

**HAIKU MASTER
TAIGI**

TAIGI TAN

**TRANSLATED BY
EARL TROTTER**

Peach Blossom Press



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1. Taigi Tan (1709-1771). 2. Japanese Haiku.



for 藤井 由紀子

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INTRODUCTION

History of Haiku

Before beginning the discussion, note that the use of “syllable” here is a little different from the usage for English. It could be rendered as “unit of sound.” The difference is that, in Japanese, long vowels and double consonants count as 2 syllables and the “n” after a vowel, one. So in romaji “*nan*” is two syllables as is “*shii*” while “*kakko*” is three syllables. Note that the long “e” and long “o” are usually rendered “ei” and “ou” (there are exceptions). The long syllables can also be written with a macron, e.g. “*shī*.” As well, “lines” are not lines as in English verse but represent the five or seven (or other) syllabic unit. Japanese verse was traditionally written vertically with no breaks.

The roots of haiku go back to the beginning of Japanese poetry. All the ancient forms consist of five or seven syllables. There were four main types. First there is the *kauta*, in a question and answer format consisting of three lines with the syllabic pattern, 5-7-7. Related is the *sedouka*, basically a double *kauta*. The *chouka* are built of alternating lines of five and seven syllables to an indeterminate length, concluding with a seven-syllable line. Within the *chouka*, there might be a break in the pattern with consecutive five or seven syllable lines. These forms eventually fell out of use although the *chouka* was a prominent form in the Manyōshū (compiled after 759).

Of greater importance are waka (or tanka). It consists of five lines with a syllabic pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. Initially this tended to consist of two couplets and a last line refrain. Later new breakdowns emerged in a 5-7-5 7-7 split where the first three lines modified the last two or where the two parts were related but

independent grammatically. Overtime there was also a growing use of a pause after the first line. This gives the first three lines a haiku flavour. By the time of the Kokinshu, compiled in 905, waka was the predominant form. A final point to notice was that the imperial anthologies of waka, over hundreds of years, divided the poems in sections and the four seasons were given prominence.

Beginning in early Heian, there appeared some waka where one person would compose the first three lines and another person, the last two. Such are called renga, or linked verse. This was mainly an exercise in wit. However the practice continued and slowly developed. Verses began to become linked – one writer composing a 5-7-5 opening then another adding 7-7, then 5-7-5 and so on. Eventually one hundred links became the standard. The first five lines would have a certain meaning, but lines four to eight would change the core idea, then lines six to ten likewise. By 1200 renga was a distinct genre. A group of poets would meet and then compose spontaneously to the preceding verse. Renga developed very complex rules for linking and also developed season words, or *kigo*, to be followed. The opening three lines were deemed very important and called *hokku*. *Hokku* were sometimes published separately and this gave them their own identity.

From renga, a humorous form developed, *haikai no renga*, which we will hereafter refer simply as *haikai*. The opening verse, as in renga, is called *hokku*. In addition to humour and wit, it also employed more colloquial language. Renga had followed the diction of traditional waka poets. The change here can also be traced to a shift where the merchant class became more involved in poetry. In Heian times it was limited to aristocrats. The first school of haikai was the Teimon School founded by Teitoku (1570-1653). Basically their principles were identical to renga, with most of its complex rules intact, with the exception of the use of colloquial language.

A reaction set in against the complexities of the Teimon School and Soin (1604-1682) founded the Danrin School. This school sought freedom and almost any diction and subject matter, including vulgar language and obscenities, were used. There was a heated competition between the two schools. Through all this development was the increasing focus on the independent *hokku*.

Although a later appellation (see below), we will refer to the independent *hokku* as haiku henceforth given its ubiquitous use.

The course of haiku was changed forever with the appearance of Matsuo Basho (1644–1694). He promoted the use of ordinary language as means of sincere expression. As well, subject matter was broadened from the Teimon School, along with humour, but not to the excesses of the Danrin School. Basho promoted a series of various approaches to *haiku* – in fact, not staying put in one theory was part of his aesthetic. He talked of sincerity (*makoto*) and later lightness (*karumi*) and his poems often exhibited *sabi* and *wabi* – feelings of transience, imperfection, poverty and simplicity. Basho had many disciples, the major being Takarai Kikaku who wrote a moving account of Basho's last days and was influential until the time of Buson.

Basho was based in Edo. In the Kansai region (Kyoto, Osaka), Uejima Onitsura (1661–1738) wrote a poetics of haiku based on sincerity (*makoto*). His and Basho's ideas are likely connected in some manner, if only through Onitsura's contacts with Basho's disciples.

The two major haiku poets after Basho were Yosa Buson (1716–1784) and Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828). Buson was a poet known for his sensibility and lyricism. He sought to be natural, not encumbered by too many rules. In his lifetime he was more renowned for his paintings and he is considered a master of *haiga*, a form of painting incorporating haiku aesthetics tending to a simple (though not simplistic) style. Issa, who was not well known in his lifetime is the foremost poet of humanity imbued with an atmosphere of pathos. There is also much down-to-earth humour in many of his haiku. Tan Taigi (1709–1771), a contemporary of Buson we deal with below. The finest woman haiku poet is considered to be Chiyo-ni (Kaga no Chiyo) (1703–1775).

The bridge to the modern era came with Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902). Considered one of the four great haiku poets, along with Basho, Buson and Issa, Shiki was the one to designate what had been known as *hokku*, as haiku. He favoured haiku based on a realistic observation of nature. Shiki revived the haiku form. It has not only been exceedingly popular in Japan since his death but enjoys a popularity worldwide.

Characteristics of Haiku

Haiku can be succinctly summarized as a Japanese poetic form consisting of seventeen syllables in a 7-5-7 format, which will include a season word (*kigo*) and a “cutting word” (*kireji*). As mentioned previously, the syllable is a “sound unit” and the 7-5-7 format, rendered in lines, in English, is not done so in Japanese. The haiku topic will be on a seasonal event, whether pertaining to nature or a social occasion. Haiku is usually in two parts, either the first line versus the last two, or first two lines versus the last. The cutting word often serves to build this structure (end of line one, two, or three) and as well frequently highlights the preceding phrase (like an exclamation mark).

Since Basho and Onitsura, haiku has been seen as representing the true feelings and/or experience of the poet. However, this should not be seen as being solely a spontaneous insight into life or nature, immediately rendered down as haiku (the Zen moment). Haiku, even of masters such as Basho, are constantly revised in composition and certain events are, in fact, imaginary (*viz.* certain episodes in Basho’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*). However, the best haiku will certainly be insightful and represent the poet’s true feelings, an aesthetic that goes back to the earliest writings of Chinese and Japanese aesthetics (see the Mao Commentary to the *Book of Songs* and the *Preface* to the *Kokinshu*).

Tan Taigi (炭太祇)

Taigi was born in 1709 in Edo (Tokyo). He studied haiku under Suitoku then Keikitsu. He travelled about the country in 1751, including Kyushu. He ended up in Kyoto the same year and became a Zen priest. He lived in Shinjuan at Daitokuji where the famous priest, Ikkyu, had had a hermitage. However, he soon left and went to live in Kyoto’s red-light district, Shimabara, to be near his friend and patron (and brothel owner), Donshi. He made friends

with many kabuki actors (he had done likewise in Edo) and taught haiku and calligraphy to them as well as courtesans. He was involved in haiku circles and became friends with Yosa Buson. The pleasure district was also known as the nightless city and copying this Taigi called his haiku school and home the nightless hermitage (不夜庵 fuya'an). He lived in Shimabara for the rest of his life but made periodic visits to Edo. He died in 1771 reportedly from a brain hemorrhage brought on from overdrinking.

Along with Buson he sought a return to the values of Basho. Taigi could present a simple human situation or reflect the grandeur of nature. Blyth felt Taigi was a near equal to the four masters: Basho, Buson, Issa and Shiki. Blyth's final comments on Taigi are worth repeating: "The greatness of Taigi is connected with his realisation that haiku is not religion, as with Basho; it is not art, as Buson thought; it is not Issa's consolation for the tragic irony of life; haiku is, or should be, life itself, no more, no less."¹

The Translation

The translation of the haiku is fairly literal. I have tried to follow the original images sequentially but with Japanese this is not always feasible. The important point is to make the key image clearly stand out. The form is reflected in the three-line structure but no attempt has been made for a consistent number of syllables or accents per line. The Japanese text is from various sources on the internet including university archives but a few were transcribed from Blyth. Haiku from different sources matched, other than the use of kanji versus hiragana in some instances. Some 740 haiku have been translated. The haiku are arranged by, but not within, season. There is often ambiguity in the pieces and alternative renderings are possible in some instances

Most of my sources had no romaji, so although overwhelmingly correct, the renderings should be considered provisional. I have replaced the sound of the older forms, は (*ha*), へ (*he*), ひ (*hi*), and

¹ R. H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku* Vol.1, p. 308.

ふ (*fu*), where applicable, as they are now, in many instances, わ (*wa*), え (*e*), い (*i*), and う (*u*). The archaic ゐ (*wi*) is *i* in modern Japanese. Note that ふ (*fu*) was often used as a verb ending where う (*u*) is now employed. There are also the following older stand-alone forms that are retained in modern Japanese but have a different sound: は (*ha*), へ (*he*) and を (*wo*) as *wa* (topic marker), *e* (to) and *o* (object marker) respectively. As well, the pre-modern rendering of “today” as けふ (*kefu*) has been replaced by *kyou* in the romaji. The odd other item has been modernized.

Further Reading

There is virtually nothing in English on Taigi. The six Blyth volumes have many haiku by Taigi scattered throughout their pages. There is a chapter in *A History of Haiku*, Vol. 1 (pp. 289–308) that deals specifically with Taigi and is highly recommended (as are all of Blyth’s works on haiku). Of course there are other scattered translations in various haiku anthologies and on the web.

The other entries for further reading relate to haiku in general and to the four most noted poets, Basho, Buson, Issa and Shiki. Yasuda’s volume was of great help in doing the Introduction. As well, Lanoue’s website of Issa translations was useful in resolving certain ambiguities in the text where the same term was used by both Taigi and Issa. Of course, this list is just a fraction of the works available.

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元日の居ごろや世にふる畳
ganjitsu no igokoro ya yo ni furumatami

On New Year's Day
so comfortable
on my old tatami mat!

Spring

はるの行音や夜すがら雨のあし
haru no yuku oto ya yo sugara ame no ashi

The sound of departing spring –
all night
a fine drizzle.

寒食や竈をめぐるあぶら虫
kanshoku ya kamado o meguru aburamushi

Cold Food Day!²⁰
Scurrying all over the hearth,
aphids.

諸声やうき藻にまとふむら蛙
morogoe ya ukime ni matou mura kaeru

A chorus of voices!
Jumbled up in the seaweed,
a throng of frogs.

²⁰ Derived from the Cold Food Festival in China and originally held the 105th day after winter solstice. Not using fire was the key idea. Little remains of this event in modern Japan.

凧白し長閑過ての夕ぐもり
tako shiroshi nodoka sugite no yuugumori

White kites float
in unearthly serenity
on a cloudy evening.

蕨採て笕にあらふひとりかな
warabi seite kakei ni arau hitori kana

All alone
gathering bracken
and washing it in the trough.

膝たてゝおそき日みるや天の原
hizatate osoki hi miru ya ama no hara

Kneeling down on a spring day
I gaze about –
the boundless heavens!

池のふねへ藤こぼるゝや此夕べ
ike no fune e fuji koboreru ya kon yuube

This evening,
wisteria blossoms
spill over the boat on the pond.

泊らばや遅き日の照る奥座敷
hakuraba ya osoki hi no teru oku zashiki

Staying overnight –
the sun shines late
into my *tatami* room²¹.

堀川の畠からたつ胡蝶かな
horikawa no hatake kara tatsu kochou kana

From the field
by the canal
a butterfly ascends.

²¹ A formal Japanese room with *tatami* mats.

山路きてむかふ城下や凧の数
yamaji kite mukau jouka ya tako no kazu

Coming along the mountain road
where it faces the castle –
scores of kites.

永日やいまだ泊らぬ鶏の声
eijitsu ya imada tomaranu tori no koe

The long spring day!
They haven't roosted yet –
squawking chickens.

しなへよく畳へ置や藤の花
shina e yoku tatami e oku ya fuji no hana

Put them down carefully
on the *tatami* mat –
wisteria blossoms.

半ば来て雨にぬれゐる花見哉
nakaba kite ame ni nure iru hanami kana

Halfway there,
I got drenched in the rain –
cherry blossom viewing.

暮遅く日の這わたる畳かな
kure osoku hi no hawataru tatami kana

The end of a long spring day –
the sun creeps
along the *tatami* mat.

遅日の光のせたり沖の浪
chijitsu no hikari no setari oki no nami

Reflecting the light
of a late sunset in spring –
the waves offshore.

狂言は南無ともいはず王生念仏
kyougen wa namu tomo iwazu mibu nenbutsu

Kyogen²².
“Hail” not said together –
Mibu’s *nembutsu*.

口たゞく夜の往来や花ざかり
kuchi tatau yo no ourai ya hanazakari

Talking a lot
while walking about in the evening –
flowers in full bloom.

巢を守る燕のはらの白さかな
su o mamoru tsubame no hara no shira sakana

Protecting the nest –
the belly of the swallow
like a white fish.

²² Kyogen is a comic interlude between noh plays. However, in this case, it is kyogen nembutsu (“Mibu Dainenbutsu Kyogen”) held on the 14th day of the third month for ten days, where there is no dialogue and Buddhistic teachings are illustrated in comic form. Such plays are still performed at Mibu Temple in Kyoto. Formerly, the audience would chant the nembutsu (Hail to Amida Butsu) during the performance.

船よせてさくらぬすむや月夜影
fune yosete sakura nusumu ya tsukiyo kage

The boat pulled near
to steal some blossoms
in the shadows of a moonlit night²³.

二里程は鳶も出て舞ふ汐干哉
ni ri hodo wa tobi mo dete mau shiohi kana

Five miles²⁴ about
black kites come out and circle –
low tide.

行雁の高キや花につりあはず
yukukari no takaki ya hana ni tsuriawazu

Departing geese²⁵ on high –
you're out of step
with the blossoms.

²³ Taigi has another haiku about the blossom guard in his patrol boat.

²⁴ Two Japanese *ri*.

²⁵ In Japan, the geese fly north to their breeding grounds in the spring.

いろいろの名は我言はずさくらかな
iroiro no na wa ware iwazu sakura kana

Of the various names,
I don't call them
cherry blossoms²⁶.

帰る雁きかぬ夜がちに成にけり
kaerukari kikanu yogachi ni nari ni keru

The departing geese –
determined as usual
to start off in the evening.

吹はれてまたふる空や春の雪
fuku harete mata furu sora ya haru no yuki

Clear weather is blowing in
but it's still falling from the sky –
spring snow.

²⁶ Specifically here in Japanese, *sakura*.

筏士よ足のとまらぬ花ざかり
ikadashi yo ashi no tomaranu hanazakari

The raftsmen!
He can't take a break –
flowers are in full bloom.

情なの蒼さくらやひなの前
nasakena no tsubomi sakura ya hina no mae

The budding cherry blossoms
look pathetic
beside the Hina Festival dolls²⁷.

むかひ居てさくらに明す詞かな
mukai ite sakura ni akasu kotoba kana

Across the way,
to put it clearly –
are cherry blossoms!

²⁷ *Hina matsuri*, held the 3rd day of the third lunar month. Also known as Girl's Day. The dolls can be very colourful and elaborate.

散てある椿にみやる木の間かな
chitte aru tsubaki ni miyaru konoma kana

I gaze upon
the camellia blossoms
fallen among the trees.

蝶飛ぶや腹に子ありてねむる猫
chou tobu ya hara ni ko arite nemuru neko

A butterfly in flight –
on the child's stomach,
a sleeping cat.

うばかゝのさくらを覗く彼岸かな
ubakaka no sakura o nozoku higan kana

*Higan*²⁸!
Peeking at
the weeping cherries²⁹.

²⁸ Buddhist observances held at spring and autumn equinoxes. The autumn observance is often referred to as *aki-higan*, the spring, just *higan*. The sun sets due west at this time.

²⁹ *Prunus pendula* 'Pleno-rosea'. Also known in Japanese as *ubahigan*.

涅槃会や礼いひありく十五日
nehane ya rei ii ariku juugonichi

Nirvana Day³⁰ –
repeating the traditional words of gratitude
on the fifteenth.

はる雨や音もいろいろに初夜のかね
haru ame ya ne mo iroiro ni shoya no kane

Spring rain!
The eight o'clock tolling³¹
blends with the various sounds.

ちるなどゝみへぬ若さやはつ桜
chiru nado do mienu wakasa ya hatsu sakura

They've just come out,
can't see many falling –
first cherry blossoms.

³⁰ The Buddha's entrance into Nirvana was celebrated on the 15th day of the second lunar month. A statue was held up and a recitation said from the Paranirvana Sutra.

³¹ Temple bells marked the time of day (2-hour periods), in this case "first night", the hour of the dog at about 8:00 p.m.

陽炎や筏木かはく岸の上
kagerou ya ikada ki kawaku kishi no ue

Shimmering heat
off the dry wooden raft
atop the bank.

すみの江に高き櫓やおぼろ月
suminoe ni takaki yagura ya oborozuki

High above the tower
at Suminoe³²
the moon shrouded in mist.

春寒し泊瀬の廊下の足のうら
harusamushi hase no rouka no ashi no ura

Along the corridor of Hasedera Temple³³
the spring cold
on the soles of one's feet.

³² Sumiyoshi, the famous literary locale, near Osaka.

³³ A major Shingon temple in Sakurai, Nara Prefecture. The corridor is likely the 200 metre long covered stairway leading to the temple.