Chapter I

The Origin of Haiku and Japanese Short Stories

A haiku is the expression of a temporary enlightenment, in which we see into the life of things. The haiku inscribed within the circle of this one reads,

Born within the circle of life (enso)
the human heart must also become
round and complete (enso).

Fig.1. Article about Zenga by Fred Stern at artnet.com

Toju Zenchu (1839-1925), known as Nantenbo, who painted an enso, a Zen circle that symbolizes life in a perfected state.

R. H. Blyth in his book Haiku says:

A haiku is not a poem, it is not literature; it is a hand beckoning, a door half-opened, a mirror wiped clean. It is a way of returning to nature, to our moon nature, our cherry blossom nature, our falling leaf nature, in short, to our Buddha nature. It is a way in which the cold winter rain, the swallows of evening, even the very day in its hotness, and the length of the night, become truly alive, share in our humanity, speak their own silent and expressive language.

(Vol.I, 243)
Haiku is “the distillation of a moment.” A haiku expresses an intimate moment of experience. The be-here-now quality of haiku is what makes it a Zen art.

What is it about haiku that is so difficult to describe and yet so strangely satisfying? Normally we undertake to protect and comfort our self-identity by masking our existence. We merely try to escape from who we really are. Haiku as an imaginative literature is wonderfully explained by Blyth. Reginald Horace as, “the state of mind in which a man looks at the outside world, or at himself, as he would like it to be.”

Webster’s Dictionary defines a Haiku poem as “A Japanese lyric poem of a fixed 17 syllables form that often simply point to a thing or pairing of things in nature that has moved the poet.”

Haiku originally came from a combination of ancient Japanese words meaning Hai -- amusement, and ku -- meaning verse. In its earliest form it was termed haikai and was meant as a rebellion against the traditional classical form of Japanese poetry called the waka.

Great Haiku poetry has the ability to evoke powerful emotions within the space of a few short lines. Often there exist within the best Haiku poems, depths within depths, meanings within meanings. Great Haiku poetry within the power of a few poignant words can suggest and point to the amazing joys and sadness of life, and to the mystery of humanities place within the great circle of existence.
Haiku (hy-koo) is a traditional Japanese verse form, notable for its compression and suggestiveness. In three lines totaling seventeen syllables measuring 5-7-5, a great haiku presents, through imagery drawn from intensely careful observation, a web of associated ideas (renso) requiring an active mind on the part of the listener. The form emerged during the 16th century and was developed by the poet Basho (1644-1694) into a refined medium of Buddhist and Taoist symbolism.

“Haiku,” Basho was fond of saying, “is the heart of the Man’yoshu,” the first imperial anthology, compiled in the eight century. “Haiku,” many modern Japanese poets are fond of saying, “began and ended with Basho.” Traditionally and ideally, a haiku presents a pair of contrasting images, one suggestive of time and place, the other a vivid but fleeting observation. Working together, they evoke mood and emotion. The poet does not comment on the connection but leaves the synthesis of the two images for the reader to perceive. A haiku by Basho, considered to have written the most perfect examples of the form, illustrates this duality:

Now the swinging bridge
Is quieted with creepers
Like our tendrilled life

In Japan, short poems have a long history. The earliest Japanese poetry such as that of the Manyoshu, written in 759 A.D., includes stirring narrative, dramatic and short lyrical poems which scholars believe were originally written as part of the pre-Buddhist or early Shinto ceremonial rituals. This
anthology includes anonymous songs and prayers designed to celebrate and pacify the gods, prayers for safe voyages, formal eulogies on the death of an Emperor or Empress and courting, marriage, planting and harvesting rituals.

The 5 syllable 7 syllable 5 syllable haiku has evolved and been reinvented many times over the centuries. One such form is the 31 syllable waka composed of five 5-7-5-7-7 syllable phrases. Developed as the early imperial court of the late eighth century consolidated cultural, social and political forms, the waka took its place as one of the important regularized poetic forms of the period. Within imperial circles, minor officials and scribes gained recognition as poem-providers and word specialists due to their ability to compose waka.

Matsuo Basho (1644-94), Taneguchi Buson (1715-83), Kobayshi Issa (1763-1827) and Masaoka Shiki (1866-1902) are the four pillars of haiku poetry.

Matsunaga Teitoku, haikai master, taught his student Matsuo Basho (1644-1694). Basho’s haiku, written while travelling around Japan, made him one of Japan’s most celebrated poets.

By the time of his death, Basho had more than 2,000 students. Today as interest in haiku continues to grow outside of Japan, Basho’s fame is becoming increasingly international. Other poets such as Buson, Issa, Ryokan, and Masaoka Shiki, the father of modern haiku, also gained fame as major haiku poets helping to make it a poetic form popular in all corners of the world.
Basho (bah-shoh), pseudonym of Matsuo Munefusa (1644-94), Japanese poet, considered the finest writer rather the First Great Master of Haiku or simply The Master of Japanese haiku during the formative years of the genre. Born into a samurai family prominent among nobility, Basho rejected that world and became a wanderer, studying Zen, history, and classical Chinese poetry, living in apparently blissful poverty under a modest patronage and from donations by his many students. From 1667 he lived in Edo (now Tokyo), where he began to compose haiku.

Basho had hundreds of keen students all over the country and some of them built him a little hut. In the front garden they planted a banana tree, which in Japanese is called a basho, and that is how he got his name. He is the poet of the banana-tree hut. Sitting in his little hut he wrote this poem:

Evening rain:
the basho
speaks of it first

The structure of his haiku reflects the simplicity of his meditative life. When he felt the need for solitude, he withdrew to his basho-an, a hut made of plantain leaves (basho)-hence his pseudonym. Basho infused a mystical quality into much of his verse and attempted to express universal themes through simple natural images, from the harvest moon to the fleas in his cottage. Basho brought to haiku “the Way of Elegance” (fuga-no-michi), deepened its Zen
influence, and approached poetry itself as a way of life (kado, the way of poetry) in the belief that poetry could be a source of enlightenment.

Basho’s haikus have no parallel. All Zen masters have written haikus, but Basho seems to have melted and merged into nature more deeply than anybody else.

Basho’s first verse in this new style, which became a model for many later haiku poets, is:

_Ancient pond_

_A frog leaps in_

_The sound of the water_

![Image](art.com)

Fig. 3. Picture by Tim Flach from _art.com_

The most famous haiku of all time is Basho’s “old pond”, which can be translated as:
Old pond...
a frog jumps in
water’s sound.

The frog has been a traditional subject of Japanese poetry since the first
recorded songs; even today, Japanese learn the songs of different species of
frogs from records, much as we learn the calls of “songs of birds”. But
Basho’s frog leaps, making a small sound with his action, rather than his
voice.

Taniguchi Buson (boo-sahn) (1716-1784),
later called Yosa Buson., was a Japanese haiku
poet and painter. He ranked second only to
Matsuo Basho, Japanese master of haiku,
among poets of the Edo or Tokugawa period
(1600-1868). Buson was born in a
suburb of Osaka, Japan, and apparently
lost both parents while he was still young. In 1737 he moved to Edo (now
Tokyo) to study painting and haiku poetry in the tradition of Basho. After the
death of one of his poetry teachers in 1742, he toured northern areas associated
with Basho and visited western Japan, finally settling in Kyoto, Japan, in 1751.
Particularly active as a painter between 1756 and 1765, Buson gradually
returned to haiku, leading a movement to return to the purity of Basho’s style
and to purge haiku of superficial wit. In 1771 he painted a famous set of ten
screens with his great contemporary Ike no Taiga, demonstrating his status as
one of the finest painters of his time. Buson’s major contribution to haiku is his complexity and his painter’s eye. Buson’s technical skill as an artist is reflected in the visual detail of his poetry. Buson’s most characteristic verses have a sensual and objective quality that we readily accept from a painter.

Here are two examples:

1. evening breeze….
   water laps the legs
   of the blue heron

2. willow leaves fallen
   clear waters dried up stones
   one place and another

The second poem has all the characteristics of the sort of Chinese landscape painting Buson most admired. The thin branches of the leafless willows hang delicately down over the rocks now free of the brook’s waters in the dryness of autumn. However, we should not be too hasty in accepting this as merely a picture. This poem illustrates the layers of allusion that can build up in what seems to be one simple haiku.

Issa (1763-1827), Japanese haiku poet of the Edo period (1600-1868). Best known by his penname, Issa, his child name was Yataro and registered name was Nobuyuki. He was born in Kashiwabara, now part of Shinanomachi (Shinano Town), Nagano Prefecture.
The majority of Japanese who like traditional haiku probably know and like Issa better than any other poet. Since he grew up in the country with a cruel step-mother and was banished from his home to city poverty in his mid teens, Issa had a rather pessimistic view of human nature. He came to prefer the company of small, seemingly insignificant creatures, and wrote many haiku on such topics as grasshoppers, flies and bugs, sparrows, and other less-than-glamorous beings.

One of Issa’s best known verses shows his empathy with those who are often not appreciated:

oh, don’t swat!

the fly rubs hands

rubs feet

Here Issa implies that, the fly prays twice as much as most humans. He wrote:

My dear old village,

every memory of home

pierces like a thorn

Masaoka Shiki (1867 - 1902) is a modern great poet who was born in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture. His enthusiasm to innovate traditional haiku caused the eruption which was the birth of modern literature in Ehime.

Fig. 5 Shiki Masaoka (1867 - 1902)
Although he was in agony of spinal tuberculoses, he always had much curiosity and humor. He said that haiku is a sketch with simple, plain words. He read almost all traditional haiku written by famous haiku poets and did extensive research on them and then he criticized Basho. He thought Buson’s haiku was ideal.

The haiku innovation by Shiki created a great sensation in the whole of Japan and revived the languishing haiku world. Shiki denied the value of haikai-renga and always used the word “haiku” instead of “haikai” or “hokku.” Today, haikai-renga is called “renku”, but few specialists are interested in this poetic form.

The word Shiki can also mean “the four seasons” in Japanese. The seasons are very important in Japanese haiku, so Shiki is an appropriate name for the haiku server.

A definition quoted from ‘Shiki and Matsuyama’, published in 1986 by Matsuyama Municipal Shiki Memorial Museum:

Haiku is a poetic form which takes nature in each season as its theme and expresses inspiration derived from nature. Since the natural world transforms itself swiftly and since inspiration is fleeting, they must be caught in words quick, short and precise. The traditional rules for haiku are that each verse uses seven or eight words, a total of only seventeen rhythmical syllables (5-7-5), including a season word. In diction, haiku values simple words over obscure and difficult ones.
Shiki wrote a series of critical essays on the state of haiku and advocated haiku as a real picture, or sketch of reality.

Some of the Shiki’s haikus:

1. How cool it is!
   A small crab, in the rain,
   Climbs on a pine.

   Fig. 6. Pine, Symbolizing Haiku. Picture from inkyarnandbeer.wordpress.com

2. Lotus leaves in the pond
   Ride on water.
   Rain in June.

3. Smoke whirls
   After the passage of a train.
   Young foliage
Seasons and the *kigo*, the season-word

In traditional haiku there is always some reference to a season. The Japanese have always been very aware of the changing seasons. Over the centuries many weather features, flowers, fruits, animals and customs have become specifically linked with one time of year or another. Even things that are present all the year or most of the year, like the moon and rain and frogs, represent, by poetic convention, one particular time. The moon, unless otherwise stated, always refers to the Harvest Moon in mid-September by Japanese convention. To mention one is to evoke all the associations of the season.

The words "dawn" or "evening" or "midday" or "old" or "teenage" or "tired" or "wide-awake" lend an emotional flavour that may be equivalent to what the season-word contributes in Japanese. Most English haiku writers are less attached to the necessity for a season-word than Japanese writers, and may very successfully "fix" their haiku in another cycle: the cycle of the day, or the life, perhaps, rather than the cycle of the seasons:

On the beach at dawn –

Last night’s heart

Washed clean away

(David Bell)

High tide

Over and over

The shifting shingle

(Brian Tasker)
But we must not abandon the idea of seasons. Certainly, in the Japanese tradition, the season-word (or kigo) is an essential element of the aesthetic. Miyamori writes in *An Anthology of Haiku Ancient and Modern*:

> The Japanese are passionate lovers of Nature. Every feature, every phase, every change of Nature in the four seasons powerfully excites their delicate aesthetic sense. Not to speak of cherry-blossom viewing picnics which are the custom among all people high and low, young and old, the Japanese often row out in pleasure boats on the sea or on a lake to enjoy the harvest moon; they often climb hills for views of the "silver world" of snow; they often visit rivers in darkness to contemplate fireflies; they often climb wooded mountains to delight in the rich brocade of frost-bitten maple leaves; they often listen with ecstasy to the songs of frogs, of which Ki no Tsurayuki, an ancient poet, says: "the frog dwelling in the water – all living things sing songs." On autumn evenings singing-insects kept in cages are sold at street-stalls; and townsfolk listen to them in order to hear the "voices of autumn." And naturally enough, men of taste, particularly poets, while enjoying these scenes, compose verses on the spur of the moment.

*Sabi and Wabi*

*Sabi* literally means ‘rust,’ and refers to things which show the marks of age, like an old pond, a gnarled tree, with a sense of unpretentious stoic endurance, and even a sense of “cosmic, existential loneliness” which links
with Buddhist preoccupations.

*Wabi* relates to simplicity, poverty. Again this has a philosophical dimension, and a Buddhist ideal, embraced by hermits and monks who renounce the things of the world and give themselves to the life of begging. Together, sabi and wabi represent aesthetic qualities much appreciated in Japan: the values that lead to a love of the simple, unpretentious, nonstandard, weatherworn and neglected rather than the new, the shiny, the regular, the glamorous or the sensational.

Traditionally, haiku poets have taken nature as their subject matter, as being more contemplatively accessible. For Zen, the ordinary is extraordinary and when we awaken our inner self, we enjoy being the ordinary.

When nature turns dramatic only the best haiku poets can both express the drama and retain the haiku spirit without tipping over into subjective melodrama. In such highly tuned haiku the translator also will be put to the test.

In Buddhist terminology, the power of Zen haiku lies in their embodiment of form-and-emptiness. The best of them come to us out of the moment in an insight so right, yet so beyond our ordinary habitual perception, as to dumbfound us. We find ourselves saying more than we mean and more than we know.

Two lines set the scene and a third, cutting line throws them out of gear by switching attention to a different perception, sparking across the gap between the phrases and momentarily illuminating the whole poem in a fresh light.
There is a Zen perspective on the optimum conditions for the making of haiku. Two conditions seem to be needful. First is the priming and internalizing of the form - getting into haiku mood and haiku mode. Second and more important is opening to a contemplative state of mind.

The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.

- Matthew Arnold in “The Study of Poetry”

In his essay “The Study of Poetry” Arnold is fundamentally concerned with poetry’s “high destiny;” he believes that “mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us” as science and philosophy will eventually prove flimsy and unstable. Arnold’s essay thus concerns itself with articulating a “high standard” and “strict judgment” in order to avoid the fallacy of valuing
certain poems (and poets) too highly, and lays out a method for discerning only the best and therefore “classic” poets.

For Arnold, feeling and sincerity are paramount, as is the seriousness of subject:

“The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner.”

Arnold’s belief that poetry should both uplift and console drives the essay’s logic and its conclusions.

Form. Line-length and syllables-

In Japanese haiku have seventeen onji, or syllables, in groups of five, seven and five. The onji are less varied than the English syllables, though there is experimental evidence to show that the seven-syllable lines are said a little quicker and are exactly equivalent in time-value to the five syllable lines. All three lines are therefore, in one sense, of equal length, though the middle one is of greater density.

The line-lengths of five and seven onji are deeply rooted rhythmic units in Japanese, and have the highly memorable qualities of an English rhymed couplet. Slogans, advertising headlines, proverbs, witty sayings and all forms of traditional poetry are composed in these rhythmic units.
Translators have adopted different policies when searching for an English equivalent: some tried using rhyme; some used a fuller four-line form which looked more like a native English quatrain, notably Noboyuki Yuasa who translated the Penguin Classics version of Basho's "The Narrow Road to the Deep North". There are two styles which have survived: a small group of translators and writers reproduce the Japanese syllabic pattern exactly in English; and a much larger group keeps the translations as minimal as possible, on the grounds that the striking features of haiku are shortness and sparseness.

Two syllables, sometimes one, in a Japanese haiku are often spent on a *kireji*, or cutting word, rendered in English by a punctuation mark. Fifteen or sixteen syllables remain. Some Japanese words may be shorter than ours, but on the whole they will be slightly less dense and the information in seventeen syllables can be translated in eight to twelve syllables, so there is a case for keeping English language haiku a little shorter than Japanese ones.

When Basho visited the site of a famous battle, he knew the story of how Yoshitsune was heavily outnumbered but fought bravely and committed suicide after killing his own wife and children. This had happened five hundred years before. As a tribute Basho wrote this haiku:

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summer grasses / strong ones / dreams afterwards
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All that remains of

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those brave warriors' dreamings -
these summer grasses
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Rhythm

The commentator who has been most influential in setting the form of the haiku in English has been William J. Higginson, an American and author of The Haiku Handbook. He has it both ways, defining the haiku by its number of stresses, or accented beats, and syllables. He compares the English-language haiku to a pentameter and a half, and says that this results in a sense of rhythmical incompleteness in English similar to the formal incompleteness of the traditional Japanese haiku; the Japanese haiku grew out of the first verse, or hokku, of a long poetic form. Higginson's given reason for settling on this form is that it very nearly duplicates the traditional form of the Japanese haiku.

Hideo Okada of Waseda University has pointed out that Japanese readers give the same amount of time to the middle seven-syllable line as to the shorter five-syllable lines when reading aloud. He states that each line contains two content words in two rhythmic segments and argues from this that, taking the basic unit of English prosody as the foot, the equivalent of a Japanese haiku is six feet, three lines of two segments each, not seven. He translates haiku with six stresses. Like Higginson, he justifies his policy because it most closely duplicates the form of the Japanese haiku.

Now that haiku have taken root in the West and are being written in English the issue is no longer, "How closely can we duplicate the Japanese practice?" The task now is to develop an appropriate form in English language for the shortest poem, in the spirit of haiku. It seems that American English, being
syllabic, may diverge from British English in solving the form-question for haiku. The American answer may be defined in syllables. The British answer is: six stresses.

Seven-stress poems of the kind that Higginson recommends are too lumpy and indigestible in English, and Higginson in practice translates using fewer stresses. Even Blyth very rarely uses the seven stresses he theoretically demands. He has a wonderful feel for haiku and overwhelmingly translates them with six or five stresses:

The silence;
The voice of the cicadas
Penetrates the rocks.

(Basho, trans. Blyth)

The ideal English haiku will not set up a rhythm that is anything like a ballad fourteener, consisting of 14 syllables or quatrain of any kind. Its length is a matter of avoiding these echoes from our commonest poetic forms. Here the three lines are crucial: four does remind one of rhyming quatrains. It must also avoid setting up a rhythm that carries the expectation of more: it is complete in one breath unit. It is a new thing. In that sense we have the advantage of the Japanese, because we do not see the haiku as a truncated renga; it is a shaped breath in silence.

One must not forget the power of the rest or silence in the poem, usually at the caesura; the pause in the middle, usually, in a haiku, at the end of line one or line two, but also often at the end, giving the poem a sort of after-life because the
expected sixth beat is silent. This is Lucien Stryk translating Basho:

Atop the mushroom –
who knows from where –
a leaf!

A haiku is the smallest language construct that can generate enough complexity to create tension and resonance between its parts and take on symbolic power. Filling seventeen syllables with rhythmic ornament or verbal elaboration is a mistake. The haiku should be as short as it can be.

Higginson recommended seven stresses. Kirkup recommends strict-form haiku of seventeen syllables, 5-7-5. Yuasa translates using four lines, for three reasons:

The language of haiku … is based on colloquialism, and in my opinion, the closest approximation of natural conversational rhythm can be achieved in English by a four-line stanza … In my opinion a three-line stanza does not carry adequate dignity and weight to compare with hokku … I had before me the task of translating a great number of poems and I found it impossible to use three-line form consistently.

**Sound effects - Onomatopoeia**

More Japanese words than English ones are onomatopoeic, and numbers of Japanese haiku have sound effects in them broad enough to be appreciated even by people like me who know nothing of the language. The sound of crickets whispering or murmuring, in a modern haiku by Koji, is given as "bosoboso."
Alliteration and assonance are used to enact effects. Basho has a line in a poem about drinking freezing water from a spring, about the feeling of tingling in the teeth, setting the teeth on edge, which seems to me as good in English as it is in Japanese: “haya ha ni hibiku.” Basho’s

summer grasses / strong ones / dreams’ site

All that remains of

Those brave warriors’ dreamings –

These summer grasses.

Haiku can have the main subject at the beginning, in the middle or at the end. It is commonest, however, to set the scene with the first line or two, the where and the when, and then give the subject, the what. The first two lines can be apparently plain, though they must be tight, not slack with spare adjectives and over-elaboration, and as there is syntactical suspense; when we are waiting for the subject, the tension is maintained.

Metaphor, simile and stylistic ornament

It is a rule with a number of notable exceptions: Haiku do not use metaphors and similes. One could quote a handful of haiku that have a metaphor or simile, to challenge the rule. Nevertheless it is true that, compared to the poetic as if the whole value of poetry lay in metaphorical ingenuity, the haiku tradition eschews the way of stunning similarities unusually combined.

There are a number of reasons for this. In the period when Basho was young, haiku and renga were full of verbal wit, linguistic sensationalism and self-conscious stylistness; the revolution Basho effected was to turn the attention of
poets from the cleverness of their own command of language to the high seriousness of the subject-matter for poetry. There is a parallel with Zen religious teachings on the illusory nature of the Self. In Zen, cleverness, achievements, - even good works and generous charitable contributions - count for nothing in the enlightenment stakes. The main task is to perceive the nature of reality, quite independent of contaminating notions about “I,” especially pride in my good works, my virtue, or my achievements.

Likewise, the main task of a poem, according to Basho, is to represent reality without contamination by the ego of the poet. Showing off, lacing the poetry with stunningly original metaphors, and foregrounding the craft of the writer in any way are all forms of interference with the experience of reader, who is to be put directly in touch with reality.

Another way in which the art of haiku is quite different from the poetry of the West is in its attitude to description. A great part of the skill of a Western poet is measured by how vividly, exactly and completely the poet can recreate an experience - by how full and accurate a description is. A haiku poet, however, refers, rather than describes. A simple naming will do, if it brings to mind the reader's memory of an experience.

Autumn sunset glow
on the playground
where no one plays

(Koji, trans. Chiyoko Marsh)
The poem would not be improved by a vibrant phrase evoking the colour of the sunset. The first line is absolutely without originality, it just refers to something we all recognize, and the poem's clarity is a function of the ordinariness of this phrase. The subtle combination of sadness, joy, and the suggestion of an acceptance of death in this poem would be ruined if the sunset were portrayed with distracting brilliance. The poet has to learn to be modest and self-effacing, which allows the subject itself to fill the reader’s mind.

Haiku do not make much use of the extraordinary simile and, on the whole, a plain style is preferred so that the focus of the poem is on the thing-in-itself. While haiku do not use metaphor, they may often be metaphors. Haiku give us little-little images, when a haiku gives us just a little hint, the kind of observation that is interesting to a naturalist, and might just as appropriately be published in the prose of a book listing the habits of birds; then it may have charm and a passing interest but it is in danger of becoming one of the dreaded “So What?” haiku.

The best haiku have metaphorical power because the concrete observation which is the subject has wider resonance. In this sense the haiku poet is like a great photographer: the art is in the selection. One could photograph everything and anything, but only those images that catch a universal significance, that show some balance of forces, are worth publishing.

Haiku are the most thoroughgoing expression of literary Zen. They are also one of the several meditative ways like calligraphy and the minimal ink paintings, zenga and haiga whose form both gives expression to insight and helps
to deepen it. The ‘haiku moment’ is thus no less than a tiny flash of an ultimate reality which in fact is just what is under our noses. Haiku which most clearly embody is this ‘suchness’ as the ground of our being is called ‘Zen haiku.’

It follows that haiku must spring from a mind open and unobstructed by any urge to make something of the reality that has come to the poet's attention. Look for them and you will not find them. Do not look for them, and they are not to be found.

The 13th century Zen Master Dogen observes, “When the self withdraws the ten thousand things advance; when the self advances, the ten thousand things withdraw”. And Basho advises, “When composing a verse let there not be a hair's breadth separating your mind from what you write; composition of a poem must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous enemy.”

The insight of the haiku moment is fresh, new-minted perception, though it may be so ordinarily expressed as to risk failing the “So What?” test unless the reader's reception is similarly attuned

A single butterfly
fluttering and drifting
in the wind

- Shiki

If haiku were no more than a reflection of how it is, they would not engage our attention as they do. But they express how it is as experienced by a human being. Thus, in Martin Lucas's words, they are “open metaphors” for our human
condition and resonate with that condition. They offer a glancing opportunity, without the poetic prompting of another, to accept for ourselves how it is. Such pure acceptance has qualities of compassion, release, quiet joy, subtle humour. Martin Lucas says, “Haiku is poetry tending towards silence.”

“Life and consciousness away from the body,” defines spirituality and it implies the existence of spirit or soul. Whereas ‘Spirit’ is defined as the part of the human being associated with the mind, will and feelings.

Haiku is both a type of poetic pattern and a way of experiencing the world. This short, 17-syllable form, usually written in three lines with a 5-7-5 syllable count, focuses our attention on a single, insightful moment. Closely tied to the Japanese aesthetic and the spirituality of Buddhism, Haiku looks deceptively simple, yet can take years to master. A well-executed haiku is rooted in the physical world of our senses, yet suggests something deeper, often evoking the mysterious, transitory nature of all existence.

Haiku (or "Hokku" = Starting verse of a verse chain) is the shortest literature form in the world. "Haiku" is of Japanese origin and can be translated to short verse. It has been a traditional poetic form in Japan for 400 years, during which time haiku lyrics entered other languages and world literature.

The Structure of Haiku

In the Japanese original a haiku consists of three lines, which together contain a maximum of 17 syllables - approximately the dimension of a breath. The syllable distribution is 5-7-5. Rhymes do not play any role, but alliterations, assonances, and a certain rhythm of syllables are part of the structure. Haiku as
found in other languages seldom fit into this scheme of rhythm and limitation to three lines.

The Japanese language favours the above conditions. Japanese is organized into syllables. In Japanese the letters Hiranga and Katakana a sign always describes or means a syllable instead of a single letter. Each syllable consists of a consonant followed by a vowel, and the number of syllables is strictly limited, less than 100. There are only a few non-syllable sounds, vowels and "n".

As number of syllables is limited, it is usual for a word to have more than one meaning, which has to be understood within the context. To keep the authenticity of a Japanese haiku is hard to do because delicacy and ambiguity are not easy to translate into another language. So one has to get the idea of the haiku and then describe it with the words of the other language to get near to the original.

Good haiku are not dependent on the understanding of the Japanese language or on strict formal rules. The effect comes with the character of the contents - independent of the used language.

History

Poetry has always been something special in Japan. Haiku derives from a type of Japanese court poetry called tanka that was popularized and refined during the 9th through 12 centuries. Tanka was often written to explore religious or courtly themes and had a structure of five lines with 5-7-5-7-7 syllable structure. During this period, it became a popular activity to write long strings of linked
tanka verse. One person would often contribute the first three lines (5-7-5) of the poetic chain and a different author would complete the chain by composing a 7-7 section. Then another author would build on the previous 7-7, with another 5-7-5 passage. This chaining of verses called renga, could sometimes add up to hundreds of linked tanka.

The first part of the poem, called hokku or "starting verse," frequently set the tone for the rest of the poem, and the authors of hokku often earned the respect and admiration of their fellow poets. By the 19th century, largely through the work of Masaoka Shiki, hokku began to be written and read as individual poems. From the word hokku derives our word haiku.

Three great masters of hokku, Basho, Buson and Issa, lived during Japan's Edo-period (1600-1868) and their work still exerts a great deal of influence on how haiku is written today. All three men were born in rural villages and spent many years practicing and refining their art form as well as wandering the countryside, observing nature and the human condition. They followed in a long Japanese tradition of poet-wanders, who seek to experience the word through direct contact.

Basho (1644-94), considered the father of haiku, studied Taoism and classical Chinese poetry in his youth. At first he wrote derivative verse, but eventually broke free from the conventions of Japanese poetry, which at the time, had an elegant, refined style full of allusions to the court. He began to wander the countryside and write travel journals as well as tanka. During the last part of his life he attempted to live with karumi or lightness. As he said in one of his poems,
“like looking at a shallow river with a sandy bed.” Here is an example of one of Basho's poems:

On this road
where nobody else travels
autumn nightfall

**Contemporary usage**

Haiku has emerged as one of the most popular poetic forms of the 20th & 21st centuries. The form, with its brevity and pinpoint illumination of the spiritual, appeals to a contemporary audience that yearns for meaning in a chaotic and rushed world. In some ways, haiku dovetails with some aspects of Post-Modernism, in its capacity to reveal telling moments and express spiritual loneliness. Many poets including Alan Watts, Robert Hass and Jack Kerouac have written and been influenced by the form. There are haiku societies in almost every country, and there are many books, journals and websites devoted to the art of writing haiku. Some practitioners remain loyal to the traditional Japanese format of 17 syllables, but others, especially English speakers, have taken the form in new directions, adapting it to the English language and allowing the use of non-natural images common to modern life.

**Contents**

A haiku is quite difficult to describe. Its three lines naturally prevent giving long explanations. Its concrete shortness makes over-blown descriptions ridiculous. The first two lines prepare the reader for the last line, which leads him
quickly into reality. It urges the reader to take part in the creation of the work. Therefore, it gains a depth that cannot be reached solely with words.

**Japanese Literature**

Japanese literature spans a period of almost two millennia of writing. Early work was heavily influenced by Chinese literature, but Japan quickly developed a style and quality of its own. When Japan reopened its ports to Western trading and diplomacy in the 19th century, Western Literature had a strong effect on Japanese writers, and this influence is still seen today.

As with all literature, Japanese literature is best read in the original. Due to deep linguistic and cultural differences, many Japanese words and phrases are not easily translated. Although Japanese literature and Japanese authors are perhaps not as well known in the west as those of their European American counterparts, Japan possesses an ancient and rich literary tradition that draws upon a millennium and a half of written records.

**Japanese Literature - History**

There is debate regarding the classification of periods in Japanese literature. The following is a general guide based on important political and cultural events. All names are in the Japanese order of surname first, given name second.
Japanese Ancient Literature (pre-8th Century)

With the introduction of kanji, Chinese characters from the Asian mainland, writing became possible, as there was no native writing system. Consequently, the only literary language was classical Chinese to begin with; later, the characters were adapted to write Japanese, creating what is known as the manyogana, the earliest form of kana, or syllabic writing. Works created in the Nara Period include Kojiki a partly mythological, partly accurate history of Japan, Nihonshoki a chronicle with a slightly more solid foundation in historical records than the Kojiki, and Manyoshu a poetry anthology. The language used in the works of this period differs significantly from later periods in both its grammar and phonology. Even in this early era, significant dialectal differences within Japanese are apparent.

Japanese Classical Literature (8th Century - 12th Century)

Classical Japanese literature generally refers to literature produced during the Heian Period, what some would consider a golden era of art and literature. The Tale of Genji, early 11th century by Murasaki Shikibu is considered the pre-eminent masterpiece of Heian fiction and an early example of a work of fiction in the form of a novel. Other important works of this period include the Kokin Wakashu, waka anthology and The Pillow Book, the latter written by Murasaki Shikibu's contemporary and rival, Sei Shonagon, about the life, loves, and pastimes of nobles in the Emperor's court. The iroha poem was also written early during this period, becoming
the standard order for the Japanese syllabary until 19th century Meiji era reforms.

In this time the imperial court and highest ranked kuge patronized the poets. There were no professional poets but most of them were courtiers or ladies-in-waiting. Editing anthologies of poetry was one of national enterprises. Reflecting the aristocratic atmosphere, the poetry in that time was elegant and sophisticated and expressed their emotions in rhetorical style.

**Japanese Medieval Literature (13th Century - 16th Century)**

A period of civil war and strife in Japan, this era is represented by *The Tale of the Heike* (1371). This story is an epic account of the struggle between the Minamoto and Taira clans for control of Japan at the end of the 12th century. Other important tales of the period include Kamo no Chomei’s *Hojoki* (1212) and Yoshida Kenko’s *Tsurezuregusa* (1331). Writing Japanese using a mixture of kanji and kana the way it is done today started with these works in the medieval period. Literature of this period evinces the influences that Buddhism and Zen ethics had on the emerging samurai class. Work from this period is noted for insights into life and death, simple lifestyles, and redemption of killing.

Other remarkable genres in this period were renga, collective poetry and Noh theatre. Both were rapidly developed in the middle of the 14th century, that is, early Muromachi period.
Japanese Early-Modern Literature (17th Century - mid-19th Century)

Literature during this time was written during the largely peaceful Tokugawa Period (commonly referred to as the Edo Period). Due in large part to the rise of the working and middle classes in the new capital of Edo (modern Tokyo), forms of popular drama developed which would later evolve into kabuki. The joruri and kabuki dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon became popular starting at the end of the 17th century. Matsuo Basho, best known for Oku no Hosomichi (a travel diary variously rendered ‘Narrow Road to the Far North’, ‘Narrow Road to Oku’, and so on into English), is considered to be one of the first and greatest masters of haiku poetry. Hokusai, perhaps Japan's most famous wood block print artist, illustrated fiction aside from his famous 36 Views of Mount Fuji.

Many genres of literature made their debut during the Edo Period, helped by a rising literacy rate that reached well over 90% (according to some sources), as well as the development of a library(-like) system. Ihara Saikaku might be said to have given birth to the modern consciousness of the novel in Japan. Jippensha Ikku wrote Tokaido chuhizakurige, a mix of travelogue and comedy. Ueda Akinari initiated the modern tradition of weird fiction in Japan with his Ugetsu Monogatari, while Kyokutei Bakin wrote the extremely popular fantasy/historical romance Nanso Satomi Hakkenden. Santo Kyoden wrote tales of the gay quarters until the Kansei edicts banned such works. Genres included horror, crime stories, morality stories, comedy —often accompanied by colorful woodcut prints.
Japanese Meiji and Taisho Literature (late 19th Century - WW II)

The Meiji era marks the re-opening of Japan to the West, and a period of rapid industrialization. The introduction of European literature brought free verse into the poetic repertoire; it became widely used for longer works embodying new intellectual themes. Young Japanese prose writers and dramatists have struggled with a whole galaxy of new ideas and artistic schools, but novelists were the first to successfully assimilate some of these concepts. A new colloquial literature developed centering on the “I novel,” with some unusual protagonists as in Natsume Soseki's Wagahai wa neko de aru (I Am a Cat). Other famous novels written by him include Botchan and Kokoro (1914). Shiga Naoya, the so called “god of the novel,” and Mori Ogai were instrumental in adopting and adapting Western literary conventions and techniques. Akutagawa Ryunosuke is known especially for his historical short stories. Ozaki Koyo, Izumi Kyoka, and Higuchi Ichiyo represent a strain of writers whose style hearkens back to early-Modern Japanese literature.

War-time Japan saw the debut of several authors best known for the beauty of their language and their tales of love and sensuality, notably Tanizaki Junichiro and Japan's first winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Kawabata Yasunari, a master of psychological fiction.
Japanese Post-war literature

World War II, and Japan's defeat, influenced Japanese literature. Many authors wrote stories of disaffection, loss of purpose, and the coping with defeat. Dazai Osamu's novel *The Setting Sun* tells of a returning soldier from Manchukuo. Mishima Yukio, well-known for both his nihilistic writing and his controversial suicide by seppuku, began writing in the post-war period.

Prominent writers of the 1970s and 1980s were identified with intellectual and moral issues in their attempts to raise social and political consciousness. One of them, Oe Kenzaburo wrote his most well-known work, *A Personal Matter* in 1964 and became Japan's second winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Inoue Mitsuaki had long been concerned with the atomic bomb and continued in the 1980s to write on problems of the nuclear age, while Endo Shusaku depicted the religious dilemma of the Kakure Kirishitan, Roman Catholics in feudal Japan, as a springboard to address spiritual problems. Inoue Yasushi also turned to the past in masterful historical novels of Inner Asia and ancient Japan, in order to portray present human fate.

Avant-garde writers, such as Abe Kobo, who wrote fantastic novels such as *Woman in the Dunes* (1960), wanted to express the Japanese experience in modern terms without using either international styles or traditional conventions, developed new inner visions. Furui Yoshikichi tellingly related the lives of alienated urban dwellers coping with the
minutiae of daily life, while the psychodramas within such daily life crises have been explored by a rising number of important women novelists. The 1988 Naoki Prize went to Todo Shizuko for *Ripening Summer*, a story capturing the complex psychology of modern women. Other award-winning stories at the end of the decade dealt with current issues of the elderly in hospitals, the recent past, Pure-Hearted Shopping District in Koenji, Tokyo, and the life of a Meiji period ukiyo-e artist. In international literature, Ishiguro Kazuo, a native of Japan, had taken up residence in Britain and won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize.

Murakami Haruki is one of the most popular and controversial of today's Japanese authors. His genre-defying, humorous and fantastic works have sparked fierce debates in Japan over whether they are true "literature" or simple pop-fiction: Oe Kenzaburo has been one of his harshest critics. However, Western critics are nearly unanimous in assessing Murakami's works as having serious literary value. Some of his most well-known works include *Norwegian Wood* (1987) and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994-1995). Another best-selling contemporary author is Banana Yoshimoto.

The first Japanese to win the Nobel for literature was Kawabata Yasunari had committed suicide. Kawabata was educated in literature and worked as a reporter during the war; although he declared that he would only be able to “write elegies” after the war’s conclusion, most scholars detect little if any thematic changes between his pre-war and post-war work.
It is uncertain as to whether Kawabata’s suicide was a suicide. Many who are close to him, including his widow, consider his death by gas to be accidental. A close friend of Yukio Mishima, another suicidal author, it is said that one possible reason for the potential suicide was his grief over Mishima; friends said that Mishima had plagued Kawabata’s dreams nightly for nearly a year. Some have also suggested that his diagnosis of Parkinson’s disease or an illicit love affair may have also prompted the suicide, if it was indeed a suicide.

Kawabata’s works were often experimental; he dabbled in stream-of-consciousness writing, and was fond of writing stories with no conclusion, much to the frustration of his readers. His reasoning was that the vignettes of incidents in the story were more important than any conclusion of the story. *Snow Country*, his most famous work and considered by many to be his masterpiece, was published in serial between 1935 and 1947. After the war, he continued to be a successful writer, publishing *Thousand Cranes*, a story of ill-fated love (1949-1952); *The Sound of the Mountain* (1949-1954); *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* (1961); *Beauty and Sadness* (1964); and *The Old Capital* (1962). His self-considered masterpiece was *The Master of Go* (1951), a semi-fictional story retelling a famous Go match, in which a Go master loses to his younger challenger. His novel is considered by many to be a parallel to Japan’s defeat in WWII. He was awarded the Nobel in 1968.
Mishima Yukio, whose real name is Hiraoka Kimitake began publishing after World War II, under the guidance of Kawabata Yasunari. His first novel, *Tōzoku* (Thieves, 1948), focused on two young members of the aristocracy who were drawn toward suicide. The publication secured a spot for Mishima among the second generation of postwar writers in Japan, along with Abe Kōbō and Ōoka Shōhei. Mishima’s second novel, *Confessions of a Mask*, made Mishima a literary celebrity at the age of 24.

In addition to being a writer, Mishima was also an actor; he starred in the 1960 film Afraid to Die, and had roles in Yukoku (1966), Black Lizard (1968) and Hitokiro (1969).

Between 1964 and 1970, Mishima wrote and published his *Sea of Fertility* teratology, which is widely considered his masterpiece. Paul Theroux described it as “the most complete vision we have of Japan in the twentieth century.” Having cemented his place in Japan’s literary society, Mishima decided that his time upon this earth had finished.

**Contemporary Japanese Literature**

Although American attitudes toward the Japanese were chilly at best and hostile at worst after World War II, the Japanese have since proven their awesomeness by creating fast, efficient cars; cartoons for children and adults; superb martial arts films; video games; huge televisions; and robots.

Although modern Japanese writers covered a wide variety of subjects, one particularly Japanese approach stressed their subjects' inner lives, widening the earlier novel's preoccupation with the narrator's consciousness. In Japanese
fiction, plot development and action have often been of secondary interest to emotional issues. In keeping with the general trend toward reaffirming national characteristics, many old themes reemerged, and some authors turned consciously to the past.

Strikingly, Buddhist attitudes about the importance of knowing oneself and the poignant impermanence of things formed an undercurrent to sharp social criticism of this material age. There was a growing emphasis on women's roles, the Japanese persona in the modern world, and the malaise of common people lost in the complexities of urban culture.

Popular fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature all flourished in urban Japan in the 1980s. Many popular works fell between "pure literature" and pulp novels, including all sorts of historical serials, information-packed docudramas, science fiction, mysteries, business stories, war journals, and animal stories. Non-fiction covered everything from crime to politics. Although factual journalism predominated, many of these works were interpretive, reflecting a high degree of individualism. Children's works remerged in the 1950s, and the newer entrants into this field, many of them younger women, brought new vitality to it in the 1980s.

Manga (comic books) have penetrated almost every sector of the popular market. They include virtually any field of human interest, such as a multivolume high-school history of Japan.
Significant Japanese authors and works

Famous authors and literary works of significant stature are listed in chronological order below.

Classical Literature

Sei Shonagon (c.~966 - c.10??): The Pillow Book
Murasaki Shikibu (c.973 - c.1025): The Tale of Genji

Medieval Literature

The Tale of the Heike (1371)

Early-Modern Literature

Ihara Saikaku (1642 – 1693)
Matsuo Basho (1644 - 1694)
Ueda Akinari (1734 - 1809)
Santo Kyoden (1761 - 1816)
Juppsensha Ikku (1765 - 1831)
Kyokutei Bakin (1767 - 1858)

Late-Modern Literature

Mori Ogai (1862 - 1922)
Ozaki Koyo (1867 - 1903)
Natsume Soseki (1867 - 1916)
Izumi Kyoka (1873 - 1939)
Shiga Naoya (1883 - 1971)
Tanizaki Junichiro (1886 - 1965)
Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892 - 1927)
Eiji Yoshikawa (1892-1962)
Kawabata Yasunari (1899 - 1972)
Dazai Osamu (1909 - 1948)
Endo Shusaku (1923 - 1996)
Abe Kobo (1924 - 1993)
Mishima Yukio (1925 - 1970)
Oe Kenzaburo (1935)
Murakami Haruki (1949)
Murakami Ryu (1952)