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Author	太田, 次男(Ota, Tsugio)
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A Historical Study on the Reception of Po Chü-i's works in the Heian Period (2)

Tsugio OTA

In this supplementary part of the treatise, the writer refers to the relation between the literary women in the Heian Period and Po Chü-i's prose and poetry, specially his poems written about human society.

As previously described in the treatise, Pu Chü-i's works were very popular in the Heian Period, but only his 'Fūyu-shi' or Allegorical Poems which we might call social poems was destined to be treated with cruelty in this country.

The themes of those poems were disregarded and the poems themselves were taken to pieces so that only the fragmental words were used in those days.

This, however, need occasion no surprise only if we give consideration to the way of life of the literary men under the powerful absolute government of those days. The literary men had already lost that ground from which they could have criticised the upper classes. The influential members were only flatterers of the upper classes.

At that time many women of ability appeared one after another in the literary salon of the Court. They created new letters called 'Hiragana' from the mother tongue of their day, and succeeded in bringing forth the new type of literature. But they could not give full play to their genius in the field of Chinese literature which had been regarded as classics so far in this country, nor could they take even a step forward in that field beyond both the refinement and the appreciative ability of the literary men.

Among those literary women Shikibu Murasaki and some others most sensitively found their life precarious in such a society of the days, and lived grieving and enduring it. In spite of the state of things, they positively read Po Chü-i's 'Fūyu-shi' or Allegorical Poems which the literary men disjointed and even avoided touching. Although they did not regard the poems as political or social against Po Chü-i's original intention, they reduced the mind of the poems to their own individual grief and distress, and could rightly appreciate the literary work superbly in their own way.