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TITLE OF ARTICLE: A Meiji Writer's outlook on Chinese Literature: the case of Mori Ōgai

In this paper I am going to analyze the impact of Chinese culture on the Japanese modern writer Mori Ōgai (actual name Mori Rintarō, 1862-1922).

Ōgai, along with Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), is regarded as one of the preeminent writers of the Meiji period. Great modern Japanese writers such as Ōgai and Sōseki share a common interest in both the Western and the Eastern literary tradition, one that would enable them to write their own works deriving themes from both, and both aspects of their education needs to be focused on.

Indeed, as many contemporary scholars in Japan and abroad have been recently pointing out, given the fact that almost any intellectual of the Meiji Period would be provided the opportunity of receiving extensive training in the Chinese Classics, and would be encouraged to master, at least to some extent, the art of composing poetry in Chinese (*kanshi*), it is unlikely that the kind of literature Sōseki and Ōgai were introduced to at a very early stage of their formation would play no role whatsoever in shaping the new literature of Meiji writers.¹

Yet, when it comes to discussing whether Confucian studies were the sole and only concern of these two well-known Meiji intellectuals, it becomes clear that their affection towards the old tales of love, romance and supernatural events in Ming-Qing China and Tokugawa Japan, and for Chinese poetry, provided an even greater source of inspiration. When reading Chinese literature, writers such as Ōgai and Sōseki based their interest on a wide variety of literary works, sometimes even wider than that of the scholars of the preceding Tokugawa period. One of the reasons why Meiji writers were able to pick up selected readings among such numerous variety is that since the introduction of Western thought in Japan, intellectuals had formally changed the way they judged the value of literary works, and this would, in turn, work towards influencing favourably the process of rediscovery of forgotten Chinese and Japanese works. This time, more often than ever Chinese intellectuals studying in Japan would be there to help them². Also, new ways to arrange an interpretation of old Chinese material became available.³

I chose to focus on Ōgai and Chinese literature because, as we shall see, his literary persona results, to a fair extent, as being a stigmatization of this process. His activity as a writer would only

¹ On the *kanshi* of the Meiji period, cfr. Keene 1998 (1984): 36-54.

² A glimpse on this condition may be gained scanning through both Murayama 1999, and the posthumous Miura (2003).

³ On the new proposals of reading Chinese, which I will discuss to a broader extent later on, see Kotajima 1997: 33-55, one of several articles on the poetry anthology *Omokage*. Ōgai's '*chokudokuron*' [proposal on reading the Chinese directly <with the pronunciation of the native>] is dealt with specifically in pp. 40-45 Therein. On translations and new editions of Chinese texts, see Murayama 1999 and its related bibliography, and particularly the introductory section (pp 1-19). Also, Odagiri (1997) brings an example of reworking a Chinese short story by means of an artistic translation (Odagiri 1997: 285-310)

apparently seem to represent the limitations of the Meiji intellectual and man of letters: having received the traditional education of a samurai in the Chinese classics, and having moved to Western study early in his life, Ōgai thoroughly worked towards broadening his knowledge of Chinese and Japanese literature, along with the study of Western fonts.

I am going to present a series of texts by Ōgai that demonstrate his interest in Chinese studies. I am going to use these examples to discuss how Ōgai's outlook on Chinese literature changed over time, to the point that he developed a more mature approach to the study of Chinese culture, and Chinese language itself. He was not entirely alone in this, as his views on Chinese literature were partly shared by some scholars belonging to the same literary circle, and constantly participating in the very same forums, such as Mori Kainan (1863-1911) and Kōda Rohan (1867-1947), another well-known novelist of the period and acclaimed scholar of Chinese.

Judging from the body of his original as well as his translation works, it becomes clear that Ōgai fundamentally succeeded in shaping a new literature drawing from the past and the present of both East and West, which earned him a reputation. His interest in Chinese literature matures from the plain reverence towards the Confucian classics that had its historical roots in the old concept of "learning" in Japan, to a fruitful rethinking of the value of many unorthodox and mainly disregarded efforts such as, to give one example for each, the prose of Li Yu (1611-?1680)'s *Rouputuan*⁴, and the poetry of Tang woman poet and nun, Yu Xuanji (844-?871). We shall see more in detail which of these works helped to shape Ōgai's outlook on literature in general, on the Chinese civilization specifically, and eventually influenced him at some points in his own literature.

A major point of interest is, in my opinion, the ever increasing degree of effort that Ōgai put in an endeavour to use his knowledge of European sources and methods to try and develop a different outlook on Chinese and Japanese literature of the past, rather than reject these as completely anachronistic, very much like it has been said that his early experience with the classical Chinese and Japanese language had not only nurtured his interest in literature, but had also provided him with a training that would reveal crucial to his future mastery of European languages.

As we shall see, Ōgai is the author of one of the most interesting – though not the only, for Confucian scholar Ogyū Sorai⁵, one of several historical figures that attracted Ōgai's interest, had preceded him in formulating one – proposals on reading the Chinese language using the actual pronunciation of the contemporary native speakers; as noted before, Ōgai and his circle of friends also developed gradually a perspective that enabled them to rethink the Chinese world. They came to the point of judging masterpieces of the Chinese literature as being fundamentally a product of a culture different from both the Japanese one and the Western one. This is a far cry from the understatement of "old school" scholars pretending that Chinese was a dignified kind of Japanese expression. The material I am going to comment on, such as the forums called *Hyōshinryō Iroku*⁶ ('*Scattered Recordings on Notable Works*'), transcribed and printed on literary magazines, clearly show that Meiji intellectuals used to hold literary debates on subjects drawn from alternatively Western, Japanese and Chinese sources; this tendency to rely on sources from both Western and Asian tradition is evident in several other critical essays of Ōgai, which I shall summarize throughout this article. Lastly, I will bring two concrete examples revealing how his knowledge of the Chinese language and culture enabled the author to derive literary themes and techniques from

⁴ A well-known erotic novel famous for its graphic descriptions, also available in a commented English translation, see. Hanan 1990

⁵ Whose activity is briefly documented in Keene B, 1998: 376. A longer essay on Sorai's thought is to be found in Yoshikawa, Maruyama and Ienaga (1973: 629-749). More remarks on 'kanbun kundoku' and Sorai are to be found also Takashima 2000: 103-153. Takashima's work also presents in translation one of Sōseki's earliest writings in Chinese, 'Bokuzetsuroku' ('A Story [made up] from Scraps').

⁶ In Ōgai Zenshū (1971-75, henceforth abbreviated as OZ, see the Bibliography for full reference), Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, Vol. XXIV, pp. 473-622

Chinese fiction. These are the short stories *Yasui Fujin* ('The Wife of Yasui'), and *Gyogenki* ('Yu Xuanji')⁷.

It is clear from these premises that when it comes to talking about Ōgai and Chinese literature, to consider what impact did the traditional training in Chinese studies had on Ōgai is by no means the only question to tackle. However, since Ōgai's early training in the Confucian classics provided the author with the opportunity of a first contact with an alien culture so early in his life, this aspect has to be dealt with first.

Even though the *gakusei* (educational system) elaborated by scholars of Western thought (*yōgakusha*) promulgated by the government in May 1872 had led to the closure of old *shijuku* (private schools) and *terakoya*, and to the abolition of *hankō* (fief's schools), thus erasing the old scholarly system and making many scholars unemployed, the old ways were not, for many reasons, to die so abruptly. It is worth quoting what Murayama Yoshihiro points out in a recent effort⁸: people were not so prompt to accept the new educational system for the very idea of having all social classes receive the same instruction must have been hard to accept in the beginning, teachers who could give lectures using the new textbooks and materials were still very few, and in addition to that, the building of public elementary schools relied mostly on local funds, thus leaving room for general distress and suspicion towards the new system. As a result, the government was forced to modify it and promulgated a second-time educational system, the *kyoiku-rei*, in 1879. Following the publication of this new system many new private academies sprung out and *kangaku*, Chinese studies, was restored as an academic subject, along with the new sciences imported from the West. According to Murayama, actually, *kangaku* still enjoyed a wide popularity during the whole first half of the Meiji Era, up to well into the 1890's, just before Sino-Japanese war raised new questions and skepticism on Japan's indebtedness to China's cultural past.

The young Ōgai acquired a solid foundation in the Confucian classics at the fief's school, the Yōrōkan, and proved very soon to be a fine would-be scholar of Chinese. Yet, times changed abruptly, requiring him to be introduced to Western studies in order to follow in his father's footsteps and become a doctor. He was later to acquire considerable proficiency in the German language, even before being sent to complete his study of hygiene in Germany during the years 1884-1888, mostly under the guidance of the physician Robert Koch⁹. At this stage of his career Ōgai seems to have made out the best of his early training in order to gain the impressive skills required to complete his studies at Tōkyō University, which he successfully graduated from at age 19, becoming the youngest ever to do so. Soon afterwards Ōgai started a career as an army surgeon, but he never put aside his interest in literature during his whole lifetime. Ōgai also grew to become one of the most productive translators of his age, producing an impressive amount of translations of European works of literature – mostly from German or French originals, and he distinguished himself, as a writer of fiction, for the variety of styles and literary themes he employed throughout his activity. His translations from Chinese, such as those for the poetry anthology *Omokage* ('Visions')¹⁰, are by no means as huge a collection as the translations from German, yet, as we shall see more in details, these too deserve a mention for the approach – unique for the time – that characterized these attempts to rewrite, rather than reproduce literally, the Chinese text in Japanese.

⁷ Both available in English translation, see Dilworth and Rimer (1991: '*Yasui fujin*', pp. 255-270, and '*Gyogenki*', pp. 185-198)

⁸ Murayama (1999: 3-4), op.cit.

⁹ Several articles deal with Ōgai's formation and his experience abroad. Among them, in addition to Ōgai's detailed biography by his brother Junzaburo (Mori Junzaburo 1942, particularly pp. 1-24 on his education) I suggest Bowring (1979, esp. pp. 1-23), and the recent and more concise Suzuki (1997: 77-127).

¹⁰ OZ, Vol. XIX pp. 1-66. See also Bowring (1979: 36-44), and Kotajima (1997: 33-55)

Ōgai derived part of his readings in Chinese prose from his several colleagues and coaches of *kanbun*. He himself would not call himself a specialist of Chinese studies (nor would he address himself as an accomplished writer at all, for that matter), yet, it has to be acknowledged that the very target of his interest, if not the manner of it, is anything but usual. Early enough the writer, who had previously studied at the fief's school from the age of six, would not be contented with the old practice of reading Chinese the Japanese way, and continued to seek a chance to improve his skills even further after his return from Germany under the guidance of eminent scholars such as the aforementioned Mori Kainan, Katsura Koson (1868-1938) and Yoda Gakkai (1833-1909), the latter being a rather eclectic scholar whose impact on Ōgai's concept of "fiction" in literature happens to be great¹¹. Similarly, Sōseki was able to gain a considerable proficiency in reading and writing Chinese after taking a course in a *kanbun gakkō* of the period, and this background enabled him to compose many a work of 'prose-poetry' in Chinese in his early youth¹². Both writers were able to travel, though for very different reasons, to different parts of China¹³. Moreover, as two or three anecdotes in Ōgai's 1909 novel *Vita Sexualis*¹⁴ effectively portray, lending old books, most notably Chinese imported novels, or masterpieces of Japanese literature of the past, was still a common practice at the beginning of the Meiji Era. This environment had an impact on the life of Meiji writers.

Ōgai, who called himself a dilettante of literature, was successful as a writer mostly because he used his mastery of the classical Chinese and Japanese to shape his own styles and manners of narrations – which vary considerably throughout his entire career as a writer, from the severely masculine prose of the early essays to the plain *genbun itchi* style of the late fiction –. Generally speaking, Ōgai's literature is one of the clearest examples of what Meiji's *sekigaku*¹⁵ could produce, one of its distinctive feature being – with the sole exceptions of some of the most 'fictional' attempts – the erudite usage of the language and the themes. Ōgai is a true *sekigakusha* also because his interest in literature, both Western and Eastern, expands covering the three fields of Fiction, Theatre, and Criticism. His interest in Chinese literature is no exception to that, but rather a part of it. As legendary scholar Maeda Ai points out in one of the first short papers dealing specifically with Ōgai's interest in the Chinese novels¹⁶, part of the author's extant library displays a selection of Chinese originals which paradoxically includes about as much, if not even more, imported volumes than any of his contemporaries which were regarded as fine scholars of Chinese (Maeda 1966: 52). Most material in Ōgai's library now at Tōdai belongs to the world of the Chinese fiction of the Ming and Qing periods, or to the florid tradition of theatre plays of the Yuan. Common themes among these works are the representation of human feelings and relationships, whether in the more romantic variety or in a more sexually explicit fashion. A feature that is shared among most Chinese fiction Ōgai had in his library, and the works by Western authors he read and translated, is that the vast majority of all these could easily fit in a somewhat more 'specific' category of works which portray strong female characters.

Ōgai has never been less than a sensitive reader of fiction, and this is true for his readings in Chinese prose, too. His reverence towards the Confucian classics, which also played a role in the style of his *shiden*¹⁷ (biographical literature), could be one of the less original aspects. His interest

¹¹ Murayama 1999: 142-147, op.cit.

¹² See Takashima 2000, op.cit.

¹³ See the recent Brodey and Tsunematsu (2000) for a presentation of Sōseki's experience in Manchuria which includes Sōseki's travel account fully translated, and Shimada (1995) on Ōgai in Taiwan.

¹⁴ 'Vita Sexualis' has been translated into English by Ninomiya and Goldstein (1972)

¹⁵ By which term I, according to Miura (1998 op.cit), refer to the ever-increasing knowledge of Western and Eastern thought that steadily broadened from the Edo period all through the Meiji Era.

¹⁶ Maeda 1966: 48-55. Ōgai's collection of Chinese texts is listed, albeit only partially, on pp. 50-51

¹⁷ On Ōgai's style and the role played by his knowledge of Chinese prose, see Seki 1971: 448-458 and the more recent Fujikawa (1997: 1-32). On his biographical literature see Marcus (1993), and Watanabe (1996).

for acclaimed masterpieces of Chinese fiction like *Shuihuzhuan* or *Jinpingmei* is a trait he shared with many other of his contemporaries, but yet, it deserves more attention because this is the field where the author rejects the traditional view of these Chinese works. And lastly, Ōgai's ability to discover obscure texts which had neither been known before, nor would have been afterward were it not for the recent outsprung of publications in English (and Chinese) language on Women studies¹⁸, such as *Xiqing Sanji* ('Random Notes from Xiqing'), or *Nuxian Waishi* ('The informal History of a Female Immortal'), is all the more remarkable, ranking him among the most flexible and interested, if not the most knowledgeable, scholars of his era.

Apart from the peculiarities of Ōgai's approach to the theme, it has to be noted that he would not, in any case, become the only Meiji author to refer specifically to Chinese literature in his late fiction, years after the spreading of the new literary modes imported from the West, and the rise of the Naturalist School: Kōda Rohan's prose, such as that of the novel *Unmei* ('Destiny'), or the collection of essays/short stories *Yūjōki* ('Stories of secret feelings')¹⁹ is just that much indebted to his knowledge in the field of Chinese studies, though his approach, if not the themes, occasionally vary from Ōgai's or Sōseki's. The author himself commenting on *Unmei* states²⁰ that he had tried to stay close to historical facts, but also that he had intentionally included in his re-edition of the story anecdotes which had been passed on since ancient times, and which he knew would probably be apocryphal, so as to be enabled to retell his story of an exiled prince more beautifully and movingly. His thesis statement is that there is a reward for good and bad actions, and so he turned to legend in order to be enabled to portray his character more heroically. In *Yūjōki*'s preface Rohan states²¹ that he had gathered anecdotes derived from a previous story ('*shussho*' a vague term indicating an 'origin' that may not always be actual truth), and that any of his stories has one or more poem as its fulcrum. The poems, though, are often obscure and open to numerous interpretations. Rohan's endeavour is directed towards creating a believable context for them, he is not always trying to reconstruct the facts the exact way they probably went. For Rohan, his rearranging the material is a crucial process. He respects the facts that have been told but is not trapped in the role of the objective historian. His starting point is the past which has survived in literature, his aim being that of creating a new literature through the works of the past. This applies, in many a sense, to Ōgai's historical fiction, too. Rohan's historical fiction is a kind of biographical literature which is intended to serve as a showcase for both '(hi)story' and 'fiction'. Defining Rohan's 'shiden shōsetsu' one could easily borrow the term '*rekishi banare*', which, along with its opposite '*rekishi sono mama*', has been indicated by Ōgai in a famous essay²² as the key element of his own historical fiction. The historical fiction of both authors deals at some point with China's past.

Also, it needs to be stressed that the composition of *kanshi* retained a popularity in the first thirty years of the Meiji era, before the advent of new style Japanese poetry, and Chinese literature specialists such as Yoda Gakkai, Mori Kainan and Kōda Rohan himself, enjoyed high cultural status and could count on rather high popularity despite the obscureness of their works, as they were clearly regarded as major contributors to Japan's cultural life up to the first half of the Meiji period. Important writers such as Ōgai, Sōseki and Rohan kept composing *kanshi* even at a stage in their career when they had already stopped writing prose in Chinese. Sōseki, right at the point where he

¹⁸ At this point I am going to introduce a series of works that may serve as a reference. An introduction to Chinese literature covering most of the above mentioned Chinese novellas, plays and texts is Idema and Haft (1997). See also Macmahon (1995). On *Xiqing Sanji* see Ropp (2001), Choy (2001), Idema and Grant 2004: 520-541. On Women's literature in China see again Idema and Grant (2004), and its related bibliography, particularly Ko (1994). An interesting series of essays on Women and Confucian cultures in Ko, Kim Haboush and Piggot (2003).

¹⁹ Both *Unmei* and *Yūjōki* are collected in Kawamura (editor, 1997)

²⁰ Kawamura 1997, *kaisetsu*: 279-287

²¹ Kōda Rohan, *Preface [to Yūjōki]*, in Kawamura 1997 op.cit.: 142

²² *Rekishi sono mama to rekishibanare* ('History as It Is and History Ignored', translated in Dilworth and Rimer 1991: 179-184. The original text is reproduced in OZ (1975), vol. XXVI, pp. 508-511).

had just started the career that would lead him to become one of the most well-regarded, and perhaps the very best known writer of the period, produced a novel, *Kusamakura*²³ ('The three-cornered world' or, literally, 'Pillow Grass', 1906), whose aulic style, very unique, is the effective product of an experimentation combining a *genbun itchi*-style grammar with words and compounds used in a more 'classical sense'. Most of these are borrowed from the classical poetry of the Chinese. *Kusamakura*'s structure is that of a *travelogue*, a form of literature that enjoyed wide popularity in both Japan and China in the past, and regardless of Sōseki's previous adherence to "new" novel forms, the main character herein is anachronistically portrayed as both a painter and a poet, similarly to how scholars in ancient China used to be. The first paragraphs of *Kusamakura* recall in the usage of the vocabulary, and the poetry-like vividness of expression, the great masterpieces of Tang dynasty poets, as well as the epic 'travel' elegy *Li Sao* ('Encountering Sorrows')²⁴, by the great Qu Yuan (?343-?277 b.C.). In the first chapter, which is a more free-form sort of "novelistic essay" sprinkled with Chinese and English poetry quoted in the original, Sōseki himself, apparently disregarding the creation of a plot, clearly takes his chance to state his point of view about the worlds of Western and Asian poetry, pointing out the differences and confirming his fondness for both. Judging from his statements, it seems that it was the contact with Western poetry which enabled the author to better evaluate the traditional Chinese and Japanese poetic forms. Likely, among Ōgai's heroines, characters such as Otama ('*Gan*'), Sayo ('*Yasui Fujin*') and clearly Gyogenki ('*Yu Xuanji*'), seem to owe much to Ōgai's early readings in the Ming and Qing literature concerning Women and the Confucian culture I mentioned before.

I stated early in the introduction that Ōgai's outlook on the culture of the Chinese became first apparent in his critical essays. In this respect, his literary essays become one of the central focuses of my analysis. Though not as successful, and widely known, as Shōyō's²⁵, these papers regularly published in the second half of Ōgai's career supply invaluable elements for a better understanding of his view of literature as a whole, as well as being a source of information on his interests in China's past. The texts, often written in a classical, erudite language, are not always easily understandable to the modern readers, even native, who have no knowledge of the context, and this may account for them being neglected by scholars for a surprisingly long time.

Criticism (*Hyōron*) was clearly one of the main concerns of intellectuals in the Era of the Enlightenment. Ōgai took up his career as a critic of literature right after his return from a prolonged stay in Germany, with the publication of essays on the Daily Yomiuri. In shorter essays, such as '*Igaku no setsu yori idetaru shōsetsuron*' ('Literary theories derived from medicine', published in January 1889)²⁶, he deals mainly with brief exposure, and criticism, of Zola's Naturalism. Shortly thereafter, Ōgai, together with his sister Kimiko, his brother Naojiro, and a few promising intellectuals which were friends of his, such as Ochiai Naobumi (1861-1903), Inoue Michiyasu (1866-1941) and Ichimura Sanjirō (1864-1947), constituted the group *Shinseisha* (*The New Voices Society*), and in October 1889 the group founded a new magazine, '*Shigarami-zoshi*' ('The Weir'). The group was soon to become very active in promoting the understanding of Western literary movements, especially Naturalism and Romanticism. Ōgai probably felt the urge to have his own magazine in order to be able to publish more material, as he contributed at least one article to every issue of the magazine. '*Shigarami-zoshi*' enjoyed a rather large circulation at the time, up to the point when it was discontinued due to the circumstances of Ōgai being summoned to the front during the Sino-Japanese War. Longer essays published in the New Voices Society's magazine,

²³ *Kusamakura* has been translated more than once, the more recent translation is '*The Three-Cornered World*' (Turney 1968)

²⁴ See Yang and Yang 1953

²⁵ Tsubouchi Shōyō, the author of '*Shosetsu shinzui*' (The Essence of the Novel), see Keene, 1984 pp. 96-106

²⁶ OZ, Vol. XXII pp 1-2.

such as the november 1889 issue's *'Ima no shoka no shōsetsuron wo yomite'*²⁷ ('The recent theories on the novel'), show all the peculiarity of Ōgai's approach to literary criticism as well as to literature as a whole.

Ōgai's *Shinseisha* was constituted at a point of Meiji's cultural life when magazines had begun to play a major role as media for spreading the 'new' tendencies in the world of literature, but is worth noting that, unlike many critics of the same age, in his early essays Ōgai deliberately chooses not to deal with criticism of one single piece of work, instead he rather tends to construct a theory of literature as a whole. Ōgai's effort is directed, as stated by scholar Ogura Hitoshi²⁸ in recent times, towards creating a 'criticism of the criticism' (*hyōron no hyōron*). In undertaking such a big task, he always employs references and quotations of works, even rather unknown ones, drawn from alternatively Western, Japanese and Chinese sources. He may establish a link between a French, German, or Russian contemporary author and the prose of a Murasaki Shikibu, or a Chinese writer of fiction such as the author of *'Shuihuzhuan'* ('Water Margin')²⁹. The time of his rough, medieval formation as a scholar of Chinese culture at the fief's school is over, as are the days of his solitary readings of Bakin, Shunsui, and of Chinese vernacular fiction at *kashidashi-ya* during his study at Tōkyō University. Yet, clearly enough, even at such an early stage in his evolution towards becoming a more mature critic and writer of fiction himself, thanks to his mastery of a variety of written literary forms of expression, Ōgai has an opportunity to pick up a wide range of works from both Eastern and Western sources, to compare them in a rather pioneeristic fashion, and to use them in order to clarify his view on literature as a whole.

It has also to be noted that, in discussing his early literary theories Ōgai displays a strong tendency to employ terms clearly derived from the Chinese tradition in a broader sense. Thus, for instance, in *'Shōsetsuron...'* Ōgai first states his opinion on the traditional distinction between *'shi'* (poetry) and *'shōsetsu'* (fiction), defining the latter as being the literary product in which 'one tells things by means of prose', and explaining how fiction has been, with a few exceptions, traditionally regarded as less valuable than the former in East Asia. Ōgai substantially rejects this traditional view, reaffirming the importance of fiction as a literary genre. Yet, he continues to refer to the world of 'literature' using compounds that always clearly incorporate the word *'shi'* ([Chinese] poetry). Another example is when the author, curiously enough, while critical of both Zola's *études* and the Romantic fiction, paradoxically claims as forerunners of superior quality fiction – which he calls alternatively *'tanhai'* and *'fukuhai'* – not only such diverse authors as Tolstoy, Beaconsfield, Jean Paul, Daudet, but even Japanese *gesaku* writer Bakin (in his early works), Murasaki Shikibu, and the author of *'Shuihuzhuan'*. Ōgai himself clarifies in the text what he means by the Chinese-derived terms *'tanhai'* and *'fukuhai'*, which are, respectively, the short story and the novel. He also uses the term *'Saishi-Kaijin'* (chinese *'Caizi-Jiaren'*) to signify a kind of literature which portrays the chancefule, romantic encounter between the male and female protagonists. At this stage, Ōgai seems to consider, in a somewhat conventional sense, that writers of every era have to describe the joys and sorrows of love. Paradoxically, the uniqueness of his theories on literature lay in the language used to describe its stylistic features, which is either directly derived from Chinese, or Chinese-sounding. *'Caizi-Jiaren (talented scholar/beauty) xiaoshuo'* is a kind of literature³⁰ that was very popular in Japan since the time of the *gesaku* writers of *ninjō-bon*, and Ōgai himself was fond of works such as *'Yanshan Waiji'*³¹ ('An unofficial account of [an story that took place in] Mount

²⁷ Henceforth abbreviated in *'shōsetsuron'*, see Mori Ōgai, OZ (1975), vol XX pp 65-82. For a translation of a few passages see the Appendix.

²⁸ Ogura (1997: 122)

²⁹ On the Meiji debates about *Shuihuzhuan*, cfr. the Appendix. See also Shapiro (1980).

³⁰ The first to treat organically the *Caizi-jiaren* genre is the great modern Chinese writer Lu Xun (1959), which had also studied in Japan. I also recommend Zhou (1995) and Miao (2004)

³¹ See Hiraoka 1997: 1-34, especially pp.16-23

Yanshan'), which clearly belong to this literary genre. Yet, the author does not seem to make any specific reference in this essay, to the 'Caizi-Jiaren' of the Chinese tradition, he rather seems to employ the term as a general umbrella definition for 'romantic' fiction: giving examples³² of what he thinks could fit into the 'Caizi-Jiaren' category, he quotes German Romantic fiction, and the *yomi-hon* of the Tokugawa. These essays were written at a time when modern literary criticism was making its first steps in Japan of the Renovation Era, and this could account for some of Ōgai's choices regarding the language, yet, one can clearly perceive that his use of the Chinese language is aimed at making his dissertation the best possible sounding to his fellow scholars. If he had referred to what he regarded to be masterpieces of the world's literature with more 'usual' terms, it would have probably sounded as if he had no will to conjure in a reader's mind that these were great fiction. His usage of terms deriving from Chinese is actually aimed towards achieving the attention of the *literati*. In this sense, one may say that at this point Ōgai's interest for Chinese literature retains a more conventional trait; nevertheless, it can be perceived that the young Ōgai, although a much better connoisseur of European literature than his contemporaries, was never trapped into an acritical admiration of the West, as he displays also early in his career a deep fondness for the traditional prose of both Japan and China. Anyone claiming that the interest of important Japanese novelists such as Ōgai, Sōseki and Rohan for Chinese and Japanese classical literature never got past their primary education may be trapped in too monolithic a conception to be able to fully understand how this interest changed over time and after they dedicated themselves to Western thought. In the case of Ōgai, this process will become gradually more apparent in his later works, where the writer who has read so much about European Naturalism and Romanticism - as well as on Freud's psychoanalysis -, will eventually display a rather unique taste for Chinese fiction and plays dealing with love, sexuality, and the condition of women, which had been at least formally disregarded by the *literati* of both Japan and China because of the 'unorthodox' matter involved.

As for the contents of *Shōsetsuron*, Ōgai does not make any statement that could account for a clear distinction between the value of literary products of the past and the present, of the Chinese, Japanese or European tradition: he tends to consider all these as requiring the most careful study and attention. He even looks for hints on the value of realistic narration and psychological description in the thought of the Chinese and Japanese scholars of the past. So, talking about the superiority of Shōyō's theories on the psychological novel, he ends up quoting two Chinese critics of fiction, 'Yuchu Xinzhi'³³'s and 'Shuihuzhuan' 's compilers, stating that they both regarded fine and realistic portraying of a character the essential characteristic of good fiction, a task that according to Ōgai's point of view Zola's followers almost failed to accomplish in later times.

Despite occasional criticism, clearly, Ōgai displays here much more indulgence towards the literature of the past than Shōyō does, though we know Shōyō himself never stated that he overtly despised the work of writers such as Bakin. Very singularly, as a means of reinforcing his assertions on the necessity of creating a new 'realistic novel', Ōgai relies more than any of his contemporaries would have probably been willing to do on Chinese literary criticism trying to theorize a 'new' novel form.

It is rather difficult to imagine how Ōgai can have been so successful in shaping his early works of criticism on modern literature using such an elaborate classical language, packed together with foreign words, and Chinese texts, quoted in the original. At the times of these early attempts at

³² for reference, see the quotations from 'Shōsetsuron' translated in the Appendix.

³³ 'The New Collection of Yu Chu', a collection of short stories of love and supernatural events from the early Qing period (completed around 1700), by a Zhang Chao, contained a version of the celebrated 'History of Xiaoqing' (*Xiaoqing zhuan*, see Idema and Grant 2004: 504-514). The collection, scarcely mentioned today, happens to have been very popular among Meiji intellectuals, as Ōgai, Gakkai and several more *literati* had a copy of the text in their library (Maeda 1966: 52).

criticism by Ōgai, the *genbun itchi* movement was moving its first steps towards a revolution in the style of Japanese prose, yet, one cannot help noticing that even though many authors employed classical Japanese in their works, Ōgai's prose is much more refined, sinicized, erudite, and generally obscure, than that of, for instance, Ishibashi Ningetsu³⁴'s, although Ningetsu did also use classical Japanese in his works. The comparison between Ishibashi's criticism to Ōgai's 1890 short novel 'Maihime' and Ōgai's replies to Ningetsu's review marks this difference quite clearly³⁵. Though both make extensive use of classical phraseology and grammar, Ningetsu's prose is generally simpler than Ōgai's. In turn, while Ningetsu's reviews may look, in the eye of a modern reader, rather primitive in the contents, the wide usage of archaic, eclectic language throughout this, as well as later essays by Ōgai makes the contrast to the modernity of most contents addressed all the more striking.

An interesting essay in which Ōgai specifically deals with the problem of reading, and interpreting Chinese prose, is '*Rōdokuhō ni tsukite no sō*' ('*On the manners of reading aloud [texts]*'),³⁶ published in 1891. In this essay, Ōgai deals with the problem of interpretation of Chinese texts by means of *kundoku*, the traditional method of reading Chinese which most Japanese scholars had been following in order to read both prose and poetry up to that point³⁷.

The proposal on reading Chinese using the pronunciation of native speakers, as unusual, even pioneeristic, as it may sound, may have been not entirely new even to scholars of the preceding Tokugawa period. The method of *bōyomi*, literally meaning 'reading straightforward', may have been formulated for the first time by confucian philosopher Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728)³⁸. Sorai's school of *kangaku* was one of the first study groups of vernacular Chinese in Japan, and they used to use as 'textbooks' the kind of Ming and Qing novels that both Yoda Gakkai and Ōgai seemed to find so interesting in the period that followed. So probably Ōgai was introduced to the school of Sorai by his coach of *kanbun*, and occasionally he overtly comments on Sorai's theories in later essays. In addition to that, copies of Sorai's works are still present in Ōgai's library now at Tōdai. The point of interest here is that Ōgai seems to have developed a perplexity on reading Chinese the way that most Japanese had done up to that point *after his experience in Germany*. This statement on the manner of reading Chinese may account for his will to consider Chinese prose as something very distinct from Japanese, a notion the academic validity of which some of his contemporaries seemed much more reluctant to admit. Presently I cannot judge how further Ōgai took his linguistic interest towards the pronunciation of Chinese, but I think it is worth pointing out that he always quotes Chinese texts in the original, or, as for the Ming poems included in the poetry anthology *Omokage* ('Visions'), or the Chinese short story published with the aid of his sister Kimiko, in a translation which is intended as a work of art in itself³⁹. His Japanese translations from Chinese are always more of an interpretation of the text than a literal translation. *Kundoku*, literal translation of Chinese, is limited by Ōgai to translation of his diaries and travel accounts written at a very early stage of his career, i.e. the *Doitsu Nikki*⁴⁰, one of the diaries which recount Ōgai's stay in

³⁴ Ishibashi Ningetsu (1865-1926) was a once renowned critic of literature, now almost unknown. He wrote, under the pseudonym of *Kidori Hanojō*, a critic of Ōgai's short story '*Maihime*', (Ishibashi Ningetsu, '*Maihime*', in Fukuda 1971: 262-264) in which he argued that the poor girl portrayed in the story is a passive character, so wretched at the end of the story that she could not reasonably have been addressed by such an aulic term as the '*Maihime*' of the title. Ōgai, disguised as Aizawa Kenkichi immediately replied to Ningetsu's critics in the two articles '*Kidari Hanojō ni atauru sho*' and '*Futatabi Kidari Hanojō ni atauru sho*', see OZ, vol XXII, 158-172.

³⁵ See the note above.

³⁶ OZ, vol. XX, pp. 351-358.

³⁷ OZ, vol. XX, pages 356-357. Also quoted in Kotajima 1997: 41.

³⁸ Cfr. above note 5.

³⁹ Cfr. note 3.

⁴⁰ In OZ, vol XXXV, pp. 85-192, see also Keene (1988: 56-69)

Germany, and the only one of his memories which, originally written in *kanbun*, had been edited and rewritten in Japanese later on.

In the second part of Ōgai's career as a critic the author keeps focusing on the theory of literature while concentrating on specific works or writers. After the publication of '*Shigarami-zoshi*' is discontinued, Ōgai has to move to the front, and upon his return he resumes his activity founding the magazine '*Mesamashikusa*'.

At this stage of his career Ōgai becomes famous for the forums (*gappyō*) he organized and hosts – mostly at his house in the Kanda quarter, the *Kanchōrō* – with many important writers and intellectuals of the period. The first of these literary debates was published in Ōgai's '*Mesamashikusa*' shortly after its creation, and many more works followed. *Gappyō* is a rather singular piece of criticism, the original form of which traces back to the times of the Tokugawa. Many of the forums recorded and printed in magazines were even open to the public, especially late ones. The first of these very particular reviews, '*Sannin jōgō*' ('The blabbering of three people'), serialized in Ōgai's new magazine from March 1896 on, has become famous for the appraisal of Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896) 's novel 'Takekurabe' ('Growing Up'), which earned her a firmer reputation as a writer. Also, Ōgai 's criticism towards the Naturalist School becomes sharper.

'*Sannin Jōgō*' was the product of Ōgai's, Koda Rohan's, and Saito Ryoku'u's criticism, reorganized, revised and transcribed partly, it seems, by Ōgai himself (Ogura 1997). The three intellectuals seem to share a somewhat similar outlook on the freshly published literary works. In addition, they talk in turn, but changing their nickname at any turn, making it rather difficult to tell who is who, and also who's talking about what. This funny, play-like piece is constructed so as to resemble a work of art in itself. The *gappyō* style may have definitely proved to be a good means to succeed in captivating the attention of the readers, who were becoming more and more tired of traditional forms of literary review.

This kind of criticism marks the difference also in that it is almost free from the excessive theorization that characterized Ōgai's early attempts, and the language, though generally refined above average, is clearly derived from actual speech. Ōgai and his companions seem to have been eventually released from the cage of Aestheticism, and the letting go of the urge to judge by means of aesthetical appreciations results in an overall relaxed, vivacious, sharp and attractive tone.

Many more *gappyō* followed the first experiment, including '*Unchūgo*' ('Words [uttered] among the clouds') and '*Hyoshinryo Iroku*' ('Scattered recordings on notable works')⁴¹, whose first forum has the date of 1897. Ōgai, who seems to have been constantly in charge as an editor and publisher of the transcribed forums, joins forces with friends, colleagues and fellow scholars such as Kōda Rohan, Saito Ryoku'u, his brother Takeji (Naojiro), and many more, such as Yoda Gakkai, Mori Kainan.

The forums gather together many specialists of both Western literature, and classical fiction of China and Japan.

The title of the collection of forums reorganized as '*Hyoshinryō Iroku*' is a pun based on the ancient Chinese idiomatic expression '*ryōi hyōshin*'⁴² originally used to acclaim a masterpiece. The forum begins as a more 'serious and academic' experiment, and the names of the participants appear clearly at the beginning of their speech. It is clear that, towards the last decade of XIX century, the literati's attention partially shifted from contemporary writings to the works of the great writers of the past. One particular reason for such shift is that these debates took place in a moment of Japan's cultural history when acritical and unconditional admiration for the West often paired with strong dislike for the traditional culture of East Asia, a contempt that the finest intellectuals regarded as

⁴¹ For reference on '*Hyoshinryo Iroku*' , see the original in OZ, op. cit. vol XXIV, pp. 473-622, and the Appendix.

⁴² Chinese 'Ling Yi Biao Xin'

perilous and suspicious. Thus, proclaiming great respect for the writers of ancient China and Japan clearly served as a means to preserve them from complete oblivion. Unsatisfaction towards the mainstream contemporary fiction almost led the participants to the forums to a rediscovery of the literature of the past, but the training in criticism of the contemporary world greatly affected these scholars' outlook on the culture of the past. This tendency towards looking back to the past will be evident in both Ōgai's and Rohan's shift from the contemporary world to an account of Japan and China's past in later works. Basically, Ōgai and his circle proved to be among the finest philologists of the era. As we have seen, Ōgai was one of the first advocates of reading Chinese prose in Chinese. This view of Chinese as a foreign language involves the notion that Chinese literature was to be considered the product of an alien culture, a basic concept whose academic validity most intellectuals of the pre-modern era, impaired by the *kundoku* practice, had failed to recognize. In these forums about Chinese literature Ōgai and his mentors occasionally push this newly formulated, more 'modern' view on the literature of the Chinese even further: it is the case of Mori Kainan and Ōgai commenting on Chinese novel *Shuihuzhuan*⁴³ (translated below in the Appendix).

What is most startling in Mori Kainan's assertion is his claim that authors of great Chinese fiction such as Cao Xueqin⁴⁴'s *Honglouloumeng* ('The Dream of the Red Chamber'), and *Jinpingmei* ('The Plum in the Golden Vase')⁴⁵ could have even held their own against the likenesses of any major contemporary writer. His judgement on these acclaimed novels closely resembles what most European and American sinologists praised – and still praise – on the rediscovery of these same novels, even much later. Yet, admonishes Kainan, this is true for those who 'ask to Chinese fiction what they generally look for in Western literature', that is, you do not have to expect that Chinese premodern fiction will live up to the standards of any modern reader, for it is a world in its own. Ōgai completes this statement adding that 'you must not judge a novel such as '*Shuihuzhuan*' by means of today's standards ('*sono zentai wa ima no hihiyō no teiki wo mochite hakaru beki mono dewa nai*'). And truly, rediscovering early literature, whether Japanese or Chinese, allowed Ōgai's circle of intellectuals to escape the otherwise ever-impending debate on the modern realistic novel. Ōgai's subsequent statements reinforce and complete Kainan's view, stating that the reason why one must appreciate the novel '*Shuihuzhuan*' is that it is a fine product of the culture of China, and incorporates many elements invaluable to obtain a better insight of the mentality of the Chinese. It should not be surprising, however, given Ōgai's disposition towards the German language, and the amount of understanding of European culture in general that he displayed so early in his life, that he would fundamentally be willing to apply the same philologic method to the study of Chinese culture.

Ōgai's assertions on the Chinese traditional theater is the point where he develops a much more solid and mature approach to the theory of literature. In this respect, though they do not say much about the Chinese work in itself, recordings of his comments of the traditional Chinese play *Pipaji* ('The story of a *Pipa*') provide some of the clearest guidelines to understanding the author's outlook on what should be the meaning of writing 'fictional' literature.⁴⁶

⁴³ Mori Ōgai (ed.), *Hyōshinryō iroku*, in *OZ* (1971-75), op.cit., vol XXIV, p. 531.

⁴⁴ ?1717-1763. His long novel was completed after his death by Gao E (?1738-?1815). See below note 45

⁴⁵ Both presented in Idema and Haft 1997, see note 15. These two masterpieces have been discussed by many, here I will limit to an introductory bibliography. *Honglouloumeng*, whose link to representation of Women in literature is briefly discussed in Idema and Grant (2004: 568-70) has been translated and republished several times, the more recent version being that of Yang (2001). *Jinpingmei* is finally going to be translated in full by Roy (1993-). Roy's monumental translation, of which only the first two volumes have appeared in print, consists of a planned five-volumes set. A rather unconventional interpretation of the famous novel *Jinpingmei* is to be found in Ding (2002): for a summary of *Jinpingmei*'s themes and textual history see the Preface (Ding 2002 op.cit: XI-XXXI)

⁴⁶ *OZ*, op.cit., vol XXIV, pp. 614 to 618.

Starting with a mere comment on one of the most renowned Chinese plays, Ōgai takes his chance to take the debate to a higher level by means of the comparison of two major plays of Chinese theater, ‘*Xixiangji*’, and ‘*Pipaji*’. Though these two plays have been traditionally regarded as expressing opposite views on the relation of love to virtue, Ōgai seems to argue that even ‘*Pipaji*’s author never meant to write his own play with the sole intent of displaying the righteousness of virtue. Ōgai is clearly using the example of Chinese theater to rectify the notion of ‘confucian’ adherence to traditional values as opposed to love and passion, which are human emotions. Also, his tale of a man who suddenly becomes rich and tired of his old wife closely resembles the plot of what has been generally regarded as one of his most successful late novels, ‘*Gan*’ (‘The Wild Goose’, 1911-14). The modernity of the author’s opinions regarding the role of literature is made clear when he, rejecting the old view of the literary product as a mean to ‘promote the good and discourage the evil’, peacefully but firmly states that ‘love and passion are warm (*atatakai*)’ while ‘virtue is cold (*hiyayaka*)’. Ōgai must have had a keen interest in ‘*Xixiangji*’ (‘The Western Pavilion’), a Yuan play of love and supernatural events that later served as a model to several Ming and Qing stories of love. Ōgai’s defense of the representation of human passions in literature can be compared with the firm apology of love by the hand of great Chinese novelist Feng Menglong in the collection ‘*Qingshi*’ (‘A history of love’). Menglong is an author that Ōgai was so fond of as to liken Elise, the main female character of his short story ‘*Maihime*’ (‘The Dancer’, 1890) to his Chinese heroines that ‘choose their husband by themselves’ (‘*Jie Xia Nuzi Neng Zi Ze Pei Zhe*’) in his reply to Ningetsu’s review of the novella on the German dancer⁴⁷.

Ōgai’s obsession with women that chose their husbands by willful decision is made even clearer in one of his late short stories, *Yasui fujin* (‘The wife of Yasui’). Apart from Menglong’s ‘Wives who chose their companion by themselves’, the preference for female characters such as O-sayo, the young beautiful heroine of Ōgai’s novel was inspired by the reading of Chinese stories concerning women, such as the fictionalized account on women *Xiqing Sanji* (‘Random Notes from Xiqing’) by late-Ming scholar Shi Zhenlin (1683-1779). The reading of Shi Zhenlin’s account on his female contemporaries may have been suggested to Ōgai by his coach in Chinese prose, Yoda Gakkai, who had got hold of an extended text of the work, still present in his library (Nunomura 1997). Ōgai’s library holds another copy of ‘Random notes’, a 1874 edition full of annotations (approximately twenty lines) handwritten in Chinese. The handwriting is almost doubtlessly Ōgai’s. Especially Books I, II, III, IV and VII of his copy of *Xiqing Sanji* show signs of careful reading and interpreting of the text such as punctuation, underlining and notations (Nunomura 1997: 56). Ōgai is assumed to have completed reading the work by 1907, as stated in his notebook on literary readings, *Chiritsuka*⁴⁸. At this point I would like to introduce some excerpts from the text that show proof of having been read by Ōgai:

Once there was the young Jingliu, wife of Yu Fushi. She had a passion for knowledge, and was a gifted poet. She pitied the fact that she herself could not aspire to become a talented scholar, and she wished to become the wife of a promising young man. She did not care much about his wealth, provided that he needed to be of a sweet complexion; and so at the age of twentyone she married Fushi. Fushi had an exceptional talent and ranked second in the imperial exams. The wedding took place in the first month of the new year [according to the lunar calendar], but in the third month the woman got sick, and in the sixth month she eventually died. (quoted in Nunomura 1997: 60)

Ōgai’s comment on the story is ‘The recurrent illness of these fine intellectuals, the sad destiny of the short-lived beautiful maidens cannot but make people shed a great deal of tears’. And ‘but isn’t this it, the Way of the Heavens (i.e. the laws of destiny)’.

⁴⁷ Mori Ōgai, ‘*Maihime*’ni tsukite *Kidori hannojo ni atauru sho*’, op. cit., in OZ, vol XXII p.159 See also above note 34.

⁴⁸ Reproduced in full in OZ, vol XXXVII, pp. 39-92

One evening, I was hosted by an old man, Ruan, at his house. He called upon a young maiden, who came out bringing tea. She looked, perhaps, twenty or so. I asked the man: ‘Who is this woman?’. And he answered ‘This is my wife’. So I told him: ‘Sir, you are well into old age; how come that you took for a wife such a young woman?’. He replied ‘Well, actually my wife is so mild and gentle as to put up with this issue’. On a wall of the cottage was hung a [strip of paper with a] poem which read:

*On mountain musk a flower has fell:
New springs replace old spring
An ancient mirror, that was never polished
Bears new dust upon old dust
This dream is long, this dream is brief
And my passion is alive again
And that man from the past – he’s back
He’s back in the shape of the white clouds*

The old man pointed at it exclaiming: ‘See? This has been composed by my wife: I can’t figure out its meaning, as I haven’t been given an education yet’. Shortly thereafter, I got back home. I went to visit the old man again, but by the time I got to his cottage, it was already empty. A man next door said that they had gone to Mount Nanshan. I got [a chance] to explore Nanshan some ten days later, I even had my friend Mengzhan come along, as I wanted to visit old Ruan’s place; but once I got there[, I found out that] the mountain was a very wild place, and when I tried to investigate among its inhabitants [asking about the couple], there seemed to be nobody who had known them. (Nunomura 1997: 61)

When I was younger I used to carry on my studies in a solitary place outside the walls of the city. There lived there a woman who was a real beauty, very knowledgeable about literature. She got engaged to a man from a family of farmers. The man had been struck by smallpox, and had remained pockmarked by the disease. And so, before her marriage, in a moment where she should have been full of joy and happiness, she looked quite distressed and discontented instead. It seemed as if she were fighting some sort of inner grief. One night she suddenly appeared at my door. We formally greeted each other, I let her in and produced some tea. Then I asked her: ‘You are virtuous by nature, and have a gentle disposition, and you are as beautiful and talented as an Immortal; you could have easily found a handsome husband, but your fate has decided otherwise’. As I talked to her, she began wiping away with her sleeves the tears that fell incessantly from her eyes. At this point I asked her: ‘Pray tell, have you ever read the *Kanyingpian*?’ She replied that she hadn’t yet. So I presented her with a copy of the *Kanyingpian* and instructed her briefly on its contents. The woman suddenly looked as if she had realized something very important. She took the manuscript and headed back home. After the marriage, she took the habit to chant out loud its text from morning to evening. Thus, she loved her husband, whom she never addressed with words of reproach or contempt. (Nunomura 1997: 62)

‘*Xiqing Sanji*’, apparently a ‘random’ fiction in the manner of Japanese *zuihitsu*, is mainly known by modern sinologists for its account of the life and poetry of the first peasant poet of premodern China, He Shuangqing (?1712-?). ‘*Random Notes...*’ is actually a rather obscure work,

written in a classical language. It has been rediscovered and extensively studied in recent times by scholars such as Paul Ropp, and Elsie Choy (Choy 2001; Ropp 2002). At first ‘*Random Notes*’ may resemble more ordinary Chinese fiction of love, but there must be something more to the work to raise the interest of Ōgai and Gakkai, and it clearly is the rather unique portrayal of women in premodern China. Apart from the story of Shuangqing’s life, which occupies a good half of the text⁴⁹, many more stories of women are told by the author’s, or his friends’ voice throughout the work. Many women are described, and their poetry is quoted by the author in an attempt, however fictionalized, to portray the condition of many of his contemporaries. These women’s devotion to their husbands may seem the hallmark of strict adherence to traditional values such as fidelity and piety, yet, it is unmistakable that the ladies portrayed in ‘*Random Notes*’ all share a surprisingly great degree of self-consciousness. As in the episodes of the Old Ruan, and of the young beautiful wife of the ugly peasant with scars of smallpox, these young wives choose *by themselves* adherence to fidelity. In addition, these women are all fine poets. This may be accounted for as the most fictionalous trait in telling these women’s histories, yet, it is clear that neither Shuangqing’s, nor these minor characters’ poetry can be wholly attributed to the hand of Shi Zhenlin. Many poems quoted in ‘*Random Notes*’ have distinct features, and the overall impression is that, although they are close enough in form, in content they belong to a slightly different world than that of male poets. One may even be startled at first that many of these poems sound flirtatious, but it is not surprising, for they are the key to understand this eminently feminine world: the poetry of these women provides them with a temporary outlet to their grief towards life, and generally, it is also the most sincere expression of their inner feelings, an outlet that can to some extent enable them to put up with their ill fate, sometimes it is even an outcome of their hopes for a better future. The unique reality of these women’s inner world, as expressed by their literary works, is something that men – with the sole exception of the male literati – fail to see. Only the literati can to some extent retell this reality by means of their own artistic creation.

Generally speaking, focusing on women’s psychology had been one of the main tasks of Ōgai’s literature from the beginning, too. Ōgai, Gakkai and whoever claimed himself interested in women’s literature in the Meiji Era must have been deeply attracted by a work depicting female writers’ condition in such a fashion. Moreover, as the recent explosion of publishing on women’s history in the late imperial China has contributed to discover⁵⁰, the condition of late Ming women poets and intellectuals may not have been so far from the depiction of ‘*Xiqing Sanji*’. If rethought of from the ‘point of view’ of gender history, the women of ‘*Xiqing Sanji*’ cease to appear entirely fictional. Shi Zhenlin’s work is a source of information about women in premodern Chinese society, as well as a piece of literature, and Ōgai was interested in the work from both sides: despite the tameness of his own remarks on ‘*Random notes*’, which is mostly due to the usage of a concise, unaffecting language such as classical Chinese, Ōgai, too, seems to have regarded these women as historical characters, rather than Shi Zhenlin’s invention. Documents such as ‘*Random notes from Xiqing*’, and many more Chinese works in Ōgai’s library, such as *Qingshi*, *Xixiangji*, *Yanshan Waiji*, *Hongloumeng*, *Jinpingmei*, *Nuxian Waishi*, often portray full-rounded female characters, and some of them provide us with a rare opportunity to glimpse on women’s condition in China, an opportunity Ōgai may have been by no means willing to miss. Actually, it is not at all surprising that Ōgai, whose circle of (mostly male) literati’s positive criticism had contributed to the success of important women writers of his era, such as Higuchi Ichi’yō, and who had been himself an early advocate and strong supporter of Hiratsuka Raichū’s *Seitōsha* (The Bluestockings), eventually ended up picking such an unusual work as ‘*Xiqing Sanji*’, among China’s literature on women. Most of all, it needs to be stressed that Ōgai himself was the male author of a literature about women, for if male characters in his works never cease to appear, his heroines generally turn out to

⁴⁹ And which has been presented in English several times during the last few years, see Choy 2001, Ropp 2002 and recently, Idema and Grant (2004: 521-541).

⁵⁰ See note 15.

be much stronger characters. Especially towards the latter part of Ōgai's career as a writer, his female characters's portrayal steadily grows in vividness and firmness.

As far as '*Yasui Fujin*' is concerned, Ōgai's annotation on his copy of *Xiqing Sanji* offers an insight to what could be the point in shifting the attention from the main male character Yasui Chūhei, whose proper name, contrasting with previous biographies, does not even appear in the title of Ōgai's tale, to his young and determined wife O-sayo. One of these female characters' outstanding characteristic is, unmistakably, their *tenaciousness* (*kikotsu*), which is one of the features Ōgai had, by his own admittance, admired in most famous heroines from Chinese novellas such as the young Xiaoqing in *Xiaoqing zhuan* ('*The story of Xiaoqing*')⁵¹. Tenaciousness is a word that applies to Ōgai's portrait of a woman, too, as we can guess from a brief comment of the writer about his heroine towards the end of the story⁵².

In this respect, one has to admit that, though neither *Random notes* nor *Yasui fujin* can be called overtly provoking or contentious attempts, both works substantially succeed in providing a delicate, thoughtful portrait of women's lives. The only major difference between Ōgai's heroine Sayo and the women characters in *Random notes* is that Sayo's voice remains hidden, and it is the writer himself who is given the task of interpreting her story. The main reason for this difference can be explained, in my opinion, considering the fact that *Yasui Fujin*, as several other *rekishi shosetsu* (historical fiction) by Ōgai is in the first place a rather truthful retelling of historical events, and the author often avoids commenting too overtly on the facts in an attempt to be as objective as a historian should be. Yet, the fact that Ōgai chose a subject such as the history of Yasui's wife is not to be so readily dismissed as purely coincidental. Ōgai's portrait of Sayo includes a variety of elements derived from the female characters of '*Xiqing Sanji*' blended into one new heroine: Sayo marries upon willful decision a man who has scars from a past illness, smallpox. She decides to become a scholar's wife because of her attraction towards her future husband's broad knowledge, the only thing she could have overheard about as they had scarcely met before the wedding. Her husband, who is destined to become a famous scholar, is about twice her age, and both she and Shuangqing, the main character of *Random notes*, are likened to a 'butterfly coming out of' their 'cocoon'. Firmness is another feature that Ōgai's female characters share with each other, as well as with the women of most Chinese fiction read by the Japanese author. Of course, Ōgai's character has distinct features, and the story belongs to a world that is not that of the ill-fated beauties of XVII century Chinese fiction, yet, it is clear that many elements from this source may have, more or less consciously, influenced Ōgai's work. Moreover, though Ōgai's heroine Sayo is not herself a poet, the author gives us a glimpse of what an educated Sayo could have been in a funny anecdote towards the end of the work (Dilworth and Rimer 1991: 266).

Ōgai did not want to change historical facts, yet, his portrait of a woman has more in common with the heroines he read about in Chinese fiction than one may think at first.

The last focus of my analysis is Ōgai's short *rekishi shosetsu Gyogenki* ('Yu Xuanji'). Ōgai himself wrote his own story of a Chinese woman poet, based on the historical figure of the great Tang dynasty female poet Yu Xuanji (?844-?871)⁵³. It needs to be stressed here that Ōgai's *rekishi shosetsu* are not all alike in adherence to historical truth. He may be meticulously searching for the facts in some of them, or mostly willing to retell an interesting story, in others. His '*Gyogenki*' almost certainly belongs more to the latter type. In this *rekishi shosetsu* Ōgai largely employs the little historical material on the life of Xuanji, like the short biographical account of her life published in '*Taiping Guanji*' ('Extensive annotations of the Taiping Era') and he is accurate and truthful in

⁵¹ See note 33.

⁵² See Dilworth and Rimer (1991: 268-69)

⁵³ Yu Xuanji's poems have been translated into English (Young 1998). Reference to Xuanji in Young 1998 (introduction, pp.: 9-18) and also the article by Suzanne E. Cahill, in Ko, Jahyung Kim and Piggott (2003: 266-68)

recapturing the environment in which concubines, women artists, and Taoist nuns probably lived in Tang times. Yet, one must remark that, unlike other historical novellas, this time Ōgai's reliance on obscure, even apochryphal sources such as the 'Sanshui Xiaodu'⁵⁴ ('Tablet of the three rivers') is heavier. The decision to rely on historically unaccurate sources tells us much of his will to fictionalize the history of this rather well-known figure of a woman poet. He even ignores, though he probably had got hold of them, the poems (about sixteen compositions) about Taoist ideals of peace of the spirit which testify the historical Xuanji's moments of bliss and serenity, and the five poems in which she tenderly addresses her master Li Yi. He does so in order to be free to shape the character the way he wants. Again, he deals with a woman whose literary talent is fully recognized and understood only by male literati. In the episode of Li Yi, which bears close resemblance to the Chinese novella 'Xiaoqingzhuan', from 'Qingshi', Ōgai chooses to deal again, if very briefly, with the history of a concubine and a jealous wife, such as he had previously done in 'Gan' (The wild goose) and talking about Chinese theater. Generally speaking, Ōgai's aim is clearly to retell most Chinese stories adding to them what some of these may have been lacking in their original formulation: psychological introspection. His woman poet Xuanji is a fictional character, but clearly believable in the context given. Ōgai's idea of fiction at this point is still influenced by the realistic novel he himself had defined in his early essays as the description of characters with a 'unique [realistic] mood that would turn them into original characters, portrayed in the compelling way described by advocates of the modern realistic novel'. As an attempt at applying the 'method of psychological analysis [...] to obtain the finest results in portraying their (his) character's inner nature'⁵⁵, Ōgai's *Gyogenki* is quite successful: it is a valuable account of women's condition in Tang China, as it portrays quite vividly, and with a fair degree of historical accuracy, three environments in which women were given the possibility of living a freer life than that of being wives of someone.

In choosing Xuanji, the author strives to provide a glimpse of the troubles of women, or, like Wen Feiqing, whoever ends up being labelled by society as an outsider. In this respect, *Gyogenki*'s murder act in the story is revealing, in that it represents Ōgai's biggest departure from the sources. Unlike the 'Tablet from Three Rivers', in Ōgai's murder scene the agonising servant Lu Qiao has not a single word of contempt or moral reproach for her mistress, who, driven crazy by envy, is clearly out of control. Lu Qiao is just paralyzed by fear. Ōgai's stile towards the end of the story grows increasingly plain, almost laconic, as if he were striving to demonstrate that the facts alone, not morality, count. He chooses to tell of the murder as if it were just an accident, as if the characters involved were just too human to avoid the inevitable – and his *Gyogenki*, once her terrible secret has leaked out, never denies it as if she herself did not completely believe she is responsible for what happened. One could hardly argue that Ōgai condemns his characters because of their immorality, and the fact that the author himself, commenting on Chinese plays of love⁵⁶ states that neither morality nor the portrayal of virtue alone, but all that is part of human nature, should be the target of fiction, completes what is left out of the concise *Gyogenki*. The moral condemnation in Ōgai's story is that of the official documents despising Wen Feiqing's work on the basis of his conduct.

Focusing on women characters which are often struck by a sad destiny mostly because they are condemned by an environment and a society incapable of understanding their aspiration towards a freer, more individualistic life, is clearly one of the hallmarks of Ōgai's works of fiction. It is my

⁵⁴ Translated in Idema and Grant (2004: 190-193), which refer to the text as the 'Minor Writings from Shanshui' (Shanshui Xiaodu) by Huangfu Mei. It has to be noted that Young (1998: introduction, p.X) cites the same source as the 'Little Tablet from Three Rivers' (*Sanshui Xiaodu*). In *Tang/Wudai biji Xiaoshuo Daguan* (Aa.Vv. 2000, see Bibliography) the story appears as 'Sanshui Xiaodu' again, and is credited to a Huang Fumei of the Tang (618-907 b. C.). Ōgai refers to a 'Sanshui Xiaodu' in the bibliography he himself adds to his short story *Gyogenki*, see OZ. vol XVI p. 118.

⁵⁵ See quotations from Ōgai's essay 'Ima no shoka no shosetsuron wo yomite' in the Appendix.

⁵⁶ See the Appendix, 3bis).

opinion that both Chinese and Western literature played a considerable role in nurturing Ōgai's interest for women and their representation in literature.

APPENDIX: Translations of excerpts from primary sources

1) FROM 'Ima no shoka no shōsetsuron wo yomite':⁵⁷

[...] As we [i.e. Ōgai himself, Shoyo and other Japanese contemporaries] have already stated, debate on the matter [the value of Zola's theories] leads to this conclusion: making use of Anatomy and Science as a basis for the creation of fiction may not be such a wrong idea, yet, one cannot help feeling that scientific results may not alone constitute good material for fiction, in the manner Zola has attempted to do in his *études*. Scientific results are the real world, but do writers really have to content themselves with wandering within the limited boundaries of such a world? It is my opinion that, while science may be good material to base upon for a novel, it is only through the power of imagination that best results are achieved with such [poor] material. In this respect, we have to note that writers such as Daudet and Beaconsfield are most likely two authors that succeeded in relying on Reality while respecting at the same time their pledge to Beauty, while Zola has dismissed the latter to serve the former. [...] We may assume that applying the rules of the realistic novel too strictly leads, as a matter of fact, to a mere, uninteresting imitation of the real world, with no artistic merit at all. This, in my opinion, accounts for the failure of the Naturalists' efforts as works of art.

Nonetheless, excessive Idealism in art, which is the opposite of Naturalism, has its flaws too. We may think of Romanticism in Germany, or the *yomihon* of the Japanese pre-modern period: both these literary genres wander quite too far from the real world. In this kind of fiction, we will read of a romantic encounter between a man and a woman, but these heroes and heroines are portrayed in an unrealistic fashion, closely resembling what an *ideal* couple should be, and as such, they will doubtlessly lack the unique [realistic] mood that would turn them into original characters, portrayed in the compelling way described by advocates of the modern realistic novel [such as Shoyo]. And in addition to that, we will get to the point where several characters all look the same, and are either all-good or all-bad, virtuous, or malicious with no in-betweens. Scholar Zhang Xinzhai says in his 'Preface to the New Collection from Yuchu':

Among the writings of authors from past and more recent times, countless are those that rely on excessively unmannered and fictional portrayal of characters who are either too joyful or too distressed; these authors keep writing and writing word upon word, roll upon roll, yet, their stories all share the defect of lacking a [more] detailed, genuine description [of the characters involved]. By such means and characters, they succeed in amusing the young and old, but will say nothing about the true nature [of man]. These may make you laugh, but for matters that are not at all laughable, and make you cry, only for things which are actually not sad.

[...] so, as we have seen, if willing to adhere to the 'Ideal', one sticks too strictly to it, that is, to the point of becoming abstract, it will end up as a copy of old models. [...]

Great long novels are, for instance, *Genji Monogatari*, and then, Bakin's *Hakkenden* and *Bishonenroku*, while in China we have masterpieces such as *Shuihuzhuan*. In Germany, we find Goethe's '*Wilhelm Meister*' as well as '*Titan*', by Jean Paul.

[...] The method of psychological introspection has widely spread since the end of the last century, along with the newly emerging philosophical theories on Realism; this is easily

⁵⁷ The text translated here refers to the edition published in Ōgai Zenshu (OZ), Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, op.cit. 1973 (1939) vol. XXII, pages 71-72 and 78-79. All translation, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

understood looking in history recordings. [...] The fact that since the very first days of the newborn realist novel, the method of psychological analysis has allowed writers to obtain the finest results in portraying their characters' inner nature needs to be emphasized. Yet, it is my opinion that these tendencies towards investigating human behaviour have not emerged in the literature of Asia only after the introduction of Shoyo's theories: it has been held as an opinion by some critics (*hihyoka*) from both Japan and China that a few of such [fine] literary products had already appeared. As an example, let's see what Jin Shengtan⁵⁸ states about *Shuihuzhuan*: 'the greater merit of *Shuihuzhuan* is that it depicts 108 characters, which are each a faithful portrayal of human nature. If we pick up another work, we will see that though the author meant [to describe] a thousand different characters, these [characters] all belong to the same type. So, the characters [of these works] will be [easily] classified only into two categories[: the good and the evil], and they will be like [two faces of] the same [coin].'

This is to prove what I just affirmed above. I believe that both categories of fiction, the short story and the novel, need to benefit from the method of psychological analysis [of the characters].

2) FROM "Rōdokuho ni tsukite no sō":⁵⁹

Speaking about our (i.e. the Japanese's) method of reading aloud Chinese, I think that we had rather learn to read straight from the beginning to the end (i.e. without going back and forth to reconstruct the sentence according to the syntax and word order of Japanese) the text, imitating even the sound of the original Chinese. [...] By doing so, the meaning of both the grammar and the syntax should be instantly clarified, and besides, a modern reader would avoid reading any Western languages translating word for word and then putting the sentence together.

Yet, our current method of reading Chinese is actually not *reading*, but *translating word for word* and reading aloud this literal translation, in an attempt to grasp the meaning. When I was in Europe, I tried to explain our method for reading Chinese to some scholars that were there, and they at first thought I was making fun of them, but then claimed it such an unusual method as to sound like some strange story to their ears. [...] Moreover, this method generates an unnatural, affected style of translation that is no longer our language nor [is it Chinese]. The method of we Japanese to read Chinese should [at least] become an inner work (*kage no shigoto*), not something that we proudly chant out loud. We have not to make out a declamation of our reading Chinese.

3) FROM "Hyoshinryo Iroku":⁶⁰

[...]

KAINAN: Let's see now more in detail the style of *Shuihuzhuan*. I dare say that, if one has to have it in today's fashion and judge its literary value, this novel scores top rank among the most finely and effectively crafted pieces of works of the entire Chinese literature, for its startling simplicity makes the text readily understandable to anyone who has received even a bit of an education. The shift from one dialect to another in the narration depends on the region [where the action takes place]. [...] This is most easily understood comparing all parts of the text. The fashion of the chapter regarding Pan Jinlian makes them different from all the rest, in that their object is an overtly explicit story. The [author of] Jinpingmei, considering this unusual part of the story the most interesting, started writing his own

⁵⁸ Perhaps the most rumored (and by some, revered) critic of Ancient China, see Wang 2004

⁵⁹ Original text in OZ, vol. XX, pages 356-357. Also quoted in Kotajima (1997: 41)

⁶⁰ Hyōshinryō iroku, OZ op.cit. (1973) vol XXIV, p. 531.

version of the story to the end, in his own manner, using as an outline these two or three chapters. The plot of *Jinpingmei* may not be as interesting as that of *Shuizhuan*, but as far as subtle, accurate descriptions are concerned, the former is even greater than the latter. The chapters telling of the death of Li Ping'er, from the point where everyone gathers at her sickbed, and she exhales her last breath, to the part where she is engraved, all together make more than one hundred pages, and are collected into one single volume; one can easily understand why professor Gakkai has praised it stating that 'you can't even imagine how accurate and realistic a description it is'. If one asks to Chinese fiction what he generally looks for in Western literature, the novels that go close to that kind of keen representation surely are *Jinpingmei* and *Honglouloumeng*. As for *Shuizhuan*, its goal is to show all the peculiar traits of the Chinese. It is not a historical fiction and it is not a romance of love: it belongs to a genre which is half way between the two.

3 bis) FROM "Hyoshinryo Iroku":⁶¹

[...]

ŌGAI: I think that professor Kainan has already told it all about *Pipaji*, and I would just like to add a personal opinion I have since the time I read the play [...]. From ancient times, *Pipaji* and *Xixiangji* have been linked together as two of the finest examples of the North, and South, theater respectively. I assume then, that in order to investigate the themes of *Pipaji*, the best way is to do a comparative analysis of both these two plays. *Xixiangji* is a tale of Love, while *Pipaji*'s main theme is Filial Piety. Love, that is, passion between a man and a woman, are commonly referred to as being a low, primitive instinct, very much like one's longing for food when hungry. On the other hand filial piety, which is one's devotion towards his or her parents, is thought of as a manifestation of a high, noble virtue. In this respect, *Xixiangji*, regardless of how interesting it may prove, is nothing but one of those famous *irobanashi* ('tales of passion') that professor Gakkai is so fond of, and if so, it surely has got to be no match for *Pipaji*. This is the point of view I would like to base my criticism on. [...]

If the author's only source of inspiration when writing *Pipaji* had been Piety, then, why shouldn't he have felt the urge to portray a more pious (i.e. respectful of his son's will) father, along with a pious son such as Bojie, who sticks to his father's commands? And again, shouldn't the author have had the impulse to give his prime minister's character a better disposition towards others, as much as he has outlined such a devoted liege out of the character of Bojie? [...] Actually, this is not at all unreasonable [...]. For if any child were constantly willing to provide care to his parents, and if any parent always tried to use every attention towards his children, never bothering them with unjust requests, and if such were the disposition of both the master and the liege towards one another, that would really be an ideal situation for administering the Good, but indeed, there would be no material for a novel or a play. By means of the *ambition* of Bojie's father, and the *egotism* of Great Minister Niu, like a wind blowing hard among the trees ends up uttering a voice, like a rock holding back the flow, and eventually creating waves, an initial conflict is created; and thanks to how this [situation of] conflict gets more intricate, or either dissolves, we can enjoy many happy or pitiful things. I am not going to pursue the matter any further, I just intended to stress the fact that, no matter how good and righteous a subject you take, you may not be able to deliver easily a good piece of work by means of flawless characters, entirely devoted to high values.

⁶¹ Hyoshinryo Iroku, OZ op.cit. vol. XXIV, pages 614 to 618.

Let's take up the play *Xixianji* now: its content is clearly reversed to that of *Pipaji*, for as the filial devotion of Bojie is the subject of the latter, the love of Junrui is the fulcrum of the former. It is for the sake of his feeling [...] that Junrui runs into men (i.e. struggles with the traditional social values). This is the conflict that triggers such a positive determination of his. [...] And indeed, I have to note that while Bojie ends up – no matter how strict his adherence to virtue may be – being depicted as a rather weak, passive character in the play, Junrui, in spite of all his yielding to love and passion, is portrayed as a strong, active character. [...]

As I said, since filial piety has been considered honorable, while love and passion, being [seen as] vile instinct, couldn't rank as worthy a subject of narration as virtue itself, it is easily understood why literary works that have virtue as their theme has been traditionally spoken of as the greatest. Well, I would like to rethink now this superiority of Virtue, and in order to do so, I need to start from a clear explanation of what is the relationship between Virtue and Love. When a man and a woman fall in love with one another, this is called "passion" (*koi*) and is accounted for as being a low instinct as the mating impulse of animals. But when this feeling is between a husband and his wife, they call it noble. Is it then a good thing, for a husband and a wife, to fall in love with each other, or not? If it is, then we have to assume that this is a case in which instinct and virtue have melted into one single piece. [...] If it isn't, how could the two go together in such a fashion? This may give the impression of being such a simple matter as to be resolved without much effort, yet, curiously enough, philosophers have costantly applied to solve this riddle in many a way. Let's think now of an example a bit more intricated than the one above: let's take a man, a husband, who once was poor but now has become wealthy. He has a wife since the time he was penniless. Will he get rid of his simple, humble wife once he has been struck by Good Fortune? Indeed, if he does, he will not be virtuous, if he does not, he will be virtuous. But, I guess the point is whether he was actually in love with her or not. Talking about a 'humble wife' (*sōkō no tsuma*) tendentially conjures up in a listener's mind an idea of someone who has a somewhat slovenly appearance, but this could be a different situation, as she could be a rather beautiful woman in her mature years, someone very active and reliable in spite of the couple's poverty, some woman who loves caring as much as she is allowed to for her dressing and appearance. I can easily imagine the husband of one such lady longing to meet her after a years-lasting separation, and eager to give her a hearty welcome, with a sense of relief, after the sudden change of the couple's financial conditions. But what if this wife is kind of unattractive, ill-mannered, someone her husband would have a hard time addressing as his wife in public, given his newly improved status; he could have been faithful to her up to that point just for the sake of duty, and perhaps he could even have mused secretly a few times whether to ask for divorce. In this case, he would grow even more unaffected by her after becoming a wealthy man. This is another occurrence. In the first case there is love and passion between the two, while in this latter instance, neither of both. Will both these two be cases of virtue, or won't it be that the former is while the latter is not? Well, it looks like we have a new contradiction, a new conflict here. Yet, even in this more intricate example, one thing is clear: that there will be no problem [regarding virtue] when that "simple wife" has been loved by her husband, and dear to him from the start. The question is raised if, although not completely undesirable in her husband's eye, she has been in such a tame relationship to him as to leave room enough to wonder "who cares? I might leave her perhaps, if I wanted to". But when there is love and passion, people won't ask for a virtuous or non-virtuous behaviour. It is only when love is absent, that the issue of virtue is raised: in this case people will intrude pleading for a moral behaviour, and blaming vice. I may say that when the warmth of Love – which being a feeling, cannot fall under rational thinking – is gone, there comes the detached judgement of Reason, like in the case above. Likewise, when Love pairs with unmoral acting and behaviour, what is blamed is the vicious

behaviour – which is a failure of Reason -, not Love itself. [...] This is my explanation of the relationship between Love and Virtue. I stated above that “Love is [considered] a vulgar instinct, while Virtue is high and valuable”, but this misconception [...] has a perilous hidden implication [...]. I do not intend to push the matter further. I only wanted to affirm that, to me, Desire (*yoku*) is not *vile* (*hikui*), it is *warm* (*atatakai*), and Virtue (*toku*) is not *valuable* (*takai*), it is *cold* (*hiyayaka*).

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