The first passage, from secular to religious life, demonstrates a dramatic reorganization of cultural value. In the early tenth century, the Japanese emperors ordered the compilation of the Senzaishū and Goshūishū, which are among the earliest anthologies of Japanese poetry. These anthologies are of particular interest because they are primarily composed by poet-priests, who were typically members of the aristocracy or the imperial court.

On the one hand, these anthologies reveal the importance of religious practices like marriage and death, which were seen as significant life passages in Japanese culture. In these poems, death is primarily addressed through the lens of mourning and the state of dissatisfaction with worldly life that led to death. The authors of these poems often compare the state of mourning after a death to the state of mourning after a marriage, as both culminate in a spiritual transformation.

On the other hand, the Senzaishū also contains poems that express a theoretical basis in which the writing of poems—especially those addressed to a particular monk or nun—could make a lyric-meditative response to the Buddhist poems in the imperial anthologies, so that they might depict the Buddhist poems in a more positive light. In this instance, the writers explicitly compare the state of mourning after a death to the state of mourning after a marriage, whereas they turn to the spiritual life more directly in the Buddhist poems.

Of the life passages that are common to both our own culture and the Buddhist culture, the topic of death was perhaps the most frequent subject of the poems from the Goshūishū and Shūishū. This particular selection of eleven poems circles around the theme of "passages." Of the life passages, some to take the tonsure. One poem here, the author wrote this poem a year after he took the tonsure, expresses the author's horror at the change it represented. The Buddhist poems in the imperial anthologies, so that they might depict the Buddhist poems in a more positive light. In this instance, the writers explicitly compare the state of mourning after a death to the state of mourning after a marriage, whereas they turn to the spiritual life more directly in the Buddhist poems.

Appendix: Some Buddhist-themed translations by Stephen D. Miller

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For the Senzaishū, the first compilation of Buddhist-themed poetry, Miller succeeded in capturing its freshness and pain. The poems are translations of Buddhist-themed poetry from the early Nara period and the late Heian period, respectively. They were compiled into the Senzaishū and Goshūishū, respectively. The Senzaishū contains poems that express the author's ambivalence about the huge change it represented. The Goshūishū contains poems that express the author's joy at the change. The poems in the Senzaishū were compiled by poet-priests, who were typically members of the aristocracy or the imperial court. The poems in the Goshūishū were compiled by poet-priests who were typically members of the Buddhist monastic community.

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