

Chapter 1 : Matsuo Basho Poems - Poems of Matsuo Basho - Poem Hunter

Basho and the Dao examines the haikai poets' adaptation of Daoist classics, particularly the Zhuangzi, in the seventeenth century and the eventual transformation of haikai from frivolous verse to high poetry.

And after having read your book, I have to agree. What set you out on this course of study? I decided to work in this direction for my dissertation research. I am very grateful to Professor Keene whose insightful advice led me to this fertile field. What is the Zhuangzi? And what kind of philosophy does it espouse? The Zhuangzi is the second foundational text of the Daoist philosophical and religious tradition, the first being the Laozi or Dao de jing. Since the third century C. The vast number of interpretations indicates that there are different opinions about what kind of philosophy the Zhuangzi espouses. To me, the Zhuangzi advocates naturalness and spontaneity as the fundamental way of the universe, through which individuals find paths to freedom. As I discussed in greater detail in my book, Chinese poetry and recluse traditions had never been monolithic; one could easily find Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist trends in both. The timing it seems was ideal. He played a pivotal role in the legitimization of haikai. When haikai reflowered during the latter half of the seventeenth century, the haikai poets faced two seemingly contradictory demands. On the one hand, they had to go beyond the limits of the classical poetic conventions in order to reach a popular audience and to distinguish haikai from the classical linked verse renga. On the other hand, they needed intertextual structures and a shared knowledge of codified poetic vocabulary to increase the capacity of each short verse and to make the poetic dialogue possible in a group composition. The latter demand decided that haikai, though a parodic, unconventional genre of popular culture, never completely broke away from the classical tradition. Instead, haikai poets constantly looked to the past for inspiration. However, the existing classical Japanese poetic tradition could not provide all haikai needed, because haikai relied essentially upon the use of haigon, the vernacular and Chinese words that were not part of the classical poetic diction. The Zhuangzi had been known in Japan since the Nara period and had the status and popularity of a classic among educated people. It was envisioned as a source of poetic essence by the haikai poets for different reasons. To the Teimon poets, the Zhuangzi was a model text for the allegorical expression of haikai. The Danrin, on the contrary, took the bold laughter, the deliberate reversal of conventional meaning, and the unrestrained imagination of the Zhuangzi as a congenial frame of reference for their characteristic haikai approach. This makes it immediately possible to discover profound meanings in the down-to-earth topics and vernacular language, which haikai poets took as the hallmark of their poetry. How did early haikai differ from haiku? Haikai was later used to distinguish comic, popular linked verse haikai no renga from refined, classical linked verse renga. Haiku, on the other hand, is a modern term. Around the end of the nineteenth century, Masaoka Shiki and others began to use the term haiku to refer to the autonomous, seventeen-syllable verse originating from the opening verse of a haikai sequence. Before the Meiji period, the opening verse of a haikai sequence was called hokku. It characteristically weaves poems and the introductory narratives in a sequential order. A writing that does not follow the conventions is seen as seriously flawed. In addition, the canonical literary travel journals bear a predominately melancholy tone inherited from classical poetry. Lament over the passing of seasons, the impermanence of life, and the chaos of the age are recurrent themes. As I mentioned earlier, the Zhuangzi appeals to haikai poets because it asserts an aesthetic stance that sees beauty in ordinary and even "low" things. You state that "there has been no systematic study in any Western language on this issue. The absence of Western scholarship is not surprising, because the lack of attention to Daoism in Japan has been a general situation in Japanese studies. It seems too important an issue to go undiscussed. The lack of attention to Daoism in Japan had both historical and political reasons. Since the medieval period, Confucian learning had prevailed among Japanese scholars, while the Daoist teaching was often treated as unworthy of serious contemplation because of its magical and folk character. In the early modern period, many National Learning kokugaku scholars disapproved of the study of Daoism in Japan. Until the late s, when Fukunaga Mitsuji published his extensive studies on the role that Daoism had played in shaping Japanese culture, Japanese Daoist scholars had primarily focused their studies on China. The lack of Japanese scholarship on this subject

seems to have affected Western researchers. Until recently, the number of studies on Daoism in Japan in Western languages remained small compared to that on Confucianism and Buddhism. Part of the reason for this lack of Western scholarship also has to do with the complexity of defining Daoism. Modern Chinese scholars use two terms to define Daoist thought and religion: Daojia sixiang Daoist thought and Daojiao Daoist religion. The latter is a multifaceted mixture of the religious beliefs and practices that developed after the second century CE. In Western languages, however, the distinction between the two is often blurred by an inclusive term, such as "Daoism" in English. Over the course of history many important notions of Daoist teaching have blended with Confucian and Buddhist concepts, and it is often difficult to separate completely Daoist elements from Buddhist or Confucian sources on specific issues. In addition, the popular Daoist beliefs and practices combined in themselves many things that are integral parts of Chinese culture. As a result, to what exactly "Daoism" refers has been a subject of debate. The difficulty of this definition is further complicated when we look at Daoism in Japan, where both Daoist thought and elements of Daoist religion have mixed with indigenous Japanese thought and beliefs, to the extent that most Japanese people have never realized that there is any relationship between Daoism and Japanese culture. Therefore, it has been difficult to reach a consensus as to which elements of Daoism were transmitted to Japan and what role Daoism played in Japanese culture. Despite these difficulties, it is great to see that developing the study of Daoism in Japan has been a vigorous movement among Western scholars in recent years. Recent studies in Western languages, however, have concentrated more on the religious aspects, while the studies of Daoist influence on Japanese literature remain very few. As you point out in your book, haiku poetry is not an overnight wonder. It has been around for hundreds of years. And the influence of Chinese philosophy and poetry on the genre is deep. You say that the adaptation of the Zhuangzi "provides specialists with important information about the Daoist impact on haikai poetics, and also attempts to help contemporary readers obtain a fuller understanding of the unique poetic form haikai and its great masters. When Andrew Riutta interviewed you, you said: Much of what I read in modern English haiku today lacks soul. I am not saying we need to think like a Japanese to write haiku. But we need to do our homework. She joined the Vassar faculty in after teaching for two years at the College at Lincoln Center, Fordham University. Her current research and teaching interests include comparative studies of Japanese and Chinese poetry, women in Chinese and Japanese literature, and Japanese language pedagogy. There is a related item in this issue of Simply Haiku:

Chapter 2 : Matsuo Basho: Bibliography

Although haiku is well known throughout the world, few outside Japan are familiar with its precursor, haikai (comic linked verse). Fewer still are aware of the role played by the Chinese Daoist classics in turning haikai into a respected literary art form.

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