

Reclusion and Poetry: reconsidering Kamo no Chomei's *Hojoki* and *Hosshinshu*

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Kamo no Chomei (1155?-1216) was a famous recluse of medieval Japan, as well as Saigyō and Kenkō. Although he was active among a group of distinguished *waka* poets under the patronage of ex-emperor Gotoba, and was seen to be secured with a position in the court society, he became more and more discontent with his life as a courtier. Realizing the ephemerality, or impermanence (*mujo*), of the world, he eventually decided to leave the capital; that is, to seclude himself. All the more, he did not abandon the way of poetry even after taking the tonsure. In fact, it is surmised that he wrote an essay concerning poetry, *Mumyōshō*, in his last years, well after his seclusion.

What was poetry for Chomei? What role did poetry have in his reclusive life? If poetry had any importance, in what sense? These are the questions that have been discussed for a long time. Some locate Chomei in the tradition of hermits, which has its origin in ancient China, and see refined activities including poetry and reclusive life as inseparable[1]. While the extent of inseparableness varies from person to person, in the case of Chomei, “playing lute (*biwa*) and chanting poems (*waka*) without anyone who attends and listens; being committed to these activities all by oneself, which is apt to be mere amusement, can lead one to the state of mind beyond one’s limited ego that is captivated by worldly attachment”[2]. Thus the mind of *suki* (reckless love to arts) “can be a trigger to forsake the world”[3]; that is, total absorption in poetry and music brings the earnest attitude that is essential to religious devotion. Others regard poetry for Chomei negatively. It is true, they say, that refined activities such as poetry and music played an important role in his eremitic life, but the fact that there are a lot of poetic vocabularies and rhetorical techniques in his writings, which are supposed to be the documents of his earnest reclusive life, should be interpreted as the proof that “Chomei, a poet, rather than a priest, could not abandon his obsessive love for poetry”[4]. If assessed strictly, his life outside of the capital which was filled with refined activities is to be considered as “deviated from the proper sense of reclusion”, or as the evidence of “his halfway religious faith” and “self-righteousness of his elegant life”[5].

This interpretive controversy concerning the role of poetry for Chomei seems to come from how one interprets and estimates Chomei’s “reclusion”, the meaning of his “forsaking the world” and his “belief”, if any. What is needed here is to reconsider his reclusive life, before evaluating the place of poetry for him.

When we think of the relationship between artistic activities and human life, we tend to take granted that there exists a certain characteristic of poetry, and think how such a character can serve for human life. In that case, a “characteristic of poetry” is assumed as autonomous, having no relevance to other things or activities. However, the “characteristic of poetry”,

especially its relationship with human life, should vary in accordance with what “human life” means; in other words, the “characteristic of poetry” must be thought of in line with “human life” itself. Thus, in order to clarify the problem of the role of poetry for Chomei it is necessary to think of the refined activities from a wider perspective; to set poetry within the humanistic universe, rather than to treat poetry only for poetry’s sake by investigating Chimeï’s poems or his poetic theory, as was done in the past[6].

This paper, based on the above-mentioned viewpoint, aims at analyzing *Hojoki*, Chomei’s primary work, and also *Hosshinshu*, his collection of Buddhist short tales. *Mumyosho*, a series of anecdotes and discussions about *waka* poetry, will hardly be referred to. Omitting *Mumyosho* from the center of the discussion might seem odd, as it has been regarded as the only way to know Chomei’s thought about poetry. However, doing so will cast an interesting light on Chomei’s passages, and thus will bring a new clue on how to solve this long-discussed issue.

1. Secluding from the World

Hojoki consists of two parts. The first part shows the brutality of Chomei’s age, “hardship of being in the world, fragility and vainness of one’s dwelling and one’s own body”[7], and the second part describes in details how he reached the decision to take the tonsure and how indeed his reclusive life was. We can see that in *Hojoki* Chomei traces his life retrospectively; he looks back at how he “abandoned worldly life, threw away his body and mind”, and then “got to the state of mind that is without any malice nor fear” (37).

According to his remark, in his mid-fifties he decided to dissociate himself from the court, and retired to the outskirts of the capital; Ohara, and later, Hino. How and why he decided to forsake the world is not clear, though some speculate on this[8]. In any case, it is certain that he secluded himself at a certain time. This needs here further investigation; what did it mean for Chomei to “seclude himself from the world”? What is the “world”, and what is to be “secluded”? How far was he away from the “world”, and what relation did he have with it? [9]

Chomei changed his residence from time to time. He is reticent about the motivation and the cause of moving. Probably there were some reasons, inner or outer discontent that prompted him to do so. Nevertheless, changing places did not calm his discontent.

After that, relations with others faded, and my body decayed finally, in my thirties, not being able to stand any more, I built a humble cottage at whim. If compared with the former dwelling, the cottage is less than one tenth. It contained just a living room for me, and I did not care if it was neat. I could not even afford to build a gate; just an earthen wall and a carriage shed made of bamboo poles. I feel danger when it snows or blows. There is a river nearby, so I am afraid of drowning, as well as white waves. (29)

There came still another “danger”, a cause of discontent; heavy snow and gale, flood, and robbers (white waves). Consequently, “having been suffering under severeness of life almost over thirty years” and “realizing my hard luck, in the spring when I was fifty, I left my home and secluded myself” (ibid.). Here is suggested that for Chomei, at least at the time he wrote

Hojoki, to change the place and to seclude –to leave his home – are different things.

Indeed, Chomei declares in his essay that he realizes that changing physical climate does not necessarily bring good fortune, still less change one's luck. "If you reside in a narrow region, you will not be able to avoid neighboring fire; if you live in an outskirts, you will have to put up with inconvenience of transport and security. Those who are energetic would torture themselves with greed, while those who are lonely would be made light of. If you have much property, you fear losing it; if you don't, you will be envy" (28). No matter where he lives, no matter how he lives, "my heart never stops staggering at any time" (*ibid.*), so "depending on circumstances and environments, things always disturb my heart; it is impossible to count them up" (27).

Chomei continues, "If I try to be subject to the world, I feel painful; if I try to resist obedience, it's like I am deranged. Where can I go to rest myself? What can I do to ease myself?"(28) This question, presented at the end of the first part of the book right after the detailed accounts of disastrous calamities that assaulted the capital, would give the readers an extremely strong impression. As often indicated, this question is not just a question, but a rhetorical one; it might be implied that "in the long run, we never ease ourselves, never rest ourselves". In any case, by asking so, did Chomei want to "express his fear about not being able to find the answer to the question"?[10] Does this question show us the "author's mental and physical state, who was overcome by the despair because he would never ease his mind whatever he would do"?[11] Maybe not. What he wanted to say was, probably, that one would not find any answer as long as one asks "where?" or "what?" He wanted to argue that the way of question, "either obey or resist?", is inappropriate.

As noted above, the prime cause of Chomei's discontent was various things that "disturb my heart", and the fact that "my heart never stops staggering at any time". In another part of the book, he says that "what Buddha teaches us is, though touching things, don't be attached to them" (39). Chomei doesn't say "don't touch things". What matters is how one deals with things and, especially, what stance one is to take when coping with various affairs. "What" one can do or "where" one can go is not a question of a primary importance at any rate.

In *Hosshinshu*, there are a lot of tales about hermits whom Chomei admired. There, Chomei's main concern seemed to be those who led their eremitic lives in the middle of the urban bustles, rather than who freed themselves from the city lives. For instance, in the first chapter of *Hosshinshu*, Chomei tells about Ruri-Hijiri, a hermit who, concealing his wisdom and theological knowledge, used to wander around the Tennoji-temple with rags and tatters as if he were a beggar; "this is the most admirable among those who want salvation after death. This is what a man of wisdom always does when he tries to seclude himself; though his body is in the middle of a crowd, he conceals his knowledge and never lets it known. A man may well escape to mountains and forests, yet this is just the behaviour of those who are not be able to conceal their wisdom" (79)[12].

Busshubo, to whom Chomei also referred, was "a saint" who lived in the Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto and died in the night of the full moon, on the 15th of August. According to Chomei, Busshubo "never removed himself from the downtown, but lived in a skid row" (75); he even ate fish openly in a happy vein, the act which of course was prohibited according to Buddhist

rites[13].

Now it can be argued that what really mattered to Chomei was his state of mind, rather than place or behaviour. Thus the escape from the capital was not the ultimate, nor the prime, purpose of his transference; rather, he wanted to ease and calm his disturbed mind. His discontent would not be removed just by changing dwelling or physical environment. A passage in the last chapter of *Hojoki*, “the three world is just one heart” (38)[14], can be seen as a reflection on this state of his life.

2. Man and Dwelling

As discussed, Chomei’s ideal “reclusion” is a kind of state of mind, rather than a concrete activity. Before investigating what such a state is indeed about and how people can reach it, it should be made a little clearer what Chomei’s discontent was, especially how the notion of “impermanence” (*mujo*) affected it.

In the course of his writing, two words, “man” and “dwelling”, often appear contiguously. What is more, this happens when he talks about the law of impermanence, the idea that was sweeping the country at that age. For instance, in the famous introductory part of *Hojoki* Chomei wrote; “A river’s flow is ceaseless, and more, is never the same; babbles floating upon the pool keep dazzling, foaming and banishing, never stay calm; just the same as *man and dwelling* in the world” (15)[15]. From such passages, it can be assumed that Chomei considered man and dwelling as having something in common with regard to the notion of impermanence, and that they can, he thought, embody the law of impermanence more explicitly than any other things. This point must not be overlooked, as the notion of impermanence is without doubt the most important theme of *Hojoki*.

Chomei describes his “dwelling”, the hermitage where he spent his eremitic life, as follows,

The condition of my cottage is so different from usual; only one *jo*[16] square in expanse and less than seven *shaku*[17] in height. I did not fix my cottage because I had not yet decided about my final dwelling. I piled up earth, thatched the roof, and settled hooks in every joint so that I can transfer nimbly if there is something displeasing. In this style, little exertion is needed when rebuilding. (30)

It should be noted here that the uniqueness of his hermitage concerns not only its “expanse” and “height”, but the fact that he “did not decide” about his dwelling and “did not fix” his cottage. It is sure that his decision derived from the practical, materialistic reason that he could move nimbly when there is displeasure; however, while, in his own words, “I thought at first that my stay here wouldn’t be long” (34), later he came to recognize that “the cottage was supposed to be temporal, yet now it becomes old enough; piles of fallen leaves around rotted eaves, a blanket of moss on the earth” (35). This does not merely mean that he was accustomed to the shabbiness of the cottage. He continues, “only the temporal dwelling can escape from any fear” (*ibid.*). His hermitage is now his home, though it is still temporal. Rather, it should be understood that temporal-ness came to have, as it were, a positive meaning for him.

“Man” cannot escape from the law of transience either. Man, as long as he or she is, comes

and goes, dies the moment he or she is born; there is nothing more reasonable than that. What is more, Chomei states in the preface of *Hosshinshu*,

Buddha once taught us; govern your heart, do not be governed by it. How true these words are! All that man thinks during lifetime must be evil. Thus, if you touch things, be prepared that your heart is silly and untrustworthy, and follow Buddha's teaching never to loosen your heart in order to be able to liberate yourself from the adherence to the world of life and death and be reborn in the Pure Land. This is like when you tame a savage horse all along a distant journey. (43-44)

Chomei might have realized that people cannot help sensing and feeling various things in various ways; there is nothing to be done about that. He likens man's heart to a savage horse. As he says, "when there is a strong heart, there is a weak one; when there is a deep one, there is a shallow one. As for myself, I don't deny the right, but I don't deny the evil, either" (44). A "horse", or one's heart, is almost instinctively savage, just as "grass in the wind is apt to wave, the moon on the surface of a pond to heave" (*ibid.*). No one can deny this, and Chomei didn't (or couldn't) either; if he did so, it would have meant to stop being human altogether.

Thus for Chomei the question was how to "tame a savage horse", how to "govern your heart" without being governed by it. If the impermanence could have any positive meaning, not only concerning "dwelling" but "man" (especially his heart), he would be able to reach the state of mind that "can escape from any fear".

3. Liberation from Sphere (*kyogai*)

As noted in the introduction of this paper, Chomei's life in the hermitage does not seem strongly faithful; rather, it can be seen as easy-going and half-hearted as far as the piousness of his activities is concerned. This might be the case in phrases such as the following;

I set up a hanger shelf on the southwest side of the hut, and put three black baskets, in which I store some copies of books such as *waka* anthologies, music scores, *Ojoyoshu*, and so on. Beside them I put a *koto* and a lute (*biwa*); they are so-called *origoto* and *tsugibiwa*. (31)

When interest excites me, I occasionally play *Shufuraku* tuning my sound to the echo of pine trees, or fit the sound of *Ryusen no kyoku* to that of water. I know my music is poor, but I do not play to please the ears of others; I play for myself and sing for myself; in order just to enjoy my own heart. (32)

When I do not feel like reciting *nembutsu* and cannot concentrate on reading sutras, I dare to rest myself; I am willing to be lazy. No one blames me for that; I never feel ashamed. Though I do not make any special effort to keep the commandment of silence, living alone automatically keeps me refrain from the sin of speech. Whether I try to keep the commandment or not, it is impossible to break it anyway, because there is no Sphere at all. (*ibid.*)

On the assumption that one must completely devote himself to austere religious activities, Chomei's life may well be seen as halfway and self-righteous. Here attention should be called to the way he justifies his behaviour. He claims not to be condemned "because there is no Sphere at all". Then, what is "Sphere"?

"Sphere" (*kyogai* in Japanese) is originally a Buddhist term, which means "the object seen and thought by various sensory organs and mind's operation"[18]. Its original meaning was "a range or a reach where sense or sensation operate", yet it "changed its meaning in Japan, so that it has various meanings such as environment, circumstance, or surrounding; things which are frequently regarded as the effect of previous incarnation"[19]. As for Chomei's usage, it has been interpreted as "an environment that leads him to impiousness"[20], or as "swarms of objects that shake one's mind which is inclined to evil, lust or desire"[21]. The sentence just quoted above, "Whether I try to keep the commandment or not, it is impossible to break it anyway, because there is no Sphere at all" (*kanarazu kinkai wo mamoru to shimo nakutomo kyogai nakereba nani ni tsukete ka yaburan* 必ず禁戒を守るとしもなくとも、境界なければ、何につけてか破らん), has been translated as, "there is no cause that prompts me to break the rule, so how can I become the breaker?"[22] However, what Chomei stresses here is not that there is a cause of impiousness *in* the Sphere, but that the existence of the Sphere itself is the cause. Moreover, it should be examined carefully whether the Sphere relates directly to "evil" or "impiousness"; if so, how.

There is little doubt, as has been indicated, that the Sphere has something to do with one's "environment". Then, how did Chomei see his environment, the realm around him, and how did he express it in his writing? In *Hojoki*, he tells us about the condition of the hermitage; "There is a water pipe made up with bamboo. I settled a rock next to it as a reservoir. There are abundant resources, for there is a forest nearby" (31). He also mentions his short trip; "in the course of my trip, I picked flowers' buds, gathered *ivanashi*, collected *nukago* and plucked *seri*. I gleaned and bunched ears. I walked around in search of cherries or maples, plucking *warabi*, picking up nuts; I dedicated some of them to the Buddha, and took others back home" (33). Here natural things around him are put in line with the chain of the daily relationships based on purposes and functions. Yet in another part of the essay, he says,

In the silence of the night, moonlight through the window makes me recall old colleagues[23] and monkeys' cries soak my robes with tear[24]. Fireflies in bushes deceive me as if they were bonfires of cormorant fishing[25], and rain in the dawn is like breeze that blows leaves off[26]. When there are cries of mountain birds, I thought as if they were my parents' voices[27]. When I happen to find deers approaching, I realize how far I removed myself from the world[28]. (34)

These sentences are all based on particular past poems (as shown in respective notes). From this it is clear that nature around him is seen as elements of, as it were, a poetic world, not as materials for meals, lightning or heating in this world. What is more, there are descriptions as follows,

In the spring, flowers of wisteria heaving in the wind are like the Purple Cloud, and their

odor drifts westward. In the summer, every time songs of *hototogisu* are heard, one is reminded of the way to heaven. In the autumn, voices of *higurashi* are as if they suffer grief at the emptiness of this world. In the winter, accumulation of snow is likened to that of sin. (31-32)

Expressions such as “Purple Cloud”, “way to heaven”, “emptiness of the world”, “that (accumulation) of sin” show that Chomei saw his surroundings in the light of Buddhist episteme. That is to say; for him, things in his surroundings (environment) can appear in various ways according to his concern or interest.

Seen this way, the Sphere in Chomei is interpreted as what directs his interest, and as a kind of framework of recognition on which each interest and concern is based each time. When one turns to and deals with something, there must accompany a certain framework. One thing is observed differently if the framework differs; so is one’s behaviour. More precisely, how things appear to one is not different from what one’s framework is. There cannot be a bare thing without any framework. Thus, the Sphere is that on which the appearance of a thing is based and which rules and determines the relationship between men and things.

Basically the Sphere exists and functions within an individual, yet when it is shared it can be the basis of a community. Among those who share the same Sphere, a sort of rule or agreement is enacted that enables them to maintain their relationships. For instance, prohibition is a kind of agreement not to do something. So for those who do not share the rule, prohibitions cannot be applied. Within the Sphere of the hermit, in a usual sense of the word, reading sutras and praying to Buddha are allowable, even desirable acts, and they are the acts Chomei himself did in his arbor indeed. Yet he regarded himself as being in the outside of the Sphere. His assertion might be that one would not be able to break a rule, whatever it is, if he is not within the Sphere on which the rule is based.

Nevertheless, Chomei says that “there is *no* Sphere”. That he is detached from the Sphere doesn’t necessarily mean that there exists no Sphere at all. What did he mean by that?

In principle, there can exist various kinds of Sphere according to one’s interest such as poetry, Buddhism, and so on. People, consciously or unconsciously, choose or are forced to choose to be in a certain kind of Sphere out of many, on which people’s behaviour and interest are based and without which they cannot turn to and deal with various matters in daily life. In that sense, Chomei’s statement “there is no Sphere” is simply wrong. He probably wanted to emphasize that the way of his being in the world is totally different from that of anybody else. Then, what is different?

Chomei states, after he mentions poetry and Buddhism, the following:

The landscape of the mountains is inexhaustible at all times; much less for those who sense and know things deeply. (34)

People, whether monks or commons, sense something from things around them. What differs is whether they “sense and know things deeply”; that is, whether “the landscape is inexhaustible” or not. Those who “sense and know things deeply” are conscious that the sight they

see now is under the rule of a certain Sphere, and that in that sense his sight or cognition is restricted and closed. People usually don't see things in such a way. For them, the world is as they see and hear; that is all and nothing more. It is not that hermits and common people see different things. When they see and hear something, they are facing exactly the same thing. However, the former see things from, so to speak, a metaphysical viewpoint; they are aware of what makes them to see and of things as such. In other words, they feel the depth of the sight, as it were. Cognition is merely capturing the sight instantaneously and tentatively, and the sight itself would change completely as soon as one's Sphere shifts. Thus one cannot regard what is perceived as firm or reliable. This is what Chomei meant with the statement "the landscape is inexhaustible".

From this, it can be concluded that the "world" from which Chomei wanted to withdraw himself is a Sphere that is admitted and shared by many, and on which they base their daily interests. To "seclude" from the "world" can be interpreted as to liberate oneself from the restriction of a Sphere[29]. Here "liberation" does not mean to become able to live without *any* influence of a Sphere; as noted above, people cannot but choose a certain kind of Sphere and live inside it. Liberation here means to be aware that human acts and behaviours are inevitably restricted by a Sphere, to be conscious of such a principle of human existence in the world, which leads one to relativize human acts and cognition; that is, to be able to "sense and know things deeply". In that sense, "reclusion" can be termed as a sense of distance or detachment. It is sure that for Chomei the life in the capital and especially the court society was a world representative of the daily Sphere. However, even though one frees himself from the court society and moves into, for instance, a deep forest, such an act does not mean he liberates himself from the world. As far as one is inside a certain kind of Sphere, whatever it is, he does not "seclude" himself. On the contrary, one might justly be seen to be secluded according to how he distances or detaches himself; wherever he is, whatever he does[30].

True, one cannot escape from discontent or unease even though he is conscious of such a principle. "[D]epending on circumstances and environments", there must still be a lot of things that "disturb my heart". Nevertheless, to know that various things that "disturb my heart" are just the results of various "circumstances" or "environments", and to be aware that the "Sphere" is also transient might lighten one's uneasiness, although it does not relieve it completely. Making it somewhat clear where such an uneasiness comes from lets one be detached from adherence to a certain kind of Sphere. That might bring the peace of mind that Chomei was anxious to reach, however tiny it might be. As cited before, Chomei states that "only the temporal dwelling can escape from any fear"; he continues,

Hermit crabs are fond of small shells. That's because they know their places. I am also like that. If you know things and the world, you won't be anxious or greedy; calmness is all you want, worryless-ness is all you enjoy. (35)

4. Buddhism and Poetry

In the previous chapter, it was pointed that *Hojoki* refers to Buddhism and poetry as

examples of certain kinds of Sphere. Yet it must be added that Buddhism and poetry are not chosen just as individual instances of Sphere. It is true that both of them are no more than one type of Sphere, if seen individually; however, if Chomei's writing is carefully analyzed, it comes to seem that Buddhism and poetry are allotted a special role.

In *Hojoki*, Chomei says that

I constructed my hermitage just for my own sake, not for others. This is because I have nobody to walk with, nobody to count on; this is the way the world goes and the way I live. As for friendship, people esteem richness and precede connections. Sympathy and affection are not necessarily valued. There are no good friends other than music and poetry. (35-36)

What Chomei denies is not human relationship in general, but a certain type of relationship; that which is based only on "richness" or "connections". It is clear that this type of relationship is founded on the kind of Sphere that determines ordinary daily life. Then, on what should one establish his relationship with others? If one can liberate himself from this kind of Sphere, then where should he or she go?

To reflect upon the way the world goes and how human cognition works, and thus to be aware of the restriction of the Sphere and to liberate one from it; these are what Buddhism has intended and asserted as its central doctrine[31]. People have, consciously or unconsciously, accepted such a doctrine and practiced recommended acts accordingly. Those who could escape from worldly affairs engaged themselves with ascetic programs such as prayer, meditation, reading and chanting of sutra, and so on. Some settled in mountainous temples and others wandered around hallowed grounds or sacred places[32]. Chomei spent his life in the middle of the Last Age (*masse*), the times when the influence of Buddhism and its ideology was extremely strong. Thus his notion of impermanence and act of reclusion can be interpreted as a result of the Buddhist doctrine. In that sense, Buddhism for Chomei, as for many others, was not only a trigger that prompted him to be liberated from a particular Sphere, but Buddhism itself was an ideal Sphere for him. Indeed, as cited above, Chomei refers to the teaching of Buddha in *Hojoki* ("what Buddha teaches us is, though touching things, don't be attached to them"). In another part, he says that "the reason why I retreat from the society and turn into the forest is to cultivate my heart and to follow the way of Buddha" (39). This shows that Chomei himself regards his acts as in accord with the way of Buddhism, however others see them.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that Chomei somehow felt doubtful about Buddhism, especially with regard to its dogmatic side. He declares in the preface of *Hosshinshu* that "Buddha knew the various nature of human heart, thus taught people by means of fables and parables. We just recognize the Way according to our abilities, so we cannot teach illiterates. Dogmas are divinely marvelous, yet the benefits we get from them are not that significant." (44)

One cause of his skepticism is his self-awareness that he is no more than a silly man. Even if silly people could "recognize the Way", he declares, it would be merely "according to our abilities"[33]. Yet there is a more fundamental reason. It should be remembered that,

as cited in this chapter, the ideal state of a hermit for Chomei is that which is based on “sympathy and affection”, rather than on “richness” or “connections”. It is people’s heart that esteems richness and precedes connections, yet it is also the heart that values “sympathy and affection”. As indicated in chapter 2, Chomei realized that people cannot help sensing and feeling various things in various ways; there is nothing that can be done about this. Of course, he would not like his heart to be disturbed by “richness” or to be made upset because of “connections”; e.g. relationships that are established out of economical, social and political concerns. Yet even if people can retreat themselves from such relationships, there still remains feeling of the kind of “sympathy” or “affection”, i.e. an inner realm that is somewhat independent of practical and materialistic concerns[34]. Buddhism would not allow one’s heart to be moved, whatever the case may be; it would be regarded as a proof of one’s worldly attachment or un-enlightenment[35]. Chomei, on the other hand, might hope to accept one’s heart in his reclusive life, rather than discard it, and he might try to let it be as it is.

What calls attention here is that in this context Chomei asserts that “[t]here are no good friends other than music and poetry”. Why did he mention “poetry” here? In what sense can “music and poetry” be his “good friends”?

As previously mentioned, there is a statement in the sixth chapter of *Hosshinshu* concerning the effects that poetry can have on human life. “*Waka* poetry is the way of utmost reason, so you calm your mind and recognize the law of impermanence with it” (276). There are many poems indeed that mourn and lament over the fragility of the world, so to appreciate them, they said, is a good opportunity to recognize the law of impermanence and a trigger to prompt people to take the tonsure[36]. This was a kind of conventional reasoning, originally invented in order to oppose Buddhist aversion against “floating phrases and fictive utterances” (*kyogen-kigo*), and has been repeatedly acclaimed by poets as the *raison d’être* of *waka* poetry. Yet what poets composed was, in fact, not necessarily related to Buddhism, but were mostly lyrical, romantic, and pastoral[37]. Above all, the effect that has been acclaimed by such a reasoning is that poetry can calm one’s heart and then make him realize the law of transience; that is to say, to settle one’s mind down. This seems to be slightly discordant with the context of *Hojoki*, where Chomei declares that one should accept and let his heart be as it is, however disturbed and moved it may be. Poetry for Chomei must be thought of within that context.

Turning to the history of *waka* theory from the age of *Kokin waka shu*, the first anthology of *waka* compiled for an imperial commission, it has been since well knowingly acknowledged that “*waka* sprouts up from the seed of people’s heart”, and that “poets express what moves inside by means of various things that touch their eyes and ears”[38]; *waka* does not have any function or usefulness other than to “express what moves inside”. The trend of *waka* theory has shifted in the course of history, and rules of composition have become more and more complex with the effect of poets only showing concerns for systemic and structural dimensions. Nevertheless, nobody tried to deny that *waka* is rooted to people’s heart. In the fifth chapter of *Hosshinshu*, Chomei writes, referring to a woman who passed away peacefully in spite of her delusory attachment, that “not knowing what to do, she expressed her mind by means of metaphors evoking Mt. Fuji and sleeves of female divers; but what’s the good of it?”(207) Here Chomei saw poetry negatively, but this statement shows rather clearly that he thought of

poetry as nothing but a means to “express her mind”. Other than this, there is no use in composing *waka*.

We cannot go into the details of Chomei’s *waka* theory in *Mumyosho* because of limited space. Suffice it to say here that although he questions the traditional way of thinking on several points in *Mumyosho*, he does not in any way raise any objection concerning the bond between poetry and people’s heart[39]. Rather, he emphasizes it. Talking about a poem written by a woman, a layperson who lamented that her life was full of vanity and despair, Chomei says “this poem was, as it were, born out of itself, because the woman was in the middle of nowhere, not knowing what to do nor what she was doing”[40], and adds that “a poem may well be composed if one is moved by his or her heart exceedingly, even though he or she is not a professional poet at all”[41]. For Chomei, to shake one’s heart and to express this exhaustively is the fundamental element of *waka* poetry.

Thus, it can be concluded that Chomei wanted in his reclusive life to relate to the human heart, acknowledging its tendency to be moved, and poetry was for him an important and essential means for this. Buddhism of course was also a vital element for hermits, yet it basically relegates the human heart to evil. In this sense, for Chomei poetry and Buddhism were like two wheels of a car, the basis on which to ground his reclusive life. In other words, while Buddhism aims to “know things deeply”, poetry seeks to “sense things deeply”. Chomei’s reclusive life would become complete when the two sides work harmoniously.

Notes

- [1] See, for instance, Ishida Yoshisada, *Inja no Bungaku* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobo, 1968), Mezaki Tokue, *Suki to Mujo* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1988), Michele Marra, *The Aesthetics of Discontent: Politics and Reclusion in Medieval Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), and so on.
- [2] Kobayashi Yasuharu, “*Hosshinshu* no sekai kara: Chomei ron e no shomei”, in Tomikura Tokujiro et al. eds., *Hojoki, Tsurezuregusa* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1975), pp.371-372.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p.370. The most recent study of the concept of *suki* in Chomei is Kinoshita Hanako, “Kamo no Chomei no ‘Suki’: gainen to jittai to”, *Kokugo to Kokubungaku* 82-2 (2005), pp.30-42.
- [4] Yanase Kazuo, *Hojoki zen chushaku* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1971), pp.214-215.
- [5] *Ibid.*
- [6] See, for instance, Yanase Kazuo, *Kamo no Chomei no shin kenkyu* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobo, 1962).
- [7] Miki Sumito ed., *Hojoki, Hosshinshu* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1976), p.27. All further references to *Hojoki* and *Hosshinshu* will be indicated in parentheses in the text. There are several translations of *Hojoki*, such as; Donald Keene, “An Account of My Hut” in his *Anthology of Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1955); A.L. Sadler, “The Ten Foot Square Hut” in his *The Ten Foot Square Hut and Tales of the Heike* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970); Frederick V. Dickins, “Ho-jo-ki [Notes from a Ten Feet Square Hut]” in Peter F. Kornicki ed., *Collected works of Frederick Victor Dickins vol.3* (Bristol: Ganesha Publishing, 1999). For *Hosshinshu* and *Mumyosho*, no complete translation has been published so far. Translation of several selected passages and sections can be found in, for instance, Hilda Kato, “The *Mumyosho* of Kamo no Chomei and its significance in Japanese literature”, *Monumenta Nipponica* 23-3/4 (1968), Marian Ury, “Recluses and Eccentric Monks: Tales from the *Hosshinshu* by Kamo no Chomei”, *Monumenta Nipponica* 27-2 (1972), and Rajyashree Pandey, “*Suki* and Religious Awakening: Kamo no Chomei’s *Hosshinshu*”, *Monumenta*

- Nipponica* 47-3 (1992), pp.299-321. All translations in this paper are mine.
- [8] Numerous biographical studies of Chomei have been published; among them, Miki Sumito, *Kamo no Chomei* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1995) is handy yet well-rounded, and includes a critical and insightful analysis about the cause of Chomei's moving and his motivation for reclusion.
- [9] In *Hojoki* Chomei repeatedly refers to discarding the world (*yo o sutsu*), such as; "When I arrived at the age of fifty, I left my house and *discarded the world*" (29); "the reason why I *retreat from the society* and turn into forests is" (39).
- [10] Yasuraoka Kosaku, *Hojoki zen chushaku* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1980), pp.119-120.
- [11] Takeda Takashi, *Hojoki zenshaku* (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 1995), p.222.
- [12] This phrase is supposedly taken from the old Chinese idea that can be found in, for instance, a poem by Wang K'ang-chu, who was well-known in the Japanese court tradition.
- [13] Tales about priests who ate fish abound in various kinds of sources. "Sometimes it happens that the priests of the highest majesty don't avoid eating fish"; Asami Kazuhiko ed., *Jikkisho* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1997), p.299.
- [14] This is a quotation from *Kegonkyo* (Avatamsaka sutra).
- [15] Cf. "the way *dwellers and dwellings* rival each other for the impermanence is like a dewdrop on a leaf of a morning glory" (16), "All is like this; hardship of being in the world, fragility and vainness of *one's dwelling and one's own body*" (27). William R. LaFleur makes similar points; LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp.62-65.
- [16] About three meters.
- [17] About two meters.
- [18] Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyo jiten*, second edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002).
- [19] Ibid. Cf. "Kyo-gai *visaya, gocara*. Sphere. I. The Sanskrit word *visaya* means the realm to which one's power extends. It means also the region to which the result of one's conduct reaches. The Sanskrit word *gocara* means the sphere where one performs one's activities as well as the world where one is born and lives according to the result of his former conduct. II. Both *visaya* and *gocara* indicate the object of cognition". (*Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, Daito Shuppansha, 1965)
- [20] Yanase, op.cit., p.209.
- [21] Takeda, op.cit., p.280.
- [22] Kanda Hideo ed., *Hojoki* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1971), p.43. Here are some other instances. "Although I make no point of keeping the commandments, how am I to break them in such surroundings as these?", Thomas Blenman Hare, "Reading Kamo no Chomei", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49-1 (1989), p.191. "Though I do not necessarily try to obey the commandments, here, where there are no temptations, what should induce me to break them?", Rajyashree Pandey, *Writing and Renunciation in Medieval Japan: The Works of the Poet-Priest Kamo no Chomei* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1998), p.157.
- [23] "The color of the new moon of the fifteenth night; an old friend of mine in thousands of miles away, how do you feel?" (*sangoya chu no shingetu no iro, nisenri no hoka no kojiri no kokoro*); a poem by Po Chu-I in *Wakan roei shu*.
- [24] "A monkey cries at dawn three times, then the traveler's robe becomes wet with tears" (*haen sankyo akatsuki koujin no mo o uruosu*); a poem in *Wakan roei shu*.
- [25] "A fisherman of *maki no shima* has shipped out his boat for cormorant fishing, without being lit by torches into the darkness, where fireflies were flying around" (*ubune o ba kagari mo shirazu ide ni keru hotaru tobikau maki no sima bito*); a *waka* in *Hirokoto shu*.
- [26] "In October, I woke up hearing the sound of a storm in the mountain village; I noticed that was the babbles of leaves" (*Kaminazuki nezame ni kikeba yamazato no arashi no koe wa konoha nari keru*); a *waka* in *Goshui shu*.

- [27] “When I hear the hollowed cry of mountain birds, I wonder it would be my father or mother” (*Yamadori no horohoro to naku koe kikeba chichi ka to zo omou haha ka to zo omou*); a *waka* by, allegedly, Gyoki in *Gyokuyo shu*.
- [28] “Deeply hidden in the mountain there is a deer very close and intimate to me; that lets me know how far I am from the world” (*Yama fukami naruru kasegi no kejikaki ni yo ni tozakaruru hodo zo siraruru*); a *waka* by Saigyō.
- [29] In the first chapter of *Hosshinshu*, Chomei interprets the eccentric act of a priest Zoga as “a means to liberate himself from the Sphere”, and states that “[p]eople tend to be obedient to those of high positions and look down on those of low; this is the way the world goes. Yet then, your body yields to others and your heart spoils because of the bonds of worldly affairs. This not only torments you, but prevents and discourages your faith to escape from the world. How can one calm his weak and fragile mind if not become free of Sphere?” (63-64)
- [30] In the first chapter of *Hosshinshu*, Chomei refers to a priest Byodo-gubu, who wandered around from mountain to mountain and finally disappeared; “Of all time, one who truly makes up his mind to tonsure would leave his home, and pass away somewhere unknown without any lust for worldly profit. However one’s decision is sincere and earnest, if he might not reach the state of no going back, his mind easily wavers at the last moment. Being at home and keeping in touch with acquaintances, how can one avoid sense of delusion?” (57-58) Here Chomei is cautious of one’s mind that “easily wavers”; freeing oneself into “somewhere unknown” is not a central matter.
- [31] For instance, in *Maka Shikan* (Mo-ho chik-kuan by Chih-i) is asserted “*isshin sankan*”, to stop the work of cognition of the world and get to the true wisdom. Sekiguchi Masahiro, *Maka shikan 1* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), p.130.
- [32] As a matter of fact, as Mezaki points out, their acts varied and were not likely to be called “ascetic program”. That is because their motivations were also various and they wanted to follow their will. What was common was only that they put on the monk’s black robe. Mezaki Tokue, *Shukke tonsei* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1976), p.7.
- [33] At the concluding part of *Hojoki*, there is a series of sentences where Chomei reproaches himself: “You; you are like a holy man in shape, but your heart is stained with impurity. Your hut may follow the example of Vimalakirti, yet your behaviour is far worse than that of Panthaka (the most foolish of Sakyamuni’s disciples). Should this be karma, the result of poorness and foolishness of my previous life? Or should it be the outcome of my limitless delusion?” (63-64)
- [34] Saigyō says in his poetry, “Even I who have no heart feel *aware*; a snipe leaps from a stream at autumn dusk” (*kokoro naki mi ni mo aware wa shirare keru shigi tatsu sawa no aki no yugure*).
- [35] In Buddhism, act of meditation, concentration, and contemplation are strongly recommended. In *Ojoyoshu*, a Buddhist text written by Genshin that Chomei himself carried with him in his cottage, it is said that “[i]f you always keep your mind suppressed in this way, five kinds of greed are eased, so that you will be able to pass away with no disturbance and will not be born in the Evil Land”. Ishida Mizumaro ed., *Ojoyoshu 1* (Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1992), p.87.
- [36] In another part of *Hosshinshu*, Chomei says “*Suki* means to keep away from social intercourses, not to lament misfortunes, and to savour and appreciate the blossoming and fading of flowers, waxing and waning of the moon; when you do so, the law of rise and fall will come to light and thirst for fame and honor will be settled. This might be the first step in your way away from this world to nirvana” (278).
- [37] In Chomei’s private collection of *waka*, *Kamo no Chomei shu* (Yanase Kazuo ed., *Kamo no Chomei zenshu 1*. Tokyo: Fuzambo, 1940), 105 poems are divided into six parts; “spring”, “summer”, “autumn”, “winter”, “love” and “miscellaneous”. Religious poems are expected to be included in the last one, yet we can only find a couple of *waka* that the notion of impermanence or transience of the world permeates; one tenth at the most. It is not easy to evaluate the meaning of such a

figure, but it is safe not to overestimate the importance of the religious function of poetry in the case of Chomei.

- [38] The preface of *Kokin waka shu*, written by Ki no Tsurayuki. Saeki Umetomo ed., *Kokin waka shu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1958), p.93. For the role Tsurayuki and his theory played in the history of *waka*, see Amagasaki Akira, *Kacho no tsukai: uta no michi no shigaku 1* (Tokyo: Keiso shobo, 1983).
- [39] Concerning the essence of *waka*, he says in *Mumyosho* rather conventionally the following: “On what point is composing *waka* superior to just writing prosaic sentences? *Waka* can, by concealing multiple meanings within one word, reveal a deep feeling without showing it off frankly. Moreover, *waka* lets its appreciators feel and grasp something invisible (intangible, unknown) by its delicate expressiveness, so it can express fabulous things through shabby ones, profound truth as if it were silly talk. Therefore, when your heart becomes so filled that you don’t know what to do or how to say, you express your mind with *waka*. Then, there emerges energy within just thirty one syllables, that are powerful enough to move heaven and earth, and to ease even the mind of demons and gods”; Hisamatsu Senichi ed., *Karon shu, Nogakuron shu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1961), p.88.
- [40] Hisamatsu ed., op.cit., p.70.
- [41] Ibid.