Is Poetry a Sin?
-Honjisuijaku and Buddhism versus poetry -

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Classical Japanese poetry was composed to a large degree by poets who can be identified as Buddhist priests or hermits. A large part of classical Japanese poetry was thus produced by authors who had chosen a religious over a secular life. Among such poet-priests were Jien (1155–1225) who is counted as one of the most prolific, and Saigyō (1118–1190) and Bashō (1644–1694), who belong to the best of Japanese poets. Such poet-priests had in common the combination of religious calling and a genuine interest in the pursuit of poetry. This combination of religion and poetry produced in Japanese verse some very characteristic religio-aesthetic qualities and moods, including a deep feeling for nature, especially for its transient, fragile aspects and an abnegation of self. Where did this relationship between poetry and religion come from, and how did it come about? The question seems as yet unanswered.

The purpose of this study is to offer a modest contribution toward solving this complex problem. I shall attempt to clarify this relationship by investigating the problem of Japanese Buddhists' varying views of poetry as being either sinful or in some degree compatible with their religion. This investigation will focus on the relationship of poetry to Shintō and Buddhism and, in particular, on the theory generally referred to as honjisuijaku, which permitted a synthesis of Shintōism and Buddhism.

My point of departure is a hypothesis; namely, that at the end of the Heian period (794-1185) and in the chūsei or middle ages (1185-1573), when the problem of the pros and cons of poetry in Buddhism became acute, poetry was generally regarded as a matter of Shintōism.1 The basis for this hypothesis is the awareness demonstrated by some poets, who will be discussed below, that the fate of poetry in the context of Buddhism depended on, among other things, the relationship between the Shinto deities and the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas.

From the time Buddhism entered Japan in 538 until the foundation of the esoteric sects of Tendai in 805 and Shingon in 806, the Buddhist priesthood seemed generally unconcerned with poetry and other native art forms which had probably developed out of archaic Shinto practices. As far as we know, the priesthood in the Buddhist monasteries of Nara engaged mainly in doctrine and scholarship. While poetry subsisted, as evidenced by the Manyōshū; a collection of poetry compiled in the mid-eighth century, it was predominantly related to Shinto practices such as enthronement, imperial celebrations, enshrinement, travel, love, etc. Notable exceptions were the poems of En no Gyōja (Nara Period 710-784), who founded the Shugen or Yamabushi sect, and those of the priest Gyōgi (670-749). However, these and other exceptions represent early examples of a synthesis of Shinto and Buddhism.2

In general, however, the practice of poetry had few followers from among the Nara Period (710-784) priesthood because of what seemed to be the lesser esteem in which the Shinto deities were held vis-à-vis the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The Shinto deities were considered to belong to the world, a world of sin from which Buddhism offered deliverance. In 763, for instance, the deity of Tado revealed in an oracle his desire to es-
cape from godhood to become a Buddha. In order to fulfill his wish, a temple (jingūji) was erected in the shrine precincts. Similarly, the deity Wakasahiko revealed his wish to abandon godhood and to embrace Buddhism. As long as this desire was not fulfilled by the erection of a jingūji (shrine temple), Wakasahiko continued to cause calamities in the land. A great number of similar stories reveal that according to Buddhism, the Shinto deities were considered to belong to the world of sin, and their desire for Buddhahood reflected a laudable desire for deliverance. Since poetry in the Shinto tradition was enmeshed, like the Shinto deities themselves, in the world, the Buddhist priesthood eschewed it as worldly and therefore sinful. Given this relationship, poetry as a Shinto art form could only survive in a Shinto context.

Another reason why poetry was held in low esteem by the Buddhist priesthood of the Nara Period may be found in the inadequacy of the Japanese language as a tool for Buddhist diction. The native language at that time was not yet ready to express Buddhist thoughts and feelings. Chinese was the predominant language used in Buddhist scholarship of the Nara period and in certain schools of subsequent periods as well.

The inferior status of the Shinto deities vis-à-vis the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and the inadequacy of the language were probably the determining factors in the rejection of poetry by certain Buddhist sects and leaders even while poetry was in the process of being accepted by other Buddhist schools. In certain Jōdō (Pure Land) schools, anything that interfered with the practice of invoking Amida's name (nembutsu) was rejected. Yoshishige no Yasutane (Jakushin) (?-1002) was a well-known poet who nevertheless rejected poetry in his later life. The Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku Ki (Japanese Stories of People Who Entered Paradise), attributed to Yoshishige no Yasutane, includes no examples of people who attained Buddhahood by any means other than nembutsu. The Ichigon Hōdan, another Pure Land text of the latter Kamakura Period (1185-1333), stresses the necessity of abandoning everything including the arts in order to accomplish the complete detachment from all worldly matters which was a prerequisite for entering the Land of Bliss of the Buddha Amida. Still within the Pure Land tradition, the High Priest Eshin (Genshin) (942-1017) at first prohibited all practice of poetry by the Tendai priesthood on Mt. Hiei (Yokawa). Eshin, like many others, proscribed poetry as being useless, even harmful, for a monk's contemplative life and desire for enlightenment.

A rejection of poetry can also be seen in certain Zen traditions. According to a commentary about the writings of Daruma (Bodhidharma) (d. 534?), the use of language should be avoided in Zen. In the Sōtō sect in particular, language was considered sinful because it emanated from intellectual activities and human consciousness, all of which had to be avoided in order to attain enlightenment. Language was acceptable only, it seems, as a device against language (e. g., kōan parables). The Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism had stronger relations with literature (e. g., Gozan Bungaku) probably because of its links with esoteric Tendai Buddhism (Zenkyō Itchi). But also in this tradition, language was often used against language (e. g., the paradox). The poetry of the Zen priest Ikkyū (1394-1481) provides a good example of the paradox as used in Zen poetry:

Not knowing
Means to know
What cannot be said
Or explained?
Personal criticisms of the poet-priests by other priests, recorded in medieval texts, further clarify the view of poetry as sinful and the total rejection of it by certain Buddhist teachers who condemned it as a testimony to worldly attachments. They often criticized the poet-priests as untruthful. According to the *Seia Shô* (Comments of a Frog in the Well) Priest Mongaku (late Heian, beginning of Kamakura Period) condemned Saigyö, claiming that his Buddhist discipline was shallow and that his travel poems were but lies. Mongaku went so far as to express a desire to smash Saigyö's head were he ever to meet him. Mongaku said of Saigyö that a man committed to the vow of priesthood should not divert his attention from Buddhist discipline and that those who dedicated themselves to the arts and to roaming about the country reciting lyrical poetry were hateful priests.

Since poetry was considered controversial in certain Buddhist circles, the question of whether or not poetry was a sin seems to have tormented the minds of many poets, especially toward the end of the Heian and the beginning of the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Takasue's daughter, author of the diary *Sarashina Nikki*, roughly covering the years 1020 to 1059, was accused and accused herself of sinning through her passionate love for tales and poetry. For instance, on a pilgrimage to Kiyomizudera Temple she dreamt of a priest who admonished her, "Engaged in senseless trifling, you are risking your future salvation." Toward the end of her diary she blames herself: "If only I had not given myself over to tales and poems since my younger days but spent my time in religious devotions, I should have been spared this misery." She tried hard, according to her own account, to detach herself from her romantic interests and attachments. It is quite possible that she wrote the diary as a confession of her passion for literature.

Similar examples revealing concern about the sinfulness of poetry are quite numerous. According to his *Jika Awase* (Personal Collection of Poems), the poet Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), in remorse over the numerous poems he had composed, wrote the following confession:

> Since my childhood long ago until now, when I have reached old age, the poems I have composed now and then could fill a box. They constitute sins of the mouth and moreover serve no good purpose for my afterlife. Because of this, now, be it ever so little, I wish to wash off my sins and accumulate virtue...

So saying, Teika selected forty-eight poems symbolizing the Forty-Eight Vows of the Buddha Amida and dedicated them to Amida.

In so doing, Fujiwara no Teika was probably following the example of the Chinese poet of the T'ang dynasty, Po Chü-i, who in 835 gathered his literary works and presented them to the Tung-Lin Monastery in Lu-shan. The following year he presented another collection to the Sheng-shan Monastery in Lo-yang. His reasons were twofold: One was that he regarded poetry as an attachment to the world and life and therefore a sin; the other was that he believed that poetry could in fact become a tool for Buddhist teachings:

> May the worldly writings of my present life, with all their excessive words and ornate phrases, serve in future ages as the inspiration of hymns of praise extolling the Buddha's teachings, and turn the Wheel of the Law forever.

Po Chü-i's expression, "excessive words and ornate phrases," *kyōgen kigyo* in Japanese, was extensively used by Japanese poets and critics to denote the sinfulness of poetry. The term *kyōgen kigyo* is mentioned in the prefaces of many works of literature.
in middle ages. Representing a Japanese interpretation of kyōgen kigyo, Priest Muju (1226-1312) the author of the Saseki Shū comments in the Preface:

Waka is included in the category of the sins committed by the mouth and thus called kyōgen kigyo, because one may be overly attached to poetry and because being carried away by superficial feelings, one may color a poem for no good reason and decorate it with empty words.¹³

Yoshishige no Yasutane, a poet who took the vows under the name of Jakushin, was influenced by the kyōgen kigyo statement of Po Chü-i when he wrote the following confession about his poetry:

What is more, in addition, in writing poetry at the sight of springtime blossoms I have used the word snow to designate the blossoms, and when I composed poetry in front of the bamboo fences in autumn, I distorted the chrysanthemums by calling them gold. Unable to escape feelings of guilt for having written such lies, how can I escape the sins committed through the excess of such ornate language?¹⁴ So saying, Jakushin secluded himself at Yokawa on Mt. Hiei to dedicate himself solely to Amida Buddhism. There he wrote the Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku Ki.¹⁵

Beginning with the end of the Heian Period (794–1185), when awareness of the possible sinfulness of poetry increased, the discussion scarcely turned on the question of whether or not poetry was, in itself, a sin. It was, at that time, much more a question of what kind of poetry was acceptable to Buddhisms, and what kind of poetry would constitute sins of mouth. Its acceptance was subject to strict conditions, and criticism was directed against poetry which did not meet those conditions. For instance, the author of the Nomori no Kagami, a critical work on poetry, condemned the poet Kyōgoku Tamekane (1254–1332) to hell for his poems, stating: "There is nothing as important as the way of poetry. With the slightest falsehood of heart it becomes a sin, and it is impossible to evade divine punishment."¹⁶ It was the absence of Buddhist elements in Tamekane’s poetry which was under attack in the Nomori no Kagami. 

"That nobleman [Tamekane] established the theory that words should not be selected, that the mind does not have to be superior and that poetry should be merely composed according to the thoughts that come to on’s mind. This not only destroys the way of poetry but also the principles of Buddhist Law."¹⁷ According to the Shirin Shūyō, another critical work on poetry, Hōnen (1130–1212), no less, believed in the possible sinfulness of poetry, but at the same time pointed out its potential for good: "Poetry can be a sin, but it can also be a virtue."¹⁸ What was under attack in these works was not poetry per se as much as its quality. Bad poetry was a sin and good poetry was, in fact, according to Hōnen, a virtue. And a poem was judged good or bad according to Buddhist ideals. Thus, the condemnation was directed against the leisurely pastime and intellectual game to which poetry had been reduced, particularly among the aristocrats of the Heian period. The author of the Nomori no Kagami was not prejudiced against poetry, but subjected it to the requirements of esoteric Buddhism, in this case Taimitsu.¹⁹ The same was true for many other critical works on poetry of the same period.

It is an open question as to whether or not the problem of the rejection or acceptance of poetry in the late Heian period was in fact a reflection of a religious dualism characteristic of the life of the aristocrats in Heian times. Many literary works of the Heian period, in particular the Tale of Genji, strongly suggest a religious dualism in the life of Heian aristocrats. The aristocrats generally lived until retirement as active members of a
court society. Their activities and general attitude toward life were optimistic, world-ac­cepting; in short, more Shintoistic than Buddhist. Their life after retirement appears, by contrast, to be a period of preparation for death, confession, and meditation, oriented more toward Buddhism. Whereas poetry belongs to the first period, it is either rejected in the second or often altered and adapted to Buddhist tastes. Fujiwara no Teika’s re­pentance, quoted above, for having composed numerous poems when he was young may well reflect this kind of religious dualism in the life of late Heian period aristocrats. This dualism (youth = Shinto, old age = Buddhism) became a political reality in the di­vision of the court into a ruling emperor (Shinto) and an abdicated priest-emperor (Buddhism), a period usually referred to as Insei and beginning in 1086. This division reflects not only a division in the religious and political life of the country but one in poetry as well. Whereas the ruling emperor is surrounded by poets who compose in the Shinto tradition, the ex-emperors associate themselves preferably with poet-priests. As examples, one may mention the association of the ex-Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239) with the poet-priest Sunne and his group, and the former’s relations with Saigyō.20 This religious and poetic dualism, however, may have been not so much an absolute division as merely a question of degree. In fact, in the middle ages (chûsei), beginning with the Kamakura period, this dualism of separate elements was no longer accepted and a synthesis was sought. It was the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism which revived poetry and made it finally, but only under certain conditions, acceptable as a Buddhist religious practice.

The acceptance of the composing of Japanese poetry as a Buddhist practice de­veloped in close conjunction with the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism. This movement of religious synthesis, which dates back to the Nara period (710–784), re­presents an attempt to overcome the inferiority of the Shinto deities vis-à-vis the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Precursors of this eclecticism were En no Gyōja and in particular Gyōgi, mentioned above. Gyōgi was ordered by Emperor Shōmu to travel to Ise and ask the sun goddess Amaterasu to become the protector of the great Buddha of Nara. The motivation for this was the belief that the central Buddha of the universe Dainichi (Mahāvairocana, the Great Sun Buddha) and the sun goddess were equal. Shortly after Gyōgi’s pilgrimage to Ise, the sun goddess appeared to the emperor as a radiant disc and proclaimed that the sun (Amaterasu) and the Buddha were the same.21 The priest Gyōgi, who was instrumental in this early synthesis, applied his eclecticism not only to doctrine but also to poetry. A poem which made him, according to the Nomori no Kagami and other works, an immortal poet, reflects a synthesis of Shinto and Bud­dhism:

    I pledged
    In front of the Buddha
    Of the Vulture Peak
    Not to speak about the eternal truth
    When we saw each other.22

In spite of the Buddhist content of the poem, the mere fact that Gyōgi used the waka form of five lines of 5/7/5/7/7 syllables is indicative of a merger of native Japanese literary forms of expression with Buddhism.

In the Nara period, such synthetic movements were sporadic and depended more on unorthodox ubasoku priests than the regular priesthood. However, it became a matter of doctrine in the two esoteric schools of Buddhism – Tendai and Shingon. Saichō
(767–822), who founded the headquarters of Tendai Buddhism on Mt. Hiei, incorporated the worship of Mt. Hiei’s Shinto deity (Hiyoshi Sannō) into Tendai Buddhism. This is evidenced by his veneration of Hiyoshi Sannō which set the foundation of Sannō Ichijitsu Shinto, developed by Saichō’s later followers who aimed at a doctrinal synthesis of the Shinto deities and Buddhas. According to this school, the deity of Mt. Hiei was considered an incarnation of the Buddha Shaka (Sākyamuni). Saichō claimed that mountains, river, plants, and trees all are incarnations of the enlightened Buddha. This, of course, includes man, at least in his pure state. This theory further encouraged the incorporation of Shinto deities into Buddhism as avatars of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the acceptance of poetry.

Saichō expressed the incorporation of Shinto deities into Buddhism in a poem:

O Buddhas of unexcelled complete enlightenment
Bestow your invisible aid
Upon this hut I open
On the mountaintop.23

The Shinto elements in this poem are the poetic form and the mountain, a reference to Hiyoshi Sannō.

Saichō was followed in the Tendai tradition of honjisuijaku by Jien who expressed his faith in honjisuijaku in numerous poems. For instance:

Truly
The Gods are
The waymarks of the Buddhas.
Why call them
Later incarnations?24

Whereas poetry was used in Tendai esoteric Buddhism which was promoting the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism, it was not universally accepted. Tendai priests of the Pure Land tradition tended, as in the example of Jakushin, to be opposed to all poetry. Genshin (also Eshin) (942–1017), who belonged to the Pure Land tradition of Mt. Hiei’s Yokawa center, also rejected poetry at first, until one day a priest recited a poem by Kī no Tsurayuki (886–945):

Life is like the moonshine
Reflected upon the water
Held in the palm of your hand
When you ask yourself,
Is it there or not?

Hearing this, Genshin finally recognized the virtues of poetry but encouraged his followers to compose poems only in reference to the Twenty-Eight Chapters of the Lotus Sutra.25 Jien, a follower of Genshin and high priest of Mt. Hiei, became one of the most outspoken advocates of poetry in Buddhism.

In Shingon Buddhism, poetry was also accepted in relation to honjisuijaku, referred to in the Shingon tradition as Ryōbu Shinto. Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Singon School, emphasized, even more than Saichō, the arts in the understanding and practice of Buddhism. Under the arts, Kūkai distinguished, among other forms, literature. For him, perfect art was a Buddha in itself: "Art is what reveals to us the state of perfection."26 Kūkai (posth. Kōbō Daishi), like Gyōgi and Saichō, used poetry to express his belief in the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism. Kūkai allegedly received a Shinto in-
ilitation, on the occasion of which he is reported to have composed the following poem, indicating a fusion of Sintoism and Buddhism:

**Among the various ways**

To become a Buddha

The most potent way is

The way of the *Kami* (Shinto)\(^2\).

From out of esoteric Buddhism (Tendai and Shingon) came many famous poets, among whom are Fujiwara no Teika, Shunzei, Saigyō, and Jien. Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241), for instance, expressed the synthesis of Shinto and Buddhism in nature poetry:

To appear on earth

The Buddhas have dimmed their light

So that even at night it remains invisible

In the streams of the waterfall

Which conceals the light.\(^2\)\(^8\)

The first two lines refer to a term commonly used in those times for the amalgamation of Shinto deities with Buddhas and bodhisattvas: Wakō Dōjin. The Nachi waterfall (Kumano), here a Shinto deity, appears as a Buddha symbolized in the light of the moon, a light by which he appears on earth. This poem applies the Wakō Dōjin theory to nature and presents an example of the merger, through *honjisuijaku*, of Buddhism with Japanese sacred places.

Saigyō's own involvement in esoteric Buddhism is known through his association with Jien and with Mt. Kōya, the center of the Shingon sect. Like Jien, Saigyō incorporated in his prolific poetry Buddhas and Shinto deities. He also dedicated two of his poem collections, the *Mimosusogawa Utaawase* and the *Miyagawa Utaawase*, to the two shrines at Ise which, according to the Tendai text *Yōten Ki*, incorporated the two *mandala* of esoteric Buddhism, the Womb and Diamond Mandala.\(^2\)\(^9\)

Saigyō had included in these collections poems revealing his belief in the *honjisuijaku* theory. For instance, the following foreword and poem:

After he [Saigyō] had lived long enough on Mt. Kōya, he went to live in a mountain temple at Futaminoura. Since it was a mountain near the Ise Shrines, it was called Mt. Kamiji [Divine Path], because it was believed that it was an *avatar* of the Buddha Dainichi.

I have already come far

As I ask the pathway of the gods [Kamiji]

About what lies beyond;

Above me looms a matchless peak

Where the wind sings in the pines.\(^3\)\(^0\)

The following poem presents a further example of *honjisuijaku* in the poetry of Saigyō:

From high in the sky

Hanging over the high peak of the Eagle

The clear moon sheds its light peacefully

Over the forest of the Moon God.\(^3\)\(^1\)

The high peak of the eagle stands for Vulture Peak where the Buddha Shaka (Sākyamuni) held his last sermon. The moon, therefore, is a symbol of Buddha shedding light over the forest (= shrine) of the moon god (Tsukiyomi) located at Ise. Tsukiyomi is a Shinto deity.
Jien’s advocacy of honjisuijaku in the pursuit of poetry has already been documented. In Jien, poetry not only becomes a priestly pastime but a practice intimately associated with Buddhist worship. Through poetry, Jien sought the law of the universe, not in an intellectual manner but in a lyrical vein of merger of self with nature. In numerous poems and prefaces to the series of poems which he piously dedicated to shrines and temples, he reiterated his belief in the honjisuijaku theory. In the foreword to a series of one hundred poems he presented to Kasagua Shrine (Nara) he pointed out the equality of the Shinto deity of Kasuga with the Buddha and cautioned that in the worship of the deity of Kasuga one should not forget the Buddha. In another instance, Jien maintained that the Japanese language (poetry) was the equal of the Buddha.

An important theoretical and religious basis for the acceptance of poetry by Buddhism came from the priest Sensai, who in 1106 on the tenth day of the ninth month left the Unkyōji Temple for a pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi, where he hoped to confess the sins he had committed by composing poetry. At the Sumiyoshi Shrine he painted a portrait of the deity of Sumiyoshi, and thereby presented his confession. Sensai was a Tendai (Taimitsu) priest who engaged in social welfare. He was fond of poetry and associated himself with the leading poets of his time. He is noted in the history of Japanese poetry for having organized a number of poetry contests.

Sensai’s confession did not mean that he had decided henceforth to abandon all poetry. In fact, the preface to the poems he presented to the deity as his confession included an important statement for the history of the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism in relation to Japanese poetry. He claimed that the Shinto god of poetry, Sumiyoshi, is an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Kōkitokuō and that, by extension, the poetry through which Sumiyoshi was worshiped was in no way inferior to the sermons of the Buddha. Yamada Shōzen of Taishō University devised the following graph to explain Sensai’s concept of the relationship between the Bodhisattva and the Shinto deity in connection with their respective use of language.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{Suijaku (incarnation as Shinto Kami)} & \text{Honji (original form of Buddha or Bodhisattva)} \\
\hline
\text{Sumiyoshi} & \text{Kōkitokuō} \\
\text{Waka poetry} & \text{sermons}^{36}
\end{array}
\]

The above outspoken statement of priest Sensai probably presents an influential theoretical basis for the equation of poetry with the sutras. Sensai is in fact saying that whereas sutra recitation and copying represents an adequate form of Buddhist worship, waka poetry is equally appropriate for all Shinto deities who are believed to be avatars of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas according to honjisuijaku. Sensai’s statement has yet a further dimension. Poetry, using a language more familiar to the Japanese, is a more effective means of worshiping the Buddhas through the intermediary of Shinto deities.

On this occasion, Sensai drew, according to the Kokin Chōmon Shū, a waka mandala. He applied waka poetry to mandala, or pictorial representations of the Buddhist universe, which were an aid in meditation peculiar to the Tendai and Shingon Schools. The central figure of his waka mandala was Sumiyoshi surrounded by the seven Buddhas who appeared in this world. These, in turn, are followed by their later incarnations, the Thirty-six Immortal Poets. According to this, not only Shinto deities but also the
immortal poets of the Nara and Heian periods were considered avatars of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. Poets of special merit were thus divinized as Shinto deities and avatars of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. A perfect poem being, like perfect art, a Buddha in itself according to the teachings of Kūkai, talented poets or especially skillful poems could be taken as the voice of Buddha through man. There are numerous such statements in medieval Japanese literature about poets being incarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For instance Gyögi was considered an incarnation of Monju (Manjusri), Ariwara no Narihira (826–880) was believed an incarnation of Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), Ono no Komachi (9th c.) of Dainichi, and Murasaki Shikibu (978–1014) of the Ishiyama Kannon. According to the Waka Kōshiki (Imperial Household Library) the immortal poets are all incarnations of the enlightened Buddha. The same statement can also be found in the Aro Monogatari.38

In connection with the honjisuijaku theory applied to poets, one may take up the example of the legendary poem exchange between Shōtoku Taishi (475–622) and a beggar:

Shōtoku Taishi:  
At Mount Kataoka  
A traveler is lying,  
About to starve.  
How sad!  
He has no father and no mother.

Beggar:  
As the River Tomi no Ogawa  
In Ikaruga  
Never dries.  
Your name will also  
Never be forgotten.

In the Konjaku Monogatari (end of Heian) and Saseki Shū, Shōtoku Taishi is identified as Kannon and the beggar as Monju (Manjusri). According to the Nomori no Kagami however, Prince Shōtoku is Monju and the beggar an incarnation of Daruma (Bodhidharma).39

With his waka mandala, Priest Sensai set a precedent for the worship of poet-ancestors such as Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (fl. ca. 680–700) and others, especially in connection with the increasing popularity of esoteric schools of poetry in the middle ages. Sensai also set an example in dedicating poems to temples and shrines (hōraku or hōno-uta), a practice which became, particularly in the middle ages (chūsei) a commonly accepted custom among poets and especially among the poet-priests.

The belief in the equality of waka poetry with the dhāraṇī (secret formulas) and therefore with the language of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which goes back to Sensai, presents an important foundation not only for medieval Japanese poetry, but also for the relationship of poetry with Buddhism and in particular with the Buddhist priesthood of certain schools.

Sensai's example is followed by the following statement in the Nomori no Kagami, "The powerful Buddhas and gods, and wise avatars, they all composed poetry."40 In other words, the Buddhas should be worshiped in the form of poetry through their avatars, the Shinto deities. The Saseki Shū includes a similar statement:
Among the deities of our country, many belong to the best of the incarnations of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Susanoo no Mikoto was the first to compose a poem in thirty-one syllables about the eightfold fence in Izumo. This is in no way inferior to the words of Buddha. The dharani of India are merely the language of the people of that country. By this language the Buddha has expounded the dharani. and elsewhere:

Saints of great virtue have appeared in our country and expressed themselves in poetry... the deities lent their hearts to the poems and fulfilled the wishes of men....

The theory that Japanese poetry equals the secret formulas of India, developed within honjisuijaku, was undoubtedly an important element in the acceptance of poetry as a form of Buddhist worship. Thus Japanese poems could be considered equal to shingon (True Words). In the Nomori no Kagami it is stated:

...shingon consists of a selection of the essential words spoken by the various Buddhas which effects the quickest salvation for mankind. Such words are few but their power manifold. It is the same for poetry where a rich vocabulary exists but one selects carefully from among the available words and contracts these words into thirty-one syllables. Thus poetry is the same as shingon. To express the true feelings of one’s heart, there is nothing better than the Japanese language.

This statement reminds one of the advice Saigyo gave Jien, "First practice waka. If you are unable to compose waka, there is no way you can understand the essence of shingon." Jien visited Saigyo to receive teachings from him in Shingon Buddhism. Vis-à-vis the young poet-priest Myöe, Saigyo said the same:

Poetry is the true body of the Buddha. Therefore, the composition of one single verse is the same as carving a statue of Buddha. To conceive a verse in secret is the same as the recitation of shingon. Through poetry we can understand the Law. If you fail to reach this stage and if you study the way of poetry without guidance, then it becomes a heresy.

There are numerous other texts dating from the middle ages in which the dharani or shingon theory of poetry is expounded.

The sources selected for inclusion in this study indicate the process of acceptance of poetry in Buddhism. To these may be added the following stories. According to the Teshokki Monogatari, Fujiwara Shunzei and Teika, in order to confess their sins committed through poetry, went on a pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi. There the deity appeared in their dreams and revealed that poetry is the only way to attain Buddhahood. According to the Nomori no Kagami, the god of Kumano appeared to Saigyo telling him that there was no need to abandon poetry. In the Nô play Saigyo-zakura, the spirit of the cherry blossoms appeared to Saigyo in a dream and denied that there was any sinfulness in the cherry blossoms about which Saigyo had composed so many poems.

In conclusion, we may sum up the process of acceptance of poetry in Buddhism by noting that poetry was apparently initially regarded as an art closely tied to Shintoism, and it was mainly, it seems, through the process of the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism that poetry became a part of Buddhism. Yet, within Buddhism, poetry continued in many respects to be related to the Shinto deities and especially to those who were believed, according to the honjisuijaku theory, to be avatars of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The acceptance of poetry in Buddhism allowed the members of the priesthood to compose poetry. Not all priests, of course, were active poets. Those who were mainly...
belonged to or had close connections with the esoteric sects. Many of the most famous poets, however, belonged to the *ubasoku* or *hijiri* group of hermit-priests who had little or no firm connections with specific temples or sects. They often traveled to the sacred places of Japan, including places of both Shinto and Buddhist interest. And it was these unorthodox *ubasoku* or *hijiri* poet-priests, such as Nōin, Saigyō, and later Bashō, whose Buddhism allowed them to create, out of the stalemate, new and spontaneous poetry which belongs to the best of Japanese literature.

Many questions about the process of the acceptance of poetry in Buddhism have not been examined here: for instance, the inclusion of Buddhist poetry (Shakkyō-ka) and Shinto poetry (Jingi-ka) in imperial anthologies of poetry, and the connection of poetry with Buddhist practices such as Shikan meditation, pilgrimage, Yamabushi practices, *nembutsu*, *kōshiki*, *kangaku-e*, ancestor worship and the like. Nor have I taken up the various forms of Buddhist poetry such as *iroha*-poems, *sutra*-poems, poems used for propagation, or series of poems using names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. These together with the question of what type of poetry was acceptable in Buddhism will be subject of a separate study.

Notes

1 The assumption that poetry was a matter of Shintoism is based on among other things, the attribution of the composition of poetry (oracle poems) to Shinto deities such as Sumiyoshi, Usa, Ise, Miwa, Kamo, Kasuga, Kibune, Inari, Kitano, Kumano, etc., and on sources such as the *Fukuro no Sōshi*, *Imakagami*, *Jikkin Shō*, *Kokin Chōmon Shū*, *Korai Fuitai Shō*, *Mommyō Shō*, *Nomori no Kagami*, *Ôgishō*, *Sasamegoto*, *Saseki Shū*, *Shintō Shū*, and *Toshiyori Zuinō*, which advocate the worship of Shinto deities through poetry. The *Shintō Shū*, for instance, lists the following Kami (Shinto deities) as poets, and therefore, as deities who should be worshiped through poetry: Kamo, Sumiyoshi, Usa Hachiman, Kasuga, Kumano, Hakusan, Iwashimizu Hachiman, Kibune, Hiyoshi and Kitano Tenjin. Some of them are listed as avatars of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. *Shintō Shū*, Tōyō Bunkō-bon, comp. by Kondō Yoshihiro, Kadokawa Shoten, Tōkyō, 1959.

2 Gyōgi (also Gyōki or Gyōgi Bosatsu) belonged to an unaffiliated shamanistic sect of Buddhism also called *Hijiri-dō*. Gyōgi was sent by the Emperor Shōmu to the Ise Shrine to ask the goddess of Ise, Amaterasu, to become the protector of the great statue of Dainichi Buddha (Mahāvairocana) completed at Tōdaiji Temple in 749. At that time a shrine of the Shinto deity Hachimao was erected within the compound of the Tōdaiji to further strengthen the Shinto protection of the Buddha statue. These stories offer some of the earliest evidence of the gradual amalgamation of Shintoism and Buddhism.

3 *Honjisuijaku*, MURAYAMA Shūichi, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, Tōkyō, 1974, pp. 35-38.


5 *Fukuro no Sōshi in Nihon Kagaku Taikei*, vol. 2, Kazama Shobō, Tōkyō, p. 55. This story figures in many other works.

6 "furusato moji kyōgai betсудen", *Hekiganroku Teihon*, Risōsha, Tōkyō, 1963, p. 2, The rejection of language appears in many Zen texts. For instance, one of the earliest Zen texts Leng-chia-shih-tzu-chi (Record of the Masters of the *Lanka vatara-sūtra*) has these words in the Preface: Buddha nature is void and has no form
The Truth is silence, inexplicable in words.
Transmitting words and speeches, Are the Zen of illusion.


8 *Seia Shō in Zoku Gunsho Ruijū*, vol. 16, Keizai Zasshi Sha, Tōkyō, 1911, pp. 904-905. When later Mongaku did meet Saigyō, they passed together an evening of peaceful conversation.


10 Ibid., p. 119.
Jatachi, Kokka Taikan, pp. jisuijaku. no Tetka and Befor Geku the legend, Taken from.

Tuttle Company, Tökyö, rev. ed., 1974, p. 133, story of this poem is told in the travel diary What should the world/Be compared to/The white waves/Behind the boats/At daybreak. The 

This story is recorded with variations in many sources: Saseki Shū (vol. 1), etc. In the travel diary The ex-emperors were equally interested in Shinto elements, but in contrast to the ruling emperors they gave their attention to popular provincial Shinto elements; for example, ex-Emperor Goshirakawa's Ryōjin Hishō (1179) includes not only Buddhist poems but also "popular" Shinto songs and poems.

This was in 742 according to G. F. Sansom, Japan, A Short Cultural History, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Tökyö, rev. ed., 1974, p. 133, and Honjisuijaku, op. cit., p. 39. The source of this story is a text entitled Ryōgā Gyōmon Shinshaku attributed to priest Kūkai.

Tendai esoteric Buddhism which played an important role at the end of the Heian and beginning of the Kamakura period (1185-1333) in reviving Japanese poetry.

This story is recorded with variations in many sources: Saseki Shū (vol. 1), Fuku no Ōschi (vol. 1), etc. In the travel diary Miyako no Tsuto (1350-1352): The High Priest of Ryōgōn Temple on Mt. Hiei said that waka are words of empty pleasure.

So saying, he gave up waka until one day, at Eshinm Temple, early in the morning he saw boats in the middle of the lake. He heard a person reciting this poem and was helped into a state of enlightenment. Thereafter, he composed many poems, all on the Twenty-Eight Chapters of the Lotus Sutra and the Ten Pleasures. So the story goes. Indeed, this is how things must be.

Taken from Miyako no Tsuto in Gunsho Ruijū, vol. 18, p. 530-531.

From Sources of Japanese Tradition, op. cit., p. 138.


In Ishida Yoshisada, Fujiwara no Teika no Kenkyū, Bungadō Shoten, Tökyö, 1957, p. 188.

Honjisuijaku, op. cit., p. 317. The Naikū represents the Womb (Taizoekai) Mandala and the Geku the Diamond (Kongōkai) Mandala. Together they symbolize the cosmic Buddha Dainich. Before Saiyō's dedication of the two collections to the Ise Shrines, he submitted them to Fujiwara no Teika and Shunzei for approval.


Yamada Shōzen, op. cit. Also in Shinbokin Waka Shū, no. 1819, Kokka Taiken, p. 208, etc.


Ibid., p. 608.


Somosomo kono Myōjin (Sumiyoshi) to mōsu wa moto wa kore Kōkitoku no henshin to shite na o bukkō ni arawashi..., Honchō Bunshū, op. cit., p. 236; and Yamada, "Mikkyō to waka bungaku", op. cit., p. 153. The same story is recorded in the Gempei Seisui Ki in Kokumin Bunkō, Kokumin Bunkō Kankō Kai, Tökyō, 1910, p. 888.

Ibid., p. 153.

Kokumin Bunkō, Kokumin Bunkō Kankō-kai, Tökyō, 1910, p. 426: "Kako shichibutsu o kakitatematsuri, mata sanjūrokunin no myōji o kakiarawaseri."
40 Nihon Kagaku Taikei, vol. 4, p. 66.
41 Saseki Shū, op. cit., pp. 222-223.
42 Ibid., p.223 and 224.
44 Saseki Shū, op. cit., p. 251.
45 Toganoo Myōe Shōnin Denki in (Kokubun-) Tōhō Bukkyō Sōsho, vol. 5 (Denki-bu), comp. by WASHIO Junkei, Kokubun Tōhō Bukkyō Sōsho Kankō-kaï, Tōkyō, 1925, p. 287.