

# The Self-organization of Japanese Literature

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**Abstract** One of the things of Japanese literature the Westerners have difficulty in seizing is the notion of seasonal time it relies upon. Different from Western literature based either on mythology or history, Japanese literature has been split between the two and has arranged the antagonism by introducing a third element which consists of the circulation of four seasons. Thus from the 10<sup>th</sup> century on, the main rule of composing a Japanese poem has been to express human sentiments by way of a thing or a phenomenon representing one of the four seasons. Now, this introduction of seasonal time is related to the other characteristics of Japanese literature: oscillation and shifting. Instead of making a choice out of them, it oscillates between the mythological and the historical, the primitive and the civilized, the domestic and the international, etc., shifting gradually from the original point in search of a new system of equilibrium. This self-organizing movement is just like an apparently chaotic dissipative system described and explained by Ilya Prigogine, a world-famous physicist. Different from Western or Chinese literary system, it never takes root in the historical nor does it cling to the mythological, but just oscillates between. As for modern literature, we have to say it has difficulties. For the oscillating system does not work fully under the devastating modernization process.

**Key Words** chaos; hybridism; constant oscillations and shifting; self-organization

It seems Japanese literature is not easy to evaluate adequately in a universal context. In this article, Dr. De Prada Vicente will explain the causes of the difficulty and propose an appropriate approach to seize the essential of that literature.  
(H. O., editor)

## 1. Three-fold Time

Aristotle (384 – 322 B. C.) said in his *Poétique* (325 B. C.) that tragedy was a mimesis of the events that took place in human history and that epic poetry was an idealization of tragedy (89). According to him, tragedy and epic poetry were much higher in quality than comedy or lyrics and that history was the soul of tragedy (92). His history-centered vision has exercised so much influence on the Western world that we can say the whole body of Western literature has been history-centered.

Of course, there have been anti-historical movements, such as Romantic movements that longed for the world of myths and dreams beyond history and Proust's search for lost time in his remembrances of the primary stage of his life. But such new directions did not change the main stream; the Western literary world has not ceased to consider historical time as the truest and this reflects even on today's literary and cultural studies. It is doubtlessly historical positivism, the product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is still influential in academic fields despite the vogue of structuralism in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the consequences of this history-centered vision of Westerners is found in their incapacity to seize other literatures adequately. Japanese literature is a prime example, despite the love Westerners express for it. Loving a thing is no guarantee of a good understanding of it. We should ask ourselves what kind of works they love, what charm they find in them and how they interpret them.

One of the factors of Japanese literature that makes it difficult for a Westerner to understand it is the notion of time developed in it. Time in Japanese literature in general is not a single, strait current from the past to the present and from the present to future. Rather, it has three layers: a mythical one that consists of timelessness, a historical one opposed to it and a seasonal one that comes between them as an intermediary. In Western literature, as well as in Chinese<sup>1</sup>, the first of these three do appear, but usually in conflicts, while Japanese literature also includes the third one, the indication of the four seasons of the year, to mediate the opposition of the mythical and the historical times.

The three-fold time of Japanese literature was established as a code as early as the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, with the compilation of *Kokin-waka-shu* (*Imperial Anthology of Ancient and Modern Poems*, 905). The anthology having being considered as a Bible for more than a thousand years allows us to imagine how deep and strong its influence on Japanese literature has been.

To show how the three-fold time works in concrete cases, let us quote one of Ki-no Tsurayuki's (866 – 945) *waka*<sup>2</sup> poems from the anthology.

Chi-haya-buru/ kami-no igaki-ni hau kuzu-mo/ aki-ni-wa aede utsuroi-ni-keri  
(Tsuneya, *Kokin Waka-shu* 106)

(How autumn is strong! / Even the arrowroot crawling on the sacred fence of the powerful gods Cannot resist it. / Its color has turned. )<sup>3</sup>

Here, the dominance of seasonal time is clear. For the poet says “autumn” is stronger than the eternal or the mythical represented by “the sacred fence of powerful gods”. As for historical time, it looks absent, but it exists, for if “powerful gods” cannot “resist” seasonal time represented by “autumn”, it means they have already lost the eternal or mythical. The poet does not admire the seasonal beauty; he just laments the loss of the mythical due to the coming of the historical. This does not mean, however, that the poet is in despair because the seasonal time that implies irreversible changes assures him of the repetitive cycle. Here we see “autumn” plays the role of intermediary between the mythical and the historical, making up for the

void caused by the loss of the eternal.

Another example of the seasonal time in Japanese literature is taken from the *hokku*<sup>4</sup> poems composed by one of the best known poets of Japan, Basho (1644 – 94). It is taken from his famous *Oku-no Hosomichi* (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, 1702):

Natsu-kusa-ya/ tsuwamono-domo-ga/ yume-no ato (Matsuo Basho 84)  
 (Oh, the summer grass! / The trace/ of the warriors' dreams. . .)

Here again, the dominance of the seasonal time represented by “the summer grass” is clear. But this time, it is placed not over the mythical but rather over the historical represented by “the warriors”. The real hero of the poem is evidently “the summer grass,” not “the warriors,” and it is in “the grass” representing the vitality of Nature that the poet saw “the trace of dreams” of those who had fought centuries before at the place where he has found himself.<sup>5</sup>

While at first glance it appears that the poet did not have mythical time in mind, the exclamatory form of *Natsu-kusa-ya* (Oh, the summer grass!) implies an admiration or awe for the eternal represented by the periodicity of summer. Here again, seasonal time symbolizes irreversible changes and repetitive returns at the same time. It is mediating the opposition of the mythical and the historical.

The examples we have seen are from traditional literature. How about the modern examples? We have to say that the fact that time is three-fold in traditional literature has made it difficult for modern Japanese to create a modern novel of Western style. If we do not find a novel in modern Japan comparable to one by Flaubert or Tolstoy, it is quite understandable. Under the pressure of objective realism and historical development of a story that they imposed upon themselves following the model of a Western novel, Japanese hardly succeeded in creating a novel in that style because of their non-epic tradition. If they tended to escape from it into confessional novels called *Shi-shosetsu*, it is again quite understandable.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Chaos

To understand Japanese literature adequately, it is also important to know that chaos is a key esthetic model for this literature. By the word “chaos”, we do not mean the opposite of “order” but the original, undetermined state of the world prior to the division of “order” and “disorder”. Since this notion is lacking in the West, Westerners have difficulty in seizing the essential of Japanese esthetics even as they find it mysteriously attractive.

Indeed, Western esthetics has always been centered on order. As is indicated in the following passage of Parmenides (5<sup>th</sup> century B. C. ), one of the fathers of Western philosophy, Westerners have walked on the way of Being, the cognizable way of order and logic he built up, rejecting the unknowable Non-Being, disorder and non-sense.

Listen and bear my words in mind, I will tell what ways of inquiry you have to

think ;

The way that is and is not Non-Being. It is the way of conviction for it leads to Truth.

The other way that is not and needs to be Non-Being; I tell you it is a completely unknown path ;

For you will never be able to know Non-Being; it is just unrealizable ;

You will never be able to make it known. (Marzoa 43)

Certainly, Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) tried to go against the orderly esthetics by propagating the esthetics of disorder he found in ancient Greek civilization, but his insistence on Dionysian ecstatic beauty<sup>7</sup> never overcame the traditional reliance on Apollonian esthetics. Even Baudelaire (1821 – 67), so fond of the exotic and the satanic, was a loyal disciple of Apollo, which can be seen in the following words of his poem titled *L' Invitation au voyage* (*Invitation to travel*) :

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté/ Luxe, calme et volupté. (Baudelaire 77)

(Over there, you will have nothing but order and beauty/ Luxury, peace, and sensuality. )

Structuralism, a method of textual analysis that bloomed in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has surely contributed significantly in opening a door for Westerners to appreciate other civilizations and cultures, but we have to say that in the end it was another form of inquiry for orderly beauty for it tried to explain the unchangeable and the universal of humanity by analyzing languages, marriage systems and myths, always in terms of a dichotomous schema. Such a method unfortunately could not provide a framework for understanding a culture based on the esthetics of chaos such as that of Japan. The schema could be useful in revealing the brain structure of humanity, but it was not enough to engender an understanding of the chaotic. To grapple with Japanese literature whose esthetics is based on chaos, we need another method.

### 3. Hybridism

Before exploring a method to understand Japanese literature in an adequate way, let us mention another difficulty for Westerners or other non-Japanese people to understand it: hybridism. By this term, we mean the coexistence of two different elements in one and the same space. Japanese literature, as well as Japanese language, does not know dialectics; it juxtaposes opposite elements without the need to make a synthesis out of them. The hybridism of Japanese literature began with the oldest book of Japan, *Kojiki* (*The Records of Ancient Matters* 712). The text of the book presents hybridism both in structure and style, and it is this hybridism that has impressed an indelible mark on Japanese literature.

From a structural point of view, the text remains far from being a totality; it gives the impression of a gathering of pieces each of which used to belong to a structured whole. There is no principle that unifies the gathering, but two forces in opposite directions coexist within one text. Those forces are of mythological and historical

orders. The mythological force aims at conserving the most primitive stage of people's history, while the historical one aims at narrating a history of the construction of a civilized nation. The two are obviously opposite to each other, but coexist at any cost. George Sansom, one of the pioneers of Japanese Studies, found the text chaotic (Sansom 22), which is understandable because the coexistence of the two opposites in one and the same text usually gives such an impression. Nevertheless, the text is not just a juxtaposition of two different forces. There exists a third one that mediates the two just like the seasonal time intervening between the mythical and the historical that we saw above. This third is a vitalistic world-vision, according to which all that happens is a manifestation of the sacred, vital and generative energy called *musuhi*<sup>8</sup>. The intervention of this vision turns the historical events narrated in *Kojiki* into the results of the divine actions of Nature.

The vitalistic vision lying at the bottom of the text of *Kojiki* was first discovered by Maruyama Masao. He made the following formula out of the words that appear frequently in the text: "tsugi-tsugi-ni nari-yuku ikioi" (the force that pushes the becoming forward and continuously), (Masao 3 – 66). His formula showed that the Japanese way of viewing history consisted in viewing history as if it had been a series of natural happenings. Haruko and Theodore Cook share this affirmation when they say, in their *Japan at War, an Oral History*, that the Japanese who had fought in World War II conceived of the war as something that came to them, not as something they did (Haruko and Cook 3).

Now, though we said above that *Kojiki* as a text has a hybrid character presenting a heterogeneous feature, it is not totally lacking in order. For example, the mythological passage of the quarrel between the couple Izanagi and Izanami, who gave birth to the islands of future Japan, shows clearly the division of the country of the Alive and of the Dead:

At last, Izanagi's beloved siser(wife) Izanami came after him. So he blocked the path with an enormous rock to prevent her from passing. Standing at the both sides of the rock, they cursed each other to divorce. Izanami, the wife, said first "My dearest man, given the circumstance, I will kill a thousand people's lives from your land each day." To this, Izanagi, the husband, answered "My dearest sister, if you do that, I will construct a thousand and five hundred cottages for childbirth a hundred newborn children. (Kenji 67)

Apparently, there was a victory on the part of the Alive over the Dead for there were more people born than dead. But we have to notice that even if the couple divorced, they still loved each other and that the wife, representing the country of the Dead, kept on being active. The division of Life and Death was truly marked there, but it does not guarantee the peace and stability of the world. The order established by them is not definite; the battle between Eros and Thanatos did not cease.<sup>9</sup>

Let us see now the hybridism of *Kojiki* from a stylistic point of view. It is generally written in classical Chinese called *kanbun* because the Japanese of the 8<sup>th</sup> century did not have their own writing system yet, but we find in it many words and expres-

sions proper to Japanese language called *Yamato-kotoba*, whose transcription in Chinese characters was made in such a way that the phonetic aspect of each word was conserved. Many of such words and expressions are names of gods and sacred places, songs and some expressions the editors found irreplaceable by Chinese language. We can appreciate a glimpse of the ancient Japanese language and culture through them.

Let us see an example of the hybrid style in the text of *Kojiki*.

When the country was young and kurage-nasu tadayoeru like floating oil, there was something coming out like reed buds and it became finally a god called Umashi Ashikabi-hikoji. (Jun 51)

In this quote, the italic parts correspond to the names or expressions proper to Japanese language and the rest to Chinese. The first of the italic parts means “floating like a jellyfish” and the second, the name of the god born out of the “float”. We can imagine that they were too important for the editors to translate in Chinese; they wished to keep the original phonetic form in order not to lose the memory of the past.

Later, this hybrid style became the common use. Around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the most common style became that where words of Chinese origin were written in Chinese characters and *Yamato-kotoba* written in Japanese alphabet called *kana*, combined according to Japanese syntax in one and the same text. This style has survived all the linguistic changes the Japanese have suffered till today. Japanese literature can thus be said to be hybrid in this sense, as well.

#### 4. Constant Oscillation and Shifting

To understand the non-historical, chaotic and hybrid nature of Japanese literature in movement, we have to go beyond the domain of humanistic sciences; we are obliged to get into physical sciences for these could give better explanations of the dynamics of any object. To determine which physical science is precisely the most useful, let us first pick up the most important points concerning the dynamics of Japanese literature.

From the beginning of its history, Japanese literature has had two opposite poles: the mythical and the historical, the primitive and the civilized, *Wa* (the vernacular, Japanese literature) and *Kan* (the foreign, Chinese) or, in other words, the natural and the artificial. These two have never made up a synthesis; they have just juxtaposed themselves to each other. Thus establishing a two-world system in parallel, this arrangement has worked without much difficulty.

Some may think the system derived from Chinese Taoism, especially from its theory of Ying and Yang, but as such a setting is common to the so-called primitive societies that try to cope with their environment (Lévi-Strauss 132 – 135), we are inclined to suppose it had existed even before the introduction of Taoism to Japanese Archipelago. The hybridism must have its origin in the prehistoric age.

Now, Japanese literature like any other literature in the world is a living body that moves in time and space. What is specific of Japanese literature is that it has been attracted by two opposite poles from the beginning, and that it has naturally os-

cillated from one side to the other incessantly. In certain ages, it was nearer to one of the poles; at others, to the other.

Moreover, we find that the poles themselves shifted according to periods. In premodern ages, the pole of *Kan* (*the Chinese*) was opposed to that of *Wa* (*the Japanese vernacular*), but in the modern age, it is *Yoo* (*the Western*) that took the place of *Kan* and opposed itself to *Wa* which was no longer the same as the premodern *Wa* but a sort of mixture of the premodern *Wa* and *Kan*. Although the structure of bipolarity has not changed and the hybridism is still working, the contents have altered because of the shifting of the poles. We can conclude that Japanese literature has not only oscillated from one side to the other but also has shifted from one point to another according to cultural currents.

Once all this is seen and taken into account the chaotic and hybrid nature of Japanese literature, we can find a physical theory suitable to explain its dynamics. A biological theory could also be useful, but generally speaking, biology depends on physical sciences; we would rather seek it therefore in the realm of physics.

As far as we know, the most suitable and useful to our objective is thermodynamics. For it offers scientific explanations to moving and chaotic phenomena of a system. Actually, Claude Lévi-Strauss already applied it to explain the nature of the difference of so-called primitive societies from civilized ones (Charbonnier 35 – 48). His explanations are not fully satisfactory because he did not view any dynamics in the “primitive” societies, but it was his useful idea to find some utility in this science for the understanding of the phenomena of human societies.

Among the modern thermodynamic theories, it is Prigogine’s *dissipative structure theory* that is the most interesting. The theory reveals the process of self-organization of a chaotic system that lacks in equilibrium owing to its peripheral location, exchanging a limited amount of energy with the external world. Such a system, according to the theory, remains as distant from the primitive static stage as from organizing a solid structure with equilibrium. It affirms that such a non-equilibrium system will never remain chaotic but form a structure in its own way, presenting oscillations and shiftings (Ilya Prigogine et Isabelle Stengers 171 – 194).

Now, we can deduce from this theory at least two conclusions. First, there are types of systems. One is at the primitive stage, completely stable and without any movement; and another type has a dissipative structure, unstable and chaotic but able to organize itself with its particular oscillations and shiftings; the third is an organizing a solid structure with equilibrium through the dynamic exchanges of energy with the outer world. These three correspond to systems of all kind, among which, of course, we can count literary ones. Literatures can be classified into three types: that of an isolated “primitive” society with primary equilibrium system, literature of a mid-closed peripheral society with non-equilibrium system, and literature of a civilized world with solid equilibrium system. Japanese literature belongs evidently to the second type, while Chinese or Western literature to the last. Prigogine’s theory explains perfectly the dynamics of Japanese literature with its oscillations and shiftings.

The other conclusion we can deduce from the theory is that Japanese literature is a system that can organize itself from the original chaos. It will never achieve a solid

system with equilibrium but form one like a “jellyfish” floating on moving water. The above mentioned phrase of *Kojiki*; kurage-nasu tadayoeru, suits the theory perfectly. It is with a good reason that the editors of the oldest book of Japan conserved the expression.

## 5. The Floating World

Let us see now some examples of the formation of a “jellyfish” system of Japanese literature. The first expression corresponding to it is what we have just seen: “kurage nasu tadayoeru”. There are second, third and many others that followed it, expressing a vision of the floating world. Here are some of them.

In *Man-yo-shu*, the oldest poetic anthology compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, we find an expression such as *kamo-no ukine* (sleeping wild duck floating on the water), which indicates more or less the same world vision as “kurage nasu tadayoeru”. The expression appears for example in the poem No. 2817:

Wagimoko-ni/ Koi-fure-ni-ka-aran/ Oki-ni-sumu/ Kamo-no ukine-no/ Yasuken-  
mo-naki. (Ito Haku 72)

(Oh, my beloved one/ Have I fallen in love? Like a sleeping wild duck/ float-  
ing off the coast/ my hearts is trembling.)

In this poem, the word “uki” is polysemous. It means “floating” but also “sad”. The word being associated with “kamo” (wild duck) implies loneliness, anguish, even death, first because wild ducks are migratory and second because to see only one of them, rather than in their usual coupling, provokes the sensation of loneliness and melancholy. The expression reflected a world vision which was not as optimistic as “kurage nasu tadayoeru” of *Kojiki*. It shows the world was viewed as unstable and melancholic. Between the prehistoric and the historic times, there must have been a big social and cultural change.

The following poem, No. 419, also from the *Man-yo-shu* is another example of the same melancholic vision:

Momo-zutau/ Iware-no ike-ni/ Naku-kamo-wo/ kyoo-nomi mite-ya/ kumo-  
gakuri-nan (Ibid. 140).

(Eternally continuous/ the Pond of iware/ a Wild duck is crying on there/ Is  
this the last time I see them? / Ah, I am going to pass away. . .)

The poem is said to have been composed by Prince Otsu (663 – 686) just before his death. The victim of a conspiracy by his political enemies, he seems to have composed it before killing himself at home. “Kamo” (wild duck) is here directly associated with death and, by saying goodbye to it, the prince himself seemingly expressed his wish to migrate to the world beyond the “clouds” (kumo). The verb “to die” is expressed here as “kumo-gakuri”, which literally means “to hide behind the clouds”.

In *Man-yo-shu* and posterior anthologies, the migrant kamo was sometimes replaced by other beings such as “chidori” (plovers). In *Man-yo-shu*, plovers appear



for example in Kakinomoto-no Hitomaro's song (Ibid. 117), but it is later in *Kin-yo-shu*, *Senzai-shu* and *Shin-Kokin-shu* that they appear more frequently. Here is an example (No. 1331) taken from *Shin-Kokin-shu*, the last and the most complete anthology of Japanese court poetry compiled in 1205:

Tsukuzuku-to/ Omoi-akashi-no/ Ura-chidori/ Nami-no makura-ni/ Nakunaku-zo kiku (Jun 115)

(Deeply and deeply/ I thought of you all night/ My head on the pillow of the waves/ Hearing the plovers crying and crying. . .)

The poem is composed by Gon-Chunagon Kimitsune, with a remarkable technique. First, it is composed in a symmetric form with the correspondence of the first repetitive phrase "tsukuzuku" (deeply and deeply) which corresponds to the final phrase which is also repetitive: "Nakunaku" (crying and crying). Second, the word "akashi" of the second phrase has a double meaning: the verb signifying "stay up all night" and the name of the place where the prince Hikaru-Genji, the well-known literary hero of *Genji Monogatari*, stayed with melancholy. The word "ura" in the third phrase also has a double meaning: "seashore" and "back". Of course, "chidori" (the plovers) that appear in the middle of the poem play the main role of evoking sadness, loneliness and anguish of life with their "naku" that means "singing" and "weeping" at the same time.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the millenary aristocratic culture was over, the floating world took a completely different tone. The word corresponding to "uki-yo" began to mean a cheerful and lively world instead of a melancholic one. The time of popular *joie de vivre* began. The new taste of the new era reflected on literature, both in poetry and prose. *Haikai* poetry was born as a mockery of *waka*, the traditional court poetry, and as a picaresque genre of novels, *Ukiyo-zoshi* were born. Here is the very beginning of Saikaku's famous *Ukiyo-zoshi*: *Kooshoku Ichidai Otoko* (*The Sexual Life of a Man Who Loved and Loved*, 1682), which reveals how lively the world vision of his time was:

Lamenting the cherry blossoms falling down/ the moon glow disappearing over the hill of Iruya/ here is a man in a silver-mining town in the County of Tajima/ leaving aside the duties of the floating world/ spending days and nights in the two golden ways of sexual life/ called *Yume-suke* (= the dreaming boy) . . .  
(Saikaku 39)

We can see from the quote that the traditional esthetic values evoked by the fall of cherry blossoms and the glow of the moon were replaced by the more realistic pleasure of sex (*kooshoku*) associated with another pleasure, that of money making which is promised by the silver mining (*kane-horu*). Designed as a parody of the famous *Genji Monogatari*, the novel reflects a gay vision of the floating world.

To see the continuity of the vision of the floating world in modern times, it is enough to see the following poem "Kurage-no uta" (*Song of a Jellyfish*, 1952) com-

posed by Kaneko Mitsuharu that reminds us of the most ancient world vision appearing in *Kojiki*.

Yurare yurare, momare momarete/ Sono-uchini/ Boku-wa/ Konnani sukitoote-kita. Daga/

Yurareru-no-wa, rakuna-koto-dewa nai-yo./Soto-kara-demo suite-mieru-daro. Hora. . .

Swaying and swaying, rocked from side to side, I've become so transparent meanwhile.

But you know, swaying and being rocked like that is no easy. Look! You can see through me, From outside to inside. . . (Mitsuharu 83 – 86)

Expressing his own life as one of a jellyfish, the poet showed his unconscious loyalty to the most ancient tradition of Japanese literature based on the oscillations and shiftings.

## 6. Structure Out of Chaos

Let us see now the self-organization of Japanese literature from the point of view of the structure made out of it. As the first gods were born out of the floating stage of the world, it began to form a structure with its basic character of oscillations and shiftings. The first formation of structure can be seen in the setting of *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* in parallel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Despite similarities in content, the two books were compiled with different aims. That of the former was not to lose the mythical vision of the world; that of the latter was to establish a historical vision of the nation newly born, though it contains a lot of mythical elements. Such a parallel setting appears not only in literature but also in other cultural fields, the most remarkable example of which is the setting of Shinto and Buddhism. But here, we would like to mention only literary examples.

The 8<sup>th</sup> century saw another literary setting with the same structure. The compilation of an anthology of Chinese poems composed by Japanese poets: *Kaifusoo* (*Cherished Recollection of Poetry*, 755), made a juxtaposition set with *Man-yo-shu*, the above mentioned anthology of *waka* (759?). Thus was established a set of *Yamato-uta* in contrast with Chinese poetry, *Kan-shi*, which continued to exist till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

The parallel setting of *Yamato-uta* and *Kanshi* seems to have ceased in the 10<sup>th</sup> century with the compilation of *Kokin-shu* (905), the first imperial anthology of *waka* considered as the bible of Japanese literature for centuries. Nevertheless, the very fact that it has two prologues, one in *kanbun* and the other in *wabun*, indicates that Chinese literature was at least as important as Japanese to the men of letters of the time. Moreover, as is shown in the following quote, the editors of the anthology held a comparative vision of literature and knew the fundamental difference of *Yamato-uta* from *Kanshi*. To them the characteristics of the former consisted in expressing human emotions by way of natural elements.

The poetry of Japan has its roots in the human heart and flourishes in the countless leaves of the words. Because human beings possess interests of so many kinds, it is in poetry that they give expression to the meditations of their hearts in terms of the sights appearing before their eyes and the sounds coming to their ears. Hearing the warbler sing among the blossoms and the frog in his fresh waters -is there any living being not given to song? It is poetry which, without exertion, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of gods and spirits invisible to the eye, softens the relations between men and women, calms the hearts of fierce warriors (Tsuneya, 11).<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, *waka* poetry consists in the expression of the “meditations” of human “hearts” in terms of the perceptible, while Chinese poetry expresses the same often in terms of narrating events or happenings in human life. Though it is undeniable that such indirect expressions do exist in Chinese poetry and that it influenced the formation of *waka*,<sup>12</sup> but it is in Japan that they flourished.

The fact that the set of *waka* and *kanshi* flourished in Heian literature is best seen in the compilation of *Wakan Rooei-shu* (1018). This book is an anthology composed of 588 Chinese poems and 216 *waka* and was read all over Japan all through Middle Ages, which shows clearly how far Chinese poetry penetrated the Japanese mind despite the flowering of *waka*. We can see that without *kanshi*, *waka* did not have its *raison d'être*.

Perhaps the most achieved form of the structure is to be found in Noh plays developed in Medieval Japan. Though *Heike-Monogatari* (*The Chronicle of the War between Heike and Genji*, 1309?) shows the set of *Wa* and *Kan* cultures by its hybrid style, the Noh plays of Kan-ami (1333 – 84) and Ze-ami (1363 – 1443) present the structure of juxtaposition in a more complete form. Their plays can be considered as a sort of incarnation of the millenary structure, not only of *waka* and *kanshi*, but also of Shinto and Buddhism, the noble and the popular or even the dead and the alive. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is in Noh plays that the essence of Japanese literature can be found.

As for Edo literature from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and modern one after 1868, the structure was maintained at least until the mid-Edo period, that is the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> This means from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, it has been losing a good balance of the two opposite elements, becoming more and more chaotic. The introduction of Western literature could not but increase the tension between the traditional and the modern, without achieving a new structure juxtaposing them one beside the other. It seems that even today, the Japanese are struggling for a new structure out of chaos without success.

One of the reasons for the modern and contemporary failure in constructing a new culture is the lack of bipolarity, without which there is no room for oscillation or shifting of the system. Japanese literature has lost its bipolarity because of the nationalistic policy that Meiji and posterior governments took to unify the country's cultures. Let us remember that all the men of letters from Antiquity to the end of Edo or even in the early Meiji period, were instructed at least in two different languages. In modern and contemporary Japan, there is hardly anyone capable of composing a poem both in Jap-

anese and a Western language. Even if today's Japanese is still written in Chinese characters and Japanese syllabary, the lack of bipolarity is undeniable. To reactivate the Japanese literary system, the Japanese need a good knowledge of another literary language than Japanese.

## Notes

1. With the case of Chinese literature, almost the same can be said. For historical writings such as Sima Qian (145 – ? B. C. )'s Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji, 91 B. C. ) could correspond to what Aristotle called tragedy. For they were based on historical facts, but not without epic elements in Aristotelian sense. Different from modern historical monographs, his Records narrates stories about what happened in the past, in a marvelous prosaic style. It is true Chinese literature lacks in epic poetry, but it is partly because it had a great historical literature as Sima Qian's Records that could replace epic poetry, in such an ancient period. In other words, Chinese literature has not really lacked in epic poetry, but has expelled it out of the realm of poetry so that it became a part of historical writings. See Victor Mair, *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2010). Jacques Pimpaneau, *Chine, Histoire de la Litterature* (Philippe Piquier, 2004).
2. The term waka or yamato-uta means Japanese song or poem, usually composed of 31 syllables, and distinguished from kan-shi, Chinese poem.
3. See Okumura Tsuneya and Shincho-sha, eds, *Kokin waka-shu* (Tokyo; Shincho-sha 1982) 106. Translation by the author of this article. All the translations in the article are by the author of this article.
4. Hokku is the briefest form of Japanese poetry, composed of 17 syllables. Haiku being the modern term for hokku, it is more adequate to call Basho's poems hokku.
5. Basho explains that he composed this poem at Hiraizumi, Iwate prefecture, in Oku-no Hosomichi.
6. There are some exceptions; some writers have created a modern story in which seasonal time has its role to play. Such are Shiga Naoya's An-ya kooro, Tanizaki Jun-ichiro's Sasame-yuki. .
7. Friedrich Nietzsche. *Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Michael Tanner and Shaun Whiteside (Penguin Classics, 1994).
8. The term musuhi is transcribed in Kojiki with two Chinese characters that mean "procreation" and "spirit" respectively.
9. Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) insisted on this in his Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920).
10. It is well known that writers such as Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892 – 1927) was pleased to compose kanshi.
11. The English quote is from Robert Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 1961).
12. Ki-butsu chin-shi, to express emotions through things, one of the ways of Chinese poetical expressions, appears in Man-yo-shu for the first time in Japan.
13. See Nakano Mitsutoshi, *Juhasseiki-no Edo Bungei* (Iwanami, 1999) 6 – 10.

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