are all dated at 889. Consequently, there exists between the first and second set of exchanges a gap of six years or more. If my suspicion is correct, the original ten-volume anthology contained between what is now the second and third volume a number of volumes—

probably two, considering an average of seventy poems per volume based on our extant editions—in which were preserved the missing one-hundred fifty odd poems composed between the years 883 and 889.⁴⁴² Finally, tentatively accepting as true all that has been supposed above, and assuming a more-or-less consistent symmetry between Tadaomi's and Michizane's collections, the original ten-volume *Denshi kashū* might have contained five volumes of poetry and five of prose, corresponding to Michizane's six volumes of poetry and six of prose. More probably, though, considering a lack of any evidence suggesting Tadaomi was at all skilled in prose, the latter half of his collection might have been dedicated to the three large series of Sinitic poems referred to in poem nos. 78 and 88.

Of the 213 poems appearing in our current (most probably abridged) editions of *Denshi kashū*, more than sixty were composed expressly for the purpose of some banquet or other public festivity. Let us, for the sake of convenience, refer to these collectively as banquet poems. This is reminiscent of those banquet poems presented by Saga's vassals and preserved in his three anthologies. Of these sixty odd banquet poems, exactly sixteen were composed in response to an imperial command (*ōseishi*). Four of these were ordered by Emperor Montoku, two by Emperor Seiwa, one by Emperor Yōzei, and, quite significantly, a total of nine by Emperor Uda. Whether

⁴⁴² This would also explain the gap of some one-hundred seventy poems between another set of poems presented at a banquet, appearing, on the one hand, in *Kanke bunsō* as poem nos. 341, 342, and 343, and, on the other, in *Denshi kashū* as poem nos. 170, 171, 172, dated somewhere around 891.

this ratio reflects upon Tadaomi's relationship to each of the four sovereigns, or if these figures are simply a result of later abridgment is impossible to say. Still, the preponderate amount of poems ordered by Emperor Uda is significant when we consider with what vigor this sovereign strove to introduce, reinstitute, and generally revitalize a number of court ceremonies.⁴⁴³ It is worth noting, especially in relation to what has been said about Saga's banquets, that the largest number of these imperially commissioned poems were composed for the annual chrysanthemum banquet (*chōyō no en*) held on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month—late autumn on the lunar calendar.⁴⁴⁴ The second largest number of banquet poems, though not imperially commissioned, were those presented at the memorial ceremony in honor of Confucius (*shakuten*) held biannually within the State University. Six of these poems are preserved in *Denshi kashū*.⁴⁴⁵ On the other hand, this anthology contains a total of thirty-two more poems belonging to a category I would like to refer to as epistolary poems, consisting of pieces composed in response to someone else's poem, in thanks of some favor received, or, on the rare occasion, in order to request some favor. Of these, seven or eight were written in response to poems sent by Michizane, and three to Mototsune.⁴⁴⁶ Finally, seventeen of these epistolary poems were written to individuals whose

⁴⁴³ Yamanaka, *Heianchō no nenchū gyōji*, 57-66.

⁴⁴⁴ See *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 19, 36, 102, 140, 168, 189, and 203.

⁴⁴⁵ See *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 42, 92, 146, 156, 167 (a), and 180.

⁴⁴⁶ For those poems written to Michizane, see *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 64, 95, 98, 99, 100, 103, 133, and 135. It is not exactly certain whether poem no. 64 was sent to Michizane, though it seems most likely. For a brief discussion of this question, see *Denshi kashū zenshaku*, 113-114. For those poems written to

identity remain unknown. All we are given is a surname or, in some cases, but one character of a surname. This is unfortunate. So long as we are unable to identify the recipient of Tadaomi's poems, that is, without any corroborating historical evidence, we can only guess at the sort of relationship enjoyed between the two.

Of the three prefaces known to have been written by Tadaomi, two are preserved in *Denshi kashū*. The first, appended to poem no. 136, explains in eloquent, clear language the poet's delight at witnessing the inaugural transplantation of a cluster of *nadeshiko*, or Japanese pinks, into the imperial garden. Both this preface and the poem to which it has been appended were composed in response to an imperial command by Emperor Uda in the year 889. The second, sandwiched in between poem nos. 167 (a) and 167 (b), explains in straightforward prose the circumstances surrounding a series of lectures about *Yijing*, conducted over a period of nine-months from 890 to 891, also for Emperor Uda. Tadaomi played a significant role in these lectures, having been charged with the difficult task of illuminating the more profound, philosophically involved points of the Chinese classic. The third preface written by Tadaomi is contained in *Honchō monzui* (fascicle 10, poem no. 270). This might seem odd, considering the poem to which the preface applies is found in *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 170. However, that poems

Mototsune, see *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 88, 120, and 121. Poem no. 88 was written to express gratitude, while poem nos. 120 and 121 were written in response to poems sent by Mototsune.

and their relevant prefaces should be preserved in separate works was not unusual. Rather, this was the general custom. *Honchō monzui* contains several fascicles of prefaces, the poems corresponding to which do not appear in that anthology. What is odd, however, is the fact that while two of Tadaomi's prefaces appear in his anthology, this third one has, for reasons unknown, been excluded. This last is an exceptionally short preface, occupying no more than one and a half lines of typed text. It surely would not have been omitted on grounds of taking up too much space.

Poems dedicated expressly to Buddhist themes can be found scattered throughout this anthology. I count a total of fourteen such poems, with another three using Buddhist terminology in a less religious fashion.⁴⁴⁷ These poems are sincere expressions of what appears to be a deep faith in the Buddhist way, especially in the Tendai sect. In one poem (no. 150), Tadaomi goes so far as to express a desire to abandon his Confucian education, in which, he laments “I have made no progress whatsoever,” in favor of Buddhist meditation. As has been discussed already, Tadaomi was on familiar terms with one of the head abbots, either Ennin or Enchin, at Enryaku Temple, and it is likely, pending Kinpara's interpretation to the contrary, that he was properly initiated into the Tendai sect. Daoist themes also appear throughout this anthology. Poem no. 79, in what might be a blatant example of hyperbole, states explicitly that the poet's personal library

⁴⁴⁷ See *Denshi kashū*, poem nos. 10-15, 34, 52-53, 63-64, 74-75, 84, 126, 150, and 161.

consists solely of, or is crowned by, *Daodejing* 道德經, a collection of 81 poems attributed to Laozi, the founder of philosophic Daoism. Poem no. 206 is a playful stab at the same book, accusing its author of at once eschewing all manner of ornamentation while at the same time decorating his prose with overly elegant diction. Finally, poem no. 211 pits Confucius against Laozi, asking which man lived the more sagely life. His conclusion, like poem no. 206, is playfully naïve:

Such things remain forever under the sway of Nature. Who among us might illuminate
my ignorance?

此理歸自然 何家決童蒙

This last sentence can also be interpreted as “Which of these two sages might best illuminate the principals of Nature?” Tadaomi delights in playing one school of thought off another. He enjoys drawing our attention to the fact that he is, at times, a man divided between a number of different intellectual traditions. Poem no. 146 is a wonderful example of this. Composed in 890, shortly after Tadaomi had been granted the position of head apothecary for the imperial family, this poem is ostensibly meant to commemorate that spring’s celebration in honor of Confucius. While

the first couplet contains, as one might expect, famous quotations from a chapter in *Lunyu* 論語 (The Confucian Analects), the second couplet suddenly shifts to a very personal note:

Where, I wonder this day, is the altar of Shennong to be found? It is with shame this
spring that I pray before the temple of Confucius.

今日神農何處廟 無顏拜賁孔堂春

Shennong, the sage-farmer of Chinese mythology, was the patron deity of medicine and therefore the deity to whom Tadaomi, now an apothecary—for the sovereign, no less—ought to direct his prayers. The art of herbology, furthermore, was intimately associated with Daoist lore. Tadaomi is asking, in a sort of roundabout way, to whom he ought to pledge allegiance on this solemn day. While trained in the Confucian tradition, his heart was more often than not drawn to the naturalistic philosophy of Laozi. Returning for a moment to poem no 150, quoted above, it ought to be clear from what has been said here that Tadaomi's apparent desire to abandon his Confucian education in favor of Buddhism must not be taken at face value. Most of these statements seem to have been written in a playful, somewhat capricious mood. This is not to say, however, that the poet was any less sincere in his convictions. He simultaneously delights in and

quietly broods over the intellectual tensions born of having his finger in too many pies.

There is one more point that must be discussed in relation to the structure of *Denshi kashū*.

Tadaomi's younger brother, Yoshiomi, passed away in 882. Poem no. 101 was written soon after

Tadaomi had finished reading through a (now lost) private collection of poems composed by his

deceased brother. The final line of this poem reads as follows:

Well aware that my brother's jeweled verses know no equal [and consequently that I
ought not sully their brilliance by placing my own verses alongside his], even so,
desirous that his poems should find a place in the Shimada family anthology, I
sought to place them between these same covers.

縱雖片玉無雙美 欲付家詩共秩看

One might very well interpret this line as being purely desiderative: Tadaomi would have liked to

include his deceased brother's poems in the family anthology. On the other hand, one might

interpret this verse in the perfect tense: Tadaomi, in order to immortalize his brother for posterity,

saw fit to include a number of his brother's poems within the family anthology. Now, whether

this family anthology (*kashi* 家詩) points to his own *Denshi kashū*, or to some other, larger

work, is not certain. All I wish to suggest here is the possibility, however slim, that some of the poems in *Denshi kashū* might not have been composed by Tadaomi himself but rather by his brother Yoshiomi.

POETIC EXPERIMENTS WITH GENDER AND AUDIENCE

Having given an overview of Tadaomi's life as well as the structure of his anthology, I would now like to tackle the central subject of this chapter by examining a small selection of his poetry. To this end, I have thought it best to focus on three different types of poetry. The first type, which I have tentatively termed encomium poetry, includes imperially commissioned poetry written for banquets or other public occasions. The finest example of this sort of poetry composed by Tadaomi is a lengthy poem, mentioned several times already, dealing with Japanese pinks (*nadeshiko*). The second type, which I have called envoy poetry, was written for emissaries from Parhae. I have selected three poems, all composed for an emissary by the name of Pei Ting.⁴⁴⁸ The third type of poetry belongs to a broad category known as epistolary or exchange poetry. Here I have included two poetic exchanges between Michizane and Tadaomi. The reason

⁴⁴⁸ This is a tentative reading, using modern Mandarin pronunciation, of a name that ought to be read in the language of ninth-century Parhae.

behind this selection is a matter of intended audience: encomium poetry is intended primarily for the sovereign, envoy poetry is intended for a foreign guest, while epistolary poetry—at least in the case of Michizane and Tadaomi—is intended ostensibly for a dear friend. That is to say, the degree of intimacy enjoyed between poet and addressee is vastly different in each type.

Encomium poetry, on one extreme of the spectrum, naturally assumes a great deal of distance between Tadaomi and his reader(s), while epistolary poetry, on the other extreme, assumes an intimate connection.

Banquet Poems Presented to Emperor Uda: “Pinks in the Imperial Palace”

Tadaomi’s “Pinks in the Imperial Palace” (poem no. 136) must be read in full in order to appreciate both the intricacy of its imagery and the sheer impact of its length. I have, for the sake of convenience, divided my translation of this poem, as well as its preface, into three sections each. Regarding the possible date of composition for Tadaomi’s monumental *nadeshiko* poem, Kuranaka argues convincingly for the year 889, that is, the first year of Kanpyō, or the third year of Emperor Uda’s reign.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁹ Kuranaka, “Sosei shōkō,” endnote no. 7 on page 48.

Pinks in the Imperial Palace⁴⁵⁰

[a] The pink (*nadeshiko*) is also referred to as *jujumai*.⁴⁵¹ This flower gets its Chinese name [(*qumai* 瞿麥), which contains the character for wheat] from the fact that its seeds look very much like those of wheat. Its blossoms, which may be crimson, purple, or red—some being darker, some lighter than others—begin to bloom in late spring, and shine most vibrantly in mid-summer. Nor does the plant itself wither in autumn or winter, but continues to bloom [the following year]. Each flower possesses petals decorated with hazy swirls of varying hues. The pink, charming as it gently sways, is to be admired in all seasons.

瞿麥一名巨句麥 子頗似麥 因名瞿麥 花紅紫赤 又有濃淡 春末初發 夏中最盛 秋冬不凋 續續開拆 窠文圓纈 異彩同葩 四時翫好 藹藹可愛

⁴⁵⁰ The full title of this poem is “Pinks in the Imperial Palace, a Sinitic poem composed in thirty rhyming couplets of verses five-characters in length, complete with a preface” 禁中瞿麥花詩 五言 三十韻并序.

⁴⁵¹ This *jujumai* 巨句麥, a synonym for the pink, is found in the second fascicle of *Shennong bencaojing* 神農本草經 (Shennong’s Book of Herbs, composed sometime between the first and the early third century) under the entry for *qumai* 瞿麥, “pinks.” Tadaomi, as imperial apothecary, would have been familiar with this classical work.

[b] This year [889] marks the first time pinks have been planted within the imperial garden. Things shine all the more brilliantly when at last they find their proper abode. Though dozens of other flowers skirt it round, the pink alone finds no peer either for color or fragrance. Even so, poets both ancient and modern have failed to include this flower in their verses. This is in virtue of the fact that the pink grows atop high mountains and along valley rivers; it will not be found growing in quaint gardens or other famous locales. If this were not the case, [why should such a flower, so supremely beautiful in fragrance and hue, be constantly ignored? In our famous gardens we find in summer] roses planted to the right and peonies to the left; [in autumn we see] thoroughwort along with chrysanthemums planted in front and the tawny daylily planted behind. [The pink, however, is nowhere to be found.]

今年初種禁籬 物得地而增美 雖有數十名花 傍若無色香耳 但古今人朗詠殆小
 蓋此花生大山川谷 不在好家名處 不亦然者 何得右薔薇 左牡丹 前蘭菊 後
 萱草乎

[c] Just as each flower has its season, so, too, does each man have his own season. Of all the refined gentlemen who have come before me, not one may boast [as I, having finally

come into my season, now may boast] of having composed poetry, in response to imperial command no less, on the subject of the pink. My poem, then, is as follows:

花亦有時 人亦有時 人臣奉敕而賦之 前修之未能云焉 詩曰：

[Section 1, couplets 1-10]

The pink, not confined to one place alone, has been brought to the palace and planted as an offering for our sovereign.

Where once patches of moss cast their shadow, now [that these pinks have been planted] clusters of mugwort dare stand alongside [their new neighbors].

Despite much inevitable jealousy from the other flowers, all these blossoms, finding themselves beside [the pinks], cannot help but recognize their [inferior] place.

The fragrance [of these pinks] rejuvenates the palace, transforming what was once a garden destitute and wild.

Spring, with gentle touch, softens those pointed stems, causing them to stand up tall, and, with her precious mist, veils its little leaves from sight.

This same mist, having cleared in the early morning, reveals scattered patches of color,

only to gather together come evening in order to pull this patchwork apart once more.

Its tender calyx is deep-red; its nodding flowers are as purple and lustrous as wax.

A partly-clouded sun winds its noon rays about those stately chambers [i.e., calyces],

while the setting sun bathes rainbow-shaped rafters [i.e., arched stems of nodding flowers] in evening hues.

[These flowers look like] seated guests, cheeks flushed with heady wine, [or like] the smiling faces of strolling maidens.

Drops of rain color these pinks redder even than madder root, while evening's mantle dyes their petals in somewhat lighter pigments.

瞿麥花非一 移栽供王皇

莓苔曾結蔭 蕭艾敢同行

諸種應相妬 頻芸自得常

敷芬新禁掖 變化舊疎荒

春揉尖莖聳 煙含細葉藏

晴霞初寸截 晚靄擬分將

脆軟紅蘇蒂 欹垂蠟紫房

半陰縈鳳暑 斜景射虹梁

坐對艷顏客 行隨笑臉娘

雨添深茜草 天染淺蘇芳

[Section 2, couplets 11-20]

What surprise is felt upon seeing such beautiful hairpins [i.e., flower petals] scattered over the ground! How could one have guessed that such colorful garments [i.e., more petals] would have been spread out to dry in the sun?

Colorful tassels [i.e. clustered flowers swaying on slender stems] are sent flying in the wind, while the patterns of figured robes [i.e., hazy swirls of color found upon each petal] are gathered beneath drops of dew.

These vibrant colors, shimmering between elegant shafts of bamboo, shower their brilliance upon the tortoiseshell-decorated frame of [our sovereign's] bed.

Shining through the embroidered reed blinds, it [i.e., the pink's color] enhances their hue; sparkling upon the polished stone steps, it emblazons an already splendid chamber.

When the sun's halo appears [in the early morning, these pinks] give to the scene all the beauty of a painting upon a folding screen; when [in the evening] the dust has

settled, [these flowers] begin applying their rouge.

Even now, [the pink's blossoms seem to be] chasing after the butterflies that flutter about,

while day after day [these flowers] draw to themselves the queen bee.

[The gently swaying blossoms of these vibrant pinks resemble] waves of clouds drifting

beneath the moon, or the red glow of torchlight burning atop an altar dedicated to the spirits of the stars.

[These pinks, having been planted in] the imperial garden, may now be viewed up

close—all through the clear afternoon, as long as one wishes.

Graced by the sandals of our most august sovereign as he strolls by, [these pinks] lend to

his imperial residence an equally august fragrance.

[At times the color of these blossoms looks like] startled courtiers, clad all in

embroidered gowns, reporting for morning duty, [or again like tired] noblemen, clad

in fine brocades, yearning to return to their native home.

乍訝簪投地 那知纈曝場

綵綫風斷繡 文綺露團章

落光琅玕竹 通明玳瑁床

透簾誇黼帳 依砌助華堂

暈發施屏畫 塵除出篋粧

當時駙蝶子 每日引蜂玉

月宇雲飛波 星壇醮療芒

彤庭看取近 清晝翫來長

宴步承仙履 宸居襲御香

繡衣驚奉使 錦服念歸鄉

[Section 3, couplets 21-30]

Lines of [pinks] cast their hues across glistening stairs, [looking for all the world like]
rows of bejeweled drapes.

The *ming* grass [sorely bewildered by the pinks' brilliance] can no longer properly count
the days, while the daylily [no less enthralled] has forgotten to cast away its woes.⁴⁵²

The pink alone is as pretty as the *reishi* mushroom, and it is for this singular flower that

⁴⁵² The first type of grass referred to in this verse, the so-called *ming* grass 莫, is also known in Japanese as *koyomigusa*, literally “calendar grass.” This is a mythological plant said to have brought forth one flower each day for the first fifteen days of each month, only to cast off one flower each day for the remaining fifteen days. It was therefore possible, by paying close attention to this plant, to accurately count the days of each month. The second type of grass, known in Chinese as *xuancao* 萱草, and in Japanese as *wasuregusa* (daylily), literally “forgetting grass,” is supposed to possess the magical property of helping people forget their worries. The irony here is that this forgetting grass, enthralled as it is by the pinks, has forgotten to fulfill its function in helping people forget their woes.

so many hearts sigh and rejoice.⁴⁵³

In summer, beneath the sun's burning rays, it glows as though ablaze; in winter, when

other flowers are wont to wither, [the pink alone] outlives the frigid frost.

After the deathly heat of summer has passed, [the pink] yet remains, ready to face the

cool winds of autumn.

And, blooming once again, its flowers seem as comely as fine silk, while its exceptional

colors shine on through the heat and cold.

[In the presence of these splendid pinks,] how could one give a thought to the white

flowers that grow along the riverside or even the yellow chrysanthemums?

Roses receive scorn for their thorns; Chinese peonies are ashamed of their dull colors.

It is difficult, amidst all these metaphors [of mine], to keep [my] heart steady; composing

all these verses keeps [my] hand rushing along.

These pinks have received such adoration at the hands of our sovereign. O, young bean

leaves—you who yearn always to follow the sun—vie no more [with the pinks] for

sunlight!

⁴⁵³ The *reishi* 靈芝 mushroom, also known in Japanese as *shisō* 芝草 (Ch: *zhicao*), was considered an auspicious herb, and one possessing potent medicinal effects. It is here referred to by one of its various synonyms, *sanxiu* 三秀, literally “three excellences.”

接影瑤階合 連輝寶幔張
 莫誣推曆記 萱謾遣憂忘
 獨餌齊三秀 偏憐過九腸
 似燒任冒暑 欲慘未殘霜
 縱使逢流火 還堪送迅商
 重榮兼繪意 異色度炎涼
 不問洲蘋白 誰占縣菊黃
 薔薇嫌有刺 芍藥愧無光
 比喻心難剛 吟題手又忙
 乾恩回照甚 傾藿莫爭陽

In the world of early Heian Sinitic poetry, at least that composed by Japanese courtiers, this poem stands out as being of exceptional length. Tadaomi's anthology contains another lengthy poem, which, in its complete form, contained fifty couplets, that is, one-hundred verses, five-characters each.⁴⁵⁴ Sometime after this lengthy poem about pinks was presented to the sovereign, Tadaomi was ordered to compose a second poem on the same subject. This second

⁴⁵⁴ The poem in question appears in *Denshi kashū* as poem no. 16. Unfortunately, our extant editions contain a number of lacunae; only seventeen (along with a small portion of one verse after the eighth couplet) out of the original fifty couplets remain.

poem, which appears in *Denshi kashū* as poem no. 138, consists of four couplets of verses seven characters in length. In terms of content, it does not differ significantly from the above poem, save for the third couplet, which compares the gentle swaying of the pink's petals to the soft feathers of a peacock's tail, and its hues to the falling scales of some brilliantly colored serpent. Michizane's own rendition, inspired by Tadaomi's first piece, is likewise four couplets of seven-character verses.⁴⁵⁵ Not only is Tadaomi's first piece lengthy, it contains a number of subtle metaphors, some of which seem to have alluded previous editors. Section 1, couplet 8, is one such example: "A partly-clouded sun winds its [noon] rays about those stately chambers [i.e., calyces], while the setting sun bathes rainbow-shaped rafters [i.e., arched stems of nodding flowers] in evening hues." As the inserted bits in square brackets—my own additions, of course—make clear, the "chambers" and "rafters" must allude to parts of the flower, otherwise these verses simply do not make sense in the context of the poem as a whole, nor even, for that matter, in the context of those couplets immediately preceding and following this one.

This sort of subtle metaphor was one of many stock rhetorical devices employed by Japanese poets conversant in the world of Sinitic verse to lend a great deal of depth to their verses. The couplet just cited may—and indeed has been—interpreted as referring more literally to the royal chambers and their rafters. More immediately, though, this same couplet is

⁴⁵⁵ *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 302. Michizane's poem, I dare say, is surprisingly unexceptional.

describing the effect of sunlight upon various parts of the pinks. In this way, the poet is able to praise two things at once: the flowers and the palace into which these flowers have been newly transplanted. Tadaomi makes ample use of this device throughout his poem. Section 1, couplet 2-3, for example, alludes to the hierarchical order within the court with “clusters of mugwort dare stand alongside [their new neighbors].” Mugwort (*yomogi* or *shōgai* 蕭艾) is a common metaphor for low-ranking courtiers, with fragrant thoroughwort (*fujibakama* or *ran* 蘭) standing in, at the opposite extreme, for their high-ranking peers. A classic example of this appears in the Sinitic preface to *Bunka shūreishū*: “Jade circlets and plums alike with the same brilliance glow; mugwort and thoroughwort together their native colors mingle.”⁴⁵⁶ Tadaomi, drawing on the same sort of dichotomy, simply substitutes thoroughwort with pinks. Even so, the message is clear, or would have been to courtiers of his day. Tadaomi seems to be saying; “Look, my fellow courtiers, at the way in which blossoms inferior in both color and fragrance are allowed to bloom alongside these splendid pinks. Is it not the same with us—we who, far inferior in virtue and wisdom, yet share an audience with our most sagacious sovereign?” The efficacy of this poem lies in its ability to achieve three things at once, and all through the medium of subtly metaphorical language: First, and most obviously, Tadaomi’s poem is a paean to pinks. Second, the poem is an encomium to the sovereign, embodied as he is in these pinks. Third, these verses

⁴⁵⁶ The original text of this passage is as follows: 至瓊環与木李齐暉、蕭艾将蘭芬雜彩。

serve to reinforce the prevailing social hierarchy by appealing to an imagined sense of harmony between the various ranks. This last function, so prominent in poetry, is nearly a universal feature of Heian period Sinitic prefaces (*jo*) for public banquets as well. All three of these functions in previous chapters.

Regarding this last function, perhaps the most revealing line is to be found near the end of the poem, in the first verse of couplet 29: “It is difficult, amidst all these metaphors [of mine], to keep [my] heart steady.” Admittedly this is an ambiguous line, and I have supplied a more-or-less literal translation in hopes of preserving that ambiguity. What might Tadaomi have meant by the word “steady,” and why should metaphors threaten this steadiness of heart? The answer, I believe, is given in the final verse: “O, young bean leaves—you who yearn always to follow the sun—vie no more [with the pinks] for sunlight!” Tadaomi has exerted a great deal of literary fervor in creating verses rich in metaphorical content, so much so that he fears he himself might become jealous of the brilliant flowers that have received so much praise at the hands of his sovereign. In order not to let himself be too carried away, therefore, he admonishes himself and others eager for attention: “Be not too bold, my fellow courtiers, in your pursuit of power. Rather, remain satisfied in your station; do not attempt to outshine your superiors.” Of course, all of this must be taken with a small grain of salt. As section C of the preface states, Tadaomi was conscious of his prestigious role in being the first to compose verses on the pink—in accordance

with imperial command, no less. In the case of Sinitic poetry composed for public occasions, humble language is more a sign of prestige than of any real modesty. Tadaomi, by his own admission, is a man who has come into his season. It is time for him, like the pinks, to shine before the sovereign. This awareness of his growing sociopolitical standing was surely one of the reasons why he must have found it difficult at times to keep his heart “steady,” that is, detached, calm, and humble enough not to attract the jealousy of others. Such a fear was very real. After all, Michizane, his intimate friend and fellow poet, was later banished as a result of jealous rivals. Tadaomi repeats this admonition in several other poems likely composed around the same time as his poem on pinks, or shortly thereafter:

Why must the crane insist upon perching atop a stately carriage in order to show off its ermine plumage? Let it rather rest quietly beneath the [shadow of some] lordly pine [i.e. the sovereign] in hopes of not being [too soon] despised.⁴⁵⁷

何必乘軒終表質、願從君子得無厭

The flower described so vividly by Tadaomi in his *nadeshiko* poem is, according to

⁴⁵⁷ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 144.

Kuranaka Sumi—with whom I happen to be in agreement on this point—of the variety grown in Japan, that is, the so-called *yamato nadeshiko* appearing in the *waka* poetry of Sosei 素性 (?-c.910). This variety of pinks begins to blossom in spring, and continues on through to summer, when it shines most vividly. The preface prefixed to Tadaomi's poem describes just this sort of flower. The Chinese variety, known in Japanese alternatively as *kara nadeshiko* or *sekichiku* 石竹, on the other hand, blossoms only for a short time in early summer.⁴⁵⁸ This is significant for the following reason: If the flower described by Tadaomi had been of the Chinese variety, we might have been justified in supposing that his poem was meant to inaugurate the introduction of yet another item of continental exotica into the palace—one more example of the re-appropriation of Sinitic culture into the Heian court, something Saga would have welcomed with open arms. Granted, this would have been a satisfactory interpretation. However, once we understand that the flower in question was in fact of the Japanese variety, and that this flower had appeared in *waka* poetry from as early as the *Man'yōshū*, the question then arises as to why the transplantation of this flower into the imperial gardens should occasion so much attention. Kuranaka offers a simple but insightful explanation, namely, that Emperor Uda's reign is characterized by a marked tendency to incorporate elements of rustic or popular life into court culture. The Japanese pink, beloved of old by non-aristocratic rural folks—at least as such folks

⁴⁵⁸ Kuranaka Sumi, "Sosei shōkō," 42, and endnote no. 9 on page 48.

were idealized in vernacular poetry promulgated by the court—was just another example of this curious project.⁴⁵⁹ The validity of Kuranaka’s explanation can be corroborated by even a cursory look at the history of annual festivities (*nenchū gyōji*) in the court. It is well known that Emperor Uda, perhaps more so than any sovereign before him, made conscious efforts at transplanting a number of rural festivals into his court. Two such examples are the reinstitutionalization of sumo wrestling and ground-stomping dances (*tōka*), both of which originated as fertility rituals across the countryside. Saga, as recorded in his formulary of annual court rituals and festivities entitled *Dairishiki*, had placed great importance on both sumo wrestling and ground-stomping dances.⁴⁶⁰ His successors, Junna and Ninmyō, too, made certain that these festivities were performed every year of their reign. After Ninmyō, however, these festivities were omitted from the court calendar. It was Uda who, after four intervening sovereigns—nearly four decades—finally reinstated both of these events. Uda even went so far as to order the preparation of specific types of rice cakes to accompany a number of annual festivals originally practiced exclusively by non-aristocratic people living in rural areas around the capital.⁴⁶¹ Yamanaka Yutaka goes a step

⁴⁵⁹ Kuranaka, “Sosei shōkō,” 42. Kuranaka gives several examples of *Man’yōshū* poems describing the Japanese pink on page 35.

⁴⁶⁰ *Dairishiki*, 333-334 (ground-stomping dances) and 353-356 (sumo wrestling matches).

⁴⁶¹ Yamanaka Yutaka, *Heianchō no nenchū gyōji*, 58-61. Regarding rice cakes, Yamanaka quotes *Moromitsu nenchū gyōji* 師光年中行事 (Moromitsu’s Guide to Annual Court Festivities, n.d.), where the word corresponding to my “rural folk” is *zokkan* 俗間, which might also be rendered as “popular customs.” Kuranaka’s phrase is *shomin no seikatsu*, “belonging to the life of common people.”

further than Kuranaka by explaining the reason behind this ardent desire to adopt rural customs into court life. In a word, Uda was responding to a larger tendency within the court to move away from slavish imitation of continental models and towards a more active assertion of some sort of unique court identity. I would rather not use the term “Japanese” here—though this is the common term employed by Japanese scholars such as Yamanaka—for it is difficult to say, especially at the beginning of the Heian period, just how precisely such categories of identity (Japanese, Chinese, *yamato*, *kara*) were delineated. Whether Uda and his contemporaries in court were attempting to assert a unique form of “Japanese identity,” that is, whether they understood their project in those terms, is beyond the present discussion. Safe to say, by deliberately searching out and incorporating rural practices into court life, Emperor Uda was certainly responsible for bringing about a transformation in aristocratic life, one which must have differed noticeably from the older, more continental model championed by Saga and his vassals.⁴⁶²

Transplanting the Japanese pink into his imperial garden, then, can be understood as contributing to this same transformation. Tadaomi, by offering up his two *nadeshiko* poems, was participating in this larger project of reconstructing the aristocratic identity. One of the reasons why I am reluctant to suspect Uda of working towards something akin to our modern concept of a

⁴⁶² For a brief evaluation of Uda’s court, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 53-54: It was during Uda’s reign that “the ritual privileges of courtiers were formalized, exacerbating the insider/outsider bifurcation of capital society.”

distinctly “Japanese” identity is the simple fact that, were this his real desire, he surely would have commissioned the composition of vernacular and not Sinitic poems. It is true, as Kuranaka points out, that Sosei did compose vernacular poems on the theme of Japanese pinks. Still, Sosei’s poetry was private insofar as he was not ordered to compose on that theme. Tadaomi alone was expressly directed by imperial command to compose Sinitic poems. So long as we cling to labels such as “Chinese” and “Japanese,” we might just as easily argue that Tadaomi was chosen in order to lend an air of continental majesty, and hence legitimacy, to the otherwise humble “Japanese” pink. The situation, of course, is not so simple.

While participating in a then prevalent trend to adopt rural customs and artifacts into aristocratic culture, Tadaomi, through this lengthy poem, is reinforcing a very conservative sort of sociopolitical model, one brought to the fore by Saga and his coterie, wherein courtiers at once respect the hierarchical nature of their relationships and attempt to harmonize these relationships through banquets and exemplary poetry. This poem, for all its originality and elegance, is thoroughly conservative in its outlook. A flower heretofore absent from court life has just been transplanted into the imperial garden. Certainly this is something new. Though Tadaomi ostensibly plays off this general feeling of newness—“The fragrance [of these pinks] rejuvenates the palace, transforming what was once a garden destitute and wild” 敷芬新禁掖 變化舊疎荒 (section 1, couplet 4)—he nevertheless resorts to the same sort of legitimizing strategies

practiced by so many of his predecessors. New though these pinks may be, they tell, through the hand of Tadaomi, a story as old as the court itself. Similarly, Michizane's own poem on pinks, mentioned briefly above, parrots the same message:

If only these [worthless] clumps of sedge might be nourished by [our sovereign's] sweet
rain [of benevolence], how they would strive to bring forth [the most exquisite]
blossoms for their most sagacious lord!⁴⁶³

菅蒯若應添雨露、吐華將奉聖明君

The sedge of this verse, written in the original as *jiankuai/kankai* 菅蒯, contains a character (the first one) corresponding to the *suga* in Sugawara, and hence alludes to the house of Michizane. Here, like Tadaomi, Michizane is attempting to curry favor with the sovereign through public promises of unwavering submission.

Tadaomi's lengthy poem about pinks was composed in response to an imperial command issued by Emperor Uda. This is what might be termed a public piece. That is to say, the poem was composed for a specific occasion or venue, and, as has been demonstrated, with a very

⁴⁶³ *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 302.

specific set of functions in mind. Earlier anthologies of Sinitic poetry, including *Kaifūsō*, and others composed in accordance with imperial command (*chokusenshū*), contain a great many examples of this sort of public poetry. Kuranaka has done a great service by inviting us to question the possible connotations of the phrase “composed in response to imperial order” (*ōsei* or *sei ni ōzu* 応製) as it appears in the title of many Sinitic poems composed for royal banquets in the Heian court. Taking as her central example an imperially commissioned poem (*ōseishi* 応製詩) composed by Tadaomi for a spring banquet (poem no. 170), Kuranaka reveals that not all such poems were, as is often assumed, necessarily solemn and dignified. While his poem about pinks is certainly the epitome of solemnity, what with its lofty metaphors and dignified diction, poem no. 170, though no doubt elegant and refined, nevertheless resonates with playful, erotic undertones carried over from a Bo Juyi poem bearing the same title.⁴⁶⁴ Kuranaka’s analysis hinges around the thematic title of poem no. 170, namely, *kashi ni tsuku* 就花枝, “among the flower branches.” Bo Juyi’s poem of the same title seems to contain a play on words, such that branches (*zhi/shi* 枝) allude, both aurally through near homophony and visually through a shared radical (on the right-hand side of each character), to the pretty dancing girls (*ji/gi* 妓) appearing in the latter’s poem. Tadaomi’s poem, while not explicitly erotic, does contain a number of

⁴⁶⁴ Kuranaka, “Shimada Tadaomi, Sugawara no Michizane: ‘kashi ni tsuku’ ōseishi ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu,” 59-60 and 62. Though I fear Kuranaka might have somewhat over-analyzed her example, it is nevertheless a telling illustration of a phenomenon found elsewhere in some of Tadaomi’s public poetry.

suggestive phrases, such as “like bees and butterflies” 如蜂如蝶, often connoting, like our phrase “the birds and the bees,” sexual excitement or at least courtship, and “rouge of spring” 春粧, which, while referring to the blush of flowers, may also allude to the ruddy flush of youth glowing on the cheeks of nubile dancing girls. According to Kuranaka’s research, Tadaomi’s imperially commissioned poems (nos. 170 and 171) were presented at a banquet held in the first month of 892, the last year of Tadaomi’s life. Emperor Uda, host of the banquet, was a mere twenty-six years old, while Michizane, also present, would have been forty-eight. Considering the potentially erotic undertones of Tadaomi’s poetry, as well as the youthfulness of Uda, Kuranaka characterizes this particular banquet as being daintily carefree, yet refined, and charming, even voluptuous (*yūga enrei*).⁴⁶⁵ I think a better example of this sort of erotic playfulness is to be found in poem no. 36, presented by Tadaomi at a chrysanthemum banquet held in the year 861. As the theme of this poem indicates—“the chrysanthemum, though warm, has yet to blossom” 菊暖花未開—this piece is dedicated to describing the beauty of chrysanthemums just before they blossom. The second couplet of this poem contains the following verse, redolent of flirtatious maidens: “[The petals of these chrysanthemums resemble those] floral fans that dancing girls use to [playfully] hide their decorative hairpins” 偏似扇花藏

⁴⁶⁵ Kuranaka, “Shimada Tadaomi, Sugawara no Michizane: ‘kashi ni tsuku’ ōseishi ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu,” 50 and 63-64.

妓筭. It is worth noting, however, that the last couplet of this same poem is duly solemn:

The fate of river grasses [i.e., us lowly courtesans], whether they [and we] should flourish
or wither, is in the hands of Heaven; the life [likewise] of this your humble servant is
in the hands of his sovereign.⁴⁶⁶

潭草榮枯天自造 小臣生事任君王

Here, again, we see the common admission of subservience and simultaneous appeal to mercy.

Whatever the case may be, Kuranaka's central point is clear enough: the term imperially commissioned need not always imply strict adherence to the lofty style of poetry so common in earlier anthologies of Sinitic poetry commissioned by Emperor Saga. During the decades when Tadaomi was most active, court banquets, including those hosted by the sovereign himself, took on a variety of forms, some more and some less solemn than others. The connotations of "composed in response to imperial order," therefore, must always be understood in relation to the nature of the particular sort of banquet in which a given poem was presented. This lends support, I would argue, to what was said in the second chapter with regards to the nature of term

⁴⁶⁶ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 36.

imperialy commissioned (*chokusen*), especially in association with Saga's three anthologies.

Though all three anthologies were alike commissioned in accordance with some sort of imperial command, the degree of gravity with which each was received by contemporary courtiers, and hence the manner in which each work was treated (or not treated) in Saga's imperial history, varied from anthology to anthology. In short, both terms—*ōseishi* and *chokusenshū*, that is, imperialy commissioned poems and imperialy commissioned anthologies—seem to have admitted of varying degrees of solemnity, which, in turn, would have entailed different expectations from their readers.⁴⁶⁷

One last example will suffice to illustrate this point. Many of the poems composed by Tadaomi for chrysanthemum banquets include vivid descriptions of intoxication. The theme of intoxication (*yoi* or *sui* 酔), while possibly out of place in certain public venues, such as the memorial ceremony in honor of Confucius (*shakuten*), was most fitting for the chrysanthemum banquet, the central activity of which involved imbibing rich liqueur made from chrysanthemum petals believed to grant longevity. Tadaomi, however, takes his descriptions farther than most. In a poem presented in accordance with imperial order for a chrysanthemum banquet held in 882, Tadaomi provides the following lively description of his own experience with intoxication:

⁴⁶⁷ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 49: "The numerous events and ceremonies in the Heian court calendar were diverse, and demonstrate varying degrees of formalization [...] and visibility." These varying degrees of formalization, it is only natural to suspect, spilled over into court productions of literary anthologies, as well.

Slouched over [nearly conquered by inebriation] I gaze upon what looks to be a little
 hollow full of yellow chicks; then, pulling myself up to peer at the vast heavens
 above, I spy what looks to be a crimson rainbow.

Wipe and rub though I may, huffing and puffing to catch my breath, the sweat
 continues to pour down; thankfully though, the curtained lattice windows [of my
 sovereign's carriage] being close by, I am graced with [my lord's] benevolence.⁴⁶⁸

低臨拗窠雞黃處 攀接穹隆蜨絳時
 澆滅汗來餘喘息 簾櫳咫尺載恩私

These yellow chicks refer to the yellow chrysanthemum petals floating in the “hollow” or bowl
 of the communal wine chalice, while the crimson rainbow refers to the red sleeves of dancing
 girls whirling around him. The editors of *Denshi kashū zenshaku* seem confused about these
 images, suggesting that the yellow chicks and rainbow are to be taken literally, that is, as things
 the drinkers actually observed at the banquet. There is no need, however, for confusion.

Michizane composed a poem for this same banquet which contains the following couplet:

⁴⁶⁸ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 102. My quotation is from the final two couplets of a four-couplet poem.

Yellow flower petals [of chrysanthemums]—a sign of our sovereign’s benevolence—float
 in the tiger’s mouth [i.e., the communal wine chalice], while red sleeves—present in
 accordance with imperial command—all belong to slender eyebrows [i.e., pretty
 dancing girls].⁴⁶⁹

恩賜黃花纔虎口 敕催紅袖惣蛾眉

Incidentally, the couplet immediately following this one—the third in the poem—evinces the
 exact same grammatical structure as the third couplet in Tadaomi’s poem just quoted insofar as its
 two verses end in *tokoro* 處 (place) and *toki* 時 (time), respectively:

When the five-colored clouds [that signal the reign of our virtuous sovereign] have
 cleared [and the banquet is concluded], then [and only then] will I ascend yon high
 mound [to catch one more glimpse of our parting sovereign]. When the thousand-
 fold sun [that is our sovereign] has finally set [and all is quiet], then [and only then]
 will my joyous intoxication begin to fade away.

⁴⁶⁹ Michizane’s poem for this banquet is preserved in *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 99.

五雲晴指登高處 千日暮知解醉時

I say this simply to foreground the intimate relationship between some of Tadaomi's poems and those of Michizane; sometimes one cannot be fully understood without reference to the other. Moreover, a comparison between two poets helps in revealing the idiosyncrasies of both. This is especially prevalent here. The final couplet of Tadaomi's poem, especially the final verse, would have us imagine an inebriated courtier—Tadaomi himself—stumbling close by, perhaps even resting his arm upon the windowsill of the sovereign's carriage. This is a rather daring image, one which Michizane, often the more conservative of the two, in his own poem composed for this same banquet, was not prepared to echo. Even considering the occasion, namely, one in which the theme of intoxication was accepted, rather expected, Tadaomi has presented us with an image of inebriation that seems to be pushing the boundaries, which is in complete accord with Kuranaka's observations regarding the occasionally playful nature of some imperially commissioned poetry.

Color plays a remarkably important role in Sinitic poetry. The image of bright colors reflecting off of one another, each increasing the vibrance of the other, was a potent trope of celebratory verse. Tadaomi's poem about pinks takes full advantage of this trope. My remark at

the end of the previous paragraph about yellow chicks and red sleeves brings home this point.

Tadaomi's poem about pinks, as I have attempted to show, is thoroughly conservative in its approach to the court hierarchy. There is nothing original or striking about his message. The content, too, may be summarized quite simply: pinks are pretty. This kernel phrase, repeated with varying intensity and through a number of curious modifications, remains constant throughout a total of thirty couplets. There is no development, no climactic moment, no story-telling. What, then, could have inspired Michizane, a poet renowned for his acute poetic taste, to praise Tadaomi's poem about pinks so enthusiastically? What, if anything, is so remarkable about this poem? The answer to this question will give us insight into a central trope of conservative public poetry. Section 1, couplets 5-6, presents us with the following verses, which I am pleased to be able to quote a second time here:

Spring, with gentle touch, softens those pointed stems, causing them to stand up tall, and,
with her [precious] mist, veils its little leaves from sight.

This same mist, having cleared in the early morning, reveals scattered patches of color,
only to gather together come evening in order to pull this patchwork apart once more.

春揉尖莖聳 煙含細葉藏

晴霞初寸截 晚靄擬分將

Both of these couplets, but especially the last (couplet 6), are highly visual. Spring mist clings to the pinks, now revealing, now hiding their vibrant petals. The image is of a colorful patchwork, which, in virtue of the slowly moving mists, looks as though it is being gently pieced together and pulled apart. Here, therefore, we have the highly visual combination of color and motion.

Couplets 9-10 continue this same imagery:

[These flowers look like] seated guests, cheeks flushed with heady wine, [or like] the smiling faces of strolling maidens.

Drops of rain color these pinks redder even than madder root, while evening's mantle dyes their petals in somewhat lighter pigments.

坐對艷顏客 行隨笑臉娘

雨添深茜草 天染淺蘇芳

Intoxicated guests, their flushed cheeks bobbing and dozing, dancing maidens, their lither figures gliding through the palace—both images lend a sense of motion, as well as a sense of warm

intimacy, to the pinks. Rain, an image of fertility, intensifies the color of these pinks, while the setting sun of evening softens their hue. Here, again, we have motion and color. Rather, we have color being intensified or transformed over time. As we are dealing here with poetic time, not real time, these intensifications of color occur instantaneously, one after the other, without cessation. One more example will do, taken from section 2, couplets 13-14:

These vibrant colors, shimmering between elegant shafts of bamboo, shower their
brilliance upon the tortoiseshell-decorated frame of [our sovereign's] bed.

Shining through the embroidered reed blinds, it [i.e., the pink's color] enhances their hue;
sparkling upon the polished stone steps, it emblazons an already splendid chamber.

落光琅玕竹 通明玳瑁床

透簾誇黼帳 依砌助華堂

This last couplet presents us with an intensification not of the color of pinks but of reed blinds: the pinks shine so vibrantly that, carried through the bamboo by rays of sunlight—much like leaves borne aloft a stream—they are able to endow the sovereign's blinds with an even brighter sheen. In other words, the pinks, having been intensified themselves, in turn intensify the things

around them. Rather, there is a mutual resonance, a mutual reflecting, which amplifies the brilliance of both the pinks and its surroundings *ad infinitum*. This trope is by no means unique to Tadaomi's poetry. Any number of similar examples may be found in earlier anthologies of Sinitic poetry, especially in imperially commissioned poems concerning springtime. Use of color, especially reflecting, mutually invigorating colors, turns out to be a conventional trope of celebratory public poetry. Tadaomi's poem about pinks draws upon an older color-trope, one which once enjoyed a particularly rich tradition in Sinitic poetry composed on the archipelago. I suspect this is one of the reasons why Michizane showed special admiration for the poem. Saga, for one, was fond of imagery involving vivid contrasts of color. The dark green of old moss juxtaposed against the bright hues of newer moss, for example, is an image that occurs in several of his poems. Despite the predominance of this color-trope in Sinitic poetry composed throughout the Nara and early Heian period, Tadaomi's own poetry—at least what we have left of it—makes little use of brilliant contrasts of reflecting color. In the extant editions of *Denshi kashū*, Tadaomi's poem about pinks stands out as being of a noticeably older, more conservatively traditional pedigree. Michizane, being of the same conservative mold, would have been able to appreciate what Tadaomi was attempting to do with this unique piece.

Tadaomi's poem about pinks fulfills its function as an encomium to the sovereign, and to the court in general, by personifying the pinks, now as courtiers, now as court ladies. In section

1, couplets 8, the calyces of the pinks are compared to stately chambers, while its arched stems are likened unto the rainbow-shaped rafters found overhead in other rooms throughout the palace. Couplet 9 compares these same flowers now to aristocrats carousing at a banquet, their cheeks ruddy with the flush of wine, now to the charming smiles of court ladies as they stroll gracefully through the halls. Section 2, couplet 11, picking up on this last reference, transforms the petals into the decorative hairpins and exquisite garments of court ladies. Couplet 13 makes explicit mention of the sovereign's bedchamber. I suspect, moreover, that the gendered reference to a queen bee, as opposed to a regular bee, in couplet 16 is no coincidence. Couplet 17 compares the bright red hue of these pinks to a ceremonial altar dedicated to paying homage to the stars, thereby alluding to a religious element of court life. Couplet 19 sees the sovereign gracing the pinks with his august presence, while couplet 20, with a touch of light-heartedness, superimposes upon these flowers the dual image of courtiers reporting for morning duty and those preparing to return home for the evening. Finally, section 3, couplet 21 turns the pinks into bejeweled drapes, a common piece of courtly furniture. Tadaomi effectively transforms his dear pinks into a miniature picture of the court as a whole, including all major aspects of court life, public and private alike. So long as one wishes to emphasize the significance of the poem, it might be argued that Tadaomi was not writing about pinks at all. This poem uses the pinks merely as a springboard from which to paint a vibrant and lively picture of the court in all its

glory. The sovereign is praised, as are his noblemen and court ladies. A sense of harmony pervades the whole. It is in this way that Tadaomi's poem about pinks fulfills its function as an encomium to the court.

Displays of Affection: Poems Presented to the Ambassador from Parhae

Sinitic poetry, as has already been seen in the case of Saga, was used throughout the ninth century—as well as before and after this—as an efficient means of communication between kingdoms whose people spoke mutually unintelligible languages, but who were skilled in the use of Sinitic logographs. Tadaomi employed Sinitic verses as one important means of hosting delegates visiting from a kingdom across the sea. It was on the twenty-second day of the fourth month—near mid-summer—of the year 883 when ambassador Pei Ting 裴頴 and his envoy from Parhae arrived at the capital.⁴⁷⁰ Tadaomi, who had only that year been sent off to Mino as vice-governor, was suddenly called back to the capital to act as host to the ambassador.

Remember that this was not Tadaomi's first experience hosting a foreign envoy, having done so

⁴⁷⁰ Parhae or Balhae 渤海 (Ch: Bohai; J: Bokkai) was the name of a kingdom, located in what is modern-day Jilin Province 吉林, China, which maintained independence for more than two centuries, from 698 to 926. The ruling class consisted mainly of refugees from the Korean kingdom of Goguryeo 高句麗 (Ch: Gaojuli; J: Kōkuri), which previously dominated the region of northern Korea and southern Manchuria from 37 BC to 668 AD.

once before in 859, though in a slightly less prestigious capacity. In order to make Ambassador Pei feel most welcome, Sugawara Michizane and Ki no Haseo, both Tadaomi's intimate friends and fellow scholars, were also assigned as hosts on this occasion. According to contemporaneous official records, Emperor Yōzei, having attended a display of mounted archery in one of the palaces halls, invited the Parhae guests to join him in viewing the martial display. This event occurred on the fifth day of the fifth month, some two weeks after the envoy had initially arrived. A heavy rain began to fall on this day, for which reason all other ceremonies were postponed to a later date. Tadaomi and the other hosts were ordered to accompany the guests to their rooms, where they were to give them all the attention and hospitality necessary. The rain must have stopped that evening, for ceremonies were carried out as usual the following day, while a grand feast, complete with music and dancing girls, was held in honor of the envoy several days thereafter.⁴⁷¹ Naturally, the arrival of a foreign envoy called for the most extravagant festivities, many of which were hosted by the sovereign himself. In this respect, poetry composed for these guests, while not bearing the official stamp "imperially commissioned" was no less public, no less political than the sort of poetry composed for banquets examined above. A close look at three such poems presented to the ambassador by Tadaomi reveals an unexpected combination of poetic genres, the product of which must have proved quite efficacious.

⁴⁷¹ *Nihon sandai tennō jitsuroku*, fascicle 43, section 4, Gangyō 7 (883) 5.5.

A Visit to Ambassador Pei's Private Quarters⁴⁷²

In hopes of finding some relief from this summer heat, we approach your curtain [i.e., chamber door], and discover your chamber to be perfectly serene after the long rainfall.

Though late the night may be, I've no doubt we will be able to see each other once more; how impossible it will be to meet and exchange our deepest sentiments from across the four seas!

[My reluctance to speak openly with you up until now] was not due to any reluctant to express my feelings, but simply in virtue of your stately demeanor as ambassador.

If, upon returning to your native land, you should happen to record [these events], be sure to lock them, too, in your memory for evermore; do not forget the wine and laughter we share here this night!

冒熱尋來逼戶帷 客房安穩雨休時

⁴⁷² *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 110. The full title of this poem is “A visit to ambassador Pei's private quarters, at which time we all composed verses on the theme ‘the heat after a long rain’” 過裴大使房同賦雨後熱.

三更會面應重得 四海交心難再期
 不是少郎無露膽 偏因大使有風姿
 他鄉若記長相憶 莫忘今宵醉解眉

Conversing with a Guest from Parhae⁴⁷³

The half-moon, like a silver pot in the sky, flies in close pursuit behind the setting sun.

Despite the dreadful heat of this mid-summer night, [the moon looks like a chilly] frost-laden flower.

Shinning upon the stones, [the moonlight looks like] pieces of scattered jade; glowing through [branches of the] forest, [this same moonlight looks like so many vernal] flowers.

[Or again, this moonlight] appears to be a white waterfall falling just outside my window, [or] smooth sand upon my [otherwise dark] garden.

⁴⁷³ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 111. The original title of this poem, which reads more like a headnote, is as follows: “Conversing on a summer night with a guest from Parhae, at which time we all composed verses on the theme ‘the moon shines on a peaceful night.’ The rhyme for this poem, composed in five-character verses and limited to sixty characters, has been taken from the theme itself” 夏夜對渤海客 同賦月華臨淨夜詩 五言 題中取韻 限六十字. The rhyme for this poem is based on the second character of the theme, namely, *ka* 華. The limitation of sixty characters refers to six couplets of ten characters—two five-character verses—each.

We strain our eyes to observe every detail of the [charming nighttime] scenery here before us, and compose verses on all the things we have seen.

The moon shines alike on both our lands—how could it be otherwise? All across the four seas are as one family.

半破銀鍋子 排空踵日車
 當天猶熱苦 仲夏卻霜華
 澆石多零玉 通林碎著花
 窗疑懸瀑布 庭訝踏晴沙
 昭察分絲髮 吟看置齒牙
 兩鄉何異照 四海是同家

A Gift to Ambassador Pei⁴⁷⁴

This garment, sewn by my own hands, of reds and greens, light and dark—this do I now present to you, dear friend from so far away, on the occasion of your departure.

⁴⁷⁴ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 112. The full title of this poem is “Composed while in a state of intoxication with Mr. Sugawara [Michizane], when the two of us removed our outer robes and presented them to Ambassador Pei, the rhyme of which is the same as Michizane’s poem” 同菅侍郎醉中脫衣贈裴大使 次韻.

Why, you may ask, have I decided to give this to you? Why, if not in hopes of resurrecting
 within your mind (even many years from now) the bitter sweet memory of a friend
 who, like you, waits impatiently for your return?

淺深紅翠自裁成 擬別交親贈遠情

此物呈君緣底事 他時引領暗愁生

Unlike Tadaomi's imperially commissioned poem about pinks, his poems composed for Ambassador Pei Ting, come across as being significantly more intimate. It must be noted that nowhere in any of these poems does Tadaomi allude to the sovereign or his court, despite the fact that it is the sovereign and a number of his courtiers who hosted the ambassador. This is due to one of the genres of poetry being employed here, namely, what might be called farewell poetry or poetry of departure (*senbetsushi* 餞別詩). In fact, in another poem composed by Tadaomi on the same occasion, the poet makes explicit reference to the palace, its courtiers, as well as the sovereign himself. This particular poem, however, is a reply (*wa* 和) to an earlier piece by Ambassador Pei, and belongs rather to the genre of epistolary poetry.⁴⁷⁵ Tadaomi has

⁴⁷⁵ The poem in question appears in *Denshi kashū* as poem no. 109. Michizane's own reply to the same initial poem by Pei appears as poem no. 105 in his own *Kanke bunsō*. The latter poem, incidentally, makes no reference to the sovereign or his court.

incorporated the salient features of a different genre of poetry in accordance with his different audience. Each genre comes with its own set of expectations. So long as Tadaomi incorporates into his verses the generic features redolent of farewell poetry, the content and tone of these same verses reveal certain idiosyncrasies not found in the pieces quoted thus far.

Borrowing from Conventions of Farewell Poetry

In the preceding section regarding Tadaomi's famous poem about pinks, I explored ways in which the poet used specific imagery in order to place himself in a subservient, and potentially (or so he hoped) advantageous position in relation to the sovereign and his fellow courtiers. The poem about pinks, with its collection of metaphors and beautifying language, belongs properly to the genre of nature poems (*eibutsushi* 詠物詩). One might even refer to this genre as still-life poetry, insofar as, not unlike works of still-life art, the poet concentrates his attention on one or two specific natural phenomena, presenting the reader with an intensified vision of the objects thus depicted.⁴⁷⁶ This latter effect—intensification of vision—is the primary function of still-life nature poems. Compared to this, the three poems presented to Ambassador Pei, including

⁴⁷⁶ As I mentioned earlier, Tadaomi's anthology preserves another lengthy poem, albeit incomplete, about snow (poem no. 16), which also belongs to this genre of "still life" poetry. That poem, however, does not seem to contain any allusions to the sovereign or the court. Neither does the title contain any reference to the circumstances behind its composition, implying that it was a more-or-less private piece.

elements from a different genre, seem to produce a different effect altogether. I use the phrase “including elements from” deliberately, considering that the three poems translated above do not meet all the expectations of farewell poetry, especially not the first two poems. Tadaomi has not composed farewell poems, *per se*, but verses partially reminiscent of farewell poems. *Denshi kashū* does contain several—eight to be exact—more orthodox farewell poems.⁴⁷⁷ One of these, poem no. 43, is a typical farewell poem for Ki no Natsui 紀夏井 (n.d.), who was appointed governor of Higo in 865. The final verse of this poem bids Natsui to “forget not the sentiments shared between us on this merry day of poetry and wine” (此時吟醉莫忘情). This same intimate request is echoed in poem no. 110 as “do not forget the wine and laughter we share here this night” (莫忘今宵醉解眉). This is but one example, an illustrative one at that, of how Tadaomi adopts the language of farewell poetry into his verses for Ambassador Pei. Farewell poem no. 56, written for a certain man of the Nakaomi family, whose real identity remains a mystery, which contains the phrase “of one mind” or “sharing the same sentiments” (*tongqing/dōjō* 同情), also contains an appeal to the feelings shared only between intimate friends. Finally, farewell poem no. 104 was composed by Tadaomi for his friends on the occasion of his own departure to Mino in 883. The opening verse of this poem reads: “We have sat with our collars side-by-side for

⁴⁷⁷ See poem nos. 43, 51, 56, 104-106, 175, and 177.

many a long year; three times already have our collars been parted.”⁴⁷⁸ The term collar (*kin* or *eri* 衿, also written 襟 on occasion) often appears in traditional farewell poetry as a symbol of deep sentiment, especially when shared between two people of like mind. Most often, the word appears in the compound *kaikin* or *eri wo hiraku* 開衿, the act of opening or loosening one’s collar, a gesture of melancholy longing for an absent friend. Furthermore, this same act of loosening one’s collar in wait for an absent friend is connected with another phrase with similar connotations, appearing in poem no. 112, namely, *yinling/inrei* or *kubi wo hiku* 引領, the act of craning one’s neck in hopes of catching sight of a beloved friend either leaving or returning. Here, then, is another example of Tadaomi’s use of language taken directly from the genre of farewell poetry in his verses to Ambassador Pei.

As the editors of *Denshi kashū zenshaku*, along with a number of scholars already mentioned above, have pointed out, Tadaomi’s poetry differs from that of Michizane in that the latter bears a stronger affinity to more conventional, lofty Sinitic poetry, such as that found in *Wenxuan* (Selections of Refined Literature), while Tadaomi’s work is obviously influenced by more romantic, sometimes erotic poetry, especially that preserved in *Yutai xinyong* (New Songs from a Jade Terrace). This last anthology, compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 (507-583) in accordance

⁴⁷⁸ The original text of this verse is as follows: 同衿歲久三分衿. Regarding the second half of this verse, it ought to be understood that aside from this most recent assignment to Mino, Tadaomi had previously been assigned to leave the capital twice, first in 869 to Inaba, and again in 873 to Dazaifu.

with imperial command, is predominantly a collection of romantic poems (*yanqingshi* 艷情詩), known in Japanese simply as *enshi*, most of which were written by male courtiers assuming the persona—perhaps caricature would be more appropriate here—of a forelorn woman pining for her absent lover. We have seen illustrative examples of this with Saga’s own romantic verses. A detailed examination of how exactly Tadaomi has adapted poetic imagery and language from this anthology is certainly out of place here. Let us be satisfied in admitting, for the moment, that Tadaomi was intimately acquainted with *Yutai xinyong*. Now, much of the language used in Tadaomi’s farewell poetry, especially those phrases just mentioned—opening one’s collar and craning one’s neck—while certainly not exclusive to *Yutai xinyong*, nevertheless find their most exemplary usage in that anthology. In other words, Tadaomi’s farewell poetry is saturated with imagery and language taken from love poetry; what was once used to express longing between man and woman has, in Tadaomi’s (though not only his) hands, been transformed into imagery and language appropriate for use exclusively between men. The three poems presented to Ambassador Pei contain blatantly romantic language. To borrow the terminology recommended by Gustav Heldt, these poems contain language borrowed from romantic poetry, which, though ostensibly heterosexual, becomes, for Tadaomi and Pei, a means of homosocial courtship.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ For a discussion of poetry exchanges between tenth-century courtiers as a vehicle for establishing and maintaining productive homosocial relationships, see Gustav Heldt’s article, “Between Followers and Friends: Male Homosocial Desire in Heian Court Poetry.”

The first and third poem (nos. 110 and 112) are especially rich with this sort of language. In poem no. 110, couplet 2, Tadaomi addresses the ambassador in most intimate terms: “Though late the night may be, I’ve no doubt we will be able to see each other once more,” lamenting immediately thereafter “how impossible it will be to meet and exchange our deepest sentiments from across the four seas!” The phrase translated here as “exchange our deepest sentiments” is 交心 (*kokoro wo kawasu*), where the second character 心 means literally heart, a tell-tale example of romantic language. In the same poem, Tadaomi reassures his guest that the reason for his silence up until now “was not due to any reluctant to express my feelings,” where the original term for “express my feelings” is *rotan* 露膽—another stock expression found in romantic poetry, where it refers to confessions of erstwhile concealed love. In terms of its imagery and language, poem no. 112, more so than the other two, is romantic through and through.

We must attempt, as we did with Tadaomi’s poem about pinks and other related poems, to examine just what sort of relationship Tadaomi is attempting to invoke with these poems, how exactly he does this, and to what end he does this. With his poem about pinks, Tadaomi was attempting to place himself in a position of subservience with regard to the sovereign. This he did in hopes of securing a place within the court, something tantamount to social and financial security. He achieved this end by using the pink as a metaphor for court life and as a means of praising the sovereign. More specifically, though, he resorted to certain traditional color-tropes

and metaphorical language, made possible primarily through the genre of nature poetry (*eibutsushi*). What can we say along similar lines with regard to the set of poems presented to Ambassador Pei? One thing is obvious: with these latter poems, Tadaomi is not attempting to say anything regarding his own relationship with the sovereign. His poetic displays of affection are directed solely at his guest, Ambassador Pei. Moreover, these poems speak not to Tadaomi's own court but to the homeland of his guest. Poem no. 110 contains the phrase *takyō* 他郷 “foreign land,” translated above as “your native land,” poem no. 111 contains the phrase *shikai* 四海, “the four seas,” while poem 112 has *enjō* 遠情, literally “sentiments of one who comes from afar (or who dwells abroad).” In all of these poems, Tadaomi expresses the nature of their relationship as being something that extends beyond the sea, something that bridges two distant kingdoms. Just as the romantic poetry of *Yutai xinyong* presents us again and again with faithful women pining for their men away at war, or on some other official business, so, too, does Tadaomi invoke a similar relationship of trust and mutual understanding between himself and his guest. He is speaking, in other words, to an equal. Though separated by the four seas, the Heian courtiers and the men of Parhae will think on one another as faithful companions hereon after. Their hearts, akin to like-minded lovers, will be as one. The utility of invoking such an intimate bond should be clear enough: modern politicians do just the same thing when engaging in foreign relations. Intimate though Tadaomi's verses might appear, his purpose was wholly public.

His duty, after all, was to host the foreign envoy and assure their comfortable stay in anticipation of future dealings. Trade between the archipelago and Parhae was, since the reign of Saga, a prosperous enterprise, and one governed primarily by epistolary etiquette, as was seen, in the second chapter, during the exchange of letters between Saga and the king of Parhae. Tadaomi's poetry, written in a language shared by both kingdoms, was, in the parlance of modern days, a kind of contract or, if you prefer, a letter of good faith. This sort of poetry was just as public, that is political, as the rest. Even so, this sort of romantic language is wholly absent from Tadaomi's other public poetry. His poem about pinks, while containing subtle references to potentially erotic images, such as the strolling court ladies and the sovereign's tortoise-shell decorated bed, bears little or no resemblance to the sort of poetry composed for Ambassador Pei. Tadaomi, as I have attempted to show, was able to adopt various genres depending on his intended audience and the sort of relationship he wished to invoke. Furthermore, by referring to his guests as equals, Tadaomi was able to reinforce an ideal fostered by the Heian imperial household, learned originally from the mighty Song and Tang empires, which viewed Parhae as a tributary kingdom owing allegiance to the Heian sovereign. The repeated appeal to sentiment (*jō* 情) and brotherly love envelops an otherwise ruthless strategy with an air of compassion. There was nothing compassionate about it—business, straight and simple, was at the heart of these poetic exchanges.

Tadaomi's poem about pinks contains a number of strikingly original, involved (in terms of poetic images), or especially intricately crafted verses. Among the more involved and intricately-crafted verses must be included couplet 6, "This same mist, having cleared in the early morning, reveals scattered patches of color..." (晴霞初寸截 晚靄擬分將) and couplet 12, "Colorful tassels [i.e. clustered flowers swaying on slender stems] are sent flying in the wind..." (綵綫風斷縲 文綺露團章). Among the more original must be included couplet 20, "[At times the color of these blossoms looks like] startled courtiers, clad all in embroidered gowns, reporting for morning duty..." (繡衣驚奉使 錦服念歸鄉) and couplet 22, "The *ming* grass [sorely bewildered by the pinks' brilliance] can no longer properly count the days..." (莫誣推曆記 萱謾遣憂忘). Now, whether my readers agree with my selection or not is a matter of taste. Whatever verses are signaled out as being of special mention, all will agree that this poem is rife with refined, deliberately well-crafted language. This is not the case with the poems for Ambassador Pei. If pressed to select the more refined verses among these poems, I should like to select couplet 3 of poem no. 111: "Shinning upon the stones, [the moonlight looks like] pieces of scattered jade; glowing through [branches of the] forest, [this same moonlight looks like so many vernal] flowers" (澆石多零玉 通林碎著花). There is nothing aside from this verse among these three poems that could be signaled out as being exceptionally refined. The language of these poems is straightforward and almost wholly free of sophisticated circumlocutions or

metaphors. In fact, I would go so far as to call these poems deliberately simple. Perhaps Tadaomi suspected his foreign guest of being no great poet and so, as a means of preventing any offence, resorted to this plain style. I rather doubt this, however, especially considering the caliber of scholarship demanded of such men. It seems more likely, therefore, that this reluctance to include any overly-refined language is a result of the genre. Looking at Tadaomi's farewell poetry, some of which has been mentioned already, one encounters again and again the same sort of straightforward language. Poetry of parting is, as a rule, short and simple. Linguistically speaking, then, Tadaomi's poetry for Ambassador Pei conforms once more to the expectations of farewell poetry.

Trusted Peers: Poetic Exchanges Between Tadaomi and Michizane

So far we have examined two types of poetry contained in Tadaomi's collection. For the moment, let us refer to the first—represented by the lengthy poem on pinks—as encomium poetry and the second—represented by the three poems for Ambassador Pei—as envoy poetry.

The following table summarizes our findings thus far:

	Encomium poetry	Envoy poetry
What genre of poetry is being most notably utilized?	Nature or “still life” poetry (<i>eibutsushi</i>)	Farewell poetry (<i>senbetsushi</i>) and romantic poetry
What sort of tropes appear most frequently?	Mutual intensification of reflecting colors and allusions to court figures	Lonely woman pining for absent lover and friendship across the sea
What sort of language is used in this type of poetry?	Deliberately refined; intricately crafted	Relatively straightforward and free of refined phrases
What sort of relationship is being invoked between poet and audience?	Subservience to sovereign	Friendship among equals of different kingdoms
To what end, primarily, was this poetry written?	Appeal to sovereign and secure place in court	Ensure amicable trade relations

Aside from these two, there is a third sort of poetry found in *Denshi kashū*, which I would like to call epistolary poetry, especially that sent in reply to a poem previously received (*washi* 和

詩).⁴⁸⁰ Of the thirty-two epistolary poems appearing in Tadaomi's anthology, seven or eight were written in response to poems received from Michizane. No other individual received so many poems from Tadaomi. An investigation of two poetic exchanges between these two men—one from 883 and another from 889—will reveal a third sort of relationship, one different from either the so-called encomium or envoy type poems encountered earlier. Let us first look at the two poems exchanged between Michizane and Tadaomi in 883, when the former was granted a prestigious post in Kaga.

First, Michizane's poem:

Vice-Governor of Kaga⁴⁸¹

This family of scholars, as may be plainly seen, has fallen on hard times. How grateful I am, therefore, that my deceased father had once been appointed vice-governor of this land [of Kaga].

⁴⁸⁰ As far as the Japanese term (*washi*) used here is concerned, the word *wa* must be understood in its original meaning, that is, a reply, and not in its later sense of *yamato* or *waka* poetry. Both *Denshi kashū* and *Kanke bunsō* use the word *wa* in its epistolary sense, as a reply to a poem received. Incidentally, the *wa* in *waka*, vernacular poetry, also seems, in its earliest stages, to have referred to a poetic exchange.

⁴⁸¹ *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 100. The full title of this poem is “My happiness at being granted the additional post of vice-governor of Kaga while in the capital” 喜被遙兼賀員外刺史.

Our stomachs, up until now, had been well-fed on the remuneration [accrued by my late father], and it is to him I wish to give homage—all the more so now that he reposes in the land of the dead.

Rather than fret about the frosty snow that lingers over that northern land [of Kaga], I should prefer [for the meantime] to set my hopes on the splendid bounties of autumn.⁴⁸²

Tell me, you three [mighty] seals dangling there from my waist, whether you can fathom how I feel, now that [thanks to you three] a most benevolent wind bathes my house in the [rejuvenating warmth] of spring.

Having already been graciously granted two offices, I am granted yet a third, this time in a distant province. The benevolence [of our sovereign] is truly boundless. My fellow scholars congratulate me.

家門認得弊箕裘 最喜先君任此州

月俸曾因含哺飽 泉途更欲計恩酬

⁴⁸² Michizane need not fret about the cold climate in Kaga, for, as the title of this poem reveals, his appointment to that northern province was as a sort of representative (*yō'nin* 遙任), allowing him to remain within the capital (*zaikyō* 在京) and collect taxes from that province *in absentia*.

無勞北陸行殘雪 只望西成遇大秋

腰底三龜知意否 仁風為我漲春流

予先忝二官 重兼州任 恩澤無極 士林榮之

Tadaomi responded to this poem with the following verses:

Congratulations Offered to Michizane⁴⁸³

The men of my master's house are always clad in the finest white fox-hair coats; why in heaven's name should [men like that] have to bother themselves with governing the inhabitants of some distant province? [You, least of all, which is why you will remain in the capital.]

Long has it been said that holding multiple offices is a most precious honor—even the dream of which painfully tantalizes a worthless simpleton like me.

You, my dear friend, who may take up several offices at once, need not bear the seal of a

⁴⁸³ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 103. The full title of this poem is “After being granted the post of vice-governor of Mino myself, Mr. Sugawara [Michizane] graciously showed me a poem about his own happiness at having been appointed to Kaga Province. I have adopted Michizane's rhyme in this my response to his poem” 拜美濃之後蒙菅侍郎見視喜遙兼賀州詩草 依本韻繼和之. The interlinear note inserted between the verses of the third couplet is Tadaomi's own addition.

local governor (I say this because, according to your poem, you are to assume this office of Kaga while in the capital); I, on the other hand, must spend several years [in the distant land of Mino] amidst bush warblers and cherry blossoms.

Though our appointments were announced on the very same day, the [pleasant] breeze [of our sovereign's grace] did not blow [as generously] through my leaves [as it did yours].

師家狐白例名裘 閭巷龔黃豈化州

重席珍稱無價久 三刀夢誤不才酬

君拋虎竹承兼世 [來章述里世遙兼賀州之意故云] 我負鶯花度數秋

雖是除書同日到 甘棠樹下少風流

Michizane was granted a post in the ministry of ceremonies (*shikibu*) in 877, and appointed a scholar of letters (*monjō hakase*) at the State University later that same year. He held both of these posts simultaneously. Later, in 883, when this poem was composed, he was granted a third post, namely, that of vice-governor of Kaga (modern-day southern Ishikawa) in the north of Honshū, a post his late father and teacher, Koreyoshi, had once held. Michizane held all three posts simultaneously—hence “three seals” in the penultimate verse of his poem—certainly good

enough reason for his fellow scholars to congratulate him. The first verse of his poem alludes to the fact that scholars such as Michizane, no matter how successful they might have been in the academic sphere, could not support their aristocratic lifestyle without some sort of additional income, which often came in the form of remuneration for service as provincial governors.⁴⁸⁴ Koreyoshi had once held this same post, wherefore Michizane wishes to thank his deceased father for having paved the way, for “rather than fret about the frosty snow that lingers over that northern land [of Kaga],” Michizane could collect taxes from the people of that province without having to leave the comfortable capital he loved. The first two couplets, though especially the second, resemble a eulogy. Tadaomi replies to this somber sentiment with a simple, almost playful “The men of my master’s house are always clad in the finest white fox-hair coats.” Of course, this verse is meant primarily as a compliment to the industriousness of Koreyoshi, whose efforts in life secured a bounteous patrimony for his offspring.

The real purpose of Tadaomi’s reply, however, is not simply to praise the political success and fame of the Sugawara family, “even the dream of which painfully tantalizes a worthless simpleton like me,” but to complain about his own less privileged station: “the [pleasant] breeze [of our sovereign’s grace] did not blow [as generously] through my leaves [as it did yours].”

⁴⁸⁴ See Kawaguchi Hisao’s commentary on this poem in his annotated edition of *Kanke bunsō*, as well as his detailed endnotes to the same on page 663.

Remember that Michizane was seventeen years younger than Tadaomi. In 883, at the time of this exchange, Tadaomi was fifty-five years old, while Michizane had not even reached forty. Both men were presented with their appointments on the same day. Despite Tadaomi's seniority, it was Michizane who was granted the less strenuous and more lucrative post, allowing him to remain comfortably within the capital, while Tadaomi was ordered to make the long northward trip to Mino. The latter's complaint regarding "bush warblers and cherry blossoms" is meant to emphasize the rustic, peripheral nature of his new assignment. Later, in the year 886, as will be discussed shortly, Michizane would also be ordered to leave the capital for a position in southern Sanuki. In the end, then, both men had to serve time away from the capital. Regardless, considering his advanced age, Tadaomi's complaint in the current poem is well-founded. Tadaomi should have been granted the less strenuous post. This complaint, though situated in an ostensibly private poetic exchange between Michizane and himself, was nevertheless meant for a public audience. Epistolary poetry of this sort was, after all, composed with the intent to be shared publically, even if only with a small clique of elite courtiers. The sovereign and his relatives would also have been privy to these poems. Once the public nature of what might otherwise be mistaken as private poems is understood, the import of Tadaomi's complaint becomes clear: though seemingly a private complaint to an intimate friend, Tadaomi's intended audience, properly speaking, was not Michizane but the sovereign. By deflecting his

disappointment through the person of Michizane, Tadaomi was able to voice a complaint to the throne without risking any serious repercussions. This sort of poetry belongs to a genre known as *jukkaishi* 述懷詩, often translated as personal complaints, in which the author endeavors to reveal his sincerest, most intimate feelings. Unlike love poetry, which is no less sincere and intimate, poems of this *jukkai* variety deal primarily with the poet's deep sense of dissatisfaction at not being duly recognized or rewarded by his superiors, especially the sovereign.

Consequently, such poems tend to convey a sense of melancholy resignation, or even of hopelessness. The poet, recognizing within himself the seeds of virtue and high learning, laments his wretched fate, ignored as he is by those who ought to raise him up to a higher calling.

Though he longs to exert his talents in the service of a sagacious lord, the frustrated poet finds no opportunity to shine. At the heart of such poetry is the hope, however dim, that the sovereign might one day turn his august gaze towards the loyal poet. It is for this reason that we ought to use the term petitionary poetry for this sort of writing.⁴⁸⁵

Tadaomi presents us with a number of petitionary poems, many of which convey the same

⁴⁸⁵ The term petitionary poetry, I admit, is potentially misleading, considering that the word petition often refers to an official petition. I use the term more loosely, in the sense of an earnest appeal for assistance or personal recognition. The sense of an official petition, however, should not be forgotten, as many of these seemingly private petitions or complaints were intended, at least indirectly, to serve as potential petitions to those in power. Complaint poetry is a good alternative to petitionary poetry, in virtue of the fact that, while the function of these poems is petitionary, the mode of expression inevitably takes the form of a complaint. Either term—petitionary poetry or complaint poetry—will do.

message as found in his 883 response to Michizane. Two examples will suffice. Having by chance stumbled upon a toy kite, fallen from the sky and jammed in between the crack of a wall, Tadaomi bewails his own fate, governed as it is by the will of others, not his own:

Though I am told [my] actions, whether to advance or retreat, are governed by my own will, I lament [the reality] that [the course of my life], whether to soar on high or plummet low, must needs depend on [the whims of] others.

了得行藏能在我 他飛伏必依人

This same poem, like so many of the encomium sort, ends with a hopeful appeal to loyalty:

Gazing up at yon clouds [that float across] the azure firmament, I see [in them, as in me] a sign of noble intentions [namely, that I, like this kite, may soar to the heavens!]; let us depend upon [the hand of] our sovereign and [like the kite] break not asunder the cords [i.e., words] of his royal commandments.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 48.

向上碧雲如有分 憑君莫久縮絲綸

It should be clear that petitionary poetry seeks to achieve the same effect as the so-called encomium poetry examined previously, namely, to win favor with the sovereign. Whereas the latter works through appeals to subservience and humility, petitionary poetry operates by means of a confession or appeal, whereby the poet testifies, amidst much resignation, to his own noble gifts. Another of Tadaomi's petitionary poems takes as its central theme an insect known in English as the click beetle or the snapping beetle, the Japanese name of which is *nukazukimushi* (叩頭蟲, though now written 額突虫), literally, the insect who kowtows. As with the kite, Tadaomi uses the beetle as a metaphor for his own life:

While this little insect no bigger than my thumb seems to have mastered the art of preserving its own way of life, I, whose body is nearly six feet tall, am unable to exercise any freedom at all!⁴⁸⁷

寸蟲猶覺全生義 六尺長身莫自由

⁴⁸⁷ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 192.

This particular poem, unlike the one about the kite, contains no hint of humble submission to the sovereign, nor any prospect of a way out of his predicament. Even so, this poem serves as a petition to the sovereign, as though to say; “My dear sovereign, see how I suffer beneath the shackles of so many incompetent men! I would serve you most loyally if only you would bestow upon me the privilege to act freely on your behalf, without interference from others.” Tadaomi’s response to Michizane, in which he bemoans his lowly station, stranger to the refreshing breezes of his sovereign, belongs properly to this genre of confessional or petitionary poetry. One of the tell-tale linguistic markers of this genre is the use of “I” and “you,” or at least “I” and some other figure referred to in the poem. Tadaomi, in the penultimate couplet of his response to Michizane, sets up this dichotomy with “You, my dear friend...” (君抛) followed by “I, on the other hand...” (我負), while his kite poem likewise has “governed by my own will” (在我) followed by “depend on others” (依人). Tadaomi makes a similar dichotomy between the small body of the snapping beetle (寸蟲) and his own significantly larger body (六尺長身). In other words, petitionary poetry is marked by a deliberate effort to emphasize the individual existence of the poetic personality within the poem and, by extension, the real man standing outside of the poem—the author himself. Now, epistolary poetry is a fine medium for this, considering the presumption of two personalities, each intimately familiar with each other, engaged in poetic exchange. Tadaomi is adopting a number of features from one genre, namely, petitionary poetry,

all the while interweaving them into a second, that of epistolary poetry.

We may now turn to the second example of a poetic exchange between Michizane and Tadaomi. This exchange, which occurred in 889, centers on a royal banquet which Michizane was unable to attend. I have provided here only one pair of poems. Michizane and Tadaomi exchanged a number of poems about the theme of this 889 banquet. *Kanke bunsō* contains another poem from the series sent to Tadaomi (poem no. 291), while *Denshi kashū* contains Tadaomi's reply (poem no. 135).

First, let us look at Michizane's poem:

Birds and Flowers Greet the Spring: To Tadaomi⁴⁸⁸

Though flowers be devoid of reason and birds of speech, it is easy to see how Spring

[most pleasant of seasons!] governs all things by harmonizing heat and cold.

The imperial summons for sages resounds in the deepest valley [and also, I pray, in distant

Sanuki, where I now dwell]; even the aged trees rejoice at [our sovereign's]

⁴⁸⁸ *Kanke bunsō*, poem no. 285. The full title of this poem is “Upon hearing that a group of noblemen [within the capital] composed poetry at a royal banquet on the theme ‘both birds and flowers greet the spring,’ I composed the following little poem [on the same theme] and sent it to Mr. Shimada [Tadaomi], former vice-governor of Mino” 聞群臣侍内宴賦花鳥共逢春 聊製一篇寄上前濃州田別駕.

benevolent care for the elderly.

I yearn to see [nay, to be] the crane soaring across boundless leagues of clear sky
 [returning at long last to the capital]; I think upon [and wish to becomes as] plum
 blossoms blooming radiantly beside those palace gates.

Here I stand, beside this wind-worn shore [of Sanuki], my fragrance concealed, my wings
 tucked away, waiting—who knows how long?—for that time when I might [once
 again] enter those imperial gardens.

花不含靈鳥不言 知春為政調寒溫
 幽溪轉感求賢詔 古木方驚養老恩
 望鶴晴飛千萬里 思梅艷發九重門
 裊香低翅風沙地 爭得時來入禁園

In reply to these verses, Tadaomi sent the following poem on the same theme:

Birds and Flowers Greet the Spring: A Reply to Michizane⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁹ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 133. The full title of this poem is “Composed in reply to a poem by Mr. Sugawara [Michizane], governor of Sanuki, on the theme ‘both birds and flowers greet the spring,’ which the latter composed upon hearing that a group of noblemen [within the capital] had composed poetry at a royal banquet on that very theme. I have adopted the same rhyme as that used in Michizane’s poem” 奉

Your blossom [I well know] has not yet had the privilege of effusing its full fragrance in response to our sovereign's commands; this crane [which is you yourself] has been encaged, though its breast is [nonetheless] warm with poetic sentiments.

A dry tree stump south of the city is beginning to show signs of color, while a wounded sparrow dwelling in the northern mountain dreams of repaying a debt of gratitude.

Your spirit, like a blossoming [plum] flower, wafts its way towards the Imperial Palace; my heart, like a soaring seagull, yearns to fly to the shores [of Sanuki, that I might see you again].

What a pity, then, that a flower as bright as yours and a phoenix as brilliant [as the sovereign], despite the coming of spring, cannot enjoy each other's company in the same garden.

未堪芬馥應綸言 豈是籠禽詩思溫

南郭槁株初著艷 北山傷雀擬酬恩

君魂花發馳宮掖 我意鷗飛到海門

可惜翰華兼綵鳳 逢春不得共林園

The second couplet of Tadaomi's poem—"A dry tree stump south of the city [...] debt of gratitude"—is somewhat ambiguous. This poem was composed in 889, after the royal banquet in question, which was held on the twenty-first day of the first month. Tadaomi was sixty-two years old, while Michizane would have been fifty. Michizane was then in Sanuki, that is, southern Japan, while Tadaomi was, according to Kuranaka and Kinpara, back in the capital.⁴⁹⁰ However, an endnote to one of Michizane's poems, probably written near the end of 889, around the time Michizane finished his service in Sanuki and returned to the capital, suggests that Tadaomi might not have been present at the banquet either.⁴⁹¹ Neither Kuranaka nor Kinpara give any evidence to support their claim that Tadaomi returned to the capital in 887. Aside from what may be gleaned from the headnotes originally appearing in *Denshi kashū* and *Kanke bunsō*, quoted above, not much more information is available regarding this inner banquet (*naien*). *Nihon kiryaku* 日本紀略 (probably early twelfth century) gives the same poetic theme, namely, "both birds and flowers greet the spring," and informs us that a preface was presented for this banquet by Fujiwara no Harumi 藤原春海 (n.d.), though this preface, as far as I can tell, is no longer extant. *Saikyūki* 西宮記 (probably late tenth century) records an imperial order, transmitted by

⁴⁹⁰ As has already been mentioned, Tadaomi is said to have returned to Kyoto in 887. See Kuranaka, "Shimada Tadaomi nenpu oboegaki," 67, and Kinpara, "Shimada Tadaomi denkō," 246.

⁴⁹¹ The poem in question is no. 291 in *Kanke bunsō*, which is mentioned in *Denshi kashū zenshaku*, 239-240.

Mototsune, stating that courtly women holding the rank of *kōi* 更衣 or *uneme* 采女 should be given the honor of serving the meal at this same banquet.⁴⁹² There is, however, certainly no evidence to support the supposition that Tadaomi was at the banquet. Michizane’s endnote to poem no. 291 states the case very clearly: “Though vice-governor [Shimada Tadaomi] completed his term [in Mino] last year [likely 888], he still has not returned to the capital” (別駕先年罷官未得放還). Based on this endnote, and a lack of evidence to the contrary, it would appear that Tadaomi was still in Mino at the time of the banquet. This goes a long way toward explaining the otherwise ambiguous couplet: Michizane, then in Sanuki, south of the capital, is the “dry tree stump south of the city.” Tadaomi, likely still in Mino, north of the capital, is the “wounded sparrow dwelling in the northern mountain.” Both men saw themselves as loyal servants of the sovereign biding their time, albeit impatiently, in distant lands, until that blessed day when they would be summoned back to the capital, where they would again be able to exert their literary, and therefore political powers, to their fullest extent.

The third couplet of Tadaomi’s 889 response evinces the same sort of intimate diction as that found in his previous response of 883; the same dichotomy between “I” and “you” is brought to the fore with “your spirit” (君魂) and “my heart” (我意). That Michizane, on the contrary, does not employ these sorts of linguistic markers is curious, and probably reflects a

⁴⁹² For both of these references, see *Dai Nihon shiryō*, 1:1, 179-180.

difference in the poetic personae of both men. As must be clear by now, Tadaomi's poetry is generally more (ostensibly) intimate, and certainly more innovative than that composed by the relatively orthodox Michizane. Regarding the intent of Tadaomi's 889 response, it would appear, so long as my hypothesis regarding both men's absence from the banquet in question is correct, that the poet is speaking not only for Michizane but for himself, as well: "What a pity, then, that a flower as bright as yours and a phoenix as brilliant [as the sovereign], despite the coming of spring, cannot enjoy each other's company in the same garden." Not only Michizane, then, but Tadaomi are to be understood as the white flowers whose innate brilliance, hidden far away from the capital, has not been given the opportunity to shine in company with the sovereign. In terms of linguistic refinement, these epistolary poems contain a handful of deliberately well-crafted and original verses. The third couplet of Tadaomi's 883 response, along with the first and fourth (final) couplet of his 889 response ought to be signaled out for their exceptional quality—at least when read in the original. Generally speaking, epistolary poetry in the hands of Tadaomi approaches the linguistic refinement of his encomium poetry, while at the same time preserving much of the intimacy—without the stock vocabulary—of his farewell poems. In this respect, we might consider Tadaomi's responses to Michizane as lying somewhere half way between his encomium and farewell poetry. It is no coincidence, therefore, that his epistolary poetry attempts to simultaneously invoke two different types of relationships: on the one hand, Tadaomi seeks to

invoke a bond of intimate and equal friendship between himself and Michizane, in much the same way as he did in his poetry to Ambassador Pei; on the other hand, however, he is also trying to invoke a relationship of loyal service to the sovereign, just as he did in his encomium pieces. Inserting this new type of epistolary poetry into the middle of the table given previously, we find ourselves with something like the following arrangement:

	Encomium poetry	Epistolary poetry	Envoy poetry
What genre of poetry is being most notably utilized?	Nature or “still life” poetry (<i>eibutsushi</i>)	Petition or personal complaint (<i>jukkaishi</i>)	Farewell poetry (<i>senbetsushi</i>) and romantic poetry
What sort of tropes appear most frequently?	Mutual intensification of reflecting colors and allusions to court figures	Frustrated scholar bemoaning his lowly station.	Lonely woman pining for absent lover and friendship across the sea
What sort of language is used in	Deliberately refined; intricately crafted	Refined—more akin to encomium poetry	Relatively straightforward and

this type of poetry?		than to envoy poetry	free of refined phrases
What sort of relationship is being invoked between poet and audience?	Subservience to sovereign	Service to sovereign, on the one hand, bond of equality with homosocial friend, on the other	Homocosial friendship among equals
To what end, primarily, was this poetry written?	Appeal to sovereign and secure place in court	Appeal to sovereign, on the one hand, and reassert friendship, on the other	Ensure amicable trade relations

The difference between the sort of twofold relationship being invoked in Tadaomi's epistolary poems to Michizane as opposed to the more straightforward expression of subservience found in his encomium pieces dedicated primarily to superiors may be most readily observed in two examples of the latter type composed for Mototsune, Tadaomi's life-long patron. The first poem is as follows:

Folding Screens: With Gratitude to Mototsune⁴⁹³

Time and time again have I sighed in shame at my inability to compose verses befitting
 this most holy age, though I have gathered together countless poems in hopes of
 repaying my debt to land and lord.

And while I know very well that my verses, lacking much substance, are not worthy of
 even the meanest price, still, hoping that they might one day be polished in the right
 hands, I offer up these rough stones.

See how this [pitiable, uncouth] mugwort [i.e., the poet himself] dares offer up his meager
 poems, and all on the excuse that his head has grown white with age! (I am now over
 fifty, and my white hair is plain to see.) Look, also, how this same old bundle of
 grass—fit for nothing but making rope—desires now to rob the blush from more
 brilliant flowers!

[True enough,] Changling was once called a lord (Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 [685-762, r.

712-756] is said to have praised the famous poet Wang Changling 王昌齡 [c. 700-

⁴⁹³ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 88. The full title of this poem is “During the winter of the fifth year of Gangyō [881], the chief minister [Fujiwara no Mototsune] had some five-hundred of my Sinitic poems written on a set of ten folding screens, in gratitude of which I humbly offered up the following cerses” 元慶五年冬 大相國以拙詩草五百餘篇 始屏風十帖 仍題長句 謹以謝上. The two interlinear notes, appearing in parentheses in my translation, are Tadaomi’s own additions.

755], calling him lord of poetry), yet he could never boast [as I may] of having his poems written on such splendid folding screens!

常嗟雅頌聖時空 收拾博偏報國功

雖識骨輕無足買 恐拋石質有堪攻

蓬蒿獻草任垂白 [行年五十餘垂白可知] 菅蒯開花欲奪紅

曾在昌齡成帝號 [玄宗立王昌齡為詩帝] 不言詩上玉屏風

Tadaomi's second poem, only half as long as the first, is of a similar cast:

Wisterias Blooming by the Pond: In Response to Mototsune⁴⁹⁴

Clustered blossoms and layered leaves flourish beside one another, while the pond

reflects the evening hue of those blossoms newly blooming.

The future is plain to see: just as these purple flowers exude their fragrance beneath this

⁴⁹⁴ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 131. The full title of this poem is “The chief minister [Fujiwara no Mototsune] has built a pond in his eastern garden. A single purple wisteria, planted beside this pond, has begun blooming for the first time this spring. We drank wine together beneath its flowers and composed poetry on the subject. This poem was composed in response to the Chief minister's official command” 大相府東庭 貯水成小池 小池種一紫藤 至於今春始發花房 酌於花下 翫以賦之 應教.

single tree, so, too, will the fragrance of this house [i.e., Mototsune's lineage, the Northern Fujiwara clan] prosper to become the fragrance of our entire land.

重華累葉種相依 池上新開映晚輝

料量紫茸花下盡 家香更作國香飛

Even a cursory reading of these two poems should reveal their likeness, both linguistically and conceptually, to Tadaomi's encomium poems. Here we have the same admission of humility and promise to servitude. Here, too, we see some of the same language, such as the mugwort in couplet three of poem no. 88, as well as the reflecting and assumed mutual amplification of colors in couplet one of poem no. 131. What we do not see here, however, is any great degree of intimacy between the poet and his addressee. These poems to Mototsune are, in terms of mood, formal and, in terms of language, highly formalized.

CONCLUSION

As revealed from the very outset, Tadaomi, by interweaving elements of different genres of poetry into his own verses, is able to invoke a number of different relationships with his

intended audiences. Different genres presuppose different audiences, and consequently different sorts of relationships between author and audience. I have taken this phenomenon as granted.

What I have tried to do here is explore some of the details unique to Tadaomi and his times.

Exactly what genres did Tadaomi adopt? Using these genres, precisely what sorts of relationships

did he attempt to invoke? Having examined three types of poetry found throughout *Denshi*

kashū, namely, encomium, envoy, and epistolary poetry, I endeavored to show how each of these

types contains elements taken over from other pre-existing poetic genres, that is, nature poetry

(*eibutsushi*), farewell poetry (*senbetsushi*) along with romantic poetry (*enshi*), and petitionary

poetry (*jukkaishi*), respectively. That is to say—at least so far as Tadaomi's poetry is

concerned—encomium poetry, though certainly a genre all its own, can be more fully

appreciated when one understands the conventions of a second, or even third, underlying genre

resonating just below its surface. The same applies to envoy and epistolary poetry, as well. What

we see with Tadaomi is an interweaving of genres such that his poetry is able to simultaneously

achieve a number of functions. Each type of poetry, aside from its ostentatious function

(describing pinks, hosting an envoy, complaining about being neglected), seeks to invoke a certain

kind of relationship: encomium poetry depicts the poet as humble servant to the sovereign, envoy

poetry seeks to forge intimate bonds of mutual—and equal—friendship with foreign visitors,

while epistolary poetry simultaneously invokes two kinds of relationships, one of loyal

subservience to the sovereign (who might be termed the indirect addressee) and one of intimate friendship with the direct addressee (that is, the recipient of the poem).

All of these types of poetry share one thing in common: in each case, Tadaomi is eager to secure a place within the court; poetry was his means of accruing social capital in the increasingly competitive world of Heian politics. Tadaomi, at certain moments, would have us believe otherwise: “I shall speak no more of lofty posts or brilliant talents, for I see now how, in this life of ours, fame and shame are one and the same” (莫論職顯與才尖 自悟人生寵辱兼). He concludes this same poem with “I care not a jot for either official post or old age” (官位年老 兩無嫌).⁴⁹⁵ Granted, this particular poem was written in 890, when Tadaomi was sixty-three, and it might be thought that the man had indeed renounced any ties to political life. That this was not in fact the case may be easily ascertained by a review of Tadaomi’s attendance record at public banquets over the next two years.⁴⁹⁶ Despite such pronouncements of resignation, Tadaomi remained very active, both as a poet and as a political figure, until the last months of his life. His poetry, as has been shown, is primarily aimed at securing or reaffirming his place within the court hierarchy, either by direct appeals to the throne, by participating in the larger project of international trade, or through indirect petitions to the sovereign. I say this in hopes of blurring

⁴⁹⁵ *Denshi kashū* as poem no. 147.

⁴⁹⁶ Kuranaka, “Shimada Tadaomi nenpu oboegaki.” 68-70.

the boundaries between so-called public poetry, on the one hand, and private poetry, on the other. *Deshi kashū* contains a large number of poems that might be considered private, insofar as they depict what seem to be intimate sentiments not relating in any way to the poet's public life. That is, these poems do not appear to be invoking any sort of sociopolitical relationship; no appeals, either direct or indirect, are expressed. For example, three poems within this anthology bear in their titles the phrase “reflecting upon the ancients” (*kaiko* 懷古).⁴⁹⁷ Each of these pieces expresses the poet's desire to commune on a spiritual level with certain legendary men of old—men who, despite their supreme talents, abandoned the madding world of political strife in favor of the quiet repose of a hermit's life. The central theme of these three poems is noble resignation. No doubt, such poems do come across as being intimate, “private” pieces. When one considers, however, the likeness of these verses to that sort of petitionary poetry (*jukkaishi*) examined above, one cannot help but wonder whether or not these three poems, too, were intended as indirect petitions to the sovereign. Recall the numerous poems Saga himself composed on the theme of seclusion and the desire to renounce the madding world of mundane cares. Whatever the poet's intention, we should acknowledge a potentially public functionality in nearly all his poems. Not all Tadaomi's poems are equally political. Some verses are more intensely personal.

Take, for example, the following short poem:

⁴⁹⁷ These three poems are poem nos. 82, 137, and 162.

Whether sitting or reclining, I am forever working on a verse or two; if not for the poetry of Bo Juyi, I would have nothing at all.

This same Bo Juyi had a son, born in the year called *wushen* (Mr. Bai's first son was born in the year called *wushen* [which corresponds to the second year of] Taihe [828] of the Tang Dynasty, the very year I myself was born), who brought his father's anthology eastward over the sea.⁴⁹⁸

坐吟臥詠翫詩媒 除卻白家餘不能

應是戊申年有子 [唐太和戊申年 白舍人始有男子 甲子與餘同] 付於文

集海東來

Here Tadaomi playfully implies that he is in reality the son of his favorite continental poet.

Elsewhere, in poem no. 80, he fancies that he might even be the incarnation of Bo Juyi. These poems, and a few others like it, seem to be ludic pieces with little, if any, political function.

Looking at *Denshi kashū* as a whole, however, the vast majority of Tadaomi's verses seem geared at invoking some sort of beneficial relationship between the poet and his intended

⁴⁹⁸ *Denshi kashū*, poem no. 127. The interlinear note is Tadaomi's own addition.

audience. It is in this sense that I would have us refer to his collection as a public collection, even though the work itself was not imperially commissioned. His private poetry, what little is included in our extant editions of *Denshi kashū*, is private insofar as it seems unconcerned with invoking any sort of potentially beneficial social relationship.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Autobiography and Couched Criticism:**The Poetry of Sugawara no Michizane**

INTRODUCTION

As well-known as Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) has become to English-speaking students of Japanese literature and history, and despite the numerous translations into English of his verses that have since been published, the poetry of this legendary figure has not, to my mind, received sufficient coverage, at least not in English. Robert Borgen, as well as Burton Watson before him, have succeeded in producing a body of English translations that covers a decent portion of Michizane's poetry.⁴⁹⁹ Understandably,

⁴⁹⁹ I am referring primarily to Borgen's monograph *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, the only English-language full-length biography of Michizane, as well as the first volume of Watson's anthology of Japanese court poetry *Japanese Literature in Chinese*. More recently, Judith Rabinovitch and Timothy Bradstock have published a fine anthology of Sinitic poetry, entitled *Dance of the Butterflies: Chinese Poetry from the Japanese Court Tradition*, which includes some forty of Michizane's poems. None of these works deal with what I have referred to in this chapter as Michizane's biographical or memorial poems.

however, this coverage is skewed towards ostensibly private, emotive verse—the sort of thing we modern readers tend to value most in poetry.⁵⁰⁰ That is fine, so far as it goes. However, this is certainly not the whole picture. What I hope to do in this chapter, therefore, while drawing most explicitly on the work of Borgen, is present a picture of Michizane's poetry which is significantly different than that which has heretofore been presented in Western scholarship. I dare say, a number of the finer points I will make along the way, especially those regarding our interpretation of certain verses, have not yet been made by Japanese scholars either. I shall focus on three genres of poetry which Western scholars have, for one reason or another, largely ignored, and show how these genres, when examined through the appropriate lens, are both fascinating in themselves and absolutely crucial to a fuller understand of Michizane's literary corpus, as well as the history of early Heian Sinitic poetry as a whole.

The three genres I have chosen to examine are, in order of appearance, biographical poems (*eishishi* 詠史詩), otiose poems (*dokuginshi* 独吟詩), and memorial poems (*sekitenshi* 積奠詩). As shall be made clear in each respective section, these generic

⁵⁰⁰ I use the term emotive poetry to refer to poetry in which the narrator or poetic persona seems to be intimating private thoughts and emotions; we hear in such poems what appears to be an interior monologue. The primary function of emotive poetry is to convey ostensibly private emotions, and consequently dedicates relatively less attention to the description of public events or personages.

names, both the English as well as their corresponding Japanese labels, are partly my own invention. They are therefore tentative and amenable to future manipulation. Very briefly, biographical poems are those composed for concluding banquets (*kyōen*), held at the end of lengthy public lectures on Chinese historical annals, in which the poet praises a certain historical figure. Saga's "Zhang Zifang" is an example of this sort of poetry.⁵⁰¹ Otiose poems are those in which we encounter a solitary poetic persona, often one who is leisurely viewing a single natural phenomenon, such as a bunch of flowers or a bird. Here, too, I hope, parallels between Michizane's otiose poems and those verses, already examined, by Saga about the solitary life will readily come to mind. Memorial poems, like biographical poems, were composed at a species of concluding banquet held after the biannual memorial rites to Confucius, and which dealt with a given Confucian classic. Saga, interestingly, does not seem to have composed any poems to Confucius. By looking very closely at a number of key examples from each genre, it will be shown both how Michizane worked within the established expectations of each genre, and how he, despite his widespread reputation as a comparatively conservative poet, deliberately overstepped these expectations to fulfill some

⁵⁰¹ A full translation of "Zhang Zifang" may be found in the Appendix, item no. 29 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 42).

more personal, that is autobiographical, end. This autobiographical element is important, and often missed in considerations of his biographical and memorial poems. On the other hand, his otiose poems, pieces which have already received some coverage in English-language scholarship, probably in virtue of their apparently emotive, intensely private (which is often interpreted as a stamp of sincerity) qualities, contain elements of a highly public nature. In other words, I would like to show how any serious consideration of Michizane's poetry must look beyond the usual selections of more obviously emotive poetry, and examine in greater detail those genres which, perhaps, speak less to a modern audience and more to Michizane's contemporaries. I wish not so much to undermine or even problematize our current understanding of his poetry, as to expand that understanding in hopes of presenting a more complex, and consequently more interesting picture of the man and his work.

THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF SUGAWARA NO MICHIZANE

A Very Brief Biography

Surely the amount of scholarship in Japanese and English that has been dedicated to exploring the life and work of Michizane rivals that dedicated to King Alfred. Numerous full-length biographies of Michizane exist in Japanese-language sources. In English, the most detailed study to date is still Robert Borgen's *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, first published in 1986. I should rather forgo including a biography of Michizane here, and request, instead, that my readers make a careful read of Borgen's work. Still, for the sake of completeness, it only seems fitting to offer a simple outline of Michizane's life and work.⁵⁰² Michizane was the youngest of three sons born to Koreyoshi (812-880). Both Michizane's father as well as his grandfather, Kiyokimi (770-842), had won for themselves a significant of sociopolitical notoriety as scholars of Sinitic literature, and especially as gifted poets in the Sinitic tradition. Indeed, both Koreyoshi and Kiyokimi had risen to the rank of high-ranking vassals (*kugyō*), that is, those who hold the Third Rank or higher, and hence were permitted to attend upon the sovereign. Michizane was

⁵⁰² The little biography of Michizane included here is based on a number of sources, the most detailed of which is Borgen's *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*. Denecke, in her *Classical World Literatures*, examines the exile poetry of Michizane in great detail, 203-233 (for a brief biographical sketch of the man, see especially, 203-206). Among the Japanese-language articles consulted were the following, which I have cited only when the author in question expresses something not belonging to the realm of common knowledge: Sakamoto Tarō, "Sugawara no Michizane," in *Kokushi daijiten* (2010 [1979-1997]); Watanabe Shōgo, "Sugawara no Michizane," in *Nihon daihyakka zensho* (1994 [1984-1989]); Kawaguchi Hisao, "Kaidai," in his annotated edition of *Kanke bunsō Kanke kōshū* (1973).

initiated into the art of Sinitic composition from an early age, composing, as his private collection attests, his first Sinitic poem at the age of eleven. Having made ample preparation for the entrance examination, Michizane was admitted into the State University as a scholar in the prestigious Faculty of Letters in the year 862, at the age of 18. Eight years later, in 870, he passed the civil examination (*hōryakushi*), thereby qualifying him for public service within the court's bureaucracy. Accordingly, in the following year, he was appointed junior Private Secretary (*shōnaiki*), an office that required a fair degree of Sinitic literacy. This was, in fact, the first appointment of most promising young graduates of the Faculty of Letters. Then, in 877, after a series of other appointments, Michizane was made, first, Junior Assistant minister in the ministry of ceremonial (*shikibushō*), and near the end of the same year, professor of letters (*monjō hakase*) at the State University. When, in 880, his father passed away, Michizane, still a professor at the university, took on the further responsibility of managing his family's private academy, the *Kanke rōka* 菅家廊下, which prepared man a young man, primarily those belonging to the Sugawara lineage, for the entrance examination at the State University.

Sugawara, as will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter, was summoned by the sovereign to serve as official host to two delegations of emissaries from Parhae. The

first such appointment took place in the year 883, at which time Michizane, whose relatively humble rank might have proven offensive to the Parhae envoys, was temporarily given the additional post of supernumerary governor of Kaga (modern-day Ishikawa), solely as a means of impressing these visitors. Then, in 886, he was sent away to Sanuki (modern-day Kagawa), where he remained, as governor of the province, for nearly four years, from age 42 to 46.⁵⁰³ It was here in Sanuki, so far away from the capital, that Michizane, having gained word of a court scandal—known now as the Akō Incident—and eager to clear the name of a fellow scholar implicated in the scandal, sent a number of impassioned letters to his former tutor, Tadaomi, requesting his assistance in addressing the matter to their sovereign. Despite his absence at court, Michizane was able, through the cooperation of Tadaomi and others, to influence the outcome of this scandal, details of which will be supplied in their proper place later on in this chapter. His status at court, upon returning to the capital in 890, was immediately raised in virtue of the zealous patronage of Emperor Uda, who saw on this outspoken scholar a key to overturning the Fujiwara monopoly. In 899, two years after Uda had abdicated in favor of Daigo, and two years later

⁵⁰³ Kaga (Ishikawa) was located along the western coast of central Japan, while Sanuki (Kagawa) occupied the northeastern corner of Shikoku.

Michizane was appointed Minister of the Right, while his most powerful political rival, Fujiwara no Tokihira, was appointed Minister of the Left, just one step above Minister of the Right. As a means of gaining the upper hand once and for all, Tokihira managed to convince Daigo that Michizane, whose daughter had earlier become consort to one of the sovereign's younger brothers, was, through this maneuver, intending on eventually meddling in the imperial succession. Daigo, apparently taking Tokihira's word at face value, ordered Michizane, in the year 901, to be demoted to supernumerary governor-general (*gon no sochi* 大宰権帥) of Dazaifu, located in modern-day Fukuoka, at a great distance from the capital. This was, in reality, a form of exile. His four sons, all of whom had promising careers at court, were likewise sent off—exiled—to live with their father. Michizane died and was, in accordance with his own will, buried near Dazaifu.

Michizane's Private Collection: *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文草 (The Sugawara Family Anthology)

Now allow me to give an equally brief summary of both the structure and content of

Michizane's private collection.⁵⁰⁴ *Kanke bunsō* (Literary drafts of the Sugawara family), a private collection in twelve fascicles of Sugawara no Michizane's Sinitic poetry and prose was compiled by the poet himself and presented to Emperor Daigo in the eighth month of the third year of Shōtai (900). More accurately, Michizane presented three collections of Sinitic poetry and prose on this occasion: the first, entitled simply *Kankeshū* 菅家集 (Sugawara family collection), in six fascicles, contained pieces by Michizane's grandfather Kiyokimi; the second, entitled *Kanshōkōshū* 菅相公集 (Collected works of Consultant Sugawara), in ten fascicles, contained work by his father Koreyoshi; *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文章 (Literary Drafts of the Sugawara Family) was the third, containing his own work. It is important to note that Michizane did not only submit his own collection to Emperor Daigo, but those of his grandfather and father, as well. Michizane clarifies his motives for offering these collections to the sovereign in an official document entitled "Offering up poetry collections of the Sugawara family" (*kashū wo kenzuru jō* 献家集状, preserved in *Kanke kōshū*, supplementary material, item no. 674).

Extant manuscripts of *Kanke bunsō* more-or-less reflect the form of the text as it was

⁵⁰⁴ This summary of Michizane's collection repeatedly draws upon the following articles: Kawaguchi, "Kanke bunsō," in *Kokushi daijiten* (2010 [1979-1997]); Kawaguchi, "Kaisetsu," in his annotated edition of *Kanke bunsō Kanke kōshū* (1971), 23-82; Gotō, "Kanke bunsō," in *Nihon daihyakka zensho* (1994 [1984-1989]).

presented to the sovereign in 900. The first six fascicles contain poetry, while the last six contain prose, for a total of 468 poems and 159 prose pieces. Regarding the prose pieces, Michizane has included a variety of genres, including lengthy rhapsodies, prefaces, imperial decrees, and official petitions. This is the largest (extant) collection from the Heian period of poetry and prose composed by a single individual. The poetry contained in this collection, like that of Tadaomi, has been arranged in chronological order, covering a period of some forty-five years, from Michizane's eleventh to his fifty-sixth year. The last poem was composed during the spring of 900, only several months before he offered up his collection to the sovereign

The first fascicle of *Kanke bunsō* includes poetry composed between his eleventh and thirty-second year. Kawaguchi divides this period into three stages, namely, Michizane's youth (11-15 years old), his formative years (16-26 years old)—literally, his training years—and his years as a newly appointed official (27-32 years old). The collection begins with a poem composed under the tutelage of his first teacher of Sinitic composition, Shimada Tadaomi. Several poems address his years of study at the family's private preparatory school. A number of pieces composed in response to mock examinations in preparation for the future are also included here. Later, we find poems written about his

official interactions with emissaries from Parhae, as well as his life as a young official. In the second fascicle, we find poems composed during his years as a professor of letters at the State University (33-41 years old). Poems included in this fascicle speak of life in academia, including the rivalries and jealousy between scholars. On one occasion, Michizane considers taking the tonsure as a means of escaping the stifling university. Here, too, he laments the deaths of both his father and his young son. Artfully constructed poems presented at public banquets, as well as a number of prefaces to such events are also found in this fascicle.

Fascicles three and four of *Kanke bunsō* contain poems written while Michizane was serving a term of official duty in Sanuki (42-46 years old). These poems tend to express a feeling of disappointment, adopting much of the imagery found in conventional travel poems. More interestingly, though, these fascicles contain poems written about the everyday life and customs of non-aristocratic men and women living in Sanuki. Many of these verses serve as sarcastic jabs at contemporary society. In direct contrast to this, the fifth fascial contains poems composed during Michizane's most prosperous years (46-51), when, having won favor with Emperor Uda, he became intimately involved in court politics. Here we see him interacting and competing with such influential aristocrats as

Fujiwara no Mototsune and, after his death, Fujiwara no Tokihira. Many poems in this fascicle were composed for grand banquets held at court, including those in which Parhae emissaries were hosted most royally. Finally, in the sixth fascicle, we find poems composed between Michizane's fifty-first and fifty-sixth year, during which time Michizane rose to unprecedented power. Many poems in this fascicle were composed for court banquets, as well as a number for screens to be displayed at public celebrations at court.

BIOGRAPHICAL POETRY: REWORKING HISTORY THROUGH POETRY

The first genre I would like to examine is one I have tentatively called biographical poetry, based on a recurring term found in a number of poems throughout Michizane's collection, namely, *eishi* 詠史, the act of reciting or composing verses about continental historical figures. Though we do not come across a noun-form—*uishishi* 詠史詩, poems about history—it is clear, as I shall endeavor to demonstrate, that Michizane and his contemporaries recognized such biographical poems as belonging to a definite genre. More properly, when writing about historical figures, they seem to have implicitly attached and consequently sought to fulfill a number of rather specific generic expectations. That these

biographical poems belonged to a genre all their own is borne out by the social context in which they were performed. Without exception, these biographical poems were presented at celebratory banquets, attended by university scholars and the younger disciples of such scholars, held at the end of a series of lectures on one of three Chinese chronicles: *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian), *Hanshu* (History of the Former Han Dynasty, 111), or *Houhanshu* (History of the Latter Han Dynasty, fifth century). These banquets required each man present to present one poem on a particular figure whose biography appears in the given chronicles. Unlike the common Heian practice of several poets composing poems on a single theme, these banquets required each man to write about a different historical figure.

Michizane's collection contains seven biographical poems, three in the first fascicle, two in the second, one in the fifth, and one more in the sixth fascicle.⁵⁰⁵ I suspect the reason why we do not find a single biographical poem in the fourth and fifth fascicles is because these two fascicles correspond to Michizane's three-year period as governor of

⁵⁰⁵ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem nos. 9, 34, and 63; fascicle 2, poem nos. 91 and 145; fascicle 5, poem no. 372; fascicle 6, poem no. 437. The last example, poem no. 437, is a rather exceptional case, and will not be considered in this chapter. It was composed at a banquet celebrating the end of a series of lectures on the *Wenxuan*, and, though it uses the term *eishi*, the poem is not about any historical figure, but rather about Michizane's own past.

Sanuki, during which time he would neither have lectured extensively on nor attended extended lectures on continental chronicles. The first three examples were all presented when Michizane was relatively young: poem no. 9 was presented in 864 when Michizane was twenty, poem no. 34 likely sometime in 868 when he was twenty-four, and poem no. 63 in 871 when he was twenty-seven. The first poem was presented at a concluding banquet in celebration of his father having completed a series of lectures on the *History of the Latter Han Dynasty*; the second at a concluding banquet celebrating the end of a series of lectures (by whom we do not know) on the *Records of the Grand Historian*; the third poem was presented at a concluding banquet celebrating the end of a series of lectures given by Michizane himself on the *Hanshu*. These three examples are incredibly revealing, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to dedicate a large portion of this section to these particular examples. In these earlier examples, especially, we find Michizane using the genre of biographical poetry primarily as a means of commenting on the art of statecraft, and on the ideal ruler.

Huang Xian Reimagined as a Daoist Immortal

As just mentioned, the earliest biographical poem appearing in Michizane's collection was composed in 864, when the poet was twenty years old. Koreyoshi, his father, had just this year completed a series of lectures on the *History of the Latter Han Dynasty* began seven years prior, and this poem was one of several presented at a banquet commemorating the event. Having drawn lots, as was the practice on such occasions, Michizane ended up with the name of Huang Xian (75-122), whose brief biography appears not under its own heading but amidst a group of other similarly short biographies in the *Houhanshu*.⁵⁰⁶ Even so, Huang Xian seems to have been a somewhat popular figure in Chinese literature, thanks, no doubt, to a pithy but evidently inspirational entry in *Mengqiu* 蒙求 (Lessons for the Young, c. 746), a primer of literature and history for instruction of children, referring to the boundless, unfathomable nature of the man's virtuous spirit.⁵⁰⁷ This primer, along with its commentary, was brought over to Japan during the early Heian

⁵⁰⁶ The biography of Huang Xian is to be found in *Houhanshu*, biographies (*liezhuan* 列伝), no. 43, the annotated version of which is in Yoshikawa (2003), volume 6, 559-562.

⁵⁰⁷ A selected episode from the life of Huang Xian is highlighted in the standard commentary to *Mengqiu*, entitled *Mengqiu jizhu* 蒙求集註 (Collected Commentaries on *Instructions for the Young*), fascicle 3, under the idiom "Huang Xian is as boundless as the sea" (Huang Xian wanqing 黄憲萬頃). This account adds nothing new to what is found in *Houhanshu*. Incidentally, the first recorded example of an official reading of *Mengqiu* occurs in Michizane's diary, *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録, under the year 878 (Gangyō 2), at which time it was being studied by a younger brother, then only nine years old, of Emperor Seiwa. For a partial translation of *Mengqiu*, see Burton Watson's *Meng Ch'iu; Famous Episodes from Chinese History and Legend*.

period and was widely read by Japanese literati. Michizane's biographical poem follows the *Houhanshu* account quite accurately. The second half of the first couplet, the second and third couplets, along with the first half of the fourth couplet allude directly to events and historical figures described in the *Houhanshu* biography, though not in the same order as they are given in that source.

Huang Xian⁵⁰⁸

*On the fifteenth day of the eighth month [in the year 864], my father, the minister of justice, completed a series of lectures on the Annals of the Latter Han Dynasty. We all composed poems on historical figures, and I happened to draw the name Huang Xian. I furthermore composed the preface for [the series of poems presented on] this occasion.*⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem no. 9, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 113-115. This title is my own addition. The original poem has as its title—or, rather, in place of a title—the lengthy headnote immediately following in italics. Giving this poem the tentative title of “Huang Xian,” the historical figure about whom this poem was written, is simply more convenient than using the cumbersome headnote. Huang Xian 黄憲 (75-122) never took up any official post, preferring the more meditative life of seclusion.

⁵⁰⁹ I have chosen not to provide a translation of the preface here. Its numerous references to past historians and other erudite allusions would make it more a chore than a benefit to read here. Instead, I have incorporated its substance into my discussion of this poem to follow.

八月十五夜、嚴閣尚書、授後漢書畢。各詠史、得黃憲、並序。

Master Huang [the immortal] could not help but direct his step through this realm of mortal men. Like some vast ocean, boundless and deep, his heart [despite worldly events] remained ever placid.

It was at a roadside inn that [Xun Shu] first discovered in Huang the man whom he thought most fit to emulate; [it was Guo Linzong who recognized] in this same man's superior talent a paragon of propriety and good-bearing.⁵¹⁰

Chen Fan was ashamed to dangle an official seal from his belt before [a since deceased] Huang had ever been given the chance, while Guo [Linzong] sighed at turning his carriage back home [from Yuan Hong's residence] after but one night.⁵¹¹

⁵¹⁰ Xun Shu 荀淑 (83-149) and Guo Linzong 郭林宗 (128-169), both eminent scholars of their day, were likewise both admirers of Huang Xian's exemplary conduct, Xun Shu from direct observation at a certain inn, Guo Linzong, who never met the man, from written accounts. Xun Shu, having served in a number of unexceptional government posts, later retired to his home and a life of tranquil seclusion. Guo Linzong, once head of the imperial university, nevertheless refused, like Huang Xian, to take up any more elevated official posts.

⁵¹¹ For, had it been Huang Xian's residence, Guo Linzong would surely have tarried for several days. Turning back his carriage after only one night signifies that the conversation offered by his host, Yuan Hong 袁閔 (n.d., fl. latter half of second century AD), himself a man of admirable

His sole trip to the capital was in response to an imperial summons calling for worthy subjects from amidst the common populace. Think not [on account of this single visit] that a noble recluse like this [could so easily have] abandoned his [beloved mountain abode all veiled in] white clouds!⁵¹²

黃生未免在人間 千頃汪汪一水閑
 逆旅初知師表相 高才更見禮容顏
 陳蕃印綬慚先佩 郭泰車鑾歎早還
 僅就京師公府辟 徵君豈出白雲山

While Michizane's biographical poem draws heavily and faithfully upon material presented in *Houhanshu*, it includes something not found in any Chinese accounts of Huang Xian,

bearing, could not offer the same moral inspiration as that once proffered by the late Huang Xian. Chen Fan 陳蕃 (?-168), who eventually rose to become advisor to the prince (the post to which this poem is referring), was eventually stripped of power after a failed attempt to undermine the political monopoly held by the then influential court eunuchs. Huang Xian was repeatedly invited during his own lifetime by Wang Gong 王龔 (n.d., fl. 129-140), a very powerful man, to assume official posts. Huang stubbornly refused all these summons.

⁵¹² This is a reference to an idyllic abode thought to lay hidden somewhere atop Mount Kunlun 崑崙, home of Xiwangmu 西王母, the Mother of the West, queen of all immortals. The implication here is that Huang Xian's single visit to the capital should not be misconstrued as indicating that the man thereafter permanently relinquished his life as an immortal. On the contrary, it is just because he remained dedicated to that more rarified realm that he did not make a second trip to the capital.

namely, the suggestion that he was an immortal. In looking for other sources from which Michizane might have gleaned this idea, one could turn to the works of Bo Juyi, whose poetry was eminently popular during Michizane's time. Recall how Tadaomi even toyed with the idea that he himself might be a reincarnation of that illustrious poet. Bo Juyi praises Huang Xian as being a virtuous man who, despite his lowly social status—he was the son of a cow doctor—nevertheless outshone the pretentious righteousness of pompous noblemen.⁵¹³ Still, there is no mention of immortality here either. Perhaps the closest hint of anything supernatural, or perhaps the better term here would be superhuman, in the figure of Huang Xian is to be found closer to home, that is, in the brief appraisal of the man appended to his biography in the *Houhanshu*. These appraisals (*lun* 論), presumably added by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445), the compiler of these annals, take the form of simple commentaries about the moral character of a given figure. In appraising Huang Xian, we are told that the profundity of his mind approached the unfathomable depth of the Way (*dao* 道), and that, had he been born earlier and had the opportunity to study under Confucius, he

⁵¹³ *Boshi wenji*, fascicle 4, “The Pine at the Bottom of the Valley” (Jiandi song 澗底松). Zhu suggests, however, that the man to whom Bo Juyi is referring in this poem is not Huang Xian but rather Yuan Xian 原憲 (c.515 BC-?), for that is how the name appears in the manuscript from which Zhu is working. This Yuan Xian was a pupil of Confucius who, like Huang Xian, was from a poor family. See Zhu (1988), volume 1, 216-217.

might very well have realized the ideals of propriety and wisdom propounded by that most sagely teacher. It should be obvious, however, that this appraisal has been framed within a strictly Confucian discourse: Huang Xian was a profound and virtuous man, but he was certainly no immortal.

It is interesting, therefore, that Michizane chose to bracket his poem with two explicit references to Huang Xian's immortality. He does this not as though it were something his audience would be hearing for the first time but rather as a matter of fact, as something his readers would accept as given. The very first line—"Master Huang [the immortal] could not help but direct his step through this realm of mortal men" (黃生未免在人間)—suggests that this divine figure descended to the mundane world of men under some compulsion, though what this might be we are not told. In Chinese literature, especially that produced during the Tang period, Daoist immortals are generally portrayed as visiting the mortal world for one of two reasons: either they are being sent down as punishment for some misdeed conducted in the ethereal realm, or they come expressly to enlighten those mortals whose nature, unbeknownst to themselves, is destined to join the ranks of immortals. Considering the praise given to Huang Xian, it would seem that he felt compelled to visit the realm of us fatuous mortals in hopes of imparting some of his

infinitely profound and boundless wisdom. The monks and hermits featured in Saga's poems are of the self-same sort. The final line of the poem elaborates on this same message: Huang Xian, having come to this mortal world in order to provide men with a worthy exemplar of virtue, suffered himself to be summoned only once to the capital, after which he never again responded to any official invitations. While on the surface it may seem to some, suggests Michizane, that Huang Xian pandered to the powerful and followed the ways of the world, his soul remained firmly fixed in a more rarified realm. As indicated in the footnotes, this final line, with its reference to the mountain of white clouds, links Huang Xian to Xiwangmu, queen of immortals. This poem begins and ends with explicit references to the world of Daoist immortals, something not found in the *Houhanshu* account.

One ought to ask why Michizane thought it fit to reimagine the figure of Huang Xian in this way. Was it, say, a necessary reimagining, or perhaps merely the product of poetic fancy? When Michizane composed this poem in 864, he had not yet passed his civil examination (*hōryakushi* 方略試). Having been granted a seat as a student of literature in the State University only two years prior, Michizane shortly thereafter participated in at least one royal banquet in which Sinitic poems, including one of his, were presented.

Between the years 862 and 864, Michizane had been requested to write up two Buddhist prayers for two different noblemen.⁵¹⁴ By the time he participated in this celebratory banquet for his father, Michizane was, though not yet a court official, certainly well known and well respected amongst the aristocracy. That his decision to rework the figure of Huang Xian into a Daoist immortal was not the product of mere fancy may be borne out by the fact that his poetry would have been, even then, subject to close scrutiny at the hands of both his peers and his superiors. This biographical poem was presented, it must be remembered, during a public event, and as such was necessarily charged with a degree of political significance. Depicting Huang Xian as a Daoist immortal was a conscious and calculated decision on Michizane's part.

His own preface (naturally in Sinitic prose) to this poem—rather to the banquet as a whole—contains numerous claims for the importance of historiography within the grander project of state administration. Here we find reiterated the universal argument common to both Eastern and Western literatures, ancient and (to a lesser degree) modern alike: by preserving in written form the noble deeds of virtuous men, such as Huang Xian and others, the historian effectively lays down the blueprints for future rulers as to how they ought to

⁵¹⁴ *Kanke bunsō*, “kaisetsu,” in *NKBT*, volume 72, 84.

properly govern their subjects. Subjects, too, may derive wholesome instruction from these same records. It follows, therefore, that Michizane's reiteration of the biography of Huang Xian would, by extension, be seen as participating in the same on-going pedagogical effort. His biographical poems, as shall be seen again further on, were most certainly intended to serve as vehicles of moral instruction. Why, then, we may ask again, did Michizane decide to reimagine Huang Xian in the form of an immortal? What pedagogical purpose, if any, might such a transformation serve? Ikeda Genta, in an article published back in 1977, provides us with one of the finest examples of an argument that, for one reason or another, never found its way into the mainstream of scholarship on Heian literature. Ikeda demonstrates very convincingly that the concept of a Daoist ruler, one who governs not by aggressive policies and willful interference with the lives of his subjects, but rather in virtue of a more natural, unassuming, unstrained form of rule, was quite prevalent during the reign of Emperor Saga. Recall Saga's "Dance of the Butterflies," briefly discussed near the end of the second chapter.⁵¹⁵ Such a ruler is just as much a sage as he is a statesman, having penetrated the profound nature of the Way, of non-action (*wuwei/mui* 無為). His soul,

⁵¹⁵ For a full translation of this poem, see Appendix, item no. 45 (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 110).

wholly untrammelled, drifts about joyously with the immortals.⁵¹⁶ Ikeda's central point is that poetic references to mist and vapor (*enka* 煙霞), especially when examined in context, almost always connote this sort of enlightened state. My own research into Sinitic poetry, both that written in China and that composed in Nara and Heian Japan, confirms this. Sinitic poetry produced throughout the reign of Emperor Saga, as well as that composed during Michizane's time, presents the ideal ruler as one who, while outwardly demonstrating the Confucian virtues of propriety and learning, is at heart a seeker after the Daoist path, a disciple of the ever-blissful immortals. Consequently, the act of portraying in writing such Daoist-style rulers becomes, in its own right, a part of the larger project of state governance.⁵¹⁷

Tellingly, Michizane's preface does contain a reference to the very mists Ikeda foregrounds as connoting the world of immortals in general, and a Daoist ruler in particular. Having lauded the administrative virtues of historiography, he goes on to describe the scene of the banquet itself: it is mid-autumn (that is, the eighth month of the lunar calendar). The cool breeze, a long-awaited relief from the heat of summer, is intoxicating. Those who

⁵¹⁶ Ikeda, "Nara Heian jidai ni okeru 'enka' to 'shōyō' no bunkateki tachiba," 94-95. Ikeda shows, furthermore, that this same ideology permeates a number of Sinitic prefaces preserved in the *Man'yōshū* (see p. 97).

⁵¹⁷ Ikeda, "Nara Heian jidai ni okeru 'enka' to 'shōyō' no bunkateki tachiba," 103.

breathe in this cool, refreshing air feel as though they are partaking of the ambrosial mists found only in the heavenly realm of immortals (*jōkai no enka* 上界之煙霞). The image of an immortal drinking mist is a very common one; coarse food, especially grains, are always shunned by immortals.⁵¹⁸ Thus enlivened by this life-giving mist, the participants at Koreyoshi's banquet pass around the drinking bowl, engaging in a rapid series of draughts and joyous singing. This last image is an allusion to the famous tale of King Mu of Zhou, who, upon visiting Mount Kunlun, raised his glass to Xiwangmu, Queen Mother of the West. Michizane, by incorporating the image of mist and Xiwangmu into his preface, sets the stage for a poem in which his protagonist, Huang Xian, must inevitably be portrayed after the fashion of a Daoist immortal. Any other approach would undermine, or at least leave undeveloped, his own preface. Michizane's preface leads up to his biographical poem, which, by reiterating the same theme, serves as yet another instance of legitimization for the ruling class. Our own sovereign, suggests Michizane, may be likened to Huang Xian: though he appears to be engaged in the affairs of this world, in governing the state, his soul remains unfettered and free, profound and boundless; he ranks among the

⁵¹⁸ Saga's "A Donation of Cotton for Master Kūkai" alludes to this concept: "Not even the mists, sublime sustenance of immortals, can match your simple yearly fare"; see Appendix, item no. 22 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 24).

immortals.

Reimagining historical figures through biographical poetry as a means of praising the ruling class meant, for Michizane at least, the incorporation of certain Daoist themes. This genre of poetry is at once descriptive and prescriptive: these verses describe, or rather reiterate, the life of a historical figure, and, by doing this, simultaneously set forth an exemplar worthy of future emulation. Linguistically speaking, this poem, while set to a conventional pattern of poetic meter, is not particularly poetic, at least not when compared to most of Michizane's other poems, both from before and after this banquet. On the contrary, the verses of "Huang Xian" are taken for the most part directly out of the *Houhanshu*, with but a few minor syntactical modifications. Aside from the mention of other historical figures, such as Xun Shu, Guo Linzong, and Chen Fan—all of whom have their own biographies in the *Houhanshu*—there are no exceptionally erudite allusions or rare phrases. Far from containing anything akin to aesthetically pleasing or striking imagery, this poem is rather plain and unassuming. This is no accident. As a number of other examples to come will show, this genre of biographic poetry seems to have been dominated by a linguistic mode taken over not from poetry but primarily from prose—more specifically, from the type of prose found in Chinese historical biographies. That is to say,

biographic poetry, at least when taken up by Michizane, was a distinctly prosaic form of poetry, readily distinguishable from his other, more elaborately crafted poems. Again, the language here is simple and straightforward; the message, likewise, is clear.

Sima Xiangru Reimagined as the “Great Man”

Sometime between 866 and 868, Michizane participated in another concluding banquet (*kyōen*) celebrating the completion of a series of lectures on Sima Qian’s (c. 145 BC-c. 86) *Records of the Grand Historian*, one of three major chronicles studied throughout Nara and Heian Japan.⁵¹⁹ The identity of the lecturer is unknown, as is the month in which this event was held. This time Michizane drew the name of Sima Xiangru (179 BC-117), a famous man of letters from the Former Han dynasty, most well-known for his rhapsodies, especially those admonishing the sovereigns of his day for their wanton profligacy.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁹ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem no. 34, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 131. The date of composition of this poem is questionable. I have set the date tentatively as lying somewhere between 866 and 868 simply because the poem that comes before it was probably composed in 866, while the poem that immediately follows it was composed sometime around 868. As stated earlier, the poems in Michizane’s collection have been arranged in a more-or-less chronological order. Michizane’s biographical poem about Xiangru, like his previous piece on Huang Xian, consists of four couplets, only here each verses contains five not seven characters.

⁵²⁰ The biography of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 may be found in *Shiji*, section 12, biographies (*liezhuan* 列傳) no. 57, in *SSKT*, volume 92, 240-375. Two of Xiangru’s most famous rhapsodies

Unlike the biography of Huang Xian, the biography of Xiangru, as it appears in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, is an independent entry, and one of considerable length.

Michizane's biographical poem of the latter, being a mere four couplets, presents us from the outset with a different question. Whereas "Huang Xian" summarized most of the major events found in his pithy biography, "Sima Xiangru" invites us to ask what Michizane left out. Or, put the other way around, what he decided to select as worthy of special mention, and why he might have selected those specific episodes. The answers to these questions will reinforce what has already been said above, as well as provide a more nuanced insight into this genre of biographical poetry as it emerged in ninth-century Japan.

Sima Xiangru⁵²¹

At a banquet concluding a series of lectures on Records of the Grand

(*fu* 賦) appear in the *Wenxuan* 文選, fascicle 8, namely, "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous" (Zixu fu 子虛賦) and "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park" (Shanglin fu 上林賦). English translations of both of these may be found in David Knechtges' *Wen Xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, volume 2, 53-72 and 73-114, respectively.

⁵²¹ As was the case with "Huang Xian," and for the very same reason, this title is my own addition. This poem does not include a preface, and we do not know who wrote the preface for this occasion—though there surely was one.

Historian, *we all composed poems on historical figures. I drew the name
of Sima Xiangru.*

史記竟宴、詠史得司馬相如。

Little Hound [as he was known as a boy], that keeper of horses, whose name we
know to be Xiangru, has enjoyed great fame since ages long past.⁵²²

Not satisfied with being merely an imperial huntsman [Xiangru left the service of
Emperor Xiaojing], and, with the chords of his zither, joyfully won the heart of
the maiden Wenjun.⁵²³

He ardently admonished the hunting party [led by Emperor Xiaojing] held around
Changyang Villa, and expressed deep sympathy for those innumerable beaters

⁵²² The first verse of this couplet contains a lighthearted play on words. As a young lad, Xiangru was known affectionately by his parents as Quanxi 犬子, Little Hound, or Doggie. His surname, Sima 司馬, translates literally as equerry, that is, a tender of horses. Xiangru is, therefore, a little dog taking care of horses—a little beastie through and through.

⁵²³ Emperor Xiaojing 孝景帝 (188 BC-141, r. 156-141) took Xiangru into his service in the capacity of an imperial huntsman, which meant that the man would accompany the sovereign on all his hunting trips. Upon discovering that his patron was in no way a supporter of poetry, Xiangru decided to leave his court in favor of another sovereign. The romantic tale of Xiangru's melodious wooing of Wenjun 文君, daughter of a wealthy man, was quite popular in China, appearing also in *Mengqiu jizhu*, fascicle 3, under the heading "Xiangru writes verses on a pillar" (Xiangru tizhu 相如題柱).

forced to toil throughout the plains of Guangze.⁵²⁴

This great man, now risen to such lofty heights, [is favored by the sovereign]; there

is no cloud, however high, above which he cannot soar!⁵²⁵

犬子猶司馬 相如有舊聞

官嫌為武騎 曲喜得文君

苦諫長楊獵 多勞廣澤軍

大人今可用 何處不凌雲

⁵²⁴ Changyang 長楊 was the name of a villa used throughout the year by the sovereign and his entourage when engaging in hunting tours. Xiangru's rhapsody, "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park", was written in response to one such hunting event, in which, according to the poet, the sovereign and his vassals engaged in horribly excessive bouts of the mass slaughter of animals great and small. It is little wonder Xiangru and the sovereign did not get along. In another rhapsody, "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous," Xiangru expresses sympathy for those poor foot soldiers forced to work as beaters, chasing game for the sovereign, when they could be serving their lord more efficiently in a military function.

⁵²⁵ Though the account of Xiangru remains ever a tale of the past, Michizane, by using the word 'now' (*jin* 今), suddenly shifts his narrative to the immediate present, creating a temporary instance of double-vision: just as Xiangru was eventually raised to greatness, so shall great men of our age be likewise favored. After leaving the service of Emperor Xiaojing, Xiangru eventually found favor at the court of his successor, Emperor Wu 武帝 (159 BC-87, r. 141-87), at which point the poet was raised to a position of some power. This last couplet refers to another lengthy rhapsody composed by Xiangru entitled "The Great Man" (Daren fu 大人賦), in which the poet propounds the way of the Daoist immortals. Unlike the other rhapsodies mentioned in the previous couplet, this rhapsody does not appear in the *Wenxuan*. Aside from the version found in *Shiji*, this piece appears also in the *History of the Former Han Dynasty* and *Yiwen reiju* 芸門類聚 (Topical Catalogue of Letters). The latter places this rhapsody under the heading "way of the immortals" (*xiandao* 仙道).

As just mentioned, the biography of Xiangru found in *Shiji* is of considerable length. A close examination of its contents would be out of place here. In summary, it may be stated that the biography in question, aside from describing the episodes appearing in Michizane's poem in great detail, seems to be aimed at emphasizing two things. First, that Xiangru's rhapsodies were meant, despite their elaborately artistic and sometimes even abstruse verbosity, to admonish the ruling class. This is one of the few biographies in *Records of the Grand Historian* to include such lengthy quotations from the poetical works of its protagonist. Sima Qian has incorporated large portions of the two rhapsodies alluded to in Michizane's poem. Second, this biography includes a number of anecdotal tales about Xiangru, some of which are rather humorous.⁵²⁶ This is a rare occurrence in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, which usually limits itself to a rather straightforward, matter-of-fact manner of narration. That the private affairs of Xiangru, especially his romantic encounter with the maiden Wenjun, should be elaborated upon with such careful attention to detail suggests that Sima Qian held a special interest in this figure. After all, they shared the same surname.

⁵²⁶ See Aoki's brief introduction to Xiangru's biography in *Shiji*, biographies (*liezhuan*) no. 57, in *SSKT*, volume 92, 240-241.

The first two couplets of Michizane's "Sima Xiangru" are taken from the very first two sections of Sima Qian's biography.⁵²⁷ This same information could just as easily have been gleaned from a quick glance at the entry pertaining to Xiangru found in *Mengqiu jizhu* 蒙求集註 (Collected Commentaries on *Instructions for the Young*, eighth century).⁵²⁸ The third couplet refers to two of Xiangru's rhapsodies, the content of which takes up the bulk of Sima Qian's biography. The final couplet, similarly, refers to "The Great Man," a rhapsody (*fu/fu* 賦)—a lengthy, prosaic poem—Xiangru composed for Emperor Wu, an adamant believer in the path of Daoist immortality, in order to elucidate the otherwise obscure secrets of that sublime realm.⁵²⁹ In terms of content, Michizane's poem is not exceptionally rich or even all that exciting. To ask what Michizane has left out of his poem would be a silly question. He has, in effect, left nearly everything out. Interestingly, he has chosen to completely omit any mention of Xiangru's political career, a subject to which Sima Qian has dedicated a number of sections. Xiangru was a native of Shu (modern-day

⁵²⁷ Section nos. 1 and 2 in Aoki's edition (*SSKT*, volume 92, 241-245). To get some idea of the length of Xiangru's biography, Aoki divides the text into a total of 65 sections, covering more than 230 pages (this includes his commentary).

⁵²⁸ *Mengqiu jizhu*, fascicle 3, "Xiangru writes verses on a pillar" (Xiangru tizhu 相如題柱). The authorship and exact date of completion of *Mengqiu jizhu* remains uncertain.

⁵²⁹ This rhapsody is quoted in section nos. 50-55, while section no. 56 describes the euphoric experience enjoyed by Emperor Wu after hearing these verses recited to him by Xiangru.

Sichuan), which was at that time still a frontier of southwestern China not yet fully integrated into the Han court. Emperor Wu appointed Xiangru as an official envoy to Shu in hopes that the poet might be able to mitigate a dispute which was disrupting the local populace. Accusations that Xiangru had accepted bribes during this mission led to his dismissal, though he was later pardoned and allowed to return to court life. Michizane's "Sima Xiangru" contains not a single reference to this part of the poet's life.⁵³⁰ What Michizane has included is an inventory of Xiangru's most famous rhapsodies, along with a short—extremely short—summary that captures the central message of each. The third couplet avers that Xiangru's poetic works are meant to admonish extravagance and instill mercy in the ruling class. The final couplet, by alluding to "The Great Man," makes an appeal to Michizane's own contemporary audience, encouraging the sovereign to recognize the talents of worthy subjects. Therefore, while Michizane has left out any mention of Xiangru's political career, he has nevertheless succeeded in making this an explicitly political poem relevant to his own day. As was seen with "Huang Xian," one of the expectations inherent in this genre of biographical poems is that verses composed in this

⁵³⁰ *Mengqiu jizhu*, however, does make mention of these events. Michizane, if he did consult this primer—and he most surely did—felt free to make omissions.

vein be both descriptive and prescriptive, both summative accounts of historical figures and implicit injunctions to (ideally) receptive rulers.

As might be expected, the final couplet is of central importance to “Sima Xiangru,” and reinforces what has been said above regarding “Huang Xian,” namely, that the genre of biographical poetry is intimately involved with the notion of a ruler who is at once an adept or even an embodiment of the ways of Daoist immortality. According to Sima Qian’s account, when Emperor Wu heard “The Great Man,” his soul was sent soaring, as though it had ascended the very clouds (*piaopiao you lingyun zhi qi* 飄飄有凌雲之氣), as though it were frolicking unfettered amidst the entirety of all creation (*si you tendi zhi jian yi* 似游天地之間意).⁵³¹ In case there is any doubt as to whether Michizane was alluding specifically to “The Great Man”—for *daren* 大人 is admittedly a generic term, like *junzi* 君子, referring to any great man, regardless of whether he be an immortal or not—we need but look at the last verse, which contains the key phrase “soaring (or ascending) above the clouds” (*izure no tokoro ni ka kumo wo shinogazaran* 何処不凌雲). Such imagery is unmistakably Daoist. By holding up Xiangru as a paragon of virtue, he simultaneously holds him forth as an exemplar of the sort of man a diligent Daoist-style ruler ought to

⁵³¹ *Shiji*, biographies (*liezhuan*) no. 57, in *SSKT*, volume 92, 351-352.

emulate. Were it not for this final couplet, “Sima Xiangru” would fall short of the expectations implied in this genre. Were it not for this final couplet, the poem, while nevertheless descriptive and prescriptive, would yet fail to convey the specific sort of exemplar—that of a Daoist ruler—demanded of the genre.

While Michizane certainly transformed Huang Xian into an immortal, he did no such thing to the figure of Sima Xiangru. Rather, it would appear that Michizane left Xiangru just the way he found him in the *Shiji*. A more careful consideration of the last couplet, however, indicates that Michizane was indeed reimagining the figure of Xiangru. In the *Shiji* account—indeed in the rhapsody itself—the protagonist of “The Great Man” is an anonymous immortal. It is Emperor Wu who, after reading, rather, hearing, about this great man, experiences the feeling of soaring into heaven and ascending above the clouds.

Michizane has deliberately tinkered with this arrangement. In “Sima Xiangru” we are made to understand that Xiangru himself is the great man and that it is Xiangru who, because of the benevolent recognition he received from Emperor Wu, ascended to such remarkable heights. In other words, Michizane deliberately recontextualizes this episode so as to make Xiangru both the protagonist and, in a sense, the beneficiary of his own rhapsody. Xiangru becomes, through Michizane’s verses, the incarnation of an otherwise fictional immortal;

the man is apotheosized. This is precisely the sort of reimagining we found in Michizane's "Huang Xian," only here it is perhaps less obvious.

Reimagining Emperor Guangwu: The Poet as Historiographer and Fellow

Commentator

Both Huang Xian and Sima Xiangru were common men, albeit with some apparently extraordinary qualities, for which reason their recasting as Daoist immortals seems all the more striking. In the case of sovereigns, whose biographies are embellished from the onset with any number of superhuman or fantastic episodes, the reimagining is not half so obvious. Even in these cases, however, Michizane seems to be at work in, if not reimagining, then at least redirecting our attention to certain key characteristics which, when emphasized through the medium of a short, pithy biographical poem, serve to create a new image of the figure in question. I emphasize here the brevity of these biographical poems in virtue of the fact that it is this very brevity which lends so much power to those particular episodes or characteristics alluded to in their verses. In the summer of 881, Michizane himself completed a series of lectures, a task he had taken up from another

prominent courtier halfway through the series, on the *Houhanshu*. During the concluding banquet, Michizane drew—or, if I may venture upon conjecture, was given—the name of Emperor Guangwu (6 BC-AD 57, r. 25-57).⁵³² Though difficult to prove, I have a lingering suspicion that the drawing of names was not as random as it might at first appear. First of all, poems for public banquets were rarely composed on the spot, but rather carefully crafted several days in advance. This would mean, of course, that the drawing of names would also have had to occur in advance. Michizane drew the name of Emperor Guangwu, apparently at random. However, it would seem more probable that Michizane was given the name, considering he was the lecturer of this particular series. It would be suitable for the most honored man at the banquet to compose a poem on one of the most revered sovereigns in the *Houhanshu*. Just the first couplet of this biographical poem, which we may tentatively entitled “Emperor Guangwu,” will be sufficient for our purposes here:

Where did Emperor Guangwu discover those [five] racing stallions wherewith he [in
his chariot] was able to ascend [to the height of the imperial throne] in but a

⁵³² *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 2, poem no. 91, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 179. The biography of Emperor Guangwu 光武帝 may be found in *Houhanshu*, biographies of sovereigns (*benji* 本紀) no. 1, the annotated version of which is in Yoshikawa (2003), volume 1, 1-127.

single morning?⁵³³

時龍何處在 光武一朝乘

The biography of Emperor Guangwu does not contain any specific references to a group of stallions, to say nothing of five stallions each of a different color. Taken literally, therefore, this first verse might seem out of place. As Yoshikawa Tadao has pointed out, however, we must not take this as a literal reference. The term to which this “five racing stallions” corresponds, namely, *shilong* 時龍, appears not in the main text of Emperor Guangwu’s biography, but in the appraisal (*lun*) appended at the end of the text by Fan Ye, the author of these annals. In fact, this term appears in the very last sentence of the appraisal, in which Fan Ye champions the belief that the reign of a virtuous sovereigns is always foretold by some auspicious sign. It is in virtue of this omen that such men are publically recognized as

⁵³³ The term I have rendered as “five stallions” appears in the original as *shilong* (J: *jiryō*) 時龍, literally, seasonal dragons, or dragons of the times. This does not make a whole lot of sense until one confirms the usage of this term in other poets, both from before and during the Tang dynasty. The best example is to be found in one of Zhang Shuo’s 張說 (667-730) poems entitled “Prancing Horses” (Wuma ci 舞馬詞), which contains the line “The seasonal dragons are of five different colors, each from one of the [five] directions” (*shilong wuse yin fang* 時龍五色因方), where the five directions—the center is counted as the fifth direction—each correspond to one of the five basic colors, which in turn correspond to one of the five elements are phases in the five phase theory. Another, more significant meaning of this same term will be discussed below.

having been bequeathed the mandate of heaven. “If this were not the case,” says Fan Ye, “how else could [Emperor Guangwu] have mounted those seasonal dragons [*shilong*] and [raising to such heights] ruled all under heaven?”⁵³⁴ The original interlinear commentary to this passage explains that the rather ambiguous term *shilong* comes from the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), which states: “When the time [has become ripe, the prospective sovereign] mounts these six dragons, whereby he rules all under heaven.” This quotation has been drawn out of *Tuanzhuan* 象傳 (Commentary on the Judgments), one of the ten canonical commentaries (actually a meta-commentary) on the *Book of Changes*, traditionally attributed to Confucius himself. Taken in this context, the six dragons refer metaphorically to the six unbroken (and therefore *yang* 陽 or creative) lines of the first hexagram, *qian* 乾, which is itself a symbol of heaven in all its virile might. Furthermore, it becomes clear from this context that *shilong* ought not to be rendered as “seasonal dragons,” but rather as “the dragons that appear in the proper season,” or, better still, “the dragons that appear when it is time for a virtuous man to ascend the throne.” This is the proper context in which to understand Michizane’s verse. Consequently, a better translation might look something

⁵³⁴ *Houhanshu*, biographies of sovereigns (*benji* 本紀) no. 1, the annotated version of which is in Yoshikawa (2003), volume 1, 126-127.

like this:

Where did Emperor Guangwu discover those [six] dragons—omens of a prospective sovereign—wherewith he [in his chariot] was able to ascend [to the height of the imperial throne] in but a single morning?

Both of the translations I have offered for this verse are accurate, each in its own way.

Michizane's readers would presumably have simultaneously understand both meanings, especially if they had just finished attending a series of lectures on the *Houhanshu*. What is interesting, of course, is the fact that Michizane opens his biographical poem with a reference not to the main text of Emperor Guangwu's biography, but rather with an allusion to the very last line of the appended appraisal. Recall the example of "Huang Xian," in which I hinted at the possibility that Michizane might have drawn upon the appraisal (*lun*) section of that biography for inspiration when reimagining the character of Huang Xian as a Daoist immortal. The case is more explicit with "Emperor Guangwu," where Michizane is undoubtedly drawing inspiration from Fan Ye's appraisal. The first verse of the couplet immediately following the one translated above contains a reference to Emperor

Guangwu's birthplace, a reference which is to be found not in the main text of the biography, but in the very first sentence of the appended appraisal section. Interestingly, this same verse, while referring accurately to the sovereign's birthplace, asserts that on the night of his conception, a phoenix was seen flying low in the sky. This was an auspicious sign celebrating the birth of an up-coming ruler. Fan Ye's appraisal does not contain any reference to this omen, nor, for that matter, does the main text. The appraisal mentions only the sudden appearance of a bright red light that filled the chamber in which Emperor Guangwu was born.⁵³⁵ The phoenix, therefore, is a deliberate embellishment by Michizane. Daoist literature is exceptionally rife with sightings of phoenixes, and I would argue that Michizane's substitution of the phoenix here was meant to enhance the overall Daoist feel of this biographical poem.

Nor can it be said that Michizane, when he alludes to the auspicious dragons, does so in a wholly unoriginal manner. Whereas the original quotation—the one found in the *Tuanzhaun*—refers to the timely appearance of six dragons, Michizane subtly reworks this into a question: Where, he asks, did Emperor discover these dragons? His enquiry is not

⁵³⁵ *Houhanshu*, biographies of sovereigns (*benji* 本紀) no. 1, the annotated version of which is in Yoshikawa (2003), volume 1, 126-127.

meant to call up any particular place, as though these dragons could be found in this or that town. Rather, Michizane seems to be saying: How in the world could Emperor Guangwu have discovered these dragons, seeing as how they are so rare? Granted, Michizane's enquiry might be taken as a common convention of Sinitic poetry, namely, a hypothetical question meant merely for emphasis. Still, it seems odd that he would pose such a question, even if it were hypothetical. If his question is in fact hypothetical, what is the assumed answer? The most likely candidate would be something like the following: He found these dragons, despite their rareness, thanks to his inherent wisdom or virtue. Nobody but he could have found those dragons. Michizane has, through this unassuming linguistic gesture, endowed Emperor Guangwu with a degree of agency: the dragons have not simply appeared to him, as they do in the *Tuanzhuan* commentary; he must search them out for himself. This motif of the man in search of a dragon or some other mystical creature, including the pseudo-mystical crane, is another common theme in Daoist literature. Only the Daoist adept or the immortal possesses the wisdom and spiritual fortitude with which to seek out such a creature. Conversely, the only sort of mortal a dragon would suffer to accept into its presence is one in possession of an enlightened soul. In other words, by phrasing his first verse in the form of a question, Michizane reframes what he found in Fan Ye's appraisal—a

reference to a passive sort of omen, one which is revealed to the people when the virtuous man is about to become a ruler—and transforms it into a more active relationship between the sovereign and the dragons. The sovereign, like a Daosit immortal, is reimagined as having set out on a quest in search of those very dragons who would ensure his ascendancy to the throne. The element of discovery, of a deliberate search, is important here.

Michizane's biographical poetry, as noted above, draws upon the earlier prose genre of Chinese historiography found in such canonical works as *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Houhanshu*. Biographical poetry is at once both descriptive and prescriptive. Here I would add one more feature to this genre, one which this last case of Emperor Guangwu certainly supports: the Heian writer of biographical poetry engages with his subject-matter in the same way as did the Chinese writers of those same biographies, especially in their capacity as detached, that is, critical, commentators. Sima Qian, at the end of his biography of Sima Xiangru, gives a poignant appraisal of the man's poetry and his moral character.⁵³⁶ Fan Ye, as we have seen, likewise appended pithy appraisals to each of his biographies. In both cases, these appraisals express the historian's views about the moral worth of the historical figure in question. These historiographers effectively pioneered the art of reimagining their subjects.

⁵³⁶ *Shiji*, biographies (*liezhuan*) no. 57, in *SSKT*, volume 92, section no. 65, 372-373.

Michizane, following in their footsteps, actively engages with subject-matter, using his biographical poems as a form of appraisal or critical commentary (*lun*) on the moral character and achievements of the figure in question. Biographical poetry, therefore, reflects not only the genre of historiographical prose writing, not, that is to say, only the main body of biographical texts, but the equally rich commentatorial efforts, the appended appraisals, engaged upon by generations of earlier historians. Put simply, Michizane's biographical poems cannot be fully appreciated until we give ample recognition to the role these suffixed appraisals and commentaries played in the formation and transmission of Chinese historiography. Returning to a point made earlier, namely, that Michizane's biographical poems do not evince much of what we would normally associate with poetic writing—elaborately artistic wording and strikingly original metaphors—I would emphasize here that, insofar as this genre is concerned, the role of the poet as historiographer, as commentator, overshadows his desire to express himself poetically. His language is plain and almost wholly bereft of metaphorical expressions. Such a dramatic shift in linguistic modes is not accidental. The genre demands such a shift. Michizane, in his biographical poems, adopts not only the stance but the very language of exemplary historiographers such as Sima Qian and Fan Ye. Here the eloquently floral voices of

Wenxuan and Bo Juyi are momentarily silenced.

A Tempting but Erroneous Analogy: Fundamental Differences between Continental Laudatory Verses (*zan*) and Early Heian Biographical Poetry

I have emphasized these appended appraisals not only because they form an integral part of biographical poetry as it developed in early Heian Japan, but also because such appraisals are likely to be passed over by modern scholars in favor of the main text. I have shown, however, that this seemingly peripheral sub-genre, if we may refer to appraisals as such, are worth more serious consideration. If that is the case, what are we to make of the laudatory poems (*zan* 讚) found at the end of many Chinese biographies? Fan Ye, in his *Houhanshu*, includes laudatory verses for each emperor, including, of course, Emperor Guangwu, which are suffixed immediately after his appraisals (*lun* 論). His biographies of figures outside the imperial line, however, have not been granted this extra embellishment. The *Hanshu* also includes laudatory verses, though its author was more generous, appending such poems to those outside the royal family, as well. It might be tempting to seek in these laudatory poems a predecessor to the Heian-period biographical poem

(*eishishi* 詠史詩). Insofar as we find in these Chinese historiographical works clear examples of poetry being placed alongside (or rather, after) prose biographies, it is hard to rule out the influence of this practice on the Japanese writers who were so inspired by these continental exemplars. Even so, a cursory perusal of these laudatory poems will reveal at least three striking differences which ought to make us question the degree to which such poetry was adopted into Heian biographical poems (*eishishi*).

The first major difference between Chinese laudatory poems and Heian biographical poems is one of meter: Whereas the Heian examples—not only those by Michizane, but others by his contemporary, Shimada Tadaomi, along with Saga’s “Zhang Zifang,” as well—tend to be quite terse, usually four couplets of five or seven syllables, the continental *zan* poems are composed of rather lengthy chains of four-character verses. The laudatory verse appended to the end of Emperor Guangwu’s biography in the *Houanshu*, for example, is fifteen couplets, four character per verse, for a total of 120 characters, while Michizane’s “Emperor Guangwu” contains but four couplets, five-characters per verse, for a total of 40 characters, that is to say, one-third of the length of the Chinese *zan* poem. The second difference is related to language: While the language of Michizane’s biographical poems is, without exception, straightforward and rather plain, that found in the *zan* poems

is highly compact (hence the short four-character verses) and sometimes frustratingly opaque, full of erudite allusions and archaic expressions. Considered from the perspective of meter and language, therefore, Heian biographical poems cannot be rightly said to have inherited much from the genre of *zan* poems.

The third difference is more striking than the previous two. Laudatory verses found in Chinese histories are, as the name of the genre implies, thoroughly congratulatory. These do not serve as commentaries but as lofty praises, and in this sense laudatory poems are akin to eulogies or tributes. They are (ostensibly) sincere and almost irritatingly emphatic, sometimes even bombastic. Michizane's biographical poems, as we have seen, while generally complimentary, are neither overly emphatic nor too garrulous. In accordance with the expectations of this genre, Michizane seeks to fulfill the role of a detached commentator, of a historiographer, and not of an impassioned eulogizer. There is at least one extant example in which Michizane does precisely what a eulogy must never do: he draws attention to the faults of his deceased subject. A series of lectures on the *History of the Former Han Dynasty* was held at the Kangakuin (Institute for the Encouragement of Learning), a private dormitory and preparatory school for scions of the Fujiwara clan, educating them in the continental classics and getting them ready for the State University

entrance examinations.⁵³⁷ During the concluding banquet (*kyōen*), Michizane presented a poem on Shu Suntong (?-c. 194 BC), a man reputed to have been a formidable Confucian scholar and leader of a reform in court ritual during the reign of Emperor Gaozu (247 or 256 BC-195, r. 202-195), founder of the Han Dynasty. Shu Suntong is also known to have been very proficient at catering to the various demands of his patrons. It was in virtue of this adaptability, this ability to shift alliances, that he was able to serve, first, Qin Ershi (aka Huhai, 229 BC-207, r. 210-207), the second sovereign of the Qin dynasty, and then Emperor Gaozu.⁵³⁸ The following verses have been taken from the concluding couplet of Michizane's biographical poem, which I have tentatively entitled "Shu Suntong":

It is true that the Grand Historian [Sima Qian, in his *Shiji*] has praised [Shu Suntong] as being a man of great fidelity. Even so, it is shameful [for me] to think with what ease, not unlike the supple feathers of a wild goose, this man came and went [from one lord to another].

⁵³⁷ For a brief summary of the Kangakuin 勸学院, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 126-128.

⁵³⁸ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 2, poem no. 145, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 219-220. A biography of Shu Suntong 叔孫通 appears in the middle of a group of biographies in *Hanshu*, fascicle 43, biographies (*liezhuan* 列伝) no. 13. Another biography of the same man appears in *Shiji*, fascicle 39, biographies (*liezhuan* 列伝) no. 99.

太史公雖稱大直 猶慙去就甚鴻毛

Here we see a wonderful instance of Michizane acting in the capacity of a commentator or appraiser of historical figures. Sima Qian, in a laudatory poem (*zan*) appended to his biography of Shu Sun tong, refers to him as a man of great fidelity (*dazhi* 大直), a man who is as honest as they come. Using a proverb taken out of the forty-fifth chapter of *Daodejing*, Sima Qian reminds his readers that the greatest fidelity, that which is straightest, often appears crooked (*dazhi ruoqu* 大直若詘). In this way, the historian justifies the apparent changeability of Shu Sun tong's shifting loyalty. Indeed, says Sima Qian, it may have appeared on the surface that Shu Sun tong was pandering to different lords simply to save his own skin. Those with wisdom, however, will realize that his was a loyalty of greater proportion, one that excelled that demonstrated by lesser mortals. This man's loyalty lay in his ability to adapt to the times and to serve each lord in accordance with what was most fitting to each. Such is the gist of Sima Qian's laudatory poem. The *Hanshu* tells us, for example, that Shu Sun tong, when he came into the service of Emperor Gaozu, promptly abandoned his old scholarly robes in favor of a wardrobe less offensive to

the critical eye of his new lord. Following in the footsteps of the *Shiji*, this *Hanshu* account likewise contains a concluding *zan* poem, which, like that by Sima Qian, is unequivocally laudatory. Michizane, while alluding to a number of (apparently) praiseworthy episodes found throughout the *Hanshu* account, challenges the canonical interpretation of these deeds.

In an attempt to explain why Michizane might have desired to undermine canonical commentary in this way, we might consider the sociopolitical venue of this poem. This poem was most likely composed in 884, probably sometime in the winter, when Michizane was forty years old.⁵³⁹ The date of composition is important. Emperor Kōkō (830-887, r. 884-887), then fifty-five years old, had just been appointed sovereign by Fujiwara no Mototsune, Tadaomi's most ardent patron, who was himself nominally a Regent but, for all intents and purposes, the real head of state—more powerful, by far, than any sovereign of his time. More precisely, Emperor Kōkō was enthroned on the twenty-third day of the second month, and it was only three months later, on the ninth day of the fifth month, that

⁵³⁹ Though the headnote to the poem does not give us a precise date, its place in the anthology, namely, between poems composed in that year, makes it almost certain that this poem was also composed in 884. Furthermore, we know for certain that poem no. 144 was composed, or at least presented, on the ninth day of the ninth month, while poem no. 147 was composed on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month. Consequently, “Shu Suntong” must have been composed between the ninth and the twelfth month, that is, sometime near the end of autumn or during the winter of 884.

Kōkō summoned all the professors, including Michizane, to offer their scholarly opinions regarding the duties of the Chief Minister (*dajō daijin*), a position then held by Mototsune. Lofty though this position might have been, its duties were by no means clear. Emperor Kōkō wished to settle the matter once and for all. Most scholars, pandering to the will of Mototsune, insisted that the office of Chief Minister was one that held real power, and a great deal of power at that. Such a conclusion would have suited Mototsune well, and it would have ensured that those scholars who had provided him with this conclusion would be duly rewarded. Michizane, however, did something quite remarkable. He averred that the office of Chief Minister was, essentially, not a permanent one, and had no real basis in the Tang legal codes.⁵⁴⁰ Despite Michizane's outspoken opinion, Mototsune was nevertheless granted special powers equivalent to what later came to be known as the Regent (*kanpaku*). Naturally, Mototsune would not have looked at Michizane in the same light after this event. Nevertheless, they seem to have continued to interact with one another on more-or-less cordial terms. Both Michizane and Mototsune were politically savvy men. Any open display of hostility would have been extremely detrimental for either of them.

⁵⁴⁰ Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 154-156. For the exact dates given above, as well as those immediately following, see *Kanke bunsō*, "kaisetsu," in *NKBT*, volume 72, 87.

Besides, Michizane's teacher was Tadaomi, who was still alive at this time. It might have been difficult for Mototsune to publically express much displeasure at a disciple of the man to whom he showed such favor. The fact that Michizane presented his similarly outspoken "Shu Suntong" at a banquet held perhaps only six or seven months after this incident, and that he did so at the Kangakuin, the veritable heart of Fujiwara academia, is proof that he was not immediately ostracized from the Fujiwara clique. In the same year, likely shortly after the concluding banquet, Michizane was invited to another concluding banquet celebrating the completion of yet another series of lectures, this time on the *Xiaojing* (Classic of Filial Piety). Most significantly, this latter banquet was held in Mototsune's residence.⁵⁴¹ Ostensibly, then, there were no hard feelings between Michizane and Mototsune.

Michizane's "Shu Suntong" was presented only several months after he had offered his bold opinions about the office of Chief Minister, opinions which, while founded in sound, objective analysis of both Japanese (Sinitic) and Tang legal codes, were nevertheless

⁵⁴¹ The fact that this particular banquet was held in one of the residences owned by Mototsune should not be construed to mean that this event was somehow less public or, to put it the other way around, any more private, in nature than those banquets already mentioned. Mototsune, as already stated, was at this time the most powerful man at court. Any banquet hosted by Mototsune would have been viewed as an event of utmost significance to all concerned.

controversial. He presented this biographical poem in Fujiwara territory. In this poem, Michizane condemns a man for pandering to those in power. He does this in the face of a canonical text that states just the opposite. This is the very same thing he did in regards to the scholarly consensus surrounding the duties of a Chief Minister. It is reasonable to assume, I think, that Michizane is using “Shu Suntong” as a means of chastising those of his colleagues, especially scions of the Fujiwara clan, for pandering to the will of Mototsune earlier that year. Even if my supposition cannot be accepted unconditionally, it cannot be denied that those present at the concluding banquet must have received Michizane’s poem against a shared context; the memory of Michizane’s rebellious behavior earlier that year would have been fresh in their minds. In this way, “Shu Suntong” may be interpreted as a clever jab at weak-kneed professors. For such a feat the genre of biographical poetry was ideally suited. Offering moral appraisals of historical figures was accepted practice in Chinese historiography. Michizane could not be found guilty on that account. Compared to his earlier, rather outspoken remarks in response to Emperor Kōkō’s summons, this sarcastic jab, couched as it is in the guise of a wider historiographical project, must have seemed somewhat less daring. After all, as we have already seen, biographical poems were expected to be not merely descriptive, but also prescriptive. When

considered within this very specific historical context, Michizane's overturning of the canonical appraisal of Shu Sun tong takes on a much more political message: pander not to power.

As a conclusion to this section, allow me to reiterate the fact that biographical poems, along with all that has been attributed to the genre thus far, were more often than not implicitly autobiographical. This goes hand-in-hand with their prescriptive function, and should be clear from what has just been said regarding "Shu Sun tong." While this last poem was used as a means of scolding his peers, Michizane also used biographical poems to praise his own lineage. In a concluding banquet held in 871 for a series of lectures given by Michizane himself on the *Hanshu*, Michizane presented a biographical poem on Sima Qian, compiler of the *Shiji*.⁵⁴² As I suggested earlier in regards to the purportedly random drawing of names at these banquets, I rather suspect that there was a significant element of forethought into who received which name. In both instances where Michizane is known to have conducted the lectures, he is recorded as having presented poetry on major historical figures—once on Emperor Guangwu, this time on Sima Qian. Michizane's poem,

⁵⁴² *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem no. 63, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 152. There are two canonical biographies of Sima Qian: the first with an autobiography written by Sima Qian himself, and can be found in his *Shiji*, fascicle 70, biographies (*liezhuan* 列伝) no. 130; the second appears in the *Hanshu*, fascicle 62, biographies (*liezhuan* 列伝) no. 32.

tentatively entitled “Sima Qian” was an exceptionally short one, consisting of but two couplets:

Sima Qian

At a concluding banquet for a series of lectures on the History of the Former Han Dynasty, we [all] composed poems on historical figures. I drew the name of Sima Qian.

In his youth [Sima Qian] managed to learn to decipher the ancient scripts. Who could have imagined that the descendants of the Sima house would each end up serving in different kingdoms?⁵⁴³

Whenever I think on how Liu Xiang praised [Sima Qian’s *Shiji*] as being a superior work of history, I bow again with reverence in the direction of those clouds

⁵⁴³ Ancient scripts (*guwen* 古文) refer to pre-Qin characters, such as those still surviving on ceremonial cauldrons, as well as oracular inscriptions on turtle shells and bones. Another possible interpretation of the second verse in this couplet is that whereas the first ancestors of the Sima clan served in a military capacity, Sima Qian, oddly enough, ended up serving as a lettered historian. This interpretation works quite well.

drifting above Longmen.⁵⁴⁴

少日纔知誦古文 何圖祖業得相分

每思劉向稱良史 再拜龍門一片雲

On the surface, these verses do not appear to be autobiographical. Closer examination, however, reveals two almost certainly autobiographical elements. It is worth noting the extreme brevity of this poem. The *Hanshu* contains a lengthy, rich biography of Sima Qian. Despite this, Michizane, as was the case with his “Sima Xiangru,” has decided to essentially leave everything out. The first couplet seems only vaguely biographical, while the second couplet looks more like a laudatory gesture than anything strictly historical. Simply put, this poem does not have much to do with Sima Qian, its ostensive protagonist. I propose that Michizane is using the genre of biographical poetry to make a statement about the Sugawara house. As my footnote to the first couplet indicates, interpretation of the second verse—“Who could have imagined, etc.”—is still open for discussion. Herein

⁵⁴⁴ Liu Xian 劉向 (77 BC-6) was a prominent scholar, government official, and historian whose praise for the *Shiji* as one of the finest works of historiography ever written may be found in the *Hanshu* biography of Sima Qian. Longmen 龍門, literally Dragon Gate, refers to the birthplace of Sima Qian. More of this below.

lies what I suspect might be the first autobiographical element in “Sima Qian.” My translation of this verse is admittedly free. A more literal translation would look something like this: “Who could have predicted that the ancestral occupation [of the Sima house] would [later] be separated” (何圖祖業得相分), namely, that the descendants would take up a different occupation than had their ancestors. The original term for ancestral occupation is *zuye* 祖業, which refers to a hereditary station. The Sugawara family, who had by the time of Michizane become somewhat well-established as a family of Sinitic scholars, was in fact descended from the Haji clan, members of which had been traditionally in charge of funerals.⁵⁴⁵ Michizane, by making this rather ambiguous remark about the ancestral occupation of the Sima house, seems to simultaneously be asserting the remarkable transformation in the nature of his own lineage, from undertakers to men of letters. Even the first verse might be taken as autobiographical, for Michizane, too, learned to read Sinitic script in his youth. Sima Qian, in his autobiography, tells us that he finally mastered the ancient scripts at the age of ten. Michizane, in a headnote to the first poem in his collection, likewise tells us that he first began composing Sinitic poetry at the age of eleven.

⁵⁴⁵ Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 24-28.

The second autobiographical element is to be found in Michizane's reference to Longmen 龍門, or Dragon Gate. This is at once the birthplace of Sima Qian and, more importantly, a nickname of the Sugawara family private academy, in virtue of the success of this academy in preparing candidates for the State University entrance exam. Thus, while seemingly echoing Liu Xiang in praising the work of Sima Qian, Michizane is in reality lauding his own family. More specifically, he is praising the family's private academy, that is, their prominent place in ninth-century academia. This last act of praise is lent even more weight if we interpret the "ancestral occupation" in the first couplet as referring to the humble origins of the Haji clan. Look how far we have come, boasts Michizane, from undertakers to academic luminaries. Who would have dreamed of such a thing? I would like to add something further: Liu Xiang praises the annals of Sima Qian as being a work of superior historiography. Now, the term for "superior history" in the original is *liangshi* 良史, literally good history, or good historian—the two senses are interchangeable. In Nara and Heian Japan, this term would have been synonymous with *wenshi* 文史, which referred broadly to the world of literature and history, and, more specifically, to scholars involved in the study and promulgation of these subjects. As we have seen with Saga and his literary project, both history and literature were understood as essential factors in the

proper administration of an ideal state.⁵⁴⁶ Consequently, Michizane's use of the term *liangshi*, “good historian,” is meant to resonate with the term *wenshi*, which by this time referred, probably more-or-less exclusively, to university scholars, and more specifically with those belonging to the prestigious Faculty of Letters. Liu Xiang's praise of the *Shiji*, therefore, becomes praise for contemporary Sugawara scholars—not merely those belonging to the Sugawara family, of course, but all those studying at their private academy. Shimada Tadaomi, in his own collection, includes a biographical poem presented at this very banquet. In the headnote to this poem, Tadaomi states explicitly that this event was arranged and attended exclusively by disciples of Michizane.⁵⁴⁷ Considering the audience, it is no wonder that Michizane chose to adapt the genre of biographical poetry as a means of offering praise to his family and those scholars most indebted to his own instruction.

From what has been discussed above, we may signal out the following seven generic features of ninth-century biographical poetry:

⁵⁴⁶ Ikeda, “Nara Heian jidai ni okeru ‘enka’ to ‘shōyō’ no bunkateki tachiba,” 94.

⁵⁴⁷ *Denshi kashū*, fascicle 1, poem no. 55, 98-102.

1. Biographical poems tend to be very short—often four couplets in length.
2. Consequently, they are extremely selective in regard to content; the poet makes conscious and, therefore, revealing decisions about what to include and what to omit from his base text.
3. They adopt a straightforward, prose-like style of language reminiscent of the historical annals to which they refer.
4. They are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive.
5. In their prescriptive role, when depicting the ideal ruler, these poems most often do so using images of Daoist immortals.
6. They are not merely laudatory (like *zan* poetry), but encourage the poet to serve as a commentator, and sometimes even a critic of historical figures; here they take cues from the appraisals (*lun*) often appended to continental biographies.
7. They are, in some way, implicitly autobiographical and contemporary; despite referring back to historical figures from a different time and country, these poems are highly political and, if they are to be fully appreciated, must be understood within a specific contemporary social context.

Naturally, not every biographical poem includes all of these features. The last two poems discussed above, for instance, do not include any allusions to Daoist immortals. This last feature may not be essential to the genre after all. Or, it may be essential only to a certain (yet unnamed) sub-genre. A broader analysis of biographical poems including those composed by other ninth-century writers, such as, for example those by Shimada Tadaomi and others, would certainly provide us with a number of additional features not readily found in Michizane's examples. The fact remains, however, that insofar as we limit our examination to the extant biographical poems composed by Michizane, the above list of seven features certainly does seem to paint a fair picture of the genre as it emerged in the ninth century.

OTIOSE POETRY: THE SOLITARY OBSERVER

In the case of biographical poems, I adopted a term, *eishi*, that is, the act of composing verses on historical figures, which occurs several times in Michizane's collection, as well as the collections of his contemporaries, and use it as a label for what undoubtedly held the status of a poetic genre throughout the ninth century. In the present

section, I will do something similar. Michizane composed a huge number of poems in which the poet is expressly depicted as a solitary observer of nature. The majority of these, many of which were composed in response to imperial demand and on a set theme, tend to contain clever metaphors, finely crafted language, and, most noticeably, intensely vivid descriptions of the natural world. These poems, with their conventionalized motifs and vocabulary, hark back to the earlier anthologies of Sinitic poetry commissioned by Emperor Saga. However, Michizane composed a number of poems which, while depicting the protagonist or narrator as a solitary observer, do so in a very different way. These poems, to put the matter quite simply, are predominantly meditative. Description for description's sake fades into the background. It is these sorts of poems I wish to discuss. As was the case with biographical poems, the titles of Michizane's poems offer us the first hint that he was composing these verses with something akin to an appreciation of genre or generic expectations. The term I wish to focus on here takes two forms: first, we find the term *dokugin* (or, *hitori ginzu*) 独吟, which refers to the act of reciting poetry alone; second, we find the related term *gūgin* (or, *tamatama ginzu*) 偶吟, referring to a sudden, spontaneous act of recitation brought about by some chance inspiration. Unlike the term *eishi*, which appears always in the same form, these two terms take on different forms. Thus, we find

such alternate terms as *dokkyō* (or, *hitori kyōzu*) 独興, the act of being inspired to write poetry while one is all alone, *dokutai* (or, *hitori* [noun] *ni mukau*) 独対, solitary verses about a particular natural object, *dokuyū* (or, *hitori asobu*) 独遊, solitary excursions into nature, and, among a few others others, *gūkyō* (or, *tamatama kyōzu*) 偶興, the act of being spontaneously inspired to compose poetry. Through all of the poems containing titles of this sort one can discern a number of common characteristics which, when considered together, are indicative of a single, distinct genre. I have tentatively called these otiose poems, from the Latin *ōtiōsus*, at leisure, in hopes that the use of this archaic term will convey the meditative, serious tone found in these verses. Of course, the term leisure poems might do just as well, were it not for the overly casual connotations inherent in the word leisure.⁵⁴⁸

A Poet All Alone in His Study: The Detached Gaze

Michizane's collection contains a total of eleven otiose poems, six of which contain the word *doku* (solitude, alone), three of which contain the word *gū* (spontaneously, suddenly) in their title, and two more which, though they do not contain either of these

⁵⁴⁸ Solitary poetry might be a pleasant, less archaic-sounding alternative to otiose poetry.

words in their title, yet contain these words within their verses, giving to these words a central position in the poem.⁵⁴⁹ As can be seen from these last two examples, Michizane did not always think it necessary to include the words *doku* or *gū* in the titles of his otiose poems. One may rightly ask whether the poet himself was consciously aware of anything akin to what I have termed otiose poems. Perhaps not. Still, as I shall demonstrate, the content of these eleven poems reveals a common thread, such that, even if he was not conscious of an independent genre, his use of such words as *doku* and *gū*—but especially the former—whether in the title or in the verses of his poems, seems to have exerted a strong influence over those pieces. Consciously or not, something is going on at the level of language which seems to be dictating the direction of Michizane’s verses. The highest concentration of otiose poems occurs in the fourth fascicle of his collection (poem nos. 247-249, 256, 267, and 309), which corresponds to the latter half of his stay in Sanuki, where, according to his poetry from that period, Michizane seems to have experienced his fair share of loneliness, intermingled here and there with moments of simple enjoyment of a more rustic way of life and its people. The last two fascicles of poetry, namely, fascicles

⁵⁴⁹ Those otiose poems that contain the word *doku* in their title are poem nos. 2, 68, 247-249, and 309; those that contain the word *gū* in their titles are poem nos. 122, 256, and 267; those which do not contain either of these words in their titles and yet contain them in their verses as a central element of their content are poem nos. 164 and 224.

five and six, which correspond to his busiest years back at court, contain no otiose poems at all. Even poems that might be seen as approaching the otiose vein are but few.⁵⁵⁰ It is obvious, therefore, that these otiose verses, like his biographical poems, are intimately bound up with the specific sociopolitical circumstances under which they were first composed. More so than his biographical poems, Michizane's otiose poems contain an explicitly (at least ostensibly so) autobiographical element, one which grows in complexity and interest as the poet himself grows older and more involved in the public life of an aristocrat. Michizane's first otiose poem, for example, written when he was only fourteen years old (in the year 858), is more artistically descriptive than genuinely otiose.⁵⁵¹ Entitled "Inspired While Alone: Written at the Close of Winter" (*Rōgetsu ni hitori kyōzu* 臘月独興), this poem is a fine example of a young aspiring poet eager to demonstrate his proficiency in Sinitic verse. The first three couplets are deliberately ornamental, embellished with erudite expressions and clever metaphors. The third couplet was deemed so exceptional that it was famously included in *Wakan rōeishū*:

⁵⁵⁰ Poem nos. 361 and 375 in fascicle 5 and poem no. 451 in fascicle six look like "vestigial" otiose verses, though only of a very secondary sort, containing neither the language nor deep meditative air found in his earlier otiose poems.

⁵⁵¹ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem no. 2, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 105-106; for an alternate translation and a very brief mention of the third couplet (which also appears in *Wakan rōeishū*, fascicle 1, in *NKBT*, volume 73, 384), see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 91.

Though I strain my ears to listen, not a wave is to be heard rippling beneath that ice-fettered pond. [Even so, despite the frosty scene,] snow bejewels yon treetops, looking for all the world like the white blossoms of spring.

冰封水面聞無浪 雪點林頭見有花

Here we see an example of that sort of deliberate double vision, a metaphorical conceit in which one thing appropriate to the present season is imagined as another thing which would, if really there, be quite out of place. This same sort of conceit characterizes Michizane's earlier, more consciously imitative poems. The first poem in his collection, composed when he was eleven (in the year 855), which contains the verse "Plum blossoms shimmer like stars in the heavens," is another example of this. Now, the fourth and final couplet of "Inspired While Alone" contains what I understand to be his earliest example of an otiose poem:

What an awful pity that I [indolent student!] dedicate such little effort to my studies,

but instead, sitting here beside the [warm northern] window of my study,
 aimlessly wile away the years.

可恨未知勤學業 書齋窗下過年華

This sort of humble, self-effacing language is another custom inherited from the world of Sinitic literature as a whole. We must not take it too literally. Indeed, the very language in which Michizane couches this ostensive humility belies an already intimate acquaintance with Sinitic verse. What is interesting about this final couplet, at least for our purposes, is its emphasis on leisure. The year is nearly over; winter will soon give way to spring. The weather is gradually getting warmer; nature will soon be stirred to life once more. While bemoaning his lack of motivation, Michizane simultaneously sets up a poetic space wherein he feels free to express sentiments that might otherwise remain wholly private. It is the very inactivity of this moment of leisure that inspires the poet to meditate on his life thus far and express his inner thoughts. In this way, we might say that his otiose poems resemble, at

least functionally, what our modern diaries are supposed to do.⁵⁵² What we see here is the beginning of an inner dialogue. Note, too, the venue: Michizane's private study. Both the tone and the venue conjure forth a quiet, private scene. Even so, the term "my studies" (*gakugyō* 学業) is indicative of a fundamentally public pursuit. That is to say, Michizane's studies—Sinitic literature—are being pursued not merely as a pleasurable pastime, but (hopefully) as a means to an end: his father gained recognition at court through his learning; a young Michizane hopes to do the same. Of course, he eventually succeeded in this. So, we begin to see how an otiose verse, as quiet and private as it claims to be, is nevertheless thoroughly permeated with a sense of the public domain; Michizane's private study is haunted by the specter of a public life. Here we see leisure saturated with (at least potential) activity. Or, to put it another way, we see a reflection on solitude that is painfully conscious of the madding outside world. This particular element recurs throughout all of his otiose poems, and it is, more often than not, this self-conscious solitude that lends to these verses their solemn, meditative quality, as well as their attractive tension.

⁵⁵² This is not at all what Sinitic diaries of Michizane's time were supposed to do. Any comparison of that sort would be misleading. Sinitic diaries of the Heian period were preoccupied with recording court-related events, especially with courtly precedents and etiquette, which knowledge could then be passed down to the diarist's offspring. Sinitic diaries of this period were highly formalized and primarily pedagogic in nature.

Whereas “Inspired While Alone,” the second poem of the first fascicle, might be considered one of Michizane’s earliest attempts at composing verses in the otiose mode, this same fascicle draws to a close with a series of poems that evince a somewhat deeper, more mature appreciation for the rather complex experience of leisure. Contrary to what many may think, leisure is a complex thing; the experience of leisure, and especially its expression in poetry, is fraught with a number of curious problems, only some of which can be touched upon here. The following poem, entitled “A Rainy Day in My Study, Looking All Alone at Plum Blossoms,” (*Shosai ni shite ame furu hi hitori baika ni mukau* 書齋雨日独对梅花) and consisting, like “Inspired While Alone,” of four couplets, was written sometime during the early months of spring, in the year 874, when Michizane was thirty years old.⁵⁵³ On the fifteen day of the first month of that year, Michizane was appointed Junior Assistant (*shōyū* 少輔) in the Ministry of Military Affairs (*Hyōbushō* 兵部省), in which post he would have been responsible for determining which noblemen were to be awarded highly sought-after military titles—marks of status, and not of any real military prowess or responsibility for those who bore them. About a month later, on the twenty-ninth day of the second month, he would be transferred to the Ministry of Popular Affairs

⁵⁵³ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem no. 68, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 156.

(Minbushō 民部省), likewise as a Junior Assistant, where he would remain for a full three years.⁵⁵⁴ At the time of writing “Looking All Alone at Plum Blossoms,” however, Michizane was still in the ministry of military affairs, a post that was, according to these verses, relatively less strenuous than some others. During the previous year, that is, 873, Michizane had attended two spring banquets, one held in the Imperial Palace, hosted by the sovereign, the other in the residence of Fujiwara no Mototsune (836-891), then Minister of the Right. On both of these occasions, Michizane presented Sinitic verses on appointed themes: “early plum blossoms reflected in spring snow” for the sovereign’s banquet, and “eastern [vernal] breezes enliven [literally, apply makeup to] the plum blossoms” for Mototsune’s banquet.⁵⁵⁵ Both of these poems are referenced in “Looking All Alone at Plum Blossoms.”

⁵⁵⁴ Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 116-118.

⁵⁵⁵ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 1, poem nos. 66 and 67, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 154-155. There is an interlinear gloss, added by Michizane himself, immediately after the second couplet, which explains the references to the previous year’s two banquets. I have omitted this gloss from my own translation. For those interested, the gloss reads as follows: “An inner banquet (*naien*) was hosted this year in which he were commanded to compose Sinitic verses on the poetic theme ‘early plum blossoms reflected in spring snow.’ The morning after this banquet, Minister of the Right [Fujiwara no Mototsune] summoned a group of five or six poets [me among them], inviting us to compose Sinitic verses on the them ‘eastern breezes enliven the plum blossoms.’ Although I am a poet of inferior ability, still, seeing as how I had the honor of attending both of these banquets, it seemed only right that I should try my hand at composing some verses” 今年内宴有敕、賦春雪映早梅。内宴後朝、右丞相招詩客五六人、賦東風粧梅。余雖不才、侍此兩宴。故云。

A Rainy Day in My Study: Looking All Alone at Plum Blossoms

As I inspect this cluster of plum blossoms now opening here by my windowsill, I try
 in vain to remember just how many years ago it was when first they began
 blooming.

Snow in front of the imperial gate reflects the colors [of plum blossoms such as my
 own] even after the first festivities of spring have passed.⁵⁵⁶ A vernal breeze
 adorns [the plum blossoms] about the [private study of] the Minister of the
 Right [Mototsune] even after that night when we all drank together.⁵⁵⁷

This paper screen of mine is admittedly low: it stands beside my plum tree [just low

⁵⁵⁶ This refers to the poem Michizane wrote for a banquet held at the Imperial Palace in 873, the poetic theme of which was “early plum blossoms reflected in spring snow” (*shunsetsu sōbai ni eizu* 春雪映早梅). Here, Michizane seems to be saying that the snow which had fallen last year, in which the colors of early-blooming plum blossoms had shone so brightly, has fallen again this year, and that the plum blossoms, too, are shining as brightly as they did last year.

⁵⁵⁷ This line refers to the banquet hosted by Fujiwara no Mototsune, then minister of the right, at which the poetic theme was “eastern [vernal] breezes enliven [literally, apply makeup to] the plum blossoms” (*tōfū mume yosōwashimu* 東風粧梅). Here, like the previous verse, Michizane rejoices that the plum blossoms, which are blooming in front of Mototsune’s study this year are just as beautiful as those of last year. Another possible interpretation of this and the preceding verse is that the plum blossoms in front of the palace, along with those about Mototsune’s study bloomed just as Michizane had predicted in the verses he presented at each of those events. My addition of the word “even” in both verses is meant to emphasize the recurrence of natural phenomena: the beauty of last year’s blossoms is experienced once again in those of this year.

enough to let the blossoms show from above].⁵⁵⁸ This reed blind of mine I
 will open for just a while, enough to welcome in the fragrance [of those
 blossoms].

Here, in my private study, I look leisurely out at the rain without a care in the world.

Though I have been appointed Junior Assistant minister in the ministry of
 military affairs, [the old] poetic inspiration is still very much alive in me.

點檢窗頭數箇梅 花時不記幾年開
 宮門雪映春遊後 相府風粧夜飲來
 紙障猶卑依樹立 蘆簾暫撥引香迴
 書齋對雨閑無事 兵部侍郎興猶催

Note that the venue for this poem is exactly the same as that of “Inspired While Alone,”
 namely, Michizane’s private study (*shosai*), where the young poet must have spent an
 enormous deal of time engaged in studies of Sinitic literature. Whereas “Inspired All

⁵⁵⁸ This paper screen refers to a moveable, temporary partition, which may have been either one of the folding type or a single panel on wooden stands. The character Michizane uses for low is *hikushi* 卑, which bears further connotations of being lowly, plain, or of poor quality.

Alone” paints a grand picture of nature, one in which we are led to imagine ice-covered rivers and the tops of an entire forest dotted with snowflakes, the current poem focuses our immediate attention on a single cluster of plum blossoms found right in front of the poet’s window. Despite this narrower, more immediate field of vision, however, Michizane brings to memory—both his own and those of his contemporaries who attended the events—two other scenes of plum blossoms, both of which must have been significantly grand. These references are crucial, for they bring to the fore the public element inherent in this particular otiose poem. Having emphasized not only his participation in the previous year’s banquets, but also his apt portrayal (or accurate prediction) of just how the plum blossoms would look when once they had begun blooming, he then goes on to speak of his own plum blossoms, effectively overlapping the public with the personal, the lofty with the low.

This poem, rather unpoetically, contains two references to official titles, both of which appear in their Sinitic versions: Mototsune is referred to as the *xiangfu* (J: *sōfu*) 相府, while Michizane calls himself *bingbu shilang* (*hyōbu shirō* 兵部侍郎). That he should use four of the seven characters in the last verse simply to state his current title evinces the poet’s complicated approach to leisure. On one level, Michizane is asserting that, despite his current office, he still has leisure enough to be inspired by natural phenomena such as

rain and flowers. On another level, he is further demonstrating the inherently self-conscious nature of leisure, which is only private insofar as it is constantly juxtaposed and saturated with, or haunted by, the public life. The appearance of two official titles in one poem, when considered from a linguistic perspective, is suggestive of a less artistic, more practical use of language. Indeed, when one compares this poem with the two that come immediately before it, namely, those Michizane presented at the previous year's two banquets (poem nos. 66 and 67), it becomes quite clear that Michizane is employing a very different mode of language in his otiose poem. The two poems presented the previous year are artfully worded and rife with beautiful metaphors. In contrast, "Looking All Alone at Plum Blossoms" uses simple language and straightforward description. Not a single metaphor finds its way into this poem. We are witnessing, I think, a move away from the pseudo-otiose verses of Michizane's early youth, in which we saw remnants of more elegant, more deliberately artful descriptions and poetic conceits, to a more meditative, less decorative kind of otiose poem.

An ideal Daoist ruler is commonly characterized by two phrases: *xiaoyao* (J: *shōyō*) 逍遙, free-spirited, untrammelled, spiritually liberated, and *wuwei* (J: *mui*) 無為, effortless, non-action, spontaneous, unforced. The penultimate verse of Michizane's "Looking All

Alone at Plum Blossoms” contains the word leisurely (*shizuka ni shite* 閑), literally, tranquil, followed by the phrase “without a care in the world (*koto nashi* 無事), literally, without anything going on, both of which resonate wonderfully with the Daoist ideal. Otiose poems of this sort allow the poet to paint himself after the fashion of a Daoist ascetic, one who enjoys the tranquility of a secluded life and who thereby attains an enlightened state of consciousness. For Michizane the poet, this enlightened state equates with poetic inspiration, hence his last line: “poetic inspiration is still very much alive in me.” Michizane seems to say with a smile, though I may have taken up the garb of a court official, though I may mingle with worldly men, my heart remains ever tranquil, always pure; I am, as before, still inspired to compose verses. This sense of the eternally pure poet-ascetic is further reinforced by the phrases “looking at plum blossoms” (*mume ni mukau* 対梅) and “looking at the rain” (*ame no mukau* 対雨), found in the title and second-last verse, respectively. The character *dui* (J: *tai*, or *mukau*) 対 is, as far as I can tell, only used in cases where the poet is observing nature alone, and, more specifically, when the thing he is observing is close by and not of an exceptionally large size—something small enough to take in at a single glance. The appearance of this particular character, therefore, at once conjures up the image of a solitary poet sitting opposite his plum blossoms, of which there

are not too many (*sūko no mume* 数個梅), meditating quietly on their beauty. He is alone with the flowers; the hectic world is far away. He, in his elevated enjoyment of otiose, is free to cultivate the pure heart of an ascetic through the vehicle of (ostensibly) spontaneous poetic inspiration.

Spontaneously Composing Verses While Viewing Paintings Alone

That said, however, we have here not a truly tranquil poet, but one haunted always by the specter of public life. Here, I contend, is where Michizane shines as a poet. He is able to speak of leisure in a way that is at once tranquil and tense, at once conventional and provocative, at once private and public. In other words, through these otiose poems, Michizane succeeds in constructing a temporary poetic space wherein the ideal (i.e., the leisurely pursuit of literature and quiet meditation) and the real (i.e., public responsibilities and political competition) come into contact, where neither force is allowed to gain the palm. Tension is never alleviated. Another illustrative example of this is to be found in a third otiose poem composed when Michizane was thirty-nine years of age, in the summer of 883. This poem, entitled “Spontaneously Inspired on a Summer Day” (*kajitsu gūkyō* 夏

日偶興), makes reference at the very end to the death of his son, Amaro, who had passed away only quite recently at the age of seven.⁵⁵⁹

Spontaneously Inspired on a Summer Day

With a soul natural and free, all unfettered, do I now enjoy this most pleasant

[summer] season. What luck! The rain has since cleared.

Three official posts to my name—far more than I deserve—I bask in these days of

[imperial] grace; six days of work and now, at last, one of quiet leisure to

spend as fancy desires.⁵⁶⁰

Now I lie gazing at a newly painted folding screen depicting a riverside scene; now I

⁵⁵⁹ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 2, poem no. 122, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 207. In reference to the passing of Amaro, and a wonderful translation of most of the poem (no. 117) Michizane wrote in memory of him, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 144-146, as well as Watson. *Japanese Literature in Chinese: volume 1*, 90-91. Watson, in the same book, also provides a translation of “Spontaneously Inspired on a Summer Day,” which he entitles “Sudden Inspiration on a Summer Day,” 92.

⁵⁶⁰ At the time these verses were composed, Michizane did indeed hold three official posts, namely, junior assistant minister in the ministry of ceremonial, professor of letters at the imperial university, along with absentee supernumerary governor of Kaga (modern-day Ishikawa). For an English translation of poem no. 100, in which Michizane speaks quite candidly about the source of income gained from his absentee appointment, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 125-126, which includes a brief discussion of absentee appointments in general. Regarding the second verse of this couplet, men who held official posts in the capital were given only one day off every week.

stroll about, reciting old verses about enjoying a cool summer evening.⁵⁶¹

Though my heart is crowded with all sorts of [worldly] cares, I feel nothing of this summer's dreadful heat. [Despite this pleasant time,] a dream I recently saw of [my deceased son] Amaro brings me sorrow.

天放一身不繫維 雨晴好是得佳期

三官過分知恩日 六暇逢閑任意時

臥見新圖臨水陣 行吟古集納涼詩

區區心地無煩熱 唯有夢中阿滿悲

The second couplet makes explicit mention not only of Michizane's three posts, but also of the six-day workweek prevailing in his time. This statement of public responsibility is couched both before and after in praises of otiose. In the first verse of the first couplet we find the phrases *tenpō* 天放, natural and free, and *chūi serarezu* 無繫維, unfettered, both of which are strongly suggestive of the Daoist ideal. In fact, the first of these phrases comes

⁵⁶¹ This couplet was singled out as being worthy of inclusion in *Wakan rōeishū*, where it appears in fascicle 1, poem no. 163, under the sub-heading “enjoying a cool summer evening” (*dōryō* 納涼).

directly from *Zhuangzi*, where it refers to the natural inclination of all people, when left well enough alone, to each go about their daily lives in an unobstructed way, sewing clothes and tilling fields: “Left alone, each man to his own devices—now this is what you call natural and free” (*yi er budang, mingyue tianfang* 一而不党命曰天放).⁵⁶² Note, in its original context, this phrase is connected with solitude, with being left perfectly alone, which is precisely how Michizane is using it here. More importantly, this same passage in *Zhuangzi* is part of a larger discussion on how best to govern a state. The narrator insists that an ideal ruler governs by leaving his people alone, by not interfering, by letting nature take its course. It is no accident, then, that Michizane crowns his poem with this phrase. In the philosophy propounded by Laozi and Zhuangzi, leisure—what I have called otiose—is not merely a matter of idle free-time. Otiose is at once a means of cultivating one’s soul as well as the most sophisticated form of statesmanship. The central role of otiose for proper government has already been encountered in Michizane’s biographical poems, as well as in some of the poetry by both Saga and Tadaomi. Here, with his otiose poems, we find the role of this lofty ideal in private life brought to the fore. My point here is simple: When Michizane speaks of leisure as being a time in which the soul is allowed to return to its

⁵⁶² *Zhuangzi*, fascicle 2, chapter 9, “Horseshoes” 馬蹄, in *SSKT*, volume 8, 322.

natural state of freedom, he is doing so as a means of connoting an ascetic (we might even say religious) ideal, one which is inextricably bound up with a Daoist philosophy of statesmanship. This same philosophy is echoed in a phrase occurring at the end of the second couplet, namely, *kokoro ni makasu toki* 任意時, a time in which one is free to follow the desires of one's fancy, literally, a time to give way or leave things up to one's own heart.

Whereas Zhuangzi suggests that people, when left alone to their own devices, will naturally resort to what he refers to as the universal virtues (*tongde* 同德) of sewing and farming, Michizane, finding himself in a state of leisure, engages in neither of these. Instead, temporarily released from public duties, our poet turns to a refined appreciation of folding screens and ancient anthologies of poetry (*koshū* 古集). The third couplet of this poem does not tell us any more about this particular folding screen, nor does it give us any hint as to what old anthology Michizane might be reciting from. I suppose the details are irrelevant. What is relevant, however, is the venue. Though not stated explicitly, it is quite obvious, especially considering he is lying down, that Michizane must be in his private study, as he had been in the previous two otiose poems. A fair number of poems in Michizane's collection feature a solitary narrator who meditates on the changeability of life

as he wanders through some scenic glen or along some murmuring rill. Very few of these take place within the narrator's private study. I would almost go so far as to say that those poems that do take place in the poet's study—so long as the poet is alone—approach the genre of meditative otiose poetry. The private study, when bereft of company, becomes in a sense a separate world, at least for the duration of the poetic experience. Not all otiose poems take place in the study, as shall be seen shortly. Still, the study (*shosai* 書齋) seems to be the ideal venue for this sort of poetry. The poet's study might be reasonably, and I think quite productively, compared to the Daoist ascetic's secret cave or hidden grotto, so often depicted as the scene of miraculous metamorphoses. It is often the case, for example, that a poet will write about stumbling upon such a cave only to find that the hermit has since attained immortality, leaving only his desk and, often, his shoes behind. Kiyokimi's "Hearing the Reed Pipes on an Autumn Night" is a perfect example of this.⁵⁶³ Just as the ascetic hermit's secret cave is a locus of mystical transformation, so, too, does the poet's private study become the locus of artistic and spiritual enlightenment. Michizane enjoys gazing at a recently completed folding screen and reciting old verses not merely as a

⁵⁶³ See Appendix, item no. 15 (*Ryōunshū*, 17), where a translation of Kiyokimi's poem appears immediately after Sagas "Reed Pipes: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi." See especially my footnote to the last couplet of Kiyokimi's poem.

diversion; these are practices that bring the soul in tune with the rhythms of nature.

We must not, in our eagerness to emphasize the personal element of otiose, overlook the specter of public life which inevitably lurks just around the corner. Folding screens were symbols of cultural capital, the production of which represented an amalgamation of various artistic achievements, from the construction of the screen, to the painting of its panels, to the poetry and, separately, to the calligraphy that invariably graced those paintings. Michizane includes in his collection a number of poems commissioned expressly for inclusion on folding screens. Generally speaking, these folding screens were presented at celebratory banquets for court notables, especially upon the occasion of their birthdays.⁵⁶⁴ These highly conspicuous artifacts, essentially crystallizations of centuries of artistic and poetic practice, formed the centerpiece in many a lavish banquet.⁵⁶⁵ While we are not given any information regarding the newly painted folding screen found in Michizane's study, we can be certain that its presence there is of some significance. Here, in

⁵⁶⁴ See, for example, *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 2, poem nos. 174-178, which were composed for a folding screen presented to Fujiwara no Mototsune in 885, the year of his fiftieth birthday, just two years after "Spontaneously Inspired on a Sumer Day" was composed.

⁵⁶⁵ The *shōshikai* 尚齒会 (gathering of revered elders) of 877 is a fine example of the central role folding screens could play in public banquets. Koreyoshi's preface to this event, which may be found in *Honchō monzui*, fascicle 9, item no. 221, gives a colorful depiction of the painting on that folding screen. Michizane, who witnessed this event, composed verses about the occasion (poem no. 78).

Michizane's private study, we find a glaring symbol of the public life, of cultural and sociopolitical exchanges. The act of viewing folding screens, in accordance with a well-established continental tradition, served almost without exception as an impetus for composing verses that dealt with the inescapable tension between a madding, tainted world, on the one hand, and the pure, ascetic world of a solitary artist, on the other. One of the finest Tang-period examples I can find is a lengthy poem by Wang Changlin 王昌齡 (c. 698-c. 756), currently preserved in the second fascicle of one of Yin Fan's 殷璠 (fl. mid-8th c.) private anthologies of contemporary Tang poets, *Heyue yinglingji* 河嶽英靈集 (Finest Souls of River and Mountain). This example is wonderfully indicative of how Heian courtiers, who were familiar with Wang Changlin, and who imitated not only the language of Sinitic poetry but the aesthetic practices and sentiments of its poets, as well, actually experienced the act of viewing folding screens. Wang Changlin's poem is entitled "Viewing a Painting of the Mountains in Jianghuai" (Guan Jianghuai mingshan tu 觀江淮名山圖), and refers to a scenic geographical area nestled between the courses of two principal rivers, namely, the Chang River 長江, better known to English-language readers as the Yangtze River, and the Huai River 淮河.

Viewing a Painting of the Mountains in Jianghuai

Though in verse have I tried with all my soul to sing of the clouds and of the
mountains, more striking still is this mysterious art of pigment red and green!
Towering mountain ranges, running along in chains of forested peaks, lift their
pinnacled crags over the rim of a distant sea.
For all my height, standing heads above those within the painting, I cannot probe the
sublime depth summoned forth by the artist's brush.
Small enough to grasp in my own two hands, this painting draws my gaze into a
vista extending more than one-thousand miles into the distance.
Light flourishes of the brush have produced veils of white mist; heavier strokes have
conjured up the colors of a setting sun.
No sooner do I begin to trace the winding path of the Chang River upstream than my
eyes meet with the Huai River pouring out into the sea.
In vain do I grieve for Qu Yuan, who died without a mote of sin. Who, I ask, will

mourn the loss of those two maidens, Nüying and Ehuang?⁵⁶⁶

Those noble souls of old are now all dead and gone. How, then, can I not but mourn

their absence, visiting as I do now their ancient haunts?

I desire only to wipe my garments clean of the dust of this madding world, to retreat

in solitude; how can I think of fishing amidst such yearnings?

Immortal An Qi it was who first cast off his shoes, leaving worldly cares behind,

renouncing forever more the vain glories of this world.⁵⁶⁷

Steeping forward now I approach very near the seashore, where I spy a lone boat

rowing amidst blue waves.

刻意吟雲山 尤知隱淪妙

遠公何為者 再詣臨海嶠

而我高其風 披圖得遺照

⁵⁶⁶ Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340 BC-c. 278) was a famous poet who, despite his loyalty and literary achievements, was banished, and later committed suicide by drowning himself in the Mi River 汨水. The two maidens Nüying 女英 and Ehuang 娥皇 were daughters of the legendary Emperor Yao 堯帝, and both became wives of his successor, Emperor Shun 舜帝. Both of these ladies committed suicide upon the death of their husband by downing themselves in the Xiang River 湘江. Both rivers are located in the Jianghuai region evidently depicted in the painting.

⁵⁶⁷ An Qi 安期, or An Qisheng 安期生, is a legendary Daoist immortal. The act of casting off his shoes is a symbol of total renunciation of the earthly coil.

援毫無逃境 遂展千裏眺
 淡掃荊門煙 明標赤城燒
 青蔥林間嶺 隱見淮海僥
 但指香爐頂 無聞白猿嘯
 沙門既雲滅 獨往豈殊調
 感對懷拂衣 胡寧事漁釣
 安期始遺舄 千古謝榮耀
 投跡庶可齊 滄浪有孤桌

A detailed analysis of this poem would take us far off course. Instead, I would like to draw attention only to the second half of the poem, especially couplets seven through ten, excluding the final (eleventh) couplet. Here we encounter allusions to the unblemished moral characters of Qu Yuan, Nüying, and Ehuang, all of whom were driven to commit suicide in virtue of an uncompromising, unsympathetic world. The viewer of this painting desires nothing more than to be rid of the filth of this madding world, to retreat into the idyllic world of this painting. This is often the way in which Michizane and his

contemporaries speak when composing verses for folding screens.⁵⁶⁸ In short, the act of viewing a folding screen becomes an opportunity for the poet to temporarily and imaginatively retreat into the painting, and, along the way, to offer a few lines of pithy social commentary. In “Spontaneously Inspired on a Summer Day,” Michizane reclines in his private study looking at a folding screen. This was, as Wang Changlin’s exemplary poem demonstrates, for Heian literati an activity thoroughly saturated with both ascetic and political undertones. The appearance of a folding screen in Michizane’s study further enhances the ever-present tension of an inherently complex experience of otiose. It would be seen, if only a sufficient number of examples were marshalled for the cause, that the genre of otiose poetry as exemplified in Michizane’s collection bears a number of striking similarities, in tone, content, and language, to Sinitic poems written in a meditative mood either for or inspired by folding screens and paintings. For example, it is often overlooked, or rather taken for granted, that in those poems where a narrator imaginatively portrays himself as entering into the painted world, he inevitably does so as a lone traveler, and never in the company of others. This is significant when we consider that the viewing of

⁵⁶⁸ See, for example, *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 4, poem nos. 319-322, in which Michizane composes four short poems for a folding screen owned by an anonymous monk.

folding screens was more often than not a public event, a group activity, in which many poets viewed and composed verses about these artifacts as a community. This element of solitude, of a lonely sojourner, is crucial to poems of the sort exemplified by Wang Changlin's "Viewing a Painting of the Mountains in Jianghuai." Moreover, just as the otiose poems of Michizane show us a narrator who is viewing a single natural phenomenon, say a flower or rain, or at least a scene that is easily observable at a single glance, so, too, do the poems about viewing folding screens and paintings present a view that is readily taken in at a glance. In both cases, everything fits into the eye without having to look around much, like a framed picture. The verb *mukau* 對 (Ch: *dui*; J: *tai*), to look at something by facing it head on, seen in the title of Michizane's "Looking All Alone at Plum Blossoms," is also reminiscent of the way in which folding screens and paintings are viewed. I am convinced that a closer comparison of otiose poems with poems about viewing paintings would reveal several other similarities, especially in regards to language and tone. Michizane's otiose poems were almost certainly heavily influenced by such verses.

Continuing in the same vein, we may now mention another of Michizane's otiose poems, in which he evokes the Daoist ideal of otiose as a means of engaging in a caustic

criticism of what he takes to be a hypocritical, avaricious nobility. This poem, entitled “Spontaneously Inspired While Enjoying the Scenery” (*Yūran shite tamatama gin zu* 遊覽偶吟), was composed in 888, when the poet was forty-four years old.⁵⁶⁹ Michizane was then serving as governor of Sanuki, and was therefore sufficiently far enough away from the capital to see things in a clearer light. The last three couplets of a four couplet poem are dedicated to scolding the nobility for their covetousness. I need not translate them here. The first couplet catches our attention, especially when compared to the first two couplets of “Spontaneously Inspired on a Summer Day”:

[Just as] a bird freed from her cage never tires of flying and fluttering about, [so, too, do I, likewise freed from my own cage] soar and dive, all fancy-free, among these green hills and azure waters!

鳥出樊籠翅不傷 青山碧海在低昂

⁵⁶⁹ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 4, poem no. 256, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 305. For a complete translation of this poem, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 184-186, where its title is rendered as “Composed on an Excursion.” That the word *tamatama* 偶 has not been included in this translation of the title is of no surprise. In my own limited research, I have not yet come across any scholar who draws special attention to this inconspicuous little word.

No doubt the second couplet may be taken as a straightforward praise for the scenic beauty of rural Sanuki, what with its vast expanses of verdured hills and crystalline rivers.

However, there is more going on here. First of all, the word Michizane uses for bird cage is *hanrō* (Ch: *fanlong*) 樊籠. This is a rare compound, one which appears nowhere else in Michizane's collection, nor in those of his contemporaries. The *locus classicus*, so to speak, for this word is an idyllic poem by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) entitled "Returning to Dwell Amidst My Fields" (*Gui tianyuan ju* 歸田園居), which contains the following couplet: "Having been trapped so long in my bird cage, [free at last!] I now return once more to my natural state."⁵⁷⁰ Here we see the conflict stated explicitly: man spends most of his time in a cage, whatever that might signify, and it is only by freeing himself from such confines that he is able to return to his natural—Tao Yuanming uses the word *ziran/shizen* 自然—state, that is, a state characterized by absolute freedom. This same rare word (*hanrō*) is found in a small number of Heian-period anthologies of Sinitic verse, where it is either nearly a direct quote of Tao Yuanming's couplet, or tellingly imitative. Ono Nagami 小野永

⁵⁷⁰ Tao Yuanming is best known for his *Taohuayuan ji* 桃花源記 (Journey to Peach Grotto), a wonderful piece of fiction in which a fisherman unwittingly stumbles upon a hidden grotto inhabited by a group of immortals. The whole piece is rife with Daoist imagery and language, as well as the usual political criticism.

見 (n.d., fl. 8th century), in a poem entitled “Excursion to a Temple” (Tera ni asobu 遊寺) uses the word as follows: “Exhausted from being sorely cramped in my bird cage for so long, I come [to this temple] in search of a safe harbor, a way to transcend this mortal coil.”⁵⁷¹ This is the only Japanese example of this word appearing before the ninth century. Michizane is using this rare word as a deliberate allusion to Tao Yuanming’s poem, just as Ono Nagami did. In Tao Yuanming’s poem, the natural state of the narrator is intimately bound up with agriculture, or at least with the fields. Michizane seems to support this view, as he praises the mountains and rivers of Sanuki. Behind this, of course, is a praise of a simpler sort of country life, in direct opposition to the cramped, frenetic life of a city-dweller. Michizane, while praising the leisurely life he now enjoys, implicitly bemoans the constricting life to which he must eventually return—indeed, and rather ironically, a life to which he often longs to return. Here, as always, we feel the tension inherent in his experience of otiose. A second word worthy of special mention appears at the end of this couplet. What I have rendered as “soar and dive, all fancy-free” is, in the original, *hoshiki mama ni teikō seri* (Ch: *ren diang*) 任低昂, a phrase which ought to remind us of a similar expression already seen in Michizane’s “Spontaneously Inspired on a Summer Day”:

⁵⁷¹ *Ryōunshū*, poem no. 74.

kokoro ni makasu toki 任意時, a time to follow the desires of one's fancy. In both cases, the poet experiences otiose as a state of absolute freedom in which the soul can roam about at will, a liberated state which leads, so goes the Daoist philosophy, to spiritual liberation and, ultimately, to a utopian government.

Though I have limited my examination of otiose poetry to but a few examples, it should be obvious from what has been discussed above that these verses share enough common characteristics in order to allow us to consider them as belonging to a single genre. There are seven characteristics in particular that stand out in all or nearly all of the poems discussed.

1. The poet is always alone.
2. The venue is almost always the poet's private study.
3. The poet is observing a single phenomenon of nature, such as a cluster of flowers, or a scene that is easily observable in a single glance; it would appear that there is a strong influence coming from Sinitic poems about viewing

folding screens and paintings.⁵⁷²

4. The language tends to be less deliberately artistic and more straightforward, often including references to official posts or work conditions.
5. As opposed to being vividly descriptive, the tone of these poems tends to be deeply meditative.
6. The experience of leisure or otiose is a complex one charged simultaneously with private and public elements; otiose necessitates a feeling of constant tension between the self and society.
7. We find words directly alluding to or plainly (at least for ninth-century readers) connoting Daoist imagery, especially that involved with the untrammelled, fancy-free life of immortals and hermits.

The appearance of the word *doku*, alone, or *gū*, spontaneously, either in the title or in some central position within the poem could be added to this list, though this is more of an indicator than a characteristic of the genre. As a final example of Michizane's otiose poetry,

⁵⁷² Much could be said about Michizane's unique method of approaching certain objects in nature, especially bamboo. For a short but informative summary, including references to the most influential Japanese-language scholarship of this topic, see Denecke, *Classic World Literatures*, 228-229.

allow me to quote the following poem, entitled simply “Reciting Poetry Alone” (Hitori ginzu 独吟), which belongs to a series of nine poems given the general title “Nine Poems Recited on a Winter’s Night” (Tōya kyūei 冬夜九詠, being poem nos. 308-316):⁵⁷³

Reciting Poetry Alone

With a chilly bed and a cold pillow, I wait for a morning that seems never to dawn.

[Unable to sleep a wink,] I get out of bed and begin reciting poetry along
before my lamp.

What started off as [more-or-less artistic] poetic inspiration has changed [as I recite
verses to myself] into a deeper, more emotive inspiration: what melancholy I
feel when thinking on all the myriad things that have happened to me.

床寒枕冷到明遲 更起燈前獨詠詩

詩興變來為感興 關身萬事自然悲

⁵⁷³ The poem translated here is the second in the series, found in *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 4, poem no. 309, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 350. For a translation of the first poem (no. 308) in this series, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 193.

This poem, along with the other eight in this series, was written in 889, when Michizane was forty-five years old, just a year after the infamous Akō Incident, already touched upon in the beginning of the second chapter, in which Emperor Uda and Fujiwara no Mototsune, then Regent and Chief Minister, began to fall out publically with one another.⁵⁷⁴ As before, Michizane demonstrated his courage in sending a provocatively outspoken letter to Mototsune, a letter which, while incurring Mototsune's ire, simultaneously succeeded in winning the favor of Emperor Uda. Michizane was still in Sanuki at this time, for which reason he could only contribute to the debate via post. "Reciting Poetry Alone" contains an explicit reference, especially in the final verse, to his own feelings about the recent scandal back at court, as well as to his own vicissitudes. Of the seven generic characteristics listed above, only the third is absent: the narrator is not described as viewing any natural phenomenon, unless we count his lamp as a substitute for flowers (though this hardly seems necessary). The seventh feature—images of fancy-fee Daoist immortals—likewise seems wanting, though I would argue that the phrase *mi ni kakawaru banji* 関身万事, "all the

⁵⁷⁴ For a summary of this incident, with special reference to Michizane's involvement, see Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 175-181.

myriad things that have happened to me,” or, more literally, “the ten-thousand affairs that surround this body of mine,” appearing in the final verse, suggests at least the dichotomy between a free, untrammelled private life, on the one hand, and a hectic, precarious public life, on the other. This otiose poem is highly meditative and, more specifically, expressly melancholy.

As a final note, and as a segue into the third and final major section of this chapter, it may come as some surprise—it certainly did to me, as I only discovered the fact afterwards—that many of the poems here designated as belonging to the otiose genre have been translated by Borgen, along with one by Watson. On the other hand, none of the biographical verses discussed in the first section of this chapter have, as far as I know, ever been translated into English. What might be the reason for this? It likely has something to do with our modern notions of good poetry, which, if it is to be taken seriously, ought to be sincere and intensely personal. Michizane’s otiose poems appeal to many of our own modern expectations of poetry, and so have found their way into English selections of his supposedly finest poetry. Watson, in his selected anthology of Heian Sinitic poetry, states his aim quite explicitly:

Most [Heian poets writing in the Sinitic mode] were content to venture nothing more ambitious than a pretty and conventionalized depiction of the scene about them, as the countless Heian *kanshi* [Sinitic poems] on outings and visits to temples will attest. But, as I hope my selection will show, a few [i.e. Michizane] employed it to create serious and highly personal works of literature.⁵⁷⁵

Watson endeavors to present to his English-speaking audience those scattered poetic pearls—things which only happened, according to him, on “a few rare occasions”—worthy of our special attention. Only serious and highly personal poems are to be included.

Michizane’s biographical poems about historical figures do not contain that same sort of interiority, and therefore, I suspect, have been left aside as unworthy of inclusion in our English selections. We as modern readers, especially those of us who read in English, must handle translations with care, for they are bound to present us with a very prejudiced, albeit

⁵⁷⁵ Watson, in his “Introduction” to volume one of *Japanese Literature in Chinese*, 12-13. Incidentally, I do not agree with Watson. These “pretty and conventionalized depictions” were certainly not merely of “the scene about them,” but represent communal poetic efforts at constructing, or reconstructing temporary (because they existed, as it were, within the poems presented at a given occasions) imaginary worlds. Watson focuses on content, and that from a modern perspective. The social context and, more interestingly, the imaginative potential or function of such poems is left out of the discussion.

appealing—because of their alignment with modern attitudes about poetry—picture of Heian Sinitic poetry. To be sure, a number of Michizane's poems, like the one translated above, do smack of something we might recognize as deeply emotional. Even so, as his biographical poems have shown this was certainly not always the case.

MEMORIAL POETRY: FROM HISTORIOGRAPHER TO AUTOBIOGRAPHER

As a means of further complicating the oft times prejudiced presentation of Michizane's poetry in English-language scholarship, dominated as it is by our modern-day preference for poetry that evinces sincere emotions coupled with a sense of deep interiority, I would like to take up another genre which, like his biographical verses, has received very little coverage outside of Japan. The genre of poetry to which I refer was limited, like that of biographical verses, to a very specific social context. Twice a year, once in the second (mid-spring) and once in the eighth (mid-autumn) month, the State University held a solemn memorial rite in honor of Confucius (*sekiten*, or, less commonly, *shakuden* 釈奠)

and his ten most honored disciples.⁵⁷⁶ After the initial memorial rituals, which included, among other objects, hanging scrolls or folding screens depicting the venerated personages, had been duly completed, a lecture would be held on one of the Confucian classics, including such familiar texts as *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects), the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety), and the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes). After this lecture, all present—professors and scholars in the Faculty of Letters—would participate in a concluding banquet (*kyōen*), during which they composed poems which would of necessity include key phrases or doctrines from the text of the day. While similar in nature to biographical verses, the lectures preceding these memorial poems to Confucius were one-day affairs—nowhere near the magnitude and sheer length of those lecture series culminating in the composition of biographical verses. Unlike the latter lecture series, moreover, the lectures given during memorial rites to Confucius occurred at regular intervals, that is, twice a year. For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to poems composed at memorial rites to Confucius simply as memorial poems. As Borgen has so revealingly stated, these memorial poems are unappealing to most modern-day readers on account, he suggests, of their conventional

⁵⁷⁶ Borgen makes some passing remarks about this ceremony: see especially *Sugawara no Michizane*, 95. For a detailed account of this subject, see Denecke, “Chinese Antiquity and Court Spectacle in Early Kanshi,” 110-115.

themes and linguistic difficulties.⁵⁷⁷ This remark echoes that made by Watson, quoted at the end of the previous section. I agree: memorial verses may come across as highly conventional, and their language may tend towards the pedantic. As I hope to demonstrate, however, a closer look at their functionality—what exactly these poems were doing—along with their selective nature—what precisely they chose to emphasize about the texts under consideration that day—ought to make us pause and reconsider the value of such pieces.

Thrice Removed: Memorial Poems as Summaries of the Introductions to Canonical Commentaries of the Confucian Classics

Michizane's anthology contains twelve memorial poems, the highest concentration being in the first fascicle, when he began his career as a university scholar.⁵⁷⁸ The very first of these poems (no. 14), in order of appearance within Michizane's anthology, and the only

⁵⁷⁷ Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane*, 182-183. Borgen translates only one of Michizane's memorial poems, namely, poem no. 14 (found on p. 96), to be discussed below.

⁵⁷⁸ *Kanke bunsō*, poem nos. 14, 23, 28, 41, and 55 in fascicle 1; poem nos. 81, 88, and 139 in fascicle 2; poem no. 220 in fascicle 3; none in fascicle 4; poem nos. 367, 370, and 382 in fascicle 5; none in fascicle 6. Michizane participated in more memorial rites to Confucius than his twelve poems suggest. His diary, *Nihon sandai jitsuroku*, contains a total of sixty-two entries pertaining variously to his own participation in such rites, as well as their cancellation due to some inauspicious event.

one which we find translated into English by Borgen, was composed either in 866 or 868, when Michizane was either twenty-two or twenty-four years old.⁵⁷⁹ Either way, Michizane was already well on his way to becoming a promising scholar of letters. Though Borgen's translation is both accurate and highly readable, I should like to supply my own rendition, entitled for convenience's sake "The Book of Rites," if only to offer a basis for comparison.

The Book of Rites⁵⁸⁰

*Composed after the mid-autumn memorial rites for Confucius, when
we courtiers had all attended a lecture on the Book of Rites held in
the Faculty of Letters.*

⁵⁷⁹ In terms of this poem's placement within the anthology, these verses would most likely have been composed in 866. An interlinear comment found in two manuscripts include this very date. However, as Kawaguchi has noted (*NKBT*, volume 72, in the endnotes to poem no. 14, pp. 639-640), the memorial rites for Confucius held in 866 were followed by a lecture not on the *Book of Rites* but on *Book of Changes*. The former was featured only two years later, in 868—hence the uncertain date of composition for this poem. Incidentally, inconsistencies of a similar nature are to be found in the memorial poems preserved in Shimada Tadaomi's *Denshi kashū*—for example, poem no. 42 in *Denshi kashū zenshaku*, 74-75). The reason for such inconsistencies remains a mystery to me.

⁵⁸⁰ An alternate translation of this poem may be found in Denecke, "Chinese Antiquity and Court Spectacle in Early Kanshi," 112.

The rites having been concluded, we [lettered] men listen once more to the *Book of Rites*, reliving yet again those solemn rituals [of yore].⁵⁸¹

Indeed, though the hall wherein we gather today be as old as ever before, even so, its vibrant pigments and shimmering hues inspire fresh emotion.

Think on the lamb who, on bended knee, reverentially acknowledges his mother; think, too, on the wild geese who soar in ordered ranks, the younger behind the elder.

We gaze up [today] in admiration at the lofty teachings of Master Confucius—what heights they attain!—and seek to emulate his virtues.

禮畢還聞禮 威儀得再成

客臺皆舊稱 粉澤更新情

屈膝羊知母 申行雁有兄

尼丘千萬仞 高仰欲揚名

⁵⁸¹ Regarding the second verse of this couplet, Borgen has “majestic ceremonies have been twice performed,” taking, I suspect, the memorial rite itself as the first performance, and the reading of the *Book of Rites* as the second. That is fine, too. I rather think, however, that the original phrase *futatabi naru* 再成, which may indeed be taken literally to mean “performed a second time,” has here a broader meaning, indicating a connection between past performances and the present one. This would fit well with the couplet immediately following.

In terms of content, this is a simple poem: may Confucius be praised; may we strive to emulate his teachings. Linguistically, it is equally simple: there are no difficult words, and the reference in the fourth couplet to prostrating lambs and respectful geese is readily understood even by those who are not aware of its *locus classicus*. The lamb and geese do not appear in the original text of the *Book of Rites*. Kawaguchi Hisao quotes as a possible source of Michizane's allusion a poem by Bo Juyi, acknowledging at the same time that the earliest reference to lambs and geese is to be found in certain canonical commentaries to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), another Confucian classic.⁵⁸² I would suggest, however, that Michizane, while he surely read these works, got the inspiration for this particular allusion from a much more direct source, namely, the *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, (Correct Interpretation of the *Book of Rites*) one of the oldest and most authoritative commentaries on the *Book of Rites*, compiled originally by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) and further expanded by the Tang scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648).⁵⁸³ Very significantly, Michizane's diary mentions this commentary by name on two occasions, once

⁵⁸² *NKBT*, volume 72, 640.

⁵⁸³ This belongs to a series of five commentaries, one for each of the five Confucian classics, known collectively as the *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義 (Correct Interpretation of the five classics), commissioned, recall, by none other than Emperor Taizong.

in reference to the *Classic of Poetry*, and once in reference to the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Odes).⁵⁸⁴ Perhaps even more significantly, in both of these instances, the *Zhengyi* commentaries are being used to justify matters of pressing courtly policy. In the first instance, a passage from the *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Correct Interpretation of the *Classic of Poetry*) is quoted in a debate as to whether or not the name of the previously burned Ōten Gate should be changed. In the second instance the *Correct Interpretation of the Book of Rites* is similarly used during a debate as to who should be selected as the next virginal princess to serve at Ise Shrine. Neither of these were trivial matters to Heian courtiers, and the use of these *Zhengyi* commentaries attests to their wide circulation and, more importantly, unquestioned authority.⁵⁸⁵

The opening page of *Correct Interpretation of the Book of Rites* contains the

⁵⁸⁴ *Nihon sandai jitsuroku*, Jōgan 13 (871).10.21 and Gangyō 1 (877).2.14.

⁵⁸⁵ In a discussion of how Nara-period Japanese historiographers imagined the origins of Sinitic literacy in their own kingdom, Denecke, quoting the famous preface to *Kojiki* 古事記 (Record of Ancient Matters, 710), draws our attention to the fact that the *Analects* are there described as having been written in ten fascicles. It is obvious, considering that the text of the *Analects* would certainly not take up so many pages, that:

...this copy of the *Analects* was not a naked version of the text [that is, one lacking any sort of annotation or commentary], but probably a version that included the commentary of the prominent Chinese scholars Zheng Xuan (127-200) or He Yan (190-249). Thus even the very first book that reached Japan, if we are to believe the *Record of Ancient Matters*, was the product of Chinese scholarly efforts that in turn shaped the experience of Its Japanese students.

In this same discussion, Denecke goes into some detail about the practice of glosses and gloss-reading (*kundoku*): see Denecke, *Classic World Literatures*, 29-31.

beginnings of a lengthy exegesis—Kong Yingda’s addition—on the meaning of the book’s title. In the first few lines of this section, we are told how all things in nature instinctively follow the principal of *li* 禮 (propriety), that which lies behind all individual expressions of propriety and ritual convention. It is here, too, that we are told of the lamb that kneels before its mother to suckle, and the geese that fly in accordance with a proper order. Kong Yingda expounds the doctrine of natural propriety found in such creatures as follows:

This [principal of propriety] is understood by all creatures dwelling in the three realms [namely, those that dwell in the heavens, those that dwell upon the earth, and man, who dwells in their midst]. That some creatures should stand before and others reverentially behind is in accordance with the workings of Nature.⁵⁸⁶

是三才既判 尊卑自然而有

Though we have no records of the actual content of the lectures given during these memorial rites, it is safe to say that they were of a necessarily cursory nature, especially

⁵⁸⁶ *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, “Liji zhushu yuanmu” 禮記注疏原目.

considering the severe time restraints. After all, the *Book of Rites* is a very large and notoriously difficult work. The lectures at these memorial rites, on the other hand, could have occupied but a few hours at most. It seems very likely, therefore, that lecturers would have resorted to canonical commentaries in order to provide convenient summaries of the work under consideration. They may even have bypassed the original altogether.

Michizane's allusion to lambs and geese is revealing for two reasons: *first*, as I have just said, it suggests that he, as well as those who lectured, were almost certainly summarizing the *Book of Rites* through fragmented commentaries; *second*, it shows the relationship between prose and poetry. This second point has already been examined above in reference to biographical poetry. Here, too, we see an example of deliberate, and necessary, omission. If my suggestion that Michizane's allusion to lambs and geese was inspired directly from the *Liji zhengyi* is ignored, one might very well ask whether this is really a poem about the *Book of Rites* at all. Granted, the first couplet mentions the book's title, and granted, the allusion to reverential animals is certainly in line with ritual conventions found in that same book. Still, this poem might equally be about the *Analects* or the *Classic of Filial Piety*. If, on the other hand, my suggestion is given some weight, it allows us to draw a possible link between what actually went on during the lecture—how the book was summarized—and

the manner in which that material was incorporated, that is, further summarized, into Michizane's poetry.

One of the central generic functions of these memorial poems is to serve as a pithy, summative encapsulation of the classic in question. The element of praise, though a necessary feature of memorial poems, does not in itself fulfil the more literary expectations of the genre. Were that the case, any laudatory piece could potentially become a memorial poem. Professors and scholars in the Faculty of Letters were charged with accomplishing three tasks in their memorial poems: *first*, and most obviously, they had to praise the establishment, which was equivalent to praising the sovereign; *second*, they had to make some sort of connection between the ancient Confucian tradition and their own current age—hence the second couplet in Michizane's "The Book of Rites;" *third*, they had to provide a concise summary of the entire classic in just one or two couplets. Michizane does this in the third couplet by alluding to lambs and geese.

This summary most likely came directly out of the particular commentary used during that day's lecture. Two other examples ought to prove sufficient here. First, we might compare two poems, one a memorial poem (poem no. 23), the other a similar sort of poem (poem no. 43) composed upon the completion of a lecture given by Wang Du 王度 (n.d.),

apparently a visiting scholar from the mainland. Both poems were composed for lectures on the *Analects*, and both show striking similarities pointing to a reliance on the very same commentary. Though conclusive evidence is yet wanting, it is quite possible that Wang Du was the lecturer—what we might now call a guest lecturer—at the memorial rites for which poem no. 23 was composed, and that poem no. 43 was therefore also a part of this same service. Kawaguchi, in his revised chronology, places both of these poems under the year 869.⁵⁸⁷ The first two couplets of poem no. 23 may be rendered as follows:

Though the [far-reaching] teachings of the sage [Confucius] cannot properly be said
to be contained within a single [volume, such as the *Analects*], even so, a single
fountainhead may give rise to ten-thousand rivers.

That pearl [of wisdom, that is, Confucius' teachings] came from out the waters of
the River Zhu [where Confucius was born,] and it is [in the well] before his
gate that we toss away our carriage linchpins [for we intend to roam no more,
intent to serve as his lifelong disciples].⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ *NKBT*, volume 72, 85.

⁵⁸⁸ A full (alternate) translation of this poem may be found in Denecke, “Chinese Antiquity and Court Spectacle in Early Kanshi,” 112-113.

聖教非唯一 孤源引萬流

珠從洙水出 轄自孔門投

That is to say, the *Analects*, by no means an exceptionally lengthy work, nevertheless enshrines within itself a wealth of wisdom which, if attended to properly, may give birth to an infinite variety of teachings; it is a source of endless inspiration. This same classic, furthermore, represents that which is most essential to Confucius' teachings, and consequently, one who reads this single work will lose all desire to consult any other teachings, such as, presumably, those of the Buddha or Laozi. Compare this couplet with the first verse of poem no. 43, which refers to the act of listening to and studying the *Analects* as follows: "I have rolled in my palm [that is, appreciated from all angles] the round pearl [of the *Analects*]". It is necessary here to take a closer look at the actual Sinitic characters used in these two examples, for they point undoubtedly to the same source-commentary. The second verse of poem no. 23 is written 独源引萬流 *hitotsu no minamoto yori yorozu no nagare wo hiku*, literally "ten-thousand rivers are drawn from a single source". The first verse of the second couplet of this same poem refers to the

Analects as a *tama* 珠, a pearl, while the verse quoted from poem no. 43 has 圓珠初一轉 *enshu hajimete hitotabi yomu*, where the final character, 轉, is rendered semantically as *yomu*, to read, in reference to the popular Buddhist phrase 轉法輪 *tenbōrin*, literally, “turning the dharma wheel,” that is, preaching or studying Buddhist doctrine. This same character also carries with it the more literal meaning of *korobu*, to turn or roll over, alluding to the perfectly spherical, flawlessly shimmering surface of the metaphorical pearl of Confucian wisdom. Neither the ten-thousand river metaphor nor the round pearl metaphor appears anywhere in the original text of the *Analects*. Kawaguchi, in his endnote to poem no. 43, quotes a passage from the introduction of a commentary by the continental scholar Huang Kan 皇侃 (488-545) entitled *Lunyu yishu* 論語義疏 (Commentary on the Interpretation of the *Analects*), in which the wisdom of the *Analects* is lauded with such phrases as *yuanzhu* 圓轉, roll about or revolve in a perfectly circular and smooth manner, and *mingzhu* 明珠, a shimmering pearl.⁵⁸⁹ Kawaguchi has, I believe, pointed to the very commentary used both by the lecturer at the memorial rites to Confucius and by Wang Du (and these two might have been the self-same man). These phrases are certainly reminiscent of those found in poem no. 23 and 43. Part of this quotation is itself a quotation

⁵⁸⁹ *NKBT*, volume 72, 647.

of an earlier commentary by Zheng Xuan, a prolific exegete whom we have already encountered in relation to *Liji zhengyi*. Zheng Xuan's commentary was the one mandated by the *Yōrō ritsuryō* 養老律令 (Yōrō legal codes) for scholars at the State University.⁵⁹⁰ What poem nos. 23 and 43 suggest, however, is that Heian scholars did not study the commentary of Zheng Xuan in isolation but, more likely, through an expanded version embedded in a longer commentary by Huang Kan. Or, put more cautiously, that short lectures of the *Analects* adopted as their central teaching material the introduction—and likely only the introduction—to Huang Kan's commentary, a view that is perfectly in line with what has been said above regarding Michizane's "The Book of Rites."

Examining Huang Kan's introduction more carefully, we find the following revealing phrases, each of which appears in some form or another in poem nos. 23 and 43.⁵⁹¹

The sages [as exemplified by Confucius] taught in accordance with the needs [of

⁵⁹⁰ *Yōrō ritsuryō* 養老律令, "gakuryō" 学令 (regulations for the imperial university), item no. 6.

⁵⁹¹ My own source text may be found on-line at Zhongguo zhexuesho denzihua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃, under the entry entitled 漢魏遺書鈔經翼四集：鄭玄《論語孔子弟子目錄》皇侃《論語義疏》：

<http://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&res=83637&by_title=%E8%AB%96%E8%AA%9E%E7%BE%A9%E7%96%8F>

Huang Kan's commentary begins on p. 20 of this document. Punctuation of the original (as found in the following footnotes) is my own addition.

people living] in particular times and places, in response to all manner of different circumstances. Their teachings arose [spontaneously] from emotional stirrings [aroused by these different circumstances], and it is for this reason that the teachings of the sages [though identical in purpose] are not identical [in their various historical manifestations].⁵⁹²

夫聖人應世事 跡多端 隨感而起 故爲教不一

Here the final phrase *weijiao buyi* 爲教不一, “[their] teachings are not identical” or “are not one [but many],” matches nicely the first verse of poem no. 23, namely, 聖教非爲一 *seikyō tada hitotsu nomi ni arazu*, “the teachings of the sages are not one [but many].”

Huang Kan explains the meaning of the first character in the title *Lunyu*:

[The character *lun* 論, “sayings” in *Lunyu* 論語, the *Analects*, is equivalent to] the character *lun* 倫, “morals,” which is itself equivalent to the character *lun* 輪,

⁵⁹² *Lunyu yishu*, p. 20, lines 2-3. This is reminiscent of the Buddhist doctrine of expedient means (*fangbian/hōben*) so concisely summarized in Saga’s “Expedient Means,” a translation of which may be found in the Appendix, item no. 18 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 20).

“carriage wheel.” That is to say, this single book contains within itself [all the] ten-thousand teachings.⁵⁹³

倫[=論]者輪也 言此書之中蘊含萬理也

Here we see a reference to *wanly* 萬理, literally, “ten-thousand principals,” which corresponds to the second verse of poem no. 23, namely, 独源引萬流 *hitotsu no minamoto yori yorozu no nagare wo hiku*, literally “ten-thousand rivers are drawn from a single source.” Looking, then, at these two quotations, we can see how Michizane has managed to summarize what he understood to be the essence of the *Analects* in one couplet, each verse of which alludes to a passage in Huang Kan’s introduction. The same may be said of poem no. 43, as Kawaguchi has already pointed out. The relevant passages are translated below:

[The character *lun* 論, “sayings” in *Lunyu* 論語, the *Analects*, is equivalent to] the character *lun* 倫, “morals,” which is itself equivalent to the character *lun* 輪,

⁵⁹³ *Lunyu yishu*, p. 22, lines 7-8.

“carriage wheel” That is to say, this book [like a perfect circle] includes everything within itself, able to be turned round and round [that is, contemplated over and over again] without end, just like the wheel of a carriage.⁵⁹⁴

倫者輪也 言此書義旨周備 圓轉無窮 如車之輪也

The phrase *yuanzhuan* 圓轉, as mentioned above, corresponds with the verse quoted from poem no. 43.

This gleaming pearl [the *Analects*], no more than an inch in diameter, embraces within itself the six regions [heaven, earth, and the four directions, that is, everything in the known cosmos]. [...] Small [short in length] though the *Analects* may be, it is smooth [without flaw] and clear [illuminating] like a shimmering pearl.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁴ *Lunyu yishu*, p. 22, line 9-p. 23, line 1.

⁵⁹⁵ *Lunyu yishu*, p. 24, line 4.

明珠一寸鑿包六合 [···] 『論語』 小而圓通 有如明珠

Here we have something that corresponds equally to poem no. 23 as well as poem no 43.

There are a number of other examples of this sort that might be marshalled in support of my hypothesis. Poem no. 41, to briefly mention but one more, which was composed after a memorial lecture on the *Classic of Poetry*, contains a large array of allusions derived not from the poems themselves but from the so-called grand preface (*daxu* 大序), which appears at the beginning of the first poem. Regardless of whether Michizane was writing a memorial poem about the *Book of Rites*, the *Analects*, the *Classic of Poetry*, or any other Confucian classic, he did so in direct response not to the original text itself, and not even to the commentary itself, but rather to a very short passage—in all the cases examined above it was an introductory section to a canonical commentary. This ought not come as any great surprise when we consider how regularly Heian scholars, as well as those down through the ages, made use of encyclopedias and topical manuals (*ruisho* 類書). Memorial poems both reflect and cater to this same tendency to summarize. Memorial poems seek to express in one or two couplets the essence of a canonical text. Now, the best way to do that, especially if you are extremely busy with other official and academic duties, is to refer to the

introduction of a canonical commentary, something which might be read in a few minutes.

These memorial poems, considered as a genre, are a product of yet another genre, that is, the sort of short lectures held immediately after memorial rites to Confucius. Both of these represent a desire to summarize, to encapsulate, and, practically speaking, to simplify.

Understood from another perspective, however, this same tendency to summarize simultaneously represents an elevation or prioritization of commentaries, such that these chronologically secondary texts take on a more primary role in the reception of a source text. This is, in fact, how Michizane himself understands the matter. In poem no. 55, a memorial poem about the *Book of Changes*—more properly, one specific line in a canonical commentary of that classic—he asks his audience how, if not for the ten commentaries (all purportedly written by Confucius himself), they would ever have been able to begin to grasp the profound mysteries enshrines within the source text.

The Emergence of a Poetic Presence in Michizane's Later Memorial Poems

The remaining memorial poems scattered throughout Michizane's collection all conform to what has been said above insofar as they do not deal directly with the original

text itself but rather with the short introduction to a commentary, or, in extreme cases (such as poem no. 139 discussed below), with a line taken from a different Confucian classic altogether. Aside from this generic feature, all of the memorial poems discussed thus far show a common tendency to downplay the presence of a poetic persona. That is to say, none of the memorial poems discussed so far have drawn any attention to the poet himself; Michizane is nowhere to be found in any of these poems. This would seem to be another generic feature of memorial poems. However, as will be revealed shortly, a number of Michizane's later memorial poems show a marked tendency to draw attention to the poetic persona. This creative shift in Michizane's use of the memorial poem as a means of expressing more personal sentiments comes to the fore somewhere in his early forties. All of the memorial poems discussed above were composed when Michizane was still in his twenties. The two pieces I wish to look at below, namely, poem nos. 139 and 220, were written when Michizane was forty and forty-three years of age, respectively. It will be readily seen how, in his later memorial poems, Michizane is playing with the genre in a way he had not done previously.

The first of these later memorial poems (no. 139) was composed at the concluding banquet of a memorial ceremony to Confucius held in the eighth month of 884, when

Michizane was forty years old. It must be recalled that this was the very same year in which Michizane composed his daring biographical poem “Shu Suntong” (poem no. 145), discussed previously in this chapter, wherein he deliberately overturned a canonical appraisal of the notoriously changeable Shu Suntong as a means of tacitly—or perhaps not so tacitly—chastising his colleagues: “...it is shameful [for me] to think with what ease, not unlike the supple feathers of a wild goose, this man came and went [from one lord to another]” (猶慙去就甚鴻毛). Michizane had come a long way since his twenties. He was now in a position of some social and political power, and consequently, seems to have attained a significant degree of confidence in his own abilities, both as a poet and a public figure. It is obvious that the same sort of daring gestures and personal flare he was willing to elaborate through the medium of bibliographic verses were spilling over into other genres, as well. The memorial poem he composed for this 884 banquet, which may be tentatively entitled “In Autumn, Study the Rites,” is a fine example of how Michizane’s personal life had become for him an object of poetic expression even in a formal setting like the memorial rites to Confucius. Though the lecture that day had been on the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the thematic phrase (a piece of advice as to what ought to be studied during the

autumn months) selected for poetic composition was taken from the *Book of Rites*.⁵⁹⁶

In Autumn, Study the Rites⁵⁹⁷

*A memorial ceremony to Confucius was held in the eighth month,
and after we scholars had finished listening to a lecture on the
Classic of Filial Piety, we composed verses on the theme “in
autumn, study the rites.”*

八月釋奠、聽講孝經、賦秋學禮。

It is truly a mournful autumn—is it not?—when a man like me can gambol through
the gardens without being halted by his father. To whom, pray tell, might I now
turn when in doubt regarding the *Book of Rites*?⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁶ Scholars were urged to study the rites during autumn, and to dedicate the winter months to reading. Spring was for reciting poetry and singing, while summer was for practicing musical instruments.

⁵⁹⁷ *Kanke bunsō*, fascicle 2, poem no. 139.

⁵⁹⁸ Michizane’s father had passed away several years earlier, in 880. According to the *Analects*, Confucius stopped his son as the latter was rambling through their garden, to ask him whether or

Behold, through the chilly clouds of this lonesome night sky there soars an ordered
 file of wild geese, each in his proper place. This shall have to serve as my
 teacher from hereon in.⁵⁹⁹

庭無父感秋時 三百三千更問誰

暮景蕭蕭雲斷處 一行寒雁是吾師

This memorial poem has very little ostensibly to do with the *Classic of Filial Piety*. This, as we have already seen, is the norm with such poems. What is striking here, of course, is the sudden and very prominent appearance of the poetic persona. Autumn is here not merely a time when the rites are to be studied but, in accordance with a more emotive poetic tradition, it is a time of mourning and loneliness. Winter is approaching; nature's beauty is waning. As was mentioned previously with regards to "Shu Suntong," Michizane attended a concluding banquet held in the private study of Mototsune after a series of lectures given

not he had studied the *Classic of Poetry*. Now that Michizane's father has passed away, there is no one either to enquire into or to consult regarding his own studies.

⁵⁹⁹ Michizane, bereft of his father's teaching, shall have to take the ordered flight of geese as his model for how a man ought to live in accordance with the principle of *li* 禮, propriety, especially as exemplified in the rites. The image of properly ordered geese has already been seen above, where it was paired with the image of reverential lambs.

on this same *Classic of Filial Piety*. This poem (no. 146), likewise presented at a very formal occasion, expressed the same sort of mournful sentiments: Michizane bemoans his lonely plight, bereft not only of a father, but of any male siblings, towards whom he might fulfil his filial duties. For Michizane, who was now forty years old and relatively well-established among his clique of elite scholar-statesmen, a poem about the *Classic of Filial Piety*, or about filial piety in general, triggered a resurgence of mournful sentiment. This, in itself, is of little significance. It is, we modern readers would all agree, quite natural. What is significant, rather, is the fact that Michizane saw fit to override, or at least dramatically manipulate, certain well-established poetic conventions in order to present a highly autobiographical picture to his audience. The language of this poem is simplistic, nowhere nearly as consciously artful as that found in poem no. 146, presented in Mototsune's study. Simplified language corresponds to a freer type of poetry, reminiscent of Bo Juyi and his contemporaries. This is no coincidence.

In effect, what we are seeing here is a tendency for Michizane to superimpose upon memorial poetry a more personal genre of complaint poetry known as *shuhuaishi /jukkaishi* 述懷詩—the same genre we saw in Tadaomi's epistolary poems—in which the author purportedly expresses in a spontaneous fashion his innermost sentiments. Michizane's

collection contains a number of such poems, the titles of which often contain such telling phrases as “expressing a portion of my thoughts and feelings” (*isasaka ni shokai* [or *omou tokoro*] *wo noberu* 聊叙所懷) or “putting into words a fraction of (or in a passing fashion) my feelings” *isasaka ni shokai* [or *omou tokoro*] *wo shirusu* 聊書所懷.⁶⁰⁰ These poems adopt a relatively straightforward register of language that is immediately appealing for its apparent autobiographic stress and unadorned imagery. We must not forget, however, that this poem was presented at a public event. We cannot overlook the very real social undertones of this piece. Recall that Michizane had, in the year 884, made a number of enemies with his outspoken opinions regarding the duties of the Chief Minister (*dajō daijin*)—a position then held by the immensely powerful Fujiwara no Mototsune. Though it seems Mototsune and Michizane remained on good terms—at least they kept up the appearance of being on good terms—Michizane’s relationships both to Mototsune and his scholars, all of whom had pandered to Mototsune, must have suffered a great deal. I would

⁶⁰⁰ I count nine such poems, namely, poem nos. 46, 65, 69, 90, 240, 305, 318, 325, and 437. There are many other poems which, while not containing the tell-tale phrase *shokai* (or *omou tokoro*) 所懷 in their title, yet conform to a genre of poetry which might be termed sentimental. The character 聊 *isasaka* may be rendered variously as “spontaneously,” “in passing,” or “a small part of,” all of which apply to the manner in which the poet is supposed to be expressing his feelings in these poems. Not surprisingly, Borgen has translated three of these sentimental poems, namely, poem nos. 69, 90, and 325, to be found in his *Sugawara no Michizane*, on pages 118-119, 140, and 199 respectively.

suggest that Michizane used this poem, with its mournful expression of self-pity, as an appeal to his potential rivals to show some leniency with him, poor, lonesome soul that he was. While not apologizing to his colleagues, Michizane's allusion to the well-ordered geese does seem to smack of humility. From now on, he seems to say, I shall strive to keep in line with my fellow scholars, respecting the proper order between us. This is one possible interpretation. On the other hand—and I think this the more likely interpretation—Michizane seems to be saying something like this: my fellow scholars, though I might have appeared unruly and outspoken to you, I was in fact merely obeying a greater law of propriety. Whatever the case, Michizane has portrayed himself within the poem as a lone observer watching a flock of geese flying off into a chilly, darkling autumn sky—an intensely personal, private scene. At the same time, he seems to be making some sort of social gesture. This mixture of private and public, past and present, is, just like the work of Tadaomi, facilitated by his drawing upon two different genres, namely, memorial and emotive poetry.

Poem no. 220, the second memorial poem I would like to examine here, was composed in 887, when Michizane was forty-three years old. Here we see a similar sort of autobiographical, predominantly emotive poetic persona coming to the fore. Strictly

speaking, this poem is not a memorial poem, but rather a poem about certain memorial rites conducted by Michizane at the local governmental academy in Sanuki. Here he laments the less than refined manner in which these rites were carried out.

Some Thoughts on Memorial Rites to Confucius Held in the Local Academy⁶⁰¹

州廟釋奠有感

[While going through the usual motions of the memorial ceremony,] now standing,
 now bowing, my heart was all the while uneasy as I wondered whether these
 rustic offerings and coarse utensils were appropriate.
 After [the prescribed] three rounds of ceremonial wine [in honor of Confucius],
 which we drank together that early spring morning, I thought to myself, surely
 [Confucius and his disciples] would have wept like children had we not served
 them [the usual sacrificial meats].

⁶⁰¹ The original text of this poem is as follows: 一趨一拜意如泥 罇俎蕭疏禮用迷 曉漏春風
 三獻後 若非供祀定兒啼.

一趨一拜意如泥 罇俎蕭疏禮用迷

曉漏春風三獻後 若非供祀定兒啼

Again, this is not a memorial poem in the strict sense. It is uncertain, for example, whether Michizane presented this at the usual banquet held after the services in question. It certainly makes no mention of a lecture or even of a particular Confucian classic. Even so, the simple fact that this poem was written about memorial services to Confucius makes it worthy of special note here. There are two curious features of this poem. First, it is the only poem of its kind written, rather preserved, from the time when Michizane was in Sanuki. Surely he must have conducted memorial rites every year during his stay in Sanuki from 886 to 889, and one would expect some sort of banquet to be held after each rite. This, in turn, would necessarily lead to poetry. For some reason, however, Michizane has not included in his collection any memorial poems, aside from the quaint piece translated above, from this four-year period. Incidentally, poem no. 191, composed in 886, Michizane's first year in Sanuki, is of a similar nature, insofar as it contains his thoughts on a Buddhist ceremony dedicated to producing rain during times of draught. Aside from these two poems about—

not for—ceremonial events, no poems that would presumably have been composed expressly *for* such public events are preserved from his Sanuki years. This surely reflects a dramatic decrease in literary banquets and related events, as least those of the more formal sort.

The second interesting feature of this poem is its apparently playful tone. The translation I have given above faithfully reflects Kawaguchi's interpretation: Confucius and his disciples might be offended by the coarse, rustic nature of the memorial rites conducted in Sanuki.⁶⁰² Even so, rustic rites are better than no rites at all. Were Michizane to ignore these rites, Confucius and his crew would be reduced to puerile tears. Understood in this way, the poem, far from revering Confucius as one would expect, reduces the sage to a whimpering infant. Interesting though such an interpretation might be, I do not think it is in line either with the genre of memorial poetry or with the general sense of isolation found in most of Michizane's Sanuki poems. In short, I think Kawaguchi's interpretation is mistaken. This, as is so often the case, is a result of certain ambiguities in the original. Kawaguchi himself expresses reservations about two terms found in the first couplet,

⁶⁰² For Kawaguchi's interpretation of poem no. 220, see *Kanke bunsō*, in *NKBT*, volume 72, 273-274, and an endnote on p. 685.

namely *kokoro hiji no gotoshi* 意如泥 and *reiyō madou* 禮用迷—the bits I have translated as “my heart was all the while uneasy” and “I wondered whether [...] were appropriate”, respectively. Furthermore, the subject of the final verse *sadamete chigo no gotoku ni naku naran* 定兒啼, “surely [...] wept like children”, is left unstated. There is no reason why we should understand the subject of this sentence to be the spirits of Confucius and his disciples. My own interpretation, which is quite different, does justice to the genre and to Michizane’s own situation. First of all, I take the term *kokoro hiji no gotoshi* 意如泥, which may literally be translated as “with a heart like mud,” to allude to a vexed and clouded mental state akin to intoxication. Michizane uses a similar expression—*kokoro no naka naru kohiji* 意中泥, “mud in [my] heart”—in a poem (no. 361) about gazing at the moon on a frosty evening: “How difficult to bear, this melancholy I feel upon gazing at the evening moon—a [heartless] moon who only too easily sets and fades from view. Its crystalline rays [though they penetrate into the recesses of my soul] are not in the least tainted by the mud in [my] heart.”⁶⁰³ Regarding the term *reiyō madou* 禮用迷, “I wondered whether [...] were appropriate,” it is possible to take *reiyō* 禮用 as a concrete

⁶⁰³ *Kanke bunsō*, in *NKBT*, volume 72, poem no. 361, p. 392. Another good example may be found in *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集, fascicle 1, poem no. 18, in which we see the phrase *marahito yoite wa hiji no gotoku* 客醉如泥, “the guests were as drunk as mud,” that is, thoroughly inebriated (see *Bunka shūreishū*, in *NKBT*, volume 69, 211).

noun referring either to the animal sacrifice slaughtered at this ceremony or to the sacred utensils upon which offerings were placed.⁶⁰⁴ Considering the verb here is *madou* 迷, to get lost or go astray, it seems more reasonable to see *reiyō* as referring to the sacrificial animal which, perhaps because of the unpreparedness of those involved in the ritual, has begun to squirm and wriggle about or even wander away from the altar. Finally, I understand the proper subject of the final verse to be Michizane himself. There is nothing either grammatically or contextually preventing this interpretation. Quite the opposite, in fact. Now, allow me to provide a second translation of Michizane's poem, one which reflects the autobiographical, more highly emotive shift in his later memorial poems:

Some Thoughts on Memorial Rites to Confucius Held in the Local Academy

[Revised version]

[While going through the usual motions of the memorial ceremony,] now standing,

⁶⁰⁴ Both the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Commentary of Zuo), one of the canonical commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, as well as the *Analects* give us examples of both uses of the word *yong* 用 in relation to rituals. See especially the *Commentary of Zuo*, entry for the nineteenth year of the Duke of Xi 僖公, as well as that for the twelfth year of the Duke of Zhao 昭公. Also, see the *Analects*, “Yongye” 雍也.

now bowing, my heart was all the while vexed and clouded. The offerings were rustic, the utensils coarse; even the sacrificial beast wriggled and wandered about.

After [the prescribed] three rounds of ceremonial wine [in honor of Confucius], which we drank together that early spring morning, [I openly admit that] were it not for the ceremony at hand [and the composure it required], I would have wept like a child [for shame].

Michizane's vexed and clouded heart is not so much a result of the rustic performance and coarse utensils as it is an expression of a deep sense of being isolated from the capital and family. Indeed, the reason why the sacrificial beast has begun to chafe and squirm may very well be due in part to Michizane's own inattentiveness, as he daydreams instead of being back in the capital. It is for this same reason that he, having imbibed three rounds of wine, felt inspired, as intoxicated poets are so often wont to do, to shed tears of grief for his piteous plight. If it were not for his responsibilities in seeing the ritual through to its end, Michizane would have happily abandoned himself to this spontaneous welling up of emotions. This poem is his way of expressing those emotions, albeit belatedly. Understood

in this way, poem no. 220 exhibits the same tendency as was seen above in “In Autumn Study the Rites.” Both poems use the genre of memorial poetry as a foundation upon which to superimpose verses reminiscent of the much more emotive so-called *jukkai* poetry. I dare say, the issue of how best to interpret poem no. 220 can only be intelligently approached when one has grasped, first, how the genre of memorial poetry initially looked, and, second, how Michizane manipulated that genre for more personal ends in his forties.

The genre of memorial poetry does not exhibit the same sort of cohesion as was found in the genres of biographical and otiose poetry discussed previously. That is to say, whereas Michizane’s biographical poems and his otiose poems evince two relatively clear-cut genres, his memorial poems show more variation. It is consequently more difficult to pin down a set of generic features shared by the latter. This situation is further complicated by the fact that Michizane began manipulating the genre in his forties, insomuch that what were once formal memorial poems became, in effect, expedient means for expressing more private, emotive, and highly autobiographical content. Add to this his last memorial poem (no. 382), composed in 895, when Michizane was fifty-one years old, which serves as a strikingly conservative but powerful panegyric to his patron, Emperor Uda, and we begin to lose sight of anything but the most tangential generic characteristics. One interesting point

regarding the transition between Michizane's earlier memorial poems and those composed in his forties and onwards is a metrical shift from four to two couplets; his later memorial poems are, without exception, half the length of his earlier memorial poems. This is curious, especially considering my suggestion that Michizane was, in his later memorial poems, inserting features from another genre of emotive poetry. Of the nine poems I cited in an earlier footnote—those whose titles contain the tell-tale phrase *shokai* or *omou tokoro* 所懷—only the last, namely, poem no. 437, contains more than exactly four couplets.

Metrically, and perhaps contradictorily, it was Michizane's earlier memorial poems and not his later that resemble the structure of these emotive poems. So, in his later memorial poems, we see at once a metrical shift away from emotive poetry along with a simultaneous shift, with regards to content, towards that emotive poetry. I mention this troublesome fact as further evidence that memorial poetry, despite any seeming unity of occasion or theme, was a rather amorphous genre.

Having said that, I would like, by means of review, to make a few remarks regarding some common features of this genre. The following four features mark Michizane's earlier memorial poems:

1. The early memorial poems were composed in response to short lectures given at the biannual memorial rites to Confucius.
2. These poems, when they do refer to a specific text, did not have to include any reference to that primary text, but rather served as pithy summaries of small (usually introductory) passages from later canonical commentaries to these texts.
3. No poetic persona is permitted to enter the poem; these are impersonal commentaries.
4. Metrically, these poems consist of four couplets.

In his later memorial poems, however, this list changes significantly. The first two features, especially the first, listed above remain more-or-less unchanged. It is the third and fourth features that must be revised. Thus:

3. A poetic persona is brought to the fore; these are highly personal, emotive poems
4. Metrically, these poems consist of two couplets.

Linguistically speaking, Michizane's memorial poems, whether they belong to the earlier or later variety, are quite straightforward and devoid of erudite allusions. In this respect, they resemble his biographical poems. Beyond this, there is not much more we might say in the way of common generic features.

One question begs consideration: Why do memorial poems show such a lack of generic cohesion? Can memorial poems, at least those preserved in Michizane's collection, even be considered a single genre? I have no ready answer to the first question. Why some genres show more internal cohesion than others is something requiring much more thought. I suspect the survival and proliferation of certain genres has something to do with how well those genres served the ambitions of prominent poets. In this sense, the survival of poetic genres may be likened to the survival of certain animal and plant species through natural selection. Regarding the second question, it is safe to say that memorial poems were considered a separate genre, albeit a loosely defined one, a fact ensured by the very specific social event—memorial rites to Confucius—governing their regular production.

CONCLUSION

The three poetic genres examined above—biographical poems, otiose poems, and memorial poems—have three things in common. First, they all employ a mode of language that is quite straightforward and relatively bereft of erudite phrases, complex allusions, and strikingly creative imagery. Second, they all evince some autobiographical aspect, referring either to specific social circumstances surrounding the production of a poem, or to equally specific events in the poet's life around the time of production. Third, all three genres served Michizane equally well in providing a vehicle for subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—social-political criticism. Of these three features, the second is also found in other genres of Michizane's poetry. The first feature, something we might refer to as linguistic simplicity, is less common in other genres. Michizane's anthology contains a very large number of poems composed for public banquets hosted either by the sovereign or some other supremely powerful figure. These poems are linguistically sophisticated, replete with erudite allusions and sophisticated imagery. It is, I suppose, primarily on account of these pieces that the reputation of Michizane's poetry has suffered somewhat in the modern period. After all, these poems that contain what most moderns would disdain as being slavishly conventional and annoyingly ornamental. On the whole, it is fair to say that

Michizane was more capable, or rather more prone, than someone like Shimada Tadaomi to use consciously erudite language. A comparison of poetry written by Michizane and Tadaomi for the same royal banquet, for example, is sure to convince most readers of Michizane's penchant for learned allusions and difficult language. Still, as we have seen, it should be obvious that Michizane was by no means a one-trick pony. His biographical poems, for one, are more truly prosaic than poetic. The third feature is likewise not to be found in the sort of high-brow poetry composed for royal banquets. It is only in his more straightforward verses that Michizane ventures into the realm of social criticism. Another tendency visible in each of these three genres is the consistent emergence of a poetic personality. Even the memorial poems, which did not initially encourage the inclusion of any personal element, eventually evolved into a more personal, emotive sort of poetry.

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AFTERWORD**Regarding Translations, and Final Thoughts****TRANSLATION: TAKING THE SINITIC OUT OF SINITIC POETRY**

Studying ninth-century Sinitic poetry composed by Heian courtiers can be a challenging task. Thankfully, for those sufficiently acquainted with the Japanese language, there are numerous modern translations and detailed annotations, all of which serve to make the task less arduous. An intimate acquaintance with classical Chinese and, say, Tang Dynasty poetry, provides the added benefit of being able, for the most part, to comprehend Sinitic poetry without having to resort to *kundoku*, that is, without having to manhandle the syntax in order to bring it in line with some form of vernacular Japanese. When I was yet young and still living in Canada, I devoted most of my time to the study of classical Chinese literature and philosophy, stubbornly dedicated to reading everything in the original; I certainly did not want to have anything to do with English translations. Years later, when I had more-or-less settled in Japan and become familiar with the world of

Sinitic poetry as it was practiced throughout the Nara and Heian periods, I spent countless hours reciting verses, composed by Japanese writers, as though they were Chinese verses: I left the syntax just as it was, and used modern Mandarin pronunciation. Had I been wiser, I probably would have attempted to master some other Sinitic language, such as Cantonese, the pronunciation of which is, to my understanding, much closer to that once employed by Tang poets, and probably closer to that heard by ninth-century Heian courtiers. Whatever the case, I treated Heian Sinitic poetry as though it was Tang poetry. For the most part, this proved fruitful. Other times, however, I encountered curious expressions, things that did not sound quite right, or did not make perfect sense in Chinese. It was only much later that I finally learned the art of *kundoku*, at which point I began to appreciate what modern-day scholars refer to as *washū* 和習, or Japanese-style (usually unorthodox) adaptations of classical Sinitic. This realization, in turn, led me to embark on a rather lengthy courtship with a sub-field of Japanese literature traditionally known as *wakan hikaku bungaku* 和漢比較文学, or Sino-Japanese comparative literature.

While this sort of scholarship proved intellectually rewarding, I eventually came to appreciate—as Denecke, Steininger, and others have—the reality that those Japanese poets whose verses I was reading did not, in all likelihood, approach their Sinitic verses as I had.

Neither did they see them as “Chinese” poems, nor did they see them as “Japanese” renditions or adaptations of “Chinese” poetry. As touched upon in my Preface, ninth-century Heian poets, be they sovereigns or vassals, most probably viewed their Sinitic compositions as, quite simply, poetry—neither wholly continental nor wholly vernacular. I dare say, these poets composed, presented, and consumed Sinitic poetry in a manner not too unlike the way modern-day readers of my English translations of Saga’s poetry will (hopefully) consume his poetry. Aside from making ninth-century Sinitic poetry of the Heian court easily accessible to a wider audience, many of whom will not be able to, or will even be interested in, reading the original, English-language translations serve a further function: so long as one reads in English, both Sinitic and vernacular poetry—*kanshi* and *waka*—begin to look very much the same. Take, for example, the following two verses, each from a different poem:

One thousand years of peace for our sovereign in his Heian capital! That is indeed
 what the little cuckoo is singing.

Fresh herbs along the sandbanks are just beginning to show their colors; warblers

perched among the willows have not yet fully cleared their throats.

The first verse announces the arrival of summer, while the second rejoices at the approach of spring. Both were composed and presented by Saga at royal banquets. Granted, those already familiar with the types of imagery employed in Sinitic and vernacular poetry will be able to discern which of these verses belongs to which sort of poetry. For most readers, however, both of these verses will be appreciated as samples of (premodern) Japanese poetry. The distinction between Sinitic and vernacular is lost. Presented in the original, that is, as they were recorded in the ninth-century, the above quoted verses look like this:

度毛爾千世爾度 和礼母企企多理

色微砂嶼草 擘澁柳園鶯

Both were written in Sinitic characters, and both, significantly, were arranged in couplet form—the first of seven characters per verse, the second of five per verse. So long as one is unable to read these characters, these two poems are visually undistinguishable. However,

for those with even a passing understanding of Sinitic characters, it becomes obvious from the very beginning that the first verse cannot be read as standard Sinitic; it simply does not make sense. It is only when we realize that the first verse employs Sinitic characters, for the most part, as approximate phonographs—the famous *man'yōgana*—that we are able to make any sense of things. Reading in this way, the first verse may be rendered as follows:

tomo ni chiyo ni to / ware mo kiki tari. This is unmistakably the final verse of a *waka*.⁶⁰⁵

The second verse, on the contrary, can be read as though it were a Chinese poem. Modern Mandarin yields the following reading: *sèwèi shāyǔ cǎo / lǒngsè liúyuàn yīng*. This is

obviously a Sinitic verse.⁶⁰⁶ Whereas some Heian courtiers were surely able to read this second verse directly in a form of Sinitic, most resorted to one species or another of

kundoku. We do not know for certain exactly how Saga's verse would have been recited, or whether there was a unified form of *kundoku* that then dominated all presentations of

Sinitic poetry. Kojima's own modern-day rendering, which represents the orthodox

kundoku reading, is as follows: *iro wa kasokeshi sasho no kusa / saezuri wa shibushi ryūen*

⁶⁰⁵ This is, of course, the second half of Saga's response to Sonohito. See the footnote to Saga's "Southern Pond Mansion," in the Appendix, item no. 5 (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 7).

⁶⁰⁶ This is the third couplet of Saga's "Early Spring," a full translation of which may be found in the Appendix, item no. 68 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 87).

no uguisu.⁶⁰⁷ Of course, if we desire to keep more of the Sinitic sounds, we might prefer to render this same verse as follows: *iro bi nari sasho no sō / saezuri shū nari ryūen no ei*. Interestingly, Kojima provides another *kundoku*-like rendering, one which, while less orthodox, certainly makes the verse more readily understandable, especially when heard aloud:

砂の洲の草 色いまだ薄く

柳の園の鶯 声滑らかならず

suna no su no kusa iro imada usuku

yanagi no sono no uguisu koe nameraka narazu

Whether historically accurate or not—probably not—this latter rendering is certainly within the limits of traditional *kundoku* practice. Again, we simply cannot say for certain in what manner Saga's verse was recited before the attendants at his spring banquet. That it was

⁶⁰⁷ Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volume 6, 3024. The more modern *kundoku*-like rendering given below is from the same source, 3028.

recited in *kundoku*-form, whatever that might have been, is almost beyond doubt. In this sense, both of the quoted verses were written in Sinitic characters and, when recited publically, effectively transmogrified into a form of vernacular understandable to the audience. The Sinitic characters of the *waka* had to effaced of their meaning as logographs and rendered anew into vernacular syllables; those of the Sinitic verse had to be reconfigured—*kundokued*—into a form of vernacular.

So far as the listeners of these poems were concerned, both the *waka* and the *kanshi* quoted above were consumed as vernacular poetry. Reading premodern Japanese poetry in English approximates this experience, insofar as the two verses just mentioned, when read (or heard) in English, do away with any presupposed distinction between Sinitic and vernacular, between *kan* and *wa*. While it is true that much of the original is lost when reading poetry in translation, in the case of ninth-century Sinitic poetry, that loss is at least partially made up by the necessity of effacing from these poems any glaring mark of their supposed Sinitic or vernacular nature. When adapted into English, both *waka* and *kanshi* become, in their new guise, Japanese poetry. Indeed, even their Japanese provenance is largely effaced. It is this ability to blur the boundaries between different registers of language, both visual and aural, that makes modern-day translations of Sinitic poetry so

helpful in overcoming outmoded theories of a Sino-Japanese binary. Neither Saga, Tadaomi, nor Michizane composed Sinitic poetry with the intent of it being read or recited as Sinitic poetry. Rather, these men composed Sinitic poetry as a prestigious form of *poetry*. For them, Sinitic poetry was synonymous with courtly, public, erudite poetry. Sinitic—*kan*—did not refer primarily to things continental or linguistically other, but rather, in more general terms, to a mode of poetic discourse which, at the time of composition, enjoyed an exceptionally elevated status at court. English translations allow us to take the Sinitic out of Sinitic poetry, something that, though seemingly obvious, goes a long way in allowing us to share in something akin, perhaps, to the way in which our ninth-century poets consumed their own poetry.

Translations of Sinitic poetry assist us in another way. By drawing our attention away from the visual register (Sinitic characters) and the aural register (*kundoku* renderings), we are encouraged to focus all our attention on the content. It was only after I began to consider Tadaomi's poetry, especially those presented to the Parhae envoys, through the lens of a translator that I suddenly became aware of the presence of elements redolent of romantic or erotic poetry (*enshi*) interwoven into the more conservative elements of these pieces. Translations, insofar as they foreground content over style or form, have the

potential to reveal generic—genre-related—elements that might otherwise go unnoticed. It becomes possible, upon retrospective examination, to see generic trends forming where the poets themselves seemed not to have noticed them, at least not consciously. In the case of Michizane’s otiose poems, I doubt whether he himself would have recognized these as a single genre. There was, to be sure, no name for such a genre. No anthology or collection of Sinitic poetry from the ninth century includes a category dedicated exclusively to such poems. The term otiose poetry is, in relation to ninth-century Sinitic poetry, my own admittedly anachronistic invention, and one, I am proud to say, which revealed itself to me while translating Michizane’s verses into English. That such anachronistic or retrospectively discovered genres are not simply whimsical inventions or impositions of modern-day scholarship, but rather represent genuine insights into the evolution of premodern literature, is a point heroically defended by Paul Battles, a scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature whose work has motivated me on several fronts. Intrinsic genres, those that would have been readily recognized as distinct or semi-distinct categories of poetry or prose by a contemporary audience, were both dynamic and mutually interrelated.⁶⁰⁸ The Buddhist verses (*bonmon*) appearing in *Keikokushū*, for example, shared several generic

⁶⁰⁸ See Battles, “Toward a Theory of Old-English Poetic Genres,” 6

elements with another genre of poetry about natural phenomena (*eibutsushi*). Considering the fluid, interpenetrating, mutually resonating nature of generic elements, it is rash to bind ourselves too slavishly to rigid distinctions of genre. While Michizane and his contemporaries might not have had a name for otiose poetry, and while they might not even have recognized the existence of such a genre, it is obvious that a distinct set of generic elements can be seen gathering around the central theme of the silent observation of a given natural phenomenon.

This dissertation, I hope, has served as an example, however imperfect, of the potential for English-translation to open up the field of premodern Sinitic poetry to a wider audience, and to draw our attention towards a more intense and nuanced appreciation of the content and generic fluidity of Japanese poetry in general. It is time to set aside concerns of Sinitic and vernacular, and get to the real heart of the matter, namely, the content and lived experience of poetry in premodern Japan.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The defining feature of this dissertation, that which sets it apart from the majority of

previous research, is its focus on genre, especially the deliberate practice of mixing different genres into a single poem as a means of creating more complex poetic personae capable of accommodating different audiences. Translation has played, and ought to continue to play, an important role in opening up the world of Sinitic poetry to broader, more theme-oriented research. Even so, in the name of comparative analyses or world literature, an intimate acquaintance with the finer nuances and potent allusions embedded in the original text must not be undervalued. Translation has its advantages, but also its limits. Those genres which do not seem to have been consciously recognized by contemporary poets as distinct genres—my so-called otiose poems (*dokuginshi* 独吟詩), for example—though perhaps recognizable to the keen eye even through the medium of translation, are much easier to spot when dealing with the text in its (supposedly) original form. There are subtle linguistic clues to be found here and there in the precise use of a certain turn of phrase, clues which are more than not likely to be overlooked when reading in translation. On the most fundamental level, certain Sinitic logographs may catch the trained eye, and lead to unexpected discoveries. An acquaintance with the original text, coupled with, wherever possible, more than one translation, is sure to provide the ideal balance.

Future research into the use of genres in ninth-century Japanese poetry, whether

Sinitic or vernacular, requires a vastly larger supply of translations. Ideally, all three of Saga's anthologies—what remains of them—must be translated in full, as must the private collections of Tadaomi and Michizane. There are a number of prominent ninth-century poets whose work I have not touched upon in this dissertation. Miyako no Yoshika 都良香 (834-879) is one such poet, a selection of whose Sinitic writing has been preserved in a collection entitled *Toshi bunshū* 都氏文集 (Collected Works of Miyako no Yoshika). Though it would appear that *Toshi bunshū* was compiled shortly after Yoshika's death, that is, sometime during or just after the year 879, this is not absolutely certain. It is also likely that Yoshika did a great deal of the compiling while still alive. There is simply not enough evidence to say either way. A number of Yoshika's writings include material taken from then popular folk tales, and it would be interesting to examine the manner in which he has incorporated elements from various prose genres into his poetry. His collection, which contains a wide variety of Sinitic prose and poetry pieces, most probably consisted, in its original form, of six fascicles. Though we do not presently have a complete manuscript, and therefore cannot be absolutely certain of how many fascicles this collection had, an entry in *Sandai jitsuroku* 三代実録 (A Veritable Account of Three Successive Reigns, 901) for Gangyō 3 (879) 2.25 tells us that the collection was indeed six fascicles in

length.⁶⁰⁹ All extant manuscripts contain only three fascicles, namely, fascicles 3-5; fascicles 1, 2, and 6 are lost. The content of the extant fascicles is as follows:

Fascicle 3: Rhapsodies (*fu* 賦), essays (*ron* 論), prefaces (*jo* 序), memorial inscriptions (*mei* 銘), laudatory verses (*san* 讚), and petitions (*hyō* 表)

Fascicle 4: Imperial edicts (*shōsho* 詔書), imperial commands (*chokusho* 勅書), imperial orders of state (*chokufu* 勅符), official correspondences (*chō* 牒), and bureaucratic missives (*jō* 狀)

Fascicle 5: Answers to examination questions (*taisaku* 対策), examination questions (*sakumon* 策問), evaluations of examination answers (*sakuhan* 策判), evaluations of poems composed for university entrance examinations (*shōshi shihan* 省試詩判).

It is likely that fascicles 1-2 might have contained poetry (*shi* 詩), and that fascicle 6 might have contained such things as prayers (*ganmon* 願文) or other religious pieces.⁶¹⁰ The

⁶⁰⁹ Nakamura Shōhachi & Ōtsuka Masashi, “Kaisetsu,” in *Toshi bunshū zenshaku*, 224-225.

⁶¹⁰ Nakamura & Ōtsuka, “Kaisetsu,” in *Toshi bunshū zenshaku*, 225-226.

fifth fascicle, which is dedicated exclusively to material relating to the entrance examination for the Faculty of Letters at the State University, promises to be of special interest.

Ki no Haseo 紀長谷雄 (845-912), another ninth-century poet of renown, was an ardent admirer of Shimada Tadaomi, as well as a fellow graduate of the Faculty of Letters. Haseo, lamenting the death of Tadaomi, referred to the man as “the master poet of our generation.”⁶¹¹ His private collection, *Kikashū* 紀家集 (Collection Works of Ki no Haseo) contains Sinitic poetry and prose. Considering Haseo was a courtier who rose to the rank of Middle Counsellor (*chūnagon*), his collection is also known as *Ki'nagonshū* 紀納言集 (Collected Works of Middle Counsellor Ki). It is thought that this collection originally contained twenty fascicles. However, the only extant portion of *Kikashū* is an incomplete manuscript of fascicle no. 14. This fragment consists of no more than seven Sinitic pieces: one set of poems, prefixed with a preface, composed for an imperial banquet; four records (*ki* 記) of imperial outings; two biographies (*den* 伝), one of a monk, the other of a hermit. This fragmentary manuscript, according to its colophon, is a copy made

⁶¹¹ Kinpara, “Shimada Tadaomi denkō,” 224. This particular quotation is from a Sinitic preface (*jo*) composed by Haseo entitled “Preface to Poems Written After the Engi Era” 延喜以後詩序, found in *Honchō monzui*, fascicle 8, no. 201. For a splendid commentary of this preface, see Gotō Akio, “Ki no Haseo ‘Engi igo shijo’ shichū,” in his *Heianchō bunjinshi*.

by Ōe no Asatsuna 大江朝綱 (886-958), completed on the evening of the twenty-first day of the first month in the nineteenth year of Engi 延喜 (919).⁶¹² It is important to note that the date given in the colophon, namely, 919, is the date at which this MS was completed.

This does not represent the date at which this collection was first compiled, considering Asatsuna, as copiest, would have been copying from an earlier, more-or-less complete (now lost) edition. When this collection was actually completed, therefore, remains unknown.

Haseo died in 912. Asatsuna's copy, completed only seven years later, may very well represent the earliest formal, presentable edition (clean copy) of this collection. The aforementioned colophon clearly states that this is a copy of the fourteenth fascicle, and not a copy of the entire collection.⁶¹³ Did Asatsuna make copies of each fascicle, or only the fourteenth? Was Asatsuna commissioned to make these copies? If so, by whom? How widely was *Kikashū* circulated at that time? In the year 919, the reigning emperor was Emperor Daigo 醍醐 (885-930, r. 897-930). Uda 宇多 (867-931, r. 887-897) was still alive, though no longer emperor. Note that it was Emperor Daigo who commissioned the *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 in 905, or, as some scholars would have it, 913. A close

⁶¹² Imai Gen'e, "*Kikashū*."

⁶¹³ Imai Gen'e, "*Kikashū*."

examination of *Kikashū* would lead to a clearer understanding of the ways in which Sinitic and vernacular modes of poetry were resonating off of one another around the turn of the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century. Of special interest for the study of the use of Sinitic genres in ninth-century Japan is Haseo's two prose biographies.

The extant writings of Miyako no Yoshika and Ki no Haseo, among a few others, must also be made available in translation if we are to even begin to approach anything akin to a comprehensive understanding of ninth-century Sinitic writing in Japan. In this dissertation, I have looked at only a small number of Sinitic genres. There remains an unexplored wealth of genres, many with standard titles, many more without. The subject of literary patronage in premodern Japan, especially during the early Heian period, is intimately connected to the creative development and usage of various literary genres, particularly Sinitic genres. This, in turn, is related to the social need to create progressively more complex personae capable of appealing to ever changing audiences. The more we understand precisely how these ninth- and tenth-century writers manipulated genre, the more we shall understand why they adopted the sorts of personae they did.

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APPENDIX

Full Translations with Commentaries of Saga's Sinitic Poetry

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APPENDIX

Full Translations with Commentaries of Saga's Sinitic Poetry**A few notes on these translations:**

1. Abbreviated titles: Some of the poems attributed to Saga have cumbersomely long titles. For the sake of citation, I have given these poems abbreviated titles. A translation of the full original title may be found in the footnotes. The first poem translated here, for example, was originally entitled "A Poem on the Theme "Falling Blossoms," Presented at a Flower-Viewing Banquet Held in the Shinsen Gardens." Considering it is the theme (*shidai* 詩題) of the poem that matters most here, I have shortened the title to read simply "Falling Blossoms."

2. Contextual headnotes: Beneath the title and prior to the original text of each poem, I have adopted the measure of inserting brief headnotes (in italics) aimed at giving the reader the bare minimum of information needed to better appreciate a given poem. These are entirely of my own design, and do not appear in the original. Any headnotes that do appear

in the original have been placed immediately before the translation in regular font.

3. Pronunciation of Sinitic terms: The pronunciation of all Sinitic terms appearing in the footnotes is given first in Mandarin and then in Japanese. For example, *zaohua/zōka* 造化, where *zaohua* is the modern Mandarin pronunciation, and *zōka* is the modern Japanese phonetic reading. Of course, we do not know how Sinitic terms were pronounced in Saga's day; all we can work with is modern approximations.

4. Omitted allusions: There are times when I have deliberately chosen *not* to include any mention, either in the translation itself or in the footnotes, of literary allusions found in the original. I have done this in those cases when knowing the details of a given allusion would not add anything of significance to our basic understanding of the content. In these cases, I have tried to modify my translation in order to capture the essence of the allusion without drawing any attention to its presence in the original. I hope this will make the poetry less cumbersome, and therefore more enjoyable, to a wider audience.

5. Lacunae: An empty square □ in the original text—e.g., 嬌心欲識乖□縛—signifies a lost or unreadable character. I have tried my best, whenever possible, to provide likely guesses, and likely translations to match those guesses.

6. Base texts and commentaries: The late Kojima Noriyuki was arguably the most prolific

Japanese scholar of Sinitic literature. He wrote incredibly detailed commentaries on all three of Saga's anthologies. The richness and erudition of these commentaries is truly remarkable. I have been careful to compare all of my English translations against his own renditions into modern Japanese. His commentaries may be found in the following works:

Anthology	Kojima commentary
<i>Ryōunshū</i>	<i>Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku</i> , volume 3.
<i>Bunka shūreishū</i>	<i>Kaifūsō, Bunka shūreishū, Honchō monzui</i> , in <i>NKBT</i> , vol. 69.
<i>Keikokushū</i>	<i>Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku</i> , volumes 4-8.



POEMS BY SAGA PRESERVED IN *RYŌUNSHŪ*1. Falling Blossoms⁶¹⁴

Ryōunshū, poem no. 03

This poem was presented by Emperor Saga at a flower-viewing banquet held within the Shinsen Gardens in mid-spring (the second month). While praising the freshness and beauty of vernal blossoms, these verses are tinted with erotic undertones. This is not merely a celebratory poem, but a prayer for fertility, both in the natural world and in the bedchamber.

⁶¹⁴ The original title of this poem is “A Poem on the Theme ‘Falling Blossoms,’ Presented at a Flower-Viewing Banquet Held in the Shinsen Gardens.” This is the first in a series of twenty-two poems by Saga. Considering the order in which the first eight poems of this series has been arranged, “Falling Blossoms” poem was likely presented at the flower-viewing banquet held on the twelfth day of the second month in the third year of Kō’nin (812), the first such banquet of Saga’s reign (*Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 3 [812].2.12, 601). It should be noted here that this piece is not a conventional *shi*-style poem (*shi/shi* 詩), which is composed exclusively of couplets of the same length. Rather, here we have what is known as a *pian/hen* 篇, in which a number of the verses vary in length, containing six instead of seven characters.

神泉苑花宴賦「落花」篇

過半青春何所催 和風數重百花開
 芳菲歇盡無由駐 爰唱文雄賞宴來
 見取花光林表出 造化寧假丹青筆
 紅英落處鶯亂鳴 紫萼散時蝶群驚
 借問濃香何獨飛 飛來滿坐堪襲衣
 春園遙望佳人在 亂雜繁花相映輝
 點珠顏 綴髻鬢 吹入懷中嬌態閑
 朝攀花 暮折花 攀花力盡衣帶賒
 未厭芬芳徒徙倚 留連林裏晚光斜
 妖姬一翫已為樂 不畏春風總吹落
 對此年華絕可憐 一時風景豈空捐

Come, tell me now, with what charms does mid-spring announce her arrival? First and foremost, snow-white blossoms unfurl in answer to the repeated caresses of a pleasant vernal breeze.

Surely it is the fragrance of these flowers that keeps us all here—why else should we tarry?—here, where we sing to great men of letters, here where we gather together to enjoy this lovely banquet.

Fix your gaze upon those vibrant floral pigments that shimmer so brightly against their verdured canvas of leaf and grass. How is it that even Nature herself has deigned to imitate the painter's art?⁶¹⁵

Where red petals fall, there one is sure to hear the elated songs of bush warblers; when the purple calyces scatter, then you will surely spy butterflies fluttering about in joyous surprise.

Let me ask you, O fragrant breeze, what makes you leave your flowering couch to drift through the air all alone? I come, she responds, with no other errand than to perfume the robes of all who sit at this banquet.

My eye, roaming far over this vernal garden, seems to catch sight of bands of beautiful

⁶¹⁵ I have used the word Nature, always with a capital *n* to translate the Sinitic term *zaohua/zōka* 造化, a term derived from the work of Zhuangzi and later Daoist thinkers. This term signifies a spontaneous, creative force working behind and through all natural phenomena, and is often understood, as in this poem, to be the source of all natural beauty and splendor. Contrary to the ways of man, there is nothing artificial or deliberate in the quiet workings of this mysterious force. Saga's statement that Nature, whose art is necessarily both before and above all human effort, is somehow a deliberate imitation of human painting, is meant to sound ironic, and hence entertaining.

maidens. What are these—now I see more clearly!—but the rich hues of pliant grasses and smiling flowers, each reflected in the other's brilliance.

Flowers that look more like pearls glitter amongst the leaves; blossoms resemble the elegant topknots of our courtly maidens.⁶¹⁶ A gentle breeze finds its way into those floral gowns—what lovely forms, so tranquil are there.

In the early morning we draw those blossoms towards us; in the evening we break off a spray or two for ourselves. Though weary with all this pulling and plucking of blossoms—my sash is overflowing with the many-colored floral treasures I have found!

Still, I cannot help but linger aimlessly, fondly, amidst these fragrant bowers. The sun is beginning to set as we, oblivious in our revelry, frolic alongside the woods:

What delicious pleasures we have found gamboling about with these comely maidens!

True, these vernal breezes may at length strip the trees bare. Fret not.

Is it not enough that we have looked upon these marvelous things at this the most splendid

⁶¹⁶ The idea here is simple: the grasses and flowers are as fresh and beautiful as young maidens. However, this description is not merely metaphorical. Banquets of this sort were almost always graced with a performance of dancing maidens. Saga is likely referring simultaneously to both the natural scenery as well as the young ladies dancing before him and his vassals. This double vision is carried throughout the remainder of the poem.

season of the year? Drink in the beauty now before you; think not of carelessly casting
aside these present joys!



2. Celebrating the Chrysanthemum Banquet⁶¹⁷

Ryōunshū, poem no. 04

This poem, likely presented at Saga's first chrysanthemum banquet, held in 809, is at once both an encomium of the event as well as an appeal to his ministers, many of whom were already aged and had served his predecessor, the (soon to be) rebellious Emperor Heizei.

⁶¹⁷ The original title of this poem is “A Poem Presented to His Majesty’s Vassals in the Shinsen Gardens During the Chrysanthemum Banquet, Including the Four Final Rhyming Characters *kong/kū* 空, *tong/tsū* 通, *feng/fū* 風, and *tong/dō* 同.” This is the first of three consecutive poems preserved in *Ryōunshū* presented by Saga at chrysanthemum banquets. *Ryōunshū* was compiled in 814, by which time Saga had hosted five such banquets—one each year, except in 810, from 809 to 814—for which reason it seems likely that each one of these three poems was taken from a different banquet. I suspect that “Celebrating the Chrysanthemum Banquet” was likely presented at the first chrysanthemum banquet to be held by Saga, in 809, soon after he ascended the throne (*Nihon kōki*, Daidō 4 [809].9.9, 495). This fact seems to be supported by the first two characters of the poem, namely, *dengin/tōrin* 登臨, which connotes the stately image of an sovereign ascending his throne and overseeing a court of ministers.

Saga assures these men that he means to maintain peace at court, and that, if only they will serve him loyally, he will be sure to recognize (and duly reward) their merits.

重陽節神泉苑賜宴群臣 勒「空」「通」「風」「同」

登臨初九日 霽色敞秋空

樹聽寒蟬斷 雲征遠雁通

晚藥猶含露 衰枝不裊風

延祥盈把菊 高宴古今同

On this fine day—this the chrysanthemum festival!—the autumnal firmament shines clear
and bright!

Evening cicadas, having heard the last leaves fall, cease their shrill chirping; from afar
come wild geese—they who traverse the very clouds—soaring high overhead.

Lingering flowers seem even now to harbor within their petals sweet pearls of dew; aged
branches rest at ease, unruffled by gust or gale.

Come now! Let us drink of the full moon! Let us partake of the chrysanthemum blossoms!

This noble banquet of ours harkens back to ages past—what has gone before let us
now renew.



3. Chrysanthemums in Autumn⁶¹⁸

Ryōunshū, poem no. 05

*This poem, presented by Emperor Saga at one of his chrysanthemum banquets, is a
laudatory piece in praise of the miraculous life-giving properties of the chrysanthemum
liqueur prepared for this occasion.*

九月九日於神泉苑宴群臣 各賦一物 得「秋菊」

⁶¹⁸ The original, title of this poem is “A Poem on the Theme ‘Chrysanthemums in Autumn,’ Presented to His Majesty’s Vassals in the Shinsen Gardens on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month.” The ninth day of the ninth month refers to the chrysanthemum banquet, which was always held on this day. It is impossible to say at which chrysanthemum banquet this poem was first presented, though certainly not at the first one (809).

旻商季序重陽節 菊為開花宴千官
 藥耐朝風今日笑 榮霑夕露此時寒
 把盈玉手流香遠 摘人金杯辨色難
 聞道仙人好所服 對之延壽動心看

The season of autumn has come; the day falls now upon the double *yang*.⁶¹⁹ It is expressly with the intention of hosting you, my myriad vassals, that these chrysanthemums have opened their petals!

Their delicate stamens have weathered the crisp morning winds in order to greet you all with smiling faces; their blossoms, drenched in nightly dew, endure this chilly season—for whom if not for us?

Fill up the maidens' hands—those arms as white and smooth as jade—with the petals of these chrysanthemums, and see how far that fragrance spreads. Place a few of those

⁶¹⁹ In Sinitic divination and cosmology, even numbers were designated as belonging to or presiding over the *yin* or passive principal, while odd numbers belonged to the *yang* or active principal. The term double *yang* (*chongyang/chōyō* 重陽) refers specifically to the ninth day of the ninth month, a day when the *yang* principal is in ascent. This is one of the reasons why the chrysanthemum liqueur (*juhuajiu/kikkashu* 菊花酒) brewed especially for this occasion was seen as especially efficacious for ensuring longevity.

flowers in our golden drinking goblet, and see whether you can distinguish those
golden petals from the color of the goblet.

We have all heard how reclusive immortals delight in imbibing the life-giving nectar found
in these blossoms. So it is with deep and reverential delight that we mortals now
partake of this chrysanthemum liqueur as a means of prolonging our lives.



4. Late Autumn Brings a Bountiful Harvest⁶²⁰

Ryōunshū, poem no. 06

*This poem, presented by Emperor Saga at one of his chrysanthemum banquets, serves
simultaneously as a toast to his fellow revelers as well as a prayer of thanksgiving, on
behalf of all present, for the abundant autumnal harvest. The implication here, firmly*

⁶²⁰ The original title of this poem is “At a Chrysanthemum Banquet Held in the Shinsen Gardens, All Present Composed Poetry on the Theme ‘Late Autumn Brings a Bountiful Harvest’. The Rhyme of Each Poem was Taken from the Title of this Theme, and My Own Poem Takes the Character *you/yū* 尤 [substituted for *you/yū* 有] as its Rhyme.”

grounded in a Sinitic cosmology, is that it is in direct response to Saga's virtuous conduct as sage-ruler that Nature has seen fit to bless his kingdom with such a rich yield. By praising the harvest, Saga thus indirectly praises himself.

重陽節神泉苑同賦「三秋大有年」 題中取韻 「尤」 韻成篇

旻氣何寥廓 登高望悠悠

大田獲豐稔 從此歲工休

芳萸筵上薦 時菊盞中浮

林洞逢搖落 池清為潦收

蟋蟀藏聲曉 蒹葭變色洲

重陽常宜宴 況復有年秋

How vast the autumnal sky stretches out in all directions! Ascending the hills, with nothing to obstruct my eye, I gaze far out over the surrounding lands.

Sprawling rice-fields promise abundant harvests. There shall be no more toil for the farmers this year!

Fruit of the autumn olive is presented to all in attendance.⁶²¹ Chrysanthemum petals,

freshly plucked, float in the drinking goblets of every reveler.

Withering trees, rustled by the wind, begin to lose their leaves; the long rains have ceased,

and the ponds are now placid and still.⁶²²

Crickets cease their chirping with the coming of dawn, while reeds growing alongside the

river slowly change their hue.

Truly, this double *yang* [the ninth day of the ninth month] is a fine day for banquets! What

⁶²¹ The original has *zhuyu/shuyu* 茱萸, which likely refers to the autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), also known as the Japanese silverberry, a plant that was, according to premodern Chinese tradition, customarily woven into the hair during the festivities of the chrysanthemum festival. It was believed that the red fruit of this plant possessed the power to ward off malicious spirits and other undesirable unseen energies.

⁶²² This is a tricky couplet. I suspect Saga might be alluding to a ritualistic song, used to praise the gods of the five directions, preserved in *Jiutangshu* 旧唐書, fascicle 30, 志 no. 10, belonging to a group of similar songs collectively entitled “Ascending [the Hills] to Sing [Words of Praise to the Gods] Amidst Offerings of Jade and Silk” 登歌奠玉帛. The particular song to which I think Saga might be alluding may be translated as follows:

Now has come the season wherein the gold element [=autumn] is in ascent, and the white spirit [=the god who presides over autumn] is seated in the center [=mid or late autumn].

The air is quiet and crisp, and the frost grows heavy. Trees have begun to wither, and the grasses grow stiff.

Jackals have made quick work of laying out their prey [something done in late autumn].

The long rains have ceased and the rivers are as placid and clear as mirrors.

The nine grains have now been harvested; food abounds, and joyful songs are heard all around!

The original lyrics are as follows: 金行在節 素靈居正 氣肅霜嚴 林凋草勁 豺祭隼擊 潦收川鏡 九穀已登 萬箱流詠. If my hunch is right, than the original text of the couplet in question as it appears in *Ryōunshū* must be slightly amended. Whereas our text reads 林洞, a term which might be understood as meaning something like sylvan abode, it might be an erratum for 林凋, withering trees.

with such an abundant harvest, there is all the more reason to be festive.



5. The Southern Pond Mansion⁶²³

Ryōunshū, poem no. 07

⁶²³ The full title of this poem is “Composed on a Summer’s Day While Visiting the Southern Pond [Mansion] of the Crown Prince,” where the crown prince refers to Prince Ōtomo, the man who would later become Emperor Junna (786-840, r. 823-833), Saga’s younger brother and immediate successor. This event took place on the twenty-second day of the fourth month (early summer) in the year 813 (*Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 4 [813].4.22, 649). As *Nihon kōki* records, this is the banquet at which Fujiwara no Sonohito, Saga’s trusted tax advisor and real right-hand man, presented a vernacular poem in response to Saga’s request for all attendants to present a Sinitic poem:

Today, yes, on this very day, here we gather by the Southern Pond to hear the little cuckoo sing.

Can you not discern its meaning? It sings of peace in this our sovereign’s Heian capital for a thousand generations to come!

Saga, evidently not one to let a good poem pass, even though it might not be in the proper mode, responded in like manner with a vernacular poem, referring obliquely, and perhaps a little sarcastically, to Sonohito as the master of vernacular (and *not* Sinitic) song:

Yes, yes, I, too, hear the same words—O, master of the song!—in the voice of that little cuckoo;

One thousand years of peace for our sovereign in his Heian capital! That is indeed what the little cuckoo is singing.

See Webb, 175-179 and Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 57-58, for some commentary on this playful and yet extremely serious exchange. His translations, naturally, are different than mine. The Southern Pond Mansion (Nanchiin 南池院) was Junna’s lifelong haunt. Both as crown prince and later as sovereign, he is recorded as having hosted a number of banquets here in which poetry was presented. After his retirement, this venue came to be known as the Junna Villa 淳和院.

This poem was presented by Emperor Saga at a banquet held in the mansion of the crown prince (later to succeed Saga as Emperor Junna). As with his previous poem, Saga presents verses about the scenic view before him as a means of praising his own rule.

夏日皇太弟南池

納涼儲貳南池裏 盡洗煩襟碧水灣

岸影見知楊柳處 潭香聞得芰荷間

風來前浦收煙遠 鳥散後林欲暮閑

天下共言貞萬國 何勞羽翼訪商山

It is here in the cool shade of the Southern Pond Mansion, home to our dear crown prince, where we take shelter from the heat of summer, and in whose azure waters we wash away all taint belonging to that maddening world without.

Alongside the pond stand rows of willow trees casting their soft shade over the scene; atop the water can be seen clusters of water chestnuts and lotus blossoms effusing their fragrance over everything.

A gentle breeze wafts over the bay, clearing away all trace of summer's languid haze; the birds have since departed, each to her own home, leaving the woods behind this pond quiet amidst dusk's falling mantle.

Among all the ten-thousand kingdoms, ours is by far the finest! All voices rise unanimously in their praise for our land. Tell me, then, what need have we to go looking for some blessed land of immortals when we have the very best before us here and now?



6. The Heavenly Firmament⁶²⁴

Ryōunshū, poem no. 08

This poem was presented by Emperor Saga to the crown prince during a banquet held at

⁶²⁴ The full title of this poem is “A Poem Regarding the Heavenly Firmament, Composed in Autumn While Visiting the Southern Pond Mansion of the Crown Prince.” Here, as with the last poem, the crown prince refers to the future Emperor Junna. This banquet took place on the fifteenth day of the eighth month (mid-autumn) in the year 813 (*Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 4 [813].8.15, 653), that is, about four months after the summer banquet referred to in the previous poem.

the latter's Southern Pond Mansion. Here Saga praises the sublime quietude and solemn beauty of the place, comparing it to a mythological garden hidden atop Mount Kunlun, home of the Heavenly Emperor, a central Daoist deity.

秋日皇太弟池亭賦「天」字 五言

玄圃秋云肅 池亭望爽天

遠聲驚旅雁 寒引聽林蟬

岸柳帷初斷 潭荷葉欲穿

蕭然幽興處 院裏滿茶煙

The autumn that visits this mansion is no less sublime, surely, than that which is said to grace the blessed gardens of the Heavenly Lord atop Mount Kunlun! From this pavilion atop the pond do we gaze up at a heavenly firmament so crisp and so clear! I listen with wonder at the distant cry of wild geese in their airy travels; cicadas chirping somewhere in the woods fill me with a quiet sense of solitude.

Willow trees growing alongside the pond are just now beginning to loose their leaves; lotus

flowers floating upon the pond, too, sport leaves that have begun to wither.

How solemnly silent, this autumnal scene before us! This mansion is truly a sublime abode!

From within yon hall I spy steam rising from freshly poured tea.⁶²⁵



7. Deep in the Autumnal Mountains

Ryōunshū, poem no. 09

In contrast to the previous six poems, this piece does not seem to have been composed for any particular public event (though it very well might have been presented at one). Here the narrator remarks on the pristine and remarkably cool atmosphere of an unnamed mountain through which he happens to be hiking.

⁶²⁵ As far as I can tell, Saga was one of the earliest Japanese enthusiasts of Chinese tea, a hobby he likely picked up from Saichō and Kūkai, who themselves learned of its benefits from Chinese monks while travelling on the continent. The mention of tea here is meant to sound somewhat exotic, and to connote the life of sophistication and lettered leisure.

秋日入深山

歷覽那逢節序悲 深山忽感宋生詞
 半天極嶂煙氣入 暗地幽溪日影遲
 聽裏清猿啼古木 望前寒雁雜涼颺
 炎氛盛夏風猶冷 況□高秋落照時⁶²⁶

O, how is it that I, having travelled both far and wide, have now chanced to stumble upon that most melancholy of seasons? Here, so deep within these mountains, I realize all at once the profundity of those verses by Song Yu.⁶²⁷

Overhead can be seen lofty peaks that reach up into the very heavens only to vanish into dense palls of mist; far below can be seen umbrageous ravines and solitary rivers, into the depths of which even sunlight is hesitant to plumb.

Within these densely wooded slopes I hear the sharp cry of monkeys perched atop ancient boughs; before me I descry the forms of wild geese beating their wings against the

⁶²⁶ Even though a character is missing from the second part of this couplet, its meaning can be surmise with some certainty.

⁶²⁷ Song Yu 宋玉 (c.298-c.222) became synonymous with a sort of conventionalized melancholy associated, in Sinitic poetry, with the coming of autumn.

chilly wind.

Here, in these deep mountains, even the scorching heat of mid-summer is transformed into
 a cold breeze. How much colder—imagine if you will—is this autumn night for a
 solitary mountain traveler such as I!



8. Summer at the Kankyo Mansion⁶²⁸

Ryōunshū, poem no. 10

⁶²⁸ The full title of this poem is “Composed on a Summer’s Day While Visiting Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, Left Major Captain of the Imperial Guard, at his Kankyo Mansion,” an alternate translation of which appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 52-53. Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu (775-826) enjoyed a lengthy career at court, having served a number of sovereigns, and was an active patron of literature and the arts. Saga is recorded as having made two official visits to Fuyutsugu’s mansion, once in 814, the occasion of this poem, and again in 821 (*Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 5 [814].4.28, 667, and Kō’nin 12 8821).9.6, 801, respectively). In regards to the first visit, *Nihon kōki* tells us that Fuyutsugu’s preparations, being both thorough and markedly elegant, were exceptionally well-received by the sovereign. Saga, we are told, deigned to write his poem—presumably the one translated here—with his own brush right then and there, a scene which inspired all present to remember this banquet as being one of extraordinary significance. Fuyutsugu was awarded a higher rank on the spot, while Fujiwara no Mitsuko (791-822), one of Fuyutsugu’s concubines, was given the Fifth Rank. This last event is quite remarkable, considering this woman had previously been without any rank whatsoever. Saga must have been extremely impressed with Fuyutsugu’s banquet preparations to make such a dramatic gesture.

Saga complements his host, Fuyutsugu, on being the owner of such a superbly elegant mansion, and for arranging such a gorgeous banquet. Kankyo, the name of Fuyutsugu's villa, means literally the abode of leisurely tranquility, and it is in praise of the otiose life that Saga composed these verses.

夏日左大將軍藤冬嗣閑居院

避暑時來閒院裏 池亭一把釣魚竿

迴塘柳翠夕陽暗 曲岸松聲炎節寒

吟詩不厭搗香茗 乘興偏宜聽雅彈

暫對清泉滌煩慮 況乎寂寞日成歡

It is here in the Kankyo Mansion, the very place we are wont to gather in order to escape the insufferable summer heat, where we, sitting leisurely in a pavilion beside the pond, dangle our fishing lines and wait for something to bite.

Around the pond are rows of willow trees, whose emerald-green branches grow dark beneath the approaching evening. Even the wind, born though it be of summer's heat,

whistling now through pine trees along the bank, sounds refreshingly chilly.

Now we raise our voices to recite poetry, now we grind our fragrant tea powder, never

tiring of the task.⁶²⁹ What better time, inspired as we now are, to loose ourselves in

the melodies of those most elegant chords!⁶³⁰

Our mundane cares are washed away by the cooling, crystalline waters of this bubbling

spring—all the more pleasing, would you not agree, on a day like today, so tranquil

and so serene?



9. Remembering the Capital⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ The reference here is not to tea leaves, which are steeped in hot water, but to *maccha* 抹茶, unfermented tea served in the form of a fine, green powder, which is first ground into an even finer consistency and then dissolved in hot water. It will be recalled that Saga referred affectionately to the practice of drinking tea in his poem “The Heavenly Firmament,” translated above (item no. 6).

⁶³⁰ It would appear that Fuyutsugu, as part of his preparations for this banquet, had ordered someone to play music. If legend is to be trusted, Saga was exceptionally fond of the Japanese zither (*wagon* 和琴).

⁶³¹ The full title of this poems is “Having Stayed for Several Nights at the Kaya Villa, I Found Myself Remembering with Fondness the Heian Capital.” An alternate translation of this poem may be found in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 53. The region in Kyoto, near the border of Osaka, just north of the Yodo River 淀川, at the foot of Mount Tennō 天王山, is known nowadays as Ōyamazaki. This toponym is derived from the name of a once prominent eighth-century way station called Yamazaki Station. This scenic station served as a strategically situated depot for overseeing trade via the Yodo River. A number of Saga’s more prominent hunting grounds, such as the wilds of Minase and Kata were located within a short riding distance from this station. It was in 813 that

Ryōunshū, poem no. 11

This poem was composed in early or mid-spring. The narrator, who has spent several nights in the mountainous region of Kaya, by making explicit mention of the mild weather that must, at that very moment, be enlivening his beloved capital, is in fact making tacit reference to the significantly cooler climate still prevailing in the mountains. Saga is setting up a dichotomy between the capital, which, by definition, forms the standard of seasonal change, and the mountains, which, going through the seasons at their own pace, mark a world somewhat detached from the capital.

河陽驛經宿有懷京邑

河陽亭子經數宿 月夜松風惱旅人

雖聽山猿助客叫 誰能不憶帝京春

Saga, having stopped at this station after a hunting party, decided to turn this scenic spot into a countryside villa for his own private enjoyment. The name by which he designated his new retreat was Kaya (or Kayō). It is not certain when this poem was first composed.

We have lodged at the Kaya Villa for some nights now, and the moonlit night, along with the sound of wind whistling through the pines, makes this poor traveler's heart grow sore.

Though I listen intently to the chirping of monkeys in yon mountains, calling out their cordial invitations to us, even so, who can help, even amidst such enchanting scenery, to recall that milder spring that now blesses our capital?



10. A Pleasant Dawn at the Riverside Pavilion⁶³²

Ryōunshū, poem no. 12

Like in the last poem, Saga here presents himself as a traveler a long way from home. The

⁶³² This poem might have been written during Saga's stay at the Kaya Villa, as mentioned in the previous poem. The imagery, at least, is nearly identical. An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 53.

pleasantness of dawn here refers not to the scenery immediately visible to the narrator, though that must have been splendid, too, but rather to memories that wild scenery conjures up of a more gentle strain of nature found only within the capital.

江亭曉興

今霄旅宿江村驛 漁浦漁歌響夜亭
 水氣眼中來濕枕 松聲覺後暗催聽
 天邊曉月看如鏡 戶外朝山望似屏
 記得煙霞春興足 況乎河畔草青青

This evening, as I lodge here in this riverside pavilion, this traveler's way station, I catch the far off sound of fisherman singing their merry songs somewhere down by the bay—

Watery airs, those!—that call back memories of the capital, and make my pillow wet with tears as I slumber. Strange how, having once awoken, even the sound of wind blowing through these pines seems to beckon me to listen.

A dawn moon hanging aloft in the heavens looks for all the world like a mirror—just the sort I treasured back in the capital; the mountains, covered in morning mist, remind me of the sort of painting one sees on folding screens back in the palace.

I recall with fondness how vernal mists, when seen from the capital, are enough to make one rejoice at the charms of spring. How much more does this heart of mine rejoice when thinking upon those tender green herbs that grow along the riverside!⁶³³



11. A Night Spent at Riverside Pavilion⁶³⁴

Ryōunshū, poem no. 13

⁶³³ Here, as in the previous poem, there is an implicit contrast being made between what the narrator imagines to be the elegant, charming vernal scenes presently visible in the capital, on the one hand, and the far more rugged, wild picture of nature actually unfolding before his eyes in the no doubt still chilly mountains, on the other.

⁶³⁴ The full title of this poem is “Composed during a Spring Hunting Expedition, While Spending the Night at the Riverside Pavilion.” This poem, like the last two, was likely composed while Saga was staying at the Kaya Villa.

While signing of the joys of hunting, Saga states in no uncertain terms that his hunting expeditions, far from being frivolous indulgences, serve the function of educating his vassals in the highest virtues of statecraft. In a sense, this poem is a polemic against those who view hunting as a mere pastime. Simultaneously, Saga firmly establishes himself as the wise ruler capable of discerning the wheat from the chaff, the disloyal from the loyal among his train.

春日遊獵 日暮宿江頭亭子

三春出獵重城外 四望江山勢轉雄

逐兔馬蹄承落日 追禽鷹翻拂輕風

征船暮入連天水 明月孤懸欲曉空

不學夏王荒此事 為思周卜遇非熊

During this merry season of spring, we set out on our hunting expedition, and, leaving the many-walled Imperial Palace behind, we gaze, awe-struck, at the majestic mountains and rolling rivers that surround us on all sides.

The hooves of our steeds, racing on in hot pursuit of many a speedy hare, gallop onwards
 with the setting sun, while the wings of our hunting falcons, beating in pursuit of
 meeker birds, sweep through their airy element.

The hunt now done, tonight our boats paddle along the river towards the horizon, to where
 the water meets the heavens. Tomorrow, my heart, convening quietly within itself,
 shall gaze with eagerness at the slowly dawning sky.

Do not presume that I hunt for the mere pleasure of hunting, like that vicious old King of
 Xia! Just as King Wen of Zhou returned from his hunting expedition with that noble
 duke of Qi, so, too, do I hunt, not for game, but for virtuous men.⁶³⁵



⁶³⁵ Saga here defends himself against those who might accuse him of indulging in frivolous pastimes. Unlike the infamously tyrannical King Jie of Xia 夏桀王, traditionally supposed to have ruled sometime between the late eighteenth and early seventeenth centuries BC, whose lust for hunting was carried to deplorable heights, Saga assures his readers that he is following in the footsteps of the virtuous King Wen of Zhou 周文王 (1152-1056 BC), who is said to have discovered Duke Qi (aka Duke Wang, “the hopeful duke,” 太公望, n.d., fl. 11th century) while out on one of his hunting expeditions. In other words, Saga invites us to envision his (frequent) hunting expeditions as important exercises in sagely statecraft, exercises aimed at inculcating his vassals with the highest ideals. Hunting, like writing, becomes for Saga a vehicle of political and moral education. Now, whether he really felt this way, or simply enjoyed the sport of hunting for its own sake, is another matter.

12. Summer at the Kaya Villa: A Reply to Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu⁶³⁶

Ryōunshū, poem no. 14

Saga praises the beauty to be found in his Kaya Villa, a place which, despite the coming summer heat, yet remains pleasantly cool. Here we find an appeal to both observe the sights and listen to the sounds of nature as a means of cultivating a more inspired, more truly poetic sentiment.

和左大將軍藤冬嗣河陽作

節序風光全就暖 河陽雨氣更生寒

千峰積翠籠山暗 萬里長江入海寬

曉猿悲吟誰斷得 朝花巧笑豈堪看

⁶³⁶ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Presented at the Kaya Villa by Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, Left Major Captain of the Imperial Guard.” This is, of course, the same Fuyutsugu who appeared in “Summer at the Kankyo Mansion” (item no. 8). The poem originally presented to Saga by Fuyutsugu has not been preserved. It would appear that the present poem was composed during the late spring months, when summer’s heat is first beginning to make its presence felt.

非唯物色催春興 別有泉聲落雲端

While the season has since changed, and all things in nature show signs of summer's

approaching heat, even so, here in the Kayo Villa, with its rainy days and nights, the
air remains refreshingly cool.

Here each and every peak [of Mt. Tennō] is veiled in rich mantles of shimmering verdure,

while the endless [Yodo] River, finding its way here, at length pours its currents into
[Osaka] Bay.

Who, pray tell, can appreciate the depth of sentiment in the cries of those wild monkeys

singing at the dawn of day? Who, tell me, is not wholly inspired when looking upon
those blossoms smiling so alluringly beneath a morning sun?

We are moved not only by the colors and forms that greet the eye; these are not the only

things that make spring so charming. Here at the Kaya Villa we are further blessed
with the echo of some far-off waterfall resounding beyond the clouds.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁷ The mere sound of water is often invoked in Sinitic poetry in virtue of its ability to bring a sort of imagined coolness to the body. That this particular waterfall should be located somewhere beyond the clouds, that is, somewhere far, far away from the narrator, suggests an element of the unknown, and is therefore naturally charming in its own right.



13. Passing by the Old Katano Villa: A Reply to Fujiwara no Otsugu⁶³⁸

Ryōunshū, poem no. 15

Saga, responding to a poem by his trusted vassal, Otsugu, laments the dilapidation of a villa and hunting spot once frequented by his father, the late Emperor Kanmu. It is not surprising that Saga chooses, among all things, to draw our attention especially to the memory of flower-viewing banquets once held here, considering his own penchant for such festivities. What must have struck Saga most poignantly, more so than the physical dilapidation of this villa, was the gradual decay of a cultural legacy: not only were flower-viewing banquets no longer being held at this villa, even the memory of those banquets, the

⁶³⁸ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Presented by Fujiwara no Otsugu, Left Captain of the Imperial Gate, in which He Expressed His Feelings at Having Passed By the Old Katano Villa.” Fujiwara no Otsugu 藤原緒嗣 (774-843), for a time one of Saga’s most powerful vassals, was appointed head compiler of Saga’s imperially commissioned history, *Nihon kōki*. While none of this man’s poetry has been preserved, the fact that Saga is here replying to a previous poem means that Otsugu must have been tolerably skilled in the art of Sinitic versification. The Katano Villa 交野離宮 was located somewhere in what is modern-day Hirakata City, Osaka, near the old Nagaoka capital, and served as a favorite hunting ground for Emperor Kanmu and his vassals. After Kanmu’s death, this villa seems to have fallen into disuse.

very thing that was supposed to remain immortal, was being lost.

和左金吾將軍藤緒嗣過交野離宮感舊作

追想昔時過舊館 淒涼淚下忽霑襟
 廢村已見人煙斷 荒院唯聞鳥雀吟
 荊棘不知歌舞處 薜蘿獨向戀情深
 看花故事誰能語 空望浮雲轉傷心

When we chanced to pass by that old villa at Katano, our hearts grew sore with memories of days long passed, and our collars became moistened by tears, cold and lonely, that rolled all unbidden down our cheeks.

The little village that once enlivened this place is no more; likewise the smoke that used to waft up from busy stoves. Alas, all that can now be heard about that dilapidated old villa is the chirping of sparrows and other little birds.

Brambles and thorns grow in profusion: there is no telling where the dancing stage was once located. Only the vines, winding their tender tendrils about that spot, show any

sign of longing for bygone days.

Who, when casting a sorry glance at what has become of this villa, can speak with any

certainty about the flower viewing banquets that once took place here? All I can do is

watch the fleeting clouds with forlorn eyes, nursing my own sorrows within.



14. Wild Geese in Autumn: A Reply to Asano no Yoshimichi⁶³⁹

Ryōunshū, poem no. 16

⁶³⁹ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Presented by Asano no Yoshimichi, Left Head of the Imperial Gate, about Hearing the Early Cry of a Wild Goose One Autumn Night while on Duty in the Palace Watchman’s Station.” The identity of this Yoshimichi, if that is indeed the correct reading of his name, is unknown. He appears again in another poem, also by Saga (poem no. 22, translated below), where his surname is given simply as 朝. While one might tentatively render his surname as Ason 朝臣, the 臣 bit may also be understood as meaning literally vassal, in which case, the man’s surname was most likely Asano 朝野 or Asahara 朝原. The season is mid-autumn—the eighth lunar month—and the poet has heard the first cries of wild geese arriving from the north. These geese, tellingly referred to in the first couplet as *saiyan/saigan* 塞鴻, geese stationed up north, represent both those loyal soldiers stationed far from home, as well as the couriers of letters sent from the northern battlefield. Consequently, it seems plausible to me that this Yoshimichi might be of Korean or Chinese descent, and that his original poem, which does not survive, was the lament of a man living far from home, in which the geese would have been understood as coming to act as his courier, bringing messages back to his native home across the sea. Mention in the fifth couplet of *bohái/bokkai* 渤海, an alternative form of 渤海, that is, Parhae, would suggest that this Yoshimichi might have been from that kingdom.

Saga sympathizes with a man, likely a foreigner in service at the Heian court, who, having spent the night on duty in the palace watchman's station, and having at that time heard the first cries of wild geese coming from the north, was stirred to sad thoughts of home, evidently in Parhae, or somewhere thereabouts. The imagery here relates to military campaigns, especially those routinely carried out against unruly "barbarian" tribes to the north, a problem shared by both the continental rulers and Saga.

和左衛督朝臣嘉通秋夜寓直周廬聽早雁之作

涼秋八月驚塞鴻 早報寒聲雜遠空
 絕域傳書全漢信 關門表弓守胡戎
 凌雲陣影低天末 叫夜遙音振水中
 葵女彈琴清曲響 潘郎作賦興情融
 朝搏渤澥事南度 夕宿煙霞耐朔風
 感殺周廬寓直者 終宵不寢意無窮

Wild geese stationed so far away up north, surprised by the chilly air of this mid-autumn moon, now fill the sky with these their earliest cries, informing kith and kin to join them here in the south.

Here, to this land so far away, they bring letters sent from the continent: *Stationed along the northern barrier, beneath a crescent moon—that bow-handle in the sky—we soldiers keep diligent watch against the barbarians.*

Dense clouds—high-soaring ill portents of war!—cast their heavy shadows lowly across the horizon. Distant cries—are they of men or of geese?—reverberate through the night, disturbing the water’s otherwise placid face.

It is with deep lamentation that those poor young maidens make their zithers ring with such sadly austere melodies, longing as they do for their men so far away.⁶⁴⁰ Sentiments

⁶⁴⁰ My use here of the word young maidens as a translation of the original *kuinü/kijo* 葵女, “lady of the Chinese mallow,” while sufficient, does not capture what I suspect to be an allusion to a rather moving Han-period tale, entitled “The Lady of Lu,” (鲁漆室女) found in Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (80 BC-6 BC) famous *Lienüzhuan* 列女伝. The protagonist of this tale, a woman of an age to be married, is found lamenting on her porch. A neighbor, eager to alleviate the woman’s suffering, offers to act as a go-between for a prospective marriage. In response to this kind offer, the weeping woman informs her neighbor that her tears are not for her own sake, but for the sake of the realm: the sovereign has grown old, while the prince, his only heir, is still too young to rule in his stead. There is sure to be disorder if the sovereign should pass away before the prince is of a suitable age. When asked why she lamented so sorely about things not directly related to her everyday life, this wise woman related a certain incident which, while not at first directly bearing upon her own life, ended up killing her only brother, leaving her without any male support. This latter incident was initially triggered by the accidental destruction of her neighbor’s garden of Chinese mallow (*dongkui* 冬葵). In virtue of this tale, the lady of Lu became in Chinese literature, a symbol of patriotic,

too deep for words are stirred up by those handsome gallants with their wartime
verses.⁶⁴¹

In the morning, the wild geese exert themselves in flying southward, beating their wings
across the Bohai Sea. By night, making the mist and sea spray [of some desolate reef]
their temporary shelter, they suffer the onslaught of northern gales.

Woe to that wretched fellow who lodged in the palace watchman's station and heard the
cries of those winged couriers! Sad thoughts, to be sure, ceaselessly renewed, drove
slumber far from his lonely pillow.



15. Reed Pipes: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi⁶⁴²

conscientious concern over the fate of the realm, especially with regards to civil unrest and potential war. It is to this literary figure, I think, that Saga is alluding here.

⁶⁴¹ It seems that here, too, the idea is that the wild geese are acting as couriers between the lamenting women back home in the south and their embattled lovers stationed up north.

⁶⁴² The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Composed by Sugawara no Kiyokimi about Hearing the Music of Reed Pipes While Travelling on the Road One Autumn Night.” Chinese reed pipes (*sheng/shō* 笙) resemble panpipes, only larger. These were first imported to Japan during the Nara period. Sugawara no Kiyokimi 菅原清公 (770-842), grandfather of the famous Michizane, served as a compiler for both *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū*. Kiyokimi's poem is preserved in *Ryōunshū* (poem no. 70). I have provided a translation of it immediately below Saga's reply. Incidentally, Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu also composed a reply to Kiyokimi's poem (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 31), though I have not provided a translation here.

Ryōunshū, poem no. 17

Saga praises the mellifluous sound and versatility of the reed pipes, which may be played in harmony both with foreign, that is, less canonical instruments as well as those of the courtly ensemble. Kiyokimi's poem, appearing immediately below this one, should be read first, as it gives the particular context within which Saga is working.

和菅清公秋夜途中聞笙

秋欲彈時聞怪音 吹笙寫得鳳皇吟

鳴簧出曲添羌笛 列管催調協雅琴

新聲宛轉遙夜振 妙響聯綿遠風沉

途中暫聽腸應斷 況復仙郎有興心

How fitting that you should happen to hear such miraculous notes, at that very time when the autumn moon inspires us most to play upon our zithers. Miraculous notes,

indeed!—notes, you say, that imitated the songs of phoenixes.

Reed pipes produce the most varied melodies: at times they may be played to accompany the flutes of foreign realms; still, at other times, they may be adopted to harmonize with our own courtly zithers.

Those fresh notes, [the very ones you yourself heard], ripple sonorously through the stillness of the night; those sublime tunes flutter through the breeze, resounding, albeit gently, both far and wide.

No wonder, then, that you, a traveler on the road, were so utterly smitten by those melodies.

How much more irresistible must those notes have been when they came from the lips of some inspired immortal!

What follows here is a translation of Kiyokimi's poem.

Hearing the Reed Pipes on an Autumn Night

Sugawara no Kiyokimi

Ryōunshū, poem no. 70

The narrator, travelling on the road one autumn night, and chancing to overhear a beautiful melody being played on the reed pipes, fancies the unseen musician to be one of the immortals of ancient Daoist legend. It ought to be noted that the road upon which Kiyokimi was travelling is, as the poet himself declares in the first couplet, one of those which ran through the capital, and not some far-off lonely mountain pass. Consequently, the imagined immortal pipe-player would have been playing somewhere in the capital.

秋夜途中聞笙

皇城陌上槐風聿 天漢波間桂月明

不知誰家郎第幾 寫鸞摸鳳以吹笙

金商鸞曲秋聲亮 玉管成文夜響清

王子偶仙何處在 洛濱遺態使人驚⁶⁴³

Autumn winds rustle through rows of stately pagoda trees standing alongside the roads that

⁶⁴³ I have given 洛濱 instead of the original 落濱, considering the fact that it was on the banks of the Luo River 洛水 where Wang Ziqiao was supposed to have met the divine sage who instructed him in the ways of immortality. See the footnote to the English translation of this couplet below.

run through the Imperial Palace. The moon shimmers brightly amidst waves of stars
 flowing through the Milky Way.

Hark! I hear the sound of a reed pipe, whose notes conjure up to the mind's eye images of
 strange birds and fabulous phoenixes! Who could be playing such divine notes? Have
 I perchance stumbled across the mansion of some illustrious musician?

That melody, with notes so crisp and cool, reverberates through the moonlit autumn air,
 engendering it with even greater luminescence; that marvelous flute sings with the
 voice of a poet, giving to the night verses as pure as jade.

How shall I search out the place where Master Wang first encountered that immortal sage?
 With what wonder I would look upon the banks of the Luo River, astonished to see
 what is left behind!⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁴ The second half of this couplet is somewhat cryptic. Wang Ziqiao 王子喬 is one of the more popular Chinese immortals, said to have been born a mortal man, Prince Jin 太子晉, son of King Ling of Zhou 周靈王, who reigned from 571 BC to 545 BC. It was by the banks of the Luo River 洛水, which flows through modern-day Henan Province, that Wang encountered the divine sage Fu Qiu 浮丘, Floating Hill, who would guide him on to become an immortal himself. In the legend of Wang Ziqiao, it is reported that, after he had disappeared for some time, he appeared one last time before his family, playing the reed pipes—the key element in Kiyokimi's poem and Saga's response—and riding on a white crane. There is no mention in this tale, however, of anything exceptional left behind along the banks of the Luo River. Could this perhaps be referring to Wang's shoes, as it is often said in Daoist accounts of men who attained immortality, that while their physical body is nowhere to be found, they often leave their shoes behind as a sign that they have sloughed off the mortal coil. Perhaps the original is not referring to any single object, but rather to a general alteration of scenery. After all, the word I have tentatively rendered as something "left behind" is *yitai/itai* 遺態, which is more usually used in reference to the overall appearance of something.



16. Early Snowfall: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi⁶⁴⁵

Ryōunshū, poem no. 18

The narrator here rejoices in what has proven to be the early arrival of winter. His reference to neglected female courtiers and poor scholars is quickly contrasted with renewed blossoms and bejeweled pagodas, giving to the whole piece an air of rejuvenation and future prosperity.

和菅清公賦早雪

雲晴朔方早雪降 從天落地本亡聲

⁶⁴⁵ Kiyokimi's poem has not been preserved. At least no poem by him bearing that exact title appears in any of Saga's anthologies. Poem no. 71, however, which appears immediately after "Hearing the Reed Pipes on an Autumn Night," is about that very subject.

班姬秋扇已無色 孫子夜書獨有明

梅柳此時花與絮 樓臺併是銀將瓊

雖言委積未盈尺 須賀初冬瑞氣呈

The clouds have since cleared away and the northern wind has begun to blow; the snow falls early this year. From the heavens, without so much as a whisper, snowflakes descend to earth.

Folding fans, the sort female courtiers eager for attention are wont to use, have long since been neglected; their brilliant colors have not been seen for some time now. Moonlight reflected upon the snow-covered ground now serves as a reading light to scholars too poor to afford oil for their lamps.

Look! Plum trees and willows, long since deprived of their blossoms, show their whitish flowers again.⁶⁴⁶ See how the pavilions and pagodas are covered in sheets of silver and bejeweled all over with beads of jade!

True, this early snowfall of ours has left us with but a thin blanket; not so much as a foot of

⁶⁴⁶ That is, the snow that has settled on the branches of these trees looks very much like spring flowers.

snow has even piled up. Even so, let us rejoice all the same and give thanks to the auspicious beginning of an early winter season.



17. The Dilapidated Mansion⁶⁴⁷

Ryōunshū, poem no. 19

Here Saga expresses his own grief over the sorry state of a once prosperous piece of property, namely, the mansion of the late Sugawara no Kiyokimi.

和進士貞主初春過菅祭酒宅 悵然傷懷簡布・巨・藤三秀才作 一絶

⁶⁴⁷ The full title of this poem is “My reply, in two septasyllabic couplets, to a poem written in early spring by Shigeno no Sadanushi, scholar of the Faculty of Letters, in which, while passing by the home of Sugawara no Kiyokimi, late head of the imperial university, he lamented the dilapidated state of that property, and which verses he then sent to three notable scholars, namely, Mr. Furu, Kose no Shikihito, and Mr. Fujiwara.” The identities of Furu and Fujiwara are uncertain.

書閣閑來冬變春 梅花獨笑向啼人
 雖知世上必然理 猶恨門前斷舊賓

Before the silence of that study, now so empty and quiet, winter has since changed to
 spring. The plum blossoms are the only ones smiling in the midst of so many who
 continue to weep.

Though I know full well that such is the fate of all worldly things, still, I cannot help but
 lament the absence of those old guests who used to visit your gates. Alas, their footfall
 shall be heard here no more.



18. Expedient Means⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁸ The full title of this poem is “After Hearing a Recitation of the Lotus Sutra, Each of Us Composed a Poem on One of its Chapters. Having Drawn Lots, I was to Compose a Poem on the Chapter Entitled ‘Expedient Means’ (*fangbianpin/hōbenbon* 方便品). My Rhyme is Taken from One of the Characters in the Title of This Chapter.” Saga took his rhyme from the character *fang/hō* 方. The term expedient means refers to the Buddha’s method of flexibly adapting all manner of teachings and manifestations to suit his audience in order to draw as many sentient beings as possible to salvation. As Saga himself states in the final couplet of this poem, while there is only really one path towards enlightenment—the so-called single or supreme vehicle (*yisheng/ichijō* —

Ryōunshū, poem no. 20

Saga here presents a poem expounding the Buddhist doctrine of expedient means, the idea that the ultimate truth, while eternally one and the same in itself, may be taught in a wide variety of ways, depending on the needs of those in search of enlightenment. It ought to be noted here that Saga's poem is in no way profound; his verses convey only the bare minimum of information needed to begin grasping this doctrine.

聽誦法華經 各賦一品 得方便品 題中取韻

春暮禪心何寂寞 恭恭傾耳聽經王

甚深知慧極難解 微妙因緣豈易量

續火香爐烟不滅 從風清梵響猶長

唯歸一乘權立二 引入群生有萬方

乘)—there is an endless variety of ways in which people, depending on their particular temperament and relative spiritual evolution, can, or ought to be, led to this ultimate realization.

How serene was my heart, deep and meditative, this late spring day, as I listened with
reverence to our great master of sutras reciting to us.

Wisdom of this profundity is near impossible to comprehend, try as we might; the chain of
karmic causation is of such mysterious complexity—no less difficult to grasp.

Incense was kept burning in the cauldron throughout the entire recitation; its smoke was not
once allowed to cease. That most sonorous voice, borne aloft upon the wind, was
carried over great distances.

Though tentative divisions are at times introduced, the supreme vehicle of Buddhism
remains but one and undivided: all sentient beings are drawn to this great path by
means of the ten-thousand expedient means.



19. The Fur Hat⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁹ The full title of this poem is “I Had a Fur Hat Sent to Nobi, Assistant Minister of Personnel, Upon Hearing that He Had Been Stationed in an Outlying Castle.” Castle here refers to a fortification erected expressly for the purpose of defending the periphery from invasion. The identity of Nobi, whose given name is not revealed, remains a mystery, as does the place where he

Ryōunshū, poem no. 21

Saga sent this poem along with a sable hat presented to a soldier who was scheduled to be stationed somewhere far up north. That Saga describes this sable hat as a “special present” is a clear indication of his desire to portray himself as a beneficent and merciful ruler, concerned about the welfare of each and every soldier sent to fight for the realm.

吏部侍野美聞使邊城賜帽裘

歲晚嚴冬寒最切 忠臣為國向邊城

貂裘暖帽宜羈旅 特贈卿之萬里行

The year draws to a close; the winter cold is now at its worst. You, loyal vassal, for the sake of our realm, despite the cold and the frost, betake yourself to some outlying castle!

was stationed. Considering Saga saw fit to gift the man with a fur hat, we can safely assume he was sent up north, likely to Mutsu, to assist in repelling the pesky *emishi* who continued to rebel against court authority.

Take this sable hat—the perfect thing to have when travelling far from home—a special present from me, your sovereign, to you, O, brave man, that it may keep you warm during that hard journey of ten-thousand miles.



20. Bidding Farewell to Yoshimichi⁶⁵⁰

Ryōunshū, poem no. 22

⁶⁵⁰ The full title of this poem is “Bidding Farewell to Asano no Yoshimichi, Junior Captain of the Right Imperial Guard, Before His Tour of Duty to Pacify the Kantō Region. We Drew Lots and I Came Up with the Character for Vassal (*chen/shin* 臣).” This Yoshimichi, assuming that is the correct reading of his name, first appeared in poem no. 16. Now, considering the two posts recorded in the titles of these two Yoshimichi poems, as well as the likely date of composition—both before 814—it seems somewhat plausible that this man is in fact Asano no Katori 朝野鹿取 (774-843), a seasoned general and recognized scholar who served Saga faithfully, both during the first years of his enthronement, and later on, as well. Katori was appointed left head of the imperial gate in 811, the post listed in poem no. 16, and junior captain of the left (not right) imperial guard in 814, the post listed in poem no. 22. If my guess is right, and the characters 嘉通 are meant to signify Katori, I can offer the following admittedly tenuous reading: The first character 嘉 can be read phonetically as *ka*, while the second character 通 can be read semantically as *tōri*, which could, without much effort, be shortened to *tori*. Furthermore, Katori was given the honorary surname Asano no ason 朝野朝臣, which would nicely explain appearance of the characters 朝臣 in poem no. 16. If, however, this Yoshimichi is Katori, how are we to account for the possibility that he was a foreigner, as suggested (by me) in poem no. 16? One possible answer is the suggestion that his father, a man by the name of Ushinumihara no Karitori 忍海原鷹取, was, as his surname indicates, descended from foreign stock (see *Nihon kōki*, “kaisetsu,” 1366). After all, Katori only obtained the surname Asano in 791 at the petition (to the sovereign) of his adopted uncle. Until then he used his father’s surname.

Saga encourages a soldier scheduled to go up north to fight the recalcitrant barbarians to stay strong and fight manly for the sake of the realm. Here, as with other related war poems, the emphasis is laid not so much on the dangers of military strife, or the hardships suffered in battle, but the lonely journey from the capital to the distant north.

餞右親衛少將軍朝嘉通奉使慰撫關東 探得臣

遠使邊城撫殘虜 禁中賜餞送良臣

離庭物候雖初夏 向處風烟未換春

鄉心杳杳切歸想 客路悠悠稀故人

別後卿能應努力 莫愁千里多苦辛

Today, here within our Imperial Palace, we hold this farewell party in your honor, loyal vassal, for soon you will off, far away to a distant castle to quell those rebellious barbarians who yet linger behind to fight.

Though the summer, with all its charms, has since begun to visit the surrounding lands, that

place to which you go—O, so far, far away to the north!—has yet to say farewell to
the cooler mists of spring.⁶⁵¹

With what grievous sorrow your heart will long for the comforts of home. On your journey,
a road both long and lonely, you will seldom meet one whom you knew from the
capital; only strangers will you see.

Once you have left us, strive with all your might to perform noble deeds, to excel in martial
valor. Let not your heart grow heavy, encumbered though it must become with toils
and tribulations met upon the way, the way of a thousand miles.



21. Bidding Farewell to Master Genpin⁶⁵²

⁶⁵¹ This couplet is meant to emphasize not only a difference in climate—the north is much colder, and therefore harsher, than the capital—but also a difference in civilization—the northern people are backward, not participating in the same cycle of nature as prevails back in the capital. All of Saga’s poems, without exception, are what might be called capital-centric: “nature,” the “proper” cycle of the seasons, means that which can be seen in the capital; anything that differs from this is unnatural, improper, less civilized.

⁶⁵² Genpin 玄賓 (734-818) was a prominent monk of the Hossō 法相 sect who, having performed Buddhist rituals meant to cure an ailing Emperor Kanmu, in 805, and again for a sickly Heizei, in 809, was, like Kūkai and Saichō, on very intimate terms with Saga. Genpin spent most of his life away from the capital. This poem of Saga’s must have been presented to the monk upon his departure from a short visit to the capital.

Ryōunshū, poem no. 23

Saga offers verses of praise to Genpin, a monk whose healing prayers were once requested both for Saga's father, the late Emperor Kanmu, as well as his brother, a recently estranged ex-sovereign Heizei. Interestingly, unlike Kūkai and Saichō, who were both very cosmopolitan and spent most of their active lives in the capital, Genpin was a hermit monk who spent most of his days far from the capital. It is this distance from the capital that Saga chooses to emphasize and praise here.

贈賓和尚

賓公遁跡星霜久 萬事無情愛寂然

水月尋常冷空性 風雷未敢動安禪

苦行獨老山中室 盥嗽偏宜林下泉

遙想焚香觀念處 寥寥日夜著雲烟

Many are the moons that have passed, Master Genpin, for you in solitude, away from the world of man; no attachments to any of our mundane cares binds *your* soul, fond as it is of profound silence.

Your soul, empty of all those things that bind us lesser mortals, is perpetually cooled by the waters and the moonlight that chance to visit you. Neither wind nor thunder—not even these things!—could ever disturb your peaceful meditation.

Strict ascetic discipline fortifies your aged frame, dwelling alone in some mountain cave; you quench your thirst and wash your face, as is most befitting a practitioner of your mastery, in some pure forest spring.

When I think on that solitary abode of yours, and how you will soon be sitting there burning incense, deep in meditation, I cannot help but imagine you clothed, like some immortal, in clouds and mist, your heart wholly at peace night and day.



22. A Donation of Cotton for Master Kūkai⁶⁵³

Ryōunshū, poem no. 24

Saga sends a gift of cotton (or, according to an alternate reading, silk) to Kūkai in his solitary mountain temple as a means of requesting prayers for the salvation of him and his subjects. Here, as elsewhere, Saga contrasts the mild climate of the capital with the colder atmosphere of the mountains.

贈綿寄空法師

閒僧久住雲中嶺 遙想深山春尚塞

松栢斜知甚靜默 烟霞不解幾年滄

⁶⁵³ An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 54, in which the gift presented to Kūkai is rendered as silk, not cotton, taking the character 綿, cotton, to be an erratum for 錦, brocade. This is certainly a plausible reading. Whereas cotton would have been appreciated for its usefulness in padding against the cold of a mountain winter, silk, too, would have been welcomed as a means of fashioning more beautiful ceremonial robes. During the time this poem was composed Kūkai was still living the life of a solitary ascetic deep within Mount Takao 高雄山, Kyoto, where he stayed from 810 to 816. It was only in 816 that Kūkai began working in Mount Kōya 高野山, Wakayama.

禪關近日消息斷 京邑如今花柳寬

菩薩莫嫌此輕贈 為救施者世間難

O, solitary monk, how long you have dwelt alone amidst those cloud-covered peaks! I

cannot help but think how chilly those distant mountains of yours must be; surely they
have not yet felt the warmth of spring.

How could those pines—oldest of things—how could they truly comprehend the profound

silence that prevails in your lonely dwelling?⁶⁵⁴ Not even the mists, sublime

sustenance of immortals, can match your simple yearly fare.⁶⁵⁵

I have received no news of you as of late from those meditative mountains. Let me tell you,

on my end, that the flowers and the willow trees here in the capital are now in full

⁶⁵⁴ The alternate translation mentioned in the previous footnote renders the compound 斜知 as “well aware.” I think, however, that 斜 should here be taken as a substitute for the homophonous character 邪, which has the function of acting as a question-marker, hence “how could they know,” or something of that sort. This fits better with the second half of this couplet, the gist of which is to emphasize the profound tranquility of the hermit-monk’s life, the real significance of which can only be understood by the hermit himself; not even nature, despite its inherent wisdom, can grasp this mystery.

⁶⁵⁵ More literally, “not even the mist knows what you’ve been eating these past years.” As my translation seeks to indicate, mist is almost always associated with Daoist immortals, for it is said that these sagely beings partake exclusively of mist, never troubling their rarefied stomachs with the coarser fare of us mortals. Kūkai, having gone a step beyond this, must be dining on something even more sublime, though what exactly that might be, not even the mist, that is, the immortals, knows.

bloom.

I pray, O, venerable saint: do not look down upon this meager gift [of cotton] we have sent to you. Think of it as an offering for the salvation of our souls; let our donation serve as a means of releasing us from the clutches of this vile world!



POEMS PRESENTED BY SAGA IN *BUNKA SHŪREISHŪ***23. A Spring Dawn in the Riverside Pavilion⁶⁵⁶**

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, excursions, poem no. 1

Saga, awoken from a peaceful sleep in his Kaya Villa, speaks fondly of the wild beauty to be found in this mountainous retreat. Notice the profuse use of sound imagery: cocks crowing, streams bubbling, and monkeys crying.

江頭春曉

江頭亭子人事睽 欹枕唯聞古戍雞

雲氣濕衣知近岫 泉聲驚寢覺鄰溪

⁶⁵⁶ This is another one of the numerous poems Saga wrote while staying in his Kaya Villa (see also *Ryōunshū*, poem nos. 11-14). Whether this poem was composed during the same time as those found in *Ryōunshū* is uncertain, though striking similarities to poem no. 12 of the latter anthology seem to indicate that it might have been. An alternative translation of the poem may be found in Burton Watson, trans., *Japanese Literature in Chinese*, volume 1, 44.

天邊孤月乘流疾 山裏飢猿到曉啼

物候雖言陽和未 汀洲春草欲萋萋

Here, in this riverside pavilion of mine, far away from all the mundane cares of that madding world, I lie awake, elbow propped upon my pillow, listening to the sounds of dawn.⁶⁵⁷ All I can hear is the cock's cry coming from that old fort nearby.

My garments have become damp with the moisture of clouds and mist: only now do I realize just how close I am to the caves of those lofty mountain peaks.⁶⁵⁸ A bubbling stream wakes me up: only now do I understand how close the valley lies.

A solitary moon, soaring so high in the night sky, is reflected upon the stream, rushing westward along with that rapid current. Monkeys in search of food wail ceaselessly,

⁶⁵⁷ Note that the pillows of those days were generally made of wood, resembling a rectangular block. The correct reading of the phrase 欹枕 is problematic. Kojima renders it as *makura wo sobatatete*, which, taken literally, means to prop up a pillow. Watson renders this as “pillow pushed aside,” which is another sound reading, seeing as the character 欹 may also be read as *katamukeru*, to put to one side. This, at least, is how Kojima understands it, too. I, however, have decided to go with the literal reading, namely, to prop up, and here imagine Saga leaning, half-sitting, half-reclining on his wooden pillow, propped up vertically so as to form a sort of elbow-rest (*kyōsoku* 脇息).

⁶⁵⁸ Chinese naturalists believed that clouds and mist originated in and were daily exhaled from mountain caves, especially those located high up. Saga is referring here to Mt. Takao, at the base of which his Kaya Villa was located. The real point of this couplet is to emphasize the relatively wild state of nature prevailing about this mountain villa, implying, as always, a direct contrast to the gentler form of nature found only in his beloved capital.

even to the coming of dawn.

According to our official calendar, this spring should soon be giving way to summer. Along the banks of this cool mountain stream, however, spring herbs are just beginning to grow in great profusion: spring comes later here.⁶⁵⁹



⁶⁵⁹ This is my own interpretation. Watson's translation, which is faithful to Kojima's reading, goes as follows: "Though seasonal signs caution us warm weather is still far off, by banks and shoals, spring grasses are ready to turn lush and green." Their reading depends on, what I believe to be, an incorrect reading of the character *wei/mi* 未, appearing at the end of the first verse in this couplet. Whereas this character can certainly be rendered as *imadashi*, "not yet," or, with Watson, "still far off," it can also be used, as the eighth of twelve terrestrial branches, to refer to the approaching end of a cycle. Of course, there is always the possibility that 未 is an erratum for 末, "the end," which would happily support my interpretation. The compound 陽和 certainly refers specifically to spring, and not merely "warm weather" in general. The expression 陽和未 (or 未), therefore, should be understood as referring to the approaching end of springtime, when, according to the official calendar used at court, spring herbs should already be starting to wither. Saga, when referring to the mountains about Kaya, never fails to emphasize the fact that they are colder than the capital. That the spring herbs growing along this mountain riverside are only beginning to become lush is clear testimony to the colder atmosphere of the place.

Indeed, another interpretation of this couplet is possible. Perhaps we might take Watson's translation, and add a few extra bits here and there, as follows: "Though [here in these chilly mountains] seasonal signs caution us warm weather is still far off, [back in the capital, where it is warmer] by banks and shoals, spring grasses are ready [in preparation for summer's arrival] to turn lush and green." That is, we might see the first verse as referring to the mountain scenery immediately visible before the narrator's eyes, which would certainly suggest that warmer weather was still a way's off, and the second verse as referring to the narrator's imagined picture of things back at the capital, where the heat of summer is already starting to show itself here and there. Such a reading seems also to harmonize with Saga's usual way of speaking of mountain scenery, especially when compared with the final couplet of poem no. 12 in *Ryōunshū*.

24. A Spring Day in the Saga Villa⁶⁶⁰

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, excursions, poem no. 2

Saga writes praise of his secluded Saga Villa.

春日嵯峨山院 探得遲字

氣序如今春欲老 嵯峨山院暖光遲

峰雲不覺侵梁棟 溪水尋常對簾帷

莓苔踏破經年髮 楊柳未懸伸月眉

此地幽閑人事少 唯餘風動暮猿悲

⁶⁶⁰ The full title of this poem is “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa. Having Drawn Lots, I Obtained the Rhyme-Character *chi/chi* 遲.” The Saga Villa, erected by command of Emperor Saga himself, was located about seven kilometers west of the imperial compound, where it served both throughout and after his reign as a temporary residence or retreat. The precise location of this villa remains unknown. Like the Kaya Villa, this retreat, located as it was amidst the mountains, was noticeably cooler than the imperial compound below. This poem was possibly composed near the end of the second lunar month—the tail end of what was officially considered mid-spring, hence the line “when springtide is quickly passing”—in the year 816, when, according to *Nihon kōki*, Saga hosted a banquet at this villa (*Nihon kōki*, Kō’nin 7 [816].2.27, 721).

In this season, today, when springtide is quickly passing as by, the atmosphere here at the Saga Villa, tucked away in the cool mountains, is not half so quick to adopt that warmth already found in the capital.

Mist lingering about the mountain peaks drifts, quite without notice, into my villa, clinging about the rafters and pillars, while the stream, as is its wont, flows always close by my hanging blinds.⁶⁶¹

While the tender sprouts of new mosses are already working their way up through the older moss patches, the new branches of willows growing along the riverbank have yet to stretch out their lithe fingers.⁶⁶²

How serene and secluded is this place, far from the chaos of mundane affairs! All I can hear is the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, and the mournful crying of monkeys as evening falls.

⁶⁶¹ The idea here is that the Saga Villa, and all who have the opportunity of staying there, exists in a harmonious relationship with nature, exemplified here by the clouds or mist above and the mountain stream below. Another connotation, I suspect, is that the clouds and the water, personified here as guests, desire to spend some time with Saga and his vassals, due to the virtuous characters of these lettered men.

⁶⁶² Willow trees, in Sinitic poetry, belong to the springtime. That the willows around Saga Villa have not yet sent forth their new branches is a sign that spring comes slowly to these mountains. Moss, while often considered a summer image, appears in many Sinitic poems as a regular, year-round feature in descriptions of deep, moist mountains. The profusion of moss here is meant to emphasize the wild, relatively untouched nature of this solitary mountain retreat.



25. A Spring Day at the Crown Prince's Elegant Mansion⁶⁶³

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, excursions, poem no. 4

As is so often the case, Saga speaks of this secluded mansion—just as he does of his own favorite villas—in terms of an idyllic place of rest, an otherworldly realm separated from the mundane cares of a madding world. Here, as with his “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa,” Saga juxtaposes the renewed color of willow trees with the lingering, older hues of aging moss, as a means of simultaneously celebrating what is to come and admiring, and thus preserving from oblivion, what has already passed.

⁶⁶³ Refer to “The Southern Pond Mansion” (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 7) for details about the crown prince—Saga’s younger brother and the man who would later become Emperor Junna—and his “elegant mansion,” the so-called Southern Pond Mansion. Kojima suggests that the present poem might have been presented at the same banquet in which “The Southern Pond Mansion” was presented. This is problematic, however, considering this banquet was held in summer. We simply do not know when the present poem was presented.

春日大弟雅院

詩家有興來雅院 雅院由來絕世閑
 陽砌雖看新柳色 陰堦常點舊苔斑
 就暖晴花開簾外 欲巢時鳥啄庭間
 此地端居翫風景 寂寥人事暫無關

We poets, inspired by the muses, have gathered here in the crown prince's most elegant mansion, a solitary and serene place wholly hidden away from the chaotic world of outside.

While, to the south of the mansion, where the sun shines most brilliantly, willow trees standing along the stone walkway are beginning to show new sprouts, at the same time, to the north of the mansion, where the sun is not half so bright, patches of moss growing by the stairs remain spotted throughout with darker, older hues.

Flowers smiling joyously beneath a warm sky now blossom just outside the furled blinds; vernal birds of all kinds are busy pecking about in the garden, looking for material for their little nests.

O, but should one dwell here in silence for a time, admiring the natural scenery surrounding him on all sides, surely such a one, bathed in these exquisitely solitary pleasures, would find himself temporarily removed from all mundane cares.



26. A Summer Boat-ride⁶⁶⁴

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, excursions, poem no. 8

Saga here describes a summer boat-ride upon Lake Biwa. Aside from the expected descriptions of natural phenomenon, we are given here a glimpse of rural life, what with the maidens who come to pick lotus roots alongside the lake, and the weathered fishermen who gather to ply their ancient trade. In this sense, the present poem might be interpreted as Saga's effort to place himself momentarily within a (probably half-imagined) rural

⁶⁶⁴ The full title of this poem is “Floating in Our Boats Upon the Great Lake [Biwa] on a Summer’s Day.” Lake Biwa, Japan’s largest and one of its most celebrated lakes, is located in Ōmi (modern-day Shiga). An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 65.

landscape.

夏日臨泛大湖

水國追涼到 乘舟泛大湖

風前翻浪起 雲裡落帆弧

浦香濃盧橘 洲色暗蒼蘆

邑女採蓮伴 村翁釣魚徒

畏景西山沒 清猿北嶼呼

沿洄興不已 弭楫轉歸臚

Here, to this land of cooling water, we have come, hoping, by taking refuge upon Lake

Biwa within our floating boats, to escape the awful heat of summer.

Headwinds stir up the waves; half-concealed by a patch of hazy mist, a lone boat lowers its

sails.

About the inlet clings the rich scent of loquats, while the sandbanks are dark with the

verdure of clustered reeds.

Maidens from the countryside have gathered side-by-side to pick lotus roots, while aged

fishermen from the surrounding villages have come to cast their hooks and nets.

The sun, so severe in its heat, has begun to set behind the western mountains, while

monkeys with their shrill, cool cry call out somewhere from the northern hills.

O, but it seems there should be no end to the pleasures we enjoy upon the water! At length,

though, we relax our poling and turn our bows towards the shore.



27. Farewell to Governor Ō: My Reply to Yoshimine no Yasuo⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶⁵ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem by Yoshimine no Yasuo, High Captain of the Imperial Gate, Entitled ‘Springtime in my Study, Bidding Farewell to [Sakai] Ō, Provincial Governor of Chikuzen [modern-day Fukuoka, Kyūshū], as He Set Out to Return to His Appointed Province’.” This Ō likely refers to Sakai Ō 栄井王, whose full name and rank—listed as assistant governor—appear in an edict issued by Saga in the winter of 813 (*Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 4 [813].11.21, 657). In this edict, Saga complains of too much leniency towards the barbarians, and commands his provincial governors, among whom this Ō is one, to quickly return to their respective provinces and do what is necessary to bring about harmonious government throughout the realm. As Ō was appointed to Chikuzen, he would be responsible for dealing with a number of ethnically different tribes based in that region known collectively as the *kumaso* 熊襲. Yoshimine no Yasuo (785-830), a son of Emperor Kanmu later (in 803) demoted to the status of vassal and given the surname Yoshimine, was one of Saga's trusted and very well educated vassals, having served as one of the four compilers of his *Nihon kōki*, and later as leader of the team of compilers for *Keikokushū*. Yasuo's original poem has not been preserved.

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, farewells, poem no. 19

Saga sympathizes with the lonely journey of a provincial governor ordered—by Saga himself—to return to his appointed province in western Kyūshū.

和金吾將軍良安世 春齊別筑前王大守還任

星使去年入主畿 今年事畢萬里歸

山隨客路春光送 人至他鄉交結稀

離心積日風煙遠 回首前程指落暉

獨在羈亭傷別意 聞猿夜夜轉依依

It was just last year that you, Governor Ō, imperially-appointed emissary, arrived in our capital. This year, having completed your duties here at court, you are to return along that ten-thousand mile long road back to your appointed province.

While the warm sun of spring shall follow you through the mountain passes as you wend your lonely way thither, once you have reached that distant province, brave soul, there

will be very few with whom you might converse.

At times, you may cast your glance longingly eastward, back towards the capital, though
 mile upon mile of mist will stand between you and here. Then, turning back towards
 the west, you might point a finger at the setting sun so far away.

Alone in some traveler's lodge you shall find yourself sitting, nursing your sorrow at
 having been parted from us, and, hearkening to the shrill cry of distant monkeys
 calling out night after night, you, too, shall weep with renewed agony.



28. To a Filial Son on His Way Home⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁶ The full title of this poem is “Presented to Fujiwara no Koreo, Left Junior Head of the Imperial Gate, Upon the Occasion of His Receiving a Promotion and Returning Home to Bicchū [modern-day Fukuoka] to Personally Inform His Parents.” Fujiwara no Koreo (or perhaps, as Kojima would have it, Yoshio, d.831), a native of modern-day Fukuoka, was awarded junior lower Fifth Rank in the late spring—hence the “it is now late spring” in the first couplet of this poem—of 818 (*Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 9 [818].3.12, 753). This man was evidently a grandson of Fujiwara no Uchimarō (756-812), the powerful courtier who, in 809, offered up victuals and drink for a banquet hosted by Saga in honor of Retired Emperor Heizei (see *Nihon kōki*, endnote no. 2, 1279). It is little wonder, having such an illustrious grandfather, that Yoshio was shown special favor by Saga. Not just any man going back to see his parents was given a poem composed by the sovereign himself.

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, farewells, poem no. 20

A filial son is setting out on the long journey back home to inform his parents of a promotion received at the hands of Emperor Saga. Moved by the man's earnest desire to give his parents the good news firsthand, Saga presents him with a poem, at once praising his filial virtue, as well as reminding him, no matter how pleasant his trip back home might prove, to remember to return to the capital in due time.

左兵衛佐藤是雄 見授爵之備州謁親 因以賜詩

別時節候春云暮 為謁慈親辭帝京

邑裏兒童歡相待 村中耆耄拜邀迎

馬蹶雲山鄉念切 猿啼海嶠助羈行

雖言客路多芳草 莫學王孫不歸情

It is now late spring—now, when you are planning to depart from our imperial capital, in order to return home to pay your respects to those dearest, most benevolent parents of

yours.

How those little children of your hometown will rejoice to see you again! With what

respect those elders of your village will welcome you now!

May your horse's hooves fly like wind through the mountains, as swift as those winged

thoughts of home within your breast. May the monkeys crying from their seaside

mountain haunts lend their lonely sentiments to your equally lonely journey.

Do not stay away too long. I know just how beautiful those spring herbs that grow along

the roadside can be to a traveler far from home. Do not, I pray, forget to return again to

us here in the capital!



29. Zhang Zifang⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁷ The full title of this poem is “Composed after a Series of Lectures on the *Shiji* (Annals) had been Concluded. Having Drawn Lots, I Obtained the Name of Zhang Zifang.” Lectures on the canonical Chinese historical classic *Shiji* 史記 were held at court held from very early times. It was customary, after the lectures were over, to have a lavish banquet, one of the events of which consisted in presenting Sinitic poems about famous historical personages whose biographies appear in *Shiji*. Saga's subject, Zhang Zifang 張子房 (d. 186 BC), also known as Zhang Liang 張良, was a prominent statesman and military strategist who contributed immensely to the success of Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (247-195 BC, r. 202-195), founder of the Western Han dynasty. It was Zhang,

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, historical verses, poem no. 42

Saga sings the praises of Zhang Zifang, a loyal and ingenious vassal of Emperor Gaozu. It is interesting to note the manner in which Saga depicts this man as an example of virtuous service, tacitly glossing over the fact that he was also responsible for the downfall of the previous sovereign, Qin Shihuang. This is an example of Saga's technique of imposing selective interpretations on canonical texts or figures, interpretations which his vassals were expected to imitate.

史記講竟 賦得張子房

受命師漢祖 英風萬古傳

沙中義初發 山中感彌玄

形容類處女 計書撓強灌

furthermore, who advised Gaozu to establish his capital in the strategically superior region of Chang'an, as oppose to the earlier Luoyang.

封敵反謀散 招翁儲貳全

定都是劉說 違宰勸蕭賢

追從赤松子 避世獨超然

O, worthy Zhang Zifang, your noble deeds shall be preserved for ever and for always—you who, having received the mandate of high heaven, served as a teacher to the founding sovereign of the Han dynasty!

It was in Bolangsha where you first thought to bring to fruition—and justly so!—the vengeance you owed to your enemy. It was, however, in the mountains, whither you fled as a fugitive, where your deeper resolve was truly honed.⁶⁶⁸

While in appearance you may have been delicate and fair, not unlike a young maiden, in the formulation of military strategy you proved most manly, able to foil even the most

⁶⁶⁸ Zhang, descendant of an aristocratic family, was a native of Xinzheng 新鄭 (in modern-day Henan), the ancient capital of the Han 韓 kingdom (403-230 BC). In 230 BC, his hometown was annexed to the victorious Qin 秦 kingdom, headed by the notoriously famous unifier Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (259-210 BC, reigned as king of the Qin kingdom, 247-220, and then as the sovereign of all China, 220-210). Understandably opposed to the new regime, Zhang planned an ambush at Bolangsha 博浪沙, an area in modern-day Henan through which Qin Shihuang was scheduled to pass, with the intent of personally assassinating the new ruler. The attempt failed, and Zhang was thus forced to flee, living as a fugitive for many years thereafter.

fearsome opponents.⁶⁶⁹

You it was who encouraged your sovereign to reward an erstwhile foe with land and wealth, thereby discouraging any future insurrection. You, also, it was who advised your lord to summon forth the four elders as a means of securing the seat of the crown prince.⁶⁷⁰

It was you, having convened with Liu Jing, who convinced the sovereign to transfer his capital to Chang'an, and it was you, most modest vassal, who declined the position of Grand Counsellor in favor of Xiao He, whom you deemed more worthy even than yourself.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁹ The last part of this couplet is alluding to an event that occurred in 206 BC, known as the Feast at Hong Gate 鴻門会, in which Zhang was instrumental in rescuing Gaozu from what would otherwise most certainly have been an ignoble defeat at the hands of one of his mighty rivals, a general by the name of Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 BC).

⁶⁷⁰ Sometime after 202 BC, shortly after the Qin forces had been subdued and Gaozu had ascended the throne, Zhang once advised Gaozu to show favor towards Yongchi 雍齒 (d. 192 BC), a man who had previously rebelled against the sovereign, but had later surrendered, and to grant him both land and wealth, as a means of ensuring his and other men's future loyalty. Later on, when the question of who should be named Gaozu's crown prince arose, Zhang advised his lord to invite the four elders of Mt. Shang 商山四皓 to assist in making this all-important decision. Thanks to their wise council, the seat of crown prince remained with Prince Liu Ying 劉盈 (210-188 BC), who later ascended the throne as Emperor Hui 惠帝 (195-188).

⁶⁷¹ Liu Jing 劉敬 (n.d., fl. c. 200 BC) was a noteworthy advisor to Emperor Gaozu who, with Zhang Zifang, advised the transfer of the capital from Luo Yang to the more strategically located Chang'an. After a successful career of royal service, Zhang Zifang declined his sovereign's offer to become grand counsellor (*zaixiang/saishō* 宰相), recommending instead the statesman Xiao He 蕭何 (?-193 BC), who then took up the position, retaining it until his death. Earlier, when Gaozu had decided to move his capital to Chang'an, it was this Xiao He who had been placed in charge of overseeing the construction of the new palace compound and its gardens.

After all this, you chose to follow in the footsteps of those revered Daoist immortals of old,
 to live a life of ascetic seclusion, wholly separated from this madding world,
 resplendent with the peace and serenity of divine cultivation.



30. The Sorrow of Consort Ban⁶⁷²

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, erotic verses (*enjō*), poem no. 58

The narrator of this poem may be seen either as one who is sympathetic with the pitiable fate of Consort Ban—the once beloved concubine who was later neglected in favor of a more youthful dancing girl—or as Consort Ban herself. Either way, it is interesting to see

⁶⁷² Consort Ban, or Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (c.48-c.6 BC), was a highly educated concubine who was evidently a skilled poet. The most famous poem attributed to her brush, “Song of Resentment” (*Yuangexing* 怨歌行), depicts a concubine who, though once much beloved by her lord, has since been forgotten in favor of a recently appointed, more youthful concubine. In this poem, the narrator—presumably Ban herself, who was actually neglected in favor of another concubine—compares herself to a discarded fan, which, come the cooler months, is no longer needed to ward off the heat of summer. A translation of this poem may be found in Kang-i Sun Chang & Haun Saussy, ed., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 18-19.

Saga, as master of so many concubines himself, apparently sympathizing with what must have been a common plight of many of these women. I doubt, however, whether he is here expressing anything akin to genuine sympathy. The figure of Consort Ban was an extremely famous one, both in China and in the Heian court. Saga is, perhaps, doing nothing more than experimenting with a familiar motif.

婕妤怨

昭陽辭恩寵 長信獨離居
 團扇含愁詠 秋風怨有餘
 閑階人跡絕 冷帳月光虛
 久罷後庭望 形將歲時除

Her sovereign's affections, once so warm, at last grew cold and distant. Consort Ban was moved from her splendid chamber to live all alone within the Queen Mother's residence.

She, like the fan discarded in autumn, sings verses full of sorrow for her wretched plight.

The autumn breeze, usually so inviting, is to her an ever-painful reminder of bygone happiness.

No more did she hear the sound of eager footsteps coming to visit her—not upon those quiet stairs. In vain did the moon cast its light upon her cold curtains—no lover to enjoy the moonlight within that lonely chamber.

All hope of once again setting foot in the sovereign's rear palace, a place she had once called home, has long since been lost. As the years passed by, so, too, does her youthful charm. Hope and beauty fade together.



31. Breaking Willow Branches⁶⁷³

⁶⁷³ The title “Breaking Willow Branches” (*zheyangliu* 折楊柳) refers not to any specific poem, nor even necessarily to the subject of willow trees, but to one of the set melodies within the courtly repertoire of *yuefu/gafu* 樂府 (popular ballad) pieces. This particular melody was meant to be played with the *fife* (*hengdi/yokobue* 橫笛), an instrument of non-Han origin, and was originally played by soldiers upon horseback when setting out to war. Numerous lyrics were composed to this melody, all of which consequently bear the title “Breaking Willow Branches.” As it happens, Saga’s poem, is an adaptation, with but slight alterations, of a poem bearing the same title, attributed variously to Emperor Jianwen 簡文帝 (503-551, r. 549-551) or Liu Yun 柳惲 (465-517), and preserved in fascicle 7 of *Yutai xinyong*. Saga’s poem is followed immediately by another of the same name by his vassal, Kose no Shikihito 巨勢識人 (c.795-?), the meter and content of which differ little from Saga’s piece.

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, popular ballads (*gafu*), poem no. 69

Not unlike Saga's "The Sorrow of Consort Ban," the narrator of this poem sympathizes deeply with the plight of a lonely young woman whose soldier lover has gone off to war, perhaps never to return. Here, like so many other poems by Saga, a dramatic of seasons is foregrounded: the warm vernal capital, where a forlorn maiden awaits her man's return, on the one hand, opposed to the still wintry northern hinterland, where the beleaguered soldiers are stationed, on the other. This poem, again like "The Sorrow of Consort Ban," is a variant—possibly an experimental one—on a common motif. Even the title of this piece is a very common one. Nothing in this poem is at all creative.

折楊柳

楊柳正亂絲 春深攀折宜

花寒邊地雪 葉暖妓樓吹

久戍歸期遠 空閨別怨悲

短篇無異曲 總是長相思

This is the season, when springtide is well on its way, when the pliant tendrils of the willow trees, blown like threads in the wind, sway and tangle about one another—this is the season for young lovers to go and break the willow branches.⁶⁷⁴

Back in the capital, where, in exquisite pagodas, the dancing girls play charming melodies upon their flutes, the vernal leaves are warm and tender. In the hinterlands, however, where the soldiers are stationed, flowers shiver upon ground still covered in snow.

A woman, sorely forlorn, sits alone in her empty bedchamber, lamenting the long absence of her lover, a soldier who, having been sent off to fight along the northern borders, is not likely to return to her any time soon.

Those flutes—both hers and his—can play but one tune; no matter what they might play, their music reveals but a single sentiment: two lovers longing for each other's embrace.

⁶⁷⁴ Young men and women were wont, come spring, to go and pick willow branches, which they would then present as quaint gifts to their lovers. The idea here is that the young women, who waits with a heavy heart in the capital for the return of her soldier lover, has no one to whom she might present such gifts.



32. A Reply to Master Saichō⁶⁷⁵

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, Buddhist verses, poem no. 71

Saga offers a bombastic encomium to the prominent monk Saichō, describing him as a veritable god among men. Immortals and divinities of all sorts are portrayed as being joyously subservient to him. This is perhaps the best example of the way in which Saga used poetry as a means of vehemently promoting a man whose religious influence he desired to enlist for his own aggrandizement.

答澄公「奉獻詩」

⁶⁷⁵ The full title of this poem is “A Reply to Master Saichō’s ‘A Poem Presented to His Majesty’.” Saichō’s poem is not extant. Saga lavished great attention on Saichō 最澄 (766-822), the founder of Japanese Tendai Buddhism, using *Bunka shūreishū* as one means of promoting the then new sect. Note that the first of Saichō’s proscriptions for annual ordinands (*nenbun gakushōshiki* 年分学生式) was submitted to the sovereign on the very same day that the completed text of *Bunka shūreishū* was presented. The Buddhist verses (*bonmon* 梵門) in *Bunka shūreishū*, of which this is the first piece, were geared at promoting a state-sponsored version of Tendai Buddhism. Kūkai 空海 (774-835), Saichō’s contemporary and rival, is not mentioned once in this section, nor anywhere in *Bunka shūreishū*, for that matter.

遠傳南岳教 夏久老天台
 杖錫凌溟海 躡虛歷蓬萊
 朝家無英俊 法侶隱賢才
 形體風塵隔 威儀律節開
 袒肩臨江上 洗足踏巖隈
 梵語翻經閱 鐘聲聽香臺
 經行人事少 宴坐歲華催
 羽客親講席 山精供茶杯
 深房春不暖 花雨自然來
 賴有護持力 定知絕輪迴

You, Master Saichō, who brought the distant teachings of Mount Nanyue to our native land,
 now sit through the long summer months in quiet meditation atop Mount Tendai [that
 is, Mt. Hiei].⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁶ The second patriarch of continental Tiantai Buddhism was Huisi 慧思 (515-577), who formed his monastic community in Mount Heng 衡山, also known as Nanyue 南嶽, or the Southern Mountain, a mountain range located in modern-day Hu'nán Province. It was his disciple Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597), the third patriarch of Tiantai Buddhism, though often spoken of as the true founder

With the walking staff of a holy ascetic in hand you crossed the vast ocean, alighting upon the far-away shores of China. As one who treads upon the very clouds above, visiting the isles of the immortals, so, too, have you wandered far and wide, communing with the most enlightened teachers.

My court hosts but men of mean capacity. Where are those great men of old? You and your fellow monks, whom I would feign call into my service, conceal your lofty souls in simple robes.

I, however, can see through your disguise. You, Saichō, above all others, in your very deportment, evince no taint of mundane cares; your solemn ways and sublime words serve as a perfect example to all men.

Your ascetic practices are a wonder to behold: dressed in monk's robes, one shoulder covered, the other bare, you walk along the riverside, now washing your feet in its current, now strolling among the craggy recesses.

Upon entering the temple library, where the ringing of the temple bell repeatedly greets

of Tiantai Buddhism, who moved the center of this sect to Mount Tiantai 天台山, located in modern-day Zhejiang Province. It is from this mountain that the sect took, and still takes, its name, both in China and in Japan. When Saichō established a slightly altered version of this sect on Mount Hiei 比叡山, in modern-day Kyoto, this mountain then became popularly known as Mount Tendai 天台山.

your ear, you take to reading Sanskrit scriptures.

I see how fastidiously you guard your time in regards to ascetic practices, keeping guests away in order to devote your energies to solitary cultivation. How remarkable, then, is it to see with what diligence you are able to commit yourself to numerous annual gatherings.⁶⁷⁷

Immortals themselves come in droves to listen to your sermons; the spirits of the mountains, likewise, rush to serve you cups of tea.

Though your monkish cell, so high up in the mountains, remains yet chilly, despite the coming of spring, divinities rain down upon you petals of heavenly blossoms, all of their own accord. A most holy springtime, that!

There is no doubt that you, who are blessed with the protective virtue of the gods above, shall transcend the cycle of reincarnation and rise at last into the highest paradise.



⁶⁷⁷ This couplet seems to be complimenting Saichō on his uncanny ability to fulfill both the commitments of a solitary monk as well as a public figure; he is able to meditate and study, as all monks should, while simultaneously making all of the public appearances required of him. Saga would have called upon Saichō to attend numerous royal banquets and other religious events.

33. A Reply to Master Kōjō⁶⁷⁸

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, Buddhist verses, poem no. 72

As was the case with the previous poem, Saga here offers high praise for a monk of the Tendai sect. Kōjō, a disciple of Saichō, is depicted as a solitary hermit dwelling deep in the mountains, washing his face alongside monkeys, and dining with non-human denizens of the mountain.

和光法師「游東山」之作

幽栖東岳上 禪坐對林巒

法宇傳經久 深山乞食難

溪流猿共漱 野飯鬼相飡

擊磬雲峰裡 暮春不退寒

⁶⁷⁸ The full title of this poem is “A Reply to a Poem Written by Master Kō Entitled ‘A Stroll amid the Eastern Mountains’.” This Master Kō refers most probably to Kōjō 光定 (779-858), a disciple of Saichō, while the eastern mountains refer to Mount Hiei. This poem, like the previous one, is meant to promote Tendai Buddhism. Kōjō’s poem is not extant.

Atop Mount Hiei, far away from the madding world, shrouded in peaceful solitude, you sit
 in meditative contemplation, gazing out over a sea of verdured peaks spread before
 you.

There is no dearth of wisdom where you dwell: your temple has long been the house of
 many a sacred scripture. What of cultivation? How might a monk so wholly separated
 from the world of man, cloistered away in such deep mountains, collect alms from
 faithful laymen, as all monks ought?⁶⁷⁹

No, not a trace of man to be found where you are! You wash out your mouth at the river in
 the company of wild monkeys, and dine on rustic fare with none but the ogres who
 haunt those mountains.⁶⁸⁰

In your temple, standing atop cloud-encircled peaks, you pass the time making music upon
 sounding stones and chimes. Even as springtime is drawing to a close in the capital

⁶⁷⁹ The second part of this couplet is not attack on the monks. Rather, Saga wishes to emphasize the solitary, austere lives of these men, who, living so far away from any surrounding villages, have difficulty finding a layman from whom they might beg alms.

⁶⁸⁰ I have translated the character *gui/ki* 鬼 here as ogres, though it could also be rendered, more sublimely, as mountain gods. The original is ambiguous, though I feel something more physical, like ogres or trolls, goes better with the image of wild monkeys.

down below, high up in your mountain home the cold still lingers.⁶⁸¹



34. On Visiting Bonshaku Temple⁶⁸²

⁶⁸¹ The relationship between the playing of sounding stones (*qing/kei* 磬) and late spring is not immediately obvious. I suspect that Saga is alluding to a short, but very revealing poem by Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698-756) entitled “Old Man Playing on Sounding Stones” (*Jiqing laoren* 擊磬老人), which may be rendered as follows:

雙峰褐衣久 一磬白眉長
誰識野人意 徒看春草芳

Dressed in coarse robes, you have dwelt atop Mount Shuangfeng [in modern-day Hubei, where stands Zhengjue Temple 正覺寺] for countless moons. With every note that comes from that sounding stone, your hoary eyebrows grow that much longer.

Who among the laity can ever hope to penetrate the mysteries of that hermit’s heart? Look how he gazes aimlessly upon the fragrant spring grasses.

If my hunch is right, Saga is superimposing the image of Wang Changling’s anonymous mountain ascetic, playing his sounding stones and looking at the spring grasses, with that of Kōjō. Whereas the former has the pleasure of gazing upon fragrant vernal herbs, Kōjō, who leads an even more solitary life, is deprived even of that joy—at least for some time yet.

⁶⁸² Bonshaku Temple, or temple of the twelve guardian deities—eleven *bonten* 梵天 or brahmins, headed by Taishakuten 帝釈天, or Indra—was first commissioned by Emperor Kanmu, Saga’s father, in the year 786, as an offering of thanks to the heavenly powers for having ensured that his new capital at Nagaoka was successfully completed without incident. The temple no longer exists. It was apparently located at the southern foot of Mount Hiei, near Sūfuku Temple, in an area corresponding to modern-day Ōtsu City, in Shiga Prefecture. Such illustrious scholar monks as Eichū 永忠 (743-816) and, significantly in the case of *Bunka shūreishū*, Saichō, served or studied at this temple: see Tamura Kōyū, *Saichō jiten* (Tokyo: Sanshūsha, 1979), 234-235. It was Eichū, who served as abbot of Bonshaku temple from 805, and later as grand priest (*daisōzu* 大僧都). This poem was composed at a royal procession that took place on twenty-second day of the fourth month in the sixth year of Kō’nin (815), shortly after Eichū was promoted to grand priest. An entry for this date in *Nihon kōki* reveals some of the splendor of the occasion:

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, Buddhist verses, poem no. 73

Saga praises the serene, holy, and refreshingly cool atmosphere of Bonshaku Temple, a

building originally commissioned by his own father, while sipping tea made from leaves

His Majesty led a royal procession to Karasaki 韓崎 [now written 唐崎, located in modern-day Ōtsu City], in the region of Shiga, in the province of Ōmi. During this trip His Majesty paid a visit to Sūfuku Temple 崇福寺. Grand priest Eichū and Master Gomyō 護命 [750-834] greeted His Majesty with a vast assembly of monks in front of the temple gates. His Majesty descended from his palanquin and ascended the temple prayer hall, where he offered up prayers to the Buddha. After this, His Majesty paid a visit to Bonshaku Temple, where he halted his palanquin in order to compose poetry. The Crown Prince [later Emperor Juntoku] and a large number of vassals composed verses in response. Grand Priest Eichū [who had accompanied the procession from nearby Sūfuku Temple] himself prepared and offered up tea to His Majesty, in return for which favor he was presented, in the form of a donation, with one of His Majesty's own garments. Thereafter the entire party enjoyed a boat ride in the pond [within the temple complex]. The provincial governors of Ōmi [of whom Fujiwara no Otsugu 藤原緒嗣 (774-843) was at that time the chief governor] performed some local songs and dances for His Majesty's delight.

This entry concludes by mentioning that various gifts of clothing and cotton were handed out by the sovereign to all present, each in accordance with his respective court rank (*Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 6 [815].4.22, 699). It should be here noted that Eichū, the monk who offered tea to Saga, had studied in China for more than twenty-five years, from sometime between 770-780 to the year 805, at which time he returned to Japan with Saichō. While in China, Eichū had proved a great help to Saichō, a fact that must surely have encouraged Saga to promote the man to the lofty position of grand priest. Saga later laments this monk's passing in a poem entitled "Lamentation for Eichū: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 86), translated below. Incidentally, Eichū's offering of tea to Emperor Saga is often cited as the earliest record of tea drinking to be found in Japanese chronicles. The tea leaves Eichū used on this occasion were most likely from the nearby Hiyoshi Tea Garden 日吉茶園, the first seedlings of which had been brought over by Saichō and Eichū directly from China a decade prior. While fresh tea (*shincha* 新茶) is generally produced in spring, the tealeaves grown in Shiga reach maturity slower than anywhere else in Japan. Even though Saga visited Bonshaku Temple near the end of the fourth lunar month, nearly mid-summer, the leaves used for his tea would have still been quite fresh.

brought over directly from China more than a decade ago by Saichō. This poem is as much an encomium for the temple as it is a promotion for Saichō and his sect of Tendai Buddhism.

過梵釋寺

雲嶺禪扃人蹤絕 昔將今日再攀登
 幽奇巖嶂吐泉水 老大杉松離舊藤
 梵宇本無塵滓事 法筵唯有薛蘿僧
 忽銷煩想夏還冷 欲去淹留暫不能

Here, nestled amidst the cloud-ensconced peaks [of Mount Hiei], not so much as a footfall of man is to be heard. Today, as once before—though many years past—I ascend its lofty heights.⁶⁸³

Crystalline springs flow forth from those sublime peaks, with their curious shaped crags,

⁶⁸³ The significance of the last part of this couplet is not clear. If Saga did make a previous trip to this temple, it has not been recorded in the historical record. I would suggest that Saga is superimposing his own present visit with that once made by his late father several decades earlier. In a sense, as living representative of his father, Saga is revisiting the temple.

while the venerable pines and giant cedars are heavy with twining vines and creepers.

Temples of this sort, far removed as they are from the dust and dregs of mundane cares, are

home to solitary monks—those who preach their sermons dressed in nothing more

than coarse robes made of woven vines.

Alas, it is time for me to depart from here—here, where all vexation and worldly

obsessions are suddenly extinguished, where summer's heat, too, seems cool and

pleasant. I must go. And yet I tarry, unable to bring myself to leave.



35. Bedridden: A Reply to Master Saichō⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁴ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Written by Master Saichō Entitled ‘Expressing My Thoughts While Sick in Bed’.” It was likely composed sometime near the beginning of summer, in the thirteenth year of Kō'nin (822), that is, the year Saichō passed away. Saichō's poem does not survive, a fact duly lamented by Miyoshi no Tameyasu 三善為康 (1049-1139), in his *Dengyō daishiden* 伝教大師伝 (aka, *Eizan konpon daishiden* 叡山根本大師伝, Biography of Saichō): see Hieizan senshūin, et al., ed., *Dengyō daishi zenshū* (Tokyo: Sekai seiten kankō kyōkai, 1975), volume 5, supplementary material, 89. An alternate translation of Saga's poem, as well as translations of the two other replies to Saichō's poem (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem nos. 77 and 78), may be found in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 69. Rouzer, too, provides us with an alternate translation of this poem: see Rouzer, “Early Buddhist Kanshi: Court, Country, and Kūkai,” 444. Note that the footnote to this poem in Rabinovitch & Bradstock gives the year 812 as the likely date of composition. This is based on a misprint in Kojima, where Kō'nin 3 弘仁三 (812) is an erratum for Kō'nin 13 弘仁十三 (822), the 十 having been accidentally omitted. Saichō, for all we know, was very healthy until 822, the year he died.

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, Buddhist verses, poem no. 76

This is a curious poem. Written shortly before Saichō's passing, it does not contain any explicitly sorrowful language, but rather seeks to affirm the most basic tenants of Buddhism. This is, furthermore, an ambiguous poem. Who is speaking here, Saga or Saichō? To whom is the final couplet directed? Surely not Saichō. Perhaps, as I suspect, the final lines Saga's way of reassuring himself, one of the many "fatuous mortals" who will be left behind after Saichō's inevitable death. Whatever the case, this poem contains an oddly playful element, the significance of which is difficult to pin down.

和澄公「臥病述懷」之作

聞公雲峰裡 臥病欲契真

對境知皆幻 觀空厭此身

栢暗禪庭寂 花明梵宇春

莫嫌應化久 為濟夢中人

Word has been brought to me that you, Master Saichō, you who dwell amidst the cloudy peaks, are presently lying sick in bed, preparing at long last to commune with the ultimate reality, that after which you have striven for so long.

All external phenomena are naught but illusion; having penetrated the interdependence of all things, realizing that nothing possesses substantial existence of itself, how, then, can one help but despise this fleeting mortal body of flesh and bone?

Verdured evergreens cast their cool shadows over a temple garden bathed in silence, while vibrant flowers bejewel the temple grounds with vernal hues.⁶⁸⁵

Why does the Buddha tarry so in bringing enlightenment to us fatuous mortals? Ah, but these complaints of mine, I well know, are puerile. All in good time: the Buddha wishes to save all mankind from this fleeting dream we call the world.

⁶⁸⁵ My translation of this couplet is deliberately optimistic. This poem, as far as I can see, is not a lamentation, but an affirmation of basic Buddhist tenants: the world and all in it are fleeting; only the pursuit of enlightenment can offer anything really lasting. Far from disparaging Saga praises the monastic life and the temple in which Saichō resides, considering it is here, and here alone, that truth can be cultivated and realized. The original Sinitic does not contain any explicitly negative vocabulary. Even so, if read in a different light, the first part of this couplet could certainly be taken as a sort of lamentation. This is how Rabinovitch & Bradstock understand the verse, hence their translation: “Dark the cypresses; forlorn the meditation garden.”



36. Copper-Sparrow Pagoda: A Reply to Yoshimine no Yasuyo⁶⁸⁶

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, lamentations, poem no. 81

Following a well-established tradition surrounding the motif of Copper-Sparrow Pagoda, Saga offers a lamentation to the pagoda's romanticized creator, King Wu of Wei, whose death suggests the futility and brevity of life.

和尚書右丞良安世「銅雀臺」

昔時魏武帝 臺樹起城阿

⁶⁸⁶ The full title of this poem is “My Response to a Poem by Yoshimine no Yasuo, Right Minister of the Board of Controllers, Entitled ‘Copper-Sparrow Pagoda’.” The name Copper-Sparrow Pagoda refers alludes to a gorgeous pagoda, erected by King Wu of Wei 魏武帝 (aka Caocao 曹操, 155-220), where countless dancing girls were summoned to perform before their king. In his will, King Wu demanded that, even after his death, songs and dances were to be performed at this pagoda, facing always the direction of his tomb. The Copper-Sparrow Pagoda was a favorite theme of many Chinese poets, and it is to this long tradition, along with Yasuyo’s poem, that Saga is here responding.

遺令奏絃管 空帷舞綺羅

每對平常月 追思怨恨多

西陵揮淚望 松檟復如何

It was in days of old that King Wu of Wei erected his Copper-Sparrow Pagoda, there in the corner of his walled city.

He commanded that, after his death, song and dance should be performed by dancing girls bedecked in silk and satin, though his mortal eye would no longer behold it.

Whenever I gaze at the moon—the same moon that shone upon King Wu before his death—my heart weeps with thoughts of what was.

I shed bitter tears towards his tomb. All in vain! Pines and catalpa, lonely companions to buried men, stand motionless by his grave.



37. Lamentation for the Passing of Master Genpin⁶⁸⁷

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, lamentations, poem no. 85

Saga mourns the passing of Genpin, a monk to whom he was wont to show special favor.

This is a typical lamentation, being both elegant and moving. It may be interesting to note that only the first two lines are remotely suggestive of anything particular to the life of Genpin: he seldom lived on one place for very long, and he did seclude himself in a mountain. Most famous monks, however, have done the same. The remainder of the poem, which is more-or-less conventional, could have been dedicated to any monk.

哭賓和尚

大士古來無住著 名山晦跡老風霜

⁶⁸⁷ Genpin 玄賓 (734-818) was a prominent monk who, having retired from the world, and even from another Buddhist temple which he deemed too worldly, in favor of devoted seclusion, eventually earned the sincere and prolonged admiration of Saga. This is not the first time Saga dedicated poetry to Genpin. Recall Saga's "Bidding Farewell to Master Genpin" (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 26), translated above. Two alternate translations of the present poem currently exist, the older in Watson, 45, the more recent in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 71.

隨緣化體厭塵久 歸正真機忽滅亡
 松掩舊庵猶鬱茂 草暗新塔漸荒涼
 生前蘿席空留月 沒後金爐誰添香
 禪林時見催枝幹 梵宇長懷失棟梁
 緇素共愁面禮罷 遙遙仰拜向西方

That enlightened bodhisattva, he who from days of old called no one place his home,
 concealed himself deep within that noteworthy mountain, growing old amidst the frost
 and howling wind.⁶⁸⁸

In hopes of leading us lost mortals to salvation it was that you took up the form of an
 earthly man, bound to suffer alongside us in this filthy world. Then, without notice, the
 fated moment came when you should return to the Ultimate Truth.

The boughs of pine trees, darker and more densely verdured than before, cast their shadows
 over your now empty hut, while long grasses grow rank about your newly erected
 stupa. All is becoming desolate and wild.

⁶⁸⁸ Genpin spent many years secluded in Mount Hōki 伯耆山, located in the western part of modern-day Tottori Prefecture.

Moonlight, bereft of your once fond admiration, now shines in vain upon your vine-covered hut. Pray tell, who shall burn offerings at your golden incense cauldron now that you have left us?

The branches, nay, the very trunk of that sacred forest—the home of so many monks—have been broken asunder! How shall the monastery keep from lamenting the loss of its mightiest rafter, that which supported the roof for so many years?

Both monks in their black robes and laity in their white mourning gowns alike have wept their share of tears. The funerary rites are done. All we mortals can do now is offer up prayers to you—you who dwell so far away in the Western Paradise.



38. Lamentation for Eichū: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi⁶⁸⁹

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, lamentations, poem no. 86

⁶⁸⁹ This is the same Eichū, who died in 817, encountered earlier in “On Visiting Bonshaku Temple” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 73), translated above. See the footnotes to that poem for details about this prominent monk.

While lamenting the passing of Eichū, that monk who once personally mixed and served tea to Saga, the poet looks forward optimistically to a time when the monk might be reincarnated. The simplicity of language and sheer brevity of this poem are noteworthy, especially when compared with the lamentation Saga dedicated to Genpin.

和菅清公「傷忠法師」

臘老煙雲裡 歸真攝化形
不知何世界 出現救蒼生

That aged monk has since vanished amidst the smoke and the clouds, taking away any trace of his once mortal form.⁶⁹⁰ He has returned at last to the Ultimate Truth. Who can say—certainly not I—in what world and in what age that noble soul might again manifest itself in material form to lead more of us lost mortals to salvation?

⁶⁹⁰ Eichū was cremated, and therefore his body, save the bones, of course, would very literally have vanished into the smoke of a blazing fire. The reference to clouds here is also reminiscent of the apotheosis that precedes passage into the Western Paradise: Eichū's soul, having at last sloughed off the mortal coil, has since soared up into the heavens.



39. Lamentations for a Princess⁶⁹¹

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 2, lamentations, poem nos. 87 and 88

These lamentations for an anonymous princess who died young are thoroughly sorrowful.

The fact that we are nowhere given her name is disturbing, especially considering the

⁶⁹¹ The full title of this pair of poems is “Verses of Lamentation for the Late Princess and Palace Attendant.” The identity of this woman remains unknown. The term *wengzhu/ōshu* 翁主, appearing in the title of this poem, should, I think, be distinguished from the more common *gongzhu/kōshu* 公主. Whereas the latter refers specifically to the daughter of an sovereign, that is, an imperial princess, the former refers more generally to the daughter of any member of the royal family (*wang/ō* 王), that is, a princess. Kojima avers that the term *ōshū* refers specifically to an imperial princess wed to one of the sovereign’s vassals. Whatever the case, it is obvious that this woman meant a great deal to Saga. Not only has Saga composed two poems on her behalf, two other paired poems in reply to Saga’s lamentations have been included in this anthology (poem nos. 89-92). I am almost tempted to say these poems were composed upon the death of Ono no Iwako 小野岩子 (746-817), one of Saga’s most valued palace attendants, and a woman of literary accomplishment. Two lamentations dedicated to her appear earlier in this anthology (poem nos. 83 and 84), where she, like this anonymous woman, is addressed as a palace attendant (*jichū* 侍中). However, the fact that Iwako is always addressed by her surname, and that the lamentations dedicated to her are separated from these by two poems (nos. 85 and 86), strongly suggests that the present lamentation is for a different, yet unidentified women. Moreover, this anonymous woman, while evidently skilled like Iwako in literary composition, died young—“you who were still so tender in years”—whereas Iwako lived to be more than seventy.

number of lamentations—six in total—dedicated to her in this anthology. Perhaps there was a reason, likely a political one, why her name could not be revealed.

侍中翁主挽歌詞

生涯如逝川 不慮忽昇仙

哀挽辭京路 客車向暮田

聲傳女侍簡 別怨艷陽年

唯有孤墳外 悲風吹松煙

戚里繁華歇 皇家淑德收

悲傷盈旦暮 悽感積春秋

月色姮娥慘 星光織女愁

一聞蕭管曲 日夜淚同流

First lamentation:

Though I know full well that life is like a racing river, even so, how could I have guessed
that you would perish and soar off into the heavens so suddenly?

I looked on as the cart bearing your coffin rolled out of the city, heading towards the place
that was to serve as your final resting ground.

All speak of your literary prowess—O, how you could write! I grieve all the more at your
passing, you who were still so tender in years.

What is left of you now? Naught but a melancholy wind that whispers through the misty
pines standing beside your solitary grave.

Second lamentation:

The halls of your royal relatives are silent now, mourning their loss. Our imperial
chambers, too, are forever bereft of your elegant virtues.

Our days and our nights are riven through and through with sorrow; the years to come shall
be to us naught but an endless amplification of sadness.

When I gaze up at the moon, I am filled with the loneliness of Lady Heng'e; when I see the

stars shining overhead, I lament with the Weaver Maid.⁶⁹²

Whenever I hear the music played upon those pipes and flutes, my tears inevitably flow

forth, both night and day.⁶⁹³



40. Visiting a Hermit's Remains: In Imitation of Shigeno no Sadanushi⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹² The deceased woman is being compared to two mythological women, both of whom symbolize, first, passage into a different world, and second, the loneliness of parted lovers. Lady Yuan'e, after over-hastily imbibing an elixir of immortality, had no choice but to spend the rest of her days upon the moon, fabled home of the immortals, far away from her mortal, earth-bound husband. The Weaver Maid, a poetic name for the star Vega, can only see her lover, the Cowherd, another name for the star Altair, once a year, on the seventh night of the seventh lunar month. While superimposing these two mythological characters onto the deceased woman, Saga is also obliquely, and somewhat awkwardly, associating himself with these same otherworldly women, insofar as it is he, the bereaved mortal left behind, who is doomed to suffer the pangs of separation.

⁶⁹³ I suspect that this final couplet is referring specifically to that music which the deceased was once accustomed to enjoying or playing.

⁶⁹⁴ The full, and rather convoluted, title of this poem is "A Poem Composed to Match Secretary of Central Affairs Shigeno no Sadanushi's 'In Memory of "Visiting a Hermit's Remains," Composed by the Clerk of Musashi, Taira no Satsuki'." That is to say, first, Taira no Satsuki 平五月 (n.d.), about whom nothing is known, wrote a poem entitled "Visiting a Hermit's Remains," which is preserved in this anthology (poem no. 95). Second, Sadanushi wrote a reply to this poem, which, unfortunately, does not survive. Fuyutsugu also wrote a reply to Satsuki's poem, which is preserved in this anthology (poem no. 94). Third, Saga composed a poem meant to serve as a sister piece specifically to Sadanushi's (and not Fuyutsugu's) verses. An alternate translation of this poem, as well as a translation of Fuyutsugu's and Satsuki's verses, appear in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 71-72.

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 1, lamentations, poem no. 93

The narrator in this poem looks with sadness upon the bleached and weather-beaten bones littering the now empty mountain grotto of a deceased hermit. This hermit, through a long acquaintance with arcane alchemical practices, was able to transcend the human condition and attain immortality. As is common with many of Saga's religious, or, in this case, pseudo-religious, verses, he concludes the piece with a self-deprecatory gesture, referring to himself as an ignorant mortal inexorably bound to the unclean world of man. To ask whether Saga actually saw the scene here depicted with his own eyes is supererogatory. This is meant, like so many of his poems, to be a quaint piece of fantasy writing, something to entertain and enchant the reader.

同内史滋貞主「追和武藏錄事平五月『訪幽人遺跡』之作」

悽然幽客隙 鎖骨曬風霜

歲月經書古 煙蘿仙竈亡

巖扃松作蓋 虛室石為牀

契道乘空復 泥中獨自傷

This solitary hermit's empty chamber, littered with his bones—all bleached from wind and
frost—grieves my heart full sore.

Look at his tomes of arcane lore, tattered and worn from years of neglect. Look, too, at his
cauldron—vessel of profound alchemy!—broken now, smothered in vines.

Without, a lofty pine extended its shady boughs over your mountain abode; within, naught
but a stone slab served as your bed.

O, divine alchemist, master of metamorphosis! You soared into the heavens, leaving me to
grieve alone, mired as I am in the muck of this base world.



41. The Blossoms of Kaya⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁵ Saga wrote a set of ten poems about his beloved Kaya (or Kayō) Mansion, a venue already encountered in *Ryōunshū* (poem nos. 11-13). Only four of these were finally included in *Bunka shūreishū* (poem nos. 96-99). It must be remembered that the name Kaya/Kayō is the Japanese rendition of a Chinese eponym, pronounced Heyang, and located in modern-day Henan 河南 Province, just north of the Yellow River. Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300), a man of letters, who had been appointed governor of this region, ordered a large number of peach trees to be planted there. Saga,

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 96

The first of four poems included in this anthology about Saga's Kaya Mansion, these verses are a perfect example of how Saga deliberately superimposed famous continental venues over his own favorite haunts, thereby creating a semi-fictional literary space that coexisted with the Actual place, at least in the imagination of Saga and his lettered vassals. The flowers blooming at Kaya Mansion are here imagined to be the famous peach blossoms at Heyang.

河陽花

三春二月河陽縣 河陽從來富於花

花落能紅復能白 山嵐頻下萬條斜

in the present poem, is alluding to this famous anecdote. Any time Saga mentions Kaya, the reader must understand that he is referring simultaneously to Heyang. This is easier, of course, when reading these poems in the original, where the Sinitic characters 河陽 may be pronounced either Kaya/Kayō or Heyang. “The Blossoms of Kaya,” therefore, could also be rendered “The Blossoms of Heyang.”

It is the middle of spring in Kaya, as it is in Heyang—that place where peach blossoms
 have always been so famous.

The blossoms are falling now: some are red, others white. Winds rushing down from the
 mountains make the myriad branches bend and sway.



42. A Boat upon the River

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 97

The second of four Kaya Mansion poems, these verses play with the technique of double vision. Just as, in the previous poem, the flowers at Saga's Kaya Mansion were superimposed upon the peach blossoms of Heyang, so, too, in this poem, is the Yodo River running beside Kaya compared with the Yellow River flowing just to the south of Heyang.

江上船

一道長江通千里 漫漫流水漾行船

風帆遠沒虛無裡 疑是仙查欲上天

The river winds its way over a course of a thousand leagues, and upon its languid current
floats a boat.

Its sail, driven by the wind, vanishes into the distance, into the great emptiness beyond,
much like the raft of some immortal ready to ascend the very heavens.



43. Riverside Herbs

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 98

*Here, in the third of four Kaya poems, Saga praises the beauty of riverside herbs, which
herbs contain here precisely the same connotations as the roadside herbs in Saga's "To a*

Filial Son on His Way Home,” translated above: “Do not stay away too long. I know just how beautiful those spring herbs that grow along the roadside can be to a traveler far from home. Do not, I pray, forget to return again to us here in the capital!”

江邊草

春日江邊何所好 青青唯見王孫草

風光就暖芳氣新 如此年年觀者老

What, you ask, is the finest sight along the riverbanks in spring? I say to you, it is the sight of green herbs—green, as far as the eye can see!

The air begins to grow warm; the fragrance of those grasses is effused anew. O, but that we could all grow old looking at this beautiful sight.



44. Hearing the Bell of a Mountain Temple

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 99

This is the last of the four Kaya poems in this series. While sleeping, the narrator recalls hearing the sound of a bell coming from some far off temple. Saga deliberately blurs the boundaries between the dream world and the waking world: did he really hear the bell, or was it all a dream? Which temple did the sound come from? Everything is left unanswered.

山寺鐘

晚到江村高枕臥 夢中遙聽半夜鐘

山寺不知何處在 旅館之東第一峯

The evening has come. I hear in my dreams, while lodging in this riverside village, the sound of a far off temple bell ringing in the depths of the night.

I wonder where that temple could be. It stands, no doubt, atop the highest peak of yon mountain looming to the east.



45. Dance of the Butterflies⁶⁹⁶

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 110

This is the first of two poems composed by Saga in response to Kose no Shikihito's verses about spring. The straightforward diction and simple content make this an exceptionally charming piece. This poem is as much a praise of butterflies as it is an expression of the Daoist ideal of living in harmony with Nature as a whole, or, as we might say, with the entire cosmos.

舞蝶

⁶⁹⁶ Both this poem and the next are Saga's response to four poems written by Kose no Shikihito entitled "Four Poems on Springtime." My translation of the title of this poem, "Dance of the Butterflies," is taken directly from Rabinovitch & Bradstock, who not only provide an alternative translation of this poem (on p. 74), but have used this as the title of their book.

數群胡蝶飛亂空 雜色紛紛花樹中

本自不因絃管響 無心處處舞春風

Bevies of butterflies flutter and flitter through the air, bespeckling flowers and trees with a vivid panoply of variegated hues.

These lovely things do not beat their wings in time to any mortal music. No, they gambol hither and thither with hearts as light and carefree as the vernal breeze itself!⁶⁹⁷



46. Flight of the Swallows

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 111

⁶⁹⁷ What I have rendered as the “light and carefree” hearts of these butterflies, is, in the original *wuxin/mushin* 無心, literally “without a heart,” which Rabinovitch & Bradstock translate as “mindlessly.” The original phrase has Daoist connotations, conjuring up images of enlightened sages living in complete accord with nature, doing nothing in an overly deliberate or presumptuous manner. These butterflies, likewise, dance in accord with Nature’s rhythm, a rhythm in which they are able to fully immerse themselves, precisely in virtue of the fact that they do not stubbornly cling to any artificially imposed harmony, such as the sort imposed by men on the art of “mortal music.”

This is the second of two poems composed by Saga in response to Kose no Shikihito's verses about spring. The poet praises the swallows for their constancy, always flying side-by-side with their mate, and laments the fact that such noble birds should have become associated in any way with Queen Feiyan, "Flying Swallow," whose presence at court caused Consort Ban to be separated from her lover, Emperor Chen.

飛燕

望裡遙聞燕語聲 雙飛來往羽儀輕

本期借屋初乳子 還恥空為漢后名

Sitting beside my window, I hear the far off trill of swallows in flight. See how they fly side by side, no matter whether coming or going. How constant their flight! How light their wings!⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁸ I have rendered the curious phrase *wangli/bōri* 望裡 as "beside my window." Kojima takes this phrase to mean "amidst the rafters," which, if correct, matches the context perfectly. However, as I have not been able to corroborate Kojima's reading of the character 望, I have reluctantly rendered

These birds, in making their nests amidst the rafters, sought no more than a borrowed home
 in which to raise their young. They never dreamed—ridiculous thing!—their own
 names would be given to that shameful queen of the Han sovereign.⁶⁹⁹



47. Listening to the Cocks Crow by the Old Fort⁷⁰⁰

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 117

The poet, looking at an old abandoned fort during cockcrow, meditates on the passage of

it as window, seeing as how that, at least, is an established reading of the character in most large Chinese dictionaries. Even so, I still prefer Kojima's interpretation.

⁶⁹⁹ The second half of this couplet is alluding to a young dancing girl who, becoming one of Emperor Chen's favorite concubines, and later his queen, was given the nickname Feiyan 飛燕, or Flying Swallow. Kojima suggests that the poet deems her shameful insofar as she, later falling from grace, committed suicide. I suspect, furthermore, that the poet condemns Feiyan because of her role in ousting Consort Ban, the tragic subject of Saga's "The Sorrow of Consort Ban" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 58), who was neglected "like the fan discarded in autumn." That flying swallows, who, like Emperor Chen and Consort Ban, ought to fly side by side, should have become associated in any way with Feiyan, whose presence served to sunder Ban from her lover, is, according to the poet, a ridiculous thought. Modern readers might argue that the real blame lies with Emperor Chen, for it was he who discarded Consort Ban in favor of Feiyan. What we think, however, has little to do with Saga and his poetry.

⁷⁰⁰ An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 74.

time. The fort, likely one near his Kaya Mansion, reminds him of the story of Meng Changjun (?-279 BC), a loyal minister of the state of Qin. While fleeing from hostile pursuers, Meng arrived at a mountain fort or checkpoint minutes before dawn. The guards at this checkpoint had orders not to open the gates before cockcrow. One of Meng's clever retainers, who mimicked the cry of a cock, fooled the guards into opening the gates, thereby granted Meng and his men a very narrow escape.

故關聽雞

烽火不傳罷關城 唯餘長短曉雞聲

孟嘗沒後年代久 誰客今鳴令人驚

No beacon-fires are to be seen here at this old abandoned fort. Only the crowing of the cocks, now prolonged and low, now short and shrill.

How many ages have passed since the death of Meng Changjun? What passerby now imitates so deftly the cock's cry?



48. An Aged Pine am I⁷⁰¹

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 120

This poem presents us with the voice of an aged pine who, despite his weather-beaten, gaunt appearance, assures his sovereign—the imagined listener—that, faithful to his inborn nature as a pine, he intends to remain constant and true: although his branches may grow thin and his needles pale, he vows to stand firm against the snow and wind. There is likely a political message here. Saga is asking his vassals, especially the aged ones among them, to remain faithful to him, come rain or come shine. He, in turn, assures his vassals that he recognizes their true natures, their desire to serve loyally, and will show them the same

⁷⁰¹ The full title of this poem is “A Song on Behalf of an Aging Pine Tree in the Shinsen Gardens.” Whether or not Saga composed this poem with the intention of having it sung to musical accompaniment, he has nevertheless adopted, in the first half of the third couplet, the musical technique of varying the number of characters per verse. Other than this, however, this piece remains a conventional poem. Whereas Kojima understands the narrator of this poem to be Saga, it seems more natural, considering the title, to render these verses as though it were the pine itself speaking to us. For an alternate translation and informative discussion about Saga’s political intentions behind this poem, see Weber, 168-171, where he also provides a translation of Prince Nakao’s reply to this poem.

fatherly care bestowed upon the aged pine.

代神泉古松傷衰歌

昔從凡木殖上林 過卻風霜年幾深
 帝者愛貞賜恩顧 水亭忽構頻近臨
 本森沉 今顛頽 長條縮折乏蒼翠
 不是辭榮好寂寞 還愁稟質抱幽志

For generations now, these imperial gardens have been home to crowds of common trees.

Only I, having withstood countless years of wind and frost, alone remain standing tall,
 peerless among my brothers.

The sovereign, in his adoration of my ceaseless constancy—when have my needles shone
 anything but green?—has built a pagoda upon the pond close by my side, that he
 might look upon me night and day.

Alas, I am not as I once was. When still young, I shone proudly, brightly verdured. Now, I
 am gaunt and pale. My long branches are thin and broken; what needles I still have are

brittle and bereft of color.

Think not that, in my haggard state, I desire to shun honor and pursue a life of seclusion.

Have sympathy on this aged pine. Understand that I cannot help but harbor this most profound desire: to stand triumphant over snow and wind.



49. *Yon Pine in the Valley*⁷⁰²

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 123

Like Saga's "An Aged Pine am I," this poem is about the unfailing constancy of a solitary pine who, despite his low station at the bottom of a valley, is able, in part at least, to ascend the peaks that surround him. Saga seems to be speaking to his vassals, urging them to remain constant, assuring them that he, as their benevolent and providential sovereign, has

⁷⁰² The full title of this poem is "When Composing Poetry in My Reizei Mansion, Having Drew Lots in Order to Determine Which Natural Objects to Write About, I Drew the Topic 'Pines in the Valley'." An alternate translation of this poem, as well as a reply poem by Kuwahara no Haraka (poem no. 124), appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 76.

each of them in his heart. Just as the music of the pines reaches the distant mountain peaks, so, too, do the sincere intentions of his vassals reach the sovereign's lofty throne.

冷然院各賦一物 得「澗底松」

鬱茂青松生幽澗 經年老大未知霜

薜蘿常掛千條重 雲霧時籠一蓋長

高聲寂寂寒炎節 古色蒼蒼暗夕陽

本自不堪登嶺上 唯餘風入韻宮商

Yon green pine, needles all aglow, standing at the bottom of a deep valley, has since grown old and tall, weathering countless years of frost. Not once has it succumbed to the chill of that frost; not once has it lost its needles.

Its myriad boughs stretch forth, despite the weight of vines that entangle them from base to tip. Clouds and mist, in their season, are wont to enshroud the pine's crown, like some great umbrella.

Come winter or summer, the music of wind rushing through its branches can be heard far

and wide. The color of its ancient branches remains forever vivid, shimmering dark
and rich amidst the westering sunlight.

This pine was never destined to ascend the high peaks that surround him on all sides; his
home has always been at the bottom of the valley. If nothing else, the music of his
branches, carried upon the wind, surely reaches those lofty summits.



50. Bright Autumn Moon over Longtou⁷⁰³

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 134

⁷⁰³ The full title of this poem is “Having Drawn Lots, I was Assigned the Poetic Topic ‘Bright Autumn Moon over Longtou’.” Longtou refers to a mountain range that straddles the modern-day provinces of Shanxi and Gansu, at the foot of which runs the Gobi Desert. Mt. Longtou, especially the crystalline waters that flow down from its peaks, became a popular poetic theme among early Chinese poets. Considering its distance from the court, Longtou, which served as a military frontier, became synonymous with homesick travelers and campaigns against foreign barbarians. For some examples of continental Longtou poetry, see Owen, 470, which provides a translation of Zhang Ji’s 張籍 (776-c.829) “Longtou Ballad” (*Longtou xing* 隴頭行), and Kroll, *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry*, 144-146, which contains a translation of Lu Zhaolin’s 盧照鄰 (c.634-684/686) “The Waters of Longtou” (*Longtou shui* 隴頭水). Both of these poems were well known to Heian writers. Saga has taken inspiration from at least one verse—the first half of the second couplet—in Lu’s last poem.

Saga uses a well-established continental poetic theme, Mt. Longtou, one of Tang China's military frontiers, against which the court struggled mightily to fend off invasions of Turkish and other non-Han forces, as a means of alluding to his own court's efforts against recalcitrant northern tribes. This poem presents little in the way of originality: both language and content have been adopted, without significant alteration, from famous continental exemplars.

賦得「隴頭秋月明」

關城秋夜淨 孤月隴頭團

水咽人腸絕 蓬飛砂塞寒

離筵驚山上 旅雁聽雲端

征戎鄉思切 聞猿愁不寬

A crisp autumn night falls over the fort atop Mt. Longtou, the lonely moon overhead
shinning full and bright.

The sound of bubbling brooks make the soldier's homesick heart all the more despondent.

Tumbleweeds blown in the wind roll by that cold desert fort.

Flutes with their farewell melodies echo sadly over the mountain peak; the songs of wild

geese, too, are heard coming from the very ends of the sky.

Soldiers stationed here—men who dream of nothing but returning home—are filled to

bursting with sorrow as they listen to the wailing of wild monkeys in the trees.



51. The Autumn Moon: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi⁷⁰⁴

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 137

As is often the case with poems about the full autumn moon, the narrator of this poem is a

⁷⁰⁴ The full title of this poem is “A Reply to a Poem Entitled ‘Song of the Autumn Moon’ by Shigeno no Sadanushi, Secretary of Central Affairs.” This poem, as well as the next, “Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden” (poem no. 139), is exceptionally long. That these lengthy poems, as well as three others (poem nos. 138, 140, and 141) appear together at the end of *Bunka shūreishū* signifies that this was, for Saga and his men, a relatively new and still experimental type of composition. It is only when a given genre gains a certain degree of recognition that it can be freely interspersed among or seamless interwoven with other likewise canonical genres.

forlorn woman waiting for the return of her long-absent lover, who, as is hinted at in the second half of the seventh couplet—“soldiers stationed about the hinterlands”—is most certainly a soldier on duty in the far north. The sheer length of this piece has given Saga room to incorporate several characters, such as Concubine Ban and Heng’e, encountered in previous poems. The third-century iconoclastic poet and habitually inebriated philosopher Ruan Ji is also brought into this complex montage of beauty and sorrow, giving to the piece a hint of the meditative.

和內史貞主「秋月歌」

天秋夜靜月光來 半捲珠簾滿輪開
 舉手欲攀誰能得 披襟抱影豈重懷
 雲暗空中清輝少 風來吹拂看更皎
 形如秦鏡出山頭 色似楚練疑天曉
 群陰共盈三五時 四海同朋一月輝
 皎潔秋悲斑女扇 玲瓏夜鑿阮公帷
 洞庭葉落秋已晚 虜塞征夫久忘歸

賤妾此時高樓上 銜情一對不勝悲
 三更露重絡緯鳴 五夜風吹砧杵聲
 明月年年不改色 看人歲歲白髮生
 寒聲淅瀝竹窗虛 晚影蕭條柳門疎
 不從姮娥竊藥遁 空閨對月恨離居

Sitting alone in my room on this quiet autumn night, everything bathed in moonlight, I furl
 up my beaded curtain halfway to better gaze at a moon which, I now see for myself,
 shines both full and bright.

Only a fool would try to reach out his hands with hopes of taking hold of that splendid
 moon. Little better the man who unties his robe and bears his breast to the moon,
 thinking thereby to embrace its incorporeal light!

Though dark clouds momentarily obscure the moon's radiance, cloaking the firmament in
 shadows, at length the wind arrives, blowing those clouds away, revealing a moon yet
 more glorious than before.

Gaze upon the great disc of that moon. Does it not look for all the world like a finely-
 polished mirror? See how brightly it shimmers there, whiter than the whitest silk. The

heavens are aglow! You might almost think the dawn was near at hand.

The full moon has this very night gathered in upon itself all the lunar radiance in its possession, and, sparing not a jot of light, pours this out over the four seas, over all creatures beneath heaven; in this moonlight, all are untied as friends.

That snow-white orb looks like the round fan of poor Consort Ban, who, just as the summer fan discarded come autumn, was slighted by her unfaithful lover.⁷⁰⁵ The sublime reflection shining down from that nocturnal mirror brings to mind visions of Ruan Ji drinking and making merry in his curtained chamber.⁷⁰⁶

Leaves of red and yellow fall softly over a placid lake: autumn is nearing its close. Soldiers stationed about the hinterlands, their term of service nearly over, linger still by the fort, enamored by the moonlight, forgetting all thoughts of home.

Here I stand, a forlorn and helpless maiden, within this tall pagoda, gazing up at a moon

⁷⁰⁵ Consort Ban is a common character in Saga's poetry: see his "The Sorrow of Consort Ban" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 58) and "Flight of the Swallows" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 111), both translated above.

⁷⁰⁶ Ruan Ji (210-263), prolific poet and musician, is, aside from his literary achievements, most famous for two things: excessive drinking and enigmatic but profound statements of a predominantly Daoist flavor. His reckless drinking, even on the very day of his own mother's funeral, along with a vehement disdain for propriety and any manner of convention, branded the man a social misfit. On the other hand, his love of poetry, philosophy, and music won him a high place in literary history. Saga here compares the brightness of the moon to Ruan Ji's illuminating intellect.

whose face I cannot look upon, even for a moment, without shedding tears of sorrow
and longing.

In the midnight, crickets cry amidst grasses bowed heavy with tears of dew. Come dawn, a
lonesome wind whispers by, carrying upon its wings the sound of women beating their
laundry upon battling blocks.⁷⁰⁷

I see how the bright autumn moon, year in and year out, returns with the same brilliant
color it sported the year before. Look, however, at this hair of mine: see how it grows
whiter and whiter with each passing moon.

Wind blows and leaves fall, each with their own cold song. Bamboo shoots sway before a
window from which no cheerful face peers out. Long shadows stretch forth their
lonesome limbs. The tendrils of a willow tree dance by a doorpost against which no
one leans.

I am no Heng'e; I shall not steal for myself the elixir of immortality and go running off the
moon alone, forsaking my mortal lover.⁷⁰⁸ Not I! Better far to wait her in my lonely

⁷⁰⁷ The battling block was a wooden or stone slab upon which laundry was beaten, usually with a wooden club known as a battledore or beetle, as a method of washing and smoothing clothing. In Chinese and Japanese poetry, this sound generally alludes to young women washing the laundry of their lovers, and hence, when heard by one such as the forlorn narrator of this poem, to loneliness.

⁷⁰⁸ Heng'e has already been encountered in the second poem of Saga's "Lamentations for a Princess" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 88).

bedchamber, gazing nightly up at the moon, pining over his long absence.



52. Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden⁷⁰⁹

Bunka shūreishū, fascicle 3, miscellaneous, poem no. 139

This poem was composed on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month—late autumn—the time of the annual Chrysanthemum Banquet, an event that Saga took very seriously, as may be seen, for example, from his “Celebrating the Chrysanthemum Banquet” and “Chrysanthemums in Autumn” (Ryōunshū, poem nos. 04 and 05). It is interesting, therefore, how, in stark contrast to the auspicious, joyful tone of his chrysanthemum

⁷⁰⁹ The full title of this poem is “Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden on the Ninth Day.” This, like Saga’s “Falling Blossoms” (*Ryōunshū*, poem nos. 03), is labelled as a *pian/hen* 篇, a genre of poetry in which a number of the couplets vary in length. The first half of the seventh as well as the eleventh couplet contains six characters, instead of seven, while twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth couplets have but five characters per verse. The poem then ends with three verses of three, five, and seven characters, respectively. Saga seems to have been one of very few poets willing to experiment with rhythm in this manner. Kose no Shikihito, in a reply to this poem (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 140), which stretches to a remarkable fifteen couplets of seven-character verse, contains but one verse of six characters.

banquet poems, the present verses are expressly forlorn and melancholy.

神泉苑九日落葉篇

寥廓秋天露為霜 山林晚葉併芸黃

自然灑落任朔風 搖颺徘徊滿雲空

朝來暮往無常時 北度南飛寧有期

歲月差馳徒逼迫 川阜變化遞盛衰

熙熙春心未傷盡 儻忽復逢秋氣悲

商飈掩亂吹洞庭 墜葉翩翩動寒聲

寒聲起 洞庭波 隨波泛泛流不已

虛條縮槭楓江上 舊蓋穿迳荷潭裡

塞外征夫戍遼西 閨中孤婦怨睽携

容華銷歇為秋暮 心事相違多慘悽

觀落葉 斷人腸 淮南木葉雜雁翔

對此長年悲 含情多所思

吁嗟潘岳興 感歎淚空垂

秋云晚 無物不蕭條 坐見寒林落葉飄

Beneath this boundless autumn firmament with its chilly winds, dew at length is turned to frost; both mountain and woodland, with their leaves so changed, now glow a vivid yellow.

Those same leaves, tossed about hither and thither by the northern wind, giving themselves up to the whim of that frosty gale, dance and whirl through an autumn sky dotted with clouds.

They have no fixed rhythm, those carefree leaves; they care not whether it be morning or night. Now they tarry, now they gambol. Now they make their way to the north, now they soar towards the south. Who can say whither they fly tomorrow?

The seasons, to be sure, run their regular course, driving heedlessly onwards until, ere long, autumn is upon us. The rivers and the fields, in accordance with the season, change their appearance, now fruitful and gay, now quiet and gaunt.

No sooner has spring come with all its warmth and joy than, leaving little us time to fully enjoy all those vernal pleasures, autumn rushes in again, engendering all hearts with

its sorrows and its sadness.⁷¹⁰

Leaves, torn from their branches by a wild autumn whirlwind that roars over the face of the lake, cry out, rustling and crackling, in dry voices choked by the cold, as they are scattered through the air.

O, those forwandered leaves, their dry voices choked with frost, are carried along with waves that now roll across the lake—no end to their ceaseless roaming!

The maple trees standing along the riverside stretch forth branches nearly bereft of leaves, adorned with naught but a few shriveled remnants. Lotus blossoms floating on the lake cling pathetically to their tattered leaves.

Soldiers stationed in forts along the hinterlands keep a close watch against invading barbarians, while their lovers and wives back home toss and turn in lonely bedchambers, pining for their absent men.

Just as autumn draws to a close, so, too, does my youthful beauty quickly fade. My heart moans with despair as I think upon the ways of this cruel world: what the heart desires is one thing; what we receive is something quite different.

⁷¹⁰ In the world of Sinitic poetry, spring is the season of joy, love, and happy leisure, whereas autumn, as was seen in Saga's "The Autumn Moon: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 137), is the season of partings, loneliness, and general despair.

Look at all those fallen leaves! How can a heart keep from weeping? Wild geese huddle in
droves atop the bare branches of many a riverside tree.

It is with deep sadness that I gaze upon such scenes, harboring secret thoughts within my
bosom, though I speak to no one.

O, woe is me! Tears of grief fall upon my breast as I pour over the verses of that inspired
poet, Pan Yue by name!⁷¹¹

Autumn is coming to a close. All things smack of loneliness and despair. Here am I, lost in
thought, looking blankly at the wind-driven leaves that fall and dance before a chilly
forest.



⁷¹¹ The poet Pan Yue is mentioned in the footnotes to Saga's "The Blossoms of Kaya" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 96). Here Saga is referring to a then well-known rhapsody by this same poet entitled "Feelings of Autumn" (*Qiuxing fu* 秋興賦), preserved in *Wenxuan* (fascicle 13). A wonderful English translation of this piece will be found in Knechtges, trans. *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, volume 3, 13-21. Pan Yue, disillusioned and bitter, borrows the theme of autumn as a means of expressing his resentment towards the corrupt bureaucracy of his day. Even a cursory perusal of Pan's rhapsody will reveal the degree to which Saga has relied upon these verses for overall inspiration and specific imagery.

POEMS PRESENTED BY SAGA IN *KEIKOKUSHŪ*53. The River during Springtide⁷¹²

Keikokushū, fascicle 1, rhapsodies, poem no. 1

During one of his regular processions, Saga praises the vernal beauty of the Yodo River and the scenic environs of his beloved Kaya Mansion. As is the case with the Sinitic tradition of rhapsodies, these verses read like a checklist of all the favorite springtime charms, including flora, fauna, and recreational activities. Saga begins his narrative with the brilliant dawn and takes us through to the moonlit night. This is meant to offer a

⁷¹² The river in question is the Yodo River, which flows by Saga's favorite Kaya (or Kayō) Mansion. Consequently, these verses ought to be read in conjunction with his other Kaya poems, translated above. This, as well as the next poem, are the only two extant rhapsodies attributed to Saga. While his "The Sorrows of Autumn" (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 9) is included in the category of rhapsodies (*fu/fu* 賦), it is not of the same type, being more of a conventional poem (*shi/shi* 詩), albeit with varying verse-lengths, than a true rhapsody. A true rhapsody is one which incorporates not only a wide variety of metrical styles, but also elements of both verse and prose. It is for this reason that the term rhapsody, in the context of Sinitic poetry, has been alternatively rendered as prose-poem or proem. I have tried to convey some of this hybridity in my translation: the prosaic bits—for example, the final sentence of the first section—are indented more than the surrounding text. The section divisions, both in this rhapsody and the next, while not explicitly labelled in the original, are signaled with the highly conventional prose markers, *shiyi/koko wo mochite* 是以 (also written *yushi/koko ni* 於是), "(and) so it is/was that," and *yushi/toki ni* 于時, "at this/that time." I have accordingly divided the translation into three stanzas.

comprehensive picture of spring as seen through the sovereign's eyes. The central sentiment is that of a traveler far from home who mingles the sadness of being far from home with the special joys of spring.

春江賦

[1]

仲月春氣滿江鄉 新年物色變河陽

江霞照出辭寒彩 海氣晴來就暖光

柳懸岸而烟中綻 桃夾堤以風後香

望春江兮騁目 觀清流之洋洋

或漫兮似不流 或渺兮逝不留

長之難可識 濬之誰能測

茲可謂春氣動 而著於江色也

[2]

是以

羽族翱翔 鱗群頡頏

繽紛雜沓 載來載行

咀嚼初藻 吞茹新荇

各各吟叫 處處相望

涉人迴楫 與淵客而為倫

漁童搆宇 接鮫室而同隣

隨波瀾之渺邈 轉舳舻而尋津

菱歌於是頻沿泝 客子於是不勝春

茲可謂江村春 而感於情人也

[3]

于時

花飛江岸 草長河畔

蝶態紛紜 鶯聲撩亂

游覽未已 日落西溪

夜在江亭 枕臥矣

江上月 浪中明

靜如練而雲間發 光與水而共清清

山風入於戶牖兮 聽颼颼乎松聲

歸雁欲辭汀洲去 飢猿曉動羈旅情

羈旅乘春心轉幽 江南江北事遨遊

總為春深多感歎 年年江望得銷憂

[1]

The New Year brings with it a host of new sights: the banks of the Yodo River are colored afresh in the warm vernal hues of mid-spring; the environs of my beloved Kaya Mansion are engendered with new life.

Mist upon the river shimmers with a radiance that drives away winter's lingering chill; the last remnants of fog have been lifted from the ocean, whose surface now smiles beneath a brilliant sky.

Willows trail their pliant branches, bejeweled now with newly opening buds, over yon mist-covered river, while peach trees, coaxed by an alluring breeze, effuse their fragrance on either side of the embankment.

Here I stand, gazing out over this river, bathed in springtide hues, marveling at the vigor of
its crystalline current:

Admiring its broad banks, the river seems not to be flowing at all. Tracing its course far
into the distance, this same river seems, on the contrary, never to stand still at all.

Who can say for sure precisely how long that river really is? Who can say with certainty
just how deep its waters run?

The warmth of spring, hidden erstwhile, begins to stir, and ere long makes its
presence known by means of vivid colors and sweet scents seen and smelt
along the riverside.

[2]

And so it is that:

Birds flutter hither and thither; fish bob and dive.

They scurry and gambol pell-mell, now coming, now going.

Some nibble on the tender fronds of seaweed; others munch on the water lilies.

Chirping and trilling, every one, they cast their joyful eyes upon one another.

Boatmen ply their oars between the riverbanks, conversing merrily with those on shore who wish to be ferried to the other side.

Those young boys and girls who dive for fish set up their huts close by the river, taking the very fish as their neighbors.

Rowing far off into the distance, half-drifting atop the waves, boatmen turn their prows left and right in search of a pier—

The same boatmen who, running up and down the river, sing rustic ditties about picking water chestnuts, filling the hearts of us travelers with all the joys of spring!

A riverside village bedecked thus in spring's gay mantle is enough, you will agree, to inspire the sensitive soul to sing.

[3]

For this is the season in which:

Flower petals grace the river, and vernal herbs grow tall along its banks.

Butterflies prance and dance to the scattered songs of bush warblers.

The sun begins to set, though this royal procession of ours is not yet over.

I shall spend the night in this riverside Kaya Mansion, enjoying a peaceful slumber.

A bright moon shines in the sky, casting its reflection down upon the waves below.

It is a still, peaceful night, as soft as silk; moonlight shimmers through the clouds, as clear
and pure as the river's waters.

Wind blowing down from the surrounding mountains comes in through my windows,
bringing with it the music it makes when whistling through the pines.

Wild geese returning north leave this quaint waterside for more distant shores; wild
monkeys, their bellies rumbling, cry out in a voice that moves the lonely traveler.

The heart of a traveler, of whom I am one, is moved most profoundly by the joys of spring,
as he frolics about the banks of this charming river.

What more can be said, save that sentiments grow deeper as spring progresses? Let me gaze
upon this river year after year! One look at its waters washes away all my sorrows.



54. Chrysanthemum Blossoms⁷¹³*Keikokushū*, fascicle 1, rhapsodies, poem no. 2

This is another of Saga's chrysanthemum poems, composed for one of his annual chrysanthemum banquets, an event already encountered several times in previous poems, held on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month—the end of autumn. The majority of this rhapsody is dedicated to praising the beauty of chrysanthemums, a flower which, like the pine tree (likewise praised by Saga), does not wither come autumn.

重陽節菊花賦

[1]

白藏氣季 玄月天高

霜零凜凜 商風騷騷

⁷¹³ The full title of this poem is “Rhapsody on Chrysanthemum Blossoms during the Chrysanthemum Festival.” Regarding the nature of Sinitic rhapsodies, see the first footnote of the previous poem.

觀物理於盛衰兮 知造化之異時

林何樹而不搖落 原何艸而不具腓

豈若

芳菊神奇 在枯獨滋

蔓延蠶靡 緣岸被坻

花實星羅 莖葉雲布

香飄朝風 色照夕露

[2]

於是

日當重陽 高宴華堂

正開玳蓆 傍引賢良

隨桓景而訪古 就陶潛以命觴

擒賞心於翰墨 聽絲竹之清商

[3]

于時

衆芳彫 寒菊咲

殊蓊鬱 獨照曜

或素或黃 滿庭芬馥

淑媛望兮移步 妖姬歛兮屬目

攘溺腕而採嫩 擢纖手以摘花

珠顏俄爾益艷 雲髻忽焉重釵

期採摘於盈把兮 愛逍遙乎日斜

[4]

亦有

鍾生稱其五美 屈子淪其落英

翫神仙之靈藥 忘塵俗之世情

感雁序於薄晚兮 傷落葉乎秋聲

時屬長年之多歎 還欣斯花之延齡

[1]

As autumn, that crisp season of reaping, draws to a close—this being the ninth lunar month—the heavens stretch out clear and lofty.

Frost falls, bringing with it an almost wintry chill; autumnal winds begin to bluster and blow over all the land.

All things in Nature change with the seasons; all things bloom only to fall, grow only to decay—this much I have learned from observation.⁷¹⁴

Tell me, is there a forest whose leaves are not stripped off their branches come autumn? Is there a field whose grasses can escape the withering frost?

While forest and field yield to autumn's touch, the chrysanthemum—most miraculous flower!—alone remains vivid and fresh when all other things have faded.

At a time when all has turned red and yellow, its leaves alone spread out in intricate profusion, covering the riverbanks and the hillsides with splendid verdure.

White blossoms shimmer forth like so many serried stars, against a background of stalks and leaves that take the place of nocturnal clouds.

Morning winds carry the chrysanthemum's fragrance far and wide, while midnight

⁷¹⁴ Here, as elsewhere, I have used the word Nature, with a capital *n* to render the Sinitic term *zao**hua*/*zōka* 造化. See Saga's "Falling Blossoms" (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3), especially the footnote to the verse "How is it that even Nature herself has deigned to imitate the painter's art?"

dewdrops shimmer with reflected light from those ermine blossoms.

[2]

And so it is that:

On this day, being the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, we enjoy this gorgeous banquet

together, here in this most exquisite hall!⁷¹⁵

Upon resplendent seats of polished tortoiseshell we sit, worthy men of wisdom and of

virtue gathered closed beside us.

We follow the continental customs of old, gathering autumn olives and brewing

chrysanthemum liqueur to ward off evil and ensure longevity.⁷¹⁶

Ink and brush express in written words the admirable sentiments our hearts all feel; our ears

delight in hearing the clear, pure melodies of strings and flutes alike.

⁷¹⁵ The implication here, of course, is that Saga, being the host of this banquet, is the lord of all that is gorgeous and exquisite, an absolute paragon of culture and wealth.

⁷¹⁶ See Saga's "Late Autumn Brings a Bountiful Harvest" (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 6), especially the footnotes to the following couplet: "Fruit of the autumn olive is presented to all in attendance. Chrysanthemum petals, freshly plucked, float in the drinking goblets of every reveler."

[3]

For this is the season in which:

While all other flowers have since lost their fragrance, the peerless chrysanthemum

blossoms most gaily.

Its leaves, more than any of its neighbors, unfurl now fresh and green, shimmering like no

other beneath an autumn sun.

Some of its blossoms are white, others yellow—all of them exuding their sweet fragrance

throughout this garden.

Comely maidens and charming girls, casting those languid eyes here and there, dally softly

amidst those flowers.

Raising their slender arms, stretching forth those delicate wrists, they gingerly pluck the

choicest flowers, decorating their faces and hair.

Behold! Those youthful cheeks, as smooth and pale as pearls, shine with a new radiance;

their hair, arrayed like floating clouds, sport exquisite new hairpins!

Wanting nothing more than to fill our arms with bundles of chrysanthemum blossoms, we
linger on in this garden until the sun begins to set.

[4]

That is not all. There is still more to say!

Men of old have lauded the exceptional beauty of chrysanthemum blossoms; great poets, so
we read, were wont to dine on those petals in hopes of longevity.

You have but to take a single draught of that chrysanthemum liqueur, that divine elixir, and
all your mundane cares will be forgotten!

Wild geese soaring through the evening sky pains me: the cold of winter is not far off. The
sound of falling leaves troubles my soul: all will soon be naked and withered.

Autumn is drawing to a close—a time of deep sorrow. Even so, let us rejoice in the
chrysanthemum flower, the source of longevity and more happiness to come!



55. The Sorrows of Autumn⁷¹⁷*Keikokushū*, fascicle 1, rhapsodies, poem no. 9

This poem, like the previous rhapsody, was composed expressly for one of Saga's annual chrysanthemum banquets.

重陽節神泉苑 賦「秋可哀」

[1]

秋可哀兮 哀年序之早寒

天高爽兮雲渺渺 氣蕭颯兮露團團

庭潦收而水既淨 林蟬踈以引欲殫

⁷¹⁷ The full title of this poem is “A Poem on the Theme ‘The Sorrows of Autumn,’ Composed in the Shinsen Gardens during the Chrysanthemum Banquet.” I have divided this poem into three stanzas, each beginning with the refrain “O, the sorrows of autumn!” While included in the category of rhapsodies, this piece is not a true rhapsody: see the first footnote for Saga’s “The River during Springtide” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 1).

燕先社日蟄巖嶺 雁雜涼氣叫江洲

荷潭帶冷無全葉 柳岸銜霜枝不柔

寒服時授 熟稼新收

[2]

秋可哀兮 哀草木之搖落

對晚林於變衰兮 聽秋聲乎蕭索

望芳菊之丘阜 看幽蘭之阜澤

年華荏苒行將闌 物候蹉跎已迴薄

楚客悲哉之詞 晉郎感興之作

[3]

秋可哀兮 哀秋夜之長遙

風凜凜 月照照 臥對風月正蕭條

窗前墜葉那堪聽 枕上未眠欲終宵

到曉城邊誰擣衣 泠泠夜響去來飛

不是愁人猶多感 深閨何況怨別離

吁嗟四運易行邁 惆悵三秋絕可悲

[1]

O, the sorrows of autumn! How sorrowful that this season should be the first to feel the
chilly hand of winter.

The autumnal sky is broad and clear; clouds are few and so far away. A sense of loneliness
pervades all things; dewdrops are everywhere to be seen.

All the puddles have since dried up, and the rivers runs clear. Cicadas lingering in the
woods are but rarely heard; soon they shall cease their songs altogether.

Swallows, fearing the coming autumnal equinox with its freezing winds, seek shelter in
mountain caves; wild geese mingle on chilly sandbanks, calling out to one another.

Lotus blossoms with their shriveled leaves float atop a frozen pond, while willow trees,
branches stiff from the cold, shiver alongside the river.

It is time now to take out my thick autumn robes. It is time, too, to take in those crops
grown over the summer.

[2]

O, the sorrows of autumn! How sorrowful that this season should see the herbs and the
leaves all falling to the ground.

Look at the woods in late autumn, and see what a change has been wrought over them!

Listen to the sounds of autumn, and hear the sorrow of those dying songs.

Even so, look also at yon hill: see the fragrant chrysanthemums blooming there! Look also
at yon streamlet: see the elegant thoroughwort shining there!

The year rolls on, never halting; the end of autumn is soon to come. Nature marches swiftly
onwards; this season cannot linger much longer.

Think on those sorrowful verses by Song Yu, and on those inspired lines by Pan Yue. Would
you not agree that they are perfectly poignant?⁷¹⁸

[3]

⁷¹⁸ Pan Yue's rhapsody on autumn has already been cited by Saga in his "Leaves Falling in the Shinsen Garden" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 139): see the footnote in that poem to the following couplet: "O, woe is me! Tears of grief fall upon my breast as I pour over the verses of that inspired poet, Pan Yue by name!" Song Yu 宋玉 (298 BC-222), in his "Jiubian" 九辨 (Nine Songs), likewise gives expression to the sorrowful sentiments incited by autumn.

O, the sorrows of autumn! How sorrowful that this season should be visited with such long,
lonely nights.

The wind is biting; the moon is shining. And I, sleeping here all alone, feel nothing in that
wind, see nothing in that moon, but loneliness.

Even the sound of falling leaves outside my window fills me with unbearable anguish! I
toss and turn in my bed, unable to sleep. The night is nearly over.

Dawn has come to this village. I hear the sound of someone beating her laundry?⁷¹⁹ The
cold whistling of last night's wind still echoes through the alleys.

Though I may not be a man of great sorrow myself, even so, my heart aches with many a
sad thought. How much more, then, must that lonely maiden grieve for her absent
lover gone to war?⁷²⁰

Alas, the four seasons pass us by all too quickly! Alack, autumn brings us far too much

⁷¹⁹ For the significance of this conventional image, see Saga's "The Autumn Moon: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 137), especially the footnote to the couplet that reads "Come dawn, a lonesome wind whispers by, carrying upon its wings the sound of women beating their laundry upon battling blocks."

⁷²⁰ Saga makes repeated use of this image: see his "Breaking Willow Branches" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 69), especially the couplet "A woman, sorely forlorn, sits alone in her empty bedchamber, lamenting the long absence of her lover, a soldier who, having been sent off to fight along the northern borders, is not likely to return to her any time soon."

sorrow!



56. Song of the Frontier⁷²¹

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, courtly ballads, poem no. 18

This is another of Saga's war poems. That he should compare the northern barbarians—the emishi—of his own realm with the Xiongnu of China is to be expected. What makes this piece especially noteworthy, however, is the fact that Saga is tacitly comparing himself to a continental sovereign, “lord of the Han people,” and demanding that his troops give their lives gladly in return for the boundless benevolence he has offered them throughout their youth. This sort of propaganda would have been necessary, considering Saga was constantly at war with the northern tribes. It is extremely unlikely, however, that soldiers were the intended audience. This poem, like all Saga's writing, was meant for his vassals,

⁷²¹ Like “Breaking Willow Branches” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 69), “Song of the Frontier” is the generic name of a once popular melody in the repertoire of courtly ballads (*yuefu/gafu*).

several of whom also served as military generals in the northern hinterlands.

塞下曲

百戰功多苦邊塵 沙場萬里不見春

漢家天子恩難報 宋盡兇奴豈顯身

What glories have our soldiers gained—one hundred battles fought and won! O, but what hardships they do face along the distant hinterlands! Upon those embattled desert sands, ten-thousand miles from home; spring comes not to these men.

The benevolent favors of their mighty sovereign—son of heaven, lord of the Han people!— is not easily repaid. So long as one Xiongnu barbarian yet stands in opposition to the sovereign, what thought give these soldiers for their own welfare?



57. Seeing Off an Elderly Monk Returning to the Mountains⁷²²

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 30

This poem contains something of the romantic. The narrator watches in awe as an aged monk walks off into mountains dappled with autumn leaves. Rather than ask who this monk might have been, it seems much more to the point to consider these verses as a sort of fantasy, akin to the iconic lone rider heading off into the sunset.

見老僧歸山

道性本來塵事遐 獨將衣鉢向煙霞

定知行盡秋山路 白雲深處是僧家

The heart of one who cultivates the way of enlightenment is free of all attachments to this

⁷²² An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 89. Our extant manuscripts of *Keikokushū* contain a total of fifty-one Buddhist verses (poem nos. 29-79), eleven of which were composed by Saga.

mundane world. Dressed in his monkish robe, begging bowl in hand, he heads for
distant shores shrouded in mist.

Know that the path this monk treads is far, and not for us worldly folk. He dwells deep
within the autumnal mountains, somewhere atop yon peaks, where only the white
clouds play.



58. The Court Lady of the Old Capital Who Became a Nun: A Reply to Fujiwara no

Koreo⁷²³

⁷²³ Not much at all is known of this Fujiwara no Koreo (or possibly Yoshio) 藤原是雄 (n.d.) is uncertain. His poem, to which Saga is replying, is not extant. Only one of his poems has been preserved, namely “Wang Zhaojun: A Reply to Emperor Saga” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 66). The identity of the court lady, assuming that was her status, is uncertain. Kojima suggests she might have been a certain lady-in-waiting in Emperor Heizei’s rear palace by the name of Ōnakatomi Momoko 大中臣百子 (n.d.). This certainly seems quite plausible. Moreover, it makes perfect sense in the context of this poem: see Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volume 5 (*chū ge* II), 2589-2590. The old capital here, assuming the tonsured woman is indeed Momoko, refers to Nara, the capital in which Heizei was born, and to which he returned after abdicating in favor of his brother, Saga. Again, assuming Kojima’s interpretation is correct, and I think it is, the “enlightened sovereign” of the first couplet must refer to the late Emperor Heizei. Considering Heizei had attempted, during the so-called Kusuko Disturbance, to undermine Saga’s authority and transfer the capital back to his “old haunt” in Nara, it is interesting to note that Saga still refers to his deceased brother as an enlightened sovereign. Heizei died in 824. Saga abdicated in 823.

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 32

This poem is about a certain lady-in-waiting who, having followed her lord—likely Retired Emperor Heizei—back to the old capital of Nara only to be left alone after his unexpected death, decides to become a nun. Taking the tonsure was, for women of the Heian period, a kind of ritualized retirement, very common among aristocratic widows and disillusioned lovers. Saga portrays the woman here, as he does in several other poems about the autumn moon, as a pining lover. The fact that she is a nun is of little importance. Even so, it is this incidental fact that made the compilers of Keikokushū place this poem in the section on Buddhist verses. Heizei, whose real reason for leaving the Heian capital was most likely political, is here portrayed after the fashion of an enlightened monk renouncing the material world. Saga, well aware of the facts, is using poetry to reimagine or romantically recreate history.

和藤是雄「舊宮美人入道詞」

遁世明皇出帝畿 移居舊邑遣歲時

忽從此地昇雲後 唯有空居戀寵姬
 訪道初停羅綺艷 剃頭新作比丘尼
 嬌心欲識乖口縛 弱體那堪著草衣⁷²⁴
 山殿風聲秋梵冷 溪窗月色曉禪悲
 焚香持誦寒林寂 坐向蒼天怨別離

Fleeing from the mundane affairs of man, that enlightened sovereign left the Heian capital behind, seeking an abode in his old haunt. It is there, in Nara, where he spent the remainder of his days on earth.

Then, quite without warning, he passed away, ascending to the heavens above, leaving behind a lonely court lady who, bereft of her lord, could be naught but pine the loss of her one true love.

Having committed herself to the path of enlightenment, she accepted the tonsure and became a nun. It was then, when all her hair had been shaven, that the woman who had once shone so beautifully abandoned her feminine charms.

⁷²⁴ The missing character near the end of the first half of this couplet was most likely something like 束 or 拘, which, when combined with the final character to form either 束縛 or 拘縛, means shackles, bonds, or impediment.

No doubt she, being a woman of deep sentiment, sought to free herself from the shackles of this mortal world. But how, pray tell, could that frail female frame of hers bear the hardship of donning a monk's coarse robe?

The sound of nuns reciting scriptures on this chilly autumn day is heard over the wind that blows through her mountain temple. It is with sadness that I imagine her sitting by a window overlooking some stream, bathed in the fading moonlight as she engages in her austere practices just before the light of dawn.

There I see her in my mind's eye, burning incense and reciting sutras, day and night, amidst a cold forest, staring up with resentment at the blue heavens, pining in vain—but pining all the same!—for her lost love.



59. Remembering Master An: A Reply to Fujiwara no Koreo⁷²⁵

⁷²⁵ The full title of this poem is “A Reply to Fujiwara no Koreo’s Poem Entitled ‘Passing By the Old Abode of Master An’.” This Fujiwara no Koreo is the same individual who appeared in the title of the previous poem. The identity of the deceased Buddhist monk, Master An, remains a mystery. The name An, the Japanese rendering of which is usually Yasu, is perhaps an abbreviated version of a surname, such as Yasuno, or of a given name, such as, say, Takayasu or Yasuyuki. Of course, this

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 33

This is a eulogy for a Buddhist monk, Master An by name, about whom we now know nothing. It is interesting to note that the narrator of this poem—Saga—refers to himself as one who is sincerely seeking enlightenment. This poem should be compared with Saga's "Visiting a Hermit's Remains: In Imitation of Shigeno no Sadanushi," preserved in Bunka shūreishū (poem no. 93), and translated above. Both the imagery and the sentiments are nearly identical, save the fact that, in the latter poem, the deceased was a Daoist hermit. Saga's poetry shows little or no distinction between Buddhist and Daoist practitioners. In terms of numbers, however, Saga composed more poems for and about Buddhist monks than he did for Daoist recluses.

和藤是雄「春日過安禪師舊院」

monk might have been of Chinese or Korean origin, in which case this single character could have well been his surname. It doesn't much matter here.

釋子歸真炎涼變 空山獨閉應禪扃

草堂虛駐松蘿月 石室罷翻了義經

護法鬼神何日會 隨緣猿鳥竟誰聽

道心拭淚禮遺跡 猶恨化身不久停

Having once set his mind upon the true path of enlightenment, that loyal disciple of the Buddha cloistered himself away in some solitary mountain grotto all enshrouded in clouds, where, exposing his mortal frame to all manner of heat and cold, he disciplined his soul through quiet meditation.

Now that he has passed away, the moonlight shines upon his old grass hut in vain, illuminating the vine-entangled branches of his once beloved pines; scriptures expounding the highest truths, once the object of daily study, lay all untouched.

When shall those unseen guardian deities who watched over Master An in live have an opportunity to again lay their eyes upon that saintly figure? To whom shall the beasts and the birds, no less eager for enlightenment, turn for instruction?

As I wipe away tears of admiration for that deceased sage—for I, too, am aflame with a desire for enlightenment!—gazing now upon his abandoned haunt, my soul cries out

against the awful brevity of such a noble life.



60. Tea with Master Kūkai⁷²⁶

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 34

Saga bids farewell to Kūkai, who must leave the capital and return to his mountain abode.

The season, significantly, is autumn, a season of departures and farewells, of pining lovers,

lonely travelers, and general melancholy.

與海公飲茶送歸山

道俗相分經數年 今秋晤語亦良緣

⁷²⁶ The full title of this poem is “Having Tea with Kūkai before Seeing Him Off to the Mountains.” Kūkai had come from his mountain abode in Mt. Takao, Kyoto, to visit the sovereign in the capital. Now it was time for the monk to return to the mountains, where he was to continue his spiritual practices and religious studies.

香茶酌罷日云暮 稽首傷離望雲烟

Considering how many years have passed since you became a monk, leaving me, as
 always, a man of the world, far behind you, I think it a great sign of our affinity that
 this autumn day we are able to converse so intimately together.

Alas, the time for tea drinking is over now; the sun is quickly setting. What can I do but
 hang my head, forlorn at your departure? What more, I say, can I do than gaze afar as
 you disappear into the misty mountains beyond?



61. Bedridden in Kegon Temple: A Reply to Korenaga no Harumichi⁷²⁷

⁷²⁷ The full title of this poem is “A Reply to a Poem by the Hermit Korenaga no Harumichi Entitled ‘Verses Written One Autumn While Bedridden in a Monk’s Cell in Kegon Temple’.” Korenaga no Harumichi 惟良春道 (n.d.) was a courtier and a poet, who despite his service as assistant provincial governor of Ise (beginning in 837), and attendant at the royal banquet held in 842 for emissaries from Parhae, was known as a hermit (*yiren/itsujin* 逸人). Kegon Temple, the place where this erudite hermit was apparently once bedridden, refers to a temple that once stood in the northern part of the Saga Wilds, Kyoto.

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 35

Saga gives generous praise to the solitude and sanctity of Kegon Temple, once located in Kyoto.

和惟逸人春道「秋日臥疾華嚴山寺精舍之作」

絕頂華嚴寺 雲深溪路遙

道心登靜境 真性隔塵囂

閱騰禪庭栢 觀空法界蕉

天花流邃澗 香氣度烟霄

風竹時開合 聲鐘曉動搖

轉經山月下 羸病轉寥寥

Kegon Temple stands at the very peak of yon mountain, shrouded forever in clouds, while
the valleys below wind off into the distance.

You, Harumichi, so pure of heart, in your search after the ultimate truth did venture into

those solitary mountains, separated as they are from all our worldly clatter.

In the temple garden stand elderly evergreens who watch over the monks as they meditate;

there, too, grow frail banana trees, signs of the mysterious void.⁷²⁸

From that temple rain divine flowers that float down to the deep valley streams below.

From that temple arises a sweet fragrance that drifts through the misty heavens.

Wind blows through the bamboo brakes only to fall silent soon after, while a temple bell

resounds with the coming of dawn.

What charming solitude your heart must feel upon hearing the monks reciting their

scriptures on that mountaintop bathed all in moonlight!



62. An Old Altar⁷²⁹

⁷²⁸ In virtue of its frail nature, the banana tree (*bajiao/bashō* 芭蕉) appears in Buddhist scriptures as a symbol of the evanescence of all things. Here it is used as a sign of the mysterious emptiness, the ultimate truth, behind all things.

⁷²⁹ The full title of this poem is “Written One Spring Upon Seeing the Old Altar of a Bodhisattva, While Travelling Past a Mountain Temple.” Neither the location of the temple nor the identity of the bodhisattva are clear.

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 37

The narrator laments the passing of time. Not even the remains of an altar dedicated to an unidentified bodhisattva—one of those who came after Buddha to save mankind—has been properly preserved. The Buddha passed away; the bodhisattva passed away; even the altars made by us mortals are bound to decay and vanish. This is not, however, a wholly pessimistic message. The narrator, I suspect, is urging us to consider the fleeting nature of reality, including religious relics, reminding us not to cling too closely to material things.

春日過山寺觀菩薩舊壇

禪扃閉雲春山寒 林下苔封萬古壇

菩薩化身滅後事 空餘歲月白雲殘

The temple, hidden within a mountain that remains chilly even in spring, is shrouded over in clouds and mist. In the forest below, blanketed in layers of moss, stands an ancient alter.

This venerable bodhisattva came after the Buddha departed, with hopes of delivering us
 mortals from ignorance. Now, after countless years, all that remains of that holy
 helper's legacy is clouds and mist.



63. Petition for an Ailing Saichō⁷³⁰

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 38

This poem, like Saga's "Bedridden: A Reply to Master Saichō," in Bunka shūreishū (poem no. 76), translated above, is dedicated to Saichō. It was likely composed around the year 818, before Bunka shūreishū was completed. Here Saga petitions the Buddhist sages, seen or unseen, to administer their healing magic to poor Saichō, whom he is eager to see well again.

⁷³⁰ While the original title does not give Saichō's name, it is safe to assume that the term *jingren/jōnin* 淨人, "man of purity," is to him.

問淨上人疾

聞公暫病臥山房 空報鐘聲不上堂

道性如思幽客問 須療身是真藥王

Word has come that you, Master Saichō, have been bedridden as of late in your mountain abode. Even the ringing of that temple bell, once so pregnant with meaning to you, must fall now on troubled ears deaf to such things.

Listen to me, all you enlightened beings: If you would have compassion on one such as I, one who longs to see Master Saichō well again, I beg you, work your magic and heal his body. That, after all, is the power of a real Medicine Buddha!



64. Seeing Master Saichō Off to the Mountains

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 41

This is another dedicated to Saichō. Here Saga sees the venerable monk in his mind's eye, sleeping alone in his mountain chamber, now meditating on Buddhist teachings, now listening with reverential awe to the sound of temple bells at dawn.

寄淨公山房

古寺從來絕人蹤 吾師坐夏老雲峰
幽情獨臥秋山裏 覺後恭聞五夜鐘

Your solitary temple, Master Saichō, hears not the footfall of worldly men. There you sit atop that cloud-covered peak, year in and year out, throughout the long summer months, meditating on profound things.

I can imagine you now: Alone with your sublime thoughts you lie, concealed deep within a mountain now colored with vivid autumnal hues. Awoken by the dawn bells, you listen with reverence to those resounding notes.



65. A Courtier Takes the Tonsure: A Reply to Emperor Junna⁷³¹

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 43

Retired Emperor Saga presents a straightforward account of a man, Sadatada by name, who, having risen to serve in the court as the then reigning Emperor Junna's guard, nevertheless decided to abandon all worldly success in favor of taking the tonsure and becoming a monk. As the footnotes indicate, some of the imagery and terminology here have already been encountered in other poems by Saga. The third couplet is noteworthy insofar as it expresses a sense of concern for the well-being of the monk, clothed as he is in

⁷³¹ The full title of this poem is “A Reply to a Poem Composed by His Majesty Entitled ‘Verses Sent to Grand General Yoshimine no Yasuo upon Hearing that Sadatada of the Right Guard Had Taken the Tonsure’.” Saga had since retired when this poem was composed; the term his majesty here refers to Emperor Junna. The identity of Sadatada is unknown, as is his relationship to Yasuo. As Kojima remarks, one of Yasuo’s own sons took the tonsure: see Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volume 5 (*chū ge* II), 2635. Perhaps this has something to do with Junna’s decision to write to Yasuo regarding Sadatada.

the meager attire of a monk, hardly enough to protect him from the colder months ahead.

和御製「聞右軍曹入道 簡大將軍良公」

伊昔邊頭俠少年 今為末將禁庭前
 歸真厭俗兵戈罷 仰拜彤闈謝皇天
 塵衣已替薛蘿衲 道性初寒楊柳綿
 古寺莓苔新跡破 草堂磬梵舊聲傳
 對境持齋宜野果 觀空爐氣和山烟
 雖逢聖代多雨露 別是素懷奉金仙

Listen here! Sadatada, born and raised in the countryside—a heady youth of martial spirit—

later came to serve within the precincts of the court as the sovereign's own guard,

albeit with a low rank.

When, however, a desire to pursue the path of enlightenment possessed his soul, this same

man cast aside his helmet and spear, requesting the sovereign's permission to quit his

station and leave the splendid palace behind.

Worldly vestments, since tossed aside in favor of the coarse robes of an ascetic monk, offer but little warmth to that diligent heart, as willows, shivering against the autumn's growing chill, shed their catkins about him.

Dark moss, which covers that age-old temple of his, sports new, tender sprouts that are just now beginning to show their brighter hues. Within a grass hut—a place he now calls home—solemn temple bells bring to his ears the echoes of ages past.⁷³²

When nurturing the physical body, a thing bound inexorably to this fleeting world of external phenomena, what better nourishment than vegetables and fruit? When seeking to penetrate the mysterious void, what could be more revealing than the sight of incense smoke and mist over the mountaintops?⁷³³

⁷³² Saga seems to have been rather fond of this image of new moss growing up from under an older bed of moss: see his “A Spring Day in the Saga Villa” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 2), especially the couplet that reads: “While the tender sprouts of new mosses are already working their way up through the older moss patches, the new branches of willows growing along the riverbank have yet to stretch out their lithe fingers.” The charm of this imagery lies in the superimposition of the old and the new, producing thereby a sense of the eternal present.

⁷³³ The juxtaposition between observing external phenomena (*duijing/kyō ni taisuru* 對境) and penetrating the mysterious, invisible, and infinitely pregnant void behind all things, that is, becoming aware of the ultimate nature of reality (*guankong/kū wo kanzuru* 觀空) appears also in Saga's “Bedridden: A Reply to Master Saichō” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 76): “All external phenomena are naught but illusion; having penetrated the interdependence of all things, realizing that nothing possesses substantial existence of itself, how, then, can one help but despise this fleeting mortal body of flesh and bone?” In this poem, incense smoke and mountain mists are supposed to afford the practitioner an opportunity to reflect upon the fleeting nature of external reality, and hence lead him into a deeper understanding of that which transpires behind that which is manifest.

Though you are blessed to be living in the reign of our most sagacious Emperor Junna,
 from whom the dews of mercy fall in abundance, you, Sadatada, have set your heart
 upon the next world; you single heartedly follow the Buddha's footsteps.



66. The Temple below the Waterfall: A Reply to Yoshimine no Yasuyo⁷³⁴

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 51

Here we see two images juxtaposed against one another: a roaring waterfall, beside which a temple stands, on the one hand, and, on the other, an aged monk who, despite the raucous that waterfall makes day in and day out, maintains a tranquil heart. This is likely one of Saga's fantasy pieces, a curious vignette meant to charm his readers. Saga's use of metaphor, especially in the second couplet, where both the Milky Way and a rainbow are

⁷³⁴ The full title of this poem is "My Reply to a Poem Composed by General Yoshimine no Yasuyo Entitled 'A Temple below the Waterfall: Sent to Kiyohara no Natsuno'." This Kiyohara no Natsuno (782-837) was an active courtier who, having served as personal advisor to both Saga and Junna, eventually rose, in 832, to become minister of the right.

depicted as waterless waterfalls, is worth noting.

和良將軍「題瀑布下蘭若 簡清大夫之作」

瀑布一邊一山寺 高車訪道遠追尋

空堂望崖銀河發 古殿看溪白虹臨

霧雨灑來霑爐氣 雷風噴怒亂鐘音

澹然僧臆流懸水 盥漱獨行禪定心

You travelled such a great distance, Yoshimine, in your stately carriage, riding through the mountains in search of that solitary temple—a temple that stands beneath the cascading splendor of a waterfall.

That, surely, is not the only waterfall to be seen: Looking out at the sky from that silent temple, one can see the Milky Way, a starry waterfall, indeed! Looking down from that ancient hall into the valley, one spies a misty rainbow, a waterfall of light!

Spray from that nearby waterfall dampens the ashes in the incense cauldron, while the thundering roar of those raging waters play havoc with the fragile tones of temple

bells.

There an aged monk, his heart forever a placid pond, washes himself beneath the waterfall,
 now cleaning his hands, now cleansing his mouth, all the while cultivating in solitude
 a heart capable of realizing the ultimate truth.



67. Sounding Stones at Night: A Reply to Korenaga no Harumichi⁷³⁵

Keikokushū, fascicle 10, Buddhist verses, poem no. 54

The narrator is lying in a dark hut somewhere in the woods. He hears the soft ringing of

⁷³⁵ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem by the hermit Korenaga no Harumichi Entitled ‘Upon Hearing Sounding Stones in the Mountains at Night’.” Korenaga no Harumichi was previously encountered in “Bedridden in Kegon Temple: A Reply to Korenaga no Harumichi” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 10). Sounding stones (*qing/kei* 磬) were likewise encountered in “A Reply to Master Kōjō” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 72): “In your temple, standing atop cloud-encircled peaks, you pass the time making music upon sounding stones and chimes. Even as springtime is drawing to a close in the capital down below, high up in your mountain home the cold still lingers.” See the footnote to this latter couplet for some discussion of the relationship between the sounding stones and late spring. The appearance of willow trees in the present poem indicates that the season is spring.

sounding stones coming down from a mountain temple nearby. This simple sound, for one reason or another, brings the man to a deeper understanding regarding the nature of reality. The second half of the final couplet is quite profound. It is not that Buddhist doctrines are inconsequential or false, but rather that the practitioner must be wary not to cling too tenaciously to any given idea; he must eventually come to the realization that even the Buddha's teachings, once fully digested, must be discarded, like a canoe after crossing over a river.

和惟山人春道「晚聽山磬」

黃昏磬發烟霄中 點點悠揚帶山風

林下暗堂臥聽磬 禪心觀念法皆空

In the fading glow of dusk, a sounding stone rings out across the misty heavens, carried along, stroke upon stroke, by a soft wind rolling down from the mountains.

Listening to that sound, lying in a dark forest hut, my soul, lost in deep meditation, suddenly comes to the realization that all phenomena, all doctrines, are empty.



68. Early Spring⁷³⁶

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 87

After emphasizing the fresh, tender, serene scenery of early spring, the narrator remarks at the sound of wild geese flying northward. These geese, with their clear, crisp notes, seem somehow out of place now.

早春

玉律三陽始 年芳萬里生

山晴銷片雪 地暖動群萌

⁷³⁶ Early spring refers specifically to the first lunar month, making this the first month of spring as well as beginning of a new year. The manuscript contains a note immediately after the title indicating that this poem was composed while Saga was still the reigning sovereign.

色微砂嶼草 擘澁柳園鶯

唯有歸飛雁 連連回北聲

It is now the first month of spring, the time when cold gives way to warmth, when the fragrance of a new year spreads over ten-thousand leagues.

Snow atop the mountains is melted, even to the last flake, and all creatures, great and small, reinvigorated by the warming soil, begin to stir and chatter.

Fresh herbs along the sandbanks are just beginning to show their colors; warblers perched among the willows have not yet fully cleared their throats.

Amidst all this fresh life, only the cries of wild geese, flying northward in their serried ranks, rings out with strange distinctness.



69. Watching the Ball Dance in Early Spring⁷³⁷

⁷³⁷ The original contains a note immediately after the title indicating that a group of emissaries from Parhae was requested to perform this ball dance before the sovereign. While the exact nature of this dance is unclear, it would appear that the men were separated into two teams, and, in accordance with some sort of musical accompaniment, made to pass a ball between them with

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 89

Saga describes a lively performance of something akin to our modern-day polo or hockey—it is not clear whether the players were mounted—by a group of emissaries from Parhae.

Despite what these verses would have us believe, I suspect that this was a highly choreographed performance, especially considering the musical accompaniment; the winning team, if there was one, was determined from the onset.

早春觀打毬

芳春烟草早朝晴 使客乘時出前庭

迴杖飛空疑初月 奔毬轉地似流星

pecially fashioned curved sticks. Kojima cites several examples of this ball dance scattered throughout the historical record. In some instances, the ball dance was performed upon horseback, in which case it might have resembled our modern polo. In other cases, the show was performed on foot, which might have looked more like a hockey match: see Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, volume 6 (*ge* I), 3033. Whatever the case, the present instance would have been a strictly choreographed performance, not a competitive game. An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 89.

左擬右承當門競 分行群踏虬雷聲

大呼伐鼓催籌急 觀者猶嫌都易成

It is early spring; the grasses are free of mist this bright early morn. Our visitors from abroad, emissaries from Parhae, inspired alike by the charms of spring, have joined us here in the courtyard.

Their curved sticks, cutting and whirling through the air, look like so many crescent moons.

The ball, plummeting to the grass, looks for all the world like a shooting star raining down from the night sky.

No sooner have the men on the left tossed the ball than those on the right intercept it with their sticks, shooting it straight between the goal posts! The players separate into two teams, dancing and stomping their feet upon the earth like thunder.

The judges cry out, beating their drums, cheering for the scores to be quickly tallied up, while the audience, ever eager to see a close match, baulk at seeing the scores so carelessly settled. They yearn to see more!



70. Springtime

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 91

This is a simple praise for spring. Saga introduces all the typical imagery: thoroughwort, willow trees, vernal flowers (not necessarily only plum or cherry blossoms), and bush warblers.

春日作

閏是新政後 陽和二月時

庭蘭萌稚葉 窗柳亂輕絲

花色風初暖 鶯聲日漸遲

春來傷節候 幽興復熙熙

This is the second month of the leap year—the first month only just behind us—a time of

warmth and peace.

Fresh thoroughwort sprouts are beginning to come up in the garden; willow trees are

waving fresh, pliant branches before my window.

Flowers, enchanted by the first warm breezes, are revealing their hues, while bush warblers

are gracing us with refrains that are more languid.

No sooner does springtime come than the heart begins to fret over its eventual departure. O,

what charm, what joy the spring brings to us!



71. Recovering from Illness⁷³⁸

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 97

Saga rejoices at seeing a vassal of his in good health after a lengthy bout with some

⁷³⁸ The full title of this poem is “Upon Seeing Shigeno no Sadanushi Recover from Illness on a Spring Day.” Kojima, citing the original table of contents for this manuscript, suggests that Sadanushi 貞主 is an erratum for 貞道 Sadamichi. Seeing as how we know next to nothing about either man, I have chosen to leave the name as it appears in the title of the poem itself.

unidentified illness.

見滋貞主春日病起

辭闕沈痾久 別來秋復春

賴逢陽氣煦 喜見更生人

It has been many months since I last saw your face. You left the palace last autumn, long-stricken with some grave illness, but now the spring finds you here again.

No doubt the warmth of this most joyous season has rejuvenated your soul. How happy I am to see you thus recovered—a new man!



72. Visiting a Bedridden Minister: My Reply to a Fujiwara Clansman⁷³⁹

⁷³⁹ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Written by a Vassal of the Fujiwara Clan Entitled ‘Paying a Visit to Mister Aki, Former Minister of the Board of Controllers, After He Had Returned Home on Account of Illness’.” The identity of the Fujiwara man is unknown. As for the man who was forced to retire from court service on account of his illness, we know nothing him

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 98

A certain courtier has, due to illness, retired from court service. The narrator, by way perhaps of consolation, compliments the man on his upright spirit; he imagines the bedridden vassal reciting well-known rhapsodies about the virtuous life of recluses and sagacious hermits. The final couplet is, to my mind, somewhat cryptic. Saga seems to be lamenting the man's failing health, one consequence of which is a reduced propensity for poetic inspiration.

和藤朝臣「春日遇前尚書秋公歸病作」

闕下新辭祿 都門舊一疎

幽情吟招隱 孤興賦閑居

姻景春深色 群萌雪盡餘

either: Aki is an abbreviation for a surname—Kojima suggests Akishino. Nothing more can be said about these two men. A note inserted immediately after the title of this poem indicates that it was composed when Saga was still on the throne.

夜來琴酒意 松月曉窗虛

You have recently retired from court service and all its remunerations. That mansion you left behind in the capital is now bereft of visitors.

With a heart full of profound sentiment you recite “Summoning the Recluses.” For your own amusement you intone “The Solitary Life.”⁷⁴⁰

Vernal hues shimmer before your eyes through a mist-covered scene; the light color of new sprouts is reminiscent of snow but recently melted.

Until just last night, it seems, you indulged in music and drink. Now, come dawn, moonlight through the pines shines on a quiet and lonely windowsill.⁷⁴¹



⁷⁴⁰ These are both titles of rhapsodies (*fu/fu* 賦) appearing in *Wenxuan*: “Summoning the Recluses” appears in several different versions, both in fascicle 22 and 33, while “The Solitary Life” appears in fascicle 16 of that anthology. Both of these pieces celebrate the austere life of a virtuous recluse. For a translation of one version of “Summoning the Recluses,” attributed to Qu Yuan, see Watson, 211-212, where the title is given as “Calling Back the Recluse”. For a full translation of “The Solitary Life”, see Knechtges, trans. *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, volume 3, 145-158, where the title is rendered “Rhapsody on Living in Idleness.”

⁷⁴¹ I am not fully satisfied with my interpretation of this last couplet, nor, for that matter, with the explanation offered by Kojima. The message, however, seems simple enough: illness has taken away the man’s love of music and drink; the moon, which is a symbol of poetic inspiration, now shines in vain on a soul too weary to hear the muses.

73. A Serene Garden Brightened with Early Plum Blossoms⁷⁴²

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 101

Saga admires a certain plum tree whose blossoms have opened up very early. While the original text does not give this tree a gender, it seems to me that the imagery is distinctly feminine. It is for this reason that I have used “her” instead of “it” to refer to this tree.

Imagining the tree as a female allows us to make more sense of the second half of the very last couplet: “How comes it,” asks Saga indignantly, “that a boorish bumpkin was put in charge of transplanting this grand old tree?” The idea of a low-ranking gardener putting his calloused hands on this feminine tree comes across as somehow distasteful.

閑庭早梅

⁷⁴² Early plum blossoms refers to those which begin to bloom very early on in the year, sometimes early enough that there is still snow on the ground—the so-called “shivering plum blossoms” (*hanmei/kanbai* 寒梅). The garden here is likely meant to be understood as one located within the Imperial Palace. An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 89.

庭前獨有早花梅 上月風和滿樹開
 純素不嫌幽院寂 濃香偏是犯窗來
 纖纖枯幹知初暖 片片寒葩委舊苔
 自恨無因佳麗折 徒然老大野人栽

It is the first month of the year, when the breeze blows so warm and so gentle. Here in my garden stands a plum tree whose blossoms, blooming before all others, bejewel her branches with their bright petals.

Those ermine petals, content even to shine in solitude, not shunning this lonely garden where few eyes are wont to linger, send their rich fragrance through my open window like some ardent nightly visitor.

Her slender, supple trunk, dry from winter's chill, at last feels the first warm caresses of spring, while her white blossoms, still shivering, flutter and prance over patches of last year's dark-green moss.

Why do those young maidens, as comely as they are, come and pluck these branches?

Shame on them for their heartlessness! How comes it that a boorish bumpkin was put

in charge of transplanting this grand old tree? What an insult!⁷⁴³



74. Spring Rain: A Reply to Sugawara no Kiyokimi⁷⁴⁴

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 102

It is the second lunar month—mid-spring. The narrator praises the life giving, purifying power of rain: dust on the capital's roads is washed away; pagodas look more charming; all the trees and the grasses are rejuvenated; birds are in song and flowers are in bloom.

The first half of the last couplet—“That life-giving rain falls mercifully upon all things, great and small”—alludes to the merciful reign of Saga himself, who was, at the time this

⁷⁴³ There are two possible interpretations of this last verse, at least two that immediately come to my own mind: First, while admiring the tree before him, Saga suddenly recalls the low-ranking gardener who originally brought the tree to this garden. That a lowly man should have been responsible for handling such a noble tree fills him with disgust. Second, the tree has recently been transplanted away from the garden by a low-ranking gardener. In this latter case, Saga is remembering the tree as it once was. I prefer the first interpretation.

⁷⁴⁴ A note inserted immediately after the title of this poem indicates that it was composed when Saga was still on the throne.

poem was composed, still on the throne.

和菅清公「春雨之作」

崇朝雲氣暗 密雨泛春空

京洛囂塵斂 章臺夕影朦

懸珠新古樹 含潤短脩藜

芳澤被群物 鶯華二月中

The early morning brings with it dark clouds, filling the vernal firmament with bouts of
drizzling rain.

Dust that dances about the capital is temporarily settled. Exquisite pagodas look hazy
through the evening mist.

Drops of rain as bright as pearls drip from trees both old and young; grasses both short and
long are bathed in moisture.

That life-giving rain falls mercifully upon all things, great and small. O, but the second
month is fine indeed—the bush warblers sing and the flowers are in bloom!



75. Old Man⁷⁴⁵

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 104

The narrator describes a poor man of low birth enjoying the life of a solitary recluse, untrammelled by social convention and not in the least concerned with worldly success. Was this state of detached and contented aloofness something Saga himself yearned for?

老翁吟

世有不羈一老翁 生來無意羨王公

人間忘卻貧與賤 醉臥芳林花柳風

⁷⁴⁵ The full title of this poem is “Song of an Old Man.”

There was an old man who had little to do with this world. He had never felt a jot of
 admiration for people of high birth.

Though poor and of low birth, he gave no thought to such things. In a flowery wood, where
 willows sway in the breeze, he lay and drank his days away.



76. The Swing⁷⁴⁶

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 105

*The Tang court, as part of the many festivities and rituals associated with welcoming in the
 New Year, observed a day of abstinence from all cooked foods—what is now referred to as
 Qingming Festival, and occurs about two weeks after the spring equinox. On this same day,
 the court set up a simple swing, hung by ropes from a tree, and had several ladies-in-*

⁷⁴⁶ This is another of Saga's *pian/hen* 篇 poems, in which a number of the couplets vary in length. A note inserted immediately after the title of this poem indicates that it was composed when Saga was still on the throne.

waiting regale everyone in attendance with a gay performance. Whether Saga went so far as to set up a swing of his own in the Heian court is uncertain; perhaps this poem is another of his fantastical vignettes.

鞦韆篇

幽閨人 粧梳早
 正是寒食節 共憐鞦韆好
 長繩高 懸芳枝 窈窕翩翩仙客姿
 玉手爭來互相推 纖腰結束如鳥飛
 初疑巫嶺行雲度 漸似洛川迴雪歸
 春風吹 體自輕 飄飄空裡無厭情
 佳麗鞦韆為造作 古來唯惜春光過清明
 蹋雲雙履透樹着 曳地長裾掃花却
 數舉不知香氣盡 頻低寧顧金釵落
 嬋娟嬌態今欲休 攀繩未下好風流
 教人把著忽飛去 空使伴儔暫淹留

西日斜 未還家

此節猶傳禁火 遂無燈月為燈

鞦韆樹下心難歇 欲去踟躕竟不能

The ladies-in-waiting awake early in the morning to apply their make-up and comb their hair.

This is the day when we must abstain from cooked food—the day, moreover, when everyone comes together to enjoy the swings!

Long ropes are tied to the flowering branches so high above; comely maidens swing and glide through the air like so many soaring immortals.

The ladies, each striving to take their turn on the swings, push one another about with their delicate hands. Once on the swings, they bind their slender waists to the seats, soaring through the air like birds.

When first they swing by, it looks as though plumes of clouds are passing over some lofty peak. Swinging back again, they look more like wisps of snow blowing along some

winding river.⁷⁴⁷

Their light bodies are made all the more buoyant in virtue of the vernal breezes that visit us now. Those feather-light maidens flutter through the sky, never tiring of this joyful pastime.

O, but just look at those ladies playing on the swings—swings made especially for this day.

From days of old, people have looked forward to this day, and it is with regret that we see this fine day pass away. Spring has many more days ahead; she will not linger for too long on just one day.

Up, up to the treetops the maidens swing, kicking their two little shoes in front of them.

Then down, down to the earth below they return—but for a space—the long trains of their robes brushing over the flowers.

Up and down, up and down they go, not knowing that the fragrance, which once clung to their robes, has since been whisked away by the wind. Nor do they notice when their golden hairpins come loose and fall to the ground below.

Those comely girls with their charming manners know it is high time they took a little rest.

⁷⁴⁷ In the original text, both the mountain and the river refer to specific places—Mount Wu and the Luo River—both of which were associated in the Sinitic imagination with divine maidens.

Even so, look how they cling to the ropes, not wishing to get off just yet. What a playful lot they are!

One silly maiden calls out to her companion: *Come and take hold of these ropes for me!* No sooner has her playmate come, however, than the first scurries off in a hurry, leaving her poor friend behind with naught but an empty swing.

The sun is setting, but no one thinks of going back home.

Custom dictates that on this day we must not light a single fire. So be it! What need of firelight have we? I say: Let the moon above serve as our light.

How hard it is to leave these wonderful swings behind us. We linger around the base of our tree, reluctant to make an end of such a joyous night.



77. First Song of the Bush Warblers⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁸ The full title of this poem is “Listening to the Early Songs of Bush Warblers: A Poem Presented to the hermit Korenaga no Harumichi.” Korenaga no Harumichi has already been encountered several times: see “Bedridden in Kegon Temple: A Reply to Korenaga no Harumichi” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 35). Bush warblers are harbingers of spring and, like the early plum blossoms of “A Serene Garden Brightened with Early Plum Blossoms” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 101), these exceptional early arrivals signify the very beginning of that joyous season.

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 128

The narrator of this poem is sitting in a secluded mountain hut, listening to the first songs of the bush warblers. Winter has only recently passed; cold still lingers in the air. He—or perhaps we are to imagine a woman?—calls for his absent companion to come and enjoy the music of the birds together, and to lend him the jovial warmth of his company in an otherwise chilly room.

聽早鶯 示惟山人春道

春歸物色早鶯飛 曉哢初歸人不歸

寂寂空房無與聽 春寒獨恨薜蘿帷

Spring has come to visit me once more, painting all things in vivid hues, and bringing in its train the early bush-warblers. How is it, then, that while those birds greet me with their songs at the break of dawn, you, Harumichi, have yet to return?

Here in this lonely hut of mine there is no one with whom I might share the pleasure of
 listening to these birds. O, this will be a cold spring, indeed, if all I have to keep out
 the chill is a curtain of woven vines!



78. Bush Warblers in the Countryside: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi⁷⁴⁹

Keikokushū, fascicle 11, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 129

*This is a straightforward poem: the song of bush warblers heard while travelling through
 the countryside reminds the listener of his beloved home back in the capital.*

和滋貞主「城外聽鶯 簡前藤中納言之作」

⁷⁴⁹ The full title of this poem is “My Reply to a Poem Written by Shigeno no Sadanushi Entitled ‘Upon Listening to the Bush Warblers Outside the Capital: A Poem Sent to the Former Middle Counsellor, a Fujiwara Clansman’.” The identity of this Fujiwara man is uncertain, though Kojima suggests he is most likely Fujiwara no Mimori (or Tadamori) 藤原三守 (785-840), a powerful courtier who was eventually appointed middle counsellor in 823, shortly after Emperor Junna ascended the throne. Mimori was an ardent supporter of both Saichō and Kūkai.

邃谷黃鶯無儔侶 冬天不語在荒林

年來更遇陽春候 澁啼一喚舊知音

Concealed in some deep valley, the bush warbler sits all alone, no companion by her side.

So long as the chill of winter persists, she refuses to open her mouth, content to wait
within the boughs of a barren forest.

Come the New Year, however—what with its warm vernal colors and its rejuvenating

breezes—and you shall hear her anon, clearing her throat in preparation for a sonorous
performance. Ah, that old song of hers, I know it well!



79. Admiring the Chrysanthemums⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁵⁰ The full title of this poem is “Admiring Chrysanthemums on the Ninth Day,” which implies, of course, that this poem was composed for the annual chrysanthemum festival. This is another *pian/hen* 篇 poem, in which a number of the couplets vary in length, and in which may be found the occasional extra verse, such as after the third and twelfth couplet.

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 138

This is another of Saga's celebratory chrysanthemum poems. Composed for one of his many chrysanthemum banquets, these verses praise the beauty of the blossoms, their ability to bloom in late autumn when all other flowers have faded, and the salubrious power inherent in the liqueur brewed from their petals.

九日翫菊花篇

沏寥兮旻穹 蕭索兮涼風
 潦行收兮池沼潔 籜稍殞兮林莽空
 菊之為草兮 寒花露更芳 自分獨遲遇重陽
 弱幹扶疎被曲丘 柔條婀娜影清流
 綠葉雲布朔風澣 紫莖星羅南鴈羽
 逸趣此時開野宴 登高遠望坐花院
 翫菊花菊花韡黃 紛葩寂寂無人見

獨攜菊酒攄情素 久□幽栖少與晤⁷⁵¹

花開花落秋將暮 秋去秋來人復故

人物蹉跎皆變衰 如何仙菊笑東籬

看花縱賞機事外 閑興攀花令節宜

盈把陶令 稱美鐘生 吾與二人愛晚榮

古今人共味 能除癘亦延齡

The autumnal firmament is broad and still; the winds blow cold and lonely.

Summer's muddy waters have since dried up, leaving behind clear ponds and marshes. Dry

branches cast off their withered leaves, lending a lonely appearance to wood and the meadow alike.

Behold the chrysanthemum! Its petals grow all the more fragrant for the cold dew that now

falls upon them. The chrysanthemum alone has set its mind on blooming after all

others have faded, intent on enjoying this day of double *yang*.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵¹ The missing character in the second half of this couplet must be a verb, perhaps something like *liu/todomu* 留 or *ju/iru* 居, both of which mean, roughly, to remain, to stay, or be seated.

⁷⁵² The double yang (*chongyang/chōyō* 重陽) refers to the ninth day of the ninth month: see “Chrysanthemums in Autumn” (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 5), especially the footnote to the couplet that reads, “The season of autumn has come; the day falls now upon the double *yang*. It is expressly with the intention of hosting you, my myriad vassals, that these chrysanthemums have opened their

The tender stalks of those flowering shrubs, heavy with verdure and blossoms, encircle the hillocks on all sides, while those branches, so elegant and so charming, reflect their glowing colors upon a crystalline river flowing close by.

Green leaves spreading out like clouds wave along the riverbanks, merry in the face of chill northern winds. Purple stems bearing white-yellow flowers that look for all the world like stars remain, while flocks of wild geese head to the south.

It is in answer to our impassioned and lofty fancy for these flowers that we gather here today at this outdoor banquet, where, having ascending this mountain, we gaze out afar, all the while reclining in a garden of these wondrous blossoms.

These wondrous blossoms, most deserving of praise—see how they glow vibrant yellow! And to think that these flowers are content to blossom here in this secluded garden, where the footfall of man is seldom heard.

Come, few though we be, let us take up the drinking bowl, filled to the brim with chrysanthemum liqueur, and bare our hearts to one another in verse. Let us linger here in this secluded garden and enjoy the silence together.

petals!” The sentiment expressed in the last half of this couplet is implied in the present couplet, as well.

Flowers bloom and flowers fade; autumn is drawing to a close. Another autumn has come, and another autumn will surely go. We men, without exception, are sure to age yet another year.

Indeed, all things in nature, flowers and men alike, fall prey to the ravages of time; all things wither, sooner or later. What of those chrysanthemums, smiling there alongside the brushwood hedges? Are they, like immortals, destined never to decay?

Forget all your elegant verses and clever metaphors; praise these flowers in whatever way you wish, so long as it comes from the heart. There is a quiet charm to be had in plucking a few of those blossoms. The season is at hand.

Poets of old used to gather chrysanthemum blossoms in their hands; like-minded men have always praised the exquisite beauty of their petals. I join such men in admiring these flowers that bloom so late in autumn!

Be they men of old or men of our own day—all desire a draught of the chrysanthemum's divine nectar. There is nothing better for casting out evil influences and ensuring longevity.



80. A Night in the Mountains

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 141

*It is likely that Saga wrote this on one of his excursions to his favorite Kaya Mansion. The first couplet contains a reference to cocks crowing just at daybreak, an image that recurs in Saga's Kaya Mansion poems. See, for example, "A Spring Dawn in the Riverside Pavilion" and "Listening to the Cocks Crow by the Old Fort" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem nos. 1 and 117, respectively).*

山夜

移居今夜薜蘿眠 夢裡山雞報曉天

不覺雲來衣暗濕 即知家近深溪邊

I have travelled here from the capital to take up lodgings in this distance mountain hut with

its curtains of woven vines. In my dreams I hear the cock crowing, hailing the coming of dawn's early light.⁷⁵³

Upon awakening I notice, to my surprise, that my robes have become damp from the gathering mist: only now do I realize just how close this hut of mine lies to the deep valley rivers running through this mountain.⁷⁵⁴



81. Mountain Lodge⁷⁵⁵

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 142

The narrator of this poem is an aged recluse who spends his days in utter solitude, hidden

⁷⁵³ Cocks crowing in the morning is a recurring image in Saga's Kaya Mansion poems. See, for example, "A Spring Dawn in the Riverside Pavilion" and "Listening to the Cocks Crow by the Old Fort" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem nos. 1 and 117, respectively).

⁷⁵⁴ This couplet is very similar to another in Saga's "A Spring Dawn in the Riverside Pavilion" (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 1): "My garments have become damp with the moisture of clouds and mist: only now do I realize just how close I am to the caves of those lofty mountain peaks."

⁷⁵⁵ The full title of this poem is "Written While Lodging in the Mountains."

with the depths of some distant mountain. He warns readers not to disturb his peace, even if it be with news of an imperial summons. As has already been mentioned in other poems by Saga, continental sovereigns were sometimes depicted summoning mountain recluses to serve at court, deeming them more virtuous than the oft times corrupted city-bred courtiers. This narrator will have nothing to do with court life. Considering these verses were written by Saga, it is interesting to note that he portrays his narrator as (potentially) defying an imperial summons. This defiance, however, is likely meant to emphasize the recluse's wholehearted dedication to the solitary life, and hence to virtuous conduct.

山居驟筆

孤雲秋色暮蕭條 魚鳥清機復寥寥
 敲枕山風空肅殺 橫琴溪月自逍遙
 僻居人老文章拙 幽谷年深鬢髮凋
 蘿戶閉來無一事 莫言吾侶隱須招

A solitary cloud drifts across a sky painted with autumn's lonely hues. Every creature, from

fish swimming beneath the water to fowl soaring through the firmament—all things
grow serene, engendered with hearts as crisp and pure as the air.

Propping an elbow upon my pillow, I listen to winds that howl down from the mountaintops
with chillingly solemn voices; setting aside my zither, I gaze at a moon meandering
through the stars, shining over valleys so deep and so dark.

I have whiled away so many years in these faraway mountains. My writing, I fear, has
grown dull and crude. A shock of white hair, all unkempt and thinning, crowns this
aged head of mine. So many moons have I passed here in this hidden valley!

My door of matted vines has been closed to visitors for many a year; I run no errands nor
bother myself with any distracting affairs. Do not come to my door with, “Come,
friend, the sovereign has summed all recluses!” I shan’t go.⁷⁵⁶



⁷⁵⁶ The allusion here is to the famous poem, or rather, poetic theme, “Summoning the Recluses,” for details of which see the footnote to the second couplet of Saga’s “Visiting a Bedridden Minister: My Reply to a Fujiwara Clansman” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 98), translated above.

82. Leisurely Drinks in an Autumn Mountain: A Reply to Yoshimine no Yasuyo⁷⁵⁷

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 143

As may be seen in various other poetic exchanges translated here, the relationship enjoyed between Saga and Yasuyo was an exceptionally close one. The current poem seems to be celebrating a secluded mansion favored by Yasuyo. Most likely, this poem was composed in response to, perhaps even presented at, a banquet hosted by Yasuyo, at which Saga would naturally have been the guest of honor. Though not stated explicitly, the general image here seems to be of two men drinking together alone, though this would have been extremely unlikely, seeing as how Saga never travelled but in company of a large retinue.

和良納言秋山閑飲

⁷⁵⁷ As may be seen in various other poetic exchanges translated here, the relationship enjoyed between Saga and Yasuyo was an exceptionally close one. The current poem seems to be celebrating a secluded mansion favored by Yasuyo. Most likely, this poem was composed in response to, perhaps even presented at, a banquet hosted by Yasuyo, at which Saga would naturally have been the guest of honor. An alternate translation of this poem appears in Rabinovitch & Bradstock, 90.

遁世雲山裏 秋深掩弊廬

溪廚乍酌濁 野院且焚枯

詠興逍遙事 琴聲語笑餘

欣將軒冕客 俱醉晚林虛

Here we sit in the depths of a cloud-veiled mountain, colored throughout with autumn's vibrant hues, secluded from the madding world without, the door of this rustic hut shut to all other visitors.

At times, when sitting by yon deep valley rills, we share draughts of fine, heady wine.

Again, at other times, when enjoying the fruits of this rural lodge, we partake of dried fish cooked over the fire.

What elevated joy, what lighthearted abandon we feel when reciting lines of inspired verse to one another! How we have regaled each other with laughter to no end while plucking at the zither.

It is with immense happiness that I, your guest, imbibe this wine in company with you—O, courtier of lofty rank!—here amidst these benighted woods, where no other mortal can disturb our revelry.



83. Verdured Mountains⁷⁵⁸

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 209

Here we find ourselves atop a lofty mountain that is half-real and half-imagined. Immortal beings and venerable sages make their home here, alongside wondrous and fantastic beasts. The whole range is perpetually covered in a veil of shimmering mist, the hue of which, in virtue of perpetual verdure, even in winter, is an emerald-green. As the final two couplets indicate, the narrator, if not one of the immortals or sages himself, is one who has spent a great deal of time roaming and sleeping in these mountains. This poem presents an

⁷⁵⁸ Kojima suggests that this poem originally belonged to fascicle 14, hence the sudden leap in numbering here—poem no. 209—whereas it appears but a dozen poems after poem no. 143 in all extant manuscripts. Kojima is most likely correct. This poem is, according to its title, a “song” (*ge/ka* 歌), a metrical genre already encountered in “An Aged Pine am I” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 120). All of the poems in fascicle 14 attributed to Saga include this character, or the closely related *yin/gin* 吟, “canticle,” in their titles, and so it seems likely that the present poem ought to have appeared in that fascicle. Even so, while I have used Kojima’s numbering, I have left the poem in its current place of rest in fascicle 13.

enchanting picture of the solitary life, one which sees man in complete harmony with nature, and wholly separated from the madding world of man.

青山歌

青山峻極兮摩蒼穹 造化神功兮勢轉雄

飛壁嶽崑兮帖屏峙 層巒迴立兮□氣融⁷⁵⁹

朝噴雲兮暮吐月 風蕭蕭兮雨濛濛

乍晴乍暗一旦變 凝烟積翠四時轉

神仙結閣 仁智棲託

或冥道而宵暝 或晦跡以寂寞

林壑花飛春色斜 登臨逸興意亦除

甚幽至險多詭獸 離俗遠□絕囂譁⁷⁶⁰

此地遨遊身自老 老來煢獨宿懷抱

夜深苔席松月眠 出洞孤雲到枕邊

⁷⁵⁹ The missing character appearing in the second verse of this couplet is, as Kojima suggests, likely *chun/shun* 春, spring, or perhaps even *nuan/dan* 暖, warm.

⁷⁶⁰ The missing character in the second verse of this couplet is likely something like *shi/se* 世, or *chen/jin* 塵, both of which refer to the mundane world,

Lofty is that verdured mountain!—so lofty, indeed, that its peak brushes against the azure firmament above. Nature has spared no skill in that intricately crafted range, what with its mighty pinnacles!

Look upon yon beetling cliffs that seem to soar through the air—sheer bluffs that stand like massive folding screens! Encircled on every side by those many-tiered peaks, the warm perfume of spring spreads languidly over the range.

Come morning, the mountain emits clouds and mist; come night that same mountain brings forth from her shadows the radiant moon. A quiet, solitary breeze whispers over the scene, while rain obscures all things behind a hazy veil.

No sooner is the mountain covered in shadows than, the rain having ceased, it shines forth all the more brightly. No matter the season, this mountain remains forever cloaked in a misty mantle of emerald green.⁷⁶¹

Deities and immortals of every kind erect their stately halls atop those peaks; benevolent

⁷⁶¹ Either this is referring to a fantastic mountain, one that never suffers from the deprecations of winter, or the verdure of this mountain is preserved throughout the winter months in virtue of evergreen trees. As the following couplet suggests—“deities and immortals of every kind”—, along with the “strange and wondrous beasts” of the eighth couplet, it would seem we are to imagine some combination of these two scenarios: an idealized mountain, half-real, half-imagined.

and wise souls find a fitting abode atop its peaks and along its rivers.

Be they deities or sages, all who come to dwell in this mountain conceal their tracks,

preferring instead to live a life of quiet solitude, away from the world of man.

I ascend those peaks, and see, bathed in the westerling rays of a vernal sun, flower petals

fluttering down the sides of deep, wooded valleys. My heart, too, are transported far

away from the mundane realm.

This mountain hideaway, with its yawning caves and vertiginous spires, is haunted by all

manner of strange and wondrous beasts. Separated from the madding world, stranger

to the grime of mundane things, this mountain abides in silence.

I have frequented this place time and time again; I dare say I have grown old here. Now, in

my old age, while a romp through these familiar mountain paths, there is many a

secret sentiment that wells up in my breast.

At night I rest my bones upon a bed of moss, slumbering beneath the glow of moonlight

shining through the pines, while mists exhaled from deep caverns waft up to my perch

and cling to my pillow.



84. Snow in the Old Capital: In Humble Reply to Emperor Heizei

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 167

This poem was likely composed very shortly after Saga's enthronement, or perhaps slightly before, when Heizei was still the ruling sovereign. The old capital, of course, is Nara, the birthplace and final resting place of Heizei. Though it might be possible, if this piece was in fact composed after Saga came to power, to read into these lines some sort of allusion to the failed Kusuko Disturbance, it would remain mere conjecture.

奉和舊邑對雪

舊邑同雲起 春天雪尚飈

含輝臨素扇 呈瑞滿冥宵

陰階飛更積 陽砌結還銷

郢曲能安和 羞歌下里調

Though spring has come to the old capital at Nara, snow-bearing clouds can be seen

hovering overhead; ermine flakes dance through the air.

Snowflakes glitter like moonlight playing across some fair maiden's white fan. Falling

snow—auspicious sign of a plentiful harvest to come—glistens across a night sky.

Snow covers the cold northern stairs, where it remains undisturbed throughout the season.

Snow that forms on the warmer southern stairs, however, soon melts.

Tell me, how can I ever hope to match those refined verses of yours? You sing of the snow

with such elegance. My rhymes are but those of an unlettered rustic.



85. The Last Day of the Year

Keikokushū, fascicle 13, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 168

This poem, composed by a retired Saga, is a quiet but poignant realization of the passage of

time; just as the old year is soon to pass away, so, too, is the aged poet soon to leave this mortal world.

除夜

欲眠不眠坐除夜 雲天此夜秀芳春
 啓祥孤燭迎獻節 遁世詩情放隱淪
 山雪暮光寒氣盡 庭梅曉色暖煙新
 生涯已見流年促 形影相隨一老身

This is the last night of the year, and I, unable to sleep, sit up looking at a dark, cloudy sky,

a sight more charming even than the spring that is soon to come.

Before me burns a single torch, offering its light up to a new year but moments away. I,

retired and at my leisure, let my poetic heart soar, heedless of all mundane care.

Snow atop the mountains, bathed now in the softer glow of dusk, seems less chilly; plum

blossoms at dawn smile more vibrantly amidst the warming mist.

My life has nearly run its course—this much I know. The body, no less ephemeral than

shadow, grows old withal.



86. A Painted Landscape⁷⁶²

Keikokushū, fascicle 14, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 205

These verses attempt to describe in words what must have been a magnificent painting.

Saga is following continental precedent in attributing nearly miraculous power to the artist's brush. He is faithful to his continental models, too, in playfully feigning a sense of wonder at, for example, the waterfall that, despite its realistic appearance, makes no noise.

清涼殿畫壁山水歌

⁷⁶² The full title of this poem is “Song about a Scenic Wall-Painting Displayed in the Seiryō Chamber.” The Seiryō Chamber was a chamber within the Imperial Palace, used by the reigning sovereign as a venue for more private occasions. An interlinear note in the original states that this poem was composed while Saga was still on the throne.

良畫師 能圖山水之幽奇
 目前海起萬里闊 筆下山生千仞危
 陰雲濛濛長不雨 輕煙冪冪無散時
 蓬萊方丈望悠哉 五湖三江情沿洄
 淼漫濤如隨風忽 行船何事往復來
 飛壁巖巖垂蘿薜 會巖盤屈衣苔莓
 嶺上流泉聽無響 潺湲觸石落溪隈
 空堂寂寞人言少 雜樹朦朧暗昏曉
 松下群居都仙 與不語意猶眇
 度歲橫琴誰奏曲 經年垂釣未得魚
 駐眼看知丹青妙 對此人情興有餘
 畫勝真花笑冬春 四時常悅世間人

A skilled artist is able to give mysterious life and profound depth to his paintings of mountains and rivers.

He summons before your very eyes vast oceans of more than ten-thousand leagues in breadth; his brush conjures forth to mountains whose perilous peaks tower thousands

of miles into the heavens.

Though umbrageous clouds hang ominously overhead, no rain falls. Gossamer mists

envelope the scene, never to open their veil.

I gaze far off at distant islands where no man has gone, frequented by blessed immortals;

my heart, captivated by mighty lakes and majestic rivers, rises and falls with their
currents.

Grand waves rear up their heads and crash down again upon the water in accordance with

the wind's fickle fancy. Look at yon boat rowing hither and thither. Upon what errand,

I wonder, could that boatman be engaged?

Vines weave their supple tendrils down the sheer face of a towering bluff, while clustered

boulders, piled atop one another hugger-mugger, cloth themselves in thick robes of
moss.

I listen in vain to a waterfall that cascades without a sound down the cliffs, buffeting—I can

but imagine the din!—the rocks below as its raging waters drain at last into some deep
ravine.

Look, beside yon forest, all covered in mist, whose boughs remain dark both day and night,

there stands a solitary pagoda, stranger to the footfall of man.

What do I spy beneath that pine tree, but a band of merry figures—immortals, each and every one of them. They do not engage in vulgar chatter, no, for their hearts are forever fixed on things elevated and sublime.

Wait. That zither painted there—tell me, will it ever be made to sing, though it sit there for years to come? And what of that painted fisherman? How long will his rod be poised above the water before he catches any fish?

Even so, my eyes are dazzled all the same by the artist's magical strokes and vibrant pigments: though it be but a painting, profound sentiments well up in my breast all the same.

Why, painted flowers, which smile just as brightly in winter as they do in spring, might even be said to exceed their more ephemeral models. Nature's blossoms wither and fade; the artist's petals make us smile in every season.



87. Travelling: A Reply to Ono no Minemori⁷⁶³

Keikokushū, fascicle 14, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 214

This is an obscure piece. The narrator, an aged man who has passed a quiet life in the capital, addresses a soldier who has spent some time defending the northern borders. The reference to northern mountains at the end of the poem is likewise obscure.

和野評事旅行吟

久戍君為客 幽居我作翁

旅愁如可話 相待北山中

While you, my fine man, were away in the north, a stranger in a distant land, I became an old man, passing my days in quietude.

⁷⁶³ In the original title, Minemori, who had served as in a military capacity along the northern border, is given the official post of *hyōji*, which meant he was involved in overseeing criminal trials and managing the prisons. Minemori's poem appears, in *Keikokushū*, immediately after this one (poem no. 215).

Should I wish to talk of the loneliness of travelling far from home, I would wait for you
somewhere in the northern mountains.



88. Fishing Songs⁷⁶⁴

Keikokushū, fascicle 14, miscellaneous subjects, poem no. 216-220

What follows is a series of five short poems, two couplets each, about fishing. These are not exceptionally original, neither in terms of content nor in regards to imagery. Saga has taken a great deal of his inspiration for these verses from a similar series of five poems entitled “Ditties of a Fisherman” (Yufuci 漁夫詞) written by the Tang-period poet Zhang Zhihe 張志和 (c. 730-c.810). The fisherman portrayed in these verses is more-or-less identical to another of Saga’s favorite characters, namely, the solitary recluse, an aged

⁷⁶⁴ An interlinear note appearing immediately after the title indicates that these verses were composed while Saga was still on the throne. As with other poems written by Saga that contain the word *ge/ka* 歌, song, in their title, it is unclear whether or not these pieces were actually sung, or even intended to be recited to any sort of melody.

sage-like figure whose most intimate companions are drink and poetry. These five poems may be compared with Saga's "Old Man" and "Visiting a Bedridden Minister: My Reply to a Fujiwara Clansman" (Keikokushū, poem nos. 104 and 98 respectively).

漁歌

[1]

江水渡頭柳亂絲 漁翁舟上煙景遲
乘春興 無厭時 求魚不得帶風吹

[2]

漁人不記歲時流 淹泊沿洄老棹舟
心自放 常狎鷗 桃花春水帶浪遊

[3]

青春林下度江橋 湖水翻翻入雲霄
煙波客 釣舟遙 往來無定帶落潮

[4]

溪邊垂釣奈樂何 世上無家水宿多

閑酌醉 獨棹歌 浩蕩飄飄帶滄波

[5]

寒江春曉片雲晴 兩岸花飛夜更明

鱸魚膾 蓴菜羹 漁罷酣歌帶月行

[1]

The supple branches of willow trees along the wharf are swaying hither and thither, while
an aged fisherman sits in his boat, half-veiled in a mantle of languid mist.

His heart, rejoicing in the charms of springtide, gives not a thought to the hour; he lingers
on—not a single catch—drifting where the wind takes him.

[2]

The aged fisherman is blithely unaware of the passing of the season, now mooring his little

boat, now drifting along with the waves, plying his oars at leisure.

With seagulls as his intimate companions, and a heart that knows no fetters, he gambols

over the waves, admiring the peach blossoms reflected in a vernal-hued river.

[3]

Boughs bejeweled with spring's vibrant blossoms stretch forth their limbs over a bridge that

traverses the lake—a lake whose dancing waves roll off into the horizon.

The fisherman, that wave-tossed traveler, drifts far away upon his solitary boat; never in

one place for very long, he follows the tide wherever it may lead.

[4]

What sort of happiness does the fisherman who casts his rod in the deep valley rivers

know—he who makes his abode not in the world of man but upon the waves?

At perfect ease, he sips on heady wine; alone with his thoughts, he sings fishing ditties to himself. Free of care, he lets the rolling waves carry him wherever they will.

[5]

A chilly river blushes in the first glow of dawn. It is spring, and not a cloud in the sky.

Flower petals flutter down the riverbanks as morning slowly awakens.

The fisherman dines on raw sea bass, and sips on broth seasoned with water shield. After dinner, he delights himself with song, paddling beneath the moonlight.