Waka and renga Theory:  
Shifts in the Conceptual Ground

Rein Raud (Helsinki/Tallinn)

One of the most important and also most difficult areas of research in waka and renga theory is the terminological apparatus. Most of the terms used in the karon and rengaron treatises are extremely difficult to render into any Western language; if approximately equivalent English notions are used to convey the Japanese original concepts in a translation, the readers will usually assume that these concepts have the same meaning. However, it is by far not always the case: for example the term „style“ that, in a Western context, can be associated with the style of one particular writer, is certainly not the correct counterpart of the term tei or fûtei as used by medieval Japanese poets and scholars, because a tei (like e.g. „the yûgen style“) is supposed to exist, as an entity, „outside“ the work of any particular writer; moreover, a tei does not inevitably refer to a particular usage of the poetic language but rather to the way how the content of a text is conceived in the first place, and one writer may well be able (or even required) to compose in different styles. The same applies to practically all terms used by medieval Japanese poetic theorists.

The next difficulty consists in the incoherence arising from the fact that identical terms are used by different theorists charged with hardly identical meaning; so, for instance, it has been pointed out that the term yûgen as used by Fujiwara no Shunzei means something else than the yûgen of Fujiwara no Moto-toshi, who was his teacher, or Kamo no Chômei, who was his contemporary pursuing, in general, quite similar poetic ideals;¹ the same category was later treated still much more differently e.g. in the theoretical treatises of the Nô theatre. The terms were, however, usually not defined with undisputable precision but described in a roundabout manner, and they may even have been used differently by the same scholar on different occasions, whereas the vocabulary itself was remarkably stable at least throughout Early and High Middle Ages.

This stablity of vocabulary enables one to posit a general conceptual ground on which any new usage of a poetic term is reflected. The problems that the theorists had to confront were always more or less analogical and in their essence not very different from questions any poetic theory in the world has had

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to answer, but, due to the specific role that poetry has had to play in the development of classical Japanese culture in general, they were particularised into specific issues that required corresponding terminology. Because of the retrospective nature of Japanese culture this ground could not be altered very visibly by any subsequent theorist and the re-evaluation of formerly used terms was quite often a more acceptable way to conceptual innovations than the introduction of new ones. Nevertheless, this conceptual ground could not remain untouched when the whole system of Japanese culture had to undergo a radical transformation during late 12th and early 13th century – a transformation that included great changes in the political and social system, the introduction of heretofore marginal or unknown trends of philosophical thought (Zen and Jōdo Buddhism, Song Confucianism etc.) as well as the rise of serious scholarship of the native literary tradition. One could also say that this is the time when the conceptual ground of *waka* theory reached a crystallised shape: subsequent developments, or what is usually called post-classical *waka*, could be regarded mostly as efforts of maintaining the essential qualities stressed by the theory of that period, either by strictly adhering to the rules established, or by trying to give them new content under the changed circumstances. Though there are many fine achievements to be seen also in the post-classical *waka* (especially the work of the Reizei and Kyōgoku schools), it is, I believe, the general point of view that after the cultural rupture had occurred, *waka* gradually lost its positions as the main, if not the only, acceptable way of poetic practice, and had to give way to other genres that began to emerge and finally establish themselves as respectable forms of poetry.²

One of these genres is *ren ga*, or „linked verse“, a poetic form that has only recently started to attract attention outside Japan. The first non-Japanese source whence a reasonable amount of information on *ren ga* could be drawn is, to my knowledge, the monograph by Earl Miner.³ The descendant of *ren ga*, the *ren ku* of the Tokugawa period, has perhaps been placed under closer observation, more probably than not because of Matsuo Bashō’s interest in it. Nevertheless the attitude towards *ren ga* among Western scholars seems to be prejudiced – *ren ga* is frequently seen only as an artificial, traditional and unoriginal poetic practice without any real capacity to express authentic feelings, and therefore with little or no intrinsic merit. This prejudice is regrettable. Not only do the finest specimens of *ren ga* rank among the truly outstanding samples of Japanese

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³ Miner 1979, An extremely valuable addition to the book is Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen’s review of it (Ramirez-Christensen 1981). A brief, yet compact introduction to the poetics of the linked verse is offered by Konishi 1975, and Konishi 1991 also contains lengthy and enlightening passages on the subject. Aspects of *ren ga* have been dealt with also by other scholars, notably by Steven Carter 1987, 1988 and elsewhere, by David Pollack 1985, and by H. Mack Horton 1993, to mention only those publications that have been available to me.
poetry, but they have also given rise to a great number of theoretical premises without which the understanding of latter medieval Japanese culture would be lacking, if not impossible. The conceptual ground of renga theory has, moreover, influenced the literature of the era to a significant extent (traces of its aesthetic are clearly visible, for instance, in the theory of the Nô theatre) and made possible the appearance of later poetic genres, haikai among them. In its turn, the theory of renga is heavily indebted to the theory of waka, and most of its concepts are either reflections or derivates of the latter. The differences between the theories of renga and waka, or so I believe, also reflect the general change in the discursivity that took place after the fall of the classical cultural system.

The following is an attempt to take a closer look at these differences. In dealing with renga theory, I shall nevertheless not be too much concerned with those points that are unique to renga (like the typology of linking stanzas into a chain) but rather the elements that are shared by both theories, though treated in a different manner. The scope of this essay will be narrowed down still more by considering in depth only parts of the work of one renga theorist – namely, Nijô Yoshimoto. It is not that Shinkei or Sôgi, in whose times renga attained perfection, would not merit the same attention; the reason is, rather, that it was Yoshimoto who brought about the reorganization of the conceptual ground and, by his authority of a high-ranking aristocrat, made renga acceptable as a „high“ and „serious“ poetic genre. It could even be said that Shinkei’s and Sôgi’s own involvement with waka was already influenced by the renga conceptual ground, though this issue evidently requires closer observation that would already reach beyond the scope of this essay.

Theoretical Heritage of the waka

The theory of waka has a long history of development that hardly needs to be described here in detail because a Western reader can access it through several excellent sources.\(^4\) Therefore I shall restrict my survey of this subject to some general remarks based mainly on the views of Fujiwara no Shunzei and Fujiwara no Teika that constituted the fundamentals of later theoretical developments.

\(^4\) Benl 1951 probably remains the classic; in English, Brower & Miner 1961 has, for a long time, enjoyed the status of the most authoritative work that Miner et al. 1988 is hardly able to replace. A shorter and trustworthy survey of the subject can be found in Katô 1968. For the initial phases of the theory McCullough 1985 and Ueda 1967 could also be consulted. My own views on the subject are more thoroughly elaborated in Raud 1994.
The principal issues of waka theory can be grouped along three axes:
1) kokoro (mind) – kotoba (words)
2) fūtei (style) – sugata (form)
3) traditional – modern

The first elements of the three pairs refer to entities that have roots outside any particular text but can be expressed in it, the second, though by no means existent only within the limits of a particular poem, are nevertheless immediately visible. Of these terms, kokoro (mind) is certainly the most complicated. It appears first, together with its counterpart kotoba (words), in Ki no Tsurayuki’s Japanese preface to the first imperial anthology of waka, the Kokinshū:

The seed of Japanese poetry lies in the human mind and it grows into ten thousand leaves of words. (KKS, p.49)

Though quite often these terms are seen to signify nothing more than „content“ and „diction“, I am inclined, together with a number of scholars, to grant them a more complex meaning. Thus, kokoro can in my opinion be said to mean (in its initial sense) an intellectually processed emotional state of mind, either on its own or reflected in a poetic text, and kotoba the limited scope of poetic vocabulary that is, however, not just a list of words, but a sophisticated code with its own rules of application, wherein each word has a particular field of (sometimes compulsory) associations; this code, having developed spontaneously during the „dark age“ of waka under the domination of Chinese poetry at the Heian Court, gained stability and recognition with the publication of the Kokinshū. One of the most important points the Japanese preface to the Kokinshū expresses is the requirement for a balance between kokoro and kotoba, that is, the level of sophistication of the emotional charge of a text and the skill demonstrated in its codification.

Later developments in the theory added new nuances to both concepts: kokoro came to signify not only the processed concept that a person (a poet) had developed in concentrating upon his own state of mind, but also the very essence of the factors that had caused this particular emotional situation, were it the changes in nature, events happening in the course of a love affair or some-

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5 One should not be confused by the third pair: I am not asserting that „mind“, „style“ and „tradition“ have anything else in common except their externality.
6 See e.g. McCullough 1985, p.326.
7 E.g. Benl 1951 or Ueda 1967.
8 Kubota 1941, p.13 provides an excellent example of how this code functions: a poem (KKS p.91) by Yoshimine no Munesada (Henjō), situated in the second Spring scroll of the Kokinshū is interpreted by him as simultaneously being a love poem. The questions on the signifying mechanism active in waka poetry are, however, too complicated to be discussed here at length; I still have to note that the existence of this code is either denied or ignored by a number of scholars so that the matter is open to discussion. See also Part I of Raud 1994.
thing else;9 kotoba, in its turn, became a stable code beyond the limits of which it was not advisable to venture, and which had to operate automatically as soon as the kokoro of a particular occasion was apprehended.10 What had been a skill in Tsurayuki’s times now became an elementary requirement. This change can be said to have taken place before or during the compilation of the Shūishū, the third imperial anthology of waka, and is reflected in the standards of judgment expressed in these times. Ki no Tsurayuki had criticized Ariwara no Narihira in his preface with the following sentence:

Ariwara no Narihira has mind in excess but lacks the words (sono kokoro amarite, kotoba tarazu). (KKS, p.57)

The compiler of the Shūishū, Fujiwara no Kintô, expresses his poetic ideal with the following words:

The excess of mind over elegant words (kotoba tae ni shite amari no koko-ro sae aru). (WKB, p.32)

What had been a drawback in Tsurayuki’s time (the excess of mind, kokoro) has now become a merit. Around the same time as Kintô wrote his treatises, Sone no Yoshitada indulged in very interesting experiments with the form and also made the first serious effort to extend the limits of the poetic code. Though neither he nor Izumi Shikibu achieved noteworthy recognition during their lifetimes,11 their very existence demonstrates that the centre of poetic attention had started to move gradually from the balanced expression typical of the Kokinshū in both directions, challenging the scope of the traditional kotoba and kokoro respectively: to a linguistic freedom (Yoshitada) or to an emotional intensity that was not dependent solely on the code for its expression (Izumi).

From the beginning of the eleventh century onwards, we can thus follow three distinct lines of poetic approach: the continuation of the „balance“ ideal of Tsurayuki with the adjustments made by Kintô; the kotoba-centered approach of Yoshitada (continued particularly by Minamoto no Tsunenobu) and the kokoro-centered approach of Izumi Shikibu that produced no immediate outcome except, perhaps, for a number of poems that appear in prose works. Of course, this distinction is nothing more than a rough simplification: there are, for instance, elements in Yoshitada’s poetic thought that are very much kokoro-centered, and the „balance“ ideal of those times had, in fact, departed so significantly from Tsurayuki’s original ideas that it is actually unjust to associate it with his name, or even with that of Kintô. This attitude, also called „conservative“,12 came to exercise a profound influence on the composition on set topics (daiei) that emerged from the formal pratique of poetic compositions at court.

9 See also Benl 1951, p.37.
10 See Katô 1968, p.336.
12 See Katô 1968, p.335.
The second axis, that of fûtei (style) and sugata (form), emerged and developed in close connection with the first. The concept of tei in Japanese poetics is, in fact, almost as old as the kokoro – kotoba opposition, having first appeared in Mibu no Tadamine's Waka jittai in the beginning of the tenth century. Already in this work tei means something more than „style“ in the usual context of Western literary theory, but is rather an abstract category outside any particular literary work that can only be an example of a „style“ or represent a „style“, the latter being primary, the former secondary. Style is thus, for Japanese poetics, a mode of organizing or developing the kokoro, and not expressing it. The second term of this pair of oppositions, sugata („appearance“), is in a sense closer to the Western notion of „style“ as it denotes the way how a particular kokoro is expressed in a particular text, having been defined as follows:

sugata – Configuration. In waka and later criticism, the cognitive outlines of a poem, so expressing in a metaphor of form some of the features of kokoro and kotoba but implying also a constituent whole. It designates the individual poetic result in terms of the classical affective-expressive poets.

(Miner et al. 1988, p.299)

If we take fûtei to signify the mode of organization of kokoro, then sugata most naturally appears to be the realization of an abstract, „outside“ fûtei in a given poem, and also the channel to access the fûtei in a text. Now we can surmise that the development noted above on the kokoro – kotoba axis cannot have left the notion of sugata untouched, and, accordingly, the concept of fûtei must have gained in importance, being now the only means to regulate the balance on that axis. Indeed, this is exactly what happened. Questions concerning fûtei are gradually being paid more and more attention until the notion finally occupies the central place in the poetic theory of Fujiwara no Shunzei whose work might truly be considered the turning point in the development of waka that already Shunzei's notion of yûgen (mystery and depth) could have been able to cause. It is difficult to clarify this long-disputed category in a few words; in my opinion, one of the most important characteristics of yûgen in terms of kokoro development is the passage from rationalization to insight, a sort of meditative approach with a poetic topic as the object of meditation, an approach that overrides the grammar of the poetic code that now only functions subcon-

13 The following is perhaps a typical definition: „... style signifies the manner or way in which something, including a work of art, is done and, more particularly, the trace the artist's way of working leaves in his artifact.“ (Chatman 1987, p.230)

14 Nôse 1981 is definitely the classic treatment of the subject.

15 The most thorough discussion of the relations between Shunzei's poetics and Buddhist practices available in English is probably to be found in LaFleur 1983, pp.80–106. The art of meditation that has influenced Shunzei's poetics has been identified as kanshin, a technique of the Tendai school of Mahayana Buddhism put forward by Zhi-yi in his Mo-he zhi-guan (Makashikan) that focuses on realizing the fundamental unity of the universe through the concentration on a single object.
sciously. In this sense, yūgen poetry is kokoro-centered, but it is also kotoba-centered in giving the actually used vocabulary a certain degree of independence from the rules of the codal grammar, leaving the compulsory associations to hang in the air. One very important aspect of such a poetic practice is the development of an adequate, conscious sensibility, the capacity to see through to the "fundamental unity" that underlies any poetic experience. This attitude can, in fact, be traced back to Yoshitada.

The style that could be called "yūgen proper" also imposes, like any other fūtei, certain limits to the poetic material and attitudes used: it would probably be unimaginable to compose a congratulatory poem to an official on the occasion of his promotion to a higher office in this style; the required insight could not be actively at work in an atmosphere without peace of mind. However, all subsequently developed fūtei seem to have adopted the same underlying mechanism of processing kokoro through insight rather than wit or reason, and in this way the meditative approach gradually spread over the whole ground of waka theory. Kazamaki's remark that "in a sense, it could be said that Shunzei renounced his own position of a recluse in order to make the recluse literary attitudes the general characteristic of the whole world of poetry" should, in my opinion, be read in this context. The same approach is expressed even more explicitly by Fujiwara no Teika who has reserved the term of yūgen for "yūgen proper" and termed the underlying mechanism ushin that could be translated for the present purposes as "the style of the (direct) presence of kokoro". Like Shunzei's yūgen, Teika's ushin is simultaneously a distinct fūtei of its own right and the attitude that has to govern all other fūtei as a principle:

... this ushin style is something that reaches over all the other nine styles. It is because in yūgen the [direct] presence of the mind is also required, and in chōkō as well, just like in the rest of them. Really – whichever style you compose in, a poem without the presence of the mind is always unsuccessful. I have just now, however, included ushin in the list of styles in an different meaning. That ushin is a style that can be particularly chosen to compose a poem. Nevertheless, whatever the style would be, its essence lies in the [direct] presence of the mind. (MGS, pp.517–181) The term fūtei can thus be said to have two different meanings that both influence the sugata and, for a particular text, can be apprehended through it. It should be noted in passing that the meaning of Teika's ushin was later (especially where renga is concerned) altered to signify serious, or acceptable

16 Kazamaki 1985, p.55.
17 The views expressed in the passage quoted here are probably attributable to Teika even if the scholars doubting the authenticity of the Maigetsushū would prove to be correct (Konishi 1991, p.201). The debate on whether the Maigetsushū is authentic or not is a long one. Mizukami is probably right in summing up the discussion with the assertion that there is no evidence for either side to prove its case beyond doubt (Mizukami 1977, p.119)
poetry as opposed to mushin, or "mindless", officially unacceptable poetry. Nevertheless it seems that the distinction of meanings here articulated still remained a part of the conceptual ground of the waka also for later ages, and renga theory will provide evidence for this argument.

As to the third axis, that of tradition and modernity, a lengthy discussion of the attitudes toward the literary heritage – especially in the twelfth century that was a period of very active scholarship – has to remain beyond the scope of this essay. It is generally acknowledged that Shunzei and Teika advocated a return to the Kokinshû but not, in my mind, because of a conscious pursuit of a neo-Classicist ideal, and not only because of their opposition against the unsophisticated spontaneity of the Man'yôshû that appealed to some of their theoretical adversaries, but rather because their aim was to intensify the poetic language. Above I have written that the meditative approach to poetry had the capacity to override the codal grammar of the Kokinshû kotoba; this does not mean, however, that the codal grammar would have become utterly insignificant. On the contrary: if the codal rules had not existed in every poet’s and reader's consciousness, there would have been nothing to override. The compulsory associations are not ignored, they are still "there", but in a latent form; their connection with the poem's significance is more remote and requires the same "meditative" insight from the part of the reader. One of the most effective ways how these associations can be put to use is, of course, the technique of honkadori, or allusive variation, that enabled a poet to include in the associative field of his own text another context with its own associations. Whenever this technique was used, the texts alluded to inevitably had to belong to a stock of source texts known to their perspective readers that were in general written in the kotoba of the Kokinshû. As the honkadori allusions were required to be limited to a minimal necessary amount of quoted words, a reader would probably try to look for allusions even in cases where there were none, and, as a result, any use of any word from the poetic code would come to evoke at least the best-known contexts where it has formerly been used. This provided an intensity for the poetic language it would have otherwise lacked, but only on the condition that the code in use referred to highly allusive contexts known from the poetic tradition, and – what is especially important – only if the emotional nuances expressed were novel in themselves. Without this intensity the poetic essence of

18 Konishi 1991, p. 94.
19 This idea is advocated in Konishi 1991, p. 140, p. 158 etc.
20 Kazamaki 1985, pp. 56–60.
21 In the Roppýakuban utaawase, Shunzei, who acted as a judge, has criticised poems that quote too much from the text alluded to (UAS p. 431); Teika has also reprimanded poets that quote more than necessary (EGTK, p. 493).
the *waka* would have sooner or later had to confront a serious crisis, as Kazamaki has pointed out.\(^{22}\)

There is also another reason, a far more political one, why the *waka* poets of the twelfth century preferred to look for a poetic intensity in engaging the tradition for their purposes and not trying to extend the scope of the poetic language, and that is, of course, the general transformation of the society. After warrior clans started to dominate the political scene, the supremacy of aristocracy was restricted to the cultural sphere only, and accordingly the aristocratic identity was tied to the cultural conventions. The kind of vocabulary outside the limits of the accepted code that may have appeared merely eccentric at the end of the tenth century, or had been, indeed, deemed acceptable in the *haikai*ka,* or „eccentric poems“ in scroll XIX of the *Kokinshū*, now inevitably bore the mark of non-aristocratic, and consequently hostile, linguistic usage. It seems therefore quite logical that the *waka* poets who identified themselves with the aristocratic past and not the deplorable present would hardly indulge in using the words marked as „vulgar“ in their serious poetic compositions, the only area where their intellectual supremacy could be maintained. On the other hand, however, a mere echoing of poetic concepts of the past, a production of lifeless artifacts, would have proved that their claims to such a supremacy are essentially void. The practical outcome of this theory constitutes one of the finest layers of Japanese poetic tradition, but it could work only if used by poets who could live up to the standards it established. As soon as the intellectual supremacy of the aristocracy became a stagnant myth – and the thirteenth century marks the beginning of this process – this theory immediately turned into its own opposite.

The above speculations could be summed up in the following diagram:

\[ \text{fûtei} \]

\[ \rightarrow \]

\[ \text{kokoro} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{sugata} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{kotoba} \]

(modern) \quad (traditional)

\textit{Sugata}, that occupies here the central position, is what reflects the individuality of the poem; it is, as it were, the meeting place of several „outside“ entities: the *fûtei*, that has to be mastered, the *kotoba* (together with the education needed to use it) that has to be learnt, and the *kokoro* that has to be cultivated. The latter – the only locus of distinct individuality in this scheme – also has to be guided by the search for an underlying poetic unity. It appears, then,

\(^{22}\) Kazamaki 1985, p.46.
that the *waka* composed according to such a theory should necessarily be quite unindivisible, but it is not so: the space between the elements, the dimensions of the poetic code as well as the riches of the tradition, and the diversity of the available *fûtei* leaves every poet a sufficient freedom of manoeuvre, and the results of the poetic practice need not be more impersonal than anything else committed to paper in writing.

Of course, the poetic theory of *waka* as handed down by the Nijô and Reizei schools had been somewhat transformed before it reached Yoshimoto, but at the same time Teika remained probably the most authoritative traditional figure to whom references were made by different theorists regardless of the case they were arguing. In the following I shall try to show that this conceptual ground was altered very significantly by Nijô Yoshimoto's *renga* theory that set quite new standards for poetic creation.

**Yoshimoto's Theory**

Concerning the relations of *waka* and *renga* theory it seems rational to proceed, as it were, in an inversed order, that is, to approach the conceptual ground of the *waka* from the point of view of *renga* theory and not vice versa. I shall take the treatise *Jûmon saiishô* ("Ten Questions on the Most Secret Matters") by Nijô Yoshimoto as the starting point, because his views are expressed in this text probably in their most advanced stage. The contemporary views on *waka* – at least those of the "conservative" Nijô school from which Yoshimoto's own basic knowledge on the *waka* came from – can be supposed to be summarized in the ten questions an imaginable student (or polemic adversary) poses to him in the *Jûmon saiishô*:

1) How should *renga* be composed?
2) What should *kotoba* ("words") and *sugata* ("form") look like?
3) What kind of *fûtei* ("style") should one adhere to?
4) What is called *zoku* ("vulgar")?
5) Which ones among the contemporary *fûtei* ("styles") are good?

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23 It is known that a number of texts attributed to Teika at that time were not genuine but falsified specially to authorize subsequent statements as continuations of his thought (qv. Konishi 1991, pp.255–261) which is probably an even more powerful evidence of his unchallenged reputation. In the early 1430s Shôtetsu, probably the most authoritative poetic theorist of that time, would begin his main theoretical work like this: "In our Way, anyone ignoring Teika forfeits the benevolence [of the gods and Buddhas] and may fall under a curse" (SM, I, 1).

24 Shimazu 1973, pp. 18–19.

25 The *waka* teacher of Yoshimoto was Ton’a, the leading poet of the Nijô school after the death of Fujiwara no Tamayo.
6) Does the abandoning of the style of one's teacher not harm the continuity of the renga tradition?

7) What does renga value more—the hana („flower“) or the mi („fruit“)?

8) Does renga have to change according to what sugata and expressions suit the taste of the people?

9) Do all the poets of a given time have to compose in a similar style?

10) What is the importance of knowledge and familiarity with rules?

Some of these questions have arisen from previous answers, thus e.g. the word zoku „vulgar“ appears in question 4 because the answer to question 3 has used this term. Without this exception the questions—unlike the answers—do not contain a single term that would not be relevant to waka theory, whereas all the crucial notions of the latter—with, again, one very important exception, that of kokoro or „mind“—have been mentioned. Thus it could be assumed that the position of this imaginative polemic adversary is that of a waka partisan who approaches renga from the point of view of the waka conceptual ground, and for evident reasons: waka is the prime poetic art and any other way of poetic expression—it has the ambition of being taken seriously—would have to conform to its standards. Yoshimoto's view is, of course, that renga should be taken seriously, but to achieve that, it necessarily has to differ from the waka (or uta, as it is mostly called in theoretical treatises).

It could be argued that Yoshimoto did not distinguish between waka and renga to that extent. Passages from his works support this view:

The renga is a form of the uta. In ancient times it was not composed in sequences of 100 or 50 stanzas but consisted only of the upper and the lower stanza, where the second half was linked to the first. (RRH 1)

The uta is called renga when it is composed by two people. (TM 3)

Also in other places he has been at pains to demonstrate that samples of renga have been included in the Man'yōshū and the older imperial anthologies by giving examples of joint composition (like MYS 1635) that have been rejected by Konishi on the ground that they do not possess the characteristics of renga:

A great many similar amoebic poems survive; in all cases, however, they are unified waka divided between two poets. Almost all can be read as single, conventional waka if the reader is unaware (or ignores the fact) that it was actually composed by two poets. A basic element of linked poetry is that each poetic unit must have a meaning complete in itself, that the seventeen- or fourteen-syllable units be able to stand on their own. Since

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26 These terms are usually pronounced ka and jitsu according to the sinified readings of the respective characters, especially in the High Middle Ages; I have here used the Japanese readings to stress the connection with waka theory, starting with Tsurayuki's Japanese preface to the Kokinshū where the words appear as poetic terms in this form.

27 Sugata „form“ in later medieval poetic theory is practically synonymous of sama „appearance“, a term that had played an important part in the works of earlier theorists.
amoebic waka can be read as single poems, their composition is probably not the formative period for linked verse, despite the occasional appearance of freestanding units within a waka. (Konishi 1991, p.86)

In fact it seems that Yoshimoto himself also shared this view. Thus, for instance, he rejects the tendency (attributed to his own renga teacher, Kyûsei, or Gusai, 1284–1378) to concentrate on connections and neglect the independence of each stanza:

Kyûsei's words have admirable yûgen which does not vanish, no matter how many times you hear them. However, he did not compose renga concentrating on his own mood in each stanza, but only paid close attention to the connection between verses instead. There are almost no stanzas among his work that would have an interesting point of their own. (JSH 6)

Of course Kyûsei could in no way be assumed to have composed amoebic waka: the links he introduces are nearly always unexpected turns that can be deduced from the previous stanza but do not fit entirely into the frames it has envisaged; however a beginner, or a person sharing the views of the imaginary polemic adversary, would, in imitating Kyûsei's style, probably end up writing waka-like quasi-renga; just before the quoted extract he has even said explicitly that imitating a master's style "transforms the renga into something like the uta" that clearly stresses the distinction. The above passages that stress the common character of the two genres could thus be taken as the usual tribute any innovation in a retrospective culture like the Japanese has to pay to the tradition; the renga is a derivate of the waka, also in the sense that it is as respectable, but not a variation of it.

Returning to the questions above we might say that they reflect the conceptual ground of the waka theory inasmuch as the range of possible answers to them is predictable. Thus, for instance, one could easily imagine the answers of a waka theorist (of any school) to the questions concerning the words and form, or the styles, because the classic treatises always touch these issues: we could expect an admonition to adhere to the vocabulary of the first three imperial anthologies, and a description of recommended styles within the range of which a preference to one, or several, would be expressed. The attitude of Yoshimoto is quite different:

The form (sugata) is the words (kotoba). But it is very difficult to establish standards of distinction between good and bad. The words become good and bad only in the context of the composition of a given stanza. No matter how good the quality of some wood may be, in the hands of a poor craftsman it becomes bad. And wood of lower quality may appear good if processed by a superior craftsman. However, as to the form of yûgen, only delicate and polished words should be thought of as good, and incoherent or unrefined words, as bad. Just like wood – it must be shaved and polished with oil before use. This is of utmost importance. A renga where the
traces of this adze-work can be seen, is to no avail. In Chinese poetry this is also criticized severely. (JSH 3)

I shall return below to the fundamental differentiation of concepts expressed in the first sentence of this passage. For the time being we might just note that Yoshimoto's view of poetic vocabulary is much more liberal than classical waka theory would have it: language is just the material, and the poetic context is the artifact in which the material has been put to use; the quality of the result depends on the skills of the author that must include, among other things, the ability to conceal a conscious effort to polish the language. More detailed statements on poetic vocabulary can be found elsewhere in Yoshimoto's work:

As to words – one should search for the flower among flowers, for the jewel among jewels. However, there is a general view among beginners that in our times one may well compose stanzas on, say, the dawn in the spring or the twilight in autumn, without any kokoro whatsoever, only with delicate words. This is still inferior to the style of ancient renga as regulated in the Old Book28 that is characterized by crude words and stiff connections, and I find it very unpleasant. In general one should not venture beyond the limits of the vocabulary of the imperial anthologies of waka, though some new expressions, or even vulgar words are not necessarily rude in the renga. (RRH 6)

The difference in the attitudes towards the subject visible in the two treatises could perhaps be accounted for by the 34 years that separate their dates of composition. The Renri hishō expresses an approach still profoundly overshadowed by the waka theory („one should not venture beyond the limits of the vocabulary of the imperial anthologies of waka“), but the capacity of the new „serious“ renga to integrate words that are inappropriate for waka is already recognized. This must mean that the renga as a poetic form, or an accomplished renga poet, possesses an intrinsic quality that compensates for the use of inappropriate words.

The manner with which the styles are dealt with in the Jûmon saiishô is even more interesting. If we do not forget that the imaginable polemic adversary who poses the questions is, in fact, Yoshimoto himself, then it will seem at least strange that he has to ask about the styles twice. The first time he does that (question 3) the answer is elusive:

As it is said in Shijin gyokusetsu:29 „Avoid vulgar (zoku) heart, vulgar words and vulgar mood (fuzei)“. The same applies to renga. (JSH 4)

28 The Old Book (honshiki) was a set of rules for renga that originated probably from mid-thirteenth century, now extinct. It is not excluded that there existed several Old Books (Konishi 1991, p.281) on the basis of which different renga schools developed; Yoshimoto uses the term in opposition to the New Book, or what is known as the Ōan Shinshiki, from his own brush (qv. RRH 1).

29 Shi-ren yu-xie, a Song poetic treatise reproducing mostly opinions on poetry of Southern Song poets. Compiled by Wei Qing-zhi and known in Japan since the late Kamakura period.
As we have seen, "vulgar words" in the sense of "words inappropriate for waka" are, in fact, acceptable in renga, and therefore Yoshimoto has to clarify the term zoku as applied here in the answer to the next question:

I call vulgar words such that sound harsh, base and incoherent, almost painful to hear. Yūgen-words, in turn, sound fresh and smooth. Among recent poets, the use of words could be learned from Kyūsei, Shūa and others. Concerning vulgar mood (fûtei): if you concentrate on what is exceptional and good and express yourself with unsensible mood – this is called bad. Keeping this in mind we can call non-vulgar an expression that forwards the gracefulness of mood just as it is. A stanza that has the fragrance of the flower is not vulgar. A stanza without the fragrance is vulgar. This should be remembered very well. (JSH 5)

After these preparations, the question of style is approached once again, but the answer is still elusive. First it states that "as has been repeatedly said before, the style of poetry has changed four or five times during the last fifty years" (JSH 6) and proceeds to comment on different authors, their strong and weak points (the passage on Kyūsei quoted above belongs to this section). That is, the style (fûtei) is treated here as an individual quality rather than a "general" mode of composition like the waka theory would have it. The chapter ends with a tentative description of "the contemporary style" as a combination of individual qualities of different authors:

The atmosphere (kakari) and words of Kyūsei, the mood (fûtei) and the labour to make each one stanza interesting of Shūa – could we call this, perhaps, the contemporary style? Of course, this cannot be mastered by just anyone. (JSH 6)

Yoshimoto's effort to avoid setting standards of style in the traditional sense does not necessarily mean that such standards would be non-existent in the discourse on renga. Some such terms he has mentioned himself:

Presently, many stanzas without real kokoro appear among the works in the merrily ornamented style (sazamekasu tei). Then there are people who compose too powerfully. (JSH 10)

However, his own conception of fûtei clearly does not posit it as an abstract category outside the text, or the texts of a given writer. Fûtei is individual, and it can only be perceived, not emulated; a poet must develop, and not acquire the fûtei of his own. The criteria according to which the fûtei is evaluated is nothing else than the general taste of the age:

If a poem is appreciated by many people under the Heavens, it is certainly good. If only two or three people like it, then it is unsuccessful. Meng-zi has said: "You have to know that a thing is good if all the world comes to it." For example, if I have one opinion in my mind, but all the world thinks otherwise, there is nothing you can do but turn in the same direction. There is no point in standing alone against the rest of the world. (JSH 9)
A statement like this would clearly have been unimaginable in earlier waka circles and political motives could perhaps be suggested for the reason: standing against the rest of the world was the question of survival for the aristocratic society of the twelfth century that regarded anything unprecedented as a further sign of the general decline.

There is still a term that may create a certain amount of confusion, namely yūgen, one of the most important fûtei of the waka. We saw above that in waka yūgen served both as a fûtei of its own right and as a model for others. Yoshimoto also makes frequent usage of this term, and for present it is not that important that the meaning he charges this word with is not the original but rather closer to what was called yûen, or the style of elegant charm in former waka, because the latter also followed the model set by yūgen and ushin. But Yoshimoto, though no doubt aware of the term's history, does not call yūgen a fûtei. For him, the word is an adjective rather than a noun, and in most cases (like also the instances quoted above) he uses yūgen as an attribute to another term, be it form (sugata), words (kotoba) or something else. As a quality, yūgen does not change, whereas fûtei are not stable. Moreover, a fûtei is not an undivisible entity: we saw above that Yoshimoto's definition of contemporary style poses it as a combination of different elements attributed to different authors, and an individual fûtei may also change. Shinkei, whose views on fûtei are very similar to Yoshimoto, actually refers to him (and Imagawa Ryôshun) in dealing with this subject:

Is it possible to attain perfection by concentrating your mind on one style alone and practicing with all your might?
According to the predecessors, not one style should be neglected – this is what two sages have said. (SG, p.141)

This treatment of fûtei as individual and changeable modes of composition brings us closer to Yoshimoto's notion of individuality that plays a major part in his renga theory. Individuality is strongly stressed already in the Renri hishô:

Renga originates in the mind and one has to learn it on one's own. Consequently it cannot be taught by a teacher. (RRH 2)

Though this passage echoes a similar statement on waka in the Yakumo mishô by Juntoku tennô (a work already reflecting the conceptual shifts), it could be said that Yoshimoto developed the requirement of individuality to what was probably an extreme from the point of view of waka. So, in the introduction to the Jûmon saihishô he writes:

In all Ways, the people who establish new schools do not obligatorily assume the style (tei) of their masters. [...] Whoever has made a discovery of his own, should establish his own school. This applies to Chinese and Japanese poetry as well. In olden times, Ki no Tsurayuki and others stud-

ied the mood (*fuzei*) of Yakamochi, but it does not correspond to their own style. Teika and Ietaka studied Tsurayuki and Mitsune, but this does not mean that they would have a resemblance. Thus, for a student, the teacher is the departing point, but when skill has been attained, he becomes independent. (JSI 1)

This passage contains a key word that is very important for understanding the background of Yoshimoto’s concern with individuality: what has been translated here as „whoever has made a discovery of his own“ is in the original waga satori-etai tokoro araba; the sentence uses the word *satori*, the Zen concept of enlightenment. *Satori* can only be achieved from within and not be taught: the role of a Zen teacher is only that of a guide, and not of an authority or a strict supervisor, and the same attitude is here applied to *renge*.

Above I mentioned the association of *waka* poetry with the meditation techniques used by the Tendai school of Buddhism; after the introduction of Zen in Japan the latter gradually gained in importance and, being particularly favoured by the Ashikaga family with whom Yoshimoto’s loyalty lay, it is not surprising that he uses a Zen term. However the weight that this term carries can be taken for evidence that his interest in Zen is by no means superficial. As far as *renge* is concerned, Buddhism is Zen and Zen only, and although Zen has inherited many characteristic features of Tendai31 (that was, and perhaps remains, the most important school of Buddhist learning in Japan), the differences between the two schools are essential. Approaching the same tenet that could be schematically formulated as „there is sameness in everything“ Tendai adopts an universalist attitude, indulging in reflections on multiple interpenetrating worlds whereas Zen is radically concrete, aiming at „pointing directly at the mind“ and never concerned with anything happening not „at this very moment“. Thus the implications for poetry are also different: Tendai standards, translated into the terms of poetry, are very well compatible with an abstract category of *fudei* that is more or less universal, whereas according to Zen views, a *fudei* – or any other palpable aspect of poetic expression – could only arise from an individual mind that is in constant movement. A universalist *fudei* in *waka* theory could be mastered from the outside, and once learned, the underlying model had to be learned with it, whereas in *renge* the underlying model had to be grasped individually, from the inside of a concrete poetic practice. Yoshimoto resumes this question later in the *Jûmon saishishô*:

If I instruct you to abandon your predecessors’ style, it concerns only their atmosphere (*kakari*) and mood (*fuzei*). The basic mind (*ijji*) has to remain the same. The correct gentle *yûgen* is not different even in Zen’a or anybody else. What has to change is the way of composition, the use of words. The style of Chinese poetry has also changed ten or twenty times.

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31 See Konishi 1991, p.157, for a discussion on the relations between Tendai and Zen and the importance of the latter for the formation of medieval Japanese literary conventions.
Or the *uta* – the *Man'yōshū*, the *Kokinshū*, the *Shinkokinshū* – all have different styles (*fūtei*). Zen-master Gidō has also said that poetry must be composed in accordance with the tastes and styles of one’s time. We can in no way call it the right Way if people do not find fascination in it. It is like the *dengaku* or the *sarugaku*. In *renga*, too, an achievement can be called skilful only if it succeeds in arising the interest of all the participants in the sitting. You may possess whatever secret teachings, but if you fail to attract the attention of the *renga* sitting, they are all in vain. (JSH 7)

It should be remarked that this attitude did not survive for very long. For instance, Shinkei’s admonition to follow one’s teacher is already quite strict:

Does one have to receive instructions from predecessors in this Way? Is it necessary to follow the remarks of people with whom you have participated in the same *renga* sittings?

What a foolish question! „You know the new from learning the old“, it is said.32 The practice of somebody to whom the Way has not been handed down is absolutely meaningless. (SG, p.141–142)

In my opinion, *iji* or „the basic mind“ in Yoshimoto’s text corresponds to the underlying model called *ushin* by Teika; this view is further supported by Yoshimoto’s saying that „the correct gentle *yūgen*“ is essentially the same in the works of any accomplished poet. „The correct *yūgen*“ seems to be no more than a synonym of „the basic mind“. The latter concept itself is probably also a derivative of the underlying consciousness or the „Buddha-nature“ of Zen. The realization of the Buddha-nature/the basic mind brings about the enlightenment/the individual *fūtei* of the practicing person that is then perceptible in his discourse.

The channel through which the *fūtei* had to be perceived in *waka* was, as stated above, *sugata*, „appearance“, the relationship between the „mind“ and the „words“. According to Yoshimoto (in the passage quoted above on „words“), the „appearance“ is the „words“. This does, indeed, seem like an effort to eliminate the (classical) notion of *kokoro* altogether, but such an interpretation turns later out not to be plausible:

... there are some poets who learn the words and the atmosphere (*kakari*) but do not learn the *kokoro*. Again, if the *kokoro* is reminiscent of others and thus unoriginal, then however exceptional it may first appear to be, it will finally not be interesting. First you have to learn the *kokoro*. The words only constitute the surface. You must be very well able to imitate the use of the *kokoro*. This point could be called the secret of how to make everyday things appear novel. [...] The poets with lacking *kokoro* should practice *kokoro* incessantly. Again those with unsatisfactory atmosphere should practice atmosphere. The first and best stanzas are those composed with a deep concentration of the mind when you lose your self-consciousness. However, it is like the eyes and nose you are born with. If you try to

32 The quotation is from *Lun-yu*, 2.11.
correct them too eagerly, the result may turn out to be bad. Nevertheless, your mind should be fixed on the supreme. (JSH 10)

The point is made quite clear: one cannot do without kokoro. It resembles "atmosphere" in that both can be learnt and practiced, and at the same time it has to be original, and it constitutes, just like in waka, the essence of the poem, for which the "words" are just the surface. But unlike in the waka its correlate here is clearly the "atmosphere" instead of the "words". The "atmosphere" and the kokoro form an axis; whichever is lacking should be practised.

Another comment is needed here: what may actually be learnt and practised is not the kokoro ("mind") in itself, but the use of kokoro; the word kokoro seems, in other places, to be an abbreviation. The text offers two approaches for interpretation: one, following immediately the first occasion where the notion appears, calls it "the secret of how to make everyday things appear novel", the other, stating what it should bring about in practice, describes it as "deep concentration of the mind, losing your self-consciousness". If this is the "use" of kokoro then kokoro itself is apparently nothing more than "the mind", that is, the word is used in its dictionary meaning and not with the enormous weight that former poetic theory has loaded it with. However, the term and the word are identical, and thus its usage indicates a displacement: what lies under the surface of the poem is not an elaborated concept, but the mind itself. The result of the poetic practice is a success if the mind (individual) has realized the "basic mind" (general). Parallels with Zen are apparent. Therefore, of course, the "appearance" of the poem cannot be anything else than "words" (impersonal, preferably characterizable as yūgen), and the only possible correlate for the mind is the "atmosphere", the visible result of its application.

The last point that remains to be discussed here is the attitude towards tradition, or, in a more limited sense, learning. Once again the difference resembles the one between the universalist Tendai approach and the radical concreteness of Zen. The attitude of the latter to learning is made explicit by Dōgen:

Nothing can be gained by extensive study and wide reading. Give them up immediately. Just focus your mind on one thing, absorb the old examples, study the actions of former Zen masters, and penetrate deeply into a single form of practice. (SGZM I,5)

While reading the sacred scriptures, one can gradually come to understand the Buddhist truth as it is revealed in the text. It is a mistake, though, to first look at the sentences, to concern oneself with the alignment of phrases and their rhymes, to evaluate them as good or bad, and then try to grasp the truth. Instead, it is better to disregard the literary considerations and to grasp the truth of the text from the outset. (SGZM II,11)

33 The term kakari was originally used to denote the phonetic pattern of a poem but later came to convey a broader meaning.
The same attitude is echoed by Yoshimoto:

If somebody has to judge a sitting, a good knowledge of the theory on his part is extremely desirable. And he has to know the rules as well. As to a beginner, if he only follows the theoretical instructions and rules but composes bad renga, it is of no use. In this practice you have to be good in renga first. Even if you know by heart the Man'yōshū, the Kokinshū and the like, but your renga is not interesting, it is only like counting your neighbour's treasures. But even if you are penniless, but skillful in renga, it is as if you had acquired a treasure of your own. Accordingly, in the Man'yōshū and the Kokinshū we can find pieces by imayō singers and dancing girls, and there are poems written by beggars among olden songs. This is because their poetry is worthy of praise. (JSH 11)

Obviously the point in common between the two texts is that extensive learning may become an obstacle to a beginner's development and a ,,measurable“ substitute for meditative insight. The target of Dōgen's critique is doubtlessly the Tendai attitude to learning, whereas Yoshimoto seems to see the dangers of learning in the example of the waka, where the intensity of the poetic language, created with the help of learning (or, at least, extensive literary competence) had been substituted with uncreative adherence to the tradition for its own sake. Combined with the more liberal attitude towards poetic words this approach definitely makes renga more mobile and changeable than waka had been. The danger of learning apparently only exists for a beginner:

However, after you have learned to compose interesting renga, learning becomes very important. In present days it is said that learning is even more important than the verses themselves. But if you embark on the Way, you should not harbour such thoughts. The words of Confucius: ,,I call knowledge if you know what you do not know“, apply to this issue. This is something to be remembered. (JSH 11)

Attaining skill in renga, as we saw above, may be seen to correspond roughly to Zen enlightenment, and we can subsume that the attitudes of a beginner and of an accomplished poet towards a literary text differ considerably, if not to the extent that separates the understanding of the world of a Zen adept before and after satori, though Yoshimoto's interpretation of the direct ,,use“ of the kokoro as ,,the secret of how to make everyday things appear novel“ suggests a parallel with Song dynasty Zen master Qing-yuan's famous dictum:

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to a point where I saw that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters. But now that I have got to the very substance I am at rest. For it is just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.34

34 Quoted from LaFleur 1983, p.23.
LaFleur points out that this kind of thinking created an attitude towards reality, or an aesthetic mode that "requires the return of a poet's perceptions and mind to the simple recognition of phenomena. This recognition is powerful because it represents a renewed simplicity rather than a naive simplicity. This aesthetic mode lives off the way it redirects our focused attention to phenomena for their own sake. It does so with stunning effect by reversing the symbolizing habit of the mind."  

35 Compared to the former aesthetic mode that had governed waka (and waka-related) expression the difference is, of course, obvious. Though similar tendencies also appeared in the waka, especially that of later ages – LaFleur traces them back to Saigyô, 36 but the poetry of Sone no Yoshitada and Minamoto no Tsunenobu could similarly be taken for starting points of this approach to reality – they were not, before the emergence of renga, explicitly posited as theoretical requirements. Another distinctive feature of renga as opposed to waka in this sense is the particular preoccupation of the renga with the present, the judgment passed by the participants of a particular renga sitting:

In renga, too, an achievement can be called skilful only if it succeeds in arising the interest of all the participants in the sitting. You may possess whatever secret teachings, but if you fail to attract the attention of the renga sitting, they are all in vain. (JSH 7)

The difference between a renga sitting and a poetry match can be said to consist, first, in the theoretically non-competitive character of a renga sitting (all participants were supposed to collaborate in order to produce a unity and not to try to prevail over the others), second, in the relative freedom of the textual stream in which any new associated link could introduce a change of theme, and third, in the autonomous character of a waka poem that, once composed, was to be regarded as a self-sufficient entity that could be read either individually or in a sequence the context of which was not a necessary condition for its interpretation and could only load it with supplementary meaning.

I will now try to summarize what has been said above about renga terms in the form of a diagram. Considering the importance of individuality in renga, we could classify the terms according to their relation to the "individual" and the "general" in the following manner:

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36 Ibid.
The closer two terms are on a particular level, the stronger their innate connection, and every lower level functions as a filter for the expression of the higher one, until the individual and the general finally meet in the text. As it can be seen, the location of the terms is very different from the diagram given above for the waka. But the most significant difference — and, as I believe, one of the factors that affected the mechanism of poetic creation most profoundly — is something not distinctly present in this diagram: it is what would correspond to the text above the highest level; it is reality — something that must be realized (satori) in order to attain true poetic skill. The poetic process is — for renga theory — an expression (codification) of reality. Isn't it always, one could ask — but it seems that it isn't: there is no need for codification of reality in the waka, because it has already been codified, the „words“ are the code, and the reality beyond them is irrelevant, as well as frequently unpleasant. Ken Akiyama has described the aristocratic Heian society as a „universe of language“,\(^{37}\) that is, a social system in which the poetic code, as the basis of all discursivity, was in a position to separate the individual from reality. After this society had collapsed, reality had to be confronted anew. In spite of the efforts of the best poets of the Muromachi period, waka still remained, for this task, too closely connected to its tradition that had brought it to perfection, but the same tradition included the system of values now lost; renga, in its turn, had largely developed in the environment outside the waka world, originating in an unsophisticated pastime, presented a more efficient vehicle for direct poetic perception of reality that was simultaneously able to make, from a certain distance, use of the means the waka tradition had employed to achieve profundity in earlier times.

\(^{37}\) Akiyama 1988, pp. 7–8.
References

Sources

NKBT refers to the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* edition by Iwanami Shoten, NKBZ to the *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* edition by Shōgakukan. Wherever possible, references to the treatises are made according to section numbers.

EGTK = *Eiga taikai*, poetic treatise by Fujiwara no Teika, NKBZ, vol. 50
JSH = *Jûmon saiishô*, poetic treatise by Nijû Yoshimoto, NKBZ, vol. 66
KKS = *Kokinwakashû*, the first imperial *waka* anthology, NKBZ, vol. 7
MGS = *Maigetsushû*, poetic treatise by Fujiwara no Teika (?), NKBZ, vol. 50
MYS = *Man’yôshû*, anthology of *waka* poetry, NKBZ, vol. 2–5
RRH = *Renri hishô*, poetic treatise by Nijû Yoshimoto, NKBZ, vol. 66
SG = *Sasamegoto*, poetic treatise by Shinkei, NKBZ, vol. 66
SM = *Shôtetsu monogatari*, a poetic treatise by Shôtetsu, NKBZ, vol. 65
UAS = *Utaawase-shû*, collection of poetry match records, NKBZ, vol. 74
WKB = *Waka kubon*, poetic treatise by Fujiwara no Kintô, NKBZ, vol. 65

Secondary literature


