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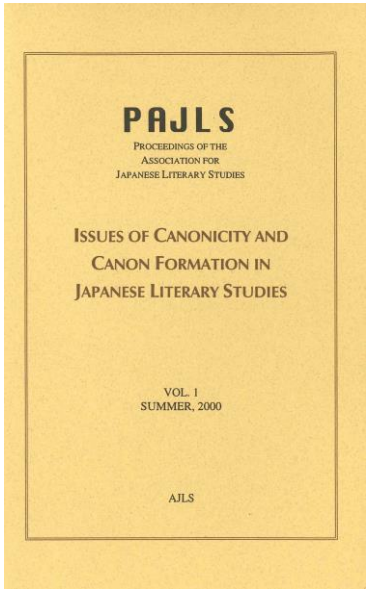

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POETIC ESSENCE (*HON'I*) AS JAPANESE LITERARY CANON

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Today the term "canon" usually refers to authorized texts, particularly those in school curricula, or texts widely perceived to be worthy of interpretation and imitation. Canon in the narrower sense means the standard repertoire, the most highly prized works within a particular genre or institution. By contrast, canon in the broader, more political sense means those texts that are recognized by established or powerful institutions. Historically, Western canon theory can be divided roughly into two approaches. The first is the foundational, which sees a foundation in the text and holds that a canonical text embodies some universal, unchanging, or absolute value. The second approach, generally followed today, is anti-foundational and holds that there is no foundation in the text, that works in a canon reflect the interests of a particular group or society at a particular time. Here the term canon, which implies conflict and change, deliberately replaces and critiques the notions of the classic and of tradition, both of which suggest something unchanging or given. In this view, traditions, like literary classics, are constructed, particularly by dominant communities or institutions. At the same time, in deference to the foundational position, it would be foolish to imply that the texts are empty boxes ready to be filled by their next owners. Each text implies certain moral or aesthetic values and possesses certain formal characteristics that have had a significant impact on the manner in which it has been received.

Taking an antifoundational position, John Guillory has argued that the value of the texts in a canon does not lie in the texts themselves but in the processes and institutions that give the texts value. "Canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission" and its relation to institutions such as the school.[1] Pierre Bourdieu, upon whom Guillory draws for his central thesis, has pointed to two fundamental forms of production: "the

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[1] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 55.

production of the work and the production of the value of the work."[2] A canonical text in this sense is constantly *re*-produced. Canon formation is thus concerned not only with the immediate producers of the work—the authors, the scribes, the printers, etc.—but with those agents and institutions (such as commentators, patrons, temples, schools, museums, publishing houses) that produce or *re*-produce the value of the text and that create the consumers and audiences capable of recognizing and desiring that value. Many of the texts that we now think of as long-standing classics such as the *Man'yōshū*, *Kojiki*, and *Heike monogatari* were in large part canonized in the modern period as a result of a radical configuration of notions of literature, genre, language, and learning that occurred in the late nineteenth century, a process closely related to the emergence of linguistic and cultural nationalism in the Meiji period and later.

Of particular interest here is the fact that the Japanese literary canon over many centuries consisted not only of a body of selected, authoritative texts but of a canon of *hon'i*, or poetic associations, which lay at the heart of the literary canon. Like the textual canon, this canon appeared at first glance to be remarkably stable, to the degree that it has been widely considered *the* tradition. Japanese attitudes toward nature, particularly the four seasons, are basically derived from these *hon'i* or poetic associations, and these attitudes toward nature and the seasons are widely regarded as being the bedrock of Japanese culture as a whole. But like all canons, this one is a constructed tradition, which has been constantly being produced and re-produced by different social communities. I would like to indicate how this canon was constructed, what it consisted of, and some of the ways in which it has been transformed as a consequence of a shift in the transmitters of that canon.[3]

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[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 35.

[3] Basically, there are two kinds of poetic topics. One kind developed through allusive variation (*honkadori*) on a specific foundation or base poem (*honka*). The second kind of poetic topic comes from an array of cultural associations, commonsense observations, or painting conventions, which sometimes derives from the name or phonic associations. For example, Ogurayama (Ogura Mountain, in Saga, across from Arashiyama), is associated with *okurai* or *ogurai* (dusky, shady, faintly dark), as well as with deer, autumn leaves, and the moon. Even a broad category like autumn, or *aki*, had a poetic essence that derived from phonic associations, namely,

From about the tenth century onward, the *waka* poet was frequently expected to compose on fixed topics, each of which had a the *hon'i*, or poetic essence, a cluster of established poetic associations, which the poet was required to compose on. In the late Heian and early Kamakura period, when the notion of the *hon'i* first became widely established, the poetic associations came from mid-Heian texts, most specifically, the *Sandaishū*, *Tales of Ise*, and *The Tale of Genji*, which were commonly recognized as the most appropriate texts for and essential to the composition of a poetic topic. These seasonal topics (as well as topics on famous places, or *meisho*) and their *honi* eventually formed the heart of the cultural and literary landscape, providing the horizon of expectations against which *waka*, *renga*, and *haikai* poets (and in the modern period, *haiku* and *tanka* poets) composed poetry and linked verse.

This process of canonizing poetic topics and their the *hon'i* can be observed most obviously in the imperial anthologies (*chokusenshū*), beginning in particular with the early tenth century *Kokinshū*, and then in the late medieval period, with the *renga* manuals, and then in the Edo period, with *haikai* manuals and anthologies, and then the modern period, with *saijiki*, or seasonal almanacs. Of the twenty volumes of poetry in the *Kokinshū*, the first six volumes are on the four seasons. Here we find roughly thirty seasonal topics (*kidai*), which are to become the canon within the canon. From the time of the *Kokinshū*, in the early tenth century, to the end of the Kamakura period, in the middle of the fourteenth century, the number of seasonal topics in *waka* increases sixfold to over 180 topics, with *waka* poets adding one new seasonal topic after another.

For poets of *renga*, or classical linked verse, which came to the fore in the late medieval period, seasonal topics were equally important. In fact, there was an increase of interest in seasonal words due to the rules of linked verse, which required a seasonal word in the *hokku*, or opening verse, and required that each subsequent verse be identified by season (or non-season). A distinction has to be made here between *kidai*, or seasonal topics, which had a defined cluster of poetic associations, and *kigo*, or seasonal words, which simply identified a word or phenomenon as belonging to a particular season. The *renga* handbooks reveal that the number of seasonal topics in

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the verb *aku*, which means to grow weary of or to grow dissatisfied with one's love life.

renga, which flourished from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, was about 160-180, about the same number as existed in classical *waka*, which *renga* was modeled on, but that the number of seasonal words reached over three hundred.

One of the most important social and political shifts occurred in the seventeenth century, when the transmitters of the literary canon shifted from aristocrats and educated priests, who had dominated the construction and reception of the poetic canon since the eleventh century, to the hands of commoners and samurai, who took up a new genre, *haikai*, which drastically changed the nature of the canon and, by implication, views of nature itself.

With the emergence of *haikai* in the seventeenth century, the number of seasonal words (*kigo*) literally exploded. Shigeyori's *Hanahigusa* (1636), one of the earliest *haikai* handbooks, contains over 590 seasonal words divided by months, and his *Kefukigusa* (1645) contains 950 seasonal words for *haikai* and 550 for orthodox *renga*, listed separately. Kigin's *Yama no i* (Mountain Well, 1648), the earliest *haikai* handbook devoted entirely to seasonal words and a predecessor to the modern *saijiki*, has over 1300 seasonal words; Baisei's *Binsen shū* (1669) includes as many as 2000.

Over time, some of the new seasonal words turned into seasonal topics. *Sakuragawa* (Cherry River, 1674), for example, contains *hokku* composed on such seasonal topics as rice-cake soup (*zōni*, New Year), herring roe (*kazu no ko*, New Year), white bait (*shirauo*, spring), baby octopus (*iidako*, spring), and other commoner topics that had appeared earlier only as seasonal words. In the Edo period, the distinction between *kigo* and *kidai* becomes ambiguous and ultimately indistinguishable. By the end of the Edo period, the combination of seasonal words and seasonal topics had reached appropriately 3,500.

In the early Edo period the seasonal topics took the form of a giant pyramid, which still exists today. At the top were the big five: the little cuckoo (*hototogisu*); the cherry blossoms (*hana*), snow (*yuki*), bright autumn leaves (*momiji*), and the moon (*tsuki*). Each of these represented a season: *hototogisu* summer, *hana* spring, *yuki* winter, *momiji* and *tsuki* autumn. Spreading out from this very narrow peak were the rest of the core of the canon, mainly from mid-Heian poetry—for spring, plum blossoms (*ume*), spring rain (*harusame*), bush warbler (*uguisu*), etc., for summer, mandarin orange blossoms (*hanatachibana*), midsummer rain (*samidare*), fireflies (*hotaru*), cicada (*semi*), for autumn, deer (*shika*), Milky Way (*amanogawa*), quail (*uzura*), autumn wind (*akikaze*), and for winter, winter shower (*shigure*), etc.. Further

down on the pyramid were those seasonal topics added by late Heian and medieval *waka* poets such as plover or sand piper (*chidori*),[4] a winter topic, or *yūgao* (moon flower) and *kakitsubata* (a type of iris) for summer. Below that were the poetic topics added by classical *renga* poets such as the paulownia flower (*kiri no hana*, summer). As we shall see, the shape of this central canon had changed with time, with certain topics rising and others falling, and with the nature of the topics themselves altering.

Occupying the base and the widest area of the seasonal pyramid were the vernacular, non-classical seasonal words that had been added by *haikai* poets. In contrast to the elegant, refined, aristocratic images at the top, the seasonal words at the bottom were taken from everyday commoner life. Some examples from spring include dandelion (*tanpopo*), garlic (*ninniku*), Japanese horseradish (*wasabi*), and cat's love (*neko no koi*). Cat's love (*neko no koi*), one of the most popular topics in Tokugawa *haikai*, reflects the down-to-earth, humorous, and popular nature of the new seasonal topics. Cats apparently go into heat twice a year, in the spring and autumn, but the poetic focus fell on early spring (January and February), when the male cat chased after the female cat, making cries like a baby.

In today's *saijiki*, or seasonal almanacs, the very bottom of the pyramid is occupied by seasonal words from the modern period. Some examples from the summer category are beer, swimming (*oyogi*), camping (*kyampu*), baseball night game (*naitaa*), yachting (*yotto*), sunburn (*hiyake*), sunglasses (*sangurasu*), and short-sleeve shirt (*natsu shattsu*).[5] In the Anglo-European

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[4] An example of a late Heian addition is *chidori*, or plover, which became a major winter topic. In the *Manyōshū*, the *chidori* has no seasonal association and appears on the banks of a river. In the *Kokinshu*, the *chidori* appears in autumn on the seashore (called *hama chidori*, or beach plover), but not as a seasonal topic. However, two poems, particularly one by Ki no Tsurayuki, in the *Shūishū* (1005), the second of the imperial *waka* anthologies, associated the crying of the plover with coldness, loneliness, and long winter nights, which became the *hon'i* of *chidori* and helped transform it into a major winter topic from the early twelfth century onward.

[5] It should be noted that by the seventh century, the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, winter—had expanded, at least in terms of *haikai* handbooks and collections, to include a fifth, New Year (Shinnen), the celebration of the arrival of the new year, at the beginning of spring (First Month, February). Like the other seasons, the New Year's celebration had its own cluster of seasonal topics and words (for

tradition, beer is drunk around the year, but in Japan, cold beer and beer halls have special associations with hot summer nights. Today, a typical *saijiki* (for example, the 1983 *Nihon daisaijiki*, edited by Mizuhara Shūōshi, Katō Shūson, and Yamamoto Kenkichi), will contain as many as five thousand seasonal words divided into the four seasons plus New Year's, which, under the solar or Gregorian calendar, now is separate from spring. Each of the seasons in turn is divided into seven categories: season or climate (*jikō*), heavens (*tenmon*), earth (*chiri*), humanity (*seikatsu*), annual observances (*gyōji*), animals (*dōbutsu*), and plants (*shokubutsu*). Of the over five thousand seasonal words that exist today, roughly five hundred represent the canon, the knowledge of which is necessary to be poetically literate, to be able to appreciate or compose Japanese poetry.

Of particular interest here is the manner in which the central canon expanded. For example, in the tenth century, in the *Kokinshū*, there were only two flowers among the seasonal topics for summer: *hanatachibana* 花橘 (mandarin orange blossoms), associated with memory, and *unohana* 卯の花 (deutzia flower). By the early thirteen century, however, the summer repertoire of flowers and plants had expanded significantly to include *nadeshiko* 撫子 (pinks, also called *tokonatsu*),[6] *ayame* 菖蒲 (wild iris),[7] *makomo* 真菰 (water oat, also known as *hanakatsumi*), and *yūgao* 夕顔 (moon flower, often translated as evening face).[8] In the Heian period, *yūgao* was considered to be a lowly plant, a simple gourd, not suitable for either poetry or the garden, but by the time of the *Shinkokinshū*, it had become a significant summer topic primarily as a result of its appearance in *The Tale of Genji*.

Examples of flowers added to the summer canon in the late medieval period, largely as a result of *renga* poets, are *kiri no hana* 桐の花 (paulownia flower) and *kakitsubata* 杜若 (blue flag, or rabbit-ear iris, often confused with *ayame* or *shōbu*, the Japanese iris). From the time of the *Shinkokinshū*,

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example, *manzai*, New Year's dancers), many of which were *kigo* at the bottom of the pyramid.

[6] *Nadeshiko* (literally petted child), which appears in *Kokinshū* in both summer and autumn, becomes associated with late summer from this time onward.

[7] In Tango no sekku, the fifth of the Fifth Month, the purple *ayame* grass was placed on the eaves of the house to keep away evil.

[8] The *Roppyakuban utaawase* (1194), an early Kamakura poetry contest judged by Fujiwara Shunzei, includes twelve yūgao poems, which are listed as summer topics.

classical poets began to write about the paulownia leaf (*kiri no ha*), which was noted for its size and weight and which they treated as an autumn topic, but it was *renga* poets in the Muromachi period who first turned their attention to the light lavender paulownia flowers, which they made a summer topic.[9] Ariwara no Narihira's famous acrostic poem, which weaves the syllables of *kakitsubata* into the beginning of each line of a travel poem, appears in the *Kokinshū* and the *Ise monogatari*, but *kakitsubata* was not treated as a summer topic until the advent of *renga* and *haikai*.[10] Its popularity in the late medieval period was such that *kakitsubata* even became a Noh play.[11] By the Edo period, it had become a major theme in Japanese art, as exemplified by the Ogata Kōrin's noted screen (Kakitsubata zubyōbu) on the irises and the Eight Bridges (Yatsuhashi) at Mikawa.

Significantly, there was an even greater explosion of summer flowers in the Edo period as a result of *haikai*. The new summer flowers, which are too numerous to list here, included the hydrangea (*ajisai* 紫陽花),[12] multiflora

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[9] In *Makura no sōshi* (Section 37), Sei Shōnagon praises the paulownia flowers but regards the paulownia leaves as ugly.

[10] *Kakitsubata* appears in the *Man'yōshū* and in some of the imperial *waka* anthologies, but in very limited numbers, and is often included in the spring section. The *Fubokushō* (1310) includes 27 poems on *kakitsubata* in the spring section. It is not until the advent of the *renga* handbooks in the late medieval period that it is firmly established as a summer topic.

[11] The *Renju gappeki shū* (1476), a 15th century *renga* handbook, lists the lexical associations of *kakitsubata* as "rubbing dye on a robe, lavender (*murasaki*), pond (*ike*), swamp (*namamizu*), and Eight Bridges (*yatsuhashi*)," words representing the accumulation of associations from the time of the *Manyōshū*.

[12] *Ajisai* appears in two poems in the *Man'yōshū*, but it does not appear at all in the twenty-one imperial anthologies or in the *Genji* or *Makura no sōshi*. It becomes a mid-summer topic with *haikai*, but its real popularity grows in the modern period, with tanka and haiku.

(rose) flower (*ibara no hana* 茨の花),[13] the lily (*yuri* 百合),[14] the lotus (*hasu* 蓮),[15] the sunflower (*himawari* 向日葵), and the peony (*botan* 牡丹).[16] Many of these became extremely popular in the modern period among both tanka and haiku poets. All of these plants had been part of everyday life, and some appear as early as the *Manyōshū*, but they had not been considered appropriate for classical or medieval *waka*. The peony, for example, was highly prized in China, where it was referred to as the "king of flowers" (*kaō*), but in Japan it did not become the object of widespread admiration until the Edo period. It was in fact Buson, composing in the late 18th century, who finally put the peony on the poetic map by composing as many as twenty-three *haiku* on this topic.[17] One of his most notable compositions is *botan chirite uchikasanarinu ni sanpen,* "the peony petals scatter, piling up, two, then three" (1771), which captures the sensation of the fading of the large, round petals. Buson was a Nanga painter, and the peony probably reflected Buson's interest in Chinese literati (*bunjin*) culture. The peony blooms from the end of April to the beginning of May (in the solar calen-

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[13] Buson was also the poet who transformed *ibara no hana*, the delicate flower of the wild thorned rose, into a symbol of nostalgia for his lost home: *hanaibara kokyō no michi ni nitaru kana*, "blossoms of the thorned rose—just like the street in my old village" (1774). Other hokku on *ibara* by Buson are *urehitsutsu oka ni noboreba hanaibara*.

[14] There were very few poems composed on *oniyuri*, demon lily, in either *waka* or *renga*, as a result of its association with demon. Some *Manyōshū* and medieval *waka* were composed on *himeyuri*, princess lily.

[15] *Waka* was composed on the lotus leaf, a major symbol in the Buddhist world, but not on its flower, which was prized for its fragrance and its ability to remain unsoiled and pure.

[16] The other summer flowers that emerge in the Edo period are *shakuyaku* (herbaceous peony, which resembles botan but blooms later, in June), *gubijinsō* (field or corn poppy), *kaki no hana* (Japanese persimmon flower, mid-summer), *nemu no hana* (or *nebu no hana*, fuzzy, delicate flower of silk tree, which appears in *Manyōshū*), *ibara no hana* (flower of thorny shrub, early summer), etc. Spring flowers that emerged in the Edo period include dandilion (*tanpopo*) and narcissus (*suisen*).

[17] This includes twelve consecutive *hokku* in Buson's *Shinhanatsumi*, including *kinbyō no kakuyaku toshite botan kana.*

dar), and in this regard it should be a spring topic, but its flamboyant image made Edo *haikai* poets think of summer.[18]

A radical movement in the canon occurred in the seventeenth century as a result of the shift from aristocratic/priestly poets to commoner poets and from *waka/renga* to *haikai*.[19] The consequence was not only a dramatic expansion in the number of new poetic topics reflecting contemporary commoner interests but a striking transformation in the poetic associations of the central canon. Most significantly, from the seventeenth century, there was a discernible shift from aural to visual emphasis, from the voice to physical appearance or motion.

Almost all the animals, birds, and insects (such as the *suzumushi*) that became seasonal topics in the Heian canon are admired for their voice, especially for their singing. Nature is literally in harmony with the human world, with human emotions. It is no accident that the kana preface to the *Kokinshū* rhetorically asks, "Of all living creatures, which does not compose poetry?" (*iki to shi ikeru mono izure ka uta wo yomazarikeru*). Poetic convention dictated that the poet wait impatiently for the first song of the *uguisu*, or bush warbler, whose song marked the arrival of spring. Part of the poetic associations of the *kari*, the wild geese of autumn, was visual, in the line of geese flying across the sky, but, as with other living creatures, Heian

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[18] The peony plant had been used for medicine, but it did not appear in the *Manyōshū* or *Kokinshū*. On the few occasions that it appeared in medieval *waka*, it appeared under such names as *fukamigusa*, deep grass, and *hatsukagusa*, twentieth grass, which gave it a soft elegant sound: it was not called *botan* until the Edo period. In the medieval period there was in fact considerable confusion about whether the peony was a spring or a summer flower. The *Shihōshō*, a *renga* handbook, lists it as spring, but from *Renga shinshiki* onward it is listed by *renga* manuals as summer.

[19] In the *Manyōshū*, *momiji*, one of the most important autumn topics, meant yellow leaves. In Princess Nukada's famous poem on the debate between autumn and spring, it is the beauty of the yellow leaves (*momichi*) that enables autumn to win out over spring. By the Heian period, however, *momiji* means bright red leaves and is frequently compared to *nishiki* (brocade), covering the surface of the river. In the seventeenth century, in Kitamura Kigin's *Yama no i*, which is the predecessor for today's *saijiki*, the leaves of the *momiji* come specifically to mean the leaves of the maple (*kaede*), which remains a central conception today.

poets focused on the voice of the *kari*, which was often referred to as *kari-gane*, literally the "voice of the wild geese."

The poetic essence of love in classical poetry was frustration at love, especially a sense of betrayal, loss, resentment, loneliness, or unrequited desire —the same kinds of emotions that infuse a whole range of living creatures. The autumn deer was admired for its mournful cries and is found longing for its wife (represented by bush clover), the voice of the wild duck (*kamo*), a major seasonal topic for winter, was thought to express its lonely, homesick, and uncertain state, the summer fireflies (*hotaru*) were believed to reveal burning, hidden love.[20] Indeed, one of the trends as we move from *Kokinshū* to *Shinkokinshū* is yet further internalization of nature. Matsuo Basho's famous frog poem, written at the end of the seventeenth century, *furuike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto*, "an ancient pond, the frog leaps in, the sound of water," was startling at the time since it went against the classical the *hon'i*, which was the beautiful, singing voice of the frog, and drew attention to its physical movement.[21] Classical poets focused on the voice of the *hototogisu*, which marked the arrival of summer. *Renga shihōshō*, a *renga* handbook on the *hon'i*, notes: "Though the *hototogisu* may sing noisily, one must compose poetry in such a way that one hears it only on occasion, so that it sings rarely, and so that one waits impatiently for to hear its song." By contrast, seventeenth century *haikai* poets turned their attention to the rapid flight of the *hototogisu*, which became one of its new poetic essences. A

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[20] The deer is found longing for its wife or mate, represented by the bush clover (*hagi*). The mating season of the deer is apparently August-September (7th-8th Month), which coincides with the blooming of the bush clover. Fireflies (*hotaru*, mid-summer), one of the major insects of summer (along with *semi*, cicada), does not appear as a seasonal topic in the *Kokinshū*, but it appears in the love volumes of the *Kokinshū* as a metaphor for burning, hidden love. In the medieval period, *hotaru* was associated with words such as "to burn" (*moyu*), "to hide in sleeve" (*sode ni tsutsumu*), thoughts of desire (*omohi*), star (*hoshi*), fishing lamp (*isariba*), to gather (*atsumu*).

[21] In fact, almost everything in Basho's frog poem represents an inversion of the poetic essence. Significantly, however, Basho observes one key aspect of the poetic essence, which is the association of the frog with spring. The poem captures the arrival of spring, through a juxtaposition of the ancient pond, which suggests winter and hibernation, and the sudden movement of the frog.

noted example by Basho in *Oi no kobumi* (Backpack Notes, 1688) was *hototogisu kieyuku kata ya shima hitotsu*: "a cuckoo—where it disappears/a single island." The speaker implicitly hears the *hototogisu*, but by the time he looks up, it has disappeared, replaced by a single island.[22]

This kind of shift from aural to visual, from internal to external, from love to non-love, is true of a broad range of canonized seasonal topics and reflects the emergence of the *keiki* (landscape) style in late seventeenth century *haikai* and a larger shift of focus toward immediate, physical reality in Edo commoner literature. In contrast to the medieval *waka* and *renga* poets, who looked back to the past, to classical precedent, or to other worlds, and who worked within an aristocratic framework of elegance and refinement, *haikai* poets from the seventeenth century, who were largely of urban commoner background, looked at the immediate, surrounding world and sought beauty in the everyday, mundane, even vulgar aspects of life. This stress on immediate observation became even more pronounced in the modern period.

In short, we have two fundamental movements: expansion of the canon and the reconfiguration of the heart of the canon, with a particularly dramatic shift occurring in the seventeenth century. Interestingly, it was the recanonization process rather than the expansion of the canon that interested *haikai* poets the most. While the number of seasonal words grew at an astounding pace in the Edo period, the actual number of seasonal topics remained limited. *Kefukigusa*, a Teimon *haikai* handbook published in 1645, which contains 950 seasonal words for *haikai* and 550 for orthodox *renga*, but there are only 166 seasonal topics, which are basically those found in classical poetry. The spring section of *Enokoshū* (Puppy Collection, 1633), a noted Teimon *haikai* collection, consists almost entirely of established topics such as plum blossom (*ume*), remaining snow (*zansetsu*), true bud (*ko no me*), and spring grass (*shunsō*).

Indeed, late seventeenth century *haikai* poets such as Basho divided poetic topics into what they called "vertical topics" (*tate no dai*), which they

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[22] Another noted Basho poem on hototogisu in *Oku no hosomichi* was *no o yoko ni uma hikimuke yo hototogisu*, in which the traveler attempts to follow the flight of the hototogisu as it cuts across the field. Another famous example by Buson is *hototogisu Heianjō wo sujichigai ni*, The cuckoo, passing diagonally over the streets of the Capital.

considered the "province of classical poets," and "horizontal topics" (*yoko no dai*), which was the "province of *haikai* poets." Unlike classical poets, who could not leave their own province, *haikai* poets were free to explore either province. Ironically, *haikai* poets ultimately spent more time in the "province of classical poets," gravitating toward classical topics at the top of the seasonal pyramid such as the moon, snow, cherry blossoms, and the cuckoo, which offered a rich poetic matrix around which the poet could build the entire *hokku* and which were no doubt easier to parody and deconstruct than those at the bottom of the pyramid. The traditional seasonal topic contained a rich fictional world communally shared by poet and audience that could not be easily duplicated by new seasonal words or topics.

On very rare occasions, a seasonal topic might be decanonized. One example, *kinuta* (fulling blocks), the mallets for the pounding of cloth, was thought to make a lonely, desolate sound and became a major seasonal topic for autumn. But today, with the advent of washing machines and dry cleaners there are no fulling blocks to be seen or heard. The understanding of the poetic associations remains important for the appreciation of earlier poetry but not for its composition.

In conclusion, the canonization process as it relates to seasonal topics can be compared to the rings on the inside of a tree trunk. The inner most circles, which were created by Heian and then medieval poets, are the oldest and bear the longest history; these inner most circles are essentially fictional, imaginary, and often very romantic. By contrast, the outer circles, added by Edo *haikai* poets and then by modern haiku poets, are rooted in contemporary popular culture and often are of limited poetic interest. Many of those on the circumference come and go, never to be seen again. The constant addition of new rings, however, was critical in bringing new life and stimulus to the tree. At the same time, the inner circles, while remaining the most stable and seeming to form an unchanging tradition, were significantly revised over time, preventing the heart of the tree from turning into a fossil. For these reasons this tree, with its many circles, continues to live today. Most importantly, nature and the seasons were never a given, an unchanging physical landscape, but rather the foundation for constant cultural construction and reproduction.