Within the history of Buddhism in East Asia the world of nature gained and retained a high position—something seen as having inherent religious value. This two-part essay reviews aspects of the history of this upward valuation of nature in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism and analyzes the interpretative shifts and changes made necessary by this impulse toward the attribution of increasingly great religious significance to nature. The development is carried as far as the twelfth century in Japan and the poetry of the Buddhist monk Saigyō (1118–90), poetry which not only itself moved the valorization of nature beyond the point where earlier writers had brought it, but also, since as poetry it gained a position in the public mind and a place in the popular imagination of the Japanese people, historically “fixed” a lasting nexus between Buddhism and nature in the popular consciousness of the Japanese people. Saigyō, therefore, is of great significance in the history of Japanese religion, a fact that has always been implicitly recognized in the Japanese regard for him as Japan’s greatest “medieval Buddhist nature poet.” His poetry is important not only as literature but also as a document in the history of Japanese religion.

Although in what follows I am more interested in an analysis of Saigyō’s verse—in relationship to the Buddhist view of nature—
Saigyō and the Value of Nature

than in details of his life, it is of importance to note here that Saigyō, whose name before he became a monk was Satō Norikiyo, saw his Buddhist vocation as something to be carried out in the mountains rather than in temples and monasteries. Before becoming a monk he had been a military guard in the service of Emperor Toba and a member of an elite corps of palace guards known as the Hokumen no Bushi or “North-facing warriors.” But at age twenty-three he relinquished his career in court and became a Buddhist monk. He was at first loosely attached to Shingon and Tendai temples in the vicinity of Heian-kyō or Kyoto and seems to have retained a lifelong attachment to the memory of Kūkai (774–835), the Japanese founder of the Shingon school. But Saigyō’s forte lay in his composition of waka or thirty-one-syllable verse and it is in the context of his writing of these verses that we gain an understanding of his vision of nature, Buddhism, and the correlation of these two. For Saigyō the world of nature was the primary world of Buddhist values, and it is this that I wish to investigate in what follows.

BUDDHAHOOD AND THE PLANT WORLD

A potentially instructive and intriguing but, unfortunately, neglected episode in the history of Buddhism in East Asia lies hidden in something which, at first sight at least, appears to be a rather sterile series of discussions by Chinese and Japanese Buddhists about the limits of salvation. Their discussions were concerned explicitly with the problem of whether or not “plants and trees” (Chinese, ch’uan-mu; Japanese, sōmoku) could “attain Buddhahood” (Chinese, ch’eng-fo; Japanese, jōbutsu). Implicitly, the problem was not limited to a question concerning vegetation alone but included all of the natural world in distinction from that which is human. Because the history of this discussion and the poetry of Saigyō are mutually illuminating and, as I shall try to show, historically related, the course and direction of these discussions deserve explication. The presentation, therefore, will move from the history of the question in China to developments in Japan and, from that point, to the analysis of Saigyō’s verse.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Apart from primary sources cited below, I am principally indebted to an article entitled “Sōmoku kokudai jōbutsu no bunshōronkei yori to sono sakusha” [The authorship and significance as a theory of the Buddha-nature of the phrase “Plants, Trees, and Earth, All Become Buddha”] by Miyamoto Shōson in Inyōgaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū (Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies) 9 (March, 1981): 94.
History of Religions

There is irony in the manner in which the problem historically came into existence. It was occasioned by the fact that, when Buddhism had been well established in China, what in the Indian sutras had been intended as a Mahayana extension of the umbrella of salvation, namely, the stress upon the eventual enlightenment and Buddhahood of "all sentient beings," was viewed as a limitation rather than as an expansion. To certain Chinese it seemed that, although the promise of Buddhahood was extended to all sentient beings, it was at the same time limited to beings that were sentient. Sensitivity to this problem seems to have led at least two Chinese Buddhist thinkers, Chi-ts'ang and Chan-jan, to give it consideration. With them begins the process whereby intellectual devices were fashioned to overcome the implicit limitation upon the range of potential Buddhahood. First these two Chinese thinkers bent the teaching derived from India to the contours of the Chinese ethos and, after them, Japanese Buddhists refashioned the tradition to meet their own requirements.

The first of the two important Chinese Buddhists concerned with this problem was Chi-t'sang (549–623) of the San-Lun school. Chi-t'sang, a native of Turkestan and a master of Madhyamika dialectic in China, was the first to use the key phrase "Attainment of Buddhahood by Plants and Trees." He made the first, although highly qualified, step in the direction of seeing Buddhahood in the nonsentient. In his Ta-ch'eng-hsuan-lun he stated that in theory plants and trees, since they are essentially like sentient beings, can achieve Buddhahood, but he allowed this as a possibility only within the realm of theory. Outside of theory, they seemed to him not to attain this. Beyond this point he seemed unwilling to go.²

The real development comes, however, in the thought of Chan-jan (711–82), the first of many important T'ien-t'ai (Japanese, Tendai) thinkers to give their attention to this problem and promote the development of the doctrine. The T'ien-t'ai and

---

672-701. A short article in English entitled "On the 'Attainment of Buddhahood by Trees and Plants,'" by Yukio Sakamoto (Western rather than Japanese name-order) is in the Proceedings of the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions (1958), Japanese Organizing Committee for the IXth I.C.H.R. Science Council of Japan (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960), pp. 415–22. Both of these articles carry the discussion historically beyond the point where I bring it to a close, that is, at the point where the discussion seems to have had an effect upon Saigō. Donald H. Shively has written about the appearance of features of this discussion at a later date and in certain Nō dramas in his "Buddhahood for the Nonsentient: A Theme in Nō Plays," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 20 (1957): 135–61. He concentrates largely on the Muromachi period.

² Niyanoto, pp. 695–98.
Saigyō and the Value of Nature

Tendai concern for this may be due to the fact that this particular school, both in China and Japan, seems to have been eager to explore the meaning of Mahayana universalism and to push it to logical conclusions. There seems to be a significance, therefore, in the fact that Chan-jan was the ninth patriarch of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism in China.³

When we review his position we see that he was the first to have moved the problem to the conclusion that "even nonsentient beings possess the Buddha-nature" (wu ch'ing yu hsing). Derk Bodde has translated some important sections from Chan-jan's works as they appeared in Fung Yu-lan's *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, and we will cite these. In his *Chin-kang Pi*, Chan-jan argued as follows:

Therefore we may know that the single mind of a single particle of dust comprises the mind-nature of all sentient beings and Buddhas. . . . Therefore, when we speak of all things, why should exception be made in the case of a tiny particle of dust? Why should the substance of the *Bhikṣu-nibbāna* ( = *budhā* or "Suddhā," "Thusness") pertain exclusively to "us" rather than to "others"? Thus there is no water without waves; there are no waves without wetness. This wetness does not distinguish between the muddy and the limpid, yet the waves are of themselves either clear or turbid. Irrespective of their clarity or turbidness, there is for them only the one undifferentiated nature.⁴

And in another place Chan-jan writes:

The man who is of all-round perfection, knows from beginning to end that Truth is not dual and that no objects exist apart from mind. Who, then, is "animate," and who "inanimate"? Within the Assembly of the Lotus, all are present without division. In the case of grass, trees, and the soil (from which they grow), what difference is there between their four kinds of atoms? Whether they (merely) lift their feet or (energetically) traverse the (long) path, they will all reach the Precious Island (a poetic term for Nirvana). By snapping their fingers and joining their palms, they will all achieve the causation for Buddhahood. Whether they agree with the One or the Three (Vehicles), they will none of them run counter to the original concept (of Buddhism). How can it still be said unto today that inanimate things are devoid (of the Buddha-nature)?⁵

Fung Yu-lan’s comment upon this is very instructive. He writes: "Logical premises existed for this universalistic theory. Hence Chan-jan’s extension of Tao-sheng’s thesis that the Buddha-nature is possessed even by the *icchāntikas* or non-believers in Buddhism is no mere accident. There is no doubt, however, that in the history

---
⁴ Fung Yu-lan, p. 385.
⁵ Ibid., p. 386.
of Chinese Buddhism, Chan-jan represents the culmination of this particular trend of thought."

This comment is apropos our discussion, for it suggests the motivation behind Chan-jan’s theory. Fung Yu-lan sees this theory as one which embodies the culmination of a certain logical process in this type of Buddhism. It should in addition be noted that Chan-jan is not interested in the Buddha-nature of plants and trees alone; he has already moved on to the assertion that it is found in all things. Although he refers to vegetation in the second of the above quotations, in the first he cites a particle of dust and waves for his illustrations. We gain the impression from this that Chan-jan holds to the Buddha-nature of the natural world not primarily because he is interested in the natural world and its religious meaning, but because the logic of Mahayana universalism is that to which he is especially sensitive. Fung Yu-lan, in my opinion, is correct in seeing him in the tradition of Tao-Sheng (360–434) who had, on the basis of the Mahayana principle, proposed that even nonbelievers (icchantikas) would attain Buddhahood and was later vindicated in his hypothesis when the full text of the Parinirvana Sutra was brought into China and verified his claim textually. Both Tao-Sheng and Chan-jan were, in their respective contexts, superb logicians and thinkers interested in the consequences of positions adopted.

When in what follows we shift the venue of the discussion from China to Japan, there seems to occur a gradual but inevitable shift also in the motivation for carrying on the discussion. Whereas the Chinese looked at above were superb logicians and interested in pressing their Buddhist universalism to the phenomenal and mundane world as a whole, the Japanese after Kūkai seem to restrict their area of concern to the natural world—in distinction to that which is civilization—rather than the whole of mundane reality. The stress is not so much on the value of the concrete and mundane per se as it is upon the special value—from a Buddhist perspective—that the natural world might have for man.

In Japan, terminology derived from the discussion appears before the discussion itself does, and it appears, significantly, in the writings of Saichō or Dengyō Daishi (766–822). Saichō had studied in China and had, in fact, become the person responsible for the transmission of the T’ien-t’ai school to Japan; he became, therefore, the founder of Japan’s Tendai school. No doubt because

* Ibid.
he had heard the term in China and because he felt its appropriate-ness within the universalism of Tendai, he was the first Japanese to use the phrase “the Buddha-nature of Trees and Rocks” (mokusen-bushi-bou) in his Futsuwaku Shiokichi Saku, where it merely appears without explanation.  

A much more substantial contribution to the discussion was made by Kūkai or Kōbō Daishi (774–835), the founder of Japan’s Shingon school of Buddhism. We find him simply assuming the presence and acceptance of the doctrine in his Unji Gi or “The Meanings of the Word Hōm,” where the following line, as translated by Yoshito S. Hakeda, appears:

> If trees and plants are to attain enlightenment,  
> Why not those who are endowed with feelings?  

Kūkai’s explicit rationale for attributing Buddhahood to plants occurs, however, in his Hisō Ki or “Record of the Secret Treasury.” I translate the key section as follows:

The explanation of the Buddhahood of insentient trees and plants is as follows: the Dharmakaya consists of the Five Great Elements within which space (kōkō) and plants and trees (sōoku) are included. Both this space and these plants and trees are the dharmakaya. Even though with the physical eye one might see the coarse form of plants and trees, it is with the Buddha-eye that the subtle color can be seen. Therefore, without any alteration in what it is in itself, trees and plants may, unobjectionably, be referred to as having Buddha-nature.

Kūkai’s argument differs from those discussed above inasmuch as he is less interested in pursuing the logical consequences of a universalistic trend in Buddhism and more interested in the positing of an identity of the Buddhist Absolute, the dharmakaya or “body of the dharma,” with all forms and things in the phenomenal, mundane world. The whole of Kūkai’s thought seems to be directed toward the forging of such an ontological union of the absolute with the mundane. Therefore, in his view plants and trees are capable of having Buddha-nature simply because they, along with everything else in the phenomenal world, are ontologically one with the Absolute, the dharmakaya. The only real problem, then, is epistemological, and Kūkai in the section translated above suggests that there are two ways of viewing trees and plants. The

---

7 Miyamoto, p. 698.
History of Religions

ordinary physical eye sees the coarse form of things, but the person in possession of “the Buddha eye” sees the subtle form.

Because of his identification of the phenomenal world with the dharmakaya, Kūkai dissolves the older distinction between sentient (yūjō) and insentient (mujō) beings. In his Sokushin Jōbutsu Giri or “Attaining Enlightenment in this Very Body and Lifetime,” a work which, characteristically and logically, deals with the question of why it happens that Buddhahood for human beings can occur while they live temporal and bodily lives, he writes the following: “In Exoteric Buddhist teachings, the four great elements [earth, water, fire, and wind] are considered to be non-sentient beings, but in Esoteric Buddhist teaching they are regarded as the samaya-body of the Tathagata. The four great elements are not independent of the mind. Differences exist between matter and mind, but in their essential nature they remain the same. Matter is no other than mind; mind, no other than matter. Without any obstruction, they are interrelated.”

What is significant in this, aside from the ease with which Kūkai can remove the distinction between sentient and insentient beings through his placing of himself in the esoteric tradition and, therefore, derived from the Mahāvairocana Buddha rather than Shakyamuni Buddha, is his reference to earth, water, fire, and wind as the samaya-body of the Tathagata. This term for Kūkai has great importance, for it means “symbolic body,” but is conceived of as being somehow really participant in the thing symbolized. That is, it is a “symbol” which is ontologically and in some peculiar way even substantially united with what is symbolized. This means that in the above-quoted paragraph, Kūkai sees phenomena in the natural world (earth, water, fire, and wind as the Great Elements and plant-and-trees as one of the combinations of these) as both symbols of the Absolute, the Tathagata, and as the reality of the Tathagata. Both are involved and implied in the designation of these as samaya.

Kūkai in this way opens up many new possibilities for the discussion. First, by subscribing to the esoteric tradition, which he regards as final and superior to the one derived from Gautama

---

10 This quotation is from Hakoda’s translation, pp. 229-30. The original is in Kōbō Daishi Zenshū, vol. 1, pp. 511-12.

11 For the importance of Kūkai’s concept of samaya, see below. It is also this particular concept of the “symbol” that seems to shape Saigyō’s dictum. I am especially indebted to Professor Joseph M. Kitagawa for showing me the importance of Kūkai’s notion of symbolization for Saigyō’s poetry.
Buddha, he places himself beyond the need for concern about the “orthodoxy” of seeing Buddhahood potential in plants, trees, and anything else within the natural world. Second, he implies that the Buddhahood of the natural world is not so much a matter of potentiality as it is of actuality. The question is not “How will these things become Buddha?” but rather, “How will we come to realize that they already are Buddha?” Ontologically the identity has been made; the only remaining problem is epistemological and that, then, is man’s problem. Third, with his conception of samaya he has opened up the possibility of a particularly Buddhist conception of symbolization, one which relates the natural world to the absolute in a special way and one which, as we shall see below, seems implicit in Saigyō’s religious valorization of nature.

However, Kūkai’s position seems to have moved too far and too quickly. Or, at least, even though he had produced a position from which all phenomenal things could be identified with the absolute, the Tathāgata, some of his contemporaries as well as thinkers of subsequent generations remained concerned about the specific question of the Buddhahood potential of the plant world. Miyamoto Shōson correctly observes: “[Kūkai] still does not explain things in terms of plants and trees (of themselves) resolving to attain Buddhahood, then undergoing (ascetic) disciplines, and then attaining such (Buddhahood). The lucid explanation of the doctrine in terms such as this was the work of later theorists.”

In any case what for Kūkai was a fait accompli was something that others still felt the necessity of debating and discussing.

Again we find scholars of the Tendai school arguing the case for the Buddha-nature of plants. One of the most important figures in this was a Tendai priest who eventually became the head abbot of the monastery complex on Mount Hiei. He was Ryōgen (912–85), also referred to as Jiei Daishō. Ryōgen is of special importance in the history of the problem because he participated in an important public debate on it. The debate is known as the Intersectarian Debate of the Ōwa Era (in Ōwa 3 or 963) and was, in fact, a series of forensic matches held under imperial auspices and involving ten representatives of the Hossō school and ten of the Tendai school in verbal contest on matters of Buddhist doctrine. The question considered during this particular series in 963 was the one traced here, namely, the possibility of seeing all things as having a potential Buddha-nature. This debate of Ōwa 3, known and

12 Miyamoto, p. 696.
remembered for its scale and intensity, is historically important also because it demonstrates that the question debated had a public interest, one at least of interest to court circles.

The principal debaters on each side were Ryōgen for the Tendai school and Chūzan (935–76) for the Hoissō. Throughout the disputations the arguments advanced by the Tendai participants were based on the principle that "All Things Have [Buddha] Nature" (issai-kaijō butsu), whereas the Hoissō position was based upon the "Distinctions between the Five Groups of Beings" principle (goshō-kakubetsu), a principle according to which the Hoissō school had traditionally, divided sentient beings into five groups ranging from śrāvaka or potential arhats to icchāntika or those doomed to pass through the birth-and-death cycle for eternity.

To substantiate his position Ryōgen cited a phrase from the Chinese text of the Saddharma-Pundarika or Lotus Sutra, the phrase 无一佛. He interpreted this phrase to mean "[There is] no one [which] does not attain Buddhahood." Chūzan, however, interpreted the first two characters ("no one" or "not one") as meaning "one without [i.e., not having] [Buddha-nature]." Thus, for him the phrase meant: "[Whatever has] no [Buddha nature] does not attain Buddhahood." At another time the debate focused on the interpretation of a passage selected by Ryōgen from the Sutra on Perfect Enlightenment or Yūan-ch’üeh-ching (Japanese Engaku-kyō), one which Ryōgen read as meaning: "Both hell and the Heavenly Palace become the Western Paradise; both sentient and insentient beings are equally put on the Buddha path," whereas Chūzan interpreted it as meaning: "If one [hypothetically] makes both hell and the Heavenly Palace as deserving of the Western Paradise, then sentient beings and insentient beings in the same way would not be on the Buddha path." In this manner the debate went on. The crucial points of divergence centered on the interpretation of sentences in Chinese texts and upon what was and what was not implied in those sentences. The debate was inconclusive. The cleverness of Chūzan’s sophistries was impressive, and many said that “there had never before been a debate such as this one in terms of its scale and intensity” in Japan.

---

14 Miyamoto, p. 675.
15 Ibid., pp. 675–76.
But the real importance of Ryôgen lay in what he wrote in his Sômoku Hosshin Shugyô Jôbutsu Kí or "Account of (How) Plants and Trees Desire Enlightenment, Discipline Themselves and Attain Buddhahood." In this work he further elaborated his case for the Buddhahood potentialities of vegetable life. Ryôgen admitted that prior to that time when Gautama Buddha revealed the teachings found in the Lotus Sutra, the teaching on this matter was not yet in the world. But according to him the provision of this sutra to the world made all the difference. In this sutra he saw implicit the understanding that the life cycle of plants moves through four stages, stages which correspond to the process of human enlightenment. He wrote:

The orthodox meaning of the "Original Buddha" is an argument for the enlightenment and the Buddhahood [of plants]. Grasses and trees already have four phases, namely, that of sprouting out, that of residing [and growing], that of changing [and reproducing], and that of dying. That is to say, this is the way in which plants first aspire for the goal [hosshin], undergo disciplines [shugyô], reach enlightenment [bodhi], and enter into extinction [nêhau]. We must, therefore, regard these [plants] as belonging to the classification of sentient beings. Therefore when plants aspire and discipline themselves, sentient beings are doing so. When sentient beings aspire and undergo austerities, plants are aspiring and disciplining themselves.16

Obviously, Ryôgen has pushed the argument to a new degree of explicitness in this, and it is of importance here to analyze more exactly what he has done.

In the first place he has tied the doctrine to the Lotus Sutra very definitely. That is, he has "solved" the problem of the doctrine's "orthodoxy" by appeal to the hermeneutics employed by the Tien-t'ai school in China, according to which the principle of p'an-chiao or "dividing the teachings" gave preeminence to this particular sutra. As worked out for example by Buddhists such as Chih-i (538–97) in China, the teachings of the Buddha were arranged into chronological periods during the Buddha's life so that the Lotus Sutra or Saddharma-Pundarika would be not only temporally final but also final as an authority. "Therefore the Saddharma is considered to be the epitome of the Buddha's teachings."17 This sutra, it should be noted, was one which was famous for the universality of salvation taught within it; so it precisely fit the Tien-t'ai desire for universalism. But even more

16 Miyamoto, p. 676; see also Sakamoto, p. 417.
important, the Lotus Sutra could serve as a locus classicus for the
"Buddhahood of Plants" doctrine because of the presence in it of a
chapter "On Plants," one which employs rich vegetation imagery
to portray the beneficence and salvation of Tathāgata.\textsuperscript{18} The
presentation there of the grace of the Tathāgata coming down
upon all things as rain does on various forms of vegetable life
suggested, apparently, to those thinkers of the Tendāi school that
this was more than imagery and analogy; to them it suggested the
participation of vegetation in the process of enlightenment and
salvation.

But Ryōgen's most significant contribution to the discussion lay
in his creation of a nexus between the biological life cycle of a
plant and the process of enlightenment as experienced by human
beings. In the passage translated above, he interprets the natural
process as being, in fact, a religious one. The sprouting forth of a
plant is really the mode by which it bursts forth its desire for
enlightenment; its residing in one place is really its undertaking of
disciplines and austerities; its reproduction of itself is its attain-
ment of (the fruits of) enlightenment; and its withering and dying
is its entry into the state of nirvana. Ryōgen has, it should be
noted, taken a four-stage sequence frequently found in Buddhism,
namely, that of arising, continuing, changing, and ceasing-to-be,
and has interpreted it as the inner sequence and meaning of the
process of a plant's life. The result is that he imagines a plant to be
a type of Buddhist yogin. When correctly understood, according
to him, the life cycle is an enlightenment cycle. And it is certainly
not so merely by analogy, for on the basis of this Ryōgen concludes
that there exists no reason for refusing to regard plants as be-
longing to the category of sentient beings.

If we compare the position of Kūkai with that of Ryōgen we can
notice that, although both are arguing for the Buddhahood of
things within the natural world, Kūkai's position is in reality more
radical. As noted above, for the Shingon master the whole distinc-
tion between sentient and insentient is dispensable. Although he
argues within the context of the "Buddhahood of Plants" dis-
cussions, his position does not, in fact, limit Buddhahood even to
the vegetable world but extends it—at least by implication—to
any and everything within the phenomenal world. In comparison
with this, Ryōgen, although later, is "conservative." He maintains

\textsuperscript{18} See Edward Conze's recent translation of this chapter in his \textit{Thirty Years of
Buddhist Studies} (Columbia, S.C., 1908).
the distinction between what is sentient and what is not, but makes a most forceful argument for inclusion of plants in the category of the sentient. His interpretation of the plant’s life cycle as an enlightenment cycle, however, could be seen as something which, while moving trees and plants clearly within the realm of those with the potential of Buddhahood, by implication rules out the Buddhahood possibility for natural objects lacking such a cycle—rocks and rivers, for example. This is the kind of distinction which Kūkai’s theory seems to have eluded or overcome. Finally, Kūkai viewed natural phenomena as already in possession of the Buddhahood-nature simply by virtue of their being in the phenomenal world; Ryōgen, by comparison, saw Buddhahood as a potentiality only in the case of plants, although it might be argued that, since it was a potentiality that would be actualized in the course of the normal and “natural” life cycle of a plant, it would in fact be present in every plant that reproduced itself and then died.

The difference between these two approaches and positions is in many ways characteristic of the different emphases of the Shingon and the Tendai schools. One hundred and fifty years separate the deaths of Kūkai and Ryōgen, but in addition their respective positions demonstrate the Shingon and the Tendai ways of handling this problem. A conflation and harmonization of these two approaches occurred later, and it is with this matter that the section below is concerned.

HONGAKU-MON AND SHIKAKU-MON

In the twelfth century in Japan the most important discussion of the Buddhahood-of-plants problem occurs in the writing of Chūjin (1065–1138), a scholar of the Tendai school. He overtly seems only to be summarizing the discussions up to his time but is, in fact, moving the discussion along by a group of new subtleties and refinements. Chūjin, it should be noticed here, is especially important because he was the principal articulator of this doctrine near the close of the Heian period. He, therefore, stands close to the poet Saigyō in time. His theories were, in fact, being put forth precisely at the time when Saigyō was a young monk and spending time in a sporadic fashion at various Tendai and Shingon temples near the capital city of Heian-kyō.

Chūjin summarized a group of arguments that had beforehand been advanced for the Buddhahood of plants. He presented these in his Kankō Itaijū. Chūjin seemed to hold that they all supported
the doctrine in a complementary fashion. He articulated the following seven arguments:  

1. **Shobutsu no kagen.** Trees and plants do not possess Buddhahood in and of themselves, but do so when they are viewed by Buddhas.

2. **Gubôshô no ri.** Trees and plants are in possession of Buddha-nature (busshô or Buddhãtô). "Buddha" means "enlightenment." The inner (or mysterious) principle of the Buddha-nature is a purity of original enlightenment (hongaku) and has nothing of impurity in it. This is something which plants and trees are in possession of.

3. **Eshô funi.** There is an inner harmony of the achievement of the right reward (akobô)—in this case the Buddha's enlightenment—and all the attendant (shô) circumstances—for example the earth, etc., upon which he depends. The enlightenment of him is accompanied by that of all these others. Therefore, plants and trees are already in possession of Buddha-nature.

4. **Tôai jissô.** Of their own nature the myriad things are Buddhas, and "Buddha" means enlightenment. In their inner nature the things of the 3,000 worlds are unchangeable, undefined, unmoved, and pure; this is what is meant by their being called "Buddha." As for trees and plants, there is no need for them to have or show the thirty-two marks (of Buddhahood); in their present form—that is, by having roots, stems, branches, and leaves, each in its own way has Buddhahood.

5. **Hongo-sammin.** Like all sentient beings, trees and plants have three bodies: the Dharma-body, the Sambhoga-body, and the Nirmana-body. Therefore, trees and plants can attain Buddhahood as sentient beings can.

6. **Hoshô fushigi.** The self-nature of trees and plants is not capable of being described and, therefore, the Buddha-nature possessed by trees and plants is also ineffable.

7. **Gokkôdô (Tendai mediation principle) and ichinen-sanzen.** The principle that the 3,000 realms (i.e., all phenomena) are contained in one thought means that the mind (kokoro) is all things and all things are the mind. Trees-and-plants as well as sentient beings both possess all things. This is why sentient beings can conceive of trees and plants. If this were not so, there could be no cognition. The real and original nature of all things (hoshô or dharmatâ) has two aspects. Its quiescent aspect is the one mind and its illuminating aspect is the 3,000 realms of being. The internal unity of these two aspects makes both for knowledge and for the fact that essentially plants and trees have the Buddha-nature.

At first sight it would seem that in the above Chûjin has merely collected and presented seven arguments for the Buddhahood of the vegetable world. However, there are some interesting features in this particular collection of arguments. Ryôgen's argument that the life cycle is an enlightenment process is conspicuous by its absence. Moreover, there seems to be a certain inner coherence in

---

19 My translations of his arguments are summaries of the main points and section of each of the seven. The complete section of the Kankô Ruijô dealing with this problem is in **Dai Nihon Bukkyô Zenkô** [Complete collection of Japanese Buddhist writings], 40:68-69, new edition (Tokyo, 1971). My version varies considerably from the seven arguments as presented by Yakio Sakamoto in his article "On 'The Attainment of Buddhahood' by Trees and Plants" (p. 418), but I have used his version of argument number 5 as he gives it (see also Miyamoto, pp. 679-81).
Chūjin's selection. That is, he has chosen arguments which in almost every case present plants and trees as already enlightened and in possession of Buddha-nature. It is for this reason, I would suggest, that Ryōgen's otherwise cogent argument is excluded—in spite of the fact that he too was a Tendai scholar and well known for the position he took and its particular argument. Instead of Ryōgen's seeing of an enlightenment in the process of a plant's life, Chūjin advances a rather different view in the fourth argument above. There he sees their possession of enlightenment "in their present form" and specifies the concurrent possession of roots, stems, branches, and leaves as the mode by which the Buddhahood of plants is shown. In fact, he seems to take pains to state that the Buddhahood of plants need not be conceived in any way upon a human model; they have no need to demonstrate any of the ordinarily expected thirty-two marks.

The significance of this is great and deserves further explication. First, it seems obvious from the above that in the century and a half that had passed since Ryōgen had advanced his arguments, the Tendai school no longer felt the need—if we may judge from Chūjin's selection—to argue for the Buddhahood of plants on the basis either of their inclusion in the category of the sentient or on the degree to which their mode of being in the world in some way is assimilable to that of human beings. In a real sense by this time it seems that plants and trees are permitted to be what they are, and this in no way throws into jeopardy their potential for Buddha-nature. The whole tenor of Chūjin's arguments suggests an independent arrival at Buddhahood rather than one based upon the degree to which plants demonstrate either characteristics or behavior which can in some way be homologized with that of man. Only the first of the seven arguments makes their Buddhahood dependent, but in that case it is dependent upon their being "seen" by Buddha or Buddhas, and here we can understand that, according to the Lotus Sutra image employed here, they are dependent upon the "grace" of the Buddha or Tathāgata in the same way that all other creatures, including ordinary men, are. The impressive common feature of every other one of the arguments advanced is that it lays stress upon the "self-nature" or independent being of trees and plants.

Second, and of equal importance, is the fact that the presentation of the Buddhahood of plants here is much more in terms of something already actualized than in terms of a potentiality. Here his second argument, namely, "The inner (or mysterious) principle
of the Buddha-nature is a purity of original enlightenment [hongaku] and has nothing of impurity in it. This is something which plants and trees are in possession of," is the crux of his position according to my view. It is in many ways an index to a major shift in Tendai thought during the time between Ryōgen and Chūjin. That is, the tendency of the latter to view the enlightenment of plants as a realized actuality rather than a potentiality is ideologically related to a growing tendency in Tendai doctrine to stress "original enlightenment" which was called hongaku [本光明] over one which had to be initiated and experienced, that is, shikaku [実現光明]. Chūjin's use of the term hongaku in his second argument is not coincidental; it is part of an important shift in Tendai doctrine, one which deserves further elucidation.

The term hongaku appeared in the Chinese translation of the Mahāyāna-śraddhāpāda-śāstra, known in Japan as the Daijō-kishin-ron. There the case is presented that, when someone moves from the state of being unenlightened to one of enlightenment, this occurs only because an already existent and underlying Buddha-nature is innate and intrinsic. In this work three states were recognized; not-being-enlightened (fugaku), one's first experience of enlightenment (shikaku), and the underlying and innate enlightenment at the root of this experience (hongaku). Historically this hongaku grew in the importance of emphasis placed upon it first in the Japanese Shingon and then in the Tendai school.

It increasingly gained preeminence. Because of this underlying and already existent enlightenment, things could be affirmed in the condition in which they existed since their mode of existence in the world was one of an already enlightened state at the root of things. This fit especially well into the Shingon emphasis upon the Buddhahood of the phenomenal world in all its forms and as it is.

An important study of the contrast between these two emphases is Bruno Petzold's "Hon Gaku Mon und Shi Kaku Mon," the two key terms of which Petzold interprets by the subtitle he gave his study, namely, "Die Lehre von der Ursprünglichen Erleuchtung"

---

20 It should be noted that in many of his writings, Ryōgen demonstrates a hongaku orientation. My argument here is that by the time of Chūjin this was much more the basic orientation of the whole of Tendai thinking and that, especially in his articulation of the meaning of the Buddhahood of plants, Chūjin demonstrates greater consistency in the application of this orientation to the specific doctrine under question.
und die Lehre von der Erleuchtung, die einen Anfang hat.”21 The following quotations from this important essay show the contrast and comparison of these two positions: “Da die Methode der Realisierung des Absoluten in shi kaku mon relativ ist, so wird hier der Weg der stufenweisen Erleuchtung befolgt. Da in hon gaku mon die Methode der Realisierung absolut ist, so beherrscht hier die plötzliche Erleuchtung das Feld, die als jisshō (jitsu shō), d.h. ‘wahre Erleuchtung’ bezeichnet wird.”22 Elsewhere he writes: “Die ontologische Realität wird von der hon gaku Lehre nicht als leerer Begriff und nicht als ein Verharren in tatenloser Ruhe, sondern als eine ununterbrochene Manifestierung der Lebenskraft selbst verstanden. Die Totalität der Dinge wird bejaht und das Universum als etwas absolutes und einheitliches definiert. . . . Kurz, alle Dhammas werden von hon gaku mon mit einander identifiziert und harmonisiert und als etwas ‘was man nicht denken kann’ (fu ka shigi), nämlich als über alles Denken hinausgehend oder mit einem Wort als ‘wunderbar’ (myō) charakterisiert.”23 And in another place: “Nach der hon gaku Lehre ist jedermann Buddha, und nur die Verdunkelung seines Geistes ist Schuld daran, das sich der gewöhnliche Mensch dessen nicht bewusst ist und einen Unterschied zwischen sich und Buddha konstruiert. Diesen Unterschied [zwischen sich und Buddha] erkennt die hon gaku Lehre nicht an. . . . In der shi kaku Lehre gibt es demnach ein wirkliches ‘Buddha Werden’ (jō butsu), in der hon gaku Lehre aber genau genommen nur ein ‘Buddha Sein’ (ze butsu).”24

In this essay Petzold has isolated some of the most important features of this divergent set of approaches to enlightenment. In terms of the present discussion I would select the following three points of contrast as especially important here:

1. In the hongaku teaching the emphasis is placed upon actuality rather than potentiality. In contrast to the shikaku teaching, here enlightenment is ontologically already present and existent. Hongaku stresses the “being Buddha” (ze butsu or “Buddha Sein”) rather than “becoming Buddha” (jō butsu or “Buddha Werden”).

2. In the hongaku teaching the emphasis is placed upon the universality rather than the limitedness of enlightenment. This universality is extended not only to the whole of mankind (jedermann) but also to the totality of existent things (die Totalität der Dinge).

21 Petzold’s essay “Hon Gaku Mon und Shi Kaku Mon” is published in Studies in Buddhism in Japan, edited by the International Buddhist Society (Tokyo, 1938), pp. 133-78. I have not been able to locate the work of the Japanese scholar Daïō Shimaji upon which Petzold bases his own study.
22 Petzold, p. 141. 23 Ibid., p. 142. 24 Ibid., p. 143.
3. In the hongaku teaching all things are affirmed rather than negated. They are affirmed (bejahnt) as they are since in their inner nature they are already enlightened and possessing the Buddha-nature.

The implication of this development toward a hongaku orientation in Japanese Buddhism will be explored below, but first it is of importance to note that Petzold agrees with Japanese scholars in dating the shift from a shikaku to a hongaku emphasis at a time roughly coinciding with the twelfth century, in which Chūjin wrote his Kankō Ruijū and Saigyō composed his verse. Petzold notes that the Shingon school seems to have had a hongaku orientation from its inception in Japan. The Tendai school, by comparison, first seemed on some points to stress a shikaku type of enlightenment but gradually, under influence from Shingon thinkers, took on the hongaku orientation. For a long while Shingon and Tendai had divergent emphases, but eventually there was a conflation. Petzold writes: “Aber in Mittelalter kam eine Versöhnung zustande, und innerhalb beide Schulen herrschte nun hongaku Geist. Der japanische Buddhismus der Gempei- und Kamakura-Zeit entsprang aus dem hon gaku Geist; er hatte seine Wurzel durchaus in ihm.” The date of this reconciliation or harmonization of the two schools and their agreement in the emphasis upon hongaku is of interest; Petzold locates it in the Gempei and Kamakura eras, that is in the late twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. A case might be made, however, that the hongaku emphasis was becoming preeminent throughout the twelfth century, since Chūjin, who wrote in the early part of that century, is clearly of a hongaku orientation. In any case, whether or not the hongaku emphasis was dominant or not in twelfth-century Tendai, it had at least articulate exponents in such as Chūjin. Through his writings we can see that Tendai thinkers were moving in the direction of ideas that had at a much earlier date been implicit in the thought of Kūkai and had, therefore, been the “mainstream” in Shingon thinking for centuries already.

It was, however, because it had an important impact upon the Buddhahood-of-Plants discussion within the Tendai school that the shift from shikaku to hongaku is, in my opinion, crucial. And it is for this reason that the statements and arguments of Chūjin, while on the surface merely a summation of arguments, in fact have within themselves evidence that Chūjin had brought the entire question onto wholly new ground. For him it seems that the Buddhahood of plants was no longer in any sense a possibility to

be entertained; it was, rather, an actuality to be accepted. When he, moreover, sees the Buddhahood of plants resident in their mere possession of roots, stems, branches, and leaves, he is affirming their ordinary mode of existence in the world as one which is in itself an enlightened existence and a Buddha-nature. He, as we have noted above, does not follow Ryōgen in forcing the members of the plant world into a frame of reference based upon human experience. That is, they are in possession of the Buddha-nature by virtue of their existence as plants, not inasmuch as they approximate human experience and norms. In many ways Chūjin disavows the necessity of positing a human model for the understanding of enlightenment and permits these members of the natural world to have their enlightenment in their own way and on their own terms. And it is in a way that escapes man's capacity for understanding; this is why in his sixth argument he writes: "The self-nature of trees and plants is not capable of being described and, therefore, the Buddha-nature possessed by trees and plants is also ineffable."

It might be expected that Chūjin's position would be the culmination and end of the discussion. But in fact it merely opened up new possibilities. For although in many ways he presented a way of understanding the Buddhahood of plants (and nature as a whole) without recourse to the human model of enlightenment, he did not simply "naturalize" nature. Inasmuch as he wrote of the "Buddha-nature" of plants and trees, he attributed religious meaning and value to the natural world. He had, in fact, opened up the possibility of a remarkably new type of religious valorization of nature within the Buddhist context.26

SAIYŌ THE PRIEST AND A NEW SHIFT OF VALUES

In outlining in the sections above the progression of the Buddhist discussions of the Buddhahood of the natural world in general and of plants in particular, the problem of motivation has been held in abeyance. That is, we have not asked why it happened that in Japan especially members of the Buddhist community felt compelled to discuss and present arguments on behalf of the Buddhahood potentialities of the natural world—often in spite of rather tenuous textual support from the Buddhist canon. However, this

26 For a presentation of the importance of the hongaku orientation for later but Tendai-influenced thinkers such as Nichiren and Dōgen, see Nakamura Hajime, Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples (Honolulu, 1984), pp. 351 ff. I have traced the position and its development only to the extent that it would have influenced Saigyō in the twelfth century.
question deserves to be asked and the answer to it suggested. We have noticed that the trend had been for increasing and growing religious value attributed to nature throughout the centuries of the discussion. Why did this occur in spite of the fact that it seems to have necessitated a rather elastic hermeneutic on the part of those who argued on behalf of the Buddhahood of plants?

The answer to this, I suggest, lies in the fact that Buddhism in Japan especially was forced to accommodate itself to the long-standing and pre-Buddhist high attribution of religious value to the natural world. Thus, the discussions outlined in the foregoing pages were not carried out in a cultural and religious vacuum; they were, in fact, either consciously or unconsciously responding to pressures exerted upon them by ancient and deeply ingrained experiences of the Japanese people—experiences especially of nature as a locus of soteriological value. To term this an accommodation of Buddhism to Shinto is an oversimplification, and yet there can be no doubt that the ancient and continuous recognition of the presence of kami throughout the natural world was a prime characteristic of the Japanese religious ethos, and it was necessary for Buddhism to adjust itself to this. The discussions above can be viewed in some sense as the adjustment of theory to this fact of experience. Chūjin’s theories, in particular, made it possible from within a Buddhist context to view natural phenomena as already enlightened; this meant that in some sense at least things within nature could be seen as Buddhas and, therefore, as approximate equivalents—although within another vocabulary—of kami.

But precise political and historical factors contributed to the emergence of these valorizations, for especially in the twelfth century Japan witnessed the gradual but powerful diminution of the glory, and hence also of the religious significance, of its capital city, Heian-kyō. During this century the “City of Peace and Tranquility,” which for three centuries seemed perpetual and inviolable, was the scene of battles and intrigue and, at the end of the century, saw the loss of its possession of the effective ruling powers of Japan. This city, which had been the epitome of Japan’s creation of a cultural and civilizations center and which, therefore, had an important religious meaning and value as well, was rather suddenly under pressures, both internal and external. We can find in the writings of this century a seemingly sudden awareness that this city, heretofore understood to be virtually perpetual, was itself characterized by “impermanence,” the Buddhist teaching of annica—what the Japanese called mujō. It was in such a historical
situation, then, that the pendulum of values seems to have swung again, this time very emphatically, in the direction of nature and its capacity to provide solace and some type of “salvation” for individuals looking for a locus of value other than that provided by the city and its style of life.

Therefore, although the general pre-Buddhist religious milieu of Japan moved the sōmakujōbutsu discussions to new attributions of value to nature within the Buddhist world, the twelfth century and its events added an additional element of coercion so that some Buddhists began, in fact, to regard nature as the proper locus of salvation. This, it should be noted, went considerably beyond the theory of Chūjin, who wrote early in the century; but Chūjin’s theory opened the possibility of this. More exactly, the hongaku view of enlightenment made this type of valorization possible. For, although in theory the hongaku orientation extended an existential enlightenment to all things, it retained the notion that man might in fact undergo the experience of shikaku or “initial experience of enlightenment.” The interesting feature of this is that in terms of the relative values involved, by implication it grants the natural and phenomenal world an enlightenment which, although basically “possessed” also by man, still seems to require man to appropriate experientially. Therefore, logically, nature is in full possession of what man only still partially possesses.

This means, then, that the implication of the hongaku orientation attributed to nature a higher degree of realization than to man. These, it should be noted, were implications which were not, to my knowledge, explicitly drawn out at this period of history; but they are rather obviously present and would probably not have been missed during this century, in which men in Japan were experiencing in various ways the salvific power of the natural world.

With Chūjin the explicit theory seems to go as far as the Buddhist thinkers would carry it. But the actual religious valorization of nature is not limited to the thoughts and writings of theoreticians. Values can be expressed by others as well, and it is my contention here that the upward valuation of nature goes much beyond Chūjin and that, if we wish to trace it in the twelfth century, we must attend to other writings, especially to the poetry of the Buddhist priest Saigyō. For the verses of this monk provide the locus classicus of the attribution of primacy and soteriological meaning to the natural world. If Chūjin had granted a status equal
History of Religions

to that of man to nature, Saigyō seems to have attributed to it an even higher one.27

It would be absurd, of course, to assume that Saigyō as poet was merely interested in pushing forward the theoretical development of the Buddhist doctrine of nature and chose poetry as his medium for doing so. This would be in violation of everything that we know of Saigyō's passion for poetry as poetry and would transform his verse into little more than a vehicle for ideas and theories. I think it reasonable to assume that Saigyō, especially because of his presence at Shingon and Tendai temples in the years soon after his adopting of a monk's mode of life, was aware of the more recent theories of sōmoku jōbutsu which were part of the discussions of these schools. However, the impetus for his concern for nature was not theoretical but, rather, experiential. It was both because he had a passion for nature and had in some way experienced it as soteric that he wrote verse which has come to be regarded as the corpus of early Buddhist nature poetry in Japan. My consideration of his verse within the historical context of a long line of discussions of nature by Buddhist thinkers is intended here to show the context for the type of valorization he gave to nature, not to suggest that he employed verse merely and somewhat arbitrarily as a medium for ideas. Yet, even though good verse is never merely a guise through which ideas can be presented, ideas are not by definition foreign to the production of good verse. Poetry is produced by men and women who have ideas and values, and these, inevitably, shape what and how they write.28 Here then, it is my intention merely to study the verse of this poet to see what idea or ideas of nature are implicit in it and shaping it as verse. My analysis will focus on this but will, hopefully, also demonstrate something of why it is that Saigyō is one of Japan's greatest poets.

27 The question of the degree to which Saigyō was aware of topics debated in Buddhist circles is not easily answered. In the years immediately after his shukke, or entry into the priesthood, he visited and, apparently, resided in or near a number of Tendai and Shingon temples in the vicinity of Heian-kyō. I think it reasonable that, given his interest in the natural world, he would have become conversant with the concurrent views of sōmoku jōbutsu, for example. The impression that Saigyō was merely a "simple" monk may be largely the result of the fact that his verse was intelligible and accessible to the "masses" relatively soon after Saigyō's death. Furthermore, his own statement to Yoritomo as recorded in the Azuma-kagami, namely, "I knew nothing about 'depths' in the composition of poetry," is highly ambiguous and cannot be taken as indicative of a lack of interest in intellectual issues of his day.

28 For the way in which a contemporary of Saigyō, Fujiwara Shunzei (1114–1204), employed in his poetry the Tendai practice of shikan or "concentration and insight," see Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, Japanese Court Poetry (Stanford, Calif., 1961), p. 257.
Saigyō and the Value of Nature

One of his better-known poems and one included in a later imperial anthology is the following:29

\begin{align*}
\text{michi no be ni} & \quad \text{“Only for a moment’s stop”} \\
\text{shimizu nagaruru} & \quad \text{I’m in a roadside willow’s shade,} \\
\text{yanagi kage} & \quad \text{Where pure water of a spring} \\
\text{shibashi tote keso} & \quad \text{Flows by . . . as has the time now} \\
\text{tachidomaritsure.} & \quad \text{Since my “moment’s stop” began.} \\
\end{align*}

[SKKS 262; SKS 2005]

This poem gains some of its unusual degree of artistic finesse from its skillful employment of imagery, especially images of sinuosity: the road, the flowing stream, and the willow, the long and flowing branches of which are visually present even though unmentioned as such. These are all ongoing and flowing in a continuous fashion. Juxtaposed to these images are the words of the final two lines of the Japanese—the order of which is different than in my translation—for there are in these lines words which both in sound and in sense suggest short-lived and punctual stoppages: shibashi (a moment), tote (thus), keso (exactly), and tachi (stop). But the last line’s sound differs from its sense so that, even while it means “to stop and stand,” its sound flows and seems to go on.

And in this the structure of the poem corresponds exactly to the experience which the poet is seeking to communicate, for the verse tells us that he merely intended to make a short stop and pause for refreshment at the side of the road on which he was traveling but that this intended momentary pause was swallowed up by the refreshment itself, and the poet is telling himself that he has already been there a long time. Just as the road, the stream, and the willow’s branches are flowing, so too is time. And standing under the willow at the stream, the passage of time goes un-

29 In citation of Saigyō’s verses, I have listed them as numbered in Itō Yoshio’s edition of the Sanshōsha or “Mountain-Home Collection,” Saigyō’s own collection of his verse. Itō’s edition is in the Nihon Kōten Zenshū series, vol. 78 (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1946). I have abbreviated “Sanshōsha” to SKS when citing poems. When one of Saigyō’s verses is also included in the Shinkokushū, the imperial collection of verse of 1206, I have listed its number in this collection, abbreviated as SKKS, as well. For this collection I have used the Nihon Kōten Bunpaku Taisetsu edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), vol. 28, ed. Hisamatsu Sen’eki, Yamazaki Yoshio, and Gotō Shigeo. As for the verse cited here, Horst Hahnmitzch has translated it as follows:

Am Wegesrande,
wo im Schatten der Weide
klar der Quellbach fließt,
auf eine kleine Weide
bin ich stehen geblieben.

(See Wilhelm Gundert and Amundsen Schimmel, eds., Lyrik des Ostens [Munich, 1962], pp. 445-47, for ten of Saigyō’s poems translated by Hahnmitzch.)
noted by the poet as he is caught in and carried along by an ongoing reverie within this natural setting.

But the poet here seems eager to suggest that the willow and stream offered him more than a moment’s coolness and drink; it offered also this opportunity to lose all sense of time and all concern about pushing on toward a destination. We have no hint in the verse that he is conscience stricken or self-judging in view of his diversion from his progress along the road. Instead, we understand him to be reflecting upon the fact that his moment’s pause has in fact lasted much longer; but he intends, it seems, to remain exactly where he is. This is interesting especially inasmuch as most commentators agree that the road he is on is one traversed by him for the sake of a pilgrimage. Therefore, here it is as if he suggests that his deflection from the “goal” of his pilgrimage is in no way lamentable. Quite the contrary. It is as if, in being drawn into this natural setting, he has been induced into something that has its own sacrality for him. Expressed in the kind of paradoxical language of which Saigyō himself was fond, we might say that it was in going “to the side of the road” (michi no be) that he found “the Way.” The distant telos of his pilgrimage has been sacrificed for one much more proximate and at hand, and Saigyō seems to accept this completely. Here under the willow he finds reverie, a sense of the abeyance of time, and in some sense the values of the “sacred” sufficient for himself, values which others might traverse miles to find at a shrine, temple, or other sacred place. He has been drawn into the world of nature, and it rather than a goal of pilgrimage which is distant and cultically formed is for Saigyō salvific.

The imagery and emotions of the poem are subtle, but so too is the value attributed in it to nature. The poet has found in the stream and the willow a “given” world of religious meaning. We find in this verse a conception of pilgrimage by implication, but it is one which coheres precisely to that found in other of his poems, one which suggests that the goal of pilgrimage is often found within the natural world through which the pilgrim-poet travels rather than at some distant place deemed and designated as “sacred” by the consensus of the cultus-concerned religious community. In finding the way as equivalent to the goal, Saigyō, in addition, gives expression to a common notion in Mahayana Buddhism. We find frequently in his verses the phrase yukue mo shiranu, words which mean “and not knowing the destination.” In many ways this phrase encapsulates this poet’s view of pil-
grimage, for he discovers the realm of sacrality along the way rather than at its end. Because of this his wandering can be comparatively aimless and destinationless. Because in the thought of Mahayana Buddhism the goal of nirvana is to be found within the world of samsara, the postulation of distant goals is, theoretically at least, redundant. Saigyō seems to have translated this principle into a peculiar mode of pilgrimage for himself. In his case, however, it had special value inasmuch as this enabled him to find “the sacred” in natural contexts and phenomena met by him and entered into by him as he went along the road. Although theoretically in Mahayana all things in the samsaric realm are sacred, experientially men find that, “although all things are sacred, some things are more sacred than others.” In Saigyō’s case this was the way in which he experienced the natural world and its forms.

An interesting presentation of a more overt preference by him of natural over against cultic forms is in the following verse, one which seems to have been written in his old age:

hotoke ni wa
sakura no hana o
iatemasure
waga nochi no yo o
hito toburawaba.

Sufficient service
For the dead one is a gift
Of cherry-blossoms—
If ever you might wish to make
A memorial rite for me.

[SKS 89]

In one sense the poet is here affirming his own attachment to nature and to natural forms, and this verse could be regarded as a hyperbolic expression of this. There can be no doubt that he had a particular fondness for the cherry blossom. But even if it is expressive of Saigyō’s personal attachment to this flower, he is also suggesting its total adequacy as a form of religious expression. The stress falls upon the sufficiency of this not just as a sentimental gesture but in lieu of other kinds of cultic rites for the dead, at least for the dead Saigyō. We have here perhaps a reverberance of the story told of Gautama Buddha’s presentation of a flower to Kāśyapa, but also the seeming implication that this presentation of a flower is adequate substitution for the reading of sutras and the performance of other rites for the dead. This seems to be adequate not so much because the activity is simple and direct as because it is a natural flower that is presented.

Somewhat similar but with much more subtlety of idea and imagery is the following verse:
On the surface this verse might be taken as a lament and as a self-pitying expression of loneliness due to the absence of other human beings. It would seem to be a turning toward the tree to fill a gap created by this absence of fellowmen and a request that the tree perform the requisite rites for the poet's own corpse. The principal verbal form here, toheyo, is an old form of the modern verb tomurau and is an imperative here meaning "say (or chant) a memorial rite!" On this level of interpretation it is a direct address to the tree and involves a "personalization" of the pine. By the "willing suspension of disbelief" permissible in poetry, it would seem to make a human request of a nonhuman phenomenon of the natural world.

However, a creative ambiguity is placed in the poem by the word shinobu [beki] in the fourth line, for this word is capable of being written with two different characters, each of which carries a different sense. The more immediate meaning would be that suggested by the character 黒 and, especially when combined with ă as the character for ato, would mean: "cherish the memory of [someone] afterward." In this context it would mean precisely that the poet laments the fact that no human being would know of his death and engage in a fond recall of his life. But another character could as easily be understood here, namely 黒, to give the meaning of "to conceal oneself" or "to be hidden." As such it applies to the remains or corpse of the poet—something suggested especially if ato is read as 黒, meaning "corpse" and if the word mi [Lisa] in the final line be taken in its most literal and corporeal sense of [my] "body." If read in this way, the phrase would mean "my corpse which ought to be covered (or concealed from view)."

Therefore, the poet has made a double-leveled request of the pine tree. He seems, on the one hand, to have requested it to be a stand-in for humans who might ordinarily, if they had knowledge of his death, recall his memory and perform rites on his behalf. However, by implication he is suggesting that the pine conceal his body and prevent its exposure to the world. It is not that he wants the pine to literally bury his corpse but, rather, he suggests that
simply by standing over him forever it will conceal his remains. It is, significantly, a pine, a tree which is always and in every season full of foliage, of which he makes his request. On this level, therefore, he is asking the pine to do nothing extraordinary and unnatural. Simply by existing in its ordinary mode of being as an evergreen tree it can adequately conceal his corpse from the world and the elements. As such it will perform for him a praiseworthy act of “service.” By covering his mouldering corpse with its branches and with its shed needles it will perform an act of “burial” —but without any violation of its ordinary and usual mode of life and activity. In this sense he entrusts himself to its care.

This leads me to suggest that the emotion and attitude in this verse is far more subtle than regarding it as simple lament would imply. Only overtly is Saigyō lamenting the absence of fellow human beings. On a deeper level he has worked out and expressed a structure of values according to which the pine’s function is fully adequate as a substitute for men. In the final analysis the pine does not need to ape or imitate man’s type of action in order to be of service to the poet; it can serve him fully by being itself.

In a later era of Japanese history there was produced a body of Nō plays which had incorporated within themselves apostrophes to trees and other natural objects in contexts similar to this. Dying men and women requested there, too, that pines and cherry trees do rites and rituals of chanting and memorializing. But here in Saigyō’s verse there is the presentation of an extraordinary subtlety. Prima facie it is rites and rituals that are requested of the plant and in that sense the plant or tree is “humanized,” but on another level it is suggested that this “humanization” of the plant is not really necessary. That is, the tree as tree performs for man a religious role and in its own ordinary mode of being is an adequate substitute for the rites and actions normally associated with religious cultus.

The reason for this type of value placed upon the religious meaning of the tree’s usual and ordinary mode of being is not because of a sensitivity to what some literary critics have called “the pathetic fallacy.” Saigyō seems, rather, to be concerned to show the natural religious role of the natural phenomenon; he, by his imagery and diction, moves the reader of his verse from the impression that the poem requests the imposition of cultus upon

30 See Shively.
nature to the awareness that the natural is an adequate—and in
Saigyô's case, a preferred—substitute for cultus. Since we find him
elsewhere addressing natural phenomena as tomo, that is, as
"companion," we cannot assume that he is concerned with the
"fallacy" of attributing human characteristics and passions as
such to natural forms. However, we can infer from the above that
he is concerned to demonstrate and provide his reader with an
awareness of how it is possible for the natural form to be religious
in its natural mode of being in the world—that is, without recourse
to categories of "sacrality" derived from and defined by man's
cultic experience and behavior. Saigyô is not constitutionally or
philosophically averse to the attribution of human characteristics
to natural phenomena, but in verses such as the one under con-
sideration here he suggests the possibility of moving beyond such
a "humanization" of nature to a regard for the sacred meaning of
nature as natural. Although he probably would have had no
awareness of historical antecedents to this when composing this
verse, it might be said that the movement from the first under-
standing of this verse to its deeper level of meaning recapitulates
the movement of thought from Ryôgen, who saw the plant's
enlightenment in a progression like that of man's, to Chûjin, who
saw its Buddhahood in its normal and simultaneous possession of
roots, stems, branches, and leaves. The difference, however, is that
Saigyô makes the natural form of the phenomenon to be an
adequate substitute for man's cultic behavior and, as such,
attributes to nature a decided preferability as the locus of the
sacred. He shifts the values so that what is a loss to cultic forms
becomes nature's gain.

In each of the verses selected for analysis immediately above we
discover that the poet has in one way or another suggested a
preference for a sacrality discoverable in his relationship to some
member of the plant world over forms of sacrality defined by
ordinary forms of cultic behavior. In these verses the contrast and
preference is comparatively overt; in the greater majority of his
verses about trees and plants, however, Saigyô merely states in
some way his profound attachment to some tree or blossom.
Although we often sense that this attachment is one of religious
significance for him, we do not in the majority of poems find
suggestions of a consequent diminution of the importance to him
of cultic forms of religious life; he merely celebrates the particular
form of plant life to which he has given and entrusted himself.

Such a verse is the following:
Saigyō and the Value of Nature

yoshino yama  
kozue no hana o  
mishi hi yori  
kokoro wa mi ni mo  
sowazu marinuki.

| Alone in these journeys,          |
| Now my body’s lost companionship |
| Even of its own heart,            |
| Which stayed behind that day when |
| I viewed blossoms on Mount Yoshino.|

[SKS 77]

Here the emotion seems direct and the meaning somewhat less subtle than in some of the verses looked at above. The intent of the poem is clear: the poet found himself so completely absorbed in and unified with the blossoms of Yoshino that his subsequent journeyings were those of a man divided, for his heart and thoughts remained at the place where he had been; his body (mi) moved on but his heart, mind, and sensibility (kokoro) were still at Yoshino. The poem is a vivid and direct celebration of the power of the blossoms to fully take and hold his inner self.

But this power is not limited to plants and trees and blossoms. Other aspects and phenomena of the natural world hold for Saigyō a fascination which suggests that his contact with them is of the nature of a religious experience. More specifically, they seem to represent for him the real locus of the Buddhist world of meaning and value. For example, the mist is so celebrated and valued in the following poem:

| sora ni naru  | A man with his mind |
| koko wa haru no | At one with the sky-void steps |
| kasumi nite     | Into a spring mist |
| yo ni araji tomo | And begins to wonder if he might |
| omohitatsu kana.|

| Have just stepped out of the world.|

[SKS 786]

The genius of this verse lies in the simplicity with which the man’s activity is presented and the attitude of surprise and wonder registered in his mind. He is portrayed as one who is totally absorbed in “emptiness,” for sora here suggests both the literal sky above the heads of men and also the Buddhist Void or śūnya; the dual sense here suggests that the sky is somehow ontologically connected with śūnya and that, if it is to be taken as a “symbol” of śūnya, it is so in the sense of Kūkai’s concept of symbol or samaya discussed above. The importance of this is that the man here presented—and it is no doubt the poet himself—is not merely “abstracted,” a man lost in a concept of Emptiness or in thoughts of Buddhist ontology. He is, on the contrary, a man whose mind and emotions (kokoro) are unified with the sky-void or, perhaps, with the sky-which-is-the-Void. And it is this man who, when he steps into a ground-hugging mist on a spring morning, wonders whether he might not have, in fact, stepped out of the world.
History of Religions

But the intent here is not to present a semiludicrous and “absent-minded” philosopher who mistakes the mist for an extramundane reality. Quite on the contrary. Saigyō, who elsewhere wrote a verse relishing paradox very much akin to Chuang Tzu’s delight in the dream about a butterfly’s possible dream that he was Chuang Tzu,31 is doing something similar with this verse. He is asking here whether or not it might not be possible that the first impression—namely, that he has mistaken the mist for the Void—is, in fact, the real illusion. Therefore the question posed by the verse would be: Is not the “second thought”—that is, the feeling of having been “fooled” into mistaking the mist for śūnya—the possible delusion here? That is, is it not in fact possible that the mist is actually what it seemed to be in that moment in which the man, whose mind was already united with the Void, felt that his body too had entered into Emptiness? And in being in the mist is he not, in fact, in tangible contact with śūnya? And, if this is so, can it not be said that his entry into the mist was in fact entry into the transcendent—with the understanding that in this code of values the “transcendent” is coterminous with the forms of the natural world?

Kūkai’s concept of samaya is very instructive here and in all probability lies within the conceptual background making Saigyō’s valorization of nature what it is. Saigyō took Kūkai as a kind of distant mentor and identified his own experiences with those of the founder of his order, especially when the poet traveled through parts of Shikoku which hallowed the memory of Kūkai.32 Therefore, if I here draw upon Kūkai’s unique concept of “symbol” to explain the particular values implicit in Saigyō’s poetic usage of

---

31 Saigyō’s poem to which I am here referring is the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utsutsu o mo</th>
<th>Since the “real world” seems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utsutsu to sara ni</td>
<td>To be less than really real,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omowaneba</td>
<td>Why need I suppose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yume o mo yume to</td>
<td>The world of dreams is nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanika omowan</td>
<td>Other than a world of dreams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arthur Waley’s terse translation of this verse is:

Since I am convinced
That Reality is in no way
Real,
How am I to admit
That dreams are dreams?

[SKS 1606]


“symbols,” the borrowing need not be forced and ahistorical. It can be assumed, I believe, that Kūkai’s view of samaya would have been the regnant view of symbol in the school of Buddhism which he founded in Japan and, therefore, Saigyō would tend unconsciously to draw upon that concept and its particularity when employing “symbols” in his verse. He is not, of course, translating the concept into verse; he is merely and, perhaps, unconsciously, allowing this concept to inform his own usage.

Yoshito S. Hakeda articulates the meaning of samaya in Kūkai’s thought in this way: “In Kūkai’s writings the Sanskrit word samaya is used in the sense of ‘symbol,’ ‘equality,’ ‘promise,’ or ‘vow.’ Here [that is, in a text] samaya-body means ‘symbolic body.’ For Kūkai any physical symbol has a double structure in that it is an object standing for X and at the same time it is part of X; e.g., a flower or a vajra is a symbol of Mahāvairocana Buddha but at the same time an integral part of Mahāvairocana in terms of the totality of existence. Thus, the four great elements cannot be regarded as ‘nonsentient beings’ which have nothing to do with Mahāvairocana.”63 The wider application of this and its function as an intellectual foundation for “symbolization” in verse such as Saigyō’s results in an intense and complete valorization of physical and natural phenomena as being identical with the religious Reality.64 In Saigyō’s case this means that natural forms are

---

34 A somewhat analogous development occurred much earlier in China. In his “The Origins of Chinese Nature Poetry,” *Asia Major*, n.s. 8, pt. 1 (1969): 69–104, J. D. Frosham has argued as follows: “It has been argued that since Reality for the Buddhist is often described in terms of emptiness, landscape is a very fitting symbol for it. But it is possible to put the matter much more exactly. Landscape was not just the symbol for the Tao—the term was at this period [i.e., fourth century A.D.] as much a Buddhist as a Taoist expression—it is the Tao itself. This is brought out very clearly by a passage in Sun Ch’o’s [Sun Ch’ao] (320–807) ‘Fu of my wanderings on Mount T’ien T’ai: ‘When the Tao dissolves itself it becomes rivers; When it condenses it becomes mountains.’ So the contemplation of landscape is the contemplation of Reality itself. It brings on that state of mystical detachment which could either be described in Taoist terms... or as the trance of visualizing the Buddha, Chien-fu san-mei 见佛三昧” (pp. 97-98). Frosham seems here to be taking issue with the position taken by Richard Mather in the latter’s “The Landscape Buddhism of the Fifth-Century Poet Hsieh Ling-yün” (*Journal of Asian Studies* 18, no. 1 [November 1958]: 67–79) and arguing that Hsieh Ling-yün (350-433) is not, in fact, the first Buddhist nature poet in China. See also Frosham’s *The Musing Stream*, a two-volume study (1967) of Hsieh Ling-yün, concerning whom he writes: “Ling-yün’s own experience of dhyāna techniques would have convinced him that, since the landscape was perhaps the most perfect manifestation of the Buddha, contemplation of it constituted a religious exercise. Looked at in this way the garden is simply a microcosm of the Tao, a cult-image of the dharmakāya itself.
"symbolic bodies" of the Tathāgata and that in this sense they are
the Tathāgata. In a similar way the sky and the mist are śūnya.

This is why in Saigyō’s verse we have a valorization of nature
which, in fact, goes beyond that given to trees and plants by
Chūjin. Out of the intellectual currents which he received from the
times in which he lived, times which—as we have seen—allowed
for the harmonization of Tendai and Shingon patterns of thought,
Saigyō brought forth a new valorization of the natural world. The
degree to which he did this in a self-conscious manner is, of course,
problematic. My argument simply is that these things were so
much part of the Buddhist milieu in which he at times moved that
they can be expected to have shaped and informed his own usage
of symbol in verse. He differs from Kūkai, however, in two ways.
Although he takes phenomenological forms as identifiable with
Buddhist absolutes, he is selective in what he takes as such; due
to his times and his own sensitivity, he has a decided preference
for identifying the Tathāgata with forms and phenomena in the
natural rather than in the civilizational world. And, second, this
means that he does not follow Kūkai in placing primary value
upon rites, constructed symbols such as mandalas, and cultic
patterns of religious expression. For Saigyō in a very literal way
nature is All.

This does not mean that religious value is attributed to the
concept of nature or to “Nature” as something abstracted from
the phenomena that compose it; this would be in violation of the
idea of samaya, the intent of which is to valorize particular
phenomena as the Tathāgata. The arc of value returns to these
particular and concrete things in the world of nature. The result
of this is that, although theoretically any- and everything in the
natural world is identifiable with the ultimate value, a poet must
make a practical selection. Saigyō does so and in his verse cele-
brates certain particular concrete phenomena.

One of these receiving attention in his verse is the sky. In the
verse analyzed immediately above, he experienced both it and the

and thus the very embodiment of the Truth (dharmadhatu). So Ling-yün’s gardening,
like his mountain climbing, must have been almost a devotional practice, bringing
him into contact with the ‘Body of the Dharma’ itself” (pp. 63–64). It is signifi-
cant that Hsieh Ling-yün had had his first Buddhist contacts at Mount Lu, a
Buddhist center founded by Hui-yün (334–416). Hui-yün, according to Erik
Zürcher, “not satisfied with [the Indian Kumārajīva’s] abstractions, goes on
asking: ‘the dharmadhatu must, after all, be made of some ‘stuff,’ however subtle
it may be; you can see it and hear it, it must have sensory faculties and so on.’
Still the same urge, typical of Hui-yün and the creed propagated by him, to
have something concrete to hold on to …” (Erik Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest
of China (Leiden, 1969), 1:229).
mist which is continuous with it as śānya. In the following verse we can notice the same type of equation:

\[
\text{kaze ni nabiku} \quad \text{The wisps of smoke from Fuji}
\]

\[
\text{fuji no kuburi no} \quad \text{Yield to the wind and lose themselves}
\]

\[
\text{sora ni kiete} \quad \text{In sky, in emptiness,}
\]

\[
\text{yukue mo shiranu} \quad \text{Which takes as well the aimless passions}
\]

\[
\text{waga omohi kana.} \quad \text{That through my life burned deep inside.}
\]

[SKS 2138; SKKS 1613]

This is not the place to comment upon this poem’s place in the biographical experiences of Saigyō; here attention must be given to its imagery and its significance in expressing the poet’s view of nature. There are complexities and subtleties here that elude translation.

First, it should be noted that the fourth line (yukue mo shiranu, meaning “aimless” or, more precisely, “not even knowing its destination”) is set on a syntactical hinge (kakekotoba) so that its sense can swing to modify either what precedes or what comes after it. It establishes the analogy that forms the poem, one made between the wisps of smoke rising from the ancient volcano and the lifelong thoughts and passions of the poet. Both are “passing on” and trailing off in a direction whose end (yukue) cannot be perceived and known. More precisely, though, they are both being enticed into union with something else; the word nabiku in the first line suggests a “yielding” to something or someone actively but gently wooing. Therefore the smoke gives itself bit by bit into the erotic power of the wind and is absorbed into the sky (sora). But the implicit analogy suggests that the totality of the poet-monk’s thoughts and emotions (omohi) likewise are being taken into the enticing power of the sky as well.

However, we know that when Saigyō is writing of the sky (sora) he intends that it mean also all that is implied in the Buddhist notion of śānya. The character for sky, 風 (sora), is capable of being read also with the reading “kū” and, as such, is a precise equivalent of the Buddhist Void. Therefore the word sora is resonant with this meaning as well. This “double intent” nature of the Japanese usage of the Chinese character here means not only that two things are suggested but that these two significations are conceptually fused and unified. This fits Kūkai’s notion of samaya precisely, and it is this that is operative here. The “sky” is really “sky-which-is-śānya” or “śānya-which-is-sky.” The abstraction and the concrete phenomenon are locked in a union so that the sky above the mountain and the poet is the Void. The meaning here is
that not only the smoke but also the poet’s thoughts and passions are absorbed into the sky-which-is-śūnya. It is not a matter of parallelism in which a concrete action—here, smoke entering the sky—is provided as an intelligible analogue or symbol for a more abstract one—here, the thoughts of the poet entering into the Eternal Void. Rather, the intended formulation would be: “Both my life and the smoke pass away into the sky-which-is-śūnya.”

A further aspect of the magnificent imagery of this verse reinforces the above interpretation. By convention of long usage there is an association (engo) between the words “smoke” (keburi) and “thoughts-and-passions” (omohi) in the second and fifth lines, respectively;35 that is, the two are understood to be conceptually related. This is due to the fact that omohi can be written with a character signifying “thoughts” (دو, 旭) but also suggests in け, the last syllable of this word, the character け, literally “fire.” This provides a striking mental image, especially when the attempt is made to visualize the poet seated in a field somewhat distant from Mount Fuji and observing it. He is suggesting by means of this “secondary reading” that the thoughts and emotions inside himself—and these two are joined—are in fact a type of “burning fire,” that is, the lava that he has contained within himself. The assimilation of volcano and poet-monk is, therefore, made complete. Both are seemingly sedate and tranquil, but inside each has existed a “fire,” one which now is somehow leaving because it is being wooed into the sky-which-is-the-Void. The sky is, therefore, taking both the man’s thoughts-and-emotions and the smoke into itself with a power which is strong while erotic. This verse, written when Saigyō’s years were advanced in number and when his poetic powers were at their greatest, establishes a remarkable set of verbal and conceptual connections through the intricate yet strong movement of its imagery.

But the real importance of this for our study is that Saigyō here takes the sky as something other than a “symbol” of the Absolute in our ordinary sense. That is, it is not a “mediating image,” something which is merely an accommodation to man’s inability to otherwise grasp and know the Absolute which is ineffable. The “image” here is not something which must itself be transcended and mentally jettisoned once it has served to create a union of the subject and the real object of his “image-ing,” that is, the Reality

35 See the comment on this poem on p. 331 of Hisamatsu Sen’ichi, Yamasaki Toshio, and Gotô Shigeo, eds., Shinkekkinaikukki (The new collection of poems of antiquity and the present), Nihon Rokten Bungaku Taikei Series (Tokyo, 1968).
Saigyō and the Value of Nature

itself. Rather, in total harmony with the view of samaya articulated by Kūkai, there is no necessity here of negating the physical and phenomenological world once it has served to point to something beyond itself. For Kūkai and for Saigyō there is no beyond. The concrete phenomenon—in this case, the sky—is itself both the symbol and the symbolized. It is the absolute which theorists might call “śūnya” but which is, in fact, nothing other than the phenomenon itself. And because of this it, in its own mode of being as concrete and natural, can fulfill a soteriological role and function for man.

Princeton University
APPENDIX OF JAPANESE AND CHINESE WORDS

Chan-ja
Chi-t'sang
Chūjin
Chūsan
Daijō-kishin-ron
Dengyō Daishi
esō funi
fugaku
Futsuwaku shūchū saku
goshō-kakubetsu setsu
gubōshō no ri
guchūdō
hongaku
hongu-sammi
hosshō
Hui-yūan
ichinen-sanzen
inja
io, iori
imai-kaijō-butsu