

■Book Review

Calligraphy is the visual image of one's mind

Ban'ya Natsuishi & Sayumi Kamakura *100 HAIKU* Cyberwit.net India 2015 US\$15

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A haiku book with interesting contents appeared recently. The book is "100 HAIKU" by Ban'ya Natsuishi and Sayumi Kamakura. By interesting, I mean that both haiku verses in print and sumi-brush calligraphies of the haiku are put together in a single volume. I have never seen a haiku book like this. Each page has printed haiku verses, both in Japanese and English, and at the bottom area of the page, images of calligraphy are layouted. Ban'ya's calligraphy works are colored lightly with watercolor paint, and Sayumi used faintly colored and patterned calligraphy paper. These aspects give to the book an impression of a colorful picture book. Such a pleasure to find a book like this.

Yang Xiong, a Chinese scholar and poet of Han dynasty, wrote in his book "Fa yan (Exemplary Sayings)", that "Calligraphy is the visual image of one's mind". Brush calligraphy reveals the inner state of the one who writes it, is what Xiong is saying. Haiku itself reveals also the inner mind so when it is combined with the calligraphy, there is a possibility that more of the mind would surface. This book offers such a revelation, and that is the another interesting aspect of the book.

Having said this, haiku and calligraphy do not reveal the whole of the inner mind, and it is not my intention to do a psychological analysis of both haijins in this writing. Rather, in this writing, I will try to explore a part of what runs through all the haiku written by both haijins. I think their calligraphy will provide some hints in the exploration.

Let's say that a haijin is like a farm field. Each haiku has its own poetic content, expressing what the haijin felt and got inspired. It is like different plants are growing on the farm field. The field would gain more fertilizer with time, giving nutrition to plants growing there. Experiences in life, be they happy or sad, pleasant or stressful, help a haijin writing good haiku.

What about, then, the field itself, or rather the soil itself? I think haijin's soil is unique; Ban'ya's haiku grows from his own soil and so does Sayumi's. I think also that their calligraphy works tell what their soils are consist of, albeit some of it.

One of the haiku by Ban'ya in the book goes: The Flying Pope's / bestfriend: an octopus / at the bottom of the sea. Ban'ya's calligraphy is like the fat legs of the octopus, tumbling around vigorously; jump effortlessly at a place, and stay put massibly at another. His calligraphy is dynamic and full of life energy. Energy that "blows the waterfall apart" is evident. The same energy seems to permeate in various haiku he has written. Basho was also energetic haijin; he poured the energy to turn once mediocre genre of haikai to a form of sophisticated poetry. Ban'ya has done various improvements, like introducing "keyword" in place of "season word", trying to "blow apart" the mannerism prevailing in an old waterfall called present-day Japanese haiku. Haiku now is no longer confined within the boundary of Japan, but is

flourishing throughout the world, which necessitates changes in the idea of haiku. As in his “Over the Pacific Ocean / a rainbow from one word / to another word”, Ban’ya has a dream, the dream of world haiku, and he directs his zeal and energy toward adding new tradition to the one established by Basho. And I think his calligraphy shows just those: his zeal and energy.

If Ban’ya’s haiku was exemplified by old Japanese earthenware, I think that the Jomon Style would apply. In Sayumi’s case, it would be Yayoi Style. While the Jomon Style is noted for its articulated forms, with dynamic spiral and protruding shapes, the Yayoi Style is simpler and rounder, and gives moderate impression. Sayumi’s calligraphy is executed with considerable care and concentration; each letter is written with simple strokes, and about the same size and spaced almost evenly. She wrote on the sheets of paper that are tinted with gradation of pastel colors and with simple graphic patterns like lines depicting water flow. Her calligraphy and the paper give the impression of tenderness and warmth. The Jomon Style earthenware was used to store foods, but it somewhat gives the impression of a sacred utensil, the kind used for religious rituals. The Yayoi earthenware looks more like household ware for daily use. Sayumi writes quite a few of her haiku from her daily life, and her talent is in spotlighting a part of the daily life. With her special spotlight, her daily life changes wonderfully and results in fine haiku; she hears “the sound of wing from out of her shadow”; her “very act of waiting” becomes “twinkling”; “blue color” becomes “singing color”; “two-minutes walking to the mailbox” becomes “spring” if run; and sees “eternity” among wintry “bare trees”. Giving spotlight on otherwise uneventful daily life requires considerable care and concentration on the part of the haikin. And I see the same attitude in her calligraphy.

I mentioned a few things about the soil of both haikin. However, when I think about my own soil, I only have very vague image. Being a left-handed man, calligraphy does not come easy for me, hence very little calligraphy training. I do use sumi brush to draw something for my haiga, but that does not equate to calligraphy. For a painter like myself, I probably need something other than calligraphy to explore my inner mind.

100 Haiku: <http://www.cyberwit.net/publications/840>