

Time, Place, Occasion(or “TPO” -- *toki to ba-ai ni ôjite*: 時と場合に応じて)*haikai, hokku, and “nature” in “japan”*

Let's begin by asking what we usually think when we hear the words “haiku and nature in japan.” The words “nature” and “japan” have a familiar ring, and you may have learned the word *haiku* in elementary school. Do people in “japan” know and use these words? Or do they represent names or epithets imposed from “without.” Is Bashō a “haiku” poet? How did people in the late Edo period (1868-1912) respond when visitors from Europe and America asked them for a word corresponding to “nature” in English?

My focus will be on Bashō (1644-1694), but I would also like to explore the challenge that Bashō posed in his *Knapsack Notebook* (*Oi no kobumi*) when he wrote: “Saigyō’s *waka*, Sōgi’s *renga*, Sesshū’s *suibokuga* (water and ink painting), Rikyū’s *chanoyu* (the art of serving tea) -- one thread runs through the artistic Ways. And this aesthetic spirit is to follow *Zōka* [create/transform], to be a companion to the turning of the four seasons.”

Since all of these monk-poet-artists rely on a “buddhist” way of thinking and seeing, I will introduce some fundamental Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas. However, since Saigyō and Bashō echo the thoughts of Shinran, I would like to introduce the vocabulary of the Jōdo (“Pure Land”) tradition with words like *nembutsu*, *jiriki*, *tariki*, and *jinen* that will provide a different way of understanding “nature” in Bashō’s *hokku*.

Finally, we need to know that the “texts and ideas” connected with Bashō present ideas and words “translated” into “Japanese” from Sanskrit and Chinese sources. These same ideas come to us in texts “translated” from “Japanese” to English. So, as we read these “English” translations, I will ask you to question how the English words describe how these monk-poets wanted to identify and enter places (*chi* 地) where people, animal, plants, and energies “jointly exist” (in *Nihongo* the phrase is *iri-ai-chi* 入合地, or “enter and gather in a common place” or “entering a place where a gathering happen”).

So, I will begin with a short introduction to how people in *Nihon* (*Nippon*) learn how to write and share their thoughts and feelings in a writing system that differed from China. This will also give me an opportunity to share with you the tradition of *uta/utau* (song/singing chanting) that informs what Bashō does.

いろは I-RO-HA Poem

<i>katakana</i>	<i>hiragana</i>	<i>kanji / kana</i>
イロハニホヘト	いろはにほへと	色は匂へど
チリヌルヲ	ちりぬるを	散りぬるを
ワカヨタレソ	わかよたれそ	我が世誰ぞ
ツネナラム	つねならむ	常ならむ
ウキノオクヤマ	うみのおくやま	有為の奥山
*ケフコエテ	けふこえて	今日越えて
アサキユメミシ	あさきゆめみし	浅き夢みし
エヒモセス	ゑひもせす	酔もせず

Classical Pronunciation and a preliminary translation

<i>i ro ha ni ho he to</i>	[7 sounds]	As for the colors [of spring blossoms], though they are fragrant
<i>chi ri nu ru (w)o</i>	[5 sounds]	they scatter [and disappear] !
<i>wa ka yo ta re so</i>	[6 sounds]	In this world of ours, who--[is there anyone/anything]
<i>tsu ne na ra mu</i>	[5 sounds]	[that] remains in a state that never changes?
<i>u (w)i no o ku ya ma</i>	[7 sounds]	the far-off mountains of transiency the far off mountains appear like peaks that we must cross to gain/acquire true understanding even though we “know” that life constantly changes, we believe that “on the other side of the mountain peak” is a realm that never changes
<i>ke fu ko e te</i>	[5 sounds]	Today, [let us] transcend [that way of seeing/thinking] let us go beyond thinking about this shore and that shore / this side and that side / let us go beyond thinking in dichotomies
<i>a sa ki yu me mi shi</i>	[7 sounds]	No more shallow dreaming our dreams will become so deep that the distinctions between dreams and reality disappears
<i>(w)e hi mo se su</i>	[5 sounds]	Nor the drunkenness and we will not become drunk by a desire to see, know, or control things in self-centered ways

Translation Notes

- 1) Although the spring flowers are beautiful and fragrant
- 2) They scatter and die.
- 3) Who in our world
- 4) Lives forever?
- 5) The faraway mountain of transiency
- 6) Today let us move beyond dualistic thinking
- 7) So that we will not see our lives as shallow dreams
- 8) And we will not remain drunk with attachments.

Modern Pronunciation

iro wa nioedo
chirinuru o
waga yo tare zo
tsune naran
ui no oku yama
kyō koete
asaki yume mi shi
ei mo sezu

4th line: *tsune* = to be always *nara* = to become *mu* = rhetorical question

Is there anyone/anything that can become always and never changing.

5th line: *ui no oku yam-a*

ウ 井 ⇒ う ゐ ⇒ 有 為 ego-centered and calculated doing/actions

ム イ ⇒ む ゐ ⇒ 無 為 non ego-centered doing

(他力・地力・無為 -- *tariki / jinen / Ch. wu-wei*)

In the first four lines, the poem introduces the idea of impermanence. In our world, nothing remains the same. But people often look at faraway mountains and think that they will find permanence or “enlightenment” on the other side. If a person sees things in dichotomies (transiency and durability, good and bad, left and right, this side and that side, “I” and “you”), that person will believe that they can transcend the bad and enter the good. The Mahāyāna world view eschews all attempts to divide the world into these dualities. “Today” (right now, each moment), we must see the world in wholeness, not dualities. We must go beyond (*koete*) the distinction between “dreams” (*yume*) and “the everyday” (*kyō*). Unbounded by shallow dreams (*asaki yume*), our vision becomes so deep that we will discard and know that the words “deep” and “shallow” are NOT TWO (Jpn. *funi* 不二), and we will no longer find ourselves drunk, captured, trapped or shackled to “things” that always change. Real understanding comes when we do not make facile distinctions between dream and reality; when we see and sense and wonder at the grandeur that includes mountains and sky; trees and rivers; people and insects; flowers and the moon.

Bashō (Banana Tree) and his *Hokku*

1. I will make a distinction between *waka/hokku* and *haiku* which is a modern words that Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) used to distinguish a “modern and independent” verse form that differed from the tradition of Bashō and his predecessors. Most people use the word *haiku* for both “modern *haiku*” and “premodern *hokku*” and they assume that both are “independent/stand alone” verses/poems.

2. I will introduce three words: *waka*, *hokku*, and *haibun*.

3. Here are two *hokku* and a *haibun* that I would like to introduce.

/ *furuike ya* / *kawazu tobi komu mizu no oto* /

/ an old pond / frog jumps in water's sound /

/ *shizukasa ya* / *iwa ni shimi iru semi no koe* /

/ *ah, the quietness* / *penetrating boulders cicadas' cries* / (100 decibels or more)

Haibun: A Farewell to Kyōriku

Just last autumn I happened to meet him, only to lament his departure now at the beginning of the Fifth Month. As our separation approached, he knocked on the door of my grass hut (*bashō*), and we spoke leisurely all day long. With great skill and sensitivity, he often shares his water and ink paintings and his *hokku*. So I asked him, “Why are you so fond of brush painting?” He replied, “Because I enjoy *hokku*.” “Why do you enjoy *hokku* / *haikai*?” “Because of *suiboku ga*.” Well, it seems that these arts are not two. Yes “it is a shame for a person to have many accomplishments,” so turning two arts to one purpose works best. In painting Kyōriku is my *sensei*; with *hokku*, I offer suggestions. But I acknowledge how he has penetrated deep into the world of water and ink painting and his brush moves with wondrous subtlety. I cannot begin to grasp the profundity of his work. I wrote: “My poetry is like a stove in winter or a fan in winter. It runs counter to popular tastes and it has no practical use. But even the play-filled words by Shunzei and Saigyō there is much that moves us. I believe it was Emperor Go-Toba who said: “In their poetry is truth suffused with sorrow. Gain strength from these words” do not stray from this one thin thread. In Kūkai’s writings we find: “Do not follow in the footsteps of the Ancients, seek what they sought.” This is also true of *haikai*. I lifted my lantern. I walked with him just past the gate. And then he departed. (1695, 6th month)