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The adoption of the Chinese calendar and its impact on seasonal poetry in early Japan (c. 700 to 1000)

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Abstract: We have evidence that since the second half of the seventh century a common calendar has been shared among Japan's political elite within an evolving state based on Chinese models. This paper discusses the impact its introduction had on the perception of time as revealed by the seasonal poetry of aristocrats who presumably had access to the calendar. Not only numerous poems on seasonal topics but also a substantial number of calendars is extant from that period. We can therefore anticipate what kind of calendars poets possibly had at their hands when pursuing their art. I argue that the impact the introduction of the common calendar had on seasonal poetry has been far greater and more complex than hitherto acknowledged by researchers, and that the underestimation of this impact is largely due to an incomplete understanding of the seasonal concepts of the adopted calendar which I intend to clarify with this paper.

Keywords: Chinese calendar; early Japan; perception of seasons; poetry

1 Precalendrical time-reckoning

Before discussing the calendrical definitions of the seasons and their impact, it is crucial to assess first how the passing of time and the seasons might have been perceived in periods of the past when there was yet no fixed calendar.¹ We may refer to the seminal study by Martin Nilsson on this topic² whose conclusions are, however, basically the same as those at which the leading advocate of

¹ The basic points of this article were presented earlier in talks held over the years at the School of Asian and African Studies (London, 12th of March 2014), the École nationale des chartes (Paris, 4th of October 2017), and at the meeting of the Arbeitskreis Vormoderne japanische Literatur (Zurich, online, 4th of September 2020).

² Nilsson (1920: 2–10).

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the nativist school (*kokugaku* 国学) in early modern Japan, Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801), arrived some 150 years earlier. In a short essay entitled “Thoughts on the true calendar” (*Shinrekikō* 真曆考, epilogue 1782)³ he concluded that in ancient times when there was yet not “such a thing as a calendar to which the people entrusted the fixing of days and months” the passing of time must have been initially determined in Japan by observing “those things between heaven and earth that change according to a seasonal [pattern]”.⁴ Norinaga’s list with phenomena of seasonal significance starts with the most universal indicator: the direction in which the sun rises and sets. He continues with recurring changes to be observed in nature; e.g. trees that reveal by their blossoming or the ripening of fruits that a certain period has been reached. Animal behaviour too may serve as an indicator for the advancement of the seasons, such as the arrival and departure of migrating birds or the insects that would crawl into holes in the earth to hibernate and come out again depending on the time of the year.⁵ The earliest concrete evidence Norinaga could provide for his assumptions are from the first compilation of Japanese poetry, the “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves” (*Man’yōshū* 万葉集, after 759). In this anthology “layers of mist” that are stretching along hills in the distance on one evening indicate to one poet that spring has arrived; in another poem, a “bush warbler” singing on a branch of a “willow tree” at the gate of an unknown poet signals that the time of the year has come that is called spring.⁶

In summary, we may say that it must have been some type of what Nilsson has labelled *pars-pro-toto* time-reckoning⁷ that has been maintained initially as the only time mode on the Japanese archipelago as in all cultures before a fixed calendar had been developed or adopted. The designation *pars-pro-toto* derives from the fact that in this time mode a point in time stands, so to speak, for what is called later a period of time. What makes Norinaga’s essay moreover significant for this assessment is his assertion that this archaic time mode remained a constant feature of seasonal poetry in Japan up to his times.⁸ This would imply that the seasonal definitions and references of the calendar never had, or at least only “rarely”, as he wrote, an impact on poets. This is, I believe, not the case at least for the earliest period of seasonal poetry I will discuss in this paper. Before proceeding, it is however essential to illustrate how time is structured and seasons are defined by the adopted calendar.

3 Text in Ōkubo (1972: 203–219).

4 Ōkubo (1972: 205).

5 Ōkubo (1972: 205).

6 Ōkubo (1972: 205–206). Norinaga cites here poems no. 1812 and 1819 from the *Man’yōshū*.

7 Nilsson (1920: 9–10).

8 Ōkubo (1972: 206).

2 The calendar

From all that we know, there is no credible evidence that – apart from the natural indicators just discussed – an indigenous system of time-reckoning had existed in Japan prior to the adoption of the Chinese calendar. It is plausible to assume on the basis of dates on excavated “wooden tablets” (*mokkan* 木簡) that from around the middle of the 670s a common calendar must have been shared on the archipelago.⁹ More revealing for the history of the calendar in Japan was, however, the discovery of a fragment of a calendar from 689 unearthed in 2003.¹⁰ Although this fragment is corrupt and covers only a few days, it discloses two things: the concrete Chinese calculation system on which its computation was based and, more importantly, the type of physical calendar that had been adopted. We may call this calendar type a hemerological almanac because it serves two functions: the basic function of all calendars, which is to arrange days, months, and years in a sequential order, as well as a second function, which is to qualify time to inform users about propitious days, for example, for planning some general or more specific activities to secure a positive outcome. What this earliest calendar fragment further shows, albeit more indirectly, is that the rules for allocating the elements performing the hemerological function do not depend on the lunar months of the lunisolar civil year but on what I have called solar months.¹¹ This means that with the adoption of the continental calendrical system actually two different types of calendars were introduced: a lunisolar calendar (*taiin taiyō reki* 太陰太陽曆) which provides the numbers of linear time of the civil year, and a solar calendar (*taiyō reki* 太陽曆) with 12 solar months that serves as the temporal framework on which the time qualifying entries are predominantly based.¹² Since both calendrical forms will become relevant in how seasons are defined in seasonal poetry, I will explain briefly their respective features and how they are expressed on the surface of extant calendars.

⁹ Ichi (2012: 24–28).

¹⁰ Ichi (2012: 79–85). See also illustration and short description of the artefact in Leinss (2021: 105–106).

¹¹ Leinss (2006: 31–33; 58–59). See also explanations about the hemerological content of this artefact in Ichi (2012: 80–82), who calls these types of months “inception months” (*setsugetsu* 節月) because each solar month starts with an “inception”, as I will explain below.

¹² The premodern calendar is sometimes erroneously called “lunar calendar” (*inreki* 陰曆). This is a term that emerged in the Meiji period (1868–1912) to distinguish the “old calendar” (*kyūreki* 旧曆) from the solar Gregorian adopted in 1873. A strictly lunar calendar such as the Islamic calendar does not adjust, however, its months with the solar year and the seasons as the Chinese lunisolar calendar does by occasionally inserting intercalary months.

Undoubtedly, the lunisolar calendar is more important. This is not only because one edition of a physical calendar always covers one lunisolar year, but also because its annual calculation yields the numbers for days, months and civil years of linear time, which in retrospect also forms what is the chronological time structure of Japan. In the Chinese type of lunisolar calendar that was adopted in Japan, months are modelled after the phases of the moon, and the day on which the conjunction of the moon with the sun occurs defines the beginning of a month. Since it is a lunisolar and not a lunar calendar, the synodic months or lunations of either 29 or 30 days were adjusted to the solar year by inserting intercalary months roughly after 32 or 33 months or once in three years. The most confusing parts of this lunisolar calendar are certainly the intercalation rules and the definition of the beginning of the civil year. Since it is predominantly the latter which is relevant for this assessment, I will focus on how the beginning of the lunisolar year is defined.¹³

The solar point crucial for this definition is probably best explained by the modern ecliptical coordinate system or alternatively by the 12 signs of the Zodiac used in Western tropical astrology in which each sign also represents a 30° segment of the 360° tropical year. The solar point that matters for the definition of civil New Year is when the sun enters the sign Pisces or reaches 330° ecliptical longitude and which is mostly called “Rain Water” (*yushui* 雨水) in the Chinese context.¹⁴ Now, the first rule is that the day of this astronomical event which occurs around the 20th of February in the Gregorian calendar must be part of the first civil month. Since this first month must start, as all months, on a new moon day, in a second step we have to find the conjunction of the moon with the sun that precedes or falls on the day when the sun reaches Pisces. It is not uncommon to hear about other definitions of the beginning of the Chinese New Year, but the only rule that works for both premodern China and Japan is that the solar point around the 20th or 21st of February has to be part of the first civil month, or in other words, the day on which this solar point is reached marks the latest theoretical possible date on which the lunisolar year may begin.¹⁵ In practice, a new

13 These definitions are valid for dynastic China from 103 BCE (except for the years 9–23, 690–700, see chronological tables in Zhang 1997: 78–414) and throughout premodern Japan (chronological tables in Uchida 1992). The most reliable account on the calculation and content of Chinese calendars in a Western language is Martzloff (2016).

14 See the reproduction of a Japanese calendar from 746 (Fig. 3 in Leinss 2021: 109) which also reveals that “rain water” was linked in this period to the second solar month.

15 The most often heard and least accurate definition is that civil New Year is defined as the second new moon after winter solstice. This does not work in years when there are extra months appended either to the eleventh or the twelfth civil months: in China this was the case in the years 1278, 1297, 1308 (see chronological tables in Zhang 1997: 308–313) or in the years 830, 849, 868 in Japan (see chronological tables in Uchida 1992: 142–155), to name just a few examples. In the Japanese

moon preceded this last possible solar date more or less significantly which is revealed by actual New Year dates in Japan for the period relevant for this assessment: the first day of the civil year in Japan fell on dates between the 22nd of January (years 782, 801, 877) and the 21st of February (years 687, 964, 983) in the proleptic Gregorian calendar.¹⁶

In contrast to these fluctuating dates for the beginning of the civil lunisolar years, the reconstructed chronology shows that the solar years between 700 and 1000 always started on the 5th of February – or one day earlier or later. Expressed in degrees of ecliptical longitude this date corresponds with 315° or the position of the sun located just in between “winter solstice” (22nd December; 270°) and “vernal equinox” (21st of March; 360°/0°). The concept of a solar year of 12 months is first outlined in a ritual calendar known as “Monthly Ordinances” (*yueling* 月令), which is the generic term used for a ritual agenda for Chinese rulers. In this ritual agenda, the 12 months were originally defined by the position of the sun relative to stellar constellations, thus forming a sidereal year in which the months were called along their relative position within one of the four seasons, that is as “initial” (*meng* 孟), “middle” (*zhong* 仲), and “last” (*ji* 季) month of “spring” (*chun* 春), “summer” (*xia* 夏), “autumn” (*qiu* 秋), and “winter” (*dong* 冬). Accordingly, this solar year started with the “initial month of spring” (*mengchun zhi yue* 孟春之月) and ended with the “last month of winter” (*jidong zhi yue* 季冬之月).¹⁷ This initial concept of a seasonal year and its 12 months was integrated into the first calculation systems documented in the dynastic histories of the Han period (206 BC–220 AD), which defined 24 points of what has become a tropical year. Among these 24 points defined, we find the two solstices and the two equinoxes that are placed in the middle of seasons, and there were four more points defined in between which marked the respective beginnings of the four seasons. The “day of the beginning of

context (see for example Higginson 2008: 103), another rule of thumb is favoured which holds the view that civil new year is the day of new moon closest to the day mid-point between winter solstice and spring equinox called “beginning of spring”, as we will see. This rule also fails, however, such as in the years 925, 944, 983, or in 983 when the beginning of spring fell on the 15th of a twelfth intercalary month and the first day of the next year would start 16 days later (Yuasa 1990, 1: 250–308).

¹⁶ Uchida (1992: 93–199). “Proleptic Gregorian calendar” is the designation for the present global calendar when applied to years prior to the reform that gave it its name and which I am using throughout this paper as chronological reference instead of the Julian calendar. The reason for this preference is that the Julian calendar was increasingly lagging behind the seasons over the centuries, and as a result yields seasonally misleading dates such as a New Year date as early as the 14th of January in 1554, which actually has been the 24th of January in the seasonally more accurate Gregorian calendar (Uchida 1992: 383).

¹⁷ See version of this ritual agenda in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (ca. 239 BCE) in Knoblock and Riegel (2000).

spring” (*lichun zhi ri* 立春之日) is such a seasonal beginning, which was announced to a Chinese ruler a few days in advance¹⁸ and fell, as stated above, on average on the 5th of February because it is located exactly in between winter solstice and vernal equinox.

On the whole, we may describe the calendrical system that had emerged in the Han period as one that computes on the one hand new moon dates for defining the beginnings of civil months and on the other hand 24 points of the tropical year which are relevant for both calendrical forms: 12 of the 24 points into which the solar year was equally divided served, just as the “beginning of spring” (5th of February), as beginning of one of the 12 solar months; the other 12 of those 24 solar points served not only as mid-points of the solar months but at the same time were used to define the latest possible dates on which a civil month of the same denomination might begin. From this double function of the solar elements we may deduce the overall idea behind the Chinese calendar as a concept that makes sure that the two types of months do not deviate from each other by more than half a solar month. One may certainly ask why a calendar system would want to define what basically are two different types of months and years, but we should probably accept this temporal double structure as the result of the ambition to integrate two functions based on two different temporal structures and time modes into one calendar: a somewhat irregular lunisolar structure that defines the dates of linear social time, and a more regular and basically cyclical solar structure for the definition of the qualitative aspects of time. For us today, this temporal double structure inherent to the Chinese calendar is possibly more difficult to appreciate than it has been for poets in the past because the latter had access to physical calendars in which these two temporal structures were clearly distinguished from each other on the surface of one and the same calendrical document.

The period of time that is covered by one edition of the yearly calendar in East Asia was the lunisolar civil year in which the months are numbered from 1 to 12 and the days in a month counted from 1 to 29 or 30. In contrast to this, days of the solar months were not counted but the respective beginning and mid-points of solar months were expressed as such in physical calendars. In Chinese editions discovered at Turfan, the beginning of a solar month was expressed in the early Tang period (618–907) by using the same numerals and designations as for civil months with the only difference that the suffix *jie* 節 (“inception”, j. *-setsu*) was attached. That is, the beginning of the ninth solar month is, for example, expressed as “ninth [solar] month, inception” (*jiuyue jie* 九月節) in a calendar of

¹⁸ Knoblock and Riegel (2000: 60–61).

the year 658 on a date that has been the third day of the ninth civil month.¹⁹ A later fragment from 720 shows that the mid-points of the 12 solar months were, for example, expressed as “mid-point of the sixth [solar] month” (*liuyue zhong* 六月中), to which a specific term was added in this edition, “great heat” (*dashu* 大暑). This is one of a total of 24 specific terms that were added from that time on to all 12 beginnings and mid-points of solar months.²⁰ Extant calendars from the same period in Japan follow the same pattern. Initially, the start of a solar month was expressed plainly as “third [solar] month, inception” (*sanyue jie* 三月節) such as on the tenth day of the third month in the earliest fragment from 689.²¹ This plain form of notation was expanded in the next century by also adding 24 specific terms on top of the 12 beginnings and mid-points of the solar months. That is, in a paper fragment from 749 we find, for example, the middle of the second solar month mentioned as “Spring equinox, mid-point of second [solar] month” (chin. *chunfen eryue zhong*, jap. *shunbun nigatsu chū* 春分二月中).²² I will not list the complete notations of all 24 solar points in relation to the solar months²³ but mention just the most important one for this assessment, which is the entry related to the beginning of the solar year: “beginning of spring; inception of first [solar] month” (chin. *lichun zhengyue jie*, jap. *risshun shōgatsu setsu* 立春正月節). Since calendars at that time were computed and compiled by one central institution that also made initial copies which were then sent to central government units and to the provinces,²⁴ we may assume that all users who had access to these standardized editions were informed on the entries of the solar year in the way just described.

A last point I want to add is that the notation of the beginning of spring can be confusing for a user because this entry may be found in the first month of the civil calendar when it comes after the beginning of the civil year or in the last month of a calendar year when that date around the 5th of February precedes civil New Year. Unexpectedly, when the beginning of spring is noted in a first month, it is very likely that it is noted again in the twelfth month of the same calendar year, but there are also some years in which this term does not appear at all or is noted only once, either in the first or in the twelfth month. This certainly was not the only peculiarity a user of the adopted calendar had to cope with, yet we should bear in mind that the adoption of this system was not a matter of choice but of

¹⁹ Ren (1993, 1: 283–286).

²⁰ Ren (1993, 1: 291–293).

²¹ Ichi (2012: 84).

²² Tōkyō daigaku shiryō hensanjo (1968: 349).

²³ For the full table, see Leinss (2006: 50–51).

²⁴ Leinss (2021: 106–107).

availability; for the people living on an island at the Eastern fringe of East Asia the only fixed calendar available was this calendar of Chinese origin which curiously defines these two types of months and years.

3 Conflicting ideas about the beginning of the spring season in early poetry

One of the earliest indications we have that the double structure of the calendar just described began to matter for poets is from 730. In this year a banquet was held at Dazaifu 太宰府, the gateway of Japan to the continent on the most southern of the four main islands, which according to Haruo Shirane marks a new development in the history of seasonal poetry because it is the “earliest recorded seasonal banquet poetry in the *Man'yōshū*”. Although this gathering “followed the model of *kanshi* [漢詩] (Chinese-style poetry) banquets on plum blossoms”,²⁵ the 32 poems were recited in the standard format of Japanese-style poetry which is generally known as “Japanese songs” (*waka* 和歌) or “short songs” (*tanka* 短歌). The only formal requirement that applies for this format is that all words and grammatical elements should fit into a five-line pattern consisting of 5–7–5–7–7 syllables. At this stage, the Japanese words and grammatical elements were expressed in this type of poetical format exclusively by Chinese characters that were used, however, only as phonograms. Not only the setting of the event and the shared topic of plum blossoms followed Chinese precedents, the preface and the first poem of the series further suggest that a certain constellation of the double structure of the Chinese calendar has been decisive for the timing of this event:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Mutsuki tachi</i> | When spring comes [as in this year] |
| <i>haru no kitaraba</i> | after the first month has [already] started |
| <i>kakushi koso</i> | then let us just like [today] |
| <i>ume wo okitsutsu</i> | invite the plum-blossoms |
| <i>tanoshiki oeme</i> ²⁶ | and enjoy ourselves to the utmost ²⁷ |

²⁵ Shirane (2012: 30).

²⁶ This transliteration of poems from the *Man'yōshū* does not attempt to represent the Old Japanese pronunciation as provided by Alexander Vovin, for example (see Vovin 2011: 57). The romanization of all poems furthermore follows the modern Hepburn system, which neglects the historical *kana* orthography.

²⁷ Poem no. 815 in Satake et al. (1999, 1: 465–466). See also Vovin (2011: 57–59).

Author of this first poem is the vice governor of Dazaifu who encouraged the guests to enjoy this event all the more because it took place on what we may call a favourable calendrical constellation: the beginning of spring has not been marked at all in the calendar of the previous year, nor will it appear in the calendar of the following year, which I assume is the reason why this gathering was held three days after the beginning of spring was marked in the calendar of the current year (tenth day of the first civil month) on what has been the thirteenth day of the first month (8th of February 730).²⁸ In this poem, not only for the first time the first month is expressed by its vernacular name, *mutzuki/mutuki* 武都紀,²⁹ the author is also the first to allude to the solar term “beginning of spring” expressed as “coming of spring” (*haru no kitaraba/paru-nō k-i-tar-aNpa* 波流能吉多良婆) in this poem. This usage is not only attested from later examples cited below but also supported by the calendrical constellation behind the date on which this event took place. I therefore assume that the governor of Dazaifu, Ōtomo no Tabito 大伴旅人 (665–731), deliberately planned this gathering of bureaucrats at his residence because it was a “favourable month at the beginning of spring” (*shoshun reigetsu* 初春令月), as it was called in the preface.³⁰ The beginning of spring noted in a first month is the first of three possible constellations in which the civil months and the solar beginnings of the year may be related to each other. I assume more confusing for a premodern poet must have been the second possible constellation when the beginning of spring was marked in the twelfth month of the calendar year, because there are numerous poems which address this constellation. One of the first examples we may cite was recited by Prince Mikata (Mikataō 三形王, dates unknown) at a gathering he hosted at his residence at the end of the first year of the era Tenpyō hōji (757/758). His invitation fell on the 18th day of the twelfth month (4th of February 758), which in this year was the day of solar New Years’s eve so to speak, because it was the day before the beginning of spring is noted in the calendar on the next day (5th of February 758).³¹

²⁸ Yuasa (1990, 1: 54–55).

²⁹ Nihon daijiten kankōkai (1979, 10: 83).

³⁰ Satake et al. (1999, 1: 465). It is worth noting, that this event has become quite famous because the current era name, Reiwa 令和, implemented in May 2019, derives from two graphs of this preface: “favourable month” (*reigetsu* 令月) and “winds [that were] gentle” (*fūwa/kaze yawaragu* 風和).

³¹ In the most recent edition of the poem it is not doubted that the invitation took place the day before the beginning of spring (see footnote Satake et al. 1999, 4: 476), but Vovin cites in his commentary outdated research which claims that this day was not the day before the beginning of spring because “the coming of spring is usually five days later” and not one day later as an early modern nativist had suggested (Vovin 2013: 275). This erroneous view can be explained by the fact that the modern Japanese expert cited by Vovin converted the date of this gathering into that of the Julian calendar which was lagging behind the seasonal accurate date of the beginning of spring in the Gregorian calendar by four days.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>Miyuki furu</i> | Only today is still |
| <i>fuyu wa kyō nomi</i> | snow-falling winter, |
| <i>uguisu no</i> | tomorrow, spring will |
| <i>nakamu harube wa</i> | certainly be announced |
| <i>asu ni shi aru rashi</i> | by the song of the bush warbler ³² |

The host is clearly aware of the fact that the beginning of spring is marked in the calendar on the following day and anticipates therefore that on the next day the snowfall typical for winter will cease and the bush warbler will possibly announce the beginning of spring as suggested by the calendar entry. For this poet, the transformation of the season is clearly defined by the solar term “beginning of spring”, which in this year fell into the twelfth month of the lunisolar calendar.

This is, however, not the only way how a season was defined in Japan at that time. A second definition is revealed by a composition of one of the major compilers of the *Man'yōshū*, Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (718?–785). Yakamochi was the son of the aforementioned governor of Dazaifu, Ōtomo no Tabito, and like his father he advanced to the highest ranks achievable in the Nara state. From his family background and career path we may assume that since his youth he was exposed to a calendar and became at some point aware of the temporal double structure intrinsic to this system. Yakamochi also contributed a poem to the above-mentioned gathering on the 18th, but another example he recited at another banquet held five days later on the 23rd of the twelfth month is more revealing:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| <i>Tsuki yomeba</i> | When we count the months |
| <i>imada fuyu nari</i> | it is still winter |
| <i>shikasuga ni</i> | however – |
| <i>kasumi tanabiku</i> | these layers of mist – |
| <i>haru tachinu to ka</i> | has spring [not already] begun? ³³ |

This poem shows that a second definition of the seasons had emerged in which three months counted by the lunisolar calendar form one season. That is, winter consists of the three months 10, 11, and 12 of the lunisolar calendar. This means that according to this second definition the date in the twelfth month when this banquet was held belongs to winter despite the solar term “spring” marked earlier in that month suggesting otherwise. The poem contains a clear statement by Yakamochi against this second definition: layers of mist, possibly observed at the gathering on the 23rd (9th of February 758), proved to him and the others attending that the solar term noted in the calendar on the 19th (5th of February 758)

³² Poem no. 4488 in Satake et al. (1999, 4: 475–476). See also Vovin (2013: 275–276).

³³ Poem no. 4492 in Satake et al. (1999, 4: 478). See also Vovin (2013: 279–281).

unsurprisingly reflects the phenological arrival of spring – indicated by layers of mist – more accurately than the second definition according to which winter continues until the end of the twelfth month, which ended quite late in seasonal terms in that year (17th of February 758).³⁴

These examples from the latest period in the *Man'yōshū* clearly show that the calendrical double structure became a matter of real or fictitious concern among poets. Poets alluded to two of three possible temporal scenarios how these two time structures could be related to each other, and it is in the last poem of this collection that the third and most auspicious and rarest of possible constellations is addressed, which is the beginnings of the two types of years falling on the same day.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Atarashiki</i> | The snowfall [we see] today |
| <i>toshi no hajime no</i> | at the beginning of the year |
| <i>hatsuharu no</i> | on the first day of spring |
| <i>kyō furu yuki no</i> | adds even further to the |
| <i>iyashike yogoto</i> | auspiciousness of the occasion ³⁵ |

This 4,516th and last poem of the anthology is composed again by Yakamochi who recited it on a banquet held at the office of the governor of Inaba 因幡 on the civil New Year in early 759. The calendrical background of the date further reveals that in this year the “beginning of spring” fell on the same day (6th of February 759). I think it is safe to assume that Yakamochi is alluding here to this rare and therefore propitious constellation of the two types of years starting on the same day. Since presumably snowfall was observed as well, it were “thrice happy omen coming together” on that day, as one translator (H.H. Honda) aptly renders the quintessence of this poem. It must have been the auspicious temporal constellation expressed in this poem which guided the editors in their decision to end the anthology on that propitious note.

In this way, the poems cited and discussed from the last period of the *Man'yōshū* have addressed all three constellations in which the two temporal components intrinsic to the adopted calendar may be related to each other at the beginning or the end of a civil year. Since the temporal double structure of the calendars in use in Japan did not disappear until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1873, the problem of the solar beginning preceding civil New Year persisted. This is revealed by the first compilation of Japanese poetry by imperial command, the “Collection of Japanese poems, old and present” (*Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 or short *Kokinshū* 古今集, c. 914) which starts with a poem that addresses

³⁴ Uchida (1992: 118); Yuasa (1988, 1: 82).

³⁵ Poem no. 4516 in Satake et al. (1999, 4: 491). See also Vovin (2013: 308–309).

the very question of how to define a year when the solar term “beginning of spring” is marked in the twelfth month of the civil year:

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Toshi no uchi ni</i> | Within the old year |
| <i>haru wa kinikeri</i> | spring has come |
| <i>hitotose wo</i> | shall we call this one year then |
| <i>kozo to ya iwamu</i> | last year or |
| <i>kotoshi to ya iwamu</i> | this year? ³⁶ |

From the preface to the poem in this first imperial anthology we learn that it was “recited on a day when spring began in the old year”, but we do not know the exact year in which its author raised the question of how to define a year and the seasons in years when the beginning of spring is marked in the twelfth month of the civil calendar. Poets and literary critics past and present wondered why the editors of this anthology, which served as a model for another 20 imperial anthologies compiled over the next centuries, placed this utterly prosaic poem at the beginning of their compilation in which the author did not even bother to include a phenomenon of the natural world. The only explanation I can think of is that the editors wanted to clarify their policy for the temporal organization of the first six volumes along the four seasons: they were aware that there were two possible definitions of the year but that in poetry poets should rely on the solar definition even in years when this beginning happened to fall in the twelfth month of the civil calendar as in that year. This interpretation is supported on the one hand by the fact that the first two poems in this spring section were composed on the day the beginning of spring is marked in the calendar, and on the other hand by the circumstance that the principal editor of this collection, Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (872–945), is clearly in favour of a solar definition. This is revealed by one of his poems from his private collection *Tsurayuki shū* 貫之集 (early tenth century) he composed on a day when the beginning of spring was marked in the twelfth month of the civil year (6th of February 913), in which he is essentially saying that “we may even learn from the young herbs” sprouting at Kasugano 春日野 that “spring has come within the old year”.³⁷ That is, he provides, just as Yakamochi before him, evidence from the natural world that the solar definition reflects seasonal changes observed in nature more faithfully than the months of the civil year.

³⁶ Poem no. 1 in Kojima and Arai (1988: 19). In Helen McCullough’s translation, the calendrical constellation behind this poem is rendered appropriately, but her commentary shows that she assumes that “The new year, according to the lunar calendar, generally begins in solar February or March.” (McCullough 1985: 49).

³⁷ Poem no. 683 in the first volume of the *Tsurayuki shū* is cited as poem no. 3 in Kokin waka rokujō rindokukai (2019: 17–18) with further explanations by the editors on the background of this poem and Tsurayuki’s view on the solar part of the calendar.

In summing up the evidences provided by these examples cited, I would say that the arguably two most influential poets and editors in this formative phase of seasonal poetry both raised the awareness about the double structure of the adopted calendar by placing poems at the beginning and end of their respective compilations that address two of the possible constellations in which the two time systems may relate to each other. From both poets and editors we also have clear statements for a solar definition of the season. What this also implies is that this definition was not shared by all and that the lunisolar months must have been after all the better-known part of that calendar system. The reason for this assumption is not only that social life was organised along the lunisolar months and years, but also that its months are aligned with the phases of the moon, which constitute, apart from day and night, the second most obvious “natural time-meters” (Norbert Elias)³⁸ for an observer on earth. Even without a calendar, the current phase of the moon revealed to an observer in premodern Japan approximately the day of the month: the half-moon of the first quarter of the lunar phase occurs around the eighth day in a civil month, and a full moon indicates that the middle or a day around the 15th is reached. In contrast to this, it is not possible to track even vaguely the course of a solar month without a calendar, not to mention the exact beginning of spring on which only the entry in the calendar may inform a potential poet. Hence, I think that the authors we cited so far must have had access to an edition of that calendar to be able to address the solar periods in their compositions, but this access to a calendar was limited to members of government units and later to courtiers at the Heian court.³⁹ It is therefore plausible to assume that only the upper strata of society was informed and understood the solar part of the adopted calendar. In contrast to this comparatively small group, the passing of linear time must have been generally perceived by the lunar phases and the civil months of the lunisolar calendar, which also included a more lunar approach to the seasons. This assumption may appear somewhat speculative on the basis of the evidence presented so far, but the trend to define the seasons by the civil months becomes very distinct in a poetry anthology with distinctive features of a handbook compiled in the late tenth century, which I believe is the first attempt to systematize the poetic repertoire including its temporal aspects.

38 Elias (2007: 35).

39 Leinss (2021: 114–118).

4 The lunar bias in court poetry around the year 1000

The handbook in question is entitled “Japanese poems old and present in six booklets” (*Kokin waka rokujō* 古今和歌六帖). It was compiled by an unknown editor who selected some 4,500 poems by 200 authors from existing anthologies – more than half were taken from the *Man’yōshū* and the two earliest imperial anthologies – which he arranged under 517 different categories or topics.⁴⁰ Knowledge organised along topics clearly reflects the general influence of Chinese “category books” (*leishu* 類書), and the title of the handbook further suggests that it has been modelled specifically after “Mr. Bai’s collection of things [according to] categories in six booklets” (*Bai-shi liutie shilei ji* 白氏六帖事類集) compiled by the renowned Tang poet and government official Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846).⁴¹ Whereas the intention behind the Chinese model has been to supply knowledge in a systematic way for students preparing for the Chinese examination system, we may assume that the Japanese compiler intended to provide a poetological handbook for those engaged in reciting poetry at one of the numerous occasions provided by or around the court at the capital Heian-kyō 平安京.

The temporal categories into which the author divided the existing corpus of poetry from the first part of the work is called “Section on the year and the seasons” (*Saiji bu* 歳時部).⁴² The 40 topics under this parent category are listed along the four seasons and start with 11 topics under the category of spring. Topics related to spring begin with “the day on which spring begins” (*haru tatsu hi* はるたつひ), for which the author selected five examples from past collections. The first three of the five are the first two poems of the *Kokinshū*, and the third is Tsurayuki’s poem just discussed. Since all three were composed, as we have seen, on the day the beginning of spring is marked in the calendar, it is safe to assume that the compiler of this handbook refers here to the solar definition of spring.⁴³ This remains, however, the only topic that is clearly related to the solar part of the calendar; the nine others are related to months and dates of the lunisolar calendar and the last topic, “end of spring” (*haru no hate* はるのはて), is ambiguous because the examples presented under this topic do not reveal whether they refer to the lunar or solar end of the spring season.

⁴⁰ For a description and annotated edition of the first booklet, see *Kokin waka rokujō rindokukai* (2019).

⁴¹ On the genre in China, see Wilkinson (2018: 1079–1087); on this particular work, see Wilkinson (2018: 1080–1081).

⁴² See list of content in *Kokin waka rokujō rindokukai* (2019: 9).

⁴³ *Kokin waka rokujō rindokukai* (2019: 15–19).

Among the nine topics clearly related to the lunisolar calendar, we find the first three civil months that represent three topics of their own, but they may also contain further sub-topics which are particularly frequent in the first month. This first civil month, *mutsuki* む月, contains five additional themes that start with “the day, the moon begins [its monthly journey]” (*tsuitachi no hi* ついたちのひ [← *tsukitachi no hi* 月立ちの日]), which refers to the first day of that month or civil New Year. Another specific day that forms a sub-topic is the first day in that month to which the cyclical sign of the rat is allocated. On this “[first] day of the Rat” (*ne no hi* ねのひ) in the first civil month, a banquet was held for the upper layer of government officials in the middle of the seventh century, but this was obviously discontinued and replaced by the middle of the Heian period (794–1185) with a less exclusive event named after the “young herbs” (*wakana* わかな) or edible plants that were gathered and presented to the court on a date bearing for the first time in that month the cyclical sign of the “rat” (*ne* 子). A fourth topic is named after the ritual usually translated as “Green Horses” (*aouma* あをむま). This must have been a rare topic, however, since Yakamochi composed the only poetic example that addresses this parade of horses scheduled in the afternoon of the seventh day of the first month after the yearly promotions of bureaucrats were announced in the morning of that day. The topic with the most numerous examples is the fifth topic in the first month, “rests of snow” or “remaining snowfall” (*nokori no yuki* のこりのゆき). The examples presented primarily address the occurrence of this phenomenon typically associated with winter in this first of three spring months. “Snowfall” remains the sole ‘natural’ topic in the entire parent category spring. The second month, “mid-spring [month]” (*naka no haru* なかの春), does not have any sub-topics, and the third month, rendered as “month of growth” (*yayoi* やよひ), contains only one, which is “day three” (*mika no hi* みかのひ). This refers to another event scheduled on the third day of the third month of the civil calendar celebrated due to the doubling of the same odd number in that date, which is considered to be auspicious.⁴⁴

This analysis of topics related to spring shows that nine of the 11 topics are defined by the lunisolar months and their dates. This shift away from solar definitions of the calendar becomes even more obvious from the inclusion of “intercalary months” (*urūzuki* うるふ月) as a topic.⁴⁵ This entry appears at the end of the handbook in the winter category, but the examples cited from previous poetical collections deal with that phenomenon intrinsic to the lunisolar part of the calendar in all four seasons. The consensus among the authors is that when an additional month is inserted a season is extended by one month. This means that

⁴⁴ Kokin waka rokujō rindokukai (2019: 19–52).

⁴⁵ Kokin waka rokujō rindokukai (2019: 134–137).

seasons are counted by civil months, of which three constitute a season in a common year. It is only when an intercalary month is added to any of the first three civil months, for example, that the spring season in that particular year consists of four months instead of three. Some poets take the phenomenon of an extra month as an opportunity to express emotions that are commonly associated with an expansion of time: joyful hope when an additional month extends enjoyable time periods such as the blossoming of flowers in spring or the time span the *hototogisu* 杜鵑 (lesser cuckoo) can be heard singing in summer. Unwanted effects of a potential extension of time were also addressed, such as the fear that the unpleasant rainy season typical for the fifth civil month might be unduly extended because of an intercalary fifth month appended to the regular fifth month. An intercalary month also causes a feeling of impatience in one poet who regrets that he has to wait another month for the festival known today as Tanabata 七夕 celebrated in that period on the seventh day of the seventh month because of an intercalary sixth month that was added in that year to the common sixth month. I assume these poets were only playing with this temporal extension caused by an intercalary month and did not really think that the length of a season might actually be extended, but what these compositions very clearly reveal is that a season was perceived by these authors as consisting of three months defined by the lunisolar part of this calendar and not by the solar entries and months.

In summary, the temporal organization of the handbook and the topics it defines show that the lunisolar months and its dates had become the dominant time structure for poets by the time this poetic agenda was compiled. In view of this dominance of the lunisolar months and dates, we may call the graph *sai* 歲 used for year in the heading of this “Section on the year and the seasons” (*Saiji bu* 歲時部) somewhat misleading since in contemporary editions of the calendar this graph stands for the solar year.⁴⁶ In contrast to this, the lunisolar year covered by one edition of the calendar is expressed by the graph *nen* 年 which is used, for example, in a ritual agenda entitled “annual events in the course of a year” (*nenjū gyōji* 年中行事). This agenda has been written originally on the two sides of a folding screen set up at the palace in the late ninth century and shows that events and festivals at court were scheduled along the months of the civil year with only a few exceptions,⁴⁷ which, I think, is the reason why its author uses the graph *nen* 年 in the title

⁴⁶ For example, the self-reference of the calendar for the year 998 has been “Fully annotated calendar days of the fourth year of [the era] Chōtoku” (*Chōtoku yonen guchū rekijitsu* 長徳四年具注曆日, whereas the type of year to which binoms of the sexagenary cycle are allocated is *sai* 歲, such as in 998 “Yang earth-dog year” (*bojutsu sai* 戊戌歲) (Yōmei bunko 1983, 1: 2).

⁴⁷ The “Text of annual events [written] on an honourable folding screen” (*Nenjū gyōji go shōjimon* 年中行事御障子文) mentions 14 events to be held at the palace on the first day of the first month,

for this ritual agenda and not *sai* 歳. This new coinage of a term for ritual events and festivals held on a yearly basis that was used in Japan throughout its history represents a rare case in this period of a term that does not have a Chinese origin. This suggests that the noticeable shift towards the lunar part of the calendar in seasonal poetry possibly reflects a general trend in early Japan to depreciate the solar parts of the adopted calendar in other contexts as well, such as in ritual procedures. More evidence is necessary to prove this hypothesis, but at this stage, the only evidence I am able to provide is the fact that by the middle of the Heian period the lunar part of the calendar became the dominant time structure in the context of seasonal poetry, as it was systemized for poets at and around the Heian court in the handbook *Japanese poems old and present in six booklets*. This shift occurred despite efforts by earlier poets and editors of major anthologies to enhance the importance and the knowledge of the solar part of this calendar, which, few will probably disagree, represents the temporal framework that is overall better suited for the purpose.

5 Further developments and conclusions

The above overview of early seasonal poetry exemplified the general impact the introduction of a calendar has on the perception of time. Due to the adoption of a fixed calendrical system, a season is no longer perceived as a discontinuous entity that is initiated by ad hoc signals gained from nature but becomes a period with a fixed beginning and end. Those with an understanding of this fixed time system were collectively informed in advance on the precise dates of these periods by a written calendar, in this case by homogenous versions of editions compiled and distributed on the archipelago within the bureaucratic framework of a centralized state. Apart from the general impact the two-dimensional representation of time has on the perception of time of calendar users, more specific influences could be detected. These are due to the particularity of the system adopted, which structures two different types of years and months. Poetical examples cited from 730 to 759 revealed that poets became aware of this dual time structure and addressed all three possible constellations in which the two types of seasonal definitions may relate to each other. Of these constellations, the solar definition of spring

whereas only one is mentioned on the “day of the beginning of spring” (*risshunbi* 立春日). Zoku gunsho ruijū kanseikai (1940, 10a: 142).

preceding civil New Year has emerged by the early tenth century as a major concern, but poets and editors made also a strong case for a solar definition of the seasons on which poets should rely upon. However, the poetical handbook *Kokin waka rokujō* from the end of the tenth century clearly showed that for a considerable number of poets a season was defined by the civil months of the lunisolar calendar. I interpreted this trend towards lunar definitions as an indication that this part of the calendar was more widely understood and acknowledged by the members of a court society whose compositions are transmitted to us in anthologies. However, in this paper I cannot further pursue the question of whether this clearly discernible decline of the solar part of this calendar in seasonal poetry represents another Japanese modification of continental ideas related to this time system and its application, just as transforming the state calendar into diaries that were prepared for noble users in the same period, as I have shown elsewhere.⁴⁸

The above findings may be difficult to acknowledge for some readers because they contradict to some extent the way in which the premodern temporal structure is presented in today's monumental encyclopaedias of seasonal poetry that are known by the generic term "records on the year and the seasons" (*saijiki* 歳時記). The editors of these contemporary works tend to take for granted that the definitions in seasonal poetry have always been based on the solar terms and months of the calendar and arrange the seasonal topics accordingly along the four seasons and 12 solar months, for which they use a slightly modified nomenclature of the "monthly ordinances" (*yueling* 月令) explained above: spring consists of three periods called "early spring" (*shoshun* 初春), "middle spring" (*chūshun* 仲春), and "late spring" (*banshun* 晩春), and each of these periods is defined by the "inceptions" of the solar months. That is, early spring is identical with the period initiated by the day "beginning of spring" and lasted until the day before the "inception" of the second solar month.⁴⁹ This is, however, an oversimplification of the premodern time structure. It may serve as a rule of thumb for converting the solar dates into those of the present calendar, but it does not adequately reflect the complexity of the calendrical double structure and the fact that poets often completely ignored the solar part of the calendar and predominantly assumed that a season is formed by three civil months. This tendency to rely on the civil lunisolar months in the definition of the seasons is not only distinct in the tenth-century *Kokin waka rokujō*, a lunisolar bias is still evident in a similar compilation from the turn of the twentieth century that was published as "Collection of all haikus according to categories" (*Bunrui haiku zenshū* 分類俳句全集, published 1928).

48 Leinss (2021: 114–118).

49 Yamamoto et al. (1989, vol. 1): unpaginated preface, points 1 und 6.

This work was compiled by the probably most influential poet and literary critic at the beginning of the modern period, Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867–1902), who selected more than 100,000 examples of a new poetic form, the 17-syllable “haiku” 俳句, which he arranged under seasonal categories. One of the reasons why this was possible was that in this new genre established as an independent lyrical form in the seventeenth century, a reference to a season (*kigo* 季語) became mandatory. The first thing we notice in Shiki’s organization of the corpus of pre-modern haiku is that he established the “beginning of the year” (*saitan* 歳旦) as an independent seasonal category. In this new category, he presented haikus related to both yearly beginnings by providing sub-topics such as civil New Year and days up to the fourth of the first civil month, but also for the solar beginning of the year, the day before and several days thereafter.⁵⁰ In contrast to this new section that deals with topics related to both possible temporal beginnings of the year, the time frame for the “spring section” (*haru no bu* 春の部) that follows is predominantly structured along the civil months of the lunisolar calendar. This does not mean that no sub-topics based on the solar year are found under the category spring, but the few solar terms mentioned were those that were coined in Japan and that were noted in the printed calendars of the early modern period.⁵¹ What is more important, sub-topics related to lunisolar months and dates were far more frequent and include the three common civil months and their intercalary counterparts.⁵² It is not only the mentioning of intercalary months as seasonal topics that show the overall lunisolar orientation in this section, but this is also revealed very clearly by the sub-topic “end of the third month” (*sangatsujin* 三月尽). This refers to the last day of the third civil month, and in roughly every second instance it falls on a date after the solar “beginning of summer” (*rikka* 立夏) is noted in the calendar. It is, therefore, sound to conclude that for some haiku poets a season consists of three months in a common year and of four months when an intercalary month was added. In summary, we may say that Masaoka Shiki’s temporal categories do not only reveal among the haiku poets the same bias towards a lunisolar definition of the seasons we have already detected among *waka* poets in the mid-Heian period as exemplified in the *Kokin waka rokujō*, but also that this bias has become even stronger because Shiki mentions topics related to the solar beginning of the year only after those of lunisolar New Year.

50 See the table of contents in Masaoka (1928, 1: 1–5).

51 For example the “88th night” (*hachijūhachi ya* 八十八夜) after *risshun* or the “other shore” (*higan* 彼岸), the Buddhist term for the days around the spring (and autumn) equinox. See Masaoka (1928, 1: 22a–22b) and explanations of these entries in Leinss (2007: 62–63, entries 2 and 5).

52 See the table of contents in Masaoka (1928, 1: 21–23).

It is difficult to assess why the seasons were defined throughout premodern Japan predominantly by the lunisolar calendar. In the case of Heian poets, their lunisolar orientation might be related to the fact that in the tenth century probably not all poets had access to a calendar, the only tool that could have informed them on the solar elements and definitions of the seasons. This cannot be true for early modern haiku poets, however, because it is assumed that at least since the end of the seventeenth century every household had access to a standardized printed edition of the calendar.⁵³ The terms of the Chinese solar months were noted first in the lower parts of the daily columns in this calendar devised, printed and distributed under the control of different bureaucratic entities, but in 1729 its editors established extra columns that from then on displayed each of the 12 inceptions and twelve mid-points of solar months more noticeably for its users. In a text added to the first edition of this new type, the editors explain that they enhanced the solar part of this calendar because they regard the solar terms as the “most important elements in a calendar” (*rekichū daiichi no yōsho* 曆中第一の要所).⁵⁴ Users should follow these solar terms, they continue, for example in the timing of agricultural activities, which implies that in that period even some farmers must have relied on the civil months of this calendar in their activities and because of this, the editors were prompted to correct the erroneous view that a lunisolar calendar would be more helpful for farmers than the solar terms.⁵⁵ This further supports the hypothesis that ignoring the solar part of the adopted calendar can be seen as a general trend throughout premodern Japan, which I assume is related to the fact that not all, neither in the past nor at present, were able to think beyond the lunisolar structure of the premodern calendar. They probably had difficulties in acknowledging the solar elements of that system, which overall are certainly more helpful in all contexts in which the actual advancement of the seasons is crucial.⁵⁶

It is futile to speculate how seasonal poetry in Japan might have developed if another calendar had been adopted. I will finally address some of the

⁵³ See Leinss (2007: 53–54).

⁵⁴ For the content of these extra columns established for solar entries since 1729 see Leinss (2006: 31–34). For a translation of the text added by the editors to explain the reasons for this decision see Leinss (2006: 40–41).

⁵⁵ Uchida also points out a common misconception about the “old calendar”, which is that it had practical benefits for farmers and fishers (Uchida 1992: 495).

⁵⁶ Atsuya Kazuo 厚谷和雄 told me some day in mid-2013 at the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tōkyō that its former head and foremost expert on calendrical documents in Japan, Momo Hiroyuki 桃裕行 (1910–1986), had returned at times quite desperate after talks to the general public because his audiences remained unconvinced that this “lunar calendar” also structured elements of the solar year.

consequences the adoption of the continental calendar has on us engaging with seasonal poetry in Japan. A first point is that we should expect to come across two different calendrical definitions of the seasons. A second point is that the decision for a certain definition depends on, as we have seen, the capabilities of poets and the preferences of editors of poetic collections. For the beginning of spring mentioned in the twelfth civil month a specific term was coined, “beginning of spring within [the old] year” (*nennai risshun* 年内立春). Sources cited in the lexicographical definition of this term in the “Great dictionary of the Japanese language” (*Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典, completed in 1976) reveal, however, that there has been no agreement achieved as to whether this topic belongs to the category of winter or spring: in compilations of “Japanese poetry”, *waka*, poems alluding to this calendrical constellation are usually found at the beginning of the category spring, whereas in the genre of “linked verse poetry” (*renga haikai* 連歌俳諧) it is regarded as a topic of winter.⁵⁷

With the explanations given so far in this paper, I hope that we will be no longer surprised to find the beginning of spring associated with winter in anthologies of linked verse poetry, and that it will be also less difficult to understand and reconstruct the calendrical background of any dated poem with the help of chronological tools that are available.⁵⁸ As an example for practice, I will select a composition by Retired Emperor Go-Saga 後嵯峨 (1220–1272, r. 1242–1246):

⁵⁷ *Nihon daijiten kankōkai* (1979, 8: 684). Robert Wittkamp cites an example on this topic by the young Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644–1694), who is regarded as the creator of the haiku as a poetic genre (Wittkamp 2020).

⁵⁸ For the assessment of the temporal background of a seasonal reference in poetry for which a date is given, the most important tool are chronologies that display the two time structures intrinsic to the adopted calendar for any given year. The two chronologies that at present serve this purpose best are Yuasa (1990) and Uchida (fourth edition 1992). Yuasa devised his tables in particular for users from the humanities who may find it difficult to translate the numbers provided by Uchida for dates of new moons and solar terms into a calendar. Yuasa is certainly easier to use because he displays one calendar year on one page each, but the drawback of his work is that for the conversion of a Japanese dates into those of the Western calendar one must consult a different set of tables that was added later to the original three volumes of his work. Despite being not very user friendly, Uchida’s pioneering work remains to this day the single most reliable chronological source available. His tables are not only transparent and specify possible chronological problems but also have the advantage that all Japanese dates provided can be easily converted into those of the Gregorian calendar. As already said, it is only the Gregorian calendar that represents seasonal dates accurately for all historical periods which I believe is essential for the appreciation of the time structured by the adopted calendar.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>Hatsune to wa</i> | Bush warbler, |
| <i>omowazaranamu</i> | I ask you not to worry |
| <i>hitotose ni</i> | about your first song |
| <i>futatabi kitaru</i> | in a year |
| <i>haru no uguisu</i> | in which spring comes twice ⁵⁹ |

The preface to this poem does not only reveal that its author indeed “speaks about the beginning of spring [noted] within the [old] year” (*nenjū risshun wo iu koto* 年中立春をいふ事), but also provides a date of the occasion where Go-Saga presented this poem, which was in the seventh month of 1265. With the help of these chronological tools we can now find out that the beginning of spring was noted twice in the course of that year, which helps us to understand – and translate for that matter – why this poet assumes that a bush warbler might get confused by the beginning of spring marked in the first and last month of the same calendar year.⁶⁰ What the application of these chronological tools further reveals is that the two beginnings of spring were noted on dates corresponding to the 5th of February 1265 and the 6th of February 1266. These anticipated seasonal dates for the first song of the bush warbler expressed in this and many other premodern poems lead to another question, which is whether the adopted seasonal definitions really correspond with pre-existing natural time meters associated with spring such as the first singing of a bush warbler. The first song of this bird is heard nowadays in the Kyōto/Nara era on average on the 1st of March, but in some years it may be heard as late as the 22nd of March, as in Kyōto in 2020.⁶¹ This question of the overall suitability of the adopted seasonal definitions for monitoring the transformation of the seasons in Japan must be pursued, however, at another occasion. The chief aim of this paper has been to clarify the seasonal concepts defined by the calendar adopted from China and how these concepts shaped the perception of time of poets and the overall organization of seasonal poetry in premodern Japan.

⁵⁹ Poem no. 1484 in the eleventh anthology by imperial command, “Collection of Japanese poems, old and present, Continued” (*Shoku Kokin wakashū* 続古今和歌集), in Shinpen Kokka taikan henshū iinkai (1983, vol. 1) [unpaginated online edition].

⁶⁰ See Yuasa (1990, 1: 590). Uchida (1992: 284).

⁶¹ Kishōchō, Data no. 16 and 25 for 2020 for “first song of bush warbler” (*uguisu no shomeibi* うぐいすの初鳴日). http://agora.ex.nii.ac.jp/cgi-bin/cps/season_list.pl?type=うぐいすの初鳴日 (2.8.2021).

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