

Reading the New Ballads: Late Heian *kanshi* poets and Bo Juyi¹

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In the year Ten'ei 2 (1111) in what was then the capital of Japan, Fujiwara no Tadamichi turned fifteen and in Confucius' words it was time "to put his mind to study." Scholarship meant not only the study but also the active practice of literature and the young man was to search for examples to emulate. As Tadamichi was the eldest son of the then Regent, the Retired Emperor Shirakawa (1053-1129) did not let this moment pass unnoticed and sent him a copy of the collected works of the Chinese poet Bo (also Bai) Juyi (772-846).² It was not really surprising that the retired sovereign should choose this poet for his courtesy gift. At the time, as well as in present-day Japan, Bo simply was the most famous poet from China. The practice of literature among the male members of the highest nobility of Heian Japan (794-1185) focused very much on the composition of texts in Chinese (*kanbun*), with special attention to poetry (*kanshi*), so that China's best-known poet seemed an obvious choice. In this particular case, however, Shirakawa's present led to an important step in broadening the range of early medieval Japanese literary subject matter. Throughout Tadamichi's career as a *kanshi* poet, Bo was to prove an exceptionally influential source of inspiration and it was Bo's poetry that tempted Tadamichi to compose some radically new poems himself.

When Shirakawa sent his present to the young Tadamichi, Bo Juyi's poetry had been known in Japan for some three centuries. Japan's infatuation with the Chinese poet owes much to its thorough customs examination. In Shôwa 5 (838), Fujiwara no Takemori (808-851) was Assistant Governor of Dazaifu, the government headquarters in Kyushu and main port for the trade contacts with the Asian continent. That year he discovered in a shipment from China, then ruled by the Tang dynasty (618-907), a book bearing the title *Poetry and prose by Yuan [Zhen] and Bo [Juyi]*. Sensing that he was on to something good,

1 First published in *Wasser-Spuren: Festschrift für Wolfram Naumann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Stanca Scholz-Cionca, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1997 (pp. 169-184). Page numbering follows the original publication. The author wishes to thank the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO; Nissan Fellowship) for making research for this article possible.

2 *Hosshô-ji kanpaku gyoshû*, Tadamichi's note to poem 63. *Gunsho ruijû* 9, 251. The term *shigaku* for "fifteen years old", which Tadamichi uses himself, derives from the *Analects* (*Lunyu*) 2: 4: "At fifteen I set my heart to learning."

Takemori sent the book on to the emperor. He was duly rewarded for this show of literary connoisseurship with a promotion in rank.³ Bo Juyi had arrived in Japan and he was there to stay.

Takemori's inspection of the Chinese ship resulted in a poetic frenzy among the Japanese literati. The demand for a complete set of Bo Juyi's works grew rapidly. The monk Egaku (dates unknown, active 835-864), who maintained a virtual one-man shuttle service with four visits to the Asian continent, played an important role as supplier. When he went to China for the second time, he spent the fourth and fifth months of Huichang 4 (844) copying Bo's collected works at the Nanchan Temple in Suzhou. Some five years before, in the second month of Kaicheng 4 (839), Bo himself had deposited this version of his works in the sutra storage of the Thousand Buddhas Hall (*qianfo tang*) of that same Nanchan-yuan.⁴ At the time this was one of only three copies of Bo's complete works available in China. It was this authorized version that Egaku copied and brought back to Japan, where it is now known as the Kanazawa bunko-bon *Hakushi monjû*.⁵ At the very same time, another Japanese monk, Ennin (794-864), then residing in the Tang capital Chang'an, also purchased a "Collection of Bo's poetry, six books."⁶ The activities of monks like Egaku and Ennin made Bo himself aware of his success abroad; he mentioned that copies of his collected works were available in Korea and Japan.⁷ After the formal decision of Japanese, in 894, to abandon their official embassies to China, the Chinese court made it a habit to question Japanese monks travelling through their empire, in order to keep up with the latest events in Japan. When these monks got an audience with the Chinese emperor, a standard point of protocol was the question which Chinese books were known in Japan. The monks never failed to mention Bo Juyi.

The first copies of Bo Juyi's poetry to reach Japan were Tang manuscripts. However, as Chinese text editions of the *Boshi wenji* grew more sophisticated, this edited and annotated Bo Juyi also made the crossing to Japan.⁸ The statesman Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027), for instance, was an avid book collector with an impressive library; on a rainy day in 1010, he rearranged his

3 *Montoku jitsuroku* 3, Ninju 1 (851)/IX/[*kinoto-hitsuji*]. *Kokushi taiki* 3, 478.

4 *Suzhou Nanchan-yuan Boshi wenji ji*. *Bo Juyi ji* 70, 1487-1489.

5 KANEKO 1948: 103-112; KOMATSU 1965, 295-302. Incidentally, recent theories hold that the Heian and Kamakura reading of the characters for "collected works" was "*bunshû*" or "*bunsu*" rather than "*monjû*." ÔTA/KOBAYASHI 1982, 129.

6 *Nittô shinkyû seikyô mokuroku*. *Dai Nihon bukkyô zensho* 2, 71.

7. *Boshi Changqingji houxu*, Huichang 5 (845)/V/1. *Bo Juyi ji waiji* 2, 1553. See also WALEY 1949, 212-213.

8 See KOMATSU 1965, 334-338; and SATÔ 1996, 231.

books and counted over two thousand volumes.⁹ Michinaga was keen to collect printed editions (*surihon*) of Bo Juyi's poetry, which he obtained either through Chinese merchants or through Japanese monks abroad.¹⁰ These were annotated Song editions (960-1279), which differed from Tang manuscript copies at several points. It remains doubtful, however, whether these new editions really contributed in any major way to Late Heian studies of Chinese poetry. For one thing, Michinaga may have owned a Song edition, but that does not necessarily imply that Chinese scholars also did. Occasionally, Fujiwara scholars from the Umakai Branch of the Ceremonial House and the Hino Branch of the Northern House were given Chinese books by Michinaga. These books found their way to the Kangaku-in, the private academy of the Fujiwara and rival institution of the court university. The older clans of Chinese scholars like the Sugawara and the Ôe, however, virtually had no access to these new editions. Moreover, the Sugawara and Ôe based their authority in the field of Chinese literature on old Tang text variants that had been passed on within the clans. The idea of having to credit text editions that deviated from their classroom material probably did not appeal to them very much. Nevertheless, their conservative attitude does not mean that they were completely unfamiliar with this "new" Bo Juyi. The scholar Ôe no Masafusa (1041-1111), for instance, pointed out more reliable variants in Song editions of Bo's popular lines.¹¹

In short, members of the Heian nobility went to great lengths to get hold of copies of Bo Juyi's poetry and were eager to lay hands on the new Chinese versions. Several arguments are put forward as to why it was Bo who became so popular in Japan rather than any other Tang poet. The most likely reason for this Japanese success was his huge popularity in China.¹² Japanese travelling through China could not fail to see that all of China was reading Bo Juyi. The simplicity of Bo's language and the ease with which his poems could be read undoubtedly accounted for this phenomenal success as well. The Buddhist tone of his poetry (OKADA), the notion that Tang society as it featured in Bo's poetry was similar to Heian society (KANEKO), and the fact that Bo's themes and style offered Japanese poetry a new treatment and new topics (BROWER/MINER), are other arguments to explain Bo's fame in Japan.¹³ Kanda Hideo

9 *Midô kanpaku ki* Kankô 7 (1010)/VIII/29. *Dai Nihon kokiroku Midô kanpaku ki* 2, 74.

10 E.g. *Midô kanpaku ki* Kankô 3 (1006)/X/20; Kankô 7 (1010)/XI/28; Chôwa 2 (1013)/IX/14; and Chôwa 4 (1015)/VII/15. *Dai Nihon kokiroku Midô kanpaku ki* 1, 196; 2, 82, 243, 3, 20. Most often, Michinaga received these books together with similar editions of the *Wenxuan*.

11 *Gôdanshō* 6, 420. *Gôdan shōchū*, pp. 1297-1300. Masafusa comments on a faulty phrasing in *Wakan rôeishū* 780, a quotation from the *Changhen ke* ("Song of everlasting sorrow").

12 See KONISHI 1986: 150-155.

13 OKADA 1954, 283-286; KANEKO 1943, 97; and BROWER/MINER 1961, 156.

suggests a few additional reasons: both the fact that Bo died a natural death and that he reached a high court position at the end of his life, in other words that Bo did not die a violent death and had social success, also appealed to the Japanese.¹⁴

Even so, Bo's poetry is not very homogeneous, not only because of the large number of poems he composed, but also because he tried his hand at a variety of styles and topics. Obviously Bo Juyi could be used as inspiration for almost any kind of poetry—and that is what happened. His poetry must always be explicitly defined when it is described as a source of inspiration.

The first anthology of Bo Juyi's poetry to arrive in Japan also contained poems by Yuan Zhen (779-831). That these two poets should be seen together on their first trip to the east is only fitting. They were long time friends and political allies. Joint collections of Yuan's and Bo's poetry were made, one of which was discovered by Takemori. Yuan Zhen and Bo Juyi agreed in matters both poetic and political. The expression "the Yuan and Bo Style" (*Yuan Bo ti*), referring to their innovating poetry, bears testimony to that. Yuan was a poet extremely concerned with social and political issues. His main literary aim was political. Like Bo, he deliberately developed a linguistic simplicity and clarity of meaning, which rendered his poetry so popular in China.¹⁵

Yuan Zhen and Bo Juyi promoted the "new ballads" (*xinyuefu*), a genre that was initiated by Yuan. The new ballads, rather long poems in a relatively free form, criticized in a simple tone social and political wrongs or described other deplorable situations in society. Bo therefore classed the new ballads with his "poems of admonition and instruction" (*fengyushi*, *J. fūyushi*). Each new ballad was usually given a motto, making the poet's theme explicit to the reader. Bo himself considered the *xinyuefu* to be one of his most important contributions to poetry.

The name of the genre took its cue from a much older one known as *yuefu*, or "ballads." Founded around 150 BC, the Music Bureau (*yuefu*) was an important Han imperial institution responsible for the collection, composition, and performance of music to be used at court rituals. Since music mostly meant song, the Music Bureau collected lyrics for ritual, dance and other songs. These ballads were regarded as folk music and literati hastened to compose other ballads, borrowing title and tune from the originals.¹⁶ Bo's and Yuan's ballads were "new" in the sense that the poets chose their own themes, rather than emulate existing ones as the literati had been used to do.

14 As in KOMATSU 1965, 327-334.

15 PALANDRI 1977, 57.

16 ALLEN 1992, 37-68.

Bo and Yuan's new ballads differed from the older *yuefu* in yet another way: they were part of a political program. Generally, Heian *kanshi* do not reveal any awareness of the political implications of the majority of Chinese poetry. In the Chinese literary tradition the poet was first of all a civil servant. Poetry was a guide in governing the state and functioned as a mirror. If the government was at fault and the people suffered, the poet was to point this out in his poetry so that the emperor would notice and set right the social wrongs. Through his poetry the poet helped to keep society in social and political balance.¹⁷ Bo Juyi and Yuan Zhen specifically meant the new ballads to be an instrument to point out the misery of different groups in society and to call for the administration to change its policies accordingly. Bo himself makes this very clear in the preface to the new ballads, where he states that the new ballads are not concerned with literature but with society and that their aim is to admonish.¹⁸

The political nature of the *xinyuefu* was not completely unknown to the literati of eleventh and twelfth century Japan. The scholar, poet, and *raconteur* Ôe no Masafusa, for instance, lectures very clearly that "the two books of Juyi's new ballads are composed as admonition and instruction for government policies."¹⁹ Incidental examples do exist of Early Heian *kanshi* that lament the fate of Japan's poor and these may well have taken their inspiration from Chinese poetry.²⁰

This Heian fondness of the *xinyuefu* is an oddity not very often touched upon. Why a people that liked most of Chinese culture except its politics should become enamoured of a genre that was invented for political purposes, is a bit puzzling.

However, the fact remains that the new ballads were a great hit with the Heian nobles. Together with verses from the "Song of everlasting sorrow," their lines were singled out for recitation. Women, too, enjoyed reading and reciting Bo's poetry, as Sei Shônagon indicates.²¹ Even though the practice and study of Chinese literature was considered a male prerogative, Murasaki Shi-

17 IDEMA/HAFT 1985, 58-82.

18 *Bo Juyi ji* 3, 52. For a translation, see ALLEN 1992, 231.

19 *Gôdanshō* 5, 309. *Gôdan shōchū*, pp. 954-957.

20 I am thinking specifically of the ten poem sequence Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) composed about the poor in winter, when he was Governor of Sanuki in northern Shikoku. *Kanke bunsō* 200-209. *NKBT* 72, 259-265. For a translation of this sequence, see BURTON WATSON, *Japanese Literature in Chinese* 1, New York, 1975, pp. 93-94; and ROBERT BORGES, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1986, pp. 187-188. Another example is Ki no Haseo's (845-912) *Hinjo no hin* ("The song of the poor woman"). *Honchō monzui*. *NKBT* 69, 344-346.

21 *Makura no sōshi* 211. *NKBT* 19, 249.

kibu “secretly” taught Empress Akiko to read Bo’s new ballads.²² Again and again, when excerpts of Bo Juyi’s poetry were singled out for copying, as a present for instance, it was practically always the new ballads that were chosen.²³ The Japanese even organized study sessions to discuss the *xinyuefu*.²⁴ In fact, when Heian nobles mentioned “ballads” they invariably meant Bo Juyi’s new ballads.

An interesting example of the *xinyuefu*’s popularity is the *Kandabon Haku-shi monjû*.²⁵ This is a Heian manuscript copy of books three and four of Bo’s collected poetry, in other words, a Heian copy of Bo’s new ballads. The manuscript has reading marks (*kunten*) by Fujiwara no Shigeaki (or Mochiakira; dates unknown, active early twelfth century), added on two separate occasions, in 1113 and 1140. Born into the Ceremonial House of the Fujiwara as the grandson of the famous Akihira (?989-1066), Shigeaki was himself active as a *kanshi* poet, but he probably was not the copyist. The Kanda manuscript, the oldest extant Japanese version of Bo’s *xinyuefu*, raises the question to what extent the new ballads circulated as an independent book. A comparison with Dunhuang manuscripts of the new ballads strongly suggests the possibility that the new ballads already circulated separately in China, and that the Kanda manuscript is a copy of such a book containing only the new ballads.²⁶ A Heian preference for the new ballads, then, may well have followed a Chinese habit of separating the new ballads from the rest of Bo’s oeuvre.

As noted above, Japanese readers of Chinese poetry preferred easy texts. The simple language of the new ballads will therefore have had a lot to do with their popularity in Heian Japan. Bo himself emphasizes in the preface to the new ballads that the clarity of their meaning is far more important than their literary style. It is also clear that the Japanese did not care much for the political implications of the Chinese examples, but used the descriptive passages and imitated those in their own poems. The Japanese *kanshi* differ from the poems from China in their lack of moral implication. In other words, the Japanese had to work hard to depoliticize the contents of the new ballads in order to be able

22 *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*. NKBT 19, 500-501.

23 E.g. *Midô kanpaku ki* Kenkô 1 (1004)/IX/7. The famous calligrapher Fujiwara no Yuki-nari brings Michinaga “the first book of the *yuefu*” he has copied out. Eight days later he brings Michinaga the second, so that now Michinaga has the complete set of Bo’s new ballads.

24 Kenkô mentions one of these in *Tsurezuregusa* 226. NKBT 30, 271-272. Tadamichi’s emulations of the *Maitan wen* are also the result of study sessions; see below.

25 A facsimile edition, with transcription and extensive accompanying essays is ÔTA/KOBAYASHI 1982.

26 For an extensive treatment of this question, see ÔTA/KOBAYASHI 1982, 148-174.

to appreciate them. Japanese imitations of Bo's *xinyuefu* offer an insightful example of what it was in the Chinese original that appealed to Heian nobility.

Fifty of Bo Juyi's new ballads have been preserved. One that is still included in every major Japanese anthology of Chinese poetry is "The old charcoal seller" (*Maitan weng*). The poem's motto is "Suffering palace marketing" (*ku gongshi ye*) and is inspired by the fact that in 797 a palace eunuch was appointed Commissioner for Palace Marketing whose sole commission was to organize requisitioning raids. People were unable to oppose these officially sanctioned robberies.²⁷ Bo's poem tells us of the hardships of those tradesmen who are forced to sell their wares to the palace for far too low a price and describes the hardships of one particular old charcoal seller. The poem is descriptive, but ends with a sarcastic observation of the ease with which the government, and in particular the eunuchs, abuses its power.

The old charcoal seller

(Suffering palace marketing)

The old charcoal seller
Cuts firewood, burns charcoal by the southern mountain.
His face, all covered, with dust and ash, the colour of smoke,
The hair at his temples is grey, his ten fingers black.
The money he makes selling coal, what is it for?
To put clothes on his back and food in his mouth.
The rags on his poor body are thin and threadbare;
Distressed at the low price of coal, he hopes for colder weather.
Night comes, an inch of snow has fallen on the city,
In the morning he rides his cart along the icy ruts,
His ox weary, he hungry, and the sun already high.
In the mud by the south gate, outside the market, he stops to rest.
All of a sudden, two dashing riders appear:
An imperial envoy, garbed in yellow (his attendant in white),
Holding an official dispatch, he reads a proclamation.
Then turns the cart around, curses the ox, and leads it north.
One cartload of coal—a thousand or more catties!
No use appealing to the official spiriting the cart away:
Half a length of red lace, a slip of damask
Dropped on the ox—is payment in full!²⁸

Slightly bizarre as it may seem at first, this poem was avidly read by Heian *kanshi* poets not as a political poem but as a text offering exotically new subject

27 WALEY 1949, 58-59.

28 *Bo Juyi ji* 4, 79-80; *Quan Tang shi* 427, 4704. Translation, with minor changes, EUGENE EOYANG in WU-CHI LIU and IRVING YUCHENG LO (eds.), *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry*, Bloomington, 1975, pp. 206-207.

matter. The first transformation of “The old charcoal seller” was the work of a group of poets centring around Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1097-1164), a man destined to be Chancellor and Regent for an uninterrupted thirty-seven years.

In his fifteenth year, Tadamichi received a copy of Bo Juyi’s collected works from the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa. Included in this gift were of course the new ballads, which were to lead to some fascinating poetic exercises by Tadamichi. At fifteen, Tadamichi already started attending gatherings of *kanshi* poets and later on he became the main organizer of such gatherings during the mid-twelfth century. One of the activities of Heian *kanshi* salons were the “reading groups” (*dokusho*). These were informal study groups, gatherings of scholars and poets who read Chinese texts and usually composed poems about whatever they had just read.

One of Tadamichi’s study groups at one point tackled Bo Juyi’s new ballads, thanks to which we are left with a series of five poems by Tadamichi which he aptly named “Reading the new ballads.”²⁹ These poems are all paraphrases of Bo’s *xinyuefu* in the form of *lüshi*, or regulated poetry in eight lines with mostly parallel couplets. To paraphrase *xinyuefu* in *shi* format was a peculiarity of the Japanese, who seem to have been uncomfortable with Chinese poetic genres other than the *shi*. The very act of using the title of the older *yuefu* poem is a practise that stems directly from the genre conventions of *yuefu* poetry; by naming the older title, the *shi* emulations connect themselves firmly to their models, even if the poetic format is wholly different. Earlier Japanese paraphrases in *shi* format of older Chinese *yuefu* poetry do exist in the *Bunka shûreishû* of 818.³⁰ Among the new ballads chosen by Tadamichi for this exercise is “The old charcoal seller.”

“The old charcoal seller”

Let us ask what the old man intends to do with
Chopping wood and burning it to charcoal, how he spends the last years of his life.
Dust covers his face in the wind from the peak at dawn;
The fire blocks his view of the moon above the mountains.
The price is low: crying he returns over frozen roads;
His clothes are unlined: he cannot endure this snow-cold feeling.
Messengers from the palace in their white liveries haul his chart away:
One roll of red silk, one should not belittle that.³¹

29 *Hosshô-ji dono gyoshû* 85-89. *Gunsho ruijû* 9, 254-255.

30 *Bunka shûreishû* 2: 62-70. *NKBT* 69, 251-257.

31 *Hosshô-ji dono gyoshû* 88. *Gunsho ruijû* 9, 255. The second character of the last line (足) must be a misprint for 𦵏.

The *pointe* of Tadamichi's paraphrase is a rare touch of irony in Heian *kanshi*, obviously inspired by Bo's original. Tadamichi has given a fairly faithful rendering of Bo's poem, although the reader has to be familiar with the the new ballad to be able to understand this condensed version without difficulties. Tadamichi's regulated poem depends heavily on borrowed phrases and words take from Bo's new ballad, in order to create an atmosphere full of "Bo-ness."

Tadamichi sent his poem to Fujiwara no Atsumitsu (1063-1144), then Master at the Ministry of Ceremonies. The younger son of Akihira, Atsumitsu carried the torch of the Ceremonial House and became himself an Erudite of Literature (*monjô hakase*) and president of the court university (*daigaku no kami*). The elder of Tadamichi by more than thirty years, his ties with the younger Chancellor were close. He not only acted as advisor and assisted in drafting Tadamichi's petitions, but Atsumitsu also functioned as Tadamichi's teacher and partner in poetic matters. At Tadamichi's request, for instance, he compiled a now lost sequel to his father's *kanshi* selection, the *Zoku honchô shûku* ("Superior Couplets of Our Court, Continued") in three books, which was presented to the Retired Emperor Shirakawa.

In keeping with the ever extending cycle of poetic emulation and intertextual reference that dominates so much of the East Asian poetic tradition, Atsumitsu composed a poem of his own in reply. Undoubtedly, this poem, too, was paraphrase of "The old charcoal seller." In return, Tadamichi sent Atsumitsu a second poem, again a paraphrase of Bo's new ballad.

Harmonizing with the excellent poem sent to me by the Master at the Ministry of Ceremonies when he saw my clumsy piece of poetry "The old charcoal seller"

The heavy rains find the old man from the mountains in his thatched hut.
 He knows his livelihood and heart's desires, whether awake or asleep.
 For his trade, of what use is a scorching sun?
 For his family, he hopes for shadow-cold winds.
 He is ashamed of his white hair, the result of hard work;
 He is afraid of the white liveries, which come galloping south of the city.
 The charcoal is more than a thousand catties, the silk but ten foot long.
 The clerk speaks the imperial order—who is the greedy one?³²

The social fringe seems to have appealed to Tadamachi for its considerable potential as poetic subject matter. He persuaded members of his salon to compose a series of poems on the subject of *kugutsu*, for instance, an itinerant group of indeterminate origin.³³ Once again, he used Bo's "The old charcoal

32 *Hosshô-ji dono gyoshû* 89. *Gunsho ruijû* 9, 255.

33 *Honchô mudaishi* 2, 77-82. *Gunsho ruijû* 9, 15-16.

seller” as a starting point for a Chinese poem, this time on the subject of a peddler woman. The last couplet makes explicit what attracted Tadamichi to his new found topic

On seeing a peddler woman

A sorry sight, this downcast woman in her shabby clothes
 Who goes about peddling until the sun has set:
 Raising the price for undue profit, she stands before a door,
 Or cries her name outside the gate, lingering there awhile.
 A poor household offers custom, but she pays no heed,
 Forcing herself unbidden onto one of greater wealth.
 “The autumn moon” and “spring blossoms” struck me as passé,
 But this topic came to me very naturally.³⁴

In composing his poems Tadamichi was strongly stimulated by Atsumitsu. In his younger days, before joining Tadamichi’s literary circles, Atsumitsu had been a member of the *salon* of Prince Sukehito (1073-1119). Sukehito had spent much of his life waiting to become emperor. He was the second son of Go-Sanjō and Minamoto no Motoko, and therefore a half-brother of Shirakawa. Shirakawa, who himself had a Fujiwara mother, had promised Go-Sanjō that Motoko’s sons Sanehito (1071-1085) and Sukehito would be next in line to the throne. When his elder brother died at the age of fourteen, Sukehito became Shirakawa’s supposed successor, in accordance with Go-Sanjō’s wish to secure the throne for princes who had no ties with the Fujiwara Regent House. Shirakawa, however, was anxious to transfer the succession to his own son, the later Horikawa (1079-1107).

Sukehito was never officially appointed crown prince, and in Kanji 1 (1087) he finally moved to the Hanazono Palace at the Ninna-ji, where he became known as San no miya, “the Third Prince” and where he devoted most of his time to literature. Affecting the air of the literatus who has renounced his worldly occupations in favour of the pursuit of the arts and the contemplation of life’s impermanence, Sukehito gathered around him a large group of *kanshi* poets who met regularly at the Ninna-ji. This group, most of which members held a middle court rank, became so well known that contemporaries started to call them “the hundred Masters of the Third Prince.”³⁵ Atsumitsu was one of this group.

Sukehito himself was not averse to experiments with new themes in Chinese poetry and composed emulations of Bo Juyi’s new ballads. When Sukehito’s

34 *Honchō mudaishi* 2, 87. *Gunsho ruijū* 9, 17. Translation AILEEN GATTEN in KONISHI 1991, 5.

35 *Genpei jōsui ki* 16, 1. *Nihon bungaku taikei* 15, 546-547.

salon was disbanded with the latter's death in 1119, Atsumitsu quite probably transferred this literary taste to his new salon centred around Tadamichi. One of Sukehito's few *kanshi* still available to us is a reworking of Bo's "The old charcoal seller." Sukehito's first line is an attempt to reproduce a typical feature of the *xinyuefu*, which always start with mentioning the topic or title of the poem.

On seeing an old charcoal woman

"The old charcoal woman"—now, listen very carefully!
 Her village lies far off, in the Ôhara mountains.
 Her clothes unlined, her journey dangerous, she sets out with the wind;
 The sun set, the sky cold, she returns, seen home by the moon.
 Her voice soars to the clouds and fills the streets;
 The autumn wind drives up the price in the ravaged village.
 The earth's products should be brought forth by able-bodied men,
 So I am moved to pity now seeing her white hairs.³⁶

We see here, then, a high-ranking aristocrat politician and an imperial prince emulating a poem that criticizes the arbitrary nature of imperial taxes. The question presents itself why Tadamichi and Sukehito were so intrigued by this subject matter. We know from history that neither ever attempted to change government policies concerning taxation, nor did they embark on a political program of social reform. In other words, both were probably interested more in the Chineseness of their topics than in changing government policies. The politically conscious, Confucianist stance of the Chinese poets had little appeal to the Japanese nobility. Heian upper class society was not very much in favour of social mobility for the poor.

The answer to the question must lie in the attraction of the social fringe as exotic subject matter. Both Tadamichi and Sukehito were poets intent on broadening the field of possible topics for poetry. "'The autumn moon' and 'spring blossoms' struck me as passé," Tadamichi had written and charcoal sellers, peddler women, *kugutsu* and others were welcome company at the writing table. This need for new, more exotic topics is seen in poetry in Japa-

36 *Honchô mudaishi* 2, 88. *Gunsho ruijû* 9, 17. The character combination 聞取, in the first line, may at first seem slightly odd or even Japanized Chinese (*kikitoru*, "to listen intently"), but actually is colloquial Tang Chinese. The auxiliary verb *qu* 取 indicates an intensification of the verb it accompanies. Examples can be found in the poetry of Li Bo and Bo Juyi. ZHANG XIANG (ed.), *Shiciqu yuci huishi*, Peking, 1954, pp. 300-301. Sukehito must have been familiar with another poem by Bo Juyi as well, "As a stand-in for a woman selling firewood, send to every courtesan" (*Dai maixin nü zeng zhuji. Bo Juyi ji* 20, 447). This short poem opens with the lines "Hair unkempt like tangled mugwort, rags for clothing,/ At dawn I walk the cold mountains with firewood on my back."

nese (*waka*) of the period as well. Eventually, Late Heian Japan saw the emergence of a new poetic genre, that of the social fringe.³⁷

In Edo Japan (1600-1868), the Late Heian *Maitan wen* emulations attracted the approving attention of neo-Confucian scholars. In 1771, for example, the Kyoto scholar and *kanshi* poet Emura Hokkai (1713-1788) published his *Nihon shishi* (“History of Chinese Poetry in Japan”) and singled out Sukehito’s poem on the old charcoal woman as exceptionally noteworthy.³⁸ Of course, neo-Confucian scholars had their own reasons for preferring Heian *kanshi* about the marginal in society. The question why Heian nobles should want to compose such poetry was asked already in 1660, when the neo-Confucian scholar Hayashi Gahô (1618-1680) and his son Baidô (1643-1666) compiled the anthology *Honchô ichinin isshu* (“One poem each by poets from our court”). Gahô selected *kanshi* of all periods and gave short commentaries to each poem, which Baidô faithfully recorded.

Sukehito’s poem was chosen to open Book Six of the anthology.³⁹ The intellectual training of Gahô, son of the famous neo-Confucian philosopher Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), naturally colours his commentary. From Bo’s political intentions through Sukehito’s and Tadamichi’s exoticism, Gahô makes the circle round by giving Sukehito’s poem a political interpretation. According to Gahô, Sukehito decided to do away with literary ornamentation, the “juggling of flowers and birds,” as well as with shallow topics, the “singing girls wearing scarlet skirts.” Instead, he deliberately chose the theme of a country so abused by its government that even old women have to go out and make a living and intended the poem as a complaint against the state. Presumably, all the men of the woman’s “ravaged village” have been called away to fulfil their corvée labour duties. Gahô expounds the political theme by linking the old woman with unsung talents. A topos in Chinese poetry, court ladies pining away in the emperor’s harem or elder courtesans fading away in the back streets of the capital are a disguise for the talented bureaucrat whose abilities are not recognized and who is not given the chance to shine as an administrator. Gahô recalls how Sukehito was deprived of his rightful claim to the throne and contrasts his politically correct attitude, along Confucian lines, with his half-brother’s usurpation of the throne and abuse of state funds. Needless to say, Gahô’s view of

37 I have touched upon this development in SMITS 1994. In the future I hope to publish an article dealing more extensively with the emergence the social fringe as a poetic genre, by which I mean poetic texts dealing with the social groups mentioned above.

38 *Nihon shishi* 1. *ShinNKBT* 65, 48, 747.

39 *Honchô ichinin isshu* 6, 261. *SNKBT* 63, 180-181, 393.

history is a fine piece of misrepresentation in order to underline his own political views.

The Master said: “The poet imitated Bo Juyi and composed ‘The old charcoal seller.’⁴⁰ It is safe to say that the essence of the two verses is alike. As for women selling charcoal, everybody saw them, but until then no one had heard of people composing poems about them.

Sukehito, who had the high rank of Imperial Prince, did not compose on singing girls wearing scarlet skirts, but put his heart to ‘ravaged villages’ and gave it a refined elegance. He was not simply juggling flowers and birds, but he pitied the charcoal seller’s white hairs. One must say that his talent and knowledge were great. If one enters this much into someone else’s feelings, then is there not a political message?

Sukehito was the third son of Emperor Go-Sanjō, which is why he was called ‘the Third Prince’. As Go-Sanjō was a wise ruler, he understood that the prince had talent, but since a distinction was made between legitimate [Shirakawa] and illegitimate sons [Sukehito], Emperor Shirakawa was to succeed to the throne.

If I compare this one poem with the way Shirakawa squandered the national budget without a thought at the Tokujōju-in,⁴¹ really, then it is not just that heaven and earth are separate from one another [*i.e.* Sukehito’s and Shirakawa’s talents are far apart], but one may say that Sukehito’s other compositions, even if they do not equal those by Kaneakira, can compete with those by Tomohira.”⁴²

Classical East Asian poetics have early on operated along imitative principles. Generic genre codes and the pervasive literariness of the acts of reading and writing forced every literary effort to be a continuous reference to past and future texts. The reference to yet unwritten texts consists in the fact that every poem added itself automatically to the existing body of the genre and in that way became a point of reference for poems to come. This self-reference within

40 Either Gahō gets the title wrong here or he literally means that Sukehito recomposes Bo Juyi’s poem. Bo’s poem is indeed “The old charcoal seller,” but Sukehito’s poem is about an old *woman*.

41 The Tokujōju-in was a temple next to the Shirakawa Southern Villa (nanden) and the Hosshō-ji, at Nijō on the east side of Kamo River. Shirakawa established the first *in no chō*, or Retired Emperor’s Bureau, at Hosshō-ji, built in 1077, from which he effectively controlled court politics. Gahō obviously mentions the Tokujōju-in in reference to Shirakawa, as it stood at the centre of the Shirakawa area from which the Retired Emperor ruled and therefore can be read as a metaphor for Shirakawa.

42 Prince Kaneakira (914-987), also known as Saki no Chūshōō (“the Former Prince in the Central Ministry”) was a famous *kanshi* poet and is credited with the compilation of the *Kokin rokujō* (“Six quires of ancient and modern poetry,” 987). Prince Tomohira (964-1009), another *kanshi* poet, was known as Nochi no Chūshōō (“the Later Prince in the Central Ministry”). Both the fact that all three were imperial princes and the existing link between Kaneakira and Tomohira will have called this comparison to Gahō’s mind.

a genre, or intratextuality if you like,⁴³ obviously dominates the small corpus of Late Heian *Maitan wen* emulations. Tadamichi is not only in dialogue with Bo Juyi when he composes his “On seeing a peddler woman” or “The old charcoal seller,” but echoes poems like Sukehito’s as well.

The functional conventions of the new ballad genre, however, were used by the Late Heian *kanshi* poets to create a new genre in Japanese literature: the poetry of the social fringe. Calls for social reform in the Chinese model were transformed into observations of exotic subject matter in the Japanese emulations. Tadamichi’s exercises in recreating the new ballads eventually converged with the emergence of the marginal in early medieval society as poetic subject matter. Reading the new ballads was an act of misreading, deliberate or culturally determined, that helped clear poetic space and broaden the field of subject matter.

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43 For a stimulating study of the intratextual poetics of the *yuefu* genre and intratextual readings of classical Chinese poetry in general, see Allen 1992.

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