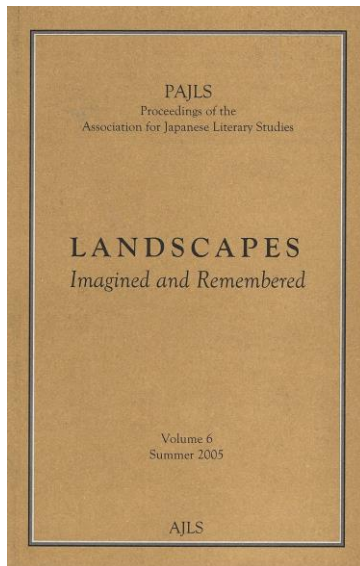


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*Proceedings of the Association for Japanese  
Literary Studies* 6 (2005): 113–120.



*PAJLS* 6:

*Landscapes: Imagined and Remembered.*

Ed. Paul S. Atkins, Davinder L. Bhowmik, and Edward Mack.

## Yosa Buson's Imagined Landscapes

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Representations of landscape, particularly the landscapes of famous places, are central to the haikai of the early modern period. This is mainly a consequence of the strong emphasis Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644-1694) placed on travel and the direct experience of nature; Bashō was renowned for his travel journals and *hokku* 発句 that refer to places famous in classical literature and history. The haikai verses of many of Bashō's followers and their second- and third-generation disciples similarly emphasize landscape and travel. Furthermore, one reason for the proliferation of haikai in the eighteenth century was the fact that so many haikai poets took to the road to seek patronage and proselytize for their genre, as well as to see places made famous in literature of the past and add their poems to the lengthy record of an ongoing tradition. Some scholars have explained this by pointing to the fact that travel became much easier for commoners in the seventeenth century than it ever had been before: they have linked the central place of travel and landscape depictions in haikai and a new identification of the literary patrimony with a sense of the national landscape that emerged as a result.

The role of travel and the depiction of landscape in the haikai of Bashō's most prominent successor, Yosa Buson (1716-1783), is a notable exception to this rule. Buson crisscrossed the country during the early years of his life as he struggled to establish himself professionally, and he made the espousal of a "Return to Bashō" the cornerstone of his poetic style but, surprisingly, his haikai place little importance on travel and personal experience of the natural world. Furthermore, Buson's other career, that of a painter, mediated his representation of landscape. What, then, were the conditions that made travel and landscape such an integral part of haikai for Bashō and his followers? How did Buson make use of travel or references to the land in his poems, and how can the differences be explained? In this paper, I argue that an examination of Buson's use of landscape offers one way to connect his two careers as poet and visual artist. And in a broader sense, Buson's use of landscape also gives us insight into an eighteenth-century view of literature and landscape at a time when a new concept of Japan and its place in the world was starting to emerge.

Almost all haikai refer to landscape, or at least to the natural world, because a basic rule of haikai is that every verse includes a *kigo* 季語 or *kidai* 季題 (a seasonal word or topic), such as the name of a plant, animal, or

meteorological phenomenon. In some cases, the seasonal word refers to a “human event” such as *Hina matsuri* 雛祭り (Girls’ Festival, the third day of the Third Month) or New Year’s Day, but even in these cases, it is common to find the human event juxtaposed with some natural object or phenomenon. My focus here is on verses that describe a broad vista of the natural world seen from the perspective of a single speaker or persona. And when I speak of verses, I refer to *hokku*, the seventeen-syllable form that became the most common one in the *haikai* of the eighteenth century.

### Landscape and travel in early modern *haikai*: The Bashō School

Matsuo Bashō, who is credited with transforming *haikai* into a serious literary genre, believed that personal encounters with the landscapes of places famous in literature and history were essential to developing an authentic poetic voice. He made numerous journeys throughout his lifetime; the very name he chose, *bashō* 芭蕉 (banana tree), reflects his perception of himself as something that the wind blows about, as something without deep roots in any one place. Many of his important works, including *Nozarashi kikō* 野ざらし紀行 (Record of a Weather-beaten Skeleton, compiled 1685-1687), *Oi no kobumi* 笈の小文 (Rucksack Notebook, compiled 1690-1691), and the most famous of all, *Oku no hosomichi* 奥の細道 (Narrow Road to the Deep North, 1702), use travel as their themes. For Bashō, travel was how poets refined their verse; he is quoted as saying, “One cannot have confidence in the poetry of those who do not know some part of the Tōkaidō.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, implicit in Bashō’s often-cited remark that one should “learn about the pine from the pine, and the bamboo from the bamboo”<sup>2</sup> is the notion that poets should actually see with their own eyes the places that would become the topic of their poems.

Bashō’s journeys were important for a number of reasons. For one, their close linkage with pilgrimage had a sacralizing effect on *haikai*, which at this point was suffering from a literary inferiority complex in response to *waka* and *renga* – poetic genres that claimed a longer and more distinguished heritage as a result of their associations with powerful elites. Bashō’s act of recording his experiences in travel journals (*kikōbun* 紀行文) gave *haikai* texts justification to claim a connection with admired travel journals written by members of elite classes of the past, such as *Tosa nikki* 土佐日記 (Tosa Diary, early tenth century) and *Izayoi nikki* 十六夜日記 (Sixteenth Night Diary, late thirteenth century), bringing together the worlds of poetic elegance

<sup>1</sup> *Honchō monzen* (Japanese Selections of Refined Literature, 1706), *Shōmon hairon haibungaku shū*, vol. 10 of *Koten haibungaku taikai*, ed. Ōiso Yoshio and Ōuchi Hatsuo (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1970), 409.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Dohō’s *Sanzōshi* (Three Notebooks), in *Kyoraishō, Sanzōshi, Tabineron*, ed. Ebara Taizō (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), 101.

and ordinary experience. Bashō's journeys also reinforced the notion that haikai had as its object direct, authentic expression, a unique insight derived from a moment of keen observation of a scene "before one's eyes." And, finally, Bashō's journeys were enormously successful marketing tools, as the encounters that he – and later his disciples – made with rural people helped to promote the genre to a larger audience, one that would regard Bashō's teachings as proper and orthodox.

Bashō's success in casting the image of the ideal haikai poet as that of a traveler was made possible by the fact that travel became easier for commoners in the early modern period. The bakufu made the improvement of roads and travel infrastructure a priority, and certain social institutions – like *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 (the system requiring provincial lords to spend alternate years in Edo) – made certain kinds of travel imperative; increasing numbers of commoners were able to benefit commercially from these changes. Despite government pressures to control and limit travel, many commoners were able to circumvent official restrictions one way or another. As Bashō found, pilgrimage offered a particularly useful cover to the would-be early modern tourist. Travel documents for visits to religious sites were easier to obtain than ones reserved for other purposes, and there was very little follow-up that ensured that people actually traveled the way they claimed.

These developments slowly contributed to another change, a shift in ideas that people – that is, commoners – had in their ideas about Japan as a nation. Peter Nosco has pointed out that in the early modern period a new "spatial orientation" began to become more general in Japan – a view of the country that "transcended the boundaries of village, *kuni* (provinces) and sub-region," a view of the nation of Japan as a whole.<sup>3</sup> This view had been shared for centuries by members of the elite classes, but in the seventeenth century it began to be taken up by commoners as well. This change in orientation makes the case of the traveler-poet Bashō particularly interesting: on one hand, the relaxation of restrictions on travel at the time is exactly what enabled him to write his travel journals in the first place; on the other, the content of the journals themselves tended to reinforce the image of a unitary Japan that was accessible to common people, at least through the medium of haikai.<sup>4</sup>

Nosco argues that this is connected to another change in this period – a new conceptualization of Japan as part of an international order. It is common to characterize the spatial orientation of Japan as one of "center and periphery" with two foci – a cultural focus in Kyoto and a political focus in Edo – outside of which radiated circles of *kuni* (provinces) and regions. Beyond this, however, "periphery" in the early modern period extended to

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Nosco, "Spiritual Pilgrimage and the Early Modern Travel Narrative: *Oku no hosomichi*" (paper presented at the Conference on Folk and Travel Culture in Korea and Japan, Hanyang University, 7 June 2003), 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-14.

include Ezo, the Ryukyu Islands, Korea, and China. Even the most distant area included in that periphery, China, was space that had lost its foreignness; it was an idealized place, one that the Japanese only imagined through texts and paintings. As Nosco writes, “China began to function less as someplace ‘real’ and more at the level of metaphor, as an expression of that which was deemed to be mature, wise, rational, and grandiose—a perfect Other against which a new sense of Japaneseness could be constructed.”<sup>5</sup>

### Yosa Buson’s landscapes: Country and community

Nosco’s concept of Japan’s place in an international order is very useful in considering the verse of Bashō’s eighteenth-century successor, Yosa Buson. While Bashō may have contributed to a seventeenth-century notion of Japan as a unitary nation, Buson expresses an eighteenth-century view of the literary landscapes of Japan and China as equally domesticized spaces. Bashō’s haikai travel accounts and those of his disciples familiarized the landscape of classical Japanese literature and brought it into a literary realm to which commoners had equal access. The spread of Confucian-based education helped to make the geography of China familiar to the literate commoners whose numbers continued to grow as a result of favorable economic conditions in the eighteenth century. These two factors alone were extremely significant in shaping Buson’s use of landscape.

Yet another factor was equally significant: the transformation of the landscape of the haikai community itself. In the early part of the eighteenth century, commercially-oriented forms of the genre collectively called *tentori* 点取 (point-scoring haikai) became extremely popular. *Tenja* 点者 (*tentori* markers) set verses called *maeku* 前句, for which their students wrote *tsukeku* 付句 (links). The *tenja* then graded the students with points that could be converted into prizes or cash. Students paid the *tenja* for their services, and the *tenja* frequently awarded points to students with a mind to increase their own popularity and thus raise their profits.<sup>6</sup> Eagerness for profit was a motivating force even among the disciples of the high-minded Bashō; his disciples used their association with the master as a means to attract more students.

This practice of popularity-building was well-established even in Bashō’s time, but when Buson arrived in Edo some forty years after Bashō’s death, it was more or less the norm. There were, however, some poets who deplored this state of affairs, among them members of the group that Buson joined. In the ensuing decades, he and an increasing number of like-minded colleagues set about trying to eradicate what they called the “vulgarity” of the haikai of the day and make the genre a serious form of poetry that was the equal of waka and renga. This group of poets looked to Bashō as their model,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Renku no sekai*, ed. Satō Katsuaki (Tokyo: Shintensha, 1997), 89-90.

and thus their activities are referred to as the Bashō Revival movement (1760-1790). This movement, which included most of the haikai poets of this period who are now part of the canon, including Buson, Katō Kyōtai 加藤晁台 (1732-1792), and Miura Chora 三浦栲良 (1729-1780), called for a return to the ideals of Bashō: elegance, sophistication, and, above all, contempt for profit.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite their espousals of Bashō's ideals, the Revival poets did not necessarily imitate Bashō's example. This was especially true of Buson.

### Buson's imagined landscapes

The difference between Bashō and Buson is evident in Buson's attitude toward travel in his verse. The poet did travel a fair amount during his lifetime; he was born in a village near Osaka, and went to Edo in his late teens to study haikai. Following the death of his teacher, Buson spent about ten years in the Tōhoku area, living off the patronage of painting clients and fellow haikai poets. (This period even included a trip to retrace Bashō's *Oku no hosomichi* journey.) After returning to the Kamigata region, Buson spent three years in Tango province and another two years in Shikoku before settling down permanently in Kyoto. Despite this, Buson wrote remarkably few verses that are related to travel and landscape or make reference to some personal experience of famous places (*meisho* 名所), especially those celebrated in waka (*utamakura* 歌枕) and haikai (*haimakura* 俳枕).

It is natural to assume that Buson would frequently write verses about landscape, for a reason beyond his stated allegiance to Bashō: Buson was a painter, and a *nanga* 南画 painter at that. *Nanga* painters drew on the tradition of Chinese literati landscape painting, in which the balance between the human and natural worlds is tipped decidedly in favor of the latter. Typical *nanga* landscapes show looming mountains, towering rocks, vast expanses of water, and only tiny signs of human activity – people in boats or on the roofs of pavilions. Human beings are depicted, but they are small and insignificant compared to the majestic sweep of nature. Buson's landscape paintings, by contrast, tend to maximize human presence. In general, Buson's landscape paintings display the following characteristics: one, a strong human presence with highly individualized, almost cartoon-character figures populating the scene; and two, a preference for fantasy spaces typically derived from other paintings or, indeed, painting manuals, rather than scenes that he could have actually witnessed. The vast majority of Buson's paintings depict Chinese locations, although, perhaps because of the cheerful friendliness of the people who inhabit them, they do not seem foreign. The world his paintings create is simultaneously free of pretense while at the same time being idealized and remote.

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<sup>7</sup> Konishi Jin'ichi, *Haiku no sekai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1995), 195-197.

Buson's *hokku* also show this paradoxical dynamic of simultaneous familiarization and distancing. Let us look at a few examples of how this happens. The first kind of verse invites the reader into a dreamlike, entirely imaginary world:

高麗船のよらで過行霞かな	
<i>komabune no</i>	the Koguryo ship
<i>yorade sugiyuku</i>	passes without stopping:
<i>kasumi kana</i>	mist <sup>8</sup>

遠浅に兵舟や夏の月	
<i>tōasa ni</i>	in the shoals
<i>tsuwamonobune ya</i>	a military ship:
<i>natsu no tsuki</i>	summer moon <sup>9</sup>

*Komabune* refers to ships from the Korean kingdom of Koguryo. Buson never saw one of these ships – the last one had sailed several hundred years earlier. *Tsuwamonobune* has a similarly “storybook” feel. Buson describes exotic ships that he knew only by their evocative names as moving through liminal, indistinct spaces: not only is the Koguryo ship too far offshore to stop into port, but it also is shrouded in mist. Similarly, the military ship is a threatening presence, and the speaker only sees it in the moonlight, which adds to its mystery and power.

In another type of verse, Buson keeps his reader in the realm of the everyday, but uses contrasting perspectives to create a sense of detachment from it:

不二を見て通る人有年の市	
<i>Fuji o mite</i>	gazing at Mount Fuji
<i>tōru hito ari</i>	there are people passing by:
<i>toshi no ichi</i>	year-end market <sup>10</sup>

In this verse, the speaker is surrounded by shoppers who are busily preparing for the New Year celebration. In the midst of the buying and selling, the speaker sees the majestic shape of Mount Fuji, literally rising above it all in its pristine grandeur. Taking in this sight, he is momentarily able to transcend the ordinary world of commerce and competition.

In a third kind of verse, the gesture is more subtle: a reference to Chinese poetry is used to describe a scene that is utterly ordinary and commonplace, thereby elevating its significance:

<sup>8</sup> *Buson zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Ogata Tsutomu and Morita Ran (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992), 99.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

花茨故郷の路に似たるかな  
*hana ibara*                      brambles in bloom:  
*kokyō no michi ni*            just like the ones  
*nitaru kana*                    on the road in my hometown<sup>11</sup>

夏河を越すうれしさよ手に草履  
*natsugawa o*                    oh, the joy  
*kosu ureshisa yo*              of crossing the summer stream:  
*te ni zōri*                        sandals in hand<sup>12</sup>

In several versions, verse four is given the headnote, “Climbing up that ‘Eastern Hill.’” The “Eastern Hill” is referred to in a poem by the Six Dynasties Chinese poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) entitled “Return Home!” This poem includes the lines, “Climbing the eastern hill, I whistle softly to myself / Gazing at a clear stream, I compose a poem.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, verse five in Buson’s poem refers to a poem written by the Tang Chinese poet Pei Di 裴迪 (716-?) as part of a series of exchanges with Wang Wei 王維 (701?-761) called *Wheel River Anthology*. Pei Di’s lines are, “Stepping on the rocks, again I stand in the shallows / I have not yet had enough of bathing my feet in the waves / The sun sinks and quickly the shore becomes cold / Clouds grow faint and lose their color.”<sup>14</sup>

Something similar happens in this final example:

柳散清水涸れ石処々  
*yanagi chiri*                    willow leaves fallen  
*shimizu kare ishi*            the clear stream, dry  
*tokoro dokoro*                stones, here and there<sup>15</sup>

This verse is the only one that can be directly identified with the trip Buson took to follow the route of Bashō’s *Oku no hosomichi* journey. The willow here is the one in Ashino that became associated first with Saigyō, then with Bashō after he visited it and wrote this verse:

田一枚植えて立ち去る柳かな  
*ta ichimai*                    a whole field  
*uete tachisaru*              was planted before I left  
*yanagi kana*                    willow<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 13.



But Buson views the willow not “just as it is,” but rather through the lens of Chinese poetry. His verse appears in several contexts, but in one the headnote makes this clear:

All of the “Later Red Cliff Rhapsody” is superb, but these lines struck me as particularly good:

Mountains tower, the moon is small;  
the stream retreats, the rocks emerge.

They are like a single bird that breaks away from the flock. Once when I was traveling in Michinoku, I composed this verse while standing below Saigyō’s willow tree.

The “Later Red Cliff Rhapsody” is by the Northern Song Chinese poet Su Shi (1036-1101), who, like Buson, was a painter.<sup>17</sup>

Buson’s landscape verses move in two directions simultaneously. His verses reflect an eighteenth-century view of China as domesticized space. At the same time, the verses look back to the past and to a literary strategy that has more in common with classical modes of dealing with landscapes that are imaginary and idealized than with the stated aims of the Bashō school of depicting things “just as they are.” While this strategy was routine among writers of waka, Buson’s use of it in haikai is notable because it contradicts the ideals of the Bashō school that he and his contemporaries in the Revival movement espoused as the foundation of their practice.

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<sup>16</sup> *Bashō kushū*, ed. Ōtani Tokuzō and Nakamura Shunjō, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 45 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967), 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Buson zenshū*, vol. 4, ed. Ogata Tsutomu and Yamashita Kazumi (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1994), 86.