

# Relevancy of Translations of the *Kokinshu* Poems to Poetic Motif

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## Introduction

It is considered that the poetry of the *Kokinshu*, *Collection of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poetry*, is intricate, oblique and ingenious due to its diction and employed techniques. Many of its poems have been interpreted in markedly different ways by its specialists, leading to a downgrading of its poetic value in recent years. These differences of interpretation are also reflected in the content of published English translations. With an aim of providing a fair assessment of the poetic imagery found in the *Kokinshu* I will provide translated versions of spring poems ( I : 1 - I :41), emphasizing the relevancy to poetic motif. The accompanying English translations were undertaken in collaboration with Joyce Ackroyd<sup>1</sup>.

## Relevancy of English translations to poetic motif

I : 1 Ariwara no Motokata (Composed when the first day of spring fell within the old year.)

Toshi no uchi ni

Haru wa kinikeri

Hitotose o

Kozo to ya iwamu

Kotoshi to ya iwamu<sup>2</sup>

Lo! Spring has come in

Before the old year's duly spent.

How swift time's unmarked flight!

Shall we call the days already past

The old year or the new?

Motif The motif of the opening poem of the imperial anthology is one of wonder at the inexorable flux of time, arising from the poet's knowledge of the Chinese literary convention (Ando, 32).

Motif of the translations by Rod and McCullough below is a reference to the overlapping phenomena in the calendar brought about by spring's early arrival. This interpretation is consistent with Masaoka Shiki (292) and Watsuji Tetsuro (107-109). Shiki stated that this poem was uninteresting and an absurd joke, much the same as wondering if a person of mixed Japanese and non-Japanese parentage should be called a Japanese or a foreigner. Watsuji stated that the poem was nothing but a play upon "knowledge of the calendar". (Uchiyama, 2003, 41-45)

1. McCullough (14)	Rodd (49)
Springtime has arrived	Spring is here before
While the old year lingers on.	year's end when New Year's Day has
What then of the year?	not yet come around
Are we to talk of "last year"?	what should we call it is it
Or are we to say "this year"?	still last year or is it this

I: 2 Ki no Tsurayuki (Composed on the first day of spring.)	
Sode hichite	With dampened sleeves,
Musubishi mizu no	Last summer cool springs we scooped
Koreru o	To drink, froz'n long since.
Haru tatsu kyo no	Shall this soft presage of spring
Kaze ya tokuramu	Release them from winter's grip?

Motif Delight at the arrival of spring was perceived from the viewpoint of the passing passage of a year; not from a flash of intuition or emotion. This is an indirect expression of wonder at the swift progression of seasons. The device of expressing wonder at the passage of time by noting natural changes through the concept of the calendar was influenced by Tang poets, in particular, Po Chu-i. (Kojima, 1976, 320-330)

Our translation is aiming to draw attention to the passing of time from summer into spring, that is, from the time when the water which the poet scooped in his hands wetting his sleeves in summer began to be held in an icy grip, over to the time when it started to melt again.

Our effort was to render this poem with “front - to - back” or “left - to - right” predication so that each action or event may be illustrated in accordance with the progression of seasons. (Uchiyama, 2001, 67- 68)

In both of the translations by Rod and McCullough below, the usage of the noun phrase qualifying “waters” resulted in the “sleeves” (or “robes”) to occur in the final line in stead of the first line as in the original poem. Such an agglutinative nature of English illustrates the fundamental syntactic difference from Japanese, in that in Japanese the modifying phrase precedes the modifier, thus allowing the fluid pattern of “subject + verb” to occur more readily (Uchiyama, 2001, 68).

Translation by Rod (49)

today long-awaited  
 day when spring begins will  
 the breeze melt icebound  
 waters in which we once dipped  
 cupped hands drenching summer robes

Translation by McCullough (14)

On this first spring day  
 might warm breezes be melting  
 the frozen waters  
 I scooped up, cupping my hands  
 and letting my sleeves soak through?

I: 3 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown)

Harugasumi	Can there be anywhere
Tateru ya izuko	The mists of spring are gath'ring yet?
Miyoshino no	From Yoshino at
Yoshino no yama ni	Mt. Yoshino's foot I see
Yuki wa furitsutsu	The snow is falling still.

Motif Noting the contradiction between spring as shown on the calendar and the actual state of nature, the poet gives voice to the feeling of

expectation of the arrival of the season itself.

I: 4 The Nijo consort, Fujiwara Takaiko (A poem composed by the Nijo Consort at the beginning of spring.)

Yuki no uchi ni	Spring's presence is felt
Haru wa kinikeri	Amidst the lingering snows.
Uguisu no	Now in the valley
Koreru namida	Will the warbler pour forth his
Ima ya tokuramu	Frozen tears in liquid song?

Motif The poem celebrates the arrival of spring. The poet comprehends the changing of the seasons through an intellectualized knowledge of the calendar and conceptually tries to produce a sense of the progression of natural phenomena through that notion of the season.

I: 5 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Umegae ni	O warbler, resting
Kiiru uguisu	On the plum-tree bough, weary
Haru kakete	Of waiting for spring,
Nakedomo imada	Though sweetly you may sing,
Yuki wa furitsutsu	Lo! The snow is falling still.

Motif A poem of longing for the aspect of genuine spring. This poem is based upon a concept of the seasons drawn from the calendar and depicts natural phenomena.

I: 6 Priest Sosei (A poem composed when the snow fell on the trees.)

Haru tateba	Perchance the warbler,
Hana to ya miramu	Singing on the bough, mistaken
Shirayuki no	For blossoms the snow
Kakareru eda ni	That clings to it still, and so
Uguisu no naku	Thinks that the spring has come.

Motif The poet expresses the joy in his heart at the beginning of spring and the beautiful scenery (the warbler and the snow) which are precursors to the scenery to be observed when the real spring has come (the concept of the warbler and the plum). The sense of longing for the spring about to come is subtly hinted at.

I: 7 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Kokorozashi	Was my too eager heart
Fukaku someshi	So dazzled by the flow'ry branch
Okikereba	I plucked carefully
Kie aenu yuki no	That I mistook for blossoms
Hana to miyuramu	The snow that barely clings to them?

Motif The poem turns upon the experience of discovery how exquisitely beautiful was the pristine snow lying undisturbed on the plucked bough.

I: 8 Funya no Yasuhide (At the time when Empress Nijo, consort of Emperor Seiwa, bore the crown prince, later Emperor Yosei, she was still referred to as the “Lady of the Bedchamber of the Eastern Pavilion”. On the third day of the first month she summoned me before her and received me in audience. On that occasion, although the sun was shining, snow was falling upon my head. The Empress bid that I compose a poem of the scene.)

Haru no hi no	I bask in the rays
Hikari ni ataru	Shed by the benign young sun
Ware naredo	That warms the loyal heart.
Kashira no yuki to	But my head has grown white
Naru zo wabishiki	With the snow of piled-up years.

Motif The poem depicts the actual scene in which the poet was present as well as his place within the court and sets forth his own impressions regarding those facts. Superficially he is describing the subject of a

strange weather phenomenon which has been assigned to him by the Empress. By implication he is expressing his satisfaction and his gratitude for the position he has held at court, and only laments the fact he is growing old. Through this work the poet is aiming to illustrate the same wit and ingenuity which has enabled him to express this kind of double meaning through utilizing his knowledge of Chinese poetry (Kaneko, 1938, 485).

I: 9 Ki no Tsurayuki (Composed when I saw the snow fall.)

Kasumi tachi	The buds are swelling
Ko no me mo haru no	Midst the gath'ring mists of spring,
Yuki fureba	While still the snow
Hana naki sato mo	Like scattered petals drifts
Hana zo chirikeru	Where yet no blossoms are.

Motif The arrival of spring is apprehended conceptually and the lovely prospect of light spring snow viewed at that moment is aesthetically depicted through the senses.

The above translation is aiming to illustrate mental and material phenomena sequentially, as it was observed that the poem is comprised of the same six patterns of subject + verb; *mists + gather*, *buds + swell*, *snow + fall*, *flowers + be not existent*, *village + receive the scattering of flowers*, and *flowers + fell*.

Both translations below include the structure of “when + S + V”, which results in a description of intellectual judgment rather than one accounting for sequential detail. (Uchiyama, 2001, 69-71)

Translation by Rod (51-52)

when the warm mists veil  
all and buds swell while yet the  
spring snows drift downward

Translation by McCullough (16)

When snow comes in spring-  
fair season of layered haze  
and burgeoning buds-

even in the hibernal                      flowers fall in villages  
village    crystal blossoms fall        where flowers have yet to bloom.

I:10 Fujihara no Kotonao (Composed in early spring)

Haru ya toki	Has spring come early
Hana ya osoki to	Or could the blossoms be late?
Kikiwakamu	I questioned.
Uguisu dani mo	But the bush-warbler himself
Nakazu mo arukana	Had no answer he could give.

Motif Kotonao is thinking of spring in terms of the warbler's call, which is associated with the concept of spring. Placing emphasis on the present moment in which the warbler is absent, the poet laments the unresponsive spring.

I:11 Mibu no Tadamine (Composed in early spring.)

Haru kinu to	Others may tell me
Hito wa iedomo	That spring has already come.
Uguisu no	But till the warbler
Nakazu kagiri wa	Sings, my heart will never know
Araji to zo omou	that it is really here.

Motif Like the preceding poem, whilst noting the present moment in which the warbler is yet to be heard, the poet is thinking of the concept of early spring to which the call of the warbler is linked.

I:12 Minamoto no Masazumi (A poem composed at the poetry contest held in the palace of the Empress in the *Kampyo* era: 889-898.)

Tanikaze ni	The foam-flecked waters
Tokuru kori no	Of the valley streams gushing
Hima goto ni	Through icy fissures
Uchiizuru nami ya	Rent by the relenting air
Haru no hatsuhana	Are surely spring's earliest blooms.

Motif The feeling of anticipation of spring is basic. The transformation of the melting ice into form is suggestive of spring's first flowers. Through that suggestion the poet fashions the concept of spring as one of a season emerging from somewhere beyond the wintery scene which lies before his eyes. Although the wavelets, which the poet imagines, belong to another plain of experience not visible to his eyes, he invokes the metaphor of a flower and the image created by that comparison is amazingly clear and vivid in terms of color. The poem escapes from the conventional, mundane world, and is projected into an unknown world of the imagination.

I:13 Ki no Tomonori (A poem composed at the poetry contest held in the palace of the Empress in the Kampo era: 889-898.)

Hana no ka o	Scent of plum blossoms
Kaze no tayori ni	Born on a questing zephyr
Taguete zo	Serves as spring's herald
Uguisu sasou	Luring the shy warbler forth
Shirube ni wa yaru	To sing his welcoming lay

Motif The poet describes the feeling of longing for the warbler to emerge from the valley to be present with its companion, the plum blossom, as symbols of spring. Ota Seikyū (68) stated that the metaphorical device of suggesting "message" by reference to "breeze" was borrowed from a verse of Po Chu-i.

I:14 Oe no Chisato (A poem composed at the poetry contest held in the palace of the Empress in the Kampo era: 889-898.)

Uguisu no	Unless the warbler
Tani yori izuru	Leaves his distant vale to sing
Koe naku wa	Would there be any
Haru kuru koto o	Who would know that spring at last
Tare ka shiramashi	Had really come to visit.



Motif Based on his knowledge of Chinese poetry the poet describes delight at the arrival of spring, which he first realized upon hearing the call of the warbler, a symbol of spring. Keichu (150) saw a connection between the phrase about the call of the warbler which emerged from the valley and a verse in the *Classic of Poetry*<sup>3</sup>. The idea of this poem is also thought to be learned from a verse by Po Chu-i (Ota Seikyu, 68).

I:15 Arihara no Muneyana (A poem composed at the poetry contest held in the palace of the Empress in the Kampo era: 889-898.)

Haru tatedo	Spring comes but tardily
Hana mo niowanu	To my mountain retreat.
Yamazato wa	Only the warbler's
Monoukanu ne ni	Unpracticed notes to stir
Uguisu zo naku	The still and scentless air.

Motif Personification of the warbler lamenting the tardy spring was a metaphor borrowed from Chinese Poetry. Kojima (1976, 309-316) considers that “hana mo niowanu yamazato” or “the mountain village where plum flowers have not come to bloom” was associated with the Chinese notion of the flowerless borderland of the Gobi Desert. Keichu (151) suggested the influence of Po Chu-i's poetry in the personification of the warbler lamenting the tardy spring.

I:16 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Nobe chikaku	My dwelling's close to
Iei shi sereba	where the moor begins, and not
Uguisu no	A morning passes
Nakunaru koe wa	But I do hear the warbler's
Asana asana kiku	Song greeting the rising sun.

Motif The poem expresses the joy that the poet feels every morning at hearing the call of the warbler by his dwelling.

## I:17 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown)

Kasugano wa	For this day only,
Kyo wa na yaki so	Ploughman, put off the burning
Wakakusa no	Of those spring-time haunts
Tsuma mo komoreri	In Kasuga's fields for there
Ware mo komoreri	Lies my love, and there be I.

Motif The poem expresses the joy of early spring experienced in the countryside by people living in the ancient capital of Nara.

## I:18 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Kasugano no	O Keeper of the
Tobuhi no nomori	Beacon-fire at Tobuhi
Idete miyo	On Kasuga's moor.
Ima ikuka arite	Come out and see not many days
Wakana tsumitemu	Before spring herbs we'll gather.

Motif The poem expresses the feeling of anticipation of gathering spring herbs.

## I:19 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Miyama ni wa	Here on the mountain
Matsu no yuki dani	Slopes, the snow still decks the pine.
Kienaku ni	But they have been out
Miyako wa nobe no	Already gathering spring herbs
Wakana tsumikeri	I found, around the capital.

Motif The poet living in the mountain expresses his anticipation of spring upon realizing it had already arrived down in the capital.

## I:20 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Azusayumi	When you string a bow
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Ashita harusame	Little by little is bent.
Kyo furinu	So also if this
Asu sae fureba	Gentle rain lasts one more day
Wakana tsumitemu	At last we'll pluck spring herbs.

Motif The poem expresses the poetess's joy at the approach of spring experienced as she watched the spring rains falling.

I:21 Emperer Koko (When Emperer Koko was still Crown Prince, he sent someone spring herbs along with this poem.)

Kimi ga tame	I went into the fields
Haru no no ni idete	To gather spring herbs for you
Wakana tsumu	And, as I plucked them,
Waga koromode ni	Gathered on my dampened sleeves
Yuki wa furitsutsu	The falling snow.

Motif This poem expresses the depth of the emperor's love by means of a simple description of an action. Its understatement lends emphasis to its message, which clearly comes straight from the heart.

I:22 Ki no Tsurayuki (Composed and presented in obedience to an imperial command.)

Kasugano no	Those girls setting out
Wakana tsumi ni ya	To gather young spring herbs,
Shirotae no	Their white sleeves fluttering,
Sode furihaete	Do they urge each other on
Hito no yukuramu	To Ancient Kasuga's green fields?

Motif The gentle calm of early spring is accentuated by the contrast of speaker and girls, of past and present, of two capitals, and of two colors, green and white.

I:23 Arihara no Yukihira (Circumstances unknown.)

\* Translated by Brower & Miner (201)

Haru no kiru	The robe of haze
Kasumi no koromo	Now worn by Spring must indeed be
Nuki o usumi	woven
Yamakaze ni koso	Of threads of gossamer
Midaru bera nare	For the slightest breath of the mountain
	wind
	Seems to rend it into shreds.

Motif Through the novel metaphor, a spring scene is evoked with a strong touch of fantasy.

I:24 Minamoto no Muneyuki (Composed at the poetry contest held in the palace of the Empress in the Kampo era: 889-898.)

\* Translated by Brower & Miner (176)

Tokiwa naru	Spring has come,
Matsu no midori mo	And even the pines, constant in their
Haru kureba	green
Ima hitoshio no	Through eternity
Iro masarikeri	Now turn, still more and more
	To advancing depth of color.

Motif The poem's overtones subtly imply that other trees too are covering themselves in the full glory of spring.

I:25 Ki no Tsurayuki (Composed and presented in obedience to an imperial command.)

Waga seko ga	Each year I spread out
Koromo harusame	My love's unstitched robes to dry
Furu goto ni	The green fields brighter
Nobe no midori zo	As the cleansing rains of spring
Iro masarikeru	Gently refresh all things.

Motif According to Motoori Norinaga's *Tokagami* (Okubo, 38) the poem was written from a woman's perspective. It is worth noting that this method of composition- the adoption of a female point of view - was employed even in works to be presented to the emperor. It seems apparent that in certain circles readers accepted the conventions of poetry composed by men from a woman's point of view. In other words, circles existed in which works whose basis was fundamentally removed from the poet - fictional poems - were accepted.

Katagiri (926) considers that this poem was "byobu uta" or a "screen poem". Screens painted in the Japanese tradition were produced for auspicious occasions. For this purpose it was commonplace to have poets prepare written works ahead of time, to be read out aloud in front of the painted screen on the actual day. It is likely that an explanation of the scene was given. Through doing this the audience entered into the world of the painting, and could appreciate the poems from the perspective of those depicted on the screen (Katagiri, 926). In this instance, a poem composed and presented in obedience to an imperial command, it can be thought that the occasion at which the screen and poem were unveiled was a pleasant one. In fact this atmosphere of "pleasure" is indicative of the fictional world which the presentation of the poem read aloud aimed to create (Katagiri, 927).

I:26 Ki no Tsuyaraki (Composed and presented in obedience to an imperial command.)

Aoyagi no	Spring only shows such
Ito yori kakuru	Sweet disorder - wind - twisted
Haru shi mo zo	Threads of willow
Midarete hana no	And buds unraveling into
Hokorobinikeru	Tangled blossoms on the bough.

Motif The passage of seasons following a most delicate order is depicted analytically. It employs a metaphor of describing nature through

domestic tasks.

The verbs “to twist into threads”, “to disorder”, and “to become unraveled” are associated with “thread”. Consequently a spring scene is described as paralleling the process of sewing. The implications involved produce an overlapping effect. (Suzuki, 11) Comparison of willow fronds to threads is also found in Six Dynasties poetry (Konishi, 163).

I:27 Bishop Henjo (Composed on the willows by Nishidera Temple.)

Asamidori	See how the pale green
Ito yori kakete	willow fronds
Shiratsuyu o	On which the dew is threaded
Tama ni mo nukeru	Like crystal beads,
Haru no yanagi ka	Display spring’s pliant softness.

Motif The poem describes the supple delicacy of new willow shoots, covered with dew, in early spring. The comparison of the pearly dew to beads is found in a verse by Po-Chi (Ota, 68).

I:28 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Momochidori	In spring when myriads
Saezuru haru wa	Of birds of every kind
Mono goto ni	Sing for every joy,
Aratamaredomo	All things on earth renew themselves
Ware zo furiyuku	While I alone grow old.

Motif The poem implies the Buddhist concept of impermanence, which has been described through contrasting the repeating cycles of nature, and accordingly people’s lives, to their subjection to the inevitable changes of time. This was actually a Chinese literary convention which originated in a verse by the Tang Poet, His-yi Liu (Kaneko, 486).

I:29 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Ochikochi no	Deep in the mountains
Tazuki mo shiranu	Where the wayfarer wanders
Yamanaka ni	Lost, the cuckoo cries,
Obotsukanaku mo	Mournfully, someone seeking,
Yobukodori kana	And fills his heart with strange fears.

Motif The poem expresses the strange, uneasy sensations occurring in the poet's mind upon hearing the eerie cries of the cuckoo in an unknown mountain.

I:30 Oshikochi no Mitsune (Composed upon hearing the cry of the wild geese and remembered a friend serving a post in the Hokuriku district, in north-western Japan.)

Haru kureba	When spring has come
Kari kaerunari	And the geese fly northwards home,
Shirakumo no	Would I now ask them
Michiyukiburi ni	As through the white clouds they wing
Koto ya tsutemashi	To great my long-banished friend.

Motif The destination of the departing wild geese inspired the poet to expand the bounds of his literary imagination. The poet associated this fancy with the Chinese legend<sup>4</sup> of the wild geese bearing tidings. The north where Mitsune's friend is serving a post represents the destination of the departing wild geese. It is associated with both the bleak, inhospitable borderland of the Gobi Desert where Su Wu was sent and subsequently held captive by barbarians, and with the locality where many administrative officials were dispatched (Kojima, 1973, 517-520).

I:31 Lady Ise (A poem on the departing geese.)

Harugasumi	The geese fly off,
Tatsu o misutete	Forsaking the gath'ring mists
Iku kari wa	Of spring, for they have
Hana naki sato ni	Learned to live contentedly

Sumi ya naraeru

In a land where no flow'rs bloom.

Motif When she saw the wild geese depart for a flowerless land choosing not to wait to enjoy the spring flowers that were soon to bloom, Lady Ise was filled with regret. However at the same time her poetic imagination moved on into the external world of literary convention. This poem is on the departing wild geese associated with the Chinese notion of the borderland of the Gobi Desert. Their destination, in this poem, is referred to as “hana naki sato”, “flowerless land”. Taking into consideration that there is another poem (No.15) in the *Kokinshu* containing the phrase “flowerless land”, it is possible to infer that this phrase was used to evoke poetic imagery, for the people at the contest where it was composed. This would allow their imagination to go beyond the materialistic world, and so move across to the external world - the bleak, inhospitable border land of the Gobi Desert (Kojima, 1976, 309-316).

I:32 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Oritsureba	The fragrance of the
Sode koso nioe	Flowering branch I plucked clings
Ume no hana	To my sleeve: the happy
Ari to ya koko ni	Warbler sings as he wonders
Uguisu no naku	Where the blossoms are hidden.

Motif The poem expresses surprise at the call of the warbler coming from somewhere nearby, where no flowers are to be seen.

I:33 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Iro yori mo	Not the blossoms' hue
Ka koso aware to	Was it that moved my heart so.
Omoyure	Ah, whose sleeve jostled
Taga sode fureshi	The plum blossoms by my gate
Yado no ume zo mo	And left behind such incense?



Motif The description of incense on one's sleeve being transmitted onto the plum blossoms is implying some human affair taking place in the background of this poem.

I:34 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Yado chikaku	I'll never plant a
Ume no hana ueji	Plum-tree by my eaves, waiting
Ajikinaku	For my love, t' would break
Matsu hito no ka ni	My heart, so oft mistaking
Ayamatarekeri	Its scent for his robe's incense.

Motif The poem expresses the poetess' longing for her lover as being stronger than her admiration of the sweet perfume of plum blossoms. The metaphorical use of the expression "ayamatarikeru", "to end up mistaking for something else", is a direct translation of an equivalent character found in Chinese verses (Ando, 21).

I:35 Anonymous (Circumstances unknown.)

Ume no hana	I merely brushed by
Tachiyoru bakari	A plum tree's blossoming bough.
Arishi yori	So heavy was its
Hito no togamuru	Scent, my love reviled me for
Ka ni zo shiminuru	Wearing another's perfume.

Motif Whilst relating his enjoyment of the strong perfume of the plum blossoms he found on his way, the poet hints at some human affair associated with it.

I:36 Minamoto no Tokiwa (Composed when I plucked plum blossoms.)

Uguisu no	The warbler weaves
Kasa ni nuu to iu	Plum blossoms into a shade.
Ume no hana	Shall I too pluck them

Orite kazasamu	And weave me a flow'ry wreath
Oi kakuru ya to	To hide my withered cheek?

Motif As the poet appreciated the loveliness of plucked plum blossoms, he was overcome with joy.

This poem is an allusive variation of “Aoyagi”, or “Pale Green Willow”, a popular “saibara”<sup>5</sup> (Takano, 163-198).

I:37 Priest Sosei (Circumstances unknown.)

Yoso ni nomi	Seen even far off
Aware to zo mishi	How deep their beauty stirs me.
Ume no hana	But only pluck and
Akanu iro ka wa	Hold the blossoms in my hand,
Orite narikeri	Their charm is joy forever.

Motif While expressing the charm of plum blossoms held before his eyes, the poet hints at some human affair associated with it.

I:38 Ki no Tomonori (Composed when I picked a bough of plum blossoms to be sent to someone.)

Kimi narade	Who else is meet but
Tare ni ka misemu	You to send this flow'ry bough?
Ume no hana	He alone enjoys
Iro o mo ka o mo	Its hue and scent who can
Shiru hito zo shiru	No other man may know.

Motif According to Takeoka Masao (322) it is possible that the plum blossoms of this poem represent feminine beauty. In that case we should infer that Tomonori wrote this poem from the perspective of a woman who is attempting to woo her lover with her charm.

“Ume no hana” or “plum blossoms” of the third line is connected in

meaning both to the preceding line and to the following line. The device of using a five syllable noun to express the name of an object in the third line connected to both preceding and following lines, whilst also found in the *Manyoshu*, is conspicuous in the poems of the *Kokinshu*. This indicates that the seven-five syllable rhythm pattern, in which the 5-7 ← 5 → 7-7 pattern is set very firmly both in meaning and form, had strengthened its position. Thus on the other hand, the five-seven syllable rhythm pattern which developed from the “choka”<sup>6</sup> or “long poem” had declined. (Morishige, 234)

The content of English translations of this poem varies depending upon how its motif is understood:

Translation by Rodd (60)

(Plucking a spray of plum blossoms  
and sending it to a friend.)

my lord if not to  
you to whom should I show these  
blossoms of the plum-  
for you understand the joys  
of the fragrance and splendor

Translation by McCullough (21)

(On breaking off plum blossoms  
sending them to someone.)

Blossoms of the plum!  
To whom am I to show them  
unless it be to you  
you who alone can savor  
color and fragrance alike?

I:39 Ki no Tsurayuki (Composed at Mt. Kurafu.)

Ume no hana

Niou harube wa

Kurafuyama

Yami ni koyuredo

Shiruku zo arikeru

So strong the perfume

Of the blossoms in spring

That even crossing

Gloomy Mt. Kurafu at night

You'd know they're blooming there.

Motif The poet describes his actual experience of feeling directly the arrival of spring in the shadowy mountains.

I:40 Oshikochi Mitsune (Composed on a moonlit night when I picked

a bough of plum blossoms for someone who had asked for them.)

Tsukiyo ni wa	On moonlight nights when
Sore to mo miezu	Our dazzled eyes confuse
Ume no hana	Brilliance and blossoms
Ka o tazunete zo	Yet, if we seek their fragrance
Shirubekarikeru	We are drawn to where they are.

Motif Kojima (1975, 43-44) claims that the theme about the scent of plum blossoms adrift in the shadowy night is seen in the verses of Tang poets, including Po Chu-i.

I:41 Oshikochi Mitsune (Composed on the plum blossoms on a spring night.)

Haru no yo no	On a moonless night
Yami wa ayanashi	In spring, in vain the shadows
Ume no hana	Hide the pale blossoms
Iro koso miene	From our eyes, they cannot quench
Ka ya wa kakururu	The fragrance that betrays them.

Motif The theme of this poem is again the scent of plum blossoms adrift in the shadowy night, influenced by the verses of Tang poets.

Masaoka Shiki (301) commented:

I am amazed at all the trouble which was taken to string together 31 syllables when it would have been quite sufficient to say “The plum blossoms send forth their perfume in the shadows of night”. However this can be overlooked since it must have been something unusual in those remote days. . . . . It seems that the contrivance of using hyperbole to describe a trifling matter is one of the major causes of poetic depravity.

Watsuji Tetsuro (116) also referred to the same poem and stated:

The scent of plum blossoms was something of which the *Manyōshū* poets knew very little. It was totally new grounds for the *Kokinshū* poets that they specially directed their attention to the scent of blossoms adrift in the shadows of night. However it also demonstrated their poetic decadence that they could not consider themselves to be satisfied unless they achieved a theoretical conclusion: “the shadows of night are there in vain - even if they can hide the color of blossoms from their eyes, they cannot hide their existence because of their strong perfume; accordingly such shadows of night do not serve their purpose.

Both Shiki and Watsuji stated that the use of the scent of plum blossoms in poetry was new to the *Kokinshū* poets. They both also scathingly criticized these works without verifying the background of the poet’s awareness of the scent.

Is it true that the scent of plum blossoms was “something of which the *Manyōshū* poets knew very little”, as Watsuji stated? In the *Manyōshū*, out of 36 poems on plum blossoms, there is only one poem (No. 4500 by Prince Ichihara) which refers to the scent. In that poem the word “ka” or “scent” appears (Takano, 6). Out of 86 examples of the verb “niou”, mostly used in reference to color, there are only four instances of it which refer to the sense of smell (Ihara, 114-133).

This deficiency does not necessarily verify the presumption that poets of the Nara era knew very little of the scent of plum blossoms. In the contemporary *Kaifuso*, the first collection of Chinese verse by Japanese poets, compiled in 751, there are a number of examples of the scent of plum blossoms (Kojima, 1977, 1335). As Kojima (1965, 13) stated, those examples show the profound influence exerted by, and the careful imitation of Chinese poetry of the Six Dynasties (228-589) and early Tang period. It is worth noting that nineteen of the total 64 poets in the *Kaifuso* had their Japanese poems included in the contemporary

Japanese anthology, the *Manyoshu* (Kurumisawa, 6). Two verses on the scent of plum blossoms in the *Kaifuso* were composed at banquets. This indicates that the scent of plum blossoms, a poetic theme of Chinese origin, had already been recognized by the pre-*Kokinshu* poets. Taking these factors into consideration, we should appreciate the positive approaches taken by the *Kokinshu* poets, demonstrated in their efforts to assimilate the Chinese theme of the scent of plum blossoms into the Japanese poetic style.

## Conclusion

In this paper I examined the relevancy of interpretations and translations of only 41 poems of the total 1,100 poems in the *Kokinshu*. Surprisingly, 34 percent of those poems were composed by assimilating elements of Chinese poetic imagery and diction mirroring cultural and aesthetic changes. On these grounds I suggest that the assessment of the *Kokinshu's* literary value should be undertaken through understanding that the work reveals a process in which its contributors attempted to assimilate foreign elements into the Japanese literary tradition, placing less emphasis on the value of lyrics. The *Kokinshu* will be duly recognized only when it is analyzed in accordance with the circumstances that were current when its poems were written.

## Notes

1. Joyce Ackroyd (1918-1986) wrote widely on Japanese language, literature and culture. Her publications include *Lessons From History, Arai Hakuseki's Tokushi Yoron* (University of Queensland Press, 1982) and *Told Round a Bushwood, The Autobiography of Arai Hakuseki* (Columbia University Press, 1995).
2. For the transferring and transliterations of Japanese texts, I quoted *Kokin Wakashu* by Ozawa (Ozawa, 1971).
3. The *Classic of Poetry: Shih Ching*, one of the five Confucian books, is an anthology of 305 Chinese poems from the Chou period (twelfth to third century B.C.).
4. Su Wu was a famous retainer of the early Han Dynasty. Whilst on a assignment to the Huns, nomads in the northern part of China who often threatened the Han, he was captured and detained for nineteen years. By sending a message tied to the

- leg of a wild goose to Wu Ti, Su Wu was able to inform Emperor Wu that he was still alive.
5. “Saibara” is a type of folk song that became popular after the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. The derivation of its name is unclear. The words of Nara era folk songs were largely borrowed and arranged to the melodies of imported Tang music, namely “gagaku”. They were sung at noblemen’s banquets and Buddhist masses held at temples (Takano, 163-198).
  6. The “choka” or long poem is comprised of an indefinite number of five and seven syllable line pairs, with an additional seven syllable line at the end to which one or more “hanka” or envoy may be added (Brower & Miner, 4).

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