

## An Essay on Japanese Seasonal Events with Haiku Images of May in Japan

### 日本の季節行事と俳句 五月の諸相

MATSUI Takako  
松井 貴子

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要旨: 五月は、暦の上では夏の始まりである。気温が上昇し、日ざしが強くなる。病床にあった子規は、五月に不調を感じていた。大学生も五月病にかかる。五月の暑さは、まだ厳しくない薄暑であり、梅雨入り前の心地よい気候である。この状態は、しばしば「爽やか」と言われてきたが、正確には「清々しい」と言う。「爽やか」は、真夏の厳しい暑さを経験した後の涼しさを表わす秋の季語だからである。五月初めには、北海道で桜が見頃になり、本州では葉桜になる。大型連休の終わり頃、立夏がきて、藤や躑躅、青葉、水田で鳴く蛙が夏の風物となる。五月五日の子供の日には武者人形を飾り、柏餅を食べる。この伝統行事は、ジェンダー・フリーの考えとは相いれないかもしれない。日本は一神教の国ではないが、季語にキリスト教由来のものがあり、その一つが「聖五月」である。

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**Key words:** the beginning day of summer, sunlight, MASAOKA Shiki, May syndrome, thin heat, refreshing, balmy, Cherry blossom leaves, wisteria, azalea, green leaves, frogs in rice paddies irrigated, Children's Day, Saint Mary's month

立夏 風光る 正岡子規 五月病 薄暑 爽やか 清々しい 葉桜 藤 躑躅 青葉  
水田の蛙 子供の日 聖五月

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According to the Japanese calendar, summer begins in May. The temperature shoots up higher. And the sunlight becomes stronger. The change has been so rapid that MASAOKA Shiki, one of the most eminent modern haiku poets as the great reformer of haiku in the Meiji era, much suffered from the weather when he was ill in bed for his last several years. In this month, the equal risk, May syndrome exists. Japanese first-year students could suffer the depression after their first month of a new term in their colleges or universities because of their physical and mental fatigue from the major reason of having studied for the entrance examinations in the preceding fiscal year.

The weather is not the hottest yet in May and is comfortable as usual because early summer in Japan is before the rainy season, so haiku poets express the weather with a seasonal word thin heat. The word thin means soft and light. Modern Japanese

haiku poet NAKAMURA Kusatao composed a haiku which described the feature of the mild heat as follows,

人々に四つ角ひろき薄暑かな 中村草田男  
 Hitobito ni yotsu-kado hiroki hakusho kana NAKAMURA Kusatao

People perceive to be  
 A street corner is spacious  
 Ah, the weather is still thin heat

Another seasonal word, *kaze-hikaru* wind and sunlight, is proper for this month. Though ordinary people often say refreshing, *sawayaka* in Japanese in early summer, the word is a seasonal word used in early fall, which express the first comfortable coolness. That is because haiku poets consider they get refreshed only after suffering an intense heat in midsummer. They use the *sugasugashii* word, which means balmy for a summer seasonal word instead. These days weather forecasters imitate them and understand part of the tradition of Japanese seasonal feelings.

In early May, cherry blossoms are in full bloom in Hokkaido, the northernmost region of Japan. Cherry trees run to leaves after the full bloom flower in central Japan at the same time. Cherry blossom leaves are the sign of the oncoming of summer. During the consecutive holidays between late April and early May, the beginning day of summer *rikka* comes around the 7<sup>th</sup>. When spring ends, Japanese wisteria flowers emit fragrances. And azaleas show vivid color petals. Plants have buds in spring and grow green leaves in summer. In rice paddies irrigated, frogs croak with vigor. These are the prominent features of nature in this season of increasing brightness and vitality.

The main seasonal event in May is Children's Day on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Parents display the heroic dolls of ancient warriors for their sons and wish them to grow healthy with strength. The staple food of the event is *kashiwa-mochi* sticky, chewy rice cake filled with red beans and wrapped in the leaf of oak, which has a savory aroma. Though this traditional event has a long history in Japanese culture, it has a problem in this day of increasing people demanding a gender-free society because of this gender specific problem having to solve someday.

Western people often believe that Japan's religion is Buddhism though most of the Japanese people have no specific faith in any religion. And they closely connect the seasonal words used in haiku to Japanese daily life. Despite this, there is an attractive seasonal word which has its roots in Christianity. That is the *Sei-Gogatsu* seasonal word, which means sacred May, which also means Saint Mary's month. This modern seasonal word proofs that Christianity affected Japanese seasonal feelings after the Meiji Restoration. Some Japanese haiku poet heard May was the Month of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism and created the new seasonal word. The word contains the delightfully beautiful image of Saint Mary and the season.

Haiku: Things in May

俳句—五月あれこれ  
Gogatsu arekore

My collar has become wide open  
In May,  
Or the virgin Mary's month

襟開きの大きくなりし聖五月  
Eri-aki no ōkiku-nari-shi sei-gogatsu

The wing of a rotting feral pigeon  
Is still brawny  
Under the burning sun

炎天に朽ちゆく鳩の羽太し  
Enten ni kuchi-yuku hatō no hane futo-shi

The order is  
To hold all classes without any light on  
It is the end of May 2011

無灯にて授業せよとや五月尽  
Mutō nite jugyō seyo-to-ya gogatsu-jin

Mild sunlight in the afternoon  
The darkness under ginkgo trees  
Is as mild

午後の陽の淡き銀杏の木下闇  
Gogo no hi no awaki ityō no koshita-yami

A tiny spider  
looks desirous to get into  
One of my shoes

蜘蛛の子が私の靴に入りたげ  
Kumo no ko ga watashi no kutsu ni hairitage

Boarding the Shinkansen super express  
Male passengers having a summer cold  
Surround me

夏風邪の男ばかりの新幹線  
Natsu-kaze no otoko bakari no shinkansen

Broad beans  
Remind Taiwanese  
Of good old home cooking

蚕豆は台湾の母の味といふ  
Sora-mame wa taiwan no haha no aji to iu

Walking up and down  
Carrying Japanese and Western books  
Summer has already come

和書洋書抱へて歩く既に初夏  
Washo yōsho kakaete aruku sudeni shoka

Wish to skip through books  
In foreign languages, too  
Sweet sugared water

異国語もとばし読みたし砂糖水  
Ikoku-go mo tobashi yomi-tashi satō mizu

Fix the teaching schedule  
Firmly in my memory  
And sadness for fading spring

時間割頭に入れて春惜しむ  
Jikann-wari atama ni irete haru osimu

A balmy breeze  
A white-haired lady carries  
A long-bow and arrows

薰風に白髪結ひて弓運ぶ  
Kun-pū ni hakuhatsu yuite yumi hakobu

Early summer's comfortable heat at a bus stop  
Waiting for a bus  
With newly published medical books

新刊の医書携へ薄暑のバス停  
Shinkan no isho kakae hakusho no basu-tei

Getting worse on his sickbed,  
The whole world Shiki lived  
It was May

五月来る六尺の世界に病み増すと  
Gogatsu kuru rokushaku no sekai ni yami-masu-to

Today, being in class  
Is a workday  
Between consecutive holidays

黄金週間の中平日授業する  
Ōgon-shūkan no shūnichī heijitsu jugyō-suru

Early in summer,  
My indoor cat is still  
With a thick winter coat of fur

猫の毛のまだふかふかとして夏初め  
Neko no ke no mada hukahuka to shite natsu hajime

A cat inside by a bow window  
Is gazing out on  
The wind through the green leaves

出窓猫ガラスの向かふの青葉風  
Demado-neko garasu no mukō no aoba-kaze

One of the station staff at a platform  
Had eaten a bun and left the wrapper  
A summer evening

駅員がパン食べた跡夏夕  
Eki-in ga pan tabeta ato natsui-yūbe

A frog croaks  
Deep in an irrigated rice paddy  
On a short night in summer

短夜の水田に深く蛙鳴く  
Mjika-yo no suiden ni fukaku kawazu naku

A Japanese bush warbler in summer  
Spreads singing  
With calmer and steadier notes

老鶯の重く確かに鳴きわたる  
Rō-ō no omoku shizuka-ni naki-wataru