

Chūgan Engetsu

Chūgan Engetsu (1300-75) began life as an unwanted child, cared for by a wet nurse and the paternal grandmother who in his eighth year (about six and a half by Western count) entered him in the Jūfukuji as a temple boy. He began the study of the Confucian classics not many years after. In religion he studied Esoteric Buddhism as well as both Rinzai and Sōtō Zen. Among the masters impressed by his youthful reputation as a scholar was Kokan, who received him at a time when, busy completing his history, he had closed his door to almost all other callers; Kokan even let him see a draft of his work. In his nineteenth year, Chūgan went to Hakata in Kyushu with the aim of embarking for China, but he was refused permission to leave by the local government authorities. In 1324 he at last made the voyage; he returned in 1332. A lonely idealist whose adherence to what he considered right made him the object of factional rancor, in 1344 Chūgan attempted unsuccessfully to go to China once more. His motive may have been the hope of escaping the unpleasantness that surrounded him despite his enjoyment of the patronage of a powerful military family, the Ōtomo.

It was the custom for a man's biographical annals to be prepared by disciples after his death; Chūgan, however, insisted on writing his own. Among his writings was a history of Japan called the *Nihon Sho*, which argued that the Japanese imperial house was descended from Wu Tai-po, eldest son of the Duke of Chou of Chinese classical times but set aside by the Duke as heir; the book was suppressed by order of the imperial court, and no copy survives.

Musing on Antiquity at Chin-lu

Its great men pass on without cease, but the land is uncrushed,
ungentled;
The Six Courts have crumbled utterly, but “the mountains and rivers
abide.”
The ancient sites of royal offices: merchants’ and fishermen’s
dwellings;
The sounds that lingered from precious groves: woodsmen’s and
oxherds’ songs.
The canyons are filled with endless clouds, constantly bearing rain;
On the Great River the winds are calmed, but waves still arise.
The fair beauties of those years — where are they now?
For the traveler from afar, in this vast view, how much to admire and
to mourn!

Chin-lu, modern Nanking, had been a royal city during much of the Six Dynasties period. Line 2 contains a quotation from what is perhaps Tu Fu’s best known poem. “Precious groves,” literally trees of jade or jewel-trees, is a common metaphor for men of superior pure demeanor. The “Great River” is the Yangtze.

Stopping at Hakata upon My Return to My Native Land I Sent Two Poems to Betsugen Enshi

I

I think of the past, when together we roamed the rivers and lakes,
rootless as duckweed;
Each floating with the current was borne eastward home across the
sea.
What together and apart we cherish has no limit —
Isn't it just what exists in wordlessness?

II

Lord of White Cloud Hall, our white-haired master —
Of his followers in the Hall, who has white eyebrows, mark of
excellence?
Older and younger brothers, when you meet for pleasure, when you
talk,
Do not forget the young wanderer who once came to you for his
gruel.

Betsugen Enshi, who had returned to Japan only a few years before Chūgan, was dharma-disciple of Tomin (or Tōmyō) E'nichi (T'ung-ming Hui-jih), a teacher from China whose residence in the Engakuji in Kamakura was known as White Cloud Hall. Tōmin, unlike almost all other important figures within the *gozan*, belonged to a Sōtō lineage, but Chūgan, though formally a member of a Rinzai lineage and therefore an outsider, served and studied under him for more than twenty years, from the age of sixteen. The second of these two poems is an elaborate compliment to Tōmin and his congregation of monks. The monks never fully

accepted Chūgan, and estrangement from fellows and master was to darken his last days.

At Kamado-ga-seki

Mountains guard the sea; in the harbor a thousand masts -
Smoke from thick-clustered habitation hides the late sun.
“Ea-yaw” — oar sounds part the darkening mist:
Startled white herons fly across the broad blue water.

In 1333, the year following his arrival at Hakata upon his return from China, Chūgan journeyed to Kyoto. His ship took him around the northern tip of Kyushu and through the Inland Sea along the coast of Honshu, landing finally at Hyōgo. This poem and the two that follow are from a series of ten describing the notable sights encountered en route. Kamado-ga-seki (Nagashima, near the southeast corner of modern Yamaguchi Prefecture) was famous since antiquity as a port. The name, which might be translated “Cook-Stove Straits,” is obviously the inspiration for the second line.

At Itsukushima

Excellent landscape of divine sport, where the holy traces are
manifested:

Mountain peaks of a yonder world in the midst of the frothing sea!
The moon shines on the winding corridors; and the tide is full—
In the deep of night who is here in these crystal mansions?

The island of Itsukushima is still one of the most renowned sights in Japan, a focus for pilgrimages since the seventh century, when the Shinto shrine was established. The shrine, with its long open corridors, extends some 160 meters into the sea; at high tide its *torii* (ritual gates) seem to be floating on the surface of the water. The shrine had special associations with the Taira clan, defeated in 1185 at Dan-no-ura, another place that Chūgan visited and wrote about on this voyage. Taoist, Buddhist, and Shinto beliefs mingle in this poem. “Holy traces” denotes the Shinto gods who inhabit the shrine; according to Shinto-Buddhist syncretic notions, Shinto deities are the “manifest traces” of the Buddhas. In Taoist legend three islands of the immortals rise in the shape of mountains peaks from the ocean. Early Japanese legends, most likely influenced by Taoist beliefs, tell of a dragon-king’s mansion under the sea; a second poem on Itsukushima by Chugan speaks of it explicitly.

At Tomo Harbor

Cold wind in the southern trees: autumn in the city by the sea;
The smoke of war-fires vanished but the ashes not yet cleared away

—

Singing girls, knowing nothing of the destruction of the state,
Clamor and clang forth their tunes as they sail upon orchid boats.

Early in 1332, Emperor Go-Daigo, deposed for plotting against the Hōjō lords of the Kamakura shogunate, was exiled to Oki. He escaped and returned to Kyoto in the summer of 1333, a few months before Chugan's poem was written. The period of civil war inaugurated was to last almost to the end of the century. Both this poem and the next play upon a quatrain, by the T'ang poet Tu Mu, included in *San-t'i Shih*, an anthology newly introduced and much admired by the *gozan* literati:

Stopping for the Night at Ch'in-huai
Mist envelops the cold waters, moonlight envelops the sand —
At night my boat rests at Ch'in-huai, close by the wine shops.
Dancing girls, knowing nothing of the sorrows of the destruction of the state,
On the far bank of the river still sing "Flowers in the Rear Garden."

"Flowers in the Rear Garden" was the name of a tune by the last emperor of the Ch'en dynasty, Ch'en Shu-pao (553-604), who — as tradition has it — gave himself up to debauchery. Ch'in-huai was his capital.

Tomo was an important stopping place for ships that traveled along the Inland Sea, and Chugan was not the only traveler to take note of its many female entertainers. Thirty years earlier the author of *Towazugatari*, on pilgrimage to Itsukushima, called at Tomo and observed a religious colony composed of former prostitutes (Karen Brazell, trans., *The Confessions of Lady Nijb* [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973], 228).

A Chance Verse: Sorrowing for the Past

This day last year Kamakura was destroyed —
Its splendid views, its temples all are gone.
Peddler girls, knowing nothing of the bitterness of the monks,
Hawk firewood and greens down former official lanes.

In the fifth month of 1333 the forces of Nitta Yoshisada, fighting on behalf of Go-Daigo, defeated the Hojo and burned Kamakura to the ground.

In Tu Mu's original poem the expression *shang nü* was used to denote female entertainers. Chūgan uses the same characters here, but for their literal meaning of "merchant women"; in "At Tomo Harbor" he had imitated the meaning of Tu Mu's phrase but used different characters.

This is the first of seven laments on various subjects that Chūgan composed under this title.

Atami

Dreams crumble at midnight; that echoing roar
Is the boiling of the waters at the base of the cliff.
Flumes divide the springs from their source; steam envelops the
houses —
Each dwelling provides baths; there guests rent chambers.
By the shore the earth is warm; in winter there is no snow —
Over mountain roads the sky is cold; at dawn I tread on frost.
A distant island: rain. Black clouds and mist.
A red tide bids farewell to the moon as it falls into dimness.

Atami, now a popular resort, was known from the time of the earliest histories for its radioactive hot springs, many of which discharge under the sea.

In the Evening of the Year

In the evening of the year, under chilly skies
When the wind is pure and the moon is white
I chant leisurely verses, playing the elegant hermit —
But sitting alone I sigh over dim shapes,
Unable to explain the world's workings
Except that each life of itself has a limit:
 If I can only divert the present moment
 I'll not need to think of the time when this self has ended.