RELIGION, SOLITUDE, AND NATURE IN THE POETRY OF
THE ZEN MONK RYÖKAN

by

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ABSTRACT

The Zen monk Ryōkan (1758-1831), who referred to himself by the self-depracating term taigu or Great Fool, is widely known in Japan through folktales which stress the eccentricities of his character. His extremely individualistic calligraphy, with its spidery unrestrained lines, is most highly valued, and new forgeries still appear frequently. He is less famous for his poetry of which there remain extant some 1,400 waka or Japanese poems and approximately 450 kanshi or Chinese poems. Although Ryōkan's name has become known in the West through the Zen boom of the past twenty-five years, very little concrete work has been produced in either translation or criticism.

It is my intent in this thesis to examine the concepts of religion, solitude, and nature, through a study of Ryōkan's Chinese poems. I feel that these three elements are central to an understanding of Ryōkan's life and poetry. As for religion, Ryōkan was a Sōtō monk who studied under the Zen Master Kokusen of Entsū-ji in Bitchū in what is today Okayama Prefecture. After gaining enlightenment and receiving inka, the formal recognition of his spiritual attainment, he wandered for five years before returning to his native province where he eventually settled in a hermitage on Mt. Kugami. Unlike the majority of monks of his day, he
continually maintained himself by means of takuhatsu or mendicancy. This aligns him with his poetic model Han-shan (Cold Mountain) and other illustrious Zen monks such as Shūhō Myōchō who lived under the Gojo bridge for twenty years before founding Daitoku-ji. Ryōkan writes in one of his poems, "living in tranquility that is being a monk."

The theme of solitude works in harmony with rather than in opposition to the idea of society in these poems. The religious seeker is trained by the sangha or community of monks, and supported by alms from the lay community, but the Zen Way relies most heavily on individual devotion, strength of discipline and self-power (jiriki). Nature is the unifying element of the poems for it represents to the poet, spontaneous existence, before contrivances and dualities: Mother Nature as a mirror for self-Nature.

In addition to the study of these major thematic elements, this thesis includes some forty-five poems, the majority of which have not previously been translated.
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Chapter I: A NOTE ON TRANSLATION
On the subject of the translations themselves, I have obviously endeavoured, in all ways, to remain as close as possible to the originals. Each line of translation represents a line of the original poem. The exception here is in certain poems with seven character lines. Where it has been necessary to break up a line for typing purposes, an indentation of the second half has been used to indicate the line length of the original.

With respect to syntax, I have also attempted to make the organization of phrases correspond to the original wherever possible. The restriction here, has been the limit not only of English grammatical possibility, but also of acceptable modern usage. I might note that the English translations which appear in this paper are far closer to the Chinese originals than the syntactical acrobatics necessary in Japanese kundoku transliteration.

In the case of punctuation, I have deferred to the Chinese convention of unpunctuated texts. Here it is a question of poetic style. There has yet to be devised a system of punctuation for reading poetry, analogous to musical notation. Just how long a pause is a period, comma, semi-colon, or question mark? I have preferred to use spaces of varying length to denote caesura. Thus a pause is regulated by the length of time the eye
takes to pass over a space. The inverse occurs in the ballbouncing poem quoted in Chapter V, p. 52, where the words of the final line have been run-on in imitation of countless childrens' playtime songs we have all heard. I have also chosen to omit the question mark, relying instead upon the reader's attention to grammatical structure to recognize the interrogative.

As for capitalization, the traditional rules apply in the case of personal names and the designation of geographical locations. However, since much of Chinese poetry is composed of parallel lines or parallel couplets, I have capitalized the initial letter of each line beginning a parallel couplet, each line preceded by an end-stopped line, and the initial letter of each first line. In the case of the term Zen, it is spelled with a lower case letter when it refers to dhyāna, or meditational practice, and with a capital letter when it refers to the school of Buddhism.

It is my belief that the language of poetry must be immediate and vibrant if the reader is to elicit its meaning. If the language of a poem does not capture our attention, if it is not alive to us, then the meaning within is not transmitted. For this reason, I have tried as much as possible to translate these poems in modern spoken language. Ryōkan's poems like those of Han-shan, whom he admired, alluded to and sometimes imitated, were simply written in often colloquial language. I have tried
to preserve that element. This approach however, is neither new nor unique. In the mid-1950's Gary Snyder translated one line of a Han-shan poem, "Go tell families with silverware and cars / What's the use of all that noise and money?" And that interpretation transmits all the force of the original.

As for the choice of poems within this text, when I began working on Ryokan's poems, my selection was based simply on what I was capable of reading. As my language skills improved and the topic became more clearly defined, I would read and translate poems which clearly contained elements important to the themes of religion, solitude, or nature. I have, in the case of this paper, been more concerned with what a particular poem might tell us about these major elements of Ryokan's life than whether that poem stood well on its own as a poem either in Sino-Japanese or in translation. From the Man'yoshū on down, the Japanese have always been great compilers and editors of poetry. Most of the poems included in this work I am sure would fall into their category of zasshi or miscellaneous poems. Throughout this paper, the criteria for selection and arrangements of poems has been subjective, and many poems could be moved freely from one category to another, but that is due to the nature of the poems and the fact that the major elements of religion, solitude and nature are so closely connected. After each section of text, I have included a selection of poems on that particular
theme, as the impetus for this work has been as much the translation of Ryōkan's poetry as the completion of this thesis. Each poem in this paper is suffixed by a number in square brackets which refers to the number of the poem in Tōgō Toyoharu's work Ryōkan Zenshū (Tokyo: Sogensha, 1959).

If there is error in these translations it is the result of linguistic conservatism and my meagre skills as a translator.
Chapter II: INTRODUCTION
This thesis presents the kanshi or Chinese style poems of the Japanese Zen monk Ryokan, whose life spanned the years from 1758 to 1831. The literature of this age is commonly referred to as chusei bungaku, or medieval literature, yet this nomenclature reveals nothing about the literature itself or the times in which Ryokan lived. In 1853, a mere twenty-two years after Ryokan's death, Commander Perry sailed into the harbour of Uraga, ending Japanese isolationism and ushering the modern age into Japan. Ryokan's lifetime, from the middle to late Tokugawa era, was a time of great political, economic, and cultural change in Japan, yet these changes are not directly reflected in his writing. The fact is that Ryokan's life and art stood still against the flow of these changes, preserving ancient traditions against modernity, and it is this archaism which is the most characteristic element of his poetic work.

But Ryokan was not just a poet. To this day in Japan, he is most widely and commonly known as the wildly eccentric monk who passed his days playing ball bouncing or hide and seek with the village children, or who cut a hole in the roof of his hut to allow a young bamboo plant to grow and flourish. It is through the oral folk tradition that Ryokan, and the spirit which he represents, have become an essential element of Japanese consciousness.
Ryōkan is also known as a highly individualistic calligrapher. The distinct yet spidery lines of Chinese characters or the alternately bold or fine flowing lines of his cursive script have long been fascinating models for aspiring calligraphers and counterfeiters alike. All his extant pieces are valued as national art treasures. Whatever the admitted shortcomings of Ryōkan's poetic style, whether it be the overuse of archaic epithets in his waka, or Japanese style verse, or the reliance on the T'ang dynasty poet Han-shan (j. Kanzan) in his kanshi, Ryōkan's calligraphy visually illustrates the spirit which is the major reason for his continued popularity as a folk figure and poet. It is this idealistic spirit of the man, as much as anything, which accounts for the upsurge in scholarly interest in Ryōkan in Japan, and which makes him the subject of this thesis.

Ryōkan's poetic output was quite high; in all some 1,400 waka and over 450 kanshi have been collected. It is from the latter that I have made my translations and on them based this study of major thematic elements. There are several reasons why it is not surprising that Ryōkan should have written poetry in Chinese. The first is the historical origin of the Japanese written language in the Chinese language, then the fact that the Japanese aristocracy, and the rising middle-class of the Tokugawa era were educated in the Chinese classics. Ryōkan was the son of a nanushi or village administrator and so received a good Confucian education. The third most important reason for Ryōkan's facility in Chinese is
the fact that he was a Buddhist monk. From the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the early 12th century, monks travelled back and forth between China and Japan, effecting religious change and carrying on trade. Because of the great difference in the spoken languages of the two countries, these monks relied to a great extent on the written word to give and receive their training. Poems were composed for social occasions such as meetings and farewells, as well as to signify the intuitive understanding of philosophical principles. During the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries in Japan, an extensive and important body of Buddhist poetry was produced under the name Gozan bungaku or "Literature of the Five Mountains."

Ryokan chose not to ally himself with this or any other particular school of kanshi writing. Instead, he eschewed the use of artifice, neglected rhyme schemes and often wrote poems of uneven line length. The result was a style all his own. As a model, he favoured the poems of the T'ang Zen recluse Han-shan, who lived in about the 7th or 8th century in the T'ien-t'ai range in Chekiang province at a place called Cold Mountain. Han-shan took the same characters for his name, so that they have come to represent a state of mind as much as a geographical location. His poems, written in the colloquial language, were based on his daily activities, on the wild mountains around him and on his meditations. Ryōkan's similar interests made him a fitting heir to Han-shan.
Along with Burton Watson, I believe that Ryōkan stood apart from the historical literary developments of the Tokugawa era. His poetic preference was for T'ang poetry, while that of his contemporaries moved towards Sung works. Other poets aimed at perfecting technique and adapting *kanshi* to fit the Japanese experience, while Ryōkan ignored stylistics. Most important of all, Ryōkan lived alone in the country away from urban social and literary activities, centered historically in Kyoto and Kamakura, and later in Edo and Nagasaki. Although the development of Neo-Confucianism in early Tokugawa times can be said to have created the atmosphere where Ryōkan was introduced to Chinese learning in his childhood, his poetry clearly reflects his Buddhist monk's training. It is not for the technical proficiency of his poetry that Ryōkan is remembered but for the intensity of his unique and individual feeling.

Ryōkan is the religious name of Yamamoto Eizo, born in 1758 in the village of Izumosaki in Echigo province (present-day Niigata-ken). As mentioned previously, Ryōkan's father was a village administrator, and as the eldest son, Ryōkan would have followed in his footsteps. For reasons which are not clear, however, Ryōkan, at the age of seventeen, shaved his head and entered a local monastery. One day the Zen Master Kokusen, on his way through Echigo, stopped at the monastery where Ryōkan was living. Ryōkan followed him to the Entsu-ji, his monastery in Bitchu in what is today Okayama prefecture, and underwent
training there for ten years. After finishing his training, and after Kokusen's death, Ryōkan wandered about for five years. He returned to his home province following the death of his father in 1795, and around 1804 settled on the slopes of Mt. Kugami, in a hut named gogo-an, the "Five Measures Retreat." The hut had been named by the former inhabitant, after his daily food allotment from the monastery on the mountain. Ryōkan lived at the Gogo-an for thirteen years, and during this period wrote some of his best kanshi. While at the Gogo-an, Ryōkan supported himself by alms-taking and gathering wild edible plants. When he became so old that he could no longer move freely on the mountainous terrain, Ryōkan moved to a shrine at the base of Mt. Kugami and ended his life in an old storehouse in the village of Shimazaki. During these final years he formed a friendship with a Buddhist nun named Teishin (1798-1872), who compiled a collected of Ryōkan's waka entitled Hachisu no tsuyu, "Lotus Dew" (1835).

Like Han-shan, Ryōkan wrote poems in simple language on everyday subjects that concerned him directly. He describes his wanderings, daily meditation, seasonal changes with their pleasures and hardships, and the natural beauties which surrounded his retreat. The major thematic elements which I have chosen to discuss - religion, solitude, and nature, are all inextricably connected. Religion is the attitude of the poet, solitude the mode of maintaining and intensifying this attitude and nature is the example and the backdrop against which Ryōkan lived his life.
Chapter III: RELIGION
This terse poem, presented in impeccable Zen style, is no doubt the most direct statement of Ryōkan's poetics. It is also a suitable starting point for a discussion of Ryōkan's religious practice as it is expressed in his poetic work.

"Who called my poems poems / My poems aren't poems." This first couplet negates the primary assumption of the discerning mind: that this grouping of words, formally structured, is poetry. Ryōkan's poems are best characterized by their intentional avoidance of the four tones and their indifference to the rules which governed rhyme scheme. It is recorded that Ryōkan most disliked "Talk that smacked of pedantry, elegance or enlightenment; writing poems on assigned topics; the poetry of poets, the writing of
writers, and chefs' cooking." He sought and admired that which was spontaneous and natural in preference to that which was excessively refined or bound by social strictures.

"When you understand that my poems aren't poems / Then we can begin to talk about poetry." This second couplet resolves the tensions of positive and negative by leaping beyond these meaningless abstractions of the dualistic mind: the Zen view. What Ryokan says is that he will be able to discuss poetry only with one who understands that his poems are not poetry in the commonly accepted meaning of the word. To really understand, is to transcend the distinction; "this is poetry" and "that is not poetry." In this attitude, Ryokan is exhibiting "rightview", (Samma Ditthi, the first step on the Eightfold Noble Path of Buddhism), because only that which surpasses form (the "form is emptiness" of prajñā-paramitā literature) is true poetry.

Looking beyond form is a poetic ideal which sets Ryokan apart from other kanshi poets who sought to write poems that were stylistically indistinguishable from T'ang and Sung dynasty models which they so admired. Ryokan's ideal, however, is also a paradox because the method of learning to compose Chinese poetry has always been by recourse to the great poems of the past. If we understand Ryokan's non-poetry as the rejection of form and poetical devices, then what can we consider to be the essence of his poetry?
How admirable a fine gentleman
at his leisure he likes to compose poetry
Old style verse patterned on Han and Wei
for modern style he makes T'ang his teacher
With such elegance he creates his compositions
improving them with novel flourishes
But since he doesn't set down what's in his heart
however many his thoughts may be what do they amount to

In the final couplet of this poem, Ryōkan suggests that this
"fine gentleman['s] poetry fails because of his inability to
overcome form and verbally transmit shinchū no mono, "things of
the heart." Ryōkan felt that all Japanese poetry went downhill
after the Kokinshū "Collection of Ancient and Modern Times,"
a.d. 905), and that the pinnacle of Japanese poetic accomplishment
lay in the Man'yōshū ("Myriad Leaves Collection," early eighth
century) because the quality of expression found therein
surpassed mere poetic structure. If we examine the latter text, we find that both Books XI and XII contain poems on the subject of *tadashi shincho o noberu,*" speaking as directly as possible about the emotions." It has been said of Ryōkan some ten centuries later: *shi no kokoro no ugoki ga konpon da.*" "The movement of the heart of the poem is fundamental."²

It is because Ryōkan rescues poetry from mere formalism that we can consider his *kanshi* as a realistic and reliable source of information regarding the spiritual life that moved his heart. Edward Sapir once defined religion as "... Man's never-ceasing attempt to discover a road to spiritual serenity across the perplexities and dangers of daily life."³ This definition applies in particular to Ryōkan because it is precisely through living within the transiety and finite that he aims to grasp the meaning of the enduring and absolute. His poems were written not for poetry meetings or other social gatherings, but rather to set down the joys of perceiving the wonders of nature, the bitterness of the cold winters, the hardships of obtaining enough food to stay alive, and the personal intuitive realization of Buddhist philosophical teachings.

In his works, Ryōkan gives an admirable account of himself as a man in general, and as a Zen monk in particular. Kera Masakazu,² one of Ryōkan's disciples wrote: *shi ga heizei no gyōjō shikachu ni guzai su,* "The everyday conduct of the
Master is superbly exhibited in his Chinese and Japanese poems.\(^d\)

The term "everyday conduct" brings to mind a statement attributed to the Chinese Zen Master Baso Doitsu\(^b\) (ch. Ma-tsu Tao-i, 707-786): "Everyday Mind -- that is the Way."\(^5\) Indeed the following poem by Ryōkan illustrates that the Buddha's Way is not to be found in the intellectual perception of philosophical principles.

Though you read as many books as the sands of the Ganges they're not equal to intuiting one true phrase
If someone were to ask what it is
I'd say Just know your own heart

"Know your own heart:" this is the core of Ryōkan's Buddhism, the goal of his spiritual life, just as the verbal transmission of what moves the heart is the essence of his poetry.
The character "shin," also read "kokoro," translated here as "heart" is generally interchangeable with the term mind. In the context of Zen Buddhism and particularly within the context of Ryōkan's poetry, it is best understood in the sense of Mind: shinbutsu (the Mind is Buddha), busshin (Buddha Mind; detached from good and evil), or bussho (Buddha Nature: the capacity for enlightenment inherent in all sentient beings).

Zen is often referred to as shinshu, the Sect of Mind or the Intuitive Sect.

In sectarian terms, Ryōkan was a monk of the Soto (ch. Ts'ao-tung) line of Zen which was established in Japan by Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253), but which originated in China where its founders were Tozan Ryokai (ch. Tung-shan Liang-chieh, 807-869) and Sozan Honjakū (ch. Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi, 840-901). In the following poem Ryōkan traces his spiritual lineage even further back, to the very introduction of Zen into China:

wa go shi todo ni kitaru
kore shōshō no en ni arazu
ryo ni asobu mo ryo gu seu
gi ni yuku mo gi tare ka awareman
tadachi ni suho no itadaki ni nobori
ichiza kunen o hetari
ban ni kotatsu no shi ni sesshi
emyo kore yori tsutau

[ll1]
Our Master's coming from the East
wasn't motivated by a trivial cause
First he travelled to Liang but
Liang wouldn't accept him
then he went to Wei but
who would sympathize with him there
Straight away he climbed to the summit of Mt. Sung
and once seated remained nine years
In his old age he met a man of vast attainment
through him the wisdom-life was passed on

The Master who came to the East is Bodhidharma (ch. P'u-t'i-ta-mo, j. Bodaidaruma) and the man of "vast attainment" is Eka (ch. Hui-k'o, 487-593), who cut off his arm while standing in the snow outside Bodhidharma's cave to prove his resolve to become the latter's disciple. Although on the surface this poem serves to trace the history of the transmission of Zen, it also contains three points of importance in defining Ryōkan's own religious practice.

The first: "And once seated remained nine years," indicated the great determination with which Bodhidharma applied himself to the practice of dhyāna, or Zen meditation. He was called the "wall-gazing Brahmin," and his nine years of meditation on Mt. Sung is basis of one of the most enduring of Zen legends.

Next: as with Bodhidharma's wall-gazing, Eka's cutting off his arm while standing in the snow exemplifies the fierce desire to overcome the delusions of the world in search for Absolute Truth. Both these patriarchs of Zen are examples to be emulated.
by other seekers of the Way, such as Ryōkan.

Finally and perhaps most important of all is the statement of the final line of the poem; "through him the wisdom-life was passed on." Although it is recorded that Bodhidharma passed on the Lankāvatāra-sūtra (j. Ryōga kyo) to Eka, this fact is usually overlooked and it is the traditional Zen view that what Bodhidharma transmitted to Eka on Mt. Sung was the same thing which Buddha Sakyamuni passed on to Mahākāsāyana on Vulture Peak: the Dharma.

A special transmission outside the scriptures, not founded upon words and letters; by pointing directly to man's (own) mind, it lets him see into (his own true) nature and (thus) attain Buddhahood.7

As for the Dharma, it is to be transmitted from mind to mind.8

This of course is the essential definition of Zen which sets it apart from other schools of Buddhism. The Sect of Mind, Zen (ch. Ch' an, skrt. dhyāna) is based on meditation aiming at ultimate knowledge or Wisdom (skrt. prajñā) of Absolute Nature realized intuitively. Ultimate Truth (Dharma) is passed on from Master to disciple, "from mind to mind," when the disciple has attained intuitive knowledge of his own nature through meditation rather than through the study of scriptures. This is the school of Buddhism to which Ryōkan belonged. After ten years training at Entsu-ji in Bitchu in what is today Okayama Prefecture, Ryōkan gained enlightenment and received inka, the formal recognition
of his attainment, from his Master Kokusen. Thus Ryōkan carried on the line of direct transmission from Buddha to Kasyapa, from Bodhidharma to Eka.

In this poem, Ryōkan contrasts his copying the Patriarch Bodhidharma, by sitting in meditation, with the intellectual approach of sutra-study, or trying to learn the mind with the mind. This is a reiteration of Ryōkan's statement quoted earlier that reading as many books as the sands of the Ganges is not equal to a single phrase intuitively realized. Reading the sutra's is intellectual, while the dhyāna of the Patriarch is intuitive. Ryōkan's poems abound with references to the practice
of dhyana or zen meditation, as well as references to the act of simple sitting which must be interpreted in the light of the poet's Zen practice as well as Dogen's shikantazā° or "just sitting."

Dhyana, zazen, seated meditation, is the cornerstone of Ryōkan's Buddhist practice, for it is through zazen that he seeks to "know (his) own heart," that is: to realize "his own true nature." His reliance on zazen makes Ryōkan a traditionalist. In Japan, the followers of the Sōtō line of Zen are more numerous than those of the Rinzai line, but it is not as well known in the West because its methods are conservative rather than outwardly curious. Rather than the shouts and beatings sometimes associated with koan interviews, and rather than insist on enlightenment as a sudden intuitive flash, Sōtō Zen stresses a life of zazen and places emphasis on the practice of zazen as enlightenment in and of itself.

 seiya kyosō no moto
daza shite nōi o yosu
hōzo wa bikō to taishi
mimi wa kento ni atatte taruru
mado shirami tsuki hajimete idete
ame yande shitatari nao shigeshi
awaremubeshi kono toki no i
ryoryō tada mizukara shiru nomi

[125]
A still night beside the empty window
sitting down I arrange my robe
Navel in line with nostrils
ears even with the tops of the shoulders
Window whitened in the sudden moon
the rain has stopped but the trickling goes on
What a pity the feeling of this moment
boundless and lonely is sensed only by me

Here Ryōkan's words echo Dōgen Kigen's text, Fukanazengi, "General teachings for the Promotion of Zazen."

In the sitting place, spread a thick square cushion and on top of it put a round cushion. Some meditate in paryanka (full cross-legged sitting) and others in half paryanka. Prepare by wearing your robe and belt loosely. Then rest your right hand on your left foot, your left hand in your right palm. Press your thumbs together. Sit upright. Do not lean to the left or right, forward or backward. Place your ears in the same plane as your shoulders, your nose in line with your navel. Keep your tongue against the palate and close your lips and teeth firmly. Keep your eyes open. Inhale quietly. Settle your body comfortably. Exhale sharply. Move your body to the left and right. Then sit cross-legged steadily.

Think the unthinkable. How do you think the unthinkable? Think beyond thinking and unthinking. This is the important aspect of sitting.

That Ryōkan alludes to Dōgen in this poem is significant because Dōgen's Zen is known as the zen of "just sitting".

Dōgen is considered to be one of Japan's great religious Minds, as the complexity and depth of his work Shobōgenzō ('Treasury of Knowledge Regarding the True Dharma') will indicate. He was uncompromising in his efforts to establish a pure Zen tradition in Japan, and rather than intermingle his Zen with other religious practices, Dōgen chose to spend most of his time in small
rural temples. However well known Dōgen may be as a metaphysical mind, the strength of Soto Zen in Japan is most certainly due to his emphatic advocacy of diligent religious practice. To Dōgen, the practice of zazen in which the posture expresses the unity of mind and body is paramount; there is no enlightenment apart from the practice of zazen.

The most important point in the study of the Way is zazen. Many people in China gained enlightenment solely through the strength of zazen. Some who were so ignorant that they could not answer a single question exceeded the learned who had studied many years solely through the efficacy of their single-minded devotion to zazen. Therefore, students must concentrate on zazen alone and not bother about other things. The Way of the Buddhas and Patriarchs is zazen alone. Follow nothing else.10
At midday I go begging food in the walled town
At night I return beneath the cliffs
and calmly sit in zen
How simple one robe and one bowl
Truly admirable the refinement of the Western sky

In this poem's illustration of Ryōkan's simple monastic existence, the ideas of mendicancy and eremitism, two other major elements of Ryōkan's Buddhism are introduced. Historically, Buddhism is an outgrowth of the tradition of the parivrajaka or wanderer who left society in order to find liberation. The Buddhist bhikṣu or monk (literally beggar) wandered for eight months of the year and stayed in monasteries established by kings or wealthy patrons during the rainy season.

Eventually monasteries became more or less permanent dwelling places for monks because they encouraged the practice of meditation and the study of scriptures. With the introduction of Buddhism into China came a new development in Indian monasticism: a form of monastic agriculture to support the communities of those who sought the Way. Without denying the support provided by the lay community in both China and Japan, the practice of alms-taking (takuhatu) became a ritual exchange in which the monk learned humility and the laymen acquired merit through self-denial. The shift to self-support did not mean that monks devoted less time to their religious practice, for the Zen monk finds lessons everywhere. As the Zen Master Hyakujo Ekai (ch. Po-chang Huai-hai) once taught: "A day without work is a
And the Master Nansen (Ch. Nan-ch'uan) said: "Your everyday mind, that is the Way."

The need to establish large monasteries as training centres inevitably led Buddhism into contact with the wealthy and powerful ruling classes in both China and Japan. In Japan of the Kamakura era, the success of Eisai in establishing the power and legitimacy of the Zen school by influencing the ruling shogun Minamoto Yoriie is a prime example of the tendency. In the Muromachi period, when Zen was at its height, monks often wielded great political and economic power. To the present day, Zen monasteries house art treasures of immeasurable value.

Without denying the importance of the monastery as a training ground for those who sought religious salvation, it must be noted that Ryokan held to the spirit rather than the letter of the Buddha's Law. After ten years of formal training, Ryokan took to wandering like the monks of early Indian Buddhism. Rather than take up a position as the head of a monastery, he moved back to his home province, lived in an empty hermitage, and sustained himself by begging: a little rice and foraging wild plants. He eschewed the monastic structure in order to live as simply as possible.
oyoso chi no kenzoku o hanare, sōan ni dokusho shi, juka ni kinhin shi, kaika rakuyo o kanji, keisei sanshoku o tomo to sum wa, koshō no shensho nari, koshin no kikan nari.

In general, leaving the doting family to live alone in a grass shack, doing walking meditation beneath the trees, contemplating the blooming flowers and falling leaves, becoming a friend of the stream's voice and the colours of the mountains, this is the precedent of the ancient sages and the model for the ages to come.\(^{13}\)

This passage from Ryōkan's *Kanjujikimon* ("Comments on Receiving Food") echoes his earlier phrase: "How simple one robe and one bowl." In making wandering and begging his way of life, Ryōkan holds fast to the tradition and spirit of the early *shramanas*, monks who relied on nothing more than a handful of rice, a tree overhead for a roof, and the ground beneath them for a seat, in their search for ultimate truth.
Many people today think that the making of statues and building of pagodas cause Buddhism to prosper. This, too, is not so. No one gained the Way by erecting lofty buildings that have gleaming jewels and gold ornaments. This merely is a good action that gives blessings by bringing lay treasures into the Buddha's world. Although small causes can have large effects, Buddhism does not prosper if monks engage in such activities. If you learn one phrase of the Buddha's teaching or practice zazen even for a moment in a thatched hut or even under a tree Buddhism will flourish.14

Clearing weeds and treading the path to the arcane
I realize how many years it has been
Suddenly to think of my teacher takes me back to the old shrine
I went and I returned it was nothing special
Clouds resting on the mountain peaks
water flowing underfoot

"I went and I returned it was nothing special," this line contains the essential meaning of the poem. For years, Ryokan
has harboured thoughts of the old shrine. To go back is to rid himself of an attachment to memories and see the place as it is naturally.

"Nothing special" is indeed the most accurate definition of Ryokan's lifestyle: not striving for possession of material things, nor blindly grasping at religious salvation. One robe, one bowl, an old stick, and a thatched roof overhead: these are very minimal means with which to carry out the business of living. For Ryokan living itself was simple and straightforward. Ikkyū Sojun put it this way:

We eat, excrete, sleep, and get up;  
This is our world.  
All we have to do after that -  
Is to die.15
Chapter IV: POEMS ON RELIGION
kyō ni kaeru
ie o ide kuni o hanarete chishiki o tazune
ichinō ippatsu oyoso ikushun zo
knon hi kyō ni kaette kyuyū o toeba
ōku wa kore na o taika ni nokosu no chiri

Returning to My Birthplace

I left my house and province in search of a teacher
One robe  one bowl  how many springs has it been
Today I returned to my birthplace to seek my old friends
Most of them are no more than names in dust beneath the moss
In my house there is a cat and a mouse
both are fur bearing animals
Overfed the cat naps in the white daylight
starving the mouse scampers in the black night
What skill does the kitten possess
when spying a life her aim is often true
What fault does the mouse bear
he gamed through a jar and does a bad job at that
The hole in the jar can be repaired
life taken away cannot be restored
If you ask about relative guilt
The scales tip towards the cat
shincho joshaku o ji shi
kojiki shite shiten ni iru
shiten chuseki ni arazu
chitai nakaba hensen su
men wa harawaru sogo no kaze ni
fukuro wa omoshi rofu no kata
yukite kyuyu no chi o sugureba
shohaku ni kanen tozasu

Early morning I take my staff and
come into town beggin food
Town's not the same as the old days
the pavilion and hills half changed
My face swept by the wind after a frost
begging bag heavy on this old shoulder
I pass by my old hangouts
pines and oak locked in a chain of cold mist
ホトケの作辞にじしんの音頭ちもまたうにあらずなににほつよしじゅうじて
かちにそてゆくこともながえおきたにしつにむかるもいつかにとつあくや

The Buddha's a creation of your own mind
The Way has no reality either
I tell you you'd better believe this
don't go siding with other opinions.

The carriage shafts point north
you're headed for Chekiang in the south
when do you think you'll get there
寒夜空者裡
香烟時已盡
戸外竹百竿
床上書幾篇

相対也無言

kanya kusai no uchi
kōen toki sude ni utsuru
kogai ni take hyakukan
shojō ni sho ikuhen
tsuki idete hanso shirami
mushi naite shirin shizuka nari
kochū kagen no i zo
aitaisuru mo mata kotoba nashi

A cold night in the empty room
in the incense smoke time is already moving on
Outside the door a hundred stalks of bamboo
on my bed just a few books
The moon comes out half the window white
insects chirping the surroundings sunk in dhyāna
in the midst of this what limit can there be to my thoughts
in the face of it again I am without words
Formerly I learned silent meditation
faintly regulating the breath
In this way I passed the stars and frost
almost forgetting about sleep and food
If there is tranquility which can be attained
it lies in the strength of discipline
How can this match the attainment of nonbeing
in which anything once attained is eternal
Don't envy me for abandoning the world
when your understanding is sufficient
Mind is tranquil of itself
Who knows that beyond the blue mountains
there aren't tigers or wolves
Don't envy me for abandoning the world
when your understanding is sufficient
Mind is tranquil of itself
Who knows that beyond the blue mountains
there aren't tigers or wolves

[337]
問古今を乙過

inishie o toweba inishie sude ni sugu
ima o omoeba ima mo mata shikari
tenten shite shōseki nashi
tare ka gu mata tare ka ken naru
en ni shitagatte jigetsu o keshi
onore o tamotte shuen o matsu
hō to shite ware kono chi ni kitari
kōbe o meguraseba nijūnen

When you ask about the past it's already gone
when you think of the present it's gone too
Whirling about without leaving a trace
who is foolish and who is wise
In accordance with causality killing time
sustaining one's self only to await the end
Blown in on the wind I came to this place
before I turn my head twenty years have gone by
sakuhi wa kono hi to kotonari
konshin wa raishin ni arazu
kokoro wa zenen ni shitagatte utsuri
en wa mono to tomo ni arata nari
ayamachi o shireba sunawachi sumiyaka ni aratame yo
shitsu wa sunawachi ze mo shin ni arazu
tare ka yoku koshu o mamotte
tadachi ni shimo bin to naru o matan ya

Yesterday is different than today
this morning is not tomorrow morning
Mind moves in keeping with former causes
causality renews itself together with matter
When one realizes error mend it promptly
if you have attachments even the right isn't real
Who would hold on to a withered stump*
just waiting for the frost to cover their sideburns

* old customs, old ways
An old monk of the western sky*
I can't reckon the springs since my tracks vanished on Mt. Kugami
How many robes have faded like the smoke and haze
I always carry the same black stick
I walk along chanting a song that fades in the distance with the green river
I sit watching the white clouds rise up in the towering mountains
How pitiful to be a visitor in this floating world of fame and profit
an empty lifetime spent running about in the windblown dust

* refers to India, where Buddhism originated
Delusion and enlightenment come into being interdependently
the universal and the particular are identical
All day the wordless sūtra
all night unpractised zen
The nightingale calls on the weeping willow bank
the dog howls in the village under the night moon
Since there is no dharma which corresponds to the emotions
what thoughts could I have to transmit
Chapter V: SOLITUDE
sei ni jusuru wa kore shukke

Abiding in tranquility that is being a monk...

Solitude was a necessary condition of Ryokan's life. The solitude expressed in his poems stands as a philosophical principle, as the practical manifestation of religious doctrine, and as an aesthetic tenet in line with the Japanese cult of *wabi*.

The broad meaning of the term *shukke* (leaving the family to become a monk), carries the implication of leaving society with its class structure, laws, custom, profits and losses, pleasures and distractions. While ideally the *sangha* may be a superior community to the lay community, it is nonetheless a social organization, and for the monk to simply choose the former in favour of the latter would be merely dualistic substitution. If Buddha-hood is to be experienced in the life of the individual, then the path towards realization of absolute wisdom (*prajña*) is necessarily solitary. To abide in solitude, however, does not lessen the monk's sense of compassion for society. His position is not that of the "sravaka, disciplined in Tao, enlightened, but on the wrong path,"¹ but rather that of the Bodhisattva who vows not to enter Nirvana until such time as all sentient beings have been saved. This is Ryokan's stance. As a Zen monk, through his solitary, self-disciplined practice, he sought illuminated wisdom not to save himself, but human society, and indeed, all living things.
Unlike many Taoist sages and Tibetan lamas, Ryōkan did not live in total physical seclusion. From Gogō-an, the hermitage where he lived for some thirteen years, Ryōkan could see the monks' quarters at Honkaku-in and Hōshū-in. During this period of his life, Ryōkan supported himself by begging in the local town which was within an easy day's journey to and from Gogō-an.

This is not to say that he did not live in solitude. Mt. Kugami, on Japan's western coast was far from the dense population and busy social scene in the capital. The open woods of Kugami were not the wilds of the T'ien-t'ai range in backcountry China, yet they were a peaceful enough location for Ryōkan's hermitage. Besides, as Chiao-jan, a poet-monk of the T'ang era in China said, the purpose was to "Seclude the mind, not the movements."²

Han-shan, the poet-recluse whom Ryōkan most admired, abandoned the world entirely, choosing to write his poems here and there among the cliffs. Chiao-jan, on the other hand, constantly struggled to resolve the dichotomy of art and aestheticism, to the extent that he gave up poetry. But for Ryōkan, the tension between the human and the ascetic was neither to be overcome nor stoically endured; it was no more than a fact and facet of his life as a monk. This tension acts as a positive force in Ryōkan's poems, His compassion for humanity sustains the intensity of his soli-
tude and keeps it from the level of mere selfish quietism.

In the midst of solitude, Ryōkan maintains an awareness of society and in the midst of the human world, his inner tranquility endures.

As a solitary ascetic, Ryōkan's position is somewhat unique. Like his poetry, his existence is natural; free from externally imposed constraints and unregulated by empty formalities. From
this stance, Ryokan criticizes everyone openly: laymen, monks,
and even himself.

When I see grasping men
no different than the silkworm bound up in itself
All for the love of money and property
not a moment's rest for mind nor body...

When I see monks these days
noon and night reciting mindlessly
Just for their mouths and bellies
a lifetime spent chasing externalities...
All my life too lazy to amount to much
I entrust my fortunes to the truth of Heaven
In my bag three shō of rice
by the fire a bundle of kindling.
Why ask for signs of delusion or enlightenment
what do I know of the dust of fame and profit
Rainy nights in my thatched-roof hut
I stretch out my legs anyway I like

Ryōkan's self-criticism is at once both real and ironic.

From the layman's perspective, what has Ryōkan accomplished?
His nature ("too lazy to amount to much") has apparently brought him little in his old age save a hut that is no more than four walls, and a dearth of material comforts. Yet in fact, in Ryōkan's case, the attribute of being "Too lazy to amount to much" is a positive one. If one follows the monk's path with the mind of an avaricious layman, the result is a monk of similar character. This is the inference of the second reference:
that the monks of Ryōkan's time placed too high a value on the trappings of religious life. The true follower of the Way is as unconcerned with delusion and enlightenment as he is with fame and gain.

The last couplet of the final poem brings the lesson home. While meditating through the long rainy nights, Ryōkan stretches out his legs when they get stiff. Just as polishing a tile won't make a mirror, merely sitting in lotus posture or emptily mouthing sutras won't make a Buddha.

In one poem, Ryōkan defines himself as neither layman nor monk. Living thus outside these social orders, where does Ryōkan come by his freedom? The second line of the third poem provides us with an answer: "I entrust my fortunes to the truth of Heaven." The character maka(su), to entrust, appears quite frequently in Ryōkan's poems, as does another character, antithetical in meanings: sute(ru), to abandon. Philosophically, these concepts, central to the poet's ascetic existence, are the converse of the layman's grasping and scheming to control his own life. To abandon is not only to cast off, but also to be freed from, and so in Ryōkan's poetry, this concept is synonymous with simplicity and purity.
The rain clears clouds clear the air clears too
My thought is pure the whole world's beings cleansed
Cast off this world abandon the self I become
a free man
The new moon and flowers accompany the rest of my life

Leaving the personal family and the society of men, shaving one's head, giving up one's possessions; all these can be classified in the category of abandoning. "Cast off the world abandoning the self" are equivalent at a level of philosophical detachment.

That humans are endowed with the necessities of a life is a statement often attributed to the Zen Master Dōgen. This realization on the part of both Dōgen and Ryokan indicates their understanding of the concept of "entrusting." This notion contains no element of separateness of self and other. To entrust does not mean to yield one's responsibility to some abstract
power. As it appears in Ryōkan's poetry, it contains on the contrary, no differentiation (bumbetsu), but rather relies on the strength of co-existent naturalness.

The flower has no mind to invite the butterfly, the butterfly doesn't intend to visit the flower, When the flower blooms the butterfly comes, when the butterfly arrives the flower opens, Me I don't understand people, people don't know me, Although unknowing acting in accord with the laws of Heaven

While Ryōkan did live outside of the mainstream of social activity, he was not in any sense anti-social. His ultimate religious goal of salvation for all sentient beings is a philosophical indication of this aim. But what was the reality of his interaction with humanity? The answer to this question is
clearly revealed through Japanese oral folk tradition.

While few Japanese today are familiar with Ryōkan's cal­ligraphic art, and even fewer still with his waka and kanshi poetry, people never fail to identify Ryōkan as the monk who played with children. Shuho Myocho lived under the Gojo bridge and associated with beggars. Ikkyū Sojun preferred to frequent brothels and keep the company of prostitutes. Ryōkan on the other hand, played games with the village children. The philosophical concepts of abandoning and entrusting are but theory. Playing games with the children was part of Ryōkan's real life and Buddhist practice.

While beggars, through choice or circumstance, ignore the social attachments to wealth and status, and prostitutes disregard the traditional moral values, both remain aspects of the dichotomy of rich/poor, moral/immoral. Children are unconcerned. Like the butterfly and the flower of the previous poem, they are in a state of mushin (ch. wu-hsin) or naturalness. They behave in a manner which is without differentiation. They react with little consideration for convention because they have not yet succumbed to the process of socialization. It is for this reason that Ryōkan rejoices in their company. Unlike the monks and laymen of Ryōkan's poems, children live with an unbridled sense of optimism and unfettered spontaneity in an eternal present ruled only by the setting sun.
袖裏織絹直千金

謂言好手無等匹
箇中竟旨君相問

在袖的口袋裡有一隻價值千金的球

說我的球技無人能敵

問君是否內心之意

一、二、三、四、五、六、七

shūri no shū kyū atai senkin
omou ware koshū tôhitsu nashi to
kochū no ishi moshi ai towaba
hii fu mii yo mu nā

In the sleeve of my robe there's a ball
worth a thousand in gold
Say my skill at ball-bouncing can't be beat
If you ask the inner meaning in this
Onetwothreefourfivesixseven
seiyo nigatsu no hajime
busshoku yaya shinsen nari
kono toki hotsu o jishi
tokutoku to shite shiten ni asobu
jidō tachimachi ware o mi
kinzen to shite ai hikiite kitaru
ware o yōsu jimon no mae
ware o tazusae ho chichitari
hachi o hakuseki no ue ni hanachi
fukuro o rokyokuju no eda ni kaku
koko ni hyakysō o tatakawase
koko ni kyūji o utsu
ware uteba kare shibaraku utai
ware utaebakare kore utsu
uchisari mata uchikitatte
jisetsu no utsuru o shirazu
kojin ware o kaerimite warau
nani ni yotte ka sore kaku no gotoki to
teitō shite kore ni kotaezu
iiuru to mo mata ika ni nisen
kochu no i o shiran to yoseba
ganrai tada kore kore

Blue sun   start of the second month
colour of things  a bit more new and fresh
That's when I pick up my begging bowl
and high-spirited   head for town
The children suddenly spying me
noisily band together   and
Catch me by the monastery gate
crowding 'round   slowing my steps
I set my bowl on the white stones
hang my bag on a green tree branch
Here we play tug-of-war
here we play ball-bouncing
When I hit the ball   they sing along
when I sing out  they hit the ball
Throwing it there passing it here
heedless of the passing time
Passersby look back at me and laugh
asking "What's wrong with you"
I hang my head don't answer
even if I replied what would it matter
If you want to know the inner meaning here
from the beginning just this

In the preceding poems, Ryōkan exhibits his understanding
on Zen Buddhist philosophy, grasping the essence of an existence
which is passing on moment by moment. In the manner of classic
Master/disciple confrontations of Zen koan, Ryōkan faces the
opponent adult bypassers. In both cases, the response is most
assuredly not just utter childish nonsense, but rather mimetic
expression of his understanding through the activity of the
moment.

This direct expression of Ryōkan's inner nature, synonymous
in this case with the spontaneity of the village children in
their undefiled state, is a manifestation of Ryōkan's "everyday
Mind," or "original face" (honrai no memmoku). While all men are
said to bear within them the pearl of Buddha-wisdom, it is not
always apparent. Thus Ryōkan writes, "Men's hearts are not alike/
like faces differing one from another." The T'ang recluse Han-
shan wrote that there was no trail which lead to Cold Mountain,
but that, "If your heart was like mine / You'd get it and be
right here."
Ryōkan's heart was one of very few to match the strength and resolve to find a way to that which Han-shan called Cold Mountain. It is widely accepted today that indeed Cold Mountain describes a poet, a mental state, and a geographical location. So it is that Ryōkan's solitary quest for ultimate wisdom leaves the world of man and enters the world of Nature.
Chapter VI: POEMS ON SOLITUDE
Tamagawa eki no ryojuku
fubutsu seiseitari shuran ni zoku su
yushi kokoro ni kakawaru kōro no nan
eiya iku taki ka odoroku ochinjō no yume
kosei ayamatte usei no kan o nasu

Stopped by Tamagawa Station

Caught in the thick of dreary autumn wind and rain
a wanderer ··my heart troubled by hardships on the road
Endless nights ··how many times so frightened by some dream
as to mistake the falling rain for the sound of the river
zashite toki ni rakuyo o kiku
sei ni jūsūru wa kore shukke
jurai shiryo o tachi
oboezu nanda kin o uruosu

Sitting I hear the falling leaves
abiding in tranquility that is being a monk
Until now I had cut off discursive thought
without realizing it tears moisten my collar
Though my hut is on the towering mountain
my body is like the floating clouds
The river village on a windy moonlit night
My stick tapping softly past gates
All human thoughts and things so fleeting
as smoke rising thickly from the floor
Through the autumn night however long
trimming the wick on the candle by the south window.
A flash of lightening - sixty years
life's ups and downs like clouds coming and going
The late night rain trying to pierce the base of the cliffs
lamp flickering by the lone window
I bound my eaves beneath the blue cliffs
somehow I'll live out my life here
Mountain birds peck at the fallen petals
forest silent on long spring days
Not the slightest pressure of human affairs
at times I see the loggers passing by
In a flood of silence I sit hugging my knees
distant mountain evening bell voice
寒夜
草堂深掩竹籬東
千峰萬壑絕人蹤
遠夜地爐燒橘積
只聞風雪打寒窓

只聞風雪打寒窓

kan ya
sōdō fukaku ou chikukei no higashi
senpō bangaku jinshō o tatsu
yoya jiro ni kottotsu o taki
tada kiku fusetsu no kansō o utsu o

Cold Night
My thatched shack is well sheltered
by the bamboo valley to the east
a thousand peaks ten thousand valleys
man's footsteps fade away
Far into the night a stump burns in the hearth
I only hear the driven snow
beating on the cold window
A single road amid ten thousand trees
a thousand mountains in the hazy mist
Not autumn yet leaves already fall
no rain yet the cliffs are always dark
Carrying a basket I pick clouds' ears*
bearing a jug I draw water from the rocky spring
Apart from those who have lost their way
nobody makes it to this place

* the english name for the mushroom mokuji is
"judas' ear" however, because of the inappropriateness of this term, I have substituted the name of another edible mushroom which is similar in appearance.
At day's end finished begging
I come home and shut the brushwood door
In the fire burning branches wreathed with leaves
I quietly read Han-Shan's poems
The west wind gusting the night rain
rustles as it soaks the thatch
Sometimes I stretch out both legs & lie back
what should I think about & what should I doubt
Stirring deep ashes in the cold hearth
not a single coal glimmers
Lonely past midnight
all I hear is the voice of the var valley stream
远方 飛鳥 絶
獨立 悔衣人
寂寞 漫葉 風
閉庭 秋風 裏

enzan hichō tae
kantei rakuyō shikiri nari
jakumakutari shūfu no uchi
dokuritsu su shie no hito

Flying birds fade into the far mountains
in the quiet garden leaves fall and fall
In the desolate autumn wind
standing alone a man in a black robe
After begging food in the rundown town
I head back to the region of the blue cliffs
The evening sun hides among the western peaks
the pale moon lights the river before me
I wash my feet and climb up on a boulder
light some incense and sit tranquilly in zen
After all I am a monk
how could I vacantly ford the stream of time

koson o kojiki shi owari
kaeri kuru ryokugan no, hōtori
yuhi saiho ni kakure
tangetsu zensen o terasu
ashi o arau sekijō ni nobori
ko o taite koko ni zen ni anzu
ware mo mata sogya no shi
ani munashiku ryūnen o wataran ya
zoku ni au
zenpan hoton torite mochisaru
zoku sodō o dasu tare ka aete todomen
shusho koza su yuso no moto
sou shōshōtari kuchiku no hayashi [305]

Carrying off my zen stick* and cushion
the thief robbed my thatched hut
Who dared stop him
All night sitting alone by the dim window
drizzling rain lonely forest of bamboo

* Watson translates zenpan as "zazen cushion" however, it was described to me by a Japanese monk as a chin rest. It was used to keep monks from dropping off to sleep during extended periods of meditation.
chōgo jo taezu
sono toki soan ni fusu
oto wa kurenai ranran
yoryū wa masa ni sansan
kyokujitsu seishō ni fukumare
selun ryokutan ni shizumu
tare ka shiran jinzoku o idete
gyoshite kanzan no minami ni nobori shi o

Birds chattering unbearably
I lie back in my thatched hut
Cherry trees a blaze of flowers
Willows trailing feathery leaves
The sun slips from the mouth of the blue mountains
Bright clouds sink into the green waters
Who'd know I've left the dusty world behind
climbing the South Face of Cold Mountain*

* This poem is virtually a copy of a Han-Shan poem. See Iriya Yoshitaka, Kanzan (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1973) p. 38.
In my house I've got Han-Shan's poems
they're better than discussing sutras
I scrawl them on the walls
from time to time I read one or two
Chapter VII: NATURE
Mountains and rivers, the whole earth,—
all manifest forth the essence of being.

Of the many varied elements of Ryōkan's poetic work, Nature occupies a central position. It is at once a theme relying upon detailed specifics and a broader, more general, poetic concern. In these poems, Nature is the backdrop against which human activities take place, so that its laws are placed in contradistinction to those of society. Because of his choice to live outside of human society, and in close proximity to the natural world, an empathy develops between Ryōkan and the realm of Nature. It is while dwelling within the world of Nature that this poet-recluse seeks to discover his true self-being. The literary aesthetic of Ryōkan's poems, characterized by simplicity and frankness, is a direct reflection of his ascetic existence.

As stated previously, the alternative of living in Nature, rather than within human society, is made without the distinction that one way is superior or inferior to the other. It is simply more conducive to a life dedicated to meditation, to avoid the desires and distractions that abound in the human universe. As one recent American poet succinctly phrased it,

Class-structured civilized society is a kind of mass ego. To transcend ego is to go beyond society as well. "Beyond" there lies, inwardly, the unconscious. Outwardly, the equivalent of the unconscious is the wilderness.
Ryōkan's life in the objective world of Nature can perhaps best be characterized by a simplicity which endures to the present as an intrinsic element of such Japanese cultural arts as No drama, flower arranging, and tea ceremony. The poet who defined his religious existence in such phrases as: "One robe, one bowl," and "Abiding in tranquility that is being a monk." realized that simplicity was essential to spiritual attainment and that material poverty led to spiritual richness. In the Buddhist quest for the direct experience of absolute wisdom, the evanescence of all material phenomena is a basic philosophic tenet.

Both Ryōkan's poetic art and his life point toward the need to cut through secular wealth and power, as well as spiritual materialism, in order to reach the goal. Leaving home and the family of man, giving up personal possessions, abandoning the self - these are prerequisite to that state where as Dōgen said: "Both Mind and body are dropped."

In Ryōkan's poetry, we see a directness of purpose in spiritual matters and a simplicity of manner in day-do-day activities. The following poem by P'ang Yun clearly illustrates this spirit:
Daily activity is nothing other than harmony within
When each thing I do is without taking or rejecting,
There is no contradiction anywhere.
For whom is the majesty of red and purple robes?
The summit of the inner being has never been defiled by
the dust of the world.
Supernatural power and wonderful functioning are found
in the carrying of water and the chopping of wood. 6

This simplicity of means leads to an expansion of the senses,
and allows the world of Nature to enter these poems in a detailed and
specific way, rather than in vague generalizations. It is not
Nature on a grand scale which symbolizes the philosophy and
meditation in these poems, but rather the raindrops falling
from the eaves, or the wind through the bamboo grove to the east,
which serve to underline and emphasize, or contrast with, the
human elements of this literature.

The starting point for this consideration of the link be­
tween recluse and Nature must be the concept of time that per­
meates these poems. The tone of the poems is set by means of
images from the natural environment. It is understood to be
spring because the colour of things is a bit greener, or autumn
because the birds are flying south, or winter because the snow
is driving in through the walls. These times of year, the kisetsu, iii
so important to Japanese culture even today, evoke specific
responses in the reader.

Season follows season, and many poems comment that the poet
has lost track of the years since he has visited a certain place,
or lost count of the springs since arriving at his mountain retreat. The changing seasons and their repetitive cyclical pattern serve to reinforce man's knowledge that, although a part of Nature remains constant, time, human time in particular, flows as sand through the neck of an hourglass which cannot be reset. This delimits Man from Nature, and for the poet, aware of his mortality and the limitations of time, intensifies the pressure never to falter in his endeavour to achieve the goal of enlightened view, and, thus, of liberation.

While the aspect of seasonal change provides an underlying sense of time, alerting the reader to the vitality of Nature on a large scale, there are other, more detailed, patterns in Nature which serve an important function in this poetry. "The chatter of a favorite bird like a tapestry," Ryokan sings. It is this manner of descriptive lyricism that weaves the threads defining space, with its multiple levels of meaning, and spatial relationships and associations. "Who can entertain a doubt about the flowing or non-flowing of mountains?"

You should practice inside the meditation hall, go to Zen Masters, or take yourself to high mountains and deep valleys. Green waters and blue mountains--these are good places to wander. Remember that all things are unstable.

Given the Buddhist view of the phenomenal realm as a world of illusion, it is philosophically significant that these poems
should present Nature as "flowing" in a state of constant flux.

There is no representation in Ryōkan's poems of Nature as stasis, and this fact re-affirms the position that his eremitism is not just ego-centred quietism. The pervading religio-poetic tone is "transparency" on the part of the poet, which D.T. Suzuki in his essay, "Love of Nature," defines as

The balancing of unity and multiplicity or, better, the merging of self with others as in the philosophy of the Avatamsaka (Kegon)... absolutely necessary to the aesthetic understanding of Nature. 9

The poetic process of which Ryōkan is a part consists not simply of the projecting of human thoughts and emotions on to the natural environment. By his humble residence in the natural world without covetousness or attachments, images and sensations of Nature penetrate to the deepest levels of Ryōkan's consciousness. Han-shan wrote:

In my first thirty years of life
I roamed hundreds and thousands of miles
Walked by rivers through deep green grass
Entered cities of boiling red dust
Tried drugs but couldn't make Immortal
Read books and wrote poems on history
Today I'm back at Cold Mountain
I'll sleep by the creek and purify my ears. 10

Echoing this poem, Ryōkan wrote, "If you want to hear about the Way you must wash your ears." This concern for purity and the acute sensitivity to natural landscape associated with it contribute to Ryōkan's credibility as a poet. These are assurances
of the careful accuracy of his descriptions not only of the outer
world of Nature, but, more importantly, of inner psychological,
spiritual processes. As a Zen Master, Ryōkan had realized that
there was no dichotomy between the two.

By pointing your finger you see that moon
by means of the moon you discern that finger
This moon and this finger
are not the same yet are not different
Now if you want to guide the novice
ask the Master of this parable for now
When at last you're capable of understanding
There is no moon and there is no finger

If the mountains and rivers, by synecdoche for Nature, are
the body of the Buddha, then it can almost certainly be said
that the mountains are Ryōkan's Mind.
Standing as a demarcation line between heaven and earth, mount-
tains have traditionally occupied an honoured position in the reli-
gions of the East. While the Alps were thought to house devils, the
mountains of India, China, and Japan have been considered the abode
of gods and sages, thus ideal places to erect monasteries and
build hermitages. Mt. Kailas/Sumeru and Vulture Peak come to mind
immediately, as to T'ien-t'ai shan in China, Fuji-san and Hiei-zan
in Japan. After years of homeless wandering, a hut on Mt. Kugami
became Ryōkan's abode.

Within the body of Japanese Buddhist literature, there is one
particular text with which Ryōkan was almost certainly familiar.
That text is the twenty-ninth book of Dōgen's Šōbōgenzō (Treasury
of the True Dharma Eye). the Sansuikyō, or "Mountains and Rivers
Sūtra," which deals with mountains and rivers as the Dharmakāya,
or "body of essence" of the Buddha.

From time immemorial the mountains have been the dwelling place
of the great sages; wise men and sages have all made the mountains
their own chambers, their own body and mind. And through these
wise men and sages the mountains have been actualized...Although
we say that mountains belong to the country, actually they belong
to those who love them. When the mountains love their master,
the wise and virtuous inevitably enter the mountains. And
when sages and wise men live in the mountains, because the moun-
tains belong to them, trees and rocks flourish and abound, and
the birds and beasts take on supernatural excellence. This is
because the sages and wise men have covered them with virtue.
We should realize that the mountains actually take delight in
wise men and sages.
The concept of mountains as mind is an image central to the theme of Nature and Self-Nature at the heart of Ryōkan's poetry and is based at least in part on Ryōkan's Buddhism. Zen Buddhism deals with the direct experience of non-verbal states and, has traditionally maintained a healthy mistrust for language and written texts. *Setsuji ichimotsu soku fuchū* "The instant you speak about a thing you miss the mark." The emphasis has always been on silent meditation, direct realization, and these methods have been tempered by face-to-face contact and confrontation between Master and disciple. The records of this sect abound with references to shouts and blows during these encounters. Despite the admonitions against the spoken and written word, the Zen school has amassed a considerable body of religious texts, as well as associated commentaries, historical records, and artistic literature. Even in modern Japan, the Zen school uses that acquired literature to describe and define, however circuitously, the immediacy of contemporary religious experience. *Zenrinkushū* (*Phrase Anthology of the Forest of Zen*), *Mumonkan* (*The Gateless Gate*), *Rinzairoku* (*The Recorded Sayings of Rinzai*), *Hekiganroku* (*The Blue Cliff Records*), as well as the works of many T'ang poets are the most commonly used Zen texts.
The blue hills are blue hills
The white clouds are white clouds

Planting flowers to which the butterflies come
Daruma says I know not

The previous lines, excerpted from the *Zenrinkushū*, both appear in slightly altered form in Ryōkan's poems. The significance of this type of poetic style is twofold. First, these lines describe the phenomenal world, and at the same time, by analogy and parallel poetic structure, they refer to a spiritual process, the ultimate realization of which is a non-differentiated view, merging or casting off both self and other. "Wise men and sages have all made the mountains their own...body and mind."

Secondly, the mode of descriptive lyricism, with its weight on the objective (if illusory) world, keeps the poet from lapsing into highly abstract, convoluted philosophical discourse.

Ryōkan's world, like Han-shan's Cold Mountain, is both a geographical location, Mt. Kugami in Niigata-ken, and state of mind. And though, at first glance, these poems might be characterized, using Western critical methodology, as reflecting an air of stillness and tranquility, the opposite is in fact true. It is through dynamic patterns of Nature, predominant in these poems, that any notion of lassitude is dispelled.

Generally the poems show movement on the part of the poet, whether it be going out begging, or returning to his hut, carrying firewood, or merely walking out in Nature. A fairly large number
of poems, though, show Ryōkan in meditation, and in these verses it is either the eye of the poet that moves, or the poet's ear that describes the acuteness of his sensory perceptions. It must be remembered that in Zen Buddhist meditation, zazen, the eyes remain slightly open, and that thoughts, sounds and sensations are allowed to come and go without any attempt to cut them off or to take hold of them.

shūya gusaku
samete koko ni inuru atawazu
tsue o hiite saihi o izu
inchū kosei ni naki
rakuyo kanshi o jisu
tani fukoshite suisei toku
yama takoshite gesshoku ososhi
chingin toki sude ni hisashiku
hakuro waga koromo o uruosu

Autumn Night Improvisation
I awaken unable to sleep
I take my stick and go out the brushwood door
Insects chirp from out the old stones
falling leaves part the cold branch
From afar deep va-ley water voices
mountains high in late moon light
Musing time is suddenly gone and
my robe is drenched with white dew
This poem illustrates all of the major concerns which I have tried to discuss on the theme of Nature in Ryōkan's works: time, space, non-differentiation of self and other, dynamism, and simplicity. The reader cannot but notice the linear element of time, which has been passing though not overtly mentioned. The element of space is multi-dimensional in this poem. The description moves from the minute and close at hand ("Insects chirp from out the old stones / falling leaves part the cold branch") to the vast and distant ("From afar deep valley water voices / mountains high in late moon light"). Distance in this poem is clearly a quality, not of the landscape but of the poet-monk's Mind, which moves out near and far, to the vast and to the minute, with the same facility. The same is true of the tranquility expressed here. It is not the surroundings which are still but the Mind of the poet which, unruffled and transparent, reflects like the pond that mirrors the image of the moon. It is this distance and this tranquility that are an expression of non-differentiated view.

In this paper, I have discussed what I feel to be the central themes of Ryōkan's Chinese poems: religion, solitude and nature. These themes, like the images from the natural world in the previous poems, do not stand alone, each separately, but are interrelated. Religion can be seen as man's
quest for true meaning; solitude, as a Way towards this goal; and nature as both the universe where this quest takes place and a complex means of describing the former. "Where is wilderness but a blank place on the map?" Ryōkan's poems offer new possibilities.

sangai jojo to shite koto asa no gotoshi
tamatama ima nomi ni arazu inishie yori shikari
subete ikku o ryokyaku sezaru ga tame ni
hyakunen hashi naku okan ni tsukaru
kyo wa, myoso o kazoueba nagaku kaerazu
zen wa jakujō o torebä tsui ni utsurigatachi
yotte omou tozan ga kogongo
mon o izureba sunawachi kore kusa manman to

Three worlds tangled like hemp
Not just now but since long past
All for not perceiving a single phrase
A hundred years exhausted in empty coming & going
In the sutras counting names & appearances
gives no eternal return
When you attain the silent stillness of Zen
it's hard to transmit
I like to think of Tōzan's favorite words
When you step out through the gate
the grass is vast boundless
Chapter VIII: POEMS ON NATURE
空階花狼藉

細々爐烟直

羽々日々如織"

On the empty stairway  a confusion of petals
the chatter of a favorite bird  like a tapestry
The sun in the window shines gloriously on and on
the hearth smoke rises tall & slender
めいもくす せんしょうのゆべ
にんげん ばんりょう むなはし
じゃくじゃく ほとん に より
りょりょう きょうそ に たいす
こは げんや の ながき に き
はくも は はくろ の きてやか なる に たんاري
じょ より たって たいさい お あゆめば
つき さいかほう に noboru

Closing the eyes a thousand evening summits
ten thousand human concerns all vanish
Desolate from this straw mat
lonely through this empty window
Incense dies out in the long black night
my robe thick with white dew
I rise from zazen & walk the edge of the garden
while the moon climbs the very highest peak
Begging Rice

This lonely six mat room
this broken down decrepit old body
On top of all this a winter season
so harsh and bitter I can scarcely say
I sip gruel and get through the cold nights
counting the days waiting for spring
If I don't beg a little rice
how will I make it through these times
Quietly contemplating no means of livelihood
I write this poem and send it to you old friend
I live back in the deep woods
year after year the green ivy grows longer
Without the slightest pressure of human affairs
sometimes I hear the woodcutter's songs
I bask in the sun and mend my robes
facing the moon I read gāthās
I say to those who tread the path
the attainment of satisfaction
does not lie in quantity
The grass gate has long been unlocked in the garden, scarcely a trace of anyone. After the rainy season, countless oak leaves fell on the green moss.
Improvisation at Shinnyotei

In spring I take my bowl and come to this place
I climb up to the cottage of ultimate reality &
lean on the balustrade
The reeds just sprouting the water sparkles indigo blue
the cherry trees like snow and the willows like smoke
sanrin aiaitari uchu no ten
kiri agarite unka izuku ni ka utsureru
manmantaru kojo ujaku o miru
ware kyūkoku ni yukite jōzen o tasuku

Hazy mountains & forests  the rain-filled sky
mist rising  clouds & haze  where do they go
Magpies reflected on the river's vast surface
I go to the hills & valleys to work on my samadhi
Growing together and drifting apart,
coming and going are the white clouds' heart
Leaving only faint trails
that humans cannot trace
正月十六日夜

shogatsu juroku nichi no yo

shunya ni san ko
tokan ni saimon o izu
bisetsu shōsan o ōi
kogetsu soran ni noboru
hito o omoeba sanka tōshi
fude o fukunde omoi bantan

First Month Evening of the Sixteenth Day

A spring night second or third watch
aimlessly I leave my hermitage
Light snow mantles the pine and cedar
a lone moon climbs above the ranging hills
Thinking of a friend distanced by mountains and rivers
I hold my pen in my mouth thinking ten thousand thoughts
Tozan osho no ge

seIZAN wa hakuun no chichi
Hakuun wa seizan to ji
Hakuun shūjitsu yoriso mo
Seizan subete shirazu

Tozan's Gatha

Blue mountains are the white clouds' father
White clouds are the blue mountains' children
All day the white clouds nestle down the mountains
While the blue mountains pay no mind
JAPANESE AND CHINESE-CHARACTER GLOSSARY

a. 訓読
b. 師範
c. 寒山
d. 瀧荷集
e. 雜詩
f. 漢詩
g. 中世文学
h. 名主
i. 五山文学
j. 天台
k. 浙江
l. 山本榮蔵
m. 出雲山奇
n. 越後
o. 国仙
p. 布通寺
q. 備中
r. 国上山
s. 五合庵
t. 島山奇
u. 貞心
v. 蓮の露
w. 古今集
x. 正伝心経
y. 詩の心の動きが根本だ
z. 解脫営重
aa. 師が平生之作状態中にある
bb. 馬祖道一
c. 心仏
d. 佛心
ee. 佛心
ff. 心宗
g. 曹洞
hh. 道元為玄
ii. 洞山良价
jj. 曹山本寂
kk. 菩提達磨
ll. 慧可
mm. 楞伽經
nn. 仏可
oo. 紙管打坐
pp. 臨濟
qq. 普勅坐禅儀
rr. 正法眼藏
ss. 托 鴨
tt. 百丈 塵海
uu. 際泉
vv. 菱西
ww. 源賴家
xx. 勸受食文
yy. 一休 宗純
zz. 本覺院
aaa. 金珠院
bbb. 皎然
ccc. 分別
ddd. 宗峰 妙超
eee. 五條
fff. 轟心
ggg. 本末面目
hhh. 龍陰
iii. 季節
jjj. 聞道 須洗耳
kkk. 比叡山
lll. 山永經
mmm. 説似 一物 即不中
nnn. 禪林句集
ooo. 蓮門閰
ppp. 臨濟 錄
qqq. 碧嶽録
NOTES

1. A Note on Translation


11. Religion

4. Watanabe, ibid.
5. See the Zen text *Mumonkan*, case XIX.
6. Legend has it that enraged by his eyelids closing while he was meditating, Bodhidharma cut them off and threw them to the ground. Tea bushes sprouted up from where they had landed, and since that time, monks have drunk teak in order to stay alert while meditating.
8. Ibid., p. 230.

12. See Note 5. Nansen was Baso's disciple.


15. Watts, ibid., p. 162.

V. Solitude


VII. Nature


3. See Chapter IV, p. 31.

4. See Chapter VI, p. 58.


7. See Chapter VIII, p. 85.


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