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Reconfiguring Traditional Japanese Aesthetics in Contemporary Haiku: A Critical Study of Six Selected Poets

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BSTRACT
This article examines the representation and transformation of traditional Japanese aesthetic principles in contemporary Japanese haiku through a critical analysis of six poems by Uda Kiyoko, Hasegawa Kai, Hoshinaga Fumio, Yagi Mikajo, Tsubouchi Nenten, and Kaneko Tōta. The study investigates how established Japanese aesthetic concepts, particularly wabi-sabi (beauty in imperfection and simplicity), yūgen (mystery and suggestiveness), ma (silence and spatial intervals), and mono no aware (sensitivity to transience), inform contemporary poetic expression. It also considers the significance of seasonal imagery, sensory perception, symbolism, linguistic experimentation, and semantic compression in constructing aesthetic meaning. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the article employs close textual analysis and comparative aesthetic interpretation to examine one representative haiku by each poet. The selected poems are analysed in relation to their imagery, language, structure, philosophical implications, and engagement with traditional Japanese sensibilities. Rather than treating classical aesthetic principles as fixed categories, the study explores their reinterpretation through modern experiences and changing literary sensibilities. Particular attention is given to the relationship between natural imagery and human consciousness, the interplay of presence and absence, and the expression of impermanence through minimal poetic forms. The article argues that contemporary Japanese haiku demonstrates both continuity and transformation in its aesthetic orientation, retaining elements of traditional Japanese poetics while exploring new modes of perception and expression. By examining six distinct poetic voices, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between literary tradition, aesthetic innovation, and contemporary Japanese poetry.

Keywords: Contemporary Japanese Haiku; Japanese Aesthetics; Wabi-sabi; Yūgen; Mono no Aware, etc

INTRODUCTION

Japanese haiku occupies a distinctive position in world literature because of its capacity to communicate complex experiences through an extremely concise poetic structure. Although commonly associated with the conventional seventeen-mora arrangement of five, seven, and five, haiku cannot be understood exclusively through its formal brevity. Its literary significance emerges from the relationship between language, perception, nature, temporality, and the reader's participation in the construction of meaning. A haiku frequently presents an apparently ordinary moment, an object, a seasonal occurrence, or an encounter with the natural environment. However, the apparent simplicity of the presentation often conceals a more complex aesthetic and philosophical experience. The reader is invited to recognise relationships that remain unstated, to perceive the significance of an image beyond its immediate physical appearance, and to participate in the emotional and intellectual possibilities generated by poetic juxtaposition.

The historical development of Japanese haiku is closely connected with the evolution of Japanese poetic traditions, particularly waka, renga, and haikai. The transformation of the opening verse of linked poetry into an independent poetic form gradually established haiku as a significant literary genre. Matsuo Bashō, Yosa Buson, Kobayashi Issa, and Masaoka Shiki contributed to different stages of this development. Bashō emphasised the philosophical and aesthetic possibilities of poetic observation, while Buson demonstrated the relationship between poetic language and visual imagination. Issa frequently incorporated ordinary experiences, human vulnerability, and compassion for living creatures. Shiki subsequently advocated the principle of shasei, or sketching from life, and contributed to the modern reformulation of haiku. These developments established a literary tradition in which formal economy, observational precision, and imaginative interpretation became important components of poetic expression.

Nevertheless, the development of Japanese haiku did not conclude with its classical masters. Modern Japanese poets reconsidered the conventions of the genre in response to historical, social, cultural, and intellectual transformations. The emergence of gendai haiku, generally understood as modern or contemporary haiku,

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introduced different possibilities of poetic expression. Modern haiku poets challenged the assumption that the genre must remain restricted to conventional natural imagery, predictable seasonal references, or traditional metrical expectations. Their poetry increasingly accommodated urban experience, historical consciousness, political anxiety, psychological complexity, linguistic experimentation, and unconventional representations of the human body and natural environment.

The emergence of modern haiku is particularly significant because it demonstrates that the literary identity of the genre is not determined by formal continuity alone. Traditional poetic elements may be retained, modified, questioned, or deliberately displaced. The seasonal word, for instance, can operate not merely as a descriptive reference to a particular time of the year but also as a symbolic instrument through which historical memory, psychological experience, and cultural associations are activated. Similarly, the relationship between nature and humanity may move beyond the traditional presentation of harmonious coexistence to include ecological anxiety, social conflict, historical trauma, and the instability of human existence.

The present research investigates these developments through the aesthetic interpretation of six selected poems by six modern Japanese haiku poets: Uda Kiyoko, Hasegawa Kai, Hoshinaga Fumio, Yagi Mikajo, Tsubouchi Nenten, and Kaneko Tōta. The selection represents different approaches to contemporary poetic expression. Their works provide opportunities to examine the relationship between traditional aesthetic principles and modern literary experimentation. Rather than concentrating on one poet or one dominant poetic technique, the study adopts a comparative perspective to identify the ways in which different poets negotiate the relationship between inherited Japanese aesthetic sensibilities and individual creative practices.

An important distinction must be established between Japanese aesthetic concepts and literary movements. Terms such as wabi, sabi, yūgen, ma, and mono no aware refer to aesthetic or philosophical sensibilities developed through particular historical and cultural traditions. They should not be treated as equivalent to literary movements such as Romanticism, Modernism, or Surrealism. Although these concepts may influence literary composition, they do not constitute mutually exclusive categories or fixed stylistic classifications. Their application to contemporary haiku therefore requires interpretive flexibility. A poem may simultaneously evoke impermanence, mystery, simplicity, and emotional sensitivity without belonging exclusively to one aesthetic category.

The study consequently examines Japanese aesthetics as an interconnected interpretive framework rather than a collection of rigid classifications. It explores how traditional concepts remain relevant when contemporary poets employ unconventional imagery, fragmented expressions, unexpected associations, and altered relationships between human beings and the natural environment. The central argument is that contemporary Japanese haiku does not simply reproduce traditional aesthetic principles. Instead, it reconfigures them through changing forms of perception, experience, and poetic imagination.

The research addresses three principal questions. First, how are traditional Japanese aesthetic principles represented in selected contemporary haiku? Second, how do modern poetic techniques transform or extend the aesthetic possibilities associated with these principles? Third, how do differences in imagery, language, sound, structure, and thematic orientation contribute to the development of individual poetic aesthetics? These questions establish the basis for a comparative investigation of continuity and transformation in modern Japanese haiku.

The article argues that the aesthetic significance of contemporary haiku emerges from the interaction between traditional sensibilities and innovative poetic practices. Its brevity should not be interpreted as a limitation of meaning but as a means of creating interpretive openness. Through carefully selected images, linguistic compression, juxtaposition, and unexpected associations, contemporary haiku generates meanings that extend beyond the literal content of individual words. The study therefore contributes to the understanding of Japanese poetry by demonstrating how inherited aesthetic principles continue to acquire new significance within modern literary expression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of Japanese aesthetics requires an understanding of the historical and philosophical contexts within which particular aesthetic concepts developed. Japanese aesthetic thought cannot be reduced to a single definition of beauty because its major concepts emerged through different artistic practices, philosophical traditions, and literary periods. The relationship between Buddhism, classical poetry, tea culture, theatrical performance, and visual arts contributed to the formation of a distinctive aesthetic vocabulary. Concepts such as wabi, sabi, yūgen, and mono no aware consequently possess complex histories that extend beyond their contemporary use as descriptive terms.

Donald Keene's discussion of Japanese aesthetic principles provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between simplicity, suggestion, irregularity, and impermanence in Japanese artistic traditions. His account identifies recurring aesthetic tendencies that help explain why Japanese artistic expression frequently privileges understatement, incompleteness, and suggestive meaning over explicit elaboration. These qualities are particularly relevant to haiku because the genre often depends upon the reader's ability to interpret relationships that are implied rather than directly explained.

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The concept of mono no aware is especially significant in the interpretation of Japanese poetry. It refers broadly to an emotional sensitivity to the transience of things and the feelings generated by recognising their impermanent existence. The philosophical and literary development of this concept is closely associated with Motoori Norinaga's interpretation of classical Japanese literature, particularly The Tale of Genji. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains that the aesthetic experience of mono no aware emerges through sensitivity to the emotional dimensions of existence and the transitory character of the world. The concept is therefore not simply an expression of sadness but a recognition that the temporary nature of experience contributes to its emotional significance (Muller).

The relationship between wabi and sabi offers another important dimension of Japanese aesthetic thought. Although frequently combined in contemporary discussions, the two concepts possess distinguishable meanings. Wabi is associated with simplicity, restraint, modesty, and the appreciation of beauty beyond material abundance. Sabi is connected with age, solitude, patina, and the beauty acquired through the passage of time. Their combination as wabi-sabi provides a useful interpretive framework for examining aesthetic experiences involving imperfection, incompleteness, and temporal change. However, the concepts should not be applied indiscriminately to every representation of simplicity or natural imagery.

Yūgen introduces the significance of suggestion, mystery, and depth. It refers to an aesthetic experience in which meaning is not exhausted by immediate visual or verbal representation. Instead, the work creates an impression of something extending beyond what is directly expressed. This quality is particularly relevant to haiku because its compressed structure frequently creates an imaginative space between the presented image and the reader's interpretation. The concept of ma, meanwhile, directs attention towards intervals, pauses, spatial relationships, and meaningful absence. In poetic composition, these intervals may emerge through juxtaposition, lineation, punctuation, silence, or the relationship between two apparently unrelated images.

Recent scholarship has also questioned the tendency to present Japanese aesthetics as a fixed collection of uniquely Japanese characteristics. Yuriko Saito's discussion of the moral dimension of Japanese aesthetics highlights the importance of examining aesthetic concepts within their historical and cultural contexts. Her work is particularly relevant because it encourages a more critical approach to the relationship between aesthetic experience, cultural identity, and the social values associated with artistic practices (Saito).

Michiko Okano's examination of wabi-sabi further demonstrates the complexity of the concept and its historical development. Her discussion emphasises the relationship between wabi, sabi, yūgen, and other aesthetic ideas, while questioning simplified interpretations that treat them as stable and universally applicable categories. This perspective is important for the present research because the selected poems demonstrate different forms of poetic experimentation that cannot be adequately explained through one aesthetic principle alone (Okano).

The study of modern Japanese haiku also requires attention to the historical transformation of the genre. Richard Gilbert's research on gendai haiku provides a significant foundation for understanding contemporary Japanese poetic experimentation. His work documents the approaches of poets such as Uda Kiyoko, Hasegawa Kai, Hoshinaga Fumio, Yagi Mikajo, and Tsubouchi Nenten. The archive includes biographies, translations, interviews, and discussions of poetic techniques. Its significance lies in demonstrating that modern haiku accommodates different relationships between language, imagination, cultural memory, and poetic form (Gilbert).

The work of Hoshinaga Fumio is particularly relevant to the present investigation because his poetry demonstrates how seasonal imagery can acquire symbolic and psychological dimensions. Gilbert's discussion of Kumaso-Ha explains that Hoshinaga frequently employs seasonal references through symbolic, psychological, and iconic associations. Consequently, the seasonal image does not function exclusively as a realistic description of the natural environment. It may also activate historical, cultural, and personal meanings (Gilbert, "Hoshinaga Fumio").

Studies of haiku aesthetics have also expanded beyond traditional literary criticism. Hitsuwari and Nomura's research on the aesthetic appreciation of haiku investigates the relationship between imagery, emotional response, and aesthetic evaluation. Their study demonstrates that the vividness of mental imagery and the emotional experience generated by a poem contribute to its aesthetic appreciation. This research provides a useful interdisciplinary perspective, although the present article adopts literary rather than experimental psychological methodology (Hitsuwari and Nomura).

More recent research by Hitsuwari and Nomura examines the role of attitudes towards ambiguity in the appreciation of haiku. This is particularly relevant to the present study because ambiguity is not necessarily a defect or an obstacle to interpretation in poetic language. Rather, it may become an important source of aesthetic engagement. The relationship between ambiguity and interpretation provides a useful basis for examining the poetry of Hasegawa, Hoshinaga, and other experimental poets (Hitsuwari and Nomura).

The scholarship discussed above establishes the importance of Japanese aesthetic concepts, the historical development of modern haiku, and the relationship between poetic imagery and aesthetic experience. However, there remains scope for a comparative literary examination that brings these perspectives together through a small, carefully documented corpus representing six different poetic voices. The present study addresses this area by

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investigating how traditional aesthetic principles are retained, transformed, or challenged in selected contemporary haiku.

Theoretical Framework: Japanese Aesthetic Principles

The theoretical framework of this research is based on five interconnected Japanese aesthetic concepts: wabi-sabi, yūgen, ma, mono no aware, and kigo. These concepts are employed as interpretive approaches rather than rigid theoretical categories. Their application allows the study to investigate how contemporary haiku creates aesthetic meaning through imagery, language, silence, temporality, and the relationship between human beings and nature.

Wabi-Sabi: Simplicity, Imperfection, And The Beauty Of Transience

The concept of wabi-sabi is frequently used to explain the appreciation of simplicity, irregularity, incompleteness, and the passage of time in Japanese artistic traditions. Although wabi and sabi have distinct historical meanings, their combined interpretation has become influential in discussions of Japanese aesthetics. Wabi emphasises modesty, restraint, and freedom from excessive material elaboration, whereas sabi suggests the beauty associated with age, solitude, and the marks of time.

In literary expression, these qualities may be communicated through ordinary objects, incomplete images, natural processes, and apparently insignificant experiences. The aesthetic value of an object does not necessarily depend upon its perfection or visual attractiveness. Rather, it may emerge from its vulnerability, temporary existence, or relationship with the surrounding environment. In haiku, such an aesthetic can be produced through the presentation of a single natural image without extensive explanation.

The present study employs wabi-sabi to investigate how selected poets represent ordinary experiences and natural phenomena through restrained yet suggestive language. It also examines whether contemporary poetic experimentation extends the traditional appreciation of simplicity by introducing unusual images and unconventional associations.

Yūgen: Mystery, Suggestion, And Imaginative Depth

Yūgen refers to an aesthetic quality associated with mystery, depth, and suggestiveness. It describes an experience in which the significance of an artistic expression extends beyond its immediately visible or verbal content. The concept is particularly relevant to haiku because the form frequently depends upon omission and interpretive participation.

A poem may present two images without explaining their relationship. The reader must establish the connection through imagination, cultural knowledge, and emotional perception. Such an arrangement creates a space between the expressed and the unexpressed. The aesthetic experience consequently develops through the reader's awareness of meanings that remain partially concealed.

In contemporary haiku, yūgen may emerge through surreal imagery, unexpected juxtapositions, symbolic objects, and incomplete narrative situations. The present study investigates whether such techniques retain the suggestive qualities of traditional Japanese poetry while introducing new forms of ambiguity.

Ma: Silence, Interval, And The Aesthetics Of Absence

The concept of ma is associated with the meaningful interval between objects, events, sounds, and experiences. It is not simply an empty physical space but a relationship through which absence becomes significant. In artistic expression, ma may be communicated through pauses, spatial arrangements, silence, interruptions, and the distance between apparently unrelated elements.

In haiku, the significance of ma is closely connected with juxtaposition and kire, the cutting or division that creates a perceptual and interpretive interval. The relationship between two images may become more meaningful because the poet does not explicitly explain their connection. The reader encounters a gap that must be negotiated through interpretation.

Hasegawa Kai's discussion of kire and ma is particularly important for this investigation. His reflections on poetic cutting demonstrate that the interval created by a haiku can extend beyond its visible structure into psychological and imaginative space (Gilbert, "Hasegawa Kai"). The present study therefore examines ma as a principle of compositional and interpretive significance rather than merely a pause in poetic rhythm.

Mono no aware: Impermanence and Emotional Sensitivity

Mono no aware is one of the most important concepts for understanding the relationship between beauty and temporality in Japanese literature. It refers to the emotional awareness generated by recognising the temporary nature of existence. The passing of seasons, disappearance of natural objects, ageing, mortality, and the transformation of familiar experiences may all generate this aesthetic response.

The concept should not be reduced to sadness or nostalgia. Its significance lies in the recognition that the temporary nature of existence intensifies the emotional value of experience. A flower becomes meaningful not simply because of its appearance but also because its beauty cannot remain permanent. Similarly, an ordinary

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natural object may acquire philosophical significance when the reader recognises its vulnerability to time.
In the selected poems, the study investigates how death, disappearing images, historical memory, and the transformation of natural phenomena create an awareness of impermanence. It also considers whether contemporary haiku transforms this traditional sensitivity through irony, experimentation, and social consciousness.

Kigo: Seasonality And Cultural Meaning

Kigo, or seasonal reference, occupies an important position in the history of Japanese haiku. A seasonal word connects a poem with a particular period of the year and activates cultural associations accumulated through literary tradition. It may refer to plants, animals, weather conditions, festivals, agricultural practices, or seasonal activities.
However, the significance of kigo extends beyond the identification of a season. A seasonal reference may establish emotional atmosphere, cultural memory, temporal movement, or symbolic meaning. In contemporary haiku, the traditional seasonal framework may be retained while its interpretive possibilities are extended.
The study therefore examines seasonal imagery as a cultural and aesthetic resource. It also considers the relationship between kigo and mukigo, or haiku without an explicit seasonal word, because modern poetic experimentation does not always conform to conventional seasonal organisation.
Taken together, these five concepts provide an interpretive framework for investigating the aesthetic possibilities of contemporary Japanese haiku. They are not treated as independent or mutually exclusive classifications. Rather, they provide overlapping perspectives through which the relationship between poetic form, imagery, cultural memory, and philosophical meaning can be examined.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research adopts a qualitative literary research methodology based on close textual analysis and comparative aesthetic interpretation. Since the primary objective is to investigate the representation and transformation of Japanese aesthetic principles in contemporary haiku, a qualitative approach is more appropriate than a quantitative examination of linguistic frequency or metrical patterns alone. The research focuses on the interpretive significance of poetic language, imagery, symbolism, juxtaposition, sound, and structural organisation.
The primary corpus consists of six Japanese haiku, with one poem selected from each of six poets: Uda Kiyoko, Hasegawa Kai, Hoshinaga Fumio, Yagi Mikajo, Tsubouchi Nenten, and Kaneko Tōta. The selection is purposive rather than random. Each poem has been selected because it offers an identifiable opportunity to examine the relationship between traditional Japanese aesthetic sensibilities and modern poetic expression. The poets represent different approaches to modern haiku, including ecological consciousness, philosophical reflection, historical memory, avant-garde experimentation, linguistic play, and surreal imagery.
The primary texts are examined in their original Japanese forms alongside published English translations. The Japanese originals are particularly important because certain aesthetic effects may depend upon lexical ambiguity, sound associations, cultural references, seasonal vocabulary, and grammatical structures that cannot be fully reproduced in English. The English translations are used as interpretive resources rather than as exact substitutes for the original poems.
The research follows three stages of analysis. The first stage involves identifying the dominant images, lexical choices, seasonal references, structural features, and thematic concerns of each poem. The second stage examines these elements through the selected Japanese aesthetic concepts. The third stage compares the poems to identify similarities, differences, and transformations in their aesthetic orientations.
The study employs an interpretive rather than a prescriptive approach. It does not assume that every poem must demonstrate all five aesthetic principles. Instead, the concepts are applied wherever textual evidence supports their relevance. For example, a poem involving death and the disappearance of a natural object may be examined through mono no aware, while a poem based on unexpected juxtaposition may be investigated through yūgen and ma. A poem employing unusual linguistic constructions may require attention to aesthetic qualities beyond the traditional framework.
The research also recognises the limitations of translation. Japanese haiku depends upon a complex relationship between moraic rhythm, sound, grammatical particles, seasonal associations, and poetic cutting. English translations frequently employ syllabic rhythm, punctuation, line breaks, and syntactic restructuring to approximate these effects. Consequently, the study does not evaluate translated haiku according to mechanical correspondence with the Japanese five-seven-five pattern. Instead, it considers functional and interpretive equivalence.
The research is based on published literary sources, scholarly studies, archival translations, and critical commentaries. It does not involve interviews, questionnaires, experimental testing, or statistical sampling. Its findings are therefore interpretive and corpus-specific. The article does not claim to represent the entire body of

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contemporary Japanese haiku. Rather, it offers a comparative investigation of six selected poems and identifies broader aesthetic tendencies that may be examined in subsequent research.

Selection of Primary Texts and Analytical Scope

The selection of six poets is intended to establish a comparative framework without sacrificing the depth of textual interpretation. Uda Kiyoko's poetry provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between natural imagery, mortality, and ecological awareness. Hasegawa Kai's work is relevant to philosophical perception and the significance of ma and kire. Hoshinaga Fumio introduces historical consciousness, symbolic seasonal imagery, and the relationship between personal memory and collective experience.

Yagi Mikajo represents an important dimension of postwar avant-garde haiku. Her poetry challenges conventional expectations through bodily imagery, unusual associations, and experimental language. Tsubouchi Nenten's work introduces humour, linguistic play, sound, and unconventional representations of natural phenomena. Kaneko Tōta, meanwhile, demonstrates how modern haiku can employ surrealistic imagery to reconsider the relationship between nature, imagination, and ordinary experience.

The selection does not suggest that these poets represent a single unified movement or that their aesthetic approaches are identical. Their differences are central to the comparative purpose of the research. The study investigates how individual poetic practices negotiate traditional Japanese aesthetics rather than assuming that contemporary haiku possesses one uniform aesthetic identity.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Uda Kiyoko: Mortality, Natural Imagery, and Mono no Aware

Uda Kiyoko's selected haiku begins with the Japanese expression Mugi yo shi wa ki isshoku to omoikomu. Richard Gilbert and Itō Yūki translate the poem as an observation of wheat and the realisation of death as a single golden colour. The poem establishes a relationship between an agricultural image and the philosophical awareness of mortality.

The reference to wheat is significant because it introduces an ordinary natural object associated with agricultural life, seasonal change, nourishment, and human dependence upon the environment. Wheat is not presented merely as a decorative element of the natural world. It becomes the central image through which the speaker approaches the abstract idea of death. The association of death with gold creates an unexpected transformation of perception. Gold generally suggests richness, value, brightness, and visual intensity, whereas death is conventionally associated with absence, loss, and disappearance. By connecting these apparently contrasting associations, the poem creates an aesthetic tension between material visibility and existential impermanence.

The poem can be interpreted through the concept of mono no aware because it establishes an awareness of mortality through an ordinary natural image. The recognition of death is not presented through an elaborate philosophical explanation. Instead, it emerges through the speaker's perception of wheat and its golden appearance. The image suggests that mortality is inseparable from the processes of natural existence.

The relationship between agricultural imagery and human consciousness also introduces an ecological dimension. Wheat is connected with cycles of growth, harvesting, consumption, and renewal. Human life similarly exists within temporal processes that cannot be permanently controlled. The poem consequently establishes a relationship between human mortality and the natural environment.

The concept of wabi-sabi may also be relevant to the poem because its aesthetic force emerges from an apparently ordinary object rather than an extraordinary spectacle. The wheat becomes meaningful through the intensity of observation. The poem does not depend upon elaborate description or rhetorical ornamentation. Its economy of language allows a single image to generate philosophical associations.

The use of colour is especially significant. Gold is not simply an objective description of wheat but a symbolic element through which the speaker interprets death. The colour creates a visual bridge between the natural world and human consciousness. The reader is encouraged to consider whether death should be understood exclusively as disappearance or whether it also belongs to the continuous transformations of nature.

The poem therefore demonstrates how contemporary Japanese haiku can retain traditional sensitivity towards impermanence while employing a distinctive symbolic relationship between colour, nature, and mortality. Its aesthetic achievement lies in transforming an ordinary agricultural image into a philosophical reflection without abandoning the concision of haiku.

The poem also raises an important question concerning the relationship between simplicity and complexity. Its language appears direct, yet the relationship between wheat, gold, and death produces multiple interpretive possibilities. This quality supports the argument that poetic brevity does not necessarily produce semantic simplicity. Rather, the concentration of meaning within a limited verbal structure may increase the interpretive possibilities of a poem.

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Hasegawa Kai: Philosophical Perception, Paradox, and Ma

Hasegawa Kai's selected haiku begins with the line Haru no mizu towa nurete iru mizu no koto, translated by Richard Gilbert and Itō Yūki through the paradoxical relationship between spring water and the condition of being wet. The poem appears to offer a simple statement about water, yet its conceptual structure challenges ordinary assumptions about perception and physical experience.

Water is commonly understood as a substance that makes other objects wet. The poem, however, directs attention towards the apparent impossibility of water itself becoming wet. Hasegawa's accompanying commentary explains this paradox by suggesting that although water wets other things, it cannot ordinarily be understood as becoming wet in the same way. The spring water nevertheless produces an unusual imaginative perception.

The poem's philosophical significance emerges through the transformation of an ordinary natural phenomenon into a question of perception. Instead of presenting spring as a decorative season associated with flowers or pleasant weather, the poet concentrates on the conceptual identity of water. The image becomes an occasion for reconsidering the relationship between an object and its qualities.

This approach can be associated with yūgen because the poem's meaning is not exhausted by its literal statement. The apparent paradox encourages the reader to move beyond ordinary physical definitions and consider the possibilities of imaginative perception. The poem does not provide a complete philosophical explanation. Its significance develops through the tension between what is logically understood and what is imaginatively experienced.

The concept of ma is also relevant because the poem creates an interval between the ordinary meaning of water and the unexpected perception introduced by the poet. The reader must negotiate the conceptual distance between the two. The poem does not explicitly explain every stage of this movement. Instead, its aesthetic effect emerges through the interpretive space created by the paradox.

The seasonal reference to spring is equally important. Spring is conventionally associated with renewal, growth, and the reappearance of natural vitality. In this poem, however, the season is connected with a philosophical reconsideration of a familiar substance. The seasonal image therefore becomes a means of generating intellectual rather than merely descriptive experience.

Hasegawa's approach also demonstrates that contemporary haiku need not depend upon a conventional emotional response to nature. The natural environment can become a site of conceptual inquiry. Water is not simply observed; its identity is questioned. This shift from description to reflection expands the possibilities of the haiku form.

The poem consequently illustrates how traditional Japanese aesthetic principles may be extended through philosophical experimentation. Its simplicity is not equivalent to the absence of intellectual complexity. Rather, the limited verbal structure creates a space in which ordinary perception can be reconsidered. The aesthetic experience emerges from the interaction between natural imagery, paradox, and interpretive participation.

Hoshinaga Fumio: Historical Memory, Ambiguity, and Yūgen

Hoshinaga Fumio's selected haiku begins with the expression Nigemizu e sengo no chichi wo oitsumeru. In the English translation provided by Richard Gilbert, the poem presents an image of postwar fathers pursuing a mirage of water. The poem is particularly significant because it combines a seasonal image with historical and psychological associations.

The Japanese term nigemizu refers to a mirage-like appearance of water, generally associated with the visual effects of heat. The image is deceptive because it appears to offer the presence of water while remaining inaccessible. The poem connects this image with the expression sengo no chichi, referring to postwar fathers. The resulting association introduces a historical dimension that extends beyond the immediate natural phenomenon.

The mirage becomes a symbolic representation of something that appears attainable but remains beyond reach. The reference to postwar fathers may evoke a generation shaped by the historical consequences of war, social disruption, and the difficult process of reconstructing personal and collective identities. The image therefore creates a relationship between environmental perception and historical memory.

The poem's aesthetic complexity emerges through the juxtaposition of the mirage and the postwar generation. The reader is not provided with a complete narrative explaining the identity of the fathers, their circumstances, or the precise meaning of their pursuit. Instead, the poem creates an interpretive situation in which the historical and psychological dimensions remain partially concealed.

This quality can be examined through yūgen. The poem suggests a deeper historical experience without converting it into an explicit narrative. The mirage operates simultaneously as a natural phenomenon and a symbolic representation of unattainable expectations. The relationship between the two images creates a sense of mystery that invites interpretive participation.

The concept of mono no aware may also be relevant because the poem evokes a sense of historical loss and the passage of time. The postwar generation is represented through an image of pursuit, suggesting the continuing presence of experiences that cannot be recovered completely. The past remains significant, but its recovery is

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complicated by historical distance.
Hoshinaga's treatment of kigo is particularly important. Gilbert observes that his seasonal references frequently acquire symbolic and psychological dimensions rather than functioning exclusively as realistic descriptions of nature. The seasonal image may therefore operate simultaneously at the literal, cultural, and psychological levels. The poem also demonstrates the capacity of haiku to incorporate historical consciousness without abandoning its compressed structure. Its language does not reproduce the extended narrative techniques of historical fiction. Instead, a small number of images establish a relationship between nature, memory, and collective experience.
Hoshinaga's poem consequently extends the aesthetic possibilities of traditional Japanese haiku. The natural world becomes a medium through which historical experience is expressed. Its suggestive structure preserves interpretive openness while demonstrating that contemporary haiku can engage with complex social and historical realities.

Yagi Mikajo: Avant-Garde Imagery, the Human Body, and Aesthetic Transformation
Yagi Mikajo's selected haiku is particularly significant because of its experimental treatment of natural and bodily imagery. The poem begins with Mankai no mori no inbu no era kokyû, translated as an image of full bloom, the forest's genitals, and the respiration of gills.
The poem departs from conventional expectations of natural description. A forest in full bloom may ordinarily suggest visual beauty, fertility, and seasonal renewal. However, Yagi introduces the image of bodily anatomy through the expression referring to the forest's genitals. The subsequent reference to gill respiration further complicates the relationship between human and natural bodies.
The image challenges the conventional separation between the natural environment and human physical existence. The forest is imagined through bodily language, while respiration introduces an association with aquatic life. Consequently, the poem constructs an unusual relationship between botanical growth, sexuality, and biological processes.
The aesthetic significance of the poem lies partly in its refusal to reproduce an idealised representation of nature. Rather than presenting the forest as an attractive visual landscape, the poet introduces a bodily and potentially disturbing image. The natural environment becomes an active and organic presence rather than a passive object of observation.
Yagi's poetry is associated with the postwar avant-garde development of Japanese haiku. Her literary practice demonstrates a willingness to challenge conventional poetic expectations through experimental imagery and unusual representations of human experience. Richard Gilbert's archival commentary identifies her work with the development of avant-garde haiku and emphasises its bold treatment of human existence, gender, and poetic expression.
The concept of wabi-sabi may initially appear less relevant to this poem because its imagery is neither conventionally restrained nor visually delicate. Nevertheless, the poem can be examined in relation to the broader aesthetic significance of imperfection, organic existence, and the rejection of idealised beauty. Its representation of nature does not depend upon decorative perfection. Instead, it emphasises the physical and biological dimensions of existence.
The relationship between the forest and the human body also invites an ecological interpretation. The poem suggests that the natural environment and human physicality cannot be understood as completely separate domains. The body becomes a means of imagining the forest, while the forest becomes an extension of biological experience.
The poem also challenges the assumption that traditional Japanese aesthetics necessarily require harmonious or peaceful representations of nature. Its imagery is deliberately provocative and unconventional. Yet the relationship between living organisms, physical processes, and natural growth remains central to its aesthetic structure.
The concept of yūgen may be considered through the unusual associations generated by the poem. Its images are not connected through an explicit explanatory statement. The reader must establish the relationship between the forest, bodily anatomy, and respiration. This interpretive uncertainty creates a form of imaginative depth.
Yagi's poem therefore demonstrates that the aesthetic development of contemporary Japanese haiku cannot be understood exclusively through continuity with classical poetic conventions. Its significance also lies in the transformation of inherited aesthetic possibilities through avant-garde experimentation, bodily imagery, and unconventional representations of nature.

Tsubouchi Nenten: Linguistic Play, Sound, and the Aesthetics of Ordinary Experience
Tsubouchi Nenten's selected haiku begins with Sangatsu no amanattô no ufufufufu, translated through the image of March, the Japanese confectionery amanattō, and the repeated sound of laughter.
The poem is particularly interesting because its aesthetic force emerges from linguistic play rather than from an elaborate description of nature. The reference to March establishes a seasonal context, while amanattō introduces an ordinary cultural object associated with Japanese food traditions. The repeated expression ufufufufu produces

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a playful auditory effect that transforms the presentation of the confectionery into an imaginative experience.
The poem demonstrates that sound can become an independent source of aesthetic meaning. The repeated syllables do not simply communicate an abstract idea of happiness. They create a particular rhythm and suggest an atmosphere of amusement, social interaction, and ordinary pleasure.
The seasonal reference to March is also culturally significant. As explained in the archival commentary, March represents the end of the business year and is associated with meetings, departures, and transitions. The confectionery and the sound of laughter consequently acquire associations that extend beyond their literal meanings.
The poem can be interpreted through wabi-sabi because it draws aesthetic significance from an ordinary object rather than from an extraordinary natural spectacle. Its central image is a familiar confectionery item. The poet does not transform it into an elaborate symbolic object through extensive description. Instead, the relationship between food, season, and sound creates an understated yet distinctive poetic experience.
However, the poem also challenges the expectation that haiku must necessarily communicate seriousness, silence, or melancholy. Its playful sound structure demonstrates that Japanese aesthetic experience can include humour and linguistic experimentation.
The concept of ma may be considered through the relationship between the verbal components of the poem. The seasonal reference, the name of the food, and the repeated laughter are placed together without an elaborate explanation of their relationship. The reader participates in constructing the connection between them. The poem's interpretive space emerges from this juxtaposition.
The repeated sound also creates a relationship between language and performance. Its meaning depends not exclusively on dictionary definitions but also on the way it is pronounced and experienced. The auditory quality of the expression becomes central to the poem's aesthetic identity.
Translation presents a particular challenge in this context. The expression ufufufufu possesses cultural and phonetic associations that cannot be reproduced mechanically in English. Gilbert and Itō's commentary explains that the expression suggests a restrained, feminine form of laughter and may evoke a group of older women sharing confectionery. The translation therefore requires cultural interpretation rather than simple lexical substitution.
Tsubouchi's approach demonstrates that contemporary haiku can reconsider the relationship between poetic meaning and linguistic form. Sound, humour, cultural reference, and everyday experience become central elements of aesthetic expression. His poem expands the interpretive possibilities of Japanese aesthetics by demonstrating that poetic significance can emerge from ordinary language and playful auditory construction.

Kaneko Tōta: Surreal Imagery, Nature, and Ecological Imagination

Kaneko Tōta's selected haiku begins with Ume saite niwajû ni aozame ga kite iru. The poem presents the unexpected image of blue sharks appearing throughout a garden while plum blossoms are in bloom.
The juxtaposition of plum blossoms and blue sharks produces a striking departure from ordinary natural perception. Plum blossoms are associated with seasonal renewal, cultural memory, and the arrival of spring. Blue sharks, by contrast, belong to a marine environment and are not ordinarily associated with gardens. Their unexpected appearance disrupts the reader's conventional understanding of physical space.
The poem therefore constructs a surreal image through the combination of two apparently incompatible natural elements. The garden becomes an imaginative environment in which the boundaries between terrestrial and aquatic worlds are temporarily displaced.
The aesthetic force of the poem emerges from this unusual juxtaposition. Rather than explaining how the sharks arrive in the garden, the poet presents their presence as an apparently accepted fact. The reader must negotiate the relationship between the seasonal image and the impossible appearance of marine creatures.
The poem can be interpreted through yūgen because its imagery creates possibilities that remain unexplained. The sharks may suggest danger, disturbance, ecological transformation, or the unexpected presence of forces beyond ordinary human perception. However, the poem does not establish one definitive symbolic interpretation.
The relationship between the two images also produces an important form of ma. The conceptual distance between the plum blossoms and the sharks becomes the central source of aesthetic energy. The reader must mentally connect the garden and the sea without receiving an explicit explanation.
The poem's treatment of nature also invites an ecological reading. The appearance of marine life in a garden disrupts conventional distinctions between different environments. Although the image is surreal, it encourages reconsideration of the relationship between natural spaces and human imagination.
Kaneko's poetry is particularly important to the development of modern Japanese haiku because of its engagement with living beings, natural experience, and the possibilities of poetic language. His work is represented in the substantial English-language collection Haiku As Life, which includes selected poems, commentary, essays, and an interview with the poet (Kaneko et al.).
The poem can also be considered in relation to mono no aware, although this is not its most immediately apparent

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aesthetic feature. The plum blossoms introduce a seasonal context associated with temporary beauty, while the sharks disrupt the expected visual and emotional atmosphere. The result is an image in which natural beauty and unexpected disturbance coexist.

Kaneko's poem demonstrates that contemporary Japanese haiku may retain seasonal imagery while radically transforming its conventional function. The seasonal reference does not simply establish a harmonious relationship between the poet and nature. Instead, it becomes part of an imaginative construction that questions the boundaries of ordinary perception.

The poem's aesthetic achievement lies in its ability to combine simplicity with imaginative disruption. Its limited verbal structure generates a complex visual situation, demonstrating that poetic compression can produce unexpected and expansive meanings.

Comparative Discussion: Continuity and Transformation in Japanese Aesthetics

The analysis of the six selected poems demonstrates that contemporary Japanese haiku cannot be understood through a single aesthetic principle. Although the poems engage with traditional Japanese sensibilities, their approaches to imagery, language, and philosophical expression differ considerably. The comparative examination reveals both continuity and transformation in the relationship between traditional aesthetics and modern poetic practices.

The first important area of comparison concerns the relationship between nature and human existence. Uda Kiyoko uses wheat as a means of contemplating mortality, while Hasegawa Kai transforms spring water into an occasion for philosophical reflection. Hoshinaga Fumio connects a natural phenomenon with historical memory, and Yagi Mikajo uses bodily imagery to reconsider the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Tsubouchi Nenten introduces an ordinary cultural object through sound and humour, whereas Kaneko Tōta employs surreal imagery to disrupt conventional distinctions between natural spaces.

These differences demonstrate that nature does not function merely as a decorative subject in contemporary haiku. It becomes a medium through which questions of identity, mortality, memory, perception, and cultural experience are explored. The natural environment may be represented through direct observation, symbolic association, philosophical paradox, or imaginative transformation.

The second area of comparison concerns the representation of impermanence. Uda's poem provides the clearest example through its relationship between wheat and death. The association between natural growth and mortality suggests that human existence remains inseparable from processes of change. Hoshinaga's poem similarly evokes the passage of time through its reference to postwar experience and the pursuit of a mirage. Tsubouchi's seasonal reference to March introduces the significance of transition and departure, while Kaneko's plum blossoms evoke the temporary character of seasonal beauty.

However, the selected poems also demonstrate that impermanence need not always be expressed through melancholy or nostalgia. It may emerge through humour, unexpected imagery, historical memory, and the recognition that familiar objects are subject to continuous transformation.

The third area concerns the significance of silence and interpretive openness. Hasegawa's paradoxical treatment of water creates a gap between ordinary perception and imaginative understanding. Hoshinaga's symbolic association between the mirage and postwar fathers leaves important aspects of the historical experience unstated. Kaneko's juxtaposition of plum blossoms and sharks similarly depends upon the reader's ability to establish a relationship between incompatible images.

These examples demonstrate the significance of ma and yūgen in modern poetic expression. The reader is not simply a recipient of a completed meaning. Rather, the reader becomes an active participant in the construction of poetic significance. The spaces created through omission, juxtaposition, and ambiguity become essential components of the aesthetic experience.

The fourth area of comparison concerns linguistic experimentation. Yagi Mikajo and Tsubouchi Nenten demonstrate particularly distinctive approaches to language. Yagi employs unconventional bodily and natural imagery to challenge established poetic expectations. Tsubouchi uses sound, humour, and linguistic play to transform an ordinary cultural object into a distinctive poetic experience.

Kaneko Tōta also demonstrates linguistic and imaginative experimentation through the unexpected association of marine and terrestrial imagery. Hoshinaga's symbolic seasonal references further demonstrate that conventional poetic vocabulary can acquire additional meanings when placed within historical and psychological contexts.

These developments indicate that the aesthetic identity of contemporary Japanese haiku is not determined exclusively by the preservation of traditional imagery. It also depends upon the poet's ability to transform familiar linguistic and cultural resources into new forms of expression.

The fifth area concerns the relationship between tradition and innovation. The selected poems do not represent a complete rejection of classical Japanese aesthetics. Instead, they demonstrate different forms of negotiation with inherited poetic principles. Traditional seasonal references, sensitivity to impermanence, and the significance of suggestion remain relevant, but their literary functions change according to the individual poet's approach.

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The findings therefore suggest that contemporary Japanese haiku operates through a dynamic relationship between aesthetic continuity and creative transformation. Traditional principles remain valuable not because they impose fixed rules upon modern poetry but because they provide interpretive resources through which new experiences can be articulated.

FINDINGS

The comparative analysis of the six selected haiku establishes several important findings concerning the relationship between traditional Japanese aesthetics and contemporary poetic expression.

The first finding is that mono no aware remains an important aesthetic principle in modern Japanese haiku. Uda Kiyoko's representation of wheat and mortality demonstrates how an ordinary natural image can communicate the temporary character of existence. The relationship between seasonal transformation and human mortality also appears in the poetry of Hoshinaga Fumio and Kaneko Tōta, although their approaches differ in terms of imagery and thematic emphasis.

The second finding concerns the transformation of yūgen through contemporary poetic experimentation. Hasegawa Kai, Hoshinaga Fumio, and Kaneko Tōta employ paradoxical, symbolic, and unconventional images that encourage interpretation beyond literal meaning. Their poems demonstrate that mystery and suggestiveness are not restricted to traditional representations of nature but may also emerge through intellectual and imaginative disruption.

The third finding is that ma operates as an important compositional and interpretive principle. The juxtaposition of apparently unrelated images creates spaces in which the reader participates in the construction of meaning. Hasegawa's philosophical paradox and Kaneko's surrealistic imagery particularly demonstrate the significance of these interpretive intervals.

The fourth finding concerns the relationship between simplicity and experimentation. Tsubouchi Nenten's linguistic play and Yagi Mikajo's avant-garde imagery demonstrate that modern Japanese haiku does not necessarily equate aesthetic simplicity with conventional subject matter or restrained visual representation. Linguistic innovation, humour, and unconventional imagery can also produce distinctive aesthetic experiences.

The fifth finding is that seasonal imagery continues to contribute to the construction of poetic meaning, although its function is not always descriptive. Hoshinaga's treatment of seasonal references demonstrates how kigo may acquire historical and psychological associations. Similarly, Tsubouchi's March imagery activates cultural meanings associated with transition and departure.

The sixth finding is that the relationship between traditional aesthetics and modern poetic expression is better understood through transformation than through simple preservation. Contemporary poets retain selected elements of Japanese aesthetic thought while adapting them to new experiences, forms of perception, and linguistic practices.

Overall, the research identifies three interconnected processes: the continuation of traditional aesthetic sensibilities, their reinterpretation through modern experience, and their transformation through individual poetic experimentation. These processes demonstrate the continuing relevance of Japanese aesthetic thought in contemporary haiku.

CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the representation and transformation of traditional Japanese aesthetic principles in contemporary haiku through six selected poems by Uda Kiyoko, Hasegawa Kai, Hoshinaga Fumio, Yagi Mikajo, Tsubouchi Nenten, and Kaneko Tōta. By employing close textual analysis and comparative aesthetic interpretation, the research has investigated how concepts such as wabi-sabi, yūgen, ma, mono no aware, and kigo contribute to the construction of poetic meaning in modern Japanese literature.

The analysis demonstrates that traditional Japanese aesthetic principles continue to provide significant interpretive possibilities for understanding contemporary haiku. However, their presence should not be understood as the mechanical reproduction of inherited conventions. Rather, contemporary poets reinterpret these principles through changing relationships between nature, human consciousness, historical experience, and linguistic expression.

Uda Kiyoko's poetry demonstrates how ordinary natural imagery can become a medium for contemplating mortality. Hasegawa Kai transforms natural observation into philosophical reflection through paradox and interpretive openness. Hoshinaga Fumio connects seasonal imagery with historical memory and psychological experience. Yagi Mikajo challenges conventional representations of nature through avant-garde and bodily imagery. Tsubouchi Nenten expands the possibilities of poetic expression through humour, sound, and linguistic experimentation. Kaneko Tōta demonstrates how surreal imagery can transform ordinary natural references into unexpected imaginative experiences.

These differences establish that contemporary Japanese haiku does not possess a uniform aesthetic identity. Its development depends upon the interaction of individual poetic practices, cultural traditions, and changing modes of perception. The selected poems demonstrate that simplicity may coexist with complexity, natural imagery with

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historical consciousness, and traditional seasonal references with experimental poetic structures.

An important conclusion of the research concerns the relationship between poetic brevity and interpretive depth. The limited verbal structure of haiku does not restrict its philosophical or aesthetic possibilities. On the contrary, compression encourages the concentration of meaning and creates interpretive spaces in which the reader actively participates. The relationship between what is expressed and what remains unstated becomes a significant source of poetic experience.

The study also highlights the importance of considering the original Japanese language when interpreting translated haiku. Differences in moraic rhythm, sound, seasonal vocabulary, cultural associations, and syntactic structure may influence the aesthetic experience of English translations. Therefore, comparative interpretation should recognise translation as an act of aesthetic mediation rather than assume complete equivalence between the original and translated texts.

The research contributes to contemporary literary studies by bringing traditional Japanese aesthetic concepts into dialogue with modern poetic experimentation. It demonstrates that the study of Japanese haiku requires attention not only to formal structure and thematic content but also to the philosophical and cultural dimensions of poetic expression.

The scope of the present study is limited to six selected poems and does not claim to represent the entire diversity of contemporary Japanese haiku. Further research may examine a larger corpus, investigate the changing role of kigo, or explore the transformation of Japanese aesthetic principles through English translations. Comparative research involving Japanese and other short poetic traditions may also provide additional perspectives on the relationship between poetic compression, silence, and aesthetic experience.

Ultimately, contemporary Japanese haiku demonstrates that literary tradition remains dynamic through reinterpretation. Its aesthetic significance emerges not simply from the preservation of established principles but from their capacity to accommodate new experiences and imaginative possibilities. The relationship between tradition and innovation therefore constitutes one of the defining characteristics of the continuing development of Japanese haiku.

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