

王昭君説話について

M・C・ミリオーレ

Some Notes on Ō Shōkun Legend*

Maria Chiara Migliore

The story of Wang Zhaojun (王昭君, known in Japan as Ō Shōkun), is one of the most popular within the whole repertory of Chinese legends and has been the theme of countless poems, plays and pictures since the Han period. From China this story came to Japan, and was used first in the poetic production in Chinese, then in Japanese poetry and prose.

In this article, I will trace briefly the development of Wang Zhaojun's story in China and in Japan, in order to fix the major themes proper to the legend, and then I will examine two Japanese *setsuwa* versions that, compared to the Chinese legend, seem to take in some

* This article is partially based upon the text of a paper given at the 10th EAJS International Conference, Warsaw 2003, and represents the line out of a wider research project still in progress. I wish to thank the Japan Foundation for having granted to me a three month Japan Foundation Fellowship, during which I could bring up my researches in Japan. I am grateful also to the Gogaku Kyōiku kenkyūjo of Daitō bunka University, who kindly accepted me as host researcher and who gave me the opportunity to publish my work in its review.

innovative traits.

The first notice we have of Wang Zhaojun is contained in the *Hanshu*, Annals of Yuandi (漢書元帝紀): in the first year of Jingning era (33 b.C.), the khan of Xiongnu, the *chanyu* Huhanye, visited the imperial court to pay homage to the emperor, and in that occasion Yuandi bestowed him a wife called Wang Qian.¹ Again, in the book on Xiongnu (漢書匈奴傳) it is written that Yuandi bestowed to Huhanye one of the young ladies of the court named Wang Qian, also called Zhaojun. The *chanyu* was so delighted by this honour, that he promised to ensure peace on the Chinese borders of the north-western territories, from Shanggu to Dunhuang.²

It is clear that this record deals with the political attempt by the Chinese empire to ensure peace on northern territories, following the practice of *heqin* (和親、Jap. *washin*, peace and amity): all we know about Wang Zhaojun in the *Han shu* is her name. However, already in the *Hou Hanshu* (後漢書南匈奴列傳), her story develops and takes on a literary character. When the *chanyu* arrived at court, Wang Zhaojun had been a court lady already for several years, but she never had the chance to meet with the emperor. Afflicted by his indifference, she expressed the desire to leave the court and become the *chanyu's* wife. Seeing that Wang Zhaojun was charming and refined, the emperor regretted to let her go, but he had given his word, and she left. She gave birth to two sons, but when Huhanye passed away, she did not want to become the wife of the next *chanyu*, one of the sons Huhanye had with another wife, and wrote a letter to the emperor asking the permission to return to China. The emperor, who was at this time Chendi, ordered her to follow the Xiongnu usage, and finally she

¹ *Hanshu, Yuandi ji*, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1962, p. 297.

² *Hanshu, Xiongnu zhuan*, cit., p. 3803.

became the wife of the new *chanyu*.³

The story of Wang Zhaojun entered literature as early as the first century, as we will see below, and developed following two literary traditions: the heroic and the tragic one, not necessarily separated from each other. The first elaboration of the story contributed in particular to establish one of the main interpretations of Wang Zhaojun, considered a heroine and a patriot by the following Chinese dynasties, and even in modern China. As recently as the 1950s, in a modern play by Cao Yu, she is depicted as a symbol of willing personal sacrifice for the purpose of national service and international relations.⁴

The earliest version of Wang Zhaojun's legend is in the *Qincao* (琴操, *Songs for Qin Music*), ascribed to Cai Yong (133-192), which stresses the voluntary choice of Wang Zhaojun to go to the land of the Xiongnu because she had never obtained the emperor's favour, and adds the literary theme of the young, beautiful lady travelling towards an unknown and barbarian land. She had a son who, after the death of Houhanye, ordered her to marry him - this detail increases even more the tragic character of Zhaojun story - and therefore she killed herself with poison. Even if in the land of the Xiongnu the grass is white, the grass on her grave mound is eternally

³ *Hou Hanshu, Nan Xiongnu liezhuan*, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1989, p. 2941.

⁴ For an extensive study of the Chinese sources of the legend, see Kwong Hing Foon, *Wang Zhaojun. Une héroïne chinoise de l'histoire à la légende*, Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes chinoises, 1986. See also Iida Miyokichirō, "Kan Gi Rikuchō no joshi bungaku", *Teikoku bungaku* 1, 3 (1901), pp. 43-56.

green.⁵

The same interpretation of Wang Zhaojun's story is in a *yuefu* by Shi Chong (249-300) entitled *Wang Mingjun ci* (王明君詞, *The Ballade of Wang Mingjun*), contained in the *Wen xuan*. In his song, which is the most representative work of his poetic production, Shi Chong introduces the element of the *pipa* (the lute). While travelling toward the Xiongnu land, Wang Zhaojun tried to relieve her sorrow playing the *pipa*.⁶ This remains the most famous of her portraits, and is also the most exploited in Chinese (and Japanese) poetic tradition, which developed above all the tragic destiny of Wang Zhaojun, forced to leave her home and parents to spend a miserable life in an uncivilised barbarian land, her beauty and refined manners wasted for a husband unable to appreciate them.⁷

As for Chinese prose, the first occurrence of Zhaojun's legend is in the *Xijing zaji* (西京雜記, *Miscellanea from the Western Capital*), composed probably in the IV century by an unknown author. Here we find a new element, comparing to the sources we have already analysed: the portrait. Wang Zhaojun was a Lady at service at Court in the time of emperor Yuan of the Han. Since the emperor had too many Palace ladies, he could not meet them all, so he made the court painters make a portrait of them, in order for him to choose the lady he liked. Then, all the ladies bribed the

⁵ Cai Yong, *Qincao*, Taipei, Yiwen yinshuguan, 1967.

⁶ See the Shinsho kanbun taikei edition, vol. 19, pp. 108-112. Mingjun is the alternative name for Zhaojun.

⁷ See also Kawaguchi Hisao, *Tonkō yori no kaze – 2 Tonkō to Nihon no setsuwa*, Tokyo, Meiji shoin, 1999, pp. 154-192, for an analyse of the Dunhuang manuscript number 2553 of the Pelliot collection, Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, containing a version of the legend.

painters so that they would paint as beauties, but Zhaojun, who was the most beautiful, refused to do so. The painter, out of spite, depicted her as an ugly woman, so that she would never meet the emperor. When the khan of Xiongnu arrived at court asking for a wife to become his queen, Yuangdi, after an examination of the portraits, selected no one else but Wang Zhaojun. However, when the day of the departure came, he saw that she was beautiful and superior to any other lady of the Palace. He did not want her to leave, but he had no choice since he had given his word. However, he punished all the painters, by executing them and confiscating all their properties.⁸

This version of the legend appears also in the *Diaoyuji* (瑠玉集, *Collection of Polished Jades*), a collection of stories on famous historical or legendary characters. The text has been lost in China, but there is a manuscript copy, albeit only of books 12 and 14, in Nagoya Shinpukuji, dated to 747. The story of Wang Zhaojun is in book 14, which has “Meiren” (Beauties) as subject, and follows the same model as *Xijing zaji* but with no mention of the punishment of the painters.⁹

The sources I have been relating here, even if few are however representative for the further development of Wang Zhaojun story in Chinese literature. They are responsible also for the development of her literary character in Japanese works. Of course, these sources, and many others, were all well known in Japan, as we can see in the *Nihon koku*

⁸ Fukui Shigemasa, ed., *Yakuchū Seikei zakki, Dokudan*, Tokyo, Tōhō shoten, 2000, pp. 47-49.

⁹ Yanase Kiyoshi, ed., *Chōgyokushū chūshaku*, Tokyo, Kyūko shoin, 1985.

genzaisho mokuroku (891 ca.),¹⁰ and where used as literary models by the Japanese élite in the composition of Chinese poetry (*kanshi*). The first occurrence of the story of Ō Shōkun in Japan is to be found in a poem in Chinese by Shigeno no Sadanushi (785-852), collected in *Ryōunshū* (凌雲集, *Collection of Poems Surpassing the Clouds*), in which the poet sings the lady's sorrow and her vain attempt of consolation through the melody of her lute. We also have five poems in the *yuefu* style collected in *Bunka shūreishū* (文華秀麗集, *Collection of Flowering Literary Elegance*), and one poem in *Keikokushū* (經国集, *Collection for Ruling the Country*) by Ono no Suetsugu (first half of IX century), composed in occasion of his examination for the Monjoshō.¹¹ The practice of composing poetry on the subject of 'Ō Shōkun' continued also in the *Wakan rōeishū* (和漢朗詠集, *Anthology of Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing*) and in the *Shinsen rōeishū* (新撰朗詠集, *New Selection of Poems to Sing*), establishing a model also for *waka* collections.¹²

Analysing the Japanese poetic production in Chinese, we find that

¹⁰ Yajima Genryō, ed., *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku – shūshō to kenkyū*, Tokyo, Kyūko shoin, 1984.

¹¹ For the poems in *Ryōunshū* and *Keikokushū* see Kojima Noriyuki, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku*, Tokyo, Hanawa shobō, vol. 3 (1979), pp. 1791-1796 and vol. 8 (1999), pp. 3821-3833, respectively. For the *Bunka shūreishū* poems see the Nihon koten bungaku taikei edition, pp. 251-254.

¹² See the Nihon koten bungaku taikei edition for the *Wakan rōeishū* (verses no. 698-705) and the Koten bunko edition for the *Shinsen rōeishū* (verses no. 910-917). For a study on the relation between Chinese sources and *rōeij*, see Tanaka Mikiko, "Kanshi, rōeij no denshō to Ō Shōkun setsuwa", in Manabe Masahiro, Kamioka Yūji, Mashimo Atsushi, eds., *Kōza Nihon no denshō bungaku*, 2, Tokyo, Miyai shoten, 1995, pp. 335-359.

Ō Shōkun is always depicted during her journey to the land of the Xiongnu, playing or listening to the *biwa*. Of course, the theme of the journey was already a well known and privileged poetic theme in Japanese poetry. Moreover, poetry has always been considered a 'formal' genre, based on tradition more than on creativity. This is the reason why it would be hard to find any originality or new literary motifs in Japanese *kanshi*. Interestingly, this same characteristic is shared also by *waka* production, which seems to have accepted the poetic theme of Ō Shōkun taking as models the Japanese production in Chinese, and which seems to be a mere transposition in Japanese language of poetic themes already developed in *kanshi*. Indeed, the first examples we have are three *waka* collected in the *Goshūi waka shū* (後拾遺集, *Second Anthology Collecting Dropped Poems*) composed after 1086, under the title 'Ō Shōkun wo yomeru'.¹³ The sources for these *waka*, which sing the hardship of traveling and the sadness of her life in a foreign land, are the *Wakan rōeishū* and the *Shinsen rōeishū*.¹⁴ All the following *waka* collections continue on the same trend, keeping the tradition of the *ruidaiishū*, up to the collection entitled *Kankoji wakashū*, composed in the Muromachi period.¹⁵

As for Japanese prose works, Wang Zhaojun's story is to be found

¹³ See the Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai edition, pp. 328 (poems 1015 to 1018).

¹⁴ For a complete analysis of the *waka* on Ō Shōkun, see Mimura Terunori, "Kankojidai waka kara mita chūsei ruidaiishū no keifu", in Wakan hikaku bungakukai, ed., *Kokinshū to kanbungaku*, Tokyo, Kyūko shoin, 1992, pp. 67-82. See also Matsuo Shigeru, "Nihon ni araharetaru Ō Shōkun", *Kokugakuin zasshi* 17,11 (1911), pp. 67-74.

¹⁵ In Ikeda Toshio, *Nicchū hikaku bungaku no kiso kenkyū*, Kasama shoin, 1974, pp. 347-375.

in the *Utsuho monogatari* (うつほ物語, *The Tale of the Hollow Tree*),¹⁶ in the *Genji monogatari* (源氏物語, *The Tale of Genji*)¹⁷, the *Toshiyori zuinō* (俊頼随脳, *Toshiyori's Poetics*),¹⁸ the *Konjaku monogatari* (今昔物語, *Tales of Times Now Past*),¹⁹ the *Kara monogatari* (唐物語, *Tales of China*)²⁰ and the Enkyō book of the *Heike monogatari*, (平家物語, *The Tale of the Heike*).²¹ These works give a Japanese rendering of the story stressing, as in *kanshi* and *waka* traditions, the tragic destiny of Wang Zhaojun. The same characteristic is shared also by the *Hyakuei waka* (百詠和歌, *Waka for One Hundred Songs*), written in 1204 by Minamoto no Mitsuyuki (1163-1244), who served at the Kamakura Bakufu. This work is a Japanese re-writing of a Chinese text, the *Bai ershi yong*, a textbook of the Tang period arrived in Japan at the end of Nara. The *Hyakuei waka* was probably

¹⁶ Nihon koten bungaku taikei edition, vol. 11, pp. 201-204. For Ō Shōkun's legend in the the *Utsuho monogatari* see Okazaki Makiko, "Heianchō ni okeru Ō Shōkun setsuwa no tenkai", *Seijō kokubungaku* 11 (1995), pp. 37-60 and Uehara Sakukazu, *Hikaru Genji monogatari no shisōshiteki henbō: 'biwa' no yukue*, Tokyo, Yūseidō, 1994, pp. 23-50. See also See Tochio Takeshi, "Chūgoku setsuwa – Ō Shōkun setsuwa ni tsuite", *Toritsu ronkyū* 6 (1967), pp. 25-35.

¹⁷ Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei edition, vol. 20, p. 38. See Saeki Masako, "Genji monogatari ni okeru Heian kanshibun", in Wakan hikaku bungakukai and Chūnichi hikaku bungakukai, eds. *Shinseiki no Nitchū bungaku kankei – sono kaiko to denpō*, Tokyo, Bensei shuppan, 2003, pp. 187-200.

¹⁸ Nihon koten bungaku zenshū edition, pp. 237-240.

¹⁹ Nihon koten bungaku taikei edition, vol. 23, pp. 279-280.

²⁰ Kobayashi Yasuharu (ed.), *Kara monogatari zenshaku*, Tokyo, Kasama shoin, 1998, pp. 272-281.

²¹ Takayama Toshihiro, ed., *Kōtei Enkyōbon Heike monogatari*, vol. 2, Tokyo, Kyūko shoin, 2001, pp. 131-132.

written to furnish a set of textbooks for the teaching of Chinese language and civilisation to the sons of Kamakura bureaucratic élite. The story of Ō Shōkun is to be found in the section “Music”, “Biwa” entry, and contains the elements present in the *Zijing zaji*, comprised, of course, the part related to the *biwa*, played by Ō Shōkun while travelling riding a horse.²²

The version most faithful to the *Xijing zaji* story is to be found in the *Kara kagami* (唐鏡, *The Mirror of China*), a rewriting in Japanese of Chinese historical sources, written probably in 1297 by Fujiwara no Shigenori (born in 1236, *shukke* in 1294). The story, clearly based on the model of the *Zijing zaji*, runs as always and contains also the part related to the punishment of the painters.²³

All the sources I examined in so far give us the same interpretation of the story, with the only exception of the *Soga monogatari* (曾我物語, XIV century). The story is as follows.

“Long ago, Empress Wang Zhaojun of the Han Dynasty was taken by the barbarians of the north and sent to their land. She could not bear the sadness of separation. So intense was her grief that she made a pledge to her husband: “Have my image depicted on your quilt and lie on it, and I shall come in your dreams to meet you”. The Han king grieved and laid down weeping on the quilt using it as a pillow. It was then that she came to him, and they met occasionally in this confused state between dream and reality. On

²² In *Zoku Gunsho ruijū* 406, p. 181.

²³ In the preface it is written that the work was intended for boys and girls education. See Yoshida Kōichi e Hirasawa Gorō, eds., *Kara kagami*, Koten bunko, 1965, pp. 138-139.

the way to the land of barbarians, Zhaojun, her eyes clouded with tears, was unable to distinguish the surrounding mountains and villages; moreover, her sleeves were continually soaked with tears. [omissis] Yoritomo had been deprived of his son, and his feelings can be compared to those of the Han empress, as she lays in her bedchamber, her sleeves wet with irrepressible tears of separation.”²⁴

In this text, the story of Ō Shōkun has been used to describe the sorrow of Yoritomo at the news that his son Senzuru had been killed. It is clear that the story of Wang Zhaojun has been mixed up with that of Li Furen, consort of the Han emperor Wudi, also quite known in Japanese literature: after her death, the emperor overcome with grief had her portrait painted, and waited night after night for her shadow to materialise from the picture. He saw her, at last, but only for a short moment.²⁵ The same situation is to be found in a play of the Yuan period written before 1290, the *Han Gong Qiu* (漢宮秋), which tells the love story between the emperor and Wang Zhaojun before she is taken by the Barbarians, and focuses on the love of the emperor and on his despair for having lost her. Every night he looks at her portrait and she dimly materialises in front of him.²⁶

²⁴ Nihon koten bungaku taikei edition, vol. 88, pp. 106-107. My translation, modified, is based on Thomas J. Cogan, *The Tale of Soga Brothers*, Tokyo University of Tokyo Press, 1987, pp. 49-50.

²⁵ Li Furen's story is also contained in the *Kara monogatari*, cit., pp. 96-105 (story no. 15).

²⁶ See Yoshikawa Kōjirō, “Kankyūshū zatsugeki no bungakusei”, *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 17 (1965), pp. 108-128.

Another different development of Ō Shōkun's legend is to be found in the nō play *Shōkun*, one of the oldest works of the nō theatre, ascribed to Konparu Gon no Kami (second half of XIV Century).

The play opens in the hometown of Ō Shōkun, where her father and mother are waiting at the foot of a willow tree in front of which they suspended a mirror. Asked by a man from the village, they explain that the willow was planted when their daughter left China for a barbarian land. She said them that at her death the willow also would die, and indeed, the willow is losing all its leaves. Moreover, her spirit will appear as a reflex in the mirror suspended in front of the willow. The nō goes on retelling the story of the portrait and the final punishment of the painter, as in *Xijing zaji* but with a difference: she was loved by the emperor (this particular is contained also in the *Utsuho monogatari*, the Enkyōbon of the *Heike monogatari* (in which the emperor cannot stand his sorrow, and order a war against the Xiongnu) and suggested in *Toshiyori zuinō*). Then, Ō Shōkun appears in all her beauty, as she was when she left: even the clear mirror of Enma could not show any sin in Ō Shōkun. With her appears also the spirit of the *chanyu* Huhanye, as he wanted to meet his wife's parents. But he is a demon, ugly and terrifying. When he looks at his own image in the mirror, and realises what his feature really is, he runs away, ashamed, to hide himself. ²⁷

After this overall view of Ō Shōkun legend in Japanese sources, I can say without hesitations that the process of transmission from China to

²⁷ Nihon koten bungaku taikai edition, vol. 40, pp. 166-173. For a comprehensive study on the willow tree, the mirror, the Enma mirror and the *chanyu* see Kobayashi Kenji, "Shōkun kō", *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan kiyō* 7 (1981), pp. 1-31.

Japan and its appropriation in Japanese literature has not boosted any particular or creative development of the original story. The only difference is that in Chinese literature we see two literary traditions, the tragic one and the heroic one, while in Japan Ō Shōkun is remembered only for her tragic destiny. Of course, there are in almost any sources some particulars more developed than the others: for example, the *Utsuho monogatari*, the *Soga monogatari* and the nō *Shōkun* have privileged the theme of the love of the emperor for Ō Shōkun and his endless sorrow for their separation. However, all the original Chinese elements of the story (the portrait, the *biwa*, etc.) are maintained faithfully with no other original *addenda*.

Nonetheless, I think that the versions of the story contained in the *Konjaku monogatari* and in the *Kara monogatari* show a high degree of independence from the Chinese tradition, and not for a different rendering of the legend, which follows the Chinese tradition, but for the didactic and moral meaning given to the story, as I will try to show below.

In the *Konjaku monogatari* version, the emperor Yuan was extremely fond of beautiful women, who crowded his Palace, but as he had no less than four or five hundreds ladies, he became unable to see them all. When the Barbarians arrived at the capital, nobody wanted them around, so a sage minister had the idea to give them the most unattractive lady. The emperor ordered the portraits but, unwilling to go to a barbarian land, the ladies bribed the painters to have a good portrait. Ō Shōkun, who surpassed all in beauty, refused to bribe the painter, and he, out of spite, made of her a hideous portrait. She was given to the barbarians, but before leaving the emperor found the time to look at her, and regretted his decision. However he had given his word, and Ō Shōkun left the capital, in despair. During the travel, the barbarians played their lutes to cheer her up.

In his rendering of the legend, the compiler gives a different meaning to the story, which I did not find in any Chinese sources: Ō Shōkun relied only on her own beauty, so in a way she deserved what happened to her. In the final remark, we read:

"The people of her time blamed her saying that all this happened because, relying only on her beauty, she did not give any money to the painter."²⁸

This same point of view is shared by the author of the *Kara monogatari*, a collection of *setsuwa* based upon secular Chinese sources written around the end of Heian period and traditionally ascribed to Fujiwara no Narinori (1135-1187). I already had the occasion to advance the hypothesis that this work is an attempt to adjust Chinese sources to shape a moral behaviour for women,²⁹ and indeed, the collection seems a catalogue of moral values: conjugal faithfulness, virtue rather than beauty, loyalty. I found the story of Ō Shōkun symbolic in illustrating the importance of wisdom on beauty. In *Kara monogatari* (story no. 25) we read that Ō Shōkun exceeded in beauty the other three thousand wives of the emperor Yuandi of the Han, but she was bestowed on a barbarian king because she was not wise enough to pay for a good portrait. We have no mention to the *biwa*, but we find again a new element, the suggestion that some of the ladies paid the painter in order to make Ō Shōkun to appear ugly. Anyway, the moral is the same: to rely only on beauty is a lack of

²⁸ *Konjaku monogatari*, cit., p. 280.

²⁹ Maria Chiara Migliore, "Pratiche di riscrittura: le fonti cinesi e il *Kara monogatari*", *Atti del XXVI Convegno di Studi sul Giappone*, Torino, 26-28 settembre 2002, Venezia, Cartotecnica veneziana editrice, 2003, pp. 307-317.

wisdom, as the author stresses in the conclusion:

“Although this barbarian king was a warrior who did not understand the refinements of feeling and the sentiments of the court, his love for Wang Zhaojun’s fragile beauty and the care he gave her exceeded his attention to the affairs of his kingdom. But despite this, from the day she left the old capital, each day that passed found her tears of regret undried. This woman relied only on the pure beauty revealed in her mirror and did not know of the impurity to be found in the hearts of men”.³⁰

For the author of *Kara monogatari* Ō Shōkun is twice guilty: she was not wise, for she should have protected herself from the other’s wrong behaviour, and she was not virtuous, because she favoured beauty. We have, in these two sources, a completely different interpretation of the personage: far to be a heroine, her behaviour is, at the contrary, considered in a negative way, and her tragic destiny is, somehow, something she deserved.

This leads me to a couple of considerations: the first is tied with the vanishing of Ō Shōkun’s legend from the literary scene of later Japanese works, like *otogizōshi*, for examples, or *jōruri*, or Edo period literature, both poetry and prose, while others Chinese heroines are still known even today (for example Yang Guifei, Jap. Yōkihi). Is it possible that the *Konjaku monogatari* and the *Kara monogatari* negative rendering of the personage of Ō Shōkun could have influenced the following works? The second consideration is related to the *nō Shōkun*: why the author

³⁰ The translation is taken from Ward Geddes, *Kara monogatari. Tales of China*, Arizona State University, 1984.

should have felt the need to write that ‘even the clear mirror of Enma could not show any sin in Ō Shōkun’? In the *nō*, the image of Ō Shōkun is reversed, if compared to *Konjaku monogatari* and *Kara monogatari* versions. She is not unwise, nor guilty, but morally pure as pure remains her beauty. Could it be possible that the author of *Shōkun* wanted to restore her traditional, poetic icon?

Ō Shōkun is just one of the many Chinese famous personages whose story was celebrated also in Japan, and my aim is to analyse other similar cases in order to understand if it does exist a common pattern in their transmission process from China to Japan. As for the case of Ō Shōkun, we have three different patterns of reception. The first one, developed in poetry, is coherent with traditional Chinese poetic cliché, which is repeated in *kanshi*, and is ‘translated’ in *waka* production up to the *nō* play *Shōkun*. The second one is the pattern we find in prose works, where different interpretations of the character are given in order to provide a model suitable to particular situations, as we see in the *Utsuho monogatari* and in the *Soga monogatari*. The third, and more interesting one, is to be found in the *Konjaku monogatari* and the in *Kara monogatari*, representing the *setsuwa* production. In these works, Ō Shōkun is not only a name suggesting a poetic theme but becomes a real person, and therefore turns out to be the object of praise or criticism. This is particularly true for the *Kara monogatari*, where the character of Ō Shōkun has been chosen as a model of wrong behaviour. Obviously, this choice can be explained considering that the didactic aim is proper to *setsuwa* literature, but, as I said above, I consider the *Kara monogatari* as one of the first works dealing

with women education,³¹ and if my hypothesis is right, then Ō Shōkun's example becomes even more interesting.

In all the sources I have analysed, I found several different details which, even if not important for the general interpretation of the story, could anyway clarify the mechanism of continuous interactions between Chinese and Japanese texts. The relation between the various Japanese sources can also be traced, in order to understand the process of literature-making along the time. Inside this process, Chinese and Japanese literatures are not in contrast, but, on the contrary, they form a unique body. This common tradition has been subjected to modifications and developments, of course, but not in the contents, as Ō Shōkun's example shows. However, in the *Konjaku monogatari* and in the *Kara monogatari* the stream of tradition is broken, revealing a different and original interpretation.

³¹ Writings concerning women's education are generally considered to belong to a later period, as for example the *Niwa no oshie* (Domestic Instructions), traditionally ascribed to the nun Abutsu (?-1283), or the *Menoto no sōshi* (The book of the wet nurse), author unknown, probably written at the beginning of the XIV century. The texts are in *Gunsho ruijū* 21, pp. 46-59 and pp. 60-72 respectively. The other major feature of the *Kara monogatari* is in the attitude of the author toward Chinese traditions: he criticizes Confucian morality and even pokes fun at the Taoist quest for immortality and other aspects of Chinese tradition.