

In Support of Creative Haiku in Nepal

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It is true that haiku writing has spread around the world. At the beginning of the 20th century, poets in Western Europe began to write haiku or short poems inspired by Japanese classic haiku translated into mainly English and French.

French Dadaist and Surrealist poet Paul Eluard wrote a distinguished haiku in three lines in 1920.

Le cœur à ce qu'elle chante
Elle fait fondre la neige
La nourrice des oiseaux.

The heart to her song
She makes snow dissolve
The wet nurse of the birds.

Thanks to Eluard, haiku became a short poem full of creative substance, written in new, sharp and unexpected language. In his haiku, he invented a new image “la nourrice des oiseaux (the wet nurse of the birds)” and activated this new image given a surreal act of “fait fondre la neige (makes snow dissolve)”. Though Eluard knew neither Japanese language nor Japanese poetry, he could build up a free verbal form with only the poetic materials provided by haiku’s small three lines. Thus haiku became a pilot plant for new poetry as well as a forefront of pure poetry. This epoch-making fact in the history of world poetry is not so well known.

In the 1910s, the American imagist poet Ezra Pound introduced the “superposition” technique, after encountering Japanese classic haiku.

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

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

The image of the first line and that of the second line are surely separate but they have something in common. This “superposition” is one of the most important Japanese classic haiku techniques. Nevertheless compared to Eluard’s haiku, Pound’s acceptance of haiku is not enough. Pound lost more of

the essential poetics of haiku.

Working as the Director of the World Haiku Association since 2000, I have found that many haiku lovers are influenced by the haiku of an American poet of the Beat Generation Jack Kerouac. In his novel “The Dharma Bums” (1958), Shiki Masaoka’s haiku “The sparrow hops along, the veranda, with wet feet (ぬれ足で雀のありく廊下かな)” is applauded as “the greatest” haiku by Kerouac. Frankly speaking, this haiku is quite mediocre, only a sketch of some trivial incident.

In the morning frost
the cats
Stepped slowly

This is a haiku written by Kerouac himself. It’s a sketch of some trivial incident imitating Shiki’s commonplace poem. His haiku is too simple and too flat. Haiku needs more depth and more dynamics in its short form. Many English-speaking people cannot escape from the simplification and the flattening of haiku after Kerouac.

The most famous and the most misunderstood haiku around the world is no doubt the following written by Basho Matsuo in 1686.

古池や蛙飛びこむ水の音

Old pond—
water sounds of
a frog jumping in

It’s not a sketch of a trivial incident. Without watching “old pond” and “a frog”, Basho can imagine clearly an image of a lonely frog jumping into the old pond, merely hearing the sounds of water made by a frog. Basho utilizes synesthesia which connects the hearing and the watching.

In 1689 Basho wrote a more excellent haiku.

荒海や佐渡に横たふ天の河

Rough sea—
over Sado Isle
extends the Milky Way

Three different elements in each line, “rough sea”, “Sado Isle” and “the Milky Way” give birth to a new and dynamic universe which is bare and mysterious. This universe liberates us from the ordinary life to the true cosmos. Basho was such an avant-garde poet in the 17th century.

A representative Nepali poet Ram Kumar Panday is publishing his haiku collection “Flooded Gorge” in 2017. His knowledge about haiku is perhaps based on English publications. Then, he may be one of the followers of Jack Kerouac’s haiku, of course not Basho’s haiku.

Birds return
Before falling night
Stop songs//126//

This is typical of Kerouac’s haiku writing which is only a simple and flat sketch of birds.

I like the following haiku which is beyond a verbal sketch.

In a small string
Sparrow dances
The galaxy opens//28//

The first and second line depict “sparrows” on an electric wire. The Milky Way in the third line invites generously “sparrows” to the free and peaceful universe. The leap between the second line and the third line is the most essential haiku technique called “kire” in Japanese. Panday activates this haiku making full use of “kire”, while English-speaking people have a tendency to ignore “kire”.

“Kire” in this haiku connects two different savage elements “sparrows” and “the galaxy”. The true haiku poet must discover the hidden relation between two or three different elements.

Each Friday
A tower falls
To fill up empty ocean//151//

I don’t know which tower falls down on every Friday in Nepal, but a tower in this haiku symbolizes something indispensable for the ocean, secretly for the author and people. The collapse of a tower completes the imperfect ocean like a mysterious ritual. I like this haiku, because this tower suggests Nepali culture which tightly connects people and nature.

One of my contemporary haiku is as follows.

未来より滝を吹き割る風来たる

From the future
a wind arrives
that blows the waterfall apart

Japanese contemporary haiku makes it possible to give birth to a more creative image. Even nature can be

transformed into another one in a surrealistic way.

Nepali nature and culture keep their savage and clear wisdom in themselves. If Nepali haiku learns the Japanese contemporary way of haiku writing, it will bloom more amazingly. If Japanese contemporary haiku learns Nepali nature and culture, it will bloom more vividly.

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