

# *Women Characters in Eleventh and Eighteenth-century Japan: Attributions of Their Differences and Similarities—A Comparative Study on Female Characters in the Tale of Genji and Chūshingura*

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore the differences and similarities of fictional female characters in eleventh and eighteenth-century Japan. Namely, this work selects Yūgao in the Tale of Genji and Okaru in Chūshingura to represent the typical females in the eleventh and eighteenth century respectively. Through thoroughly examining their feminine personal distributions, suppressed sexuality, and the instrumental fashion in which males treat them, the traditional Japanese aesthetics and the historical trend of increasing female agency are concluded. By extending the observation made from the comparison between the two compositions to the modern period of Japanese history (1868-present), this research remarks the unchanging cultural aesthetics and improving female agency in gender relations.

**Keywords:** Japanese studies, Aesthetics, Gender relations, Literature

## 1. Introduction

The Tale of Genji, written in the early eleventh century, is the oldest novel known in the world. Being created at the peak of the Heian period, it is also an invaluable historical source of the aristocratic lifestyle under the rule of the Fujiwara clan. Among the female characters who had affairs with the protagonist of chapters 1-44, Hikaru Genji, Yūgao seemed to be one of the first women whom Genji deeply loved, also one of his earliest lovers, representing pure and young amor. Yūgao was born into a noble family and became Tō no Chūjō's concubine when she was still a juvenile. But then Tō no Chūjō's main wife sent her to an ordinary shanty out of jealousy. After an affair with Genji, Lady Rokujō killed her through spirit possession.

On the other hand, Chūshingura<sup>1</sup>, a kabuki play, is a literary account of the historical event of the forty-seven rōnin who avenged their master Asano Naganori's death. It is made later chronologically than the Tale of Genji during the early eighteenth century, also known as the Edo period (Tokugawa period). As a historical kabuki play, Chūshingura represents both traditional Japanese aesthetics and the cultural affiliations of the audiences in the early eighteenth century. Chūshingura shed light on a

<sup>1</sup>Throughout the essay, "Chūshingura" refers to Donald Keene's translation of the scenario of the traditional Japanese Kabuki play Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers, published by Columbia University Press in 1997. Although Chūshingura was also acted out in Ningyo Jōruri, also known as Bunraku, I will not discuss this art form in this essay.

woman character Okaru. She was the wife of a samurai, but also worked in a brothel, ironically referred to as Ichiriki Teahouse. This is especially unusual since women in the samurai class are taught to be respectful and loyal to their husbands by neo-Confucian indoctrination.

By analyzing the Tale of Genji, the oldest novel in Japanese history, and Chūshingura, the kabuki play with traits from both the chōnin class and the samurai class, this research aims to at exploring the developing trend in Japanese history. Especially, aspects relating to gender relations and behaviors of female characters are highlighted, with Yūgao and Okaru deliberately selected as representatives from the two works respectively. There exist differences, which also show a general trend of ideological development of Japanese culture, between the two women considering their distinctive cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, there are similarities between the two. The homogenous characteristics of the two females reflect the root of Japanese aesthetics and can still be observed in more recent Japanese artworks until the present.

## 2. Methodologies

The reason why I chose the two compositions is that I consider them to be the most characteristic of the classical period and early modern period of Japan, respectively. The Tale of Genji and Chūshingura each represent the aristocratic band in the Heian period and samurai society in the Edo period. The aristocrats act as the most influential class in their time, which was also most symbolic of the Heian culture, and samurais played the same role in their time as well. Meanwhile, Chūshingura, as a play written by chōnin and targeted at common audiences, incorporates traits from the chōnin culture and welcomes townsman interpretation, which amplifies certain representational characteristics and lightens others.

The two female characters are also deliberately chosen to reflect the typical fashion in gender relations then. In other words, the two selected females are most aware of the social conventions. They both stayed in a relatively high-class family at a young age, and are thus well educated. On the other hand, after learning the common fashion of “how to be a woman,” Yūgao was sent to an ordinary family and Okaru was sold to a brothel. There, without any financial and social support from their family, they earnestly implemented the principles they learned so as to be better liked and accepted by people around them. The two selected characters are both granted access to the theoretical principles for women at a young age and had the incentive to carry out these principles when they entered a societal environment. Therefore, their behaviors are more representational in their epoch.

## 3. Differences Between YūGao and Okaru

### 3.1. Males’ Attitude: Idealizing or Belittling

Yūgao and Okaru are viewed differently by male characters around them. Yūgao’s appearance and behaviors are idealized, but Okaru’s personality and intelligence are belittled by the male characters in the composition.

In the Tale of Genji, Yūgao was seen as a Japanese Aphrodite by Genji. Symbolism and allusion were used to portray her excellence. Just like what her name Yūgao, which refers to a beautiful but short-lived flower, indicated, her “softness” and “gentleness,” as described by Genji, made her an ideal woman [1]. To illustrate, Yūgao was deliberately connected with remote and romanticized beauty, symbolized by flowers and perfume. To strengthen the feminine ideal, not only was she named after the flower Yūgao, but she also existed handing a “heavily perfumed white fan”[1] to Genji’s attendant. The affinity of her ethereal glamour could best be illustrated by Genji himself’s lyricism: when discussing ideal wives, Genji claimed that he “would love her dearly,”[1] in which “her” referred to a “soft and gentle” woman, metaphorically pointing to Yūgao.

However, in *Chūshingura*, Okaru was belittled. She was described as a beautiful but credulous and love-oriented blunt woman. The story indicates that she is stupid enough for males to deceive her with an obvious lie. For instance, an antagonist Ono Kudayū promised to redeem Okaru from the Ichiriki brothel the first time they met but actually planned to kill her since Okaru overheard his plot.[1] In ecstasy, Okaru ignored any logical fallacies in Kudayū's explanation. Knowing that she peeped into Kudayū's secret plot, Okaru still believed in him, who claimed to her that she could return to her husband after redemption. Okaru's mind was so deeply occupied with the love of her husband that she could not detect even the most obvious conspiracy of Kudayū whom she already knew was the political opponent of both her brother and husband. Both credulous and love-oriented, Okaru was considered an unwise woman who can be cheated on by any man with the excuse of love.

Thus, the description of the two females reflects a different attitude toward women in literary productions of different times. The unique social structures and ideologies are especially notable for this difference as illustrated below in Section IV of this essay.

### **3.2. Gender Relations: The Role Female Plays in Male's Lives**

The stereotypical gender relations in the *Tale of Genji* and *Chūshingura* are different. That is, there are different roles that females played in males' lives.

In the *Tale of Genji*, Yūgao had far less discourse and agency than Genji and acted like a beautiful but egoless object for Genji to appreciate. Genji holds sway in their relationship, and Yūgao is granted no other option than to accept his love and show complete compliance to his favor. Specifically, the time and place they encounter are completely dependent on Genji's choice. Yūgao knows nothing about Genji's family and social status, while Genji investigated Yūgao that he knows almost everything about her. Yūgao cannot contact Genji by any means unless he chooses to come to her. Their relationship breaks when Genji unilaterally worried that paying a visit to Yūgao's home "might give away his identity." [1]. Rooting back to his intentions, one of Genji's major concerns is losing the distance and aloofness — or maybe it's better to use the word "dominance" — in their relationship. Genji's affection towards Yūgao was created by her beauty, and he required her to remain "guarded and constant and act according to the desires of her man." [1]. In this completely unequal relationship, Genji wants an egoless lover and did not expect to get anything other than obedience from Yūgao, whose rights to opine and express are deprived.

On the other hand, in *Chūshingura*, the female character Okaru was tool-like, being instrumentally useful to her husband and brother. Okaru was sold to Ichiriki Teahouse, which was actually a brothel instead of a real teahouse, because her husband needed money to join other samurais for revenge. Okaru herself was also aware of her instrumental use and was willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of love and family responsibility. Indeed, even she herself placed her life far lower in terms of importance than her brother's integrity. When her brother Teraoka Heiemon pulled his sword towards her, the only thing Okaru was concerned about was that their mother "would hate" Heiemon if she died in Heiemon's hand. To protect Heiemon's reputation, Okaru decided to commit suicide, declaring that after she died, Heiemon could use her body for any purpose as long as doing so brings him credit [2]. Okaru, as well as her husband and brother, is aware of her instrumental nature in serving the male.

The direct interaction between males and females in either the *Tale of Genji* or *Chūshingura* suggested different roles of females in males' lives. Namely, Yūgao's egoless beauty is emphasized through the expectation of her being obedient, yet Okaru is valued for instrumentally serving the males.

## 4. Similarities Between YūGao and Okaru

### 4.1. Genealogical Significance: Women as Representation and Component of A Family

The genealogical background was significant in judging women. A woman was often considered the representation as well as a component of her family. Her family background determined her decision and influences the fashion males to treat her. In the Tale of Genji, Genji took Yūgao's family background as a factor even in their barely romantic relationship. In considering whether to continue his clandestine visiting with Yūgao, Genji said to himself, "After all, the difference in status between them was very great." [1]. As a seventeen-year-old underage boy, even in an obsession with Yūgao's beauty, Genji still naturally took Yūgao's family background into account, suggesting the deep entrenchment of this thinking mode.

Likewise, Heiemon, Okaru's brother in Chūshingura, precisely described the importance of family, declaring "there's no disputing family lineage." [2]. Heiemon, though loyal to his previous master, could not participate in the other rōnin's (samurai's) plan for revenge, for even the right to avenge becomes a privilege of samurais from noble families. The status of one's family was implanted in not only women's but also man's minds. Just like what is suggested in the Tale of Genji, the future of women in Chūshingura was also hooked by her family under the judgment of the woman herself and the family-oriented men around her.

### 4.2. Objectified Women: "as Good as Dead"

Women were expected to be quiet, compliant, and emotionless. Their emotions and opinions were ignored, and themselves reduced to an object that satisfies either the bragging right or practical needs of males. This could be better illustrated by a phrase that was originally used to describe Ōboshi Yuranosuke in chapter VII of Chūshingura, "as good as dead." [1]. This phrase indicates satisfaction with lifelessness. Women are expected to be selflessly compliant and deadly silent.

The objectification of women could be seen in males' infidelity and their idiosyncratic requirement of the fidelity of females in an affair. Males treated females as their belongings, whose spirits were ignored or overlooked compared to the will of males themselves. To show this, in the Tale of Genji, the reason why Genji was "utterly enchanted by" Yūgao is her "desire to follow him so earnestly." [1]. Genji ignored Yūgao's uniqueness. Instead, he, together with people around him, treated Yūgao as one of the numerous women to have an affair with. Furthermore, Genji was said to be "regrettable, almost as if something were amiss" for not pursuing multiple love affairs at a time. In other words, although pleased by Yūgao's obedience, Genji was expected to engage in multiple romantic relationships. In their time, women in aristocratic families become numerable parameters to suggest the charm of males, while their existence is reduced to a beautiful object to satisfy males' bragging rights.

This completely unmatchable power of males and total ignorance of feminine humanity is also seen in Chūshingura. In particular, Okaru's brother Heiemon ruthlessly decided to kill Okaru just because he thought Okaru would be killed by his political rival unless he kills her first, which, according to him, is a better way to die. To provide Heiemon's original words, Heiemon, drawing "his sword and slashes" at Okaru, told her that she "can't escape," and commanded, "let me take your life." [2]. In this situation, Okaru's ego was infinitely narrowed to nothingness. Her sacrifice became a mere logical premise of Heiemon's loyalty to his previous lord Enya Hangan who had already been dead.

### 4.3. Femininity Under The Male Gaze

The women characters seem like comely but monotonous symbols under the male gaze. They were young and innocent, their body looked small, delicate, and lovely. In the Tale of Genji, Yūgao existed in a completely childish fashion. From Genji's perspective, Yūgao spoke in an "innocent, childlike way." [1]. Also, her body was light and frail enough that Yamada Koremitsu, Genji's attendant who held her body after her death, described, "she was so small and delicate" that Koremitsu "felt not the least sense of revulsion." [1]. Childishness, delicacy, and frailty all lead to a single conclusion — dependence on males.

In Chūshingura, similar traits could be observed in Okaru's own language. Okaru, either intentionally or unintentionally, spoke ignorantly and timidly. Facing a nine-rung ladder, which was only about 2.5 meters long, she exclaimed, "Oh, I'm afraid! It feels dangerous somehow." [2]. She repetitively mentioned her unease. Later in the play, again, she indicated that she was "afraid," and she felt uncertain and threatened as if being "on a boat." [2]. Either the author depicted her as an innocent young woman out of his ideal or Okaru herself intentionally wanted to behave childishly, she represented a talentless but lovely woman under the male gaze, providing Oxford's definition: "a manner of treating women's bodies as objects to be surveyed, which is associated by feminists with hegemonic masculinity." [3]. In Chūshingura, femininity shows stereotypical delicate and dependent traits in the face of masculinity, the same within the Tale of Genji.

### 4.4. Sexual Connotation: Females Are Considered Baby-Makers

Notably, the two women were largely viewed as mere baby-makers under objectification. The animalistic males looked for "baby factories" with high fidelity and only belongs to them — to make sure the genealogical purity of their offspring. As a result, the women's demureness and virginity were emphasized in both compositions. Genji and Yūgao engaged in a platonic relationship, in which "sexual desire is nonexistent or has been suppressed or sublimated." [4]. Their love belongs to fanciful, daydreaming youth. They fell "into a reverie" and were "lost in fantastic speculations." [1]. Sex was absent in their platonic romanticism.

Likewise, Okaru's virginity was highlighted in her love affairs. At the first sight of Okaru, Ōboshi Yuranosuke, another faithful retainer of Enya Hangan, commented "you make such a fuss anybody would think you were a virgin." [2]. In the Ichiriki brothel of Chūshingura, an innately sex-oriented environment, sexual connotations were reasonably more obvious than that in the Tale of Genji. However, even in such a flirtatious greeting, virginity, instead of sexual ability and beauty, was emphasized.

The sexual elements of the woman were suppressed in both works within the emphasis on either platonic love or virginity.

## 5. Distinctive Cultural Backgrounds Lead to Literary Differences

### 5.1. Ideology: Buddhism Versus Bushido

The dominant philosophical and religious theories were different in Heian and Edo Japan.

On one hand, Buddhism was exercising control over the ideology of the eleventh-century Japanese aristocratic society. Buddhist elements inserted the Tale of Genji, in which daily conversations involved allusion to Buddhism. For example, to express her happiness seeing Genji, a minor character described, "I can await the gracious coming of Amida Buddha with a pure heart unburdened by regrets." [1]. Amida Buddha, also known as the Buddha of Immeasurable Light and Buddha of Limitless Life, is the center of a branch of Buddhism, the Pure Land worship [5]. Pure Land Worship, as well as other Buddhist branches like Zen Buddhism, was internalized in the thinking mode of Heian

Japanese. Furthermore, Yūgao's life was compactly bounded by the Buddhist concept of *mujō*, meaning "impermanence, transience, or mutability." [6]. She was named after the short-lived, sad-fated[1] Yūgao flower, metaphorically foreshadowing her unexpected, supernatural death. Genji's belief in reincarnation also testified to the significance of *mujō*. Believing in the existence of other lives, Genji did not suffer from agony after Yūgao's death. Instead, he just despondently wondered "in what life to come, would he be able to see her again." [1]. The Buddhist ideology provided eleventh-century Japan with the realization of *mujō* and tranquility towards death.

On the other hand, Bushido and neo-Confucianism were more significant in the philosophical systems of the early eighteenth century, in which *Chūshingura* takes place. Instead of believing in the existence of other lives and *mujō*, characters in *Chūshingura* were less Buddhist, yet tended to focus on neo-Confucian etiquettes, which center on human relationships and responsibilities, and, similarly, the Bushido loyalty especially in their current life, in contrary to Buddhists who pursue the happiness in the afterlife. For instance, Okaru was concerned being in the brothel might bring "disgrace to my parents and my husband." [2]. From her idea that she represents her family and is obligated to protect its reputation, we can see that Okaru incorporated the neo-Confucian idea that "the great lifelong duty of a woman is obedience" into her belief, probably under the prescriptions of women in *Onna Daigaku* (Greater Learning for Women) [7]. *Onna Daigaku*, the textbook example of ethics for Japanese women, inherits Zhu Xi's school of neo-Confucianism and "advocates women's obedience to their parents, parents-in-law, husband, and, if widowed, to their eldest son." [8]. Under the influence of *Onna Daigaku* and Bushido, eighteenth-century Japanese women had a sense of belonging and responsibility to their family, and therefore more this-worldly than those in the eleventh century.

## 5.2. Artistic Representation: Entertainment Novel Versus Historical Kabuki Play

Another possible reason for the differences between Yūgao and Okaru is the unique artistic representation of either artwork. The Tale of Genji is an entertainment novel, and *Chūshingura* is a historical kabuki play, composed and acted out by *chōnins*. The preferences and status of the author and the audiences made their expressions different. Kabuki is a "premier form of stage entertainment among the lower social classes." [9]. Therefore, to strengthen the literary conflict and intensity of the plot, more sexual implications, cruder language, and more intense emotional expressions were used in *Chūshingura* than in the Tale of Genji. Besides, the play originated from the historical event of forty-seven *rōnin*, which is a revengeful tragedy with mainly male characters [10], and was written by a male. However, the Tale of Genji was a love story written for entertaining the Japanese court by a woman.

These differences in the art form, audiences, and the identity of the author surely led to the distinctive tone used to describe female characters. The Tale of Genji, written as an entertainment novel for the female aristocrats by a female, focuses on the fragility and innocence of beauty. Obviously, Murasaki Shikibu was enjoying the tangled relationship and raw attraction between man and woman, and her book focuses on romantic, platonic, and somewhat unconventional affairs including elements like underage engagement and polygamy. On the other hand, *Chūshingura*, while written by a male, also targets more general audiences. This supplies the story with a wider range of human relations, including ruler and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend, which is also emphasized in neo-Confucianism, nominated as the *gorin* (the five relationships). Accordingly, less description is cast on merely

dynamics between males and females in *Chūshingura*, and female characters are depicted as relatively flat and static.

### 5.3. Social Structure: Status and The Form of Family

The financial and social statuses of the characters are different, and the structure of their family is different. This led to the differences in gender relations between the two compositions.

In the time of the Tale of Genji, a better word for “families” should be “clan.” An overwhelmingly complicated hierarchic structure was seen in a single aristocratic family. Consanguineous marriage and chaotic polygamous relationships are seen at the time. John Dougill, professor of British Culture at Ryukoku University in Kyoto, concluded, “morality played second fiddle to style. Aesthetics, not ethics, were what mattered.” [11]. At the time, the male could engage in multiple romantic relationships at a time, which might be considered unethical in modern society. Also, since the aristocrats lived on the tribute from shōen, the private estates of powerful local clans [12], their marriage had less explicitly pragmatic meaning but more implicit relationship-forming and reputational significance.

On the contrary, in the Edo period, the family is considered an institution, in which the current head of the family played a dual role: a custodian of the family’s past and the preserver of its future [13]. The firm sense of belonging was interdependent with the wish to inherit the previous generations and to preserve family reputation, name, and property for future generations. When this sense of belonging reflects onto women, just like what Onna Daikaku concludes, a wife “must find no fault with [her husband] but consider the poverty of the household that it has pleased Heaven to give there as the ordering of an unpropitious life.” [14]. In other words, a woman must show total acceptance of the miserable incidents happening to her family and devote herself to ameliorating the misfortune. Correspondingly, Okaru was, and was expected to be, willing to be sold to satisfy her husband’s need for money and be killed to pave the road for her brother.

## 6. The Homogeneity of Fictional Female Characters Reflects Japanese Aesthetics

### 6.1. Aesthetic Vagueness and Suggestions

Vagueness is embedded in traditional Japanese aesthetics [15]. Both compositions reflect this intimacy towards subtle suggestions behind the verbal language. To illustrate, vague symbols of celestial bodies like moons, stars, and the milky way existed very often in both works. In the Tale of Genji, the moon was depicted often as a suggestive description of the mood of the characters. When Genji was “mulling over his dizzying and unexpected proposal,” the moon also “seemed to be hesitating, unwilling or unable to set.” [1]. However, when Genji persuaded Yūgao to go with him, the moon “suddenly went behind a cloud and the morning sky took on an exquisite appearance as it gradually brightened.” [1]. In this composition, the vague symbols provide implications, as well as unspecified suggestions, for the characters’ emotions.

Not only are vague celestial bodies the indicators of the emotions of the characters, but they are also metaphors for the characters themselves. In Chūshingura, the sky was dark under dim moonlight when Okaru was trying to read a letter, which was “far away and the writing indistinct.” [2]. The darkness and indistinctness symbolized the austere and undecided future of Okaru. Besides, Okaru herself also showed appreciation for the hazy and bleak scenery. She admired “the autumn moon.” [2]. Autumn is often linked with death, wane, and emptiness, while the moon carries a feeling of distance, vastness, haziness, and boundlessness.

### 6.2. Appreciation of Perishability

Also, the Japanese have an inherited ability to appreciate perishability. The realization of unescapable death adds a melancholic but passionately sacrificial atmosphere to Japanese aesthetics. This could be best illustrated through the proverbial comparison of samurai and cherry blossoms that drops

dramatically at the height of their strength and beauty [16]. Using the poet Ton'a's language to explain, "It is only after the silk wrapper has frayed at top and bottom, and the mother-of-pearl has fallen from the roller, that a scroll looks beautiful." [17]. Specifically, the plots of the two women characters were somewhat related to death. In the Tale of Genji, the death of Yūgao was described as a "frail and precious" death, a fade of a beautiful young woman [18]. In Chūshingura, when Okaru was captured by Yuranosuke, she was said to be "impatient for death." The two women represent either the appreciation of death or the desire to sacrifice.

## 7. Limitations

Admittedly, my research also has limitations.

First, this research is a comparative and case study, so it might not successfully represent the societal reality in eleventh and eighteenth-century Japan. To avoid this problem, two female characters who lived in the widest range of environments and social classes were chosen to best show a comprehensive image of women at that time.

Second, the sources of my study are fictional, so the author's experiences and dispositions, and the preferences of the audiences of the works might affect the description of female characters in the book. Fictions sometimes twist the truth to make it more entertaining and intriguing. However, this twist could also be considered advantageous, for they are deliberately made to satisfy the inclination of their primary audiences. That is to say, the two female characters, as confidantes in fictional works, were created to match the aesthetic ideals of their time.

Third, the sources of the two compositions are English-translated publications. The deviation that existed through translation might also cause comprehensive inaccuracies. This is also a problem for a large number of non-native historians in general. Improvements could be made by gathering more primary sources, like the audiences' comments on the Tale of Genji and Chūshingura. The interpretations from people there and then are supposedly more accurate than deductions from the twenty-first-century ideology.

## 8. Significance: Feminine Agency in The Historical Trend

My research, exploring gender relations in Japanese history based on the most representational and ideal fictional women figures in literary and artistic works, serves to provide accounts for modern-world gender relations.

What we see in common is infinite suppression of women, objectified women, symbolized and stereotypical weakness of women, and flattened women images as emblems of their families. This situation continued throughout Japanese history. Referring to post-Edo modern Japan, the factory girls in the Meiji period and ideal wives in our modern world had all shown similar characteristics. The Japanese even invented a word to praise these soft, nice, beautiful, quiet, demure, and suppressed women, Yamato Nadeshiko, literally meaning "dianthus from ancient Japan." This word is the personification of "an idealized Japanese woman with all traditional graces," or "the epitome of pure, feminine beauty; poised, decorous, kind, gentle, graceful, humble, patient, virtuous, respectful, benevolent, honest, charitable, [and] faithful." [19-20]. The creation of the notion of Yamato Nadeshiko reflects the Japanese desire for obedient and submissive females long ingrained in their history.

However, from the differences between Yūgao and Okaru, we also see an elevated self-awareness of females. Although Okaru was portrayed as a selfless and idealized lover, she was braver to step out to pursue love than Yūgao. She was no more a beautiful but short-lived flower. In particular, she owned a name and was able to speak up about her own opinions in front of the male. The future society continued this trend. In the Meiji period, the rebellious schoolgirls existed at least in literary

works, and, in the early twentieth century, the Bluestocking, founded by Hiratsuka Raichō, have shown disconformities to the traditionally feminine characteristics. Although history left footprints on the Japanese mindset, thanks to modernization, the status of women is showing a steadily rising trend.

## 9. Conclusion

For this research, I first concluded the differences and similarities between the two female characters Yūgao and Okaru from Chapter IV of the Tale of Genji and Chapter VII of Chūshingura respectively, specifically focusing on traits typically ascribed to females and the way males treat them. To further explore the historical roots of these observations, I attributed the presumed differences to the distinctive cultural backgrounds and the concluded homogeneity of the two to the genetically hardwired fundamental Japanese aesthetics. In a word, the traits of Yūgao and Okaru, as typical fictional female characters, and their relationships with males reflect the universal conception of the woman in their times. Their differences reveal the political and cultural values in different periods in Japan, and their similarities encompass internalized Japanese aesthetic values.

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