Haiku in English and Haiku in Japanese: A Conversation with Kimiko Horne

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Kimiko Horne is a poet, educator, artist, and dancer. She was born in Japan, and moved to the United Kingdom as an adult. After four years there, she moved to Canada in 1964 and currently resides in St. Catharines, Ontario. She has been writing haiku in Japanese and English for over 40 years, and published her first book in 2010: *in the mist* (Haunted Press). It featured 150 haiku appearing in both English and Japanese, accompanied by 44 sumi-e paintings by 10 artists (1). Here is the title haiku:

homeland
now for visits only
in the mist

In 2013, she was awarded best poet of the year in the category of the experienced poets of Kaitei haiku group (2). Also that year, she received First Prize in the Betty Drevniok Award Contest which was judged by Dorothy Howard:

the soft snow falls
on the hill, on my roof and
on the homeless

As an educator, Kimiko taught Japanese Language at Niagara College and Brock University, and also did research at the Brock Centre for Canada and Asia Pacific Studies (3). For many years, she gave readings and workshops in the Greater Toronto Area. At the Burlington Library, she gave workshops and would leave the haiku on display after the event. In March 2021, she gave an

online presentation to the Ontario Region of Haiku Canada, and this video is still available (see note 2). In her talk, she noted: “There is a Japanese saying that ‘heart and eyes are one.’ It is understood that turning what is experienced into concrete words, is reinforced by the poet’s subjectivity. In other words: look at the object, take one step back and look for the life in the object—its feeling.”

Kimiko is a sumi-e artist, and for 60 years has also enjoyed making Japanese eggshell dolls. She says that her dolls “represent the characters of Japan, such as Geisha dancer, Samurai, Summer Festival dancer, Babysitter girl, and Aukido player. The range covers Japanese history, fairytale, Kabuki characters, some professionals etc. of my favourite, and I design the costumes and handmake the accessories.” Proceeds from the sale of the dolls support the Dyslexia Association of Ontario.

Last but not least, she has a passion for Scottish Country Dancing, and still attends one or two sessions each week. For over 66 years, she has travelled all over the world to attend their events (4). In July 2025, she received the honour of having one of her dances, *Merry Mayhem*, published by the Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society, Scotland. A video of the dance performed by members of the St. Catharines Branch is available online (5).

I first met Kimiko at a Haiku Canada conference. I was moved by her haiku in the 2024 Haiku Canada Anthology, and we exchanged emails over the summer.

> the age that begins
> to see the invisible:
> winter berries

I wanted to learn more about her perspective on the similarities and differences in writing haiku in Japanese and English, so I invited her for an interview. I am glad that she agreed, as our July 2025 conversation was enjoyable and enlightening.

How did you find your way to haiku?

The way I got in was late. I knew what haiku was, because I studied it. When I turned 50—that's rather late in my life—I moved to Toronto from Northern Ontario for a job teaching Japanese Language.

In Japan, there were a lot of magazines for women. In a monthly magazine, they were looking for haiku submissions. I said "I've never done a haiku before," but I knew about haiku. So, I submitted one of my haiku, and surprisingly my haiku was the top selection. The judge was one of the haiku masters in Japan: Tohta Kaneko, the president of the Modern Haiku Association. His comment was that my haiku was quite unique for Japanese haiku. He also suggested that I join his haiku group, Kaitei Group. It was a quite modern haiku group. That was my beginning.

There were two Japanese-Canadian haiku groups in Toronto. But instead of joining these groups, I searched and found Haiku Canada in 1980. I don't remember how I found them, but this was before online searches were available. I joined Haiku Canada and was really interested. Then a few years later, I joined a Japanese-Canadian haiku group.

I just happened to send one of my Japanese haiku, and that's how it started.

You write haiku in both English and Japanese. From your experience, what is the same and what is different?

To start with, Mr. Kaneko pointed out, "it was quite unique as a Japanese in what you composed." That means that probably my thinking was not the Japanese way of looking at the poetry. I thought maybe it was because I already lived so many years overseas (20 some years), that probably my thinking is different. So, the way between language and my real thinking is already not purely Japanese.

To explain what is the same and what is different would probably take a whole day workshop for everybody. Everyone has their own opinion.

What is the same is that haiku is the shortest poem known.

What is different is not only vocabulary to vocabulary—it is based on life, culture, and a way of thinking. Behind the language (the vocabulary), the culture and thinking are different. I had many occasions in the past to discuss this matter with other Haiku Canada members and the English-language haiku poets, but the deeper discussion never took place. So, I would like to share more about that.

One of the most significant elements of the Japanese haiku is Rhythm. There are 17 *onji* (phonetic units) in haiku, and each *onji* has a vowel in it (5/7/5). That's different from the English letters and sounds. For the Japanese, 5/7 has a special effect—so the fixed form is important. In Japan, haiku is loved not only for the words selected, but also because of the poetic rhythm of

haiku. This seems to be impossible to look for such an effective rhythm in English (effective beat or some sort of format) which will offer tension. The last letter from Mr. Kaneko before his passing, repeated his plea that haiku in English would one day set some sort of effective rhythm similar to the Japanese poetic rhythm which raises the emotional effects. I would invite poets writing in English to consider this aspect—perhaps read your haiku out loud, and look for rhythm as well as meaning.

How have you seen haiku evolve since 1980?

It's evolved a lot.

Probably most people know the history: two centuries ago, haiku was introduced overseas. But in those days, they only touched just a very small portion of haiku.

In the beginning, wrong information was given all over the place. Even the dictionary was saying that haiku was an imitation of a Japanese short poem, and all that kind of thing. It was partially true, but early information didn't really translate it correctly in English. That changed with two influential authors whose publications really gave the idea of what haiku is about.

R.H. Blyth published the first volume of his four-volume work in 1949 entitled *Haiku* (The Hokuseido Press) (6). He was a master of the Japanese language, and his books introduced haiku to a post-war English-language audience.

Bill Higginson's book, written with Penny Harter, was probably one of the bestsellers: *The Haiku Handbook* (Kodansha America, 1985) (7). I always called it the 'Haiku Bible,' because he covers

almost everything. He was also a master of the Japanese language, and that was one of the biggest skills he had. Unless he knew the language, I don't think he could go that deeply into haiku.

So, language is the biggest element that they had. Haiku evolved not only from those two experts, but more information came out from Japan. Now the people know what we call the spirit of haiku.

Modern haiku is a lot different. It is much closer to what the original haiku is.

I don't know if it's because of my age, or because of the hundreds of books I've read, I guess the way I look at haiku is much different—it's much wider. For example, the Japanese haiku has many tips you can use: cutting words (kireji), seasonal words, and things like that. I use more of these than before. Sadly, I would say that when you get old, you lose your sensitivities. What you sense through nature or life and so on, you have to cover for that loss with a selection of words, or add other techniques. So probably my haiku is not the same. In a way, I have to do more study to look for the word that covers what I lost. So, I don't know if you could call that evolving, but it is a change. I try to look into the wider area through the selection of my words.

You belong to an online *kukai* in Japanese [*now in its seventh year, with 10 members in Canada, the United States and Japan*], and one in English [*now over 10 years, that you facilitated for most of that time*]. What have you noticed about haiku through your participation?

When I asked, several members of Haiku Canada thought it was a good idea to start an online kukai. We only see each other's work when the *Haiku Canada Review* comes. My idea was that each participant submitted their haiku without the poet's name. One of the rules we had was "give a friendly comment." We found this very helpful, and encouraging for the next kukai meeting. We met online 4 times a year, and it was very successful. We lost some members, but we still have some original members as well. It's going very well. It's not a competition—actually we encourage each other to improve their skill.

The Japanese one is doing very well. The facilitator is an expert, and she puts a lot of her own research into each meeting so that we could learn. And now we have decided that from September, other members will also submit their own research so we can learn together without getting together. Because in Japan, people get together once or twice a year, and stay 2-3 nights in the same hotel, and exchange research and discuss all kinds of things. For us, we do that online.

The first purpose for me is that when you show your haiku, others can make suggestions for how you might express your haiku more clearly.

As a workshop leader, what is the most important thing for new haiku poets to know?

As long as they know that haiku is poetry, then they can come in without knowing anything more.

In the workshop, one of the most important things is that haiku is one of the shortest poems known.

I ask “what is a haiku? what is a poem?” and even the little children can say that a poem has to have a feeling.

I would tell them that haiku is different from other poems in that there is no judgmental expression.

Tips for improving your haiku is secondary. Whether it’s a 2.5-hour session, or a 2-session event, they all try writing haiku. Then I can suggest tips for this and that. From all of these tips, they will learn technique to improve.

After co-organizing with Lin Geary for a few contests, you now organize the entries by Canadian children and youth for the JAL Foundation World Children’s Haiku Contest. What are your observations on children’s haiku?

Lin and I did the whole thing one year: collected all the submissions, and did the judging. We were given directions about how many to choose.

After that, the Japan Airlines main office in Vancouver were given the main task of collecting the submissions. I was asked to help with the judging. Because of publicity, British Columbia has a high number of submissions. Unfortunately, other parts of Canada have fewer entries, even though libraries and school boards try to promote it. Due to the number of submissions, the coordinator at the Japan Airlines office would do the first pick. Even so, I get quite a lot of haiku to judge: a few hundred from which I choose a few dozen. Then the final selection will be

done by individuals from the Japan Airlines office along with the office of the Consulate-General of Japan in Vancouver.

From reading the haiku, I don't think that they teach enough in schools about what haiku is. This is all managed by the curriculum for the Ministry of Education. I'm not sure that they really have time to study it. Sometimes I think that it would be good to have a connection between Haiku Canada and those who coordinate the curriculum. There is a rule that if you want to teach in the schools, that you have to do it according to the curriculum.

Is there anything that you would like educators to know about teaching haiku to children and youth?

To encourage students to write haiku, it's good to look at things in a different way. For example, what I do when I go to class I ask "what happened after you left home this morning to get to school?" They give their answers, and then we pick one description: for example, he saw two dogs. So, I ask "what do you think the dogs are thinking?" "what's the person thinking?" So, the students actually imagine that scene, and I ask them to write their haiku from that experience. Not just making up the words, but actually imagining themselves in the scene. That kind of leading is very important. Kids really enjoy it.

What has kept you connected to haiku for so many years?

I don't know. I guess haiku is interesting, and for me it is fun. I enjoy it.

Another thing that a lot of people don't know is that people in Basho's time saw haiku as 'camaraderie arts.' You can write

your haiku and enjoy it. But they say that if you have a haiku you can share with others, that is adds more value for the haiku.

The majority of Japanese haiku throughout the history says haiku is something you share with others. It's not just the words, the feeling, the experience—you share those secondary things behind the poem. So, the kukai is very important.

Would you be willing to share a favourite haiku you have written, and why?

A lot of people like to hear how the Japanese haiku sounds. In 1980 or 1981, we had a small meeting of Haiku Canada, and they invited some Japanese haikuists from Toronto. And those at the conference were fascinated by hearing them recite their haiku in Japanese. And also, the Japanese tradition is that you read the haiku twice.

This is the first haiku that I wrote, which Mr. Kaneko selected when I submitted it to that contest. He thought that is not the way Japanese feel, that it was unique. So I guess it must have been something different.

蚤の市	nomi no ichi	flea market
裸婦画淋しく	rafuga samishiku	the nude painting lonely
陽に痛く	hi ni Itakura	painful in the sun

I used to write tanka, but that was my first haiku. I never expected anything, and when I heard it was unique, I thought "wow."

NOTES:

(1) Kimiko Horne. *in the mist*. Niagara Falls, Ontario: Haunted Press, 2010. [Bilingual English & Japanese, including 44 sumi-e paintings by 10 artists.]
(2) Introduction. Video presentation by Kimiko Horne to the Ontario Division of Haiku Canada (March 21, 2021). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G6A4-hSXGk
(3) Website for the Consulate-General of Japan in Toronto (Wonder of Japan Summer Program 2014), accessed July 14, 2025, https://www.toronto.ca.emb-japan.go.jp/english/news/infocul-news/haiku-teachers.html
(4) Introduction. Video presentation.
(5) *Merry Mayhem*. Dance devised by Kim Horne. (Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society, published in Book 54, Dance 18 – released July 15, 2025). Video of the dance performed by members from the RSCDS, St. Catharines Branch (July 17, 2025): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfgqBNYIU7g
(6) R. H. Blyth. *Haiku*, in four volumes. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1949-1952. [A four-part comprehensive survey of classical Japanese haiku.]
(7) William J. Higginson, with Penny Harter. *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku*. New York: Kodansha America, Inc., 1985. [25th Anniversary Edition: by William J. Higginson (Author), Jane Reichhold (Foreword), Penny Harter (Contributor). New York: Kodansha USA, 2010.]