

Introduction To Basho's Haiku

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Haiku is a symbolic poem being the shortest in the world [1]. Haiku is literal sculpture by engraving and removing odd parts as much as possible from the original material, but has potential to fill enormous amount of contents regarding to emotion, atmosphere, and/or scenery. Haiku is essentially different from literal architecture, western poetry, consisting of various components that are added during the composition [2]. Haiku consists of 17 syllables, Kireji (or cutting letter), and Kigo (or seasonal word), and is independent of language. In this letter, after translating a famous Haiku by Basho[1] into English, the literal structure and way how to interpret the Haiku have been introduced and discussed. The mutual communication between the composer and readers is critical in Haiku, which is always exposed to free criticism and interpretation by readers. This is due to history of the formation and symbolic nature in the literal structure expressed by a few syllable points. It is suggested that pointillism plays the vital role not only in Haiku and painting, but also in meanders and turbulence in physics.

Haiku consists of 17 syllable points, the connected line of which meanders from left to right and *vice versa* at 5th and 12th points, and stops at 17th point. At these bending points and at the end point, an emotional entanglement, twist, vague, and/or lingering tone might arise, so there must be leaps of logic as the essential part in Haiku. Haiku may be considered as poem based on pointillism in painting: When green point and purple point are put side by side closely enough, for example, it looks as if the color of the two points and line between them changes into a single line with pearl color[2]. That is, two points having different color interfere with each other, and produce a new color line after removing the space between them. This is the reason why Haiku looks continuous line(s), though it consists of syllable points. In other words, Haiku is a series of 17 syllables or 3 passages (or phrases) consisting of 5, 7 and 5 syllables, respectively. The first, the second and the third passages are divided naturally to some extent, but sometimes they are punctuated intentionally in terms of Kireji (or cutting letter). Kireji enhances to create an entangled emotion in the mind of composer as well as readers. Another indispensable character in Hiku is Kigo (or seasonal word) that plays critical role in providing it seasonal atmosphere and/or scenery. Kigo gives immediately the theme a season as the background of the particular situation. Indeed, Kigo plays the vital role in the symbolic poem, Haiku. It may be worth noting here that pointillism plays a crucial role in meanders [3] and turbulence [4, 5]: Origin of meanders becomes clear by considering the locus of fluid particles having the maximum velocity at each the cross section of flow, while several problems in turbulence have been theoretically solved by viewing the flow being consisting representative 3 particles and all of the rest background particles. This suggests that difficult problems can also be elucidated based on pointillism by engraving the object and removing the odd parts as Haiku does.

Let me allow to translate a famous Haiku on the way of journey to 'Oku-no-Hosomichi'(or Secluded Narrow

Road) composed by Matsuo Basho(1644-1694)[1] to English.

furuike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto

ancient pond ! a frog jumps into it sound of water

The translated poem consists of 17 syllables, Kireji, '!', and Kigo, 'frog' satisfying the basic three rules in Haiku, so this is a Haiku, though the composer is permitted to violate the rules if it is more desirable. The passage 'ancient pond' itself punctuates the Haiku to some extent, but by adding the Kireji, '!' at the end, much more clear pause appears after the first passage, so that one may feel some emotion regarding to the pond and anticipates the next word. After the pause, the second passage (or phrase) 'a frog jumps into it' goes to the right (or left) in keeping afterimage of the pond and describes the motion of the frog, where Kigo, 'frog' sets up the season, summer, of the poem. Then, a weak pause appears after the second passage, together with afterimage of the frog and even that of pond in the first passage still being persisting. In Haiku, it is quite natural that image goes forward and backward, and *vice versa* in many times. Following the second pause, the third passage turns to the left (or right) this time. At this stage, the composer may be pleased and healed to hear delicate sound caused by the frog's jump into the pond in a deep and calm forest. The frog also splashes the water droplets on the surface and generates the circular waves moving outward. These waves reach at the shore and then will be reflected. This process will be repeated until they attenuate completely. Thus, it is required to wait long time for recovering original perfect silence until the sound due to the frog's jump and the water splash decay and the surface waves attenuate. After the end of the third passage 'sound of water,' there exists an eternal pause with afterimage regarding to pond, frog, sound, droplet or wave persisting still even now. The present author could share the afterimage with Matsuo Basho [1] and uncountable number of readers in this globe.

Basho has proposed that one must keep old customs if they are essential; otherwise, Haiku loses its own value, but at the same time one must always try to take into account the newest fashion when one writes Haiku[1]. It may be evident how above Basho's Haiku is modern as if it was composed yesterday! Historically, long passage of 17 syllables and short passage of 14 syllables are composed by different poets alternatively, and this process is repeated in many times. The long passage of 17 syllables becomes an independent poem, Haiku, and the combined passage of the long passage and the short passage having 31 syllables becomes another poem, called Tanka: This means that Haiku or Tanka is essentially composed by plural persons. Therefore, even Haiku is written by a single poet; it is always exposed to free criticism and interpretation by readers. This infers that mutual communication between the composer and readers is critical in Haiku. The poem of 17 syllables was coined as Haiku during Meiji era beginning 1868, though Basho wrote poem consisting of 17 syllables long before that era[1].

Note: Haiku and Tanka

It may be instructive to present a long passage of 17 syllables and a short passage of 14 syllables to explain the relation and the difference between Haiku and Tanka:

origami! while I am folding frog other is crying

I played with my daughter at house in home town

Historically, long passage of 17 syllables and short passage of 14 syllables have been composed by different poets alternatively in many times. The first passage of 17 syllables becomes Haiku, and the first combined passage of 31 syllables forms a Tanka.

References

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