

An Essay on Japanese Seasonal Events with Haiku February: The beginning of spring

日本の季節行事と俳句

二月－春の始まり

MATSUI Takako

松井 貴子

要旨: 二月は春の始まりである。暦の上で春になっても、実際には、まだ冬のように寒い。一月の寒が明けても残る寒さが余寒である。その中で人々は、春の兆しを求めて外に出る。梅と鶯は春を告げる動植物として喜ばれる。立春の前日の節分には、豆まきをして邪気を払い、年齢の数だけ豆を食べる。恵方巻は、もともと関西地方のものであったが、近年、日本中に広まった。これは、コンビニエンスストア・チェーンの商業戦略から生じた変化である。これは、季節行事が商業活動に影響を受けた典型例である。また、外国の記念日が、商業資本の力によって、日本の季節行事として定着した例もある。ヨーロッパに起源を持つバレンタイン・デーが、日本では、女性から男性にチョコレートを贈る日となり、義理チョコも贈られている。二月はまた、入学試験の時期でもある。受験生の将来を左右する大切な試験であることから、「大試験」とも言われる。本格的な春を実感できるのは、まだ先であるが、人々は、生活の中で春の気配を感じ取り、春を迎える季節行事によって無病息災を願っている。

Key words: early spring, the first day of spring, the lingering cold of early spring, plum blossom, a bush warbler, an announcer of spring, the day which separates two seasons, the day before the first day of spring, bean-scattering ceremony, to drive out evil spirits and to be healthy, a lucky direction sushi roll, Valentine's Day, commercial enterprise, entrance examinations to universities, important examinations

浅春 立春 余寒 梅 鶯 春を告げる 節分 豆まき 邪気を払う 恵方巻 バレンタイン・デー 商業資本 大学入試 大試験

According to the Japanese calendar, spring begins around the 3rd of February. The first day of spring is called 'rit'shun' (originally 'ritsu' and 'shun'), which literally means "spring stands". People actually feel it is still winter. The weather is still cold and it sometimes even snows. Such weather is referred to as 'yo-kan', which means

“coldness lingers”.

Though the weather is not warm, people enjoy going to parks to view plum blossom, which is called ‘ume-mi’. Japanese people have felt that this plum blossom announces the coming of spring for over one thousand years. Also a bush warbler(‘uguisu’) is considered to be another announcer of spring.

The day before the first day of spring is called ‘setsu-bun’, which means the day which separates two seasons. On the day people scatter parched beans saying “Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi.” (“Out with the demons! In with good fortune!”) and eat the special beans. It is believed that we should eat the number of beans with correlates our age to drive out evil spirits and to be healthy in the coming year. People also display a branch of holly (hiiragi) and the head of a grilled sardine to ward off ogres.

Another ceremony of setsu-bun is eating ‘ehō-maki’ (a lucky direction sushi roll). This sushi roll consists of seven kinds of ingredients. Seven is one of the lucky numbers in Japan. While eating it people face the lucky direction of the year and have to remain silent. Originally this ceremony was held only in Kansai (the western area of Japan), however, the convenience store industry spread it all over Japan. This is a typical example of how Japanese traditional seasonal events are maintained through commercial enterprise.

Valentine’s Day has its origin in Western countries, however, commercial enterprise imported it to Japan and adopted it in another style. Japanese chocolate companies spread the day and decided that Valentine’s Day is the day when women give chocolate to men to confess their love for them. They sometimes have had to give chocolate to their male colleagues due to a sense of obligation (giri choco). These days women give it not only to men but also to their female friends (tomo choco) and even to themselves. This is a typical example of how Japanese traditional seasonal events are newly established through commercial enterprise.

In February entrance examinations to universities are held across Japan. The examinations are very serious for Japanese students because they decide their future paths. Therefore these examinations are called ‘dai-shiken’ (the important examinations).

Spring begins in February, however, people have to wait for the actual beginning of spring because of the still cold winter-like weather and the serious entrance examinations. People wish to be happy and healthy through seasonal events. They feel the very faint atmosphere of spring with plum blossoms until peach blossoms bloom in March.

Haiku in February:

early spring, Valentine's Day and final and entrance examinations

二月の俳句—春淡き、愛の日と大試験

Nigatsu no haiku: haru awaki, ai no hi to daishiken

The first day of spring

Lying on the stairs outside

One soybean remains

春立てる外階段に豆一つ

Haru tateru soto'kaidan ni mame hitotsu

Spring coldness lingers

A one-legged dove strongly

Steps on a railway

軌道ぐいと踏む片脚の鳩余寒

Kidō gui to fumu kata'ashi no hato yokan

Talking to my cat

Giving me gentle head butts

On Valentine's Day

頭突きする猫と語らふバレンタイン

Zutsuki suru neko to katarau barentain

Half-and-half for each

A heart shaped special cake shared

For Valentine's Day

Cut the cake in two
A heart shaped special treat
For Valentine's Day

ヴァレンタインハートのケーキ半分こ
Barenntain hāto no kēki wo hanbunko

Never having loved
Still looking for baby milk
Still cute like a kitten

猫の恋どこかに置いてミルク猫
Neko no koi dokoka ni oite miruku'neko

Hearing my meows
To cats in one-sided love
No replies for me

恋猫に鳴き返しては黙さるる
Koi'neko ni naki'kaeshite wa modasaruru

On Valentine's Day
Only ten research papers
Arrived at my office

愛の日にレポート十編届きをり
Ai no hi ni repōto go'hen todoki'ori

Now interviewing
Entrance examinations
Today's spring water

面接をする側にをり春の水

Mensetsu wo suru gawa ni ori haru no mizu

My weary life is

Split between two addresses

Still in early spring

春淡し住所をふたつ持ってゐる

Haru awashi jūsho wo futatsu motte'iru

An entrance exam

Asked to produce my ID

To my close colleague!

同僚に身分証見せる大試験

Dōryō ni mibun'shō miseru daishiken

Solving the questions

For an entrance examination

Invigilator's time killing...

問題を解く暇つぶし大試験

Mondai wo toku hima'tsubushi daishiken

An entrance exam

Each angle of their pencils

For each candidate

それぞれの鉛筆の角度大試験

Sorezore no enpitsu no kakudo daishiken

Pottery village
Cherry blossoms' honey has
The flower's sweet scent

山桜蜜匂ひ立つ陶の里
Yama'zakura mitsu nioi'tatsu sue no sato