

The Dynamics of *Nyonin jōbutsu* in Zenchiku's *Yōkihi* *Honzetsu*, Poetic Allusion, and Sacred Space

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Abstract Medieval *nō* theatre is built upon *honzetsu* (source texts), which are drawn from the premodern Japanese canon and critical for dramaturgical structure and meaning. This study focuses on Zenchiku's *Yōkihi*, a female-spirit play with an initial *honzetsu* of Chinese Tang the poem *Changhengge* that is further filtered through additional texts, primarily Heian-period narrative *Genji monogatari*. Therefore, examination of *Yōkihi* involves consideration of all relevant *honzetsu* cited within the play, their earlier Heian receptions, and subsequent medieval textual lives. The dramaturgical structure and language of *Yōkihi*, with its variations from these *honzetsu*, emphasise thematic concerns of existential isolation, karmic clinging, and sacred space as critical to feminine ontological and enlightenment status.

Keywords *Nō* theatre. Premodern Japanese literature. Religion. Gender dynamics. Female enlightenment.

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1 Introduction and Methodology

While focused on universal salvation of all sentient beings, Mahāyāna Buddhism displays practical incongruities concerning female gender and sexuality. One example is manifested in *nō* theatre, Japan's masked drama developed during the Muromachi period (1337-1557).

nō is a vector for elite Buddhist soteriological discourse and popular religious beliefs, providing a view into gender-based social and spiritual topics within medieval Japanese society, such as gender-bias within soteriological discourse. This example is presented in Third Category or female-spirit plays (*katsura mono* 鬘物, or 'wig plays') genre, works featuring dense religious language, utilisation of shamanic ritual, and dramatic conflict centred on ambiguous feminine soteriological status. This article focuses on *Yōkihi* 楊貴妃 (Consort Yang), a female-spirit nō play attributed to actor and dramatist Konparu Zenchiku 金春禪竹 (1405-1468). Influenced by Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (Jp. Haku Kyōi, 772-846) and Heian-period author Murasaki Shikibu's 紫式部 eleventh century narrative *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji), *Yōkihi* is a nuanced dramatic work that considers the issue of female soteriology within medieval combinatory Buddhist discourse through multiple layers of poetic influence. Its attributed author Zenchiku frequently utilised the *mugen* 夢幻 (dream-vision) plot structure, which was developed by his father-in-law, innovative actor and playwright Zeami Motokiyo 世阿弥元清 (1363-1443). In *Yōkihi*, the *shite* シテ (main actor) plays the spirit of Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 who languishes in a Daoist heaven realm, clinging to memories with her karmic state in stagnation, experiencing emotional torment. Is this poetic emphasis within Zenchiku's dramaturgy to produce *yūgen* 幽玄 (ineffable beauty) or a manifestation of deeper medieval socio-religious issues? To answer these and other questions, my primary interdisciplinary methodology takes a three-pronged approach to analysis of nō plays (*yōkyōku* 謡曲) in historical, social, and religious context. The first is predicated on nō's textual construction as densely layered rhetorical weaves of allusive poetic variation and textual citation via *honzetsu* 本説 (source texts). This wide range of texts from the classical (ninth century) through late medieval (fifteenth century) eras of the Japanese and Chinese literary canons include genres such as: poetry (*waka* 和歌, Japanese poetry; *kanshi* 漢詩, Chinese poetry; *renga* 連歌, linked verse), diaries (*nikki* 日記), narrative tales (*monogatari* 物語; *otogizōshi* 御伽草子), folk tales (*setsuwa* 説話), temple histories (*engi* 縁起), and religious texts (various genres). *Honzetsu* was central to nō textual composition and structure, and also dramatic performance, in that these textual sources:

typically provides the source material on which the composition [of the nō play] as a whole is based, the *shite*'s identity, and the outline of the plot coming from it. (Quinn 2005, 138)

Therefore, it is logical that interrelated gender elements, religious and ontological associations, and geographical locations with their associated sacred spaces located within these *honzetsu* will be vital factors

in determining soteriological status for a play's female-spirit persona. As will be examined below, the demarcation and ritual purification of sacred space was critical in the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 (the Buddhas as original enlightenment, the kami as traces) paradigm (Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003, 4-7) that defined medieval religiosity, making a historicised analysis of geographic location and sacred space within *honzet-su* essential to understanding its soteriological dynamics.

This leads into my second approach, the examination of the female-spirit persona's geographic location, its religious associations, and their impact on soteriological status. I will unpack the religious and poetic references connecting a character to her physical surroundings and how they inhibit or encourage enlightenment. In almost all instances, *nō* plays take place in spiritually charged spaces directly affecting dramatic action, with each play's setting functioning like a central dramatic persona. A primary example of this methodology at work is demonstrated in *Yōkihi*'s ostensibly Chinese folk religion setting of Penglai 蓬莱 (Jp. *Hōrai*), which will be examined in detail.

Lastly, I systematically examined the densely layered rhetorical weaves of allusive poetic variation and textual citations in *nō* plays. This involves two distinct activities: tracking the multiple textual citations and *honkadōri* 本歌取り (allusive variation) to canonical works for symbolic and allusive resonance and identifying the utilisation of *honji suijaku* language and textual sources for their meaning. Etymological allegoresis, or paronomasia, is a central concept to medieval understanding of language and plays an important role in delineating *nō honzetsu*, especially regarding soteriology.¹ Seemingly non-religious words and phrases, when cross-referenced with Buddhist texts and related writings, may reveal deeper Buddhological or kami worship meanings.

My analysis of *Yōkihi* reveals that achieving enlightenment for female-spirits in the medieval *honji suijaku* worldview of Muromachi Japan is complex and variable, with ambiguous soteriological potentialities. As I will demonstrate, the female *shite* in *Yōkihi* grapples with karmic constraints from previous manifestations of cosmically Chinese literary origins, that are revealed to be deeply rooted in medieval Japanese literary and religious traditions. Additionally, she is located in an ambiguous sacred space with resonances that have shifted across space and time via disparate *honzetsu*. This is combined with an incomplete/missing ritual process for enlightenment, further complicating her soteriological potential.

1 "Paronomasia analyzes graphs into their component parts and rearranges them into a sentence that reveals the 'true' meaning of the graph, including hidden identities. The methodology of associational identification derives from the rule of correspondence: that when two people, places, or things share a name, they must ultimately be the same (nondual)" (Klein 2021, 91).

2 Brief Background on Religious Environment and Female Soteriology in Medieval Japan

Medieval Japan was governed by the *honji suijaku* paradigm where Buddhism, kami worship, and multiple religious systems were combined in an amalgamation under the ultimate authority of Buddhist institutions (Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003, 4-7). It is within the systems of this paradigm that the Buddhist doctrine of female enlightenment (Ch. *nuren chengfo*, Jp. *nyonin jōbutsu* 女人成仏) operated. However, in early Indic Mahāyāna Buddhism, the female body was a problematic topic due to cultural perceptions of physical and spiritual uncleanness that necessitated extraordinary means for potential enlightenment.² In Japan's earlier Heian period, court commissioned rituals based on Ying-Yang divination (*onmyōdō* 陰陽道), adapted from combinatory Chinese traditions termed the Five Elements or Five Phases (Ch. *wuxing* 五行; Jp. *gogyō shisō* 五行思想), served to reinforce ideologies of ritual purity as central to spiritual health, personal safety, and financial prosperity (Faure 2003, 71). By the medieval era, *kegare* 汚れ (defilement), meaning 'filth' and 'exhausted energy', became central within society to preserving ritual purity, including the demarcation of sacred space within *honji suijaku* religious thought (Faure 2003, 69). A woman's menstrual cycle, blood from childbirth, and other feminine biological processes were viewed as desecration to sacred and even secular spaces. Medieval religious responses to these blood-based sources of *kegare* were not uniform but shifted in severity over time.³

When considering female soteriology, it is useful to address the core of Buddhist practice as cessation of *samsāra* (Ch. *lunhui*, Jp. *rinne* 輪廻), wandering through the six realms of rebirth (Buswell, Lopez 2014, 758). It is manifested in the medieval Japanese concept of the *rokudō* 六道 (Skt. *ṣaḍgatīḥ*, Ch. *liudao*), the six realms (literally, 'paths') of transmigration. The concept of *rokudō* permeated all forms of combinatory Japanese religious experience. While the original Sanskrit terminology refers to six destinies of rebirth with their associated realms of existence (Buswell, Lopez 2014, 315-14, 731), the premodern Japanese interpreta-

2 The Parable of the Dragon Princess (Skt. *Nāgākanya*, Ch. *Longnu*, Jp. *Ryūno* 龍女): she gives the Buddha a jewel representing purity, changes into a human male, then an enlightened buddha (Hurvitz 2009, 184). While allegorical for female enlightenment potential, multiple aspects of this parable have been heavily debated and are outside the current study.

3 *Onmyōdō* and several kami worship sects (such as Ise Grand Shrine 伊勢神宮) viewed *kegare* via female blood harshly, as did Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-1282), who cited menstruation as "the moral defilement of women". Other Buddhist leaders were positive, with Jōdo sect 浄土宗 founder Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212) denying it as *kegare*. Rinzaï Zen 臨濟宗 monk Mujū 無住 (1227-1312) also discounted female blood as defilement, proclaiming "if only the heart is pure, the body likewise is not defiled" (Faure 2003, 71-3).

tion emphasised the 'act of wandering' through all six realms (*rokudō rinne* 六道輪廻) and with the accruing of karmic sin or merit (Nakamura et al. 1989, 848). Central to *rokudō* were the many hell realms and their associated torments, depictions of which gained widespread influence in premodern literature and visual art. A primary option for salvation in this *honji suijaku* system was through shamanic ritual practised by an ascetic who communicated with the spirit realm. The role of the ascetic, in the form of the *waki* ワキ (side actor), is a central feature in female-spirit *nō* plays, linking the diverse threads of medieval combinatorial Japanese religious practice with *nō* dramaturgy.

The ascetic is a principal figure in the *honji suijaku* religiosity of the medieval era, a conduit between the human world and spiritual realms inhabited by kami and Buddhas (Blacker 1999, 75 and 79). It also bears relevance to the role of the *waki* in the *mugen nō* genre. Within this dramatic structure, a Buddhist monk (*waki*) encounters a spirit disguised as a local resident (*maejite* 前ジテ, Part 1 lead actor) of a famous site who is suffering from karmic delusion, thereby trapped in the physical and spiritual pain of *rokudō*. This spirit slowly reveals their true identity via poetic exchanges filled with profound knowledge about the famous historical or literary figure connected to the famous site. The monk promises to hold funerary rites to assist in the spirit's transmigration, thereby breaking the cycle of *rokudō* and releasing the spirit into enlightenment. In Part II, the *shite* re-emerges in their true form having changed costume (*nochi-jite* 後ジテ, Part II lead actor) and acts out the character's karmic delusion in connection with the location, punctuated by a final dance. Intrinsic to the *waki*'s status as an ascetic are the following abilities within the dramaturgy of the play: the ability to undertake a dream-vision, contact spirits, and special ritual knowledge. In medieval Japan, only select initiates with esoteric knowledge and spiritual powers gained via physical austerities and religious disciplines were true aesthetes, primarily tasked with healing illness and exorcising malevolent spirits (Blacker 1999, 21-2). Fully ordained Buddhist monks of the Tendai, Shingon, and Nichiren sects frequently performed severe austerities within their religious life and specialisation in healing spiritual ailments (Blacker 1999, 165), aligning them with the Buddhist monks frequently seen as *waki* in female-spirit *nō*.

In Japanese shamanism, the spiritual journey by the ascetic is typically accomplished utilising three different methodologies: first, through a supernatural dream (dream-vision); second, divine possession by a spirit or god (*kamigakari* 神憑り); and third, in the mantic journey where the ascetic's soul (*tamashii* 魂) is guided across space-time to another realm, often by a guardian divinity (Blacker 1999, 168). Dreams have a long history of supernatural, spiritual, and literary provenance in Japan. In the case of *mugen nō*, the dream-vision appears to be the most common type of shamanic communion

between the *waki* and the spirit *shite*. The lines between dream-vision and mantic journey may be blurred in *nō* dramaturgy, as will be observed in the analysis of *Yōkihi*.

3 *Yōkihi: Honzetsu and Textual Analysis*

Yōkihi occurs in a heaven realm, yet the *shite* of Yang Guifei occupying this reality expresses intense emotions that are fully human, diverging from standard depictions of Buddhist heavens. Why this incongruity? This involves analysis of the multiple source texts of Zenchiku's work and their spiritual resonances. The play seems to take its influence from the final third of *Changhenge* 長恨歌 (Jp. *Chōgonka*), a narrative poem written by Chinese poet Bai Juyi. Active during China's Tang Dynasty, Bai's poetry exerted influence on the Heian period, with its subsequent medieval literary reception heavily filtered through this prior canon. Therefore, examination of *Yōkihi*'s dramatic operation involves consideration of the original poem, its Heian reception, and medieval era readings. From a critical perspective, the textual structure of Zenchiku's play, and its unique variations from Bai's text, emphasises *Yōkihi*'s thematic concerns of existential isolation, karmic clinging, and the static nature of the Yang persona. In many ways, the feminine suffering of the *shite* this work clarifies complimentary themes that pervade Zenchiku's other female-spirit plays: a deep textual connection to *Genji monogatari* as a primary *honzetsu*, female-gendered modes of karmic suffering, and the centrality of sacred space as critical element to the *shite*'s spiritual status (Chudnow 2017, 95). Before continuing, delineation of the following is required: first, the work's Chinese antecedents; second, its influence and connection with the Heian literary world informing it; and third, this overall literary cannon's further influence on the Japanese cultural world.

Bai Juyi's poetry exerted a considerable impact upon *kanshi* 漢詩 (Chinese-language poetry) among the Heian literati, with the synthesis of his works into the Heian poetic consciousness being essential in the development of *waka* 和歌 (Japanese-language poetry). Among his works (Ch. *Bai shi wenji*, Jp. *Hakushi monjū* 白氏文集), the *xin yuefu* 新樂府 (Jp. *shingafu*, 'new ballads') were especially popular in the Heian period. However, their Confucian didactic nature was generally ignored by most Japanese *kanshi* and *waka* poets, who preferred a depoliticised aesthetic focusing on the natural world's beauty as an expression of truth (Smits 1997, 174). This selective approach is a hallmark of Bai reception in Japan and essential to understanding later Japanese interpretations of his works as *honkadōri* and *honzetsu*. Of all the subjects in Bai's collected poems, his poems detailing imperial consorts most enjoyed the greatest popularity with Heian and

later medieval writers and were referred to collectively as the “Five Consorts” (Jp. *gohi* 五妃; Sasaki 2001, 89). The poetic images of these women be utilised as *honkadori*, *honzetsu*, and other forms of intertextual variations in multiple premodern Japanese literary and performance genres, with representative examples in Heian period *waka* and *monogatari*, as well as later Muromachi period *nō* plays. However, the negative historical and political contexts originally depicted in Bai's original poems were frequently removed or glossed over in these Japanese interpretations, thus constructing the “Five Consorts” as idealised feminine poetic archetypes that typified poetic expression of tragedy, isolation, longing, and ephemeral beauty (Sasaki 2001, 87-8). Of all these poetic personae, *Changhenge's* Yang Guifei was especially captivating to the Japanese artistic and popular imagination throughout the premodern era.

Reception of *Changhenge* during the Heian period was multifaceted across several artforms. Bai work was popular across all literate Heian social classes, including the highest-ranking members of the imperial court: Genji's author Murasaki Shikibu tutored Empress Shōshi 彰子 (988-1074) in Bai's poetry (Fukumori 2001, 109). In *Sarashina nikki* 更級日記 (The Sarashina Diary, ca. 1060), the author takes great pleasure in receiving a gift of an early *monogatari* (fictive narrative) version of *Changhenge* as a beautifully illustrated scroll (Inukai 1994, 303). The Heian court was immersed in works dedicated to Bai's work, as will be discussed further below. The most famous of these is the opening “Kiritsubo” 桐壺 (The Paulownia Pavilion) chapter of Murasaki's *Genji monogatari*, where *Changhenge* and the image of Yang play an essential narrative function, as will be explored further. The deep intertextual dynamic between Bai's work and Shikibu's tale resulted in a symbiotic relationship between the two texts in post-Heian reception, with *Genji* and *Changhenge* forever linked in the Japanese literary consciousness. Furthermore, this literary image of Yang established an independent life within the premodern Japanese literary canon, separate from Chinese historical fact or the original context of Bai's poem (Itō 1988, 508). Both of these conditions will be seen in full effect through analysis of Zenchiku's *Yōkihi*.

A basic summary and analysis of *Changhenge* is essential to contrast Bai's original Yang character with the hybrid *Genji*-influenced *Yōkihi*-persona of Zenchiku's play. The original is a pseudo-historical narrative poem based on popular aspects of the political scandal at the Tang Emperor's court during the later era of that dynasty: the deep infatuation of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (Jp. Gensō, 685-762) with his primary consort Yang Guifei (Jp. *Yōkihi*, 719-756). Born into a family of minor provincial officials, Yang was introduced into court as a concubine for the emperor's son. After the emperor's previous favourite died, Yang was recommended, and he was instantly taken with her artistry in dance. She was raised to level of *guifei* 貴妃 (Jp. *ki-*

hi, 'Precious Consort'). Popular legend and Bai's poem dictates that Xuanzong became more focused on Yang than government, culminating in the rebellion of general An Lushan 安祿山 (Jp. An Rokuzan, 705-757) in 755. During the evacuation of the capital Chang'an 長安 (Jp. Chōan), the emperor's guard refused to continue unless Yang, whom they blamed, was killed. Xuanzong then abdicated in favour of his son, who quelled the rebellion and reinstated Tang rule. Later, Yang was given the title of Empress posthumously while Xuanzong grieved in retirement (Jian, Luo 2000, 219-21).

Although *Changhenge* deals with these events, Bai Juyi is interested in portraying a tragic love affair through poetic narrative. While Bai was a Confucian scholar and an active provincial official, the complex political conditions surrounding the An rebellion are obscured to stage a romantic tragedy. The final two thirds of the poem is focused on the emperor's deep mourning, forming the poetic and thematic core. Tortured by sorrow, Xuanzong employs a Daoist wizard (an ascetic) to undertake a mantic journey to search for Yang's spirit, as she has inauspiciously not appeared in his dreams. The wizard transverses heavens, the earth, and underworlds but is unable to locate Yang. He finally arrives at Penglai, the Isle of the Immortals, where Yang has been reborn as a goddess. She grants the wizard an audience and speaks of her longing for the emperor. Before the wizard leaves, she entrusts him with a jewelled hairpin and filigree box to give Xuanzong as evidence of her existence and sign of their eternal love. She also tells of their promise in life, on the seventh night of the Seventh Month, during the Seventh Night (Ch. *Qixi*, Jp. *Tanabata* 七夕) star festival.⁴

[I]f in Heaven, may we become those birds that fly on shared wings; or on Earth, then may we become branches that twine together. (Owen 1996, 447)⁵

The closing line of Bai's poem iterates that even after Heaven and Earth cease to exist, "yet this pain of ours will continue and never finally end" (Owen 1996, 447).

According to Manling Luo, this ending in the heaven-like realm of Penglai, coupled with the eternal vow made on earth, completes the construction of *Changhenge* as a transcendental romance. This posi-

⁴ Allusion to the Chinese legend of the Cowherd (Ch. *Niulang*, Jp. Gyūrō 牛郎, the star Altair) and the Weaver Girl (Ch. *Zhinu*, Jp. *Shokujo* 織女 or *Orihime* 織り姫, the star Vega), who can only meet once a year, on the seventh night of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, by crossing over the River of Heaven (the Milky Way) on a bridge of magpies (Luo 2005, 166).

⁵ Owen's translation was used for this study while Kroll's (1990-91) translation was also referenced.

tions Xuanzong and Yang Guifei as a romantic couple on an equal hierarchical level via physical and spiritual separation, thereby circumventing the political and social pressures inherent in their roles in life (Tang Emperor/man and concubine/woman); with him in the human realm and her reborn as an immortal goddess in Penglai (Luo 2005, 166-7). It is also worth noting that Yang is reborn as a divine Daoist being, elevating her social and spiritual status to one worthy of the Tang Son of Heaven, something impossible while she was a mortal woman and concubine. While tragic, Luo's reading and this change of spiritual status brings a degree of equity to a fundamentally uneven relationship and social dynamic (Chudnow 2017, 100-1). However, this type of resolution on the ontological and soteriological level is complicated in the Japanese environment of Zenchiku's *Yōkihi* due to several mitigating socio-religious factors, as will be examined below.

When discussing the *honzetsu* utilised by Zenchiku for composition of *Yōkihi*, it is critical to note that Bai's original Chinese-language poem was not the primary source. As will be examined further, this plays a significant role in forming the soteriological status of the work's Yang persona (Chudnow 2017, 102). There is a strong possibility via textual analysis that *Yōkihi*'s primary *honzetsu* were summaries of *Changhenge*'s plot and descriptions of the Yang poetic mythos as described within medieval commentaries on *Genji monogatari* (Itō 1988, 508). Here again the deep connection between the reception of Bai's poem with *Genji* in the medieval era becomes evident but raises another question: why would a *nō* playwright like Zenchiku be using medieval commentaries as a source for textual composition?

By Zenchiku's lifetime in the mid-fifteenth century, the Heian period language of *Genji* was increasingly remote to all but elite specialists of the text. Furthermore, knowledge of *Genji* tended toward being based on *renga* (linked verse) handbooks, plot digests, and general summaries rather than the original text.⁶ As the popularity of *renga* spread, literate people of disparate social and education levels sought knowledge of the poetic tradition necessary for composition. Therefore, simplified plot digests and *renga* linking manuals were produced to accommodate their interests. For example, *Genji* digests written in contemporary language contained short chapter summaries, the most famous poems, and brief commentaries were often used as *honzetsu*. Such works were excellent resources for *renga* poets and *nō* playwrights, who primarily required the following: the general location, dramatic concept, and poetic atmosphere for *Genji* chapters; main characters and their mythos; and critical poems to draw upon as *honkadōri* (Goff 1991, 27-8). This type of textual filtering during the medieval era was common, especially for a literary Chinese-language

⁶ Please view Goff 1991, 14-29 for a detailed history of *renga* and its influence on *nō*.

source such a *Changhenge* which would be linguistically inaccessible to the majority of poets and playwrights. It is likely that during Zenchiku's lifetime, Bai's original poem was mostly known from its intertextual status as a Chinese source text for *Genji*'s opening chapter, "Kiritsubo", which will be examined in detail below.

The dramatic action of *Yōkihi* begins with the Daoist wizard (played by the *waki*) travelling to and then arriving at Penglai. He summarises key points of *Changhenge*'s narrative before inquiring with an inhabitant (*aikyōgen* 間狂言)⁷ about Yang. He learns of a female deity residing on Penglai's and visits her palace (represented by a veiled *tsukurimono* 作り物),⁸ which contains Yang in her celestial form (the *shite*). The dramatic action in these passages is primarily constructed from a poetic weave of allusions derived from imagery distilled from Bai's original poem. The exchange of the jewelled hairpin and a variant of the iconic 'joined-wing/entwined branches' metaphor is featured prominently (Itō 1988, 409). The wizard announces his departure, causing Yang to be wracked with sorrow and yearning for her previous life. These are expressed through lines that combine nostalgic longing with Buddhist anxiety on reincarnation and impermanence. These emotional passages are dramatically punctuated by the *shite*'s slow *jo no mai* 序ノ舞 (slow tempo dance); the chorus states this is *Geishō ui no kyoku* 霓裳羽衣曲 (Ch. *Nichang yuyi qu*, 'Song of Rainbow Skirts and Feathered Vestments'), the piece Yang danced famously in life (Itō 1988, 412).⁹ As will be explored below, Yang's meditation on the process of reincarnation is linked inextricably with her karmic clinging, unique ontological origins based on divergent *honzetsu*, and hybrid sacred space (Chudnow 2017, 103-4).

Yōkihi opens with the *waki* reciting a *michiyuki* 道行 (travelling chant). The *michiyuki* is a key passage located in *Dan* 段 1 of the *mugen nō* structure (Quinn 2005, 131), describing travel via famous landmarks and the *waki*'s arrival at his destination (2005, 132). In Zenchiku's play, the *michiyuki* portrays the wizard undertaking a mantic journey via dream-vision, traversing the phenomenological realm to reach Penglai:

7 Actor specialising in comedic, satirical *kyōgen* 狂言 theatre roles, who also chants the narrative explanatory passages between *nō* play sections.

8 *Tsukurimono*, 'built things', the minimal stage props used in *nō*. They are assembled and taken apart by hand before and after every performance.

9 Itō's edited version of *Yōkihi* with its accompanying scholarship was primarily utilised for this study. However, I also cross-referenced Sanari's (1982) earlier version as well as Koyama and Satō's (1997) later edit.

[ageuta] WAKI If only there were a wizard,
if only there were a wizard,
who could go and inquire on the whereabouts of her soul.
As my ship parts through waves,
over the sails I have faintly seen the island mountain
where I shall weave a traveller's grass pillow.
I have arrived at the land of Tokoyo,
I have arrived at the land of Tokoyo.
(Itō 1988, 406; Author's transl.)

This passage also establishes thematic elements essential to the play: the *waki* as ascetic utilising a dream-vision and immediate allusive variation to *Genji monogatari*, grounding the play directly to the poetic mythos of Shikibu's tale. The phrase "weave a traveller's grass pillow" (Itō 1988, 406) contains the overlaid pun "brief sleep" (*karine* かり寝), indicating the poetic conceit of a resting traveller while also focusing on the ascetic's dream-vision employed to contact the spirit realm. This is predicated upon imagery of a ship sailing through both waves and the void of space-time: *namiji o wakete yuku fune no* なみちを分けて行く舟の (Itō 1988, 406) with the phrase *namiji* containing the overlaid poetic meanings of "void" (無) on the single phoneme *na* and "waterways/ocean" (波路) on the entire phrase. This paronomasia is the wizard's mantic journey as he travels to the supernatural shores of Penglai, conceived as a physical location within the void of supernatural space (Chudnow 2017, 105-6).

In Japan, conceptions of Penglai diverged from original Chinese Daoist legends of an isle of immortality, combining with indigenous beliefs in supernatural maritime realms such as Tokoyo 常世 and the *Ryūgūjō* 龍宮城, the Dragon King's Palace (Itō 1988, 406; Nakamura et al. 1989, 731). Diverse definitions of Tokoyo existed in the *honji suijaku* beliefs of premodern Japan. One was as a realm of immortal beings similar to Penglai, although at ocean's floor, similar to the mythical Dragon King's Palace from Chinese myth (Ōno et al. 2002, 934). In other definitions, it became almost a general catch-all 'other realm' for supernatural existence:

The locus of Tokoyo can vary: in a foreign land, under the sea, in heaven, under the ground, or in a place beyond the ocean. Various kami and spirits of ancestors are believed to live there. In ancient times people perceived Tokoyo as an utopia of eternal youth, long life, bounteous wealth, and pleasure across the sea. Tokoyo also implied the land of the dead, the nether worlds of *yomotsu kuni*, or *ne no kuni*. (Nishioka 2012)

With shared features such as the sea, immortality, and the domain of sacred beings, the combination of Penglai with the indigenous subterranean world of Tokoyo may have appeared natural to Muromachi Japanese. The distinct ontological and sacred space resonances of Chinese Penglai and Japanese Tokoyo should be considered when analysing *Yōkihi*'s dramatic action, especially the potential for female enlightenment in both non-Buddhist sites.

The Daoist wizard's *michiyuki* provides more crucial information via an allusion to the "Kiritsubo" chapter of *Genji*. The line "If only there were a wizard who could go and inquire" (Itō 1988, 406) intoned during his *michiyuki* is a direct allusion to "Kiritsubo" from *Genji*. This poem is spoken by the Kiritsubo Emperor while in deep mourning for his recently deceased love, the Kiritsubo Intimate:

たづねゆくまぼろしもがなつてにても魂のありかをそこと知るべく

tazune yuku
maboroshi mo ga na
tsute nite mo
tama no arika o
soko to shiru beku

If only there were
a wizard who could
go and inquire of
the whereabouts of her soul,
so that I may know that it is there.
(Abe et al. 1970, 104; Author's transl.)

This poem implicitly refers to *Changhenge* as the Kiritsubo Emperor is directly viewing screen paintings illustrating scenes from Bai's poem at this point in the chapter. The *Changhenge* screen paintings (*byōbu-e* 屏風絵) cited in "Kiritsubo" were commissioned by Emperor Uda 宇多天皇 (867-931, r. 887-897) and documented in the personal collection of early Heian poet Ise 伊勢, who composed a series of poems with these screens as subject (Inukai et al. 1994, 18-19). In this scene from "Kiritsubo", the Kiritsubo Emperor is viewing Uda's screens, reciting Chinese verse (presumably *Changhenge*) and also Ise's poems, obsessing "only on that theme, of which he spoke of day and night" (Abe et al. 1970, 104).

Like Xuanzong, who sends the wizard to Penglai to bring back Yang's hairpin, the Kiritsubo Emperor sends a lady-in-waiting on a journey, this time to the home of the Kiritsubo Intimate's mother. She also returns with a hairpin and a letter with information about his son, Hikaru Genji. He composes the above poem holding his former love's hairpin, almost playacting as Xuanzong while gazing at the screens depicting Yang, seeing the lotus blossoms of Taieki Lake and the willows of Biau in her features (Abe et al. 1970, 111) drawing a direct connection between his sorrow and the imagery of *Changhenge* (Owen 1996, 445). This first section of the chapter concludes with dramatic emphasis directly from the final lines of Bai's poem:

Day and night, he had said that they would fly side by side as two birds who share a pair of wings or be as two trees with branches intertwined, so now the unfulfilled life was full of inextinguishable regret. (Abe et al. 1970, 111; Author's transl.)

This assimilation of *Changhenge* into Heian literature and the *Genji* specifically is critical for understanding the symbiosis of Bai's work with Shikibu's by the Muromachi period. When *Yōkihi* was originally performed, it may have been more closely identified with the *Genji* mythos and the Heian poetic than the Chinese Tang. This is further confirmed by additional allusive variation to *Genji* throughout the play, such as frequent citation of the "Yūgao" 夕顔 (Evening Face) chapter with its meditations on sorrowful memory as intrinsic to the poetic construction of *Yōkihi* (Matsuoka 2005, 100). This deeply overlaid image of *Genji* within *Yōkihi* illustrates that the play has two primary *honzetsu*: the mythos of *Changhenge* and of *Genji*. As will be explored further, the dynamics of karmic suffering within *rokudō* is the focus of *Yōkihi* rather than the tragic transcendental romance of *Changhenge*.

It has been observed that among Zenchiku's plays, *Yōkihi* creates an atmosphere of complete isolation and focuses on the stasis of the *shite* (Atkins 2006, 174). While the play *Yōkihi* takes poetic cues from the original Bai's poem and the *Genji*, drawing heavily from the *Genji*'s broader theme concerning female karmic suffering due to love relationships and social status. This is emphasised in the following:

[ageuta] SHITE Even so within the world,
even so within the world,
where the practice of transmigration through birth and death,
as so while that body remained at Bagai,
the spirit has arrived at the Immortal's Palace.
The bird that flies on shared wing longs for her partner,
and lies alone on one wing.
The trees with entwined branches also wither,
immediately their colour also changes.
(Itō 1988, 410; Author's transl.)

In this passage is an allusive variation on *Changhenge*'s famous "birds that fly on shared wing" poetic image. However, in *Yōkihi*, the karmic sin of attachment appears to break this transcendental vow, replacing it with a solitary, loveless bird on one wing and withered branches (Itō 1988, 410).

The line detailing entwined branches is allusive variation on Bai's line of "may we become branches that twine together" and is of special significance to the Yang spirit's soteriological status, as it refer-

ences the *shorea robusta* trees (Jp. *sara sōju* 沙羅双樹) that withered and turned white upon the death of the historical Buddha, Siddārtha Guatama (Ch. *Shijiamouni*, Jp. *Shakamuni* 釈迦牟尼; Itō 1988, 410, headnote 4). It is uncertain if *Yōkihi* is referring to the Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa* (Ch. *niepan*, Jp. *nehan* 涅槃, 'extinction: the cessation of suffering'; Nakamura et al. 1989, 647) to indicate enlightenment potentiality for Yang's spirit in Penglai/Tokoyo. However, given the work's overall poetically melancholy tone, this image may be an allusion to the sadness and loss felt upon the Buddha passing, exemplified by even plants turning white to express their mourning. Here, the image of dying vegetation serves as the first Buddhist sign of decay in *Yōkihi* and underscores Yang desolate mourning. In fact, Yang's spirit seems acutely aware of *rokudō* and the inevitability of suffering through endless transmigration:

[*kuri*] CHORUS Transmigration continues eternally,
still birth and death have no end,
SHITE Whereas among the Twenty-Five Stages of Existence,
inevitably there may be no escape from the law
that all who are born must die?
CHORUS First, from the Five Signs of Decay of a Celestial Being,
to the longevity of those residing on the Four Continents
around Mount Shumi:
people of the Northern Continent who live a thousand years,
in the end will be decayed.
SHITE Not to speak of not knowing when one may die,
CHORUS Is this not lament upon lament?
(Itō 1988, 411, Author's transl.)

In this passage, the Yang spirit (voiced simultaneously by *shite* and chorus) invokes the inevitability of endless transmigration (Itō 1988, 411) emphasizing that *all* sentient beings dwelling within the Twenty-Five Stages of Existence (Skt. *pañca-viṃśati-bhava*, Ch. *ershīwu you*, Jp. *nijūgōu* 二十五有)¹⁰ are bound to Buddhist Law of Mortality (Ch. *Shengzhe bi mie*, Jp. *Shōja hitsumetu* 生者必滅; Itō 1988, 411)

Yang may be referring to herself, which is clarified as she references the Five Signs of Decay of a Celestial Being (Ch. *tianshang wushuai*, Jp. *tenjō no gosui* 天上五衰). This is *Yōkihi's* second Buddhist sign of decay: the symptoms when a celestial being (*tenjō*) is approaching death: their flower-crown falling from above their head, heavenly robes becoming filthy, sweating from the armpits, eyes

¹⁰ Three realms of existences that are sub-divided into twenty-five realms where all sentient beings will transmigrate (Itō 1988, 411, headnote 15).

suddenly spinning, and finally, being unable to return to their heavenly realm (Nakamura et al. 1989, 275). She concludes that across the cosmos, from celestial beings in heavens to the denizens of far-away Mount Shumi and the Northern Continent, all will eventually die (Chudnow 2017, 113-14).¹¹ These Buddhological references on mortality and ephemerality further define the Yang spirit as far removed from *Changhenge's* divine goddess and closer to the *honji suijaku* worries of medieval women, positioning these issues central to the play's dramatic action.

This is due to the *honji suijaku* problem of rebirth and karmic clinging, as is revealed in the next passage:

[kuse] CHORUS At that time, I also was a celestial being,
yet because of a karmic bond, I was temporarily born into the
human realm, and was raised in the inner chambers of the Yō
clan. (Itō 1988, 412, Author's transl.)

This passage leads the play's *kuse* section. The *kuse* narrative style was pioneered by medieval female *kusemai* 曲舞 performers whose distinctive vocal style was adopted by *nō*. Performed by the chorus (*ji* 地), the *kuse* is typically where the *shite* reveals their inner psychology and karmic conflict. In *Yōkihi*, Yang reveals the root of her karmic suffering: an undefined karmic bond from a prior existence. She is reborn into the human realm from a celestial existence, with the chain of events involving her relationship with the Tang Emperor resulting in the female-gendered karmic sin of attachment. Paul Atkins has noted that Yang's status as a celestial being was first delineated by *nō* scholar Wang Donglan who cites the medieval Japanese *kanbun* text *Chōgonka jo* 長恨歌序 (Preface to the Song of Everlasting Sorrow), which uses language referencing karma, and Yang celestial origin and rebirth in the human realm that appears in *Yōkihi* (Wang 1994, 15-16; Atkins 2006, 171). This utilisation of native Japanese reinterpretations of the Yang mythos is corroborated by Itō Masayoshi, who notes texts such as *Chōgonka den* 長恨歌伝 (also cited by Wang 1994) along with *Genji*, as major sources for *Yōkihi* (Itō 1988, 411). These native-Japanese *honzetsu* share the concept of Yang as celestial being of divine origin and ontological status suffering from karmic clinging, which complements the socio-religious thematic within the *honzetsu* of *Genji*. Therefore, *Yōkihi's* Yang spirit

¹¹ Both mysterious locations cited in the late-Muromachi dictionary *Ikyōshū* 伊京集: Mount Shumi (Skt. *Sumeru* or *Mahāmeru*, Ch. *Xumishan*, Jp. *Shumisen* 須弥山) is surrounded by Four Continents at the cardinal directions and its citizens live to five hundred. People of its satellite Northern Continent (Skt. *Uttarakuru-dvīpa*, Ch. *Beijulu-zhou*, Jp. *Hokkuru-shū* 北俱盧洲) live to one thousand (Itō 1998, 411, headnote 17).

is highly complex, as she appears aware of her past and current ontological and soteriological statuses while also struggling with concepts of mortality and suffering from the karmic sin of attachment within a heaven-like realm.

Following the *shite*'s slow *jo no mae* (a dance piece typical of Third Category plays), the focus on Buddhist decay and ephemerality is transformed to outright sorrow and mourning with the drama's closing lines:

[*nori ji*] CHORUS As for my Lord, I shall never meet him again in the world...
although drifting in an ephemeral world,
how I long for the past, and our fleeting parting.
The goddess sinks down to the floor of the Palace of Tokoyo,
to remain. (Itō 1988, 412; Author's transl.)

These closing lines ground the Yang spirit in the hybrid supernatural realm of Penglai/Tokoyo, where she continues to endure the karmic suffering of attachment. Also of interest is the line, "As for my Lord, I shall never meet him again in the world...", indicating that the transcendental romance achieved in *Changhenge* is not only impossible but further meetings through rebirth may be unrealised. Instead, her attachment and clinging to Xuanzong seems to have bound her to the sacred space of Penglai/Tokoyo. But what of the ascetic wizard who has visited her? Why is he unable to provide aid? The answers may be within the play's rhetorical and dramaturgic structure.

While *Yōkihi*'s thematics and its Yang persona align with the *mugen nō*, the work fundamentally lacks important structural divisions typical of the genre. As previously noted, this is typified by the following: two overall parts of dramatic action, further subdivided into five *dan* of dramatic action, accentuated by a change of costume and persona for the *shite* on their re-emergence in Part II.¹² *Yōkihi* does not feature this costume or identity transformation for *shite*; rather the Yang persona manifests at Penglai to the *waki* in her true form throughout the entire dramatic action. Additionally, despite occurrence within the supernatural sacred space of Penglai/Tokoyo, the play's dramatic action occurs in linear progress, i.e., 'real time'. While this aligns *Yōkihi* closer to the dramaturgic operation of *genzai* 現在 *nō*, dramatic action grounded in linear time, categorising the play as purely in the *genzai* dramatic mode is problematic. This is due to major thematic and dramaturgical differences between works classified as *genzai nō* and *Yōkihi*. For example, plays considered as *genzai nō* focus on familial and sociological conflicts pertinent to Muromachi society located in the real world, rather than the super-

¹² Again, refer to the *mugen nō* structure chart (Quinn 2005, 131).

natural or mythical. The genre's masterwork may be the Fourth Category (*yonbanme-mono* 四番組物, Miscellaneous Piece) play *Sumidagawa* 隅田川 (Sumida River) by Zeami's son Kanze Motomasa 観世元雅 (1394-1401), depicting a mother driven mad with grief searching for her abducted child. With grief and mourning are also major themes of Motomasa's work, the poetic axis centres on mother-child love, with Pure Land Buddhism used as ritual means of assuaging a mother's grief and enacting a child's enlightenment.

This is sharply contrasted in *Yōkihi*, where the Yang persona appears static in karmic clinging while marked by signs of Buddhological decay. However, the play is also missing a critical rhetorical and religious element common to other female-spirit *mugen nō*. This is the *shite*'s request for enlightenment and the ascetic *waki*'s later performance of religious rites for her. These passages are usually located following the *kuse* passage in *Dan* 4 at the conclusion of Part I (*shite*'s request) and the beginning of *Dan* 5 to start Part II (*waki* intones *kuyō* 供養, funerary or memorial services). These passages are missing from *Yōkihi* when cross-referenced with other Zenchiku-attributed *Genji*-based female-spirit *mugen* works such as *Tamakazura* 玉鬘 (The Jewelled Chaplet) and *Nonomiya* 野宮 (The Shrine of the Fields), or even Zeami-attributed female-spirit *mugen nō*.¹³ In these plays, the *shite* directly requests the *waki* to hold a memorial service for their true form (hinted at throughout Part I). The *waki* then frequently utilises the verbal *tomurafu* 弔ふ (to hold a memorial service), the consonant alternate form of *toburafu* (訪ふ/弔ふ; Ōno et al. 2002, 951) to indicate that proper religious rites have been performed. Use of the specific character 弔ふ to write the phrase is also typically employed in *mugen nō* and is explicitly defined as holding *kuyō* to pacify and commemorate the dead (Ōno et al. 2002, 947-8). This reoccurring textual example of providing funerary services for the spirit's enlightenment embedded within the dramaturgic fabric of the plays indicates the intrinsic *honji suijaku* role of the *waki* as ascetic involved in pacification of karmically troubled spirits. This ritual interaction between spirit *shite* and ascetic *waki* is noticeably lacking in *Yōkihi*. Instead, these two interactions are replaced by the following lines in the same textual positions. Rather than the *shite*'s request for enlightenment, there follows:

[*mondō*] SHITE Truly it is as you have said, my body is fragile as dew,
although it seems his August love had you search so far,
this visit is painful, like chrysanthemums that wither when
scattered,
how I resent the wind that may bring news of my love!

¹³ This includes plays such as *Izutsu* 井筒 (The Well Curb) and *Matsukaze* 松風 (Pining Wind).

Yet even still, I cry tears of longing,
my spirit disappears as I remember my past life in the human realm.
WAKI I must return quickly and report to the Emperor,
with that being the case, may you grant me an August memento
[to return with]? (Itō 1988, 408-9, Author's transl.)

This exchange details two critical points. First, the Yang spirit appears extremely bound by the karmic sin of clinging. With her “body is fragile as dew”, an ephemeral poetic image that is allusive variation to an Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部 (976-1030) poem that describes the female body both dew and tears (Itō 1988, 409, headnote 13). Usage of this type of imagery was common in Heian women’s poetry to describe the insubstantial nature of romantic relationships and their emotional impacts. Additionally, the Yang spirit describes that the *waki*’s visit causes great pain due to causing reminiscences of her former life, even to the point of her own annihilation. Here she again avails upon the imagery of withering foliage, a poetic theme in *Yōkihi* that sharpens its soteriological focuses. Rather than providing enlightenment potentiality, the *waki* is only causing additional karmic pain. Finally, the *waki* himself is only tasked with information gathering: “report to the Emperor” (*sōmon* 奏聞) is the unique phrase. This strictly follows the role of the wizard in the play’s *honzetsu*, regardless of origin. Furthermore, the *waki* never performs any religious rites for the Yang spirit. He announces his departure thusly:

[*rongi*] WAKI I must say farewell and depart,
and still would feel happiness to bring you with me.
SHITE I likewise have grown so thin with longing,
as you see my sash is wrapped three-fold around my waist,¹⁴
As I do not know if we shall meet again in this body,
if it is permissible, wait a moment,
and I shall perform the evening’s entertainments of those
past days. (Itō 1988, 410, Author’s transl.)

It is important to note that the *waki* used no Buddhist language for memorial rituals, as discussed above, although he appears moved by the *shite*’s sorrow. Furthermore, the Yang spirit delays the wizard on his mantic journey back to the human realm by desiring to

¹⁴ Allusive variation to *Manyōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, compiled approx. 759), poem no. 13, describing becoming so thin due to stress over love that the author can wrap their belt or sash (*obi* 帯) around their waist three times (Itō 1988, 410, headnote 7).

recreate the evening's entertainments (*gayū* 夜遊) from her time as Xuanzong's consort. This is manifested by her dance of the "Song of Rainbow Skirts and Feathered Vestments" as a slow *jo no mae*, the main dance piece closing the play.

This lack of these specific female-spirit *mugen nō* rhetorical and dramatic hallmarks, replaced by passages highlighting karmic clinging, may be critical in explaining why the *waki* of *Yōkihi* is unable to facilitate enlightenment to the *shite* despite his ascetic nature. Another possibility may be the multiple *honzetsu* of the play:

1. The *waki* is a wizard in the Chinese Daoist/Five Elements tradition, which may be identified with Ying-Yang divination (*onmyōdō*) in medieval Japan. While a powerful ascetic in his own tradition, Buddhist enlightenment may have been beyond his spiritual abilities.
2. In all the *honzetsu* for *Yōkihi* examined in this study, Xuanzong tasks the wizard to find evidence of Yang's existence and report back. Her soteriological status and suffering in Penglai/Tokoyo only appears to be a thematic concern in *Yōkihi*.

These unique quirks of the text may delineate why the Yang persona is denied enlightenment: her hybrid Daoist/kami worship sacred space lacks the dharmic power required, she does not request or receive the proper ritual means, and her attachment remains too great.

4 Conclusion: Inability to Transmigrate or Incomplete Ritual Process?

Zenchiku's play *Yōkihi* closes with intense focus on the soteriological suffering experienced by the *shite*. This stands in direct opposition to Luo's interpretation of Yang's reincarnation as a goddess in Bai's conception of Penglai, which creates a transcendental romance levelling the social and spiritual hierarchies of Tang China. As we have seen, delineating the layers of *honzetsu* in *Yōkihi* places intense focus on Japanese issues such as transmigration and the aesthetic of longing. Also of crucial interest is hybrid Penglai/Tokoyo local and its associated sacred space, along with the role of Daoist wizard as *waki*. As detailed above, the Yang persona seems trapped by the female-gendered sin of karmic attachment, with the combinatory Chinese/Japanese space of Penglai/Tokoyo functioning more as a netherworld than a heaven realm, making enlightenment problematic. Finally, the Daoist wizard *waki* does not possess the Buddhist knowledge to offer her soteriological aid despite his powerful ascetic ability (Chudnow 2017, 117). Furthermore, he was only tasked by the Tang Emperor with bringing back evidence of her existence, not with releasing her karmic constituents into the void of enlightenment.

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