

## **HAIKU and English Education : Sharing International Haiku in Class**

Hidenori HIRUTA

*Haiku International Association*

### **Haiku (俳句)**

Haiku is a form of Japanese poetry, consisting of 17 moras (or *on*), in the phrases of 5, 7, and 5 mora respectively. Although haiku are often stated to have 17 syllables, this is inaccurate as syllables and moras are not the same. Haiku typically contain a *kigo* (seasonal reference), and a *kireji* (cutting word). In Japanese, haiku are traditionally printed in a single vertical line and tend to take aspects of the natural world as their subject matter, while haiku in English often appear in three lines to parallel the three phrases of Japanese haiku and may deal with any subject matter.

In English haiku, some writers like the 5-7-5 syllable pattern, and others the 3-5-3 syllable pattern. Some of young people write poems of three short lines.

Writers are expected to use all possible season words extending beyond the original Japanese concept in order to gain cultural awareness in sharing their haiku with readers. World Kigo Data Base by Dr. Gabi Greve is very helpful. Please check it out at her blog: <http://worldkigodatabase.blogspot.com/>.

### **International Haiku**

Haiku is loved in over 50 nations, where more than two million writers compose haiku in English as well as in their own languages.

Haiku tell us about how they feel, think, or live as they imply life styles as well as viewpoints on nature and human affairs.

As a result, haiku help us gain deeper understanding of cultures, and have better communication.

### **Haiku by Students**

Students study about haiku in English at junior or senior high schools. They get familiar with haiku written worldwide.

Some students write haiku for contests, and others for school festivals.

Haiku by students at Akita Meitokukan High School are posted among the prizewinners at the blog of the Earthday Haiku Contest :

<http://kidsearthdayhaiku.blogspot.com/>.

Haiku is taken up in class to inspire college students who take creative writing courses, and also to inspire international students who take ESL writing courses.

This is because writing haiku is helpful for students to express themselves, and because haiku could be a good topic in class, about which they easily talk with each other.

Haiku could be a pleasing means of communication, which leads to a mutual understanding beyond the gaps of cultures.

### **Patricia Lidia in dialogue with Hidenori Hiruta:**

#### **Interview with the Japanese haiku writer**

Patricia Lidia in Romania is a haiku friend of mine, a member of the Romanian Haiku Group. She gave an interview to me about haiku through e-mail in May, 2011, which was translated into Romanian, and also published in the Haiku Romanian Magazine *ROKU* on July 4, 2011.

I hope that this interview will be helpful for students and teachers when they take up haiku in class.

Patricia Lidia has her haiku blog, whose address is:

<http://patricialidia.wordpress.com/>.

1. *Dear Hidenori San, you are one of the haiku writers that I follow and read constantly. Please, tell us more about yourself, education, professional background.*

I studied at Akita University in Akita prefecture, Northern Honshu, Japan, from 1961 till 1965.

I majored in the English language and literature. I wrote a graduation thesis on *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot, titled *Despair and Salvation*.

I taught English at high schools in Akita prefecture from 1965 till 2010.

My lifework is to write haiku in Japanese as well as in English.

I had two haiku mentors.

One of them is Dr. Akito Arima leading the Japanese haiku group: Ten'I (Providence).

The other is Professor David McMurray at the International University of Kagoshima, and a columnist at the Asahi Haikuist Network by the Asahi Shimbun.

2. *How were you first introduced to haiku, and what do you mostly enjoy about the form?*

In May, 1998, I studied about international haiku and started writing haiku in English. Professor David McMurray at the International University of Kagoshima came to Akita-city and gave us a workshop on international haiku at the meeting of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT).

He told us about international haiku and showed us how to write haiku in English. Since then I have been studying about haiku in English through the Asahi Culture Center, where we can enjoy International Haiku Correspondence with Professor David McMurray. As our mentor he gives us instructions and suggestions on how to burnish and improve haiku in English.

I enjoy writing haiku in English by the format of 3-5-3 syllables. This is because the 3-5-3 format is similar to Japanese haiku, consisting of 17 moras (or *on*), in three phrases of 5, 7, 5 moras respectively.

3. *Who are some of your favorite poets and can you suggest any of your favourite haiku of all time?*

Matsuo Basho, Dr. Akito Arima, David McMurray and Kirby Record in Japan.

Michael Dylan Welch in USA. John McDonald in UK.

Kisakata—

Seishi sleeping in the rain,

Wet mimosa blossoms.

Matsuo Basho

looking for  
something lost —  
wearing a winter cap

Dr. Akito Arima

White lilies  
feeding tube  
removed

David McMurray

sunset floating  
with a single cherry blossom  
over green stones

Kirby Record

first dream —  
the way home  
perfectly clear

Michael Dylan Welch

*yill bottle taps skailt —  
he hunkers  
refleckin on the galaxy*

*(scots haiku)*

beer bottle tops scattered —  
he sits  
musing on the galaxy

John McDonald

4. *As a prolific writer of haiku, can you give us a window into your creative process? Where do you find the inspiration for your poetry? What do you find most challenging about writing haiku? Do you have a strict discipline for practicing haiku?*

I make the most of a glossary of seasonal words for Japanese haikuists, and check out seasonal words and haiku on the Internet.

You can make the most of *World Kigo Database* by Dr. Gabi Greve at her blog.

<http://worldkigodatabase.blogspot.com/>.

I am a member of the three Japanese haiku groups, which makes me write and submit at least 18 haiku a month. And I usually write 12 haiku in English as well as in Japanese a month for my blog and website on the Internet.

Practice makes perfect, but it is important to have a careful observation, a deep insight and a good imagination. It is also important to select words and terms suitable for expressing what we have in mind, thinking of what images are given to readers through the haiku.

My haiku are based on the wonders and beauties given by nature, sometimes on fears or sorrows nature gives to us. Nature includes the earth itself as well as the universe. They are also based on our human lives, which imply how we feel, think, or love in our daily lives.

Haiku is a means of expressing my insight or my intuitive grasp of reality. Firstly, it is most challenging to have my own insights, to realize what is hidden or invisible in the abyss of things or affairs, and to grasp what is essential or true in them.

Lastly, it is also challenging to select words or terms in order to express my insights concretely and briefly.

My strict discipline is that I should get my own insights and find my own expressions.

5. *Of all the haiku you've written over the years, could you share the three poems of which you're proudest?*

Basho's wind  
circling the stone tablet  
midsummer

the spring thaw  
awakens primroses  
valley dawn

tying a boat  
i cannot even dream  
mimosa blossoms

6. *What is your opinion on the modern haiku (haiku that lax syllable count, uses metaphors, similes and rhyme, and has unnatural images as its central focus)?*

Haiku is shared with each other among haikuists and readers.

Even the modern haiku should be written concretely and briefly enough to be appreciated by most lovers of haiku.

Next, I think that haiku is the shortest form of poetry, which is composed of three short lines. Maybe haiku might be composed of any free short three lines. The most important point is what we want to express through this short form. Haiku is not impressive nor stunning without insight.

7. *Haikai, Hokku, and Haiku. These terms can be confusing. Please explain. Is there a difference between the terms?*

In the earliest times we have Long Poems and Short Poems, Tanka.

Then at a later date, at the beginning of the Christian Era, Short Poems began to be composed by two poets, one making the 5,7,5, the other the 7,7.

A Short Poem was called a Short Linked Poem, that is, a tanka or Short Poem made by two people.

Long Linked Poems, that is, a succession of 5, 7, 5; 7, 7; 5, 7, 5; 7, 7. etc. for fifty or a hundred or a thousand verses begin to appear in the later part of the Heian Era, 794-858.

In the early part of the Kamakura Era, 1186-1339, such long linked poems became exceedingly popular, and was named Haikai Renga, "sportive linked poems", abbreviated to Haikai to their composition, which became used of all such poetry and poetical exercise.

The word Haiku is a mixture of this expression, Haikai, and Hokku, the first poem of the Long Linked Verses, Haikai plus Hokku becoming Haiku, about the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

“Haikai” sometimes means Haiku, and some other people still use the word “Hokku.”

Haikai or Renku has practically died out in Japan.

The contempt of Shiki, 1886-1902, for this form of literary composition is often given as the reason for it.

More probably, the inherent difficulty finding four or five real poets, in sufficient harmony of character and mood to accomplish the difficult task of writing one poem between them, may have caused the practice to stop.

8. *You publish on your blog your haiku in both Japanese and English, but translating haiku is a complex task. Please explain the complexity of this task. Do you always feel that the translated version captures the same feelings as the original haiku?*

It is not so complicated for me to write haiku in both Japanese and English

This is because my haiku is written from my own insight, whether it is written in Japanese or in English.

This means that my Japanese haiku is not equal to its direct translation in English.

I write haiku in Japanese to express my insight from the Japanese standpoints influenced by the Japanese cultural backgrounds.

At the same time I write haiku in English to express the insight from the English standpoints influenced by the English cultural backgrounds as much as possible.

The problem is whether my own insight or my intuitive grasp of reality is well expressed in Japanese haiku and English haiku or not.

In fact, it might be almost impossible to express the insight or the grasp of reality in both languages of Japanese and English because I am not a native speaker of English.

But I hope that I would like to try to do that, appealing to the universal feelings or the common senses beyond the gaps of cultures, and that haiku will give birth to a deeper mutual understanding and a better communication.

Some directly or literally translated versions successfully capture the same feelings of the original haiku. But others don't.

This is because the cultural backgrounds are different.

So I usually try to translate haiku in free translation, expressing the writer's insight exactly and considerately.

This is because the most important point is what the writer implies as his or her insight in haiku.

*9. What are your future writing goals? Do you have any haiku projects currently in the works?*

One of my future writing goals is to write haiku in Japanese so that Japanese readers will appreciate them in such impressive and profound ways.

And it is also that their English version can also be appreciated in the same ways by readers worldwide.

I am planning to teach haiku and haiga to some students at Akita International University from June. They will donate their haiku or haiga to the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Students exhibit their haiku or haiga at the school festival, and at the International Festival in Akita-city in October.

Citizens or visitors will donate their money, getting their favorite haiku or haiga by AIU students in exchange.

*10. Could you tell us about the Akita International Haiku Network and its history? How did you initially become involved with the group, and what are your main responsibilities as Secretary-General?*



In March, 2009, my friend and I talked about the idea that we should start Akita International Haiku Network, a nonprofit group.

In May, president and three professors at Akita International University, a professor emeritus at Akita University, three haikuists, a tanka poet, three senryu poets, a high school English teacher, and four members of the Akita Foreign Language Association participated in the group as the founding members.

We founded the group with the motto, “We all try our best / in our busy, busy lives / to write poetry.” We have opened the web site in the hope that children as well as adults will write and enjoy haiku, senryu and tanka, and that they will share it on our network.

As Secretary-General, I have been in charge of almost all the activities, such as network postings, the publication of the yearly pamphlet, and festival events of poetry.

*11. What are some of your other reading and writing interests? What was the best book you read over the last years?*

Zen and Japanese culture are one of my interests.

*HAIKU Volume 1 EASTERN CULTURE* by R. H. BLYTH was.

*12. Is there a question that I didn't ask you and would be relevant for us?*

There are four styles of printing haiku.

- a) apple orchard –  
the withered tree remains  
in radish flowers

- b) Apple orchard –  
the withered tree remains  
in radish flowers
  
- c) Apple orchard –  
The withered tree remains  
In radish flowers.
  
- d) apple orchard – the withered tree remains in radish flowers

Now I prefer a) type, because haiku means phrases in Japanese.

Haiku is the shortest form of poetry composed of three lines, not a sentence.

In conclusion, it is up to each haikuist what type of writing he or she should choose.

### **Brief bio**

Hidenori Hiruta (蛭田秀法)

Shuto Hiruta (蛭田秋稻) (pen name) b. Akita-city, Northern Honshu, Japan, 1942.

Founding member and Secretary-General of the Akita International Haiku Network, and member of the Haiku International Association.

His haiku have appeared in various publications including Asahi Shimbun; Haijinx; Simply Haiku; and HaikuPix Review, and HI (Tokyo) haiku publications.

Blog: <http://akitahaiku.blogspot.com> Website: <http://akitahaiku.wordpress.com/>

He is based in Akita, Northern Honshu, Japan.