



A Study on the Word “Sleeve” in Japanese Waka

Taking the Waka in “The Tale of Genji” as an Example

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Abstract. This study analysed the word “sleeve” in the waka poem of “The Tale of Genji”, using natural language processing and text analysis methods, mainly studied the frequency and distribution of “sleeve” and the role of “sleeves” under different classifications. Results show that “sleeve” is one of the most frequently occurring nouns in “The Tale of Genji”, and the frequency of occurrence is second only to “heart”, “people”, “flower”, and “world”, ranking No. 5 among all nouns. Furthermore, in different contexts, the usage of “sleeve” is also different. It can be mainly divided into two categories. The first category is that “sleeve” appears alone and has no strong correlation with other words. The other category is that “sleeve” is strongly related to other words and express different meanings and contexts together with different words. This study further enriched the study of Japanese poetic imagery, and helped us research on Japanese poetry to better understand the Japanese spiritual world.

Keywords: The Tale of Genji · Waka Poem · Sleeve

1 Introduction

Poetry is the highest form of literature, in which the essence of the country’s language and the inherent aesthetic consciousness of the nation are often condensed. Waka is a type of poetry in classical Japanese literature [1]. The Tale of Genji is a masterpiece in the history of Japanese and even world literature, representing the pinnacle of Japanese classical literature [2]. There are 795 waka poems, interspersed between the texts, which mainly play a role in shaping the characters and promoting the development of the story [3]. The unspeakable emotions of the author or the main character are often expressed in the form of waka.

It is not uncommon for different critics to give completely different comments on the same literary work [4]. It is often said that literary critics’ evaluation of literary works is too subjective and lacks objectivity. In recent years, science and technology and artificial intelligence have provided more convenient tools and methods for literary research [5, 6]. It also makes up for the weakness of solid subjectivity and lack of objectivity in literary research. However, to study literature by purely technical means is as a human being without flesh, lacking soul [7]. Therefore, this paper combines the objective natural language processing method with the subjective text analysis method to bring new possibilities for studying classical literature.

In Chinese poetry, different images represent special meanings. Such as the moon representing homesickness, red beans representing lovesickness, and willow trees representing farewell. Japanese classical literature is greatly influenced by Chinese Tang and Han poetry, and there are also significant similarities in poetic imagery. However, the related research on Chinese poetic imagery is rich in academia, but there is very little research on Japanese poetic imagery. It is hoped that this research can fill the gap in the study of Japanese poetic imagery to a certain extent.

2 High-Frequency Nouns in the Waka of the Tale of Genji

In order to count the high-frequency nouns in the waka of the Tale of Genji, we used a simple natural language processing tool Mecab to reduce the subjectivity of this study [2]. MeCab is an open-source text segmentation library for use with text written in the Japanese language. It can analyse and segment a sentence into its parts of speech. Using it, we can analyse high-frequency words with different parts of speech in the waka poem of the Tale of Genji. From the analysis results of Mecab, we obtained the top 50 high-frequency nouns in the waka poem of the Tale of Genji. (see Table 1).

From this table, we unexpectedly found that “sleeve” was the fifth most frequent of all nouns, appearing 68 times in 795 waka poems, next to common nouns “heart”, “people”, “flower” and “world”. “heart”, “people”, “flower” and “world” are commonly used in our daily life. We can easily understand why they appear in the waka poems so often. Nevertheless, “sleeve” is not a word that often occurs in our daily lives, so it has a high frequency in the waka poem. Therefore, it is also valuable to study why it often appears in the waka poem in the Tale of Genji.

Table 1. The 50 most frequently appeared nouns in the waka of the Tale of Genji

Ranking	Common Noun	English Meaning	Frequency	Ranking	Common Noun	English Meaning	Frequency
1	心	Heart	101	26	山	mountain	24
2	人	people	92	27	名	name	24
3	花	flower	85	28	うち	home	23
4	世	life/world	75	29	松	pine	22
5	袖	sleeve	68	30	浦	ura	22
6	身	body/life/world	66	31	影	shadow	22
7	露	dew	60	32	道	road	21
8	こと	thing/matter	52	33	神	god	19
9	惑	confuse	43	34	雪	snow	19
10	秋	autumn/fall	42	35	声	voice	19
11	色	color/look	40	36	波	wave	18
12	今日	today	39	37	昔	long ago	18

(continued)

Table 1. (*continued*)

Ranking	Common Noun	English Meaning	Frequency	Ranking	Common Noun	English Meaning	Frequency
13	もの	thing	39	38	契り	pledge	18
14	憂	melancholy	38	39	雲	cloud	17
15	空	sky/bare	36	40	衣	clothing	17
16	宿	residence/domicile	36	41	風	wind	16
17	涙	tears	32	42	今	now	16
18	春	spring	31	43	香	scent	16
19	夜	night	31	44	煙	smoke	15
20	月	moon	30	45	雲居	Kumoi	15
21	恋	love	29	46	瀬	torrent	15
22	ひ	fire	27	47	木	wood	14
23	音	sound	26	48	海人	The sea people	14
24	あはれ	pathos of things	25	49	この世	this world	14
25	変	change	24	50	山里	mountain	14

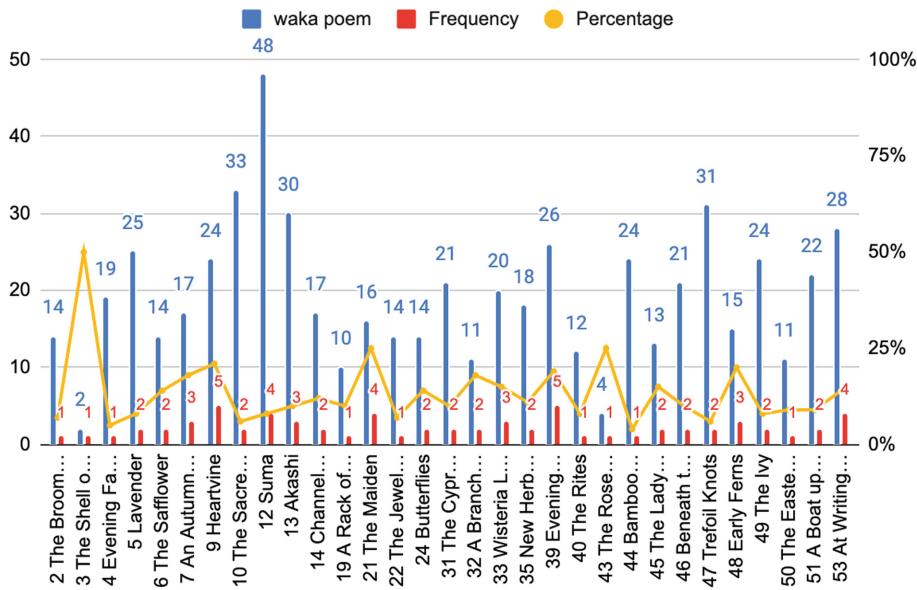
3 “Sleeve” in the Waka of the Tale of Genji

3.1 The Frequency and Distribution of “Sleeve”

The word “sleeve” appears in 31 out of 54 chapters in the waka of the Tale of Genji, and it appears five times in the ninth chapter, “Heartvine” and the 39th chapter, “Evening Mist.” We can see how often “sleeve” appears in the waka of the Tale of Genji. Table 2 lists chapters with the word “sleeve”, including numbers of waka, frequency of “sleeve” and the proportion of all wakas in the chapter.

3.2 Classification of the Noun “Sleeve” in the Waka of the Tale of Genji

We referred to the original text of The Tale of Genji and the modern Japanese version of Yosano Akiko and found that the “sleeve” can be divided into two main categories in the Tale of Genji. The first category is mainly the word “sleeve”, which appears alone and has no strong correlation with other words. The case generally includes ‘sleeve’ original meaning and referring to the clothes. The second category mainly refers to “sleeve” and other words strongly correlated, mainly divided into sleeve and tears, sleeve and fragrance (see Table 3).

Table 2. “Sleeve” in the waka of The Tale of Genji**Table 3.** Classification of the noun “sleeve” in the waka of the Tale of Genji

Category	Usage	Frequency
“sleeve” only	“sleeve” original meaning	15
	Sleeves refer to clothing	3
“sleeve” with other words	“sleeve” with tears	40
	“sleeve” with fragrance	10

3.2.1 “Sleeve” Which Appears Alone and Has no Strong Correlation with Other Words

3.2.1.1. “Sleeve” Original Meaning

It mainly refers to the original meaning of “sleeve”, without other special meaning.

Example 1:

月影の宿れる袖はせばくとも
とめても見ばやあかぬ光を (waka poem No.174)

Seidensticker’s translation: Narrow these sleeves, now lodging for the moonlight.
Would they might keep a light which I do not tire of.

This waka is from the 12th chapter Suma. Genji went to Hanachirusato’s residence before he was exiled to Sumo. It mainly expresses the two people’s reluctance to part,

among which “sleeve” is the original meaning, which refers to the moonlight sprinkled on the sleeve.

3.2.1.2. Sleeves Refer to Clothing

Example 2:

尼衣 変はれる身にや ありし世の
形見に袖を かけて懐ばむ (waka poem No.794)

Seidensticker's translation: Shall I, having taken the habit of the nun. Now change to robes of remembrance, think of the past?

This waka comes from the 53rd chapter, “At Writing Practice”. Because of the inclusion in the love of two men tortured, woman Ukifune attempted suicide but was saved by monks. So, she lost her hair and became a monk. However, everyone thought that she was dead. The Ukifune made this waka while sewing her funeral clothes with other monks in the temple. The “sleeve” here, referring to ornate clothes in the past, contrasts with the plainclothes worn by the monks and expresses her nostalgia for her luxurious time.

3.2.2 “Sleeve” is Strongly Related to Other Words and Express Different Meanings

3.2.2.1. “Sleeve” with Tears

Sometimes “sleeve” is used with the noun “tears” and “dew” or the verb “soak” to indicate the unspeakable sadness of tears getting wet up to your sleeves.

Example 3:

うち払ふ袖も露けき 常夏に
あらし吹きそふ 秋も来にけり (waka poem No.16)

Seidensticker's translation: Dew wets the sleeve that brushes the wild carnation. The tempest rages. Now comes autumn too.

This waka comes from chapter 2, The Broom Tree, in which Genji and his friends discuss love between men and women. This waka comes from a woman who cheated on Genji's friend. After the friend's wife found out about the affair, the woman was satirized and tortured. "dew" in this waka means "tears", which echoes "sleeve". The woman was so sad that tears wet her sleeves. It shows the woman's hatred and despair.

3.2.2.2. “Sleeve” with Fragrance

It is used to express that the smell of the sleeves reminds people of someone. There are mainly two types. The first one is used to describe smelling the smell of a sleeve and remembering someone. Another one is that the fragrance on the sleeve refers to the clues left by men's and women's affairs.

Example 4:

袖の香を よそふるからに 橘の
身さへはかなくなりもこそすれ (waka poem No.370)

Seidensticker's translation: The sleeve bears the scent of that blossom long ago. Then might not the fruit as quickly vanish away?

This waka is from the 24th chapter, Butterflies. It is a waka of Tamakazura to Genji. The smell of orange in her sleeve reminded her of her long-dead mother.

Example 5:

また人に 駐れける袖の 移り香を
わが身にしめて 恨みつるかな (waka poem No.711)

Seidensticker's translation: Most friendly it was of him to give to your sleeve. The scent that maddens, sinks into the bones.

This waka is from the 49th chapter of the Ivy. Here mainly refers to the man's adultery left evidence (the smell on the sleeve), more let the woman uncomfortable unceasingly.

4 Conclusion

This paper studied the noun “sleeve” in the waka of the Tale of Genji by combining natural language processing and text analysis. It mainly studied the distribution, frequency and function of “sleeve” under a different classification. It is found that the noun “sleeve” is often used together with “tears”, “dew” and “fragrance” in addition to the meaning of the sleeve itself, which represents the meaning of tears, nostalgia for the old people, nostalgia and adultery between men and women. This study enriched the meaning of “sleeve” in Japanese classical literature. It is also a new attempt to combine the natural language processing method with the text analysis method, bringing more new possibilities for the future study of Japanese poetry and classical literature.

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