

SAA Fall 2015 "Women of Japan *The Tale of Genji*

John R Wallace (jwallace@berkeley.edu)

Website: <http://sonic.net/~tabine/SAAFa15/saafa15-homepage.html>

Ranks

Titles bestowed by Emperor

taikōdaigō (太皇太后) — August Grand Empress

kōtaigō (皇太后) — Grand Empress

kōgō (皇后) — Empress

chūgū (中宮) — First Consort (but by the late tenth century there was little distinction between this title and Empress)

nyōgo (御女) — imperial consort or consort

kōi (更衣) — Wardrobe Mistress

menoto (乳母) — wet nurse or nurse (a very important role, maintained over the years as the woman becomes a trusted, protective and authoritative voice of wisdom)

miya (宮) — Princess (a term used for members—men or women—of the royal family or women marrying into the royal family. The ladies-in-waiting often refer to the woman they serve as “Miya”—this is most common in Lady Murasaki’s *Journal and Pillow Leaves* as these two writers seem to have served their mistresses intimately.)

Generic descriptions

miyasundokoro (御息所) — Venerable Consort. (Originally referring respectfully to empresses and first consorts, later indicates imperial consorts and wardrobe mistresses)

nyōbō (女房) — ladies-in-waiting. (a broad term for women who served at court, residing at the anterior palace, or women who serve important members of the aristocracy, residing at those estates)

O-moto (御許) — Personal Aide, or Lady. A woman of high stature who thus is permitted to serve close at hand.

myōbu (命婦) — servitress. (historically women who gained fourth or fifth ranks either by imperial appointment, “inner servitresses,” or by marriage, “outer servitresses”—a distinction not made explicit in the memoirs which, like other Heian kana literature uses it to mean mid-ranking ladies-in-waiting. Tsunoda believes Sei Shōnagon was a myōbu.)

naishi (内侍) — handmaiden. (“Naishi” used by itself is often a shorthand for lower ranking—but still elite—group of officers in the Handmaidens’ Office, Naishi no Tsukasa. In this office there were two Head Imperial Handmaidens, Naishi no Kami, two Assistant Head Imperial Handmaidens, Naishi no Suke, four Handmaidens, Naishi no Jō, and one hundred Serving Girls, Nyōju.)

Indications of respect

kimi (君) — Gentlewoman. When suffixed to women’s names, it is a strong indicator of respect.

himegimi (姫君) — Mistress. When suffixed to a woman’s name, it usually indicates a daughter, often unmarried, of an important family. It can also indicate an imperial offspring, but this is not the case in the memoirs.

AOI

Updated Sep 20, 2015

[Aoi no ue \(葵の上\) "Grand Lady Aoi"](#)

"Aoi" is a type of plant, a "heartvine" and is treated in poetry as a symbol of bondedness because the word "aoi" is a close in pronunciation to "au" ("to meet").

[Brief description:](#)

Genji's first wife, the eldest daughter of a princess (sister to Emperor Kiritsubo) and the Minister of the Left. She is a commoner, but probably the single most eligible unmarried woman at the time when the Court is deciding a spouse for Genji. She is full sister to Genji's best friend Tō no Chūjō. She is married to Genji when he is 12. She gives birth to one child, a boy named Yūgiri. The father is Genji.

[Names used in the translations:](#)

In all three translations she is "the wife" or "Genji's wife" of "the first wife" and so forth.

[Mentions in the work ...](#)

Mentioned in about 28 sections of the work, across 12 chapters beginning with Chapter 1, but far more frequently in the first nine chapters of the work. The 9th chapter is named after her.

[After *The Tale of Genji*](#)

There is a famous Noh play titles "Aoi no Ue" (in which she appears only metaphorically as a robe on the floor of the stage — the active character is Rokujō) and a modern interpretation of the play by Yukio Mishima with the same title.

[On the web](#)

[Web search](#)

"Aoi no ue" will lead to considerable information related to both the original play and Mishima's modern play, including synopsis, scripts, and YouTube uploads of the full play (but not necessarily with English subtitles).

[Web image search terms](#)

"Aoi" is not useful. "Aoi no ue" will lead to many images of the Noh play, usually with an angry Rokujō depicted.

FUJITSUBO

Updated Sep 20, 2015

[Fujitsubo no chūgū \(藤壺中宮\) "First Consort Fujitsubo"](#)

Fujitsubo is a set of living chambers within the "back palace" devoted to the emperor's women. Like the Kōkiden, it is one of the best of those apartment sets. The woman is identified, therefore, by location, which is a typical name. She has, in other words, a very standard, proper name, and lives in the very best of places.

[Brief description:](#)

She was the fourth princess (daughter) of a prior emperor, and so of very high rank, but motherless and taken in by Emperor Kiritsubo as an imperial consort (nyōgo 女御, one rank above someone like Kiritsubo who is a kōi, 更衣) and replacement for the deceased and deeply loved Kiritsubo, whom she resembles. She is the object of Genji's love (and I suppose we should think that they resemble one another since both are said to resemble Genji's mother Kiritsubo) and they secretly produce a child together, whom the world thinks of as the son of the Kiritsubo Emperor. Adultery by an imperial consort is definitely a sinful act and this will weigh heavily on her. She is five years older than Genji. She is sister to Murasaki's father.

[Names used in the translations:](#)

Seidensticker and Washburn use "Fujitsubo".

In Chapter 1, Tyler uses: Daughter of an earlier Emperor

In Chapter 5, Tyler uses: Her Highness

In Chapter 7, Tyler uses: Her Highness, then Her Majesty

In Chapters 8, 9, Tyler uses: Her Majesty

In Chapters 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, Tyler uses: Her Majesty, then Her Cloistered Eminence

In Chapter 20, Tyler uses: a dream phantom

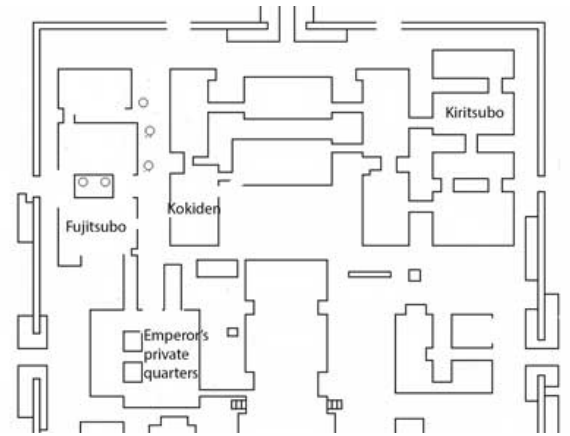
[Mentions in the work ...](#)

Mentioned in about 50 sections of the work, across 14 chapters beginning with Chapter 1 and ending with the final chapter of that portion of the text before the death of Genji, but with most mentions are in the first 20 chapters of the work.

KIRITSUBO

[Kiritsubo no kōi \(桐壺更衣\) "The Kiritsubo Wardrobe Mistress"](#)

As is the case with Fujitsubo and Kōkiden, Kiritsubo is a set of living chambers within the "back palace" devoted to the emperor's women. She has, in other words, a very standard, proper name, but her rank is lower than many women in the work. Further, as the narrative indicates, the Kiritsubo apartments are farther from the emperor's bedchamber than some other apartments, forcing her or him to pass other consorts living quarters in order to see each other, and easily enabling the type of persecution other women heaped upon her, as well. (In this YouTube, the photographer is standing just about where the apostrophe is at "Emperor's" and starts the film pointing towards the Kokiden, although it is blocked by a secondary building. Panning counter-clockwise gives a view of the emperor's sleeping quarters. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2BplvOJrss>)



[Brief description:](#)

Mother of Genji and consort to Emperor Kiritsubo. As Tyler indicates, there are times when she is called "the Haven" (miyasundokoro 御息所) which indicates that her closeness (role in providing emotional and physical comfort) to her emperor is more or less on par with Rokujō's closeness to her emperor (who is deceased by the beginning of the story). Her rank is not particularly high, comparatively speaking—her father was a Grand Counselor (dainagon 大納言).

[Names used in the translations:](#)

Seidensticker and Washburn designate her generically.
In Chapter 1, Tyler uses: The Kiritsubo Intimate, the Haven

[Mentions in the work ...](#)

I believe Kiritsubo is mentioned only in the first chapter of the work, which is named after her.

KOKIDEN

Updated Sep 20, 2015

[Kōkiden no ōgisaki \(弘徽殿太后\) "Grand Empress Kōkiden"](#)

Kōkiden is a set of living and working chambers within the "back palace" devoted to the emperor's women. Together with the Fujitsubo, it might be considered among the best of those apartment sets. Kōkiden, the woman, is identified, therefore, by location, which is a typical name. She has, in other words, a very standard, proper name, and lives in the very best of places.

[Brief description:](#)

She is an imperial consort (nyōgo 女御) to Emperor Kiritsubo just as is Kiritsubo. However, she has seniority because she was installed before Kiritsubo in the "back palace" (in fact, before all other women), has given birth to the Crown Prince (who will become Emperor Suzaku), and comes from a higher-ranking family (her father is Minister of the Right). She is usually now called "Grand Empress" because, by the end of the work, her son has become emperor, which increases her own rank. From the beginning she is "anti-Genji" and a powerful force to contend with. One of her younger sisters is married to Genji's best friend, Tō no chūjō. So although there is a fairly clear "those with the Minister of the Left" (Tō no chūjō as son, Aoi as daughter, Genji as son-in-law) vs "those with the Minister of the Right" (Kōkiden as eldest daughter, fourth daughter as his favorite daughter, the Crown Prince / Emp. Suzaku, as eldest son, Oborozukiyo, as little sister to Kōkiden) and these political lines are real and have narrative influence, there is a complicated crossing over in that Tō no Chūjō will take the M. of the Right's favorite daughter as his proper wife and Genji will sleep with Oborozukiyo and Emp. Suzaku, while forced by his mother to exile Genji over the Oborozukiyo affair, is more or less Genji's lifelong friend with a few of awkward times along the way.

[Names used in the translations:](#)

Seidensticker uses "Kokiden" while Washburn uses "Kokiden Consort"

In Chapters 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, Tyler uses: The Kokiden Consort

In Chapters 13, 14, Tyler uses: the Empress Mother

In Chapter 21, Tyler uses: Her Majesty, the Empress Mother

[Mentions in the work ...](#)

Mentioned in about 35 sections across 13 chapters that span most of the narrative but by far her most frequent mentions are in Chapter 1 and Chapter 10 (when she is busy trying to exile Genji). Nevertheless, even when not mentioned, she is a powerhouse in the background.

MURASAKI

Murasaki no ue (紫の上) "Grand Lady Murasaki"

"Murasaki" is the color purple and is associated with high-ranking officials and the powerful Fujiwara clan of the author's day. ("Fujiwara" means "Wisteria field" and wisteria were treated as purple flowers although there were white wisteria at that time as well.) "Ue" is a term of respect shown towards aristocracy but indicates no specific rank. She gains this respect as the privileged (ahead of other of his women) companion to Genji. Murasaki's name feels like the name of a fictional character in an unrealistic drama: "Grand Lady Purple". However, many of the most sympathetic female characters of the story have these sorts of names, most of which connect to natural imagery in some way: Yūgao (Evening Face / Moonflower), Suetsumuhana (Safflower), Asagao (Bluebell), Ukifune (Floating Boat), and so on.

Brief description:

Although her father was a prince (and brother to Fujitsubo), her mother (daughter of a Grand Counselor, dainagon 大納言) is dead. She was being cared for by her grandmother, a nun, who herself was once wife to a Grand Counselor. This makes Murasaki's position quite weak.

A wife but not quite completely a wife in the way Aoi was because that was an arranged marriage between powerful entities with full ceremonies recognizing it while this is a marriage of choice by Genji with limited ceremonies marking it (due to Murasaki's low rank). Murasaki never gives birth to a child but does adopt Akashi's young daughter, whom she rears properly to become an First Consort (chūgū 中宮). Genji will die of grief after she passes away.

Names used in the translations:

Seidensticker and Washburn call her "Murasaki".

In Chapters 5, 6, Tyler uses: a little girl

In Chapters 7, 8, 9, Tyler uses: Genji's young lady

In Chapters 10, 12, 21, Tyler uses: the mistress of Genji's west wing

In Chapters 13, 14, Tyler uses: Genji's lady at Nijō

In Chapters 18, 22, 23, 25, 29, Tyler uses: Genji's lady

In Chapters 19, 20, Tyler uses: the lady in Genji's west wing

In Chapters 23, Tyler uses: Genji's love

In Chapters 24, 28, 29, 32, Tyler uses: the mistress of the southeast corner

In Chapters 31, Tyler uses: the lady of spring

In Chapters 33, Tyler uses: the mistress of Genji's east wing

In Chapters 34, 35, Tyler uses: the mistress of the east wing

In Chapters 35, 39, 40, Tyler uses: Lady Murasaki

Mentions in the work ...

Mentioned in about 140 sections of the work (more than any other woman, I am sure), across 32 chapters beginning with Chapter 5 that is titled after her. She has a presence in nearly all of the chapters while Genji is still alive. The author herself is now known by the name of this character. (The author did not give the character her own name.)

ROKUJO

[Rokujō no miyasundokoro \(六条御息所\) "Venerable Consort at Rokujō"](#)

Women who were "miyasundokoro" were special companions to the emperor for his personal comfort. The word literally means "where one of royalty makes leisure". "Rokujō" is a main avenue designation in the Capital. The closer the main avenue was to the imperial grounds the higher the number (First Avenue, Second Avenue, etc.) This is Sixth Avenue which, in fact, is rather far from the center of things as far in terms of the truly upper-class. Thus the sense of this designation is someone somewhat marginalized.

[Brief description:](#)

She was the daughter of a Great Minister (daijin 大臣), and entered imperial service as consort to the Crown Prince at age 16, which is about right though perhaps a year or so on the late side. She gives birth to Akikonomu (who will later become a First Consort, chūgū 中宮). However, four years later the Crown Prince died, leaving her with no special place at court any longer. We do not know how her relationship with Genji began but she is clearly obsessed with him and rages against some of his other women.

[Names used in the translations:](#)

Seidensticker uses mostly "Rokujō lady", Washburn uses mostly "lady at Rokujō"

In Chapters 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, Tyler uses: The Rokujō Haven

In Chapters 35, 36, Tyler uses: (as a spirit)

[Mentions in the work ...](#)

Mentioned in about 38 sections across 14 chapters beginning with Chapter 4 (Yūgao's death, perhaps caused by her). She is most frequently mentioned by far in Chapter 9 (Aoi's death). She continues to make appearances as a ghost in scattered locations.

