

## An Essay on Japanese Seasonal Events with Haiku July: The Feature of Traditional Events in Japan

### 日本の季節行事と俳句

### 七月—伝統行事の特質

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要旨: 七月には七夕がある。天の川の兩岸に別れている寒牛と織女が年に一度再会するという中国の伝説に起源があり、奈良時代に、五節句の一つとして宮中行事となった。中国の行事に、日本の在来の行事が結びついて、日本の季節行事となり、江戸時代に庶民に広まった。五色の短冊に歌や字を書いて、葉竹に飾りつけ、書道や裁縫の上達を願うのである。現代では学校行事として行われている。古代から近世までの日本の文化受容の特徴として、天皇や貴族が中国から受容した後、日本化して、庶民の生活に浸透するということがある。お中元の贈答習慣も同様である。土用の丑の日には鰻を食べるのは、江戸時代に、平賀源内が、名前に「う」のつくものを食べることを発案したことによる。季節行事が、学校教育や商業宣伝と結びつくことで維持されていることが現代日本の特徴である。梅雨明け後は猛暑となり、学校は夏休みになって、風鈴やかき氷が夏の風物であった。

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**Keywords:** the *Tanabata* Festival, the Star Festival, the Cowherd, the Weaver, the summer gift period, a *Tennō*, emperor, an aristocrat, a school event, the end of the rainy season, the summer vacation, terrible heat, a wind-bell, a summer refreshment of flavored shaved ice, a supermarket, a 100-yen shop, midsummer, promotion, the *doiyō* season

七夕祭 牽牛 織女 お中元 天皇 貴族 庶民 学校行事 梅雨明け 夏休み 猛暑 風鈴 かき氷 スーパーマーケット 百元ショップ 商業宣伝 土用

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The main seasonal event in July is the *Tanabata* Festival on the seventh day of the seventh month. Most Japanese people enjoyed it as children. On the day, they attach slips of colored paper with prayers written on them to bamboo branches at their nursery or elementary schools. This Star Festival in Japan originated in ancient China and celebrates a Chinese legend. The legend says the Weaver, Vega in Lyra, and the Cowherd, Altair in Aquila, live on opposite banks of the Milky Way. They meet only once

a year.

The Tanabata Festival was accepted and prevailed as follows: Originally, the Japanese embassy brought it from ancient China to Japan in the Nara era. Japanese Tennō emperors and aristocrats adopted it and made it one of the five seasonal festivals at Court. Through a syncretic fusion of new events from China and traditional seasonal events in Japan, the Star Festival became popular during the Edo era, and the Japanese populace prayed to the gods to make progress in calligraphy and sewing.

This festival follows a typical pattern. That is, from the upper class to the lower class. At first, the rulers adopted foreign cultures and adapted them to Japanese ways. Then the general populace accepted them as a valuable novelty. They changed them in their own way and enjoyed them in daily life. Ancient, medieval, and early modern Japanese people once received a new culture from outside Japan to improve their lives. After the Meiji Restoration, their lifestyle changed. In present-day Japan, they often pass these events on to the next generation as school events, but not family ones.

Ironically, supermarkets and 100-yen shops are much fuller of seasonal feelings than fields and paddies in rural districts where people lived according to seasonal change. Seasonal events survive thanks to advertising campaigns, so they carry on into the future. In contemporary Japan, commercial companies turn a stale event into an amusing one for sales promotions. This phenomenon is characteristic of modern Japan and is another effective way of sustaining traditional events.

For *Chūgen*, the fifteenth day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar, department stores promote the exchange of summer gifts. So, sending midyear presents is a general standard, and few Japanese adults can ignore this summer gift period. People in eastern Japan, the *Kantō*, follow the solar calendar, in which Chūgen is in July. People in western Japan, the *Kansai*, still follow a lunar calendar, in which it is in August. This causes about a one-month lag between the two areas.

The *doiyō* season is the hottest part of summer, when the Japanese have a custom of eating eel on the midsummer day of the Ox. This custom originated with HIRAGA Gen'nai (1728-1779), a botanist and writer of light literature in the late Edo period, who suggested eating those whose names included the sound U. He intended to benefit an eel restaurant and improve customers' health. Even now, restaurants, supermarkets, and convenience stores prepare traditional eel dishes.

After the rainy season in late July, fierce heat comes. During this period, elementary, lower, and upper schools break up for summer. Even in severe heat, Japanese people enjoy the cooling. Flavored shaved ice is still a great summer favorite. In the past, the light sound of a hanging bell rang in the wind. Unfortunately, some people in overpopulated cities find the ringing discordant. As people's values and lifestyles have become more diverse, seasonal events are no longer observed by everyone; instead, people choose and enjoy the seasonal events that suit their individual

tastes.

TSUDA Kiyoko, a famous female poet in contemporary Japan, composed a haiku about Gods.

虹二重神も恋愛したまへり 津田清子  
Niji hutae kami mo ren'ai shi-tamaeri TSUDA Kiyoko

A double rainbow,  
Gods fall in love  
As human beings do

When she saw a rare phenomenon, or two rainbows, she made a story that the Gods had fallen in love as if they were human beings and manifested themselves as rainbows.

Haiku: Days of Journeys and Daily Lives in July by Takako

七月の俳句一旅と日常 貴子  
Shichi-gatsu: tabi to nichijō Takako

Soda water  
Every froth swallows a soul  
It seems to me

魂を飲み込んでゐるソーダ水  
Tamashii wo nomi-konde-iru soda-sui

Sharp corners of jellified agar, *Kanten*,  
With cold sweet syrup, *Mitsu-mame*  
Enveloped in gloom

蜜豆の寒天尖る闇近し  
Mitsu-mame no kanten togaru yami chikashi

I opened the refrigerator door,  
And then cooled me  
Quite a while

冷蔵庫開けてそのまま涼みをり  
Reizōko akete sonomama suzumi-ori

I turned on a fan  
The fan was working  
After a year

扇風機一年ぶりに回したり  
Senpūki ichinen-buri ni mawashi-tari

Now in class  
A deep sigh  
Marine Day, a national holiday

海の日に授業を受けるため息  
Umi no hi ni jugyō wo ukeru tame-iki

Summer rain,  
A fire in a fireplace  
At a large bookstore

夏の雨爰炉焚きをり大書店  
Natsu no ame danro taki-ori dai-shoten

It's fiercely hot  
A telephone set got broken  
A cat keeps on sleeping

電話機が壊れた極暑猫眠る  
Denwa-ki ga kowareta goku-sho neko nemuru

Our new home  
Two refrigerators  
His one and mine

冷蔵庫二つ並べる新居かな  
Reizōko futatsu naraberu shinkyo-kana

Japanese hydrangea  
Is dying  
Still in bud

半枯の紫陽花いまだつばみ持て  
Han-g(k)are no ajisai imada tsubomi mot(t)e

A stone pavement in Tallinn  
One-sided shade on a path  
Distorted

片陰のゆがむタリンの石畳  
Kata-kage no yugamu tarin no ishi-da(ta)tami

The great emperor's capital  
Is under construction,  
It's burning hot

大帝の都灼けゐて普請中  
Taitei no miyako yake-ite fushin-chū

One-sided shadow,  
A homeless person  
Grooms himself

片かげり家なき人の身づくろひ  
Kata-kageri ie-naki-hito no mi-zukuroi

A bush warbler  
Is still singing in summer  
I imitate it with my lips

老鶯の音色なぞりて口ずさむ  
Rō-ō no neiro nazorite kuchi-zusamu

A break in the rainy season  
At a construction site  
Radio exercises

梅雨晴間工事現場のラジオ体操  
Tsuyu-harema kōji-genba no rajio-taisō

I finished reading three papers  
In a Japanese restaurant  
Midsummer has come

食堂の三紙読み果つ盛夏来る  
Shokudō no sanshi yomi-hatsu seika-kuru

A green frog  
In hunger  
Hangs its head

空腹に頭を垂れる青蛙  
Kūfuku ni atama wo tareru ao-ga(ka)eru

It's a green frog  
That is blocking the keyhole  
Of the front door

玄関の鍵穴ふさぐ青蛙  
Genkan no kagi-ana fusagu ao-ga(ka)eru

Gion Matsuri Festival,  
The roadside is not as crowded as  
Commuter trains

祇園祭通勤電車ほど混まず

Gion-matsuri tsūkin-densha-hodo komazu

The grief in the right eye of

A Noh mask of a divine lady,

Darkness under the summer trees

増女右眼の悲哀木下闇

Zō-on'na migi-me no hiai koshita-yami

In a rainy-season typhoon,

An open-mouthed cat

Is sleeping

口開けて猫が寝てゐる梅雨台風

Kuchi akete neko ga nete-iru tsuyu-yaifū

Yoshino,

Deep in the mountains

A summer evening prolonged

山深き吉野も長き夏夕

Yama-fukaki Yoshino mo nagaki natsu-yūbe

To the Yoshinoguchi station,

The big evening summer sun is strong

At the edge of the mountains

大西日強き山の端吉野口

Ōnishibi tsuyoki yama no ha yoshino-guchi

Stopped at the sunflower

To compare heights

And passed by

向日葵と背比べして通り過ぐ

Himawari to sei-kurabe-shite tori-sugu

Rainy season this year

Alternates

Between extreme cold and warm

寒暖の極み交互に今年梅雨

Kandan no kiwami kōgo ni kotoshi-zu(tsu)yu

Water warmed by the sun

From a small faucet

Every time I use it

使うたび小さな蛇口の日向水

Tsukau-tabi chi'isana-jaguchi no hinata-mizu