THE POWER OF INSTABILITY – MEDIEVAL RECEPTION AND APPROPRIATION OF MAN’YŌSHŪ AS EXAMINED IN POETIC CRITICISM (KARON) AND POETRY (WAKA) BY FUJIWARA KIYOSUKE AND FUJIWARA SHUNZEI

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Date: April 27, 2018 (Friday)
Time: 3pm – 5pm
Location: Moore Hall 103

Abstract
What happens to knowledge when we gain access to new information and take into account more variables? The answer is obvious – it updates and it changes. And yet, in many academic areas, including Japanese literary studies, some scholars try to achieve the impossible – to find out “the original truth” by generating seemingly stable and permanent definitions. In this dissertation, I trace how generations of reception and appropriation of Man’yōshū (759-785), the first extant poetry collection in Japanese, have been affected by the poetic discourse, instability of knowledge and channels through which knowledge is carried, and existence of various manuscripts of Man’yōshū in the early medieval era. I deal with two allegedly rival schools – Rokujō and Mikohidari – and two of their representatives – Fujiwara Kiyosuke (1104-1177) and Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204). I examine their Man’yōshū reception and appropriation strategies by analyzing their poetry criticism (karon) and poetry (waka). My approach is, however, to see them not only as binaries and rivals but above all as representing continuous stages in the development of the Japanese poetic tradition.

The results of my research lead me to a conclusion that the Mikohidari poets, considered to be specialists on the Heian period tales like Genji monogatari, paid much more attention to Man’yōshū scholarship than it is currently acknowledged. Moreover, I argue that the process of modifying the waka tradition in fact started with Kiyosuke, not with Shunzei. The Mikohidari poets took over this process after Kiyosuke’s death, claimed a big part of the Rokujō tradition, and established themselves as modernizers of the poetic craft. The two poets and schools had thus much more in common than is usually acknowledged but they utilized the idea of their rivalry as a tool in pursuit of their goals – to attract potential patrons and thus gain power through knowledge. The Rokujō-Mikohidari rivalry, being the most definitive frameworks for discussing the two schools, is a result of variability of texts and knowledge owned by the two schools. This implies that the common knowledge about waka or Man’yōshū in the early medieval era was much more indefinite than we currently believe. Such instability was possible due to the existence of the already-established poetic discourse that lay beyond the Rokujō and Mikohidari labels; discourse was a shared space where the circulated knowledge continues to be added, replaced, modified and negotiated. In fact, the fluidity of knowledge enabled the poets to use it to their advantage by various mechanisms of stabilizing their line of knowledge transmission; instability of texts and knowledge gave them power.