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## *Shakkyōka* as Religious Experience

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***Shakkyōka* as religious experience** (Jean-Noël Robert, Collège de France)

I was walking the other day with a friend of old in a park near Paris, a habit of many years, and we were speaking of our current projects, as old friends do. When I told him I was due to attend a two-day symposium at Yale and read a paper there, he asked, very wisely, what was the meeting about. I tried and make not too cryptic an answer and told him it was about Japanese Buddhist poetry. « That's awful, he said indignantly, you're going to spend two days on that? You're all be saying the same thing! » Even if you take into account that my friend is a journalist, and a Frenchman to boot, his reply left me speechless, all the more so as he moonlights as a literary critic, and is generally considered as knowledgeable in foreign literatures. I realized there was yet much work to be done in order to enlighten the world about the reasons that have kept me, and us, working on that subject for a number of years. I am sure my friend would have reacted differently had I told him that the conference was about Latin Christian poetry, or German, English or French religious poetry for that matter. Somehow, viewed from outside, Japanese poetry must be something rather monolithic, all about *waka* and *haiku*, cherry blossoms and *uguisu* (granted, there is much of that too), it seems that there is simply no place in common Western representations of that poetry for religious feeling. Or rather, people seem to think that *waka* and *haiku* are in themselves spiritual poetry of sorts, having something to do with Zen or some Shintoistic nature cult, so that talking about Japanese Buddhist poetry must sound like redundant pedantry to most people. I know I am here preaching the Dharma to Shakyamuni, as the Japanese saying goes, and that everybody present is aware of the importance of the *shakkyōka* as a literary genre, or at least a subgenre, but I am sure it will be worth our while to endeavour to bring it to the attention of a larger circle of people, scholarly at first, but also of the reading public in general, even if that might be a bit of wishful thinking. And I think that one of the best ways we could take towards that goal would be to underline the religious significance of the *shakkyōka* and read those poems as the fruits of religious experience.

The relation between poetry and religion needs not be demonstrated. One can easily show that most of the founding texts in the great or minor religions contain to some extent verse or poetical narration, or outright versified passages. Without going back to the Vedas or the Avesta, and keeping for the sake of brevity to the Western world to find some analogies, it will suffice here to mention the Bible and especially the Book of Psalms to illustrate the matter. Actually, as one might guess, my choice of the Book of Psalms as an example is not a

random one. There is in it several elements that can bring us back, to the *shakkyōka*. The Book of Psalms was indeed originally written in Hebrew, but its fortune in Europe was due to a change in language. I shall skip here, albeit reluctantly, the Greek translation and restrain the matter to the Latin version by Saint Jerome, which was achieved in 406 AD according to tradition. As is well known, even as great a saint as Jerome could not bring about that the older Latin translation of the Psalms, known as the *Vetus Latina* version, be superseded by his own, as if popular election and support was stronger than the prestige and authority of the saintly translator. Whatever may have been the reason, the *Vetus Latina* version of the Psalms became the reference text not only for medieval Europe, but until the Renaissance, and well into modern times for the Catholic culture. As an evidence for the centrality of that secondary text, we can point out that there were translations made from Latin into modern languages even in the twentieth century, as show the example of Ronald Knox<sup>1</sup> (1888-1957), one of the founding fathers of the detective novels, or the highly original translation by the French writer Paul Claudel (1868-1955). Not less original is the Chinese translation made by the extraordinary scholar Wu Ching-Hsiung (1899-1986) who published a Chinese version of the New Testament and the Psalms around 1946, but it was not just another Mandarin version: Wu chose to translate the Scriptures into classical Chinese, and for the Psalms, his translation is heavily influenced by the *Book of Songs*.

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- Wu Jingxiong – John Ching Hsiung Wu  
(1899-1986) 吳經熊

- 第一首 君子與小人

1 長樂唯君子，為善百祥集。不偕無道行，恥與群小立。

2 避彼輕慢徒，不屑與同席。優游聖道中，涵泳徹朝夕。

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The literary history of the Psalms is well-nigh inexhaustible, but let me just take up here two examples that I find tellingly interesting about religious texts that fall into the realm of literature. Two highly original individuals have elaborated diverging literary responses to the Latin book of Psalms. One was a Florentine, the other a Scotsman. Let me begin with the Florentine,

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<sup>1</sup> He translated indeed the whole of the Bible from the Vulgate version, though referring constantly to the Hebrew and Greek texts.

or Tuscan at least, as he was chronologically the first: there is little doubt that Francesco Petrararch was a devout Catholic (1304-1374), but what he attempted to do with the Psalms was quite intriguing. We may even wonder if he was not, for his time, verging on the edge of herodoxy, as he planned to compose his own Psalter<sup>2</sup>, of which he only achieved a handful of pieces, to wit the six *Psalmi penitentiales* that were left to posterity. His aim was not to paraphrase the Psalter, but to utilize what he understood to be the Psalmist's style in order to build a new, highly idiosyncratic poetic style that he could use to express emotions that he felt more classical Latin poetry was inadequate to transcribe. Just to quote a few verses from Psalmus II:

1. *Invocabo quem offendi, nec timebo ; revocabo quem abieci, nec erubescam.*
2. *Spem perditam restituum; audebo rursus ex his tenebris in coelum oculos attollere.*
3. *Illic habitat redemptor meus, qui potens est ab infernis evellere.*
4. *Et gelidis artubus spiritum infundere, et extrahere iacentem de sepulcro.*
5. *Ego in me perii, sed in illo vita michi permanet, et salus in aeternum.*
6. *Ille imperat morti; ille vitam praestat et restaurat. Quis prohibet sperare meliora?*

It is really a pity that he did not follow through his attempt to a whole corpus of psalmistic poetry, and I do not know of any other author who emulated his project. Let me jump now about three centuries to George Buchanan (1506-1582), the famous Scots Neo-Latin writer. One of his major achievements was his Latin paraphrase of the Psalms, which he commenced while he was in a Portuguese jail. He was one of those humanists who, as Saint Augustine long before, felt deeply embarrassed by the clumsy Latinity of the Latin bible, and especially of the Book of Psalms, a favourite reading matter for centuries, so that he decided to rephrase it in a poetic style and metre that would satisfy the most supercilious latinizing martinets. This paraphrase is indeed something of an achievement, and one cannot but marvel at the chaste Latin style he imposed on the crude directness of the old Latin version. I have always wondered whether one of the most recent aftermaths of this puristic reaction, albeit in a different manner, was not the new Latin translation of the Psalter made by Cardinal Augustin Bea (1881-1968) and published in 1945; it has been known as the *Versio Piana*, for Pope Pius XII actively supported its use in the Church liturgy. Let me just quote the first verse of the first psalm by Buchanan as an example:

Felix ille animi, quem non de tramite recto  
Impia sacrilegae flexit contagio turbae,  
Non iter erroris tenuit, sessorve cathedrae

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<sup>2</sup> Saint Bonaventure had done something like that in the twelfth century with the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but Petrarch's attempt is much more personal.

Pestiferae facilem dedit irrisoribus aurem,  
Sed vitae rimatur iter melioris, et alta  
Mente Dei leges noctesque diesque revolvit.

It makes fascinating reading to compare Buchanan's phraseology with the Vulgate version of the Psalms, but it is not the purpose of this paper. Another captivating study would be to follow how vernacular versions or paraphrases of the Psalms began to flourish besides a host of other Latin versions around the Renaissance and the Reformation, and to see how, for instance, Protestant writers endeavoured to differentiate themselves from Latinate versions.

This rather long preamble only apparently does not have any connection with the matter that brings us together today, but the similarities are not difficult to point. As the original tongues of both Testament, Hebrew and Greek, so is the Sanskrit layer of the Buddhist Canon that was transmitted to China and, eventually, to Japan, immersed in oblivion. Amidst the ocean of the Issaikyô, it is obvious that the main, the only Scriptures that can be compared with the Bible for its central position in the poetical activity centered on religious themes is the *Lotus Sutra*. And here a situation obtains that corresponds closely to what I described for the Bible : we could say, for instance, that the relation between Kumârajîva's and Dharmarakṣa's translation is similar to the relation between the *Vetus Latina* and Saint Jerome's version. This Chinese version was divulged through all of Eastern Asia, and especially, for us at least, to Japan. It served as a repository of scriptural quotations since the tenth century at the latest and continued that role until the modern age.

As is well known, the manner in which Buddhist Scriptures were transmitted to Japan and melted within Japanese culture is rather peculiar. Externally, there was no attempt at systematic translation, to the difference of what could be seen in Tibet for instance, where a state-sponsored translation project started from an early date and was systematically developed with the elaboration of a Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary of Buddhist terms. The Tibetan translators endeavoured to make up a whole lexicon of Buddhist terminology based on purely Tibetan vocabulary, purged, as far as possible, of explicit Indic influence. They thus succeeded in transposing into Tibetan the greatest part of the Buddhist lexicon, from the basic terms to the most sophisticated concepts : *sang-rgyas*, *chos*, *las*, *rnam shes*, etc., giving the necessary basis for developing one of the richest Buddhist literatures in Asia. The Japanese appropriated the Buddhist Canon as they received it, in Chinese translation, as was the case of the other countries belonging to the *kanbun-bunka-ken* or « cultural sphere of classical Chinese » and made it the center of all Buddhist thought and practice, so that we have an outward conti-

nunity with the continental culture. But internally, so to speak, the Japanese literati elaborated from a very early stage, certainly under the influence of language practices already existing in the Korean peninsula where they later disappeared a new way of reading. It consisted, as it is superfluous to remind here, in an oral transposition into Japanese of the Chinese written text, a transposition which obliged the reader to change the reading order of Chinese characters. Those changed were indicated by reading signs (*kaeri-ten*) and the adjunction of syllabic signs (*okoto-ten, okuri-gana, kakuhitsu*). For centuries, that transposition remained oral, and is only attested by the reading signs left on manuscripts. This means that we had indeed a translation into Japanese, but it was not felt necessary to set it down in writing. Even doctrinal treatises were read in the same way, as evidenced by a recently discovered manuscript of the *Maka-shikan* from the eleventh century. Although we may be fairly certain of the syntactic features of the Japanese transposition, the lexical one is much more vague. It may be, as was the case later, that Chinese compounds were left as they are in the original, and read as Sino-Japanese compounds. But it might be as well that exegetical readings of the sutras were made according to the practice current in Heian period called *monzen-yomi*, with the successive reading of a Chinese compound first in Sino-Japanese pronunciation, then in explicative (*kun*) reading.

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- 文選読み
  - 天地玄黄 *tenchi no ame-tsuchi ha genkô to kuroku ki-nari*
  - 宇宙洪荒 *uchû no ôzora ha kôkô ôi ni ôki nari*
  - 法華、法花 *nori no hana*
  - 草庵 *kusa no io (iori)*
  - 鹿苑 *shika no sono*
- 

This habit is exactly what we have in certain *shakkyôka* clichés, as “the flower of Law” (*hokke*), or “a hut of grass” (*sôan*), or “the Deer Garden” (*rokuon*). They make by themselves (or with the addition of a grammatical suffix) a Japanese verse and can be readily used in a

poem. We can think that this reading habit, which was not confined to Buddhist texts, but to any literary Chinese text, and especially poetry, at its name of *monzen-yomi* tells it enough, provided with an entire array of translated Buddhist topics which were the nearest thing we can find in Japanese of a fixed Buddhist lexicon comparable to the Tibetan one, although it was never used in a continuous Japanese translation, at least non before later periods.

We know that the habit of composing Japanese poetry on Buddhist themes begun probably with Buddhist ceremonies where men made laudatory verses in Chinese and women in Japanese. It took some decades for poets to engage into series of verse centred on one Scripture, namely the *Lotus Sutra*, which quickly became and remained for the centuries to come the main object of religious poetry. Thus started a dialogue between two languages, one of which, classical Chinese, was a firm and immutable material, the perennial expression of religious truth, and the only medium for knowing Buddha's teachings. The other one, Japanese, was by no means a "vulgar" tongue in the same way that European vernaculars were deemed to be vulgar compared with Latin and Greek. As is clear from the prefaces that were written to the imperial poetic anthologies starting with the *Kokin-shû*, Japanese language was the poetical language *par excellence* of the Japanese people, and Japanese poetry had been created by the Japanese deities, the *kami*. The first *tanka* was composed by Susanoo no miko-to when he built his shrine with the eightfold fence for his wife, and for human beings thereafter to make Japanese poetry was an imitation of the gods.

It is of interest here to point the remarkable evolution of the word *kotowaza* that appears in those same poetical prefaces. In the *Kokin-shû*, it seems to mean primarily human "deeds and activities", while in the *Go-Shûi-shû* the prevalent meaning is taken to be "political activities". But when Fujiwara Shunzei writes his own preface to the *Senzai-shû*, the seventh anthology at the end of the twelfth century, the meaning is doubtless to be understood as *waka*. It shows that the word had now been reanalysed as « speech act » (« acte de langage »), a sense that is not given, as far as I know, in the dictionaries, which only register the meaning « proverb » for *kotowaza*. Henceforward, as we can see in Jien's texts, very soon after Shunzei, this linguistic meaning of *kotowaza* was definitely established, and the word will be regularly used in that meaning in the same context, as is shown by Jikkai's preface to his *Yakuwa-waka-shû* around 1500. It thus appears that for Japanese poetical theory, the speech act *par excellence* is none other than the *waka*, a poetic act of divine origin. To transpose the Chinese text of the sutra into Japanese is not to make a vernacular translation for propagating its teaching under a form easier to understand, it is a religious act presented as an offering to the gods. Indeed, the act of transposing the Chinese formulation of the Buddhist teaching into

Japanese poems, of going from Buddha's speech (though everybody knew that the original language of the sutras was the Brahmic speech, there was no way of getting to it, much like Latin was the nearest you could get to the Divine word) into the gods' language. It is the transposition in the linguistic plane of the very adaptation that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas perform in becoming *gongen*, emanations in *kami* forms. We can then say that composing Japanese poems on Buddhist themes is another, linguistic, aspect of *honji-suijaku* theory. This aspect is strengthened by the adroit pun on another close expression, very often mentioned together with *honji-suijaku*, namely *wakô-dôjin*, « to soften one's radiance and assimilate to the wordly dust », where the character *wa* is often diverted from its original meaning « to appease, to soften » to « facilitate (understanding) », and whence to « japanize, translate into Japanese ».

It is perhaps not enough to say that the *shakkyôka* is influenced by the *honji-suijaku* theory, we should take a step further and assert that the *shakkyôka* is the very linguistic illustration of that idea and its concretization, for everybody able to compose Japanese poetry to perform, and that it grew together with the *honji-suijaku*. In order to more fully appreciate the importance of the linguistic factor in that process, we just have to look at what happened in China itself, where we do not find such a full-fledged theory of correspondence between buddhas and bodhisattvas and local deities, although *wakô-dôjin* is of course a very old Chinese notion hailing from the *Daodejing* and buddhicized in the *Mohe-zhiguan*, and the premisses of *honji-suijaku* are Chinese as well. But, as far as I know, even in modern Chinese versions of the *Lotus Sutra*, only the prose parts are translated, not the verse parts. Although there is no dearth of poetical allusions to the *Lotus* in Chinese poetry, as well as double-entendre on the Buddhist meanings of words (for example *gen* as « root » and « sense organ »), there is no linguistic exit from the scriptural frame, no back and forth movement that feeds on the original and infuses into it a wealth of new meanings together with a rooting in a different sacred geography. The linguistic differentiation allows a bold freedom of interpretation while outwardly sticking to the letter of the sutra, which is given as a caution of orthodoxy above the Japanese poem. As is shown in the practice of making collections of *shakkyôka* classified according to the Chinese scriptural quotations, the *shakkyôka* are considered to be strictly dependent on the Chinese original, presenting a motley of meanings, multiple facets of the same notion, but never to be severed from their source. That linguistic differentiation was allowed within the circle of high Japanese culture because of the high value that was conferred to Japanese poetry as a divine activity, while a Japanese translation of the sutras would have seemed



debased at the time *shakkyōka* were thriving. Those poems are thus not exactly a translation or a linguistic gloss, but seem to be primarily an elaboration on meanings.

But are they really and primarily elaborations, which word I understand to mean a development of some kind: adding an idea or an explanation to the basic scriptural text. What is most striking when you read *shakkyōka* by one of the great masters of the genre, as Jien, is the purely tautological form of some of the best ones, that is those that leave the strongest impression. A good example would be this poem written on a short quotation from chapter Two of the *Lotus*: « *Like the vow that I made in the past* », thus phrased: « *At Katsushika / is the linked bridge of Mama / just as I thought long ago / that made us cross / on the path of Law* ».

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- 如我昔所願

18. かつしかや法のみちにそわたしつる  
むかし思しままのつき橋

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That piece, from the point of view of meaning, does not add anything to the Chinese original quotation, which is in itself very easy to understand. It is only a rephrasing of the same assertion, but anybody who reads the quotation together with its poetic expression will feel an abysmal difference between the two worlds and will barely acknowledge the identity of meaning. By skillfully playing with the Japanese landscape, more literary than real, the poet has succeeded in transposing the sutra's message in another dimension, both rooted in the reality and contemplative. We are, so to say, invited to contemplate the meaning of the sutra as concretized (or is it better to say "imagined") within the world around us. It is to be seen as the literary equivalent of what Allan Grapard described in his article about "The Textualized Mountain – Enmountained Text" in Kunisaki.

Another fine example, perhaps the best of all, the most famous anyway, is the poem by Jien about the celebrated sentence of the same chapter, "*The Reality of Dharmas*": "*That Naniwa / in the province of Tsu / be a reality / this we know / from the Reliable Gate*". As everyone understands, it is actually but a rewording of a sentence that could be thus phrased: "The teaching on the Reality of Dharmas' is to be found in chapter Two of the *Lotus Sutra*". As in

the previous poem, the original words are encrypted in a delightful vignette that is rather hard to read as a Buddhist piece, but then the reader's pleasure arises from the confrontation between the original quote and the final image, and from the understanding of the tautological meaning of the poem.

There is an exegetical element as well in the *shakkyōka*, and one could argue that the Naniwa poem is that too, as it derives the revelation of the true nature of a poetic landscape from the meaning of *shohō-jissō*. But I shall not dwell on this aspect here, as I have treated it elsewhere. I simply want to emphasize, beyond the exegetical and translational aspects that *shakkyōka* no doubt represent too, that the primary characteristic is linguistic, it is a speech act, and we must understand it as such. We have known since the beginning, from the very first words in the Preface of the *Kokin-shū*, what is the definition of poetry for the Japanese :

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- やまとうたは、人のこころをたねとして、  
よろづのことはとぞなれりける、世中  
にある人、ことわざしげきものなれば、  
心におもふことを見るものきくものにつ  
けていひい だせるなり。

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*“Japanese poetry has its seed in the human heart and ripens into the myriads of words (of the Japanese language). As activities are thriving in the human world, what they think in their heart when stimulated by what they see and hear is expressed in speech.”* This passage is pervaded with Buddhist doctrine, and accordingly describes poetry not as a description of the outside world, but as an expression of what happens within the mind when it perceives stimuli from the outside. A *waka* does not describe cherry blossoms or nightingales, as everyone can see, because you could hardly learn what a plum flower looks like or the warble's song sounds like even when you have read hundreds of poems, but it only purports to transmit what is in its author's mind when they see it or hear it. It does not explain a cherry flower or a war-

bler, it only declares that the author sees them, says “here is a warbler” and describes in few, indirectly alluding words, how they feel because of that perception.

It is thus perfectly logical if we start from the premise of the *Kokinshû*, indefinitely repeated afterwards, that in the case of *shakkyôka*, we have the very same relationship: *shakkyôka* 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. The two poems I have quoted are tautological from the point of view of their deep meaning (*ôgi*), as they only repeat the Scriptures, but the topological adornments brought about by their authors is the reflection of their state of minds which makes the originality of the piece. As the classical, “generalistic” *waka* is the product of a sensory experience, we can see the *shakkyôka* as the fruit of a religious experience. But it is not to be considered as different in itself from the classical *waka*, only its object differs. If we take the traditional Buddhist categorization of six senses, the classical *waka* deals with the first five senses, the *shakkyôka* deals with the sixth sense, that is *i* (*kokoro*), whose object is *hô* (*dharma*). In that case, *dharma* could be understood in the singular as well as the plural.

Before going any further, I would like to submit here a concrete manifestation of that contemplative aspect of *shakkyôka*, clearly related to a doctrinal tenet that explains and justifies it. I shall take it from a small corpus of poems written by Jien under the title of *Scriptural Poems on the Ten Suchnesses successively read at the Summer Festival of Relics*. Let us take only the first three poems of that series, as they give us the key for reading the rest. They are not very literary poems, for they are heavily loaded with Buddhist terminology in Sino-Japanese. Moreover, each one of the three is preceded with a character that refers to the three truths of Tendai teachings: “conditionality”, “medianity”, “vacuity” and, as you can see, in each poem, the order of the three characters that make the name of the Suchness permutes, so that we have, for the first one, the ‘regular’ order *nyo-ze-sô*, then *shô-nyo-ze*, and finally *ze-tai-nyo*, and this permutation will be repeated until the end of the series.

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- 夏日舍利講演次同詠十如法文和歌
  - 仮 如是相を見るそかなしき拘尸那城双樹  
にわけし仏舍利かさは
  - 中 性如是のくちぬめくみそたのもしき仏  
のたねはこの身なりけり
  - 空 是体如は東大寺なる盧遮那仏けにあか  
金の大仏かは
- 

To put it a bit rashly, the meaning of the individual poems here is not so important, let me however translate them roughly :

- [Conditionality] “Such is Aspect / *to see them is so sad / in the city of Kuśi / between the twin trees divided / here are they, His relics*”

- [Medianity] “Nature such is / *incorruptible bounty / and so reliable / the seed of the Awakened One / is verily this body*”

- [Vacuity] “Is Substance such / *in the Great Eastern Temple / Rocana-buddha / is He really of copper made / the great Awakened One*”

This permutation in the order of the Suchnesses is well known, as we can find it in Dôgen’s *Shôbôgenzô*, for example, and the superposition of Buddhist poems with the three Truths is now well known too in Western studies since William LaFleur translated the part of Shunzei’s *Korai fûtei-shô* dealing with the relation between them and the *waka*. But it is not so well known that this very permutation is a meditation process of the Tendai school that we find described very early in Japan, as early indeed as the first third of the ninth century, in the compendium written by Saichô’s disciple Gishin in his *Tendai Hokke-shû gi shû*.

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義真 「天台法華宗義集」

- 若爾依義讀文如何。答：凡有三轉。  
一云：是相如。是性如。對是報如。  
二云：如是相。如是性。乃至如是報。  
三云：相如是。性如。乃至報如是

- 凡聖皆實相故言中等
- 一念三觀

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Relying mostly on Zhiyi's teaching, Gishin describes here the permutation of the three Truths according to the ten Suchnesses. Each part of the three-letter compounds naming the Suchnesses relates to one of the three Truths: *nyo* to Vacuity, *ze* to Medianity, and, last, the variable name for each Suchness to Conditionality, this last one being the changing display of the phenomena. The alternating denominations allow to exhaust the full range of possibilities in the relation of equality between the three truths whatever be the point of view whence they are contemplated. And Gishin concludes saying: "*Because the saintly and the profane are both equally real, this is called equality in Medianity*", that is equality within the Middle Truth. The very permutation of the Truths is in itself an exercise in contemplation and is directly linked in Gishin's treatise to the idea of the whole three-thousand structure of the dharma-worlds within one thought moment (*ichinen-sanzen*) [see Fr. tr. pp.55 & 57 & last page] and to the idea of the three contemplations within one thought (*ichinen-sangan*).

It is plain for us to see that in this short series of poems on the ten Suchnesses Jien concretizes poetically this Tendai teaching, and even takes care to signal it with his marginal annotations that leaves to the reader no doubt about which truth is accommodated to which suchness. It is thus self-evident here that those *shakkyōka* are not only poems but exercises in contemplation as well, founded on very precise scholastic teachings.

The question is to know whether we can relate the composition of other, less conspicuously scholastic forms of *shakkyōka* by Jien to this same teaching. And on this point, we are lucky enough to be able to rely on writings by Jien himself, who explains to his reader the state of mind he was in when he wrote some of his collections.

- 今以龜言徐轉法輪，雖似狂言，又通實道。
- 以暮秋初冬之候，入二諦一如之觀，忽詠四五之拙歌，法樂三所之權現，利他而思，觀自而念(...)依此倭國之風俗欲彰淨土之月輪矣。
- 片山寺に籠居てはただ二諦の道理より外に思つづくる事もなし 其道理を歌によまむと思けるなるべし。

In his foreword to his *Hundred Poems on the Lotus Sutra*, he states that he “will now turn the Dharma Wheel with the help of crude words (sogon). Although they seem to be the speech of fool, yet they communicate with the real Path.” A much clearer assertion is found in the afterword: “Between the end of autumn and the beginning of spring, I entered the contemplation of the One Identity of the two Truths (nitai-ichinyo no kan) and improvised some poems that I presented as offerings to the avatars of the three Shrines. I was thinking of benefiting others as well as contemplating (for) myself. [...] That is why the customs [fûzoku] of our land will manifest the lunar disc of the Pure Land.” In these few lines, Jien tells us explicitly that he wrote his poems in what he considers to be a state of deep meditation, and that he sees his poetry as fulfilling a double aim: to benefit others and to contemplate for himself. That looks like an adaptation of the well-known description of the bodhisattva conduct: *jigyô-keta*, “practicing” for oneself being here replaced by “contemplating” for oneself, but as you can see, the Chinese wording is a bit strange, as it should have been *jikan*. I think that we can conclude from it that what Jien had in mind to say in reality was *mizukara wo kan-zuru*, that is “contemplate oneself”. He is doing the same thing as any other Japanese poet on any other nonreligious object, which is to contemplate the action of the external object on his own mind, and *kanji* is evidently used for *kanjin* “contemplating the mind”. If that is the case, then the *shakkyôka* is nothing else than *kanjin-shaku*, the highest level of exegesis according to Tendai teachings, that is, the exegesis by contemplation of the impact of the sutra letter on the mind. Jien reaffirms the same thing in other forewords as well, and appears to think firmly that poet-

ic composition is contemplation itself. Let me just quote here his words from another collection (*Rôso-ki*): “As I was retired in solitude at the Hengan-ji, there was nothing I could meditate on besides the principle of the Two Truths, that is why I chose to put that principle into poems.”

It is not for us to decide whether those repeated affirmations on the religious aspect of poetry are only rhetorical. We can see that they go much farther than merely stating the utility of Japanese poetry for disseminating Buddhist predication. And we cannot but take the poet’s words at their face value and assume that his poems are the result of an exercise in meditation and contemplation, in a word that they are the aftermath of a religious experience. The next question to ask would be to no whether that experience is transmissible or not.

Jien insists repeatedly on the Two Truths and their identification in the Middle Truth (*nitai-ichinyo*), as the underlying principle of his poetic creation. The result of that contemplation is the realization of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the realization that the opposites merge into one ineffable Essence, as is already hinted by Zhiyi in the *Mohe-zhiguan* (*shôji-sokunehan, bonnô-soku-bodai...*), and when the *shakkyôka* is not the tautological rephrasing of the scriptural letter, we find that a very important number are dedicated to the expression of that identity of *kû* (meaning non only vacuity, but as a designation of the realm of absolute truth) and *ke* (the variable in the Ten Suchnesses) through *ze* : the Medianity, being the identification.

We find in the *shakkyôka* written by Son.en (1298-1356), whom we might call a Jien *redivivus*, on account of the similarities in their lives, a good illustration of how the contemplative aspect of the *shakkyôka* has been elaborated in the course of the century and a half that separates the two poets, the latter as you know, having been the editor of the poetical work of the former (*Sûgyoku-shô*). One of Son.en’s main characteristics, when compared to his model, is the thoroughness with which he endeavours to separate the literal wording of the *Lotus* quotes he gives as theme from the content of his own poems. At first glance, we have only few instances of the tautological conceits that we found to be a major poetical strategy in the *shakkyôka*, but what impresses most the reader is the number of bold identifications, that can at times only be taken humoristically, that Son.en seems to delight in. I shall take here only three of them.

The first two are rather delightful. Let us begin with number Three : under the caption « *Their voice is pure, it resounds melodiously...* », the poem reads thus : « *Spring is the time / in its old snowy nest / like thunder it sounds / again in its youthful voice / the warbler in the valley* ». You have the usual puns on *furu*, with the symmetrical *furu* and *wakaki*, but what

arrests here the reader's attention is the comparison of the frail warbler's song with thunder, a comparison that applies to the Buddha's voice in the *Lotus* text, but hardly to a bird. But, possibly too because the warbler sings *hokekyô*, this familiar spring voice is superimposed to the cosmic dimension of the buddhas. There must be too some kind of humour as well on Son.en's side, because in the very same passage of the sutra, the buddhas are called « the saintly lords, the lions ». Thus warblers are compared with lions through their voice. It is a bit far-fetched, but there are other meanings as well in this apparently charming poem (*naru kami*) that shows one of Son.en's favorite [devices] : transposing (*mitate*) the sublime into the profane, the extraordinary in the familiar world. And let us notice that it is perceptible only if we refer to the text of the sutra, as in the example of the lions.

My second example is yet more humorous. It is number Fifty-four, on chapter Fifteen « Surging from the earth », where you have that truly grandiose description of billions of bodhisattvas coming from the other side of the universe and emerging from the ground to build up the backdrop of the Buddha's revelation. The caption reads « *All the lands were quaking and in their midst there were countless billions of bodhisattvas* ». And what Son.en makes of that magnificent scene is all the more astounding : « *The rising sun shines / on the shore and ice / begins to melt / they gather to search for food / the ducks in the pool reeds* », a vignette where bodhisattvas are changed into ducks. It looks at best humorous, at worst impious, but impiety has not the same meaning in Buddhism, and as in the case of the nightingale and the Buddha lions, what unites ducks and bodhisattvas is the action of rising from earth, the transcendental movement of the sutra being reduced to a more human scale.

The third example is, to my judgment at least, an image of impressive beauty. It is poem number Twenty-four, on a passage from chapter VI « Giving prediction » : « *The Buddha there will dwell permanently in space preaching to the multitudes* », inspiring this poem to Son.en : « *In the infinity / of sky resounding / and thundering / the darkness of the fifth month / a lightning illuminates* ». You can see here that the same word *narukami* is treated more seriously by Son.en, and the poem as such reads like a nice piece indeed, but the wonder arises when we report our attention to the caption. We see that the thunder is definitely the voice of the Buddha, but what is permanent, even eternal in the sutra, that is the predication in the celestial space, is in the poem transposed to what is the shortest lived phenomenon that can be imagined, the lightning. The first word of the poem suggests temporal and spatial endlessness, the latest one the apex of the ephemeral (to wit the well known comparisons of the *Vajracchedikâ*). It is very hard to think of a more contrasted *coincidentia oppositorum*,



where the *shintai* and the *zokutai* are blended into oneness through the poet's contemplative power. It is a literary manifestation of the grammatical word *soku*.

I think, then that we may legitimately speak of the *shakkyōka* as religious experience either when we have expression of bliss and joy on the hearing and reading the Buddha's words ; this happens in the great number of poems starting with *ureshiku mo*, or ending with *zo ureshiki*. We have yet a religious experience of another kind when the poet rewords the sutra's teaching or narration and inscribes them in the familiar Japanese scenery, making a perfect and beautifully adorned tautological statement, and then finally we have the poems that bring together the two dimensions of reality into identity within the contemplative mind.

The exceptional clarity the authors of *shakkyōka* wield in thus composing those cleverly carved and yet deeply impressive images gives the Japanese Buddhist poetry a unique paradigmatic value that could be applied to other cultural and religious domains and I hope that this meeting will be a first step toward that goal.