

THE LANGUAGE CONNECTION

GO-SHICHI-GO

HAIKU IN ENGLISH

Exemplary haiku push boundaries of kigo

By Susumu Takiguchi

Special to The Daily Yomiuri

The sample haiku by leading world haiku poets in the last Go-Shichi-Go have been very well-received. I will therefore continue to present poems that represent exemplary work along the traditional lines represented by the Ten Neoclassical Haiku Commandments.

The first poet in this latest column is someone already familiar to readers of this Go-Shichi-Go:

Zhanna P. Rader, United States

*On the basketball hoop,
a dragonfly. the child
delays his shot*

A traditional autumn season word “dragonfly” set against an aspect of the modern (urban) life of the coming generation. Does the child’s hesitation reflect wonder, his love for the insect, or his sensitivity toward our nature’s friends?

*She raises her face
to the wind-blown cherry blossoms—
blind woman*

One wishes to relish this remarkable haiku in silence. Only, how would it translate itself into Japanese: *hana-fubuki/meshii no onna/kaio agu*

*A cicada shell
at the cabin door;
the owner is gone*

“Wabi” is a Japanese aesthetic term that is tantalizing and esoteric to non-Japanese haijin. This haiku embodies it—a rare occurrence.

Getting grip

Takiguchi is chairman of the World Haiku Club, a worldwide haiku network (www.worldhaikuclub.org). A Japanese artist, poet and essayist, Takiguchi has lived in England since 1971.

*of the prison's window bars—
morning glory*

The surprise in line 3 does not sound gimmicky, but is simply beautiful.

*Moon—
half in the sky,
half in the pond*

Is this a depiction of half moon? Whatever, it is a new and striking sketch.

*Gusty wind.
on the line, a frozen night gown
somersaulting*

Like other haiku by her, the author’s originality knows no bounds.

*Robins have arrived—
still no letters
from the front*

Explicit depiction of such themes as war and sex is not a typical practice of neoclassical haiku. But with no explicit words, this haiku goes deeply to the heart of the emotion of the soldier’s family and to the heart of war itself.

Hisanori Ogane, Japan

meigetsu ya/yashoku mochiyoru/onna tachi

*under the full moon
the women gather
with after-dinner meals*

Yashoku is a light supper eaten by people who work till late at night, such as farmers or company employees. It is also an autumn kigo, which makes this a case of kigasanari (double kigo) with the moon, which is also an autumn kigo. However, it seems to me that the very kigasanari is making the haiku effective in accentuating the length of the autumn night.

wakaki so/kuruma o arau/tera no aki

*a young Buddhist monk,
washing his brand-new car...
the autumn at the temple*

Things that never change, a monk, a temple or autumn, are contrasted with what has changed, the young generation and car culture. The tori-awase here is perfect.

hagi kobore/ko no na wasureshi/haha no emi

*bush clover petals fall...
forgetting her daughter's name,
the old mom smiles*

A sad scene accentuated by the resigned smile of the mother, gives a strange sense of beauty against the backdrop of falling bush clover petals.

choji yomu/megane ni te yaru/tsuya no aki

*mourning in autumn...
he touches his eyeglasses,
unable to read the memorial address*

The season adds to the sorrow of sending the deceased away. The act of touching the glasses says it all.

Ross Clark, Australia

*this new year
holding a grandson
to your breast*

The drama of childbirth and the joy of parents coincides with the start of the New Year.

*by Good Friday
the Christmas Tree
has turned brown*

The seasons in Australia are the mirror-image of the Northern Hemisphere where Christmas is in summer. The Christmas trees do not last long and, according to the author, the haiku has “theological resonances.”

*a new sun touches
Hiroshima Nagasaki
autumn arrives*

According to the Japanese haiku calendar, the anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing is still in summer whereas the anniversary for Nagasaki three days later is in autumn. Both are in the consciousness of all Western people. Autumn may represent melancholy but the new sun symbolizes hope.

Bette Wappner (b'oki), United States

*still visited
by a white butterfly
shriveled iris*

The short life of an iris emphasizes its majestic beauty, which goes on attracting the white butterfly even after it is lost. So, what is the majestic beauty inside humans?

*last day of May
raindrops darken the name
on your gravestone*

Raindrops are interchangeable with teardrops. Darken may be a tricky word to choose as it could mean something negative or melancholic, rather than simply “bring out.” However, the strong sense of missing the deceased is keenly felt by this expression.

*the last cicadas
sing between the memories
twin towers of light*

According to the author, each year since the Sept. 11, 2001, tragedy in New York, “the cicadas sing the same lovelorn song as the columns of light soar to the heavens.”

Raffael de Gruttola, United States

*chilly mountain air
beads of sweat
on the cyclist's brow*



Susumu Takiguchi

Blind winter crow

Modern man’s activity has disturbed the standard seasonal sensibility in that cold is caused by the high altitude of the mountains and the sweat is caused by heavy exercise, bringing in a new dimension to kigo.

*sidewalk cafe
lily-of-the-valley
on all the tables*

The drab scene of a cafe is brightened up by these little white flowers, which must have been really refreshing.

*leaving Osaka
plum blossoms scatter
over the paddy*

One has to go a long way out of Osaka to see a paddy. The plum blossoms must have looked especially pretty.

Readers are encouraged to submit English haiku for this column via dy-edu@yomiuri.com.