Adaptations of the Haiku

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Abstract

This paper examines the Japanese poetic form “haiku” and its adaptations in America. Since its introduction from Japan, the haiku has evolved many times in structure and content to suit its changing environment. We trace the form’s history from Edo period Japan to modern America through a comparative analysis of several notable haiku. Research for this paper included primary sources such as the original poetry of Wright, Vizenor, Pound, Cristoforo, and the modern internet. Research also included secondary sources, such as academic articles on the history of haiku, literary interpretations, and English translations of Japanese haiku. All research leads to the conclusion that further exploration of the haiku form is a worthwhile endeavor providing historical and contemporary cultural insights. However, we also find that our thesis, which is based on a broad, inclusive definition of haiku, may not be the most suitable perspective. By choosing to define haiku using strict traditional standards, we may discover that many so-called “adaptations” are not true haiku at all. Following this logic, we may instead conclude that the haiku has not evolved since the Edo period in Japan, a view that holds its own merits.

Adaptations of the Haiku

Huge dreams of fortune
Go with me to foreign lands,
Across the ocean.

Unknown immigrant (Takaki, 2008, p. 233)

Originating from Japan, the haiku poetic form has migrated across the ocean to America. Exemplifying the qualities of conciseness and immediacy, its versatility made it widespread within the English-speaking world. Today, it survives as a popular form of poetry in both English and Japanese. In overcoming barriers of culture, language, and geography, the haiku has changed its structural form and repeatedly evolved in content, style, and purpose to different times and circumstances.

Significance

Although it traces its roots to Edo period Japan, haiku has been adopted and modified so widely that some may argue that its adaptations have themselves become new forms of poetry (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Its presence is felt in American literature, shaped not only by Japanese Americans but by those of other cultural backgrounds who have come together to participate in the haiku's ongoing evolution. The haiku is also an interesting subject of study for the student of history. We may be able to infer much about the cultural circumstances of a particular place and time by examining their unique take on the haiku.

In order to prove our thesis, we will outline a series of research questions to guide our study. First, this paper will examine the origins and development of the traditional haiku. Second, we will trace the haiku's journey to the United States and follow the changes it has gone

through to adapt to America and the English language. Third, we will examine notable examples of haiku throughout history from both Japan and America and compare them using historical and literary analysis.

Origins

Furuike ya, kawazu tobikomu, mizu no oto.

Breaking the silence
Of an ancient pond,
A frog jumped into water—
A deep resonance.

Matsuo Basho (Burleson, 1998, para. 7)

In order to explore its adaptations in America, we must first understand the haiku's origins in its homeland. The haiku originated in 17th century Japan during the Edo period (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019, para. 1). During that time, poetry in Japan was often a communal leisure activity. Friends took turns adding impromptu stanzas to a growing string of verses, guided by a set of traditional rules. Over time, early masters such as Basho and Issa began composing isolated verses and committing them to paper. By the 19th century, "haiku" had come to refer to these short, single-stanza poems composed by a single author (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019, para. 1).

Definitions

Before we go on, it would be useful to define "haiku". According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019), the haiku is "[an] unrhymed poetic form consisting of 17 syllables arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively" (para. 1). American poet Harold G. Henderson

adds on to these conditions, prescribing that a haiku must contain nature, must revolve around a specific event, and must be set in the present moment, a time known as the Eternal Now (Kawano, 1983). The three-line, 5-7-5 rule is a popular element of the Western definition. However, early haiku in Japan were often written not in three horizontal lines but one vertical one (Shirane, 2019). The 5-7-5 syllabic rule is also only a loose guideline, especially in English haiku, as English syllables operate differently from Japanese syllables (Zheng, 2014). In both languages, there are numerous examples of its subversion. Henderson's conditions, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate, are likewise frequently subverted.

By strict traditional standards, a proper haiku also requires both a season word and a cutting word (Eaton, 2009). A season word is an anchor in the haiku that cues the reader to the season the poem is set in (Shirane, 2019). The socially understood connotations of season words are used to create a more immersive experience without wordy elaborations that would destroy the conciseness of the poem. For example, a south wind represents summer, a shrike autumn, futon quilts winter, and card games the New Year. The frog in Basho's "frog haiku" cited above is a season word for spring. The seasons themselves carry associated moods, such as celebration in the New Year and rebirth in springtime (Higginson, 2005). The cutting word is a more elusive concept, representing the point in the poem where the tension rests (Shirane, 2019). In Basho's haiku, it could be interpreted as the exclamation "ya", an utterance expressing appreciation or awe (Zheng, 2014). Yet, William Oandasan's haiku subverts both these ideas. Using only the letter X, Oandason creates a visual symbol of surviving Native Americans still keeping time, like marking X's in a calendar.

X X X X X

X X X X X X X

X X X X X

William Oandasan (Ford, 2009, p. 333)

The haiku is a form of poetry that seems to elude definition. Any rule put forward attempting to set boundaries inevitably finds a poem to challenge it. Having considered this difficulty, this paper will take a broad, wholistic view on the definition of haiku, keeping in mind traditional patterns but foregoing hard rules and definitions. We will, instead, adopt the intuitive and inclusive modern international understanding of what haiku is today.

The English Haiku

Perhaps the most important steppingstone for haiku on its way from Japan to America was its adaptation to English. In order to make this linguistic leap, the structure and content of haiku underwent significant modifications. Some of these modifications can best be understood not by directly considering English haiku but by looking at English translations of classic Japanese haiku. Basho's frog poem, translated by Nobuyuki Yuasa above, has over thirty recognized professional translations, each with its merits and flaws (Morita, 1982, p. 15). Japanese professor of English Kiuchi Toru offers another well-known translation: "oh, an old pond / a frog jumps into it / the sound of water" (Zheng, 2014, p. 7). English writer Peter Beilensen also has his own take: "Old dark sleepy pool / Quick unexpected / Frog / Goes plop! Watersplash" (Morita, 1982, p. 16). The popularity of the three-line (or even Beilensen's four-line) poem as opposed to the one-line may have stemmed from linguistic differences between English and Japanese. English relies heavily on spacing and punctuation for phrasing, whereas Japanese contains words that can function as punctuation. English, of course, is also written from left to right horizontally, whereas traditional Japanese was written from right to left vertically.

Besides phrasing, line numbers, and directions, there is also the issue of vocabulary. The word “ya” in Basho’s frog haiku illustrates how jumping between languages can result in the loss of certain linguistic subtleties. “Ya” is an exclamative particle, similar to “oh” or “ah” in English. However, English speakers can detect that “Oh, old pond” and “Ah, old pond” contain subtle but important differences in the way they strike in the mind (Zheng, 2018). Some translations use “ah”, some use “oh”, and some leave out the utterance entirely (Morita, 1982). Because there is no English exclamative particle that can capture the exact intention of “ya”, the experience of the haiku is invariably changed between the original Japanese and its many English forms.

English haiku can, however, preserve certain aspects of traditional ones. One pioneering, English-speaking poet who first experimented with the haiku was American writer Ezra Pound (Lin, 2015). His famous “In a Station of the Metro”, sometimes called the first English haiku, is cited below (Marx, 2006).

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound (Kawano, 1983, p. 117)

Pound’s haiku, like Basho’s, is inspired by Zen philosophy. Namely, the strange and dark beauty of the poem invokes the idea of “yugen”, the Zen mood of deep emotion at the mysteriousness of nature (Lin, 2015). Also similar to Basho is the setting of the poem in the immediate present and the use of natural imagery. “In a Station of the Metro” demonstrates several aspects of traditional haiku that can be preserved in English— the Zen attitude, immediacy, conciseness, and natural imagery. For all the elements that English haiku lost, the

transition between languages was not a solely diminishing one. English opened a way for haiku into the Western world and paved its path for further adaptation and growth.

The Haiku of Japanese Immigrants

One of the haiku's major bridges to America was the first wave of Japanese immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Stirred to action by the unwelcome Western presence in China, the Japanese government prepared to defend against foreigners by levying heavy taxes (Takaki, 2008, p. 232). Many farmers, unable to afford this, lost their land and livelihoods. One new opportunity, passage aboard government-sponsored ships to America, was extremely selective. At one time, twenty-eight thousand would-be emigrants competed for six-hundred seats (Takaki, 2008, p. 233). Those who were able to make the journey carried the haiku to America and left us extensive anthologies of poetry that give a unique perspective into their lives (Kumei, 2005).

Translated to English from their original Japanese, the following examples were composed by Japanese immigrants and compiled by Japanese American poetry circles that recognized their imminent historical value and collected them at the time they were written (Kumei, 2005). A poignant poem tells of a parent missing their child across the ocean: "Never forget that smile. / When we parted, / My child beamed at me." (Kumei, 2005, p. 89). Another tells of an immigrant thinking of their Japanese home: "For the New Year celebration, / I draw water out of the ocean, / over waves lies my home." (Kumei, 2005, p. 90). New themes and ideas began to emerge in a new generation of haiku. These hybrid Japanese and American poems took on an aesthetic different from the nature-centered Zen haiku of Japanese tradition. Their contents often focused on more human activities, depicting themes of discovery, homesickness, pride, worry, and uncertainty in a foreign land.

Harsh realities met many immigrants who had crossed the seas with big expectations. One man documents his pain in a haiku: “Given a dog’s name, / I do dishes. This is / my Life in America.” (Kumei, 2005, p. 90). Japanese immigrants faced ethnic discrimination and often worked menial, low-paying jobs. As they adapted to their new country, haiku took on distinctively American subjects. One immigrant writes: “Roast beef looks bloody. / Really it’s juicy and tender, racy, unforgettable taste.” (Kumei, 2005, p. 95). The taste of American beef steak would have been a new sensation to them, worthy of being recorded in poem.

As the first-generation immigrants, called the Issei, grew older, their children, the Nisei, adopted American ideas that often clashed with the values of their elders. However, their American citizen children were an anchor to the land and a source of protection for Japanese families. Upon seeing her children in U.S. uniform, one mother writes, “Sons in uniform. / Swelling and expanding / Mothers’ proud shoulders.” (Kumei, 2005, p. 102). Although the Issei and Nisei faced hardship in their new country, they—and their haiku—had adapted to find a tentative place in America.

The struggle of Japanese Americans continues into recent times. In a collection of poems compiled by art professor Roger Shimomura from the University of Kansas, contemporary Japanese American poet Amy Uyematsu pens a haiku titled “Beady Eyed Purse”: “American blues / trap my O-RI-EN-TAL eyes— / a joke for children” (Shimomura, 2000, p. 83). “Blues” can refer to the musical genre, but also to Uyematsu’s sadness at the American mockery directed toward her oriental features. The dashes in “O-RI-EN-TAL” create a sound that mimics the musical rhythm of blues but also the singsong, mocking voices of children. With the emergence of Japanese American haiku, old techniques were often abandoned and new ones employed. As generations passed, the traditionally understood guidelines of haiku became more and more

distant, and the rules of the form relaxed. Though many haiku are still composed according to traditional guidelines today, the subjects of these poems were allowed to become increasingly human, and, as “Beady Eyed Purse” demonstrates, some began to take on sociopolitical topics.

The Haiku of Gerald Vizenor

The early haiku anthologies recorded poetry up until World War II, when war broke out between Japan and America (Kumei, 2005). For Japanese Americans forced into internment camps, haiku became a medium for sociopolitical expression. Violet Masuda de Cristoforo lived for three years in an internment camp with a view of Castle Rock, a historical landmark for Modoc Native Americans. Cristoforo wrote, “Looking at summer moon / on Castle Rock / we are living in alien (enemy) land” (Ford, 2009, p. 337). Comparing her own alienation to that of the Modoc tribe before her, she found a sense of camaraderie with a people she knew little about.

American poets Foster and Rhoda Jewell elegized Native Americans as a vanishing people in their collection published in 1976 (Ford, 2009, p. 339). Included was the following haiku: “Where others have gone—? / Creeping over a cliff’s edge, / into blue haze…” (Ford, 2009, p. 340). Certain interpretations of this poem reveal messages that leave some, including Native American writer Gerald Vizenor, unsatisfied. The question, “Where others have gone—?” suggests that the answer is a mystery. This may blur over the reality that the fate of the “others” (the lost natives) is known and documented. They had been killed by conflict and disease and forced to leave their homelands. The image of fog creeping over a cliff and the trailing ellipses at the end of the poem may also symbolize a trailing away of the Native people into the blue haze of history, the opposite of what Vizenor seeks to encourage (Ford, 2009).

Gerald Vizenor, a contemporary Anishinaabe Native American, believes in the philosophy of survivance (Iadonisi, 2013). Through survivance, natives are called upon to preserve their ethnicity, celebrating their culture and not accepting the mantle of victimhood that

society places upon them. Vizenor was stationed in Japan during World War II, where he developed an appreciation for Japanese literature that would guide the rest of his ongoing literary career (Iadonisi, 2013). Vizenor's poetry returns to many elements of traditional haiku, frequently using season words, images of animals, and other references to nature. He also understands haiku to be performative and communal and relates the transformative experience of classic haiku to the emotions evoked in Native Ojibwa dream songs (Lynch, 2000).

Unlike traditional haiku, Vizenor's work contains themes of social critique. These critiques are illustrated through symbolism and delivered in a humorous and intelligent voice inspired by the "trickster", a playful character from his native tradition (Lynch, 2000). Vizenor also takes the liberty of employing metaphors and similes, elements not found in traditional haiku. An example of his poetry is cited below.

Against the zoo fence
Zebras and Sunday school children
Hearing about Africa.

Gerald Vizenor (Iadonisi, 2013, para. 37)

Literature professor Richard Iadonisi (2013) interprets this poem as a direct metaphor between the children and zebras. To Vizenor, it seemed that the Sunday school children had been raised within a structure outside of their natural habitat, like zebras living in a zoo. The underlying theme of this poem could be a critique on Christianity or on America's estrangement from nature (Iadonisi, 2013). The fact that the children and zebras are hearing about Africa could

be another nod to the haiku's sociopolitical intent, given America's history of slavery and African American civil rights.

The Haiku of Richard Wright

The world of dew
is the world of dew:
And yet, and yet—

Kobayashi Issa (Marshall & Simpson, 2006, p. 124)

The above poem by Issa, translated by American poet Robert Hass, does not require explanation in order to appreciate. Knowing the context behind its creation, however, may provide a broader understanding of both the poem and the poet. Before its composition, Issa's daughter had recently died of smallpox during the summer solstice (Marshall & Simpson, 2006). Knowing this, the poem takes on a different feeling. "Dew" is a Japanese season word representing autumn, a season of endings (Higginson, 2005). The image of dew itself can also represent clarity, freshness, and life (Marshall & Simpson, 2006). Thus, "The world of dew / is the world of dew" is deepened by the double meaning that each one of the "dews" can hold.

Knowing the context of his poem evokes greater appreciation for Issa. Similarly, historical context can deepen our understanding of Richard Wright, whose imagery often contains an intentionally constructed second layer of meaning. Like Vizenor, African American poet Richard Wright adopted haiku as sociopolitical critique. An avid writer on the subject of civil rights, Wright eventually left the United States, frustrated by the prejudice of his nation (Brink, 2014). Three haiku stanzas from one of his linked poems are cited below.

I am nobody:

A red sinking autumn sun

Took my name away.

For you, O gulls,

I order slaty waters

And this leaden sky!

Sweep away the clouds

And let a dome of blue sky

Give this sea a name!

Richard Wright (Brink, 2014, p. 1092)

The most striking element of Wright's poetry is its symbolic imagery. In the first stanza, Wright employs the image of a sinking autumn sun. In the second stanza, he paints a picture of gulls, a white bird, in the bleak weather. In the third stanza, he implores an unnamed force to sweep away the white clouds and clear the sky. It is worth noting that the image of an autumn sun can be considered a season word for autumn and a leaden sky a season word for winter. The gulls in the second stanza and clouds in the third stanza can be taken together to form the image of birds flying into clouds, which is a season word for springtime (Higginson, 2005). In the falling season of autumn, his name was taken by the sinking sun. In the harsh of winter, he spoke to the white gulls, surrounded by heavy skies and gray waters. Finally, in springtime, the season of rebirth, he calls for the clearing of the white clouds and the restoration of his name. Wright often used images of whiteness, such as gulls, clouds, or snow, to represent "Caucasian" (Brink,

2014). Analyzing these verses in the context of history and Wright's other political writings reveals social critiques entwined with the aesthetic imagery. If the clouds and gulls represent white people, then the clearing of the sky represents Wright's longing for the removal of the blanket of subjugation, hanging over him like the sky and gulls above the sea. Only then can he reclaim his identity.

Wright's strong sociopolitical intent greatly contrasts with Basho and Issa's Zen attitude. By using words like "I" and "you", Wright also purposefully reminds the reader of the presence of the poet, something traditional haikuists sought to avoid. By doing this, he adds another layer of perspective between the reader and the experience of the poem, dulling the immediacy of the Eternal Now.

Conclusion

On its journey across time and space from Edo period Japan to modern America, the haiku has traversed many cultures. With each encounter, it evolved in structure and content. Beginning from the Zen-inspired poems of Basho and Issa, it was adapted and translated by early Western enthusiasts, immigrated to America with the Issei, and found a home in the social commentary of Japanese, Native, and African American literature. By examining the origins of haiku and analyzing notable examples from various time periods and cultural backgrounds, we traced its paths of evolution as it was changed by English and America. Literary analyses of several notable haiku provided insights into their author's experiences and cultures of origin. In turn, the haiku's historical contexts also provided us with insight into the intent and meaning of the poems.

To conclude this paper, we must address one last important point. After seeing the examples above, it may seem strange to ask, "Has the haiku changed at all?" However, a strong argument could be made that the haiku has not evolved since the time of Basho and Issa. This

suggestion is prompted by the many instances of poems that truly push the limit of what haiku can and cannot be. Such examples include Oandasan's "XXXXX" and American poet Cor van den Heuvel's one-word haiku— "tundra", printed in the center of a blank page (Marshall & Simpson, 2006). By far the greatest collection of poems that walk the line between haiku and something else exists on the modern internet. Here, novel haiku and haikesque poetry are generated by computers, used as a format for memes, and expressed in incredibly bizarre mediums.

Hair flows in the light
Empty all through sands of time
Drinks shared freely

The above poem was generated by the computer program "Haiku Generator" from Fantasy Name Generators (Emily, n.d.). Held next to poems composed by humans, it is virtually indistinguishable. However, a second reading of the haiku, this time knowing its origins, creates a wholly different experience. Does knowing that a computer wrote it close our minds to the poem? Does it open our minds in some other ways? Again, we see how knowing the context behind a haiku affects the experience and interpretation.

The next haiku, a Reddit meme titled "Real Nigga Haiku", makes fun of a catcaller who is disappointed as a girl walks past without paying him attention.

Aye! Lemme Holla!
Aye Girl! You With The Fat Ass!

Aight! Fuck You Then!

Anonymous poet (Eat_it_With_Rice, 2013)

The poem demonstrates several qualities commonly associated with haiku, including conciseness, immediacy, imagery, and three lines. Its subject and style are, however, particularly striking. Upon closer examination, it reveals many interesting subversions and innovations. For example, the image is delivered not through direct description but through a monologue. Also, the poem contains a cutting word, but not in the haiku itself. One could argue that the word "Nigga" in the title is the seat of the poem's tension. This is due to the term's controversy and its sensitive position as a potentially inflammatory subject. "Nigga" could suggest that the catcaller is African American or imply that the poem is meant to be taken lightly considering the term's casual and colloquial connotations on the internet. By using this word, the author creates a mixed atmosphere about the poem that is both vulgar and, strangely, delicately balanced between complete offensiveness and comedy.

Finally, in April of 2020, Reddit user Squidjan posted a video titled "phrog" in the subreddit r/youtubehaiku. It is a thirty second clip of a frog sitting on a mossy bench in dappled sunlight accompanied by poor audio quality, upbeat music (Squidjan, 2020). The imagery in this concise "video haiku" is quite literally visual. The internet had created a "haiku" that was not meant to be read, subverting traditional guidelines to an arguable ridiculous extent.

These internet haiku are so far removed from haiku's traditional roots that it makes sense to question whether they should be considered haiku at all. If not, where do we draw the line between what is haiku and what it is not? Do we cross that line at "phrog", at poetry generated by computers, at one-word haiku, or perhaps at Wright, Vizenor, or Pound? It may follow that the most logical place to draw the line is back at the beginning, at Basho and Issa. By this logic,

the thesis of this paper, that haiku has adapted in structure and content throughout its encounters with different cultures, is overturned. In choosing a strict traditional definition, we would elect to exclude modernist interpretations and, in fact, all English poems from the label of haiku. These haiku-inspired offshoots would be considered not adaptations of haiku but new poetic forms in their own right. Narrowing the definition of haiku respects the purity of traditional haiku, protecting it from adjustments that some, including Japanese writer Kaneko Tota, feel diminish the form (Tota, 1972).

The haiku is a relatively young field within the world of literary academic study. In the future, further exploration may yield a more unifying consensus on whether the boundaries of haiku are to be drawn at the frog poem of Basho or “phrog” of Squidjan. For today, though we leave with more questions than we have answered, our investigation of haiku and its many pioneering offshoots has provided an interesting perspective into the histories and cultures of those who created and continue to create them, throughout the centuries in both the East and the West.

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Statement of Purpose

Statement of Purpose

Topic and Thesis: Originating from Japan, the haiku is a form of poetry that has migrated to America. Traditionally consisting of three short lines (often arranged in a 5-7-5 syllabic pattern), its versatility has made it widespread within the English-speaking world. Today, it is a popular form of poetry in both English and Japanese. In spreading across cultures, the haiku has retained its original structural form but evolved repeatedly in content, style, and purpose to different times and circumstances.

Significance: The haiku is a significant type of poetry in that it comes in so many forms. Although it traces its roots to 17th century Japan, it has been adopted and modified so widely that some may argue that its adaptations have themselves become new forms of poetry. It is, however, still easy for the average reader to identify a poem as a haiku, even if the cultural context and symbolic meaning have evolved. Its presence is felt in American literature, not only for Japanese Americans, but for those of other cultural backgrounds who have come together to participate in the haiku's ongoing evolution.

Research Questions:

1. What is the traditional context and purpose of the haiku?
2. What changes has the haiku gone through, and what has it gained or lost as it was modified?
3. What are some notable examples of traditional and adapted haikus?

Annotated Bibliography

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Dean Brink is a professor in the Department of Foreign Language and Literatures at National Chiao Tung University. The subject of his paper is Richard Wright's haiku of the 1960s. Wright used the haiku form in innovative ways to make provocative statements on the African American experience. Brink used primary sources, such as quotes from critics and commentators and Wright's original poetry. His paper is based on literary analysis, focusing on such ideas as imagery, allegory, and intertextuality. Analysis of Wright's haiku in the context of his other works reveals underlying social statements. Brink's analysis is a demonstration of how Richard Wright changed the traditional haiku to serve a new purpose in the context of his society.

Eaton, G. (2009). A Note on Haiku. *The Cambridge Quarterly, 38*(4), 328–337. https://doi.org/10.1093/camqtly/bfp019

Gary Eaton is a literary writer for *The Cambridge Quarterly*. His paper is an informative demonstration of how English haiku should be read. Reading haiku is an art, and the experience becomes much more illuminating in the mind of an informed reader. Eaton uses haiku by various authors as primary sources. His paper is a critical analysis of haiku reading and writing techniques, borrowing insights from literary experts and examples from Basho, Issa, and Virgilio. Eaton writes that the art of reading English haiku can be studied and practiced. To be able to read English haiku with sensitivity allows readers to appreciate haiku as a mature and complex art form.

Iadonisi, R. A. (2013). Gerald Vizenor's "Socioacupuncture" through His Haiku. *Journal of Ethnic American Literature, 3,* 64–86. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1490466587

Richard Iadonisi is a professor in the Department of Writing at Grand Valley State University. The subject of his paper is Native American poet Gerald Vizenor's haiku. Vizenor created what Iadonisi calls a "hybrid" haiku, drawing on both traditional Japanese elements and his Native American background. Iadonisi used primary sources, such as Vizenor's original works, and secondary sources documenting the history of the Americanized haiku and Vizenor's life. His paper is a comparative study of Vizenor's haiku viewed alongside both traditional haiku and the haiku of his American colleagues. By borrowing certain traditional elements while changing others, Vizenor creates an innovative form influenced by Native American identity. Vizenor demonstrates how the haiku has changed yet remained connected to its roots since coming to America.

Jianqing, Z. (2014). Rereading Basho's Frog Haiku: Its Stylistic Features. *Japan Studies Association Journal, 12,* 1–11.

Jianqing Zheng is a professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Mississippi Valley State University. The subject of his paper is Japanese poet Matsuo Basho and his most famous poem. In the 1600s, Basho, influenced by nature and Buddhist philosophy, created the frog haiku that has been remembered for centuries. Zheng used primary sources, such as Basho's original work, its attempted translations, and direct insights from other literary professionals. Zheng's paper is a wholistic literary analysis of Basho's haiku, studying its linguistics, artistic elements, connection to Buddhism, and translations into English. Basho greatly influenced the future of the haiku and created a timeless poem that captured what Zheng calls the "Eternal Now". Basho is considered a quintessential example of traditional haiku.

Marshall, I., & Simpson, M. (2006). Deconstructing Haiku: A Dialogue. *College Literature, 33*(3), 117–134. https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2006.0042

Ian Marshall and Megan Simpson are professors of English from Penn State Altoona. The subject of their dialogue is the question of whether haiku can be deconstructed. Deconstruction is a Western idea that relies on the concept of binaries, something that is difficult to apply to Eastern haiku. Marshall and Simpson examined primary sources, including poetry from Basho, Issa, and Hotham. They answered their question through trial, attempting to deconstruct the language of these haiku using various methods. They found that, though the haiku is resistant to deconstruction, the process of attempting to deconstruct it can provide insights. Their analysis of Issa's dew haiku is particularly illuminating and demonstrates how knowing the context of the poet's life can change the reader's interpretation, an idea that can also be applied to Richard Wright.

Marx, E. (2006). A Slightly-Open Door: Yone Noguchi and the Invention of English Haiku. *Duke University Press, 39*(3), 107–126. https://doi.org/10.1215/00166928-39-3-107

Edward Marx is a literary writer for *Duke University Press*. The subject of his paper is Japanese American poet Yone Noguchi's contributions to the English haiku during the 20th century. Marx argues that the haiku is an Asian American poetic subgenre. His paper uses primary sources, such as original poems, quotes, and other published materials. Marx analyzes Yone Noguchi's contributions to the haiku from both a literary and historical perspective, studying critiques and praises of the time. His study finds that Noguchi has perhaps not been given adequate recognition for his part in bringing the haiku from Asia to the English-speaking world. The dialogue between Yone Noguchi and his peers gives insight into the English haiku's early development.

Morita, J. R. (1982). The Depth of Our Being Really Worth Communication: On English Translation of Haiku. *Translation Review, 10,* 13–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/07374836.1982.10523294

James Morita is a Japanese-to-English translator. The subject of his paper is the difficulty of translating classical Japanese haiku into English. This is the result of linguistic differences, translator interpretations, and the cultural gap. Morita used primary sources, including Basho's

frog poem and examples of its many translations. Through critical analysis of various translations, comparing them to the original as well as each other, Morita gathers insights into common translational flaws. Though it is perhaps impossible to accomplish perfectly, translation is a worthy endeavor, and the multitude of translations of the frog poem should be encouraged. Morita's paper presents a valuable perspective on Japanese-to-English haiku translation.

Shimomura, R. (2000). Thrift Store Haiku. *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures*, 10(1), 79–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/713665790'

Roger Shimomura is an art professor at the University of Kansas. The subject of his paper is haiku influenced by the Asian American experience. In his examples, Asian American poets use the haiku as a flexible medium to express cultural and racial conflict. Shimomura used primary sources, including original poems and photographs. Shimomura's paper is an analysis of contemporary haiku from the perspective of a visual artist, exploring the Asian American experience by pairing haiku with visual representations of history. By involving visual art, the racial, political, and socioeconomic ideas in the poems are enhanced and supported. This paper presents haiku that are direct and freely political, breaking traditions surrounding the original Japanese form.

Shirane, H. (2019). Haiku. *New Literary History*, *50*(3), 461–465. https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2019.0043

Haruo Shirane is a professor of Japanese Literature and Culture at Columbia University. The subject of his paper is the haiku: what it is, how it originated, and how it has changed. From its social roots in Japan to its contemporary use on the internet, the haiku is a form that develops as its context changes. Shirane used primary sources, such as poems and quotes, and secondary sources, such as information documenting the haiku's history. Shirane's paper is a literary analysis of the haiku's development in the context of history and its shifting surroundings. One feature of haiku that has remained the same is its use as a social medium. This paper displays the haiku's versatility and changing form.

Tota, K. (1972). Ancient Facets of Modern Haiku. *Japan Quarterly*, *19*, 68–70. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1304278580

Kaneko Tota was a Japanese writer who graduated form the University of Tokyo. The subject of his paper is a quality he refers to as "crystallization". Crystallization, which can be compared to ninjutsu, is the "secret art of making oneself invisible" that is essential for haiku. Tota used primary sources, presenting haiku by Nakamura Kusatao and various contemporary poets. Through comparative literary analysis of modern and classical haiku, Tota discovered qualities in both that would be difficult to understand individually. Because of their complex and human topics, modern poets fail to create "crystallization" and produce haiku that may read as immature. Tota provides insights into both traditional and contemporary haiku.

Outline

Outline

I. Introduction

A. Topic and Thesis

1. Ethnic Group: Japanese
2. Cultural practice: haiku poetry
3. Although the structure of the haiku has remained relatively unchanged since its beginnings in Japan, its content, style, and purpose have been adapted by the context of each culture that incorporates it.
4. Research questions
5. This paper will discuss the following:
    a. Where the haiku originated from and its purpose within traditional Japanese culture
    b. How the haiku was adapted as a form of poetry in the context of different cultures and circumstances, looking at its use by Japanese immigrants, English-speaking poets, and modern-day poets
    c. Notable examples of haikus in its original style and as it has been adapted into each of these different cultures

B. Significance of Topic

II. Cultural Practice Overview

A. The haiku is a form of traditional Japanese poetry.

1. Explanation of form and syllabic structure
    a. Traditional example

b. Explanation of elements of a traditional haiku using traditional example, which will later be contrasted to adapted haikus

B. Transition

1. Origin and history of the haiku

a. Examples of notable Japanese haiku poets and their works

b. Academic writings on the significance of the traditional haiku, which will later be contrasted to adapted haikus

C. Concluding sentence

D. Transition

III. The English haiku

A. A major transformation of the haiku was its appearance in English.

1. Example of an early English haiku

a. Discuss English haikus, compare them to traditional haikus

b. Issues with English haikus and issues in translating traditional Japanese haikus into English

B. Transition

1. Another example of an English haiku

a. Discuss

C. Concluding sentence

D. Transition

IV. The American haiku

A. Historically, the haiku was a medium of expression for Japanese American immigrants and other groups.

1. Japanese American example
    a. Discuss

B. Transition

1. African Americans
2. Native Americans
3. European Americans

C. Concluding Sentence

D. Transition

V. The modern haiku

A. The haiku is still in use and has been adapted by modern cultures in America.

1. Example of modern American haiku similar to traditional haiku
    a. Discuss similarities and differences

B. Has the haiku changed too much?

1. Example of modern American haiku different from traditional haiku
    a. Discuss differences
2. Examples of internet haikus different from traditional haiku
    a. Discuss strong differences
    b. Perhaps these are still haikus. Perhaps these are no longer haikus but a new genre of poetry. Discuss what makes a haiku a haiku.

C. Concluding sentence

D. Transition

VI. Conclusion

A. Restate thesis

1. We explored the thesis by examining haikus within their original culture and as it has been adapted by different cultures in America.

B. Restate advanced organizer

1. Summary of how research questions were answered and how point 5 in Introduction was explored

C. Restate significance

1. Summarize the significance of the haiku and how it has changed
    a. Ask the reader to think about how their “participation” in culture can change the haiku
    b. Make conclusions on what aspects of culture specific changes to the haiku reflect

D. Concluding sentence

Rough Draft

Adaptations of the Haiku

Huge dreams of fortune
Go with me to foreign lands,
Across the ocean.

-Unknown immigrant (Takaki, 2008, pp. 233)

Originating from Japan, the haiku is a form of poetry that has migrated to America. Exemplifying the qualities of conciseness, novelty, and immediacy, its versatility has made it widespread within the English-speaking world. Today, it is a popular form of poetry in both English and Japanese. In spreading across cultures, the haiku has not only loosened its structural form but evolved repeatedly in content, style, and purpose to different times and circumstances.

Significance

The haiku is a significant type of poetry in that it comes in so many forms. Although it traces its roots to 17th century Japan, it has been adopted and modified so widely that some may argue that its adaptations have themselves become new forms of poetry (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Its presence is felt in American literature, not only for Japanese Americans, but for those of other cultural backgrounds who have come together to participate in the haiku's ongoing evolution. The haiku is also an interesting subject of study for history. We may be able to infer much about the social circumstances of a particular place and time by examining their unique take on the haiku. Keeping this in mind, this paper will explore the traditional context and significance of the haiku, the changes it has gone through as it adapted to America and the English language, and some notable examples of haiku from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds from both America and Japan.

The Haiku in Japan

Furuike ya, kawazu tobikomu, mizu no oto.

Breaking the silence

Of an ancient pond,

A frog jumped into water--

A deep resonance.

-Matsuo Basho, Translated by Nobuyuki Yuasa (Morita, 1982)

In order to explore its adaptations in America, we must first understand the haiku's origins and its significance in its homeland. The haiku originated in 17th century Japan, during the Edo period (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). During that time, poetry in Japan was often communal, with friends gathering to create an oral poem together, taking turns adding impromptu verses (Shirane, 2019). Over time, haiku came to mean a single verse (or a few verses) by a single author, not oral but committed to paper. According to Shirane (2019), the haiku belongs to a distinct category of poems that includes such terms as haiku, hokku, haikai, and senryu. Shirane explains that the haiku, sometimes also referred to as the hokku, began as the opening verse in a longer work of linked poetry called the haikai. Senryu, on the other hand, evolved as a slightly different form, using the same structural pattern as haiku but traditionally less strict about the content and subject of the poem. In fact, many poems seen as classic haiku today would actually be senryu by a strict traditional standard.

Before we go farther, it would be useful to attempt to define "haiku". According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019), the haiku is "[an] unrhymed poetic form consisting of 17 syllables arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively". Poet Harold G. Henderson adds on to this definition, prescribing more conditions, among them that the haiku must contain

nature, must revolve around a specific event, and must be set in the present moment (Kawano, 1983). The three line, 5-7-5 rule is a popular element of the Western definition of haiku. However, this is a contradiction, as the early haiku of the Edo period were often written not in three horizontal lines but one vertical one (Shirane, 2019). The 5-7-5 syllabic rule is also debatable, especially in English haiku, as English syllables operate differently from Japanese syllables, and there are many notable examples of its subversion (Zheng, 2014). Others propose that proper haiku require a "season word" and "cutting word". A season word is an anchor word in the poem that sets it in a particular season and associated mood (Shirane, 2019). For example, the frog in Matsuo Basho's famous "frog haiku" cited above traditionally represents springtime (Higginson, 2005). The cutting word is more elusive and harder to pinpoint, representing the point in the poem where the tension rests (Shirane, 2019). In the frog haiku, it could be interpreted as the word "ya". Yet, subverting these ideas, William Oandasan's playful haiku represents the survival of Native Americans still keeping time, like marking X's in a calendar.

X X X X X

X X X X X X X

X X X X X

-Oandasan (Ford, 2009)

Having considered these definitions, this paper will take a broad, wholistic view on the definition of haiku, keeping in mind traditional patterns but attempting to stay as close as possible to the inclusive, modern international understanding of what haiku is today.

Migration to English

Perhaps the most important jump for the haiku on its way from Japan to America was its migration into English. In order to make the cultural and linguistic leap, the structure and content

of the haiku had to be modified significantly. Some of these challenges can best be understood not by considering English haiku directly but by looking at English translation of classic Japanese haiku. For example, Basho's frog poem, cited above, has over thirty recognized professional translation, each with their own merits and flaws. Kuichi offers another well-known translation: "oh, an old pond / a frog jumps into it / the sound of water" (Zheng, 2014). Peter Beilensen also has his own take: "Old dark sleepy pool / Quick unexpected / Frog / Goes plop! Watersplash" (Morita, 1982). The popularity of the three line poem as opposed to the one line poem may have stemmed from linguistic differences between English and Japanese. English relies heavily on spacing and punctuation for phrasing, whereas Japanese contains words that can function as punctuation. English, of course, is also written left to right horizontally, whereas traditional Japanese was written vertically from right to left (although in modern Japan, this has changed).

To illustrate the subtlety of linguistic difference, we can look at the word "ya" in Basho's frog poem. *Ya* is an exclamation, similar to "oh" or "ah" in English. However, "Oh, old pond" and "Ah, old pond" suggest slight, but vastly significant differences in meaning for those who understand the subtleties of English (Zheng, 2018). Because there is no exclamatory particle, nor in fact any combination of English words, that can capture the exact meaning of "ya" to those who understand Japanese, something in the haiku has been irreparably changed between its Japanese and English forms. English haiku, however, can preserve some aspects of traditional ones. For example, one of the pioneering English-speaking poets who first experimented with haiku-like poetry was American writer Ezra Pound (1885–1972). His famous "In a Station of the Metro", sometimes called the first English haiku, is cited below.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough.

-Ezra Pound (Marx, 2006)

In this poem, Pound, like Basho and the other classic Japanese poets, makes use of Zen philosophy. Namely, he uses the idea of "yugen", one of the four dominant Zen moods which Lin (2015) describes as "the sense of a mysterious depth in nature". Also similar to Basho was the setting of the poem in the immediate present and the use of natural imagery. In this way, Pound's poem demonstrates some aspects of haiku that could be preserved in transition from Japanese to English.

Japanese Immigrants

One of the haiku's major pathways to American was the first wave of Japanese immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Stirred to action by the unwelcome Western presence in China, the Japanese government of that time prepared to defend against foreigners by taxing citizens heavily. Many farmers, unable to afford this, lost their land and jobs and were in the unique position of having little to lose and everything to gain when tales of a golden land of opportunity reached them in the form of recruitment for first passage ships to America. Passage aboard these ships, many bound for Hawaii, was extremely selective. At one point, twenty-eight thousand would-be emigrants competed for six-hundred seats (Takaki, 2008, pp. 233). Those who were able to make the journey left behind a rich legacy, which included anthologies of haiku (Kumei, 2005).

These new, hybrid Japanese and American poems took on a quality separate from the Zen, Buddhist, and aesthetic philosophy of traditional haiku in Japan. Their contents display themes of missing home, harsh realities, pride, worry, and settlement into new surroundings. References to American objects and ideas began to appear. Translated into English from their

original Japanese, the following examples are written by unknown authors and compiled by Japanese American poetry circles that recognized their imminent historical value and fortunately collected and preserved them at the time they were written (Kumei, 2005). A poignant example tells of a parent missing their child across the ocean: “Never forget that smile. / When we parted, / My child beamed at me.”. Another tells of one immigrant in America thinking of their Japanese home: “For the New Year celebration, / I draw water out of the ocean, / over waves lies my home.” (Kumei, 2005).

Harsh realities met many of the immigrants who had crossed the waves with big expectations. They faced racial discrimination and worked menial, low-paying jobs. One such immigrant documents their pain in a haiku: “Given a dog’s name, / I do dishes. This is / my Life in America.” (Kumei, 2005). As the immigrants adapted to their new country, their haiku took on American topics. One writes: “Roast beef looks bloody. / Really it’s juicy and tender, racy, unforgettable taste.” (Kumei, 2005). The taste of American beef steak would have been a new sensation to them, worthy of being recorded in poem. As the first generation of immigrants, called *Issei*, grew older, their children, the *Nisei*, adopted American values that often clashed with the ideas of their elders. However, their American citizen children were an anchor to the land, their American-ness a source of protection and pride. For example, upon seeing her children in U.S. uniform, one mother writes, “Sons in uniform. / Swelling and expanding / Mothers’ proud shoulders.” (Kumei, 2005). Although the *Issei* and *Nisei* faced discrimination and hardship in this new land, they—and their haiku—had adapted to find a tentative place in American society.

Native Americans and African Americans

The anthologies recorded poetry all the way up until World War II, when war broke out between Japan and America—a dreaded and unfortunate circumstance for Japanese Americans. Many who had spent their lives building a secure place in America were once again held in mistrust, like foreigners in their own homes. As immigrants were forced into internment camps, haiku once again became a medium for expression. Violet Masuda de Cristoforo spent three years in an internment camp with a view of Castle Rock, a historical landmark for Modoc Native Americans. Cristoforo wrote, “Looking at summer moon / on Castle Rock / we are living in alien (enemy) land” (Ford, 2009). Comparing her own alienation to that of Native Americans before her, she found a sense of camaraderie with a people she knew little about.

Foster and Rhoda Jewell’s poetry elegized Native Americans as a vanishing people. One of their many haiku portraying Native American themes reads, “Where others have gone—? / Creeping over a cliff’s edge, / into blue haze…” (Ford, 2009). Though beautiful and sophisticated, the poem leaves some dissatisfied. The question, “Where others have gone—?” suggests the answer is a mystery. Actually, the “others” had been killed by violence and disease and forced off their homeland. Some may also feel that the trailing ellipses at the end of the poem suggests a trailing away of the Native people into the blue haze of history, while they are still very much alive today (Ford, 2009).

Gerald Vizenor (1934–Present), an Anishinaabe Native American, was stationed in Japan during World War II, where the haiku form made a major impression on him and helped guide the rest of his ongoing literary career. Like Japanese poets even before Basho, Vizenor understands the haiku to be communal and performative, in keeping with Japanese and Native American customs, and relates the emotional experience of haiku to Ojibwa dream songs. His

poems often use season words and depict animals and other themes of nature. Unlike original haiku, however, his work often also serves as a social and economic critique, delivered in a humorous and intelligent manner inspired by the "trickster" character from Native American tradition (Iadonisi, 2013). He also takes the liberty of employing metaphors and similes, elements not found in traditional haiku. An example of his poetry is cited below.

Against the zoo fence
Zebras and Sunday school children
Hearing about Africa.

-Vizenor (Iadonisi, 2013).

This haiku can have many interpretations, one of which, according to Iadonisi (2013), is a comparison of humans to animals. Like zebras in a zoo, the Sunday school children, too, had been raised within a structure outside of their natural habitat. The underlying theme of this poem could be a critique on Christianity or on America's removal from nature.

Haiku as socio-political critique was also adopted by African American poet Richard Wright (1908–1960). Frustrated with the prejudices of his nation, Wright eventually left America (Brink, 2014). His critiques are presented in haiku as the second, deeper layer of meaning beneath the aesthetic. Three select stanzas from one of his poems are presented below.

I am nobody:
A red sinking autumn sun
Took my name away.

For you, O gulls,
I order slaty waters

And this leaden sky!

Sweep away the clouds

And let a dome of blue sky

Give this sea a name!

-Wright (Brink, 2014)

In the first stanza, Wright employs a falling season—autumn—paired with imagery of a sunset to suggest hopelessness and death to his identity and personality, the loss of his "name". In the second stanza, he paints a picture of gulls, a white bird, in the bleak weather. In the third stanza, he proclaims to sweep away the white clouds, and to give his name back to him. Wright often employed images of whiteness, such as seagulls, clouds, and snow, to represent white people (Brink, 2014). His poem can be interpreted as aesthetic imagery, or, understanding the context of his life, as a bold social statement. This carefully constructed second layer of meaning contrasts sharply with Basho's traditional poetry. By linking his haiku stanzas together, Wright also in a way almost subverts the idea of the haiku's immediacy—its "Eternal Now". His poems take on direction, suggesting an order of events and thus a series of moments instead of just one. First, he is nameless, then the gulls fly overhead, then he asks for the clouds to part.

Conclusion

On its journey across time and space from Edo period Japan to modern America, the haiku has touched and been touched by many cultures. With each encounter, it evolved in structure and content, beginning with Basho's imagery influenced by Zen philosophy, immigrating to America with the Issei who documented their first experience with steak, adapted and translated by early Western enthusiasts, and finding a home in the social commentary of

Japanese, Native, and African American literature. By examining the origins of traditional haiku and analyzing notable examples from varying time periods and cultural backgrounds, we traced its paths of evolution as it was changed by English and America. By exploring the adaptations of haiku, we can learn much about the history and culture of the people who have appreciated it, throughout all times in both the East and the West.

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