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The Aesthetics of the Three Obediences:
Murasaki Shikibu and Asian Women's Responses to the Code of
Feminine Conduct

by

Kazuko Masumitsu

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Thank you Jan Streader, a connoisseur and lover of Japanese culture, for your feedback of the *Tale of Genji*:

Genji is drop-dead gorgeous. Every woman falls for him. He is like a walking art fact we all want to have. But when he says, “If they were not fundamentally evil, they would not have been born as women at all” it jumped into my eyes.

(qtd. from Arthur Waley’s translation of *The Tale of Genji* 666).

Your finding of this passage confirms the implicit message of the author Murasaki Shikibu that such a nobleman as Genji in her contemporary society believed in his prerogative to assess women’s nature. This thesis is dedicated to Jan and other women and men who are not listed by name here.

Abstract

All the three ancient sacred scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, the *Laws of Manu*, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Book of Rites*, demonstrate that the three obediences were once the prescribed code of woman's conduct for South and East Asian women, as follows:

Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.

(The *Laws of Manu* Ch. IX. 3)¹

A woman obeys her parents in childhood, her husband in marriage and her son in widowhood, and she remains chaste.

(listed in Buddhist sutras including *Lotus Sutra*, qtd. in *Mochizuki Buddhist Great Dictionary* 望月仏教大辞典 1542-1543)

The wife should follow and obey her husband. The woman obeys her father in childhood, her husband in marriage and her son in old age.² (The *Book of Rites* 礼記)

The woman is bound by the three obediences.³ (Ch. "Blue Trousers 藤袴." *The Genji* Vol. 3. 328)

These ancient Chinese and Indian manuscripts indicate that their women were expected to observe the three obediences. The three obediences, written in Chinese as 三従 and pronounced as *sanjyū* in Japanese and *sankon* in Chinese,

¹ In the English translation of the *Laws of Manu* by George Bühler. All the additional phrases in parentheses are listed.

² My translation.

³ My translation.

were once a familiar phrase in East Asia, including Korea and Vietnam. The presence of the same code of women's conduct in the *Tale of Genji* also implies that the author, Murasaki Shikibu, wrote her work during the period when Japanese noblewomen were equally bound by that code. This recognition is the major inspiration for the first exploratory study of Pan-Asian womanhood under the three obediences within the field of comparative literature. This dissertation will trace back the development, evolution and effect of the three obediences on womanhood in India, China and Japan; then, it will re-read the *Tale of Genji* in the frame of the three obediences.

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Introduction

Women Inside and Outside the Tale of Genji

Genji 源氏 is astonished and embarrassed by the report of his son Yūgiri 夕霧 of what their noble society, including the father of Tamakazura 玉鬘, suspects: Genji is seducing her, his beautiful adopted daughter. Genji senses that Yūgiri has not only informed his father of the gossip but also implicitly expressed his own suspicion. Yūgiri has already seen him fondling Tamakazura in the guise of paternal affection but has remained quiet. Desperate to play a moralist father, Genji at first appeals to his Confucian-trained son by quoting the familiar phrase, the three obediences:

The woman is bound by the three obediences.

女は三に従ふものにこそあなれ

(Ch. “Blue Trousers 藤袴.” *The Genji* Vol. 4. 328).⁴

It is Genji’s insinuation that this code of woman’s conduct forces Tamakazura to obey her biological father, but he has no power over her as her mere guardian.

Here the author Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 presents the exact phrase, “the three obediences,” only once through her hero’s speech. In *the Tale of Genji* 源氏物語, Shikibu sarcastically suggests the noblemen’s mutual tolerance of their fellow men’s moral transgression and protection of their dignity.

⁴ All the *Genji* passages in this thesis are cited from the most popular version of the reconstructed texts compiled by the three *Genji* doyens, Abe Akio, Akiyama Ken, and Imai Gen’ei. The detail of the text is listed in the works cited under the name of the main editor, Abe Akio. All the English translations of these passages are mine.

The *Genji* is a product of the Japanese imperial culture that thrived between 794 and 1185, the era known as the Heian period. Although Heian imperial culture has been regarded as the first authentic product of the nation, it was also a product of hybridity and homogeneity: Chinese (the lingua franca of East Asia), Confucianism and Buddhism were imported from Japan's culturally advanced and politically powerful neighbor, China, and integrated into the indigenous noble society.⁵ If *Genji* and *Yūgiri* are regular Heian noblemen, they must have learned the three obediences from the Confucian work, the *Book of Rites* 礼記⁶. The Buddhist version is also indirectly present in the *Genji* when the heroine Murasaki's grand-uncle, a Buddhist priest, presumably quotes from the most popular Buddhist scripture among Heian nobility, the *Lotus Sutra* 法華經⁷:

The woman can be treated as an adult when she is supported and protected by men.

⁵ The Japanese scholar of Chinese Studies, Kaji Nobuyuki 加地伸行, argues in his *Silent Religion: Confucianism* 沈黙の宗教—儒教 that Confucianism has been grafted into Japanese Buddhism. For example, Japanese families have an altar for their deceased members and ancestors, whereas in India, the deceased are burned and their ashes would be thrown into the Ganges River. Filial piety has been a supreme teaching of Confucianism, which East Asian Buddhists have taken for granted. As Kaji says, Confucianism did not develop a communal institution but quietly and deeply seeped into the Japanese psyche. Particularly, since Buddhism and Confucianism almost simultaneously came from China to the early Japan, both became perhaps more inseparable there than in China.

⁶ The *Book of Rites* was one of the Confucian texts 四書五經 widely read among Heian noblemen. In the *Genji*, his father sends *Yūgiri* to the university to study Confucianism, the standard scholarship of the day.

⁷ In his *Genji Gaiden* 源氏外伝, Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619-1691) identifies this implicit reference to the Buddhist three obediences (143). Imai also lists Shikibu's reading of Buddhist sutras, including the *Lotus Sutra*, which are used in the *Genji*. The text documents Heian nobility's familiarity with the *Lotus Sutra* (see page 50).

そもそも女は、人にもてなされて大人になりたまふものなれば⁸ (Ch. “Young Murasaki 若紫.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 288)

Another man’s implicit reference to the three obediences is present in the abdicated Emperor Suzaku’s concern about his immature daughter, the Third Princess’ future:

How sad and exacerbating a woman is fated to be criticized as thoughtless against her will.

女は心よりほかに、あはあはしく、人におとしめらるる宿世あるむ、いとちおしく悲しき。

(Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” I. The *Genji* Vol. 5. 13)

Both Murasaki’s grand-uncle and Suzaku seem to represent the conventional view of a woman in Shikibu’s society.

The *Lotus Sutra* also enumerates “the woman’s five obstacles 女人五障: doubtfulness, lethargy, hatred, envy (or jealousy) and perpetual grudge 欺怠目真恨怨.” According to the traditional Buddhist doctrine, these five obstacles hinder women to become the five highest male figures: the greatest Brahmin (Indian priest), the king, the ancient Indian deities such as Indra, Mara, and Buddha. In the *Genji*, as noted by Saigō Nobutuna 西郷信綱, the five obstacles are also present. Kaoru, the illegitimate son of Genji’s youngest wife the Third Princess and Kashiwagi, senses the secret of his birth and ponders over his mother’s salvation after death (152):

⁸This passage is listed in Saigō Nobutuna’s discussion of “The Woman’s Unhappiness” in *Nihonbungaku no hōhō* (147).

Mother prays to Buddha every morning morning and evening, but as a woman, she does not seem to have a serious understanding of spirituality. Her salvation might be difficult.⁹ A woman has the five obstacles, too. She worries me. I should help her spiritual work so that she will be saved.

明け暮れ勤めたまふやうなめれど、はかもとなくおほどきた
まへる女の御悟りのほどに、蓮の露も明らかに、玉と磨きた
まはむこともを難し、五つのながしも、なほうしろめたきを、
われ、この御道をたすけて、同じうは後の世をだにと思ふ。

(Ch. “Prince Nioi 匂兵部卿.” The *Genji* Vol. 5. 18)

Kaoru’s anxiety about his mother’s salvation is sincere; particularly, her past and his birth are proof of her sin as a woman in the Buddhist terms. Yet as in the case of the three obediences, Shikibu uses male characters to mention the negative Buddhist teaching against women. No women characters in the *Genji* mention either the three obediences or the five obstacles. The packaged doctrine of the five obstacles and the three obediences, *goshōsanjyū* 五障三従 in Japanese Buddhism, as suggested in the *Genji*, seems to have been already present in Shikibu’s time.

Shikibu’s use of men defining womanhood in the text is acutely pointed out by the *Genji* doyen and the biographer of Murasaki Shikibu, Imai Gen’e 今井源衛 (1919-2004):

⁹ The literal translation is that it is difficult for her to polish the dew of the lotus. This metaphorical sentence means that because the saved one will sit on the lotus flower, she should cleanse her soul as if polishing the dew of the lotus like a jewel.

A variety of woman's codes and destinies are mostly spoken by men, but they never recognize, [for example] Genji's favorite wife Murasaki's despair and her sorrowful death. Her plight is what only the woman experiences and understands. (258)

Although Murasaki has been celebrated as a traditional icon of Japanese femininity and appealed to numerous women's Cinderella fantasy as Genji's most favorite spouse, Imai nevertheless has already noted that Shikibu did not invent her as the model of the happiest heroine for women. Actually, she suffers from Genji's promiscuity and the dynamics of the sexual rivalries caused by him.

Imai also correctly detects that "Shikibu's perspective of womanhood might have been even different from the conventional view of her contemporary society" (259). Had she openly confronted her society with the depiction of a man's promiscuity as a sign of his supremacy over women who had no marital option but polygyny with unrealistic expectations grounded on the mirage of the ideal relationship, she would have been censured. The renowned *Genji* critic and novelist, Enchi Fumiko 円地文子, succinctly summarizes Shikibu's literary technique as follows: "the *Genji* is wrapped with soft cloth and its bone structure shows a hard-core 非情 intellectual exertion" (Seidensticker 223). Shikibu's acute point of view is camouflaged in her elegant courtly language and careful depiction of men and women's sexual-gender relations. This thesis proposes to interpret the author of the *Genji* as a cautious but representative critic of womanhood in her society.

Shikibu's *Diary* also hints that she is a critical person by nature. Her frequent allusion to *Yuan shi wuyu* 白氏文集, a popular Chinese collection of poetry in her society, written by the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易, have been noted by *Genji* scholars. *Yuan shi wuyu* includes Bai Juyi's political and social satires, *Xinefu* 新樂府, which might have helped her to cultivate her literary technique of implicit criticism by using poetic aesthetics (Mekata 目加田 315). In her *Diary*, she records that she tutored her mistress Empress Shōshi 彰子 *Xinefu*.

Although recognizing Shikibu's criticism in the *Genji*, one might still question how much her fiction reflects and reveals the effect of the three obediences in her 11th-century society. Edward Kamens points out this ambiguity of her text: "the *Genji* ... teases the reader's sense of what is historical, what is familiar, what is plausible and what isn't" (132). The *Genji* does sometimes deviate from the actual past, including the rise of Emperor Reizei, the illegitimate son of Empress Fujitubo and our hero. Moreover, Shikibu highly idealizes noble characters.

There is evidence of Heian nobility's familiarity with the three obediences, as they are listed in the *Collection of Proverbs in Society and their Etymology* (*Sezoku genbun* in Japanese) 世俗諺文 written in Shikibu's time of 1007 (qtd. in Tanaka, "Later Antiquity 古代後期" 26). The *Collection of Proverbs* was not only a product of the Heian period but was even written in Shikibu's lifetime, confirming the suggestion of the *Genji* that the three obediences were a household phrase in the author's noble society. Neither *Genji* nor Murasaki's grand-uncle is particularly lauded for referring to the three obediences. Shikibu has quietly

integrated her critical point of view of the three obediences preached by contemporary men to women.

The *Genji* critics relatively close to Shikibu's time found that the work communicates the spirit of Heian culture as follows. In the introduction of the Chinese poem (by an unknown Japanese) *Fu hikarugenjimongatari shii* 賦光源氏物語詩 of 1291, the *Genji* is praised as next to the *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書記 and the ancient Chinese classic of *History* (*Shiji* in Chinese pronunciation and *Shiki* in the Japanese) 史記, which has been renowned in East Asia for its literary quality and historical accuracy. The comparison of the *Genji* and the *Shiji* would have been the most flattering comment to Shikibu. It is already known that she extensively cites the *Shiji* in the *Genji*. Sanjyōnishi Kinsada 三条西交条 also proclaims in his *Myojōshō* 明星抄 (1530) that the *Genji* carries on the history of Japan after the six imperial chronicles.¹⁰ Of course, these men viewed history differently from modern historians. A medieval noblewoman named Nijō 二条 (1257-?) gives us a clue in her work (the *Confession*) *Towazugatari* とわずがたり how her contemporary nobility found their recent past in the *Genji*. She records that her master, the Retired Emperor Gofukakusa 後深草, and his imperial consorts and mistresses impersonated *Genji* and his women and had a music recital. For later generations of aristocrats and imperial family members, the *Genji*

¹⁰ The *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書記 (recording the period from the age of myth to 697), the *Extended Chronicles of Japan* 続日本書記 (the period between 697-791), the *Chronicles of Later Japan* 日本後記 (the period between 792-833), the *Extended Chronicles of Later Japan* 続日本後記 (the period 833-850), the *Record of Emperor Montoku* 日本文徳天皇実録 (the reign of Emperor Montoku between 850-858) and the *Record of the Three Generations [of Regents]* 三代実録 (the period between 858-887). After the six chronicles, no new imperial chronicles have been completed. This shows that the imperial authority had already declined in Shikibu's time.

preserved their glorious customs and events. If so, those classic historians' comments reinforce the argument of this thesis that the *Genji* documents the social ambiances and mores of Shikibu's time, including the social force of the three obediences.

The three earliest *Genji* commentaries, such as *Kō'an genji ron* 公安源氏論議 (written around 1281?), *Shimeishō* 紫明抄 (written before 1294?) and *Kakaishō* 河海抄 (written some time between 1362 and 1367), also trace back the characters and episodes in the *Genji* in relation to the historical figures and events. The reference to medieval Buddhism in *Kakaishō* is useful to reinforce the argument of this thesis that the woman's three obediences present in the *Genji* also have a Buddhist source. These commentaries' focus on the historical actuality indicates that this was the criterion of good literature in medieval times as opposed to the extravaganza of fiction, and this justified their preservation of Shikibu's work along with other documents.

In current Japanese and North American scholarship, the three obediences have not been sufficiently studied as the epitome of Asian women's position in classic literature. Moreover, the presence of the three obediences in the *Genji* has been acknowledged and studied only by a few critics. Ivan Morris is one of them, alluding to the three obediences in his *World of the Shining Princess* of 1964:

“According to Confucian and Buddhist doctrine [of the three obediences], her position was not a happy one...Despite her low status in religion, the Heian woman enjoyed a remarkably favorite position in law. The current codes guaranteed her right to inherit

and keep property [the custom of unitary male inheritance was not established until much later in Japan]; and in this respect her condition compares very favorably with that of women in contemporary West. (205)

In principle, noblewomen had rights to property. Yet a small-number of high-born women might have been able to inherit abundant wealth. As Saigō and other critics postulate, the historically literary noblewomen were daughters of declined nobility owing to the concentration of limited power and wealth on the minority elite of the prominent Fujiwara families in Shikibu's time (158). Shikibu and her contemporary noblewoman Sei Shōnagon had fathers who had the best education in their time but were hindered to thrive in the imperial court by the prominent Fujiwara families. Shikibu's family, too, belonged to the Fujiwara clan but lost competition and was reduced to the middle rank. Shikibu's father endured unemployment for ten years before his appointment as the governor of a province called Echizen 越前.¹¹ As the governor of a province is contemptuously depicted in the *Genji*, one can imagine what self-image the author had for herself. The melancholic tone of her *Diary* might suggest her reluctance to serve as a gentlewoman to Empress Shōshi 彰子 to return the favor to her father and the most dominant figure in the imperial court, Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長.

The drastically hierarchal difference between the high-born woman Shōshi and

¹¹ Shikibu's father Fujiwara no Tametoki 藤原為時 and another man competed for the position of the governor of Echizen. When Tametoki was not chosen, he sent a Chinese poem describing his hardship to the young Emperor Ichijō and made him neither eat nor sleep. The imperial government reversed the decision and appointed Tametoki as the governor of Echizen (qtd in Saigō 154). This widely known story implies that Shikibu had an intellectual and literary father who took interest in educating his daughter.

the middle-rank noblewoman Shikibu thus should be recognized. Those literary women left only the individual criticisms of their noble society, but their contemporary men recorded their sense of crisis and the impoverished and frustration in Japanese and Chinese poetry (Saigō 158).

Morris recognizes noblewomen's physical confinement: "we must never forget what a closed and immobile existence most of them were expected to lead"(210). It is imperative to pursue the degree of Heian noblewomen's self-confinement in relation to the three obediences. Yet the current scholarship of Japanese history has not offered a clear answer to it. It seems that their confinement could be compared to purdah, which segregated high-caste women in medieval India. A further comparison between Heian noblewomen and purdah will be pursued in later chapters.

In a way, Shikibu belonged to the minority elite society in contrast to the majority of regular women about whom historical documents record very little. Yet we have a glimpse of how the three obediences have continued to affect regular womanhood by crossing over a vast historical distance of 900 years since Shikibu's time in the *Criticism of the Great Learning for Women* 女大学批判 written by Nakagawa Zennosuke 中川善之助 in 1952. His work is an open contest against the 17th century New Confucian Kaibara Ettuken 貝原益軒 who wrote the renowned *Great Learning for Women* as part of his campaign for women's absolute submission to men. Nakagawa saw the effect of women's absolute submission in a farmer's wife:

A young wife in the farmer's family wakes up before dawn and has no time for napping. After the exhausting field labor, she immediately boils the water to prepare the bath for her family and cooks supper for them. When her husband and father-in-law take a bath, drink sake and go to bed, she must clean up the dishes, mend the clothes, weave the straw slippers for the family. She eventually takes a luke-warm bath,¹² and goes to bed late at night. In the bed, she feeds her infant and changes her diapers and soon hears the rooster crowing. The husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law believe that she is as strong as cattle and cannot be crushed. Some wives have died of exhaustion, but many managed [to meet their rigorous family demands]. She is like sesame seeds continuously and relentlessly squeezed and transformed into a rich amount of oil....

Nakagawa concludes:

I kept thinking how the farmer's wife can stay healthy, working hard without much sleep. She is neither well nourished nor rested but has the strength of a pig. I can never explain this. It would be too cruel to say that her body is used to this degree of hardship. The only one explanation I have found is that her pig-like strength is due to the absence of her senses and thoughts. A human can sacrifice her thoughts and senses and degrade her human intelligence and sensitivity in order to focus all her energy on the

¹² The traditional Japanese family would share a bath and not change the water for each member.

preservation of the animalistic status quo. (qtd. in Takamure 高群
442)

What is important here is that a woman who leads a physically oppressive life tends to remain mentally oppressed because she has no time to think but is likely to focus her whole life only on the “animalistic status quo.” Nakagawa attests that this degree of women’s physical and mental oppression was seen even recently. Then, what about the majority of women working during the Heian period not recorded in literary and history books? The three obediences might not have been penetrated into all of the Heian multitudes, but the actual hard labor might not have been less oppressive than that of the farmer’s wife in the 20th century. Those women evidently had no privilege of pondering over their condition and status in their own society. Shikibu and her literary contemporary women showed little interest in those below their class. How currently familiar is this cruel hierarchy among privileged and unprivileged women.

The modern Japanese woman historian Takamure Ituse 高群逸枝 has included Nakagawa’s thesis in her *History of Women* 女性の歴史 to evince a long tradition and convention of women’s degradation in Japanese society, revealing not only by her intellectual curiosity but the empathy and sense of mission. With Nakagawa, Takamure suggests that for centuries, many Japanese women had little time to think of philosophical, social and political issues such as their conditions and positions as women.

The Indian critic Susie Tharu also acknowledges in her compiled and inclusive work *Women Writing in India* that many women were historically not

necessarily concerned with so-called gender issues (34). In contrast to the island country of Japan, India is one of the world's oldest civilizations and includes diverse multitudes. Tharu's work contains Indian women's works from antiquity, crossing the differences of language, ethnicity, class (caste) and religion.

According to Tharu, Indian women are more concerned with their immediate issues, such as their family members, marital and social relations. Only a limited number of them seem to have questioned the philosophical issue of who they were.

This might have been the same in the case of ancient China. East Asian scholarship shares ancient Chinese literature in which much fewer women than men are represented. Shikibu and her contemporary noblewomen almost accidentally achieved a rare accomplishment as the builders of a national literature.

This thesis will largely concentrate on the privileged women intellectuals and writers in India, China and Heian Japan capable of expressing their attitudes toward the three obediences with the pen (or the ink brush in East Asia).

Unfortunately, it should be acknowledged that the majority of Heian women, as well as Indian and Chinese women, will be written out, even though they existed, because of the scarceness of their records. Although the majority of Asian women in the past will be absent, it is important to keep in mind the differences among women in class, ethnicity, and the range of time, all of which complicate their lives.

Unlike the farmer's wife in the middle of the 20th century, Shikibu at least had the time to think critically of a male-centered mode of her society. Shigematu

Nobuhiro 重松信弘 is one of the *Genji* critics who comment on Shikibu's criticism of her contemporary society:

Women's condition during the Heian period (794-1192) was not much worse than before and later. In fact, noblewomen were more dignified during the Heian period than later periods. Even so, why do heroines in the *Genji* feel incensed by their [relatively better but] unfair condition? Heian noblewomen were actually aware [of their gender discrimination]. They were educated, cultured and artistic as much as men. Actually, talented women exceeded mediocre men in poetry, fiction, journals and essays. Even heroines in the *Genji* demonstrate their supreme characters... Heian women's foremost literature cumulated in Shikibu's depiction of her own gender. (19)

Shigematu correctly points out that Shikibu and her contemporary literary women had high education, more than those in later periods. Still, we need to add the sober historical facts of women in the ruling class. After the patriarchal mores were established by the domestic determination and the aid of the two imported ideologies, Confucianism and Buddhism, Heian noblewomen lost the religious and political prominence that ancient women had possessed. During the Heian period (794-1192), there were no longer supreme Shintō priestesses or empresses in their own rights. Even only a limited number of noblewomen were probably highly educated and thrived in literature. Although education helped Heian noblewomen achieve literary fame, all of them still lived under the social censure

of the three obediences buttressed as the Confucian and Buddhist codes of femininity.

Tanaka Tokusada 田中徳定 offers a recent study of Confucianism in the *Genji* in 2001, arguing that Confucianism had more influence over Heian aristocracy than previous scholars have believed. Interestingly, he points out that the study of Confucianism in the modern scholarship of Heian literature has not been much discussed since the publication of *The Study of [Japanese] Citizens' Ideology in Literature* 文学に現れたる国民の思想 written by Tuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 (1873-1961). An influential historian and scholar of East Asian philosophy, Tuda boldly criticized the *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書記, which had been once regarded as an almost sacred record of the imperial family, for its occasional inaccuracies. (In fact, an erudite Shikibu already is critical of the *Chronicles of Japan* through *Genji* in her work.) On the one hand, Tuda did contribute to the liberal exegesis of Japanese history in academia. On the other hand, his criticism of Confucianism and Buddhism has once dissuaded modern historians and literary scholars from pursuing these two imported ideologies embedded in Heian manuscripts. Moreover, because Heian literature has been hailed as a collection of the first authentic Japanese works, modern Japanese scholars have tended to overlook the historical fact that ancient Chinese culture was the ultimate root of their own. Moreover, possibly overshadowed by the remnants of nationalism before WWII, modern Japanese scholarship of the *Genji* has paid more attention to the indigenous religion Shintō. Now is the high time to recognize that Confucianism and Buddhism came from China to Japan more than

four hundred years before Shikibu's time and dominated her society as the religious and moral guidances in Heian noble society. In fact, pre-modern *Genji* commentaries kept taking Buddhism and Confucianism as their own adopted ideologies, but left out the author Shikibu's tone of voice that this thesis tries to salvage and illuminate. Shikibu has a complex point of view toward Confucianism and Buddhism seemingly so distinct in her society.

Tanaka points out filial piety (*kō* in Japanese) 孝 and the three obediences 三従 as examples of Confucianism depicted in the *Genji*. Our hero is not particularly a filial son, having betrayed his father Emperor with his consort and the stepmother Fujitubo 藤壺, but his illegitimate son Emperor Reizei 冷泉 is terrified to learn the secret of his birth and finds it unbearable to treat his biological father as his subject. As Tanaka says, Reizei interprets his lack of respect for his own father as the confirmation of the Buddhist belief that he might be punished in hell. Reizei's sense of morality can be a sufficient example to prove that the fusion of Confucianism and Buddhism had already taken place in Heian society. Genji nevertheless firmly rejects Reizei's offer of the throne and manages to maintain the secrecy of his past illicit affair but is avenged by nature when his nephew Kashiwagi 柏木 and his youngest wife, the Third Princess 女三の宮 cuckold him. Like his son, Genji interprets the betrayal of the young illicit couple with the Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect, *ingaōho* 因果応報, as the consequence of himself having violated the Confucian cardinal moral code of filial piety. Yet Genji conveniently comforts himself that the couple has reduced his possible torment after death. The Buddhist doctrine of the past, present and

future governs the Heian nobleman's way of viewing life. Shikibu does not make Genji an ideal Confucian or Buddhist, but Himuki Kazuo 日向一雄 calls him the “patriarch 家長” in a Confucian sense, suggesting that Genji reigns over the household and public affairs in Heian noble society (qtd in Tanaka 82-83). If Genji is so, he reflects Shikibu's ambivalence toward Confucianism.

As Tanaka points out, Genji's secondary wife Akashi no Kimi 明石の君 is a perfect embodiment of the three obediences. Her father decides on his daughter's destination at her birth, giving her an unreasonable commandment:

After I die, if you cannot achieve what I have kept telling, and your fate turns different, you should drown yourself in the ocean.

もし我に後れてその志とげず、この思ひおきつる宿世違はば、
海の入りにね。 (Ch. “Young Murasaki 若紫.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 278)

Akashi's father uses *Sukuse*, 宿世, the Buddhist term, to mean good karma or desirable fate in this context. He has the firm agenda of marrying up his daughter and rejects a series of her suitors. As a wealthy provincial governor, he has an ambition to join the highest noble society stringently closed to the middle-rank nobility. His daughter is his only means to achieve his dream and is thus forbidden to exercise her will, and she is fortunately obedient to him. When Genji is in exile close to his region, Akashi's father immediately invites him and pleads to him to wed her so that his family will be upgraded by the connection to the imperial prince. It is a typical Confucian notion that family obligation precedes individual desire, and Heian noblemen would apply it to their own ambitious agenda by using the means of their daughters' matrimony. Tanaka concludes that

Heian noblewomen's matrimony was generally conducted between their fathers and the suitors; if the bridegroom candidate was a minor, the fathers of the son and daughter negotiated their marriage. Genji and his first wife Aoi 葵 are teenagers when their fathers marry them.

Tanaka argues that the *Genji* demonstrates that the three obediences were a well-established norm in Heian noble society. For instance, Tera'uchi Seinosuke 寺内清之助 also thinks that "numerous Genji heroines whom Shikibu depicts as ideal reveal the author's understanding and concern with Confucianism" (qtd in Tanaka 69). On the other hand, neither Tanaka nor Tera'uchi pursues further the author's tone of voice. Shikibu hints at her own qualms about the Confucian virtues, as most of her heroines fulfill their own fathers' desires. Akashi is obliged to pursue the three obediences for her supreme mate when Genji urges her to surrender her young daughter to his favorite wife Murasaki to rear her. The author certainly arouses the reader's sympathy for the scene of Akashi's tearful separation from her child.

The woman writer Ōba Minako 大庭みなこ (1930-2007) is able to detect acutely beneath Shikibu's aesthetics, her heroines' generic melancholic mood:

the heroines who appear in the pages of the *Tale of Genji* stand uncomfortably within the value system of their time. In the way they are narrated, they appear sad, seductive and sometimes humorous, in a blending of the eternal and the changing. None of the depictions of the women in Genji's life strike the reader as a characterization of a happy woman....On the surface Genji seems

to care for these women, but in actuality they suffer constantly from Genji's infidelity; they exist for mere decoration, like pretty flowers, to enhance the prestige of a man of power. (30)

Ōba's use of the words "Genji's infidelity" articulates his women's constant sense of his betrayal, but the idea of man's infidelity did not legally exist in Japanese society until 1947 when the Japanese constitution proclaimed sexual equality.

Still, Ōba's view illuminates what traditional *Genji* scholarship has overlooked, such as the heroines' perspectives on womanhood, their sense of fulfillments and vexations in life, all of which have been overshadowed by their focus on our hero, the Shining Prince. With the Buddhist and Confucian authority of ethics, Heian noblemen and the later generations of rich and powerful men could justify their polygyny and promiscuity. It was Shikibu's sensitivity to recognize the perpetual psychological discrepancy between women and men in her noble society and the women's inferior position which made their protest against their men's indulgent marital status futile, compelling them to resign to their fate. Yet she was still inhibited from explicating her viewpoints, compelling her to camouflage her criticism of men's supreme position over women in literary aesthetics to evade a social attack on intellectual and independent women thinkers like herself. Shikibu used the three obediences as her self-censure.

Shikibu's *Collection of Poetry* is also essential to detect her criticism of the Buddhist version of the three obediences. In her *Collection of Poetry*, Yamamoto Ritatu 山本利達 finds it peculiar that Shikibu lists only one *waka* on Buddhism in contrast to her contemporary women poets, Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部

and Akazome Emon 赤染衛門 (194). Medieval noblewomen wrote many devotional poems about the *Lotus Sutra*, which was the Bible for East Asian Buddhists, but Shikibu did not. In the 13th century, the author of *Mumyōzōshi* already points out in her work that Shikibu's lack of reference to the *Lotus Sutra* is only one flaw of the *Genji* (187). On the other hand, the author also says, "she [Shikibu] is believed to have been a conscientious seeker. Fearing her after-life, she constantly chanted every morning and evening. She seemed to be interested in a spiritual quest" (Higuchi 188). All of Shikibu's works, her *Diary*, the *Collection* of her poetry and the *Genji*, suggest her qualms and ambivalent faith in Buddhism, which is unusual for a medieval noblewoman immersed in Buddhist society. This thesis will further discuss Shikibu's Buddhism complex in the following chapters.

Admittedly, Shikibu does aestheticize the women's "closed and immobile existence," in Morris' terms, to the extent of often almost obscuring its oppressive ambiance and allows numerous readers to enjoy only the pleasingly idealized noble culture. Yet the *Genji* is not an evenly constructed work, suggesting Shikibu's vacillation between assertive and self-effacing attitudes as a woman living under the three obediences and fulfilling all the feminine imperative requirements and etiquette of her culture. That is why her occasional critical responses to the contemporary womanhood tend to be symptomatic. Saigō exerts an insightful analysis in 1955:

The *Genji* presents realistic pictures, which seems to have been rare even in the world of the contemporary time. Yet in contrast to modern novels, characters are typed and the plot uses numerous

coincidences. As a whole, it is undoubtedly not refined yet. Owing to the limit of the time, the author's criticism compromises with the convention and mores and does not transcend them. The *Genji* tries to criticize the promiscuous and nobleman's life through the Shining Prince from a woman's perspective, but cannot help idealizing the womanizing hero as enjoying many women's company. In contrast to a modern writer, the author has not developed individualism and experimental expressions. (123)

Saigō is perceptive in detecting Shikibu's limited criticism but cannot help overlooking her gender status before the advent of women's studies in the 1970s. Are her heroines' hesitant criticism of the three obediences reluctant submission and subtle resistance representative of all Indian, Chinese and other Japanese women? In response to this question, we will explore the voices of Pan-Asian women, even a glimpse of them.

A Brief History of the Tale of Genji

Shikibu wrote the *Genji* during the Heian 平安 period (794-1185) when the minority ruling class, particularly the prominent Fujiwara families, enjoyed a leisurely existence just before they gradually began to lose their prestige in wealth and political power. They followed the tradition of their Chinese neighbors in being adept in music, poetry and calligraphy, as Heian noblewomen were expected to have accomplished all of these. Literature had more social prestige than music in Heian noble society (Shimizu 33). Yet in contrast to poetry, fiction was regarded as entertaining for women, as recored in *Sanpōe* 三宝絵 (984):

[Women's] stories grew like weeds in the forest of Ōaragi 大荒木
and spread like the sand in the seashore of Arisomi 有磯海.”

(Fujioka 11)

Unfortunately, only a few Heian stories, including the *Genji*, have survived to this day. Particularly between the 10th and 11th century, noblewomen actively participated in writing poetry and prose and seem to have circulated them widely in their literary communities. Most probably, as Morris remarks, it was the noblewomen's custom to remain inside the household and so they needed literature to distract from their monotonous lives. The historical apotheosis of Japanese women's literature took place in the imperial court of the 11th century.

The British scholar Rosalind Miles offers an interesting observation of Heian literary women:

A classic example of the way patriarchal rules could sometimes work to the advantage of women, not against them, is provided by the fine tradition of Japanese women's writing. At the Emperor's court only men were permitted to use the scholarly language of Chinese; women were restricted to their own Japanese vernacular, on pain of mockery, disgrace or punishment. The “beautiful irony” of this has not escaped later commentators: “Dozens of women wrote brilliant literature that is still read today, while the men, whose ‘superior’ Chinese produced a stilted and unnatural literature, are read only for historical information.” For it was in her own tongue that Lady Murasaki wrote the world's first novel

and still one of its greatest, *The Tale of Genji*, at the beginning of the eleventh century, a golden age of female creativity in Japan, when education for women was a requirement, not a stigma. (129)

Miles' first sentence, "patriarchal rules could sometimes work to the advantage of women," is an impressive observation. In many cultures, men initiated their national literature, but Heian noblewomen founded the tradition of Japanese literature. This must be a relatively rare accomplishment of women in the world.

Yet Miles' statement is unfortunately based on the secondary sources of 1980 and needs to be partly corrected. The current scholarship of Heian history has begun to find out that some literary women used Chinese characters, and the *Genji* occasionally refers to Chinese classics, and Shikibu tutored Chinese poetry to her mistress Empress Shōshi 中宮彰子. Although Chinese characters are integrated in the existing oldest copies of the *Genji*, it has been the traditional position of Heian scholarship that Heian women's literature as well as the *Genji* were originally written only in the vernacular. This thesis will discuss Heian women's use of Chinese characters in Chapter 2.

Miles' other interesting comment on Heian noblewomen's literature is her comparison of that literature with medieval European nuns' literary and scholarly accomplishments as another example of taking advantage of patriarchal culture. The contemplative convent life in Europe produced a quite a few poets, writers and music composers, such as Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) in the English isles, Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) in Germany and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) in Italy. They were called "brides of Christ" and had to live a secluded life

as well. The moderate or large seclusion of Heian noblewomen and medieval European women might have benefitted their desire for a private realm in which to pursue literature and scholarship, which Miles sees as one example of patriarchal roles working for the advantage of women.

We know nothing about how Shikibu started the *Genji*, but her *Diary* records that she served as a courtier in the literary salon of Empress Shōshi, whose father Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 virtually ruled the country behind his contemporary sovereign and nephew Emperor Ichijyō 一条天皇. Eager to entertain his literary sovereign and produce an imperial heir by the imperial couple, Michinaga recruited renowned women writers and poets, including Shikibu, for Shōshi's gentlewomen. Shikibu's *Diary* indicates that Michinaga funded her composition of the *Genji*, which made a sensational success in the imperial court. He probably chose a gentlewoman with a melodious voice to recite the *Genji* in front of the audience consisting of Empress Shōshi, her spouse Emperor Ichijyō and their entourage. (Emperor Ichijyō, listening to a woman courtier reading the *Genji*, lauds Shikibu's scholarship in her *Diary*). Michinaga's greatest fortune was the births of Shōshi's two sons to prolong his political dominance in the land. The *Genji* thus might have contributed to his pragmatic goal of producing two imperial heirs.

Shikibu, too, gave birth to her beloved hero Genji, who personifies the gentlest yoke of the three obediences. Genji is idealized, according to the criteria of her contemporary women confined to the interior world of the household and

the rear palace. Genji thus lacks traditional masculine realism, as pointed out by Tomikura Tokujirō 富倉徳二郎:

Frankly, Musasaki Shikibu excels in depicting women. It might not be far from a mistake to say that her male characters are not as well drawn as the female. Admittedly this statement needs some additional notes and commentaries. By contrast, her women characters are so authentic that even we [men] can understand. They are not all distinctly remarkable, but we can perceive they have blood and flesh. In short, the Shining Genji is mostly the author's puppet, and so it is difficult to understand him as other than an idealized nobleman.... (58)

Even Heian literature documents that noblemen enjoyed masculine sports such as archery, hunting and horse-riding, but Genji does none of them because noblewomen did not participate in them and knew little of them. He does carry a sword, but brandishes it only once, when the mysterious ghost called the *mononoke* frightens him in the chapter of Yūgao. He likes to write pretty verses, identify the scent of incense and selects suitable robes for his multiple wives. Genji epitomizes the ideal Heian masculine “*politesse*.”

As Tomioka says, Shikibu plays the role of the ventriloquist for her puppet hero, so that she can introduce a gallery of her heroines along with him. The author also consciously censors herself by having Genji speak of politics and Chinese scholarship, which are regarded as unfeminine subjects. Genji's knowledge of Confucianism and Chinese literature representing the supreme

contemporary scholarship is Shikibu's own, which she can openly afford to reveal through male characters so that she will not threaten or arouse the envy and jealousy of the majority of her audience probably comprising her women courtier colleagues. In contrast to another major contemporary woman writer, Sei Shōnagon 清少納言, who likes to demonstrate publicly her Chinese scholarship in her *Pillow Book*, Shikibu's *Diary* suggests her preference of concealing her own. Saigō comments on Sei Shōnagon's "deceptive" persona of flaunting her knowledge of Chinese literature that she learned from her own "never-do-well" father, who played a clown in the court and left the poetry lamenting his lack of fortune (155). In her *Pillow-Book*, Sei Shōnagon does sympathize with marginalized middle-rank men from the glorious courtly society, like her father. She might have hidden her interior sadness with her cheery demeanor. If so, Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon, seemingly contrary in expressing themselves, cultivated strategies to protect their inner selves from the contempt for insignificant middle-rank women in their high society.

Shikibu describes a young teenaged Prince Genji with a famous and often quoted line as follows:

The Shining Genji, what a brilliant name! Yet he seems to have already incited many accusations to dim his nickname. Although he carefully guards his secrets so that they will not be used against even his posthumous reputation, how merciless his public reputation is now. (Ch. *The Bloom Tree* 帚木. *The Genji* Vol.1.

129)

In the Japanese text, “the Shining Genji 光源氏” is immediately followed by the verb “to dim 消つ,” as if the narrator is teasing the gullible reader. It is the narrator’s implication that Genji’s sexual adventures have been well known in public. This has been often interpreted as the celebration of his glorious conquest of women in the permissive Heian culture. Yet the narrator is also ironical, possibly alluding to the impunity of the imperial prince to possible protests against his clandestine affairs.

The woman writer Shikibu did create the most pleasant seducer of her sex. Genji’s good looks, imperial dignity and gentle language most probably appealed to the romantic imagination of her audience, particularly women as their perfect lover they wished to meet. Shikibu understands her audience very well. However, her aesthetics and elegant diction are used to distract from any possible criticism. Genji’s noble pedigree and seemingly super-heroic character attracted generations of readers and might have created a sort of Genji complex within them, leading later generations of *Genji* critics to understate carefully his occasional clandestine and callous behavior.

As the translators of the *Genji*, Edward Seidensticker and Enchi Fumiko 円地文子,¹³ note, the author inevitably diminishes Genji’s sexual appeal in his 30s.¹⁴ Shikibu’s realism increases throughout her work. Perhaps Shikibu means that a man cannot always rely on good looks and charms to attract women. Genji’s eventual despair over the death of his favorite wife Murasaki manifests

¹³Their conversation took place when Seidensticker was translating the English version of the *Genji*, and Enchi had already published her contemporary Japanese translation of the *Genji*.

¹⁴Takeda Munetoshi 武田宗俊 already commented that Shikibu later felt dissatisfied with idealizing Genji and later altered to depict him realistically (qtd. in Saigō 1955, 207).

the author's subtle criticism of a Heian high-born man dominating women with wealth and power but lacking insight.

Admittedly, Shikibu's depiction can be read as circuitous, and her voice is quiet. On the one hand, this flexibility of the text suggests how she survived as a woman with outstanding scholarship and relatively modest social status as a woman courtier in Heian noble society. On the other hand, the *Genji* has generated a wide spectrum of readings and accommodated a variety of agendas and ideologies in previous scholarship. The thousand-year historical attitude toward the *Genji* has never been monolithic and it still is not now. Let us see how the *Genji* progressed through the historical controversy of its criticism.

Shikibu's literary patron, Michinaga's granddaughter Minamoto no Reishi 源麗子 (1040-1114), is the first known copyist of the complete set of the *Genji* for her family descendants, as documented in her poem:

I have now completed copying the *Tale of Genji*, waiting to have the colophon attached to it; even though I feel that my project might be as ephemeral as a bird's footprints, may my descendants appreciate my efforts.

源氏の物語を書きて奥に書き付けられて待ちぬはかもなき鳥
の跡とは思ふともわがすえずえは哀れとを身よ。

(*The New Imperial Collection of Poetry* 新勅撰和歌集, Vol. 7, 雅
II. 1119)

As a decorous Heian high-born woman, Reishi had to sing “modestly,” but her sense of accomplishment is evident in her poem. When the *Genji* was a popular

and widely read work in Shikibu's lifetime, it was not surprising that a noblewoman possessed a complete copy. The author of *Sanashina Diary* recalls her delight in receiving the whole set of the *Genji* as a gift (Fujioka 302). Yet during the Heian period, numerous women's stories were read and discarded because they were regarded as worthless. Unlike other women's works, the *Genji* was already recognized by the contemporary nobility, including Reishi, as worth preserving, and several early copies are believed to have been preserved as a family asset. In the historically important *Genji* commentary *Kakaisho* 河海抄, composed between 1362 and 1367, Reishi's version is acknowledged as one of the *Genji* texts borrowed as reference. The owner of Reishi's *Genji* text was her 10th descendant. Her project proves her intellectual initiative of recognizing the literary worth of the *Genji*. If so, Reishi's poem and project should name her as one of the early *Genji* critics.¹⁵

All other known annotated *Genji* manuscripts have been preserved through the extensive efforts of male scholars for the past thousand years. This indicates the historical fact of the drastic decline in women's position. The *Genji* even led the nobleman poet, Fujiwara no Toshinari 藤原俊成 (1114-1204), to declare, "Shame on the poet reciting his work without having read the *Genji*" (qtd in Matsui 松井 159). Unfortunately, later generations of women produced no such work as the *Genji*. Yet *Mumyōshi* is a rare commentary on the *Genji* written by a woman from the 13th century. Its authorship has been attributed to Toshinari's daughter, who became a courtier and later a Buddhist nun. This is a plausible

¹⁵ Most later *Genji* scholars used the copy version of Fujiwara no Teika (or Sadaie) 藤原定家 (1162-1241). The original manuscript(s) of Teika's copy is unknown.

hypothesis since the author celebrates Shikibu's literary genius: "I think that she attained unusual 'karma' to produce the *Genji*" (188). As she claims that she read Shikibu's *Diary*, she shows an intimate understanding of the author. As previously said, she questions why Shikibu did not refer to the most popular Buddhist text, the *Lotus Sutra*, in the *Genji* (Higuchi 187).

For our subject matter of women's response to the three obediences, the most intriguing is the protest of the *Mumyōshi* against the literary bias against women in society:

The woman has no authority to judge and choose poems [for the compiled collections commissioned by the imperial government...].

The ancients have not left too many great poems yet. Let alone women's poems. Had a woman written an awkwardly phrased poem, she could have never been chosen in the poetry collections. It is rare for women to be recorded. (Higuchi 263-264)

Implicitly mocking some male poets' "awkwardly phrased" poems selected for the past imperial collections, the author is not blind to the gender discrimination among the male editors in court and manages to articulate it. To counteract the masculine dominant culture, as Matsui Kenji 松井健児 points out, the author hails Shikibu's *Genji* and her contemporary literary woman Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* as products of the "woman's talent called *on'na no shiwaza* 女のしわざ" (Matsui 松井 164). Shikibu used her "woman's talent" to overcome the contemporary pressure of the three obediences and left us the *Genji*.

The *Genji* became a hallmark of Japanese classics. Yet numerous Buddhists and Confucians remained hostile toward the *Genji* as a woman's fabricated "crazy story, *kyogen* 狂言,"¹⁶ and they were also indignant at her depiction of "sexuality and eroticism 好色" (Koyano 4). Around the 12th century, a Buddhist legend was born that Shikibu was damned in hell. After the stoic and authoritative Neo-Confucianism 新儒学 dominated Japanese scholarship around the 16th century, it generated numerous didactic approaches toward the *Genji*, many of them not surprisingly being critical. The champion of the three obediences, Kaibara Ekken 貝原益軒 (1630-1714), cautiously stated, "the *Tales of Ise* and the *Tale of Genji* are elegantly written works but must not be exposed to young women" (qtd in Kotani 6). Ekken could not reconcile his literary admiration for the *Genji* with his Neo-Confucianism. On the other hand, Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山¹⁷ (1619-1691) expressed in his *Commentary on the Genji* 源氏外伝 his wholehearted joy of reading Shikibu's work. As previously mentioned, a prominent *Genji* scholar, Banzan was quick to identify the three obediences in Murasaki's grand-uncle the Buddhist monk's speech, approvingly commenting on her depiction of the three obediences in the text, "Indeed, a woman should have the heart of the three obediences" (77). He did not detect Shikibu's mockery and irony in her elegant language.

¹⁶ Christina Laffin disagrees with this interpretation, seeming to take it as a medieval genre of comical play. *Kyogen* 狂言 literally means *a crazy word*. Its meaning has a broad spectrum, such as comical, untrue and even crazy. *Kyogen* can be dismissively used as not serious. In the context of criticizing the *Genji*, I interpreted *kyogen* as a hyperbolic statement (the *Kōjien Dictionary of Japanese* 広辞苑, ed. Sinmura Izuru 新村出 616).

¹⁷ Kumazawa Banzan belonged to another school of Confucianism, *Yomeigaku* (Japanese pronunciation) 陽明学, and remained critical of Neo-Confucianism.

The Neo-Confucian Ise Sadatake 伊勢貞丈 (1717-1784) is known for the most blatant attack on the *Genji* in his *Monologue about the Genji* 源氏ひとりごち. In fact, as Hara Toyozō 原豊二 says, Sadatake's work exposes "his love-and-hate 愛憎 relations" with the woman's work (315). Sadatake condemned the *Genji* for using "feminine expressions 女詞" but suspected that "her father might have written it" (qtd. in Koyano 7). On the other hand, he praised "the literary style, poetry and depiction of human psychology" of the *Genji* (qtd. in Hara 313). Clearly, the *Genji* upset his firm belief that women should not surpass men in literature and scholarship. The same can be said of Ekken. The *Genji* was their dire challenge from a woman in the past. These Neo-Confucians' ambivalent attitudes toward the *Genji* themselves reveal the loss of women's intellectual credibility in their time.

Those Confucians' opposite is the nationalist scholar Moto'ori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801), who made Shikibu the founder of Japanese aesthetics, particularly with his renowned phrase, "the pathos of sorrow called *mono no aware* もののあわれ." Norinaga's theory of pathos of sorrow became the mainstream of *Genji* criticism and appealed to the collective Japanese nostalgia of idealizing Heian noble culture as their glorious past filled with what was beyond mundane experience. This glamorous picture of the past nevertheless ironically shut out Shikibu's voice as a woman critic of her time.

The age of modernity began in Japan in 1868 with the abolition of the three-hundred-year isolation policy, and the fear of the West led the public to revive the reverence for the emperor as their champion to protect their nationhood.

In this political ambiance, Genji's illicit relation with Empress Fujitubo was severely criticized as an insult to the imperial family. On the other hand, the *Genji* still was widely read and inspired an ambivalent admiration. When the early modern prominent scholar of Japanese classics, Fujioka Sakutarō 藤岡作太郎 (1870-1910), proclaimed that "the *Genji* presents a woman's world view," this was not an obvious statement, but his personality and fame contributed to the restoration of Shikibu's voice to some extent (qtd. in Koyano 11).¹⁸ Shikibu's critical view had been noted, as argued by numerous critics that the *Genji* was a protest against her contemporary politics. Fujioka nevertheless contended that, as a woman, Shikibu was shut out of politics. From the perspective of this study, despite the pronounced doctrine of the three obediences in their society, Heian noblewomen like the mothers and wives of the sovereigns, such as Empress Anshi 安子 and the Mother of the Nation Senshi 栓子 did wield their political influence, as recorded in their contemporary literary works, the *Tale of Fortune* and *Ōkagami*. We will later discuss the woman's behind-the-scene power further. The dynamics of sexual-gender relations in Heian noble society depicted in the *Genji* are complex and were overlooked by both Fujioka and his literary opponents. Yet it was a taboo to criticize the Heian noble culture representing the past glory of the imperial family before WWII, particularly during the height of militarism upholding the emperor's authority (Imai 282).

After WWII, *Genji* scholarship has been still slow to acknowledge Shikibu's critique of masculine superiority. The gradual interest in questioning

¹⁸ Also see *Kokubungakuzenshi: Heiancho-hen* 国文学全史 平安朝篇. Tokyo: Tokyo Kaiseikan, 1905.

her heroines' attitude toward men has been increasing for the last decades, as exemplified in the discussion of the *Genji* texts between the two experts, Ōno Shin 大野晋 and Maruyama Saichi 丸山才一 in 1989. Their discussion presents an interesting contrast in the two men's insights. Ōno amazed Maruyama with his statement that Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* helped him to understand why Shikibu's heroine Ōigimi 大君 rejects her gentle admirer Kaoru 薫. Ōigimi is one of Shikibu's heroines whose rejection of marriage has puzzled numerous male critics including Maruyama. Ōno explained to Maruyama Beauvoir's view that marriage has been structured by men, and Ōigimi fears the masculine dominance in marriage (262). Ōno's "discovery" suggests that, as Imai says, Shikibu had a unique view of womanhood for a Heian noblewoman, which has not been detected in the traditional *Genji* scholarship. The engaging heroine Ōigimi will not be examined in this study. Yet this thesis will also argue with Ōno that Shikibu suggests the inevitable psychological discrepancy between women and men in the view of polygynous relations. In a highly gender-class stratified society like Shikibu's, women had to adjust to their view of their men positioned as supreme. That is why her quiet criticism has kept puzzling many readers up to now.

Like Ōikimi, most of Shikibu's heroines are not vocal enough from our current perspective, but the first Anglophone reviewer of the *Genji*, Virginia Woolf, already detected women's ambiguous silence in the first English translation completed by Arthur Waley in 1925:

Relieved from the violent pressure of these two forces, life expressed itself chiefly in the intricacies of behavior, in what men said and what women did not quiet say, in poems that break the surface of silence with silver fins, in dance and painting, and in that love of the wildness of nature, which only comes people feel themselves perfectly secure. (266)

After the First World War, Woolf did not feel “perfectly secure,” sounding as if she was even envious of the peaceful fictional world of the *Genji*. Yet she sensed the subtle oppressive mood dominating the graceful surface of the courtly culture. Most important for us in the context of the three obediences is her statement, “what women did not quiet say, in poems that break the surface of silence.” Woolf acutely noted that *Genji* heroines do not explicate their sentiments in speech but elaborate them aesthetically in poems. Poetry was a Heian woman’s most effective means to express her innermost feelings, and it should not be surprising that Shikibu’s heroines are much better poets than *Genji*.

The Masculine Sexuality over the Woman’s Chastity

The word for *rape* is both Chinese and Japanese, comprising two Chinese characters, *force* 強 and *evil* 姦, as 強姦, which is pronounced as *gōkan* in Japanese and *giangjian* in Chinese. *Gōkan* is still current as well as ancient, as used in the *Chronicles of the Sui [Empire]: 81:43 on Eastern Barbarians [the Japanese Islander]* 隨書卷八十一列傳第四十六東夷 compiled in 636 ACE:

The death penalty is usually applied to murder, rape and robbery.

其俗殺人強姦及窃盜死。¹⁹

The ancient Japanese recognized forcible sex as a grave crime, but there must have been differences in treating the crime of the ruling class and the multitudes.

The erudite Shikibu certainly knows the word *gōkan* but never uses such a crude word in her decorous work; still, she suggests that a nobleman in her society can become a sexual aggressor in numerous passages which have been debated in *Genji* scholarship. Since one of her most controversial passages is Genji's encounter with Utusemi 空蟬, let us read it together here. Having heard of middle-rank women's attraction from other men at a rainy night discussion, the imperial prince invites himself into the residence of the provincial governor to spend a night there while the master of the household is absent. He sneaks into the wife's bedchamber (feeling a little guilty about what he is doing²⁰), takes out the cloth covering her body, and introduce himself to the amazed woman Utusemi:

“You called me, Chujō 中将, I feel my love and admiration for you are reciprocated.” [Utusemi is looking for her maid named Chujō, which is also Genji's current rank as a middle-rank captain. He means to be comical but Utusemi is in no mood for being entertained by the sudden intruder....] Utusemi is at a loss with fright when the stranger already gets close to her, his clothes

¹⁹ The *Chronicles of Japan* documents that the imperial government frequently sent envoys to the Sui Empire (581-618), and Chinese information on the contemporary Japan is thus usually credited by both Chinese and Japanese historians.

²⁰ Abe Akio's version is that Utusemi feels bothered, whereas Shimizu Yoshiko thinks that this phrase is Genji's bothered conscience (The “Bloom Tree 帚木.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 87). Shimizu's reading seems contextually more sensible than Abe's and is applied here. This is one example of how different *Genji* experts provide different readings of the text. Shimizu Yoshiko's version of the *Genji* is listed under her name in Works Cited.

[soaked with incense fragrance] covering her face. She feels as if she is having a dream. “You might think I am doing this out on a whim. Please understand I came here to tell you that I have been smitten with you,” Genji says so gently that he can even charm the demon. Utusemi cannot rudely scream [recognizing he is Prince Genji, her social superior], nor make noises. Although feeling helpless and demoralized, she can only say with a faltering voice, “You caught the wrong person.”[...]. Genji responds, “I am not mistaken, having followed my heart to meet you. I am sorry you do not trust me. I will not do anything improper. I just want to tell you I have been in love with you.” He lifts her light body and leaves her chamber. (Ch. The “Bloom Tree 帯木.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 175-176)

Clearly bound by the two hierarchical bondages of gender and class, Utusemi cannot afford to resist Genji. He is a man and the imperial prince is much higher than the middle-rank woman in social rank. She soon admonishes him, “Your station and mine are different,” meaning that they should not cross the class boundaries by sexual involvement (177).

A typical Confucian, Ise Sadatake 伊勢貞丈(1717-1784), would agree with Utusemi, fuming at Genji: “he violates the relation between a master and subject by raping a wife of his subject, the provincial governor (the husband of Utusemi 空蟬)” (qtd. in Hara Tomiji 原富二 313). Ise does take consideration of Utusemi’s reluctant attitudes toward Genji’s passion; otherwise, he would have

called her “adulteress.” Even so, Ise applies the Confucian doctrine of the three obediences to define rape in that, because Utusemi belongs to her husband, his guardian authority is violated by their social superior Genji. As indicated by his criticism of Genji, this traditional Neo-Confucian believes in the mutual respect of the master and subject. Yet as discussed in the previous pages, Sadatake finds the woman author problematic: “Murasaki Shikibu has such a great talent for a woman to write a story but misused and atrophied it.” He is not charmed by Genji’s glorious sexuality. Cleverly understanding that Genji is Shikibu’s creature, Sadatake cannot forgive the woman Shikibu for belittling his own gender.

Does Genji actually seduce or rape the heroines? In response, Royall Tyler cites the novelist and *Genji* critic, Setouchi Harumi: “she scoffs at that [the question]: ‘it was all rape, not seduction’” (2). It might be futile to differentiate seduction and rape. Seduction means the pursuit of sexual relations without sincere affection and thus the mind of a seducer is virtually that of a rapist. On the other hand, Tyler quotes Utusemi’s response to Genji’s sexual aggression afterward: “if they were more nearly equal she would gladly accept him as a lover” (6). Admittedly, she does not see herself as her social superior Genji’s rape victim. Utusemi yearns for a romantic love she has never experienced in her marriage. Utusemi nevertheless differentiates her attraction to the young handsome imperial prince and her firm sense of chastity. To her, virtue is more important than sexual passion, as the Confucian Ise clearly understands. Utusemi manages to escape his second-time attack, surprises Genji and frustrates his sexual pride that he should be much more attractive than her old and socially inferior husband. In Utusemi’s

rejection, Shikibu displays the middle-rank noblewoman's pride and dignity, which she possibly finds to be slighted by a high-born man like Genji. Yet Genji's supreme social position and beauty could easily lead Shikibu's reader to condone his sexual aggression.

Another *Genji* doyen, Abe Akiko 安部秋生, thinks that the sexual mores of Shikibu's time still remain unclear, but also asserts his view that "noble society approved of the individual man's multiple sexual relations in relation to his class, lineage and political power. [...] Yet the excessive masculine sexuality was not necessarily condoned" (182). Abe probably represents the majority of *Genji* scholars who do not think it possible to define sexual crime in a highly stratified Heian noble society, where the ruling class has extensive impunity. Those *Genji* scholars might think Genji goes too far but hesitate to indict the Shining Prince. The phrase "sexual harassment" emerged in the 1970s as women started identifying it with men's unwanted advances.

Norma Field demonstrates an insightful reading of male characters' sexual aggression toward women in the *Genji* with the current notion of woman's sexuality in 1986:

The abduction of Yūgao, the kidnapping of Murasaki, the captivity of Tamakazura in the Rokujōin and in the Uji chapters, the removal of Ukifune to Uji by Kaoru, and all share an informality of arrangement. Words such as "abduction" and "captivity" may have a hyperbolic ring since the victims rarely protest, but that is because they cannot, either from ignorance or

from the knowledge that life offers them no suitable alternatives. A profound passivity characterizes these women at such junctions.

(167)

As she suggests, the *Genji* noblemen have impunity. Genji's rape sounds "hyperbolic." Yet what word can one use instead when Genji ignores the pleading of Utusemi? In her case, "life offers her no suitable alternatives." On the one hand, she wishes she had been single so that she could be his mistress even briefly. On the other hand, Utusemi wants to be a chaste woman but Genji violates her moral value as her gender-class superior.

Imai Gen'e is famous for his thesis of 1990 entitled "[Heian] Women's Writings Begin with Rape." He argues, "rape is the violence inflicted by masculine sexuality on women, and their marriage and illicit affair tend to be initiated by male violence overpowering them" (Kimura Saeko 木村朗子 74). Imai has permitted the use of the word *rape* among *Genji* scholars later to come. In the *Message to Murasaki Shikibu* of 1991, Komashaku Kimi 駒尺喜美 addresses the issue of "Genji's rape" as follows:

Dear Murasaki Shikibu,

You were born one thousand years early. [That is why] your message took one thousand years for a regular reader to comprehend. But don't worry. History has drastically changed, and now is the time to hear your actual voice clearly. A friend of mine wrote a college thesis on your heroine Utusemi, pointing out that she is "raped" by Genji. Male scholars, though timidly, have also

begun to argue that Genji is a rapist. In this society, sexual harassments have been discussed, and people have started taking the woman's perspective seriously. (7)

It is Komashaku's argument that although Genji is the best possible polygynous lover Shikibu can ever imagine, he still is unable to convince her that a woman can live happily by accommodating and adjusting to a rich and powerful man.

According to Kimura Saeko in 1994, Japanese scholars have not delved into this issue seriously. Kimura also reports that Kawazoe Fusae 河添房江 attended a lecture by the US *Genji* expert Norma Field on Komashaku's *Message to Murasaki Shikibu* at the University of Chicago in 1992 and afterward stated "the *Genji* might be interpreted by American readers" as a story of women's oppression or sexual harassment (74). Kimura and Kawazoe might belong to those *Genji* scholars who fear that identifying the Shining Prince's "questionable sexual affairs" will taint the representative work of Japanese literature. Yet in her *Message to Murasaki Shikibu*, Komashaku also understands that the controversial issue of rape in the *Genji* should not degrade its literary value. Her emphasis is that the greatness of the *Genji* lies in Shikibu's candid critique of Heian womanhood. Kimura insists that sexual activities were conducted with protocols in the highly stratified gender-class society of Heian court and would not have discouraged rape (77). In principle, Kimura might be right. The noblemen were expected to have been highly educated with Confucian morality and had sophisticated manners. Yet the Heian imperial court was still a fallible human society which does not negate the possibility that the supreme

position of noblemen sporadically led to unwanted sexual advances toward women courtiers placed below them in class and gender. Had they been harassed by high-born men, they most probably would have remained quiet, knowing that their stations depended upon those men.

The historian Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子 also points out the supremacy of masculine sexuality over the woman's chastity in late medieval Japan after Shikibu's time, citing the parable of Princess Kasuga, who is raped by her brother-in-law and prays to god to forbid the *rough skin* 荒肌. Wakita believes that *the rough skin* means *rape*. If so, the parable shows that medieval women could not sometimes help being raped against their sense of chastity, but they had no appropriate word to define their grievances. Similarly, Shikibu describes the male sexual aggression with no defining words, suggesting that a woman had no recourse in her society. As a woman, Princess Kasuga also finds no solution to deter the male sexual aggression except for a prayer to a divine authority. The *Genji* and the parable of Princess Kasuga imply that women had to depend on men and could not criticize their fallibility openly.

Wakita continues her argument as follows:

Yet it cannot be denied that the medieval mores and idea of sexual love, while condoning polygyny in [both reality] and principle, tended to emphasize the woman's chastity. I believe that the nobility insisted on the value of woman's chastity since the early age. The Heian tendency of polyandry and polygyny [according to the historian Takamura Ituse's hypothesis of the remnant of ancient

matriarchy] has been widely known, but didn't the nobility distinguish sexual flings and the formal wife to have an heir? The unofficial sexual partners were not necessarily prostitutes, but their sexuality and sense of chastity tended to be slighted and dismissed. The difference between formal and informal sexual partners [in the eyes of the nobleman] should be noted. (997)

Importantly, Wakita suggests that Heian noblemen tried to guard their formal wives' chastity so that they would not raise the "cuckold's egg", but the woman's chastity, particularly that of their extramarital partners, did not weigh much to them. This is depicted by Shikibu contrasting Genji's carefree sexual advances toward women and his later outrage at the illicit liaison of his most prestigious wife the Third Princess 女三の宮 with his nephew Kashiwagi 柏木. Ironically, his other wives remain chaste and never devastate him as much as the last and youngest wife.

Sexual Inequality through the Religious Institutions

The voice of God is the voice of man. Religion does not only embody human belief, it embodies the attitudes, the moral and social codes of the human beings who celebrate that religion, of the priests and scribes who give it body and reality. The voice of the lawmaker is more likely to inspire unquestioning obedience if it can thunder out from behind a terrifying mask, or reveal its wishes above. (Figs 41)

Although Eva Figs talks of her Judeo-Christian background, one might suspect that the three obediences were given the same way, by some “divine” voice, in Asia. The construction of traditional femininity in many religious cultures could be amazingly generalized. In Abrahamic religious cultures, the first woman Eve in the *Genesis* has been the most unfortunate model for her “daughters” for leading her mate Adam to disobey god. The sinful first woman haunts classic Euro-American literature. Paul, for example, cites *Genesis* in his “Epistle to Timothy” in the New Testament: “I do not permit women to teach or dictate to the men; they should keep quiet. For Adam was created first, and Eve afterwards; moreover it was not Adam who was deceived, fell into sin” (1 Timothy 2:11-14, ed. by Suggs). Women in the two other Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Islam also share with their Christian sisters the same legacy of Eve and sexual discrimination. The sacred text now seems to have embarrassed religious authorities, as pointed out by the Jewish scholar Rachel Adler’s protest in 1973: “scholars do not discuss female status in terms of Halacha (Jewish law) – at least not with females. Instead, they make lyrical expresses...” (11). Adler articulates her dissatisfaction with the “lyrical expresses” of Jewish women’s traditional condition and position. The Egyptian writer Nawai El Saadawi, who is also internationally recognized for her sensational autobiography, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, describes the gender inequality justified by Islam. In response to the question of Islamic feminism in 1997, she unhesitantly says, “Yes, there is meaning to Islamic feminism (and Christian feminism) if those religions are interpreted in a progressive way so that God means justice, freedom and love and not a text.” El Saadawi alludes to the

presence of Eve in the Old Testament, which is often called the Hebrew Bible, and Koran as a religious stumbling block for Abrahamic women used for the justification of sexual inequality by their religious authorities. Equally, Confucian, Buddhist and Hindu authorities regarded their “texts” as containing messages from heaven. This will be discussed further in Chapter 1. Religion now seems to have lost its moral, legal and social authorities in some cultures, but the “voice of God” remains current in others. It should not be deliberately forgotten that many religions once played an indispensable role in the history of gender and sexual inequality.

In contrast to Eve as the personification of femininity in the Abrahamic religions, South and East Asian women share the terse disciplinary phrase of the three obediences. One might suspect that, in much the same way that Eve was once an archetype of the feminine sinful nature to admonish women in the Abrahamic cultures, the three obediences became the basis of South and East Asian femininity. In other words, both Abrahamic and South and East Asian cultures used to have sophisticated and subtle means to imprison women’s psyche with religious myths and morals.

Recent East Asian women have had an ambivalent relationship with Confucianism as the epitome of their traditional womanhood. Confucianism continually suffered a blatant attack in mainland China from the early 20th century onward as feudalistic and sexually discriminatory. In other Chinese-speaking areas, such as Taiwan 台湾, Hong Kong 香港, Korea and Vietnam, the Confucian teachings of the four virtues and three obediences 四德三從 for women were still

heard in the 1970s. The four virtues 四徳 comprise the feminine personality, appearance, speech and skills 婦徳; 婦容; 婦言; 婦工. In other words, a woman must be placid, clean, soft-spoken and skillful at domestic affairs, such as cooking, sewing and remaining a frugal housewife. The four virtues and three obediences have been an inseparable set of the Chinese code of woman's conduct but do not seem to have been preached as a package in Japan. Yet the oldest collection of Japanese poetry, the *Ten Thousand Leaves* 万葉集, suggests that the Confucian teachings of the four virtues and the three obediences were present in Japan by the 7th-8th century. Yet only the three obediences are listed in the *Genji*. Equally, it seems that only the three obediences have been frequently both promoted by Japanese Confucians and criticized by scholars.

In current Japanese Buddhist scholarship, the historical discrimination of women has been rigorously criticized since the rise of feminism in the 1970s. The Japanese Organization of Buddhist Studies 日本仏教学会 demonstrated in the 1990 Symposium a clear divide between the male scholars' argument that Buddhism was originally an egalitarian religion and the women scholars' contention that Buddhism should take responsibility for past sexual discrimination and promote further efforts to eliminate it. Like Jewish scholar Adler, Japanese women scholars of Buddhism have so far found their male counterparts' responses to their criticism as unsatisfactory and ambiguous. The male Buddhist scholars did acknowledge the past discrimination against women but did not seem to have noticed that their gender-privileged position obscured their perception and sensitivity to those below them. The philosopher Ōgoshi A'iko 大越愛子 and

other scholars of Buddhism have been quick to note the historical women's qualms and the internalized sense of guilt in response to its discriminatory doctrines in, for example, Shikibu and her cotemporary poet Izumi Shikibu's works (Ehara Yumiko 江原由美子 260).

In Japanese Buddhist academia, the three obediences in the *Lotus Sutra* have been claimed as a feature of "Hindunized" Buddhism, but their argument has not been proven sufficiently. As did the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Laws of Manu* has had an ambivalent history. The *Laws of Manu* seems to have been jealously guarded by generations of Hindu gurus for centuries until it was translated in English in the 19th century during the Indian colonial period and widely known as one of the sacred texts of early Hinduism. While the *Laws of Manu* has been denounced by Hindu liberals as privileging high-caste men and severely structuring the rest of the population, it has been vehemently defended by orthodox leaders.

How to Study the Three Obediences

Finally, we will discuss mechanical and pragmatic aspects of this study: the description of the three obediences, the clarification and elaboration of goals; the application of approaches; the texts; the linguistic conventions; and the chapter division.

Before proceeding, we need to look at the ideology of traditional Hinduism and Confucianism briefly to understand the cultural grounds of the three obediences. The Indian scholar K. D. Prithipaul has stated that the traditional Hindu society has pursued "the same in hierarchy," which seems to

prescribe their static view of castes.²¹ Similarly, Confucianism in East Asia has professed the unity of state and family in hierarchy. If so, both Hinduism in India and Confucianism, aided by Buddhism, in East Asia have aimed at the stability of hierarchal class society. In this sense, the authors of the *Laws of Manu*, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Book of Rites* prescribed only the code of woman's conduct in the household with the three obediences, presuming that a woman should be a daughter, wife and mother. Yet this phrase does not reflect the historical reality that her family men, the father, husband and son, were structured in the complex class structure of their own societies. Asian men were subjected to the will of their social superiors, such as their rulers, and male relatives and siblings, and their social obligations would easily alter their women's lives. In other words, the will of a woman's society surpasses the three obediences. Hence the three obediences reflect that these authors overlooked or recognized the impossibility of stabilizing the complex dynamics of class structure sufficiently.

The obedience to their sons in the third command of the three obediences must have obliged numerous Indian, Chinese and Japanese mothers to value their sons more than their daughters. As in other male-dominant cultures, Asian sons had more personal authority and independence than daughters in the past. Yet the three obediences do not seem to have succeeded in governing mothers, as the Asian mother of a son has been most envied for enjoying his filial devotion. Royal mothers in India, China and Japan sometimes wielded their political power behind their heirs apparent and their adult sons rose as sovereigns. Regular Asian mothers

²¹ Dr. Prithipaul's lecture on Buddhism and Hinduism was privately given to me on 20 March 2012. I use my lecture notes in this thesis.

also at times embodied the petty tyranny of the household. Hindu, Confucian and Japanese mothers will be discussed further later on in this thesis. Thus, as a whole, it should be noted that the three obediences are not a perfect term, but a useful strategic means to explore and describe womanhood in South and East Asia.

This study of the three obediences in the *Genji* has three distinctive goals from previous *Genji* scholarship that has not dealt with it sufficiently. First, we will measure and set the geographical and cultural scope of the three obediences for this study with the traditional Hindu scripture, the *Laws of Manu*; the most popular Buddhist text in Asia, the *Lotus Sutra*; and the ancient Confucian text, the *Book of Rites*; and the *Genji* so that we will be able to declare that it is an Asian product. Hence, we will prove that Hindu, Confucian and Buddhist women all shared the three obediences. Secondly, we will examine Indian, Chinese and Japanese literary works in the frame of the three obediences, comparing them together and distinguishing each of them. This will establish the *Genji* as a product of not a homogeneous but a hybrid and heterogeneous culture. Fourth, we will reread the *Genji* in the frame of the three obediences to demonstrate that Shikibu is a critic of her contemporary women's status defined by the two imported ideologies of Buddhism and Confucianism.

The interdisciplinary and comparative approaches are imperative for the study of the three obediences, as its presence encompasses three distinctive cultural and geographical areas, India, China and Japan. By the term "comparative," this study does not mean the mere comparison of the three obediences in these cultures. As a whole, we will explore how the three

obediences evolved in India and China and landed in the text of the *Genji*, and reread the texts of these three cultures in the frame of the three obediences. This study would ultimately like to propose the use of the traditional three obediences in a new critical context, that is, as a conceptual key cultivated in the comparative disciplinary field to reread not only the *Genji* participating in the scope of Asian literature, but to read Asian women's literature in search of the common features of their cultures and histories and their shared experiences.

Given the three distinct cultures and literary sources and their remoteness in geography and time, this initial and experimental study of the three obediences has taken time to look for appropriate approaches to learn from the past scholarship integrating both literature and history. Consequently found are the following three scholars' ideologies built on their rigorous study of the past manuscripts. First of all, the Indian scholars Susie Tharu and K. Lalita propose wise and academic advice to this thesis in their compilation *Women Writing in India*, published in 1991. Their work covers a wide range of Indian women's writings, which is filled with a variety of languages and cultures, in the entire subcontinent from the 6th century BCE to the early 20th century, reminding us that Asia is one of the earliest civilizations enriched with women's literature. Their phrase, "a joyous retrieval of artifacts that signify women's achievements [from the past]" (34), is most illuminating.

Moreover, the two scholars pragmatically demonstrate that they have cultivated multi-cultural and multi-linguistic strategies to accommodate all that is useful for the study of the three obediences placed in the field of comparative

literature. Tharu and Lalita assert that Indian women's scholarship developed independently while compounding Western theories. Since I am dealing with Asian literature and the three obediences embedded in it, this thesis will wholeheartedly follow their approach, not easily co-opting Western theories but compounding them if necessary, along with integrating traditional Asian scholarship and Asian women's newly cultivated literary strategies.

The Western scholars Simone de Beauvoir and Edward Said built their analyses of literature on history, demonstrating effective models for this thesis. Beauvoir's *Second Sex* is the analysis of a broad range of women's history with her famous existentialist premise, "a woman is made by society." As far as historical construction of femininity and traditional womanhood are concerned, her theory is useful to find out whether the three obediences have contributed to shaping an Asian woman into a feminine type. Beauvoir also is a stern critic of the *Genji*, stating "it is not truly universal enough"²² (Moi 305). Shikibu may not be as bold in language as male writers, and the lack of clarity in the *Genji* might have led this invincible mother of modern feminism to downgrade it. Yet her bold picture of Genji and Fujitubo's illicit affair was regarded as a threat to society by generations of Confucians and the early modern imperial government. Her subtlety is also Shikibu's literary option as well as her strength, which helped to preserve the *Genji* throughout the complex history of its criticism.

Beauvoir's theory of constructed femininity negates the possibility of woman's innate essence, exactly opposite to the premise of the three obediences.

²² Beauvoir had read the *Tale of Genji* before she gave a lecture in Japan in 1966 entitled "Women and Creativity" (Moi 305).

Many Asian men and women possibly believed in or complied with the three obediences and promoted them. Even though we perceive in hindsight that the three obediences were structurally implemented in their society, their literature shows that they saw their code of woman's conduct as their individual problematic matter. Heian literary women did not write their issues as of social structure. We should keep in mind that this is one of the differences between modern feminist ideologies and historical Asian women.

Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which has not only opened up the study of postcolonialism but also redefined North American comparative literature, is a useful text with which to approach the three obediences in their literary and historical contexts. *Orientalism* rigorously criticizes the past "Oriental" studies in Western scholarship for demeaning the Orientals. What is useful for this thesis is Said's articulation of the power dynamics between the West and the East that the first has defined and governed the latter as the master of the globe; the prominence of Western values and authority in the world can be translated into those of gender-class relations. His statement, "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, ruling over it," is particularly useful (3). Here, we replace "Orientalism" with the three obediences and "the Orient" with women. In Indian, Chinese and Japanese societies, the three obediences became an Asian "corporate institution", authorizing men to rule women without their knowledge. Moreover, this thesis endorses Said's belief in the individual efforts and influence over the historical operation of Orientalism, and the same process took place in

the dissemination of the three obediences in Asia (23). Anonymous Confucians, Buddhists and Hindu priests and their followers, possibly including numerous women, deliberately participated in campaigning for the three obediences.

This thesis will use and test the hypothesis of the Japanese woman historian (both a female historian and one who focuses on women's history) Takamure Itue 高群逸枝 (1894-1964) that Japan began as a matriarchal culture in the construction and dissemination of the Japanese three obediences. Takamure pioneered the scholarship of Japanese women's history and contributed to finding out the historical decline of women's condition and position. She remarked on the following historical facts: ancient women acted as the priestesses of the indigenous religion and ruled the land; and women had property rights by approximately the 13th century. Secondly, she noted that ancient Japanese couples lived separately as the husband visited his wife. Takamure argued that this form of marital arrangement was a remnant of an ancient matriarchy in Japan under which the woman remained with her parents, raised her children, and inherited the parents' property. This is called duolocal marriage, in which the mother is likely to have more authority than in the husband's household. In the *Genji*, the first wife of our hero, Aoi, maintains a duolocal arrangement, living with her parents and bearing her son there. Unlike Aoi, Genji's favorite wife Murasaki is orphaned and lives with him all her life. Takamure sees in this the transitional period from matriarchy to patriarchy in Heian culture. The Heian marital arrangement will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Takamure's hypothesis of ancient Japanese matriarchy is confronted by the historical paradox that the ruling male and their powerful and wealthy subjects had multiple wives. Polygyny puts women in the disadvantageous position of sharing one man and compelling them to compete for his favor. Takamure points out that Heian noblewomen could divorce their partners more easily than women in the later periods. This is true, but noblewomen still had to choose polygynous mates. Polygyny contradicts her hypothesis of ancient Japanese matriarchy. Yet her argument for Japanese women's declined position has been still credited by many scholars, including Fukuto Sanae 服藤早苗. Hence, we will apply Takamure's theory in focusing on the decline of women's position rather than the ancient matriarchy, which seems to need more sufficient evidence than what she provides.

According to Takamure, the Heian period still maintained matriarchal customs and traditions, but the woman's position continued to be downgraded and remained oppressive until the early 20th century and the arrival of modern liberalism. The absence of a woman's work like the *Genji* in later periods points to the proof of Takamure's theory as a whole. She calls the later period that of "women's humiliation." Chronologically tracing from the pre-Heian period to the Heian in the frame of Takamure's theory, we will see the compromised authority of the supreme Shintō deity, the Sun Goddess, with the arrival of Buddhism and Confucianism and its effect on Shikibu's composition of the *Genji*.

This study follows the textual method of Komashyaku, who brings all Shikibu's works together in her *Message from Murasaki Shikibu: the Genji*; the

Diary of Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部日記 and the *Collection of Murasaki Shikibu's Poetry (Waka)* 紫式部選集. Before Komashaku, Ando Tameakira 安藤為章 (1659-1718) wrote the first major *Genji* commentary by integrating the *Diary of Shikibu* into the *Seven Factors of Murasaki Shikibu [to become the] Author of the Genji* 紫家七論. Tameakira's seven factors are as follows: 1) her father Tametoki's scholarship; 2) Shikibu's natural intelligence; 3) her wide scholarship of Japanese and Chinese; 4) her knowledge of imperial etiquette; 5) the flourishing literature in her time; 6) her knowledge outside the capital through her travelling experience; 7) being the daughter of a middle-rank nobleman (qtd. in Imai, *Biography of Murasaki Shikibu* 279). The current view of Shikibu's literary genius owes much to Tameakira's theory, but as a Confucian he tends to envision her as a chaste widow.

In 1948 Akiyama Ken 秋山虔 also used Shikibu's *Diary* to find the *Genji* author an active critic of her contemporary society (qtd. in Imai, *Biography of Murasaki Shikibu* 283). Yet, as Nanba Hiroshi 南波浩 acknowledges in 2002, the absence of the author has resonated in the mainstream of *Genji* scholarship, meaning that Shikibu's *Diary* has been studied in the genre of women's diary literature but is not often combined with the critical analysis of the *Genji* (2). It is fortunate for the study of the three obediences that Shikibu left her *Diary* and *Collection of Poetry*, which have been preserved up to this day. While Shikibu's *Diary* is now an essential document of a Heian woman courtier's life, it also seems to indicate her determination to preserve her authorship of the *Genji* by recording the most relevant things such as her character Murasaki, the copy

versions of the *Genji* and Emperor Ichijō's praise of her scholarship. Isn't it possible that she came across numerous anonymous ancient Chinese classics, which prompted her to preserve her own authorship, and took a hint of documenting the date and the authorship of her work from her favorite Chinese historian, Sima Qian 司馬遷? Otherwise, biased scholars such as Sadatake would have succeeded in discrediting her authorship of the *Genji* for being too good to be a woman's work.

As for the texts, this thesis will use nearly all the earliest authenticated and the most frequently used texts by Chinese and *Genji* scholars. The most standard version of the *Genji* compiled by the three *Genji* experts, Abe Akio 安部秋生, Akiyama Ken 秋山虔 and Imai Gen'e 今井源衛, and published by Shogakukan is used as reference in the thesis. Another authenticated version of the *Genji* compiled by Ishida Jyoshi 石田穰二 and Shimizu Yoshiko 清水好子 also offers useful commentaries to cite in this thesis. Needless to say, these Chinese and Japanese texts reconstructed as closely as possible to the "originals" are indispensable for textual accuracy. Particularly, the most authenticated version of the *Genji* is a must to decode Shikibu's nuanced courtly prose and poetry and demonstrate her views embedded in her texts. Moreover, it should also be kept in mind that the Heian intellectual woman Shikibu was bilingual in reading Chinese and Japanese.²³ Reading archaic characters in Chinese classics will put one a little

²³ The *Genji* reveals a glimpse of Shikibu's Chinese and Japanese scholarship: nineteen Chinese literary works including (*Bai shi wen ji* in Chinese; *Hakushi monjyu* in Japanese) 白氏文集, (*Shiji* in Chinese; *Shiki* in Japanese) 史記, (*Wen Xuan* in Chinese; *Bunsen* in Japanese) 文選; seven Buddhist sutras including the *Lotus Sutra*; forty-one collections of Japanese poetry; three diaries and tales; the collections of songs such as *wakanrōeishū* 和漢朗詠集, *kagurauta* 神樂歌, *Saibara*

closer to understanding how the *Genji* author read the configuration of each Chinese character consisting of a few components.

There have been three excellent English translations of the *Genji* by Arthur Waley, Edward G. Seidensticker, and Royall Tyler.²⁴ Compared with theirs, my translation of the *Genji* is pointed out as being “often awkward.” Even so, thinking it essential to demonstrate my own reading of Shikibu’s tone of voice, I present my own version. In my translation, accuracy precedes aesthetics.

In this thesis, the closeness of the written Japanese and Chinese and the abundant historical studies of Chinese classics by Japanese scholars facilitates an inter-textual analysis of the two national literatures. Yet Liu Hsiang’s *Exemplary Women* are written in too complex ancient Chinese prose for a regular Sinophone reader. Fortunately, since there have been several versions of the *Exemplary Women* in contemporary Japanese, I will use the most recent translation by the Japanese woman scholar Nakajima Midori 中島みどり.

This study emphasizes the originality of poetry. Hence, some of the Chinese and Japanese poems and phrases thought to be important are listed in both the original languages and English translation to accommodate readers with background in these languages. The English translation of “My Song of Sorrow 自悼賦” is used with slight modifications in Chapter 1. The rest of the English

催馬楽, *Fūzokuuta* 風俗歌; the oldest known Japanese woman’s diary, *Teishiin Utaawase Two* 亭子院歌合 2; two imperial annals including (*The Chronicles of Japan*) *Nihonshoki* 日本書記 (Imai, *Biography of Murasaki Shikibu* 66).

²⁴ In the Japanese language, the degree of formality and gender difference are distinctly expressed with diction and a variety of pronouns. The contemporary Japanese men and women writers translated the medieval *Genji* into their current language, but the latter are more successful than the first partly because the women inherited and still use their feminine language daily, whereas the men had to project themselves on a woman courtier. These male Anglophone translators dealt both with two different languages, English and Japanese, and the gender-coded expression of the latter.

translations of the Chinese and Japanese texts, including the *Genji*, and the French text of Beauvoir's *Second Sex* are mine, and I am responsible for any errors.

In the Asian Sinosphere, the present China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and other East Asian regions, the pronunciation of Chinese characters has evolved differently. This study makes efforts in order to honor *Pinyin*, the currently standardized Chinese pronunciation for the names of people in Chinese classics.

This thesis accommodates not only English readers but also those with Sinophone background with the frequent use of Chinese characters and the following convention. As Chinese and Japanese names are listed in the order of the family name and the given, we will follow this convention. Japanese names are introduced in Romanization, at least for the first time, followed by Chinese characters because Japanese names have numerous homophones, and thus it is sometimes confusing for readers to differentiate them only with the transcribed alphabet. Secondly, Chinese names have one pronunciation in contrast to the Japanese, which are notoriously difficult for even native speakers to guess the pronunciation. Hence, the presentation of Romanized transcription and Chinese characters help Sinophone readers' understanding of the Japanese names. Moreover, the frequency of the Chinese presence in this thesis is meant for the convenience of East Asian readers who find their own characters faster to grasp the content. This effort is meant to be reader-friendly.

As for the Buddhist sources for the three obediences and Indian literature, the ancient text of the *Laws of Manu* and other Indian literature used in this thesis are in English translation. Although I am conscious of the linguistic limitation,

this study is led by my curiosity, imagination and empathy to explore the presence of the three obediences in India and the shared truth about it among the history of Indian, Chinese and Japanese women.

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, “The Past of the Three Obediences in India and China,” will trace back the evolution of Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian versions of the three obediences, womanhood and women’s literature in those nations. Although China later acquired the Buddhist interpretation of the three obediences and exported both the Buddhist and Confucian versions to Japan, we will only examine the evolution of the Confucian version.

Chapter 2, “The Legacy of the Sun Goddess,” will apply Takamure’s theory of the ancient matriarchy in Japan and trace the effect of the three obediences and the woman’s declined position up to the Heian period. We will examine her argument and historical sources, including the cult of the Sun Goddess and the *Genji*, which she uses as evidence of the remnants of Japanese matriarchal culture.

The following chapters 3 and 4 will analyze Shikibu’s two heroines, Rōkujo and Murasaki. Although Shikibu’s view of contemporary womanhood is embedded in all of her heroines, this is not an exhaustive study of them. Rokujō and Murasaki are chosen here because they are Shikibu’s two contrary heroines. If Rokujō represents Shikibu’s rejection of feminine submission, Murasaki is the author’s ambivalent and poignant picture of the perfect femininity in Heian patriarchal society.

In Chapter 3, “Contesting Polygyny,” Rokujō challenges the reader as the most complex and enigmatic *Genji* heroine. She is noted for her jealous passion for Genji and her grudge at his neglect and her convincing him in horror that she has become the invisible spirit called the *mononoke*. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic* can be an appropriate analogy in studying Shikibu’s invention of Rokujō. If Bertha Mason’s violence and madness are a product of the polite and repressive Victorian society, Rokujō’s supposed *mononoke* plays an equivalent role in the elegant and decorous Heian noble culture.

Chapter 4, “The Pathos of the Ideal Feminine,” will examine Rokujō’s antithetical character and the epitome of the three obediences, Murasaki. Shikibu’s narrator celebrates Murasaki as “the most fortunate woman,” but in her rise and fall as the masculine version of the ideal feminine, Shikibu’s disbelief in the woman’s ability to endure the three obediences persists. Chapter 1 will examine and analyze the idea that Murasaki is not an isolated case, and her Indian and Chinese sisters were also bound to the three obediences and how differently and similarly these women beyond the Japanese islands coped with the code of woman’s conduct.

Chapter 1

The Past of the Three Obediences 三従 in India and China

Because our mistress is like this, her life is not happy. Why does she read Chinese? In the old days when a woman read a Buddhist sutra, people frowned at her.

(Fujioka Tadaharu, ed. *The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu* 紫式部日記 140)

Shikibu's maids' unexamined allusion is that had she not been educated, she would not have been a widow. Those maids thus participated in forming the stereotypical idea based on the masculine censure of women's scholarship as an invasion of the male occupation. The proverb of the three obediences circulating in their society would certainly uphold her maids. Shikibu is obviously exasperated by their superstition and gossip behind her back when reading her deceased husband's (or her father's) books. Yet to our surprise, the author of the *Genji* cannot help admitting that they are right. As a woman "professional writer," Shikibu might have inspired the respect and admiration of a large part of her audience in the imperial court but also remained distressed by other courtiers' jealousy and envy. Moreover, her maids let her know that she is not a regular woman, and she inevitably invites both suspicion and jealousy of women and men.

The implication of her reluctant acquiescence and acknowledgement suggest both her sense of isolation and the longing for a more extensive acceptance in her society and the anxiety over her rejection of the social expectation of what a woman should do. Although the implicit author of the *Genji*

presents herself as a composed and ironic critic of her society, her *Diary* demonstrates that social convention constantly confronted and often led the actual author to feel marginalized in her contemporary culture.

Shikibu's description of her maids' gossip unwittingly gives us the very important information that she read Chinese like a regular nobleman. By Shikibu's time, Japanese nobility had been already using their more culturally advanced neighbor's written language, Chinese, as their own for more than 400 years. They were also Buddhist devotees and embraced the *Lotus Sutra* as their essential spiritual and moral references, even though they knew little about India. Shikibu must have known that the three obediences 三従 are listed in the Confucian text, the *Book of Rites* 礼記, and Buddhist scriptures including the *Lotus Sutra* 法華經.

The *Genji* hints at Shikibu's quiet distrust and rebellion against what she found in the Confucian and Buddhist texts. She ridicules Genji's son Yūgiri's Confucian examiners as austere and obtuse to their social ambiances, and she is not impressed by Murasaki's grand-uncle the Buddhist priest's automatic affirmation of the three obediences. Prince Kaoru is a gentle son with the presumption that his mother, the Third Princess, can never achieve her salvation because she is a woman inheriting the Buddhist five obstacles. Being conscious of male supremacy and the religious authority of Buddhism in her society, she tries to minimize her criticism as much as possible, possibly taking the position that, when one cannot say nice things about it, it is better to say nothing. Hence, her occasional reference to Buddhist theology tends to remain conventional and even

gloomy. Shikibu's implicit quarrels with the three obediences in both Buddhist sutras and Confucian texts are the inspiration for this chapter. In the following pages, we will explore the three obediences in the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Laws of Manu*, and the *Book of Rites*.

It is not surprising that the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Laws of Manu* demonstrate that the two Indian indigenous religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, inherited the three obediences from their predecessor religion, the ancient Brahmanism in the same subcontinent. What confronts us is the question: Why do the Chinese text, the *Book of Rites*, and the two Indian texts have the same prescription of the three obediences? The two ancient civilizations were distanced from each other, and they do not seem to have had contact during the time when each nation formulated its own set of the three obediences. This mystery cannot be solved now. Buddha and Confucius seem to have been almost contemporary figures in the 5th century BCE. Buddhism probably entered the Confucian society around the 1st century ACE.

The *Lotus Sutra* is a representative East Asian Buddhist text, but as previously said, very little is known about its origin and its original Indian language.²⁵ Secondly, when and how the *Lotus Sutra* arrived in China is unknown. Did it cross a vast Central Asian continent or the ocean? After the central Asian monk Kumarajiva completed the second known Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sutra* in 406 CE, this version was disseminated throughout the rest of East Asia. As the most powerful leader of East Asian civilization, ancient China triumphed

²⁵ It seems that the original *Lotus Sutra* had been written before Sanskrit achieved its linguistic prominence in ancient India. Hence, the original Indian version might have been written in some other indigenous language.

in exporting Confucianism and the naturalized Buddhism to its neighboring countries including Japan. Ancient China developed the theory of three teachings of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, 三教: 儒教; 道教; 仏教, all of which adopted and influenced and each other. The Japanese government consciously promoted Confucianism for their political paradigms and Buddhism for its perceived magical protection of the nation, and Taoism is known to have been already embedded into the two teachings in Japan.

Admittedly, it is daunting to do justice to this complex subject. One apparent disadvantage is the peculiar scarcity of Indian historical documents.²⁶ The pioneer of Indian historiography, D. D. Kosambi, frankly states this as follows: “India has virtually no historical records worth the name. Chinese imperial annals, country records, the work of early historians like Ssu-ma Chien [Sima Qian 司馬遷] in inscription on graves and oracle-bones enable the history of China to be traced with some certainty from about 1400 BCE... What little is left is so nebulous that virtually no dates can be determined for any Indian personality till the Muslim period [which started in around the 7th century]. It is very difficult to say over how much territory a great king actually ruled. There are no court annals in existence... Similarly for great names in Indian literature. The work survived, but the author’s date is rarely known” (9-10). The current Indian historian Romila Thapar also acknowledges the struggle to recapture the past of India through inscriptions, coins, buildings, literature, and documents

²⁶ This thesis has aimed at finding Indian Buddhist and Hindu women writers and their cultural affinity in research.

Not many Buddhist women’s works have been found, though there are women characters in Buddhist sutras, which were already translated and possibly “naturalized” in Chinese.

written by foreigners, such as Greco-Romans, Chinese and Arabs, pointing to the impossible division among archeology, anthropology and history in scholarship (xxi-xxii). Owing to our meager knowledge of early Indian history, we must acknowledge that it is impossible to trace back the evolution of the three obediences in the *Law of Manu*, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Book of Rites* in a clear chronological sequence.

The Chinese annals are certainly rich with ancient heroes but not heroines. Sima Qian has been probably not only the founder of Chinese but also East Asian historical scholarship, as noted for his literary influence in the *Genji*. Yet since ancient literature generally catered to the interest of male rulers to inscribe their presence, its descriptions of women are severely limited. As women's literature in most cultures has often been accidentally preserved, we cannot help remaining hypothetical to some extent, which can be corrected in later studies.

Admittedly, the influence of Indian literature on the Japanese is limited to Buddhism and Buddhist-related literature and architecture, in contrast to the continuous historical effect of Chinese literature. This chapter will spend more time on Hindu and Buddhist versions of the three obediences to pursue their connection with Japanese womanhood. Chapter 2 will continue the discussion of Chinese influence on Japanese feminine virtues.

Manu's Daughters

It seems odd that Hindu culture, which is known for its patriarchal hierarchy, accomodates an overwhelmingly great number of goddesses in its religious pantheons. A good example is the hymn *Devi Gita*, meaning the "Song of the

Goddess,”²⁷ in which the deity sings “The sacred law, like Manu’s as well as *Vedic* revelations, is regarded as authoritative” (9.17. Brown 113). The goddess is the guardian of the *Laws of Manu* and the earliest known Indian hymns known as the *Vedas*, the two essential works of the current Hindu literature inherited from the ancient Brahmin culture. Numerous goddesses also became consorts of Hindu gods, upholding the orthodox Brahmin’s agenda of preserving the class-gender hierarchal society.

The *Vedas* were the earliest known Indian literature composed, according to Thapar, around 1500 BCE to 500 CE in Northwestern India. The *Vedic* literature became a popular subject of European Indologists who claimed it as a product of one of the Indian golden ages when women were most honored. The Indian women critics, Thapar and Tharu, in retrospect take a critical stance against them in 1991:

The tendency to essentialize vedic culture and exaggerate its virtues, Romila Thapar writes, was in part a result of the Romantic search for a distant Edenic world, a utopia, “to escape from the bewildering changes taking place in nineteenth century Europe and in part to counteract the highly critical attitudes current among Utilitarian thinkers in Britain from whose ranks came the more influential writing on India.” However kindly the intentions, the effects were hardly benign. (45)

Tharu contends that some Indian scholars, including the Hindu classical scholar A.S. Alterkar, joined this fervor. Thapar downplays *Vedic* literature in her book *The Early India*, and Tharu also starts hers, *Women Writing in India*, with

²⁷ Devi manifests herself as all other goddesses in Hinduism.

Buddhist nuns' songs from 5 BCE. This study presents Alterkar and his critics since no one is currently able to define the *Vedic* period, but it is an indispensable piece to understand the source of the Indian gender-caste system.

Examining the *Vedas*, A. S. Alterkar concludes that the ancient women depicted in them had much better religious and social status than later generations. The women performed religious rites, had freedom to go out and even had the right to remarriage. He and Thapar agree that the *Vedas* were written much later than the actual Vedic period. This means that the *Vedas* were preserved orally for generations, possibly even up to the Post-Vedic period. Alterkar argues that since the *Vedas* were sung in religious rituals and the ritualistic knowledge stood for all knowledge, women's participation in the ritual and their composition of some verses, as indicated through the content, signifies their access to high education. Possibly so, but high education seems to have been limited only to high-caste women.

Alterkar nevertheless acknowledges that the *Vedas* present an ancient patriarchal society, as there is an invocation to god for the birth of a son in *Atharva Vedas*:

The birth of a girl, O Prajapati, grant elsewhere!

Here grant a boy. (qtd in Sharma 67)

The adverse social perception of a daughter's birth and the desperate desire for a son were later religiously justified by the notion of karma. The daughter would become the reincarnation of one who had led an ignoble previous life, whereas the son would ensure the immortality of his father and become the head of the

family.²⁸ Unfortunately, this religious gender inequality seems to have increased and been justified by traditional Hindu and Buddhist doctrines, encouraging the social bias against women as an inferior species.

The *Vedic* society was also already governed by the caste ideology, as demonstrated in the following verse:

But for the sake of the prosperity of the world, he (the Lord)
 caused *the Brâmana* [priest], *the Kshatriya* (warrior), *the Vaisya*
 (wealthy merchant and farmer) and the *Sudra* (slave and servant)
 to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet.
 (The *Reg Veda* Book 10, Hymn 90, verse 12).

The Brahmin's god proclaims his followers who seek to rule the rest of the population and justify the hierarchal stratification as the cosmic order. Although the Brahmin attributes the authorship of the *Vedas* to his god, one cannot help sensing that he has no problem proclaiming his supremacy and placing himself on top of the stratification. In the Brahmin's view, he is the most pure and primary in religious status. He lets the god proclaim his two benefactors of power and money, the warrior caste and the wealthy merchant and land-owner caste, to share the religious privileges. The *Sudra* has no rights but belongs to the three upper castes and was later compared to women. Both the *Sudra* and women are at the mercy of high-caste men.

The ancient priests known as the Brahmins somehow inherited and preserved the *Vedas*, as they were known to have been singing them in the royal

²⁸ The eldest son's traditional birthright is still now signified by his role to light the pyre of the deceased elders in his family (qtd. by Asma Sayed).

courts (Thapar 120-121). It is likely that the warrior ruled the actual land, not the Brahmin, even though the latter insisted on his spiritual superiority in the text. Yet the Brahmin was indispensable to validate the kingship. Using his knowledge to construct this blue-print of hierarchy, the Brahmin offered it to the warrior and the rich to allow his religious authority over them so that they all could monopolize their privileges. Religion, military power and wealth, each constituted the indispensable assets of a ruling society, in which all of the three high castes were placed comfortably. By contrast, the *Sudra*, presumably representing the majority of men, was expected to serve all the three castes above him as either a slave or servant. High-caste women definitely had power over the male *Sudra*. Yet the slave woman had to submit to the slave man because the bottom of each caste was assigned to women.

The content of the *Vedas* indicates that the Brahmin had an uncompromising motive to perpetuate the gender-caste stratification. It is a historically familiar ideology that the rulers deified their ancestry in order to legitimize their political power, as did the *Vedic* Brahmin who developed the ideology of incarnation. The initial stage of the ideology of incarnation is hinted in the depiction of the god Vishnu's capacity for incarnation:

Do not assume this form, since thou didst assume another in battle.

(VII: 100: 6. *Rig Veda*, qtd. in Sharma 58).

Vishnu, the embodiment of the sunlight, is believed to have come to the earth in order to remove all evil. His sanctification has been prevalent in Indian

indigenous religions. The legendary hero Rama is worshipped as the reincarnation of Vishnu and Buddhism also made Vishnu one of its deities.

To justify the hierarchal structure of their society, the Brahmin developed the discriminatory doctrine of karma and rebirth for the masses so that those masses had to accept the idea of “karmic retribution.” The literal meaning of *karma* is *deed* but it can also be interpreted as fate, predestination and the “baggage” from the past. The masses were taught to have been born into their lower castes for their ignoble actions in their previous lives (Bronkhorst 4). The three high-caste men, the Brahmin, warrior and rich men, were supposed to have accomplished good work in their previous lives, and their karmic consequence brought them more privileges than women and the slave and servant. In order to placate women and the lower castes, the Brahmin would preach the tenet of karmic retribution to them, that they should be content in their conditions and positions, be loyal to their masters and husbands with the hope that their fortune would be better in their next lives. Karmic retribution unfailingly works, and so does fate.

Thapar consistently argues in her *Early India* that the presumption of the castes as static, permanent and stagnating is based on the British colonial theory of “Oriental Despotism” (xxiv). In fact, to the foreign rulers, the caste system was a convenient means to govern the Indian natives, and their apathetic and utilitarian attitudes toward it might have increased its rigidity. Thapar does not believe that the early caste system was as stringently structured as it later became, quoting the travelogue of a Greek in the 4th century BCE: “philosophers were most respected

among seven social hierarchal divisions” (62). She does not think that those philosophers were necessarily Brahmins. Thapar seems to argue that ancient people rose and fell from one caste to the other, following their fortunes.

The castes might have been even flexible while the relatively egalitarian Buddhism became a national religion of a few empires from the 3rd century BCE until the last Pala Buddhist dynasty fell in the 12th century. Meanwhile, the *Vedic* Brahmin’s ideology of the four-fold castes survived and began to be written in many religious works, including the *Laws of Manu*. In this sense, the caste system might have been much younger than we believe it to be. Actually, when we later study the *Laws of Manu*, it will be clear that the idea of constructing the castes and that of structuring women were rooted in the generic Brahmin’s intention to establish his supremacy and control the masses. The *Laws of Manu* indicates the correlation between the lowest caste and women as the condemned masses.

Alterkar perceives the change of women’s social and legal status in Hindu society around 1000 ACE, when the illiterate child bride became a prevalent norm (92). The majority of medieval high-caste women were forbidden to study the *Vedas* and lost all other privileges and rights. The social norm of downgrading women presumably trickled down to the lower castes, and as a result the majority of women remained illiterate. In the northern part of medieval India, *purdah*, literally meaning the “veil,” became a metaphor for women’s seclusion. As the topic of *purdah* is important as the essential means of preserving the woman’s chastity in medieval India, we will discuss it later. Medieval women could claim their property right only through their sons and endured the severely ascetic

customs of widowhood: for example, they were prohibited remarriage and had to undergo the ritual of having their head shaved.

Still, we must keep in mind that the *Vedas* and the custom of *pardah* demonstrate a much more patriarchal norm of North India than South India, which is known to maintain numerous matriarchal cultural remnants. This thesis arguably focuses the historical source of Hinduism and Buddhism in North India.

Hindu Womanhood in the Epics²⁹

We can have a glimpse of how individual women lived under the ancient patriarchal code, in the two epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which evolved in *Kshatriya* (warrior) communities. In both epics warfare is the major scene, but here we are more interested in the women characters. Each epic has a totally contrasting type of heroine, the contentious and assertive Draupadi in *Mahabharata* and the submissive and innocent Sita in *Ramayana*. Even so, they focus their lives on their spouses, remain chaste and devoted to them and have an undeserved tragic end in our current review. Along with the notion of karma discussed in *Vedic* literature, also prevalent is the notion of *dharma* in Indian classic literature, which, according to Prithipaul, means the right conduct or path, *michi* 道 in Japanese. In Indian literature, it can mean widely “natural law and wisdom.”

The heroes and heroines in the *Mahabharata* are not as idealized as those in *Ramayana* and are more recognizable as humans. Because *Mahabharata* contains candid stories of people’s struggles for survival in clannish wars, it is

²⁹ The passages from the two epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, are excerpts from several English translations of each thought to be “better” than others.

believed that these events actually took place around Delhi in northwestern India and had been orally preserved for generations before being compiled as an epic. The time of the ancient characters seems to have been distanced even from that of the author (or the plural authors) because he often has them unsuccessfully explain their behavior and morality and end up justifying them with Brahmanical ideologies of *dharma* as the law of nature to make them acceptable (Vaidya 26). This might be due to the fact that when the author recorded the oral narrative, he himself did not understand the significant meaning of the characters' behavior.

The heroine Draupadi's marriage to five husbands probably remains an enigma to the reader even though the epic tries to explain it, but unconvincingly. This extraordinary princess of a certain kingdom falls in love with one of five Pandava brother princes, Arjuna, when he defeats her other suitors as the best archer of the age. When Arjuna reports to his mother, "I have won something very precious," she answers him literally without looking at what he means, "Share it with your brothers" (qtd. in Thomas 130). It is strange that even after the brothers' mother sees Draupadi as a bride for Arjuna and recognizes the error of her words in horror, she cannot alter her error when the oldest son declares, "This is our family custom, and we do not feel we are transgressing the *dharma* in following it" (qtd. in Vaidya 95). Even though Draupadi's father protests against this polyandry, he must recognize that his daughter's fate is already sealed when told by a sage that she was the wife of five celestials who have been reincarnated into the five Pandava princes. Perhaps wife sharing had been an ancient custom, and in this case it is a political expedience to unite the brothers, but by the time the epic was

composed, it was no longer acceptable, compelling the author to use the idea of karma in order to justify this odd conduct of the ancient heroes.

R. P. Sharma refuses to call Draupadi's marriage to the five brothers polyandry because it connotes a woman's free choice, but she is forced into it even though she is partial to Arjuna. When she wonders how she can lead a life with five husbands, Sage Krishna advises her to live with each one for a year. Draupadi is crowned as the consort of the oldest brother and bears five sons for each husband. Although all five Pandava princes agree to share her, two of them bring other wives, whom they do not have to share with other siblings. This again leads one to suspect that the brothers all are in love with her and decide to share her in order to avoid sibling rivalry. Although faithful to all five brothers, Draupadi is heart-broken when Arjuna takes a second wife. No woman envies Draupadi's lonely and strained matrimony.

Yet on one occasion, asked by Krishna's wife about her secret of success in maintaining domestic harmony, Draupadi proudly responds:

Hence, hear my friend, how I control my husbands. Without vanity and egoism, without jealousy and malice, I always serve my husband and my co-wives with devotion and kindness. I never bathe and eat till my husbands have eaten, nor do I take my meals before the servants are fed. When any of my husbands comes home, from the field, forest or the deliberations in the assembly, I hasten to receive him, bring water to bathe his feet, and lead him to the house. (Thomas 154)

This is probably the model answer of a traditional Hindu wife. Actually, Draupadi's conjugal life is worse than that of a polygynist's wife. She not only endures rivalries with her co-wives but also has to repress her partial love for Arjuna in order to maintain her odd relationships with her five husbands.

Draupadi sometimes demonstrates her assertive intelligence when clashing with her oldest husband, the peace-loving king:

I see the noble and the good in distress, and the wicked enjoying the good thing of life. You, my lord, are righteousness personified, and yet are always in misery....God is partial: He favors some with wealth and comfort, others he condemns to sweat and toil without any apparent reason. (Thomas 136)

What is striking is that she dares to speak like a modern cynic, challenging the conventional belief in a benevolent god, who would be a familiar comforting conclusion of most religions. It is not clear whether the authors intentionally made her an independent thinker and critic of contemporary religiosity or recorded her as an unusual heroine in the precedent narrative.

The moment of Draupadi's most public harassment and humiliation takes place when her oldest husband gambles her and loses in a dice game to his cousin Duryodhana. Draupadi is menstruating but is dragged by the hair to a public hall by Duryodhana's brother Duhashasana, and he starts to disrobe her in front of her five husbands who remain helplessly quiet. Fortunately, her loud prayer to the deity is answered as she is re-robed each time a piece of her clothes is torn away. Draupadi later recounts her experience to her family friend Krishna:

They dragged me, the sister of Dhrishtadyumna, the wife of the Pandavas, during my period, stained with blood, dressed in a single cloth – they dragged me in front of all the kings – And the sons of Dhritrashtra laughed at me! They wanted to make me their slave by force! And my husbands sat through it, unmoving! Arjuna! Doesn't dharma say a husband should protect his wife's honor? Others they protect – me they couldn't! Have I given them five sons? And don't I deserve protection at least on that account? Shame on Arjuna's magic bow, that slept while I was dragged in my period through the Hall! Shame on Bhima's strength! Poison he could drink, serpents he could kill, Kunti he could save from the burning lacquer house, but me he couldn't protect! I was seized by my hair, Krishna, while the Pandavas watched, the brave Indra, my own husbands. (qtd. in Sharma 208)

Sharma is puzzled by this gruesome scene:

The real motive for such attempted disrobing seems to emanate from much deeper levels than those mentioned in the epic. Since no answer to the question can ever be definitive, one is reduced only to conjecture and the conjecture leads to a number of counter questions. (217)

We can still conjecture that the author almost exposes the woman's gross appearance through Draupadi's menstruating body in front of the disparaging courtiers. The winner of her, Duryodhana, his kinsmen and the by-standing

courtiers obviously want to punish her for the virtual polyandry, an insult to masculine authority over a woman, into which she has been forced in the beginning by the consensus of the five brothers and her father. One might say that this is a classic example of blaming a woman for the men's moral failure. Also, their additional motive is to shame her five husbands more than her for being unable to protect her because one of them has already gambled her.

At the moment of the public humiliation, Draupadi has to defend herself, realizing the fragility of the marital bond since the rest of her four other husbands quietly share the public disgrace of her first husband and their oldest brother's defeat to the dice-game winner, all of them showing the stronger tie of their brotherhood than their conjugal responsibility. Draupadi comes to the realization of her worth to her brother husbands that they treat her as no more than something to confirm their comradeship.

The 20th-century short story entitled "Draupadi," written by Mahasveta Devi, exposes the euphonium of the Hindu epic by having her gang-raped and defying the perpetrator:

Draupadi comes closer. Stands with her hand on her hip, laughs and says. The object of your search. Dopdi [Draupadi] Mehen. You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me? (Spivak 402)

Heaven does not send miraculous aid to a victim of rape in this realistic story. The current version of Draupadi nevertheless turns into the trope of the strength of the weakest, frightening the perpetrator by forcing him to see her gruesomely ravaged

body. In the epic, Draupadi does hint at this invincible personality even though it is often glossed over.

Draupadi's assertion and vindictive disposition call to mind Rokujō's ghost whom Genji continues to perceive in his debilitated multiple wives throughout the story. Shikibu suggests that the imperial polygynist needs to acknowledge the maltreatment of his women, having Rokujō's ghost suddenly return from death and confront his past:

I need to talk to you my lord alone. You have tormented and trapped me with ceaseless prayer and chanting for months. My heart was full of hatred and drove me to torment you as much as I suffered. But when you were frantically worried [about your favorite wife], I felt sorry. I have now changed and look loathsome to you. But my old feelings have remained the same and compelled me to arise from death. I have tried hard to hide who I am from you. (Ch. "Young Herb 若菜". I. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 226)

Genji has never imagined his beautiful and decorous mistress turning into the hideous ghost and continuing to haunt him for the rest of his life. Shikibu knows that even Rokujō, Genji's social superior as a widow of the crown prince, is still hindered by the social code of the three obediences; as a woman, she is not able to charge openly, but her ghost can. Rokujō's ghost is Shikibu's indispensable agent to goad Genji toward his final destruction with the loss of all his prominent women, such as Murasaki and the Third Princess. The *Mahabharata* also needs Draupadi for an organic development of the narrative with her strong personality.

Both Draupadi and Rokujō's ghost are passionate and vengeful lovers, being pitiful and dreadful, elegantly beautiful and aggressively direct. They can denounce men when they choose to, and their complex characters baffle and fascinate the reader.

The epic punishes Draupadi's attacker Duryodhana according to the Hindu taboo of touching a woman who is menstruating. He has polluted himself by dragging Draupadi's menstruating body. When her attacker is killed in the battle against her husbands, the epic suggests that he deserves his death for having violated the taboo. Draupadi takes revenge on her attacker for this undeserved ordeal, when he dies in war, by soaking her hair in his blood. This act might suggest her own purification of her defilement by his attack. Draupadi does not forget the offence directed at her, and this vindictive personality makes her very human.

She follows faithfully her husbands' exile and their retirement and dies with them. Draupadi is conditioned to believe in the karmic consequence of having five husbands and fulfills what she thinks to be her duties. As a result, she is not only underappreciated by them but also blamed. During their final pilgrimage of climbing up the Himalaya, when she collapses, her oldest husband vindictively says, "Today, she pays the price of her partiality [to Arjuna]" (204). He is the one who has forced her into polyandry, later gambled her and allowed the winner to strip her clothes off in public. Yet the cowardly husband shows her no mercy for her inevitable humanity and leaves her to die alone. Even so, the oldest husband is portrayed to embody the so-called dharma but his vindictive

speech actually displays conventional morality. He is nevertheless more privileged than other characters, going to heaven ahead of his other siblings and Draupadi, who needs to be detained for her partiality to Arjuna. Were Draupadi a man, she might be lauded for her courage and assertiveness as much more heroic than her husbands.

Moreover, Draupadi's collapse before her five husbands on their pilgrimage symbolizes the Brahmin discriminatory ideology that it is difficult for a woman to reach heaven. We are later told that she and her four other husbands have to remain in a sort of purgatory for penance before they reach heaven. Despite Draupadi's much more generous love for all her husbands, she is hampered to pursue the path to heaven for her only supposed fault of partiality to one particular husband. She is doomed for her humanity. Yet the author preserved Draupadi's character not as a stereotyped virtuous heroine, but one might find her as a recognizable woman, grumbling but trying to make the best of what she has.

Sharma lauds her sense of self-worth and courage to speak up against the male characters dismissing, abandoning and neglecting, harassing and denigrating her. It is a relief to recognize Draupadi as a mouthpiece of not only ancient Indian women but also the critic speaking against the patriarchal exploitation of women in numerous cultures. Interestingly, a cult of Draupadi has developed in medieval Southern India, whose culture is more matriarchal than the North, incongruously as virgin and mother goddess, and she is also dubbed with the goddess of anger and vengeance, Kali. Her worshippers have recognized her inner strength in the

epic and deified her as their protector and harbinger of their luck. Still, she is an ambivalent heroine of the complex epic *Mahabharata* from an unknown past.

Unlike *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* is a traditional epic, inclined to oversimplify women characters as good and evil with a patriarchal notion. In the beginning, Queen Kaikeyi appears as Rama's wicked stepmother to doom him, as opposed to his chaste and faithful wife, Sita. Ironically, both types are ultimately obstacles for the hero Rama to overcome in order to fulfill his destiny as the ideal ruler. Trying to replace her stepson Rama with her own son as the heir apparent, Queen Kaikeyi succeeds in tricking her royal spouse, his father, into banishing him for fourteen years. The rivalry of co-wives over reproduction and raising children is a common problem of polygyny, but Rama's father induces the reader's sympathy for the moral torture of expelling his undeserving son Rama, the authentic heir of a feudal kingdom, who observes his father's order and moves out of his home country with his younger brother and Sita to a forest to live during their period of exile.

Once and for all, the perfect helpmate Sita also turns out to be Rama's disaster, creating an eternal divide between them when the demon king of Ceylon, Ravana, deceives and abducts her. Sita is criticized for the folly of sending Rama to hunt a beautiful golden deer and later compelling his brother guarding her to look for her husband, thus allowing Ravana to capture her in the absence of her male kin. Still, the obedient wife's sudden capricious demand of capturing the unusual deer seems to be a narrative contrivance to invent a disaster for the couple. Except for this incident, Sita is an ideal Hindu wife. The moral of her abduction is

the same as Rama's stepmother's that a woman must remain selfless and passive, never asserting her desire or exerting her influence on a man.

The abduction of a woman is a common theme of classic epics, such as the case of Helen of Troy in which the two patriarchal powers of the captor and the contender fight to the death to defend their "honor" more than to retrieve the victim. After defeating Ravana in open battle, Rama surprises Sita and the reader by refusing to take her back unconditionally. Sita grieves:

Ah, wretched me! ...And freed from my prison, how shall I prove
my virtue uncorrupt,
If he should say, "Away, thou are not worthy of my love.

(qtd. in Sharma 217)

In Rama's rejection of Sita, the ancient man's constant anxiety over his wife's "defilement" by a foreigner is apparent. Yet it is practically impossible for a woman to prove her chastity as an abstract idea imposed on the feminine body. In some versions, Sita yields to Rama's cruel and irrational demand that she undergo the test of passing the burning pyre, and in others, she voluntarily proposes to Rama the seemingly fatal deed. In both cases, she comes out with no slight injury. What is noteworthy is that here seems to be a familiar scenario in Asian cultures of blaming a rape victim. As previously said in the case of rape in the introduction, women in Confucian cultures have been also strictly instructed to remain faithful to one man at any cost, whereas the possibility of a man turning into a rapist has been downplayed. Those cultures would protect the permissive masculine sexuality as the man's prerogative.

The early version possibly ended here, celebrating Sita's chastity and unconditional submission to her husband. *Ramayana* literally means *the reign of Rama*, suggesting that the epic was meant to celebrate his utopian state with a simplistic happy ending.³⁰ The most renowned version, believed to be written by the poet Valmiki, has a psychologically complex twist in which Rama cannot stop some citizens' rumors questioning his wife's chastity and abandons Sita with child in a forest. She is one of the earliest single mothers in classic literature, bearing and raising two sons alone in the deep forest. Years later, Rama happens to recognize the two boys as his flesh, rejoices over this surprising fortune and quickly decides to take back Sita. Yet instead of thanking her for raising their sons alone, he asks her to cross the burning pyre for a second time to prove her chastity in public.

While Rama may exasperate many readers, Sita, too, finds him impossible, probably realizing that he will repeat the dreadful test endlessly. Her devotion finally has a limit. Sita pleads to the earth to swallow her:

I have not even thought of any, what to speak of touching him,
other than Rama. [...].

If it is so, give me shelter, in your womb, O mother Earth.

(Banerjee 167)

³⁰ *Ramayana* has now many versions, such as the Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina and Islamic versions, with different moral messages. Interestingly, in the Buddhist version, Sita and Rama are a sister and brother, emphasizing celibacy over sexual union and reflecting asceticism (Tharper 102-104).

One level of reading this passage is that the author takes poetic license, returning Sita, whose name literally means *the furrow*,³¹ to her mother earth. Yet the effect of her action is virtually suicide in human terms. When Sita leaves him permanently, her departure turns out to be a silent protest against Rama's political exploitation of her to demonstrate his invincible ruling authority in public to show that he can abandon his wife for the sake of the state. He is left as the lonely ruler on the throne for 10,000 years. For an epic glorifying masculine valor, *Ramayana* has such a rather ambivalent ending as the author finally allows Sita to rebel against her spouse's abuse of his supreme position. Paul Thomas reads Sita's end as "more of a warning [to impossible masculine standards] than an example" (195). We are still mystified by the author's sudden shift, after the glorification of warfare, in Sita's rejection of Rama without forewarning.

Still, Rama is much more privileged than Sita in character and intelligence. He is praised for his stoic choice of his people over Sita, but she is criticized as the initiator of their perpetual separation by the personal and idiosyncratic desire to have the beautiful deer. The epic also continues to show that Rama compels Sita to be a mere mirror of his own virtues and ignores her happiness until she rejects him in the ending.

R. P. Sharma proposes a lucid analysis of Sita's character. Yet he acknowledges that Sita is "not a round but static and monotonous character" as a stereotyped non-threatening heroine in the masculine drama (223). Yet this is his literary trained view. On the other hand, Sharma compassionately identifies Sita

³¹ Sita seems to have been the goddess of the earth before becoming Rama's mate. Her possible origin is not surprising, as *Ramayana* developed in the region of the fertile plain along the Ganges River.

with numerous innocent women condemned by irrational masculine arrogance and offers his own insight:

Rama fails to understand how anyone who has access to Sita's presence can overcome their irresistible temptation to make love to her. It is this ingredient in his psychology that haunts him again and again to such an extent that he ultimately decides to give her up for good. (216)

In this sense, Sharma correctly calls Sita "the Desdemona of Hindu literature." Although Othello loves Desdemona, he murders her, and she does not deserve death for her innocence. Interestingly, Rama and Othello are righteous warriors who value absolute loyalty most and cannot stand their own suspicion of having an unchaste mate. Although Sharma complains that Sita constantly suffers because "she fails to realize that no explanation can appease a suspicious mind," he does fail to perceive that she has been raised to believe in the feminine code of the three obediences. Desdemona equally remains naïve and vulnerable, stunned by Othello's doubt of her chastity: "I never gave him cause." She does not know how to leave Othello even though her maid Emilia forewarns her, "But jealous soul will not be answered so. 'Tis a monster. Begot upon itself, born on itself" (*Othello* III.iv. 159-161). It is too late for Sita and Desdemona to recognize the futility of their devotion. Despite her disastrous fate, Sita has been a popular idol of Indian women and possibly subtly shaped their view of feminine virtues during the time of formation. Indian brides have been exhorted to strive to emulate Sita's purity and sacrificial devotion to Rama regardless of their husbands' indifference

to their well-being. The public celebration of Sita certainly comforted the women reluctantly to be submissive and self-effacing and even temporarily converted them to be willing helpers of their mates. Yet women in traditional Indian culture were presumably not encouraged to question Sita's unrewarded life and her final refusal to cross the burning pyre. Perhaps the storyteller had to quickly gloss over her final rebellion against Rama. Sally J. Sutherland says in her "Sita and Draupadi," published in 1989, that Sita is more favored than Draupadi among Indian men and women because they are uncomfortable with the latter's "undisguised aggression" (79).

Yet numerous Indian women were not always silenced by the social discourse of male supremacy and thought that Rama was a far cry from a perfect lover and husband, as attested in the village women's folk songs collected by Nabaneeta Dev Sen in 2009. Sen does not tell us how old those village songs are, perhaps as she herself is uncertain of the history of them. Those folk songs have been orally sung among generations of the village women. Naturally, the masculine affairs of Rama's claim to kingship and the combat scenes did not interest the women as much as Sita and her hardships that were similar to their daily travails. The women saw Sita as a helpless child bride neglected by her hard-working husband in the following song:

Sita has been in exile right inside her bedroom.

Rama did not share her bed.

For twelve years

She was locked up behind seven doors.

Rama is absorbed in his own business.

Poor Sita's youth is wasted away [...]. (qtd. in Sen 22)

In many versions of the epic, Rama is a monogamist, unusual for a Hindu hero, but a stoically stern husband. Interestingly, Sita is already “in exile” right from the beginning of her marriage as Rama, the dutiful son and prince, is too busy to recognize her companionship. So, Sita is his forgotten prisoner, not a wife, representing the child brides in the village pining for their families and homes.

The song challenges what is irrelevant in the official versions of *Ramayana* – the neglect of the woman's welfare demonstrated by Sita's life. Generations of women kept singing their versions of *Ramayana* in the village, responded to Sita's devotion, sacrifice and undeserved punishment with compassion and indignation, and identified with her. Yet in contrast to Valmiki's sophisticated version written in Sanskrit, the village women's folk songs, including this one, seem to have been overlooked by the critics of *Ramayana* until a woman writer, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, found their value as authentic voices of social criticism.

Indian Buddhism

Ramayana did not come to East Asia with Buddhism. Still, it might not be accidental that Sita's pathetic uncomplaining personality evokes Genji's multiple wives and mistresses since they all share the three obediences. Murasaki 紫の上, Hana Chiru Sato 花散里, Akashi 明石 and Yūgao try to be Genji's pleasant mates. Sita and Genji's above-mentioned women never challenge their mates and let him remain oblivious to their needs. The three obediences condition Indian and Japanese women to depend on the good intentions of their men and leave them

with anxiety over desertion by those men. And their men, Rama and Genji, ultimately abandon them, if not materialistically, then psychologically. All of Genji's wives are convinced of their obligation of chastity to their then-polygynous mate, just as regular Hindu women probably would never imagine transgressing the code of woman's conduct, because their religion and social convention told them so.

Although Hinduism was the rightful heir of *Vedic* Brahmanism and inherited its patriarchal attitudes, how Buddhism was initially connected to Brahmanism has been debated in academia. In Japanese Buddhist scholarship, it has been proclaimed that Buddhism was not initially a patriarchal religion, having denounced the Brahmin ideology. Yet despite his proclamation of an egalitarian salvation, Buddha himself is known to have been skeptical of woman's potential capability to develop her spirituality in this world. Reluctantly, he gave women devotees the permission to build their own communities with the condition that they had to acknowledge the authority of men over them. He was even worried that women would become the destruction of his teachings (Tharu 67). Buddha's hesitance and reluctance to admit women into his spiritual communities implies the ancient fact that asceticism and the renunciation of family and social obligations were permitted mostly to men in most cultures since antiquity. This was because the woman's decision of renouncing the world itself was a sign of her independent spirit and seen as threatening to her society.

From the current perspective, Buddha's teaching still falls short of egalitarianism. Yet ancient women were enthralled by this conditional opportunity

to pursue their spirituality. During the period from Buddha's life in 600 BCE until around 500 CE, approximately for one thousand years, numerous women joined Buddhist communities thriving in the subcontinent. Buddhist women upheld three authorities: Buddha, dharma and *Sungha* (the ascetic community) (Tharu 66).

Ancient Indian Buddhism at least gave a woman the alternative of religious retirement with the belief that marriage was a secular matter (Thomas 98). *Therigatha*, interpreted as the *Songs of the Nuns*, composed between 200 BCE and 300 CE, has such stories narrated in poems, in which Buddhist nuns do not hesitate to expose their frank perspectives on men. One of the nuns named Mutta, once the wife of a Brahmin, professes her own liberation theology:

So free am I, so gloriously free,
Free from three petty things
From mortar, from pestle and from my twisted lord
And all that has held me down
Is hurled away. (Tharu 68)

According to the commentary of the *Songs of the Nuns*, she constantly chanted this verse. Evidently, this is her honest thanks-giving hymn to the Buddha for her release from the tyranny of domestic chores and her husband's marital dominance. Her nunnery might have been her shelter despite the monks' intervention. The translator nevertheless notices that there are only similar joyful songs in this collection of nuns' songs (Tharu 68). Are the nuns' songs ancient Buddhist propaganda to increase the religion's followers? Those nuns do not seem to have

had Buddhist sutras professing the woman's karmic retribution of her inferior sex yet.

It is known that the Buddhist ideologies were preserved orally in the early period and later written in sutras and imported outside India. So Buddhism was disseminated in China, Korea and Japan through the sutras preached by the ordained monks and nuns as a systematic religion. Those nuns had to work under the authority of monks but were visible in public as theologians and preachers by the 6th centuries. Yet by the 8th century, Japanese nuns were rarely ordained and were shut out from the Buddhist rituals in the imperial court (Katuura 勝浦 15-29). The disappearance of nuns from the public probably correlated to the decline of Japanese women's position in Heian society. The religious renunciation released Heian noblewomen from matrimony and domestic responsibilities, but the women usually remained in the household, not the nunnery. In the *Genji*, the woman's religious renunciation often became a pragmatic means of self-preservation to cease her sexual relations or to follow the customary practice of a mature stage of life. Shikibu's heroines are thus less motivated by religious fervor, reflecting the author's qualms about Buddhism.

Indian Buddhism once flourished from its rise in the 6th century BCE broadly up to the 1st century ACE. King Ashoka (304 BCE-232 BCE) was a renowned Buddhist and sent missionaries abroad to propagate Buddhism. Yet it is difficult to trace back ancient Indian Buddhist ideology since authentic Buddhist manuscripts written in indigenous languages were mostly extinguished, possibly by the 10th century. Seishi Karashima argues that the majority of Sanskrit

Buddhist manuscripts date from the 11th century, and these texts are results of additions and interpolations. In other words, these Sanskrit Buddhist texts were heavily influenced by medieval Hindu ideology. By contrast, Chinese translations of Buddhist texts were made from the 2nd to the 6th century and presumably contain early Buddhist doctrines more than the Sanskrit translations. The *Lotus Sutra* was one of these Chinese translations and became the most prominent East Asian Buddhist text. The central Asian monk, Kumarajiva (344-413), is believed to have translated the current version of the *Lotus Sutra* from its unknown Indian language into Chinese. He must have been a product of Ashoka's propagation of Buddhism beyond India.

Still, it is difficult to trace back the ancient Indian Buddhist ideology since its authentic manuscripts were almost extinguished, possibly by the 10th century, and numerous Buddhist sutras have been translated in Chinese and might have been localized to a large extent. How much current Hindusim and Buddhism share indigenous religious assets is a question that has compelled religious scholars in India and the rest of the world to construct hypotheses. This thesis can only choose a few of their ideas. According to the Indian theologian K. D. Prithipaul, Hinduism and Buddhism share the belief that an individual is responsible for the four aspects of life, such as past action, known as *Frarabdha*; present action, *Sancita*; future action, *Agami*; and all kinds of desire, *Niskama* – sexual, material, intellectual and artistic. In Japanese Buddhism, cause and effect also governs the past, present and future. In the chain-like connection of the past, present and future, one can perceive that karma is integrated as the cause and the effect of

one's previous life. The ultimate dharma as wisdom would be the renunciation of desire which governs the individual's past, present and future to achieve enlightenment and salvation. One can say that Buddhism and Hinduism share at least the notion of karma and cause-and-effect relations between the past, present and future, and the religious renunciation often interpreted as ascetic life, confirming Prithipaul's explication.

Both the *Laws of Manu* and the *Lotus Sutra* are proclaimed by their believers to have the law or way of the universe and nature. The *Laws of Manu* has religious names in Sanskrit, such as *Manava Dharma Shastra* and *Manu Smrite*, declaring that the universal wisdom has been given by the mythological first human, Manu. Although this study will use the title *Laws of Manu* only for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the original names imply that it is a work of divine inspiration and thus is believed as eternally indisputable, invincible, and unquestionable. Equally, the *Lotus Sutra* is supposed to contain *dharma*, which is translated as the law of Buddhism and Buddha's teachings, *minori* 御法 in Japanese. Chapter 40 of the *Genji* is entitled *minori* 御法, in which Murasaki celebrates the completion of a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* with a grand ritual before her death, as she is supposed to have accomplished all she could do in order to be saved in "pure land 浄土." Although Shikibu does not pursue Buddhist theology in depth, in this context, *dharma* is *minori* in a diffusive form. In relation to the three obediences, this thesis will discuss farther how the *Laws of Manu* and the *Lotus Sutra* teach a woman the dharma of accepting her lot,

remaining virtuous and renouncing her desires for the future salvation because her karma from her previous life has assigned her to the inferior sex.

Dharma were moral laws as well as social conventions in Indian culture, and one was expected to follow these laws and conventions in order to earn good karma. The cruel belief that women and the powerless were born with poor karma gave rich and powerful men an excuse for maltreating them with the belief that they are not responsible for the fate of the unfortunate. As karma was often referred to as one's inherited defect, religious asceticism was supposed to work it out individually, but it was the privilege of high-caste men. In *Ramayana*, Rama kills a *Sudra* because he practices asceticism, neglects his life duty to serve the high castes and violates dharma (Thomas 194). This seems to be a Hindu dharma. In contrast, Buddha at least gives the permission of asceticism to everyone, including *Sudras* and women, with the hopeful belief that they can earn good karmas.

In the two epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, woman's sinful nature is taken for granted. *Mahabharata* shows a misogynistic view of the sage Narada repeating the story of a courtesan:

None is more inclined to sin than women. Women are the root of all troubles. [...].

Among women, virtue is confined to those who have no access to men and to those who have a wholesome fear of their guardian.

(Thomas 166)

Narada's conclusion is that women are by nature evil and need to be constantly watched by men. As a man, he needs the courtesan as reference to give his lecture credibility, possibly because she is supposed to have used her sexual power, the foremost temptation of men, for her ultimate gains. Clearly, Narada defines the nature of woman's vice and virtue in relation to men. If a woman is against a man, she is sinful, and if she pleases him, she is virtuous. Man is the judge of woman.

Ramayana has Rama's mother Kausalya tell Sita of her belief that women earn their natural base nature as their poor karma from their previous ignoble life and she must transform her fate by good deeds:

Women, as a rule, are fickle, and have regard for their husbands only during the days of their good fortune. Though attached to them in prosperity, women, in adversity, reprimand their husbands for their thoughtlessness, take them to task and abandon them – such is the nature of women. Neither benefits received, nor learning nor gifts, can secure the heart of a woman; surely, women are unstable. But you have overcome the weakness of your sex by abiding and delighting in truth, acting according to the precepts of superiors, maintaining the dignity of your family and compassing the spiritual welfare of your husband. (Thomas 180)

If this is an opinion of the wise queen, a sage also tells Sita:

Indeed in following your husband to the forest [in exile], you have done something doubly noble. For from the commencement of creation, it has been the nature of woman to seek him who is rich

and powerful and forsake him who has fallen on evil days.

Women, in their instability, are like lightning, in their sharpness

like weapons, and in celerity like the wind-god. (181)

Both Kausalya and the sage are in agreement that women must learn good karma and salvation by counteracting their poor karma. This is the law of nature, or *dharma*, a disheartening teaching to current women. The model Hindu wife Sita persuades Rama to take her with him in his exile with the tenet of karma: “the wife shares with her husband his fortune and karma” (Thomas 166). Whatever karma Rama has earned in his previous life, by sharing it with him, Sita believes that she can also improve her karma. Sita embodies the ideal of Indian femininity because of her single-minded devotion to her spouse Rama. The ideology of woman’s penance for her evil nature depicted in these two ancient Indian epics is implicitly present in the Buddhist sutras circulated in East Asia. As far as Japanese mythology is concerned, strong goddesses and women are not condemned for their valor as sinful. The Buddhist sutras certainly took part in degrading women’s position in Japan.

Heian Noblewomen's Concept of Dharma and Karma

As noted in the introduction, since the *Lotus Sutra* contains the woman's five obstacles and three obediences, both are packaged as the five obstacles and three obediences, *goshōsanjyū* 五障三従, and were preached to women so that they could never surpass men and had to submit to them. The medieval Buddhist priest Ren'nyo 蓮如 (1415-1499) cites the woman's obstacles and three obediences in the collection of his five teachings known as *5 chō ofumi* 五帖御文:

The woman should be taught the five obstacles and three obediences because she is more sinful than men. Even one hundred thousand Buddhas found it impossible to save her. Yet Amida Buddha 阿弥陀如来 had the ardent desire to save a woman and did so. Without his power, a woman can never become a Buddha [a saved one].

This is why women were urged to pray to Amida Buddha every morning and evening for their salvation. As previously discussed, in the *Genji*, Prince Kaoru is worried about his mother the Third Princess's salvation, even though she continues her prayer, because he does not trust the woman's capacity to save herself. Shikibu suggests through a filial Kaoru that Heian noblemen consciously or unconsciously used the five obstacles and three obediences without contradiction as a means to remind women of their "innate" subordinate position to men.

The Buddhist scholar and priest Saichō 最澄 (767-822) also created his own doctrine, called "rapid Buddhahood 即身成仏," with a parable in the fifth

chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, entitled “Devadatta 堤婆達多品”: The eight-year-old daughter of the Dragon King attains enlightenment and salvation despite the three obstacles of being young, female and an animal lower than a human in the spiritual realm. She is disparaged by Buddha’s disciples for her youthful ambition without austere spiritual practice. Moreover, according to the essential Buddhist theology of cause and effect, she was born a female animal owing to her vile deeds in her previous life. Yet when she gives Buddha a shining jewel, presumably the sign of her sincere devotion, she is suddenly transformed into a man and earns Buddhahood, the ticket to the “Pure Land of Paradise 極樂淨土” (qtd. in Tamura 61).

Saichō preached his doctrine that because even a young, female animal could be saved only in the *Lotus Sutra*, it must have been the best text to demonstrate Buddha’s teachings. Yet his message suggests an undercurrent that a woman is inferior to a man and has to undergo sexual transformation in order to earn salvation. Still, this parable seems to have been good enough for noblewomen to embrace the *Lotus Sutra*. Saichō’s salvation message might have consoled Heian noblewomen, making it easier for them to accept their lowly status, the three obediences and the karmic retribution of their supposed inferior nature. In the *Genji*, our hero’s favorite wife Murasaki’s act of having the *Lotus Sutra* copied reveals the popularity of this practice among noblewomen in the 11th century. Yet was Shikibu the only woman who held an ambivalent view of this gender-discriminatory religiosity of Buddhism?

The first Japanese collection of Buddhist parables, *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記, from the 9th century, contains a story in which a woman is saved by her husband's act of copying the *Lotus Sutra* (Kato 129). Kato notes that the negative notions of women as inferior, polluting (by menstruation) and contributing to the ceaseless human suffering by childbearing took root between the late 9th and 10th century. These notions must have disheartened contemporary women, including Shikibu. Copying the *Lotus Sutra* seems to have been made into a cult before Shikibu's time, as the *Tale of the Flowering Fortunes* refers to it as a matter of fact in Heian noble society. The *Genji* also gives an example of Murasaki's grand ceremony with her co-wives upon the completion of one copy. Murasaki and her co-wives are supposedly granted the chance to reduce their karmic retribution. The Buddhist doctrine of their karmic retribution as the inferior sex was internalized as an inherited and inescapable sin among Heian noblewomen, constantly reminding them of it through their biological reality.

The Indian concept of karma can be diffusively identified as the *Sukuse* 宿世 used in Heian noble society, literally meaning the karma that one earns from the previous life and the past (Takeda 564). Yet *sukuse* displays a nuanced meaning in *Genji* criticism. As previously said, Saigō interpretes *sukuse* in the context of a [Heian] woman's unhappiness by citing the chapter in the *Genji* entitled "Young Herb II".³² Shimizu 清水 interprets it as fate in her compiled text of the *Genji*. Satō Sekito 佐藤勢紀子 perceives that Shikibu thinks the woman's *sukuse* her misfortune (122). Hence in the context of the *Genji*, *sukuse* should be

³² See page 5.

interpreted as the woman's fate or even her predestination, something she cannot alter with her will. Moreover in the negative context of *Genji* women's lives, *sukuse* is virtually karma. Women characters, such as Fujitubo 藤壺, Utusemi 空蟬 and Rokujō 六条, are particularly sensitive to their *sukuse*. Fujitubo falls into an illicit affair with her stepson Genji and is appalled by the resemblance of their offspring Reizei 冷泉 to his father and laments her *sukuse*. Forced to betray her husband by Genji, Utusemi feels guilty and decides to conceal her ambivalent attraction to the imperious prince. The most enigmatic is Rokujō's recognition of her own *sukuse*. After being humiliated by Genji's first wife Aoi 葵, who has allowed her retainers to attack her carriage in public, Rokujō cannot repress her hatred for Aoi and her grudge against Genji. When hearing the rumor that her live spirit is tormenting the heavily pregnant Aoi, Rokujō thinks that Genji's neglect, Aoi's contempt and her own enmity are due to her *sukuse*, and she can do nothing about them. All of these three women eventually take the tonsure according to their individual circumstantial reasons, but possibly also owing to their ambivalent recognition of hidden guilt for possessing a sinful nature.

Heian noblewomen expressed their devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* in poetry, but we find nothing like the ancient Indian nun Mutta's demonstration of an intense faith in them including Shikibu's following poem:

How glorious the fifth day of the fifth month (May) is!

We had a recitation of the fifth volume of the Law (the *Lotus Sutra*).

妙なりや 今日は五月の五日とて いつつの巻にあへる御法も

(*Murasaki Shikibu Nikki: Shikibu Senshū* 紫式部日記; 式部選集 158).

Ta'enariya 妙なりや means “mysteriously awesome,” but this skillful work seems to lack her enthusiasm. Shikibu wrote her poem on the day when numerous Buddhists chanted the *Sutra* loudly, presumably for the safe delivery of her mistress Empress Shōshi 彰子 who was then pregnant. The presence of the number five in her poem should be noted, implying that the fifth day of the fifth month was carefully chosen, possibly not only to pray for her mistress’s safe childbirth but also to remind Buddha of the salvation message in the fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* and the woman’s supposed five obstacles [to enlightenment], and plead for his mercy (*The Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 1. 392). Empress Shōshi’s father Michinaga 道長 was anxiously waiting for the birth of his first grandson and organized this splendid event, which seems to have deeply impressed the gentlewoman Shikibu. Because childbirth was life-threatening to women, the Buddhist priests also were gathered to pray for her salvation in the case of the worst possible outcome of her death. The cruel contemporary folk belief was that a woman who died in childbirth deserved karmic retribution.

What further complicated child-bearing was that mothers were blamed by the apathetic Buddhist doctrine as the cause of the rebirth and human suffering that they were believed to have perpetuated. Women’s menstruation was also considered the sources of polluting a society for centuries to come (Kato 120). Still, the birth of a son was welcome, but that of a girl would be blamed by the Buddhist teaching as an inferior sex repeating the rebirth owing to her sinful previous life. Michinaga did have more daughters and made the best use of them for his political scheme by marrying them to the three emperors and the imperial

family members, but regular noblemen would prefer sons; as Shikibu describes in her *Diary*, her father lamented over his daughter's sexual identity for her extraordinary intelligence, "It's a shame you were not born a boy. I have no luck" (Fujioka 244). Shikibu is conscious of the social preference of sons to daughters in deciding on the gender ratio of Genji's children as two sons and one daughter. Moreover, the unusually small number of Genji's children for his glorious sexuality and pervasive relations with women might have been due to Shikibu's implicit consent to the apathetic Buddhist doctrine of treating marriage as a secular matter and celebrating religious renunciation. It seems that she sometimes renounces her individual criticism to acquiesce in religious and social conventions. Shikibu might have struggled with her ambivalent faith in her works.

Shikibu's nearly contemporary woman, the daughter of Sugawara Takasue 菅原孝標女 (1008-1059), confesses in her *Sarashina Diary* 更科日記 that while she was absorbed in reading the *Genji*, a Buddhist monk appeared in her dream and urged her to study the fifth volume of the *Lotus Sutra* (Fujioka 302). She was embarrassed by him pointing out her neglect of the *Sutra* lesson, but the implicit threat of damnation seems to have been real for this Heian noblewoman. No Heian women seem to have dared to protest against this reification of women's potential damnation overtly preached by Buddhist priests, just as women in Abrahamic religious cultures were once expected to humble themselves as the daughters of the "evil Eve."

Presuming the faith in the *Lotus Sutra* widely established in her society, 200 years after Shikibu's time, the author of the *Mumyōzōshi* 無名草子 finds it

odd that the author of the *Genji* shows little enthusiasm about the text. She has her women characters discuss it as follows:

One character: Did Murasaki Shikibu ever read the *Lotus Sutra*?

The other character: We don't know. It's a shame she says nothing about the *Lotus Sutra*. Even we think it only one flaw of the *Genji*.

Other people and future generations must think that she did not care about her afterlife. We would have liked to force her to listen to the *Lotus Sutra*. How could such a literary genius omit it?

(Higuchi 187-188)

Actually, Shikibu has a Buddhist priest, Young Murasaki's great-uncle, affirm the three obediences when Genji declares his desire to have the girl: "A woman always needs a man to look after and protect her all her life" (Ch. "Young Murasaki 若紫." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 288). Yet none of her women characters discuss the *Sutra* parables intimately, as women characters do in *Mumyōzōshi*. The frequent reference to *sukuse* among *Genji* characters adds a melancholy mood to the story. Although numerous Heian noblewomen did copy the *Lotus Sutra*, and Shikibu's heroine Murasaki has it copied, the author seems to reflect the contemporary religious norm on the surface. Shikibu's intentional silence about the most popular Buddhist literature in her society must have been particularly vexing to the author of *Mumyōzōshi* if she was the daughter of Fujiwara Toshinari 藤原俊成女, who possibly wrote her work after becoming a nun.

Interestingly, as opposed to Shikibu, her contemporary literary woman Izumi Shikibu is described as follows in the *Mumyōzōshi*:

Very few women have composed as many poems as Izumi Shikibu. She had no discreet personality, having acted carelessly. She does not seem to have made these wonderful poems by herself. Perhaps she inherited good karma from the previous life. (Higuchi 270)

The author has less respect for Izumi Shikibu than Murasaki Shikibu, perhaps owing to her widely known affairs with two imperial princes. She thus has to attribute Izumi Shikibu's literary accomplishment in Buddhist terms that she did not lead a virtuous life and must have been aided by her good karma to write many poems.

Unlike the author of *Mumyōzōshi*, Shikibu sees the pragmatic convenience in the woman's religious devotion. Just as the ancient Indian Buddhist nun Mutta's religious choice signals her discreet divorce from her husband, Shikibu's women characters, Fujitubo, the Third Princess and other women terminate their sexual relations with men by becoming nuns. Shikibu approves of their religious retirement over the woe of their men's pursuit and neglect, thinking that it is a pragmatically wise choice. The religious life usually served as mature women's termination of their sexual and marital life in Shikibu's society. Yet the Third Princess becomes a nun in her early twenties to escape her husband Genji's relentless censure of her illicit affair with Kashiwagi. Shikibu does not think that Buddhism is the ultimate answer to women's salvation. Genji's two lovers, Fujitubo and Rokujō, become nuns before their deaths, but neither woman is saved. Fujitubo horrifies Genji by making him believe that she came from hell in his dream, and he sees Rokujō turning into a ghost, the *mononoke*. Shikibu might

have remained suspicious of spiritual benefit in the patriarchal institution of Buddhism.

Indian Buddhism had its golden age during the reign of King Asoka (268-231 BCE) and was disseminated beyond the national borders through missionaries but later mysteriously died out in the subcontinent. Unfortunately, the ancient nunneries, the preaching nuns and their possible scholarship disappeared from India. Orthodox Hinduism did what Buddhism had not done, consecrating marriage with religious rituals and doctrines and binding women to the household.

There have been numerous and various hypotheses about how Buddhism disappeared from the subcontinent. Johannes Bronkhorst offers his theory of the rise and fall of the two Indian indigenous religions, new Brahmanism turning into Hinduism and Buddhism. His theory is that, as an originally priest-centered religion, Brahmanism was connected to the ruling castes. After the ritualistic *Vedic* Brahmanism died out, a new Brahmanism that brought back the hierarchal world view constituted by the four-fold castes – the priest, warrior, rich and servant and slave – and arose in the 2nd century. The new Brahmin priests were equipped with the power of their own language, Sanskrit, and produced their own literature. The key to the rise of the new Brahmanism lay in the Brahmin's postulation that their literature was not new. The Brahmin priest insisted that Sanskrit was older than the world and applied the same logic to the four-fold caste system, which attracted the rulers (40). By contrast, Buddhism started as a religion for everyone, did not offer the rulers pragmatic advice to govern the state, and disapproved of military violence. Buddhism eventually exhausted the kings'

interest and disappeared without state support. Although also lacking historical evidence, Bronkhorst's theory of the popularity of Brahmanism among the rulers seems to be a historically plausible explanation. This new Brahmanism might have dominated the pinnacle of Hinduism with the power of language and literature.

The Hindu Woman Condemned by the Laws of Manu

Alterkar thinks that Hindu women's position gradually began to decline after the Common Era, and Thapar remarks through the Chinese traveler Fa Hsien's statement that after around the 4th century, the gender-caste system seems to have been more regimented. Both Alterkar and Thapar agree that numerous *Dharma shastras*, including the *Laws of Manu*, were written at some time after the early Common Era; at a certain point, it virtually superseded the *Vedas* with its more severe and rigid *dharma* (natural law and wisdom) (Alterkar 169; Thapar 305).

Thapar and Alterkar agree that the *Laws of Manu* extensively privileges high-caste men over the low castes and women. The *Manu* prescribes Hindu traditions and customs but gives the law teacher Brahmin some room for interpretation. In that sense, the *Manu* does not contain literal laws, as the British colonial government later mistook it. Still, the natural law is more powerful than the actual with the connotation of its pervasiveness and eternity. The lawgiver Manu is biased toward the Brahmin, justifying his superiority above the lower castes, upholding his rights and stamping the basic concept of the caste-system in the subcontinent to continue for generations.

Manu's attitudes toward women are problematically paradoxical. He once declares the three obediences that are used to bind women of all castes, as follows:

Her father protects (her)³³ in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth (marriage), and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. (Ch. IX. 3)

As previously said, the castes further divide women's condition; the worst is the *Sudra* woman's position placed below the man of her own caste.

The same idea of the three obediences is also present in Buddhist scriptures, including the *Lotus Sutra*, indicating the ambivalent brotherhood of Hinduism and Buddhism:

Woman obeys her parents in childhood, her husband in marriage and her son in widowhood, and she remains chaste. (qtd. in

Mochizuki Buddhist Great Dictionary 望月仏教大辞典 1542-1543)

The Buddhist scholar Tamura Yoshiro proclaims that the *Lotus Sutra* reveals the wonderful [natural] law as the text of Mahayana Buddhism³⁴ professing the great unifying truth of the universe that animates everyone and everything equally (41). Perhaps the *Lotus Sutra* is meant to be the law of everyman. The presence of the three obediences in the *Lotus Sutra* does not make every woman unconditionally embrace it. Yet both Manu and the *Lotus Sutra* insist that the three obediences is a natural law. If convinced of her inferior sex owing to poor karma, a woman can possibly accept the three obediences as well.

³³ All the additional phrases in parentheses are listed in the English translation of the *Laws of Manu*.

³⁴ Mahayana, which literally means "the Great Vehicle," Buddhism was disseminated into East Asia, including Japan.

We cannot tell how the *Manu* and the *Lotus Sutra* came to share the three obediences. To complicate the matter further, Buddhism's later adoption of Brahmanism has been a well accepted theory among current Buddhist scholars. Bronkhorst, too, proposes a subtle and gradual process of the Indian Buddhists' adoption of the Brahmanical view of the world, as revealed in their canonical texts: the Buddhists at first adopted Sanskrit terminology, and that allowed them to shift from a total rejection of the caste system to a familiarization with its concept and eventually to an acceptance of it (41). As the gradual theological shift took centuries, the Buddhists even did not recognize that their egalitarian theology was affected by the Hindu notion of gender-class hierarchy. If so, the three obediences might also have been adopted during this unknown period. Current Buddhist scholars, including Tamura and Bronkhorst, have the premise that Buddhist doctrines were originally more egalitarian than the content of the current sutras but could not help the later dominant religion Hinduism in the subcontinent. Since none of the "original" Buddhist sutras survived, we are mystified by the presence of the identically-phrased three obediences in the *Manu* and the *Lotus Sutra*.

The "Brahmanical" Buddhist sutras are believed to have eventually travelled from India to East Asia including Japan. Buddhist and Hindu women thus ended up inheriting the three obediences with the same justification of the karmic retribution that they had done something ignoble in the previous life to be born the inferior sex. This is the law of nature, *dharma*. The scarceness of women's literature in this period suggests that many of them remained silent and

had no intellectual resources to counteract the karmic retribution as a religious fallacy. The ideology of the karmic three obediences was so indestructible that it ruled Hindu and Buddhist women's psyche for ages.³⁵

In the *Manu*, the woman and the *Sudra* (servant-slave) are equally condemned as the two major threats to the caste society. Thapar nevertheless argues that the *Sudra* and the current lower castes are not at all the same, and the obscure origin of the current castes indicates that the castes were not stable and continued to shift. Numerous inter-caste sexual relationships and marriages must have occurred, as hinted by Manu's incrimination and condemnation of them. The Brahmin's horror is evident in Manu's voice of abomination against the offspring of the sexual union of the *Sudra* man and the high-caste woman:

From a *Sudra* springs in the inverse order (by female of the higher castes) three base-born (sons), an *apasada*, an *Ayogava*, a *Kshattri*, and a *Kandala*, the lowest of men. (Ch. X. 16)

It was the Brahmins' nightmare that new contenders with a *Sudra* background would topple their religious authority and supplant their caste superiority by marrying their daughters. Manu seems to have communicated that Brahmins were particularly terrified at the eventual termination of their caste as indistinguishable by male offspring born from cross-caste unions.

Probably unable to put a stop to the inter-caste marriage, Manu at one point vents his ill-temper on women of all castes, holding them responsible for arousing male lust:

³⁵According to Asma Sayed, it still does in India in 2012.

It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world); for that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.

(Ch. II. 213)

It is likely that most high-caste women were married by their fathers to create family alliances with the new rising power of the time at a certain period of political disruption, but Manu here uses a classic masculine logic to blame women for men's failure in maintaining the caste hierarchy. The angry Manu cannot be as analytical as the *Lotus Sutra* meticulously listing each of the women's five obstacles 女人五障, which we have already discussed. The five obstacles and the three obediences 五障三從 were once preached as one set by the Buddhist priest to have a woman submit to men. In this sense, both the Hindu Brahmin and Buddhist priest share the idea of controlling the woman's chastity.

Manu forgets his diatribes against women once when he adulates them in the following passage:

Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards. If the wife is radiant with beauty, the whole house is bright; but if she is destitute of beauty, all will appear dismal. (Ch. III. 55, 62)

Carefully reading the context, one can perceive that "women" means high-caste wives and daughters, excluding their *Sudra* sisters, whom Manu condemns for "seducing" the high-caste men and polluting their castes. His vacillating attitude toward women also implies that the text was constantly rewritten by other writers over time. Yet those plural Brahmins did not bother to strive for consistency.

Moreover, whether benevolent or severe to women, Manu still presumes that men define women's condition and position. The definition of caste and gender was the ancient Brahmin's ultimate religious patriarchal power.

In the *Manu*, there is no such word as *purdah*, literally meaning *veil and curtain*, but Alterkar thinks that the segregation of women gradually began to take place in ancient times. By contrast, A. R. Gupta argues that the warfare between Hindus and Muslims forced high-caste women to put themselves further under their men's authority for self-preservation by hiding themselves from enemies in the rear of the household. Yet even after the invasions became history, once implemented, the *purdah* has still tenaciously remained in Northern Central India. As the social superior's customs and traditions usually trickled down to the lower castes, *purdah* became normative in those regions. Varsha Joshi argues that when polygyny was once prevalent in medieval India among the Indian royal clan known as the Rajputs, *purdah* functioned as harem to control co-wives and prevent their escape. It was nevertheless believed that noblewomen demonstrated their dignity and status by secluding themselves from the public(88).³⁶ In fact, the woman's chastity was the essential aim of *purdah*.

This was not an isolated history. In ancient China, noblewomen were not seen in public. The Confucians also imposed gender segregation and kept women in the household while men could freely go out and come back. Particularly in Shikibu's time, noblewomen's segregation became a symbol of their status, as

³⁶ Medieval Hindus and Muslims practiced *purdah*. The worst disgrace for a medieval Muslim nobleman was to expose the face of his wife in public. The Muslim monarchs in India punished their subjects by parading their wives on the street. The disgraced husband would commit suicide (Thomas 250).

women did not show their faces to stranger males. This only happened during the Heian period in Japan. Purdah seems to have been more severely imposed on women in India, perhaps owing to constant foreign invasions. Hindu high-caste women were secluded in the rear part of the household, whereas Japanese noblewomen remained behind the bamboo screen and could see the outside and the strangers. Both purdah and the Confucian gender segregation shared the idea of controlling the woman's chastity. The Heian noblewomen's segregation will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Since marriage established the supremacy of the husband over the wife in ancient patriarchal Hindu society, polygyny maximized his power and authority over her. Polygyny was once the major form of high-caste matrimony as the rich and powerful men's prerogative in numerous cultures. The ancient Indian epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* also present the world of royal polygyny. Yet the ancient high-caste men were well aware of the problematic nature of polygyny. Manu wants to regulate polygyny, urging the high-caste men to treat their wives according to their natal castes:

For the first marriage of twice-born men, (such as the Brahman, the *Kshatriya* [warrior], the *Vaisya* [wealthy merchant and farmer]), (wives) of equal caste are recommended, but for those who through desire proceed (to marry again) the following females, (chosen) according to the (direct) order (of the castes), are most approved.
(Ch. III. 12)

If twice-born men wed women of their own and of other (lower castes), the seniority, honor, habitation of those (wives) must be (settled) according to the order of the castes. (Ch. IX. 85)

The complexity of psychological strains among the co-wives is unrecognized. From Manu's perspective, the marital strife of the co-wives is solvable if their husband treats them according to their natal backgrounds and castes. Another sexual privilege of high-caste men is marriage to a variety of women regardless of their castes, whereas, as previously discussed, Manu condemns women who marry out of their castes. The high-caste woman's marriage to the lower-caste man is particularly not acceptable to him.

Hypergamy still remains as a prominent marital institution in many of our current cultures in which men have more social and legal privileges and wealth than women. When the three obediences compelled women to depend entirely on men for their welfare, it would be natural for women to have powerful and wealthy mates. When Hindu women and their parents were eager to improve their social status, their hypergamy resulted in a great demand for a limited number of men with power and wealth, which ultimately contributed to the perpetuation of polygyny and led to a tolerance of male promiscuity, in the current term. Manu's condemnation of high-caste women's marriage to lower-caste men also probably contributed to the prevalence of hypergamy as well as polygyny in Hindu society.

Religious hypergamy was practiced by the Japanese imperial clan in uncertain Shintō terms of maintaining their "pure blood" descended from the deity and severely limiting their daughters' chances to marry outside their clan. Even

the empresses in their rulership, who had disappeared in the Heian period, were chosen from unmarried princesses and widows and were expected to remain single. By contrast, their male counterparts had a much wider selection. They married several consorts for political alliances but also added more women as official mistresses and had casual flings with courtiers. Yet those Japanese women sovereigns in the pre-Heian period still remained under the patriarchal power of their male counselors jealously guarding them against the new contenders aspiring to dominate the imperial politics through their sexual allure to the women rulers.

The institution of the child bride in India is well known but its beginning still remains mysterious. Child marriage does not appear in the *Vedas*. Yet in one version of *Ramayana*, the heroine Sita is a child bride of six years old. The *Manu* is one example of the ancient Hindu codes already approving of pre-puberty marriage:

A man, aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him, or a man of twenty-four, a girl eight years of age; [...].

(Ch. IX. 94)

Although the minimum marriageable age still varies in the *Manu*, some other lawgivers maintain harsher and more coercive injunctions, as follows.

Yajnavalkya declares that if parents do not marry their daughter before puberty, she will have a deformed foetus at every time of menstruation. Yama forewarns parents and older brothers that by keeping a girl after puberty from marriage, they will go to hell. Marichi declares that a father who marries his daughter of eight will go to heaven, but if he does so after her puberty, he will go to hell. Other

lawgivers also hold more or less similar injunctions (Thomas 225). One wonders why those fanatic lawgivers desperately wanted to ensure that girls would marry before puberty. One possible answer is that, like Manu, they feared the disruption of the caste structure by the offspring produced from their women's free sexual relations with men in other castes or with foreign origins. These lawgivers' coercion worked effectively for centuries. The child bride probably at first became an institution among high castes, which was gradually followed by the lower castes who aspired for social respectability and the supposed religious merits.

The political and material interests of noble fathers also led them to lower the bride's age in 11th-century Japan, as exemplified by Shikibu's mistress and Fujiwara no Michinaga's daughter, Empress Shōshi, who married at the age of twelve. Michinaga and other noble fathers strived to produce an imperial heir and control the imperial court behind their possible grandson. Their political fervor certainly seems to have contributed to the surplus of imperial brides, and the imperial institution of polygyny for generation to come and buttressed the norm of matrimony in Heian noble society.

In the current research, we have no access to medieval Hindu women's direct responses to the *Laws of Manu*. Instead, by crossing the time of centuries, we can learn from the accounts of 19th century Hindu women their responses to the later effect of the *Laws of Manu*. The scholar and social reformer Ramabai (1858-1922), who studied Sanskrit classics, explains the bride's parents' perspective in the context of her contemporary Hindu high-caste society:

The early marriage system, although not the oldest custom of my country, is at least five hundred years older than the Christian era... The earlier the act of giving the daughter in marriage, the greater is the merit, for thereby the parents are entitled to rich rewards in heaven... Although no law has ever said so, the popular belief is that a woman can have no salvation unless she be formally married. (29-34)

According to Ramabai, if a girl, beginning her life as an inferior sex, was told that marriage was the ticket to heaven, she would naturally be eager to marry as soon as possible. The initially convenient pragmatism of the early marriage was transformed into a religiously sanctioned parental duty and descended into the lower castes eager to emulate their social superior in Hindu society. Since the immature bride inevitably had little education, the early marriage ended up reinforcing the patriarchal discourse that women were ignorant and not fit to teach men.

Another 19th century Hindu woman, Rassundari Devi (1810-?), tells her story in her autobiography that she terminated at twelve when she married one of the three high castes, a *Vaisya* (land owner). This deeply religious Hindu woman with a desire to read religious texts, secretly self-taught in the midst of heavy domestic duties, and wrote and published her autobiography in widowhood. Unpretentiously, Rassundari recalls her fear of social censure and the struggle of hiding her desire for education, unusual for a housewife and mother:

How unfortunate those women were, they said. They were no better than animals. But it is no use blaming others. Our fate is our own. In fact older women used to show a great deal of displeasure if they saw a piece of paper in the hands of a woman. (Tharu 199)

It was once an amazingly familiar practice of many cultures to discourage women's intellectual desires with social censure, as women were supposed to live for men, not to aspire to their individual accomplishments. The wife was expected to attend her husband and children's needs, and the fulfillment of her desire was never acknowledged.

The institutions of polygyny and the child bride inevitably resulted in a large number of young widows in Hindu society because they tended to survive their much older husbands. The traditional condition of widowhood was a stark reminder of the three obediences that women had little claim to social status without men. Having lived only for her husband, the widow had no skills outside the household, would become a financial burden on the marital family and sometimes suffered the worst fate of abandonment. Alterkar notes that it was a historical disaster that Buddhism and Hinduism gradually developed extreme asceticism, and this vogue eventually compelled women, particularly widows, to live like nuns (157). The mode of asceticism is exemplified by Manu's denial of the widow's remarriage:

A virtuous wife, who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste, reaches heaven, though she has no son, just like those chaste men. (Ch. V. 160)

This means that once married, the wife is still bound to her deceased husband permanently both on earth and in heaven. Hindu society developed the ritual of widowhood, such as head shaving and seclusion from public activities for the rest of her life. The traditional Hindu widowhood seems to have become equivalent to the religious renunciation of a Buddhist nun. Alterkar suspects the institution of Hindu widowhood was influenced by Buddhist asceticism.

The striking scene of Rassundari's autobiography is her widow ritual of the tonsure, still practiced in the 19th century in rural India, against which she protests as undeserving and humiliating:

Toward the end of my life I have been widowed. I feel ashamed and hurt by the realization that even if a woman has lived her life fully, has brought up her children and leaves behind her sons and daughters to carry on, her widowhood is still considered misfortune. (Tharu 191)

Rassundari left the rare record of a candid widow's response to the severely ascetic tradition based on the social presumption that women did not suffer public humiliation as much as men. Most widows nevertheless remained silent, possibly out of their timidity and ignorance, for centuries.

While forbidding the widow's remarriage, Manu promotes the widower's quick remarriage, as follows:

A twice-born man, versed in the sacred law, shall burn a wife of equal caste, who conducts herself and dies before him, with (the sacred fires used for) the Agnihotra, and with the sacrificial

implements. Having thus at the funeral, given the sacred fires to his wife who dies before him, he may marry again, and again kindle the (nuptial) fires. (Ch. V. 167-169)

Manu's clear message is that the widower can have a fresh start with a new wife because women are replaceable.

To be sure, the *Manu* does not prescribe *sati*, the act of self-immolation for widows. An early stage of *sati* appears in the *Vedas*, in which a widow presumably belonging to nobility performs a symbolic self-immolation of lying next to the corpse of her deceased husband but descending from the pyre (Thapar 118). Later, this originally fake funeral ritual for the man began to include his widow's voluntary or mandatory self-immolation. Women belonging to the royal warrior Rajput clans in medieval northwestern India were reputed for committing *sati*, the militant demonstration of feminine fidelity reflecting their cultural identity and ideology. Their *sati* was widely praised and presumably contributed to its dissemination among high-castes in other areas.

Joshi concludes that polygyny, child brides and the prohibition of remarriage were three major causes of the medieval Rajput widows' self-immolation. The child bride was the Rajput's traditional means of political alliance, and she often survived her husband who died either in battle or in old age. The young widow's remarriage was not acceptable for the warrior caste because she would have ended up producing sons by the same mother and different fathers, disrupting the rigid clan structure. For this reason, the widow was swiftly persuaded and led by her relatives to the burning pyre of her deceased husband.

The polygyny of the deceased ruler would also become financial burden for his successor. When the deceased king had numerous wives and mistresses, *sati* was an ample reason for the successor to discard at least some of them in order to reduce the cost of feeding them. Accustomed to listening to the court bard singing hymns celebrating these self-immolated widows, Rajput girls were trained not to fear their possible turns to become widows, at least in theory (164). These traditional hymns for widow burning thus possibly inculcated the concept into the psyche of the Rajput noblewomen. Moreover, Joshi confirms what we already presume that the surplus number of women in polygyny led numerous husbands not to treat all of them equally and with respect, but sometimes even abuse them with the implicit mindset that their lives were dispensable.

The 11th-century Muslim scholar Alberuni recorded his acute observation of Hindu women:

The Hindu marry at a very young age; therefore, the parents arrange the marriage for their sons....Husband and wife can only be separated by death, as they have no divorce. If a wife loses her husband by death, she cannot marry another man. She has only to choose between two things – either to remain a widow as long as she lives, or to burn herself; and the latter eventuality is considered the preferable, because as widows of kings, they are in the habit of burning them, whether they wish it or not, by which they desire to prevent any of them, by chance, committing something unworthy of their illustrious husband. They make an exception of only

women of advanced years, and for those who have children; for the son is the responsible protector of the mother. (Thomas 235)

If the widow was young, attractive and childless, her relatives had to ensure the perpetuation of her deceased husband's honor by burning her. This was still the quickest means to earn social respectability for the burned widow and her relatives. Yet widow immolation was practiced mainly among the high-castes and royalties, as the majority of the Hindu population, the lower castes found it of little merit and could afford to ignore it.

Widow immolation continued into 19th century colonial India, and Ramabai postulates the Brahmin's scheme of sending young Hindu widows to the burning pyre:

It is very difficult to ascertain the motives of those who invented the terrible custom of the so-called *sati*, which was regarded as a sublimely meritorious act. As Manu the greatest authority next to the *Vedas* did not sanction this sacrifice, the priests saw the necessity of producing some text which would overcome the natural fears of the widow as well as silence the critic who should refuse to allow such a horrid rite without strong authority. So the priests said there was a text in *Rig Veda* (the oldest and most authoritative religious text) which according to their own rendering reads thus: "Oh! Let these women, not to be widowed, good wives, adorned with collyrium, holding clarified butter, consign themselves to the fire! Immortal, not childless, not husbandless,

well adorned with gems, let them pass into the fire whose original element is water.”

Here was an authority greater than that of Manu or of any other law giver, which could not be disobeyed. The priests and their allies pictured heaven in the most beautiful colors and described various enjoyments so vividly that the poor widow became madly impatient to get to the blessed place in company with her departed husband. Not only was the woman assured of her getting into heaven by this sublime act, but also that by this great sacrifice, she would secure salvation for herself and husband, and for their family and for the seventh generation. Be they ever so sinful, they would surely attain the highest bliss in heaven as well as prosperity on earth. Who would not sacrifice herself if she were sure of such a result to herself and her loved ones? Besides this, she was conscious of the miseries and degradation to which she would be subjected now that she had survived her husband. The momentary agony of suffocation in the flames was nothing compared to her lot as a widow. She gladly consented and voluntarily offered herself to please the gods and men. (74-76)

A Hindu high-caste woman's first-hand information and dramatic description stress how easily the manipulation of religious power can transform a naïve Hindu widow into a willing martyr of self-immolation. According to her implicit argument, Hindu widowhood was regarded as a punishment for the woman's

crime in her previous life. Hinduism and Buddhism inherited this worst karmic retribution, and the trouble was that both religions generously used it against widows in South and East Asia as the best means of dispiriting and demeaning them. Medieval Buddhism in Japan did not promote widow burning but disapproved of widows' remarriage. As karmic retribution requires no evidence, when either the Brahmin or Buddhist priest told a widow that her widowhood is her karma, what could she have said?

In 1829 the British government banned *sati*, against the ferocious objection of Hindu male fundamentalists. One of the Indian advocates for banning *sati*, Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), witnessed his sister-in-law forcibly led to the cremation ground, pressed down to the bamboo poles and tied with the ropes to the burning pyre of her deceased husband (Thomas 295). His report confirmed the suspicion that it was not always the widow's voluntary act of grief over the loss of her husband, as constantly postulated by numerous ultra-conservative Hindu supporters.

The mother of a son is the only woman to whom Manu has to give homage for perpetuating the Brahmin's supremacy:

The teacher is ten times more venerable than a sub-teacher, the father a hundred times more than the teacher, but the mother a thousand times more than the father. (Ch. II. 145)

What is contextually clear is that she cannot be the mother of a daughter to be celebrated by the Brahmin who reveres and adores his own mother. The mother of

a son at least knocks off one of the three obediences, as she usually manages to influence him.

Ramabai also postulates that the mother's traditional clout still remained in the 19th-century Hindu family:

The mother is the queen of the son's household. She wields great power there, and is generally obeyed as the head of the family by her sons and by her daughters-in-law. (52)

Though limited in number, several mothers of imperial heirs triumphed over the three obediences throughout the history of India, China and Japan as their regents or virtual rulers and the matriarchs of the household. Even mothers of ordinary sons were usually considered to be better-off in South and East Asia. Without the luck of having their own sons, mothers found it difficult to become prominent members of their patriarchal cultures. Ramabai reports that in 19th-century India, a mother who bore only daughters had much less joy of parenthood (60). Often frowned at and tormented in the household and in public, she would have to keep trying to bear a son. The ancient Brahmins demonstrated an ambivalent reluctance about giving women education. Manu vacillates, and once he does permit their education:

Excellent wives, learning (the knowledge of) the law, (the rules of) purity, good advice, and various arts may be acquired from anybody. (Ch. II. 240)

The idea of educating daughters might have been a remnant of *Vedic* society when women and men recited the hymns together in the religious rituals. Yet Manu

takes back his permission in the other passage, firmly declaring women's intellectual deficiency:

For women no (sacramental) rite (is performed) with sacred texts,
 thus the law is settled; women (who are) destitute of strength and
 destitute of (the knowledge of) *Vedic* texts, (are as impure as)
 falsehood (itself), that is a fixed rite. (Ch. IX. 18)

As the *Vedas* represent sacred scriptures and a metonymy for knowledge in general, Manu's rejection of them presents his belief that women deserve no education.³⁷ Women were forbidden not only to read the *Vedas*, but also to listen to them, and they were unable to know their content. Had women and the lowest castes been able to read the content of their degrading policy, they would possibly end up confronting the men ruling patriarchal society. By forbidding the education of women and the lowest castes, the flagrant Brahmins openly disparaged them, the victims of their degrading policy (Ho).

Numerous Hindu women managed to compose their devotional literature in vernacular languages. One of them is a Hindu mystic named Bahinabai (1628-1700), who even seems to have studied the *Vedas*:

The *Vedas* cry aloud, the Puranas shout

“No good may come to woman.”

I was born with a woman's body

How am I to attain Truth?

“They are foolish, seductive, deceptive –

³⁷ When there were the two different passages like these, Thomas says that the Brahmin presented a mythical calendar and explained away that one was no longer valid in their time (219). Those ancient Brahmins were great politicians.

Any connection with a woman is disastrous.” (Tharu 107)

Admittedly, Hinduism is an inconvenient umbrella term for Indian indigenous religiosity to describe the spirituality of a woman like Bahinabai who took part in the campaign for *bhakti* (devotion) professing that spiritual practice is for everyone against the elite ritualistic Brahmanism. The daughter of a Brahmin family, Bahinabai pined for an individual spiritual life, but her caste convention pushed her to marry at the age of three. She remained married, but her independent and unconventional religious inclination and association with the lower castes angered her husband and led him to abuse her physically. Bahinabai is a firm believer in woman’s karmic three obediences, as demonstrated in the following passage: “My duty is to serve my husband, for he is God to me....If I transgress my husband’s commands, all the sins of the world will be on my head” (Tharu 115). Yet whether the mystic Bahinabai reconciled her simultaneous devotion to two seemingly incompatible entities, God and the spouse, is unclear. Tharu does not think Bahinabai did (109).

Bahinabai told her son that she would never be reborn again after death, perhaps believing that upholding karmic three obediences were the ultimate means of her salvation probably just as numerous women in her time thought. For this thesis, Bahinabai’s accomplishment is her honest exposure of the clash between individual desire and social expectation that has also tormented intelligent and spirited women in widely different cultures and times. Shikibu’s melancholic tone of the voice in her *Diary* suggest that in 11th-century Japan, she

also suffered the tyranny of social convention disapproving of women's intellectual independence.

Ramabai had an unusual Brahmin father who educated his wife and daughters. The personal experience changed him. Traveling around the subcontinent, he came across the wife of a local king studying Sanskrit. She made him realize that a woman was capable of scholarship if given a chance. He went back to his village, and to his people's horror, he taught all his knowledge to his wife, except the *Vedas* because the *Manu* forbade women to study them. Ramabai tells how her father, an expert in Hindu literature, met the adamant disapproval of his village people upon educating his wife:

My father replied by asking the Dharma Guru [the teacher of natural law], "What is written in the *Dharma Shastras* which in any way forbids the education of women?" But the *Dharma Guru* could not give a satisfactory answer [...]. ("My Story" qtd. in Adhav 58)

Ramabai's father's experience reveals that even orthodox Brahmins widely disputed over the interpretation of the *Manu*. Yet his desire for an intellectual mate was rare and offended all castes in his village even though he interpreted the *Manu* irreproachably and found a "loophole" of withholding the *Vedas* from his women. Called *Pundita* (a woman scholar) for her amazing knowledge of Sanskrit classics, Ramabai proudly declares that her own mother was her teacher, proving her father's accomplishment of educating all women in his family. Yet he lost all his survival connections and means for educating his wife and daughters, and all

his family was forced to leave. The social persecution of Ramabai's family gives us a glimpse of the public fear of disrupting the complex gender-caste stratification in rural Hindu culture.

In a way, Ramabai is an extraordinarily fortunate woman, perhaps one of the few who occasionally came out in every patriarchal culture at every period. Shikibu, too, was born into a family having produced generations of scholars and poets and was taught both Chinese and Japanese literature by her father. In the *Genji*, Shikibu used a collection of poetry composed by her ancestors, proving that women intellectuals needed the unusually abundant support of family men and intellectual assets to thrive in patriarchal society. Ramabai and Shikibu nevertheless learned to question social conventions and traditions of their own cultures, their critical awareness setting them apart from their own gender and leading them to struggle with doubts and internal rebelliousness alone. The 19th-century Indian liberalism prompted Ramabai to go farther than her father, read the *Vedas*, marry a lower caste man and convert to Christianity. Yet she did recognize the sexual inequality in the church which was rooted in the myth of Eve's original sin.

Confucian Femininity

Just as Brahmin patriarchy was present before the presence of the three obediences in ancient India, the discourse of masculine supremacy was prevalent in ancient China before the rise of Confucianism, as evinced by the earliest known Chinese literary piece, the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing* in Chinese and *Shikyo* in Japanese) 詩經. Widely read as a Confucian classic in East Asia, the *Poetry* has a

legendary claim that the Great Master Confucius collected, edited and compiled classic poems. This indicates that, just as the Brahmins represented Hindu intellectual traditions with Sanskrit and the *Vedas*, generations of Confucians established and led traditional Chinese scholarship for centuries. By 891 the Japanese nobility possessed 16,790 pieces of Chinese classic literature, as documented in the *Current Collection of Literature in Japan* 日本國見在書目録.³⁸ As the Chinese literary works that will be discussed in the rest of this chapter were mostly already familiar in Shikibu's society of the 11th century, we can imagine that she, too, read at least some of them.

The Confucians have been excellent in preserving the ancient manuscripts but also developed peculiar scholastic customs. Perhaps out of reverence for the Great Master, they attributed the compilation of the numerous manuscripts to his scholarship and wrote Confucianized-moral commentaries. The *Poetry* contains Pre-Confucian works and probably became familiar to the Great Master, as he sings in the *Analects*. Although the *Poetry* has been traditionally believed to be edited by him, Shirakawa Shizuka 白川静 attests that several Confucians already pointed out one thousand years ago that it could not have been the Great Master's edition, as it was edifying as his moral ideology. Since the norm of treating the *Poetry* as one of the Confucian sacred texts had already been challenged, Shirakawa's proposal is that the product of pre-Confucian society should be interpreted in the context of contemporary Chinese culture of the 8th-9th century BCE, and it does not have to follow Confucian moralizing commentaries.

³⁸ A few works written in Chinese by the Japanese are also included.

The *Poetry* lists diatribes directed at the mistress of the last King Yu 幽王 of the Zhou 周 (1046-1256 BCE), Bao Si 褒姒, a classic *femme fatale* in East Asia, like a demonized Queen Jezebel, a woman in power behind the throne in the Hebrew Bible. Bao Si has been believed to have perpetrated the fall of the dynasty in the two poems. In one poem, she is blamed for her intelligence and wisdom:

The wise [intelligent] man builds the castle; his wise (intelligent) mate destroys it.

哲夫成城 哲婦傾城

Conspicuously ambivalent is that the same Chinese character 哲, meaning *intelligence*, is used for the man 哲夫 and his woman 哲婦. In other words, it is wrong for Bao Si to be as intelligent as her master and king. An irony is that had Bao Si been a lesser woman, she would not have been as harshly attacked as she is. In the other poem, Bao Si has been made to be the sole cause of the fall of the Zhou:

Alas, the glorious Zhou dynasty was destroyed by Bao Si.

赫赫宗周 褒姒以滅之 (Shirakawa 226)

Shirakawa thinks that it was a contemporary political discourse to blame the “intelligent” Bao Si, and she generated a variety of titillating legends. If so, the two poems demonstrate a classic strategy of punishing women for what was the man’s fault. The *Poetry* nevertheless remains mute about her royal lover King Yu’s ruling responsibility. He is believed to have replaced the incumbent queen with his favorite, Bao Si, to install her son as the heir-apparent, thus provoking a revolt of the local nobility. As a result, he caused the destruction of his kingdom.

Almost one thousand years later, Sima Qian 司馬遷 records the legend of Bao Si in the *Chronicle of Zhou* 周本紀, which also contains a most unbelievably preposterous parable about her: King Yu kept launching the rocket signaling the invasion of the enemy to gather the local nobles because he wanted to see Bao Si's laughter at their bewildered responses to the false alarm from their sovereign. Doesn't the parable point to King Yu's loss of mind by his obsessive sensuality? Only the lack of one woman's laughter could not have brought down the country. The diatribes against his mistress hide an adamant refusal to acknowledge King Yu's incompetent ruler-ship.

The *Chronicle of Zhou* quotes the following proverb, insinuating Bao Si's supposed political interference as the cause of the fall of the Zhou:

The hen never crows; [as long as] the rooster crows, the household is well-maintained.

雌鷄無晨 雄鷄之晨 惟家之索

If the hen crows, meaning that the woman leads her husband, she will destroy the equilibrium of their family. Sima Qian probably might have been responsible for the propagation of this proverb, as it has been a widely known in East Asia. Bao Si and the hen-crowing have been packaged as a disastrous example for society and ceaselessly quoted to admonish women's domination over their husbands. Shikibu certainly knew the proverb, as previously said, her narrator never forgetting the apology of mentioning politics briefly in the *Genji*. However ambivalent her attitude toward Confucianism is, she tried to maintain irreproachable manners in the imperial court.

In fact, the disparaging of Bao Si's intelligence prompts us to suspect that she might have been a formidable politician wielding power. It is a recent speculation inferred from archeological finds of Zho Kingdom that Bao Si might have been a priestess of some indigenous religion. If so, the priestesses might have governed the ancient kingdom for some time until they were replaced by the masculine power in a certain period, which Takamura believes to be in China around 1000 BCE. She posits that China joined the patriarchal civilization in the rest of the world and left the Japanese islands behind with a matriarchal culture (48). If so, Bao Si lived around this transitional period from matriarchy to patriarchy in ancient China. Possibly, the ancient priestess' political clout offended the later patriarchal ideologists including Confucians as their anathema.

In Confucius' time, Bao Si was already a legendary figure, but he says nothing of her in the *Analects* 論語. The later Confucians nevertheless constructed the first Nation-Ravaging Beauty 傾国美人 out of Bao Si, holding her responsible for the fall of the Zho. After Bao Si, the number of Nation-Ravaging Beauties increased and they have been blamed for their political influence on rulers throughout Chinese history. The discouragement of women's political interference became a Confucian doctrine. The Japanese women were also blamed for copying the Chinese Nation-Ravaging Beauties.

Shikibu might have learned the *Poetry* as a Confucian moral parable. She nervously has her narrator apologize in the *Genji* whenever she is compelled to bring in imperial politics briefly. For instance, depicting Genji's father Emperor on his deathbed, the narrator informs, "He has left numerous heart-feeling wills,

but a woman should not reveal them. I feel guilty for having disclosed even a couple now”(Ch. “The Sacred Tree 賢木.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 88). The narrator’s excuse implies that although Heian noblewomen still influenced imperial politics, Shikibu was aware that it was regarded as unfeminine by numerous noblemen. Confucian morality was gradually advancing in Japanese noble society of the 11th century.

The *Poetry* also has an aristocrats’ wedding song, perfectly accommodating the Confucian notion of gender division and roles, and the most quoted passage is the celebration of the future offspring of a new couple:

When he has sons, / they will be cradled on couches. / they will wear robes. / they will be given scepters for toys. / Their cry will be loudly heard. / When they sit, their knees will be covered with red cloth [the symbol of the ruler’s dignity]. / The [future] kings, the princes of the household and land.

及生男子・載寢之牀・載衣之裳・載弄之境王章・其泣口皇口
皇・朱帶斯皇・室家君王

When he will have daughters, / they will be put to sleep on the ground. / They will be clothed in infant outfits. / They will be given a piece of ceramic for toys. / They will have neither decoration nor ceremonies [The other interpretation is “They will do neither wrong nor right,” but Shirakawa seems correct.] / Drinking and Eating [in the kitchen] will be only their concern and task / so that they will not worry their parents.

及生女子・載寢之地・載衣之_レ易・載弄之瓦・無非無儀・

唯酒食是議・無父母言台羅. (Shirakawa 126)

This wedding song needs no explanation, evidently declaring the gender hierarchy and roles from infancy, as the male infants are “cradled on couches,” and the females, “put on the ground.” Interestingly, it was a traditional habit of Hindu midwives to put an infant girl on the ground and lift an infant boy up (Alterkar 7). It is amazing that the ancient Hindu and Chinese men constructed the identical ideology of the three obediences and the same custom of treating infants according to their own sex. In both ancient Indian and Chinese cultures, the birth of a boy was evidently much welcomed and a girl was a disappointment. Shirakawa kindly interprets the sexual “distinction” as the appropriation of Yin-Yang cosmology 陰陽学 that the male belongs to the sky and the female reigns on the earth (126). Yet “the earth” was mostly dominated by male rulers throughout Chinese history. Yin-Yang cosmology can be a matter of interpretation, as often a convenient means to approve of the ancient norm of masculine supremacy. Listening to the wedding song, the ancient bride might have felt pressured from the beginning, expected to conceive a male infant for the perpetuation of her marital family.

Since the *Poetry* was widely read in Heian noble society, Shikibu might have read this relatively easy song or even sung it. When she rather proudly recalls in her *Diary* her father’s constant lament, “What a shame you were not born a boy. I have no luck,” she seems to accept the masculine superiority declared in the song (Fujioka 244). She is privileged for a woman. Yet belonging

to women minority intellectuals, she is painfully conscious that she does not fit into the conventional expectation for her gender.

The folk song in the *Poetry*, “The Quince 木瓜,”³⁹ presents a liberal ambiance in Pre-Confucian society with the celebration of spontaneous love affairs.

She throws a quince at me. / I throw back my gem [on the sash
belt] at her. / This is not a mere formal greeting. / We desire to
carry out a long rapport.

投我以木瓜⁴⁰ · 報之以環王居 · 匪報也 · 永以為好

(Shirakawa 103)

The quince symbolizes female fertility, and throwing the fruit 投果 is a woman’s customary means to choose her marital partner (Ishikawa 179). The woman in the poem is fortunate as the man of her interest reciprocates her throwing the quince at him by throwing his ornament back at her. Sometimes a woman might have to keep throwing fruits at the man who keeps ignoring her until she throws the last remaining one. Shirakawa tells the episode of a popular handsome man called Fan Yue 播岳 in the nation of Jin 晉 during the Six Dynasties 六朝時代 (222-589). When Fan Yue rode in a carriage, women on the street would throw fruits at him, and his carriage was immediately filled with their fruits. If so, the custom of fruit throwing possibly lasted for more than seven centuries, and might have been still

³⁹ The quince belongs to the papaya family. The Chinese quince is a native of China and spread into East Asia. In Japan, the flower of the quince is called *boké* and its fruit is hard and tart like a plum and used to make wine.

carried on somewhere in China. This song delightfully sheds the stereotype of a sad Asian woman oppressed in a male-dominant culture.

Had the ancient woman had bound feet, she would not have been agile enough to throw the fruit at her beloved passing by her to let him know her inmost passion, as she would have had to hobble with the aid of sticks. The “Quince Throwing” has no hint of the ancient woman’s bound feet. The accepted hypothesis is that the custom of foot-binding started between the 8th century and the 13th century, and lasted for about 1000 years up to the beginning of the 20th century. Foot binding is believed to have begun to accommodate a male fetish desire for women with 10cm feet (half of a regular woman’s size),⁴¹ but it also turned into a pragmatic means to hinder her mobility. Ancient Chinese women could even dance in religious rites and communal feasts, and they still could flee in times of flood, fire and war, all of which later trapped and destroyed numerous descendants of their own sex. Ironically, foot-binding was a sign of the woman’s freedom from manual labor and was disseminated in upper-class society.

The much revered Confucius as the founder of morality and scholarship in East Asia might have been a paradoxical face to women in East Asia. The *Analects*, which is believed to have been a collection of his disciples’ notes, presents an irreproachable and even caring teacher to his disciples. Both men and women must have learned the *Analects* as the model of human relations, and the

⁴¹The origin of foot-binding is unknown and has generated numerous hypotheses. One of them is that the last king of Southern Tang 南唐 (937-975) preferred women with small feet. After North Song 北宋 (960-1127) had succeeded Southern Tang, foot-binding gradually became popular. This implies that foot-binding started in a particular area and later spread widely among noblewomen in Han society.

Confucian discourses must have been ingrained even in women. On the other hand, his most unflattering statement for women is widely quoted:

The Master says, a woman 唯女子 and a petty (literally little) man 小人 are difficult to manage. If you are friendly, they will be disrespectful. If you shun them, they will pout.”

子白、唯女子興小人、為難養也。近之則不孫。遠之則怨。

{陽貨十七} (Yoshida 399)

The Chinese characters, “唯女子,”⁴² which literally mean “a mere woman,” have been usually interpreted to mean a woman in general. The Great Master’s statement has been historically recognized as “Women and children are difficult to manage,” to appropriate the discourse of East Asian patriarchy. How could women protest the Great Master, the founder of their morality? They were probably thought to be “just women” and not to suffer public humiliation as much as men would.

Moreover, the only individual woman recorded in the *Analects* is the contemporary ruler’s favorite mate and an infamous adulteress, Nanzu 南子, whom Confucius only wants to avoid, but as his social superior, she forces him to visit her and exasperates him. The *Analects* lists only his adversarial attitudes toward women as if disastrous to his teachings of morality. The *Analects* indicates that the best Confucian feminine behavior is withdrawal from the public, as his followers kept preached for centuries. The current Confucians have to struggle to

⁴² The translator Yoshida 吉田賢抗 argues that 唯女子 means an ignorant low-class woman, and in the *Poetry*, there is a respectful word for a woman, a lady or noblewoman, 淑女 (399). Yet the majority of women in China in the 5th century BCE were possibly not educated.

make these words sound amenable but should not forget that their Great Master was never an egalitarian. Confucius' vision is a righteous patriarchy. He is not even the stereotyped Confucian, who seems to have been more austere than the Great Master.

The Absolute Submission of Han Confucianism

The First Han 漢 (206 BCE-220 CE) was the first Chinese empire to adopt Confucianism as the state ideology and hire numerous Confucians scholars for the court. Like the Brahmins in ancient Indian royal courts, the Confucians embodied the literacy, intellect, moral guidance and ritual in society. As the Brahmins proposed the four-fold caste system to the Hindu rulers, the Confucians introduced their own theory of the hierarchal relationship between the ruler and subjects to the Han emperors. In this sense, both the Brahmins and Confucians were adept pragmatic advisors to their rulers. As a result, the Han established imperial Confucianism for the later series of Chinese dynasties as well as for other East Asian kingdoms for centuries to come. Confucianism thus became the basis of East Asian patriarchy.

Around the 2nd to 1st century BCE, 400 years after the time of the Great Master, one of his 11th (12th?) descendants, Kong Anguo 孔安国, taught an extremely autocratic ideology of Confucianism in the Han court. Still renowned to this day is his proverb of the absolute fidelity and submission of the public to the ruler, “Even if the ruler is incompetent and unjust, the public still must serve him with unfailing fidelity and submission” (qtd. by Fukuda⁴³). This is a “new

⁴³ I quoted the statement of the Japanese Confucian scholar Fukuda Shigru 福田殖.

Confucianism.” Not surprisingly, Han emperors favored Kong Anguo’s theory of the absolute fidelity and submission of the public to the ruler. The unconditional submission to the superior set the tone of autocracy in East Asia. In Japan, Kong Anguo’s Confucianism particularly suited the warrior class to command unconditional loyalty from subjects in times of wars. Yet unconditional submission is completely contrary to Confucius in the *Analects*, who constantly refuses to serve rogue rulers and chooses to preserve his moral integrity and genteel poverty all his life. The Han Confucianism became a patriotic theory, ceasing to use much of rationalism and allowing the ruler to trample the public openly.

One of Kong Anguo’s disciples and a court historian, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 BCE-?), implicitly rejected his mentor’s ideology in his gigantic masterpiece *History*, known as *Shiji* 史記 in Chinese, containing a series of previous dynasties and historical figures’ lives by making historical accuracy his priority more than ingratiating himself to the contemporary Han ruler. Sima Qian’s historical accuracy does not mean the categorization of myth and history, as in the current work on history, but to record what he thought paramount as objectively as possible. To his professionalism, Sima Qian was even defiant of Confucianism. In Chinese imperial annals, women usually appear briefly, but Sima Qian included the *Biography of Empress Lu* 呂后本紀, probably pragmatically judging that Empress Lu (241 BCE-180 BCE), the widow of the first Han sovereign, virtually ruled the Han until her death. Sima Qian ended up exposing a series of her cruel murders to maintain her political dominance, which have been renowned in East

Asia and overshadowed Sima Qian's fair statement in the end that the nation remained peaceful during her reign. Although the Confucian would like to argue that Empress Lu realized the old proverb, "if the hen crows, the house will ruin," according to Sima Qian, she proved to be a competent ruler.

Sima Qian's *Biography of Empress Lu* terrified ancient Chinese men and must have become one of the major reasons of their determination to prevent women rulers in future, as indicated by the modern Chinese scholar Yang's following postulation:

Although China did not have a written Salic law, nevertheless there was a prohibition, silently observed through dynasties, that a woman was not to become emperor. (Yang Lien-sheng 19)

The ancient Confucian dynasties succeeded in stamping out the woman's possible challenge against masculine dominance ahead, 600 years before medieval Europe began to use the Salic law around 507-511 to regulate succession to the throne through the male line. Even so, as Yang acknowledges, China had Empress Wu 武則天 in her own right during the Tang dynasty,⁴⁴ but Confucianism succeeded to maintain the male lines for two thousand years. Ancient Korea and Japan had women rulers and later adopted the Confucian paradigm of nation building.

In the *Biography of Confucius* 孔子世家, Sima Qian also maintains historical objectivity while demonstrating his impassioned respect for the Great Master, expressed in his commentary:

⁴⁴ Yang quotes the first known Chinese empress of prehistoric times, Nukua, recorded in the Japanese scholar Endo Ryukichi's article, "Shina Shiso Hatatsu Shi, part 1 section 1," but finds her time too remote to take as a fact (19).

I studied Confucius' literature and pictured a glimpse of his character [...]. Although he was born a commoner, his teachings carried on for ten generations, and scholars revere them deeply. Kings, royalties and whoever knows the six arts in China, set his teachings as their standards. He is indeed a sage.

余讀孔氏書、想見其為人....孔子布衣十余世。學者宗之。中國言六藝者、折中於夫子，可講至聖埃 (Yoshida Kenkō 888)

Sima Qian's *Biography of Confucius* is not a hagiography. He does not hesitate to disclose Confucius's unflattering birth out of wedlock, literally "the union in the field," *yagō* (Japanese pronunciation) 野合, when the "sage" was even believed to have been a descendant of a king (799).

The *Biography of Confucius* established the traditional picture of Confucius as an impoverished and conscientious scholar undervalued by his contemporary rulers, who strove for political hegemony in the time of constant political upheavals and took no interest in him. Yet both the *Analects* and the *Confucius* show us only a male world. Sima Qian briefly records Confucius' genealogy, including his mother and his son's name, but nothing about his wife or daughter(s); only the names of his male descendants are recorded. When only imperial women, princesses and empresses were recorded in the annals, even women in Confucius' family remained obscure. The *Analects* and the *Confucius* have thus contributed to the traditional Confucian emphasis on education for men, brotherhood and righteous ruler-ship but, because of their refined literary and

moral qualities, unfortunately marginalized or even ignored half the population of Chinese population, women, and imported this attitude to the rest of East Asia.

Shikibu nevertheless owes much to the *Shiji* for the composition of the *Genji*. Although Shikibu's direct references to the *Shiji* and its technical application have been already pointed out, the possibility that her bilingualism led to the discovery of an ideological affinity with Sima Qian should be remarked as essential to comprehend the *Genji*. Shikibu must have known that Sima Qian had lived in a state-based stratified society of the Han Empire through Confucianism, which her country had adopted to a large extent. Neither Sima Qian nor Shikibu could afford to take the freedom of press for granted. Despite his evident reverence for Confucius, Sima Qian proved to Shikibu that he was not a typical Han Confucian bureaucrat through his famous humiliating punishment of castration by offending the irascible Emperor Wu 武帝 and the posthumous reputation of his subversive scholarship.⁴⁵ Didn't Shikibu recognize Sima Qian's individual freedom from the conventional morality and ideology of his time? Didn't she learn from the Great Historian to liberate herself from social convention and assert individualism in writing? Both Sima Qian and Shikibu chose prose for their works, which, according to the French philosopher Alain (1868-1951), allows the author to be more analytical than poetry (qtd. in Saigō 194). Saigō thinks that Shikibu cultivated her technique of criticism by writing analytically in prose. She shrewdly chose the genre of fiction perhaps because it was popular and entertaining but not taken seriously. It is still a wonder how a

⁴⁵ In the *Chronicles of Han* 漢書, Ban Gu detects the influence of a liberal ideology of Daoism in the *Shiji*, presumably owing to Sima Qian's candid depiction of historical figures and remarking at a woman's reign through composing the *Biography of Empress Lu*.

woman like Shikibu ran the risk of inviting the political censure by inventing a semi-incest between Genji and his stepmother Empress Fujitubo, which could have been regarded as a grave offense to the imperial government.

The Han emperors from the beginning thought it urgent and imperative to secure and reinforce the multitudes' unconditional submission to political and legal authorities. When the Han Confucian scholars found numerous ancient manuals on the code of behavior and rituals, knowing that the manuals would meet the rulers' expectation, they edited, compiled and offered them to the emperors. It is now impossible to put those manuals in a chronological order but suspects that all of them were constructed at about the same time (Noma Fumishi 野間文史 185). The three obediences⁴⁶ are listed in those manuals including the *Book of Rites*, all of which are known to have been present during the reign of Xuandi 宣帝 (91 BCE-49 BCE).

Some readers might find it tiresome to read all of these antiquated manuals. They appear to be unnecessary details of gender roles and rules and how to conduct rituals and ceremonies, most of which are no longer in use now. Yet we must not forget, as the historian Kawajiri Akio 川尻秋生 insists, "Once, the ritual was politics. (Han) Confucianism had the purpose [of combining both] and exerted great influence" (250). The Han rulers were eager to amplify their authority by making the best use of the Confucian rituals in public. Those rituals were presumably at first prescribed for the higher class, but we do not know how

⁴⁶ The three obediences are present in four ritual manuals, such as the *Record of Guilan Zhuan* 穀梁伝, the *Great Book of Rites* 儀礼大載礼記, the *Book of Ceremonial Rites* 儀礼 and the *Book of Rites* 礼記.

much they impacted the rest of the Han multitudes. Although a detailed description is not within the scope of this study, we will take a brief look at the prescription of the three obediences and its possible ramification in Confucian nations in East Asia. The three obediences 三從 in all of the manuals are written with the same Chinese character 從, which has two meanings, *to follow* and *to obey*, in order to emphasize women's subordinate position. As near-identical three obediences commanded Hindu and East Asian women, to follow and obey men were what they were once expected to do.

The simpler Chinese sentences in the *Gulian Zhuan* seem to demonstrate that it was composed earlier than the other manuals and its ideas were further elaborated with more rituals in the later ones. After examining the entire *Gulian Zhuan*, Noma comes to the conclusion that the author is determined to circumscribe women, and the possible later manuals also continue to uphold the ideology and code of woman's conduct as the primary basis of their agenda for women. The *Gulian Zhuan* declares woman's obedience to her father, husband and son most plainly of all the manuals:

The woman is ruled by her father at home; when she is married, she is ruled by her husband; when the husband dies, she obeys the first-born son.

婦人在家制於父、概嫁制於夫、夫死從長子 (Noma 182)

In the *Gulian Zhuan*, the woman's presence is forbidden when a man dies so that she will not defile him (Noma 182). Even though the author might have expressed his fanatic belief in male supremacy by limiting woman's presence on the most

grave and grievous occasion in society, it might have been ignored in actual life, as too inhumanly severe. Yet ranking co-wives as the principal, secondary and third was practiced in an attempt to minimize their influence on the husband. To implement the hierarchy of the co-wives, the man wedded the principal wife with a proper rite but took the second and the third informally. Only the first wife was entitled to be the mistress of the household. This idea of structuring co-wives was also appropriated for the rank of multiple imperial consorts in the Han Empire. Only the empress dowager was allowed to assist a minor emperor, who could be her junior consort's son. This was part of the Han Confucians' efforts to diminish women's participation in imperial politics. Those Confucians never wanted women to interfere with politics, and must have discouraged them by shaming them with the familiar proverb, "the hen never crows in the morning. If she does so, [it is an alarm that] the household will be ruined."

The three obediences are listed in the prescription of "the Mourning Dress Code 儀礼喪服伝" in the *Book of Ceremonial Rites* and in the instruction in the *Book of Rites* of how to conduct a wedding. The Confucians evidently thought it appropriate to preach the three obediences to women on the two foremost important occasions in society. The *Book of Ceremonial Rites* presents a little more sophisticated prescription of the code of woman's conduct than that in the *Gulian Zhuan* with the succinct phrase of the three obediences 三従:⁴⁷

⁴⁷. As far as these early Confucian manuals are concerned, the characters of the four virtues are not yet listed. But as previously said in the Introduction, the first known presence of the three obediences in the earliest Japanese collection of poetry, *One Thousand Leaves* from the 7th century, is already packaged with four virtues as 三従四徳. It seems that the four virtues were constructed later than the three obediences, but not long after these Confucian manuals.

The woman has the “three obediences” but no other path to follow. She obeys her father before marriage, her husband in marriage and her son in widowhood.

婦人有三從之義、無專用之道。故未嫁從父、既婚從夫、夫死從子 (Noma 184)

The *Book of Rites* does not have the phrase ‘the three obediences’ 三從 but envisions it with the procedure of the couple leaving the bride’s natal home after the wedding:

(After the wedding), when the couple leave the bride’s house, the bridegroom’s carriage leaves ahead of the bride’s and leads her.

This sequence shows the couple how they should behave. That is, the wife should follow and obey her husband. The woman obeys her father in childhood, her husband in marriage and her son in old age. The husband must be the master of the household. He must lead members of his household with intelligence.

出乎大門而先。男師女、女從男、夫婦之義由此始也。婦人從入者也、幼從父兄、嫁從夫、夫死從子。夫也者夫也、夫也者以知師入者也 (Takeuchi 410)

Here again, the Chinese character 從, “to obey” and “to follow,” is repeated to put the bride in her place. By contrast, her bridegroom’s authority is emphasized with the twice recurrence of the character 師, “to lead.” The two major events in the community, the funeral and wedding, are selected as the best occasions for the

obvious reason of constantly drilling the woman with the three obediences. In the funeral section, the women mourners were presumably reminded of their subordination to men for the rest of their lives. The passage of the wedding procedure indicates that the three obediences are appropriated to establish the supremacy of the husband over the wife from the beginning of matrimony.

Not surprisingly, in the *Book of Rites*, men exercise an ample authority over women in the section of mourning regulation and rituals. There is an ignoble episode in which a man appearing to be an impoverished scholar, who has lost his own mother to death, is recommended by his disciple to sell the minor wife of his (possibly deceased) father to pay for his funeral. Certainly finding the proposal immoral, he rejects it (111). This episode itself indicates that women in lower social status in the family were regarded as chattel. In another episode, Confucius' disciple recalls his master's instruction of the dismissive attitude toward the deaths of women: The Master says, "When your lord's wife or yours dies, you may act, eat and speak in relaxed manners" (Takeuchi 126). In other words, even the wife of the man's social superior is virtually inferior to him in gender, let alone his own wife.

Although the *Liji* 礼記 is interpreted as *the Book of Rites* in English, "li" in Chinese 礼 means not merely *rites* but close to *righteous deeds* when Confucius warns that the lack of *li* leads to anarchy in society. Yet the elaborate rituals developed must have convinced numerous Han Confucian bureaucrats of their values as essential means to maintain the status quo of the nation and resulted in making them the automatic guardians of ceremonies. Ancient Japanese nobility

had inherited this Confucian attitude, meticulously recording ceremonies as Heian noblemen eagerly kept work logs in Chinese with no room for their individual thoughts. Their women also presumably learned to record family rituals and later developed them into diaries with recording their insights. As the ambition to control politics through performing rituals was closed to most noblewomen, they might have learned the freedom to write their interests and ideas in an extra space and initiated the tradition of the diary, a genre of Heian literature.

Although numerous rituals in the *Book of Rites* later became obsolete and were studied by a limited number of scholars, the basic ideology of gender roles must have continued resonating in East Asia. For instance, the Confucians developed the code of gender segregation in their daily life. The space distance between boy and girl from the age of seven was a familiar Confucian custom to prepare them for their gender roles in adulthood in China and Japan. Gender segregation prevented women's interference with politics, social events and public affairs and politics. The ideal Confucian couple was thus to remain distanced in the daytime so that women stayed in the private sphere mostly in the household, and men, the outside. Even though the Confucian notion of gender segregation may not have been consistently and literally practiced, the basis of woman's subordination and man's supremacy became a normative code of behavior in East Asia for centuries.

The First Han produced an ideal Confucian mate, Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (48-6 BCE?), a junior imperial consort of Emperor Cheng 成帝 (33-7 BCE). She belonged to the Ban 班 family, who produced generations of court scribes and

intellectual women. Her great-grand-nephew, Ban Gu 班固, proudly records the biography of Ban Jieyu, who had the highest career among his family, in the section of imperial consorts in the *Chronicles of the Han* 漢書 and depicts her as the epitome of Confucian femininity.

There are two episodes that prove Ban Jieyu's Confucianism. One episode is her refusal of Emperor Cheng's invitation to sit next to him in the carriage with the reason that it is inappropriate for the ruler to present himself with a woman in public. Hearing her demonstration of Confucian feminine propriety, Emperor Cheng's mother, the Dowager Empress, lauds her, "there was Fan Ji (a renowned wise, royal consort) in the ancient time, we now have Ban Jieyu." This episode implies that the staunch Han Confucian, Ban Gu, believes that the woman has no place in public and embraces his great-grand-aunt's voluntary withdrawal from the public scene as a remarkable manifestation of feminine self-effacement.

The second episode indicates that the Han court was an extremely dangerous arena for career competition, full of back-stabbing and intrigues, and Emperor Cheng was a renowned libertine in Chinese history. After he transferred his favor to the Zhao sisters, they tried to wipe out all their rivals in the palace, his empress and other consorts including Ban Jieyu with the charge of the attempted murder of the Emperor and them by witchcraft. Yet Ban Jieyu succeeded in defending herself with the following Confucian rhetoric:

I am told, [She quotes the *Analects*] 'Life and death are fated, and wealth and honor are mandated by heaven.' I am not blessed with the fortune [of bearing the heir apparent] but tried to act

righteously. Had I committed treason, what would I have gained by it? [She has no heir to reinforce her possible power.] Had heaven known my crime, I would have been prevented as a disloyal subject. [Heaven has not punished her because she is innocent.] Had heaven been oblivious, what good would it have been to invoke heaven for my ignoble act? I declare I have committed no crime.

妾聞’死生有命、富貴在天。修正尚未蒙福、為邪欲以何望? 使鬼神有知、不受不臣之愬、如其無知, 塑之何益, 故不為也

(Ban Gu 3984)

This is a carefully formulated diplomatic and convoluted speech, difficult to comprehend without reading between the lines. At any rate, she was able to convince Emperor Cheng of her innocence. Ban Jieyu aroused his pity and received a considerable amount of gold.

Her articulation and discretion ultimately saved herself and her family. Had she been found guilty, the harsh Han criminal law would have executed not only her but also her family members. The Ban family was extremely grateful for Ban Jieyu’s successful defense, which saved their lives, understandably as her great-grand-nephew did not spare his words to praise her Confucian femininity. Yet immediately after this trial, fearing the Zhao sisters’ further scheme, Ban Jieyu altered her career from the imperial consort to the dowager empress’s gentlewoman. This was an excellent Confucian diplomatic move, not

antagonizing anyone, as the Great Master would leave his unprincipled lord quietly.

Ban Jieyu is also the first known Chinese woman poet in her own right. “My Song of Sorrow 自悼賦” reveals a rational woman with high intellect and sense of morality in describing her delight, bitterness and sorrow over her glory and fall in her autobiographical recount:

Having been blessed by an undeserved position,

I secretly hoped for the everlasting bliss.

Whether awake or asleep, I sighed repeatedly.

既過幸於非位号、乘萬庶幾平嘉時、每寢起而紊息号、

(Ban Gu 3985 and Kang-I Sun Chang)

The imperial consort feels “gratitude” to the sovereign, who prefers her to other women. The imperial matrimony is thus meant not to be an intimate but a hierarchal relationship between sovereign and subject. This was also a perfect model for traditional Confucian marriage. Although mutual affection was desirable in any form of marriage, the formality of Confucian ethics downplayed it, upholding the husband’s supreme position and the wife’s submission.

Ban Jieyu’s poem also gives us the rare information on the education of imperial consorts in the rear palace 後宮, as follows:

I spread out paintings of women to serve as guiding mirrors;

Consulting the lady scribe, I asked about the *Songs*.

Saddened by the usurping hen that crows at dawn,

I lamented the transgression of a beautiful favorite Bao Si.

陳女團以鏡監号、顧女史而問詩。悲震婦之作戒号、哀褒、閹
之篇郵、 (Ban Gu 3985 and Kang-I Sun Chang)

The “lady scribe” is in charge of educating the new imperial mistress, who has just entered the rear palace, particularly focusing on Confucian propriety. The paintings of famous and infamous women in legends were a most effective visual means to impress the young mind and urge her to follow Confucian propriety. As previously discussed, in the *Poetry* “Bao Si” had been already severely criticized before Confucius’ time and was later judged as an anti-Confucian model of the Nation-Ravaging Beauty. Ban Jieyu’s reference to “Bao Si” is a metaphor for the Zhao sisters, who have stolen her imperial spouse’s affection and plotted against her.

In the Confucian view, the Zhao sisters have blatantly interfered with imperial politics as “the usurping hen.” Ban Jieyu alludes to the familiar parable that “the hen usually never crows in the morning; if she does, she invites the fall of the nation.” The two sisters, who dominated Emperor Cheng, were later blamed for corrupting him and exhausting the imperial wealth with their luxurious lifestyle. By then, the First Han Empire 前漢 was gradually going downhill. Ban Jieyu follows the social discourse of blaming women for the ruler’s political incompetence, as Confucian patriotism forbids her to charge the sovereign.

Strictly Confucian to the end, Ban Jieyu accepts her fate graciously, but she still questions:

Could it be my fault? One can never alter the mandate of heaven.

豈妾人之映咎号？将天命之不可求 (Ban Gu 3985 and Kang-I

Sun Chang)

Right or wrong, her imperial lover is above the law, as the so-called “son of heaven.” It was a defect of Han Confucianism that no one could check the abuse of the emperor’s moral injustice, owing to its teaching of unconditional submission, which the rulers embraced to maintain the status quo and their power. Ban Jieyu seems to have perceived the futility of unconditional submission even momentarily in the poem.

Ban Jieyu’s posthumous fame has carried on for centuries in both China and Japan. The later Confucians continued to laud her prudent manners in her imperial service and her retirement perhaps, projecting the woman version of their Great Master who was undervalued in his time. Her loss of the imperial lover’s favor of the beautiful poetess also inspired such famous Chinese poets in Japan, Wang Wei 王維 and Libai 李白, to compose empathetically romantic poems on her dejection. Shikibu might have read the poem “*Tuanshange* 团扇歌,”⁴⁸ meaning “The Song of a Round Fan,” as it is listed in the *Selected Works* of [Classic Chinese Poems], *Wensuan* in Chinese and *Bunsen* in Japanese 文選, popular among Heian nobility. In the poem, the woman believed to be Ban Jieyu, comparing herself to a fan in autumn, an item out of season, would not be an alien image to the Japanese noblewomen in polygyny as their husbands could easily afford to leave them for a new sexual partner. The later medieval Noh play

⁴⁸ As “*Tuanshange* 团扇歌” is not listed as Ban Jieyu’s work in the *Chronicles of Han*, her authorship is now discredited.

“Hanjyo 班女” is also built on Ban Jieyu’s reputation as abandoned lover, presenting an insane young woman longing for her departed lover.

Ban Jieyu’s posthumous image in China and Japan had undergone a sort of deterioration, as these male poets and playwrights willfully ignored the historical fact that she had the apparent intelligence to save herself and write a moving poem, not believing that a woman could have her own life without a man. In the *Genji*, women are also abandoned by our hero but ultimately survive, rejecting the timeless male fantasy over the fragile beauty in inconsolable grief to moralize the three obediences. In *Writing Margins*, Terry Kawashima points out the posthumous deterioration and marginalization of Japanese women in late medieval literature, arguing it as an effect of polygyny and Buddhism endorsing masculine dominance in society. If so, the Chinese woman poet Ban Jieyu joined the marginalization of Japanese literary women having taken place in Post-Heian society. Kawashima’s work confirms Takamura’s idea of “Japanese women’s humiliated period” in Post-Heian society in her work, *The History of Women*.

The Construction of Confucian Femininity

If the amplification of Ban Jieyu’s grief by the male Chinese poets insinuates their desirable femininity, her contemporary, Liu Hsiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE), also invented his feminine ideal in his masterpiece. He seems to have experienced the futility of unconditional loyalty with his work, the *Biography of Exemplary Women* 列女傳. As a member of the royal clan, bureaucrat and scholar, Liu Hsiang spent his life buttressing the empire and probably concluded that the current court politics was constantly disrupted by maternal in-laws of emperors

and imperial consorts competing for the hegemonic power. Worst of all, the pleasure-seeking Emperor Cheng paid little attention to imperial politics. Desperately attempting to wake up the sovereign from his debauchery, Liu Hsiang wrote and possibly offered him the *Exemplary Women* but failed to interest him, and his work was left, supposedly covered with dust in the imperial library until the later Confucians salvaged it.

The *Exemplary Women* proves that Liu Hsiang was the first known male Confucian who understood the importance of women's education. The *Analects* finds women problematic and does not take interest in their education, but Liu Hsiang is believed to have gloried in educating all his women in his household, including maids, with Confucian literature. In Liu Hsiang's contemporary society, education was believed to teach Kong Ango's theory of the absolute submission of the social inferior to the superior, and the *Exemplary Women* dramatizes its feminine version with unusual Confucian heroines depicted in more than 100 stories.

The Japanese scholar of Chinese, Nakajima Midori 中島みどり, draws a conclusion through her research that although Liu Hsiang entitled his work the *Biography of Exemplary Women*, it is in fact not a collection of biographies but of Confucian moral parables to teach women their ideal Confucian behavior. Liu Hsiang drew his heroines from legends and history in a predictably black-and-white fashion. His virtuous women consist of wise mothers, chaste wives and faithful daughters who teach men, such as their rulers, fathers, husbands and sons, the Confucian patriarchal ideology of proper behavior and relations between

master and subject in the feudal context. We can hear Liu Hsiang's virile voice through each heroine speaking his impassioned agenda of preserving the Han Empire. So, it is most likely that his heroines are Confucian patriarchal women who never existed before or in his time.

Although Liu Hsiang's complex prose of the *Exemplary Women* has been studied in Japan and translated for centuries, this thesis uses the most current translation of Nakajima for an easy understanding. The *Exemplary Women* begins with the chapter of "Righteous Mothers 母義伝," suggesting his argument in the first place that maternal roles are paramount bolsters of Confucian society. Some of his heroines are not even mothers, but he considers them to be maternal for taking care of men. Particularly, believing that the future of the Han Dynasty depended on how to shape sons in noble families, Liu Hsiang demonstrates how women should rear and educate their sons with the examples of fourteen mothers of sons.

Curiously, Liu Hsiang avoids using Confucius' mother, perhaps finding his illegitimate birth problematic. Instead, he narrates the story of the mother of the renowned Confucian Mencius 孟子 (372-289 BCE). Liu Hsiang's "mother of Mencius 孟車可母" is a tour de force and the most famous moral tale in the *Exemplary Women*. Since more than a half century before Liu Hsiang's time, Sima Qian also wrote a *Biography of Mencius* 孟子, which does not have the same tale of his mother, Nakajima thinks that Liu Hsiang used some other ancient sources to invent a worthy mother for Mencius (163).

The parable of “Mencius’s Mother’s Three Moves 孟母三選” is a household term in East Asia. It also became one of the classic moral parables passed down for generations in Japan. Mencius’ mother first moves close to a cemetery, where her son immediately starts playing a burial digger and horrifies her. She then moves to a market and again regrets to hear him picking up commercial words and learning nothing either academic or moral. The mother’s last move close to a school eventually pays off her ceaseless efforts, as Mencius is delighted to mimic the teacher. The moral of this episode is that the wise mother should be careful and selective to decide where she can start off her son’s education in the best condition. This parable still is quoted when Japanese mothers choose schools for their children.

A close reading of the “Three Moves of Mencius’s Mother” displays the Han royal prince’s idea of successful career education, privileging intellect and placing the burial digger and merchant in the bottom of the social hierarchy. Once, Japanese Confucian hierarchy also placed the merchant in the bottom of the hierarchy, as the warrior-farmer-artisan merchant 士-農-工-商.⁴⁹ The Confucian hierarchy resembles the Hindu four-fold caste system descended from the ancient *Vedic* hymn, both sharing the idea of structuring the masses including women. If so, the story of the “Three Moves of Mencius’ Mother” might be not as innocent as it appears to be.

⁴⁹ The hierarchy of the warrior-farmer-artisan-merchant is listed in the ancient Chinese work *Guanzi* 管子, written in the 5th century BCE. In feudal Chinese society, the merchant was perceived as a threat to agrarian economies.

Liu Hsiang continues to celebrate this ardently sacrificial woman, Mencius's mother, probably just as he would do to the impassioned sacrificial subject to the Han Empire. In this way, Mencius's mother is structured in the Han society as a patriotic as well as patriarchal member. Yet Liu Hsiang might have never imagined a sacrificial father to his family. To Liu Hsiang, a patriotic and patriarchal father upholds the nation as his priority. In this way, he thinks like the ideal Hindu ruler Rama, who abandons his wife Sita owing to the public suspicion of her tainted chastity during her captivity. Rama chooses his nation over his wife. In Liu Hsiang's hierarchal order, a patriotic and patriarchal mother sacrifices herself for her son just as a patriotic and patriarchal father sacrifices himself to his ruler as the living model for his son.

Mothers of daughters are absent in the chapter of "Righteous Mothers," presumably being out of Liu Hsiang's picture. He obviously did not find them particularly useful to buttress Han patriarchal society. While approving of educated mothers for their sons with Confucianism, Liu Hsiang believes in the essence of the three obediences that woman should live only for man. A good-intentioned Confucian, he at least has the best hope for daughters of Han families to be the potential mothers of sons.

The most improbable of Liu Hsian's parables is the wife of the king Chao in the nation of Chu 楚昭貞妾 in the chapter of the "Stories of the Chaste and Obedient 貞順伝." Hearing a weather forecast that his palace will be flooded, the king immediately dispatches the messenger to fetch her but unfortunately forgets to give him the token of his commission, one half of a bamboo leaf, which has to

match the other half the wife has. She adamantly refuses to leave the palace with the messenger, who cannot show her the seal, saying that she will rather die than dishonor the agreement with her husband. She keeps her word. When the messenger returns with the seal, the wife has already been wiped away by the flood.

To praise the chaste and obedient wife, Liu Hsiang incongruously quotes a line in the *Poetry*: “The gentleman never alters the Way 道” (Liu Hsiang Vol. 2. 166). The phrase originally lauds a man who does not have to sacrifice his life for his wife in order to prove his chastity. Not surprisingly, the *Poetry* has more poems praising the character of men than that of women, and the shortage of praise for women’s character in classic literature forced Liu Hsiang to substitute the poem for the man to exaggerate the blind obedience of the non-existent wife.

This wife shares with Sita in *Ramayana* the same extreme degree of chastity and obedience, and their husbands are equally excessively righteous and never comprehend the horror of sacrificing their wives for pursuing the narrow self-interest of proving their supreme sense of morality. Hindu and Confucian women were expected to be inspired by both heroines, emulate them and strive for a higher morality in their patriarchal norm of society. Yet had the author of *Ramayana* and Liu Hsiang found their inspiration in the abstract ideal of femininity, is it possible that the majority of actual women would not have easily been persuaded by either blind faith nor futile suicidal action?

The most excruciating story to a modern reader is probably that of the “Widow Gao Xing 寡高行 in Liang 梁.” The beautiful and young widow Gao

Xing rejects the king of Liang's proposal by saying, "Unfortunately, my husband had a more brief life than a dog and horse. [...]. I should have followed him and lay next to him in the coffin, but I had to raise my young children and could not selfishly do so. [...]. I have been taught that once a woman is married, she must never do again and pursue chastity. It is unfaithful to forget the deceased and have a new husband. It is not chaste to forget poverty and crave wealth. It has no human meaning to ignore righteousness and seek personal gain (Liu Hsiang 182-183). After this eloquent speech on the chastity of a widow, Gao Xing suddenly cuts off her nose with a knife.

Nakajima says that this, too, has no specific source, suspecting that it is most probably Liu Hsiang's invention, or he might have learned of a rare actual incident during the time of the Han Empire. Most importantly, she points out that this is the only one case of a self-mutilating widow to reject the offer of remarriage and preserve her chastity in Liu Hsiang's *Exemplary Women*. This parable of the widow's self-mutilation must have deeply impressed the writers of the later versions of the *Exemplary Women* and initiated their rigorous competition of constructing the impassioned chaste widow 節婦烈女 resisting remarriage by cutting not only their noses but their ears and eventually committing suicide (184-185). The impassioned chaste widows in those series of the *Exemplary Women* presumably were popular heroines after the rise of Neo-Confucianism in China around the 10th century, which adopted the ascetic aspect of Buddhism and disapproved of widows' remarriage. As previously noted, the Hindu widow's chastity also became a norm in medieval India owing to the

increased trend of asceticism. While the teaching of the three obediences impelled Asian women to depend on men, the cultural convention of chastity made widows without sons vulnerable to the whims of their societies.

Nakajima thinks that with his patriarchal heroines, Liu Hsiang invites women to earn their right to share the man's role of preserving the Han Empire by teaching and demonstrating the unconditional submission to their fathers, husbands and sons. On the other hand, one might notice that he is apparently oblivious to the fact that the three obediences do not allow women to act on their own will.⁵⁰ In the "Campaign for the *Exemplary Women* in Confucian Society," the father of modern Chinese literature, Luxun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), presents a most biting criticism of its moral stance celebrating the widow's suicide and blaming the women victimized by rape. He points out that the *Exemplary Women* 列女伝 has turned into the *Impassioned Women* 烈女伝. (Both Chinese characters, "lie 列" and "liè 烈", have close pronunciations and resemble each other in shape but have entirely different meanings, as "the number of persons or things" and as "impassion.") As an early modern critic of Confucianism, Luxun contends that Chinese men imposed on women what they found impossible to do for centuries. Luxun's criticism of Chinese womanhood is repeated by Alterkar referring to the

⁵⁰ While translating those parables into contemporary Japanese, Nakajima confesses that she had a nightmare that women were forced to act against their inclination (Liu Hsiang, "Afterward" 328). Perhaps she had a temporarily psychological atavistic reaction by analyzing the *Exemplary Women*, who exhorted generations of regular Asian women to follow what a small number of them could do out of some intense conviction, defying the natural human instinct of self-preservation. The translator's experience tells that Liu Hsiang fully used the power of language for the campaign of producing those heroines in his ancient society, which still affects the current woman's psychology with its amazing callousness to the sentiments and welfare of her own sex.

traditional censure of Hindu widows' remarriage (109). Both men recognize the callousness of masculine tradition in their societies.

Although Liu Hsian's *Exemplary Women* was present in Shikibu's society, as far as known in the women's literature, it does not seem to have had a particular impact on them. Yet the historian Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子 argues that noblewomen's chastity was already promoted by their men to ensure the validity of their heir in the Heian period while the men could have a variety of flings and slighted the chastity of their brief lovers (97). Love poetry was prevalent in Heian literature. Polygyny allowed noblemen to exchange numerous love poems with multiple partners, which have enticed the contemporary critics of the day to preserve them in their selected collection of poetry. On the other hand, the *Exemplary Women* might have been taught to high-born women and imperial consorts, who were expected to become a mother of an heir rather than a passionate lover. The middle-rank women could remarry, but the high-born and imperial women seem to have been discouraged to do so to avoid the complication of family alliance and disruption of family dynamics, just as the Rajput royal clan in medieval Hindu society forbade their women's remarriage for the same reason.

More than one century after Liu Hsiang's time, the first renowned woman Confucian moralist and historian, Ban Zhao 班昭 (45-117) indirectly responded to his ideal of Confucian femininity as an ambivalent blessing in her *Admonition for Women* 女戒, once an influential work for womanhood in East Asia. Being as ardent a patriot as Liu Hsiang, Ban Zhao welcomed his earnest advocacy of

women's education to serve the Han as effective subjects as men. Yet she found that his invitation to share the male responsibility to hold the Empire together as counselor and orator to men was preposterously unrealistic even for her, a token woman Confucian. Instead, the *Admonition* proposes to a larger audience of regular women a more accessible idea and practice of Confucian femininity, perhaps reflecting Ban Zhao's own experience as a wife and a survivor in the treacherous Han court like her great-grand-aunt Ban Jieyu.

Generations of the Ban family produced brilliant Confucian intellectuals, including a recent "eminent woman," Ban Jieyu. After the imperial scribe and Ban Zhao's older brother Ban Gu 班固 died without completing the *Chronicle of the Han* 漢書,⁵¹ his younger sister, who was a widow,⁵² received the imperial order to continue the writing project.⁵² Ban Zhao thus unexpectedly began an extraordinary career in the Han imperial court as a historian, tutor and later the dowager empress' political advisor. Deeply impressed by her outstanding scholarship and modest attitude, the contemporary Emperor Zhao 和帝 hired her as his regular scribe and an instructor of Confucian classics and morals for his consorts in the rear palace.

⁵¹ Ban Gu writes in the geography section of the *Chronicles of Han*, around the 1st century BCE, "Beyond the ocean (Korean colony) *Rakuro* (Japanese pronunciation) 樂浪海, there is the nation of *Wa* 倭 (the ancient Chinese name for Japan) divided into 100 tribes. They occasionally bring gifts to our nation. . . . Eastern barbarians (the Japanese islanders) are naturally more peaceful than other savages. It is understandable that even Confucius, dismayed by the lack of morality among the Chinese, thought of travelling to those islands" (Okamura 岡村 218). In the Han courtier's view, Japan was obviously a nebulous backward country.

⁵² Ban Zhao is believed to have compiled Liu Hsiang's *Exemplary Women* and the *Continuous Eminent Women* with commentaries and included them in the *Chronicles of Han*; but they are not present in the current *Chronicles of Han*.

Ban Zhao had two renowned students. One of her women students became the empress who virtually ruled the Later Han as the regent for the minor emperor and kept Ban Zhao as her political confidant. Ban Zhao also mentored Ma Rong 馬融, who literally bowed down to her and pleaded for her instruction to read the *Chronicle of the Han* written in complex Chinese characters. Renowned as the founder of the Later Han Confucianism, Ma Rong presumably inherited Ban Zhao's scholarship by producing numerous Han scholars and preserved his mentor's *Admonition for Women* as proof of her ideology of feminine Confucianism. Yet Ban Zhao has not been credited for her mentorship of Ma Rong's Confucian accomplishments in the Later Han period. The *Chronicle of Later Han* 後漢書 lauds Ban Zhao in typical Confucian terms for her impeccable chaste widowhood and her authorship of the *Admonition for Women* but not much for her outstanding scholarship. From the perspective of traditional Confucianism, a woman's worth is her chastity, not her intellect.

Ban Zhao states that her concern for her daughters' future in marriage is her motive to write the *Admonition for Women* at fifty-two. Yet, as she married briefly in youth and became a young widow, her daughters should have been married by then. By addressing young women in Han noble society as her daughters, she might have written her work out of a patriotic motive, since a good wife would be an imperative subject of the nation. In this aspect, the *Admonition for Women* differs from the *Exemplary Women* in that the latter contains stories of noblewomen and rulers' wives, whereas the first is mainly addressed to noblewomen in the household.

Frankly, without context, it can be psychologically tasking for a woman of today to read through the *Admonition for Women* demeaning her own sex. From the beginning, Ban Zhao uses the modest topos, characteristic to the Confucian:

I am ignorant and unintelligent by nature. Fortunately, my late father loved me and my mother and teachers trained me well to marry into the Song family at the age of fourteen.

鄙人愚暗、受性不敏、蒙先君之有余寵、賴母師之典訓。年
十有四、執箕帚於曹氏、 (Fan Ye 2786)

Admittedly, this is not much different from a regular Confucian male scholar who would start by declaring, “I am an unworthy and unenlightened writer.” Confucius is a respectable gentleman and teacher but politely refuses the invitation of employment by rogue warlords in the *Analects*, never as ingratiating as Han Confucians, who developed an extreme manner of obeisance to the sovereign in the court.

Ban Zhao uses the two Chinese characters 箕帚, literally meaning “the broom and dustpan,” to mean marriage. The same verb was also used for the male subject to serve his lord dutifully. In her time, a woman having a husband was equated to a man having a master, emphasizing the servile condition of both sexes. In this sense, the Brahmin and the Han Confucian shared the conviction that marriage was a woman’s duty and service to the social superior was a masculine lot to maintain a society. The use of the same verb articulates this philosophy which would be possibly true to most feudal cultures.

Ban Zhao presents herself as the author of the most renowned Confucian catchphrase, the four virtues and the three obediences, for Chinese women by adding the four virtues to the three obediences listed in the *Book of Rites*, as follows:

The woman [should aim at] four particular accomplishments:

womanly intelligence; womanly speech; womanly appearance;

womanly skills.

婦行第四、女有四行、一曰婦德、二曰婦言、三曰婦容、四曰婦功。

Ban Zhao insists that womanly intelligence does not necessarily mean cleverness. A woman has to be neither eloquent, beautiful nor extraordinary; womanly virtue includes her graciousness, chastity, caution, good manners; womanly speech means to avoid slandering and choose good words; the woman should be first of all clean; in order to be a talented wife, she should sew and cook well and treat guests with hospitality. Here, the *Admonition for Women* perfects the four virtues and the three obediences 四德三從, which have been used for an amazingly long time, for almost two thousand years.

As previously said, although the four virtues and three obediences are an inseparable phrase in China, the *Genji* lists only the latter part. Yet Shikibu does show her understanding of the four virtues, as her heroines are overemphasized with their sense of chastity, modesty, beauty, literary and music skills. Shikibu is particularly concerned with Confucian chastity as an essential means to preserve a noblewoman's reputation and her sense of self-worth, which *Genji* ignores for his

sexual conquest and imposes on his regular mates. This thesis does not particularly focus on the recognition of the four virtues in the two chapters of analyzing Rokujō and Murasaki but witnesses how Rokujō and Murasaki struggle with the three obediences and the four virtues, illuminating the double-standard of gender roles and sexuality in the male-dominant mode of the *Genji*.

The supreme goal of the *Admonition for Women* is woman's graceful self-preservation in the household as a peace maker. To achieve it, Ban Zhao firmly tells the wife to curb her behavior by using the ancient folklore belief:

As yang is naturally rigid and yin is pliable, strength suits best for man and weakness, for a woman.

陰陽特性、男女異行。陽以剛篤德、陰以柔篤用。

(Fen Ye 2788)

For Ban Zhao, woman's strength is the pleasing "weakness" and evidently means docility, placidity, modesty and endurance to maintain conjugal relations.

If the wife is not pliable enough, Ban Zhao points to the destructive outcome of the couple, the husband's violence:

If the wife slights her husband, his angry shouts follow. Unless the wife soothes his rage, she will suffer an endless beating.

侮夫不節、言遣口可從之、忿怒不止、楚撻從之。

(Fan Ye 2789)

Ban Zhao is unpretentious enough to admit that domestic violence was a familiar scene in Han noble society and tries to persuade the wife that she can stop it with her gentle behavior. Yet the believer in Kong Anguo's ideology of unconditional

submission has nothing to say against the violence of the husband. It is difficult for us to imagine how mere feminine passivity can overcome male violence, just as the male subject's unconditional submission does not prevent his master's abusive power.

Remarking at Ban Zhao's discouragement of the "intimacy in the private room [bedroom] 房室周旋" (2789) as an "indecorous attitude" toward her husband displaying her want of respect toward him, Takamura postulates that the *Admonition for Women* has inhibited woman's sexuality and instead demanded her absolute passivity and silence in marriage (64). Since conjugal intimacy would create an egalitarian ambiance and undermine the Han Confucian's notion of hierarchy, the noblemen were forewarned against women's affection as a secret ulterior motive to manipulate them. Ban Zhao does not see the Confucian paradox of the need for male offspring and the fear of being overpowered by woman's sensuality. Nor does she find the invisible psychological barrier between the couple problematic. In this sense, she is indeed a Han patriot and Confucian.

Ban Zhao urges the bride, who has to move into a large family household as a stranger, to establish her own status by yielding not only to her husband but also to her mother-in-law for the sake of family equilibrium:

Even when the mother-in-law is wrong, it is best to obey her. Let the wife not start a dispute with the mother-in-law over right and wrong. The daughter-in-law should be pliable and obedient (to her senior).

姑伝繭而非、猶宣順命。勿得違戾是非、争分曲直。

(Fan Ye 2790)

Although the bride's pliable obedience is only urged for her relationship with her mother-in-law, Ban Zhao basically argues that the wife should use it in dealing with the rest of her marital family for self-preservation, only with whom she is entitled to stay.

Strangely, there is no word for multiple wives in the *Admonition for Women* although polygyny was common in Han noble society. Ban Zhao nevertheless hints at the presence of polygyny when approvingly quoting the *Book of Rites*, which denies the woman's remarriage but permits the man to have multiple wives:

According to the *Book of Rites*, the husband can remarry, but there is no word for the wife's remarriage.... That is, [since the husband is heaven], the wife cannot escape from the will of heaven. Nor can she escape from her husband.

禮、夫有再娶之義、婦無二適之文、、、。天固不可逃、夫固不可離也。(Fan Ye 2790)

This is basically the same message as that of the *Manu*. Ban Zhao unknowingly shows that Confucian femininity is in alliance with the Hindu code of woman's conduct in articulating the denial of woman's remarriage and the approval of man's privilege to have multiple mates by invoking the divine will to argue for marital inequality.

This shows that Confucianism has a stronger hold upon Ban Zhao as an imperial subject than her concern for young women. For a patriotic Confucian like

her, the perpetuation of the Han Empire is the will of heaven and marriage is the foundation of Han noble society. Marriage thus means polygyny in her society with the ample reason of perpetuating the paternal line. Yet Ban Zhao does not pursue either the relations of multiple wives or their jealousy, the greatest threat to domestic harmony in polygynous matrimony. By contrast, Liu Hsiang optimistically thinks it possible to erase the jealousy among multiple wives in the *Eminent Women*, presenting the ideal polygyny with their sisterhood.

A literal reading of the *Admonition for Women* might end up concluding that Ban Zhao is a drastically Confucian advocate for male supremacy and privileges. Yet she does earnestly promote women's education. At one point, she almost sounds as if she is protesting against her fellow men for neglecting women's education:

In my observation, the current gentlemen only think that they must control their wives to keep their authority over them. They train their sons to reason by teaching classic literature. Yet they do not know how to teach their daughters devotion to the husband and proper conjugal relationship. Training only sons but not daughters exposes the ignorance of essential [human] education. The *Book of Rites* says that men should begin learning to read books at the age of eight and start high education at the age of fifteen. Why can't we apply this principle of education to women?

察今之君子、徒知妻婦之不可不御、威儀之不可不整、故訓其男、檢以書傳、殊不知夫主之不可不事、禮義之不可不存

也。但教男而不教女、不赤藪於彼此之敷乎！禮、八歲始教之書、十五而至於學矣。獨不可依此以篇則哉！（Fan Ye 2788）

She does know that the *Book of Rites* never addresses girls' education. Here the *Admonition for Women* turns out to be an “admonition” of men's reluctance to share education with women.

While promoting the inequality of the couple, Ban Zhao thinks it unfair that only men can attain an education. How can we interpret her argument? Men can learn the *Book of Rites*, which justifies the stratification of their Empire and is intended to construct loyal subjects with their voluntary sacrifice for the ruler. She wants her fellow men to understand that education will make women as effective subjects as men. Admittedly, the value of the individual life was dismissed for the preservation of the Han Empire. Still, educational opportunities gave men a chance to widen their scope of life. Confucian scholarship produced not only blindly obedient subjects but also independent thinkers such as the great historian Sima Qian. He remained loyal to historical accuracy more than to the embellishment of the contemporary ruler.

The *Admonition for Women* survived as an ambivalent work. Ban Zhao seems to have understood her identity as a token woman, who had the exceptional fortune of having such an intellectual family, proving that a woman could learn if given an opportunity, while conscious that the majority of her contemporary women were much less educated than men and earned less respect. Fukuyama Yasuo 福山泰男 questions whether actual Han noblewomen might have been different from the *Exemplary Women* and the ideal femininity constructed by the

Admonition for Women (25). The *Exemplary Women* and the *Admonition for Women* were overpowered by the influence of Han Confucianism. We learn in the *Chronicles of the Later Han* that Ban Jieyu and her great-grand-niece Ban Zhao perfectly fit into the Han code of woman's conduct, as they later joined in the *Exemplary Women*. Yet it is debatable that the two women represented the majority of Han noblewomen. Interestingly, the *Admonition for Women* was already a controversial work in Ban Zhao's time as her sister-in-law wrote a direct criticism of the work, which has unfortunately not been preserved. Possibly, numerous contemporary women read the *Admonition for Women* and found it alienating and disillusioning to be taught how inferior they were to men. Even so, the Confucian scholars lauded and sided with Ban Zhao by not preserving the contentious response of her sister-in-law.

The *Admonition for Women* was mostly used by Confucians to indoctrinate women with their innate inferiority and lowly position only, but many of them ignored the author's desire for the education of her own sex. Ban Zhao's "admonition" for men thus fell on deaf ears. Generations of Confucians continued to put Ban Zhao safely on a pedestal as an isolated example of the ancient woman genius and approved of the fact that it took a woman Confucian to convince her own sex of their own inferiority and to demand their submission to men.

The weakness of the *Admonition to Women*, which explicitly advocates the wife's obedience to her husband, is that the author Ban Zhao did not practice it for a large part of her life. As a scholar, educator and political advisor, she led a more

intellectual and active life than a regular man by taking advantage of education. Unlike the *Admonition for Women*, Ban Zhao's poetic essay "Journey to the East 東征賦" demonstrates her intellectual assertion and is preserved in the *Bunsen* 文選. Had Ban Zhao been as meek and obedient a woman, as she promotes in the *Admonition for Women*, she could not have become a prominent Han scholar. She might have had the facade of humility to follow protocol. Humility was a Confucian commodity for both genders, but characteristically, it demanded more from women than men as the lowly sex. By participating in the majority maintaining the status quo, she survived the dangerous intrigues in the imperial court. This was Ban Zhao's choice to pursue her ambition, but she might have been a more complex historical figure than we think she was.

Although Confucianism became the legal and moral ideology in the Han court, Ban Zhao might have heard that the foreign religion of Buddhism was gradually captivating her people with its exotic allure. Buddhism was present in China by the 1st century ACE but does not seem to have had great impact on Han politics. Yet Buddhism eventually became an extraordinary success with its non-violent approaches to East Asian countries. Bronkhorst argues that Buddhism was initially perceived in East Asia as having the magical power to protect the state through rituals (242).

This was largely true in Japan. Owing to their relative geographical isolation as an island country, the Japanese did not have to worry as much as the Chinese and Koreans about foreign invasions, but natural disasters, such as earthquakes, storms, famines, floods, and epidemics frightened and coerced them

into turning to the supposed magical power of Buddha and praying to him for protection. The Confucian texts and the Buddhist sutras translated into Chinese, including the *Lotus Sutra*, were already present in Japan around the 6th century. The pious Buddhist Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701-756) had numerous National Temples 国分寺 built in their governing regions. Meanwhile, the imperial family gradually lost their spiritual enthusiasm for the ancestral cult of the Sun Goddess.⁵³

The mythology in the *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書記 presents agricultural communities with a deep sense of awe for the fertility deity, the Sun Goddess, and their women rulers and imperial daughters played the role of her chief priestesses. Overpowered by the domestic patriarchal force and the two imported ideologies, Confucianism and Buddhism, the cult of the Sun Goddess had already dwindled by the time of the 11th-century noble society in which Shikibu was writing the *Genji*. She thought herself a student of Chinese classics and seems to have taken little interest in the Sun Goddess from remote antiquity who had been oddly worshipped in a Buddhist society. Yet Shikibu never knew that Takamura would use the *Genji* to support her hypothesis that the text shows the remnant of an early matriarchal society. For example, numerous weddings start with the bridegroom's consecutive three-night visits to the bride's home and she continues to live with her parents even after marriage. This is quite different from the prescription of the

⁵³ Thirty-two out of the thirty-eight currently remaining Buddha statues in the National Temples are of the Medicine Buddha 藥師如来, whose healing power was obviously believed by the rulers and the masses. This shows that the early Japanese were pragmatic Buddhists. Both Hinduism and Buddhism have been traditionally linked to the study of human health. The Buddha Statue with a medicine bottle was popular in the Heian period (Okuda 奥田).

Book of Rites that the bride moves into the bridegroom's household as her first experience of obeying him. In Chapter 2, we will study how Japanese women's condition and position had declined by the time of the author of the *Genji*.

Chapter 2

The Legacy of the Sun Goddess

The three obediences 三従の徳 were in vogue as the woman's supreme virtue among the Japanese ruling class by the time of Ichijo Kanera 一条兼良 (1402-1481), a prominent aristocrat, politician and renowned scholar of both Japanese and Chinese. What is oddly intriguing is that in the collection of his lecture notes, Kanera left a statement refuting the three obediences: "As the nation of peace, Japan should be ruled by women... The Sun Goddess Amaterasu 天照 came to us in a woman's body. Empress Jingu 神功皇后 also was the mother of Hachiman Daibusatu 八幡大菩薩" (qtd. in Yamane). Kanera did not think that Japanese women had to practice the three obediences as Chinese women did. Having lost status and wealth, particularly a huge collection of literature in the most disastrous civil war in Japanese history, *Ōnin no ran* 応仁の乱 (1467-1477), he might have found this violent patriarchal strife for political hegemony most devastating to the nation. This statement was later quoted in books on the code of warrior's behavior (Yamane). If so, it is likely that only men read Kanera's statement. Unfortunately, Kanera's enlightened advice for the nation of peace was ignored by men for generations.

Kanera's unusual celebration of women in his time might perhaps have also been partly influenced by his scholarship of the *Genji*. He lauded the *Genji* as a national treasure and his lecture notes have contributed to its later studies and been quoted to this day. A series of scholars, including Kanera, wrote commentaries on the *Genji*, demonstrating the fascination of medieval nobility

with Shikibu's work. The *Genji* established women's prominence in the history of Japanese literature. Yet, the author of the *Genji* at times aroused doubt that she was a woman and the rumor that she was a man, during the later periods, as the masculine mode of Japanese society increased and became hostile toward women's literary accomplishments.

An intellectual man like Kanera, who read the *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書記, had to acknowledge that women once played the role of supreme priestess of the Sun Goddess and ruled the nation. By Kanera's time, Buddhism replaced Shintō as the primary Japanese religion and ended up assisting the patriarchal structure of the nation. As far as we know, since Kanera's time, Takamura Itue 高郡逸枝 (1894-1964) is the first modern scholar to point out the legend and history of female rulers as proof of women's political capability if given a chance. Takamura constructed a unique, though controversial, theory that ancient Japan was a matriarchal nation. Furthermore, she used the *Genji* as ahistorical evidence to argue that Shikibu and other literary women inherited the intellectual legacy of matriarchal culture when their literature thrived during the Heian period (794-1185).

Shikibu accommodates the imperial family's claim that they descended from the Sun Goddess by calling our hero "Shining Genji 光る源氏," implying not only his extremely good looks but also his imperial breeding as the son of the sovereign believed to possess the divine aura of light (Ch. "The Broom Tree 帚木." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 129). Yet as previously said, Shikibu suggests an irony of his nickname in contrast to his imperfect character. Shikibu also uses the attributes of

the Sun Goddess to depict another supposed descendant, the daughter of the previous emperor Fujitubo 藤壺, who marries to Genji's father and the Emperor, by calling her "the Princess of the radiant Sun" (Ch. "Kiritubo 桐壺." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 120). It became probably a cliché in eleventh-century noble society to laud the imperial family members with the aura of the Sun Goddess. Shikibu's mistress Empress Shōshi 彰子, whose apartment in the rear palace was surrounded by wisteria blossoms, was a beauty called "the Shining wisteria blossom 藤壺" (The *Flowering Fortunes* 栄花物語 Vol. 1. 302). Although Heian nobility already had a masculine society, the light of the Sun Goddess was used to legitimize the imperial authority and its members as "semi-divine." This indicates that the political climate before the Heian period was more favorable to the cult of the Sun Goddess, reinforcing Takamure's theory of matriarchal politics and culture in ancient Japan.

This chapter will discuss how the *Genji* reveals the decline of women's status and how women managed to achieve their literary supremacy in the gender-class stratification of Heian noble society. First we need to trace back to the pre-Heian period when noblewomen had religious authority as the priestess of the Sun Goddess in the Japanese islands. It seems fair to say that polygyny in the ancient ruling class signals the first stage of women's demotion independent of the influence of the two imported ideologies, Confucianism and Buddhism. When Confucianism and Buddhism simultaneously arrived in Japan and brought with them the two versions of the three obediences, the patriarchal ideologies of the

two great civilizations might have convinced the islanders that progress meant that they should have a male ruler and structure a hierachal society.

Three obediences, rooted in the Confucian imperial paradigm and the Buddhist belief in karmic retribution of women as the “wrong sex”, was certainly a disaster for Japanese women exercising religious authority and participating in imperial politics. We need to study the decline of Japanese women’s position and its subsequent process that took root before the production of the *Genji*, if we wish to understand Shikibu’s heroines in the scope of her contemporary womanhood. This is not a full study of the momentous changes in women’s condition, but will selectively focus on crucial aspects in history and literature.

The Saga of the Shintō Priestess

In 1911 when the first modern Japanese woman’s magazine, the *Seito* 青鞵 (meaning *blue stocking*), was issued in Tokyo, its founder Hiratuka Raiteu 平塚雷鳥 (1886-1971) wrote the following manifesto, “In the beginning, the woman was the sun – the real human. Now, she is the moon depending on the other to live, like a pale moon merely reflecting the light of the sun. We must restore our shrouded sun” (358). Raiteu has been commemorated for the first sentence, “In the beginning, the woman was the sun,” which inspired both admiration and controversy in her contemporary society. Raiteu’s postulation compelled her society to recall that the prominent Shintō deity is female, bluntly debunking the automatic presumption that the Japanese islands had been a patriarchal society since antiquity.

The Sun Goddess was a symbolic inspiration for Raiteu and her literary comrades rather than the deity of Shintō. Most *Seito* women were young and frustrated that they could not find an occupation other than marriage in the early modern society. Those women rejected the traditional Japanese Confucian feminine roles of “good wife and wise mother 良妻賢母 (the wise wife and good mother in the Chinese Confucian 賢妻良母)” and invoked the ancient cult of the Sun Goddess to fare beyond the household with their relatively liberal education. Raiteu’s manifesto inspired more women in Japan to send their essays and poems to the *Seito*. The contemporary newspapers nevertheless refused to take the *Seito* women seriously, disparaging and teasing them with the phrase that Raiteu undauntedly used, the “new women.”

One of the “new women” inspired by Raiteu’s manifesto was Takamura, who used the role of the Sun Goddess in the creation myth to reinforce her scholarship of Japanese women’s history. It is her argument in the *History of (Japanese) Women 女性の歴史* that the Sun Goddess Amaterasu is the symbol of love in the creation myth illustrating women’s authority in the ancient matriarchal culture (18). The myth of Amaterasu recorded in the *Chronicles of Japan* presents her as a ruler in an agrarian society. When her brother deity destroys her rice paddy and kills a weaving maid, the appalled Amaterasu flees into the cave and leaves the world in the dark. Her people, troubled by the pitch-dark world, induce her to come out by desperately dancing before her cave and expel her violent brother. Amaterasu restores order. Her myth suggests the restoration of nature, in which the female deity as the sun returns after the typhoon personified by the male deity.

The early Japanese associated the power of the sunlight with the woman's fertility, as both were indispensable for the survival of their community, and they constructed the myth of Amaterasu accordingly.

The core of Takamura's arguments is that the early Japanese islands were a matriarchal society in the third century when patriarchy was already a dominant mode of society on the Eurasian Continent including China (270). Because Japan had not produced its own literature at that time, Takamura relies on our Chinese neighbor's annals, the *Chronicles of Wei* 魏 in the *Three Nations* 三国志, as the proof of the first known historical ruler in Japan, referred to in the chronicles as Wa 倭, Queen Himiko 卑弥呼:

其國本亦以男子爲王、住七八年、倭国乱、相攻伐歷年、及共
立一女子爲王名曰卑弥呼、事鬼道。

That nation [of Wa] originally chose a man for their king and remained the same for 70-80 years, but fought themselves within. Hence they chose a woman named Himiko for their ruler. She practiced magic.

This crucial passage introducing the identity of the queen has induced a variety of hypotheses among Chinese and Japanese historians. Takamura postulates that Wa was a "democratic" state, as it chose their rulers by consensus. Himiko was a priestess telling the oracle of a maternal deity to her brother to administer it in public.

Origuchi Shinobu 折口信夫 proposes in his "Origin of Ancient Japanese Womanhood 最古日本の女性生活の根拠" that Queen Himiko was both a ruler

and Shintō priestess in the early Japanese islands, and that her descendants are the current imperial clan. He bases his argument on the fact that several ancient Japanese empresses were rulers as well as Amaterasu's supreme priestesses. He finds a remnant of the early Japanese matriarchy in the southern island of Okinawa, where priestesses still now command reverence in religious rites. If Origuchi is correct, Himiko turns out to be one of the early Japanese female rulers and the supreme priestess of Amaterasu.

Yet the Chinese historian Shen Yan On 沈仁安 believes that Himiko was a temporarily chosen queen to solve the internal war. His argument is that the slavery and pervasive polygyny practiced by the ruling class and the multitudes of Wa present an ancient masculine despotic society. The magic 鬼道 that Himiko practiced is unclear for both Japanese and Chinese historians. On thinks it must have been a Chinese imported religion like Daoism (123-131).

On the one hand, there is no record of Himiko in the *Chronicles of Japan*, which was written in the 7th century, much later than the *Chronicles of Wei*. On the other hand, the *Chronicles of Japan* shows that that Shamanism was an important part of early Shintō religiosity, and women rulers were simultaneously priestesses. When politics and religions were inseparable to justify the ruler's power by divine authority, it is a plausible supposition that women shamans 巫女 held a powerful role in making decisions on politics and warfare during the tribal era. The early imperial court kept shamans of both sexes, who danced and prophesied on behalf of Amaterasu and presided over Shintō rituals and ceremonies. Even in Shikibu's time of the eleventh century, the court retained

Shintō priests and priestesses, who were believed to be descendants of the Sun Goddess. Japanese shamans had visible presence until 1873 when the government officially forbade their practice in shrines. This has persuaded Takamura, Origuchi and Chinese historians other than Shen to theorize that ancient Japan began as a matriarchal society. The prominent roles of Shintō women shamans certainly reinforce Takamura's theory of matriarchal authority in ancient Japan. Shamanistic elements are also present in the myth of Amaterasu when her people dance to induce her out of the cave. The ancient people believed in the spiritual power of ritualistic dancing.

Kato Mieko offers a compelling outcome of the research on the change in women's roles in Shintō shrines in villages close to the capital of the Heian period [the current Kyoto] which took place during the 14th-16th centuries. In 1365, the shrine in one village revoked the daughters' birthright to become chief officials. In the same document, there is an undated inscription, "Women are forbidden to be chief" (122). Kato detects the "masculinization" of Shintō religiosity by gradually adopting Buddhist theology. Unable to assert its independent ideological status against the imported religion, Shintō eventually joined it and coexisted with it. In the same site, both Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples were built and developed certain amalgamated rituals. If so, it makes sense that most Shintō shrines are currently led by priests subordinated by priestesses. Okinawa was not yet annexed to Japan at that time and managed to preserve the tradition of priestess-led rituals. The Buddhist feminine code of the three obediences and the

karmic argument of the woman's five obstacles were propounded in late-medieval Japan, possibly to the extent that women largely lost authority over Shintō.

In the *Chronicles of Japan*, Empress Jingū (170-269) was also a shaman priestess. She was once a popular figure for her military triumph in Korea, but after World War II she disappeared from history texts, owing to her story's connotation of ancient colonialism. The widow Empress Jingū had an oracle to invade Korea. Although heavily pregnant, she led the Japanese troops into the Korean peninsula across the ocean. After her successful raids in Korea, she returned to Japan, bore an heir on the way to the capital and had to race back to the court to crush an internal rebellion there. Her reign suggests the early volatile tribal period of the imperial clan when the competition for ruler-ship was decided by force. One correctly reads the *Chronicles of Japan*, which records numerous cruel blood-shedding combats over the early rulership of the nation, but the later religious image of the emperor as the supreme priest of Shintō has obscured it (173). As he says, there has been no unified hypothesis in the scholarship of Japanese history about how and when Japan was unified. The time range of the unified nation has so far been hypothesized between the 3rd and 8th century in the scholarship of Japanese history.

The myth of Amaterasu, Himiko and Empress Jingū imply that, as matriarchs, they had political and religious authorities which were intertwined. This again reinforces Takamura's theory of ancient matriarchy. We nevertheless do not know the extent and degree of matriarchal culture. In the *Chronicles of Japan*, noble polygyny was a norm of ancient matrimony, contradicting the notion

of prominent women insisting on their dignity and exclusive position in sexual relations. No historical evidence is found for Takamure's argument of an egalitarian polygamy in which women and men chose and separated freely from their partners (77-78). In the *Chronicles of Japan*, the rulers' polygyny infuriates their consorts, but those women at least openly protest the masculine sexual prerogative as a breach of the conjugal relations. Yet most of Shikibu's heroines in Heian noble society repress their anger, remain silent and live in their strained polygynous marriage. Heian noblewomen even lost the right to express their anger at the three obediences.

Women gradually began to lose their religious and political authority in the 6th century upon the arrival of the two foreign male contenders, Confucius and Buddha from India via China, who overpowered the cult of the Sun Goddess. Confucianism and Buddhism were part of Japanese religious and intellectual investments to build their nation. When Japan carried on a suzerainty relationship with each of the contemporary Chinese empires, the imperial government sent envoys to them every 10-20 years. Returning from China, the envoys brought massive works of literature on politics, religion, science, technology, arts and classics. The grandeur of the ancient Chinese civilization mesmerized the Japanese islanders.

The *Chronicle of Early Tang* 旧唐書 documents with a wry sense of humor that the Japanese envoys of 718 demonstrated a blatant hunger for knowledge. As soon as they completed paying official homage to the emperor in the palace, they went to the city market and sold out the precious gifts he had just

given to them. With the extra financial means, they bought as many scrolls as possible to carry and left for home (qtd in Kanee 鐘江 138). At that time, any knowledge and information from the continent was a sign of advanced civilization for the Japanese, who were conscious of their backward culture.

As Confucianism and Buddhism flourished in the Tang 唐 (618-907), the most cosmopolitan empire in Chinese history, the Japanese must have believed that they were the two major religious and moral means to build a powerful nation. Eager to emulate the set of Confucian legal and administrative paradigms, *the Tang Law System (Tō Rituryō in Japanese) 唐律令*, the Japanese imperial administrator Fujiwara Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659-720) led a group to compile the *Taiho Law System (Taiho Rituryō) 大宝律令*. How the *Taiho Statute* functioned in Japan has been a topic of debate among current historians. This study accepts the view of Kanee Hiroshi 鐘江宏之 that “Fuhito and the rest of the pre-Heian politicians applied the Chinese paradigms to Japanese politics but did not predict their effect” (349). Perhaps they did not understand Confucianism in depth, either. A good example is that the matrimonial regulations in the *Rituryō* which did not operate effectively in Japan and were even ignored because it was foreign for Japanese nobility to bind sexual relations by law. In the Taiho Law System, the three obediences and the seven reasons for divorce 三従七去 were already listed (qtd. in Saigō 152). The husband could have one of seven reasons to divorce his wife: 1. She does not obey the in-laws; 2. She does not have a child; 3. She cannot stop idle talk; 4. She steals family items; 5. She is not chaste; 6. She is jealous; 7. She has a disease. This mere imitation of the Confucian law did not work

effectively. Heian noble couples seem to have usually terminated their marriage just by not meeting each other. Even so, this matrimonial code indicates that the Confucian ideology of femininity had already begun to penetrate into the early Japanese society.

Yoshie Akiko argues that in the 7th and 8th century, both the indigenous force for patriarchy and the imported ideology of Confucianism still faced tenacious resistance from the actual matriarchal norms, conventions and traditions. The lineage record of Regent Prince Shotoku 聖徳太子 (574-622), *Tenjūkōkushūchōmei* 天寿国縹帳名 shows that individuals could claim their family lineage through either that of their fathers or mothers (439). This shows that the discrepancy between the Japanese reality and the Confucian code was still huge even though the government consciously tried to implement the code in the masses. The census taken in 702, for example, lists a woman named Agata no Miyatuko Nanimome 県造奈羅 毛壳 in the province of Mino 美濃 as the mother of the head of the residence unit, who owned thirteen slaves, but the supposed head, her son, had none (441). The mother was obviously the head of the residence, not her son. Unlike noblewomen in the capital, rural women were engaged in the productive enterprises of agriculture and could retain economic and social powers at that time. The word *koji* 刀自 is now interpreted as the wife of a man of high status but seems to have originally meant a woman with a tremendous economic means. The current historians, including Yoshie, have been discovering more and more evidence of the early Japanese women's powerful status in ancient archives.

Five hundred years later, marriage was still a civil and flexible custom for Heian nobility. Although the Confucian martial law in the *Rituryō* permitted only the husband to initiate divorce, the *Genji* shows that wives would leave their husbands as a matter of fact. One of them, the wife of Lord Higekurho, enraged by his second marriage, suddenly leaves for her parents' household, and their divorce virtually takes place. That a Heian noblewoman still could initiate a divorce, argues Takamura, indicates a remnant of the ancient matriarchal culture (418). According to the *Rituryō*, the wife's jealousy was one of the reasons for the husband to divorce his wife, but numerous noblemen seem to have been inured to it and often left their wives for more advantageous reasons such as the marriage to a daughter of the rich and powerful, instead.

Moreover, the Japanese *Rituryō* was not a mere copy of the Chinese in the maternal authority over the imperial heir. Although the Chinese dynasties allowed only the principal imperial consort, the empress, to become the regent of an heir in their *Rituryō*, the Japanese version gave this privilege to any mother of an heir, even though she might be a minor consort (Fukuto 服藤 18). The role of mother of an imperial heir was an essential source of Fujiwara Fuhito and his descendants' political dominance. Fuhito married his two daughters to two emperors and acted as their regents. His two daughters had heirs and subsequently helped generations of Fujiwara men to establish their hereditary regency and dominate Heian politics.

During the Heian period, the political clout of the Japanese mother of an emperor was obviously in vogue. In Shikibu's time, the mother of Emperor Ichijo

一条天皇, Senshi 詮子, did not become the empress but had political authority as the Mother of the Nation 国母. In the *Genji*, Shikibu also shows that the political mother Kokiden 弘微殿, who is not the empress either, manages to control her son Emperor Suzaku 朱雀. After the disappearance of empresses in their own right, the Mother of the Nation became the woman's supreme political authority in the Heian period and continued to resist the Confucian antipathy to women's involvement in politics. In Shikibu's time, Japanese nobility were not as good Confucians as the later ruling class. In post-Heian society, the Confucian notion of the three obediences bound women severely, and their degenerated condition and position remained until the arrival of modernism in the early 20th century.

In the beginning, Buddhism did not win the heart of the Japanese ruling class as immediately as Confucianism. Although the official initiation to Buddhism recorded in the *Chronicles of Japan* that the Korean envoy brought the golden Buddha statue and the sutras in 538 has been discredited,⁵⁴ events such as these still epitomize what lured the Japanese islanders: the aesthetics and intellect of the Chinese adopted religiosity. The Japanese wanted Buddhism but knew that they had to shape it into a form they could handle. In order to appropriate Buddhism for the reinforcement of their political authority, the imperial Japanese government alternated the two major policies of restraint and promotion between the 7th and 8th century (Adolphson 213). First of all, they tried to make sure that Buddhism would not challenge their ancestral religion of Shintō, particularly the

⁵⁴ In 522, according to *Fusoryakuki* 扶桑略紀, Buddhism had already been brought with the Korean immigrants (Kane'e 鐘江 115).

cult of Amaterasu, the essential means to justify their ruler-ship and hereditary privileges.

Eventually, the Japanese imperial government attained the help of ingratiating Buddhist priests to maintain the Sun Goddess. The Buddhist priests preached that the Japanese deity was the reincarnation of Vairocana, the great solar Buddha 大日如来, and initiated the Japanese religious merge of Shintō and Buddhism. The fusion statue of the Sun Goddess and Buddha was constructed in Todaiji Temple 東大寺, the hub of all the national temples built by the imperial government, relieving their anxiety over throwing out the first to make way for the latter, and inspiring their whole hearted devotion. The amalgamated religiosity of Buddhism and Shintō remained in Japanese society until the late 19th century when the nationalistic modern government elevated Shintō deities and forcefully separated shrines from Buddhist temples. Still, there has been some mutual ambivalence between Shintō and Buddhism as each has excluded one another at religious rituals and ceremonies. The excluded party has remained politely marginalized.

Six Women Rulers between 592-770

Why numerous women rulers concentrated on this period has not been much studied yet. Joan R. Piggott correctly points out that the Japanese rulership was by then already gendered and gender hierarchy was advancing (41). That is, the male ruler was then favored and expected to rise again. As far as the *Chronicles of Japan* is concerned, women rulers were either the widows of the previous emperors or the daughters of the sovereigns remaining unmarried,

whereas their male counterparts were polygynists with the justification of transferring the throne to their sons. The widow and daughter sovereigns' marriages were presumably forbidden with the political fear of producing a son and complicating the imperial succession. Even the legendary Empress Jingū also was a widow empress. Jitō was also a widow sovereign who had inherited the throne of her deceased husband. Still, during the pre-Heian period, a woman was more favored than a male minor to be sovereign, and not all of these women rulers played the figurehead, which has been the traditional perspective of Japanese historical scholarship. It should be emphasized that in this period, women had the sovereigns of their own sex as their role models and the sources of their aspiration. Shikibu and other Heian noblewomen had no memory of woman rulers in their society upholding the patriarchal ideologies of Confucianism and Buddhism.

Empress Jitō 持統 (645-703) is the woman sovereign most renowned for political acumen in Japanese history, as well documented in the *Chronicles of Japan*. Written during her reign, the *Chronicles of Japan* does not spare a word of supreme praise for the contemporary ruler. She was one of four daughters of Emperor Tenchi 天智天皇 (626-672) given as brides to his brother and heir, Emperor Tenmu 天武天皇 (631?-686), for their political alliance. Chinese and Korean dynasties shunned endogamous matrimony, but the Japanese imperial family continued to practice marriage between cousins, between niece and uncle, or between nephew and aunt. Like ancient Egyptian dynasties, the Japanese imperial family tried to perpetuate their political dominance by maintaining their

“pure blood.” Their policy of endogamous marriage carried on in Heian society, as exemplified by Genji’s marriage to his niece the Third Princess, the daughter of his brother emperor.

The typical historical assessment of Empress Jitō’s politics is that “she accomplished the will of her deceased spouse Emperor Tenmu, including having the first comprehensive Japanese constitution, the *Rituryō*, compiled and the construction of the new capital (Satō 佐藤 14). This assessment downplays Jitō’s two major political achievements. To be sure, she had an indispensable administrator, Fujiwara Fujituo, who led the *Rituryō* project. Yet that she built the new capital Fujiwarakyo 藤原京 four years after the death of her imperial spouse now points to the possibility that this was her independent agenda. Empress Jitō’s most notable achievement is that she maximized the sovereign’s personal authority in Japanese history. The later Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 is known for his domineering politics, but he exerted his rulership in a way already paved by Empress Jitō.

Empress Jingū and Empress Jitō were simultaneously the supreme priestesses of Amaterasu and women rulers, embodying the unity of political and religious power. Generations of early male sovereigns nevertheless needed the supreme priestess of the Sun Goddess, called *saigū* 齋宮, to represent them; they sent their own priestesses to Ise Shrine in which the deity is believed to have dwelled. The institution of *saigū* was still prevalent 500 years later in Shikibu’s time as she depicts Genji’s mistress Rokujō’s daughter’s installation as the virgin priestess, her departure ritual in the imperial court and the trip to Ise Shrine. The

beginning of the *saigū* institution is unknown, but it lasted until 1336.⁵⁵

Understandably, the desire of each emperor to ensure his reign by dutifully observing all the traditions regarding his office resulted in prolonging the *saigū* institution. This leads us to a hypothesis that in the beginning, a man had to legitimize his temporary reign in the norm of matriarchal rulership by dedicating the *saigū* as his representative to the Sun Goddess, but the patriarchal ideologies gradually eroded and took over woman's politics and institutionalized the male sovereign.

To impress her semi-divinity and political clout upon the public, Empress Jitō conducted more than 30 field trips with pomp and procession including the two pilgrimages to Ise Shrine, the Sun Goddess's residence as her supreme priestess. No other empresses are known to have taken a trip to Ise Shrine. During her trip, Jitō rewarded the local chiefs paying homage to her by distributing titles among them (qtd. in Piggott 37). She knew the shrewd politician's gambit of free gifts to ensure the loyalty of her subjects. Her frequent field trips thus evoke an image of the wise ruler in Japanese mythology who climbs up a hill to examine the condition of the rice pad and household of his people and decides how much the amount of taxes should be (Ebersole, qtd. in Piggott). When the majority of the population was illiterate, the mythological rulers were probably orally recalled, and their memory certainly worked effectively to buttress Empress Jitō's religion.

⁵⁵ When the civil war *Engen no ran* 延元の乱 started, the last *saigū* was deterred from travelling to Ise Shrine.

While building the new capital, she even had her bard Kakimoto no Hitomaro 柿本の人麻呂⁵⁶ (660?-720?) sing a hymn:

The Sovereign is a god, capable of having created the capital out of a lake filled with water birds.

大君は神にしませ場水鳥のすだく水沼そ都と成しつ。

(qtd. in Kane'e 鐘江⁵⁷ 317)

The hymn has been believed to celebrate her spouse Emperor Tenmu, but he was already deceased when the construction of the capital was ongoing. Hitomaro obviously envisioned the Shintō theology that the sovereign was descended from the Sun Goddess as “a demigod.” This style of hymn was never composed later, proving that the Japanese imperial authority achieved supremacy during Empress Jitō’s reign. Empress Jitō should be given more credit for her political acumen which has been downplayed by the traditional scholarship of history in Japanese academia presenting her as a faithful widow in a Confucian mode.

Hitomaro is now called the supreme poet in the first known collection of Japanese poetry, *the Ten Thousand Leaves* 万葉集, compiled between the 7th and 8th centuries. Chinese characters were used to transcribe this monumental work of 4500 Japanese poems. Yet Hitomaro’s songs are a good example of how Shintō spirituality was more pronounced in the majority of poems in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* than Confucianism and Buddhism. The mode of the *Ten Thousand Leaves*

⁵⁶ Whether or not Empress Jitō had a literary salon and recruited Hitomaro has been a subject of current debate. In *Hitomaro: Poet as God*, Anne Commons argues that Hitomaro was a poet performer, which is a reasonable theory.

⁵⁷ Kane'e says that the hymn was created when Emperor Tenmu began to build Fujiwarakyo. Yet the capital construction started in the fourth year of Jitō’s reign and ended within her time.

has been traditionally described as “masculine ますらおぶり” because the songs use less technically intricate literary technicality and sound more straightforward than Heian poetry. Perhaps this is a later association of directness and assertiveness with masculinity and that of subtlety and elegance with femininity.

Yashima Izumi 矢嶋泉 argues that each of the three women sovereigns, Jitō, Genmei 元明 (661-721) and Genshō 元正 (680-748), ordered the compilation of a collection of poems during their reigns, and later all of them were put together and called the *Ten Thousand Leaves* (265). If the three women rulers truly led the compiling project of the poems, to define the whole mood of the work as masculine turns out to be a historical irony. In contrast to later Heian collections of poetry, the *Ten Thousand Leaves* is amazingly inclusive, comprising songs of the nobility and the masses, the powerful and the impoverished, urban elites and regional folksongs.

In contrast to the poetry of the contemporary neighbor the Tang Empire, which has been the supreme product of Chinese classics, Kudō Takashi 工藤隆 notes that there are an excessive number of love poems in the one *Ten Thousand Leaves*, more than half of around 4500 pieces. He thinks that the Japanese islanders still maintained an oral form of courtship that originated in the early communal culture (112). The earliest known *Collection of Chinese Poetry* of about the 5th century BCE discussed in Chapter 1 would be the closest to the *Ten Thousand Leaves*, as lovers sing to each other in both collections. Yet numerous lovers in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* lived in polygynous society, not necessarily having the same egalitarian concept of heterosexual relations in our current

society. On the other hand, women poets in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* do not hesitate to express their own sentiments much more candidly than Heian noblewomen, not yet affected by the Buddhist and Confucian code of woman's conduct, the three obediences.

Princess Nukata 額田王 is celebrated for the most famous love poem:

Field Shimeno full of Murasaki grass brightened with the sunlight

I fear that when you wave at me, we might be discovered by the gatekeeper.

あかねさす 紫野行き 標野行き 野守は見ずや 君が袖ふる

(Vol. 1. 20)

The ancients grew the grass called “Murasaki” in the field of Shimeno to extract the reddish purple dye from its root. Murasaki was a most popular color and later became a poetic metaphor for an attractive woman, as Genji calls his favorite wife Murasaki, signifying her beauty and his love.

Little is recorded about Princess Nukata in *the Chronicles of Japan*, except that she was a distanced imperial family member as indicated by her title, Princess 王. She was a consort of Emperor Tenmu when he was the crown prince. Yet strangely, her poem hints that she is no longer married to the crown prince when she addresses him. Emperor Tenmu also indicates their divorce in his poem responding to her poem:

Even though I pine for my beloved as beautiful as Murasaki,

I have to hide my love for the wife of someone else

紫のにほへる妹を憎く あらば人妻故に 吾恋ひめやも

(Vol. 1. 21).

These poems are an early example of reciprocal love songs, called *Somonka* 相聞歌,⁵⁸ which were still in vogue among Heian lovers. The traditional interpretation is that the brother of the crown prince Emperor Tenchi at some time compelled his brother to give Nukata up to him. The imperial heir had no choice but to offer him his favorite wife Nukata. This is a reasonable historical guess. Their poetry exchange has been interpreted to mean that the two lovers were the victims of a domineering Emperor Tenchi.

Princess Nutaka and the crown prince set the tone for lovers in Japanese classic literature. Love is an illicit affair, bypassing the marriage of convenience. The unattainable woman makes herself most attractive to a man. Shikibu repeats this theme of male illicit passion in Genji's pursuit of his stepmother Fujitubo. Genji's young acquaintance Kashiwagi also commits adultery with Genji's most prestigious wife the Third Princess. Illicit lovers are always doomed in the *Genji*.

The Ten Thousand Leaves 万葉集 presents a remnant of tribal culture in which noblewomen went out freely, as suggested by a pastoral scene in Princess Nutaka and the crown prince's poems in which women and men courted each other, face to face. They were pastoral lovers. Noblewomen of 400 years later, particularly high-born women in the Heian period, lived in urban culture strictly regulated by social decorum, remaining inside the household and meeting only

⁵⁸ The ancient Chinese (*somonka* in Japanese) 相聞歌 meant a pair of poems expressing mutual personal concerns in exchange. In Japan, *Somonka* became a pair of reciprocal love songs.

two men closely, their fathers and husbands.⁵⁹ Besides, the complex family dynamic of Heian polygyny limited the fraternity of women with their stepbrothers, as Genji's son Yūgiri sees his stepsister Princess Akashi only through the bamboo screen. Having committed an incestuous affair with his stepmother Fujitubo, Genji strictly forbids his son's access to his wives and daughter. The middle-rank women seem to have had more mobility and freedom than the high-born women. The author of *Kagerō Diary* took a short trip and visited temples alone.

In the *Ten Thousand Leaves*, polygyny is hinted in the poem of Sakanoue no Iratume 坂上郎女, a woman frustrated by her partner's neglect:

You keep saying, “coming” but you never came. You eventually told me, “Not coming.” Why should I wait for you?

来むと言ふも来ぬときあるを来じと言ふを来るむとは待たじ
と言ふもの⁶⁰ (527)

She waited for her husband's visit. This was a conventional polygynous matrimony that continued in Heian society as evinced in the *Genji*. Sakanoue Iratume decided to move on and found another husband. The woman's rejection of her steady mate was also a regular sexual norm of Heian noble society. Genji once visits a woman after a while and finds out that the door to her household is tightly closed to him.

⁵⁹ Jenn-Shann Lin's comment: during this time, the Tang women, who wrote pastoral love poems, might not have been noblewomen because Tang noblewomen had already been confined to the household. If so, the Chinese neighbors were more advanced than the Japanese in locking up their women.

⁶⁰ Qtd. in (*The Collection of One Hundred Songs in the Ten Thousand Leaves*) *Manyō no hyakunin isshu* 万葉の百人一首.

The woman poet in the *Ten Thousand Leaves*, Ishikawa no Iratume 石川
女郎, aggressively approaches the man like this:

I heard you were a gentleman but you did not accommodate me
overnight and let me go. What a nice man you are!

みやびをと吾は聞けるを宿貸さず吾を帰せりおその風流士.⁶¹

(126)

She kept sending love poems to a handsome and elegant nobleman, Otomo no
Tanushi 大伴宿補田主, who never responded to her. Exasperated, she eventually
visited his household but failed to seduce him. The poem expresses her open
grudge and mockery of him. He is her sour grape. This failure did not discourage
her from approaching his younger brother.

The *Ten Thousand Leaves* shows that women had polygynous mates,
having to wait for them at their households and suffering their infrequent visits,
just as Heian noblewomen did. Yet the pre-Heian women's poems indicate that
they were not affected by Confucian modesty yet. They do not mince words of
frustration and anger so that they will not miscommunicate with their lovers. The
Genji characters occasionally suffer the disaster of misunderstanding, owing to
the norm of indirect contact and communication between the two genders, usually
through letters.

The majority of the *Ten Thousand Leaves* are Japanese poems, but
surprisingly it has only one authentic Chinese poem. This is a formal eulogy

⁶¹Qtd. in the *Ten Thousand Leaves*: Ishikawa no Iratume 万集:石川娘女.

dedicated to the deceased imperial couple by Yamanoue no Okura 山上憶良
(660?-733?).

The young prince died with the three obediences [his wife]

Permanently destroyed are her fair skin and the four virtues [of
hers].

紅顏共三従長逝・素質与四徳永滅⁶²

The poem contains the first known appearance of the three obediences in Japanese literature. Okura was one of the envoys sent to the Tang Empire by the government in 701 and obviously studied Confucianism to be an imperial bureaucrat. He gives the deceased bride of the imperial prince, his social superior, the supreme praise, using the Confucian set of “the three obediences 三従” and “the four virtues 四徳,” the metaphor for her character. No other praise could please the contemporary woman more than these. It is still amazing that after Ban Zhao had perfected the packaged phrase, the four virtues and the three obediences, five hundred years ago, Okura presumably learned it as a proverb while studying in the Tang. His knowledge of Confucianism was a sign of “progressive education,” embracing social hierarchy as well as the code of woman’s conduct. His poem also foreshadows how Confucianism gradually began to erode and replace the traditional reverence for the Sun Goddess and woman’s political prominence in Japanese society.

⁶² Qtd. in “(The Study of the Japanese Eulogy Written in Chinese in the Beginning of *the Ten Thousand Leaves*) Monyōshū zenchikanbun kara nihonbanka wo kanshō suru 万葉集前置漢文から日本挽歌を鑑賞する。”

As Confucianism disapproves of women's political involvement, no pre-Heian women rulers are known to have embraced this inconvenient ideology to their reign. Yet Buddhism fascinated them. Empress Jitō was the first known ruler cremated in the Buddhist style of funeral. The last pre-Heian woman sovereign, Koken 孝謙 天皇 (718-770), a product of the early Fujiwara regency as a granddaughter of Fujiwara Fuhito, used Buddhism to buttress her sovereignty. This was not her idea but that of the first and last woman ruler known in Chinese history, Empress Wu 武則天 of the Tang Empire (623-705). Unlike Empress Koken, Empress Wu was a social climber who made the best use of her beauty, intelligence and desire to grasp power in the imperial court. Recruited to serve in the rear palace, Empress Wu at first became a minor consort of the two generations of the emperors, father and son, and managed to rise as the consort empress of the latter. During her widowhood, she played the role of regent of her sons and eventually took over their ruler-ship, declaring herself as the sovereign and even altered the name of the nation from Tang to Zho 周 during her reign.

Not surprisingly, Empress Wu detested Confucianism for incriminating the woman's political involvement and so replaced the hierarchal structure of the imperial court with Buddhist ideologies. She tried to legitimize her reign with the public propaganda that the *Great Cloud Sutra* 大雲經 prophesied that Buddha's woman disciple would reincarnate as a human and rule a quarter of the world. Empress Wu claimed that she was the reincarnation of this Buddha's disciple. She had numerous temples named the Great Cloud built and had a copy of the so-

named sutra installed in each temple (Hongō 本郷 189). Obviously, the copies and temples were meant to validate the propaganda she circulated.

Empress Wu served as the model woman ruler for her Japanese counterpart Empress Koken. She, her pious Buddhist mother, the dowager Empress Komyo 光明皇后, and their Fujiwara male relatives campaigned for her reign with a parable in the *Lotus Sutra* that Buddha's disciple turned into a woman and preached the law in the rear palace (Hongō 191). They had numerous temples built for nuns to pair up with those for monks and installed in each temple a statue of Kishotten 吉祥天, known as Laksmi in Indian mythology, a woman deity shared by Hinduism and Buddhism. Empress Koken is believed to have imitated Empress Wu's alteration of the Chinese title of the ruler from *kōtei* in Japanese 皇帝 to *tennō* in Japanese 天皇.⁶³ Yet Empress Koken lacked her Chinese counterpart's political acumen and determination. In the midst of her reign when she wanted to abdicate and transfer her throne to a mere Buddhist priest, she horrified her Fujiwara relatives. Fujiwara men possibly never forgot that they almost lost their political power and were determined to have no women sovereigns again.⁶⁴

⁶³ The First Emperor 始皇帝 of Qin 秦 (259-210 BCE) started using the two Chinese characters 皇帝. 皇 means *great beauty*, and 帝, that *virtue is equivalent to heaven*. Empress Wu is believed to have invented 天皇 meaning *anointed by heaven*. The Japanese emperors have continued to use the more lofty title 天皇, whereas their Chinese counterparts returned to 皇帝.

⁶⁴ Japan had two more women sovereigns between the 17-18th centuries, who only functioned as figureheads.

The Decline of Matriarchal Power and Culture during the Heian Period
(794-1185)

is apparent in the contemporary politics. Empresses in their own right disappeared and it became an institution to choose the *saigū* among imperial princesses to represent each emperor. When hereditary Fujiwara regents virtually ruled the country, both *saigū* and emperors played the roles of their figureheads to justify the regency. The Heian woman's highest position in the country was now the Mother of the Nation, called *kokumo* 国母, the title dominated by daughters of prominent Fujiwara clans when their sons rose as the sovereigns.

The crucial change of women's lowered status is recognizable in the episode of the birth of the princess of Emperor Go Ichijō 後一条 (1008-1036): "What a misfortune!" Gentlewomen in the imperial court frankly lamented that his consort did not bear a prince. Hearing this, the happy father Emperor protested, "What a cruel thing to say! We ought to rejoice at the safe delivery. It's silly to think a girl is a disappointment. Didn't the ancient emperors choose women to be their heirs?" (The *Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 3. 84). Emperor Go Ichijō had only two daughters but dared not to argue with his grandfather and Michinaga to install one of them as his heir. His speech indicates that the past empresses in their own right were the product of "the age of gods" in Heian noble society. Like these gentlewomen, noblewomen themselves knew no history of their women rulers because generations of Fujiwara regents chose the male sovereign. The disappearance of women rulers certainly reinforced the political and social discourse of patriarchy in Heian culture.

If the Fujiwara regency was an actual cause of removing the empress in her right, the Japanese love affair with generations of Chinese dynasties founded on Confucian paradigms certainly contributed to shaping women's depreciated image. This was a gradual shift in the Japanese psyche. In this context, Johannes Bronkhorst's idea, discussed in Chapter 1, that the adoption of the Brahmin's language gradually affected and eventually altered Buddhist theology in ancient India, is applicable as he perceives in the content of the Buddhist sutras (41). When the Japanese adopted Chinese characters, they at first modified the Confucian political system in an attempt to fit it to their social reality. Yet their psyche was unwittingly prepared for "the ground" to further adoption and dissemination of Confucianism as they believed it to be a more advanced political and legal systems than theirs.

In Shikibu's time of the 10-11th century, the Tang was already history, but Chinese literature thrived in Heian nobility. By then, as previously said, the Japanese nobility possessed most of the works of Chinese classic literature, as documented in the *Current Collection of Literature in Japan* 日本國見在書目錄. The nobility were more sophisticated in understanding Chinese in the Heian period than in the pre-Heian. Prince Genji is a typical Heian nobleman well-versed in the patriarchal ideologies of Confucianism and Buddhism and campaigns for the three obediences. Intellectual women possibly read even the *Analects* and the *Exemplary Women*, but none of them seem to have become a woman Confucian like Ban Zhao. In the *Genji*, no woman embraces the three obediences, and Shikibu has only men say what a woman should do and what her

life should be. Other Heian women writers' silence about the three obediences might have been also their aversion of its contemptuous view of their own sex.

By contrast, Buddhism dominated the Heian noble's spirituality as a whole. The degree of Buddhist influence of non-violence in state politics is measured by the abolition of capital punishment in 818, which happened only once in Japanese history and lasted 347 years. This calls to mind the inscription of King Asoka (268-231 BCE) in the Indian Buddhist Empire that "Here no living being must be killed and sacrificed" (Bronkhorst 15). In Heian noble society, Asoka's legend must have been popular as the Buddhist king who ruled without conquest. Political criminals were exiled from the capital although that could mean the death penalty to the nobility immersed in a luxurious city lifestyle. Violence is also absent in the *Genji*, in which the imaginary world of Heian polite behavior was the ideal of masculinity.⁶⁵

Heian Buddhist authorities took it for granted that they educated only men to become professional priests. By contrast, women as nuns had few opportunities for the systematic study of Buddhist theologies. Empress Koken and her mother Empress Komyō's efforts to empower Buddhist nuns' religious authority was a lost cause in the Heian period with the disappearance of nunneries. A woman needed a priest to undergo the ritual of taking the tonsure as he cut her hair a little below the shoulder.⁶⁶ In the *Genji*, the hero's last wife the Third Princess pleads

⁶⁵ In the *Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, the *Genji* expert Imai notes Heian noblemen's occasional violence: for example, they threatened their sexual rivals by shooting at them (Vol. 2. 229). The *Flowering Fortune* records a variety of their violent events.

⁶⁶ Head shaving was still not common for Buddhist nuns in Heian noble society, unlike the traditional ritual of Hindu widowhood. A Heian noblewoman could grow her hair back when she

to her father, who retired and took the tonsure, to cut her hair and undergo the renunciation ritual. Usually remaining in their household and working for their salvation by chanting and prayer, the nuns had much lower status than monks. Buddhism thus ended up joining Confucianism in downgrading the woman's position and reinforcing the three obediences. Even so, Buddhism dominated the spirituality of Heian noblewomen with the conditional guarantee that they could earn salvation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the parable of the fifth chapter was popular among women readers because it is the story of the eight-year-old daughter of the Dragon King in the *Lotus Sutra*, who attains salvation despite her three disadvantages: her youth, sexual and animal identities.

In *The Supremacy of Masculine Sexuality over the Commodity of Modesty* Itahashi Tomoyuki 板橋倫行 says, “the first Japanese collection of Buddhist parables, *Nihon Ryoyuiki* 日本靈異記, must have confronted the indigenous people with the definite notion of good and evil” (qtd in Otuka 56). What appalled the Japanese must have been the karmic consequence that their present behavior would affect and alter their next life. This was more so for women than men. The Buddhist doctrine that their inferior sex was due to their karmic retribution presumably frightened numerous Heian noblewomen. The fear of karmic retribution doubtlessly kept women busily copying the *Lotus Sutra* and visiting temples to pray for their salvation.⁶⁷ Even such an intellectual woman as Shikibu might have been no exception. The notable avoidance of quoting the content of

changed her mind. In the *Genji*, after the priest snipped the hair of Ukifuni 浮船, her patron Kaoru 薫 finds out where she is; the priest urges her to return to him as a regular woman.

⁶⁷ If Heian noblewomen copied the *Lotus Sutra* in written Chinese, doesn't this evince that numerous women could read and write Chinese?

the popular *Lotus Sutra* suggests her silent quarrel with the Buddhist misogynistic view. Yet living in a Buddhist society, how could she avoid being affected by its religiosity, even partially and unconsciously? Probably, the denigrating Buddhist doctrines and the notion of karmic retribution threatened her and added to her noted pessimism about womanhood in the *Genji*.

When this spiritual fear succeeded in putting a woman in her place, the idea of modesty gradually became attractive to her. Feminine modesty was also compatible to the Confucian notion of masculine humility to the social superior, and women below men were characteristically expected to demonstrate it more than them. The Confucian idea of feminine modesty thus developed into women's passive, receptive and ingratiating attitudes toward men. Social encouragement for feminine modesty suited the noblewomen's retirement from public roles and a life confined in the household and the rear palace. Heian literature illustrates that the nobility led a more leisurely and interior life than the poets in the *Ten Thousand Leaves*, whose culture still maintained the remnant of an agrarian ambiance evolved in fields. Because the definition of the nobility became the lack of occupation and remaining inside the household, their women's physical immobility, too, became a sign of their high status.

Ellen Peel notes, "In fact, in Heian society extreme indirectness is viewed as a luxury – though sometimes a torture – reserved for the well-born" (114). This is an excellent point. Even though the noblewomen went out, they rode on the oxen carriages and peeked at the scenery through silk curtains and bamboo

screens. Yet as long as they did not know the freedom to go out, they did not pine for it and were content to live in a luxurious cage with a narrow scope of life.

Takeda Sachiko offers an intriguing study of the long red trousers, which epitomizes the ineffectiveness of the 500-year history of noblewomen's embraced dignity and modesty. When noblemen were accustomed to wear Chinese-styled trousers in the early Heian period, an ardent admirer of Tang culture, Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇, ordered gentlewomen, too, to put on trousers. Presumably, the emperor thought the trousers would make them move swiftly and more effectively serve in the palace. Yet unlike the male trousers, the women's trousers covered their feet and they had to walk as if dragging each foot. Therefore, the woman's trousers were not functional at all. For some reason, the color of the woman's trousers was uniformly red, and the red silk trousers graced the Heian imperial court and became the status symbol of a noblewoman. In the *Genji*, noble daughters wear the red trousers when they undergo the initiation rite, *mogi* 裳着, just before their marriage. Genji asks Empress Akikonomu to tie his daughter's string around her waist, suggesting that it is important to choose a high-rank adult woman for this role in order to impress the public.

Why did noblewomen cease wearing the red trousers by the 14th century in the post-Heian period? Takeda does not give a clear reason. One reasonable answer is its impracticality. Heian noblewomen had trailing hair and robes and wore the dragging trousers on formal occasions. As long as they led an interior life, they managed these cumbersome "thrice dragging" items. Pragmatism prevailed over the sense of prestige of wearing the red trousers, particularly when

frequent civil wars broke out during the post-Heian period, and noblewomen had to flee for their lives without their trousers. Even though stability returned in society, the red trousers no longer attracted noblewomen.

The degree of Heian noblewomen's seclusion has still not been well researched yet, but it seems that Asian sisters lived in a similar cultural tradition for some time in history. Heian noblewomen's interior life possibly emulated their Chinese sisters, who seldom showed themselves to male strangers, as recorded in the *Analects*: when Confucius visits the wife of the local lord *Nanzu* 南子, they bow to each other through the screen. He hears only the bell tied to her clothes softly ringing. Her indirect interview with him was probably a customary practice to preserve the ancient Chinese noblewoman's dignity. The seclusion of Chinese noblewomen perfectly would have accommodated Confucianism insisting on the division of gender roles and spheres and dissuading the intimacy of both sexes to maintain the hierarchal structure of society. To the typical Confucian, intimacy would create horizontal relations and was an anathema adulterating their ideology of absolute submission of the loyal subjects to their feudal rulers and the obedience of women to men. Moreover, as the supreme goal of Ban Zhao's four virtues must have been the woman's chastity, her voluntary or forced segregation should be ideal for this purpose. In this way, Heian noblewomen must have shared the same Confucian ideal of protecting chastity. In the *Genji*, our hero constantly insists that his most precious wives, Murasaki and the Third Princess, guard themselves from the male gaze of a stranger. *Purdah* has the same purpose of protecting women's chastity, having developed in medieval Northern Central

India by putting noblewomen behind the household as possibly rooted in the idea of hiding them during foreign invasions. If so, Asian noblewomen shared not only the three obediences but also the custom of self-segregation from men to protect their chastity.

In principle, the Heian noblewoman did not meet male strangers. In the contemporary work, *Kagerō Diary*, the author tells that she saw the bridegroom for the first time at the wedding. Later, as a mature woman, she met her adopted daughter's suitor through the bamboo screen, maintaining a distant hospitality toward her male guest. Yet this custom seems to have been occasionally violated, as illustrated in the sixth vignette of the early Heian work, the *Tales of Ise* 伊勢物語. The sixth vignette is a controversial piece, evoking many interpretations throughout the history of commentaries. The heroine, Princess Takaiko 高子, is “stolen” by a man named Narihira 業平, but they are actually eloping and escaping from her family men because she is already pledged to be an imperial consort.⁶⁸ Takaiko and Narihira's relationship is thus doomed. While carried by her lover in the field at dawn, she innocently points to the shining grass glittering with dew and inquires about it, “What is this?” (Katagiri 125). The naïve princess' incongruous question suddenly sheds the tension of the story and lets us know that this is a parody of an elopement romance.

The critique of the *Ise* expert Katagiri Yōichi 片桐洋一 reinforces the reading impression that Takaiko is an extremely sheltered high-born heroine. The

⁶⁸ Heian nobility believed that the historical Empress Takaiko 高子 and Prince Arihira no Narihira 在平業平 were the characters of the *Tales of Ise*. Yet current historians are not sure whether this is true.

author of the *Ise* is unknown but the text tends to expose the masculine style and features of writing (Fukui 福井 221). If so, the vignette displays that women were more confined inside the household in Heian noble society than the pre-Heian, leading the male author to ridicule the heroine's lack of touch with reality.⁶⁹ The heroine's passivity and silence also connotes the male ideal features of Heian femininity, perhaps as opposed to the reality. Takaiko is a feminine type rather than a recognizable woman.

Two hundred years after the composition of the *Ise*, the abduction scenario was probably still popular among Shikibu's contemporary audience, as reiterated in Genji's whimsical escapade with Yūgao and his abduction of the young girl Murasaki. Yet Yūgao and Murasaki demonstrate the usual human response of anxiety, ambivalence and reluctance to go along with the male stranger in contrast to Takaiko, the reduced model of feminine passivity and naivety suitable as Narihira's prey.

Narihira had been idealized as a legendary lover in the Heian court, inspiring Shikibu to model Young Genji on him with noble lineage, extremely good looks and courtly manners. The son of the current emperor Genji has more sexual prerogative and impunity than a mere imperial male relative such as Narihira. In Genji's illicit sexual relations with women belonging to other men, his stepmother Fujitubo, the wife of his subject Utusemi and his brother's mistress Oborozukuyo, Shikibu suggests his thrill of challenging these men's sexual

⁶⁹ In the 18th century, Motoori Norinaga and other scholars, too, found some of the vignettes not merely celebrations of sexual love but contemporary criticism of the ruling class (qtd. in Mostow and Tyler 4).

monopoly over them and his indifference to women's danger of losing their social reputation and status.

In Narihira's fling with a country woman in Vignette Fourteen, one perceives that feminine modesty is a construction of aristocratic urban culture. Inviting him to spend a night in her household and innocently being delighted at his acceptance, she recites a short poem: "It is better to turn into a pair of silkworms in the cocoon than to die of love-sickness" (Katagiri 146). Her upright attitude reminds us of women poets in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* examined in the previous pages, but the prince from the capital thinks it a lack of feminine modesty, surreptitiously enjoying mocking her. Her aggressive invitation and candid delight in his company appall Narihira, who is used to passive noblewomen in the capital and drives him away before dawn.

The country woman's poem tells that she knows how to grow silkworms, and this kind of domestic labor gives her self-confidence to be assertive to men in her agrarian society. Yet Narihira's contempt of her confirms that noblewomen did not work but were expected to know exclusive courtly grace. Tatusé Takayoshi 滝瀬爵克 is one of the current critics fiercely denouncing the class-gender discrimination in Vignette Fourteen:

In fact, there was no time like the Heian period when women were treated with contempt in aristocratic society. Polygyny facilitated women's vulnerable fate, while male aristocrats pursued their erotic egotism fully. At the time, *miyabi* [courtly elegance] was identified with urban aristocracy and *hinabi* [rusticity] with

provincial multitudes in the hierarchy of Heian society. Neither *miyabi* nor *hinabi* cultures treated women as individual humans. The dual consciousness of class and gender dominated the entire society. This narrow scope of view is evident in the noble hero's sexual adventures with both common and aristocratic women in the *Ise*. That is why we should not look at Narihira's legendary love affairs from our modern perspective of [egalitarian] sexual relationships. (83)

Tatuse notes class-gender prejudice in the *Ise* privileging Narihira and scorning the country woman and her culture. Were Narihira a lowly country bumpkin, his sexual adventure would be not celebrated as much as it is. His status and exclusive knowledge of *miyabi* nevertheless dignifies and guards him from social censure.

As Narihira does, Genji also leaves the capital to escape sexual scandals. Heian literature evinces that it was a common practice for noblemen to have native wives when they had to live temporarily in the countryside, and they deserted these women when they returned to the capital. When Genji has as a native wife, a daughter of the provincial governor Akashi, Shikibu reverses the stereotyped image of a woman in *hinabi* culture with her unusual sophistication and intellect. Akashi even bears his only daughter, fulfilling Genji's horoscope that he will have an empress for his daughter and obliging him not to desert the mother and her child. Yet Shikibu still privileges urban culture and high society when Genji has his favorite wife Murasaki raise Akashi's daughter in the capital

to blur her lowly birth. Akashi's inferior gender and class forces her to accept Genji's proposal, and she surrenders her own daughter to Murasaki, her social superior and a city resident.

Vignette Sixty-Nine in the *Ise* debunks the decorous image of a high-born woman with the chief priestess of the Sun Goddess, the *saigū*, "secretly" falling in love with "Narihira" and subsequently violating the sexual taboo. This episode is believed to have actually happened and shocked Heian nobility as exposing the fallibility of the priestess, who was chosen and consecrated, and whose virginity was sanctioned for Amaterasu. The Vignette also indicates the loss of reverence for the Sun Goddess in Heian noble society where the virginity of the *saigū* became a mere object of male fetish sexuality.

The legendary scandal of the *saigū* is believed to have inspired Shikibu to invent the greatest scandal in her work, the illicit affair between Genji and his stepmother, Empress Fujitubo, and to put their illegitimate son on the throne as Emperor Reizei. Genji is a much more audacious illicit lover than Narihira, continuing to pursue Fujitubo until she escapes him by becoming a nun. The *saigū* and Empress Fujitubo's illicit affairs would not have been depicted in the time of the *Ten Thousand Leaves* in which the bard Hitomaro sings that the sovereign is a living god believed to have descended from the Sun Goddess. Both the *Ise* and the *Genji* shed the dignified image of Heian noble society and exposed their imperfect humanity, but despite these subversive elements, they were widely read in Shikibu's time.

The myth of Amaterasu, in which the woman shaman dances naked to induce the Sun Goddess from the cave, might have embarrassed Heian nobility. Shikibu projects the rustic image of the deity evolved in rice-paddy fields on the character of a country girl working in the palace, Ōmi no Kimi 近江の君. Good natured but outspoken and provincial, Ōmi no Kimi is unaware that she continues to baffle diffident and graceful noblewomen and delights male courtiers finding a prey of their mockery. The young noblemen eventually get through a message to her, comparing her to Amaterasu coming out of her cave: “You have such robust muscles to demolish the heavenly chasm into pieces like melting snow... You might do us a favor by staying in the cave permanently.” (Ch. “The Excursion of the Emperor 行幸” The *Genji* Vol. 3. 313-314).

Comically compared to the goddess marching out of the cave, Ōmi no Kimi finally realizes their obvious contempt and cries loudly. To the noblemen, neither Amaterasu nor Ōmi no Kimi fit into their desirable category of a decorous and modest beauty. This unflattering reference to Amaterasu also confirms that she no longer inspires spiritual awe in Heian nobility.

Yet Heian nobility believed that they had to maintain the sacred origin of the sovereign representing their privilege and status for their self-preservation even in a dwindled form. Actually, having lost their political hegemony to Fujiwara regents, the emperors needed Amaterasu more to amplify their inalienable authority with their “divine lineage.” Fujiwara men also needed the Sun Goddess to dominate the imperial politics behind their divine sovereigns.

Amaterasu, the epitome of matriarchal power, survived Heian patriarchy, maintaining an interestingly ambiguous status.

Keeping in mind the Heian noble custom of gender division, we are not sure how women courtiers contacted men. Shikibu's contemporary woman courtier Sei Shōnagon records a "brazen" woman in her *Pillow Book*, who senses a nobleman of her interest passing her chamber and quickly opens the door to let him in. Yet Sei Shōnagon has a firm class consciousness, annoyed to expose her face to the commoners. In her *Diary*, Shikibu is aware that women courtiers' frequent contact with men certainly developed their public reputation as being women of easy virtue, and it enhanced the prejudice and contempt of high-born nobility toward them. The widow possibly in her thirties, a few years younger than Michinaga in his early forties, records his several playful overtures and her diplomatic and firm rejections rather proudly. One of those incidences takes place when Michinaga visits his daughter's apartment, he writes an impromptu *waka* (a short poem) and gallantly reads it in front of the audience, including Shikibu: "I am sure no man passes you without *plucking* such a renowned amorous woman, [who looks like a plum blossom]" (Fujioka 249). He intentionally makes the author of the *Genji* as oversexed as her hero. To her vexation, the *Genji* created her reputation as a woman with an amorous past and titillated male sexual fantasies. Immediately, Shikibu gives him a demurring response: "Who plucks and tastes me such a sour (plum)?" (249). She seems to be too ironical and too detached to be played out by the sexual whim of the most powerful man Michinaga. These incidences between Michinaga and Shikibu puzzle the reader

whether they talked through the curtain in the imperial court. There has been a historical doubt that Shikibu in fact could not resist Michinaga's harassment and became his brief fling (Imai 190). On the other hand, because of her successful self-defense, the later Confucian scholars lauded her as the most chaste and modest widow preserving her fidelity to her deceased husband. As far as her *Diary* is concerned, she is determined to maintain polite employer-employee relations. Yet many of her heroines are more passive to men's sexual advances than the author, who might have been perceived as too eccentric to reject men and their potential support in her contemporary society.

Considering Shikibu's distrust of high-born men's wayward sexuality and criticism of self-exceptionalism, it might not be surprising that Takamura finds the *Exemplary Women's* influence in her *Diary* (432). Shikibu plays a stern Confucian promoter of chastity in criticizing a renowned amorous poet and her literary colleague Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部 (976?-1030?): "An unscrupulous personality....She is thought to be a spontaneous poet....but I don't think her poetry is good enough to make me feel envious" (Fujioka 237). Shikibu acknowledges her poetic skills, which are so different from hers, grounded on thought-out intricate metaphors and complex psychology. What vexes Shikibu must have been her audacious work, the *Diary of Izumi Shikibu* 和泉式部日記, a memoir of her consecutive affairs with the two sons of the emperor. Possibly, the *Diary of Izumi Shikibu* was her attempted vindication of the affairs which might have been a sensational success, to Shikibu's disgust, as her fellow literary woman was recruited into Empress Shōshi's salon.

What Izumi Shikibu did is beyond Shikibu's imagination. In Shikibu's view, a middle-rank noblewoman was supposed to know that she would never be officially recognized as a wife for an imperial member, but her literary colleague chose to make her vulnerable social status exploited by the imperial brothers. Besides, Izumi Shikibu violated conventional morality as a married woman. One of Shikibu's heroines, Oborozukiyo 朧月夜,⁷⁰ might be the closest image of Izumi Shikibu having two men, Genji and his older brother Suzaku, but she is a high-born woman protected by her status, power and wealth, unlike Izumi Shikibu. Shikibu seems to be using her class prejudice against her literary rival that a middle-rank woman must be more cautious and discerning than high-born women in the danger of high-born men's flippant sexuality. It is likely that Izumi Shikibu has utterly dismantled Shikibu's agenda of elevating the moral image of middle-rank women in the imperial court.

Shikibu nevertheless knew that Genji remained the ideal high-born man, to whose courtesy the most powerful and wealthy man Michinaga could never measure up. Michinaga once let Shikibu know that he was entitled to raid her room during her absence in the Empress' apartment by taking all her *Genji* drafts on which she was still working, and he gave them to his younger daughter to be the next empress. One can imagine Shikibu's shock and rage. Yet what could she do? She maintained a cool façade as if nothing had happened, understanding that her social superior could afford to violate the conventional morality at his convenience. Not pouring out her wrath even in her *Diary* in case someone were

⁷⁰ This name can also be pronounced as *Oborozukyo*.

to read it, Shikibu resorted to only a factual report: “If he thought them worthwhile circulating, it pains me that the unpolished writings will earn me only a poor reputation” (Fujioka 205). It is unclear whether this is her sincere concern about defaming her by exposing the rough draft in public or a sarcastic understatement about Michinaga’s flagrant abuse of power. Either way, her statement reveals that a woman courtier had no right to protest against the misdemeanor of her literary patron. Since Michinaga financed her composition of the *Genji*, he apparently felt entitled to own all of her writings. Had Shikibu complained to him, the regent would have nonchalantly replaced her with a new literary gentlewoman immediately. Shikibu’s service in the court must have made her recognize that the ruler put aside the good part of his nature for political aggrandizement.

Michinaga’s son Norimichi 教通 also once exercised his impunity by temporarily disrupting the gender divided spheres in the court during the new-year ceremony and outraging the gentlewomen. The new widower was not allowed to attend the ceremony during the mourning period of his deceased wife as being profane for having been exposed to the deceased, but he had a harmless curiosity to see the glamorous ceremony without upsetting the public etiquette. He thus joined a crowd of gentlewomen attending the ceremony and sitting behind the bamboo screen incognito (*The Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 2. 451). This was evidently not a matter of possibly endangering their chastity nor merely violating gender decorum, but violating the taboo and supposedly polluting the gentlewomen’s sphere cleansed for the new-year ceremony. Although infuriated

and distracted, the women courtiers could do nothing to the high-born man with the impunity of suspending the taboo. They only recorded their polite vexation in the *Flowering Fortunes* as the high-born man's nameless offence to them, just as Shikibu describes her male characters' offence to women and belief in self-exceptionalism without defining it. In conclusion, imperial and high-born women's seclusion seemed firmer than women's courtiers as their inalienable dignity in Heian noble society, whereas women courtiers endured the occasional violation of gender segregation by men above their status with quiet passivity and patience.

The Fujiwara Regency and the Mother of the Nation

Many critics, including Negoro Tukasa 根来司, have argued that the *Genji* is an anti-Fujiwara regency narrative like the *Ise* (52). This seems a simplistic theory. Admittedly, Shikibu models *Genji* on the legendary hero Narihira, who is supposed to have descended from an imperial family member, to a large extent. Actually the imperial family members and Fujiwara clans were all virtually descended from Fujiwara Fuhito. The Fujiwara men gradually dominated the imperial court and established the hereditary regency by continuously marrying their daughters to the emperors. Thus, children of the emperors did carry Fujiwara genes even though their family names became *Genji* 源氏, signifying their imperial lineage. Other noble families survived in middle-rank status, called *naka no hin* 中の品 in the *Genji*. The daughter of a middle-rank family like Akashi in the *Genji* would not have married up to such a high-born man as our hero as his

minor wife in Heian noble society, but Shikibu takes literary liberty in depicting her as a most fortunate heroine.

The *Genji* is a product of Fujiwara regent culture when the emperor could not be installed without the support of his maternal relatives, such as his uncles or grandfather. The regent played the role of the virtual ruler during the Heian period. As the second son of the emperor and junior consort, our hero has such an ambiguous name as “Genji,” meaning a subject with the imperial lineage. He is reluctantly demoted by his father Emperor for having no possibility to be his heir without his prominent maternal male relatives. Yet Shikibu has Genji play the regent of his younger brother (his actual illegitimate son) Emperor Reizei and appropriates the political reality of her contemporary society to make him the most powerful man in the land. To dominate imperial politics, Genji can always depend on Reizei’s mother and his ex-illicit lover, Empress Fujitubo’s influence on the boy sovereign. Fujitubo as the “Mother of the Nation 国母” has the behind-the-scenes power essential for Genji to dominate the imperial court.

The Mothers of the Nation, Fujiwara daughters were the agents of cementing and reinforcing the connection between their marital imperial family and the natal Fujiwara. Hence, the Heian period saw the maternal regency of more than 400 years largely carried on by the Fujiwara families. By contrast, the Chinese Confucians cultivated the stereotyped image of maternal relatives as imbred parasites as indicated in the imperial chronicle. Confucian theory is that the woman has no place in politics. Yet as said in the previous pages, the Japanese *Rituryō* modified the Chinese version that only the empress could play the role of

the regent for a young emperor to allow a junior imperial consort to rise as the Mother of the Nation as long as her son was a minor sovereign.

Biological endogamy was the main marital alliance strategy of the Fujiwara and Genji (imperial) families, driven by their desire to perpetuate their prestige and wealth, and contributing to rigorous inbreeding rivalries. Among the high-rank nobility of the Fujiwara and Genji, many families lost the competition and had to join the middle-rank nobility. Shikibu herself belongs to a middle-rank Fujiwara family who once produced a prime minister and made her proud of her lineage. Yet her father remained the governor of a province, and Shikibu served as a gentlewoman to Empress Shōshi, a daughter of the most prominent man Fujiwara no Michinaga. The narrator of the *Genji* is a middle-rank woman courtier like the author, describing the high-rank characters in honorific terms. The *Genji* itself hints at a stark stratification of Heian nobility, focusing on high-rank nobility and limiting the depiction of the author's own middle-rank. Unlike Negoro's argument, she had no substantial reason to write against her Fujiwara clan, but her *Diary* demonstrates that Shikibu's own gender-class consciousness as a woman courtier in a tight endogamous and hierarchal noble society, which will be later discussed.

The termination of compiling the imperial annals after the *True History of Three Reigns of Japanese [Emperors]* 日本三大実録 (879) signifies the decline of the emperor's authority during the Heian period. On the other hand, Michinaga built the apotheosis of Fujiwara regency and contributed to the composition of two massive works on the history of Heian nobility, mainly lauding his Fujiwara clan

and his rule in *Eiga Monogatari* 栄花物語, translated into English as the *Tales of Fortune* and *Ōkagami*⁷¹ 大鏡. Both works demonstrate how the high-born Fujiwara women cooperated with their family men while staying in the rear palace as imperial consorts. The *Fortune* will be discussed later. Here, we will use *Ōkagami* to learn about the two renowned Mothers of the Nation, Anshi 安子 (927-964) and Senshi 詮子 (962-1001), the aunt and sister of Michinaga who founded his glory. Anshi is the most powerful Mother of the Nation in *Ōkagami*, rising as Empress because she was the daughter of the prime minister and had the most number of children among her co-consorts.

The most famous episode of Anshi's jealousy is the violence she inflicted on her cousin and new beautiful consort Hōshi 芳子. When the Emperor was visiting Hōshi's apartment, Anshi had clay pieces thrown at them through a hole in the wall (115). Unable to punish Anshi directly, the Emperor ordered her brothers to leave the palace, instead. Yet she compelled him to bring them back. This episode is not recorded in the *Flowering Fortune*, which lauds Michinaga's aunt, Anshi's intelligence and leadership in the rear palace, but in *Ōkagami*, written 50 years after the composition of the first. Anshi's jealousy might have been exaggerated in *Ōkagami*. The *Flowering Fortunes* and *Ōkagami* nevertheless acknowledge Anshi's dominant character and presence in the rear

⁷¹ *Ōkagami* literally means *The Great Mirror* as the work is supposed to produce the "mirror" image of the past. Both the *Tale of Fortune* and *Ōkagami* are anonymous works, but the content of each work suggests the gender of the author: a woman courtier (or women courtiers) probably wrote the first, describing numerous historical imperial consorts and high-born men, whereas a male writer in the imperial court is believed to have written the latter since the tone of voice tends to be definite and is occasionally critical. *Ōkagami* is believed to have been written after the *Fortune*, possibly as a critical and additional source to the latter.

palace as a daughter of the supreme Fujiwara family and the mother of an imperial heir. Anshi never withdrew her protest against her imperial spouse's sexual promiscuity and she fully used her prerogative to defend her supreme status and her family's political monopoly.

Another episode suggests Anshi's tremendous political power, which influenced the selection of the prime minister posthumously on her son. After her death, her second brother Kanemichi 兼通 is believed to have carried his sister's will that the seniority of her brothers determine the selection of the prime minister. After his older brother and the prime minister died, Kanemichi compelled Anshi's son, Emperor Enyu 円融, to replace his older brother by showing her will (*Ōkagami* 206).

Anshi's niece and Michinaga's older sister Senshi 詮子, who became an imperial consort of her cousin Emperor Enyu and the mother of Emperor Ichijo, also worked for her father and brothers. Emperor Enyu installed another consort as his Empress despite their only son by Senshi, alienating her and her family men. Not forgetting her insult by the imperial spouse, Senshi raised the heir apparent in her home and seldom took him to the palace to show him. Her father and brothers also supported her virtual separation from the imperial spouse, who thwarted their political ambition to dominate the imperial politics behind her and her son.

Like Anshi, Senshi perceived herself as the promoter of her family men in counteracting her imperial spouse's will. The Fujiwara daughters were in unison with their men in the belief that the imperial consort and her son were the essential means to sustain the emperor as well as their power of regency, and

imposed this on their sovereign as the implicit contract. Emperor Murakami and Emperor Enyu's favor of some other consort threatened not only Anshi and Senshi but also their family men's political ambitions. Heian imperial matrimonial relations determined the trajectory of national politics.

After the death of Emperor Enyu, Senshi became the Mother of the Nation with her teenage son Emperor Ichijō 一条. Promoting his younger brother Michinaga over her nephew Korechika 伊周, she forced her teenage son to appoint his uncle *Nairan* 内覧, the title of which was slightly lower than the regent. Michinaga nevertheless virtually acted as the young Emperor's regent. Emperor Ichijō preferred Korechika, the brother of his favorite consort Empress Teishi, as his regent, but he gave in to his mother (330). Like their Indian and Chinese counterparts, Japanese mothers usually managed to control their sons and limit their daughters-in-law's influence over them. To repeat once more, the actuality of the three obediences was often the two obediences. Senshi became the first Buddhist nun as the mother of the emperor, entitled *nyoin* 女院, and commanded implicitly the public reverence for her simultaneous political and religious status. This title of *nyoin* was carried on by her daughter-in-law Empress Shōshi, who also became a nun and controlled the choice of imperial consorts and the succession of her brothers as regents. In the *Genji*, Empress Fujitubo also becomes the *nyoin*, the religious and political authority of the Mother of the Nation distancing herself from Genji, her past illicit partner.

Ōkagami nevertheless justifies Michinaga's glory with the Buddhist ideology that it was due to his karma (330). Indeed, he was fortunate, born the

third son of Regent Fujiwara Kane'ei 藤原兼家 and retaining his older sister and Senshi's favor and trust, which were crucial for Michinaga's political ambition to monopolize the imperial court. His next step was to marry his first daughter Shōshi 彰子 to Emperor Ichijō. Michinaga took an unprecedented political move, upgrading the status of Teishi to the senior empress and installing his daughter to be the second empress. Emperor Ichijō thus had two empresses simultaneously. Michinaga also had the luck of Teishi's death and his daughter Shōshi bore two sons. The grandfather put each on the throne, thus prolonging his political dominance in the imperial court. Michinaga eventually became the father of three empresses, the grandfather of three emperors and the uncle of two emperors.

The *Genji* was born as a byproduct of Michinaga's rear palace policy to ensure the birth of Shōshi's offspring with his nephew and Emperor Ichijō, the lover of literature, who missed the literary salon of his deceased consort Empress Teishi. Shikibu was one of Michinaga's acquisitions of renowned women poets and writers to surround Shōshi in order to entice the literary Emperor Ichijō's frequent visits to her apartment and have her bear an heir. Heaven rewarded Michinaga's shrewd and expensive enterprise with the astonishing generosity of two grandsons. In her *Diary*, Shikibu records Michinaga's elation over the birth of Shōshi's two sons, each of whom he made the emperor.

Michinaga's rear palace policy to buttress his power is echoed in Genji's political agenda of reinforcing his illegitimate son Emperor Reizei with Dowager Empress Fujitubo. Fujitubo assists the marriage between Genji's adopted daughter Princess Akikonomu and Reizei. Even though Genji is concerned with his brother

and retired Emperor Suzaku's interest in Akikonomu, Fujitubo shrewdly advises him to declare in public that it is the Princess' deceased mother's wish to marry her daughter to the emperor in order not to earn his brother's grudge. When Genji uses Reizei's penchant for collecting paintings to arouse his attachment to the new mate Akikonomu, Fujitubo plays a crucial role as judge in the picture competition between his two consorts. While posing as a fair judge, Fujitubo sides with Akikonomu, who obtains Genji's abundant supplies of interesting paintings. Akikonomu wins the imperial spouse's greatest favor and secures her adopted father's hegemonic power in the court. Shikibu's realism is that the once-glamorous Empress Fujitubo and the handsome imperial prince Genji, the two illicit mates now turn out the two calculating politicians to ensure their illegitimate son's reign and his father's regency.

Michinaga's confident and easy manners recorded in Shikibu's *Diary* resemble Genji in middle age perhaps because Shikibu partly based her hero on her literary patron, but the imperial son is much more glamorous than even the idealized Michinaga in the *Flowering Fortunes* and *Ōkagami*. Genji's biological relation entices his illegitimate son and Emperor Reizei to give him the fictional title of the semi-Emperor 准太政天皇, but Michinaga remained a mere regent. Genji thus becomes a larger-than-life character, with no specific historical characters achieving the degree of his glory. When Shikibu says in her *Diary* that there is no such man as Genji, she confirms us that our hero belongs to the realm beyond her realism (202).

Needless to say, the perpetuation of the regent's power depends on the luck of biology, the heir produced by his daughter. Michinaga's fortune was that he made three empresses out of his numerous daughters and they had three sons, all of who became emperors. Michinaga's sons also married their daughters to the emperors, but none of them bore an heir and ensured the fall of the Fujiwara regency. The maternal regency thus disappeared at the end of the Heian period, not owing to new contenders but to the force of nature. Nor does Genji's son Emperor Reizei produce an heir. Shikibu troubles numerous readers by putting Fujitubo into an impossible position of being guilty of playing an illegitimate Mother of the Nation but unable to withdraw her son's heir-ship secured unwittingly by the gullible Genji's father Emperor. Yet Shikibu terminates the blood line of Reizei by the absence of his heir during his reign, restoring the legitimate imperial authority and revealing her moral position.

The Apotheosis and Marginality of Heian Women's Literature

When Heian noblewomen were denied political and religious offices, what option did they have in order to empower themselves? Literature is Takamure's answer: "The melancholic tone of Heian women's literature reveals that they still retained the intellectual independence, but they were unfortunately overcome by the historical wave of patriarchy" (279). Takamure believes that after the loss of their political power, Heian women channeled their creative energy into literature. This might also have been partly Takamure's experience. The early 20th century unleashed the literary fervor of Raiteu and her women comrades to present their poetry and essays in the magazine *Seito*. Raiteu recalls those *Seito* women's

passion for literature: “It is now difficult to articulate how literature fascinated young women in my time ... I wanted to write about my ideas and experiences and publish them” (318). Like middle-rank Heian noblemen, early-modern middle-class women were equipped with education and were expected to aid their family men. The Seito women resisted modelling themselves on the “good wife and wise mother 良妻賢母,” a Confucian phrase which the government rejuvenated for the modern education of their gender, and they found literature one of their scarce means of expressing their individuality.

What language those Heian women used in writing has been a mystery to the critics and historians. We have neither original texts of the *Genji* nor other Heian women’s prose and poetry because they were written on paper and circulated among readers, were eventually worn out and had to be copied onto new sheets. The absence of the original Heian women’s literary texts probably led to the traditional hypothesis that when male critics and scholars copied them,⁷² they replaced Chinese characters with *hiragana* words. Because Heian women’s literature triumphed over men’s, the traditional literary criticism tended to overrate the contribution of *hiragana* and overlook the close link between Chinese and *hiragana*.

The traditional overemphasis of *hiragana* in Heian women’s literature and *waka* tends to forget the indispensable presence of those Chinese words. In contrast to *hiragana*, Chinese characters were certainly perceived as Heian nobility’s official letters. The convention of using Chinese characters only in

⁷² Each copy of the remaining Heian women’s works exhibits occasional differences in the usage of Chinese characters.

official documents and noblemen's diaries lasted even after the Heian period for centuries. Noblemen in Heian society were more savvy than the previous generations and wrote their diaries only in Chinese⁷³ (Kane'e 350). Their families kept their diaries, using them as reference and sometimes lending them to others for the information on ceremonies (Kato 52). Those works were meant to preserve information as their society was decorous, and ceremonies and rituals were highly valued. In the current perspective, they may not always be palatable to read.⁷⁴

The Heian nobility's view of the supremacy of Chinese culture over the Japanese and their association of it with masculinity in the use of written letters perfectly correlates with a remarkable finding of Chino Kaori 千野香織 in the 1990s on the interior decor of rooms in the imperial palace of their time (qtd. in Ikedan Shinobu 池田忍 212-217). The formal rooms used for ceremonies were decorated with Chinese paintings on the screens, suggesting the emperor's admiration for the glorious past of the Tang Empire, whereas Japanese scenes were painted on the screens of the emperor's private rooms of his family members over whom he had absolute power. In other words, Heian noblemen expressed the view of cultural and gender hierarchy, identifying China and themselves as supreme over their nation and their women, in the label of the letter and the division of Chinese and Japanese sceneries. We do not know how consciously

⁷³ The Pre-Heian work, the *Chronicles of Japan*, is not as Chinese as the Heian nobility's works. No wonder an erudite Shikibu has Genji comment on it as second-rate.

⁷⁴ Kino Turayuki 紀貫之 wrote his *Tosa Diary* 土佐日記 in a combination of Chinese characters and *hiragana*. The traditional interpretation has been that he tried to disguise his masculine identity; a current interpretation is that he also implied that he used the feminine hand *hiragana* in his private diary just as the contemporary women did (Ishikawa Kyuyo 石川九楊, qtd. in the front reference of Nijō). This is an illuminating interpretation. The poet Turayuri did not merely amuse himself by playing a woman but noticed that *hiragana* was also often essential to convey Japanese sensitivity that Chinese characters sometimes did not accommodate.

Heian nobility did so, but they evidently took the supremacy of masculinity for granted.

Heian noblewomen are believed to have used only *hiragana* to write their diaries, and a widely accepted historical irony is that *hiragana* enabled Heian women to describe sentiments and ideas embedded in the indigenous culture more at ease than their men using the borrowed Chinese characters only. Yet possibly, the women's diaries, too, were in a combination of *hiragana* and Chinese characters. Therefore, the superior literary quality of Heian women's diaries to the men's may have been due to the difference in the purpose of using the diary, not to the two kinds of letters. Those women's works dramatize their daily life much more vividly than those of men focusing on preserving important information. Again, Takamura might be correct in noting that after the women's loss of political authority and power several centuries ago, a still recent past, those women channeled their creative energy and ambition into literature. Heian nobility seems to have begun to use the two sets of simplified Chinese characters, *hiragana* and *katakana* 片仮名, in the 9th century. No one knows how these simplified Chinese characters evolved. We will discuss only *hiragana* which is known to have contributed to Heian women's literature. Chinese characters were called either "actual letters 真名" or the "masculine hand 男手," whereas *hiragana* 平仮名, literally meaning "temporary letters," was labeled as the "feminine hand 女手."

It has been believed that Heian noblemen wrote in Chinese and their women, in *hiragana*, but the current women historians have been arguing that

some women did use Chinese, as follows. Nishimura Satomi 西村さとみ proposes that both women and men used the combination of *hiragana* and Chinese by using the indigenous poetry known as *waka* 和歌 as an example. It has been believed that the *waka* initially used only *hiragana*, as opposed to Chinese poetry 漢詩, which used only Chinese. *Waka* seems to have at first had less prestige than Chinese poetry because of its usage of *hiragana*, the “feminine hand.” Yet Heian noblemen composed both Chinese poetry and *waka* and the latter soon became fashionable, as evinced by the early Heian work sponsored by the imperial government, the *Collection of Old and New Japanese Poetry* 古今和歌集. Pointing out that there are more men’s *waka* in this collection, Nishimura contends that both men and women used the combination of Chinese and *hiragana* from the beginning.

Even though the early Heian nobility, immersed in patriarchal ideologies, privileged Chinese by calling it the “masculine hand” and gave *hiragana* the denigrating nickname of the “feminine hand,” that does not mean that the usages of the two types of letters were gendered. A sufficient example Nishimura gives is the diary of the early Heian Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 in which he recorded what he overheard from gentlewomen’s discourse, “Men compete with each other in Chinese poetry and women enjoy discussing Japanese poetry (qtd. in Nishimura 287). He already had a grand Chinese poetry contest in the previous year, and the gentlewomen’s remarks prompted him to organize a *waka* contest but invited mostly men. Composing *waka*, Heian noblemen might have used *hiragana* just as much as the women.

Nishimura's argument is convincing. All the Heian collections of *waka* left to us are in the combinations of *hiragana* and Chinese. As far as we know, *hiragana* has been used as linking particles of Chinese words, and they are still so now to a large extent. Written Japanese without Chinese characters would be confusing as the Japanese language has numerous homophones. It would be appropriate to assume that the early indigenous poetry was the configuration of Chinese characters and *hiragana* from the beginning.

We do have a few known women who wrote Chinese even though not many. Even in the pre-Heian period, Empress Komyō wrote beautiful Chinese characters as her work remains in the imperial storage *Shōsōin* 正倉院 (Ozaki 尾崎 190). There were two Heian women renowned for their Chinese poetry. In 823 Princess Uchiko 有智子 composed a Chinese poem at seventeen and the amazed father Emperor Saga 嵯峨天皇 rewarded her literary accomplishment by upgrading her title (Nishimura 西村 287).⁷⁵ Emperor Ichijō's favorite consort Empress Teishi 定子 (977-1001) was knowledgeable of Chinese poetry, as recorded by her gentlewoman Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 in her work, the (*Pillow Book*) *Mukura nosōshi* 枕草子. *Ōkagami* records Teishi's intellectual mother Takashina Kishi 高階貴子 who composed both Chinese and Japanese, and she attended Chinese poetry contests organized in the imperial court by modestly sitting in a closet-like room attached to the hall filled with men (258-259). Her son Fujiwara Korechika 藤原伊周 was known for improvising Chinese poems

⁷⁵ Her poem is listed in the imperial collection of Japanese-made Chinese poetry, *Keicokushū* 経国集.

and arousing public admiration. Yet *Ōkagami* concludes with the stereotyped criticism of the contemporary society that “the woman’s talent is wrong. That is why she died of grief [over her two sons’ exile].” In Chapter 1, we have learned the exactly same sentiment of Shikibu’s maids in her *Diary*. These two incidences hint at the mainstream prejudice and rejection of women’s intellectual accomplishments in Heian noble society as being out of their gender occupation.

The *Genji* also hints at Shikibu’s recognition that the majority of men in her society found educated women undesirable and intimidating. The most intellectual woman well-versed in Chinese is ridiculed as the daughter of a certain scholar in the episode narrated by one of the courtiers, Shikibujyo 式部丞, when a group of young men gather and keep vigil in the palace on a rainy night 雨夜の品定め. She becomes his bride as well as a teacher of Chinese, but her sincere intellectual advice, love letters written only in Chinese characters and the Chinese diction in her speech annoy him and drive him away. The moral of Shikibujyo’s story is that a woman should never flaunt her knowledge, especially to her lover (Ozaki 191). This extraordinary woman scholar of Chinese might have been Shikibu’s self-mockery, as she was conscious that her scholarship was regarded as “unfeminine” in the mainstream of her society. On the other hand, this episode also implies that there were such women in Heian noble society including Shikibu herself.

In a post-Heian work, *Oyudono no ue no nikki (Diary)* 御湯殿上日記 (a series of diaries in which events and rituals are recorded by generations of gentlewomen in the imperial court between 1477 and 1824), several Chinese

characters are customarily used; such as the honorific terms of *the lord* 殿 for the ruling-class man and *the lady* 御 for the high-born woman (qtd. in Isono 34). In contrast to their fellow noblemen who recorded all in Chinese, the number of Chinese characters was an absolute minimum, but this does not negate the fact that noblewomen used them. Nakai Umi in her dissertation of 1991 points out that those women courtiers did not avoid Chinese rooted words in the diaries (qtd. in Jugaku 寿岳 134). Nakai has discovered that gentlewomen used even the direct Chinese characters, the “body nose 鼻血,” debunking their stereotyped image as too decorous to choose such graphic expressions (134). The Heian woman writer also uses a formal Chinese word, *kandō* (Japanese pronunciation) 勘当, meaning *to disown*, twice in *Kagerō Nikki (Diary)* 蜻蛉日記 although we can never know whether the author used the actual Chinese characters to transcribe the word in her writing. Considering this incidence and that even a small number of noblewomen seem to have written in Chinese before the evolution of *kana* exemplified by Empress Komyō in the pre-Heian period, Heian noblewomen do not seem to have avoided Chinese characters. As the extent of regular Heian women’s use of Chinese characters is still a complex on-going research topic for historians, we cannot solve it right now.

In relation to Heian literary women’s Chinese scholarship, Mekata Kuwao 目加田くわを refers to the theory of Tamaki Kōsuke 玉井幸助 that their diaries are rooted in the record of Confucius’s scholarship and the chronicles of dynasties. Mekata further remarks that all those women diarists had parents from families known for Chinese scholarship. In other words, the women inherited the family

tradition of Chinese learning. By meaning the *diary*, Mekata includes the women's prose works, which should include not only *Kagerō Diary*, *Izumi Shikibu's Diary*, and *Shikibu's Diary* but also the *Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon, who also has a scholarly family. (Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, which does not have *waka* but the author's short sentences, could be interpreted as free-verse poetry. She is not known for her poetry, possibly because her individualism was not suited to the constrained literary conventions.)

As Mekata says, their scholarly family ambiance nurtured their literary talent, but also their fathers might have actively encouraged their learning for their careers in the imperial court or the prestigious marriage and their possible promotion through their daughters. The author of *Kagerō Diary* married up as the secondary wife of Fujiwara Kaneie, who became the regent. Other women diarists used their literary talents as courtiers. Shikibu's career certainly promoted her daughter to thrive as a wet nurse of Emperor Goreizei 後冷泉天皇, the highest career for a middle-rank woman. Those women's possible intellectual and literary contribution to their male kinsmen's career must have been taken for granted, as not being recorded much in Heian literature. Rosalind Miles constantly complains in her book, *Who Cooked the Last Supper*, the invisibility of women's work and labor aided men's known accomplishments behind the scenes.

The memoir might be useful as a loose categorization of Heian diaries⁷⁶ as they are occasionally dated loosely with a certain month and year. What concerns

⁷⁶ Discussing Heian noblewomen's *Nikki*, translated as "diary" in English, including *Kagerō Diary*, Edith Sarra proposes the genre of memoir to categorize them. Oka Kazuko 岡一雄 already calls *Kagerō Diary* a memoir from a slightly different perspective. He thinks that *Kagerō Diary* follows

us more than the genre of category for this thesis is that those middle-rank authors of *Kagerō Diary*, *Izumi Shikibu's Diary* and the *Pillow Book* recorded their personal experiences and possibly circulated among their literary communities to share but not to market them. (Shikibu's *Diary* largely differs from others, starting like a commissioned work by Michinaga to record the detail of her mistress' childbearing, but in the middle, it switches to her personal issues in the imperial court.) Because paper was precious, their works might have had the luxury of the *Genji*, as recorded in Shikibu's *Diary*, copied neatly and bound with refined covers as a gift to Emperor Ichijō in Michinaga's mansion, possibly being copied on the back side of the used sheets by their readers and handed to other readers extensively.

Now, those women's prose works are viewed as subversive and as the insiders' criticism of their own society. Yet their countercultural attitudes are not ideologically coherent. As discussed in the previous pages, *Kagerō Diary* argues against male promiscuity and for marital chastity, as opposed to *Izumi Shikibu's Diary* in which the narrator presents herself as the third woman falling in love with a married prince and letting his official wife to leave the household in exasperation. *Izumi Shikibu's Diary* might be the vindication of a middle-rank woman's extra marital affair with an imperial family member, implicitly arguing that love transcends the conventional gender-class morality. Sei Shōnagon's preservation of Empress Teishi as the ideal feminine, instead of recording her distress over her uncle Michinaga's political harassment of her family, might be

the tradition of *Kosa Diary* and the *Tale of Ise*, both of which recall past events with a series of *waka*. The memoir might be useful as a loose categorization of Heian diaries.

partly a resistance to the current dominant power having destroyed her happiness and fortune. The author of the *Genji* left a most gloomy personal *Diary* but it shows her relentless criticism of her contemporary society which helps to understand the same stance in her fiction. The implicit criticism of those middle-rank women might be partly due to their close contact with higher-class people. Learning their own deprivation of certain luxury and privilege of the high-class people who were just as imperfect as they were, they might have inserted their critical insights with precaution.

However, those Heian noblewomen give little information on their servants and carriage drivers in their households, whose works were indispensable to maintain the level of their lives. This suggests that a firm sense of hierarchy is internalized within themselves and they did not take interest in the lower class, just as the scribe did not record women much in the imperial annals, regarding them as unimportant. In the *Pillow Book*, Sei Shōnagon sometimes records her contact with the lower class and shocks the current reader with egalitarian sensitivity by unhesitatingly uttering her candid contempt, “The same thing can be spoken differently: the word of monks, men and women [are different]. The language of the lower class *gesu* (in Japanese) 下衆 always needs unnecessary additional explanation” (*Makura no sōshi* 32). Possibly, because she was a noblewoman, she had little contact with the lower class and did not comprehend their language well and needed to explicate it further to her audience of the privileged minority.

Shikibu perhaps never met the author of the *Pillow Book* 枕草子, Sei Shōnagon, as the latter left the palace upon the death of her mistress about ten years before Shikibu recorded the following accusation in her *Diary*:

Sei Shōnagon is conceited and self-satisfied. [Her work] pompously is filled with Chinese characters, but my careful reading proves that she still lacks sufficient knowledge. It is not a gracious manner to try to excel others like her. Not surprisingly, she faded away. Constantly trying to look sophisticated and sensitive to nubilous things, one can acquire pretentious manners.

(Fujioka 238)

Shikibu's invective, though merciless, articulates Sei Shōnagon's personality, which is contrary to hers. Shikibu believes that modest topos should be a customary gesture of intellectual middle-rank women in the imperial court not to invite the envy of their colleagues and public persecution as unfeminine and indecorous.

Yet Sei Shōnagon likes to demonstrate her knowledge of Chinese as recorded in her collection of essays, the *Pillow Book*. Once Sei Shōnagon and her mistresses improvised the game of envisioning the scene in the poem of Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846):

Empress (Teishi) asked me jokingly, “How is the snow on Mount Koro 香炉峰?” I immediately understood what my mistress meant... Flipping up high the bamboo screen to show snow outside,

I looked back at her as if asking, "How does your majesty see the snow? She smiled approvingly (Matuo 433).

Sei Shōnagon responded to her question alluding to the phrase:

I flipped up the screen to see Mount Koro 香炉峰雪撥簾看.

This passage must have made Sei Shōnagon's wit and spontaneity famous not only in the imperial court of her time but also among generations of readers. At the same time, she must have invited much accusation from her contemporary women and generations of readers for lacking "feminine" modesty. Shikibu exaggerates in her *Diary* that she has to conceal her knowledge of the easiest Chinese character the number one, "一," but Sei Shōnagon did what she found it impossible and was not the type of personality she would like to be friends with (Fujioka 244). As previously discussed in the introduction, Saigō nevertheless suggests that Shikibu did not detect beneath Sei Shōnagon's *shitarigao* したり顔 meaning her "proud face," the desire of the daughter of an impoverished middle-rank noble family for financial security and social acceptance in the high society of the imperial court.

Admittedly, the *Genji* demonstrates the depth of Shikibu's Chinese scholarship much more than Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*. As Shikibu's integration of numerous Chinese classics into the *Genji* is already well known, we will only discuss Bai Juyi's narrative poem, the "Song of Eternal Grief 長恨歌" in relation to her response to the contemporary sexual relations.⁷⁷ The "Song of

⁷⁷ See "The *Tale of Genji* and International Textuality 源氏物語と国際交流," Chapter 5 in *Heian Literature in the Realm of International Textuality 交流する平安文学* by Takana Takaaki 田中隆昭.

Eternal Grief⁷⁸ is drawn from the historical relationship of a Tang ruler, Emperor Longji 玄宗⁷⁸ (685-762), and his favorite Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719-756). Bai Juyi does not depict Yang Guifei as a typical Nation-Ravaging Beauty 傾国美人 but her feminine allure and beauty is distracting to the rulership:

The imperial lovers lament over the short spring night when
waking up after the sun is already high. The ruler thus starts
omitting the early morning meeting [with his subjects].

春宵苦短日高起從此/君王不早朝 (The *Genji* Vol. 1. 442)

The poem can be read as an admonition to a man too sexually obsessed to perform his obligations and duties. Yang Guifei's male relatives later dominated the imperial politics, and their strife for the hegemonic power against their rivals prompted a civil war. While the Emperor and Yang Guifei were fleeing, the enraged royalists forced him to have his mistress hanged. The "Song of Eternal Grief" ends with the Emperor's devotion to the memory of the deceased mate enticing him to search for her soul in the other world.

Although the Chinese emperor grieves for the permanent loss of his paramour, his choice of sacrificing her for the restoration of the Tang Empire is depicted as inevitable. Rama also sacrifices his consort Sita by having her deserted in the forest to stop the public gossip of her chastity. The ruler had the right to destroy the male social inferior's life, but by destroying their dearest women, the Indian and Chinese sovereigns could demonstrate their ability to sacrifice their pleasure in order to prove their masculine superior stoicism. Bai

⁷⁸ The poet disguises Longji as the emperor of Han 漢皇 because the Tang poet probably tried not to be disrespectful to the ruler of his nation. Yet the identity of his consort Yuan Guifei is evident.

Juyi diverts the gloomy mood of the poem in the middle with the emperor's quest for Yang Guifei's soul and ends with his pining for their reencounter.

The "Song of Eternal Grief" is written in relatively easy Chinese characters and must have been widely read in Heian noble society, where it was interpreted as an ideal love story without detecting the poet's ambivalence. Particularly for women in a polygynous culture, the "Eternal Grief" debunked the conventional sexual norm of the man's transitory attachment to a woman with an appealingly novel theme that the epitome of the Chinese polygynist surrounded by "3000 beauties in the rear palace" is capable of permanently grieving for the death of one single woman (The *Genji* Vol. 1. 442). If a woman's devotion to her spouse was taken for granted, whereas a man's devotion to his wife might have been rare and supposed to be her ultimate happiness in Heian polygynous society. Beneath the traditional emphasis on the Heian woman's happiness to retain her husband's affection, there has been the doubtless social belief that her occupation for life should be devoted only to him. The emphasis on woman's chastity was thus relevant to this pervasive ideology of Heian nobility.

Shikibu nevertheless suggests an ironical response to the man's passion for a woman in reference to the "Eternal Grief," having Genji's father Emperor identify himself with his Chinese counterpart upon the death of his junior consort Kiritubo 桐壺. Assessing the direct cause of Yuan Guifei's violent death as her imperial lover's excessive passion, the author carefully hints that Kiritubo also dies of the same cause through her mother's timid criticism of her imperial spouse, "because of his attention" (Ch. "Kiritubo 桐壺." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 107).

Shikibu's criticism is that the most powerful men's love for women is self-loving in nature and ensures the women's premature deaths (Nakanishi 4). The *Genji* thus quietly rejects the contemporary women's view of their glory envisioned in the imperious man's grief over the pathetic heroine Yang Guifei.

Yet the man's fidelity to the memory of his deceased lover had a ceaseless appeal to Heian noblemen. Shikibu's contemporary work, the *Tale of Flowering Fortunes* 栄花物語, confirms the conventional view of woman's happiness in the passage in which, when Michinaga's daughter died, her husband and the son of the emperor walked by her coffin during the funeral procession. This was regarded as an unusual expression of the spouse's attachment to the deceased wife, especially considering his high status as an imperial family member. The writer emphatically repeats Michinaga and others' comments, "This is the ultimate happiness of a woman" (Vol. 2. 847).

The *Flowering Fortunes* suggests a woman's authorship, at least for the following reasons. First of all, unlike regular chronicles written by men, the *Flowering Fortunes* does not detail men's political and military accomplishments but the events of Michinaga's family and his imperial relatives and the dynamics of their relations. Secondly, it describes the psychology of imperial consorts and Michinaga's women relatives, wives and daughters from a kind and conventional woman's perspective.

The *Tale of Flowering Fortunes* is not a tale but a chronicle encompassing the two hundred years of the Fujiwara family and their imperial relatives, but has been assessed with literary criteria and unfairly compared with the *Genji*. For

example, the *Genji* critic Terada Tōru 寺田透 flatly dismisses it for lacking literary individuality (3). The author of the *Flowering Fortunes* nevertheless suggests her aspiration to write a history, stating in the beginning: “Since the reign of the first emperor there have been sixty sovereigns. Yet this [work] will not detail those periods but start with the recent past”⁷⁹ (Vol. 1. 17). Like *Ōkagami*, the *Flowering Fortunes* displays the Fujiwara family’s agenda to record their lineage and political rulership and particularly Michinaga who amplified their wealth and power. The contents of *Ōkagami* and the *Flowering Fortunes* imply that they were commissioned by Michinaga or his family. Despite their bias toward the contemporary ruling class, both are indispensable historical sources to contextualize the study of Heian literature including the *Genji*.

The *Flowering Fortunes* is the earliest known work imitating the *Genji*, proving the wide popularity of the latter in its contemporary society. First of all, the *Flowering Fortunes* idealizes Michinaga as the perfect family man and ruler just like Genji. Secondly, oddly, the *Flowering Fortunes* does copy the part of Shikibu’s *Diary* vividly describing Michnaga’s elation over the birth of his first grandson, who signified his “flowering fortune.” Moreover following the *Genji*’s imitation of Sima Qian’s History *Shiji* 史記, the *Flowering Fortunes* is divided into chronological chapters. Arguably, in the pursuit of historical accuracy and a clear structure, the *Flowering Fortunes* echoes the *Shiji*. As Sima Qian collected historical sources on research trips, the author of the *Flowering Fortunes* is

⁷⁹The *True History of Three Reigns of Japanese [Emperors]* 日本三大実録 (879), compiled by Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真, had been the most recent work before the *Flowering Fortunes* was written. This might have led the author of the *Flowering Fortunes* to start right after the previous work (The editor’s comment in The *Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 1. 3).

believed to have used generations of women courtiers' diaries. Even so, unlike the *Genji*, which not only emulates *Shiji* but exhibits its own literary originality, the *Flowering Fortunes* remains a regular chronicle.

The *Flowering Fortunes* sides with Michinaga and downplays the inbreeding hostility between him and his nephews fought over the regency of Emperor Ichijō, presenting the “united front” for the decorum of the high-born family. *Ōkagami* is known for being more critical than the *Flowering Fortunes*. This further reinforces the historical hypothesis of the author's gender of *Flowering Fortunes* because as a woman, she would be aware that she was expected to defer to men, particularly male rulers. Yet even so, the *Genji* surpasses both the *Flowering Fortunes* and *Ōkagami* in the objective view and criticism of the contemporary noble society.

The difficulty of candidly describing their gender-class superiors is certainly detectable in Heian women's literature. Instead, Sei Shōnagon and Shikibu demonstrate their generous admiration for their social superiors, which the high-born people would possibly take it for granted. Sei Shōnagon's adoration for her mistress Teishi in her *Pillow Book*, who represents beauty, grace and dignity based on a sense of confidence and freedom, all of them representing the ideal high-born woman, seems sincere (Matuo 505). Sei Shōnagon's total omission of the fall of Teishi's brothers from grace after the death of their father and the agony of her mistress over her brothers' exile may surprise the reader. She perhaps wanted to record only the glory of Teishi and her family. Similarly, in the *Genji*, Shikibu also sometimes does “poetic justice,” reversing her realism that

most middle-rank women were probably more educated than the majority of noblewomen married much younger than them for their fathers' political ambitions. The widow of the crown princess Rokujō is depicted with the most and intellect which even threatens Genji's masculine pride. His stepmother and illicit lover, Empress Fujitubo, delightfully surprises him in her poem revealing her knowledge of Chinese literature. None of her middle-rank heroines surpasses the high-born. Interestingly, Genji educates his favorite mate Murasaki with the composition of *waka*, music and calligraphy but skips Chinese literature, the ultimate scholarship usually preserved for noblemen. Shikibu does not want the Ideal Feminine Murasaki to threaten Genji by surpassing him in intellect. None of her heroines thus has the author's high education, which occasionally is exposed through Genji and other high-born men, correlating with the gender-class hierarchy of her time.

The author of the *Flowering Fortunes* is unknown, but Shikibu's colleague Akazome Emon 赤染衛門 (956-1041) is believed to have written its largest part.⁸⁰ In her *Diary* Shikibu comments on Akazome Emon, "She is not particularly an outstanding poetess. But she looks dignified and modest unlike those who show off their talent easily in public. They arouse my pity" (Fujioka 238). Although this comment is supposed to be friendly, Shikibu sounds like a difficult person to please. She seems to be firmly convinced of her own literary superiority to others, including Akazome Emon, but cannot afford to publicize it.

⁸⁰ The fact that Akazome Emon is the wife of the imperial scribe Ōe Masahira 大江匡衡 makes this hypothesis appear plausible. She is currently believed to have completed at least thirty chapters out of forty in the whole work.

Metaka detects a thwarted achiever in the melancholic tone of her *Diary*, who is not content at being merely Empress Shōshi's gentlewoman; but she cannot hope for more than this (316). If so, she might harbor an unsolvable discrepancy between her high spirit and mind and her actual humble gender-class status. As a middle-rank woman, Shikibu remained an untitled woman courtier as the titles were preserved only for high-born women.

Shikibu's life span is approximated, and her name is called, according to the custom of addressing women courtiers with their paternal names and titles.⁸¹ The author of the *Genji* is a member of the Fujiwara clan whose father worked as the bureaucrat in the department of personnel and rites called *shikibu-shō* 式部省. She was at first called Fuji (her shortened family name Fujiwara) Shikibu. With the rise of the *Genji* boom, her popular and beautiful heroine's name Murasaki was attached to her and her pen name became Murasaki Shikibu in her lifetime (*The Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 1. 408). Shikibu shares the fate of other Heian literary women whose actual names are not recorded. As Imai says in "The Essential Quality of [Heian] Women's Diary Literature," Heian literary women are currently referred to as the daughter, wife or mother of some man, suggesting that their social status was dependent upon their men(10).⁸²

Shikibu nevertheless preserved her conviction of the *Genji*'s literary worth in her works. In her *Diary*, she records an episode in which Emperor Ichijō

⁸¹ The family and given names of the imperial consorts and princesses are recorded in the imperial annals.

⁸² Uehara Sakukazu 上原作和 and other *Genji* scholars have proposed that Shikibu's actual name is Fujiwara Takako 藤原香子, but he acknowledges that this postulation has not been accepted widely (298). This study thus takes the position that Shikibu's given name has not been discovered yet.

listened to the *Genji* and lauded her: “she read such a difficult work as the *Chronicles of Japan*. Her scholarship is outstanding” (Fujioka 244). Shikibu must have treasured the sovereign’s praise, particularly recognizing that he had been known for scholarship and literature. She nevertheless remained competitive toward the imperial chronicles, which had been revered as the records of their actual past and much more valued than the story in her time. As the author’s agent, Genji argues for her work: “The *Chronicles of Japan* shows only a glimpse [of the past]. But the story elaborates [life]” (Ch. “The Firefly 螢.” The *Genji* Vol. 3. 204). Considering that the *Genji* gives an illusion of history, Shikibu was convinced of her work’s superiority to the *Chronicles* more than anyone else.

Noble Polygyny

Although Shikibu’s attitude toward polygyny has been traditionally read as tolerant, Murakami Riu 村上リウ proposes her insightful reading of the author’s perspective on Genji’s multiple sexual relations, as follows:

Genji is the ideal polygynist with good looks, sensitivity and noble breeding, but Shikibu still thinks monogamy the ideal relationship. To suggest her preference for monogamy, she uses her mouthpiece Genji’s comment on her son Yūgiri’s marriage, “I am proud of my son for keeping one wife and not attracting gossips. I cultivated my reputation as a heartless and oversexed man in youth. I am glad my son is not like me.” (60).

On the one hand, Genji always has the voice of authority in Shikibu’s work. She is aware that a woman’s criticism has no weight in her society and has to rely on

an imperial prince's gender-class prestige to be heard. It is also an adept literary strategy to have the ultimate polygynist make his own self-criticism of the promiscuous past in order to add a realistic impact to his words. Genji also hints that unchecked male sexuality was not unconditionally celebrated even in Heian polygynous culture.

On the other hand, Shikibu also has him proclaim the Heian idea of imperial polygyny: "the ultimate imperial service is [the dedication of great beauties] to compete for the sovereign's favor" (Ch. "The Plum Blossom Branch 梅枝." The *Genji* Vol. 3.). Field articulates this idea best: "the emperor's sacred vitality is manifested in his multiple sexual relation, with the consequence that there is frequently, if not predictably, more than one son" (23). The sovereign epitomized the essence of noble polygyny for the prosperity of the nation, actually manifesting the preservation of the ruling class for centuries. Until the grandfather of the current one (1933-), the Japanese emperor continued to have multiple consorts. Genji's speech exposes the dichotomy of Shikibu's desire as a Heian noblewoman, who prefers monogamy for herself, but her sense of class obliges her to acknowledge the exceptionalism of her sovereign representing their privileges. The idea that personal is political never belonged to the Heian noblewoman.

It is Takamura's theory that ancient Japanese couples did not live together but visited each other and separated as they pleased (37). She points out a remnant of egalitarian matrimony in the *Genji* in the marriage of our hero's first wife, Aoi, a daughter of the Minister of the Left. Aoi lives with her parents, receives Genji's

regular visits and bears their son in her home, and after her death, her parents raise their son. Takamura perceives an example of the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy in Heian society in the case of Genji's favorite wife Murasaki's life in his household (122). Yet Takamura's egalitarian matrimony does not exist in the Japanese creation myth in which gods and heroes have the privilege of having multiple women. Japanese noble polygyny grew independently of Confucianism and Buddhism. The *Ten Thousand Leaves* also presents a polygynous world, women poets having to wait infinitely for their turns to receive their husbands with an oversupply of mates. The women nevertheless could leave their unreliable mates and find the new ones as the freedom of divorce lasted even in Heian society. In this sense, Takamura correctly argues that the Heian period (794-1185) was not as severely patriarchal as the rest of the later periods.

The Chinese style of rear palace 後宮, in which the ruler gathered his multiple consorts, epitomized East Asian noble polygyny. The early Heian Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 (737-781) led an aggressive campaign for adopting Chinese political paradigms and institutionalized the rear palace with more than thirty consorts (Fukuto 19). This style of imperial polygyny aimed at reinforcing the paternal line and encouraged the ambition of noblemen to send their daughters to the rear palace as the emperor's consorts, hoping they would bear his heir and become his regent to dominate the imperial politics.

Even though the Japanese rear palace was an adoption of the Chinese, it still retained the consort's strong connection with her family. Each Heian imperial consort's apartment in the rear palace was in a way an extension of her natal

house, as her family members were allowed to visit her freely. She frequently went home and her imperial children were reared there so that the grandfather of the minor emperor could control him for his political advantage as his regent. By contrast, the Chinese rear palace prohibited men's visits and had eunuchs work there. The Chinese emperor had much more personal power than his Japanese counterpart.

The typical Heian arrangement of polygyny was that the husband visited each of his wives and later chose one of them to live together. In this sense, Genji acts like a Chinese emperor, building a gigantic mansion called Rokujō-in 六条院 and collecting all his co-wives there, perhaps revealing Shikibu's reading of ancient Chinese history and literature (Kurozaka 黒坂 362). The gigantic Rokujō-in packed with women did not exist in Heian noble society but seems to be a contemporary nobleman's fantasy generated out of Chinese literature. The closest Japanese image of Genji's glorious life in Rokujō-in would be that of Michinaga's marital arrangement.

The actual Heian "perfect man," Michinaga, did not build a Rokujō-in to collect his multiple wives. He used polygynous matrimony more consciously for his career promotion than Genji. He married two high-born women, Rinshi 倫子 and Meishi 明子. Rinshi's family's power and wealth attracted Michinaga, and Meishi was adopted by Michinaga's sister Empress Senshi, giving him the idea to reinforce the fraternal relations with his sister for his political goals by marrying her. Even the son of the regent, Michinaga had to choose his mates carefully to win over the rigorous competition for hegemonic political power, unlike the

fictional hero Genji who already has every advantage of the imperial prince, wealth and power.

Michinaga's wives were customarily ranked by their wealth as the first and second, but not strictly in the context of Confucian hierarchy of giving the exact titles. As Rinshi's family's status and wealth surpassed those of Meishi, he chose the mansion Rinshi inherited from her parents for his permanent residence and visited Meishi. Besides his two principal wives, Michinaga had four secondary wives, each of whom he presumably visited. Rinshi's children had more privileges in marital alliance and career promotion than those of the other wives, proving that Michinaga's treatment of his children correlated to their mother's fortune which assisted his rise in the imperial politics.

Still, Rinshi's wealth and fertility did not always secure her marital happiness. Young Rinshi's response on hearing of Michinaga's second marriage to Meishi recorded in the *Flowering Fortunes* is ambiguous: "She [at first] felt miserable, but afterward the gentle and calm young lady acted as if nothing matters" (Vol. 1. 158). The author at first frankly acknowledges Rinshi's natural response as a betrayed wife but quickly praises her ability to minimize it. Rinshi's appropriate response might have been contrived by the author who understands the futility of an incumbent wife to contest the male prerogative of acquiring as many wives as possible without consulting her.

Tolerance was the polygynist's wife's supreme virtue. By celebrating Rinshi as a worthy mate of the perfect man Michinaga, the *Flowering Fortunes* represents the conventional morality of Heian polygynous society to turn a blind

eye and remain mute about the psychological strain of multiple wives.

Michinaga's later acquisition of more wives and mistresses might have eventually compelled Rinshi to choose resignation. Even so, Michinaga's unprecedented glory convinced both women and men in Heian noble society that polygyny was a necessary means to rise above their status. For them, Rinshi was regarded as the most fortunate wife for having the most powerful man in the land for her husband, the daughters' installation as empresses and her sons' quick promotion to high positions in the court.

One might find it refreshing to hear the candid protest of a Heian polygynist's wife in *Kagerō Diary* 蜻蛉日記, however gloomy and depressing it might sound. Comparing the brief bliss of her marriage to a short-lived dragonfly called Kagerō, she proposes, "Let's call this piece Kagerō Diary," and so is her memoir named (Matumura 202). The cramped and dark world of *Kagerō Diary* fascinated Shikibu, who was forty years younger than the author. It has been pointed out that the *Genji* echoes much of her predecessor's work. The author of *Kagerō Diary* evokes Genji's Rokujō, the best *waka* poet in the story and his most outspoken mate. *Ōkagami* records an event of one hundred years before in which the author circulated *Kagerō Diary* in the capital (250). If so, Shikibu must have read *Kagerō Diary*.

The author of *Kagerō Diary* is still popular one thousand years later for the following melancholic *waka*:

Do you know while lying alone at the dawn, I cannot help
constantly lamenting and feeling how long the night is.

嘆きつつひとり寝る夜の明くる間はいかに久しきものとかは

知る (Matumura 136)

The author once sent her husband this *waka* with a withered chrysanthemum daisy to signify her languished state. After reading this *waka*, he immediately came, expecting to see his wife pining for his affection but found her starting to rant at his neglect. They exploded and he left in rage. The author nevertheless recorded this *waka* in her *Diary* and it was later chosen for the *Collection of 100 Heian Waka* 百人一首.

Her *waka* reminds us of the one in the *Collection of Murasaki Shikibu's Poetry* 紫式部集:

Pity me already exhausted your interest like other women although you are now in love with someone else.

おほかたの秋のあはれを思ひやれ月にこころはあくがれぬと

も (Yamamoto 227)

The word *autumn*, *aki* 秋, puns upon *aki* meaning *to exhaust*, and the moon, *tsuki* 月, connotes *the changeable heart*. This poem reinforces the assumption that Shikibu was already estranged from her husband before his death. Considering the domestic status of Fujiwara no Nobutaka 藤原宣孝, who already had three wives and numerous children, Shikibu predictably felt the occasional neglect and loneliness of a polygynist's wife. On the other hand, as Nobutake is believed to have been a competent provincial governor, Shikibu might have been thought to have settled with a sufficiently good match in the eyes of her society. If so,

Kagerō Diary confirmed to Shikibu that the fate of a neglected and abandoned wife was not abnormal in polygynous marriage.

The *Genji* owes much to the candid disclosure of a woman's unsolvable frustration and plight in the polygynous relations described in *Kagerō Diary*. Although Shikibu is much more subtle than the author of *Kagerō Diary*, she fully recognizes the discrepancy between the public perception of the woman's glamorous marriage to the powerful and wealthy man and the revelation of her perpetual thwarted hope, love and desires, all of which are present in the *Genji*. The anti-polygyny sentiment in *Kagerō Diary*, as often remarked, is manifested in Shikibu's most strong-willed heroine Rokujō. Finding the author of *Kagerō Diary* a "waiting woman," Shikibu based Rokujō upon her.

Kagerō Diary narrates twenty years of the tumultuous marital relations between Michinaga's father, Fujiwara no Kaneie 藤原兼家 (927-990) and the author. (Michinaga's mother is Kaneie's first wife and the author of *Kagerō Diary* is the second wife of his father.) Kaneie belonged to the most prestigious family having produced generations of regents. In that sense, the author had an extraordinary fortune to marry a high-born man for a middle-rank woman at eighteen. Renowned in the capital for her beauty and *waka* skills, she was possibly one of many ambitious daughters hopefully determined to marry up in the stringently hierarchal structure of her noble society. Like Shikibu, we know no personal name of the author. Although she is usually called Michituna's Mother for her son's sake, we will temporarily call this disillusioned Cinderella Kagerō for convenience.

In the beginning, Kagerō presents a surprisingly clear mission statement for a Heian noblewoman brought up to be modest and diffident:

Even though highly improbable, old stories are widely read. I think that if I record an actual woman's life, people might be more intrigued to read it. If you wonder what the woman's marriage to a high-born man looks like, my story might give you a glimpse of it.

(Matumura 125)

This passage presents an amazingly independent and courageous woman with a critical mind seemingly unusual for a Heian housewife. She might have been aware that her work would cause some damage to Kaneie and her social reputations by exposing years of their marital quarrels. Yet unlike Shikibu, Kagerō was a high-born woman by marriage; she seems to have been financially secure and decided to take the risk of becoming “the whistle blower” for her contemporary polygynous woes. The last phrase, “If you wonder what a woman's marriage to a high-born man looks like,” suggests her intention to debunk her reputation as the most fortunate woman. She wants to prove that she has shared the trouble of a polygynous marriage common among women.

Kagerō Diary shows us how differently Heian nobility treated *waka* from current Japanese. Heian literature reveals that the nobility also frequently used *waka* not only for personal but also pragmatic purposes of courtship, social correspondence and career-promotion in their society. In Heian polygynous society, courtship was a woman's only time to assert her sexual power and enjoy brief flattery. Her reputed beauty and *waka* drew the attention of the young high-

born man who later became the regent of the emperor. She nevertheless complained, “he had not chosen the appropriate sheet of paper to write such an important letter [of courtship] and his spelling was careless unlike that of a suitor” (Matumura 126). Kaneie seems to have been overconfident of his superior social position in treating his courtship toward a daughter of a middle-rank family. Kagerō felt slighted by him, her romantic notion of courtship disillusioned. Following the customary practice of contemporary courtship, Kagerō at first ignored the suitors’ letters and had her maid write responses to Kaneie to test his eagerness. Meanwhile, inside the household, she could collect information on him through her servants reporting her on street rumors and word of mouth.

Most noblewomen wanted to be the first wife, the most privileged position in the marital family and social status. The man already having a first wife and a son thus does not seem to have impressed Kagerō much. Yet Kaneie’s brilliant family must have deeply impressed her parents and already led them to decide their marriage before their formal courtship of exchanging *waka*. Immediately after her marriage, her father actually was assigned to be the governor of Mutu 陸奥, a most lucrative region for gold mining, some of which he was permitted to obtain for himself.

Kagerō suffered a sudden and permanent reversal of their positions immediately after their marriage. When she and Kaneie met for the first time on the first wedding night and sealed their marriage by the bridegroom’s three-night visits in a row, she desperately tried every strategy to extend his consecutive visits. Yet he started visiting her at his convenience. As a typical polygynist, Kaneie

expected his multiple wives' tolerance and eventually ended up having eight wives. In addition to several wives, the high-born man would have unofficial mistresses and extended his sexual power to the female servants of the wives and mistresses. We think that because she was raised in a polygynous family, Kagerō was used to the idea of sharing a husband. She nevertheless continued to reject her new contenders and was embittered by his perpetual promiscuity throughout her marital life.

Kagerō remained competitive toward Kaneie's first wife who had more children than any of the other co-wives. Yet the first wife was the first victim of the polygynous marriage. Perhaps aware of this and feeling ambivalent guilt, Kagerō never complained of her husband's first wife and built cordial relations with her children. Yet Kagerō could not control her hostility toward each new contender she discovered with the help of her servants spying for her. “*Nikushi* 憎< じ,” meaning *hateful*, repeated the author. Particularly, Kagerō's intense hatred against the first contender was blended with prejudice against the woman below her status, the first fear of losing Kaneie's interest and the subsequent abandonment, all of which paralyzed her good nature. She openly rejoiced at the news of the death of her rival's infant and Kaneie's cooled passion. One might feel perplexed at her candid exposure of raw feelings. Still, her honesty might be admirable, leading us to recognize how polygyny can demoralize a woman.

In the world of literature, Kagerō might share with the heroine of the Greek tragedy, Euripides's *Medea*, the pride, grudge and jealousy of a woman betrayed and deserted by her spouse, “when once she is wronged in the matter of

love, no other souls can hold so many thoughts of blood” (263-264). Kagerō might have harbored the murderous fantasy of a betrayed woman like Medea who devastates her husband by killing their own children, his bride and her father. Instead, Kagerō describes her agony in her *waka* vividly. In this way, both *Kagerō Diary* and *Medea* challenge the unexamined masculine belief in sexual prerogative and feminine acquiescence.

Kagerō’s desire for an exclusive intimacy with her husband was inconceivable for a typical polygynist like Kaneie and even baffled him. He obviously had no moral qualms about fully exercising his sexual privileges with abundant wealth and power, as the Heian nobleman needed no permission to acquire numerous wives. From Kaneie’s perspective, his second wife unreasonably demanded his excessive attention, ceaselessly blamed his absence, and eventually exhausted his interest. His visits dwindled year by year and ceased twenty years later.

Although Takamura insists that the polygynist’s wife could be independent in a separate household, it was a double-edged sword for the noblewoman. For the husband, the separate household of each wife was a convenient arrangement to avoid the rivalry and strife among all of the wives. He also could desert his wife by refusing to visit her, as Kaneie eventually did so. The wife could reject him, as one night, Kagerō shut the gate to the household to him to show her grudge but only drove him away to the other woman.

Once in the later stage of their marriage, weary of waiting, Kagerō suddenly fled to a Buddhist temple in the mountain outside the capital with the

excuse of spiritual purification. Shocked and feared that she would become a nun and defame him as a deserted husband, reversing the gender norm, Kaneie raced to the temple to bring her back to the capital. Kagerō's eventual return scandalized the public in the capital, who saw a selfish wife deserting her glamorous marriage. Yet she expressed no glimpse of regret in her *Diary*, demonstrating an amazing mental strength to ignore the gossips and social censure of feminine modesty and diffidence.

Even had she accepted Kaneie's multiple marriages, she could have only prolonged the marital demise as he had no intention to stop acquiring young mates and deserted not only her but also other wives more quickly than her. This seems to have been a familiar scenario of Heian polygynous marriage, particularly those of wealthy and powerful high-born men. Kagerō kept Kaneie relatively long probably in part because her *waka* was a great help to use for his career. His son Michinaga could not afford to desert his first wife Rinshi, whose wealth financed the marriages of their daughters to male imperial family members. Michinaga and Rinshi were united in promoting and perpetuating their family privileges and wealth. Their joint project thus bound this couple permanently. Unlike Rinshi, Kagerō offered Kaneie neither numerous children nor wealth.

Sei Shōnagon, who was a much younger distant relative of Kagerō (as Heian nobility had a narrow endogamous society), may have read her *Diary* circulating in her time. In the *Pillow Book*, she implies her ambivalent attitude toward a housewife like Kagerō:

Some women have no prospects for the future but just keep themselves busy with domestic chores and do not know what they are missing. I have neither sympathy nor respect for them. I think it best for the daughter of a nobleman to associate with a variety of people while working as a courtier. (Matuo 56)

Sei Shōnagon is believed to have once had an unsatisfactory marriage but later bloomed as a courtier and evidently took pride in her present status. Succeeding in her career change from a wife to a gentlewoman of the empress, she found it utterly absurd to remain in an unhappy marriage for the rest of her life. *Kagerō Diary* probably repelled the lighthearted Sei Shōnagon, who records only the bright side of life in the court.

Did Shikibu read Kagerō's quick realization in the early stage of her marriage, "He does not think about our relationship like me. [I can do nothing about this]"? (Matumura 139). This statement summarizes the wife's unstable condition caused by the disproportionate commitments of the polygynous couple. We do not know how the majority of Heian nobility responded to *Kagerō Diary*. There is no direct reference to *Kagerō Diary* in the *Pillow Book*, the *Genji* or the *Flowering Fortunes*. One hundred years later, only *Ōkagami* informed the circulation of *Kagerō Diary* as a matter of fact, as the distant past event would have no longer provoked the prominent Fujiwara family. The absence of the reference to *Kagerō Diary* in contemporary women's literature implies the understandable fact that all of their writers worked for Kaneie's sons' families and avoided reminding their patrons of this inconvenient piece of out of respect. Still,

Kagerō Diary confirmed to the majority of noblewomen what they had already known: that very few women could manage to turn a blind eye to the fact that their men never understood that sharing a husband exasperated and humiliated them. *Kagerō Diary* compelled them to recognize a woman's honest admittance that she could not reconcile herself to the institution of polygyny and the customary tolerance to male promiscuity prevalent in her society.

Toward the end of the Fujiwara regency rose an exceptionally monogamous sovereign, Emperor Go-ichijō 後一条天皇 (1008-1036), one of Empress Shōshi's sons, who married his aunt Ishi 威子 (1000-1036). The imperial couple managed to remain monogamous during his reign. The *Flowering Fortunes* records that although Ishi's mother Rinshi admonished her daughter, who bore only two princesses, to tolerate her husband's additional consorts, Ishi did not take polygyny as her fate (Vol. 3. 192). She chose her personal contentment and dissuaded her brothers to marry their daughters to her husband. The majority of high-born women were not as successful as Ishi and possibly embittered by their grudge and humiliation. In Chapter 3, we will discuss one of those women, Shikibu's heroine Rokujō, and how the author's anti-polygyny arguments are embedded in her character.

Chapter 3

Contesting Polygyny: The Imperial Consort Rokujō 六条の御息所

Shikibu's way of contesting polygyny is complex. Heian polygyny was maintained at the expense of women's monogamy, which she presumed as morally appropriate for her own sex, but she found noblemen's mercurial sexuality devastating to them. She created Rokujō as the epitome of Heian feminine decorum to lead her to a sensual doom with a handsome polygynist and her nephew-in-law Genji:

The Lady residing at the Rokujō 六条 (the sixth avenue) at first demurred and hesitated. It is baneful to witness Prince Genji's withdrawal of attention soon after he has compelled her to turn toward him. (Ch. "Yūgao 夕顔." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 221)

Rokujō and Genji constitute an archetype of seduction and betrayal. The narrator does not spare her full empathy for Rokujō, which simultaneously becomes a careful accusation against her seducer. Rokujō is amazed by his swift transformation from passionate suitor to self-satisfied sexual conqueror.

Genji is also stunned. As far as his smug perspective is concerned, he is only caught by his usual spree of conquering the novel object, in this case the chaste widow of the former crown prince. To his regret, he discovers in horror that the elegant Rokujō has degenerated into the spirit *mononoke* which becomes his ceaseless menace for the rest of his life. In their final encounter Rokujō's *mononoke* laughs at Genji triumphantly, "When you thought you managed to retrieve the other one [Murasaki], I was outraged. I kept haunting her [the Third

Princess] for several days [and helped her to divorce you]. Now I will return” (Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” II. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 300). The author of *Kagerō Diary* also terrified her husband Fujiwara Kaneie, the most powerful man in the land, with her ceaseless ranting against his habitual negligence, but did not alter his belief in the masculine inalienable right to have any woman. She and Shikibu came to know that it would be futile to change those men and that women could only contest the male sexual prerogative in literature.

This chapter will explore Shikibu’s verdict illustrated in the character of Rokujō. The author suggests that the woman’s jealousy and *mononoke* are the manifestation of her rebellious spirit against the disproportional sexual dynamic of Heian polygyny. Doris Bagen also makes this point in her *Woman’s Weapon*:

Where Murasaki Shikibu used the phenomenon of spirit possession to probe deeply into gender relations in her polygynous society, the chroniclers blamed rampant *mononoke* for political strife and for inexplicable or untreatable diseases, both physical and mental.

(xviii)

As Bagen says, Shikibu understood that the cause of women’s *mononoke* was due to their grievances over male sexual hegemony, including polygyny and gender discrimination against women. This study nevertheless differs from Bagen, who argues that Genji’s women possessed by Rokujō’s *mononoke* actually express their grievances against our promiscuous hero. Yet Shikibu never clarifies its identity throughout the text. We accept that Shikibu suspends the *mononoke* in the liminal realm between normality and supernaturalism. Our focus

is the author's hesitance and reluctance to give us the exact identification of the *mononoke*, which are relative to the suppression of the Heian literary woman by the three obediences.

In the section of *mononoke*, how the reader's image of Rokujō has slightly altered from that in the *Genji* will be explored. Following the course of Genji and Rokujō's relationship, we will also discuss the author's pessimistic belief that a woman can never find a reciprocal monogamy in patriarchal Heian society.

First, let us start with woman's jealousy, which has been often applied only to women in classic literature. It is necessary to understand that Shikibu and many of her contemporary women tried to validate the polygynist's mate's jealousy. All these women, including Shikibu, had experienced Heian polygyny. Her brief marriage seems to have turned sour as nuanced in her *waka*. She also knew that the social discourse reduced and dismissed women's complaints of sharing a mate.

While upholding the three obediences, Buddhist priests and Confucian moralists constantly preached against women's jealousy as festering and perilous in society. The Confucian marital law imported from the Tang dynasty even threatened the wife by incriminating her jealousy as one of the supreme causes for divorce. The *Exemplary Women* 列女伝 was brought to Japan but the author, Liu Hsiang's proposal for co-wives to build their sisterhood among themselves had little effect on Heian noblewomen. These men chose not to bother to use the law but at times abandoned their wives anyway.

In the *Flowering Fortunes* and *Ōkagami* 大鏡, noblewomen do not hide hostility toward their sexual rivals and grudge at their spouses. The orthodox polygynist Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 (926-967), who had eleven consorts and twenty children, is renowned for his failure in placating the rigorous rivalries of his consorts. He particularly feared the relentless jealousy of his supreme mate Empress Anshi 安子. It was a familiar strategy of a jealous wife to lock her husband out, as the author of *Kagerō Diary* also did. Like the author of *Kagerō Diary*, Anshi learned bitterly that locking her spouse out only gave him the best excuse to visit another woman (qtd. in Tanabe 115). Yet Empress Anshi was a strong-willed woman. She once succeeded in hampering her imperial spouse's attempt to install her own sister as the co-consort. Only after her death could he bring her sister to the rear palace (*The Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 1. 51).

Another of Emperor Murakami's consorts, Kishi 徽子 (929-985), also did not hide her jealous heart in the exchange of their *waka*. He politely reprimanded her jealousy in *waka*, "I heard the locusts and consorts never feel jealousy. Why do you hate your co-consorts?" He alluded to the poem, "the Flying Locust (pronounced as *shūshi* in Japanese) 蝻斯"⁸³ in the *Book of Poetry* 詩經, which celebrates the locust's fast multiplication. Finding the locust's multiplication suitable for their agenda of perpetuating posterity, the Confucian constructed the doctrine that the co-wives should focus their interest on bearing children like a

⁸³ The poem, named after a kind of locust, the "*Shūshi* (in Japanese) 蝻斯" is present in the *Poetry*. According to Nagase, what kind of locust is referred to in this poem is unclear in the classic Chinese commentaries. She says that the Chinese commentary 毛伝 merely identifies it as a kind of insect; the other Chinese 正義, as a kind of a flying locust in the sky 虫皇, which usually does not exist in the Japanese islands. In Japan, the closest noxious insect, named *inago*, written in Chinese 蝗 or 稻子, is found in the rice fields.

shūshi instead of provoking mutual jealousy. The Chinese consorts in the rear palace seem to have been lectured to overcome jealousy and live in sisterhood.⁸⁴ They could even imagine the powerful image of swarms of locusts hovering over fields and darkening the sky, unlike Heian noblewomen who never saw locusts in their islands. Evidently not impressed by the Chinese poem, Consort Kishi retorted in *waka*, “I am not a Chinese empress; how can I suppress my natural feelings just as one cannot stop the blowing wind?” (qtd. in Nagase 247-249). Neither Anshi nor Kishi pretended to be a paragon of Confucian femininity. The poetry exchange of Emperor Murakami and Consort Kishi shows her knowledge of the *Book of Poetry*, adding evidence to the argument for a few Heian noblewomen educated in Chinese. Consort Kishi is believed to have been one of the historical models for the character of Rokujō. The argument of this historical consort demonstrates her confidence as a granddaughter of the emperor and a woman intellectual on whom Shikibu drew Rokujō. Consort Kishi will be discussed later in this chapter.

The *waka* exchange between Consort Kishi and Emperor Murakami presents a microcosm of the Heian couple’s psychological impasse on the issue of polygyny. Emperor Murakami innocently believed that all women sent to him were trained to suppress their jealousy with Confucian morals just like the *Exemplary Women*. Contrary to his belief, Anshi and Kishi mocked his efforts.

⁸⁴ According to Jenn-Shann Lin, the Chinese emperor was troubled only by his major consort and empress’ jealousy. The hierarchal rank of Chinese imperial mates was more clearly regulated than that of the Japanese, and the emperor’s minor consorts had ruler-subject relations with him and were placed much lower than the empress. Yet, the historical reality reveals some anomalous cases: the only woman ruler known in China, Empress Wu, had started as a minor consort before she became the major consort and wielded political power.

Had he known his Chinese counterpart, who had a much larger rear palace and many more consorts than he did but only needed to subdue the empress, he would have been envious of him (information qtd. from Jenn-Shann Lin). In China when the Han Empire had adopted the Confucian hierarchal structure, only one empress was regarded as the official consort of the emperor, and her status was much higher than the rest of his minor consorts. The Chinese emperor officially “wedded” the empress but did not do the same to his other consorts. By contrast in Heian Japan, the empress was chosen among the emperor’s incumbent consorts, and the mother of the sovereign as the Mother of the Nation had more power than the empress. This proves that Heian nobility had not built as Confucian a society as their Chinese counterpart yet. Still, the Confucian classics were a very influential moral reference for Heian nobility. Numerous Heian noblemen were thus never convinced that woman’s jealousy was a legitimate feeling. As previously mentioned, Empress Anshi’s brother Fujiwara Kaneie also amply suffered the violent jealousy of his second wife, the author of *Kagerō Diary*.

Heian women’s literature attests that many of them did not hold back their jealousy even though the ideology of the three obediences denies that women are accountable for their will or emotions. Their jealousy was not always due to the grand desire to dominate their mates but also to the pragmatic fear of the men’s desertion resulting in the loss of their economic means and social respectability. Shikibu’s narrator insists that the “Shining Prince” never deserts his women, but he actually does, if not materially then psychologically, or forgets them. Heian

noble matrimony functioned only on men's terms. It is Shikibu's strategy to validate that women's grudges and jealousy are bred in her polygynous society.

Whether the *mononoke* is Rokujō or Genji's illusion remains obscure throughout the story. Shikibu's refusal to clarify the identity of the *mononoke* is no doubt due to her apprehension of challenging the conventional belief in its presence in her society and upsetting her audience by having her heroine undermining the male authority represented by Genji. The author needed to protect herself and her heroine. Yet as Setouchi continues to proclaim, Rokujō's *mononoke* is a major excitement of the *Genji*. Rokujō's enigmatic spirit *mononoke* compels Genji to recognize that she neither forgets nor forgives the contemptuous lover. Women's jealousy and *mononoke* were two interwoven but dismissed matters in Heian noble society, which Shikibu pursues in the *Genji* relentlessly but subtly.

The Scourge of the Mononoke 物の怪

In this section, we will discuss the ambivalent nature of Rokujō's "supposed" *mononoke*, which has generated a variety of theories from readers and scholars for centuries. The *mononoke* has too ambivalent a nature in the imperial annals and literature to define it as a mere superstition with our current criteria. First, we will explore the historical appearance, perception and reception of *mononoke* for a better understanding of Shikibu's construction of what appears to be Rokujō's *mononoke*.

In the post-Han literary piece, the *Selected Works* 文選, there is a poem depicting a ghost, literally meaning "the mysterious thing 物恠", hovering over

the imperial palace 紫宸殿 (qtd. in Ueno 上野 1).⁸⁵ The ancient Japanese also had the idea of the invisible spirit known as *mononoke* and adopted the Chinese characters 物怪⁸⁶ to denote the same meaning. In traditional Japanese literature, the *mononoke* collectively consists of the demon, monster, incubus and natural disasters, as things unfathomable arousing anxiety, dread, trouble and mystification. Numerous victims of political strife also joined the fearful realm of the *mononoke* after death. The indestructible and ubiquitous spirits embodied a deep fear in noble society.

The *mononoke* might have affected the imperial politics and social norms more often and profoundly than the emperors and nobility would like to admit. The *mononoke* altered the politics of Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 (781-806) in the capital Nagaokakyo 長岡京. When he was ceaselessly troubled by famines, epidemics and the deaths of his consort and son, the shaman and astrologer (of a new amalgamated religion of Shintō and Buddhism, Yin-Yang cosmology called *Yinyodo* 陰陽道), declared that he had been cursed by the *mononoke* of his deceased brother Prince Sawara 早良親王, whom he had stripped of the title of

⁸⁵*Bunsen* 文選 was composed by Prince Xiao Tong 昭明太子 of the nation of Liang 梁 (502-557). As Sei Shōnagon refers to it in her *Pillow Book*, it was popular among Heian nobility.

⁸⁶In China, the characters of the mysterious thing 物怪 seem to have evolved into 怪物 and are now used in the genre of the supernatural and fantastic novel 伝奇小説 written during the period of the Tang Empire. Shikibu seems to have been familiar with the Tang fantastic novel. Ueno says that in the early versions of the *Genji* texts, the *mononoke* is written as 物; 物遣; 物希; 物け – the Chinese writing for the *mononoke* is not unified. Ueno thinks that Heian people did not see the *mononoke* but heard rumors of it and quotes from Kuji Kimiyo 久慈君代 that the *mononoke* in the *Genji* does not mean the same as the mysterious and grotesque creature 妖怪 (3). It seems that the Heian *mononoke* is invisible. The *Flowering Fortunes* reports on Michinaga and other people's experience with the *mononoke*, but what exactly they saw is unclear. Shikibu depicts the *mononoke* graphically in the *Genji*, not like the Heian conventional notion of an invisible being. She might have been influenced by reading the fantastic representation of otherworldly creatures in the Chinese supernatural stories.

the heir apparent with the allegation of sedition and then banished. Terrified, Emperor Kanmu frantically tried to appease his deceased brother's spirit, reburying him with a grand ceremony, giving him the posthumous title of the emperor and enshrining him. The *mononoke* drove Emperor Kanmu into moving the capital to Heiankyo 平安京 in 794, the name of the capital of peace manifesting his desperate desire. The *mononoke* nevertheless moved with him to Heiankyo.

The new capital had its own share of epidemics, famines, floods and political intrigues, all of which were attributed to the curse of *mononoke* and compelled the imperial government to enshrine them promptly. On the surface, Heian nobility, particularly, its prominent members had invincible status in society but lived with *mononoke* hidden in the dark and emerging and to confront them at an unpredictable time. To appease *mononoke*, the imperial government invented festivals. The grandest annual Kamo Festival 賀茂祭 dramatized in the *Genji* was one of these imperial endeavors to appease the wrath of the Kamo-River *mononoke* turning into the deity manifested in the flood.

Having started as a medical religion in Japan, Buddhism characteristically undertook the role of healing those possessed by the *mononoke*. In the 10th century, the cult of appeasing grudging spirits 怨霊思想 with Buddhist exorcism was born (Onomura 小野村 141). Heian literature attests that Buddhist priests' exorcism of the *mononoke* was an ordinary sight in households whenever someone fell ill. These "medical" doctors must have made a lucrative business. They had to race to the household to spend hours at the exhausting task of praying

and exorcising the *mononoke* from the patients, sometimes beating and shaking them in sweat until they calmed them down. Rokujō's *mononoke* possessing Genji's three wives indicates that the exorcised *mononoke* often reentered into someone else, using him/her as medium, and kept ranting and cursing. How the priests managed to "cure" the patient is still unclear to us. Sei Shōnagon reveals a glimpse of the exorcist's desperate efforts in the *Pillow Book*: "How pitiful is the exorcist struggling with a powerful *mononoke*. His prayer has not worked, and he is worried about being laughed at by others" (276). Sei Shōnagon almost sounds as though she were controlling her own laughter. The *mononoke* exorcism evidently did not often work well.

The *Flowering Fortunes* records two hundred years of sensational *mononoke* episodes as a matter of fact. Emperor Reizei (950-1011; not the fictional character of Genji's illegitimate son) is recorded as possessed by an unknown *mononoke*. He is now believed to have suffered some mental disorder. The two major causes of *mononoke* were mostly divided by genders. The male *mononoke* was usually the victim of imperial politics. When the Heian nobleman's greatest ambition had been to elevate his status in the court, after he failed and died with a grudge against his adversaries, he turned into a *mononoke* and haunted them. The female *mononoke* was often a woman abandoned by her mate. Losing her livelihood and social respectability, the woman, who had died of a grief and grudge, became a *mononoke* and relentlessly pursued her mate.

Numerous women's *mononoke* expose the woes of noble polygyny. The husband of the author of *Kagerō Diary*, Fujiwara Kaneie, was tormented on his

deathbed by the *mononoke* of his deceased mistress, the third daughter of Emperor Murakami, Princess Hōshi 保子. Kaneie briefly made Princess Hōshi his mistress and soon stopped visiting her. She died of shame and became a *mononoke* (*The Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 1. 171). This high-born woman treated as a casual sexual mate reminds us of the imperial widow Rokujō, to whom Shikibu ascribes a similar fate.

Shikibu's literary patron Michinaga's two daughters are believed to have been murdered by the same pair of the *mononoke* in the *Flowering Fortunes*. Michinaga married his daughter to an imperial prince, Koichijō-in 小一条院, who already had a wife and children but moved out of their residence to live with his new bride. His first wife died of grief and her father also followed her fate; they became murderous *mononoke* to torment the imperial prince's new bride. When she died, they jeered, "We succeeded. We feel revenged" (*The Flowering Fortunes* Vol. 2. 482). Michinaga's youngest daughter, who became the consort of the crown prince, died in childbirth but was also believed to have been murdered by the same father and daughter. The deaths of his two daughters by the same pair of *mononoke* appalled and filled the invincible Michinaga with grief, fear and regret. Michinaga tried to rejuvenate his daughter with the shaman of *Yinyodo* 陰陽道, who climbed up to the roof and spread her robe so that her soul would return from the sky and dwell on it; if so, he was somehow expected to rejuvenate her body with the soul (Vol. 2. 507). Yet the shaman could not resurrect Michinaga's daughter, supposedly unable to defeat the *mononoke*.

These episodes in the *Flowering Fortunes* suggest that only the *mononoke* could attack the most prestigious Heian noblemen representing the apotheosis of Heian imperial culture. Those *mononoke* also remind us that their way of life had devastated numerous individuals and earned their grudges. Heian people seem to have believed that the powerless could invoke supernatural means to retaliate on the abusive powerful with impunity. If we conclude that the *mononoke* might have been a product of Heian nobility's superstitious fear, we are still perplexed by the graphic descriptions of them in the episodes.

Terry Kawashima, examining the deterioration of the myth of Hashihime 橋姫⁸⁷ in the vicinity of the capital, Uji 宇治, during the Heian and Kamakura periods (794-1333), draws an intriguing conclusion on polygyny and woman's jealousy. Hashihime started as the deity of the Uji River, turned into a mysterious woman waiting for her lover/husband by the Uji Bridge and eventually became the jealous wife transforming herself into a demon to retaliate against her husband and his mistress/the second wife. Kawashima proposes that these "narratives present women's jealousy and consequent transformation and can be studied to investigate why women's jealousy was marginalized into the demonized" (265). The presence of numerous women *mononoke* in Heian society certainly reinforces Kawamura's theory. The campaign of polygynous policy to suppress and marginalize women's grief and grudge in polygynous society must have ended up creating numerous female *mononoke*.

⁸⁷ Shikibu recognizes the Hashihime legend in the the chapter "Hashihime 橋姫", in which the legend foreshadows the sad fate of the two sister imperial princesses, Ōgiimi 大君 and Nakanokimi 中の君. Ōikimi rejects her suitor Kaoru 薫 and Nakanokimi ends up becoming a minor wife of the emperor's son Prince Nioi 匂宮.

Although the majority of Heian noble society was inured to the presence of the *mononoke*, it is surprising that Shikibu flatly denies it in her *Collection of Poetry (Waka)* 紫式部集. She writes a commentary for one of her *waka*, as follows:

On seeing a scroll showing such a hideous picture:

The wife possessed by the *mononoke* of her husband's deceased wife is bound (with the sash belt) by a Buddhist priest. Horror-stricken, the husband is ceaselessly chanting to exorcise it.

(Yamamoto 131).

The picture Shikibu sees must have been a familiar scene in the Heian household. A Buddhist priest is called to cure a sick wife believed to be possessed by the *mononoke* of the deceased wife of her husband.

Shikibu questions whether this chaotic scene is the husband's actual state of mind in her *waka*:

When the man blames his dead wife for possessing his new mate,
isn't he tormented by the demon in his heart?

亡き人にかごとを掛けてわずらうもおのが心の鬼にやはあらぬ (131)

In this context, the “demon in his heart 心の鬼” is a metaphor for the guilty conscience of the man. The husband desperately denies that he is guilty of his late wife's grief and grudge, but the further he denies, the more futile is his attempt of imagining that his new mate is being possessed by the dead wife. The two men, the priest and the husband, thus act on bad faith that they have to suppress the

mononoke's rage to control the present wife. The mental derangement of the present wife might have been the exact cause of death of the previous one, but the husband chooses to believe that the new mate's loss of control is due to the *mononoke*'s mysterious act. The picture convinces Shikibu that the *mononoke* is the husband's projection of his guilt upon the deceased wife. In other words, the *mononoke* is his psychological escape. It was also a convenient reification of Heian polite society to attribute their problems to something apart from them. Shikibu was an unusual individual in her society, denying the presence of the *mononoke* and recognizing the futility of Buddhist exorcism. Shikibu's statement is usually quoted to prove that Rokujō's *mononoke* is Genji's illusion born out of his guilty conscience.

Along with the teaching of the three obediences and karmic retribution, the scene above suggests another example of Shikibu's secret quarrel with Buddhism. The Buddhist priest would help the husband to dismiss his wife's anguish and nervous breakdown in marriage, insisting that women were innately sinful and easily possessed by the *mononoke*. Since she was destined to harm others owing to her karmic retribution, they could justify their physical torture and humiliation of her in the guise of exorcism.

Genji also exposes his belief in woman's sinful nature when Rokujō's dead spirit has almost killed his favorite wife Murasaki. In rage and terror, a usually courteous Genji explodes:

She was terrible [even as the living *mononoke*]. Now she is in another world, a mysterious, dreadful creature... The woman is the seed of evil.

(Ch. “Young Herb 若菜 II.” The *Genji* Vol. 4. 232).

Blaming all women for his unresolved problem with Rokujō, Genji proves to be a classic example of a self-righteous man. His diatribe against Rokujō might also voice some of Shikibu’s audience’s uneasiness to watch the female *mononoke*’s triumph over the supreme man.

Genji’s fury is an allusion to the *Nirvana Sutra* 涅槃經, listed in the early *Genji* commentary, *Kakaisho* 河海抄 written in the 14th century, and currently notorious for the misogynistic doctrine:

The man can be saved by prayer, but because of the woman’s sinful nature *go* (karma), it is difficult for her to be saved. The woman is the messenger of hell and evil enough to eradicate all the [spiritual] seeds of Buddha with the façade of the Bodhisatva Goddess and the nature of the demon.

(qtd. in Ch. “Young Herb 若菜 II.” The *Genji* Vol. 4. 232).

Does Shikibu’s allusion to this theology reveal her revulsion? Had she professed an unshakable faith in Buddhism, she would have glossed over this misogynistic doctrine as an isolated example.

Yet Shikibu did not overlook the denigration of women in Buddhist religiosity. Despite her disbelief in the *mononoke*, it fascinated Shikibu. She might have had a clue of how to use it from the fantasy novels 伝奇小説, which were in vogue during the Tang dynasty. Shikibu would have been sympathetic to the 9th-century Chinese writer’s statement, “I am not ashamed of writing and reading otherworldly fiction” (qtd. in Xiaohuan Zhao 17). He understood that occult

fiction was considered a low form of literature for not edifying morality, but he might have enjoyed entertaining the public with his works. Fantasy novels may have reached out to a wider audience than the high-form literature of poetry, which achieved its apotheosis in the Tang Empire. The stories of “The Pleasure Land 遊仙窟,” “The Account Upon the Pillow 枕中記” and “The Story of the Fox Wife 任氏伝” are still widely read in Japan, and some have been adapted into Japanese folk literature.⁸⁸ Both the Chinese and Japanese were fascinated by the abnormality in literature, which allowed them to vicariously transcend a life of predictability. Depicting Genji’s astonishment at Rokujō’s transformation from an elegant high-born woman into a hideous ghost, Shikibu might have followed the Chinese literary convention of a horror story with a stunning beauty turning into an aggressive demon to attack her adversary. Shikibu nevertheless had a more pressing aim than the Chinese occult novelists, her *mononoke* being a reminder of women’s condition in her polygynous society.

In order to circumvent possible protests from the audience for attacking their most desirable man Genji, Shikibu deliberately has him identify the *mononoke* with an impeccable high-born woman, Rokujō. Being his social superior as his aunt-in-law and the widow of the former crown prince, she also commands her due reverence from him. Her sense of decorum and virtue is frustrated by Genji’s flippant attitude toward their affair and irritates him. His uneasy feelings in front of her presence do suggest his vague intimidation, which

⁸⁸ All of them expose the man’s daydreaming wish. In “The Pleasure Land”, a man wanders into a supernatural realm and meets a fairy-like woman; “The Account upon the Pillow” tells of a man who sleeps on a particular pillow and has a brief dream of achieving a pleasurable life within a few minutes; in “The Story of the Fox Wife,” a man unknowingly marries a fox turned into a woman.

actually foreshadows his later fear of the *mononoke*. The fact that Genji is only seventeen does not make Shikibu change the plot of his later torment by the *mononoke*. Genji represents numerous noble polygynists who trivialized their women's love, commitment and their effort to reform their mates and expected their exoneration. Yet Shikibu does not let Genji get away.

Fujimoto Katutoshi 藤本勝義 points out the importance of the Kamo Festival 賀茂祭 as the major cause of the *mononoke*'s entry into Genji's life (qtd. in Nishizawa 145). In Kyoto, the thunder god, who promises the abundant harvest of agricultural products with rain, has been enshrined for more than one thousand years. The Kamo shrine god was worshipped as the divine guardian of the imperial government and the capital during the Heian period, while he has attracted regular visitors to pray for their individual wishes; Genji visits the Kamo Shrine before his voluntary exile to Suma probably to pray for his safe return to the capital (Ino'ue 149-155).

The Kamo Festival evolved into an exhibition of the grandeur and authority of the imperial government in Heian society with the glorious procession of an imperial virgin princess, known as *saiin* 齋院, taking gifts to the river deity. Buddhist events and ceremonies were stopped during the period of the Kamo Festival to show their reverence for the imperial government. It was believed that the absence of Buddhist power led the mischievous *mononoke* to run rampant. Intriguing is Heian nobility's vague belief in the mysterious alliance between the *mononoke* turning into the river deity and other *mononoke*. The deity did not become a part of obsolete Shintō religiosity in Heian Buddhist society, as

he was once a year conveniently brought back to be the object of public worship during the Kamo Festival. The contemporary nobility possibly still felt the fear of his rage in the form of floods.

When Genji's principal wife Aoi and his mistress Rokujō come to watch the *saiin* procession, their hostile retainers clash in public. Afterward, Genji is appalled to see Rokujō's living *mononoke* tormenting Aoi at the moment of her child-bearing, and loses his wife to death. The Kamo Festival is again appropriated when Rokujō's posthumous *mononoke* suddenly appears twenty years after her death and possesses Genji's beloved Murasaki. Kashiwagi also rapes Genji's most prestigious wife the Third Princess when her gentlewomen are busy preparing for the Festival. Before Kashiwagi dies of the psychological torture of a guilty conscience, the exorcist sees a woman possessing him. Shikibu must have been aware that most of her audience would think that Rokujō's deceased spirit has used Kashiwagi to ruin Genji's domestic equilibrium.

With Rokujō's living *mononoke*, Shikibu creates an immediate and direct connection with her grievance against his wife Aoi's public insult and his complicity.⁸⁹ Yet the living *mononoke* is not Shikibu's literary invention as it was already present in the *Collection of Old and New Tales* 今昔物語 (1120?). It is a dreadful story in which the spirit of a deserted woman departs from her body, visits her husband and kills him in retaliation. Later she receives the news of his death joyously far away from his place (qtd. in Imai Noboru 240). In the *Pillow Book*, Sei Shōnagon also says, "The most terrific name is a *mononoke* of a living

⁸⁹ That all the *mononoke* recorded in the *Flowering Fortunes* are the ghosts of the deceased indicates that this was a familiar and mainstream phenomenon in Heian noble society.

person 生靈” (274). She does not seem to have seen a live *mononoke* but is capable of imagining its ominous effect.

To rectify his past maltreatment of Rokujō, Genji marries her daughter to Emperor Reizei and installs her as Empress Akikonomu, believing that he has demonstrated his sincere contrite heart. Yet more than twenty years after Rokujō’s death, Genji again confronts in horror her *mononoke* possessing his two major wives, Murasaki and the Third Princess. Why does Rokujō’s *mononoke*’s reentry take place after such a long respite? She has little justification to torment his two wives, who have done no wrong to her. Rokujō’s *mononoke* still wishes to afflict Genji. Even Shikibu’s kind biographer Imai Gen’e finds Genji reasonably repenting and denounces her as “pestering” (250). Even the father of Genji’s lover Oborozukiyo, the Minister of Right, grudgingly acknowledges Prince Genji’s scandalous sexual involvement with his daughter as “an ordinary male habit” (Ch. “The Sacred Tree 賢木.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 139). Like the father of Oborozukiyo, Genji still assumes that women are accustomed to men’s seduction and desertion in his society. Shikibu nevertheless thinks that the imperial prince has abused his sexual impunity and it needs to be curtailed.

Shikibu surprises the reader by frankly depicting the most perverse Heian nobleman’s sexual penchants in Genji’s seduction of the daughters of his deceased mistresses, Empress Akikonomu 秋好 and Tamakazura 玉鬘. Akikonomu is a crucial pawn to ensure Genji’s political dominance in the court, but her guardian secretly pursues his virtual daughter-in-law. Detesting the lover of her deceased mother, Akikonomu successfully defends herself with aloof

hostility and silence. Tamakazura is Yūgao's daughter and the victim of Genji's concealment of his deceased mistress by his thoughtless escapade and the desertion of her household. Years later when Tamakazura emerges as a beautiful maid, Genji adopts her, secretly interested in educating her to be his mistress. Worse is the view of the conventional morality represented by Yūgao's maid Ukon's wishful thinking that Tamakazura will replace her mother as one of Genji's minor wives. Shikibu nevertheless finds Genji's seduction of Tamakazura by playing her pseudo-father repelling and has her protest in her *waka*, "I have read ancient tales in which no father falls in love with his daughter" (Ch. "The Firefly 螢." The *Genji* Vol. 3. 206). Unlike her docile mother Yūgao, Tamakazura can articulate her repugnance and manages to embarrass Genji. Tamakazura evidently violates the code of three obediences, implying Shikibu's belief that woman's self-preservation should precede the conventional morality which would even tolerate Genji's sexual relations with the mother and her daughter.

The *Flowering Fortunes* and (the *Confession*) *Towazugatari* confirm that Genji's semi-incestuous attempts at having a mother and her daughter for his sexual mates were not uncommon among medieval noblemen. The *Flowering Fortunes* reveals that Emperor Kazan 花山 retired to become a Buddhist monk but later violated his asceticism and had his maids, who were a mother and daughter, for his mistresses (191). In her *Confession* Lady Nijō 二条 (1271-?) reports that her mother had served Emperor Gofukakusa 後深草天皇 as his nurse and sexual mate before she was born, and he told her that he intended to raise her daughter to replace her (152). The medieval man's work *Ōkagami* chronicles

Heian rulers' lives but shows little interest in exposing their sexual proclivities. By contrast, these women writers dared to record and expose such sexual scandals of their contemporary rulers from our current perspective. Their records suggest that they recognized that male sexuality surpassed feminine chastity as a double standard in their society and quietly subverted their expected silence.

Genji's failure with the two adopted daughters and Rokujō's posthumous *mononoke* manifest Shikibu's exasperation of her beloved hero who has neither gained self-knowledge nor repented. His constant erratic sexual promiscuity finally crushes Murasaki's hope for a peaceful life and makes her feel ready for death. Genji is dumbfounded to see Rokujō's *mononoke* having been exorcised from Murasaki violently accusing him through a medium, "I have completely changed and look hideous. But you haven't changed, as untruthful as ever" (Ch. "Young Herb 若菜" II. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 227). Rokujō's *mononoke* also declares her successful scheme of having removed the Third Princess from Genji. The Third Princess has adamantly rejected Genji's plea to remain in marriage, never wanting to be relentlessly nagged for his nephew Kashiwagi's rape she could not prevent, and becomes a Buddhist nun. Rokujō's *mononoke* has only aided the two wives' desires for liberation from him. Shikibu certainly believes in the Buddhist doctrine of Cause and Effect 因果応報 as a normal human verdict that a guilty Genji eventually gets what he deserves. Despite Genji's apparent moral fallibility, the historical review of the *mononoke* has been overshadowed by his gender-class authority as the "Shining Prince." The literary tradition of hero worship remains in numerous cultures, as noted by Elizabeth Hardwick:

The danger of ridicule must, in literature, be circumvented if the man is to retain force, magnetism, spirit. Dignity is scarcely at stake, since it is the mark of a gentleman to look upon dignity as a quality given and once given the last crumble. (186)

Were Hamlet not the prince of Denmark, his verbal abuse of a poor Ophelia would have raised much more criticism in historical reviews. The same is true of Genji. Genji's terror and fury at Rokujō's *mononoke* has drawn more attention from readers than why he sees her wrath in the invisible spirit.

When Kanazawa Haruhiko 金沢春彦 declares, "Rokujō is the victim of her own passion," he seems to follow the literary tradition of adoring the "Shining Prince," assuming that Genji's sexual perversion is normal (300). According to the *Flowering Fortunes*, the high-born man's excessive promiscuity and sexual perversion were tolerated in Heian noble society. Similarly, the degree of Genji's sexual flings would have been tolerated, but Shikibu plays the critic of her society. If Rokujō is the victim of her own passion, Genji is also the victim of his excessive and indiscriminate passion for women. Possessing his two major mates, Murasaki and the Third Princess, Rokujō's deceased *mononoke* plays Shikibu's agent of censoring Genji.

Two hundred years after Shikibu's time and after the fall of the Heian aristocracy, the author of the author of the *Mumyōzōshi* 無名草子 defends Rokujō with some ambivalence: "she comes out as a terrific *mononoke*. But she is a modest and virtuous woman" (194). While believing that Rokujō's *mononoke* pursues her retaliation against Genji, the author indirectly argues that even "a

modest woman” such as Rokujō would become a victim of his seduction and betrayal. The author’s view is complicated by her hesitance to approve of Rokujō’s retaliation on Genji against the contemporary literary criticism denouncing her as the lustful, malicious and egocentric murderer of Yūgao, Aoi and Murasaki.

Three hundred years after the composition of the *Genji*, the warrior clans, such as the Heike (or the Taira) 平家 (1167-1185), the Genji (or the Minamoto) 源氏 (1185-1333) and the Ashikaga 足利 (1336-1573), consecutively rose and governed the nation, and they at times resolved their political conflicts into military operations. As a result, the patriarchal mode of Japanese society turned more militant and further progressed. During this period evolved the legend that Shikibu was condemned to suffer in hell for having invented such a crazy story as the *Genji* (Koyano 2). The defamed Shikibu also reflects the wide popularity and familiarity of the *Genji* in late medieval noble society. Lady Nijō recalls that her imperial lover, Ex-Emperor Gofukakusa had once recreated the music concert organized by Genji and his women, with himself impersonating our hero and his own consorts and gentlewomen, the hero’s lovers (218). The *Genji* became a work representing the past glory of the imperial clans and nobility. Rokujō nevertheless turned into a rebellious heroine challenging the warrior social mode for frightening her lover and the man.

The Noh plays “Lady Aoi 葵上” and “The Shrine in the Field 野宮” shaped the current image of Rokujō as a woman damned by her own sensual attachment to Genji. Composed between the 14th and 15th centuries, the plays

reflect the contemporary norms of medieval Buddhism and of the fascination with death, spirit and the after-life resulting from a series of civil wars. Given the masculine background of the Noh plays originally featuring only male actors who played women's parts by putting on masks and feminine robes to entertain male audiences, it is not surprising that Rokujō became the embodiment of the feminine sinful nature in Buddhist terms. The Noh plays define Rokujō as *mononoke* although Shikibu still allows the reader to doubt whether Genji is having an illusion out of fear. The belief in Rokujō's *mononoke* has still been prevalent in *Genji* scholarship, perhaps owing to the presentation of her in the Noh plays.

Kosai Tutomu points out the departure of the two Noh plays from the *Genji* text with two examples: the added characters and the different language from the text (qtd. in Hare 187). More importantly, Genji is absent in the plays but only discussed by others in relation to Rokujō, although he is the only character who sees Rokujō's *mononoke* in the text. "Lady Aoi" uses few words from the *Genji*, revealing that the playwright did not read the text but had some digested knowledge about it. Even so, "Lady Aoi" has been one of the most popular Noh plays. The play is easy to follow with dramatic scenes and black-and-white themes, resulting in making Rokujō the prototype of the "woman with furious passion." The visual effect of the beautiful noblewoman turning into a terrible demon also excites the audience, further promoting the accessibility of the Noh play.

The plot of "Lady Aoi" emphasizes the danger of woman's jealousy and sexual passion and the masculine authority of Buddhism to defeat it. The woman

shaman at first uses the incantation to expose Rokujō's spirit, who is violently beating Genji's sick wife Aoi, represented by a piece of Kimono cloth, with a stick. That the shaman cannot placate Rokujō's spirit implies the powerlessness of women's spirituality and the need for the male power. When the priest of the blended spirituality of Shintō and Buddhism, known as a *yamabushi* 山伏, is called to pray for Aoi's healing, Rokujō's sudden transformation into his aggressor as a demon takes place but she is eventually chased away by the power of his prayer. The *yamabushi* epitomizes the amalgamation of medieval Buddhism and Shintō as a masculine religion.

The Noh "The Shrine in the Field" demonstrates more knowledge about the *Genji* text than "Lady Aoi", the playwright extracting from the textual diction and inventing Rokujō's ghost to create the Noh concept of melancholic and mysterious beauty known as *yugen* 幽玄. Shikibu chooses the site of Genji and Rokujō's last flare-up as lovers, the Shrine of the Field in Sagano 嵯峨野, a countryside near the capital. Before Rokujō's departure to chaperon her daughter who has been chosen to be the *saigū* representing the new Emperor Suzaku, her daughter has been undergoing the last purification of her priestess-hood for the Sun Goddess in the temporarily built Shrine. One year after Aoi's death, he quickly forgets his suspicion that Rokujō has murdered Aoi, and it is now his priority to retain his living mistress rather than the dead wife. Genji shows Rokujō a spray of *sakaki* 賢木, the sacred evergreen tree used to decorate the Shintō altar, and improvises a *waka*, "I followed my heart, which will stay the same as this

evergreen, and I even trespassed on the sacred fence [to meet you]. But your [cold] reception saddens me” (Ch. “The Sakaki 賢木.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 79).

In the Noh play of “The Shrine in the Field,” Rokujō’s *mononoke* carries the *sakaki* given by Genji, the symbol of her attachment to his memory. The attachment to human emotions hinders one’s salvation according to the Buddhist ideology. Shikibu’s Rokujō does feel almost seduced by his inviting manners in the shrine of the field. Yet, never forgetting Genji’s past neglect, she is determined not to suffer it again while poignantly recognizing their permanent separation. Genji realizes that Rokujō will not fall back in love with him and he must accept his defeat graciously. The Shintō shrine is also an implicit aid for Rokujō, obliging Genji to show reverence for her daughter as the supreme priestess of the Sun Goddess and to leave peacefully. Rokujō has relied on her daughter’s status in achieving her hard victory, not remaining as unresolved in the text as she does in the Noh play. In the text she confirms her decision to terminate her relationship with Genji.

Shikibu shows that Rokujō is an unusual Heian woman in her rejection of the imperial prince and her choice to live alone through her gentlewomen’s response to their mistress’ decision. Having secretly expected Rokujō and Genji’s reconciliation, they lament over his amiable manners of bidding farewell. They find their mistress too imperious and not docile enough to remain as his prominent lover, if not his formal wife. It is Heian women’s pragmatism that having a man is better than none. The majority of Shikibu’s audience must also have sympathized

with those women's ambition to catch the attention of an imperial male in the court.

Both Noh plays, "Lady Aoi" and "The Shrine in the Field," readily embrace the medieval Buddhist doctrine of detachment from the mortal world and amplify Rokujō's *mononoke*'s obsessive passion for the man as the woman's innate defect hindering her salvation. Moreover, Genji's conspicuous absence implies that only Rokujō is responsible for her own damnation. She is a woman and thus seduceable and betrayable. *Yamabushi* and the Buddhist monk's prayers for Rokujō also illustrate the notion of masculine superiority in her need for the men's aid to save her damned soul. Rokujō in "Lady Aoi" does not ask for her salvation, and we are not sure whether she is saved or not. In "The Shrine in the Field," Rokujō pleads for the priest's prayer and dances gracefully in the end, expressing her gratitude to him, but we are again uncertain of her salvation. Both plays primarily confirm the Buddhist doctrine of the difficulty of women's salvation.

In the Noh plays, Rokujō is the *mononoke* of an obsessive lover, superseding her ambiguous and ambivalent image in the *Genji* read by a limited number of people who had access to the classic text. These visible presentations of Rokujō have thus contributed to dismissing Shikibu's nuanced insistence on the inevitability of woman's jealousy in polygyny and refusal to clarify the *mononoke*'s identity. Genji's absence in the two plays also ignores Shikibu's subtle mission of contesting polygyny.

Our last focus on Rokujō's *mononoke* is its current criticism. The ambiguous identity of the *mononoke* has fascinated a variety of critics who deserve our serious attention. Fujimoto asks: "if Shikibu wanted to depict Rokujō's *mononoke* as 'Genji's inner demon, his guilty conscience,' why didn't she say so?" (198). His question actually overlooks the woman writer Shikibu's gender-class handicap as a woman writer. As a woman Shikibu was not in the position to declare an open combat against her patriarchal social norm by depicting a prominent man such as Genji being tormented by his own conscience. She knew this would be suicidal for her literary career. On the other hand, she refused to incriminate Rokujō as sinful for horrifying Genji because she respected her heroine's courage and sincere passion. The ambiguity of Rokujō's *mononoke* thus demonstrates Shikibu's awareness of contemporary patriarchal censure.

Fujimoto nevertheless carefully points out Shikibu's unique appropriation of the *mononoke* that it is usually told of from the victim's point of view in historical documents and fiction; but the *Genji* focuses on Rokujō who becomes the aggressive *mononoke* (216). Rokujō's *mononoke* is Shikibu's best available means to illustrate a woman's complex psychological struggle, aggression and rebellion against the feminine decorum. Rokujō is intelligent enough to recognize that her intense passion for Genji is problematic, identifying him as the ultimate source of years of her agony:

I think it horrific and sinful that people sometimes die with
harboring hatred. Worse is to be gossiped about as the *mononoke*

full of hatred when I am still alive. Is this my *sukuse* 宿世 from the previous life? I should not dwell on such a cruel man.

(Ch. “Aoi 葵” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 31)

She attributes her hatred for Aoi to her *sukuse*, karma from her previous life.

As Sato Sekiko 佐藤勢紀子 notes, Shikibu’s heroines believe in their *sukuse* as women’s sinful nature (125). Heian women’s response to fatalistic *sukuse* or karmic retribution would be usually helpless silence. As discussed in Chapter 1, karmic retribution in Hinduism and Buddhism imposed self-reproach on women to put them in their place. Rokujō is one of Shikibu’s three heroines along with Fujitubo and Utusemi, who are convicted by a strong sense of guilt. Fujitubo has an illicit affair with Genji and bears their illegitimate son Emperor Reizei, and Utusemi, the wife of a provincial governor, also feels guilty for having been raped by Genji and betrayed her husband. Unlike Fujitubo and Utusemi, the widow Rokujō has not betrayed her spouse but feels guilty about her hatred for Genji’s wife Aoi’s debilitated condition. Her affair with Genji has frustrated Rokujō for having not lived up to her firm sense of morality.

Rokujō’s conscience is further relentlessly pursued by the dream that she violently shakes and thrashes Aoi to the extent that she is almost convinced that her soul has flown to attack her. Wakened, Rokujō discovers that her robe and hair are soaked by the scent of the mustard-seed incense burned by the Buddhist priest exorcising the *mononoke*. She shampoos her hair and changes her clothes, but the scent of the incense persists in her body. Rokujō’s panic-driven act of removing the scent of the incense attached to her body reminds us of the insane

Lady Macbeth compulsively washing her hands, imagining that they are soaked with the blood of the king she and her husband murdered. Shimizu Yoshiko 清水好子 proposes that Rokujo's ceaseless sense of smelling the incense is due to her paranoia, appropriating Shikibu's disbelief in the *mononoke* (qtd. in Fujimoto 197). Shimizu thinks that Rokujō's murderous desire is manifested only in the dream, but the author still allows numerous readers to believe in Rokujo's *mononoke* torturing Aoi and even her murder of the latter.

The novelist and one of the translators of the *Genji* into contemporary Japanese, Enchi Fumiko 円地文子 (1905-1986), thinks that the *mononoke* is Shikibu's clandestine means of a woman's transformation into an aggressive avenger in order to achieve her goal in patriarchal society. In her novel *The Mask* 女面, the protagonist Mieko 三重子 manifests a modern version of Rokujō, who secretly retaliates against her husband's promiscuity and betrayal by having an extramarital affair and passing her illegitimate children as his own. As Mieko eventually inherits her husband's property and house with her illegitimate children, Rokujō's *mononoke* does drive Genji and Murasaki away from their Rokujō-in mansion and dismantles his glory epitomized by his beloved wife. In Mieko's college thesis, Enchi presents her point of view of Rokujō as follows:

Although Shikibu did not believe in the *mononoke*, how could she describe it vividly and vigorously in the *Genji*? Probably, by inventing Rokujō embodying the female shamanic power suppressed [in Heian culture], she wanted to have her confront her lover Genji. As the woman's shamanistic power has dwindled in

the current society, she may be innately able to control the man, and it may be evil from his perspective. Buddhism defines it as woman's *go* [the vindictive inclination] to create chaos....If there is the archetype of the desirable woman for a man, there is the opposite type of woman inspiring eternal fear in him. (875).

In the *Genji*, the priestess of the Sun Goddess, the *saigū*, has no shamanistic power, not reinforcing Enchi's idea of the woman's spiritual affinity with Shintō. Even so, Enchi notes Shikibu's ambivalent attitude toward Buddhism for incriminating women's assertion as sinful, whereas both women writers find that a willful woman living in a masculine culture cannot help acting on her *go* or the vindictive inclination and frightening men by debunking their unexamined belief in feminine passivity and silence.

Ōtsuka Hikari 大塚ひかり is a more of a modernist than Enchi, believing that the Heian *mononoke* can be solvable with a theory. She proposes a pathological theory of identifying Rokujō's *mononoke* with a rhetorical question, "what is behind its reification in Heian noble society?" (211). She points out a lack of volatile expressions in late Heian literature including the *Genji* in contrast to the early Japanese mythology, in which heroes and heroines shout, laugh and cry openly. Ōtsuka's conclusion is that, living in a small endogamous society, Heian nobility was affected by a claustrophobic fear of becoming a laughing-stock by trivial matters and as a result, they developed an aesthetic decorum to mask their genuine feelings. Hence, every uncontrollable psychological symptom

became a *mononoke*, but the *mononoke*'s ranting was the actual outburst of the possessed (189).

Ōtuka's theory sufficiently explains the psychology of Heian nobility. Their inmost desire to buttress their privileges led them to endogamous marriages which resulted into a crowded and repressive community in the capital dominated by a limited number of prominent Fujiwara clans. To maintain the status quo, the noble city inhabitants developed mutual surveillance and social expectation of propriety which bound their behavior. The conformity of keeping appearances thus stifled their freedom of expressing emotions. When they were out of control, in order to conceal their outburst of emotions, tantrums, angers and sorrows, they invented the spirit *mononoke* as possessing them temporarily.

Ōtuka's pathological theory of the *mononoke* perfectly explains Higekuro's wife's loss of her temper. Shikibu creates a tragicomic moment of the *mononoke* episode with the first wife of Lord Higekuro 髭黒. His wife is devastated when he starts visiting his new bride Tamakazura and is "possessed" by the *mononoke*. While helping him dressing up to meet Tamakazura as a dutiful wife should do, she suddenly picks up an incense container full of ash and pours its content over his shoulders from the back. Covered with ash, he gives up visiting Tamakazura on that day but no one feels sorry for him, who has forced himself to be her bridegroom after raping her. Higekuro's first wife's temporary violence turns out to be a double vengeance for herself as well as her rival. The usually quiet and submissive Higekuro's wife also repeats Shikibu's view that any woman has the potential to become a *mononoke* when wronged by her mate. Yet

like Genji, Higekuro finds nothing wrong about himself and has a Buddhist priest exorcise his wife's *mononoke*.

Higekuro's wife has to be satisfied with her first and last retaliation on her husband and flees to her natal family. According to Heian civil custom, her return to her home results in a natural divorce. Afterward, a regular noblewoman, she is reluctantly resigned to feminine passivity as expected in her society. Were Rokujo a docile regular noblewoman like Higekuro's wife, the lot of Genji's slighted mistress would have been much easier. Gifted with beauty, elegance, intelligence and an excellent status as the crown princess' widow, Rokujō does not forget Genji's slight and the thwarted desire to be his first wife. Her *mononoke* signifies the fury of a strong-willed woman who has not achieved the happiness she thinks she deserves. Komashyaku Kimi 駒尺清美 argues that when Genji perceives Rokujō's living and dead spirits possessing his women, she constantly reminds of her strong pride and individuality (147). Although Enchi nuances her statement more than Komashaku, they agree that the *mononoke* manifests Genji's fear of a woman like Rokujo.

Ōtuka argues, "the *mononoke* does not lie" (176). Shikibu's narrator nevertheless insists how discreet Rokujō is as if trying to conceal her volatile and violent emotions. Shikibu understood how easily the noblewoman could be judged and labeled as morally corrupted by double standards operating in her noble society. A discreet high-born woman, Rokujō would rather die than admit her grudge against Genji and the jealousy of Aoi. The *mononoke* played the agent of unfolding the inconvenient truth in Heian noble society.

While Ōtuka interprets a woman's *mononoke* as her mental affliction, Doris G. Bargen further extends their theories as women's active protests, as indicated by her book title, collectively calling them *A Woman's Weapon*. Shikibu's *mononoke* is in effect a woman's dreadful weapon, but does not seem to be as intentional as connoted by the phrase "a woman's weapon". Shikibu relies on the effect of the *mononoke* to frighten Genji in order to expose his fallibility. Yet the actual women's Heian *mononoke* might not have remained as effective as their male counterparts enshrined and worshipped up to this day.

Along the same line with Ōtuka, Hashimoto Mariko 橋本真理子 offers an unequivocal theory that Genji's troubled conscience is the *mononoke* (Fujimoto 197). Her theory perfectly appropriates the *mononoke* constituting the nightmares that trouble Genji and his stepbrother Emperor Suzaku's conscience. A timid and indecisive Emperor Suzaku feels the internal guilt of allowing his brother Genji's exile. Seeing their late Father Emperor in rage in the dream, Suzaku falls ill out of dread and invites his imperious mother Kokiden's scolding: "You have been just affected by a gloomy weather and wretched thoughts" (Ch. "Akashi 明石." The *Genji* Vol. 2. 241). Yet Suzaku swiftly calls Genji back to the capital, expiating his guilt. Genji also is frightened by the deceased Fujitubo being in hell in his dream. Having cuckolded his father Emperor with her, he cannot help the resonating anxiety over his after-life. The nightmares arouse Suzaku and Genji's conscience which is not too alert.

Shikibu knew that high-born men did not have to live with the consequences of their choices, which even the ineffectual Third Princess knows.

After the Third Princess becomes a nun, Genji tries to seduce her back to their sexual relations with him, not taking her renunciation seriously. Even though he fears the *mononoke*, his fear is not the same as his conscience but only its reminder. In a way, it might have been his prerogative as a Heian nobleman to create and label the *mononoke* as the other and enshrine it so that they would not have to deal with it directly. This is reinforced by the historical fact that after the disappearance of their glory, the *mononoke* also vanished. Obscuring the negative emotions by projecting them collectively on the *mononoke*, they set them apart from themselves as the “other.” The *mononoke* was an effective mask of their inhibited behavior and the essential means of self-delusion. Possibly both unconsciously and consciously, they had a social conspiracy to reify the *mononoke*.

The Marginalized Widow

As a Heian widower, Genji basically follows the same convention as his Hindu and Confucian brothers. He remains a chaste widower after the death of his primary wife Aoi for the designated period of 49 days and marries Murasaki. Widowers in Hindu and Confucian cultures were expected to marry soon, since the loss of one mate little altered the life of a polygynous man. Hindu, Confucian and Heian polygynous cultures permitted men’s obvious easy access to a superfluity of brides in the marriage market and diminished the desirability of non-virginal women.

Chaste widowhood is prescribed in the *Manu* and the *Admonition for Women*, both of which insist that fidelity to the memory of her deceased spouse

should be what the ideal widow should seek in the rest of her life. According to the Hindu ideology of karmic retribution, widowhood was the consequence of her crime in her previous life, and the widow was blamed for the death of her husband. The theologically untrained Indian widow had no means to prove otherwise. Orthodox Confucians celebrated Ban Jieyu, her great-grand-niece Ban Zhao and heroines of the *Exemplary Women* for preserving their chastity only for one mate which these men never imagined to need for themselves. Particularly, because a noblewoman's remarriage could disrupt the interests of her male relatives by her new mate and their possible children, it was usually forbidden. Hence, control of a widow's chastity seems to have been for political rather than moral reasons in Asian high society. Besides, the reputed chaste widow was a moral asset to her and her relatives.

The chastity control of imperial consorts became more stringent in Shikibu's time than the early Heian period, as documented in the *Flowering Fortunes*. Michinaga's two daughters, including Shikibu's mistress, Empress Shōshi, lost their imperial spouses in their early twenties and led a long widowhood for the rest of their lives. Particularly, those widow consorts with children were required to protect their future advantage as imperial family members for their father, who used the birthrights of his grandchildren to dominate the court. A childless imperial widow's new relationship seems to have been tolerated, but Consort Genshi 元子 of the deceased Emperor Ichijō 一条 enraged her father with her new relationship to the extent that he snipped off her long hair. In the *Flowering Fortunes*, the young imperial widow is described with

sympathy and celebrated for her eventual escape to her lover (Vol. 2. 19). The *Flowering Fortunes* also reveals that mistresses of the deceased male imperial family member could have been treated casually by their new mates. Shikibu's patron Michinaga pursued and made the favorite companion of the abducted Emperor Kazan 花山 his own mistress after his death but provoked no particular social criticism (Vol. 1. 434).

Rokujō, the widow of the crown prince and the mother of his daughter, initiates a secretive relationship with her nephew Genji and might have incited some moral qualms among Shikibu's audience. The death of the crown prince was a rare incident in Shikibu's time and would have been regarded as a major political panic. Rokujō's deceased spouse must have evoked the audience's collective memory of Crown Prince Yasuakira 保明 (903-923), who was believed to have been murdered by the *mononoke* of Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903) one century before. Shikibu's adoption of the renowned historical case of the crown prince's death might show her intention to avoid provoking her contemporary audience's possible revulsion of the imperial widow's sexual affair. The author's projection of Rokujō on those imperial widows also suggests her sensitivity to the instability of high-born women's precarious status. *Ōkagami* records that Michizane's political colleague Fujiwara no Tokihira 藤原時平 falsely incriminated him to dominate the imperial court and brought his posthumous curse onto the entire land (Tachibana 73-81). The contemporary Emperor Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885-930) demoted Michizane from the minister of right to the governor of Dazaifu, virtually having exiled and left him to die there.

Soon after Michizane's death, unusual disasters constantly took place and terrified the imperial government as his curse. When Emperor Daigo's son and the Crown Prince Yasuakira died at the age of twenty, his father immediately replaced him with his grandson who also died. *Ōkagami* does not detail the deaths of these imperial heirs but suggests that they took the imperial government by surprise and fear. Moreover, Michizane's *mononoke* was believed to have brought famines and epidemics and murdered his adversary Tokihira's family members. To soothe Michizane's spirit, the imperial government built two shrines in his exiled province Dazaifu and in the capital, but still constantly found his relentless wrath disrupting their equilibrium and undermining their authority whenever unpredictable disasters happened. Michizane thus had turned into one of the *mononoke* in the capital to which Heian nobility became inured.

According to *Ōkagami*, Prince Yasuakira left three or four young consorts, and his childless widows remarried. The public must not have spared much sympathy for those young widows, whose auspicious lives suddenly ended. Were they regular high-born women, they surely felt that their ambition to become the sovereign's mates was thwarted regardless of their feelings toward him. The memory of Prince Yasuakira's equivocal death certainly aroused Shikibu's audience's empathy for Rokujō resembling his widow's fall from grace, which the author probably calculates to counterbalance their later qualms about her unconventionally willful behavior and Genji's fearful perception of her *mononoke*. Ironically, Shikibu's audience might have seen Rokujō's initial role as a circumstantial victim of the *mononoke* owing to the complex political dynamic in

which she happened to be trapped. In a way, the author surrounds Rokujō with the mysterious and fearful ambiance of the *mononoke*.

Shikibu reveals little about Rokujō's marital relations with her deceased imperial spouse but hints that as far as the Heian ideal of matrimony was concerned, Rokujō was a successful bride because the crown prince immediately fell in love with her, as recalled by Genji's father Emperor and her brother-in-law that "he prized her most" (Ch. "Aoi 葵." The *Genji* Vol. 2. 12). Neither does Shikibu detail Rokujō's imperial spouse's death, but the *mononoke* would be a usual cause of the unpredicted death of the heir apparent. A young widow of twenty, Rokujō feels defeated in the early stage of her womanhood, wishing to regain her initial successful matrimony.

The vulnerability of widows remained more or less similar in Asian cultures. Despite the severe prescription of Hindu widows, Sharma postulates their sexual exploitation as exemplified in ancient pornographic literature such as *Kama Sutra* (119). Since there was no regular marriage for a Hindu widow, she was perceived as close to a prostitute and easily seduced by a pleasure seeker. Shikibu, too, understood that a widow would arouse men's convenient sexual interest in her society. In her *Collection of Waka*, the author describes a suitor knocking at the door of her household during the mourning period, but she did not open it (132). It is believed that Shikibu had a daughter and remained a widow for the rest of her life. Shikibu's widow heroine's complex psychology has no doubt been drawn from the author's own experience as a widow after her brief and unsatisfactory marriage and her ambivalent attitude toward widowhood. The

Collection of Shikibu's Waka and her *Diary* suggest that the author was not interested in becoming a Confucian chaste widow but rejected the remarriage, which would have further downgraded her previous marital status. Rokujō also kept the conventional image of a mourning imperial widow for four years, rejecting the proposal of Genji's father and the older brother of her husband, who could have qualified to be her respectful mate. The woman sanctified by her marriage to a man only one step away from god does not want to become a minor consort. Oddly, our heroine has no male relatives who would have protected her interests and also sheltered from a variety of undesirable suitors presuming that the beautiful widow would compromise herself for a prospective mate.

From the author's point of view, Rokujō makes the irrevocable error of having a fickle lover like Genji and suffers its consequence. Rokujō and Genji must have met halfway. The twenty-four-year-old imperial widow has responded to the call of her own sex. Genji's good looks, courtly manners, particularly his excellent breeding and his status slightly below her as the son of the sovereign, have certainly persuaded her to consider a future with him. His first wife Aoi has not at first concerned her much, as the rumor has it that they have been cool to each other. If he officially installs her even as his second wife, she will hope to rise above the first, as the new mate can sometimes outshine the incumbent. Yet Rokujō is self-conscious that Genji is seven years her junior, believing that the discord of their relationship is due to their age difference. She does not know that Genji's secret beloved Fujitubo is five years older than he.

The seventeen-year-old Genji secretly adores Fujitubo, his father's favorite consort and his beautiful stepmother, as *la femme éternelle*. Yet he does not intend to sacrifice his immediate pleasure to devote himself entirely to Fujitubo. When impeded from access to the imperial consort tightly guarded in the rear palace, Genji at first hoped that Rokujō would replace Fujitubo in his heart. He has no idea about the young widow's complex sense of defeat and loss of her first marriage and desperate desire for a stable relationship. Both Fujitubo and Rokujō share much in common, such as beauty, intelligence, exclusive breeding and their mature grace and sophistication. Genji has been too impetuous to recognize the crucial factor of their personality differences in sexual relations. Fujitubo is a compliant and placid consort to please Genji's father the Emperor, but Rokujō proves her capability to lead an independent life, managing her household and property and maintaining her impeccable public reputation, which is a vital factor for a single noblewoman to survive in her claustrophobic and decorous society. Although disappointed by Rokujō not being a substitute for Fujitubo, he does not know how to correct his hasty error. Both Rokujō and Genji are mutually doomed by their different expectations.

Too modest to express her desire for the respectability of Genji's formal wife, Rokujō only compels him to hide their affair from the public. Yet having already lost interest in their affair, Genji can be too careless about helping her need. The author suggests the lovers' psychological incompatibility in the aesthetically delightful morning scene:

After many times urged, Genji at last comes out of Rokujō's room, feeling very sleepy and lethargic. One of her maids lifts part of the folding-shutter, seeming to invite her mistress to watch his departure. Rokujō pulls aside the bed-curtain, tossing her raven hair that reached the floor back from her shoulders and looks out into the garden. Her gaze follows Genji strolling into the garden. So many morning glories are blooming on the border that he stops for a while to enjoy their beauty. As he is nearing the portico the maid who opens the shutter comes to greet him. She wears light purple pantaloons that exquisitely matched the season [of autumn] and place. Charmed by her beauty, when Genji urges her to sit for a chat, she cautiously obeys, tilting her strikingly beautiful black hair. "It is a shame to leave a beautiful morning glory without 'plucking it.' What can I do?" While improvising a *waka*, he snatches her hand. Immediately, she responds. "Leaving in the morning mist, you do not seem to care for the flower (my mistress)." She successfully averts his sexual advancements, when a handsome page walks in the garden full of the flowers covered with the dew (Ch. "Yūgao 夕顔." *The Genji* Vol. 1. 222. trans. by Waley⁹⁰ 59)

Rokujō is still under the spell of sensuality. Actually, Genji and Rokujō have much in common. Both are the disciples of aesthetics and sensuality, and Rokujō

⁹⁰ This scene is renowned for demonstrating Shikibu's literary aesthetics. I think that Arthur Waley captures the scene best in English, and so I use it here.

has more profound comprehension of the arts, which he deeply admires. Yet her passion for aesthetics and sensuality are also her weaknesses, as she cannot resist the handsome imperial male. Here, Shikibu suggests the futility of her trying to rekindle Genji's passion, as he is delighted in finding a diversion with her pretty maid.

Genji's lighthearted jest with Rokujō's maid shows his intention to make her a servant sexual mate, a *meshiudo* 召人. Wherever he goes, he never misses the opportunity of "plucking a flower: *hana o oru* 花を折る" in the Heian phrase. Rokujō's maid politely evades his gallant overtures, deliberately misinterpreting Genji's word "flower," which means her, for her mistress as she asks indirectly: "why do you leave her so early?" Her gracious response to Genji proves that Rokujō is cautious and intelligent enough to choose tactful and loyal maids so that they will not meddle with the affair of their mistress. Rokujō is probably the most capable of all Genji's women of managing the household.

His two wives Aoi and Murasaki are unable to prevent his seduction of their maids and presumably turn a blind eye to Genji's sexual flings, as Heian noblewomen were probably advised to do. Although *meshiudo* further complicated the sexual rivalries of multiple partners of noblemen, there were few records about them in Heian literature. *Meshiudo* remained morally ambivalent in Heian noble society but were also regarded as part of petty household matters not worthy to record in journals and official documents. Shikibu is one of the very few Heian writers who frankly depicted noblemen's flings with *meshiudo*.

This aesthetically constructed passage illustrates that Genji is Rokujō's illusion of happiness. Her beautiful household has eventually exhausted the interest and curiosity of the dashing and flamboyant youth and his visits become less frequent, as the narrator reports:

Where is his blind passion he had while she was unattainable?

Being so sensitive and serious, she is easily tormented by the gossip that the older woman is seduced and betrayed by her younger lover. (Ch. "Yūgao 夕顔." The *Genji* Vol. I. 220)

Having gloried in being the favorite consort of the crown prince, Rokujo has never experienced her defeat until now.

Yet we have learned how precarious a polygynist's mate's position was in her society. The futility of holding the polygynist husband's perpetual attention was already exposed in *Kagerō Diary*. She was known for poetry and beauty, which captivated her husband for a long time, as she records her husband's ardent courtship. Yet as soon as she was pregnant for the first time, he resumed his promiscuous habits and eventually ceased to visit her. In the *Flowering Fortunes*, the imperial consorts' rigorously competed to obtain the favor of the emperors who had as brief passion as fireworks, and only the obligations to produce an heir and the mutual political interest with their regents and the fathers of those consorts bound them to their daughters. The beautiful and intelligent Rokujō did enthrall the crown prince. Had he come to the throne, more women would have been sent to him and taken over his affection from Rokujō. It is not far from Heian reality that all Genji's women suffer his neglect sooner or later, including

his favorite wife Murasaki. Although Rokujō is not as pliable as Murasaki, the personality difference mounts little to his sexual proclivity. Neither does the degree of the wife's devotion and commitment to her husband. Genji merely takes his women's jealousy as annoyance and expects them to be inured to his infidelity.

Although conscientious Heian noblemen knew that their daughters and kinswomen suffered the heartless neglect and desertion of their fellow men, they were accustomed to think of and treat the wronged women not as social but as individual problems. They had to protect their right to a variety of women. Hearing the gossip over his brother's widow and Genji's sexual involvement and his subsequent neglect of her, the gentle-hearted father Emperor chastises his son:

It grieves me to hear that you have been treating her casually as a mere kept woman. I feel (her daughter) the princess is like my own daughter. Don't treat them heartlessly. If you keep acting so flippantly, you will eventually provoke public hatred....Don't humiliate women. Treat them fairly. Don't earn their grudge.

(Ch. "Aoi 葵." The *Genji* Vol. 2. 12)

This is the wisdom of the imperial polygamist, who retains at least six consorts without our knowledge of his possible sexual flings with women courtiers.

Genji's father continuously suffers a classical polygynous triangle of imperial family members. The Emperor duly married Kokiden 弘微殿, the daughter of the Minister of Right, for a political alliance and fulfilled his duty of producing an heir with her. He nevertheless was happy to create another family of his own with Genji and his mother Kiritubo 桐壺, who made Kokiden jealous and

insecure. Suffering the deep jealousy of Kokiden, Genji's mother died of stress. Despite the glory of becoming the mother of the next emperor, Kokiden never forgives her imperial spouse, his deceased favorite and her stepson Genji. Kokiden and the Emperor are permanently estranged. The Emperor now has another new consort, Fujitubo, who is sent to him to replace Kirutibo. The ruler of a polygynous society offers his son the advice of what he never can do himself, satisfying all plural partners. Yet it only humiliates Rokujō that her brother-in-law Emperor knows that his son has easily seduced and spurned the once-chaste imperial widow.

The Gentle Victim of Three Obediences

Yūgao 夕顔 and Rokujō enter together in the chapter of “Yūgao” as the binary opposite types of women, signifying feminine passivity and aggression. Rokujō has “unfortunate” traits for a woman: a mind of her own, pride and jealousy, which drive the “Shining Prince” away and served Shikibu's contemporary audience as the antithesis to their ideal gender behavior. By contrast, Yūgao could be an ample example to teach Heian noblewomen that yielding and compliance are the best strategies to bind to them to their desirable man like Genji, even if briefly. Genji never forgets his youthful ephemeral love for Yūgao and later creates his Ideal Feminine model out of a young girl, Murasaki, whom we will study in Chapter 4. Yūgao is an excellent example of the three obediences. Although she nonetheless shares with Rokujō and Murasaki the vulnerability and doom of a woman without male relatives in Heian noble society, Rokujō's wealth allows her to choose an independent life, which Yūgao can never imagine.

Shikibu has already prepared readers for Yūgao's entry in the previous chapter "The Sacred Tree 箒木," in which Genji's cousin To no Chujō 頭中将 tells him and a group of young noblemen of his regret over the sudden banishment of his mistress. To no Chujō describes Yūgao's personality as *shiremono* しれ者, "an idiot". This is an insult for a woman with whom he had a daughter together during their three-year relationship. Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 kindly comments that *shiremono* means being shy and deferential (qtd. in *The Genji* 源氏 Vol. 1. 157). Yet Komashyaku finds To no Chujō contemptuous toward his "undemanding mistress" (185).

Is Yūgao truly undemanding? In To no Chujō's reminiscence, Yūgao is an insecure kept woman worried about the exhaustion of his interest in her and their daughter but tries hard to address her concern in the least offensive manners. He admits that he neglected her and did not know her fright by his first wife's blackmail. Yūgao constantly sends To no Chujō *waka* to remind him of his responsibility for the second family and bring him back to their household. This is a familiar scenario of Heian polygynous dynamics. The author of *Kagerō Diary* also continued to send her husband *waka* to urge his visits.

Although To no Chujō thinks that his wife's blackmail frightened Yūgao and prompted her to disappear from his sight, the blackmail was in fact Yūgao's last straw, as nuanced in her *waka*:

My sleeves are already soaked with tears, but I am currently
enduring the autumn storm.

うち払う袖も露けきとこなつに嵐ふきそむ秋も来にけり

(Ch. “The Sacred Tree 簀木.” The *Genji* 源氏 Vol. 1. 159)

Yūgao is not Rokujō’s match in *waka*, which still sufficiently communicates her grievances. The “autumn” is the conventional metaphor for the exhaustion of male passion after the heat of summer, as often used in numerous works of women’s poetry; it even appears in the pre-Heian collection of the *Ten Thousand Leaves* to reproach their men’s neglect gently. Yūgao also hints at To no Chujō’s wife’s blackmail with the word “storm,” but her poetic conceit is too subtle for the obtuse and oblivious master to notice. Finding her situation hopeless, she escaped from the pursuit of To no Chujō’s wife and terminated her relationship with her husband as well. From our current perspective she might be preposterously timid. The daughter of a low-rank aristocrat orphaned young, Yūgao remains powerless against class-gender discriminations. She thinks that she is in no position to complain her master about his wife and even to plead for his protection.

Shikibu understands that polygyny demoralizes women and men. The women become ruthlessly competitive, whereas the object of their possessive determination, their mate, remains indolent, vain and self-loving. Genji’s father Emperor, his son and his cousin To no Chujō want to maintain their plural marriages, courteously refusing to understand their women’s frustration, insecurity and self-delusion. None of the polygynists came up with the perfect solution to satisfy their multiple wives. Actually, in patriarchal ideology the men’s satisfaction precedes the women’s. Worst of all, the weakness of the polygynist is his incapability to comprehend his mates’ condition, preoccupied with the rivalry and competition which he never experiences. Blaming the victim of his neglect,

To no Chujō reveals himself to be a typical high-born man assessing the woman's character according to his convenient moral logic to evade his guilt. To no Chujō's wife's blackmail of her rival is at least understandable when two women are left in his hellish "harem" ambiance. The wife should explode her wrath to her husband but, knowing the futility of combating against the norm of polygynous matrimony, directs it to her poor inferior co-partner.

To no Chujō's wife's blackmail confirms what we have already learned from *Kagerō Diary*, that polygyny puts the husband under the constant surveillance of his wives. Although the Heian noblewoman usually stayed inside the household, she maintained an extensive spy network with her servants to get constant information on her spouse's relations with other women. The author of *Kagerō Diary* had her servant stalk her husband Kaneie's carriage to find out where he would stop after her house. To her chagrin, he went to a new mistress. The wife's spying would never terminate his affairs, and the information only continued to torment her. Yet she naturally wanted to know who her rival was, the degree of their intimacy and the frequency of his visits. Despite her open hostility, Kagero does not report that she ever blackmailed any of Kaneie's new wives as To no Chujō's first wife does to Yūgao. Even if she did so, she probably chose not to write about it.

We accept that Yūgao disappears from To no Chujō's sight with no plans. What else could she have done? Had she stayed with To no Chujō, her circumstances would not have gotten better but worse. When she meets Genji, Shikibu shows that a woman like her, totally dependent on men, has no choice but

to repeat the same polygynous relations. This time is worse as Yūgao attracts the *mononoke* of a mysterious jealous woman and appears to be murdered by her. Had she refused to accompany Genji's reckless escapade, Yūgao would have saved herself. She is the victim of the three obediences rather than of his demon lover.

Believing in the presence of the *mononoke* in their society, Shikibu's audience must have concluded that Genji's most jealous woman Rokujō murdered her. Although Shikibu gives us no impression that Rokujō must be well informed of Genji's sexual flings, how can Genji escape the jealous and watchful eye of his mistress with her efficient employees living in Yūgao's neighborhood? His visits to the new mistress' household must have aroused Rokujō's jealousy and detest of the unfortunate lowly rival to the same extent of the female *mononoke* having dragged Yūgao in front of an appalled Genji. Isn't he possibly too upset to recognize her?

Genji's encounter with Yūgao is a deceptively enchanting episode. He is only overjoyed at discovering a beauty where she is unlikely to be, a bustling low-class neighborhood, when he visits his old nurse on the way to meet Rokujō in the summer evening. Genji is charmed by white goat flowers, called Yūgao 夕顔, blooming, covering the trail in front of a shabby house, as he is pleased by morning glories in Rokujō's mansion. His extreme sensitivity to the beauty of flowers corresponds with his quick eroticism toward women. The white evening flowers foreshadow the delicate beauty and evanescent life of the mistress in the house. In response to his request for the flower, it is sent to him with the fan on

which a *waka* is written, “I wonder if the gentleman delighted with Yūgao is the ‘Shining Prince’?”(Ch. “Yūgao 夕顔.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 214). The fan is not a utilitarian tool for cooling, but it is painted beautifully to use as a communication means between lovers in the *Genji*. After our hero and Oborozukiyo 朧月夜 spend their first night together, they exchange their fans before bidding farewell. The seventeen-year-old Genji immediately is captivated by the flower and the *waka* on the fan, correctly identifying them as the invitation to an affair.

After To no Chujō’s wife’s jealousy, Yūgao seems too oblivious of the predictable jealousy of women surrounding a more glorious imperial playboy such as Genji. Probably, she and her household employees are too desperate to alleviate their impoverished life. Yūgao is too modest and passive to invite a male stranger, but she has maids who can play fortune hunters looking for a new patron for their mistress and themselves. Servants and nurses have influential roles in dealing with their mistress and her lovers, helping both of them or one of them for better or worse outcomes. Genji forces his way to Fujitubo’s chamber with her gentlewoman’s aid. It is likely that Yūgao’s women watch outside and urge their mistress to send him a *waka*. Genji has no hesitation to accept the invitation of this mysterious woman looking as if she is hardly out of childhood even though she is nineteen years old, two years older than he is.

Yūgao is an accidental diversion for Genji, who is now reluctant to visit both his first wife Aoi and mistress Rokujō, the two high-born women habituated to reproach his neglect. He wants a brief respite from these imperious women with this new gentle lover and takes extreme precaution. He is aware that his

jealous lover Rokujō living within the neighborhood might detect his visits to Yūgao. Secondly, the imperial prince does not want to scandalize the public for having a mistress discovered out of nowhere. Moreover, he does not think it worthwhile to disclose his identity to Yūgao and her maids with no intention to commit himself to them for long. Preposterously, Genji puts on a cloth-mask to meet Yūgao – Rokujō would never accept such an insult. Yūgao also feels insulted but never shows it to Genji, who later learns her grievance posthumously from her maid Ukon 右近. Obsessed with his seemingly agreeable attitude toward whatever he does and says, Genji is convinced, “Even it is bizarre [to have a lover with the mask], she is gladly obedient to me” (Ch. “Yūgao 夕顔.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 229).

On the surface, Yūgao looks like Olga in Chekhov’s short story “Darling,” who perfectly adjusts herself to the man to whom she devotes herself. Olga sees no meaning in life outside her relations with men and offers them selfless love. Chekhov might have believed such a woman as Olga existed, as Genji believes that he has miraculously believes the same type of woman in Yūgao, not understanding her destitution. Shikibu’s genius is her depiction of the psychological discrepancy between man and woman recurrent in the *Genji*. Komashyaku calls the *Genji* “the story of misunderstanding in [hetero] sexual relations” (147).

Genji has no intention to make a woman below his status one of his wives but fears that To no Chujō will discover his ex-mistress and claims her. His only option to keep Yūgao for himself is to make her a *meshiudo*, a servant lover in his

household. To become an imperial male's servant-lover *meshiudo* can nevertheless be a catastrophic fate for a noblewoman with the loss of her reputation and of her household. In the worst case, after the *meshiudo* exhausts his interest in her lover's residence, she has nowhere to go but remains his servant. As long as she keeps her household, she can at least fall back on it. Shikibu's literary rival Izumi Shikibu did not hesitate to live with her imperial lover as a *meshiudo* and must have infuriated her as degrading for a middle-rank noblewoman. Shikibu has no illusions about the duration of Genji's delight in Yūgao's sweet demeanor and she must either disillusion him or take her out of his sight. She chooses the latter and has Genji pine for her perpetually.

Although Shikibu's audience knew that the full moon of August fifteenth was believed to be an inauspicious time for lovers to meet, Genji remains obtuse, caught with a sudden wild whim of taking Yūgao into a secluded love nest, an unused mansion owned by the imperial family so that no one will discover his elopement (Ch. "Yūgao 夕顔." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 229). He nevertheless sensibly chooses the dawn of the day for his own reason to avoid the curious public eye, taking the reluctant Yūgao and her nurse Ukon outside with the oxen carriage.

The communication discrepancy between Genji and Yūgao comes up again on the way to the ghostly mansion, still dark outside. Yūgao's young new lover is in an excellent mood and composes his impromptu *waka*: "Were lovers not foolish since the beginning of the world? I have never known such a rash eloping at the break of the day." Yūgao is not amused at all. Not knowing his motive of kidnapping her from the household, she promptly responds to

communicate her anxiety in her *waka*: “I am like the moon moving toward the mountain [a metaphor for Genji] not knowing what menace awaiting me there; I might disappear in the dark” (Ch. “Yūgao.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 234). The *waka* indeed foreshadows her impending death in the ghostly mansion. The stark contrast is Genji’s full delight in pursuing his pleasure and Yūgao’s timid panic and regret of allowing the stranger to abduct her.

The abduction scenario will repeat when Genji moves Young Murasaki into his mansion, choosing the dawn again to hide his clandestine act. Although Yūgao is much older than the ten-year-old Murasaki and has an intuition of the coming menace, she is doomed by her own diffidence to her social and gender superior, which provokes the jealousy of the mysterious female *mononoke* as ingratiating herself with Genji, her proclaimed lover. In the pitch dark of midnight, Genji sees the first *mononoke* in his life in the form of a beautiful and towering woman shouting and dragging the trembling Yūgao: “I adore you more than anyone. But you have not visited me for long. Your affair with such a worthless girl is hateful” (Ch. “Yūgao.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 238). Terrified, he brandishes his sword to wipe out the evil spirit before he discovers Yūgao already lying cold and lifeless.

Like Rokujō’s *mononoke*, Shikibu leaves the first *mononoke* in the text ambiguous in identity but abrupt in effect. Genji believes that he has seen the *mononoke* but cannot identify who she is. Yet later, he can immediately identify Rokujō’s *mononoke* seizing Aoi, Murasaki and the Third Princess. After Yūgao’s death, the same *mononoke* again appears in Genji’s dream and convinces him that

“the evil female spirit falls in love with my good looks” (Ch. “Yūgao.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 268). He uses the same smug reason again when he is almost drowned during the storm in the seashore of Suma 須磨, believing “the evil sea spirit takes fancy of me and tried to drag me into the ocean” (Ch. “The Exile in Suma 須磨.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 209). Genji’s narcissism strangely never offended later generations of readers, who saw it as the inalienable privilege of the imperial prince.

The traditional view of the unknown female *mononoke* as Rokujō has no longer been well supported in recent *Genji* criticism. Nor has the *mononoke* been unanimously accepted as Yūgao’s murderer. Komashyaku thinks that a timid Yūgao dies of heart failure, frightened by Genji’s reaction to the *mononoke* of swinging the sword when her fear reached the height (95). Conspicuously, while he takes up with Yūgao, the narrator keeps reporting on Aoi’s family’s grievances over Genji’s promiscuity as an unreliable son-in-law and Rokujo’s anxiety over his neglect. Occasionally, the narrator hints that he has more women than the reader knows. If so, might the mysterious female *mononoke* be a collective spirit of Genji’s women in a frenzied rage at the pitiful victim dominating Genji’s whole attention?

Shikibu’s eloquent depiction has also seduced generations of readers into commiserating with Genji on his short-lived love and overlooking his self-absorbed grief:

She was so lovingly delicate. The clever and disobedient woman is unpalatable. Very pleasing is a soft-spoken woman....I myself

prefer a gentle and innocent woman almost easily fooled – modest and submissive to the husband. If I can make a woman’s personality I desire [one like her], we will be an ideal couple.

(Ch. “Yūgao.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 262)

Genji alludes to his distaste for Aoi and Rokujō, both of who are exalted for their beauty and dignity but are not as meek as Yūgao. It is Shikibu’s subtle sarcasm of the high-born man’s egotistical wish for a pliable and yielding woman but his lack of interest in who she actually is.

Genji never informs the rest of Yūgao’s household employees about the death of their mistress, leaving them in the cold to avoid a public scandal. He says that he wants to adopt her little girl Tamakazura but never keeps his words until she is discovered years later as a beautiful, nubile maid who captivates his sexual interest. Shikibu knows that the imperial prince’s sexual indulgence has prompted the catastrophic death of the lowly woman, and her desertion of her daughter and her house employees are moral delinquencies. Her society would not challenge the high-born man’s impunity. The author concludes the episode of Yūgao with the narrator’s cautious and teasing apology for her reserved, differential depiction of Genji:

Because I felt sympathy for what the prince had taken pains to conceal, I remain silent in discretion. But I have been accused of fabricating a story by constantly praising him as if the imperial prince acts perfectly. That is now why I exposed everything about

his delinquency like this. I now cannot help being accused for
slandering him. (Ch. “Yūgao.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 269)

Shikibu’s most literary candor about her hero in the *Genji* is present here. Her “twin-sister” narrator acknowledges that the author’s characterization of Genji is affected by her own gender-class consciousness. As a woman courtier, Shikibu must pay homage to her fictional superior while occasionally asserting her own view point that the imperial prince is just as flawed as every man. Remote from Shikibu’s stratified society, we now tend to take this view for granted, bewildered by her seemingly inconsistent depiction, but she cannot help it. Did Shikibu’s audience turn a deaf ear to the author’s rare moment of rebuking their hero after vicariously enjoying his larger-than-life adventures? Unfortunately, this passage has not been discussed much in past *Genji* criticism.

Neither To no Chujō nor Genji have insight into Yūgao’s lowly position and impoverished life. Yūgago tries to support her household with a suitable rich noble patron, but had she lived longer, Genji also would have eventually neglected her like his cousin, but her death only leaves him the fond memory of their brief mysterious affair. Yūgao’s story is in the end more of a warning than an example, but does not appear an egregious warning to Shikibu’s audience. Genji’s grief has also seduced numerous readers to believe in the power of Yūgao’s charm of the imperial prince.

It might be surprising for the current reader that Shikibu’s contemporary reader, the author of *Sarashina Diary* 更級日記, fondly recalls her lowly-ranked heroines Yūgao and Ukifune 浮船, both of who do not seem to be happy with

their lovers and masters, as objects of her desire in her youth (303). The daughter of a middle-rank aristocrat used to fantasize about drawing the attention of an imperial prince some day. In her reminiscence, the author mocks herself as a youthful daydreamer, who settled for a husband of her own rank. The mature writer probably understood Shikibu's realism that neither Yūgao nor Ukifune remains the high-born man's mistress for long, but their brief glory was even beyond the reach of the regular middle-rank noblewoman. The author of *Sarashina Diary* exposes the norm of her time when the *Genji* was written that as the hair-splitting class distinction determined Heian noble matrimony, an ambitious and intelligent girl had no chance to rise above her natal status.

The Shining Prince's obsession with a lowly woman, Yūgao; and an orphaned girl, Murasaki; appeared to be Cinderella stories⁹¹ in Heian stratified society. Yet Shikibu does not believe in the Cinderella story, her realism always defeating the reader's wishful expectations. Yūgao dies prematurely and Murasaki is later replaced by Genji's new bride and her social superior, the Third Princess. Neither woman does anything to offend Genji, but they do not know how to save themselves from the trap of his self-loving demands. By contrast, Rokujō at least recognizes Genji's ruthless sexual drive and leaves him after struggling with her own lingering sensuality.

The Ox-Carriage Battle

Five years after Yūgao's death, Genji in his early twenties has achieved the apotheosis of his sexual conquest with the growing number of his women, in

⁹¹ The term *fairy tale* 物語 was used in the *Genji* and Heian noble society to mean something blessed with unusual happiness. Yet not all English fairy tales end happily. Here, to specify the content, a Cinderella story is used.

addition to Aoi, an unappetizing Suetumuhana 未摘花, voluptuous Oborozukiyo 朧月夜, Young Murasaki and numerous unknown mistresses only implied by the narrator. *Kagerō Diary* suggests that usually in Heian noble society, most wives lived separately and avoided contact with their rivals if they could. In the *Flowering Fortunes*, imperial consorts in the rear palace had separate apartments and, if necessarily, had indirect contact with each other through gentlewomen. If the episode was true, Empress Anshi was an unusual bold woman among her peers, peeping through a hole in the wall between her apartment and that of the new consort, whose beauty aroused her wild jealousy to the extent of having pieces of clays thrown at her. Murasaki later meets Genji's two wives, Akashi and the Third Princess, but numerous Heian multiple wives probably never met each other in life to reduce their rivalries and maintain an equilibrium in their polygynous families.

The author of *Kagerō Diary* found that the longer she remained in her marriage, the more difficult it became to endure the growing number of her husband's women. While she feels that she feels getting older, feminine beauty enticed her husband's appetite for more wives, and the rant of the chaste wife only annoyed him. It was an actual state of Heian marriage that the author and her husband kept drifting away for years before he finally ceased visiting her. Shikibu nevertheless dramatically ends Genji and Rokujō's relationship prompted by his two mates' battle on the street. Rokujō is in despair over the gossip of Genji's cooled passion toward her, which has been widely known in noble society. The shame, disappointment and thwarted love give her ample reason to meditate on

terminating their relationship before he finally puts a stop to his visits. When her daughter is chosen to be the *saigū* at Ise Shrine, it gives her a valid excuse for breaking up with Genji to accompany her daughter there. Rokujō's decision to rebuff a lover is an unusual move for a Heian noblewoman, but Shikibu decides not to let her go unremarkably before the audience. The problems with Genji's promiscuity should be illuminated with a spectacular clash of his women at the Kamo Festival 賀茂祭, the ultimate Heian festival.

Aoi Festival 葵祭 is the other name for the Kamo Festival because the emblem of the river deity is a plant named *afui*, a kind of hollyhock, which also has a double meaning, "to meet." The festival is dedicated to the deity of the Kamo River since its main attraction is the imperial procession of the virgin priestess *saiin* chosen from imperial princesses to meet the river deity. The entourage in the procession decorated their huts with the leaves of *afui* to signify the meeting between them and the deity. The meaning of *afui* also extended to a good occasion of seeing the crowds coming to the annual event of the grand *saiin* procession. The masses enjoyed spotting and identifying the remarkable oxen carriages decorated magnificently. The lovers hiding inside the carriages to watch the procession were often the object of public scandals. Shikibu's rival Izumi Shikibu's story of riding with her imperial lover in the carriage during the festival and attracting the public attention more than the procession must have disgusted our decorous author.

The awkward encounters of the multiple wives were also familiar incidents, as the author of *Kagerō Diary* records that she happened to come

across the first wife of her husband. Neither woman seems to have met each other all their lives but occasionally exchanged *waka* through their servants. The accidental encounter also compelled them to exchange their *waka* insinuating mutual polite hostility. They possibly drew the attention of the curious public waiting for some trouble to entertain them, but they used no violence. This episode in *Kagerō Diary* possibly inspired Shikibu to write the encounter of Aoi and Rokujō, Genji's two high-born women's hostile trains vying with each other.

Aoi typifies Shikibu's poor impression of high-born women as vain, spoiled, self-centered and lethargic, but she has her own cause of not having fulfilled her desire owing to parental interference. Genji and Aoi's union typifies the two major interests of Heian nobility trusting their pragmatism more than the sentiments of the couple, family alliance and procreation. Genji's father Emperor wanted his favorite son to have a prominent guardian with his marriage to the daughter of his political ally, and the Minister of the Left was eager to maintain his political dominance by offering his daughter. The marriage of their children fulfilled their mutual needs. Yet, sought after by Genji's stepmother Kokiden for her son Suzaku's consort, Aoi probably would have been happier to go to the rear palace. The sixteen year-old maiden was embittered by the loss of her fortune to be the empress and by her marriage to a twelve-year-old boy looking much more immature than she was.

Aoi sulks and drives him into the arms of other women. Yet Aoi is not the ultimate cause of his promiscuity. None of his other devoted women can bind him to them for long. Genji is one of those unsteady noblemen who love their women on their terms. It is more difficult to sympathize with Genji than Aoi for their wretched marriage. When Genji complains of her indifferent attitude to him, she is at least honest in response:

“Yes, it is painful to know others do not care about what happens to you.”

Glancing at her vexed husband over the shoulder, she still is capable of impressing him with her imperious beauty. (Ch. “Young Murasaki 若紫.”

The *Genji* Vol. 1. 300)

Aoi has sufficient intelligence to complain back about Genji’s neglect, although some critics suspect that she is retarded because she seldom speaks and never composes a *waka*, a basic accomplishment of noblewomen. Aoi’s lack of interest in composing a *waka* might be merely a lack of interest in pleasing her spouse.

Virtually neglected by Genji, Rokujō and Aoi have no cause to antagonize each other until Aoi gets pregnant ten years after their marriage and alarms Rokujō. Considering their cool relationship, Rokujō did not expect that Aoi could have even conceived Genji’s child. Shikibu uses an irony of the human mechanism with Aoi’s accidental pregnancy, as she shows no joy over the prospect of being the mother of his child. The news of her rival’s pregnancy devastates Rokujō who already suffers the lack of Genji’s infrequent visits.

Childbearing was the best means for a polygynist’s wife to elevate her worth in her husband’s heart, but it also disrupted the hierarchy of the co-wives

and aggravated their vigorous rivalries. In *Kagerō Diary*, we find a characteristic jealous response of the co-wife to the other wives' fertility through the frank confession of the author. As the second wife, Kagerō managed to remain cordial to the first wife, her predecessor, but still expressed her ambivalent feelings toward her rival's prolific motherhood with five children in contrast to herself with one son. Her excessively candid delight over the death of her new rival's son has perplexed generations of readers even though they remained sympathetic toward her grief over her husband's womanizing and neglect of her.

Heian co-wives' mutual antagonism sometimes transferred to their servants' territorial loyalty. Again, the author of *Kagerō Diary* records domestic squabbles between the retainers of hers and her husband's first wife's when both wives were living in the neighborhood. She quietly moved to a different house, perhaps feeling diffident about her status as the second wife (204). Aoi and Rokujō's carriage clash was thus probably not surprising to Shikibu's audience. Behind the screens inside the carriages, neither side would see the other nor shout at their opponent. The open battle of mutual altercation and violence soon spread as part of the habitual gossips in the small realm of minority elite society in the capital.

Shikibu can be a merciless writer. When neither woman is in the best condition, she drags them to the street crowded at the festival to expose their problems. Rokujō wants to see Genji riding on his horse in the imperial procession but fears to attract the masses and aggravate the gossip about their relations already circulating in the capital. It is her ironic mistake to choose a

shabby carriage to hide her imperial identity but her guise is insufficient. Despite her morning sickness, Aoi is obligated to watch her husband in the procession with little sense of appreciation. When Aoi's carriage arrives on the street late owing to the mistress' reluctance, her retainers discover a train of Rokujō's carriages blocking their view. When a high-born woman tries to disguise herself in public, it would be a decorous gesture to leave her alone. Yet Aoi's male retainers decide to pretend that they are removing an unremarkable train of the carriages to give their mistress a better view of the procession.

Already drunk at the celebration of the festival, the men on both Aoi and Rokujō's sides are easily provoked into a combative mode. When Aoi's carriage drivers start pushing away the shabby carriages and outrage Rokujō's men, the latter start shrieking that their carriages must not be treated rudely and try to push Aoi's carriages back. In response, Aoi's men yell back, "You cannot use the Prince Genji [for the protection of your mistress]" (Ch. "Aoi 葵." The *Genji* Vol. 2. 17). This innuendo is an obvious contempt for Rokujō's status as Genji's unloved companion and paralyzes the decorous matron with fury.

Shikibu presents a brilliant contrast between Rokujō in tearful despair watching from a distance and her unwittingly cheerful and vain lover on the horse passing through the admiring crowds and recognizing his wife's carriage. The gossip follows this baneful triangle. It is an entertaining gossip in the small realm of the minority elite society that his proudly pregnant wife has insulted his mistress of her husband on the street, which is ready to accept that Rokujō turns into the vengeful *mononoke*.

One of those viewers is Princess Asagao, Genji's cousin, whom he has been courting for years. She is alarmed by Rokujō's public humiliation. Despite Genji's aggressive courtship, the violent battle vicariously fought between his two women quickly forewarns her not to accept Genji's proposal. Asago vows not to repeat their fate. The amiable cousin princess nevertheless still maintains their family socialization, not totally cutting off their correspondence. Shikibu offers Asagao's rejection of Genji as what Rokujō could have chosen, instead of allowing Genji to treat her as a low-maintenance companion.

The woman trapped in the humiliation of an unloved mate was a familiar sad scene in Heian noble society, as recorded in *Kagerō Diary*. Once Kagerō heard the sound of the carriage, in which her husband and his new mistress sat, passing by her house. He obviously thought that he did nothing wrong as a regular polygynist. Yet his wife and her servants thought that he and his new mistress blatantly flaunted their intimacy. Speechless and dazed, Kagerō wished for death (144). Unlike Kaneie, Genji is a discreet and considerate polygynist, who sends Rokujō a letter of apology for his long absence for taking care of Aoi's pregnancy. Yet never suffering for long, he quickly forgets his guilt. Both Kaneie and Genji share characteristically willful detachment from their mates' torments in polygynous relations. They are not likely to experience the loss of mate as long as they can afford to retain a sufficient number of women. Not being capable of sympathizing with others, such a sheltered high-born woman as Aoi also has little idea about the depth of her rival's torment perhaps even if it were explained to her.

Shikibu's deep empathy for Rokujō is evident in having her compose the most complex and ambivalent *waka* in the text:

Didn't I know that my sleeves would be soaked with tears on the
 path of love just as a peasant soils himself in the muddy rice-pad?
 袖ぬるるこいじとかつは知りながら下り立つ田子のみずから
 ぞうき. (Ch. "Aoi葵" The *Genji* Vol. 2. 28)

It is Shikibu's pessimistic belief that "*koiji* こいじ, the path of love," is inevitably filled with sorrow, grief and despair, just as the peasant gets into "the muddy rice-pad" for his labor. The course of Rokujō's relationship with Genji has been sordid. Yet it is the noblewoman Shikibu's unfortunate prejudice to equate the high-born woman's sense of being demeaned by her callous lover with the life of the lowly positioned peasant.

While admiring Rokujō's skillful *waka*, Genji expresses the high-born man's characteristically self-centered desire: "Each woman has something to offer, beauty or character. I am sorry I have no woman to discard or focus on" (Ch. "Aoi." The *Genji* Vol. 2. 29). Genji's pleasure with women is the cliché of the polygynist ruler living in the rear palace full of his consorts. Yet like the polygynous ruler, he has not figured out how to balance his sexual dominance and his peace of mind. Shikibu suggests that Genji has inherited nothing from his pitiful mother Kiritubo, who died of the stress over other consorts' jealousy, but her father's imperious sexuality and his obtuse penchant to the multiple consorts' rivalries even after the death of his favorite. Yet the conventional view of Genji has been sympathetic toward his deprivation of maternal love by his mother's

premature death and tolerant toward his illicit passion for Fujitubo who resembles his deceased mother. Yūgao's death temporarily devastates Genji, but he does not see that his mother and Yūgao suffered the same perpetual problem of women's rivalries and their men's neglect. He is too vain to take the rumor seriously that he and Aoi have invited Rokujō's wrath and her furious *mononoke* tormenting his wife on the verge of giving birth.

Aoi's death in childbirth was not uncommon in Heian noble society. The *Flowering Fortunes* attributes the mothers' peril and pain to *mononoke* and reports on numerous cases of their sudden deaths. In her *Diary*, Shikibu also describes her mistress Empress Shōshi in labor tormented by the *mononoke*, despite her professed denial of its existence in her *Collection of Waka* (Fujioka 171). Shikibu uses the conventional belief in the graphic depiction of Rokujō's living *mononoke* tormenting the guilty couple of Genji and Aoi.

The excruciating pang suddenly alters Aoi's usual undemonstrative and scornful attitudes and alarms Genji: "Please stop the priests' prayer. They are torturing me. I did not want to come here." Genji now is horror-stricken by the invisible Rokujō improvising *waka* through Aoi's mouth – the admixture of his two mates in their troubled relationships with him:

My anguished soul traveled this far. Bring back my soul hovering
in the air by making a knot in the hem of your clothes.

なげきわび空に乱るるわが魂を結びとどめよしたがひのつま

(Ch. "Aoi 葵." The *Genji* Vol. 2. 33-34)

It was a folk belief that the soul could be brought back to the body by making a knot in the hem of the kimono. The *mononoke* addresses Genji as “*tuma* つま (in Japanese characters)”, or “夫 (in Chinese characters)”, meaning *my husband*, alluding to Vignette 110 in the *Tales of Ise*:

A man secretly keeps visiting a woman, who sends him a letter, “I saw you in my dream.” The man writes her back, “Because I constantly think about you, my soul went to you. If you dream about me again, please make a knot in the hem of your clothes so that my soul will stay in my body.” (Katagiri 220)

Familiar with the *Ise*, Shikibu’s audience would immediately identify the *mononoke*’s allusion to the mystery of the lover’s dream. Yet Rokujō’s *mononoke* and Genji constitute a parody of the *Ise* lovers, pointing to his problematic relations with his wife and mistress. Moreover, the gender relations are reversed, the *mononoke* demanding Genji to restore her soul to the body by tying the hem of his clothes. When the *mononoke* ignores his feeble challenge of questioning her identity, the author is more interested in mocking him than exposing the identity of her mysterious agent.

Aoi’s parents and maids watching Genji from a distance cannot probably see the *mononoke* but sense what is happening to them. It is his fear that they will blame him for Aoi’s torment by the *mononoke* owing to his promiscuity and earning his mistress’ hatred and jealousy. With Genji’s astonishment and panic, exposing the high-born man’s incapability of dealing with the *mononoke*

presenting a woman's exasperation in polygynous relations, Shikibu undermines his moral credibility.

After the episode of Rokujō's living *mononoke*, Genji's glorious sexual conquest is tarnished and he never attracts new desirous lovers. He still catches women with a low degree of sensuality, like Akashi and Hana Chiru Sato. Akashi is the victim of her father's ambition to marry his daughter to the imperial prince, and Hana Chiru Sato accepts Genji's patronage for economic comforts and social respectability. Setouchi correctly insists that Rokujō loves Genji most. Rokujō desires nothing but their exclusive relations. Sensual love nevertheless costs her most dear price, her own moral pride as a chaste widow.

Without Aoi's death, Rokujō and Genji's relations still would have gradually ceased. Yet sensuality and companionship are difficult for a lonely widow like Rokujō to give up abruptly and impels her pursuit of binding him to her again. After Aoi's death, Rokujō sends Genji the most insincere letter of condolence with a fresh chrysanthemum: "Please understand me sending you no letters for long. The news of death always saddens me, particularly the thought of you left behind" (Ch. "Aoi" The *Genji* Vol. 2. 44). She carefully generalizes Aoi's death, avoiding expressing her ill feelings toward her. Her letter simultaneously impresses as well as repels Genji with the doubt that she has brazenly hidden her transformation into the *mononoke* which has tortured him and his wife. He has never wanted to marry Rokujō and now finds a good occasion to inform her so with an implicit reproach:

I have not written to you for long although you have been in my constant thoughts. [a *Waka*] ‘How brief our life is just like a dew drop; isn’t it futile to dwell on woes?’ I hope you have relinquished hard feelings. (Ch. “Aoi.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 45-46)

His letter finally destroys Rokujō’s continuous hope to rekindle his passion. Shikibu does not believe that a widow can stand on the chance of a glorious marriage in Heian polygynous society.

If Shikibu does not reveal that Genji made one of Aoi’s women servants his *meshiudo*, we might believe his sincere sense of guilt and grief over his deceased wife. Even upon the death of Murasaki, the author refers to his *meshiudo* among her women, damping our empathy for the hero’s loss of his best companion. Shikibu shows the *meshiudo* as a common practice of Heian noble household inconveniently for Genji after the death of each of his two wives, Aoi and Murasaki, as if questioning the degree of the husband’s sense of loss of his wives. Heian society always supplied women to the high-born man in every stage and aspect of his life. After the end of the mourning period, Genji marches into his own Nijō mansion, in which he has kept Murasaki, a beautiful maid younger than Aoi and Rokujō for his consolation and prospective companion. Hardly any other Heian noblewoman remarked at their contemporary men’s disproportional privileges in as critical terms as Shikibu.

The Fierce Motherhood

In Shikibu’s view, Rokujō makes a practical decision to terminate her relationship with Genji, who has no will to make any commitment to her. Yet in historical

reality, few women probably took an initiative to break up with their mates. Nor did Rokujō's model, the author of *Kagerō Diary*, succeed in leaving her marital misery when her husband came to the Buddhist temple, to which she fled, and took her back to the capital. Motherhood, years of marital investment and her father's persuasion, all of them compelled her to return to the lifeless life of a polygynist's wife. By contrast, the six years of Rokujo and Genji's hopeless affair with no offspring make it relatively easier for her to terminate that affair.

In Chapter 2, Consort Kishi has demonstrated her candid acknowledgement of jealousy of other consorts as natural, evoking Rokujō's assertive personality. This historical woman now returns here as Rokujō's historical model for her elegant and poignant *waka* depicting the woe of losing the favor of her imperial spouse and for her unusual act of departing for the Ise Shrine region with her *saigū* daughter. Consort Kishi 徽子 herself once served as *saigū* in youth and, after the discharge of her divine service, she was ardently courted by her uncle Emperor Murakami who exercised the sovereign's prerogative to have the retired priestess for himself. After the imperial spouse's brief attraction to the novelty of her status and her famous poetic skills, she led the typical life of a neglected consort in the rear palace. The neglected and atrophied imperial consorts in the rear palace inspired the poetic imagination of classic Chinese poets Wang Wei 王維 and Li Po 李白. Shikibu might have read their poetry portraying Ban Jieyu's fate as a consort spurned on the whim of her sovereign mate. Consort Kishi nevertheless left a rare record of the neglected consort's psychology in one of her *waka*:

The Emperor just passed by my apartment [to visit some other consort]; is my nebulous presence as futile as trying to spell a letter on the running water?

かつ見つつ影はなれゆく水のおもにかく数ならぬ身をいか
にせむ (qtd. as number 879 in *The Last Imperial Collection of*

Waka: Shuiwakashiu 拾遺和歌集)

Along with the author of *Kagerō Diary* and her melancholic *waka*, Consort Kishi's unfulfilled life and her poignant piece as the imperial polygynist's neglected mate must have been Shikibu's inspiration to base Rokujō on her.

The unprecedented act of Consort Kishi's accompanying her *saigū* daughter, which upset the imperial government, was an event of the recent past in Shikibu's time. Throughout the 700-year history of the *saigū* institution, the imperial Consort Kishi was the only mother who secretly joined the troop of her *saigū* daughter sent to the Ise Shrine region despite the adamant objection of the new-risen Emperor Enyū 円猷天皇. Recognizing that upholding traditional ritual and ceremonies was his imperative duty to buttress the self-proclaimed superiority of Heian noble society, he dreaded to provoke the wrath of Amaterasu by deviating from the traditional dedication of his representative. Consort Kishi was a quiet woman rebel in Heian noble society.

When Shikibu has Rokujō accompany her daughter *saigū* to Ise, she suggests her approval of Consort Kishi's historical rebellion as courageous and appropriate. In the *Genji*, Rokujō meets no opposition against her plan, as Genji's father Emperor feels sorry for her as the woman neglected by his son, and assists

her and her daughter's trip to Ise. Yet in Shikibu's society, her audience must have immediately identified Rokujō leaving for Ise with her daughter as Consort Kishi, with some ambivalence. Like Genji's stepmother Fujitubo and his illicit affair, Shikibu at times quietly challenges her audience's comfort zone.

It is the author's conviction that motherhood is the only consolation and compensation for woeful polygynous marriage and should precede other duties in womanhood, as manifested in Genji's mistress and wives, all of who are good mothers. After the birth of their illegitimate son Reizei, Fujitubo fends off Genji to conceal their affair and eventually becomes a nun to shed Genji's sexual ambition. Genji's minor wife Akashi focuses her life on their daughter, Princess Akashi, and rejoices at her rise as the imperial consort and the growing number of her grandchildren. Even Genji's two childless wives, Murasaki and Hana Chiru Sato, become good surrogate mothers to Genji's children.

When Rokujō returns to the capital with her daughter upon the abdication of Emperor Suzaku and the rise of the new Emperor Reizei, she becomes a nun, giving what is from our current perspective a strange reason, that her sudden illness is due to her six-year residence in Ise with her daughter serving as the supreme priestess of the Sun Goddess. The imperial family tried hard to amalgamate Buddhism and Shintō, the religion of their ancestors, but could not erase the doubt that they remained insincere devotees of Buddhism. When they fell ill, even emperors and retired *saigū* adopted the Heian noble custom of renouncing the world with the hope that Buddha would see their faith and restore

their health. Rokujō follows this incongruous religious attitude of the imperial family.

When Rokujō and Genji meet after an interval of more than six years, the dynamic of their relationship is completely altered. Genji hears the news of his ex-mistress's impending death and races to her household as a dutiful member of the imperial family. The Minister of Interior Affairs Genji is now Rokujō's prominent nephew-in-law and her only close male relative who can soon entitle himself to look after her daughter as guardian as well as even spouse. Yet the mother is hardened to protect her daughter from the path she led. Her dilemma is that Genji's status as the most powerful man in the land should secure her daughter's future, but she does not want him to make her the mistress of such a compulsive womanizer. Their last meeting is formally conducted through the curtain between them, Rokujō's renunciation enhancing her indomitable disposition and compelling Genji to show more respect for her than before.

When Rokujō brings up her concern about her daughter, Genji readily reassures her that he would have protected her even if she did not ask him. Rokujō immediately rebuffs his insinuated marriage proposal:

This might sound disagreeable to you. It is a pity that my daughter will lose her own mother. If the guardian becomes her lover, she will suffer the jealousy of your women. I am sorry to be suspicious. But I must ask you not to make her your mistress. Considering my unhappy past, I don't think a woman can always prevent herself from falling into an unexpected misfortune. It is my utmost wish

that my daughter will not follow my path. (Ch. “Gage 濤標.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 301).

Genji is stunned by her stern rebuke and allusion to their past relationship as the lowest point of her life. She lets him recognize that she trusts little of him. Worst of all, he is embarrassed by the mother’s correct guess of his interest in her daughter and the forewarning to him in her presence sitting next to the mother and watching them through the thin silk curtain. The mother does not fail to see his eyes occasionally bobbing toward where her daughter is. Rokujō succeeds in damping his interest in the glorious ex-imperial virgin priestess. Her daughter, sitting next to her mother behind the curtain, will never forget this scene, later avoiding direct contact with Genji for the rest of her life.

To deny Rokujō’s correct guess, Genji rushes to reply, “I am no longer as reckless and thoughtless as I used to be. I wish you would find me so. I am sure you will soon understand my sincere heart” (Ch. “Gage.” The *Genji* Vol. 2. 302). Though vexed, Genji manages to compose himself. Her words nevertheless sowed deep guilt and fear in him, as he never forgets it twenty years later when he immediately identifies Rokujō’s *mononoke* possessing Murasaki and the Third Princess.

If Genji has expected a warm reconciliation in their last meeting, he is now absolutely disappointed and disenchanted, finding Rokujō as embittered and defensive by the past of their deteriorated relationship and her maternal concern. Had Rokujō been pleasantly agreeable to Genji at their last meeting, he would have made her daughter his mistress. Genji never realizes that Rokujō has

frightened him because she is the most truthful lover he has ever had. He does not believe that women are entitled to tell him what he is. Rokujō remains too independent and candid for Genji and became the “woman inspiring the eternal fear in him”, as the *mononoke* (Enchi 875).

In contrast to Rokujō, his obsession with his stepmother Fujitubo is partly due to her silence. Fujitubo keeps avoiding him and dies without revealing to him her innermost thoughts about him, mystifying him permanently. To substitute for Fujitubo, he eagerly grooms her niece Young Murasaki, not recognizing that she will also acquire the self-concealing and self-repressing habits in their marriage that her aunt has demonstrated in their meetings. Fujitubo and Murasaki avoid criticizing male fallibility in front of Genji, leading him to praise them to the skies. In Chapter 4, we will study Genji’s construction of the Ideal Feminine Murasaki, how she lives up to his expectations and what it costs her to do so.

Chapter 4

The Pathos of the Ideal Feminine: Lady Murasaki 紫の上

As the shadow to the substance, to her lord is faithful wife

And my Sita best of women follows thee in death and life!

(*Ramayana* trans. by Dutt, “The Wedding VI” line)

Sita’s doting father guarantees Prince Rama that he has successfully educated her to be “the shadow” of her future spouse. Sita embodies the Indian version of the three obediences and the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice.

Ramayana nevertheless has a strange twist in the end. Sita continues to yield to Rama’s commands until she finds it impossible to comply with his second ordeal of passing the burning pyre for the proof of her chastity, choosing to be engulfed by the Mother Earth. The end of the epic acknowledges a woman’s rejection of the three obediences as a legitimate protest.

Sita’s devotion and popularity are reincarnated in Heian noble society in Shikibu’s most irreproachable heroine, Murasaki. Throughout the *Genji*, Shikibu is ironical about women’s devotion to men. Murasaki does accomplish the impossible feminine task of remaining Genji’s most favorite and longest-lasting mate in his polygynous matrimony. Yet while celebrating Murasaki as the Ideal Feminine, Shikibu also hints at the futility of her devotion and commitment to Genji, who busily and relentlessly purses his sexual conquests and leaves her alone frequently. Murasaki gradually comes to realize that her life has been futile but cannot dissolve their hopeless relationship by getting out of a luxurious cage. She eventually collapses on the three obediences. It is Shikibu’s subtle criticism

of her contemporary society that a woman cannot find her happiness only through living as “a shadow of the man,” a commentary which has been overlooked either unconsciously or willingly by generations of readers.

Murasaki’s popularity among Shikibu’s contemporary noblemen is already exemplified in her *Diary*. The prominent politician and renowned poet Fujiwara Kintō 藤原公任 cheerily asked Shikibu, sitting behind the screen between them (as gentlewomen were not supposed to see men face to face), “Is my Young Murasaki around here?” (Fujioka 201). Perhaps the author had not written the mature noblewoman Murasaki’s death yet. For Kintō, Young Murasaki possibly proved that a woman could live happily with the gender roles taught by the gentle polygynist Genji. Considering the author of *Kagerō Diary* exploding and expressing her fury and despair over her promiscuous husband, one can comprehend that such an obedient wife as Murasaki was still a novel achievement in Heian noble society. Reluctant obedience was probably an accurate description of most noblewomen’s attitude to their men. If the gentle Yūgao was their ideal mistress for men, Murasaki served as the model wife prescribed in Heian feminine education.

Shikibu immediately sensed that the gallant courtier Kintō tried to tease the author of possibly more than thirty by addressing her as his beloved heroine, the adolescent girl. He might have been ready to be entertained in the role of Genji. Painfully shy and finding it dreadful to draw attention to herself, the author pretended not to understand Kintō’s overture and remained quiet. Afterward she dryly records: “There are no characters of the *Genji* here” (201). This passage has

served as the evidence of her authorship of the *Genji* in Shikibu's *Diary*, but she does not seem to have been too pleased with Kintō's celebration of her heroine, whom she leads to despair in the end. Shikibu nevertheless has been given the pen name Murasaki Shikibu to this day. Did she find herself gratified without qualms?

The earliest known woman critic of Murasaki, the author of *Mumyōzōshi* 無名草子, lauds her character as "nothing lacks in her" (191). This was probably representative of the medieval view of the Ideal Feminine, in which the woman's sole object in life was to retain her husband's favor by living under the three obediences even though the actual life of a woman might have been quite different. The narrator's constant proclamation that Murasaki is the most fortunate wife in the *Genji* is misleading, reassuring the conventional view of a woman's marriage relying on her spouse's wealth and power. The literary criticism of Murasaki has gradually altered over the past 50 years. Non-traditional readers tend to comment that Rokujō's *mononoke* serves Genji right, and she is more authentically attractive than Murasaki and Yūgao who remain passive and powerless toward Genji's convenient affection. Setouchi Jyakucho 瀬戸内寂聴 and Komashaku agree that Murasaki is the unhappiest of all Shikibu's heroines (qtd. in Komashaku 152). This chapter will explore the pathos of the Ideal Feminine embodying the three obediences and the irony of appearance versus actuality.

Polygynous Lover

Which woman does Genji actually prefer, his stepmother Fujitubo or her niece Murasaki? This has been a literary question endlessly debated in our current

monogamous society. Genji is a polygynist lover whose “diffusive” eroticism, if permitted, would claim both women with no hesitation. Polygyny is a product of masculine supremacy in wealth and power, which inculcated the Heian nobleman to believe in his sexual authority over multiple women. The ancient system of polygyny seems to have permitted a son to inherit his father’s consorts, as illustrated in the mythology of the First Ruler, Emperor Jinmu 神武, whose first son Prince Tagishimimi 手研耳命 forced his widow and stepmother to marry him. By possessing his father’s principal wife, Prince Tagishimimi might demonstrate more of his own political hegemony in the nation than his sexual passion.

Ikeda Yasaburo 池田弥三郎 offers us an interesting theory of the Japanese traditional eroticism known as *irogonomi* 色好み to examine the Heian nobleman’s sexual promiscuity:

In ancient Japanese tribal society, the male ruler needed the supreme priestess’ power to hear the divine oracle in governorship... When he aspired to extend his territory, he at first courted the priestess in those potential areas. If he failed to have the women, he used military force. The Heian nobleman inherited this primordial sexuality. (218-219)

Ikeda’s hypothesis points to the traditional ambivalent celebration of *irogonomi* as the masculine vitality for sexual conquest. Coveting someone else’s mate created a political tension in ancient polygynous society, as we have discussed in Chapter 2 in the case of the pre-Heian lovers Princess Nukata and Prince Ōama. Nukata’s second mate Emperor Tenmu is believed to have forced Prince Ōama to

release his favorite mate. Although Princess Nukata and Emperor Tenmu expressed mutual pining in their poems, it might have been easier for him to give up one of his consorts to his brother than she would have been treated as their political pawn. Both Princess Nukata and Emperor Temnu use the word *Murasaki* as the symbol of their illicit passion, which Genji inherits as their descendant in coveting his father Emperor's favorite consort Fujitubo.

The hero of the *Ise*, Narihira, also demonstrates diffusive eroticism as a polygynous lover in the first episode. While hunting, he incidentally meets two beautiful young sisters in a ruined old village, who inspire him to compose a *waka*: “Beautiful maidens like tender purple shoots Murasaki in the field of Kasuga, you dazzle and bewilder my senses and heart!” (123). Murasaki has already become a conventional trope for an attractive woman. On the surface, the poem has a conventional setting of courtship, that the poet is a hunter looking for a doe when he discovers the enchanting beauties. Interestingly in the *waka*, the young man desires both sisters at once. Even though polygyny was the norm in Heian noble society, no other male poet's work is known to record his simultaneous sexual interest in two women. Yet we know nothing about the response of the maidens, the story ending with the polygynist's sexual quest.

The imperious polygynist Emperor Murakami flaunted his sexual hegemony as recorded in the *Flowering Fortunes*: he sent each of his consorts in the rear palace a copy of the same *waka* expressing his passionate overture to them (Vol. 1. 28). He actually tested their responses to his *waka* to judge which one had the most wit. The Emperor decided that the most impressive response he

received was the gift of incense from one consort, not the immediate visit of another one, who believed that he summoned her with the *waka* to meet him. The episode reveals the arbitrariness of human judgment and irrational eroticism, but his personal taste seriously affected the political strife among the consorts' male family members, who carefully educated and sent their daughters, trying to attain his favor and dominate the court through them.

Although imperial polygyny had the two major pragmatic agendas of multiple reproduction and political alliance with primary nobility, the sovereign could afford to have recourse with his favorite consort. To illustrate the prerogative of Genji's father Emperor, who loses his favorite Kiritubo to death, Shikibu invents a woman miraculously resembling her, Princess Fujitubo. He immediately installs Fujitubo as his favorite consort. Genji's interest in his beautiful young stepmother and his senior of only five years does not surprise one. Fujitubo is a dazzling beauty, her status as the sovereign's most favorite making her look much more attractive than any other woman he meets in the rear palace. Beauty and power are amalgamated in Fujitubo, enticing his ambitious sexual conquest. Yet the story of the illicit affair between members of the imperial family would be considered scandalous and is still audacious to this day.

Shikibu is aware that both Chinese and Japanese imperial families have not been short of the scandals of the illicit liaison and coveting some one else's spouse. Her favorite Sima Qian writes in the *Shiji*⁹² that the First Emperor 始皇帝

⁹² The illegitimate birth of the First Emperor is recorded in the *Biography of Lu Buwei* 呂不韋傳, written in part of the *Shiji* 史記, which was believed for centuries, but has been a current controversial issue among scholars of Chinese history. In Sima Qian's time, the Han Empire,

(259 BCE-210 BCE) was the illegitimate son of his official father and an emperor's subject, Lu Buwei 呂不韋. The alleged illegitimate birth of the renowned Chinese ruler seems to have inspired the author of the *Genji* to invent the illegitimate son of Emperor Reizei by our hero and Fujitubo. Before Shikibu's time, the birth controversy of the emperor does not seem to have happened. The renowned Chinese woman ruler, Empress Wu 武則天, also was the imperial consort of the emperor and his son, who had eventually replaced his father, before ascending the throne. The model of the heroine in the early Heian work, the *Tales of Ise*, Empress Takaiko 高子 (842-910), was suspected to have had an illicit liaison with a Buddhist monk in her widowhood; her title was stripped and her alleged lover was exiled. If discovered, Genji and Fujitubo would suffer the same fate as they did. Both the *Flowering Fortune* and *Ōkagami*⁹³ record the contemporary illicit affair of Michinaga's stepsister and the consort of an heir apparent (the later Emperor Sanjyō 三条) Suishi 綏子, indicating its wide circulation in Shikibu's society. The heir apparent punished only her lover and an imperial member by forbidding his presence in the palace but left Suishi, his distant aunt, alone. The complex dynamic of interrelations between the imperial and Fujiwara families seems to have made the heir apparent lenient toward the illicit lovers. Mores of Heian noble society were definitely more severe toward women, as suggested the fate of Suishi and her lover: she died prematurely,

which replaced the First Emperor's nation, might have attempted to justify their political authority over his by defaming his birth.

⁹³ The *Flowering Fortunes* and *Ōkagami* describe the same illicit liaison with different tones: the first remains sympathetic toward the imperial consort's illicit affair, attributing this to the heir apparent's neglect of her (Vol. 2. 333), but the latter remarks at Michinaga's act of finding the liaison (Tachibana 245).

seemingly of moral agony, whereas her lover survived and was permitted to come to the palace years later.

Even though the imperial scandals of illicit liaisons were not surprising in Shikibu's time, it is intriguing why she was permitted to invent one and popularized it as the *Genji*. Many scholars, including Yamada Ritasu 山本利達, have pointed out that Shikibu frequently uses the compound word *sora* (sky or heaven) *osoroshi* (frightful or fearful), meaning "being fearful of heaven," to imply the gravity of Genji and Fujitubo's illicit affair and that of his young wife the Third Princess and his nephew Kashiwagi; the couple are deeply conscious of *tumi* 罪, the word comprising three meanings, crime in the legal term, guilt in the moral and sin in the Buddhist (23). Not only that, Genji and Fujitubo manage to install their illegitimate son as the sovereign and even to hide all of their illicit affairs.

This could have been perceived as a dire insult to the imperial families. Actually, during WWII, the military Japanese government treated Genji and Fujitubo's affair as disrespectful to the imperial family and had Tanizaki Junichrō 谷崎潤一郎, who was translating the text into contemporary Japanese, rewrite that passage. Yet in Shikibu's *Diary*, the contemporary Emperor Ichijō and his virtual regent Michinaga listened to the *Genji* with some interest. Neither thought that Fujitubo and Genji, unconnected to the Fujiwara family, scandalized them. Emperor Ichijō had parents whose mothers were Fujiwara daughters, and would not have recognized Fujitubo and Genji an insult to his political authority. Neither would Michinaga have done so. Fujitubo is a daughter of a previous emperor with

no powerful Fujiwara male guardian in her maternal family and could not have been an empress in Shikibu's time. Equally, as a son of a minor consort with no Fujiwara male guardian, Genji could have been an obscure imperial family member. Shikibu did use her shrewd political sense not to scandalize the current power dynamics. On the other hand, the *Genji* seems to have been already a controversial work in her society. The *Flowering Fortunes* lists Shikibu's name and a part of her *Diary*, seeming to show respect for her as a renowned writer. *Ōkagami* nevertheless mentions no Heian women writers, not even Shikibu.

As there is no passage showing how Genji and Fujitubo start their liaison in the current remaining text, three writers have produced books containing the beginning of their liaison.⁹⁴ This thesis nevertheless sides with the belief that the discreet Shikibu never intended to detail the imperial family members' illicit affair. Naturally nervous and careful, the author seems to have managed to obscure what has initiated their liaison and keep the depiction of Genji and Fujitubo's meetings brief and elusive. In contrast to Genji's obvious passion, Shikibu does not allow us to latch on to Fujitubo's psychology and has led generations of readers to believe that she cannot resist his good looks and affable manners. Fujitubo in her early twenties has no reason to hate her handsome teenaged stepson, but she is at least a reluctant adulteress.

Shikibu starts exposing their illicit affair to us from the occasion in which Genji arranges their meeting by compelling Fujitubo's gentlewoman to guide him into her chamber; this implies the monomaniac prince uses his impunity to

⁹⁴ Motoori Norinaga, *Temakura* 手枕 (1763); Maruyama Saiichi, *Kagayaku Hinomiya* 輝く日の宮 (2003); Setouchi Jyakuchō, *Fujitubo* 藤つぼ (2004).

achieve his goal without the imperial consort's consent. At their meeting, Genji and Fujitubo are not a union at all. He is worried about her rejection as expressed in his *waka*:

Were it impossible to meet you again, I would vanish forever into
the dream!

見てもまたあふよまれなる夢の中にやがてまぎるるわが身と
もがな。(Ch. "Young Murasaki若紫." *The Genji* Vol. 1. 305)

As an impetuous teenager Genji does not take the crime of adultery seriously. His attraction to Fujitubo is usually defined as "love," but his determination ends up demoralizing her.

Fujitubo takes her society's attitude toward adultery. Horrified by the possible disclosure of their affair, she compares their meeting to a nightmare:

I wish I were just in the sad dream of eternal sleep; I fear our affair
will run through the world from tongue to tongue.

世がたりに人や伝へんたぐひなくうき身を醒めぬ夢になして
も (Ch. "Young Murasaki 若紫." *The Genji* Vol. 1. 306)

Her *waka* hints that despite their sexual involvement, they are not lovers on an emotional level. Whatever Fujitubo thinks of her good-looking stepson, had her gentlewoman not betrayed her, she might have remained intact. None of the maids are altruistically loyal to their mistresses in the *Genji*, easily bribed by their suitors and primarily looking for their own benefits or survival. The servants are no better or worse than their social superiors. Fujitubo and Tamakazura have the worst maids who guide their mistresses' suitors into their chambers.

Genji and Fujitubo's meetings have been often read as the lovers' irresistible passion of their own despite their deep sense of sin. There is such an undeniable element in Genji's part, but is he content with her if she ever becomes his? Apart from her, Genji pursues other sexual mates, such as Rokujō, Yūgao, Utusemi, and some unknown women hinted in the passages. Meanwhile Fujitubo is frightened by some heavenly vengeance and the exposure of their affair.

Fujitubo is accused of silence about her illegitimate son Reizei by Setouchi and other critics. Yet what option does she have? Most women would act the same, knowing that their confession will only ruin them. Genji's father Emperor appears ridiculously credulous, having aroused the critics' doubt of his secretive knowledge, which nevertheless has little evidence in the text. After the death of her imperial spouse, Fujitubo demonstrates for the first time her pragmatic intelligence by taking the Buddhist vow with the foreknowledge of Genji and her destruction by the inevitable exposure of their affair. Before her death, Fujitubo perceives in anguish the divine wrath against the illegitimate reign of her son, as seen in the frequent natural disasters and epidemics in the capital. The absence of Reizei's heir implies the author's moral decision not to perpetuate the illegitimate blood in the imperial line, even in fiction.

Genji has the susceptibility of his exceptionalism, entertaining divine forgiveness for more than twenty years until his supreme wife, the Third Princess' extramarital pregnancy humiliates him. In horror and rage, Genji wonders whether his Father Emperor held the new-born baby Reizei with an effulgent smile, knowing he was not his own son even though he said:

I have many sons. But because I saw only you as an infant, he
looks to me much like you. Doesn't every infant look alike?

(Ch. "The Maple Festival 紅葉賀." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 401)

When social decorum compels Genji to hold the illegitimate son of the Third Princess and Kashiwagi as a happy father, we are struck by Shikibu's ironical ethical judgment as if saying that nature eventually avenges the son who has cuckolded his own father. Here, Genji also for the first time seriously thinks of his karmic retribution in the next life, consoling himself that the young adulterous couple might have lightened it a little.

Shikibu does not think only Genji responsible for the masculine extensive desire for feminine beauties, as suggested by the use of *katashiro* 形代, meaning *the likeness*, which governs the three generations of the imperial men, Genji's father Emperor, his son and his supposed son Kaoru 薫. The *katashiro* originally functioned as the human image of the deity for religious rituals in Heian society. Shikibu's *katashiro* is the likeness of a woman with whom her male characters are obsessed. Genji's father Emperor, his son, and the Third Princess' illegitimate son Kaoru become monomaniacs, never content until they have the perfect likeness of their unattainable women. These three men are not deprived of sexual mates but long for the women whom they can never possess in this world. After Genji's mother Kiritubo's death, his father Emperor can never be content until Fujitubo, who resembles her, is offered. Like his father, Genji also pursues his adoration for his stepmother secretly and includes her nieces Murasaki and the Third Princess, who are not only Fujitubo's *katashiro* but also his sexual glory. Although Genji at

first seems luckily enough to find his seemingly perfect woman, Young Murasaki, his excessive quest for another niece of Fujitubo ends up with only his disappointment of the naïve and childish Third Princess. He eventually loses his uncontested sexual glory through the Third Princess's illicit affair with his nephew Kashiwagi, but manages to think that their sin will lighten his in the next life. The ultimate fall of Genji, the icon of masculine beauty, power and wealth, and most of all, the supreme polygynist, signifies Shikibu's implicit but firm criticism of contemporary sexual relations. Ukifune 浮船 also is offered to Kaoru as *katashiro* of Ōigimi 大君, who rejects him before her death. When Kaoru marries and neglects Ukifune, she unwittingly mistakes his cousin Prince Nioki 匂 for him and ends up betraying her master. Eventually Genji's father, his son and Kaoru are cuckolded by their *katashiro* Fujitubo, the Third Princess and Ukifune. None of those women plays the typical femme fatale, but each passively allows their seducer to dominate them, perhaps knowing that they cannot act otherwise.

Feminine beauty captivates Genji, his father and Kaoru and their individual personality does not seem to matter much. Interestingly, *katashiro*, which literally means *shape* and *likeness* 形代, shares the same Chinese character, *shape* 形, with *a doll*, pronounced as *ninjyō* 人形. The doll 人形 consists of the two characters *human* and *shape*. Heian dolls were made out of paper for girls. When Genji and a Young Murasaki play with her dolls, Shikibu remains sarcastic about him collecting beautiful women while taking little interest in their interior lives. Yūgiri inherits his father Genji's love of feminine beauty. The author

equivocally uses Murasaki's corpse, which Yūgiri accidentally glimpses while his father is distracted by grief. What does Yūgiri's fascination with the lifeless feminine beauty mean? Genji has paid most of his attention to Murasaki's beauty as Fujitubo's *katashiro*, just as his father Emperor cherished Fujitubo as that of his mother Kiritubo. Shikibu understands that feminine beauty is celebrated in poetry as the ultimate aesthetic of her culture, but her response to it is ambivalent. When Genji discovers Murasaki Fujitubo's *katashiro* in exterior, he is determined to construct his Ideal Feminine in interior. Yet Murasaki's pathos is her eventual realization that she cannot be his Ideal Feminine all her life.

Pygmalion

The chapter of “Young Musaraki 若紫” juxtaposes as a stark contrast Fujitubo and Genji's sordid illicit entanglement with the young girl's innocent appearance. Frustrated by Fujitubo's firm rejection, Genji finds a temporary consolation in the discovery of her niece, still an unformed child in every aspect. Although unknown to Murasaki all her life, Fujitubo's torment over her relationship with Genji foreshadows the eventual despair of her niece in her marriage to Genji. The *Genji* expert, Imai Gen'e 今井源衛, does not seem to see that in his question, “Why does Shikibu have Young Murasaki die of a broken heart?” (263). At least, Imai acknowledges that Murasaki's marriage to Genji does not end happily, but to many readers, she is a sacrificially devoted mate for Genji like her aunt Fujitubo, who becomes a nun to bury their illicit affair. Shikibu did not believe in the woman's happiness in Heian polygyny but knew that her audience wanted to believe otherwise. The author also failed in getting later

generations of readers to accept her view. Shikibu offered a compromise as Murasaki's story suggests her balancing between the audience's expectation that she becomes Genji's worthy partner and her resistance to invent a fairy tale. At least, her very attractive young girl delighted many readers for centuries.

Murasaki's youth is one of the aesthetically cheery scenes in the melancholic story of the *Genji*. The usually unsentimental Shikibu is excellent at depicting children, particularly such a bright girl as Young Murasaki, who is the only heroine to grow up in the *Genji*. The children fascinate Shikibu, who might have projected her own childhood on Murasaki, as fondly recalled in the passage of her *Diary* that she as a lively and precocious girl amazed her intellectual father. Or as the mother of a girl, Shikibu might have drawn Young Murasaki on her own daughter who is known to have been a light-hearted courtier in contrast to her melancholic mother (Setouchi 79).

Shikibu chooses spring for Murasaki's entry, the favorite season of Heian nobility in the capital which is still famous for cherry blossoms. Genji visits a temple at Northern Mountain 北山 with profusely blooming cherry blossoms in late spring, which will be constantly associated with Murasaki's vivid beauty. When Genji later builds four seasoned gardens for his women in his Rokujō-in mansion, Murasaki has her apartment in the garden of spring full of cherry blossoms as the emblem of his glorious time. Yet ornamental cherry blossoms have a brief blooming period and yield no fruit, just as Murasaki's happiness in her marriage to Genji is ephemeral and she remains childless. The want of her

own children will force her to focus her entire life on Genji and depend on him, her pseudo-father, master and an unreliable lover.

We have the first picture of the lively girl Murasaki through Genji's peeping eye behind the bushy fence:

Several little girls come running in and out of the room at play.

Among them is one girl who looks like about ten years old...Her features are outstandingly exquisite and gentle. Watching this beautiful girl, he wonders what she will look like when she grows up. Her hair is cut in a girlish fashion, billowing like an unfolded fan on the shoulders. She must have cried, still rubbing her red eyes. "What happened? Did you fight other children," a nun asks the girl looking at her. They look like a mother and her daughter. "Inuki opened the basket and let the baby sparrow go," she says angrily....Looking at her face, he suddenly finds resemblances to the one he adores. That is why he cannot take his eyes off her.

(Ch. "Young Murasaki 若紫." *The Genji* Vol. 1. 280).

We can assume that girls were still allowed to run even in the strictly decorous noble society.

The innocent spontaneity of Murasaki must have immediately won over not only Genji but also Shikibu's audience of courtiers who had lost of the childish impulsive habit of running. Haraoka Fumiko 原岡文子 finds that Young Murasaki's rebellious spirit is manifested in her running and her hair "billowing like an unfolded fan on the shoulders" (qtd. in Shimoshima Asayo 下島朝代 405).

Young Murasaki retains personal freedom. Yet she will be captured and protected by the most powerful and wealthy male in the land all her life so that her androgynous potential will never grow fully.

Genji soon finds out that she is Fujitubo's niece, a daughter of her brother Hyōbu 兵部 and his deceased minor wife. Like Genji, Murasaki is a usual product of the grievous polygynous marriage in that her mother suffered the first wife's jealousy, died of a psychological malady and left her only daughter with her own mother and the Buddhist nun. Noble children are customarily raised by their maternal families, but Murasaki has her loving widowed grandmother and a Buddhist nun.

The grandmother's concern with Murasaki's future is already revealed in the exchange of *waka* with her nurse Shōnagon 少納言: "Who will nurture this young shoot when the dew must soon banish in the sky." The "dew" is the grandmother's metaphor for the fragility and evanescence of her life. Her meditation on death and leaving her granddaughter, the "young shoot," arouses the nurse's sympathetic response, "How can the dew disappear and leave the young shoot without knowing its growth?" (Ch. "Young Murasaki 若紫." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 282). In Murasaki's grandmother and Shōnagon's poetic exchange, Genji learns that she has no male guardians to promote her future. He quickly determines to have Fujitubo's niece and construct his Ideal Feminine as revealed in his *waka*:

It is my desire to grasp, “Young Murasaki,” the spring shoot with the purple root in my hand. (Ch. “Young Murasaki 若紫.” The *Genji* Vol. 1. 314)

Familiar with Genji’s allusion to Narihira’s “the spring shoot of Murasaki” in the *Tales of Ise*, Shikibu’s audience immediately comprehended that Genji would play the pastoral lover pursuing this girl.

Shikibu thinks Murasaki at ten still premature, as suggested by other characters’ responses to Genji’s interest in her. He at first asks her grand-uncle, the Buddhist priest, about adopting and raising her but is immediately rejected because of her youthfulness. Murasaki’s grandmother also diplomatically rejects Genji’s proposal: “If you still feel the same when she is old enough, please add her among your women” (311). Although every noblewoman would like to be the first wife, the grandmother understands that her granddaughter with no male guardians cannot expect much in life. As a widow, she also raised her daughter and Murasaki’s mother, who settled as a minor wife of the imperial family member Prince Hyobu. Were Murasaki fifteen years old, her grandmother would certainly have approved of her becoming Genji’s minor wife. Yet neither of Murasaki’s relatives finds her at a marriageable age.

The first Japanese matrimonial law in *Taiho Rituryō* 大宝律令 (701 CE) prescribed the marriageable ages for the bridegroom at fifteen and the bride at thirteen. Yet this law, copied from the Chinese, was not enforced in Japanese noble society. Marriage was still only a civil matter and couples married at a

variety of ages.⁹⁵ Shikibu gives the same married age of her mistress Empress Shōshi to Genji's daughter Princess Akashi when his daughter is sent to the rear palace to be an imperial consort of the crown prince. The author nevertheless thinks Murasaki at ten is still too young to marry, for her grandmother diplomatically rejects Genji's proposal: "If you still feel the same when she is old enough, please add her among your women" (311).

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Murasaki's nurse Shōnagon takes over her grandmother's pragmatic position in educating her young mistress. It is the nurse's dilemma of the choice she has to make between the teenaged prince's mercurial infatuation with her little mistress and her stepmother's potential ill treatment of her with her ineffectual biological father. The lack of caring members in Murasaki's father's family

⁹⁵ The marriageable age of noble women seems to have differed by class in Shikibu's time of the 10-11th century. High-born men aspired to dominate the imperial court as the grandfather of the heir apparent and sent their various aged daughters as imperial consorts to the rear palace. The political climate determined their daughter's marriageable ages. Regent Michinaga had his three daughters installed as the empresses. His first daughter Shōshi 彰子 at twelve wedded twenty-year-old Emperor Ichijō; the second daughter Kenshi 妍子 at sixteen was sent to Emperor Sanjō at thirty-four; the third daughter Ishi 威子 at twenty had her nephew and Shōshi's son, eleven-year-old Emperor Goichijō, for her husband. Michinaga's daughters' various ages at their weddings show that he managed to control the three sovereigns in a row by their marital links; his daughters' age compatibility was irrelevant. Although the imperial consorts' ages are well documented in the annals, their middle-rank sisters are unclear unless one can figure out in the context of their records. They seem to have remained single longer than their high-born sisters. The author of *Sarashina Diary* worked as a courtier and married at thirty-three (331). The author of *Kagerō Diary* seems to have wedded at nineteen (127). Shikibu's *Diary* and her *Collection of Waka* give us no clue about her wedded age.

prompts Shōnagon to comply with Genji in abducting her little mistress, furiously hastening his abduction with the news that her father will soon take her to his residence. Young Murasaki is constantly taught by Shōnagon that she is fortunate enough to have the handsome, wealthy and powerful Genji for her husband.

When Murasaki's grandmother soon dies, conveniently for Genji, Shikibu's audience was enthralled by the Shining Prince's rescuing Young Murasaki from her uncaring father and the wicked stepmother just like a fairy tale. As the narrator keeps insisting that he will never forget the woman who once captivated him, they believed that the best polygynist Genji would always ensure Murasaki's welfare. Their romantic version of an abducted bride unrealistically overlooked Murasaki's ambiguous social status as the ward of the teenaged male in view of the rigid marital custom of Heian nobility.

Heian noblewomen did not record their relations with servants much although the servants seem to have worked indispensably in maintaining the level of their comforts and sharing the mistress' fate. The author of *Kagerō Diary* suggests that her servant women, possibly including her nurse, consoled and advised her in coping with her troubled marriage. Shikibu is an unusual writer, for the *Genji* testifies that nurses raised noble children and played an unofficial parental role for their young masters and mistresses in Heian noble society. The nurse often stayed with her mistress in adulthood as they developed a particular intimate relationship. Like Murasaki's nurse Shōnagon, the Third Princess's nurse also treats her mistress' marriage to Genji as the best means of her and her mistress' survival at the expense of his incumbent mate Murasaki's position.

Perhaps, living under the three obediences, both the maid and her mistress would share the survival instinct of looking for her bridegroom in a substantial financial supporter. While educating Young Murasaki, Shōnagon cannot help her doubt that Genji's numerous women will eventually overshadow her little mistress' future, revealing the author's observation that women servants have the same amount of foresight and shrewdness as noblewomen. Shōnagon's fearful premonition will come true with Murasaki's marriage complicated by Genji's promiscuity.

Admittedly, Genji treats the young orphaned girl much better than a regular nobleman. Murasaki could have become the *meshiudo* 召人, the servant-sexual mate, much more despised than the mistress retaining her household. This would have been Shōnagon's regret for life. He later gives Murasaki his Nijō-in mansion she grew up in after they move to the Rokujō-in mansion. Murasaki's gratitude survives even though his marriage to the Third Princess cools off her attachment to him, inhibiting her to pursue the desire of becoming a Buddhist nun against his will. Certainly, it was the obligation of a woman living under the three obediences to feel gratitude to her father and husband for their care and protection.

If it is true that Shikibu lost her mother in early childhood and was reared only by her father, she probably experienced an unusual paternal care, for she imposes an unbelievable sensitivity on the pampered teenaged Prince Genji. Tenderly soothing the stolen girl, he provides everything she needs: her playmates, story books and doll set. The books and dolls that entertained the young girl Murasaki reappear ironically in her adulthood when selecting picture books for

her adopted daughter Princess Akashi. Genji lectures Murasaki not to show Princess Akashi love stories, presumably including the *Tales of Ise*, the most popular in Heian noble society. It does not occur to him that he once acted more defiantly than the classical rebel “Narihira,” kidnapping the innocent girl Young Murasaki to be his mate. Raising his daughter to be an empress, the once-reckless hero in youth turns out to be an authoritative regent in middle age and wants to keep his daughter ignorant of imaginary love stories so that she will not rebel against his agenda. Genji also makes fun of his ward Tamakazura’s enthusiasm about stories:

Women are born to be fooled by stories. Even though they know they are not truthful, they still spend much time in reading them.

(Ch. “The Dragon Fly 蜩.” The *Genji* Vol. 3. 202).

Unlike Genji, the author still understands that women confined to the household sometimes distract their boredom with fantastic stories. Catering for women’s wishful thinking, Heian stories usually celebrate a monogamous couple in the end, which Shikibu debunks with Genji’s polygynous relations.

Dolls are another reminder of the discrepancy between appearance and reality. More than twenty years later when Murasaki visits Genji’s new wife and her social superior, the Third Princess, the matron at thirty-two makes herself ingratiating to the girl at fifteen, old enough to be her daughter, telling her about her favorite dolls and story pictures. Not comprehending her older co-wife’s grievance over her demotion by her presence, the Third Princess is innocently delighted to believe that “she is such a gentle lady understanding young girls” (Ch.

“Young Herb 若菜” I. The *Genji* Vol. 3. 85). Although once as naïve as the Third Princess, the mature Murasaki now suffers the unwitting cruelty of her contender. Murasaki and the Third Princess now belong to a variety of women Genji collects to flaunt his sexual magnetism, wealth and power, and they are expected to remain obedient and submissive, smothering their desires and individuality like the beautiful dolls they have.

Genji’s maternal treatment almost leads us to forget his single-minded goal of creating the little Fujitubo, for Murasaki becomes his receptive student depending only on him so that she will see no option of rejecting him, unlike Fujitubo. Genji gives his ward lessons in the Heian feminine accomplishments, such as the stringed music instrument *koto* 琴, *waka* and calligraphy effectively used to entice the suitor’s interest in Heian courtship. After the fall of Heian culture, music, poetry and calligraphy were preserved as a remnant of the past aristocracy and became the three major arts of high-class courtesans to learn in traditional pleasure quarters. Those courtesans were the best companions of the wealthy and rich men as skillful musicians, poets and writers of elegant love letters to please them.

Young Murasaki masters all of them, making Genji renowned as “at once lover, guardian, educator, and patron” (Shirane 93). Her transformation into a refined noblewoman meets the conventional expectation of both Genji and Shikibu’s audience but backfires later. Ironically, Murasaki’s accomplishments became pervasively renowned in public for years to the extent of enticing the ex-Emperor Suzaku 朱雀 into marrying his favorite daughter the Third Princess to

Genji in the hope that he will educate her the same way. To Suzaku, Murasaki is the ideal woman in his society as Genji's student, lover and mate, taught to depend on him only for life. Aspiring to secure the most eligible polygynous husband for his daughter, Suzaku remains totally obtuse of his selfish desire of taking over Murasaki's unique relations with Genji. Hence Murasaki's triumphant effect will return her to an insecure position, as Shōnagon feared. The beauty and intelligence of a woman remained ephemeral in Heian noble society.

Shikibu occasionally signals that Genji and Murasaki's happiest and most intimate time will not last for long, her attitude toward his delight and infatuation with the innocent girl tinged with sarcastic ambivalence, as the narrator dryly comments:

Murasaki still is not tiresome [for Genji], not knowing to suspect or feel jealousy yet. She is such a lovely plaything. Even were she his own daughter, he would not sleep or wake up with her about her age. Prince Genji might think he has a strange pet right now.

(Ch. "Young Murasaki 若紫." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 335-336).

Murasaki is still Genji's "lovely plaything" and his "strange pet" being prepared to be his own sexual mate by sleeping together without sexual contact. It is Shikibu's subtle criticism of the excessive self-interest of her hero who simultaneously has several mates and raises a premature girl to add her to his collection of women. Murasaki does not understand Shōnagon's words that "she is already married" means that she is bound to him for life. The girl innocently accepts her joking recommendation to "be his daughter" (Ch. "Young Murasaki."

The *Genji* Vol. 1. 298). Murasaki's sheltered life has not taught her how to doubt others yet.

Reared by their mothers and maternal families, Heian noble daughters gradually grew to comprehend that their mothers had several co-wives somewhere. Although accustomed to watch their mothers often fuming at the competition of the co-wives, most girls still did not understand that their turn would come some day. Raised by Shōnagon and Genji, the docile child Murasaki never saw a woman hostile to her husband. It is a poignant sight that Murasaki names one male doll Genji and treasures it, probably identifying herself with the female doll to match it to make a pair, never imagining the presence of his multiple mates. The Heian doll set presumably had a pair of male and female dolls catered to the dream of the girl, sheltered from the fact of polygyny.

The noblewoman Lady Nijō 二条 (1258-?) records her sexual relations with her imperial lover, the retired Emperor Gofukakusa 後深草院 in her memoir, the *Confession*, which reminds one of Young Murasaki. Pining for her deceased mother and his instructor of sexual education, Gofukasa raised the four-year-old girl Nijō in the palace to make her his future mistress. As an enthusiastic imitator of the world of the *Genji*, Emperor Gofukakusa probably projected himself on Genji educating Young Murasaki, while watching Nijō's growth. Yoshino Kazuko 吉野和子 and other critics postulate that Gofukasa and Nijō belong to the 13th-century nobility, who tried to recapture the "glorious past" of Heian imperial culture depicted in the *Genji*. The late-medieval nobility, including the emperor, lost their political power to the warrior clans and tended to idealize their past.

To her women audience, the author offered “a universal version” of Cinderella with Murasaki as if confirming that a girl is discovered by a Prince Charming. To her male audience, Murasaki epitomized their indulgent fantasy of constructing their ideal mate; for most Heian noblemen, marriage was not always emotionally gratifying but accomplished the pragmatic goals of procreation and family alliance. Shikibu had to entertain those men, Emperor Ichijō, her patron Michinaga and her male courtiers placed in the highest ranks of the hierarchal structure, as pointed out by Komashyaku Kimi 駒尺喜美 in 1993:

Genji constructs a woman only for himself. He wants the woman who is appropriate for his noble class with refined tastes, intelligence and devotion to him all her life. He concludes he must raise a young girl by himself. This is the man’s desire in those days. Shikibu envisions the masculine unattainable desire with her super hero equipped with good looks, intellect, high status and wealth. Shikibu’s scheme might owe to the Chinese tradition of a child wife. In addition to her malleability to the custom of the family she marries into, the foot binding is a perfect strategy of keeping a bride so that she cannot escape. Constructing the man’s desirable woman persisted in the West as well in the East. Young Murasaki is the Heian version of *Pygmalion*. (107-108)

Komashyaku probably refers to the Greek myth of the sculptor Pygmalion creating his ideal woman Galatea. The Greek myth has a happy ending, but George Bernard Shaw adopted it into his play *Pygmalion* with an ambiguous

ending a little closer to Murasaki's destiny. On the surface, Shaw created a conventional Cinderella story with the transformation of the flower girl Eliza, but she realizes that her mentor Higgins has used her only to win the bet of passing her off as a duchess and leaves him in the end. Murasaki also comes to the realization that she has been under Genji's authority, but the medieval Japanese noblewoman is too inculcated to reject her mate, and we will later perceive her subversive mind only in her internal monologues.

Ironically, both *Genji*'s readers and *Pygmalion*'s audience would prefer a sentimental straightforward romance in the end of the works. Just as Murasaki's subversive monologues and Shikibu's suggestive irony remained irrelevant, Eliza's refusal to Higgins' demand to purchase his items have been omitted in *My Fair Lady*, the most popular version of *Pygmalion*. If Eliza's departure on her own would have frustrated the conventional expectation of the audience in the early 20th century, Murasaki's preference of the religious renunciation to Genji's companionship might have surprised a Japanese medieval audience. By depending on Genji, she could ensure her life security. If a woman could not have achieved much alone in a patriarchal society, she would have naturally chosen security over freedom.

Murasaki's unconditional submission is what Genji desires from her more than her accomplishments of refinement. He suffers occasionally from women's rejections and grudges. The high-born women, Aoi and Rokujō, have no fear to vex him. The narrator reports that some mistress shuts him out of the gate to her residence and Fujitubo and his cousin Asagao seldom write him back and injure

his sexual pride. Sheltered in his residence, Young Murasaki learns nothing of them, as the product of Genji's successful education to live under obedience and submission to him. He thus manages to retain her trust and devotion much longer than other lovers.

The Ignorant Bride

Shikibu is one of very few women writers who propose the validity of describing a woman's sexual initiation from a woman's perspective. The *Genji* shows that Heian unmarried noblewomen, typical of their time and class, were sheltered, ignorant and caught in surprise on the wedding night, in contrast to their men like Genji, highly sexed since adolescence and presuming the passivity of their mates. Shikibu's virgin heroines vary in their responses to the male sexual aggression. Nokibanohagi 軒端萩 and Oborozukiyo 朧月夜 are physically attacked by the stranger Genji but never see themselves as his victims, allowing him to play a gentle seducer, and even earns the author's slight contempt illustrated in Genji's smugness at his easy conquests. Shikibu thinks it a moral defect that the victim of rape expresses little indignation: Nokibanohagi and Oborozukiyo are easily seduced and so are seduceable.

She does not spare her sympathy for Tamakazura and Murasaki who are appalled and vexed by the men overpowering them. It is Tamakazura's suitor Lord Hige-kuro's intrigue that he rapes her while pretending to be visiting the bride on the wedding night. In contrast to his open elation and gratitude to her maid's betrayal of having guided him into the mistress' chamber, Tamakazu's sobbing and distress reveal her absence of consent. Although Genji consoles her,

he is in no position to protest against Higekuro, knowing that he has done what he would have done by playing her pseudo-father. Shikibu's sudden transformation of the beautiful and intelligent Tamakazura into a victim of rape, and her nefarious marriage have disheartened generations of readers.

Murasaki's "wedding" is not much better than that of Tamakazura, actually a common-law wife arrangement by the standard of Heian noble society. A regular high-born woman's wedding is performed by the consent between the men, the fathers of the bride and bridegroom or between the father of the bride and the bridegroom. The bride's consent was often irrelevant. Genji at twelve marries Aoi at sixteen according to their fathers' plan, visiting her residence on the first wedding night. Genji's son Yūgiri also is invited by the father of Kumoi no Kari 雲井の雁 to their residence on the wedding night. From the Heian conventional perspective, Murasaki lacks even paternal protection, and their consummation is conducted only on Genji's terms. Segregated from a regular mode of society, she thought that her husband Genji meant that he was her surrogate father, who instructed and guarded her. Genji and Shōnagon gave Murasaki all the education they thought necessary for her, except for sexuality. Willing to share her young mistress's fortune, Shōnagon has been anxious that her immature mistress might exhaust his interest before her maturation but let the nature shape the course of their relationship.

The first night of a newly wedded couple is called the "new pillow *nimakura* 新枕," as the bride is supposed to sleep with her head on the bridegroom's arm. As usual, the discreet author refuses to detail exactly what has

happened to Murasaki's sexual initiation at fifteen, focusing on her response, evidently finding it essential to show a detrimental lack in Genji's Pygmalion education:

One morning, Genji was early up, but Murasaki stayed in bed and worried her attendants, "Why is she still in bed? Is she sick?" (Ch. "Aoi." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 63).

This is a tactful and succinct depiction to hint at Genji's sexual advances toward his ward. The scene implies that Murasaki and Genji have slept together for five years with no sexual intercourse, but the servants in the household have already presumed that they have been a conjugal couple. It is Murasaki's traumatic realization that she has been the only one in the household kept in the dark. Having slept with him like a daughter and her father, Murasaki feels him brutal and herself betrayed, asking, "Why did I trust him?" (Ch. "Aoi." The *Genji* Vol. 1. 64). Having lived under the obedience to Genji's paternal authority for five years, she struggles to see a difference between father and husband. It is her eventual realization that their relationship now includes their sexual activity on his terms.

A tragicomedy takes place when Genji in his early twenties remains utterly obtuse to Murasaki's nightmare experience and plays the part of a conventional lover. Mechanically following the etiquette of a Heian nobleman, he leaves Murasaki the "letter of the next morning called *kinuginu no fumi* 後朝の文."⁹⁶ Yet she knows nothing about it. Ironically, Shikibu shows that Genji has

⁹⁶ As a rule, Heian noble marriage and any sexual relations started with a man visiting a woman to spend a night together. The bridegroom had to leave the bride's house early the next morning and write a letter to her. His prompt letter would be regarded as good manners and the sign of his attachment to her.

little thought of his bride's sheltered life that he has arranged for her. When he returns, he finds Murasaki still lying in bed and avoiding eye contact with him. Perplexed, he chooses to dismiss her lack of response as merely childish.

The letter of the next morning developed into an ineffectual means to discourage the Heian nobleman's promiscuity and desertion of his mate. When he slept with his lover, the first thing he was supposed to do was write her a letter to reassure her of his commitment to their relationship. The most sensitive and demanding receiver of the "letter of the next morning" among Shikibu's heroines is Rokujō, who feels slighted when Genji's letter arrives late in the afternoon. Rokujō has an impeccable sense of courtly decorum, counting every error of her younger lover's etiquette and possibly constantly intimidating him. Noblewomen would also occasionally have their maids write responses to their mates, as the author of *Kagerō Diary* had her maid answer to her husband, letting him know that they did so out of formality but had no heart to write an affectionate letter by themselves. Genji's treatment of his ignorant bride discloses that Rokujō's critical responses must have taught Genji to be a frequent love-letter writer and observer of conventional etiquette with little insight into his multiple mates. Here, Elizabeth Hardwick's severe comment on the letter might be appropriate: "The letter is, by its natural shape, self-justifying; it is one's own evidence, deposition, a self-serving testimony" (207). In other words, as a decorous Heian gentleman, Genji frequently writes love letters as Rokujō's mechanical student to accomplish his agenda, but not knowing the actual meaning of the letter as the lover's communication.

Including Murasaki, her heroines' trauma over their sexual encounters suggests Shikibu's criticism that the woman should not acquiesce but express protest. Yet what else can the victim do? Shikibu has no more answer than "silent protest" within the Heian decorous protocol. As Genji never understands Murasaki's silent protest, this incident sets the cycle of their lack of communication, and the seed of her distrust and resentment of him slowly and steadily grows for the rest of their marriage.

We can spot the woman's resistance and fear of male sexuality in Shikibu's contemporary society, as a stubborn virgin Princess Teishi 禎子 (1013-1094) is recorded in the *Flowering Fortunes*: the fifteen-year-old bride, who resisted marriage to the crown prince Atunara 敦良 (1009-1045), the son of Empress Shōshi, who was Shikibu's mistress; but she was tricked into going to the palace with her uncle one evening (Vol. 3. 99-100). When her uncle tried to introduce her to the crown prince, the bride suddenly sat on the floor and must have made the uncle feel panic. Yet her resistance was brief. The crown prince helped to save the uncle's face by picking her up and taking her to bed. The narrator quickly goes on to say that the crown prince stayed in bed with the bride so late the next morning – a usual rhetoric of celebrating the nuptial morning. The perspective demonstrated in the *Flowering Fortunes* never exceeds the conventional morality on masculine terms.

Interestingly, it is added in the *Flowering Fortunes* that her mother and grandmother were concerned over Princess Teishi's wedding by deception and stayed overnight until she came back the next morning. As we have previously

studied in Chapter 1, imperial polygyny followed the Chinese way, with their brides going to the rear palace; the multiple imperial consorts would be regarded as serving to the sovereign, and when they took leave they returned to their natal homes. Following the contemporary aristocratic etiquette, the crown prince also sent Princess Teishi “the letter of the next morning.” Princess Teishi seems to have reconciled with her fate, bearing an heir and becoming the Mother of the Nation. Her life indicates that she was one of those noblewomen who accepted their life paved by their kinsmen with grace and resignation and thrived.

Lady Nijō’s memoir, the *Confession*, is strikingly candid even in our current view in recording her sexual initiation with her imperial lover, the ex-Emperor Gofukakusa, as traumatic. As previously said, her memoir about her relationship with Gofukakusa echoes that of Young Murasaki and Genji. Like Murasaki, she was also a victim of ignorance at fifteen, merely told by her father to submit to the will of their master at twenty-eight. Nijō’s account of the virgin’s horror is graphic, as Gofukakusa treated her “roughly tearing off her thin garment on the skin...” (Kubota 久保 205). She seems to have even resisted her imperial master, unlike the passive Murasaki. Nijō might be a more recognizable woman than Murasaki, recording her memory of indignation at her master and her father who conducted the transference of her guardianship without her knowledge. Nijō even had a sweet heart and desired to marry him. Yet her father could not have rejected his master’s proposal under the circumstances. She later developed her complex attraction and loyalty toward her imperial master. Gofukakusa wanted a Young Murasaki, but Nijō remained too assertive and active to play a placid

heroine. She did not forget his insult of hitting his mistresses, including her, with a porridge scoop in public, organized a revenge group with those women and struck him back. Nijō even had several sexual mates. *Kagerō Diary* and Nijō's *Confession* are Japanese medieval women's important historical documents describing the complex dynamics of sexual relationships in which the hierarchy of gender and class doubly compelled them to remain obedient to their mates. Unlike Shikibu's heroines who are highly idealized by the author, those women do not mince their words in protesting against their sexual mates.

The ignorant bride's horror at the wedding night has been prevalent even in France in the age of modernity, as Simone de Beauvoir calls it "*un terrain de vérité* [the actual realm]:

During the period of engagement and flirtation, however childish, she continues to live habitually in her dreamy and ceremonial realm. In the disguise of a romantic or courtly language, the trick is still possible... Then she is suddenly gazed upon by the man's actual eyes and grabbed by his actual hands. This relentless actuality of the male gaze and capture terrifies her.

Pendant la période des fiançailles, du flirt, de la cour, si rudimentaire qu'elle ait été, elle a continué à vivre dans son univers habituel de cérémonie et de rêve... Et soudain la voilà vue par de vrais yeux, empoignée par de vraies mains: c'est l'implacable réalité de ces regards et de ces étreintes qui l'épouvante. (Vol. 2. 157)

Shikibu and Beauvoir point out what millions of brides had already experienced in widely different cultures and times that a woman's naivety, man's advanced knowledge and their contradictory attitudes toward sex have pathologically affected their marital relations. Yet neither Shikibu nor Beauvoir finds particular solutions to the terror of the virgin.

In the context of the traditional Hindu attitude toward woman and man's sexuality, Sharma also postulates in 1995:

Boys easily overcome their ambivalence toward sex and love. Much sooner than expected, they come to understand that they can use wives as objects of routine sexuality and turn to other women for erotic adventures. But girls are so different. Innocent and gullible as they turn out to be, they faithfully separate sex from love so that for them where there is sex, there is no love, and where there is love, there is no sex. For young women, despite education and exposure, sex is marital and loveless, while love is extra-marital and asexual. When they fall in love, they do not expect any sexual overtures from their lovers. When they marry, they do not expect any love from their husbands....Marriage for most women is loveless but full of sex....Brought up in cultural contexts where sex is constantly condemned as something evil and degrading and now suddenly thrown into a situation where they have to surrender themselves to indiscriminate and unilateral sexuality at the ends of their husbands, new wives find it very difficult to shift overnight

their allegiance from an inhibitive past to a licentious present....No program of women's liberation from a repressive culture and a crippling social structure can ever succeed in making a marriage a fulfilling experience for women unless they see through the traditional masculine game and reconcile love with sex. Since few males would have females equated and liberated, women would have to liberate themselves, in spite of men. (245-246)

Sharma accurately points out that girls in many cultures have been implicitly or explicitly forewarned of the dire sexual consequence of pregnancy, until the pill has solved that concern. They have thus learned to disassociate love and sex, whereas boys have been permitted to explore premarital sex as part of their education to establish male supremacy in relating to women, thus having no problem to reconcile love and sex. Admittedly, Sharma's observation is based on a modern Hindu society, but Murasaki is probably much more ignorant than regular girls in medieval Japan. Yet Sharma offers what Shikibu and Beauvoir have left out for women in their time: that they need to take their sexuality into their own hands.

Murasaki's pragmatic nurse Shōnagon is Shikibu's compromised solution to help our beloved heroine out. Looking after herself in the conventional mode, Shōnagon finds Genji's formalizing her mistress as his bride in the household flawless. Genji orders a set of rice cakes, a traditional ceremonial meal for the wedding. To Shonagon's relief, Genji did not make her his *meshiudo*, the servant-mistress, which would have been the usual fate of an orphaned maiden with

neither wealth nor male relatives. When Genji reveals their marriage to Murasaki's father, Prince Hyobu, she is publically acknowledged as his wife and "the most fortunate woman." Yet without Murasaki's father's involvement in the wedding ceremony, Murasaki is Genji's de facto wife, later superseded by the Third Princess, who arrives in a glamorous procession, cementing her position as his official and supreme wife.

Murasaki will never forget this bitter experience of coming of age and Genji's agenda to capture and raise her for his sexual mate. More than ten years later, when Genji discovers Yūgao's daughter Tamakazura and harbors his sexual interest in the beautiful maiden, he cannot escape Murasaki's acute eyes, her suspicious face and sarcastic comment: "She is a sensible young lady. I am sorry she trusts and depends on you....I myself once could not help feeling sad about your penchant" (Ch. "The Butterfly 胡蝶." The *Genji* Vol. 3. 175). Embarrassed, Genji can only mumble. Murasaki's implicit warning nevertheless damps Genji's passion for his helpless ward. Much to his chagrin, Tamakazura escapes Genji's tentacle arms but is forced to marry her least favorite suitor and later her rapist, Lord Kurohige.

The Confucian Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢藩山 lauds Murasaki's transformation into the wise woman 賢女 according to the 16th-century standard of traditional patriarchal ideology, who remains a chaste partner of Genji as promiscuous as ever (100). Yet she loses the early vivacity and vigor of Young Murasaki, sinking into a rather monotonous and flat character. Not surprisingly, Genji's marital infatuation is short-lived and soon turns Murasaki into an insecure

mate over the series of his affairs, such as his fling with Oborozukiyo 朧月夜, the official mistress of his brother and the current Emperor Suzaku, his infatuation with his cousin Princess Asagao 朝顔, and his acquisition of two more minor wives, Hana Chiru Sato 花散里 and Akashi 明石. All of these women are attractive and threatening to Murasaki, but never try to oust her, being her merely circumstantial rivals for coming to share Genji with each other.

Genji's two major minor wives, Akashi and Hana Chiru Sato, are as idealized as Murasaki, not for beauty but for feminine virtues. Neither Akashi nor Hana Chiru Sato demonstrates as furious a temper as the second wife of Michinaga's father, the author of *Kagerō Diary*. They never complain of being left alone by Genji no longer taking interest in his past sexual conquests. Actually, neither Akashi nor Hana Chiru Sato begins their relations with Genji with a high level of passion. Had Genji been not in exile, he would not have seriously considered the marriage proposal of Akashi's father, the local governor as a misalliance to his class. Recognizing her lowly status, Akashi focuses her life on the well-being of her daughter, Empress Akashi. A plain and placid high-born woman, Hana Chiru Sato does not seem to have enough financial means to live alone, relying on Genji's support and making herself Genji's helpmate next to Murasaki as the most domestic wife. Genji never introduces his son Yūgiri to his most beautiful wife Murasaki, but finds Hana Chiru Sato ideal for his son's surrogate mother.

The two minor wives' choice of terminating their conjugal relations with Genji is hinted by Akashi's frequent visits to her daughter in the rear palace, and

Hana Chiru Sato's accommodation of Genji's separate bedding on his visit. This might not be the best solution for women's fulfilled life, but Shikibu approves of their choice of resignation and acceptance of their subordinate position to Genji's most favorite wife Murasaki as a pragmatic solution to maintain equilibrium in the polygynous household. On the surface Akashi and Hana Chiru Sato live under Genji's protection and the submission to him but psychologically divorce him with discretion in order to guard their hearts.

Yet Shikibu carefully denies the Chinese Confucian Liu Hsiang's theory of genuine sisterhood of co-wives, as Hana Chiru Sato and Akashi politely refuse the supreme wife Murasaki's generous invitations to social events to minimize their emotional strains while selectively joining her in submitting to Genji's needs. Before her death, Murasaki once tries to reach out them by writing them farewell *waka* but receives only mildly positive responses from them. For the minor co-wives, their good will is inevitably inhibited by their self-consciousness of the ambivalent position potentially threatening to Murasaki and of their inferior status to her. Each of Genji's three wives, despite their lives at the same site of Rokujō-in, isolates herself from the others to prevent frictions undercurrent in their conflicting positions.

Fujimoto Katuyoshi 藤本勝義 points out Shikibu's euphonism that the lack of children does not deteriorate Murasaki and Genji's marriage and diminish Murasaki's status, and her demotion does not take place until the arrival of the Third Princess as her social superior (218-266). Children in Heian noble society were the indispensable means for the wife to secure her social status and her

desirability in the husband's heart. Even without the husband's attention, children, particularly sons, justified the wife's social status and her sense of self-worth.

Despite her beauty and poetic skills, the author of *Kagerō Diary* inevitably found herself insecure in contrast to the first wife of her husband, who had been reputed as the most fortunate woman for her prolific motherhood.

Murasaki's eager acceptance of raising her rival Akashi's daughter Princess Akashi has aroused numerous readers' suspicion as making her an incredibly virtuous wife. In the film version of the *Genji* produced in 2007, "The Dream of 1000 Years," the anger and disappointment of the betrayed wife is more vividly visualized with Murasaki's attempted strangling of her little adopted daughter Princess Akashi out of jealousy and the later reconciliation with her role as the surrogate mother to raise her. Yet Shikibu makes Murasaki fond of children, not making her appear to bend her jealousy of Akashi on her daughter. A good relationship between the woman and her rival's daughter is possible. The author of *Kagerō Diary* also adopted the daughter of her husband's mate, but she did so years after her husband had deserted the rival. There is something overwrought in the narrator's insistence on Akashi's daughter and Murasaki's exclusive relations, not entirely truthful. Murasaki raises her adopted daughter lovingly but later transfers the maternal duty to her biological mother Akashi back, perhaps out of some guilt and of her recognition that she has completed her part.

Shikibu reverses the stereotyped images of wicked stepmother, happy motherhood and jealous barren women. To counterbalance Murasaki and Hana Chiro Sato, Shikibu does acknowledge that there are stepmothers jealous of their

stepchildren, like Genji's stepmother Kokiden and Murasaki's father's first wife. Biological mothers are not unconditionally celebrated. Reizei's resemblance to Genji continues to trouble Fujitubo as a reminder of her illicit past. Genji's first wife Aoi dies in childbirth, leaving Genji's son Yūgiri to be raised by her parents and later looked after by Genji's minor wife, Hana Chiruru Sato. Akashi has to surrender her only child to Murasaki, her social superior and sexual rival, who resents her for having stolen Genji when he is out of the capital. The Third Princess is an accidental and ineffectual mother of her illegitimate son Kaoru. Ironically, the two surrogate mothers, Hana Chiru Sato and Murasaki, mostly enjoy the company of children without the pain and peril of child-bearing. Having only one daughter, who would be conventionally regarded as less fortunate than a son, Shikibu might have been sympathetic to childless mothers. Still, her women characters live in a utopian community, which transcend their mutual rivalries, meanness, squabble and doubts in order to achieve a higher call of motherhood than regular Heian noblewomen.

Stepmothers in the complex dynamics of Heian polygyny actually learned to deal with their stepchildren with a variety of their motives. In the *Collection of Murasaki Shikibu's Waka* 紫式部集, Shikibu showed her correspondence with a daughter of her co-wife after her husband's death, but it is not clear that this was just a one-time cordial gesture. The author of the *Kagerō Diary* also corresponded with the prominent children of her husband's first wife, Consort Senshi, and the Prime Minister Michitaka, possibly trying to help her son's career promotion through his step-siblings. She celebrated the birth of Senshi's son, the later

Emperor Ichijō, with her skillful *waka* and gifts. The harmonious relations of a polygynous family were nevertheless understandably maintained by its conscious efforts, precaution and restraint of multiple wives.

The Utopian Polygyny Disintegrated

A familiar scene to Shikibu's contemporary audience was the agony of the polygynous wife over her husband's new marriage. In Chapter 1, we learned how devastated the author of *Kagerō Diary* was by her husband's frequent acquisitions of new official and casual mates. The severe realist Shikibu is vexingly conscious that Murasaki outdoes regular noblewomen in remaining Genji's principal wife and favorite companion for more than twenty years, sustaining her audience's wishful expectation that Genji finally binds himself only to Murasaki. The author finds a compromising solution to exert her unfailing realism while adjusting it to the audience's expectation that Murasaki remains the Ideal Feminine and Genji's favorite wife despite his marriage to her social superior, the daughter of ex-Emperor Suzaku, the Third Princess 女三宮. Yet Shikibu does not torment Murasaki alone, as Genji's last marriage unwittingly sheds his belief in his own impunity.

In Genji's deteriorating household, Shikibu demonstrates her disbelief in the utopian polygyny consisting of the devoted and sisterly wives and magnanimous husband. Most powerful high-born men committed to the acquisition of many mates, official and unofficial, putting their incumbent wives in constant anxiety. Unlike Genji, Regent Michinaga never thought the marriage to the daughter of a sovereign pragmatically feasible. Yet until he took the tonsure

in his sixties, Michinaga had several young mistresses, forcing his most prominent wife Rinshi to tolerate them as nebulous affairs. Although knowing this reality, Shikibu's audience could not help feeling disappointed by Genji and Murasaki's dissipated matrimony ending with her death.

Genji's marriage to the Third Princess exposes the vulnerability of Murasaki's position dependent only on Genji's favor, which has led *Genji* critics and readers to wonder what her social status is before the arrival of her prominent contender and how it changes in the context of Heian polygyny. Heian nobles were half-converted Confucians, who did not always follow the strict Chinese hierarchy of the formal wife 正妻 and the minor wives 妾妻. Besides, the dynamic of power relations among the co-wives has not been well examined yet in the current scholarship of Japanese history.

Kimura Kaori 木村佳織 postulates that Heian emperors did not permit marriages between their daughters and their subjects, known as *kōka* 降嫁, meaning "marrying down," as frequently as their counterparts do in the *Genji* (298). As a rule, the daughters of the emperors would remain single or to marry the emperors. Probably, the two major parts of the hereditary governing body, the emperor and his regent, remained wary of the bridegroom of an imperial princess as their potential contender. The emperor would sparingly use his own prerogative of permitting his daughter's marriage to a subject for his political gains.

The *Flowering Fortunes* does record the sovereign's promotion of the marriage between his daughter and a subject in Shikibu's contemporary society. Emperor Sanjō 三条天皇 tried to marry one of his daughters to Michinaga's first

son Yorimichi 頼道 in order to earn his Regent's favor. Michinaga was then a virtual ruler. When Emperor Sanjō made his proposal to Michinaga, the elated father ordered his son to accept the imperial offer with the reason that his wife had been childless. Although the daughter of the emperor was the most desirable commodity in the Heian marriage market for the politically ambitious nobleman to establish a crucial link to the imperial family, Yorimichi did not want to devastate his beloved wife. When he suddenly fell ill, the deceased father of his current wife appeared as the *mononoke* and compelled the horrified Michinaga to cancel the son's wedding (Vol. 2. 56-63).

This episode is a good example of how the husband's remarriage would destabilize the incumbent wife's status and devastate her particularly when he brought a new bride with a higher social background than she had. The fluctuation of the polygynous wife's status could plague all Heian noblewomen, from the consorts of the emperors to the wives of their subjects; but the husband's remarriage could be justified with various reasons for his own benefits. The two most powerful men, Emperor Sanjō and Michinaga, assumed that Yorimichi's first wife already lost her father and saw little objection to have her social superior oust her until her father's ghost used his supernatural threat. This implies that only the wife's father could at least contest the new marriage of her husband according to the theory of the patriarchal ideology. The mother of Yorimichi's wife was still alive and lamented over her daughter's misfortune, but this was irrelevant because she was a woman. Yorimichi's remarriage also involved both gender and class

hierarchy conventions. Probably, even most fathers would not have protested against either the emperor or regent. Neither does Murasaki's biological father.

Murasaki's ambiguous marital status persists as an intriguing subject in *Genji* criticism. We have to take into consideration that the abduction of the premature bride Murasaki is Shikibu's invention, not likely to have happened to a regular Heian noblewoman confined to the household. Hence, it would be a contrivance to apply literally to our heroine's anomalous position the Heian conventional institution of polygynous wives' hierarchy, which itself has remained a historically unclear subject to this day.

After idealizing Murasaki's rise as Genji's sole companion to share his glamorous life, Shikibu dramatizes her fall from grace with the historically irregular case of Genji's marriage to the daughter of the emperor. Yet Murasaki's agony over Genji's remarriage to her social superior still illuminates the psychological norm of polygynous wives in Shikibu's time. The author particularly emphasizes the futility of trying to hold a polygynous wife's position by her charms through Genji's most favorite wife. The wealthy and powerful polygynist Genji is allowed to remain fickle. We will focus on Murasaki's inner life affected by Genji's marriage to the Third Princess in the rest of this chapter.

Understandably, Shikibu cannot overtly incriminate the husband's new marriage, which is the bone of polygyny, carefully suggesting that there is nothing vicious about the Third Princess' father and her nurse, but they are unwise and ineffectual guardians. Before retiring as a Buddhist monk, ex-Emperor Suzaku wants to ease his conventional father's concern about the future of his most

favorite daughter and is easily persuaded by her nurse's words that Genji wants a prestigious wife. Arguing that her mistress is worthy of Genji, she apparently finds that his most favorite wife is no threat to her mistress. Genji's son Yūgiri is Suzaku's passing thought as the bridegroom, but his first wife's prominent father, the Minister of Internal Affairs 内大臣, dissuades him as disadvantageous to his own daughter's marital prominence. Despite her imperial lineage, Murasaki's lack of the vital connection with her biological father leads Suzaku and the nurse to campaign for the Third Princess' marriage to Genji, the most powerful and wealthy man in the land.

Already having more than enough of official and casual sexual mates, Genji wants none if the Third Princess were not Fujitubo's other niece. With little knowledge about the Third Princess, Genji hastily accepts his brother's proposal to marry his niece. He certainly feels guilty that his new bride will automatically demote Murasaki from the position of his de facto first wife: "My feelings for her will never change even though I will marry the Third Princess. Actually, my pity will make him love Murasaki more than ever" (Ch. "Young Herb 若菜." I. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 44). In Genji's self-justification, Shikibu continues to expose the amazing fallacy of her contemporary noblemen. By adding another wife, he betrays Murasaki again. Even in their polygynous society, some discerning people in Shikibu's audience must have realized that they could not take Genji seriously.

Many Heian noblemen probably did not think that they had to tell their current wives the most unpleasant news of acquiring a new bride. The author of

Kagerō Diary constantly stewed over the ceaseless rumors of her husband's new mates. Her husband seems to have never told her of each of his new mates. Shikibu nevertheless makes Genji an unusually considerate Heian nobleman, “selectively” telling his favorite wife about the presence of his mates to alleviate her panic and rage. He once wrote to Murasaki about his native wife Akashi. Yet his marriage to her social superior, the Third Princess, is incomparable in the degree of damage to Murasaki's self-esteem, even though Genji uses the most tactful excuse:

The ex-Emperor Suzaku has been recently sick and I cannot help sympathizing with his worry about the Third Princess. He wants me to take care of the daughter and I feel deeply obliged. I might scandalize many people, and I am embarrassed to marry at my age [of forty]....I know I am hurting you. But your life will be the same. I feel sorry for the young Princess and want to look after her well. We will live together in peace. (Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” I.

The *Genji* Vol. 4. 45-46)

No longer an impetuous youth but a shrewd conventional moralist, Genji sounds as if it were his obligation to marry the imperial princess, instead of confessing his interest in Fujitubo's other niece. Yet whatever his reason is, the catastrophic impact of the news is all the same to Murasaki. Crushed by the news, but no longer pouting or sobbing like a young bride in her early thirties, she is accustomed to suppressing and hiding her feelings, giving a response characteristic of the Ideal Feminine:

The ex-Emperor is humbling himself to the younger brother, asking for your favor. How can I object to him or you? If the Third Princess does not mind my presence here, I am sure I will live well. I hope she will treat me as one of her relatives and allow me to join her entourage. (Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” I. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 46)

From the traditional masculine perspective, Murasaki’s lack of grudge and eager adjustability to her husband’s desire is admirable. This is one of the reasons why she has been a popular *Genji* heroine. Her guarded response even disappoints Genji, who is ready to console her afterward. His doubt might be “Am I still loved enough to arouse her jealousy?” He never understands the humiliation of a betrayed wife, and his last marriage is the last straw to shatter her last hope for a peaceful life.

Komashyaku points out a difference between Genji’s most feisty mistresses, Rokujō and Murasaki, in their attitudes toward Genji:

Rokujō is neither docile nor compliable. Genji knows she will neither tolerate his neglect nor resign to it....She dies with an enormous grudge at him and frightens him. But Murasaki is the opposite of Rokujō. Having suffered women’s jealousy, Genji taught Murasaki not to trouble him with jealousy. Although she does feel jealousy, she usually represses it and shows Genji only a glimpse of its presence. (Murasaki is) the ideal picture of (the wife) for men. (148)

Murasaki never learns how to reject Genji. When Genji courts Rokujō, she is an independent woman with financial skills to maintain her gorgeous mansion and has the choice of accepting or rejecting him. Even the immature Third Princess knows that she does not have to obey Genji, backed by her father, the ex-Emperor Suzaku, and her own wealth. By contrast, virtually incarcerated in Genji's luxurious residence, Murasaki develops her habit of adjusting to Genji, who is accustomed to believe that she always reconciles with her fate.

The *Genji* parades a variety of Heian noblewomen's impotent angry outbursts at their husbands' new marriages. The first one is Genji's stepmother Kokiden, complaining of the Emperor's favor of his beautiful lesser consort, Kiritubo. Lord Higekuro suffers a sudden violent attack from his meek first wife pouring ash over his back. Genji's son Yūgiri has a strong-willed wife with a powerful and wealthy father, who angrily marches out of their household with their children and returns to her natal home. Yet none of those wives succeed in forcing their husbands to give up on the new wife, as most Heian noblemen most probably insisted on their privilege of polygyny despite the protest of the incumbent one. Feminine aggression was morally disapproved according to the code of the three obediences, but numerous noblewomen presumably objected to their husbands' acquired new co-wives anyway.

Murasaki at first cannot face her demotion recognized by the public and servants in the household and declares to him defensively:

My Lord had many women but none of us was suitable for his position. This glorious and beautiful princess finally came to be his

match. I still feel like a child and would like to join her entourage.

But people might doubt I am not open to the Princess. (Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” I. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 60).

Shei is self-effacing but also sarcastically remarking at Genji’s marriage to a bride of fifteen, young enough to be his daughter. It is her proud determination to keep her anger and disappointment to herself, as she deals with drastic changes surrounding her smoothly and quietly.

By contrast, her gentlewomen demonstrate their indignation at Genji when he races to Murasaki’s apartment after the last of his disappointing three-consecutive-wedding-night visits to the Third Princess. Hearing his loud knocks in the freezing winter morning, his women slowly march toward the door to unlock it, secretly gloating over his grumbling. This comic relief might have entertained some of Shikibu’s audience comprising Empress Shōshi’s gentlewomen, as we can imagine that they clapped hands at the scene of the servants’ sabotage of the familiar trick of the courtiers. They probably knew that the renowned jealous Empress Anshi once got her revenge on her imperial spouse by closing all the doors to her apartment when he tried to get in. Yet even the Empress had no official means of protesting against her imperial spouse’s sexual liberty, but had to be satisfied with petty revenge, because they were ‘just women.’

Murasaki’s trouble is more than Genji’s remarriage but the vulnerability of her marital life exposed by it, as illustrated in her *waka*:

As I watch these hills covered with luscious green leaves losing the color,
isn’t autumn coming to me.

身に近く秋や来むらん見るままに青葉の山もうつろひにけり

Again, the “autumn” is the typical metaphor for the man’s exhaustion of interest in his lover. Genji writes his protest alongside her *waka*:

The water bird keeps the same blue wings however altered the scenery is.

水鳥の青葉はいろもかはらぬをはぎのしたこそけしきことなれ

(Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” I. The *Genji* Vol. 4. 82).

He compares the bird’s unchanged color to his perpetual love for her. Yet as soon as he composes the *waka*, he leaves his two wives quickly to meet Oborozukiyo, with whom he had taken up again after her imperial lover Emperor Suzaku became a monk. Yet our hero is probably no worse than other high-born men believing that they looked after all their women’s needs well, blithely ignoring their inner lives.

One can find a glimpse of Murasaki’s self-knowledge seven years after Genji’s marriage to the Third Princess, when he is in the height of his glory and power. He invites his male guests (who can only see the presence of his wives behind the bamboo screen) and has a music recital with the three wives, Akashi, Murasaki and the Third Princess and his daughter, Imperial Consort Akashi, playing the string instruments *koto* 琴 and *biwa* 琵琶. This is his last time to flaunt his beautiful and talented women in public before the Third Princess’ illicit affair devastates him. After the concert, he is in an excellent mood to talk to his longest companion Murasaki:

I don’t think you had so much trouble except our temporary

separation by my exile in Akashi. Even such high-born women as

the empress and other consorts have their own heart-aching problems. Those women in court suffer in rigorous competition but you led your life as if constantly protected by your parents. You are extraordinarily fortunate. The Third Princess of course came abruptly and upset you. But I feel my love for you grew more than ever. You are sensible enough to have confidence in my heart. (Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” II. *The Genji* Vol. 4. 197-198).

Genji voices the conventional view of Murasaki’s most fortunate life. Perhaps he is correct that she is better-off than women in rigorous competitions in the court. Yet his simplistic presumption of women’s happiness cannot detect Murasaki’s gradual and subtle sense of futility over her own life. This is another ironic scene exemplifying the couple’s impasse created by his obtuse and patronizing tenderness to Murasaki.

Although too diffident to offend Genji, Murasaki no longer believes that her companionship with him is her lot:

You are right that I have been thought of as being fortunate above my breeding. But I have a share of my own afflictions even though no one knows them. In fact, I keep praying (to Buddha) to help me live...I do not think I can live for long. I know it is wrong to ignore my premonition and do nothing at my age of 37. I implore you again to release me. It is my greatest desire to become a nun. (Ch. “Young Herb 若菜” II. *The Genji* Vol. 4. 198).

Remarking on Murasaki's age of thirty-seven, Shikibu's narrator is conscious of women's inauspicious ages in Buddhist numerology, seriously believed in Heian noble society. Fujitubo, tormented by the sin of adultery, silently accepts the verdict of death at thirty-seven from heaven. Equally, Murasaki sees her age as the time to prepare for her spiritual salvation, but her plea for a discreet religious divorce meets Genji's firm rejection and induces the narrator's sympathy: "Sadly, her sense of modesty inhibits her from saying more!" (Ch. "Young Herb 若菜" II. *The Genji* Vol. 4. 198). This is the highest compliment for the Ideal Feminine, far from our current inclination of judging her as being abject.

The tragicomedy ends with Genji reassuring Murasaki of his unflinching love and leaving her to spend a night with the Third Princess. How can Murasaki take him seriously? Conscious of the anti-climax, she tries to find an answer to her loneliness and despair in classic tales:

There are many old tales about a woman who got involved with a fickle, lustful and double-hearted man 二心ある人.⁹⁷ Each tale has a reasonable closure. How about me? Strangely, I am still unsettled in my late life. My lord [Genji] tells me I am so fortunate. But do I have to spend the rest of life with such a torment? (Ch. "Young Herb 若菜." II. *The Genji* Vol. 4. 203).

This passage suggests that it was an odd fact of Heian noble society that the polygynist had to assure each of his wives of "no double heart." Each wife surely

⁹⁷ The double-hearted man or person is pronounced as *futagokoro-aruhito*. This term seems to have been regularly used in Heian society. In current Japanese, it is still used to refer to a promiscuous man or insincere person.

wanted to hear that her husband was devoted only to herself. Yet in fact, the polygynist had multiple hearts. Shikibu also experienced this deceptive game of the “no-double heart.” In the *Collection of Murasaki Shikibu’s Waka* 紫式部集, the author lists the *waka* composed by a man, possibly her husband, who keeps insisting that he has “no double heart” (125). Yet in the context of her *Collection*, Shikibu is eventually disillusioned by her own marriage as her husband keeps himself busy visiting multiple wives.

Like Shikibu, Murasaki comes to a hapless conclusion that there is no “single-hearted” man who loves only one woman in their society, but he is only present in their imagination. It is clear that Murasaki no longer wants to suffer for Genji’s promiscuity. Yet perhaps monogamy is not Shikibu’s answer, either. After the Third Princess’ discreet divorce, Murasaki shows no interest in the restoration of her virtual monogamous relationship with Genji. Murasaki’s “torment” is to know how to leave her “most fortunate life.”

The religious renunciation of a noblewoman in her thirties was probably not surprising in Heian noble society.⁹⁸ Polygyny made the husband magnanimously permit his mature wife’s discreet divorce of taking the tonsure after the age of reproduction. Numerous widows, from empresses to regular noblewomen, also transformed themselves into nuns, their respectable life according to conventional morality. We nevertheless know whether or not Shikibu became a nun. In her *Diary*, Shikibu toys with the idea of retiring from the world

⁹⁸ *Kagerō Diary* and the *Flowering Fortunes* suggest that wives in their thirties would exhaust their polygynist husbands’ interest and think of becoming nuns. Ikeda states that mature Heian wives voluntarily quit marriage and became nuns (232). This was convenient for polygynist men looking for younger mates.

as a nun, which would have probably given her a sufficient excuse to leave her reluctant service in the court, but hints at her qualms about her sincere religious faith and devotion (Fujioka 246). She is quick to trivialize the imperfection of Buddhist institutions and mocking the priests for their religious hypocrisy, fallacy and authority. Had she taken the tonsure, she would have had no illusion about the deprivation of the nun's formal Buddhist education which led the public to slight her as a casual celibate; by contrast, the monks were welcomed to study the theology under the priests' instructions.

The author's skepticism of the Buddhist institution might have partly contributed to her refusal to grant Murasaki a religious retirement. Shikibu maintains her view that a woman's religious life is a pragmatic means of self-preservation. Genji's mistress Oborozukiyo and his wife, the Third Princess, are not particularly pious Buddhists but humiliate and outrage him by becoming nuns without his consent. Their religious retirement turns into a strange revenge against the vanity and self-love of their mate. For Murasaki, Shikibu provides a different fate. Murasaki needs something more than a pragmatic solution of becoming a nun to fulfill a void in her life; otherwise, she will be again disappointed. She awaits some spiritual agent to release the bonds and obligations to pay a debt to Genji for having saved her as an orphaned girl. Genji also has to understand the weight of her contribution as his last mate. Murasaki's death is thus Shikibu's choice.

Murasaki's second and last monologue takes place when she is amazed, but she remains powerlessly silent when Genji is agitated by Yūgiri's taking his

friend Kashiwagi's widow as his second wife against her will. Genji's Confucian son and family man, seemingly more observant of the conventional morality than his father, still proves that he, too, is a typical Heian nobleman. When Genji tells Murasaki of his suspicion that Yūgiri may even take her over after his death, he does not even recognize that he has insulted her even though "her face turns red" (Ch. "Yūgiri 夕霧." The *Genji* Vol. 4. 441). Shikibu shows the last moment of Genji and Murasaki's estrangement overtly only to her audience. Murasaki does not know Genji's devastation over the Third Princess' betrayal and that his suspicion is due to his own past sexual transgression with his stepmother Fujitubo.

As demonstrated in the *Genji*, Heian noblemen probably forbade their sons to meet their stepmothers to prevent semi-incestuous relations. The author of *Kagerō Diary* tells us that she met a son of the first wife of her husband Michitaka through the bamboo screen in a Buddhist temple when he came to bring her back to the capital as his father's representative. Genji's father Emperor was an unconventional polygynist who thought too optimistically that his young son and Fujitubo would make his ideal family. By contrast, the guilty Genji never allows his son Yūgiri to meet Murasaki, jealously guarding his most beautiful wife and instead letting his plain minor wife Hana Chiru Sato look after her stepson.

The Second Princess is another sad case of marrying Yūgiri against her will. Led by her bribed maid to her chamber, Yūgiri has sexual intercourse with the Second Princess against her will. Along with the Second Princess, Shikibu demonstrates the evident lack of will in the case of Utusemi, Tamakazura and Murasaki's responses to their sexual partners, Hige-kuro and Genji. Yet none of

them shrieks at their sexual assaults. Are the heroines supposed to be paralyzed by fear? As discussed in the introduction, because there is no word for *rape* in the *Genji* and because those heroines demonstrate “profound passivity” in Norma Field’s terms, they have not been perceived as rape victims until the rise of feminism in the 1970s. There has still been strong resistance in the literary community against calling those male *Genji* characters rapists. Shikibu suggests much sympathy for Utusemi, Murasaki, Tamakazura and the Second Princess as a woman. How did Shikibu’s decorous audience in the imperial court listen to those graphic scenes of how the man invades the woman’s chamber (not of their actual sexual actions)? They may not have been surprised. The *Flowering Fortunes* candidly reports on Heian high-born men, emperors and imperial princes’ sexual flings with their maid servants as a matter of fact. Yet no other Heian women writers describe the lack of women’s will in response to the men’s sexual aggression as graphically as Shikibu does. Did these scenes make her audience feel awkward? Did they hit too close to home? It is a wonder that Shikibu might have shown in the *Genji* how a regular Heian nobleman initiates a sexual fling against his partner. Yet all Shikibu’s heroines are eventually settled with their sexual aggressors in marriage. As women were protected and cared by men according to the three obediences, Shikibu’s audience might have felt relieved. Similarly, neither Genji nor the father of the Second Princess, Ex-Emperor Suzaku, do not take Yūgiri’s sexual assault as a serious moral offence. They probably mirror the Heian conventional belief that it is the woman’s best interest to have a man for survival, discounting the Second Princess’ desire for a religious

retirement. Yet Shikibu's criticism of aggressive male sexuality persists through her heroines.

Shikibu exposes only to her audience Murasaki's identification with the Second Princess' plight:

A woman is not allowed to lead a life of her own. Poor thing!
 Constrained behind the bamboo screen and repressing her feelings,
 how can she comfort her own life? Even though her parents raise
 their daughter with much love and care, isn't it a shame for them to
 see she remains pathetically ignorant and lethargic? It is
 meaningless to be as timid as the Prince of Silence 無言太子 [the
 Indian Buddhist saint, who knows the past, present and future but
 hides them] and learn this parable for self-discipline. What can a
 woman do about this? (Ch. "Yūgiri." The *Genji* Vol. 4. 442)

The Prince of Silence is a Buddhist parable familiar in all Asia: a crown prince remembers his previous life as king and his suffering in hell afterward for eight thousand years. In order to avoid the second round of hell, he decides to reject the throne awaiting him and remains dumb for 16 years even at the expense of being put to death. In this context, kingship means karmic retribution destined to hell, and he eventually gets out of the palace and becomes an ascetic.

Buddhist priests most probably preached to Heian noblewomen how to avoid the karmic retribution of their lowly condition through the Prince's good example of patience and endurance. In other words, the parable became another convenient means to convince women that they could find no faults in their

society but in their own biology. Given that even such a privileged Prince of Silence suffers his karmic retribution, a woman is no worse than him and should work out her salvation. Here, the three obediences would be routinely justified as a spiritual fact for women.

Murasaki now regrets that she has spent her entire life in his service although the young girl was programmed to be the Ideal Feminine without her knowledge. She even seems to regret her own motherhood of raising a surrogate daughter, who is now Empress Akashi, installed in the highest position of women in the land as the Mother of the Nation. Yet Murasaki's grooming the surrogate daughter to be the sovereign's mate has been under Genji's direction to reinforce his political dominance. In a way, Murasaki and Genji have reproduced as beautiful and docile a woman as she in order to be the sovereign's favorite mate although the public envies their fortune. It is important to notice Murasaki's self-criticism as having been "timid" to Genji. She has been like a dormant volcano in her adulthood, whose lava has still been constantly boiling underneath her affable and pleasant demeanor but has now erupted only inwardly.

As Shimizu Yoshiko 清水好子 says, we realize that Murasaki grows from "a lovely maid into a dignified matron," but also her inwardly impoverished life as follows:

This is a cry of a woman deprived of voice and expression,
 exposing the basic human issue more fundamental than her love
 and trust in a man. (qtd. in Miura Tomoki 339)

If freedom defines human beings, in Heian noble society only men were human beings, since most women lived under the three obediences and probably murmured and whispered their complaints. Although Shikibu's rival Sei Shōnagon demonstrates her own perspective of womanhood in her *Pillow Book*, she is not as severely critical of her contemporary society as Shikibu is. Even so, Shikibu can afford to show only in her internal monologues Murasaki's awakening to her comfortable cage and marital bondage just before her death, pointing to the numerous silenced women in Heian society.

After Murasaki's internal outburst, the author still feels pressured by self-censorship. The narrator is quick to add apologetically, "Murasaki now thinks of the First Princess, the daughter of Empress Akashi", whom she raises like a grandmother (Nishizawa 81). In other words, Murasaki has never thought of herself as silenced, but her interest in educating the First Princess has led her to a radical thought. Yet Murasaki has no clear answer to the First Princess' education and leaves it out.

Acknowledging her silenced self, Murasaki somehow reminds us of Nora in Ibsen's "Doll's House," although she has not been exposed to the liberal spirit of nineteenth-century modernism in Norway. Had Genji ever heard Murasaki's first and last protest, Genji would have been as appalled and bewildered as Helmer. Nora articulates, by analogy, Murasaki's apathy toward Genji:

Nora: When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything and so I had the same opinions, and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He

called me his doll-child, and he played with me just I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you – I was simply transferred from papa’s hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same taste as you – or else I pretended to....I have existed merely to perform tricks for you....It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

Helmer: How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora!

Have you not been happy here?

Nora: No. I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

Like Nora, Murasaki has been a vivacious girl eager for a spontaneous life, but her Heian decorous education has stunted her initial inclinations. The ironical coincidence is that Murasaki as a girl had a set of dolls and a miniature house and used to enjoy playing with them. Just like Helmer, Genji thinks that Murasaki should be grateful for her happy childhood and womanhood secured by him. The set of factors establishing social respect for the Heian nobleman is wealth, status, household and a variety of prestigious wives, all of which symbolically constitute Genji’s own doll house and his pleasure dorm, the Rokujō-in mansion filled with his multiple wives. He takes pride in Murasaki as his most beautiful doll. His obsessive quest for Fujitubo’s *katashiro* (likeness) has turned out to be his hobby of collecting a particular type of dolls and led him to a disastrous end with the Third Princess. Who says a man never plays with dolls? Nora tells her husband that her father and he treated her as she played with dolls. Actually, the metaphor

for the lack of individuality as doll-like people originally comes from the male playwright Ibsen.

Nora's further speech echoes Shikibu:

Nora: I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books, but I can no longer content myself and get to understand them...

Helmer: Can you understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that? – have you no religion?

Nora: I am afraid. Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is. – I know nothing but what the clergy man said. When I went to be confirmed, he told us that religion was this, and that, and the other.

(Act III)

Nora's open denunciation of institutionized Christianity teaching woman's obedience to man can be easily replaced by Shikibu's thinly disguised skepticism of Buddhism and its teaching of the three obediences in Murasaki's critical remarks at the Prince of Silence as useless.

What has prompted Shikibu's audience to approve of Murasaki is that her life hardly violates moral and conventional standards of their time as ideal wife and mother. Hence, Murasaki's last outburst against womanhood and gender roles defined by Genji must have shocked Shikibu's audience. Particularly, the author must have put Emperor Ichijō, Michinaga and other high-born people, participating in her audience in an uncomfortably realistic light with her heroine's

defiance, too close to the bone of social structure. Did they find them mercilessly portrayed in Murasaki's speech and complain to Shikibu that she had crushed their Ideal Feminine with this single moment? Did they understand Shikibu's gender-class dilemma and her literary restlessness as a background of her work? This is Shikibu's rare moment of refusing to entertain the audience with the Ideal Feminine and lets us know her view that Murasaki's life is pitiful although she has a noble husband and wealth. She has no freedom to express her individuality. Shikibu suggests that Genji and her society never imagine women bury their desires and sense of self-respect for their security, and Murasaki is one of them.

Katuya Keiko 勝矢啓子 points out the literary neglect of ages that, against the author's intention, the readers have continued to read the story from Genji's perspective and accept his definition of Murasaki as the ideal woman (85). The dismissal of Murasaki's interior monologues exemplifies the traditional *Genji* scholarship focusing on Shikibu's heroines only in relation to the Shining Prince as his essential companion and not knowing how to interpret her speech seemingly detached from him. Yet the two examples of Murasaki's internal monologues demonstrate that Murasaki has achieved her self-knowledge and individual view without Genji's help.

In a drastically unrelated work to the *Genji*, the *Admonition for Women*, the icon of Confucian femininity Ban Zhao, too, abruptly protests to her fellow scholars for their neglect of women's education, asserting her individuality against the Confucian norm of her society. Ban Zhao and Shikibu share the feminine inhibition defined by the decorum and morality of their time, habitually

careful and conscious not to offend their contemporary ruling men. Yet they had moments of indignation over the social discrimination against their own sex as unjust. Given the omnipotence of masculinity in their times, it is hardly surprising that Ban Zhao and Shikibu used self-censorship, quitting their subversive statements in the middle. They cannot envision any alternative and anywhere for their own sex.

It is also fascinating that the Indian epic *Ramayana*, which celebrates Rama's masculine power and Sita's three obediences, permits her sudden expression of individuality: in the end Sita chooses departure to the underground over Rama. This is symbolically her choice of death. Perhaps, Sita's first and final assertion reflects the author(s)'s view contradicting the conventional morality of his (their) time. Murasaki also echoes Sita's eventual loss of hope to redeem her conjugal relations with Rama. Yet Rama and Genji never comprehend that they have undervalued and exhausted their love and devotion and neglected their spouses' loneliness and humiliation.

Ibsen's Nora left her marriage and outraged the conventional audience in 19th-century Europe. Yet afterward, Ibsen could find her no definite occupation. In Sita and Murasaki's times, women had nowhere to go, let alone any occupations. After discovering their individual voices, Sita and Murasaki find nothing worth continuing to live under the three obediences. Shikibu realizes that Murasaki will only waste away. The plight of a slave is that he/she cannot flee as the world is their prison, and similarly, a masculine dominant society functions as

an invisible prison for a woman. Murasaki's death is Shikibu's literary solution to liberate her.

Conclusion

I. *Why Indian Three Obediences?*

The first question to this thesis was raised by Jonathan Hart. First, let us acknowledge that the only cultural link between Japan and India up to Shikibu's time was Buddhism, and their connection was still slim in the later periods.⁹⁹ As Bronkhorst points out, the influence of Indian culture in East Asia was limited without sharing the same language:

We only know these countries (the Himalayas, Tibet, China, Korea and Japan) were interested in Buddhism, and to a lesser extent in Indian culture, so that efforts were made to translate texts from Sanskrit into regional languages. As a result there were some scholars in those countries who knew Sanskrit, but this is not to be confused with a supposed spread of Sanskrit, but as little as the Christianization of Europe is an indication of the spread of Hebrew.¹⁰⁰ (45)

No Indian languages penetrated much into Chinese, Korean and Japanese.

Bronkhorst's appropriate analogy is that just as Western Christians read the Bible in translation and, except for a few scholars, did not learn Hebrew, East Asians

⁹⁹ The first known Indian to visit Japan was a priest named Bodhisena (704-760), who came to Japan in 736 and was well received by the imperial government. How he contributed to the development of early Japanese Buddhism is unknown, perhaps because Buddhism was still only taught to the minority ruling class.

¹⁰⁰ A little modification of Bronkhorst's statement is needed here. He himself acknowledges that Sanskrit was originally the ancient Brahmins' language until it gained social prestige and at a certain time, Buddhists began to use it in writing (122). It has been debated whether the original Buddhist sutras of the Chinese translated versions, including *Lotus Sutra*, were written either in Sanskrit or other Indian languages.

were accustomed to reading the Chinese *Lotus Sutra* within their own cultural contexts. Without linguistic contact, the Japanese knew little about Indian culture.

In ancient East Asia, Chinese was the lingua franca, and China was the hub of culture and intellectual scholarship. Without Chinese influence, Japan as we know it is unimaginable. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Japanese envoys sent to the Tang Empire invited mockery from the contemporary Chinese for their aggressive intellectual quest. The Japanese went not to India but to China to learn Buddhism. The mixed blessing for Japanese women was that they also brought the three obediences in Confucian and Buddhist literature back to their home.

Confucianism created the ancient scholar and moralist Ban Zhao whose work, the *Admonition for Women*, initiated the packaged phrase, the four virtues and the three obediences, in China. The woman Confucian's work certainly convinced and encouraged generations of Japanese male Confucians to promote consciously the absolute submission of women to men, which cumulated in Kaibara Eitoku's *Great Learnings for Women* 女大学. The modern woman writer Miyamoto Yuriko 宮本百合子 critiques in the "Three [Versions of] *Great Learning for Women*" of 1940 the three Confucian works, including Ban Zhao's *Admonition for Women* 女戒, and their application in society. This emancipated woman writer's concern was the constant campaign for the revival of the woman's submission to man in her society, suggesting that she sensed its prevalent practice throughout Japanese history.

The pragmatic Confucian and the karmic Buddhist three obediences became amalgamated in Heian noble society, as evinced in Shikibu's *Diary* and

the *Genji*. Chastity is the major concern of the *Genji* author and heroines, such as Utusemi, Fujitubo and Tamakazura, as expressed in their responses to men's sexual aggressions. Shikibu seems to have been able to fend off her literary patron Michinaga, but her heroines are not as fortunate as their author. Utusemi and Fujitubo are overpowered by Genji and struggle to terminate his ceaseless sexual advances for fear of their public reputation. Their sense of chastity is certainly governed by social mores more than their faith in Confucianism.

The mores also alter Oborozukiyo and Tamakazura's lives after being attacked by men. Oborozukiyo's future is decided to be an imperial consort but the stranger Genji's sexual aggression alters her fate: her family has to rank down the position of the violated maid to send her to the palace as an official mistress. Similarly, Genji decides to send Tamakazura to the palace as the imperial mistress, but she is raped by Lord Higeekurao, her suitor, sneaking into her chamber. She reluctantly accepts the worst fate of marrying him perhaps because they are thought to have consummated the wedding.

Shikibu's *Diary* and *Genji* present a pious Buddhist society and her ambivalent faith in Buddhism. The fear of karmic retribution over sexual matters weighed on her heroines more than men. Genji's stepmother Fujitubo remains fearful of the karmic retribution for her illicit sexual affair with him for the rest of her life. She renounces the world as a nun with the clear reason to fend off Genji but also feels that she needs to undergo penance. On the other hand, Utusemi and Oborozukiyo seem to become Buddhist nuns as a conventional step for mature womanhood, although they might take into consideration the possible karmic

retribution for their illicit sexual involvements with Genji. He, too, does fear karmic retribution for having violated his father and the emperor's spouse Fujitubo. Yet he does not feel convicted by his sexual relations with Utusemi, the wife of a provincial governor, and Oborozukiyo, the official mistress of his brother and Emperor Suzaku. Heian noblemen had much more impunity than their women and naturally came to take the supernatural punishment more lightly.

The *Laws of Manu* demonstrates that Hindu high-caste men also historically believed in their impunity in a wide range of ancient and medieval periods, as confirmed by A. S. Altekar's following statement.:

The husband may be self-willed, he may be even vicious; the wife must nevertheless worship him as a god. (109)

Even if the husband was a moral wreck, the wife had neither recourse nor advocates rectifying her grievances.

The worship of the husband was carried on in Hindu society, as demonstrated by Bahinabai, a 17th-century woman:

My duty is to serve my husband, for he is God to me...If I transgress my husband's commands, all the sins of the world will be on my head. (113)

Despite her affirmation of feminine submission, this unusually well-educated woman for her time candidly documented her husband's domestic violence. One does not know what to make of her interior clash between the pursuit of individual spirituality and the attempt at appropriating three obediences. The possible reason for this pious Hindu woman's determination was partly that her

fear of karmic retribution was attached to her faith. Bahinabai was a rare Hindu woman saint: this may be partly because she continued to uphold male supremacy, however much of a bully her husband was.

The triumphant vision of the karmic three obediences is epitomized by the timeless heroine Sita's speech, "But the wife shares with her husband his fortunes and karma" (Thomas 186). Sita's unhesitant declaration of her unconditional devotion proves that she exceeds even Shikibu's heroine Murasaki and the epitome of the Japanese three obediences. Sita is the masculine ideal of Indian feminine perfection, whereas Murasaki is a woman's invention. Murasaki's quiet tolerance and lack of self-assertion against Genji's promiscuity nevertheless has been celebrated as a paragon of Japanese femininity. Like Sita, she, too, ends as a martyr to the three obediences. Yet neither Rama nor Genji comprehends that their mates have perished in upholding the three obediences.

This brief discussion has hopefully responded to the question sufficiently and extended the theme of Heian noblewomen and Hindu women's shared problematic history of the three obediences. Moreover, the presence of Buddhist and Confucian three obediences in the *Genji* reinforces the notion of culture as "heterogeneous and hybrid culture," in Said's terms (347). The *Genji* unfolds Japan's participation in the pan-Asian past of campaigning for the three obediences.

Finally, for the improvement of this thesis, other readers are also appreciated, as follows:

Jenn-Shann Lin asked whether the three obediences and the four virtues have been packaged in Japanese culture just as done in the Chinese. It seems that the four virtues were pervasive in Japanese society, particularly the virtue of chastity, but the packaged phrase does not seem to be present as frequently as in the Chinese. Yet Buddhism packaged the five obstacles and three obediences and preached them to women in Japan, meaning that since a woman's salvation is difficult, she should remain obedient to men all her life to appeal to Buddha's mercy. I also thank Asma Sayed for pointing out the clarification of *purdah* and Confucian gender segregation in terms of the campaign for women's chastity. Both Hinduism and Confucianism evidently had the ultimate goal of preserving women's chastity by locking up noblewomen, but the comparison of their strategies in application and extent also requires a further historical study outside this thesis. Finally, I thank Anne Commons for the information of Kumazawa Banzan's *Commentary on the Genji Gaiden* and Tanaka Tokusada's article, "The Three Obediences in Heian Literature," to give an in-depth argument to this thesis. Much appreciation for Christina Laffin's scrutinizing reading and criticism. The final thanks for Massimo Verdicchio's interest in Chinese characters' influence on the Japanese for the encouragement to elaborate the relation between Chinese and Japanese cultural affinity.

II. The Use of the Three Obediences

This study can be either extended or used to create new theses. One extensive subject will be a comparison of heroines in the Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and the *Genji* to elaborate the Buddhist and Hindu sisterhood under

the three obediences and woman's karmic retribution. The second possible project is the change of Chinese womanhood after the arrival of Buddhism and its implicit affinity with the Heian noblewoman Shikibu and the literary impact on the depiction of her heroine. Although the three obediences in South and East Asia are a complex and rich subject, one can further extend the theme of religious effect on womanhood beyond these regions to the Abrahamic cultures by comparing it with the archetype of Eve. As the study of the three obediences has taught us that women's scholarship and literature had been a broken and disconnected tradition in Asia, this recognition itself can be extended in a future project by starting with Shikibu.

Norma Field reports that one of the students in her *Genji* class called Shikibu "Shakespeare's sister" (302). We might be sympathetic to her analogy. As far as Shikibu's national reputation is concerned in Japan, she did achieve the same impact as Shakespeare did. Yet Virginia Woolf celebrated her fictional desirable woman writer as Shakespeare's sister, but Shikibu amply recorded that the three obediences remained problematic to her literary independence in her works. Shikibu never knew that she and Asian women were connected by the bondage of the three obediences and the response to it. Denied the knowledge of their collective history, even though not openly fighting the three obediences, those women wrote their awareness of sexual-gender inequality generations over generations. This thesis has, I hope, become a product of the empathetic hindsight of their struggles.

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