

Japanese *Kanshi*: A Special Story of Poetry

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a unique literary phenomenon of Japanese *kanshi* poetry. Since early times, Japanese literature has consisted of two branches, one composed in Japanese and the other in Chinese. The former was transmitted orally until a written system came into being in the eighth century, and the latter has always been written in the Chinese language and based on the set literary form of Chinese. This paper aims to explore the feature of this poetic form and its English translator Burton Watson's view based on the Stylistics theory. Specifically, the paper first reviews the development of *kanshi* and how it was influenced by traditional Japanese verses. Next, the paper investigates its relationship with classical Chinese poetry, and a deeper understanding of classical Japanese and Chinese poetry could be gained via comparisons between poetic features, including themes, forms, imagery, rhetorical devices and aesthetics demonstrated in *kanshi*, *haiku*, *shi* and *ci*. This paper finds that though the Japanese *kanshi* takes the form of classical Chinese poetry, its poetic features and aesthetics are more to the taste of Japanese literary tradition and thus should be appreciated in its own term. This special style of *kanshi* poetry deserves more attention from both the reader and scholar.

Keywords: Burton Watson; classical Chinese poetry; Japanese poetry; *kanshi*; poetic features

1. Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to attract wider attention to a marginalized form of poetry—Japanese *kanshi* and allow readers to better appreciate this special kind of verse. To achieve the goal, the paper investigates the development and poetic features of *kanshi* and exemplifies how it is approached in English. Specifically, the paper discusses its relationship with classical Chinese poetry, and a deeper understanding of this form of Japanese poetry could be gained via comparisons between poetic features among *kanshi*, *haiku*, *shi* and *ci*. The paper uses the stylistics theory as methodology. According to Boase-Beier's (2020) Stylistics theory, the study of style in translation practice concerns not only the source text and its author but also the target text and translator. This has two layers of implications. First,

the translator should be aware of the style of the source language and his or her own translation style; second, the reader of the target text should also be clear-minded about the style of the source language and the translator's style. Therefore, the paper will explore the style of *kanshi* by comparing it with classical Chinese poetry in various aspects, including poetic forms, imagery, themes, rhetoric devices and aesthetics. Also, this paper provides views of Burton Watson, as a translator, on this kind of poetry.

2. Body of Paper

2.1 Literature Review

Japanese Chinese poetry, known as *kanshi*, appeared in the mid-seventh century. It gradually quit the Japanese literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, *kanshi* has gone through a history of 1,300 years, and it is a result of cultural exchange between China and Japan. According to *The Catalogue of Chinese Poetry in Text and Graph* issued in Tokyo in 1980, there are 769 anthologies of all kinds of *kanshi* poetry, more than 200,000 poems, published in Japan from Nara (710-784) to Meiji (1868-1912) periods (Wu, 2006). The development can be divided generally into four periods. The first period was the initial stage of *kanshi* in the Nara and Heian periods (646-1192); the second stage in the Gozan period (1192-1602) marked the development of *kanshi*; the third period in Edo (1603-1868) witnessed the heyday of *kanshi*; the popularity of *kanshi* began to decline in the fourth period, which was after the Meiji Restoration (1868).

Though *kanshi* is viewed as a marginalized form of literature in China and Japan, there are some important achievements in the study of *kanshi*. The first comprehensive *kanshi* anthology *Selection of Dongying Poetry* was composed in 1882 by a Chinese scholar Yu Yue (Wu, 2006), and in the recent two decades, there is a resurgence of studies on Japanese *kanshi* in China, such as Xiao Ruifeng's *History of Japanese Kanshi* (Jilin University Press, 1992), Ma Gedong's *Three Hundred Japanese Kanshi Poems* (World Publishing Organization, 1994), and *Comparative Study of the Source of Japanese kanshi* (China Social Science Press, 2004), to name a few. *Kanshi* studies in China are gaining more attention and are becoming more systematic. Research of *kanshi* in Japan began earlier and their studies are more detailed. Essential works of Japanese scholars are represented by Kenjiro Makino's *Japanese Sinology History* (World Hall Press, 1939), and Hiroshi Ishida's *Introduction of Chinese Literature* (Yuzankaku Press, 1983), among others. However, despite these achievements in *kanshi* studies, researches in this area are far from enough, and more attention should be paid to the unique characteristics of *kanshi*, and the value of this special form of poetry lies in its difference from, instead of similarity to, classical Chinese poetry.

2.2 Characteristics of Early *Kanshi*

Kanshi was originally used by the Japanese to refer to classical Chinese poetry, including those composed by Japanese poets in Chinese poetic etiquette. But it is now a term that only denotes *shi* poems composed by Japanese writers in the Chinese language. In the early period of its development, which is roughly from the seventh to the twelfth centuries, *kanshi* was a total replication of classical Chinese poetry. In fact, the Japanese writer in this period tried very hard to imitate the Chinese original, including its theme, form, dictation, rhetorical devices, rhythm and rhyme patterns, to list a few. While most classical Chinese poems were composed in four-lined “*jueju*” or eight-lined “*lüshi*”, the Japanese poets were more inclined to write *kanshi* in the form of four-lined *jueju* (Zhang, 1993).

The use of Chinese characters greatly propelled the development of Japanese literature and culture. In the early eighth century, *katakana* was created based on radicals of Chinese characters and later in the ninth century, *hiragana* evolved from the cursive script of Chinese characters also took shape. By then, the Japanese own writing system was established (Wu, 2006). Under such circumstances, Chinese characters soon enjoyed great popularity. Japanese literati and scholars all committed themselves to the study of Chinese characters. Chinese literature was regarded as orthodox learning and a symbol of high social status. While during that time, writings in Japanese *kana* were not treated with equal respect. “Fictional story” *Monogatari* was disdained by learned men, especially aristocrats. An extreme example is a writer named Kino Tsurayuki in the ninth and tenth centuries, who pretended to be a female writer in his works composed in *kana*.

For elite Japanese in the past, *kanshi* resembled the character of fatherhood and traditional Japanese poetry motherhood. They liked to express their ideal and aspiration with the former and personal emotions and delicate feelings of nature with the latter. This is especially the case in the early times of *kanshi*, whose composers were limited to the emperor, aristocracies and prestigious monks. Compared with classical Chinese poetry, *kanshi* works composed by the Japanese lack novelty in wording, but it pays great attention to the technique of applying rhetorical devices. One notable characteristic of *kanshi* is its intriguing conceiving of the plot. Specifically, it could be demonstrated in two aspects. First, attaching significance to the transitional line. The four-lined *jueju* usually follows the structure of introduction, follow-up, transition and conclusion, and each line corresponds to a role accordingly. Japanese poets know well that the transitional line is key to the success of a poem and make a great effort to produce excellent-conceived transitional lines. The following is a representative piece for elucidation (the English translation is by the author of the paper if not otherwise noted):

Coldness has not yet turned rain into snowflakes,

What a lovely scene for a pleasant man.
However, under the same roof where the raindrops,
What a sad man hears is only the sound of sorrow.

The first two lines indicate that the coldness has not turned into snow but drizzles, and this is a pleasant view for someone in a good mood. While the third line takes a turn in the meaning by showing the other way of interpreting the scene: although under the same roof, watching the same rain, all a sad person can feel is sorrow. This transition of the third line reveals the gist of this poem: people in different moods see things differently, and the same scene does not necessarily evoke the same emotion from different people or the same person but at different times. With a turn in the third line, reason has been added to the poem for the reader to ponder over, and the taste of the work is also elevated.

The second primary characteristic of *kanshi* is using a new combination of old images to create new scenes. The following piece is a case in point:

By the sycamore tree above the well stands a winch,
who is drawing a cattail rope that stretches a hundred *chi*?
The rumbling sound from the winch interrupts a Taoist's dream,
The moonlight flows westward from where the copper bottle slants.

The name of this poem is called “Dawn, Well, Winch”. As the name suggests, the poem describes a morning scene in front of a Taoist temple. From the first and second lines, we know that in the early morning, a young monk comes to a very deep well by a sycamore tree to get water; in the third line, the rumbling sound from the working winch wakes up a Taoist man from his dream. By now, the story has almost ended, and nothing interesting has happened. However, the last line shows the reader a brand-new perspective and elevates the work to a higher poetic realm presented by a beautiful picture: from the westering water flow, we can see the glittering light of the waning moon. In this poem, all the images are commonly seen, including sycamore trees, wells, winches, ropes, bottles and the moon, among others. The novelty of the poem lies in its unconventional way of presentation of the old images. Different from the common way of appreciating the moonlight which is usually from lakes or rivers, we can also get its beauty from the water pouring out of a bottle. The unexpected but sensible arrangement of the unexpected way to appreciate the moonlight from the flowing water also reflects the peaceful mood of the poet.

The third essential characteristic of *kanshi* is its imitating nature. It is no exaggeration to say that most Japanese *kanshi* works are imitations and could find their stereotypes in the

existing classical Chinese poems. As Burton Watson (1976) puts it: “but for all its linguistic skill, their verse (*kanshi*) seems, to me at least, on the whole disappointingly stereotyped and impersonal in content”. In fact, Watson’s opinion is shared by many academicians and the Japanese *kanshi* is usually criticized for its lack of originality. That being said, there are still merits to be admired in their effort, and some could be better than the Chinese originals.

Concerning the form of *kanshi*, it has something different from classical Chinese poetry. *Kanshi*, as an essential part of ancient Japanese literature, is special since it completely takes the form of foreign literature: classical Chinese poetry. Japanese literati elites in ancient times, before their own literature came into shape, had already accepted the whole idea of classical Chinese poetry and every form it had, which includes the ancient form poetry and the modern form poetry. The latter incorporates four-character, five-character and seven-character *lǔshi*, *jueju* and *changshi* (long poem), and even six-character, eight-character and nine-character poems. Poems constructed in even number character lines are rather rare in China but enjoy relatively greater popularity among Japanese poets.

Another noticeable feature of *kanshi* worth mentioning is that some poets are very good at playing word games. Take the following piece for an example:

班	轶	边	城	久
squad	excel	border	town	long
夕	来	梦	帝	畿
night	come	dream	(vicinity of a capital)	
衿	沾	异	县	泪
(garment’s front)	wet	other	county	tear
衣	缓	故	乡	闾
clothes	slow	(hometown)	(side gates of imperial palace)	
弦	望	年	颇	改
crescent (full moon)		year	rather	change
弓	鞍	力	稍	非
bow	saddle	strength	slight	not
绵	绵	千	里	路
(continuous)		thousand	(length unit)	road
帛	素	寄	双	飞
silk	plain	entrust	(inseparable)	

The squad has garrisoned the border town for long,
Night dream brings me home to the capital.

Homesick tears damp the front of the garment,
which I wear for going back home.
Months and years pass soon,
I can feel my strength weakened when shooting arrows or on the horse.
The road home goes on and on,
the white silk carries a wish for reunion.

This is an acrostic *kanshi*. On first reading, it is just another piece about homesickness and the yearning for loved ones. But if scrutinized carefully, much more information could be gained from the text. For the first couplet (the first two lines), the first character “班” of the first line consists of three radicals from left to right, namely “王”, “夕” and “王”, if the first character of the second line “夕” is removed from the character “班”, then a new character “珣” is produced. The rest three couplets follow the same rule as the first one: if the first character of the fourth line “衣” is removed from the first character of the third line “衿”, which consists of two radicals of “衣” and “今”, we will get the character of “今”; then the two new characters from the first two couplets, namely, “珣” and “今” could be combined into the character “琴”. With the same method, the first characters of the third and fourth couplets are “弦” and “绵”, from which “弓” and “帛” are removed, respectively, “玄” and “糸” would be left to produce another new character “絃”, meaning “string”. The word “琴絃”, which literally means “string of musical instruments”, is usually used in poems to indicate bosom friend. Though the content of the poem is not that artistically creative, it is apparent that the poet has great attainment in the language and cares more about demonstrating his skill in wordplay than conveying his thoughts through this art form.

2.2 Localization of *Kanshi*

When the time came to the Edo period, *kanshi* poets were no longer limited to emperors, aristocracies or monks. Secular Japanese, the Samurai class in particular, began to commit themselves to the study of Confucian classics and Chinese literature in general (Watson, 1976). At the same time, *kanshi* came much closer to Japanese traditional literature as it began to pay attention to personal emotions rather than politics or public events. The shift of the *kanshi* theme from “public” and “elegant” to “individual” and “secular” shows the trend of its development: from admiring and imitating classical Chinese poetry to integrating it with the Japanese’s own literature. In this period, *kanshi* was no longer a rigid imitation of classical Chinese poetry but a poetic form with its own cultural elements. This could be reflected in three aspects. To begin with, using Japanese words in *kanshi*. As is known, although composed by Japanese poets, *kanshi* totally takes the form of classical Chinese

poetry and uses archaic Chinese language, at least in the early period. Nevertheless, the strict poetic rules and diction limit the expression of Japanese culture and taste. Therefore, some poets began to renovate the traditional *kanshi* by adding their own *kana* words, such as “さ ま (sama)”, which is usually written in the Chinese character-like word “様”. It may seem like a Chinese word, but words of this kind are purely constructed by Japanese. Some poets even try to use *katakana* in their practice of *kanshi* composition to foreground unique Japanese characteristics and culture. A case in point is the comment of Kikuti Gozan (1769-1849) on a line of *kanshi* “月新題ノ字” (meaning on the day of a new moon, the character “ノ” should be inscribed). “ノ” is a Japanese *katakana*, which originally should not be in a *kanshi* poem. This *kana* character visually resembles the shape of a crescent moon and could inject novelty in versification, so in this sense, it is no harm to employ a few *katakana* characters occasionally, though this kind of practice should not be encouraged (Ma, 2000). The second aspect of adding Japanese elements to *kanshi* is the representative local scenes in Japan, among which the Fuji Mountain and cherry blossoms are most frequently used. The well-known piece “Fuji Mountain” by Ishikawa Jozan (1583-1672) could be a good example of the former. Besides, the poet expands the scope of theme in *kanshi* by composing poems themed on Japanese peach blossoms, which could be seen as a practice that promotes the localization of *kanshi* in Japan. This is because the theme of a poem is more than just a subject. It also demonstrates the unique perspective or habit of observing things. For example, peach blossoms represent the liveliness of life and the quiet beauty of death in Japanese culture. The nation’s obsession with the peach blossom is a reflection of their respect toward life, their views on life and death and their aesthetic taste embodied by the life of plants. Peach blossom is the epitome of Japanese aesthetics. The third aspect of enriching *kanshi* with Japanese elements should be adding natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, to its themes. Since no such theme could be found in classical Chinese poetry, this is definitely an innovation by Japanese poets.

The Japanese elements in *kanshi* works have always been railed against by Chinese poets and scholars for distorting classical Chinese poetry. However, if appreciated in its own terms, this kind of *kanshi* shows much more characteristics and unique beauty of the Japanese personality. These works, with their special expressions and subjects, could be seen as a sign of maturity of *kanshi*. In fact, the Japanese elements that *kanshi* took in are more than words and certain expressions. Some *kanshi* poets also use materials they found in their traditional poetry forms of *waka* or *haiku* and adapt them into *kanshi* poems. For example, the work of Rikunyo (1734-1801), ‘Morning Glory’ is adapted from the archetype of a *haiku* piece by Kaga no Chiyo, the adapted *kanshi* poem and the original *haiku* piece are as follows:

井	边	移	种	牵	牛	花
well	side	(transplant)		(morning glory)		
狂	漫	攀	栏	又	西	斜
wild	spread	climb	railing	and	westward	slant
汲	纒	无	端	为	渠	夺
(rope)		(unwarranted)	(participle)	vine		snatch
近	来	乞	水	向	邻	家
(near)		ask	water	from	(neighbor)	

By the well side,
 morning-glories I transplanted,
wild tendrils climbing the rail,
 angling this way and that:
before I know it the well rope's
 been completely seized--
now I beg water
 from the house next door.

朝顔に	By morning-glories
釣瓶とられて	my well-bucket's been seized--
もらひ水	borrowing water

Both the translations above are Watson's (1976). It can be seen that both poems are almost the same in terms of the gist: the vines of morning glories have seized *my* well rope/bucket, so instead of getting water from the well, *I* need to go ask for water from others. And their most important distinction lies in their forms, namely *kanshi* and *haiku*. According to Watson (1976), a collection of *tanka* accompanied by *kanshi* adaptations in the form of seven-character *jueju* was compiled in 893-913. From such efforts, we can notice that in its middle and later development, *kanshi* became much more localized and flexible as it absorbed traditional Japanese elements for diction and content. Watson (1976) also provides his explanation of the motivation behind reproducing traditional forms of Japanese poetry in the figure of *kanshi*:

[...] the potential advantages which the *kanshi*, because of its unstrict length, offered for extended passages of description or for the treatment of philosophical, social, or political themes that could not, or by convention would not, be dealt with in native Japanese poetry.

The extremely concise *haiku* form is very suitable for capturing transient and delicate feelings. However, it seems a little constrained to illustrate a more sophisticated theme or emotion in such limited word space, just as evidenced by the above-quoted *haiku* of “Morning Glory” by Kaga no Chiyo. In this work, the poet tries to convey her pity and love for the morning glory as she would rather borrow water from others instead of disturbing the flower which is twining around the bucket. Nevertheless, the reason for her “not willing to hurt the flower” and “borrowing water” is very hard to discern from the *haiku* poem: “By morning glories, my well-bucket’s been seized -- borrowing water”. Readers without any knowledge about the poet or who do not share the same care and passion for this plant would not figure out the connection between the “seized well-bucket” and “borrowing water”. Comparatively, the *kanshi* piece is easier to understand simply because it has more space for explanation.

2.3 Comparison of *Kanshi* and *Shi*

Natural imagery is a special link between Chinese and Japanese poetry. There is no doubt that *kanshi* uses imagery quite similar to those in classical Chinese poems. Take the image of flowers as an example. There are both resemblances and differences in emotions or themes delivered through flower-related poems in *shi* poetry and *kanshi*. In the face of beautiful nature, the same emotions could be evoked in poets from different backgrounds. In spring, poets are naturally drawn to the fascinating scenery of blossoms, and a joyful feeling propels them to generate verses about their fondness for flowers. For instance, in a Tang *shi* poem, there is a well-known sentence from Du Fu’s “Strolling Alone Along the River Bank in Search of Flowers”: “The lane of Huang Siniang is covered with flowers, hundreds and thousands of them weigh down the branches”. These two lines present a spectacular view of blossoms, and the poet describes the flower blooms purely for appreciating their beauty instead of expressing any personal emotion.

In Japanese *kanshi*, the same efforts could be found in Heizei Tenno’s “Song of Peach Blossoms”: “In spring there are hundreds of kinds of blossoms contending with each other, yet the peach blossom is the most adorable”. The poem is full of bright colours and permeated with flowers’ fragrances, which makes it a masterpiece dedicated to capturing the charm of flowers. However, upon seeing the withered flowers, sentimental feelings of poets are aroused over the passing of time and youth, as evidenced by a *shi* piece by the Tang poet Liu Xiyi (651-680) named “Sighing over White Hair”: “each and every year the flowers are alike, but every and each year the people are different”: sighing over the relentless years and change of things. Works of the same spirit could also be found in *kanshi*, such as two lines of

Sugawara no Michizane's "At the End of September, on Decayed Chrysanthemums", the meaning of these two lines are "pitying for the fade of flower and ageing of man, and sighing for the scarce of the remaining years". Lastly, flowers are also employed by Chinese and Japanese poets to express homesickness tactfully in verse. In classical Chinese poetry, there is Li Bai's "Seeing Azalea in the Town of Xuan" indicates the poet's extreme homesickness:

I heard the heartbreaking chirp of cuckoos in Sichuan,
And saw the homesick flower in the town of Xuan.
Every twig of the bird aches my heart,
This time of spring renders me yearning for my hometown Sichuan.

Though in *kanshi*, it is not as often to see such a subject expressed through flower-related poems, there are still cases in point that clearly use the flower as a vehicle for delivering homesickness, such as "Seven Character, en Route in Early Spring" by Michizane:

The plum blossoms at the cold north border have seen no bloom,
The willow catkins are budding in the warm river south.
The road ahead seems endless when you are in sorrow,
For the yearning for the one in my hometown.

Concerning the different emotions or themes conveyed by flower-related poetry between *shi* and *kanshi*, the former often uses flowers to represent the poet himself. Just as the writer and critic Liu Xizai (1978) remarks in *Compendium of Arts*: "Chanting objects invisibly is to express one's aspiration, because the object is the poet himself". Among the flower-themed Tang *shi* poems, a large portion is dedicated to works of "expressing ideal through flowers". Portraying flowers is portraying oneself: a way the poet uses to show either his noble and unsullied character, the grief of unrecognized talents or lofty aspirations etc., for example, Li Shangyin's "Fallen Blossoms" is a work that expresses his distress about the thwarted ambition and ill-fated life through describing flowers which represent himself. This indirectness of expressing personal ideals or emotions consists of important features of flower-related Tang *shi*. Besides, the image of the flower is also frequently used in romantic poems such as "Written in the Village South of the Capital" by Cui Hu (772-846): "the flower-like face is nowhere to be seen, the peach blossoms are still smiling at the spring breeze". While in *kanshi* and classical Japanese poetry, it is neither very common to see political ideals represented by flowers nor to express a good wish for romance by singing the praise of flowers (Yang, 2013). Rather, this kind of poem is mostly composed to demonstrate

fine taste in daily life by describing the beauty and elegance of flowers.

Except for the comparison of what kinds of flowers are used in *kanshi* and *shi* poetry, aesthetic features demonstrated in the flower-related poems in China and Japan also have analogies and differences. Since Japanese *kanshi* is a variant inheritance of classical Chinese poetry, and its early works are mostly imitations of Tang *shi* and Song *ci*, naturally, they have an overlapping area in aesthetics. And with its development in Japan, it has localized by absorbing elements of local literature and culture.

Firstly, both *kanshi* and *shi* poetry have a tendency to show flowers' beauty set off by their delicate scent. This could be evidenced by sentences describing the flower's fragrance from Tang *shi*, such as "The special appeal is implied by its fragrance, and its refined temperament seems to know no cold"; and *kanshi* lines like "The pleasant scent is delivered to the window, and the light and shadow sweep the door". These are all examples of enjoying the beauty of flowers by depicting their fragrance.

Secondly, presenting the luxuriance of flowers is another common way to demonstrate their beauty in such poems. Both Chinese and Japanese poets think the scenery of flowers in full bloom is picturesque. Examples could be again found in Du Fu's description of "hundreds and thousands of blossoms weigh down the branches", or a *kanshi* sentence from Saga Tenno (786-842): "last month the gentle wind brought blooms to the entire tree". The Chinese and Japanese poets have always had a fervour for the lively beauty of the flower.

Chinese poetry critic Li Yuanluo (2016) argues in his book *Poetic Aesthetics* that "The beauty of poetry is a combination of both the objective life itself and the subjective mind. The mentality of the poet as the aesthetic subjectivity has a decisive role to play in feeling, elevating and reflecting the beauty of life". On the one hand, poetic aesthetics is subjected to each individual poet's aesthetic taste; on the other hand, it could also reflect a nation's general aesthetic tendency. The aesthetic differences between the two peoples decide variances in their ways of appreciation. One of the most distinguished variances should be the unique Japanese predilection for "mono no aware" or "pathos of things", an aesthetic pursuit of expressing one's inner sadness through the description of declined or withered natural scenery. The term "mono no aware" comes from Heian period literature and developed in the Edo period. This concept best illustrates exquisite Japanese attention to transience. The word *mono* 物 means "things", and *aware* 哀れ is usually translated as "pathos", "awareness", or "sensitivity". And the phrase "mono no aware" denotes a gentle feeling of sadness at the passing of things. With this kind of aesthetics, Japanese poets are more prone to describe the beauty of flowers' decline and capture the mood of sadness over falling petals rather than praise the charm of full bloom. Therefore, Japanese *kanshi* works about falling flowers far outnumber those celebrating the blossom. The plaintive emotion carried by Japanese poetry is

quite different from the value of “to express enjoyment without being licentious and sadness without being heart-breaking” (Confucius, 2016) demonstrated in classical Chinese poems. This is because though classical Chinese poets liked to express emotion through things, Chinese culture under the influence of Confucianism tends to avoid going to extremes.

Another difference between *kanshi* and classical Chinese poetry is that the former is primarily lyrics and is seldom used for expressing aspirations. This is because although *kanshi* is composed in the form of classical Chinese poetry, it is still much influenced by Japanese poetic traditions. To better understand this characteristic of *kanshi*, a comparison should be made between the functions undertaken by the two poetries. Since ancient times, poetry in China has been used as a tool for educating people, as can be demonstrated by the preface to *The Book of Odes*: “Poem is where the emotion roams”. Chinese poets prefer to express their aspirations through lyrical verses, and they pay attention to conveying serious themes and contents through various literary forms, poetry being one of them. Regarding the Japanese poetic tradition, it certainly received influences from Chinese poetry, as written in “Chinese Introduction to Ancient and Modern Poems”: “feelings come from aspiration and odes take the shape of words”, which seems to be influenced by the thought of preface to *The Book of Odes*. However, Japanese *waka* stepped on a different road from that of classical Chinese poetry since it is mainly lyrical verse without expression of aspirations. Japanese men of letters have always loved Bai Juyi’s verses for long time, but their favourites are those about leisure and carefree life and sentimental lyrics. Their quotations from Tang *shi* or Song *ci* are mostly lyrics of scenery, which is decided by the Japanese aesthetic taste or to cater for the complex of “mono no aware”.

There is a distinguished difference in aesthetic taste between the two cultures. Other than the relationship between expressing aspiration and lyrical poetry discussed above, Japanese poetry also differs from classical Chinese poetry in terms of artistic style or methods, and how well a reader understands this distinction would affect the appreciation of a *kanshi* work. Japanese *haiku* poet Morimoto Tetsurou (1925-2014) illustrated the difference between how Chinese and Japanese appreciate poems in the article “Moonlight and Shade of Flowers”, which could shed some light on how to interpret classical Chinese and Japanese poetry. He expounds with Li Bai’s famous lines, “My white hair -- thirty thousand feet! Because of my sorrows, it has grown as long as this” (Waley, 1958) and “Peach Blossom Lake is a thousand feet deep/but it can’t compare with Wang Lun’s love or the way he said goodbye”. In these pieces, the poet’s sorrow and his friendship are quantified into specific amounts: “three thousand *zhang* of grey hair” and “thousand *chi* depth of water” respectively. Obviously, Chinese poets have a tendency to concretize intangible emotion and friendship into something perceptible. Tetsurou points out that Japanese people prefer obscurity over

concreteness, such as the transitioning period between two seasons; or if it comes to rain, the Japanese favour misty drizzles falling now and then in late autumn (Waley, 1958).

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, the above discussions introduce the origin and development of *kanshi*. By making a comparison between *shi*, as in classical Chinese poetry, and *kanshi*, as in the category of Japanese poetry, the similarities and differences between them have been made clear: though *kanshi* imitates the wording and theme of *shi* poetry, it gives special attention to rhetorical devices and composing techniques; *kanshi* poets are good at creating new scenes with ordinary imagery and playing word games; poems in the form of four and six-character *jueju* are much more commonly used in *kanshi* than in classical Chinese poetry. In the later development of *kanshi*, Japanese elements are found in *kanshi* works, including *kana*, local imagery and themes. Through discussion of the image of flower used in the two forms of poetry, delicate disparity in connotation, emotion and aesthetics are reviewed. I propose that *kanshi* poetry, although stereotyped to some extent, has its unique style. Hence it deserves more attention and should be appreciated in its own terms instead of being entirely judged as classical Chinese poetry.

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