

Saigyō's "Six Elements and Four Mandalas" Sequence:
The Story and Rhetoric of Enlightenment

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Abstract

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This paper analyzes Saigyō's little-discussed waka cycle on the six elements and four mandalas of Shingon. I first introduce the sequence in the context of other similar works by Saigyō, then turn to a discussion of the place of Saigyō's poetry as a whole within the history of Buddhist themes in Japanese poetry. Saigyō lived at a turning point when Heian-era tension between the poetic and Buddhist traditions was giving way to robust and varied philosophical defenses of their compatibility. Saigyō's work formed a defense of this compatibility via practice: he allowed his Buddhist and poetic impulses to confront each other within his poetry. After tracing this thread through Saigyō's oeuvre more broadly, I introduce the Shingon conceptualization of the six elements and four mandalas, then translate and analyze

each of Saigyō's ten poems, commenting on stylistic elements and allusions and on the larger structure of the cycle. I find these poems to be representative of Saigyō's broader vision in that they treat a Buddhist concept with the same sense of narrative and inner dialogue that marks the encounter between Buddhism and poetry in Saigyō's work as a whole.

Saigyō's "Six Elements and Four Mandalas" Sequence:

The Story and Rhetoric of Enlightenment

Saigyō (1118-1190), the late Heian poet known largely for his descriptive nature poetry and for expressing conflict between his devotion to Buddhism and his poetic sensibilities, received an image update in the early twentieth century when three long-lost treasure troves of his poetry were rediscovered within a few years of each other. First came the 263 poems of the *Kikigaki shū* 聞書集¹ in 1929, next the thirty-two poems of the *Kikigaki zanshū* 聞書殘集² in 1934, and later in the same year the sixty-seven additional poems contained in the previously lost Matsuyabon 松屋本 lineage of the *Sankashū* 山家集, Saigyō's main waka collection.³ The *Kikigaki shū* and the Matsuyabon poems contain several cycles of

¹ Apparently transcribed and collected by friends or disciples of Saigyō, the 263 poems of the *Kikigaki shū* include 261 waka and two *tan-renga* ("short linked poems"), which can be described as waka in which the initial 5-7-5 segment is composed by one poet and the 7-7 segment by another.

² The *Kikigaki zanshū*, which contains twenty-five poems and seven *tan-renga*, forms a continuation of the *Kikigaki shū*.

³ Hirai Takurō discovered the poems of the Matsuyabon lineage hand-copied into an Edo-era woodblock-print copy of the Rokkashū version of the *Sankashū*, with a handwritten note by a disciple of nativist (*kokugaku*) scholar Takada Tomokiyo (Oyama Tomokiyo, also called Matsuya, 1783-1847) stating that in the fifth month of Bunsei 10 (1827) he borrowed from his master a *Sankashū* manuscript that dated to the second month of Enbō 3 (1675) and copied over the extra poems it contained into the woodblock-print version. The manuscript from Oyama Tomokiyo's collection is no longer extant, but earlier in 1934 Itō Yoshio had discovered an incomplete early Edo manuscript of the *Sankashū*, the surviving parts of which turned out to largely correspond to the Matsuyabon text discovered by Hirai Takurō. After much comparison with the more widely circulated Yōmei Bunko and Hanpon

Buddhist poems that in their depth and scope are unlike anything in the previously known works of Saigyō. Although the more widely circulated versions of the *Sankashū* contain a number of poems on Buddhist themes (*shakkyōka*, 釈教歌) that includes several poems on scattered chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the only complete cycle on a Buddhist doctrinal concept (other than *mujō* 無常 “impermanence,” which was already a common poetic theme in Saigyō’s day) is a relatively unremarkable set on the six realms.⁴ The longer and more complex Buddhist cycles in the recently uncovered collections help round out a portrait of Saigyō as a well-read scholar of various Pure Land and Shingon texts. Most of these cycles are found in the *Kikigaki shū*, which contains a full *nijū-happon* 二十八品 cycle, or a set of poems on the twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*;⁵ a set of ten poems,

lineages, scholars have come to consider the Matsuyabon text, while it appears to have a number of copy errors, to be the closest extant version of the poems to lost earlier versions of the *Sankashū* (Terazawa Yukiada, *Sankashū no kōhon to kenkyū* [Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 1993], 858-862; and Takagi Isao, “Matsuyabon Sankashū ni tsuite” in *Waka bungaku kenkyū* 43 [Nov 1980], 7-20).

⁴ *Sankashū* 897-902 (poem numbers refer to Nishizawa Yoshihito, Kubota Jun, and Utsugi Genkō, ed., *Sankashū; Kikigaki shū; Kikigaki zanshū* [Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 2003]; the sixty-seven Matsuyabon poems are numbered separately in this volume). This is a set of rather typical *shakkyōka* that bring less of an original slant to their topics than does the *rokudai-shiman* set or the sequences in the *Kikigaki shū*.

⁵ *Kikigaki shū* 1-34. There are two poems each on Chapters 7 and 25, and one poem each on four sutras frequently read together with the *Lotus Sūtra* (the *Sūtra of Innumerable Meanings*, the *Samantabhadra Contemplation Sūtra*, the *Heart Sūtra*, and the *Amitābha Sūtra*, respectively), for a total of thirty-four poems. The *Lotus Sūtra* was a popular poetic topic in Saigyō’s day, and other prominent contemporaries including Fujiwara no Shunzei and Jien also composed Lotus cycles. Ishihara Kiyoshi’s massive study *Shakkyōka no kenkyū: hachidaishū wo chūshin to shite* (Kyoto: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1980) includes a lengthy analysis of each of these three cycles. Yamada Shōzen briefly compares the three cycles and gives a short history of Lotus poems in “Poetry and Meaning: Medieval Poets and the *Lotus Sutra*,”

referred to in scholarship as the *jūdai-jisshu* (十題十首, “ten topics, ten poems”), which takes passages from ten different Buddhist texts as the topics (*dai* 題) for the respective poems;⁶ and a set on the *jūroku* 十樂 or the Ten Pleasures of the Pure Land.⁷ The Matsuyabon *Sankashū*, meanwhile, contains the set I will discuss in this paper, a sequence of ten Buddhist poems on a theme never previously treated in waka: the *rokudai-shiman* 六大四曼, or six elements and four mandalas, of Shingon Buddhism.

The *rokudai-shiman* cycle contains ten poems, one for each of the six Shingon elements—earth (*chi* 地), water (*sui* 水), fire (*ka* 火), wind (*fū* 風), space (*kū* 空), and consciousness (*shiki* 識)—and one for each of the four Shingon mandalas, which will be discussed in detail in the second half of this paper. The primary source text for the Shingon conceptualization of the six elements and four mandalas is Kūkai’s *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* (即身成仏義, “Attaining Enlightenment in this Very Existence”). In this treatise Kūkai explains the six elements and four mandalas as aspects of a cosmology that allows for the possibility of *sokushin*

translated in George Tanabe and Willa Tanabe, ed., *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1989), 95-117.

⁶ *Kikigaki shū* 35-44. This is one cycle that showcases Saigyō’s interest in Pure Land Buddhism; many, though not all, of the passages selected as topics in this sequence are from Pure Land texts. In the article “Kikigaki shū jūdai-jisshu shakkyōka ni tsuite” (*Waka bungaku kenkyū* 57 [1988], 25-37), Kinouchi Itsuko analyzes the themes, textual references and diction of these poems, as well as their relationship to the Lotus poems, in an attempt to date them.

⁷ *Kikigaki shū* 144-155. Kim Imjung’s article “Saigyō no jūrakuka ni tsuite” in *Meiji daigaku jinbunkagaku kenkyūjo kiyō* 51 (2002), 26-51, discusses the themes, stylistic elements, and textual references in this sequence.

jōbutsu 即身成仏, or attaining Buddhahood in the present existence. The poems in Saigyō's cycle make frequent references to enlightenment, and the whole cycle seems to be constructed keeping in mind Kūkai's larger vision of the six elements and four mandalas as components of an enlightenment-friendly universe.

In addition to references to the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, the cycle weaves together a web of allusions to various other Shingon texts, including the *Mahāvairocana Sutra*, in Japanese the *Dainichikyō* 大日經; the *Dainichikyō sho* 大日經疏, an early 8th-century Chinese commentary on the *Dainichikyō*;⁸ and the *Hizōki* (秘藏記, "Notes on the Secret Treasury"), a Shingon text of uncertain provenance.⁹ I am indebted throughout this paper to Yamada Shōzen, who has mined this cycle along with many of Saigyō's other Buddhist poems for allusions to Shingon texts in his monograph *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*.¹⁰ Aside from Yamada's study, the *rokudai-shiman* poems have gone largely untouched in Japanese scholarship, but they are highly deserving of more attention. Seamlessly weaving together complex Shingon concepts with Saigyō's quintessential narrative voice and running inner dialogue, this sequence as a whole forms one of the most eloquent and deeply-conceived statements in all of Saigyō's oeuvre on the nature of the path toward

⁸ Dictated by Śubhakarasiṃha (Zemui 善無畏 in Japanese) around the time he translated the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* into Chinese; transcribed and compiled by Yi Xing (in Japanese Ichigyō or Ikkō 一行).

⁹ While the *Hizōki* cannot be traced back farther than Kūkai, because of differences in style with Kūkai's known works it is theorized to be based on other sources, perhaps oral transmissions Kūkai received while in China. The stylistic differences are summarized in Ōsawa Shōkan's article "Kōbō Daishi no kyōgaku to Hizōki" in *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 36.1 (1987), 131-135.

¹⁰ Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1987.

enlightenment. I intend to build on Yamada's work on the allusions in this sequence by discussing the literary characteristics of the sequence in more depth, and placing this work within the context of themes that play out throughout Saigyō's oeuvre.

The dating of the *rokudai-shiman* cycle as well as of the other Buddhist cycles in the more recently-discovered collections is quite difficult as it always is with Saigyō, with whom we often have little to go on besides internal evidence. There has been some debate among scholars regarding the dating of Saigyō's Lotus cycle, with Ishihara Kiyoshi among others suggesting that it is an early work, perhaps composed around the same time Saigyō's friend and contemporary Fujiwara no Shunzei composed his own Lotus cycle,¹¹ while Yamada Shōzen argues that it must be a much later work due to the apparent allusions it contains to the *Dainichikyō sho*, a Shingon text which Saigyō would not have begun to study before the beginning of his years on Mt. Kōya (nearly thirty years in total, from around 1149 or 1150 to his move to Ise in 1180, interrupted by a pilgrimage to Shikoku in 1167 or 1168).¹² For the same reason Yamada argues that the Shingon-specific theme of the *rokudai-shiman* poems and the allusions they make to a variety of Shingon texts would seem to date them to Saigyō's Kōya years, perhaps to near the

¹¹ Ishihara 549.

¹² The Kinouchi Itsuko article referenced in note 6 summarizes the dating controversy surrounding the Lotus poems on page 26. Yamada's comments can be found in *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*, 118-121.

beginning of this period shortly after Saigyō would have begun to study the *Dainichikyō sho*.¹³

This sequence is a poetic construction of the process of enlightenment that in many aspects is quite characteristic of the way Saigyō constructed emotional and religious experience throughout his poetry more broadly. Therefore, before turning to examine the *rokudai-shiman* sequence in depth, I would first like to turn to a discussion of how Saigyō constructed experience and enlightenment in his work as a whole: what was the problem he was trying to solve, how he tried to solve it, and how he told the story of his journey. To do this we need to return for a moment to the dominant image of Saigyō perpetuated by the content of his better-known poems in the circulated lineages of the *Sankashū*: as a man torn between his twin roles of poet and priest.

The Heian Dialogue between Buddhism and Poetry

Poetry, with its valorization of the beauty of natural phenomena, was thought by many in the Heian period to be at odds with Buddhism, which in its more orthodox iterations demonizes just such transient and dependently-arising phenomena, viewing them as the source of human suffering. Proponents for the compatibility of poetry and Buddhism were also nonetheless numerous; in William

¹³ Yamada, 53. Yamada also mentions the *rokudai-shiman* cycle in his discussion of the dating of the Lotus cycle on pp. 118-121, cited above. He estimates the *rokudai-shiman* poems to be from earlier in the Kōya years and the Lotus cycle to be later.

LaFleur's words, "it appears that Mahayana Buddhism's readiness to locate nirvana within the world of samsara reinforced...a traditional penchant for regarding the arts as numinous."¹⁴ Over the course of the Heian period the Japanese Buddhist tradition and the Japanese poetic tradition engaged in an ongoing peace negotiation of sorts, with gradual concessions coming from both sides. The dialogue between the two can be seen as similar to the "chess game" Steven Heine describes in the sphere of religion, in which the continental Buddhist tradition and indigenous religious traditions each sacrificed certain principles as "pawns" in order to protect others as their "kings," resulting in the appearance of the uniquely life-affirming form of Buddhism that developed in Japan over the Heian and Kamakura periods:

In the match, Buddhism and folk religion exert a kind of magnetic pull on one another, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion that causes a shifting or realignment of their respective standpoints as they both strive for accommodation and independence. The fundamental principles of pre-Buddhist folk religion that cannot be abandoned seem to be *natural affirmation* and an acceptance of the *objective reality* of nature spirits. Although there is an intuitive awareness of the beauty and deification of nature suggesting subjectivity at the root of the littlest tradition, folk religion presupposes and celebrates the existence of deities as objects of worship over and beyond the merely human realm. The basic principles of Buddhism are the goal of *attaining enlightenment* and a *negation* or denial of the phenomenal world viewed as a relative and evanescent projection that is conditioned by a deluded mind which must realize the truth that the 'triple world is [inseparable from the One] Mind-only.' Of its two principles folk religion is more willing to abandon objectivism, as seen in the assimilative doctrine *honji-suijaku* in which the localized tutelary, mythical, and natural *kami* are considered trace manifestations of the original, universal essence of the Dharmakāya.

¹⁴ William R. LaFleur, *Saigyō, the Priest and His Poetry of Reclusion: A Buddhist Valorization of Nature in Twelfth-Century Japan* (diss., University of Chicago Divinity School, 1973), 1.

Similarly, Buddhism concedes and transforms its attitude of life-negation to world affirmation in doctrines such as Kūkai's 'attaining the buddha in this very body' (*sokushin jōbutsu*) and the Tendai 'true form of all dharmas' (*shohō jissō*).¹⁵

A similar interaction can be observed between Buddhism and poetry. Poetry's main concession, made in the interest of preserving its priority on affirming the natural world, was a shift of tone from the more celebratory and optimistic character that marks much of the earliest of Japanese poetry to the more melancholy tone, full of a Buddhist-influenced awareness of the transience of life, that marks poetry of the Heian and medieval eras. For Buddhism the trade was the same as in its "game" with indigenous religion: it sacrificed its negation of the phenomenal world while preserving its emphasis on gaining enlightenment. These concessions occurred gradually over time, eventually resulting in a union of philosophy and poetics that cemented during the medieval period.

The first move was poetry's adoption of the Buddhist-influenced aesthetic of *mujō* 無常 or impermanence. Early examples of *mujō* date to *Man'yōshū* poems such as the following waka attributed to Novice Mansei (Sami Mansei, 沙弥满誓):

世の中を何に喩へむ朝開き漕ぎ去にし船の跡なきごとし (MYS 351)

yo no naka o / nani ni tatoemu / asabiraki / kogiinishi fune no / ato naki gotoshi

To what shall I compare
this world?
It is like a boat
that departed at the break of dawn,
leaving no wake behind it

¹⁵ Steven Heine, "From Rice Cultivation to Mind Contemplation: the Meaning of Impermanence in Japanese Religion," *History of Religions* 30.4 (1991), 373-403, quote from 381-382.

Stephen Miller points out that although there is debate about whether a Buddhist interpretation is intended in this verse, evidence indicates that it was read this way from early on.¹⁶ Poems with a marked sense of *mujō* are in a minority in the *Man'yōshū*, but they mark the beginning of a poetic tradition that had become somewhat more broadly incorporated into Japanese poetics by the time of the *Kokinshū*, the Spring sections of which are dotted with waka such as the following by Ōtomo no Kuronushi:

春雨のふるは涙かさくら花ちるををしまぬ人しなければ (KKS 88)

*harusame no / furu wa namida ka / sakurabana / chiru wo oshimanu / hito shi
nakereba*

The falling of the spring rain—
or is it the falling
of tears?
For there is none who does not mourn

¹⁶ Stephen D. Miller and Patrick Donnelly, *The Wind from Vulture Peak: The Buddhification of Japanese Waka in the Heian Period* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, 2013), 59. Miller's reasons for supporting a Buddhist reading of this verse include its attribution to a Buddhist priest; its later inclusion in an imperial anthology, the *Shūishū*, where it was placed close to an explicitly Buddhist sequence of verses; and the similarity of its imagery to metaphors in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*.

Adding evidence to Miller's second point regarding the Buddhist reading of this verse in the Heian period is the fact that Saigyō himself wrote a waka that alludes to this one, recorded by Jien in his *Shūgyokushū* as being the final lines Saigyō ever composed:

にほてるや風たる朝に見わたせば漕ぎ行跡の浪だにもなし

(*Shūgyokushū* 5106)

nioteru ya / nagitaru asa ni / miwataseba / kogiyuku ato no / nami dani mo nashi
When I look out over
the shining waves
in the still morning,
there is not even the wake
of a rowing boat

the scattering of the cherry blossoms

This poem is representative of the mournful tone that came to dominate Heian poetics. Although the *Kokinshū*'s kana preface states that poetry “comes into being when men use the seen and the heard to give voice to feelings aroused by the innumerable events in their lives,”¹⁷ in reality certain feelings were expected to be produced by certain stimuli—the falling of the cherry blossoms brought on sadness, the voice of the cricket nostalgia—and many of these feelings can be summed up as seasonally varying manifestations of the aesthetic principle referred to since Motoori Norinaga as *mono no aware*, or sensitivity to the transient aspects of nature and life. It is difficult to sort out to what degree the prominence of this sensibility in Heian poetry derives from Buddhist influence and to what degree it stems from an indigenous preoccupation with the seasons and seasonal change as poetic topic, but a clear shift can be seen from the *Man'yōshū*'s treatment of seasonal themes, which is more varied in mood and is frequently more celebratory than mournful. Thus it can be seen that Heian poetry began to concede to Buddhism's emphasis on the ephemerality of phenomena, but would not submit to a wholesale denial of the value of those phenomena.

Mujō is a special case of a Buddhist principle that was adopted into the poetic tradition early on because it meshed well with pre-existing elements in Japanese poetics. The presence of more unambiguous Buddhist elements in Heian

¹⁷ Translation from Helen Craig McCullough, tr., *Kokin Wakashū: The First Imperial Anthology of Japanese Poetry: with Tosa Nikki and Shinsen Waka* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 1985), 3.

waka was as yet mostly limited to *shakkyōka*, a genre which became distinct over the course of the Heian period. Much of the poetry composed in this form was formulaic and repetitive; Mezaki Tokue goes so far as to say that “from our modern aesthetic perspective [*shakkyōka*] can only be thought to involve a certain sacrifice of literary quality.”¹⁸ The best of *shakkyōka* began to be included in imperial anthologies from the 11th century onward; the *Shūishū* (1006) and the *Goshūishū* (1086) each included a cluster of *shakkyōka*, although a separate section for *shakkyōka* would not appear until the *Senzaishū* (1187).¹⁹ An example of a *shakkyōka* from the *Goshūishū* follows in Steven Miller’s translation:

月の輪に心をかけし夕よりよろづのことを夢とみるかな (GSS 1188)

tsuki no wa ni / kokoro wo kakeshi / yūbe yori / yorozu no koto o / yume to miru
kana

ever since the night
when I turned my heart toward
the perfect, round moon
I see all phenomena
as the dreams that they are²⁰

This poem by the Tendai monk Kakuchō 覚超 (960-1034) refers to the meditation technique of *gachirinkan* 月輪観, or moon-disc visualization. Like many of the

¹⁸ Mezaki Tokue, “Aesthete-Recluses during the Transition from Ancient to Medieval Japan,” in Miner, Earl, ed., *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 151-180, quote from 157.

¹⁹ Stephen Miller introduces the *shakkyōka* contained in each of the Heian-era imperial anthologies in his study referenced in note 16. As Miller notes, the word *shakkyō* is not actually used as a subsection label until the *Goshūishū*.

²⁰ Translation from Stephen D. Miller, *Shakkyō-ka: The Formation and Development of a Classical Buddhist Poetry Tradition in the Early Imperial Poetry Anthologies* (diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1993), 180.

best of Heian *shakkyōka*, it expounds a Buddhist concept in terms of its author's state of mind upon experiencing that concept firsthand, a common pattern for *shakkyōka*.²¹ At the same time, like all *shakkyōka*, it draws from a limited vocabulary of ideas and metaphors that allows for little overlap with those of secular poetry.

Such was the state of Buddhist themes in poetry in the early twelfth century, when Saigyō came on the scene. Buddhism was gradually coming to have a place in waka, but other than in the case of *mujō* the presence of Buddhism was largely sequestered in the as-yet minor *shakkyōka* category. Poetry at large was dominated by emotional engagements with fleeting phenomena which, however Buddhist-influenced their aesthetic might be, were far from Buddhist in their motive. There had as yet been no real face-off between poetry, with its embrace of transient phenomena and of passionate human emotions, and Buddhism with its negation of the same. The two remained parallel cultural threads that continued side by side with an ongoing tension between them. Although Bai Juyi's famous prayer, included in poetic form in the *Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集, "that the secular literature I have written in this life and the faults occasioned by my wild words and fancy language (*kyōgen kigo* 狂言綺語) be transformed, for worlds to

²¹ In Jean-Noël Robert's words, "...*shakkyōka* do not primarily aim at describing, that is, explaining the scriptural quotation, they aim at describing the state of mind of their authors as they read them....As the classical, "generalistic" waka is the product of a sensory experience, we can see the *shakkyōka* as the fruit of a religious experience." Jean-Noël Robert, "Shakkyōka as Religious Experience" (Waka Workshop 2013, Paper 3 <<http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/waka2013/3>>), 11.

come, into a factor extolling the Dharma and a link to the preaching of the Buddha's Word,"²² was frequently used to justify the compatibility of literature and Buddhism, the expression *kyōgen kigo* itself was often used to refer negatively to the un-Buddhistic quality of literary activities. In Mezaki Tokue's words, "even while literature was recognized as a powerful service to religious ends, its autonomy was conceived of solely in negative terms."²³ While literature such as *shakkyōka* that was composed directly in the service of Buddhism was easy to justify, justification for the compatibility of Buddhism with literature more broadly, including secular literature, remained on a theoretical level at best. LaFleur states that "the presupposition of many in this [late Heian and early medieval] period was that at bottom the practice of poetry and the practice of Buddhism were fully compatible; but this had to be proved and demonstrated, not merely asserted."²⁴

Starting in the 12th century, a few innovators began working harder on this proof and demonstration, going farther in linking poetry and Buddhism through the use of esoteric Japanese Buddhist philosophy. This brought about the second move in the game, one from the Buddhist side: the expansion of esoteric Buddhist concepts to apply to poetry. Saigyō was one of these innovators, and among others were two of his friends and contemporaries. Fujiwara no Shunzei's treatise

²² Translation appears in Earl Miner's translation of Konishi Jin'ichi's essay "Michi and Medieval Writing" in *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature*, 181-208, quote from 192.

²³ Mezaki 157.

²⁴ William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 8.

on poetics, the *Korai fūteishō*, applied Tendai concepts including *shikan* 止觀 (“calm-and-contemplation”) and the *santai* 三諦 or three stages of truth to his poetics of *yūgen* by way of justifying poetry as Buddhist practice.²⁵ Jakuzen, another friend and contemporary of Saigyō’s, also used Tendai concepts to defend the compatibility of poetry and Buddhism, composing waka explicitly on such concepts as *bonnō soku bodai* (煩惱即菩提, “passions are the same as enlightenment”) and *shaba soku jōdo* (娑婆即淨土, “this world is the Pure Land”).²⁶ Saigyō’s contribution was in large part less theoretical and more practical than Shunzei’s or Jakuzen’s: he engaged in a lifelong experiment of allowing his Buddhist and poetic impulses to clash, and of dealing honestly with the results.

²⁵ The three stages are 1) realization of the “void” (*kū* 空), 2) return to affirmation of a “provisional” (*ke* 仮) phenomenal reality, and 3) the “middle” (*chū* 中) or mediated perception of reality, a tension resulting from an ongoing dialectic of the first two stages. William LaFleur examines Shunzei’s argument in detail in *The Karma of Words*, Chapter 4, “Symbol and Yūgen: Shunzei’s Use of Tendai Buddhism” (80-106), and David Pollack discusses its historical significance in *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan’s Synthesis of China from the Eighth through the Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986), 80-82.

²⁶ Yamamoto Akihiro discusses the influences of these and other Tendai concepts on Jakuzen’s *Hōmon hyakushū* in the chapter “Jakuzen: jōdo o miru” in Abe Yasurō and Nishiki Hitoshi, ed. *Sei naru koe: waka ni hisomu chikara* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 2011), 302-324.

The Clash of Saigyō's Two Selves

A look at a few waka on two of Saigyō's most frequently recurring images, the moon and cherry blossoms, will serve to demonstrate the distinction between Saigyō's poetic and Buddhist modes and to show some of the ways in which they interact. Many of Saigyō's poems do preserve the same separation between the poetic and Buddhist realms that was common in poetry of his time, while others seem to balance the two voices and to be capable of a dual-layered reading. In certain crucial moments of special clarity an uninhibited clash occurs that brings Saigyō's central problem into relief.

In many of his poems on the moon, Saigyō speaks purely in the voice of the monk:

いかで我心の雲に塵すべき見る効ありて月を眺めん (SKS 1405)

*ika de ware / kokoro no kumo ni / chiri subeki / miru kai arite / tsuki wo
nagamemu*

How could I
become spotted
with clouds of the heart?
I'll gaze upon the moon,
efficacious for those who look on it

This poem is a fairly unambiguous Buddhist utterance. From the strongly Buddhist-colored "efficacious" (*kai arite*) to the devout tone of the verb "gaze" (*nagame*), this poem is full of religiously marked language pointing to a reading of

the moon as Buddhist symbol of enlightenment and of the clouds as hindering worldly passions.

The moon is of course also a classical poetic topic. In the following poem Saigyō takes a more typical poetic treatment of the moon:

いかばかりうれしからまし秋の夜の月澄む空に雲なかりせば (SKS 310)

ika bakari / ureshikaramashi / aki no yo no / tsuki sumu sora ni / kumo nakariseba

How much
happier would I be,
if only there were no clouds
in the sky
where the autumn moon shines

In this poem the devout tone of the Buddhist poem above is replaced by the poet's helpless sighs of complaint and of longing for a reality that exists only in his imagination, indicated by the hypothetical constructions of *mashi* and *seba*. In both poems the moon's pure beauty is revered while the vision-obscuring clouds are disparaged. The functions of the elements in the scene largely carry over; the difference between the Buddhist treatment and the poetic treatment of the moon lies in the moment chosen for a poem and the emotion focused upon—devout gazing versus pining resentment.

These two poems represent opposite ends of a kind of spectrum along which many of Saigyō's moon poems lie. Due to the ultimately affirmative emotions expressed toward the moon in both the Buddhist and waka traditions, many of Saigyō's poems on the moon seem to lie somewhere between the two extremes and are easy to read either way. The following is an example:

世の憂さに一方ならずうかれ行心定めよ秋の夜の月 (SHKS²⁷ 58)

yo no usa ni / hitokata narazu / ukareyuku / kokoro sadameyo / aki no yo no tsuki

Moon of this autumn night,
anchor my heart
that floats and shifts
this way and that
with the grief of this world

This poem can be read either as a Buddhist utterance or as a poetic expression with no real conflict between the two, simply due to the moon's pre-existing associations in both the Buddhist and poetic traditions. The moon thus serves as a link for Saigyō between poetry and Buddhism. In Nishizawa Yoshihito's words, "although upon taking the tonsure [Saigyō] apparently shifted the source of his suffering onto his heart which was entranced by the blossoms' beauty, no such brakes applied when it came to the moon, symbol of enlightenment."²⁸

As Nishizawa points out, cherry blossoms were a different matter. In Saigyō's cherry blossom poems there is more dissonance between the high emotions evoked by the blossoms, with their flamboyant but fleeting beauty, and the sober outlook on the world that might be expected of a Buddhist priest. In the following poem, in which Saigyō speaks in his poet's voice, cherry blossoms are the instigator of emotional extremes:

花見ればそのいはれとはなけれども心の内ぞ苦しかりける (SKS 68)

²⁷ *Saigyō hōshi kashū*, a small collection of Saigyō poems of which 137 have been judged to be authentic. My numbering again refers to Nishizawa et al.

²⁸ Nishizawa Yoshihito, "Saigyō no suki," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 37.7 (1992), 66-72, quote from 72.

*hana mireba / sono iware to wa / nakeredomo / kokoro no uchi zo /
kurushikarikeru*

When I look at the flowers,
although
I can't even say why,
I feel pain
in the depths of my heart

Saigyō also has poems in which cherry blossoms appear to serve a Buddhist metaphorical function, however. There is no specific Buddhist reading of cherry blossoms other than possibly as an example of *mujō*, but in some waka such as the following it seems possible to read cherry blossoms as a symbol of the object of religious pursuit:

吉野山奥をも我ぞ知りぬべき花ゆゑ深く入りならひつつ (KGS 187)

yoshinoyama / oku wo mo ware zo / shirinubeki / hana yue fukaku / irinaraitsutsu

I surely know
the very heart of Mt. Yoshino,
I who come often
and enter deep
in search of the flowers

This poem can be read both at the literal level, as the utterance of a devoted lover of the blossoms' beauty, and at a figurative level in which the blossoms represent spiritual truth; as Yamamoto Keisuke comments, "surely it is hinted that to know these 'depths' of Mt. Yoshino is to know the mysteries of the Buddhist path."²⁹ Many interpreters of Saigyō see a symbolic significance in phrases such as "enter deep" (*fukaku ir[u]*), which recur in Saigyō's Yoshino poems in particular. This

²⁹ Yamamoto Keisuke, "Saigyō to Yoshinoyama." *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 76.3 (2011), 62-71, quote from 68.

double reading is of course possible only because the more troublesome poetic associations of cherry blossoms—their fleeting nature and the problematic emotions they induce—are not invoked. Meanwhile, the meshing of the Buddhist and poetic visions in the moon poems is possible only because the Buddhist experience is framed affirmatively, as an aspiration toward enlightenment, rather than negatively, as a repudiation of emotions and attachments.

A union between the Buddhist and poetic viewpoints that affirms both equally is then easily achieved then only by keeping things positive. (This may seem at first glance like a strange reversal of the larger pattern of poetry's adoption of a general tone of Buddhist-influenced melancholy, but in reality it is more of a matter of expanding the list of images that escape their status as mere "phenomena" by gaining status as Buddhist metaphor.) But this type of careful balancing act represents no particular progress towards a true reconciliation, and it is ultimately not enough for Saigyō. In some of his frankest moments he allows a head-on clash to occur, and in these moments we can see most clearly the essence of his problem:

花に染む心のいかで残りけん捨て果てきと思ふ我身に (SKS 76)

hana ni somu / kokoro no ika de / nokoriken / sutehateteki to / omou waga mi ni

Why does my heart
remain dyed
in cherry blossoms—
when I thought I had thrown
all that away?

The phrasing of the poem in the form of a question creates a sense of pause, a pause of dualistic crisis in which Saigyō seems to be looking at his own self from the outside. The inner dialogue and split sense of self that appear in poems such as this one are frequently recurring phenomena in Saigyō that have received much scholarly comment. Jack Stoneman notes of this poem that

“...*kokoro* and *mi* are both used in a fashion that creates a duality—the physical self and the emotional, psychological, or spiritual self. Saigyō seems to be asking himself (something he does quite often in his poetry, even addressing his ‘heart’ as if it were another entity altogether) why the physical and spiritual elements of his being cannot be reconciled.”³⁰

Many readers perceive moments such as this one to reflect a moment of failure on Saigyō’s part. Satō Masahide refers to this type of moment in Saigyō as follows:

“[Saigyō] could not go all the way over to the realm of the ideal. He could not but frustrate the effort toward the absolute deed of renunciation. For Saigyō, it is when he sees this that a poem is born. To compose a song is an attempt...that comes in the wake of [that] frustration...he is trying to attain the realm of the ideal.”³¹

³⁰ Jack Stoneman, *Constructing Saigyō: Poetry, Biography, and Medieval Reception* (diss., Columbia University, New York, 2005), 106. Many other scholars have commented on this same split sense of self in Saigyō: “Saigyō’s sense of reclusion as a self-reflective deed produced his concept of examining the contradiction and rivalry between “the self and the heart,” in which his eyes and heart worked to examine the discontinuity between the Buddha’s viewpoint and that of mankind” (Itō Hiroyuki, *Inton no bungaku: bōnen to kakusei* [Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 1975], 47). Mōri Toyofumi identifies Saigyō’s split sense of self as an essential element of the reclusion experience: “this is when ‘the self,’ our consciousness as it is, confronts ‘the self and its experience.’ In confronting this ‘self and its experience,’ the self begins to separate from and float above that ‘self and its experience’” (*Saigyō no shisō: jishiki to zettaichi* [Tokyo: Senshū Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 2007], 11).

³¹ Satō Masahide, *Inton no shisō: Saigyō wo megutte* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1977), 97.

In other words, for Saigyō the poetic moment results from, and attempts to overcome, the frustration of failure. Yet although a sense of frustration in this poem is indeed clear, something more than mere frustration and renewed effort may be going on. The speaker's problem here is not that he cannot get rid of a spiritual blockage or distraction, but that he cannot get rid of the reality of his experience: that he has committed himself utterly to the Buddhist path, and yet he still feels. His resolve is real, and his continuing emotions are real; the division of his loyalty between the two is due to an experience-based conviction of the authenticity of both. He must continue seeking to find how to reconcile the inherent value he perceives in the poetic experience of emotion, and how to integrate it into his Buddhist vision.

The following poem, one of Saigyō's most celebrated, puts the same problem in the form of a statement rather than a question:

心なき身にもあはれは知られけり 鴨立沢の秋の夕暮 (SKS 470)

kokoro naki / mi ni mo aware ha / shirarekeri / shigi tatsu sawa no / aki no yūgure

Even one with no heart
cannot help but feel
this pathos:
autumn evening
in a marsh where snipes fly up

This much-celebrated poem, which Ishida Yoshisada says “feels the truth of the world through the aesthetic of loneliness, and achieves a grasp of the aesthetic of *sabi*”³² has a number of semantic complexities that allow for a variety of possible

³² Ishida Yoshisada, *Inja no bungaku: kumonsuru bi* (Tokyo: Haniwa Shobō, 1968), 135.

readings.³³ Although the primary sense of *kokoro naki mi* (“one with no heart”) in this poem is probably that of a person who has taken Buddhist vows and resolved to leave worldly passions behind, it can also refer to a person lacking in poetic taste, making it into a humble utterance on the part of the poet. The *-rare-* construction in the third line of the Japanese has a number of possible meanings, including both passive and spontaneous; I have translated it here as spontaneous, but it is ultimately ambiguous. The *keri* probably indicates either sudden realization or poetic exclamation, in either case marking a sense of surprise at the spontaneous emotion the poet is experiencing.

Again, although it is clear in this poem that the speaker is experiencing inner conflict, to equate that fact with a failure of his will or vision as a monk is perhaps simplistic. The problem, again, is the reality of what he has just confirmed through experience: he has committed himself utterly as a monk, yet still he feels. He therefore finds feelings to have a certain self-evident truth, and implicitly opens up the question of whether they should have ever have been forsaken in the first place. This poem is an extraordinarily piercing and honest moment in which Saigyō, or his poetic persona, looks with two pairs of eyes—as a poet he sees the object, and as a monk he sees himself seeing the object—and compares the two visions. It is the Buddhist vision that comes up short: priest-Saigyō, unable to come up with any Buddhist gloss on the scene at hand that can

³³ Paul Atkins discusses in depth the difficulties this poem presents to the translator in “A Wisp of Snipes: Translating Medieval Japanese Poetry,” *Simply Haiku* 7.3 (2009), Web. Accessed 20 Dec. 2014.

touch the more powerful vision of poet-Saigyō, only watches distressed from the sidelines as the latter carries on spontaneously connecting to the phenomenal object of contemplation. The priestly eye cannot deny the authenticity of the poetic vision; all he can do is envy its firm connection to empirical reality.

It is this empirical aspect of the poetic worldview that the speaker in Saigyō's poems cannot bring himself to devalue. He confirms the validity of an object's meaning within the poetic tradition every time he feels and expresses it afresh. Even if in many cases that meaning is highly pre-determined by centuries of literary history, its viability is still reaffirmed every time a poet experiences it once more in the moment of a poem. (In the case of the snipe poem, the image is an uncommon one in previous poetic tradition, perhaps part of the reason it appears to bring about a breakthrough for Saigyō. In the case of cherry blossoms the image is invested with more layers of meaning deriving from poetic tradition, although the core of the crisis in the poem is the same.) There is an ongoing mutual confirmation between the wisdom of tradition and the wisdom of experience, a handshake that happens again every time a poem is composed, the working of an empirically based epistemological method. The voice in Saigyō's poetry seeks to reconcile this method with more traditional Buddhist practice—to find a single way of seeing and preserve two parallel visions no longer, to achieve a unified perspective where the seer is only the seer, using one pair of eyes and looking through one lens.

Therefore, although it is indeed clear that, as Satō Masahide says, poems such as this one form points of pause in the speaker's process, they can be seen as more than points of failure or even merely points of taking stock. Satō goes on to say that “even if in the end Saigyō failed at full renunciation, behind the poetic exclamation lay an affirmation of his progress up to that point,”³⁴ but, more than just this, poetic moments such as the *hana ni somu* and *kokoro naki* poems represent crucial breakthroughs in clarity as to the nature of the problem the speaker in these poems faces—that is, that poetic emotions are real and undeniable and must be reckoned with.

Indeed, it is difficult to call any point in Saigyō is a true point of failure since in the context of his larger work each poem appears as a step along a larger path. Saigyō has several poems in which he retrospectively affirms the whole process of seeking enlightenment along with whatever has happened on the way, part of an observable pattern of a storytelling impulse in Saigyō's poetry that is surely part of the reason for his status as a much-legendized literary figure.³⁵ One

³⁴ Satō 97-98.

³⁵ A famous example of the retrospective moment in Saigyō in a context less specifically related to the enlightenment narrative occurs in the following late poem that is among Saigyō's most beloved:

年たけて又越ゆべしと思きや命成けり佐夜の中山 (*Shin kokinshū* 987)
toshi takete / mata koyu beshi to / omoiki ya / inochi narikeri / saya no nakayama

Did I ever think
 I would cross this way again,
 So many years later?
 This has been my life:
 the mountain pass at Saya

This autobiography in thirty-one syllables exemplifies Saigyō's strong narrative sense. Here too he splits his self into two, albeit not as an expression of tension but only as a narrative device. Saigyō's status as the subject of many legends

fascinating poem, assumed to be from late in Saigyō's career due to its inclusion in the *Mimosusogawa uta-awase*,³⁶ seems as Stoneman observes³⁷ to be a possible answer to the *hana ni somu* poem:

思ひかへすさととりや今日はなからまし花にそめおく色なかりせば

(MSU 9)

omoikaesu / satori ya kyō wa / nakaramashi / hana ni someoku / iro nakariseba

A change of mind,
an enlightenment—
This day would not have been
were it not for the color of the blossoms
in which I dyed myself so deeply

Here the speaker synthesizes the conflict formerly perceived into a piece of the larger picture and his two selves into one. In the interest of this sublime moment,

embellishing his life—including the *Saigyō monogatari*, the *Saigyō monogatari emaki*, the *Senjūshō* (a *setsuwa* collection that claims to have been authored by Saigyō), and various noh plays including *Saigyōzakura* and *Eguchi*—despite a dearth of reliable biographical details is surely due not only to his unusually wide travels, which dominate his legend somewhat to the exclusion of the long periods he spent in reclusion, but also to this extraordinary narrative/dramatic sense. This is not to neglect this poem's stature within the Japanese travel literature tradition. As noted by Stoneman (249-250), although the journey as metaphor for life may seem like an intuitive one to modern readers, it was not a common comparison in Saigyō's day; Saigyō hits here on a deeply resonant but heretofore uncommon metaphor. In the Heian period travel in literature was associated with the trials and discomforts of exile or of duty far from home, and was rarely viewed in a positive light. A tradition of travel literature had begun with *Tosa nikki* and the travel scenes of *Ise monogatari*, but in these works travel was still portrayed as a hardship. Saigyō was a major turning in the shift to a positive image of travel; the legendary status his travels took on in later centuries paved the way for the new and positive literary associations with travel that would bear such fruit as Matsuo Bashō's travel journals.

³⁶ 御裳濯川歌合, a collection of poems by Saigyō that he arranged in pairs in the form of an *uta-awase*, or poetic contest, with himself. Saigyō requested Fujiwara no Shunzei to judge the pairs of poems, and Shunzei's comments are included in received texts of the *uta-awase*.

³⁷ Stoneman 285.

all earlier questionings and tensions were necessary. One of the final poems of the *Sankashū* goes even farther to make one of the most transcendent statements on enlightenment in all of Saigyō's oeuvre:

野辺の色も春の匂ひもおしなべて心染めける悟りにぞなる (SKS 1542)

nobe no iro mo / haru no nioi mo / oshinabete / kokoro somekeru / satori ni zo naru

The colors of the meadow
the glowing hues of spring:
all these things
become the enlightenment
of the heart dyed in their shades

Once more the image of "dyeing" is used to refer to the passions of the human heart. In this poem, with its triumphant sense of being the end of the tale, the speaker achieves the ultimate empirically-based answer to his great question: he sees the passions, the emotional encounters with earthly phenomena, with which he once struggled fold into a final enlightenment of which all his previous experiences are an integral part. Everything that happened along the way toward this unification is sweepingly affirmed. In William LaFleur's words,

...The natural "images" in Saigyō's poetry are not something which must themselves be transcended and mentally jettisoned once they have served to create a union of the subject and the real object of his "image-ing," that is, the Reality itself. Rather...there is no necessity here of negating the physical and phenomenological world once it has served to point to something beyond itself.there is no beyond. The concrete phenomenon....is itself both the symbol and the symbolized. It is

the absolute which theorists might call "Emptiness," but which is, in fact, nothing other than the phenomenon itself.³⁸

The grand narrative seen in Saigyō's poetry is essentially the story of an empirical journey towards the same affirmation of the enlightened and enlightening true nature of things—particularly of human emotions—that is also affirmed in the esoteric Buddhist tradition via a more theoretical path. For the Saigyō in these poems the theoretical claim of *bonnō soku bodai* was not enough. He had to prove that it actually worked in life and practice, to find the same mutual confirmation between Buddhist principle and Buddhist experience that he found between poetic tradition and poetic experience.

The *rokudai-shiman* sequence, which I will shortly turn to examine in detail, is somewhat different from most of the poems just discussed in that it is a *shakkyōka* series that starts from the Buddhist concept as its foundation. Nevertheless I intend to show that Saigyō uses the same tools to approach such a topic that he does to approach anything else: he treats it in terms of experience and narrative. The *rokudai-shiman* cycle is full of moments of sudden realization, inner dialogue, and retrospection, similar to those discussed in the first half of this paper, and shows Saigyō constructing Buddhist concepts as experience in the same way he constructs his experience of more secular topics.

Saigyō's *rokudai-shiman* poems can safely be said to outshine much of the *shakkyōka* genre in their individuality and complexity. Yamada Shōzen, speaking

³⁸ "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, ed., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 183-209, quote from 203.

of one of Saigyō's Lotus poems, compares them favorably to those of even such a prominent contemporary as Shunzei, saying that where "Shunzei's poetic standpoint is passive, only restating the ideas[,] Saigyō transforms the idea into his own metaphor."³⁹ The same can be said of Saigyō's treatment of the six elements and four mandalas: he uses them as a frame to tell his own story of an enlightening encounter with a Shingon-colored reality that is inherently enlightening in its nature. In this way the sequence can perhaps even be seen as an implicit theoretical underpinning for Saigyō's own encounter with reality and truth through the Way of Poetry.

The Six Elements and Four Mandalas of Shingon

The six elements (*rokudai-taidai* 六大体大 or *rokudai* 六大)⁴⁰ and the four mandalas (*shishu-mandara* 四種曼荼羅 or *shiman* 四曼) are central concepts in Kūkai's philosophy. The six elements long predate Kūkai's explication of them in the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, and there is also some precedent for the set of concepts connected to the four mandalas; but Kūkai's connection of the six elements with the four mandalas and his esoteric interpretation of these two sets of concepts is new. In early Buddhism the elements are conceived of as the components of the

³⁹ Yamada, "Poetry and Meaning," 115.

⁴⁰ The elements—sometimes all six, although more often the first four or five—are referenced in various Mahāyāna texts, but Kūkai is the first to call them the *rokudai*. The usual translation of the Sanskrit word *sad-dhātu* ["six elements"] in the Chinese canon is 六界, pronounced *rokkai* in Japanese.

physical universe, but in Kūkai's conception they are the body and mind of the Dharmakāya (the truth-body of the Buddha), which, to quote Ryūichi Abe, “precisely because of their inseparability, are in a constant state of harmonious interfusion.”⁴¹

Kūkai introduces the place of the six elements and four mandalas in his philosophy in the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* (即身成仏儀, “Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence [or body]”) starting in the following portion near the beginning of the treatise:

The Six Great Elements are interfused and are in a state of eternal harmony;
The Four Mandalas are inseparably related to one another.⁴²

Kūkai subsequently unpacks these dense lines, explaining that they describe the nature of “this very [body or] existence” in which, he argues, it is possible to gain enlightenment. “The first line stands for the essence (*tai*, [体]); the second, for the attributes (*sō*, [相]).”⁴³

Kūkai then proceeds to tackle a problem, the fact that the six elements are not clearly referenced as such in the *Dainichikyō* 大日經 or *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, the text most revered by Kūkai. The *Dainichikyō* discusses the first five elements at some length, but does not mention a sixth. Kūkai explains in the *Sokushin*

⁴¹ Ryūichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 282.

⁴² Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 227.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 228.

jōbutsu gi how he reads the presence of a sixth element into passages from the *Dainichikyō*:

The definition of these elements is contained in the following verse given in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*:

I have realized that which is unborn;
 It is that which language cannot communicate;
 It is free from all defilements;
 It transcends causality.
 I know that it is void like space.⁴⁴

Kūkai matches one of the first five elements to each of the lines above, interpreting “that which is unborn” as the earth element, “that which language cannot communicate” as the water element, that which is “free from all defilements” as the fire element, that which “transcends causality” as the wind element, and that which is “void like space” as the space element. He reads the consciousness element as being represented by the “I have realized” at the beginning.⁴⁵

Kūkai envisions the elements as a unified system comprising the sum of existence, and as both physical and metaphysical principles:

These Six Great Elements create all the Buddhas, all sentient beings, and the material worlds....The Buddha [Mahāvairocana], therefore, preached that the Six Great Elements are the essence of the World of Dharma. In Exoteric Buddhist teachings, the four great elements [earth, water, fire, and wind] are considered to be nonsentient beings, but in Esoteric Buddhist teaching they are regarded as the *samaya*-body of the Tathāgata. The four great elements are not independent of the mind. Differences exist between matter and mind, but in their essential nature they remain the same. Matter is no other than mind; mind, no other than matter.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 228.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 228.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 229.

The following passage from the *Dainichikyō* further expounds on the nature of the first five elements. This passage does not appear quoted in the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*; but it is worth introducing here since Yamada Shōzen notes visible allusions in Saigyō's *rokudai-shiman* poems⁴⁷ to this passage:

“...take, for example, space. It is separated from all discrimination and is at the same time without discrimination and not without discrimination. So also the all-knowing is separated from discrimination, and is at the same time without discrimination and not without discrimination....Just as earth is the dependence of all sentient beings, so also the all-knowing is the dependence of gods, human beings and asuras....Just as the element of fire burns all firewood insatiably, so also the all-knowing burns the firewood of ignorance insatiably....Just as the element of the wind removes all dust, so also the all-knowing removes the dust of all passion....Just as all sentient beings rejoice in the element of water, so also the all-knowing gives benefit to gods and human beings.”⁴⁸

The meaning of the elements, as expounded in the above passages from the central Shingon texts upon which Saigyō appears to have drawn, are then as follows:

- 1) Earth: the unborn; that which is depended upon
- 2) Water: the ineffable; that which is rejoiced in
- 3) Fire: that which is free from all defilements; that which consumes
- 4) Wind: that which transcends causality; that which blows away
- 5) Space: that which is void like space; that which does not discriminate
- 6) Consciousness: that which realizes; that which pervades all other elements.

The four mandalas Kūkai explains as four interlocking forms of expression of the sum of truth as comprised by the six elements. These four are the *mahā* or

⁴⁷ Yamada, *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*, 37.

⁴⁸ Translation adapted from Chikyō Yamamoto, *Mahāvairocana-sūtra: Translated into English from Ta-p'i lu che na ch'eng-fo shen-pien chia-ch'ih ching, the Chinese version of Śubhākarasīma and I-hsing, (A.D. 725)*. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1990, 2-3.

“great” 大 mandala, *samaya* or “vow” 三昧耶 mandala, *dharma* or “teachings” 法 mandala, and *karma* or “action” 羯磨 mandala.⁴⁹ Kūkai is frequently referred to as the origin of the concept of the four mandalas, and his texts do seem to be the first to refer to this set of four as a set of mandalas. However, the same set of four concepts is referenced in the *Kongōchōkyō* 金剛頂經 or *Vajrasekhara Sūtra*, another sutra highly revered within Shingon, which lists *mahā*, *samaya*, *dharma*, and *karma* as the “great seals.”⁵⁰

Kūkai once more quotes the *Dainichikyō*, which again in this case does not clearly mention this particular group of four, and expounds on his reading of the passage:

...it is explained in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* that “there are three esoteric forms of expression for all the Tathāgatas. They are *aksara* [Sanskrit letters], *mudrā* [signs], and *bimba* [images].” By *aksara* the Dharma-mandala is meant; by *mudrā*, various religious symbols, that is the Samaya-mandala; and by *bimba*, the physical forms of Buddha with major and minor characteristic marks, that is, the Mahā-mandala. Implicit in each of these three kinds of mandala are the departments and activities which we call the Karma-mandala....⁵¹

Again it appears that Kūkai is taking influences from other texts and looking for textual support for them in the *Dainichikyō*. Kūkai’s emphasis on the importance

⁴⁹ Another somewhat better-known Shingon categorization is that of the twin mandalas of the diamond world and the womb world. This set of four is a different system of categorization: the twin mandalas are different configurations of Buddhist figures, while the four mandalas are different ways of representing those figures. Either a diamond world mandala or a womb world mandala can be any of the four types, depending on how the Buddhist figures are visually represented.

⁵⁰ An English translation of the section on the Great Seals can be found on pp. 84-97 of Rolf W. Giebel, tr. *Two Esoteric Sutras* (Berkeley, Calif: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2001).

⁵¹ Hakeda 230.

of the sixth element that pervades all the others is parallel to his reading of the *karma* mandala/expression as the fourth that is implicit in the other three. In both cases Kūkai places central importance on the agency of the seeker of enlightenment, incorporating the practitioner’s connection to the concept into the concept itself as part of his defense of the possibility of attaining enlightenment in this very existence.

The *Hizōki* also addresses the four mandalas, but its uncertain provenance only adds to the question regarding the origin of the concept of the four mandalas. The passages from the *Hizōki* explaining the four mandalas are as follows:

The five elements. Said to be pictures in figure form, etc. The meaning of “great”

The tools and vows embraced by the beings. The meaning of “equal”

The third is the *dharma* mandala. It is of seed syllables. That is, it is said to be the meaning of “knowledge of the doctrine (軌持, *kiji*)”

The fourth is the action mandala. Action according to principles (威儀, *igi*). Of wood, soil, etc. The meaning of action....⁵²

In visual versions of these mandalas, the great mandala represents the Buddhist beings (Buddhas, bodhisattvas and deities) in anthropomorphic form. The *samaya* mandala represents the vows of the beings through objects, such as swords or lotus blossoms, that are associated with them. (The word *samaya*, which primarily means “vow,” is also used within Shingon to mean “equality.” The *Hizōki* therefore explains the meaning of the Shingon *samaya* mandala as incorporating both senses of the word.) The *dharma* mandala represents the figures through Siddham Sanskrit letters associated with them, and is intended to

⁵² Japanese text taken from Yamada, *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*, 46-50.

show the beings' receipt and transmission of the teachings; and the *karma* mandala represents the beings' action by portraying them three-dimensionally, in sculpted form.⁵³

The *rokudai-shiman* was a massive topic for Saigyō to tackle in verse form. Unlike in the case of his set on the *Lotus Sūtra*, there was no precedent within the history of waka for a poetic treatment of the concept. Yet Saigyō's is a highly sophisticated set of poems full of allusions to various Buddhist texts that, in addition to showing a well-grounded understanding of the Shingon conceptualization of each element and mandala, also possesses a composition of its own as a sequence. The poems interact and build on each other, creating a larger trajectory that, true to the context in which Kūkai introduces the elements and mandalas in the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, works towards demonstrating the possibility of attaining enlightenment in this very existence. The set features Saigyō's distinctive personal voice front and center; true again to Kūkai's conception of consciousness as the element that ties the other elements together and of action as the mandala implicit in all the others, Saigyō's set of poems creates a Shingon portrait of reality that emphasizes the practitioner's subjectivity and narrative. The speaker in these poems, like the voice heard in much of the rest of Saigyō's poetry, has a running inner dialogue that is constantly grappling with the various philosophical and emotional questions and obstacles

⁵³ One of the best-known examples of a *karma* mandala can be found in the *kōdō* or lecture hall at Tōji temple in Kyoto. Designed by Kūkai, it consists of the figures of twenty-one buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities, with Dainichi Nyorai in the center.

encountered along the Buddhist path. The same push and pull that can be seen in the rest of Saigyō's oeuvre between all-absorbing spiritual enthusiasm on the one hand and moments of friction due to conflicting or questioning impulses on the other is also seen here, as well as the sense that each of these individual moments ultimately contributes to the greater trajectory. Each element is framed as a stage along the path toward enlightenment and each mandala as a building block in a rhetorical defense of the viability of that path. The two sub-sequences thus form wholes that both interlock and contrast: the elements portion of the sequence is more of a narrative from inside the process of seeking enlightenment, consisting of a series of individual moments of Buddhist experience or realization that increase in profundity, while the mandala portion is more of an analysis of the same process from the outside.

This cycle is about enlightenment on multiple levels—in its theme, in its motion, and in its diction.⁵⁴ One important theme within the cycle is *hongaku* or original enlightenment, the central tenet of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism⁵⁵ that

⁵⁴ This statement is true not only of the *rokudai-shiman* sequence, but of Saigyō's sequences on the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *jūdai-jisshu*, and the Ten Pleasures of the Pure Land, which are also full of both the language of enlightenment and a larger theme of enlightenment constructed through Saigyō's own personal interpretation of the topic.

⁵⁵ Although the concept is mainly associated with Tendai Buddhism, Kūkai was an important early Japanese *hongaku* theorist. Jacqueline Stone states that "Kūkai must be acknowledged as the first Japanese Buddhist to engage seriously the concept of original enlightenment" (*Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* [Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999], 11). "Kūkai develops the idea of *hongaku* from that of an immanent principle that underlies all phenomena (*sheng mieh men*, J. *shōmetsu-mon*), to a notion identified with suchness itself (*chen ju men*, J. *shinnyo-mon*), synonymous with Buddhahood fully accomplished from all eternity." (Ruben Habito, *Originary*

lays the foundation for the possibility of *sokushin jōbutsu*,⁵⁶ or the possibility of attaining enlightenment in this very existence, by stating that by its very nature the human heart already possesses enlightenment, or the potential for enlightenment—indeed, “that all beings are enlightened inherently. Not only human beings, but ants and crickets, mountains and rivers, grasses and trees are all innately Buddhas.”⁵⁷ The process portrayed in the *rokudai-shiman* sequence of realizing one’s own potential for Buddhahood is that of an unfolding encounter with a reality that is inherently enlightening in its nature. Many of the poems use phrasing expressive of surprise or sudden realization, or frame the realization in terms of a rhetorical question so that the reader vicariously experiences the speaker’s thought process. Each poem, each fresh encounter, is like a small breakthrough, a miniature *satori* in and of itself.

The Poems on the Six Elements

1. Earth / *chi* / 地 (the unborn; that which is depended upon)

その門に出でて後ぞ知られける根を離れたる草木やはある (MBSS 54)

sono kado ni / idete nochi zo / shirarekeru / ne o hanaretaru / kusaki ya wa aru

Enlightenment: Tendai Hongaku Doctrine and Japanese Buddhism [Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies, 1996], 5.)

⁵⁶ The concept of *sokushin jōbutsu* was taken up by both Saichō, the founder of Tendai Buddhism, and Kūkai, the founder of Shingon; it is not known which of them was the first to espouse it (Stone 31).

⁵⁷ Stone 3.

It was after
 setting out for that gate
 that I realized:
 Does any plant really exist
 apart from its roots?

This poem expresses the nature of the earth element in terms of a realization, which is portrayed in all its immediacy by being phrased as a rhetorical question. This opening sets the stage for the unfolding series of revelations and realizations, told with a strong narrative subjectivity and a tendency towards self-examination and retrospection, that will follow.

The gate may represent the moment of *shukke*, or leaving behind family ties to pursue the Buddhist path. Yamada interprets it specifically as referring to *nyū shingon mon* or “entering the mantra gateway,” a term from the *Dainichikyō*, but acknowledges the problem with the verb—the poem does not say “enter” *irite* but “leave” *idete*, which due to the presence of the particle *ni* I have translated as “set out (for)” —and goes on to speculate that the verb in the received text may be mistaken.⁵⁸ I consider this relatively unlikely,⁵⁹ and believe that the more grammatically obvious interpretation of this poem is about the moment of leaving the world to set out for something else, which like Utsugi Genkō⁶⁰ I interpret to be the *hosshinmon*, or gateway into the world of the pursuit of enlightenment. The speaker is thus recalling the moment immediately before committing to the Buddhist path—that is, when he was still in the “unborn” state.

⁵⁸ Yamada, *Saigyō no waka to bukkō*, 37.

⁵⁹ Such a mistake would mean not a mere character-copying error but would require the *okurigana* to be changed as well.

⁶⁰ Nishizawa et al ed., *Sankashū* 382.

Saigyō also uses the imagery of the “gate” in the following poem from the *jūdai-jisshu* sequence:

入り初めて悟り開くる折は又同じ門より出づるなりけり (KGS 42)

irisomete / satori akuru / ori wa mata / onaji kado yori / izuru narikeri

That gate
where I first entered—
when enlightenment comes
I will go out again
through that same gate!

The *dai* of this poem is a line from the *Daihatsunehangyō* 大般涅槃經, or *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, that affirms the equality of *hosshin* (発心, the awakening of the heart to the desire for enlightenment) and *hikkyō* (畢竟, the attaining of enlightenment).⁶¹ The moment of entering the gate is the moment of *hosshin*, and the moment of leaving it is the moment of *hikkyō*: the two are referred to as equal. Due to its appearance in a poem referencing a sutra not particularly connected to Shingon, it would seem that for Saigyō the image of the “gate” is something larger than a Shingon-specific reference.

It may seem strange that the poem on the earth element does not directly mention the element itself at all, which is not the case for most of the rest of the element poems, but the second meaning of the earth element, “that which is depended upon,” is clearly visible in the image of the roots. Yamada Shōzen finds

⁶¹ The line reads 発心畢竟二无別、如是二心先心難、自未得度先度他、是故我礼初発心: “The awakening and the end [the gaining of enlightenment] are two that are not separate; in the same way, of these two the first is more difficult, for without yet understanding yourself you must first teach others. For this reason I honor the first awakening of the heart.”

a possible allusion here to a passage in the *Dainichikyō sho* that expounds on the *Dainichikyō's* description of earth as the “dependence of all sentient beings,” explaining that plants “all root and bud following the earth and...become the dependence for all sentient beings.”⁶² The image of the plant’s dependence on its roots and the roots on the soil may be seen as the non-dependently-arising starting point of dependently arising phenomena and beings, which nevertheless are able to attain Buddhahood through their inherent possession of Buddha-nature. It can also be seen as a symbol of that pre-existing foundation of Buddha-nature itself, which makes the eventual attainment of enlightenment possible. In other words, this poem affirms the principle of *hongaku* or original enlightenment, the basis for enlightenment that exists in every human being.

The moment from which this poem is spoken is therefore the starting point of the process towards the attainment of enlightenment. The following poems describe successive stages along the path. Saigyō’s apparent comparison of the seeker, or of his efforts along the Buddhist path, to a tree or a plant is a metaphor that will resurface later in the sequence.

2. Water / *sui* / 水 (the ineffable; that which is rejoiced in)

谷川の濁れるそこを澄ましつつおしてる波に流し出でつる (MBSS 55)

tanikawa no / nigoreru soko o / sumashitsutsu / oshiteru nami ni / nagashiidetsuru

Sweeping clean
the murky bed

⁶² Yamada, *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*, 38.

of the valley river,
it washes all out into
the shining waves beyond

The narrating voice visible throughout most of this sequence has temporarily disappeared in this second poem, although the rest of the sequence will see it return with gradually increasing clarity. The focus here is on the naturally cleansing action of the water element, rather than on the subjectivity of the recipient of the action; if the speaker from the previous poem is to be found anywhere in this poem, he is the riverbed being washed of filth. The “murky” (*nigoru*) state of the riverbed symbolizes worldly passions. Saigyō uses the same word in a poem from his series on the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which its meaning is more clearly stated:⁶³

あはれみの名残をばなほ留めけり濁る思ひの水澄まぬ世に (KGS 30)

awaremi no / nagori o ba nao / todomekeri / nigoru omoi no / mizu sumanu yo ni

You [the Buddha] have kept
the memory of pity
alive still, in this world
where the water murky with passions
does not shine clean

Yamada finds another likely allusion to the *Dainichikyō sho* in the water element poem, to a passage that describes the water element as that which “flows from the high to the low...waters well the plants and trees making them grow, returns things to their original cleanliness with no dirt or mud...cleans away

⁶³ The *dai* of this poem is the following line from the 28th chapter of the Lotus Sutra: 濁悪世中、其有受持是經典者、我当守護 (“In this filthy world, if there is a person who will receive these scriptures, I will surely protect him”).

passions..."⁶⁴ If the allusion to this passage is intended, it would suggest a somewhat hidden connection between this verse and the preceding one: the water is that which nourishes the roots upon which the trees and plants depend. As we will see, this is not the only point in the sequence where Saigyō appears to be including rather subtle and hidden connections between successive poems.

This poem is all written in one long line that seems to mirror the continuous flow of the water from the dirty shadows of the valley out to the wide and sunny ocean. The continuous flowing line seems to reflect the “rejoicing” aspect of the water element. The poem describes a passive acceptance of and delight in the encounter with cleansing wisdom.

3. Fire / *ka* / 火 (that which is free from all defilements; that which consumes)

光添えむ苦しみ燃ゆる罪の火に思ひ消つべきゆえなかりけり (MBSS 56)

hikari soemu / kurushimi moyuru / tsumi no hi ni / omoiketsubeki / yue nakarikeri

Adding its light
to the suffering burning
fire of sin—
There is after all
no reason to extinguish hope!

The free and joyful flow of the previous poem has turned into suffering as the process of cleansing from passions has become more intense. The striking image of the light, presumably of the Buddha’s wisdom, as working together with the

⁶⁴ Yamada, *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*, 39.

fires of hell effectively portrays the latter as cleansing rather than punitive in nature, and even as illuminating. Yamada finds another allusion here to a passage in the *Dainichikyō sho* which expounds on the illuminating function of fire: “just as the fire of the world can be used by the rich and the poor alike, and shines well in the dark night and brings the lost to the right way, effectively saving all living beings, so the fire of absolute wisdom exists equally for saints and strangers, and in the midst of the night of no beginning shows travelers the way toward virtue, and thus saves all the dharmas.”⁶⁵

In the second half of the poem the narrator’s inner dialogue reappears, voicing the realization (marked with the final auxiliary verb *keri*) that he has reason to hope. The word *omo[h]iketsu* contains an elaborate pun. There is first a conventional pun on *hi*, which both forms the last *kana* of the word *omohi* (emotion, passion), and possesses its own meaning of “fire”—thus *omohi* are the flames of earthly desires. But the word *omoiketsu* in its entirety also means “to despair”—thus, perhaps, “to despair in the flames of earthly desires.”

Saigyō treats the subject of hell in other poems; there is a sequence of twenty-seven poems in the *Kikigaki shū* called “On Seeing Pictures of Hell.”⁶⁶

4. Wind / *fū* / 風 (that which transcends causality; that which blows away)

⁶⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁶ *Kikigaki shū* 198-224. Joseph Sorensen has introduced this sequence in English in the article “Poetic Sequence as Personal Salvation: Saigyō’s Poems “Upon Seeing Pictures of Hell” in *Japanese Language and Literature* 46.1 (2012), 1-45.

古き木の根をも何かは思ふべき底にとほれる風にまかせて (MBSS 57)

furuki ki no / ne o mo nani ka wa / omoubeki / soko ni tōreru / kaze ni makasete

Why worry
about the roots
of the old tree?
I will leave them to the wind
that penetrates through their base

The narrator's inner dialogue is back in full force in this moment that represents a major realization, again phrased in the form of a rhetorical question. The image of tree roots from the earth poem has also returned. But, strikingly, the realization found in this poem is the reverse of the one in the earth poem: The roots that were earlier seen as so essential—and indeed, the very life of the tree itself—are now treated as an unnecessary attachment to be surrendered. Compared to the beginning verse of the sequence, this poem represents a moment of advanced awakening, the tearing down of the more elementary forms of understanding represented by the tree. In retrospect, perhaps the tree can be seen as symbolizing the illusions of self or of phenomena that serve as crutches during the earlier stages of the search for enlightenment, but are later transcended for a higher stage of understanding that, while built on the experience of phenomena, learns to look beyond them.

Yamada finds an allusion to the *Dainichikyō sho* which states that wind “skillfully nourishes the trees and forests and causes them to grow, and also tears down all things.”⁶⁷ The wind is therefore that which gives and also takes away—

⁶⁷ Yamada, *Saigyō no waka to bukkyō*, 41.

just as the fire both punishes and illuminates, the water both purges and nourishes, and dependence upon the ground can now be seen as either good or bad; all the elements so far can be seen to be double-sided as well as interactive in their qualities.

The clearest proof yet that Saigyō extends metaphors over more than one verse in this sequence will appear in the following verse.

5. Space/ *kū* / 空 (that which is void like space; that which does not discriminate)

塵もなき心の空にとめつればむなしき影もむなしからぬを (MBSS 58)

*chiri mo naki / kokoro no sora ni / tomet sureba / munashiki kage mo /
munashikaranu o*

When I searched the sky
of my spotless heart
I found that
even empty shadows
are not so empty after all!

This poem encapsulates one of the highest moment of awakening in this sequence, an awakening to the non-duality of form and emptiness, framed as a sudden realization by the use of the final exclamatory [*w*]/*o*. There is another affirmation of *hongaku* to be found here in the role played by the seeker's own heart in the attainment of this awakening. Yamada finds another possible allusion to the *Dainichikyō sho* which states in part that "the space element does not create departing from the appearance of the forms and colors of the various things, but

skillfully includes all of creation”⁶⁸—in other words, creates a faithful and complete reproduction of reality. The speaker in the poem appears to equate the function of his own heart with that of the space element, displaying a faith in the inherent potential of the human heart that is steeped in *hongaku* philosophy.

It is in the word “spotless,” literally “without even dust,” that a hidden connection between this verse and the previous one appears. It is the wind element that the *Dainichikyō* describes as removing the dust of delusions. The speaker can come to this moment of realization only once his heart is free of the dust that the wind has blown away. Thus these two verses are clearly linked together; it is the action of the wind that has made the heart finally pure enough for this moment of enlightenment.

6. Consciousness 識 (that which realizes; that which pervades all other elements)

おなじ里におのおの宿をしめおきてわが垣根とは思ふなりけり

(MBSS 59)

onaji sato ni / onoono yado o / shimeokite / wa ga kakine to wa / omou narikeri

Even in the same village
they each possess
their own dwellings,
each thinking
'this is my own fence!'

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42. The allusions Yamada finds to the *Dainichikyō sho* conclude with this poem; Saigyō appears to rely on the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* and the *Hizōki* for the remaining five poems.

The village is a metaphor for consciousness, which each of the villagers incorrectly sees as being his own respective possession; none of them realizes that consciousness transcends the individual. The scene is seen from the outside, and assumes a knowledge of the true nature of the situation that the villagers lack. Although the speaker in the previous poems seems to have disappeared, the perspective he has gained from the progression of the five preceding poems remains. The reader has followed the speaker through all the realizations that have occurred up to this point, culminating in the moment of non-dual awakening in the previous verse, and has now returned with him to the outside world to look with the enlightened and compassionate eyes of a bodhisattva at the delusions under which the rest of humanity labor. However, the repeated affirmations of *hongaku* throughout this cycle indicate that there is hope for the enlightenment of these characters as well, even if it is not yet realized.

The first six poems in the sequence thus portray the individual elements as moments within the process of moving toward enlightenment. Most of the verses are framed as instants of realization that gradually increase in profundity. These instants of specific realization, which occur in every verse except for the second, are marked by being phrased as rhetorical questions posed to the self (verses #1 and #4), or with the particles *keri* (verses #1, #3 and #6) or *[w]o* (verse #5).

The last four poems of the sequence also examine the process of achieving enlightenment in this existence, analyzing the process from the outside rather than the inside.

The Poems on the Four Mandalas

1. *Mahā* (Great) / *Dai* / 大 (mandala of anthropomorphic figures)

さまざまに染めつつ着けるきぬの色をやがて悟にかえりつるかな

(MBSS 60)

samazama ni / sometsutsu kikeru / kinu no iro wo / yagate satori ni / kaeritsuru

kana

Wearing robes
dyed in many colors,
even so,
returning in the end
to enlightenment

The portraits of the Buddhist figures in a *mahā* mandala incorporate the five Buddhist colors—yellow, green, red, white, and blue. Each of these colors is associated with one of the first five elements: yellow with earth, green with water, red with fire, white with wind, and blue with space. Consciousness, which is not represented visually, does not have a color. The reference to the colors ties this poem in with the six poems preceding. The subject of the “returning” is not clearly stated; it could either be the figures in the mandala or the speaker from the preceding poems. This verse can be seen as summing up the entire trajectory

of the first six poems, and in this way serving as a hinge between the two parts of the sequence.

The image of moving toward enlightenment while arrayed in the colors of the elements seems to represent an encounter with all aspects of the nature of reality in this existence, particularly since the use of the word “color” *iro* 色 seems to connect to the use in Buddhism of the word *shiki* 色 to refer to material phenomena. Saigyō further supports this interpretation with the twist introduced by the use of the word “dyed”: this is the same word that was used in the three poems discussed earlier in this paper in which its meaning clearly refers to emotional or aesthetic attachments to transient phenomena. For two reasons then Saigyō’s use of the word *iro* here can then be read as having a second sense, that of affirming the possibility of enlightenment in this existence by connecting it directly to the experience of the passions encountered in this existence—an affirmation of *bonnō soku bodai*.

The rest of the mandalas portion comprise similar affirmations of *hongaku* and *sokushin jōbutsu*, forming a mounting defense.

2. *Samaya* (Vows) / *Sanmaya* / 三昧耶 (mandala of objects associated with figures)

影形よろづのことはいろひ草さて平等といふにぞありける (MBSS 61)

kage katachi / yorozu no koto wa / iroigusa / sate byōdō to / iu ni zo arikeru

All things
both form and shadow

are tools—
all, then,
can be called equal

The obscure word *iroigusa* can refer either to a topic for discussion or to a tool to be used for a specific purpose;⁶⁹ in context the latter meaning would seem to be intended. By representing the Buddhist figures through objects that represent their individual vows, the *samaya* mandala focuses on the role of the practitioner's will and commitment to practice. Saigyō ties together the two senses of the word *samaya*, “vow” and “equality,” by stating that anything can be the “tool” that forms the symbol of an individual being's vow to pursue enlightenment. In other words, if any vow to pursue enlightenment is equal to any other, then any method of pursuing it is also equally valid. After the preceding verse's affirmation of enlightenment through experience of the sum of this existence, including its passions, this verse goes farther in saying that not only are all things compatible with enlightenment, but all things can be actively used as tools for its pursuit. The reference to “things both form and shadow” recalls the language of the fifth element poem; here we have another reaffirmation of the non-duality of substance and emptiness.

3. *Dharma* (Teachings) / *Hō* / 法 (mandala of Sanskrit letters associated with figures)

⁶⁹ Ibid., 48.

書きもおかず読みも足らねばいかにしてこのもとにだに心めぐらん

(MBSS 62)

kaki mo okazu / yomi mo taraneba / ika ni shite / kono moto ni dani / kokoro

meguran

I haven't written them down
nor even read them adequately—
How then do they then
course through my heart
as they do?

The Siddham Sanskrit letters or *bonji* 梵字 that replace the figures of the buddhas, bodhisattvas and deities in a *dharma* mandala draw attention to the role of verbal transmission in the pursuit of enlightenment. Nonetheless, Saigyō's treatment of the topic in this verse is unexpected: he appears to be downplaying the role of the verbally transmitted teachings. What the speaker has not read or copied enough are of course the scriptures, yet he affirms his progress despite his neglect of them.

The allusions in Saigyō's poems make it clear that he did in fact read and ruminate on at least the more central Shingon texts. Perhaps he considered his knowledge of more esoteric texts to be insufficient, and Yamada suggests that this poem constitutes a confession on Saigyō's part that he was not skilled at reading Sanskrit.⁷⁰ There seems to be a little more than this going on here, however. The speaker is asking a non-rhetorical question: how, indeed, could the truths of the scriptures fill one's heart despite a lack of thorough knowledge of their contents?

⁷⁰ Ibid., 49-50, 54.

Looking at the poem immediately preceding this one, we can assume that one answer to this question is that there are other paths to enlightenment, other ways of fulfilling the same vow, besides devoting oneself to reading and copying the scriptures.

There is one more component to the answer, which will appear in the poem that follows.

4. *Karma* (Action) / *Katsuma* / 羯磨 (three-dimensional mandala)

たらちねのおほしたてたる姿にて悟りはやがてありける物を (MBSS 63)

tarachine no / ohoshitatetaru / sugata ni te / satori wa yagate / arikeru mono o

In my form
just as
my parents raised me—
Enlightenment
was already there!

The final poem of the sequence answers the question from the previous poem with triumphant finality: knowledge of the scriptures is less necessary than the inherent potential for enlightenment that already lies within the human heart. The three-dimensional *karma* mandala is meant to emphasize the role of the practitioner's action in the search for enlightenment. In light of this, Saigyō's approach to the *dai* seems oddly non-active. Perhaps he is subverting the centrality of action, as he subverts the centrality of verbal transmission in the previous verse, or perhaps he is emphasizing that the end goal of the action is to realize the potential already there. Either way, he is clearly affirming the truth of

hongaku, the potential for enlightenment present in the seeker's heart from the very beginning.

Saigyō's return in this final verse to *hongaku*, the theoretical foundation for the possibility of *sokushin jōbutsu*, triumphantly ties up the defense he has developed over the course of the four mandala poems. In the *mahā* mandala poem Saigyō identifies wisdom with experience, perhaps even with the experience of passions; in the *samaya* mandala poem he emphasizes the infinite variety of forms commitment to the Buddhist way can take; in the *dharma* mandala poem he de-emphasizes the role of verbal tradition; in the *karma* mandala poem he de-emphasizes the role of action. If the thread running through the six elements portion of the sequence is the narrative of a soul going through the process of attaining enlightenment in this existence, the thread running through the mandalas portion is more of a rhetorical defense of the viability of that process, a discussion of the how and the why. As a running thread, the mandala sequence reads: *The road to enlightenment is full of engagement with the present existence. Commitment to enlightenment can take any form. Even knowledge of the scriptures is not the only way to enlightenment—why is this? Because the potential for enlightenment was already there within you from your birth.* The mandala portion of the sequence comes back in the end to the same affirmation of *hongaku* from which the elements portion began. *Hongaku* is thus the beginning and the end of the basis for the possibility of enlightenment in this existence.

Conclusion

The *rokudai-shiman* sequence is representative of Saigyō's spirit of empiricism in reconciling Buddhism and poetry. Full of Saigyō's sense of narrative and portrayal of inner dialogue, the sequence shows the poet grappling with Buddhist concepts in the same way he grapples with every other topic. Saigyō blends Buddhist theoretical frames with the experience-oriented poetic approach throughout his poetry, and although in many of his best-known works he brings a Buddhist reflection into a poetic moment, here he can be seen bringing poetic processing into the exploration of a Buddhist concept. Saigyō affirms the viability of enlightenment in this existence by poetically engaging with each individual component of the concepts Kūkai brings into play to defend the idea. He does this both on the level of the single poem, by portraying the essence of each element in the form of a personal moment of realization, and on the level of the entire sequence, by shaping a chain of interrelated concepts into a narrative and an ongoing dialogue conducted in his own distinctive voice.

In defending the possibility of enlightenment through experience, engagement with passions, and a path unique to the individual that may take a variety of forms, Saigyō may even on some level be defending his own chosen path, the Way of Poetry, making the case that it is as good as any other way. This series forms a convincing defense of poetry's compatibility with Buddhism not only in

its successful weaving together of multiple layers of Shingon concepts and images into a piece of literature, but also in its portrayal of the similarity between the poetic moment of realization and the Buddhist moment of enlightenment. So many of Saigyō's *shakkyōka* are about moments of enlightenment in both topic and structure that perhaps it can be said that for Saigyō a Buddhist poem is in a sense always about enlightenment at least on the micro scale—that is, about the *satori*-like moment of personally grasping the truth of a concept. By extension, the poetic act itself can be seen as a moment of *satori*, albeit one that does not stop with a passive realization, but translates the poet's moment of *satori* into a moment that will happen over and over again for readers: in other words, poetry as the act of a bodhisattva.

Saigyō's intimate engagement with the parallels and conflicts between the Buddhist and poetic mindsets, with both the possibilities and the problems of merging the two, paved the way for the closer union of poetics and Buddhist philosophy that would be seen in the medieval period to come. Although much progress had already been made toward the productive coexistence of Buddhism and literature by the late Heian period, Saigyō made new inroads in investigation of the issues that arise in the practice of melding the two. His work, along with that of others including Fujiwara no Shunzei and Jakuzen, cleared the way for the closer engagement of poetics with Buddhist philosophy that would occur in the medieval era, from Myōe's embrace of waka as mantra⁷¹ to the later application of

⁷¹ Myōe attributes this teaching to Saigyō in accounts of conversations between the two contained in *Myōe shōnin denki*, Myōe's teachings as recorded by

Zen aesthetics to linked verse by poets such as Shinkei. Over the coming centuries the place of Buddhism within poetry would gradually become less a matter of poetic topic and more a matter of application to the creative process. Saigyō helped open the way for this next phase through his poetic record of a lifelong encounter between Buddhism and poetry. The *rokudai-shiman* sequence represents an instance of that encounter that is of a kind different from many of Saigyō's better-known poems, but that helps to give a more rounded picture of his practice of the Way of Poetry.

his disciple Kikai. Among Myōe's supposed quotes from Saigyō are the following: "To think of and meditate on one *ku* is the same as to recite the secrets of Shingon (Hiraizumi Akira, ed., *Myōe shōnin denki* [Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980], 166)." As commentator Hiraizumi Akira observes, these conversations can probably be assumed to be embellished since Myōe was a mere eighteen years of age at the time of Saigyō's death (176).

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