



Forgive, But Do Not Forget: Modern Haiku and Totalitarianism

Itô Yûki talks with Udo Wenzel

Prefatory note: The Japanese Author Itô Yûki presents in his monograph, “New Rising Haiku: The Evolution of Modern Japanese Haiku and the Haiku Persecution Incident”¹, published in November 2007, about a chapter in Japanese Haiku history mostly unknown in the Haiku world, outside of Japan (and within Japan these facts are no longer well recalled). In the forties of the last century haiku poets were persecuted, arrested, tortured and their journals annihilated by the ultranationalist Tennô regime; some poets died in prison or were sent to the frontlines of the war. All victims were advocates of free-verse haiku poetry, which had turned away from the “traditional” stylism of haiku composition. After the war, it was Takahama Kyoshi (1874-1959), who was considered to be mainly in charge. Kyoshi was chief editor of the haiku journal *Hototogisu*, the journal with the greatest public success in Japan, and the inventor of the “traditional” haiku (*dentô haiku*). He was one of the two main disciples of Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902). With his aesthetics of *kachôfûei* („singing about flowers and birds“) Kyoshi propagated a return to “tradition”, against the innovative reform efforts of other haiku poets and groups. At end of the thirties and beginning of the forties of the last century, Kyoshi came into influential governmental positions. He became president of the Haiku branch of the “The Japanese Literary Patriotic Organization” (*Nihon bungaku hôkoku kai*), a culture-control/propaganda organisation of the Tennô system, under control of the Intelligence Bureau of Japan. The persecutions of haiku poets took place during Kyoshi’s presidency. After the war, unlike many other poets and writers, Kyoshi did not distance himself from his attitudes or apologize for his wartime activities. From 1946, a movement began, whose aim was to bring charges of haiku war crimes to Kyoshi and others. In Itô’s Addendum: “Historical Revisionism (Negationism) and the Image of Takahama Kyoshi,” which is nearly the half of the monograph,

Itô debates efforts to minimize or negate Kyoshi's responsibility and role in the promotion of fascism and persecutions. The author, Itô Yûki, was born in 1983 in Kumamoto, composes and publishes haiku himself, and is a member of the *Gendai Haiku Kyôkai* (Modern Haiku Association). Currently he is a Ph.D. (cand.) at Kumamoto University, Graduate School of Cultural and Social Sciences, and is a co-member and co-translator of a cross-cultural research project lead by Prof. Richard Gilbert to present contemporary Japanese haiku (Gendai Haiku) in international contexts.

Udo Wenzel: Dear Itô Yûki, you are a Ph.D. (cand.) at Kumamoto University, Graduate School of Cultural and Social Sciences. You wrote and published the historical work, *New Rising Haiku: The Evolution of Modern Japanese Haiku and the Haiku Persecution Incident*¹, about the incidents of haiku persecutions during the age of Japanese imperialism. With this work you reveal aspects of Japanese history which are mostly unknown in the Western haiku-world. What was your motivation in writing this monograph? What inspired you to undertake this project?

Itô Yûki: From the starting point of my haiku career, I have had great respect for the mastery demonstrated by many haiku poets, and have read many books of haiku poetry and criticism, from the classics like Bashô to the contemporary, such as Kaneko Tôta, one of the key figures of modern haiku. However, I did not learn much of the deeper history of haiku until recent years. This project first began when Prof. Richard Gilbert, who teaches in my Department at Kumamoto University, requested whether I might write something in English describing the history of gendai (modern Japanese) haiku. In our discussions which followed I was surprised to learn that there was almost nothing published in English on this topic.

When I began to study the history of haiku in depth, some of the first books I read were Kaneko Tôta's *Kon nichi no haiku* [Today's Haiku; 1965], and his *Waga sengo haiku shi* [My postwar haiku history]. In the latter book, Kaneko mentions that in order to understand gendai haiku history, a study of the wartime period is of great importance. He further states that without such an understanding a historical study would remain stereotypical and implicitly superficial. This was the process which lead me to pursue

the topic, and particularly, to write in English to an international audience. So it was that I learned of the Haiku Persecution Incident(s), and I want to say that I became quite shocked. I realized that in order to discuss the history of haiku, this wartime history should and in fact must be mentioned.

I became quite upset and had many sleepless nights. What I am saying here is literally true, without exaggeration. I felt the bitter sting of conscience, and nearly cursed myself as a haiku poet of Japan. At first I felt it was not my place to criticize those haiku poets who had collaborated with the totalitarian government; that is, from a perspective of safety and distance, concerning these events. I felt some repentance with regard to the wartime period events. However, repentance alone was not a good solution.

My next step was to gather as many primary-source materials on the subject as possible to obtain, and read them. For instance, I obtained many facsimiles of original documents, such as the records of the Japanese Secret Police (*tokubetsu kôto keisatsu* or *tokkô*). After some difficulties, I was able to first locate and obtain some of the Holy War Haiku books, most of which had been gathered and burned by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). As well, I obtained banned books, such as *Seisen haiku-sen* [The Holy War haiku selection]. These original documents clearly reveal and document historical attitudes and facts. Nevertheless, if no one writes about these historical facts, they will likely be forgotten.

There is an Asian proverb, "Forgive, but do not forget." Forgetting is not a good attitude towards, nor treatment of history, in my opinion. Furthermore, I wanted to express, through my research, a sense of warning in light of recent inclinations in contemporary Japan toward right-wing ideology. Some conservative groups tend to forget or negate historical facts. In consideration of these various social, cultural, personal, and historical perspectives, I wrote the monograph on the Haiku Persecution Incident(s) in relation to the evolution of modern Japanese haiku, so that these facts and histories would be preserved for the future.

Udo Wenzel: You wrote of Takahama Kyoshi's (1874-1959) long period of editorship of *Hototogisu*, and of his extended rule of the haiku world, before, during, and after the war. You also quoted briefly from his "The Commandment," an authoritarian essay, as you state. Later in your monograph you also indicate the strict hierarchy of the master-disciple system of haiku. Can it be said that "*kachôfûei*" was mainly Kyoshi's development – and that this aesthetic was strictly enforced in *Hototogisu*? To comment further, Hachirô Sakanishi published "Treibeis"² (in German; "drift ice" in English). In "Remark 19" (p. 31) Sakanishi states that Kyoshi visited Asahikawa (in Hokkaidô) in 1933, where there was a main-meeting of *Hototogisu*. In his lecture, he documented the strict discipline of the *Hototogisu*-group related to the aesthetic. He stated that kigo must be oriented to the climate of Kyôto or Tôkyô³, and that Haiku should only be composed about nature (*kachôfûei*). "Heresy should be strict proscribed." (p. 34) Can you support this statement? It seems from this quote that, in terms of Kyoshi, "*kachôfûei*" might be viewed not only as an artistic aesthetic, but also as a means of social rule or even control, as well as intellectual control.

As well, the German author Annika Reich, in "Was ist Haiku?" (in German, "What is Haiku?" in English)⁴ quotes from her personal communication with Kaneko Tôta: "Takahama Kyoshi said kigo must be a rule, Bashô wrote seasonless poems. Before Kyoshi kigo was only a promise not a rule."⁵ This also suggests the dictatorial attitude of Kyoshi.

Itô Yûki: To answer your questions sufficiently, I would have to write more than one additional essay. And in fact, your question has motivated me to do this⁶ As it is impossible for lack of space, I will answer with only a few remarks.

That kigo before Kyoshi was not a rule but a "promise", is a statement Tôta Kaneko similarly, in various places and texts. If you look at the history of haikai literature, it will become clear. There were no authorized "rulebooks" at Bashô's time and only a few compilations of keywords; in fact, there was only a single case of a limited season-keyword compilation, from the unique haikai poet Kitamura Kigin (b. 1625-1705) of the

Teimon school. Bashô himself recommended a different haikai “rulebook” to his disciples, the *Haikai mugonshô* [Haikai book without words] published in 1676, which presented the techniques and philosophy of haikai, rather than being a dictionary of keywords. And Bashô included haiku without kigo in his haiku philosophy. Even the founder of modern haiku, Masaoka Shiki (b. 1867-1902) accepted haiku without kigo and wrote such haiku himself. Shiki’s treatment of non kigo haiku follows the example of Bashô, and other haiku poets of the Edo period. In the last years of Shiki’s life Kyoshi, one of his main disciples, became *de facto* chief editor of *Hototogisu*. Following Shiki’s death, the conflict between Kyoshi and Shiki’s other important disciple, Kawahigashi Hekigotô (b.1873-1937), who wanted to promote also haiku in the free verse style, became serious and intense. Kyoshi criticized Hekigotô several times in *Hototogisu*. Hekigotô then met with Ogiwara Seisensui (1884-1976), and they founded the free-verse haiku journal *Sôun* [Layered clouds] in 1911, and later Hekigotô left the *Hototogisu* journal.

It is important to consider the socio-political and economic realities as well: Kyoshi met with his haiku style the expectations of a new audience, the new bourgeoisie, who mostly had only little literary skill and knowledge. He provided haiku composition with religious connotations, and enunciates the truth that, for all those who write haiku, even bad poets who write haiku as a hobby can become enlightened. The true way to such salvation, we find, obtains in Kyoshi’s haiku style. Kyoshi calls his haiku style the “literature of heaven” [*gokuraku no bungaku*], while other styles are deemed the “literature(s) of hell” [*jigoku no bungaku*].

And Kyoshi floated with the current of the already existing nationalism, as the following example from 1928 reveals. It was written after an attack by the Japanese Imperial Army against a Manchurian warlord, which was a prelude to the Manchurian Incident, thus bringing about the Fifteen Years War (1931-1945). Kyoshi reflects in this lecture about the development of his haiku style, of *kachôfûei*:

Especially, the hokku of haikai, today's haiku, became a completely specialized literature of kachô. . . . We ourselves are those who do not serve the nation well, but succeeding to and following the tradition of our ancestors' taste, we cherish ka-chô-fû-getsu. Thus, in order to gather together the power of you men of culture, at a time when the Japanese nation stands in the world with its glorious power rising, Japanese literature must also rise within world literature. Then, when the time comes that the Japanese nation gains a strong footing in the world as the greatest nation, all peoples of other nations will without doubt pay close attention to the unique character of the literature of Japan. At that time, from among the crowds of plays and novels, there can be seen the face of a haiku poet, and he will say, "Here: this is the literature of kachôfûei. That is, haiku." I expect such a time to come.⁷

Kyoshi's editorship of *Hototogisu* ran in parallel with the development of military expansionism. At the time, Kyoshi was the most powerful authority in the haiku world. In opposition to Kyoshi's dictatorial attitude, Mizuhara Shûôshi (b.1892-1981) and Yamaguchi Seishi (b.1901-1994) left *Hototogisu*. And as for Kyoshi, in 1936 he banished Hino Sôjô (b.1901-1956), Yoshioka Zenjidô (b.1889-1961), and Sugita Hisajo (b.1890-1946) from *Hototogisu*. All of these events reflect Kyoshi's dictatorial attitude, and there are numerous Kyoshi writings and lectures that could be quoted to further document the consistency of his character and attitude.

Udo Wenzel: The "war crimes" for which Kyoshi is accused have an ideological nature (censorship, the publication of war-glorifying scriptures or lectures, propagandistic actions, etc.). After reading your monograph, it seems that Ono Bushi is more directly responsible for arresting poets or initiating torture or deportation to the front-lines of the war. You also write that the nationalism of Shûôshi was much more obvious than that of Kyoshi. How could it happen that Kyoshi is in the main focus of the accusal: that he was put on the top of the list of "haiku war criminals," but Bushi or Shûôshi beneath?

Itô Yûki: This order of the haiku poets' names which I presented in my monograph follows the order of the original document published by the "Prosecution for Haiku War Criminals" movement (*haidan senpan saiban undô*), and I have quoted from that section. In the writings of the movement, the name of Kyoshi is listed first.⁸ This listing, with Kyoshi first, reflects Kyoshi's position during the wartime period. His title during this period was, "President of the Haiku Branch" of the fascist government culture-control/propaganda group, "The Japanese Literary Patriotic Organization" (*nihon bungaku hôkoku kai*; JLPO). The titles of Ono Bushi and Shûôshi were, in both cases, "Director-Trustee." After the war, in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tôkyô Trial), the General President of the JLPO Tokutomi Sohô was listed as a Class A War Criminal. Kyoshi's position as President of the Haiku Branch of the JLPO is quite similar to his. As well, after the war, Shûôshi presented an apology for his actions, and Ono Bushi had died before the end of the war. Kyoshi however never apologized for his actions. I think these facts help explain the reason for Kyoshi being listed first in the quoted "Prosecution for Haiku War Criminals" document.

Udo Wenzel: Nowadays the term "war crimes" is commonly used to signify offences against Public International Law which are closely connected to warfare. In which sense do you use the term "war crime," or how was it used in the historical (immediate postwar) period you are discussing? What was the basis for the accusation of being a "haiku war criminal"? What was the ambition of the "Prosecution for Haiku War Criminals" movement (*haidan senpan saiban undô*), and what did they concretely try to achieve?

Itô Yûki: The "Prosecution for Haiku War Criminals" movement (*haidan senpan saiban undô*) was begun in 1946. This was the same year as the beginning of "The Tôkyô War Crimes Trials" (The International Military Tribunal for the Far East), according to the 10th article of the Potsdam Declaration. So this movement, which developed along with The Tôkyô War Crimes Trials, had a particular emphasis. As a consequence of the defeat of Japan, the Tôkyô War Crimes Trials proceeded, naturally enough, from the perspective of "judgments by the winner" (of the war), so to say. In

witnessing this process, some felt that trials by Japanese citizens themselves should supplement The Tôkyô War Crimes Trials — that such activity was necessary and important. The "Prosecution for Haiku War Criminals" movement began exactly in this spirit; that Japanese people themselves should fully and honestly judge the wartime actions of those most responsible for atrocities, persecution, and other war crimes. Concerning the "Prosecution for Haiku War Criminals" movement, in my monograph, I wrote:

Its advocates were Higashi Kyôzô (Akimoto Fujio), Furuya Kayao, several other haiku poets, and the lawyer, Minato Yôichiro (1900-2002). The movement's aim was not to imprison those who had either instituted persecutions or collaborated with the Secret Police, but to justly and publicly cause those guilty parties to recognize the weight of their guilt and feel the sting of conscience. It was not a witch hunt. If it had been, the movement would have become a reverse mirror image of the Haiku Persecution Incident(s) itself. By contrast, the aim of the movement was "to resolve all the issues of the past in order to together hold hands for the progress of haiku"⁹

Such was their intention and aim. I hope this answers your question.

Udo Wenzel: How wide is the influence of the *Hototogisu* school today?

Itô Yûki: Even today, the influence of the *Hototogisu* school is very strong, and this influence is widespread. The term *kachôfuei* (composition based upon the traditional sense of the beauty of nature) is applied by many haiku groups, and forms a major part of the Japanese haiku world.

Udo Wenzel: In your monograph one can find several times in the critical writings of the New Rising Haiku poets a reproach, that traditional haiku is not serious literature but instead a kind of hobby-literature. What is the reason for this allegation, and how do you assess it?

Itô Yûki: The phrase “season-hobby literature” is not my coinage, but rather a term first used by Yamaguchi Seishi in 1935. He stated that the aim of the New Rising Haiku movement was to “overthrow the conservative haiku as season-hobby literature, and to create gendai haiku as season-feeling literature in the spirit of Bashô, and as true poetry”¹⁰. Seishi criticized the *Hototogisu* school because the school had an inclination to remain within narrow and stagnated cliché expressions. Seishi’s critique was similar in intent to the manner in which Masaoka Shiki had earlier criticized the traditional haikai of the Meiji era, as “*tsukinami* [hackneyed, formulaic].” Basho said, “Do not follow the trace of the old masters. Rather follow what the old masters wanted to seek out” (*kojin no ato wo motomezu, kozjin no motometaru tokoro wo motomeyo*). Seishi thought that the *Hototogisu* school had strayed far from this intention and motivation, and he was not the only one who felt this way. I agree by the way with Yamaguchi Seishi’s opinion.

Udo Wenzel: Are some of the persecuted poets or any close disciples still alive today? Were you able to get in touch with any of them personally? If so, how do they assess your monograph? Is there still bad blood because of these past incidents?

Itô Yûki: As far as I know, all of the arrested haiku poets have passed away. Recently, I met the haiku poet Yagi Mikajo (1924-), whose haiku teachers were the three arrested haiku poets of the *Kyôdai Haiku* group: Saitô Sanki (1900-1962), Hirahata Seitô (1905-1997), and Hashi Kageo (1910-1985). Her *haigô* [penname as a haiku poet] was given to her by Saitô Sanki and Hirahata Seitô. She writes that Hirahata Seitô never, in any fulsome way, elucidated the story and historical details of the haiku persecution incident(s).

And yes, these incidents indeed are “bad blood” among the different groups of haiku poets. It is certainly “bad blood” concerning the *Hototogisu* haiku poets. Even for myself, it is very, very disturbing “bad blood,” because these incidents are undeniable facts in haiku history of Japan.

Udo Wenzel: You presented the historical background of the divisiveness and division of the haiku-movement. After Shiki's death the traditional haiku-school led by Kyoshi gained in importance and became more popular than the opposing movement of Shiki's other main disciple, Kawahigashi Hekigotô. Later the "rebels" Shûôshi und Seishi departed from the *Hototogisu*-school and founded their own groups. Facing this background, how do you see the different approaches and methods of composition of haiku, within the haiku movements of the non-Japanese-speaking world related to subjects such as form, *kigo*, *kireji*, etc.?

Itô Yûki: I think it is good to study as many works of haiku poets as possible. It is unfortunate that many historical studies of haiku in the 20th century outside of Japan stop at Kyoshi or Shûôshi. Although some of the works of Kyoshi and Shûôshi are admirable, to neglect gendai haiku is a terrible loss for western haiku, as well as a diminishment or reduction of both of historic struggles and genius. Gendai haiku continues to develop in various ways.¹¹ Also, it must be said that gendai haiku does not negate traditional haiku or haiku tradition. In fact, the gendai haiku poet Hasegawa Kai attains his mastery through the application of classical haiku techniques. A contrastive example is Tsubouchi Nenten, who attains his mastery via fragmentary and playful language, at times lacking *kigo* and *kireji*. He writes that "*katakoto*" (fragmentary language) is a *sine qua non* of haiku, and of traditional Japanese culture. There are many more examples which reveal that, while incorporating national and international modern/contemporary art theories and techniques, gendai haiku flows within the ancient river of Japanese haiku, literature, and culture.

In my opinion, haiku in the non-Japanese-speaking world does not have to use *kigo* because climate and cultural traditions are different, etc. And as well, from a linguistic point of view, *kireji* ("cutting words") have their origin in the modal verbs existing in ancient Japanese language. However, we haiku poets should know that *kire* (cutting) is not created merely through the use of special words, but rather that *kire* creates 'ma' (the subtle empty room or "psychological space" of time, space, and mind) among words and senses, exhibited as disjunction, juxtaposition, etc. On *kire*, *kireji*, and 'ma,'

Hasagawa Kai has much to offer, and hopefully his haiku criticism will be translated into various languages in the future. I feel that, wherever they are in the world, haiku poets should not limit the possibilities of the poetry, haiku, in any sense.

Udo Wenzel: In your monograph you called the master-disciple system feudalistic. And, in your acknowledgments you expressed gratitude to your haiku teachers. What is the difference between a teacher and a master? Is this master-disciple system still alive today?

Itô Yûki: Kuwabara Takeo called the master-disciple system of haiku feudalistic, in his essay, "A Second Class Art: The Case of Gendai Haiku" (*daini geijutsu ron: gendai haiku ni tsuite*). I partly agree with him. I think that the master-disciple system of Japanese haiku has a feudalistic aspect, but I do not completely deny its value. Japanese haiku has had a long history as a literature of the party (*kukai*)—a social gathering—and is not limited to (the more contemporary stylism of) individualistic literature. In terms of *kukai*, the master-disciple system of haiku seems to work well.

In Japan, many master-disciple systems exist, not only in haiku, but also within many "traditional" arts. In the Japanese haiku world, *kessha* systems ("one's own literary association") are quite strong. To be recognized as a leading haiku poet, typically one must found a *kessha* as a magazine-group, and become its chief editor, hold one's own *kukai* (haiku meeting or party), etc. Certainly, most Japanese haiku poets belong to several *kessha*, whether as members or leaders.

As a "traditional" art, each *kessha* and its haiku poets are placed in a *shikei* (the genealogical tree of haiku schools). However, some *kessha* and haiku poets reject this system. In my case, one of my main haiku teachers, Morisu Ran, said to me some time ago, "Do not call me *sensei*!" As a result, I do not use or apply the term "master" to my haiku teachers.

Udo Wenzel: What reputation has the haiku within contemporary Japanese society? Is it regarded as politically neutral, as progressive, conservative, or even unprogressive?

Itô Yûki: Today, in Japanese society, haiku is regarded as a common “traditional” literature, which is politically neutral. Some poets are progressive, but it has to be said that conservative attitudes occupy a major part of the genre here. In fact there are strongly nationalist haiku groups which act politically in various ways, including the creation of, or joining with, coalitions of certain political parties. I would like to express some sense of warning concerning this situation.

Udo Wenzel: Was your monograph published in Japan (in Japanese) too?

Itô Yûki: Although I have published various poetic works in Japan, I have not published the monograph on the Haiku Persecution Incident(s), in Japanese here. The reason may be obvious, when you examine the bibliography appended to my work. Many books exist in Japanese, and I would especially recommend the following:

Kosakai Shouzou. *Mikoku: Showa haiku danatsu jiken* [Betrayal/Informer: Showa era haiku persecution]. Tôkyô: Daimondo, 1979.

Furukawa Katsumi. *Taikenteki sinkou haikushi*. [A history of New Rising Haiku, in my own experience] Tôkyô: Orienta, 2000.

Tajima Kazuo. *Shinkô hijin no gunzô: "Kyôdai Haiku" no hikari to kage* [The figures of the New Rising Haiku Poets: Light and shadow of KyôdaiHaiku] Shibunkaku: Tôkyô, 2005.

Kosakai's book represents a landmark study of the Haiku Persecution Incident(s). Unfortunately however, Kosakai adopted the theory that Saitô Sanki acted as a spy. Therefore, in 1978, Sanki's disciples (especially Suzuki Murio; b. 1919-2004) accused Kosakai, and sued both Kosakai and the publisher in Court. The upshot of all this was that in 1983 the Court pronounced Sanki innocent on all counts. Other descriptions within the book were corroborated, and the discussion of the Haiku Persecution Incident(s) took on a new life. In 2005, Tajima's book won the Haiku Poets Association Research Award.

On the other hand, there is not enough work on the haiku persecution incident(s) in western languages. It remains my wish that this history be conveyed to the western world, as there are so few published studies.

Udo Wenzel: Thank you very much for the interview!

Endnotes

1. USA: Red Moon Press, May, 2007 (ISBN 978-1-893959-64-4). In German: „Das Neue Haiku. Die Entwicklung des modernen japanischen Haiku und das Phänomen der Haiku-Verfolgungen“, Haiku heute December 2007, translated by Udo Wenzel.
<http://www.haiku-heute.de/Dateien/Das%20Neue%20Haiku%20Ito%20Yuki.pdf>
2. Hachirô Sakanishi (ed.), Treibeis. Haiku. Seibunsha, Tôkyô 1986, Adonia-Verlag Thalwil 1990.
3. For example, the climate in Tôkyô or Kyôto is very different from the northern island of Hokkaidô.
4. Annika Reich, Was ist Haiku? Zur Konstruktion der japanischen Nation zwischen Orient und Okzident. Lit-Verlag Hamburg, 2000
5. Reich, p. 34
6. We intend to publish the essays in another issue of “Haiku heute”.
7. *Teihon Takahama Kyoshi zenshû* [Collected works of Takahama Kyoshi] vol 11, 179-81. Tôkyô: Mainichi shinbunsha, 1974.
8. Cf. Ôno, Rinka. (ed.) *Haiku-nenkan: Shôwa 22*. [Haiku Almanac: 1947], Tôkyô: Tôryô Shobô, 1943. pp. 304-18.

9. Minato Yôichirô. "*Haidan senpan saiban no koto* [On "the prosecution for haiku war criminals" movement]," in *Haikujin*, January 1947. Minpôsha, 1947. p, 34.

10. Komuro Zenkô. *Haijin tachi no kindai* [The early-modern era and the haiku poets]. Tôkyô: Hon'ami shoten, 2002. p. 48.

11. More information about Gendai haiku: <http://gendaihaiku.com/>