

The Impact of the Research to The Tale of Genji on Contemporary Society

— Interpretation of the Two Dimensions of

The Tale of Genji

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ABSTRACT

The Tale of Genji has a significant role in the history of Japanese literature. In recent years, researches on this book has been increasing. This paper attempts to analyze the "ideal woman" characteristics of The Tale of Genji, the association of this book and early mythical stories, and explore new research directions.

Keywords: *contemporary society, early mythological stories, ideal woman, kojiki.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a notable Monogatari in Japanese literature, The Tale of Genji was written by Murasaki Shikibu who was a Japanese novelist, poet, and lady-in-waiting at the Imperial court in the Heian period. The Monogatari itself has had a profound influence on the development of Japanese literature, known as the peak of both Japanese classical literature and Oriental literature.[1] There is no clear statement of its written time, which is generally considered to be between A.D.1001 and A.D.1008. Therefore, it can be said that The Tale of Genji is the earliest realistic novel in the world and plays a significant role in the history of world literature. Therefore, in various fields, the study of The Tale of Genji had been exhaustive. This paper aims to provide a new perspective for the future research of The Tale of Genji in two levels.

2. IMAGE OF "IDEAL WOMEN" IN THE THE TALE OF GENJI

2.1. Depictions of "Ideal Woman" in the Work

The Tale of Genji described the social landscape of Japan during the Heian period, disclosing the darkness of both struggle in the palace and the powerless status and miserable life of women. The book also followed the Genji's own ambivalence emotion as a story line. Therefore, there were many female characters in the book

and the evaluation of female characters. This can also reflect the social expectations of women during the written time (between AD1001 and AD1008).

For example, in the second chapter of the book — hahakigi, tounotyuujoyou and Genji aroused the topic of "female evaluation" due to the love letter in the bookcase, and then the lecher samanokami also joined the discussion. They pointed out that the stereotype of the female figure, such as physical appearance, skill in writing letters, and frequent involvements in relationships. But if people select excellent female only according to these standards, there were very few women will fail to be selected. There were also many women who flaunt their slight mastery in these field to others, showing a disgusting manner. It follows that the most basic expectation for women is being both elegant and knowledgeable, but also being skilled in communication, and being humble. Later, they discussed their ideal partner, "there were times when a husband wished he had a wife who would be agreeable to him, and there were times when he was full of funny things which he wished he could talk about. But the wife was so dull that it was of no use to talk to her. Then they can only think and talk to themselves in silence. If so it is better to find a wife who is as good as a child, and who can be taught by her husband to cultivate good qualities." [2] Although the author showed through the dialogue of the characters in the work, it still reflected society's expectations of ideal women at that time. Female had better understand the

world clearly and had a reasonable understanding and response to what their husbands want to say. If they could not do this, it is better to be gentle and obedient. At the same time, in the book, some people put forward that there is a kind of woman who saw her husband give a little love to others, then holds a grudge and openly leaves her husband. This is also a foolish method. It is a woman's attitude, in most cases, that cure a man's faithlessness. It can be viewed that "ideal women" must also had forgiveness for male sin.

In *The Tale of Genji*, there were many details that emphasized the importance of motherhood. Lady Fujitsubo was the first woman that Genji really loved. This love was not only male for female, but also mixed with Genji's curiosity and longing for the long lost maternal love.[3] Genji had a dirty secret with lady Fujitsubo who was closely resembles his mother. There was only a five-year difference between them, and the two were nominally stepmother and stepson. Because Emperor Kiritubo wanted to relieve Genji's sadness of missing his mother, he allowed Genji to visit her often, which led to many opportunities for two people to get along. As time goes by, Genji had a love for her that goes beyond mother and son. Although the lady Fujitsubo was aware of it, she never broke the rules. Until one day she went back to her mother's home to recuperate due to illness, Genji got the opportunity, and under the guidance of the Oumyoubu, he went to lady Fujitsubo's residence to have sex forcibly. Thus it can be seen that there is a strong oedipus complex tendency in all sorts of feelings of Genji towards the lady Fujitsubo.

To sum up, the "ideal woman" image shown in this book has the following characteristics: having beautiful appearance and mild temper, being considerate, obedient and loyalty, at the same time have a strong maternity and need to forgive the sin of male unconditionally.

2.2. The Value of Researching "ideal women" in The Tale of Genji

The shaping of female image can reflect the social status of women from the side. In *The Tale of Genji*, the shape of women were more in line with the male aesthetic. Moreover, many female images in the author's works, no matter they were noble or in obscurity, were in the same situation. They not only became the tools of aristocratic political struggle, but also became the playthings of aristocratic men and the victims of polygamy.[4] Of course, there were also two women — Utsusemi and Ukifune with resistance consciousness, but their resistance is hopeless and powerless. It may also showed that in the society of the author, no better way can be found to save these poor women, but to become a nun or die.[5] In this case, women can only survive in the society by meeting the "ideal woman" image standards and male aesthetic standards. Therefore, "the ideal woman created by the author in the book is completely in

line with the male aesthetic" can be seen as a proof of female low social status. *The Tale of Genji* not only exists as a literary work but also has great historical research value, which has significant effect on studying the changing female status.

To sum up, in this book, the description of women occupied much space, and the "ideal women" shaped in *The Tale of Genji* does not only exist as a novel but also has certain social and historical research value. "What kinds of aesthetic appreciation of that period of time were reflected by the ideal female images created in the book" can also become a new topic for studying the *Tale of Genji*.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY JAPANESE MYTHOLOGICAL STORIES TO THE TALE OF GENJI

3.1. The Characteristics of Early Mythologies Represented in the Tale of Genji

Myth is the ancient people's imaginative interpretation of natural phenomena. Japanese ancient mythologies are mostly included in three books—*Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki* and *Fudoki*. *The Tale of Genji* was roughly written between 1001 and 1008, so it may have been influenced by early mythological stories in terms of narrative style and values.

Firstly, Japanese civilization of nature-admiring was showed in early mythological stories. On the whole, the climate of Japan island has a moderate climate and the four seasons change slowly. Japanese people present a relatively soft view of nature. It is this beautiful natural scene that makes Japanese people admire nature and regard the view of nature as the basis of Japanese traditional thoughts. [6] The Japanese regard everything in nature as the embodiment of gods, as the object of worship. The Japanese view of nature has become the original Japanese consciousness of beauty and the basis of ancient Japanese literature. For example, in *Koziki* and *Nihonshyoki*, the sprout of the reed at the beginning of the story signified the arrival of spring, which had a strong sense of season. In line with this, *The Tale of Genji* also has some detailed description of the Japanese four seasons and other natural scenes like wind, flower, snow and moon. For example, in the fourth chapter of this book, there is a description of the scene of autumn: the dew on the flowers is the same as in the palace, reflecting the dawn moon. The autumn insects chirp everywhere. There are numerous fragments of nature formalize. The author speculates that it may be caused by the diverse geographical environment of Japan. On the other hand, it is closely related to the worship of nature presented in the early myths.

Secondly, Japanese mythology has a certain degree of "sexual worship". The worship of sex and reproduction

existed in many ancient nation, and they explored the energy of nature through exploring their own sexual energy. Japanese mythologies also emphasized the sexual harmony, the harmony between male and female, endorsing free love and sex.[7]In ancient Japan, genitals were also used to pray for good harvests and good weather.[8] They advocated the sex organ which they believe is a symbol of vitality, having a certain role in keeping away evil spirits. Compared with the Chinese Nuwa created human beings, the Greek myth of Prometheus used soil to knead people and other asexual made man, the Japanese myth was sexual creation. Such a concept undoubtedly has a significant impact on the aesthetic and ethical values of Japanese literature and even Japanese culture. In the Tale of Genji, Murasaki Shikibe also had a detailed account of Genji's unforgiving love and had a bold description of sex. It portray presented the image of Genji as a romantic but not indecent playboy.In the Japanese concept, love is obscure, but love and sex are inseparable. The author also explored the world, customs, and revealed the meaning of life through the description of this kind of interest of lasciviousness.[8]

Thirdly, there is a certain amount of maternal love presented in the early mythologies. For example, in the first volume of the Kojiki, the author portrayed Amaterasu-ōkami as the highest god because she was gentle, beautiful, kind and, most importantly, maternal to all things. On the contrary, her younger brother, susanowo, was a violent man who, instead of ruling his own land, wreaked havoc on Amaterasu-ōkami's land. However she was a very patient goddess,who loved her brother deeply, defending and forgiving him. Although susanowo gone to far, instand of punishing him, Amaterasu-ōkami hid in the stone house with anger. As we can see, in that myth, susanowo was like a child who lost his temper, Amaterasu-ōkami was like a mother who tolerate all his fault. Amaterasu-ōkami's strong motherhood and tolerance for male errors were also exactly in line with the motherhood of the ideal woman as mentioned earlier. Both in early mythology and in The Tale of Genji, women play two maternal roles. For one, in order to meet the need of human nature, women need to take responsibility for procreation. For another, in order to satisfy their psychological needs, women also need to give men and their children a degree of protection.

3.2. The Value of Studying the Relationship between the Tale of Genji and Early Mythological Stories

It is also of great value to explore the inheritance of some ideas in the early myths in the Tale of Genji to study the cultural characteristics of today's Japan. Nowadays, some ideas of early mythologies inherited by the Tale of Genji still apply to some of the phenomena of Japanese society, such as the worship of nature, the perception of

nature changes, and the tolerant attitude toward lust. Therefore, the Tale of Genji, as a classic in ancient Japanese literature, is of vital importance to explore its effect on reality.

There may be inheritance and development between early mythological stories and the Tale of Genji in some ideologies. Therefore, textual research on the relationship between Tale of Genji and the early myths and its influence on later generations may become subjects of further research in the future.

4. CONCLUSOIN

From the analysis of the ideal female images in The Tale of Genji and the political, economic, and other factors of that time, we can see the factors that affect female social status, which plays a great role in improving female status in modern society. At the same time, the analysis of the relationship between the early mythological stories and the Tale of Genji and their common values may play an important role in exploring the origin of the national character of modern Japan.

To sum up, the study of the narrative style of The Tale of Genji and the values it conveys not only plays a great part in the study of historical reality but also plays a critical part in the study of today's social issues. It is also because The Tale of Genji is still of profound significance to contemporary studies that it has remained alive for more than 2,000 years.

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