

Rivals or allies in Japanese court poetry?
Appropriation of *Man'yōshū* in poetry of Rokujō and Mikohidari
school members

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The first collection of Japanese poetry, entitled *Man'yōshū* (Ten Thousand Leaves, ca. 759-782) has been annotated, studied and translated by many generations of scholars around the world. The *Man'yōshū* is an important subject matter for the field of *waka* studies, since it lies at the source of Japanese literary history, and it has always aroused much interest and controversy among Japanologists.

Man'yōshū became an object of scholarship early in the history, since already in the Heian Period (8-12th century) a shift from the Western Old Japanese language of the Asuka Period (538-710) and Nara Period (710-784) to Middle Japanese took place. This language change was the reason why already in the Heian Period poets were unable to read the *man'yōgana* script used in the *Man'yōshū*, and fully understand poems composed in Western Old Japanese. Such inaccessibility of *Man'yōshū* poetry was possibly a direct reason why, since the Heian Period there were numerous attempts aimed at annotating this collection and thus making it more accessible to the contemporary poets. The earliest one of such attempts was *koten* (old glossing), commissioned in 951 by Emperor Murakami (926-967) and carried out by five scholars of the *Nashitsubo* (Pear Pavilion): Kiyowara Motosuke (908-990), Ki no Tokibumi (922-996), Ōnakatomi Yoshinobu (921-991), Minamoto Shitagō (911-983), and Sakanoue Mochiki (late 10th century)

Knowledge about *Man'yōshū* became contested especially in the medieval era, when numerous poetic circles and schools emerged, and poetry became intertwined in court politics. The study of this collection has been for a long time believed rather exclusive to the Rokujō poetic school, whose influence flourished during the *insei* period (specifically from 1087 - Emperor Shirakawa's [1053-1129] abdication). However, based on the results presented in this paper it is clear that it was also an object of interest for the Mikohidari school poets, who are believed to have mainly focused on the Heian Period masterpieces, e.g. *Genji monogatari* (The tale of Genji, ca. 1008) by Murasaki Shikibu (ca. 970-ca. 1014), *Makura no sōshi* (The pillow book, ca. 1002) by Sei Shōnagon (ca. 964-ca. 1027), or *Ise monogatari* (The tales of Ise, mid-10th century), and who have been considered to be rivals of the Rokujō school in Japan for many centuries. It was already since the notorious clashes between Kenshō (ca. 1130-ca. 1210) and Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204) in the *Ropyakuban uta'awase* (Poetry contest in six hundred rounds, 1193), when Rokujō and Mikohidari schools started to be perceived as “rivals,” even though any rivalry or clashes about waka were more an issue between individual Rokujō and Mikohidari poets rather than between those respective poetic schools. Regardless of those public clashes between individual poets, I believe the concept of “rivalry” was constructed based on the transmission of knowledge of certain literary texts that both schools' members claimed to possess. However, we should remember that as much as the Rokujō school focused on studying the *Man'yōshū*, it did not ignore the mentioned Heian Period tales. In fact, numerous poetic examples from those works may be found in the poetic treatises of the Rokujō school, which means that the Rokujō poets also studied those works. Thus, while attributing labels of the *Man'yōshū* and Heian Period classics “specialists” to the Rokujō and Mikohidari schools respectively is an unnecessary oversimplification, the notion of the “Rokujō-Mikohidari rivalry” needs reconsideration.

It must be admitted that both poetic schools did possess some knowledge about certain literary texts that they had been studying, although it was not yet in an exclusive manner of “secret teachings” (*denju*), which started in the Muromachi Period (1336-1573). Subsequent school members transmitted this knowledge, both orally and in writing, within their families and to their patrons from both the imperial court and shogunate. The knowledge about certain literary texts became a kind of capital, which brought poetic schools political and material benefits, and support. This may sound akin to the Foucauldian concept of the “power/knowledge,” in which it is argued that power and knowledge are inter-related and therefore every human relationship is a negotiation of power. Even though the “power/knowledge” concept was not created based on literary studies, I believe that it applies astonishingly well to the poetic world in early medieval Japan. In the early medieval era, in order to gain patronage for their poetic activity, that is to become receptors of power, poets started to participate in activities involving poetry criticism (*kagaku* or *karon*), e.g. writing poetic treatises and judging poetry contests (*uta’awase*), which would demonstrate their extensive knowledge about Japanese literature. It was thus not the secrecy of one’s literary knowledge but rather its skilful public demonstration and distribution that provided poetic schools with valuable imperial and shogunal patronage. Moreover, it was exactly due to such poetic criticism of the Rokujō and Mikohidari schools, as well as some earlier works containing a significant number of *Man’yōshū* poems, e.g. *Kokinwaka rokujō* (Six quires of ancient and modern Japanese poetry, ca. 980’s), and the appropriative practice of *honkadori* (allusive variation - borrowing lines from earlier poems and reconfiguring them in one’s own work) that more extensive knowledge of the *Man’yōshū* became more and more desirable in the era of the *Shinkokin wakashū* (New collection of Japanese poems from ancient and modern times, 1205) compilation, which generally sought poetic innovation among others through the renewal of poetic tradition.

In my analysis I apply a few key concepts from Western literary theory. Those concepts are, however, not the core of my study but simply tools, vehicles, sometimes revised and reconsidered, which hopefully enable me to present the results of my research comprehensively. Thus, being aware of the notion of “the historicity of texts,” coined by American New Historicist named Louis Montrose, which informs us that reception of any literary work in the following centuries is affected by the social, political and cultural processes of those eras, in this dissertation I also apply the deconstructive analysis derived mainly from work of a French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Deconstruction is a form of semiotic analysis that overturns all binary oppositions, which allows me to demonstrate incoherence of such constructed labels as “Rokujō” and “Mikohidari.”

The historicity of texts and deconstruction are in this study closely related to the notion of literature’s “reception,” which has been applied in the area of Japanese literary studies by Joshua Mostow who argued that poetry’s ‘production and reception are constituted by specific historical forces of which we ourselves are a result and part,’ thus emphasizing the historical nature of poetry and implying that any text is not ‘the self-same over time.’ Even though I generally agree with this definitions and interpretations of “reception,” I revise the understanding of this concept and distinguish between the “reception” (*kyōju*) and the “appropriation” (*sesshu*). I define “reception” as an activity of perception of a literary work, characteristic for a given historical period, society, or group, which “receives” (perceives or sees) various literary works, and processes them in a manner that suits best their worldly views, religious and political ideals and needs. Thus, given objects of the “reception” activity are subject to change, transformation, reconfiguration, reconsideration, etc., according to the standards of a given society that receives them. I understand the “reception,” which usually occurs in a form of readership, literary criticism and exchanges of views, as a comparatively passive activity in comparison to the “appropriation,” which I define as a

process of an aware and active engagement or usage of given works in the newly created literature. “Reception” and “appropriation” are thus inter-related concepts but they are not identical activities.

Another crucial concept for this study is intertextuality, developed first by Russian philosopher named Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), and then expanded upon by Bulgarian-French philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva. The latter claims that “a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system,” since writers are first of all readers of other texts that influence them during their activity of writing. Both Kristeva and Bakhtin argue that even discursive practices themselves are intertextual, since they also influence the texts. Based on such a definition of intertextuality we may conclude that authors and readers ought to accept and recognize the inevitable intertextuality of their activities of writing, reading and participating in the discourse.

Thus, the concept of intertextuality leads us to another notion crucial for this study - the “discourse,” which was defined by French philosopher and historicist Michel Foucault (1926-1984), as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.” Even though it was first developed in social sciences and originally applied to the theory of political science due to Foucault’s concept of “power/knowledge,” it provides literary studies with a tool that enables scholars to reconsider numerous allegedly fixed notions about literature. The notion of “discourse,” defined by Foucault as simply “knowledge,” in Japanese medieval poetry is particularly useful, since the existence of a poetic discourse has been brought up as one of the characteristics of the early medieval poetic world by already in 1990’s. In this study the notion of discourse becomes a vehicle that allows me to demonstrate that despite the existence of various labels, e.g. “Rokujō” and “Mikohidari,” it is the poetic discourse that lies beyond those fixed notion and is shared by not only poets of both schools but all the poets of the early

medieval era. Differences in the *Man'yōshū* reception and appropriation, as well as similarities, may be found only in the manner in which the poetic discourse is interpreted and applied in various poets' compositions.

Taken all the above into consideration, this paper examines the appropriation of *Man'yōshū* poetry in selected poetic examples of Rokujō Kiyosuke (1104-1177) and Kenshō (Rokujō), Fujiwara Shunzei and Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241) (Mikohidari). The results demonstrate that, as opposed to a general belief about the Rokujō and Mikohidari houses to be rivals having poetically not much in common, there are significant similarities in the appropriation of *Man'yōshū* poetry in works of both schools' members. Based on the analysis of numerous poetic examples of the poets mentioned above, it turns out that all poets were participants of the same *Man'yōshū* discourse. Moreover, they seemed to have similar ultimate goals of their poetic activity, which was to excel at waka, as well as to gain power and respect through poetic knowledge. They also frequently appropriated the same *Man'yōshū* poems/lines/expressions from the same volumes (mostly vol. X-XI). They made references to *Man'yōshū* poems included in the same secondary sources, e.g. *Kokinwaka Rokujō*. Finally, they appropriated *Man'yōshū* poetry through similar channels, e.g. *Horikawa hyakushu* (One hundred poems for Emperor Horikawa, 1105-1106).

If we were to point out differences in the appropriation of *Man'yōshū* poetry between the Rokujō and Mikohidari poets, alternative ways of participation in and interpretation of the *Man'yōshū* discourse, e.g. references to less known *Man'yōshū* poems or less common styles of appropriation that obscure the original poem (*honka*), appear to be the most significant issues. I believe that the discrepancies in the appropriation of *Man'yōshū* in the work of Rokujō and Mikohidari poets are resultant of various attempts to push the boundaries of the discourse and hopes to gain power thanks to public manifestations of literary expertise. Rokujō and Mikohidari poets might have thus emphasized their various opinions in public to establish themselves as

legitimate waka scholars and specialists but it does not mean that they were fundamentally different in their poetic activity.

I argue that the differences in the appropriation of *Man'yōshū* result not from the Rokujō or Mikohidari “identities” but from various poets’ individuality of *Man'yōshū* treatment and interpretation of poetic discourse, which were at times motivated by political and poetic implications. Rokujō and Mikohidari poets represent an evolution of *Man'yōshū* poetry’s appropriation, which was continued and reinterpreted based on the same poetic tradition and discourse. Thus, both schools continued the same processes started by earlier generations of poets, and they represent not the rivalry but alliance in the art of waka. Rokujō and Mikohidari schools are thus oversimplifications and constructed labels that, instead of clarifying, obscure the intricate connections and similarities between various school members’ poetic activity. Moreover, they disguise the existence of a much more challenging concept of the poetic discourse, which undeniably lies above all poetic schools, houses, factions, circles, etc.