

NORTHEAST ASIA

The Tale of Genji and Heian Literature: Reception History, Translations, and New Frontiers

Mapping Courtship and Kinship in Classical Japan: The Tale of Genji and Its Predecessors. By DORIS G. BARGEN. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. xix, 372 pp. ISBN: 9780824851545 (cloth, also available in paper and as e-book).

The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature. By MICHAEL EMMERICH. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. xv, 494 pp. ISBN: 9780231162722 (cloth, also available in paper and as e-book).

Courtly Visions: The Ise Stories and the Politics of Cultural Appropriation. By JOSHUA S. MOSTOW. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xiv, 354 pp. ISBN: 9789004244856 (cloth).

L'Âge d'or de la prose féminine au Japon (Xe–XIe siècle) [The Golden Age of Women's Prose in Japan (10th–11th Centuries)]. By JACQUELINE PIGEOT. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2017. 176 pp. ISBN: 9782251446400 (paper, also available as e-book).

The Tale of Genji. By MURASAKI SHIKIBU, trans. DENNIS WASHBURN. New York: W.W. Norton, 2015. xxxviii, 1,320 pp. ISBN: 9780393047875 (cloth, also available in paper and as e-book).

Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan: Poetics and Practice. By BRIAN STEININGER. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017. xi, 293 pp. ISBN: 9780674975156 (cloth).
doi:10.1017/S0021911818002772

Six books in four years attest to the vitality of this field of scholarship in Japanese literature. The number also presents a challenge for a multi-book review. Without preamble, let me launch into consideration of the individual works, making comments that connect the works along the way.

Michael Emmerich's *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature* traverses enormous ground in detailing the history of the *Tale of Genji's* reception from mid-nineteenth-century Japan through a "global translational loop" in the twentieth century that has resulted in the placement of the *Tale of Genji* at the top echelon of both the canon of national literature within Japan and the canon of world literature. His study is divided into two parts.

The first part imaginatively reconstructs the early modern reading of the *Nise Murasaki Inaka Genji* (A Fraudulent Murasaki's Bumpkin Genji). The *Inaka Genji*, produced between 1829 and 1842, was a parodic adaptation of the *Tale of Genji* published as a *gōkan*, a lavishly illustrated woodblock print booklet. Emmerich's description of the *Inaka Genji* as a *gōkan*, "a visually and textually sophisticated, thrillingly hybrid, beautifully printed, stylish book" (Emmerich, p. 35), radiates the enthusiasm

that permeates this study throughout. The *Inaka Genji*, despite its enormous contemporary popularity, is now as difficult to decode as a medieval manuscript of the *Genji*. Emmerich's reconstruction of how the *Inaka Genji* was read and appreciated in its own time is a tour de force aided by copious illustrations. He advances the provocative thesis that the *Inaka Genji* actually created the image of the *Tale of Genji* as a great work among the general populace while at the same time "replacing" it, and thereby causing a proliferation of what one Edo wit termed "*Genji*-wise non-readers of *Genji*" (Emmerich, p. 55). This phenomenon, he asserts, is what laid the foundation for the replacement of the *Tale of Genji* in the modern period by translations into modern Japanese and into Western languages.

The second part of the book tracks the history of the *Genji*'s translation into English and into modern Japanese and how those translations exerted a decisive influence on the *Genji*'s placement within the emerging canon of classical Japanese literature in Japan. Emmerich translates key portions of several essays on *Genji* by the modern novelist Masamune Hakuchō to demonstrate how Hakuchō's evaluation of *Genji* evolved in a positive direction directly due to Arthur Waley's translation. Hakuchō is famous for his suggestion in 1933 that Waley's translation should be "back-translated" into Japanese so that "it might attract a large and avid readership that would enjoy it as one of the great novels of the world" (Emmerich, p. 328). Hakuchō's insights are foundational to Emmerich's own. His summation of Hakuchō's view concludes part two: "He knew that the interpenetration of versions of the same work written in different languages, in different places, at different times, is the reality of world literature and this, above all, is what *Genji* had become and what it would remain, no doubt, for the foreseeable future" (Emmerich, p. 382).

Emmerich, a consummate historian, leaves no primary source unturned to flesh out his narrative and arguments. He displays a genius for identifying the telling, often quirky, detail that will make his case or add one layer of intriguing human interest to the topic; his style is Bill Bryson-like in this respect. For example, to demonstrate that Suematsu Kenchō's 1882 partial *Genji* translation, now consigned to oblivion, played a long, important role in establishing *Genji* as a world classic, he cites a 1925 letter to the editor of the *Literary Digest International Book Review* by none other than a prominent zoologist and one-time chief aquarist of the New York Aquarium, Ida Mellen. Mellen counters an assertion made in a review of Waley's translation that it had no predecessor, writing: "Every reader of Oriental literature is familiar with ... the 1882 translation of *Genji*" (Emmerich, p. 240). One wonders if the current chief of the New York aquarium is as "*Genji*-wise."

The audacious thesis unifying this work is that no "original" *Genji* exists; rather, the putative original has been replaced time and again by medieval calligraphic manuscripts; Edo period and modern critical editions; translations; adaptations into *gōkan*, manga, and film; and even by a "*Genji monogatari* Millennium Anniversary *Matcha baumkuchen*." Although he grants that some items in the above list might be considered closer to the "original" than others, he asserts that "each object holds out the promise, however tenuous, of an indirect connection to the *Genji monogatari* and its canonical prestige" (Emmerich, p. 14). I agree with this radical equation as it concerns *Genji*'s canonical prestige, but I cannot accept the denial of an original text for the *Genji*. While it is true that no manuscript in Murasaki Shikibu's own hand and designated as her final draft exists, any modern critical edition based on the text collated by Fujiwara no Teika from all the *Genji* manuscripts available to him in the thirteenth century is enough of an original for most scholars. This is the *Genji* text against which the accuracy of translations can be judged,

about which I will say more shortly in the discussion of the new Washburn translation of *Genji*.

Emmerich concludes his work with ruminations on the importance of translation. He questions the dichotomy often drawn between applied literary work (as translation is often considered) and theory, lamenting the tendency, at least in the United States academy since the 1970s, to regard translation as a lesser scholarly enterprise. He asserts that scholars working in Japanese literary studies and other national literatures “must stress and demonstrate, vociferously and frequently, that translation is an act not only of critical but, more important, of theoretical exploration that touches on issues fundamental to contemporary literary studies” (Emmerich, p. 395). This last chapter bristles with insights into contemporary literary theory, comparative literature, traditional Japanese literary study, and the particular concerns and potential contributions of the polyglot scholar-translator. And it is accessibly written. It deserves to be taken up for discussion in every national literature and comparative literature department in the English-reading world.

This review has only scratched the surface of Emmerich’s far-ranging work. The book is so full, it sprawls, but it is held together by an incisive mind and a dazzling wit. Rarely is scholarly work so ebullient.

Joshua Mostow’s *Courtly Visions: The Ise Stories and the Politics of Cultural Appropriation* is also a fine work of reception history. The *Ise Monogatari* (*Ise Stories*) differs from the *Tale of Genji* in many respects. Of uncertain authorship, the *Ise* is relatively short and comprised of brief, loosely connected episodes that provide contexts for poems. Its complicated textual history makes the issue of an “original” text particularly vexed. As Mostow declares, “*Ise* is a paradigmatic example of a text with no ‘origins,’ but ‘always already’ reread and rewritten” (Mostow, p. 75). Although these characteristics have made the *Ise* an unlikely candidate for inclusion in the canon of world literature, it has always shared equal pride of place with *Genji* in Japanese literary history and has been widely read over the centuries and often pictorialized. *Courtly Visions* explores the reception of the *Ise Monogatari* through the lens of its pictorialization.

Before discussing *Courtly Visions* in more detail, it must be noted that Mostow’s study is underpinned by a new translation of the *Ise Monogatari* done by Mostow and Royall Tyler, a clear example supporting Emmerich’s affirmation of the essential importance of translation to scholarship in this field.¹ The Mostow and Tyler translation is itself a careful work of reception history, since it provides at the end of each episode well-chosen excerpts from the centuries of commentaries on the *Ise*, which demonstrate how interpretations of even the most famous episodes have varied widely.

Courtly Visions covers pictorial representations of the *Ise* stretching over a thousand years but focuses particularly on three works considered to have originated in the medieval period, *Hakubyō Ise Monogatari Emaki Dankan* (monochrome ink outline), *Kubosō-bon Ise Monogatari Emaki* (richly colored and ornamented with silver and gold), and the *Ihon Ise Monogatari Emaki* (simpler painting style but full of domestic detail). These three works visually demonstrate Mostow’s contention that from the beginning the written text of the *Ise Monogatari* was appropriated by different readerships for their own purposes. He asks, “How was the *Ise* positioned to function differently in different contexts? How were these contexts defined? On the basis of class? Gender? Religious affiliation?” (Mostow, p. 3). Mostow proposes original answers to these questions along with a

¹Joshua S. Mostow and Royall Tyler, *Ise Stories: Ise Monogatari* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010).

comprehensive digest of the vast Japanese scholarship on the *Ise* text and its illustrations. This cross-disciplinary work combines literary study, social history, and art history.

Mostow's concept of "cultural appropriation" deserves special mention. He notes that in contemporary usage the term usually "entails the use of cultural forms seen as belonging to a relatively marginal or disempowered group by a relatively more dominant social group" (Mostow, p. 5). His use is broader. His first chapter details how the *Hakubyō Ise* reveals an appropriation of *Ise* by women readers, nearly always a "disempowered group." In Mostow's exposition, the *Ise* text appears like a free-floating signifier able to take on any meaning that might serve its audience.

Brill is noted equally for its high scholarly standards and the high cost of its books. In the case of this book, one gets a lot for one's money, 171 illustrations, most of them in full color. All pictorialization entails a specific vocabulary in images and style. Mostow is brilliant in instructing the reader how to read these illustrations. While much of the discussion of lineages in *Ise* iconography and debates over dating of manuscripts will primarily interest Japanese art historians, the elaboration of Mostow's thesis of cultural appropriation and the social history part of the work offer much to a wider audience.

The appearance of a new translation of the *Tale of Genji* is always epoch-marking, but along with everything else in our modern world, epochs are getting shorter. If we count only the complete translations, there have been four: Arthur Waley, 1925–33; Edward Seidensticker, 1976; Royall Tyler, 2001; and now Dennis Washburn, 2015. Only fourteen years separate the Tyler translation from the Washburn; it feels like a heartbeat. In his "notes on the translation," Washburn explains why he took up the "daunting challenge" of translating *Genji*, given that he was not motivated by dissatisfaction with earlier translations. His justification articulates a significant theoretical position:

The art of literature only comes into being at the moment of engagement between reader and text and since every such engagement is different, there can never be a definitive reading.... It is only through multiple translations of brilliantly complex and historically influential narratives like *Genji monogatari* that we can 'get at' a source work in another language, that the art created in the moment of reading can be made truly manifest. (Washburn, p. xxxv)

Note that Washburn shares Emmerich's discomfort with the term "original," substituting for it "source work" and "source text." In fact, Washburn states provocatively, "... the only truly original text is the one that has never been read" (Washburn, p. xxxvi).

So briefly, how is Washburn's translation and reading different from the others? Washburn states that he strove for "accessibility and clarity," goals that he has accomplished in full measure. Of the translations to date, Tyler's translation is simultaneously the most literal and literary.² By "literal," I mean the intention to translate as closely as possible the original, leaving nothing out, nor adding anything in. One notoriously difficult aspect of the original is the absence of fixed names for its many characters. Designations for characters shift with residence; relationships; and, especially for men, the acquiring of rank. Tyler's is the first translation to mirror this aspect of the original, and it does give precious insight into a society where personal names were seldom used and rank was of paramount importance, but it makes his translation difficult to

²I have elsewhere done a more detailed comparison of this aspect of the Tyler and Washburn translations. See Sonja Arntzen, "Moonlight in the Tangles," *Times Literary Supplement*, May 26, 2017, p. 23.

follow. Washburn chooses the opposite strategy, providing the characters with names as well as adding qualifiers of rank or relationship to the names as needed. Although Waley and Seidensticker used fixed names for characters, they did not often add the qualifiers of rank, so that aspect of Heian social relationships was somewhat erased. The result in Washburn's translation is perfect certainty as to who is saying or doing what to whom along with a precise sense of their hierarchical relationship. The translations of Waley and Seidensticker certainly achieved accessibility and clarity too, but at the cost of eliding much of what was in the original—in Waley's case, actual content; in Seidensticker's, stylistic aspects. Washburn leaves nothing out.

In general, Washburn tilts toward amplitude. He integrates allusions to poetry as much as possible into the body of the text; he makes explicit motivations that are merely suggested in the original and adds location markers and other bits and pieces of information that were not needed by Heian readers. His translation runs two hundred pages longer than any of the others, but, except for Seidensticker's, it is a faster read, largely because of its clarity.

Washburn boldly updates dialogue in his translation, incorporating colloquialisms such as “played it cool” (Washburn, p. 701) and “enough already” (Washburn, p. 732), but always in an appropriate way. He is a master at crafting dialogue to fit the speech levels and the nature of specific occasions. He has created a new three-line format for translating the myriad *waka* poems in the text and generally imparts a pleasing musicality to them. In this, he stands toe to toe with Tyler, whereas Waley and Seidensticker did as little with the poetry as they could.

In conclusion, I concur with Washburn that only multiple translations can grant access to works as rich and complex as *Genji*. Washburn's and Tyler's make a wonderfully complementary pair for entering the *Genji*'s world.

Doris Bargaen's *Mapping Courtship and Kinship in Classical Japan: The Tale of Genji and Its Predecessors* focuses on patterns of courtship and the driving force of genealogical ambition in the tale. Her book is divided into three parts. Part one describes the physical space of the capital, palace, and private residences as well as the conceptual space of the Heian marital system. Part two centers on the literary topos of *kaimami* (seeing through a gap in the fence) to explore various permutations of courtship in both fictional and autobiographical narratives prior to *Genji*. Part three, constituting two-thirds of the work, follows key narratives of courtship in the *Genji* to demonstrate that “[t]hrough various intergenerational entanglements, the author of the *Genji* stages the imbrication of courtship and kinship as an intergenerational drama that preoccupies three or four generations of characters in the genealogical quests” (Bargaen, p. 2). Bargaen's methodology is comprised of “... a combination of close textual and contextual analysis, along with occasional readings between the lines” (Bargaen, p. xiii). Her stated aim is to explore anthropological and political approaches to the *Genji*, but a constant attention to the psychology of characters grounds many of her perceptions. For example, in her discussion of Genji's early sexual adventures as training for winning over Fujitsubo, his stepmother, as a sexual partner, she states that “[h]e can fail with all the women he is courting, but he must win Fujitsubo to reach the ultimate goal of putting an heir on the throne in lieu of himself” (Bargaen, p. 252). Since Genji's pursuit of Fujitsubo in the early chapters is depicted exclusively as a passion driven by having known her as a child and finding in her a substitute for the mother he lost so early, the political ambition of putting a son on the throne must be understood as unconscious. This is a case of reading between the lines.

Bargaen's analysis of *kaimami*, a “uniquely Japanese form of erotic hide-and-peek” (Bargaen, p. 2), is the first extended treatment in English of this important motif in

Heian literature. Her account will be useful in the undergraduate classroom for conveying the serious side of a courtship activity that is usually regarded as comic and vulgar from a Western perspective. Her meticulous charting of the kinship relationships among the characters in *Genji* brings home forcefully how tightly woven the web of kinship was in Heian aristocratic society. One of her thought-provoking arguments is that genealogical desire for forging connections with the royal blood line had its shadow opposite in the storylines of some characters, such as the elder of the Uji sisters, who wants only to extinguish her line.

This book leaves one with the impression that each time a dedicated reader like Bargaen enters the labyrinth of *Genji*, new aspects present themselves. Since this time she started into the maze with architectural space and genealogical drives as her reading guides, she ended up with a completely different work from her *A Woman's Weapon*, where her focus was spirit possession and its paradoxical relationship to female agency.³ Bargaen often refers to the *Genji* as a “masterpiece.” If we can agree on anything that makes a masterpiece, surely it must be this kind of fertility to spawn such variation in interpretation as well as the seemingly infinite replacements that are so vigorously documented by Emmerich.

Brian Steininger's *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan: Poetics and Practice* opens up a new frontier in Heian literary scholarship, which, in the English-reading academic sphere, as in the study of *kokugaku* (national literature) within Japan, has focused almost exclusively on the study of works written in vernacular Japanese and therefore primarily on the works of women writers. Within the works of Heian women writers, as this review exemplifies, studies on the *Tale of Genji* predominate. But the fathers of all the Heian women writers were scholars of Chinese “letters” in the largest sense of that word, and practicing poets and essayists in literary Chinese. Their careers at the mid-level of Heian aristocracy depended on this academic expertise even though the respect for that learning was eroding slowly. In the Heian period itself, the literary production of these men mattered enormously, both socially and politically, while that of the women writers ran a very distant second. Steininger's book begins to correct the skewed perception of Heian-period literate culture that has developed in the modern period through the neglect of its Sinitic side.

This work is both social history and literary study. Steininger has chosen to focus on the “networks of the mid-Heian literary quotidian: the day-to-day exchanges, performances, missives, commissions, banquets and games that made up the lived practice of classical literary culture” (Steininger, pp. 1–2). He has wisely grounded his study on the writings and career of one representative figure for mid-Heian literati, Minamoto no Shitagō (911–83), whose struggles for patronage through scribal service have been well documented. Shitagō wrote widely in both literary Sinitic and vernacular genres. Most interestingly, he is credited with an early work of vernacular fiction, the *Utsuho Monogatari* (Tale of a Tree Hollow).

Steininger's first chapter uses the *Utsuho Monogatari* as a mirror for the sociopolitical situation faced by members of officialdom such as Shitagō. The succeeding chapters interweave consideration of the social dynamics of Sinitic literary culture with literary analysis of excerpts from a wide variety of texts. Chapter 4 provides an illuminating account of how Heian officials acquired their education in literary Chinese. The work is rounded out with two translation appendices of selections from two works by

³Doris G. Bargaen, *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

Shitagō: *Sakumon Daitai*, a manual for composing regulated verse and parallel prose, and *Wamyō Ruijushō*, a kind of encyclopedia written in Chinese but dedicated to explaining Japanese names of things.

The latter title brings up the most difficult issue with which this book has to contend, the fluidity of Heian literacy. Steinger summarizes it thus:

Technically and practically speaking, writing and literacy in the Heian court were not characterized by a hard boundary between the Japanese and Chinese languages. Literacy based on *kundoku*, which deciphered Sinographs in terms of vernacular language, ensured that all writing—whether it adopted the grammar and lexicon of literary Sinitic, the syllabic transcription of *kana*, or some combination thereof—took place upon a spectrum of potentially infinite gradation and variation. (Steinger, p. 10)

The scholarly depth and range of this work is stunning. In general, Steinger handles his complex topics with admirable clarity and apt use of example. Only when he moves to theoretical abstraction does he stray into the opaque, as in this sentence that begins, “Heian scholars theorized a discursive sphere of Sinographic text and *kundoku* recitation through a unipolar model of the relationship between script and speech ...” (Steinger, p. 216). This, however, is a small complaint given the rich content this work opens up. The translations appended to the volume are like pictures, worth a thousand words. Reading the simplified prescriptions for regulated verse in *Sakumon Daitai*, one feels almost as though, with the right set of dictionaries, one could compose it oneself.

The last work under review here, *L'Âge d'Or de la Prose Féminine au Japon (Xe–XIIe Siècle)* [The Golden Age of Women's Prose in Japan (10th–11th Centuries)] by Jacqueline Pigeot, one of the most distinguished scholars and translators of Japanese literature in France, is included here not only for its intrinsic worth, but for two other reasons. Since publications in English dominate scholarship in Japanese literature outside Japan, it is good to be reminded that excellent work is being done in other languages. Secondly, this work exemplifies a type of work that has all but disappeared from scholarship in English on Japanese literature, a work of literary reflection elegantly written for the general educated reader. Translations are the exception, for they must appeal to a wide audience, but Japanese literary research in English has grown so large and specialized that scholars now write primarily for each other. This development was inevitable with the maturity of the field, and yet I wonder if general works are not still needed to expand the readership for Japanese literature.

Pigeot's collection of essays provides a broad overview of Heian women's writing well supported by textual citations, and makes insightful comparisons with that of French women writers over the centuries. Even though the work is pitched to a general audience, she raises thought-provoking issues for specialists. There is only space in this essay for a cursory consideration of Pigeot's work, but I would like to cite at least one point that I found especially revelatory. In her discussion of Heian marriage, Pigeot mentions that the marriage ceremony itself was a brief, purely familial affair, “lacking any religious or even legal character and unaccompanied by any moral prescriptions.” She goes on to note the general levity with which infidelity on the part of a “wife” could be treated in the Heian period, saying, “One can speak, perhaps not without some exaggeration, of the possibility in the aristocratic milieu, of a reciprocal polygamy. The religions imposed no sexual morality” (Pigeot, pp. 30–31). This last statement struck me forcefully. It signals a key difference between the premodern Japanese world view and the Western tradition, based as it is on the Christian equation of sex and sin. Even though I can think of some

qualifying counter-arguments to this statement, I find the simple truth it presents with one broad stroke very stimulating. Pigeot's work is full of such moments.

Finally, the fact that two of the six books presented here are works of reception history is significant. Although both Emmerich and Mostow are uncomfortable with the passive connotations of the word "reception," Emmerich preferring "replacement" and Mostow preferring "appropriation," both works still draw their inspiration from viewing a text not as something fixed but as an event that happens in the act of reading and changes over time. Note that this is also the point of departure for Washburn's translation. Given the large number of reception histories that have emanated in particular from Columbia University,⁴ one can say this appears to have become a dominant line of inquiry in premodern Japanese literary studies. While Pigeot's work reminds us of the need to reach general audiences, all these works bear witness to the vital importance of translation for this field and to the contribution literary theory has made in deepening our perception of Heian literature.

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Rethinking Japanese Resistance to Global Capitalist Modernity

Recasting Red Culture in Proletarian Japan: Childhood, Korea, and the Historical Avant-Garde. By SAMUEL PERRY. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014. xii, 228 pp. ISBN: 9780824875190 (paper, also available in cloth and as e-book).

Against Harmony: Progressive and Radical Buddhism in Modern Japan. By JAMES MARK SHIELDS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. x, 404 pp. ISBN: 9780190664008 (cloth, also available as e-book).

The Sublime Perversion of Capital: Marxist Theory and the Politics of History in Modern Japan. By GAVIN WALKER. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016. xvi, 245 pp. ISBN: 9780822361411 (cloth, also available in paper and as e-book). doi:10.1017/S0021911818002784

In recent years, the project of socialism appears to have run out of steam. Since at least the 1990s, with the fall of the socialist bloc and China's turn to marketization, people have been discussing leftist melancholy, but now the situation is more serious.¹

⁴Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, eds., *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Patrick W. Caddeau, *Appraising Genji: Literary Criticism and Cultural Anxiety in the Age of the Last Samurai* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Haruo Shirane, ed., *Envisioning the Tale of Genji: Media, Gender, and Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

¹Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). See also Helmut Dubiel, *Ungewißheit und Politik* [Uncertainty and Politics] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), chap. 1, where he uses the term "linke Trauerarbeit [leftist mourning]." I discuss Dubiel's use of the term in Viren Murthy, "Leftist Mourning: Civil Society and Political Practice in Hegel and Marx," *Rethinking Marxism* 11, no. 3 (1999): 36–55.