

Creativity and Contextual Sensitivity in Classical Japanese Formulae and Homeric Epithet
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Ever since Milman Parry's groundbreaking observations on Homeric epithets, the nature of formulaic language has been the subject of much scholarly controversy. Parry and his followers have argued for the persistence of ornamental epithets, where epithets are used primarily for metrical utility and economy. More recent studies, however, such as those by Austin (1975), Scully (1990), and Friedrich (2007) have demonstrated that many epithets and poetic formulae carry dramatic weight and are particularized to the language that surrounds them. Friedrich further believed that the Homeric epics we have today were written in a time during or after the transition from oral traditions to literacy, citing evidence of a lack of economy that results from the poet's creative utility of conventions and contextual sensitivity. Parallels in the application of formulaic language between the Homeric epics and early Japanese court poetry support Friedrich's theory that the epics are products of a transitional post-orality.

A poetic device known as the *makura-kotoba* ("pillow word(s)") appears in the oldest collection of Classical Japanese poetry, the *Man'yōshū* ("The Myriad Leaves Collection", 8th century C.E.). The *makura-kotoba* is an epithetical phrase that often combines an adjective and a noun and is used very much like its Greek counterpart. The *Man'yōshū* is the earliest collection of poetry written in the Japanese language that remains today. Some poems can be attributed to individual authors, which allow us to date and trace allusions to specific formulae over the centuries, with poems dating from the 4th to the 8th century C.E. Further, ancient commentaries on the *Man'yōshū* refer to now-lost anthologies out of which the whole collection was compiled. It is therefore clear that the imperial court was actively preserving poems in written form. But as the earliest Japanese collection, the *Man'yōshū* features many traditional aspects lost in later anthologies, such as *makura-kotoba*, which are eventually phased out of poetic convention. The *Man'yōshū* is thus without doubt a product of transitional post-orality.

Case studies of two prominent *makura-kotoba* reveal that *makura-kotoba* are both effective literary devices associated with their context, as well as flexible formulae with a high degree of creativity. By cataloguing every instance of a formula and recording its variations, one can immediately notice trends in its usage, such as the location of a formula within a line of verse. For example, the *makura-kotoba akane-sasu* ("madder-shining") is only at the beginning of the line in its adjectival form and appears mid-line at the same location in its adverbial form. The data also show that a poet could be creative and play with the audience's anticipation of the completion of a formula, or even reference a longer formula in abbreviation. *Akane-sasu* ("madder-shining") can be found in a complete 24-syllable formulaic construction paired with a second *makura-kotoba*, *nubatama-no* ("of blackberry"). This pair of *makura-kotoba* can also be found in various other forms alluding to the complete formula. A similar catalogue of epithets modifying Dawn (Eos) within the Homeric epics shows formulaic language operating in the same way, with contextual sensitivity as well as creative flexibility. For example, Dawn often requires the expression of two complex epithets, as in the oft repeated "early-born rosy-fingered Dawn" throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and there are instances where the poet delays the expression of a second epithet, using the audience's anticipation of the completion of the formula for dramatic effect. Further, this phenomenon of epithets associating themselves with other specific epithets is certainly a case of particularization outside the notion of ornamental usage, contrary to Parry's notions of oral-traditional formulaic language.

Thus the numerous parallels between the formulaic language of Homeric epic and classical Japanese poetry strongly suggest a similarity in their composition, as transitional post-orality texts.