

The Season of 'No-Season' in Contemporary Haiku: The Modern Haiku Association *Muki-Kigo Saijiki*

Richard Gilbert, Yūki Itō, Tomoko Murase, Ayaka Nishikawa and Tomoko Takaki

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This article is an online compliment to the *Introduction* by Tohta Kaneko found in the above-referenced *Muki Saijiki*, which was translated by the authors and published by the *Modern Haiku Journal*. Additionally, this article compliments a second article composed of the authors' interpretations of several haiku found in the *Muki Saijiki*, which has been published by *Simply Haiku Journal*. All three works were completed in March, 2006.

Introduction

In 2004, a remarkable work in five volumes was published by the Modern Haiku Association, the *Gendai Haiku Saijiki* ([Modern Haiku Season-Word Compendium] Tokyo: *gendaihaikukyoukai*, June, 2004). In these volumes, perhaps tens of thousands of haiku can be found, associated with a revolutionary *saijiki* (season-word compendium). In this paper, we would like to offer the reader an introductory look at the most unique of the five volumes, the 'no-season' or *Muki Saijiki*, which represents a great innovation in modern haiku.

Haiku diverged in two opposite directions after the death of Shiki Masaoka (1867-1902), the founder of modern haiku. While one main school espouses fixed styles of verse—the use of kigo and 17-*on* form—the other main school respects freedom concerning both the form and use of kigo. The former school, known as *Hototogisu*, has been a strong cultural influence and both the poems and perspective of this school are recognized as orthodox haiku; some of these classic styles are taught in primary schools throughout Japan. Due to such strict and old-fashioned rules, haiku has become something overly serious and far from enjoyment. As a result, it seems that most Japanese—particularly young people—tend to stay away from haiku. Although orthodox haiku might yield a quiet and nostalgic feeling to readers, it is necessary to consider contemporary haiku, which connect with universal concerns and the manifold phenomena of contemporary life. The *Muki Saijiki* has been created in order to introduce contemporary haiku with *muki-kigo*. A kigo is a form of poetic language indicative of a manifold historico-literary culture which Japanese people hold in common—connoting an image, feeling, and environment of some particular season. And kigo is precious because it is a word which can

connect our mind (heart) with the natural world. However, following the 'true intention' of kigo, a much more extensive vocabulary is needed to genuinely meet the contemporary era, as Tohta Kaneko explains in his Introduction to the volumes; found in the 'keywords' of *muki-kigo*. The *Muki Saijiki* compiles keywords of natural phenomena, geography, humanity, daily life, culture, plants and animals, as 'non?season' season words, and thus exemplifies the contemporary haiku world.

As the *Muki Saijiki* is divided into six major categories, we have taken one haiku from each, and collaboratively translated and commented on the haiku, as a sort of cross?cultural experiment in communicating how at least a group of Japanese readers experience a sampling of gendai (modern) Japanese haiku. We have attempted to translate the original Japanese haiku without losing the image and language that they contain. Rather than to leave the reader with a translation only, our intention has been to consider what might be absent from an English translation, and offer some added images, analyses and contextual information which might help the reader get closer to the original haiku, as experienced within its original culture and language. Following this section, we offer a brief introduction to the sensibility of the *Muki Saijiki* and its historical context, followed by a translation of the entire Table of Contents of the volume. [Editor's note: This will appear in the next issue of *Simply Haiku*.]

Six Haiku from the Muki Saiji, with Interpretations

1) Muki-categories:

天文 (てんもん) **tenmon: natural phenomena**

影 (かげ) **kage: shadow**

影法師 (かげぼうし) **kage-boushi: human shadow/silhouette**

Haiku

人を待つ影が来て影ふんでゆく 市原 正直
hito o matsu kage ga kite kage funde yuku Ichihara Masanao

Translations

while waiting -
shadows tread
on shadow

whose waiting shadow
passes shadows
passing

Image 1

The narrator waits for someone in a crowded place. Strangers are coming and passing by. They are stepping on shadows—the shadows of the narrator and each others' shadows as well.

Image 2

A person is waiting interminably for someone to arrive, in vain. Strangers approach and pass stepping on the waiting person's shadow. The individual never arrives, and the protagonist continues to wait.

Interpretation

1. The narrator is perhaps at a train station. People going on their way are indifferent to each other, and they are "passing over" each other's shadows. Perhaps they are arriving for meetings, like the narrator. All of these people are just shadows. It reminds us of Ezra Pound's poem:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

In addition, it is only the narrator that has a moment of pause and becomes aware of the shadows being stepped upon. It seems that this poem recommends we take the time to stop in the present moment so that we might see the world from a new aspect. There is a philosophical perspective in this haiku similar to Plato's theory of perception. Nothing in this world is real, and what we see are as if shadows of pure reality. The usage of "shadow" implies the shadow on the wall of Plato's cave.

2. The narrator feels sad and lonely, because the person they are waiting for does not arrive, and others pass by without noticing. When the narrator sees his/her own shadow being stepped on by others, he/she feels as if his/her own heart were being stepped on by the feet of others.

Cultural comments

The *kage-fumi* (shadow-treading) game.

In childhood, we play a *kage-fumi* game. It is a type of tag game, in which the tagger has to step on the shadow of other players in order to change places with them. This is a common child's game throughout East Asia, usually held in the late afternoon or twilight, when shadows become long. Japanese adults may recollect this play with innocent joy; however, this play also has ancient-magical roots. In ancient times, we find a belief that our shadows are the evidence of the soul's existence. According to this belief, if our shadow is stolen, we could die—and if our shadow becomes vague, this indicates approaching death. Even today we feel a spiritual aura and meaning in our shadows—they are more than just a phenomenon produced by light. Moreover, twilight is a mysterious time between day and

night, so that stepping on someone's shadow can be a curse: a form of sympathetic magic.

The figuration of "human shadow/silhouette" also reminds us of the classical-haiku theme of *kagebōshi* (the silhouette).

Orange Color

Some Japanese people receive an internal perception or image of orange from this haiku, since children play *kage-fumi* in the late afternoon, when the street turns orange in the twilight. Twilight shadows are much longer than those of midday, and are also fading out. These settings evoke the color orange. As well, the time-period of returning home—putting these images together, we can realize a complex feeling of melancholy mixed with ease.

2) Muki-categories:

地理(ちり) **chiri: geography**

湖沼(こしょう) **koshō: lake, pond, marsh**

ダム湖〔だむこ〕 **damu-ko: dammed lake**

Haiku

少年のバイク ダム湖を傾けて 三好 靖子
shounen no baiku damu-ko o katamukete Miyoshi Yashuko

Translation

a youth on a motorcycle:
the dammed lake tilts

Image

A young man is riding a motorbike around a dam. When he enters a narrow curve, he leans his bike over. To his eye, the dammed lake water seems to be tilting.

Interpretation 1

It is the young man who's tilting but the author says the dam is tilted by him. It seems that the young man is trying to resist something—a huge power, like a natural law. As well, he is not riding around a natural lake but rather an artificial, dammed lake. A dam is a wall which stops water flowing, so "dam" indicates the stagnated society to which he belongs. This poem indicates a young man's rebellious spirit pitted against the adult world, and his attempt to disrupt or challenge such a society.

Interpretation 2

A young man blissfully speeds along on his motorbike, which is not all that

large (400cc at most), among the greenery of woods and lake. He is traveling through a deep valley, then around a dammed lake. The touring road winds but it is a good motorcycle road. He leans his bike and body through a curve and the dammed lake water is tilted with a sense of intense speed, driving beyond the edge of control. His driving is reckless but energetic, just as this haiku is sharp and energetic.

Interpretation 3

This haiku suggests the young rider's unlimited possibility, because the subject, 'young rider's bike' causes a lake to tilt-a much bigger object than the rider himself. A young man's ambition is seen here.

3) Muki-categories:

人間 (にんげん) **ningen: human**

身体 (しんたい) **shintai: body (objectively)**

体 (からだ) **karada: body (common use)**

Haiku

どしゃ降りの身体の中に町黒く
dosyaburi no karada no naka ni machi kuroku

小川 双々子
Ogawa Sōsōshi

Translations

heavy rain
within the body
dark street

heavy rain body
within the dark street

Image

The narrator is wandering around the street in heavy rain, without an umbrella, depressed, helpless, and gloomy. The street is as dark as the narrator's heart, and probably deserted.

Interpretation 1

In spite of the expression "heavy rain," it is not really raining in front of the narrator; rather, the haiku refers to the narrator's tears and sorrow. The narrator's dark internal emotion leads to a perception of the street as dark.

Interpretation 2

It is pouring with rain, and the narrator is sobbing. This feeling crosses over the street scene, heavy with rain; the narrator sees this vision within his very flesh and bones. With the mysterious overlap between the narrator's

feeling and the outer scene, this haiku becomes darker and darker.

Cultural/Historical Comment 1

In Japan, there are several words that mean "body." When we see this kanji "身体" we pronounce it as "shintai," and it has a medical-scientific (objective) nuance. Importantly however, "shintai" is 4-on in length. So, in this haiku, if we were to pronounce these kanji in the typical way, we would have an extra sound (an 18-on haiku). There is another, much more common kanji for body, which is "体," and we pronounce it as "karada." This kanji is 3-on in length, and so fits into the 17-on haiku form. By using the less usual and specialized collocation of "shintai," and it being outside the norm of 17-on, the author skillfully infers or leads the reader towards the kanji-idea "karada." This example reveals a form of poetic creativity utilizing the unique ideational qualities inherent in Japanese kanji, which contain multiple sound/sense relationships. As a result, the two different ideas expressed by the different kanji combine, giving us an image of both a human body, and a more clinical sense. This usage is useful for expressing a mixed subjective melancholy, which also has a cold (e.g., objective, scientific) nuance.

Cultural/Historical Comment 2

Here, the kanji "町" is used, but we have another kanji with this same pronunciation, 街 (machi). Both 町 and 街 mean town, but with slight differences. 町 is used for the district of a local community, while 街 indicates a downtown area, where many people, shops, and restaurants are found. By using 町 instead of 街, this haiku is indicative of the narrator standing in his own neighborhood; hence, the translation of "street." As well, we note the use of 町, rather than michi (lit. 'street'), which unavoidably connotes 'way,' path, or direction, in addition to 'street,' in Japanese.

4) Muki-categories:

生活 (せいかつ) **seikatsu: daily life**

言葉 (ことば) **kotoba: language, word(s)**

言霊 (ことだま) **kotodama: word-spirit**, 隠語 (いんご)

lingo: slang/secret language/jargon, 文字 (もじ) **moji: letters**

(**orthography**), 手話 (しゅわ)

shuwa: sign language/gesture

Haiku

きみにふれたことばの端が黄ばんでゆく 伊藤 利恵
kimi ni fureta kotoba no hashi ga kiban de yuku Ito Toshie

Translations

through you
the ending of language
turns yellow

Image

The edges of words are turning yellow when they touch on "you." These words are spoken between a man and woman, and the couple's relationship is getting worse. Their conversation is not as fresh as it used to be.

Interpretation 1

This poem indicates the fading love between a couple. It is not only their love which begins to become worn out, but also their speech is gradually losing its power and its meaning.

Interpretation 2

The man does not want to say anything to his partner, but he has to do so, as a duty. The edge of his language is becoming a dirty yellow, as though the language he uses towards her contains a feeling close to hatred.

Interpretation 3

When a person wants to speak, before utterance, the words exist in the heart. Such words are also warm, because they come from the breast, the soul. When these or any words are actually uttered, they enter into the air on the medium of the breath. The breath keeps the words' warmth for a moment, but after utterance, words can lose their warmth. And if one's heart does not have love for one's partner anymore, those words within the breast are not warm. And, when these are spoken, they become that much colder. The cold, loveless conversation is like something which "turns yellow," which is out-of-date and stale.

This haiku also reminds us of the haiku by Bashō:

もの言えば唇寒し秋の風
ものいえばくちびるさむしあきのかぜ
mono ieba kuchibiru samushi aki no kaze

after speaking
lips feel cold -
autumn wind

Cultural Comment 1

In Japan we seldom call each other "you," and tend to avoid using the subject in a sentence. When we use "you," there are two main forms of address: あなた (*anata*) and きみ (*kimi*). In this haiku, the latter きみ is used. When using あなた, there is a closer relationship between "you" and "I" than きみ. On the contrary, きみ suggests a more formal relationship, and so there

appears some distance between "you" and "I."

Cultural Comment 2

Concerning the meaning of "fureru" (ふれる is the attributive or past-tense form of *fureta*). Regarding *fureru*, it could be interpreted as having two different meanings in this poem: one is "to touch," that is, "to feel or make contact with objects," and the other is "to refer to" someone or something.

Cultural Comment 3

In western philosophy, 'word' (the essential connotative, conceptual particle of language) is strongly related to logos and reason. There exists a sensibility that "word" is highly connected to 'truth' or 'idea.' One could say that the western attitude to "word" is logos-centric. However, in Japan, 'word' is definitively regarded as "*koto-no-ha*" (a margin of a fact), and so is neither logos nor reason. "Word" could be a way to truth or idea, but it is not highly connected to these. The Japanese attitude to "word" is thus not logos-centric. Additionally, in Japan, there is a belief that 'word' has spiritual power. This power is called "*kotodama*" (word spirit). In Shintoism, our world is full of word spirits. Word spirits are not only possessed by human beings but also word spirits belong to animals, plants, stones, mountains, rivers, seas, etc. All sounds in the natural world are likewise word spirits, and so they are also seeds of poetry. This belief is animistic. (c.f. Japanese Mythologies in the *Kojiki*, and ancient Japanese poetry in the *Man'yōshū*, also Noh plays such as *Takasago*.)

Cultural Comment 4

In Japanese, "*kotoba no hashi*" (ことばの端 the ending of language) also means "trivial, superficial words."

Cultural Comment 5

"*Kibamu*" (黄ばむ) refers literally to "getting yellow," (as with leaves) but we often use the expression for clothes and paper. It implies that the subject is getting old, worn-out, passing away after a long time.

Cultural Comment 6

Yellow as a color was not mentioned in the *Kojiki* (712 C.E.). The kanji existed, but with a variant concept. In the *Man'yōshū* (759? C.E.), the earliest extant anthology of Japanese verse, yellow (黄) is mentioned as a color close to red, in that yellow refers to the color of the Japanese maple, in autumn. So it seems that historically a color of autumn was yellow, though this seasonal usage is now deprecated.

5) Muki-categories:

文化 (ぶんか) **bunka: culture**

詩 (し) **shi: poetry**

現代詩 (げんだいし) **gendai-shi: modern poetry**, 詩集 (ししゅ

う) **shi-shū:**
book of poetry

Haiku

忘れていた詩集の紙で指を切る
wasureteita shishyu no kami de yubi o kiru 土井 博子
Doi Hiroko

Translations

cut a finger
on neglected poems

the edge of a page
of a forgotten poetry book
cuts my finger

Image

The author finds a forgotten poetry book, and the edge of a page cuts her finger.

Interpretation

1. "Poems" (*shishū*) are, especially, haiku, and this poem shows the revenge of haiku. Words have power. Each poem contains a poet's soul, so an anthology would be a collection of poets' souls.
2. A paper cut is trivial, but yields a sharp and surprising pain. This sharp and unexpected feeling implies the piercing, moving feeling when we read poems.
3. An old poetry book was taken from a bookshelf or somewhere similar, and it cut the author's finger. The pain is a reminder of youthful innocence; of poetry and dreams.
4. The poetry book may not be a real book, but rather, poems existing in the author's mind. She may recall her sad poem or just a memory then experience a painful feeling, as if she had injured her heart instead of her finger.

6) Muki-categories:

動植物 (どうしょくぶつ) **doushokubutsu: plants and animals**

象 (ぞう) **elephants**

巨象 (きょぞう) **kyozō: enormous elephant**

Haiku

死の時を知りたる巨象うしろ見ず 高屋 窓秋
shi no toki o shiritaru kyozō ushiro mizu Takaya Sōshu

Translations

knowing its death
an enormous elephant:
not looking back

Image

An enormous elephant doesn't look back, knowing its own moment of death.

Interpretation

1. The elephant has nothing to regret in its life knowing it is soon to die, so it lives in dignity and peace, without unease. This elephant indicates a masterful older person (man) who has lived his life powerfully.

2. The elephant in this poem is described as an animal with a strong will and a dignified appearance. He accepts his death calmly. There is neither regret for the past nor fear of dying. This poem can be interpreted as a question which the author asks—how will we act in our last moments. An animal is closer to nirvana than a human being.

3. Elephants do not inhabit Japan. However, the image of elephants was imported from India and China as connoting one of the mythical animals of ancient times. In India, elephants are believed to be holy — in Hinduism *Ganesha* is a deity with an elephant's head and human body — called *Ganeza* in Sanskrit, which means "the lord of the people." In Buddhism, the deity is accepted as one of its guardian deities. In Japanese Buddhism, it is called *Kangi-ten*, which means "a deity of love and pleasure." This deity also celebrates sexual pleasure. Therefore, in Japanese Buddhism, the deity is represented not only as a half-elephant deity but also as a man and a woman making love.

There were no elephants in Japan before the medieval era, but there are some place names that derive from elephants. *Zōzusan* (elephant's head mountain) is one of them. In 1766, the great haiku poet Buson visited this place and penned the famous haiku:

象の目の笑いかけたり山桜 蕪村
zō no me no waraikaketari yamazakura Buson

an elephant's eyes smile -

mountain cherry blossoms

This haiku is written with inspiration from the place name, and its geological shape. The shape of *Zōzusan* is that of an elephant's head, and the shrine on the mountain looks like an elephant's eye.

Historical/cultural comment

It was in 1408 (the shogunate of Ashikaga Yoshimochi) that the first elephant came to Japan from a Spanish or Portuguese ship which had been routed through Southeast Asia. Later, some elephants arrived in 1597 (the reign of Kampaku Toyotomi Hideyoshi), and again in 1602 (the shogunate of Tokugawa Ieyasu). In 1728, two Indian elephants landed in Nagasaki, and Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune ordered his followers to take one to Edo, and he viewed it there. The event very much impressed people at that time, and many pictures and books of elephants were consequently painted and published. By 1888, two elephants had arrived at Ueno Zoological Gardens in Tokyo.

In Japan, the elephant is a popular animal among children and regarded as strong and warm-hearted. Most zoos in Japan have elephants. Among these, Ueno Zoological Gardens is the most famous. This zoo, and elephant, remind us of the sad story, *A Pitiful Elephant* (and the film version, *A Zoo without an Elephant*, 1982). The plot relates an event of the Pacific War, when the Japanese government gave a command to "kill all wild animals" in all the zoos. Through this device, the tragedy of the war, and a hope for peace is expressed.

Afterword

In working to translate the haiku, we began by individually writing down the images and language that each haiku offered. After discussing our own images, analysis, and various cultural aspects, we collaboratively translated the haiku into English and then researched historical, cultural and lexical ideas which arose from the readings. Inevitably most of the haiku have yielded several images and analyses, as each reader added his/her own responses. We have found it interesting to learn more about contemporary haiku through this compositional process, and would be very pleased if this work gives readers in English a taste of contemporary Japanese haiku.