

July 11, 2012

[24 THREE LINE VERSES OF 15 SYLLABLE ENGLISH "HAIKU"]

REALITY BETWEEN THE LINES

(Title suggested by John Tiong
Chunghoo in April 2012.)

HAIKU¹ BY THE MASTER, MATSUO BASHO [1644-1694]

**CONSIDERED HIS POEM OF FAREWELL, WRITTEN IN 1694, THE YEAR
OF HIS DEATH OF A STOMACH ILLNESS.**

"Falling sick on a journey

My dream goes wandering

Over a field of dried grass"



One is living

In seventeenth century

Edo town

¹ A "**Haiku**" is a short Poem, invented by the Japanese Poet, **Matsuo Basho**, in the 17th Century, almost 400 years ago. Only three lines long, there is no room for waste – every word counts and must be chosen carefully. "**Haiku**" draws upon **metaphor, simile, personification** and **apostrophe**. The word itself is drawn from "**hai**", a Chinese word, the equal of "**kokkei**", meaning '**comicality**', '**witticism**', '**humour**', or '**pleasantry**'; whilst "**ku**" means **a stanza** or **piece of poetry**. A well-executed "haiku" is **based in the physical world of our senses**, yet suggests **a deeper, mysterious, transitory nature of all existence**. It is, therefore, both tangible and metaphysical in content and nature. One looks to the printed word and beyond, seeking additional meanings beyond the purely descriptive and the specific. Thus, one may interpret Basho's last known Poem in the following manner- the famous Poet is suddenly taken ill in the final stages of his life's allotted time – his "**journey**" if you will; his spirit or "**dream**" goes ahead of him searching for hidden spiritual realities by which his future reincarnations, if they occur, may take; and finally he will be laid to rest in the fertile earth as suggested by the metaphor of dead vegetation in the form of "**dried grass**".



A samurai sworn to
Do his Daimyo's duty
Passes

One bows one's head
Politely as it is the law
On pain of death

Full payment is one koku

-330 pounds-

of rice



One koku worth

5,280 ounces

Of gold



Today one pure ounce
Of gold measures
Fifteen hundred full dollars

A Tozama Daimyo's



Value was
100 million dollars



A Shogun's value

Was almost four trillion



Dollars in land

Five classes made Japan

- **Emperor, Shogun**

And Daimyos

Followed by

Samurai, Farmers

Artisans and Chonin

The most famous



Geisha District



Was Gion in Kyoto

Merchants were the lowly

Selling fine goods



To rich samurai



When rich themselves

Merchants could move to

High ranking districts

In 1641 almost



All foreigners

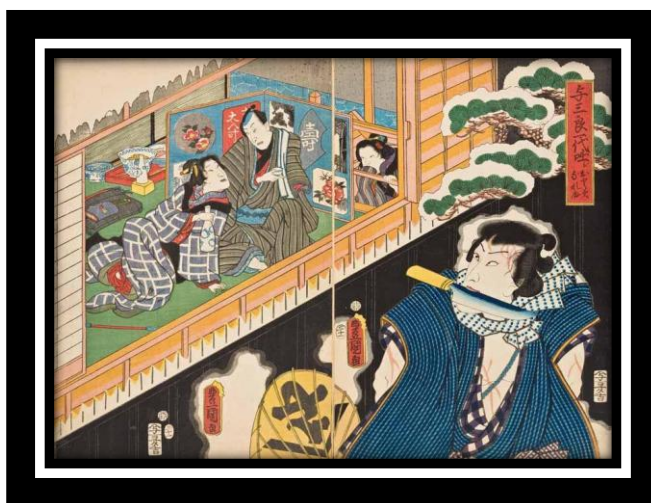
Were banned

In 1650 literate

Warriors became

New Nobles

In 1710 the art



Of Kabuki

Was popular

Japan's 1697

Rice sale

was profitable²

The power of



The last shogun fell

At Toba-Fushimi.

² 5,000 koku or 750,000 pounds of rice was sold that year for 3,571 ryo, or, in July 2012 gold prices, US\$5.4 million. In the 16th century, a samurai's stipend was around 100 koku a year, or, in July 2012 currency, US\$150,000. During the Edo Period, a basic stipend for a Daimyo was 10,000 koku a year, or, in July 2012 gold prices, US\$15,000,000. The Merchants who sold the rice, though, were to become extremely rich and powerful by lending large sums of money to Samurai and Daimyos who had impoverished themselves with too high a lifestyle. It was jokingly, though ruefully, said that "*the wrath of Osaka Merchants could turn the 300 Daimyos pale and make them tremble in fear.*" [For Annual Stipend figures, see www.samurai-archive.com/vocab.html#k] Accessed 11 July 2012.

Haiku is not devoid
Of humour
Having a gentle wit

Basho himself
Enjoyed poking fun
At the powerful



*Samurai's gathering,
Their chat has the pungent taste
Of daikon radish*

He also was amused
By birdlife and food,
Spoiling rice cakes

*Bush warbler –
A dropping on the rice cake
At the verandah's edge!*

The humour of modern Haiku

Is less subtle

And more sharp

I wake, reluctant;

Too cold to get out of bed

But I need to pee

NOTES ON THE POEM

Between the 8th and the 12th Centuries, emperors ruled Japan. But powerful families gained the loyalty of the samurai – the emperor’s warriors.

In 1185, one local lord took control of government as shogun, the leader of the samurai armies. For the next 700 years, emperors were ceremonial figures whilst the shoguns ruled Japan, banning the interaction with the Western world.

The shogun in theory (and in practice) was a despot, accountable to none but the emperor. The emperor in turn represented the “will of heaven” that placed on the shogun the responsibility of ensuring the well being of the people. From 1147 to 1868, a period of 721 years, there was a total of 49 shoguns in Japan.

LONGEST LASTING EMPIRES

ORIGIN	DURATION
British	414 years
Persia	437 years
Spain	483 years
Gaul	500 years
Thailand	564 years
Holy Roman	844 years
Sudan	1,123 years

MODERN SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT	NUMBER IN WORLD
Presidential	71
Parliamentary Republics	41
Constitutional Monarchies	29
One Party States	8

It can be seen that, in order, of 149 out of 196 countries in the world, the most predominant governmental systems are:

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT	NUMBER AND PERCENT
Presidential	71 – 48%
Parliamentary Republics	41 – 28%
Constitutional Monarchies	29 – 19%
One Party States	8 – 5%

Australian and Japan are Constitutional Monarchies

HAIKU AND BEAUTY

Amid the bloody warfare and the ruthless political intrigue, Poets, Actors, Musicians, Sculptors and Painters were deeply involved in creating and perpetuating the Fine Arts, over and above the violence and political trappings of the seven Century Shogunate.

By way of closing this discussion, it is appropriate to illustrate Japan's paradoxical attachment to both bellicosity and to beauty. Sufficient space has been allocated to the former, the following is an expression of the latter.

