

[論文]

## Poem Letters in *The Tale of Genji* : What Shows in the Poem Letters?

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### 1. Introduction

In illustration of my views, I cite several instances from English translations of *The Tale of Genji*, by Arthur Waley, Edward G. Seidensticker, and Royall Tyler.

I also explain why I choose the word *waka*, whereas *tanka* is widely acknowledged as Japanese short verse of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables in the world.

Poem letters, correspondence including *waka*, are good examples to show how *waka* affects the plot of the novel.<sup>1)</sup> Also, we can see what the translators have done to convey the meaning and style of the poem letters to readers who have different backgrounds from the original.<sup>2)</sup>

### 2. *The Tale of Genji* and Translation

First of all, I'll refer to *The Tale of*

*Genji* and the 3 English translations, then what translation should be to the original.

*The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu (c.973-c.1014), a court lady in the Heian Period, first appeared in the record in A.D.1008 and was completed around A.D. 1010. The genuine original was lost and the manuscript copy called 'Blue Book' was admitted as an authorized version by the great poet FUJIWARA no Teika in about 1225. Annotated editions were based on it and modern Japanese translations use those editions as the original. So, here I call the annotated editions the original.

The Waley translation was completed in 1933 and the Seidensticker's was in 1976. The Tyler translation appeared in 2001. The three translations are models in the history of translation. From 1925 through to 2001, their achievements have marked our era. They also indicate changes in the usage of words. Indeed, one of the greatest differences between

Waley and Seidensticker may lie in this area.

According to Eugene A. Nida, an editor of *Kyodo-Yaku-Seisho* 'A Common Translation of the Bible' (1978) in Japan, "Translation consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in the meaning, and secondly in style."<sup>3</sup> "The message" in the original is sometimes hidden behind the surface of the source language, which makes the process of translation more complicated and cumbersome.

*The Tale of Genji* is really a long novel and contains a lot of traditional conventions and ceremonies unique to Heian Japan (eleventh century) in it.

### 3. The Difference between *Waka* and *Tanka*

Both *tanka* and *waka* are Japanese versified poetry of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. But *tanka* accepted by English speaking people is free from the traditional ways of making *waka*, and made into 5 lines, 2 stanzas, or a couplet of 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllables.

Unlike *tanka*, *waka* has many conventions and rules, especially in the scenes of people exchanging poem letters or singing poems among friends or at various ceremonies.

Punning (掛詞) was the most typical

and common rhetoric in the poems of the Heian Period and the number of puns in *the Genji* is almost as many as the poems or more, for sometimes a poem consists of five or six puns.

Associated words (縁語) are used to invoke certain imagery by lining up one after another.

Citing and using the terms and words from existing poems (引歌) was a typical device of making poems at the time, and by making metaphors and similes from those terms and words, one could play with images freely and persuasively in his [her] poem. So the knowledge of old Japanese poems and songs issued previously is indispensable.

Places or famous spots (歌枕), as well as some special words (枕詞), induce other special words related to the place or the words.

Folk belief, superstitions and folklore are also alluded to.

Those devices were, so to say, the codes for the people who corresponded with each other. Readers only who can decode the secret message understand the meaning of the poem.

### 4. Poem Letters (Correspondence Including *Waka*)

There are three types of the poem called *waka* in *the Tale of Genji*: (795 poems in all)

1. Poem letters, or letters containing a poem along with a few words or lines (624)
2. Poems to him [her] self. (107)
3. Poems to read and sing at parties or among friends. (64)<sup>4)</sup>

Among the three, poem letters, correspondence including *waka*, have functions similar to dialogue consisting of some codes. *The Tale of Genji* is a grand novel of complicated plot which consists of various stories. In ten chapters (22 *Tamakazura* to 31 *Makibashira*) so-called the *Tamakazura* story, we can see how such poem letters in the scenes of courtship affect the plot of *the Tale of Genji*.

In those days, women of fashion were secluded in the inner rooms of their parents' home. The ladies should not be seen by men, except father and brothers. Husbands used not to look at their wives until three days after their marriage. Letters, reputations, sounds of music (*koto* 'Japanese harp') and sometimes peeping through fences were the clues for falling in love. It is not surprising that letters were the best source to know each other's talents, tastes and nature.

According to circumstances, certain rules or manners were applied to poem letters. One should attach something related to the season like flowers, twigs or grass to the letter. The content

(including a poem), color and paper of the letter should match the flower or the like attached to it. The paper should be perfumed. A swift reply was expected. A poem in the reply should correspond to a poem in the letter, citing some words from it. Handwriting was an indication of his [her] education. Through these letters, a sender was judged by the other.

Not only in courtship but in politics, rituals and seeking positions, poem letters were used to sound out the other's thoughts and feelings and show his [her] own. Stories took a new turn in the scenes of exchanging poem letters.

Correspondence including *waka* affects the story-telling of *The Tale of Genji*. Some words in *waka* need decoding in order to make sense to readers. If not, the readers won't understand the meaning of the correspondence and are to be left behind the plot.

#### 4.1 Poem Letters along with Conventions (Chap.22 *Tamakazura*)

Genji was in love with a lovely girl Yugao in his youth. It was a secret love. She once had been a lover of his cousin and closest friend To-no-Chujo and had a daughter between them. After she was killed by a living ghost who was supposed to be a wife of Genji, Lady Rokujo, out of jealousy, her daughter Tamakazura left the capital Kyoto with

her nurse and family to Kyushu, the western district of Japan.

18 years passed and when Tamakazura came back to Kyoto again, Genji intended to take charge of her, though she and her nurse wanted to go to her father, To-no-Chujo, the Palace Minister at the time. Genji and her father became political rivals then and both needed a daughter to become an emperor's wife. Genji also did not forget Yugao and still wanted to see her again if he could.

Genji wanted to test Tamakazura to know whether she deserved him as his daughter or not. He sent a poem letter to her, through which he tried to judge her background.

Numbers in the original and translations correspond to each other.

(See underlined parts.)

Original <sup>①</sup> 先づ文の気色ゆかしく思さるなりけり。 …

源氏：「かく聞ゆるを、<sup>②</sup> 知らずとも尋ねてしらむみしまえに生ふる三稜（みくり）のすちは絶えじを」

…唐の紙のいとかうばしきを取り出でて、書かせ奉る。

玉鬘：「<sup>③</sup> 数ならぬみくりや何のすちなればうきにしもかく根をとどめけむ」とのみほのかなり。手は、はかなだちて、よろぼはしけれど、あてはかにて口惜しからねば、御心おちるにけり。<sup>④</sup>

(『源氏物語』3. *Genji Monogatari* [*The Tale of Genji*] vol.3 pp.123-124)

Seidensticker <sup>⑤</sup> (no translation) …

…“And as to my reasons for writing, Genji: <sup>②</sup> “You may not know, but presently you will, / Where leads the line of rushes at *Mishimae*”

…She chose richly perfumed Chinese paper and wrote only this, in a faint, delicate hand:

Tamakazura: <sup>③</sup> “You speak of lines and rushes – and by what line / Has this poor rush taken root in this sad world?”

The hand was immature, but it showed character and breeding. Genji was more confident.<sup>⑥</sup>

(*The Tale of Genji* vol.1, p.402)

Tyler: <sup>①</sup> “he wanted first to see what a letter from her would be like.”…“The one who so addresses you

Genji: <sup>②</sup> you do not yet know, but you need only ask and will quickly learn / what lasting bond, stem by stem, the *Mishima* reeds proclaim.”

…Her nurse took out some highly perfumed Chinese paper and made sure she wrote:

Tamakazura: <sup>③</sup> “Whence does her stem spring, this unhappy reed whose worth is so very small, / that she has struck such deep root into the sorrows life brings?”

That was all, in faint lines. Her hand was wandering and uncertain, but it had distinction. No, it was not contemptible. Genji felt reassured.<sup>⑦</sup>

(*The Tale of Genji* vol.1, pp.421-422)

①Genji put Tamakazura to a test in the form of a letter. Not only from the content of her letter but also from the manner in which she wrote could he judge her elegance, education and upbringing. Here is the point of the passage.

②In Genji's poem, "reeds" or "rushes" have "lines", which are associated with both 'lineage' and 'reasons'. Alluding to "bond" (Genji, the Palace Minister, Tamakazura) "stem by stem" (the ancestors, a sister of Genji's father was the Palace Minister's mother), Genji tried to stress the 'lineage' of them. Also, Genji tried to find out the understanding and wit of Takakazura.

③In her reply, she understood the code "rush" or "reeds" and intentionally took it for the other meaning 'reasons', saying "by what line," and "root."

Genji perceived her immaturity of education through her hand; nevertheless, Genji came to know Tamakazura was fairly talented from her reply. She had disadvantages of growing up in the country, so she needed to be carefully treated and educated before her debut.

People used to conjecture the other's talents and education by poem letters. He [She] was expected to understand the codes or key words in the letter and show it in his [her] reply, citing some words in the poem and changing them

intentionally in his [her] poem, making use of the ambiguity of associated words and puns.

The reply from Tamakazura made Genji decide to take care of her as his daughter.

#### 4.2 Poem Letters Citing Other Poems from Previous Chapters (Chap.26 *Tokonatsu*)

One summer evening, Genji suggested some reasons why he could not connect Tamakazura with her real family at the time. In front of her chamber, some *nadeshiko* 'pink, wild carnations' were planted beneath the low bamboo fence. Genji was talking to her.

Original

源氏：「<sup>①</sup>なでしこ [*nadeshiko*] のとこな  
つかしき [*tokonatsukashiki*] 色を見ばも  
との垣根を人やたづねむ」…

玉鬘：「<sup>②</sup>山がつの垣ほに生ひしなでしこの  
もとの根ざしをたれか尋ねむ」(p.233)

Waley

Genji: '<sup>①</sup>Gladly would I show the world this Child-flower's beauty, did I not fear that men would ask me where stands the hedge on which it grew.'

Tamakazura:…'<sup>②</sup>Who cares to question whence was first transplanted a Child-flower that from the peasant's tattered was hither brought?'<sup>8)</sup>

(*The Tale of Genji* vol.1, p.513)

Tyler

Genji: '<sup>①</sup>If he were to see all the inviting

beauty of the little pink, / he might wish to know as well more of the gillyflower.”…

Tamakazura:…“<sup>⑤</sup>Who would wish to know where it was the little pink first of all took root, / when she came into the world in a mountain rustic's hedge?” (p.471)

These poem letters are based on the poem written by To-no-Chujo to console his lady and Tamakazura's mother Yugao [Evening Face] in “*Hahakigi* [Chap.2. the Broom Tree].

Yugao once sent a poem letter, alluding to their child: 夕顔: 「山が<sup>⑥</sup>つの垣ほ荒るともをりをりにあはれはかけよなでしこの露」<sup>⑥</sup> “The dew [To-no-Chujo], put your affection on the pink wild carnation [Tamakazura] occasionally, though the hedge of the peasant [Yugao] becomes tattered.”

He replied: 頭の中將: 「咲きまじる色は何れとわかねどもなほ常夏にしくものぞなき」<sup>⑦</sup> “although flowers are blooming so mingled that I cannot tell one apart another (I won't favor one among all the flowers,) still nothing is comparable with the wild carnation.” “Flowers” are his ladies, whereas “the wild carnation” is Yugao.

④In the original, the first half of the poem by Genji is a little complicated with punning. Not only *nadeshiko* and *tokonatsu* are synonymous meaning “little pink”, “wild carnation” or

“gillyflower” but *nadeshiko* refers to *ko* ‘a child’ whom her [his] parents *nadeshi* ‘patted’ with love, and *tokonatsu* is also divided into two parts *toko* ‘bed’ and *natsu* ‘summer.’ *Nadeshiko* here is Tamakazura, *toko natsukashiki* is broken down into *tokonatsu* [Yugao] and *natuskashiki* ‘longing for’ or ‘reminiscent.’ The poem means, “If he [To-no-Chujo, the Palace Minister] saw Tamakazura whose looks remind him of Yugao with whom he shared bed and is still longing for.” The latter half means, “he would seek the hedge [Yugao] where the pink carnation [Tamakazura] was planted before.”

Tamakazura replied in tears. Of course, she did not know the poems written by her father and mother, so she only replied based on the poem of Genji, yet some echoes of her parents' poems, such as “peasant's tattered”, “rustic's hedge” resonate through the poetry.

④In Genji's poem translated by Tyler, “the gillyflower” in the second line replaces “the little pink” in the first line. Synonyms “*tokonatsu*” and “*nadeshiko*” are used effectively, so the gentle image of the former “*tokonatsu*” [Yugao with whom he shared bed and is still longing for] emerges from Chapter 2.

⑥⑦The poems cited from Chapter 2 *Hahakigi* are to associate the chapter with the *Tamakazura* story. Puns and synonyms convey an episode of Yugao

from Chapter 2 *Hahakigi* to the surface of the *Tamakazura* story through many other stories.

#### 4.3 Poem Letters Using the Words with Double Phases (Chap.27 *Kagaribi*)

Since Tamakazura met Genji and was accepted as a foster daughter, her feelings to him were gradually changing from embarrassment to silent attachment. He took good care of her in every aspect of her life and education. Her gratitude rose to affection. Marriage at that time was polygamous. The difference between the formal marriage and the informal one mostly depended on the lady's background.

Genji noticed the formal marriage with Tamakazura would be troublesome, considering his difficult relationship to Tamakazura's father. Tamakazura also noticed the difficulties of her situation. She had not been introduced to her father yet and the world thought of her as Genji's daughter. In other words, she did not have any financial and legal background to accept Genji as her husband. Accordingly, both of them were aware that in their case the marriage would have to be informal and secret; Genji hoped to ignore that informality but Tamakazura refused to do so.

There are ten correspondences between them through the whole *Tamakazura* stories. Genji confessed his love for the

first time in the third correspondence. The following was their sixth correspondence, so they (Tamakazura especially) were at the point of making a decision. Genji said to her with a poem: Original

源氏：「<sup>⑧</sup>篝火にたちそふ恋のけぶりこそ世には絶えせぬほのほなりけれ  
<sup>⑨</sup>いつまでとかや。ふすぶるならでも、苦しき下燃えなりけり」…

玉鬘：「<sup>⑩</sup>行方なきそらに消ちてよかがり火の頼りにたぐふ煙とならば…」 (pp.257-258)

Tyler

Genji: "<sup>⑧</sup>With these cressets' smoke another rises, of desire, from such inner flames / As I know now will burn on for as long as this world lasts.  
<sup>⑨</sup>Ah, how long indeed! You do not see me smoking, perhaps, but I smolder so painfully underneath!" …

Tamakazura: "<sup>⑩</sup>Let it then dissolve in the vastness of the sky, if the cressets' smoke / sets your own to smoldering from such other, unseen fires. …" (p.482)

These are, obviously, the poems of courtship and refusal.

⑨Genji added a part of the old poem in *Kokinwakashu* to appeal his strong feelings. ⑩「夏なれば宿にふすぶる蚊遣火のいつまでわが身下燃えにせむ」(古今集・恋一・読人知らず) The translation of the old poem is: "As it is summer, a smudge fire is smoldering at the courtyard and like

that till when should my heart burn underneath?" (Anonymous, *Kokinwakashu* 11 *Koi* [Love] 1, 500)

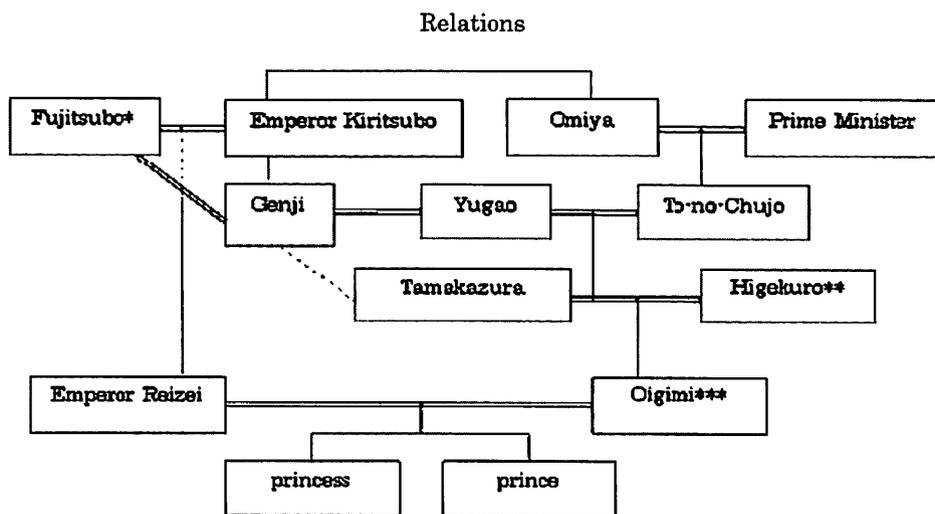
Tyler puts ⑨ the cited poem into a footnote and translates the part which Genji recited from it. In his translation, ⑩ Tamakazura cited "cressets' smoke" from Genji's poem. The "desire" in Genji's poem matches "unseen fires" in Tamakazura's. Also she recited "smolder" from his additional words.

⑩ Tamakazura refused Genji's courtship by taking up the other feature of "flames [fires]" and "smoke". They could "dissolve in the vastness of sky." Countering with the other phases of words is also the convention of *waka* poetry.

Tamakazura's reply was probably benefited more than she had expected by the language of *waka* poetry, which is

"anti-honorific," that is, "the one form of Japanese that is free of the more normal pragmatic elements that reinforce the concept of hierarchy and status."<sup>9)</sup> The prose part through the original is strictly regulated by the honorific usages of the language of Heian period. Tamakazura couldn't talk unreservedly to Genji, because he was one of the rulers and she was under his patronage as a foster daughter. The language of *waka* poetry became "the language of love *par excellence*"<sup>10)</sup> through which they could talk more freely and on equal footing to each other. It worked effectively on the refusal of love. Genji was obliged to withdraw.

The achievement of love between Genji and Tamakazura was handed over to the next generation, the Reizei Emperor, who was thought to be his younger brother



\* Wisteria Court    \*\* Black Beard    \*\*\* Eldest Daughter

but in reality his secret son by his step-mother Fujitsubo [Wisteria Court], and Oigimi (so called the eldest daughter of Tamakazura.) The love over the generations found completion at last and bore fruits in a baby prince and princess many years later. (See the chart.)

## 5. Style

Styles of translated *waka* also have a considerable influence on the plot of *The Tale of Genji*. Poem letters contain a lot of information behind the surface. The number of words in a translated poem is inevitably limited by its form, meaning that in some cases the poem has too many or too few words to convey the meaning of the original *waka* to readers.

Waley puts most of the poems into the prose part of Genji's letters. They are one-line poems and that look like a part of a conversation. His translations are eloquent, so that sometimes the background of the poems comes to the surface and reduces the effect of the poems, because vagueness and ambiguity especially serve as a poetical device to the novel.

Seidensticker tries not to make his translation obscure in terms of the story told in prose, and cuts or ignores some phrases that look unnecessary but nevertheless are important under the

surface. His translation of the prose part thus sacrifices some hidden meanings that emerge between the lines and phrases. Yet his way works well in translation of the poems. He simplifies the poems and makes them into couplet form without concern about syllable count, yet he respects the versified form of the originals, 5-7-5 and 7-7. Thus, his style of translated *waka* contributes to the ambiguity inherent in the poems.

Tyler translates the 31 syllables of *waka* into two-line poems of 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllables. Japanese generally has only one or two letters (sounds) in a syllable, whereas English generally has more, so that Tyler needs to insert other words to fill the requisite number of syllables, which leaves him in danger of sacrificing the ambiguity and saying too much.

## 6. Conclusion

*The Tale of Genji* is a novel containing as many as 795 poems. Poem letters are effectively used to convey thoughts and feelings to the addressee; control emotions; guess another's thoughts, feelings, and educational background; and sometimes defend oneself, as Tamakazura did in Chapter 27, *Kagaribi*.

Accordingly, these letters constitute important dialogues affecting the storyline and the plot of the novel.

Shown in Chapter 4, culturally characteristic poetic devices such as associated words, cited poems, and puns are included in the *waka*, in order to put as much information as possible into the limited number of words. They become a sort of codes not only for the characters who correspond with each other but also for general readers. Both have to break the code to understand the message and follow the plot.

Thus, it is very difficult for readers of different backgrounds such as, especially readers outside Japan, to enjoy the story, because they don't share the culture that lets them make out the codes.

Translators' role is to decipher the codes and then suggest a meaning by selecting words and style or enriching supplemental footnotes. They are, as it were, translating *waka* between cultures as well as languages.

Poem letters including *waka*, especially in *The Tale of Genji*, have functions similar to dialogue in that they involve a code. They show us the ingenious turns of the plot, and the essence of the art of translation as well.

#### Notes

- 1) This article is based on my lecture at The 23 World Congress of Poets Osaka/Japan held by United Poets Laureate International on March 25, 2014.
- 2) This original idea on the art of translation

was first mentioned in my article "Artisan' and 'Artist' – A Personal Aspect to the English Translations of *The Tale of Genji*," 1984, and then fully revised in "Artisan and Artist : A Comparative Study of Translations of *The Tale of Genji*," (I) 2000, (II) 2001, (III) 2002, and (IV) 2004, in *The Journal of Aikoku Gakuen University*.

- 3) Tobita, Shigeo. *Honyaku no Gihou* [The Art and Skills of Translation]. Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1997. 26.
- 4) Komachiya, Teruhiko. "Uta -- Dokuei to Zoutou [Poems -- Alone and Correspondence]." *Kokubunbaku*. [Japanese Literature]. Gakutosha. Dec.1972. 113.
- 5) Murasaki Shikibu. *Genji Monogatari* [*The Tale of Genji*]. Annot. Trans. Abe, Akio. et al. 6 vols. *Shinpen Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshu* [The New Complete Series of Japanese Classics]. Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1996, 1999.

Waley's translation is said to be based on *The Tale of Genji Kogetsusho* annotated by Kitamura, Kigin in the Edo period.

Seidensticker's translation is based on *Genji Monogatari* [*The Tale of Genji*]. Annot. Ed. Yamagishi, Tokubei. 5 vols. *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* [The Series of Japanese Classics]. Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 1962.

Tyler says his translation relies on the editions included in *Shin(pen) Nihon Koten (Bungaku) Zenshu* (published by Shogakukan), *Nihon Koten Shusei* (Shinchosha), and *Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* (Iwanami-shoten).

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- 10) Bowring, 71.

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『源氏物語』の贈答歌：贈答歌が見せてくれるもの  
伏見 親子

#### 【要旨】

『源氏物語』に795首あるといわれる和歌のうち、贈答歌は624首を占める。制作当時の平安朝において、高貴な男女の間では親兄弟以外に対面することはほとんどなく、和歌の遣り取りを介してお互いの人柄、教養、意図を読み取った。本編では、これまでの研究を踏まえ、贈答歌は手紙の形式をとる重要な対話であり、その遣り取りによって物語の筋 (plot) は往々にして新たな展開を見せる、とした上で、Waley, Seidensticker, Tylerの英訳を取り上げ、比較した。

31文字という短い定型詩である和歌は、引き歌、掛詞、縁語、歌枕、といった様々な技法を駆使して内容をできるだけ豊かにする、という特質がある。それらは平安期の社会、制度、文化、言葉に特有なものが多く、異時代・異文化圏の読者

にとっては多重化された裏の意味を持つ一種の暗号であり、それらは解説 (decode) して伝える必要がある。また5-7-5-7-7というスタイルを持つ和歌を異文化圏の読者に示す形も選択する必要がある。

「玉鬘十帖」での源氏と養女玉鬘の贈答歌を取り上げ、翻訳の技法が物語の展開に対する読者の理解に影響を与えていることを、翻訳によって伝わる意味内容と使用された英詩のスタイルの点から、具体例を挙げて検証した。

翻訳者は、いわば異言語と異文化の間で和歌を訳している。特に対話詩である贈答歌は、物語の筋の巧みな展開と同時に、翻訳の技法のエッセンスをわれわれに見せてくれる。

(本稿は、2014年3月25日～29日に大阪国際交流センターで開催された「第23回世界詩人会議大阪・日本大会」での講演の内容に、加筆修正を施したものである。)