REINVENTING CHINA:  
CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN MEDIEVAL JAPANESE NÔ THEATRE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of  
The Ohio State University

By

Leo Shing Chi Yip, M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
2004

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Shelley Fenno Quinn, Adviser

Professor Amy Shuman

Professor Charles J. Quinn, Jr.

Professor Patricia A. Sieber

Approved by

Advisor

Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures
ABSTRACT

This study examines adaptations of Chinese culture in medieval Japanese Nô theatre through analyzing a group of Nô plays featuring Chinese motifs, also referred to as “Chinese plays,” written between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. It investigates how changing relations with China, reception history of Chinese motifs, as well as evolving aesthetic and cultural norms on the part of playwrights and audiences of Nô theatre, shaped the making of these plays. I propose what I refer to as a Filter Model, based on my reading of theatrical treatises of Nô and supported by contemporary theory of intercultural theatre, in order to analyze the (re)interpretations and (re)construction of various images of China within specific historical and cultural contexts. I argue that this group of plays was not about representing China (a cultural Other), but rather about manipulating the perceived images of China and catering to the cultural practices, aesthetic preferences, and sociopolitical attitudes of various audience groups in medieval Japan. It is through the different images of China constructed
in these plays that the playwrights amplify certain aspects of Nô, such as auspiciousness, cultural identity, depictions of human emotion, as well as spectacular dance performances.

Chapter One lays out the theoretical and historical framework for the study. I critically review current scholarship on issues of Other and Self, and on conceptions of Intercultural Theatre. I then trace the dynamics of cultural exchanges between China and Japan from the seventh to the late sixteenth centuries that had influenced the reception of Chinese motifs in Nô theatre. Chapter Two centers on the underlying variables in the composition of “Chinese plays.” I first assess the influential role of audience and patron in the art of Nô. I then introduce my Filter Model, which illustrates the complex interplay of sociopolitical milieux, basic sources, perspectives of the playwrights, and selections and compositions of dance and song, in the making of “Chinese plays.” Chapters Three to Seven examine ten “Chinese plays,” written at various junctures of Nô theatre and sociopolitical circumstances that, taken together, display a well-rounded representation of Chinese images constructed in Nô. A close study of these plays elucidates the various patterns and motivations for cultural adaptation on the part of playwrights, as well as disparate, and sometimes conflicting, sentiments and political stances towards China held by audiences of Nô. Chapter Eight identifies the characteristics and significance of
cross-cultural adaptations involved in “Chinese plays.” Furthermore, I put relevant modern theories to the test against my findings to highlight the particularities of “Chinese plays” in an East-East context.
Dedicated to Yip Pikha and Tam Hungkwong
I would like to express my gratitude to my many mentors for their guidance and support. First and foremost, I wish to thank my adviser, Professor Shelley Fenno Quinn, for her encouragement, guidance, and patience throughout my graduate work. Her expertise in Nô directed me to explore various aspects of the performing art, and her detailed and insightful feedback on my drafts were invaluable. Sincere thanks also go to Professor Patricia Sieber for her inspiring discussion, high expectations, and unfailing support that kept propelling me forward in the course of this project. I benefited immensely from the stimulating discussion in her classes on interdisciplinary study and reception history of theatre and Yuan drama. I am indebted to Professor Amy Shuman for intellectual conversations and enthusiastic support. It was her seminars on cultural studies and folklore that inspired me to ponder the dynamics of Other and Self from various perspectives. Her inspirational style of teaching opened up my mind and helped me to pursue important issues for this study. I am also grateful to Professor Charles J. Quinn for his careful and insightful readings of the drafts, as well as important comments on the approach to Classical Japanese
texts. I want to thank Professors Mark Bender and Chan Park. Their teachings on oral performance in local and cross-cultural settings have inspired and guided me to develop some crucial arguments in this study.

I am grateful for the invaluable advice, suggestions, and encouragement at various stages of this project that came from Professors Mari Noda, Naomi Fukumori, Julia F. Andrews, Stratos Constantinidis, Pat Mullen, Xiaomei Chen (University of California at Davis), John Miles Foley (University of Missouri), Yamanaka Reiko (Hôsei University), Miyake Akiko (Yokohama National University). I am thankful for the opportunities to study Nô performance under Professor Richard Emmert of the Musashino Women’s University, a scholar, playwright, performer, and licensed instructor of Nô, as well as Mr. Matsui Akira, a professional Nô actor. Their expertise in all aspects of Nô performance and in teaching them to foreigners have provided answers to some of the fundamental questions raised in this study.

I am very grateful for a number of funding resources that supported this research. The Toshiba International Foundation Scholarship provided me with the opportunity to study Nô performance under professional Nô actors in the Nô Training Workshop Project in 1998. The International Travel Award and Mentorship Project of the American Folklore Society enabled me to present my project to scholars of various cultural backgrounds. The International Dissertation Research Travel Grant and Dissertation Research Grant, both from
The Ohio State University, facilitated my research in Japan. A Presidential Fellowship granted by the Graduate School at the Ohio State University enabled me to devote myself to writing the dissertation. I would also like to extend appreciation to the staff at the National Nô Theater Library, and the Museum and Library of Theatre at the Waseda University in Tokyo.

I owe thanks to friends for their encouragement, help, and advise throughout my graduate years, especially Shauna Seung, Roxana Fung, Chao Fangyi, Noda Kenji, Takei Hiroko, Tsunokuni Mami, Annie Keung, Ah Lung, Ocean Fung, Yu Li, Michael Tangeman, Stephen Filler, Jonathan Noble, Debbie Knicely, and Ella Leung. Finally, I must thank Pikha and Hungkwong, for more than I can ever express. Without their support, I would never have come this far. It is to them I dedicate this work.
VITA

March 1994 . . . . . . . . . . . B.A. Japanese Language and Area Studies
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
Tokyo, Japan

September 1995–December 2002 . . . Graduate Teaching Associate
East Asian Languages and Literatures
The Ohio State University

August 1997 . . . . . . . . . M.A. East Asian Languages and Literatures
East Asian Languages and Literatures
The Ohio State University

March 2002-June 2002 . . . . . Lecturer
East Asian Languages and Literatures
The Ohio State University

January 2003-December 2003 . . . . Graduate Fellow (Presidential Fellowship)
Graduate School
The Ohio State University

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: East Asian Languages and Literatures
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction: Theoretical and Historical Frameworks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Audience and Performer: Towards a Theoretical Framework to Analyze “Chinese Plays”</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chinese Beauties</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shōkun (Lady Zhaojun)</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yōkihi (Consort Yang)</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chinese Deities and Emperors</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seiōbō (The Queen Mother of the West)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tōbōsaku (Dongfang Shuo)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chinese Literati: Expelled or Embraced</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakurakuten (Bai Letian)</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanshō (The Three Laughers)</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Exotic Creatures ................................................................. 257
   Shakkyō (Stone Bridge) ....................................................... 258
   Ryōko (The Dragon and the Tiger) ....................................... 271

7. Visitors from China: Invaders and Captives ......................... 282
   Zegai (Zegai) ................................................................. 283
   Tōsen (The Chinese Boat) ................................................ 295

8. Conclusion ......................................................................... 309

Bibliography ....................................................................... 330
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patrice Pavis’s Hourglass Model</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Filter Model: Composition of a “Chinese play”</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Filter Model: Performing a “Chinese play”</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Standard Structure of a Nô play</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Structures of Seiôbô, Kureha, and Ukon .................. 191</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Structures of Hakurakuten, Oimatsu, and Tama no i ............ 220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Structures of Zegai ........................................... 291</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS

This dissertation examines adaptations of Chinese culture in medieval Japanese Nô theatre through analyzing a group of Nô plays featuring Chinese motifs that were written between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. There are about twenty-four of these plays in the current repertoire that retell stories of Chinese origin, which are referred to as “Chinese plays” (karagoto-mono 唐事物) today.¹ This study investigates how changing relations with China, earlier receptions of Chinese motifs in question, as well as evolving aesthetic and cultural norms on the part of playwrights and audiences of Nô theatre, shaped the making of these plays. I argue that this group of plays was not about representing China (a cultural Other) as it was, but rather about

constructing various images of China that catered to cultural practices, aesthetic preferences, and sociopolitical attitudes of various audience groups in medieval Japan.

Such a study of representations of China in medieval Japanese theatre should contribute to the growing body of research of the dynamics between Other and Self, and of Intercultural Theatre, which have been centered on modern cultural phenomena involving the West. To my knowledge, there is not yet a scholarly study that focuses on the adaptation of Chinese motifs in Nô. Many questions need to be explored. What was the sociopolitical climate that triggered cross-cultural exchanges? What was it about China that appealed to the Japanese during this period, and how did Nô playwrights interpret and adopt Chinese materials? Did those strategies vary across genres and evolve in accordance with changing cultural and social contexts? If so, how should we make sense of the changing images of Chinese motifs within Japan? If conceptions of “China” as well as socio-cultural contexts in Japan have been changing continuously, how are we to assess the authenticity of “China” in Japan-China cultural interactions? This study sets out to answer these questions.

**What was China to Japan?**

The study of Japan inevitably involves China. Western scholars have pointed out the complex relation between the two Asian cultures. Although there
are similarities between the two, Japan did not merely borrow from China; rather, Chinese cultures were digested, used, modeled, and represented in various ways. As David Pollack has put it, “It is difficult to conceive of Japan apart from China; and yet, China seems strangely redundant when we think of Japan. To say that something Japanese was “originally Chinese” is at once to state the obvious and to explain nothing.”

Donald Keene sees China as one determining factor in shaping Japanese literature, as he states, “The central factor of Japanese literature—if not the entire traditional culture—was the love for and the rejection of Chinese influence.”

Earl Jackson has criticized the viewing of Japan as a civilization that borrows from another culture instead of developing its own. He claims that such a view ignores “the tendency of Japanese identity to galvanize itself most distinctly against the horizon of a foreign entity.”

To the best of my knowledge, the only other Western scholarly study of the representation of China in Japanese Nô theatre was done in the 1970s by Carl Sesar. Sesar’s work surveys the use of Chinese literature in Nô theatre. His detailed study encompasses the majority of the “Chinese plays,” and provides general information on the Chinese and Japanese materials that also depict

---


similar motifs featured in the “Chinese plays.” Sesar was accurate in pointing out the different attitudes towards China’s culture, ranging from total admiration to complete rejection. He attributes such differences to what he described as:

A deep-seated ambivalence in Japanese attitudes toward China that on the one hand could not help but acknowledge the weight and prestige of Chinese culture and its influence upon Japan, but at the same time stubbornly refused either to subordinate native Japanese culture to it or to forfeit claims to Japanese inventiveness and originality in assimilating it.5

He treats such “ambivalence” as an arbitrary choice, and a recurring theme in Japanese culture; however, he does not provide reasons for the different portrayals. Instead, he notes:

As a dramatic form that dealt with major religious, intellectual and artistic concerns of a sophisticated court audience, Nô drama was not exempt from this theme or from its ambivalences, and so it is not surprising to find the question of Japan's cultural relation to China treated as the central theme in certain of the plays themselves.6

However, I would argue that the different portrayals of China were not ambivalent acts. Rather I will show that they were meant to cater to different Selves in various socio-political contexts.

Before moving on to the discussion about the relation of the Self and the Other, it is necessary to first identify the Other, with a focus on the issues central to the current study. Since this study investigates the presentations of China and Chinese motifs in Japanese Nô theatre, it may seem obvious that the Self is Japan,


6 Ibid.
whereas the Other is China. Nevertheless, I should hesitate to jump to such a conclusion until the identities of ‘China’ presented in Nô are made clear. Put differently, it is one of the goals of this study to examine and define the identity of the ‘China’ portrayed in the “Chinese plays” in Nô theatre. In my survey of scholarly studies of the Self and Other, I found Jacob Raz’s study of otherness in Japanese culture most helpful. Thus, in my study, I adopt Raz’s theories, particularly the concept of the fluidity of the Self, against which the Other is constructed.7

The Fluid Self and the Constructed Other

Scholars have challenged the concept of a continuous and consistent Self in the past two decades. One new concept of the Self is that the Self is fluid and may be shaped by different contexts. For instance, Clifford Geertz has pointed out that the conception of a constant Self overlooks the fact that people play different roles in accordance with different contexts. Echoing Geertz’s claim, Jon Elster explores the idea of the “multiple Self,” which suggests the existence of multiple individual selves.8 Jacob Raz emphasizes the fluidity of the Self, defining the Self as a “ceaseless process of actions,” which may be produced


differently in various contexts. As a consequence, when a Self is presented, it is simultaneously created. Thus, the Self can be regarded as Richard Rorty puts it, as “a loose configuration of habits, habits of thought and perception and motivation and action, acquired at different stages, in the service of different ends; some are acquired accidentally and incidentally; others are constitutionally based.”

The identity of the Self is most lucid when compared to the Other. By the same token, the Other is inevitably conceptualized through the Self. Sander Gilman, in his study of pathology, has claimed that since the “Other is the antithesis of Self, the definition of the Other must incorporate the basic categories by which the Self is defined.” He has observed that the “Other is stereotyped, labeled with a set of signs paralleling (or mirroring) our loss of control. The Other is invested with all the qualities of the "bad" or the "good" … the images of the Other can be shaped through texts containing the fantasy life of culture, quite independent of the existence or absence of the (other) group in a given society.” Margaret Higonnet has proposed another model of the Other, that is, “a Self-

---


12 Ibid., 20.
other that lies buried within the Self.” For example, she considers the remote Self in the history (“past Self”), such as ‘childhood’ as a version of the Other that is, as she puts it, “a historic or diasporic inflection of identity.” Emphasizing the characteristic of the evolving Self, Jacob Raz has proposed to view the Self/Other relation as a “metastable system in which there is a permanent switch between a clear, albeit temporary and shaky, concept of separate, autonomous Self on the one hand, and a relational Self, where boundaries between Self and Other are blurred, on the other. … “Other” is no more consistent, coherent, no more a clear "signified" than Self.”

Studies of the Other often highlight the ‘otherness’ by focusing on the differences from the Self. Raz has noted the bivalence of the Other that may “appear as either negative images or positive idealizations.” It seems that the negative portrayals of the Other are more dominant. In his foreword to De Certeau’s book *Heterologies*, Wlad Godzich characterizes the representation of the Other in the West by stating that “Western thought has always thematized the other as a threat to be reduced, as a potential same-to-be, a not-yet-same.”

---


15 Ibid., 17.

Kathleen M. Ashley has pointed out the “power of otherness” in which the exotic was a significant category of representation of the Other in Medieval and Renaissance performances.\(^\text{17}\) She endorses the idea of the Other as a “mechanism of negative self-definition” by providing examples in Renaissance plays.\(^\text{18}\) Stephen William Foster has suggested that the exotic, which “immediately evokes a symbolic world of infinite complexity, surprise, color, manifold variety and richness,” functions as “a cultural mechanism for comprehending remote and unknown phenomena without totally emptying them of their strangeness.”\(^\text{19}\)

The question that arises in the presentation of the Other is the true identity of the Other. Put differently, is the Other presented genuinely the same as it is in its original culture? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coined the term “real other” which refers to the Other that is purely of foreign origin and uncontaminated by the target culture.\(^\text{20}\) However, many scholars uphold views opposite to that of Spivak’s. One major argument is that the Other is always represented through and within the system of the Self, as Margaret Higonnet puts it, “the Self always


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 78. For more on this idea, see Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: Representation of the Other* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 43.


lurks within the image of the other.” Hence, what Spivak considers as “real others” are in fact also culturally constructed selves mixed with many historical strands and allegiances, traditional and modern, indigenous and imported.21

Edward W. Said, in his influential book *Orientalism*, poses a similar question on the representation of the Other:

“The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambiance of the representer.”22

In his study of the images of the Chinese represented in Euroamerican drama around the early twentieth century, Dave Williams responds to Said’s remark by stating his belief in the latter alternative and adds that such representation is “implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the ‘truth’, which is itself a representation.”23 In actuality, the Other is often used for the sake of the Self.

There are examples of scholarly studies that exemplify such use of the Other for the benefit of the Self. Zhang Longxi, in his study of the relation between China and the West, has provided two examples involving two well-known western scholars. Zhang points out that Michel Foucault, in his book *The

---


Order of Things, cites a fabricated passage on the Chinese classification of animals that is supposedly an excerpt from a “certain Chinese encyclopedia.” Zhang suggested that the fictitious passage, which Foucault does not indicate is so, serves the need of “setting up a framework for his archeology of knowledge, enabling him to differentiate the Self from what is alien and pertaining to the Other and to map out the contours of Western culture recognizable as a self-contained system.” Japan was also used as a discourse in the study of the Self. Roland Barthes, in his book Empire of Signs, explicitly reveals his construction of Japanese culture for the sake of his own study:

I am not lovingly gazing toward an Oriental essence—to me the Orient is a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation—whose invented interplay—allows me to 'entertain' the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own. What can be addressed, in the consideration of the Orient, are not other symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom; it is the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic system.

The above two cases not only show that not only may the Other that is presented be fictitious, but they also verify the complex motives underlying the representation of the Other. As Zhang has summed it up, it is very difficult to verify if the Other presented is indeed the “true Other.” He further states the


25 Ibid., 21.

difficulty of locating a “purely ‘objective’ or ‘correct’ understanding unaffected by historical and ideological givens,” since it is the language of the Self that is used in the presentation and comprehension of the Other.27

The question is, then, how influential are historical and ideological givens in our reception of the Other? Indeed, historical and ideological givens to a certain extent shape our thinking and knowledge. As Martin Heidegger states, “an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us, but rather will be founded essentially upon ‘something we have in advance (fore-having)’, ‘something we see in advance (fore-sight)’, and ‘something we grasp in advance (fore-conception)’.28 However, as Zhang Longxi has noted, Heidegger sees that the presuppositions are provisional, beginning to be challenged and revised during the hermeneutic process.29

Beyond Heidegger’s theory, Zhang further endorses Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion of “horizons,” such as the ones that shape the presuppositions of the interpreter, and the temporal horizons associated with the object/text. It is when the horizons of the interpreter (Self) and the object/text (Other) fuse that the meaning is understood. Gadamer dubbed such a state as “the fusion of

27 Zhang, Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China, 46.


29 Zhang, Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China, 46-47.
horizons.” As Zhang describes, it is in such fusion of horizons, that we can learn and assimilate the Other so as to internalize it, transcending the boundaries of language and culture. Zhang’s ultimate goal is for the West to “demythologize China as the myth of the Other” so that they can fully recognize and appreciate the real differences between China and the West, so as to celebrate the heritage of human culture.

Other and Self in Intra-Asian Context

Theoretical studies on the Other and Self dynamics have so far centered on the West, or between the West and the East. Since little work has been done on in the context of intra-Asian relations, I will put the Western theories above to the test so as to facilitate discussions in the current study. How was the complex dynamic between China and Japan played out in Nō? Are the images of China represented in Nō genuinely China? What were the purposes of depicting China in Nō during the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries? What do these representations of the other reveal about the Japanese Self? What are the strategies of selecting and incorporating the Chinese motifs into Nō?

---


31 Zhang, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China*, 54.

32 Ibid.
the motives of presenting the other? And, what are the effects of these plays? I will seek to answers these questions in this study.

Of course, not all of the above theories are applicable to the current study. Nevertheless, they offer a paradigm for examining treatment of China in the Nô theatre. With the above theories in mind, the following chapters illustrate that the Japanese Self is indeed fluid and the Chinese motifs are incorporated according to the need of the changing Self. I will show that the different presentations of China were not arbitrary, but well constructed to serve the needs of different selves in different socio-political contexts. As the analyses of the “Chinese plays” in the later chapters will show, Japanese Nô playwrights had little interest in presenting a ‘true China (Other).’ What are we to make of the “Chinese plays” in such a complex relation between Other and Self?

**Intercultural Theatre: (Re)presenting the Other on Stage**

One field of research on the (re)presentation of the Other in theatrical performance, is Intercultural Theatre/Performance. Although the study of Intercultural theatre has been centered on modern theatrical works involving the West, it can provide a framework to investigate the methodologies that Nô playwrights adopted in the retelling of the Chinese motifs and reworking of preceding Chinese and Japanese materials. However, I must note that there is

33 Hereafter, I will only use the term “Intercultural theatre”.
neither a dominant definition nor a set of theories regarding Intercultural Theatre. This is partly because of the array of different cultures and different performing styles involved, as well as the fact that it is still an emerging field.

Many of the different definitions of Intercultural theatre are focused on the West, and yet there is not yet a dominating definition that can be applied to theatrical performances from all cultures. One definition that reflects leading western cultures’ role is by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert. They define Intercultural theatre as, “A hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions, [which is] primarily a Western-based tradition with a lineage in modernist experimentation.”

John Joseph Flynn, Jr.’s definition is perhaps more accommodating, as he defines Interculturalism in performance as “the use of foreign performance techniques, texts, dramaturgy, and design elements for the creation of new theatrical pieces for a native community.” Flynn also emphasizes that intercultural performance must be considered as “an artistic strategy in its own right.” Inspired by Flynn’s insights, I propose a definition of Intercultural theatre that is not centered on modern western theatre, but encompasses theatres of other cultures, in particular Japanese Nô theatre. My definition reads, “Intercultural theatre is a theatrical performance that adopts foreign elements, or elements that perceived as foreign,

---

34 J. Lo and H. Gilbert, “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,” The Drama Review 46.3 (Fall 2002): 36.

such as performance techniques, literary texts, visual materials, body
movements, and music that suggests an otherness for a native audience.”

One major function of Intercultural theatre is, as Erika Fischer-Lichte has
proposed, that it offers changes to the theatre for revitalization or creation, so as
to bolster the productivity of the theatre company. Emphasizing the process of
appropriation in intercultural exchange, Fischer-Lichte claims that intercultural
production is a process of reception of foreign culture. She generates her
argument based upon Gunter Grimm’s concept of “productive reception,” which
she defines:

*Productive reception* allows any elements of any number of foreign cultures
to undergo cultural transformation through the process of production,
thereby making the own theatre and the own culture productive again. This
process does not only change the form, use and function of the
adopted elements, but also that of the adopting theatre, and in the long
run, perhaps even the adopting culture. In that the theatre adjusts itself to
elements of foreign traditions (cultures), it can become a *permanent
dynamic* which, although it may concern foreign elements in the first
instance, yet is also concerned with itself and its own culture.36

Fischer-Lichte elaborates that intercultural performances are carefully
produced within the cultural and artistic contexts of the target culture. She notes
that the underlying system of the theatrical form, the specific restrictions of
production and the reception, as well as the existing problems of the target
culture play the decisive role in such productions. It is the dynamics between

36 Erika Fischer-Lichte, Michael Gissenwehrer, and Josephine Riley, eds., *The Dramatic
Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign* (Tübingen: Narr, 1990), 287.
these factors that determine which culture or theatre tradition to look for, which elements to choose, in what ways they should be altered, and how they should be combined with the local culture. She adds that “this kind of productive reception is, in many cases, in a good position to regain the capability of the underlying theatre forms to revitalize the original, antiquated functions long since beyond repair, or at the same time, to realize and satisfy newly arisen functions which have occurred because of specific recent developments in society.”

She further restates that the primary interest of Intercultural theatre is not in the foreign theatrical form or culture, but rather in the target culture. For example, in her analyses of representative intercultural productions, she highlights that Peter Brook’s theatrical works select elements from other cultures that can carry meanings in cultures other than the original one. Her awareness of the danger of the quest for universality is revealed in her comment on Robert Wilson’s works, which she suggests could be considered the “renunciation of a Western cultural imperialism” because of the tendency to “force its own meaning on other cultures through its own products.” Although Fischer-Lichte’s observation provides invaluable perspectives in the study of intercultural

37 Ibid., 284.

38 Ibid., 283.

theatre, she does not further investigate the problematic issues she detected, such as the assumption of the universality of intercultural theatre.

Patrice Pavis, one of the pioneers in the study of Interculturalism in (theatrical) performance, has pointed out that Fischer-Lichte’s view of intercultural performance is essentially eurocentric for "universal needs".40 Patrice Pavis, on the other hand, has proposed a model of intercultural exchange using the metaphor of an hourglass (see figure 1).41 The model depicts the intercultural transfer from a source culture to the target culture. By referring to culture as “grains,” Pavis illustrates how elements of a foreign culture are adapted within the artistic and socio-cultural contexts of the target culture. He explains that the foreign (source) culture, in the upper bowl, has to pass through filters (1) to (7) in order to enter the target culture. He states:

If the grains of culture or their conglomerate are sufficiently fine, they will flow through without any trouble, however slowly, into the lower bowl, that of the target culture, from which point we observe this slow flow. The grains will rearrange themselves in a way which appears random, but which is partly regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer.42

Pavis claims that culture can be tangibly described only in the form of semiotic codes that function in the target culture. ‘Cultural modeling (1)’ deals with the

---

40 Pavis ed., The Intercultural Performance Reader, 27.


42 Ibid.
Figure 1: Patrice Pavis’s Hourglass Model
target culture’s identification of foreign cultural entities that are incorporated into the target culture, as well as the operations in the transmission (or transformation) during the adaptation. Pavis acknowledges that such a process is inevitably ethnocentric, and underlines the importance of knowing how the target culture recognizes the foreign culture, including stereotyping and presupposing, as well as how the foreign elements are reconstructed from the perspectives of the target culture. Artistic modeling (2) deals with the codification of the foreign materials into artistic forms of the target culture. Pavis states that, although codification may have a relative autonomy once it is established, it does not exist in a vacuum, but evolves within socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, it involves the exploitation of images of the foreign element upheld by those in the target culture.

Pavis applies the hourglass model in his analysis of The Mahabharata, a well-known intercultural theatrical work that retells an epic Indian story. Pavis points out that “India is suggested” in the mise en scène of the production. As the director Peter Brook states in the issues of ‘cultural and artistic modeling (1 & 2)’:

“This is an imaginary India, but one that has a tangible connection to past and present … [it] also shows aspects of contemporary everyday culture and sees

43 Ibid., 186.

44 The Mahabharata is based on an epic narrative of India that depicts the saga of the Bharata, of the two great Sanskrit. Peter Brook directed the play in 1986 using the adaptation by Jean-Claude Carrière.
Indian culture as a codification of human experience.”45 Put differently by Pavis, “it is not India, but it has the flavor of India!”46 This “flavor of India” is what Pavis refers to as the “universally conceived” image of India. As he explains that in the process of ‘cultural and artistic modeling’ Peter Brooks seeks “a balance between rootedness and a universalizing imaginary. Pavis claims that such universality requires no essential cultural references to understanding the performance, or at least the cultural references can be easily understood by the target audience due to the fact that the “universal transcultural” has been established.47

The perspectives of the adapter (3) are arguably the most important in the entire process of intercultural production. Pavis defines the adapter as someone who has a mediating function, including adapting, transforming, modifying, borrowing, or appropriating source text and culture for a target culture and audience. This may include, as examples, the translator of the text, the director, designer, and actor of the production.48 He points out that the adapters are to make tactical choices, ideological and political, corresponding to the influences of

45 Pavis, Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture, 187.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 187.
48 Ibid., 191.
their own culture. Therefore, the adapter’s preferences, such as aesthetic, cultural, philosophical, and political, are determining factors that influence the choice making.

The fourth stage is the work of adaptation (4), which is not limited to text, but also the performance of the text. Pavis has emphasized that this work of adaptation should “bring together an artistic modeling system (2), cut off from its culture (1), and reworked according to western theatrical modeling systems (10A). The interplay between the text and performance may create significant negotiation.

The preparatory work of the actors (5) and the choice of a theatrical form (6) go hand in hand to shape the performance. In addition, the actor’s ‘theatrical knowledge, which transmits from generation to generation, also plays a crucial part in the preparation process. It is important to borrow forms in the preparation that is different from that of the target culture. It is because such a form, as Pavis explicates, “revitalizes the natural structure of the work, concentrating attention on its novelty and strangeness, so as to produce an effect

---

49 Ibid., 192.

50 Ibid., 30.

of defamiliarization, which de-automatizes habitual perception and highlights the value of theatrical codification.”

As he elucidates with Peter Brook’s production of *The Mahabharata*, the actors were trained in Kathakali, a traditional Indian dance, not to be able to reproduce the technique in the performance, but to transform their body and mind. The training was meant to heighten the actors’ awareness of the foreign performing techniques, yet not to construct an ‘external imitation of Indian dance or theatre techniques.’ Rather, Brook expected the actors to “maintain direct and straightforward communication with the audience, guarding against any exotic effects or intimidating virtuosity.” Pavis also provides other ways of preparation, such as the productions by Mnouchkine and Cixous, which are different from Brook’s approach. However, they are all essentially similar in that the actors do not directly borrow the traditional forms, but attain inspiration and rework and reinvent the foreign performance techniques for the audience of the target culture.

The selection of a theatrical form (6) is selecting a means to transfer the source culture for the target audience. According to Pavis, theatrical

---

52 Ibid., 196.

53 Kathakali is a group presentation, in which dancers take various roles in performances based on themes from Hindu mythology. It involves colorful and elaborate make-up and costumes, large head dresses, as well as gestures and dance movements accompanied by music.

representation of culture (7) “obliges us to find specific dramatic means to represent or perform a foreign or domestic culture, to utilize theatre as an instrument to transmit and produce information on the conveyed culture.” In this stage, the foreign culture is not only represented, but performed through theatrical means. Such ability to perform a culture theatrically makes theatre a powerful means in cultural exchanges.

The reception-adapters (8) ‘simplify and model some key elements of the source culture’ so as to facilitate smooth transfers from the source culture to the target. Pavis stresses that the director must arrange the source culture’s reception and predict the audience’s reaction to those arrangements so as to ensure communication between cultures. He adds that some adapters are established in relation to the perspective of those from the target culture of the 'dramaturgical' adapters, readability, and reception. However, he is aware of the danger of ethnocentrism, or even Eurocentrism as a result of such appropriation.

The next stage concerns the readability (9) of the performance. Pavis points out that the production has different levels of readability, including narrative, thematic, formal, ideological, and sociocultural aspects that are embedded in the mise en scène. It is up to the audience (receiver) to decide at

---

55 Pavis, Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture, 16.

56 Ibid., 203.
which level to read.\textsuperscript{57} Pavis states that in intercultural communication, it is often
inevitable to change the mode of readability of the source culture to suit the
target culture. It seems that Pavis endorses the production of \textit{The Mahabharata},
which compensates for the difficulties of reading at the level of details of the
actions and the religious and philosophical motivations by adopting a “direct
acting style that allies with universalizing perspectives. By doing this, it makes it
possible for the audience to ‘follow the actions in their physical, mythical and
universal dimensions.”\textsuperscript{58}

In his discussion of the ‘reception within the target culture (10)’, Pavis
points out the inevitable evaluation by the audience of the target culture:

\begin{quote}
[who] will always compare cultural and artistic modeling systems in the
source [(1) and (2)] with those in their own culture or to observe
differences and justify transformations. …. [such comparison] involves not
vague cultural images, but well-established modeling systems and
codifications ((1), (2) and (10A), (10B), (10C)), which the audience judge as
consumers of their own culture, as specialists competent in familiar and
strange forms and as private individuals marked by their ideological and
aesthetic presuppositions.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Pavis questions how the audience, ‘in a hegemonic or ideological way’,
appropriates elements of the source culture for their own ‘selfish ends’. He states
that receptions are not static, but may change when there are changes in the
audience. Modifications in the context of reception will cause the major elements

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 206.
in (3), (4), (6), (7), (8), (9) to be restructured and reorganized. In such modifications for different audiences, different aspects of the play are to be reconsidered, including ‘The choice and the connotations of a form, the presumed intention of the adaptations, the function of theatricality, the mode of readability’. Pavis adds that future audiences will also view and receive the mise en scène differently, which may be considered as a series of open choices, strategies, and propositions.⁶⁰

At the bottom of the hourglass model is the ‘given and anticipated consequences (11)’. Borrowing from Peter Brook’s analyses on the issue, Pavis suggests that the mise en scène may have a ‘transformative effect’ on the spectator.⁶¹ As Brook states:

The final reconciliation is for me much less an anecdotal reconciliation between characters, than an internal reconciliation that ricochets on to the audience: the audience should leave the theatre having lived all this and, at the same time, reconciled with themselves, liberated.⁶²

Pavis sees intercultural performance as a tool of linking different cultural traditions. He endorses Brooks claims that new cultural links may be established when the theatrical production caters to the need of establishing new relations with people from different cultural traditions. It seems to me that the hourglass model set out to offer a theory of intercultural performance with two

---

⁶⁰ Ibid., 206-7.

⁶¹ Ibid., 207.

⁶² Ibid., 207-8. Originally appears in ‘Interview,’ Vogue (February 1986)
assumptions: a universality of elements of the production that should appeal to audiences of a different culture; the desire to link different cultures, or introduce a foreign culture.

Representing the Other on Stage: “Chinese Plays” in Nô

The central issue here is to what extent the above theories of intercultural theatre can be applied to the current study of sixteenth-century Japanese Nô theatre. As I have pointed out earlier, none of these theories concern intercultural exchanges between cultural traditions in the East. Borrowing the words of Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, critical and institutional interest in cross-cultural experimentations has been dominantly focused on the encounters between the West and "the rest." Nevertheless, I found the insights of Fischer-Lichte and Pavis most helpful in analyzing Nô playwrights’ reconstructions of Chinese motifs. This includes the idea of portraying the Other as an artistic strategy (Flynn), the function of revitalization and bolstering productivity of the target theatre within its cultural and artistic contexts (Fischer-Lichte), and the process of adaptation of a foreign culture as described in the Hourglass Model (Pavis).

Inspired by these theories, in the following chapter, I propose a schema to examine representations of China in Nô. Such a schema to analyze Nô

---

playwrights’ treatment of Chinese motifs in their creations of the “Chinese plays” will be useful in bringing to light the various goals involved in staging “China” on the Nô stage. Through using the audiences’ prior knowledge and images of China and Chinese culture to reconstruct “China,” the playwrights fulfill various goals to bolster the popularity of Nô. Some of these various goals are: to transform Nô into a more refined and culturally charged art form by virtue of the authority embodied by certain Chinese motifs to enhance the auspicious quality of the plays by borrowing unique elements from Chinese culture, and to make sociopolitical statements celebrating Japan with, or against, the backdrop of China. However, I must emphasize that, as I will show in this study, the images of China presented in these “Chinese plays” are in fact derived from modified images of China perceived in earlier Japanese works. Moreover, I would like to stress again that these “Chinese plays” were not meant to reveal a “true China” to their audience.

The major reason for proposing a schema for the current study is to detect if there are certain patterns in the representation of the Other within Asian contexts, at least between China and Japan. I will use some of the concepts and terminologies of the western theoretical discourses discussed above so as to facilitate cross-cultural conversations of the studies of Other/Self and Intercultural theatre between the West and the East.
First, however, I will investigate the sociopolitical climate during which
the “Chinese plays” were composed and first performed. One defect of Pavis’s
hourglass model is, as Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert have observed, that it
centers on aesthetics rather than politics.\textsuperscript{64} In fact, both Pavis and Fischer-Lichte
spend little ink on sociopolitical climate and historical contact between the
foreign and target cultures. However, the sociopolitical climate was an influential
factor in the composition and performance of the “Chinese plays” in Nô.

All twenty-four “Chinese plays” were written between the mid-fourteenth
and mid-sixteenth centuries, a period that witnessed the rise and fall of the
Ashikaga shogunate.\textsuperscript{65} Within the century and a half, Japan progressed from
relative political stability to a series of civil wars that ended only when the
Tokugawa shogunate finally unified the country in 1603. This era also saw the
development of cultural traditions such as Nô theatre, which are heralded today
as quintessentially Japanese cultural traditions. Moreover, as we shall see, the
attitude towards China, or Chinese culture, changed during this period. Below, I
will concentrate on Japan’s interaction with and policies towards China, as well
as historical events that had enduring influences on the different conceptions of
China upheld by different audiences of medieval Nô.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{65} This is based on performance records, attribution of authorship, commentaries, and
theoretical writings. See performance records and attribution of authorship in Takemoto, \textit{Kanze
jidai no Nôgaku}, 514-40.
Historical Background of Sino-Japanese Relations

Japan’s encounters with China have had a long and complex history. Much scholarly work has been done on Chinese influence on various aspects of Japanese civilization, such as the writing system, religion, literature, and the arts. The Japanese government had been proactive in acquiring Chinese culture during the first few centuries of country building, particularly from the seventh to the early ninth centuries. Buddhism and the Chinese writing system were already introduced to Japan by the early sixth century. From antiquity to the Muromachi period, Japan had viewed China as a cultural, religious, as well as economic and military power. One monumental step in Japanese relations with China was sending official Japanese missions to China. On the one hand, this accelerated Japanese adaptation of Chinese culture; on the other hand, it conveyed to Japanese the need for political identity. From the year 600 to 838, the Japanese government sent off about nineteen missions to China.66 Besides carrying out diplomatic functions, other major reasons for sending these missions were to import material goods in order to acquire knowledge of Chinese culture and its administrative system, and to expedite the study of Buddhism. The members in the missions consisted of government officials, Buddhist monks, and literati. Material goods and knowledge of Chinese culture

---

66 The actual number of missions sent to Japan is uncertain. There are discrepancies between Chinese and Japanese historical records. For studies on cultural exchanges between China and Japan, see Tsunoda Ryūsaku, Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories (South Pasadena: P.D. & Iona Perkins, 1951) and Kimiya Yasuhiko, Nikka Bunka Kōryūshi (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1955).
brought back by the Japanese envoys strongly influenced various aspects of Japanese life, including state building, religion, and literature.

These official missions also underscored Japan’s identity as a country at odds with China, which remains a recurring issue throughout premodern Japanese history. In 607, Japan sent the second mission to China carrying a message addressed to the Chinese emperor (Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty). The letter contains a line that made clear the attitudes of the rulers of the two countries concerning their own identities. The line reads: ‘From the Son of Heaven in the land of the rising sun to the Son of Heaven in the land of the setting sun.’ It is recorded that the Chinese emperor was displeased and ordered that such a disrespectful letter should not be brought to him again.67 To China, Japan was merely a small island in the east and was subordinate. Yet, Japan was not content to be treated as one of the subordinate states of China. Nevertheless, Emperor Yang believed Japan’s support would strengthen China’s chance of conquering Koguryŏ (Korean state), and thus maintained a diplomatic relations with Japan.68 Japan also wanted to maintain a good relation with China because of the political instability in the Korean peninsula, and the desire to assimilate Chinese culture.

67 This episode was documented in the Chinese source Sui shu (History of the Sui dynasty 581-618). See Tsunoda Ryūsaku, Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories, 32.

In 894, after over two centuries of sending embassies to China, the Japanese government cancelled further official missions to China due to the political turmoil in China and the decline of the pressing need to conduct research on Chinese culture. There was an attempt to send another mission in 894, which was cancelled as a result of the proposal of the appointed envoy Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903) that cited the danger of the trip in the midst of the political turmoil in China.69 By the late ninth century, the major importation of Chinese civilization, such as Buddhism, Confucian ethical and political thought, the centralized bureaucratic state system, and the Chinese writing system, had been adapted in ways that best served the Japanese. Although the material goods of the continent continued to be eagerly sought, private trade was seen as sufficient for procuring them in lieu of official missions.

Private trading with China was limited to ports in northern Kyūshū from the ninth through the early fifteenth centuries. During the Northern Sung dynasty (960-1127), Chinese trading ships were restricted to docking at the Dazaifu port in Kyūshū. Chinese merchants were only allowed to visit Japan once every three years. However, private ports in Kyūshū that had fewer restrictions, such as Hakata, Hakozaki, and Kashii, also engaged in trading with Chinese merchants.70 Major products imported were Chinese silk fabrics,

---


aromatics, medicines, luxury building materials, manuscripts and printed books, paintings, and exotic animals such as peacocks and parrots. In return, Japanese goods bought back to China included natural material goods including pearls, yellow amber, and silver, as well as crafts such as lacquer ware and screens.71

Cessation of official missions to China did not put a halt to Japanese monks’ traveling to China or Chinese influence on Japanese Buddhism. Japanese monks continued to visit China by traveling on Chinese merchants’ ships. There were records of about twenty Japanese monks making their trips during the Northern Sung period. Most of their destinations were Mount Tiantai for the purpose of practicing religious austerities.72 In contrast, during the Southern Sung period (1127-1206), over one hundred monks traveled to China to pursue their study of the Buddhist teachings.73 Among them were prominent monks who helped introduce Zen Buddhism to Japan. To name a few, they included Eisai栄西 (1141-1215) who established the Rinzai school of Zen and built Kennin-ji temple in Kyoto and Jufuku-ji temple in Kamakura, as well as Dōgen道元 (1200-1253) who founded the Sōtō school and established Eiheiji temple in Echizen.

71 Fujiya, Nicchû kôrû nisennen, 128.

72 Among them, there were well-known monks such as Chônen and Jakushô.

73 Fujiya, Nicchû kôrû nisennen, 146-49.
With the political instability in China in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was an increasing number of Chinese monks who migrated to Japan. They strongly influenced the religious and cultural life both in Kamakura and Kyoto. For example, Lanxi Daolong 蘭溪道隆 (Jp. Rankei dôrô, 1213-78) and Wuxue Zuyuan 無學祖元 (Jp. Mugaku Sogen, 1226-86) came to Japan and became the first abbots of Kenchô-ji temple and Enkaku-ji temple respectively. These Chinese monks and their Japanese disciples established strong connections among temples in Kyoto and Kamakura, and became the powerhouse of Zen Buddhism throughout the medieval period.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, Japan experienced battles with a foreign military giant, the Mongols, which had an enduring influence on its foreign and military policies. As in its relations with Sui China, Japan had to make a decision about its identity set against that of the foreign country. The Mongols sent a letter to Japan in which they declared themselves to be the master of the universe and demanded Japan become a subject of the Mongolian Empire and build a tributary relation with them. Since the letter contains nuances that caused the Japanese Shogunate government to ponder the real intentions of the Yüan government, I have included the letter below for reference. The translation is taken from Hall, eds., The Cambridge History of Japan, vol. 3, 132.

From time immemorial, rulers of small states have sought to maintain friendly relations with one another. We, the Great Mongolian Empire, have received the Mandate of Heaven and have become the master of the universe. Therefore, innumerable states in far-off lands have longed to form ties with us. As soon as I ascended the throne, I ceased fighting with Koryô and restored their land and people. In gratitude, both the ruler and the people of Koryô came to us to become our subjects; their joy resembles that of children with their father. Japan is located near Koryô and since its founding has on
the letter was finally delivered to the Kamakura Shogunate in 1268. As Ishii Susumu has pointed out, Japan did not have the necessary skill to handle diplomatic negotiation with the Mongols.\textsuperscript{75} There had been no formal diplomacy between Japan and China since the cancellation of Japanese missions to China in the late ninth century. At first, the Japanese did not respond to the letter, but eventually they decided to defend themselves in case of an invasion.

After the failure of several attempts to obtain a response from the Japanese, the Mongol empire sent navy troops to conquer Japan in 1274. The invasion ended quickly on the second day when a sudden typhoon destroyed and sunk the Mongol vessels. The Mongols struck again in 1281, this time with many more troops, and they fought for about two months. Yet, again, another typhoon struck and damaged the Mongol fleet. Since the Japanese emperor had offered prayers to the gods at the Ise Shrine before the Mongols invaded, the timely mighty winds were received as help from Shintô deities (\textit{kami} 神) and thus referred to as “divine winds” (\textit{kamikaze} 神風).

Japan’s defeat of the Mongols with the help of the typhoons (divine winds) not only bolstered a Shintô revival in the Kamakura period, but also heightened a sense among Japanese of the potential harm imposed by a foreign

\textsuperscript{75} Hall, eds., \textit{The Cambridge History of Japan}, vol. 3, 134.
power, the Mongols. For example, the Japanese government ordered all land
formerly owned by all shrines in Kyūshû to be returned to the government
unconditionally. Decades after the invasion, cultural exchanges and trading with
China became frequent again. However, both the Chinese and Japanese were
more cautious with visiting merchants. There are reports of unjust treatment of
Japanese merchants when entering China, and with Japanese merchants
destroying Chinese properties.76 Such problems associated with trading nurtured
discontent among people of both countries and probably intensified the activities
of piracy along the shore of the continent.

The fierce raids of wakô (lit. Japanese pirate) from the fourteenth century
precipitated a diplomatic crisis between Ming dynasty (1368-1644) China and
Japan.77 The wakô were particularly interested in rice and capturing Chinese for
slavery. They attacked the warehouses and ships used for grain storage and
transport. The wakô kidnapped thousands of Chinese and Korean people to be
held captive in Japan as cheap labor.78 In 1366, the Koguryô envoys delivered the
Yuan dynasty to the Muromachi Shogunate requesting Japan’s suppression of

76 Fujiya, Nicchû kôryû nisennen, 158.

77 The composition of wakô is uncertain, but as Tanaka Takeo has pointed out, they were
mainly made up of Japanese from islands off northern Kyūshû. See Tanaka Takeo, “Japan’s
Relations with Overseas Countries,” in John Whitney Hall and Toyoda Takeshi, eds., Japan in the

78 Tanaka, “Japan’s Relations with Overseas Countries,” 160.
piracy.\textsuperscript{79} At that time, Japan was divided between the Southern and Northern courts. Since the Southern Court controlled the Kyūshū area where most pirate activities originated, the Muromachi Shogunate had no power to interfere.

In 1368 the Yuan dynasty was overthrown and the Ming dynasty established. In the following years, the Ming emperor Taizu sent envoys to Japan to demand Japan establish diplomatic relations and bring tribute to Ming China as the Central Kingdom, as well as to suppress the \textit{wakō} raids along the China coast. The Ming Chinese chose to negotiate with the Southern Court due to its proximity to Kyūshū, and thus recognized the Southern Court general Prince Kaneyoshi as the “true ruler of Japan.”\textsuperscript{80} Meanwhile, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358-1408), the third shogun of the Muromachi Shogunate, striving for recognition as Japan’s representative in the international order through diplomatic relations with Ming China. He sent envoys to Ming China in 1373, 1374, and 1380, however, the Ming dynasty only considered Prince Kaneyoshi as the ruler of Japan and refused to form any diplomatic or commercial alliance with the Shogunate.

After defeating the Southern Court in 1392, the Ashikaga Shogunate finally received Ming China’s recognition. In 1401 Yoshimitsu sent a mission to China to establish formal diplomatic relations. The envoys returned with a

\textsuperscript{79} Kimiya, \textit{Nikka bunka kōryūshi}.

diplomatic document from the Ming emperor referring to Yoshimitsu as the “King of Japan” and ordered him to adopt the Chinese imperial calendar. Abiding by the Chinese document would make Yoshimitsu and Japan a subordinate of China. This is because using Chinese imperial calendar would involve abandoning Japanese year names. Moreover, since Yoshimitsu was shogun, not the emperor, accepting the Ming emperor’s designation would be a betrayal to the Japanese people.

Nevertheless, Yoshimitsu accepted investiture by the Ming emperor as the “king of Japan,” and thus commenced a new phase of relations with China. In the document delivered by the second envoys to the Ming emperor in 1403, Yoshimitsu addresses himself as “King of Japan, Your Subject, Minamoto.” As a consequence, Japan was incorporated into the Ming China tribute system, ending the policy of regarding China as an equal since the seventh century. Of course, Yoshimitsu’s diplomatic policy aroused opposition within the capital, especially from the court nobility. This also marks the beginning of the tally trade (kangô bôeki 倫合貿易) agreement between the two countries.81 This trading system brought immense amount of profit to Japan. Decades after the system began, the

---

81 The name “kangô” was an abbreviation of the seals of approval, kangôfu 倫合符 issued by the Ming Chinese government in order to distinguish between pirate ships and trading ships. Tanaka, “Japan’s Relations with Overseas Countries,” 165.
Chinese government became very cautious and imposed limitations on the number of ships per trip and only allowed one trip every ten years.82

After Yoshimitsu’s death, the diplomatic relations with China shifted in accordance with the policies of the new shoguns. The succeeding shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持 (1386-1428), stopped the Japanese tally ships to China in 1411 and rejected the Ming Emperor Chengzu’s overtures of restoring the relation with China and suppressing the piracy along the coast of China.83 However, the policy towards China changed again under the next shogun Ashikaga Yoshinori 足利義教 (1394-1441), who to a large extent, resumed Yoshimitsu’s diplomacy. In 1433, Yoshinori recommenced the sending of tally ship to China from 1432. In the document sent to the Chinese emperor, Yoshinori referred to himself as “Your Japanese Subject, Minamoto Yoshinori.”84 Moreover, the Chinese calendar was used in the document. As Tanaka Takeo has pointed out, although the term “King of Japan” was not employed, Yoshinori’s document shows that Yoshinori, similar to Yoshimitsu, assigned more weight to the political and economic prospects of a diplomatic relation with Ming China he did to avoiding investiture by the Chinese emperor. Tally ships sent to China

---

82 For a detailed study of the tally trade, see Kimiya, Nikka bunka kōryūshi, 511-81.

83 Tanaka, “Japan’s Relations with Overseas Countries,” 168.

84 Ibid.
continued until 1547 with the increasing involvement of powerful temples, shrines, and leading provincial lords.85

Provincial lords became more independent from the central government and more powerful, particularly from the late fifteenth century on. The Ônin War (1467-77), a domestic war fought in the capital Kyoto between the two most powerful provincial lord clans (the Hosokawa and the Yamana), marks the beginning of the long civil war period, which ended with the downfall of the Ashikaga shogunate. To make things worse, a series of peasant uprisings shook the country and deepened the rift between the Ashikaga shogunate and the provincial lords.

When the Ashikaga shogunate became powerless, those depending on its patronage also suffered. The courtier class and the Gozan Zen priests in Kyoto were two large groups who depended heavily on the support of the Ashikaga shogunate.86 For example, the coronation of Emperor Gokashiwabara (r. 1500-26) was postponed for over two decades due to financial difficulties. As a consequence of the weakened shogunate, the Gozan Zen temples lost their privileges in the tally ship system, which was taken over by provincial lords in Kyūshū and the Inland Sea areas.87 Having the Ashikaga shogunate and the Zen

---

85 For details of each tally ship trip, see Fujiya, *Nicchû kôryû nisennen*, 172.

86 For more information on Gozan, see Chapter Five.

temples as two major patrons, Nō troupes were undoubtedly adversely affected. From the late fifteenth century on, Nō troupes increasingly looked for other sources of support, especially from provincial lords.

With the arrival of Portuguese traders and Christian missionaries, from the mid to the end of the sixteenth century, the relation with China was no longer a priority for Japan. The westerners were more proactive than China ever was. They not only requested trade, but also religious conversions. Provincial lords had different attitudes and intentions vis-à-vis these foreigners. Some converted to Christianity, while some traded commodities for guns and firearms. In 1633, decades after the unification of the country, the Tokugawa shogunate imposed the seclusion policy that banned Japanese from leaving the country and forbade relations with foreign countries, both European and Asian. However, limited trading was continued with China, Holland, and Korea.

How did the changing relation between China and Japan influence the making of the “Chinese plays?” Were the plays supposed to be mere reflections of the social attitude towards China at a given time, or aggressive social statements? To what extent were these plays affected by the contemporary sociopolitical climate? Put differently, should we look at Nō plays, at least the “Chinese plays,” as the product of aesthetics or politics, and to what degree? The following chapters will seek to answer these questions.
In Chapter Two, focusing on the underlying forces in the making of “Chinese plays,” I assess the indispensable roles of audience and patron in the art of Nô. I then develop a “Filter Model” which illustrates the complex interplay of sociopolitical climate, basic sources, perspectives of the playwrights, and selections and compositions of dance and song, in the creation of “Chinese plays.” Chapter Three to Chapter Seven examine ten “Chinese plays” that, taken together, display a well-rounded representation of Chinese images constructed in Nô. Written at various junctures of Nô theatre between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth century, these plays reveal the use of source materials, as well as the artistic and philosophical views of the playwrights. The plays also reflect the disparate sentiments and political stances towards China held by audiences of Nô with historical specificities. Finally, Chapter Eight identifies and evaluates the significance of cross-cultural adaptations involved in these “Chinese plays.” I then put relevant modern theories to the test against my findings to highlight the particularities of “Chinese plays” in an East-East context.
CHAPTER 2

AUDIENCE AND PERFORMER: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO ANALYZE “CHINESE PLAYS”

This chapter proposes a framework to facilitate the investigation of issues of Self and Other, and of Intercultural theatre in representations of China found in a representative sample of “Chinese plays.” In doing so, I integrate the western theories introduced in the last chapter with theoretical treatises on the dramaturgy and performance of Nô written during the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century. I place emphasis on three aspects of the creation of these Nô plays: the artistic conventions of Nô, the Nô audience, and the sociopolitical contexts in which the plays were composed/performed. As noted in the last chapter, the sociopolitical climate during this time (the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries) changed drastically. This period witnessed the rise and fall of the Ashikaga Shogunate, during which Japan progressed from relative political stability to a series of civil wars that ended when the Tokugawa unified the country in 1603. It was during this era that we saw Nô theatre develop into one of the cultural traditions that is heralded today as quintessentially Japanese.
Surviving Nô treatises from this period were all written by influential playwrights and actors of several generations and cover different aspects of Nô within various social, political, and artistic contexts. I will take these changing contexts into account in the construction of the framework.

The most influential treatises discussing the artistic conventions of Nô, particularly the selection and treatment of materials and dramaturgy, are those authored by Zeami Motokiyo 世阿弥元清 (?1363-?1443). An actor, playwright and theoretician of Nô, Zeami was the single most influential figure in this process. After being transmitted exclusively in a family context, Zeami’s theoretical writings were accidentally brought to the attention of the scholarly community in the early twentieth-century and have profoundly influenced the study of Nô thereafter.

Nô scholars consider Zeami’s treatises as important assets in the study of the principles of Nô, since these writings not only tell us much about the artistic principles of Nô during his own day, but also about the early development of Nô predating Zeami’s lifetime. It is noteworthy that, in addition to Zeami’s own treatises, all other surviving theoretical writings on Nô from the Muromachi period were produced by the members of two Nô troupes, both of which, two different extents, had ties to Zeami himself, the Kanze 観世 troupe (Zeami, Kanze

---

Kojirō Nobumitsu 観世小次郎信光 (1435-1516), and Kanze Nagatoshi 観世長俊 (1488-1541), and the Konparu 金春 troupe (Konparu Zenchiku 金春禅竹 (?1403-?1468), Zeami’s son-in-law who was given access to many of Zeami’s treatises, and his grandson Konparu Zenpō 金春禅鳳 (1454-?1532)). Close readings of these later writings reveal that they agree with Zeami’s insights into the principal issues of Nô, even if some explored certain key issues and concepts in their own terms, particularly those by Zenchiku.

The most important element in Nô, however, should be considered to be the audience. Indeed, the audience’s support was one major reason that Nô flourished during this period. Moreover, the patronage that some Nô playwrights and actors enjoyed also contributed to the emergence of Nô treatises and deeply influenced the artistic choices of playwrights and actors. I will argue that consideration of the audience’s tastes, expectations, and knowledge of literary and artistic precedents was a key factor in shaping Nô as an artistic institution, which in turn determined the making and staging of “Chinese plays” in medieval Japan. Therefore, before constructing a framework for the analyses of the “Chinese plays,” it is necessary to first map out some of the dynamics between Nô and its audiences and patrons.

89 There are about sixty-six surviving theatrical writings on the dramaturgy of Nô: twenty-two were written by Zeami, twenty-three by Zenchiku, and the majority of the rest were by decedents or disciples of the two. Yokomichi Mariō, Nô Kyôgen Kôza, vol. 2, Nôgaku no densho (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987).
Modern dramatists of the West have pointed out the significance of audience in theatre. Director Jerzy Grotowski defines theatre in a succinct fashion when he notes, “can theatre exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance.”

According to Grotowski, the audience plays a key role in various aspects of performance, including economic support, selection of materials, and evaluation of the aesthetic and socio-political presentation. In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Susan Bennett also points out that “the survival of theatre is economically tied to a willing audience, not only those people paying to sit and watch a performance but increasingly those who approve a government, corporate, or other subsidy.”

The importance of the audience is also true in the domain of Nô theatre. The emphasis on the audience put forth by Zeami is echoed by modern theories regarding the audience’s role in performance and literary work. In *Kaden* (Teachings on acting style and the flower, 1400-1418), the earliest surviving theoretical writing on the art of Nô, Zeami provides a comprehensive account of

---


Zeami places great emphasis on the importance of the audience, as he states:

It is important to keep in mind that audiences are the foundation of our art. Conform to current tastes, and when performing in front of an audience that favors yūgen 幽玄 (“graceful beauty”), favor the style of elegance and grace in portraying the strong and vigorous, even if it may not correspond to the role.

Throughout its six-century history, the support of various audience groups was the key factor in the flourishing and the longevity of Nô. At all points, the audience significantly influenced the aesthetic and thematic norms of the art. During the Muromachi period, Nô audience came from a variety of social backgrounds, including the ordinary populace, Buddhist monks, the warrior class, and aristocrats.

All these different social groups colored the artistry and status of Nô, or sarugaku no nô 猿楽の能 as it was referred to in medieval Japan. The performance content of sarugaku no nô in households of the warriors and officials or at court was rather different from those that were held in religious settings.

---

92 Kaden (Teachings on acting style and the flower) is Zeami’s first treaty in which he synthesizes his own insights and those inherited from his father Kan’ami Kiyotsugu (観阿弥清次, 1333-1384).

93 Omote Akira and Katô Shûichi, eds. Nihon shisô taikei vol. 24, Zeami, Zenchiku (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1974), 47. All translations into English are mine unless otherwise noted.

94 See pp.8-9 for discussion on the term sarugaku no nô vis-à-vis Nô.
institutions. In fact, performers often found themselves responding to audience’s requests, in advance or spontaneously. As P.G. O’Neill has noted, performers confronted difficult situations in which, at private performances, they had to alter pre-planned programs in order to cater to the audience’s preferences. In less than a century, sarugaku no nō experienced a social ascent, from entertaining the populace in public spaces, to giving religiously and morally charged performances in temples and shrines, to performing for the rich and powerful warrior class in private settings. The status of the members of sarugaku no nō rose from near slavery to becoming independent prosperous troupes that enjoyed the support of the rich and the powerful.

Audiences and Patrons of Nō from the Early Muromachi to the Early Edo Periods

Sarugaku was an umbrella term that referred to miscellaneous (musical) performances imported from the Asian continent in the ninth century, consisting of dance, music, acrobatics, and comical tricks. The term Nō designated a range of performances, including “field music” (dengaku no nō 田楽) and “performance

---

95 By 1420’s Sarugaku no nō had not only become the formal entertainment of the warrior class and the shogunate, but also a frequent performance at the court. See Jacob Raz, Audience and Actors: A Study of their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theatre (Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1983), 74.

for longevity” (ennen no nô 延年). In the late thirteenth century, sarugaku no nô emerged as a form of entertainment that fused three elements—dance, song, and mimicry. While in dengaku no nô the blending of dance and song had been well received, the capacity of sarugaku no nô to induce a narrative won support from the populace. As a result, both traditions were included in religious ceremonies in temples and shrines.

The support of a temple ensured a troupe’s livelihood, and in return, the troupe had to participate in performances held at respective temples and shrines, in particular, at the Kôfuku-ji Temple, the Kasuga Shrine, and Tô-no-mine Temple in the Nara region. Another arena for sarugaku no nô troupes’ performance was at subscription performances (kanjin nô 勧進能) in temples that raised contributions for religious and public institutions through admission to the theatre. Of course, the success of these public performances was measured by the number and the reaction of the audience.

---

97 Dengaku was originally songs and dances of peasants performed while working in the fields. It was later developed as professional performance by groups of professional performers. Although it was developed in a similar fashion as sarugaku no nô into a form of theater, the performance tends to be more fragmentary and miscellaneous. See Ibid., 10-41, 85-93, and 127-147. Ennen originally were performances given by monks at Buddhist temples in association with festive and ceremonial events with a connotation of praying for longevity for the nation and its people. Later, professional performers took over the performance as a variety of sarugaku.

98 For more discussion on the role of sarugaku in religious context, see Raz. Audience and Actors, 71-72.

99 A list of such performances and the troupes that participated is included in the Teaching of Style and the Flower. See Omote and Katô, Zeami, Zenchiku, 40-41.

100 The first known subscription performance by sarugaku no nô troupes was recorded in 1364. O’Neill, Early Nô Drama, 74-76.
A good performance could not only secure the troupe’s relationship with its current religious patron, but could also attract new patrons. In Chapter Five of *Teachings on Acting Style and the Flower*, entitled “The Most Profound Principles of the Art of the Nô” (Ôgi ni iwaku 奥義云) under the subtitle “Certain Additional Secret Observations” (Higi ni iwaku 秘義云). Zeami spells out the importance of the audience in terms of the purpose of Nô, the career of an actor, and the prosperity his troupe:

> It can be said that the purpose of the art of Nô is to serve as a means to pacify people’s hearts and to move the high and the low alike, which brings prosperity to all of us and promotes long life. In our art in particular, when the highest reaches have been obtained, one who leaves behind a great name is one who has gained recognition everywhere. Thus are longevity and happiness prolonged for our troupe … When one thinks over the real purposes of our art, a player who truly can bring happiness to his audience is one who can without censure bring his art to all, from the nobility to audiences in mountain temples, the countryside, the far-off provinces, and the various shrine festivals. However gifted a player, if he does not win the love and the respect of his audiences, he can hardly be said to be an actor who brings prosperity to his troupe.101

In drawing audiences from all walks of life, successful public performances could, as Zeami was well aware, introduce new audiences, especially the warrior class and the aristocrats, to *sarugaku no nô*.

A dynamic change in terms of *sarugaku no nô* audiences is marked by the well-known performance in 1374 attended by the Shogun Yoshimitsu (1368-1408), the Minister of the Right Kanetsugu and the regent Nijô Yoshimoto 二条良...

---

Enchanted by the performance of the young actor Zeami Motokiyo, Shogun Yoshimitsu became the patron of Zeami’s sarugaku troupe. Yoshimitsu’s move marked the beginning of a new era for sarugaku. Following the cue of the shogun, warriors and provincial lords began to favor sarugaku no nô as well.

Despite the religious nature of many of these events, performances by various troupes had highly competitive overtones. Different troupes often performed on the same stage and vied for the patronage of the rich and powerful. Besides the Yûzaki 結崎 troupe of the Yamato sarugaku headed by Kan’ami and his son Zeami that enjoyed the shogun Yoshimitsu’s support, there were three other Yamato sarugaku troupes: Tobi 外山, Enman’i 円満井, and Sakado 坂戸. There were also other major sarugaku no nô troupes, such as the Hiyoshi 日吉 troupe of the Ômi Sarugaku no nô 近江猿楽の能 and E’nami 榎並 troupe of the Settsu sarugaku no nô 摂津猿楽の能.

As a result, the Shogun’s patronage immensely influenced the aesthetics of Nô. Ever since the Ashikaga Shogunate had seized control of the nation’s economy and politics from the court located in Kyoto, the court aristocracy played a dual role. On the one hand, deprived of real power, the court

---

102 Raz, Audience and Actors, 77.
103 Ibid, 76.
104 Yamato sarugaku troupes performed in the region of Nara and southern Kyoto.
nevertheless was retained as a figurehead to shore up the legitimacy of the
shogun’s rule; on the other hand, their way of life became a source of emulation
for the elite members of the Shogunate. As a result, Muromachi Japan witnessed
the rise of social gatherings for new and old cultural activities, such as classical
Japanese poetry (waka 和歌) and linked poetry (ren ga 連歌) contests, appreciation
of ink paintings and poetic inscriptions on paintings, and tea ceremony,
which were held in warriors’ households throughout the country.\(^\text{105}\) Sarugaku no
nô was the newest activity added to the cultural repertoire of the warrior class.

Under the auspices of the Shogun Yoshimitsu’s patronage, sarugaku no nô
was developed into a more refined art form. The central figure of this
advancement was Zeami, who, with the aid of Yoshimitsu, attained training in
literature, poetry, and philosophy under the tutelage of court officials, including
the renowned renga poet Nijô Yoshimoto. Zeami also participated in various
social gatherings and was highly praised for his poetic talent. Zenchiku, Zeami’s
son-in-law, also had a disciple-like relationship with prominent renga (linked-
poetry) poets, Chinese scholars, and Buddhist monks. It is evident that both
Zeami and Zenchiku had sent some of their secret treatises on the art of Nô to
elite monks for comments. All their writings have strong Buddhist overtones,

\(^{105}\) For more information on the cultural life in Muromachi Japan, see Jeffrey P. Mass, ed.,
*The Origins of Japan’s Medieval World: Courtiers, Clerics, Warriors, and Peasants in the Fourteenth
while some of the main themes are derived from Buddhist doctrines. This intermingling with literary elites fostered aesthetic, literary, and philosophical comprehension of Zeami and Zenchiku which in turn inspired them to write plays that would appeal to these culturally influential groups.

The life of Zeami provides an example of the importance of remaining in favor with the shogun. Zeami and his troupe enjoyed the continuing patronage of Yoshimitsu for over three decades, which ended with the shogun’s death in 1408. The Ashikaga shogun’s successor, Yoshimochi 義持 (1386-1428), favored Zōami 増阿弥, a talented actor in a rival troupe, over Zeami. Having lost the current shogun’s patronage, Zeami’s troupe faced keen competition and could no longer enjoy the privileges that had helped them to polish their artistry. Probably inspired by the cruelty of competitive life, Zeami wrote over twenty pedagogical and critical essays designed for his successor in his own troupe in hopes of preserving the secrets of the art and to compete more successfully.

---

106 For example, the metaphor of *rokurin ichiro* (six circles and one dew drop) in Zenchiku’s treatises is derived from Buddhist teaching. Zenchiku developed this metaphor while attending a gathering at a temple by which he was inspired.

107 In his later treatises, Zeami often cites Buddhist doctrines to elaborate the metaphysic of the art of Nô. Zenchiku sent his writings to eminent Buddhist monks for comments. For example, Zenchiku’s major treaty *Rokurin ichiro no ki* (A record of Six Circles and One Dewdrop) was thoroughly commented by Shigyoku (1383-1463), abbot of the Kaidan-in at Tôdai-ji in Nara.
against other troupes. Eventually, at seventy-one, Zeami was exiled under the order of the shogun Yoshinori 義教 (1394-1441), who favored Zeami’s nephew On’ami 音阿弥.108

The Ashikaga shogunate was by no means the only audience of Nô. Religious communities and other groups of the populace were also major audiences. The different preferences among these audiences influenced the evolving spectrum of the aesthetics of Nô. On the one hand, Nô troupes had to keep the shogunate amused by plays that were reminiscent of the high culture of the Heian period; on the other hand, they needed to fulfill the religious end through plays that have a more straightforward plot featuring Shintô or Buddhist deities. Maintaining a balance of performing a wide range of plays posed a challenge for Nô performers.

Around the mid-fifteenth century, the audience of Nô was no longer merely watching plays, but became more involved in the performance itself. Audiences from different social groups, including warriors, aristocrats, and townsmen, gathered to learn the chants of plays at chanting clubs (utai-kô 謡い講). New troupes formed by semi-professional performers referred to as semi-professional Nô (te-sarugaku 手猿楽) emerged and performed plays in various

108 The reasons for this exile are unknown.
settings, even for emperors. One reason for such a flowering of semi-professional performances was probably because they were free from the constraints of the selection of plays to be performed that were imposed by the patrons of professional Nô troupes. Free from the obligation of the patronage system, semi-professional performers were able to perform their own favorites for a relatively closed audience group.

The sociopolitical turmoil during and after the Ônin War (1467-77) also had a strong impact on the increase in amateur actors’ participation. The war, between two parties of the Ashikaga shogunate, had weakened the political and economic power of the shogunate in the capital, while strengthening that of the provincial lords. Some professional troupes eventually vanished, while many were forced to move to other provinces in order to make a living. The works of the last two generations of actor-playwrights, Kojirô Nobumitsu, Konparu Zenpo, and Kanze Nagatoshi reflect the changing dynamics in society and audiences in the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. As Yamanaka Reiko has noted:

[Nagatoshi] epitomizes [Nô] dramatists’ attempts in the last decades of the Muromachi period to explore new directions. They employed large casts instead of the shite-centered structure favored by Zeami, experimented with new role types and subjects, and spectacular performance by introducing fighting scenes and flamboyant stage props.

---

109 According to surviving record, the first performance by nobles was in 1487. Raz, *Audience and Actors*, 121.

110 Yamanaka, *Muromachi makki no Nô to kankyaku*, 51
By the 1600s, only four professional *sarugaku no nô* troupes survived. They found a new powerful patron, the Tokugawa Shogunate, which united the country after decades of civil war. The shogun, Hideyoshi, had a great interest in Nô and had not only performed plays in the repertoire, but also had his own playwrights write new plays tailored for him.\textsuperscript{111} In 1615, ‘Nô’ became the official entertainment of the state.\textsuperscript{112} Under the full protection of the state, not only were various aspects of Nô standardized, including the repertoire, categorization of plays, and performing elements and styles, but also the study of plays in the standard repertoire was initiated. The canonization of Nô as an exclusive entertainment for officials, on the one hand, enabled the art form to endure for over two centuries with full sponsorship from the state. On the other hand, it minimized the accessibility of the art to other social groups outside the shogunate, which threatened its survival when the feudal system was abolished in the Meiji period (1868-1912).

**The Location of “Chinese Plays”**

The audience and patron of course also have a significant role in the making and reception of “Chinese plays.” As discussed above, the endurance of each Nô troupe heavily relied on the support of the audience and patron. As a

\textsuperscript{111} Raz, *Audience and Actors*, 127-129.

\textsuperscript{112} From Edo period, as the other *sarugaku* traditions vanished (at least in the public domain), the term ‘Nô’ is commonly used instead of *Sarugaku no nô*. 

55
consequence, these supporters’ aesthetic preferences and sociopolitical stances to
a large degree shaped the art and dramaturgy of Nô. The question, then, is,
where do the “Chinese plays” fit into the repertoire of Nô?

Interestingly, despite the in-depth discussion on various aspects of Nô,
there are no surviving writings on the composition of plays that retell stories of
Chinese origin. Chinese elements are discussed only in terms of the performance
of a Chinese character. In *Teachings on Acting Style and the Flower*, Zeami briefly
discusses how Chinese roles should be performed:

> Since this is a particularly special kind of role, there is no fixed form to
> emulate. However, the crucial elements are costume and mask. Although
> it is also a human character, it is best to wear something with a touch of
> difference [from Japanese characters] and maintain an atmosphere that
> suggests a hint of difference. … In short, besides the costume, there is no
> other technique. … At any rate, since even if one does an excellent
> imitation of the Chinese in chant or movement, it will not be [effectively]
> interesting. Changing only certain aspects of the presentation is sufficient.
> … Because there is no designated model for the Chinese style, a slight
> change in movement from the ordinary will suggest a sense of
> Chineseness.¹¹³

The other reference to a Chinese role appears in a treaty of Zenchiku. In
the treaty entitled *Rokurin ichiro hichû 六輪一露秘注* (Secret notes on “An account
of the six circles and one dewdrop”, 1465?), he echoes what Zeami has advised,
“The Chinese role depends entirely on external appearance. The basic
techniques for Japanese and Chinese roles are the same.”¹¹⁴ Other than his


¹¹⁴ Ibid., 396.
advocacy of creating a dramatic, exotic atmosphere through the use of costume and movement, Zeami warns that nothing too extraordinary should be done. It is clear that preserving a performance style familiar to domestic audiences is Zeami’s key concern for his art.

The Filter Models

To facilitate analyses of the composition and performance of “Chinese plays,” I propose two “Filter models” that illustrate each step in the process (see figure 2 and 3). The terminology used is a blend of Patrice Pavis’s Hourglass model and those in Nô treatises from Muromachi Japan. Both models consist of two parts—a cone-shaped filter and a cylinder. On the top of figure (1) is Chinese Culture imported to Japan from antiquity to the time of the composition. I adopt Pavis’s metaphor of ‘grain’ for culture, however, instead of an hourglass, the “grains of Chinese culture imported” have to pass through four layers (1) to (4)). In each of these layers, the ‘grains’ interact with the elements embedded in each layer, and are inevitably transformed throughout this process. The final product after the interactions is a Nô adaptation (5) of certain Chinese cultural imports. Figure (3) illustrates the performance of these “Chinese plays.” Whenever a “Chinese play” is selected to be performed it has to pass through two layers (layers (6) to (7)). First and foremost, a play is selected according to its coherence with the contemporary “sociopolitical and performance contexts (6).” The play
(1) Sociopolitical Contexts
(2) Identifying the “Basic Sources”
(3) Perspectives of the Adapter
(4) Choice and Composition of Dance and Song
(5) Work of adaptation (script of Nô play)

Figure 2: The Filter Model: Composition of a “Chinese play”

(6) Sociopolitical and Performance Contexts
(7) Preparatory work by actors (Mask, costume, modifications of the script)

(5a) Modified Work of adaptation

Figure 3: The Filter Model: Performing a “Chinese play”
chosen to be performed will then be reconstructed in the hands of the performers who make important decisions mainly concerned with the semiotic aspects of the performance, such as selecting masks and costumes (Preparatory work by actors (7)). The result of these adjustments is the “Modified Work of adaptation (script of Nô play) (5a).” Procedures illustrated in figure (3) will be repeated for each performance of the play.

(1) Sociopolitical Contexts

Prior to the composition of a play, the playwright needs to select the motif that is appropriate to the social and political contexts (at least during the moment of the creation). Of course, throughout the reception history of Chinese motifs, the sociopolitical environment always played a crucial role. All the earlier interpretations of Chinese culture were influenced, or sometimes governed, by politics, social directions, and so forth. Consequently, these interpretations, to various degrees, reflect the social values and political preferences of the time during which they were produced. Moreover, adapting earlier interpretations into a Nô play is equal to endorsing the sociopolitical values associated with those interpretations. Of course, it depends on how the earlier renditions are reinterpreted in the Nô play.

As discussed above, Nô theatre had close association with its audience throughout the Muromachi period. Given the changing social and political
relationship between China and Japan, as well as the intense changes in the
domestic social and political climate, Nô playwrights had to entertain different
audience and patrons so as to ensure their endurance and prosperity. In the
analyses of “Chinese plays” in the following chapters, we will see how China, the
cultural other, is represented in the changing dynamics of Self and Other.

(2) Identifying the “Basic Sources” (Honzetsu 本説)

The first step in the composition of a Nô play (including “Chinese plays”) is to identify the audience’s foreknowledge and perspectives of the central motif to be portrayed. Put differently, Nô playwrights seek out what the audience knows about the materials to be adapted so as to refashion them in ways that will captivate their interests and thus lead to the success of the play. Indeed, such a strategy of exploiting the audience’s foreknowledge is crucial in literary creations across cultures and time.

Modern scholars in the West have pointed out the importance of utilizing the audience’s preexisting knowledge of the original source in literary creation. Reception theory and reader-response theory concern about this very aspect of literature. In his groundbreaking article “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” Hans Robert Jauss claims that the manipulation of the audience’s foreknowledge is vital and inevitable in literature. He coins the term “horizon of expectations” to refer to the audience’s expectations informed by
their knowledge of a certain topic. Jauss argues that no literary work is absolutely new to the audience in the sense that it “predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions.” Jauss sees the process in the reception of a text as one that stimulates the reader’s memories and leads him to develop certain emotions. He emphasizes that even a new form of art is perceived through its association with other preexisting forms. Jauss suggests that this process follows a logical course with its beginning prompting the reader’s expectations for the “middle and end,” in which, governed by the specifics of the genre, the reader’s emotion can be maintained or altered. It is by evoking the reader’s horizon of expectations, which are manipulated by the author, that poetic effects are produced.

Some scholars have identified formulaic language, familiar themes and story patterns as key elements to engage the audience in traditional storytelling genres. In his seminal study of traditional epic that stems from oral tradition, John Miles Foley coins the term ‘traditional referentiality’ to signify the use of traditional phraseology, thematics, and story-patterns that cause audiences to think of a larger and echoic context than the current work, and bring the


116 Ibid.

lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual
performance or text.\textsuperscript{118} Foley states that traditional work is primarily built upon
preexisting elements and strategies that are inherited by the people of that
culture long before the completion of the present version or text. It is the
“author’s” manipulation of the traditional elements that gives the performance
or text meanings with reference to the tradition.\textsuperscript{119} These works, however, are not
repetitions of earlier texts, or performances, rather as Foley has put it, “[they
boast] the authority given it by the power of traditional referentiality, so that
each … summons the work or event or idea metonymically, causing that which is
immanent to become part of the artistic creation in the present time and
experience of the individual version or text.”\textsuperscript{120}

Such a utilization of the audience’s perceived knowledge is common in
Japanese literature. As Karen Brazell has pointed out, unlike the twentieth-
century American preference in which originality is valued, traditional Japanese
aesthetics favor allusion to, manipulation of, and variations on familiar
sources.\textsuperscript{121} Focusing on the audience’s knowledge and expectations in the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item[118] John Miles Foley, \textit{Immanent Art, : From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic.}
\item[119] Ibid., 8.
\item[120] Ibid., 10.
\item[121] Karen Brazell, ed., \textit{Traditional Japanese Theater: an Anthology of Plays}. (New York:
\end{thebibliography}
motifs by Muromachi playwrights. By the Muromachi period, knowing and alluding to literary precedents was well established as a necessary skill in literary creation. Longstanding poetic devices, such as the “pillow-word” (makura kotoba 枕詞, a conventional epithet or attribute for a word), the “pivot-word” (kakekotoba 掛け詞, a rhetorical scheme of word play), and “allusive variation” (honkadori 本歌取り, varying the conception of an earlier poem with a new one), are a few examples of the Japanese preference for alluding to precedents in order to create literary texture and historical depth.122

Such a strategy also extends to the use of earlier tales, for example, Genji monogatari 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji, early-eleventh century). In her study of the Nô plays inspired by The Tale of Genji, Janet Goff notes the advantage of using a well-known source by observing that, “it absolves the playwright of the need to expend valuable time establishing the identity of a character and that character’s legitimacy as a subject.”123 Goff further points out that such a technique “makes what is represented on stage more accessible to an audience, leaving spectators free to turn their attention to other aspects of the performance.”124

---

122 For a glossary of these poetic devices, see Robert Brower and Earl Miner, Japanese Court Poetry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961).

123 Janet Goff, Nô Drama and The Tale of Genji: the Art of Allusion in Fifteen Classical Plays (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3. Other scholars, such as Shelley Fenno Quinn, have also noted such merit. See Quinn, Shelley Fenno. “How to Write a Noh Play: Zeami’s Sandô.” Monumenta Nipponica 48:1 (Spring 1993), 61.

124 Goff, Nô Drama and The Tale of Genji, 3.
Moreover, literary creations often have a targeted audience in mind. Marco de Marinis’s notion of the “model spectator” and Wolfgang Iser’s idea of the “implied reader have illustrated such a phenomenon. Similarly, given the importance of audience patronage, as Zeami’s critical observations suggest, Muromachi Nô playwrights composed plays that targeted the foreknowledge of specific audience groups.

Questions that arise here are: how did the playwrights identify and react to the various horizons of expectations upheld by what they presumed to be model spectators? What aesthetic traditions that Nô audiences appreciated the most were subsequently incorporated into Nô plays? What strategies did Nô playwrights’ employ in such a process? What are the functions of Chinese source materials and why did the playwrights find it useful to bring China into their plays?

The western notions discussed above--horizon of expectations, traditional referentiality, and implied reader, can be translated into a Nô terminology—honzetsu 本説 ("basic sources," lit. ‘original telling/version’). Originally used in poetic criticism, honzetsu (modern Japanese: honsetsu) means the original source of a poem, or story, particularly those associated with Chinese poetry. It is also related to the poetic technique of allusion, such as “allusive variation” (honkadori

---

Thomas Hare defines *honzetsu* in Nō as the source or situation around which a Nō play is created.\textsuperscript{126} Western Nō scholars often translate the term into ‘source material’.\textsuperscript{127} However, I suggest another translation—‘basic sources’—which indicates the version of the story that is most commonly received by the majority of the audience of Nō (at least during the time of the composition of the play).

Based on the surviving writings on the art of Nō, Zeami Motokiyo was the first dramatist of Nō who used the term *honzetsu*. Zeami advocates the importance of selecting and treating the *honzetsu* in order to achieve the goals of their art. Based upon Zeami’s theories, the *tane/shu* 種 (seed) of a Nō play is the *honzetsu*, whereas the *hana* 花 (flower) is an intangible connection that occurs between performers and audience members. In one treatise, *Sandō* 三道 (The three techniques of Nō composition, 1423), Zeami thoroughly explains the dynamic between the *honzetsu* and performance, and how a playwright can create a balance in writing a good Nō play. He identifies three aspects of playwrighting:

First is understanding the *honzetsu* (shu 種); second, structuring the play (saku 作); third, writing the play (sho 書). Grasp the nature of the material in the source, work the three phases of ‘introduction-development-rapid

\begin{footnotes}
\item[127] For example, see Rimer and Yamazaki, *On the Art of the Nō Drama*, 148.
\end{footnotes}
conclusion (jo-ha-kyû 序破急)\textsuperscript{128} into five phases; then, gather the words, adding the modulation and writing line by line.\textsuperscript{129}

Zeami expands on the honzetsu of the play by highlighting one crucial element of the art of Nô—the nature of the lead character. He explicitly spells out the key elements of a good Nô play, that is, a lead character whose story the audience is familiar with and whose performance of dances and chants display his/her principal characteristics. He accentuates the importance of the implications for dancing and chanting:

The seed (shu) is the character in the honzetsu of the play who does the performing; understand the importance of that character who is the agent of dance and chant. This is, needless to say, because our art takes shape through dance and chant. No matter how well-known the character is in history or literary tradition, if the character is not the appropriate type to perform these two modes of dance movement and lyrical chant, then materialization of the visional affect will not be possible.\textsuperscript{130} Make sure to thoroughly understand this principle.\textsuperscript{131}

Zeami provides examples of ideal types of characters in accordance with their potential to appeal to different audience groups on religious or secular

\textsuperscript{128} Jo-ha-kyû (introduction-development-rapid conclusion) is a sequential rhythmic principle first appeared in gagaku 雅楽 (court music), and later adopted as the developmental phases in renga (linked verse) genre. It was then adapted to Nô as a principle of the structuring of a play.

\textsuperscript{129} Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 134. The modified translation is taken from Quinn, “Sandô,” 58.

\textsuperscript{130} The term ‘visional affect’ is coined by Shelley Fenno Quinn. See Quinn, “Sandô,” 59. The original in Japanese, kempû 見風, literally means ‘the style and atmosphere which is visible’. However, kempû goes beyond visual projection, by which Zeami is referring to the total effect manifested outward through the performance.

\textsuperscript{131} Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 134.
occasions. He lists three groups: first are those who are suitable for the performance of sacred dances and chants of kagura (Deity music), that is, celestial maidens, female deities, and shrine maidens. Second are male figures, for which Zeami considers gentlemen of artistic accomplishment such as Narihira, Kuronushi, and Genji most suitable. Third are female figures, for which he suggests Ise, Komachi, Giô, Gijo, Shizuka, Hyakuman, and other women of artistic accomplishment. He explains that these characters’ superb abilities in the entertainment of dance and chant make them ideal candidates for the lead character of a Nô play.

To Zeami, the honzetsu is indeed a vehicle through which the audience’s pre-established knowledge associated with that source may be activated. He advises selecting the “seed” (shu 種), the central character in the honzetsu of the play, which naturally lends itself not only to the performance modes (dance and chant), but also coincides with the audience’s expectations of encountering literary precedents.

---

132 Ariwara Narihira (825-880) and Ôtomo Kuronushi (ca. 9th century) were well-known waka (Japanese poetry) poets, both were enlisted as one of the Six Poetic Genesis. Genji is the protagonist of The Tale of Genji, the celebrated novel from the early eleventh century.

133 Lady Ise and Ono no Komachi were renowned waka poetess from about the tenth century. The latter was a legendary beauty and one of the Six Poetic Genesis. Giô and Gijo are fictional figures portrayed in The Tale of Heike. They are shirabyôshi dancers, that is, female entertainer dressed in male’s clothes who perform dances. Shizuka (no Gozen) was a shirabyôshi dancer of the twelfth century and lover of the well-known warrior Minamoto Yoshitsune. Hyakuman is the central character of a Nô play which was probably based upon folk tales. She dances and sings for the loss of her child.

134 Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 134.
Besides exploitation of literary precedents, Zeami also points to the power of collective memory to elicit audience response, even in the absence of a well-known figure. He takes into account those ‘new’ plays that have no traces of an original source and suggests that in the hands of an accomplished playwright, such plays nevertheless have the potential to move the audience:

For what is called made-up Nô, which has no honzetsu but is newly conceived and formed in connection with a noted place or historical site, there are times when the play can give rise to moving visional affect. This task demands the skill of a consummate master.\textsuperscript{135}

Although lacking an ideal honzetsu, the association with well-known places or historical sites will arguably summon a larger context stored in the audience’s minds and amplifies the potential for invoking effects through dance and chant. Therefore, one major quest for Nô playwrights is to identify the honzetsu that will be readily recognizable to the audience. The following chapters will analyze the cultural and artistic modeling within which Nô playwrights of the “Chinese plays” identified the honzetsu.

(3) Perspectives of the Adapter

The sole adapter in this process of composition is the playwright. Unlike Patrice Pavis’s Hourglass model, which has multiple adapters, such as translator of the text, director, designer, and actor in the production, Nô playwrights

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
usually undertake multiple tasks. The composition includes writing the text, deciding the music and dance arrangements and the stage design. With these elements in hand, the playwrights construct the theme and artistic effects of the play. Thus, the playwright is arguably the most important individual element in the preparation of a play.

In order to map out a theoretical framework to investigate the “Chinese plays” in question I will identify the Nô treatises written during the Muromachi age. However, there are no surviving records of other treatises, besides those written by Zeami, that ponder or offer instruction on the composition of a Nô play, or on the ranking and criteria of a good play. But this by no means suggests that the dramaturgy of other Muromachi Nô playwrights, at least those who wrote the surviving “Chinese plays,” is identical to that of Zeami. Nor does it mean that later playwrights adopted Zeami’s doctrine into their creative activities without making any adjustments. Nonetheless, the fundamental structure and strategies remained similar to what Zeami had written. This will be manifested by investigating the criteria of a successful Nô play.

Criteria of a Successful Play

When advising on strategies for competing in a Nô contest, Zeami tells his heir how to put on a successful performance, and in the process provides his definition of a good play:
This is quintessential. First of all, have a wide-ranging repertoire, and perform plays of different qualities from those of the opposing troupe. … [Nô] performance can be ranked in three categories: superior, average, and inferior … A play that is derived from an authentic “Basic sources” (honzetsu 本説), shows “novelty” (mezurashiki 珍しき), possesses “graceful beauty” (yūgen 幽玄), and has some “interesting qualities” which attract the audience (omoshiroki 面白き) should be considered a “good play” (yokinô 良き能).136

It is clear that the key factors of a successful performance are the quality of the play and the performance itself. According to Zeami, the authenticity of the original source and the performing skills of the actor are the two pillars of a first-ranked performance of a good play. Such criteria of a successful performance of a good Nô play epitomize the three principal aspects determining a play’s success. These are the original source selected and refashioned by the playwright, the performance given by the actor, and the audience for whom the play is performed and to whom it must make sense. Zeami does not rule out plays that lack some of these qualities. Rather, he emphasizes that these qualities only make sense when they are rated by an audience. Although it is the playwright and the performer who decide the material and the performing style to be used in a play, it is the audience’s knowledge of the original source, the performing style, and expectations that form the basis for determining its authenticity, creativity, and capacity to fascinate.

136 Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 30.
Evolving Aesthetic Ideals

The notion of *yûgen* ("graceful beauty") cited earlier as one of Zeami’s most prized qualities of a good play was further explored in later Nô treatises. However, it appears almost exclusively in the writings of Zenchiku, who expands the notion of *yûgen* by integrating Buddhist thoughts, performance, and dramaturgy. Such continuous emphasis on *yûgen* reflects the aesthetic preference of the prominent patron in Zenchiku’s time — the literary, political, military, and religious elites. Zenchiku wrote a set of treatises on *yûgen* that is rather different from that of the “Five Modes,” yet also serves the goals of Nô.

In the series of treatises using the *Rokurin ichiro* 六輪一露 (six circles and one dewdrop) symbolism, Zenchiku constructs seven symbols (six circles and one dewdrop) accompanied by texts to illustrate the generation of specific artistic effects and the process of developing higher levels of art by the performer.¹³⁷ Zenchiku embodies the purpose of Nô, the promoting of eternal life and prosperity, in the very first symbol, which he names the Circle of Longevity (*jurin* 寿輪; literally, ‘longevity ring/circle’).¹³⁸ In *Rokurin ichiro no ki* 六輪一露之記 (An account of the six circles and one dewdrop, 1455?), the illustration


¹³⁸ The Circle of Longevity recurs as the first circle in all the nine treatises associated with the Six Circle and One Dewdrop metaphor.
accompanying the first circle is a single-line circle that denotes the endless flow of life, and the notation reinforces Zeami’s idea of the purpose of Nô:

The Circle of Longevity is the fundamental source of the yūgen of song and dance. It is the vessel in which deep feelings develop upon viewing a performer’s movement and listening to his singing. Due to its round, perfect nature and eternal life span, it is called the Circle of Longevity.¹³⁹

The other six symbols, namely Circle of Height, Circle of Abiding, Circle of Forms, Circle of Breaking, Circle of Emptiness, and One Dewdrop, are each devoted to a pedagogical discussion of the articulation of specific artistic effects and attainment of different levels of artistry in one’s performance.

From the mid-fifteenth century on, particularly after the time of Zeami and Zenchiku, support from the shogunate and court drastically declined and Nô troupes had to turn to other groups of audience and patrons in the provinces. In general, these new audience groups were from a diverse social and political background, and were less culturally cultivated than were the court aristocrats and Ashikaga shogunate. Hence, Nô playwrights had to produce plays that were more attuned to the literary intelligentsia and aesthetic preferences of these new audiences. Consequently, qualities such as mezurashiki 珍しき (“novelty”) and omoshiroki 面白き (“intriguing appeal”) became increasingly popular.

¹³⁹ Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 324. The translation is taken from Thornhill, Six Circles, One Dewdrop, 25.
Zeami’s theoretical writings were influential throughout the Muromachi period, in terms of providing frameworks and terminology for composing plays and theoretical writings about the art of Nô. Surviving writings on Nô by actor-playwrights after the time of Zeami and Zenchiku mainly focus on performance details, such as costumes, props, dance movements, and music. There are some pedagogical writings, such as *Hachijô kadensho* 八帖花伝書 (Treatise on the transmission of the flower in eight chapters, 1573-1591), were clearly inspired by Zeami’s treatises in terms of the structure and rhetoric of the writings.

(4) Choice and Composition of Dance and Song

Nô is a musical dance drama, the story is almost exclusively told through the form of lyrical chant punctuated by dance movements. Although Western scholarship often refers to Nô as “Nô theatre” or “Nô drama,” it is important to keep in mind that Japanese from the Muromachi period to the present day have never attached the word “drama” or “theatre” (Jp. *geki* 劇) as a suffix to “Nô.” Rather they tend to refer to it simply as “nô,” or “nôgaku” (lit. Nô music, a modern term that refers to both Nô and Kyôgen). The word *gaku* 楽 (music) is an umbrella term for several traditional performances, including *bugaku* and *gigaku*, which have ritualistic overtones. Thus, referring to Nô as “nôgaku” suggests, to a certain extent, its ritualistic quality as a traditional performance. Nevertheless,
there is a corpus of plays that has a dramatic plot, which leads modern Japanese scholars to use the term *geki(teki)* 剧的 ("drama(tic)") when referring to these plays.\(^{140}\)

In Zeami’s criteria of a good Nô play cited earlier, Zeami underscores the importance of the performance to the success of any play. He states,

> If such a play is well performed and well received, it should be placed in the first category. In the case of plays that do not have all the qualities of a “good play,” but were written in accordance with the original sources without any flaws, if successfully performed, they should be put into the second category. As for plays that are showy and of bad quality, if the actor turns the faults of the original source to his advantage and applies all his skill and effort to performing well, the performance should be belong to the third category.\(^{141}\)

Zeami singles out *buga* 舞歌 (dance movement and lyrical chant) as the two basic modes of Nô. Shelley Fenno Quinn has pointed out that Zeami seems more concerned that the lead character “belong to a generic type noted for musical accomplishment than whether he/she is well-known characters (historical or fictional).”\(^{142}\) Zeami considers a play successful when its central character can be identified with musical modes of expression and has a quality

---

\(^{140}\) For example, the term *geki-teki*-Nô was used by Sanari Kentarô and Kitagawa Tadahiko. See Sanari Kentarô, *Yôkyoku taikan* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1982) and Kitagawa Tadahiko, *Zeami* (Tokyo: Chûô Kôransha, 1972).


\(^{142}\) Quinn, “*Sandô*,” 61.
that naturally brings about the dance movement. Such a concern derives from the two basic modes of Nô: buga nïkyoku (the two modes: dance movement and lyrical chant).

Structure of a Play

In Nô, all movements of the actors on stage are choreographed. Particularly, the dance movements, the lyrics, and the music are constructed in ways that allow the components to complement each other. The most important movements in a play are the dance pieces performed by the main character (shite), which are accompanied by either vocal or/and instrumental music.¹⁴³

These constructed dance pieces convey the emotion and the aesthetic qualities that the character embraces, and are the highlights of the entire play. These dance pieces are placed in crucial phases of the play that punctuate its theme and heighten its theatrical effects. Therefore, playwrights should construct dance pieces in a manner that best represents the character type in accordance with the basic sources (honzetsu) of the story regarding the character.

Each Nô play is constructed with small component parts (dan) and gradually increases its tempo as the story unfolds. The table in figure 4 shows the standard structure of a Nô play as advocated by Zeami. According to Zeami, the

playwright should apply the *jo-ha-kyû*, (‘introduction-development-rapid conclusion) progression in accordance with the different phrases of a play. This structure is the fundamental style of a noh play, but as Zeami adds that it is possible to have four or six parts in a play.\footnote{Omite and Katô, *Zeami Zenchiku*, 135.}

In addition, there are two important effects at certain important points of a play, which concern captivating the audience’s interest. They are what Zeami calls the “ear-opening 開聞” and “eye-opening 開眼” [effects]. In *Sandô*, Zeami explains:

> [T]he ear-opening and the eye-opening, in the course of one play, are positioned somewhere in *ha* and *kyû*. The ear-opening is that instant in which the two aural dimensions fuse into one impression. Put the content of the source for the play into words, and to that first aural dimension that opens the mind’s ear of all the audience—that is, to the written word that conveys the content—match the vocal expressiveness, thereby creating the aural impression of content and expressiveness as one sound; this is the locus of feeling whose beauty moves all present to admiration ... As for the eye-opening, there should be a revelatory point at which the feeling inspired by the visional affect is brought to consummation ... Hence, the ear-opening is the creation of the playwright; the eye-opening, the acting of the *shite*.\footnote{Quinn, “Sandô,” 82. Omote and Katô, *Zeami Zenchiku*, 141.}

These two effects are expressed by the two basic modes of Nô performance—“dance and lyrical chant” (*buga nikiyoku*). The lyrical chant that is sometimes accompanied by a short dance is usually placed in the fourth *dan*, whereas the long structured dance piece, usually accompanied by music only, is placed in the fifth *dan* (see figure 4).
Figure 4: Standard Structure of a Nô play
Types of Dance

Dance sequences in Nô can be categorized into three groups: dance to song, long instrumental dance, and action piece. The segment of ‘dance to song’ consists of three different types of dance accompanied by chant. They are kuse, kiri, and miscellaneous dances. Kuse dances are usually associated with female characters. It was believed that Kan’ami, Zeami’s father, adopted it from kusénmai, a kind of dance performed by female entertainers. Kiri dances are short dances performed at the conclusion of a play. Situated in the kyū phase (rapid conclusion) of the play, kiri dances have more dynamic and faster movements. Miscellaneous dances are short dances that do not fit as kuse or kiri. Many miscellaneous dances are performed by characters who belong to the grouping characterized as mad or distraught (monogurui 物狂い). Combining lyrical chant and dance movements, these dances express the fundamental nature of the main character.

The second group of dances is long instrumental dances (mai-goto 舞事). Yokomichi Mariō has listed twenty-one kinds of dance belonging to this category. But since some of them are different versions of the same dance, or only performed in one single play, I have abbreviated them into eight groups.

---

146 These terms are used in Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell, Dance in the Nô Theater: Plays and Scores (Ithaca, N.Y.: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, c1982), 145-258.

They are *jo-no-mai* 序の舞 (slow dance), *chi-ko-mai* 中の舞 (medium dance), *haya-mai* 早舞 (rapid dance), *otoko-mai* 男舞 (male dance), *kami-mai* 神舞 (deity dance), *gaku* 楽 (court dance), *kagura* 神楽 (Shintō dance), and *shishi-mai* 獅子舞 (lion dance). Karen Brazell and Monica Bethe, however, further simplified them into four groups: male dance (*otoko-mai*), quiet dance (*jo-no-mai*), court dance (*gaku*), and Shintō dance (*kagura*). The third group consists of vigorous, descriptive pieces (*hataraki-goto* 働き事). They are short pieces of dance that consist of relatively dynamic and wilder steps compared to other dance pieces. Besides the two hand drums and the flute, the stick drum that vigorously magnifies the tempo often accompanies the *hataraki* piece.

Among the above different dances the court dance (*gaku*) and the lion dance (*shishi-mai*) have strong Chinese overtones. Nevertheless, other dances are also incorporated into many “Chinese plays.” The following chapters will look into the role of dance in the construction of “Chinese plays.”

**Elements of Chanting**

Chanting (*utai*) in a Nô play consists of two parts—prose and verse. Whereas the prose is non-rhythmic and non-melodic that is plain dialogue, the verse is melodic and often poetic. The verse form usually consists of twelve

---

syllables, which resembles the fundamental unit of classical Japanese verse, the waka, which is made up of alternating hemistichs of seven and five syllables.

Zeami has written extensively on various topics of chanting. In Ongyoku kowadashi kuden (Treatise on musical and vocal production, 1419), he advises the vocalization of two emotions—“joy and auspiciousness (shûgen 祝言)” and “nostalgic melancholy (bôoku ぼうおく). This is derived from the twelve tones of classical Chinese music with the first six as ryo 吕, which are more lively, and the other six ritsu 律 of a lower and weaker tone.\textsuperscript{149} In his later treatises, such as Go’onyoku jôjô (Various matters concerning the five sounds of aural expression, ?1430s), Zeami expands his theory of vocalization and relates it to the themes of the plays. He develops a five-category paradigm, referred to as “Five Modes,” to discuss the different modes of musical and vocal performance in relation to the themes of plays. He divides representative plays into five groups: “auspicious expression” (shûgen 祝言), “graceful beauty” (yûkyoku 幽曲), “love attachment” (renbo 恋慕), “grief” (aishô 哀傷), “the sublime” (rangyoku 閒曲).\textsuperscript{150}

These terms were well-established notions in the poetic and performance works of the highbrow cultures of Nara and Heian Japan. Zeami was the first Nô

\textsuperscript{149} Omote and Katô, Zeami, Zenchiku, 76.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 198-204. A similar classification also appears in mentioned in Sandô (The Three Techniques of Nô Composition) and Go’on (Five sounds, ?1430s).
theoretician to use these terms in the writing of Nô treatises. The fact that these poetic terminologies were adopted into and continuously used by later theoreticians of Nô underscores the existence of a poetic diction in Nô. It also provides a glimpse of the ambitions of Zeami and later generations of Nô, who were all from a very humble social class.

Zeami considers the poetic tradition to be the backbone of chanting. In the citation given earlier, he alludes to the first piece of Japanese poetic criticism, *Kanajo* (The Japanese preface) of *Kokin waka shû* (The collection of ancient and contemporary poems, 905) by Ki no Tsurayuki, which had been very influential among Japanese poets. Zeami borrows Tsurayuki’s conviction that Japanese poetry “has its root in the human heart” and has the power that “moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of deities and spirits invisible to the eye, softens the relations between men and women, calms the hearts of fierce warriors.” Following in Tsurayuki’s footsteps, rather than...

---

151 Zeami first used this term in *Teachings on Acting Style and the Flower*. See Omote and Katô, *Zeami Zenchiku*, 29. *Shûgen* is a sub-group of Japanese poetry collection which categorizes the poems according to their themes. For example, *The Collection of Ancient and Contemporary Poems* (*Kokinshû*, 905).

152 The translation is taken from Earl Miner, *An Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 18. The relevant passage in its entity reads:

The poetry of Japan has its roots in the human heart and flourishes in the countless leaves of words. Because human beings possess interests of so many kinds, it is in poetry that they give expression to the meditations of their hearts in terms of the sights appearing before their eyes and the sounds coming to their ears. Hearing the warbler sing among the blossoms and the frog in his fresh waters—is there any living being not given to song? It is poetry which, without exertion, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of deities and spirits invisible to the eye, softens the relations between men and women, calms the hearts of fierce warriors.
emphasizing the Confucian concept of good governance, Zeami highlights the Buddhist notion of pacifying all souls, living or dead. The Chinese concept and reduces it to the pacification of the human heart.\textsuperscript{153} Surely Zeami knew well that this ultimate goal of Nô—to pacify and touch the hearts of all souls—would not only bring peace and prosperity to the country, but also meant that their troupe would enjoy the support of all audience groups.

This categorization of plays in accordance with theme and mode of performance was adopted by later theorists and play critics in the Muromachi and early Edo periods. The earliest allusion to Zeami’s view appears in Zenchiku’s treatises. Zenchiku, the son-in-law of Zeami, further explores the concept of “Five sounds” in three treatises.\textsuperscript{154} Zenchiku listed the same classification in \textit{Go’on no shidai} \textit{五音の次第} (Notes on the five sounds, 1455). In fact, the titles of the Five sounds (\textit{shūgen}, \textit{yūkyoku}, \textit{renbo}, \textit{aishô}, and \textit{rangyoku}) were used as terminology in the commentary on plays in later treatises of Muromachi and Edo Japan. For example, Shimotsuma Shôshin 下間少進 (1551-1616), an official of Honganji Temple in Kyoto and an amateur performer-theorist who

\textsuperscript{153} Similar allusion to the same lines from the “Great Preface” of \textit{The Book of Odes (Shi Jing)} also appear in later treatises of Zeami, including \textit{Yûgaku geifû goi} (Five levels of performance for the joy of art).

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Go’on no shidai} \textit{五音の次第} (Progression of the five sounds), \textit{Go’ongyoku jittei} \textit{五音十体} (the five sounds and ten styles, 1457), and \textit{Go’on sangyoku shû} \textit{五音三曲集} (Collection of the five sounds and three skills, 1460).
recorded the performance styles, stage directions, and costumes of various plays, uses the five terms to classify the modes of plays.155

Notes on the Selected “Chinese Plays”

One of the major challenges of this study is to select the “Chinese plays” to use as the exemplars for analyzing the portrayals of China in Nô. From the pool of the approximately two thousand extant plays including those that have been phased out of the present repertoire, and those that are still being performed today, I have selected ten plays that taken together provide a well-rounded representation spanning from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century.156 It was during this period that Nô developed into a mature art form even as it continuously reinvented itself to suit the various tastes of different groups of audiences. Moreover, all the “Chinese plays” were written during this time.157 These plays were written by playwrights, professional and semi-professional, of different generations who represent various portrayals of China within that time period in different sociopolitical contexts. This encompasses

---

156 I examined all the “Chinese plays” listed in the Nô kyôgen hikkei (Kokubungaku, bessatsu).

157 Some exceptions are the expanded or abbreviated versions of earlier plays. They are mainly derived from the plays Shakkyô 石橋 (Stone Bridge) and Shôjô 猿々 (The Orangutan).
prominent professional playwrights Zenchiku, Nobumitsu, and Zenpô, as well as semi-professional playwrights Hosokawa Nariyuki 細川成之 (1434-1511), an elite warrior who became a Zen monk, and Takeda Hōin Sadamori 竹田法印定盛 (1421-1508), a physician and a gifted Nô performer. I situate these plays within the artistic heritage of Nô and examine how these playwrights treat basic sources (honzetsu), if any, and (re)interpret the Chinese stories within the relevant sociopolitical contexts and artistic constraints. In addition, the selected plays showcase a variety of dance performances and themes that reveal certain important reasons that playwrights chose Chinese motifs.

The plays selected are Shôkun 昭君 (Lady Zhaojun), Yôkihi 楊貴妃 (Consort Yang), Seiôbo 西王母 (The Queen Mother of the West), Tôbôsaku 東方朔 (Dong Fangshuo), Hakurakuten 白樂天 (Bai Letian), Sanshô 三笑 (The three laughers), Shakyô 石橋 (The stone bridge), Ryôko 龍虎 (The dragon and the tiger), Zegai 善界 (Zegai), Tôsen 唐船 (The Chinese boat). I divided the ten selected plays into five groups according to the nature of the characters. They are “Chinese Beauties,” “Chinese Deities and Emperors,” “Chinese Literati,” “Exotic Creatures,” and “Visitors from China.”

This grouping of the plays is inspired by the influential categorization of role types in the artistic treatises of Zeami, which was adopted in later treatises of Nô. The earliest categorization of role types in Nô appears in the second chapter of Zeami’s Kaden 花伝. He lists nine role types in the following order: “women,”
“old men,” “characters without a mask,” “the crazed ones,” “priests,”
“warriors,” “deities,” “demons,” and “Chinese roles.” The key factor
underlying these role types is that the audience can easily recognize their stories
(“basic sources” 本説 honzetsu), and expect the character to perform dance and chant.

In most cases, “Chinese plays” of same role types have similar themes and
are rendered in similar fashions. Plays about the “Chinese Beauties,” Shôkun and
Yôkihi, tell their tragic stories and evoke sympathy from the audience. As
Chapter Four will demonstrate, such intimate portrayals were possible mainly
due to the interpretations in earlier Japanese literary works, particularly in
poetry. Plays on the “Chinese Deities and Emperors,” Seiôbô and Tôbôsaku, reveal
how foreign mythology was adapted in Nô so as to redirect the auspiciousness to
Japanese contexts. The plays Shakkyô and Ryôko provide examples of how “Exotic
Creatures,” that are mainly known through dance and paintings, are
transformed into Nô plays with spectacular dance sequence and socio-religious
overtones.

However, as the chapter on “Chinese Literati” will demonstrate, despite
the similarity of the role type, the plays Sanshô and Hakurakuten present
contrasting attitudes. Sanshô praises three Chinese individuals who, despite their
different beliefs (Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism), found harmony and joy

---
in friendship. *Hakurakuten* is an absolute reversal of Japanese attitudes toward the most renowned and influential Chinese poet Bai Juyi in premodern Japan. It is a fictitious story that makes use of the fame of the Chinese poet to justify the supremacy and originality of Japanese poetry. The play does so by transforming Bai Juyi into a spy who comes to Japan seeking the secrets of Japanese poetry.

Another example is presented in the chapter “Chinese Visitors” which features two plays, *Zegai* and *Tôsen*. Because of the different aims of the Chinese visitors, the two plays have contrasting themes, performance styles, and portrayals of foreigners. *Zegai* tells of a demon from China that comes to destroy the prosperity of Japanese Buddhism. The demon is expelled by the joint power of Buddhism and Shintô. The play thus celebrates and validates Japan as a blessed land. The other play *Tôsen*, however, presents a very different Sino-Japanese dynamic which is rarely seen in Nô. Two young Chinese come to Japan to take home their father, who was kidnapped and had been enslaved in Japan for over a decade. Because the father has acculturated and has two sons with his Japanese wife, he finds himself torn between the two groups of sons, and his social and moral obligations. The problem is solved as the Japanese lord eventually lets the Chinese man and all four of his sons leave Japan for China. And, the play ends with the Chinese man expressing his joy by dancing on the boat to China.
In addition, the selected plays showcase a variety of dance performances and thus reveal certain important purposes for portraying Chinese motifs. For example, the gaku 楽 (court dance) is unique to Chinese characters and thus a crucial element of “Chinese plays” in the repertoire of Nô. Some dance sequences of certain “Chinese plays” became so important that sometimes abbreviated versions of the plays were staged consisting mainly of the dance performance. The play Shakkyô is one example of such a play.

Moreover, the drastic changes in the diplomatic relations with China during the first half of the fifteenth century are reflected in some plays, such as in the contrasting treatments of Chinese visitors in Zegai and Tôsen. A comparison of basic sources for some plays reveals differing patterns of the Japanese reception of Chinese motifs. Some plays such as Shôkun and Yôkihi were written against a tremendous number of earlier literary sources depicting the Chinese motifs both in Japan and China, whereas plays such as Tôsen and Ryôko have none, or have minimal earlier sources to work with. Moreover, some of these plays, such as Sanshô and Shakkyô, call attention to the different media involved in the transmission of Chinese motifs. Specifically, motifs were introduced not only in literary works, but also in other artistic forms including paintings and dance.

The ten selected plays display a variety of Chinese images constructed in Nô within the sociopolitical contexts that reflect the employment of source
materials, and the artistic and philosophical standpoints of the playwrights as well as the composition of the text and performance. Written at various junctures in Sino-Japanese relations, the ten plays reflect a range of sentiments and political stances towards China held by audiences of Nô from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century.

One important proviso is needed here regarding my approach to these plays. I intend to approach these “Chinese plays” from the perspectives of the playwrights and audience groups in the Muromachi period. I do not assume that all the playwrights of “Chinese plays” were consciously striving to “represent” China in their plays. I apply the Filter Model introduced in Chapter Two to analyze these plays so as to systematically examine them from the four underlying variables (the four layers of filters mentioned earlier) in the composition of a Nô play. In Chapter Eight, I will address the issues of Other and Self, as well as Intercultural Theatre that became apparent through the case studies of the different “Chinese plays.”

Questions abound. To what degree did the sociopolitical milieu play a part in the interpretation of Chinese motifs? What are the “basic sources” for the plays? Are there any particular media, such as poetry, tales, or paintings, that predominate as the basic sources of the plays? How did the playwrights select among the sources available and incorporate them into their plays? Can we identify any patterns in the adaptations of the Chinese motifs in Nô? Were the
playwrights purposely addressing the issues of Other and Self in their portrayals of the Chinese characters? And, why did the playwrights need to (re)tell the Chinese stories? The following five chapters will seek answers to these questions.
CHAPTER 3

CHINESE BEAUTIES

The plays Shôkun 昭君 (Lady Zhaojun) and YÔkihi 楊貴妃 (Consort Yang) feature two Chinese historical beauties well-known in premodern Japan, Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (Jp. Ô Shôkun) and Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (Jp. Yô kihi) respectively. The two plays are distinctive in terms of their “basic sources” (honzetsu) and themes. Among all “Chinese plays,” their stories have the richest reception history and by the fourteenth century had penetrated into almost all major Japanese literary and artistic works. Both plays depict emotions such as sorrow and regret that are seldom found in other “Chinese plays,” but which are recurring themes of many Nô plays.

The ample reinterpretations of these two women and their stories as Chinese motifs in Japanese poetry allowed the playwrights to portray the sentiment of the Chinese figures in ways that are similar to the “Japanese plays.” One of the major themes in these reinterpretations is taken from Buddhist teachings that were popular among medieval Japanese, particularly the notion of impermanence and the belief that worldly attachments are obstacles to
enlightenment. Other themes featured in these two plays are the notions of “love attachment” (renbo 恋慕), and “grief” (aishô 哀傷). They are in fact mentioned among the five basic modes of musical and vocal performance introduced by Zeami in relation to the themes of plays in his treatise Go’ongyoku jôjô 五音曲条々, and later in Zenchiku’s Go’on shidai 五音次第. “Love attachment” (renbo), and “grief” (aishô), too, are not common in the other “Chinese plays.” Moreover, both Chinese beauties were, to a certain degree, victims of politics related to barbarians. Hence, the plays Shôkun and Yôkihi provide fruitful case studies of how Nô playwrights treated the vast preceding sources and refashioned the Chinese motifs with themes that suited specific aesthetic and socio-cultural contexts of their own time.

Shôkun 昭君 (Lady Zhaojun)

As the oldest surviving “Chinese play” and one of the oldest surviving Nô plays overall, Shôkun sheds light on the treatment of a Chinese motif in early Nô dramaturgy. The play tells the tragic story of Wang Zhaojun, an imperial consort of the Emperor Yuan (r. 48-31B.C.) who, for political reasons, was sent off to marry the Khan of the Xiong-nu, a barbarian king in the north. However, the Nô version depoliticizes the Chinese story and centers on Wang Zhaojun’s parents lamenting her parting from them and mourning her death in exile.
Sociopolitical Context [1]

*Shôkun* was attributed to Konparu Gon no Kami 金春権守 (fl. ca. late fourteenth century). Zeami’s treatise *Go’on 五音* lists *Shôkun* as a play of the Konparu troupe, and Zenchiku’s *Kabu zuinôki 歌舞髄脳記* attributes the play to Gon no Kami. Gon no Kami was a contemporary of Zeami’s father Kan’ami 観阿弥 (1333-1384) and the grandfather of Zenchiku. Later playwrights revised certain parts of the play so as to appeal to their contemporary audiences. Therefore, a close examination of the revisions of this earlier play will provide valuable information on the evolution of Nô from the late fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries that also involved the treatment of Chinese motifs.

It was during the second half of the fourteenth century that Nô theatre began its transformation to cater to the aesthetic preferences and sociopolitical stance of the Ashikaga shoguns. Shogun Yoshimitsu (1368-1408) was the first powerful patron of Nô, and provided tremendous support to Zeami’s troupe from the late 1370s. As the prominent military and political power of the Muromachi period, Ashikaga shoguns were interested in achieving cultural and literary fluency beyond, or at least on a par with that of Heian high culture. With the shogun Yoshimitsu’s support, Zeami’s troupe created Nô plays that are charged with poetic nuances. Zeami and Kan’ami not only composed new plays,

---

159 Omote and Katô, *Zeami Zenchiku*, 210 and 348-49.
they also revised earlier plays in ways that were attuned to the aesthetic and sociopolitical views of their patrons.

The Konparu, considered the oldest of the Yamato sarugaku troupes, was another prominent Nô troupe in Muromachi Japan. Although they lacked the support of the shoguns, they enjoyed the patronage of religious institutions.\(^{160}\) In the late fourteenth century and the early fifteenth century, their works were not as poetic as that of the Kanze troupe. However, in later generations, particularly during the time of Zenchiku (Gon no Kami’s grandson), their plays became very rich in poetic and religious content.

The Wang Zhaojun motif involves diplomatic policies between China and the barbarians. In an analogous fashion, the play Shôkun may be seen to comment on Japan’s relations with China. It is certain that Shôkun was written between the late fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries. The Ashikaga shogunate was in the process of establishing trade and diplomatic relations with the Ming Chinese government during the second half of the fourteenth century. The official trading relation started in 1404 but was interrupted between 1411 and the 1430s due to changes in foreign policies.

Nonetheless, a close reading of Shôkun reveals that political issues are not the focal point of the Nô play. Rather, the playwright interwove several folktales

and retold the Chinese story from a new perspective, which concentrates on the 
lament of Wang Zhaojun’s parents over her tragic fate. As I will demonstrate in 
the following, such a depiction was possible due to the existence of various 
reinterpretations of the Chinese motif in major Japanese literary works, through 
which the Nô audience became familiar with the story of Wang Zhaojun.

Identifying the “Basic Sources” of Shôkun [2]  
Chinese Interpretations of Wang Zhaojun’s Story

The following discussion examines Chinese materials about Wang 
Zhaojun that were imported into Japan by the Heian period and still existed in 
fifteenth-century Japan. The story of Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 was told in Chinese 
oficial and unofficial historical texts, poetry, theatre, paintings, and so forth. 
From the first century B.C. to the present day, each interpretation reflects not 
only narrative conventions within specific social contexts, but also the influences 
of earlier portrayals. Recurring themes in Chinese interpretations of Wang 
Zhaojun’s story can be summarized in three points: first and most obvious, she is 
an exemplar of political exile; second, she is the epitome of a virtuous female; 
third, she is a victim of political corruption.

With Confucian teachings at work in most of the portrayals, Zhaojun’s 
good virtue as a Chinese female is often praised. Her virtue is manifested 
through the choices she made before and after her exile to the barbarian land.

One example is Han shu 漢書 (History of Han) written by Ban Gu 班固 (A.D. 32-
92), the first piece of writing depicting Wang Zhaojun’s story. It portrays Wang Zhaojun as an obedient and passive woman who follows the orders of her husbands, even marrying her own son, a barbarian practice in conflict with her Chinese morality. It tells that Emperor Yuan presented one of his consorts Wang Qiang (Wang Zhaojun) to the barbarian king Hu Shan-yu (the leader of the Xiongnu). Wang Zhaojun gave birth to a son, whom she married and had two daughters with, after the death of Hun Shanyu. However, in *Hou hang shu* 後漢書 (History of the late Han), compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445), Wang Zhaojun is depicted as a strong individual who volunteers to be one of the five consorts to be sent off as a concubine to the barbarian king. She is not motivated by a desire to save the empire, but by her resentment at the emperor’s neglect of her through the years. Other non-official works also build up the narrative around Wang Zhaojun’s virtue. For example, *Qin cao* 琴操 (The lore of the lute) by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192), a collection of stories glorifying virtuous historical women, depicts that Wang Zhaojun volunteers to be sent as a consort to the barbarian king, and later refuses to follow the barbarian custom of marrying her own son after her husband’s death. She commits suicide in protest.

---


162 No reason is provided for the emperor’s neglect of Wang Zhaojun, although motifs of the portrait and the corruptive painters already appeared a century ago, in the *Xijing zaji* (Miscellanea from the western capital).

A new element—the fallacious portrait—is introduced in *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 (Miscellanies from the western capital, 3rd century).\(^{164}\) It tells of Wang Zhaojun’s refusal to bribe the painter, who misrepresents her beauty in her portrait, and was in part responsible for her tragedy.\(^{165}\) The portrait ties Wang Zhaojun’s incorruptible fortitude, the emperor’s regrettable mistake, and the unethical court painters together to accentuate Wang Zhaojun as a victim of a corrupt system.


Since there were many women in the harem of Emperor Yuan [r. 48-33 B.C.], he didn't have a chance to see them regularly. So he had painters do their portraits, and on consulting the portraits he would summon women to his bed. The court ladies all bribed the painters, some giving as much as a hundred thousand taels, and at the very least offering no less than fifty thousand. Wang Zhaojun alone refused to pay a bribe, and as a result she did not get to see the Emperor.

The Xiong-nu came to court seeking a beautiful woman to be the Khan’s bride. Thereupon His Majesty consulted the portraits and chose Wang Zhaojun to go. When she was leaving, he summoned her to an audience. Her features were the loveliest in all the harem; she was quick in her replies and graceful in her bearing. The Emperor regretted it, but her name had already been decided on. The Emperor had repeatedly commended her to the foreigners, so he couldn't make an exchange. He then made a thorough investigation of what had happened, and the painters were all beheaded in the marketplace, and the vast fortunes of their households were all confiscated.

Among the painters was Mao Yan-shou of Du-ling; in drawing the human form, he always captured the true image of beauty, ugliness, youth, and age. Chen Chang of An-ling and Liu Bai and Gong Kuan of Xin-feng were all skilled in catching the moving forms of cattle, horses, and birds in flight, but in the beauty of the human form they were not equal to Mao Yanshou. Yang Wang of Xia-du was a skilled painter, particularly in the use of color; Fan Yu was also good at using colors. On the same day they were all beheaded in the marketplace. Thereafter, painters were rather scarce in the capital.

From then on, the fallacious portrait and the corrupt political system became recurring themes of Wang Zhaojun’s story, particularly in poetry. The majority of the poems expresses sympathy for her tragic life and criticizes the political situations that led to a tragic end. The following are poems by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846), whose works were very popular and influential in pre-modern Japan.¹⁶⁶ Bai Juyi composed three poems on the Wang Zhaojun motif. The first one entitled 王昭君二首 (Two poems on Wang Zhaojun, 788) reads:¹⁶⁷

Her face covered with the barbarian desert, her hair wind-blown
Her dark eyebrows faded, her face turned pale
Sorrow and adversity tormented her so completely that
Now she looks like the one in the portrait
The Han envoy asks for a message to be delivered.
Ask when they will send gold to redeem me this delicate beauty
If the Emperor asks about my appearance
Don’t tell him that I am not as beautiful as I was in the Han palace

¹⁶⁶ Bai Juyi’s popularity in Japan is evidenced by Japanese citing his work as the best of its kind. For example, in Makura no sōshi 枕草子 (The Pillow Book), Sei Shōnagon comments that the Collection of Bai’s Works as the best of writings. Indeed, Heian Japanese considered him as the representative of Chinese poetry, and his works were the most alluded to in early Japanese literature. Some scholars suggest that Bai Juyi’s use of Chinese language is relatively easy to understand, thus contributed to his popularity among the Japanese. However, as some other scholars suggested, the fact that Bai Juyi published the collection of his work earlier than his contemporaries did theirs, may have meant that it was imported earlier to Japan, perhaps helping to ensure his popularity over other Chinese poets.

¹⁶⁷ Bai Juyi ji jianjiao, trans. Zhu Jincheng (Shanghai : Shanghai guji chubanshe), 870.
The other two poems are more in the vein of political satire. The one entitled *Zhaojun yuan* 昭君怨 (*The sorrow of Zhaojun, 817*) depicts Wang Zhaojun’s resentment over never having had a chance to serve the Chinese Emperor. The other one, entitled *Guo Zhaojun cun* 過昭君村 (*Passing the village of Zhaojun, 819*), tells Wang Zhaojun’s ill-fated life story and ends with a satirical criticism by depicting all the young girls in Wang Zhaojun’s home village burning their faces to avoid following in the footsteps of Wang Zhaojun.

The story of Wang Zhaojun is also explored in other media, including theatre and painting. The most well known play is the Yuan dynasty drama entitled *Han gong qiu* 漢宮秋 (*Autumn in the Han palace, late thirteenth century*). One characteristic of Yuan drama is the transformation of historical and fictional stories that often amplify the romantic aspects of the story, a feature exemplified by *Autumn in the Han Palace*. As Kimberly Besio has pointed out, the

---

168 Ibid., 1051.

169 Ibid., 578.

play introduces an unprecedented portrayal of Wang Zhaojun’s story, that is, a love romance between her and the Chinese Emperor. In *Autumn in the Han Palace*, Wang Zhaojun and the Chinese emperor are in love before the barbarian king posts a threat to the country. After his lover is sent to the barbarian land, the Chinese emperor laments his ill-fated love. Again, Wang Zhaojun is, on the one hand, treated as a political victim when the Emperor decides to marry her off to avoid political disturbance; and on the other hand, she is glorified for her female virtue, as she commits suicide along her journey to marry the barbarian king, at the border of Han China and the barbarian land.

Along with other Chinese historical figures, such as Yang Guifei, Wang Zhaojun was one of the popular subjects for pictorial representation. Among the numerous paintings portraying the story of Wang Zhaojun, one recurring theme is her political exile to the barbarian land, epitomizing both her grief and her beauty. A twelfth-century handscroll ink-painting entitled *Consort Ming Crossing the Frontier* 明妃出塞図 by Gong Suran 宮素然, which now survives in Japan, depicts this very motif. The painting illustrates Wang Zhaojun and her entourage

---


172 The latest dramatization of the subject was written by Cao Yu (1910-?), a seminal playwright of modern Chinese drama, entitled *Wang Zhaojun* 王昭君 (1978). The image of Wang Zhaojun is drastically changed. Under the heavy influence of his political agenda, Cao Yu transforms Wang Zhaojun into an icon for interracial and intercultural exchanges. In the preface of the printed script, Cao Yu reveals, “Former Prime Minister Zhou En-lai commissioned me to write this historical play. I comprehend his intention – to employ this subject matter to celebrate the unification of and cultural exchanges among all ethnic groups in our nation.” See Cao Yu, *Wang Zhaojun* (Szechuan: Szechuan renmin chubanshe, 1979), 1.
leaving Han China for the Xiongnu Kingdom. In the painting, Wang Zhou-jun, dressed in the barbarian (Xiong-nu) style, rides a horse, whereas her Han Chinese attendants are all weeping with one arm covering their faces. Her only female attendant is carrying a lute and gazing backward to the Han capital. At the end of the scroll, there is a seal of the Zhaofu shi (High commissioner for pacification) which suggests that the painting might have been a present from China to a foreign country. The striking similarity between the painting and preceding poetry on the subject suggests the intertextual references between the two genres.

As shown above, Chinese portrayals of Wang Zhaojun’s story, particularly in literary works, are often charged with sociopolitical agendas. With political exile the core of her story, various elements were added as the interpretation evolved, ranging from the emphasis on Zhaojun’s virtue in accordance with the ideal standards of the Confucian female, to Zhaojun as a victim of corruption, and a love relationship between Zhaojun and the Chinese emperor. It was also noted that the Chinese materials discussed above were imported into Japan, many by the tenth century. However, there is no surviving

---

173 Osaka Municipal Museum of Fine Arts and San Francisco Center of Asian Art and Culture, Osaka Exchange Exhibition: Paintings from the Abe Collection and other Masterpieces of Chinese Art (San Francisco, San Francisco Center of Asian Art and Culture, 1970), 35.

174 Zhaofu shi (High Commissioner for Pacification) was an official position that existed from the time of Emperor Kao-tsung of the Southern Sung to Emperor Ning-tsung at the beginning of the thirteenth century.
record of the importation of Yuan drama to Japan, and in any case, the Yuan plays are very different in terms of the focus and the theme of the plays. With these characteristics in mind, the following discussion will examine Japanese interpretations prior to the emergence of the Nô play.

Japanese Reception of the Wang Zhaojun Motif in Poetry

In contrast with the Chinese works discussed, condemnation of corruption and praise for Wang Zhaojun’s virtues are absent in Japanese retellings of Wang’s story. However, Heian Japanese authors retained the motif of political exile, and focus on Wang Zhaojun’s grief and suffering in exile. Japanese interpretation of the Wang Zhaojun motif prior to the Muromachi period can be generally divided into three chronological phases, in poetry, in fictional and historical tales, and in collections of Chinese and Buddhist tales. Moreover, there were also pictorial representations of the Chinese story. However, due to the lack of surviving examples, our discussion of pictorial representation of the Chinese story inevitably depends on descriptions found in literary texts. The first phase of interpreting the motif, that of poetry, includes classical Chinese and Japanese verses written by Japanese poets from the late seventh to mid-eleventh centuries. Portrayals of Wang Zhaojun’s story in this phase are similar to the Chinese interpretations discussed above, that is, they focus on the exile by depicting her sorrow and beauty fading in the barbarian land. Some of these poems were
canonized and significantly influenced subsequent Japanese interpretations of the Chinese story, and thus warrant a look.

*Kanshi 漢詩 (Poetry in Classical Chinese)*

The earliest reinterpretation in a Japanese literary work of Wang Zhaojun’s story appears in *kanshi* 漢詩 (poetry in classical Chinese) composed by Japanese. Four extant collections of early *kanshi*, *Ryôunshû* 凌雲集 (A collection from above the clouds, 782-814),175 *Bunka shûreishû* 文華秀麗集 (A collection of glories and graces, 818),176 *Keikokushû* 経国集 (A collection of managing the country, 827),177 and *Fusôshû* 扶桑集 (A collection of Japan, 999?), all contain poems on the Wang Zhaojun motifs. These poems focus on Wang Zhaojun’s lament about her journey to exile and the harsh weather in the barbarian land in

---

175 Ono no Minemori, the compiler of *Ryôunshû* 凌雲集 (A Collection from above the clouds) gathered ninety poems by twenty-three poets, in which twenty-two are by Emperor Saga, who ordered the collection. The ten topics are in Chinese fashion, whereas the verses are of 7- and 5-character lines. The poem on Wang Zhaojun is the earliest Japanese rendition of her story. It reads:

Snow flurry falling darkens the desert sky
Snow at the border so severe, the border so cold
Gazing at the sun in Chang-an throughout the journey
The color at dawn in the East is heartbreaking

See *Gunsho ruijû*, vol. 8 (Gunsho ruijû kanseikai, 1932), 465.

176 *Bunka shûreishû* 文華秀麗集 (A Collection of Glories and Graces, 818), also ordered by Saga (r. 809-813), compiled 148 poems by twenty-six poets. The five poems on Wang Zhaojun were composed on the occasion of an imperial gathering in which Emperor Saga composed the first poem and four court officials responded with their renditions.

177 Ordered by Emperor Junna (r. 823-833) the collection contains various topics that evoke a model reign.
which her beauty fades. For example, Emperor Saga’s poem anthologized in 

*Bunka shûreishû* reads:

Leaving the pylons of Han China at a young age  
Entering the Huns’ gate with sorrow  
Thousands of miles away afar  
A journey of no return  
The desert damages her silky sidelocks  
Wind and frost ravage her jade-like face  
Only the moon of Chang-an still  
Shines and accompanies her on the mountain ranges crossed.\[^{178}\]

弱歳辞漢闕  
含愁入胡関  
天涯千万里  
一去更無還  
沙漠壊蝉鬢  
風霜残玉顔  
唯餘長安月  
照送幾重山

Two elements introduced in these poems recur in later retelling of Wang Zhaojun’s story and play an important role in the reception that follows. The first element is the lute, which appears in the poem by Fujiwara no Yoshio 藤原是雄 (d. 831) included in *Bunka shûreishû* 文華秀麗集. The lute, often associated with Wang Zhaojun’s image in China, is highlighted in the last couplet, which reads, “the tune of the lute full of grief and resentment/how would I want to play it (琵琶多哀怨/何意更為弾).”\[^{179}\] The lute motif was also depicted in the poem by

\[^{178}\] Gunsho ruijû, vol. 8, 478.  \[^{179}\] Ibid.
Tachibana no Aritsura 橘在列 (d. 953) in *Fusōshū* 扶桑集.\(^{180}\) The poem illustrates Zhaojun’s journey to the north. It reads:

Further and further, the moon upon the Han palace sees me off
Farther and farther, the clouds of sand in the desert get darker still
On the horse, she plays a melancholy tune on the lute
The barbarians moved to tears can’t bear to listen

The second motif is a mirror, and appears in the last couplets of the poem in *Keikokushū* 経国集 (A collection of managing the country, 827).\(^{181}\) It reads:

Knowing well that my figure is no longer as beautiful as it was
Why would I bother looking into the mirror?

The five poems on the motif of Wang Zhaojun compiled in the *Bunka shūreishū* were composed in a gathering led by the Emperor Saga. It is probable that a poem or painting was used as a stimulus for the poetry composition. In any case, it is more apt to conclude that in the realm of *kanshi*, the foci seem to be on depicting Wang Zhaojun’s sorrow during her exile to the barbarian land and the harsh environment in exile.

---

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 564.
\(^{181}\) Ibid., 530.
The popularity of Wang Zhaojun’s story is evidenced by the fact that it occupies the only section devoted to a Chinese figure in a Heian collection of poetry—*Wakan rôei shû* 和漢朗詠集 (Collection of Japanese and Chinese poetry to recite, 1013). Compiled by Fujiwara no Kintô 藤原公任 (966-1041) in about 1013 as a wedding gift for his daughter, the collection included 216 Japanese *waka* poems by Japanese poets and 588 couplets extracted from Chinese poems by Chinese poets. Structurally modeled after the *Kokin wakashû* 古今和歌集 (Collection of ancient and modern poems, 905), the collection is divided into twenty parts with individual topics, such as Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Congratulations, Partings, Love, and so forth. Only one section is devoted to a historical figure, and that is—Ô Shôkun 王昭君 (Ch. Wang Zhaojun). *Wakan rôei shû* is often deemed the most influential collection of Chinese poems, and was canonized as the ‘textbook’ of Chinese poetry and calligraphy for centuries in Japan.182

The compiler Kintô’s method of juxtaposing Chinese and Japanese poems not only demonstrates the “process of assimilation” of Chinese poetry, but also promotes Japanese poetic creativity.183 The structure of the section on Wang Zhaojun provides a good example. The section consists of three parts: a couplet

---


extracted from Bai Juyi’s poem entitled *Wang Zhaojun*, six Chinese couplets composed by Japanese court officials on the Chinese motif, and a Japanese poem (*waka*) by Fujiwara no Sanekata 藤原実方 (d. 998) on the sorrow of exile.\textsuperscript{184} Bai Juyi’s verse is cited in an earlier poem entitled *Wang Zhaojun er-shou* 王昭君二首 (Two poems on Wang Zhaojun, 788).\textsuperscript{185} This poem was included in Bai Juyi’s collected works, *Bai shi zhang qing ji* (Collection of Bai’s works 白氏長慶集, 825), which was imported into Japan in the mid-ninth century.\textsuperscript{186} Although Bai Juyi’s satirical style is evident in the poem, political criticism did not seem to appeal to Japanese readers. Rather, their preferences were for verses having few political overtones that were easy to comprehend and identify with. Moreover, as I will discuss later, paintings of Wang Zhaojun existed in Heian Japan. Thus, by selecting the couplet that makes direct reference to her portrait, Kintô adds a dimension.

Stylistically, too, Kintô was well aware of the preferences of the audience. As in the ninth century, Japanese literati preferred a shorter poem, the thirty-one-syllable poem (*waka*), over long poems (*)chôka*). Taking only one couplet from a long Chinese poem suited the Japanese *waka* poetic style. Although this act may

\textsuperscript{184} The combination of the six Chinese couplets by Japanese are: four by Ôe no Asatsuna 大江朝綱, one by Ki no Haseo 紀長谷雄 (845-912), and one attributed to Minamoto no Fusaakira 源英明.


\textsuperscript{186} *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku*, in *Zoku Gunsho ruijû* (Gunsho ruijû kanseikai, 1932), 48.
seem to risk taking the verse out of its original context, in fact, for the compilers and their audience, it was a simple but useful way to suppress Chinese social and political contexts that were foreign, and of little interest to Japanese.

The first six couplets are in classical Chinese:

(1)
Her body long decayed into bones in the barbarian land
Her house vacant, a deserted abode of Han China

身化早為胡朽骨
家留空作漢荒門

Ki no Haseo (紀長谷雄 – 845-912)

(2)
Dark-green eyebrows, rouged cheeks—embellished looks
In tears, leaves home and journeys to the sandy frontier

翠黛紅顏錦繡粧
泣尋沙塞出家郷

Ôe no Asatsuna (大江朝綱 886-957)

(3)
Border winds cut her autumnal feelings
The frontier river runs, adding streaks of tears shed at night

邊風吹斷秋心緒
隴水流添夜淚行

Ôe no Asatsuna (大江朝綱 886-957)

(4)
One single blast of a Tartar horn – a dream after the frost
Ten thousand mile away from the Han Palace –
a broken heart under the moon

漠宮万里月前腸
胡角一声霜後夢

Ôe no Asatsuna (大江朝綱 886-957)
(5)  
If Zhaojun had bribed the painter  
Undoubtedly she would have served the Han emperor all her life

昭君若贈黃金赂
定是終身奉帝王

Ôe no Asatsuna (大江朝綱 886-957)

(6)  
Several rows of secret tears beyond the lonely clouds  
One fleck of sad eyebrow by the setting moon

数行暗涙孤雲外  
一點愁眉落月邊

Minamoto no Fusaakira (源英明 ?-939)187

In depoliticizing the story of Wang Zhaojun, Japanese poets shifted light onto her  
grief of exile. Although couplet numbers one and five can be read as a satirical  
political statement, the other four couplets are more open in that they describe  
only the emotion of Wang Zhaojun during her journey of exile, not the political  
circumstances precipitating it. Such emphasis on the motif of exile not only  
resembles that of the poems in the four kanshi collections, but also is  
paradigmatic for subsequent depictions of Wang Zhaojun’s story. Indeed, Ôe no  
Asatsuna’s couplet, “it is the single blast of a Tartar horn—a dream after the  
frost/Ten thousand miles away from the Han Palace – a broken heart under the  
moon” attained a canonical status and was frequently cited in later works.

187 Some copies of the Wakan rôei shû attribute this poem to Sugano no Meimei 菅野名明.
Kintô went one step further in acknowledging and celebrating the Japanese response to the continental culture. Kintô ends the section with one Japanese *waka* poem—an indigenous poetic form of Japan. The poem reads:

The cuckoo hidden in the mountain deep at dusk,
not even a soul to hear his cry of solitude.

あしびきの山がくれなる時鳥
きく人もなきねをのみぞなく

The inclusion of this poem reveals that the compiler Kintô, and probably his audience also, consider the heart of Wang Zhaojun’s story to be sorrow in exile. The Japanese poem was composed by Fujiwara no Sanekata 藤原実方 and had already appeared in an earlier collection, the imperial anthology *Shûi wakashû* 拾遺和歌集 (*Collection of gleanings of Japanese poems*, 1005-1011?) which was also compiled by Fujiwara no Kintô. Sanekata was one of the earliest victims of political exile. He composed the poem upon hearing the cry of a cuckoo during his lonely life in the deserted woods during exile to the northern wilds of Michinoku where he eventually died. Despite the absence of reference to Wang Zhaojun’s story, the sense of abandoned loneliness in an unknown land resembles that of Wang Zhaojun’s feeling in exile. Kintô certainly did not choose the *waka* poem the way he selected the Chinese couplets by Japanese poets. Rather than presenting historical information, Kintô sought to evoke the inner feeling, by appealing to the local, established imagery that this poem provided.
Kintô’s treatment of the Chinese motif in this section, in a general sense, resembles Heian Japanese literati’s assimilation of Chinese literary works. Kintô cannibalized Bai Juyi’s poem and selected that portion of it most attuned to the sensibilities of the Japanese audience. He then supplied selective couplets in Chinese by Japanese poets that showcase their linguistic and poetic talents in classical Chinese. At the end, he highlighted the Japanese literary interpretation of the same motif—sorrow in exile, employing the familiar imagery of Japanese *waka* poetry, and thus displaying the Japanese poet’s ability to express his emotions in his own vernacular language and poetic tradition’s sensibilities. These poems, complemented by a rich array of visual art, contributed to the phenomenal influence *Wakan rôei shû* had on succeeding Japanese literature and arts, and its enduring status as a sourcebook of exemplars of Chinese poetry and calligraphy. Kintô presented *Wakan rôei shû*, as a wedding gift for his daughter, not in the form of a book or a scroll, but as a set of nearly two-hundred sliding screen doors, on which each poem was accompanied by a small painting. Indeed, the screens showcased not only the Kintô’s family’s accomplishment in Chinese and Japanese poetry, but also in calligraphy and painting.

**Japanese Waka Poetry**

Although adopting Chinese motifs as verse-topics was not a common practice in Japanese *waka* poetry in the Heian period, Wang Zhaojun and Yang
Guei-fei are the exceptions that appealed to Japanese *waka* poets. Freed from constraints of Chinese language and poetic form, like Fujiwara no Sanekata, other Japanese poets were able to interpret the Chinese story in ways that truly represented their feelings. Indeed, this first generation of interpretations in Japanese *waka* poetry set the tone for later retelling of the Chinese motifs in terms of the choice of theme and poetic sentiment. The earliest extant Japanese *waka* poem that explicitly mentions Wang Zhaojun was composed by the female poet Akazome Emon 赤染衛門 (976-1041), a contemporary of Kintô’S. Entitled Ô shôkun o yomeru 王昭君をよめる (*On Wang Zhaojun*), the poem reads:188

> Tears of missing the home I am accustomed to
> Falling among dew on this road along which I grieve

> なげきこし道の露にもまさりけり
> なれにし里を恋ふるなみだは

The poem offers an interpretation of Wang Zhaojun’s story from her perspective which is rare in China. It shares similar insight and motif with the *kanashi* from *wakan rôei shû* cited earlier. However, writing in Japanese, Akazome not only liberates herself from using the Chinese lexical terms, such as ‘Tartar horn 胡角’, ‘Han Palace 漢宮’, and ‘lute 琵琶’, but also makes it possible to

---

employ Japanese poetic expressions, such as tsuyu 露 (dew), to symbolize the inner feeling of Wang Zhaojun.

A century later, in Shinsen rōeishū 新撰朗詠集 (A new collection of poetic recitations, 1122-1133), another Japanese waka poem was grouped under the topic Ō Shōkun 王昭君 (Wang Zhaojun). Composed by Priest Kaien 懐円法師 (?eleventh century), the poem reads:

With every look in the mirror, how painful the reflection is. If there had been no attraction, would she/I have been afflicted so?

見るたびに鏡の影のつらきかな かからぎりせばかからましやは

Employing the motif of the mirror that first appeared in Keikokushū 経国集, the poem is open to two possible interpretations of who is looking into the mirror. One possibility is that it is Wang Zhaojun who is looking into the mirror. Seeing her own image reflected, she regrets that her beauty has led her to a tragic ending. Another possible interpretation is that seeing Wang Zhaojun’s image reflected, some other person laments her tragic life. As I will argue later in this chapter, this poem should be read as a depiction of the emotion of someone other than Wang Zhaojun, the Chinese emperor or her parents.

---

189 Shinsen rōeishū (A new collection of poetic recitations, 1122-1133) is an updated version of the Wakan rōei shū. It follows the structure of Wakan rōeishū, yet replaces the Chinese couplets and waka poems with those by a later generation of Japanese poets.

Along with Akazome Emon’s poem, the poem was selected as a sample under the topic “Wang Zhaojun” in several Heian works, including Shinsen rōeishū 新撰朗詠集, Toshiyori zuinô 俊頼髓腦 (Toshiyori’s poetic essentials, ?1115), and Hōbutsu shū 宝物集 (A collection of treasures). As the reinterpretation of Wang Zhaojun’s story evolved, the mirror motif recurs in both poetry collections and the storytelling genre, such as Kara monogatari, Kankoji wakashū 漢故事和歌集 (Collection of Japanese poetry and the associated Chinese tales, mid to late Muromachi period), Fuboku wakashô 夫木和歌抄 (Handbook of Japanese poems, ?1310). For example, the poem in Fuboku wakashô alludes to the verse of Priest Kaien’s cited above. It reads:

If only it would appear to me—even if it is invisible, that remembered Mirror. Ah, that she has gone so far as to have turned herself into it!

みえばやな見えざりとも思ひ出る
かがみに身をもかへてけるかな

Japanese Reception of the Wang Zhaojun Motif in Tales

The next phase of assimilation of the Wang Zhaojun motif occurred in fictional and historical tales, the most well-known example of which is Genji monogatari 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji, ?1010), relates the life and romances of a Heian nobleman with major focus on the male protagonist, Hikaru Genji 光源氏.

191 Hōbutsushū is an early Kamakura setsuwa collection

192 Fuboku wakashô is a late Kamakura privately selected waka collection/handbook.
The author Murasaki Shikibu was well versed in Chinese and Japanese literatures. Well aware of the social norm that considered a female’s knowledge of Chinese literature as socially improper for women, Murasaki Shikibu managed to position herself adroitly in the ‘Chinese script vs. Japanese script’ spectrum in her fiction. She does not retreat from utilizing her knowledge of Chinese literary writing, but, rather tactfully adopts Chinese literary works in manners that enrich the narrative and complement the rendering of the characters’ emotions.

In Genji monogatari, Wang Zhaojun’s story is not an inspiration for poetry, but becomes a rhetorical device that adds more dimensions to the fictional characters. David Pollack suggests that incorporating Chinese stories and figures adds depth to the fictional characters, and helps make the characters and their actions more distinctly Japanese making them “stand out more clearly against the complexly interwoven designs of plot, place, and time.” Pollack coins a term “chiaroscuro technique” to describe such a narrative strategy.

---

193 Also a contemporary of Fujiwara no Kintō, Murasaki Shikibu was a Heian court lady who served the Empress Shōshi during the early eleventh century.

194 Murasaki Shikibu criticized Sei Shônagon, her contemporary and the author of Makura no sōshi (The Pillow Book), for displaying her knowledge of Chinese literature.

Pollack also points out that Wang Zhaojun is an “informing Chinese images that translates Genji to the proportions of archetypal figure.”\textsuperscript{196} Indeed, Murasaki Shikibu adapts the motif of exile to magnify the protagonist Genji’s grief and yearning for his loved ones in the capital; however, she discards recurrent themes in the Chinese and Japanese portrayals of Wang Zhaojun’s story, such as political sacrifice, victimization by a corrupt system, and portrayal as a model of woman’s virtue.

Wang Zhaojun is brought into the narrative in two events that happened during and immediately after the protagonist’s exile. In the \textit{Suma} (‘Suma’) Chapter, it is employed in the depiction of Genji’s sentiment during his exile in Suma. To better illustrate the adaptation, I will cite a large portion from a translation of the original:\textsuperscript{197}

Winter came. When it stormed with snow, he [Genji] would gaze at the gloomy sky, play the zither and have Yoshikiyo sing, with Koremitsu playing the flute. At times when he played the melody especially touchingly, the others would stop playing their instruments, wiping away tears. He thought of the lady who was sent off to the barbarian land in the past. He thought how terrible it must have been. What would it be like to send one’s loved one afar like that? He shuddered, as though it might really happen, “a dream after the frost,” he recited to himself.

\textsuperscript{196} Pollack, \textit{The Fractures of Meaning}, 64.

\textsuperscript{197} The following translation is slightly modified from Murasaki Shikibu, \textit{Genji monogatari}, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1992), 240-41.
The moon shone brightly into the shabby cottage, lighting up every corner. Seated on the floor, he could even see the late night sky.\textsuperscript{198} Looking at the setting moon, which seemed so alonesolitary, he muttered to himself, “Just going toward the west.”\textsuperscript{199}

On what pattern of cloud paths would I also be wandering?  
It shames me that the setting moon should see me.

He recited it silently to himself. Sleepless as always, he heard the sad calls of the plovers in the dawn and repeated several times to himself:

Cries of plovers in the dawn bring comfort  
To one who awakens in a lonely bed.

Scholars’ interpretations of this segment have focused on the underlined sentences. Translators have made Genji’s wife the object of his thought—‘one’s loved one’, hence, implicitly, Genji compares his parting from Murasaki to the Han emperor who had to part from Wang Zhaojun. David Pollack has argued that in spite of the difference in gender, it is Genji himself who is being compared to Wang Zhaojun, since it is Genji who is in exile. Thus, Genji is pondering how miserable it would be for his own emperor to send away someone as beloved as himself.\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{198} An allusion to a \textit{waka} recorded in \textit{Wakan rōei shū} (537), \textit{Kimi nakute aretaru yado no itama yori tuki no moru ni mo sode wa nurekeri} (Without you, in a poor hut; the moonlight drips in from between the boards—and wets my sleeves.), which evokes Genji longing for his wife, Murasaki.

\textsuperscript{199} The following two poems allude to verses composed in exile by Sugawara no Michizane. The original line translates, “I simply journey toward the west; it is not that I have been sent into exile.” See Kawaguchi Hisao, ed., \textit{Kanke bunsō, Kanke gushû} (Tokyo: Iwanai Shoten, 1966), 511.

\textsuperscript{200} Pollack, \textit{The Fracture of Meaning}, 64-5.
As in Wakan róei shû, Murasaki Shikibu’s assimilation of the Chinese motif does not end with mere references to the original Chinese story; it too is followed by an allusion to a literary work indigenous to Japan. Following the above citation, Genji composes a poem that derived from a poem by Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903), who was also a victim of political exile. In 901, Michizane was accused in a conspiracy fabricated by Fujiwara no Tokihira 藤原時平 (871-909) and was demoted to serve as Provisional Governor-General of Dazaifu in Kyûshû, which was considered to be political exile in Heian Japan. Michizane, in despair, died there two years later. In certain aspects, the story is strikingly similar to that of Genji’s up to this point.201 The poems alluded to were composed by Michizane in the early stage of his exile. The first poem entitled Asking the Autumn Moon 问秋月 reads;202

201 Like Genji, Michizane was also a talented child. He became a master of Chinese and historical studies in his early life and was given the degree of Doctor of Letters (bunshô hakase 文章博士) at the age of thirty-two. Michizane lacked the support of a noble house, just as Genji was the son of a low-rank court lady. Nevertheless, like Genji, Michizane’s talent was highly admired by emperors. Emperor Daigo promoted him to Minister of the Right (Udaijin 右大臣). Such promotion for someone without the support of a noble house was uncommon in those days, and thus caused the anxiety of the Fujiwara clan and the jealousy of other scholars. It is also believed that the emperors appointed Michizane to high position in order to balance the power of the Fujiwara clan. After his death, several natural calamities struck Dazaifu and Kyoto. Many assumed that it was the angry spirit of Michizane. In 910, the emperor declared Michizane’s innocence, and many shrines were built to soothe the angry spirit of Michizane. Besides the posthumous honor of appointment as Chancellor (Daijôdaijin), he was also regarded as the god of learning and one of the most endowed of Japanese poets in Chinese. His best known works are his collections of Chinese compositions: Kanke bunsô (Sugawara poems 菅家文草, 900?) and Kanke kôsô (A Later Sugawara Collection 菅家後集, 920).

Spring went by, summer passed, now it is autumn
What sometimes looked like a mirror,
or sometimes a ring, is actually a hook
When asked I have yet to tell all
Why are you being pushed by the floating clouds, drifting to the west?

The second poem entitled *Replying on Behalf of the Moon* 代月答  reads:

The grass sprouts, cassia exudes its fragrance—
first half-open, then fully round
When in the three-thousand-worlds—one tour at
Heaven is turning the sacred mirror, clouds will disappear soon
However, only setting in the west, not a demotion

By making reference to the above poems, particularly the last hemistiches,
Murasaki Shikibu draws a parallel between Genji and Michizane. The Heian
readership’s knowledge of the tragic ending to Michizane’s exile allows the
allusion to Michizane’s poems to add yet another layer of interpretation of
Genji’s state of mind. Moreover, it triggers the audience’s concern for Genji’s
future, making them wonder if Genji’s exile in Suma will have an ending similar
to Michizane’s. As reflected in his poems, Michizane saw his demotion not as
political exile, but as a temporary change resembling the phase of the moon, and
was confident that justice would soon clear the obstacles and he would have a
bright political future. In contrast to Michizane, Genji’s poem reveals his uncertainty about his future. Genji’s muttering the line “just going towards the west” discloses his worry to an audience so informed that they probably were able to recite the rest of the poem, which read, “not a demotion.” Therefore, it is clear that Genji also sees, or hopes, that unlike Wang Zhaojun, he will not be left in exile.

By weaving into the discourse two historical figures, one from China, one from Japan, both perhaps the most well-known icons associated with the motif of exile, Murasaki Shikibu adds more dimensions to the narrative of Genji’s exile. She prompted her readers to reconstruct the image of Wang Zhaojun in exile in three ways. In doing so, she recreated the atmosphere – a sad melody played by the protagonist in exile during a snowy day that moves everyone to tears – that resembles the image of Wang Zhaojun constructed in Japanese literary precedents, such as the Ryôun shû and Fusô shû. She then includes a direct reference made by Genji, “the lady who was sent off to the barbarian land in the past” that helps the audience to solve the puzzle. In addition, she alludes to Ôe no Asatsuna’s poem on Wang Zhaojun, which incidentally also appears in Wakan rôei shû.

It is noteworthy that even without reference by title to any Chinese work, the image of Wang Zhaojun is successfully introduced into a passage in Heian fictional narrative. More importantly, the author’s intention is not to retell the
Chinese story, but to use the Chinese motif to enhance the texture of the narrative. In depicting the protagonist’s inner feelings, Murasaki alludes to a Japanese icon (and renowned scholar of Chinese letters), Sugawara no Michizane, whereas the Chinese motif serves only to further characterize Genji’s situation.

The second event in which Wang Zhaojun is brought into the Genji narrative happens immediately after Genji’s return from exile. In a later chapter, E-awase 絵合 (‘The Picture Contest’), Murasaki Shikibu again employs the image of Wang Zhaojun to highlight the Japanese sensibility. Genji has attained new political power after returning from his exile at Suma. Preparing for the upcoming picture contest, Genji and his wife Murasaki are selecting paintings from their collection:

At Nijô, the chests and cases that stored old and new paintings and scolls were opened; Genji and Lady Murasaki selected out an array that well-matched current tastes. There were paintings such as Chôgonka 長恨歌 and Ô Shôkun 王昭君 (Wang Zhaojun) on which Genji commented that they were interesting and moving, but, their subject matters were inauspicious, and therefore, not to be chosen.204

Following this passage, Genji shows Lady Murasaki the paintings he did while in exile at Suma. They select one of Genji’s paintings, which eventually takes first place. Again, Murasaki Shikibu incorporates the story of Wang Zhaojun, as a

---

203 Chôgonka (The song of everlasting sorrow 長恨歌) is a narrative poem written by Bai Juyi on the tragic story of Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, an imperial consort of Tang China. Her story is also employed at the beginning of Genji monogatari as a parallel of the ill-fated love story of Genji’s parents.

backdrop for Genji’s painting to stand out. Bringing in the foreign motif so as to highlight the domestic creation on the same topic is indeed a common strategy of assimilating Chinese motifs.

Along with four other Chinese motifs, the story of Wang Zhaojun also appears in the medieval war tale Taiheiki 太平記 (The Record of the Great Peace, 1372).\(^{205}\) The others are Shôkun 昭君, Kôu 項羽, Yôkihi 楊貴妃, Kantan 邯鄲, and Kikujidô 菊慈童. The narrative of Taiheiki consistently draws parallels between political and social events in Japan and China that are in some ways related. As Donald Keene has pointed out, it is the author’s intention to demonstrate the possibility of “learn[ing] from history” by “providing evidence that similar events recur in different countries.”\(^{206}\) However, sometimes the Chinese anecdotes contain some fictitious details.

Rather than recounting the entire story of Wang Zhaojun, only the motif of her lament upon leaving China is adapted to add another layer to the melancholy of Uesugi Izu no Kami and Hatakeyama Ôkura no shô on their journey of exile. It reads:

As it has been one of the routines of playing the lute, they tied a lute to the horse and would play it under the moonlight in the lodging inns. It was just as like the scene of Ô shôkun, “One single blast of a Tartar

\(^{205}\) The other four motifs are that of featured in the Nô plays Yôkihi, Kantan, Kôu, and Kikujidô.

Horn—a dream after the frost, ten thousand miles away from the Han Palace—a broken heart under the moon.”207 Upon hearing the lute, they were reminded of [Wang Zhaojun’s] grief over departing for the barbarian land and all burst into tears.208

In adapting the Chinese motif into the narrative, the strategy employed in Taiheiki is strikingly similar to that of Genji monogatari. First, the same couplet composed by Ôe no Asatsuna is alluded to as a reference to Wang Zhaojun’s story. As employed in Genji monogatari, it enriches the narrative of the characters’ exile. Second, immediately following the allusion to Ôe no Asatsuna’s poem, both authors incorporate Sugawara no Michizane, the Japanese icon of political exile, to reflect their protagonists’ outlook on their own future. In the case of Taiheiki, given that the protagonists are certain of their wrongdoing and unavoidable punishment, they allude to a poem Michizane composed as a prayer for a safe trip. The entire poem reads, “This time for this trip, no time to take prayer strips for an offering, instead take these brocade-like autumn leaves from Offering Hill, the work of the gods.”209 Michizane composed this poem at Mount Tamuke (‘Offering Hill’) on the way to visit the retired emperor Uda (Suzakuin) in Nara. The poem manifests Michizane’s respect for the retired emperor,

207 This is the couplet of Ôe no Asatsuna’s renowned poem on the story of Zhaojun, which has been alluded to in various preceding works discussed earlier in this chapter.


209 The original in Japanese reads “このたびはぬさもどりあへず手向山/もみぢのにしき神のまにまに  This time for this trip, no time to bring prayer strips for an offering, instead take these brocade-like autumn leaves on Offering Hill, the work of the gods.” Ozawa Masao, ed., Kokin wakashû (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1994), 180.
thereby providing evidence of Michizane’s loyalty to the court. By incorporating this poem, the author presents a sharp contrast with historical figures of different eras.

It is not a coincidence that the author of Taiheiki employs Wang Zhaojun and Sugawara no Michizane in a manner similar to Murasaki Shikibu in Genji monogatari. The author exploits not only the motifs of the two historical figures, but also brings the protagonist of Genji monogatari, Genji, into his narrative to add more dimensions to the characters in Taiheiki. Moreover, it evokes its audience’s knowledge of the three cultural icons, in order to enhance their reading experience of the Taiheiki.

The Wang Zhaojun motif also appears in literary criticism and a treatise on the art of composing poetry. The inclusion of the Chinese motif indicates its popularity among Japanese literati and the practical demand to be able to allude to related poems, whether telling a story or composing verse. Of course, the close tie between poetry and tale in pre-modern Japanese literature was an important factor. A famous example is the Toshiyori zuinô, an early twelfth century poetic commentary and treatise written by Minamoto no Toshiyori 源俊頼 (?1055-?1129). Toshiyori cites the aforementioned waka poems by Priest Kaien 懐円法師 and Akazome Emon 赤染衛門 as the locus classicus for Wang Zhaojun’s motif. By citing poems as models for each topic, Toshiyori discusses the essence of
poetry and its composition. The two poems are cited at the outset of the section on “poetry and tales (歌と物語).”

Following the two poems, Toshiyori provides the context of Wang Zhaojun’s story which contains an unprecedented interpretation that points to the ambiguity in Japanese reception of Chinese motifs. The first part of the story closely resembles Xijing zaji 西京雜記 (Miscellanea from the western capital), whereas the latter half depicts the Chinese emperor’s lament over losing Wang Zhaojun—an interpretation that is new to both China and Japan. Toshiyori describes the emperor’s sentiments and regrets, and his visit of the palace where Wang Zhaojun used to stay. The palace is charged with things that evoke a sense of grief and loneliness, such as the willow tree in the spring breeze, nightingale in idleness, and fallen autumn leaves on the ground. This passage is strikingly similar to the portrayal of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong’s lament on Yang Guifei in Changhen ge 長恨歌 (The song of everlasting sorrow, 806). Since the story of Yang Guifei is also featured in Toshiyori zuinô and resembles the story depicted

---

210 There are altogether fourteen topics, namely (1) types of waka poetry, (2) poetic defects, (3) eligibility of a poet, (4) effects of poetry, (5) examples of a variety of poetry, (6) topic and method of composing, (7) examples of good poem, (8) techniques of composing Japanese poetry, (9) alternative terminology, (10) origins of kigo and kago, (11) illusive expression and poetic heart, (12) expression of linked-poetry renga, (13) questions on kago, and (14) poetry and tales.

211 The celebrated portrayal of the love romance between the Chinese Emperor and Wang Zhaojun Hangong qiu (Autumn in the Han palace) appears about two centuries later.

212 In fact, Toshiyori also included poems and tale on the Yang Guifei motif. Two other Chinese tales, one on Wu Songkao 吳松孝, and the other on Confucius 孔子, are included.
in *Changhen ge*, it is unlikely that Toshiyori confused the two stories. As in the opening passage to *Genji monogatari*, in which the ill-fated love between Yang Guifei and the Chinese emperor is adapted into the narrative, Toshiyori may have also found the lament over one’s loss of a loved one a more appealing theme in Wang Zhaojun’s story. Therefore, with this story as a backdrop, the poems selected can be read as portrayals of the emotions of the emperor and Wang Zhaojun. As discussed earlier, Priest Kaien’s poem can be interpreted as a depiction of the emotion of Wang Zhaojun or that of someone close to her in China. Given that Toshiyori prefers the story of a love relationship between her and the Chinese emperor, it is apt to assume that Priest Kaien’s poem represents a portrayal of the Chinese emperor’s sentiments.

**Story-telling tales 説話 (setsuwa)**

Japanese interpretation of Wang Zhaojun’s story in oral storytelling from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries can be considered as the third phase of the reception of the Chinese motif. Examples of such works include *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語 (*Tales of times now past*, ca. 1120?), *Kara monogatari* 唐物語 (*Tales of China*, 1165-1176), and *Kara kagami* 唐鏡 (*The mirror of China*). These works are similar in terms of the basic plot, which resembles the Chinese text—*Xijing zaji* 西京雑記, and all conclude on a didactic note.
Konjaku monogatari is a collection of tales from India, China, and Japan. The stories all have a didactic intent and many are charged with Buddhist ideas. The texts were written in classical Chinese in third-person narrative with dialogues inserted. Besides Shôkun, three Chinese motifs later portrayed in the Nô plays Yôkihi, Genjô, and Zegai appear in this work. The story of Wang Zhaojun presented here is fairly similar to that in the Xijing zaji. The absence of poetry may suggest that the author/storyteller and audience were probably of another social circle outside of the court and literati groups. Moreover, the text replaces the Chinese term for ‘emperor’, tei 帝, with an indigenous Japanese term ‘tenno 天皇’. Such ‘renaming’ indicates the domestication of the Chinese story. In Konjaku monogatari, Wang Zhaojun’s story is used as an example of the suffering that results from overconfidence in one’s outstanding qualities. In contrast with the Chinese, where Zhaojun is seen as a victim of corruption, the Japanese story criticizes her for being overconfident about her beauty and not bribing the painter, which therefore leads to her tragic ending.213

Kara monogatari (Tales of China) interpolates a positive portrayal of the barbarian king. Kara monogatari is a collection of Chinese tales214 containing twenty-seven tales, among which motifs of five Nô plays are featured.215


214 Since the format of the work resembles the uta monogatari (‘poem-tales’) genre, some scholars also consider the work as uta monogatari (‘poem-tales’).

215 The five plays are Shôkun, Hakurakuten, Yôkihi, Tôbôsaku, and Seiôbo.
Ward Geddes has pointed out, *Kara monogatari* shares the characteristics of other storytelling tales, such as didacticism, anecdotal treatment of historical events, and third-person narration.\(^{216}\) Each tale has at least one poem functioning as a highlight or conclusion to the story. Moreover, all tales share a common theme, that is the suffering from attachment to worldly matters. The retelling of Wang Zhaojun’s story resembles that of the *Xijing zaji* 西京雑記, however, the later half focuses on the emotion of Wang Zhaojun, both on her journey to the barbarian land and her life there. The author does so by alluding to the two Japanese *waka* poems cited in *Toshiyori’s Poetic Essentials* and mentioned above. The poem by Akazome Emon is modified into the narrative, which translates as the following:

> When she left China, her tears of yearning for her old home far exceeded the dewdrops along the roadside, and her grief for separating from her loved ones ran deeper than the most remote mountains.

Alluding to the mirror motif depicted in Priest Kaien’s poem, the author proposes a reason for Zhaojun’s sorrow, namely her attachment to her beauty regardless of her knowledge of the transience of life. The poem reads:\(^{217}\)

> Knowing well it is a floating world—everything is ephemeral
> It is that I have clung to the image in the mirror!


The author then juxtaposes Wang Zhaojun’s emotion with that of the barbarian king. Immediately following the above poem, the narrative continues:

Although this barbarian king was a warrior and did not comprehend the sophisticated emotion of a court woman, he loved the refined beauty of Wang Zhaojun and took much better care of her than the affairs of his kingdom.

Such an image of the barbarian king is unprecedented both in China and Japan. Unlike other interpretations in which the barbarian king is overshadowed by the Chinese characters – Wang Zhaojun, the Han Emperor, and even the corrupt painter, he is portrayed as a devoted lover echoing the portrayal of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong in Changhen ge.

The concluding paragraph, however, criticizes Wang Zhaojun’s insensitivity and attachment. It reads:

In spite of [the barbarian king’s love], she [Wang Zhaojun] weeps every day ever since she left China. She is fixated on the pure beauty reflected in the mirror and does not realize the compassion of others.

Such comparison drawn between the barbarian king and Wang Zhaojun, as well as the mirror motif and the yearning from afar for one’s loved, are precisely some of the major elements portrayed in the “Chinese play,” which I will discuss later.

Kara kagami, a late thirteenth century work that retells Chinese stories, portrays Wang Zhaojun’s story in a way that resembles Xijing zaji even more than Kara monogatari does. Attributed to Fujiwara no Shigenori 藤原茂範 (1236-?), Karakagami belongs to a group of works referred to as kagami-mono 鏡物 (“mirror works”) in which history is seen through a morally reflecting mirror. A well-
known exemplar of this genre is Ōkagami 大鏡 (The great mirror, 1119?) which covers 176 years (850-1025) of Japanese history. Drawing on historical records, mythology, and Buddhist writings, Karakagami focuses on tales about the Chinese rulers and warriors from the time of the Yin 殷 period (1500 B.C.) to the Sung period (960-1206). Stories of Wang Zhaojun, Yang Guei-fei and the Queen Mother of the West are all included.

Indeed, in Karakagami, historical fact carries greater weight than literary interest. As in other tales in the collection, no poems are included in the section on Wang Zhaojun. The motif of the corrupt painter is elaborated in detail, which is uncommon in other Japanese interpretations. Moreover, the author supplemented an explanation of Wang Zhaojun’s first name ‘zhao 昭’ being switched to ‘ming 明’ during the reign of an emperor whose name also had the same character ‘zhao 昭.”218 However, unlike the Chinese historical works such as Han Shu, the author of Karakagami does not depict Wang Zhaojun’s moral struggle of marrying her own son after her husband’s death. Therefore, as a historical piece of writing, Karakagami does provide new and more detailed information about the Chinese story, however, in a fashion that is more attuned to its Japanese audiences.

Chinese and Japanese receptions of Wang Zhaojun’s motif reflect differing interests, influenced by the conventions of the genres and the cultural sensibilities of the two countries. For example, Wang Zhaojun’s moral struggle of marrying her own son after her husband’s death as depicted in the Chinese texts *Han Shu* and *Ch’in Ts’ao* is absent in the Japanese interpretations. Moreover, intertextuality is a key element in the reception of the motif, since earlier interpretations inform audience and playwrights of the story and influence their interpretations of subsequent renderings.

**Perspectives of the Adapter [3]**

We know very little about the playwright Komparu Gon no kami. According to the writings of his contemporaries, he was neither skilled nor popular as a performer in his time. Kan’ami’s criticism of Gon no Kami is recorded in *Sarugaku dangi* 猿楽談議 (An account of Zeami’s reflection on *sarugaku*, 1430):

Concerning field music performances: Komparu Gon no kami and Kongô Gon no kami never attained great success. The shogun did not attend their subscription performances in the capital. Komparu himself, in his subscription performances in Kyoto, was not a success, abandoned his series after two days, and retired to the countryside. ... the fact that these two accomplished as much as they did in an age when the standards of *sarugaku* were so high meant exceptional good luck for them. These days, when the standards of our art have fallen, even those who do not perform
the Nô with any dexterity can on occasion excel. Yet such success does not represent true accomplishment.\textsuperscript{219}

Nô scholars have pointed out the play \textit{Shôkun} was revised in accordance with the later established structure developed by the Kanze troupe. It was not uncommon to revise plays originally by other troupes. However, if significant changes were made, the revised version was usually given another title and attributed to the playwright who did the revision.\textsuperscript{220}

In the case of \textit{Shôkun}, however, there is no written record of any revision, but only attribution of authorship to Konparu Gon no Kami. Nonetheless, the focus of scholarly discussion regarding the major alteration of the play is the arrangement of two characters—Wang Zhaojun’s father and the spirit of the barbarian king. Nô scholar Yokomichi Mario has suggested that in the original performance, the \textit{shite} Hakudô (Wang Zhaojun’s father) functioned as an agent (\textit{shigoto-yaku}) in the first part of the play, and undergoer (\textit{uke-yaku}) in the latter-part of the play. Yokomichi points out that the principal actor playing a living person remains on stage and becomes a supporting actor after another actor, the \textit{nochijite} (the principal actor in the second act of a play), playing a spirit appears

\textsuperscript{219} The slightly modified translation is taken from \textit{Rimer and Yamazaki}, 232. For original in Japanese, see Omote and Katô, \textit{Zeami Zenchiku}, 298.

\textsuperscript{220} Kan’ami was also known for revising plays by the other troupes. For instance, \textit{Kayoi Komachi} 通小町 by Kan’ami was actually a revision of the play \textit{Shii no Shôshô} 四位の少将 written by preaching monks in Yamato, and was performed by Konparu Gon no Kami at the autumn festival of Tônomine temple.\textsuperscript{220} Another example is \textit{Matsukaze} 松風 by Kan’ami, which was a revision of the \textit{dengaku} Nô play \textit{Shiokumi} 汐汲 by Kiami 亀阿弥, a contemporary of Kan’ami.
in the second act.\textsuperscript{221} However, as Yokomichi has noted, at some point, the performance of the play was revised so that one actor plays both the roles of the father as well as the spirit of the barbarian king. Thus, in the second part of the play, the father does not appear on stage regardless of the fact that his disappearance is not explained.\textsuperscript{222} Such a recasting of \textit{Shôkun} reflects the process of the development of a mainstream cultural product and its influential power on those that are less popular. Put differently, as plays featuring one single principal actor became predominantly popular, earlier plays of different style were revised accordingly.

In spite of these alterations in the performance of the play, as the earliest adaptation of a Chinese motif in Nô, \textit{Shôkun} provides an example of the retelling of a Chinese story. With the Japanese audience in mind, the playwright Konparu Gon no Kami integrates the Chinese motif and the social sensibilities of his time in the play. He was well aware of the audience’s knowledge of the Wang Zhaojun motif and utilized the shared knowledge in the Nô play. Within \textit{Shôkun}, there is a clear preference for Heian literary texts, since all Japanese and Chinese texts alluded to in the play, whether or not directly related to Wang Zhaojun’s story, are either written or cited by Japanese literati of the Heian period. The text of the Nô play suggests that the playwright did have access to some kind of an


\textsuperscript{222}Ibid., 44-47.
outline of the Chinese story, either from the original text or Japanese commentaries. As illustrated above, by the time Nô theatre emerged, the Chinese motif had undergone cycles of re-presentations, absorptions, and adaptation in Japan for over five centuries. As a result, complex frameworks interwoven by the various re-presentations in both China and Japan form as the basis for yet more reinterpretations to follow.

Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]

The play Shôkun is not simply a dramatization of how Heian Japanese had interpreted the Wang Zhaojun trope. Rather the playwright makes use of these earlier interpretations to retell the story from a perspective tailored to the sensibilities of his audience. The play depoliticizes the Chinese story and casts it simply as a human drama. The playwright shows no interest in criticizing the corrupt system, the love relationship between Wang Zhaojun and the Chinese emperor, nor her virtue of being an ideal Confucian female. Rather, the Nô play emphasizes the lament of Zhaojun’s parents over her parting and her death in exile, and arranges a brief reunion between the deceased daughter and the mourning parents. The playwright achieves these effects by incorporating domestic folk beliefs associated with tree planting and the magic power of mirrors. In so doing, the play provides a resolution to appease the old parents,
and enhances the theatricality of the play by creating a dynamic confrontation between good and evil. The following is a synopsis of the play.

A village man pays a visit to the old parents of Wang Zhaojun, Hakudô and Ôbo, who bemoan over their daughter’s exile to the land of the barbarians. The old couple laments their daughter’s tragic karma that separates her from her family and from the Chinese emperor who was passionate about her. They reveal that before she was sent away she planted a willow tree as a symbol of herself, and that the tree would wither if she died. Now, seeing the willow tree withered, they realize that she has died. They then explain that their daughter, unlike the other consorts, did not bribe the portrait painter, and thus was depicted least flattering. Based on her unflattering portrait, she was chosen to be sent to the barbarian land. The father recalls a story about seeing the image of a departed divine being in a mirror. They then hold a mirror to the willow hoping to see Wang Zhaojun’s appearance. After a Kyôgen interlude, both the village man and the father exit the stage. In the second act, Wang Zhaojun’s dead spirit, played by a child actor, appears (as a reflection in the mirror). The spirit of the barbarian king Kan’yashô also appears in the mirror. Zhaojun’s mother Ôbo, although frightened by the barbarian king’s ghostly appearance, disgraces him and suggests that he look at his own image in the mirror. Shocked by his own appearance, the barbarian king dances fiercely and disappears. The play ends by
praising the power of the mirror that reflects the crystal truth of human and spirits, good or evil.

A close reading of the play reveals the divergences between the Nô play and the story told in China. Although the Nô play contains some details of Wang Zhaojun’s story, such as her refusal to bribe the painter, there are various elements that do not correspond to any Chinese sources. One example is that the Nô play tells that Zhaojun enjoyed the affection of the Chinese emperor prior to her exile. There are other details in the Nô play that attest to the gap between the Chinese sources and the Nô play. First, the names of Wang Zhaojun’s parents and hometown in the Nô play do not coincide with any preceding Chinese sources. And most significantly, the willow tree and the mirror motifs are absent in preceding Chinese texts, except the symbolic use of willow branches to describe Wang Zhaojun’s eyebrows.223

The strategy of employing Chinese sources in Shôkun provides a perfect example of a common strategy in the adaptation of Chinese sources into Nô. The Chinese sources incorporated are often cited excerpts in earlier Japanese literature. Among the seven poetic allusions in the play, three are related to Chinese sources and are all Bai Juyi’s poems. However, these Chinese poems had already appeared in earlier Japanese sources from the Heian period on. Two of them are compiled into the Wakan Rôei shû under the topic of Wang Zhaojun, the

223 For example, see Bai Juyi’s poem “Passing by the Village of Zhaojun 過昭君村.”
other one from the well-known epic poem Changhen ge on the story of imperial consort Yang Guifei. Only fragments of the original Chinese poems are alluded to as descriptions of the story settings. Below are the original poems and the related lines in the Nô play.

1. Original: Sand and wind in the barbarian land cover her face. Her eyebrows have lost the greenish shine, her cheeks, their rouged radiance. Sorrow and adversity have tormented her, now, she does look like the one in the portrait.224

Nô play: Suffering made her resemble her portrait

2. Original: The blossoms at the Wu-nü Temple crimson like powder. The Willows at the Zhaojun Village green as eyebrows.

Nô play: Shôkun’s darkened eyebrows. Were tinged with the willow-green of spring

3. Original: Three thousand beauties in the harems, the favor pours onto only one among the three thousand

Nô play: but of the three thousand ladies he kept, [The Han emperor] could not decide whom to send away

The fact that the fragments of the Chinese poems employed in Shôkun already appear in various preceding Japanese texts means that the audience could utilize their knowledge of these texts in comprehending the “Chinese play.”

By contrast, allusions to Japanese classical poems hold a very different and much more important position in the Nô play. Among the four allusions to poetry written by Japanese poets, only one is written in classical Chinese and directly associated with the Wang Zhaojun motif. The poem alluded to was authored by Ōe no Asatsuna (大江朝綱 886-957) and was included in the Wakan Rôei shû also under the topic entitled “Ô Shôkun.” It will be recalled that it reads:

One single blast of a Tartar horn—a dream after the frost,  
Ten thousand miles away from the Han Palace—  
a broken heart under the moon.

胡角一声霜後夢  
漢宮万里月前腸

As discussed earlier, this is perhaps the most famous couplet and the most alluded to in the Japanese literary tradition depicting the story of Wang Zhaojun. Nevertheless, similar to the assimilation of the Chinese poems discussed above, only a fragment of the poem is incorporated into the play, namely, “ten thousand miles away from the Han Palace.”

The other three poems by Japanese in Shôkun are all written in Japanese. None of them is associated with the Wang Zhaojun motif. Although two of them were also in the Wakan Rôei shû, unlike those written in Chinese, they were not
used as fragments, but in slightly modified form. Allusions to these poems introduce two crucial motifs—the willow tree and the mirror, and appear at crucial points of the play, the opening lines of Wang Zhaojun’s parents (the shite and the tsure in the first act). The opening lines of the shite and tsure in the first act also begins with an allusion to a Japanese poem. Composed by Ki no Tsurayuki (ca. 872-945) at a poetry contest in 913 on the topic of “spring,” the poem was included in the Shûi wakashû 拾遺和歌集 (Collection of Gleanings of Japanese Poems, 1005-1011) under the same topic, and in the Wakan Rôei Shû, under the topic of “scattered flowers.” The poem reads,

Breezes that waft under cherry trees shedding their blossoms do not chill; it’s a snow unknown to the sky that falls there.

桜散る木の下風は寒からで
空にしられぬゆきぞ降りける

The line in the play reads, “as we stand beneath this tree, the scattered blossoms fall—a snow unknown to the sky.” Despite the fact that the poem is not about Wang Zhaojun, it sets the tone for the play. By the Japanese convention that is thus introduced, the scattered blossoms symbolize the death of Wang Zhaojun and the image of a snowfall hints at the harsh winter in the barbarian land.

The other two allusions in this play to classical Japanese poems both contain the mirror motif that appears at the end of the first act. Again, neither of the poems was composed for or inspired by the story of Wang Zhaojun. The scattered blossom motif is linked to the mythical power of mirrors. The
playwright accomplishes this by alluding to a Japanese poem by Lady Ise (?877-?940), which echoes this play’s opening lines of the old couple and links the image of scattered blossoms and the mirror through the image of water. The original poem reads:

The water that has been a mirror to the blossoms through the years: Might we say it is clouded, when they scatter upon it? 225

年を経て花の鏡となる水は
ちりかかるをやくもるといふらむ

In the play, this allusion is phrased as follows, “This is the old times, now many years have passed, the water that mirrors the blossoms is clouded by the scattered blossoms.” Here, the clouded mirror expresses the doubts of the parents about the well-being of their daughter who has been away for years. The old couple decides to try and place the mirror in front of the willow, which marks the end of the first act.

The third allusion to a Japanese poem follows the self-introduction of the spirit of Wang Zhaojun at the beginning of the second act. The original poem, composed by Ôe no Chisato (fl. ca. 900) and included in the Shin Kokinshû 新古今集 (New collection of the collection of ancient and contemporary poems, early thirteenth-century), reads:

---

225 The poem was compiled into the Kokin wakashû under the topic “Spring.” See Ozawa Masao, ed., Kokin wakashû, 45.
A spring night neither bright nor clouded over—
there is nothing that surpasses a hazy moonlit night.

照りもせず曇りも果てぬ春の夜
朧月夜にしくものぞなき

Alluding to this poem, the playwright interweaves the willow and mirror motifs.

The lines read:

I am the spirit of Shôkun who was sent away from my parents to the land of the barbarians. They grieved over the parting, now weeping underneath the spring willow. My image like the hazy moon on a spring night, though clouded, I shall reveal myself [in the mirror].

This poem embodies the major theme and the new motifs of the Nô play. That is, the lament of Zhaojun’s parents over her parting and her death in exile, and mediums (the willow tree and the mirror) that make possible a brief reunion between the deceased daughter and the mourning parents.

The Theme of Shôkun and the Willow and Mirror Motifs

The playwright uses the Chinese story as a vehicle to demonstrate how two objects—a tree and a jôruri mirror may bring consolation to one who is lamenting over the parting of one’s love. In Shôkun, the willow tree is an embodiment of Wang Zhaojun’s fate in exile. The importance of the willow tree for the play is manifested in several writings from the Muromachi period. In Zenchiku’s Go’on sankyoku shû 五音三曲集 (An account on the five modes and the three styles, 1460), the play Shôkun is referred to as “yanagi no Nô 柳の能 (The Nô
about the willow).” In his article on the Nô play *Shôkun*, Kobayashi Kenji has suggested a possible source beyond the couplet by Bai Juyi discussed earlier that inspired the incorporation of the willow tree. Kobayashi refers to the *Wakan Rôei shû shichû* 和漢朗詠集私注 (Private commentary on the *Wakan rôei shû*, ?1531), a commentary of the *Wakan Rôei shû* which contains a footnote on Bai Juyi’s poem on the willow in the hometown village of Wang Zhaojun. It reads:

> According to the *Han shu* (The History of Han), Wang Zhaojun was an empress of Emperor Gao-chung. Wang’s mother planted a tree as a celebration for [her daughter’s fortune] and made a prayer that if her daughter would enjoy the emperor’s favors, the tree should flourish, but if she would lose the emperor’s love, the tree should wither.

Kobayashi points out that the willow motif had firmly attached itself to Wang Zhaojun’s story in medieval Japan. He supports such a claim with reference to two records from the Muromachi period, *Taigenshô* 体源抄 (Notes on the Original Sources) and *Getsuan suiseiki* 月庵酔醒記 (Miscellaneous account of the monk Getsuan, mid fourteenth century). *Taigenshô* is an encyclopedic work on music, written by Toyohara Sumiaki 豊原統秋 (1450-1524), a late Muromachi *gagaku* musician. Under the topic of Wang Zhaojun, it tells a similar story to that of the *Wakan Rôei shû shichû*. Yet, this version is slightly more detailed in that it identifies the name of Zhaojun’s father as Wang Rang. It also notes that her mother planted a willow tree that reflects the fate of Zhaojun at the palace. It

---


227 Ibid., 16.
adds that the tree withered overnight when Zhaojun was sent to the land of the barbarians.

The version in the *Getsuan suiseiki* is titled ‘willow tree at the village of Zhaojun (昭君村ノ柳)’ after Bai Juyi’s poem. The *Getsuan suiseiki* version may explain why the story told is very similar to the *Wakan Rōei shū shichū*. This version also gives the geographical location of the village, and a different name for the Chinese emperor from that of the Private Commentary of the *Wakan Rōei shū*. As Kobayashi has summarized, although variations on the story exist, these different versions share the same fundamental aspect—a willow tree functioning as a prophecy of Wang Zhaojun’s sad fate.

The *jôruri* mirror, however, has a more powerful impact than the willow tree does in the play *Shôkun*. It reflects the being of one’s loved one (i.e., the spirit of Wang Zhaojun) and identifies the good and evil of all humans and spirits (i.e., the spirits of Wang Zhaojun and the barbarian king). The mirror motif, to the best of my knowledge, does not appear in any preceding Chinese text on Wang Zhaojun’s story. However, to a Muromachi audience, it probably has a legitimate association with Wang Zhaojun’s story as it was perceived to have derived from Chinese sources. Kobayashi Kenji has investigated the evolution of the mirror motif in association with Wang Zhaojun’s story from the Heian to Muromachi periods. As mentioned earlier, Priest Kaien’s poem is the first Japanese literary work that incorporates the mirror motif.
Beyond the association of the mirror motif in Japanese literary precedents, folk belief regarding the power of mirrors shapes the making of the Nô play. There is a long history in Japanese mythology about the magic power of mirrors. In Kôjiki 古事記 (Records of ancient matters, 705), a mirror is one of the three sacred items which the Japanese emperor inherited from heaven. In late Heian and early medieval period narratives, a mirror was depicted as having the power to foretell one’s future such as one’s destined lover and future life. For example, in Sarashina nikki 更科日記 (The sarashina diary, early eleventh century), a diary of a late Heian lady, the protagonist’s future is reflected in a mirror; similarly, in the Matsuurara no miya monogatari 松浦の宮物語 (Tales of Matsuurariya, late twelve century), written by Fujiwara no Teika, one’s departed loved one is reflected in a mirror.228

The magic power of mirrors is a recurring subject in Nô. Besides Shôkun, there are other plays featuring the power of a mirror that fends off evil. Matsuurara no Nô 松浦の能, Matsuyama kagami 松山鏡, and Kôtei 皇帝 are a few examples. The mirror in Shôkun is called masumi-kagami 真澄鏡 (literally, ‘truly clear mirror’) or jôruri 彌璃璃, a device that has the power of reflecting one’s true identity. Kobayashi Kenji has concluded that the myth of the jôruri mirror was a common topic in Buddhist paintings and setsuwa shû storytelling, in which the

horrific scenes in hell are often vividly illustrated. One recurring scene is the judgment by the king of hell 閻魔王 who relies on the jōruri mirror to reflect the good and bad deeds of all lives.229

The play transforms the motif of exile associated with the Chinese story in Heian Japanese literary works by focusing on the parents’ lamenting over Wang Zhaojun’s misfortune and allaying their grief through the miraculous power of the jōruri mirror. It seems that the Nô play ventures a new perception of the story by presenting the emotions of those left behind, rather than portraying the harsh environment in the barbarian land and Wang Zhaojun’s grief, which had dominated both its Chinese and earlier Japanese versions. However, such a focus on Zhaojun’s parents is indeed inspired by an influential Japanese classic, the Wakan rōei shû. In Wakan rōei shû, portrayals of the sorrow and regrets in exile aside, two couplets by Heian Japanese poets describe the home of Zhaojun in China. One depicts Zhaojun’s beauty upon leaving home for the land of the barbarians, the other the ruins of Zhaojun’s home after her death. They are cited below for easy reference:

Her body long decayed into bones in the barbarian land  
Her house vacant as a deserted abode of Han China

身化早為胡朽骨  
家留空作漢荒門  

Ki no Haseo (紀長谷雄, 845-912)

Utilizing the celebrated *Wakan Rôei shû*, the playwright on the one hand alludes to the two couplets that are more well-known, which contain the phrases “Ten thousand miles away from the Han Palace” and “now, she does look like the one in the portrait.” On the other hand, he develops the images derived from the above two couplets, that is, Zhaojun’s dark-green eyebrows and her home after her death, which allow for a relatively fresh yet not entirely unfamiliar portrayal of the ill-fated Chinese beauty—lament over unavoidable parting due to the impermanence of all things.

By shifting the focus of the play to the portrayal of parents’ longing for their offspring, the playwright downplays the Chinese story with its critique of corruption. In doing so, the playwright magnifies universalized emotions—the longing for one’s offspring. Another sub-theme of the play, which does not exist in surviving Chinese sources, is the magic power of the *jôruri* mirror that expels the evil spirit of the barbarian king and comforts the spirit of Wang Zhaojun. The portrayal of evil spirits enhances the exotic quality of the play. In *Shôkun*, it is achieved by making the spirit of the Barbarian King the main character in the second act and assigning him the dance sequence in the play’s climax. Unlike other plays of such confrontation, which often have a monk to pacify or suppress
the evil spirit, the play Shōkun relies on the magic power of the mirror. Of course, this narrative is successful only because of the popular belief surrounding the power of mirrors held by Nô audiences.

Rather than the original Chinese source, the playwright uses earlier Japanese interpretations of the story in writing Shōkun, and employs Buddhist and folk beliefs that the audience is familiar with. The consequence is a blend of Japanese reconstructed elements inspired by the Chinese story or other Japanese interpretations in the retelling of the story. Moreover, the approach to the exile of Wang Zhaojun in the play is rather different from that of the earlier works, both in China and Japan. For example, the staging of a communication between Wang Zhaojun’s spirit and her parents through the use of two objects—the willow tree and the mirror—is an innovation.

**Yōkihi 楊貴妃(Consort Yang)**

The play Yōkihi is an excellent example of how a Chinese motif made well known predominantly by a Chinese poem was reconstructed in Nô. It depicts the tragic story of the Tang imperial consort Yang Guifei made famous by Bai Juyi’s epic poem Changhen ge 長恨歌. The poem had an immense influence on Japanese literature and was integrated into the works of celebrated literati. The remainder of this chapter illustrates how the playwright selected only fragments of the Chinese poem that had appeared in well-known Japanese literary works in the
play Yōkihi. Indeed, as in the case of the Wang Zhaojun story in the play Shōkun, the Yang Guifei story in Yōkihi was retold by employing Chinese sources subsequently modified within Japan. Among Japanese interpretations prior to the Nō play, there are two major themes derived from the Chinese story—the ill-fated love between Yang Guifei and Emperor Xuanzong, and the political turmoil caused by the emperor’s negligence of the state affairs due to his infatuation for Consort Yang. Focusing on Yang Guifei’s lament over her tragic love, the play Yōkihi, however, rationalizes her misfortune and offers a remedy in the form of the Buddhist notions of impermanence and enlightenment.

Arguably the most graceful and elegant “Chinese play,” Yōkihi exemplifies how the aesthetic sensibilities often found in “women plays” (plays that feature a graceful female character) are manifested in the story of a Chinese beauty. Written by Konparu Zenchiku (1403-?1468), the play indeed demonstrates his effort to portray the Chinese story in a fashion that evokes the quality of yûgen (graceful beauty) with a sense of grief.

Sociopolitical Context [1]

The play Yōkihi was written sometime during the third to the sixth decades of the fifteenth century. The earliest performance record of the play dates from 1478.230 All extant records of authorship attribute the play Yōkihi to

Zenchiku. Modern Nô scholars agreed that the play was indeed written by Zenchiku, and consider it as one of his representative plays.231 As was true of many art forms of his time, Zenchiku’s artistry has strong Zen Buddhist overtones.

During the 1430s to the 1460s, Zen Buddhism had a strong influence both in the political and cultural domains. As noted in Chapter One, from the era of the sixth Ashikaga shogun Yoshinori (r. 1429-1441), Japan resumed diplomatic and trading relations with China after a ban of two decades. It was during this period that Zen temples, including Sôkokuji and Tenryûji, were appointed to take part in the tally ship trading. The influx of Chinese materials and culture as a result of the official trading boosted Japanese interest in China.

Zen monks were selected as the cultural advisors of the shoguns and provincial lords. Indeed, Zen Buddhism’s influence was clearly manifested in the cultural renaissance during the 1450s to the early 1460s, which is now referred to as the Higashiyama Culture (東山文化 Higashiyama bunka). Cultural activities such as tea ceremony and ink paintings were greatly influenced by the teaching and practice of Zen Buddhism.232

231 Itô Masayoshi, Konparu Zenchiku no kenkyû, 46-53.

Chinese portrayal of the Story of Yang Guifei

Chinese portrayals of Yang Guifei’s story can be divided into four groups according to their themes. They are admiration of Yang Guifei’s beauty, sympathy for her misfortune, condemnation of her beauty which had monopolized the emperor’s attention and had kept him from governing the nation, and criticism of the emperor’s infatuation for Yang Guifei and his disregard of political affairs. These portrayals are mainly in three forms: tale, poetry, and prose.

Biographical depiction of Yang Guifei’s life appears in official and unofficial historical texts. These works tell the rise and fall of Yang Guifei, from being selected to enter the Emperor’s service at the palace and becoming the favorite of the emperor to being executed as demanded by the imperial army. To various degrees, these works all criticize the emperor’s infatuation for Yang Guifei and his negligence of political affairs, which in turn brought about the downfall of the nation. Official historical texts are *Jiu Tang shu* 旧唐書 (Old Tang history, ca. 945) and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (New Tang history, ca. 1060), as well as unofficial historical texts, such as *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (A comprehensive mirror for aid in government, mid-eleventh century) *Yang Taizhen waichuan* 楊太真外伝 (Unofficial biography of Yang Taizhen, late tenth century).233

---

High Tang poetry praises the charm of the Chinese consort, laments her tragic life and criticizes the political situation that led to her tragic ending. Representative poems are those by renowned poet Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), such as Qingping diao 清平調 (The Tune of Qingping) and Liren xing 儔人行 (A Parade of Beauties). After the death of Yang Guifei, Du Fu also wrote a poem entitled Ai jiangtao 哀江頭 (Lament at the Riverside, 757) in sympathy for her misfortune. However, by all accounts, the most distinguished and influential work on the Yang Guifei motif is Bai Juyi’s Changhen ge 長恨歌 (Song of Everlasting Sorrow, ?806) well known and popular in both China and Japan. Its popularity in Japan is due to the fact that it was the earliest literary work on the topic that was imported into Japan by the mid-ninth century,234 and in part due to the thematic and poetic excellence of the epic poem.

The epic poem has a postscript entitled Changhen ge zhuan 長恨歌伝 (The tale of the song of everlasting sorrow, ?806) written by Chen Hung 陳鴻 at his friend Bai Juyi’s request. The prose begins by portraying Yang Guifei as a femme fatale (youwu 尤物). Chen Hung spells out in the Changhen ge zhuan that “[Bai Juyi’s] intention was not only to express his sympathy with the events, but to convey this record to posterity to caution against (the influence of) femmes

---

234 A Japanese monk Keigaku 華萼, during his study in China, handcopied the entire volumes of Bai’s Collected Work (Hakushi monjū 白氏文集) at Nanzen’in Temple in So Chou in the year 844. He returned to Japan with it in 847. Lu Chien and Wang Yung, eds., Chung-kuo tien chi tsai jih-pen ti liu chuan yu ying hisian (Hangzhou: Hangzhou daxue chubanshe), 11.
The first line of Bai Juyi’s poem foreshadows the tragic ending, employing the word qingguo 傾国 (literally “topple a kingdom”) to describe an extraordinary beauty who is reputed to distract a ruler from his duties. Nonetheless, both Changhen ge and Changhen ge chuan change their tones distinctly. Both authors eventually end up sympathizing with the two doomed lovers.

Such a development can be best illustrated if the poem is divided into three sections. The first section, comprising one-third of the entire poem, depicts the love relationship between the emperor and Yang Guifei, from the beginning to the tragic end in which she was executed at the request of the army. It is in this section that the extraordinary beauty of Yang Guifei that charms the emperor is portrayed as the reason for the emperor’s disregard of the country’s affairs, which led to the demise of the Tang dynasty. This is explicitly stated in the following lines from the poem:

The spring nights were regretfully so short, and the sun rose high so early
From then on, the emperor did not attend the morning court.

The poem continues by depicting the emperor’s infatuation for Yang Guifei in the following lines:

Three thousand beauties in the harems
The love for the three thousand was devoted to only one.

後宮佳麗三千人
三千寵愛在一身

Her sisters and brothers were all honored and ennobled
Glory and sublimity that anyone would envy adorned the Yangs.

姊妹弟兄皆列士
可憐光彩生門戸

The second section, comprising another one-third of the poem, centers on the lament of the Emperor and his yearning for his lost love. It contains an extensive portrayal of his grief in the palace. He then retired and lived with the memory of his beloved consort. Longing to see her again, he commanded a Taoist necromancer, who claimed to have the ability to seek out the soul of the deceased, to look for the spirit of Yang Guifei.

The third section makes up the last one-third of the poem. It tells of the Taoist necromancer’s meeting with the spirit of Yang Guifei and depicts her resentment of her ill-fated love. This section introduces the two tokens of the love relationship—the mementos and the love vow. The poem concludes with the famous couplets that embody the poet’s ultimate view of Yang Guifei’s story. It reads:

In the sky, may we be birds flying on shared wings
On earth, may we be trees with branches entwined
Heaven and earth last, for a limited time
This sorrow lingers, without end.
在天願作比翼鳥
在地願為連理枝
天長地久有時尽
此恨綿綿無絕期

Indeed, Bai Juyi’s poem does not reflect such harsh criticism of Yang Guifei. As its title suggests, the poem interprets Yang Guifei’s story as a heartbreaking tale that never ends. Bai Juyi sympathizes with the two doomed lovers through depicting the lament of the emperor over the loss of his loved one, and Yang Guifei’s resentment over her ill-fated love and the unfulfilled vow for everlasting love.

Japanese Reception of the Yang Guifei Motif Prior to the Nô Play

The above mentioned Chinese sources on the Yang Guifei story were all imported to Japan no later than the Heian period (907-1133). Among them, the most influential text was Changhen ge. The Chinese poem permeated various literary and artistic works in premodern Japan. Portrayals of Yang Guifei’s story appear in almost the same Japanese literary works in which Wang Zhaojun’s story is retold. They are screen painting poetry (byōbu-e uta 屏風絵歌) from the ninth century, Wakan Rôei shû (A collection of Japanese and Chinese poetry to recite, 1018), Genji monogatari, Toshiyori zuinô, Konjaku monogatari, Kara monogatari, Heike monogatari (The tale of Heike, twelfth to thirteenth centuries), and Taiheiki. However, there are no representations in early kanshi (poetry in classical Chinese) collections such as Ryôun Shû (A Collection from above the clouds, 782-814)
and Bunka shūreishū (A collection of glories and graces, 818). This absence is probably due to the fact that Bai Juyi’s work arrived after the compilation of these collections, and that by the second half of the ninth century, Japanese literatis’ interest in composing Chinese poetry was gradually replaced by a preference for Japanese waka poetry.

In these Japanese texts, Yang Guifei is portrayed as a passive character who was the victim of the Chinese emperor’s love. She is not condemned as the cause of the emperor’s neglect of state affairs nor as the cause of the demise of the dynasty. Instead, the Japanese authors focus on the Chinese characters’ emotions, in particular, the grief and resentment of the Chinese lovers over their ill-fated love.

Such a portrayal first appeared in the screen painting poems by Lady Ise 伊勢 (?877-?940) and Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (ca. 872-945). Emperor Uda 宇田天皇 (r. 887-897) commanded the making of the screen paintings on the Song of the Everlasting Sorrow motif and had the two renowned poets compose poems corresponding to the paintings. Since both the paintings and the poem by Ki no Tsurayuki were lost, Lady Ise’s poems, which were included in her poetry collection, provide a glimpse of the early Heain aristocrats’ appreciation of the
Chinese tale. All the poems composed by Lady Ise depict Yang Guifei’s grief for her ill-fated love relation.\textsuperscript{236}

The Chinese emperor’s sorrow after the loss of his beloved consort is the dominant theme in the poems selected in the \textit{Wakan rōei shû} (A collection of Japanese and Chinese poetry to recite). All three couplets are derived from \textit{Changhen ge}, and they all portray the emperor’s sorrow. Moreover, the only selection composed by a Japanese poet also shares the same characteristic of focusing on the emperor.\textsuperscript{237} It reads: “The sorrow of the Tang Emperor after Yang Guifei had passed away (\textit{Yōkihi kaette tōtei no omoi} 楊貴妃かえって唐帝の思い).”\textsuperscript{238}

Such a focus on the sentiment of the male character is also emphasized in \textit{Genji monogatari}. In modern scholarship, it is widely accepted that \textit{Genji monogatari}, particularly the first chapter \textit{Kiritsubo “The Paulownia Court,”} is indebted to Bai Juyi’s poem. The author Murasaki Shikibu adapts \textit{Changhen ge} to illustrate the tragic love story of the protagonist’s parents—the Japanese emperor and his beloved consort the Kiritsubo lady. However, she mainly adopts the section of the Chinese poem that depicts the sorrow of the emperor rather than


\textsuperscript{237} Kawaguchi and Shida eds., \textit{Wakan Rōei Shû}, 251-52.

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 110.
that of Yang Guifei. Similar to the Chinese story, the Japanese emperor’s infatuation for consort Kiritsubo caused the resentment of the other imperial consorts and eventually led to her death. Early in the chapter, the author cites the story of Yang Guifei to foreshadow the outcome of the Japanese narrative:

His [the Japanese emperor’s] court looked with very great misgiving upon what seemed a reckless infatuation. In China just such an unreasoning passion had been the undoing of an emperor and had spread turmoil through the land. As the resentment grew, she was frequently being cited against the lady.239

Although the author does not spell out the name of the Chinese figures, the underlying Chinese motif becomes apparent as the story unfolds and closely resembles Changhen ge. In Genji monogatari, the consort’s untimely death was in part due to the pressure applied by other consorts. Similar to the plot of the Chinese poem, in which the Tang emperor sends a Taoist necromancer to visit the spirit of Yang Guifei and bring back a hairpin as a memento, the Japanese emperor also sends a messenger to visit the consort’s mother who returns with the consort’s combs and bodkins as keepsakes for the emperor. The messenger returns to the palace only to find the Japanese emperor gazing at Emperor Uda’s screen painting of the story of Changhen ge:

[The Emperor] had become addicted to illustrations by the Emperor Uda for “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow” and to poems by Ise and Tsurayuki on that subject, and to Chinese poems as well.240

239 Translation taken from Seidensticker, trans., The Tale of Genji, 3.

240 Ibid., 11.
Murasaki Shikibu further brings the plot of the Chinese poem into her work to highlight the Japanese emperor’s lament over his lost love:

There are limits to the powers of the most gifted artists. The Chinese lady in the paintings did not have the luster of life. Yang Guifei was said to have resembled the lotus of the sublime pond, the willows of the Timeless Hall. No doubt she was very beautiful in her Chinese finery. When he tried to remember the quiet charm of his lost lady, he found that there was no color of flower, no song of bird to summon her up. Morning and night, over and over again, they had repeated to each other the lines from Changhen ge: “In the sky, as birds that share a wing, on earth, as trees that share a branch.” It had been their vow, and the shortness of her life had made it an empty dream. Everything, the moaning of the wind, the humming of autumn insects, added to the sadness.241

Indeed, by drawing parallels between the plot and the characters of her story and the Chinese poem, Murasaki Shikibu makes her characters’ emotion more vivid and clear to the reader.

Unlike Genji monogatari’s treatment, Yang Guifei’s story was told in a more direct fashion in collections of stories and war tales. These works include Toshiyori zuinô, Konjaku monogatari, and Kara monogatari. In these works, a brief version of the Chinese story is retold and used as an example to support a theme or to convey certain message(s) that are unique to that particular Japanese work. The following are a few examples of such a use of the Chinese story.

The retelling in the Konjaku monogatari is entitled “How the Tang emperor Xuanzong’s Yang Guifei was killed by his majesty’s favor.”242 The story focuses

241 Ibid., 12.

on telling the cause of the Chinese consort’s death. The author imposes his judgment that the welfare of the country is more important than the love between two individuals, and thus blames the emperor for his inappropriate infatuation.

The story of Yang Guifei as told in *Kara monogatari* is the most detailed and the first that extensively focuses on the Chinese consort’s emotion. As Iwayama Taijō has pointed out, it largely adopts the plot of *Changhen ge chuan*. However, there is no apparent intention to convey the story to posterity to caution against the influence of superlative beauty or to prevent misfortune. Therefore, in contrast to its counterpart in *Konjaku monogatari*, the Chinese story is treated as a tale of the ill-fated love between two individuals rather than as a didactic tale about politics. Nevertheless, Buddhist ideas are employed at the end of the tale to provide an opportunity for the reader to ponder upon and learn from the story of Yang Guifei. The commentary relates the story to the concept of salvation in Western Paradise:

For all things of this world are dreams and illusion. As the eight sufferings are unavoidable, even if one took the tonsure, one would still be repelled. The joy of heaven is unlimited, but if one is not aware of the five decays [of celestial beings], even if one prays, the birth in this world is meaningless. One should determine to do good in the three worlds and pray for the highest of the nine steps of salvation.

---


In war tales such as *Heike monogatari*, and *Taiheiki*, however, Yang Guifei’s story exists only in fragments and only certain motifs that were canonized in earlier literary interpretations are incorporated into the narrative. The peerless beauty of the Chinese consort and the political turmoil depicted in the Chinese story were adapted into war tales as allusive prototypes for similar situations that occur in their material.

For instance, in *Heike monogatari*, a tale on the rise and fall of the military clan the Taira, Yang Guifei’s popularity in court that brought her family power and fame is used as an analogue of the Japanese story. Kenshunmon’in, a member of the Taira clan who became a consort and the mother of the crown prince, had brought the clan to prosperity and prominence. As the author describes:

> As the Emperor’s maternal relative, Kenshunmon’in’s brother, the Taira Major Counselor Yokitada, was able to exercise great influence both inside and outside the palace. Every rank granted and every appointment bestowed in those days conformed to his will. His power resembled that of Yang Guo-zhong during the period of Yang Guifei’s good fortune.245

Allusions to canonized couplets of *Changhen ge* are used to depict the appearance of the Empress Kenreimon’in, the niece of Kenshunmon’in:

> The Empress’s discomfort increased as the months went by. It seemed that Lady Li of the Han dynasty, whose single smile was said to cast a hundred spells, must have looked the same when she lay ill in the Zhaoyang Hall, that even Yang Guifei of the Tang dynasty must have

---

appeared less pitiful when she grieved like a spray of pear blossoms drenched by spring rain, or a lotus blossom drooping in the wind, or a maiden flower weighed down by dewdrops.246

As the above study of Japanese reception of the Yang Guifei motif has shown, the (re)interpretations and adaptations of the Chinese story vary according to the nature of the genres and the perspectives of Japanese authors within respective social contexts. Different aspects of the Chinese story are emphasized. For example, in Genji monogatari, the Chinese poem Changhen ge is incorporated into the narrative as a device for parallel comparison of a shared theme, that is, the lament of the emperor for a lost love and the fate of a beloved consort whose tragic death is indirectly caused by the emperor’s obsessive love toward her. Another example is the anecdote in Kara monogatari. It applies Buddhist teachings to explain Yang Guifei’s tragic death. The Nô counterpart plays close attention to these earlier interpretations so as to present the Chinese story in ways that match the audience’s knowledge that was, to a certain degree, derived from the above representations.

Perspectives of the Adapter [3]

Konparu Zenchiku, the playwright of Yōkihi, was a performer, playwright and theoretician of Nô. A legitimate heir of the Konparu troupe, he was also the

246 The translation is taken from Helen Craig McCullough, trans. *The Tale of the Heike*, 97. For the original in Japanese, see *Heike monogatari* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1994), 198-199. The last two lines allude to a couplet of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, “She was graceful as a pear blossom, bearing the rain of spring.”
son-in-law of Zeami and is generally regarded as Zeami’s artistic heir. After the
death of Motomasa, the talented son of Zeami, Zeami had passed on to Zenchiku
many writings of his artistry of Nô. Indeed, Zeami’s teachings had an immense
influence on Zenchiku’s dramaturgy and artistic pursuits.

Such a mentorship is evident in some of the extant writings. Zeami had
composed two treatises, Rikugi 六義 (Six principles, 1428) and Shûgyoku tokka 拾玉得花 (Finding gems, gaining the flower, 1428) for him. In the postscript of
Shûgyoku tokka, Zeami states, “This volume contains some secret teachings on the
training for our art. Konparu Zenchiku understands the essence of Nô, and thus I
pass this on to him.” In a later treaty, Kyakuraika 却来華 (The flower of
returning, 1433), Zeami comments on the potential of Zenchiku and states the
expectations he had for him. The passage hints that Zenchiku might had access
to some of the secret teachings of Zeami. It reads:

Of course, the head of the Konparu troupe’s [i.e., Zenchiku’s] fundamental
style is correct. And, he may be capable of preserving our tradition, but as
of now he does not seem likely to become a great performer. Perhaps
when he becomes older and his powers mature, he will become an
uncommonly skilled actor with a distinctive style. However, as I do not
expect to live that long, who will be able to transmit the seal of attainment
to him? Still, Motomasa permitted Konparu to look at one of our most

---

247 Rikugi elaborates the six aspects of Nô by adopting the six principles of Japanese waka
poetry that were originated from the Chinese classics Shi jing (The book of odes). In Shûgyoku
tokka, Zeami answers six questions posted by Zenchiku regarding the art of Nô. The part on yûgen
(graceful beauty) is particularly important.

248 Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 196.
important secret treatises, no doubt thinking that other than he there was no one who could preserve our school’s name for future generations.249

Many of Zenchiku’s treatises on the art of Nô were highly influenced by Zeami. For example, as stated in chapter two, Zenchiku further explored Zeami’s Go’ongyoku jôjô 五音曲条々 in Go’on no shidai 五音の次第. Also, his pedagogical writings on the achieving different levels of artistry in one’s performance through the motif of Rokurin ichirô 六輪一露 (Six circles and one dewdrop) are inspired by some of Zeami’s writings and the latter’s notion of yûgen 幽玄 (graceful beauty).

In Yûgen sanrin 幽玄三輪 (Yûgen and the Upper Three Circles, ?1466), a treaty that elaborates the important connection between the realization of yûgen and the first three of the six circles motif, Zenchiku aligns his precepts with the perspective of Zeami’s Kyûi 九位 (The Nine Levels)250 as follows:

Zeami has left us his nine types of essential acting levels for keeping the ranking of levels in mind. When my thoughts are incorporated into that system, the three performing styles of Zeami’s upper types correspond to the three upper spheres of the Six Spheres. His middle types are mixed and correspond to the Sphere of Likening. His lower levels correspond to the Sphere of Breaking Free. The Emptied Sphere and the Single Dewdrop are the levels of highest artistic effects, and are the levels [respectively] inherent in spiritual emancipation and in enlightenment, which operates

---

249 The translation is taken from Thornhill, 17. For the original in Japanese, see Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 246.

250 The word i literally means ‘position’, ‘rank’. In Kyûi, Zeami ranks different levels of acting based on the artistic accomplishment. See Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 173-77.
unhindered when the producing of acting on the uppermost of [Zeami's three] upper types is the level. The Appearance of a Miraculous Flowering will be its inherent nature.251

Such a comparison provides evidence not only that Zenchiku had access to Kyûi, an important treaty by Zeami, but also insinuates that Zeami’s writing might have become a major reference, or at least an accessible source, for Zenchiku’s reader(s). It is plausible that many ideas and terminology in the yûgen sanrin treaty were derived from, or at least inspired by, Zeami’s ideas of Nô.

The core of Zenchiku’s theory of the art of Nô is the Six Circles and One Dewdrop motif, in which certain ideas and terminology are derived from Zeami, but it is Zenchiku’s integration of Buddhist cosmology that sets him apart from Zeami. In Rokurin ichirô hichû 六輪一露秘注, Zenchiku spells out the relationship between the Buddhist cycle of birth-and-death and the six circles:

The sharp sword of the Single Dewdrop sweeps away all hindrances and is the natural substance of mind analogous to a wish-granting jewel. It will sever the demon’s ropes [that binds us] to a perpetual cycle of rebirths in the Six Realms of Existence and will be made the link for emancipating oneself along with all other sentient beings.252

Although Buddhist terminology and devices also appear in Zeami’s writing, they only attain real significance in his later writings. Such a powerful cosmology,

---


which integrates the art of Nô with the prominent Buddhist teaching, further promotes the religious and philosophical aspects of Nô.

**Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]**

The play *Yôkili* is a great example that showcases Zenchiku’s dramaturgy. In the light of Buddhist teachings, he retells the Chinese story that has a long reception history in Japan and creates an atmosphere of *yûgen*. Zenchiku followed the teaching of Zeami, which emphasizes the importance of selecting a *honzetsu*, that is perceived authentic according to the audience’s knowledge. The following is a synopsis of the play.

A Taoist necromancer in the service of Xuanzong, Emperor of the Tang dynasty of China, was sent by imperial command to seek out the spirit of the emperor’s beloved consort, Yang Guifei. After searching elsewhere, he arrives at the Land of Immortals and learns that the spirit of the consort dwells in the Hall of Great Verity. Calling on the spirit there, he informs her about the emperor’s grief over losing her. To his request for a memento to bring back to the emperor, Yang Guifei presents him with a jade hairpin. But the necromancer desires something more momentous about their love. She then reveals to him the secret vow she and the emperor once exchanged. Before the necromancer leaves, she re-enacts the pleasures of the past by performing the “Dance of the rainbow skirt and the coat of feathers” that she used to perform for the emperor.
She tells of how she misses the days when she and the emperor were together. After she finishes dancing, the necromancer departs. Yang Guifei, all alone again, weeps in the Hall.

The kernel for the plot of Yôkihi resembles the last section of Changhen ge. Indeed, the play contains about twenty fragments that resemble Changhen ge; however, all of these fragments had previously appeared in well-known Japanese literary works including Toshiyori zuinô, Taiheiki, Konjaku monogatari, Kara monogatari, Genji monogatari, and Heike monogatari. A close reading of the Nô play against both the Chinese and Japanese sources should make manifest the strategies that Zenchiku employs to represent the Chinese story in Nô.

Itô Masayoshi has pointed out that “behind the Nô play Yôkihi is the world of Bai Juyi’s Changhen ge from which some of the language of the play derives; but it is not the honzetsu of the play … One should be aware of the existence of the interpretations of Yang Guifei’s story that developed in our country [Japan].” Itô points to Toshiyori zuinô and the Chûsei Genji monogatari kôgaisho (Annotation of “The Tale of Genji” medieval version) as the honzetsu of the play. In addition to the sources that Itô mentions, we need to take into account

---


254 One generally accepted theory is that the plot of the first chapter of Genji monogatari is modeled after the “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow (Changhen ge).” See chapter two of David Pollack, The Fractures of Meaning.
other Japanese sources such as *Taiheiki*, *Konjaku monogatari*, *Kara monogatari*, *Heike monogatari*, as well as pictorial representations of *Changhen ge* such as screen paintings.\textsuperscript{255}

One piece of evidence is the memento that Consort Yang gives to the necromancer in the Nô play. In *Changhen ge*, the mementos are the broken halves of a golden hairpin. Consort Yang, now living in the immortal isle after her death, gives one half to the necromancer to bring back to the emperor while keeping the other half for herself. In contrast to this, in *Taiheiki*, *Konjaku monogatari*, and *Toshiyori zuinô*, the memento is a jade hairpin, and in *Kara monogatari* it is a golden hairpin. In the Nô play, the memento is a jade hairpin and it is not broken into two halves. One may argue that, the portion of *Changhen ge* in the Nô play had already appeared in earlier Japanese materials, and thus the inclusion of details such as the hairpin shows that the Nô play is a closer rendition of the domestic source. Such a discrepancy suggests that the Nô playwright was likely referred to the Japanese sources in the composition of the play. If he indeed had access to the *Changhen ge*, the jade hairpin then serves as evidence that the playwright Zenchiku was more interested in retelling the story consistent with Japanese precedents rather than being faithful to original Chinese sources.

\textsuperscript{255} For example, a screen painting of the Chinese poem was made under the order of the Emperor Uda (r.887-897). The emperor then had two renowned poets, Ki no Tsurayuki and Lady Ise compose poems on the subject related to the painting. See Seidensticker, trans., *The Tale of Genji*, 9-10.
Based upon the fragments in the Nô play that resemble *Changhen ge*, it is clear that Zenchiku only employed the portion that already appeared in other Japanese sources and followed closely what had been received in Japan. Zenchiku also followed Zeami’s teaching on the assignment of poetic and easily recognized words to the *shite* and avoided difficult terms deriving from foreign languages. He allots almost all the lines similar to that of the *Changhen ge* to the *waki* and the chorus. Only a few phrases of Chinese verse are chanted by the *shite*, Yang Guifei.

Allusions to the Japanese sources unrelated to the Chinese story or to Bai Juyi’s poem are abundant and are used in more important segments in the play than are those related to the Chinese poem. Besides Buddhist sutras, Japanese texts incorporated include *Genji monogatari*, *Konjaku monogatari*, *Taiheiki*, *Kara monogatari*, *Toshiyori zuinô*, *Manyôshû*, *Wakan rôei shû*, *Kokin wakashû*, and *Shoku kokin wakashû*. Among them, those related to *Genji monogatari* and Buddhist sutras are particularly crucial.

Zenchiku employs allusions to *Genji monogatari* at critical junctures of the play. They are the death and parting, the grief of losing one’s beloved, the reason for the unavoidable parting, the transience of all things, and one’s deep attachments to a former life. The notion of transience, which is absent in the Chinese source, offers the reason for the parting as unavoidable karma that controls life and death as well as the meeting and parting of all humans. In the
Nô play, similar to the *Kara monogatari*, Consort Yang’s love attachment and resentment toward the ill-fated love are identified as the causes that prevent her from attaining salvation, thus causing her to linger at *Penglai (Hôrai)*, an isle of immortals located between heaven and earth.

Indeed, Zenchiku interprets the story of Yang Guifei in ways that coincide with the Buddhist teaching that appealed to medieval Japanese. He interprets her story with the Buddhist notion of salvation and concept of the impermanence of all things. Since neither of these two concepts is the focus of any Chinese sources, the Buddhist notions elucidate that the playwright referred to Japanese sources. Such a domestication of the foreign story helps the audience be involved with the story. Zenchiku does so by integrating allusions to *Genji monogatari* with Buddhist ideas.

The first allusion to *Genji monogatari* appears in the very first verse of the play (*shidai*). The line is taken from a poem composed by the protagonist Genji when he and Lady Yûgao are on their way to a mansion for their secret tryst, where she dies later on that night. Through such allusion to the poem in this well-known episode of *Genji monogatari*, Zenchiku introduces a key theme in the play—death and parting between two lovers. Moreover, in the same episode, upon arrival at the mansion, Genji and Lady Yûgao comment on the inauspiciousness of the love vow by the Chinese lovers canonized by the Chinese poem *Changhen ge*. Rather than making a wish for everlasting love, the
Japanese lovers turn to the Buddha of the Future, Lord Maitreya. However, they are doubtful whether any vows should be made, given that uncontrollable karma governs each life.256

The second allusion is embedded in the first line of the *waki’s michiyuki* (traveling song). It is directly taken from the first chapter of *Genji monogatari*. It reads, “Would there were a wizard, would there were a wizard, to search for her and tell me where her spirit dwells.”257 The poem in *Genji monogatari* is originally an allusion to *Changhen ge*, and Zenchiku quotes its adapted version as it exists in the Japanese tale. In *Genji monogatari*, the emperor (Genji’s father) laments the loss of his beloved consort, Lady Kiritsubo (Genji’s mother), while gazing at the screen painting of the legend of Consort Yang and comparing himself to the Chinese emperor who laments the loss of his lover. Murasaki Shikibu, the author of *Genji monogatari*, utilizes *Changhen ge* as a narrative device to enhance the reader’s involvement in her work, whereas Zenchiku alludes to *Genji monogatari* to utilize the audience’s foreknowledge and thus enhance the narrative of his play.

256 Genji and Lady Yûgao’s vow reads: “This pious one shall lead us on our way, as we plight our troth for all the lives to come.” The vow exchanged by the Chinese emperor and Yang Kei-fei seemed to bode ill, and so he preferred to invoke Lord Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future; but such a promise is rash. “So heavy the burden I bring with me from the past, I doubt that I should make these vows for the future.” It was a reply that suggested doubts about his “lives to come.” The translation is taken from Seidensticker, trans., *The Tale of Genji*, 68.

257 The poem in *Genji monogatari* reads, “And will no wizard search her out for me, that even he may tell me where she is?” The translation is taken from Seidensticker, trans., *The Tale of Genji*, 12.
The notion of impermanence is spelled out in the third allusion to *Genji monogatari*, that reads, “Life must end. It is a transient world.” In the novel, the female protagonist, Murasaki, wrote a letter to Genji that reads, “Life must end. It is a transient world. The one thing lasting is the bond between us.”258 Not only is the notion of transience first introduced into the play through this allusion, it is embedded at a crucial point of the play, namely the recitative lines (*sashi*) delivered by Lady Yang when she appears on stage. Such placement shows the playwright’s emphasis on the theme of transience as an explanation of death and parting.

The fourth allusion is placed towards the end of the play, prior to the *kyû no dan* (climax). It reads:

*Shite:*   Dance of the Coat of Feathers,  
   So rare to see the maiden turn.  
*Chorus:* The fluttering sleeves, oh, express her feelings.

The underlined part is an allusion taken from a poem in the chapter of *Genji monogatari*. The poem is composed by Genji in which he directly asks if Lady Fujitsubo noticed his feeling toward her when she saw his dance the night before. Genji’s deep attachment to Lady Fujitsubo, his step-mother for whom he has a tremendous attraction that continues throughout the tale, is well-known to the audience. In the Nô play, Yang Guifei performs the “Dance of the Rainbow Skirt and Coat of Feathers” (*ui no kyoku*) as she used to in the past to entertain the

---

Chinese emperor. Here, the Consort Yang asks the necromancer if he understands her resentment over the ill-fated vow and her yearning for the days gone by. Her attachment to her former life is rendered as the root of her resentment. This allusion to Genji’s poem heightens the emphasis on the shite’s revealing of this deep attachment.

The notion of transience of all things is further exemplified by allusions to other well-known Japanese sources. For example, Zenchiku takes a widely known and quoted poem of the Heian poet Ariwara no Narihira upon realization of unavoidable parting as the consequence of the law of transience. The original poem reads:

Would that there were, in this world, no unavoidable parting
For the sake of the child who prays for long life for his parents.259

This poem has been alluded to in various Japanese literary works and is probably the most well known poem on the theme of parting with one’s loved one. In the Nô play, it is alluded to to connote Yang Guifei’s resentment:

If there were no unavoidable parting in the world,
We would have been together for a thousand reigns.

Zenchiku also incorporates one of the central themes of a well-known medieval narrative, Heike monogatari, “Those who meet must part,” a canonical phrase expressing the notion of transience. Zenchiku places this phrase in the kuse

section, which is followed by the climax (*kyû no dan*) and usually contains the key message of the play.

As in the play *Shōkun*, *Yōkihi* depicts the Chinese story through the Muromachi Japanese cultural lens, centering on different aspects than the Chinese. The Chinese story is depoliticized to suit domestic tastes. Unlike the Chinese, who tend to place blame on the misbehavior of humans, that is, the Chinese emperor and Consort Yang, Japanese literary texts that preceded the Nô version are more interested in the tragic love story between the two, and rationalize it as the consequence of the inconceivable power of karma accumulated over lifetimes.

The majority of the fragments that resemble *Changhen ge* are plain descriptive narration. Moreover, a significant portion (section one and two discussed earlier) of the Chinese poem is omitted in the Nô play. That is the section describing Consort Yang’s monopolization of the emperor, the historical events that led to her execution, and the emperor’s lament over the loss of Yang Guifei. With the political implications and historical incidents eliminated, the playwright is able to concentrate on the portrayals of universal sentiment that the domestic audience shares, that is, the lament over a tragic love relationship. In contrast with *Changhen ge*, which portrays Consort Yang as someone who continuously regrets her ill-fated love, the play *Yōkihi* provides the reasons for the misfortune and the way to find relief—awareness of impermanence and
detachment. The play depicts her as someone who does realize the notion of transience, yet, cannot release herself from her attachment to her love relationship in her past life and thus remains in sorrow forever.

With the richest literary precedents in both Chinese and Japanese sources among all the “Chinese plays,” the plays Shôkun and Yôkihi demonstrate how earlier Japanese interpretations are utilized in the retelling of Chinese stories. The ample interpretations in Japanese poetry of the two Chinese motifs are significant factors in the composition of Nô versions of the stories. These poems are only incorporated in fragments in the plays as an aid to trigger the audience to utilize their pre-established knowledge related to the Chinese story. It was also the rich interpretation predating the Nô plays that facilitated the depiction of the emotions of these foreign characters. However, as discussed above, rather than following the Chinese interpretations, the playwrights center on themes that appeal to domestic audiences. In short, the Buddhist teaching of the notion of impermanence and the belief that worldly attachments are obstacles to enlightenment are the central themes of both plays.
CHAPTER 4

CHINESE DEITIES AND EMPERORS

Offering prayers for the longevity and prosperity of Chinese emperors and their reigns is a predominant theme of “Chinese plays” in the current Nô repertoire. About half of that group employs such themes to various degrees. Nine of the plays directly treat this theme. They are Kureha 呉服 (Kureha), Seiôbo 西王母 (The Queen Mother of the West), Tôbosaku 東方朔 (Dong Fangshuo), Kikujidô 菊慈童 (The chrysanthemum boy), Tsurukame 鶴亀 (The tortoise and the crane), Shôki 鐘馗 (Zhongkui), Kôtei 皇帝 (The Chinese emperor), Chôryô 張良 (Zhangliang), and Kan’yôkyû 咸陽宮 (Xianyang Palace). China is positively portrayed in these nine plays. Five of them, namely, Kureha, Seiôbo, Tôbosaku, Kikujidô, and Tsurukame, have very simple plots that depict Chinese deities offering prayers. Shôki and Chôryô tell the story of how the Chinese protagonists came to guard the country against evil spirits. Kôtei and Kan’yôkyû portray the story of saving the imperial consort and the emperor from evil attacks.

Although these stories are all set in China, the Nô playwrights strategically redirect the blessings for China to Japan. In other words, the
blessings and prayers for the prosperity and longevity of Chinese rulers and
their reigns are brought into Japanese sociopolitical contexts. There are at least
two elements peculiar to these plays that made such cross-cultural assimilation
possible. These are the change of the recipient (Chinese emperors) of the prayers,
and the existence of an auspicious or magical object. I will argue that it is
through the strategic employment of these elements that playwrights achieve the
domestication of Chinese motifs to promote auspicious tones more attuned to
Japanese audiences.

The first element—the inclusion of Chinese emperors in the plays,
enhances auspiciousness within the constraints of Nô. Japanese emperors are
rarely portrayed in Nô, although they are referred to in many plays. There are a
few exceptions, such as Genjô 弦上 (The lute Genjô); however, the Japanese
emperors portrayed are from ancient times and have previously undergone
deification. In fact, none of the plays depicting a Japanese emperor is a
contemporary play. As scholars have pointed out, it is because it was considered
inappropriate and disrespectful for a Nô actor to play a role as a Japanese
emperor. As Zeami states in the section on performing different kinds of
characters (monomane jôjô 物まね条々) in the second book of Kaden 花伝, it is
almost impossible to imitate people from the ruling class. He explains, “Firstly,
we shall start with the emperors and the ministers. The honorable style of the
court members and the dispositions of the military officials is something that is beyond our reach, and a very difficult thing to learn.”

Similarly, the second element—auspicious or magical objects also enhances the auspiciousness of the play. The existence of a concrete object increases the perceived authenticity and ritualistic qualities of the prayers. Although the objects and characters are of foreign origin, the presence of the addressee to whom prayers are offered makes the auspicious mode more tangible and clearly manifested. The objects employed are mainly associated with two auspicious prayers for longevity and peace. Six plays that offer prayers for longevity incorporate auspicious objects and creatures such as mythical peaches (*Seiôbo* and *Tôbosaku*), dew on chrysanthemums (*Kikujidô*), chrysanthemum wine (*Shôjô*), as well as the tortoise and crane (*Tsurukame*). The other four plays feature objects and power that safeguard the nation from turmoil. They include a guardian spirit (*Shôki*) and a mirror that fends off evil spirits (*Kôtei*), and military wisdom and power that safeguard the nation from invasions and turmoil (*Kan’yôkyû* and *Chôryô*).

Focusing on two plays, *Seiôbo* (The Queen Mother of the West) and *Tôbôsaku* (Dong Fangshuo), the following examines how blessings intended for China are redirected to Japan so as to bring auspiciousness to the Japanese theatrical stage. Moreover, since *Tôbôsaku* features the same Chinese motif as

---

Seiôbo but was written decades later, the play offers a case study of the evolving artistic and thematic preferences of Nô during the second half of the fifteenth century.

Seiôbo 西王母 (The Queen Mother of the West)
Sociopolitical Context of Seiôbo [1]

As I will explain in the section on the perspectives of the adapters [3], it is likely that the play Seiôbo was written in the 1450s or 1460s by a playwright later than Zeami (?1363-?1443) but prior to the generation of Konparu Zenpô (1454-1532?). As mentioned in chapter one, fifteenth-century Japan saw several changes in its relationship with China. In 1403, the long-halted official trading was resumed with the establishment of the tally trading system marked by the controversial diplomatic move of the third shogun Yoshimitsu, of submitting to the Chinese tribute scheme. However, such a tributary relationship with China was interrupted under the order of the next shôgun Yoshimochi (1386-1428) who was against the pro-China policies. Yet, the succeeding shogun Yoshinori recommenced trading and a diplomatic relationship with China. In 1432, the tally ship trading was reestablished and continued through 1547.

The story of Xiwangmu befits such a sociopolitical climate in the mid-fifteenth-century, in which Japan welcomed the resumption of diplomatic and trading relationships with China. The deity Xiwangmu bestowing the fruit of longevity on the Chinese emperor signifies that China is a country not only ruled
by an emperor with virtues, but also blessed by the deities. Hence, the story is a positive portrayal of China and could contribute to spreading goodwill towards China among Japanese.

Identifying the “Basic Sources” of Seiôbo [2]
Archetypal images of Xiwangmu in China

In China, there are different, and sometimes even contradictory, images of Xiwangmu. The name Xiwangmu first appears in inscriptions made on bones and shells in association with an indigenous cult of the Yin period (1500 B.C.). From then on, stories of Xiwangmu recur in a variety of texts in which her images and characteristics are quite different and sometimes even contradictory. In *Shan hai jing* 山海経 (The classic of mountains and seas), Xiwangmu is described as a cave-dwelling mountain goddess who is in human form yet with the tail of a panther and the teeth of a tiger. She has three blue birds that hunt for her. In the chapter on geography in the *Han shu* 漢書 (History of Han), the location of her cave is detailed, whereas in the chapter on *Wuxing zhi* 五行志 (Monograph on the five phases), the practice of worshiping the Queen Mother of the West is recorded. As Mori Masako has suggested, underneath the
inconsistent images the fundamental nature of Xiwangmu, that is, is consistent as the mother goddess nurtured by the matriarchal society of ancient China.261

The first transformation of the Xiwangmu motif tells of her interactions with human beings, particularly with Chinese emperors, and associates her with the attainment of immortality. These stories are told in unofficial historical tales, in which they depict Xiwangmu as a queen mother with magical power living in the far west of China. Her interactions with Emperor Mu of the Zhou Dynasty (tenth-century B.C.) and Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (110 B.C.) are particularly well known. In Mu tianzi chuan 穆天子伝 (Legends of Mu), she is depicted as having a romantic relationship with Emperor Mu and they visited each other and exchanged gifts. In Han wudi neichuan 漢武帝内伝 (Legends of the Emperor Wu of the Han) and Han Wu gushi 漢武故事 (Stories about the Han and Wu Period), she pays visits to Emperor Wu. As a tribute to his virtues, she offers the emperor peaches that confer longevity. Among them, Han wudi neichuan shares many similarities with the Nô counterpart, and so I cite it below:

In the fourth month of the first year of Yuan feng (110 B.C.), the Emperor was present in the Chenghua Palace, accompanied by Dongfang Shuo and Tung Chungshu. Suddenly a beautiful maiden appeared. She revealed that she was sent by Xiwangmu to inform the Emperor that she has heard of his virtues and plans to visit him on the seventh night of the seventh month. On that night, Xiwangmu arrived in a chariot of purple clouds drawn by many colorful dragons, along with many attendants. Xiwangmu

offered a feast and granted seven peaches from her garden. The peach trees only bear fruit once every three thousand years and conferred longevity on those who ate it.

**Japanese Reception of the Xiwangmu Motif**

Stories of Xiwangmu reached Japan by the early ninth-century. The Chinese historical and mythological texts mentioned above were all recorded in the *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* 日本国見在書目録 (Catalogue of Chinese books in Japan, 891?), a catalogue of imported books in Chinese circulating in Heian Japan.262

The peach, the fruit of longevity, that blossoms and ripens every three thousand years is the focus in Japanese *waka* poetry. The following are two representative poems alluding to the peach motif of Xiwangmu’s story. The first one was composed by Heian poet Ôshikôchi Mitsune 凡河内躬恆 (fl.898-922) and was compiled in *Shûi waka shû* 拾遺和歌集 (*Collection of Gleanings of Japanese Poems*, 1005-1011) and *Wakan rôei shû* 和漢朗詠集 (*Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poetry to Recite*, 1013):263

This is the year, once in three thousand years, the peach bears its fruit; in this year, its flowers are blooming in the spring that I am encountering!

---

262 *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku*, in *Zoku Gunshô ruijû*, 31-50.

263 Kawaguchi and Shida eds., *Wakan Rôei Shû*, 58.
三千年になるてふ桃の今年より
花咲く春に逢ひけるかな

The second one was composed by the Kamakura period poet Fujiwara Tameie 藤原為家 (1198-1275) and was compiled in *Fuboku wakashô* 夫木和歌抄:

Comes around
for a good while, in this third month,
once in three thousand years,
the peach bears its fruit;
cups of peach blossoms.

めぐりくる三月も久し三千年に
なるてふ桃の花の盃

Both poems were composed on occasions celebrating spring. The poets link the image of peach blossoms blooming to the Chinese motif. As such, the auspiciousness of the first season of the year, which symbolizes the beginning or rebirth of all life, is enhanced by bringing in the Chinese myth of the magical peach of longevity. These poems suggest that Japanese literati in the tenth and thirteenth-centuries were familiar with the Chinese story.

The retelling of the Chinese story appeared in Japanese collections of Chinese tales and poetry from the twelfth-century. These retellings of the story are fairly similar to that of the *Han wudi neichuan*, however, there are discrepancies in details and different emphases among these stories. Surviving

---

264 Mitsune composed the poem in a spring poetry contest. The poem was later compiled into *Wakan rōei shū* under the topic of “the third month” in the chapter entitled “Spring.” Tameie composed the poem at a *kyokusui no en* (winding water banquet), an imperial poetry contest held along a winding stream on the third day of the third month.
texts include annotation of *Wakan Rôei shû* on the aforementioned poem by Ōshikôchi Mitsune, *Kara monogatari*, *Kara kagami*, and *Kankoji wakashû*. The version in *Kara kagami* is quite different from the others. It focuses on the character Dongfang Shuo and relates that he was a court official of Emperor Wu who stole and ate the peaches and became an immortal himself.265 The versions in the annotation of *Wakan Rôei shû*, *Kara monogatari*, and *Kankoji wakashû* resemble the *Legends of the Han Emperor Wu*. Yet, the latter two also include a brief anecdote on Dongfang Shuo similar to that in *Kara kagami*.

One obvious difference, however, is the description of the bird that appeared in the Chinese palace that caught the attention of Emperor Wu. In China, the *Shan-hai ching* (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*) tells that Xiwangmu has three blue birds, and the *Han wu gushi* (*Stories about the Han and Wu period*) mentions a three-legged blue bird as the messenger of Xiwangmu. In Japan, the *Kara monogatari* depicts a yellow sparrow flying in the palace as a sign of the arrival of Xiwangmu, whereas in the *Kankoji wakashû*, it is a blue bird.

The interpretations in the storytelling (*setsuwa*) genre of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods are rather different from earlier Japanese interpretations in other art forms. The principal element of the Xiwangmu motif shifted from the peach blossom as depicted in the poems in Heian and early Kamakura periods to the mythical peach that confers longevity as portrayed in the later tales.

---

265 *Karakagami*, 221-22.
Moreover, the Chinese texts, such as the *Hanwu-di neichuan* (Legends of the Han Emperor Wu), specify that the reason for Xiwangmu’s delivering the peaches to the Chinese emperor was his virtue. This rationale is missing in the Japanese texts.

The quest to acquire immortality is an apparent underlying theme. Nevertheless, given that the belief in immortality is more of Taoism than Buddhism, the Japanese interpretations, in fact, play down the mystical power of the peach. For example, the *Kankoji wakashû* describes the peaches merely as delicious food, “…[Xiwangmu] presents an array of delicacies and uses a large plate to hold the seven peaches. The emperor ate the peaches and found them very sweet and tasty.”

None of the aforementioned works, except *Kara monogatari*, challenges the notion of immortality. In the end, the mythical peach is not an elixir of eternal life, but can only prolong one’s life for three thousand years. *Kara monogatari* is a work that has heavy Buddhist overtones. Its story portrays the Emperor Wu as an enthusiast pursuing the way of immortality and the elixir of eternal life. After receiving three peaches from Xiwangmu, the emperor asked her for more seeds.

---

266 *Kankoji wakashû*, 354.
to plant in his garden and is refused and laughed at by her. When the emperor presses Xiwangmu for the elixir of eternal life, she responds that it is impossible for a mortal to acquire such an elixir.267

Based upon the rich interpretations of the Xiwangmu motif discussed above, the medieval Japanese Nô audience must have had some knowledge of the Xiwangmu story prior to the Nô version. Xiwangmu once visited Emperor Wu of Han China and presented him with the peaches that have the power to prolong life. Other characters known were her messenger—the unusual bird—extravagant clothes, mythical creatures accompanying her arrival, and a mystical figure—Dongfang Shuo.

Perspectives of the Adapter of Seiôbo [3]

Attribution of authorship of the play Seiôbo varies among scholars. However, it is highly probable that it was written by a playwright later than Zeami but prior to the generation of Konparu Zenpô (1454-1532?), the grandson of Zenchiku (1403?-1468?). Nôhon sakusha chûmon 能本作者注文 (Notes on authorship of Nô plays, 1524) attributes the play to Zenchiku.268 Since this is the only surviving record on the authorship of Seiôbo, the fact that Zenchiku does not mention the play in his treatises, which include an extensive list of plays, makes

267 Kara monogatari, 35-39.

268 Nose, Nôgaku genryûkô, 1329.
modern Nô scholars skeptical about this attribution. Nevertheless, Nôhon sakusha chûmon is widely considered reliable in its attribution of plays written by Kanze Kojirô Nobumitsu, Zenpô, and Kanze Nagatoshi. Therefore, it is almost certain that none of the three wrote the play. Moreover, the earliest surviving reference to the play appeared in Zenpô Zôdan (Miscellaneous conversations with Zenpô, 1512), a treatise on the art of Nô based upon Zenpô’s oral teachings. All the plays discussed in the treatise were written by earlier playwrights, and none of the work by Zenpô, Nobumitsu, or Nagatosi is mentioned, except one play (Chôryô) by Nobumitsu. Thus, it is unlikely that Zenpô would discuss a play written by himself or his contemporary. Therefore, the play was almost definitely written sometime during the mid to the late fifteenth century.

But I would propose that it was written during the mid-fifteenth-century. This is because of the fact that Zenpô authored the play Tôbôsaku, which is a revision of the play Seiôbo. Within the corpus of “Chinese Plays,” there are only a few similar cases in which characters of an earlier play are featured again in a later one. One example is Kôtei (The Chinese Emperor) by Nobumitsu, which depicts a story involving characters that appeared in two of Zenchiku’s plays (Yôkihi and Shôki). Given that these plays that have close relations with earlier plays were written about two generations later than the earlier ones, it is likely that the play Seiôbo was written in the 1450s or the 1460s.

---

Aesthetic ideals in the second half of the fifteenth-century in the realm of Nô can be divided into two stages. First is the further development of Zeami’s artistic innovations, particularly the notion of *yûgen* and *go’on* 五音 (Five modes), by Zenchiku. The second is the gradual exploration of spectacular and lively styles to cater to general audiences outside of the shogunate and aristocratic circles. Zenchiku, the son-in-law of Zeami, is considered the heir of Zeami’s art. Upon the recommendation of Zeami’s gifted son Motomasa, Zeami permitted Zenchiku to read some of his secret treatises, such as *Kakyô* 花鏡 (A mirror to training in the flower). Zeami admired Zenchiku’s talent and composed two treatises for him. From 1455 to about 1466, Zenchiku wrote a series of treatises using a set of images he termed *Rokurin ichiro* 六輪一露 (Six spheres and one single dewdrop) to illustrate his concepts of the art of Nô in close association with the notion of *yûgen*. The other group of Zenchiku’s secret treatises derived from Zeami’s treatises on the *Go’on* 五音 (Five modes) in Nô performances. As a matter of fact, one of the most circulated treatises from the late fifteenth-century on was Zenchiku’s *Go’on jittei* 五音十体 (Five sound and ten styles, 1456). The treatise defines the five modes of performance with examples of poems, as well

---


271 The two treatises are *Rikugi* (Six Principles, 1428) and *Shûgyoku tokka* (Finding Gems, Gaining the Flower, 1428). *Rikugi* relates the six principles of poetry composition to Nô. In *Shûgyoku tokka*, Zeami answers Zenchiku’s questions regarding the art of Nô. Omote and Katô, *Zeami Zenchiku*, 246.

as the ten styles of Japanese poetry (waka) illustrated with Nô play titles and poems. It is believed that Zenchiku composed the treatise for the sake of educating the powerful provincial lord of Yamaguchi, Ôuchi Masahiro.273

After the Ônin War (1467-77), many parts of Kyoto were in ruin, and many Nô troupes lost their patrons in the capital, particularly patrons of the warrior and aristocratic classes. Ability to please the less cultivated groups of audiences became increasingly crucial to the survival of the art. Therefore, by the end of the fifteenth-century, we see an increase in the number of plays that place emphasis on pleasing the crowd with more spectacular staging, dynamic dance sequences, and more characters. The question here is, how was the play Seiôbo received under such circumstances?

Choice and Composition of the Lyrics and Dance [4]

Given the primary version of the story of Xiwangmu, the sociopolitical contexts, and the artistic ideals discussed above, how was a Chinese female deity portrayed in medieval Nô? According to Zeami a female deity (shinjo 神女) fits the criterion for an ideal character because she is naturally associated with dance and chant.274 A close reading of the play Seiôbo reveals that the Chinese deity Xiwangmu is portrayed in ways that are consistent with Zeami’s artistic ideals.

273 Thornhill, Six Circles, One Dew Drop, 193.

274 Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 134.
Moreover, the playwright crafted this story of foreign origin into something Japanese audiences could relate to, while always having fresh appeal.

Modern scholars have named various sources for the play Seiôbo. However, a close reading of the play suggests otherwise and reveals a complicated pattern.

The following is a synopsis of the play.

A beautiful maiden appears at the palace of Emperor Wu of Han China (ca. 110 B.C.) to announce the upcoming visit of Xiwangmu (the Queen Mother of the West) as a consequence of the virtue and good leadership of the emperor. Arriving amidst an array of heavenly maidens and attendants and on a chariot of purple clouds driven by dragons, Xiwangmu presents the emperor with peaches from her garden that ripen once every three thousand years. Whoever ate the peach would become immortal. After presenting the gift and performing a dance, the celestial beings return to heaven.

In their discussion of possible sources for this play, Sanari Kentarô points to the Kara monogatari as the predominant one. Taguchi Kazuo attribute Han wudi neichuan as the major source. Nevertheless, as Taguchi has pointed out, one problem in determining the source is the inconsistent treatments of the historical setting for the play. The Nô play is set in the reign of the Emperor of Chou and casts the waki actor as the Chinese emperor. The question here is, if Han wudi

neichuan was the source, why is the play not set during the Han Dynasty?

Taguchi Kazuo attributes the discrepancy to the kyôgen school which has its own text of the kyôgen portion of each play. However, in the Nô text there is no mention of the name or the reign of the Chinese emperor. Instead, the playwright uses the term kimi 君, which is often used to address the Japanese emperor.

This ambiguity in the historical setting makes it easier for the Japanese audience to digest the foreign story as their own. There are several possible reasons for the ambiguity of the setting and reign of the emperor. First, both the authors of the kyôgen and Nô versions situate the play in the reign of Emperor Mu of the Chou Dynasty. This suggests that the original source may not have been the Hanwu-di neichuan, nor the Japanese texts that specify Emperor Wu of Han as the reigning emperor. Second, the playwright, and possibly the audience also, were not too concerned whether Xiwangmu paid a visit to the Emperor Wu of Han or the Emperor Mu of Chou. Rather, their main interest was that she paid a visit to the ruler of the country in appreciation of his leadership, and it did not matter to which Chinese dynasty he belonged.

The Structure of Seiôbo

A comparison of Seiôbo and plays that feature a female deity of Japanese origin should provide a fruitful case study of the treatment of a Chinese motif in Nô. Only four plays in the current repertoire, Kureha 呉服, Ukon 右近 (Ukon),
Seiôbo, and Sahôyama (Mount Sahô), are considered as “Deity plays (waki-nô).” Kureha features two Chinese maidens who are credited with introducing the artistry of weaving to Japan in ancient times. According to the Nihon shoki (The chronicle of Japan, 720?), they spent the rest of their lives in Japan and became deities of weaving.276 Since their stories are not found in China, and the play is not set in China, I do not consider Kureha to be a “Chinese play.” The play Ukon depicts the deity of cherry blossoms, whereas Sahôyama features the goddess of spring Sahô-hime. Based on the treatises of Zeami and Zenchiku, modern scholars are rather certain that Kureha and Ukon were written by Zeami, and Sahôyama by Zenchiku. Therefore, I select Kureha and Ukon to compare with Seiôbo since both plays were written before Seiôbo.

As shown in Table One, the structure of the play Seiôbo is similar to that of Ukon, except for the opening. The play begins with a kyôgen actor’s opening speech (kyôgen kuchiake), followed by the waki’s reciting of the introduction in a style of lyrical monologue (sashi). Such an arrangement is different from the conventional progression of a play, which opens with the shidai (entrance lines), nanori (self-introduction), michiyuki (traveling song), and tsuki-serifu (announcing arrival) performed by the waki in most plays featuring deities. This opening with a speech by the kyôgen actor is common in “Chinese plays.” In fact, only a few of them follow the more conventional opening, namely Yôkihi 楊貴妃 and Kôu 項羽

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seiôbo</th>
<th>Kureha</th>
<th>Ukon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Kyôgen kuchiake</td>
<td>(kyôgen)</td>
<td>1. Shidai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waki-sashi</td>
<td>(waki)</td>
<td>Nanori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageuta</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
<td>Ageuta <a href="waki">michiyuki</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tsukizerifu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mondô</td>
<td>(waki &amp; shite)</td>
<td>2. Issei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageuta</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
<td>Sashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rongi</td>
<td>(chorus &amp; shite)</td>
<td>Sageuta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shite exits</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ageuta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aikyôgen</td>
<td>(kyôgen)</td>
<td>3. Mondô</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ageuta[machiuta]</td>
<td>(waki &amp; wakitsure)</td>
<td>Ageuta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Norizi</td>
<td>(chorus &amp; shite)</td>
<td>Kuri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shite dances [chû no mai]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Norizi</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
<td>Kuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shite dances [chû no mai]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Norizi</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
<td>Issei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shite dances [chû no mai]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Norizi</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
<td>Norizi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shite dances [ha no mai]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Structures of Seiôbo, Kureha, and Ukon
The “kyôgen speech opening” provides a synopsis of the social and historical contexts of the story, thus making it easier for the audience to follow the foreign story. However, such a strategy sacrifices the dramatic effect of revealing the story as it develops. The remainder of the play Seiôbo closely resembles the structure of other Nô plays featuring female deities.

**Allusions in Seiôbo**

The text of Seiôbo contains many allusions to earlier literature, both of Chinese and Japanese origin. However, close investigation reveals that the allusions are predominantly drawn from Japanese materials, which are located at important junctures in the play. There are in total eight allusions to Japanese literary precedents, all of which are poems in famous collections from the tenth to thirteenth centuries. As for allusions to Chinese sources, there are three, but none of them is from a poetry collection, but rather from Confucian and Taoist classics, as well as from historical writing. They are *Lun yu* 論語 (The analects of Confucius, c.400 B.C.), *Zhuang zi* 莊子 (Zhuang Zi, third-century B.C.), and *Shi ji* 史記 (Records compiled by the historian, second-century B.C.).

All three allusions to these Chinese works are used to praise the emperor’s virtue and leadership. These allusions appear in the beginning of the play, two of them are buried in the narrative songs. The other one, however, is incorporated
in the first chant (*issei*, see table one) by Xiwangmu (principal actor) and her companions when they enter the stage. It reads:

Peaches and plums do not speak a word
Yet under them, crowds gather
Noble and humble mingle
No distance in between

This alludes to one of the most well known works on Chinese history *Shi ji*. The plants’ popularity that attracts people to gather under them is personified to praise the Chinese emperor’s virtue, which has galvanized supporters from all classes. The emphasis on the mute presence of the plants highlights the innate charismatic supremacy of the emperor. Of course, this line can definitely be interpreted as an admiration of the mythical fruit of the peach owned by Xiwangmu. Such an allusion increases the depth of the image of the peach and ties it in to the story of the Xiwangmu’s visit to the Chinese emperor. Moreover, since this is the opening chant of the *shite*, the importance of such images is highlighted.

One important point is that the Chinese text alluded to, although originally appearing in *Shi ji*, is cited in medieval commentaries of the *Wakan rōei shū* (Collection of Japanese and Chinese poetry to recite). In addition, a Chinese poem composed by Sugawara no Fumitoki 菅原文時 (899-981) also alludes to the very same Chinese text and is compiled under the topic of *senka* 仙家 (dwelling of immortals) in *Wakan rōei shū*. The poem reads:
The peach and plum keep their silence;
How many springs have passed?
The haze and vapors leave no trace,
Who dwelled here in the past?²⁷⁷

桃李不言春幾暮
煙霞無跡昔誰栖

This couplet is also incorporated into the Nô play. Therefore, it is certain that the playwright was well aware of the Chinese text. It is also probable that he referred to the Wakan rôei shû, which provides ample information, rather than the original Chinese text in Shih Chi. It is likely that medieval Nô audiences were familiar with the version of the Chinese motif through the Wakan rôei shû. On the same note, the other two Chinese texts alluded to, Lun yü and Chuang tzu, also existed in medieval Japan and records verify that they were imported by the ninth-century.²⁷⁸

Allusions to Japanese Materials

The eight allusions to earlier Japanese poetry collections (three from the Wakan rôei shû, the other from a variety of celebrated collections from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries) are key to the study of the play. These allusions can be divided into two groups—one group concentrates on the image of the peach, the other on Xiwangmu’s image as a female immortal.

²⁷⁷ Kawaguchi and Shida eds., Wakan rôei shû, 190.

²⁷⁸ All three Chinese sources are recorded in the Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku (Catalogue of Chinese Books in Japan, ?891).
The first group includes four poems that are all to various degrees associated with the mythical peach in the Xiwangmu’s story. Three are the earlier mentioned poems by Ôshikôchi Mitsune, Fujiwara no Tameie, and Sugawara no Fumitoki. The other is a well-known Chinese poem by Sugawara no Masanori菅原規雅(d. 978) on a festive occasion in spring namely, the “Banquet by a Winding Stream.” The poem was also compiled in the Wakan rôei shû under the same section as Ôshikôchi Mitsune’s poem, and was alluded to in many Nô plays, for example, Yôrô養老(Yôrô).279

Allusions to these four poems can be further divided into two sub-groups—one emphasizing the cycle of life and thus the notion of immortality, the other on the celebration of spring in literary and aristocratic style. The first two allude to the poems by Sugawara no Funtoki and Ôshikôchi Mitsune in the following excerpts of the play.

Xiwangmu: Peaches and plums keep their silence

Chinese emperor: How many springs, how many years

Xiwangmu: have come and gone?280

Chinese emperor: This spring

279 Kawaguchi Hisao and Shida Nobuyoshi eds., Wakan rôei shû, 57.

280 The above three lines allude to Sugawara no Fumitoki’s poem. For original in Japanese, see Sanari Kentarô, Yôkyoku taikan, vol. 3, 1572.
Chorus: Once in three thousand years,  
the peach bears its fruit; in this year  
the peach bears its fruit; in this year  
its flowers are blooming in the spring  
I have come to encounter.281

The other two allude to the poems by Fujiwara no Tameie, and Sugawara no Masanori located before and after the dance sequence (chû-no-mai) performed by the shite (Xiwangmu):

Xiwangmu: Offering his majesty these peaches

Chorus: the peach blossom wine cup  
His majesty drinks from, and becomes intoxicated. 282

[Xiwangmu performs a dance (chû no mai)]

Chorus: The blossoms, too, intoxicated! The wine cup of blossoms, too, intoxicated! The wine cup  
is checked by a hand outstretched  
in the banquet by the winding stream.283

The second group of poems alluded to in the play enhances the portrayal of Xiwangmu’s image as a female immortal, particularly in ways that domesticate the foreign figure. The playwright does so by incorporating four well-known Japanese poems to portray Xiwangmu. Interestingly, only one poem alluded to is directly related to the image of the tennyo 天女 (heavenly maiden), a desirable

281 The above five lines allude to Ôshikóchi Mitsune’s poem. For original in Japanese, see ibid.

282 This line alludes to Fujiwara no Tameie’s poem. For original in Japanese see, ibid, 1575.

283 This line alludes to Sugawara no Masanori’s poem. For original in Japanese, see ibid.
The poem was by Archbishop Henjō 僧正遍 昭 (816-890), compiled in the Kokin shû. The playwright places the allusion to this poem in the waiting song immediately preceding the re-entrance of the shite, who is now in her true form as the deity Xiwangmu, in the second act.

The original poems alluded to in the other three poetic allusions, however, depict the sorrow and helplessness experienced by humans. By including these, the playwright highlights the excellence of immortality and heightens the dramatic effect of the story of the mythical peach and superiority of Xiwangmu. Moreover, employing the famous poems on the sadness in human life, the playwright evokes a poetic sense of melancholy, which is further suggested by the beautiful heavenly maiden. Beyond the auspiciousness regarding the peach of immortality, Xiwangmu’s heavenly beauty also embraces a sense of mystical sadness that is conducive to invoking such aesthetic qualities as yûgen.

This sequence of poetic allusions is placed in the last segment of the first act before the shite exits the stage. The three poems alluded to were composed by Ono no Komachi 小野小町 (fl.ca.850), Fujiwara Tsuneie 藤原経家 (1149-1209), and Fujiwara Masatsune 藤原雅経 (1170-1221) and were compiled in Kokinshû 古今集, Shin kokin shû 新古今集, and Shoku gosen shû 続後撰集 respectively. The

---

284 Zeami noted in Sandô that tennyo is one of the characters desirable to portray due to her ability to dance and chant. See Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 134.
poem by Ono no Komachi, the only female poet whose works are alluded to, is particularly celebrated. It captures the transience of human life. It reads:

What fades away
Yet its color remains unchanged—
It is the flower
in the hearts of men
living in this world.

色見えて移ろうものは世の中の
人の心の花にぞありける

Chorus: What fades away is the flower in the hearts of men living in this world.

Dance Sequence in Seiôbo

Similar to plays featuring a female deity such as Kureha and Ukon, the shite in Seiôbô performs the chû-no-mai 中の舞 (a dance of medium tempo). As Takemoto Mikio has pointed out, tennyo-no-mai 天女の舞 (dance of the heavenly maiden) was the usual dance sequence for plays about a female deity (megami no mai 女神の舞) during Zeami’s time. However, as Itô Masayoshi has noted, tennyo-no-mai was later replaced with chû-no-mai, as in today’s repertoire, in

---

285 Takemoto Mikio, Kanze jidai no nôgaku, 289-95.
plays such as *Kureha* and *Ukon*. One possible reason for such change is the revision of plays by later generations of playwrights and in different troupes of Nô.

Of course, there are other surviving plays about female deities that perform other sorts of dances. Three other plays in the current repertoire also feature a female deity, namely *Ema* 絵馬 (Ema), *Sahôyama* 佐保山, *U no matsuri* 鵜祭 (The cormorant festival). Yet, these plays perform other dances, including *kami-mai* 神舞 (deity dance), *shin-no-jo-no-mai* 真の序の舞 (true prelude dance), and *gaku* 楽 (court dance). However, these three plays may not be representative ones. Both *Sahôyama* and *U no matsuri* are only performed by the Konparu troupe. The play *Ema* is performed in various ways with different versions of text, characters, and dance sequences. For example, in the versions of the Hôshô and Kita schools, the *shite* in the second act is in fact a male deity.

Whether it is *tennyo-no-mai* or *chû-no-mai* that Xiwangmu performs, the play *Seiôbo*, along with *Kureha* and *Ukon*, is distinctively different from the rest of the “Deity plays.” There are approximately forty “deity plays” in the current repertoire; among them only the above three have the *shite* performing a *chû-no-mai*, a slower tempo dance in comparison to the other dances that are more dynamic. Such a slower tempo dance befits the physical and psychological

---


aspects of the character—a heavenly maiden. It is such a dance sequence that accentuates the gracefulness of the female deity and thus matches the aesthetic qualities such as *yūgen* that were highly prized during the early and mid fifteenth-century. Consequently, the playwright crafts an atmosphere of elegant beauty and enhances the peaceful and heavenly quality of the play.

*Tôbôsaku* 東方朔: A Revision of *Seiôbo*

The story of Xiwangmu was retold in the later play entitled *Tôbôsaku* (Dongfang shuo) written by Konparu Zenpô (1454-1532). The play offers an excellent case study of how changing aesthetic preferences and sociopolitical contexts influenced Nô theatre in the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. The following will identify such changes through the examination of the differences and similarities between the two plays.

*Tôbôsaku* tells a very similar story but in more spectacular and dynamic fashion. The playwright Zenpô enhances the auspiciousness in *Tôbôsaku* by setting the play on the night of a festival event at the Chinese palace and by incorporating the character Dongfang shuo 東方朔 (Japan. Tôbôsaku), who performs a celebratory dance (*gaku*) with Xiwangmu and functions as an archetype of the human-turned-immortal. The following is a synopsis of the play.

On the seventh night of the seventh month, the Chinese palace holds a festival to observe the stars. An old man appears and praises the prosperity of
the country. He then explains that the strange three-legged blue bird that has been flying above the palace lately belongs to Xiwangmu (Queen Mother of the West), and that its appearance indicates her upcoming visit. He continues telling how to become an immortal and introduces the peaches that grew in Xiwangmu’s garden—the fruit of immortality. He reveals that he is Dongfang Shuo and claims he will accompany Xiwangmu to present the emperor the peaches. He reappears with Xiwangmu and the peaches. After presenting the peaches to the emperor, together they perform a noble and harmonious dance and fly back to heaven.

Sociopolitical and Performance Context [1]

By contrasting Tōbōsaku against Seiōbo, we can detect changes in the dramaturgy and performance preferences between the two Nō plays. As discussed earlier, Seiōbo was probably written around the mid fifteenth-century, and Tōbōsaku, in the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. It was around the turn of the sixteenth-century that Nō theatre favored more dynamic and spectacular performances rather than the subtle aesthetic ideals such as yūgen. As chapter two has described, such changes grew from the need for new audiences and patrons, which was mainly the result of the loss of shogunal and aristocratic patronage at the turn of the sixteenth-century.
Moreover, Nô plays written during this period are sometimes characterized as furyû Nô 風流 ('Nô in furyû style'). Furyû characteristics are definitely also shown in the “Chinese plays.” Chinese motifs were widely employed in the contemporaneous art known as furyû 風流 ('stylish popular performance art'), which was performed from the late Heian to Muromachi period.288 As Benito Ortolani has described it, furyû consists of different kinds of performance: parades, group dancing in fancy-dress processions, and individual plays accompanied by music.289 Although it can be considered as an individual genre, furyû were often performed along with other traditional performances. The prominent example is its association with ennen 延年 (lit. ‘prolonging life’), a combination of different performances usually held in large temples in Kamakura and Muromachi period. Ennen performance consisted of four forms: kaiko 開口 ('prologue'), renji 連事 ('link'), shôfuryû 小風流 (small-scale furyû), and daifuryû 大風流 (large-scale furyû).290

One important question is why these plays were so compelling that different performance arts had to develop their own versions, running the risks

288 I owe this translation of the term to Benito Ortolani. As Ortolani has illustrated, the origin of furyû was probably impromptu entertainment performed by noblemen who lost in poetical competitions and other games. Benito Ortolani, The Japanese Theatre: from Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism (Princeton University Press, 1990), 67.


290 For a definition of these four components, see Ortolani, The Japanese Theatre: from Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism, 72.
of repetition and comparison with the productions by other performing troupes. First to point out is the fact that the majority of the ennen plays tell a Chinese story. There are five plays, both in Nô and in ennen repertoires that are strikingly similar. The five plays in the Nô are Shôjô猩々, Shakkyô石橋, Tsurukame鶴亀, Seiôbô西王母, and Tôbôsaku東方朔. Chinese motifs presented not only function as prayers for the prosperity and longevity of the country and its emperor, but also feature the actual appearance of an emperor on stage. Such portrayal of an emperor was rare in Nô. In addition, many of them feature exotic animals that are either geographically or mythically foreign to Japan.

**Identifying the Honzetsu of Tôbôsaku [2]**

Earlier sources associated with Chinese motifs depicted in the “Chinese plays” are not limited to literary texts. As discussed in Chapter Three, other art forms such as painting and dance performance also have substantial influence. In the case of Tôbôsaku, the gaku楽 (court dance) played an important role in retelling the Xiwangmu story. The dance performance of course does not give details of the story; nevertheless, it does amplify the central emotion in it. The play Tôbôsaku also presents another issue regarding honzetsu. That is the intertextual borrowing between Nô theatre and other contemporary performing arts.
On the level of literary texts, it is highly likely that Tôbôsaku shares the same honzetsu as Seiôbo. Nonetheless, since it postdates Seiôbo, the influence of Seiôbo cannot be ignored. To complicate the issue, there is the other performance tradition—furyû 風流 (‘stylish popular performance arts’) in the medieval period—which repertoire includes a play entitled Seiôbô no koto 西王母事 (The Story of the Queen Mother of the West) that depicts the very same story as Tôbôsaku. Indeed, Nô scholars have suggested that the two Nô plays are closely related to the furyû tradition.

In his study of these performance traditions and Nô theatre, Ortolani has pointed out the striking similarities between Nô and ennen, both in terms of the structure and content. For example, we often find the characters traveling to a certain place where they encounter a spirit or a deity. Although scholars have suggested that Sarugaku nô may have borrowed from ennen performance, there is no external evidence to justify their suggestions. Ortolani points out the irrelevance of questions of chronology and originality since these different performing arts existed simultaneously and were often performed at the same events sponsored by the same religious institutions. Ortolani has also noted that these events showcased all the talents of various entertainers and the “cross-fertilization of different traditions was a matter of fact, mutual imitation

291 Ibid.
being limited only by the personal skill of the artists involved.”

It is impossible to draw a clear map of the inter-borrowing between Sarugaku nō and these performing arts given the extant documents and performance records.

We are not certain whether the furyû play did in fact postdate the Nô plays. Since the authorship of furyû plays is unknown, and the surviving performance records of the furyû and Sarugaku nō plays do not represent the entire performance history, it is difficult to determine the chronology of the two different types of plays. Moreover, the furyû tradition can be traced to as early as the Heian period. Given that Nô theatre and furyû were contemporary arts of performance, it is appropriate to consider them as two interpretations of a similar corpus of earlier works on the Xiwangmu motif. Hence, I treat the furyû play as a contemporaneous counterpart to Tôbôsaku that provides further reference points concerning the performance contexts of the Nô play, rather than treating it as an earlier source for the play.

Perspectives of the Adapter [3]

Konparu Zenpô (1454-1532?), the playwright of Tôbôsaku, lived in an era when the ability to entertain different audience groups, ranging from the shoguns to the general public, was vital to the survival and prosperity of a Nô troupe. Aesthetic ideals such as the subtle and mysterious beauty of yûgen, had

292 Ibid.
lost their most powerful advocate—the Ashikaga shogunate, for the central
government met its demise in the Ônin War (1467-77). Nô plays written in late
fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries are distinctly different from those from
the era of Zeami and Zenchiku.

Two characteristics of Zenpô’s plays are the performance of aimai 相舞
(two characters dancing in synchronization) and revision of earlier plays. Among
the five plays attributed to Zenpô, namely Tôbôsaku, Arashiyama 嵐山 (Mount
Arashi), Ikkaku sennin 一角仙人 (Ikkaku sennin), Ikuta Atsumori 生田敦盛
(Atsumori at Ikuta), and Hatsuyuki 初雪 (Hatsuyuki), three of them contain aimai
and two of them are revisions of an earlier play. Aimai was a popular performing
style during Zenpô’s time. The lively and dynamic atmosphere of Tôbôsaku is also
a product created to suit the tastes of the audiences of Zenpô’s time. Such dance
sequences contrasted markedly with the plays by Zeami and Zenchiku, which
mainly focus on the principal character.\footnote{Scholars use the term—shite hitori shugi (the concept of one central character) to
describe the Nô plays from the time of Zeami in particular.} In fact, to the best of my knowledge,
there is not a single play ascertained to be by Zeami or Zenchiku that features a
dance sequence performed by two characters. Therefore, in the case of Seiôbô, the
playwright omits the character Dongfang Shuo in order to craft an atmosphere of
elegant beauty. In contrast, the performance of aimai contributes to a spectacular
and dynamic play which audiences of Zenpô’s time favored. In fact, the furyû

\footnote{Scholars use the term—shite hitori shugi (the concept of one central character) to
describe the Nô plays from the time of Zeami in particular.}
play Seiôbô no koto also contains a dance sequence performed simultaneously by the characters Xiwangmu and Dongfang Shuo.

Revision of earlier plays was also a noticeable trend in late fifteenth-century Nô. Kanze Nobumitsu, a prominent playwright of the latter half of the fifteenth century, had written plays that were derived from earlier plays. For example, Kôtei 皇帝 (The Chinese Emperor) is related to two earlier plays, Shôki and Yôkihi. The play Kôtei is also a spectacular play featuring multiple characters. It is a signature of Nobumitsu’s play that the waki (supporting actor) has a much important role than those in earlier plays. Modern scholars often refer to Nobumitsu’s repertoire as furyû nô 風流能 (‘Nô plays in furyû style’). The spectacular style of furyû indeed can be detected in the play Tôbôsaku.

Choice and Composition of Dance and Chant [theme] [4]

By introducing the character of Dongfang Shuo in Tôbôsaku, the playwright enhances the auspiciousness of the Chinese story, both in terms of performance and theme. First, the “shite-focused” approach seen in Seiôbô is diffused in Tôbôsaku with the additional character—Dongfang Shuo. As mentioned above, in Seiôbô, the main character Xiwangmu, performs a chû-no-mai (a dance of medium tempo) which is more elegant and possesses an atmosphere of heavenly beauty. In Tôbôsaku, Xiwangmu and Dongfang Shuo perform the
gaku (court dance, a rhythmic dance with multiple foot stamps) in an aimai (two performers dancing in synchronization), which is more lively and dynamic.

The character Dongfang Shuo functions as ‘living’ evidence of immortality. The playwright Zenpô enhances the credibility of the mythical story by featuring Dongfang Shuo, a mortal who turns immortal after having consumed the magical peaches growing in the garden of the Queen Mother of the West. In the play, he tells of the “path to immortality.” Zenpô solidifies the Taoist-oriented idea of immortality by linking it to Buddhism. In the realm of Buddhism, the concept of longevity fundamentally does not exist, since Buddhism considers life to be transient and all living things must die. However, Zenpô makes Dongfang Shuo the narrator of a Buddhist story from the *Lotus Sūtra*. The story tells of the historical Buddha Gautama studying with the immortals before taking the tonsure. In the Nô play, the story is referred to as the following:

_Shite:_ Even the Prince Shaka was at the service of the immortals,

_Chorus:_ Picking fruit and collecting water for years. Through which he was spiritually awakened and became the “Great Enlightened one.”

Zenpô thus legitimizes the idea of immortality and makes it more appealing to Buddhist audiences. Of course, Nô playwrights were not eager to differentiate and establish one religious dogma over the other. Rather, they

---

294 Itô, Yōkyokushû, vol. 1, 102.
tended to present Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto as coexisting in harmony. Indeed, the play *Tôbôsaku* takes such a syncretic approach.

*Seiôbô* and *Tôbôsaku* each retell a Chinese story of an auspicious nature in which prayers for the longevity of the Chinese emperor and his reign are offered. The playwrights incorporated Japanese poetry and de-emphasized the identity of the Chinese emperor. In addition, the dance sequences that are appropriate for Chinese characters in Nô (i.e., *chû-no-mai* and *gaku*) attuned these plays to the expectations of Nô audiences. As a consequence of these adaptation strategies, despite the absence of Japanese characters, the foreign origin of the story seems immaterial to the playwright and the audience; and thus the celebratory message is effectively redirected to Japan.
CHAPTER 5

CHINESE LITERATI: EXPELLED OR EMBRACED

Characters with poetic talents are highly valued by Nô playwrights because of their outstanding accomplishments associated with poetic composition and performance. All historical figures proposed as ideal protagonists by Zeami in The Three Techniques of Nô Composition (Sandô 三道) are renowned Japanese poets of the ninth century.295 Plays featuring these Japanese literati are often praised for their aesthetic and artistic values. To name a few representative plays, there are Izutsu 井筒 (The well cradle) and Sekidera Komachi 関寺小町 (Komachi at Seki Temple). However, in contrast with the Japanese literati, stories of Chinese literati were not as common a topic for Nô adaptation. There are only two surviving plays featuring Chinese poets, namely Hakurakuten 白楽天 (Bai Letian) and Sanshô 三笑 (The three laughers) telling the stories of the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (also known as Bai Letian 白楽天, Jp. Hakurakuten,

295 They are Ariwara Narihira (825-880), Ôtomo Kuronushi (ca. ninth century), Ono no Komachi (ca.850), and Lady Ise (?877-?940). The first three were members of the Six Poetic Geniuses. See Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 134.
772-846) and the Ch’in poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) respectively. However, the two plays do not praise the poetic talents of these men, but rather use them to emphasize the superiority of Japanese over Chinese culture.

Tao Yuanming’s popularity cannot be compared to that of Bai Juyi, who was undoubtedly the most influential and celebrated Chinese poet in traditional Japan. Nonetheless, the Nô plays reveal contrary views of the two. Tao Yuanming is embraced and praised, whereas Bai Juyi is condemned and expelled from Japan. While both plays are in an auspicious mode, Hakurakuten celebrates Japan’s cultural supremacy over China, whereas Sanshô embraces and celebrates Chinese values. The following will demonstrate that the polarity of such portrayals resulted from the impact of different audiences and sociopolitical climates.

**Hakurakuten 白楽天 (Bai Letian)**

The play Hakurakuten proposes an ultimate reversal of Japan’s longtime appreciation of Chinese poetry and declares the superiority and originality of Japanese poetry over Chinese. The play tells a fictitious story of the Tang poet Bai Juyi’s visit to Japan. The following is a synopsis of the play.

Bai Juyi, by imperial command, came to Japan to take measure of Japan’s learning and accomplishments. On arriving at Matsura bay at Bizen province, he encounters a fisherman, who is in fact the god of Japanese poetry, Sumiyoshi
Myôjin, in disguise. The fisherman immediately identifies the Chinese visitor and says that there has been a rumor in Japan that he, Hakurakuten (Bai Juyi), is coming to evaluate the wisdom of Japanese culture. Alluding to the “Japanese Preface” of the Kokinshû, the fisherman praises the poetic tradition of Japan—that all living things there sing songs. In the second act, the fisherman reveals his true identity and summons an array of other Shintô gods, while performing a spectacular dance. His dance stirs up the divine wind that blows the Chinese poet back to China in his ship.

Sociopolitical Context [1]

The play is highly readable on a political level regarding Japan’s foreign policy with China. As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, the Sino-Japanese relationship entered a new age under the rule of the Muromachi Shogunate. The Ming Chinese government established a diplomatic relation with Japan to push for the Japanese government’s control over Japanese piracy along the coast of China. As for the Shogunate, trading remained the major goal. However, politics towards China changed, sometimes drastically, with the changing policies of different shoguns.

Among the leaders of Muromachi Japan, the third Shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, was the one who most favored a diplomatic relation with China. He was also the most controversial figure due to his acceptance of Chinese
investiture. In 1401, Yoshimitsu accepted the designation of "King of Japan" by the Chinese emperor and the Chinese imperial calendar, which indicated acceptance of the use of Chinese year names and dates in official documents, signifying that the Japanese ruler had come under the authority of China. This meant that Yoshimitsu had agreed to make himself a subject of the Chinese emperor. Of course, Yoshimitsu’s decision created discontent within Japan, in particular at the imperial court. After his death, diplomatic relations with China were terminated. The succeeding shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimochi, stopped the Japanese tally ships to China and rejected the Ming Emperor Chengzu’s overtures, which were made to restore the relationship with China and to suppress the piracy along the coast of China.\textsuperscript{296}

However, the policy towards China changed again under Ashikaga Shogun Yoshinori, who, to a large extent, resumed Yoshimitsu’s diplomacy. In 1432, Yoshinori recommenced the sending of tally ships to China. In the document sent to the Chinese emperor, Yoshinori referred to himself as “Your Japanese subject, Minamoto Yoshinori.” Moreover, the Chinese calendar was used in the document. As Tanaka Takeo has pointed out, although the term “King of Japan” was not employed, Yoshinori’s document shows that Yoshinori, similar to Yoshimitsu, considered the political and economic prospects of a

diplomatic relation with Ming China more important than avoiding investiture by the Chinese emperor. Tally ships sent to China continued until 1547 with the increasing involvement of powerful temples, shrines, and leading provincial lords.

Nô scholar Sanari Kentarô has pointed out that the play *Hakurakuten* has a patriotic tone that glorifies the Ashikaga Shogunate rather than imperial sovereignty. Sanari suggests that it is because the Shogunate was the major patrons of Nô in the Muromachi period. However, to justify his statement we must know more about the authorship of the play. Unfortunately, we are uncertain about the authorship and about the date of the first performance. Some records attribute the play to Zeami, which current scholarship disagrees with. The earliest record of the performance is in 1464. Zeami lost the support of the shogun when Yoshimitsu died in 1408, whereas the succeeding shogun Yoshinori favored another troupe. Since the policy towards China changed drastically during the first half of the fifteenth century, this play would be an apt form of responding to foreign policies regarding China.

**Identifying the “Basic sources” of Hakurakuten [2]**

As noted above, Bai Juyi is indisputably the most influential Chinese poet in traditional Japan. His poetry was alluded to or provided models in many well-

---

297 Sanari, *Yôkyoku taikan*, vol. 4, 2470.
known literary works. The most well known examples are *The Tale of Genji* and *Wakan rôei shû*. His writing was highly prized in Heian Japan. For example, in *Makura no sôshi* (The Pillow book, 1002?), the author Sei Shônagon ranks Bai Juyi’s work as the best of all writings. Nô playwrights were also conscious of the immense stature that that particular Chinese poet’s works enjoyed. About forty percent of the currently performed plays contain allusions to Bai Juyi’s poems, attesting to his enormous popularity.

Interestingly, according to extant Chinese sources, Bai Juyi never visited Japan. Nonetheless, the Nô playwright was not the first Japanese to imagine a visit to Japan by the Chinese poet. There are earlier Japanese sources depicting the his encounters there. Itô Masayoshi has pointed out that *Kingyokuyô shû* (Collection of gold and jewels, ?1004-?1012), a Heian collection of poetry, contains an episode of an encounter between the Shintô deity Sumiyoshi Myôjin and Bai Juyi on the shore of Japan. In the story, the Shinto god comments on a poem by the Chinese poet. The poem under discussion reads:

---


White clouds, as though a ribbon, encircling the waist of the mountain
Green moss, like a cloak, lying on the shoulders of the cliff.

Interestingly, the poem was not by the Chinese poet, but by a tenth-century Japanese poet. The poem first appears in the Fûdoki 風土記 (Topographies of Japan, 713), and was later recited by Miyako no Arinaka 都在中 (ca. 919) as recorded in Gôdanshô 江談抄, a collection of tales told by Ôe Masafusa 大江匡房 (1041-1111). Arinaka recited the Chinese poem, to which his wife responded by translating it into the form of a Japanese waka poem. The misattribution of the Chinese verse can be mapped by looking at similar poems from the Heian period. Japanese scholars, such as Itô Masayoshi, have pointed out the possible influence of a couplet appearing in Chûmonjô 仲文章. This is a Heian work wrongly believed to be the collected works of Bai Juyi, which might have influenced the misattribution. The couplet reads:

White clouds with the wind,
lingering at the waist of the mountain;
Green moss and vines clinging to the cliff,
extending to the pine branches.

300 Gôdanshô is the words of Ôe no Masafusa recorded by Fujiwara no Sanekane 藤原実兼 (1085-1112).


302 Itô, Yôkyôkushû, vol. 1, 453; and Gotô, Gôdanshô, 108.
As Sanari Kentarô has pointed out, an episode about a literatus who dreamed of Bai Juyi visiting Japan was recorded in the story collection *Kokon Chomonjû* 古今著聞集 (Stories heard from writers old and new, 1254). The episode relates that, on the eighteenth day of the tenth month in 952, Ôe no Asatsuna 大江朝綱 (866-957) had a dream in which Bai Juyi appeared in front of him. Overjoyed, Asatsuna asks if he came from heaven. Bai Juyi admits as much and says that he has come to tell Asatsuna something. However, it was at that moment that Asatsuna woke up. There are no poems accompanying the story.

By the Muromachi period, the poem was treated as the work of Bai Juyi. An important example appeared in *Kintôsho* 金嶋書 (Essays from the golden island, 1434-36), letters written by Zeami during his journey to exile. Zeami recites the poem as the work of Bai Juyi. Therefore, it is evident that stories of Bai Juyi’s encounter with a Japanese literatus and the Shintô deity Sumiyoshi Myôjin already existed in earlier Japanese literature. Moreover, the aforementioned poem, although authored by a Japanese poet, had become associated with the Chinese poet.

---

303 *Kokon chomonshû* was a storytelling (*setsuwa*) collection written by Tachibana Narisue in the thirteenth century.


Perspectives of the Adapter [3]

Although the authorship of *Hakurakuten* is uncertain, it was written before 1464 by someone highly influenced by Zeami’s dramaturgy. According to the earliest extant performance record, the play was staged in 1464 as a subscription performance. Two Muromachi period documents on authorship, *Nōhon sakusha chûmon* and *Nihyakujuhban yômokuroku*, attribute the play to Zeami. However, Nō scholars have deemed the two records as unreliable regarding plays prior to Nobumitsu’s age, and have thus doubted whether Zeami authored *Hakurakuten*. Itô Masayoshi has suggested that the surviving version of the play is Nobumitsu’s revision of Zeami’s original; however, there is no sufficient evidence to corroborate that claim. By comparing *Hakurakuten* with *Takasago*, a play by Zeami, Takemoto Mikio suggests that the author was not Zeami, but was greatly influenced by him. Takemoto did not point to Nobumitsu as the one who revised the current version of the play. However, he noted the weighty role of the *waki*, which is similar to the later plays written by Nobumitsu and Zenpô.

I would concur that the play was not written by Nobumitsu, but indeed by someone influenced by Zeami’s style. Since *Nōhon sakusha chûmon* is highly accurate about the plays by Nobumitsu and Zenpô, it is probable that the play

---


307 Ibid., 7-9.
would have been attributed to Nobumitsu if it was indeed written by him. Moreover, revising an old play into a new one unique to his style is not unknown in Nobumitsu’s repertoire. For instance, the play Kôtei by Nobumitsu intermingles two earlier plays (Shôki and Yôkihi) and tells a new story. I support Takemoto Mikio’s claim that Hakurakuten should be located between the time of Zeami and that of Nobumitsu and Zenpô. A close reading of the play will make manifest the characteristics of this play.

**Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]**

As shown in Table 2, the structure of Hakurakuten, on the one hand, closely resembles that of the “deity plays” featuring Japanese deities of a similar magnitude, such as Oimatsu (The aged pine); on the other hand, it also resembles “deity plays” that feature waki of a greater stature such as in the play Tama no i (The jade well). Since the two plays represent “deity plays” of two different epochs of Nô, having similarities to both plays suggests that Hakurakuten is a work from the interim period. Written by Zeami, Oimatsu is a “deity play” that portrays a court official’s encounter with the sacred spirit of a celebrated pine tree. Written by Nobumitsu, Tama no i is a “deity play” that has a more spectacular style of performance. It depicts a Japanese deity’s hunt for a treasure with the help of the dragon princess.
### Table 2: Structures of *Hakurakuten*, *Oimatsu*, and *Tama no i*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hakurakuten</th>
<th>Oimatsu</th>
<th>Tama no i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. {han-kaikô}</td>
<td>Nanori (waki)</td>
<td>1. {shin-no-shidai}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shidai (waki &amp; tsure)</td>
<td>Nanori (waki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Ageuta <a href="waki">michiyuki</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. {shin-no-shidai}</td>
<td>Shidai (waki &amp; tsure)</td>
<td>Issei (shite &amp; tsure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nanori (waki)</td>
<td>Shidai (waki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ageuta [michiyuki](waki &amp; tsure)</td>
<td>Mondō (waki &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsukizerifu (waki)</td>
<td>Sageuta (chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Issei (shite &amp; tsure)</td>
<td>Mondō (waki &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sashi (shite)</td>
<td>Sashi (shite &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sageuta (shite &amp; tsure)</td>
<td>Ageuta (waki &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ageuta (waki &amp; tsure)</td>
<td>Kuse (waki &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kakeai (waki &amp; shite)</td>
<td>Ageuta (chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ageuta (waki)</td>
<td>Kuse (waki &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kuse (chorus &amp; shite)</td>
<td>Noriji (chorus &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Rongi (chorus &amp; shite)</td>
<td>Noriji (chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shite exits</td>
<td>Shite dances [Hataraki]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Aikyōgen (kyōgen)</td>
<td>Shite dances [heavenly beings]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shite enters</td>
<td>Shite enters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Issei (chorus &amp; shite)</td>
<td>Tsure performs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shite dances [Shin-no-jō-no-mai]</td>
<td>Shite enters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noriji (chorus)</td>
<td>Shite dances [Shin-no-jō-no-mai]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Except for the beginning, the structure of *Hakurakuten* is very similar to that of *Oimatsu*. The structures of both plays closely follow what Zeami illustrated in his treatise *Sandô*. In both plays, the *shite* performs *shin-no-jô-no-mai* 真の序の舞, a slow tempo dance generally assigned to characters such as aged deities. Among various troupes, there are two different ways to begin the play. The *kami-gakari* troupes begin the play with *han-kaikô* 半開口, followed by *nanori* (name announcing), and *shidai* (entrance song), illustrated in his treatise *Sandô*. In both plays, the *shite* performs *shin-no-jô-no-mai* 真の序の舞, a slow tempo dance generally assigned to characters such as aged deities. Among various troupes, there are two different ways to begin the play. The *kami-gakari* troupes begin the play with *han-kaikô* 半開口, followed by *nanori* (name announcing), and *shidai* (entrance song), *waka*, *shidai* (entrance song) of the *waki* and *waki-tsure*, followed by *nanori* (name announcing) of the *waki*. As Carl Sesar has noted, such an entrance pattern draws attention to the *waki* and highlights the magnitude of his rank and dignity, which are higher than that of the usual *waki* (either a traveling priest, or an imperial envoy). The literary reputation of Bai Juyi is emphasized by means of such an entrance sequence.308

---

Allusions in the Play

In spite of the poetic genius and large corpus of work of Bai Juyi, only sample of his poetry is incorporated into the play. However, in actuality, it was only a poem that medieval Japanese mistook as the work of the Chinese poet, the poem by Miyako no Arinaka discussed earlier. In the first act of the play, Bai Juyi (the waki) recites the poem (in Japanese) to describe the surrounding scenery and to challenge the poetic skill of the fisherman (shite in the first act). In response to that, the shite recites the poem in the format of a Japanese waka poem. The dialogue appears in the mondō section of segment four, in which Bai Juyi and the fisherman exchange definitions and examples of poetry of China and Japan:

Hakurakuten: Well, fisherman, what do people do for leisure in Nippon in recent times?

Fisherman: How about in China? What kind of things do people engage them in for leisure?


Fisherman: In Japan, people compose uta ([Japanese] poems) to soothe minds and hearts.\(^{309}\)

Hakurakuten: What exactly is uta?

Fisherman: Derived from the holy sutras of India are Chinese poetry and poetical prose. Out of Chinese poetry and poetical prose, Japanese uta (poetry) are made. Since Japanese uta blends three different countries in harmony, it is titled Yamato uta, written as “largely”

\(^{309}\) Uta 歌 (lit. song) and waka 和歌 (lit. Japanese song) are different terms that refer to Japanese poetry.
“harmony” “poems. You probably already knew, but are only testing the heart and mind of an old man like me.

Hakurakuten: No, that was not at all my intention. Well, how about letting me compose a poem about the scenery in front of us.

Green moss, like a cloak, 
lying on the shoulders of the cliff
White clouds, as though a ribbon, 
encircling the waist of the mountain

青苔衣をびて巌の肩にかかり
白雲帯に似て山の腰を囲る

What do you think, old fisherman?

Fisherman: ‘Green moss’ is the green moss growing on the shoulders of the cliff as though it is a robe the cliff has put on. ‘White clouds’ resembles a ribbon encircling the waist of the mountain. How interesting! Japanese uta, too, is similar to that.

The crag wears a robe of moss without a sash
the mountain, not dressed in a robe,
seems to be wearing a sash

苔衣着る巌はさもなくて
衣着ぬ山の帯をするかな

The above exchange between Bai Juyi and the fisherman (the deity of Japanese poetry in disguise) provides a definition of Japanese poetry that emphasizes Japan’s ability to integrate Chinese and Indian traditions in the creation of its own form of poetry. Since the poems composed by Bai Juyi and the fisherman closely resemble those of Miyako no Arinaka and his wife that appeared in Gōdanshō, it is possible that the playwright was aware that Arinaka
was the author of the poem instead of Bai Juyi. Thus, the major concern of the playwright was not the authenticity of the poem, but rather that the poem could be translated into Japanese, and vice versa, which assured familiarity on the part of a Japanese audience.

It is clear that the playwright intended to make light of Bai Juyi’s talent and accomplishment in the play so as to focus on the poetic tradition of Japan. In fact, no Chinese sources are used in the Nô play. Moreover, given the popularity of Bai Juyi and the large corpus of his works existing in Japan since the ninth century, the playwright could have easily incorporated some of his well-known poems into the play. The goals of the playwright are manifested in the section following the above poetic exchanges, in which a well-known Japanese source is alluded to.

The major source employed is the “Kana Preface” 仮名序 (Japanese preface), and annotations to the *Kokin shû* 古今集 (The collection of ancient and contemporary poems, 905), the cornerstone of Japanese poetic criticism. They are used to substantiate the innateness of Japanese *waka* poetry to Japanese, so as to remove it from the shadow of Chinese poetry, both in terms of originality and inspiration. By alluding to the *locus classicus* of the “Kana Preface” the playwright asserts that all living beings in Japan are spontaneously given to singing. The original lines of the “Kana Preface” alluded to in the Nô play reads:
Hearing the warbler sing among the blossoms and
the sound of the frog living in water—
is there any living creature not able to spontaneously sing?

It is transformed in the Nô play into:

**Fisherman:** For all living beings there is none that does not sing
**Hakurakuten:** If you say “all living beings,” are you suggesting even
birds and animals too …
**Fisherman:** They are examples of singing Japanese songs
**Hakurakuten:** In the land of Japan,
**Fisherman:** there are many examples
**Hakurakuten:** The nightingale singing among blossoms, even the
frog living in the pond. I do not know if it is so in
China, in Japan we sing the Yamato song, including
this old man.

The Nô play goes on legitimizing the origin of the Japanese poem by illustrating
that Japanese waka poetry was simply inspired by nature, specifically the song of
birds. The playwright provides an example from a story in the *Kokin hishō 古今秘抄* (The secret notes to the *Kokinshū*):

**Chorus:** To begin with, it is said that the first example of the
nightingale singing Japanese song is during the reign
of Emperor Kōken. In the land of Yamato, a priest
lived at Takama Temple. One spring, there came a
nightingale to the plum tree near his window.
Listening to the song of the bird, it sings:

*Shoyōmaichōrai*
*fusōkenhonsei*

初陽毎朝来
不遭還本栖

when transcribed into characters, it emerges as a poem in thirty-one syllables:

---

Fisherman:  
*Hatsu-haru no ashita goto ni wa kitare domo,*
In early spring, on each morning, although I visit,

初春のあしたごとにには来たれども

Chorus:  
*Awade zo kaeru moto no sumika ni*
failing to meet, I return to my old dwelling.

遭はでぞ還る本の栖に

The chorus continues with an allusion to a Japanese poem from the “Kana Preface” to illustrate the ability of Japanese people to compose poetry, in this case, the ability of a fisherman at the shore of Ariso Bay.

After proving the originality of Japanese poetry and its independence from Chinese poetry, the god of Japanese poetry sends the foreign visitor away in order to protect the divine tradition of Japan. In the second act, the *shite* appears in his true form, that is the god of Japanese poetry—Sumiyoshi Myôjin. He performs a dynamic dance (*shin-no-jo-no-mai*) to summon other Shinto deities and the eight dragon kings of the sea to stir up “divine winds” (*kamikaze*) that blew the boat of the Chinese poet back to China. The play ends on an auspicious note that celebrates the longevity, the stability, and the prosperity of the Japanese reign.

What exactly is the function of such an action of summoning Shintô deities, and what is the significance of worshiping the longevity of the reign of the Japanese emperor? First, celebration of the longevity and prosperity of the country and the emperor’s reign is a rather common theme in many “deity
plays”. In *Hakurakuten*, the worship takes place at the end of the first act of the play, before the main character, the fisherman, exits the stage. It reads:

Fisherman: Reed Plain

Chorus: The country endures its stability for thousands of years.

Chorus: For the deities and our lord (*kimi*), indeed, we are grateful,
For the deities and the reign of our lord,
enduring stability, our nation everlasting,
enduring stability, our nation everlasting.

The use of the terms “*kimi*” and “*kimi ga yo*” to refer to the emperor and his reign are identical to those in almost all other “deity plays” that portray the same theme. Since the two terms were also used to refer to the emperor of Japan, it is difficult to exclude the idea that the worship and prayer also apply to the Japanese emperor. After all, the Nô plays were performed by Japanese actors in Japanese language for Japanese audiences. It would not make sense to conclude that the Japanese gathered to offer prayers for a foreign country. Moreover, the prayers can be extended to refer to the shogunate or the provincial lord of that time, since they could potentially be applied to a leader. Such ambiguousness of the addressee, thus, is key to the domestication of the Chinese story and to increasing the popularity of the play.

**A Statement about Sino-Japanese Relations**

On one level, the play strikes the audience as a declaration of the integrity and superiority of the Japanese poetic tradition over that of China. On another
level, in the light of the Sino-Japanese relationship during the fifteenth century as described above, the play can be read as an anti-China complex revealed through the rhetorical move of promoting Japan’s divineds over those of China. The highlight of the play is the negative portrayal of the most popular Chinese poet in Japanese culture with the scene in which he is chased away by the divine force of an array of Shinto deities.

The playwright makes use of Bai Juyi’s popularity in Japan to propagandize the superiority of Japanese poetry over Chinese. Bai Juyi has been perceived as the epitome of the Chinese poetic tradition ever since the Heian period, and his works have been cherished and emulated by Japanese literati since the that time. In light of the different policies of different Muromachi shoguns, arguably the play reflects negative reception of such a new-founded relationship with China as that adopted by the third Shogun Yoshimitsu, with his acceptance of vassalage to Ming China. The staging of a negative portrayal of the celebrated Chinese poet as a threat to Japanese culture and his expulsion by the indigenous deities of Japan in effect amounts to a statement advocating the cultural and political supremacy of Japan over China. The play is evidence of the existence of certain groups of Japanese who not only took pride in their own culture, but also perceived the possible hazard and potential threat posed by the people and culture of China. From such a perspective, the play might have been used as a denunciation of Shogun Yoshimitsu’s foreign policy.
Moreover, the Nô play posits Japan’s religious superiority over China, not only in the realm of Buddhism, but also in terms of its strong tie with Japan’s indigenous religion, Shintô. In *Hakurakuten*, the divine winds play a crucial role in defending Japan from external threats. The discourse of the “divine winds” connotes the historical battles between the Japanese and the Mongols during the Mongol invasions in the late thirteenth century. On the one hand, the reference to the “divine winds” in the play amplifies the negative images that Japanese might hold of China and of China’s potential harm to Japan; on the other hand, it promotes the notion that Japan is a divine country and is protected by the deities from both religions, Shintô and Buddhism.

*Sanshô 三笑 (The Three Laugthers)*

Another play depicting Chinese literati is *Sanshô* (The three laughers). In contrast to *Hakurakuten*, the play embraces Chinese personages and their beliefs. The play tells the story of a gathering of three Chinese figures: the poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (ca. 365-427), the Taoist scholar Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (ca. 406-477), and the Buddhist monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416). A synopsis of the play is as follows:

Huiyuan, with eighteen other literati (賢), founded the White Lotus Circle 白蓮社 at Mount Lu. Devoted to the pursuit of the way of Buddhism, Huiyuan made a vow that he would never step beyond the Tiger Ravine 虎溪, which
marked the land of the Buddhist monastery. One day, while seeing off his visitors Tao and Lu, Huiyuan unintentionally crossed the bridge over the Tiger Ravine. Suddenly, they heard the roaring of a tiger and realized that Huiyuan had broken his vow. In response, they burst into laughter.

The play was written sometime in the second half of the fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, since all extant records of authorship attribute the play to Hosokawa Nariyuki 細川成之 (1434-1511). An elite member of the warrior class with a love of poetry, paintings, and Nô, Nariyuki befriended Zen Buddhist circles.

**Sociopolitical Contexts [1]**

The play Sanshô directly addresses the sociopolitical issues that confronted members of political, religious, and literary institutions of fifteenth century Japan, particularly the Zen Buddhist network associated with the Zen temple system known as Gozan 五山 (“Five Mountains”). The immense influence of Zen Buddhism in medieval Japanese arts is widely acknowledged by modern scholars. Topics of studies include religion, aesthetics, Japanese poetry, tea ceremony, ink painting, and Nô theatre. However, to date little attention has been devoted to the relationship between the Five Mountains network and Nô theatre.
Modeled after the Chinese ranking system of Buddhist temples, Gozan refers to the five highest ranked Zen temples in Japan. The system was in place from the thirteenth century. Temples selected were either in Kyoto or Kamakura, and sometimes there were up to ten temples selected. Under the five to ten head temples, there were thousands of Zen temples across the country. Among the Gozan temples, the most important ones were Nanzenji 南禅寺 and Shôkokuji 相国寺 in Kyoto, and Kenchôji 建長寺 and Engakuji 円覚寺 in Kamakura. The Gozan temples formed a network of religious, cultural, and social relationships. Monks of these head temples were highly literate and were familiar with Chinese culture. Some of them had studied in China, some had in fact migrated from China. The Gozan Zen monks were not only well versed in Chinese letters, but were also responsible for the influx of Chinese culture during the medieval period. The literature they produced is referred to as Gozan bungaku 五山文学 (Five Mountains literature) and was written in the Chinese language.

In the late fourteenth to the mid fifteenth centuries, the Gozan group was at its zenith of influence under the patronage of the Ashikaga shogunate, from whom they received tremendous support. The Ashikaga shoguns were enthusiastic about Zen Buddhism. For instance, the Shogun Yoshimitsu commanded the building of Shôkokuji, which was ranked the second of the Five

Mountains temples in Kyoto in 1386. Besides cultural and religious activities, the 
Gozan Zen monks were also very involved in diplomacy and commerce. We
know that, in the fifteenth century, the Ashikaga shogunate reestablished official
trading and diplomatic relations with China. Moreover, they appointed Zen
monks to assist in the tally ship trading. The Gozan Zen monks’ fluency in
Chinese language and culture was an invaluable asset.

Most Ashikaga shoguns were interested in discussions of Zen teachings,
Zen ceremonies, and literary gatherings at Zen temples. Three shoguns,
Yoshimitsu 義満 (1358-1408), Yoshimochi 義持 (1386-1428), and Yoshimasa 義政
(1436-1490), were particularly enthusiastic about Zen. Yoshimitsu studied Zen
under his advisor Gidô Shûshin 義堂周信 (1325-1388), one of the most prominent
Gozan Zen monks in medieval Japan. Yoshimochi was interested in Sung and
Yüan-style ink painting introduced into Japan by the Gozan monks. He was very
involved in Zen ink painting practices, such as shigajiku 詩画軸 (poem-and-
painting scrolls) in monochrome ink inscribed with Chinese poems. Yoshimasa’s
interest was, however, mainly in literature. As Martin Collcutt has noted, the
interests of the Ashikaga Shoguns in Zen was mainly in the cultural rather than
the religious realm.312

312 Ibid., 98-9.
Shigajiku “Poem-and-Painting Scrolls” and Yûsha (‘Circles of Friends’)

Sung and Yüan-style monochrome ink paintings were popular in Muromachi political and religious circles, and were given as presents on various occasions, for instance, as “house-warming” gifts to senior monks for their sub-temples, or as gifts to other temples, such as the previously mentioned account at the Shôkokuji-temple. Mastering various “methods of the brush” (hippo 笔法) of famous Chinese painters through the reproduction of their masterpieces was a common practice among Japanese painters.

As John Rosenfield has pointed out, it was by its integration with social and literary gatherings that ink painting “became a coherent, fully mature pictorial language in both artistic and social terms, that expresses the basic cultural values of the leaders of Japanese society.” Such integration was best revealed in the production of shigajiku “poem-and-painting scrolls,” figural or landscape subjects in monochrome ink inscribed with Chinese poems.

Inscriptions on paintings would take place in the context of literary gatherings, which were often organized by yûsha 友社 (‘circles of friends’) formed by elite members of religious and political establishments. Using ink painting as the

---


stimulus, participants would compose Chinese poems on the theme of the painting, and sometimes a preface would also be included.

Chinese ink paintings used in these gatherings had at least two effects on the participants: first, they offered a sense of escape by providing a glimpse of the reclusive lives of foreign figures; and second, they invoked the teachings of Zen Buddhism. The story of the Three Laughers embodies not only these two themes, but also parallels the socio-political climate of the Muromachi Zen Buddhist institution. Unable to concentrate solely on their religious pursuits, Muromachi Zen monks saw the Chinese characters as living the ideal life they themselves longed for. Kanazawa Hiroshi has noted that, as Muromachi Zen monks became more involved with political affairs and the complex monastic economy, the monastic organization gradually tightened. As a consequence, the monks lost the freedom to visit other temples to pursue their disciplines and study with other teachers.\footnote{Kanazawa Hiroshi, “Ink Painting as a Focus for Literary Gatherings,” in Watanabe Akiyoshi, Kanazawa Hiroshi, and Paul Varley, eds., \textit{Of Water and Ink: Muromachi-Period Paintings From Japan 1392-1568} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 59.} Under such social circumstances, as the following will illustrate, the story of the Three Laughers would have in all likelihood been appealing to the Gozan Zen monks. Through interpreting the Chinese story, the Japanese monks and the members of their yūsha expressed their views on the difference of philosophical beliefs and friendship.
Identifying the Honzetsu of Sanshô [2]
The Three Laughers Motif in China

Both in China and Japan, the story of the three laughers was predominantly represented in ink painting, upon which poetry and prose were composed. In China, pictorial and literary representations of the three laughers motif first appeared in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. The earliest surviving literary work on the story, *Lu-shan zi* (Record of Mt. Lu 廬山記, 1072) was meant to give a detailed background of the story behind the painting.

Eminent Chinese painters including Shi Ke 石恪 (ca. 965), Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1105), Li Tang 李唐 (1050-?1130), and Muxi 牧溪 (Jp. Mu-ch’i, ca. 1177-1239) all have paintings on the subject. Literary works on the motif either make reference to the paintings or were inscribed on the paintings. One of the earliest written accounts of the story is *Lushan ji* 廬山記 (Record of Mount Lu, 1072) by Sung literatus Chen Shunyu 陳舜俞. It reads:

---

316 Li Gonglin, also known as Lung-mien, was a literatus painter from a distinguished family of scholar-officials. He passed the chin-shin examination in 1070 and served in minor prefectural posts. He painted in the company of Su Shi and members of his circle. He was interested in Ch’án Buddhism. He did an imaginative illustration of the poet Tao Yuanming’s famous poem on returning home to retirement. Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1985), 317-8.

317 Li Tang, t. His-ku. A well-known figure painter. He was a painter-in-attendance in Northern and Southern Sung. He was honored by a military title and the award of the golden belt. His brushstroke style influenced later Academy landscapists. Bush and Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 315.

318 Muxi. Also known as Fachang 法常, he studied Ch’án Buddhism and painting with abbot Wuchun. His works were appreciated by contemporary Japanese monks, and his ink paintings of Buddhist figures, landscapes, animals, birds, fruits, and flowers have been preserved in Japan. Bush and Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 304.
Once monk Huiyuan was seeing off his visitors, as he crossed here, a tiger roared. This is how the place received its name [the Tiger Ravine]. The two visitors were Tao Yuanming and Lu Xiujing. They were having conversation along the way, and unintentionally crossed the ravine. They all burst into laughter. This is the source of the painting “Three laughers 三笑圖” that we know today.319

Biographical records of the three Chinese characters indicate that the story is fabricated; however, it was not challenged in China. Although there are records of meetings between the Buddhist monk Huiyuan (334-416) and the poet Tao Yuanming (ca. 365-427), there is no evidence of their meeting with Lu Xiujing (ca 406-477). At the time when Huiyuan died, Lu Xiujing was only ten years old. If they really did meet, then, the painting is fictitious, since the surviving pictorial depictions of the story all portray Lu Xiujing as a man of Tao Yuanming’s age; therefore, there is no doubt that the paintings were fabricated also.

Prior to Lushan ji, there were Tang poems about monk Huiyuan and his dwelling in Mount Lu. This includes works by renowned poets such as Li Bai 李白 (701-762), Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846), who had written poems on Huiyuan and Mount Lu. None of them tell the story of the three laughers, or of the meeting between Huiyuan and Lu Xiujing. Ishida Hiroshi listed representative poetry and prose by these literati and expressed

319 For original in Chinese, see Jing yin wen yuan ge si ku quan shu, vol. 585 (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1983), 21.
doubt that the story of the three laughers might have existed in Tang Dynasty.\textsuperscript{320} Indeed, none of the surviving Tang texts record the meeting of the three Chinese figures.

The theme of the Three Laughers at the Tiger Ravine was not the only story that advocated the unity of different beliefs. A closely related theme, \textit{Sanjiao-yizhi} 三教一致 (Three doctrines and one source), concerning the unity of the three different religions, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, was a topic of debate in Tang China. It was a popular topic of ink painting. There is a series of ink paintings depicting the unity of the three patriarchs, that is, the Buddha Śākyamuni, Laozi, and Confucius. Paintings on this concept were referred to as \textit{Sankyō-zu} 三教図 (Painting of the three creeds).\textsuperscript{321}

Historical records show that well known Tang and Sung Chinese painters Sun Wei 孫位 (late ninth century), Shi Ke 石恪 (ca.965), Ma Yuan 馬遠 (ca. 1190-1225), and Chen Jingfu 陳敬甫 (ca. 1174-1189) had done paintings on the Three Patriarchs theme.\textsuperscript{322} Unfortunately, none of these works survived. One exception

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{320} See Ishida Hiroshi, “\textit{Nôgaku Sanshô ni tsuite},” in \textit{Nihon bungaku kenkyû} (June, 1962): 59-63.
  \item \textsuperscript{321} Rosenfield, “The Unity of the Three Creeds,” 219.
  \item \textsuperscript{322} Sun Wei (Yū). A figure specialist who painted murals in the Tang capital and Shu capital. His specialty includes secular figures, dragons in water, Heavenly Kings and demonic divinities. Of a careless disposition and fond of wine. See Bush and Shih, eds., \textit{Early Chinese Texts on Painting}, 332. Shi Ke, T. Tzu-chuan. A Confucian scholar turned painter. In 965, he went to K’ai-feng where he was given a position as a painter I the Academy. However, he preferred to return home to Cheng-tu. His painting specialty was atique and outlandish historical figures. He also did Buddhist and Taoist subjects. See Bush and Shih, eds., \textit{Early Chinese Texts on Painting}, 330. Ma Yuan, t. Ch’in-shan. Son of Ma Hsingtsu. a painter-in-attendance in the Southern Sung
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
is a painting surviving in Japan, which Rosenfield points out it may be an early Japanese reproduction of the lost original, that may provide a glimpse of the early portrayal of the theme. The painting contains the seals of the painter Yin-t’o-lo (late thirteenth to early fourteenth century), as well as an inscription by a Chinese monk Qingzhuo Zhengcheng 清拙正澄 (1274-1339). It reads:

The Magistrate of Lu [Confucius]
The Pillar of Chou [Lao Tzu]
And who is the person in front of them?
The princely son of Siddhodana [Śākyamuni]
The three are all masters.
Choose among them a good one,
And follow him!  

Although some of the ink paintings are lost, there are other surviving inscriptions on these paintings that were transcribed in collected work of the poet. These poems certainly offer us a glimpse of the reception of these paintings and interpretations of the theme. One of these poems that predates that of Qingzhuo Zhengcheng was written by Wuzhun Shifan 無準師範 (1177-1249), which reads:

The one is three.
The three are one.

Painting Academy. He and Hsia Kuei are the founders of the so-called Ma-Hsia style of Academy landscape painting. See Bush and Shih, eds., Early Chinese Texts on Painting, 325.

323 Yin T’o-lo, also known as Fan-yin T’o-lo. About a dozen of his paintings survive. Based on the signature of one of his paintings, he might be Indian, or a Chinese monk who adopted an Indian-sounding name. He was active in China. Qingzhuo Zhengcheng came to Japan in 1327 and resided in temples in Kamakura and Kyoto. See Sylvan Barnet and William Burto, Zen Ink Paintings (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1982), 38.

324 The translation is taken from Rosenfield, “The Unity of the Three Creeds,” 222-23.
The three are one.
The one is three.
Apart, they cannot be separated.
Together, they cannot form a group. Now, as in the past,
They join together
In silence,
For the simple reason
That within the creeds
Are many vessels.325

Another poem that predates that of Qingzhuo Zhengcheng was written by

Mingji Chujun 明極楚俊 (1262-1336). It reads:

The saintly ones of the three creeds.
Each established his own doctrine:
Confucius' law of great integrity
That administers firmness without injustice;
Śākyamuni’s law of the great enlightenment
Whose inherent universal harmony transcends all obstacles;
The law of the great vision of the Tao
Whose magnanimous wisdom flows without cease.
Like a tripod standing on three legs,
It is not possible to break one off.
Be that as it may,
Which among the three saintly ones
Should receive the devotions of men and gods?
There can be no agreement.326

Both Qingzhuo Zhengcheng and Mingji Chujun came to Japan in the late
1320s’, whereas Wuzhun Shifan’s disciples, such as Shôichi Kokushi 聖一国師
(1202-1280) and Wuxue Zuyuan 無学祖元 (1226-1286), were active in Japan and
founded the Tôfukuji and Engakuji respectively. The three poems, particularly

325 Ibid., 223.
326 Ibid., 224.
the latter two, share the similar viewpoint that the three doctrines are complementary. Such a syncretic union of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism corresponds to the theory of the “Three Creeds and One Source.” The idea of the compatibility of the three doctrines was well recognized among monks and literati of the Sung and Yüan Dynasties.327

Paintings on the topic of the three laughers first appeared in late eleventh century China. Historical records indicate that eminent painters such as Shi Ke 石恪, Li Gonglin 李公麟, Li Tang 李唐, and Muxi 牧溪 had paintings entitled “Three Laughers at the Tiger Ravine.”328 Noted Sung Chinese scholars had also shown great interest in the legend. For instance, Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1036-1101) and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105) both wrote inscription poems for ink

---


328 Li Gonglin, also known as Lung-mien, was literati painter from a distinguished family of scholar-officals. He passed the ch'in-shin examination in 1070 and served in minor prefectural posts. He painted in the company of Su Shih and members of his circle. He was interested in Ch'an Buddhism. He did an imaginative illustration of the poet Tao Yuanming’s famous poem on returning home to retirement. Bush and Shih, eds., Early Chinese Texts on Painting, 317-8. Li Tang, t. His-ku. A well-known figure painter. He was a painter-in-attendance in Northern and Southern Sung. He was honored by a military title and the award of the golden belt. His brushstroke style influenced later Academy landscapists. Bush and Shih, eds., Early Chinese Texts on Painting, 315. Muxi. Also known as Fa-ch'ang 法常, he studied C'an Buddhism and painting with abbot Wu-chun. His works were appreciated by contemporary Japanese monks, and ink paintings of Buddhist figures, landscapes, animals, birds, fruits, and flowers have been preserved in Japan. Bush and Shih, eds., Early Chinese Texts on Painting, 304.
paintings on the Chinese motif. Su Dongpo’s poem on a painting of the Three Laughers 三笑図 by Shi Ke 石恪 reads:

They three are sages;  
In gaining the concept words are forgotten.  
Instead they utter a stifled laugh 
In their pleasure and innocence.  
Ah! This small boy watches them  
As the deer watches the monkey.  
You! What do any of you know?  
Your very laughter fills the world.  
What is despicable?  
What is admirable?  
Each laugh is that laugh 
One cannot know which of you is superior.

Since the inscription does not identify the three figures, some may argue that Su Dongpo might not be writing on the topic of the three laughers, as it is clear that he knew the irrationality of the story. Nevertheless, by scrutinizing other poems by Su, Ishida Hiroshi argues that even if Su was aware of the illogicality, he would have admired and yearned for such friendship.

Su Dongpo’s close friend Huang Tingjian 黄庭堅 (1045-1105) also wrote about the story of the three laughers. It was a preface for a poem by Chan yue 禪月 (ca. late ninth century) that depicts the very same story. The preface reads:

---

329 Huang Tingjian was one of the four great Sung calligraphers, noted for his cursive script. He served as a provincial magistrate and later appointed as a professor in the National University and as one of the compilers of Emperor Shen-tsung’s Veritable Records. Involved in political controversies, and was frequently exiled. He was interested in Ch’an Buddhism and associated with monk-painters such as Chungjen. Bush and Shih, eds., Early Chinese Texts on Painting, 311.

The monk Huiyuan, dwelling on the slopes of Mount Lu, observed the rules of pure asceticism and fanatically refused the honeyed water which might have saved his life. However, when composing poems, he would turn to wine and drink with Tao Yuanming. When he bade farewell to his guests, whether they were high or low in rank, he would not cross the Tiger Ravine. However, when accompanying Lu Xiujing, the Taoist sage, he went a hundred steps beyond and, giving a great laugh, then parted from him.331

Indeed, Su Dongpo and his friends in their literary circle probably identified with the mentality of the characters in the three laughers motif. Through writing about the story, they expressed their views on the unity beyond different social and philosophical beliefs. As John M. Rosenfield has proposed, the interpretation by Su Dongpo and his literati circle might have been the original source that inspired Japanese reception of the Chinese motif.332

The Three Laughers Motif in Japan

The story of the three laughers was introduced to Japan through several mediums including Chinese literature and ink paintings, Chinese monks who immigrated there, and returning Japanese monks from China. Japanese literati’s earliest encounters with stories of Huiyuan and Tao Yuanming were probably through the poems of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, Li Bai 李白, Du Fu 杜甫, and Bai Juyi 白居易. Collections of their works were imported to Japan as of the ninth


332 Rosenfield, “The Unity of the Three Creeds,” 211.
century. However, as mentioned earlier, their works do not depict the story of the Three Laughers, but rather focus on the political and religious stances of Huiyuan and Tao Yuanming.

The story of the monk Huiyuan appears in some medieval *setsuwa* and war tales, namely the *Shasekishû 沙石集* (Sand and pebbles, 1279-1283), *Zôtanshû 雑談集* (Casual digressions, 1305), and *Taiheiki 太平記*. The former two were both written by Mujû 無住 (1226-1312), a Gozan Zen monk. His writing incorporates Buddhist doctrines and teachings into the tales. Neither of these works mentions the story of the Three Laughers. The focus of these adaptations is Huiyuan, and his commitment to his vow of not leaving the vicinity of the Mount Lu temple.

For instance, in *Shasekishû 沙石集*, Huiyuan’s story is used as an example of a good Buddhist monk, so as to contrast with that of a misbehaving Buddhist monk of the Pure Land sect. Huiyuan is praised for keeping his vow of not getting involved with the secular world and pursuing solely the attainment of enlightenment. The episode reads:

In China, eighteen wise men, including Huiyuan, founded the White Loutus Circle in Mount Lu. They made a vow that they would not get involved with worldly business in the secular world. They said, “our shadows will not leave the mountain, when seeing off guests, we will not step beyond the Tiger Ravine,” and did not step out of the valley. They concentrated on working on nothing else but attaining enlightenment. Indeed the acquiring of enlightenment is the most important thing …

---

Huiyuan’s story is used for the same purpose in *Taiheiki*. In the episode entitled ‘On the conduct of the head priest Monkan’, Huiyuan’s behavior is praised. Huiyuan’s observance of his vow of not leaving Mount Lu, and his dedication as a monk, are used as contrastive devices in telling the story of the Japanese priest Monkan. In spite of devoting himself to Buddhism, Monkan kept himself occupied with pursuits of wealth and fame in the mundane world. It is in the light of the Chinese monk’s commitment that the Japanese monk’s inappropriate behavior stands out clearly. The passage on Huiyuan reads:

> The Monk Huiyuan of Mount Lu, ever since leaving the realm of mundane affairs and settling in the room of solitude, vowed never to leave the mountain for even a moment. Joining the Eighteen Wise Ones, he was very diligent in worship and prayed six times a day for many years.  


**Pictorial Representations**

The Story of the Three Laughers, however, mainly appeared in Zen literature and ink paintings by the *Gozan* Zen monks from the early fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries. Zen scholar Asakura Hisashi has listed a corpus of such work, which includes over sixty pieces by thirty-two Japanese Zen monks.  

About two-thirds of these works were written as inscriptions for ink
paintings depicting the Three Laughers. Ink paintings by Chinese and Japanese painters were related to this corpus of work.

The Gozan Zen monks responded in poetry, prose, and diaries to the Chinese ink painting renditions of the three laughers motif by the aforementioned painters, such as Shi Ke 石恪, Li Gonglin 李公麟, Li Tang 李唐, and Muxi 牧溪. For example, Kôsei Ryûha 江西龍派 (1375-1446), abbot of the Ken’ninji Temple and later of the Nanzenji Temple who was also an active inscriber of paintings in the early fifteenth century, composed a poem entitled On the Painting of the Three Laughers painted by Longmian [Li Tang] 题龍眠[李唐]所畫三咲圖. Other evidence of the appreciation among Muromachi political and religious circles over the works of these Chinese painters included praise of their other paintings, records of displays of their paintings, and encyclopedic records of Chinese painters. Li Tang 李唐 was listed among the top-ranked Chinese painters in the Kundaikan saû chôki 君臺觀左右帳記, an evaluation and ranking of Chinese artists (including most of the above mentioned Chinese painters) and instructions for the proper display of paintings, written by Sôami 相阿弥 (1455-1525) upon the order of the Ashikaga shogunate.

Works of the Chinese painter Muxi 牧溪, although not well known in China, were very popular and highly praised in Muromachi Japan. Muxi’s

---

336 Li Longmian 李龍眠, the pen name of Li Tang 李唐.

paintings dominated the Ashikaga Shogun’s collection of Chinese paintings. As listed in the *Gyomotsu on’e mokuroku* 御物御絵目録 (Inventory of items and paintings), a catalogue of Chinese valuables and paintings owned by the Ashikaga shoguns, more than one-third of the Chinese paintings are attributed to Muxi.\(^{338}\) Two paintings by Muxi 牧溪 entitled *Three Laughers* 三笑 (sanshô) are recorded as being in the possession of the third Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimitsu.

An episode recorded in the diary of Gidô Shûshin, *Kûge Nichiyô Kufû* 空華日用工夫集 documented the shogun’s encounter with Muxi’s *Three Laughers*. It reads:

> On the 26th day of the eleventh month in 1382, at the construction ceremony of the Shôkoku-ji Temple, Shogun Yoshimitsu, inquired about the meaning of the inscription on the painting entitled *The Three Laughers* by the Chinese painter-monk Mu Ch’i, given as a present by the Enkaku-ji Temple. [Gidô] explained, “They laughed because Monk Huiyuan had crossed the bridge.” Gidô continued and told the story behind this incident: “Monk Huiyuan of China lived in seclusion at the Tung-lin Temple in Mount. Lu had taken a vow that he would not cross the Tiger Ravine [which marks the boundary of the temple]. Once when the emperor summoned him to come out, he refused. This day, when seeing off his friends, Tao Yuanming and Lu Xiujing, he unintentionally crossed the ravine.” [Gidô then added this comment:] “Perhaps both keeping and breaking his vow were for the sake of the path.”\(^{339}\)

This episode encapsulates three important aspects of Chinese ink-painting in Muromachi Japan. First, Chinese ink paintings were used as gifts between

\(^{338}\) One hundred three out of the two hundred eighty paintings listed are attributed to Muxi.

temples; second, some of the paintings were not merely used as décor, but also as inspiration for creative activities, such as the composition of poetic inscriptions; third, as Gidô Shûshin demonstrated, Gozan Zen monks had a sound knowledge of Chinese ink paintings, particularly within their literary circle of Gozan. Unfortunately, the painting by Mu Ch’i no longer survives, but there are a few existing ink paintings from the mid-fifteenth century that provide us some ideas of what the painting that Yoshimitsu saw may have looked like.340

Besides Muxi’s paintings, there are three surviving paintings on the motif of the three laughers at the Tiger Ravine. One of them is attributed to a Gozan monk, Bunsei 文西 (ca. mid-15th century), and one to Chû’an Shinkô 仲庵真康 (ca. mid 15th century). The other one was by an anonymous painter. The celebrated monk painter Sesshû Tôyô 雪舟等楊 (1420-1506) also painted The Three Laughers, though, during his stay in China, and the painting was collected by a Chinese official in southern China.341 Later Japanese painters, such as

340 Although Bunsei’s version is the oldest surviving version of the Three Laughers theme, the strikingly similar composition, pose, and details of the three figures that it shares with the anonymous painting suggests the existence of an earlier work which both paintings might have been modeled after.

341 As recorded in Kikô Daishuku, ed., Shaken nichiroku (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1953) under the entry of the fourteenth day of the third month of 1486, two paintings by Sesshû entitled 三笑圖 and 商山四皓圖 were in a Chinese official’s resident in Ling-bo 寧波 in southern China. Sesshû probably did the painting during his stay in China.
Shûbun 周文 (ca. 1423-60), Kano Motonobu 狩野元信 (1476-1558), and Kenkô Shôkei 賢江祥啓 (ca. 1478), also painted on the same theme.342

The anonymous painting contains poetic inscriptions by four Gozan Zen monks, including Ten'in Ryûtaku 天隠龍沢 (1422-1500), an abbot of Kenninji temple. His poem contains the following comments on the theme in his poem:

A man in a Taoist hat, a man in Confucian shoes in the style of China,
as the lotus clock marks the passing hours, the old ones gather to visit at
the lonely hermitage,
ne Nar Wu-lao Peak the monk's wizened face is the first to break out in
laughter,
the three men together, saying nothing of it, together cross the bridge.343

As John Rosenfield has pointed out, Zen ink paintings were integrated
with social and literary gatherings and “became a coherent, fully mature pictorial
language in both artistic and social terms, that expresses the basic cultural values
of the leaders of Japanese society.”344 Such an integration is best revealed in the
production of shigajiku “poem-and-painting scrolls” that took place in the context
of literary gatherings of yûsha (‘circles of friends’) formed by elite members of
religious and political establishments. Using ink painting as the stimulus,
participants would compose Chinese poems on the theme of the painting, and
sometimes a preface would also be included.

343 The translation is taken from Rosenfield, “The Unity of the Three Creeds,” 214.
Muromachi Zen monks might have seen a possible resolution of this tension in the Chinese story, in which harmony is achieved through the unity of the three different doctrines—Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, symbolized by the laughing between the three Chinese characters. The Japanese monks were enchanted by this idea, as is evidenced in the fact that *The Three Laughers* was by no means the only ink painting that took on the theme of unity of the three different doctrines. Several surviving ink paintings from around the same time, such as the Sankyôzu 三教図 (Unity of the three patriarchs) and Sanzanzu 三酸図 (The three vinegar tasters), substantiate the popularity of this very theme. Indeed, the characters and the story of the *Three Laughers* provide a Chinese counterpart recognizable as resembling the religious and social dynamics experienced by members of Muromachi culture. Then, how was it that this material came to be reworked into the Nô play?

**Perspectives of the Adapters [3]**

Although little is known about Hosokawa Nariyuki 細川成之 (1434-1511), the author of the Nô play *Sanshô*, he certainly was associated with Gozan Zen circles. In fact, he wrote the play after taking the tonsure and used his Buddhist name Jiun’in 慈雲院. Several of his poems were compiled in *Ten’in shû* 天隠集 (Collection of Ten’ìn, late 15th century), a collection of poems compiled by the

345 See Rosenfield, “The Unity of the Three Creeds” for a discussion of these paintings.
Gozan Zen monk Ten’in Ryūtaku 天隠龍沢 (d. 1500). As mentioned earlier, Ten’in Ryūtaku inscribed a poem on the anonymous ink painting *Kokei sanshō* (Three laughers at the tiger ravine). Therefore, it is not surprising that Nariyuki knew of the Chinese story through the ink painting.

Around the mid-fifteenth century, the audience of Nō was no longer merely watching plays, but became more involved in performances themselves. Audiences from different social groups, including warriors, aristocrats, and townsmen, gathered to learn the chants of plays in chant clubs (*utai-kō* [讃い講]). New troupes formed by semi-professional performers who specialized in what was referred to as amateur Nō (*te-sarugaku* [手猿楽]) emerged and performed plays in various settings, even for emperors. One reason for such a flowering of semi-professional performances was probably because they were free from the constraints of the selection of plays to be performed that were imposed by the patrons of professional Nō troupes. Since they were not beholden to the patronage system, semi-professional performers were able to perform their own favorites for a relatively closed audience group.

Similar to the semi-professional playwrights who wrote and staged their own productions for selected audiences, Hosokawa Nariyuki was not a

---


347 For example, according to surviving record, the first performance by nobles was in 1487. See Raz, Audience and Actors, 121.
professional actor or playwright of Nô, and did not belong to any professional Nô troupe. Moreover, since he was an elite warrior and a Zen monk later in his life, he did not need to compete for patronage in order to gain economic support. Therefore, he had more freedom than professional playwrights to adopt such a Chinese motif into Nô.

**Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]**

Although written by a non-professional playwright, the play *Sanshô* closely follows the typical structure and composition of a play. First of all, as discussed in Chapter Two, the nature of the characters, that is accomplished poets and sages, naturally lent itself to poetic portrayals. Although they were not known for their ability to dance, they did have the requisite attributes to perform dances.

In terms of the compositional techniques used in the play, the play builds on the audience’s knowledge associated with certain poems and motifs to achieve two major results: first, to foster the visualization, or re-visualization, of the ink painting in the audience’s minds; second, to domesticate the Chinese motifs and de-emphasize their original political import in order to magnify the auspicious aspects of the story. In doing so, the playwright Hosogawa Nariyuki selected poetic allusions in ways that conform to the conventions of Nô. However, he did not use poems inscribed on the *Three Laughers* paintings, which
were relatively new and inclined toward the philosophical. Rather, he employs Chinese and Japanese literary works that had existed since the Heian period and had permeated Japanese literary traditions. They were all by celebrated poets. The Chinese poems were by Li Bai, Tao Yuanming, Bai Juyi, and Miyako no Yoshika 都良香 (ca. ?880), whereas the Japanese ones were by Kiyowara no Motosuke 清原元輔 (908-990).

More interesting is the playwright’s manipulation of these poems. The poems by Japanese poets depict the feelings of the Chinese characters, whereas the poems by the Chinese poets describe the landscape of Mount Lu, in particular the waterfall and the dwellings of the characters. The most important poem alluded to was by Miyako no Yoshika. It is used to depict that the character, overwhelmed and uplifted by nature, could be set free from his religious entanglements. The original poem reads:

The three thousand-fold world is exhausted before our eyes
The twelvefold karmic chain turns empty in our hearts.348

In the play, the poem is alluded to in a section describing the astounding landscape that overwhelmed the characters. It reads:

Chorus: The Three thousand-fold world before our eyes, unfolds,
The twelvefold karmic chain in our hearts turns void

---

The other important poem alluded to was also by a Japanese poet (Kiyowara no Motosuke). Moreover, it is a Japanese waka poem. It sustains the turning point of the play, that is, the domestication of the Chinese motif—transforming it from “the unity of the three doctrines” into “the celebration of longevity and eternal youth.” The playwright does this by intertwining the visual image of the landscape depicted in the ink painting—that is the waterfall and the ravine, and the mythical symbolism often used in Nô—that is “dewdrops on the chrysanthemum” (kikusui 菊水). In doing so, the collective belief in “dewdrops on the chrysanthemum” overshadows the Chinese counterpart which symbolizes the integrity and loyalty of Tao Yuanming. The original poem reads:

Collecting the dewdrops on the chrysanthemums,
This spring of the elixir of longevity and eternal youth flows forever

菊の白露積り積って
不老不死の薬の泉よも尽きじ

Instead of debating, or advocating, the issue of philosophical differences embraced by the three religious traditions, the auspicious impulse sprang from the purpose of Nô mentioned in earlier chapters, that is, to bring prosperity and longevity to all humans. The playwright highlights auspiciousness as the theme for the Nô adaptation of the Chinese motif. In so doing, he incorporated an allusion to Kiyowara Motosuke’s poem which immediately precedes the dance sequence at the climax.
The dance sequence is *gaku* (‘court dance’) and is performed by the three characters. As defined in Chapter Three, the *gaku* dance is mostly performed by Chinese characters, or characters perceived as exotic. Moreover, the majority of the plays in which the *gaku* dance is performed have an auspicious theme.

Similar to other plays in the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, which are more spectacular and have more characters, the play *Sanshô* is very lively. The playwright arranges all three characters, Tao Yuanming, Lu Xiujing, and monk Huiyuan, to perform the dance in synchronization (*sannin-aimai*). It is a very unusual dance sequence, and the only one surviving play that features a dance performed by three characters. Such a staging not only accentuates the harmony between the three characters and encourages an auspicious mood, but is also strikingly reminiscent of the ink painting.

Indeed, the playwright Nariyuki waters down the idea of the unity of the three doctrines and summons a larger and more echoic context that allows the audience to utilize their knowledge to make sense of the foreign story within a domestic context. He does so by manipulating the image of the chrysanthemum and changing its symbolism to something more directly familiar to Japanese audiences, allotting the dynamic dance movement of the *gaku* dance to all three characters to assign them an auspicious identity that will meet the expectations of very local Nô audiences. As a result, the Nô version presents not only an
interpretation of the philosophical aspects embedded in the Chinese ink painting, but also a spectacular and unique entertainment with auspicious overtones.

*Hakurakuten* and *Sanshô* present contrasting portrayals of Chinese literati that reflect the different receptions of Chinese cultural icons. Both plays are celebratory, however, *Hakurakuten* tells of the triumph of Japanese poetic tradition over the Chinese, whereas *Sanshô* embraces the Chinese in order to commemorate the joy of friendship prevailing over differences in religious beliefs and social constraints. Such difference is the epitome of conflicting Japanese attitudes, whereby, at times, Chinese culture was embraced, but at other times counteracted.

*Sanshô* demonstrates, as *Seiôbô* and *Tôbôsaku* do, how Nô playwrights adopted a celebratory Chinese story into Nô. One key factor that made for such a favorable reception is the audiences' knowledge of the Chinese motif. However, unlike the motif of Xiwangmu in *Seiôbô* and *Tôbôsaku*, which mainly appeared in collections of tales, the story of the three laughers at the Tiger Ravine was primarily portrayed in ink paintings and the poetry written in response to them. Therefore, *Sanshô* offers unique views on how pictorial arts were made into a Nô play. Moreover, since the play was written by a semi-professional playwright who was closely associated with the literary and religious circles in Muromachi Japan, and did not have to cater to certain patrons or the general audience, the story of *Sanshô* offers a window on the state of mind of the literary and religious
elites in those circles. The Chinese story appealed to them as a model answer for one’s struggle between personal emotions and socio-religious constraints. Indeed, Sanshô can be viewed as an acknowledgment of the importance of friendship that is beyond the level of religious doctrines. The play certainly praises such harmony and joy by the unique dance sequence, with the three characters performing the gaku dance in synchronization.

The negative image of the Chinese poet Bai Juyi depicted in Hakurakuten was also a product of the playwright’s creative interpretation of earlier versions of a similar story in Japan. It is a typical adaptation strategy that incorporates well-known Japanese texts into the “basic sources” (honzetsu). For example, in the case of Hakurakuten, the playwright integrates the “Japanese Preface” of the Kokinshû into Japanese stories of Bai Juyi’s encounters with a Japanese literatus and a deity as told in Kokon Chomonjû and Kingyokuyô shû. The fictitious portrayal of Bai Juyi, the single most renowned and influential Chinese poet in Japan, who comes to investigate the secrets of the Japanese poetic tradition, is an effective strategy for substantiating the integrity, originality, and superiority of Japanese poetry over Chinese. Indeed, Hakurakuten is a very nuanced portrayal of Sino-Japanese relations. Moreover, given the changing diplomatic policy with China in the first half of the fifteenth century, and the fact that the play was written before 1464, the sociopolitical implications of the play provide important indications of the attitude towards China held by many Japanese.
EXOTIC CREATURES

Among “Chinese plays” are several that feature exotic creatures, including mythological ones that are of Chinese origin. The plays in question are *Shakkyô* 石橋 (Stone bridge), *Ryôko* 龍虎 (The dragon and the tiger), and *Shôjô* 猩々 (The orangutan). These plays promote the exotic as a source of lively and dynamic entertainment by showcasing flamboyant costumes, masks, and dynamic dance sequences. Such exotic qualities produce an atmosphere of wonder and surprise. Such an atmosphere is most vividly staged in the play *Ryôko*, which portrays a fight between a tiger and a dragon. In *Shakkyô* and *Shôjô*, the exotic atmosphere is counterbalanced by the celebratory theme of the prosperity and longevity of Japan.

The highlights of these plays are the spectacular dance performances and the exotic masks and costumes. These motifs were depicted mainly in ink.

---

*349* There is a play entitled *Tsurukame* 鶴亀 (The crane and the tortoise) that tells of a festive ceremony in Tang Dynasty China in which the spirit of a crane and a tortoise appear to worship the emperor.
paintings, and were rarely drawn from literary sources, poetic references being especially rare. Therefore, these plays offer an excellent case study of how motifs that were mainly depicted in pictorial media might be adapted into Nô. For our discussion here, I selected *Shakkyô* and *Ryôko* because they represent the various aspects that are peculiar to the adaptation of motifs related to exotic creatures. The employment of Chinese and Japanese poetry in the two plays as well as the arrangement of danced performance demonstrate a perfect synthesis of poetry, paintings, and dance in Nô. Furthermore, if read in the light of historical contexts, both plays make interesting references to contemporary social and political phenomena.

*Shakkyô* 石橋 (Stone Bridge)

The play *Shakkyô* tells a fictional story of a historical figure, the Japanese monk Jakushô 寂照, also known as Ōe no Sadamoto 大江定基 (961-1034), who traveled to China to study Buddhism and died there. The following is a synopsis of the Nô play.

Monk Jakushô arrives at a stone bridge at the holy mountain Qingliang Shan 清涼山 during his stay in China. Wondering if it is the stone bridge that connects to the dwelling of the Bodhisattva Monju 文殊菩薩 (Sk. Mañjuśrī), he inquires of a local child. The child confirms that it is indeed the sacred bridge and warns the monk that to be able to cross the bridge, even those with great
spiritual training had to first spend years performing difficult and selfless austerities. It is an impossible task even for those of high caliber and confidence in their spiritual powers. The two exchange a description of the astounding difficulties and danger in crossing the bridge. The child tells Monk Jakushô to wait there and the Bodhisattva may appear soon. The child exits and the first act ends. A lion, which is believed to be the companion of the Bodhisattva, appears in the second act. It performs a lion dance among the peonies and celebrates prosperity and longevity of the country.

**Sociopolitical Context [1]**

The earliest surviving performance record of the play indicates that it was performed by the Kanze troupe in 1465. Some records of authorship attributed the play to Jûrô Motomasa 十郎元雅 (d. 1432), the son of Zeami, while others assigned it to Miyamasu 宮増 (ca. ?1429-?1467), a contemporary of Zenchiku. Modern scholarship, too, has different views on the authorship. Some scholars such as Nôgami Toyoichirô attribute the play to Motomasa, whereas some

---

350 Nose Asaji, *Nôgaku genryû*, 1262. It was recorded under the title *Shishi* (The lion). As Nô scholar Omote Akira has pointed out, the change of title to *Shakkyô* happened in the late Muromachi period. It was to avoid confusion with another play entitled *Mochiduki* (Mochizuki), which also features a lion dance. Omote Akina, “Nô ‘Shakkyô’ no rekishiteki kenkyû,” *Kanze* 32.8 (August 1965): 4.

351 Yokomichi, *Nô no sakusha to sakuhin*, 243-44.
regard it as anonymous. Based on this information, the play was probably written sometime in the first half of the fifteenth century.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, the first half of the fifteenth century saw abrupt changes in Sino-Japanese relations. The diplomatic and trading relations begun in 1403 were halted for two decades by the shogun Yoshimochi (1386-1428) as of 1411. Yoshimochi refused to become a subject of Ming China and rejected the Ming emperor’s requests for suppression of piracy. In 1433, the shogun Yoshinori (1394-1441) resumed relations, which would continue for a century. The tally ship trading lasted until 1549. In the first half of the fifteenth century, the number of people and ships participating in each mission of tally ship trading was so overwhelming that it alarmed the Ming government. For example, thirty-eight ships were sent in six trips during the first decade of the trade, and the trip in 1453 consisted of nine ships with 1200 people on board. From the 1460s on, the Ming government limited the number of ships per trip to three with a total of three hundred people on board.

Official restrictions notwithstanding, private trips to China continued for centuries, particularly in Buddhist circles. Throughout the premodern period, Japanese Buddhist monks had been traveling to China to deepen their

---


understanding of Buddhist teachings. When they returned from China, these monks not only contributed to the development of Japanese Buddhism, but also to the study of Chinese culture. Of course, not all of them returned to Japan. Some monks stayed in China for the rest of their lives, and some died there. The monk who is the focus of the play *Shakkyô* was among the unfortunate ones who passed away during his pilgrimage in China.

**Identifying the “Basic Sources” of *Shakkyô* [2]**

The story of the play is to a large extent fictional, and no earlier sources are extant. The *honzetsu* of the play consists of three parts: the story of Jakushô (Ôe no Sadamoto), the image of the lion and its association with the Bodhisattva Monju, as well as the performance of the lion dance (*shishimai* 獅子舞).

Ôe no Sadamoto took the tonsure and the name Jakushô in 988. He traveled to China in 1002 for his spiritual pursuit and planned to visit Mount Wutai 五台山, also known as Mount Qingliang 清涼山. He did not make it to that particular holy mountain, but visited Mount Tiantai 天台山 a few years before his death in 1034.354 There are a few anecdotes about him in *Jikkinshô* 十訓抄 (A Collection of the Ten Teachings, ca.1252), a story collection that elaborates on the

---

354 There is one version of his story stating that Jakushô died at Mount Qingliang.
ten moral principles. However, there are no images of a lion in any of the stories, nor any record of his arrival at the stone bridge.

The image of the lion appeared in a variety of media from the early Heian to the early Muromachi period. The motif of the lion was often used in the imperial court. For instance, images of lions were painted on the screen of the Shishinden Hall, a hall in the imperial palace where the emperor held rituals and ceremonies. Also, a sculpture of a lion was placed on the left side of the entrance of the Seiryôden Hall. It is likely that these lion images were employed less to emulate the Tang Chinese Palace, than to bolster the supremacy and authority of the Japanese court.

The image of the lion mainly appears in two groups of Buddhist paintings predating the Nô play. The first group contains paintings depicting events around the death of the historical Buddha—the scene of his death and his rising from the Golden Coffin. The earliest surviving examples of these paintings are from the mid-eleventh century. In these paintings, a lion is often the only animal depicted as representing the entire animal kingdom. The second group

---

355 Attributed to Rokuhara Jirôzaemon (ca. 1252), Jikkinshô is a collection of moral tales with Buddhist overtones. Among the tales, one tells of a man’s good deed to a sick woman who turns out to be a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Monju.

356 Nagasumi and Shimada, eds. Kokon chomonshû, 308.


358 Elephants and horses are also depicted in the early twelfth century painting entitled “Shaka Rising from the Golden Coffin.” See Mason, History of Japanese Art, 125.
of paintings features the Bodhisattva Monju, who symbolizes wisdom. It is believed that the bodhisattva’s companion is a lion. One popular portrayal of Mañjuśrī in paintings depicts the bodhisattva seated on a lion.

Renditions of the image of a lion also appeared in *kagura* 神楽 (Entertainment for the deities), *gigaku* 伎楽 (Chinese court music) and *bugaku* 舞楽 (Chinese court dance), traditional performances that evince strong Chinese and Korean influences. *Kagura*, as Benito Ortolani has pointed out, is a total event consisting of different parts, some are ritualistic sequences designed to welcome the presence of the deity, and some are conceived as entertainment for the divine guest. *Shishimai* 獅子舞 (Lion dance) was one of the four main performances of *sato kagura* 里神楽 (provincial *kagura* performance) and was referred to as *shishi kagura* 獅子神楽 (i.e. lion dance in *Kagura* style). In the performance, a priest wearing a lion mask performs a dance for exorcism and protection from sickness, since it was believed that a lion mask had the power to exorcize evil spirits and sickness. The lion dance, thus, also involves offering prayers for longevity and prosperity. The lion dance was probably staged along

---


with other entertainment in the early stages after its introduction to Japan. In the art of *gigaku*, *shishi* appeared in two phases: first, in the opening procession held in temples; second, as an individual piece of performance. As for *bugaku*, a lion dance was accompanied by music.

The lion motif also appears in traditional music. There is a musical piece entitled *Shishi* (lion) documented in *Kyōkunshō* (A learner’s treatise, 1233), an encyclopedic work on court music and dance. Employing flute and drums, the piece accompanies the lion dance (*shishimai*), which is defined as a dance for the purpose of praying and memorial ceremonies. *Kyōkunshō* includes the lyrics of the chant that goes with the music, in which the lion is identified as a Buddhist sacred creature from India to serve as a guardian of the Japanese court. There are records indicating that the lion dance was performed along with other *gigaku* pieces during processions of the festive events such as part of the celebration of the Buddha’s birthday.

---


364 Ibid., 252.

365 Ibid., 253.
Perspectives of the Adapter [3]

As discussed earlier, it is probably apt to consider the play to have been written sometime in the first half of the fifteenth century. Official trips to China were halted from 1411 to 1431, and therefore Japanese monks had to rely on private ships as a means of traveling to and from China. The issue of traveling to China to further their religious pursuits would have been of great concern to Japanese monks. Indeed, the play is charged with Buddhist references, namely the Buddhist belief in the Bodhisattva Monju, the story of the well-known monk Jakushô, and the sacred site of Mount Qingliang in China. Therefore, *Shakkyô* was undoubtedly an interesting play for Japanese Buddhist audiences. Moreover, the dynamic lion dance and the extravagant mask, costumes, and setting, would have made for an extremely entertaining play, even for audiences unfamiliar with the story of the monk Jakushô or the Bodhisattva Monju. A close reading of the play, however, will provide more information to assist in analyzing it.

Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]

The playwright of *Shakkyô* integrates the story of a historical figure, the monk Jakushô and the legend of the Bodhisattva Monju, with the image and dance sequence of the lion. In so doing, the play invokes an auspiciousness and dynamic atmosphere, which is underlined by the theme of promoting Buddhism and supporting the study of the religion in China.
The playwright increases the dimensions of the play by making one important alteration to the location of the stone bridge, changing it from its actual site at Mount Tiantai to Mount Qingliang. There are two possible reasons for such an alteration, namely to incorporate a famous site into the play, and to add color to the story of monk Jakushô. As Zeami recommends in *Sandô*, selecting a famous setting for the play is crucial for its success, in particular for plays that do not have rich source materials. He states that “in the case of plays that lack an earlier rendition of the story or source materials, employ famous locations and historical sites.”366

The playwright of *Shakkyô* in fact incorporated two famous places—the stone bridge and Mount Qingliang. The stone bridge is well known for its scenic impact. It was built near the head of a waterfall of a thousand feet high at Mount Tiantai. Monk Jakujô probably visited the stone bridge while traveling to Mount Tiantai. In the Nô play, the extreme danger in crossing the bridge is amply elaborated in the exchange between monk Jakujô and the child. Mount Qingliang (Mount Wutai), however, is a site that Jakujô failed to reach. As a sacred site of Chinese Buddhism, Mount Qingliang was a very popular destination among Japanese monks who traveled to China. It is believed that the Bodhisattva Monju dwells there with the lion. Therefore, by combining the two sites associated with the characters of the play, the playwrights successfully integrated both the stories

of monk Jakujô and bodhisattva Monju. Such an arrangement also fulfilled the supposed wish of monk Jakujô to visit the sacred Mount Qingliang.

In spite of the lack of literary works depicting a story similar to the play *Shakkyô*, the playwright incorporated allusions to well known poems by focusing on the landscape and scenery at the stone bridge. Among the five literary texts that are alluded to in the text, three are on the mountain landscape, one on the peony blossom, and the other one on the Pure Land Paradise where the Bodhisattva Monju dwells. Although all five texts alluded to were written in Chinese, four of them were in fact by Japanese literati. The two by Ki no Tadana 紫氏 unmatched (959-999) and the one by Ōe no Asatsuna 大江朝綱 (866-957) depict mountain landscapes. The other one, by Monk Jakujô, describes the liveliness of the Pure Land Paradise. The other Chinese poem, by the Chinese poet Bai Juyi, praises the beauty of the peony blossom.

All these are celebrated sources that existed in Japan prior to the eleventh century. The poem attributed to monk Jakujô appears in *The Tale of the Heike* and several Buddhist story collections such as *Jikkinshô* and *Hōbutsushū* 宝物集 (A Collection of treasures, late twelfth century). The Chinese poems by Ki no Tadana and Ōe no Asatsuna were compiled into the *Wakan rôei shû* 和漢朗詠集. Bai Juyi’s poem was taken from his collection *Baishi wenji* 白氏文集 which was imported to Japan in the tenth century. None of these poetic allusions is chanted by the monk Jakujô (*waki*). Rather, they are all assigned to the child (*maejite*, the
principal character in the first act) and the chorus. Except for the allusion to the Bai Juyi poem, the other poetic allusions appear in the first part of the play. The second act, in fact, is only comprised of the lion dance sequence set to the choral chant.

These poetic allusions, although seemingly irrelevant to the motif of the bodhisattva and the lion, in fact reveal an important composition strategy that integrates different media of representations—ink painting, poetry, and Buddhist tale into the play. In spite of the lack of literary works depicting a story similar to the play *Shakkyô*, the playwright incorporated allusions to well known poems by focusing on the landscape and scenery at the stone bridge.

Although surviving paintings on the motif of the Bodhisattva Monju often only depict the Bodhisattva riding on the lion, there is a large corpus of ink painting in fifteenth century Japan that illustrates the landscape of China and dwellings of hermits and immortals. Recurring motifs in these landscape paintings include waterfalls, steep cliffs, as well as travelers crossing bridges over creeks. It is likely that the poetic allusions in *Shakkyô* are selected and sequenced in ways that resemble the pilgrimage of the Buddhist monk in the story. These allusions that vividly describe the foreign landscape lead the audience through the same path that the monk Jakushô might have taken. To audiences who are familiar with the landscape paintings and the original poems,

367 See the discussion in Chapter Five.
the chanting of these poetic references might have made it possible for them to experience a symphony that combines paintings and poetic language. This experience is further heightened by the spectacular lion dance that amplifies the religious content of the play.

Although the second act centers on the lion dance, it is implied that Bodhisattva Monju also appears on stage. This is achieved by the playwright’s manipulation of the audience’s knowledge of the Bodhisattva’s image attained through Buddhist paintings. There is a group of ink paintings on the motif of the Bodhisattva, in which the Bodhisattva is always depicted riding a lion. As John Rosenfield and Shûjirô Shimada have pointed out, the Five Pedestal Mountain in China was believed to be the Bodhisattva’s dwelling, and Buddhist monks would undertake a pilgrimage full of hardship to worship and pray for an appearance of the Bodhisattva. Paintings of Mañjuśrī riding a lion were intended to replicate the image of Mañjuśrī as witnessed by those who claimed to have seen him.368 The last few lines in the first act spell out that he will be appearing. The chorus chants, “Please wait a moment. In a while the time of the Bodhisattva’s manifestation will come.”

It is at the end of the second act that the playwright inserts a prayer for the longevity and prosperity of the country offered by the lion, the king of the animal kingdom. Chanted by the chorus, the lines read:

368 Rosenfield and Shimada, Traditions of Japanese Art, 110.
Chorus: Truly, nothing surpasses the might of this Lion King. Indeed, this is a time when no plant fails to bow to him. For a thousand autumns and ten-thousand years! He ends the dance. For a thousand autumns and ten-thousand years! He ends the dance. It is the throne of the lion where he returns.

Such a prayer for the country, and implicitly for the ruler, is usually found in Nô plays that feature a Shinto deity. A bodhisattva would normally offer a hint for achieving enlightenment. Therefore, it is rare to have the envoy of a bodhisattva offering such a different kind of prayer. The play could have ended with a joyful expression celebrating the monk’s arrival at the sacred site, or even by praising the Pure Land Paradise as the destiny of all humans. Instead, the playwright chose to pray for the country’s prosperity.

Based on the nature of the prayer, it is clear that the playwright focused on the lion dance more than on the encounter with the Bodhisattva Monju. As noted earlier, the mythical power of the lion dance is intended to exorcise evil spirits and sickness, and thus facilitates a long and healthy life. This part of the play indeed became more important than the first act, and thus the play was sometimes shortened to concentrate on the performance of the lion dance.

Such an emphasis on the dynamic and spectacular dance is not unique to Shakkyô. Rather, it is also a focal point of other “Chinese plays” that feature exotic creatures, such as Ryôko (The dragon and the tiger). Earlier sources on the motif of dragons and tigers are also predominantly in paintings. As the
remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, the playwright of Ryōko also employed similar adaptation strategies, intermingling visual media, poetic allusions, and Buddhist doctrines in the play.

Ryōko 龍虎 (The Dragon and the Tiger)

The play Ryōko 龍虎 (The dragon and the tiger) tells a fictional story about a Japanese monk who traveled to China and witnessed a fight between a tiger and a dragon. The following is a synopsis of the story:

An old Japanese monk, who claims to have exhausted all places in Japan for Buddhist learning, decided to go on a religious pilgrimage to China and India. After arriving in China, he is amazed by the beautiful landscape and comes across a wood-cutter. Soon he notices a sudden change of the sky above a bamboo grove in the distance, where dark clouds appear with gusting winds. The wood-cutter tells him that it is a fight between a dragon and a tiger, and encourages him to go over and watch. In the second act, the monk arrives at the site of the fight. He witnesses the fight till the end.

Sociopolitical Context [1]

The play was written during the second half of the fifteenth to the early sixteenth century. All extant records of authorship attribute the play to Kanze
Kôjirô Nobumitsu 観世小次郎信光 (1435?-1516?).369 Given that the play deals with the issues of fighting and traveling in China, the warfare predating the creation of the play has to be taken into account. There were many wars and uprisings from the mid-fifteenth century on. Members of the Ashikaga shogunate, provincial lords, and peasants were all involved in the struggle for economic and political power. Confrontations were not limited to domestic issues, but included foreign trading as well. For example, in the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, the Ôuchi and Hosokawa houses were fighting for the right of overseeing official trade with China.370 On a larger scale, the succession dispute within the Ashikaga Shogun over whom to appoint as heir to the shogun Yoshimasa led to the Ônin War (1467-1477). The Ônin War devastated the Shogunate and further spread the conflicts throughout the country. Fights between provincial lords who tried to seize political power lasted through the end of the sixteenth century.

Identifying the “Basic Sources” of Ryôko [2]

There are no earlier literary texts that depict a story similar to Ryôko. However, the play can be linked to a corpus of ink paintings on the motif of the dragon and the tiger. Modern scholars, such as Sanari Kentarô and Nishino

369 For example, Nôhon sakusha chûmon (Notes on authorship of Nô plays) attributed the play to Nobumitsu. See Nose Asaji, Nêgaku genryûkô, 1329.

370 Tanaka, “Japan’s Relations with Overseas Countries,” 170.
Haruo, have suggested that the playwright Nobumitsu attained inspiration from ink paintings that employ the same motif. However, there are no studies on the possible influence of such visual representations on the composition of this Nô play.

As John Rosenfield and Shûjirô Shimada have pointed out, Japanese Zen Buddhism treats the images of tigers and dragons as symbols of the forces of nature and of the human spirit that can be soothed by the power of Buddhist teachings. One popular topic in early Chinese and Japanese Zen paintings depicts tigers and dragons being tamed by Buddhist sages. These images were painted on the interiors of monasteries as examples or challenges to the monks’ meditation. One famous example is Shisuizu 四睡図 (The four sleepers), a hanging scroll in monochrome ink inscribed with Chinese poems by Mokuan Reien 默庵霊淵 (d.1345). The painting depicts two young boys Kanzan and Jittoku, the monk Bukan, and a tiger, all asleep under a tree. Bukan was an interesting man who not only looked after Jittoku, but also kept a tiger. The painting shows that the four, despite their differences, were attuned to each other.

This mentality is highlighted by the colophon inscribed at the top of the painting. It reads:

Old Bukan hugging his tiger asleep
huddling together with Kanzan and Jittoku

---

371 Rosenfield and Shimada, Traditions of Japanese Art, 198.

had a dream, as though experienced the highpoint of life
lingering is the old tree clinging to the bottom of a cold rock

老豊干抱虎睡拾得寒山打作一處
做場大夢當風流依々老樹寒巖底

It was a common practice in the medieval Zen world to have other literati respond to an ink painting by inscribing poems or short prose on it. As discussed in Chapter Six, it was a popular socio-cultural activity that triggered intellectual and philosophical exchanges.

Ink paintings on the motif of tigers and dragons could also be found in many Buddhist temples and private households, including those of the Ashikaga shoguns. One important piece is a pair of ink painting scrolls entitled *Ryôko[zu]* (Dragon and tiger) by Muxi (ca. 1177-1239), whose works were well received by Muromachi literati. The painting was kept in Daitokuji Zen monastery in Kyoto. Zen monk painters Soga Chokuan 曽我直庵 and Tan’an Chiden 単庵智伝 who were active during the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, had painted the same motif by modeling their work on Muxi’s *Ryôko[zu]*.

Although inscriptions are rare in this group of paintings depicting the dragon and the tiger, the one by Muxi contains the following lines:

---

Clouds gather as the dragon rises
Wind gusts as the tiger howls

龍興而致雲
虎嘯而風烈

Indeed, the images of dragons and tigers were mainly seen through ink paintings which were sometimes used as an inspiration for Buddhist teachings and Chinese studies through the medium of poetry.

**Perspectives of the Adapter [3]**

The playwright Nobumitsu was Zeami’s nephew and a prominent actor, playwright, and theorist active in the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. He specialized in playing *waki* (supporting actor) roles, and perhaps because of such expertise, the plays he wrote tend to contain active parts for the *waki*. His representative plays such as *Momiji-gari* 紅葉狩 (Crimson leaf viewing) and *Funa Benkei* 船弁慶 (Benkei on a boat), feature well-known warriors in the *waki* roles replete with intense drama.

Another reason for such an arrangement is the changing audience preferences concerning Nô performances during Nobumitsu’s time. As the economic power of the Ashikaga Shogun and of the imperial court was weakened by civil war and peasant uprisings from the late fifteenth century, gaining the support of other audience groups became increasingly important. Plays that appeal to an audience that is less literarily sophisticated such as
provincial lords and commoners came to be crucial to the survival of a Nô troupe. Plays focusing on one central character and his or her internal struggles, a form perfected by Zeami, were no longer as popular in the early fourteenth century. Rather, plays that are full of dramatic action and have spectacular and dynamic performances were more popular. Well versed in classical literature and a gifted playwright, Nobumitsu wrote plays that balance poetry and dramatic action. He was able to please an increasingly broad audience during times of political instability.

Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]

The play Ryôko showcases Nobumitsu’s style of dramaturgy, combining both poetic texts and spectacular performance. It contains eleven allusions to works in the poetic tradition, and a dynamic dance sequence that mimics a fight between the dragon and the tiger. As pointed out in the discussion of Shakkyô, the employment of poetic allusions is a well-planned strategy in the depiction of a foreign landscape. As a result, the play appeals a broad audience, including those who appreciate the nuances of a poetic text and those who enjoy dynamic danced performance and extravagant costumes.

Nobumitsu integrates an array of poetic allusions to works from prestigious collections of poetry. Six of them are Chinese poems, four of which were composed by Chinese literati. The other five are Japanese poems by poets
from the ninth century. *Wakan rôei shû* and imperial collections of Japanese poetry are the major sources. Four of the Chinese poems alluded to are taken from the *Wakan rôei shû*, including the two by Bai Juyi. The other two Chinese works alluded to in the play: a poem by Xuhun 許渾 (791-?854) and a reference to *Huainan-zi* 淮南子, also have entries in the *Wakan rôei shû*. Japanese poems alluded to are from famed imperial collections, including the *Kokinshû* 古今集 and *Shin Kokinshû* 新古今集.

All the poetic allusions appear in the earlier portion of the play, before the dragon and the tiger appear. Assigned rather evenly to the *waki*, *shite*, and chorus, these allusions amplify various topics. They include the vivid depictions of the landscape of Japan and China, the state of mind of the Chinese wood-cutter (the *shite* in the first act), comments on fighting, and images associated with the dragon and the tiger.

Logically, a Japanese poem is alluded to in the description of the landscape of Japan, Chinese poems from the *Wakan rôei shû* are used for that of China. Interestingly, Nobumitsu employs four Japanese poems and only one Chinese poem to portray the mind of the Chinese wood-cutter. The likely reason for using poetry on the depiction of landscape is similar to that of the play *Shakkyô*. Beyond the use of poetic allusions to illustrate the landscape in China, the play *Ryôko* includes that of Japan by beginning the play in Japan. In doing so,
the playwright makes use of the audience’s knowledge of a more familiar landscape to increase their enjoyment of the play.

The most important poetic allusions are the two drawing upon two Chinese poems to illustrate the exotic creatures’ images and their fight. One of them describing the image of the dragon and the tiger provides crucial evidence of the associative link between the Nô play and the ink painting 《龍虎図》 (Dragon and tiger) by Muxi. The lines chanted by the chorus read:

When the dragon yowls, clouds develop
When the tiger howls, wind blows

龍吟すれば雲起り
虎嘯けば風生ず

The close resemblance to the inscriptions on Muxi’s painting cited earlier suggests that the playwright was aware of, or even alluding to, the Chinese painting. Another piece of evidence for the reference to ink painting related to a similar motif is the preceding line in the play. It cites the title of the ink painting, 四睡 (The four sleepers), which is mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Bai Juyi’s poem is alluded to in the criticism of the fighting, which suggests such a fight is a transient act common to all living beings. The original Chinese poem was compiled into the 《Wakan rôei shû》, under the topic entitled “Impermanence.” The poem reads:
For what matters do we fight for, on the horns of a snail?
We live our life in the flash struck off a stone.\textsuperscript{374}

蝸牛角上爭何事
石火光中寄此身

It is alluded to in the play as the following:

It is as vain as the fight on the horns of a snail. Mankind, too, fighting as though it is the unchanged practice of this world. Well, then, it is understandable for beasts to fight too.

蝸牛の角の上にして。はかなや何事を。争ひは人の身も。変わるぬものを世の中の。習ひなければ畜類の戦ふころも、理や戦ふことも理や。

This insight on fighting among humans, or among beasts, that it is a meaningless and transient act, has at least two levels of meaning. Given the sociopolitical situation during the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, it can be interpreted as a social criticism of the civil wars and various struggles among different social classes in the country. Also, as explained earlier, the fierce beasts such as tigers and dragons were used as an emblem for Buddhist teachings. Monks are confronted with the ferocious images for the purpose of meditation. The conclusion in either case is that fighting, as other matters in this world, is futile and transient.

Nobumitsu dramatizes the pictorial images in Nô by arranging both the characters of the dragon and the tiger to perform the  \textit{maibataraki} 舞働 simultaneously. This is an ingenious arrangement of \textit{aimai} 相舞 (two actors

\textsuperscript{374} Kawaguchi and Shida eds., \textit{Wakan rôei shû}, 254.
dancing simultaneously). As in the plays Tôbôsaku and Sanshô, aimai is performed in synchronization to symbolize the harmony between the dancers. However, in Ryôko, the dragon and the tiger do not perform the dance in synchronization, but rather in a manner of confrontation. Of course, this is also due to the dynamic nature and the fast tempo of the maibataraki 舞働. It is through such a vigorous dance performance that the impact of the fight between the two beasts is realized on stage. In this fashion, Nobumitsu successfully dramatized a Chinese motif that was mainly known through pictorial representations.

As pointed out earlier, the striking images of tigers and dragons depicted in ink paintings were adopted as examples of the power of Buddhist doctrine, which soothes and tames the fierce creatures, and as a medium for meditation that challenges and stimulates Buddhist learning. By staging these pictorial images of exotic creatures in Nô, it enables the audience to witness the graphic dramatization unfolding in front of them. The play is indeed an entertaining dramatization of a popular topic of ink paintings, often seen in temples and individual households. Furthermore, the play also invites different interpretations according to the mindsets of the audience. For example, the criticism on fighting might have been taken as a critique of the contemporary struggles between the different social and political groups during a time of continuous civil wars. Also, it might have been interpreted as a reaffirmation of
the power of Buddhism in taming the fierce heart of exotic creatures. In either case, the play is indeed attuned to cater to a broad audience base.

*Shakkyô* and *Ryôko* demonstrate the staging of exotic creatures of a Chinese origin that were mainly known to the Japanese through visual media such as paintings and dance performances. The dynamic authority and auspiciousness of the lion associated with the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, as well as the fierce quality of the dragon and the tiger depicted in ink paintings are brought to life through the spectacular dance performances in the plays. Although the Chinese motifs lack earlier poetic interpretations, the playwrights incorporated poems on the landscape of China that evoke images of Chinese landscape paintings with which the Japanese audiences were familiar. In addition, the playwright integrated adventures of Japanese Buddhist monks in China into the discourse of the plays. For instance, the story of Japanese monk Jakushô is introduced into *Shakkyô*. The playwrights make it easier for the audience to enjoy the play by enhancing the realistic effects of the play. Consequently, the two plays successfully staged the exotic by including spectacular danced performances that entertained their audiences, and incorporating into the plays Buddhist narratives that the audiences could identify with.
CHAPTER 7

VISITORS FROM CHINA: INVADERS AND CAPTIVES

Agendas of the Visitors from China: Tôsen and Zegai

There are four surviving plays that feature visitors from China. They are Zegai 善界 (Zegai), Tôsen 唐船 (The Chinese boat), Fujisan 富士山 (Mount Fuji), and Hakurakuten 白楽天 (Bai Letian). The Chinese visitors in these plays come to Japan with an agenda. In Zegai, a demon strives to destroy the prosperity of Buddhism; in Tôsen, two young Chinese men intend to look for their father who was captured by the Japanese; in Fujisan, a Chinese imperial envoy arrives at Mount Fuji to seek the elixir of longevity; in Hakurakuten, as discussed in Chapter Five, the Chinese poet Bai Juyi attempts to investigate the secret of Japanese poetry. The demon in Zegai is eventually blown back to China by divine winds in a fashion similar to that of Bai Juyi in Hakurakuten. Both the visitors in Tôsen and Fujisan are granted what they request. Zegai and Hakurakuten, however, present Japan’s triumph over China in the realm of Buddhism and poetry, both of which were arguably introduced from China.
This chapter examines two plays, Zegai and Tôsen, and will illustrate in what ways they reflect the artistic and sociopolitical milieu of fifteenth century Japan, in light of Japan’s relations with China. Close readings of Zegai and Tôsen reveal contrasting portrayals of visitors from China and thus demonstrate most clearly the varying treatments of Chinese motifs. Tôsen presents a rare case in which an earlier interpretation does not exist. In other words, the play was an original play that may shed new light on the composition of Nô where contemporary events and social phenomena in in Japan were likely the source materials. Zegai, however, reveals the adaptation of other forms of source materials, such as scroll paintings (emaki 絵巻) and tales with illustrations (otogizôshi 御伽草子).

Zegai 善害 (Zegai)

The play Zegai tells the story of Zegai-bô 善害坊 of China, the head tengu, a mythical winged goblin-like demon, who comes to Japan to obstruct the flourishing of Buddhism. He does this with the help of Tarô-bô 太郎坊, a tengu who dwells in Japan. Zegai-bô confronts Monk Sôsei who has received the imperial command to stop Zegai’s destructiveness. Responding to Shôsô’s prayers, Buddhist Bodhisattvas and Shintô deities appear and stir up divine

---

375 The third play, Fujisan, features worship of the deity of Mount Fuji and its heavenly maidens. Fujisan is a rather straightforward play that resembles plays that feature a Japanese deity.
winds that blow Zegai-bô away. Defeated by the power of Buddhism and Shintô, Zegai-bô vows that he will never tread on the land of Japan again.

**Sociopolitical Context [1]**

The play is attributed to Takeda Hôin Sadamori 竹田法印定盛 (1421-1508) and was probably written during the second half of the fifteenth century. Sadamori was a well-known medical doctor and served the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa 義政 (1436-90).376

Yoshimasa’s tenure as shogun (1449-73) saw growing disturbances in the country, from peasant uprisings to the devastating Ônin War (1467-77) that marks the demise of the Ashikaga Shogunate. However, instead of working to reinforce the power of the Ashikaga shogunate, Yoshimasa devoted himself to the pursuit of his cultural interests. Although Yoshimasa was incompetent as the political and military leader of his time, historians credit him as the shogun who contributed to the flourishing culture that is often referred to as Higashiyama culture. He ordered the construction of the Silver Pavilion, which epitomizes the essence of Japanese aesthetics in the late fifteenth-century. It was during his era that Nô theatre flourished, and the tea ceremony developed into the form that is still treasured today. Moreover, other literary and art forms, such as *renga* (linked poetry), ink painting, and flower arrangement, also became more important.

---

cultural activities. In fact, Yoshimasa was actively involved in Nô theatre, and hosted Nô performances at his residence.\(^{377}\)

As in the play *Hakurakuten*, the Chinese visitor in *Zegai* (*Zegai-bô*) was blown away from Japan by “divine winds.” The historical defeat of the powerful Mongols might have served as the rationale for the “divine winds,” for the notion of *kamikaze* calls to mind the Mongol Invasions in the late thirteenth century. The Mongol navy troops were destroyed by typhoons in two separate attempts to conquer Japan. The Japanese interpreted the typhoons as the mighty force of the Shintô deities, who answered the prayers of the Japanese emperor.

**Identifying the “Basic Sources” of *Zegai* [2]**

There are no Chinese sources resembling the plot or theme of the Nô play. The term *tengu* 天狗 (Ch. *tian gou*), literally meaning “heavenly dog,” was the Chinese word for “comet.” The concept was introduced to Japan from the continent around the seventh century. In medieval Japan, the term *tengu* came to be associated with a variety of images. One group is the *karasu tengu* (crow-headed *tengu*) that did horrible deeds such as eating humans. The other was the *yamabushi tengu* (mountain priest *tengu*) that deluded Buddhist monks by

disguising himself as one of them.\textsuperscript{378} The portrayal of \textit{tengu} in medieval Japan was mainly centered on the latter group, which was presented as adversaries and challengers of Japanese Buddhism. The target of \textit{yamabushi tengu} in these portrayals are Buddhist priests who did not dedicate themselves to practice and learning, in particular those who were corrupted by pride and worldly attachments.

In the late Kamakura and Muromachi periods, stories of \textit{tengu} appeared in short tales (\textit{setsuwa} 說話), scroll paintings (\textit{emaki 絵巻}), and tales with illustrations (\textit{otogizôshi 御伽草子}) with didactic intentions for the teaching of Buddhism for laymen and priests alike. An extant \textit{otogizôshi} entitled \textit{Tengu-zoshi 天狗草子} (Illustrated tales about \textit{tengu}, 1296) depicts two kinds of \textit{tengu}, that is, Buddhist priests-turned-tengu due to their pride and attachments, and evil-\textit{tengu} that defy Buddhism.\textsuperscript{379} The myth relies on the concept of \textit{tengu-dô 天狗道} (the realm of \textit{tengu}). It was believed that an arrogant priest who lacks true understanding of the teaching of Buddhism and is attached to worldly matters will fall into the realm of \textit{tengu} (\textit{tengu-dô}) after his death. Another story depicting a \textit{tengu} from China attempting to obstruct the spread of Buddhism in Japan first


\textsuperscript{379} Tosa Yukimitsu, \textit{Tengu no sôshi} vol. 1-3 (Tokyo: Yamatoe Dokokai, 1922).
appeared in *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語, a collection of tales from India, China, and Japan replete with Buddhist didacticism.\(^{380}\)

The *tengu* is a recurring character in Nô, yet, the play *Zegai* is the first to assign the *tengu* a role in issues of cultural conflict between Japan and China. There are approximately twenty extant plays in which *tengu* appear; among them about, nine are still in the current repertoire. Three of them were written in the early and mid-fifteenth century, namely *Kagetsu* 花月 (*Kagetsu*), *Shikimi tengu* 木密天狗 (*Tengu at Shikimi*), and *Kurama tengu* 鞍馬天狗 (*Tengu at Kurama*), which predate *Zegai*. Nevertheless, as Yamanaka Reiko has pointed out, *tengu* portrayed in the three plays are either merely implicated on a rhetorical level, or they play an insignificant role. Yamanaka argues that *Zegai* is the first play depicting interaction among non-human characters.\(^{381}\)

The play *Zegai* is a blend of various Japanese sources that emerged in the three centuries prior to the Nô play. Although some commentaries, such as *Yôkyoku shûyôshô*, attribute the episode in the *Konjaku monogatari* as the source of *Zegai*, the Nô play is not a replica of the version contained in the twelfth-century collection.\(^{382}\) Nevertheless, the existence of such a story in the *Konjaku monogatari*

---


\(^{381}\) Four other plays are in the current repertoire, *Kurumazô*, *Daie*, *Kazuraki-tengu* and *Chôkyôjî*. The last two were by Kanze Nagatoshi.

indicates that the concept of a *tengu* invading Japan was a familiar topic for fifteenth-century Nô audiences. Modern scholars Yamanaka Reiko and Ishikawa Tôru have pointed to the picture-scroll (*emaki*) entitled *Zegai-bô-e* 善界坊絵 (Illustrated story of Zegai-bô, 1308) as the major source of the play.\(^{383}\) However, Itô Masayoshi has argued that *Zegai-bôe* was not the source, since the name of the Japanese *tengu*—Tarô-bô—is different from that of the *tengu* in the picture-scroll. Indeed, as Itô has suggested, the play intermingles characters and stories from the picture-scroll *Zegaibô-e* and other versions in tale literature, such as in *Genpei jôsuiki* 源平盛衰記 (Record of the rise and fall of the Genji and Heike; early fourteenth-century).

**Perspectives of the Adapter [3]**

As mentioned earlier, *Zegai* is attributed to Takeda Höin Sadamori 竹田法印定盛 (1421-1508), a reputed medical doctor who was also known for his various literary and artistic talents. He was actively involved in Nô theatre, and hosted performances at his residence in which he may have also performed.\(^{384}\) Two facts about Sadamori might have an interesting connection to his interest in China and Nô. First, his grandmother was a Chinese who married his grandfather while the latter studied and practiced medicine during a sojourn in China and Nô. First, his grandmother was a Chinese who married his grandfather while the latter studied and practiced medicine during a sojourn in


\(^{384}\) Kobayashi, *Yôkyoku shakusha no kenkyû*, 244-45.
China. This might explain his interest in Chinese material. Second, during the period from the 1450s to the late 1460s, he repeatedly cured the Shogun Yoshimasa of an illness, and was promoted to the highest rank in the medical profession in 1468. Such a close relationship with the shogun may have given him opportunities to socialize with members of the cultural circle of Yoshimasa. Moreover, since Yoshimasa was eager to continue trading with Ming China, the content of Zegai, which depicts an invader from China, must have drawn attention from various audience groups in Muromachi Japan.

Sadamori was close friends with Buddhist monks. One of his closest friends was the monk Keizô (1428-1493) of the Rokuen’in. According to diaries and prose writings by different Buddhist monks, Sadamori was a talented artist. He excelled in ikebana (flower arrangement) and was very talented in Nô. He frequently performed as a musician in Nô plays staged at the imperial court. He spent his early life in Kyûshû and came to the capital in the mid-1450s. Therefore, he must have had opportunities to familiaize himself with the Nô performances of Nobumitsu. Indeed, the exotic and dynamic qualities of the play Zegai call to mind the Nô plays of Nobumitsu.

Sadamori was a very outspoken and bold individual. For instance, in 1465, he had a confrontation with Hosokawa Masakuni, a military official and the cousin of the powerful provincial lord Hosokawa Katsumoto. It

385 Ibid., 253.
was unusual for someone of Sadamori’s rank to challenge his superior. As Kobayashi Shizuo has noted, Sadamori’s dynamic personality is reflected in his play Zegai. A close reading of the play will corroborate Kobayashi’s point and offer some ideas on the dramaturgy of non-professional Nô playwrights in the second half of the fifteenth century.

**Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]**

The unique structure and the plot of the play Zegai not only shed light on the dramaturgy of the playwright, but also on the connotations of the play. On the one hand, the arrangement of the segments of the shite (Zegai-bô) and the waki (Monk Sôsei 僧正) provides information on the sources that the playwright employed and his expertise in the art of Nô. On the other hand, the introduction of new elements to the story reveals the underlying theme of the play.

As shown in Table 3, the play begins with the entrance of the shite, followed by the mondô (“question and answer”) and kakeai (“dialogue exchange”) between the shite and the shite-tsure (Tarô-bô). The waki does not appear until after the aikyôgen interlude. In the current repertoire, of about two hundred and forty plays, only six other plays begin with the shite’s entrance. Two of these plays, Aisomegawa 藍染川 (River Aisome) and Shichikiochi 七騎落 (The seventh warrior), have the waki appear in the second act and their plots are unrelated to China.
### Zegai

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segments</th>
<th>(Agent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{shidai}</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shidai</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanori</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageuta [michiyuki]</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsukizerifu</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mondō</td>
<td>(shite &amp; tsure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakeai</td>
<td>(shite &amp; tsure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuri</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sashi</td>
<td>(chorus &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuse</td>
<td>(chorus &amp; shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shite exits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aikyōgen</td>
<td>(kyōgen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waki &amp; waki-tsure enters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issei</td>
<td>(waki &amp; waki-tsure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sashi</td>
<td>(waki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageuta</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nochijite enters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sashi</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isseki</td>
<td>(shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sageuta</td>
<td>(shite &amp; tsure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noriji</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumon</td>
<td>(waki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noriji</td>
<td>(chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nochijite dances [hataraki]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakeai</td>
<td>(shite &amp; chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issei</td>
<td>(shite &amp; chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shite dances [Shin-no-jō-no-mai]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norizi</td>
<td>(shite &amp; chorus)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 3: Structures of Zegai
Such an arrangement of the entrances of the *shite* and the *waki* substantiates the claim that the play was influenced by the *Zegai-bôe* (Illustrated story of Zegai-bô). The structure of the play resembles the sequence of events depicted in the surviving version of the picture-scroll from the early thirteenth century. The playwright could have adopted a structure more in keeping with the conventions of a Nô play. For example, he could have had the *waki* appear first, announce that Zegai-bô had arrived and vow to expel him from Japan. Or, he could have used the technique of some “Chinese plays” to have a kyôgen actor give a brief synopsis of the objective of Zegai-bô and announce his arrival. Nevertheless, the playwright chose to have Zegai-bô appear on stage from the very beginning. Such an early entrance enhances the impact of Zegai-bô and heightens the tension of the confrontation between him and the Japanese monks later in the play. In fact, the beginning segment resembles the opening of most Nô plays. That is, it includes Zegai-bô’s self-introduction, his journey from China to Japan, and the announcement of his arrival. Abiding by the standard format for the opening scene, the playwright has skillfully tailored the materials in accordance with the conventions of Nô, except that it is the *shite* instead of the *waki*.

The playwright introduced two elements into the play to reinforce its underlying themes, that is, the linking of Shintô traditions to Buddhist authority and celebration of the mightiness of their combined power. Neither of these two
elements exists in the picture-scrolls or in other preceding extant interpretations of the story of Zegai-bô. The first one is the imperial command sent to the monk Sôsei. In his opening lines, Sôsei (the *waki*) claims that he has received an imperial command summoning him to the capital to protect it from the attack of Zegai-bô. It is significant that only Buddhist monks are being called upon to help and that it is the monks’ prayers that successfully invoked an array of Buddhist deities who chased Zegai-bô away. Thus, the play confirms the power of Buddhism and its importance to Japan. By inserting the “imperial command,” an endorsement by the imperial court, the playwright Sadamori underlines the importance of Buddhist monks and heightens the court’s reputation and importance in times of turmoil.

The other element incorporated in the play is the *kamikaze* (“divine winds”), which not only blows Zegai-bô back to China, but also signifies the alliance of Buddhism with Shintô. Through defeating Zegai-bô, the play celebrates Japan’s religious superiority over China, as well as the strong tie between religions of foreign origin and of indigenous origin. Contrary to earlier portrayals, including *Konjaku monogatari* and *Zegai-bôe*, in which the Chinese invader was defeated by the sole power of Buddhist monks, the Nô play depicts Zegai-bô as being blown away by the divine winds generated by the combined force of Shintô and Buddhist deities. As Zegai-bô vows never to come to Japan
again at the end of the play, it is due to the mighty convergence of Buddhism and Shintô (仏力神力 butsu-riki shin-riki).

By adapting the story of Zegai-bô’s unsuccessful attempt to obstruct the prosperity of Japanese Buddhism, the play Zegai cautions its audience against the potential harm of Chinese visitors, and warns Buddhist monks not to be lured by evil spirits such as the tengu. The play celebrates the power and prosperity of religions in Japan that are proven superior to China. The play shows how the alliance of the foreign yet authoritative Buddhism and the indigenous Shintô repel the Chinese invaders and protect the land of Japan. By including Shintô into the story, the playwright elevates the power and legitimacy of the religion that is unique to Japan. Moreover, the play demonstrates how the story that was told in the picture-scroll Zegai-bô-e (Illustrated story of Zegai-bô) was appropriated into Nô. The structure and sequence of events matched the surviving picture-scroll from the thirteenth century. The playwright made adjustments to the conventional structure of a Nô play, such as the entrance of Zegai-bô, so as to increase the dramatic effect that the picture-scroll presents.

However, in the play Tôsen (The Chinese boat) discussed below, the Chinese visitors are not driven away from the Japanese isles and their request is answered. Unlike Zegai, Tôsen concludes on a happy note for both the Chinese and the Japanese.
Tôsen 唐船 (The Chinese Boat): Celebrating Reunion

The play Tôsen deals with cultural conflicts in relation to filial piety, acculturation, and cultural identity. Filial piety is a recurring topic in Nô plays. However, the other two issues are seldom portrayed. The play thus provides an excellent case study of these issues in the light of Sino-Japanese relations. The oyako-complex (“parent-child complex”) depicted in the play Tôsen is a familiar topic in Nô plays. There is a group of plays on the theme of searching for one’s long-lost next of kin, for example, Sakuragawa 桜川 (River cherry blossom) by Zeami and Sumidagawa 隅田川 (River Sumida) by Zeami’s talented son Jûrô Motomasa 十郎元雅. Such portrayal of the close relationship between parent and child is not uncommon in the treatment of Chinese characters. For example, the play Shôkun 昭君, discussed in Chapter Four, deals with the very same theme. Therefore, to medieval Japanese Nô audiences, Tôsen would have fit into this group of plays and should have evoked a similar sensibility from the Japanese audience.

Tôsen depicts a layman from China torn between obligations towards his off-spring and duty to his lord. The story tells of two young men from China arriving at Port Hakozaki in Japan’s Tsukuzen province to look for their long-lost father who was believed to have been kidnapped and brought there by pirates during a fight between the Chinese and Japanese thirteen years before. They brought with them valuables and treasures to buy their father’s freedom. The
father, referred to as Sokei Kannin 祖慶官人, has been herding cattle for his Japanese lord, and has remarried a Japanese women with whom he has had two children. The young Chinese men are reunited with their father, wishing to take him back to China. But the Japanese lord agrees to release only Sokei Kannin, and demands that his two Japanese sons stay. Unable to make a choice between his children from China and Japan, Sokei Kannin decides to commit suicide rather than leave one group of his children fatherless. The Japanese lord, moved by such strong family ties, eventually lets Sokei Kannin and all of his children leave for China. Overjoyed by the lord’s mercy, Sokei Kannin dances joyfully on the boat while it sails to China.

**Sociopolitical Context [1]**

All but one document on authorship lists Tôsen as anonymous. According to Nihyaku-jû-ban utai mokuroku 二百十番謡目録 (A list of two-hundred and ten Nô plays, late seventeenth-century) the play was written by Tobi Matagorô Yoshihiro 外山又五郎吉広, an author for whom no biographical information survives. Nô scholars such as Nishino Haruo and Yamanaka Reiko have suggested that the play Tôsen was in fact the same as the play listed under the title Ushihiki no nô ウシヒキノ [牛牽きの] 能 (literally “The Nô play about the

386 Nose, Nôgaku genryûkô, 1328.
cattle herder”). Although the author of *Ushihiki no nô* is unknown, the earliest surviving record of the play is in a list owned by Zenchiku about plays that were given to him by Zeami from the late 1420s to the early 1430s. Therefore, the play was probably written no later than the early 1430s.

If seen in the light of the historical events happening in the early fifteenth century, *Tôsen* can be considered as a play that celebrates the resumption of a peaceful trade relationship with China. Yamanaka Reiko has proposed an insightful theory about the historical background of *Tôsen*. Yamanaka has suggested that the turmoil referred to in the play is probably “Ôe no Gaikô 応永の外寇 (Foreign Invaders in the Ôei Era 1394-1428)” in 1419. As recorded in the *Mansaijugô nikki* 滿済准後日記 (The diary of Mansai Jugô, 1411-35), approximately 500 Korean and 20,000 Chinese attacked a base for Japanese pirates at Tsushima Island off Kyûshû. With the help of a typhoon, which was also referred to as kamikaze (mighty winds), that sank more than half of the Chinese fleet, the Japanese defeated and captured many of the foreign

---


388 Yamanaka, “‘Tôsen’ no haikei: Ôei no gaikô nada,” 3-5.

389 *Mansaijugô nikki* (The Diary of Mansai Jugô) was written by the monk Mansai (1378-1435).
invaders. As Yamanaka has pointed out, thirteen years after the foreign attack was 1432, the very same year in which the Ashikaga Shogunate relaunched tally ship trading with Ming China after a ban of over two decades by the previous shogun. Arguably, the play may well have resonated due to the historical backdrop, the renewal of trading with China.

**Identifying the “Basic Sources” of Tôsen [2]**

Given the social circumstances discussed above, it is highly likely that the story of Tôsen was inspired by contemporary events. There are no preceding works that depict a story similar to this story. In fact, among all surviving “Chinese plays,” Tôsen is the only play that is not a retelling of an earlier literary or artistic work. There is evidence that the play indeed reflects the situation of captured Chinese in fifteenth-century Japan. A monument commemorating the episode depicted in Tôsen was built in the vicinity of the Hachiman Shrine at Hakozaki sometime after the staging of the play. It cites the play’s title and provides a synopsis of the play. It is said that it was built with a donation by the

---

390 See the entries on the sixth, seventeenth, and twenty-sixth days of the sixth month, and the seventh day of the eighth month of the twenty-sixth year of the Ōei era in the *Mansaijugō Nikki* (The Diary of Mansai Jugō).

391 As I have discussed earlier, the tally ship system between Japan and China was banned from 1410-1431 by the order of Ashikaga shōgun Yoshimochi. See Tanaka, “Japan's Relations with Overseas Countries,” 169.
two Chinese children of Sokei Kannin to the God of Hakozaki (Hakozaki Daijin) in gratitude for their reunion with their father.\textsuperscript{392}

If the play were an absolute fabrication, it is rather unlikely that such a monument would have been built. One possible rationale is that the play in fact dramatized an actual event involving the Chinese captive Sokei Kannin and his children. Alternatively, the play might have been a fictional construct inspired by the collective phenomenon of captured Chinese in Japan. Although neither one of these rationales can be conclusively accepted due to the lack of historical records, the building of the monument strongly suggests that the play was commemorating the release of enslaved Chinese and their reunions with their Chinese families.

**Perspectives of the Adapters [3]**

Very little is known about the authorship of the play *Tôsen*. As noted earlier, *Nihyaku-jû-ban utai mokuroku* 二百十番謡目録 (A list of two-hundred and ten Nô plays) attributed the play *Tôsen* to Tobi Matagorô Yoshihiro 外山又五郎吉, about whom nothing is known except that he might have been from another professional troupe Hôshô 宝生.\textsuperscript{393} Under the title *Ushihiki no nô* (“The Nô play about the cattle herder”), the authorship is also listed as anonymous.


\textsuperscript{393} Yokomichi, *Nô no sakusha to sakuhin*, 295.
However, I would argue that the play was written in the late 1420s to the early 1430s by a playwright of Zeami’s troupe. In fact, some modern scholars, such as Nishino Haruo, consider that Motomasa 元雅, Zeami’s son, probably wrote the play. Such a claim is not without circumstantial evidence. First, Motomasa was an active playwright during that period. Second, he was known for depicting the lives of people of humble origins and stories about family ties, both characteristics applicable to the story of Tôsen. Third, the play Ushihiki no nô was included in the Nôhon sanjûgo-ban mokuroku 能本三十五番目録 (A list of thirty-five Nô plays) that lists plays of the Kanze troupe. The list was written on the wrapping paper of a pile of Nô texts that Zeami passed onto Zenchiku, his son-in-law and artistic heir. Nô scholar Takemoto Mikio has suggested that about twenty of the plays listed were actually passed down by Zeami sometime between 1424-27. Zenchiku added the title of the other plays, including Ushihiki no nô, when he inherited them from Zeami after 1427. Although the authorship of plays in the catalogue was not marked, we know from other sources that some were by Zeami. Since the catalogue represents a portion of the Kanze troupe’s heritage, it is unlikely that Zeami would include plays written by other troupes. Therefore, although we cannot pinpoint the authorship of Tôsen,

\[394\] Ibid., 228-29, and 241.

there is evidence that it was someone from Zeami’s troupe, and that it was
passed down to Zenchiku in the late 1420s to the early 1430s.

In addition to the historical significance of the early 1430s as noted by
Yamanaka Reiko, the play also corresponds to events affecting Zeami’s troupe
during that period. The popularity of Zeami’s troupe among the Ashikaga
shoguns had been in decline since the death of the shogun Yoshimitsu (1358-
1408). In the late 1420s and early 1430s, the shogun Yoshinori (r.1429-1441)
favored Zeami’s nephew On’ami 音阿弥. Zeami was further devastated by the
untimely death of his son Motomasa in 1432. In 1434, Yoshinori sent Zeami into
exile to Sado Island. There are no records of Zeami returning to the capital.
During the late 1420s to the early 1430s, Zeami strived to regain the support for
his troupe and made efforts to ensure the continuity their art. How are these
struggles revealed in the Nô play Tôsen? A close reading of the play will indicate
that it reflects the situation of Zeami’s troupe and embodies strategies to ensure
the survival of the troupe.

Choice and Composition of Dance and Song [4]

The play conveys three major themes: the issue of loyalty to one’s family,
social standing, and country; the celebration of a family reunion; and the
compassion of one’s lord. These themes were significant to Zeami’s troupe in its
time of trouble, whereas the use of Chinese characters reveals a unique function
of a foreign culture in Nô. The play values strong family ties, particularly in
times of adversity. It portrays the shite, Sokei Kannin 祖慶官人, as an individual
who has made peace with his misfortune and is contented with his humble life in
his new-found homeland, Japan, due to his love for his two sons there.

Sokei Kannin and his two Japanese children reveal such a perspective in
their entrance. Responding to the children’s lament over the hardship of cattle
herding, Sokei Kannin comforts them with the story of the star that bears the
same name as their job—ushihiku 牛牽 (literally, herding cattle; also referred to
as Altair). They then relate the star to the flower that also shares the same name
kengyû 牽牛 (also known as morning glory), and voice the idea that they find
comfort in the company of this humble flower that blooms in the field in autumn.
When asked by his two children to compare Japan with China, Sokei Kannin
comments that China is far bigger in scale and a better place to live. However, he
prefers to live in Japan because of his two children.

Besides the metaphors of the star and flower, to which Sokei Kannin
compares his life, the playwright also employs earlier literary sources in the play.
Chinese sources alluded to are Bai Juyi’s prose, Shu jing 書經 (Classic of
documents, B.C. ?400), Han shu 漢書 (The history of the former Han Dynasty,
first-century), and a poem by Su Dongbo 蘇東坡 (1037-1101). Japanese sources
alluded to include poems from Man’yôshû 万葉集 (Collection of ten thousand
leaves, ?759), Kokinshû 古今集 (The collection of ancient and contemporary
poems, 905), *Shoku Kokinshû 続古今集* (The continued collection of ancient and contemporary poems, 1265), as well as fragments from *Shikashû 詞花集* (Collection of flowers of verse, 1151), *Konjaku monogatari 今昔物語* (A collection of tales now past, ?1120), and *Taiheiki 太平記* (The record of the great peace, 1372).

The playwright’s manipulation of these texts reveals certain techniques related to the portrayal of the foreign characters. Allusions to the above texts concentrate on two subtexts of the play—the strong tie between parent and child as well as geographical and factual information on China. Interestingly, all Japanese sources speak to family ties, whereas the Chinese sources provide factual information. The texts containing allusions to the Chinese sources are chanted by the *shite*, Sokei Kannin, and his Chinese sons, whereas those drawing on Japanese sources are delivered by the Japanese lord, the Japanese children, and the chorus.

Nevertheless, there is one exception that mingles both Chinese and Japanese sources so as to juxtapose the different value systems of the two cultures. The Chinese source alluded to is the poem by Su Dongpo. It is used as a modifier of something valuable—gold. The Chinese poem reads:

A moment of a spring night worth a thousand pieces of gold,
The blossom has its fragrance, and the moon has its shadow.
It is immediately followed by an allusion to a Japanese poem from the *Man’yôshû* by the well-known poet Yamanoue no Okura 山上憶良 (660-733). It reads:

Silver, gold, and jade--invaluable they are,
But no comparison to one’s precious offspring.

銀も金も玉も何せむにまされる宝子にしかめやも

Alluding to these two poems, the segment in the Nô play praises the filial piety of the two Chinese sons that surprised the Japanese lord. The segment reads:

Chorus: A moment of a spring night, the price, a thousand pieces of gold. But nothing is more valuable than your own child. It is said that China is a barbaric land and people there lack compassion. The fact that there are such filial sons impresses the Japanese. Even the gods at Hakozaki Shrine would be impressed.

By using only a fragment of the Chinese poem and linking it to a more fully adapted Japanese poem, the playwright calls upon the Chinese image through Japanese perspectives. Such an arrangement also lays the groundwork for comparing Chinese and Japanese cultures, in particular, on the subject of filial piety. The line taken from the Chinese poem is used in the Nô play to emphasize the priceless love between children and parents.

Another interesting arrangement is that none of the allusions to poems is assigned to the *shite*, Sokei Kannin, or to his Chinese sons. Put differently, poetic lines are only chanted by the Japanese sons and the chorus. It might have been due to the humble origin and profession (cattle herder) of the *shite* and his Chinese sons that they are not well versed in poetry. However, in that case, the
Japanese sons should not be any different. Moreover, characters of humble background, such as woodcutters and fishermen, often turn out to be well versed in poetry in Nô. The other obvious difference between the two groups is their respective cultural backgrounds, which probably account for such an arrangement. Through such a strategy, the playwright subtly suggests the superiority of Japanese over Chinese culture.

The dance sequence *gaku*, however, is performed by the *shite*, Sokei Kannin, at the climax of the play. The dance expresses his joy at reuniting with his Chinese sons and returning to his homeland with all his sons. It also shows his gratitude for his lord’s merciful act of allowing him and his Japanese sons to leave Japan. As Yamanaka Reiko has noted, the Japanese lord’s refusal to let the Japanese sons leave with their father imposes a crisis, which magnifies the joy of Sokei Kannin when the problem is eventually solved. As such, the ending justifies the joyful dance sequence.\(^{396}\)

Through the portrayal of domestic events in the early fifteenth-century, the play *Tôsen* copes with issues of filial piety, cultural identity, and acculturation that involve both Chinese and Japanese cultures. There is no doubt that the play promotes the diplomatic treatment of Chinese captives. Furthermore, in light of the Sino-Japanese history during that period, the play can also be viewed as a propaganda piece for improving the relationship with China.

\(^{396}\) Yamanaka, “*Tôsen*’ no haikei: Ôei no gaikô nado,” 4-5.
Nonetheless, if taking into account the struggle of Zeami’s troupe during that period discussed above, the play can also be understood as the playwright’s wish for the continuous prosperity of his troupe and family members. A few variables are likely to be the objectives. First, the family reunion depicted in the play may suggest the desire for reconciliation with other competing troupes that share the same origin. In particular, the troupes of Zeami and his nephew On’ami were competing for the shogun Yoshinori’s patronage. Also, the praise of family ties may reflect the faith in the power of strong family bonds to overcome hardships. Second, the compassion of the Japanese lord may reveal the playwright’s wish for the generosity and support of his patron(s). Of course, we cannot identify the intention of the playwright; however, it is important to take into consideration that the use of the Other (the Chinese captive and his sons) was in fact a strategy through which certain issues about the Self (the playwright and the performers) were dealt with.

The contrasting treatments of the Chinese visitors in Zegai and Tôsen are the results of the balancing acts between the foreigners’ demands and the Japanese hosts’ interests. In Zegai, the destructive demon from China who presents harm to Japanese Buddhism is defeated and blown back to China by the joint power of Japanese Buddhism and Shintô. In Tôsen, the quest for family reunion sought by the sons of a Chinese captive is granted thanks to the compassion of the Japanese lord.
Zegai celebrates the power and prosperity of religions in Japan that are proven superior over China. It demonstrates how the combined force of the foreign and the indigenous religions, Buddhism and Shintô respectively, protects Japan from Chinese invaders. Moreover, since Buddhism was introduced through China into Japan in the early sixth century, having a character from China challenge Japanese Buddhism and eventually being defeated serves as a testament to the authority and supremacy of Japanese Buddhism. Such a strategy of mortifying the supposedly superior Other to celebrate the Self is similar to that of the play Hakurakuten in which poetry is the object of interest. The adaptation of the picture-scroll (emaki) that tells of the same story is an important example of an adaptation strategy that involves another form of pictorial representation besides ink paintings.

Tôsen rejoices in the harmony and happiness found in family reunion and the resolution of cultural conflicts. The play is another example of the theme of oyako-complex (“parent-child complex”). Rather than following the usual pattern, which portrays the parent’s search for the child, Tôsen tells of the children seeking their parent. The play can also be viewed as a promotion for the diplomatic treatment of Chinese captives, or for improving the relations with China. It is important to note that Tôsen is one rare example of a “Chinese play” that does not have a corpus of earlier interpretations in other art forms. Such a lack of poetic sources may be a reason for the celebratory tone, rather than a
sympathetic tone as depicted in the play. Nonetheless, given the existence of a group of plays on *oyako*-complex (“parent-child complex”), it is likely that the story invokes audience knowledge of plays on a similar subject during their interpretation of *Tôsen* itself.

Finally, both plays employ the Other to magnify the portrayal of the Self. Put differently, in *Tôsen*, the compassion and generosity of the Japanese are highlighted; whereas in *Zegai*, the authority and supremacy of Japanese Buddhism and Shintô are glorified.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The “Chinese plays” discussed in the previous chapters offer ample evidence that cross-cultural adaptations of Chinese motifs into medieval Japanese Nô theatre reveal more about the cultural norms, aesthetic preferences, as well as the religious and philosophical perspectives held by playwrights and audiences of Nô than they do about actual Chinese views. Through constructing various images of China in these plays, the playwrights amplify chosen aspects to achieve their own aims, which might range from heightening the auspiciousness of the mood, to bringing out certain aspects of cultural identity and human emotion, or promoting spectacular dance performances. The main goal is not to represent China, but, rather, to (cor)respond to the cultural practices, aesthetic preferences, and sociopolitical attitudes of various audience groups in medieval Japan.

This study has examined ten selected “Chinese plays” which, as a whole, embrace the major images of China constructed in Nô between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. I have also taken into account
China-Japan cultural exchanges and political relations between the seventh and the early fifteenth centuries. Through investigating the sociopolitical contexts, treatment of source materials, the conventions of Nô theatre, and the changing dynamics between audiences, playwrights and performers, I have found that there are four indispensable elements in the composition of “Chinese plays.” They are the sociopolitical contexts, the basic sources, the perspectives of the playwright, as well as the choice and composition of dance and song for the play.

To facilitate analyses of these plays and comparisons among them, I proposed what I refer to as a Filter Model, which consists of four layers of filters corresponding to the aforementioned four elements. I developed this model based on my reading of theatrical treatises of Nô and by referencing leading western theories on Intercultural Theatre as well. Based upon a set of strategies for adapting Chinese culture as manifested in these “Chinese plays,” this chapter will summarize some of the key dynamics of Other and Self, and make a case for what my study of cross-cultural adaptation in medieval Japanese Nô theatre has to contribute to studies of Intercultural Theatre.

Images of China in Nô

As the previous chapters have illustrated, different images of China were constructed due to the changing variables in the making of Nô plays, such as the aesthetic preferences and socio-cultural standpoints of the audience, patrons, and
playwrights of Nô, as well as the changing sociopolitical contexts, especially as they concerned Sino-Japanese relations. Such a pattern is congruent with Raz’s notion of the Fluid Self, which continuously redefines the Other in accordance with change. As I have pointed out in the individual discussion of the ten “Chinese plays,” they embody different sentiments towards China. The ten plays can be rearranged in the following five groupings to underscore the varied and conflicting images of China. They are: the “Sympathetic Chinese (Shôkun and Yôkihi),” the “Auspicious Chinese (Seiôbô and Tôbôsaku),” the “Destructive Chinese (Hakurakuten and Zegai),” the “Harmonious Chinese (Sanshô and Tôsen),” and the “Exotic Chinese (Shakkyô and Ryôko).”

I argue that the plays Shôkun and Yôkihi are able to elicit the audience’s sympathy towards the characters largely because of the rich interpretations of their stories in earlier Japanese literary works, particularly in poetry. As illustrated in Chapter Four, the motifs of Wang Zhaojun and Yang Guifei were recurring topics in major collections of poetry from the eighth century onward. The stories of the two Chinese beauties were also retold in collections of tales and poetry criticism. Among them, the most well known adaptation appears in the celebrated work The Tale of Genji.

Seiôbô and Tôbôsaku reveal an image of China as a source of auspiciousness that is so welcomed by Japanese that the distinction between Other and Self is blurred. By focusing on the auspiciousness of the Chinese stories, the Other is
treated as “a double of the Self.” The two plays demonstrate how an auspicious motif of foreign origin was adopted into Nô and applied to Japanese contexts. As discussed in Chapter Five, the plays tell a Taoist mythological story about the Queen Mother of the West offering magical peaches to the Chinese emperor in reward for his good virtue. By focusing on the magical power of the peaches, the prayer for longevity, and the ritualistic dance, the blessings are redirected to a Japanese audience. The absence of any Japanese characters or explicit references to Japan in no way undermines the heightened auspiciousness induced by this material on stage. On a similar note, the play Sanshô also shows how a celebratory story of Chinese origin is embraced in Nô. The Chinese story serves as an exemplar of struggle between individual emotion and socio-religious constraints that both Chinese and Japanese could identify with. The playwright presents a Chinese story that Japanese audiences could relate to at a level that is beyond cultural differences. It is possible because the Chinese characters’ embrace of friendship was close to the hearts and minds of Japanese audiences. The playwright uses the Chinese motif to enable the Japanese audience to experience the joy of unification among different doctrines. Such joy is found in the harmony between the characters in their friendship that transcends their different religious beliefs. As in Seiôbô and Tôbôsaku, no Japanese characters appear in the play Sanshô either. However, the religious doctrines featured
(Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism) were familiar domains for the Japanese audience, and hence allowed them to relate to the Chinese characters.

Harmony that transcends conflicts is also the key theme of Tôsen. The portrayal of the Chinese character in Tôsen is similar to that of Sanshô in the sense that the central character is also torn between individualized emotion and social constraints. The play also ends on a celebratory note expressing the joy of unification. The story of Tôsen does not appear in any extant literary or artistic works that predate the Nô play. It can be considered a rare example of an original play that reflects contemporary cultural phenomena. It is the only surviving “Chinese play” of its kind. However, the play also abides by the common Nô practice of having the Chinese character perform the gaku dance—a dance derived from the court dance of China and only performed by Chinese characters in Nô.397

The exotic is another important image of China. Shakkyô and Ryôko vividly illustrate the exotic quality of the land of China by featuring creatures alien to Japan. Traditional belief in the auspiciousness of the lion and fierceness of the dragon and the tiger are fused with the discourse of Buddhist tales, as well as with contemporary issues regarding travel in China. These subtexts increase the

---

397 One exception is the play Fuji taiko (Fuji drum), in which a Japanese character performs the gaku dance. But, the character is a musician who plays the music of the gaku dance, and thus provides legitimate grounds for the dance performance.
unpredictability of the image of China and draw the audience closer to the story by relating it to the familiar issue of journeying to China.

China as “destructive Other” is depicted in Hakurakuten and Zegai. Such an image of the Other may be compared to the notion of “the Other as a threat to be reduced” as argued by Wlad Godzich.\(^{398}\) The two plays portray the Chinese visitors as destructive Others who challenge the integrity and strength of the cultural and religious foundations of Japan. Hakurakuten is an absolute reversal of Japan’s appreciation of the most renowned and influential Chinese poet in traditional Japan. Zegai, too, celebrates Japan’s religious power prevailing over a Chinese invader. Both plays employ a supposedly superior Other to magnify the mighty power of Japan. In Hakurakuten, the originality and innateness of Japanese poetry to Japan are highlighted, whereas in Zegai, a syncretic treatment of the power of Buddhism and Shintô is validated.

**Why “Chinese Plays?”**

Presentations of China in the “Chinese plays” are not arbitrary choices, but rather intentional constructs that cater to various audience groups in different times. Moreover, these plays contribute to Nô in several aspects that only Chinese motifs can address. First, Nô is elevated into a more refined and culturally charged art form with the cachet and authority that certain Chinese

\(^{398}\) Godzich, “The Further Possibility of Knowledge,” xiii.
motifs embodied. The plays Shōkun and Yōkihi adapt earlier interpretations of the stories of Wang Zhaojun and Yang Guifei in well-known Japanese tales and poems, which serve to heighten the literary caliber of Nô. Those earlier Japanese interpretations not only invoke the highly praised Chinese works, but also create associations with the Heian period, which was commonly perceived as the zenith of Japanese court culture.

Second, some Chinese plays add auspicious elements that are unique to China all the better to celebrate the land of Japan. Prayers for the longevity of the country and its lord are enhanced by tangible elements—the emperor as recipient of magical peaches—as depicted in Seiōbō and Tōbōsaku. Seiōbō features one of the few female deities in Nô, whereas Tōbōsaku presents a spectacular danced performance that heightens the auspiciousness of the play. This links to the third aspect, which is the dynamic and spectacular danced performances unique to “Chinese plays.” Such dances form the core of Shakkyō and Ryōko, in which exotic creatures from China are staged. The two plays also relate to adventures of Buddhist monks in their pilgrimages to sacred places in China, which was one important aspect of Japanese Buddhist practice in Muromachi Japan.

The fourth aspect is the making of social and political statements through the “Chinese plays.” This aspect is twofold—one celebrates Japan with the Chinese, the other against the Chinese. Sanshô offers a unique perspective that
places friendship beyond differences in the various religious doctrines of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, which had been introduced to Japan from China, and on the basis of which individuals were to find harmony and joy. Since its Chinese motif was primarily depicted in ink paintings, Sanshô also sheds light on how pictorial arts might be made into Nô plays. On a similar note, Tôsen celebrates the reunion of a Chinese family, which is made possible due to the compassion of the Japanese lord. Both plays have the Chinese characters perform the gaku dance, a dance closely associated with China that has upbeat and joyful connotations.

Negative portrayals of China are seen in Hakurakuten and Zegai. Chinese characters in the plays are depicted both as harmful and as inferior to their Japanese hosts. Hakurakuten uses the single most influential Chinese poet Bai Juyi to attest the integrity, originality, and superiority of Japanese poetry over the Chinese. The play Zegai celebrates the power and prosperity of religions in Japan that are proven superior over China. The play demonstrates how the combined force of the foreign and the indigenous religions, Buddhism and Shintô respectively, protect Japan from Chinese invaders.

Nonetheless, one may argue that the aforementioned reasons for staging “Chinese plays” are conditional and conjectural due to the lack of explicit evidence that discloses the motives for composing these “Chinese plays.” However, the circumstantial information on the sociopolitical contexts, reception
history and basic sources of the Chinese motifs, the playwrights’ dramaturgies, and close readings of the plays must not be overlooked.

**Exploitation of Foreign Materials?**

Modern scholars of cultural and theatre studies, such as Rustom Bharucha, might well find the treatments of Chinese materials in Nô as exploitations of the source culture and as lacking genuine intercultural exchange. This is because he has questioned whether a dramatist should use a foreign culture to conduct experiments with his own dramaturgy.\(^{399}\) He warns that the culture of the “third world” should not be reduced to a “repository of materials” for the sake of rejuvenating local theatre. Rather, he advocates a “genuine exchange” of the materials to be presented with “appropriate concepts and interpretations” true to the “third world.”\(^{400}\) Bharucha spells out his philosophy of intercultural exchange in the following passage:

> What I am advocating … is not a closed-doors policy, but an attitude of critical openness, a greater sensitivity to the ethics involved in translating and transporting other cultures, and a renewed respect for cultural self-sufficiencies in an age of globalization, where there is a tendency to homogenize the particularities of cultures, if not obliterate them altogether.\(^{401}\)


\(^{401}\) Ibid., 208.
The above concerns, however, are not relevant to the representation of China in the “Chinese plays” discussed in this study. First and foremost, China-Japan relations in that time period are not analogous to the “third world” or the East to the West in the contexts of the current scholarship of Intercultural Theatre and the Other and the Self. As pointed out in Chapter One, China was an affluent empire with superior cultural achievements. Japanese elites imported Chinese culture and adapted it in various media for centuries before the emergence of Nô theatre. Therefore, instead of adapting a supposedly inferior culture, such as the western cultures adapting the East that are examined in current western scholarship, the “Chinese plays” in the Nô repertoire dealt with what was normally perceived in traditional Japan as a superior culture.

The “Chinese plays” do not qualify as an attempt to achieve genuine cultural exchange. Rather, Chinese motifs are refashioned in ways that facilitate the (re)telling of a story for Japanese audiences, regardless of whether the (re)interpretation indeed aspires to represent authentic images of China. Such appropriations of materials originating from a foreign culture offer an important area of inquiry that is often overlooked in the current study of Intercultural Theatre: the close examination of the so-called foreign materials/motifs. As this investigation of the source materials of “Chinese plays” has demonstrated,
patterns of reception of foreign materials/motifs prior to their adaptation into theatrical performances must be taken into account in the study of Intercultural Theatre.

Therefore, it was necessary to first identify the nature of the Chinese materials involved by investigating their reception history in Japan. It is doubtful that the goal of these playwrights was to present the stories in ways close to their Chinese sources in order to highlight the similarities and differences between the two cultures and thus promote intercultural understanding among Japanese audiences. As the analyses of Shôkun, Yôkihi, Sanshô, Seiôbô, and Tôbósaku have indicated, the core motifs of these plays are to varying degrees different from those of their Chinese counterparts. Issues such as the ethics of cultural appropriation were unlikely to be of concern to Japanese playwrights. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that sociopolitical relations with China shaped the creation of “Chinese plays.” As discussed earlier, for example, the plays Hakurakuten and Zegai celebrate Japan’s superiority over China in the realm of poetry and religion, whereas the play Tôsen promotes the diplomatic treatment of Chinese captives. Of course, there are also a few exceptions, such as Shôkun and Yôkihi, which center on the portrayal of a character’s emotions. Moreover, all the Chinese motifs, except that of the play Tôsen, were introduced into Japan at least a century earlier, and were interpreted in earlier literary and art forms. It is
unlikely that the audiences of Nô were encountering the Chinese motifs for the first time through the Nô plays that they witnessed.

**Modified Self and the Fusion of Horizons**

This brings us to issues of Other and Self in these “Chinese plays.” The previous chapters have demonstrated that the basic sources of the plays are earlier Japanese interpretations of Chinese motifs, and the Chinese materials employed were actually taken from earlier Japanese interpretations, or have been excerpted by earlier Japanese writers. For instance, the majority of the poetry of Bai Juyi alluded to in Nô plays appeared in the *Wakan rôei shû* and was often used as a model or inspiration for poetic composition.

The previous chapters have shown that the various images of China presented in the “Chinese plays” in Nô were all Japanese constructs rooted in earlier Japanese interpretations. In other words, the playwrights were not interested in portraying images of China that actually approximated some kind of Chinese originals. Even if they were, there is no one absolute definition of what constitutes an authentic Chinese original. Rather, all conceptions of China are subject to the interpretations of different individuals at different junctures, both in China and Japan. The concept of a “real China,” if it even existed among the audiences of Nô, must have therefore been a collective social construct that evolved and varied over time.
Hence, to depict a Chinese motif required the playwright to seek out the “basic sources (honzetsu)” that coincided with the knowledge and expectations of his audience. Instead of striving to stage the “real China,” Nô playwrights present a China tweaked to seem authentic from the perspective of Japanese audiences. This is in accordance with the comments by Peter Brook and Patrice Pavis on Mahabharata, which describe the play as having “the flavor of India” that is “connected to the past and present,” all the while showing “aspects of contemporary everyday culture.”402 Such a treatment of foreign elements insofar as suggesting a foreign flavor coincides with Zeami’s precept on how to perform a Chinese role (a touch of what seems exotic will do). 403

Consequently, the China depicted in the “Chinese plays” is not “the Other,” but in fact what I will call a “Modified Self.” That is, the “basic sources (honzetsu)” of the plays, when there are any, are actually taken from earlier Japanese works/interpretations (“Past Self”), which the playwrights refashioned in accordance with audience sensibilities and related socio-cultural contexts (“Present Self”). Such a strategy calls to mind the conception of “the fusion of horizons” advocated by Hans-Georg Gadamer.404 Gadamer’s definition of “horizons” includes those that have chronological horizons associated with

402 Pavis, Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture, 187.

403 Omote and Katô, Zeami Zenchiku, 26-7. See Chapter Two for an English translation.

404 See Chapter One.
earlier objects/texts that inform the interpreter regarding the topic in question, as well as those that shape the presuppositions of the interpreter. These two groups of horizons can be correlated with the four layers of filters in my proposed Filter Model. The “basic sources (honzetsu)” discussed in the second layer of the Filter Model can be categorized as chronological horizons. The first, third, and fourth layers of the Filter Model (i.e., the sociopolitical contexts, the perspectives of the playwrights, and the choices of dance and song) can be considered the second group of horizons.

The chronological horizons associated with the object/text are crucial elements that frame the playwright’s re-interpretation of Chinese motifs. These include the content, quantity, and popularity of earlier reception of the Chinese motifs. Plays that draw the audience’s sympathy over the misfortune of Chinese characters and end on a sad note are those Chinese motifs that have long permeated earlier Japanese literature and art (e.g. Shōkun and Yōkihi). However, plays that are less psychologically intense, focus on spectacular elements in performance, and often end on an upbeat note, tend to be plays with Chinese motifs that had few prior interpretations in Japanese literature. Rather, these motifs were more prevalent in such visual media as paintings, and their adaptation into Nō plays also contributed most to heightened graphic appeal and spectacle, as in the climactic dance sequences of Ryōko and Shakkyō. The existence or the absence of affective dimensions that were the outgrowth of earlier
reception and internalization of Chinese motifs was indeed a determining factor in how those motifs were subsequently incorporated into Nô plays. The horizons that shape the presuppositions of the interpreter are also manifested in various media, such as literary and art works, storytelling, and danced performance. Although these other elements are not in themselves directly related to the Chinese motifs, they are the horizons fused into the play to create an interpretation that is unique to Nô and that caters to its audiences. These include: the most prominent element—Buddhist doctrines (e.g., the notion of impermanence and the pitfall of attachment as depicted in Yôkihi), Japanese Buddhist tales (the legend of the Japanese monk Jakushô in Shakkyô), Japanese folk beliefs (the mirror with magic power in Shôkun), Shinto beliefs (the “divine wind” in Hakurakuten and Zegai), and historical events (the Sino-Japanese struggle off the coast of China as a setting for the story of Tôsen).

I have demonstrated that all the Chinese motifs featured in the plays under discussion, except in the case of Tôsen, had gone through a series of assimilations before their Nô counterparts emerged. The Chinese motifs had permeated Japanese culture from as early as the eighth century in different artistic and/or literary forms. The predominant Japanese media are, as investigated in the last five chapters, poetry, tales, danced performance, and paintings. Some of these motifs appeared in more than one medium. In the case of Tôsen, contemporary events are likely the source materials. The Nô
playwrights did not merely cite the earlier interpretations, but instead interwove
them with poetic allusions to Japanese and Chinese literary works that were
related to the Chinese motifs and/or the themes of the play. It is through such a
strategy that the foreign themes are modified for domestic audiences.

A Challenge to Intercultural Theatre

This study has demonstrated that the China represented in “Chinese
plays” is in fact a “culturally constructed Self” admixed with various historical
strands and allegiances.405 It is the historical and cultural specificities of my study
that provide new reference points for studies of how the Other might be
presented in theatre within an Asian context.

First, as pointed out in Chapter One, current studies of Intercultural
Theatre center on West-East dynamics (i.e., adaptations between theatres in the
West and the East). Second, since Intercultural Theatre is an emerging field and
does not yet have a dominant definition that encompasses the range of theatres
of the West and the East, it is not surprising that current scholarship does not
adequately treat East/East relations.

Several key elements and concepts regarding Intercultural Theatre cited in
Chapter One do not correspond to the findings about the “Chinese plays” in Nô.
For instance, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert have identified Intercultural

______________________________

405 Higonnet and Jones, eds. Visions of the Other, 300.
Theatre as a “hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between different cultures and performing traditions,” whereas John Joseph Flynn, Jr. considers it as “the use of foreign performance techniques, texts, dramaturgy, and design elements for the creation of new theatrical pieces for a native community.”

The identification of the Chineseness of the “Chinese plays” is a very complex issue that requires careful examination of the various aspects of these plays. First, the figures and motifs that are presented as Chinese in the “Chinese plays” had undergone considerable distortions in Japan before the Nô plays emerged. As my analyses of the Nô plays in the previous chapters have demonstrated, the Chinese motifs featured were in fact derived from earlier Japanese interpretations. Therefore, it is inappropriate to consider those plays merely as a theatrical hybrid between the two cultures. Rather, it can be argued that the plays are only a reworking of earlier Japanese sources, which contain reflections of foreign materials. This is the same as Flynn’s notion of “foreign elements.” We need to look more closely at the seemingly foreign elements in the plays and examine the reception history within the target culture prior to the making of the plays.

Moreover, Flynn has pointed out that the target of intercultural performances is the “native community;” therefore, it is crucial that the local

---

audience identifies the elements presented in the play as foreign. How exactly does the audience identify the “foreignness” of the elements presented? As noted in Chapter One, scholars such as Jacob Raz have argued that the Other is constructed against the Self.\textsuperscript{407} In other words, the audience interprets a play through the lens of the Self and distinguishes the “foreign elements.” The “Chinese plays” examined in this study have provided evidence to support such a phenomenon. The Nô playwrights selected earlier sources related to the Chinese motifs and/or the themes of the plays that the audience was familiar with. In so doing, they invite their audience to employ their knowledge to identify the “Chineseness” of the plays. As a result, various images of “China” are constructed in Nô.

To a certain degree, the staging of these “Chinese plays” corresponds to the concept of “productive reception” proposed by Erika Fischer-Lichte as cited in Chapter One. This is particularly true of the plays written in the late fifteenth century, such as \textit{Tôbôsaku} and \textit{Ryôko}, when Nô troupes strived to appeal to new audience groups due to the loss of shogunal patronage. Arguably, Chinese motifs were selected to increase the variety of the repertoire so as to bolster the popularity of Nô among different audience groups. Themes that reach out to various audiences were one of the characteristics of the plays composed during this period, for example, \textit{Hakurakuten} and \textit{Zegai}.

\textsuperscript{407} Raz, \textit{Aspects of Otherness in Japanese Culture}, 1-16.
Reinventing China through Staging “Chinese Plays”

The representation of China did not stop after these “Chinese plays” were written, or after the first performance. Many of the plays have been staged since the early sixteenth century. However, every performance of the same play is bound to be different. From the text to the props, various aspects of a play can be altered.

Although the scripts of these plays are generally perceived to be very close to the originals written in the medieval period, they are by no means identical to those of the originals, at least not on the level of performance. Different troupes have to various extents modified the texts to suit their styles and the preferences of their audiences. The actors and the other members of the troupe are responsible for the selection of mask, costumes, and other elements of the performance (Preparatory work by actors [7]). The texts of Nô plays are also subject to change to cater to the changing preferences of audiences and of the performance styles of the various actors (Sociopolitical and Performance Contexts [6]). Beyond the level of the performance of each Nô play, the arrangement of plays to be performed in a program is also subject to the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts of each performance.

One area that needs to be further explored is the performance history of these “Chinese plays” for different audiences at various historical junctures so as to investigate the reception of these plays. Because of the fact that multiple plays
were staged in a program, and a program might last longer than a day, the sequence of plays performed also affects the performance as a whole. The performers had to make decisions such as whether to stage “Chinese plays,” and in what order. The themes and styles of the plays are also crucial factors to be considered. Based on the surviving performance records that I have investigated, it is rare to stage “Chinese plays” in consecutive order.408

Moreover, since Nô is a performing art practiced since the fourteenth century, a study of the staging of the “Chinese plays” should shed some light on the evolving artistic and thematic preferences of audiences, as well as their sentiments towards China in the past six centuries. One possible case study is to investigate the popularity of certain “Chinese plays” of different styles and themes. For example, according to the surviving performance records, Zegai was performed thirty-nine times between 1534 and 1602.409 Twenty-one of these performances were staged in Buddhist temples or Shintô shrines. The others were at households of military and government officials. One of the performances was requested by an audience group of warriors. During a similar period (1540-1599), the play Yôkihi was performed twenty-one times, half of

---

408 One example of such a rare arrangement is a performance by the Konparu troupe at the Honganji-temple in today’s Kyoto area in 1554. Among the twelve plays performed, four were “Chinese plays,” and three of them were performed consecutively. Nose, Nôgaku genryûkô, 1275.

409 The following information on Zegai and Yôkihi is based on the performance records reprinted in Nose, Nôgaku genryûkô, 1264-99.
which were in temples or shrines, whereas the others were at the households of military and government officials. Also, three private performances were requested by an audience including warriors and provincial lords. Interestingly, only in two of all these fifty-eight programs were the two plays performed in the same program.

This data poses questions that my current study cannot answer thoroughly. It calls for more scholarly work that investigates how changing artistic preferences, as well as relevant social, economic, and political contexts have influenced reception of “Chinese plays.” In so doing, we need to investigate the performance history of “Chinese plays.” A study of the subsequent staging of “Chinese plays” will be invaluable to the inquiry of how Nô theatre continuously reinvents China into the twenty-first century.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:


_____. *Qian Xizuo jiao Han Wudi nei zhuan*. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937.


330


Zhu, Jincheng, ed. *Bai Juyi jijianjiao*. Shanghai : Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1988
Secondary Sources:


______. Nô no hanashi. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1940.


Taguchi Kazuo. “‘Seiôbo' no dedokoro: dômoku to kanbu.” *Nôgaku taimuzu* 491 (February 1, 1993): 5.


______. “‘Tôsen’ no haikei: Òei no gaikô nado.’” *Tessen* (July 1984): 3-5.


