A Study of Japanese Kansi in the Early Heian Period

In the early Heian period, Chinese poems were widely seen in the public literature of the imperial court of Japan. In the first half of the 9th century, “The Ryōunsyū” (814), “The Bunka Shūreišū” (818), and “Keikokushū (827)” were compiled under the command of Emperors Saga (786 – 842) and Junna (786 – 840), which are known as the earliest imperially commissioned anthologies about Japan. Then, in the latter half of the 9th century, Mitizane Sugawara, Dataomi Simada, and others showed up, and their poems reflected that the techniques of Chinese poetry in Japan came to maturity. Many researchers believe that Chinese poems of those times especially Bai Juyi’s masterpieces, have had a significant influence on the Japanese Kansi in the early Heian period. On the other hand, the aspects of Japanese Kansi which have not been influenced by Chinese Kansi and are very much unique to Japanese Kansi have not been paid enough attention to. More research should be done on the possibility of these new forms of Japanese Kansi that are independent of influences of the Chinese poetry.

This study systematically investigates the subjects based on “forms”, “phoneme”, and “content” which are the three vital components for poems. This study also investigates those aspects which have not drawn much attention of the researchers. Below is the brief explanation of the chapters.

In the introduction, previous researches on Japanese Kansi in the early Heian period are reviewed, and the objective, methodology and structure of this thesis are given.

In the first chapter, based on the forms of poems, I will focus on the couplets expressions which are the most prominent rhetorical features in Chinese poems, and consider the subjects of ‘Ryūsuitui’ and ‘kakkutui’ which have not received much attention before.

In the first section ‘Ryūsuitui’, I wish to define ‘Ryūsuitui’ and throw light on its meaning in the historical context. And then, build upon the historical development of ‘Ryūsuitui in the Japanese Kansi of the early Heian period. Further, investigate the possibility of independent and unique form of ‘Ryūsuitui among the Japanese Kansi developed in the early Heian period.

In the second section, By analyzing how the forms of ‘kattutui’ were used and have changed in Japanese Kansi from the first half to the latter half of ninth century, I wish to bring to light the Japanese Kansi poets who learned the Chinese Kansi poetics by being in Japan’s Kansi literary environment and evolved independently and created unique Japanese Kansi literature.

In the second chapter, I will focus on the problems related to the rhyming of Jiinn poems based the perspective of “phoneme”. I will investigate the appearance and evolution of the structure of Jiinn
poems in relation to Chinese literary scenario and under Japan’s Kansi literary and political environment.

In the first section through the perspective of mechanism of appearance of Jiinn poems, I wish to bring to light the existence of literary background that emphasized on “rhythm” and “座” in Japanese poetry from Pre-Heian era. I further wish to discuss the possibility of appearance of Jiinn poems on its own under Japan’s Kansi literary environment without direct influence of Chinese Kansi literature.

In the second section ‘the Development of ‘Jiinn poems’, I wish to research on Jiinn poems recorded in the compilations of Mitizane Sugawa and the three great imperially commissioned anthologies and throw light on the rapid increase of Jiinn poems during the second half of the 9th century as compared to the first half of the 9th century. I further wish to explore the great influence of Bai Juyi on the Japanese Kansi in the latter half of ninth century. I will also investigate whether the Jiinn poems of the first half of the ninth century were established under the Japanese Kansi literary environment.

In the third section ‘ From buninsi to ‘Jiinn poems’, I wish to focus on the changes from Buninshi to Jiinshi poetic forms of Kansi poems composed during the exchanges between Japanese diplomats, Siragi and Bokkai evoys during the Nara and early Heian periods. I will investigate the relationship between these developments and the changes in China’s Kansi literary scenario and also with Japan’s diplomatic environment.

In the Supplementary section, I will include annotation of ‘Jiinn poems’ that Japanese poets sent to Bokkai’s envoys, to show the specific form of ‘Jiinn poems’.

In the third chapter, based on the ‘contents’ of poems, I will take cues from the problems in Chinese Poems and Historical Matters and Interpretation of History and clarify the political meaning of kansi literature of early Heain period, and at the same time, find out the direction of traditional Japanese literature running parallel at that time.

In the first section ‘Analysis of Chinese Poems Historical Matters in the Early Heian Period’, I will focus on the subjects of Chinese poems on historical matters, composed at the banquets (held for the interpretation of official Chinese historical works).

At the same time, I will explore the underlying motives of the union between religion and politics through these poems which were composed at the banquets. I also wish to throw light on the development of the notion from the early ninth century to the latter half of the ninth century, that learning of the Chinese literature was indispensable to governing the country as put forth in the Bonjokeikoku.

In the second section ‘Interpretations of Nihongi in the Early Heian Period —There are various factors that reflect in the meaning and nature of the lectures in Nihongi and official Chinese
Historical works. I will explore the trend of these developments by comparing and contrasting the characteristics of these literary works by focusing on the settings of these banquets which differ significantly in terms of attendees, venue and end of these lectures.

In the final chapter, this study will arrive at the conclusion that: While Chinese Poems of Japan in the Early Heian Period were heavily influenced by Chinese literature, it still showed many original developments in ‘forms’ ‘phoneme’ and ‘content’, which suggests the individualism and uniqueness of Japanese Kansi.