



Haiku in English

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Abstract: It seems that today everybody writes haiku. Haiku has become a global phenomenon. It seems to be the most democratic means of artistic expression accessible to people worldwide as it has no restriction of race, faith, ideology, etc. Haiku poetry is comparable to Naïve art viz. by ignoring the so-called rules is essential for the art to be considered naive, and being more accessible to everyone with no necessity for institutional learning due to its short form and its relationship with the world of nature which most of the men, women and even children are intimately related to. However, the form of haiku prevailing today rarely represents the authentic zen form of haiku, but is rather composed in a wide variety of forms, as one-liner, three-liner, four-liner and even minimalistic style of verse.

Key words: chan, zen, yin, yang, dao, bodhi

INTRODUCTION

The compound term *hai-ku*^[9] 俳句 “amusing verse” is an incorrectly spelled term derived from two Old Chinese words: 1) *pai* [Pinyin Romanization] or *p'ai* [Wade Romanization pronounced actually *p^hai* the initial stop/plosive sound *p* being aspirated, viz. followed by a sharp puff of breath; and 2) Middle Chinese **kiu* < from the Old Chinese form **ko* with no aspirate component (modern Chinese spelling [Pinyin] *pái jù*). Since there are no aspirated phonemes in Japanese, the authentically aspirated *p^h* in the initial position of the compound terms becomes decomposed, retaining only the aspirate while losing the initial plosive component *p*. Haiku formerly (in classical or Basho period) known as *hai-kai* 俳諧 “amusingly harmonious” (instead of the authentic spelling *phai-kai*) is derived from the Chinese 俳 + 諧 = *pái* + *xié* “not serious=amusing + harmonious”, viz. “amusing harmony” (the term 俳 *pái* being the same as the first syllable of *hai-ku*). Thus, the Japanese term *hai-ku* should be pronounced authentically and properly *phai-ku*! Besides, the term *hai* is considered a two-syllabic unit *ha-i* in Japanese, whereas it is authentically a monosyllabic word (as every Chinese word originally was) comprising aspirated plosive *ph* and the diphthong *ai*.

NB. The letter “z” represents the affricate “DZ” in Chinese and Japanese. Thus the term “zen” (derived from Chinese “chan” as a variation of the Buddhist Pali “jhana”) is to be properly pronounced “dzen” in Japanese.

Classical zen-haiku

Analyzing the most famous haiku of them all, viz. Matsuo Basho’s Frog Haiku, Susumu Takiguchi^[15] has clearly demonstrated that Basho did not compose this well-known haiku intuitively, spontaneously, and from direct experience as expected to be the case of a zen follower, as advocated by D.T. Suzuki^{[5][14]} in his many writings on Zen-Buddhism, but he did go through various stages of honing and polishing the verse before perfecting it.

Basho firstly utilized premeditation with selecting deliberately on purpose the introductory 5-syllable phrase from several available options.

Premeditation means that the author did not compose his haiku spontaneously from a direct experience, but apparently used a careful planning scheme (in accord with the principles of Daoist dialectics) in order to

honing its final form to perfection – this being in contradiction with the teaching of D.T.Suzuki who advocates non-intellectual or thoughtless “zen” - thus he praises Hui-Neng the 6th patriarch of the Chinese Chan (viz. Zen-sect) for being illiterate, to emphasize his “pure unsullied heart” of a unlearned village boy uncontaminated by human learning.

This innocent virginal aspect of the prominent religious figures as a rule is stressed in all religions, e.g. the prophet Muhammad is styled *ummī* (“unlettered”), meaning that his soul was unsullied by human knowledge and virginal before it received the divine word from god directly, i.e. “without premeditation (viz. the cognitive process of thinking)”.

But the ideal of Chan or Zen is not to become ignorant, empty-headed, thoughtless or to use urban speech “dumb stupid” but to get rid of slobbery mawkish sentimentality which inevitably interferes with one’s objective perception of Reality (viz. *tathatā* “suchness or thusness” in Buddhist terminology) thus keeping one in the bondage of illusions, phantasies, and unreal expectations, as the main obstacles on one’s path to the attainment of *nirvāna* or *moksha* the final liberation from *samsāra* viz. the endless cycle of painful deaths and rebirths.

Secondly, Basho conformed the verse to the renown Daoist dialectical pattern of *yin* and *yang*; Chinese adepts of Daoism known as *shan-ren* “man of the mountain, a recluse” (modelled after the Vedic *vana-prastha* “forest-dweller”) were intimately related to Nature, where came actually from quite a familiar attitude to seasonal changes in nature of the haiku poets.

Dialectics by definition is the ultimately OBJECTIVE method of understanding Reality as the Unity of two opposite but complementary principles (in Buddhist terminology the concept of objective Reality is called *tathatā*, as stated above).

Chinese Daoist dialectics involve the opposition yin-yang (actually borrowed and adopted from the Aryan Veda) as is defined by the “Great Commentary on the I Ching (viz. the Book of Changes):

一 阴 一 阳 之 谓 道 = *yi yin yi yang zhe wei DAO* viz. “One yin and one yang is what is called (viz. what constitutes the Dao or) the WAY”.^{[7][8]}

The Dao viz. Dao-ism has exerted the most decisive influence on the formation of Chinese Buddhism called “Chan (or Zen in Japanese)” and since the Chan or Zen greatly contributed to the authentic classical zen-form of haiku by Matsuo Basho (actually his haiku always represent various modes of the DAO itself as explained below in the example below) it is of utmost relevance in composing haiku poems.

Thirdly, Basho coupled the Daoist concept of complementary opposites with an additional awakening *bodhi* zen-element inherited from Buddhist tradition.

In point of fact, the “awakening (sc. to Reality as it is)” viz. *bodhi* element is not at all an authentically Buddhist concept but is a part of the legacy of the Vedic sacred tradition, the synonymous Vedic term is *jāgarti* “waking, vigilance”, related to *jāgrvas* viz. “wakeful, watchful, vigilant” being applied to the gods as their pre-eminent divine attribute but also to their followers who used to “staying awake” during important religious festivities as to gain spiritual rewards. These are the examples from the hymns of the Rigveda^[13], e.g., 1.136.3: “(Gods) Mitra and Varuna come ye day by day, ye two *jāgrvāmsā* viz. wakeful ones, who watch sleepless day by day”; “the holy Vedic singers versed in sacred hymns, being *jāgrvāmsaḥ* viz. ever vigilant, wakeful, kindle Agni the sacrificial Fire” (3, 10, 9); and “the god Agni himself is said to be exalted day by day by *jāgrvādbhir* (viz. men who watch, the wakeful ones) and worshipped with oblation” (3.29, 2; 7, 5, 1; 10, 91, 1).

As Takiguchi underlines “the frog haiku has three versions...the haiku was not composed in a single session in a complete form...and had a number of issues for Basho...it is wrong to assume, let alone conclude, that Basho wrote the frog haiku *in situ* or even from direct experience”.

The traditional version of Frog Haiku beginning with *yamabuki ya* viz. “mountain rose” as seasonal reference, do not conform to *yin-yang* pattern, and is really unnecessary since the frog itself represents “spring season”.

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Thus Basho substituted the initial phrase *yamabuki ya* by *furu ike ya* in order to confirm it to the Daoist dialectics, viz.:

古 池 や 蛙 飛 び こ む 水 の 音
furu ike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto

“Old pond, o(h)! a frog jumps in; the sound (viz. noise) of water”

The principles of zen-haiku

Thus, every of the three constitutive elements of the authentic zen-haiku plays perfectly its role in accordance to the law of Daoist dialectics:

1. (*yin*) passive scenery (= old pond, symbolic of eternity, motionlessness, stillness, passivity)
2. (*yang*) active seasonal agent (= a jumping frog, activity)
3. (*zen*) awaking startle or *bodhi*-element (viz. a split-second transient sound of water, symbolic of non-lasting nature of all things, which startled Basho awake from being deeply absorbed into his own thoughts) the purpose of which is to awaken one to *tathatā* viz. “suchness or thusness”, viz. “reality as it is”.

In Christianity^[6] too the “staying awake” is a very important spiritual conception. Jesus himself often has emphasized the importance of this spiritual requirement of “staying awake” to his disciples, e.g. “Therefore, keep watch...” (Matthew 24:42);

“But you do know this: had the owner of the house known when the thief was coming, he would have watched (=stayed awake) and not allowed his house to be broken into.” (Matthew 24:43);

“The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps...Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:4-13).

This important phrase viz. “keep watch/stay awake” written in the original Greek text Γρηγορεῖτε (=Grēgoreite) and ἐγρηγόρησεν is related etymologically to the Vedic terms of the same reduplicated verb *jā-gr*/Greek (*e*) *gre-gor* from which derived the Christian name *Gregorius* viz. Gregory which means the same as Vedic *jāgrvas* “wakeful, watchful”.

The haiku which is composed without the dialectical opposition of *yin* vs. *yang* and which bears no *bodhi*-element within, viz. “awakening moment”, is worthless like a tree that bears no fruit. Compare Jesus’s attitude quite similar the one described above when he said (as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew): “Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire”, and again: “Maybe next year (this fig tree) will bear fruit. If not, then cut it down”.

Modern no-zen haiku

There is a vast variety of the newly “invented” types of haiku, new one-liners, four-liners, even minimalistic forms which are not poetry at all, how much less haiku. The following examples published by the “Chrysanthemum (example A)”^[4], the “Asahi Haikuist (examples B and C)”^[1], and the “Presence (example D)”^[10] will illustrate the point:

(A)

sun

tunnel

sun

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The above stanza features the opposition *yin-yang* viz. The alternation of the opposites only, only, just like the examples presented below (it has no awakening element within unless we assume that the author has fallen asleep before the exit from the tunnel), e.g.:

YANG - YIN - YANG (viz. Bright - Dark - Bright).

The Chinese term *yang* is derived from Vedic (*śuk*)*lam* “bright” via apheresis > Old Chinese *lang* > Middle Chinese and Modern Mandarin *yang*; the term *yin* is derived from Vedic *kṛṣṇam* “dark” > Old Chinese *qrum* > Middle Chinese *kyim* > Modern Mandarin *yin*. The characters *yang* and *yin* originally depicted:

1. *yang* 陽 = *fu* 阜 “a hill/mound/wall” + *yang* 易 “sun” meaning “sun above a hill, viz. sunny (=bright) side of a hill”; modern simplified form is 阳 with no change in meaning.

2. *yin* 陰 = *fu* 阜 “a hill/mound/wall” + *yin* 侏 “presence of clouds” viz. sun’s being covered by the clouds, hence meaning “shady (=dark) side of a hill”; modern simplified form of the character *yin* 阴 differs from the classical one, consisting of *fu* 阜 “a hill/mound/wall” + *yue* 月 “moon”, whence the meaning “moon above a hill” (denoting actually darkness/nighttime).

As explained above *yin* and *yang* constitute what is called *dao* 道 the “way”.

Thus the sequence YANG - YIN - YANG may denote:

- I Sun - Clouds - Sun
- II Light - Darkness - Light
- III Sun - Moon - Sun
- IV Warmth - Coolness - Warmth
- V Heat - Cold - Heat
- VI Inbreathe - Outbreathe - Inbreathe
- VII Positive - Negative - Positive

The author has apparently abused the proverbial opposition light vs. darkness prevailing in many folk traditions, but with far less inventiveness on his side, compare e.g.

English: *come rain, com shine / there will be sunbshine after rain /*

Slavic: *red evening wet morning*

(B)

between two sighs--heat

The above haiku distinguishes a kind of superficial yin-yang scheme, sighs vs. heat, but the scene is dull rather than awakening.

(C)

the beauty in the beauty magnolia

This is not a haiku and not a poetry at all. There is no unity of complementary opposite principles, yin vs. yang. It is an example of empty tautology, a pseudo alliteration of the same sequence of sounds, actually a superfluous repetition of the same word. With regard to that, the following comments by Dhugal J. Lindsay^[11] are especially instructive:

“Haiku are born of experience. When crafting a haiku, one should always endeavor to instill the same experience

in the reader, rather than telling them what they should be experiencing. This is why phrases such as “How beautiful!” or “the loneliness” are very rarely found in haiku. A haiku poet chooses words that refer to concrete entities such as flowers or birds, rocks or the wind, enabling readers to instantly recognize them and either picture them or experience them in their memories through their senses. The poet then combines these words in a way that lets readers experience that moment or insight that the poet thought worthwhile to convey. In doing so, the composer needs to be concrete.”

The term “beauty” is just a matter of personal taste and not an objective reality, and as such it is far from zen *dao* and Buddhist *tathatā*, being an illusion. Thus instead of only alluding on the esthetic appearance of magnolia, the author obtrusively imposes his own taste on the readers. This is in sharp contrast to Martin Lucas’s^[10] requirements for a good haiku: “Original thought; original imagery; and, with its unobtrusive alliteration, pleasingly musical language. Importantly, it also resists definitive interpretation.”

Moreover, the author’s onesided obsession with beauty alone makes it impossible the attainment of *naiṣkramya* (Sanskrit) > *nekkhamma* Pali term denoting Buddhist ideal of non-attachment, viz. “giving up the world and leading a holy life, renunciation of worldliness, freedom from lust, craving & desires, dispassionateness, self-abnegation”.^[12] It dramatically affects one’s *karma* which causes a series of deaths and rebirths. As *Brahma-vaivarta puranam*^[3] expounds: “Through karma a person acquires happiness or sorrow...beauty or deformity... all the animate and inanimate objects of the world are transitory like dream...the good and the evil which attend a person are destructible like bubbles of water. This is why sages are not attached to them.”

(D)

at dawn the din of distant dogs

Apparently, Martin Lucas as the author has been amusing himself with the alliteration of the “d” sound in the above haiku. However, the scene is quite “dreary” one (note his favorite “d” sound within), and the barking of the rambling dogs is a part of everyday scenery. On the other hand, the barking of dogs has absolutely nothing to do with “d” sound. In English language this sound of a dog is rather transcribed as “woof, woof”! And no awakening moment is there, since the barking of the dogs in the morning is quite an ordinary usual habit. A more “original imagery with an unobtrusive alliteration” would sound like this: *at holy hour the howl of hidden hounds*.

(E)

sharpening this night of stars distant dogs

This one-liner by Stuart Quine is interesting but not as Martin Lucas commented: “There is no other way of saying it”. Yes, there are other ways of saying it, for example in Slavic tradition it is expressed somewhat differently, though it is hard to translate it literally into English. But approximately, it says: *it’s becoming serene* (sc. the night sky), *with stars goggling* (sc. on us from above), *it will be a frosty morning* (or *there will be frost in the morn*).

Natural or Divine Haiku

Apart from all those artificial forms of haiku thus composed intentionally on purpose, there is a special kind of haiku created by Mother Nature herself:

A)

rain

sunlight

(the bow of) rainbow

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viz. *rain* (YIN) - *sunlight* (YANG) - *rainbow* (jāgarti/BODHI awakening surprise)

The appearance of the bow of Rainbow in the atmosphere is caused by dispersion of sun (YANG) beams through the drops of rain or mist (YIN) in the sky opposite the sun. Rainbow forms a full circle but the observer on the ground sees only a bow of colors above the ground. In ancient times Rainbow was considered a Divine Token, e.g. God said allegedly to Noah: "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." (Genesis 9:13). But the appearance of Rainbow has even greater significance for man, since it testifies that the Earth (consequently the atmosphere around it too) is a round object and not a flat platform.

But some modern haikuists being not impressed by this natural marvel they object that instead of *rain - sunlight - rainbow* it would be more appropriate to utilize the sequence: *rain / dream / rainbow* in which words are to be used as metaphors, viz. *rain* = hard time / *dream* = trying to be better / *rainbow* = hope in the future. However, they do completely overlook one crucial thing viz. that haiku is not meant for dreaming and making metaphors of one's experience, but to awaken to Reality as it is.

As Kevin McLaughlin^[2] argues convincingly: "Haiku is simply the Fact."

The second example is even more "awakening", out of ordinary awakening, it is a great discovery of cosmic principles:

B)

sun

moon

eclipse (of the earth)

viz. *Sun* (YANG) - *Moon* (YIN) - *Eclipse of the Earth* (awakening surprise) !!!

There is a *lunar eclipse* which occurs when the Moon becomes covered by the shadow cast by Mother Earth. However, the phenomenon erroneously and mistakenly called *solar eclipse* is impossible to occur and is actually the *eclipse of the Earth*, since a part of the Earth becomes covered by the shadow cast by the moon. Sun is the only primary light source in our universe, hence it cannot go into eclipse viz. cannot be covered by the shadow cast either by the moon or by the earth. The proof of this being so, is the visibility of the sun's *corona* (but NOT the VIRUS corona), the dark disc of the moon being large enough only to cover the sun disc but not the corona itself. This is also proof that the moon just like the earth has no light of its own.

As for corona, it is the crown of the sun, viz. sun's hair, hence in the Veda the sun is called *keśava* "hairy" or *hiranya-keśin* "having golden hairs". Thus the erroneous term *solar eclipse* used even by the NASA staff is a down to earth primitive primatial (viz. monkeyish) perspective of looking at natural phenomena, comparable to the concepts of "rising and setting of the sun" whereas they in fact only reflect the dancing of Mother Earth around her own axis and around the sun.

Conclusion

As is demonstrated previously modern adherents of haiku poetry do not comprehend its Daoist and Zen spiritual background. This is the reason why modern writers especially in the west strive continually for some newly invented forms of haiku, a sort of either poetic satyriasis (males) or nymphomania (females), viz. haikomania (both gender). Thus the contemporary forms of haiku have been considerably alienated from the authentic spirit of the classical zen-haiku, seeking mostly weird moments of surprise in order to satisfy modern man's insatiable hunger for sensations.

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