

# “Chrysanthemum Tryst”: Remaking a Chinese Ghost Story in Japan<sup>1</sup>

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During the Edo period (1600-1867) Chinese books were a major element in a secular intellectual expansion unmatched in any previous period of Japanese history. No doubt this was partly due to the fact that the Tokugawa government adopted Neo-Confucianism as the official ideology to buttress its political control. One feature of Neo-Confucianism was a social order stipulating that all people conform to a strict hierarchical structure of classes with stern obligations. The Tokugawa government found this model of social order useful, which placed the highest value on the performance of such duties as loyalty to one's lord and filial piety (Varley 1984: 152). A wide range of “Chinese vernacular stories” (Hanan 1981) from *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin) to *Sanyan* 三言 (literally, “Three Words,” 1620, 1624, and 1627) arrived in Japan together with the great Chinese classics, driving this intellectual expansion, and began to gain the serious attention of Japanese intellectuals in roughly the Kyôhô period (1716-1736). Some Japanese found the Chinese vernacular story a useful vehicle for their study of contemporary Chinese society, including the vernacular language and writing style, while others employed it in their examination of policies of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and still others found the vernacular stories to be simple entertainment.<sup>2</sup>

Though not common, some literati even wrote short stories based upon Chinese vernacular stories as an intellectual exercise.<sup>3</sup> Among them was Ueda Akinari 上天秋

<sup>1</sup> Dominic Cheung published “‘Chrysanthemum Tryst’ and ‘Fan Chü-ch’ing’s [Juqing’s] Eternal Friendship’: A Comparative Study of Two Ghost-Friendship Tales in Japan and China” in *Tamkang Review* in 1977. He traces back “Fan Chü-ch’ing’s Eternal Friendship” to the *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty, ca. fifth century) and explains how the story of Fan Shi changed through various Chinese texts until it reaches the form of “Fan Chü-ch’ing’s Eternal Friendship.” He then examines in comparative perspective the common themes of “obligation” and “trust” in the friendships of both stories. His explanation of the Chinese text is informative and insightful, but his explanation of the Japanese text is not fully developed, and I offer an alternative reading to the critical ending of the story. In addition to the clarification of the aforementioned points, my essay examines important differences in the socio-cultural context apparent in the process of adapting the text.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the element of “entertainment” in Chinese vernacular stories, Yoshikawa Kôjirô states that Chinese vernacular fiction was primarily developed in China as “entertainment.” See his three essays (Yoshikawa Kôjirô 1968: 181-229): “*Chûgoku koshôsetsu shû kaidai*” 中国古小説集解題 (Explanatory notes to *Collection of Pre-Modern Chinese Fiction*); “*Chûgoku shôsetsu no chii*” 中国小説の地位 (The position of Chinese fiction); and “*Chûgoku shôsetsu ni okeru ronshô no kyômi*” 中国小説に於ける論証の興味 (Interest in proof in Chinese fiction). A similar “entertainment” theory is expounded by Timothy C. Wong (1981: 235-50).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Tsuga Teishô 都賀庭鐘 (1718-1791) wrote a collection of short stories entitled *Hanabusa zôshi* 英草紙 (Tales of a Garland, 1749) in which every story was an adaptation from Chinese vernacular fiction.

成 (1734-1809), a poet, scholar, sometime physician, and fiction writer. He deftly adopted the Chinese story "Fan Juqing jishu sisheng jiao" 范巨卿鷄黍死生交 (Fan Juqing's Eternal Friendship) into a new work more appealing to Japanese tastes.<sup>4</sup> The changes Akinari made in his "Kikuka no chigiri" 菊花の約 (Chrysanthemum Tryst) reflect cultural differences and/or similarities between the two countries as well as the authors' artistic intentions.

This essay examines the cultural and artistic significance of some of the major changes Akinari made in the process of adapting the text. Of specific impact is the significance of the changes in the socio-economic status of the characters, the family structure, the ending of the story, and finally Akinari's writing style—especially, in the scenes before the ghost appears. Scholars such as Uzuki Hiroshi (1965), however, have noted that the ending of the story is the most significant departure from the Chinese text.

### Summaries of "Fan Juqing's Eternal Friendship" and "Chrysanthemum Tryst"

"Fan Juqing's Eternal Friendship" appears in the *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (Stories Old and New, 1620), compiled by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646). As the title denotes, a major theme of the story is faithfulness and loyalty between friends. The main characters are Fan Shi 范式, a merchant, and Zhang Shao 張劭, a farmer. Zhang Shao has a mother and a younger brother. Hearing the news that the emperor is recruiting new talent, Zhang Shao decides to take the official examinations and sets out for Luoyang, the examination site. While staying the night at an inn not far from Luoyang, he learns that a man in the next room, also a candidate for the examinations, has fallen seriously ill. Zhang Shao commits himself to the recovery of the ill candidate, who as a result of Zhang's conscientious care, gradually recovers.

The candidate, Fan Shi, introduces himself, and explains that he has given up his business to take the official examinations. Yet, while Fan Shi is recuperating, they both miss the examinations. Orphaned when young, Fan Shi now has a wife and a son. As their friendship grows, they become sworn brothers, with Fan Shi being five years Zhang Shao's senior. Not having his own parents, Fan plans to commit to a fictive kinship relationship by considering Zhang Shao's mother as his own.

After six months together, they decide to return to their respective native provinces. Before parting, Fan Shi promises to visit Zhang Shao's house a year hence, on the Double Ninth Festival Day (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month). Upon their reunion, Fan Shi plans to pay his respects to Zhang Shao's mother.

A year passes and on the promised day, Zhang Shao, looking forward to seeing Fan Shi, gets up early and prepares a feast for him. The day passes into night, but Fan Shi does not appear. Everyone has already gone to bed. After the setting of the moon past midnight, Zhang Shao, who is still waiting, sees a shadow in the darkness. It is Fan Shi. But Fan Shi reveals that he is already dead and that Zhang Shao is seeing his ghost. He explains that while busily attending to his business, he forgot the appointment until the day of their scheduled meeting. Fan Shi knew it was impossible to travel a thousand miles in one day but remembered the ancient saying that a spirit can go a thousand miles in a day. In order to keep his promise, he committed suicide and arrived at Zhang Shao's

<sup>4</sup> The source of the translation is John L. Bishop's *The Colloquial Short Story in China*. Bishop uses the Wade-Giles system in his translation. Except for the translations from Bishop, all other translations in this essay employ the *pinyin* system.

home on time as a ghost. Before cutting his throat, Fan Shi instructed his wife not to bury him until Zhang Shao came to view his corpse. After expressing his wish that Zhang Shao should visit him in his native Shanyang, Fan Shi's spirit disappears.

On the following day, Zhang Shao sets out for Fan Shi's funeral. When Zhang Shao reaches Shanyang, Fan Shi's wife explains to Zhang Shao that directly in front of the grave, Fan Shi's coffin has stopped and will not move. Everyone understands that the coffin was waiting for Zhang's arrival. Zhang Shao falls to the ground, weeps for Fan Shi, and reads his condolences which express his desire to accompany Fan Shi. After telling Fan Shi's wife his wish to be buried beside Fan Shi, Zhang Shao cuts his own throat. Hearing of the extreme faithfulness between Fan Shi and Zhang Shao, the emperor confers posthumous titles on them. A Shrine of Loyalty is built in front of their grave, and many verses are written on it as tribute to their virtue.

"Chrysanthemum Tryst" appears in a collection of nine short stories of the supernatural entitled *Ugetsu monogatari* 雨月物語 (Tales of Moonlight and Rain, 1776). The main characters are Akana Sôemon 赤穴宗右衛門, a samurai-strategist, and Hasebe Samon 文部左門, a Confucian scholar. Hasebe Samon has a mother and a younger sister who is already married and resides outside of the family home. One day when Hasebe Samon visits a local acquaintance, he finds out that a man in the next room is seriously ill. Samon commits himself to the sick man's needs, and as a result of Samon's conscientious care, the man gradually recovers. The man introduces himself as Akana Sôemon from Izumo province who has been sent on a secret mission by his master. While he is away, back in Izumo his master is killed by a man named Amako Tsunehisa 尼子經久. Hearing the news, Sôemon urges other lords to attack Amako but nobody would adopt his plan. While en route to Izumo, Sôemon fell critically ill in Samon's hometown. A friendship between Sôemon and Samon develops, and they decide to become sworn brothers, with Sôemon being five years Samon's senior. After recovering fully, Sôemon goes to Samon's house to pay his respects to Samon's mother. Having lost his own parents, Sôemon plans to consider Samon's mother as his own. After staying for a while at Samon's, Sôemon decides to go to Izumo to inquire into the state of things, but he promises to come back on the Double Ninth Festival Day, which is also called the Chrysanthemum Festival.

On the promised day, Samon, looking forward to seeing Sôemon, gets up early and prepares a feast for him. The day passes into night but Sôemon does not appear. Samon's mother has already gone to bed. After the moon has set and Samon is about to close the door, he sees a shadow in the darkness. It is Akana Sôemon. Sôemon reveals that he is already dead and what Samon sees is his ghost. The ghost explains as follows: When Sôemon returned to Izumo, everybody was on the side of Amako Tsunehisa. Even Sôemon's cousin, Akana Tanji 赤穴丹治, recommended that Sôemon serve Amako and arranged a meeting for Sôemon with him. However, Sôemon was suspicious of Amako and wished to leave. Amako ordered Akana Tanji, the cousin, to detain Sôemon. Confined and unable to return to Samon's house on time, Sôemon remembered the ancient saying that the spirit can go a thousand miles a day. In order to keep his word, he committed suicide and arrived at Samon's on time. After telling Samon to take care of their mother, the ghost disappears.

On the following day, Samon leaves his mother to go to Izumo to collect Sôemon's remains. When he arrives there, he visits Akana Tanji, who is surprised to see

that Samon knows of Sôemon's death. Samon denounces Tanji, citing an ancient Chinese story. Claiming that Tanji has dishonored his name by committing a dishonorable act, Samon kills him with one blow of his sword and flees immediately. Hearing of the extreme faithfulness between Sôemon and Samon, Amako orders his men not to follow Samon.

### Changes in Socio-Economic Status and Focus

Akinari first adapted the story by changing the socio-economic status of the main characters and their family structure and by incorporating into the story a technique used in Nô drama to focus attention on the main character. In the Chinese story, Fan Shi is a tradesman and Zhang Shao is a farmer, both on their way to take the official examinations. Confucian ethics emphasized such virtues as loyalty, filial piety, faithfulness, and righteousness. Though human beings are endowed with these virtuous elements regardless of whether or not they study Confucian ethics, in China those who studied Confucian texts were considered to have a better understanding of them. The *shi* 士, scholars,<sup>5</sup> who served in public office had this knowledge and understanding. From the early fourteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century when the teachings of the twelfth-century philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) were accepted as the orthodox doctrine of Confucian learning, Zhu Xi's school of Neo-Confucianism was meticulously studied especially by the candidates for the official examinations to enter into governmental positions (Varley 1984: 151). Those who studied for the examinations theoretically knew and could embody the aforementioned basic values of Confucianism. Since the Ming government emphasized equal opportunity in male education (Hsu 1998: 1050), virtually any man regardless of social status could take the examinations. Hence, a character's ultimate social status was not as important in Chinese fiction as his intellectual achievements.

In Akinari's story, Akana Sôemon is a samurai-strategist and Hasebe Samon is a Confucian scholar (Uzuki 1969: 110, 123). Though the Tokugawa government adopted the same Zhu Xi's school of Neo-Confucianism as the official ideology for political purposes, for the same reason it did not adopt the equal education for males. Instead, the Tokugawa government adopted a class system which was hereditary, and the concept of *shi* was transferred to the ruling samurai class. Intellectuals such as Yamaga Sokô 山鹿素行 (1622-85) asserted that a samurai "must cultivate not only his physical skills as a warrior but also his mind and character. In particular, he must serve as the exemplar of high moral purpose for Japanese of all classes. Central to such moral purpose was the samurai's sense of duty or obligation,...absolute loyalty to one's overlord and devotion to

<sup>5</sup> According to Yu Ying-shih 余英時, the concept of the Chinese *shi* is similar to the appellation "intellectual" in Western culture. Yu states that intellectuals not only have special knowledge of and devotion to their work, as do artists and scholars, but they also care about their society, country, and even the world. They profess to care about the well-being of the public as well. The same applies to Chinese *shi*. Like Western intellectuals, *shi* explained world perspectives and tried to change the world. Historically speaking, it was Confucius who first discussed *shi*. He stated that the *shi* had made up their minds to carry out the *dao* 道 (Way). Confucius assigned the role of *shi* to the advocates of "basic values." As such, Confucianism was the backbone of the concept of *shi*. Yu notes that each period generated various aspects of *shi*, corresponding to social forces of the time but the basic concept of *shi* has not much changed throughout the history of China. See Yu Yingshi 1987: 1-11.

duty that far transcended what could realistically be expected of members of the other classes of Tokugawa society" (Varley 1984: 183). Along with loyalty, a moral code of *shingi* 信義, faithfulness and righteousness, was upheld as a great virtue and became the virtual property of the privileged samurai. Akinari himself was a merchant, but there was little chance for merchants or peasants to become samurai. Akinari would have found the original Chinese story with the virtues of trust and loyalty among commoners and their social mobility attractive. But to make it plausible for the Japanese readers, it was necessary for Akinari to change the social status of the main characters from a farmer and a merchant to a samurai and a Confucian scholar. This change emphasized a code of faithfulness.

Second, the Chinese story was written in consideration of societal expectations. In the Chinese story, Zhang Shao has a younger brother and Fan Shi has a son. In other words, both had male heirs. The younger brother of Zhang Shao would continue the family line and take care of their mother after Zhang Shao's death. Similarly Fan Shi's son would continue the family line and assist his mother. Confucian teachings required filial piety. According to Thomas Taylor Meadows, a British interpreter in the mid-nineteenth century, "The Imperial Government dare not refuse leave of absence to a mandarin if he, as an only son, requires it in order to tend his widowed mother during her declining years; even though the government may know that the real cause of his asking for leave, is to escape from some impending official difficulty."<sup>6</sup> Whether real or an expedient, filial piety was socially considered an ultimate obligation for which there was no remonstrance—theoretically even higher than obligations to the government. Accordingly, both Zhang Shao's brother and Fan Shi's son would be expected to carry out filial piety on behalf of the deceased and to continue their family lines as the sole male members of the family. The character setting of the Chinese text thus reflects its importance in Chinese life.

By contrast, Sôemon in "Chrysanthemum Tryst" is an orphan. This was a change made by Akinari probably for artistic reasons. Akinari may have wanted the readers to focus on the main character, Sôemon, alone (Uzuki 1976: 110). When the reader's attention is focused, the intensity of the situation is more easily produced. In Nô theater, the lead actor who plays the role of a ghost frequently takes on several roles in order to focus the audience's attention on himself alone. When there is only one figure on stage, the audience naturally pays more attention to that character. This intensified atmosphere is strengthened by such a technique. Akinari probably adopted this focusing technique from Nô drama (Shigetomo 1946: 77- 78).

The last statement that the ghost of Sôemon makes to Samon before he vanishes forever is: "Please do take good care of our mother." It is a moving sentence and it expresses his filial character. Sôemon has considered Samon's mother as his own, and he has expressed his wishes to serve her before he leaves for Izumo province. But inasmuch he commits suicide, this does not materialize. Faithfulness and loyalty to his brethren takes precedent over filial piety. In the code of the samurai, the virtues of loyalty and faithfulness to the samurai override filial piety.

Similarly in Samon's family, from artistic considerations Samon's sibling is replaced by a sister, who is mentioned but does not appear in the story. Without appearing, Akinari can make the reader concentrate on the character of Samon alone. In

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Lien-sheng Yang 1968: 155.

the Chinese story, Zhang Shao's younger brother has the common sense to ask Zhang Shao how he came to know whether or not Fan Shi really died. As Dominic Cheung has noted, the doubt the younger brother casts on the truth of Fan Shi's ghost makes the story all the more believable (Cheung 1977: 125-26). However, the younger brother's appearance and common sense could divide the audience's attention between Zhang Shao and his sibling. Akinari may have considered this situation undesirable. Still, though, similar to Zhang Shao's brother, Samon's sister is instrumental in strengthening the conduct of filial piety, for Samon asks his sister's family to take care of their mother after his departure. Unlike the custom in China, the continuation of a family line in Japan does not need to pass by blood lines through the male child of the family—adoption from another family would have sufficed in Japan. In fact, Akinari himself was an orphan who was adopted into a merchant family. Therefore, a male child of Samon's sister can be easily adopted into the Hasebe household to continue the Hasebe line. Akinari's design to focus attention on the main character also reveals the different social contexts in China and Japan.

### Authorial Fulfillment

While differences in the texts do reveal different elements of China and Japan, sometimes differences may reflect similar psychological foundations. The greatest change made in the process of adaptation at the end of the story is a good example.

At the end of the Chinese story, the emperor confers upon Zhang Shao and Fan Shi posthumous titles for their faithfulness to one other and their righteous actions, *even though they did not pass or even take the civil service examinations*. Though the Ming government encouraged equal education for males of all social classes, in the late Ming period the number of candidates who became qualified students (*xiucai* 秀才) by passing the civil service examinations at the local level greatly exceeded the number of available positions, which were allotted according to a fixed quota system. As a consequence, the country was full of student candidates who never became officials—some of rather advanced age (Hsu 1998: 1050-51). According to Shuhui Yang, the compiler Feng Menglong (1574-1645), publishing the last of the *Sanyan* collections in 1627 at the age of 53, was

still holding a degree of the lowest level, with no official appointment anywhere on the horizon. Like most scholars of his time, his highest ambition was to hold office himself and like them, he must have experienced a great deal of frustration and emotional suffering for his repeated failures. (Yang 1998: 126)

The narrator states: "Even though they were not officials, Fan Juqing was ennobled as Earl of Shan-yang [Shanyang] and Chan Yüan-po [Zhan Yuanbo] as Earl of Ju-nan [Runan]."<sup>7</sup> This is a reflection of an image of Feng Menglong who, in spite of his talent, could not pass the advanced examinations necessary to hold a high position in the government. That virtuous persons obtained public honors from the emperor without passing the examinations might be interpreted as a wish-fulfillment of the compiler. Yang states that "Feng Menglong's anxiety over service seems to have derived from his strong desire to be known and to have his personal worth recognized," and argues that

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<sup>7</sup> Translated by Bishop 1956: 97.

“this sense of exclusion from the political center found expression in his writings [of *Sanyan*]” (Yang 1998: 151). A shrine is built and a number of verses are composed in the honor of Zhang Shao and Fan Shi, satisfying the desire of the compiler and other numerous scholars in a situation similar to Feng Menglong’s.

The same wish-fulfillment may be observed in Akinari’s version through the changes he made in the text. The Chinese story which Samon tells Tanji is about Gong Shuzuo 公叔座 and Shang Yang 商鞅, taken from *Shiji* (The Records of the Grand Historian, ca. first century B.C.E.). When Gong Shuzuo, the prime minister of the kingdom of Wei 魏 (ca. 300 B.C.E.), was critically ill, the king of Wei visited Gong and asked him whom he would recommend to assume his position in the event of his death. Gong recommended his young talented friend, Shang Yang. If the king was not going to appoint Shang Yang, Gong said, the king should not let Shang Yang pass beyond the border, even if it meant killing him. Otherwise Shang Yang would later bring disaster to the Wei kingdom. Then, seeing that the king was not going to take his advice, Gong called on Shang Yang to tell him what had happened between himself and the king. Gong explained that he was giving priority to his lord over his private feelings, according to the Way of lord and subject. But as things looked ominous for Shang Yang, Gong told him to flee the kingdom to avoid calamity.

Akinari does not have Samon explain the exact relationship between the Chinese story and Sôemon and Tanji. Seemingly, this is another story of faithfulness which shows Akinari’s knowledge of classical Chinese literature. Samon’s killing of Tanji which immediately follows the Chinese story is then Samon’s revenge against Tanji on behalf of Sôemon. Yet, if Samon really meant to seek revenge, the target should have been Amako Tsunehisa, who ordered Tanji to detain Sôemon, rather than Tanji himself. After all, it is Amako Tsunehisa who usurps Tomita Castle 富天城 and murders Sôemon’s lord, Enya Kamonnosuke 鹽冶掃部介. Killing Tanji, who only does what he is ordered to do, is tantamount to punishing the innocent.

The inserted classical Chinese story is, then, more than a story of faithfulness. As Ôwa Yasuhiro has argued, it is embedded into the story’s development and works as an explanation for killing Tanji (Ôwa 1976: 94-95). Tanji’s situation is similar to Gong’s, though Tanji’s status is not as high as Gong Shuzuo’s, and, moreover, he is serving the lord who murdered his previous master. Like Gong, who serves the king and is a friend of Shang Yang, Tanji is Amako’s servant and, at the same time, a friend and relative of Sôemon. As Gong recommends Shang Yang to the king, Tanji encourages Sôemon to serve Amako. Thus, like Gong Shuzuo, Tanji should secretly let Sôemon escape when the situation becomes ominous. Perhaps Akinari wanted to express that, as exemplified in the story of Gong Shuzuo and Shang Yang, Tanji should have been loyal to both Amako and Sôemon, even though, in this case, loyalties to both conflict with one another. It is Akinari’s strict moral sense which brings about this ending. The inscription on Akinari’s tomb notes that he was “obstinate and perfectly upright.” Akinari’s disciple, Fujita Gyô, describes Akinari as “honest” and writes that “when Akinari associated with a person, if the man was unjust, he immediately severed his acquaintance. For this reason, he was not accepted in his hometown. *Akinari grieved and said, ‘People in thriving Ôsaka do not understand my naoki kokoro (honest and upright mind).’*”<sup>8</sup> Akinari’s conviction about rigidly upholding the ethic that, under any circumstances, a

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<sup>8</sup> Fujita Gyô 1970: 149.



human being should be able to live in accordance with a strict moral standard characterized by sincerity and wisdom, is reflected in "Chrysanthemum Tryst" (Ôwa 1976: 94-99). Akinari probably created this scene, wishing to declare his own upright character through Samon. While this scene clearly displays his knowledge of classical Chinese literature, it possibly serves to vent his pent up emotions as well. As Qian Zhongshu has demonstrated (Qian 1986), the idea that "poetry can vent resentment" is common in Chinese art and literature. Whether it is in China or Japan, such emotions share a common psychological foundation.<sup>9</sup>

Akinari upheld a strong moral code like his main characters. In fact, Akinari's main characters are his alter ego, for Akinari shares the frustration of the characters as well: Sôemon is frustrated in his efforts to ally lords against the murderer of his lord, but nobody pays attention to his scheme or his faithfulness. Samon is a scholar but has lost an opportunity to make the best of his talent. Akinari was talented, but like Feng Menglong, his ability was not always recognized. Intelligent and upright men like him were not always rewarded or recognized; on the contrary, sycophants low in intellect but fortunate in birth were frequently rewarded. This tendency is true in any society of any period. Yet, it was all the more so in his time, because during the Edo period the class system imposed on the people by the shogunal government made it apparent that a talented man of low birth would remain in his low status, while a mediocre man of high birth could enjoy high position and benefit lucratively. In this sense, the frustration of Samon and Sôemon was Akinari's own. The reward for Samon and Sôemon was not the act of killing Tanji, but rather the acknowledgment of their character by Amako Tsunehisa, the man who ordered Tanji to detain Sôemon. The narrator relates that "Amako Tsunehisa, hearing this effect, was touched by the true faithfulness between the brothers and did not have his men follow Samon." In the late fifteenth century, the backdrop of "Chrysanthemum Tryst," as well as in Akinari's own time, the Japanese emperor exercised only nominal power. Actual power resided in the hands of provincial lords such as Amako Tsunehisa, or in Akinari's time the Tokugawa military government. Under these circumstances, a Japanese audience would find it more plausible if the reward was Samon's freedom bestowed by Amako, rather than an honor conferred on Samon by the emperor. The man in power, Amako (or the Tokugawa family), recognized the faithful act of the brothers, just as Feng Menglong's readers admired the conduct of Fan Shi and Zhang Shao. The frustration and its sublimation found at the end of both stories are in accord with the mores of their age—that is, the time and place of Akinari and Feng Menglong. Akinari seems to have deviated greatly from the original text in this last segment by killing the sworn brother's cousin and fleeing. But in essence, it follows the spirit of the Chinese text in a Japanese context. Readers, especially scholars or literati of the day in both countries would have enjoyed the stories of belatedly recognized virtuous men.

#### **Akinari's Writing Style—From the Scene of the Ghost's Appearance**

There were numerous Japanese writers in the Edo period who tried their hands at tales of the supernatural. Among them, Akinari is generally recognized as a master of the genre (Yamaguchi 1927: 90). This was because, as other gifted writers in the world, he had a talent for manipulating various types of language—from elegant poetic Japanese to

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<sup>9</sup> Zhongshu Qian 1986: 1- 15.



mundane Japanese, even Chinese expressions—for different situations. I will delineate this point through the examination of the scenes until the appearance of the ghost.

After recovering from illness, Sôemon expresses his desire to survey the situation in his home province, but Samon urges him to set a date for their reunion with little reflection. Sôemon, a strict samurai, is unerringly mindful of his promise and remembers the date while events beyond his control build to detain him. Since the events which detain him are not Sôemon's fault at all, and with no way out wherever he turns, his determined faithfulness leads to tragedy. The fact that these events are the construct of his own cousin, Akana Tanji, a relative and a comrade who would ordinarily be expected to help Sôemon, makes the situation even more sorrowful. Yet, interestingly, unlike the Chinese version, the important date of Samon and Sôemon's reunion is chosen in a random manner. To commit suicide because one wants to keep an appointment made so arbitrarily is not an act of an ordinary man. Sôemon is indeed not an ordinary man; he is a samurai of intense integrity. *The Book of the Samurai* ennobles death and even teaches one to die without thinking.<sup>10</sup> Even so, one may wonder why Sôemon, as a strategist, had not considered and planned the prospect of going back to the Hasebe household to live with the family for the rest of his life. After all, that was what he had strongly wished for. A brief delay in one's arrival seems small compared with the long-term prospect of living together. What makes the story, especially the apparatus of the ghost, so believable is how Akinari introduces the ghost, based upon the Chinese text.

First, the conversation between Sôemon and Samon regarding the setting of the date is carried out at a quick tempo:

Akana says to Samon and his mother, "The reason why I escaped from Ômi is to survey the situation in Izumo province. Therefore, I would like to return temporarily and then come back here to requite your favors and practice filial piety. Let me bid farewell now." Samon asks, "Then when will you return, my brother?" Akana replies, "The moon and days go by fast. At most, it will not be later than this autumn." Samon asks, "When in autumn? Please do set the date." Akana answers, "Let's make it on the day of the Chrysanthemum Festival." Samon says, "My brother, please do not forget me on this date. I shall be waiting for you with a sprig of chrysanthemums and sake wine." Having done all they could do, Akana left for the West.<sup>11</sup>

Akinari creates a sense of urgency by piling up short sentences one after the next, and the date made so arbitrarily becomes definitive. Also, it foreshadows the coming climactic scene.

Immediately after this scene, a new paragraph starts with a poetic device called *makura kotoba* 枕詞 (pillow word): "Newly jeweled months and days have quickly passed by, the holly berries on the lower branches changed their colors, wild chrysanthemums in the hedges bloom in various colors, and the ninth month has come." In describing the scenery, Akinari uses poetic language to create both a subtle and soft atmosphere.<sup>12</sup> The change of style from the previous paragraph also indicates the change of mood and time.

<sup>10</sup> Yamamoto Tsunetomo 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Ueda Akinari 1959: 51. The translations hereafter are the author's.

<sup>12</sup> The Chinese story reads: "The months rolled past, and soon the Double Ninth festival was at hand." Translation by Bishop 1956: 90.

Samon has carefully prepared for Sôemon's arrival to his house just as Zhang Shao did for Fan Shi. The scene, then, shifts from inside of Samon's house to the outside. Identical to the Chinese version, "it is perfect autumn weather with no clouds in the entire azure sky." In the Chinese tale, the reader's eyes follow Zhang Shao who comes out of his gate whenever he hears the dog's bark to greet the arrival of Fan Shi. In Akinari's story, however, the reader's eyes are directed in a leisurely fashion toward the outside, overhearing the travelers' idle conversations—as if to check the excitement of Samon's meeting with Sôemon. At this moment, the reader becomes a casual onlooker. The story is relaxed in expectation of the coming climactic scene. Uzuki Hiroshi calls this technique *ma* 間 (space or pause), frequently used on the stage to relieve tension (Uzuki 1976: 145). This *ma* cannot be too relaxed or too long, for it obviously loses its effect to relieve or to create ensuing tension. Umberto Eco uses the term "trepidation time," signifying that "it delays the arrival of a dramatic ending" (Eco 1994: 64). Indeed, this scene, which does not exist in the Chinese story, is effective in its contrast to Samon's anxiousness waiting for Sôemon. It is a brief moment of relief before the appearance of the ghost.

The day passes and the sun sets, yet, Sôemon still has not come. Samon's mother sensibly calls out to Samon to go to bed by saying that "kiku no iro koki wa kefu nomi ka wa" 菊の色こきはけふのみかは (the color of the chrysanthemums will last even after today). It is a poetic way of saying that Sôemon's arrival may be the following day when the chrysanthemums will still be in full bloom. She then says: "Kaerikuru makoto da ni araba sora wa shigure ni utsuriyuku to mo nani o ka uramubeki" 帰りくる信だにあらば、空は時雨にうつりゆくとも何をか怨むべき (If he has the sincerity [or faithfulness 信] to come back to you, why should you feel bitter even if he returns at the time of the autumn rain). Her sensible comment includes another poetic device called *engo* 縁語 or associate words, which are "sincerity" (or "faithfulness") and "autumn rain."<sup>13</sup> The theme of faithfulness in the story sadly resounds through its associate word, autumn rain. In contrast to the bright color of the chrysanthemums in her previous sentence, which appeals to the visual sense, the sound of autumn showers is pleasant to the audible sense.

Just as a main character in the Chinese story does, Samon first persuades his mother to sleep and then continues to wait for Sôemon, as if intoxicated. As the reader becomes more informed of Samon's anxiety, he becomes more sympathetic with and worried about Samon. Samon goes out again to look about, but only sees the Milky Way shimmering and "the bright moon shedding its lonely light on him." The original text of the phrase, "the bright moon shedding its lonely light on him" is "hyôrin ware nomi o terashite sabishiki ni" 氷輪我のみを照して淋しきに. Its literal translation is actually "the moon's icy wheel is shedding its light on me, intensifying the loneliness." The word *ware* 我 (me) signifies both Samon and the reader. As Ôwa (1976: 96-99) has pointed out, the reader who has heretofore been an onlooker from outside becomes one with Samon at this moment. In other words, through the language of *ware* which refers to both Samon and the reader, Samon's state of mind and that of the reader's become united. Under the lonely moonlight, the reader is drawn completely into the world of Akinari's fiction. This description of the Milky Way and the moonlight comes directly

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<sup>13</sup> Ueda Akinari 1959: 53.

from the Chinese story. But in the Chinese version, the word referring to *ware* does not appear so that the distance between Zhang and the reader is maintained.

Akinari then adds two more phrases to describe its desolate atmosphere: “noki moru inu hoyuru koe sumiwatari, uranami no oto zo koko moto ni tachikuru yô nari” 軒守る犬吼る声すみわたり、浦浪の音ぞここもとにたちくるやうなり (The watchdog’s bark resounds in clear air, and the sound of the waves in the bay are heard as if surging to the place where he stood). The dog’s bark, which in the Chinese story caused Zhang Shao to look for Fan, is used by Akinari here to enhance the forlorn mood in the middle of the night. The last phrase, “the sound of the waves...,” will remind those who know *The Tale of Genji* of the loneliness of Genji at Suma Bay. John Miles Foley has written that “individual poet and individual audience member or reader draw from a spectrum of responses selected by the unifying—but explicitly extraperformance and extratextual—context of tradition” (Foley 1995: 7). “The sound of the waves...” is part of the Japanese frame of “traditional referentiality” which “submerged beneath the surface of the single tale or element [wherein] lies a wealth of associations accessible only under the agreement of metonymic representation and interpretation” (Foley 1991: 11, 42). Pathos and anxiety which Genji and past heroes suffered at Suma Bay surge up through Samon, intensifying the loneliness.

Then, just like the Chinese story, even the moon sets behind the mountains leaving the area black. When Samon is about to give up, he sees a dim shadow coming toward him, riding on the wind. Imagine on a dark night, something faint approaching as the wind blows. That something is recognizable when the residue of the blue icy moonlight shines on it—it is a ghost. The spirit of Sôemon has with the prelude of the moonlight as the title of the collection suggests. The darkness in which the ghost of Fan Shi appears is described as *hei ying* 黑影 (black shadow). Exactly the same characters are used in “Chrysanthemum Tryst.” Yet, Akinari’s Japanese rendering is flexible. Ordinarily, *heiying* are read as *kokuei* in the Japanese *on* reading, or *kurokage* in the *kun* reading, both meaning “black shadow.” Instead, Akinari writes *kageroi* alongside the characters, which reminds readers of shimmering heated air. As Komatsu Masuo states, Akinari wants to express the image of unstable flickering darkness by giving *kageroi* to the characters (Komatsu 1974: 121).

The appearance of the ghost is described with a translucent and simmering image within the darkness. This is the most beautiful and austere scene of the story, epitomizing faithfulness in the atmosphere of pathos. The story of Sôemon’s horrific end is told under this intensely lonely but telling atmosphere. That he terminates his life to keep his promise—i.e., the act of extreme faithfulness—is registered in the reader’s mind only as plausible and fatal. Akinari considers that those who write neo-classical literature are best served by choosing the most appropriate words to express their feelings without the restriction of grammatical rules.<sup>14</sup> As Nakamura Yukihiro points out, Akinari freely uses the words of both the ancient and contemporary Chinese characters, Chinese characters with the rendition of Japanese poetic words (Nakamura 1961: 253- 54). It is precisely because of his unrestrained diction that the imagery of Akinari’s supernatural world refracts and expands.

<sup>14</sup> Nakamura Yukihiro notes that Akinari’s techniques were grammatically unacceptable from the viewpoint of classical grammarians like Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730- 1801). Nakamura Yukihiro, 1961: 253.

Using "Fan Juqing's Eternal Friendship" as a foundation and injecting distinctly Japanese elements into his "Chrysanthemum Tryst," Akinari created a Japanese masterwork of the supernatural. "Fan Juqing's Eternal Friendship" and "Chrysanthemum Tryst" are self-expressions of the unrecognized men of different cultures of different times. As demonstrated, Akinari recreated his story by changing the basic premises of the story, such as characters' status and family structure, to make them culturally more plausible to the Japanese audience and to suit a more Japanese aesthetic sensitivity. In addition, Akinari, as an educated man, knew traditional Chinese and Japanese art and poetry well. His writing style reveals how skillfully he used allusions to traditional Japanese literature and art and manipulation of language registers, while freely borrowing Chinese language from the original Chinese texts to strengthen the believability of his story. As a result, while following the major framework of the story, and even using diction from "Fan Juqing's Eternal Friendship," "Chrysanthemum Tryst" became a distinctively Japanese story.

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