

SAGA WOOS THE COURT:
Vernacular Poetry, Powerful Women,
and Romantic Verses

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Introduction

The object of this paper is quite simple: to draw attention to a seldom seen side of Emperor Saga's 嵯峨 (786–842, r. 809–823) poetic activity. Saga produced a large number of Sinitic verses (*kanshi* 漢詩), all of which, so far as can be gleaned from extant anthologies, he composed for and presented at specific court-related events, most of which took the form of elaborate banquets. While Sinitic poetry certainly was the major public form of versification within the ninth-century Heian court, vernacular poetry (*waka* 和歌) was alive and well, especially within the rear palace (*kōkyū* 後宮), a complex of buildings inhabited by the emperor's numerous consorts and other female court functionaries. While not much vernacular verse from Saga's reign has been preserved in the official anthologies of the age, it would be mistaken to assume that the practice of such poetry had in any way died out or even declined, at least not in the rear palace. As eager as Saga was to impress, inculcate, and dominate his numerous courtiers by means, among other things, of numerous banquets rife with pageantry, poetry, music, and drink, he was, as I shall demonstrate, equally eager to court the no less numerous women whose political influ-

ence extended far beyond the rear palace.

Now, to equate the rear palace exclusively with vernacular poetry would be a misleading oversimplification. Some of the most powerful women, including Saga's own primary consort, were skilled in Sinitic versification. Likewise, to equate the world of court banquets solely with Sinitic verse, while perhaps less of an oversimplification, is likewise potentially misleading. One of Saga's most trusted male ministers, Fujiwara no Sonohito, seems to have been much more at home with vernacular poetry, even going so far as to present one such poem at a public banquet when he had been expressly requested by the sovereign to present a Sinitic poem. The worlds of Sinitic and vernacular poetry were never so clearly divided, neither in terms of gender—Sinitic poetry for men, vernacular poetry for women—nor in regards to venue—Sinitic poetry for banquets, vernacular poetry for the rear palace. Saga, like most of his courtiers, men and women alike, was skilled in both modes of poetry.

This paper addresses three interrelated issues: First, I will take a close look at a vernacular poem most probably composed by Saga, as well as another likely composed by the woman who would later become his primary consort, Tachibana no Kachiko. The intimate relationship between Saga's vernacular poem and a number of contemporary consorts at court leads into a more general discussion of poetry and women at court. Second, I will dedicate a separate section to the aforementioned Kachiko, a woman whose role in Saga's literary development has been heretofore almost entirely ignored. Not a great deal of work has been done in this area. I have done little more than summarize what has already been said by a small number of Japanese scholars, adding a few of my own observations here and there. Third, and finally, I will turn our attention back to Saga's Sinitic poetry, and focus on those verses that deal expressly with women, especially in an erotic or romantic manner. This section serves as a final discussion on the role of male sexu-

ality—at least that of the sovereign—within the court.

First of all, however, a brief note on Saga's literary legacy is in order. Emperor Saga was a skilled poet and equally skilled ruler who brought about the greatest efflorescence in Sinitic learning and literature ever to be witnessed within Japan throughout the eighth through to the twelfth century. Any serious investigation into the history of Sinitic writing as a court-based practice in premodern Japan ought to include an in-depth study of Saga and his impressive literary legacy. Sinitic learning had flourished before Saga. A large portion of the Buddhist canon, translated from Pali and Sanskrit into various versions of literary Sinitic (*kanbun* 漢文), had found its way into Japan sometime early in the eighth century. Official histories of the Nara court, also written in hybrid variants of Sinitic, were completed in the first two decades of the eighth century. Anthologies of poetry, too, had been completed around the middle of the same century. By the time Saga ascended the throne in 809, the practice of Sinitic writing was well underway. Saga was certainly not the originator of Sinitic literacy. He was, however, one of its greatest promoters, as well as one of its earliest innovators, especially in the area of poetry.

Three imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic poetry—the final one containing prose, as well—were commissioned during Saga's lifetime. The first two, *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (Soaring Over the Clouds, 814) and *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (818, Splendid Literary Flowerings), were commissioned by Saga himself while still on the throne, while the third, *Keikokushū* 經国集 (827, Governing the Realm), commissioned nominally by Emperor Junna 淳和 (786–840, r. 823–833), Saga's half-brother and immediate successor, was through and through a product of Saga's making. It is for this reason that I shall refer to these three anthologies of Sinitic writing collectively as the Saga anthologies.¹⁾ Saga's

1) Japanese scholarship generally groups these three anthologies together, referring

literary legacy is not limited to poetry. In 819, less than one year after his second anthology, *Bunka shūreishū*, was completed, Saga commissioned *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀 (The Continued History of Japan), the third imperial history of Japan. Due to a number of untimely deaths among its appointed compilers, this history was not completed until 840, just two years before Saga passed away.

Aside from his *Nihon kōki*, Saga is said to have commissioned at least three other historically important works. In 815, the year after his first anthology, *Ryōunshū*, was completed, Saga had his vassals compile *Shinsen shōjiroku* 新撰姓氏錄 (Newly Compiled Genealogy of Prominent Lineages), a kind of official register containing the ancestral origins of a select number of prominent lineages or clans then active throughout the capital and its environs. This was compiled ultimately as a means of sorting out thorny tax-related issues. Lineages whose ancestry could be legitimately traced to the imperial family were not required to submit any tax goods to the court. Fraudulent claimants—and there were not a few of these—had to be weeded out if the court was to receive ample resources from the various clans. The two other works commissioned by Saga were meant to serve as compendiums and primers of court ceremony: *Kō'nin kyakushiki* 弘仁格式 (Court Regulations for the Kō'nin Era) and *Dairishiki* (Imperial Ceremonial) were completed in 820 and 821, respectively. It was through these that Saga at once incorporated the court ceremonials of his predecessors as well as formulated a series of unique practices expressly for his own reign.

to them as the three imperially commissioned anthologies of Sinitic poetry, *chokusen sanshū* 勅撰三集. The precise status of each of these anthologies in relation to one another, however, is still not settled; the term imperially commissioned (*chokusen*) may not apply univocally to all three.

Saga's Vernacular Poetry:
***Saga gyoshū* 嵯峨御集 (The Saga Collection)**

Much has been written over the years about Saga's anthologies, and about his love of Sinitic literature, especially poetry. Much has yet to be said in regards to the practice of vernacular poetry during Saga's reign.²⁾ Here, in what can only amount to a very cursory discussion of vernacular poetry during the time of Saga, I would like to draw attention to the related issue of female courtiers, especially the figure of Tachibana no Kachiko 橘嘉智子 (aka Queen Danrin, or Queen of the Sandalwood Forest 檀林皇后, 786-850), Saga's primary consort. There is an anonymous anthology of vernacular poetry, supposed to have been compiled sometime around the ninth or tenth century, which goes by the rather unrevealing title of *Nara gyoshū* 奈良御集 (Nara Imperial Anthology). It is very likely that, first, this anthology represents an amalgamation of several shorter, earlier collections, each preserving poems by a single sovereign, and, second, that one of these original collections contained vernacular poems by Emperor Saga, which Yamaguchi Hiroshi 山口博 tentatively calls *Saga gyoshū* 嵯峨御集 (The Saga Collection). As he himself admits, there is no historical record of such a collection; the title is a convenient fabrication.³⁾

Having looked over the evidence in support of Yamaguchi's

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- 2) For a brief discussion of the social standing of vernacular poetry during the ninth century, see Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan*, 70. Steininger has rightly stated that vernacular poetry was, during Saga's reign, treated as "a form of occasional entertainment, equivalent to a music performance, rather than a composition whose specific contents were worthy of record." The proof of this is in the pudding: only a very few of Saga's vernacular poems have been recorded for posterity.
- 3) Yamaguchi Hiroshi, "Saga gyoshū no sōtei," 25 and 30. I have had to rely on Yamaguchi for much of this discussion. Not much other research has been done in this area.

argument, I am more-or-less confident that his conclusions are in line with the facts. We know for certain that Saga composed vernacular poetry, or, if we wish to split hairs, that vernacular poems were attributed to him. Saga's famous poetic exchange with Fujiwara no Sonohito 藤原園人 (756–819), an able vassal who served first as Emperor Heizei's 平城 (774–824, r. 806–809) and then as Emperor Saga's loyal minister of revenue, bears ample witness to this. Considering that this particular exchange reveals something about the interaction of Sinitic and vernacular poetry during Saga's reign, it seems not out of place here to take a brief look at the poems presented on both sides. The banquet in question took place on the twenty-second day of the fourth month (early summer), in the year 813.⁴⁾ Significantly, Emperor Saga had decided to host the banquet at the mansion of the then crown prince, later to succeed Saga as Emperor Junna. Saga presented a Sinitic poem, the full title of which is “Composed on a Summer's Day While Visiting the Southern Pond [Mansion] of the Crown Prince” 夏日皇太弟南池. The four couplets that make up this poem may be rendered as follows:

It is here in the cool shade of the Southern Pond Mansion,
home to our dear crown prince, where we take shelter
from the heat of summer, and in whose azure waters we
wash away all taint belonging to that maddening world
without.

Alongside the pond stand rows of willow trees casting their
soft shade over the scene; atop the water can be seen clus-
ters of water chestnuts and lotus blossoms effusing their
fragrance over everything.

4) *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 4 [813].4.22, 649. Note that all citations of *Nihon kōki* refer to the fully annotated edition of that text by Kuroita Nobuo & Morita Tei, a volume which belongs to a series of annotated historical records entitled *Yakuchū Nihon shiryō*.

A gentle breeze wafts over the bay, clearing away all trace of summer's languid haze; the birds have since departed, each to her own home, leaving the woods behind this pond quiet amidst dusk's falling mantle.

Among all the ten-thousand kingdoms, ours is by far the finest!
All voices rise unanimously in their praise for our land. Tell me, then, what need have we to go looking for some blessed land of immortals when we have the very best before us here and now?

納涼儲貳南池裏 盡洗煩襟碧水灣
岸影見知楊柳處 潭香聞得芰荷間
風來前浦收煙遠 鳥散後林欲暮閑
天下共言貞萬國 何勞羽翼訪商山

As *Nihon kōki* records, this is the banquet at which Fujiwara no Sonohito, Saga's trusted tax advisor and right-hand man, presented a vernacular poem in response to Saga's request for all attendants to present a Sinitic poem. While responding to Saga's poem as a whole, Sonohito's poem specifically echoes the first verse of the final couplet:

Today, yes, on this very day, we gather here by the [Southern] Pond to hear the little cuckoos sing.
Can you not discern their meaning? It sings of peace in this our sovereign's Heian capital for a thousand generations to come!

*Kyō no hi no / ike no hotori ni / hototogisu
taira no chiyo to / naku wa kikitsu ya*

今日の日の 池のほとりに ほととぎす
平の千代と 鳴くは聴きつや

Saga, evidently not one to let a good poem pass, even though it might not be in the requested (Sinitic) mode, responded in like manner with a vernacular poem, referring obliquely, and perhaps a little sarcastically, to Sonohito as the master of vernacular, and *not* Sinitic, song:

Yes, yes, I, too, discern the same meaning—O, master of
[vernacular] song!—in the voice of those little cuckoos:
*One thousand years of peace for our sovereign in his Heian
capital!* That is indeed what the little cuckoos are singing.

*Hotogisu / naku koe kikeba / utanushi to
tomo ni chiyoni to / ware mo kikitari*

ほととぎす 鳴く声聴けば 歌主と
共に千代にと我も聴きたり

Saga here demonstrates his proficiency in both Sinitic as well as vernacular poetry, as well as his willingness to interweave the two during a public banquet.⁵⁾ Unfortunately, there are not many examples of this sort of Sinitic-vernacular poetic exchange in the written records of the time. I suspect, however, that this sort of thing was not all that uncommon. The problem, most likely, lies in our sources. As mentioned above, all of the works commissioned by Saga were written in a variety of Sinitic. It would seem there was

5) For more on this exchange, see Webb, 175-179 and Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 57-58, for some commentary on this playful and yet extremely serious exchange. His translations, naturally, are different than mine. The Southern Pond Mansion (Nanchiin 南池院) was Junna's lifelong haunt. Both as crown prince and later as sovereign, he is recorded as having hosted a number of banquets here in which poetry was presented. After his retirement, this venue came to be known as the Junna Villa 淳和院.

not much room here for vernacular poetry.

That Saga did indeed compose vernacular poetry, and that these vernacular poems should have been gathered and duly arranged in some sort of collection fits neatly into poetic practices of his day. Extant manuscripts of *Nara gyoshū* contain a total of but twenty-four poems. Only the final portion of this anthology, namely, the last seven poems have headnotes describing the circumstances surrounding the composition of each piece. It seems most likely that the first portion of *Nara gyoshū*—seventeen poems—is in fact a collection of verse by Emperor Heizei, the “Nara Emperor” who grew up in the Nara capital, while the last seven poems are by Saga and his various consorts.

A dearth of vernacular poetry from Saga’s reign need not preclude the practice of that sort of versification by the sovereign and his court. The interpretation, famously—or rather, infamously—put forward by Kojima Noriyuki 小島憲之 (1913–1998) that Saga’s reign was a dark age for vernacular poetry is, at very best, a tentative one. The practice of vernacular poetry, while not nearly as well covered in historical sources as his promotion of Sinitic verse, was nevertheless alive and well.⁶⁾ Headnotes found scattered throughout *Nara gyoshū* make it clear that these poems were understood as having been authored or at least enunciated by ninth-century sovereigns. Scholars active around the twelfth century, near the end of the Heian period, certainly thought this to be the case. Fujiwara no Kiyosuke 藤原清輔 (1104–1177), the author of a manual of poetics and related court ritual entitled *Fukuro zōshi* 袋草紙 (Poetic Miscellany, 1157–1158), who was familiar with the anthology, said as much. Kiyosuke’s younger (adopted) brother, Kenshō 顯昭 (c.1130–c.1209) concurred, though he harbored serious doubts as to exactly which sovereigns the

6) Yamaguchi, “Saga gyoshū no sōtei,” 25 and 35; see also Sakai, “Saga tennō: gyōsei to bungaku,” 9.

poems in this anthology ought to be attributed. Not convinced by the then common view that Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701–756, r. 724–749) had composed these poems, Kenshō, and many scholars since, deemed it more probable that these poems were authored by Emperor Heizei.

Yamaguchi, in quoting Kenshō, calls for a reconsideration of the facts. He mentions a number of curious phenomena that seem, when taken together, to point squarely at Saga. We see, for example, in some of the headnotes, mention of *nyōgo* 女御, junior consorts of the sovereign. Saga's father, Emperor Kanmu, seems to be the first to have appointed junior consorts, notably such women as Ki no Otouo 紀乙魚 (?–840) and Kudara-no-konikishi Kyōhō 百濟王教法 (?–840), though the term *nyōgo* does not appear during his reign. This term first appears in the historical record with Saga, in an entry from *Nihon kōki* for the year 815.⁷⁾ It follows, therefore, that this anthology of vernacular verse must have been compiled shortly after the reign of Kanmu. One could argue, and rightly so, that the headnotes are necessarily later additions added sometime during or even after Saga's reign, while the poems themselves were first presented sometime before. It should be noted, though, that Emperor Heizei appointed no junior consorts, wherefore he is not a likely candidate for the authorship of these poems—at least not those whose headnotes refer to a junior consort.⁸⁾

At least one of the vernacular poems in *Saga gyoshū* only makes sense when attributed to Saga. The poem in question was, according to Yamaguchi, composed sometime between the years 810 and 812. Considering, however, that one of the princesses mentioned in this poem passed away in the year 809, this poem must have been composed sometime before that date. If so, the voice of this poem is that of a soon-to-be Emperor Saga. Signifi-

7) *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 6 (815).10.25, 713

8) Yamaguchi, "Saga gyoshū no sōtei," 27.

cantly, it is a poem in which Saga—probably still a prince—is comparing the relative beauty of two women: one, referred to here as the eighth princess (*onna hachi* 女八), was a consort of his elder brother, Emperor Heizei, while the other, here referred to as the fifth princess (*onnago* 女五), was a consort of his younger brother, the future Emperor Junna. A headnote to this poem reads: “Having heard that the imperial consorts [of his two brothers] were exceedingly comely, [Emperor Saga] composed these verses.” If I am right in assigning this poem to a date sometime prior to 809, the royal appellation of sovereign was a later addition courtesy of the editors of this anthology. Whatever the case, the poem itself reads as follows:

I wonder, were we to compare the lovely faces of the eighth and the fifth princesses, could we say with any confidence which of the two shines the more radiantly?⁹⁾

女八と 女五の宮と くらぶれば
いづれか顔の 光まされる

All three men—Heizei, Saga, and Junna—were sired by Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (737-806, r. 781-806). The consorts of all three men—those two referred to in this poem, and Saga’s primary consort at this time—were likewise fathered by Kanmu, though each by different mothers. That is to say, all of the people involved in this poem, both the men and their consorts, were all children of a then retired Kanmu.¹⁰⁾ What is important to note here is, quite

9) The proper reading of this poem, especially of the first two verses, is problematic. I offer the following tentative reading: *Onnahachi to onnago no miya to kurabureba / izureka kao no hikari masareru*. The assumed answer to Saga’s hypothetical question is, of course, that we would not be able to say who was more beautiful; they are both exceedingly radiant.

10) Yamaguchi, “Saga gyoshū no sōtei,” 31-33. Yamaguchi’s argument is very

simply, the fact that Saga is using vernacular poetry as a means of praising the beauty of his brothers' consorts: vernacular poetry, for Saga, could serve as a means of navigating through the courtly world of erotic power. He does not praise the beauty of his own consort. That would have been in bad taste. By thus praising the consorts of his brothers, Saga is making two simultaneous gestures. On the one hand, he seeks to maintain, at least on the surface, an appearance of harmonious relations between himself and his brothers. In this respect, his poem may be interpreted as a gesture of humility. On the other hand, by speaking in the voice of one who has the aesthetic discernment with which to potentially pass judgement upon the relative beauty of court ladies, Saga portrays himself, as he does in several Sinitic romantic poems to be discussed below, as a master of the rear palace (*kōkyū* 後宮), that is, for lack of a better term, the imperial seraglio. An intimate acquaintance with women, and an ability to judge their relatives virtues, placed princes and sovereigns in a superior position in relation to the complex world of marriage politics. For better or for worse, in the ninth-century court of Heian Japan, a woman's perceived beauty, along with a man's assumed ability to discern and pass judgment upon it, was synonymous with political power. Here, the erotic and the political are united.¹¹⁾

involved. I have deliberately simplified things a great deal here. Though not of consequence to our present discussion, some readers may be interested to learn the proposed identities of the two princesses mentioned in this poem: The eighth princess, consort of Emperor Heizei, was likely Princess Ōyake 大宅 (?-849). Incidentally, she was among those who did not follow Heizei during his move back to Nara. The fourth princess, consort to the future Emperor Junna, was likely Princess Koshi 高志 (789-809). Saga, likely still prince at the time of this poem, had as his consort a lady by the name of Princess Takatsu 高津 (?-841).

- 11) In the year 807, Saga, while still but a prince, presented a vernacular poem of praise to Heizei, then the ruling sovereign. This poem, which is preserved in *Ruijū kokushi*, 31 (Teiōbu 11), is translated and discussed in Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 38-41.

Tachibana no Kachiko, Queen of the Sandalwood Forest

Not all of the poems in the so-called *Saga gyoshū* were by Saga. At least one, as Yamaguchi quite convincingly argues, was by his future queen, Tachibana no Kachiko, who, at the time the poem in question was composed, was yet a junior consort.¹²⁾ A headnote to this poem reads as follows:

During that time when [Tachibana no Kachiko] had not yet been appointed primary consort [of Emperor Saga], she suffered greatly [on account of the exceptional favor she received] from the jealous looks of her fellow ladies-in-waiting. One night, when His Majesty [Saga] had come secretly to the entrance of her bedchamber, she [fearing the jealousy of her rivals,] humbly declined his visit, presenting him instead with the following poem.

まだ后になり給はざりける時、かたはらの女御たちそねみ
給ふけしきなりける時、みかど御曹司に忍びて立ちより給
へりけるに、御対面はなくて、たてまつり給ひける。

The vernacular poem reads as follows:

Gossip spreads like wildfire! Wait there, I beg you, at my
curtain but a little while longer. Do not rush in just yet.
The dew is bound to fall come nightfall, and when it does,
I shall come out to wipe it off the grass.

Kotoshigeshi / shibashi wa tatere / yoi no ma ni

12) Yamaguchi, “Saga gyoshū no sōtei,” 29. This same poem, along with its headnote, has also been preserved in *Gosen wakashū* 後撰和歌集 (955-957), fascicle no. 15, under the category of miscellaneous poems (*zōka*), poem no. 1080.

okeran tsuyu wa / idete harawamu

言繁し 暫しはたてれ 宵の間に
置けらん露は 出でて払はむ

Kachiko, fearful that Saga's rather early visit will be detected by her jealous rivals, bids the man wait until the night has grown somewhat older, when, she hopes, her fellow ladies-in-waiting will have gone to bed. Then, like one who wakes up long before the sun rises and quietly brushes the dew off the grass, Kachiko, just as quietly, promises to rise from her bed and secretly greet the sovereign. Kachiko was appointed Saga's primary consort in 815, when she was thirty years old. This poem was likely written shortly before that date. Saga is depicted here as the all-too-eager lover calling upon his beloved lady. Kachiko is able, through the medium of vernacular poetry, to at once temporarily postpone the sovereign's visit, thereby forcing him to wait outside, as well as offer a promise to meet at a somewhat later time. Kachiko is in control here. Even so, by assenting to Saga's amorous entreaty, she simultaneously succeeds in portraying the sovereign as the consummate lover, one whose advances simply cannot be refused. Here, too, then, Saga is portrayed as erotically, and therefore politically, powerful.

Like Saga, Kachiko was also famous for Sinitic poetry. She, like Saga, was evidently skilled in vernacular poetry, as well. Kachiko was also known by a Sinitic moniker, namely, Queen Danrin (Danrin kōgō 檀林皇后), or Queen of the Sandalwood Forest, which latter term refers to Buddhist temples or the world of Buddhist learning in general. She has gone down in history as having possessed exceptional comeliness coupled with remarkable literary talent. Her father, too, is attested as having been blessed with these same virtues. Kachiko's father died when she was but three years old, leaving her with little support.¹³⁾ Kachiko's beauty was

preserved for posterity in this wise: “The queen had a sympathetic, warm heart, along with peerless beauty. Her hands reached below her knees; her hair flowed down to the very ground. All gazed upon her with wonder.” It is thought that this exceptional beauty might have played a significant role in Saga’s choice, while he was yet a prince, to appoint her—a woman who, having lost her father, could have afforded little significant political advantage—as one of his consorts.¹⁴⁾

Kachiko, as just mentioned, was appointed Saga’s primary consort in the year 815, just six days after the Tanabata Festival, which occurs annually on the seventh day of the seventh month (early autumn). This is significant, for it serves to symbolically portray Kachiko as the Weaver Maiden, Orihime 織姫, one of the central figures of the Tanabata legend. This characterization would stick with her throughout history. She is recorded as having been granted intimations of key future events by means of her own dreams. She seems, furthermore, to have been associated throughout her career at court with a Buddhist divinity. Her title, Queen Danrin, with its Buddhist associations, was deliberately suggestive. Her beauty, seen itself as a sign of unearthly influence, coupled with her mysterious prognostications, must have convinced all who associated with her that Kachiko possessed a touch of the divine. The description of Kachiko, quoted above, depicts her as having hands that reached down to her knees. Interestingly, this same feature is listed as one of the thirty-two distinguishing characteristics (*sanjūnisō* 三十二相) of a fully enlightened Buddha. Now, the same source that has immortalized Kachiko’s beauty also preserves a quaint legend about a nun who predicted

13) Inoue, “Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko),” 63.

14) Inoue, “Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko),” 64; the original text is to be found in Montoku jitsuroku, Kashō 3 (850).5.5, where the passage translated above reads, in the original, as follows: 后為人寬和風容絕異手過於膝髮委於地觀者皆驚.

the girl would one day become queen. This nun is said to have been based in Hokkeji Temple 法華寺 (in modern-day Nara City), which then and still now contains a statue of the Eleven-Faced Avalokiteśvara (Jūichimen kannon 十一面觀音). A quick look at the statue currently housed in Hokkeji Temple, a statue supposed to have been carved sometime in the early ninth century, shows a divinity whose right hand does indeed extend below the knee.¹⁵⁾

Regardless of whether or not the episode of the soothsaying nun is historically accurate, the fact remains, as Inoue argues, that Kachiko's contemporaries certainly associated her with Hokkeji Temple, and especially with the figure of the Eleven-Faced Avalokiteśvara. Moreover, this statue, in turn, was said to have been a faithful likeness of Queen Kōmyō 光明 (701–760), primary consort of Emperor Shōmu, and the woman credited with commissioning the building of Hokkeji Temple. Kachiko was, in all likelihood, seen by Saga and his immediate associates as somehow reminiscent of Kōmyō. Saga went to some trouble to emphasize this imagined likeness, while at the same time associating himself with Emperor Shōmu: Shōmu had his Kōmyō, and Saga had his Kachiko. Both women were ardent devotees of Buddhism; both commissioned the building of temples; both were associated with the Eleven-Faced Avalokiteśvara.¹⁶⁾

Kachiko's moniker, Queen Danrin, is derived from a temple of that name, Danrinji Temple 檀林寺, which she herself commissioned sometime before 847.¹⁷⁾ Kachiko took this project very seri-

15) A particularly fine photograph of this image can be viewed at the homepage of Hokkeji Temple: http://yamatoji.nara-kankou.or.jp/01shaji/02tera/01north_area/hokkeji/event/8hr66pktg

16) Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 68–69; the passage mentioned here appears in the same section mentioned above, namely, *Montoku jitsuroku*, Kashō 3 (850).5.5.

17) Incidentally, present-day Danrinji Temple, completed in 1964, bears no relationship whatsoever to the original building, aside from that fact that it is in western Kyoto, where Kachiko's Danrinji Temple was supposed to have been located.

ously. A monk by the name of Egaku 惠萼 (n.d.) was sent to Mount Wutai 五台山, in modern-day Shaanxi Province, with the express mission of bringing back a Chinese monk capable of running her prospective temple. Egaku returned to the court in 847 with Yikong 義空 (n.d.), a monk who belonged to the Chan (Zen) school. Once installed, Danrinji became the first temple in Japan to propound the teachings of Zen Buddhism. This temple was originally erected in a corner of the Saga Wilds (Sagano 嵯峨野), a place most dear to Saga himself, and from whence his posthumous name was derived. Thus it was that Emperor Kamino 神野 became known as Emperor Saga of the Saga Wilds, and Queen Kachiko became known as Queen Danrin of Danrinji Temple.¹⁸⁾

Like Saga, Kachiko's enthusiasm for Sinitic learning was exceptional. She even went so far as to establish a private academy, known as the Gakukan'in 学官院, in which her relatives and descendants could study the Chinese classics. So intimately was Saga bound to Kachiko that a legend grew up around the pair, in which Saga was said to be the reincarnation of a Buddhist ascetic named Jōsen 上仙, literally, Elevated Immortal, while Kachiko, for her part, was apparently the reincarnation of an old woman who, despite her poverty, ceaselessly supplied Jōsen with sustenance. Another similar legend, included in *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (Record of Miraculous Events in Japan, completed sometime between 810 and 824), and therefore circulated during the lifetime of Saga, states that the sovereign was a reincarnation of a monk by the name of Jakusen 寂仙, literally, the Solitary Immortal. This legend says nothing about Kachiko, however.¹⁹⁾ There were, therefore, during the lives of both Saga and Kachiko, stories circulating

18) Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 70.

19) Inoue, "Danrin kōgō (Tachibana no Kachiko)," 73-74; for the legend about Jōsen, see *Montoku jitsuroku*, Kashō 3 (850).5.5; for the legend about Jakusen, see *Nihon ryōiki*, fascicle 3, tale no. 39, an English translation of which may be found in Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 198-201.

that associated the two with saintly Buddhist figures.

When considering the career of Saga, and the sway he exerted over courtly culture, especially his encouragement of Sinitic learning, we must not fail to take into consideration the role of some of the more obviously influential women around him. Kachiko is an example of one such woman. This queen seems to have been in no way inferior to Saga in terms of her enthusiasm for the promotion of both Buddhism and literature, especially those sorts imported more-or-less directly from the continent. To this end, she was responsible for establishing a number of Buddhist temples, along with one private academy for the study of Sinitic classics. She was skilled both in vernacular as well as Sinitic poetry, engaging on more than one occasion in poetic exchanges with Saga.²⁰⁾ Saga, when still just a prince, took Kachiko under his arm. Without a father behind her, she could have offered little in the way of political advantage for a young, aspiring Saga. Inoue and others suspect Saga was moved by her extreme beauty. Surely he was not insensitive to her charms. Saga, after all, had more than thirty consorts. I would suggest, on top of this, that Saga, considering his lifelong promotion of Sinitic learning, would have been attracted likewise to her literary talents. It is not at all far-fetched to imagine Kachiko serving as a sort of tutor to the young prince, especially considering the prominent role women of the court played in the education of fledgling men.

While Saga's reign is so often spoken of as the zenith of Sinitic learning, it must be noted that the rear palace remained, as it had before the Heian period, a bastion of vernacular poetry. Vernacular poems composed by Tachibana no Kachiko, prior to her promotion to primary consort, show ample evidence of the robust, conservative nature of this mode of versification. Vernacular poetry, at least its more refined, more elaborately developed form, has been cred-

20) Yamaguchi, "Saga gyoshū no sōtei," 29

ited in part to the poetic innovations brought about by Saga and his literary legacy. The Sinitic preface to *Shinsen wakashū* 新撰和歌集 (Newly Compiled Anthology of Vernacular Poetry, compiled sometime between 930 and 934), written by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (868–945), traces the origin of that variety of sophisticated vernacular poetry found in *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Vernacular Poems Old and New, 914) back about one century to the Kō'nin 弘仁 years, namely, to the reign of Emperor Saga. That is to say, the renaissance in Sinitic writing, especially poetry, brought about by Saga and his coterie was seen, at least throughout the early Heian period, as having in some way fostered a revival in vernacular verse as well.

Similarly, the so-called Japanese (six-stringed) zither, or *wagon* 和琴, also enjoyed exceptional prestige during Saga's reign. Whether or not the sovereign himself was skilled in the use of this instrument is, so far as I can tell, not wholly certain. It would appear, from a number of later sources which regard Saga as the founder of a musical lineage for the Japanese zither, that he must have exhibited some talent. Either that or, what is more likely, he acted as generous patron to a close-knit group of skilled court musicians. One of the most prominent such musicians was a woman, serving in Saga's rear palace in the capacity of the Head of Female Officials (*naishi no kami* 尚侍), by the name of Princess Hiroi 広井女王 (?–859).²¹⁾ Just as Kachiko might have acted as Saga's private tutor, instructing him in the art of Sinitic versification, it is likewise possible that this Hiroi taught Saga how to play the zither.

Romantic Poetry, Male Sexuality, and the Emperor's Seraglio

Returning to Saga's poetry, considering the prominent role of

21) Kumagai, "Sagachō no joryū sakka tachi," 71, 78–79.

literary women such as Kachiko, along with his exceptionally bustling seraglio, it is no surprise to see numerous verses dealing with women, or the subject of romantic love between man and woman. These romantic verses serve as a means of emphasizing Saga's sexual power, which in turn signifies his dominant position as the focus of all court-based marriage politics. It must not be forgotten that Saga housed within his rear palace no less than thirty-one women, by means of whom he fathered some fifty children. Women played a crucial role in Saga's political life, not only as bearers of potential heirs but also as private tutors, both to their own children and to Saga himself. That Saga's poetry should contain numerous erotic—or at least romantic—references, some more obvious than others, is to be expected. As has been said, a fair number of these women, among whom Tachibana no Kachiko was the most celebrated, were accomplished poets, both in the vernacular as well as the Sinitic tradition.

Saga was writing as much for his male vassals as he was for his bevy of female consorts. In the sovereign's able hand, verses charged with sexual connotations are simultaneously pronouncements of political mastery as well as declarations of superior cultural refinement. Sexuality—male sexuality—is expressed not so much as a mastery over women, though that is certainly implied, as a form of aesthetic appreciation or sensitivity. It is for this reason that so much of Saga's erotic or romantic poetry is couched within the suggestive language of flowers, the supreme objects of aesthetic admiration in Sinitic poetry. Furthermore, as this aesthetic appreciation of the erotic is meant to convey a sense of real political power, such an experience is necessarily meant to be admired or consumed publically. Saga's romantic verses, for the most part, appear in pieces that were composed expressly for and presented at public occasions, such as royal feasts and official outings. That is to say, male sexuality, while always tastefully obscured beneath the niceties of poetic convention, was by no

means a private matter. Quite the opposite. Saga's sexuality was something to be intoned and celebrated for all to hear, at least all those in attendance at his banquets, as well as those who would later read his anthologized verses.

One of the sovereign's very earliest poems, "A Poem on the Theme 'Falling Blossoms,' Presented at a Flower-Viewing Banquet Held in the Shinsen Gardens" 神泉苑花宴賦「落花」篇, is the first in a series of twenty-two poems by Saga. This poem was likely presented at a flower-viewing banquet held on the twelfth day of the second month (mid-spring) in the third year of Kō'nin (812), being the first such banquet of Saga's reign, is a revealing example of Saga's desire to publically announce his sexual potency.²²⁾ This poem appears near the beginning (poem no. 3) of *Ryōunshū*, the very first two poems of which are by Retired Emperor Heizei: the first is about peach blossoms, the second cherry blossoms. As far as Saga's poetry is concerned, therefore, "Falling Blossoms" is the first of his poems to appear in anthologized form. As such, it would have been engendered with a great deal of extra prestige. "Falling Blossoms," presented in the Shinsen Gardens, was part of a thoroughly public performance.²³⁾ Saga adroitly dresses the beautiful vernal blossoms immediately before him in language suggestive of comely maidens. This is not mere metaphor. Some of his consorts, as well as a whole host of colorfully clad dancing girls, were in attendance at this regal banquet. We must approach his verses with double vision; we must see at once both flowers and women:

Come, tell me now, with what charms does mid-spring
announce her arrival? First and foremost, snow-white

22) The banquet in question is mentioned in *Nihon kōki*, Kō'nin 3 [812].2.12, 601.

23) For a provocative comparison between the thoroughly performative aspect of Heian poetry and that of Roman rhetoric, see Denecke, *Classic World Literatures*, 57-58.

blossoms unfurl in answer to the repeated caresses of a pleasant vernal breeze.

Surely it is the fragrance of these flowers that keeps us all here—why else should we tarry?—here, where we sing to great men of letters, here where we gather together to enjoy this lovely banquet.

Fix your gaze upon those vibrant floral pigments that shimmer so brightly against their verdured canvas of leaf and grass. How is it that even Nature herself has deigned to imitate the painter's art?²⁴⁾

Where red petals fall, there one is sure to hear the elated songs of bush warblers; when the purple calyces scatter, then you will surely spy butterflies fluttering about in joyous surprise.

Let me ask you, O fragrant breeze, what makes you leave your flowering couch to drift through the air all alone? I come, she responds, with no other errand than to perfume the robes of all who sit at this banquet.

My eye, roaming far over this vernal garden, seems to catch sight of bands of beautiful maidens. What are these—now I see more clearly!—but the rich hues of pliant grasses and smiling flowers, each reflected in the other's brilliance.

Flowers that look more like pearls glitter amongst the leaves; blossoms resemble the elegant topknots of our courtly maidens.²⁵⁾ A gentle breeze finds its way into those floral

24) I have used the word Nature, always with a capital *n* to translate the Sinitic term *zaohua/zōka* 造化, a term derived from the work of Zhuangzi and later Daoist thinkers. This term signifies a spontaneous, creative force working behind and through all natural phenomena, and is often understood, as in this poem, to be the source of all natural beauty and splendor. Contrary to the ways of man, there is nothing artificial or deliberate in the quiet workings of this mysterious force. Saga's statement that Nature, whose art is necessarily both before and above all human effort, is somehow a deliberate imitation of human painting, is meant to sound ironic, and hence entertaining.

gowns—what lovely forms, so tranquil are they.

In the early morning we draw those blossoms towards us; in the evening we break off a spray or two for ourselves. Though weary with all this pulling and plucking of blossoms—my sash is overflowing with the many-colored floral treasures I have found!

Still, I cannot help but linger aimlessly, fondly, amidst these fragrant bowers. The sun is beginning to set as we, oblivious in our revelry, frolic alongside the woods:

What delicious pleasures we have found gamboling about with these comely maidens! True, these vernal breezes may at length strip the trees bare. Fret not:

Is it not enough that we have looked upon these marvelous things at this the most splendid season of the year? Drink in the beauty now before you; think not of carelessly casting aside these present joys!

過半青春何所催	和風數重百花開
芳菲歇盡無由駐	爰唱文雄賞宴來
見取花光林表出	造化寧假丹青筆
紅英落處鶯亂鳴	紫萼散時蝶群驚
借問濃香何獨飛	飛來滿坐堪襲衣
春園遙望佳人在	亂雜繁花相映輝
點珠顏 綴髻鬢	吹入懷中嬌態閑
朝攀花 暮折花	攀花力盡衣帶賒
未厭芬芳徒徙倚	留連林裏晚光斜
妖姬一翫已為樂	不畏春風總吹落

- 25) The idea here is simple: the grasses and flowers are as fresh and beautiful as young maidens. However, this description is not merely metaphorical. Banquets of this sort were almost always graced with a performance of dancing maidens. Saga is likely referring simultaneously to both the natural scenery as well as the young ladies dancing before him and his vassals. This double visions is carried throughout the remainder of the poem.

A detailed analysis of this lengthy piece would be out of place here. Instead, let us focus our attention squarely on couplet nos. 6–10: “My eye, roaming far over this vernal garden [...] Fret not. The last couplet, in particular, is exceptionally provocative. Of course, one might find umbrage with my translation, especially the phrase “delicious pleasures.” I have taken the liberty of adding the adjective ‘delicious’ in hopes of conveying some sense of the original. Whether or not these pleasures are meant to convey expressly erotic connotations is, in the original, deliberately left unclear. The use of the verb *wan/moteasobu* 翫, frolic, gambol, play with, especially in the sense of turning something (often flowers) over and over in the hands, however, suggests a flirtatious engagement of some sort. As though to emphasize his commitment to sensual joys, and to encourage the same sentiments in his vassals and consorts, Saga concludes this poem with a carefree petition: “Drink in the beauty now before you; think not of carelessly casting aside these present joys!” The wholehearted enjoyment of pleasure is, for Saga, a sign of his peaceful and peaceable rule.

A similar sentiment is to be found in another poem (*Ryōunshū*, pome no. 5), also by Saga, which celebrates his favorite chrysanthemum banquet, entitled “A Poem on the Theme ‘Chrysanthemums in Autumn,’ Presented to His Majesty’s Vassals in the Shinsen Gardens on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month” 九月九日於神泉苑宴群臣 各賦一物 得「秋菊」. The ninth day of the ninth month refers to the chrysanthemum banquet, which was always held on this day. It is impossible to say at which chrysanthemum banquet this poem was first presented, though certainly not at the first one (809):

The season of autumn has come; the day falls now upon the double *yang*.²⁶⁾ It is expressly with the intention of hosting

you, my myriad vassals, that these chrysanthemums have opened their petals!

Their delicate stamens have weathered the crisp morning winds in order to greet you all with smiling faces; their blossoms, drenched in nightly dew, endure this chilly season—for whom if not for us?

Fill up the maidens' hands—those arms as white and smooth as jade—with the petals of these chrysanthemums, and see how far that fragrance spreads. Place a few of those flowers in our golden drinking goblet, and see whether you can distinguish the golden petals from the color of this goblet.

We have all heard how reclusive immortals delight in imbibing the life-giving nectar found in these blossoms. So it is with deep and reverential delight that we mortals now partake of this chrysanthemum liqueur as a means of prolonging our lives.

旻商季序重陽節	菊為開花宴千官
藥耐朝風今日笑	榮露夕露此時寒
把盈玉手流香遠	摘入金杯辨色難
聞道仙人好所服	對之延壽動心看

The third couplet—“Fill up the maidens' hands—those arms as white and smooth as jade—with the petals of these chrysanthemums, and see how far that fragrance spreads”—is especially revealing in virtue of its erotic imagery.

26) In Sinitic divination and cosmology, even numbers were designated as belonging to or presiding over the *yin* or passive principal, while odd numbers belonged to the *yang* or active principal. The term double *yang* (*chongyang/chōyō* 重陽) refers specifically to the ninth day of the ninth month, a day when the *yang* principal is in ascent. This is one of the reasons why the chrysanthemum liqueur (*juhuajiu/kikkashu* 菊花酒) brewed especially for this occasion was seen as especially efficacious for ensuring longevity.

Chrysanthemum blossoms, aside from their then popular medicinal use in liqueurs specially brewed for the chrysanthemum banquet, were, for Saga, a symbol of female beauty, especially in its most youthful forms. As with “Falling Blossoms,” his very lengthy “Chrysanthemum Blossoms” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 2) invites us to turn our attention now to the flowers, now to the maidens gathered about them. We need only quote the relevant verses here:

Some of its blossoms are white, others yellow—all of them
exuding their sweet fragrance throughout this garden.
Comely maidens and charming girls, casting those languid
eyes here and there, dally softly amidst those flowers.
Raising their slender arms, stretching forth those delicate
wrists, they gingerly pluck the choicest flowers, decorating
their faces and hair.
Behold! Those youthful cheeks, as smooth and pale as pearls,
shine with a new radiance; their hair, arrayed like floating
clouds, sport exquisite new hairpins!
Wanting nothing more than to fill our arms with bundles of
chrysanthemum blossoms, we linger on in this garden until
the sun begins to set.

或素或黃 滿庭芬馥
淑媛望兮移步 妖姬歆兮屬目
攘溺腕而採嫩 擢纖手以摘花
珠顏俄爾益艷 雲髻忽焉重釵
期採摘於盈把兮 愛逍遙乎日斜

Significantly, as was the case with “Falling Blossoms,” this poem crowns an entire anthology—in this case, *Keikokushū*. This is a celebratory piece, and as such, provides Saga with the perfect opportunity to assert his sexual powers. Just as with “Falling Bloss-

soms,” this poem concludes with a lighthearted hooray, in which Saga urges his vassals and consorts to “rejoice in the chrysanthemum flower, the source of longevity and more happiness to come!” More interesting, still, is the way in which Saga effectively sexualizes his beloved chrysanthemums. The smooth, pale, radiant cheeks of the maidens appearing in these verses are, at the same time, the pale, radiant petals of the very chrysanthemums they long to pick. The maidens are as beautiful as the flowers; the blossoms are as radiant as the women. It is little wonder that Saga associates these flowers with youthful women, that is, with sexual energy. Chrysanthemum liqueur was supposed to ensure longevity for the sovereign and his attendants. Fertile consorts, similarly, were supposed to ensure the longevity of the imperial lineage. However, it was not only chrysanthemum blossoms who were poetically engendered with sexual energy. Plum blossoms, too, could be transformed into symbols of feminine sexuality. In “A Serene Garden Brightened with Early Plum Blossoms” 閑庭早梅 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 101), Saga praises a solitary cherry tree, whose early-blooming flowers are properly appreciated by him alone:

It is the first month of the year, when the breeze blows so warm and so gentle. Here in my garden stands a plum tree whose blossoms, blooming before all others, bejewel her branches with their bright petals.

Those ermine petals, content even to shine in solitude, not shunning this lonely garden where few eyes are wont to linger, send their rich fragrance through my open window like some ardent nightly visitor.

Her slender, supple trunk, dry from winter’s chill, at last feels the first warm caresses of spring, while her white blossoms, still shivering, flutter and prance over patches of last year’s dark-green moss.

Why do those young maidens, as comely as they are, come and pluck these branches? Shame on them for their heartlessness! How comes it that a boorish bumpkin was put in charge of transplanting this grand old tree? What an insult!²⁷⁾

庭前獨有早花梅 上月風和滿樹開
純素不嫌幽院寂 濃香偏是犯窻來
纖纖枯幹知初暖 片片寒葩委舊苔
自恨無因佳麗折 徒然老大野人栽

Flowers, be they plum blossoms or chrysanthemums, were not the only objects populating Saga's erotic landscape. The sovereign devoted a number of poems to a certain famous continental imperial consort by the name of Consort Ban. Known in Chinese histories as Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (c.48-c.6 bc), where the final *jiemyu* refers to her official position as consort to the sovereign, this woman was a highly-educated and, from what poetry she has left behind, a gifted writer. In virtue of both her erudition and comely appearance, Consort Ban became a favorite consort of Emperor Cheng 成帝 (51-7 bc, r. 33-7). Eventually, however, Emperor Cheng was hopelessly smitten by a newcomer: a lovely young dancing girl nicknamed the Flying Swallow of Zhao, or Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (?-1 bc). Consort Ban, realizing she was no longer the object of Emperor Cheng's affection, humbly requested to be moved to the Changxin Hall 長信宮, the Palace of Everlasting Constancy, where

27) There are two possible interpretations of this last verse, at least two that immediately come to my own mind: First, while admiring the tree before him, Saga suddenly recalls the low-ranking gardener who originally brought the tree to this garden. That a lowly man should have been responsible for handling such a noble tree fills him with disgust. Second, the tree has recently been transplanted away from the garden by a low-ranking gardener. In this latter case, Saga is remembering the tree as it once was. I prefer the first interpretation.

she might wait upon the Empress Dowager—Emperor Cheng’s mother—Wang Zhengjun 王政君 (71–13 bc), a woman who had managed to establish around her person a palace bureaucracy of remarkable size and complexity.²⁸⁾ It was here than Consort Ban spent the remainder of her lonely days, and it was here that she composed her most famous poem “Song of Resentment” (*Yuangexing* 怨歌行), which depicts a concubine who, like herself, though once much beloved by her lord, had been forgotten in favor of a recently appointed, more youthful concubine. In this poem, the narrator, compares herself to a discarded fan, which, come the cooler months, is no longer needed to ward off the heat of summer.²⁹⁾ Saga includes allusions to this fan in several poems, even when its appearance there seems somewhat out of place.³⁰⁾ While it may be argued that Saga wrote poetry about Consort Ban as a more-or-less playful response to continental models—there is no shortage of Consort Ban poems on the continent—it remains to be explained why he focused on this particular figure. There were many other notable ladies to whom he could have turned his literary attention.

Consort Ban was abandoned by her lover—a man, like Saga, who happened to be the sovereign of a vast kingdom. While Saga might very well have felt a sense of pity for, or at least a detached

28) For more on the Empress Dowager and her bureaucracy, see Anthony Barbieri-Low and Robin Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiaoshan Tomb No. 247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), volume 1, 956.

29) A translation of Consort Ban’s poem may be found in Kang-i Sun Chang & Haun Saussy, ed., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 18–19.

30) In his “Snow in the Old Capital: In Humble Reply to Emperor Heizei” 奉和舊邑對雪 (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 167) Saga refers to the beauty of falling snow with an awkward allusion to Consort Ban’s legendary white fan: “Snowflakes glitter like moonlight playing across some fair maiden’s white fan. Falling snow—auspicious sign of a plentiful harvest to come—glistens across a night sky” 含輝臨素扇 呈瑞滿冥宵.

sense of interest in the character of this consort, it seems more likely that his deliberate and repeated reference to this woman throughout his poetry carries a political message. I think, moreover, that his message is rather simple: Fear not, my faithful consorts, I shall not abandon you, as Emperor Cheng so heartlessly abandoned the lovely Consort Ban. I shall remain true to you, so long as you remain true to me. By repeatedly alluding to the tale of Consort Ban, Saga reassures his female audience that he will remain forever constant to his women. This assertion, in turn, is meant to ensure the lasting peace of his rear palace, the center of erotic power (marriage politics) within his court. “The Sorrow of Consort Ban” (*Bunka shūreishū*, poem no. 58) is Saga’s way of at once showing, or perhaps feigning, a sense of sympathy for the poor woman’s plight, as well as indirectly reasserting his own position of power, for it was Saga, after all, who would determine which woman were permitted to stay and which had to go.

Her sovereign’s affections, once so warm, at last grew cold and distant. Consort Ban was moved from her splendid chamber to live all alone within the Queen Mother’s residence.

She, like the fan discarded in autumn, sings verses full of sorrow for her wretched plight. The autumn breeze, usually so inviting, is to her an ever-painful reminder of bygone happiness.

No more did she hear the sound of eager footsteps coming to visit her—not upon those quiet stairs. In vain did the moon cast its light upon her cold curtains—no lover to enjoy the moonlight within that lonely chamber.

All hope of once again setting foot in the sovereign’s rear palace, a place she had once called home, has long since been lost. As the years passed by, so, too, does her youthful charm. Hope and beauty fade together.

昭陽辭恩寵	長信獨離居
團扇含愁詠	秋風怨有餘
閑階人跡絕	冷帳月光虛
久罷後庭望	形將歲時除

The final remark—hope and beauty fade together—despite its fatalistic turn, resonates, when coming from the figure of Saga, with a sense of reassurance. He comforts his women, thus: While it was true, for Consort Ban, that her beauty fled when hope was lost, rest assured that, for you, my dears, it will not be so. You shall enjoy my company for years to come. Nurtured by my love, *your* beauty will never fade. He employs this same method of indirect reassurance in another poem, “Flight of the Swallows,” which alludes likewise to the fate of Consort Ban. This time the focus is on the dancing girl Feiyan, Flying Swallow, whose arrival in Emperor Chen’s court led to so much suffering for Consort Ban. The “shameful queen” Feiyan, unlike real swallows who remain faithful to their partners, flying side-by-side at all times, has instead brought about the separation of Emperor Chen and Consort Ban. Again, in his lengthy “The Autumn Moon: A Reply to Shigeno no Sadanushi,” Saga describes the full moon as follows: “That snow-white orb looks like the round fan of poor Consort Ban, who, just as the summer fan discarded come autumn, was slighted by her unfaithful lover.” It is likely, what with more than thirty consorts in his seraglio, that Saga would have inadvertently offended some of these women at one time or another. Perhaps these references to Consort Ban were meant to serve as a reminder to those consorts who, deeming themselves slighted by their sovereign lover, might take some comfort in thinking that Saga was at least aware of their situation. Whatever the case, Consort Ban was for Saga a perennial figure, one who he employed, first, to demonstrate a sense of sympathy for the plight of lovelorn consorts, and, second, to indirectly assert his dominance as sole arbitrator of a

large rear palace.

Conclusion

A good portion of Saga's Sinitic poetry, as well as at least some—if not a great deal that has not been preserved—of his vernacular poetry, is intimately bound up with establishing a relationship of power between the sovereign, on the one hand, and the many women at court, on the other. It is significant, moreover, that a number of these poems, such as “Falling Blossoms” (*Ryōunshū*, poem no. 3) and “Chrysanthemum Blossoms” (*Keikokushū*, poem no. 2), appear near the very beginning of their respective imperial anthologies. Saga's eagerness to assert his sexual supremacy, and hence his mastery over marriage politics and all matters relating to the rear palace, no doubt informed this particular editorial decision. Saga's erotic poetry, far from being a private affair, was composed expressly for presentation at important public events, such as vernal flower viewing banquets and autumnal chrysanthemum banquets. As the vernacular verses tentatively attributed to Saga, and preserved in the provisionally titled Saga *gyoshū*, suggest—but, due to a lack of more examples, certainly do not prove—Saga was ready to employ vernacular poetry to the same end.

Saga was an avid patron of literature. He was also a prolific father, siring some fifty children. His father, Emperor Kanmu, could boast a sizable seraglio: twenty-six women, ten of whom belonged to the Fujiwara lineage, and three of whom belonged to the Tachibana lineage. Kanmu's primary consort was a Fujiwara woman. Saga's seraglio totaled more than thirty-one women, two of whom belonged to the Tachibana lineage, and only one of whom was a Fujiwara. His primary consort, Kachiko, was, of course, a Tachibana. The rear palace of Saga's reign, in contrast to that of Kanmu, shows a very wide variety in terms of the number of lineages it includes. Saga had two Tachibana women, two Kudara

百濟 women (probably of Korean ancestry), and two Ōhara 大原 women. Aside from these three lineages, however, there was no more duplication; each woman was from a different lineage. This tells us two things about the marriage politics during Saga's reign: First, Saga sought to suppress the troublesome Fujiwara monopoly; second, he sought to connect himself to as many lineages as possible, thereby broadening his network of influence. Both of these proved tremendously effective.

Just as Saga, by hosting banquets in a wide variety of venues, both close to and somewhat far away from the imperial palace, sought to develop a wide network of trustworthy vassals, so, too, did he attempt to people his seraglio with a wide variety of women from as many different lineages as possible. Looked at from this perspective, Saga's erotic poetry begins to take on a greater, more immediately political significance. More research into the everyday lives of ninth-century court ladies will, I sincerely, hope, lead us to a deeper understanding of the relationship between women and court poetry, both vernacular and Sinitic. For the time being, there is much that remains a mystery, at least to me. This paper has been an attempt to at least make some of these mysteries more public, in hopes that others might illuminate what would otherwise remain dark.

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