How Women in Heian Japan Reflect and Alter Ancient China's Ideal Woman: The Warriors of Virtue

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How Women in Heian Japan Reflect and Alter Ancient China’s Ideal Woman:

The Warriors of Virtue

With access to education and the opportunity to travel, people have been able to explore the world and discover more about our intricate pasts. As historians interested in our Asian neighbors, if we were to take a look at East Asia specifically, we would be able to recognize that those areas are successfully advancing economically and technologically. The geography, landscapes, and various atmospheres are also things that are often admired and topics frequently debated. Through famous pieces of literature, scrolls, art, relics, and sites we have discovered that China and Japan have acted together in one way or another. Although the relations of these two nations have an intricate, complicated history, the ties in which they go back help to cast an understanding of what it was like hundreds of years ago. So, what do we know about ancient Asia? Most often when people are asked, “What are some of the ideas you associate dynastic China and Japan with?” You will find that people tend to respond with ideas and terms such as samurais, dynasties, scandals, and polygamy. Through records and writings we are able to see how these two individual empires functioned and the important choices they made in order to continue throughout the years. For example, China would take significant steps in developing its dynastic system by creating a process of succession that transitioned from a blood tie to a system based off of the “Mandate of Heaven.”

Japan would also transform itself through adopting Buddhism, not only affecting the individual spiritually but the society as a whole. These

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examples of significant transformations have helped to produce a past that, as historians, we are still fascinated with. But, as history has shown, those choices did not occur without consequences. Sovereigns would reign and eventually fall or pass away, men would fight, either ending with battle cries of joy or loss, and religion would be highly recognized or barely practiced. But who else was affected from these changes? Very seldom does one mention women and their roles in these ancient dynastic systems. Most impressions of women in ancient Asia reflect a role surrounding a romantic and or physical nature, and yes, although this affiliation does hold merit, certainly there is more we can associate between these nations’ social systems and women? And so, deriving from the history we have today, our goal is to take a closer look at the female characters not always appreciated in this beautifully recorded and vast history.

The Warriors of Virtue

Women in ancient China and Japan are not often reflected upon in the most encouraging light, and a shadow of sexism and prejudice often encompasses the attitude associated with this topic. The research I have encountered though has described women’s roles in various ways challenging this negative perception. From their accounts of wives to daughters and laborers to royalty, previous works have given me an exclusive look into what a day in ancient Asia would look like for a woman in various parts of the hierarchy. Through the famous Chinese narrative handscroll painting, The Admonitions Scroll of the Instructress to the Court Ladies, a work of the 5th- or 6th- century illustrating a much earlier parody, and diaries written by noble women at the court of Heian Japan (794-1192), I have been educated on who played a most significant role to the history of these nations. However, previous to my research, there were many questions I had
in regards to the topic at hand. My questions first began as, “What were the jobs women had?” “What roles did women play in the court system?” “How much power did women have?” “What were their daily lives like?” To answer these questions I have had to research both China and Japan’s specific pasts, which are individually so exclusive despite how close they are in proximity. However, once I found satisfactory answers, I then questioned, “Can these ancient histories be compared or linked, and if so, how do they challenge the negative perception attached to the memory society has to women in ancient East Asia?” What has become my most central source of history will now also be used to guide my interpretation of women in ancient China and Japan. *The Admonitions Scroll* is one of the earliest pieces of work historians have found which suggests a standard for women’s’ behavior in China. Using this scroll of illustrations and rhyme, we will track how women have adhered to this document’s teachings and guidance, and how individuals have acted against the lessons indicated within Heian Japan specifically. How has China’s influential document weaved its way into Japan’s history, and with this impact, influenced women of the Heian?
Part One:

Introduction: ancient China and *The Admonitions Scroll*

Part One of this work describes the creation and influence of *The Admonitions Scroll* in ancient China. What is this work and what does it say about women in ancient China? Looking at various examples of women in Chinese society and culture, readers will understand how the lessons depicted in the *Admonitions* did, indeed, affect women and their lifestyles.
Putting Together the Pieces

According to the interpretation and investigation of Jan Stuart, *The Admonitions Scroll*, “is an internationally recognized masterpiece of narrative painting and the most famous and earliest surviving Chinese handscroll painting, dating back to circa fifth to sixth century A.D.” While in its surviving state as a handscroll copy held by the British Museum, the scroll is attributed to an earlier artist Gu Kaizhi (c. 344-c. 405). This intricate and beautifully detailed scroll illustrates, “a poem written in A.D. 292 by poet-official Zhang Hua,” which was first created as a measure to reprimand Empress Jia, “whose wanton behavior was destabilizing the dynasty.” According to Stuart’s research, Zhang’s ruler, Emperor Hui of the Western Jin Dynasty (266-316), “was mentally deficient, seemed oblivious to the merciless machinations of his young wife, Empress Jia’s, behavior.” But who is this woman who inspired this historical text and how did she come to so much power? Under the research of Shane McCausland and an

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4 Ibid
5 Ibid
6 Ibid
7 Ibid
article with an entry titled, *A Warning to Women From 700 Hundred Years Ago,* a deep investigation of the poem’s transformation to the scroll has been uncovered.

It is said that, “Master Jia’s daughter had five vices, was resented for not being a son, and was ugly, short and dark. Nevertheless, in the second month of 272 CE, the Jia clan was honored when she was invested as a concubine of the Heir Apparent to the Western Jin (265-316) throne.

” With this new position as a concubine, to most, she “intimidated the Heir Apparent, who was just fifteen years old in his second year in his position, by her many resentments and jealousies, abuses and deceptions.” As she continued to have a heavy presence alongside the Heir Apparent, it was not until the fourth month of 290 CE that he finally rose to the throne as emperor Huidi. She naturally became empress, but grew more cruel with each day. Those who opposed her had no way to avoid or control her, and eventually it reached the point where she alone laid down the law.

To further understand how powerful this young lady would become, McCausland has laid out a timeline of events depicting her vicious actions:

The most significant events may be pieced together as follows: A year after becoming Empress, in the third month of 291 CE, she murdered the Grand Preceptor Yang Jun, but failed in an attempt to do away with the Empress Dowager Yang. In the sixth month, she secretly ordered the Prince of Chu, Sima Wei, to assassinate the young emperor’s co-regents, the Prince of Ru’nan, Sima Liang, and the minister Wei Guan. He succeeded, only to be executed on her orders the following day. In the second month of 292 CE, the year Zhang Hua composed the “Admonitions” text, she finally succeeded in assassinating the Empress Dowager Yang. In the twelfth month of 299 CE, assisted by eunuchs loyal to her, she framed the Heir Apparent Yu, and had charges of treachery brought against him, which resulted in his being demoted to commoner status. Egged on by Prince of

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9 Ibid. Blog Entry.
10 Ibid. 4.
11 Ibid. 5.
12 Ibid
Zhao, Sima Lun, she eventually had him murdered in the third month of 300 CE.”13 If this treacherous history was not enough, “she was known to dispatch performing girls out into the streets in search of handsome men. They would be seduced into a carriage where she lay hidden behind matting, and then kidnapped them. While detained in her company for several nights on end of entertainment and feasting, they would be bullied into having sex with her.”14 It was not until the fourth month of 300 CE, when a *coup de 'tat* occurred that the empress’s regime would dissipate and was finally destroyed.

*The Admonitions* would begin to be written within the chaos of Empress Jia’s reign.

Zhang Hua, the creator of the eighty-line poetic text, “was a prominent courtier who was ‘versatile and widely experienced, and erudite among his contemporaries, and distinguished ‘in that he maintained national stability despite serving a deluded and tyrannical empress.”15 Although it was due to Empress Jia that Zhang had his position in the court, he quickly came to fear her actions from witnessing, “the unravelling of the dynasty at her hands.”16 In retaliation towards her treacherous acts, Zhang Hua produced *The Admonitions* in an attempt to “admonish and warn members of the court to correct their behaviors.”17 With the later scroll, bearing official title, *The Admonitions Scroll of the Instructress to the Court Ladies (Nushi zhen tu)*18 historians have a beautifully recorded plea expressing fear over an unruly empress.

Although the poem was made in order to warn and guide, we would find that:

“unfortunately Empress Jia was impervious to the poem’s moral message, and she carried on with her scandalous sexual exploits and her murderous activities. Some of her ruthlessness may have been warranted, since there were rebels stirring up civil war, and ultimately in 300 AD there was a successful coup. She was captured and forced to commit suicide.”19

13 Ibid
14 Ibid
15 Ibid
17 Ibid
18 Ibid
Although the scroll itself came later, inspired by Zhang Hua’s poem, this dynamic sequence of imagery captures an individual, and her influence, through a single piece of ancient art.

Zhang Hua’s poem was meant to serve as a forceful corrective to her Empress Jia’s wanton habits and desire for power. The poem advocates the correct behaviour that all court women should choose to follow and it sets out that by submissively and loyally serving their lord, women are following cosmic order. This would allow women, like Empress Jia, to play a key role in promoting social welfare and harmony for family and state. But sometimes words are not enough, and about one century later, a similar female figure would emerge and the actual scroll, displayed at the British Museum, would be created by the legendary artist Gu Kaizhi.

The scroll itself contains twelve separate, yet intricate images, so that when unrolled one was able to focus on each scene and its content separately. With imagery created by the hand of a legendary artist, the message you were to observe was clear: a healthy and prosperous society is the result of everyone, especially women, honoring their proper roles and positions. Not only are there twelve different scenes, but the content of each image has different women as its focus, including: Lady Fan, The Lady of Wei, Lady Feng, Lady Ban, the court Instructress, and various unnamed women. These various female figures provide variety for the reader, which allows each person to connect to this piece on a personal level. Whether you are married or a daughter, vain, brave, and even lonely, there is an image relatable to your circumstance. What

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we must recognize though is that this scroll is not about a perfect ‘woman,’ but about how every individual can reach such perfection and virtue.

In closing, I found a very well thought out interpretation of the scroll, and the poetry which inspired it, that helped me as a reader, but also researcher grasp the purpose of this document. Not only does it give a summary of its purpose, but also helped me imagine the setting surrounding its creation:

“The scroll before us fits into a tradition of didactic imagery established in the Han Dynasty and influenced by the great philosopher Confucius. When you read the text alongside the images, you realise that there’s a deep message being communicated here. Confucius had the idea that everyone in society has a proper role and place, and if they follow that, then a very healthy and effective society is ensured. Now that message must have been especially important at the time that the poem that this scroll is based on was written, and at the time it was painted, because these were times of social chaos. So what the message is, is that the women, even one with great beauty, must always evince humility, she must always abide by rules, and never forget her position in relationship to her husband and family; and by doing so, she is a positive and active force in promoting social order.”21

A Brief History of China and The Admonitions Scroll

Looking specifically into ancient Chinese court- into life, marriage, motherhood, and loyalty- one could observe how all these positions would adhere and challenge the instructions The Admonitions Scroll represented. Often enough the daily roles of social and political life, or of mere existence, for women, were used as a way to obtain power and status within society. Presenting the argument, “Were women simply commodities in ancient China or was their presence enough to change the course of Chinese history?” As for The Admonitions Scroll, you

would assume women were loyal, submissive wives who showed bravery and good character in all situations. However, how can such a perfect person exist? When investigating *The Admonitions Scroll* and its influence of ideas it transmits in Chinese history, I found an amazing topic to research was the bonds of marriage, the relationship between woman and man, the position of the widow, and the role of the mother in the family. Throughout the many lectures I have attended and books I have read, a common theme of marital advancement has made its appearance. Most marriages within China’s past have shown that a union would occur when it would better the family; making one view women as ‘pawns’ to better one’s standing. This system definitely supports *The Admonitions Scroll* and the content it preaches; through being brave, submissive, and of good character. A great example demonstrating this marriage system within Chinese history could derive from the Tubo people who were ancestors of Tibetan heritage. “The story of Princess Wencheng is but a short chapter of the larger complex of the 1400-years long history of Sino-Tibetan relations and an even smaller part of the long-term contacts between Imperial China and Inner Asia, but it illustrates some traditional patterns of contacts between China and her neighbours.”

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Songtsen Gampo admired the culture of the Tang Dynasty, and was eager to form an alliance with that powerful empire. In 641 BC, Emperor Taizong sent Princess Wencheng to him as his bride. Through this marriage, Princess Wencheng accepted her circumstances and used her new marriage as a way to create a friendship between two nations. Her participation in this marriage was so influential that even today, many Statues of Princess Wencheng have a home in the Jokhang Temple and Potala Palace because, “Princess Wencheng is in all Tibetan later sources credited with the bringing of the statue of the Buddha Śākyamuni (in Tibetan referred to as Jo bo) to Tibet.” Her legacy has even been accredited with ensuring peace until the early 660s when the Tibetan people launched a new, compromising endeavor. In terms of The Admonitions Scroll, this story could easily be associated with scene four: “Lady Feng and the Bear,” which suggests bravery. The woman in the picture does not run in the face of an enemy, but stands firm. Although this woman, concubine Lady Feng, would be criticized for her behavior by historians, like Princess Wencheng, she too sacrificed her own potential future for the sake of a higher cause. However, demonstrations of bravery, like that of Princess Wencheng, were not always the case when it comes to marital commitment. Poetry has also served as a significant guide into the past when it comes to women hundreds of years ago. For example, when looking back to the Chinese literature and poetry of Xijun (c. 110 BCE), a relative of Emperor Wu, she would share an image most women could often associate with. Xijun’s words

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24 Ibid
27 Scene 3: Lady of Wei ignores her love of music. Appendix. 50.
would express longing, homesickness, and an unimpressed eloquence encapsulating the tragedy
her marriage resonated with.

My Family married me to a lost horizon
Sent me far away to the Wusun King’s strange land
A canvas hut is my mansion, of fled is its wall
Flesh for food, mare’s milk for drink
Long ever for my homeland, my heart’s inner world
I wish I were the brown goose going to its old home

Xijun, and her devastating story, provides historians
with an example of how behavior advocated in The Admonitions Scroll was disobeyed in ancient China.
Looking at scene three and scene seven of the scroll,
readers are meant to be inspired to sacrifice what they
love for the benefit of their others and expected to do so
in the right manner. However, it is through stories like
that of Xijun, that we can see and interpret how a good
attitude and sacrifice did not necessarily go hand in hand.

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29 Scene 3: Lady of Wei ignores her love of music (sacrifice), Scene 7: The Toilet Scene (focusing on one’s personal character). Available in Appendix. Images. 50 and 54.
Divorce and the Widower

Women in ancient China generally had no rights to divorce or separation, and or the prospect of potential remarriage. As discussed by Dr. Cia, within her class on Early Chinese Empires, a woman was expected to be tied to her spouse’s family lineage even if she had lost her husband. “Good faith is the virtue of a wife.” This was the standard manner expected of marriage and of loyalty to one's partner. One of the most fascinating stories demonstrating this intense marriage commitment is centered on a beautiful widow. A king would approach this woman, and being so struck by her beauty, would request her hand in marriage. In order to refute his offer and show her commitment to her previous husband, she would take extreme measures and cut off her nose. In accord with scene seven, “The Toilette Scene,” one could argue that her inner beauty, her commitment and loyalty, were so honorable that she abandoned the physical norm to promote her character.

The Love of a Mother

Motherhood in ancient China has often been interpreted as the strongest of relationships, demonstrating moments of passion, bravery, and sincere care. However, there are of course circumstances when this strong tie would be forgotten and cause an individual to sacrifice this

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32 Scene Seven: The toilette scene. Appendix. 54.
34 Scene Seven: The Toilette Scene. Appendix. 54.
guardian role. The mother of Jiangyi of Chu, as explained by Lisa Raphals in her book *Sharing the Light*, is a story of a woman, in no ordained or high position in China, who would come to her son’s defense when it was decided that he would be dismissed from his position in office. She would demonstrate extreme bravery by arguing with the ruler that he had no right to remove her son from office and was only replacing Jiangyi with those, “whose dereliction of duty and lack of virtue forced people to steal.” According to records, due to her honesty and well-spoken argument, the king himself would see this indirect criticism and remark, “If the mother is as wise as this, her son is surely no fool,” and her son would once again be employed. Furthermore, it is important to understand that there were instances, completely different than that of Jiangyi’s mother, where a female would change the course of her marriage and make a decision affecting more than just her husband. Cai Wenji, both a poet and musician, would be a female within the Han Dynasty who was married off. Unsatisfied with the marriage, she decided to return home but that decision came at a great cost. Unlike scene nine from *The Admonitions Scroll*, Wenji had to abandon her children and destroyed the idealistic image of the family scenario.

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37 Scene Nine: The family scene. Appendix. 56.
To truly understand the influence family had in a woman’s life, we must step away from our idealistic impression of today’s family standard and look towards the stories left behind from ancient East Asia. Scene nine in *The Admonitions Scroll* depicts generations coming together to enjoy the company of one another, sharing this ideal that, “Let your hearts be as locusts, and your race shall multiple.” However as we have seen from only a few brief characters of the past, choices have been made and actions taken to defend and honor marriage and motherhood, or to satisfy one’s own desires by abandoning expectations. In China, and as we will discover in Japan, marriage was often used as a diplomatic tool to further one’s political power and standing in the hierarchy. Through this system, we have very distinct examples where this arrangement worked and how this system was unsuccessful. We have also been able to view examples of how a mother would risk so much to benefit her own son’s success and how another would decide to abandon her family for her own happiness. What these examples help us to perceive today is that although we have a document guiding how women were supposed to act, there are always exceptions to those expectations.

38 Scene Nine: The family scene. Appendix. 56.
Part Two: China and Japan Collide

Part Two of this work explains the introduction of China to Japan, the trade between these two nations, and the eventual dissolve of this relationship. As you read, it is important that you understand that Chinese influence was wanted and desired by Japan, not forced upon them. With this in mind, readers will see how it is possible that the lessons depicted in The Admonitions Scroll could be linked to women of the Heian.
Understanding China and Japan’s History

Through *The Admonitions Scroll*, which has its origins in the Western Jin Dynasty, the research we will now discuss will revolve around the poetry hidden within its content. However, one may question how an illustrated scroll from China could be used to describe and or compare to a dynasty in medieval Japan? My reading of Weng Zhenping’s *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals* and Ivan Morris’s, *The World of the Shining Prince*, explains this weaving of cultures. When did this transaction occur? Who was involved? And what influence did the Chinese leave its neighbors with?

According to *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals*, Japan would become an emerging, powerful nation within the Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1185) periods. But what was it that caused the Chinese to be so invested with this foreign island? From *Ambassadors* it was expressed, by Wang Zhenping, that in order to see what ideas and concepts were passed to Japan, we must first look at the beginning of this fascinating and diverse relationship. In the introduction of the book, we are given an opportunity to look back into Chinese history and uncover what their legends and concepts of Japan had been. What Wang will explain to readers is that, “a three-thousand-year-old yellow beast inhabits the island…It once carried the legendary Yellow

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40 "China to Japan Transfer Heian - Google Search." China to Japan Transfer Heian
41 Wang, Zhen Ping. *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period*.
Emperor…Those who were fortunate enough to ride the beast will live for two thousand years.”

Already one could understand that the idea of immortality, or everlasting life, played an important role in the excitement over this divine island. It was also said that there was a magical ice silkworm with protective powers and a plant that supposedly brought back the dead; and as if that was not enough, it was believed that divine spirits protected this magical island. So it is no surprise that this mysterious land, filled with protection and immortality, would spark the interest of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty. Wang would later explain that the First Emperor was so invested in what this land was said to offer, that he would send men on a quest to unfold the truths behind its myth. Although the Emperor would eventually learn the truth behind this island’s existence, it is the legends themselves that convey a very important message to us today. Through all these beliefs and tales we can now see how a relationship between a great dynasty and an emerging state first began, and this curiosity would ignite the beginning of the transfer of “China” to Japan. Soon after discovering that the island was inhabited, it is said that the Chinese were heavily determined to make their mark in Japanese society. “In their thinking there was no clear-cut line between internal and external affairs. A Chinese ruler considered himself the son of heaven and believed that the whole world therefore came under his jurisdiction.”

_Ambassadors_ exposes an intricate, yet simple, ancient history between the Chinese and the Japanese. What first started out as a ‘mystery island’ with magical elements and spirits would later be exposed as a nation hungry for advancement and potential. Japan would

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44 Ibid

eventually become the persistent player among the two—making extreme efforts to learn and to 
grow from China, but maintaining a nature of Japanese roots for the future.

Based on Wang’s research alone we are able to see how a relationship began. Now 
through *The World of the Shining Prince*, by Ivan Morris, a detailed description of Chinese 
influence and Japan’s reaction would be further explained. “The seventh and eighth centuries 
were one of Japan’s great ‘borrowing’ periods.”46 During the seventh century, “the official 
mission to China in 607 included a number of students who remained on the continent for many 
years and who on their return home helped in the efforts to remodel the primitive island kingdom 
on the line of the advanced and sophisticated state that they had admired abroad.”47 This 
‘student investment’ was an effort by the Chinese emperor to become, “the sole ruler over all the 
people and all the land.”48 This transformation concept was also visited through Wang’s 
research as well, emphasising how men would be sent abroad in order to influence and teach 
those in Japan. “At the beginning of the eighth century the first permanent capital was 
established at Nara, and during the so-called Nara period… every aspect of Chinese culture was 
avidly adopted.”49 Morris even states how,

“The city was a small copy of Ch’ang-an and the court was modelled on the Chinese 
emperor’s; the system of administration was that of the great T’ang bureaucracy; the 
language of scholarship and official affairs was Chinese; the national histories were based 
on the model of the Chinese chronicles; Buddhism, which during this century became a

46 Morris, Ivan I. The World of the Shining Prince; Court Life in Ancient Japan. New York: 
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid. Quote and Image provided from text.
49 Ibid.
state religion, and which exerted a decisive influence on architecture, sculpture, and painting, had reached Japan by way of China...almost all of alien origin.”

These details above must be acknowledged for one to understand this intricate relationship. When we first approach this ancient transaction, we may all initially think that Chinese influence was forced and unwanted by the Japanese. However, by understanding that this relationship was encouraged and desired by the Japanese, to the extent that the Japanese Dynasty designed itself around China’s integrity, this gives readers the opportunity to understand this diverse history between China and Japan.

Now that the foundation of this relationship is understood, it is possible that our next question might be: “When did this rich relationship come to an end?” It was not until the eleventh century in Heian Japan that we see a change in China’s exposure within this nation. Through the court romance, The Tale of Genji, written by Lady Murasaki around the year 1008, “a craze for things Chinese (or supposedly Chinese) continued to dominate the aristocracy.” However, “after a period of avid borrowing, during which the country almost indiscriminately imports and imitates things from abroad, the pendulum swings and there follows a period of reaction when Japan tends to turn in on herself.”

This intricate history lends to our understanding of how a culture was affected and transitioned within a dynasty. Through Wang and Morris alone one is able to see how China weaved its way into Japan creating a lasting influence within Heian politics and society, which is why I suggest we can use The Admonitions Scroll to observe and describe social life within

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51 Ibid
52 Ibid
Heian Japan’s court system. The original poetic text of *The Admonitions Scroll* was written around 292 AD, created nearly 500 years before the Heian period began in 794 CE. Within those 500 years, as Japan was clearly influenced by Chinese culture and power, there are grounds for speculation that the Chinese standards for women’s conduct did in some way enter into the Heian period.
Part Three:

Heian Japan

Now as we begin to focus on Heian Japan, it is important to point out that *The Admonitions Scroll* never actually entered Japan. It was not until Captain Clarence Johnson, who served in the British Military, that the scroll would leave China around 1900 A.D. Part Three of this work will now serve to explain how the lessons of this ancient Chinese scroll, which never made an appearance in Japan physically, can be seen throughout Heian culture and society.

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Religion and its Impact

54 When China entered into Japan, it not only brought with it different ideas, but would share religious aspects that would change how society would view its people. Most importantly, Heian Japan’s court women. In earlier material from Dr. Markham’s Heian Japan course, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals* and a film centered on monk Kukai, an influential religious figure in early Heian Japan, one can ascertain how belief systems would appear within the Japanese culture and change societal standards forever.

Through an article titled, *Women in Ancient Japan: From Matriarchal Antiquity to Acquiescent Confinement*, Silvia-Grondin would argue that, “Integration of the two major religions of Japan, Shintoism and Buddhism, created a paradox for the female identity. Evaluating the feminine identities educed by these beliefs illustrates the drastic changes that occurred for women.”

56 Solvia-Grondin, Mallary A.. " HOME » TOPICS » HISTORY » ANCIENT JAPAN Women in Ancient Japan: From Matriarchal Antiquity to Acquiescent Confinement."
Shintoism

“The Kojiki and Nihongi are two original Japanese written records that illuminate the first documented Japanese attitude towards women.” The Nihongi holds insight into the birth of Shinto through the story of Amaterasu. These two “chronicles” of Japan date from the early and late eighth century respectively. But who is this figure? Amaterasu, in full, Amaterasu Omikami, is known in Japan as the Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven. Portrayed as a female, she is the celestial sun goddess from whom, “the Japanese imperial family claims descent, and an important Shinto deity;” she is central to, “Japan’s creation myth.”

She was born from the left eye of her father, Izanagi, who bestowed upon her a necklace of jewels and placed her in charge of Takamagahara (“High Celestial Plain”), the abode of all the kami. One of her brothers, the storm god Susanoo, was sent to rule the sea plain. Before going, Susanoo went to take leave of his sister. As an act of good faith, they produced children together, she by chewing and spitting out pieces of the sword he gave her, and he by doing the same with her jewels. Susanoo then began to behave very rudely—he broke down the divisions in the rice fields, defiled his sister’s dwelling place, and finally threw a flayed horse into her weaving hall. Indignant, Amaterasu withdrew in protest into a cave, and darkness fell upon the world. The other 800 myriads of gods conferred on how to lure the sun goddess out. They collected cocks, whose crowing precedes the dawn, and hung a mirror and jewels on a sakaki tree in front of the cave.

The goddess Amenouzume began a dance on an upturned tub, partially disrobing herself, which so delighted the assembled gods that they roared with laughter. Amaterasu became curious how the gods could make merry while the world was plunged into darkness and was told that outside the cave there was a deity more illustrious than she. She peeped out, saw her reflection in the mirror, heard the cocks crow, and was thus drawn out from the cave. The kami then quickly threw a shimenawa, or sacred rope of rice straw, before the entrance to prevent her return to hiding.

56 Solvia-Grondin, Mallary A.. " HOME » TOPICS » HISTORY » ANCIENT JAPAN Women in Ancient Japan: From Matriarchal Antiquity to Acquiescent Confinement."
57 "Amaterasu (Shinto deity)."
58 Ibid
The importance of this story is that it conveys an image women in Japan would internalize in regards to this Goddess. Intelligence, beauty, fertility, and purity were all traits that were associated with Amaterasu. Amaterasu would be a mythological example for others to follow as was the case with Himiko (or also addressed as Yamatohime No Mikoto). “Himiko was the first known ruler of Japan and the supposed originator of the Grand Shrine of Ise.”

Although Himiko’s story cannot be confirmed for all the details associated with her past, people regard her as the “sun child” or “sun daughter” in archaic Japanese. She is not only an important historical figure, but also demonstrates the connection legend and myth held for women in society, and especially promotes the Shinto belief system in the community.

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60 "Himiko (Japanese ruler)"

61 “A Shirabyoshi dancer in formal male court clothes of the Heian era preparing to dance. She wears the eboshi hat of a high official; the painted eyebrows on her forehead called “moth eyebrows” after the silk moth. Shirabyoshi were connected with female shamanism.” 97.
Buddhism

“Two monks, Saicho (767 – 822) and Kukai (774 – 835), effected this change which so decisively affected the future of Japanese Buddhism. By their comprehensive syntheses of the Chinese doctrine, two systems of teaching and practice were created, which effectively furnished all the essentials for the entire further development of Japanese Buddhism.” 62 From these two men, the Heian would perceive a new foundation for belief. It was widely acknowledged, even in general accounts, that, “The aspects of Buddhism which define its character had begun to make inroad on society’s attitude towards women.” And Silvia-Gordin adds, “this particular form of Buddhism that assimilated in Japan was immensely anti-feminine. Japan’s newfound Buddhism had fundamental convictions that women were of evil nature, which eventually led women into a submissive role of in Japanese society.” 63 Also it was believed that only men were able to achieve enlightenment because, “...man is the personification of the Buddha.” This automatically excluded women from any sort of achievements within this religious practice.

One specific form of Buddhism, that historians know gathered strength and popularity in Lady Murasaki’s day, is known as Amidism. “Amidism was already becoming the basis of

63 Solvia-Grondin, Mallary A.. " HOME » TOPICS » HISTORY » ANCIENT JAPAN Women in Ancient Japan: From Matriarchal Antiquity to Acquiescent Confinement."
popular Buddhism, and the great Amidst work, *The Essentials of Salvation* (one of the first books printed in Japan), appeared while Murasaki was a girl."\(^{64}\) This book, and its content on hell and the bliss of followers, spread throughout the nation. “The basis of Amidism was the belief that men of this decadent age were no longer able to obtain the state of nirvana by means of righteous conduct.”\(^{65}\) Once again, we are seeing how women are not even considered within this form of Buddhism, making a further statement of the evident struggles women faced within Japan. However despite being initially excluded, it is understood that women were still practicing the religion. Lady Murasaki, who did, “believe in salvation by Amida\(^{66}\)...but was an adherent of Tendai,” wrote in her diary, “I shall recite my prayers tirelessly to Amida Buddha,”\(^{67}\) despite whether this practice had been promoted for women or not.

Both Shintoism and Buddhism would meet at a time where influence and change were welcomed within Japan. With these changes, it is hard to believe that these separate systems of thought could both strive without conflict and chaos. Unfortunately though, if ever there was tension, it was the women who would have to be subject to the paradox these conflicting systems would maintain. Silvia-Gordin would finish her argument over women and religion by stating,

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\(^{65}\) Ibid. 101-102.  
\(^{66}\) Ibid. “To receive Amida, one would recite a vow, *Namu Amida Butsu* (‘I call on thee, Amida Buddha’)  
\(^{67}\) Ibid
“The two religions were harmonious in practice yet created a contradictory and confusing role for women of ancient Japan,” and we will see this throughout the Heian dynastic period.

**Women of the Heian**

Continuing to look east of China, to better understand the family setting depicted in *The Admonitions Scroll*, there is one family, who was most influential in Japan’s timeline, which would effectively change marriage and politics within the Japanese empire. This most influential group, the Fujiwara Clan, would be marked down in history for the transformation they brought to our view of ‘Courtly Love.’

“The rise of the Fujiwaras to supreme power had been a slow and arduous process.”

In Murasaki’s day the court was dominated by one clan, the Fujiwara, and in particular by one branch, the Northern Branch, and by one man, Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027). But who were the Fujiwaras and where did they come from? Using Morris’s research within *The World of the Shining Prince*, we find the beginning remnants of their legend. According to Morris, the founder of the Fujiwara clan was a leading member within the Great Reform, who was named Nakatomi Kamatari. “He and one of the imperial princes (who later came to the throne as Emperor Tenchi) had been ringleaders of the conspiracy that led to the bloody overthrow of the

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68 Solvia-Grondin, Mallary A.. " HOME » TOPICS » HISTORY » ANCIENT JAPAN Women in Ancient Japan: From Matriarchal Antiquity to Acquiescent Confinement."
Sogas, the previous ruling family.” Following this successful overthrow, in remembrance of the their success, Emperor Tenchi would grant the name Fujiwara to his companion in, “memory of the arbour wistarias where they had laid their plans.” Eventually the Fujiwara name would carry on, but it was not until three centuries later that the Fujiwara oligarchy would be fully established.

The second question we must now face is how did this family become so prominent within the Heian Court? Their tactic used as entry into the political world brings us to our understanding of how this legendary family fits into the “Family” oriented portion of The Admonitions Scroll: Scene Nine, The Family Scene. “Physical force was the least important of their methods. The Fujiwaras’ themselves never commanded any significant military strength---certainly not enough to assure them their long dominance...For, above all, they were consummate politicians, and it was mainly by political methods that they achieve their ends.”

Known as ‘marriage politics,’ the Fujiwaras’ would use their daughters as a way to gain control of the emperor and his family (similar to what we saw being used in ancient China). “It should be clear that women had an important role to play in the politics of the time. They were vital pawns, ‘borrowed wombs’ as the saying went, and, depending on their strength of character, might wield considerable influence.”

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73 Ibid
74 Scene Nine: The Family Scene. Appendix. 56.
infrangible links between the imperial family and the Fujiwaras.\footnote{77} To understand how successful this family was in maintaining their political life, we can look at Fujiwara family member Michinaga (born 966, Kyōto—died Jan. 3, 1028, Kyōto)\footnote{78}. “He was the father-in-law of two emperors, grandfather of a third, grandfather and great-grandfather of a fourth, grandfather and father-in-law of a fifth.”\footnote{79}

This pattern of marriage ties would continue throughout the Heian period making the Fujiwara Clan a powerful entity within Japan. What this system further demonstrates to readers and historians is how women and marriage in ancient Japan were used and manipulated. One could easily argue that rather than the picturesque image we see within The Admonitions Scroll, specifically scene nine,\footnote{80} the Fujiwara Clan demonstrates how marriage became a tool for success and political protocol. Once again, we see a prime example of how Heian women were

\footnote{78} Michinaga. "Fujiwara Family | Japanese Family."
\footnote{80} Early 12th Century art of Fujiwara Clan. googleimages.
\footnote{81} Scene 9: The Family scene. Appendix. Page 56.
being obedient to ideas consistent with those advocated in *The Admonitions Scroll* through their submissive nature.

Through the marriages of these family members to women of the Heian, we are also able to understand the emotional treatment a wife and mother of this period would experience. Through Lady Murasaki’s diary, *The Pillow Book*, and *The Kagero Diary*, which we will discuss later on, readers and historians are able to take a glimpse into the Heian to understand the social life and affairs of these various women’s lives.

**Romance in the Heian**

Before discussing the content within the diaries from the Heian, it is best for us to understand what conditions these women were living in in reference to Heian marriage and relationship customs. Sonja Arntzen would argue that, “Sometimes, from a contemporary Western point of view, it is difficult to distinguish how in the Heian period formal marriage was much different from a casual liaison.”

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82 Arntzen, Sonja. *The Kagero Diary*. : The University of Michigan
83 Ibid. 9.
84 "Google Images."
differed according to the particular degree of relationship (principle wife, concubine, etc.); it is 
nevertheless possible to formulate a general pattern that had been adopted by the upper classes in 
Murasaki’s time.”  

“Often the first marriage for a young man would be arranged by his family to cement 
political alliances, but he would go courting for his other marriages.”  

Arntzen even explains that,

“Views of marriage customs in the Heian period have been distorted by assuming that 
society actually followed the Yoro legal code modeled after Chinese laws and instituted 
during the eighth century. In that code, there was a clear hierarchy of first wife, second 
wife, and concubines. In reality, the situation in Heian Japan was much more fluid. 
There was a notion of “principal” wife, which was not always determined by the order of 
marriage.”

This marriage structure and routine, deviating from tradition, is so vital to our understanding of 
women in the Heian due to the fact that the authors, who have left diaries depicting social life, all 
had different reactions to this marriage system. For example, “In the case of the Kagero Diary 
author’s marriage, it was a first marriage for her and a second marriage for him. The author 
registers annoyance that her husband did not come courting properly, which would have meant 
cultivating a connection with a female member of her household so that he could deliver love 
letters to her secretly.”

In further illustration of Heian relations, romance could begin at a sudden glance; 
however, it was not necessarily the features of a woman that caught a man’s attention, but her

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86 Morris, Ivan I. The World of the Shining Prince; Court Life in Ancient Japan. New York: 
87 Arntzen, Sonja. The Kagero Diary. : The University of Michigan, . Print. 10.
89 Arntzen, Sonja. The Kagero Diary. : The University of Michigan, . Print. 10.
hand and script. “Since the people of Genji’s world regarded handwriting as the mirror of a person’s soul, they awaited the first letter from a potential lover or mistress with the greatest trepidation.”90 “Often it is the sight of a lady’s handwriting that first wins a man’s affection, sometimes even before he has met her. Women are no less susceptible to the charms of calligraphy.”91 With this nature of attraction and flirtation evident in Heian Japan, one is able to see scene eight in The Admonitions Scroll influence romance and companionship in Japan.

Scene eight: “The bedroom scene” states: “If the words that you utter are good, all men for a thousand leagues around will make response to you. But if you depart from this principle, even your bedfellow will distrust you.”92 Other historians have argued this is referring to lovers as political allies, but one may also interpret this scene as a way of confirming that your words have power and influence in the relationship. The poetry or letters that lovers exchanged were the notes that illustrated flirtation and attraction within the Heian. Due to the relationship protocol, and in regards to The Admonitions Scroll, a woman’s words could get her to a position of marriage and or stability (concubine, second wife, etc.).

The use of words would also be used to set the tone for one’s future and a couple’s relationship. This is illustrated within The Kagero Diary, when the author writes a letter to her husband.

“Being struck by the sight of my letter, he must have felt the agitation of my heart; his reply was this, “I know you have a lot a reasons for being upset, but you might at least let me know where you are planning to go...Do not go! I will be over right away as there is

something I want to discuss.” The author then replies, “When I saw this, I departed with even greater haste.”

This little, but powerfully significant story goes to show the reader that although married and faithful to her husband, the author stands up for herself by disobeying his suggestion. Her lack of submission goes to show an example of how a woman in the Heian did not concede to the rules set down in *The Admonitions Scroll*.

There are also cases, when it comes to love within the Heian, where seeing a woman was enough for a man to act on one's affection; this notion of love at first site. This was a rare occurrence though, because for the most part women were shielded from the outside world.

“Women were not normally seen by any men other than their fathers, brothers of the same mother, husbands, and sons. Aristocratic women tried to be seen by as few people as possible. Even when they went outside, they generally traveled in curtained carriages. They held audiences from behind screens. For a woman, allowing oneself to be seen by a man was tantamount to inviting violation, and the literature of the period abounds in “peeping tom” scenes.”

John Gallagher, who has investigated the history of the Geisha, characterized the Heian Period as a time for a nobleman to pursue his desire, one’s “only truly serious object in life.”

“The object of desire was the Heian noblewoman, a fabulous creature wrapped in multilayered robes, with a bolt of jet-black tresses shooting to the floor.” Gallagher would conclude the section discussing the Heian by stating,

“The men had access to all kinds of partners--multiple wives, concubines, maids, and prostitutes. The women, too, could take numerous lovers. Heian romance was more like an aesthetic extreme sport. The thrill of entering a lady’s bed, or of welcoming a lover, was like a skydiver’s pleasure in falling with perfect balance.”

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94 Arntzen, Sonja. The Kagero Diary. : The University of Michigan,. Print. 11.
96 Ibid
97 Ibid. 98.
While written from an angle that could entice objection from serious scholars of women’s studies, Gallagher does offer, once again, a slant on lifestyle choice that both coordinates with The Admonitions Scroll and neglects it. When a husband has multiple partners a wife must be understanding and willing to accept this reality; once again, in relation to scene one of The Admonitions Scroll, titled “Filial Sons and Virtuous Daughters,” this involves being submissive and ruled. As for a woman in this Heian tale of romance, on occasion women also took a lover. If this was one’s circumstance, we could argue that they rejected what scene three, “The Lady of Wei”98 from The Admonitions Scroll, was expressing. The Lady of Wei ignored her passion of music in order to be an example to her family. However, for a woman to have a lover, this relation would take away from her main focus as an, “agent in promoting proper behaviour and setting high standards for the family.”99

**Ladies-in-Waiting**

It is valuable that we take a look into the lives and roles of the ladies-in-waiting (within the Heian Period) in order to see the system The Admonitions Scroll would have to impact. Translated by Paul Atkins, “Ladies-in-Waiting in the Heian Period,” an article by Yoshikawa Shinji, allows readers to observe the structure of the Japanese Court system.

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98 Scene Three: Lady of Wei. Appendix. 44.
First we will visit the Upper Ladies-in-Waiting, who served in the Inner Palace (dairi) and were categorized in to five different groups:\footnote{Atkins, Paul. "Ladies-in-Waiting of the Heian Period." \textit{Gender and Japanese History}, 1999, 283-311. Accessed March 12, 2015. \texttt{illinfo@uark.edu}. 284.}

1. empresses (chugu kogo), grand empresses (kotaigo), and senior empress (taigotaigo)
2. ladies of the bedchamber (miyasudokoro): junior consorts (nyogo) and concubines (ka)
3. ladies-in-waiting
4. female officials (nyokan--low-ranking female attendants besides the ladies-in-waiting)
5. women servants (jujo): maids (shimotsukae) and serving girls (me no warawa)

With official duties such as: “cleaning the palace, preparing washing water, serving meals, and keep the lamps lit; moreover, they prepared the emperor’s bath, arranged his hair and dress him. That is to say, ladies-in-waiting directly attended to the emperor’s needs.”\footnote{Ibid. 286.} As for the personal and intimate needs of the emperor, that service was designated to the senior-grade ladies-in-waiting who remained constantly by his side. “In the case of a child emperor, they slept by him, attended to his slightest needs, and educated him. When an emperor died, it was these women who grieved for him the most.”\footnote{Ibid. 287.} The lives of the ladies-in-waiting however were intimate with authority no matter what rank they were associated with. Your life, and its purpose, was to aide and comfort the emperor; orr as \textit{The Admonitions Scroll} would state, ‘the Ruled’ (scene one: Male and Female: the Ruler and the Ruled).\footnote{Scene One: Male and Female: the Ruler and the Ruled. Appendix. 48.}

There were, however, also ladies-in-waiting that did not reside in the imperial palace, working instead in the homes of nobles. Known as “private ladies-in-waiting” (ie no nyobo), these women were employed in the households of contemporary elites such as Prince Atsumichi.
and the household of Fujiwara Norimichi. In both of these households, Shinji shares that a wet nurse, followers, and maids would attend to the head of the household, and a wet nurse and numerous ladies-in-waiting would attend to the official wife. However, following the death of Norimichi’s official wife, he would get remarried and the ladies-in-waiting at that time were put aside with the introduction of his new wife and her entourage of ladies-in-waiting. The original ladies-in-waiting had not only cared for Fujiwara Norimichi’s wife, but they also took care of his children and had even lived in his mansion; however, when a new wife was introduced, they would then aim to attend to her needs. It is important to recognize this in order to understand how the system proceeded. “Ladies-in-waiting were assigned to female aristocrats, and stewards served their male counterparts; these appear to have been the fundamental service relationships at the time.”

Not only would the private ladies-in-waiting serve the official wife but they also looked after all aspects of the employer’s life, starting with the dressing of the hair, and including clothing, meals and dwelling. Shinji also states that ladies-in-waiting were divided into two groups: “mature persons” (otonashiki hitobito) and “young persons,” (wakai hitobito) because of their actions and ways of thinking. The “mature persons” would include the wet nurse who provided advice and admonishments to the head of the household or even the official wife. She also would lead and train the ladies-in-waiting in how to run the household. Counter to this position were the “young persons” who often were found gossiping and fulfilling an entertainment role within the household. “It should be noted that ladies-in-waiting could

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privately act on behalf of the head of the household or the official wife,”¹⁰⁵ and so when an offer of marriage was discussed, the ladies-in-waiting would serve as go-between.

Finally, we will discuss the Ladies-in-Waiting to Imperial Consorts, or those who served the emperor’s consorts (the empresses and junior consorts) from the late tenth to the mid-eleventh century. According to Shinji, by this time, “the concubines were with rare exceptions no longer present at the palace. Those who served empresses were not called upper ladies-in-waiting (*ue no nyobo*) but rather “palace ladies-in-waiting” (*miya no nyobo*).¹⁰⁶ Although there are differences as to how an empress was taken care of, and how one would attend to the junior consorts, “it is impossible to completely separate the upper ladies-in-waiting from the palace ladies-in-waiting, and there were some women who belonged to both groups.”¹⁰⁷ Both types of ladies-in-waiting to Imperial Consorts were responsible for the meals, wardrobes, and quarters of the consort. They also looked after the everyday needs of these individuals, and were expected to amuse their consort and offer advice when needed, even act as an intermediary when needed.

Overall, by looking into the different types of positions one could acquire as a lady-in-waiting, we are able to see how a system of care and comfort worked in the Heian. Rather than just observing the safekeeping of an emperor, we have learned that ladies-in-waiting also attended to women within the system. Why this matters is because we already are able to see how this idea of the ‘Male and Female: Ruler and Ruled’ (scene one of *The Admonitions Scroll*), has shifted. No longer are men the only one’s cared for, but this idea of submissive

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 295.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 297.
behavior has become watered down. Due to the fact that the ladies-in-waiting care for fellow women and men, give advice, deliver messages, and even care for the families, these women have a direct way to reveal what happens behind closed doors (through diaries, art, poetry, etc.). Their observations have allowed us to be able to see the reason and rhyme behind the history of the Heian and show how in a time of tranquility the ideas and values expressed and illustrated in *The Admonitions Scroll* were interpreted.

**Literature in the Heian**

“Spiritual attitudes can be found in the literary works of the time.”

For the following women and their works, Murasaki, Sei Shonagon, and the author of *The Kagero Diary*, these various types of literature are some of the best resources we have exposing the lives and hardships associated with women of the Heian; which is why they are so important and relevant to historians today. Through the honesty of their brushes, a doorway has been opened and reveals a past so fascinating and at times tragic.

There is a tale called, *The Captain of Naruto*, and it would emphasize the concept of female submission and male dominance (as seen in scene one: Male and Female: Ruler and Ruled of *The Admonitions Scroll*). In this story, the wife, who has captured the eye of the emperor, is ordered by her husband to go and service their ruler. Also in *The Tale of Genji*, there would be other instances where females would be used as pawns of sexuality and companionship within political circumstances. Even in this poem by, Izumi Shikibu, another

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110 Ibid.
aristocratic woman writer of the time, demonstrates a type of isolation and restriction in these women’s lives:

_Thinking of the world_

_Sleeves wet with tears are my bed-fellows._

_Calmly to dream sweet dreams_

_Here is no night for that._

_The Kagero Diary_, one of the most interesting books available in regards to the women of the Heian, is, as we have seen earlier, a diary unveiling the aspects of a marriage within this time period. The author, whose name is unknown, writes of her experiences as a second wife to her husband and the toils of seeing him in different relationships throughout their years together. Why this diary is so interesting is due to the fact that she is allowing us to glimpse into her marriage, and it is through her honesty that we can begin to further understand family structure and religion within that era through three different ‘books’ of work. “Book one covers fourteen years in the author’s married life, from the year 954 to the year 968. The author, Michitsuna’s Mother, is a woman of the middle-ranking aristocracy. She is about nineteen when the proposal for marriage comes from Fujiwara

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111 "Google Images."
Kaneie."¹¹² Book two covers only three years, from 969 to 971. After a rather hopeful start, the tone of the narration becomes more and more distraught as the author’s dissatisfaction with her marriage increases. Kaneie takes up with another woman again, and while this is a catalyst for the author’s anguish, she struggles more and more with her own state of mind than with him."¹¹³ Finally, “book three, which covers again three years, 972 to 974, is most like a conventional diary in that has frequent entries that appear to have been written on the heels of events,”¹¹⁴ and focuses on the issues surrounding her adopted daughter. What her life, and the many observations she shares, displays to readers is a woman who respected the customs of marriage and the obligations associated with this union, but also felt discontent with the daily role she was expected to display. The author of this diary, mother of Michitsuna, helped me to recognize a sense of rebellion (a rebellious spirit of sorts) that tradition and rules cannot control. As I have shown already, *The Admonitions Scroll* preached the idea that you had to be submissive, or ‘ruled,’ but do so with an honorable attitude. You also were expected to be a reliable confidant and political ally to your husband. In so many ways, the author of this diary does all those things, yet she proves that not all rules and expectations, according to one’s heart, can be honored day and night. Although this woman could be a great example displaying the qualities of Scene One: Ruler and Ruled and Scene Nine: The Family Scene of *The Admonition Scroll*, (taking care of her husband and also extending the family by adoption), we cannot ignore the fact that her words also display pain from the life she must live.

¹¹³ Ibid. 167.
¹¹⁴ Ibid. 275.
The next authoress I had the pleasure of reading was Sei Shonagon. Within her diary entitled, The Pillow Book, we are able to gain a perspective into the life of one titled a lady-in-waiting. Although she would heavily introduce traditional/festive facts and activities within the whole of her diary, this work provided an essence of pleasure and understanding in regards to everyday elements within court life. Discussing the seasons and sharing her snarky, personal observations, this diary was a colorful way for any reader to grasp the reality a woman might truly feel as an observer of the court. Shonagon’s words and blunt thoughts only further displayed how educated, working women might have truly felt within the Heian. This makes it easy to argue how in all ways she captured what The Admonitions Scroll had intended for whom it addressed, and yet reflects the same rebellious attitude expressed by Empress Jia. She was smart, passionate, submissive and loyal, but even with all those traits in tact she never once tamed her thoughts. In fact, Ivan Morris, a translator of the Pillow Book, has exposed how Shonagon, who was briefly married to a government official produces only one son and had a somewhat obscure ending. “There is a tradition that she died in lonely poverty; but this may be the invention of moralists who, shocked by her worldly approach and promiscuous doings, ascribed to her last years a type of retribution that occurs more often in fiction than in reality.”

Just like Empress Jia, Shonagon caused a ruckus with her words, causing more than one person to take notice to this inappropriate, or undesirable behavior.

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Murasaki

Arguably the most important female figure from the Heian, Lady Murasaki (Murasaki Shikibu), a member of the northern branch of the Fujiwara Family, is one of the most prolific female figures in Japanese history. The creation that would come from her hand would be one that remained throughout time, and has allowed historians an illustrious ‘doorway’ to the past. Lady Murasaki, or Lady Shikibu, was born around 973 A.D., in Kyoto, Japan. Due to her mother’s death, Murasaki would be raised by her father- Fujiwara no Tametoki, an officer and scholar of the imperial court. This situation was not common within this time period (for a father to rear the daughter exclusively); however, her unique raising, with a male-styled education, may contribute to the mastery of skills she would one day possess. Within the Heian period, “upper class women, as well as men, were expected to become experts in music, writing, and the art of dressing well,”¹¹⁶ as discussed previously. So it comes as no surprise that when looking back towards Murasaki’s life, we are able to see the development of expertise and experience she would gain in order to attract the attention of the imperial family. “When she was in her early twenties, Lady Murasaki was married to a distant relative. Her only daughter, Daini no Sanmi, was born in 999 A.D. After the death of her husband in 1001 A.D., knowing of her writing

¹¹⁶ "Murasaki Shikibu." Female Hero: (Women in World History Curriculum).
talent and her brilliant mind, the imperial family brought Lady Murasaki to court;”¹¹⁸ and from this position, a great story would begin to take shape, as would the mark she leaves within history. Shikibu’s novel, *The Tale of Genji* (Genji-monogatari) “is considered to be one of the world’s finest and earliest novels. Some argue that Murasaki is the world’s first modern novelist.”¹¹⁹ To think that novels and poetry were some of the only forms of entertainment, especially for a woman associated with the most powerful family within the Heian, it is easy to see how, “The Tale of Genji which had it all - romance, travel, encounters with the supernatural, and a hero so perfect he seemed to belong in a bygone age,”¹²⁰ would be a staple in society’s entertainment. Through this perception that Murasaki was the world’s first novelist, we are seeing how as a woman she was successful in a male-dominated community, but also as a Fujiwara member she is sharing once again a prime example of how they were so efficacious in the Heian period. As Hilary Putman has stated, “Lady Murasaki, writing in tenth-century Japan,

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¹¹⁷ "Genji no monogatari emaki." "Illustrated Scroll of the Tale of Genji." Image.
¹¹⁸ "Murasaki Shikibu." Female Hero: (Women in World History Curriculum).
¹¹⁹ Ibid
rejects the idea that moral uplift is the purpose of literature just as wholeheartedly as any novelist would today.” In three different, but related ways, Murasaki was challenging ideas we might characterize as *The Admonitions Scroll’s* very purpose. First, she gained power and a discernible presence as an influential author. Second, her words were estranged to the typical theme one associates with women’s writing in ancient Japan, and finally, she has proven that being honorable and dedicated to a man (her father specifically) has brought her a future that, unbeknownst to her, would mark history.

Social Historians

Looking back at these three female authors, it is obvious that not all Heian women are represented in this notorious pact. However, what these women have done is created a way for us to observe and imagine what life was like for certain women within ancient Japan. I would argue that these women are Social Historians; exposing the personal secrets and thoughts of a lady-in-waiting, a second wife, and even sharing the toils of motherhood. Although not all women were lucky enough to be educated or in the right position for a notable marriage, the

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order and structure of society within the Heian makes it appear that despite wealth or significance, the ideas and sentiments within this era are comparable amongst different women. Looking back to *The Admonitions Scroll*, yes, we do find that the ideal, respectable woman is portrayed as to guide an individual into living a proper life; however, just like Empress Jia, no woman could ever truly match up to such an extreme expectation. Even so, all three of these women in the Heian did stick to tradition by both honoring their partners, families and through being diligent, helpful, and subservient. And yet, when those three women took brush to paper, they completely transformed from a perfect individual to someone who was honest, expressive, and rebellious. Empress Jia used violence to display her feelings and sense of reality; one that terrified others so much that it almost brought down a community. However, rather than using violence, the three authors above have displayed some truth about Heian Japan that otherwise might have been forgotten. Their words have forever changed history and how we now perceive this period of peace and tranquility. More than violence could ever do, the private thoughts of these individuals explain why and how there could be no perfect women in reality, only those who strive for excellence in the delicate circumstances they are dealt.

**Conclusion**

What is virtue? "*Behavior showing high moral standard.*" And what is a warrior? "(Especially in former times) A brave fighter." The combination of the two create an image of who women of the Heian were. As time transformed, so did ideas and perceptions of men and women. From the initial idea of yin and yang (two parts of equal importance), to later finding a

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123 google.com.dictionarydefinition
124 Ibid.
religious system which denies women a sense of equality and a right to worship (Buddhism), the
transfer and influence of China into Japan was a significant movement forever changing many
people’s futures. As historians look to the Heian, a ‘mysterious island’ becomes the target of
China, but as we have seen, Japan for some time was open to this new outside knowledge.
Through government, traditions, ideas, and even religion, a format for progress was introduced,
but this Chinese focused reflection would soon be cast out. As Japan cut itself off from others,
attempting to be individual and powerful, the interaction of these two neighbors may have
falterered but was never forgotten. But what about the people? Yes, we see a family gain power,
laws are passed, ideas are shared, and religion is challenged, but it was through the works of
three individuals that we remember women of the Heian specifically. Looking back, we
understand that they often were used in marriage diplomacy (and this is demonstrated heavily
through the Fujiwara Clan). We also can understand through the various works discussed the
pressure of becoming a well educated individual who showed affection through poetry rather
than a smile. Marriage had its challenges, and so did motherhood. But, by understanding the
circumstances, laws, traditions and jobs a woman must or could assume, allows us to preserve
the memory of a growing nation. From Empress Jia to Shonagon or Murasaki, even to the
unknown author of The Kagero Diary, we now see how through actions and words women,
separated by hundreds of years, yet dictated by tenacious ideas expressed in a poem then
illustrated to a scroll, nevertheless fought in different ways (violence and script) for what they
believed and felt; making these ladies not only immortal but Warriors of Virtue.

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125 Morris, Ivan I. The World of the Shining Prince; Court Life in Ancient Japan. New York:
Appendix

Scene 1: Male and female, ruler and ruled

“From the chaotic cosmos were yin and yang separated; from emanate for and amorphous form were they moulded and shaped. With Fu Xi as ruler were the divine and the human distinguished. Thus began male and female, ruler and ruled. The family’s dao [Way] is regulated and the ruler’s dao stabilized. Feminine virtue honours yielding, holding within codes of moral behavior; submissive and meek is the female’s proper role within the household. Having assumed matrimonial robes, she should reverently prepare the offerings; dignified and grave in deportment, be a model of propriety.”

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Scene 2: Lady Fan

“To influence King Zhuang of Chu, the Lady Fan ate not fresh meat or fowl.”\(^\text{129}\)

\(^{128}\) Ibid 30.

\(^{129}\) Ibid. 30.
Scene 3: The Lady of Wei

“To reform Duke Huan of Qi, the Lady of Wei ignored her own love of music. These two women’s firm wills and lofty ideals changed the minds of two rulers.”\textsuperscript{131}
Scene 4: Lady Feng and the bear

“When the black bear escaped its cage, the Lady Feng hastened forward. How was she not in fear? But aware of mortal danger, she did not hesitate.”¹³³

¹³² Ibid. 32.
¹³³ Ibid. 34.
Scene 5: Lady Ban refuses to ride in the imperial litter.

“Lady Ban by her refusal lost the pleasure of riding in the imperial litter. Was it that she did not care? No! But she was anxious to avoid even hidden and remote consequences.”

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Ibid. 34-35.
Ibid. 36-37.
Scene 6: The mountain and archer

“There is no Way that upon reaching its apex of glory does not decline; and there is nothing that upon reaching its peak of splendour does not deteriorate. The sun at midday begins to set; the full moon begins to diminish. A lofty mountain is but a pile of dust; decline is as fast as a crossbow trigger.”

Ibid. 36-37.

Ibid. 39.
Scene 7: The toilette scene

“Men and women know how to adorn their faces, but there is none who knows how to adorn his character. Yet if the character be not adorned, there is a danger that the rules of conduct may be transgressed. Correct your character as with an axe, embellish it as with a chisel; strive to overcome desires and be a sage.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid. 40-41.
¹³⁹ Ibid. 42.
Scene 8: The bedroom scene

“If the words that you utter are good, all men for a thousand leagues around will make response to you. But if you depart from this principle, even your bedfellow will distrust you.”141

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140 Ibid. 43.
141 Ibid. 46.
Scene 9: The family scene

“To utter a word, how light a thing that seems! Yet from a word, with honour and shame proceed. Do not think that you are hidden; be seen. Do not think that you have been noiseless; God’s ear needs no sound. Do not boast of your glory; for heaven’s law hates what is full. Do not put your trust in honours and high birth; for he that is highest falls. Make the ‘Little Stars’ your pattern.”

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142 Ibid. 46.
143 Ibid. 48.
Scene 10: The rejection scene

“No one can please forever; affection cannot be for one alone; if it be so, it will end in disgust. When love has reached its highest pitch, it changes its object; for whatever has reached fullness must needs decline. This law is absolute. The beautiful wife who knew herself to be beautiful was soon hated. If by a mincing air you seek to please, wise men will abhor you. From this cause truly comes the breaking of favour’s bond.”

144 Ibid. 48.
145 Ibid. 50.
Scene 11: A lady reflects upon her conduct

“Therefore I say, be watchful; keep an eager guard over your behavior; from thence good fortune will come. Fulfil your duties calmly and respectfully; thus shall you win glory and honour.”\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid. 50.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid. 52.
Scene 12: The Instructress

“Thus has the Instructress, charged with a duty of admonition thought good to speak to the ladies of the palace harem.”149

148 Ibid. 54-55.
149 Ibid. 54.