

The Imperial Mode of Sinitic Poetry: Literacy and Authority in Early Heian Japan

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1. Introduction: The Rise of Sinitic Poetry in Japan

The beginning of the Heian period (794–1185) in Japan ushered in an era of renovation and expansion in the ceremonial life of the imperial court. The construction of the Nagaoka 長岡 capital, first, and of the Heian capital later, made new ritual structures available for accommodating the ceremonies performed on the occasion of the annual state festivities.¹ Thus, the ritual manual *Dairishiki* 内裏式 (Ritual Ceremonies of the Imperial Court), completed in 821 (Kōnin 弘仁 12), prescribes that the newly built Burakuden 豊楽殿 (Hall of Abundant Pleasures) at the Heian court, situated to the west of the central Chōdōin 朝堂院 (State Halls Compound), host such ceremonies as the banquet customarily held on the seventh day of the first month, which later developed into the so-called Horse-Watching Ceremony (*aouma no sechie* 青馬節会), the “stomping song” (*tōka* 踏歌) ritual on the sixteenth day of the first month, and the archery shooting ritual (*jarai* 射礼) on the seventeenth day of the first month.²

Another significant architectural and urbanistic feature of the new capitals was a large imperial garden, adjacent to the imperial court and extending south of it, that soon came to be associated primarily with imperially sponsored poetry composition. During the ten years the court spent at the Nagaoka capital (784–794), the park is referred to as the Southern Garden (*nan'en* 南園) in historiographical works; in the Heian capital, it was instead called the Shinsen'en 神泉苑 (Park of the Divine Spring).³ In both cases, the imperial gardens gradually became the

¹ Yamanaka, *Heianchō no nenjū gyōji*, pp. 38–54.

² Following academic conventions, dates are given according to the lunar calendar, with years given according to the Western calendar and with reference to the era name (*nengō* 年号).

³ The Southern Garden in the Nagaoka capital was possibly built as a sort of detached imperial palace within the residence compound of the recently deceased Crown Prince Sawara 早良 (750?–785). The planning and construction of the Nagaoka capital is detailed in Van Goethem, *Nagaoka*. The project for the new Heian capital's Shinsen'en park followed and expanded the model of the Southern Garden. See Yoshino, “Shinsen'en no tanjō.”

regular sites for official poetry banquets on the calendrically auspicious days of the Double Third (third day of the third month), the Double Seventh (seventh day of the seventh month; also known as *tanabata* 七夕), and the Double Ninth (ninth day of the ninth month; also known as the Chrysanthemum Festival).⁴ As a matter of fact, from the late eighth century, the literary genre of Sinitic poetry (*shi* 詩) acquired an increasingly important position at the imperial court as imperially sponsored annual poetry banquets became more and more frequent and regulated.

In particular, the Southern Garden at the Nagaoka capital became the preferred venue for the Winding Stream Banquet (Kyokusui no En 曲水宴). This banquet was held sporadically during Emperor Shōmu's 聖武 (r. 724–749) reign but became increasingly prominent in the last decade of the Nara period (710–784) during the reign of Emperor Kōnin 光仁 (r. 770–781).⁵ Possibly owing to prolonged construction at the Shinsen'en site, the Winding Stream Banquet appears only sparsely in historiographical entries in the years after the capital was moved to Heian by Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (r. 781–806); and with no clear connection to the imperial park, the banquet was discontinued because of its proximity to the dates of Emperor Kanmu's and his imperial consort's passing.⁶

It is with Kanmu's son Saga 嵯峨 (r. 809–823), who ascended the throne after the brief reign of his elder brother Heizei 平城 (r. 806–809), that poetry banquets become a conspicuous part of early Heian ceremonial activity. From very early on after the Double Third Banquet was discontinued, the Double Ninth date, traditionally associated with continental lore of longevity, achieved through ingestion of chrysanthemum wine, became the most prominent date for court-sponsored poetic composition.⁷ In fact, the *Dairishiki* presents instructions only for the Double Ninth Banquet to be performed at the Shinsen'en park, implying that similar events sponsored by the court should be modeled after it. In addition to the Double Ninth Banquet, Saga also held for some time the Blossom-Viewing Banquet (Hana no En 花宴) without a fixed date during the second lunar month. These official imperial banquets all appear in the imperial history *Nibon kōki* 日本後紀 (Later Chronicles of Japan, 840) invariably in connection

⁴ For an overview of the evolution of imperial poetry banquets in the early ninth century, see Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, pp. 31–42.

⁵ The Double Third date was originally strongly associated with a number of continental rites that had also taken root in Japan, among which the most prominent was arguably the ritual purification of the sovereign by ablution (*misogi harae* 禊祓). Although the poetry composed at the Winding Stream Banquet in Japan as early as Emperor Shōmu's reign in the Nara period shows imagery connected to the ablution rite, the core component of the banquet was wine drinking and poetry composition by the participants, who were seated along a water stream. For a detailed account on the evolution of the Double Third date and the significance of poetry therein in medieval China, see Duffy, "The Third Day"; for an overview of the Winding Stream Banquet in Japan, see Yamanaka, *Heianchō no nenjū gyōji*, pp. 173–190.

⁶ Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, pp. 31–32.

⁷ On the origin and development of the Double Ninth Banquet in early Heian Japan, see *ibid.*, pp. 198–242.

with the Shinsen'en.⁸ Featuring the same architectural elements as other public buildings within the court compound such as the Burakuden, the Shinsen'en thus constituted an extension of the imperial court and ensured that the poetry banquets performed therein were an integral part of the annual ceremonial calendar.⁹ A preface to the first Blossom-Viewing Banquet held on 812 (Kōnin 3) drafted by the Confucian scholar Sugawara no Kiyotomo 菅原清公 (770–842), which survives only as a fragment, links the inauguration of the mid-spring flower banquet with the founding of the park by Emperor Saga and celebrates the Shinsen'en as a dwelling of immortals (*senjin* 仙人) and therefore as a site strongly connected with imperial power:

若夫蓬山沼澗、奏皇懷而不遑。崑嶺嵯峨、周王遊以忘倦。豈如我聖朝。京城之內、探勝地而作園。魏闕之前、道神泉以為流。

Dreaming from afar of Mount Peng, the Emperor of Qin incessantly pursued his quest; resting on the steep Kun Peak, the Duke of Zhou let go of his worries. Yet how could they match the wisdom of our sovereign? Within the borders of the capital, he finds a superb terrain and transforms it into a park; before the imperial gates, he traces the path of the sacred spring and generates a stream.¹⁰

⁸ On the entry for the seventh day of the seventh month in Daidō 3 (808), for example, the *Nihon kōki* has the following: “The sovereign progressed to the Park of the Divine Spring. He watched the *sumai* performance and had the *monnin* literati compose poems on *tanabata* (幸神泉苑。觀相撲。命文人賦七夕詩。); *Nihon kōki*, Daidō 3 (808).7.7 (pp. 98–99). On the twelfth day of the second month of Kōnin 3 (812), it has: “The sovereign progressed to the Park of the Divine Spring, where he admired the flowering trees. He commanded the *monnin* literati to compose poems and bestowed upon them silk floss each according to their rank. The festivity of the Blossom-Viewing Banquet begins from here” (幸神泉苑、覽花樹。命文人賦詩、賜綿有差。花宴之節、始於此矣。); *Nihon kōki*, Kōnin 3 (812).2.12 (p. 148). On the ninth day of the ninth month of the same year, it reads: “The sovereign progressed to the Park of the Divine Spring, where he held a banquet for those with the status of personal attendants and above. Music was provided by the Office of Female Performers. The sovereign commanded the *monnin* literati to compose poems, and bestowed emoluments upon them and upon those above the fifth rank, each according to their rank” (幸神泉苑、宴侍從已上。奏妓樂。命文人賦詩。五位已上及文人、賜祿有差。); *Nihon kōki*, Kōnin 3 (812).9.9 (p. 157).

⁹ Yoshino, *Shinsen'en no tanjo*.

¹⁰ All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted. The quoted text is from Makino, “(Honchō) bunshū’ hensan shiryō.” The excerpt belongs to a fragmentary anonymous collection of forty-some banquet prefaces now referred to as *Heianchō itsumei shijosbū bassui* 平安朝佚名詩序集拔萃 (Refined Excerpts from an Anonymous Banquet Preface Collection of the Heian Court). The text exists in two manuscripts. Banquet prefaces (*jo* 序) are texts written in literary Sinitic following a parallel prose format in which the author begins by describing the banquet’s venue, host, and participants, then expands on the topic chosen for poetic composition, finally concluding with a personal statement. By the mid-Heian period (the late tenth and early eleventh centuries), prefaces developed as the most prestigious literary genre for Confucian scholars; see Satō, “Heianchō no shijo.” For an overview of the formal structure of prefaces and its evolution during the Heian period, see Kido, “Heian shijo no keishiki.”

Until 831 (Tenchō 天長 8), when the Double Ninth Banquet was moved to the Shishinden 紫宸殿 (Purple Imperial Hall), the hall for public events and ceremonies within the imperial palace, the Shinsen'en continued to host imperially sponsored poetry banquets in the fashion of official state rituals. The Heian capital, thus, was designed from the start to offer new ways of representing and legitimizing the imperial court and the imperial clan through ritual and spectacle. Insofar as annual ceremonies were a powerful tool to generate, claim, and maintain authority, Sinitic poetry, too, rapidly became a valuable form of cultural capital for the early Heian sovereigns and the imperial clan.

In this period, namely between the late eighth century and the third decade of the ninth century, the place of Sinitic poetry within the imperial court and its educational infrastructure underwent significant changes, of which imperially sponsored poetry banquets were the most noticeable results. Perhaps to support the increasing regularity with which the Double Third Banquet was held starting from the late eighth century, the composition of Tang-style regulated Sinitic poetry (*lǜshī* 律詩) on a given topic was incorporated as a test subject for the recruitment of regular literature students (*monjōshō* 文章生) in the *kidendō* 紀伝道 (“way of annals and biographies”) curriculum at the Bureau of High Education (Daigakuryō 大学寮).¹¹ Originally named *monjōdō* 文章道 (“way of patterned writing”), the curriculum focused on the study of continental dictionaries and lexicographical works and of the literary collection *Wenxuan* 文選 (Collection of Ornate Writings, mid-sixth century), and supported the formation of a class of literate individuals with writing proficiency to be incorporated within the bureaucracy of the state. Later, it was merged with the short-lived *kidendō* curriculum, which focused on the study of continental histories, but it retained the centrality of writing proficiency.¹² By becoming the entry-level examination to earn a place as a regular student in the *kidendō* curriculum on the way toward the status of Confucian scholar (*jusha* 儒者), Sinitic poetry was made into a key form of writing proficiency that any *kidendō* graduate was supposed to master. As a matter of fact, from the early ninth century onward, students and graduates of the *kidendō* curriculum became more and more sought-after by the court to provide Sinitic poetry at imperially sponsored banquets, so much so that the selection procedure was eventually codified in the ceremonial manual *Kōninsbiki* 弘仁式 (Procedures of

¹¹ Regulated poetry differed from the “ancient style” primarily because it required adherence to complex prosodical patterns within each verse. The exact date when poetry was introduced as a test subject is not known, but the first indication of the *monjōshō* 文章生 examination is found in the biography of the *kidendō* 紀伝道 graduate Sugawara no Kiyotomo 菅原清公 (770–842), who seems to have passed the selection in 789 (Enryaku 延暦 8). The entry is in *Shoku Nihon kōki* 続日本後紀 (Later Annals of Japan Continued, 869) on Jōwa 承和 9 (842).10.17 (pp. 368–369). See also Momo, *Jodai gakusei*, pp. 86–87. In China, regulated poetry became a test subject for the *jīnshì* 進士 (presented scholar) examination during the early eighth century. An overview of poetry composition in the Tang civil service examination is in Vedal, “Never Taking a Shortcut.”

¹² Momo, *Jodai gakusei*, pp. 132–152.

the Kōnin Era, 820).¹³ In turn, imperial banquets gradually became the most prestigious outlet for poetic composition by *kidendō* graduates and Confucian scholars.

At the same time that Sinitic poetry within institutional education was being systematized in the early ninth century, the imperial household sought to secure its political and cultural authority by claiming this literary genre as a specific form of legitimizing cultural capital. In 820 (Kōnin 11), the *kidendō* track was re-configured: a specific path for individuals from the imperial household and high nobility was created requiring selection by way of poetry composition. It has been argued that this reorganization, which was dismantled just a few years later in 827 (Tenchō 4), served the interests of the imperial family and the aristocracy in that it helped them maintain a particular privileged professional path for the scions of their clans, one that was primarily based on poetic proficiency.¹⁴ The fact that the reorganization of the *kidendō* curriculum was halted in 827 following a petition from the poetry-inclined Confucian scholar Kuwahara no Haraka 桑原腹赤 (789–825) suggests that multiple parties, namely the imperial household and the *kidendō* elite, were negotiating and competing for control over poetic erudition. In other words, the generation and perpetuation of cultural and political authority through the continued ritual performance of Sinitic poetry constituted a source of legitimation for both the imperial clan and the *kidendō* elite. The two anthologies of Sinitic poetry compiled in rapid succession during Emperor Saga's reign, the *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Collection Soaring above the Clouds, 814) and the *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (Collection of Masterpieces of Literary Talent, 818), testify to the complex interplay and interconnections between members of the imperial household and members of the *kidendō* graduate elite, as they consist of virtually only poems by the two social groups.¹⁵

This article explores the interconnections between the sovereign and the poets in further detail by analyzing how both groups sought to claim authority through the acquisition of poetic literacy and, therefore, cultural authority. Although performative sites such as official poetry banquets were designed to represent the sovereign as the ultimate superintendent of poetic erudition and practice, and therefore the unchallenged source of cultural orthodoxy and legitimacy, early ninth-century sources reveal the poetic legitimacy of the sovereign and the imperial clan at large to be the product of a complex and nuanced interaction and

¹³The entry for the Chrysanthemum Flower Banquet on the Double Ninth date dictates that literary experts (*monnin* 文人) be selected one day prior to the banquet by the Ministry of Ceremonial Affairs (Shikibushō 式部省) from a pool of prospective students (*gakushō* 学生) and literature students (*monjōshō*) in the *kidendō* curriculum, as well as from among individuals in service at various offices of the court who were particularly versed in poetry composition; see *Koninshiki*, p. 2.

¹⁴Kotō, “Saga-chō jidai no monjōshō shusshin kanjin.”

¹⁵I do not consider here the third monumental collection *Keikokushū* 經国集 (Collection for Binding the Realm, 827), compiled during the reign of Emperor Junna 淳和 (r. 823–833), primarily because I consider this work a site for the negotiation of poetry's position within the *kidendō* curriculum; see Minguzzi, “‘Keikokushū’ Reconsidered.”

interconnection with the literary authority of institutionally trained *kidendō* graduates, so much so that the former could never exist independently of the latter. During the early Heian period, the significance of Sinitic poetry grew to the extent that by the end of the tenth century it had arguably become one of the most prestigious literary genres. I argue, thus, that the rise of Sinitic poetry in the Heian period was a process informed by the relationship between the imperial household and the *kidendō* elite, whose mutual dependency consistently maintained its strategic value as a form of legitimizing cultural capital through continued education, training, and performance.

2. *Kidendō* Education and Imperial Poetic Training

The reign of Emperor Saga was particularly rich in the imperial sponsorship of poetic activity, and it is the moment when the poetry banquet culture that became the staple of early Heian literary culture began to take shape. Saga himself is traditionally known as a tremendously prolific poet. As a matter of fact, Saga is the best-represented poet in both the *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū* collections (with twenty-two and thirty-four poems transmitted, respectively), which were compiled during his reign and ostensibly under his supervision. It is undeniable that Saga understood poetic literacy and practice as a valuable tool for crafting and maintaining a strategic representation of himself as a cultured and literarily skilled monarch. Through his active participation in, and control of, the poetic practice of his court, Saga undoubtedly redefined the parameters of sovereignty.¹⁶

One overlooked and yet significant aspect of the poetic activity of the early ninth century, however, is the role of *kidendō* graduates as imperial tutors or generally position holders within the Eastern Palace Chambers (Tōgūbō 東宮坊), the office in charge of administering the residence and upbringing of the designated crown prince. As a matter of fact, imperial tutors, usually scholars trained in the Bureau of High Education who were charged with the crown prince's education and appointed "tutors of the Eastern Palace" (*Tōgū no fu* 東宮傅) or "scholars of the Eastern Palace" (*Tōgū gakushi* 東宮学士), feature prominently in the *Ryōunshū* collection.¹⁷ Specifically, many of the twenty-three poets included in the collection were active as imperial tutors when Prince Kamino 賀美能 (later Emperor Saga) was appointed crown prince in 806 (role held until 809) or had served as imperial tutors before. For example, Sugano no Mamichi 菅野真道

¹⁶ For an extensive discussion on Saga's politics of writing and his diverse poetic activity, see Reeves, "Of Poetry, Patronage, and Politics." Jason Webb describes what he calls Saga's "orthodoxy of reception," namely the active control of reading imported continental texts and quoting them in local compositions, a control that extended to the compositions of attending poets who performed at his request; see Webb, "In Good Order," pp. 216–229.

¹⁷ This aspect was noted early on by the renowned scholar Kojima Noriyuki 小島憲之 (1913–1998) in the introduction to his critical edition and translation of *Ryōunshū*. See Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai*, vol. 2 (*chū*), book 2 (*chū*), pp. 1242–1245.

(741–814), represented in *Ryōunshū* by one poem composed at imperial command at the Shinsen'en, was appointed scholar of the Eastern Palace in 785 (Enryaku 4) when Prince Ate 安殿 (later Emperor Heizei) was selected as crown prince.¹⁸ Hayashi no Saba 林娑婆 (?–?), represented in the collection by two poems lamenting the loss of his academic status, served in the capacity of scholar of the Eastern Palace for Crown Prince Kamino.¹⁹ Some of the poets included in *Ryōunshū* would later rise to the position of imperial tutor after the compilation of the anthology. Kamitsukeno no Ehito 上毛野穎人 (766–821), represented by one poem purportedly attached to a petition in which he lamented his lack of social recognition, became scholar of the Eastern Palace in 817 (Kōnin 8). In other words, the pool of *Ryōunshū* poets was populated by *kidendō*-trained scholars with close connections with the imperial household.

The status of the collection's compilers, furthermore, offers an important window into the social dynamics that informed and supported the cultural system of Sinitic poetry at the early Heian court. The main compiler of *Ryōunshū* and the author of its preface, *kidendō* graduate Ono no Minemori 小野岑守 (778–830), held the office of assistant executive secretary of the Eastern Palace (*Tōgū no shōshin* 東宮少進) when Saga was crown prince, and later rose to the position of assistant director of the Eastern Palace Chambers (*Tōgū no suke* 東宮亮).²⁰ Admittedly, these two positions were not directly associated with tutoring; however, there is indirect evidence that Minemori took part in the education of Emperor Saga when he was crown prince.²¹ The other individuals explicitly mentioned in the *Ryōunshū* preface also had links to both the *kidendō* and the court: Sugawara no Kiyotomo was a renowned *kidendō* scholar and poet who had also held the position of director of the Bureau of High Education (*Daigaku no kami* 大学頭), and Isayama no Fumitsugu 勇山文繼 (773–828) was the assistant director of the Bureau of High Education (*Daigaku no suke* 大学助) who had also served as professor in charge of the *kidendō* curriculum (*کیدん 紀伝博士*).²² Bringing together poetry, imperial tutoring, and institutional academic offices, the social and bureaucratic identities of the *Ryōunshū* compilers invite a reconsideration of early Heian poetic practice in terms of the interconnection between the poetic

¹⁸ The appointment is recorded in *Shoku Nihongi*, Enryaku 4 (785).11.25 (pp. 776–777).

¹⁹ The appointment of Saba as scholar of the Eastern Palace is documented in *Nihon kōki* in 806 upon the selection of Prince Kamino as crown prince. *Nihon kōki*, Daidō 1 (806).5.19 (p. 81).

²⁰ Biographies of Ono no Minemori can be found in Kinpara, *Heianchō kanshibun*, pp. 74–96; and Gotō, *Heianchō kanbungaku*, pp. 54–63.

²¹ The biography of Minabuchi no Nagakawa 南淵永河 (777–857), preserved in *Nihon Montoku jitsuroku* 日本文徳実録 (Ten'an 天安 1 [857].10.13), contains a passage that reads: “In the past, when retired Emperor Saga was crown prince, he assisted him in his reading practice together with Asano no Katori, Ono no Minemori, and Sugawara no Kiyohito” 昔者嵯峨太上天皇在藩之時、與朝野鹿取、小野岑守、菅原清人等、共侍讀書 (*Nihon Montoku jitsuroku*, pp. 627–628).

²² Kojima suggests that Fumitsugu was probably selected as a compiler by virtue of his office at the Bureau of High Education since there is no direct evidence of his being particularly active as a poet; see Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai*, vol. 2 (*chū*), book 2 (*chū*), p. 1242.

training of the imperial clan and the institutional infrastructure of poetic education in the *keidendō* curriculum.

In what follows, I offer an analysis of a poetic exchange between Emperor Saga and the *keidendō* graduate Ono no Minemori, preserved in the *Bunka shūreishū* collection of 818, which offers a precious window into the poetic training of the early Heian sovereign. The two poems by Emperor Saga and Ono no Minemori are also connected to another set of four poems composed on the same topic, which is preserved in the *Keikokushū* collection of 827. Because these four poems were composed by candidates for the status of *monjōshō* at the examination of 822, an integrated reading of these two sets of poems reveals the complex relationship between sovereign-centered poetic activity and the poetic literacy of the *keidendō* graduates.

The two poems by Emperor Saga and Ono no Minemori are titled, respectively, “Composing on a topic, obtaining ‘The autumn moon shines bright above Mount Long’” (賦得隴頭秋月明) (*Bunka shūreishū* 134) and “Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with the topic ‘The autumn moon shines bright above Mount Long’” (奉和隴頭秋月明) (*Bunka shūreishū* 135).²³ Minemori’s poem falls in the category of “harmonizing” poems (*washi* 和詩), that is, poems composed in response to a previous poem by a peer or, as in this case, by a social superior (in which case the character 奉 is added to make the hierarchical gap explicit).²⁴

This exchange is significant for a number of reasons. First, the poems are composed on a topic that consists of a line extrapolated from an existing continental poem. This referentiality anticipates the practice of so-called topic-line poetry (*kudaishi* 句題詩) that gradually came to dominate the landscape of banquet poetry in the mid- and late Heian period.²⁵ Second, Saga’s poem is marked by the characters meaning “composing on a topic” (*fu* 賦) and “obtaining” (*de* 得), which marked the fact that the poem was composed on an assigned topic. In medieval China, particularly from the late Six Dynasties period (third to sixth centuries), *fude* 賦得 poetry rapidly gained traction as a preferred modality for poetic composition at imperial banquets. By the early part of the Tang 唐 period (618–907), this expression had also come to signal those poems composed for the prestigious *jīnshì* 進士 degree examination, or in preparation thereof. In the literary landscape of early Heian Japan, *fude* poetry appears in the same contexts, namely banquet poetry

²³ *Bunka shūreishū* poem numbers follow those in the critical edition of *Bunka shūreishū* by Kojima Noriyuki, in NKBT 69.

²⁴ The character 和 can be variously translated as “responding,” “replying,” or “matching.” However, I support the English rendering “harmonizing” as it underscores the role of these kinds of poetry exchanges to reflect and reinforce existing sociopolitical hierarchies.

²⁵ By the mid-tenth century, topic-line poetry had developed into a rigorously codified genre, in which every couplet of a seven-character, eight-line regulated verse (*lǜshī* 律詩) had to show different techniques for exposition of elements featured in the topic line. The unquestionable authority on *kudaishi* scholarship is Satō Michio 佐藤道生; see in particular Satō, *Kudaishi ronkō*. Wiebke Denecke provides an overview of the cultural background for the rise of this specific genre as well as an analysis of early examples of topic-line poems; see Denecke, “Topic Poetry.”

and examination poetry. As a matter of fact, many of the *monjōshō* examination poems included in the surviving volumes of the *Keikokushū* are marked by this expression. *Fude* also appears in later examples of examination poems as well as in poems composed in preparation by late ninth-century *keidendō* scholars such as Shimada no Tadaomi 島田忠臣 (828–891) and Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903); these poems are found in their personal collections, the three-volume *Denshi kashū* 田氏家集 (House Collection of the Shimada Clan, date of compilation unknown) and the twelve-volume *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文章 (Literary Drafts of the Sugawara House, 900), respectively. The poem in question by Emperor Saga, in sum, was composed in contiguity with banquet poetry, on the one hand, and examination poetry, on the other, where the former constitutes an ideal extension of the latter.

The topic line of the poetry exchange between Saga and Minemori is also particularly significant in relation to its connection with continental poetic culture and the local configuration thereof in early ninth-century Japan. The topic was extrapolated from the first line of a continental poem by the early Tang poet Yang Shidao 楊師道 (?–647). Yang Shidao was a member of Emperor Taizong's 太宗 (r. 626–649) poetic coterie. His poems appear, for example, in the remaining fascicle of the early Tang collection *Hanlin xueshi ji* 翰林學士集 (Literary Collection of the Hanlin Academicians).²⁶ Yang Shidao's poem, titled “The Waters of Mount Long” (隴頭水), reads as follows:

隴頭秋月明	The autumn moon shines bright above Mount Long;
隴水帶關城	The Long River encloses the fortress by the pass.
笳添離別曲	The flutes play a melody of parting,
風送斷腸聲	The wind brings a gut-piercing sound.
映雪峯猶暗	The mountain peak looks dark on reflecting snow,
乘冰馬屢驚	The horses become nervous as they cross the ice.
霧中寒雁至	Amidst the fog, the cold cry of geese arrives;
沙上轉蓬輕	Upon the desert, mugwort leaves fall softly.
天山傳羽檄	As feathered letters are dispatched from the Heavenly Mountain,
漢地急徵兵	Troops are summoned hastily in the Han territories.
陣開都護道	Lines of soldiers open the road toward the protectorate;
劍聚伏波營	Swords assemble in the camp that calms the waves. ²⁷
於茲覺無度	By this time, they are resolute beyond measure:
方共濯胡纓	Together they shall rinse the strings of their nomad hats. ²⁸

²⁶ For a translation of surviving poems in the *Hanlin* collection, see Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, pp. 237–266.

²⁷ Starting from the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), *fubo* 伏波 (literally “subduer of waves”) was a title assigned to military generals upon illustrious military feats.

²⁸ *Quan Tang shi*, p. 181. The meaning of the last line is somewhat unclear. The expression “to rinse one's hat strings” (濯纓 濯纓) appears to derive from a song verse that occurs with very little variation in a poem from the *Chu ci* 楚辭 (Lyrics from Chu, third century BCE) and in an episode of the *Mengzi* 孟子: “When the Canglang waters are clear, I rinse my hat strings; when the Canglang waters are muddy, I rinse my feet” 滄浪之水清兮、可以濯吾纓。滄浪之水濁兮、可以濯吾足 (*Mengzi*, p. 135). It is probably an indirect reference to the clearness of the Mount Long waters in the topic.

The poem belongs to the genre of “frontier poetry” (*bensaishi* 辺塞詩). Frontier poetry was often associated with the representation of soldiers stationing in or traveling to the northern desert to fight the barbaric tribes at the periphery of the Chinese empire, and it included expressions of longing and parting as well as representations of the desolate landscape of the northern lands. The topic of Yang Shidao’s poem, in addition, was traditionally associated with the so-called *yuefu* 樂府 (Jp. *gafu*, Music Bureau) genre. Although historically the Music Bureau office was established in China during the Han period to collect folk songs, by the Tang dynasty, the same term simply designated traditional topics upon which poetry had to be composed on a set of conventional themes.²⁹ Jack Chen describes *yuefu* poetry as typological in nature, being neither historical, occasional, nor personal and being defined by clear generic constraints.³⁰ In this sense, *yuefu* poetry exhibited some affinity with the genre of “poems on things,” or *yongwu* 詠物 (Jp. *eibutsu*) poetry. Both genres were particularly productive in early Heian Japan; and significantly, both were associated with poetic training. The codification of the vocabulary and imagery associated with a particular theme in the case of *yuefu* poetry, and the limitations imposed by the specificity of the poetic object in the case of *yongwu* poetry, arguably made these configurations of poetic composition particularly suited to the acquisition of poetic vocabulary and to learning how to read and quote appropriate sources.³¹ It is hardly a coincidence that topics strongly associated with learning and training appear conspicuously precisely at a time when Sinitic poetry was emerging as a genre to be mastered by the imperial clan and the *kidendō* scholarly elite alike.

The poem composed by Emperor Saga on the topic extrapolated from Yang Shidao’s verse, as a matter of fact, strongly appears to be an exercise in the acquisition and repurposing of vocabulary and imagery, which unfolds within a protected textual environment modeled after a *yuefu* frontier topic. Saga’s poem reads as follows:

關城秋夜淨	At the fortress by the pass, the autumn night is clear;
孤月隴頭團	The solitary moon over Mount Long is round.
水咽人腸絕	The muffled sound of the water pierces my gut;
蓬飛沙塞寒	The mugwort flies over the cold frontier desert.

²⁹ It has been argued that *yuefu* poetry as a written literary genre was in fact codified later (between the fourth and the sixth centuries) and that the folk songs from the historical Music Bureau were retroactively included within the same tradition to equip the newly established genre with a sort of literary genealogy; see Allen, *In the Voice of Others*, pp. 37–68.

³⁰ Chen, “The Writing of Imperial Poetry.”

³¹ Probably the most famous example of *yongwu* poetry connected with imperial poetic tutoring is the set of seventeen poems (originally twenty) composed on various “things” by the early Heian scholar and poet Sugawara no Michizane for Crown Prince Atsugimi 敦仁 (later Emperor Daigo 醍醐, r. 897–930) in 895 (Kanpyō 寛平 7). The poems are included in the fifth volume of Michizane’s personal collection, *Kanke bunsō*. For an analysis of the poetic set, see Taniguchi, *Sugawara no Michizane*, pp. 91–101.

離笳驚山上	Flutes playing parting [melodies] surprise me up in the hills;
旅雁聽雲端	Traveling geese I hear far away in the clouds.
征戎鄉思切	On frontier duty, thoughts of home are acute:
聞猿愁不寬	Hearing the cries of the apes, my sorrow never subsides. ³²

As is evident, Saga's poem is devoted to achieving a representation of the Chinese frontier landscape by borrowing vocabulary and imagery directly from Yang Shidao's original poem. Imagery such as the fortress by the pass, the gut-piercing sound, mugwort leaves flying over the desert, flutes playing parting melodies, and traveling geese are all shared between Yang Shidao's source poem and Saga's composition, making the latter a clear example of early Heian imperial poetic training.

In contrast to Saga's poem, which makes virtually no reference to Han military activity, the harmonizing poem by the *kidendō* graduate Ono no Minemori appears entirely adherent to the second half of Yang Shidao's source poem, leaning heavily on the depiction of military activity at the frontier and avoiding almost entirely the description of frontier landscape:

反覆天驕性	As the nature of the haughty son of Heaven is unstable, ³³
元戎馭未安	Even controlling a grand army [the nomad people at the frontier] are not yet pacified.
我行都護道	I travel the road toward the protectorate,
經陟隴頭難	Climbing the steep path of Mount Long.
水添鞞鼓咽	The muffled sound of water joins that of the horse drums;
月濕鐵衣寒	The cold light of the moon soaks the suits of armor.
獨提敕賜劍	I shall wield only the sword bestowed by the sovereign,
怒髮屢衝冠	Again and again wearing as crown the hair straightened by rage. ³⁴

In Minemori's poem, the solitary frontier landscape gives way to an imminent sense of warfare between the Han soldiers and the northern barbarians. In contrast to Saga's poem, Minemori's adoption of vocabulary from the second part of Yang Shidao's poem hardly substantiates his adherence to that section, as only the expression about the "road toward the protectorate" appears as a clear direct borrowing. In other words, Minemori shows a significant degree of independence from the source poem, a sort of literary dexterity and creativity that would be expected from an institutionally trained poetry expert; and this demonstrated skill thereby counterbalances the sociopolitical gap inscribed in the act of harmonization with a higher degree of literary expertise.

³² Translation slightly adapted from Rabinovitch and Bradstock, *No Moonlight in My Cup*, p. 179.

³³ The "haughty son of Heaven" is meant as a derogatory term to indicate the leader of the Xiongnu 匈奴 confederation.

³⁴ Minemori's locus classicus here is a passage in the exemplary biography (*retsuden* 列伝) of Lin Xiangru 蘭相如 (?-?) included in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian, c. 91 BCE). See Kojima, *Kokufū ankoku jidai*, vol. 2 (*chū*), book 3 (*ge*), part 2 (II), p. 3563.

The exchange between Saga and Minemori is thus particularly revealing in that it shows how the literary training of the Heian sovereign was carefully organized as a textual choreography. By expanding on the contents of the second half of the source poem, which is virtually untouched by Saga, Minemori complements, integrates, and expands the sovereign's poetic utterance. Moreover, the exchange also shows the tension between the two hierarchies at play: on the one hand, the "harmonization" framework ensures that the sovereign initiates the exchange and is formally in charge of the poetic discourse; on the other hand, the gap in poetic expertise makes the *kidendō* scholar the true superintendent of imperial poetry.

As mentioned, the poetic exchange of Emperor Saga and Ono no Minemori is also in connection with a set of four poems preserved in the thirteenth volume of the *Keikokushū* collection, one of the six surviving volumes from the original twenty. The poems in this set are examination poems composed on the same topic line from Yang Shidao's poem. Since Minemori's son, Ono no Takamura 小野篁 (802–852), took part in the examination and the year he obtained *monjōshō* status is recorded in his biography, this particular examination must have taken place in 822 (Kōnin 13).³⁵ This was at least a few years after the didactic exchange between Saga and Minemori, which must necessarily date prior to 818. The successful *monjōshō* examinees in 822 were Prince Toyosaki (Toyosaki Ō 豊前王, 805–865), Ono no Takamura, Fujiwara no Yoshio 藤原令緒 (?–?), and Tajihhi no Enaga 多治比穎長 (?–?). The fact that the examination topic that year was the same as the Saga and Minemori exchange reinforces the latter's connection with poetic training.

However, it further suggests deeper interconnections between imperial tutoring, household traditions, and *kidendō* institutional education. Although it is unclear whether Minemori could have had any role in selecting the examination topic, it is presumable that the topic line from Yang Shidao's *yuefu* poem must have been chosen precisely because Minemori's son Takamura was sitting for the examination. As a matter of fact, Takamura's poem exploits aptly the connection between his examination topic and the poem composed by his father as a form of imperial poetic tutoring. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Takamura's examination poem opens with an almost *verbatim* quotation of the opening line of his father's poem on the same topic:

反覆單于性	As the nature of the nomads' king (<i>chanyu</i>) is unstable, ³⁶
邊城未解兵	In the fortress at the frontier the army is not yet dismantled.
戍夫朝蓐食	In the morning the soldiers eat their meal on their mats;
戎馬曉寒鳴	At dawn the war horses cry coldly.

³⁵ Ono no Takamura's biography is found in *Nihon Montoku jitsuroku*, Ninju 仁寿 2 (852).12.22 (pp. 554–556).

³⁶ *Chanyu* was the title traditionally used by the supreme leaders of the Xiongnu tribal confederation.

帶水城門冷	Enclosed by the water, the fortress gates are chilled;
添風角韻清	Brought by the wind, the sound of the horn is clear.
隴頭一孤月	On Mount Long hangs the solitary moon;
萬物影云生	It casts the shadows of ten thousand things.
色滿都護道	Its color fills the road to the protectorate;
光流伏飛營	Its light shines upon the camp of the “apt and volent.” ³⁷
邊機候侵寇	On the lookout to scout the frontier for signs of an enemy attack,
應驚此夜明	The soldiers will be startled by the brightness of this night. ³⁸

Both Takamura’s and Minemori’s poems open with the same two characters, which Takamura follows with “*chanyu*” in place of the expression “haughty son of Heaven.” In addition, Takamura makes sure to use in his poem the only expression that his father borrowed from Yang Shidao’s source poem, namely the “road to the protectorate.” All in all, Takamura’s poem exhibits few but unquestionable connections with his father’s poem on the same topic and furthermore prominently features the description of the frontier army, as did Minemori, instead of expanding the description of the autumn moon in the fashion of a *yongnu* poem, as his fellow examinees do in their own poems.

Significantly, topics chosen for the *monjōshō* examination were de facto treated as *yongnu* topics, with one element from the topic singled out and used for poetic exposition. Consider, by way of example, the first half of Prince Toyosaki’s examination poem on Yang Shidao’s topic line “The autumn moon shines bright above Mount Long:”

桂氣三秋晚	The scent of the cassia tree spreads in the autumn night;
莫陰一點輕	The shadow of the <i>ming</i> grass casts a faint dot.
傍弓形始望	We begin to gaze at the shape resembling a bow;
圓鏡暈今傾	Now we lean towards the halo of the round mirror.
漏盡姮娥落	As the water clock ceases, the beautiful lady falls;
更深顧兔驚	As the night deepens, the rabbit is startled. ³⁹

In Prince Toyosaki’s poem, virtually all verses are employed to describe the moon, either directly by means of descriptive imagery or indirectly by recourse to continental sources of erudition. The first couplet, for example, deploys the parallel between the cassia tree and the *ming* grass that appears, most notably, in the “Heaven” (*tian* 天) section of the early Tang encyclopedic compendium *Chuxueji* 初學記 (Notes to First Learning, c. 728): “looking at the *ming* grass, watching the cassia tree” (觀莫視桂). In the *Chuxueji*, this parallel passage is followed by two anecdotes about this grass and this tree, respectively, which explain their relationship with the moon.⁴⁰ The parallel between these two plants is also

³⁷ “Apt and volent” (*cifei*) was the name given to a particular group of imperial archers in the Han period.

³⁸ *Keikokushū* 161.

³⁹ *Keikokushū* 160.

⁴⁰ Kojima, *Kokufū ankokū jidai*, vol. 2 (*chū*), book 3 (*ge*), part 2 (II), pp. 3559–3560.

featured in a couplet of a poem on the topic of “moon” by the early Tang poet Li Jiao 李嶠 (?–?), part of a collection of 120 *yongwu* poems transmitted to Japan at least by the early ninth century.⁴¹ In the third couplet, on the other hand, the moon is suggested obliquely by references to two anecdotes related to it. The lady Heng’e 嫦娥 appears in the *Huainanzǐ* 淮南子 (The Masters of Huainan, second century BCE), where she is described as stealing an immortality elixir and ascending to the palace in the moon.⁴² The anecdote is quoted in the categorically arranged Tang encyclopedia *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Categorized Collection of Arts and Letters, early seventh century), in the “Heaven” section, under the category of “moon.”⁴³ The “looking rabbit” (*gutu* 顧兔), which lives on the moon and looks down at the world below, appears in the *Chu ci*, in the “Heavenly Questions” (*tianwen* 天問) category.⁴⁴ In sum, Prince Toyosaki mostly ignores the original context of the topic line and demonstrates his skills in navigating appropriate sources to excavate quotations associated with the poetic object of the moon.

By contrast, Takamura distances his poem from the standard modality of examination topic poetry to instead capitalize on the immediate association with the poem on the same topic that his father offered in harmonization with one by Emperor Saga. In this way, Takamura defies the conventions of examination poetry and situates his poem firmly at the intersection of his family’s poetic erudition and material transmission and the opportunity to actively use such erudition for imperial poetic tutoring. In other words, his examination poem reveals the complex interactions and interconnections between institutional poetic education, imperial training, and the household traditions of *keidendō* scholars.

3. The Imperial Mode of Early Heian Sinitic Poetry

The institutionalized poetry banquets incorporated in the imperial court’s annual ceremonial calendar from the beginning of the Heian period undoubtedly constitute a privileged site in which and through which the sovereign’s sociopolitical, cultural, and discursive authority is claimed, supported, and maintained. Imperially sponsored poetry banquets were sociopolitically significant as state ritual meant to symbolically reaffirm power relationships centered on the sovereign and to cosmologically represent the structure of the court, features that have been adequately discussed in existing scholarship.⁴⁵ In the early ninth cen-

⁴¹ On the role of Li Jiao’s collection in the literary landscape of Heian Japan, see Steinger, “Li Jiao’s Songs.”

⁴² *Huainanzǐ* is a collection of philosophical treatises compiled under the patronage of Liu An 劉安 (179–122), Prince of Huainan 淮南.

⁴³ Ouyang, *Yiwen leiju*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Chu ci*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ See Webb, “In Good Order,” pp. 77–92; Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, pp. 51–59; Steinger, *Chinese Literary Forms*, pp. 48–50.

ture, banquet organization went to great lengths to affirm the sovereign's authority. Normally, the summoned poets would compose poems upon imperial command (*ōsei* 応製) on a topic that had been formally selected and bestowed by the sovereign. There is evidence that during the early ninth century, before the official imperial banquets were moved within the imperial palace, the sovereign would compose his poem first, and the attending poets would then use it as a model, incorporating the sovereign's words and expressions in their own compositions.⁴⁶ As a privileged tool to manifest and support imperial cultural authority, banquet poetry was therefore placed at the top of a hierarchy of compositional settings. The *Ryōunshū* collection, for example, makes this apparent by organizing the poems of every represented author such that banquet poetry appears first, followed by harmonizing poetry, and down to less social and more private and solitary contexts.⁴⁷ At the same time as they proclaim the cultural authority of the Heian sovereign, imperial banquets also betray the fact that imperial poetry was inherently a collective endeavor, and the very presence at banquets of poetry experts from the pool of *kidendō*-trained students and scholars is a clear indication that imperial poetry could never support itself independently.

Harmonizing poetry, in particular, shows this “collective” modality of imperial poetry more clearly. In contrast to imperial banquets, in which the sovereign-poet relationship was formalized within a quasi-bureaucratic framework—poets were summoned as *monnin* 文人 in a fixed quota and received a one-time stipend for their poetic contributions—harmonizing poetry was a more versatile tool that allowed for the configuration of a variety of social relationships. In the *Ryōunshū* collection, for example, Emperor Saga initiates harmonizing exchanges and actively harmonizes almost exclusively with four individuals: Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu 藤原冬嗣 (775–826), Asano no Katori 朝野鹿取 (774–843), Ono no Minemori, and Sugawara no Kiyotomo. The first three served as Saga's tutors, but interestingly, there is no evidence that Kiyotomo ever acted as tutor to Saga. However, Kiyotomo's brother Kiyohito 清人 (?–?), although not particularly known as a poet, is listed as an imperial tutor in the aforementioned biography of Minabuchi no Nagakawa. Thus, the *Ryōunshū* suggests that the poetically skilled Kiyotomo might have functioned as a placeholder for his presumably less gifted brother Kiyohito, thus securing sociopolitical significance for the Sugawara clan through ties with the imperial household and with imperial tutoring.

The poems that Emperor Saga actively composed in harmonization with existing poems by *kidendō* graduates are particularly interesting and reveal the conditional nature of imperial poetry. One poem by Saga in *Ryōunshū*, a quatrain that he composed in harmonization with a poem by the *kidendō* literature student (also called *shinshi* 進士, or presented scholar) Shigeno no Sadanushi 滋野貞主 (785–852), attempts to actively position the sovereign within a network of

⁴⁶ Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, pp. 54–55.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–48.

kidendō scholars versed in poetic composition who interacted with each other through poetic exchanges:

Harmonizing with the poem by the presented scholar Sadanushi, “Early spring, passing by the residence of the Master of Libations Sugawara, feeling frustration and sorrow I send [a poem] to the three flourishing talents Furu [no Takaniwa?], Kose no Shikihito, and Fujiwara [no Koreo?]” (和進士貞主初春過菅祭酒宅、悵然傷懷簡布臣藤三秀才作)

書閣閉來冬變春	Since the book pavilion was dismantled, winter has given way to spring;
梅花獨笑向啼人	Now the plum flowers alone smile towards he who weeps.
雖知世上必然理	Although I am aware of the inevitable principle governing this world,
猶恨門前斷舊賓	All the same I lament that the old guests no longer stop by the gate. ⁴⁸

The *Ryōunshū* also includes the response sent by the Confucian scholar Kose no Shikihito to the original poem by Shigeno no Sadanushi:

間庭宿草無復掃	Nobody removes the grass that now dwells in the quiet garden;
虛院孤松自作聲	Only the voice of the solitary pine in the deserted pavilion can be heard.
但見平生風月處	Although I look at the same place of the wind and moon of old,
春朝花鳥慘人情	On this spring morning the flowers and birds make me sorrowful. ⁴⁹

Based on the shared elements of the two poems, the original composition by Shigeno no Sadanushi, by which the exchange was initiated, might have contained a reference to the arrival of spring, the sorry state of the garden, and the disappearance of a community of *kidendō*-trained literati and possibly of a poetic circle. Whereas Kose no Shikihito’s response emphasizes this latter aspect by positing a sort of seasonal and affective mismatch between the abandoned locale and the poet, Saga’s contribution is more oriented toward the loss of a social and material hub.⁵⁰ In Saga’s headnote, the Sugawara in question is most likely Sugawara no Kiyotomo, whose short tenure (812–813 [Kōnin 3–4]) as director of the Bureau of High Education (Master of Libations is the Tang equivalent) took place just before the *Ryōunshū* was compiled in 814. One possible reason

⁴⁸ *Ryōunshū* 19.

⁴⁹ *Ryōunshū* 91.

⁵⁰ Although not necessarily codified as such in the early ninth century, the meaning of the expression “wind and moon” (*fūgetsu* 風月) would eventually narrow to explicitly indicate “poetry” (originally intended as the poetic response to the natural environment). On the gradual codification of the meaning of *fūgetsu* and its connection with institutionalized poetry banquets, see Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, pp. 145–161.

for the poems' emphasis on feelings of sadness and loss could be identified in Kiyotomo's loss of formal academic status at the Bureau of High Education, due to his transferring to a different bureaucratic position, and his concurrent physical move to a new residence, which might have shaken the balance of a social group formed around him and his place.

The topic of composition, namely the visit to the old mansion of a deceased individual or an old acquaintance who no longer lives there, is frequent enough in Japanese sources to allow a conceptualization of it as a thematic subgenre usually used by poets to signal an important change in their sociopolitical environment.⁵¹ In any case, the poetic exchange took place within a social network of *kidendō*-trained scholars and was originally independent from the sovereign and the imperial court. At some point, however, Shigeno no Sadanushi's original poem was presented to Emperor Saga, who used it as the basis for a new verse. Saga composed this as though he was also part of the exchange, thereby positioning himself within a web of social and textual relationships centered on members of the *kidendō*-trained elite. Moreover, it is plausible that a system was in place in the early ninth century by which Sinitic poetry composed in external settings was actively sought-after and collected by the imperial court. By inserting himself within the *kidendō* scholars' poetic exchange and imagining himself as part of that particular social network, Saga was able to bring external poetic activity within imperial purview; on the other hand, his reliance on an independent network of poets strongly suggests that imperial poetry could never exist in isolation.

One significant venue where the tensions and contradictions in the sociopolitical distribution of early Heian poetic literacy and authority are most visible is the category of "Love" (*enjo* 艶情) in the second volume of the *Bunka shūreishū*. The eleven-poem sequence is as follows (here only the titles are presented; the actual poems are omitted):

- (51) 奉和春閨怨。菅原清公
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] "Lament of the spring bedchamber" (Sugawara no Kiyotomo)
- (52) 奉和春閨怨。朝野鹿取
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] "Lament of the spring bedchamber" (Asano no Katori)

⁵¹ One significant example is a poem by Sugawara no Michizane on the old residence of the deceased former Minister of the Right (*udaijin* 右大臣) Minamoto no Masaru 源多 (831–888). Significantly, Michizane places this poem at the beginning of a sequence of poems composed after returning to the Heian capital from his governorship period (886–890) in Sanuki 讃岐 Province in modern Shikoku. The poem, titled "Spring day, feeling emotion by the old residence of the former minister of the right" (春日感故右丞相舊宅) is no. 323 in the critical edition of Michizane's *Kanke bunsō* by Kawaguchi Hisao 川口久雄 (1910–1993), in NKBT 72.

- (53) 奉和春閨怨。巨勢識人
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] “Lament of the spring bedchamber” (Kose no Shikihito)
- (54) 奉和春情。巨勢識人
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] “Spring feelings” (Kose no Shikihito)
- (55) 和伴姬秋夜閨情。巨勢識人
Harmonizing with Lady [Ō]tomo’s poem “Autumn night, bed-chamber feeling” (Kose no Shikihito)
- (56) 長門怨。御製
Lament at the Changmen Palace (imperial composition)
- (57) 奉和長門怨。巨勢識人
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] “Lament at the Changmen Palace” (Kose no Shikihito)
- (58) 婕妤怨。御製
Lament of the imperial concubine (imperial composition)
- (59) 奉和婕妤怨。巨勢識人
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] “Lament of the imperial concubine” (Kose no Shikihito)
- (60) 奉和婕妤怨。桑原腹赤
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] “Lament of the imperial concubine” (Kuwahara no Haraka)
- (61) 奉和聽擣衣。桑原腹赤
Respectfully offering a poem harmonizing with [the topic] “Hearing the sound of beating clothes” (Kuwahara no Haraka)

As is evident, the “Love” section in *Bunka shūreishū* is made up exclusively of sets of harmonizing poems. With the exclusion of no. 55, which testifies to a poetic exchange between the Confucian scholar Kose no Shikihito and a woman of the Ōtomo clan, all the poems in the sequence are by Emperor Saga and by poets who offer a poem in harmonization. However, there is an important difference between the sets within the sequence. Kose no Shikihito’s no. 57 harmonizes with Saga’s no. 56, and the poems by Kose no Shikihito and Kuwahara no Haraka (nos. 59 and 60) harmonize with Saga’s no. 58. On the other hand, the remaining poems (nos. 51–53, 54, and 61) originally harmonized with poems by Saga not included in the collection, either because the compilers actively excluded them or because they no longer had access to them. The fact that the original imperial poems with which *kidendō* poets harmonized are not necessarily recorded suggests that, in *Bunka shūreishū*, the principle of inclusion for harmonizing poems was not centered around the authority of the sovereign’s poetic

literacy. In fact, I would argue that the baseline that informs the structure of the “Love” sequence in the *Bunka shūreishū* is represented not by the imperial poems, but rather by the harmonizing poems produced by the *kidendō* poets.

As a matter of fact, this is true for other places in the *Bunka shūreishū*. The third volume, for example, includes several harmonizing poems by *kidendō* graduates that are no longer matched with the original imperial poem. Clearly, the absence of the sovereign’s original poem did not prevent the compilers from including the surviving poems composed in harmonization with it. The contrary, however, can never be observed in the poetic collections of the early ninth century, substantiating the fact that imperial poetry was never represented independently of the poetic authority of *kidendō*-trained scholars. In sum, the early ninth-century practice of poetic harmonization—and the anthologizing strategies thereof—represents a site of investigation that allows us to complicate the relationship between the Heian sovereign and the literary service provided by the semi-professional class of institutionally trained poets. The *Bunka shūreishū* collection, for example, appears to have been in part conceived by its compilers as an opportunity to underscore the vital role of the poetic expertise of *kidendō* graduates to support, integrate, and legitimize the cultural authority of the imperial household, and to represent imperial poetic literacy as a by-product of the poetic expertise of *kidendō* scholars, insofar as the former could never exist independently of the latter.

4. Conclusions: Sinitic Poetry and Authority in Early Heian Japan

In this article, I explored the nuanced relationship between the imperial household and the institutionally trained elite of literary experts in early Heian Japan. Although official and public texts such as imperial histories, banquet prefaces, and prefaces to poetry collections invariably subordinated the activity and the sociopolitical identity of expert poets to the imperial court’s political and cultural authority, a counter-discourse existed that in turn sought to emphasize the power of *kidendō* scholars to support and legitimize the cultural claims of the Heian sovereign. Thus, the ideal imagination of a literary field controlled and guaranteed not only by the political power and economic resources of the imperial household but also by its authoritative poetic literacy needed to be necessarily negotiated with the historical reality of imperial education, wherein sovereigns and imperial princes were trained by members of the literate elite and thereby gained enough cultural capital to sustain the political legitimacy of the imperial lineage. Perhaps the tension in the distribution of sociopolitical and cultural capital is most visible in the *Bunka shūreishū*, which tends to emphasize the representation of low-ranking *kidendō* graduates. These individuals sought to capitalize on Sinitic poetry as their primary form of cultural capital, as seen in the case of members of the Shigeno 滋野 and the Kuwahara 桑原 clans who lacked institutional affiliation with the imperial household (for example in the capacity of imperial

tutors), and their poetic activity was often predicated on extra-institutional and private forms of social obligations and reciprocity with the sovereign.

In many ways, however, the gradual rise of Sinitic poetry as a source of political and cultural legitimation for both the imperial clan and *kidendō* scholars from the beginning of the Heian period set in motion a mutually beneficial and symbiotic system, one that would go on to last for at least two centuries. As a matter of fact, until the late tenth century, the imperial household was the institution that supported the continuous generation of cultural and political legitimation for itself and for the *kidendō* scholars who gravitated around it. Significantly, the first two centuries of the Heian period also constitute the temporal arc when the institution of official annual imperial poetry banquets was firmly in place. Only with the gradual reconfiguration of political authority at the imperial court, beginning from the tenth century, did institutionalized poetry banquets as state-run rituals start to decline, disappearing almost completely by the second half of the tenth century.⁵² During its zenith, however, the cultural system generated by the relationship between the imperial household and the *kidendō* elite was so strong that when the Northern branch of the Fujiwara 藤原 clan emerged from the second half of the ninth century as a new form of political power that complemented and paralleled the imperial household, it sought to mimic and reproduce the cultural strategies of the imperial clan for their own benefit. Thus, as the renowned statesman Fujiwara no Mototsune 藤原基経 (836–891) gained enough power to configure his mansion as an alternative site of political and cultural authority, Sinitic poetry began to play a significant part in the clan's social and cultural practices, from hosting imperial-style poetry banquets to establishing the patronage of *kidendō* scholars and securing poetic training for him and members of his household.⁵³ For example, Mototsune employed *kidendō* graduates as personal retainers, among whom were the Shimada brothers Yoshiomi 良臣 (832–882) and the already mentioned Tadaomi, the latter of whom was active primarily as a poet and as a provider of poetic education and training.⁵⁴ Moreover, Sugawara no Michizane himself seems to have acted as a poetry tutor for Mototsune's son Tokihira 時平 (871–909): a number of poetic exchanges recorded in Michizane's personal collections point to Tokihira's reliance on Michizane's poetic expertise.⁵⁵ In sum, the rise to power of the so-called "early Fujiwara regency" was also partly the product of Mototsune's ability to claim Sinitic poetry as a constituent form of cultural capital and to establish a system of cultural production that paralleled that of the imperial palace and could attract and provide legitimation for *kidendō* poets.

⁵² Takigawa, *Tennō to bundan*, pp. 23–44.

⁵³ Takigawa, "Fujiwara no Mototsune."

⁵⁴ Tadaomi appears to have been consistently valued by the court more for his poetic skills than for his bureaucratic potential. As a matter of fact, he held only few official positions and many years apart, and his main source of income presumably derived from his poetic services to Fujiwara no Mototsune's household; see Takigawa, "Shimada no Tadaomi no ichi."

⁵⁵ Takigawa, "Tokihira to Michizane."

As already mentioned, the ways in which poetry was strategically used to represent, perform, and naturalize hierarchical relationships of power at the Heian imperial court has been thoroughly investigated. Jason Webb and Gustav Heldt, in particular, have provided important insights on the significant roles of Sinitic and Japanese (*waka* 和歌) poetry, respectively, in affirming the cultural and political authority of the early Heian sovereign and imperial clan.⁵⁶ Thomas Lamarre, however, has urged us to complicate the notion that the infrastructure of imperial power should be seen as the primary force generating and controlling cultural production, or as the ultimate and ideal result of such production.⁵⁷ Accordingly, I have provided a reading of early Heian Sinitic poetry that attempts to displace imperial authority as the unquestioned cause and effect of poetic activity. In other words, I suggest that the practice of Sinitic poetry in early Heian Japan, such as poetic performance at court or the compilation of a poetry collection, should be best understood as a complex act of negotiation, whereby institutionally trained poets who supplied the necessary cultural capital actively sought to manipulate and reconfigure not only the result of their imperially sponsored poetic performance but the performance itself.⁵⁸ The reign of Emperor Saga and the first three decades of the ninth century were arguably an exceptional moment in the literary history of Heian Japan. In part, the rapid compilation of three literary anthologies and the amount of literary evidence they provide can be thought of as the product of a transitional period, during which Sinitic poetry was emerging as a powerful cultural force yet still was not completely integrated within the established political and educational system. The complex and at times contradictory relationship between the imperial household and the *kidendō*-trained poetry experts, who sought to manipulate the representation of cultural authority both to generate and to support their own sociopolitical identity and legitimacy, was eventually normalized during the latter half of the ninth century. The transition from the late Nara to the early Heian period, however, remains a critical historical juncture that laid the foundations for the steady rise of Sinitic poetry as one of the most prestigious and productive literary genres of the Heian period.

⁵⁶ The significance of poetry in regulating power relationships and hierarchies at court is not necessarily a Heian phenomenon. Torquil Duthie's study of the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) and the role of vernacular poetry (*uta* 歌) in the late seventh and early eighth centuries clearly reveals that poetic literacy and poetic activity were important components in the formation of the imperial lineage's authority and legitimacy; see Duthie, "*Man'yōshū*" and the Imperial Imagination.

⁵⁷ Lamarre, review of *The Pursuit of Harmony*.

⁵⁸ Danica Truscott's recent study of the strategies of the Ōtomo clan to carve out their own space within the overarching imperial imagination of the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) collection also brings to light such complexities in the field of vernacular poetry during the Nara period; see Truscott, "Assembling the *Man'yō* Woman."

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