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**RYŌKAN:
POEMS FROM A MAN
WHO PREFERRED SOLITUDE**

By Jean Moore

**International Area Studies Programs
University of Massachusetts at Amherst**

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**RYŌKAN:
POEMS FROM A MAN
WHO PREFERRED SOLITUDE**

**By Jean Moore
Department of Asian Languages and Literatures
University of Massachusetts at Amherst**

March 1982

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Jean Moore, Instructor of Japanese at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, is a Ph.D. candidate in Japanese literature at Columbia University.

I. Ryōkan's Background and Career

The Zen priest Ryōkan, who lived in northern Japan in the latter part of the Tokugawa period, is known to most Japanese today only through children's stories and songs which relate anecdotes about his life in Echigo, today's Niigata prefecture. Although unverifiable and perhaps partially invented, such anecdotes do convey the impression which the eccentric monk made upon the villagers from whom he begged sustenance. That impression does not contradict, but certainly differs from, the impression of the man that his poems convey. The body of this paper will deal with his poetry as the product of his life of meditation, but I shall begin with a few anecdotes which reflect Ryōkan as his lay contemporaries saw him.

One tells of Ryōkan joining some children in a late afternoon game of hide-and-go-seek. He concealed himself so well in a pile of bundled straw that the children had not found him even when their parents' calls to supper ended the day's play. The next morning a farmer who came to fetch some straw discovered Ryōkan still in hiding and exclaimed in surprise. But Ryōkan quickly hushed him lest he reveal his presence to the children and spoil the game.¹

Another story concerns Kameda Bōsai (1752-1826), a Confucian scholar from Edo who visited Ryōkan's hermitage Gogōan in 1809. Having spent the afternoon in conversation with Ryōkan, Kameda was about to take his leave at sunset, but at Ryōkan's suggestion that he stay for dinner, sat back and continued their discussion. After what seemed a long time to the hungrily waiting Kameda, Ryōkan said something about getting dinner and strolled out of the house. As more time passed with no sign of Ryōkan or the promised meal, Kameda too went outside, only to find Ryōkan standing on the path gazing at the sky. When he saw Kameda, Ryōkan apologized for the delay. He explained that having no food in the house he had gone to beg some. On his return he had been entranced by the beauty of the moon. When the two entered Ryōkan's hermitage, Ryōkan proffered a large bowl which, to Kameda's disappointment, held nothing more tempting than cold, hardened rice and two thin slices of pickled radish.²

I presented an earlier version of this paper as part of the requirements for my M.A. degree at Columbia University in 1972.

In 1977 two volumes of English translations of Ryōkan's poetry appeared; John Stevens' One Robe, One Bowl, and Burton Watson's Ryōkan. While a few of the poems may be duplicated, the present paper is concerned with analysis of specific poems, rather than with providing an overview of Ryōkan's work. This paper includes translations of twenty-two poems from Japanese, and forty-six poems from Chinese language originals.

An alphabetical list of proper names with their Chinese characters follows the text.

boats bearing the gold mined on Sado Island, saw a great deal of official and commercial traffic.⁶

The Yamamoto family, into which Ryōkan was born, was old and locally important. Their house's name, Tachibana-ya, has been said to indicate that their remote ancestors were the Tachibana of the Nara period,^{*} but this is a problematic claim. However, the Hino family has preserved a poem card written in 1325 by Hino Chūnagon Suketomo^{**} who spent a night at the Yamamoto house on his way to exile on Sado Island. The poem, composed in praise of a flowering orange tree (tachibana) in their front garden, reads;

wasuru na yo	Do not forget!
hodo wa namiji o	But even when the waves
hedatsu to mo	lie between us,
kawarazu nioe	stay fragrant, unchanged,
yado no tachibana	tachibana which sheltered me.

It has been suggested that the association of the name with the family began with this poem.⁷ Whether this is true or not, Suketomo is clearly bidding farewell to his host, and not merely to the tree.

In the Genna era (1615-1623) the prayers of Ryōkan's ancestor Ichizaemon apparently quelled a sudden squall, allowing an endangered tribute boat to land safely on Sado Island. In thanksgiving he donated some reclaimed land to the shrine of the god who had answered his prayer and ordered further reclamation work. In the early 1670's when these fields became productive, his family was asked to administer them and the shrine's other properties. Later, priesthood at the Ishii shrine and headship of the village were made hereditary in the family along with the right to bear a sword and surname.⁸

In 1751, his own child Shinnosuke having died very young, Yamamoto Shinzaemon adopted Yamamoto Hideko from a Sado Island branch of the family. In 1755 he adopted Araki Jirozaemon of nearby Yoita-machi to be her husband and his own heir. This couple's first child, Eizō, was born in 1758. His alternate name (azana) was Magari, but it is by his religious name Ryōkan that he is best known. In the years that followed six more children were born, three boys and three girls.⁹

* Agata Inugai Michiyo, wife of a fifth generation descendant of the Emperor Bidatsu, received this kabane in 708. Their children ranked as commoners with the surname Tachibana.

** Hino Suketomo (1290-1332) was exiled to Sado Island for his involvement in Emperor Godaigo's plot against the Kamakura shogunate.

An intelligent and aloof child, Eizō preferred reading to all other activities. Even during the Bon festival* he was found sitting in a corner with Confucian and Buddhist texts. To his parents' chagrin, this strange taste earned him the epithet, 'headman's son, useless as a lantern lit at noon.'¹⁰

His formal education consisted of about six years' study at Ōmori Shiyō's Kyosen-juku in Jizōdō-machi in the next district. Ōmori, who had studied in Edo, was one of the province's foremost Confucian scholars.¹¹

The Noguchi family, which headed Amaze, the neighboring village, had for some time been gaining prominence at the expense of the Yamamoto family's influence.¹² During Eizō's childhood they acquired the right to have the board for official notices posted in front of their gate, an honor which had been the Yamamoto's for generations. It is said that after this heavy blow to the prestige of the Tachibana-ya, Eizō's father lost interest in his official duties.

Instead, he devoted himself to composing poetry with his friends. His best poems were haikai, seventeen syllable verses, which he signed with the pen-name (gō) I'nan. He is regarded as a contributor to the revival of interest in the Bashō style of haikai which was taking place in Echigo at that time.¹³

Eizō was not the only one of I'nan's children to reflect the influence of this literary atmosphere. The second son, Yoshiyuki, maintained a lifelong interest in poetry and literary scholarship. The youngest son, Tansai, became a Confucian tutor to the Crown Prince and to the Emperor Kōkaku (r. 1780-1817),¹⁴ I'nan's youngest daughter, Mikako, was also a poet.¹⁵

As the eldest son, Eizō was expected to succeed his father as Shinto priest and village headman. He had begun his apprenticeship, studying the duties attached to these positions, but suddenly, late in his teens, he left his family for the Sōtō Zen temple Kōshōji in Amaze-machi.¹⁶ There he was tonsured and took the religious names Taigu (Great Fool) and Ryōkan (Pleasant Magnanimity).¹⁷

No statement by Ryōkan of his reasons for becoming a monk is known, but there are several traditional explanations. According to one, it was the emotion he felt upon witnessing an execution that prompted him to take orders. According to another, Ryōkan, as apprentice headman, was requested to arbitrate a dispute between some fishermen and a bailiff. Since he merely transmitted the complaints of each party to the other without tactfully reshaping them, the disagreement grew worse until finally both sides turned their reproaches on him.

* The Bon festival celebrated the return of the spirits of deceased loved ones for a few days in late summer.

Then, in despair at a world more receptive to deceit than simple honesty, he became a buddhist priest.¹⁸ It must also be remembered that the position which Ryōkan was to inherit, although of local importance, was the headship of a house whose fortunes were in decline. This may have been a factor in his decision to become a priest, but in view of his unworldliness, whatever influence it exerted must have been psychological, convincing him of the impermanence of wealth and influence, for it is hard to imagine Ryōkan being motivated by pragmatic consideration of the little advantage such an inheritance would bring.

Soon afterwards, in 1779, the priest Kokusen arrived at Kōshōji on a tour of the province. Kokusen was the head of the Entsuji, a Sōtō Zen temple in Tamashima in Bitchū, present day Okayama prefecture. When Kokusen returned to the Entsuji Ryōkan accompanied him as his disciple. Although there are poems in which Ryōkan refers to his life at Entsuji, little is recorded of him during the years he spent studying and practicing Zen there. One of the few facts known is that when Ryōkan was thirty-two, Kokusen recognised his attainment of enlightenment and presented him with a ge, or Buddhist verse modeled on the Sanskrit gāthā, in accordance with Zen custom.¹⁹ The poem is written in Chinese* and has four lines of seven characters each. The first, second and fourth lines are rhymed, each ending in a character read kan in Japanese. Thus in form the poem is a zekku (ch'ueh chū), or short regulated verse.

It is good, Ryōkan! The Way, like folly, extends ever more vast.
How to act freely, in natural accord with Dharma, is something
few understand.

So I give to you a wisteria staff, knarled with hillocks and knots.
Wherever you go there will be time to nap between the walls.

The first line uses three characters from Ryōkan's religious names. In this Kokusen has followed the common practice of incorporating the recipient's name in such verses to personalize and authenticate them. He likens the Way to Ryōkan's apparent foolishness, alluding at the same time to the Buddhist belief that delusion and enlightenment are fundamentally identified. The second line refers to the actions of an enlightened mind, which are spontaneously in harmony with the Buddhist Law. The bestowal of the staff in the third line is probably a metaphor for the personal transmission of Zen wisdom from master to disciple. A staff, of course, is used in climbing, and the rugged form of this one seems to suggest the energy one must apply to the practice of Zen to

* The Chinese text of this poem is given in the list of Chinese characters, under Kokusen.

accomplish the transformation of foolishness into enlightenment. The last line is an illustration of the natural behavior mentioned in line two. Having attained enlightenment, Ryōkan will feel at ease in any surroundings and manifest enlightenment in every activity.

Despite its difficulty, this poem is a welcome addition to the semi-fictional anecdotes and dry biographical data which provide most of our information about Ryōkan. Although its language is technical and its content somewhat conventional, it is concerned with the aspect of life which was all-important to Ryōkan, the religious. Kokusen, writing for his disciple of ten years, praises the easiness and flexibility of spirit which Ryōkan's neighbors in Echigo considered eccentric. The tranquil repose in enlightenment mentioned in the last line of Kokusen's verse also became a frequent theme of Ryōkan's own poetry.

Kokusen died in 1791, a year after he presented this ge to Ryōkan. Following his master's death, Ryōkan left Entsuji and became a wanderer.²⁰

In 1845 Kondō Manjō wrote an account of a journey he had made to Tosa, now Kōchi prefecture, while still a young man. He tells of having found shelter from a storm in the dilapidated cottage of a very strange monk who spoke only to welcome him. Afterwards he was silent, yet did not appear to be engaged in either Zen meditation or recitation of the name of Amida Buddha. The only furniture the hut contained was a desk. On it lay a copy of the Taoist text Chuang Tzu and a beautifully written Chinese poem. Impressed by the calligraphy, Manjō asked the monk to write something on his fan. The monk did so, signing himself Ryōkan. The monk refused the money Manjō offered as he departed but gratefully accepted a gift of paper.²¹ This tale is indeed vague, and the character ryō } given in Manjō's account is not the one Ryōkan usually used. However, nothing more specific is known of Ryōkan's activities until 1795.

In that year he attended memorial services in Kyoto on the forty-ninth day after his father's death, news of which had reached him as he travelled.²²

I'nan had retired in 1786, three years after his wife's death. He turned the household over to Yoshiyuki, his second son, and in 1792 went on a journey with friends. They travelled from one haikai gathering to the next, and arrived eventually in Kyoto. I'nan had written a book entitled Tenshinroku which deplored the decline of the Imperial family's power and prestige. Since the Tokugawa shogunate considered such ideas potentially subversive, its agents were keeping watch on I'nan. It was apparently to escape them that I'nan leapt to his death in the Katsura River. There is some speculation that the report of I'nan's

drowning was fabricated to mask his actual escape to Mt. Kōya in Wakayama prefecture, and the fact that that Ryōkan, on leaving Kyoto, went there to pray is sometimes interpreted as supporting the escape theory.²³ It has also been suggested that I'nan's youngest son, Tansai, an Imperial tutor, may have influenced his father's politics.²⁴ I'nan's own training as a Shinto priest may also have predisposed him to such radical ideas. Ryōkan at any rate does not seem to have been interested in political intrigue.

At age thirty-seven Ryōkan made his way back to Echigo, but he did not visit his family, or even notify them of his return. He continued to live by begging food and necessities, staying for a while in an abandoned hermitage at Gōmoto on the coast not far from Izumozaki. When his family and friends heard that he was there and sent someone to persuade him to return to Izumozaki, he refused and travelled on.²⁵

Gogōan, where Ryōkan took up permanent residence after 1804, is located on the western slope of Mt. Kugami in Nishikanbara district in Niigata. Its name, Five Measure Hermitage, is said to date from the 1680's when Kokujōji, the Shingon temple at the top of the mountain, sent down five measures (1 gō=.18 liter)²⁶ of rice each day to the retired priest Mangen who then resided in the hermitage. From the period of Ryōkan's residence at Gogōan come most of the works of poetry and calligraphy, the anecdotes, friendships and correspondence through which we know him today. Thus, in contrast with his early years, there is a good deal of material on this and later periods. There is a considerable body of poetry, much of which deals with his life as a hermit, and the natural surroundings of his hermitage. There are also more prosaic documents, such as letters of thanks for gifts of pickled radishes and other necessities.

Ryōkan corresponded often with his brother Yoshiyuki, who, unfortunately for the house of Tachibana, was not a successful administrator. In an effort to restore the family prestige Yoshiyuki tried to get the magistrate's office (daikanjo) moved from Amaze to Izumozaki. This effort cost more than Yoshiyuki himself could afford and it seems he dipped into public funds. As a result of complaints about his handling of finances Yoshiyuki was barred from Izumozaki and the family property confiscated in 1810.²⁷ He then took the tonsure and the name Mukakaen (Barren Garden) and retired to a hermitage in Yoita.²⁸

Although Ryōkan was never attached to a particular teacher or poetic group, he exchanged letters and poems with educated and literary men in the area. The Suzuki, Kera, Harada and Kimura families, prominent and wealthy

during Ryōkan's lifetime, still preserve samples of his writing as well as stories of their ancestors' acquaintance with him.

As Ryōkan's advancing age made it increasingly difficult for him to winter on the mountainside, he began to occupy a small empty house at the foot of the mountain during the cold weather. By 1817 he had come to live year-round in this house on the grounds of the Otogo Shrine. In 1826, at the invitation of a wealthy farmer from Shimazaki, Kimura Motoemon, Ryōkan moved to a small house in Kimura's garden. Ryōkan complained that he felt cramped by town life, not a surprising reaction in one who had spent so many years as a recluse.²⁹

It was also during 1826 that the nun Teishin (d. 1872), then twenty-eight years old, first came to study poetry with Ryōkan. She was the daughter of Okumura Gohyōe, a retainer of the Nagaoka han in Echigo. Widowed shortly after her marriage to a doctor, she had become a nun at Dōunji, a temple in Kashiwazaki, also in Echigo. Teishin was perhaps Ryōkan's closest companion during the next four years.³⁰ She also compiled the first collection of his works, Hachisu no tsuyu (Dewdrops on the Lotus), which she completed in 1835, four years after Ryōkan's death.³¹ The collection includes poems exchanged between Ryōkan and Teishin in the course of their acquaintance. The last poems in this section of Hachisu no tsuyu are those Ryōkan composed during his final illness.³² Each poem is prefaced by Teishin's description of the occasion of its composition. Although some of the poems are Buddhist in content, many simply express affection. As Tōgō Toyoharu comments, this new friendship must have brought a great deal of brightness into the aged monk's last years.³³ In addition to these poems, Hachisu no tsuyu contains other waka, haikai and admonitions (kaigo) by Ryōkan, Teishin's introductory account of his life, and reminiscences written by other friends.³⁴

Ryōkan fell seriously ill in the summer of 1830 and remained so until his death on the sixth day after the lunar new year in 1831 (Feb. 18). Yoshiyuki, Kimura Motoemon, Teishin and other friends who had been nursing him were all at his bedside. He was buried in the Kimura family's cemetery plot at Ryūsenji, a Pure Land temple in Shimazaki.³⁵

Much of the biographical information given above, being either impersonal or insufficiently verifiable, has little direct relevance to an understanding of Ryōkan's poetry. But at least it gives us a nodding acquaintance with the life of Zen meditation and quiet, forested hills at Gogōan, so often referred

to in his work.

He must have spoken often of his dislike for the poetry, calligraphy and cuisine produced by professionals, for such comments are recorded in several contemporary sources. He also disliked the practice of composing poems on assigned topics.³⁶ Thus, for Ryōkan the essence of poetry lay in expressing one's feelings with spontaneity and sincerity rather than in the technical expertise of a work.³⁷ Despite their often obscure and archaic diction, his own poems have a freshness and humanity which is still attractive to his readers in this very different age.

II. Poetry - in Japanese

As was stated in the biographical section above, Ryōkan wrote poetry in both Chinese and Japanese. Although I intend to deal mainly with his Chinese poetry, his work in Japanese is equally well known and deserves mention. He wrote in several Japanese poetic forms, including haikai. Unlike his father I'nan, however, Ryōkan seems to have considered haikai writing only a casual pastime.

His attitude towards the writing of verse in the thirty-one syllable waka form was much more serious. Natural imagery has been important throughout the history of waka, and is prominent in many of Ryōkan's verses. Some poems are simple appreciations of nature's beauty, while others employ elements of the natural world to express the poet's feelings about something else. There are poems which recall the Ryōkan of the anecdotes, for they record his joy at finding his lost begging bowl, playing with children, or picking spring flowers and greens. Other poems express nostalgia for absent friends and times past. Some of his waka are overly simple and deficient in poetic tension. But others are quite beautiful;

akiyama o
waga koekureba
tamahoko no
michi mo teru made
momiji shinikeri

As I came across
the autumn hills
even the path, a jeweled halberd,*
radiated the brilliance
of scarlet maple leaves.

Ryōkan wrote waka not in the simplified hiragana syllabary, but in manyō-gana, Chinese characters used phonetically as they had been in the eighth century anthology of Japanese poetry, the Manyōshū. He also incorporated fragments from Manyōshū poems in his own works. His early training for the Shinto priesthood would have given him some familiarity with the ancient language of Shinto prayers. His frequent use of archaic vocabulary and grammatical constructions may reflect a fondness for the ancient language fostered by that education. Ryōkan sprinkled his poetry with Manyōshū era pillow words (makura kotoba), fixed epithets which add euphony and atmosphere without necessarily contributing to the logical sense of a poem. Ryōkan's antiquarian taste is also shown by his attention to the chōka (long poem), a form little used since the time of the Manyōshū. Ryōkan recommended that Kera Yoshishige, the son of one of his patrons, read the Manyōshū in order to improve his own poetry. When Yoshishige protested that he could not understand the Manyōshū, Ryōkan replied that whatever little he did understand would be of help to him.³⁸

* "Jeweled halberd" tamahoko, put to excellent use here, is one of the pillow words Ryōkan favored. The reason for its association with 'road' and 'villager', the words it usually precedes, is not clear.

Ryōkan's high regard for this pre-classical work provides an interesting example of the pervasiveness of the Kokugaku (National Learning) movement in Tokugawa society. Ancient works like the Manyōshū (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) and the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters, completed in 712) had been indecipherable for centuries until the linguistic studies of Kada Azumamaro (1669-1736), Kamo Mabuchi (1679-1769) and Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) rendered them comprehensible again during Ryōkan's lifetime. Kera Yoshishige wrote in Ryōkan Zenji kiwa (Curious Tales of the Zen Monk Ryōkan) that there were no copies of Mabuchi's or Motoori's works in Echigo. But Ryōkan did borrow a book entitled Manyōshū ryakuge (Brief Notes on the Manyōshū), a likely vehicle for the diffusion of Kokugaku ideas since it was written by Mabuchi's pupil Katō Chikage (1735-1808). Like Ryōkan, the Kokugaku scholars attempted poems in the style of the Manyōshū but achieved only limited success.³⁹

Another aspect of the National Learning movement reflected in Ryōkan's biography is the tendency to respect and even to revere the Emperor shown in Ryōkan's father I'nan's book Tenshinroku. For many of those interested in the old texts this political element was primary, overshadowing their literary interest in these books.⁴⁰ Ryōkan's concern was with religious rather than secular philosophy, and his appreciation of the Manyōshū seems to have been purely literary. An inquiry into the Shinto aspects of Ryōkan's appreciation of nature would perhaps yield some results, but I find no overt Shinto elements in his work. The beauty of the ancient words themselves, enhanced as they were by nostalgia for the long vanished civilization which had produced them, was what fascinated Ryōkan. His use of these words in their ancient orthography in his own poetry is an expression of the pleasure he found in them. That Ryōkan, who lived in relative isolation and was not a member of any scholarly or literary school, was nevertheless able to draw on almost contemporary scholarship for his own purposes indicates the relative ease of communications in Tokugawa Japan and the breadth of Kokugaku influence.

Tokugawa poets had turned to the Manyōshū in part as an alternative to the over-codified waka tradition. Ryōkan's Japanese poems are praised for their spiritual affinity to the Manyōshū, manifested in their spontaneity, purity and sincerity.⁴¹ These qualities were admired in Manyōshū poetry but rarely found in the waka written a thousand years later. Ryōkan's chōka do not compare in force and grandeur with the best works in the Manyōshū and they survive as a sort of literary curiosity.

The following examples of Ryōkan's Japanese poetry are waka except where otherwise noted. The numbers given to the translations correspond to those in Kinsei Wakashū, Vol. 93 of the Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei series, pp. 177-188.

5. Staying overnight at the base of Mt. Kurosaka;*

ashihiki no
Kurosakayama no
ko no ma yori
morikuru tsuki no
kage no sayakesa

How pure the moonlight
which filters
through the trees
on the spreading skirts
of Black Slope Mountain.

6. Passing Iwamuro;**

Iwamuro no
tanaka no matsu o
kefu mireba
shigure ame ni
nuretsutsu tateri

Today when I saw
the pine in the field
at Iwamuro,
it was standing getting drenched,
getting drenched by the winter rain.

7. Composed on Mt. Kugami;

Kite mireba
waga furusato wa
arenikeri
niwa mo magaki
ochiba nomi shite

Coming to see
the place where I grew up
I found all a shambles,
both garden and fence
just a heap of fallen leaves.

8. inishie o
omoeba yume ka
utsutsu ka mo
yoru wa shigure no
ame o kikitsutsu

Recollecting the past -
dream?
or reality?
Not knowing, in the night I listen
to the cold autumn rain.

* Location uncertain. Ryōkan heightens the other-worldly atmosphere of the moonlit scene by establishing an antique tone through his use of several Manyō-shū words, sayakesa, clarity, and ashihiki, pillow word for mountains, here translated spreading skirts.

** In Nishikambara district, Niigata prefecture.

11. yamakage no
ariso no nami no
tachikaeri
miredomo akanu
hitotsu matsu no ki
- Never tired of watching
the rise and return of waves,
on the rocky,
mountain-shadowed shore
a lone pine.
12. ashihiki no
Kugami no yama ni
ieishite
iyukikaerai
yama mireba
yama mo migahoshi
sato mireba
sato mo yutakeshi
harube ni wa
nana saki oori
akisareba
momiji o taori
hisakata no
tsuki ni kazashite
aratama no
toshi no totose wa
suginikerashi mo
- Coming and going
to the house I built
on Mt. Kugami
of the trailing skirts
I look at the hills
and the hills are lovely,
I look at the village
and see the village prospering.
In the spring
cherry blossoms filled the branches
now that it is autumn,
I break off a twig of crimson leaves
and wear it in my cap
in the soft moonlight --
this is the way I seem to have passed
ten
unpolished jewels of years.*
14. wakana tsumu
shizu ga kadoda no
ta no azu ni
chikiri naku nari
haru ni wa narinu
- Plucking young greens
on a path through
a field by a poor man's gate
a wagtail is singing,
yes, this is spring.
18. kono sato ni
temari tsukitsutsu
kodomora to
asobu haru hi wa
kurezu to mo yoshi
- Playing ball
with the children
in this village,
how lovely if
the spring sun never set.

* This is a choka. Ryokan has taken lines 5-8 from a Manyōshū poem by Tanabe Sakimaro (Book VI, No. 1047), but has changed the last word of line 8 from sumiyoshi, pleasant to live in, to yutakeshi, prosperous. Line ten is identical to a line from Manyōshū, Book VI, No. 1050, also by Sakimaru. Note also the pillow words ashihiki, mentioned above, hisakata, soft, tranquil, associated with sunlight and moonlight, and aratama, unpolished jewel, associated with the time words, year, month, day, evening and spring.

23. yo no naka o
 ushi tomoeba ka
 hototogisu
 ko no magakure ni
 nakiwataru nari
- Was it because
I felt the world dreary
that the hototogisu*
passed singing
hidden in the shadows between the trees?
25. tsukiyo yomi
 kado ta no tai ni
 detemireba
 too yamamoto ni
 kiri tachiwataru
- Night of brilliant moonlight -
out in the field by the gate
gazing,
mist rises, spreading across
the feet of distant hills.
33. sabishisa ni
 kusa no iori o
 dete mireba
 inaba oshinamu
 akikaze zo fuku
- Too lonely,
I leave my thatched hut
to see
fields of rice bent trembling
under the autumn wind.
37. yamazato wa
 ura sabishiku
 narinikeru
 kigi no kozue no
 chiriyuku mireba
- How forlorn
the mountain village
has become
as I watch the leaves
scatter down from the treetops.
38. momijiba wa
 chiri wa suru to mo
 tani kawa ni
 kage dani nokose
 aki no kata ni
- Maple leaves
though you fall
leave at least your scarlet shadows
on the stream in the valley
as a memento of autumn.
41. Waking after seeing Yoshiyuki in a dream;
- izuku yori
 yoru no yumeji o
 tadori koshi
 miyama wa imada
 yuki no fukaki ni
- From where
did you come
along the night dream-path?
for the mountains are still
deep in snow.

* A summer bird, often mentioned in poetry.

42. On about the tenth day of the fifth lunar month my begging took me to Makiyama.* When I stopped by for a look at Arinori's** old house I found that its site had become an open field. As I gazed at the plum tree which had begun to drop its petals, memories of the old days came to me and I wrote;

sono kami wa
sake ni uketsuru
ume no no hana (sic)
tsuchi ni ochikeri
itazura ni shite

Then
we floated them in sake cups,
plum blossoms
wasted now
fall upon the ground.

44. In the spring, a year after the death of a beloved friend, I happened to pass his house and stopped to have a look at the place. No one was living there, and the cherry blossoms were scattered in disorder about the garden;

omohoezu
mata kono iho ni
kinikerashi
arishi mukashi no
kokoro narai ni

Without meaning to
I seem to have visited
this cottage again,
following a habit learned
in times now past.

54. Looking in the mirror at the end of the year;

shirayuki o
yoso ni nomi shite
sugureshi ga
masa ni waga mi ni
tsumorinuru ka mo

All this time I've watched
the white snow fall
on others,
now I see
the drifts that lie on me.

* Makiyama is south of Mt. Kugami.

** Harada Arinori, a physician fond of Chinese poetry, waka and haikai, was one of Ryōkan's close friends.

The following chōka may be found on pp. 262-263 of Ōshima Kasoku's Ryōkan Zenshū. Underlining indicates Manyōshū vocabulary and makura kotoba.

White Hair

Morning after morning frost forms -- but that's all right,
 At the end of the year snow falls -- but that's all right,
 Though it may accumulate, it will vanish.
 The white snow which falls on men's heads
 Piles up and increases,
 Though springtime comes, vibrant as a drawn bow,
 It does not melt away at all.

Thinking that this transient floating world had no being,
 I changed my white layman's robes and shaved off my black hair.
 Since then I've been like a cloud in the sky which leaves no traces,
 Like flowing water which is never 'there',
 Visiting palaces which glitter in the sun
 As well as thatched huts, again and again.
 I feel that, good or bad, what is, is.
 Why are my thoughts so unceasing?
 My thoughts, who could understand them?
 This heart, to whom can I speak of it?
 Even if I spoke I could not tell all.
 Though the sea is deep around the wave thrashed rocks,
 Though the lofty mountains are tall,
 It is said they will come to an end in time,
 Perhaps my thoughts never will.
 Why do my thoughts not stop -- even though my gate appears shut
 to the world?

The first of these is a simple lament, its gentle language effective despite the fact that the metaphorical use of snow for grey hair is not at all original. The second poem seems to be an admission that Ryōkan has failed to attain his religious goals. Although Zen practice is intended to stop all troubling, distracting thoughts, Ryōkan complains that despite his life of mendicancy and solitude, he has not yet achieved a state of mental quietude. The very different mood of the following poem contrasts with the melancholy expressed in the poems above. But all three of these poems depart from the mainstream of the Japanese poetic tradition in being explicitly

philosophical.

The title of the next poem contains a word of Sanskrit origin, the Buddhist term skandha. The five skandha, or aggregates, are the material and perceptual elements whose conjunction brings about our existence. According to Buddhist doctrine, their existence is not real, but the product of delusion. The body of the poem however, uses native Japanese words, except for the mention of skandha again near the end. As a chōka it is written in alternate lines of five and seven syllables, then ends with two seven syllable lines. It is followed by two tanka as envois. The sense of the poem seems to allow the division I have made into three stanzas, but the original contains no indications of stanza breaks.

The first stanza establishes the situation in which man finds himself, living but a moment in a vast world-in-flux. The second section expresses the panic of a man caught up in the world. Like the man in the second poem above, he longs for some stability, some absolute referent in the chaos. In the third section the man exultantly discovers the way to the peace he has so feverishly sought. The power of the images for enlightenment is all the greater for the plaint which precedes them. The two tanka which end the poem express two views of enlightenment. The first reminds us that all beings are originally enlightened, a standpoint compatible with the tariki, or effort-of-another stance associated with Pure Land Buddhism and its dependence on Amida Buddha's vow to save all beings. The second seems to urge human effort, the jiriki path of religious practice and meditation advocated by Zen and other sects.

On Mind which Reflects the Emptiness of the Five Skandhas⁴²

The world is a fleeting thing,
When one takes a good look at the long ages
Long as the tail, as the trailing tail,
Of a bird of the trailing mountains,
Continuing for a hundred lifetimes, through five hundred
generations, for a myriad ages,
Dividing at branch after branch, fork after fork
Are ranged the roads to be followed.

I would stand still but know not the means
Would stay but know not how,
My thoughts tangled as unlaced robes,
Not knowing the destination of this floating cloud
Nor how to speak or act,
Gasping in long breaths like an offshore-dwelling duck or water bird

I would turn to someone and appeal.

When, as though releasing the bow lines,
 Releasing the stern lines, of a great ship in a great harbor,
 One pushes off into the great sea plain,
 Ah, the distance!

When, as though striking down a sturdy tree with a sharp-tempered blade,
 One realizes that the five skandhas are none other than the five skandhas,
 One has transcended the troubles of the world
 Without troubling the mind, effortlessly.

Perhaps our fleeting bodies and minds won't come to an end,
 for our salvation took place before birth.

Let the reeds of Naniwa in Tsu no Kuni be as they may,*
 just put one foot forward everybody.

* Naniwa, the ancient name for the Osaka region of present day Hyōgo prefecture, was long associated with luxuriantly growing reeds. Here Ryōkan prefixes the place name to the word yoshi, which may mean reed, as an engo or associated word. Yet in the latter part of the verse he uses yoshi in another sense, to mean 'never mind, I don't care.' As a result the Naniwa phrase has little to do with the sense of the verse, but it does continue the water imagery used earlier in the poem.

III. Poetry - in Chinese

By Ryōkan's time the practice of writing poetry in Chinese had long been established in Japan, the first collection of Chinese poems by Japanese authors, the Kaifūso, having been made in 751. Until the eighteenth century poems in Chinese, kanshi, had been written almost exclusively by scholars, monks, and aristocrats, but during that century their composition became more and more popular among educated common people.⁴³ Ryōkan had studied the Chinese classics at Kyosenjuku as a child, and as a monk would have used Chinese texts of sutras and works of Zen philosophy. However, he could not speak Chinese, and his poems are not faithful to the rhyme schemes called for by Chinese poetics. However, when we recall Ryōkan's conviction that the essence of poetry lies in the emotions and thoughts expressed rather than in any set of metrical regulations, the poems seem sincere and unaffected.

In Praise of the Mid-Autumn Full Moon⁴⁴

Tonight the moon shines white
 Startling a magpie which calls again and again
 The sorrow in its voice calling up thoughts of my homeland,
 I know not where I should turn.

The theme of this poem, the longing for home evoked by the full moon, would seem to indicate that it was composed while Ryōkan was away from Echigo, perhaps during his stay in Bitchū. The thesis that it was an early work seems to be supported by the Chinese atmosphere of this poem. Longing for one's homeland was a popular Chinese theme, and the midsummer full moon was traditionally in China an occasion for family gatherings to appreciate the moon and compose poetry on its beauty. In addition, Ryōkan here alludes to the poem Tuan Ko Hsing by the Chinese poet Ts'ao Ts'ao (155-220). Ts'ao's poem begins with a lament for the brevity of human life, but I shall quote only the relevant lines, which come towards the end of the poem;

The moon so bright that few stars appear,
 A magpie flying south
 Circles the tree three times
 But there is no trustworthy branch.

The moon, the bird and the tone of uncertainty are common to both poems, as is the desire to find shelter, a person or place to depend upon.

That Ryōkan at least on occasion considered the question of rhyme in

his Chinese verse is evidenced by the following poem.*

Rhymed after a Poem Received⁴⁵

My foolishness is beyond compare,
I have made trees and plants my neighbors,
Too lazy to investigate the bounds of delusion and enlightenment,
Even I laugh at my old withered self.
Baring my shins I slowly cross the brook,
Dangling my bag I ramble through the springtime.
It's a frugal existence, but I manage,
Of course I don't mind this dusty world.

The practice of answering a poem with another that used the same rhyme scheme was Chinese. This poem was sent as a reply to one by Harada Jakusai. The Sino-Japanese pronunciations of the final characters of the even numbered lines rhyme: rin, shin, shun, jin (隣, 身, 春, 塵). Since the second and third lines exhibit parallel grammatical construction the verse can be classified as a five character regulated verse (go gon risshi or, in Chinese, wu-yen lü-shih). Yet with all this unaccustomed attention to the rules of versification, Ryōkan has produced a poem full of vitality, not just a formal **exercise**.

The Chinese influence most evident in Ryōkan's poetry is the work of the T'ang dynasty poet Han Shan.⁴⁶ Clearly Ryōkan admired Han Shan as a poet and as a man of religion;⁴⁷

After a full day of begging I stop
Return home and shut the tattered wicker gate,
While branches, leaves and all, burn in the hearth
I quietly read the poetry of Han Shan.

Poem in praise of Han Shan and Shih-te⁴⁸

Shih-te, broom in hand,
Sweeps the dust from the summit, but
The more he sweeps, the more dust rises.
Han Shan holds a sacred scroll
Which could not be thoroughly read in a year.
No one in ancient or modern times has valued them highly
So they have long remained, neglected on Mt. T'ien T'ai.
What can one do after all,
But wait for the Compassionate One to come down and judge?

Shih-te is supposed to have been Han Shan's companion, but details of his biography are even more obscure than those of Han Shan's. A few poems attributed to him have been preserved along with those by Han Shan. In popular Chinese legend Han Shan and Shih-te were thought to have been incarnations of

* Rhyme has for linguistic reasons never been a consideration in Japanese poetics.

the bodhisattvas Manjushrī and Samantabhadra. By the Compassionate One in the last line is meant the bodhisattva Maitreya, whose character as Buddha of the future has made a frequent object of messianic cults.

Han Shan stands out among Chinese poets, as Ryōkan does among Japanese, for having written explicitly Buddhistic works that are more than versified sermons. Religion was a major part of both their lives as mountain hermits. They shared the belief that monastic life drew one into prestige seeking and obscurantist argument. Both preferred the simple activities of a hermit's life as a means to find and express truths of the spirit. Neither Ryōkan nor Han Shan felt that he had found the ultimate religious answer. As a consequence, their work contains poems on the joys of solitary meditative life, and others on its crushing loneliness.

In addition to the similarities of attitude which prompt Japanese writers to compare Ryōkan to Han Shan, there is also the latter's reputation as an eccentric. Tenuous as the relationship between the anecdotes and the actual life of either may be, the image of a mad monk laughing at convention has been created for them both. Yet one's image of Ryōkan is gentler and more contemplative, as Mt. Mugami is less wildly forbidding than Han Shan's T'ien T'ai range.

But more than the sympathies which exist between them supports the claim that Ryōkan was strongly influenced by Han Shan. Indeed, specific lines and phrasings in Han Shan's works strike a note of familiarity in one who has first read Ryōkan.⁴⁹ Of course many of these can be attributed to their similar circumstances and attitudes, or are familiar themes of eremitic poetry; musings on youth, the deaths of friends, life in the mountains, enlightenment as a jewel hidden within all men, and meditation. Yet the presence of numerous similarities does not, in the end, detract from Ryōkan's individuality. The overall impression one derives from Han Shan's work is distinctly Chinese, for a number of his poems deal with his days as a layman and scholar who aspired to an official post. He regards poverty as a social injustice, for the immoral and the foolish prosper while men of true worth perish in obscurity. He makes many references to Taoist and Confucian, as well as Buddhist, figures and works. Han Shan's treatment of nature also differs from Ryōkan's although both wrote poems in which the distance between nature and man diminishes, so that the external world becomes the embodiment of the insight the poets have reached through meditation. But Han Shan often depicts nature as mysterious and vaguely

menacing, while to Ryōkan the mountains are lonely at times, but usually comfortably beautiful. Other features characteristic of Ryōkan's works; mention of rain, lying awake and listening to night sounds, fond accounts of his begging rounds, plucking spring greens or playing with children, are not emphasized in the works of Han Shan known to me.

As an example of the distinctiveness of Ryōkan's work, even when it includes phrases similar to some found in Han Shan, I shall quote several poems by Han Shan, as translated by Burton Watson, then a poem by Ryōkan.⁵⁰

I think of all the places I've been,
Chasing about from one famous spot to another.
Delighting in mountains, I scaled the mile high peaks;
Loving the water, I sailed a thousand rivers.
I held farewell parties with my friends in Lute Valley;
I brought my zither and played on Parrot Shoals.
Who would guess I'd end up under a pine tree,
Clasping my knees in the whispering cold.

My father and mother left me a good living;
I need not envy the fields of other men.
Clack -- clack -- my wife works her loom.
Jabber, jabber, goes my son at play.
I clap hands, urging on the swirling petals,
Chin in hand, I listen to singing birds.
Who comes to commend me on my way of life?
Well, the wood cutter sometimes passes by.

My house is at the foot of the green cliff,
My garden, a jumble of weeds I no longer bother to mow.
New vines dangle in twisted strands
Over old rocks rising steep and high.
Monkeys make off with mountain fruits,
The white heron crams his bill with fish from the pond,
While I, with a book or two of the immortals,
Read under the trees -- mumble, mumble.

Compare this poem by Ryōkan;

I've built a hut at the foot of a green mountain wall,
A place to spend what time is left to me.
Flowers fall and are taken up by mountain birds,
Through long spring days in the still forest
I'm completely untroubled by other people's problems,
Though sometimes I see a woodcutter passing by.
As I sit, clasping my knees, immersed in solitude,
An evening bell sounds from the distant hills.

Many of Ryōkan's poems depict him sitting thus, or with chin in hand, or in a more formal posture of meditation. Birds, woodcutters, his untended garden, and his hut in the mountains also receive frequent mention in his verse. Yet Ryōkan's work is not a patchwork of lines from Han Shan, nor do the similar lines allude to their contexts in Han Shan. Rather, it is images which have been borrowed, and these not word for word but quite naturally, their immediate source being Ryōkan's own vocabulary, not a poem by Han Shan.

Let us next examine the Buddhist themes which find both implicit and explicit expression in Ryōkan's Chinese poetry. One pervasive theme is that mentioned in Kokusen's ge, surrender to and trust in the continual flow of change that constitutes existence. The idea that absolute truth can only be realized on a transcendent plane is a basic one, but Ryōkan's approach to transcendence is rather novel - relax, and you will find it. For him, as for other Zen monks, rational thought cannot provide the answers to ultimate questions, but when cognition ceases one may approach their solution. This view is stated in the following poem, whose last line echoes the message of Kokusen's ge.

From whence was I born?
 Departing, where will I go?
 Sitting alone beneath the weed-grown window
 Earnestly, quietly, I ponder.
 Ponder, and yet, not knowing the beginning
 How can I know the end?
 The present likewise
 Changes, revolves, and all is emptiness,
 Amidst the emptiness I exist only briefly,
 How then can I judge things good or bad?
 It's best that I yield to fate,
 Relax and form these simple thoughts. 51

The questions he raises are not new ones, but the state of mind expressed in the last couplet is characteristic of Ryōkan's approach.

The next poem also begins with a question, which is partially answered in the second line with another phrase reminiscent of Kokusen's ge.

What does my life resemble?
 Floating free, I leave all to destiny,
 Laughable, lamentable,
 Neither layman nor cleric.
 Though the spring rains fall

The plum in the garden is not yet in bloom.
 All morning we've sat around the hearth
 Facing each other without a word.
 Stretching a hand behind my back I seek a copy book,
 Here's a bit of verse presented in the gentle stillness. 52

The body of the poem is ambiguous. Is he facing another aspect of himself, or is there another person in the room? I incline to the former interpretation, since the first four lines are more appropriate as a soliloquy than as the thoughts of one entertaining a guest. Inquiry into his identity leads Ryōkan to the negative conclusion that he is neither layman nor cleric, implying that he is a bit of both, and leaving room for the interpretation that he faces his thoughts, his own Buddha nature, or some other sort of self.

As his status is not clearly definable, so is the tree late to assert its identity by blooming, making it a metaphor for the slowness of Ryōkan's mind in opening to full perception of the truth. In the Zen tradition, silence, an absence of distraction, is a positive quality, and probably should be interpreted as such in this poem. Thus, although Ryōkan, like the plum tree, has not yet fulfilled his ideal potential, he waits patiently for the natural course of events to bring him to it.

Some poems by Ryōkan make it clear that he left the monastery and became a recluse because he felt that was the only way to an unsullied life of religion. He felt that most priests had been led astray by the temptation to rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and by the delights of debate. The following poem, written in fifty-two five word lines, is one of the few poems by Ryōkan which approach being sermons.⁵³

The Clergy

By shaving one's head one becomes a monk
 Who begs food and improves his nature a bit.
 Once you understand that
 How can you keep from introspection?
 In my eyes those who have become monks
 Are shouting out at random, night and day.
 Merely for the sake of mouth and belly
 They dash around the outer regions all their lives.

The impiety of laymen
 Should somehow be forgiven but
 The impiety of monks
 Is real disgrace.

With their hair they should sever their attachment to the three worlds,*
 Their dark robes should obliterate the illusory forms of things.
 They should disregard obligations and enter the Absolute
 Disregarding considerations of "Is" and "Is Not".

As I go through the country
 I see each man and woman at their own tasks.
 If they do not weave, what will they wear?
 If they do not plow, what will they eat?
 Those who are called monks today
 Neither practice austerities nor attain enlightenment,
 Consuming the contributions of partrons to no avail,
 They never look back at the karma of their thoughts, words, and deeds.

They assemble and boast to one another,
 Stodgily pass mornings and evenings--
 On the surface commendable and stalwart
 They delude the old country women
 And think themselves very clever for it.
 Aah, when will they awaken?
 If even a trace of desire for fame and profit enters one's mind,
 The waters of the ocean can barely wash it out.

Since your father sent you to the monastery
 What has he been doing day and night?
 Lighting incense and beseeching the gods and Buddhas,
 Praying always that your faith be strengthened.
 Doesn't your being as you are today
 Go against all that?

The three worlds are like way stations,
 Human life like morning dew,
 The opportune moment always easy to miss,
 The True Law difficult to encounter,
 You ought to develop a fine, bright goodness,
 Not change roles and wait to be called.

The earnest lecture I am giving you now
 Is not for my own pleasure.
 Beginning at this moment, consider carefully
 And correct your attitude,
 Let us get to work, we who live in the world Buddha has departed,
 So that we ourselves do not leave a legacy of doubt.

The next poem criticizes established Buddhism for its sectarian disputes.
 Ryōkan tells us that it is a ge, but its formalism is softened by the natural
 metaphor for Buddhism's beneficial effects.⁵⁴

* The three worlds of sentience; the world of desires, the world of form without
 desire, and the formless world. Or, the three worlds of past, present and future.

Two priests were wasting their time in arguing the merits of various sutras back and forth, so I composed this ge.

Buddha preached the canon in twelve parts,
 Each and every part is pure truth.
 When an east wind brings rain in the night
 All the woods are freshened and renewed.
 Is there a sutra that doesn't bring salvation?
 Is there a branch not clothed in spring?
 Understand the truth within them, don't press arguments about their
 degree of closeness to the truth.

Ryōkan felt that the priests neglected the larger truth for petty details. He left the monastery, not to return to lay life, but to seek in a hermitage surroundings conducive to meditative practice. Let us consider the following poem as a statement of what he found in retirement.⁵⁵

Impromptu Work

My priestly dwelling is beneath Mt. Kugami,
 Coarse tea and plain rice provide for this body,
 In all my life I have never received an earringed visitor,
 But only see the people who gather leaves in the empty forest.

The tea and rice of the second line are seen by Iida Toshiyuki as a reference to a passage in the Kajō section of Dogen's Shōbō genzō.^{*} There Dōgen speaks of the marvellous qualities of rice as the real basis of life, meditation, and miracles.⁵⁶ Whether Ryōkan made this allusion consciously or not, the poem is a statement of his perception that there is wonder and truth in the ordinary materials and events of daily life. The third line indicates that Ryōkan is not visited by famous men of religion like Bodhidharma, the exotic earringed Indian said to have introduced Zen Buddhism to China. Instead Ryōkan encounters humble country folk, who are equally possessed of the potential for enlightenment, and thus not inferior companions. The neutral tone of the poem makes it liable to be read as a complaint. But in consideration of Ryōkan's voluntary withdrawal from society, I see no justification for such an interpretation.

It is clear that Ryōkan felt a particular appreciation for Dōgen. Ryōkan himself had studied at Sōtō temples, and often expressed his admiration for the sect's founder.

* After studying in China from 1223-1227, the priest Dōgen (1200-1253) founded the Sōtō branch of Zen in Japan. The Shōbō genzō is the representative collection of his sermons and lectures.

On Reading Eihei-roku* 57

- A spring night -- shadowed midnight
 The spring rain, snow mingled, pours down on bamboo in the
 garden,
 Inconsolably lonely
 My hands search out the Eihei-roku in the darkness.
5. On the table, under the bright window,
 I light some incense, light the lamp, then quietly open and read.
 "To drop off body and mind" simply means fidelity to one's own
 nature,
 Truth shown in a thousand forms, ten thousand aspects, as though
 a dragon played with a jewel.
10. One who is really accomplished can capture a tiger
 And will look just like Śakyamuni Buddha,
 I remember that in former days when I was at Entsūji
 My teacher showed me the Shōbō genzō,
 In those days I felt I really had been enlightened
 And so sought audience and close guidance.
15. But realizing more and more that heretofore I had exerted my own
 strength,
 I left masters to travel afar.
 What fateful connection have I with Dōgen?
 The Shōbō genzō guides me in everything.
 How many years have I been following you?
20. I have come home, forgotten circumstances, and given myself over
 to detached idleness.
 Now I take up this record and consider it quietly,
 It really is distinct from the things round about.
 No one even inquires whether it is a gem or common stone,
 It has been left to gather dust for five hundred years
25. Only because men lack eyes to discern the Law.
 For whose sake is all this eloquence offered?
 To one who loves the past, the present is cutting, a cause of
 heartache.
 By the lamp all night my tears, unchecked,
 Dampened the enlightened master's work.
30. The next day my elderly neighbor came to my thatched hut
 And asked me how the book had gotten wet.
 Though I tried I could not speak, my mind too exhausted,
 My heart ever more pained, I couldn't explain.
 I bowed my head a moment -- then found words;
35. "Last night's rain dripped in and wet the bookshelf."

* Eihei-roku may indicate either the Eihei-kōroku (10 vols.) or the Eihei-jitsuroku (1 vol.). Both were records of Dōgen's words and deeds as compiled by his disciples. Eihei is used to refer to Dōgen, since it was he who founded the Eihei-ji. It also seems possible that Ryōkan is here referring to the Shōbō genzō itself.

This poem begins, as do many of Ryōkan's lyrical poems, with a description of the night--the season, the weather, the garden, and then moves on to tell of Ryōkan's own mood and activities. In this instance however, the poem does not end when he turns to his book, but takes up the contents of the book and the train of thought it has prompted. Lines 13-16 speak of a change in Ryōkan's outlook, a movement away from his early belief that truth is fully comprehensible if one perseveres along the prescribed path, to an awareness of the necessity of dropping off also the desire to attain enlightenment, as in line 20. He has devoted himself to Dōgen, as to a living master, and trusts in him as he does in karmic law. In this poem again, we seem to see a fusion of the two approaches to enlightenment/salvation: through arduous self discipline (jiriki), and through the popular, 'easy way' of trust in the power of another (tariki). In lines 15-20 he seems to recommend the tariki approach, but as he laments the neglect of Dōgen's writings, one realizes that to reach a state of selflessness, a resolve which can only be made by the individual is required. The poem ends with a tension-relieving twist, bringing us back from the somber world of late night reflection to the easier world of day. The neighbor's entrance brings a new perspective to the reader and to Ryōkan, who becomes abashed about his emotional lapse from detachment.

Abstract and paradoxical, but just as concerned with religion are the following poems; ⁵⁸

Before listening to the Way you should wash your ears,*
 Otherwise the Way is hard to keep.
 Why should one wash out the ears?
 Because there should be no knowledge.
 Even the slightest bit of knowledge
 Will bar you from the Way.
 If it agrees with one's own view wrong seems right,
 If it differs from one's own view, right seems wrong,
 Though we have innate standards of right and wrong,
 The Way transcends them.
 Concealing a rock with water
 Is an ineffective subterfuge.

* * * * *

Is there a house where they don't eat?
 Why don't they know themselves?
 If I spoke thus
 Everyone nowadays would laugh.

* As did the legendary Chinese recluse Ch'ao Fu when offered the throne by Sage Emperor Yao.

Rather than laugh at **my words**,
 You should withdraw and think about them.
 If you think about them ceaselessly,
 There is sure to come a time when you ought to laugh.

Both of these poems are about the nature of truth. The first centers on its irrelevance to ordinary knowledge, reasoning and self-interest, and points out in its final cryptic couplet that no amount of rationalization can alter the Absolute or one's ignorance of it. In the second poem Ryōkan returns to the idea of the importance of life sustaining food. Both life itself and the food which makes it possible are wonders which should not be taken for granted, but contemplated if one wishes to understand the nature of existence. The final quatrain of this poem suggests that the poem is meant to function as an instruction. Contemplation of it, as of a kōan, can spark enlightenment.

The next poem refers explicitly to the practice of meditation, but its effect is entirely different from that of the preceding poems.⁵⁹

When I close my eyes at evening amid the mountains
 The myriad concerns of men become empty.
 Silent upon the cushion,
 Alone before the empty window.
 Late in the dark night the incense burns out.
 My robe a single layer against the pale, heavy dew,
 I rise from meditation to walk about the garden--
 The moon has climbed the highest peak.

This poem draws the reader into the poet's private space, within the three insulating layers of closed lids, evening darkness, and surrounding mountains. The details of sensation add to this feeling of intimacy--silence, incense, the dampening robe. Thus we are prepared to feel exalted with him when he goes out of the hut to find the moon, a symbol of Buddhist truth, ascending the sky.

The following two poems are in a similar vein. Although they do not mention zazen, their tone, tranquil and yet sensitively perceptive, makes it clear that they originate from the same meditative mood. Their depiction of the poet's surroundings includes more natural elements than does the preceding poem, but the plants, birds, and insects are not presented in opposition to human constructions. It is rather that they, with the cottage, compose Ryōkan's environment. The comment Burton Watson has made with regard to Wang Wei* has

* Wang Wei 699-759, was a noted author of contemplative nature poetry.

a degree of applicability here.⁶⁰

. . .he gives the impression of viewing the landscape with perfect Buddhist passivity, not seeking to see anything at all, but merely allowing whatever may lie within the scope of vision to register upon his mind.

Ryōkan's poems;⁶¹

Night is cold in a monk's bare cell
Where incense has long been burning.
A hundred straight bamboos outside the door
Some books on the bed.
Moonshine illumines half the window,
Insect calls highlight the surrounding silence.
Within myself an infinity of meaning
In the face of which there is nothing I need say.

So lonesome, with spring already ending,
All is still, the gate long locked.
Beneath skyward-reaching wisteria and bamboo is a dimness
Where medicinal herbs' luxuriance hides the stairs.
For some time my begging bag and bowl have hung on the wall,
The incense burner stands smokeless.
Pure and well ordered is this immaterial region
As all evening hototogisu call.

A further step removed from formal discussion of religion, but also a product of the same spirit is this poem.⁶²

Its rustic gate long unlocked
But rarely visited nonetheless -- my quiet garden.
After the summer rains oak leaves innumerable
Dot ~~the~~ emerald moss.

This poem is an example of that portion of Ryōkan's work which I find most satisfying. The images are drawn from nature. The images he selects tend to be quiet ones. Oak leaves and moss provide not an eye-catching, but a subtle contrast of colors. This is in keeping with the theme we have noticed before, Ryōkan's belief that truth is most discernible in ordinary things, although most people overlook them because of their familiarity. But one cannot say that this poem or many of those which follow are passively objective. Ryōkan chooses his images so that the reader will react to the poem. He endeavors to create a crystallization of the absolute reality he experiences. The next group of translations are further examples of his lyrical-mystical mode.⁶³

Evening in Autumn

The scenery of autumn, so desolate,
 I go out the gate and find the wind grown chill.
 A lone village in the mist--
 People returning home by the bridge in the fields--
 Aged crows gather in an old tree.
 Geese fly slantwise vanishing into the distant sky.
 There is only a black robed priest
 Who lingers on and on before the dusky river.

Comparing Grasses

With the children I've again contested the beauties of a hundred
 grasses,
 Arguing their merits back and forth, ever more elegantly.
 Evening is lonely, but after the children go home,
 The single disk of the full moon crowns the autumn.

23. Done with begging alms in town,
 I return satisfied, dangling my sack.
 Return, but to where?
 My home is at the frontier of white clouds.
25. Every peak frozen solid and covered with snow
 Every path without a trace of human passage
 Every day nothing but meditation, face to the wall,
 Sometimes hearing at the window the skittering of snow.
26. Gogōan
 Desolate Gogōan
 A cell bare as a gong.
 Outside the door a cryptomeria forest,
 The wall hung with poems in praise of Buddha.
 Dust sometimes gathers in the kettle,
 Smoke never rises through the steamer.
 Yet an old man from the village to the east
 Often comes knocking on the moonlit gate.
27. Bearing a load of firewood I descend the green mountain
 On a lush mountain path that is anything but smooth.
 Sometimes I catch my breath beneath a tall pine tree
 And listen quietly to spring bird songs.

31. Mid August*
- Where to escape the steaming, blazing heat?
 One place I love is the Izuruta Shrine.
 Here cicadas' trilling fills the ear,
 Here the forest exhales a cool breeze.
32. Ten feet square but awfully lonely,
 This house where whole days pass without a glimpse of humankind.
 Sitting alone in this quiet spot under the window,
 I hear only the leaves' incessant fall.
33. Awesome and mysterious, the long-lasting night--
 Its pale dew dampens my robe.
 Insects somewhere at the edge of the garden--
 Their calling the only sound.
34. Living in a house deep in the forest
 Where the green ivy lengthens year after year
 I feel no pressure from people's problems,
 Though sometimes I hear the woodcutters' songs.
 In the sunlight I mend my surplice,
 By moonlight I read Buddhist hymns,
 A word to those on the path of truth;
 Success does not depend on numbers.
36. Since I set foot on the Ts'ao Valley path**
 A thousand peaks have barred my gate.
 Dark are the aged, wisteria veiled trees,
 Chill are the dimly seen, cloud enshrouded crags,
 Little by little the night dews rot my staff
 And smoke of many dawns has aged my surplice.
 Year after year no one comes to ask about me
 Year after year.

* Literally, The Sixteenth Day of the Seventh Lunar Month. Izuruta Shrine is in the village of Shimazaki, where Ryokan spent the last five years of his life.

** A valley in the Shao-chou district of Kwantung province, where the Sixth Ch'an patriarch, Hui Neng, settled. Thus, since Ryōkan became a monk.

38. The rainy season--dark and obscure,
 My cassock is chilly, never dry.
 The roof left to vanish in the weeds,
 The fence left to be ravished by climbing vines,
 Though I can speak I am as silent as a stick,
 And heartlessly shut the gate for long stretches of time.
 All day in an enclosed room
 Sitting alone and thinking of Nothingness.

40. Summer Night

Very late on a summer night
 Bamboo dew drips onto the brushwood gate.
 The mortar now silent in the house to the west,
 The grass is dew damp in the hermit's three-pathed garden.*
 Frogs' voices far away, then near,
 Fireflies glimmer low down, then take flight.
 Waking once I sleep no more
 But stroke my pillow and muse on the awesomeness.

45. Composed Impromptu on an Autumn Night

Awake, able to sleep no more
 I take up my staff and go out the brushwood door.
 Autumn insects chirp beneath the flagstones
 And falling leaves depart the chill branches.
 The valley so deep that the sound of water is made distant,
 The mountains so high that the moon rises late.
 So long have I been standing lost in thought
 That bright drops have bedewed my robe.

48. Lonely hilltops. Alone in my hut at night
 As sleet falls my thoughts are gloomy.
 Black monkeys cry in the mountain ash trees,
 The cold valley locks in the burbling sound of water.
 The single lamp is frozen before the window,
 The inkwell dry near the head of the bed.
 All night awake, unsleeping,
 Breathing on my brush to write a trifling verse.

* A reference to Chiang Yu, who became a recluse rather than serve in Wang Mang's (reigned 9-23 A.D.) government. He cleared three paths in the bamboo grove around his hut and there entertained friends who held similar principles.

49.

Autumn Composition

Near the year's end in a makeshift hut,
 A hut at the edge of a rural village,
 Under the chill and desolate rain
 Fallen leaves cover the empty stairs.
 In a spirit of Emptiness I turn a hymnal's pages,
 Writing, at times, verses of my own,
 Once in a while a sturdy lad comes
 To escort me to dinner in the village.

86.

Early Autumn Composition

A night of heavy rain in the rural village
 Drove the fierce heat from my morning cottage.
 Through the window chips of jade, colors of distant mountains.
 Beyond the door a filament of glossy silk, the clear river's stream.
 Beneath the cliff a crystal clear spring bathes my weary ears,
 In the treetops chill cicadas cry of autumn.
 Anticipating, I take my staff for an experimental stroll,
 The coming season's winds and moon, soon to be savored.

87.

Frigid winter, the eleventh lunar month.
 As evening approached the snow fell thick and fast.
 At first I wondered if it was salt scattering down.
 In mid storm like willow cotton flying,
 Pouring down on bamboo it sets up a quiet rustle,
 Clinging to the pines it is solemn and wonderful.
 Yet uninclined to turn to my books,
 Hidden in the darkness I write a hermit's poem.

88.

Lotus

I wonder how long ago
 They left the Western Paradise?
 Their white petals deep in dew,
 Their green leaves covering the circular pond,
 A freshly scented breeze sweeps over the railing.
 So cooling to watch it come trembling over the water.
 Although the sun has already fallen into the hills before me,
 Tranquil, entranced, I do not go home.

94.

On a clear midnight
 I take up my staff and go outside.
 Wisteria and ivy linked to each other,

The stony path all twists and turns.
 Nesting birds twitter on their branches,
 Black monkeys howl on either side,
 Far in the distance I spy the Tower of Infinity,*
 When I reach the clearing on the hilltop
 Every old pine seems to be a mile high.
 From the cold spring a clear draught bubbles,
 From the heavens blows a constant breeze.
 A lone disk hangs in the dark sky.
 Leaning for a while against the high railing
 I float and soar like a crane in the clouds.

97. Seated on a rugged boulder
 Chin in hand I look out on mist and clouds.
 Smoke-like clouds in a thousand, myriad layers.
 A treasure tower** suspended among them gleams in the sun.
 Below is the spring of the dragon king
 Where one can cleanse both mind and face.
 Above, a thousand year old pine
 Where pure winds pass all day.
 Who can transcend his earthly bonds
 Come here and accompany me through the vastness?

116. Tattered clothes, ragged robes,
 My life itself a tattered rag,
 Scraps of food scrounged on the wayside,
 A house left completely to mugworts and pigweeds.
 Watching the moon I wail all night,
 Wandering among the blossoms, never going home.
 As soon as I had left the monastery
 I strayed and took up these dullards ways.

121. Desireless, one finds all satisfactory,
 But when one makes demands, one suffers lack of everything.
 Simple greens can assuage hunger,
 Priestly robes manage to cover one's nakedness.
 Walking alone, tame deer for companions,
 Singing aloud, the village children join in.
 For washing the ears, there's water beneath the rock.
 As balm for the heart, the pines on the mountain top.

* Muryōkaku, metaphorical, but perhaps as well a building in a temple across the valley, or at the top of the hill he is climbing.

** Hōtō or Hōkyōintō, a type of pagoda.

I have set apart the following poems because their central concern is not with Ryōkan's daily meditative activity but with other people, places and times. They are not merely occasional poems whose interest depends on knowledge of the circumstances of their composition, but they do seem to be related to specific events, unlike the above poems with their variations on the theme of meditation. The first poem⁶⁴ tells of a visit to the grave of Ōmori Shiyō, Ryōkan's teacher, who had died while Ryōkan was in Bitchū. The grave is at the Manpukuji in Ōkōzu village in the Santō district of Niigata prefecture.

On Visiting Shiyō's Grave

Which of the old graves? Perhaps it is this one,
Thick with grass in the spring sun.
By the Narrow River I traveled long ago
Earnest and anxious to be with him.
My old friends, one by one, have faded and fallen away,
And the town undergone many changes,
Life really is like a dream,
Looking back, it has been thirty years.

The second is perhaps set in Omori's school, where Ryōkan was a boarding student.⁶⁵

Long Winter Nights

My clearest childhood memory
Is of reading in an empty hall,
Refilling the lamp several times
And still not minding the length of the winter night.

The next recounts a visit to the hermitage of his friend Yūgan (d. 1808), who was also a monk.⁶⁶ Yūgan's hermitage, the Tanomoan, was in Ōshimamura, Minamikanbara district, Niigata prefecture.

Looking at Blossoms on the Way to Tanomoan

Peach blossoms have opened like a mist along the banks,
The spring stream flows indigo about the village.
Gazing at peach blossoms I stroll along its course--
There's my old friend's house on the eastern bank!

There is no indication as to whom the next poem was sent, or if it was actually sent at all.⁶⁷

Appeal for Rice

Dreary and bleak is this ten by ten room,
This body age-withered, crumpled by time.
The dark winter most painful of all,
Bitter and painful, too trying to recount in detail.

Sipping gruel I pass the frigid nights,
 Counting days--how slow the sunlit spring.
 What other way to survive this time
 But to beg some measure of rice?
 Contemplation earns no livelihood
 So I write a poem and send it to an old friend.

Although Ryōkan later deplored the worldliness of clerics, it would seem from the following poem that he was not completely anti-social during his residence at Entsūji.^{68.}

We climb the hill at Entsūji, the summer forest fresh.
 I recommend a cup of sake as relief from the season's warmth.
 The keg empty, we're inspired to write Chinese prose and verse,
 The heat's forgotten, then we hear the voice of the evening bell.

I shall close with a poem in which Ryōkan speaks of his relation to human society as well as to the Absolute. The body of the poem seems to depict the Ryōkan of popular imagination--a dear old monk wandering through the pleasant countryside. But near the end he calls into question his own way of life, as it must look frivolous to those occupied with farm work. His answer to this question is open to interpretation as an admission of failure, or as an affirmation of his choice.^{69.}

The east wind blew in a seasonable shower
 Last night to pour down on the reed thatch.
 The householder within, sound asleep on his pillow,
 What knows he of the floating world's schemes?
 Green hills suddenly revealed at dawn,
 Spring birds singing on their branches,
 I too leave my hut
 Lighthearted, wondering where to go.
 The river on the plain travels on to water distant regions.
 Lovely flowers shine on the green hillside.
 There's an old man leading an ox,
 And a young man shouldering a plow.
 The four seasons pass without tarrying for a moment
 And every man has his appointed task,
 Aah, but me, what am I doing?
 Forever keeping watch at my old garden gate.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tōgō Toyoharu, Ryōkan, p. 249. Tokyo, 1958.
2. Ibid, p. 138-9.
3. Tsuda Seifū, Ryōkan Zuihitsu, p. 112, pp. 151-160. Tokyo, 1935.
4. Saitō Mokichi, Kawada Jun, Yoshino Hideo ed., Sanetomo-shū, Saigyō-shū, Ryōkan-shū, p. 396. Tokyo, 1966.
5. Ōshima Kasoku, Ryōkan Zenshū, p. 559. Tokyo, 1958.
6. Tōgō, p. 51.
7. Hisamatsu Sen'ichi ed., Kinsei no Kajin, p. 147. Tokyo, 1960.
8. Ōshima, pp. 555-556.
9. Hisamatsu, p. 147.
10. Ōshima, pp. 610-612.
11. Hisamatsu, p. 149.
12. Saitō et al., p. 388.
13. Tōgō, pp.52-55.
14. Hisamatsu, p. 148.
15. Ōshima, p. 597.
16. Takagi Ichinosuke and Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, eds., Kinsei waka shū, p. 13. Tokyo, 1967.
17. Ōshima, p. 602.
18. Ibid., pp. 613-614.
19. Saitō et al., pp. 391-392.
20. Ibid., pp. 394-392.
21. Sōma Gyofū, Issa to Ryōkan to Bashō, pp. 158-161. Tokyo, 1925.
22. Takagi and Hisamatsu, p. 14.
23. Hisamatsu, p. 151.
24. Saitō et al., p. 393.
25. Ōshima, p. 606.
26. Hisamatsu, pp. 151-152.
27. Tōgō, pp. 20-21.
28. Hisamatsu, p. 148.
29. Ōshima, pp. 607-609.
30. Hisamatsu, p. 153.
31. Sōma, p. 268.
32. Ōshima, pp. 440-447.
33. Tōgō, p. 285.

34. Ibid., p. 41.
35. Saitō et al., pp. 403-404.
36. Tsuda, p. 357 and Hisamatsu, p. 15.
37. Takagi and Hisamatsu, p. 182.
38. Hisamatsu, p. 156.
39. Ibid., p. 155.
40. Bellah, Robert, Tokuqawa Religion, p. 99. Glencoe, Illinois, 1957.
41. Ōshima, p. 630 and Hisamatsu, p. 160.
42. Ōshima, pp. 253-254.
43. Wada Toshio, Nihon kanshi kanshō no susume, pp. 6-7. Tokyo, 1968.
44. Yamagishi Tokuhei, Gozan bungaku-shū, Edo kanshi-shū, p. 367. Tokyo, 1967.
45. Tōgō, Ryōkan shishū, p. 102.
46. See Tōgō, Ryōkan, pp. 112 and 215. Also Ōshima, p. 2, and Karaki Junzō, Ryōkan, p. 35.
For information on Han Shan I have drawn on Burton Watson, Cold Mountain, New York, 1962, and Chinese Lyricism, pp. 176-179, New York, 1971, and Iriya Yoshitaka, Kan Zan, Tokyo, 1959.
47. Tōgō, Ryōkan shishū, p. 34.
48. Ibid., pp. 418-419.
49. For example, Iriya Yoshitaka, Kan Zan, pp. 25, 26, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 55, 58, 59, 72, 79, 87, 99, 110, 126, 130, 167, 168, 175, 188.
50. Ibid., p. 37, Watson, Cold Mountain, p. 55.
Iriya, p. 25, Watson " ", p. 19.
Iriya, pp. 110-111, Watson, Cold Mountain, p. 90.
Tōgō, Ryōkan shishū, p. 36.
51. Ibid., p. 169.
52. Ibid., p. 114.
53. Ibid., pp. 159-162.
54. Ibid., pp. 178-179.
55. Iida Toshiyuki, Ryōkan shishū yaku, p. 45.
56. Ibid., pp. 45-46.
57. Ibid., pp. 51-52.
58. Tōgō, Ryōkan shishū, pp. 188, 181-182.
59. Ibid., pp. 41-42.
60. Watson, Chinese Lyricism, p. 172.
61. Tōgō, Ryōkan shishū, p. 41, 37-38.
62. Ibid., p. 31.
63. The first two poems are from Yamagishi, pp. 369-370. The poems which follow have numbers corresponding to those given them in Tōgō, Ryōkan shishū, pp. 28-113.

64. Yamagishi, p. 367.
65. Ibid., p. 368.
66. Ibid., p. 369.
67. Tōgō, Ryōkan Shishū, pp. 47-48.
68. Ibid., p. 50.
69. Ibid., pp. 109-110.

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Index of Chinese Characters

(I have not included characters for the names of Emperors, reign dates, prefectures, provinces and districts, since these are readily available in general reference works.)

Agata Inugai Michiyo	泉犬養三千代
Araki Jirōzaemon	新木次郎左衛門
Chiang Yu	蔣翹
Dōgen	道元
Dōunji	洞雲寺
<u>Eihei-jitsu-roku</u>	永平實錄
<u>Eihei-kō-roku</u>	永平廣錄
<u>Eihei-roku</u>	永平錄
Gogōan	五合庵
<u>Hachisu no tsuyu</u>	蓮の露
Harada Arinori	原田有則
Harada Jakusai	原田鶴斎
Han Shan	寒山
Hino Suketomo	日野資朝
Hōkyōin-tō	宝篋印塔
Hōtō	宝塔
Ishii Shrine	石井神社
Izuruta Shrine	出田宮
Kada Azumamaro	荷田春滿
<u>Kaifūso</u>	懷風藻
<u>Kajō</u>	家常
Kameda Bōsai	龜田鵬斎
Kamo Mabuchi	賀茂真淵
Katō Chikage	加藤千陰

Kera Yoshishige

解良榮重

Kimura Motōemon

木村元右衛門

Kojiki

古事記

Kokujōji

國上寺

Kokusen

國仙

his ge 偈:

良也如愚道較寬
騰々位運得誰者
為附山形爛藤杖
到处壁間午睡間

Kondō Manjō

近藤萬丈

Kōshōji

光照寺

Kyosenjuku

狹川塾

Kugami-yama

國上山

Mangen

萬元

Manpukuji

萬福寺

Manyōshū

萬葉集

Manyōshū-ryakuge

萬葉集略解

Motoori Norinaga

本居宣長

Mukakaen

無花果園

Muryōkaku

無量閣

Okumura Gohyōe

奧村五兵衛

Ōmori Shiyō

大森子陽

Otogo Shrine

乙子神社

Ryōkan

良寛

Ryōkan Zenji kiwa

良寛禪師奇話

Ryūsenji

隆泉寺

Shih-te

拾得

Shōkaan		松下庵
<u>Shōbō-genzō</u>		正法眼藏
Tachibana-ya		橘屋
Taigu		大愚
Tanabe Sakimaro		田辺福庵
Tanomoon		田面庵
Teishin		貞心
<u>Tenshinroku</u>		天真錄
Ts'ao Ts'ao		曹操
<u>Tuan ko hsing</u>		短歌行
Yamamoto 山本	Eizō	榮藏
	Hideko	秀子
	Ichizaemon	市左衛門
	Kaoru	春
	Magari	曲
	Mikako	みかこ
	Shinnosuke	新之助
	Shinzaemon	新左衛門
	Tansai	澹齋
	Yoshiyuki	由允
Yūgan		有願
Wang Wei		王維