

The Public, the Private, and the In-Between: Poetry Exchanges as Court Diplomacy in Mid-Heian Japan*

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The paper argues that the well-established distinction between “formal” / “public” (*hare*) and “informal” / “private” (*ke*) poetry in *waka* studies not only fails to describe adequately the styles it purports to illustrate but actively hinders a more accurate understanding of the literary cultures to which it is applied. After briefly reviewing the debate on formal and informal styles in *waka* scholarship and a brief analysis of the *zōtōka* (“poetic dialogues”) as a particular kind of poetic communication, I provide close readings of the personal poetry collections of Fujiwara no Morosuke (907–960) and Fujiwara no Kishi (929–985) in order to show that, when viewed against its historical context, so-called “private” poetry was as politically significant and as consequential for the state as its formal counterpart, albeit in a different way. Whereas formal, *daiei*-style composition reflected and celebrated the vertical, emperor-centric structure of the *ritsuryō* state, everyday exchanges between court aristocrats were the perfect literary complement to the “privatized,” cooperative, and consensus-based order now known as the “court-centered polity” (*ōchō kokka*).

Keywords: private/public, court society, *ōchō kokka*, *ritsuryō*, Heian, Fujiwara, *waka* poetry, marriage politics, gender, Fujiwara no Morosuke, Fujiwara no Kishi, Heian women writers, *Gosen wakashū*

The distinction between “formal” or “public” poetry (*hare no uta* 晴の歌) and “informal” or “private” poetry (*ke no uta* 藝の歌) is one of the oldest and most well-established in *waka* scholarship.¹ Since it was first introduced in the early postwar years, it has been used in

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¹ The terms *hare* and *ke* are not easily rendered into English. For scholars of folklore who first adopted them as scholarly terms, *hare* referred to days and activities of special significance in the life of the community such as religious festivals and *ke* to ordinary days and activities. Over decades of use, however, they have acquired various other nuances, which makes finding exact equivalents difficult. Depending on the context, *hare* can mean “public,” “official,” or “formal” and *ke* “private,” “unofficial,” or “informal.” In this essay, I will use all these translations interchangeably as all of these nuances are now part of the semantic scope of the terms. On the origin of the terms in folklore studies, see Masuda 1977, p. 75.

a plethora of studies by countless scholars, and continues to be widely employed today.² As a way to conceptualize differences between poetic styles, the distinction has allowed scholars to articulate developments in *waka* history that would otherwise have been difficult to notice or account for. But there is also a very real sense in which these categories not only fail to describe adequately the styles that they purport to describe but actively hinder a better understanding of the literary cultures to which they are applied. The mid-tenth century is a good case in point: known to *waka* scholars as “the *Gosenshū* age” (*Gosen jidai* 後撰時代) after the title of the second imperial *waka* anthology, the *Gosen waka shū* 後撰和歌集 (Later selection of *waka*, 951; hereafter simply *Gosenshū*), this period is widely regarded as the heyday of “private” poetry, and this notion colors the entire understanding on the literature of this period. In this essay, I will offer close readings of the poetic output of two important mid-century authors of so-called “private poetry,” Fujiwara no Morosuke 藤原師輔 (907–960) and Fujiwara no Kishi 藤原徽子 (or Yoshiko, 929–985), in order to demonstrate that it is essentially inaccurate to view this kind of poetry as purely “informal” and “private.” When viewed in the context of the changes to the structure and organization of the state that took place between the late-ninth and the mid-tenth centuries, this kind of poetry appears to be as rich in political significance and as intertwined with questions of authority and political necessity as its “formal” counterpart, albeit in a different way. Both our usage of these categories and the understanding of literary history that we have built upon them, therefore, are badly in need of revision.

Hare and Ke in Waka Scholarship

Piecing together definitions by different scholars, “formal” poetry can be defined as poetry composed at court, on set topics (*dai* 題), at the command of figures of authority.³ This kind of poetry was the specialty of (usually male) semi-professional poets known today as “poetry specialists” (*senmon kajin* 専門歌人, sometimes translated as “professional poets”), and is often said to be of greater literary merit than so-called informal poetry.⁴ By contrast, the term “unofficial” or “private” poetry is used to refer to poems improvised in everyday situations, such as love encounters and communications with friends and family. Unlike “formal” poetry, this kind of poetry was composed by poets of both sexes, including the so-called “amateur poets” (*shirōto kajin* 素人歌人),⁵ and is said to be more derivative, of lesser artistic value, and to have been primarily “utilitarian” (*jitsuyōteki* 実用的) in aim.⁶ Because it was composed by male state functionaries, in official settings, and at the command of an authority, formal poetry is said to have served a “public” (*kōteki* 公的) function, while informal poetry is almost universally understood as purely “private” (*shiteki* 私的) and

2 Studies that make use of or mention the distinction are too numerous to list exhaustively. A number of significant ones are cited below.

3 For a useful overview of the debate in Japanese, see Kudō 1994, Masuda 1977.

4 Well-known examples of poetry specialists are Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (872?–945?), Mibu no Tadamine 壬生忠岑 (860?–920?), and, a generation later, Kiyohara no Motosuke 清原元輔 (908–990).

5 Usami 1952, pp. 66–68. Given the lack of clear criteria to determine professional status at the time, the distinction between “professional” and “amateur” poets is problematic. *Waka* scholars use the term “professional poets” loosely to refer to poets who were frequently chosen to provide poems for official events or who, in their work, demonstrated a special commitment to their art.

6 Katagiri 2000, p. 216. The distinction between “literary” and “utilitarian” poetry was first made by Kubota Utsubo (1965, pp. 12–13).

devoid of political meaning. In one of the earliest uses of the terms, Kazamaki Keijirō 風巻景次郎 (1902–1960) clearly equated formal poetry with officialdom and informal poetry with the private sphere:

Poetry exchanges between men and women can be considered the expression of a person's interiority, of their most intimate, private lives, and therefore were not amenable to being used in official court contexts. [...] Thus, the tradition of the Japanese-language poem exchanges [*sōmonka* 相聞歌] could continue at court only in the form of “Rear Palace” poetry, while the role of official poetry, following the example of Tang China, was played by *shi* poems of praise for the virtue of the sovereign and seasonal poems composed at court banquets. [...] Thus, two distinct styles emerged independently, official poems composed at court, on seasonal topics, and lyrical, everyday poems composed in more casual situations; in terms of style, a “state style” [*ōyake no uta* 公の歌] and “a private style” [*watakushi no uta* 私の歌] [...].⁷

By far the most influential use of these notions has been that of Katagiri Yōichi 片桐洋一. In a number of studies published between the 1960s and the 1980s, Katagiri made the *hare/ke* dichotomy the cornerstone of a history of *waka* development from a *Kokinshū* age dominated by formal poetry to a *Gosenshū* age dominated by private poetry.⁸ Drawing on earlier studies by Usami Kisohachi 宇佐美喜三八 (1906–1964), Katagiri presented the *Kokinshū*, with its emphasis on poetry composed by imperial command on set topics (*daieika* 題詠歌), as the embodiment of the formal, public style, and the *Gosenshū*, with its focus on love poetry, its large number of poems by high-ranking “amateurs,” and the large presence of poems by women, as the epitome of the informal, private mode.⁹ Although he recognized the increased political significance of person-to-person interaction and poetic banter at court (especially of a romantic nature) in the Fujiwara age, Katagiri held fast to a view of the public and private modes as fundamentally distinct and stopped short of retheorizing “private” poetry as a new kind of “public” poetry for the new times, which is what I aim to do here.¹⁰

Ueno Osamu 上野理's (1935–2007) use of the notions in his equally influential *Goshūishū zengo* 後拾遺集前後 (Before and after the *Goshūishū*, 1976) was somewhat different but also similar in one key respect. Drawing on Kubota Utsubo 窪田空穂's (1887–1967) earlier distinction between “literary” (*bungeiteki* 文芸的) and “practical” (*jitsuyōteki*) verse,¹¹ Ueno argued that it is the level of artistry and technical sophistication that differentiates formal poems from informal ones.¹² For Ueno, both the *Kokinshū* and the *Gosenshū* belonged to the age of the *ke no uta* (although he conceded that the latter is marked by “a manifest disdain for formal poetry”), and it is only by the third official anthology, the *Shūi wakashū* 拾遺和歌集 (Gleanings of *waka*, ca. 1005, hereafter *Shūishū*), that the transition from the informal-practical mode to the formal-literary mode truly took

7 Kazamaki, “*Kokin to Shinkokin*,” as quoted in Kudō 1994, pp. 260–261.

8 Katagiri 1978, pp. 208, 215–218; Katagiri 2000, pp. 188–189.

9 Katagiri 2000, 1978.

10 Katagiri 1978, pp. 203–205.

11 Kubota 1965, pp. 12–13.

12 Ueno 1976, p. 13.

place.¹³ Like Kazamaki and Katagiri, however, Ueno squarely associated formal poetry with the political and informal poetry with the private arena.¹⁴

The distinction has not been without its critics. Kikuchi Yasuhiko 菊地靖彦 (1936–2001) pointed out early enough that whether a poem is to be classified as “public” or “private” is determined solely by the circumstances of composition and not by any intrinsic difference.¹⁵ Echoing Kikuchi, Kudō Shigenori 工藤重矩 notes that it is impossible to draw too fine a line between the two, and that only the context of composition dictates whether a poem should be read as a formal or informal one: “It is the formal context that makes a poem formal, not vice versa.”¹⁶ A similar criticism has been voiced in English by Gustav Heldt.¹⁷ Despite these criticisms, however, and partly because they do not amount to a more substantive critique, these notions continue to be widely used and to shape our understanding of Heian *waka* history.

The *Gosenshū* Age as *Ke* Anthology?

For several decades now, *waka* historiography has been presenting the middle decades of the tenth century as the golden age of private poetry. The work that more than any other is said to epitomize the mid-century dominance of the *ke no uta* is the *Gosenshū*, the second of the imperial *waka* anthologies. Compiled in 951 at the behest of Emperor Murakami 村上 (926–967; r. 946–967), the *Gosenshū* is the work that made compiling royally-commissioned anthologies of *waka* (*chokusenshū* 勅撰集) a regular practice. As numerous commentators have pointed out, however, the *Gosenshū* makes a rather odd companion to the other two earliest imperial *waka* anthologies, the *Kokinshū* and the *Shūishū*.¹⁸ The very features that set the *Gosenshū* apart from the other two of the *sandaishū* 三代集 are also the features that incontrovertibly mark it as a *ke* anthology in the opinion of critics.¹⁹ These can be summarized as follows:

1. Lack of poems composed in formal circumstances, such as “screen poems” (*byōbu-uta* 屏風歌) and poems from poetry contests (*uta-awase*);
2. Large number of poems by “amateur poets” of high rank;
3. Emphasis on love poetry and poetry composed in everyday situations;
4. Large number of poems by women poets;
5. Large number of *zōtōka* 贈答歌 (“poetic dialogues”) exchanges;
6. Lack of poems by the compilers.²⁰

Particularly defining of the *Gosenshū* as a “private poetry anthology” (*ke no shūsei* 葵の集成) in the opinion of critics is the large number of *zōtōka* that it contains. Unlike poems composed on set topics, on formal occasions, and at the behest of authority, *zōtōka*

13 Ueno 1976, p. 9.

14 Ueno 1976, pp. 5–6.

15 Kikuchi 1980.

16 Kudō 1994, p. 280.

17 Heldt 2008, pp. 82–83.

18 Katagiri 2000, pp. 175–190.

19 *Sandaishū* (Collections of the three ages) is the name by which the first three imperial *waka* anthologies were traditionally referred to.

20 Katagiri 1978, pp. 202–221; Katagiri 2000, Abe 1972, Terauchi 1968, Nishimaru 1997.

exchanges were improvised in everyday situations, as part of daily life. Moreover, whereas formal poems were typically composed by and addressed to men, *zōtōka* exchanges were composed by and exchanged between both sexes, often (though not exclusively) in romantic situations. Perhaps more than anything else, it is the large number of these intergender dialogues, and the worlds of romance and sexual indulgence with which they are primarily associated, that gives the *Gosenshū* its unmistakably “everyday” (*nichijōteki* 日常的) and “private” (*shiteki*) character in the eyes of critics.²¹

There is, of course, something intuitively problematic in viewing an anthology compiled by imperial decree and which features prominently many of the court’s most powerful figures as an “informal” or “private” work. Compiled at regular intervals by imperial decree, *chokusenshū* were always at least in part official state business, regardless of their content. But the problems run deeper, and concern the ahistorical applications of these notions, without considering the sociopolitical context within which these poetic modes emerged and rose to prominence. As the following pages will show, the gradual blurring of the boundary between private interests and state power and the rise of a new, eminently collaborative political order between the ninth and tenth centuries makes classifying everyday poems by court aristocrats as purely “informal” or “private” untenable. When viewed against the historical context, so-called “private” poetry appears to be no less consequential for the life of the state than its formal counterpart, although the political order that it implies, and more or less directly served to support, is not the vertical, emperor-centric one of the *ritsuryō* 律令 codes but the more horizontal and collaborative one that came to prevail at court at this time. Our whole understanding of *Gosenshū*-age poetry as the private obverse of official, politically-minded verse needs to be fundamentally rethought.

Historicizing Literary Categories: From *Ritsuryō Kokka* to *Ōchō Kokka*

Historians view the tenth century as a time of significant change in the structure and organization of the Heian state as the court transitioned from the *ritsuryō*-style polity of the Nara and early Heian periods to a new type of organization known as the *ōchō kokka* 王朝国家 (“court-centered polity”; also translated “royal court state”).²² The new regime involved a decentralization of functions to the provinces, a move toward descent-determined office, and increased emphasis on personal ties in the procurement and exercise of power. Particularly relevant for my purposes here is the increasingly “privatized” nature of political life. Historians understand “privatization” in two main ways: as an increased emphasis on familial and personal ties in government appointments and decision-making, and as reliance on private assets in the exercise of state functions.²³ Also worth emphasizing is the “shared” nature of authority under the new regime. In place of direct imperial authority, Fujiwara-style politics emphasized cooperation among multiple stakeholders. John Wallace uses the expression “networks of power” to describe the complex human linkages through which authority was won and exercised under the Fujiwara regency, and the expression is an apt one.²⁴ From roughly the time of Fujiwara no Tadahira 藤原忠平 (880–949), authority ceased

21 Terauchi 1968; Usami 1952, pp. 62–63; Sugitani 1991, p. 251.

22 The literature on *ōchō kokka* is already vast and continues to grow. Useful overviews in English include Batten 1993; and Sasaki 2006.

23 Hurst 2007b, p. 33; Adolphson and Kamens 2007, pp. 9–10; Adolphson 2012.

24 Wallace 2005, pp. 5, 149.

to be firmly localized in the hands of the emperor and came to be “shared” by a cluster of people that included, at a minimum, the emperor, the primary consort, her father, and the future heir. Joan Piggott describes the tenth-century monarchy as “a consensus system” whereby “members of the royal family with their staff in the palace, including the *sesshō* 摂政 or *kanpaku* 関白 as their deputed court leader, worked with council members and their staff—the controllers and secretaries—to govern capital and provinces.”²⁵ Ōtsu Tōru 大津透 labels this new configuration of power “aristocratic coalition” (*jōryū rengō taisei* 上流連合体制), while Tamai Chikara 玉井力 speaks of “composite kingship” (*bunkenteki ōsei* 分権的王政).²⁶

Equally cooperative was the relationship between the male heads of the main aristocratic families, their wives, and their daughters to be married off to emperors and other figures of importance. As Carole Cavanaugh has pointed out, far from being mere pawns in the hands of their male relations, Heian elite women actively contributed to the smooth functioning of the system not only through marriage and childbirth but also through their manifold talents and expertise.²⁷ The case of empresses who influenced state affairs as “mothers of the nation” (*kokumo* 国母) is only the most conspicuous example of the way in which Heian court women actively contributed to the system of which they were part.²⁸

It is within this new sociopolitical order so heavily reliant on personal ties and cooperation among multiple stakeholders, both male and female, that so-called private poetry rose to the forefront of the literary scene. It will be my contention in the remainder of this paper that far from being purely private and devoid of political significance, this kind of dialogic, eminently interactive poetry was political in the most fundamental sense of the word, as it provided a mechanism to establish, monitor, and keep healthy ties between members of the court, thus providing vital soft support to the cooperative and consensus-based order known as *ōchō kokka*.

Zōtōka as Horizontal Poetic Community

Before looking at some concrete examples of this highly political use of “private” poetry, it is worth pausing a moment to consider the nature of the *zōtōka* as a particular kind of poetic exchange. Insofar as it involves language, all poetic communication both implies or prescribes some kind of social relation between speaker and addressee.²⁹ In the formal, *daiei*-type exchange, the purest form of which is the poem made by imperial command (*chokueika* 勅詠歌), the addressee is the authority who commissions the poem, and the author is someone of lower rank, typically a male court official. The relation between speaker and addressee is, therefore, vertical (from low to high) and unidirectional (figure 1).³⁰

25 Piggott 2007, p. 56.

26 Ōtsu 1996, p. 41; Tamai 2000, p. 11. Piggott (2008, p. 27) translates *bunkenteki ōsei* as “stakeholder kingship.”

27 Cavanaugh 1996, pp. 597–599; see also Arntzen 2001, pp. 31–33.

28 Fukutō 2007.

29 Here I take a cue from Bakhtin, who argues that language style “is inseparably linked [...] to types of relation between the speaker and the other participants in speech communication.” Bakhtin 1986, p. 64.

30 In semi-formal contexts such as occasional banquets and royal excursions, the ruler sometimes added a poem of his own to compositions by his courtiers. In formal courtly contexts, however, the emperor limited himself to issuing the command to compose the topics, and formally-appointed *utayomi* 歌よみ (lit. “poem-makers”) “offered up” (*tatematsuru* 奉る) their poems for his perusal.

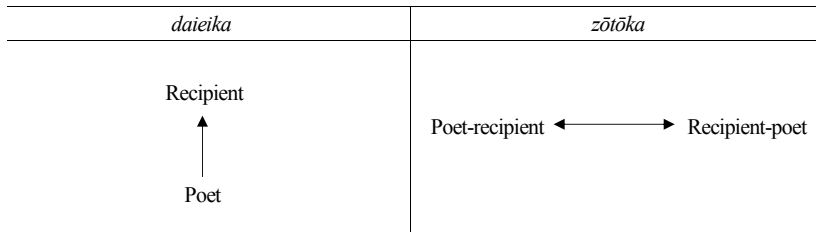


Figure 1. Social orientation of *daiei* and *zōtō* modes of poetic communication.

Made and respectfully presented when His Majesty ordered him to compose a poem:
Tsurayuki

<i>Kasuga no no</i>	Are they off to pluck
<i>wakana tsumi niya</i>	young sprouts at Kasuga fields?
<i>Shirotae no</i>	The merry courtiers
<i>sode furihaete</i>	wave their dazzling white sleeves
<i>hito no yukuramu</i>	as they set on their journey. ³¹
かすが野のわかになつみにや	白たへの袖ふりはへて人の行くらむ

By contrast, in *zōtōka* exchanges the addressee was usually a relative or direct acquaintance of the poet, and the occasion was an event or situation—love encounters, the birth of a child, bereavements, etc.—in which poet and recipient participated in a personal rather than professional capacity. Furthermore, in a *zōtōka* exchange poet and recipient always switched sides as the recipient produced their reply to the first poem. Thus, the implied social relation of a *zōtōka* exchange can be said to be “horizontal” (or less openly vertical) and always bi-directional.

Coming to the formal characteristics of the *zōtōka*, a distinctive feature of these exchanges is that the respondent usually employed the same imagery and language of the first poem in their responses. In love exchanges, the respondent also added some unexpected twist or inversion of the meaning of the first poem as a way to deflect the suitor’s advances, as in the following example:³²

Sent to Shōni: (Lord Fujiwara no Asatada)

<i>Toki shimo are</i>	It may be the time,
<i>hana no sakari ni</i>	but your cruel indifference
<i>tsurakereba</i>	while the blossoms bloom
<i>omowanu yama ni</i>	makes me want to head for the hills,

³¹ *Kokinshū* 22.

³² In Japanese-language scholarship this feature is variously known as “faultfinding” (*ageashitori* 揚げ足取り), “repelling” (*hanpatsu* 反発), and “counterattack” (*kirikaeshi* 切り返し).

iri ya shinamashi something I'd never even thought.
 時しもあれ花のさかりにつらければ 思はぬ山に入りやしなまし

The reply:

Wa ga tame ni Is it just the hills
omowanu yama no you had never even thought?
oto ni nomi Finding out you'll leave
hana sakariyuku when the blossoms are at peak
haru o uramimu makes the spring truly hateful!³³
 わがために思はぬ山の音にのみ 花さかりゆく春をうら見む

By deftly reworking the imagery of Asatada 朝忠's (910–966) poem, Shōni Myōbu 少弐命婦 (d.u.) turns his plea for greater consideration into an expression of her own dissatisfaction with his courtship. The phrase “I'd never even thought” (*omowanu*), which in the first poem only refers to the poet's decision to take vows, is applied in the second poem to his feelings for the woman, which thereby become accidental and only half-hearted. Although the man's entreaty is ultimately disappointed, the respondent accepts to work within the discursive boundaries laid by him; the two parties can therefore be said to cooperate in creating beauty from a shared set of ingredients.

To sum up, in virtually every respect, *zōtōka* exchanges emphasize intimacy and cooperation between poet and addressee. Unlike *daiei*-style composition, which draws attention to, and indeed spectacularizes, the social distance between speaker and recipient, *zōtōka* exchanges symbolically collapse it by engaging the two in a horizontal, two-way, and honorific-free dialogue.³⁴ The rise to prominence of this interactive and eminently dialogic mode of poetic communication at a time of increasing reliance on cooperation in court affairs is too well-timed to be simply casual. It is far more reasonable to see it as another facet of the shift to a more cooperative and shared vision of the court after the onset of the Fujiwara regency.

Case Study #1: The Poetry of Fujiwara no Morosuke

Having looked at the *zōtōka* in somewhat abstract terms, I will now examine some concrete examples in order to show the variety of important social and political functions that so-called informal poetry fulfilled. My first case study is the poetic oeuvre of Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Morosuke 藤原師輔 (907–960). Morosuke is in many ways the archetypal mid-century poet of high rank. He was a very prolific poet (fourteen of his poems were included in the *Gosenshū*), but his poetic output consists entirely of *zōtōka* exchanged with various court figures of the time.

As Tadahira's second son, Morosuke had a first-rate career in the government, which peaked in 947 with his appointment to the position of minister of the right. Although his brother Saneyori 実頼 (900–970) was older, of higher rank, and held a higher office (that

33 *Gosenshū* 70–71. To “head for the hills” meant to enter monastic life.

34 Honorifics are not used in *waka*, so even people of vastly different rank “spoke” to each other as social equals. See Arntzen 2001, p. 32.

of minister of the left), Morosuke is generally thought to have been the more powerful of the two, and it was his line of the family—the Kujō 九条 branch—which eventually prevailed.³⁵ Like his more famous grandson Michinaga 道長 (966–1028), Morosuke owed his political success to his uncommon ability to build and manage an impressive network of alliances both at court and beyond.³⁶ In 940, he married his daughter Anshi 安子 (or Yasuko, 927–964) to the then crown prince Nariakira 成明 (future Emperor Murakami), and was later able to have her firstborn Norihira 憲平 (950–1011, future Emperor Reizei 冷泉, r. 967–969) appointed crown prince over the grandson of his rival, Fujiwara no Motokata 藤原元方 (888–953).³⁷ In a move of remarkable political savviness, he also married his third daughter (name unknown, 934–962) to Minamoto no Takaakira 源高明 (914–983), a senior member of the rival Minamoto clan and a major competitor in the struggle for power.³⁸ He also married another daughter (Tōshi, or, Nariko, ?–975) to Emperor Daigo 醍醐’s (r. 897–930) son Shigeakira 重明 (906–954), the father of Anshi’s rival consort, Kishi (or Yoshiko, 929–985; more on her below). Nor was his knack for building profitable alliances limited to the court context. Between 940 and his death in 960, he cultivated a long and mutually advantageous friendship with Ryōgen 良源 (912–985), the abbot of the Yokawa section of Enryakuji 延暦寺.³⁹ In 957, he “donated” his then fourteen-year-old son (religious name Jinzen 尋禪) to Enryakuji to be groomed to become the next abbot.⁴⁰ By tirelessly using his influence to expand his network of alliances, Morosuke built his own formidable “network of power,” which stretched from the capital to the provinces and included potential rivals and powerful religious institutions.

Essential to the success of this strategy were Morosuke’s own marriages, which gave him both plentiful offspring to place in important positions or marry strategically, and valuable symbolic capital. His primary wife was Seishi 盛子 (or Moriko, ?–943), the daughter of Fujiwara no Tsunekuni 藤原経邦 (no dates), a mid-ranking member of the weaker Nanke branch of the family. Seishi bore him five sons and four daughters, all of whom would later climb to the highest positions of the court.⁴¹ While stably married to Seishi, Morosuke also pursued formal liaisons with several other women. In 931, he obtained special permission to marry Emperor Daigo’s fourth daughter Kinshi 勤子 (?–938), the first civilian in history to do so. After Kinshi’s untimely death in 938, he married two of her sisters, Gashi 雅女 (910–954) in 938, and Kōshi 康子 (919–957) in 955. In addition to solidifying Morosuke’s ties with the imperial family, these marriages to women of imperial blood added to Morosuke’s aura as *de facto* leader of the court nobility.⁴²

35 For about a hundred years after Morosuke’s death, all emperors and senior court politicians were his direct descendants.

36 On Michinaga’s use of family ties, see Hurst 2007a, pp. 69–74.

37 The event precipitated one of the most famous examples of supernatural revenge in Japanese history. The deaths of Morosuke in 960, Anshi in 964, and Emperor Reizei’s madness were all attributed by contemporaries to Motokata’s angry ghost.

38 Takaakira held some of the court’s highest positions until his exile to Kyushu in 969 as a result of the events known as the An’na disturbance (*An’na no hen* 安和の変).

39 McMullin 1989, pp. 123–129.

40 McMullin 1989, p. 128.

41 Morosuke would eventually have some twelve sons and five daughters. For a complete list, see McCullough 1980, p. 127.

42 Mostow 2004, p. 2.

In Morosuke's hands, *waka* served as a formidable tool to build and manage these profitable alliances. His personal poetry collection consists entirely of *zōtōka* poems exchanged with various court figures of the time, with a special focus on his exchanges with his four wives.⁴³ Poem nos. 3 and 4 in the Idemitsu Museum text chronicle the beginnings of his relationship with Seishi:

Composed when the same Lord and his primary wife were still children and had just begun to exchange poems:

<i>Yukikaeri</i>	This vain to and fro
<i>mi wa itazura ni</i>	is just going to kill me
<i>narinuredo</i>	and nothing more.
<i>inochi ni kaeyo</i>	Risk your life to come to me
<i>aware to omowamu</i>	and I will believe your love.
ゆきかへり身はいたづらになりぬれど いのちにかへよあはれとおもはむ	

The man's reply:

<i>Au ni dani</i>	Were I to meet you
<i>kaeba nani kawa</i>	what would there ever be then
<i>oshikaran</i>	to feel regret for?
<i>yoso niwa shinaji</i>	I wish to die for no one
<i>inochizukushi ni</i>	but the one that I live for! ⁴⁴
あふにだにかへばなにかはおしからん よそにはしなじいのちづくしに	

While stably married to Seishi (their marriage dates from circa 923), Morosuke also became involved with a number of other women, notably three of Emperor Daigo's daughters.⁴⁵ Rather than shy away from them, the collection celebrates such "taboo" affairs with women of imperial blood. The following exchange celebrates the beginnings of his liaison with Kinshi:

His Lordship, probably to the first [of the three Princesses]:

<i>Hito shirezu</i>	When it first started
<i>omoisometeshi</i>	no one knew of my passion,
<i>kurenai no</i>	but shortly enough
<i>iro ni idenubeku</i>	it will be obvious to all

⁴³ There are three main textual lineages of Morosuke's collection, which vary slightly in the number and arrangement of the poems and are thought to derive from a single ancestor: the Sonkeikaku lineage (89 poems), the Shōryōbu lineage (85 poems), and the Tankaku Sōsho lineage (86 poems). All citations are from the Idemitsu Museum text as edited by Katagiri Yōichi and the Kansai Shikashū Kenkyūkai (Kasama Shoin, 2002); see *Kujō dono Morosuke-shū*.

⁴⁴ *Kujō dono Morosuke-shū* 3–4, pp. 188–190.

⁴⁵ Kudō Shigenori argues that these marriages were probably less formal unions than Morosuke's marriage to Seishi. The position of these women was probably more akin to that of a concubine or secondary wife (*shō* 妾), who was looked after economically in exchange for favors. See Kudō 2002, pp. 108–109.

omōyuru kana from the scarlet on my face!
 人しれず思ひそめてしくれなるの 色にいでぬべくおもほゆるかな

Her Highness's reply:

Yurusarenu I hear that such things
mono to shi kikeba are most strictly forbidden.
kurenai no Pray, do not flaunt
ho ni izuru iro wa the scarlet of your feelings
misezu mo aranan like ripened ears in full view!⁴⁶
 ゆるされぬものとしきげばくれなるの ほにいづるいろは見せずもあらなん

Kinshi died young and several poems in the collection mourn her untimely departure (nos. 29–32 and 83–84). While Kinshi was still alive, Morosuke began another, even more scandalous relationship with her sister Gashi who, in addition to being the emperor's sister, also served as Ise vestal (*saigū* 齋宮).⁴⁷ Morosuke's affair with Gashi is another striking real-world example of the "forbidden love" so frequently depicted in Heian literature:

When the Ise vestal departed for Ise:

Au koto no You will be alone,
arashi ni magau like a tiny boat at the
obune yue mercy of the storm—
tomaru ware sae But even I who stay here
kogarenuru kana will be there with you, rowing!⁴⁸
 あふことのあらしにまがふをぶねゆへ とまるわれさへこがれぬるかな

While it provided Morosuke with the perfect tool to pursue these profitable connections, *waka* also gave his primary wife Senshi a means to preserve their marriage despite their physical separation. Poem no. 5 of the Idemitsu Museum text reads:

When His Lordship spent all his time at the Fourth Princess [Kinshi] and visited her rarely, she sent him a set of ritual blue garments with this poem:

Yamaai mote I used indigo
sureru koromo no to get the color right but
Kai mo naku it was all for naught;
Kefu sae hito o if today, too, no one comes,

46 *Kujō dono Morosuke-shū* 42–43. *Ho ni izuru* (lit. "to produce [ripened] ears") was an established metaphor for becoming obvious.

47 Vestals were expected to remain chaste and avoid contact with commoners. Gashi served as Ise vestal between 931 and 935. Her relationship with Morosuke seems to have continued throughout this time.

48 *Kujō dono Morosuke-shū* 34.

Minu ya naninari what will I have made them for?⁴⁹
 やまあひもてすれる衣のかひもなく けふさへ人を見ぬやなになり

Readers of Heian literature will recall the many similar exchanges in the *Kagerō Diary* (*Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記, c. 974) through which the author and her powerful husband Kaneie keep their marriage afloat despite the growing distance between them.⁵⁰ Perhaps to an even higher degree than usual, the Heian aristocratic marriage was the foundation of the couple's social and political standing, so marital harmony meant much more than just the partners' psychological well-being.

Though the majority of poems in Morosuke's collection are love poems, a few significant ones are not. Most extant versions open with an exchange between Morosuke and Minamoto no Moroakira 源庶明 (903–955), a grandson of Emperor Uda 宇多's (r. 887–897), on the occasion of Moroakira's promotion to the third rank in 947. A few years earlier, Moroakira had given Morosuke a set of robes to congratulate him for his promotion to the fourth rank, so the occasion represented the perfect opportunity to reciprocate:

When Lord Kujō [Morosuke] was promoted to the fourth rank, he was given an overcoat by the Hirohata Middle Counselor [Moroakira]. When His Lordship became minister and the counsellor was promoted to the third rank, he sent him an overcoat, with this poem:

Omoiki ya Who would have thought it,
kimi ga koromo o at the time when I took off
nugishi toki my Lord's welcome robes
wa ga murasaki no that soon He would be donning
iro o kin to wa my lavender-colored ones?⁵¹
 おもいきや君が衣を脱ぎしとき わがむらさきのいろをきんとは

As the father of another of Murakami's consorts (Minamoto no Keishi 源計子; d.u.), Moroakira was technically a rival in the competition for power at court. Far from making the relationship between the two more difficult, however, this made maintaining cordial relationships even more vital. If one were to give a name to this social use of poetry to manage important relationships, "poetic diplomacy" would perhaps be an apt choice.⁵² Poetry is here a means to deal with people effectively and maintain harmonious relations when the circumstances threatened to deteriorate them.⁵³

49 *Kujō dono Morosuke-shū* 5. Because it contains the word *ai* ("to meet"), *yamaai* ("indigo") alludes to meeting one's lover.

50 Kaneie 兼家 (929–990) was Morosuke's third son.

51 *Kujō dono Morosuke-shū* 1.

52 I use the term "diplomacy" in its general sense of managing relations with others, in order to avoid friction.

53 There is, of course, nothing particularly unique about this use of poetry as a tool to maintain harmony. Soothing tension and softening the relations between husband and wife are listed as primary functions of poetry in many foundational texts of East Asian poetic culture including the "Great Preface" of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry, 3rd c.) and the *Kokinshū* prefaces.

Moroakira's response could have been less than courteous. In a matter of years, Morosuke had not only surpassed him in rank but had succeeded in becoming paternal grandfather of the future emperor.⁵⁴ Yet, Moroakira's reply is perfectly civil and in no way suggests that he resented Morosuke's success. Far from it, his gracious reply can be said to sanction his acceptance of the status quo and of the mutated terms of their relationship:

The Middle Counsellor's reply:

<i>Inishie ni</i>	Because you wore them
<i>kisashite kereba</i>	so long ago before me,
<i>uchihabuki</i>	I shall flap my wings
<i>tobitachinikeri</i>	and soar up to the sky in
<i>ama no hagoromo</i>	these immortal's feathered robes
いにしへにきさしてければ	うちはぶきとびたちにつけりあまのは衣

The importance of such exchanges of civilities for the smooth functioning of the political order known as *ōchō kokka* would be difficult to exaggerate. Based as it was on the disruption of traditional criteria for advancement (merit, seniority), Fujiwara-style politics required a constant work of crisis prevention to defuse tensions and minimize the risk of open conflict. The need for consensus to carry out many of the court's most important activities also made maintaining harmony among the various stakeholders essential. The civil exchange of poems of precisely the kind that Morosuke and his fellow aristocrats seem to have specialized in can be seen as one of the mechanisms (though certainly not the only one) through which harmony was maintained and the smooth functioning of the system was ensured.

It is also worth noting the role that gifts, which were often attached to poems, played in the process. The strategic, interested nature of gift-giving has long been recognized by theorists of gift-giving. In one of the classic statements on the subject, Marcel Mauss noted that "gifts are not freely given, they are also not really disinterested. They already represent for the most part total counter-services, not only made with a view to paying for services or things, but also to maintaining a profitable alliance, one that cannot be rejected."⁵⁵ Like the gifts to which they were attached, *waka* poems served to establish and keep healthy alliances that were at once personal and profitable. This does not mean that they did not also express genuine emotions or were devoid of literary value. Quite to the contrary, a measure of literariness and aesthetic appeal were essential to their functioning as a kind of social lubricant in a courtly context. Nor were the considerable political benefits that such poems brought incompatible with genuine emotion, for as Sonja Arntzen once so aptly put it, at the mid-Heian court "the personal is political."⁵⁶

54 Unlike Morosuke's daughter Anshi, Moroakira's daughter Keishi only produced daughters, Risshi 理子 (948–960) and Seishi 盛子 (951–998).

55 Mauss 1990, p. 94.

56 Arntzen 1997, p. 13.

Case Study #2: The Poems of the Vestal Consort Kishi

As my second case study, I now examine the poetic oeuvre of Emperor Murakami's junior consort Fujiwara Kishi 藤原徽子 (or Yoshiko, 929–985), variously known at the time as the vestal consort (*saigū no nyōgo* 齋宮女御) and the Shōkyōden 承香殿 consort.⁵⁷ As the daughter of Tadahira's second daughter Hiroko 寛子 (or Kanshi, 906–945), Kishi was Morosuke's niece. She made her formal entrance to court in 948 and was appointed junior consort in the following year. Although not as prolific as her rival Anshi (she only gave birth to one daughter), she was an excellent poet, perhaps the best of the many gifted poets who graced the halls of Murakami's "Rear Palace" (*kōkyū* 後宮).⁵⁸

Like Morosuke's collected poems, Kishi's personal poetry collection consists almost entirely of *zōtōka*, with the lion's share taken up by her exchanges with Murakami.⁵⁹ The relationship with the emperor was by far the most important for Kishi. As Rose Bundy notes, not only the consort's personal well-being but that of her entire family depended on her capacity to attract and maintain imperial favor.⁶⁰ From the many exchanges in the collection, Murakami comes across as a remarkably attentive partner, constantly inquiring after her at every leave of absence or reassuring her of his devotion (poem nos. 82–83, 86–87, 88–89, and 110–111). At times when such attention was less forthcoming, however, poetry provided Kishi a means to solicit visits and express jealousy or resentment:

After some time, His Majesty ordered her to go to him but she failed to, and upon hearing that someone else had joined him instead:

<i>Uguisu no</i>	If I had answered
<i>naku hitokoe ni</i>	the warbler's first call right then
<i>kikeriseba</i>	when I first heard it,
<i>yobu yamabiko ya</i>	would the echo of the valley
<i>Kuyashikaramashi</i>	not sound as full of regret? ⁶¹
うぐひすのなくひとこゑにきけりせば よぶやまびこやくやしからまし	

It is startling, at first, to see sentiments such as anxiety (*obotsukanasa*), self-pity (*mi o uramu*), worry, and uncertainty about the future (*kokorobososa*) recur with such frequency in the poems of an imperial consort.⁶² However, it must be kept in mind that in the highly competitive space of the palace, imperial favor was volatile, and could easily be transferred to a rival, with potentially dire consequences for the consort and her family.

57 The Shōkyōden was one of the halls of the palace that housed imperial consorts and their staff.

58 Her reputation at the time is suggested by the prominent position she is accorded in Murakami's own personal poetry collection, the *Murakami gyōshū* 村上御集 (His Majesty Murakami's collected poems), where exchanges with Kishi take up a good 75 percent of the collection.

59 Kishi's collection is known as the *Saigū nyōgoshū* 齋宮女御集 (The Vestal Consort's collection). There are four main textual lineages: the Imperial Household Agency text (Shōryōbu-hon, 164 poems), the Nishi Honganji text (265 poems), the *Kasen Kashū* text (102 poems), and the Ōshima fragment. All citations are from the Nishi Honganji text as annotated by the Heian Bungaku Rindokukai, *Saigū nyōgoshū chūshaku* (Hanawa Shobō, 1981).

60 Bundy 2007, pp. 34, 42.

61 *Saigū nyōgoshū* 16.

62 Poem nos. 6, 21, 23, 32, 34, and 45 are some examples.

A moment of particular charm and intimacy is captured in poem no. 15 and accompanying headnote:

One autumn evening, when the emperor had not been visiting her for some time, Her Highness played the *koto* in such a magnificent way that His Majesty threw on the first white trousers that he found and rushed to her. Although he sat there by her side, Her Highness continued to play for him pretending not to see him:

<i>Aki no hi no</i>	On this autumn dusk,
<i>ayashiki hodo no</i>	so filled with longing that one
<i>yūgure ni</i>	cannot stop wondering,
<i>ogi fuku kaze no</i>	how startling to hear the wind
<i>oto zo kikoyuru</i>	rustle through the bush clover! ⁶³

うへひさしうわたらせ給はぬ秋のゆふぐれに、きむをいとをかしうひき給に、上、しろき御
ぞのなえたるをたてまつりて、いそぎわたらせ給て、御かたはらにゐさせ給へど、人のおは
するともみいれさせたまはぬけしきにて、ひき給をきこしめせば

秋の日のあやしきほどのゆふぐれに をぎふくかぜのおとぞきこゆる

The sound of the *koto* traveling through the air to pique the sovereign's interest is a perfect metaphor for poetry's role within the palace as a catalyst for imperial attention. Like the melodies of her *koto*, Kishi's poems traveled through space and reached their intended target, ensuring that his attention would remain firmly focused on her.

In addition to this "practical" function of facilitating the relation between sovereign and consort, poetry exchanges between emperor and consorts also served the all-important symbolic function of adding to the aura of the palace as a site of supreme splendor and refinement. Poem no. 12 in the collection was composed in response to a note from Murakami which contained an allusion to the following poem of the *Kokinshū*:

<i>Suma no ama no</i>	Have we grown apart,
<i>Shioyaki koromo</i>	like threads on the rude garments
<i>osa o arami</i>	Suma seafolk wear
<i>madō ni are ya</i>	as they toil to make salt?
<i>kimi ga kimasanu</i>	You, my Lord, never visit. ⁶⁴

須磨のあまの塩やき衣おさをあらみ まどをにあれやきみが来まさぬ

Kishi's poem is couched in the same language and imagery of the source poem, showing that she not only understood the allusion but spoke the same language of beauty that the emperor spoke:⁶⁵

63 *Saigū nyōgoshū* 15.

64 *Kokinshū* 758.

65 On the political significance of beauty and women's role in its production, see Wallace 2005, p. 149.

Sent in response to a letter from His Majesty that alluded to the poem “Have we grown far apart?”

<i>Narenureba</i>	The novelty fades,
<i>ukime kareba ya</i>	so we reap seaweed of gloom.
<i>Suma no ama no</i>	Apart we've grown, yes,
<i>shio yaku koromo</i>	like the garments the Suma
<i>madō naruramu</i>	seafolk wear to make salt. ⁶⁶
なれぬればうきめかればや	すまのあまのしほやくころもまどほなるらむ

An even better example of collaboration in the production of beauty is the following *tan-renga* 単連歌 (single linked verse) sequence, which was composed as a four-hand effort by Murakami and Kishi together:

On the first day of the fifth month, with the words, “From today on, how are we to...”:

<i>Satsuki yami</i>	The fifth month's darkness
<i>obotsukanasa no</i>	will no doubt make my worries
<i>itodo masaramu</i>	greater than usual!
さつきやみおほづかなさのいとどまさらむ	

Upon receiving the poem:

<i>Nagame kuru sora wa</i>	I stare idly at the rains
<i>sa nomi ya.</i>	wondering, is it really so? ⁶⁷
ながめくるそらはさのみや	

As important to Kishi as her relationship with the emperor was her connection with the other women of the imperial harem. Like the relationship with the sovereign, these connections had to be carefully cultivated, and poems provided an excellent means to do so. The twelfth-century chronicle *Ōkagami* 大鏡 (The great mirror) says of Empress Anshi (Murakami's primary consort and Kishi's superior in the palace hierarchy) that, “[s]he was quite understanding with the other consorts, frequently exchanging *acts of courtliness* [*on-miyabi*] with them and so forth.”⁶⁸ Kishi's collection contains many such “acts of courtliness” directed to either her rivals or persons close to them. She seems to have been on particularly close terms with Anshi's daughters Senshi 選子 (964–1035) and Shishi 資子 (955–1015), and with the daughter of Fujiwara Masahime, Yasuko 保子 (known at the time

66 *Saigū nyōgoshū* 12. Kishi's poem includes a second allusion to *Kokinshū* 1122.

67 *Saigū nyōgoshū* 78. In the lunar calendar, the fifth month marked the beginning of the rainy season and the frequently overcast sky made the nights darker than usual.

68 *Ōkagami*, p. 165, my emphasis. The general term “acts of elegance” encompasses sending poems, gifts, and other acts intended to foster cordial relations with fellow courtiers. McCullough (1980, p. 129) translates *on-miyabi* as “poems.”

as the Third Princess, ? –967).⁶⁹ To read these exchanges between consorts or their close relatives is to glimpse the constant to and fro of courtesy acts through which harmony at the palace was built and maintained:

To the Sen'yōden Junior Consort:

<i>Tamasaka ni</i>	Has the lax watchman
<i>tou hi ari ya to</i>	of the Kasuga Fields
<i>Kasugano no</i>	even just told you,
<i>nomori wa ikaga</i>	how I long for the fine day
<i>tsuge ya shitsuramu</i>	when you will call on me?
たまさかにとふひありやとかすが野の のもりはいかがつげやしつらむ	

Her Majesty's reply:

<i>Kasuga no no</i>	It is rather me,
<i>Yuki no shimokusa</i>	the little snow-covered grass
<i>Hitoshirezu</i>	of Kasuga Fields,
<i>Tou hi ari ya to</i>	who waits so eagerly for
<i>Ware zo machitsuru</i>	the day when you will visit. ⁷⁰
春日野の雪の下草ひとしれず とふひありやとわれぞまちつる	

As with Morosuke's poems, to stress the social and political significance of these poems is not to suggest that they did not also express genuine emotions. There are some intensely personal poems in Kishi's collection. Examples include poems for her father's death (no. 44), poems of remembrance for her late mother (nos. 43, 46), intimate exchanges with her husband, and farewell poems sent to her daughter upon her departure for Nonomiya, where prospective Ise vestals spent a period of seclusion prior to taking up their duties (nos. 57, 59).⁷¹ Yet, because power and status were so firmly rooted in interpersonal ties, the significance of even the most personal of exchanges always went beyond the personal and merged in complex ways with sociopolitical considerations. Given the close interpenetration of public and private in Heian court life, it is unhelpful to draw too sharp a line between public and private modes of literary expression. Although poems could vary in their level of formality and political expediency, to dismiss as purely private all poetry not composed on official occasions is to overlook the immense political significance of private ties and personal interactions at this time.

69 Senshi is best known for her *Hosshin wakashū* 発心和歌集 (Waka poems for religious awakening, 1012), a collection of poems based on excerpts from Buddhist scripture.

70 *Saigū nyōgoshū* 55–56. The first poem contains a pun between *tou hi* ("the day you will visit") and *tobuhi* ("signal fire," the fires used by watchmen to signal danger). "Signal fire" and "watchmen" are *engo* 縁語 (associated words).

71 Prospective Ise vestals (*saigū*) spent a year at Nonomiya to purify themselves before formally taking up office. Kishi's daughter served as Ise vestal between 975 and 984.

Reassessing the *Gosenshū*

Before concluding, I would like to briefly reopen the file on the *Gosenshū*, so to speak, in order to release it from the interpretive cage in which it has been trapped for too long. The modern critical reception of the *Gosenshū* is a strange case of selective blindness. On the one hand, scholars have duly noted the involvement in its compilation of senior Fujiwara figures like Morosuke's son Koretada 伊尹 (or Koremasa, 924–972), his sister Anshi, as well as the close attention paid by the compilers to questions of rank and pedigree.⁷² Because of the generous representation of high-ranking poets, Fujioka Tadaharu 藤岡忠美 famously described the *Gosenshū* as “a barometer of the power relations at the time of its compilation.”⁷³ On the other hand, because of the supposedly private and informal nature of everyday *zōtōka* exchanges, scholars have been unable to see anything political in the *content* of the anthology. Literary histories almost invariably describe the *Gosenshū* as an “everyday” (*nichijōteki*) and “private” (*shiteki*) anthology, a sort of bona fide obverse of politically-minded works like the *Kokinshū*. If the reading of mid-century poetry exchanges given above is correct, nothing could be farther from the truth. With its emphasis on everyday poetic exchanges between high-ranking court figures, the *Gosenshū* is a profoundly political work, but the political order it both represents and celebrates is not the emperor-centric, “vertical” order defined by the codes and exalted in the *Kokinshū*, but the more cooperative, consensus-based, and “privatized” one that prevailed at court at the time of its compilation.⁷⁴ Through exchanges of poems and other means, mid-Heian court aristocrats built and maintained the large networks of personal alliances on which success and the ability to govern rested at this time. Far from signifying a loss of interest in political affairs and a retreat of poets into purely aesthetic pursuits, the prominence of *zōtōka* exchanges in the *Gosenshū* and mid-century *waka* works in general reflects the decline of the *ritsuryō* understanding of power, and the shift towards a more horizontal and collaborative order centered on personal ties and shared goals among multiple stakeholders.

The *Gosenshū*'s nature as a permanent record of the daily conversations of the court's most powerful figures also deserves greater emphasis than perhaps it has been given. Following Moriya Shōgo 守屋省吾, Joshua Mostow has argued that several mid-century texts edited by, or on behalf of, senior Fujiwara figures, were created with the specific aim of augmenting the cultural status of these men.⁷⁵ Slightly later works such as Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi* 枕草子, c. 1005) and Murasaki Shikibu's *Diary* (*Murasaki Shikibu nikki* 紫式部日記, c. 1010) are also thought to have been written at least in part to

72 Koretada served as Superintendent (*bettō* 別当) of the selection committee (*sen-wakadokoro* 撰和歌所). As Koretada's sister and the usual resident of the building where the editorial work was conducted (the *Nashitsubo* 梨壺 or “Pear-tree Pavilion”), Anshi is thought to have had some role in the compilation of the anthology. Like the *Kokinshū*, the *Gosenshū* was compiled by a pool of poets of relatively humble station (the already-mentioned Motosuke; Ōnakatomi no Yoshinobu 大中臣能宣, 921–991; Minamoto no Shitagō 源順, 911–983; Ki no Tokibumi 紀時文, fl. c. 940–960; and Sakanoue no Mochiki 坂上望城, d. 980). However, whereas the *Kokinshū* prominently features poems by its four compilers, the *Gosenshū* does not contain a single poem by the compilers.

73 Fujioka 1966, p. 64.

74 In using terms like “private” and “privatized” to describe the functioning of the mid-Heian state, one runs into the same kind of complications that one faces when trying to apply them to literary matters. In a world in which government depended heavily on personal ties, individual assets, and non-statutory mechanisms, inflexible terms such as “private” and “public” are inherently misleading.

75 Mostow 2004, pp. 2–3.

enhance the cultural status of the households in which their authors lived and worked. As a record of the daily dealings of some of the court's most influential men and women, the *Gosenshū* certainly belongs to this lineage of works that support the aristocratic order by glorifying the cultural exploits of its members.

If one were to choose an exchange to illustrate this political aspect of the *Gosenshū* as a literary manifestation of the new political order, the following, thoroughly gregarious exchange between the regent Tadahira and his nephew, the soon-to-be emperor Murakami, would perhaps be an apt choice:

When the current emperor was still called the Prince Governor-General, he visited the house of the chancellor [Tadahira]. When he was about to leave, [Tadahira] composed this poem and attached it to a gift of books:

<i>Kimi ga tame</i>	My heart is full of
<i>iwau kokoro no</i>	the most sincere hope for
<i>fukakereba</i>	your future success—
<i>hijiri no miyo no</i>	May these books show you the path
<i>ato narae tozo</i>	traced by the sages of old!
君がため祝ふ心の深ければ	聖の御代の跡ならへとぞ

His Majesty's reply:

<i>Oshie oku</i>	If one just follows
<i>koto tagawazu wa</i>	the recorded teachings,
<i>yukusue no</i>	one shall never lose
<i>michi tōku tomo</i>	the Way, no matter how long
<i>ato wa madowaji</i>	the road ahead may still be. ⁷⁶
教へ置く事たがはずは	行末の道遠くとも後はまどはじ

Conclusion

This essay has argued that it is essentially incorrect to see the poetry exchanges favored by the mid-tenth century Japanese elite and so prominently featured in mid-century *waka* works as merely private and devoid of political significance. When viewed against the changes to the structure and organization of the court that took place between the mid-ninth and late-tenth centuries, so-called “private” or “informal” poetry appears to be as laden with political significance and as consequential for the functioning of the state as its “formal/public” counterpart, although the political order that it both reflected and contributed to support was not the vertical, emperor-centric one defined by the *ritsuryō* codes but the new, more “horizontal,” cooperative, and increasingly “privatized” one of the “court-centered polity.” Poetry exchanges functioned as a form of court diplomacy, allowing court aristocrats to establish and maintain the extended networks of personal alliances through which power was won and enacted at this time. Far from signifying a widening of

⁷⁶ *Gosenshū* 1378–1379. The exchange dates from 943 or 944, when Murakami held the title of governor-general (*sochi* 帥) of Dazaifu.

the gap between literature and the state, the surge in popularity of this kind of poetry in the mid-tenth century throws into even sharper relief the extent of sociopolitical change during the two centuries of the Fujiwara regency.

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Abbreviations

NKKBZ *Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū* 日本古典文学全集

SNKBT *Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* 新日本古典文学大系

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