Introduction

Haiku’s popularity is worldwide today, comparable even to the modern Western realistic novel. Indeed, Japanese haiku verses are now translated into many languages, haiku variants are being composed in different tongues on all the major continents, and a quick Internet search on haiku produces more than three million links on the subject. While the general interest in haiku continues to grow, few people outside Japan know about haikai, or comic linked verse, which gave birth to haiku. Even fewer know about the interesting role that Chinese Daoist classics played in its becoming a high art. This book examines an important epoch in the development of haikai—the haikai poets’ adaptation of the Daoist classics, particularly the Zhuangzi, during the seventeenth century, a movement that contributed to haikai’s transformation from an entertaining pastime to a serious art.

The latter half of the seventeenth century witnessed an interesting phenomenon in the development of Japanese poetry. When haikai overshadowed the classical waka (Japanese song) and renga (linked verse) to become one of the mainstays of the newly rising popular literature, haikai poets enthusiastically drew upon the Chinese Daoist texts, namely the Zhuangzi. Haikai poets’ interest in the Zhuangzi grew almost simultaneously with the reﬂourishing of the genre in the middle of the century, when the Teimon School prevailed. This interest continued in the succeeding Danrin and Shômon schools in the 1670s and 1680s, and the Daoist classic became one of the cornerstones of haikai theories and its intertextual structure.

The impact of the Zhuangzi on haikai is clearly documented in the haikai literature of the time. The Danrin School took Zhuangzi’s gûgen¹ as the hallmark of haikai; as its leader, Nishiyama Sôin (1605–1682), declared, "haikai is the gûgen of waka, the kyôgen (eccentric drama or com-
Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), the founder of the Shōmon School who gained posthumous popularity as Japan’s greatest haikai poet, repeatedly instructed his followers to study the Zhuangzi. According to his disciples, Bashō’s teaching on haikai “encapsulated the quintessence of Zhuangzi’s thought.” Although the impact of the Zhuangzi on haikai is remarkable, 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.

Although the presence of Daoism in Japan has never been questioned, the study of it is very limited in both Japanese and Western scholarship. In 1923, Kuroïta Katsumi made the first formal study on Daoism in early Japan, but this pioneering work did not inspire immediate interest among Japanese Daoist scholars. The lack of consequential interest has both historical and political dimensions. Since the medieval period, the prevailing emphasis on Confucianism among Japanese scholars more or less stigmatized Daoism, creating a general impression that it was unworthy of serious contemplation because of its magical and folk character. In the early modern period, the opinions of the National Learning (kokugaku) scholars further disapproved of the study of Daoism in Japan. Although the intellectual environment of early modern Japan was not entirely hostile to Daoist teaching—even some of the National Learning scholars, such as Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769), made favorable comments on the Daoist classics Laozi and Zhuangzi—the National Learning movement as a whole laid the foundation for the elevation of Shintō to a state doctrine, which created a myth of Japanese uniqueness that denied any substantial Chinese influence on early Japanese thought and religious belief. Moreover, Japan’s militaristic effort to conquer Asia and control the world in the 1930s and 1940s made the study of any Daoist influence in Japanese culture heretical, for a critical view of Japan’s cultural heritage would be considered a challenge to the uniqueness and supremacy of the “divine imperial state” (kōkoku). It is not surprising that until, in the late 1970s, Fukunaga Mitsuji published his extensive studies on the role Daoism played in shaping Japanese culture, Japanese Daoist scholars had primarily focused their studies on China. The lack of Japanese scholarship on this subject no doubt affected Western researchers. Until recently, the number of studies on Daoism in Japan in Western languages remained very small, and many important aspects in this field are largely unexplored. Part of the reason for this lack of Western scholarship 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 former is typically
represented by early Daoist works, namely Laozi’s Dao te jing and the
Zhuangzi. The latter is a multifaceted mixture of the religious beliefs and practices that
developed after the second century AD. In Western languages, however,
the distinction between the two is often blurred by an inclusive term,
such as “Daoism” in English. “Daoism” as the combination of the two is
hard to distinguish from Chinese culture itself. For one thing, 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, including beliefs in heaven and God, ancestor worship,
aspirations to immortality, divination, the yin and yang theory, geo-
mancy, astrology, medical thinking, and exorcism. As a result, to what
exactly “Daoism” refers has generated a lot of debate.

The difficulty of definition is further complicated when we look at
Daoism in Japan, where both Daoist thought and elements of Daoist re-
ligion have mixed with indigenous Japanese thought and beliefs, to the
extent that most Japanese people have never realized that there is any re-
lationship between Daoism and Japanese culture.9 Not surprisingly, no
consensus has been reached among scholars as to which elements of
Daoism were transmitted to Japan and what role Daoism played in Japa-
nese culture.

Despite these difficulties, developing the study of Daoism in Japan
has been a vigorous movement among Western scholars in recent
years.10 Recent studies in Western languages, however, have concen-
trated more on the religious aspects, and the impact of Daoist thought on
Japanese literature remains virtually uninvestigated. As the first mono-
graph in a Western language on Daoist influence in Japanese literature,
this book examines the haikai poets’ dynamic reception and reinterpret-
tion of the Daoist classics during the seventeenth century, particularly
their adaptation of the Zhuangzi. It provides specialists with important
information about the Daoist impact on haikai poetics, and also at-
ttempts to help contemporary readers obtain a fuller understanding of
the unique poetic form haikai and its great masters.

While scholars disagree about the authorship of the extant text of
the Zhuangzi and the identity of its author, Zhuangzi (Master Zhuang),
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It is generally accepted that the seven “inner chapters” constitute the heart of the work and that the remaining chapters might have been written by different writers at different times. For convenience, in this book “the Zhuangzi” refers to the complete thirty-three chapters of the existing text, and “Zhuangzi” to the Daoist thinker or thinkers who created the text. When using “Daoist” to designate the tendencies or traits characterized by Daoist thought in Japanese poetry, this work does not treat the subject matter primarily as a philosophical issue. Rather, it places emphasis on clarifying the processes through which Daoist tenets were turned into poetic principles and affected poetic practices. Moreover, the investigation into such processes is not intended to outline a Daoist tradition in Japanese poetics, but to provide a meaningful frame of reference for the understanding of haikai. As mentioned earlier, by the seventeenth century when the haikai poets were enthusiastically reading the Zhuangzi, it had become rather difficult to distinguish clearly Daoist elements from other thought and belief in both Japan and China. Yet, the significance of haikai’s encounter with the Zhuangzi cannot be fully revealed without certain delimitation and contextualization. While focusing discussion on the haikai poets’ advocacy of Daoist ideas, this study does not deny the fact that there are possible Confucian and Buddhist infusions and overlap in the same area.

The intertextual relation between haikai and the Zhuangzi is a very prominent phenomenon. So prominent that, unlike the general scarcity in the study of Daoist influence on Japanese literature, the allusions to the Zhuangzi in haikai have received a number of treatments from Japanese scholars since the 1930s. When discussing the peculiar marriage between haikai and the Zhuangzi, the existing studies note two contributing factors. One is the influence of the commentaries of Genji monogatari (The Tale of Genji) in medieval Japan. Kon Eizō notes that in fourteenth-century commentaries of Genji monogatari such as the Kakaishō (Notes of rivers and seas, ca. 1367), commentators have drawn upon the gûgen of the Zhuangzi to justify the fictional nature of the tale. He found that the haikai poets in the seventeenth century were generally aware of this tradition and cited the Zhuangzi in their writings similarly in order to legitimize the comic linked verse. The other factor contributing to the melding of haikai and the Zhuangzi, according to Nonomura Katsuhide, is the influence of an interpretive work of the Zhuangzi by a thirteenth-century Chinese scholar, Lin Xiyi. Nonomura argues that, unlike the earlier annotation of the Zhuangzi by Guo Xiang (d. 312), who stresses that yuyan (J. gûgen) is a vehicle by which to convey the Dao, or universal principle,
Lin highlights the novel and unrestricted writing style of the classic, which aroused great interest among the Danrin poets. Later Japanese scholarship on this subject focuses mostly on Matsuo Bashō and his Shōmon School, whose works mark the apogee of haikai. Konishi Jin’ichi and Hirota Jirō trace the Daoist impact on the growth of the Shōmon haikai and demonstrate that the Shōmon incorporated Daoist ideas not only in their themes and expressions but also in their haikai theories. Both suggest that, through the effort of Bashō and his school, Daoist ideas contributed significantly to the perfection of haikai.

Previous Japanese works of scholarship, as mentioned, point to the important place the Zhuangzi occupies in the development of haikai. They also suggest a helpful frame of reference to contemporary readers, especially Western readers, who have generally considered haiku a purely Japanese form, a genre that is intuitive and expressive rather than referential and allusive. Yet, answers to some fundamental questions regarding haikai’s encounter with the Zhuangzi remain obscure. Why did haikai poets need to justify the legitimacy of their poetry? Why did they choose an old Daoist text as a source of authority? What are the inner factors in the development of haikai that led to the haikai poets’ sustained interest in the Zhuangzi? And, fundamentally, how did the ancient Daoist text become relevant to poetry and literary principles, and what role did it play in haikai poetics?

To answer these questions, this book examines not only the nature of haikai but also the literary tradition and historical environment that occasioned haikai’s evolution. In addition, it investigates the processes by which Daoist teachings were incorporated into Chinese poetry and how they became part and parcel of the poetic language. It demonstrates that haikai poets’ encounter with the Zhuangzi has as much to do with the nature of haikai—its short form, ironic approach, dialogic mode, and vernacular language—as with Japanese poetic tradition, which places extreme importance on classical precedents. Finally, this book provides a close examination of Bashō’s poetry in light of its intertextual relationship with the Daoist traits in Chinese poetry. It shows that it was mainly due to Bashō’s understanding of the correspondences between the Daoist principles and Chinese poetic tradition that the Zhuangzi became a fruitful source for haikai creation.

In this book, the three major haikai schools’ varied interests in the Zhuangzi are discussed in five chapters. The first chapter, “Encountering the Zhuangzi,” looks at the Teimon and Danrin schools and their divergent interests in the Zhuangzi. The Teimon became prominent in the
early seventeenth century, after a bleak period of haikai. Earlier haikai masters, such as Yamazaki Sōkan (d. ca. 1539–1540) and Arakida Moritake (1473–1549), promoted a liberal spirit in bold expressions, but their excessive emphasis on jest and unconstrained expression led to vulgarity, speeding the decline of the genre. A verse by Sōkan, “Even at the time / When my father lay dying / I still kept farting,” for example, became the target of criticism from renga masters. When haikai regained its popularity along with the rise of the townsmen class, the Teimon poets attempted to elevate the genre’s status by refamiliarizing the haikai world with classical tradition. Matsunaga Teitoku (1571–1653), the founder of the Teimon School, formalized haikai with rules derived from renga regulations. In order to prove the virtue of comic linked verse, the Teimon masters claimed that haikai functioned like Zhuangzi’s gûgen and could convey moral values in jest.

The Teimons’ interest in the Zhuangzi also had to do with an important formalistic change of haikai in this period: the increasing independence of the opening verse and the fragmentation of the links in a sequence brought about an urgent demand to expand the expressive capacity of each link through metaphorical and evocative expressions. This essential demand led Teimon poets to discover the Zhuangzi from another perspective, and they found it to be a rich source of metaphors and emblems. Yet, the metaphorical implications the Teimon poets sought had a heavily didactic tone. For example, in Takaragura (The treasure house) Yamaoka Genrin (1631–1672), a major poet of the Teimon School, overtly announces that his experimental work of haibun (haikai prose) emulates Zhuangzi’s gûgen by revealing beauty and virtue in ordinary household apparatus; the purpose of the work, according to his son, is “to harmonize all things with the Heavenly Equality and by doing so to correct man’s mind.”

The Danrin School emerged as a reaction to the Teimon’s formalism and didacticism. Concerning the identity of haikai, which inherited the same form as that of renga, Danrin poets publicly parted company with the renga tradition and advocated comic poetry for its own sake. For Danrin poets, the unconstrained laughter, rebellious spirit, and imaginative expressions of the Zhuangzi provided an authoritative model for haikai—humor and wit had their own worth. Danrin poets also used the Zhuangzi to define and supply the essence of the haikai language (haigon), vernacular words and Chinese-origin words that had not been allowable in poetry. Okanishi Ichû (1639–1711), a vocal theoretician of the Danrin School, frequently referred to the Zhuangzi in defending the
essence of Danrin haikai. He proclaimed that “the Zhuangzi embodies the essence (hon’i) of haikai. Its use of words and its expression are all haikai.” The poetic essence that Danrin poets asserted through the authority of the Zhuangzi was primarily freedom of expression. In Ichû’s words, haikai consisted of “wild exaggerations” and “the baldest falsehood.” The Teimon and Danrin Schools came to the Zhuangzi with distinct needs that arose in different stages of haikai’s development. Because both schools interpreted the text from only one perspective, neither of them truly grasped the profundity of the Daoist classic and the aesthetic principles operating in its literary style. Nonetheless, their promotion of the Zhuangzi widened the imaginative world of haikai and inspired later poets.

Chapter 2, “From Falsehood to Sincerity,” examines an important period of transition in haikai history when the Shômon School arose. From the end of the 1670s to the 1680s, following the widespread reprinting of books on Chinese poetry and poetics, a “Chinese style” prevailed in haikai circles, reflecting both a discontent with the mannerisms of early haikai and a determination to make haikai an art form comparable to the best of Chinese poetry. Matsuo Bashô, who studied haikai with both Teimon and Danrin masters, launched the Shômon School during this period and eventually led his disciples to discover the rich poetic possibilities suggested by the Zhuangzi. From the beginning, Shômon poets frequently drew upon Daoist tenets such as ziran (J. shizen or jinen, the Natural) and xiaoyaoyou (J. shôyôyû, carefree wandering) in their works. Earlier studies on haikai’s adaptation of the Zhuangzi in this period tend to focus on the philosophical connotations of the Daoist concepts, with special attention to the influence of these concepts in Bashô’s life. This kind of approach is necessary to the understanding of Bashô’s aesthetic experience. However, one consequence has been that certain thematic emphases of the new school are interpreted as direct manifestations of the Daoist tenets, and the poetic explorations of its founder are considered an individual preference for Daoist ideals rather than a result of a larger trend in the development of haikai. As revealed in the second chapter of the present study, the Shômon School’s interest in the Zhuangzi was an extension of a larger movement of haikai that strived for truthfulness and profundity, as opposed to artificiality and vulgar laughter. From this perspective, the chapter compares the Shômon School’s use of the Zhuangzi not only with those of the preceding schools but also with the approaches of contemporary haikai poets, including Ikenishi Gonsui (1650–1722), Shiinomoto Saimaro (1656–1738), and Uejima Onitsura (1661–1738). It shows that
during this important transition period the Zhuangzi became, explicitly or implicitly, the theoretical underpinning of various haikai schools and poets who struggled to make comic linked verse a profound poetry.

Chapter 3, "Bashô’s Fûkyô and the Spirit of Shôyôyû," examines the Daoist impact on the themes of the Shômon haikai, particularly the fûkyô (poetic eccentricity) aesthetic emphasized by Bashô. The thematic focuses of the school from the 1680s, such as fûkyô and shôyôyû, demonstrate conspicuous affinity to the Daoist traits in Chinese poetry. These thematic emphases permeate not only the Shômons’ poems and haikai sequences, but also a variety of their haibun (prose written with the spirit and stylistic features of haikai), elevating the dialogic context of haikai from its previous focus on material culture to a profound poetic world, one valuing simplicity, nonconformity, and physical and mental freedom in the embrace of nature. This thematic tendency is particularly explicit in Bashô’s haikai kikôbun (haikai travel journal), a genre that combines the best verses and prose by the master.

Landscape is an essential component of haikai imagination. The importance of landscape in the creation of haikai can be seen clearly in the pivotal significance of famous places (meisho) in haikai verses and the great emphasis on geographical imagination in haikai prose. Comparative examinations of his kikôbun show that Bashô’s geographical imagination was shaped not only by the material qualities of landscape, but even more by conceptions that were molded through broader cultural, aesthetical, and epistemological frameworks, among which the Zhuangzi was an essential text.

The Japanese travel journal as a literary genre developed a close relationship with poetry. From the earliest extant travel journal, Tosa Nikki (ca. 935), Japanese literary travel journals followed a tradition of combining poems and prose in sequential order. The fusion with poetry both enriched and limited the representation of the landscape of the kikôbun, since by centering on poems the geographical imagination of the travel journal was inevitably defined by classical poetic diction and poetic toponym. When Bashô aspired to develop a new type of travel journal in haikai style, he met a challenge that had faced haikai when it reflourished in the early seventeenth century: the classically defined landscape had to be redefined and re-presented through a popular haikai vision and by using vernacular haikai language. In order to reinvent the significance of imagined landscape, Bashô referred widely to Daoist classics and Chinese poetry. As we shall see in the third chapter, Bashô’s self-portrayal of a hut dweller and perpetual traveler was directly inspired by the shôyôyû spirit.
Using the Zhuangzi as a foundation, Bashô reconstructed the intertextual structure of haikai expression, simultaneously injecting unconventional significance into the classical poetic toponyms and investing the mundane haikai words and images with profound meaning.

In discussing Bashô’s reading of the Daoist classic, Lin Xiyi’s Zhuangzi Juanzai kouyi (Juanzai’s vernacular explanations of the Zhuangzi) is used in this book as a primary source, and both the third and fourth chapters pay close attention to the critical and aesthetic tradition reflected in Lin Xiyi’s explanations, especially his association between the recluse tradition and Daoist teachings. The Shômon used a staggering body of Chinese sources, but their allusions and citations notably leaned toward the recluse taste. As Chapter 3 suggests, this inclination owes much to the influence of Lin Xiyi’s annotation to the Zhuangzi, as well as to popular Chinese poetic anthologies and handbooks. In examining the textual influence of Lin’s work on Bashô, previous studies have noted its philosophical synthesis of Daoism and the Song Confucian learning (Sôgaku). Yet another important feature of the text has contributed more directly to the Shômon School’s enduring interest in the Zhuangzi: Lin Xiyi consciously or unconsciously employs the terms and notions of contemporary literary criticism in his interpretation and often refers to celebrated poets and verses to explain Daoist concepts. In his preface to Zhuangzi Juanzhai kouyi, Lin uses the literary achievement of the great Song poet Su Shi (1037–1101)—one of the Chinese poets Bashô admired most—to illustrate the importance of reading the Zhuangzi. He writes: “This is the book one must read and it also is the most difficult book to read. The lifetime works of Su Shi are all based on the understanding of this book.” Statements such as this no doubt have contributed to Bashô’s belief in the Zhuangzi as required reading for poetry. Particularly noteworthy is that Lin Xiyi cites famous Chinese poets who are not typically reclusive, such as the great Tang poet Du Fu (712–770), to exemplify the Daoist spirit of carefree wandering, leaving an impression that the Daoist traits embodied in the recluse tradition reflect the essence of Chinese poetry.

Together with Lin Xiyi’s explanations, many Chinese poetic anthologies and handbooks popular during Bashô’s time, such as Shiren yu xie (Gemlike words of poets), Yuan ji huo fa shixue quanshu (Practical knacks and workable methods: An encyclopedia of poetics), and San ti shi (Poems of three forms), also provided Bashô with collective information about poetic diction, images, themes, and criteria that were infused with Daoist values. In Shiren yu xie, a collection of excerpts from the critical treatises of the Song dynasty, the deliberate eccentricity of the Seven Worthies of
the Bamboo Grove and the aesthete-recluse image of Tao Qian (365–427) are praised and highlighted as essential poetic language and personality. These works provided Bashô and his followers, not only with a general impression of Daoist traits in Chinese poetry, but also with congenial materials for composing poems. As a result, the Shômon School enthusiastically identified itself with the shôyôyû tradition and adopted its language to enrich the haikai vocabulary.

Expanding from the thematic comparison of the third chapter, Chapter 4 offers a diachronic examination of the connection between Bashô’s fûryû and the Daoist traits in Chinese poetry. As argued throughout this book, the literary significance of the Zhuangzi in haikai could not be fully grasped without recognizing the conceptualization of Daoist principles in Chinese poetics and the embodiment of Daoist spirit in Chinese poetry. In fact, it was through the long history of Chinese literature that Daoist principles gradually took on the literary values that interested Bashô and his fellow poets. Unlike the orthodox Confucian classics that treat literature as an important vehicle for carrying ethical codes, early Daoist texts criticize traditional modes of learning, including literary writings, as fraudulent institutions that help promote absurd desires and hypocrisy. Therefore, in early Daoist texts, such as the Laozi and the Zhuangzi, little interest is shown in literature. Nevertheless, these Daoist classics influenced the Chinese artistic sensibility profoundly, for the basic assumptions of the philosophy related not only to human life in general but also to human perception and expression in particular. The Daoist thinkers’ expositions on the relationships between outer form and inner state, between language and ideas, and between creativity and spontaneity played an important part in shaping the Chinese perspective on poetry.

Daoist principles were first applied in literary discussion by Wang Chong (27 CE–ca. 97 CE) of the Eastern Han period (25 CE–220 CE), but it was through the Wei-Jin period (220–420) that Daoist tenets became widely embodied in literary works. The basic principles of Daoist philosophy, namely, xiaoyaoyou and ziran wuwei (J. shizen mui, naturalness and inaction or noninterference), met the spiritual and intellectual demands of Chinese literati in a period of political disorder and societal instability. The authority of orthodox Confucianism was weakened, and there arose a strong tendency to “transcend the Confucian ethical codes and follow the Natural (ziran).” This ethos had a significant impact on the themes, images, and tone of the Wei-Jin literature. The Daoist thinkers’ keen awareness of the universe’s changing nature was reflected in the promi-
inent sense of impermanence in their writings. Their emphasis on naturalness and spontaneity as the fundamental principles of the universe provided a theoretical base for the growth of a poetic tradition that prioritized naturalness as a poetic principle. The free spirit and love of nature emphasized by the Daoist texts came to influence poetic practice, forming a recluse-literatus tradition that critics termed *fengliu* (J. *fûryû*). This influence is especially notable in the unconventionality and deliberate eccentricity of the famous Zhulin qi xian (Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove) and later in the writings of recluse poets such as Tao Qian.

During the same period, Daoist ideas and reasoning began to be conceptualized in literary criticism. From the Wei-Jin period onward, the reflection of Daoist taste in poetic practice and the conventionalization of Daoist concepts in poetics developed contemporaneously. Chinese *shi* poetry reached its peak in the Tang dynasty (618–907). The Tang also was the period in which Daoist teachings and religion gained official recognition and spread throughout China. The poetry of the High Tang further popularized and conventionalized Daoist ideas and themes. By the time of the Song dynasty (960–1279), many Daoist concepts were adapted into poetic criteria and became the intrinsic part of the poetic language. This kind of language and criteria filled the poetic anthologies and handbooks of the period and found their way into Song scholars’ annotations of Daoist classics, such as Lin Xiyi’s *Zhuangzi Juanzhai kouyi*. It was mainly through these sources that Bashô obtained his knowledge of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* as well as of Chinese poetry. Evidence shows that Bashô’s understanding of the *Zhuangzi* and his reading of Chinese poetry are closely related. It was the conscious association of the Chinese poetic tradition and Daoist principles that distinguished Bashô’s reading of the *Zhuangzi* from that of his predecessors. Chapter 4 demonstrates that Bashô’s concept of *fûryû* shows salient affinity with the meaning of *fengliu* asserted by the *shôyôyû* tradition. The latter was an aesthetic stance originating from the *Zhuangzi* and figured in the practices of Chinese poets from the Wei-Jin period. The examination of Bashô’s *fûryû* locates his use of the *Zhuangzi* in a broader literary context: by returning to the *shôyôyû* tradition and joining the great recluse poets of ancient China, Bashô attempted to reclaim a sphere of profundity and elegance through the popular poetic genre *haikai*, a world distinct from that of classical *waka* and *renge*.

Using Daoist principles embodied in Chinese poetic tradition as a frame of reference, Chapter 5, “Following *Zôka* and Returning to *Zôka*,” examines the Daoist impact on Bashô’s *haikai* theories. Along with the de-
velopment of Shômon haikai, the shôyôyû tradition, which had a remarkable impact on the thematic interests of the Shômon in the 1680s, was given new theoretical significance; on that basis, Bashô put forth his poetic principle to “follow zôka (C. zaohua, the creative) and return to zôka.” A notion originating in the Zhuangzi and used widely in Chinese philosophical and literary writings, zôka implies the workings of the Dao in the natural creation and transformation of all things and beings. Applied to artistic creation, it refers primarily to naturalness and spontaneity. Tracing the application of a cluster of Daoist terms, such as zôka, shizen/jinen, tenkô (heaven’s work), tenrai (the piping of heaven), kyo (emptiness), and ki (the primal breath), back to Chinese critical tradition, this chapter examines how Bashô adapted these notions, particularly the principles regarding the operation of the poetic mind and the criteria of poetic quality, in forming his compositional theories. In both areas, Bashô emphasizes the importance of following zôka to poetic creativity. In his famous hai-bun, Oi no kobumi (Essays in my pannier, 1687), Bashô declares that zôka is the single most important principle that runs through all arts. This declaration—one of the rare theoretical statements the master left in his own writings—reveals the fundamental principle of his later years.

Although Bashô left no elaborate theoretical works on poetry, many of his ideas on haikai composition, such as kôgo kizoku (awakening to the lofty and returning to the common), butsuga ichinyo (object and self as one), fueki ryûkô (the unchanging and the fluid), were summarized and recorded in his disciples’ notes. As indicated by the dichotomous aspects of these concepts, Bashô attempted to solve the fundamental contradictions of haikai—the paradoxes between sublimation and popularization, between extemporaneous individual verse and rigidly regulated collaborative sequence, and between the dependence on classical tradition and the pressing need for newness—with a dualistic poetics. As we shall see in my fifth chapter, among a wide spectrum of sources he absorbed in his practical poetics, Daoist principles functioned as a cornerstone of Bashô’s haikai theory. By drawing upon the Daoist ideas, he greatly reduced the formalistic limitations inherited by haikai and widened its latitude for spontaneity. As a result, the adaptation of the Zhuangzi did not obliterate the originality of Bashô and his followers. Rather, it assisted them in their extraordinary effort to transform haikai, which hitherto had been regarded as a frivolous pastime, into a lasting art form.