

***Ria Monogatari* (The Tale of Ria):**

A Japanese Adaptation of a Chinese Tale

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Ria monogatari 李娃物語, an *otogizôshi* 御伽草紙 or medieval Japanese short story, is a Japanese adaptation of a Chinese tale, *Li Wa chuan* 李娃傳, that tells the tale of the romance between a young man from a prestigious family and a courtesan.¹ As in other stories of this era, a definitive author of *Ria monogatari* cannot be determined.² Yet upon examination, we find that its composition is most likely of the late sixteenth century inasmuch as the textual influences of earlier literary works, such as *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草 (c. 1330) and *Taiheiki* 太平記 (c. 1370), are readily apparent.³

In analyzing the relationship of *Ria monogatari* with the Chinese original, this article first compares the origins of the two stories and then discusses similarities and differences in plot, structure, and theme. The Chinese tale *Li Wa chuan* is said to be based on "I-chih hua" 一枝花, a folktale that no longer remains extant. Certain components in the Chinese original which are omitted in the Japanese adaptation are elements of fairy tales, possibly adopted from "I-chih hua." When the young man first visits the girl's house, the interior is described as follows:

Curtains and hangings, couches and blinds were dazzlingly bright to the eye; toilet-articles, quilts and pillows were likewise sumptuous and elegant.
(Glen Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*, p. 125)

Toward the end of the Chinese story a miraculous phenomenon takes place after the funeral of the parents of the young man. An auspicious plant Ling-chih 靈芝 grows and three flowers bloom out of one bud in front of the area where the young man and the

¹ English translations of *Li Wa chuan* are available. In this study I have used Glen Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa: Study and critical edition of a Chinese story from the ninth century* (Ithaca Press, 1983). My translation of *Ria monogatari* follows this critical section. See also Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau, ed., *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 163-71.

² Hiraide Kenjirô 平出堅二郎, *Kinko shôsetsu kaidai* 近古小説解題 (Tokyo: Dai Nihon tosho, 1909), pp. 455-56.

³ The *Taiheiki* is said to have been composed by a priest named Kojima 小島法師 in the fourteenth century. It depicts historical battles between the military government and their aristocratic opponents.

girl spent their mourning period. These descriptions, not found in the Japanese version, show the influence of "I-chih hua."

Still, doubts remain surrounding the alleged authorship of Po Hsing-chien 白行簡 (773?-826), claimed as author within the body of the Chinese text.⁴ In fact, it is more likely that Po Hsing-chien revised "I-chih hua," a popular tale in the literary language of the time. This skepticism arises on a number of grounds. The alleged year in which Po Hsing-chien wrote the tale, 765, fell during a period of mourning for Po Hsing-chien's father. It was also a year in which the putative author would have been about twenty years old, whereas *Li Wa chuan* is so well written as to hint of a writer who had attained a more mature age.

There is historical evidence of differences in length between the two works. In "Ch'ou Han-lin Po hsüeh-chih tai-shu i-pai yün" 酬翰林白學士代書一百韻 (A Poem in a Hundred Couplets written in response to the Hanlin scholar Po [804-806]), Yüan Zhen 元稹 wrote that a friend's recitation of the "I-chih hua" lasted four hours, indicating that "I-chih hua" could not have been a simple folkloric tale.

So that while a number of scholars believe that "I-chih hua" and *Li Wa chuan* are identical, others infer only that they both are based on the same material. When Hwa Yu Walkenstein, in her "*Hui-Chen Chi*" vs "*Li-Wa Chuan*": A Study of Contrasting Love Themes, examined the origin of *Li Wa chuan*, she offered the following refutation:⁵

One cannot help wonder what inspired in him a literary taste that was so different from that of his peers. And what accounted for the exceptional craftsmanship in writing fiction that was not part of his literary training? These questions cease to exist when *Li Wa chuan* turns out to be a retold story of a popular tale. It did not come out of the author's real experience and understanding of life. It is a typical popular story that momentarily attracted his attention, which he couched in the elegant classic language. The main structure of the story is the work of doubtless many storytellers who made successive modifications.

Among the comparative textual issues, one of the most significant as to Japanese influence is the reaction of the father when he learns of his son's lowly occupation and deeds. In the Chinese original, the father hits him with a whip and the son faints, whereas in the Japanese version, the father intends to kill his son to preserve his family's good name. In the latter version, the father says to him: "From ancient times rarely has a parent killed his child. Yet, I believe things would be better if you were dead than alive in your shameful plight." He strikes the son hundreds of times by using the back side of his sword until the son falls. In this act, we may see medieval samurai morality.

In addition, Japanese scholars have pointed out the influence of *Taiheiki* on *Ria monogatari*.⁶ The style, a mixture of classical Japanese and the Japanese reading of

⁴ Victor H. Mair, "Scroll Presentation in the T'ang Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* XXXVIII.1 (June 1978), p. 38.

⁵ M.A. thesis in the Oriental Studies Department, University of Pennsylvania, 1975.

⁶ See Gotô Tanji 後藤丹治, *Senki monogatari no kenkyû* 戦記物語の研究 (Tokyo: Isobe kôyôdô, 1944), pp. 227-45.

classical Chinese called *kanbun kundokutai* 漢文訓讀本, is close to that of *Taiheiki*, a tale of warriors. Likewise amorous encounters are condemned and women occupy a secondary position in the narrative. The following section of the narration is revealing:

King Yu 幽王 of the Chou 周 dynasty started an era of disturbance at Mt. Li 驪山 because of Pao-szu 褒姒. Hsüan-tsung 玄宗 of the T'ang suffered hardships in his flight to Szechwan and lost his country due to Yang Kuei-fei 楊貴妃. The king of Wu 吳, Fu-ch'a 夫差, lost his life to Hsi Shih 西施. All of these brave kings saw their lives and countries vanish when they became infatuated with women.

This quotation reminds us of some of the teachings in the *Taiheiki* said to have been written by a priest. Quite often reference to and quotations from Chinese history, proverbs, and classics are included in the *Taiheiki*.⁷ Furthermore, instances of direct borrowing from that text can be cited. While the Chinese description of the girl at her first meeting with the hero tells of her hair style and dress, the Japanese author writes that Yasunori 安則 "saw a girl of about sixteen years. Her peerless beauty and charm seemed like a fresh lotus flower emerging out of the water. She was seated behind blinds that were rolled up high, playing a lute (*biwa* 琵琶)." The question may arise: Why does she have to be sixteen and play a lute in that particular scene? But within the *Taiheiki*, in an identical situation, a young prince, Ichinomiya 一の宮, saw a girl in a house he happened to pass. The girl is described as follows: "The blind was rolled up high. A beautiful girl of about sixteen was playing the composition called Autumn Separation on the lute while singing."⁸

Other Japanese influences in *Ria monogatari* stem from the Japanese classics. There are poems; one is recited by the young man, the other two are exchanges between him and the girl on the morning after their affair. The exchange of poetry in such a situation is commonly found in Japanese classics and especially in old love stories.⁹ Furthermore, this poetry exchange was practiced in real life among aristocrats. And whereas the treatment of the early love affair is sketchy in the Chinese original, the love story in the Japanese version is given with detail, a literary characteristic typical of older Japanese tales.

Evidence of differences can also be seen in the stories' endings. *Li Wa chuan* is a story of a courtesan who eventually becomes successful and happy due to her virtue. At the closing she marries a young man from a prestigious family. Such an occurrence would rarely have happened in the life of that time, and it therefore reflects the world of folklore upon which *Li Wa chuan* was based. Also, *Ria monogatari* is more of a love

⁷ See Craig McCullough, trans., *The Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 384-87.

⁸ Nakatsuka Eijirô 中塚榮次郎, ed., *Nihon bungaku taikei* 日本文化大系 (Tokyo: Kokumin tosho, 1925), volume 17, pp. 595-96.

⁹ After a brief preface, *Ria monogatari* starts with the word *sono koro* そのころ (at that time). This is a typical beginning expression for short stories written after *The Tale of Genji*.

story than the story of a faithful heroine since it focuses on both hero and heroine; indeed, in spite of its title, in the latter half of the story Yasunori draws central attention.

In medieval Japanese literature, translated Chinese literary works were not a rarity. Thus, some reason must be given for why the storyteller did not simply translate it without alteration. Judging from the quality of *Ria monogatari*, the storyteller had a fairly good knowledge of the Chinese and Japanese classics and was as much of a literary man as Po Hsing-chien. We might speculate that he was a priest by profession as was the author of the *Taiheiki*, but since there is no proof for this, we should be content to classify him as a sixteenth-century literary man, possessing his own viewpoint, a viewpoint that might have conflicted with that of the author of *Li Wa chuan*. The author's own interpretation was not one that depicted the heroine as praiseworthy, as Po Hsing-chien had declared her; hence, he reevaluated the moral of the story.

In terms of plot, there is little variation between *Ria monogatari* and its Chinese predecessor. Both depict the love of a young man from a good family with a beautiful courtesan. The young man falls in love while studying in the capital, an act that serves to change the course of his life. After approximately one year of living together, the young man spends the money that his parents have given him for his education. At this point, he is completely abandoned as a result of a ruse devised by the courtesan and her mother. After a period of despair and illness, he finds himself in a singing contest. His father, who happens to be visiting the capital at that time, sees his son and in a fit of anger almost kills him. Barely recovered from his injuries, the young man wanders around as a beggar, and one day comes to the courtesan's house. The girl recognizes him and, repenting her misdeed, takes him in to care for him. Immediately upon recovery, following her advice, the young man resumes his studies. There is a happy ending as the couple marry and live together prosperously.

When *Li Wa chuan* reached Japan, the names of the people, the places, and the social settings were altered to fit those of its new setting. For instance, the singing girl (*ch'ang-nü* 倡女) of Ch'ang-an became the dancing girl (*shirabyōshi* 白拍子) of Kyoto while the son of the Lord Jung Yang, ambassador of Ch'ang-chou (*Ch'ang-chou tz'u-li Jung Yang* 常州刺史榮陽公), became the son of the governor of Satsuma province (*Satsuma no kuni no shugo* 薩摩の國の守護). In the Chinese story, the young man went to the capital to take the civil service examination. As Japan did not have an equivalent civil service system, the young man in the Japanese version went to Kyoto to raise the reputation of his family. Kiyomizu Temple 清水寺, one of the most popular destinations of Japanese pilgrims in Kyoto, takes the place of the shrine of the Bamboo Grove (*chu-lin* 竹林) in the original story which the hero and heroine visited in order to be blessed with a child. In *Ria monogatari*, the friend who informs the young man of the girl's identity is introduced with his full name, while remaining unidentified in *Li Wa chuan*.

As to structure, the two works are constructed in a similar style: preface, story, final section. Upon analysis, however, some variations exist in technique, so that elements seen in one version are not necessarily in the other. In *Li Wa chuan*, the author explains the purpose of the narrative and how he heard the story. The name of the storyteller, in this case Po Hsing-chien, and the date of his composition are cited in the preface and in the last paragraph when the narrator explains that he recorded this story

because he was touched by Li Wa's faithfulness and honor. He emphasizes the truthfulness of the narrative by stating that his great uncle, an official who occupied several posts in the regional government, was well acquainted with the details of the story.

Preface:

Li Wa, the Duchess of Ch'ien, was a courtesan of Ch'ang-an. Her conduct as a true and loyal woman was so rare and wonderful that it merits praise. Accordingly Po Hsing-chien, Examining Censor, has passed on an account of it.
(Glen Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*, p. 105)

Last Paragraph:

O!—that a wanton singing girl should prove so true! Even the paragons of womanly virtue in ancient times could not do more. How can we help sighing in admiration of her?

My paternal great-uncle was once prefect of Chin-chou, was then transferred to the Board of Finance, and became a Commissioner for Land and Water Transport. In all three posts he took that young scholar's place and so became well informed about these matters.

(*The Tale of Li Wa*, pp. 183, 185)

What is more, the Chinese story was not presented as fiction. The young man and his father are not named, perhaps deliberately, while the names of characters are found throughout the Japanese version.

Dissimilarities may be seen in the time dimension as well. The Japanese story takes place in the past, while the original Chinese story of Li Wa is comparable to contemporary gossip, with the Chinese writer assuming the role of recorder. This interpretation serves as a basis for the claim that *Li Wa chuan* was written to reveal the low origin of the wife of a political opponent of Po Hsing-chien.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Japanese author has no interest in revealing his identity or explaining the origins of the story; he does not even say that the story is of a courtesan or mention her quality of faithfulness. The preface is quite short:

In the reign of the now retired Emperor Gokōgon 後光嚴院, there lived a dancing girl called Ria. Narrating her story is indeed a splendid task.

Lastly, there is substantial modification in the thematic content of the two works. The Japanese narrator inserts a number of didactic commentaries that are not to be found in the Chinese original. The first occurs before the description of the young man's initial meeting with the girl: "Then suddenly something unexpected came into his life."

This commentary begins not only a change in tone but in the central premise. After Yasunori, the hero in the narration, sees Ria on his way back from visiting a priest, he falls in love, telling his friend that he would spend all his money, even give his own life, to see the girl again. Then the following instructive comment is made:

¹⁰ See the Introduction to Glen Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*.

What a deplorable affair! From Confucius's *Lu lun* 魯論 comes the saying, "When young, curb desires." The adage continues, "Not only that, change such desires into thirst for knowledge." Otherwise even the most brilliant young man will become a victim and survive only to satiate his persistent longing for women. Yoshida Kenkô 吉田兼好 has said, "The senses give rise to many desires, but it should be possible to shun them all. Only one, infatuation, is impossible to control; old or young, wise or foolish, in this respect all seem identical."

This discourse is no doubt based on moralistic points of view found in Buddhist and Confucian texts. Moralistic concerns are seen within the content of the story. A number of ethical issues relate to the character of the heroine. The girl in the Japanese version is consistently characterized as a deceitful courtesan, while the original Li Wa is virtuous enough not to show resentment towards the penniless young man. Not only does she become more affectionate, but, despite her mother's coldness, is not at all responsible for deceiving or abandoning the young man.

To demonstrate the Japanese author's portrayal of the courtesan as crafty, the author tells us:

However, a courtesan is, first, foremost, and always, the follower of a deceitful occupation. Ria pondered ways to forsake Yasunori after he had spent all his money. Truly she was pitiless.

A similar remark is made when the young man and the girl have their first meeting:

Being a courtesan, as soon as Ria saw Yasunori, she knew at once all he was feeling. She responded by glancing back at him with a slight smile that was attractive and sensuous.

This encounter marks not only Yasunori's but also the reader's introduction to the heroine, an introduction not favorable to the girl's honor.¹¹ Moreover, while the title of *Ria monogatari* indicates that the story will probably concentrate on the heroine, it does not, due to the characterization of the courtesan. In contrast, the Chinese story consistently lauds her as a praiseworthy, faithful woman.

The conclusion of the story echoes this contradiction. *Li Wa chuan* ends in the girl's praise while the Japanese version ends with praise for the young man.¹² The last paragraph of *Li Wa chuan* starts: "O!--that a wanton singing girl should prove so true! Even the paragons of womanly virtue in ancient times could not do more." The last paragraph of *Ria monogatari* states that the young man has become unparalleled in terms of his intelligence and virtue:

¹¹ In the description of the young man visiting the girl, there also is the same type of short comment: "Yet her words did not come from her true heart, but were spoken only to please him."

¹² The young man's characterization is also slightly changed in the Japanese version. He is more passive and docile than the young man in the Chinese original.

Yasunori, gifted with great knowledge, became a fine administrator of the government.... The people liked his ways and thought him to be a truly fine man. His reputation spread throughout the world. The emperor favored him and often visited his house. As the years passed, prosperity continued to grow among his descendants.

Therefore the Japanese adapter has transformed not only the theme but the import of the young man, thus leading to a fundamental divergence of the Chinese original from the Japanese work.

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Ria Monogatari

In the reign of the now retired Emperor Gokôgon,¹³ there lived a dancing girl called Ria.¹⁴ Narrating her story is indeed a splendid task.

At that time, Saemon Yasumori 左衛門安森, the governor of the province of Satsuma 薩摩, had a son, lieutenant-general Yasunori 安則.¹⁵ The son was thirteen years old and already intelligent and ambitious. While paying little attention to worldly affairs, Yasunori enjoyed Japanese and Chinese classics and poetry, and was thoroughly conversant with the Six Literary Styles of the *Book of Poetry* (*rokugi no michi* 六義の道).¹⁶ Everyone said that the boy's future was unlimited. With a son so respected and praised by the people, Yasunori's parents were proud of him, considering him to be the family's "thousand-li colt" (*senri no koma* 千里の駒).¹⁷

As time passed like water flowing without a barrier, the boy turned fifteen. Now living in Satsuma was an august abbot who was learned in the teachings of the Buddha and outstanding in both literary skill and knowledge of Chinese philosophy. Yasunori began to study with this abbot in his temple, and working day and night became educated in the Chinese Classics and the Six Accomplishments of propriety, music, archery,

¹³ Emperor Go-Kôgon (r. 1352-71).

¹⁴ Her name is the same as Li Wa (Ria in Japanese) in the Chinese text. Following the convention of Japanese pronunciations and names, in this text it is treated as her first name, Ria. *Shirabyôshi* 白拍子 were dancing girls dressed as men. Such dancing girls were popular from the late twelfth to fourteenth centuries in Japan.

¹⁵ Satsuma is the western half of the present-day Kagoshima prefecture in southern Kyûshû.

¹⁶ *Liu-i* from the *Shih ching* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry).

¹⁷ The phrase implies precocious brilliance, derived from the poem "Divination" (*pu-chu* 卜祝) in the *Ch'u-tz'u* 楚辭 collection. The same phrase is also found in the original Chinese text of the story as presented in the *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記.

charioteering, writing, and mathematics (*Shisho rokuhei* 詩書六藝).¹⁸ Always he showed excellence as a scholar.

The seasons rushed by, one into the next. The aroma of the spring cherry blossoms blended with the breezes from the valley. The autumn moon rose high over the viewing tower, reflected upon a jeweled pond. When the year came to a close, the father, Yasunori, said to the young man, "When I look upon your talents, I am certain that you are ten times better than I. Perhaps you should go to the capital to learn from a good teacher. This will be valuable not only for your literary enjoyment but also for our family's fame." Listening to his father's words, Yasunori was overjoyed and began preparing for his journey.

Pleased by his son's acceptance, the father provided him with funds, a beautifully decorated horse and carriage, and costly furniture, then sent him off to the capital with a hundred servants. Yasunori studied so diligently that in accord with the maxim "Friends should come to one from afar" he became admired by all the people.¹⁹

Then, suddenly something unexpected came into his life. One day passing through the neighborhood of Seventh Avenue²⁰ on his way back from visiting a priest in Saga 嵯峨,²¹ he noticed an elegant house whose owner was unknown to him. At the house, he saw a girl of about sixteen years. Her peerless beauty and charm seemed like a fresh lotus flower emerging out of the water. She was seated behind blinds that were rolled up high, playing a lute (*biwa* 琵琶). This girl was none other than the dancing girl, Ria.

Yasunori was so attracted that he could not divert his gaze from her. Being a courtesan, as soon as Ria saw Yasunori, she knew at once all he was feeling. She responded by glancing back at him with a slight smile that was attractive and sensuous. In his confusion, he could not bring himself to move. But as evening approached with the sky darkening, he forced himself to continue on his way.

From this time on, he was lovesick. Immersing himself in Chinese and Japanese poetry, he watched the moon and listened to the wind. This became his daily routine! Occasionally he attended private evening music concerts but was unable to enjoy them. Although he remembered that he once thought this world to be a dream and that nothing was important, now he felt otherwise. Startled to see the change in himself, he attempted

¹⁸ These accomplishments were known as the *Liu-i* 六藝 (Six Arts).

¹⁹ The expression, "friends should come to one from afar," in the original text is quoted from the *Analects of Confucius*, Book 1: "The Master said, To learn and at due times to repeat what one has learnt, is that not after all a pleasure? That friends should come to one from afar, is this not after all delightful?" (Arthur Waley, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* [London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1938], p. 83).

²⁰ Throughout the old capital nine avenues ran parallel from the east to the west.

²¹ Saga was a secluded region to the west of the capital. The section of the text describing Yasunori's encounter with Ria is an allusion to the *Taiheiki*, vol. 18. For more details, see Gotô Tanji, *Senki monogatari no kenkyû*, pp. 227-45.

to remain calm, but in vain. No matter what he did, he could only think of the girl more and more.

Yasunori's good friend, Hida no Saburô Kunimitsu 飛驒三郎國光, saw how his friend's behavior had altered.

"You don't look well these days," he said. "Is anything bothering you?" Realizing that he was unable to conceal his anxiety, Yasunori decided to reveal the truth. With an old love poem as a hint, he recited:

I would conceal it, yet
In my looks it is shown--
My love, so plain
That men ask of me:
"Do you not brood on things?"²²

"That is what I thought you are suffering from," Kunimitsu said. "Well, who is the girl? Why don't you write to her? It would be better than suffering so much alone. If you want, I will help you to see her."

"The other day near Seventh Avenue," Yasunori began, "I caught sight of a girl about sixteen playing a lute. Since then, my mind has been distracted. You are my close friend, so I will tell you that I want to spend a night with her. Do you think it is possible?"

"I think it will be quite easy," his friend answered.

But after Kunimitsu investigated, he discovered that the object of Yasunori's infatuation was a courtesan. He told the young man, "Since she is a courtesan, a letter might not do much. She is quite popular now. If you are not willing to spend a large amount of money, you won't be able to see her for even one night."

Hearing this, Yasunori said, "My worry is that I may not be able to get acquainted with her. What is money to me? I don't even care about losing my own life."

What a deplorable affair! From Confucius's *Lu lun* 魯論 comes the saying,²³ "When young, curb desires." The adage continues, "Not only that, change such desires into thirst for knowledge." Otherwise even the most brilliant young man will become a victim and survive only to satiate his persistent longing for women. Yoshida Kenkô has said, "The senses give rise to many desires, but it should be possible to shun them all. Only one, infatuation, is impossible to control; old or young, wise or foolish, in this respect all seem identical." He goes on, "That is why they say that even a great elephant can be fastened securely with a rope plaited from the strands of a woman's hair, and that a flute made from a sandal a woman has worn will infallibly summon the autumn deer."²⁴ These words remain true.

²² A celebrated poem by Taira no Kanemori 平兼盛 (mid-tenth century). *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), p. 84.

²³ *The Annals of Lu* by Confucius covers the history of Lu 魯, his native state, from 722 to 481 B.C.E.

²⁴ Donald Keene, trans., *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkô* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 9. *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草, a collection of essays,

Still, Yasunori was incapable of controlling himself. Once he was dead, of what importance would people's opinion of him be? Chang Han 張翰 of Chin 晉 has said, "Life is a pursuit of ambition."²⁵ Trusting in the verity of these words, Yasunori set out for Ria's residence that evening, accompanied by his servants.

As dusk had fallen, all doors of the house were closed. Yasunori walked up to the main entrance and knocked at the door. A young girl of about fourteen or fifteen years old came out to learn who was there. She ran back in after looking at him. She then said to her mistress who was Ria, "The gentleman standing at the gate the other day has come."

"Ask him to wait while I put on some powder," Ria said, going into the inner room.

When Yasunori, led by the young girl, entered the main quarters, Ria's mother who was leaning against a handrail saw him. She asked, "Where did you come from?"

"Please do not be concerned," replied Yasunori. "I am from this neighborhood. Since it is too late to find a lodging, perhaps you can help me find a place to stay for the night."

"It is very unusual to receive a guest at such a late hour. I am afraid I cannot help you," said the old woman.

Yasunori again asked for her assistance. The mother, who had no intention of refusing him, agreed to let him stay. Only her treacherous intention had caused her initial refusal of overnight lodging.

Meanwhile, Ria having finished adorning her face, came to the room where the young man was waiting for her. Now she looked more attractive than ever. He thought that her beauty could be compared to a peach in the spring and a willow in the breeze; she would have made such noted women as Mao Qiang 毛嬙 and Hsi Shih 西施 cover their mirrors out of shame.²⁶ As T'ai Shih Kung 太史公²⁷ said, "A woman paints her face for a man who cares for her."

Yasunori was so drawn to her that he felt his uncontrollable spirit might float out and enter into the sleeves of her robe. Alone with her in the dim lamplight, Yasunori said, "I did not come here simply in search of overnight lodging. Since I caught sight of you the other day, my heart has been with you. I decided to visit you because I could not restrain myself any longer."

"Oh, so that is how you feel. I have felt the same way, but I am unable to express my sentiments as you because I am a woman," Ria responded. Yet her words did not

seems to have been written between 1330 and 1332 by a Buddhist priest by the name of Yoshida Kenkô (1283-1350).

²⁵ Biographical data about him is not available.

²⁶ Mao Qiang was a famous beauty from about 465 B.C.E. Hsi Shih was a celebrated beauty during the fifth century, B.C.E.

²⁷ T'ai Shih Kung (The Grand Scribe/Historian) refers to Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷, author of the *Shi Chi* 史記.

come from her true heart, but were spoken only to please him. It is a pity that his father, never dreaming this might happen, believed his son was spending his time at study.

Yasunori was delighted to hear Ria's words, and overjoyed to see his dream becoming reality. As the hours passed, they lay together and talked through the night. However, the night was short, and before long, birds started singing high in the morning sky. Yasunori deeply regretted that the time had slipped away so quickly. He wished he could spend a thousand autumn nights with Ria. As the sun cast its light high over the windows, Yasunori recited a poem to show his sorrow:²⁸

My most heart-felt wish answered,
After spending this splendid night
On a flowery couch.
It is so hard
To leave in the morning.

In her poem, Ria answered:

If we had not spent the night together,
We would never have known
How terribly sad
The separation could be
In the morning.

After exchanging the poems, they wept quietly. Then in a little while, Yasunori had his servant bring rolls of silk to Ria's house. She refused his gift, smiling a little and saying, "What does that mean? Why did he send me a gift after staying only one night? Next time I hope he will stay four or five days."

Yasunori replied in a dejected manner, "Telling you this may embarrass you and me, but I do not think I can live without you. My only desire is to have a life-long relationship with you."

"Even sleeping under a tree and spending a night together are destined from a former life. If that is what you want, how should I deny it?" Ria answered.

In light of the great importance of such a matter, they agreed to consult Ria's mother. The mother listened to Ria and then said, "It has been said since olden times that the strongest desire among humans resides between a man and a woman. If their feelings for each other are mutual, even their mothers cannot stop them. Thus, I say nothing; the decision is up to you."

From then on, Yasunori and Ria became even more intimate. Day and night, he amused himself in her company in the enjoyment of music, parties, and the like. Quickly he used up his money, and finally sold his clothing, horse, and carriage to pay for their pleasures.

However, a courtesan is, first, foremost, and always, the follower of a deceitful occupation. Ria pondered ways to forsake Yasunori after he had spent all his money. Truly she was pitiless.

²⁸ In Japan it was a courtly custom for lovers to exchange poems after their initial meeting.

Under the pretense of love for Yasunori, one day Ria said to him, "I have known you over a year, yet I am still without a child. Why do we not stay at the Kiyomizu Temple to pray for a child?" Since he believed her implicitly, they visited the Kiyomizu Temple and stayed for three days.²⁹

When they returned, Ria said to him, "I have an aunt who lives only one square from here. I am sorry that she has not met you. Since today is a festival day of the Kitano 北野 shrine, why don't we visit her on our way back?"³⁰

"You should have told me that earlier," Yasunori answered. "I am embarrassed that I haven't paid a visit to her yet. I will of course visit." Sending Ria to her aunt with many of his servants, he followed later.

The aunt, saying she was delighted to meet this rare guest, entertained him with a beautifully prepared banquet. Of course, Ria's mother had already related the scheme to the aunt. In accordance with their plan, a messenger sent by Ria's mother arrived. The messenger said to Ria, "Your mother has suddenly fallen seriously ill. You and Yasunori must hurry home."

Ria, looking surprised, gave this message to Yasunori. As he prepared to leave, the aunt stopped him and said, "Ria should go home to see her mother, but you have paid me a nice surprise visit. Why leave now? Even if the worst should happen to her mother, you and I can discuss the matter of the funeral."

No sooner had Ria returned home, than she and her mother moved into a different house. This they could do easily since they had rented the previous house with a lease ending that year. Confident in the trust he and Ria had built during their time together, pitiful Yasunori never suspected the scheme.

Hours later, when the aunt thought that Ria must already have departed, she said to Yasunori, "I am apprehensive about Ria's mother. You should go home now. I will come after you in awhile." However, when Yasunori reached home, the gate was tightly locked. Banging on it, he shouted, "Why did you lock up so tightly? Please open this gate." As the house was empty, he received no answer. Alarmed, he called even louder, but all attempts were in vain. Eventually a neighbor informed him that Ria and her mother had moved that morning.

Yasunori was shocked. If they had moved, they should have told him of their plans. Hoping the aunt would know their whereabouts, he returned to her residence, but there the gate was fastened securely, as if the aunt had also moved. Totally lost, he stood for awhile and then in a booming voice cried, "The lieutenant has come. Please open the gate." Yet once again he had no response from the empty house.

Soon an old man came out and asked, "Who is that calling out so noisily? No one is in. Why don't you go home?"

"How can it be possible? My wife's aunt was here until this morning," Yasunori answered in disbelief.

²⁹ The Kiyomizu Temple is a famous Buddhist temple located to the east of the capital.

³⁰ The Kitano Shrine in the north of the capital was founded in the tenth century in honor of Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903). The festival day was August fourth on the lunar calendar.

"I am the caretaker of the house. She just rented it. I suppose she has already gone somewhere else."

Realizing finally that he had been tricked, Yasunori stood paralyzed for several hours. When evening came, he was without a residence and slept outside. The next morning, still homeless, he pondered what to do.

Since he was alone and penniless, Yasunori's servants soon deserted him. He then understood the meaning of Chang Yün-ku's 張蘊古 words,³¹ "Do not feel bitter in love affairs; bitterness will overtake you. Do not indulge yourself; after the height of enjoyment comes sadness."

Ashamed and not knowing what steps to take, he went to the house of his old teacher. After a year of absence, the teacher was surprised to see Yasunori in his current state and took pity on him. Yasunori stayed at his teacher's home for a month, remaining depressed the entire time. Although the seriousness of Yasunori's illness alarmed the teacher, he could do nothing to lighten his student's mood.

At that time a group of professional singers sang dirges (*aika* 哀歌) along West Tôin Street 西洞院 and another group at East Tôin Street 東洞院.³² Yasunori, who was skilled at singing such dirges, decided that it might be more prudent to join these singers and perform with them rather than stay and be feared due to his strange illness. Also, he hoped that by singing and working with others he might grow in health. Therefore he went to West Tôin where the funeral dirge singers offered him protection.

This they did out of compassion, but when they heard the beauty of his voice, they were more than ever eager to use him to win their contest. In fact, everyone who heard Yasunori sing was so deeply moved that they began to weep. Now the West Tôin singers were quite sure that with Yasunori they would finally defeat their adversary. Accordingly, they sent an invitation for a contest to the East Tôin group who agreed, believing they would win as they had in the past.

On the contest day, both the East and West parties set up stages across from each other and sang their dirges. Tens of thousands, old and young, listened as both parties competed with such earnestness that every dirge sounded exquisite.

Just as the East appeared to be about to win, the West allowed Yasunori, dressed in an elegant costume, to sing the Song of Bamboo and Dew (*take tsuyu no kyoku* 竹露の曲). His peerless voice echoed throughout the streets, and people began sobbing even before the song had ended. What a pity that this youth who as a young nobleman had studied in a golden pavilion had now fallen so low as to become a dirge singer!

Meanwhile, Yasunori's father had left Satsuma and was visiting the capital to serve at court. When his servants decided to see the famed dirge singer, they came upon their master's missing son. The servants came back in tears, telling the father whom they had seen.

"Why are you telling a lie?" the father bellowed. "I heard only recently that my son had died because of a love affair."

³¹ Chang Yün-ku is a historical figure from the T'ang Dynasty.

³² East and West Tôin (Cave Temple), corresponding to the East and West markets in the Chinese original, were sections in the center of the capital between Fourth and Fifth Avenues.

The servants returned to the place of the dirge contest in order to bring the son back to his father. While Yasunori was singing, he spotted his father's servants. He was about to flee quickly into the dressing room, when sensing his panic and shame, the servants rushed forward and surrounded him. "Why have you sunk to this impoverished state, sir?" they questioned. "Your father, Yasumori, left Satsuma and is now in the capital. We are here because he heard of you and told us to bring you back. We are very sorry to see you in such a state. Please meet your father soon and get back to studying again."

Yasunori felt great shame. "Gentlemen, please don't take me. I don't think I can face my parent in this way," he said. "I would rather die here than meet more disgrace. Please go back now, gentlemen."

"How could that be possible?" they answered. "Even if you don't want to come with us, we cannot go back empty-handed. We were told by your father to bring you back." After so much insistence, Yasunori could not resist, and therefore was brought weeping before his father. For awhile after seeing his son, Yasumori did not say a word.

Brooding over how to respond, he looked angry. The son hardly spoke. It appeared that he regretted agreeing to meet his father, but there was no way to turn back now.

"The true way of man is to establish one's father's fame as well as one's own fame for the future," Yasumori began. "Now you, in such a shameful way, not only bring disgrace upon your father, but you also bring shame upon all your relatives and their descendants. If you had died because of this disgraceful matter, it would have been better. From ancient times rarely has a parent killed his child. Yet, I believe things would be better if you were dead than alive in your shameful plight. Do not try to invoke pity from me, but blame yourself."

Then he took his son beside him and lashed him with the back of his sword. Several hundred times he hit Yasunori, who, overcome by pain, fell unconscious. Leaving the son for dead, the father returned to his lodging. The servants, who had taken so much trouble to bring Yasunori to Yasumori, were shocked to see this unexpected turn of events. If they had known this would happen, they would not have informed the father about the son. Unfortunately, their repentance came too late.

Sighing with grief, his fellow singers found him. Not quite dead, he was breathing only with difficulty. They sprayed water upon his face, so that after awhile, he began to breathe in a normal manner. Carrying him back to their home, they looked after him with great care in order that he might regain his life. Still, the wounds on his body festered and burst; he could hardly stand upright. Afraid that he had some terrible illness, his fellow singers bundled him in a straw mat and abandoned him on the street.

Many years ago, King Yu of the Chou dynasty began an era of disturbance at Mt. Li because of Pao-szu.³³ Hsüan-tsung of the T'ang suffered hardships in his flight to

³³ Pao-szu was the consort of King Yu of the Chou Dynasty. The king often ignited signal fires to see her smile. When foreign forces actually invaded the country, the warlords were no longer willing to come to rescue the king.

Szechwan and lost his country due to Yang Kuei-fei.³⁴ The king of Wu, Fu-ch'a, lost his life to Hsi Shih.³⁵ All of these brave kings saw their lives and countries vanish when they became infatuated with women. Now Yasunori shamelessly carried away by his senses did not mind throwing away his life for a woman. From his example we should learn to avoid amorous desire.

The stray beggars who looked with sympathy at the abandoned young man, guessed that he was probably the son of a noble family who had fallen low. Pitying him, they fed him leftover food. Abandoning one's life altogether is not a simple task and so, as time passed, Yasunori managed to regain strength. Instead of throwing himself into a pond or river, he begged from one house to another with the aid of a walking stick. At night he had not even a grass hut as lodging. In the autumn and winter he survived by taking shelter in a cave.

Now during this time, Ria had rented a house and was living near Fifth Avenue. Never imagining that he was at her house, Yasunori, standing in front of her gate, begged for food.

At first, Ria did not recognize Yasunori. Because he was so wizened, he scarcely looked human. She told him to go away. Then she recognized his voice and suddenly remembered that Yasunori was said to have become a beggar. She realized that, yes, this man with the unmistakable voice was in fact her husband! Even grass and trees have feelings, Ria said to herself. Yet she had pitilessly and coldly driven him into the lowest state. It was as if she were without a heart. Acknowledging all that she had done, she asked in a meek voice, "Is that you?"

Full of anger and resentment, Yasunori could not speak. Ria took him to the inner chamber. While weeping, she said, "It is my fault that you have come to this state and disgraced your family name. I don't know what I should say. Please forgive me. From now on I will take care of you."

Taking away his worn-out clothes, she dressed him in a warm fur robe. Since she did nothing but attend to him, Ria's mother asked her, "Why do you love such a beggar? Send him away."

"No, it is impossible," said Ria. "Please listen to me. He is the son of a noble family. When he came to our house, he drove a grand carriage and was in fine attire. We swindled him and threw him out. Now he is in a miserable state. What we did was quite inhuman.

"Fate is like a link," Ria went on, "everything comes back to where it was. Nowadays his relatives fill the court. One day those in power will look into this matter from beginning to end. Then calamity will fall upon us. If you are concerned about me, would you help take care of him?" Again and again Ria tried to persuade her mother, but the mother was not satisfied.

³⁴ Yang Kuei-fei (719-56), the consort of Hsüan-tsung (r. 712-756) of the T'ang Dynasty, is said to have caused the An Lu-shan 安祿山 Rebellion.

³⁵ Hsi Shih was a beautiful concubine of the King of Yüeh in the fifth century B.C.E. After Yüeh was defeated by Wu, she was used to lead the victorious king Fu-ch'a into debauchery.

"This must not be pleasant for you, but please think of it this way," Ria argued. "Man's life is just like the dream of a spring night, dust before the wind. With such a mortal body, upsetting morals and swindling people will evoke divine displeasure. Now I have more than a thousand taels and you are over sixty years of age. Even if you live till a hundred years, and I also become a hundred years, our finances will be inexhaustible. It will be better if I look after him. If not, he and I shall become beggars together."

After the mother listened to this intimation of her old age, she no longer tried to stop her daughter.

"I understand," the mother said. "Everything is up to you."

Ria rejoiced when she heard these words. Hour after hour, she devoted herself to Yasunori's recovery. As the severe winter passed and spring arrived, he regained his health and returned to normal.

"Do you still remember your scholarship and all that you learned before?" Ria asked Yasunori.

"I only remember two or three parts out of ten," he replied.

Ria suggested that he go to the marketplace to find books. She ordered a carriage, spent a hundred gold pieces to collect all the books, then drove back home.

As nights turn into days, Ria allowed Yasunori time to concentrate his attention on the great works. Encouraging him to read and study, she dispelled mosquitos with a fan for him in the summer, and in the winter put a brazier in his study, sitting beside him from morning till late. He studied more diligently than people like Chiang Pi 江泌 of Ch'i 齊, Sun K'ang 孫康 of Sung 宋, or Ch'e Yin 車胤 of Chin.³⁶ Within a year, people said that he had no equal in the capital.

At that time, many people entered the court through examination. Yasunori believed that he should reveal his identity and sit for the test. Ria disagreed.

"Although you might surpass other people in knowledge, you were once a beggar. People might despise you when you take the examination because you were so low. I think you should continue in your learning. Wait to sit for the examination until your talent is known throughout the world."

Ria continued to encourage him to work at a diligent pace. Two years passed and Yasunori's reputation rose. People said that even the most talented could not compete with him.

Finally Yasunori announced, "I have finished my preparation. I believe I should take the examination now."

Ria agreed and, having bathed and dressed him properly, sent him out. In the court were many students writing poetry. All of them looked tense since their abilities were about to be judged. Yasunori went ahead and composed seven or eight Chinese poems before the others had finished only one. The emperor was sufficiently impressed to give Yasunori the rank of Senior Counselor and to put him in charge of two provinces, Kôchi 河内 and Settsu 攝津.³⁷

³⁶ Sun K'ang of Chin and Ch'e Yin of Chin were known to be diligent students.

³⁷ Kôchi or Kawachi was a region located in present-day Ôsaka. Settsu was a part of present-day Ôsaka and Hyôgo prefectures.

After returning home, Yasunori told Ria what had happened. Her mother and friends visited, all delighted.

Yasunori planned to hire servants to go down with him to the province of Tsu 津. He invited Ria and her mother to join him. Ria then said, "I once deceived you and made you a beggar. Now I have helped you gain a high rank. Please do not blame me any longer. Although I have helped you to prepare for your trip, this is my own town. I would like to stay to look after my mother. Let me remain."

"How can you say such words?" he answered. "How can I go by myself and leave you behind? I shan't go without you."

"In that case," Ria said, "I will accompany you for part of your journey."

As he left the capital, Yasunori encountered Yasumori who had left Satsuma for the capital to serve at court. Recognizing his father, Yasunori sent out a messenger. When Yasumori saw the young man from afar and noted the resemblance to his son, he could not understand how Yasunori, who had been beaten to death, could still be alive. As a result, he sent no one to the approaching party. As the two groups came close, the son jumped down from his horse and, holding onto the bridle of his father's horse, broke into tears. "Is that you?" Yasumori asked incredulously.

Yasunori explained to his father all that had happened in the past and his present situation. Feeling the same way as Wang Chih 王質 when he returned from the fairy land and met his descendants of seven generations later,³⁸ Yasumori was overwhelmed with joy and broke into tears.

"Where is your wife?" Yasumori asked.

"I made an effort to persuade her to accompany me on the journey," Yasunori replied. "But she declared that she must go back to the capital."

"It is not good," Yasumori said. "Make her stay here. We shall dispatch a matchmaker to arrange a formal marriage proposal and to prepare the six rites for the occasion. Then we shall come back for her."

Yasumori and his son went to the province of Tsu, where together they built a new house. Ria entered the house, in accord with the formal rites and with the assistance of the matchmaker. It was a grand event. An annex was even built for her mother, who was called Grand Lady. From then on the couple pledged endless bonds and their relationship became closer than before.

Years passed and they had five children. Ria's reputation rose among people. Everyone admired her for her unusual faithfulness as a wife.

Yasunori, gifted with great knowledge, became a fine administrator of the government. Following the ways of the Duke of Chou 周公³⁹ and Confucius, he remained correct in his private relationships and in public life (*sankô gojô no gi* 三綱五

³⁸ Wang Chih is the Chinese Rip Van Winkle, a Taoist patriarch who is said to have lived during the Chin Dynasty. After awakening from his magical sleep, which lasted several centuries, he devoted himself to the search for immortality and obtained it.

³⁹ The Duke of Chou was the son of Wen Wang 文王, first ruler of the Chou Dynasty.

常の儀).⁴⁰ Not only did he try to restore the golden periods of the Engi 延喜 and Tenryaku 天曆 eras,⁴¹ but revived proper old traditions that had died out, never neglecting to praise all things good, no matter how small, done by others. The people liked his ways and thought him to be a truly fine man. His reputation spread throughout the world. The emperor favored him and often visited his house. As the years passed, prosperity continued to grow among his descendants.

Text: "Ria monogatari" 李娃物語, in Yokoyama Shigeru 横山重, ed., *Muromachi jidai shôsetsushû* 室町時代小説集 (Tokyo: Shônan shobô, 1943), pp. 112-34.

⁴⁰ *San-kang wu-ch'ang* in the text stands for the three bonds and the five constant virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and sincerity.

⁴¹ The Engi and Tenryaku eras were the golden age of Heian Period. Engi and Tenryaku are the names of eras of Emperor Daigo 醍醐 (r. 897-930) and Emperor Murakami 村上 (r. 946-67).