

An Essay on Japanese Seasonal Events with Haiku What April means to people in Japan

日本の季節行事と俳句 四月—春深む

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要旨: 四月には、新しい年度が始まり、新たな生活が始まる。明治時代の日本では、大学が九月に始まっていたが、大正時代初めに四月に変更された。現在の学年暦は会計年度に符合している。新学期に向けて、日本の各地で咲く桜は、入学や入社によって新しい生活を始める人々の特別な思いと結びついている。もし秋入学になれば、この感覚は失われてしまうだろう。奈良時代の梅を賛美する中国文化の影響を脱して、平安時代に桜は日本の「花」となった。この花の下での飲食は、古来、神との飲食であり、現代の日本人も花見を楽しんでいる。俳人は春の終わりを春が深まるととらえる。これは、盛りを過ぎた状態をも賛美する伝統的な日本の詩的感覚からくる季節感である。

Key words: An academic year, a fiscal year, an entrance ceremony, matriculation at a university in autumn, Japanese apricots, cherry blossoms, a cherry blossom viewing, the end of spring, Japanese traditional poetic sense

新学期 新年度 入学式 入社式 秋入学 梅 桜 花見 春深む 伝統的季節感

April in Japan is a kind of “second” beginning of the year when many school children start schools and new employees start working for companies. April is the starting time for them. Formal entering ceremonies are held both at almost all schools and companies.

The year from April to March corresponds to the national financial year. Now the fiscal year begins in April, so schools in Japan begin from the same month. Universities, however, used to begin in September in the Meiji era, the timing of the school year changed to the present system in the early Taisho era.

At the beginning of April, cherry blossoms are usually in full bloom in the central district of Japan during the entrance time. The flower, therefore, is closely connected to the beginning of people’s new lives. If the beginning of the school year is changed to another season or is returned to September as tried to be planned by the University of Tokyo, one of the most important Japanese seasonal feelings will surely be lost. Nevertheless, in recent years some universities permit not only foreign students but also Japanese students who have returned from abroad to enter postgraduate schools in October.

The Japanese like to enjoy watching cherry blossoms from bursting buds to falling petals while eating and drinking under the trees. Originally cherry blossom was

a signal to start farming. Eating and drinking under the trees represent a meal with the gods of the rice fields.

Japanese people had imitated Chinese culture and appreciated ‘ume’ trees, or plums also being called Japanese apricots which originally had come from China in the Nara era, around the 8th century. They, however, decided to cultivate their own culture, so the Japanese representative flower changed to cherry blossom in the Heian era, around the 10th century. Cherry blossom is one of the national flowers. The other national flower is the chrysanthemum, one of the representative autumn flowers.

Flowers express the season and they are ever present in Japanese literature. Although most ordinary people feel it is mid spring in April, in fact, the end of April is near the close of spring because, according to the calendar, summer begins on May 6th or 7th. Therefore, haiku poets feel summer will come from May even though the summer heat is still far away.

Haiku poets describe the end of spring as deepening spring. The depth of spring usually means the middle of spring. For haiku poets, nonetheless, the depth of the season doesn’t mean the height of it, but the matured end of it. The reason for it is that Japanese poetical sense in the Japanese classics was inclined to prefer being on the decline to at the peak of the seasons. This traditional sense affected Japanese seasonal feeling and modern haiku poets inherit it.

April: Spring makes people move

四月—春動く

Shigatu: Haru ugoku

A blue-eyed woman
Bent a spray of cherry blossoms
And brought it close to her face

碧眼に花枝撓め寄せらるる
Hekigan ni hanaeda tawame- yose-raruru

The beginning of a spring semester
Green Ginkgo leaves
Are trembling and Swaying

新学期いちらうの葉っぱが揺れてゐる
Shin-gakki ichō no happa ga yurete-iru

The new semester begins
The wall got cracked in one horizontal line
After the 3.11 earthquake

新学期真一文字の壁のひび
shin-gakki ma-ichi-mon'ji no kabe no hibi

Warm Spring
Cold Spring
One after the other

春暑し春寒し日々交互なる
Haru atsuishi haru samushi hibi kougo naru

Water in the spring season
The molecules, shaped like hiragana 'ku'
Stick all of my sense organs

春の水くの字くの字が突き刺さる
Haru no mizu ku no ji ku no ji ga tsuki-sasaru

An abandoned kitten
With harsh and rough fur
Are licking a puddle

毛の荒き子猫舐めゐる涼
Ke no araki koneko name-iru niwatazumi

Being extremely bored
Leaning on his police staff
Summer is coming

警杖に凭れる退屈夏近し
Keijō ni yoreru taikutsu natsu chikashi
Sweet peas into flower
Remind me
To smile

豆の花笑むといふこと思ひ出す
Mame no hana emu to iu-koto omoi-dasu

A spring stormy wind
A Buddhist rosary in his pocket
A man in work uniform

作業着のポケットに数珠春嵐
Sagyō-gi no poketto ni juzu haru arashi

A male student sleeping
With his arms folded
During the first lecture

腕組みの春眠初回の授業より
Ude-gumi no shun'min shokai no jugyō yori

Thunder in spring
Rushed to the home mailbox
Some postal matters

春の雷郵便受けを急ぎ見る
Haru no rai yūbin-uke wo isogi miru

Warm and bright spring
Great Buddha of bamboos and scriptures
Is smiling and laughing

麗や籠大仏の笑み勝る
Uraraka-ya kago-daibutsu no emi masaru

I think that...
Haiku is nothing concern to me
This spring

俳句なぞどうでもよいとおもふ春
Haiku nazo dōdemo-yoi to omou haru

A school playground
Well water flows
On a lengthening day of spring

校庭に井戸水溢れゐる遅日
Kōtei ni ido-mizu afure-iru chijitsu

Tiny grasses
Of spring plants
On the Shinkansen platform

新幹線ホームに春の草一寸
Shinkansen hōmu ni haru no kusa i'ssun

A blue-eyed female jogger
With her back to a peach grove
Of coming into bloom

桃林に背を向け碧眼走りゆく
Tōrin ni se wo muke hekigan hashiri-yuku

A cock crows
At every midnight
Still cold in spring

子の刻に鳴く雄鶏や春寒し
Ne no koku ni naku ondori-ya haru-samushi

A spring semester has begun
Cutting and pasting materials for handouts
On weekends

週末は切り貼りばかり新学期
Shūmatsu wa kiri-hari-bakari shin'gakki

Cherry blossoms are in full bloom
At noontime
Large snowflakes fall thick and fast

花真昼大粒の雪降りしきる
Hana-mahiru ōtsubu no yuki furi-shikiru

Spring rain
In the morning and evening
It snows during daytime

朝夕に春雨昼は雪なりき
Asa-yū ni haru-same hiru wa yuk inari-ki