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## Mountain Buddhism and the Emergence of a Buddhist Cosmic Imaginary in Ancient Japan

This article attempts to clarify the emergence of a Buddhist “cosmic imaginary,” or a generally shared understanding of the natural world, in early Heian Japan. Through examination of poems preserved in the 751 *Kaifūsō* and the 759 *Man'yōshū*, it shows how this cosmic imaginary first took shape as an inflection of prevailing Confucian and Daoist ways of understanding the natural world among monks and poets who pursued the Buddhist teachings in the mountains. It then situates the introduction of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism in the early ninth century by Saichō and Kūkai, respectively, in the context of this trend toward mountain practice. Based on analysis of Saichō’s and Kūkai’s poetical and doctrinal writings, the argument is made that the teachings and practices of their new schools reconfigured the cosmic imaginaries of the Nara period and thus effected a transformation of the way people in Japan understood and imagined their world.

KEYWORDS: mountain Buddhism—cosmic imaginary—Saichō—Kūkai—*Kaifūsō*—*Man'yōshū*

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SCHOLARS HAVE long considered the early ninth century of the Heian period (794–1185) a decisive turning point in the history of Japanese Buddhism. At this time, the monks Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and Kūkai 空海 (774–835) founded two schools of Buddhism in the mountains, Tendai and Shingon, respectively: the former on Mount Hiei northeast of Kyoto and the latter on Mount Kōya in present-day Wakayama Prefecture. Over the last three decades, the cultural significance of the establishment of the Tendai and Shingon schools has been explained in either Marxist or poststructuralist terms. The Marxist view (see, for example, KURODA 1996a) holds that these new schools laid the foundation for the medieval development of Buddhism as an ideology of the state that more directly and effectively mystified the authority of the ruling elites. The poststructuralist view (see, for example, ABÉ 1999) challenges the Marxist interpretation of religion as essentially mystifying and irrational. Focusing on Kūkai, it argues that his theory of mantra provided the Buddhist clergy with a more cogent discourse for explaining the efficacy of Buddhist ritual practice and, in this way, was crucial to his efforts to persuade the imperial court and the Confucian intelligentsia of Buddhism’s superiority as a ruling ideology. Both interpretations focus exclusively on the political and intellectual dimensions of ancient Japanese culture and thus ignore the embeddedness of these dimensions in the physical environment and the ways in which the people of Japan actively engaged with and imagined that environment.

In this article, I consider Saichō and Kūkai side-by-side and situate their founding of the Tendai and Shingon schools in the context of a trend in the practice of Buddhism from the late seventh through the eighth centuries toward the pursuit of the Buddhist teachings on the mountains, or what I term “mountain Buddhism.”<sup>1</sup> By calling attention to the importance of mountain practice in ancient Japanese Buddhism, I intend to introduce into our discussions of this formative period of Japanese Buddhist history consideration of the ways in which the physical environment, or natural world, has figured in the Buddhist imagination. My analysis traces the configuration of a Buddhist background sense and understanding of the natural world from the late seventh century of the Asuka period (538–710) through the eighth century of the Nara period (710–794) and into the early ninth century. In doing so, I make use of the concept of “cosmic

1. My term “mountain Buddhism” is a translation of a common term in Japanese-language scholarship on this period, namely, *sangaku Bukkyō* 山岳仏教, which is also sometimes termed *sanrin Bukkyō* 山林仏教, literally, “mountain-and-forest Buddhism.”

imaginary” developed by Charles TAYLOR (2007) in his history of religion in the West, *A Secular Age*.

Cosmic imaginary, as Taylor defines the term, refers to “the way the world is imagined.” By “imagined,” he means two things. In the first sense, the term is analogous to another key term in his thought, the social imaginary, or “the generally shared background understandings of society, which makes it possible for it to function as it does” (TAYLOR 2007, 323).<sup>2</sup> A cosmic imaginary is social as well, in that it is generally shared and plays a role in the changes a society undergoes; yet it is not about society per se, but rather about the world, the cosmos. Thus, the cosmic imaginary, in the first sense, refers to the ensemble of ways we imagine and make sense of the world we live in; or, as Taylor explains, “the ways, for instance, that [the world] figures in our religious images and practices, including explicit cosmological doctrines; in the stories we tell about other lands and other ages; in our ways of marking the seasons and the passage of time; in the place of ‘nature’ in our moral and/or aesthetic sensibilities” (TAYLOR 2007, 323). Cosmic imaginary, in the second sense, refers to the last part of that list, “the way in which nature figures in our moral and aesthetic imagination.” The aim, then, lies in understanding “nature” not as a timeless realm beyond history and culture but rather as a “world” in the phenomenological sense—that is, a world of meaning that provides the framework and background for our engagements with things in our lives. Thus, a cosmic imaginary is not fixed; it changes and transforms, emerges and declines.

In contrast to an ideology or discourse, a cosmic imaginary comes into being not by the political machinations of ruling elites nor by the construction of a new theory of language but rather out of an engagement with a shared world of meaning. Viewed phenomenologically, the world we live in has meaning because of the engagements with that world by others in our world. A new world, therefore, cannot be imposed from the top down nor can it be constructed by an intellectually adept individual. Rather, a new world of meaning emerges through a process of reconfiguring a shared world that is always already there for any given individual. A “reconfiguration,” as Hubert DREYFUS and Sean Dorrance KELLY (2011, 103–109) have suggested, transforms our repertoire of ways of engaging with the world by bringing to the fore styles of engagement that had hitherto existed only marginally for most people.

In the account that follows, I show how Saichō and Kūkai contributed to the emergence of a new Buddhist cosmic imaginary by reconfiguring the prevailing cosmic imaginaries of the late Asuka and Nara periods. I begin, therefore, with a description of the cosmic imaginaries of Asuka-Nara Japan. Based on a reading

2. Taylor’s concept of the social imaginary builds on and extends Benedict Anderson’s influential concept of “imagined communities.” See TAYLOR (2007, 208).

of poems preserved in the two earliest poetry anthologies compiled in Japan, the 751 *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻 and the 759 *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, I contest the prevailing claim that the imagination of the world we find in these anthologies is predominantly “imperial” by calling attention to a repertoire of cosmic imaginaries that defined the meaning of things for a way of life outside the sphere of imperial power. This repertoire, I show, incorporated Confucian, Daoist, and early medieval Chinese poetic views that locate virtue, the Way (*dao* 道), and the vital pneuma (*qi* 氣) in the world of nature, rather than the world of humans. I then consider how the earliest articulations of a Buddhist cosmic imaginary began to take shape as inflections of this repertoire. Whereas the Confucian elements of the repertoire stressed active cultivation of virtue and its Daoist elements, passivity and stillness, its Buddhist inflections placed greater emphasis on engaging in ascetic practice and meditation in order to awaken to the enlightening wisdom that lies immanent in the natural world.

A guiding insight of my analysis is that human culture emerges out of a socially shared background that frames the way we understand and engage with the world and, therefore, is never entirely disembedded from the world in which we live. For this reason, before considering the Buddhist reconfiguration of the cosmic imaginaries of the Asuka-Nara period, I examine the social and natural world that fostered this reconfiguration. That world, I suggest, was the mountains of Japan outside the spheres of imperial power and the Buddhist establishment in Nara; and it was this world that provided the background for Saichō and Kūkai’s reconfiguration of the Asuka-Nara cosmic imaginary in the early Heian period. In analyzing their reconfiguration, I clarify the emergence of a new Buddhist understanding of human agency that, in contrast to the Asuka-Nara-period repertoire of Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginaries, sees humans as dependently arisen Buddhas in the world. Thus, in what follows, I show that the cultural significance of the founding of Tendai and Shingon in early Heian Japan lay not in the formulation of a new ruling ideology nor in the construction of a new discourse but rather in the reconfiguration of the way people in Japan sensed, felt, and spontaneously imagined the world—that is, in the emergence of a new cosmic imaginary.<sup>3</sup>

3. It is worth stressing here that I aim to describe only the *emergence* of this imaginary, which, in a precise sense, refers only to the reconfiguration of the Asuka-Nara cosmic imaginaries. I do not intend to suggest that this imaginary was immediately adopted by everyone in Japan; only through its further articulation, particularly by Saichō’s successors on Mount Hiei, Ennin 円仁 (794–864), Enchin 円珍 (814–891), and Annen 安然 (841?–915?), did it begin to spread more extensively, first through the aristocracy and, only later, through the general population. Consideration of this process of its articulation and spread must be reserved for a separate study.

*The Confucian-Daoist Imagination of Nature in Asuka-Nara Japan*

The eighth century was a period of dynamic cultural growth in Japan, a time when “foreign stimuli created a synthesis with native ways” (BENDER 2012, 111). In this period of creative synthesis, we observe the efflorescence of a plurality of cosmic imaginaries based on the cultural traditions of Shinto, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Any single articulation of these cosmic imaginaries, moreover, was mixed. In the earliest Japanese collections of poetry, the *Kaifūsō* and the *Man'yōshū*, we find many poems that articulate a cosmic imaginary oriented toward, or presented for the purpose of, exalting the Japanese emperor.<sup>4</sup> In his recent study on the *Man'yōshū*, Torquil Duthie focuses on what I call the cosmic imaginary by using the term, “imperial imaginary (or imagination).” Duthie’s concept is illuminating. In contrast to what Herman OOMS (2009, xvi) has called “imperial symbolics,” Duthie’s concept of imperial imaginary is intended to elucidate not only the ways in which symbols and texts sacralize the authority, status, and power of the state but also the ways in which they “make sense of the entire world” (DUTHIE 2014, 86). He aptly points out, moreover, that there was more than one way to imagine the emperor’s power, that there was “a varied repertoire of imperial imaginaries” (DUTHIE 2014, 3). I follow Duthie in looking to the entire repertoire of imaginaries that helped Japanese in the ancient period make sense of the world. However, I contend that not all ways of making sense of the world that we see in the *Kaifūsō* and *Man'yōshū* orbit around the figure of the emperor. Some give voice to the experience of a courtier beyond his official capacities as a loyal minister of the emperor. Others, especially poems from the early Nara period on, are peculiar to poets who lived their lives at the margins of the imperium and, therefore, exist tangentially, at best, in relation to the imperial imagination. These poems especially are less conceptual in their treatment of nature and are thus closer to articulations of a background *sense* of the world. For this reason, in considering such poems, it is more apt to talk of cosmic, rather than imperial, imaginaries; the former referring to a sense and feel of the world, whereas the latter, a conceptual understanding, or even a discourse, concerned with imposing, or constructing, a particular political meaning of things in the world.

From our primary poetic sources of this period, the *Kaifūsō* and the *Man'yōshū*, we can discern the contours of two distinct but interrelated cosmic

4. In the *Man'yōshū*, see, for example, a set of four imperially ordered poems, two *chōka* and two envoys, by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 (662–710) composed in honor of a visit by Empress Jitō to the imperial villa in Yoshino (CRANSTON 1993, 193–95). In the *Kaifūsō*, see, for example, poem number twenty, “Following the Procession at the Bequest of the Emperor” (*jūga ōshō* 從駕応詔) by Kose no Tayasu 巨勢多益須 (663–710) (NKBT 69: 90) and poem number seventy-three, “Dedication to the Emperor upon Following Him to the Yoshino Palace” (*Yoshino no miya ni koshō su* 扈從吉野宮), by Ki no Ohito 紀男人 (682–738) (NKBT 69: 136–37).

imaginaries. Since they are related, I will, for the sake of clarity, refer to them in the singular as a Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary, but I do so with the caveat that they span a plurality of meanings and ways of being in the world.

The first is more general and hews more closely to the classical texts of the Confucian and Daoist traditions. In this imaginary, emphasis is placed on the cultivation of the Confucian virtues of benevolence and wisdom through Daoist retreat into the mountains. The *Kaifūsō* features the most striking example of this way of understanding nature. In poem number thirty-nine, “Expressing Sentiments about a Mountain Hermitage,” (*Sansai kokorozashi o iu* 山齋言志) the courtier Ōmiwa no Yasumaro 大神安麻呂 (d. 714) states his desire to live in seclusion on a mountain:

Wishing to understand the meaning of a quiet retreat,  
I have come to a tranquil [place] in the mountain by the stream.  
Beyond the mist and clouds that sink and float,  
I find joy in the flowers in the autumn fields.  
The rice leaves, burdened with frost, have fallen over;  
The cries of the cicadas are blown by the wind.  
I just enjoy the excellence of benevolence and wisdom;  
Why must I speak of the pleasures of the capital city?           (NKBT 69: 107)

Yasumaro here emphasizes the feeling of joy he receives when he escapes city life and is finally able to devote himself wholly to the pursuit of benevolence and wisdom in the mountains. The natural landscape of the mountains provides the ideal environment for this pursuit. He depicts the Confucian virtues of benevolence (*jin* 仁) and wisdom (*zhi* 智) as immanent in the natural world of mountains through allusion to the line from the *Analects*, “The wise enjoy water. The benevolent enjoy mountains. The wise act. The benevolent remain quiet. The wise are joyful. The benevolent live long” (KBTK 1: 142). This statement served as a *locus classicus* for Confucian presentations of nature in the *Kaifūsō*. Yasumaro, however, combines it with Daoist sentiments; namely, that it is in nature, apart from the world of humans, where the rice leaves are laden with frost and the wind carries the cries of the cicadas, that one discovers true virtue. In Yasumaro’s poem, then, we see the poet consciously rejecting the life of the capital and actively pursuing self-cultivation through seclusion in nature, beyond the sphere of the imperial court.

The second is a poetic specification of the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary. It first appears in a preface to a poem in the *Kaifūsō* by the scholar of Chinese literature, Shimotsuke no Mushimaro 下毛野虫麻呂 (active 717–724), and then is further developed and adapted by the poet and likely compiler of the *Man’yōshū*, Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (718?–785). As TATSUMI Masaaki (2008, 25–28) has recently argued with regard to Mushimaro, and NAKANISHI Susumu (2007,

67–71) has suggested with regard to Yakamochi, this poetic understanding of nature can be traced back to the 502 poetic treatise, the *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, by the Chinese literatus Liu Xie 劉勰 (465–521). Both Tatsumi and Nakanishi call attention to a key term from the *Wenxin diaolong* that figures in the poetic remarks of Mushimaro and Yakamochi: “the appearance of things,” or *wuse* 物色 in Chinese.

In the chapter entitled, “Appearance of Things,” Liu elaborates on this term in a discussion of the natural world and its constitutive relation to the human heart:

Spring and autumn roll around, succeeding one another, and the yin and yang principles alternately darken and brighten. When the appearance of things changes, our hearts are also affected. When the yang principle begins to ascend, ants burrow, and when the yin principle congeals, the mantis begins to feed. Insignificant as these insects are, even they are affected. Profoundly indeed do things change across the four seasons. Excellent jade inspires the mind of the intelligent, and glorious flowers shower splendor upon the vital pneuma that is pure. The appearance of things draws us in. Who could rest without being captivated?

(KBTK 65: 618; translation slightly modified from SHIH 2015, 323)

Liu here refers to what we would call “nature” by the term “the appearance of things.” In contrast to Western materialist understandings of nature as inert and empty of emotional significance, Liu, by this term, draws attention to how changes in the seasons bring new configurations of the cosmic forces of yin and yang and how these new configurations, in turn, affect living beings, from insects all the way to any being with a vital pneuma that is pure. These changes in the appearance of things “draw us in.” We are transformed and cannot help but be moved in our hearts.

Liu Xie’s view of nature as composed of things that move the human heart is central to his conception of literature. A key feature of this conception of literature—and an aspect of Chinese poetic thought with which we see poets in Nara Japan such as Mushimaro and Yakamochi grappling—is a marked emphasis on passivity and naturalness (*ziran* 自然) in the poetic apprehension and expression of the appearance of things. To frame our discussion of the Japanese reception of the Chinese poetical understanding of nature, then, let us look more closely at Liu’s understanding of the proper relation of the poet to the world.

In chapter 6, “An Elucidation of Poetry,” Liu suggests that good poetry comes from a heart that responds naturally to things in the world. Extending the classical Chinese notion that poetry is the expression of intention (*zhi* 志), he avers that poetry is “apprehension” (*chi* 持):

Humans are endowed with seven emotions. In coming into contact with things (*wu* 物), these emotions arise in response. In responding to things, one sings to express one's sentiments. All this is perfectly natural.

(КВТК 64: 83; translation modified from SHIH 2015, 40)

Liu, in other words, insists that to compose good poetry the poet must come into contact with and respond to the appearance of things entirely “naturally.” Only then will the poetic sentiment, or intention, be authentic. What, however, does he mean by “natural”?

Reading the discussion that follows later in the chapter, we find that Liu is particularly critical of highly conceptual poetry. Specifically, he mentions the poetry of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420) by poets such as Sun Chuo 孫綽 (320–377). Criticizing it for indulging in Daoist metaphysics, he suggests that it was only when the philosophy of Zhuangzi and Laozi had begun to recede in the subsequent dynasty, the Liu Song (420–479), that the theme of mountains and streams—that is, what we often call in English “nature poetry”—began to flourish (SHIH 2015, 43–44). Yet, despite this criticism of Daoist metaphysics, Liu advocates an essentially Daoist approach to the literary problem of how to naturally apprehend things in nature and thereby compose good poetry.

In chapter 26, “Spiritual Imagination,” he writes, “In shaping and molding literary thinking, of utmost importance is emptiness and stillness (*xujing* 虛靜) whereby one cleanses the five viscera and purifies the spirit” (КВТК 65: 396; translation modified from SHIH 2015, 204). As Shuen-Fu LIN (2001, 155) has shown, Liu's reference to “emptiness and stillness” alludes to the following passage from the *Daodejing*:

I do my utmost to attain emptiness;  
I hold firmly to stillness.  
The myriad creatures all rise together  
And I watch their return.  
The teeming creatures  
All return to their separate roots.  
Returning to one's roots is known as stillness. (LAU 1963, 72)

Here the *Daodejing* advocates a way of perceiving the world freed from human conceptualizations and artifice. In this view, it is only in a state of stillness that the true nature of things is revealed. Thus, by invoking the importance of emptiness and stillness, Liu recommends a Daoist passivity and receptivity to the appearance of things in the natural world as the wellspring for creativity. Insofar as it privileges a passive and “natural” mode of human agency in the apprehension of things in the natural world, his poetics articulate what we might characterize in a general way as a kind of Daoist naturalism. Such a characterization will prove useful when we are attempting to distinguish it from the form of Bud-



dhist naturalism that Saichō and Kūkai came to articulate in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

The textual evidence of the impact that Liu Xie's poetic thought had on Japanese poetry of the eighth century is limited to the citation of his term "appearance of things" in the poetic writings of the above mentioned Mushimaro and Yakamochi. Yet, through analysis of the context in which we find these citations, we can infer the ways in which Japanese poets attempted to adopt the Daoist naturalist understanding of human agency that underpins Liu's use of the term. As already mentioned, the first use of the term appears in a poem-preface in the *Kaifūsō* by Shimotsuke no Mushimaro. The preface is entitled, "Banquet at the Residence of Prince Nagaya for Guests from Silla on an Autumn Day" (*Shūjitsu chō'ō no taku ni Shiragi no kyaku o shite utagesu* 秋日於長王宅宴新羅客), and, as the title suggests, was written for a collection of poems composed at a poetry banquet hosted by Prince Nagaya 長屋王 (684–729) for guests visiting from Korea. In it, Mushimaro frames the poetry gathering with a discussion of the Chinese notion of autumn as a season of melancholy, stating that "the *qi* of autumn is melancholic" (*shūki wa kanashimu beshi* 秋氣可悲) (NKBT 69: 128). He then suggests that those who "are able to feel the pathos" (*awaremu beshi* 可憐) of "the things of this time of year" (*saikō no jibutsu* 歲光時物) may, in fact, delight in them and find them worthy of praise. Feeling pathos in response to the way things change over the course of a year, in other words, can be a source of solace for one who is refined enough to appreciate such things. Herein, he suggests, lies the purpose of the banquet: to feel together in a bond of friendship the pathos of seasonal change and, in communing thus, forget the melancholy of autumn and, also, for the guests from Korea, anxieties about the voyage home. After describing the emperor's virtuous governance in Daoist terms as a kind of "non-action" (*wuwei* 無為), Mushimaro offers a naturalistic description of the scene before him:

Today the humidity has begun to relent, and on the hill the evening sun visits us. Cold clouds surround the peaks and a cool breeze blows in the four directions. Silently, the autumn dew falls upon the south-facing arbor. Harmoniously, the blue-green mist rises in the woods to the north. Nothing surpasses for inspiration the sight of the grasses bending and the yellow leaves of the trees scattering.

(NKBT 69: 129)

This scene is not a landscape of neutral "objects"; rather, it moves the poets and inspires in them a desire to enter more deeply into it. Mushimaro continues, "Called forth by the appearance of things (*busshoku aimesu* 物色相召), we feel compelled to stroll through the places where the mist and fog dwell. Mountains and rivers nourish benevolence [and wisdom], but there is no time to linger." And so, he writes, they immediately "give form in words to the phenomena" before them.

Elements of the Confucian-Daoist imperial imaginary remain in Mushimaro's preface. Yet, his central focus lies not in the presentation of metaphysical concepts but rather in the depiction of the flow of *qi* through the natural environment. While not independent of an imperial imaginary, Mushimaro's preface can be understood as the earliest indication that early Nara-period poets were beginning to compose a new kind of poetry that disclosed their own background sense of—and feel for—things in the natural world, that a cosmic imaginary, in other words, was taking shape.

Liu Xie's poetics of the appearance of things also made its way into the *Man'yōshū*, where poets drew on it in a way that distanced them further from the Confucian-Daoist imperial imaginary. There are three references to "the appearance of things" in the *Man'yōshū*, all in connection with the poetry of Yakamochi. Son of the *Man'yō* poet Ōtomo no Tabito 大伴旅人 (665–731), Yakamochi was well versed in Chinese letters, and, along with his many poems in various Chinese styles and lengthy poem-prefaces in *kanbun*, his references to the notion of "the appearance of things" suggests his familiarity with the poetic views set forth in Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong*.

The first reference is by Yakamochi's favorite poetic correspondent and fellow kinsman, Ōtomo no Ikenushi 大伴池主 (d.u.). In the preface to his reply to poems that Yakamochi sent to him when Yakamochi fell ill in the spring of 747, Ikenushi uses the term in reference to what he sees as an anomaly: his friend Yakamochi is not feeling well in spring, a time of joy, and thus the sensitive poet's feelings are not attuned, as they usually are, to the "appearance of things," the feelings that things in nature offer up to the poet (NKBT 7: 205). The other two references appear in notes Yakamochi appended to his own poems. One describes a sequence of three poems from 743 as being "composed upon looking at the appearance of things" (*busshoku o mite tsukureri* 見物色作) (NKBT 5: 333), and the other states that a poem from 757 was "composed in feeling sadness [in response to] the transformation of the appearance of things" (*kore o busshoku no henka o kanashibiite tsukureri* 悲怜物色变化作之也) (NKBT 7: 476). The poems are naturalistic in their description of the poet's world, disclosing his refined attunement to subtle transformations in nature. The last poem in the series of three poems composed in 743 is representative:

<i>Aki no no ni</i>	In the fields of autumn
<i>Sakikeru akihagi</i>	The bush clover has bloomed.
<i>Aki kaze ni</i>	Before the autumn wind
<i>Nabikeru ue ni</i>	Bends its flowers, and upon them
<i>Aki no tsuyu okeri</i>	Form beads of autumn dew.

(NKBT 5: 333)

From a broad autumnal landscape, the poem zooms in on a fine detail: the beads of dew forming on the bush clover bending before the autumn wind. The poet's perception of things in the natural world is keen. Yet, unlike poems by Yakamochi that we will examine below, his feelings upon apprehending these phenomena are less clearly expressed.

Yakamochi appends other poetic notes as well that similarly explain the origins of the poem in his perception of and receptivity to transformations in the natural world, albeit without citing the term "appearance of things." One note to a *chōka*, or long poem, and two envoys on the cuckoo, or *hototogisu*, and summer flowers from 751, for example, states that it was composed "in response to stimuli [in the environment]" (*kyō ni yorite kanete tsukureri* 依興預作) (NKBT 7: 331); while another note to a pair of poems from 750 on the *hototogisu* explains that he composed them, "in responding to the season of early summer in the fourth month" (*rikka shigatsu no setsu ni atareri* 応立夏四月節) (NKBT 7: 333). Notes such as these indicate Yakamochi's understanding of each season as distinguished by a particular mood or configuration of *qi*, as we saw in the passage from the *Wenxin diaolong* above, and, moreover, his interest in apprehending this seasonal mood and giving expression to it in poetry.

In the second month of 753, Yakamochi composed three poems and appended to them a note that together offer us a window onto his attempts to fully assimilate the understanding of nature and being human that we observed in Liu Xie's poetics. The poems show the poet meditating on a spring landscape from his garden. Even though it is spring, his mood is melancholic and lonely, and his attention is pulled towards the appearance of things in the spring landscape that align with his melancholic mood. To borrow a Wordsworthian expression introduced in Edwin Cranston's insightful discussion of these poems, the poet's mind and the landscape in these first two poems are perfectly "interfused":

<i>Haru no no ni</i>	Over the spring moors
<i>Kasumi tanabiki</i>	Hovers a hazy, drifting mist
<i>Uraganashi</i>	All too sad at heart
<i>Kono yūkage ni</i>	Somewhere in this shadowed light
<i>Uguisu naku mo</i>	At evening a warbler sings.

<i>Wa ga yado no</i>	In the small cluster
<i>Isasa muratake</i>	Of bamboo around my house
<i>Fuku kaze no</i>	A wind is stirring:
<i>Oto no kasokeki</i>	Tonight the faintest rustling comes
<i>Kono yūhe kamo</i>	Across the dusky air.

(CRANSTON 1993, 476)

The third, composed two days after the above, shows the poet's sad mood in a new light, as fundamentally out of alignment with the mood of the spring landscape: unlike the skylark, or perhaps skylarks, that rise up high toward the shining sun on a bright spring day, the poet is earth bound, alone, his feelings ponderous:

<i>Uraura ni</i>	In the endless calm
<i>Tereru haruhi ni</i>	Of a spring day bright with sun
<i>Hibari agari</i>	A skylark rises;
<i>Kokoroganashi mo</i>	And my heart—how sad it is
<i>Hitori shi omoeba</i>	As I ponder here alone.

(CRANSTON 1993, 476)

The note that comes after this last poem of the series states Yakamochi's intention to use poetry to elevate his mood. He writes, "The spring days are lengthening, the orioles are in full cry. Without poetry it would be hard indeed to dispel my cares. And so I compose these poems to loosen my knotted feelings." The first statement in the first sentence appears in two poems from the *Shijing* and is also cited by Liu Xie in a verse that concludes the chapter, "The Appearance of Things" (see NAKANISHI 2007, 69–70). The note thus suggests Yakamochi's erudition and his intimate familiarity with classical Chinese poetics. Moreover, it shows him attempting to conform to that tradition by aiming to dispel his cares through poetry. The idea of dispelling cares through poetry figures in the *Shi pin* 詩品 by Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (ca. 468–518), another Six-Dynasties poetic treatise that was highly influential for poets of Nara Japan. Yet, Yakamochi's poems show the poet struggling to live with this poetic understanding of the cosmos: he knows spring is a time of joy, as his friend Ikenushi reminded him in his letter, and yet he remains unable to attune himself to the joy of spring as determined by the tradition. In the first two poems, contrary to the ideals of the Chinese poetic tradition, he perceives the melancholic overtones of spring; in the last, he describes what should, according to the tradition, be viewed with great joy, the rising of skylarks toward the sun, and yet he remains unable to liberate himself from the weight of his sadness. The poems, in other words, depict the poet's failure to live up to the lofty Chinese poetic tradition. But, in the failure itself, we observe an authentic grappling with the appearance of things. Yakamochi in these poems is thus disclosing how the things in the spring landscape before him make him feel, despite the poetic tradition for which he has such profound admiration.

### *Buddhist Inflections of the Confucian-Daoist Cosmic Imaginary*

In Yakamochi's poems and poetic statements preserved in the *Man'yōshū*, we observe a poet who was not only steeped in the Chinese poetic tradition but also

attempted to live out the understanding of the world articulated by that tradition in and through his poetry. Thus, it is curious that among his last recorded poems in the *Man'yōshū* is a pair of poems on his desire to practice the Buddhist path, or “Way” (*michi o osamemu to omoi* 欲修道) (NKBT 7: 460). Composed in the sixth month of 756 as he was lying ill and “feeling sadness over impermanence” (*mujō o kanashibi* 悲無常), the poems express his desire to “gaze on beauty / In clear mountains and rivers” (*yama kawa no sayakeki mitsutsu* 夜麻加波乃佐夜氣吉見都々) and seek there “the Way that is so pure” (*kiyoki sono michi* 伎欲吉曾能美知) (CRANSTON 1993, 480). Although Yakamochi did not articulate this view until close to the end of his long poetic career, interest among poets in the pursuit of Buddhist practice in the mountains can be traced back as early as the late Asuka period. Yet this interest in mountain Buddhism remained grounded in Confucian-Daoist understandings of nature. Thus, rather than independent Buddhist cosmic imaginaries, early articulations of a Buddhist imagination of nature are best understood as inflections of the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary that predominated from the late-Asuka to the mid-Nara period.

There are three extant poems from the late-Asuka to the mid-Nara that describe Buddhist practice on a mountain. All are *kanshi* poems preserved in the *Kaifūsō*. The earliest is by the monk Chizō 智藏 (active during the reign of Jitō, 686–697) who traveled to Tang China to study Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Tenji (661–671). Like Yasumaro’s poem above, Chizō’s poem, “Stating My Sentiments on an Autumn Day” (*Shūjitsu kokorozashi o iu* 秋日言志, poem 9), expresses the poet’s desire to seclude himself in the mountains in order to better appreciate the Confucian virtues of benevolence and wisdom. The poem begins: “Wishing to discover a place where I can attain my nature / I went out to seek the feeling of benevolence and wisdom [in the mountains]” (NKBT 69: 80). He then offers a description of the natural landscape, noting that:

The *qi* is fresh, and the mountain and its rivers are beautiful;  
The wind is lofty, and the climate is good.  
From the swallow’s nest, already the color of summer has left;  
On the bay where geese [flock], I hear the cries of autumn.

Chizō concludes the poem with a reference to the seven sages of the bamboo grove, a third-century group of literati and musicians associated with the *qingtan* 清談 (lit., pure conversation) school of Daoism: “Thanks to my friends of the bamboo grove / I am no longer preoccupied with wealth or shame.” Thus renouncing social recognition and otherworldly concerns, Chizō expresses a Daoist desire to pursue “non-action” by retreating into the bamboo groves in the mountain. For Chizō, as for the seven sages he references, this pursuit of non-action is indistinguishable from a Buddhist renunciation of the world, and thus,

in his poem, the Buddhist understanding of the world is not yet independent from the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary.

The second is by the monk Dōji 道慈 (d. 744), a disciple of Chizō who traveled to the Tang in 701. Dōji composed the poem as part of his declination to attend a banquet hosted by Prince Nagaya, as its title indicates, “Composed at a Mountain Temple Among the Bamboo in Early Spring in Declination to Prince Nagaya’s Invitation to Attend His Banquet” (*Shoshun chikukei no yamadera ni ari Chōō no taku ni oite utage su ji o itasu* 初春在竹溪山寺於長王宅宴道致辭, poem 104). The poem depicts the poet engaged in extreme ascetic practices on the mountain:

My monk’s robes barely cover my body in the cold;  
 My alms bowl is just enough to stave off starvation.  
 I weave vines to make a curtain [to protect from the wind];  
 And, with rock as my pillow, I lie in between the crags.  
 Secluding myself, I cut off connections with the profane world;  
 Purifying my heart, I strive to abide in true emptiness.  
 With my cane, I climb the high mountain;  
 Baring my breast, I receive the soft wind.  
 Among the peach blossoms dances the snow;  
 Mount Zhuxi is serene.  
 Awakened by spring, the willows bud;  
 And yet, the lingering cold is harsh. (NKBT 69: 166–67)

In comparison to Chizō’s poem, Dōji gives us a picture of a dedicated Buddhist monk. Although he does not mention the specific practices he is engaging in, he does refer to a specific Buddhist teaching, emptiness (*kū* 空). Nonetheless, the poem remains steeped in the Confucian-Daoist tradition. In his reference to “baring his breast” to “receive the soft wind,” Dōji incorporates the poetic specification of the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary that we observed in Liu Xie, Mushimaro, and Yakamochi. This image is drawn from a *fu*, or rhapsody, attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 (ca. 319–298 BCE) (for a translation, see WALEY 1919, 24–26), who came to be viewed in early medieval China as a key figure in the poetic articulation of the inherent pathos of things in nature. The poem appears in the early sixth-century anthology, the *Wenxuan* 文選, where we find it spuriously attributed to Song Yu under the category, “The Appearance of Things” (*wuse*), and is mentioned by Liu Xie as a paradigm example of how the poetic form of *fu* achieved its independence. The image thus suggests an orientation toward being in nature that attempts to cultivate an openness to its moods and pathos. The last image of the willow buds awakening by the spring weather juxtaposed with the harsh cold of the winter suggests a sophisticated poetic technique that expresses the feelings of the poet through naturalistic descriptions of the landscape. Dōji then ends his poem with a Daoist expression. In stating his

reason for being unable to attend, he refers to himself using the Daoist expression “a man beyond the realm [of society]” (*hōgai no shi* 方外士). Thus, although Dōji presents himself as a dedicated Buddhist monk, he still remains firmly situated within a Daoist vocabulary and orientation toward the natural world.

The third is the most explicitly Buddhist poem, as it describes the practice of meditation (*zen* 禪) on Mount Hiei and the various accoutrements used for such meditation. Composed in 745 by the lay aristocrat Asada no Yōshun (or Yasu) 麻田陽春 (d.u.) in reply to a poem by the eminent statesman, also lay, Fujiwara no Nakamaro 藤原仲麻呂 (706–764), about “the old place for zen meditation” on Mount Hiei of his deceased father, Fujiwara no Muchimaro 藤原武智麻呂 (680–737), the poem is also the most syncretic of the three. Yet, perhaps because of the distance of the poet from Muchimaro’s experience in the mountain described in the poem, the poem is more conceptual, lacking the expression of the feeling of fusion with the landscape that we observed in Dōji’s poem. It opens with a reference to Ōmi, the site of the imperial palace of Emperor Tenji and where Muchimaro served as provincial governor. In the second line, parallel to the first, Mount Hiei is described as a “mountain of the kami” (*shinsen* 神山). The mention of kami here suggests an early form of Shinto political theology wherein the kami are understood as key actors in the divine protection of the sovereign (on Nara-period Shinto political theology, see BENDER 2016, 13–14) and perhaps also an early instance of Shinto discourse on Japan as a “divine country,” or *shinkoku* 神国.<sup>5</sup> To describe the mountain, Yōshun uses phraseology common to both the Chinese Buddhist and Daoist traditions: “The mountain is quiet, and the profane dust quiescent. / The valley is still, and the true principle whole” (NKBT 69: 168). He then uses specifically Buddhist language to describe Muchimaro’s practice on the mountain: “Becoming awakened alone, he opened up good karma” (*hitori satori hōen o hiraku* 独悟闡芳緣). The accoutrements of his place for zen practice are also explicitly Buddhist: “The jeweled altar [of his place for zen meditation] faces the sky. / [The sound of] the Brahman bell mingles with the wind and carries [far away].” Yōshun then expresses regret for how quickly Muchimaro’s “place for zen meditation” (*zensho* 禪処) fell into decay after his death. His

5. KURODA (1996b) links the emergence of *shinkoku* discourse with the formation of the *kenmitsu* ideological system. This argument is based on his more fundamental view that what we call “Shinto” in the medieval period was really an element of the Buddhist tradition (KURODA 1981). This view of Shinto as a modern invention has been challenged by recent studies of Shinto in English; see, for example, HARDACRE (2017) and the aforementioned BENDER (2016). If there existed already in the mid-eighth century, as Bender has argued, a religious tradition distinct from Buddhism that we may call Shinto, then it is possible that there existed some form of Shinto discourse on Japan as a divine country, or *shinkoku*, during that time. I should also note that I use the term “country” to translate *koku* or *kuni* of *shinkoku* not to designate a modern nation-state but rather a distinct territory or land, which already by the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 of 720 had come to be understood by the name “Nihon.”



poem thus provides us with a personal and detailed description of zen meditation on a mountain, perhaps the earliest such description we have in the sources. Yet the poem is fundamentally Confucian in nature, for the poet's intent is to memorialize the deceased father of Nakamaro and present Nakamaro himself as a filial son, as the last line states in reference to the current state of the old spot for zen meditation, "Only a pair of willow trees remain, / And thus the filial bird [Nakamaro], from dawn to dusk, is saddened."

These three Buddhist poems in the *Kaifūsō*, some of the earliest intimate records of Buddhist practice in Japan, are highly syncretic in nature, combining Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist understandings of nature. Yet, in comparison to the Confucian-Daoist repertoire of cosmic imaginaries examined in the previous section, particularly as articulated by Mushimaro and Yakamochi, we observe especially in the latter two poems by Chizō and Yōshun the earliest indications of a new Buddhist understanding of human agency that places greater emphasis on actively striving to apprehend the truth immanent in nature. That is, whereas both Mushimaro and Yakamochi passively observe the configuration of *qi* in the landscape before them, Dōji, in our second poem, describes extreme forms of asceticism, and Yōshun, in our third, zen meditation. The natural world as apprehended through these more active modes of engagement, moreover, differs in two key ways: first, it constitutes a locus for awakening to the enlightening truths of the Buddhist tradition, "true emptiness" (*shinkū* 真空) in Dōji's poem and "the true principle" (*shinri* 真理) in Yōshun's;<sup>6</sup> second, it is more remote and extraordinary, or, we might even say, "sacred"; located not in the gardens of an aristocrat's home but rather in the high peaks of the mountains, "quiescent" and cut off from "the profane dust" of the world.<sup>7</sup> This latter observation, in particular, suggests that, in comparison to the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary, the new Buddhist understanding of nature accorded a special place to the mountains over and above the world of nature known to aristocrats in the capital. If we are to overcome the dominant textualist mode of interpreting premodern Japanese poetry, according to which poetry is necessarily born of poetry rather than any kind of engagement with the world, we must think carefully about the relation that pertains between the mountain environment and the poetic articulation of a new Buddhist understanding of that environment.

6. The Buddhist connotations of the term "true principle" are perhaps stronger than any possible Daoist implications, as the line that follows its mention states that Muchimaro "awakened alone and cultivated good karma"—attainments that can only properly be described as Buddhist. Moreover, the *Kokugo daijiten* 国語大辞典 also highlights the Buddhist meaning of this term: it points to this line from Yōshun's poem as the earliest instance of its Buddhist sense.

7. In this regard, there is a close affinity between Yasumaro's articulation of the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary, which emphasized a Daoist desire to retreat from society, and the Buddhist inflections of this imaginary.



*The Acceptance and Spread of Mountain Buddhism in the Late Nara Period*

Viewed phenomenologically, poetry is not representational but rather constitutive and articulative. To borrow an important phenomenological formula, it *discloses* a way of being-in-the-world. The cosmic imaginary disclosed in poetry, therefore, is not disembodied from the world of lived experience. It is not, in other words, a system of knowledge, or episteme, that can be invented entirely in the mind or in language divorced from an experience of things represented. Rather, it emerges out of the interaction between the mind and things perceived. Reflection may lead to adjustment and further refinement of this interaction, but it can never be cut off from it entirely, for once the imaginary no longer embeds the human agent in a world and allows him or her to imagine ways of possibly interacting with the world, it ceases to have any meaning.<sup>8</sup> Thus, our reading of the poems leads us to a consideration of how mountain practice in Nara Buddhism contributed to, first, the Buddhist inflections of the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginary we observed above and, ultimately, to its Buddhist reconfiguration in the early Heian period, which we will examine below.<sup>9</sup>

Let us begin with a consideration of Chizō, Dōji, and the subject of Yōshun's poem, Fujiwara no Muchimaro. From historical accounts of the lives of these three men, we know that the above poems' presentation of mountain practice was based, in fact, on their lived experience in the mountains. The *Kaifūsō* includes short biographies of both Chizō and Dōji. With regard to Chizō, it states that upon

8. On the reciprocal relation between understanding and embodied ways of engaging with the world, see DREYFUS and TAYLOR (2015, 54).

9. In the analysis that follows, I consider mountain Buddhism a form of "popular Buddhism" in the precise sense in that it aimed to achieve ends other than "state protection" (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家), such as healing, community building, and personal and collective salvation. By emphasizing the role of popular Buddhism in transforming the state's approach to Buddhism in the Nara and early Heian periods, I aim to challenge the common assumption that Nara Buddhism was essentially a kind of "state Buddhism" (*kokka Bukkyō* 国家仏教). In his recent study of the practice of sutra-copying in Nara Buddhism, Bryan LOWE (2017, 14–19) also challenges this assumption. Rather than setting up a distinction between "state" and "popular" Buddhism, Lowe pursues an approach that focuses on a single ritual practice—that of sutra-copying—and, through analysis of this practice, elucidates the social networks that cut across common sociological distinctions such as state, popular, and clan. While effective for nuancing our synchronic vision of the religious landscape of Nara Japan, such an approach hinders our understanding of its diachronic development. I, therefore, retain the term "popular Buddhism," with the understanding that it is an "ideal type" in the Weberian sense. While on-the-ground analyses of a single practice can show how the type did not ever exist in its pure form, ideal types help us to discern general trends and transformations within a religion over time. By the ideal type of "popular Buddhism," as will be clear, I mean to show how it emerged in reciprocal relation with the ideal type of "state Buddhism." In my use of this term, therefore, I do not intend to set up an opposition or dichotomy but rather a contrasting pair that shows how two types of Buddhism emerged and developed interdependently.

returning to Japan during the reign of Empress Jitō, he “climbed the mountain with his companions and aired out the sutra texts. Turning to face the wind, the Dharma Teacher bared his breast and said, ‘I shall air out the deep meaning of the sutra canon’” (NKBT 69: 78–79). The biography goes on to state that he proceeded to debate with various monks and his skill in responding to their arguments won him the favor of the emperor. The emperor’s recognition of his activities is particularly noteworthy as the court, since Emperor Tenmu’s edict of 679, explicitly prohibited monks from pursuing the study and practice of Buddhism outside the confines of state-sanctioned temples, which were located in the plains of the Nara basin. Thus, the example of Chizō reveals an ambivalence in the court’s stance toward mountain Buddhism, one that continued well into the eighth century.

The *Kaifūsō*’s biography of Dōji tells us that he returned to the mountains after retiring from his official post as preceptor in the state-supervised branch of the Buddhist clergy, the Office of Monastic Affairs (*sōgō* 僧綱) (NKBT 69: 164–65). Although the nature of his practice in the mountains is not described, the biography lends historical evidence in support of the image of a mountain ascetic that he presents in his poem. Like his teacher Chizō, Dōji was an eminent monk in the Nara Buddhist establishment who had won the favor of the emperor for his learning and yet still, despite official prohibitions of the state, retreated into the mountains to pursue the practice of Buddhism.

Though an eminent statesman, Muchimaro also appears to have been genuinely committed to mountain practice. According to his biography, the *Muchimaro den* 武智麻呂伝, he revered the Buddha’s teachings and sought to attain enlightenment, always worshipping at monasteries even when he had official business; and his reverence for the teachings ultimately led him to climb Mount Hiei and set up a hermitage, where he lived out the rest of his days (cited in YAMAGUCHI 2008, 155).<sup>10</sup> From this account, then, we know that Yōshun’s poetic presentation referred to Muchimaro’s lived experience in the mountains.

In addition to eminent scholar-monks such as Chizō and Dōji, there were also monks who pursued mountain asceticism on the margins of the Buddhist establishment. The most important example of such a monk is Gyōki 行基 (668–749). Gyōki began his studies of Buddhism at the state-sponsored temple in Nara, Asukadera, under the eminent monk and Hossō scholar, Dōshō 道昭 (629–700). Eventually, however, he left the urban temple to pursue the practice of Buddhism in the Ikoma mountains (AUGUSTINE 2004, 20). At the age of forty, he began preaching directly to commoners and organizing civil works and other construction projects for their benefit. Through his efforts, Gyōki acquired fame among the people and garnered the attention even of the emperor. It is not unlikely, therefore, that

10. On the larger biographical record of the Fujiwara clan in which the *Muchimaro den* appears, the *Tōshi kaden* 藤氏家伝, see BAUER (2017, 483).

interest in mountain Buddhism by laypeople such as Muchimaro and Yakamochi was informed by his popular movement.

While the state seemed to make tacit exceptions for eminent scholar-monks who pursued mountain practice, it was, at least initially, less accommodating of mountain practitioners who mobilized the people at the grassroots level. In 701, the state issued a set of seven articles outlining the rules and regulations for monks and nuns called the *sōniryō* 僧尼令 as part of its legal code known as the *ritsuryō* 律令. Among its seven articles, article five prohibited any monk or nun from “resid[ing] outside of temples, build[ing] practice halls, [and] gather[ing] and preach[ing] to the masses” (AUGUSTINE 2004, 49). In accordance with these rules, in 717, the state issued an imperial edict explicitly condemning Gyōki’s activities (AUGUSTINE 2004, 47). The state’s opposition, however, was short-lived. In 745, Emperor Shōmu granted Gyōki the prestigious rank of Daisōjō 大僧正 (Great Chief Executive) in the Office of Monastic Affairs, the first monk in Japan to receive this honor. The example of Gyōki thus highlights the state’s evolving and often contradictory strategies for managing forms of Buddhism that took shape in the mountains outside of the establishment in the Nara capital.

After Gyōki and the composition of Yōshun’s and Yakamochi’s poems, the state’s relation to mountain Buddhism continued to evolve. A key figure in the history is Dōkyō 道鏡 (d. 772), a learned monk who had gained a reputation for himself as a meditation master (*zenji* 禪師) and powerful healer through his practice of austerities on Mount Katsuragi. In 752, Dōkyō was called to court to serve Empress Kōken (r. 749–758; as Empress Shōtoku r. 764–770) (BENDER 1979, 138). Nine years later, in 761, he cured the empress of a serious illness and, for his services, received special favor from her. After capturing and killing his primary political rival, Fujiwara no Nakamaro, in 764, he wielded uncontested influence at court. During his time in power, as one would expect, he promoted the propagation of state Buddhism (BENDER 1979, 140). Ironically, though hailing from a background of mountain practice, he issued an edict banning the pursuit of mountain asceticism immediately after taking the reins of power. The edict is mentioned in a request presented by the Sangha to the imperial court to lift the ban on mountain practice in the tenth month of 770, just after Empress Kōken died and Dōkyō was summarily exiled:

On the twenty-eighth day, the Office of Monastic Affairs thus submits to the emperor: In Tenpyō Hōji 8 (764), an imperial edict was issued that placed a strict ban on delinquent monks gathering in private more than one monk at a monastic institution in the mountain forests and chanting the sutras and performing repentance there. As a result, for a long time now, the traces of meditation in the mountain forests under the trees have disappeared and in the monasteries the echoes of the Brahman [bells] have ceased. Even the lay gentlemen Chao [Fu] and Xu [You] had reverence for taking delight in retiring [from

the world]. How much more so the followers of Śākyamuni who have left their homes! How could there not be any who dwell in seclusion [in the mountain forests]? Thus, we beseech you: please allow by imperial edict long-abiding followers to pursue their austerities. (KT 2: 386)

The request refers specifically to an edict to ban mountain practice in 764, the year Dōkyō rose to power. As a meditation master and mountain practitioner himself, Dōkyō seems to have been keenly sensitive to the potential threat mountain Buddhism posed to established forms of power. Indeed, as we observed above, Nakamaro, Dōkyō's primarily political rival, was also associated with mountain Buddhism, and it thus seems likely that this political rivalry was not unrelated to the ban.

The request is furthermore noteworthy for the case it makes for the necessity of mountain practice for Buddhist monks. It does so primarily through an allusion to the mythical Confucian paragons of virtue, Chao Fu 巢父 and Xu You 許由, the latter of whom, according to legend, retreated into a mountain upon receiving an offer by the mythical Chinese Emperor Yao to ascend to the throne (while in the mountain he was helped by his friend Chao Fu). The allusion implies that practitioners of mountain Buddhism are not only virtuous but also uninterested in seizing the reins of power and thus fundamentally different from power-hungry monks such as Dōkyō. By drawing on Confucian legends about sages who lived life in the mountains, it suggests that Buddhism is not incompatible with Confucian principles that affirmed the cultivation of virtue through seclusion in nature.

Upon receiving the request, Emperor Kōnin (r. 770–781) lifted the ban, thus marking a turning point in the court's stance toward mountain Buddhism (FUNAOKA 1987, 24). As a second step in this reform, Emperor Kōnin in 772 established a system for appointing ten meditation masters to serve the emperor by attending to his health. Of the ten meditation masters, four were disciples of Gyōki and two were practitioners of mountain Buddhism (FUNAOKA 1987, 25). These reforms indicate that the court began to develop policies for incorporating and drawing on the power of popular, mountain-based Buddhism, rather than trying to suppress or destroy it altogether. These reforms laid the foundation for the Buddhist policies of subsequent emperors, Kanmu (r. 781–806) and Saga (r. 809–823). The policies of the courts of Kanmu and Saga, to be clear, were intended to reform, not to give monks free rein to practice in the mountains as they pleased. Consider, for example, Emperor Kanmu's announcement in Enryaku 17 (798) that article thirteen of the *sōniryō*, which states that monks and nuns who wish to pursue meditative training in the mountains must first receive permission from the appropriate temple authorities, will be strictly enforced (translated in ABÉ 1999, 82). This and other similar pronouncements by Emperor

Kanmu, however, should not be taken as indications that the state was hostile to mountain Buddhism. On the contrary, in the twenty years following Emperor Kōnin's lifting of the ban, the state sanctioned the building of numerous mountain temples, including Kokawadera 粉河寺 in Kii Province in 770, Chūzenji 中禪寺 by the monk Tokuitsu 徳一 (ca. 760–840) on Mount Tsukuba in 782, and Jingūji 神宮寺 on Mount Nikkō by the monk Shōdō 勝道 (735–817) in 784. In 786, Emperor Kanmu himself even built a mountain temple named Bonshakuji 梵釈寺 in Ōtsu.<sup>11</sup> In short, although the pursuit of austerities on the mountain by unsanctioned Buddhist practitioners was still not officially permitted by the Nara state, the shift in state policy on mountain practice following the exile of Dōkyō opened up new opportunities for mountain Buddhism to flourish in the late Nara period, and thus the stage was set for the introduction of new forms of Buddhism centering on the practice of meditation and other austerities in the mountains by Saichō and Kūkai in the early Heian period.<sup>12</sup>

*The Buddhist Reconfiguration of the  
Confucian-Daoist Cosmic Imaginary: Saichō and Kūkai*

In our examination of the Asuka-Nara repertoire of Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginaries, we observed the adoption and extension of the Chinese poetic of *wuse* in the poetics of Mushimaro and Yakamochi. According to our reading, this poetic emphasized passive receptivity to the energies (*qi*) of the natural world as the source of poetic creativity. The three Buddhist poems that we considered as inflections of this way of understanding nature introduced a more pronounced emphasis on actively striving to apprehend these natural energies and construed such striving as a way to abide in emptiness (Dōji) and awaken to the true principle (Yōshun). This inflection provided the basic material for the subsequent development of a distinct Buddhist cosmic imaginary wherein enlightened human agency is understood not as either passive or active but rather as a mode of selfless interaction with the environment. For this imaginary to emerge as a distinct way of understanding being-in-the-world, however,

11. The name Bonshakuji refers to the Buddhist protector deities Brahmā and Śakra and thus alludes to its function as a temple for protecting the Dharma, rather than the state per se. See HATOOKA (2016, 135).

12. In his landmark study of Saichō, Paul GRONER (2000, 179) similarly situates Saichō's establishment of the Tendai school in the context of late-Nara period reforms in state policy that recognized trends in Nara Buddhism toward more popular forms of practice, even arguing that "Saichō was thus fortunate to live at a time when government policies were often favorable to the establishment of new forms of Buddhism" (14). However, in his analysis of the factors that contributed to the shift in the state's stance toward Buddhism, Groner emphasizes sectarian competition within the Nara Buddhist establishment, whereas I call attention to the positive role of mountain Buddhism.

this material had to be brought further into the foreground of the ways people engaged with the world—that is, the Asuka-Nara repertoire of Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginaries had to be reconfigured.

As the Nara period drew to a close at the end of the eighth century, Saichō initiated this reconfiguring process through his systematic introduction of the Tiantai meditation practice, “cessation-and-contemplation” (*shikan* 止觀), and the Tiantai teaching that this practice seeks to realize, namely, the three truths (*santai* 三諦). The doctrine of the three truths, simply stated, holds that the ultimate truth of the Buddhist teachings lies immanent in ordinary phenomena.<sup>13</sup> Kūkai, seven years Saichō’s junior, contributed further to the construction of this new understanding of the world and enlightened human agency in it by introducing a new conception of the Buddha’s presence in the world and the practice by which one apprehends this presence: namely, the doctrine of the Mahāvairocana Buddha, a Dharma-Body of the Buddha—that is, a concrete embodiment of the truth of his teachings—immanent in nature and inherent in one’s own mind and the practice of the three mysteries (*sanmitsu* 三密) of body (*mudra*), speech (*mantra*), and mind (*mandala*). These practices and the doctrines that supported them were first established by Saichō and Kūkai in the context of the pursuit of the Buddhist teachings in the mountains outside the capital and thus on the margins of the Nara Buddhist establishment. Let us consider further each of these forms of mountain Buddhism, Saichō’s Tendai and Kūkai’s Shingon, in turn.

### Saichō

Saichō hailed from a lineage of Buddhist teachers who valued and pursued the practice of meditation in the mountains. At the age of twelve, he studied under the meditation master, Gyōhyō 行表 (722–797). Gyōhyō was a major disciple of Daoxuan 道璿 (702–760), a Chinese monk who emigrated to Japan in 733. While in China, Daoxuan studied Tiantai, Huayan, and Northern School Chan, or Zen. In his record of Dharma transmissions that he compiled after returning from Tang China, the *Naishō Buppō sōjō kechimyakufu* 内証仏法相承血脉譜, the only teaching Saichō traced back to his training in Japan is the Zen teaching he received via Gyōhyō and Daoxuan, thus suggesting the extent to which he valued this teaching (GRONER 2000, 24). Late in life, Daoxuan became ill and withdrew to the moun-

13. More specifically, the three truths refer to three interrelated aspects of reality: emptiness, or the absence of independent being; conventional existence, or the provisional being of the phenomenal world from the perspective of social convention and language; and the middle, or the simultaneous emptiness and conventional existence of all phenomena (see SWANSON 1989, 6–8). What matters for our discussion is that none of these truths stand above, or transcend, ordinary phenomena; in this sense, the ultimate truth of the Tendai teachings is to be located in ordinary phenomena, rather than somewhere beyond them.

tain temple Hisodera in Yoshino. Gyōhyō followed him and together they pursued meditative practices on the mountain until his death in 760.

Saichō studied under Gyōhyō at the state-sponsored temple Kokushōji in Ōmi until 785. That year, just after he turned nineteen years old, he traveled to Nara to receive full ordination at Tōdaiji. However, rather than pursuing the career of a monk-official in the capital that such an ordination qualified him for, Saichō made the uncommon decision to retreat into Mount Hiei. One important source of inspiration must have been the example of his teacher Gyōhyō. In addition, based on his biography, the *Eizan Daishi den* 叡山大師伝, we may also make the inference that his encounter with the Tiantai teachings and the meditation practice of *shikan* also informed his decision.

Following its citation of the short prayer text (*ganmon* 願文) that Saichō composed after climbing Mount Hiei, the *Eizan Daishi den* notes the texts that inspired Saichō to pursue his study of Tiantai. Prior to climbing the mountain, it mentions that he studied two works by the Huayan master Fazang 法藏 (643–712) as manuals for studying Tiantai: his commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, the *Dacheng qixinlun shu* 大乘起信論疏, and his treatise on the Huayan teaching of the one vehicle, the *Huayan wujiao zhang* 華嚴五教章 (DZ 5, *bekkan*: 7). The biography vividly depicts Saichō reading these texts, mentioning that every time he perused them, he shed tears, so keenly was he aware of how exceedingly rare it was for someone at that time to have access to the Tiantai teachings. Once he climbed the mountain, the biography tells us, Saichō met a person who knew Tiantai texts and, through this person, he was able to copy the major canonical Tiantai texts by the Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597): namely, the *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, the *Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義, the *Fahua wenji (shu)* 法華文句疏, the *Sijiao yi* 四教義, and the *Weimo jing shu* 維摩經疏 (DZ 5, *bekkan*: 7).<sup>14</sup> Thus, from this account in Saichō's biography, we know that the Tiantai teachings, as preserved in Fazang's writings, were particularly influential in Saichō's decision to climb Mount Hiei and that once he climbed the mountain he focused his attention on the study of Tiantai texts.

In his study of the *Daishi den*, SAEKI Arikaio (1992, 205–208) points to two citations of Zhiyi's writings in Fazang's commentaries that may have served as possible sources of inspiration for Saichō's turn to Tiantai and his pursuit of

14. In his analysis of this passage from the *Daishi den*, SAEKI Arikaio (1992, 210–14) shows that Saichō copied a manuscript of Zhiyi's writings that was brought to Japan by the Chinese monk Jianzhen 鑑真 (688–763) and his disciple Fajin 法進 (707–778) in the mid-eighth century. Moreover, he demonstrates that the particular copy of Zhiyi's *Mohe zhiguan* that Saichō copied belonged to the library of Bonshakuji. As noted above, Bonshakuji was a mountain temple built by Emperor Kanmu in the first month of 786, just months after Saichō climbed Mount Hiei. Thus, from this analysis of the early dissemination of Tiantai teachings, we can infer that they were of particular interest to monks who were pursuing Buddhist practice on the mountains.



Buddhist practice on Mount Hiei. The first, from Fazang's *Qixinlun shu*, refers to the section heading from Zhiyi's two-fascicle *Tiantai xiao zhiguan* 天台小止觀: "Those who pursue [the meditation practice of] cessation should dwell in a quiet place, sit upright, and rectify the mind," and cites an extended passage from Zhiyi's exposition of five preliminary conditions (*wuyuan* 五緣) for meditation.<sup>15</sup> The first of these preliminary conditions is to "live in seclusion in a quiet place; in other words, live in the mountains" (for the citation in the *Qixinlun shu*, see T 44.283a; in the *Xiao zhiguan*, see T 46.463b). This passage would have provided Saichō with a basis for believing that living in the mountains was an essential component of Tiantai practice, particularly *shikan* meditation. The second, from Fazang's *Wujiao zhang*, explains the fourfold classification of the teachings established by Zhiyi. Fazang identifies the Huayan teachings with Zhiyi's elaboration of the fourth and highest teaching, the perfect teaching, stating that the perfect teaching with which Zhiyi identifies his Tiantai teachings is no different than the teachings of the *Huayan Sutra*, for it reveals the truth that the Buddha's Dharma lies immanent in all things, or as Fazang puts it in distinctly Huayan terms: "The realm of phenomena freely endows all inexhaustible gates of the Dharma such that in one is all and in all is one" (T 45.481a). Fazang then even goes on to praise Zhiyi for his exceptional insight and understanding of the Buddhist teachings (T 45.481a). A passage such as this would have piqued even further Saichō's interest in Zhiyi's Tiantai teachings, and it is easy to imagine how it might have contributed to his understanding of those teachings as centering on the radical claim that the truth of the Buddha's teachings lies not only in scripture or ritual but also in ordinary phenomena. With this understanding in mind, he would have sufficient motivation to leave the monastic institution in the capital and seek out the truth of the Buddhist teachings on Mount Hiei, free from the distractions of society.

In his treatise, the *Kenkairon* 顯戒論, composed sometime after he established the Tendai school on Mount Hiei, Saichō, quoting a line from the *Foshuo famiejin jing* 仏說法滅盡經, explicates his rationale for mountain practice: "When one enters the mountains [to pursue] the three vehicles [of Mahāyāna], one naturally maintains, through grounding in the meritorious practices [of the six *pāramitās*], a tranquil composure and thus becomes joyful" (DZ 1: 156). In addition, later in the treatise, in an interpretation of a long passage from the *Da fangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經 on the six *pāramitās*, he writes, "The ultimate truth of the six *pāramitās* is to sit or lie in the mountain forests and to make all

15. For the passage as cited in Fazang's *Qixinlun shu*, see T 44.283a–b. As Saeki notes, Fazang, under the influence of the Korean Huayan master Wonhyo 元曉 (617–687), significantly alters Zhiyi's text. For the passage as it appears in the Taishō version of Zhiyi's *Xiao zhiguan*, see T 46.462a–3b. SWANSON (2007) discusses Zhiyi's *Xiao zhiguan* and his exposition of the "twenty-five means" to prepare for meditation, the broader category under which Zhiyi classifies the five preliminary conditions.



things that arise in one's thoughts perfect and full" (DZ 1: 159). In these two passages, then, we see explicitly laid out in Saichō's mature writings his evaluation of mountain practice as essential to the realization of the Buddhist teachings.

Saichō's mountain Buddhist practice emphasizes meditative training, particularly as it was expounded by Zhiyi in his *Mohe zhiguan*. The above-cited passage from the *Eizan Daishi den* states that Saichō copied this text along with other canonical texts of the Tiantai school composed by Zhiyi. The *Mohe zhiguan* is a comprehensive text that elaborates a diversity of meditative and ritual practices.<sup>16</sup> The influential preface by his major disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561–632) offers a threefold classification of these practices. The third and highest, "perfect-and-sudden" (*yuandun zhiguan* 円頓止觀), differs from the others in that it involves, "taking the true aspect [of reality] as the object of contemplation from the very beginning" (SWANSON 2018, 99; T 46.1c). In its most advanced form, in other words, Tendai *shikan* meditation aims at grasping the true nature of phenomena in the world, rather than concerning itself with the contemplation of ritual symbols or scriptural passages. It thus advocates what we might call a naturalist orientation to being-in-the-world, encouraging the *shikan* practitioner to find truth in ordinary phenomena. To lay bare this orientation, Guanding offers a pithy formula that was to figure prominently in subsequent Japanese Tendai thought, "There is not a single color and scent that is not the Middle Way" (SWANSON 2018, 100; T 46.1c). The Middle Way is the ultimate truth in Tiantai, the third of the three truths that, when contemplated, allows the practitioner to achieve liberation from excessive attachment to the conventional truths of the provisional and the empty. Yet this ultimate truth does not transcend but rather lies immanent in these conventional truths. The conventional truth is present everywhere; therefore, the ultimate need not be sought anywhere else than in the phenomena present in the *shikan* meditator's immediate field of experience.

This idea that ultimate truth lies not only in scripture or ritual but also in ordinary, natural phenomena soon came to be understood as the central crux of Saichō's teachings. We find this understanding in the biography of Ennin, one of the most important figures in the early history of Japanese Tendai. The biography, known as the *Jikaku Daishi den* 慈覺大師伝, describes a conversation that a forty-three-year-old Saichō had with Ennin just after the latter climbed up Mount Hiei at the age of fifteen (SAEKI 1986, 177). According to the account we find here, Saichō told the young Ennin that while there are some who understand that the ultimate truth is neither created nor destroyed, few know that the conventional, worldly truth is also uncreated and undestroyed. Thus, Saichō enjoined the young monk to save people by spreading the perfect teachings of Tendai, which teach

16. For more on this seminal treatise in the Tiantai/Tendai tradition, see the recent masterful translation and commentary by Paul L. SWANSON (2018).

that even the conventional truth is uncreated and undestroyed. Ennin seems to have taken Saichō's injunction seriously, for he later devoted a short text to this teaching, the *Zokutai fushō fumetsu ron* 俗諦不生不滅論. In it, Ennin, following his teacher, discusses the importance of this teaching for spreading the Tendai perfect teachings and benefiting ordinary people of the world (BZ 24: 94b–95a).

Saichō himself articulates a naturalist orientation to being-in-the-world in his *Shugo kokkai shō* 守護国界章, a nine-fascicle text in which he refutes the views of his Hossō rival, Tokuitsu. Therein, Saichō states, “The mountain master [Zhiyi] took out the body of the sutra and said, ‘Just as we make the colors of the ink on paper the very body of the sutra, so too do we make the five objects of sensory perception the body of the sutra’” (T 74.191a).<sup>17</sup> Based on a passage from Zhiyi's *Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義 (T 33.776c), Saichō here argues that all sensory objects are none other than the body of the sutra—the palpable presence of the Buddha's teaching. In light of the foregoing, we can understand that this statement does not suggest an insistence on scriptural study as the exclusive source of Buddhist wisdom. It does not indicate, in other words, a view of the text-as-the-world, or a Derridean notion that nothing is outside the text. To the contrary, it suggests an understanding of the world-as-text, that the world can be perceived as a text and thus revelatory of the Buddha's teachings.

In comparison to the Daoist naturalist orientation that we observed in the poetry of Mushimaro and Yakamochi, Saichō's Buddhist naturalism places greater emphasis on active engagement with the world, on the one hand, and, on the other, the natural world as a locus for the realization of enlightenment. This emphasis is eminently observable in the following verse by Saichō, entitled, “On Crimson Leaves in the Mountain Valley” (*Momiji no tani ni ren shite* 紅葉溪聯):

On the ground of green moss, I focus the mind in *samādhi*.

Before the trees of crimson leaves, I contemplate Perfect Enlightenment.

(DZ 5: 483)

Far from a passive conduit of natural energies, the Tendai practitioner, through the practice of *samādhi*, or absorptive meditation, actively apprehends the true nature of things and, in doing so, realizes that all phenomena in his or her field of experience have always been a manifestation of perfect enlightenment. Truth, in other words, lies immanent in reality, particularly the natural world experienced in the mountains, yet it remains undisclosed to those not trained in the perfect teachings of the Tendai school. This understanding of the mutual dependence of the human agent and his or her world remains mostly

17. In his study of Saichō, ŌKUBO Ryōshun (2015, 25) identifies this passage as central to Saichō's thought.

implicit in Saichō's writing, however. It is, instead, in the writings of his friend-cum-rival, Kūkai, that we find this understanding extensively articulated.

### *Kūkai*

Like Saichō, Kūkai was also committed to the practice of Buddhism in the mountains. In 797, at the age of twenty-four, he abandoned his studies of Confucianism at the Confucian academy in Nara and decided to embrace the Buddhist life, becoming a Buddhist layman (*ubasoku* 優婆塞). Facing opposition from his family, he composed a didactic work of fiction, the *Rōko shiiki* 聾瞽指歸, in which he attempted to establish the moral superiority of Buddhism to Confucianism and Daoism. Later, in his fifties, he revised the text into the *Sangō shiiki* 三教指歸. The revised preface describes his travels across the country and his pursuit of austerities in the mountains:

I climbed up Mount Tairyū in Awa Province and meditated at Cape Muroto in Tosa. The valley reverberated to the sound of my voice as I recited [mantras] and the planet Venus appeared in the sky. From that time on, I despised the wealth and fame of the city and longed for a life among the mist and clouds in the groves on the mountains from dawn to dusk.

(NKBT 71: 84; translation modified from HAKEDA 1972, 102)

From the age of twenty-four to thirty-one, Kūkai remained an *ubasoku*, though the sources fall silent on how he lived his life during this time. He then traveled to Changan in Tang China and studied under the esoteric Buddhist master Huiguo 惠果 (746–805). Upon returning to Japan, he continued his extensive engagement in meditative practice in the mountains. In his 824 “Statement of Declination of [the Position] Lesser Bishop” (*Shōsōzu o ji suru hyō* 辭小僧都表), he writes: “Since my capping ceremony [at the age of twenty] up to [the age of fifty when] I came to know my destiny, I made the mountain groves my home and silent meditation my heart” (NKBT 71: 250).

In Kūkai's literary, poetical, and other miscellaneous writings, we find numerous striking descriptions of his mountain practice. In his 804 “Record of My Request to Enter the Capital to the Patrol Officer of Fujian in China” (*Kansatsu shi ni koute nyūkyō suru kei* 与福州觀察使入京啓), he writes, “In the snow I used my elbow as a pillow and ate herbs in the cloudy peaks” (NKBT 71: 270); in his 818 poem, “Seeing a Practitioner of the Way from Silla on the Southern Mountain” (*Nansanchū ni shinra no dōja o misugosu* 南山中新羅道者見過), he remarks: “Living on this mountain, I have forgotten the spring / Contemplating the sun in the empty clouds, I do not see anyone” (GR 8: 508); and in his letter addressed to the secretary of the governor of Shimotsuke Province (*Shimotsuke taishu warikushū higashi hakase* 下野大守和陸州東博士), he states: “Sitting alone among the clouds, I age along with the pines. Without attachment to myriad phenomena, I

contemplate the Path only” (ZGR 12: 816). Mountains thus figure prominently in Kūkai’s descriptions of his meditative practice and, indeed, of who he was as a person. In his 815 “Preface to Poems Sent to [Ono no Minemori 小野岑守 when he was appointed Governor of] Michinoku Province,” (*Yarikushū ni okuru uta no jo* 贈野陸州歌序), he even refers to himself as a “person of the white clouds” (*shira-kumo no hito* 白雲人) (NKBT 69: 165)—that is, a person who dwells on mountain peaks among the white clouds.

In other poetical writings, Kūkai articulates his belief in aligning his mind (*shin* 心) with the world (*kyō* 境)—or, more precisely, the phenomena in his field of perception. In one poem, he makes this concern for mind-world alignment clear in the title: “On a mountain in autumn facing rain clouds and comparing my mind to the world” (*Shūzan ni un’u o nozomi, kyō o motte shin ni hi su* 秋山望雲雨以境此心). In it, he describes natural phenomena in the mountains around him as correlates to what he feels in his own mind:

White clouds, light and heavy, rise in the mountain valley;  
 Green peaks, low and high, enter the sky from their base.  
 Rain from the south and from the north pours here and falls there;  
 Wind from the east and from the west blusters here and blows there.

(GR 8: 523)

Kūkai believed that to attain this level of mental attunement to the environment, a person must engage in meditation, particularly the meditative practice of the three mysteries. In his piece of poetical prose, “What Joy is There in the Mountains?” (*Sanchū ni nan no tanoshihi aru* 山中有何樂), he explains to Yoshimine no Yasuyo 良岑安世 (785–830), son of Emperor Kanmu, the joy of life in the mountains. Similar to the above poem, he uses imagery of natural phenomena in the mountains to convey the joy he feels in his mind:

Valley water—one cup in the morning sustains life;  
 Mountain mist—one whiff in the evening nurtures the soul.  
 Hanging moss, delicate grasses suffice to clothe my body;  
 Rose leaves, cedar bark—these will be my bedding.  
 Heaven’s compassion spreads over me the indigo canopy of the sky;  
 The Dragon King’s devotion passes round me curtains of white clouds.  
 Mountain birds sometimes come, each singing its own song;  
 Mountain monkeys nimbly leap, displaying incredible skill.  
 Spring flowers, autumn chrysanthemums smile at me;  
 Dawn moons, morning winds cleanse the dust from my heart.

(KEENE 1999, 187)

Kūkai then expresses in literary form the central idea of his Shingon teachings: through the practice of the three mysteries, one may attune one's body, speech, and mind to the cosmic Buddha immanent in all things. Herein, he suggests, lies the true joy of life in the mountains:

In this single body, the three mysteries exceed all particles of dust and foam,  
Thus I make offerings to the [Buddha-]body that [pervades] the phenomenal  
world in the ten directions...  
The light of perfect [wisdom] pervades the utter vastness of the great sky;  
How could this quiescence not but give joy? (NKBT 71: 174–76)

Kūkai formulates his emphasis on mind-world nonduality in a more explicit fashion in his “Poem on Responding to Stimuli in Mid-Life” (*Chūju kankyo no shi* 中寿感興詩), which he composed in 814 when he was forty years old:

The Dharma-Buddha from the beginning inheres in my mind. The Two Truths of the Ultimate and Conventional both are eternally abiding. Birds and beasts, grasses and trees, are all the sound of the Dharma. Peaceful joy resides originally in my chest.... From where do the floating clouds issue forth? Their origin is the pure empty sky. In attempting to discuss the orientation of the one-mind, the three heavenly bodies [sun, moon, and stars] are clear.  
(NKBT 71: 214)

Like Saichō, Kūkai believed that the conventional truth, like the ultimate, is neither created nor destroyed and thus eternally abiding. In contrast to his Tendai counterpart, however, he explicitly unfolds an understanding of the interdependence of the practitioner's mind with his world. He explains that when the monk lives in the truth of the Dharma, presumably by practicing the three mysteries, he opens to the cosmic Buddha, or Dharma-Buddha, that dwells originally in his mind and comes to perceive all things in nature as the manifestation of the Dharma-Buddha. Thus breaking down the false barrier that separates the mind from its world, the monk becomes a dependently arisen Buddha.

Kūkai sets forth this idea of mind/world nonduality more pithily in his 814 “Inscription for the Śramana Shōdō's Traversing of the Mountains and Waters [of Nikkō] to Refine His Search for the Profound Jewel [of the Way] (*Shami shōdō sansui o ete genju o migaku no hi* 沙門勝道歷山水瑩玄珠碑). He writes, “Looking up to the sun of wisdom deep in the sky, I awaken the permeating wisdom that is my self” (NKBT 71: 187). In the Shingon tradition, the name given to the cosmic Buddha is Mahāvairocana, or Dainichi 大日 in Japanese, literally “Great Sun.” This line thus articulates the insight that the Great Sun Buddha in the sky lies also within; therefore, there is no hard and fast distinction between inner and outer, mind and world.

At the beginning of the inscription, Kūkai emphasizes the interdependence of mind and world. He writes:

The world (*kyō* 境) transforms in accordance with the mind (*shin* 心). If one's mind is defiled, then the world will be polluted. Following the world, the mind moves. If the world is quiescent, then the mind is clear. When the mind and the world meet mysteriously, the virtues of the [Buddhist] Path abide subtly.

(NKBT 71: 182)

As I suggested above, Kūkai's Shingon teachings are fundamentally concerned with the attunement of the mind with the world and the attainment of enlightenment thereby. His doctrinal writings, particularly the *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* 即身成仏義 and the *Shōji jissō gi* 声字実相義, articulate this perspective in theoretical terms, drawing on Shingon notions of the Buddha-body and its presence in the deepest layers of the mind. Paul INGRAM (1997) has already drawn attention to the implications of Kūkai's doctrinal thought for development of a non-dualistic Buddhist ecological consciousness. Thus, rather than considering the doctrinal basis for Kūkai's understanding of mind-world nonduality, let us turn now to a brief consideration of how this understanding informed his poetics, which was widely admired by the leading literati of his day.

During his time in Tang China, Kūkai not only collected Buddhist texts but also the latest anthologies of Chinese poetry and poetic treatises, including those by the poets Liu Xiyi 劉希夷 (651–679) and Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–756). The poetics of Wang Changling, in particular, form a central portion of Kūkai's 819 poetic treatise, the *Bunkyo hifuron* 文鏡秘府論. Few sections from Kūkai's *Bunkyo hifuron* are directly attributable to Kūkai (BODMAN 1978, 16). Despite the designation "treatise" the work is better understood as a compilation of Chinese poetic works. Nonetheless, from Kūkai's compilation and arrangement of these works, we can infer some of the key ideas that underpinned both his understanding of poetry as well as his Shingon Buddhist philosophy.

Shingon means "true word," which was Kūkai's preferred translation for the Sanskrit term "mantra." In Kūkai's formulation of the Shingon teachings, the oral recitation of mantra is the essential practice for concentrating the mind and attaining union with the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana. Voice thus constitutes the medium that unites the mind with the true body of the Buddha understood as the world itself. In the section, "On the Meaning of Literature" (*Ronbun i* 論文意), in the "South" chapter, Kūkai presents Wang Changling's views on the role of the "mind," or *i* 意, in poetic composition.<sup>18</sup> Near the beginning of this section,

18. In Wang Changling's poetics, the term *i*, or *yi* in Chinese, is multivalent, sometimes implying the sense of the "meaning" or "idea" of the poem and other times in a quasi-Buddhist sense of the "mind" that perceives and apprehends the world. In the translations that follow, I will prefer the translation "mind," while also indicating when it implies something like "meaning" or "idea."

Kūkai, citing Wang Changling’s treatise *Standards for Poetry* (*Shige* 詩格) without attribution, discusses the importance of the voice in enhancing the poet’s perception of the world:

Now, as for the basis for poetic composition, the mind determines the standard and voice determines the meter. When the mind is lofty, then the standard is lofty. When the voice is clear, then the meter is pure. Only when the standard and meter are completely thus is there tone. When you [thus] apply your mind in a fashion superior to the ancients, you will be able to perceive the world of heaven and earth in its depth.<sup>19</sup> (KONISHI 1953, 163)

Here Kūkai, borrowing Wang’s words, suggests that through skillful use of the mind and voice, the poet may surpass the ancients in their grasp of the world. Later in the same section, Kūkai, still citing Wang, enjoins the poet to compose the mind:

Those who are dedicated to writing should always compose their mind (*i o okosu* 作意). Focusing their heart externally on the heavens and ocean, they apply their thoughts to the original *qi* before them and skillfully set words in motion, thus ordering their soul and mind. (KONISHI 1953, 165)

To compose the mind, the poet should, in other words, focus his attention not inward, but outward on the things before him—the sea and sky and the distribution of *qi* therein. Emphasis is thus placed on focusing the mind, or *i* 意, on the world, or *kyō* 境.

As Zong-qi CAI (2017, 198) has recently shown, Wang’s attention to the mind-world relation is informed by Yogācārin theories of consciousness. Yet, this relation to Yogācāra should not lead us to the assumption that Kūkai’s view of poetry was fundamentally idealist or that Wang himself understood the world grasped by the poet to be an “inscape,” or “mental presentation” (CAI 2017, 187). For Yogācāra, despite its slogan “mind-only” (*yuishiki* 唯識), is not a form of idealism in which the mind constructs the world. It is, rather, better understood as a kind of phenomenological ontology.<sup>20</sup> According to the interpretation of Yogācārin phenomenological ontology that we find in the influential Chinese treatise, the *Qixinlun* 起信論, the mind participates in the disclosure of things’ being in the world, and yet it does not *determine* being as such. Phenomena

19. In translating Kūkai’s *Bunkyō hifuron*, I have consulted BODMAN’S annotated translation (1978, 363–403).

20. In his book *Buddhist Phenomenology*, Dan LUSTHAUS (2002) similarly argues that Yogācāra should be considered not a form of idealism but rather a kind of phenomenology. In his exposition of phenomenological thought, Lusthaus, however, tends to focus on Edmund Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology, which brackets the ontological question of being. My suggestion here is that Yogācāra is perhaps better understood as a kind of phenomenological ontology in which the mind and the world co-participate in the disclosure of being.



that show up in one's "field of perception," perhaps a more literal translation of *kyō*, are not, in other words, complete constructions or mental presentations. Accordingly, in Wang Changling's Yogācārin-inflected understanding of poetry, although things grasped by the poet's mind do have a special significance for him, they are not purely mental. The significance, or meaning/idea 意, of the things grasped, rather, is dependently arisen out of the interaction of the mind with the world. The mind does not "mediate" the way things show up for the poet; rather, it opens the poet up to a more selfless mode of interacting with the world and grasping the underlying meaning of things.

The importance of the mind penetrating the things perceived, as opposed to mediating its contact with those things, is further elaborated in the following passage from the *Bunkyō hifuron*:

Now when you have an idea for composing a poem, you should concentrate your mind and fix your gaze on that thing. When you fix [your gaze] with your mind [on that thing], then you deeply penetrate its world. It is like climbing to the summit of a tall mountain and looking down: the myriad phenomena seem as if they lie in the palm of your hand. When you see phenomena in this way, you see [them] clearly in your mind. (KONISHI 1953, 164)

In other words, when the poet concentrates his mind thus on the things before him, it penetrates those things, and he perceives them clearly.

Later in the same section, Kūkai presents another key passage from Wang's *Shige* on the interdependence of the mind and the world:

His thoughts and the things in the scene that he speaks of must conform to the appropriate season. The appearance of spring, summer, fall, and winter scenes in turn gives rise to [a certain] idea [or mind, *yi*], which the poet should select and use. When he uses these ideas, he must quiet his soul and make tranquil his anxieties. As his eye observes a thing, it enters his mind. His mind penetrates it and when the thing is penetrated, he speaks. When he speaks of its form, what he says resembles its image. His speech will be such that the contents of the sea of heaven are gathered in a square inch.

(KONISHI 1953, 169–70)

In Wang Changling's poetics, as compiled and arranged by Kūkai, the mind-world relation is subtle. The poet must conform his thoughts to things in the world, and when he does, things unfold a certain idea, or literally mind, that should be used for the composition of a poem. This, in turn, quiets the mind, and he is able to further penetrate the meaning of the thing perceived. Through this process of contemplation, poetry reveals entire worlds in the space of a square inch.



### Conclusion

The foregoing has attempted to clarify how two practitioners of mountain Buddhism, Saichō and Kūkai, introduced a new Buddhist background understanding of the world by reconfiguring the Confucian-Daoist cosmic imaginaries of the Asuka-Nara period. In doing so, my intention has been to open up a new perspective onto the establishment of the Tendai and Shingon schools in early Heian Japan, one that does not explain it by assuming either political motivations or intellectual concerns as its sole determinants. There is an important implication to this perspective for the way we think about the relationship between Buddhism and Japanese culture in premodern Japan. Specifically, it suggests that Buddhism, as early as the ancient period of Japan's history, appealed to and, indeed, transformed the way the people of Japan sensed and felt their world, and that it was in this way that Buddhism came to shape the development of Japanese culture. Thus, we may consider this Buddhist understanding of the world, or cosmic imaginary, as both an element of ancient Japanese culture and also one of its taken-for-granted frameworks—that is, a kind of background for the practice of Japanese culture. The further articulation of this background understanding, its spread among the general population, and its impact on the development of medieval Japanese culture are just a few potentially productive areas for future inquiry.

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- DZ *Dengyō Daishi zenshū* 伝教大師全集. Ed. Eizan Gakuin 叡山学院. Tokyo: Nihon Bussho Kankōkai, 1975.
- GR *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類従. 29 vols. Ed. Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kankōkai 続群書類従刊行会. Tokyo, 1959–1960.
- KBTK *Shinshaku kanbun taikai* 新釈漢文大系. 120 vols. Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1960–2017.
- KT *Shintei zōho kokushi taikai* 新訂増補国史大系. 66 vols. Ed. Kokushi Taikai Henshūkai 国史大系編集会. Tokyo, 1964–1967.
- NKBT *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 日本古典文学大系. 100 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958–1966.
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