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Author(s)	Yokota, Gerry
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The Representation of Gender in Noh: Canon, Category, Perception

Gerry Yokota

1. Introduction

The classical canon of noh is a corpus of over two hundred plays divided into five categories for the purpose of programming; these categories are largely determined by the nature of the main character. How might this classification system affect the cognitive perception of the spectator, especially in crucial areas such as gender and cultural politics? This question becomes particularly important in intercultural situations. People around the world are often drawn to traditional performing arts such as noh in their quest to experience and know a different culture. While a system of categorization can serve as a useful heuristic to help the viewer process a large volume of unfamiliar data, it also runs the risk of functioning as a filter and blurring cultural messages, whether used independently as a navigation tool by the newcomer or as a reference guide by a local interpreter. Following Lakoff (1987), the premise of this study is that awareness of the potential subliminal effects of this sort of introductory classification system is an effective way to minimize such interference and enable freer engagement with the art.

As a specific case study designed to respond to this question of how a traditional canon, as a proclaimed standard of representation (Hall [1997]; Hobsbawm [1983]) in particular may work as a major category that affects individual perception and sociocultural reception (Berger [1973]; Guillory [1993]; Robinson [1985]), in this paper I analyze an interesting phenomenon in the organization of the canon of noh: the establishment of a liminal subcategory called *ryaku-wakinō*, which I translate as alternate wakinō. An alternate wakinō is a specially designated play which may be performed in the premier first-category position usually reserved for plays featuring deities, even though the category where the play is normally classified primarily features human characters and demons.

Plays designated as alternate wakinō may be found in the third, fourth and fifth categories. In this study, I will focus on the alternate wakinō of the third category, with a view toward how the representation of gender in the play intersects in different ways, depending on context, with other heuristic categories, especially in the spheres of religion and geopolitics. I will begin by providing a survey of the dominant trends in the first category of deity plays and the third category of “women” plays. I will then analyze how contextualization of the same play in these two different categories might affect its reception, from a cognitive point of view. I will conclude with an analysis of the degree to which the dominant effect of the play, viewed in this regard, represents the broader effect of this system of classification on audience perception of the art as a whole, especially implications for perceptions of gender, but also for intercultural communication and understanding.

2. Background

2.1 The Representation of Gender in the First Category

I began my initial study of the formation of the canon of noh (Yokota [1997]) with the first category not because of its ordinal position, but because I was interested in the potential effect of its skewed ratio of feminine and masculine characters in a canon whose ordinal position in a program also indicated a higher level of status and orthodoxy. I begin with a review of the representation of gender in that category here, as this will form the basis for an understanding of the rationale for moving some plays into the liminal alternate wakinō subcategory.

As Table 1 demonstrates, we may observe marked trends in the gender ratio of the five subcategories of deity plays, which are conventionally classified according to the solo dance that is performed by the main character in the highlight scene.

Table 1. The representation of gender in the first category of noh (adapted from Yokota 1997:217)

Subcategory	Masculine/Feminine Ratio
Kamimai	8/9 (88%)
Hataraki	12/12 (100%)
Gaku	9/10 (90%)
Shinnojonomai	3/4 (75%)
Chūnomai	3/3 (100%)
Total	38

It will be noted that the preponderance of masculine deities declines from first to fifth subcategory. This ordering must be taken into consideration, rather than simply calculating the average for the whole group or for each subgroup, because this list is hierarchical. The small group that includes only feminine deities is the group with the lowest status. Whereas all the other dances were originally choreographed for deities or high-ranking male shamanic figures, the feminine chūnomai is a dance that was originally developed for mortal women in the third category, not for feminine deities.

2.2 The Representation of Gender in the Third Category

The third category is likewise organized according to dance, as shown in Table 2. As the plays of this category are nominally called “women” plays, as noted in the Introduction, one might expect the gender balance to be 100% feminine, but in fact that is not the case.

Table 2. The representation of gender in the third category of noh

Subcategory	Feminine/Masculine Ratio
Daishō jonomai	21/21 (100%)
Taiko jonomai	8/12 (67%)
Daishō chūnomai	4/4 (100%)
Taiko chūnomai	3/3 (100%)
Iroe	2/2 (100%)
Total	42

3. Corpus

Six alternate wakinō may be found distributed among four of these five subcategories of the third category, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Alternate wakinō in the third category

Subcategory	Alternate wakinō
Daishō jonomai	<i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i>
Taiko jonomai	<i>Hagoromo, Kazuraki, Ume</i>
Daishō chūnomai	<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i>
Taiko chūnomai	<i>Yoshino Tennin</i>
Total	6

To better understand the significance of this phenomenon, let us begin by taking a closer look at the dominant types of personae in both first and third categories, to get a sense of their defining characteristics which may affect their perception depending to context, due to their liminal status.

4. Structural Context

Tables 4 and 5 give summaries of the dominant personae of the first and third categories of noh as context for the liminal group of six alternate wakinō within the third category.

Table 4. Dominant personae in the first category of noh

Subcategory	Dominant personae
Kamimai (9)	8 masculine Shinto deities: Izanagi no Mikoto (<i>Awaji</i>), Matsuno'o Myōjin (<i>Matsuno'o</i>), Okitama no Kami (<i>Mimosuso</i>), Shiga no Myōjin (<i>Shiga</i>), Kotoshironushi no Mikoto (<i>Shironushi</i>), Sumiyoshi Myōjin (<i>Takasago</i>), Yōrō no Yama no Kami (<i>Yōrō</i>), Kōra Myōjin (<i>Yumiyawata</i>) 1 feminine Shinto deity: Amaterasu Ōmikami (<i>Ema</i>)
Hataraki (12)	6 masculine Shinto deities: Zaō Gongen (<i>Arashiyama</i>), Fuji no Yama no Kami (<i>Fujisan</i>), Himuro no Kami (<i>Himuro</i>), Wakeikazuchi no Kami (<i>Kamo</i>), Amatsufutodama no Mikoto (<i>Kinsatsu</i>), Takimatsuri no Kami (<i>Sakahoko</i>) 4 masculine dragon gods (ryūjin) (<i>Chikubushima</i> , <i>Iwafune</i> , <i>Mekari</i> , <i>Kusenoto</i>) 2 masculine dragon kings (ryūō) (<i>Enoshima</i> , <i>Tamanoi</i>)
Gaku (10)	3 masculine Shinto deities: Shiratayū no Kami (<i>Dōmyōji</i>), Gendayū no Kami (<i>Gendayū</i>), Ōyashiro no Kami (<i>Ōyashiro</i>) 1 feminine Shinto deity: Keta Myōjin (<i>Unomatsuri</i>) 1 dragon god (<i>Shirahige</i>) 1 ancient Chinese emperor (<i>Tsurukame</i>), 1 spirit of an ancient Korean poet (<i>Naniwa</i>), 1 old man (<i>Nezame</i>), 1 spirit of an ancient Chinese Buddhist monk (<i>Rinzō</i>), 1 spirit of an ancient Chinese scholar (<i>Tōbōsaku</i>)
Shinno-jonmai (4)	2 masculine Shinto deities: Sumiyoshi Myōjin (<i>Hakurakuten</i>), Takeuji no Kami (<i>Hōjōgawa</i>) 1 feminine mountain deity: Saohime (<i>Saoyama</i>) 1 masculine spirit of a pine tree (Oimatsu no Rei) (<i>Oimatsu</i>)
Chūnomai (3)	1 spirit (<i>rei</i>) of a female Chinese weaver (<i>Kureha</i>), 1 Chinese Queen Mother of the West (<i>Seiōbo</i>), 1 feminine Shinto deity (Sakuraba no Kami) (<i>Ukon</i>)
Total: 38	

Table 5. Dominant personae in the third category of noh

Subcategory	Dominant personae
Daishō jonmai (21)	4 feminine spirits of dancers from <i>The Tales of the Heike</i> (<i>Futari Shizuka</i> , <i>Hotokenohara</i> , <i>Senju</i> , <i>Yoshino Shizuka</i>) 4 spirits of fictional female characters from <i>The Tale of Genji</i> (<i>Hajitomi</i> , <i>Nonomiya</i> , <i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i> , <i>Yūgao</i>) 4 spirits of famous female poets (<i>Ōmu Komachi</i> , <i>Sekidera Komachi</i> , <i>Teika</i> , <i>Tōboku</i>) 2 feminine spirits of trees (<i>Bashō</i> , <i>Sumizomezakura</i>) 2 feminine spirits of dancers from poetic legend (<i>Eguchi</i> , <i>Higaki</i>) 1 spirit of a wife of a famous historical poet (<i>Izutsu</i>) 1 nameless female devotee of the Lotus Sutra (<i>Minobu</i>) 1 nameless court lady (<i>Uneme</i>), 1 spirit of an imperial Chinese consort (<i>Yōkihi</i>), 1 spirit of snow (<i>Yuki</i>)
Taiko jonmai (12)	2 feminine spirits of trees (<i>Fuji</i> , <i>Mutsura</i>) 2 masculine spirits of trees (<i>Saigyōzakura</i> , <i>Yūgyōyanagi</i>) 2 spirits of flowers (<i>Kakitsubata</i> , <i>Ume</i>) 1 angel (<i>Hagoromo</i>), 1 mountain deity (<i>Kazuraki</i>) 1 nameless old woman (<i>Obasute</i>), 1 spirit of a female poet (<i>Seiganji</i>) 2 spirits of a famous male poet (<i>Oshio</i> , <i>Unrin'in</i>)
Daishō chūnomai (4)	2 spirits of dancers from <i>The Tales of the Heike</i> (<i>Giō</i> , <i>Yuya</i>), 1 female laborer from poetic legend (<i>Matsukaze</i>), 1 historical female poet (<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i>)
Taiko chūnomai (3)	1 spirit of a chicken (<i>Hatsuyuki</i>), 1 spirit of a butterfly (<i>Kochō</i>), 1 angel (<i>Yoshino Tennin</i>)
Iroe (2)	1 spirit of the author of <i>The Tale of Genji</i> (<i>Genji Kuyō</i>) 1 imperial consort from <i>The Tales of the Heike</i> (<i>Ohara Gokō</i>)
Total: 42	

While the organization of these two categories is structurally similar, both sets of subcategories being based on the dance performed by the main character in the highlight scene, the effect of this organizing principle is obviously quite different. The plays of the first category, in line with its emphasis on orthodoxy and ceremony, naturally fall into a hierarchical pattern reflecting the emphasis on order in both divine and earthly realms, and the deities grouped in each subcategory thus exhibit a high degree of similarity in status and godliness, with the premier kamimai category containing by far the largest ratio of Ōmikami, Mikoto, and Myōjin. The plays in each subcategory of the third category exhibit no such obvious order or similarity. Let us next observe how our perception may change if we regroup the third-category plays by the type of main character rather than type of dance. Original subcategories by dance are noted parenthetically.

Table 6. Dominant personae in the third category of noh, reorganized

Otherworldly spirits, including angels and spirits of insects, animals, trees, flowers, and other natural phenomena	Human characters, including historical figures such as famous poets, fictional characters, and nameless archetypes
2 feminine angels (b)(d) 1 spirit of a butterfly in feminine form (d) 1 spirit of a chicken in feminine form (d) 1 spirit of snow in feminine form (a) 1 mountain deity in feminine form (b) 6 feminine spirits of trees or flowers --1 spirit of a blossoming cherry tree (a) --1 spirit of a blossoming plum tree (b) --1 spirit of a maple tree (b) --1 spirit of a plantain tree (a) --1 spirit of an iris flower (b) --1 spirit of a flowering wistaria (b) 2 masculine spirits of trees or flowers --1 spirit of a blossoming cherry tree (b) --1 spirit of a willow tree (b)	26 mortal women who may be grouped as follows --8 dancers, including 5 from <i>The Tales of the Heike</i> (ax6)(cx2) --4 fictional characters (all from <i>The Tale of Genji</i>) (ax4) --4 nameless archetypal women (ax3)(b) --3 historically famous female poets (some featuring in multiple plays, for a total of 6 plays) (ax4)(b)(c) --2 historical imperial consorts (a)(e) --1 female author of <i>The Tale of Genji</i> (e) --1 unnamed wife of the famous male poet listed below (a) 1 historically famous male poet featured in 2 plays (bx2) Total: 42

It should be noted that I reserve the terms “female” and “male” for human characters whose gender classification is clear according to dramatic convention; I use the terms “feminine” and “masculine” to refer to other-worldly characters whose gender identity is ambiguous or subject to multiple staging conventions, or as a comprehensive term for mixed groups. Details are given below as required for the sake of argument.

5. Comparison and Contrast of Content

Let us now revisit our small corpus of six alternate wakinō from the third category, and consider what features may have made them candidates for this liminal group, poised between first and third. We will focus on three attributes: main characters (shite), deuteragonists (waki), and geopolitical features.

5.1 Main Characters (Shite)

Instead of the order of Table 3, where they were listed by dance subcategory, Table 7 now lists the main characters of the six third-category alternate wakinō in order corresponding to the more obvious cognitive categories of Table 6:

- one mountain deity (originally from the second dance group);
- two angels (one of which was originally from the second and one of which was originally from the fourth dance group);
- one spirit of a flowering tree (originally from the second group);
- one dramatization of a scene from *The Tale of Genji* (originally from the first dance group); and
- one creative dramatization of an incident of poetic rivalry at court (originally from the third group).

Table 7. Dominant personae in the alternate wakinō of the third category

<i>Kazuraki</i> features a mountain deity in feminine form who appears before a Buddhist ascetic to beg for release from her suffering.
<i>Hagoromo</i> features an angel who descends temporarily to earth from the heavens and is accidentally discovered by a mortal man.
<i>Yoshino Tennin</i> features an angel who appears in the dream of a mortal man.
<i>Ume</i> depicts the revelation of the spirit of the blossoming plum to a traveler.
<i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i> dramatizes a scene from <i>The Tale of Genji</i> , where Genji makes a pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi Shrine after being pardoned from exile to give thanks for his release, and unexpectedly meets the lady he met during his exile but left behind.
<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i> depicts an incident of poetic rivalry at the Heian imperial court, where a male poet challenges a female poet, accusing her of plagiarism; his “evidence” is proven to be a forgery.

What logic might have led to the selection of these particular plays for inclusion in this liminal category of alternate wakinō, and how might that reorganization affect our perception of the individual plays as well as of the canon as a whole? Let us consider other possible determining attributes in addition to the main character, bearing in mind that the goal of this exercise is not to determine editorial intent but rather to elucidate the cognitive process.

5.2 Deuteragonists (Waki)

One important attribute is the identity of the waki, the character who serves as a guide to the spectator, a sort of medium between the spectator and the world of the noh, being often a traveler in unfamiliar territory himself. Elsewhere (Yokota 2016) I have noted that the difference between the waki of the first and third categories has a large influence on the perception of the nature and status of the main character: whereas the waki in a first-category play is most often a Shinto priest or court official adopting an attitude of reverence toward the deity, a dominant pattern of the third category is for the spirit of a woman to appear before a Buddhist priest and ask for prayers for her salvation.

This is a prime example of why canon theory is so important for understanding cognitive perception of a different culture. A spectator viewing a single play may not be aware at a conscious level of how the accumulated knowledge of the canon may be affecting their perception of the characters in that one particular performance. But an aficionado of the art who enjoys reading libretti as literature in addition to attending performances at the theater will inevitably, however unconsciously, be placing the characters of the given play in certain positions in their memory of the canon as a whole. A novice who lacks this background knowledge of convention may appreciate the play quite differently, for better or for worse. They may have very general knowledge, such as “the traveler is often a Buddhist monk,” but not enough knowledge to judge the significance of variations from the norm.

To demonstrate this cognitive process at work, in Tables 8 and 9, I present the two categories organized by type of waki. Subcategories are not indicated as no remarkable patterns were discerned; the emphasis is rather on contrast between the two categories, and the degree of variety.

Table 8: Types of waki in the first and third categories of noh

Types of waki in 1st category	Types of waki in 3rd category
Shinto priest (6)	Buddhist monk (26)
Courtier (25)	Courtier (5)
Buddhist monk (2)	Member of warrior class (4)
Other (one each x 5)	Man of unspecified class or occupation (3)
	Shinto priest (2)
	Other (one each x 2)
Total: 38	Total: 42

5.3 Geopolitics

The location of the dramatized incident may also have a significant effect on audience perception. Table 9 lists the locations (with modern place names for ease of visualization) of the first- and third-category plays in relation to the capital, and Table 10 abstracts the locations of the six alternate wakinō from the third category.

Table 9. Locations of first- and third-category plays

Locations of 1st-category plays	Locations of 3rd-category plays
<u>Kamimai (9)</u> Kyoto (2), Shiga (1), Osaka (1), Nara (1), Hyogo (1), Gifu (1), Ise (2)	<u>Daishō jonomai (21)</u> Kyoto (7), Shiga (1), Osaka (3), Nara (4), Ishikawa (1), Yamanashi (1), Kanagawa (1), Kumamoto (1), China (2)
<u>Hataraki (12)</u> Kyoto (4), Shiga (1), Osaka (1), Nara (1), Hyogo (1), Shimane (1), Kanagawa (1), Shizuoka/Yamanashi (1), Japan Sea (1)	<u>Taiko jonomai (12)</u> Kyoto (4), Osaka (1), Nara (1), Aichi (1), Shizuoka (1), Kanagawa (1), Toyama (1), Nagano (1), Fukushima (1)
<u>Gaku (10)</u> Kyoto (1), Shiga (1), Osaka (2), Shimane (1), Ishikawa (1), Aichi (1), Nagano (1), China (2)	<u>Daishō chūnomai (4)</u> Kyoto (3), Hyogo (1)
<u>Shinnojonomai (4)</u> Kyoto (1), Osaka (1), Nara (1), Fukuoka (1)	<u>Taiko chūnomai (3)</u> Kyoto (1), Osaka (1), Nara (1)
<u>Taiko chūnomai (3)</u> Kyoto (1), Hyogo (1), China (1)	<u>Iroe (2)</u> Kyoto (1), Shiga (1)
Total: 38	Total: 42

The most common locations of first-category plays are Kyoto (9), Osaka (5), Shiga (3), Nara (3), Hyogo (3), and China (3). The most common locations of third-category plays are Kyoto (16), Nara (6), and Osaka (5). Distance from the capital does not, of course, automatically translate into a vertical hierarchy. But location is one attribute to be considered intersectionally. Like gender, it may be factored into the equation unconsciously as part of the cognitive process of comprehension.

Table 10 shows the locations of the six plays in our small corpus of alternate wakinō. Two are set in Nara, two are set in Osaka, one is set in Kyoto, and one is set in Shizuoka.

Table 10. Locations of the six alternate wakinō from the third category

3rd-category alternate wakinō	Location
<i>Kazuraki</i>	Nara
<i>Hagoromo</i>	Shizuoka
<i>Yoshino Tennin</i>	Nara
<i>Ume</i>	Osaka
<i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i>	Osaka
<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i>	Kyoto

How does the group of six alternate wakinō of the third category compare and contrast with the wider context when all these factors are considered en suite? In Section 6, we will attempt to consciously unpack some of the unconscious assumptions about gender and geography that are likely to be made by a spectator familiar with the canon, and consider the degree to which such observations may serve as a guide (or interference) to communicating the complex but aesthetically rewarding nuances of the art to a relative newcomer.

6. Textual Comparison and Contrast

With this background in mind, let us now turn to our small corpus of third-category alternate wakinō and observe what patterns emerge when viewed in this broader context. Table 11 presents minimal summaries for the purpose of basic orientation. The sections following Table 11 expand upon those summaries by noting more detailed points of comparison and contrast with the first and third categories.

Table 11. Third-category alternate wakinō: Précis

Title	Location	Gender of shite	Summary
<i>Kazuraki</i>	Nara	Feminine	<i>Kazuraki</i> features a mountain deity in feminine form who appears before a Buddhist ascetic to beg for release from her suffering.
<i>Hagoromo</i>	Shizuoka	Feminine	<i>Hagoromo</i> features an angel who descends temporarily to earth from the heavens and is accidentally discovered by a mortal man.
<i>Yoshino Tennin</i>	Nara	Feminine	<i>Yoshino Tennin</i> features an angel who appears in the dream of a mortal man.
<i>Ume</i>	Osaka	Feminine	<i>Ume</i> depicts the revelation of the spirit of the blossoming plum to a traveler.
<i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i>	Osaka	Female	<i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i> dramatizes a scene from <i>The Tale of Genji</i> , where Genji makes a pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi Shrine after being pardoned from exile to give thanks for his release, and meets the lady he had an affair with during his exile.
<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i>	Kyoto	Female	<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i> depicts an imaginary incident of poetic rivalry between aristocrats at the Heian imperial court, where a male poet challenges a female poet, accusing her of plagiarism; his “evidence” is proven to be a forgery.

Let us finally attempt a simulation of how background information, which is normally buried quite deeply in memory, is retrieved and processed in every encounter with a play, paying particular attention to how perception may be affected by canons and categories such as gender and geography, especially when the play is one with a liminal status between categories such as an alternate wakinō.

6.1 *Kazuraki*

Kazuraki features a mountain deity in feminine form who appears before a Buddhist ascetic to beg for release from her suffering. It follows the standard two-act structure, whereby a traveler, in this case a mountain ascetic, first encounters a local woman who, after establishing a connection with the traveler, reveals that her human form is a guise to facilitate initial contact.

In terms of gender, the most interesting point of *Kazuraki* is that the indigenous deity who has taken this guise, Hitokotonushi, is not normally conceived of as feminine, but as masculine. Indeed, the torment from which he pleads for release is the indignity of forced labor, compelled by a Buddhist ascetic who claimed the higher peak of Kazuraki for his temple to build a bridge to the lower peak to which he was exiled. Even in the revelatory second act, Hitokotonushi does not fully reveal himself according to the standard staging for a masculine deity, but continues to present in feminine form, albeit a far more splendid one—a choice that may be interpreted, according to dramatic convention, as indicating the depth of his trauma.

In terms of geopolitics, the vicinity of Mount Kazuraki is especially known as the habitat of an indigenous clan which was subjugated and brought under the control of the Yamato state; such indigenous peoples were collectively referred to by the conquerors as *tsuchigumo*, ground spiders, because they lived in caves. In the highlight dance of the second act, the deity wears a crown of vines, a symbol analogous to the Christian crown of thorns which may be found in other noh such as *Tamakazura* and *Teika*, and dances the Yamato Dance. That clan also features in another alternate wakinō in the fourth category, *Aridōshi*.

6.2 *Hagoromo*

Hagoromo features a nameless angel who descends temporarily to earth from the heavens and is accidentally discovered by a mortal man. The main character is thus otherworldly but not a member or descendant of the divine order identified in mythology as the ancestors of the Japanese imperial family. The play is simply structured in one act, and involves no revelation of hidden identity.

While *Hagoromo* may appear to be a simple celebration of feminine beauty as a symbol of peace, when viewed in cultural context, it may be noted that in the standard tale of the angel with the feather mantle, the man takes her as his wife; in the *noh*, her reasoned argument with him as to why he should return the mantle thus is a significant variation that gives the main character far more autonomy than many versions.

And of course the simple association of feminine beauty and peace alone would not be enough to justify the promotion of this particular play to alternate deity play status, since nearly all of the plays of the third category present aspects of feminine beauty. The particular feature of this play that would seem to be the primary factor in its selection for this designation is the image of the feather mantle, which also features four times in *Okina* and in four other first-category deity plays (*Fujisan*, *Kureha*, *Saoyama*, and *Tsurukame*). The image is also highly like to evoke the Japanese national anthem “Kimigayo,” “The Reign of Our Lord,” which is based on a *waka* poem from the first imperial anthology of poetry, the *Kokinshū*.

<i>kimigayo wa</i>	May the reign of our lord continue
<i>chiyo ni yachiyo ni</i>	For a thousand generations and more
<i>sazareishi no</i>	Until pebbles
<i>iwao to narite</i>	Become boulders
<i>koke no musu made</i>	Covered with moss

Although the feather mantle is not explicitly mentioned in the national anthem, its symbolism is related to that of the boulder, as a similar poetic line from the third imperial anthology of poetry, the *Shūishū*, is used in various *noh* to praise the constant, everlasting nature of the lord’s reign to a boulder that is occasionally brushed by an angel’s feather mantle.

The subtext of *Hagoromo* also contains a number of interesting features from a geopolitical point of view, namely that the play is located at Mio no Matsubara in what is now Shizuoka Prefecture, and that the dance she performs is the Suruga Dance, Suruga being the home province of the Tokugawa shogun.

These are just a few of the most obvious criteria that would lend themselves to qualification for alternate *wakinō* status. We will continue to monitor other candidates that will no doubt become more apparent through their network of associations within this group.

6.3 *Yoshino Tennin*

Yoshino Tennin features an angel who appears in the dream of a mortal man. The setting moves back to Nara, but this time more to a favored retreat for Kyoto royalty and aristocracy—Yoshino, which is still today the locale par excellence for viewing cherry blossoms. Otherwise, the play is quite similar to *Hagoromo*, except that it takes the two-act structure where the angel first appears in human form.

The setting of the play in a more appealing area of Nara than forbidding Mount Kazuraki counts as one factor lending *Yoshino Tennin* an auspicious air. But *Yoshino Tennin* resembles *Hagoromo* in another significant way: the allusion to the same *Shūishū* poem featuring the image of the angel’s feather mantle brushing a boulder, used to praise the stability of the reign.

6.4 *Ume*

Ume depicts the revelation of the spirit of the blossoming plum to a traveler, a member of the Fujiwara clan from Kyoto visiting Osaka. This is a relatively new composition, dating from the Tokugawa-era Meiwa collection edited by Kanze Motoakira, and reflects the role *kokugaku* nativist scholars of that era took upon themselves to amend perceived errors of linguistic and historical interpretation. In this case the problem is the misinterpretation of a poem due to assuming the word “flower” referred to a cherry blossom when in fact it referred to a plum blossom, the error being proven by reference to the date of the composition of the poem.

Like *Kazuraki* and *Yoshino Tennin*, this is a two-act play where the spirit first approaches the traveler in human form and later reveals its true identity. Like *Hagoromo* and *Yoshino Tennin*, the play includes a line about the proverbial boulder as symbol of the constancy of the reign, but remarkably without the feather mantle. One interesting phenomenon that becomes more salient at this point, analyzing this small corpus as a group, is all four plays considered so far feature a woman initiating engagement by calling out to a man.

6.5 *Sumiyoshi Mōde*

Sumiyoshi Mōde dramatizes a scene from *The Tale of Genji*, where Genji makes a pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi Shrine after being pardoned from exile to give thanks for his release, and meets the lady he had an affair with during his exile. Upon first inspection, this play might seem a natural choice for performance as an alternate wakinō, as it is set at Sumiyoshi Shrine and opens auspiciously with the priest of Sumiyoshi Shrine performing an incantational ritual of celebration and thanksgiving for the answering of Genji's prayer.

However, the ending of the play is not as auspicious, at least not in the conventional sense. The lady Genji left after he was pardoned from exile, Akashi no Ue, also happens to be on pilgrimage to the shrine at the same time. They meet and exchange poems, but then part with no small sense of sadness. How might such a play possibly fit the standards of the first category for felicity?

While I would not presume to propose a definitive interpretation, in the interest of exploring how canonical categories affect perception and interpretation, I would initially propose that this choice is most likely related to the convention in *noh* to dramatize fragments of the same narrative taken from different stages of the timeline, with the expectation that the spectator will take aesthetic pleasure from the recontextualization of that fragment not only into the timeline of the original literary source, but also into the unique palette of interpretations on the *noh* stage, as in the case of *Komachi* described in Section 6.6. Perhaps the most famous example within the canon of *noh* is the fourth-category play *Aoi no Ue*, which ends with the Buddhist monk's apparent exorcism of the malignant spirit possessing Genji's wife; the knowledgeable spectator knows that later the malignant spirit returns and kills Aoi no Ue. Likewise, in the case of *Sumiyoshi Mōde*, the informed spectator knows the rest of the story: that despite the sad nature of this temporary parting, when Genji returns to the capital and achieves even greater glory than the splendor of his youth, he eventually calls Akashi no Ue to court, and marries their daughter to an emperor.

6.6 *Sōshiarai Komachi*

With *Sōshiarai Komachi*, we return to the imperial court in Kyoto to witness an imaginary incident of poetic rivalry between aristocrats at a court poetry contest, where a male poet challenges a female poet, accusing her of plagiarism; his "evidence" is proven to be a forgery. Like *Hagoromo* and *Yoshino Tennin*, this play readily lends itself to pairing with the last one in that both feature dramatic human situations with connections to classical literature, although this play features historical poets whereas the next one features fictional characters.

In the case of *Sumiyoshi Mōde*, one obvious rationale for designation as an alternate wakinō is the fact that the play takes place at Sumiyoshi Shrine, where the deity is given credit for the auspicious turn of Genji's fortune. But the plot of *Sōshiarai Komachi* certainly gives no hint as to any possible rationale for such designation. What criteria might possibly be involved?

I would submit that the major reason is the theme of the power of poetry to bring peace to society. Of the three main poets appearing in the play, one is the compiler of the first imperial anthology of poetry, the *Kokinshū* (Ki no Tsurayuki) and the other two (Ono no Komachi and Ōtomo Karonushi) are honored as two of the Six Poetic Immortals which Tsurayuki introduces in his Preface to that work. A number of first-category plays take this as their theme, including *Takasago*, the supremely orthodox classic.

Another reason may be related to the legendary identification of Komachi as a reincarnation of the mythical poet Sotōrihime, an association which is explicitly mentioned in the play. Most *noh* plays featuring Komachi present her in sublime old age; this one presents her in her prime. But her archetypal status in Japanese culture ensures that the *noh* play *Sōshiarai Komachi* is also infused with that aura of sublimity that adheres to her name. Even the humorous elements such as Karonushi peeping on Komachi while she is composing her poem find analogies in deity plays which depict ancient taboos, such as Hohodemi no Mikoto peeping on Toyotamahime while she is giving birth in *Unoha*. And while there are no

boulders or feather mantles, the play does end with a considerably celebratory air. There is a ritual of purification, as the courtiers clap to purify the air of any lingering anger or shame after Komachi forgives Kuronushi. And in the concluding chant, there is a litany of blessings on the emperor's peaceful reign thanks to the power of the Way of Poetry, including many phrases that resonate with classic plays like *Takasago*: the evergreen pine, the Four Seas, a realm so secure that citizens leave their doors unlocked, and a reference to the special protection of the deity Susano'o no Mikoto, whose poem on the occasion of his wedding is traditionally considered to be the first 31-syllable waka poem in the history of Japanese literature.

7. Religious Associations

The review presented in Section 6 clearly indicates that, in addition to the two original core factors of gender and geography that were surveyed, there is a need to further analyze the religious overtones of the plays, especially since we are looking at a liminal category between the first and third categories, divine and human worlds. Table 12 presents a review of the significant points of comparison and contrast among these six plays in this additional category, as well as additional information about alternate staging (*kogaki*). This will be followed by a comprehensive review of what salient patterns of cognition emerge as a result.

Table 12. Religious associations in third-category alternate wakinō

Play	Location	Dramatic structure	Religious associations
<i>Kazuraki</i>	Nara	Two acts, taiko jonomai Alternate dances: Kagura, Yamatamai, Iwatonomai	Buddhist (En no Gyōja) Shinto (Hitokotonushi)
<i>Hagoromo</i>	Shizuoka	One act, taiko jonomai (Surugamai) Alternate dance: Wagōnomai	Shinto (Izanagi/Izanami)
<i>Yoshino Tennin</i>	Nara	Two acts, taiko chūnomai (Gosechinomai) Alternate dance: Tenninzoroi	Shinto (Gosechinomai)
<i>Ume</i>	Osaka	Two acts, taiko jonomai	Shinto (Kami) Buddhist (Mihotoke)
<i>Sumiyoshi Mōde</i>	Osaka	One act, daishō jonomai (utsurimai)	Shinto (Sumiyoshi)
<i>Sōshiarai Komachi</i>	Kyoto	One act, daishō chūnomai	Shinto (Sotōrihime, Susano'o)

The advantage of a small corpus like this for this study of this cognitive perception is that it facilitates a considerably realistic replication of the average human capacity for information processing, famously known as Miller's Law, where the magic number is seven. (This law is also the basis for the common concept of "chunking" used in foreign language education.)

Table 12 does not include a column for gender because all the main characters are female or feminine, though it should be noted of course that all are interacting with a male character. While our two core factors heretofore have been gender and geography, I have now added one more intersecting category, religious associations, because our focus is on the liminal area between divinity and humanity. The important thing to maintain awareness of here is that "religious associations" is a very loose category. Some plays may exhibit a very strong religious coloring; in others, the connections may be far weaker. The following sections provide a review that clarifies this relative emphasis.

7.1 *Kazuraki*

When *Kazuraki* is performed as a third-category play, the feminine beauty of the deity is emphasized; but as our survey has shown, it still stands out as an anomalous play, especially because it is common knowledge that Hitokotonushi was generally perceived as masculine. The lack of iconography in the indigenous spiritual tradition now institutionalized as Shinto is not only cause but just as likely to be a

result of the fact that concepts of many Shinto deities are gender-fluid, the compulsion to classify a later trend. Indeed, this idea is explicitly expressed in the fourth play of this group, *Ume*, where the spirit of the blossoming plum in Act II says it has no fixed form but simply adapts to the situation when it manifests itself visually to humans (*tada sono ori ni shitagaite, sadamaru sugata mo aranu*).

But when *Kazuraki* is performed as an alternate wakinō, awareness of the power struggle between Buddhism and Shinto becomes more pronounced. This is subtly emphasized by changes in the staging, especially of the dance, where the standard taiko jononmai is replaced by a kagura (Shinto ritual dance), Yamatomai, or Iwatonomai, the last of these commemorating the myth of the supreme sun deity Amaterasu Ōmikami being coaxed out of the cave where she had secluded herself. However, it should also be noted that even if the actual choreography is unchanged, the deity in Act II explicitly refers to the kagura, Yamatomai, and Iwatonomai in her song.

7.2 *Hagoromo*

Kazuraki is an obvious candidate for alternate wakinō status due to the main character actually being a deity. As *Hagoromo* features an immortal character, an angel from heaven, it also lends itself easily to this liminal status, even if the angel is not a named deity worshipped at any particular shrine. The main textual feature that adds further to this propensity is the indirect reference to the deities Izanagi and Izanami (*nishin*, the two deities) in the recounting of the myth of the creation of the islands of Japan. The Surugamai is only nominally mentioned in the song as having originated in the legend of the feather mantle; there is no actual alternate choreography to emphasize that distinction with the standard taiko jononmai. The main choreographic feature that affects the degree of religious coloring is the alternate dance called Wagōnomai, where the usual emblem on the headdress, the moon, is replaced by a phoenix.

7.3 *Yoshino Tennin*

Like *Hagoromo*, *Yoshino Tennin* also features an angel from heaven. It does not contain any direct or indirect references to deities as *Hagoromo* does. But the dance the angel performs is the Gosechinomai, which is performed in sacred imperial rituals such as the Daijōsai and Niinamesai (imperial harvest festivals). Performed in the standard third-category position, the play takes on romantic, subjective overtones. But performed as an alternate wakinō, the play takes on a far greater sacred atmosphere, as in the alternate choreography, Tenninzoroi, the angel is accompanied by an additional pair or quartet of angels, increasing the ritualistic effect.

7.4 *Ume*

The main character in *Ume* is the spirit of a blossoming plum appearing in human form, which also makes this play an apt choice for an alternate wakinō positioned in the liminal position between human and divine. Indeed, the spirit says she has been compelled to reveal herself to correct imperfect human knowledge about the conception of the natural world among the gods, proclaiming that they valued blossoming trees over flowering plants, and that when the ambiguous phrase *konohana* (blossoms of a tree) was used, the default meaning was blossoming plum, not cherry. Indeed, the play is set in Naniwa (Osaka), and the first-category play *Naniwa* clearly associates the deity Konohananosakuyahime, wife of the first earthly kami Ninigi no Mikoto, with the blossoming plum. But in *Naniwa*, the spirit of the blossoming plum is played by a kyogen actor, separate from Konohananosakuyahime.

The spirit of the blossoming plum in *Ume* mentions that its species was also valued by the Buddha. But the Buddhist coloring is extremely limited. The definitive textual feature of the play that renders *Ume* appropriate as an alternate wakinō is the concluding choral chant, which again praises the auspicious nature of the lord's reign as everlasting as a boulder which remains steady and secure, no matter how many times it is brushed. The angel's feather mantle is implied but not explicitly named (*nazutomo tsukisenu iwao*), suggesting an invitation to substitute other feather-like substances—such as petals of plum blossoms.

7.5 *Sumiyoshi Mōde*

Religious associations in *Sumiyoshi Mōde* would upon first glance appear to be found not so much in the main scene but as in the background. The curious question is, which religious tradition dominates? The

reunion between Genji and the Akashi Lady occurs at Sumiyoshi Shrine. Certainly a sacred norito ritual of thanksgiving for the deity's benevolence in answering Genji's prayer for pardon from exile takes place at the beginning of the play. But the latter half of the play, containing the highlight scene of the reunion of the lovers where they exchange poems and then dance a duet, has a much stronger Buddhist coloring, powerful enough to overshadow the shrine setting. The image of Sumiyoshi as a busy thoroughfare for commerce would seem to be overlapped with the Buddhist concept of cyclical time. As they observe boats plying their way back and forth carrying goods for trade, they also speak of their hopes that their paths will cross again.

Genji's poem:

*wasuregusa
hau to dani kiku
mono naraba,
sono kanegoto mo
araji kashi...*

*Grass of forgetfulness:
if I had thought there was a chance
that it would grow as one hears
I would never
have made such a promise.*

Genji: Arishi chigiri no eni araba

Chorus: Yagate no ause mo hodo araji no...

As long as the bonds of our pledge hold
Surely we will meet again.

The Akashi Lady's poem:

*Mi o tsukushi
kouru shirushi ni
koko made mo
meguriaikeru
eni wa fukashi na.*

*And so we meet again:
the fact that I have come so far
(like these drifting buoys)
is surely is a sign
of my utter devotion
and the depth of our bond.*

7.6 *Sōshiarai Komachi*

Sōshiarai Komachi is perhaps the most anomalous play in this group. It features all human characters in an antagonistic drama—no deities, angels, or spirits of flowers or trees. Its indoor setting and limited use of natural imagery also make it stand out. *Kazuraki* prominently features snow, brushwood, and vine in stage properties as well as poetry; *Hagoromo* is full of images of the moon, sky, and clouds; *Yoshino Tennin* features cherry blossoms, while *Ume* features plum blossoms; and while *Sumiyoshi Mōde* does not feature much natural imagery except for the bay where the Lady of Akashi moors her boat, at least it takes place outdoors like the rest. But the only natural image in *Sōshiarai Komachi* is floating waterweed, the natural image used in the disputed entry to the poetry contest.

The aspect of *Sōshiarai Komachi* that qualifies it for alternate wakinō status would rather seem to be found in the theme of the cultural power of poetry to facilitate order in the realm, rather than association with the divine natural order. As noted above, textually speaking, this theme is expressed in two main ways. Together with the mention of Susano'o no Mikoto as the father of Japanese poetry, the explicit reference to the traditional association of Ono no Komachi with the feminine guardian deity of poetry, Sotōrihime, becomes particularly significant when the play is viewed as part of this group of third-category alternative wakinō, because Sotōrihime is worshipped as Tamatsushima Myōjin. Tamatsushima Myōjin is counted among the three guardian deities of poetry, together with Sumiyoshi Myōjin and Tenjin. The white waves of Sumiyoshi washing the ancient pines are further explicitly mentioned in *Sōshiarai Komachi* in a poetic catalog of images related to washing, sung as Komachi washes the scroll to expose the forgery.

8. Conclusion

The rearrangement of these six third-category noh plays by character type, four immortal and two mortal, rather than dance, effectively highlighted the various aspects of the plays that rendered them suitable choices for performance as alternate wakinō. While *Kazuraki* stands out as somewhat anomalous in the third category due to the primary identification of the deity Hitokotonushi as an ugly masculine deity, the play's association with the first category through this liminal classification brings a heightened appreciation of its complexity. The angels of *Hagoromo* and *Yoshino Tennin* risk being marginalized amidst the majority of human (including fictional human) characters of the third category, their characterization

lacking the psychological depth that marks most other characters, but have their divinity reaffirmed through this liminal association. The spirit of *Ume* fits fairly comfortably with the other spirits of flowers and trees of the third category, but benefits from heightened appreciation for her divine connections. The two plays featuring mortals, *Sumiyoshi Mōde* and *Sōshiarai Komachi*, could never qualify as standard first-category deity plays, but their designation as alternates likewise suggests renewed appreciation for the nonduality of sacred and mundane. But in addition to the distinction between the sacred and the mundane, I would submit that the duality challenged by this liminal classification is the distinction between *shūgen* and *yūgen*. *Shūgen* refers to more visible felicity, whereas *yūgen* refers more to hidden beauty deeper than mere felicity.

In my earlier study of the group of feminine deity plays that were excluded from the first category of *noh*, I saw their manipulation, including revisions to delete feminine characters and reclassification into lower categories, primarily as an act of demotion, viewing the canon largely as a vertical hierarchy. When I first began this study, I wondered if the positioning of these plays as alternate *wakinō* would conversely signify a promotion to an elevated status. While final consideration of this question must be deferred until I can analyze the alternate *wakinō* of the fourth and fifth categories, my preliminary hypothesis is that this liminal classification system actually ameliorates rather than reinforcing the hierarchical structure, accommodating more appreciation for complexity and diversity than for containment.

My ultimate goal in this series of studies is a practical one, to demonstrate how applied cognitive linguistics can promote awareness of the constructed nature of invented traditions which tend to reify stereotypes. Such awareness, I hope, will open the way for more authentic engagement with traditional culture rather than rejection, as unilateral rejection may only result in opening space to newer but equally oppressive forms of expression and their canons. We can never abolish canons; all we can do is intervene in the dominant discourses that influence how they are perceived. I hope this study will prove to be an effective intervention in the perception of Japan, in the English-speaking world and beyond.

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