

## Chapter 1

### Introduction



#### 1.1 Rationale and Significance

Haiku can be used to share with other people a moment of life or an experience that has moved us. As such, many aspects of the culture and society that the poet is living in can be gleaned from reading haiku. Since the time of the Second World War, and up until the present, there have been a considerable number of Japanese people living in Thailand who have written haiku that reflect many interesting aspects of Thai culture, environment and society. However, the existence of such haiku is little known to Thai society, and their contributions to understanding Thai culture and society have not been introduced previously in languages other than Japanese. As the haiku written by these Japanese residents of Thailand cover a broad range of topics and span over a period of more than fifty years, readers may come to understand many facets of Thailand through the poems, as well as observe changes in Thai society over the years.

#### 1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this thesis is to analyze the major subjects of haiku written by Japanese people living in Thailand in order to show how such haiku can reflect various pictures of Thailand. The main subjects of these haiku, which often provide insightful observations of Thai society, include people, animals, plants, the seasons and natural phenomenon, life environment, culture and history. In fulfilling this objective, the following questions will be posed: What are the common or varying themes of haiku written by Japanese residents of Thailand? How are the haiku written by such poets influenced by Thai society, especially from a social, historical and environmental perspective?

The secondary objective of this thesis is to show how such Japanese poets have adapted the system of *kigo* or season words, which is integral to the writing of haiku, to accommodate haiku written in Thailand. The season words used by the poets are not

those traditionally used by haiku poets living in Japan, as the poets living in Thailand had to create new words that reflected the tropical seasons and environment of Thailand, as well as the differing traditional calendars and seasonal festivals. In this respect, this thesis will pose the following questions: What kind of season words are used in particular reference to Thailand, and how are these adapted for use in haiku? How did the poets invent new season words, and how did they adjust old season words in haiku they wrote about Thailand? What are some of the problems in using season words in haiku written in Thailand? What are some of the historical aspects of inventing season words for use in reference to Thailand?

### 1.3 Hypotheses

In respect to the above objectives, this thesis puts forth two main hypotheses: 1) that Japanese people who came to live in Thailand and who wrote haiku were able to describe many subjects such as Thai people, animals, plants, customs, social events and other subjects in such a way that these haiku reflect certain pictures of Thailand, sharing with the reader valuable insights and understanding of Thai culture, and 2) that in doing so these poets invented many new season words unique to the Thai environment [such as “*mango-ame*” (mango rain), “*dorian*” (durian), “*mizu-matsuri*” (water festival), or “*Sonkuran*” (*Songkran*)], as well as adapted some traditional season words to accommodate the climate of Thailand [such as “*manatsu*” (midsummer) for the months of April-May, rather than July-August as in Japan]. Through these new and adapted season words, one is able to discern various characteristics about the Thai environment.

### 1.4 Methodology

The majority of the primary data for this thesis was gathered from published and non-published haiku of the “Menam Kukai”, as well as haiku of “Bangkok Haikukai” and “Pinan Haikukai” during the Second World War. The Menam Kukai is a group of Japanese people who meet regularly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of every month at the Japanese Association in Bangkok in the interests of writing and sharing haiku. The group, which is comprised of people of various backgrounds and ages, was first formed in 1962 and

continues to meet until today. The haiku written by members of the group can be found in several sources, which are discussed below.

Since the group's inception, it has published five volumes entitled Menam Kushū (Menam Haiku Collections). These volumes were published in limited numbers (approximately 1000 or so copies of each), and only a few copies still exist. Only two people possess all five volumes. The individual poets of the group, who select 15-30 or so of their own haiku to appear in the publication, edited the haiku contained in the volumes. Through these collections of haiku, we are able to take in the most representative haiku written by Japanese people living in Thailand over a period of 30 years. However, the volumes do not note the actual dates that the poets wrote the haiku.

In addition, the Menam Kukai keeps minutes of their monthly meetings, which they compile into notebooks containing haiku written by its members (the "Notebooks"). Unfortunately, the early Notebooks from these meetings (before 1971) have been lost. However, Notebook Nos. 9-22 (1971-2000) remain, and much useful information is available from these Notebooks. At present, these Notebooks Nos.9-22 are still kept at senior member, Yamamoto Midori's<sup>1</sup> place. I, myself, am a long time member of the Menam Kukai since 1970. ( while staying in Japan, I continue to attend to Tokyo Menam Kukai). I also recorded minutes of the meeting and including some photos in the Notebooks. In 1998, seeking the missing Notebooks, I visited the late member, Sekiyō's home to see his son off Sathorn Road in Bangkok. In spite of the kind help of his son, Sirichai, I could not find the missing Notebooks, but fortunately found and borrowed Sekiyō's Notebook, entitled *Nettai Haiku* (Tropical Haiku) written during 1944-1945, which is the record of "the Bangkok Haikukai" and "the Pinan Haikukai"<sup>2</sup> including memorandums of season words in Thailand and other countries.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Japanese custom, the order of a full name is given with surname first, followed by the first name. Although in Japan people in formal surnames often call each other by surname, haiku names (*haigo*) are exceptions. At the haiku gatherings and in the books of haiku, poets' names are often called and written only by haiku names, or the first name. The method adopted in this thesis is that only the order of the cover name follows the international way, as or a Japanese passport, and the order of names in the thesis document follows Japanese custom. Names of writers of haiku are recorded as haiku names, or first name like Western and Thai names. In the cases of shared haiku names, surnames also are added, for example, Yamamoto Midori, not Midori only.

<sup>2</sup> *kai* in Japanese means a club or a group

Other haiku written by members of the Menam Kukai can be found from various sources, such as Krungthep, the monthly magazine of the Japanese Association in Thailand. For nearly 30 years, the group has selected two haiku written by the members to appear in the monthly magazine. Another Japanese-language publication in Bangkok, the Bangkok Shuho, is a weekly newspaper that introduced a series of essays and haiku, titled *Orifushi no Bankoku no Ku* (Haiku in Bangkok in Seasons) written by senior member of the Menam Kukai, Yamamoto Midori, during 1980-1983. In addition, there is a haiku column in the Satellite issue of the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shinbun written by Tsushima Yasuko (a member of the Menam Kukai during 1993-1996) who selects haiku written in various Asian countries. This column usually includes haiku written by the members of the Menam Kukai.

Further sources include the monthly newsletters of the Menam Kukai, which have been published since 1995, and are distributed among the groups. Some of the members of the Menam Kukai upon returning to Japan have even had their haiku published in various collections or in books.

This thesis also utilizes other valuable sources of information about haiku written in Thailand. On its 50<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, the Japanese Association published special issues of its magazine to include useful information about old haiku written in the 1940's and 1960's with descriptions of season words and Thailand used in the early years.

In general, the haiku selected for analysis in this thesis come from those written by the members of the Menam Kukai, as well as members of previous "haiku clubs" in Thailand in existence during the Second World War, prior to the inception of the Menam Kukai. Of these haiku, which are found in the above-mentioned sources, certain criteria were utilized in order to select specific haiku for analysis in this thesis. First, the haiku must express a vivid picture of Thailand, showing a characteristic specific to Thailand or Thai people. Some haiku, while good as a poem, were not selected for analysis because they did not express something distinctly Thai. Second, the phenomena expressed (e.g., observation, knowledge, feeling) must be a proper and accurate description as it relates to fact or reality. Third, the haiku must imply some understanding of Thailand, Thai people or relate a new discovery as a Japanese person in Thailand. Fourth, the haiku must have a smooth and rhythmical sound, and have the

proper expression of a haiku. Fifth, the haiku must contain an effective season word that suits the entire haiku. As for the poets themselves, their understanding of Thai people and Thailand was considered, and an effort to highlight significant poets over the covered period was made.

### 1.5 Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, some data, for example in the case of the early Menam Kukai Notebooks, is missing. Other data, such as that contained in magazines or newspaper articles, is often incomplete. Sometimes, the recorded dates of haiku are difficult to trace back. Furthermore, many of the senior members of the Menam Kukai have already passed away and many members returned to Japan, while only two senior members remain in Bangkok. Therefore, interviews could not be held with the poets in case of need for further clarification. Despite these limitations however, it is hoped that the analyses and conclusions made in this thesis will contribute to cross-cultural relations and understanding.

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