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Shirakawa Kinsui: Writing Biographies of Exemplary Women in the Age of Modernization

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Abstract. Following the Meiji Restoration, Japan experienced an unprecedented wave of modernization. At the same time, many early modern cultural phenomena survived well into the Meiji era including the tradition of writing didactic biographies of exemplary women aimed at educating young girls. This article examines a collection of such biographies entitled *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* published by a female scholar Shirakawa Kinsui in 1879. It places her work within a broader historical context and identifies major themes explored therein. The article argues that, while rooted in orthodox Confucian values, the image of a woman Kinsui proffered possessed many qualities shared by men and women alike.

Keywords: Shirakawa Kinsui, female history, exemplary women, Confucianism.

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Сиракава Кинсуй: жизнеописания выдающихся женщин в эпоху модернизации

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Аннотация. После реставрации Мэйдзи Японию захлестнула беспрецедентная волна модернизации. В то же время многие культурные феномены раннего нового времени сохранились и в эпоху Мэйдзи, включая традицию создания дидактических жизнеописаний выдающихся женщин для обучения девочек. Эта статья обращается к сборнику таких жизнеописаний под названием «Хонтё тōси рэцудзёдэн», опубликованному женщиной-учёным Сиракава Кинсуй в 1879 г. Статья помещает её работу в широкий исторический контекст и выделяет основные темы, раскрытые в «Хонтё тōси рэцудзёдэн». Статья отмечает, что образ женщины, который рисует Кинсуй, основывается на ортодоксальных конфуцианских ценностях, но в то же время обладает многими качествами, свойственными как женщинам, так и мужчинам.

Ключевые слова: Сиракава Кинсуй, история женщин, выдающиеся женщины, конфуцианство.

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Introduction

Shirakawa Kinsui (1856–1890) was a female poet, painter, historian, and educator active in Kyoto and Osaka at the beginning of the Meiji era. In 1879, she published *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* (*Biographies of Japan's Exemplary Women by a Female Historian*), a didactic collection of accounts of Japan's exemplary women intended to instill Confucian values in young girls. Kinsui was unusual in a number of ways. Unlike most women of her time, she received a thorough Sinological training at home. She wrote poetry in Chinese and published her first collection of verse when she was only twenty years old. Moreover, having studied western literature and the English language, Kinsui remained loyal to the age-old Confucian tradition in her approach to female education. This makes her an interesting subject for historical research, but for unknown reasons Kinsui and her oeuvre remained forgotten for a century.

In Japan, Kinsui's life and work were first studied by Taga Akigorō (1912–1990), a historian specializing, among other things, in the history of Hida (now Gifu prefecture), Kinsui's native province. In 1986, Taga published an article in which he reconstructed Kinsui's biography and made a few arguments about her approach to education. His work was followed by that of Morioka Yukari, a contemporary scholar, who authored two short papers on Kinsui's poetry and *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*. In this article, I will pick up where Taga and Morioka left. I will place Kinsui's work in a historical context by surveying Chinese and Japanese literary traditions of writing accounts of exemplary women, reconstruct her biography once again synthesizing Taga and Morioka's previous findings, and analyze the contents of *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* to find out more about Kinsui's views on the problem of women.

This is the first study to address Shirakawa Kinsui and her work in a European language. I hope that scholars of female history, the history of literacy and education, local history, and intellectual history will find it useful. Moreover, the findings of this study may be utilized in prosopographical research as Kinsui was a member of a few literary networks in late nineteenth century Japan and was connected to Chinese Confucian literati of the day. Kinsui's story may also interest researchers studying modernity in general. After all, her case offers insights into how pre-modern traditions linger and change in societies facing the challenges of modernization.

Biographies of Exemplary Women in Chinese and Japanese Literary Traditions

The tradition of recording biographies of notable women dates back to the first century BCE when Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE), a Confucian intellectual and an imperial official charged with supervising the affairs of the ruling Liu clan, compiled the first collection of such biographies entitled *Lienü zhuan*, or the *Biographies of Exemplary Women*. During Liu's lifetime, the emperor's female relatives such as his concubines and in-laws arrogated great power, which threatened the survival of the ruling family. Women of humble origins wielded unprecedented influence at court much to the chagrin of Confucian scholar-officials. According to Ban Gu, Liu Xiang observed the depravity of people like Empress and Consort Zhao and Consort Wei and compiled his *Biographies* to admonish the Son of Heaven [1].

The *Biographies of Exemplary Women* consists of seven original chapters: the Maternal Models, the Worthy and Enlightened, the Sympathetic and Wise, the Chaste and Compliant, the Principled and Righteous, the Accomplished Rhetoricians, and the Depraved and Favored. Each chapter is preceded by a brief rhymed introduction and followed by a eulogy. Later an eighth chapter containing some supplementary biographies was added to the text by an unknown author sometimes identified as Ban Zhao (circa 45–117 CE), who is also known to have commented on it. Each original chapter except for the first one contains fifteen biographies (the first chapter contains fourteen). This format itself was influenced by Sima Qian's arranged biographies (Ch. *liezhuan*) in the *Records of the Grand Historian*. In most biographies, Liu Xiang uses original material from older texts such as the *Book of Documents*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Zuo Commentary*, *Hanshi waizhuan*, etc. However, for some biographies, sources have not been identified, and it is likely that they are Liu's original works.

By submitting the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* to the throne, Liu Xiang attempted to expose the abnormal situation at court and also present models for the imperial women to emulate. The text was clearly meant to be read not only by the emperor himself, but also by courtier women as prefaces to its seven chapters make reference to a female readership. Moreover, Liu used the *Biographies* as a vehicle to translate his own ideas about government and politics to his superiors. When compiling the work, he aptly manipulated historical precedents and embellished them with his own words to get his position across [12, p. 70].

The main theme of the text is how women can contribute to the prosperity of their clan and the state by behaving according to the rules of propriety. In all biographies, women prioritize the fate of the clan rather than their individual fortune or even that of their husbands. While women's social roles as daughters, wives, and mothers are emphasized, «their functions are multifaceted and include active social and political involvements; their roles and actions are not limited to family and marriage» [9, p. 12]. Conversely, if women's energy is not guided by the rules of propriety, it may become destructive and cause the downfall of not just family lineages, but also dynasties and states. It is worth mentioning that when faced with extraordinary circumstances, Liu Xiang's women are prepared to incur death so as to maintain their principles and righteousness. Some of them commit suicide, while one chooses to mutilate herself in order to avoid the advances of an unwanted suitor. These motifs would become an integral part of later historical writing on exemplary women.

Liu Xian's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* inaugurated a new genre of Chinese biographical literature. After Liu, numerous collections of women's biographies appeared, often under the same title (e.g. *Biographies of Exemplary Women* by Huangfu Mi, now lost). As time went by, these collections of biographies were influenced by other genres such as horror stories (Ch. *zhiguai*) or Buddhist scripture. Vernacular adaptations of *lienü* accounts became especially popular during the Ming dynasty: a good example is *Gujin lienüzhuan yanyi* (*The Romance of Exemplary Women, Old and Contemporary*) by Feng Menglong (1547–1646) [3, p. 61]. Most importantly, Chinese historians seem to have been inspired by Liu Xiang's work when they chose to record biographies of notable women in official dynastic histories. Among twenty-four of China's standard histories, twelve have chapters

dedicated to exemplary women¹. Subscribing to a largely didactic view of history, Chinese historians agreed that it was necessary to preserve accounts of notable women's lives to propagate exemplars of womanly virtue and assist in the teaching of females. However, their views on what it was that made those women exemplary changed over time, a process aptly captured by Sherry J. Mou in her *Gentlemen's Prescriptions for Women's Lives*.

In her work, Mou analyzes Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* and chapters on exemplary women in the first seven standard histories. Her findings suggest that with time these biographies became more moralistic and more focused on such virtues as amicability, complaisance, gentleness, and chastity. On the other hand, the importance of such qualities as prescience and learning steadily decreased. Moreover, starting with the two Tang histories, a surge in the number of accounts concerning self-mutilation to preserve one's chastity is observed. Such accounts, along with stories of either suicide or involuntary death in defense of one's chastity, become a staple of Chinese historical writing on women. Mou also observes that while Liu Xiang places greater emphasis on the potencies of women, later standard histories focus on set familial roles such as the filial daughter, the loyal wife, the chaste widow, and the sagacious mother [9].

After the Tang dynasty, a number of trends can be discerned in the evolution of writing on exemplary women. First, the sheer number of accounts of such women increased significantly starting from the Yuan dynasty. This can be explained by the fact that a system of official commendation was established in the Yuan to recognize noteworthy women. Since the system involved officials reviewing accounts of women to establish whether or not they were worthy of recognition, a great number of such accounts were composed by literati on behalf of families who wanted a female member to be immortalized. Furthermore, writing biographies and poems dedicated to virtuous women became a widespread practice among literati and played an important role in their socializing [6, p. 192].

Second, the increase in the number of accounts of exemplary women was accompanied by their standardization and simplification. Mizukoshi Tomo argues that while some individuality and vigor can be observed in the relevant chapter of *Song shi*, biographies of women found in *Yuan shi* become formalized under the influence of Neo-Confucian rigorism [6, p. 174]. The same can be said about all further dynastic histories. There is no doubt that the official system of recognition of exemplary women and the fact that composing accounts of such women became the vogue among the literati class contributed to this trend.

Third, with time Chinese historians became preoccupied with writing biographies of female martyrs. More attention was paid to gruesome incidents involving involuntary death, suicide, self-mutilation, and other kinds of adversity. It is curious that historians themselves were aware of this trend. For instance, the introduction to the chapter on exemplary women in *Ming shi* openly acknowledges this fact:

When Liu Xiang compiled biographies of exemplary women, he chose accounts that could serve as a warning and did not confine himself to a singular virtue. Fan Ye followed his example and

¹ These are *Hou Han shu*, *Jin shu*, *Wei shu*, *Sui shu*, *Bei shi*, *Jiu Tang shu*, *Xin Tang shu*, *Song shi*, *Liao shi*, *Jin shi*, *Yuan shi*, and *Ming shi*.

collected stories of exemplary talent and behavior; it was not just female martyrs that he extolled. However, after Wei and Sui, historians began to pay increased attention to accounts of adversity and hardship, stories concerning death and martyrdom. One may argue that contemporary [popular] sentiment made light of measured action and valued extremity. In all instances, it was extreme oddity and hardship that were considered to be praiseworthy; they were rewarded by state institutions, recorded by historians, praised by ordinary people, and found titillating by commoners. Moreover, scholars and other men of learning used accounts of extraordinary behavior to express their own bold, vehement, and unrestrained sentiments as they pleased. That is why the biographies they produced were most extravagant, yet these accounts were also among the most well-known ones [16].

The introduction goes on to state that most accounts recorded during the Ming are of women martyrs and attributes this trend to the pervasive influence of royal suasion that compelled Ming subjects to act in such a laudable way. Moreover, it mentions the increasing number of such accounts found in contemporary «veritable records» and «local gazetteers» and admits that only a modicum of these accounts is preserved in *Ming shi*.

By the end of the Ming, a rich literary tradition of recording biographies of notable women centering on official standard histories had been formed in China. It was inaugurated by Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, appropriated by Chinese historians, and also popularized by vernacular adaptations. With time accounts of exemplary women became more uniform, more focused on familial roles, and intensely preoccupied with martyrdom. In connection with this, a valid question one may ask is how this rich tradition was received, interpreted, and adapted in Japan.

It is unclear when Chinese biographies of exemplary women reached Japan for the first time. A catalogue of Chinese books compiled around 891 by Fujiwara-no Sukeyo and entitled *Nihon-koku genzaisho mokuroku* (*A Catalogue of Contemporary Books in the Japanese Realm*) contains Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* and a number of related titles [12, p. 36]. Thus we can assume that these books were brought to Japan before the end of the ninth century and must have been read by the learned elite. Yet they did not circulate widely as Chinese literature remained exclusively within the purview of court nobility, scholars, and Buddhist monks until the inception of the Edo period. The *lienü* genre did not take root in classical and medieval Japan: there were no attempts by Japanese authors to record accounts of Japan's notable women². It was only in the Edo period that biographies of exemplary women began to be widely read and also composed in that country.

In 1653–1654, the first printed edition of Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* was published in Japan. It was followed by a partial rendering of the same book into Japanese by Kitamura Kigin (1625–1705) entitled *Kana retsujoden* (*The Biographies of Exemplary Women in Kana Script*) printed just a year later [5, pp. 23–24]. These books inaugurated what Sekiguchi Sumiko has called

² Incidentally, something akin to biographies of exemplary women may be found in Buddhist *setsuwa* literature – for instance, chapter eighteen of *Genkō shakusho* (*The Genkō Era Accounts of Eminent Priests*) is devoted to the accounts of fifteen exemplary nuns, most of whom were from Japan. However, the precise relationship between *setsuwa* literature and Chinese *lienü* narratives remains to be studied (for this comment I am indebted to Professor Keller Kimbrough).

a «veritable biographies of exemplary women boom» [10, p. 204]. Kasai Kiyoshi has analyzed this phenomenon in detail; a summary of his analysis is provided below [4].

As printed editions of the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* in original Chinese and its partial Japanese translations entered wide circulation, one of the first Japanese collection of accounts of notable women appeared in 1655. It was authored by Kurokawa Hirotsada (1612–1678), a Confucian scholar, and entitled *Honchō retsujoden* (*The Biographies of Japan's Exemplary Women*). In his introductory notes, Kurokawa mentions that he was following the example of Liu Xiang when composing his voluminous compilation. However, he rejected the classification of exemplary women proposed by Liu and instead separated his 217 heroines into ten strictly hierarchical groups: Empresses and Consorts, Wives of Feudal Lords, Wives of Grandees, Wives of Officials, Wives of Commoners, Concubines, Courtesans, Virgins, Odd Women, and Devine Women. Kurokawa's *Biographies* is a didactic work: in its introduction, the author himself says that he wishes it to be used as an aid to domestic governance and regulating family affairs. Since it is written in *kanbun*, it was probably meant to be read by educated men and then explained to women.

Honchō retsujoden inaugurated a new genre in Japanese literature, that of didactic female biographies. It was followed by a number of books that were aiming to provide exemplars of female virtue to Japanese women. One notable work of this type is *Honchō jōkan* (*The Female Mirror of Japan*) published in 1661 by Asai Ryōi (1612–1691). This book is written in Japanese and contains accounts of some eighty-five notable Japanese women from high antiquity to the beginning of the early modern period organized into five categories similar to those found in Liu Xiang's work. It is clear from its preface that the author intended *Honchō jōkan* to be read by women as a textbook of womanly virtue. Curiously, while focusing on Japanese women, *Honchō jōkan* utilizes storylines from Chinese *lienü* literature adapting them to the domestic context.

Among other didactic accounts on Japanese notable women are *Wakan kenjō monogatari* (*Tales of Japanese and Chinese Wise Women*) published in 1668 and *Nihon meijō monogatari* (*Tales of Famous Japanese Women*) printed two years later. This genre seems to have become quite popular in Tokugawa Japan as such books were often reprinted. However, didactic literature was not the only popular mode of biographical writing about women. In 1678, a book entitled *Shikidō ōkagami* (*The Great Mirror of the Way of Love*) was published by Fujimoto Kizan. It contained a chapter entitled «Japan's Exemplary Women,» but quite surprisingly Fujimoto's heroines were all famous courtesans. Starting with Fujimoto's work, accounts of notable women's amorous affairs became another popular genre directly related to biographies of exemplary women. Similar works include *Meijō nasakekurabe* (*The Comparison of Famous Women's Feelings*) published in 1681. It is worth mentioning that this book also contains a separate chapter dedicated to renowned courtesans.

The above analysis suggests that by the end of the seventeenth century two major genres of biographical writing focusing on accounts of notable women had developed in Japan. One was that of serious didactic literature aiming to inculcate primarily Confucian moral teachings in Japanese women (this genre is quite similar to Chinese *lienü* narratives and their vernacular adaptations); the other focused on the love life of famous women and was largely enjoyed as reading for entertainment. However, one of the pivotal modes of writing on exemplary women did not appear in Japan at all. I am referring to biographies of exemplary women in standard histories. The reason for this is quite simple:

Japanese official historiography never adopted the *jizhuanti* (annals and biographies) style of Chinese standard histories; all six official Japanese histories (Jp. *rikkokushi*) were written in the *biannianti* (chronology) style thus leaving no room for accounts of exemplary women. There is one important exception: the voluminous *Dainihon-shi* (*The History of Great Japan*), the compilation of which was initiated under the auspices of Tokugawa Mitsuikuni, the second lord of the Mito domain, in 1657 and which was completed only in 1906. This monumental work of semi-official historiography was meant to become the Japanese version of the *Records of the Grand Historian* and was written in the *jizhuanti* style. It contained a chapter on the biographies of Japanese exemplary women modeled on those found in Chinese standard histories and explored topics often encountered in Chinese *lienü* narratives such as filial piety and chastity.

Works of the *lienü* genre continued to be published well into the Meiji period. This literature was also influenced by the wave of westernization that swept over Japan following the Meiji Restoration. For instance, a work entitled *Fujo kagami* (*A Mirror for Women*) was printed in 1887 under the editorship of Nishimura Shigeki and subsequently adopted as a textbook in the Peers School for Girls. The text contained not only biographies of China's exemplary women such as the mother of Mencius, but also accounts of Japanese and Western notable women [11, pp. 109–110].

Chinese and Japanese accounts of exemplary women first entered wide circulation in Japan in the second half of the seventeenth century. As many of them were written in the vernacular, and as Japanese female literacy rates grew throughout the Edo period, it may be assumed that these works became more accessible to a female readership as time went by. Most of such books were composed by educated men, but there are exceptions to this trend, on one of which I would like to focus here. Shirakawa Kinsui produced a compilation of accounts of notable Japanese women of her own written in the Japanese language in 1879. What was the nature of her work and the reason for its compilation? What is its place in the broader *lienü* traditions of both Japan and China? What can Kinsui's compilation tell us about her take on women's education? Before addressing these and other questions, I will attempt to reconstruct Kinsui's biography below.

Shirakawa Kinsui: A Biographical Sketch³

A landlocked province in the Tōsandō area of Japan, Hida was never famous for producing literary talent. A land «encircled by myriad mountain peaks covered with clouds and mists, its valleys deep, its vegetation dense» [14], it became a renowned source of high quality timber in ancient times. Old legends speak of Hida-no Takumi, a prodigy carpenter from Hida, whose skill with wood was unrivalled across the country and who is rumored to have erected a score of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. The inhabitants of this secluded province have been described as «simple and straightforward, hard-working and frugal», and also somewhat «aloof from worldly trends» [2, p. 58]. From 1692 and until the Meiji Restoration, Hida was directly administered by the Shogunate as a *tenryō*, which may have also contributed to the conservative disposition of its people.

³ Unless otherwise noted, this biography is based on findings by Taga Akigorō [15] and Morioka Yukari [7, 8].

As many other remote provinces in the Edo period, Hida lacked high-level educational facilities. Virtually the only source of knowledge available to its residents were the numerous temple schools referred to as *terakoya*, which offered their students basic tutelage in arithmetic and literacy [2, p. 60]. Buddhist clergy that ran these schools, however, was relatively educated and often well-versed not only in the Buddhist canon, but also in the Confucian classics. In 1856, a girl named Sachi was born to one of the priestly families from Hida surnamed Shirakawa. Later she would become a female poet, painter, and educator known to posterity as Shirakawa Kinsui.

Kinsui's father Jishō was a Shin Buddhist priest and the twentieth abbot of Ganshōji temple located in present-day Takayama. His predecessor, the nineteenth abbot of Ganshōji Ryōgyō was a highly educated man, who learned the art of composing Chinese poetry from Akada Gagyū, a Confucian scholar and a poet himself. The atmosphere of literary attainment must have been strong in the Shirakawa family: apart from her grandfather, Kinsui's two elder brothers Jikō and Jiben were both accomplished poets. Jishō did his best to educate his daughter, who proved to have a natural talent for learning. At the age of five she could already read Chinese books and have a general grasp of their meaning; at seven she composed Chinese poetry herself. Moreover, from an early age Kinsui had a particular penchant for painting. According to Taga Akigorō, her talent can be discerned even in the works that she produced when she was eight [15, p. 27]. We can find them in two albums of Kinsui's paintings that have been preserved in Ganshōji to this day.

When Kinsui was thirteen, the old Bakufu system collapsed as the young emperor Meiji assumed direct control of the country. The Restoration sent shock waves across Japan, and Hida was not an exception. Formerly a domain under the Shogunate's direct administration, it became a prefecture in 1868, first named Hida and then renamed Takayama. The new government dispatched a twenty-seven-year-old loyalist samurai from the Mito domain to Takayama making him the prefecture's first governor. The man's name was Umemura Hayami, and he went down in history as an unsuccessful reformer, whose policies resulted in a series of disturbances known as the Umemura riots. In March, 1869, Umemura was relieved of his duties and left Takayama, but during his short stint as governor he managed to remarry twice, one of his wives being none other than the teenage Shirakawa Kinsui. Their marriage did not last more than a few months, yet must have had a profound influence on Kinsui's life. Taga Akigorō surmises that Takayama's residents' attitude toward the former wife of the failed reformer must have been mixed [15, p. 28].

In 1873, Kinsui's brothers Jikō and Jiben obtained positions at Higashi Honganji and moved to Kyoto taking their sister with them. A year later she entered the Shūsei Middle School in Osaka, where she studied the English language and literature. However, in October of the same year, Jikō died at the age of thirty-two. Following his death, Kinsui moved to Kyoto and occupied herself with making silk. At that point she met Kikuchi Sankei (1819–1891), a Confucian scholar and a poet who taught her the art of Chinese verse. According to him,

Ms. [Shirakawa] was born in Hida. This land is surrounded by many mountains forcing one to lead a life of seclusion. There are few good teachers and wise companions there. Ms. [Shirakawa] was displeased with this, so she set out on a journey of a thousand li and occupied herself with learning in Naniwa (Osaka) studying western books. She gained a general understanding of their

meaning. Shortly thereafter she began to adore the cultural accomplishments of Heian (Kyoto), so last year (1875) she moved to the western capital and sometimes, whenever she was free from silk-making, she came to me and asked me about poetry [13].

Kikuchi's testimony makes it clear that Kinsui moved to Kyoto and Osaka not simply because her brothers found employment there, but also owing to her strong desire to learn and engage in cultural pursuits. Besides Chinese poetry, she studied traditional Japanese painting under Murata Kōkoku and oil painting under Wetton. In 1876, her first collection of Chinese poetry entitled *Kinsui shōkō* (*Kinsui's Small Manuscript*) was published. Kinsui was only twenty years old at the time.

In January, 1877, Kinsui entered Kyoto Prefectural Women's School. Her performance must have been exceptional, so much so that she obtained a teaching position at the school just two months after matriculation. The decision to employ Kinsui may have been influenced by the high honors she received from the imperial family: her accomplishments were noticed by the empress and emperor Meiji himself, who bestowed on Kinsui a copy of the Kangxi dictionary during his visit to the school. In December, 1879, Kinsui resigned from her position at the school to marry Aoki Yosuke, a merchant from Nagoya. They had three children together: two girls and a boy. In the year of her resignation, Kinsui completed her second book, a collection of biographies of Japan's exemplary women entitled *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*, and submitted it to the Imperial Household Ministry.

Kinsui's poetry was noticed by her contemporaries at an early time. It was highly regarded by her teacher Kikuchi Sankei, who praised it in his introduction to *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*:

Her literary talent is as sharp as the *kunwudao* sword piercing jade: one strike and [the stone] is cut into a hundred pieces, everyone who touches it perishes. ... Her poems are pure and elegant, natural and unrestrained. She never loses sense of what is important. Sometimes she uses powerful and expressive language to surprise her audience. Whenever I appraise her verse, I use the eight characters inscribed on the back side of the Cao E stele [14]⁴.

Ten of her poems were featured in an anthology of women's verse entitled *Nihon keien ginsō* (*The Declamations of Japanese Women*) published in Tokyo in 1880. At some point between 1880 and 1883 her work attracted the attention of Yu Yue, a Confucian scholar from China who was collecting Chinese poetry by Japanese authors. He selected a number of Kinsui's poems to be included in *Tongying shixuan* (*An Anthology of Japanese Verse*), a monumental collection of Chinese poems composed in Japan in forty volumes published in China in 1883. Yu Yue regarded her poetry quite highly, which is apparent from a small introduction to Kinsui's verse in *Tongying shixuan*:

Kinsui is highly skilled in the old style of poetry, a talent hard to find among female authors. Her four pieces entitled *Hongxian yuchang* (*Kōgen yoshō*) resemble songs or folk ballads with a superb and unusual rhythmic structure. In her preface to these poems, Kinsui says that she «has

⁴ Eight characters on the back of the stele form a character rebus meaning «beautiful words».

devoted some time to studying the rhythms of local songs», and I believe that she is referring to what is called *waka* in her land. Her poetry is sensitive and moving [15, p. 22].

Yu Yue is not entirely correct in his suggestion. What Kinsui refers to in her preface to *Kōgen yoshō* are not *waka*, but rather traditional Japanese songs belonging to the *jiuta* genre. The four poems collected under the title *Kōgen yoshō – The Echo of the Red Strings* – are in fact free translations of such songs into literary Chinese. In *Kinsui shōkō*, the names of these original songs are inscribed under each poem's title in smaller characters: they include *Hana-mo yuki-mo*, *Kurokami-no*, *Harusame-ni* and *Izukata-he*.

Yu Yue was not the only Chinese intellectual to have noticed Kinsui's verse. Some of her poems were included in an anthology of contemporary Japanese poetry in Chinese compiled by Chen Honggao in 1883 and entitled *Riben dongren shixuan (An Anthology of Verse by Fellow Japanese Poets)*. He is believed to have selected a few pieces from *Ōsei gūsō (Scribbles from the Residence West of the Kamo River)*, another collection of Kinsui's poems, which unfortunately has been lost. Chen Honggao commented on each of her poems praising Kinsui's literary talent. He described her style as «pure and elegant, not sullied by the dust of the world» and compared her to renowned Qing female poets Xi Peilan and Jin Xianxian [15, p. 22].

In 1885, Kinsui's husband Aoki Yosuke died. She continued to live in Nagoya raising her three children, writing and painting. In 1890, she died at the age of thirty-five and was buried at Shōkyōji, the ancestral temple of the Aoki family. Her daughter Jōko became a well-known *waka* poet and was active in Nagoya's literary circles.

Shirakawa Kinsui's *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*: A Confucian Primer for Women in an Age of Modernization

In December, 1879, *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* was released by a publishing house in Kyoto. Morioka Yukari has researched the archives of Kinsui's ancestral Ganshōji temple and discovered three editions of the same text [8]. The first edition seems to have been printed as a sample and delivered to Kinsui for proofreading (It is likely that this sample edition was printed before December, 1879). The remaining two are very similar with only minor differences pertaining to design. We may assume that the text had been completed by the end of 1878: both its prefaces – one written by Kinsui herself and the other by her teacher Kikuchi Sankei – are dated November and October, 1878, respectively. Moreover, Kinsui's introductory notes were written in the summer of 1877. Thus we understand that she was working on her book during her studies and employment at Kyoto Prefectural Women's School.

The book's title *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* may be translated as *Biographies of Japan's Exemplary Women by a Female Historian*. According to Kinsui's own introductory notes, she originally intended to call the book *Honchō tōshi – A Women's History of Japan* – but her publisher demanded she adduce the «*retsujoden*» part to the title to make it more comprehensible. This fact suggests that the *retsujō/lienū* genre was still easily recognizable and popular in Japan at the time.

To understand Kinsui's reasons for releasing yet another collection of accounts of exemplary women, one must refer to her preface and introductory notes. The preface is quoted in full below:

Without historical writings it is impossible to discern the truth and reflect on the traces of high antiquity. Without historical writings it is also impossible to relate affairs and illuminate facts for distant posterity. Therefore the role such writings play is indeed great. In our land, a cultural boom occurred in the middle ages, so historical writings are now readily available. It is needless to say that all the notable accomplishments of enlightened sovereigns, learned vassals, and heroes have been recorded in detail and preserved. However, there also are many works that can serve as lessons for women in female virtue [such as] *Guan ju* and domestic governance [such as] *Neize*. It is only regrettable that so far they have not been compiled into a single volume. That is why I spent several years collecting accounts of wise, virtuous, righteous, and upright women whenever I was free from sewing and weaving, recorded what I managed to find in historical sources, and produced a book in four volumes arranged into six categories. I called it *A Women's History of Japan*. However, the labor of the historian is so challenging that even men sometimes find themselves at a loss. This is even more so in case of a woman who attempts to relate the events that happened a thousand years ago using a red brush of three *sun*. She only shows that she does not know her own capacity. Thus, I have written this work in expectation of someone like Xie Daoyun or Cao Dagu [14].

Here Kinsui contends that the many historical accounts of notable Japanese women are yet to be compiled into a single volume, so she decided to undertake this arduous task. This remark is curious: Kinsui must have known of Kurokawa's *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*, but for some reason considered his work unsuitable for her intended purposes. Perhaps she believed *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* to be inaccessible to women as it was written in *kanbun*.

Kinsui's introductory notes shed more light on her motives:

Whenever I read ancient and contemporary historical accounts and encounter the words and deeds of exemplary women, I admire the veracity of facts and the elegance of language; I wish that young girls everywhere could read such accounts and draw moral lessons from them. However, historical writings are abundant, and I fear that this makes learning inconvenient for young girls. Therefore I have excerpted the essential parts of these writings and re-written them in the vernacular script so as to offer an easy path to reading history. This is why I compiled this volume [14].

From Kinsui's explanation, it is clear that she intended *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* to be a didactic manual for young girls. She also wanted to make accounts of Japan's exemplary women more accessible to them, so she re-wrote them in the vernacular, albeit heavily Sinitized.

As she mentioned in her preface, Kinsui originally intended to arrange the biographies into six categories each dedicated to a certain Confucian virtue: filial piety, chastity, wisdom, loyalty, talent, and bravery. However, for an unknown reason she managed to complete only two parts of her work, one on filial piety and the other on chastity. It is worth mentioning that Kinsui chose not to arrange her biographies according to class or social status. In this regard, her work resembles Liu Xiang's *Biographies* and differs from Kurokawa's *Honchō retsujoden*. In the introductory notes, Kinsui makes

it clear that she eschewed accounts she believed to be fictional. Taiga Akigorō maintains that her belief that moral lessons can only be drawn from facts and not fables resembles the tenets of the evidential scholarship tradition developed in the Qing [15, p. 34], but it is unclear whether Kinsui had encountered any works by Qing *kaozheng* scholars.

Unlike Liu Xiang, Kinsui did not embellish the accounts she borrowed from her sources. Morioka Yukari has discovered that most of Kinsui's stories are taken from the chapter on exemplary women in *Dainihon-shi*, while others are borrowed from Ōtsuki Bankei's (1801–1878) *Kinko shidan* (*Historical Discourses on the Contemporary and the Ancient*) and Rai San'yō's (1780–1832) *San'yō ikō* (*The Remaining Writings of Rai San'yō*) [8, p. 43]. Since all these sources are written in *kanbun*, Kinsui transcribed them into heavily sinicized Japanese. While easier to read than *kanbun*, this style of Japanese was only accessible to readers who, like Kinsui, had received at least some training in the Chinese classics.

The actual accounts of Japanese exemplary women are interspaced with Kinsui's own comments, which are by far the most interesting feature of the text. These comments allow the reader to infer the author's stance on a whole number of themes and issues, which will be explored below. Some of the biographies are also accompanied by Chinese poems and *waka* written by Kinsui as well as illustrations painted by her. Moreover, critical commentary by Kikuchi Sankei is inscribed in *kanbun* at the top of every other page.

Honchō tōshi retsujoden contains accounts of twenty-five notable women from high antiquity to the Tokugawa period. The social status of Kinsui's heroines ranges from aristocrats to commoners. Below I will examine the key themes Kinsui explores in her work (a list of these themes can be found in Table 1).

Filial piety

Six biographies in *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* are devoted exclusively to the virtue of filial piety. In her comments, Kinsui contends that filial piety is an innate quality of every child – both male and female – originating from natural feelings for one's parents. Learning is not a necessary prerequisite to attain filial piety; however, in order for filial piety to be expressed properly, it must be regulated by rights. Without rights, there is bound to be either excess or lack of filial devotion. Kinsui's understanding parallels the general Confucian principle that the superior man must regulate his behavior by the rules of propriety. Kinsui also argues against «doing the impossible in the service of one's parents,» that is, against extreme behavior in pursuit of filial piety. Later Chinese *lienü* accounts often extol reckless self-sacrifice, bodily harm, and even cannibalism as examples of filial piety, but Kinsui does not go so far.

Dedicated service to one's parents (or parents-in-law) when they are alive and proper mourning when they pass away is an important theme of *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*. In two cases, a bereaved daughter goes so far as to reside in a hut near the deceased parent's grave for an extended period of time – a common practice in China called *lumū*. Three women are recognized by officials and either given tax exemption or official rank as commendation for their filial behavior (another common theme in Chinese biographies of exemplary women). Curiously, three other women demonstrate Buddhist devotion following their parent's demise, which is not a standard feature of Chinese *lienü* accounts.

The most extensive biography of a filial daughter is dedicated to revenge. In it, a girl named Riya learns swordsmanship, tracks down and slays the murderer of her father. The text demonstrates that daughters can avenge their parents similarly to sons. In her comment, Kinsui adds that revenge should not be a moral lesson in the Meiji era as it is prohibited by law, but during the Tokugawa period revenge was an ordinary matter. Kinsui believes that if a woman has integrity, she can be viewed as a man of valor (Jp. *jōbu*). In case of Riya, she behaved as a real *jōbu*, even though she was born a woman. It is important to point out that while revenge was prohibited by the legal systems of China and Japan alike, it was nonetheless universally acclaimed, and perpetrators of revenge were often pardoned by officials.

Chastity

The greater part of *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* (eighteen biographies) concerns the virtue of chastity (Ch. *zhen*, Jp. *tei*). The term *zhen/tei* is often translated as «chastity» when referring to Chinese imperial accounts of notable women, especially widows who do not remarry. However, in case of *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*, a more general and gender-neutral rendering «firm of character, upright» is also applicable since the book covers a whole number of moral qualities often going beyond «chastity» in the conventional sense.

The most prominent theme of the second part of *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* is suicide. Nine heroines of the book commit suicide; most do so to follow their husbands in death. One woman, Okatsu, ended her life to prevent a war between Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Another, Oshō, chose death over the shame of contradicting the deathbed wish of her father by breaking her engagement vows. In an apparent adaptation of one of the stories from Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, Kesa, the wife of an official, posed as her husband and incurred a gruesome death instead of him. In all instances, these women demonstrate an unwavering dedication to their husbands (or fiancés), and their actions are condoned by Kinsui in her commentaries. She goes so far as to state that to die for one's husband for a woman is the same as to die for one's country in case of a man.

Refusal to associate with other men and/or to remarry is another prominent motif of the book. The wife of Minamoto-no Yoshitaka refused to remarry after her husband's death and died of grief soon. Ōiso-no Tora, a courtesan who became a samurai's concubine, turned down another man's advances and took the tonsure after her master perished. Yoi, a samurai's wife, killed an unwanted suitor who intended to assault her in her husband's absence. A commoner young widow Tsuru never remarried and even ordered that no man should participate in her burial. The accounts of these women resemble similar Chinese stories lauding female chastity.

Less prominent dimensions of «chastity», or, more appropriately, «firmness of character» include wisdom, cunning and bravery. The Wife of Kamitsukenu-no Katana, a general, used her wisdom and cunning to persuade her husband to fight and fooled his enemies thereby helping him win the battle. In her comments, Kinsui says that she was as good as other male warriors and laments the fact that there are few women like her. The wife of Yamanouchi Kazutoyo saved money for an important occasion and then gave it to her husband resulting in his promotion. The wife of Tomita Nobutaka, again a

general, rushed onto the battlefield thinking that he was dead and fought bravely. All these women demonstrated their staunch devotion to their husband.

The account of the wife of Kajiura Heishichi is especially curious. She was the daughter of Asano Naganori's senior retainer, who did not participate in the Akō incident. When Heishichi learned about this, he decided to divorce her because, as he explained, he could not bear to be married to a coward's daughter. She obediently followed her husband's wish and never spoke to him again despite being blameless herself. This story may dishearten the modern reader, but to Kinsui it remained exemplary nonetheless.

Kinsui understood chastity more broadly than late Chinese authors. To her, it revolved around devotion to one's husband and was not necessarily confined to refusal to remarry. Taga Akigorō notes that for Kinsui, chastity originates as love for one's husband and is expressed in accordance with righteousness [15, p. 35]. This is similar to Kinsui's views on filial piety: proper filial piety must be regulated by rights while chastity must be expressed with righteousness in mind.

Conclusion

In *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*, Kinsui articulated an image of a woman she wished young girls to emulate. While rooted in orthodox Confucian virtues, this image is nonetheless somewhat different from late Chinese accounts that emphasize submissiveness and focus on martyrdom. Just like Liu Xiang's women, Kinsui's heroines possess great potential that is expressed in accordance with rules of propriety and righteousness. Many of them choose death to demonstrate their devotion to husbands, but others exhibit such qualities as bravery, cunning, and wisdom in order to promote the fortune of their families. Moreover, according to Kinsui, some women may be as good as men when it comes to military affairs or revenge. They may even put lesser men to shame. In general, Kinsui demands from women the same virtues any Confucian would require of men: filial piety and uprightness.

Kinsui's adherence to orthodox ideals in female education is curious. She is known to have spent considerable time studying western books and art, but remained committed to Confucian ethics. Unlike many educators of her time, Kinsui was not enthralled by western discourses of civilization and enlightenment and continued to live essentially as a Confucian literatus until her death in 1890. Taga Akigorō points out that Kinsui's work on *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* coincided with a trend toward a more nativist understanding of education at Kyoto Prefectural Women's School in particular and in Japan as a whole [15, p. 36]. In this light, Kinsui's emphasis on traditional morals in *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* becomes more understandable.

Above I have attempted to place *Honchō tōshi retsujoden* within a broader historical context and analyze its contents. I have also reconstructed Shirakawa Kinsui's biography. However, given the scope of this article, one aspect of Kinsui's work has not been illuminated here. I am referring to her poetry in Chinese, which is an interesting subject for study and to which I intend to turn next.

Table 1. Key Themes in *Honchō tōshi retsujoden*

No.	Name	Years active	Social status	Main theme and comments
<i>Filial women</i>				
1.	The daughter of Kinunui-no Kanatsugu	9 th century	Most likely a commoner	Mourning for her father and mother, Buddhist devotion, living next to her father's grave, official recognition, receiving rank, tax exemption
2.	Fukuyome	9 th century	A commoner from Satsuma	Serving one's parents according to the rules of propriety, official recognition, receiving rank
3.	The daughter of Tachibana-no Hayanari	8 th -9 th century	Daughter of a noble courtier	Following one's parents to exile, living next to her father's grave, Buddhist devotion
4.	The dancing girl Mimyō	12 th century	Daughter from a good family from the capital	Dedication to a lowly profession so as to find information about father, Buddhist devotion
5.	Ito	No data	A commoner from Wakasa	Fulfilling father-in-law's wishes no matter how hard that could be, official recognition, tax exemption
6.	Riya	17 th century	Daughter of an <i>ashigaru</i> from Sanuki	Revenge for deceased parents
<i>Chaste women</i>				
7.	The wife of Taji	4 th century	Wife of a general	Suicide after husband's brave death
8.	The wife of Kamitsukenu-no Katana	7 th century	Wife of a general	Cunning in the service of husband
9.	The wife of Abe-no Noritō	11 th century	Wife of a samurai	Suicide with husband
10.	The wife of Kamada Masaie	12 th century	Daughter of a <i>shōen</i> administrator, wife of a samurai	Suicide after husband's death
11.	Kesa	12 th century	Daughter from a rich family, wife of an official	Self-sacrifice for the sake of husband
12.	The wife of Minamoto-no Yoshitaka	12 th century	Wife of a nobleman	Refusal to remarry and death of grief
13.	Kozaishō	12 th century	Wife of a Taira nobleman, daughter from a noble family	Suicide after husband's death

14.	The wife of Sasuke Sadatoshi	14 th century	Wife of a samurai	Suicide after husband's death
15.	Shizuka	12 th century	A <i>shirabyōshi</i> dancer, Minamoto-no Yoshitsune's concubine	General strength of character and devotion to husband, refusal to associate with other men
16.	Ōiso-no Tora	12 th century	A courtesan, a samurai's concubine	General strength of character and devotion to husband, refusal to associate with other men, Buddhist devotion
17.	Okatsu	16 th century	A servant to Oda Nobuyuki	Revenge for the death of her husband, suicide to prevent war
18.	The wife of Yamanouchi Kazutoyo	16 th century	Wife of a samurai	Wifely wisdom.
19.	The wife of Tomita Nobutaka	16 th century	Wife of a general	Martial valor and devotion to husband, willingness to die for husband
20.	The wife of Hosokawa Tadaoki	16 th century	Wife of a samurai	Suicide to prevent shame
21.	The wife of Ojima Kihei (and the wife of Kajiura Heishichi)	18 th century	Wife of a samurai	Suicide after husband's death
22.	Yoi	17 th –18 th century	Wife of a samurai	Kindness in caring for a child of a concubine, bravery, killing an unwanted suitor
23.	Tsuru	18 th century	Most likely a commoner	Never remarried, womanly benevolence
24.	Oshō	18 th –19 th century	A commoner	Suicide, not contradicting father's wishes and marital vows, commended by local authorities

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