

Meeting Report

The 8th World Haiku Association Conference

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Horse chestnut trees rustled around the Liberty Tower of Meiji University, the venue of the 8th World Haiku Association Conference. From September 4 to 6, 2015, the Conference was held at the campus in the Ochanomizu area of Tokyo, Japan. The theme on this occasion was “Limitless Dialogue.” It turned out to be an innovative effort to provide a platform of haiku for dialogues between various languages, cultures, and artistic genres. Prior to the meeting, a gallery in the same building started an exhibition, “Haiku in the World,” showing about 20 books on haiku and several calligraphic works of haiku by the attendants.

Around 50 haiku and/or free-verse poets from Japan and other 13 countries attended the Conference. The welcome party in the evening of September 4 was an indication of how successful the meeting would turn out, gathering almost all the participants. Mongolian and Vietnamese haiku-colleagues made their appearance in their national costumes. It was beautiful indeed. Such costumes were perfect for the international gathering making it easy to see at glance where participants came from.

While Kuniharu Shimizu acted as a master of ceremony, Ban'ya Natsuishi, Director of the Association, made an opening speech followed by greetings by the guests. The party really came alive, as artist, Kosai Hori proposed a toast. There was then a performance of *gagaku*, traditional Japanese court music: Kanako Nakamura played *ryuteki* flute and Fumiya Otonashi *sho* mouth organ. In addition, traditional festival music was performed with the *shinobue* flute by Koji Yamada, who had been also active as a secretariat member of the Conference. Many people videoed and photographed these players. Their performances were a valuable experience even for Japanese participants as well as those from abroad. Then, customary haiku reading — preceding 6 reading sessions held during the conference — began with Urjin Khurelbaatar from Mongolia as the first reader:

On the gazelle-striding steppe, / a flame swaying above an oasis / it's a mirage

The party was in full swing when the poets recited in succession the haiku “*Mirai yori taki o fukiwaru kaze kitaru* (From the future / a wind arrives / that blows the waterfall apart)” by Natsuishi in eight languages.

On the first day of the conference, Saturday, September 5th, the World Haiku Association held a meeting from morning. It approved the following agenda items: (1) financial report of 2014, (2) report of *World Haiku* No.11 publication, (3) the next WHA Conference to be held in Parma, Italy in September 2017, and (4) the appointment of Urjin Khurelbaatar (Mongolia) and Bo Lille (Denmark) to PR staff of the Association.

Poet Shizue Ogawa was the first person to give speech on the theme of “Haiku in French and English speaking countries.” She also shared a documentary film about haiku in Japanese language education at an elementary school in Japan.

The afternoon session was an examination of women's haiku by five female haiku poets, one of the most distinctive events of this conference. Firstly, Sayumi Kamakura remarked, “Feminine quality appears spontaneously in haiku by female poets if they simply create haiku as they sought to write, without necessarily emphasizing their femininity overtly. Besides, we should mutually accept the differences between women and men.” This was what Kamakura practices and realizes in her own works. Chiaki Nagamine estimated, “Varied female haiku will appear according to the change of women's social status in future, for haiku by women have been largely affected by women's social backgrounds.” She concluded, “Sexual discrimination against women still exists in Japan, though it is important to

acknowledge gender differences.” Yuki Kajiwara analyzed recent female freestyle haiku from the viewpoint of “femininity.” Her opinion, “We know there are physical and cultural differences between men and women, but there should be haiku as human beings,” conveying energy of the young generation. Zlatka Timenova (Portugal/Bulgaria) treated the topic from a perspective different from the above three Japanese poets, as shown in her comment, “There are signs of the masculine in haiku written by women, and signs of the feminine in haiku written by men.” She made us aware of differences between social and/or religious backgrounds among us, and was unique for saying “Haiku is doing well in the realm of women” as one of her “non-conclusion” listings. Lê Thị Bình (Vietnam) reported on women’s active role in Vietnamese haiku which has a short history. After these speeches, many questions came from the audience proving this plan on women’s haiku session was a great success.

After the third haiku reading session, Naohiko Umewaka gave a speech on *komi* (silent pause), *kire* (caesura) and meter in Noh songs, demonstrating some Noh performances. The next program was a special speech by Sukehiro Hirakawa. He explained how “haiku” a Japanese literature genre became “HAIKU” a worldwide poetic form, placing works of Ban’ya Natsuishi, his own student, in haiku history. This Professor Emeritus of University of Tokyo lectured in a clear-cut, witty manner despite his age. Its wonderful contents included impressive statements like “haiku will soon become more globalized by being separated from the Japanese language.”

Following up were James Shea (United States) spoke on “Circular Influences: Haiku in Translation,” and Ikko Ueno on “Japanese Classic Haiku,” there were speeches about the regional conditions of haiku in the world: Urjin Khurelbaatar on Mongolian haiku; Đinh Nhật Hạnh on Vietnamese haiku; Abdelkader Jamoussi from Morocco on Arabic haiku. Bo Lille added information on Danish haiku the next day. The speakers regularly mentioned how their language characteristic and musicality, as well as social and traditional characteristics have affinity with traditional haiku of Japan. Haiku are now synchronized to each regional situation, adopting various styles from the 5-7-5 rhythm to incorporate the spirit of singing nature. Although we may leave each region to evolve its haiku individually, the World Haiku Association should present core ideas since it aims to make haiku a platform. Japanese haiku with its history still retains freshness and can be spread throughout the world.

Other programs were Masanobu Yamaguchi’s speech on “Poetics of Japanese Proverb” and the fourth haiku reading session that ended this long, but short first day of the conference.

On the second day of the conference, Sunday, September 6th awards were presented to the prizewinners of the “WHA Haiku Contest” and the “Haiku in Chiyoda Ward Contest,” both held for the first time prior to this conference. The former was an open competition, and the latter associated with the venue of the conference and mainly targeted young people. The WHA Haiku Contest had 7 winning haiku pieces, including the following two first-place poems that earned the same points from the judges.

人危める白い指先スマートフォン

Hito ayameru shiroi yubisaki sumato-fo

White fingertip / killing a man / a smart phone

—Kei Kinjo

真夏の夜空地球をもう一つ

Manatsubi no yozora chikyu o mou hitotsu

The night sky / of a tropical day / Add to it one more earth

— Shinji Noya

Kinjo’s winning was reported in her local newspaper, the Okinawa Times. Among the overseas submissions, Leonilda Alfarrobinha (Portugal) and Joseph Salvatore Aversano (USA/Turkey) received their prizes. The Association has been running another contest, the “WHA Haiga Contest” for haiku with visual image, as mentioned by Kuniharu Shimizu in his speech.

“Haiku in Chiyoda Ward Contest” had 12 winners, among them a university student, Daiki Koyama, was selected as best.

坂の上文人たちの監獄

Saka no ue bunjin-tachi no kangoku

At the top / of a slope / a prison for writers

—Daiki Koyama

The morning programs of the second day included a lecture on “Rakugo and Haiku” by a poet Chuei Yagi, and a discussion between Xu Yiping (China) and Hideki Ishikura (Japan) titled “Musicality of Chinese Haiku.” In the afternoon, Hajime Kawana examined the trends in haiku reformation which happened in the earlier decades of Showa-era (1925–1945), e.g. *choritsu-ku* (freestyle haiku consisting longer syllables), *rensaku* (haiku cycle), and *tagyo-ku* (haiku in multiple lines). Toshio Kimura on “The Poetics of Modern Haiku—the Quest of the Haiku Spirit” defined the modern haiku in the world as “a short verse form with the haiku spirit, preserving its tradition and groping a new poetic horizon.” Yu Soneda concluded the session with his speech “Musicality of Free-form Haiku.”

It may be said that the second-day features also focused on dialogue between different artistic genres. Hiroto Sou showed a collaboration of contemporary dance and haiku. Eiji Koyama integrated movie and image of haiku. Kanako Nakamura and Ban’ya Natsuishi performed together with their *ryuteki* flute and haiku reading respectively.

The conference ended successfully without any major problems and was attended by more than 160 people. It is hoped this successful trend will continue to the next conference in Parma and promote further development of the World Haiku Association. The farewell party was celebrated as the night in Tokyo enveloped the world outside.