Concepts in Literary Criticism
Problems in the Comparative Study of Japanese, Chinese and Western Literature

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Nobody who is familiar with different traditions of literary criticism in Japan, (pre-communist) China and countries with literatures in European languages can fail to observe fundamental differences of approach. This is particularly evident in the use of different concepts used in literary analysis, which at times seem to defy any attempt to raise the science of literature to a level where methods of analysis are no longer confined to a particular tradition.

A comparatist like Etiemble is quite outspoken about the necessity to use and develop literary concepts which may be applied not only within the confines of one national tradition (or a complex tradition as the European one) but are valid in the exploration of literature on an even wider basis, a view increasingly shared by specialists of Asian literature as well. Critics have tried to apply various concepts, such as for instance “romantic” to analyses of Chinese and Japanese literature. Such studies do indeed throw an interesting light on what may possibly be “universal” currents in traditions as diverse as the European or the East Asian traditions. The methodological questions involved in such an approach deserve, however, careful consideration.

In this short paper I wish to limit myself to a few remarks about the use of Western concepts of the novel when evaluating Japanese novels. In addition, on the basis of a short discussion of Chinese and Japanese classical poetry, I will suggest that it might be useful to pay greater attention than has hitherto been the case to the study of indigenous literary concepts.

Western Concepts of the Novel and the Evaluation of the Japanese Novel

Western critics, brought up in their own traditions, tend to direct much effort in the analysis of novels on discovering its (conscious) design, its underlying coherence. The search for coherence as a main criterion for the evaluation of a literary work is also encouraged by European philosophical traditions that focus on the search of the “ultimate meaning” of a world that, behind its many façades, promises to present an understandable, rational order to those who are able to see through the veils; without the assumption of such underlying coherent order, the world would be meaningless. Likewise, it is held to be the task of the critic to discover the ultimate meaning of a work of literature by perceiving its coherence, the patterns that make sense. Jacques Souvage, in his well-known Introduction to the Study of the Novel, advocates explicitly the discovery of “coherence” as a central task for the critic of the novel:

"...a novel may achieve integration to the extent that its plot has a bearing on its theme...in the novel, the concept of integration is a rich and profoundly significant concept which it might be profitable to make central to the study of the novel, as of literature and art in general. ...At the basis of the integration achieved by the work of art lies vision, which may be defined as an organic mode of apprehending reality... The work of art, then, will have both intensity... and comprehensiveness... (quoting Albert Cook) 'Our first criterion in judging a novel should be that of unity..."
Another criterion...is what I would call intensity or sharpness of focus,...Related to intensity is sensibility."

Western critics find it often very difficult to discover coherence, a certain degree of "integration" in the Japanese novel; this is particularly true for the pre-modern novel. However, coherence is usually associated with the absence or presence of plot. Commenting on the Japanese novelist Takizawa Bakin, Leon Zolbrod remarked that

'Plots with an obvious beginning, middle, and end gave Eight "Dogs", and Bakin's other novels as well, a structured "whole, easily comprehended by the eye." Earlier Japanese stories rarely had rich and complicated plots. Some, like the Tales of the Heike, were episodic. Others, like the Tale of Genji, or The Life of an Amorous Woman, achieved an organic unity by treating the life of one person or a group of people... Only after Shogun Yoshimune's time, when numerous Chinese popular stories and romances arrived in Japan, did Japanese readers discover the pleasure of conscious design in larger works of fiction."

"Conscious design" is also perceived as an obvious advancement over other forms of the Japanese novel which, to many Western observers, appear to be loosely organized, if not disparate. Richard Lane, differing from Zolbrod, finds conscious design already in Saikaku's The Life of an Amorous Woman.

'Of all Saikaku's works of fiction Love and Five Women features perhaps the greatest complexity of plot and character development. At the same time it must be acknowledged that Saikaku, as a novelist of some four years' experience, has by now learned his trade well. He is able to tell a unified, extended story in a concise and moving manner, and in a disciplined and effective style. There remain conventions and inconsistencies that will mar the Western reader's enjoyment of the tales, but Love and Five Women clearly marks an early peak in Saikaku's development as a novelist."

Despite their differences, both critics appear to share Souvage's point of view, in that they link the "unity of the plot" with the degree of coherence found in a particular novel. Frequently the absence of a plot is equated with lack of structure. At the same time, little effort is spent on finding coherence of a different kind, coherence that permeates the work despite the lack of a unified plot.

Richard Lane seems to be aware of the fact that judgments arrived at on this basis tend to conflict with the esteem in which Saikaku's stories are held in Japanese literature, and points out that

"Of all Saikaku's works of fiction Five Women Who Loved Love features perhaps the greatest complexity of plot and character development. Saikaku's forte was never plot, but style; and thus much of the interest of his stylistically greatest works must remain obscure to the Western reader."

I would suggest, however, that it is impossible to arrive at a proper evaluation of these novels without referring to those stylistic elements that greatly contribute to the achievement of coherence.

Specifically Japanese elements of style deriving from Japanese classical literature such as the travelogue (michiyuki) are referred to in a rather apologetic way:

"The michiyuki sequence in this chapter, which describes the lover's journey in terms of the passing scenes they view, is an intrusion from the Joruri drama. Though
an excellent piece of writing in itself, for the modern reader it may tend to detract from the realism of the story. The concept of "realism" was, however, only now being developed by Saikaku, and such poetic elements were rather expected by his readers."

Lane is not the first critic to apply the concept of "realism" as a kind of panacea to "explain" and "reason" the inherent literary value when other concepts (such as unity of theme and plot) fail to account for the unquestionable excellence of a particular work. Yet there is all reason to believe that there is indeed coherence to be found, not just since Saikaku, but long before; Befu Ben, a Japanese critic, pointed out that even loosely connected individual stories with a simple plot which together make up the Eitaigura (another work by Saikaku) do form a whole, and that "there was an attempt to apply the haikai technique of link-by-link progression from episode to episode."

Commenting on Murasaki Shikibu's Genji Monogatari Armando Janeiro also suggested that coherence can be achieved by means other than "unity of plot": he pointed out that this novel is similarly concerned with time as Marcel Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, and that it applied technical devices "like 'patterns' of action which occur with variations at widely separated points of the narrative like motives of a musical composition, like "rhythms" of certain recurrent images."

Following an argument brought up by B. Eikhenbaum in his study Théorie de la prose I would suggest that one of the keys to a better understanding of the coherent structure of the Japanese novel in general is a systematic analysis of those style elements such as the haikai technique of link-by-link progression referred to above and also other traditional stylistic elements that are so important in creating "structural patterns." Japanese as well as some foreign critics are well aware that early Japanese literature with its niki (usually translated as "diaries", but essentially differing from a Western diary), the sometimes similar zuihitsu (miscellaneous essays), the epic monogatari and the so-called linked verse renga developed structural forms exercising tremendous influence on later narrative literature. The influence of this tradition can be felt even in contemporary literature; not only in pieces that obviously try to establish a link with tradition, such as Tanizaki's short étude Yume no ukihashi, but also in numerous others. Let it suffice here to refer to an early modern story by Nagai Kafū entitled Sumidagawa, the structure of which is characterized by various elements of style deriving from traditional genres mentioned above. Parts which evoke the concise, at the same time sensitive world of the haibun (a "mixture" of poetic prose and poetry) alternate with scenes in which the hero watches a stream of people passing by, a stereotype element in novels since it was first prominently used in the beginning chapters of the Genji monogatari. Throughout the story 'images' appear like coded signals which serve to create linkages, a technique well-known to the reader of Japanese poetic texts. Such linkages are sometimes employed to connect seemingly disparate parts of the story: in Sumidagawa one such signal is found in the repeated reference to "moonlight" (or the moon itself). In this way associations are established between situations which from the point of "plot" may have very little in common, yet which for various reasons - one of them e.g., to contrast moods of the hero at various stages of his life - contribute to the coherence of this work.

Here as elsewhere we may observe a tendency to link passages which from the point of view of a "plot" could easily be regarded as self-contained fragments. It is such fea-
tures which have often provoked Western critics to refer to the 'episodic' or 'fragmentary' character of Japanese literature. The poet Ishikawa Takuboku commented rather well on this feature when justifying his particular way of writing poetry:

"... a poem should be a strict report of events taking place in one's emotional life (for the want of some better term) - a straightforward diary. This means it has to be fragmentary, it can't have unity or coherence."

It is obvious that for Takuboku the lack of so-called 'unity' or 'coherence' does not constitute a negative criterion. He emphasized the role of "emotional life" in his writings, or rather, the 'reports' of such an emotional life. His comments also shed an interesting light on his interpretation of the role of the diary as a record of emotional rather than 'factual' events. As a result one notices in much of Japanese literature a tendency towards anti-tectonic structure, a feature quite characteristic for much of Japanese poetry, and one which contrasts sharply with the general structure of Chinese classical poetry, as I will show below.

"Murasaki (the writer of the Genji Monogatari) - and indeed all traditional Japanese writers - compose episodically, with no obvious emphasis given to certain actions as guides to further development. This differs from Western episodic treatment which generally means only that the same characters are present in a series of separate actions, and in the totality there is no development either of action or of character ... The Japanese writer deals with effects and causation is only hinted at, if mentioned at all."

It is against this background that one must view the importance of poetic lines to the whole structure of Japanese novels and narrative prose in general. At the risk of generalizing I would maintain that one of the main functions of these lines is to summarize and crystallize an emotional situation that has been set out in the passages before, thus forming a culminating point. As long as these poetic lines are mainly seen as an "embellishment" one will neglect an important element in the structure of Japanese novels. It is for this reason that Arthur Waley's otherwise famous translation, through his omission of a large number of poems, which are an integral part of this novel fails to reflect an important segment of the structure of this novel.

The close link between a prose passage that culminates in terse, but evocative lines of poetry is perhaps nowhere else better observed than in haibun. To give an example, Bashō's poem

Araumi ya / Sado ni yokotau / Ama no gawa

can hardly be fully understood without the context supplied in the "preface", a much longer passage in prose preceding it, and of which these lines are summary and culmination at the same time. There have been attempts by Western critics to "explain" the poem (a haiku in form) independently of its context, but the results are not very encouraging. Some authors maintain that since in early Japanese literature "prose and poetry were not yet distinctly separated as literary forms, prose was written poetically or prose narrations introduced or connected poems." I would however argue that in order to achieve an adequate interpretation of works that belong to a genre in which prose and poetry occur side by side, one should not start from the assumption that this presents, somehow, a "lower" stage in the historical development (implied by the expression "not yet distinctly separated as literary forms"). In discussing a similar problem in Chinese literature, David Chen pointed out that
“Elements of poetry permeated all other genres of literature, from classical prose to vernacular novel, not as a mere rhetorical ornamentation but as an integral part of those various types of composition.”

The use of the traditional Western concept of “novel”, however, has become so much concerned and associated with terms such as “causality”, “unity of plot” and the like that expectations are raised with regard to the Japanese traditional “novel” which they were never meant to fulfill. For the same reason, insufficient attention is paid to the aims that the Japanese authors themselves endeavoured to achieve. After all, it seems no accident that traditional Japanese criticism created no equivalent term for “novel”; the only direct equivalent “shōsetsu” acquired the modern meaning “novel” only in recent times.

It is suggested that the different historical genesis of the various genres in Japanese literature make an indiscriminate application of Western concepts a rather questionable undertaking. Some early Western critics noticed this difficulty when they hesitated to classify haiku as “poetry”. One may refer to Karl Florenz, who in his discussion of this form rather appropriately chose the German term “Epigramm”, which may refer to a short poem with a witty ending or a “pointed saying”, thus avoiding the question of “prose” or “poetry.”

Structure and poetic vocabulary in Chinese and Japanese poetry

If much of Japanese literature is characterized by an “anti-tectonic” structure, the opposite is true of classical Chinese poetry, in particular shī poetry which reached its first height during the Táng dynasty. By comparing the structure of the shī with that of the most characteristic form of poetic activity in Japan, the tanka and the haiku I wish to bring up again not only the question of “genre”, but also that of other literary concepts suitable in an analysis of works from widely differing traditions. Traditional Chinese literary criticism of poetry is to be found in collections usually called shihua “remarks on poetry”; akin in style to Chinese diary literature and the so-called suibi (Jap. zuihitsu, “random notes”) they usually do not present an attempt to establish a unified, systematic approach to literary criticism. Nevertheless, it is possible, by extensive reading, to establish common points and underlying concepts in works by authors from differing periods. One of the basic terms encountered in numerous shihua is a pair of concepts called qìng (emotions) and jǐng (scenery). Already in the first major Chinese poetic anthology, the shijing (Classic of poetry) we find numerous poems that lend itself to an interpretation based on the division of lines in those describing scenery jǐng and those dealing with emotions, qìng.

The Wind and the Rain
Cold, cold, the wind and the rain,
The cock crows cockle-doo.
I have been to see my lover.
Why is my heart not at rest?
The wind whistles and the rain,
The cock crows cockle-doo.
I have been to see my lover.
Why is my heart not at peace?
Dark night, wind and rain.
Cockrow without end.
I have been to see my lover.
Why should I not rejoice26?

A similar dichotomy between an introductory part describing a scene of nature and a following part, referring, in one way or another, to human feelings, reactions, emotions or similar is also observable in many poems of later periods. We may, for instance, refer to Wang Zhizhuan's famous poem entitled Deng guanquelou:

On Climbing Stork-Tower

 Bairi.yi shan jin  
 The white sun leaning on the mountains finishes [her day].  
 Huanghe. ru hai liu  
 The Yellow River entering the sea takes [its course].  
 Yu qiong.qianli mu  
 I want to extend my view to a thousand li;  
 Geng shang.yiceng lou.  
 Again, I climb up one storey higher27.

The dichotomy between a part devoted to the sphere of qing (emotions) and another concentrating on jing (scenery) plays a major role in this poem. A tight structure is achieved by the intensive use of parallelisms and antitheses. The first and the second, as well as the third and fourth lines, are grammatically parallel, while the corresponding nouns, for instance bairi "white sun" and huang he "yellow river", as well as the verbs yi "leaning" and ru "entering", form antithetical pairs. It goes without saying that Chinese poems do not always show a similarly tight structure; yet much of the classical shi poetry with its subgenres jueju (of four lines) and the liushi (of eight lines) exhibit a tendency towards what I would like to call "architectonic" structure.

"Creating qiqu [a later poetic genre] resembles the construction of a mansion...The composer of qu must likewise first divide [the piece] in [several] sections and consider with which concept to start, with which concept to continue, which concept [to apply] to the extended (elaborate) central section, which concept [to use] in the final section [to achieve] a conclusion. [Only] after [the whole structure] is before his eyes may he realize the written composition. This method [was followed] by all practitioners of prose writing, the fu and the [Chu]ci, and songs and poetry28.

Quite a few Chinese critics emphasize that a similar approach towards the writing of poetry, a conscious attempt at "building a poetic structure" can be observed not only in the qu, but also in the preceding classical shi poetry. Among those critics, perhaps the most famous is Fan Deji of the Yuan dynasty whose description of the "normal" structure of a jueju (the four-line sub-genre of the shi) has found its way into practically every Chinese handbook on poetics29.

Although many, among them some of the best Chinese poems, do not slavishly follow strict compositional rules one has to admit that the widespread tendency towards an "architectonic" approach is quite characteristic of Chinese poetry. Such an approach is encouraged by typical features of the Chinese language; just as in other poetic traditions some basic features of poetic "rules" are intimately connected with peculiarities of the language medium. For quite a significant part, rather "mechanical" characteristics, such as the phonetic structure of the language, are also involved.
In classical Chinese, a word consists most often of one of two syllables (units of sounds); while nouns can be either one or two syllable words, verbs are usually monosyllabic. Abstract independent adjectives are very uncommon. In classical diction, adjectives occur mainly as monosyllables in well-established binominal expressions: in this way, the boundary of two syllables is not exceeded. These features of classical diction, from which the poetic vocabulary derived, were so pervading that even at a much later time when new prosodic rules permitted the use of polysyllabic expressions, the more "refined" and "elegant" poets time and again went back to the older tradition.

A single line of a shi poem usually consists of five or seven syllables, with a strong tendency towards a caesura before the three final syllables. The result is a standard form in two variants:

2-2/1-2 or 2-2/2-1. (2 standing for a bisyllabic, 1 for a monosyllabic expression).

Simple as this form appears, it allows in each line—in its unaltered form—for a change of rhythm between even-numbered groups of two or four characters and one of three characters. One notices that quite a number of poets—among them the best ones—does sometimes consciously go beyond the limitations imposed by the caesura as well as the grouping of syllables given above. By going against the pattern expected in the mind of the listener (or reader) of a poem, new and subtle rhythms can be created. The custom of writing poems with lines of the same number of syllables in each line had become established long before the rise of the shi; it is easily seen that once four lines of the standard type described above were combined, there should develop a tendency towards parallelism in neighbouring lines, a parallelism which would establish associative relations between words in comparable positions that were not related to each other in a strict syntactical sense. We can observe this also in Wang Zhizhuian's poem quoted above. Similar verbs referring to "direction" "yi and "ru" appear at the beginning of the second half of the line after the caesura. The parallelism thus achieved results in an emphasis on this directional aspect of the verbs which would be considerably lessened if they would appear in unrelated positions of a line. From the first two lines to the second pair of two lines, a subtle shift of rhythm takes place with the verbs of the latter line appearing before the caesura. In this way it has become possible to fit exceptionally long groups of three syllable-expressions in the final parts of the last two lines, thus underlining the general mood of the poem (e.g. qianli mu, gazing into the distance).

Summarizing one may say that one of the basic features of the poetic form of the shi is its similarity to a positional game, where each word is not only caught in the network of the line to which it belongs, but also commonly associated with words in other lines in corresponding positions, either through contrast or similarity.

There is perhaps no greater contrast to the form of a Chinese poem than poems of the tanka and haiku genre from the Japanese tradition. Approaching the form of these Japanese poems one immediately notices fundamental differences in their form, despite the fact that viewed superficially, Japanese poetic lines likewise consist of lines of five or seven syllables. Yet the nature of classical (as well as modern) Japanese is such that words other than grammatical particles normally consist—at least for prosodic purposes—of more than one syllable; moreover, words of Chinese origin, an integral part of "ordinary" Japanese, are shunned in poetic diction. Japanese verbs in contrast to verbs in classical Chinese poetry are inflected and are usually polysyllabic. It follows that the number of words fitting into a line of five or seven syllables is much smaller than that of a Chinese poetic line. Quite often, one word—for instance a makura-kotoba—takes up
the whole of the first line. The sheer length of an inflected verb necessitates fundamental differences in the way verbs are being used in Japanese and Chinese poetry. It is easily seen that such irregularity of word-length, together with the fact that in Japanese poetry lines of five and seven syllables tend to alternate, necessitate quite a different approach in the composition of a poem. In Chinese poetry, changes in rhythm and stress can easily be achieved by arranging the position of certain words within a line. There exists a fairly consistent pattern which a listener on expect to be followed within a line; this is, however, not the case in a Japanese poetic line, at least not to that extent. “Rules”, or rather frequently adopted patterns do exist. There are two basic patterns of a traditional tanka poem:

1. 5 - 7; 5 - 7 ; 7 . (; indicates a caesura).
2. 5 ; 7 - 5 ; 7 - 7.

The first pattern is characteristic of the period of the Manyō poems, while the second one is more typical of poetry from the Heian period onwards.31

In Chinese poetry, the most basic ordinary grammatical pattern is that of either subject – verb – object or topic – verb – object, in that order. Inversions do occur, but if used, are often used for special effects. Verbs are extremely seldom omitted. On the whole, Japanese poetic grammar allows far more flexibility in the word order. By choosing various grammatical forms of the verb such as for instance the shushikei, rentaikei or izenkei the word order can be suited to particular requirements without being considered as “surprising” (i.e. unanticipated) inversions. Japanese literary critics, particularly in the Edo period have extensively studied the structural pattern of tanka with special reference to the use of different grammatical verb forms. This is a very complex topic which I cannot deal with here within the limits of this paper.32 I should like to emphasize, however, that one result of the form of the tanka is that one word or concept in isolation can acquire a dominating position in a way that is extremely rare in Chinese poetry with its balanced structure. In each Chinese poem there are a number of more or less independent phrases and sentences. A Japanese poem consists not infrequently of one sentence, the major components of which are topic and predicates, without a prescribed order. The following two quotations may serve to illustrate this point:

Miyako no tsuki
Miyako nite tsuki wo aware to omoishi wa kazu ni mo aranu susabi narikeri
The moon in the capital
In the capital: the moon - a delight, I thought; yet it’s nothing, a mere trifle, now34.

In this poem, the main topic (not grammatically speaking!) is the “moon view at the capital.” The predicate “has become a mere trifle, now” appears in the last two lines. The unity and flow of the whole composition is stressed by the fact that the poem does not consist of more or less independent sentences. The first verb at the end of the first part “I thought; yet...” does not suggest a break, but on the contrary leads smoothly to the final part of the poem.

(Title unknown)
Yura no mon o wataru funabito kaji o tae yukikata mo shiranu koi no michi kana
The skipper that crosses The Gate of Yura, losing his rudder;
not knowing where to go: the ways of love35!
Here, the topic of the poem appears at the end: "the ways of love", followed not by the "usual" sentence-concluding verb, but by the exclamatory particle "kana". The two preceding verbs "wataru" (to cross) and "shiranu" (not know) are initially associated with "funabito" (the skipper) until, at the end of the poem, it becomes clear that the phrase "yukikata mo shiranu" (not knowing the way) is not only a predicate to "funabito" (the skipper) but a phrase modifying the topic, "koi no michi" (the ways of love); this technique connect the image of the rudderless boat with that of the ways of love very closely, thus adding to the overall coherence of the "separate" phrases and lines.

In contrast with the fairly concise structure of a Chinese poetical sentence the Japanese poet fully explores some characteristic features of the Japanese language which allow for the loose juxtaposition of topics, predicates and subjects. In every language a standard sentence can be said to possess a certain pattern of tension which is built up as soon as parts of the sentence are mentioned which raise expectations as to what is most likely to follow. This tension is resolved only when all parts necessary to a complete sentence have been uttered. Many tanka and haiku consist, in fact, of only one grammatical sentence, or even of an incomplete one (often an exclamation!). This means that the tension of such a sentence embraces the whole poem urging a continued flow of the sentence. This, of course, is in sharp contrast with the structure of a Chinese poem. It may be added that the traditional way of reciting and presenting Japanese and Chinese poetry underline this difference in a very clear way; the balanced musical structure of a Chinese recitation contrasts clearly with the uninterrupted flow in which a tanka is often presented.

It has often been noticed that the Japanese verb with its highly developed system of inflection might be one of the chief factors in accounting for the subtleness of much of Japanese poetry. It seems to me that the whole of the syntactical structure as sketched above points to a very basic distinction between Chinese and Japanese poetry.

The Chinese poem, as I view it, a balanced structure of semi-independent sentences, in which word-position, antithesis and parallelism play a most important role; the Japanese poem, dynamic with the full tension of a longer sentence spread over the whole length of the poem. Yet the differences are not only of a structural nature. One may refer to important differences in the composition and use of poetic vocabulary; yet despite all differences, some features are common to both the Chinese and the Japanese poetic tradition. This is perhaps best illustrated by a category of words that are commonly used to indicate seasons, or to use the Japanese term, kigo or kidai. It is very well known that in much of Japanese poetry, but especially in the haiku, one encounters words which by their literal meaning or by convention indicate the time of the year. Examples are, for instance, uguisu (cuckoo), kajika (frog) for "springtime", hagi (lespedeza) and susuki (eularia) for autumn. It is perhaps less well known that seasonal words, often identical with their Japanese equivalents, play an important role in Chinese poetry as well, particularly in post-classical poetry. I have dealt with this problem in some detail elsewhere.

It has previously been noticed that terms commonly used in Western literary criticism, such as image, metaphor, and symbol, are at times not very apt when it comes to an analytical description of Japanese poetic vocabulary. This is particularly true for the seasonal words just mentioned:
"Classical Japanese shares with classical Chinese a concrete particularity different from Western poetic language ... the personified abstraction, or the abstraction of a moral or ethical quality, which we owe to Hebrew, late Latin, and medieval literature, simply is not a part of Japanese poetry. ... The nouns employed in almost all Court poetry name objects apprehensible by the senses; therefore almost every noun is psychologically an image and incipiently a literary image. Japanese nouns have thus a greater potential for connotation than do the nouns of our more generalized vocabulary."

It should be kept in mind that in China as well as in Japan poetry and the poet had a much more important social function and role than they have in the modern Western tradition. It is my impression that his may have been an important factor in the development of a rather codified poetic vocabulary, used by the community of poets in a well-known, specific sense. An example of this "code-language" is the group of words called kigo (seasonal words), the presence of which are nearly obligatory in haiku and quite common in tanka as well.

So far, I have mainly talked about features of Chinese and Japanese poetry that are closely connected with phonetic and structural particularities of these languages, and I have largely avoided reference to differences of a more "psychological" nature. This does not mean that I underestimate such differences. The direction, which a further analysis might take, is perhaps indicated in Tsuruta Kinya's introduction to his study on Akutagawa Ryunosuke:

"... to the Japanese ... [nature] is a place for attachment. Even when they sit on stones under trees for the purpose of getting away from afflictions of the mind and body, they soon find flowers and take delight in them."

The Japanese also differ considerably from the Chinese in their approach to nature, according to Tsuda Sōkichi. He says that a Chinese tends to conceive of nature and life as opposing entities, and to return to nature rebelling against life, while a Japanese does not make such a sharp distinction. Tsuda points out that a Chinese poet is inclined to use nature images to describe a certain mood, while things of nature immediately become a poem when they touch the heart of a Japanese poet."

Universal concepts of literary criticism (?)

At this point we may attempt to summarize some of the points raised above.

1. With regard to the Japanese novel it was found that "devices", stylistic elements such as the travelogue (michiyuki), linking techniques deriving from linked verse renga and others contribute to create a coherent pattern which cannot be explained in terms of "unity of plot" and the like. It is perhaps not surprising that some of the elements (such as the use of signal words in Kafu's story Sumidagawa) lend a rather poetic quality to the genre of what is expediently called "the Japanese novel."

2. The relationship between "prose" and "narrative" - distinctions which are easily blurred when applied to, e.g. the Genji monogatari - should be viewed within its specific Japanese context. Not a few haiku are at present analysed and interpreted as if they are independent units, a microcosmos that can be explored and its meaning found as if that particular haiku were a poem from a European language tradition. This approach, however fails to take into account the context that is provided to many haiku that originally
occur in “prose” passages or to which a preface was written, and that is vital to its interpretation.

3. I have pointed out the difficulties that arise when applying concepts such as “image” or “symbol” to sections of the Japanese (and Chinese) poetic vocabulary such as the seasonal words kigo or kidai. I also introduced critical concepts from the Chinese tradition such as qing (emotions) and jing (scenery). It is easily seen that for instance seasonal words belong to the sphere of scenery (jing). Just as the use of kigo and their function within the poem can only be circumscribed in a rather inadequate way by using Western concepts, the use of concepts such as qing and jing facilitates our understanding of the basic elements of poetic composition in Chinese poetry.

Together these remarks suggest that literary works from the Japanese and the Chinese tradition cannot be properly understood if viewed without reference to the historical context and the genesis of the genre to which these works belong in their native tradition. I now wish to give an example of how a facile application of “Western” concepts of analysis may easily lead to biased or even wrong interpretations of works that belong to a different literary tradition. Rather than daring to discuss the possibility of applying complex concepts such as “romantic” to the study of non-Western literature I should like to refer to the interpretation of sound patterns in Chinese and Western poetry. As far as Western criticism is concerned, the French, Russian, Brazilian or other symbolist schools created an interest in the study of the role of “sound” in literature which made itself felt not only in other literary genres (futurist poetry) but also in the way modern criticism proceeded to give a thorough reappraisal to the role of sound in the constitution of “meaning” of a literary piece. Recently, some studies on Chinese poetry appeared which, in a sometimes more, sometimes less sophisticated way made use of sound patterns observed in ancient and modern poetry to elucidate its “meaning” from a modern point of view. Interesting as some of the more serious attempts may be, one frequently notices an almost complete ignorance of fundamental issues involved.

From very ancient times Chinese authors and critics stressed that in certain genres some kind of sound patterns were either to be avoided or, on the contrary, regarded as most desirable. To give but one example, the strong presence of sound patterns based on alliteration and echoing rhymes within lines was thought to befit the texts of songs in general more than those of the poem proper, the shi. The following partial transliteration of a song from the ci genre may give an impression of the density of sound patterns in some Chinese ci songs:

Hanchan qiqie,
dui changting wan,
zouyü chuxie,
dumen zhangyin wuxu.
Liulianchu,
Nienququ qianli yanpo,
muai chenchutian kuo
Gengnakan lengluo qingqiu jie.*

The presence of such sound patterns, at least according to Chinese traditions, is completely in accordance with the ci tradition, would however be quite out of place in the genre shi. In other words, any attempt by Western scholars to discuss the functions of sound patterns within a given Chinese text would have to take into consideration the
specific aesthetic demands the native tradition makes on that particular genre. The occurrence of such a sound pattern in a *shi* must simply not be judged in a “neutral” way without admitting, that its presence as such would indicate the poet’s intention to “go against the rules of the game”, a factor which could not be left out of consideration. Linked to this problem is of course the question whether one may legitimately make judgments on the sound of poetry that originally was intended for (formal) recitation when that particular tradition was discontinued. As far as Japanese poetry goes we are aware that we are hardly able to reproduce the origin of early poetry by relying on reconstructions of the phonetic original sounds of poems as recited during poetry contests. In the field of Chinese poetry attempts were made, e.g. by Stimson, to reproduce the sound of early poetry by relying on reconstructions of the phonetic system of eight or ninth century Chinese for instance. Interesting as such attempts may be, it should not be forgotten that the sound patterns thus created have only very little to do with the way in which a particular poem was originally performed. Even more suspect, are attempts of psychological interpretations of the emotional values of sounds. One may also refer to the fact that in present-day chanting of Chinese poetry one does not seldom observe the technique of *enjambement* across lines, even when the parallel composition of adjoining lines would not in itself suggest this.

What I said above with reference to the interpretation of sound patterns suggests that in a more general way we have to make sure that the concepts used in literary analysis do not conflict with the “rules” of the genre as interpreted by persons judged to possess literary competence in the tradition concerned, normally native speakers of the language in question. The problem brought up here finds its parallel in modern linguistics; while attempts were made to find objective procedures for the establishment of a grammar or a natural language it became gradually clear that at some crucial points such grammars (or partial descriptions of a language) had to be tested, evaluated against the competence of a native speaker. One might suggest that a similar approach be taken in dealing with literary works which after all constitute a significant part of the corpus of language material towards which linguistic study is directed. Yet even if the notion of literary competence analogous to linguistic competence is accepted, one must not neglect basic differences. The language of literature has its own conventions, and literary competence does therefore involve more than purely linguistic competence found in a person familiar with the spoken vernacular, but not the written tradition. Literary competence thus involves a knowledge of conventions and features which may be observed in a large number of literary works of a particular tradition, and which were referred to by Roman Jakobson when he used the term “literariness” (literariness). Who, however, decides who is qualified as a literary competent figure? Any educated native speaker? Perhaps the famous supercritic? I dare not answer the question. I would, however, assume that on the basis of the points made so far it seems reasonable to suggest that the knowledge of the indigenous critic, the concepts used in Japanese and Chinese literary criticism, may be of considerable value. This does not only apply to lower categories of concepts referring to technical aspects such as word categories (*kigo*), for instance. One may, for instance, refer to the potential usefulness of terms such as “objective” and “subjective” as defined by Masaoka Shiki or Takahama Kyoshi, for instance. Terms used by the modern Chinese critic Wang Guowei such as *youwo* and *wuwo* (meaning “the poet’s ‘I’ is present versus the poet’s ‘I’ is absent”) remind strongly of Masaoka and Takahama’s use of the terms “objective” and “subjective”. 
One must not forget, however, that even such seemingly modern terms are intimately related to and used with a reference to traditional terms.

“In Yoshimoto’s usage [Nijo Yoshimoto, 1320–88] yugen is/roughly equivalent to elegance, gracefulness, or polished beauty. Important is here the fact that yugen is conceived not as a personal, human emotion like joy or grief but as a mood or atmosphere, as an objective feeling generated from an external object...”

[on the term sabi with regard to Basho] Sabi loneliness is not referring to a man’s personal emotion, it is describing an impersonal atmosphere a mood created by a natural landscape...Nature has no emotion, but it has life, through which it creates an atmosphere...the core of sabi. For Zeami a cedar tree is beautiful because an eternal god is behind it. For Basho a cypress tree is beautiful because it is a cypress tree, because it is a part of impersonal nature.

The applicability of the terms kyakkanteki (objective) and shukanteki (subjective) or youwo and wuwo seems to be so wide in Chinese as well as Japanese literature that it might be extremely interesting to test the usefulness of these concepts outside the Chinese and Japanese tradition; if it is basically acceptable to apply Western concepts of criticism in an analysis of Sino-Japanese literature, there is no reason to assume a priori that the reverse is unacceptable.

Yet a word of caution is necessary. Wellek pointed out that certain terms that are inextricably linked with a particular period should not be used outside this context. Commenting on the use and function of period terms he argued “that one must conceive of them, not as arbitrary linguistic labels nor as metaphysical entities, but as names for systems of norms which dominate literature at a specific time of the historical process.”

One may, for instance, refer to the application of the term “romantic.” While a critic like Etienne is clearly aware of the problems involved in using this concept outside its original context, there are numerous examples of an inappropriately loose application of this and other period terms.

Conclusion

One of the main problems in applying Western concepts of criticism to literary works from the Japanese and Chinese tradition is that one will first have to establish beyond reasonable doubt that the concept in question will not result in evaluations that are clearly unreliable. For obvious reasons it is impossible to find ‘objective’ ways of testing the applicability of a particular concept; it seems however highly advisable to become acquainted with the historical genesis and the literary context of a particular genre and work, as well as with the literary evaluation given by critics from within the same tradition before proceeding to an indiscriminate use of foreign concepts which, after all, may result in a deformed perception. It goes without saying, however, that the modern native critic himself cannot invariably be relied upon in matters of judgment; one of the simple reasons being that the modern Chinese or Japanese critic himself is influenced by Western critical approaches. The question is, however, to what extent. Etö Jun, commenting on the lineage of contemporary Japanese literary criticism, argues that “it is...deeply rooted in the Japanese aesthetic tradition, and remains comparatively free from foreign influence despite all apparent confusion.”
Despite the difficulties of a comparative approach it seems highly interesting and promising to test to the limit the usefulness of Western literary concepts in other literary traditions and vice versa; such an approach will – hopefully – lead to a better understanding of the process of literary criticism itself.

I wish to conclude this brief essay by quoting a Chinese and a Japanese poem which despite their seeming timelessness and simplicity are inseparable from their respective native tradition.

Tsui ni yuku michi to wa kanete kikishi kado
“The final way for all”: I had heard about it before. And yet, kinō kiyō to wa omowazarishi wo
I did not imagine that day to come now.

Kongshan bu jian ren
Empty mountains; nobody to be seen.

Dan wen renyiüxiang
Only the echo of somebody’s talk.

Fanying ru shenlin
Rays of the evening sun enter the deep forest

Fuzhao qingtai shang
reflected onto the green moss.

While it is relatively easy to interpret in a very analytical way poems such as those above by Wang Zhihuan or the onomatopoetic ci, the critic dealing with unadorned poems quoted above faces a challenge that can only successfully be met by those who, in addition to being literary “scientists”, show the same understanding that is peculiar to a poet himself. Here, perhaps, lies the greatest danger: the danger that those literary works which lend themselves to “ingenious” analysis through sophisticated analysis gain prominence at the expense of those that may lack in artifice and pretense, yet are great literature.

NOTES

1 Cf. Wellek, René Concepts of Criticism, Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1963 c. While being a good survey of different concepts it is surprising to note that Wellek pays very little attention to the methodological problem involved in using concepts as such.


3 Wellek Concepts of Criticism, p. 129. Commenting on the use and function of period terms, e.g. he points out “that one must conceive of them, not as arbitrary linguistic labels nor as metaphysical entities, but as names for systems of norms which dominate literature at a specific time of the historical process.”

4 Published by E. Story-Scientia, Gent, 1965; pp. 21-3, 28-30.


8 Cf. Foster, E. M. Aspects of the Novel, 1927 c, Penguin Books, 1962, p. 93: “We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.”


10 This is very much the case in some discussions of the Genji monogatari by Murasaki Shikibu. William Aston already praised the realism of this novel but continued: “Japanese critics claim for the Genji that it surpasses anything of the kind in Chinese literature, and even deserves to be
ranked with the masterpieces of European fiction. None, however, but an extreme Japanophile (the species is not altogether unknown) will go so far as to place Murasaki on a level with Fielding, Thackeray, Victor Hugo, Dumas, and Cervantes.” (A History of Japanese Literature, Tutt, Rutland & Tokyo, 1972 c (reprint), esp. pp. 96–7) The realism of the Genji monogatari is also emphasized by Nicholas, James R. “The Tale of Genji – A Novel of Manners,” in Japan Quarterly, XVII, No. 2, April/June 1970. In my view the approach inherent in Miner, Earl “Some Thematic and Structural Features of the Genji Monogatari,” in Monumenta Nipponica, XXIV, 1969 seems to be more promising, partly because it gives due attention to the “poetic” elements of the novel. A more sophisticated approach to the problem of „realism” , “subjective” and “objective” in the Genji monogatari is offered by Mitani, Kuniakira (published in two parts in Bungaku, vol. 42, no. 1: p. 16–29, no. 2, p. 31–55, “Kodai joji bungei no jikan to hyōgen – Genji monogatari ni okeru jikan ishiki no kezō”) cf. also Janiero, Armando Martins “The Idea of Time in Japanese and Western Novel. Proust and Murasaki.” in France-Asie/Asia, 1969, p. 127–134. I am wondering whether it is appropriate to talk about “realism” connection with the Genji monogatari at all, and whether the answer to the whole problem might not lie in the direction indicated by Ki no Tsurayuki who “has little to say about truth or ultimate reality... there is no much difference between subjective and objective reality.” (Ueda, Makoto Literary and Art Theories in Japan, The Press of Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, 1967, p. 24). The concept “naturalism” is likewise often used in an inappropriate manner, as pointed out by Wayne Falke (“Tanizaki; Opponent of Naturalism,” in Critique, VIII, 3, Spring/Summer 1966, p. 19–25).

12 Cf. Mitani “Kodai joji bungei no jikan to hyōgen.”
16 A beautiful example of the seemingly “fragmented” character of the Japanese novel is offered by the last chapter of the Genji monogatari, entitled “Yume no ukihashi” (The Floating Bridge of Dreams), vacillating between “dream” and “reality” to such an extent that the boundaries between the two seem to disappear. Cf. Miner “Features of the Genji monogatari,” p. 18 ff.
21 See, for example, the interpretation of the “basic statement” of Bashō’s poem “Araumi ya Sado ni yokotau ama no gawa,” as given in A History of Japan, by R.H.P. Mason and J. G. Caiger, Cassell Asian Histories, Cassell Australia, 1972, pp. 198–9. There exists a famous preface (cf.

Cf. Japan Quarterly, XVI, 1970, no. 1, p. 100–102; Brock, Mervyn “Review of Fujiwara Teika: Superior Poems of Our Time. trans. Brower, R. H. and E. Miner, Stanford UP, 1967.” Brock argues against a reinterpretation of the Kindai shūka as being a single gigantic poem in 83 five-line stanzas “which must be treated as an original work by Fujiwara no Teika.” I would go along with Brock’s argument if it can be established beyond reasonable doubt that in Fujiwara no Teika’s time nobody conceived of this anthology in the way suggested by Brower and Miner.


 Cf. Wang, Guowei Renjian cihua.

Cf. Ueda Literary and Art Theories in Japan, p. 37–40, and 149.

See note 3).

See note 2.


Miyamori Masterpieces of Japanese Poetry, p. 193. This translation is mine.

Quan Tangshi, II, 8 Wang Wei, 4, p. 713, p. 6a.