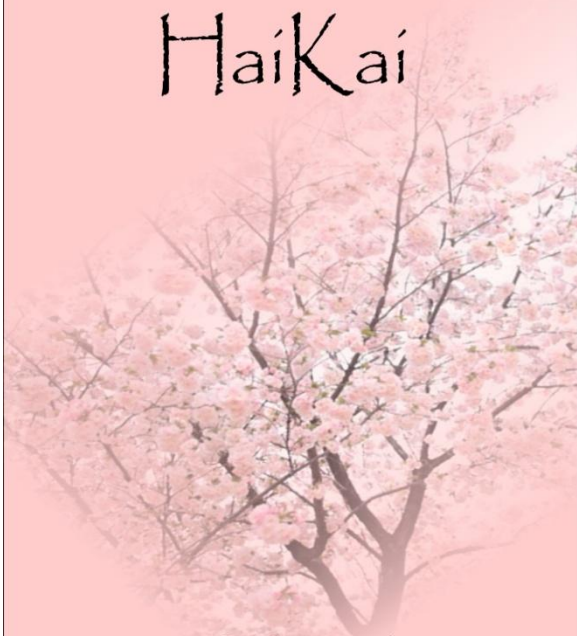


How To

HaiKai



A Guide To The
5-7-5 Forms of Japanese Poetry

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Local Gems Press

How To Haikai

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Table of Contents

What Is Haikai.....	1
Haiku	4
Senryu	9
Zappai.....	13
Hokku.....	14
Other 5-7-5 Forms.....	17

What Is Haikai

Japanese poetry, has a lot of similarities to English or American poetry; the spirits may be similar, and so might the subject-matter in many cases (we often find it funny examining that Japanese poets from over 1000 years ago were writing about many of the same topics that we write about today,) however, there are fundamental differences in the make-up of the poetic forms.

In western culture, poetic forms are usually defined by the rhyme scheme, meter, syllable count, etc, aka, what makes up the poem in terms of aesthetics. In Japanese poetry forms, it is not the structure of the poem, but the content that determines what type of poem it is.

As such, there are many forms of Japanese poetry with the same structure and syllable count, that would be considered entirely different forms based on what the poem is

about (and in some cases is there are certain other rules involved.) Most forms of Japanese poetry has syllable counts with 5 or 7 lines in varying combinations.

For example, almost every poet in the English language at this point knows of the Japanese poetry form Haiku, and the fact that in traditional Japanese, it consisted of the syllable count of 5-7-5. (In some American versions, people count the Haiku as simply less than 17 syllables.)

But as we will discuss later on in this book, Haiku have certain rules that must be followed in the subject matter to actually be considered a Haiku. In English, Haiku has become a word for the entire category of 5-7-5 poems from the Japanese style, but in reality, the category of 5-7-5 poems is called Haikai, and there are many different types of poems that use this same syllable count depending on the content.

So let's explore the Haikai category and what makes the various forms what they are.

Haiku

The haiku is the most well known (though often also most misunderstood) form of Japanese poetry. People have assumed any poem that has the 5-7-5 syllable count to be Haiku, but in order for a poem to specifically be Haiku there are other requirements.

1: A seasonal word.

Haiku in general deal with nature and a word related to a season is a requirement.

2: A cutting word.

A "cutting word" (kireji) or exclamation. Kireji have no exact equivalent in English. But usually the word is the turn in the poem. In translated haiku, they are generally replaced by punctuation. The closest thing in English would be the dash. -

History:

Japanese poets traditionally used haiku to capture and distill a fleeting natural image, such as a frog jumping into a pond, rain falling onto leaves, or a flower bending in the wind. Many people go for walks just to find new inspiration for their poetry, known in Japan as ginkgo walks.

Contemporary haiku may stray from pure nature as a subject.

Urban environments for example, may be haiku subjects.

In traditional Japanese the form consists of

5

7

5

in terms of syllable count.

The form of Haiku has been adjusted and has adapted to many different languages throughout the world. In English for example, a haiku is often considered to be any poem that is less than 17 syllables long, regardless of topic, line structure or word requirements.

Haiku Examples

Over the wintry
forest, winds howl in rage
with no leaves to blow.

~ Natsume Soseki

Snow yet remaining
The mountain slopes are misty
an evening in spring

~ Iio Sogi

Senryu

The next form of the 5-7-5 syllable structure poem is the Senryu.

The Senryu is an extremely popular form of Japanese poetry, arguably the second most popular form after Haiku in the modern world. Like the Haiku the Senryu focuses on the 3 line form, traditionally with the same

5

7

5

A Senryu is in many ways a partner form to a haiku for while Haiku deal with the wonders of nature, Senryu deal with human psychology and the deep intricacies of the human mind. In many cases, the Senryu is comical in nature.

Senryu is named after Edo period haikai poet

Karai Senryu.

His poetry collection *Haifūyanagidaru*
launched the style into the public.

Senryu Examples

When I catch,
The robber,
my own son

~ Karai Senryu

A single ant gets
A good girl
Out of her clothes!

~ Unknown

Zappai

The Zappai is probably one of the least heard of forms of Haikai but ironically is one of the most frequently written.

As the previous forms,

5

7

5

is the line structure and syllable count. But the Zappai is a form that essentially doesn't fit the particular requirements for the 5-7-5 poem to be considered either a Haiku or a Senryu. Odds are many poems over the years you have heard or read that were labeled Haiku or Senryu were actually Zappai.

Hokku

The Hokku is a unique member of the Haikai family in the sense that it is not a poem that stands alone on its own. The Hokku is the first part of the much longer style of Japanese poem, the Renga. A Renga is a series of linked verse written by more than 1 poet. The first author would write the Hokku, or the 5-7-5 lines to kick off the poem, and then the next poet would respond in kind, usually with a two line verse of 7-7 making a complete Tanka verse for a total of 5 lines of

5

7

5

7

7

here's wishing
a millennium of sundries gathered
new year's feast!

~ *Basho*

first song of the bush warbler
even as snow flutters down

~ *Boncho*

Or completed together:

here's wishing
a millennium of sundries gathered
new year's feast!
first song of the bush warbler
even as snow flutters down

You might recognize Basho's name having started this Hokku. He was an avid Hokku poet. It is worth noting that many of his Haiku, for which he is known for, were actually mistaken upon early discovery for Haiku and were actually Hokku starters of Renga poems (that just happened to fit the criteria to be considered Haiku.)

Other 5-7-5 Forms

The forms we mentioned so far are the forms of Haikai that stand alone. However, there is a long standing tradition of mixing poetry with other media, and the 5-7-5 form of Japanese poetry make an appearance in these as well. While these technically go beyond the realm of being simply poetry, poetry is a main component of them.

Haibun

The Haibun is a form of Japanese poetry/writing that mixes prose and Haiku. The prose can vary in range and size and can include autobiography, journal, essay, prose poems, short stories, and in traditional Japanese literature, travel journals.

It is unknown exactly when the Haibun was invented but the first recorded use of the phrase we have was used by Matsuo Basho in a letter to his disciple Kyoai in 1690. Since Basho was a prominent writer of Haiku and Hokku he frequently mixed them with his prose writing of his travels.

Haiga

Haiga is a style of Japanese painting that incorporates the use of Haikai. They are typically painted by Haiku poets and include a Haikai poem somewhere in the image.

The image, and the poem both usually deal with a profound observation of the everyday world.





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