

COLT 264 Finals

Stanley Hong

Due May 9, 2023

Part I. Short Answers (25%). Question 1 is worth 5 points. All other questions in this section are worth 4 points. Responses should be 100-150 words (with the exception of question 1.)

Problem 1. When did the Heian period begin and end?

The Heian period began in 794 and ended in 1185.

Problem 2. What is the moral lesson of "The Ricepoop Saint" (*Japanese Tales*)?

The overt moral lesson of "The Rice-Poop Saint" revolved around honesty. The saint claimed to have given up eating grain, a virtuous yet difficult decision (131), which earned him the respect of the emperor. However, he was exposed by the young courtiers who saw his feces full of rice, and he ran away. The tragic ending of the Rice-Poop Saint served as a cautionary tale against dishonesty and hypocrisy, particularly in matters of religious and moral virtue. By lying to gain the emperor's respect, the Rice-Poop Saint ultimately faced humiliation and met a terrible end.

The covert moral lesson concerned the danger of blindly accepting a person's claims. Emperor Montoku, having believed the Rice-Poop Saint's deceptive assertions, granted him high social status and a residence in the imperial garden (131), despite the saint's dishonesty. This underscored the importance of questioning and verifying the truth, rather than naively trusting others' claims without scrutiny.

Problem 3. In "The Tale of Two Nursemaids," what is the Dragon King's opinion of a traditional Heian-style aristocratic upbringing for a girl?

The Dragon King held contrasting opinions to the traditional Heian-style aristocratic upbringing for a girl, as demonstrated by her way of teaching the elder sister. In opposition to Heian standards of elegance and manners, she instructed the elder sister in the crude manner of a commoner. Under her guidance, the elder sister played in the style of *biwa hōshi* (1117) at the full moon gathering, which "had nothing to do with elegant music" (1117). In her letter of advice, the Dragon King also recommended being ill-tempered and angry at times (1122), which not only went against the Heian ideals of feminine elegance but also suggested disloyalty in male-female relationships. The "rude" manner in which the Dragon King raised the elder sister indicated her dissenting opinion regarding traditional Heian aristocratic feminine standards, which was further emphasized by contrasting her approach with that of the Lady of the West.

Problem 4. Discuss how Buddhism is suggested to be superior to fox enchantment in "Touched in the Head" (*Japanese Tales*).

The superiority of Buddhism over supernatural fox enchantment can be seen when Yoshifuji was first brought out of the storehouse. As his family prayed, the eleven-headed Kannon, a Buddhist deity, arrived at Yoshifuji's "new house." Then the entire household of fox-enchanted people fled in terror (117), allowing Yoshifuji to escape the storehouse. This demonstrated that the power of Buddhism could dominate the evil foxes. Furthermore, the transformative power of Buddhism proved superior to fox enchantment. Although the foxes lured Yoshifuji into being "touched in the head," the intervention of Kannon ultimately saved him and helped restore his true self (118). By reversing the effects of fox enchantment, the cleansing power of Buddhism was capable of saving a lost man like Yoshifuji from the charms of the foxes.

Problem 5. In "The Awakening" (*Japanese Tales*), the Buddhist deity Kokūzō manifests as a beautiful woman to a habitually procrastinating monk. In doing so, what is Kokūzō's purpose and method?

As the self-dissatisfied monk came to Hōrinji to pray for scholarly talent, Kokūzō wanted to inspire the procrastinating monk. Knowing that the monk was drawn to women, Kokūzō manifested as a beautiful woman to "guide" him. Giving him constant support, Kokūzō offered *her* body for his successful memorization of Lotus Sutra (254), and offered to be together after the monk had become a scholar. Throughout the process, she constantly checked on him (256), and as a result he never forgot his promise with her, as the monk said, "Anyway, she's made all the difference for my own studies" (256). Instead of granting him scholarly talent directly, Kokūzō provided guidance and *awakened* his scholarly success through his own work, dedication, and perseverance.

Problem 6. In the opening passage of *Hōjōki* ("An Account of a Ten-Foot-Square-Hut"), what does the foam on the water signify?

"The foam ... now vanishing, now forming, never stays the same for long" (624), as Chōmei wrote in *Hōjōki*. The "foam on the water" acted as a metaphor for the impermanence of things, a central theme in *Hōjōki* and in Buddhist philosophy. Moreover, Chōmei extended the impermanence to people and the dwellings of the world (624). Houses may be rebuilt or changed, and the people who live in them moved in and out through the cycles of reincarnation, birth and death (624). Using the description of the foam on the water as a hook, Chōmei highlighted the impermanence of life and relationships. This, in turn, foiled his understanding of this Buddhist theme and his reactions: through living in solitary in his ten-foot-square-hut.

Part II. Essay questions (75%). Respond to three of the following four prompts. Each response should be a coherent, highly polished discussion of 450-650 words. Carefully chosen citations can and should be used as evidence to support your argument, but it is not necessary to provide lengthy plot summaries.

Problem 7. Characterize different orientations toward nature and natural phenomena encountered in at minimum 3 of this semester's readings or films.

Throughout the history of Japanese literature, various authors have expressed their unique perspectives on nature and the impermanence it represents. The Heian period was no exception. While some writers, like Ono no Komachi, utilized nature as a medium to convey emotions and experiences, others, such as Sei Shōnagon in *The Pillow Book*, celebrated nature's beauty and wonder. In contrast, authors like Kamo no Chōmei in *Hojōki* drew attention to the destructive power of natural phenomena and the suffering it brought to human life. The exploration of different orientations towards nature illustrated a diverse range of emotions it could evoke, while also reflecting the broader philosophical understanding of nature's impermanence and the relationship between the natural world and humanity.

In one of Ono no Komachi's poem (25), she employed imagery to convey emotions by describing nature. Comparing her desire to follow someone "like a ripple that chases the breeze" (25), she generated a sense of vulnerability in herself. By metaphorically presenting herself as a ripple, she suggested that she would follow the other person with grace and care. The poems by Ono no Komachi, often inspired by her interactions with nature, utilized nature as a medium to convey personal feelings. Using figurative language, the Ono no Komachi visualized her emotions through comparing them with tangible experiences with nature.

In "In Spring It is the Dawn" in *The Pillow Book*, Sei Shōnagon captured the essence of each season to celebrate the beauty and wonder of nature. Through her vivid descriptions, she invited the reader to experience the moments of the day that embodied the beauty of nature in each season. For instance, in describing the summer night, she exclaimed "how beautiful it is!" (249) to express her admiration towards the atmosphere of summer night with moonlight, fireflies and even rain (249). Instead of infusing personal emotions evoked by interacting with nature, Sei Shōnagon focused her attention to her interactions with nature in each season. By describing a simple yet sterling experience with the nature, she encouraged the readers to embrace the offering of nature throughout the changing seasons.

Kamo no Chōmei's account for nature was drastically different from the other two. Unlike Ono no Komachi and Sei Shōnagon, who expressed the beautiful aspect of nature, Kamo no Chōmei described nature's hazardous side in *Hojōki*. Recounting natural disasters like the Kyoto fire in 1177 that "engulfed one-third of the capital" (625) and the famine and earthquake that broke out during the Yowa era (627), Kamo no Chōmei illustrated the flipside of nature's beauty in natural disasters and suggested the powerlessness of humanity against nature. He then used this to connect with the philosophical theme of impermanence, both in humanity and in nature.

The impermanence of everything undoubtedly exists in nature and natural phenomena as well. As different people had different experiences with nature, it's not surprising to see radically different accounts and emotions towards the "same" nature in literary works. These diverse perspectives on nature found in the works of Ono no Komachi, Sei Shōnagon, and Kamo no Chōmei highlight the multifaceted relationship that humanity has with the natural world.

Problem 8. In the beginning of the semester when we first read "The Sparrow's Gifts" from *Japanese Tales*, we observed that animals can function as "agents of karma" - that is, they can furnish rewards or mete out punishment according to a system of cosmic justice. Is that observation universally valid when it comes to snakes? Discuss how snakes can mean starkly different things in at least three narrative contexts.

I "crossed" this question out - I chose to not attempt this question but the other 3 instead.

Problem 9. In the film *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, lady Sagami trains the princess in court etiquette and teaches her techniques for achieving the Heian standard of feminine beauty, a plot element that is not present in the Heian-era *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*. Explain how this added element - and the depictions of the princess's response to it - indicate a twenty-first-century reception of the Heian narrative.

In *the Tale of Princess Kaguya*, the addition of the plot element involving Lady Sagami includes a more modern perspective to the classic tale, highlighting aspects of the Heian society that may be unfamiliar or even shocking to the contemporary audience. The depiction of Kaguya-Hime's resistant behavior also introduced the modern audience to the artificiality of courtly life in the Heian period, prompting reflection on societal values.

Lady Sagami's teachings aligned with the strict beauty standards and etiquette of the Heian period, informing the 21-st century viewers about the societal expectations of Heian aristocrats. A significant part of Lady Sagami's teachings involved grooming Kaguya-Hime to adhere to the Heian standards of feminine beauty and court etiquette. She trained her in the art of poetry, calligraphy, and music, instructing her to behave with poise and elegance. The readers of *Taketori Monogatari* in the Heian period would be aware of the aristocratic standards, so they wouldn't be surprised by Lady Sagami teaching Kaguya-Hime these cultural practices. However, the viewers of *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* would not be as familiar with the Heian standards. In fact, the Heian societal norms of a well-refined woman were quite different from the modern norms, both in terms of appearance and behavior. Therefore, the addition of Lady Sagami's plot element was beneficial as it provided a more detailed background and a more accurate depiction of Heian culture, making the story more accessible and engaging for the 21st-century viewers.

Lady Sagami's training epitomized the strict Heian aristocratic standards, the shackles that bind Kaguya-Hime's actions and emotions. Longing for a simpler life she had in the countryside, Kaguya-hime initially resisted the noble teaching and practices. She pranked Lady Sagami during the teaching and did almost the opposite of what she was instructed to. She also refused to apply a makeup with white face powder and blackened teeth, which was viewed as "pretty" by Heian standards. By depicting Kaguya-Hime's resistant behaviors, the film invited the audience to question the values of the Heian aristocratic society and explore the tension between societal expectations and personal desires and individuality, a common theme that was still relevant in modern Japan. The Heian-era answer to the question was conveyed through Kaguya-Hime's eventual compliance, implying that adherence to societal norms often outweighed personal happiness and fulfillment.

By presenting the Heian cultural practices and beauty standards in a more detailed and nuanced manner, the film demonstrated the creators' awareness of the need to educate and inform 21st-century viewers about the historical context of the narrative. Not only did the film introduce modern audience to the Heian aristocratic standards of beauty and elegance, but it also introduced the readers to the conflict between societal norms and personal desires. This approach to adapting the Heian-era tale ensured that modern audiences could appreciate the story's cultural significance while also critically examining its relevance to contemporary society.

Problem 10. Rewrite a *Japanese Tale* or an episode from *The Tales of Ise* assigned in class in a way that conveys a *Rashōmon*-like, multi-perspectival presentation of what might have happened. Include at the end a few sentences about what you found to be challenging about such a project.

I am rewriting "The Well-Curb" from *Ise Monogatari* (191).

The Wife's Perspective

After my parents died, he became more like a stranger at times. He left our home in the direction of Kōchi more frequently than before. Every time he left for Kōchi, I would carefully apply my makeup and compose a poem, praying that he would return to me. Sometimes he did, but sometimes he didn't. I held onto the memories of our shared past, of our childhood innocence playing by the well-curb, but I couldn't help but question our relationship. The uncertainty ate away at my heart, and I wondered if he still cherished our bond like I did.

One day, I found myself particularly lost in thought. I composed a poem, sincerely asking if he would be crossing Mount Tatsuta alone at night. I was worried about him, and I was worried about our relationship. Dear, have you forgotten our tender memories and left me for another? Would you remember our love and return to me? Perhaps the Buddha heard my prayers, and he was back one day.

The Takayasu Woman's Perspective

I was captivated by his charm the very first time I met him. Since then, every time I thought he would come and meet me, I took great care of myself to appear refined and polished - just like how an aristocrat would dress, behave, and act - only to make myself worthy of his affection. I was optimistic about our relationship; he *never* mentioned having a wife. I would never allow myself to fall for him even if he only gave me a hint, perhaps resisting intimate actions or mentioning his family. Now I am still ashamed by that I fell in love with a taken man.

However, as time went by, he started visiting me less frequently. One day, as he left my room, I never thought it was the last time I could see him. I was confused; I was hurt. I couldn't understand what I had done wrong. I waited for him, my love never wavering. Gazing into the distance and thinking of him, I composed poem after poem. But he never returned. What a *kataomoi*!

The Husband's Perspective

My intentions were misunderstood from the first moment. I was not seeking the Takayasu woman's companionship or love; I wanted to test my wife's loyalty. I had grown suspicious, fearing that she was visiting others during my absences; and there is *nothing wrong* with that. I maintained a distance from the Takayasu woman, never allowing myself to become involved. My heart remained with my wife, treasuring our shared childhood memories and the bond we had built.

Once, as I hid in the shrubbery, I heard my wife recite a poem filled with sadness and longing. It was then when I realized her true loyalty, and I felt a renewed sense of love for her. There was no more need to continue my visits to the Takayasu woman. I immediately stopped going to Kōchi and our lives returned to their previous harmony.

It *was* indeed difficult. As *Rashōmon* revolved around one event, I had to shorten the story to emphasize on the latter part on the husband's visit of the Takayasu woman. Additionally, I had a hard time balancing contrary views. Aiming to include a subjective plot twist affected by the biases like how *Rashōmon* did, I had to balance between the logical fluency with respect to the speakers' own perspectives and the overall contradictory theme. The original story was also structured so that I couldn't include an omniscient POV of an "audience" like *Rashōmon*.