

# Japanese Satoyama: Thoughts on Living with Nature

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Japanese haiku is often thought of as being just a form a poetry. For Westerners, it is not exactly a form of art we are familiar with and is not seen as something very deep because of its simplicity. However, through the book and the film, I was able to see why haiku is unique to Japanese culture and exactly why it has had such a major influence to people not only in Japan but around the world as well.

To start, haiku is a seventeen syllable poem usually referring to happenings in the natural world. In the documentary in class, it followed a group of foreign tourist who came to Japan to travel and learn more about haiku and see areas that were witnessed by Matsuo Basho, the person who created the modern haiku art form. They travelled along the Oku no Hosomichi to find their own haiku moment. A haiku moment, according to the textbook, is a certain moment in time, describe as a Nirvana state of feeling (p.145). One of the travelers was a school teacher. Her story was very interesting as she was explaining how she uses haiku along with pictures drawn by her students to help them express their inner feelings. For her, haiku brought to life the inner feelings that were hidden inside her students. This was interesting because at first I found her to be quite unique and a little strange, however this opened up my mind to realize that the meaning of haiku is different depending on each person. Also among the travelers was a man who was able to find an escape from harsh realities through haiku. He had come through a divorce and was able to find a mental escape and calming in walking with nature and creating haiku. In a sense, for him haiku became a form of therapy that was important for him because he realized this at a key moment in his life. Because of its influence, he also found that haiku was able to help him in his career as a film maker. These two alone from the film showed me how haiku is something that must be felt inside and is not just a short poem on a page. The simplicity allows for many interpretations allowing more than a single emotion to be ingrained inside the

words. The almost incompleteness of haiku relates to how Japanese find perfection in incompleteness and leaves the ending to an individual's imagination. For Japanese, since there is such an importance on everyday life in keeping harmony with oneself and with nature, it seems natural that haiku would be born in order to try and convey the indescribable feeling that individuals have in such an abstract and indirect way. Japanese people in comparison with Westerners tend to have a deeper connection and emotional feeling with nature. This is where I believe separates the two ways of thinking from Japanese mind and Western interpretation. Haiku is usually about nature with Japanese people, however the Westerners shown in the documentary used haiku in their own unique forms which were slightly different than traditional Japanese thinking.

As briefly mentioned before, the haiku moment, is something I want to touch on a little more. The haiku moment is further explained as point in time in which emotions, logic, thought and imagination disappear and only the words and the moment come together as one (Hume p.146). This is exactly why haiku is felt differently for each person and is unique in the sense that is not the same for everyone. For Japanese, the four seasons are felt strong throughout the country, more so than many other countries that exist in the world. Through each season there are different meanings such as new beginnings, endings, and so on. Because each season is felt strongly in Japan, it will have a profound influence on the subject matter of the haiku and what the poet is expressing. A haiku written in the summer will not depict cherry blossoms or the cold snow that appears in the winter. In the book this is described as the seasonal theme that depicts exactly which the haiku deals with (p.144).

In elementary school and middle school, I was introduced to haiku. The meaning of haiku, however, was never fully explained to us. The school and teachers explain it to us as being just a

type of poetry used within Japan, therefore I remember clearly we wrote anything that would fit into the seventeen syllables as it did not have a meaning for us. If we were told about how it is used to express what we feel around us in nature, students probably would not have written about sports, another person, or a favorite celebrity. People in the United States are so distant in their feelings with nature that it is hard in a sense to connect with any sort of positive feeling, let alone try and describe it in such few words. The indirectness of the Japanese language and the abstract state of mind needed to reach the haiku moment fits in with everything I have learned about Japanese people and culture. Haiku is a unique art form and I honestly feel if shared more in detail with other countries could serve a stronger purpose than what it appears to be on the outside.

*The sun comes rising*

*Against a brightening sky*

*Revealing true life*