

■ Meeting Report

The 7th World Haiku Association Conference Medellin

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After attending the 2011 International Poetry Festival in Medellin, held in South America's Colombia (located almost on the reverse side of the globe from Japan), I once again visited there and was both surprised and delighted at the overwhelming enthusiasm for creating haiku, which far exceeded my expectations.

Sayumi Kamakura, Kentaro Awano and I successfully represented Japan in the 7th World Haiku Association Conference Medellin held from September 13-15, 2013.

The World Haiku Association was founded in 2000 in Slovenia and has been holding conferences every alternate year since 2003 in European countries such as Bulgaria and Lithuania, as well as other cities around the world including Tenri in 2003 and Tokyo in 2007 and 2011.

This was the first time for the conference to be held in South America, which has a distinctive cultural landscape compared to Europe and Japan. The main venue was the auditorium of the Parque Biblioteca Belén in Colombia's Medellin city. In the center of the venue is a square-shaped pond, which is modeled in the manner of the palatial architecture of Japan's Heian era. The opening ceremony featured greetings from representatives of the Colombian government and Medellin City, and then Katsuhiko Matsumoto – the local Japanese Embassy counselor – commented on modern day haiku.

The Conference was hosted by the Colombian member Juan Felipe Jaramillo, who is a doctor and also a researcher of Japanese spiritual culture. As per the custom of the World Haiku Association Conference, the program consisted of presentations from each country and haiku readings by the participants, as well as joint discussions, which were all conducted in the primary language of the host country (Spanish in this case) with the use of simultaneous interpretation in English and Japanese. It was a fairly intense two-and-a-half days in which around 100 participants from four countries intermingled, including five poets from Japan, America and Lithuania in addition to Colombian poets who made up the majority of attendees.

This conference also featured the first Medellin City Haiku Contest in Spanish. Numerous submissions came from not only Colombia, but also other Spanish-speaking countries in Central and South America, as well as from European countries such as Spain. The first place in this Haiku Division went to a poet living in Medellin City, who is an ardent haiku fan. This is his winning entry - an excellent haiku that is both simple but deep with the suggestion of more under the surface.

Ese cántaro
tan lleno de vacío
como la noche

It's an amphora
full of emptiness
like the night

Raúl Ortiz

The winner received *shikishi*, a square cardboard presentation piece inscribed by Natsuishi in both Japanese and Spanish, and

haiku publications, which he was clearly delighted to receive from the Association.

I only first came to know of the Haiku Collection Division in the contest when in Medellín City itself. The publication of haiku collections in Spanish has flourished to such a level that it is now an area of competition. The first place in this Division was awarded to Susana Benet from Spain, for her personal collection of haiku entitled *Ráfagas (Gusts)* (a privately-printed book).

El abejorro
a un lado del cristal
Al otro, el gato

A bumblebee
in one face of the crystal
in another, a cat

Carnicería
Entre voces el hacha
Partiendo huesos

Butcher.
Between his voices an ax
divides bones

Although there are no seasonal phrases or 5-7-5 syllabic structure in these verses, they are still solid works that impressively reflect the expressive style of haiku.

In my keynote speech, I first referred to the splendid natural environment of Medellín City and then discussed the characteristics of the following three-line poem (similar to a haiku) called “Prójimo lejano” (“Distant Neighbor”), written by the Nobel prize recipient and Mexican poet Octavio Paz.

Anoche un fresno
a punto de decirme
algo—callóse

Last night an ash tree
was about to tell
me something—and didn't.

I also commented on the appeal of the following outstanding haiku by Colombia's leading poet Raúl Henao...

La ropa en el alambre
bailotea al viento.
¡Se despeinó el negrito!

Clothing on the wire
dancing in the wind.
A negress disheveling hair!

...and mentioned the avant-garde quality of Matsuo Basho's “furukeya” (old pond), and in doing so encouraged the abundant potential of Spanish haiku.

In the discussions by Colombian poets on the Haiku of Colombia and Latin America, the venue fell momentarily silent when Gustavo Adolfo Garcés posed the question of whether the Mexican poet José Juan Tablada – who is the originator of Spanish haiku – had actually visited Japan.

Although Tablada did reside in Japan for a period of time, he did not have any direct contact with Japanese haiku or haiku poets, and only spent time familiarizing himself with classic haiku in English and French. Nonetheless, Tablada's legacy in Spanish literature is opening up a path for creating short poems that are similar to haiku. His three-line poem titled “La pajarera” (The Aviary) is featured in the collection *Un día (One Day)* (1919).

Distintos cantos a la vez;
la pajarrera musical
es una torre de Babel.

Different songs at once;
the musical aviary
is a tower of Babel.

In the presentation on haiku publications, *World Haiku 2012: No. 8* (Shichigatsudo, 2012) and *World Haiku 2013: No. 9* (Shichigatsudo, 2013) are introduced first. The following haiku, which was penned two-years ago in Medellin City, is included in the haiku collection *Black Card* by Natsuishi (Cyberwit.net, India, 2013), which is published in three languages including Spanish translations.

石の上の時間の檻に夢を置く

I placed a dream
in a prison of time
on a stone

Pongo un sueño
en una cárcel de tiempo
sobre una piedra

This haiku is included, among others, in the haiku collection by Sayumi Kamakura titled *Nanatsu no Yuhi* (English: Seven Sunsets) (Cyberwit.net, India, 2013), which is also published in three languages.

海に浮く雲はいつでも一人称

Floating clouds on the sea
always
is the first person

Nube en primera persona
siempre flotante
sobre el mar

The following haiku has a quality of black humor to it, and is from the collection of the Colombian scientist and poet Humberto Jarrín B, titled *El rumor de los seres (Rumor of the Beings)* (Ediciones Trinchera, 2012).

Ansiosos hablan
el arroz y mis dientes;
los mueve el hambre.

Eager to speak,
rice and my teeth;
hunger moves them.

In the final discussion by all participants on the topic of “The localism and universality of haiku”, there were many questions raised by the Colombian poets, such as “Can the content of haiku cover global events?” My reply to this was a reference to French haiku about the front line of WWI.

The American Charles Trumbull pointed out that the 5-7-5 syllabic structure is not suitable for use in languages other than Japanese, and mentioned that haiku poets in North America have abandoned trying to mimic Japanese haiku and are instead pursuing an original style.

I provided the introduction for the haiku readings, which were taken from a commemorative collection compiled by Jaramillo especially for this event, titled *空虚/El cántaro vacío/The Empty Amphora* (Todográficas, Colombia, 2013). The unique humanity of the

authors permeated the venue as they read aloud their creations, and I could feel the richness of haiku culture that has spread around the world; this brought me a sense of fulfillment.

En mi cuaderno
gota a gota la tarde
Azul naufragio

In my notebook
drop by drop the evening
Blue trairewreck

Claudia Cecilia Trujillo (Colombia)

Alguien mas pisó,
explotó el camino.
Luego la muleta

Someone else took a step,
the road exploded.
Then the crutch.

Luis Esteban Patiño Cruz (Colombia)

cloudless plains sky
my soul completely
exposed to God

planicie sin nubes el cielo
mi alma por completo
expuesta a Dios

Charles Trumbull (USA)

I can't understand,
in the course of a single night
you knit this many blossoms

no puedo entender,
en el curso de una sola noche
tejiste todas estas flores

Julius Keleras (Lithuania)

It may be the end of the world
I'm relaxed
in a morning bath tub

Tal vez llegue el fin del mundo
esta mañana
me doy un baño relajante

Kentaro Awano (Japan)

La mejor ventana
para ver el jardín:
Mariposa de cristal.

The best window
to see the garden:
crystal butterfly.

Álvaro Lopera (Colombia)

En el charco de la calle
mi casa
se hunde en las estrellas

In the street puddle
my house
sinking in stars

Rubén Darío Lotero Contreras (Colombia)

The greatest achievement of The 7th World Haiku Association Medellin was encountering an enormous wealth of Spanish haiku of the highest purity.