



Mukashi no hito no sode no ka zo suru
【It smells like the sleeves of someone in the past.】

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(1)

①Satsuki matsu hana tachibana no ka wo kageba mukashi no hito no sode no ka zo suru

『古今和歌集』、夏部 139、『和漢朗詠集』上巻「橘花」

(*Kokin wakashū*, “Summer section” 139, untitled, Anonymous

Wakan rōeishū 1, “Kitsuka”)

【When I smell the fragrance of the mandarin (Chinese orange flower) waiting for May, I am reminded of the scent of someone in the past.】

This is arguably the most famous poem concerning the sweet smell of flowers in the history of Waka poetry. It encapsulates the wonder of an evocative smell in a mere 31 Japanese syllabaries. The sense of smell can be neither seen nor touched. However, probably because of its ephemeral nature, it can free one’s mind from the present and immediately take one back to the past. “The scent of his lover’s sleeve” is certainly such a reminiscence.

However, fine poems are not always simple and self-explanatory, and this poem is no exception. For example, the first phrase “satsuki matsu” (waiting for May) sounds simple enough, but there have been many different interpretations among commentators throughout history. Who was the “mukashi no hito” (lit. “person of yore”)? What is his relationship with “sode no ka” (lit. “scent of sleeves”) and “hana tachibana no ka” (the sweet smell of the mandarin orange flower)? As for the character of “mukashi no hito,” there is a consensus among modern scholars that “mukashi no hito” is a female and the poet’s former lover. Therefore, the sweet smell of the mandarin orange flower in May reminds the poet of the scent of his former lover’s sleeves.

Before the Edo period it was not common to interpret “mukashi no hito” as a former lover. In other words, this poem presented a completely different picture and suggested a very different connection between “the sweet smell of the mandarin orange flower” and “the scent of sleeves”. I wish to explain various interpretations of “Satsuki matsu” (poem①) in the pre-Edo period in this essay.

(2)

First, the meaning of the epithet “satsuki matsu” (waiting for May) will be discussed.

Let me draw attention to *Kokin wakashū* 137, which also begins with “satsuki matsu”:

②Satsuki matsu yamahotogisu uchihabuki ima mo nakanan kozo no furugoe

『古今和歌集』夏部、137

(*Kokin wakashū*, “Summer section” 137, untitled, Anonymous)

【Waiting for May, the cuckoo is trembling as if it is about to start singing exactly like last year.】

It is customary in poetry from the time of the *Man’yōshū* 万葉集 that the *hototogisu* (cuckoo)

starts singing in *satsuki* (5th month of the year). In *Kokin wakashū* 137 an anonymous poet is observing that a cuckoo may start singing even before May comes. Therefore “satsuki matsu” indicates that the *hototogisu* (cuckoo) is waiting for the singing season in May. By the same token, in *Kokin wakashū* 139, “satsuki matsu hana tachibana” could be understood to mean that “the mandarin orange flower is waiting to blossom in May.” However, the flower must be open if the scent can be sensed, as the poem implies. Some commentators insist that “satsuki matsu” here means “machitsukete” (having waited until the arrival of the blossoming season in May) (Motoori Toyokawa and Kaneko Motoomi). But if one reads “satsuki matsu hana tachibana” without any preconceptions, it must mean “*hana tachibana* is waiting for May to blossom.” It is unnatural to interpret it as “*hana tachibana* has waited until May to blossom.”

Recently two leading scholars (Katagiri Yōichi and Komatsu Hideo) have also argued for the sense of “waiting for May.” However, both scholars take the view that the advent of May is synonymous with the cuckoo’s singing season, which may be somewhat farfetched.

My view on “satsuki matsu” is different from any of these interpretations. I believe that what the mandarin flowers are waiting for is “tango no sekku,” which is one of the five annual ceremonies in the imperial court. “Tango no sekku” in May is the season when the cuckoo sings. Since ancient times, it was customary to make a head-dress or crown by attaching calamus or mandarin orange flowers with string. In addition, these flowers are attached to *kusudama* (paper balls) and hung on pillars and walls. The scent of the flowers is intended to dispel bad spirits and promote longevity.

On the 5th day of *satsuki* in Tenshō 19 (A.D. 747) the former empress Genshō issued an edict:
 In ancient times on *tango no sekku* people made head-dresses with calamus flowers, but this is sadly no longer the case. I now declare that unless one wears a hairpiece with calamus flowers one will not be allowed to enter the imperial palace. (*Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀)

There are many poems about hairpieces with calamus flowers in the *Man’yōshū* as well.

③Hototogisu naku satsuki ni wa ayamegusa hana tachibana wo tama ni nuki kazura ni semu to (423)

【The cuckoo is singing in May as I put calamus and mandarin flowers through beads to make a head-dress.】

④Satsuki no hana tachibana wo kimi ga tame tama ni koso tsuranuke chiramaku oshimi (1502)

【In May I put mandarin flowers onto beads for you because they may wither away.】

⑤(shinju wo) ayamegusa hana tachibana ni tsuranuki majihe kazura ni seyo to (4101)

【I will send a pearl to my wife to add to the calamus and Chinese orange flower head-dress she is making.】

References to calamus flowers are often preceded by “satsuki matsu.”

⑥Satsuki matsu nobe no hotori no ayamegusa ka wo akazu to ya tazu ga kowe suru

『新撰万葉集、夏、55』 (*Shinsen Man’yōshū*, “Summer” 55)

【Waiting for May, calamus flowers by the roadside spread a sweet smell and cranes keep on crying.】

Waiting for May, in other words. waiting for *tango no sekku*, calamus flowers by the roadside spread sweet smells around. It is same with the Chinese orange flower, which spreads a sweet smell before it is attached to a *kusudama* or head-piece. “Satsuki matsu hana tachibana” is an expression of such a hopeful state of waiting for *tango no sekku*.

In addition, there is an interesting poem in the section “Komo” (Mandarin wild rice) in the *Kokin waka rokujō* 古今和歌六帖.

⑦ Satsuki matsu numa ni ohitaru wakagomo no soyosoyo ware mo ikade to zo omofu (3814)

【*Komo* grown in marshland must be waiting for *tango no sekku*, swaying to and fro.】

Komo, along with *kaya*, is essential for making *chimaki* (rice cakes).

On the 5th of May in the second year of Manju (1025), Fujiwara Yoshitada 藤原義忠 organized an *uta-awase* (poetry-writing contest). He left the following poem with a comment.

⑧ 右 蘆橘芳風

Migi Rokitsu hōfū

Tsune yori mo koto ni mo aru kana kefu wo matsu hana tachibana no kaze no nihohi ha
...migi uta ni kefu wo matsu to aru wa ayamegusa no tameshi ni hiku beshi to omofu ni ya aran
『東宮学士義忠歌合』 14 (*Tōgū gakushi Yoshitada uta-awase* 14)

【The smell of the mandarin flowers is more intense than usual as they have been waiting for today (5th of May).】

This poem says “waiting for today” because it follows the example of calamus flowers.

Yoshitada replaced “Chinese orange flowers waiting for May” with “Chinese orange flowers waiting for today.” His aim was to stress that Chinese orange flowers emit the strongest sweet smell so far. When Motoori says, “satsuki matsu hana tachibana,” it may also mean that the Chinese orange flowers have already waited for the 5th of May. There is also the possibility that poems ⑥ “Satsuki matsu nobe no hotori no ayamegusa” and ⑦ “Satsuki matsu numa ni ohitaru wakagomo no” indicate that the flowers have been waiting for the 5th of May.

(3)

When one smells the fragrance of the Chinese orange flowers that are waiting for May, it reminds one of the scent of the sleeves of someone in the past. So who is this “person in the past”? Why does his sleeve smell like the mandarin flower?

Let us look at some modern commentaries on this poem.

When the Chinese orange flower blossoms before May, I sense its strong fragrance. That reminds me of the scent of the sleeves of my former lover, and it transports me to a state of reminiscence.

『古今和歌集』 日本古典文学全集
(*Kokin wakashū*, *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*)

The Chinese orange flower is blossoming in May. When I smell its fragrance, I remember the scent of someone who was close to me.

『古今和歌集』新潮日本古典集成

(*Kokin wakashū*, Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei)

Both commentaries agree that “mukashi no hito” (someone in the past) is a former lover whose sleeves smell like the Chinese orange flower. There are many commentaries similar to this.

Each person had his or her preference in scenting his or her sleeves. Therefore, any particular smell, such as that of the mandarin flower, reminds one of that person. Nowadays this interpretation is taught in the classrooms of high schools and colleges. However, before the Edo period the view that “mukashi no hito” is a former lover or an old acquaintance was not common.

Keichū 契沖 introduces some alternative views of “mukashi no hito” in his commentary on the *Kokin wakashū* (*Kokin yozaishō* 古今餘材抄).

It is mentioned in the *Tale of Ise* and its commentary (*Kenchū* 顕注, by Rokujōke Kenshō 六条家顕昭) that during the reign of Suinin Emperor, Tajima Mori 田道間守 went as far as Shangri-la and brought the mandarin (Chinese orange flower) back wrapped in his own sleeves. However, another important commentary (*Mitsukan* 蜜勘, by Fujiwara Teika 藤原定家) suggests that it did not have to be Tajima’s sleeves, and it could have been anybody’s sleeves in which the flowers were wrapped. The *Kenchū* does not share this view, but it is more emotionally satisfying to think of the transfer of the scent from an unknown person’s sleeves. In the *Kokin wakashū* there is a poem about the transfer of the scent of the plum blossom by touching a stranger’s sleeves (*Kokin wakashū* 33).

The “Satsuki matsu” poem (*Kokin wakashū* 139) is featured in the *Tale of Ise* (*Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語, chapter 60) as well, and this will be discussed below.

The *Kenchū* is a commentary on the *Kokin wakashū* by Rokujōke Kenshō, and the *Mitsukan* is a commentary by Fujiwara Teika, who added his comments on the *Kenchū*. Whether it was Tajima Mori or someone unknown, the *Kenshō*, Teika, and Keichū all agree that “mukashi no hito” is not a former lover but a person from the past whose sleeves smell like the *hana tachibana* waiting for May. Why is this historic interpretation completely ignored by contemporary commentators? Does it sound too implausible to modern ears?

(4)

Let us summarize the two different renderings of “Satsuki matsu hana tachibana no ka wo kakeba mukashi no hito no sode no ka zo suru” (*Kokin wakashū* 139). According to the historic view, “mukashi no hito” is Tajima Mori or an anonymous person. According to modern readings, “mukashi no hito” is an old acquaintance or former lover of the poet.

As for the relationship between the fragrance of the mandarin flower and the scent of sleeves, the historic view regards them as one and the same and originating from the sleeves. The modern view insists that the fragrance of the mandarin flower reminds the poet of the scent of an old acquaintance’s sleeves, but they are essentially two different smells.

“Mukashi no hito” has several meanings: it could mean a person of yore, a dead person or an old acquaintance. In the *Man'yōshū* “mukashi no hito” is a person in the past, who features in many poems. Let me give two types of examples from the *Man'yōshū*.

*The historic view (“mukashi no hito” as a person from the past or Tajima Mori)

⑨Sasanami no shiga no oowada yodomu to mo mukashi no hito ni mata mo ahameyamo
(*Man'yōshū* 31)

【There is plenty of water stagnant at Shiga, but one is unlikely to meet someone of former times (mukashi no hito).】

The poet Kakinomoto Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 composed this poem at the desolate site of the former capital of Ōmi, wondering if he might meet some old courtiers.

The next poem refers to people (“mukashi no hito”) who once climbed Mount Tsukuba for pleasure.

⑩Kefu no hi ni ika ni ka shikamu tsukuhane ni mukashi no hito no kikemu sono hi mo
(*Man'yōshū* 1754)

【My climbing Mount Tsukuba today must be finer than any of the expeditions of people before (mukashi no hito).】

In modern interpretations “mukashi no hito” is often interpreted as a former lover or an old acquaintance. Let me cite some examples.

⑪Kaheshikemu mukashi no hito no tamazusa wo kikite zo sosoku oi no namida ha

『後拾遺和歌集』雜 4 1086

(*Goshūi wakashū*, “Miscellaneous” 4.1086)

【When I hear you returning the poetic manuscripts of an old acquaintance (mukashi no hito), I shed tears.】

This poem by Kiyohara Motosuke 清原元輔 was sent to Ki no Tokifumi 紀時文. In this poem Kiyohara was reminded of Tokifumi’s late father Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 by reading his fine poems. In this poem “mukashi no hito” is the late Ki no Tsurayuki.

⑫Among 100 poems the next poem is about a dream.

utatane no yume nakariseba wakare ni shi mukashi no hito wo mata mo mimashiya

『金葉和歌集』、雜上 553

(*Kin'yō wakashū*, “Miscellaneous” 1.553)

【Without slumber I would not have the chance to see my old lover (mukashi no hito).】

The historic view can be traced back to the *Ōgishō* 奥義抄 by Fujiwara Kiyosuke 藤原清輔 of the Heian period. In the *Ōgishō*, Kiyosuke mentions the reason that the person’s sleeves are

often said to smell like the mandarin flower. He argues that it is because a person in the past, Tajima Mori, brought Chinese orange flowers back from paradise in his sleeves.

As for the modern theory, one can find the following passage in the *Kokin eigashō* 古今栄華抄 of the Muromachi period:

Waiting for May, the mandarin flower blossoms. When one smells this, it reminds one of the scent of the sleeves of an old acquaintance.

In the Edo period, Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 reiterates the same point in his *Tōkagami* 遠鏡. The modern interpretation (“mukashi no hito” as an old acquaintance) was probably influenced by chapter 60 of the *Tale of Ise*. In this chapter, a man recites the “Satsuki matsu” poem (*Kokin wakashū* 139) to his former wife with a mandarin flower in his hand. In this context, what he meant by “mukashi no hito” was just an old acquaintance or a former lover. Based on this, the commentary *Eigashō* declares that “mukashi no hito” was a former lover of whom he was reminded by the smell of a mandarin flower.

However, this is an anachronistic interpretation as “Satsuki matsu” (*Kokin wakashū* 139) was written before the composition of the *Tale of Ise*. In the *Tale of Ise*, a man picked a mandarin flower from a table. It was clearly not in the season of “satsuki matsu” (waiting for May).

Keichū offers an interpretation based on the historic theory. In his commentary on the *Tale of Ise* (*Seigo okudan* 勢語臆断), he argues that “mukashi no hito” could be any anonymous person in the past. In chapter 60 of the *Tale of Ise*, a man makes metaphoric use of “mukashi no hito” to indicate a former association with a woman.

In the *Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語), Hikaru Genji 光源氏 cites “mukashi no hito” in a poem when he visits Tamakazura, the only child of the late Yūgao. Hikaru Genji recites:
⑬Hako no futa naru on kudamono no naka ni tachibana no aru wo masagurite,
Tachibana no kawori shi sode ni yosofureba kahareru mi to mo omofoeni kamo

『源氏物語』、胡蝶

Genji monogatari, “Kochō”

【Touching Chinese orange fruits in the box, the scent, which I identify as that of *tamakazura*, reminds me of the smell of the sleeves of the late Yūgao.】

The inspiration is directional, i.e. from “mukashi no hito” (an unknown person from the past) to Genji’s “mukashi no hito” (Yūgao), not the other way around.

(5)

It is appropriate to ask poets about poems. There are many poems about mandarin flowers in the *Man’yōshū*, but it was *Kokin wakashū* 136 that first combined the mandarin flower with the scent of sleeves. After this poem there appeared many *honkadōri* (allusion to an old poem such as *Kokin wakashū* 136). How did they handle the relationship between “mukashi no hito” (someone in the past) and “sode no ka” (scent of sleeves)? I now wish to quote some representative examples of *honkadōri* poems.

Fujiwara Mototoshi’s poem

⑭Sode fureshi mukashi no hito zo shinobaruru hana tachibana no kaworu yube ha

『基俊集』 25

Mototoshi-shū, 25

【I am reminded of the sleeves of someone in the past as I smell the scent of mandarin flowers in the evening.】

In this poem I wish to highlight the touching of sleeves (*sode fureshi*). As Keichū mentions in his commentary (*Kokin yozaishō*), it was the person's sleeves that gave a distinct fragrance to the Chinese orange flower. Therefore, the smell of the Chinese orange flower evokes the memory of the unknown person from former times.

⑮Tachibana no hana mono ihaba sode fureshi mukashi no hito no uheya towamashi

『百首歌合』、建長 8 年、1105 九条行家

(*Hyakushu uta-awase*, Kenchō 8, 1105, Kujō Yukiie)

【If Chinese orange flowers could talk, I would like to ask whose sleeves have touched you.】

By the same token, the poet asks the Chinese orange flowers who bestowed their fragrance. “If the Chinese orange flowers could talk” was probably a tribute to a Chinese poem by Sugawara Fumitoki that included the famous phrase “several springs have gone without the *tōri* (Chinese peach) speaking, and there is no smoke or sign that anybody ever lived in the past” (*Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集, “Senke” 仙家).

⑯Mukashi taga sode wo fureken awarenaru ka ni koso nihohe yado no tachibana

『百首歌合』、建長 8 年、1103 中納言

(*Hyakushu uta-awase*, Kenchō 8, 1103, Chūnagon)

【A long time ago, whose sleeves touched you! There is such a strong fragrance of Chinese orange flowers in my house.】

⑰Kagen hyakushu uta tatematsurikeru toki rokitsu

前大納言 (坊城) 俊定

(saki no dainagon Bōjō Shunjō)

Taga sode no nagori wo tomete tachibana no mukashi kawaranu ka ni nihofuran

『新拾遺和歌集』、夏、246

(*Shinshūi wakashū*, “Summer,” 246)

【Whose scent from their sleeves remains with the Chinese orange flower? They smell of the same ancient fragrance.】

“Whose sleeves” (*taga sode*) is another popular expression. The idea was that an unknown person's sleeves transmitted the fragrance to the Chinese orange flower. Sometimes the fragrance was called the remnant (*nagori*) or legacy (*katami*). As mentioned before, Fujiwara Teika wrote that the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower could come from any person's sleeves.

When Teika visited a rural garden, he recited the following poem:

⑱ Taga sode wo hana tsubaki ni yuzuriken yado ha ikuyo to otozure mo sede

『拾遺愚草』、929

(*Shūi gusō* 929)

【Whose sleeves gave the fragrance of the Chinese orange flowers in this deserted garden?】

Now the unknown previous owner of the country house has left the scent of his sleeves to the Chinese orange flowers in the garden. It was certainly not Tajima Mori but an unknown person of former times. Using *honkadori*, Teika replaces “satsuki matsu” (waiting for May) with “nan no sode nite mo” (whose sleeves it was). As Teika demonstrated by using the “Satsuki matsu” poem as *honkadori* material, it was common to describe the scent of an unknown person’s sleeves transferred to Chinese orange flowers.

However, there are different types of *honkadori* using the “Satsuki matsu” poem.

⑲ Kono mimakarinikeru tsugi no toshi no natsu, kano ie ni makaritarikeru ni, hana tachibana no kaworikereba yomeru Hafuribe no Narinaka

Arazaran ato shinobe to ya sode no kawori wo hana tachibana ni todome okiken

『新古今和歌集』哀傷 844

(*Kokin wakashū*, “Sorrow” 844)

The following summer, after my son passed away, when I smelled the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower, I recite as follows:

【My son must have left the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower to remind us of his departure from this life】

In this poem it was not an unknown ancient person but his dead son who had left the scent of his sleeves to the Chinese orange flowers in the garden. However, this poem also shares the belief that the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower came from the scent of someone’s sleeves. For this reason the historic theory (“mukashi no hito” as an unknown person in the past) holds true.

(6)

Nonetheless, there are exceptions to the “mukashi no hito as an unknown person in the past” theory, of which two examples are cited below.

⑳ 嘉保三年五月家歌合 蘆橘 詠人不知

Kahō 3 Satsuki Ie-uta-awase Rokitsu Yomibito shirazu

Sayofukete hana tachibana ni kaze fukeba waga matsu hito no kuru ka to zo omofu

『夫木和歌抄』橘、2720

(*Fuboku wakashō*, “Tachibana” 2720)

【Late in the evening when I smelled the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower, I thought my lover was coming.】

㉑ Yusareba hana tachibana no kaworu ka wo matsu hito ka to zo odorokarenuru

『夫木和歌抄』橘、2721

(*Fuboku wakashū*, “Tachibana” 2721)

【In the evening the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower surprised me, suggesting to me my lover’s arrival.】

In both poems a man mistook the smell of the Chinese orange flower in the wind for the arrival of his lover. It is important to stress that the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower and the scent of his lover are different. This is a crucial difference according to the historic theory (“*mukashi no hito*” as an unknown person from the past). The mistaken smell of the Chinese orange flower may have its origins in the following poem in the *Kokin wakashū*.

②Yado chikaku ume no hana uweji ajikinaku matsu hito no ka ni ayamatarekeri

『古今和歌集』春上 34

(*Kokin wakashū*, “Spring” 1.34)

【I would not plant plum trees in my garden as I may mistake their smell for the scent of my former lover, who is not coming.】

The next two poems are in a similar vein.

③Natsu no yo ni koishiki hito no ka wo tomeba hana tachibana zo shirube narikeru

『後撰和歌集』夏 188

(*Gosen wakashū*, “Summer” 188)

【In the summer evening it was the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower that led me to my lover.】

④Tazunu beki hito ha nokiha no furusato ni sore ka to kaworu niwa no tachibana

『新古今和歌集』夏 243

(*Shin kokin wakashū*, “Summer” 243)

【When I visited someone whom I wanted to see, she was no longer there, but the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower in the corner (*nokiha*) of the garden.】

“*Nokiha*” is a wordplay on the verb *noku* (“to remove”).

The last two poems are often cited as *honkadori* of the “Satsuki matsu” poem in the *Kokin wakashū*, but it should be noted that they are associations and in fact the smell of humans and the flower are not the same. It is also worth pointing out that these poems lack *sode* (sleeves as a medium of scent). The sleeves are an integral part of the original “Satsuki matsu” poem. “*Mukashi no hito*” (someone in the past) could take flower twigs in their hands whereby his sleeves also touched the flower and as a result the scent of the sleeves would transfer to the flower.

Human scent and the fragrance of Chinese orange flowers are very similar, but without *sode* (sleeves) in the poems these two smells never converge. Therefore, the poems without *sode* should be interpreted to mean that the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower smells as if it were the scent of a former lover.

(7)

In the world of Waka poetry, flowers and sleeves are key components: the sleeves belong to the person who snaps off a flowery twig, and the twig is kept in the sleeves. As a result, the sleeves are tinged with the color and scent of the flower. Let me cite some examples from the *Man'yōshū*.

②⑤ Hikiyojite oraba chiru bemi ume no hana sode ni kokiiretsu shimaba somu tomo
(*Man'yōshū* 1644)

【I rub the plucked plum flowers in my sleeves; I don't care if the color and the scent remain there or not.】

②⑥ Te ni toreba sode sahe nihofu ominaheshi kono shiratsuyu ni chiramaku oshimo
(*Man'yōshū* 2115)

【My sleeves would smell like the yellow patrinia if I took it in my hand, though it will sadly wither away in the morning dew.】

②⑦ Wotomera ni tsuto ni mo yarimi, shirotahe no sode ni mo kokiire, kaguhashimi okite karashimi
(*Man'yōshū* 4111)

【...the cuckoo is singing in May, plucking the twigs of the first flowers; maidens rub and leave them to wither in their white sleeves.】

In the *Man'yōshū*, as in the *Kokin wakashū*, if one rubs the flower in one's sleeves or simply touches the sleeves, the color and smell of the flowers transfer to the sleeves themselves.

②⑧ Oritsureba sode koso nihohe ume no hana
『古今和歌集』 32

(*Kokin wakashū* 32)

【If I pluck the twig of a plum flower, let my sleeves assume the fragrance!】

②⑨ Ume no hana utate nihohi no sode ni tomareru
『古今和歌集』 47

(*Kokin wakashū* 47)

【The plum flower's fragrance stays on my sleeves.】

Now, in some of the poems the transfer of the fragrance from the flower to the sleeves is reversed. Namely, the scent of the sleeves is added to the fragrance of the flowers.

③⑩ Wagimoko ga sode ya huretsuru ume no hana ayashiki hodo no ka ni nihohuran
俊恵、『林葉和歌集』 66

(Shun'e, *Rin'yō wakashū* 66)

【I wonder if my lover's sleeves touched the plum flower—they smell exquisite.】

In the case of the mandarin flower, there are many *honkadori* poems based on the “Satsuki

matsu” poem.

③① Sode no ka wo hana tachibana ni tomeokite mukashi no hito ha izuchi inuramu

源有房 『有房集』 92

(Minamoto Arifusa, *Yūbōshū* 92)

【Where did the person go, leaving his sleeves’ scent on the Chinese orange flower?】

③② Ikusuwe ni waga sode no ka ya nokoru beki tezukara uweshi noki no tachibana

藤原良経 『秋篠月清集』 244

(Fujiwara Ryōkei, *Akishino gesseishū* 244)

【I wonder if the scent of my sleeves will remain with the Chinese orange flower that I planted in my garden.】

Let me quote one example from Fujiwara Teika.

③③ Sode no ka wa hana tachibana ni nokoredomo taete tsurenaki yume no omokage

『拾遺愚草』 1256

(*Shūi gusō* 1256)

【Though the scent of their sleeves remains with the Chinese orange flower, the images of my lover cease to exist in my dreams.】

Drawing inspiration from the “mukashi no hito” poem, Teika regrets that the image of the lover is gone even though the scent of her sleeves remains with the Chinese orange flower.

The transfer of the color and smells of flowers to human sleeves and the transfer in the opposite direction were standard allusions in Waka poetry. In this tradition, both smells are in fact the same thing. The popular interpretation that the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower reminds one of the scent of the sleeves of a loved one is an aberration. Some poets avoided this confusion by not using the word *sode* (sleeves) so that they could say that the fragrance of the flower evoked the scent of their lover, since they could treat them as similar but essentially different smells. These poems are exceptions in the traditions of Waka poetry.

(8)

It was standard practice in *honkadori* of the “Satsuki matsu” poem to regard the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower as having been transferred from the sleeves of an unknown person of the past. Juxtaposing the flower and the sleeves in a Waka poem is very common.

However, this correct interpretation is almost forgotten now. There must be good reasons for this. One of the reasons must be that the idea that the scent of sleeves could transfer to the flower and become the fragrance of the flower sounds fantastical and incredulous to people today.

But removing fantastical elements would be an evisceration of Waka poetry. Other fantastical clichés include “The frozen tears of the nightingale will melt away” (*Kokin wakashū* 4) and “The tears of wild geese will flood the field” (*Kokin wakashū* 258). These fantastical expressions have been part of the tradition of Waka poems from the beginning. The transfer of scent from sleeves

to flower is one of these fantastical poetic elements (*uta soragoto*).

(9)

Waiting for *satsuki no sekku*, the smell of the blossoming Chinese orange flower reminds me of the scent of the sleeves of someone from the past. The fragrance of the Chinese orange flower was physically transferred from the sleeves of an unknown person in the past. Of course, that person had no intention to transfer the smell of her sleeves to the flower. She did so accidentally when she picked the Chinese orange flowers or calamus flowers to make a hairpiece or *kusudama* (flower balls).

③④ Tachibana ni ayame no makura kaworu yo zo mukashi wo shinobu kagiri narikeru

藤原俊成 『千五百番歌合』 827

(Fujiwara Shunzei, *Sengohyakuban uta-awase* 827)

【My pillow smelling of Chinese orange flower and calamus reminds me of former days in the night.】

This poem shows a reminiscence of the past caused by the smell of flowers on the night of *satsuki no sekku*. In the case of the “Satsuki matsu” poem, the reminiscences extend to the unknown person in the past whose sleeves had touched the Chinese orange flower just as the poet did.

When we experience strong feelings such as joy or sadness, we tend to think that it is a unique feeling. However, on some occasions we may imagine that people in the past shared the same feeling. Here are some examples from the *Man'yōshū*.

③⑤ Inishihe ni arikemu hito mo wagagoto ka imo ni kohitsutsu inekatezukemu

(*Man'yōshū* 497)

【In missing his lover, I wonder if “inishie ni arikemu hito” (someone who existed in the past) may have lost his sleep like myself.】

③⑥ Inishihe ni arikemu hito mo wagagoto ka miwa no hihara ni kazashi orikemu

(*Man'yōshū* 1118)

【I wonder if “inishie ni arikemu hito” (someone who existed in the past) also plucked the flower of Miwa no Hibara to make a hairpiece.】

This poem is attributed to Kakinomoto Hitomaro.

③⑦ Yo kutachite naku kawachidori ubeshi koso mukashi no hito mo shinohikinikere

(*Man'yōshū* 4147)

【The plovers sing in the night as “mukashi no hito” (someone in the past) would have sneaked in.】

This poem is by Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持, and uses “mukashi no hito” (someone in

the past) instead of “inishie ni arikemu hito” (someone who existed in the past).

It is apparent that these poets believed that their emotional experiences were not unique but ubiquitous among the ancients.

Hiyoshisha no
Uta-awase tote hito yomi haberikeru toki, yomeru
Hahuribe no Sukune Narishige

In *Senzai wakashū*, “Spring” 1.67 (『千載和歌集』春上 67)
日吉社の歌合とて人よみ侍りける時、よめる
祝部宿禰成仲

③8 Sazanami ya shiga no hanazono miru tabi ni mukashi no hito no kokoro wo zo shiru
【Every time I look at the flower fields of the ancient capital of Shiga I am reminded of the mind of “mukashi no hito” (someone in the past).】

It is important to understand that the minds of both people in the past and the poet are one and the same. In this poem, “mukashi no hito” (someone in the past) is imagined to have been the first person to have planted cherry trees, as is indicated in the next poem.

③9 Mukashi tare arenan ato no katami tote shiga no miyako ni hana wo uweken
後鳥羽院『続拾遺和歌集』春下 88
(Go-Toba-in, *Shoku shūi wakashū*, “Spring” 2.88)
【Who in the past planted cherry trees in the deserted ancient capital of Shiga as a memento?】

Some poets chose mandarin flowers instead of cherry blossoms.

④0 Furusato no hana tachibana ni mukashi tare sode no ka nagara utsushiuweken
浄阿上人『新後拾遺和歌集』雑春 962
(Jōa Shōnin, *Shin goshūi wakashū*, “Miscellaneous, Spring” 962)
【Who in the past planted the Chinese orange flowers, leaving the scent of their sleeves to the flower?】

Obviously, this was a *honkadori* from the “Satsuki matsu” poem.

④1 Taga sode no nagori wo tomete tachibana no mukashi kwaranu ka ni nihohuran
坊城俊定
(Bōjō Shunjō)
【Whose scent from their sleeves remains with the Chinese orange flower? They smell of the same ancient fragrance.】

④2 Iku suwe ni waga sode no ka ya nokoru beki tezukara uweshi noki no tachibana
藤原良経
(Fujiwara Ryōkei)
【Wondering if the scent of my sleeves will remain forever, as I plant the Chinese orange flower in my garden.】

These two poems reiterate the spirit of the “mukashi no hito” poem very clearly. The fragrance of the Chinese orange flower remains with the scent of the sleeves of someone in the past, and the scent of my sleeves will remain with the Chinese orange flowers forever after my death. Of course, the scent of the sleeves will disappear after each person’s death, but the transferred fragrance of the flower will remain the same. As long as people appreciate the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower as something transferred from sleeves, it represents the continuity and permanence of human life. This was a view held especially by the historic school of Waka poets. There were acknowledgements of the ephemeral nature of life in the falling cherry blossoms and the permanence in human nature in the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower. However, these two perceptions became unfashionable. As a result, the interpretation of the “Satsuki matsu” poem has changed. It is now common to interpret it to mean that the fragrance of the Chinese orange flower momentarily reminds the poet of the scent of a former lover. It is a reminiscence evoked by the fragrance.

However, in the true spirit of the “Satsuki matsu” poem, the poets not only recall the past but also send their thoughts to the distant future. The scent of human sleeves is passed on to the fragrance of a flower, and in return the flower passes on the fragrance to the sleeves of the next generation. The cycle continues forever.