
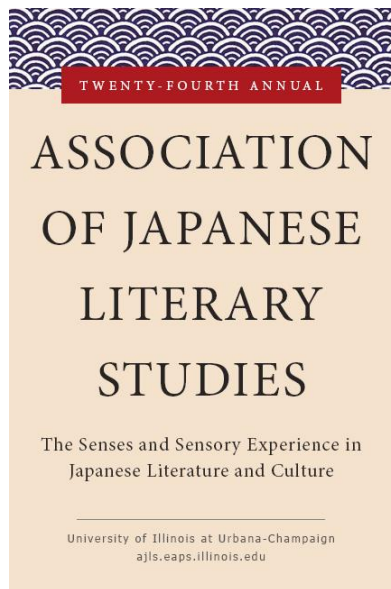


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Jakuzen’s *Hōmon hyakushu*”

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THE BUDDHIST NEGOTIATION WITH THE SENSES IN
JAKUZEN'S *HŌMON HYAKUSHU*

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The *Kana* Preface to the *Kokinshū* (905) is nothing if not a prose paean to the senses, sensibility, and sensitivity. From the opening lines about seeds and leaves, seeing and hearing, to the *rikugi* (or six poetic principles) and the evaluations of Narihira's excess of emotion or Komachi's weak sentimentality, Tsurayuki seemed determined to emphasize the emotional heart over the rational mind. But, what happened to this point of view when Japanese poets began to write *waka* on Buddhist themes? I have addressed this question as it concerns imperial poetry anthologies (*choksenwakashū*) previously in *The Wind from Vulture Peak: The Buddhification of Japanese Waka in the Heian Period*, but here I will turn my attention to this problem in one poem in a different kind of anthology: Priest Jakuzen's *Hōmon hyakushu* (One Hundred *Waka* on the Dharma Gate), a mid-12th century *shakkyō-ka* collection.

The *Hōmon hyakushu* is unique in a number of ways, but two of the most interesting aspects to the work are: (1) it is compiled like a miniature imperial poetry anthology—that is, ten poems each are devoted to a number of the same topics one finds in those anthologies; and (2) following each *waka* is a prose commentary—some short and some quite long—that serves to expand upon or meditate upon the Chinese *dai* or topic (taken from a Buddhist text) as well as Jakuzen's own *waka*. The *waka* that most directly address the desire as it is produced by the senses, sensations, and sensibilities are Jakuzen's forty poems on the four seasons and his ten poems on love. (Other topical categories in this work include congratulatory poems, poems on separation, *jukkai* [poems of complaint], impermanence, and miscellaneous poems.) What is critical here, as it was in my book, is the tension between privileging/foregrounding the senses (as *waka* do) and calming/critiquing the senses (as Buddhism promotes).

While it might not have been Ki no Tsurayuki's stated intention, the opening two sentences of the *Kana* Preface seek to mollify—in my reading—the self (or ego) as it asserts itself in the aesthetic sphere. These two sentences can be compared to the five *skandhas* (or aggregates) in Buddhism. In short, the *skandhas* are defined as the factors that comprise a person, self, or ego (*pudgala*, in Sanskrit). The five *skandhas* are experienced again and again, second after second, in our conscious life. The reproduction of the *skandhas* is what leads us to believe that the self is a solid mental construct. Just to name them so that we have a point of reference, they are usually translated as (1) “form,” (2) “sensation, emotion, or feeling,” (3) “recognition or perception,” (4) “karmic activity or mental formations,” and finally (5) “consciousness.” Because the five *skandhas* are mental processes that constantly reconfirm the existence of a self or ego, they are also what lead us to a realization of the First Noble Truth of Buddhism: *dukkha*, or suffering.

Even though it was most likely not Ki no Tsurayuki's intention to apply the five *skandhas* (if, that is, he knew about them) to his Preface, the first two sentences can

be analyzed in such a way that they correspond to the *skandhas*, and, in turn, to the production of the self. In other words, this is a correspondence, not a causal relationship. What follows are the first two sentences in Laurel Rodd's translation of the Preface along with my commentary in parentheses on their correspondence to the five *skandhas*. English translations of the *skandha* terms are in bold.

“The seeds of Japanese poetry lie in the human heart and grow into leaves of

form

(These can be connected to the body or matter that exists apart from the body.)

feelings

(This is the interplay between the body and some matter—not yet true conscious feeling.)

perceptions

(This is the first interaction between body and mind and produces pleasure, displeasure, or neutrality.)

ten thousand words. Many things happen to the people of this world, and

mental formations

(With mental formation, there are fully developed attachments and aversions—emotions in the common sense of the word.)

all that they think and feel is given expression in description of things they see and hear.”¹

consciousness→

(At this point, the “self” is fully engaged, pursuing its sense of pleasure, displeasure, or neutrality.)

There were poets in early 11th century Japan—long before the *Hōmon hyakushū* was written—who did question the assumption about pursuing—poetically or otherwise—our attachments to nature or love. In the Preface to her *Hosshin wakashū* in 1012, Princess Senshi described a new use for the *waka* form that is not grounded in attachments, but instead grounded in the enlightened words of the Buddha. Senshi clearly believed that *waka* could awaken human beings to Buddhist enlightenment—a belief that had never before been expressed in written form in Japan. With a remarkable combination of logic and feeling, Senshi reinterpreted Tsurayuki's claim that people use *waka* to describe their engagement with the sensual world.

Senshi's answer to this problem was to place the words of the Buddha (that is, the Buddhist texts and sutras known to her) in the *dai* of her *waka* and have those serve as a mediating force for her *waka* that followed. By adding what she believed were the words of the Buddha, Senshi apparently thought that she could derail the constant circularity of the five *skandhas*—even though she might not have used that

¹ Laurel Rasplica Rodd, *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, 1996), 35.

term—by replacing unwholesome perceptions (our feelings for what we see and hear) with wholesome perceptions (the topics of *waka* as filtered through holy texts).

What I have just outlined is a truncated version of a philosophical framework for my argument about Jakuzen's *shakkyō-ka hyakushu*. How might this have applied to the first poem in Jakuzen's anthology? What strategies did Jakuzen employ, either to subvert or to elucidate the relationship between the poet's memorialization of sensitivity and the priest's recognition that privileging the senses as poets have sometimes done unconsciously or uncritically runs counter to the ultimate goals of Buddhist Dharma and Buddhist practice?

Poem number one in the *Hōmon hyakushu* is, unsurprisingly, located among the first ten poems of the spring section since the *hyakushu* is structured like an imperial poetry anthology. Many first poems in the imperial poetry anthologies are not so much about spring as they are about spring's imminent arrival. The same is true for Jakuzen's first poem.²

As dark changes to light, so melting ice becomes water

in spring wind ice
 melt upon melt turns
 to valley water: the heart runs
 clear inside itself:
 free to see
 free to understand

WHEN THE NEW YEAR COMES AGAIN to dwellings deep in the mountains, the voice of the storm changes and morning sun on the peaks becomes peaceful, sunlight opening a window of calm and insight. And when one turns to look into the distant valley whose sounds had stopped, spring, a familiar face, now sending up its waves again—this is what it means to feel *aware*. Delusions are calmed on their own, and when the Dharma Gate floats up into our hearts, the ice of ignorance melting in the breeze of spring, of wisdom— isn't this a moment when we remember that the old flow of life and death becomes the waters of uncreated wisdom? When this heart must become the words Seeing Clearly?³

The overall theme that supports the *dai*, the poem, and the afterword is transformation—an appropriate topic for a season that is about to come into being. In the *dai*, which is from one of the foundational Tendai texts—the *Makashikan* (The Great Calming and Contemplation)—we encounter a simile that likens darkness

² For the original, see Yamamoto Akihiro, *Jakuzen hōmon hyakushu zenshaku* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 2010), 11-13.

³ Translation by the author and Patrick Donnelly. No reproductions without permission.

turning to light with ice becoming water. This sentence comes from the first Lesser Chapter (“Arousing the Great Thought [of Enlightenment]”) of the *Makashikan* in a section that the translators, Dan Stevenson and Neal Donner, have titled “The Four Vows and the Unconstructed Four Noble Truths.” The opening sentence to this section has been translated thus: “...on contemplating the arising of a single moment of thought through the interaction of sense faculty and sense object, one may find that it is, at once, identical with emptiness, identical with provisionality, and identical with the middle.”⁴ The topic of this section from the first Lesser Chapter is about identifying the arising of sensations (or thoughts that arise from sensations) with the three truths (J: *santai*; C: *san-ti*)—in particular, the truth of the middle way, that which transcends emptiness and provisionality—in other words, the truth of enlightenment.⁵

The sentence that immediately precedes the *dai* (and unseen by the reader) reveals that every “affliction” (that is, a mental affliction, or moment or moments of suffering) becomes a gate to meditation, to *dhāranī* (or mantra), and to methods of counteracting the afflictions. So while the simile in the *dai* is, in fact, composed of a natural image partially grounded in the season of spring, it is contained within a much larger argument about the non-dual identity of suffering and enlightenment.

Jakuzen’s *waka* about this topic is clearly positioned both in the season of spring (the first *ku* reads *harukaze ni*) and in one’s heart/mind (the fourth *ku* reads *kokoro no uchi ni*). While the first three *ku* of the poem are based upon spring images of nature, the final two *ku* are about mental perception (as we see in the verb *miru* that can mean both “see” and “understand”). Not only does the speaker see the natural images of wind, ice, and water, but he also understands the kind of clarity that the pure melted water suggests—that is the clarity of enlightenment. In other words, the melting water of enlightenment is none other than the frozen affliction of ice.

In the afterword to the poem number one, Jakuzen elucidates this theme. He affirms that the poem is about a new year—a time of renewal, or transformation. He places the action of the poem in the mountains (unmentioned except in the image of the valley) in order to augment our sense of vast space, and even suggests that this is a place where humans live (noting his reference to the *dwelling*s). The world Jakuzen creates is new (the *toshi* has changed), it is full of sunlight (on the mountain peaks—*mine*), and it is peaceful (*nodokanaru*). He even gives us a window (*mado*) to view this, but it is the *mado* of *shikan*—calm and insight (the calm and insight of the *Makashikan*, and the calm and insight of *śamatha-vipasyana* [*shikan*] meditation). The view of the valley beyond serves to turn the attention of the reader from the calming images of the passing storm, the mountains and the sunlight to an even vaster psychical space—in other words, it is the expansion of calm meditative experience into insight meditative experience.

⁴ Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson, *The Great Calming and Contemplation: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i’s* Mo-Ho Chih-Kuan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 194.

⁵ “This three truths system introduces the middle truth as a third absolute that transcends and unifies the conventional...and ultimate...truths.” Donner and Stevenson, *The Great Calming and Contemplation*, 9.

To keep us within the sphere of court poetry, however, Jakuzen notes that all of this is very moving—*ito awarenari*. But the reason it is moving has shifted subtly from our attachment to such sights to deep feeling, because our delusions have been calmed as the “ice of ignorance” melts in the breeze of spring, the breeze of wisdom (*kan'e*). In the final part of the afterword, Jakuzen introduces an even larger topic: the cessation of *samsāra*, the cessation of life, death, and rebirth. Our awareness of this is contained in the words “uncreated wisdom” (*hosshō*)—that is, wisdom that does not arise from the logic of thought but arises, instead, from an understanding of the ultimate nature of all things (*dharmatā*). In Tendai thought, in particular, *hosshō* has both a defiled and purified aspect. Since Jakuzen refers to the “water of *hosshō*,” we can be certain that he is referring to its purified aspect.

So what can we take away from all of this? Poem number one—the actual *waka* itself—has all the characteristics of Japanese court poetry. The spring wind, the melting water, and the valley (where the water is flowing) are all a part of the court sensibility that supports the *hon'i* of what spring is. The *waka* is a Japanese poetic translation of the Chinese text that precedes it, but once we become aware of the text that surrounds the *dai* in the source text—the *Makashikan*—it becomes obvious that the ontological construct of declaring X to be Y—that is, that the frozen ice of our delusions is none other than the pure waters of enlightenment—casts a bigger epistemological net than a routine courtly poem about spring would ordinarily suggest. The poem is the same, but what it is emblematic of has expanded.

As for Jakuzen's afterwords in general throughout the *Hōmon hyakushū*: they do not serve any singular purpose in the anthology since they can be instructional, contemplative, or emotionally expressive—or a blend of all three in one passage. The afterword to poem number one is a good example of this. In the opening sentence to this particular afterword, Jakuzen is contemplating what a new year brings. Then when the storm changes into the sunlight that opens a window of calm and insight, we get our first glimpse of the instructional nature of the passage. But Jakuzen never abandons the sensual for the purely instructional. He weaves poetic and sensual images of nature—sometimes valorized uncritically by the court poet—into his teachings about the Dharma Gate, wisdom, the meditation of calm and insight, and the true nature of all living things.

In conclusion, while the writing of poetry—and this includes Japanese court poetry—is often sensually specific, Jakuzen is saying that our observance of and reactions to those sensations do not necessarily have to end in attachments to those sensations. Sensations, like ice, can melt into a calm awareness of and insight about the nonduality of experience.