

pursuers” (157), readers remain an abstraction, with some notable exceptions. In the case of the *enpon* collections, Kawana writes that “it is reasonable to say that ... women readers were not necessarily less interested than men in the discourses of book ownership and cultural edification” (30) or that “it is reasonable to assume that ... *enpon zenshū* still had an intellectual impact on [working class] readers” (45): both of these qualified statements are backed up by references to Japanese scholarship. With media mix and literary tourism, one wonders what is at the root of the passionate pursuit of the intermedial world of the story, what psychic investments could be at play. The book analyses mostly elite actors: writers, critics, publishers, manga artists, film directors, memoirists, literary journalists. If indeed various forms of intermediality and literary tourism bring in modes of sensory engagement with the story that are not limited to the modern paradigm of silent, privatized, disembodied reading, then ethnographic studies of such experiences might be one possible way for future scholarship to build on Kawana’s ground-breaking approach.

Idly Scribbling Rhymers: Poetry, Print, and Community in Nineteenth-Century Japan

By **Robert Tuck**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
xxxv, 280 pp. \$75.00 (hardcover), \$74.99 (e-book).

**Reviewed by
Ivo Smits**

Robert Tuck’s new book, *Idly Scribbling Rhymers*, is an ambitious study of the place of poetry in a modernizing Japan in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As his fascinating book maps the modernization debates of traditional poetic forms (*haiku*, *waka* or *tanka*, Sinitic poetry), it becomes apparent that the modern nation-state not only expressed itself in poetry but also that poetry was an important battleground where the contours of the nation-state were given shape. The battles were fought through print media, mostly newspapers and poetry journals. However, unlike what one at first might expect, Tuck does not follow the Benedict Anderson model as outlined in his classic *Imagined Communities* (1983, revised 2006), which gives pride of place to print media and fiction as the

great shapers of a budding yet largely *unified* national identity. In fact, Tuck closes his book with a warning against the dominance of Anderson's ideas, because we "tend to overlook that which does not readily fit with his enormously influential model" (200). Instead, Tuck argues that "the process of fashioning imagined national communities is unstable and fraught with problems of gender, class, and political affiliation." *Idly Scribbling Rhymers* goes a long way to trace these instabilities and problems. Throughout, Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), best known as innovator and reputedly the inventor of the "haiku" but also a *kanshi* and *waka* poet, functions as a central agent in these processes, as does the newspaper *Nippon* in which Shiki would publish much of his views. The first two chapters deal with *kanshi*, the third and fourth with *haiku*, and the final chapter with *waka*, progressing over a roughly chronological trajectory, with a heavy emphasis on the nineteenth century's last decade.

In his first chapter, "Climbing the Stairs of Poetry: *Kanshi*, Print, and Writership in Nineteenth-Century Japan," Tuck explores how in early Meiji one learned to read as well as compose Sinitic verse (*kanshi*). Creatively and persuasively, Tuck shows that *kanshi* composition manuals and lexicons provided a "textual infrastructure" that made it possible for Sinitic verse to become a popular genre in the Meiji period, accessible to many. Simultaneously, Tuck shows how increasingly, amidst what one might think of as a "democratization push" in *kanshi* practice that already began to take shape in the late Edo period, the genre also became socially stratified, increasingly privileging "those in Japan who belonged to the social, cultural, and economic stratum that could realistically aspire to a career in government" (32). In chapter two, "Not the Kind of Poetry Men Write: 'Fragrant Style' *kanshi* and Poetic Masculinity," central place is given to the popularity in late Edo and early Meiji of Sinitic poems expressing female voices or featuring female figures in their boudoirs and the Meiji movements to condemn and squelch this genre in order to supplant it with a more "masculine" type of verse. Attacks on the "Fragrant Style" (*kōrentai*) were a way for rising poets to cement sociality for their own circles, and to gender *kanshi* practice to subscribe to an agenda of professed masculinity that resurfaces in the final chapter of Tuck's book in the context of *waka* reform.

Chapters three, "Clamorous Frogs and Verminous Insects: *Nippon* and Political Haiku, 1890–1900," and four, "Shiki's Plebeian Poetry: Haiku as 'Commoner Literature,' 1890–1900," turn to *haiku*. The third chapter is largely built around the newspaper *Nippon* and the genre of "topical haiku"

(*jiji haiku*) that it and other newspapers published and thereby helped the genre attain a more highbrow standing. Tuck points out that *haiku*'s image as poetry with a "more ideologically neutral focus on the natural world" (xxxiv) only emerged after Shiki's reform movement had managed to get *haiku* accepted as "Literature." On the pages of *Nippon*, *haiku* certainly was a different kettle of fish. There, the genre was emphatically political and it was, ironically, their ideological coloring that gave it momentum. We see here a theme that resurfaces quite often in Tuck's book, namely that opposition to the government and its institutions was a way to formulate alternative visions of the directions that Japan's modernization process should take. Chapter four sketches Shiki's efforts to see *haiku* accepted as a form of "Literature." To this end, it was necessary to argue against *haiku*'s perceived status as a "commoner literature" (*heimin bungaku*), which in turn meant that *haiku* was pushed as an elite poetic form with universal qualities, access to which was exclusive and class-based (or, perhaps we should say "education-based").

Finally, chapter five, "The Unmanly Poetry of Our Times: Shiki, Tekkan, and *Waka* Reform, 1890–1900," delves into the modernization debates concerning *waka* (or *tanka*, as it eventually came to be called). Tuck deals at length with the late nineteenth century popularity of the "so-called sword-and-tiger style of hypermasculine, martially focused poetry," advocated by the poets Yosano Tekkan (1873–1935) and Ochiai Naobumi (1861–1903), quite a bit of which is fairly unreadable by present-day standards, no matter how masterful Tuck's translations. Illustrative is Ochiai's "how fine, I think, it would be / to gaze on them / wearing my armor with the red braid / and with sword strapped to my side— / mountain cherry blossoms" (*hiadoshi no / yoroi o tsukete / tachi hakite / mibaya to zo omou / yamazakurabana*) (160). Several strands come together: there is the echo of the "fragrant style" criticisms, the rhetorical equation of martial virility and national identity, politics as subject matter, as well as the revolt against the government's established *waka* institutions (particularly in its manifestation as the Outadokoro or Waka Bureau). Here, too, we see Shiki push for *waka* to be also included in his view of poetry as literature and work eloquently and abusively against the idea that *waka* was a somehow inalienably "Japanese" genre.

It is refreshing to finally see a book that makes use of poetry, rather than the ubiquitous novel, to discuss the dizzy dynamics of the budding Japanese nation-state and to be shown that these dynamics played themselves out outside Tokyo as well. Tuck makes full use of discursive

practices of the late nineteenth century, for which print media provided the main platform. He points out, for instance, that it is useful to read the poems in the context in which they first appeared, namely in newspapers and such, so as to read responding critiques that were subsequently omitted when poems appeared in book form. It is in the newspapers and the journals where we best see poetry in action and can best gauge its impact.

One does wonder where women have gone in the fracas that played out on the printed page around 1900. Tuck makes an effort to highlight their existence and gives us glimpses of female *kanshi* poets or the female voices of the Asakasha *waka* group, but they are drowned out by the men. Not only such chauvinists as Tekkan and Ochiai, who interestingly both taught at women's colleges, but others as well, seem singularly intent on turning poetry-where-it-matters into a homosocial and masculine affair. Shiki (famous for apparently having no women in his life except for his mother and sister) debated exclusively with men. This masculinity was at times presented as a correction to history. In his abhorrence of love poetry and his rejection of the ideal of *mono no aware* the scholar Hagino Yoshiyuki lamented the role of *waka* practice in emasculating the Japanese court, writing in 1887 that in the Heian and early Kamakura periods "everyone became overly concerned with *waka* and ... the court became like women, weak and languid." (An echo of this sentiment surfaces in the writings of Karl Florenz, 1865–1939, who two years later was appointed at the Tokyo Imperial University. In his 1906 history of Japanese literature he, too, complained about the effeminate court culture of the classical age and the dominance of women in the literary field at the time.)

This makes one pause to ponder the nature of Meiji sociability. It is true, as we learn from this book, that the number of people engaged in poetry was enormous; as an important social asset poetry cemented their lives, and any distinction between readers and writers of poems at the time is artificial. The "problems of gender, class, and political affiliation" invoked by Tuck point to a countermovement of segregation in poetic practices and seem to translate into exclusivity for educated, nationalistic males—in the context of the discussions central to this book, that is. Enlightening that certainly is, as it tells us something about who dominated certain discursive spaces and about the tensions of aspirations to elitism of various sorts versus aspirations to speak for the new nation.

Tuck's choice to treat all three major genres of traditional poetry clearly demonstrates that Sinitic verse was part and parcel of Meiji literary production and figured prominently in print media. In fact, it may well be

that Meiji Japan produced more *kanshi* than any of the previous historical periods, to judge by what is left. Anyone who wishes to learn more about how much we have missed in textbook histories of modern literature because of the privileging of “national literature” in Japanese that, ironically, first took shape in exactly that same last decade of the nineteenth century, will do well to read Tuck’s book. His felicitous translations of poems in all three genres make reading not only educational but a joy as well.

Idly Scribbling Rhymers is a rich book, and it is to Tuck’s credit that the different strands of his argumentation do not get tangled nor suffocate the reader. This is as much a study of politics and ideology as expressed in poetry debates as it is a thoughtful contemplation of Masaoka Shiki and his strategies to push his ideas about “Literature.” For many, I imagine, Tuck’s book will above all be a plea against all-too-neat narratives of modernization processes and ideologies of nation-state building. Tuck’s book is yet another healthy corrective to ideas we may harbor about the young Meiji state that may dangerously suggest a programmatic application of a Japanese meta-analysis of nineteenth century European ideas. Modernizing Japanese spoke and wrote in many voices, in many communities, many of which were not happy with state institutions. Anderson was right in singling out print media as a prime vehicle for nation building, but Tuck helps to remind us that the building site for the nation was a cacophony. This is a masterful book; anyone with an interest in poetry or politics should read it.

The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction: “The Water Margin” and the Making of a National Canon

By **William C. Hedberg**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. xii, 250 pp. \$65.50.

Reviewed by
Mikhail Skovoronskikh

The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction: “The Water Margin” and the Making of a National Canon by William C. Hedberg is a study in the reception and canonization of Chinese vernacular fiction in early modern and Meiji-period (1868–1912) Japan. The monograph turns to *Shuihu*