

The Imaginary Travels of *Jinqhua yuan* and *Furyu Shidoken den*

Stephen J. Roddy

ABSTRACT

Here I discuss two narrative works which, due to their depiction of fantastic adventures in foreign lands, have been called the "Gulliver's Travels" of their respective literary traditions: the 18th-century Japanese *Furyu Shidoken Den* and early 19th-century Chinese *Jing hua Yuan*. Both of these narratives utilize the portrayal of bizarre foreign lands visited by sea as a satirical device, directed in Swiftian fashion toward domestic political and intellectual issues. Thus, as in Swift, there is little attempt at description of real conditions in actual countries—partly a function of the relative isolation of Japan and China at that time. Of particular interest is the critique of Confucianism (arbitrary social hierarchy) and the use of gender reversal in both works.

KEY WORDS

fantastic
satire domestic
gender reversal
social hierarchy

foreign Confucianism
arbitrary
isolation

Travel to foreign or imaginary lands in search of knowledge has long served as an important topos in Western literature. During the Enlightenment in particular, writers of works such as *Lettes Persanes Candide* and *Gulliver's Travels* employed imaginary travels and foreign guests as satirical devices in their portrayals of the mores and intellectual conditions in their respective countries. Prose narrative works closely analogous to these were also produced in Japan and China during roughly the same period, that is, the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I find it curious that while such Asian works have often been compared to their European counterparts, there appears to have been little interest in looking at the parallels among the Asian works themselves, without reference to Western literature.

I would like to discuss two prose narrative works that have been dubbed the *Gulliver's Travels* of their respective literary traditions. *Furyu Shidoken den* ("The Biography of the Romantic Shidoken," hereafter *Biography*), is a relatively short work by the Japanese scholar and playwright Hiraga Gennai (1721-1773). It is renowned in literary history largely as a precursor of the *kokkeibon* or *sharebon*, a genre of humorous and often bawdy prose narrative that proliferated especially in the capital Edo (now Tokyo) during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹ The Chinese work *Jinghua yuan* ("Flowers in the Mirror," hereafter *Flowers*) by Li Ruzhen (1763-1830?) belongs to the genre known in Chinese as "full-length fiction" (*changpian xiaoshuo*), and is a rather

scholarly work featuring interminable discussions of recondite textual and scientific questions.² In spite of the disparity in form and content between these two works, they nonetheless exhibit a number of striking parallels, most obviously in their depiction of travel through fantastic foreign lands. Like Jonathon Swift's masterpiece, both utilize the portrayal of bizarre foreign lands visited by sea as a satirical device directed toward domestic political and intellectual issues.

That *Gulliver's Travels*, *Biography* and *Flowers* all date from the one hundred years or so between the early eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suggests that the increasing incidence of, and technological advances in, travel and commerce by Europeans and later Americans found expression in literary production in the East as well as the West. But while eighteenth-century Britain was engaged in large-scale colonial and mercantile expansion, Tokugawa Japan and Qing China maintained minimal contacts with foreign countries. In the light of this isolation, as well as their shared literary and philosophical heritage, one might naturally expect a certain degree of convergence between *Flowers* and *Biography* in their attitude toward and depiction of the outside world, whether real or imaginary. And indeed, in spite of the complete lack of mutual influence, the similarities between these two works are remarkable. Nonetheless, while these similarities are significant, careful comparison of the two works reveals a number of striking differences. By reviewing both their overlapping and contrasting features I hope to illuminate the attitudes toward and uses of the outside world as manifested in these works, written before the West came to exert significant global influence on the literary minds of subsequent eras.

During the mid-eighteenth century when Hiraga Gennai was writing the *Biography*, certain Japanese writers had already begun to warn of their nation's vulnerability vis-à-vis European nations such as Britain and Russia. Economic,

political, and technological developments in Western nations came under scrutiny by several of Hiraga's contemporaries, who compared them favorably to conditions in their own country. From the 1630s until the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate the country was isolated from most outside contact by the bakufu's policy of exclusion (*sakoku*); but a number of intellectuals who came to be known as advocates of *rangaku* (literally "Dutch learning") eagerly sought knowledge of western sciences such as medicine and cartography, and introduced them to their countrymen.³ Hiraga Gennai himself was an exceptionally energetic if somewhat erratic member of *rangaku* circles, involved in activities as diverse as pharmacology and metallurgy.⁴

China of the first decades of the nineteenth century was similarly isolated, and although some diplomatic and commercial contacts were tolerated, government policies were aimed at keeping westerners on the empire's periphery at Canton.⁵ But whereas Japanese *rangaku* attracted a number of serious scholars, who in turn were patronized by daimyo and even bakufu officials, Chinese literati of this period were considerably less concerned with the potential value of what they referred to as Western Learning. The civilization and technology of Europe were treated not as serious rivals to those of the Middle Kingdom, but rather as objects of curiosity, and their allure lay more in a fascination with exotica than a realization of their potential utility. It appears that "sinocentrism" remained as pervasive in this period as in earlier times.

The two works treated here offer evidence of this disparity in knowledge of and curiosity toward the outside world. But like Swift's work, both utilize the motif of foreign travel primarily as a satirical device, and display little if any interest in the description of conditions in actual countries. Nevertheless, as I shall attempt to demonstrate at the conclusion of this essay, the exploration of foreign identities as alterities to

domestic life is far from incidental to the satirical thrust of both works. But first I would like to examine the parallels between these two works in terms of their allegorical use of foreign lands as means by which they explore conditions in their respective home countries.

Biography was published about sixty years before *Flowers*, but there is no evidence that the former work was ever read in China, where little if any interest in or knowledge of Japanese writings remained the rule until the late nineteenth century.⁶ It presents itself as a rather fanciful biography of a contemporary of the author, the famed storyteller Shidoken of the Asakusa area of Edo. The story passes quickly through his childhood and youth as a Buddhist monk novice until a fateful encounter with a wizard (Furai Sennin, or "wizard brought by the wind"). At the wizard's urging, Shidoken (called by his original name Asanoshin), discards his Buddhist garb and heads straight for the pleasure quarters, first of Edo and then of several cities in the provinces. Eventually he embarks on a journey through a number of foreign countries both real and fantastic before finally returning to Edo to pursue a career as storyteller, that is, the profession of the historical Shidoken.

In contrast to *Biography's* relatively straightforward plot, *Flowers* encompasses numerous episodes populated by a large and disparate cast of characters, including one hundred talented girls, their male relatives, and a wide array of figures both historical and mythical. It is moreover set not in the author's own times as is *Biography*, but in the rather distant past of the reign of Empress Wu (684-705), the usurper of the Tang dynasty. Wu's position as the only female monarch in Chinese history to assume the throne in name as well as in fact is exploited as a setting for the novel's fictional exploration of female talent. But like *Biography*, foreign journeys (in this case, two of them) comprise roughly half the work's total length, and these sections have generally been

grotesque or bizarre physical features and social practices. There are countries of giants and of midgets, of long-armed and of long-legged people, and of people with pierced chests; lands of incompetent doctors, of uncouth samurai, and of *tsu*, or habitues of the pleasure quarter, among others. His adventures apparently trace a process of discovery quite comparable in outline to that of Gulliver's visits to Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the Houyhnhnms—that is, a discovery of the limitations of domestic modes of life and thought. But unlike Gulliver, Asaonshin rarely reflects upon his experiences. In spite of the brilliance of his model—Shidoken was famed as the greatest raconteur of his time—Asanoshin betrays little interest in anything other than the mute enjoyment of sexual pleasure.

For example, in the neighboring countries of the giants and the midgets, Asanoshin is displayed as a curiosity by the former, who laugh at the arrogance of such a tiny creature. The midgets in turn are tormented by him; he captures a princess and thereby unwittingly brings about the suicide (by *harakiri*) of her retainer. As his spiritual guide Furai sennin later explains, societal power is given corporeal form in this allegory of the relativity of national characteristics, or more specifically of what were called “rituals” (*rei*). In the country of the long-legged peoples, Asanoshin himself is threatened by the inhabitants, who, noting his amazing powers, try to steal his magic fan with the help of their neighbors, the long-armed people. Modern Japanese commentators generally agree that this allegory satirizes the jealousy and avariciousness of practitioners of professions and trades. This satire concludes with the futility of such endeavors: the long-legged people are excellent walkers, and the long-armed ones adept thieves, but their unsteadiness makes them extremely vulnerable to the slightest push.⁸

A more extended allegory on the potential arbitrariness of social distinctions is that of the Chest-pierced Country.

Social prestige and position are determined based on the size of the hole in the inhabitants' chests, which it is explained is in direct proportion to one's intelligence and abilities. People are carried about on poles that run through their chests, and the unfortunate men who lack them are condemned to serve as pole-bearers, who like palanquin-bearers in contemporary Japan fall on the lowest rung of the social ladder.⁹

In these and subsequent episodes of *Biography*, such satiric descriptions highlight the foibles of various social ranks and professions, whose representatives possess neither merit nor qualifications commensurate with their status. Doctors, who in Tokugawa Japan frequently identified themselves as Confucian scholars, are vilified for their incompetence and pursuit of material gain without regard for professional knowledge. Provincial samurai make fools of themselves with their boorish manners and accents, and are despised by everyone, even prostitutes; and scions of merchant families squander their fortunes in profligacy and debauchery. In short, the initially rather bizarre exotica of this journey turns rather soon to a catalog of the social landscape of Tokugawa urban life.

In *Flowers*, the foreign countries to which the travellers venture are similarly distinguished by various physical and social oddities. As was mentioned above, several nations are shared in common by both works, notably the long-armed and long-legged nations, and the lands of the giants and midgets. Indeed, in spite of their superficial dissimilarity the respective lands of midgets in particular seem to represent very similar allegories in both works. *Flowers's* midgets are described as collectors of cocoons, which they use to spin into special hats worn by their inhabitants. They are also habitual liars, and insist on saying exactly the opposite of what they actually mean (which cocoons, whose multifarious threads tangle together in confusion, apparently embody). These attributes derive from a secondary or figural meaning

of midgets, "petty men" who do not base their actions on moral standards.¹⁰ This extended meaning of midget is also apparent in Asanoshin's experience in the country of the same name. After discovering the body of a dead retainer, who committed suicide in shame for having failed to protect his charge, Asanoshin realizes that even these small (i.e., petty) men know what it is to be loyal and virtuous.

As in *Biography*, the nations visited in *Flowers* are notable in most cases by a foregrounding of their concern with social rank and the means to achieve and perpetuate it. Physically, these nations exhibit deformities even more bizarre than those of *Biography*, being distinguished by traits such as black skin and teeth (Heichiguo), a split tongue (Qisheguo), and Janus-faces (Liangmianguo), among others. But unlike *Biography*, *Flowers* presents extensive descriptions of the intellectual conditions in its exotic lands, and in particular the doctrines that serve as the foundation for the social system which distinguishes each nation. And these doctrines are without exception distinctly Confucian in origin.

Confucianism

This brings us to the second area of convergence between the two works, that is, the Confucian doctrines discussed and satirized in both. Confucian doctrines assume particular prominence in *Flowers*. In the Nation of Gentlemen (Junziguo), for example, the Confucian virtues of yielding and righteousness hold sway; while in its neighbor, the Nation of Blackened Teeth (Heichiguo), the inhabitants vie for excellence in scholarship. Nations such as those of the White People (Baiminguo), the Virtuous Scholars (Shushiguo), and the Split Tongue (Qisheguo) all revere Confucian ideals of public-mindedness and learning to the exclusion of practical considerations, and propagate one or

another of such doctrines with great zeal. The journey chapters of *Flowers* can in fact be interpreted as an exploration of the ramifications of a confucian ethic taken to varying degrees of absurdity.¹¹

In the most obvious of these allegories, the Nation of Virtuous Scholars manifests a comically distorted version of the Chinese examination system for bureaucratic appointment, which is one of the principal targets of the novel's satire. Here all members of society, from ministers and bureaucrats to carpenters, farmers, and waiters, must participate in written Chinese. The nobility of book-learning is cited as justification for this regime: "Books can change physical nature. If people abide by the teachings of the sages, then those who commit evil and falsehood will diminish in number."¹² The entire male population of the nation is busy studying classical Confucian texts in preparation for the examinations. But their understanding of them is so superficial and indeed garbled that their Chinese interlocutors can only double up in laughter at their absurd renderings of famous passages from the classics.

The attention to the Confucian vocation, what the novel calls *ruye*, points to its Chinese practitioners at home, that is, the literati, also known as the scholar-gentry (in Chinese, *shi*). The literati were the principal guardians of Confucian civilization, the social elite whose very existence was determined by their knowledge of Confucian classics tested in the imperial examination system. The largely satirical portraits of these various nations each brings into relief some specific foible or trait identified with the literati, such as their pedantry and impractical or half-baked knowledge, their inability to solve technical problems, a pompous concern with status and protocol, and other failings. Hence, the satire of Confucian doctrines through their manifestation in the lands visited by the novel's travelers seems pointed primarily at the institution of the literati as a social and

cultural elite. By contrast, *Biography* contains few references to the Tokugawa ruling class, the samurai or bushi. Instead the latter work seems to satirize less specific social classes than the incongruities and absurdities perpetuated by a rigidly hierarchical society.

Although *Biography* lacks the Chinese work's interest in the elite, it nonetheless makes a number of pronouncements on Confucianism as a philosophical and social doctrine. Most pointedly, it derisively refers to Japanese Confucians as idolizers of Chinese culture, who seek the wholesale sinicization of Japan. The wizard Furai sennin plaintively laments that "China is China, and Japan is Japan,"¹³ that Chinese institutions however great are not necessarily suited to Japanese circumstances. In fact, following his visits to the fictive lands of the earlier sections of his journey Asanoshin lands in Beijing, the seat of what was then the mighty and flourishing empire of the Qianlong Emperor. This visit, which comes near the conclusion of Asanoshin's journey, signals the degree to which China looms large as a symbolic presence within the narrative, and I will thus discuss it in some detail.

Soon after arriving in Beijing, Asanoshin infiltrates Qianlong's inner palace and becomes the lover of the emperor's consorts. He is eventually caught, but despite the gravity of his crime he strikes the emperor's fancy and is spared punishment. Impressed by his guest's descriptions of his native land, and in particular Mt. Fuji, Qianlong sends a huge armada with Asanoshin at its head to make a full-scale *papier-mâché* replica of the mountain, and bring it back to China. Asanoshin tries to do the Emperor's bidding, but, echoing the Mongol invasion of five centuries earlier, the entire fleet is destroyed by a divine wind (*kamikaze*), caused by gods who are enraged at the prospect of their most sacred mountain being replicated in China.¹⁴

The joke here seems to be that China is attempting to

accomplish in caricatured form what Japan has long engaged in, namely the imitation of forms from another country. The author Hiraga Gennai was a friend and fellow-painter of the artist Shiba Kokan, who advocated painting Fuji as it looked rather than in the traditional Chinese style then popular.¹⁵ Both Gennai and Shiba adopted western methods of painting, emphasizing accuracy and realism and the eschewal of Chinese impressionistic methods. This defeat of the Chinese attempt to bring their nation into symbolic submission apparently represents a rejection of Japan's self-imposed Chinese cultural yoke, personified within Japan by the advocates of Confucian doctrines.¹⁶

Yet this rebuke does not seem to imply the complete repudiation of Confucianism. In the book's final pages the author returns to the question of Japan's relationship to China, and uses the rather Confucian argument later repeated by many that Japan is in fact more Confucian than China. By never transgressing the proper bonds of ruler and subject, the Japanese have upheld their royal lineage from time immemorial to the present day, something China has not come close to accomplishing. By contrast, China has been prone to violence and rebellion, and the sages enunciated their teachings, he says, precisely because there was a need for them.

Japan is a country that upholds humanity and righteousness naturally. Hence, even though sages do not appear, the country is at peace.¹⁷

The problem with Confucianism seems to be that its adherents seek to impose ridiculously outmoded practices:

Scholars, being ignorant like frogs who have grown up inside a well, become the allies of China, and call the Japan where they were born "Eastern Barbary." They

spread fallacious theories such as that the Sun Goddess was none other than Taibo of Wu [a Chinese sage]. Ostentatiously proclaiming the Way of [Kings] Wen and Wu, they spread hot air, and insist that rice be measured by the *sheng* of the Zhou period [eleventh through sixth centuries B. C.]. At such a time the sages are actually to be despised.¹⁸

As an outspoken advocate of Dutch Learning, Hiraga seems to have viewed Japanese Confucians as obstacles to a more even-handed assessment of the relative merits of Chinese and Western civilization. The interpretation offered by Furai sennin of Asanoshin's experiences during his travels points precisely to this relativity: "Japanese look upon the midgets as akin to insects, while the giants treat Japanese as playthings... all [these variants] are [simply] the customs of these various localities."¹⁹ No single country possesses customs and rituals inherently superior to any other, he seems to be suggesting. Hence Confucianism, for all its insights, represents simply one more variant of the totality of human culture, and deserves no special subservience by the Japanese. This is particularly true when such subservience entails a pedantic and impractical adherence to continental models already outdated in China, let alone in Japan. Without taking account of local conditions, the teachings of the Chinese sages can be irrelevant or even harmful.²⁰

In *Flowers*, Confucianism is similarly portrayed as a doctrine that has spread to and been adopted rather uncritically by the foreign nations through which its travellers pass. By worshipping rather slavishly at the altar of the Chinese sages these lands have instituted what turn into mere parodied versions of their doctrines. Just as Furai sennin warns in *Biography*, the impracticality and pedantry of Confucianism taken to such extremes results in ludicrousness. But whereas *Biography* points only to the general social

effects of such policies, *Flowers* is focused more narrowly on its relevance to the social group most closely tied to Confucian doctrines, the literati. Significantly, nowhere in *Flowers* is Confucianism castigated as directly or unequivocally as in *Biography*, which quite simply brands it as a foreign doctrine artificially imposed upon Japan. The Confucians of the Chinese work are instead subjected to a temporary disenfranchisement from their rightful role as bureaucrats and servants of the throne, an experience which apparently allows them to discern the weaknesses of their mode of life.

Gender reversal

Following Asanoshin's adventures in China and his attempt to return to Japan by sea, he is blown by the winds of the gods to the Island of Women. The first and lengthiest journey in *Flowers* reaches a similar conclusion in the Country of Women. That the two narratives converge at such a terminus suggests that gender reversal, and in particular, the assumption by women of positions of power and dominance over men, represents something of great significance in both works. In *Flowers* the reversal of roles is complete, with women as rulers and husbands. The Island of Women in *Biography* is populated exclusively by women, who rule the island by default. When men arrive, however, in the form of Asanoshin and the small contingent of sailors who survive the divine winds, they are assigned the role of courtesans to the sex-starved inhabitants of the island.

For both *Biography* and *Flowers* the subversion and reversal of gender roles seems to imply the most extreme of their various representations of foreignness, for it completely inverts the normative social order.²¹ During their visits to these queendoms the two works' male protagonists experience life in a position of passivity and subservience, in matrimony (*Flowers*) and prostitution (*Biography*). Following

these experiences, the lessons of their respective journeys are complete, and the travellers return either home (*Biography*), or on to a Taoist paradise (*Flowers*).

But in *Flowers* this episode marks only the beginning of the novel's total feminization of the cast of characters, and the complete effacement of men as a significant presence. This process begins in earnest here, roughly one-third through the novel's total length, and reaches its culmination in Chapter 67, following which the cast of characters is without exception female. Over the thirty-odd chapters of this transformation, women become the standard-bearers of culture and knowledge, filling the literati's role and responsibilities. In the ultimate scheme of the novel, gender reversal allows the literati (as women) to free themselves from the straightjacket of hidebound Confucian ideology, to pursue knowledge as an endeavor worthy in and of itself, without the teleological ends imposed on it by moral philosophy.

For *Biography*, its gender reversal occurs not in the context of such literati soul-searching, but as the culmination of Asanoshin's philandering.²² The hero began his voyage of self-discovery in the brothels of Edo, and finds himself on the Island of Women partly as a consequence of his sexual exploits in China. Indeed the journey was initiated on his mentor Furai sennin's instructions to "play" (*asobu*), which could be seen as a reference to the *yuri* or various pleasure quarters the protagonist frequents. True to his sobriquet *furyu* or "romantic" of the work's title, Asanoshin seems to be ruled largely by his sexual appetites. The conclusion of his journeys on the Island of Women might indeed constitute an allusion to a similarly amorous protagonist, Yonosuke of the classic work by Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Man* (*koshoku ichidai otoko*), who also ends his philandering career on an island of the same name.²³

And yet the dimensions of this prurient adventure

suggest not a male paradise, but the social implications of sexual servitude. Asanoshin and his companions are installed in an enclosed compound whose layout, customs, and peculiarities mirror those of Yoshiwara, the pleasure quarter of Edo. This arrangement comes about as the solution to the problem of the distribution of sexual goods—in this case men—among the island's inhabitants. When the ruler attempts to keep the newly arrived males for her own enjoyment, her subjects surround her castle threatening rebellion. The construction of a pleasure quarter is devised as the best possible solution to potential social unrest arising from such inequities, for it is open to anyone with money, regardless of social status.²⁴

Once again, then, the concern with these two female-dominated domains revolves around the question of the establishment and maintenance of the social hierarchy. In *Flowers*, the reversal of gender roles first adumbrated in the *Country of Women* enables the reconfiguration of literati interests and ideals. Through the transformation of literati gender, this social elite are in effect liberated from the moral and political duties prescribed for them by Confucian doctrines, which dictate that they serve as political and moral leaders. Female-gendered talent brings about not only the subversion of the normative order, but its dissolution as well. *Biography* lacks the Chinese work's remarkably steady fixation on the literati, instead exploring the *yuri* as a social leveller of society. For both works, though, we find that gender reversal offers an opportunity, however temporary, for the complete overturning of the social patterning toward which their satire is directed.

Conclusion

In sum, then, the satirical objects of these two works appear to be remarkably similar—namely, the political and

ideological nexus of practices and beliefs implicated in the maintenance of the social hierarchies of Tokugawa Japan and Qing China. Confucianism lies at the core of this nexus, and serves as the butt of the most trenchant ridicule. Both works paint their respective Confucianists as pedantic, self-righteous ideologues who fail to come to terms with present conditions, and cling to impractical idealism. The antidote to such ills is to be found in the escape from and ultimate overturning of the Confucian order, which concludes in the reversal of gender roles found in both works. Through the discovery of foreign lands the protagonists of these works find both a mirror magnifying the distortions brought on by such social practices at home, as well as the means of remedying these ills. Interestingly, for both authors the solutions to their respective dilemmas seem to center on depriving men of their privileged social position, relegating them to passivity as objects of sexual attention. Both seem to imply that only the *subversion of phallogentrism* will bring about the changes deemed necessary in their respective nations.

In conclusion, let us address the issue of isolation broached at the beginning of this essay. We have noted some significant differences in the two works' treatment of their imaginary journeys, in particular the Chinese concern with the status and role of the literati, as opposed to the Japanese perspective on Confucianism as the bearer of an alien, Chinese culture. This would seem to suggest that whereas the Japanese work clearly articulates an "other" independent of its domestic identity, the Chinese work tends to portray the wider world largely as the reflection of a domestic, sinocentric world order. The topical nature of *Biography* and historicizing of *Flowers* seem to further attest to such a characterization. *Biography* contains references not only to China, but also to a number of contemporary nations and regions such as Muscovy, Armenia, Sumatra, and Holland, as

well as to contemporary figures such as the Qianlong Emperor and Shidoken himself. By contrast *Flowers* employs an historical frame not as a metaphor for contemporary events or conditions (as was common to many works of fiction and history), but simply for its mythic appropriateness. And its depiction of island nations is derived almost entirely from geographical works dating from the second century A.D. or earlier, works which clearly had little relevance to actual foreign countries by then well-known to the Chinese. To borrow Stephen Owen's words, *Flowers* appears to be absorbed in a "retrospective gaze on the past."²⁵

It might be objected that, like Swift's work, the question of whether or not these works embody any accurate knowledge of or genuine interest in the outside world is irrelevant to our reading of them. They employ their descriptions of foreign lands as satirical tools in the exploration of conditions at home, and thus perhaps should not be judged by their faithfulness to geography. Yet as we have seen in the case of *Biography*, the role of the foreign in determining the contours of a Japanese identity is central to the meaning of the work. Japan's adoption of a foreign doctrine—Confucianism—which is of questionable relevance to local needs has resulted in a social hierarchy that fails to adequately distribute sexual and by extension material goods among the population as a whole. Asanoshin journeys beyond Japan's own borders, to lands whose features illustrate the arbitrariness of his nation's decision to employ Confucianism, which is after all the product not of humanity as a whole, but only of the historically and geographically delimited region known as China.

For *Flowers*, its wholly fictional account of foreign travel similarly brings its protagonists to a self-realization apparently impossible to attain within the borders of the Middle Kingdom. But this enlightenment does not entail the discovery of the limitations of Chinese civilization vis-à-vis

the rest of the world. Rather, it presents a satirically distorted mirror (as alluded to in the title, "Flowers in the Mirror") of the Confucian institutions that have brought the literati to their current state of decline, and suggests the dimensions of a revamped intellectual order within which they might achieve fulfillment. For the literati, foreign nations exist not as genuine alternatives to Chinese life, but as extensions of Chinese civilization itself. They are of interest only in their ability to reflect the absurdities and weaknesses of China's institutions, and possess no qualities independent of their relation to China.

It is intriguing, then, that while sharing in common the motifs of foreign travel and gender reversal, as well as a distaste for Confucianism, *Flowers* and *Biography* sharply diverge in the interest they evince toward the world beyond their borders. This fact is reflected in the reception given to these works. Japanese of the eighteenth century only rarely had access to accounts of foreign countries, especially in the form of literary works written in relatively accessible prose. The sheer novelty of *Biography* seems to have excited the public with the prospect of reading about the world beyond Japan, however fantastic it may have been. The travel sections of *Flowers*, by contrast, seem never to have been regarded as anything more than pure fantasy. Judging from the literary output of nineteenth century China, there seems to have been very little appetite for descriptions of actual foreign lands among readers of popular fiction. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century, after China's humiliation by the West in the Boxer Rebellion, do literary works begin to include accounts of foreign countries and peoples. While Hiraga Gennai and Li Ruzhen held similar ideas on various social and intellectual issues, this did not include a correspondence of views of the place of their respective nations in the world as a whole. Instead, each narrative reflects the historical circumstances of its time—a fact that

is hardly surprising.

Notes:

¹ Jofuku Isamu, *Hiraga Gennai no kenkyu*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1976, p. 248. The only translation of *Biography* into a western language of which I am aware is a French version by Hubert Maes. See Hubert Maes, trans. *Histoire galante de Shidoken. Traduction de Furyu Shidoken den de Furai sanjin-suivi des Attractions foraines au Japon sous les Tokugawa et de les voyages fictifs dans la litterature Japonaise de l'epoche d'Edo*. Paris: L'Asiatheque, 1979

² A partial English translation of this novel exists. See Lin Tai-yi, trans, *Flowers in the Mirror*, by Li Ju-chen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.

³ Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 16-91 ff.; Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-foreignism and Western Learning in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 5, 10 ff.

⁴ On Hiraga's multifarious activities, see Jofuku, *ibid.*; Teruoka Yasutaka, "Hiraga Gennai Kenkyu" in his *Kinsei bungaku no tembo* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1953); Tsukatni Mitsuhiro and Masui Kunio, *Hiraga Gennai: sono kodo to shiso* (Tokyo: Hyoronsha, 1978); Haga Toru, *Hiraga Gennai* (Tokyo: Shinnichi shinbunsha, 1981); Ingaki Takeshi, *Hiraga Gennai: Edo no yume* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1989); and Hubert Maes, *Hiraga Gennai et son temps* (Paris: Ecole francise d'Extreme-Orient, 1970).

⁵ See Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, P. 4.

⁶ *Biography* is written in *wabun* (the classcal Japanese language), which in contrast to *kanbun* few if any Chinese of the mid-Qing period could read.

⁷ *Shanghai jing* (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963) juan 6 (pp. 84, 85); juan 7 (p. 89). These nations are also described in Japanese geographical works of the early Edo period, specifically Nishikawa Joken's *Ka-i tsusho ko* (enlarged edition, 1708), and Terashima Ryoan's *Wakan*

sanzai zue (1715), which according to the annotators of *Biography* are the immediate source of most of its information on foreign lands. But these no doubt derive originally from *Shanghai jing* or other Chinese sources.

⁸ Hiraga Gennai, *Furyu sanjin shu*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten (Nihon kotenbungaku taikei, vol. 49), 1957, pp. 190-192, 194-196.

⁹ *Furai sanjin shu*, pp. 197-198.

¹⁰ Li Ruzhen, *Jinghua yuan*. Taipei: Dingwen Shuju, 1982, Ch. 19, pp. 13-136.

¹¹ *Jinghua yuan*, Chs. 11-12 (pp. 66-80); Chs. 16-19 (pp. 108-135); Chs. 21-25 (pp. 150-176); and Chs. 28-30 (pp. 200-216).

¹² *Jinghua yuan*, ch. 24, p.170

¹³ *Furai sanjin shu*, p. 167. This as well as several other statements in the work closely resemble remarks by scholars of National Learning such as Motoori Norinaga. Hiraga became a disciple of Kamo Mabuchi, Norinaga's teacher, just two months before the publication of *FSD* in 1763. But Haga Toru dismisses his knowledge of and interest in such teachings as superficial and transitory. (See Haga, *ibid.* p. 266).

¹⁴ *Furai sanjin shu*, pp. 200-205.

¹⁵ Donald Keene, *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁶ Modern Japanese critics have generally taken a rather different view of this episode from the interpretation I have offered. Most see it as a satire of the popularity of ersatz Mt. Fujis (miniature models of the mountain) erected during this period in various parts of Edo. In the words of Inagaki Takeshi, "Asanoshin's pride in Mt. Fuji is representative of the mood of Edo citizens of that time. While the Kamigata region far outrivalled Edo in the number of ancient monuments and famous places, Edoites, greatest pride was that they lived in a city from which Mt. Fuji was visible... Climbing Mt. Fuji as a form of mountain worship was also popular, and an Edoite's dream was to visit the Ise Shrine and climb Mt. Fuji, at least once in his lifetime. For those who had neither time nor money for such pursuits, there were as many as seventy artificial Mt. Fujis within the city of Edo." (Inagaki, *ibid.*, p. 86). See also Tsukatani and Misui, *ibid.*, pp.

181-82.

¹⁷ *Furai sanjin shu*, p. 217.

¹⁸ *Fursi sanjin shu*, p. 216.

¹⁹ *Furai sanjin shu*, p. 217.

²⁰ Many scholars have noted that in spite of his virulent denunciations of Ito Jinsei and other Confucians, Hiraga pays certain lip service to Confucian doctrines, as in his affirmation of the Five Cardinal Relationships (*gorin*). What most fail to note is that this passage goes on to undercut Confucianism's importance in affirming such virtues. Hiraga asserts that such relations exist not only in all human societies, but even in the animal world. Confucianism thus becomes superfluous to the maintenance of morality, which is natural to all creatures.

²¹ In her provocative history of foreigners in western civilization, *Strangers to Ourselves* (trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), Julia Kristeva points to Greek epic: "It is noteworthy that the first foreigners to emerge at the dawn of our civilization are foreign women—the Danaides" (p.43). She goes on to postulate that for the Greeks, the institution of marriage—that is, the incorporation of the bride into, and domestication by, the groom's family—was analogous to the subjugation and assimilation of foreigners. By rejecting this (most murdered their husbands on their wedding night), the Danaides are condemned to permanent status as foreigners.

²² The protagonist's real-life model Shidoken went by the nickname Marabo, or "Penis-monk." See Jofuku, *ibid.*, p. 247

²³ Thara Saikaku, *Saikaku shu*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten (Nihon kotenbungaku taikai, Vol. 47), 1957, pp. 212-214.

²⁴ *Furyu sanjin shu*, p. 210.

²⁵ Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, p.3.

