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What's Haiku? 2

For the Students of the University of Rwanda

Japanese Culture influenced by the nature

The Japan Archipelago, mountainous, volcanic, surrounded by seas, belongs to the temperate zone. In summer, it is hot and humid, and in winter, cold and snowy.

The special characteristics of the climate in Japan are clearly distinguished seasons and the highest precipitation rate among the other temperate zone countries. That's why the Japanese, who are agricultural people, have developed a keen sense of seasons, that has influenced our aesthetic consciousness and sensibility. We admire the nature; landscapes with flowers, dead and dry leaves and animals. However, sometimes it destroys our life completely; storm, thunder, earthquake, tsunamis, flood, eruption, and so on. We have always cohabited with cruel, dangerous and beautiful nature from ancient time.

There is a term "transiency" in the Japanese spirit. This is one of Buddhism's most important world view: it refers to the notion of the transmigration of soul, which holds that every single life inevitably dies and everything is under constant change. All beings continue to turn around with the times. Since ancient times, it has been a chief subject of literature in Japan.

I notice some similar points with Rwanda. You are also agricultural people and you also have the rich nature; volcanos, lakes, thousands hills, high precipitation, wild life, flowers... For example, Japanese have 99 expressions to describe the rain; strong, fine, short, long time, seasonal, etc. I heard here in Rwanda, you have also many expressions for the rain. Imvura yi itumba(time to seed), imvura irashaka kugua(start to rain), gushaka(for cows), umuhimdo(harvest time), kunyagira(wet), gutonyanga(fine) ...

So I believe maybe we understand each other easily by mediation of Haiku poetry.

In my last note “What’s Haiku?”, I showed you the technical points of Haiku poetry. Briefly again, there are two important elements, 1) Short; 17 syllables and 2) Seasonal reference. So you make your Haiku in brief with 17 syllables or 3 lines, containing the key word which evokes a particular season.

Some of the most famous Haiku

I show you now some examples. I put the underline to each poem to indicate the seasonal reference.

外に出よふるるばかりに春の月 (Toniideyo, Fururubakarini, Harunotsuki)

Come and look outside!/ What a big spring moon!/ We might touch it

大根引き大根で道を教えけり (Daikohiki, Daikodemichiwo, Oshiekeri)

A farmer pulls one radish,/ indicating the route / with this radish

夏草や兵どもが夢の跡 (Natsukusaya, Tsuwamonodomoga, Yumenoato)

In the wild field, / rest the dream of / ancient soldiers

やれ打つな蠅が手をする足をする (Yareutsuna, Haegatewosuru, Ashiwosuru)

Don’t beat the fly! / See it ribbing its legs/ Pity...

古池やかかわず飛び込む水の音 (Furuikeya, Kawazutobikomu, Mizunooto)

Old silent pond, /A frog jumped into the water/ sound of silence

五月雨や大河を前に家二軒 (Samidareya, Taigawomaeni, Ieniken)

After big rain of May,/ only a few houses/ in front of a big stream

As you see, Haiku seems no more than beginnings or even just titles for poems and in translation it is impossible to convey the effect of their sound and rhythm. It’s not true. Because the translation can usually convey the image. This is an important point.

Remember that certain good poems of the Beatles, Bob Dylan, for example, are like a small stone thrown into the pool of the listeners' mind, evoking association out of the richness of his own memory or personal story.

Let's see more Haikus.

冬蜂の死にどころなく歩きけり (Fuyubachino, Shinidokoronaku, Arukikeri)

A bee creeps,/ searching his place to die/ in winter

It might be a beetle or a cockroach as you are familiar, I suppose.

愛されずして沖遠く泳ぐなり (Aisarezushite, Okitoku, Oyogunri)

Lost my love,/ swim and swim/ far from shore

In my case, I punch and punch the sandbag at the boxing club.

逝く母を父が迎えて木の根明く (Ikuhahawo, Chichigamukaete, Kinoneaku)

Mother dying,/ Father coming down to meet her,/ the snow thaws soon

I hope deeply also for my dear mother some day.

倒・裂・破・崩・礫の街寒雀 (Tou, Retsu, Ha, Hou, Reki Nomachi, Fuyusuzume)

Felt, split, broken, collapsed.../ one city full of debris/ and sparrows are in winter

I saw the entirely same scene in Kobe city a week after the famous big earthquake in 1995.

Haiku could make you smart!?

As I said in my note "What's Haiku?", making and reading Haiku is getting more and more popular all over the world. They say that some primary schools in the USA practice it to admire the nature. It is worthy if Haiku can make young people more aware of the importance of the nature through the seasons. Furthermore, I want to put the accent to the another element of Haiku; short like with only 17 syllables, or 3 lines. It is also important for you to select the best one among plenty of words or terms to convey your emotion or feeling the most effectively possible within the conditions.

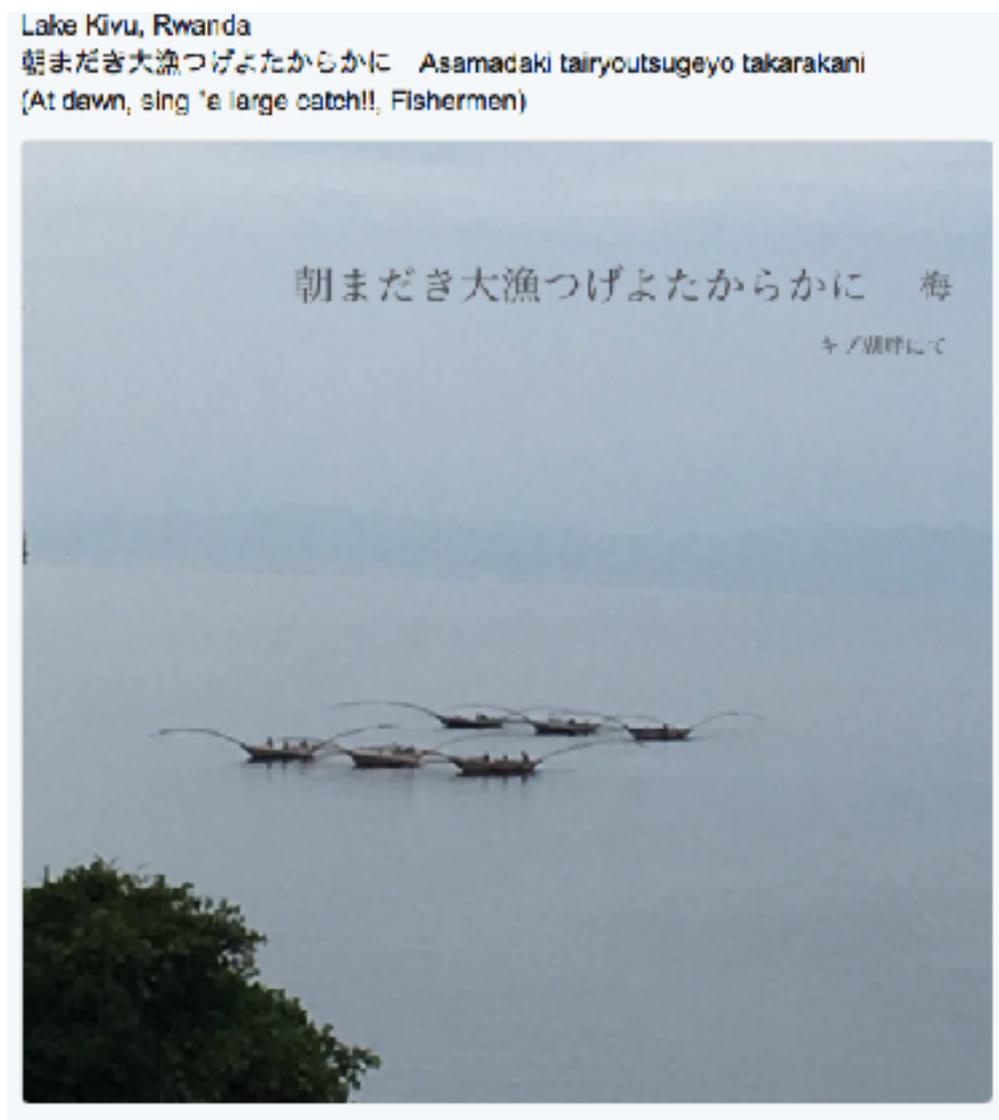
So, it seems to me like a kind of game because when playing the game, we have to respect the rules. And I believe these limited conditions make your sense of expression smarter in all scenes of life.

Haiku with a picture

In conclusion, let's play the Haiku game together in your own languages, in English, in Kinyarwanda. And at the beginning, I would propose you to do that with a picture, why not? Haiku can evoke an image, so the picture could help your creation to explain your message, I suppose.

I show my trial Photo-Haiku to close this note.

Thank you.

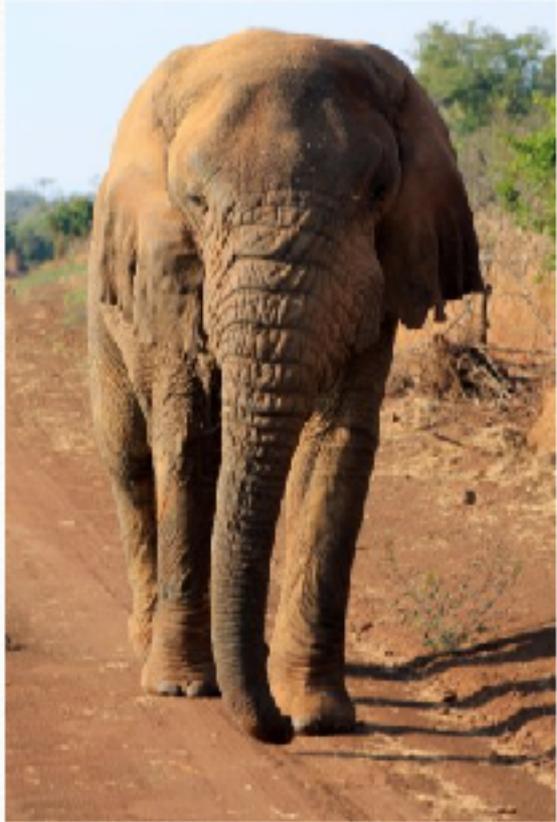


Famous Mtsuware In Akagera National Park

時めぐり牙なくしてもボスはボス Tokimegiri kibanakushitemo

bosuhabosu

(As time goes by, Boss without his ivories, stays Boss)



遠く来て極彩色の初日かな Tookukite gokuseishikino hatsuhikana
(Far from my hometowns, what a multi-colorful new year day)

