

Learn New Words

JAPANESE POETRY TERMS

Compiled by Jane Reichhold

Learning every word of this glossary will not guarantee to make you an excellent writer. Trying to memorize it could lead to brain-strain and an inability to speak intelligent English. However, a read-through can acquaint you with some hints of the kind of thinking the Japanese have attached to their poetry over the last 800 years. Your occasion to use most of these words in daily speech will be fairly rare but being able to zing out a term or two is invaluable in games of one-upmanship. The anglicized pronunciations are approximate; considered as moderate tongue exercise.

ageku (AH-GAY-COO) -completing verse- The last stanza of a renga. The link that attempts to summarize the whole work with a reference to the beginning stanza.

aware (AH-WAH-RAY) - touchingness- The quality of an object to touch one's emotions, often with pathos or sadness. Your native flag has aware; another country's better designed flag does not have it.

Basho (BAH-SHOW) and not BASH-OH -banana tree- The pen name of the poet Matsuo Yozaemon inspired by his delight in a such a plant given to him by a student to be planted outside the window of his newest hut on the outskirts of what is now known as Tokyo. Renga Master, Poet of Poets, Legend of Japanese literature: Basho is now a common English-Japanese word that makes people respond with the words, "Frog!" or "Autumn Crow!" in the same way that "Thank you" brings forth "You are welcome".

choka (CHOE-KAH) A long poem with the 5-7-5, 7-7 pattern of a renga but done by one person. A favorite genre about a thousand years ago which has enjoyed some revival at different times since.

dai (DAY'EE) Meaning topic, which in the poem which is either noted in the first stanza or in a preface. It also means that the poets have decided to agree to have a topic for the poem.

daisan (DAY'EE-SAH-N)-the third- In renga, the third stanza which ends, in English, with a verb - often a gerund [ending in -ing].

dokugin (DOE-COO-JEAN) A solo work or renga written by one person.

gojuin (GO-JEW-EEN) A 50-link renga.

gunsaku (GOO'N-SAH-KOO) - group work- A group of poems on one subject which represents various viewpoints while each part can be read as a complete whole. In spite of the name, it can be done by one person.

ha (HAH) The 24-link "body" or middle part of a kasen renga. The renga is divided into three parts. The first page and those six stanza are the *jo*. The last page and those six stanza are the *kyu*. Each has different attributes. The *ha* is characterized by many shifts in scene and more non-seasonal verses (talking more about people and less about the weather).

haiga (HI-GAH)-painting- Brush and ink drawing done to accompany a handwritten haiku or hokku. It is usually a rough sketch, slightly abstract or simplified in style like a cartoon.

haigon (HI-GO'N)-haikai words- Words not allowed in serious poetry meaning those words in foreign languages or those too vulgar for polite company. Such expressions used in *haikai* writing are signposts of the genre.

haijin (HI-GIN) - haiku or haikai person- A haiku poet or a crippled person. I kid you not.

haikai (HI-K'EYE) - humor or joke or unusual- A designation for humorous poems which was later used to substitute for the phrase haikai-no-renga which as become a generic word for any poetry in this vein.

haikai-no-renga (HI-K'EYE-NO-RAY'N-GAH) - comic renga- In Basho's time it meant vulgar, earthy renga, full of satire and puns, which was the dominant mode at that time. When Basho spoke of his work, this is what he called it.

haiku (HI-COO)-a verse of *haikai*- Thus it originally meant a verse taken from a renga, but in this century, it was coined by Shiki to be synonymous with *hokku*. From this came the idea that haiku had to have the elements of the hokku, a *kigo* and a *kireji*, but most important was the linking of images completely within the three lines without relying on connections with other elements to make a completed thought.

Also it was to be uplifting, edifying, profound, and not fun. Modern poets have reverted back to writing haiku which could have been the stanza from any part of a renga. Also, in Japanese, the singular and plural are the same: the sheep are and the sheep is so there are no haikus or rengas.

haimi (HI-ME) A refined quality in haiku.

hana no ku (HAH-NAH-NO-COO) The flower stanza in renga.

hankasen (HAHN-KAH-SAY'N) Half of a kasen or an 18-stanza renga.

hibiki (HE-BEE-KEY) -echo- Term used when two stanza reflect images closely or relate in the same way.

hiraku (HE-RAH-COO) The name for any of the stanza in a renga which have no name -- those other than the *hokku*, *ageku*, etc.

hokku (HOE'K-COO) - starting verse- Name for the first stanza of a renga. As poets jotted down *hokku* against the day when they might be called upon to start a renga without preparation, there came to be collections of only beginning verses. Later, in this century, since Shiki, *hokku* were called haiku, even in Japan.

honkadori (HOE'N-KAH-DOE-REE) A stanza that has borrowed (heavily?) from literature or refers to a commonly known incident from past writings or writers. The license to steal.

hyakuin (HE-YAH-COO-EEN) - one hundred verse - A term for a renga which was that long. Before Basho shortened the renga to 36 stanza, this was the usual length.

kaishi (KAY-EE-SHE) - pocket paper - Small, slim sheets of paper used for writing poems. Implies why one should always have them available and their alternate purpose. Aahoo! kaishi!

kaori (KAH-OH-REE) - scent or fragrance - A term for the relationship between stanza in which both evoke the same feeling with very different images. Both a puppy lost in the rain and a newly divorced man might have *kaori*.

karumi (KAH-RUE-ME) - lightness - The quality in writing that Basho encouraged, especially in his later years. Here it meant the beauty of ordinary things spoken of in a simple way. This was the end of puns and word play which was so dear to the hearts of renga writers. Kikaku, his most brilliant student, left him at this point, feeling that *karumi* lacked challenge and sparkle. People still argue about the concept three hundred years later.

kasen (KAH-SAY'N) - immortal poets - Meaning the 36 immortal poets of Japan until Basho took the phrase and concept to shorten the *hyakuin*. *Kasen* is now a term for the 36-verse renga written in the traditional style with moon and flower verses.

kidai (KEY-DAY'EE) - season topic - A condition that designates a season by agreement among poets which makes the full moon a sign of autumn. As this path is full of potholes and debates, there are dictionaries called *saijiki* which are devoted to the sport and explain little with many words.

kigo (KEY-GO)-seasonal word- Nouns which imply the season because they have been traditionally associated with certain times of the year in Japanese literature and/or real life. There are winter bird and summer plants, spring activities and winter skies, fall trees and summer holidays and the list goes on and on. Is a red balloon an indication of summer or fall? Look it up.

kyoka (QUE'YOE-KAH) - a mad poem - The tone and feel of a limerick written in tanka form and just as bawdy. Often the subject is about poets or the writing of poems which makes fun of both.

ku (COO)-verse- Terse or worse.

kuzari (COO-ZAH-REE) - suspension - The lapse of a number of stanza between the use of certain words. For example, there should be eight stanza between the use of "dream". And "insects" should be used only once in 100 verses. By the way, the word 'woman' was not allowed to be included in a renga in the 15th century.

iisute (EE-SUE-TAY) A short sequence with an irregular number of stanza or a renga which has ended in the middle because your partner has left town and no forwarding address.

jo (JOE) The beginning six stanza of a renga which are characterized by a calm preparatory stanza using many season words. Someone has compared a renga to a social evening. The *jo* is like the first half hour when everyone is politely getting acquainted, still talking of the situation that has brought them together -- the weather, the host's house, furnishings, the food, how lovely everyone looks. The *ha* or 24-link body is the conversation over dinner when the wine has soaked in. The *kyu* are those disconnected phrases one hears while saying good-bye, thanks, and don't forget and remember when.

maeku (MAH'EE-COO) - previous verse - The preceding stanza. The one to which another author is expected to add a verse.

maekuzuki (MAH'EE-COO-ZOO-KEY) - joining to the previous verse- A game resulting from renga writing in which one person, usually a poet, writes a *maeku* and someone (or each member of a group) responds with a *tsukeku*. It can be a contest with the poet then choosing a winner. A *maeku* plus a *tsukeku* is a tan renga, the shortest possible kind. The *maekuzuki* is a sadly neglected practice at the moment, but still it has great possibilities for the enjoyment of linkage on a competitive basis. You can investigate the form and try it out at [Maekuzuki](#).

mankuawase (MAH'N-COO-AH-WAH-SAY) - collected verses - An anthology of the winning *tsukeku* (verses) written in a *maekuzuki*.

mushin (MOO-SHE'N)-without heart- As used in renga it means the use of images without classical beauty. The opposite is *ushin*. Torn black lace tights, neon green sculpture nails and a mouthful of "rad" and "max" has *mushin*. The naked country lass surprised while washing her hair in a cold mountain stream has *ushin*.

onji (OH'N-GEE)- sound symbol - An archaic Japanese word American haiku writers were misinformed about. For years we used the word which no one in Japan recognized! We have learned our lesson and now refer to the things the Japanese count on their fingers when writing poetry simply as 'sound units' because the word they use is *on* which is simply too confusing with English.

oriku (OH-REE-COO) Acrostic renga. Here is something almost no one has explored in English except John Cage. Not joking.

renga (RAY'N-GAH) - linked elegance- The Japanese poetry form in which three-line stanza of 5-7-5 *on* are linked to a two- line 7-7 *on*, usually written by two or more persons. Renga baffle Westerners because as a poetry form it lacks a narrative, actual time sequence, and doesn't seem to be doing anything except jumping all over the place. The secret is the linking between images within a stanza and in the empty places between the stanza. Once you learn to appreciate this you can be made to believe anything.

rengaawase (RAY'N-GAH-AH-WAH-SAY) A renga contest.

renku (RAY'N-COO) - *ren* = linked *ku* = verse - A term invented in the 1740s in Japan to cause confusion and the disrupt the lineage of renga from its historical beginning. Some Americans mistakenly use the term in place of renga, which is what Basho called his work. Renku can also mean inferior renga-type poems written in Japanese since Basho's death. The English term "linked verse" however, means an experimental or modern renga-influenced work usually written by poets.

rensaku (RAY'N-SAH-COO)-linked work- A sequence of haiku or tanka wherein each stanza is dependent upon the previous one for meaning.

ryogin (RE-YOE-JEAN) A renga written by two authors.

sabi (SAH-BEE)-aged/loneliness- A quality of images used in poetry that expresses something aged or weathered with a hint of sadness because of being abandoned. A split-rail fence sagging with overgrown vines has *sabi*; a freshly painted picket fence does not.

sangin (SAH'N-JEAN) A renga written by three authors.

sedoka (SAY-DOE-KAH) An old verse form used in the 7th century consisting of matching stanza, using a question and answer method to reveal riddles. Considered the forerunner of renga.

senku (SAY'N-COO) A 1,000 link renga. In practice, it is composed of ten *hyakuin* or hundred-link renga in one poem. The only one I know of in modern times was conducted by Heinz Kurz in Germany in the 1980s.

senryu (SEN-YOU-RUE) - river willow - The pen name of the most famous poet who conducted maekuzuki (linking contests) has been given to this genre in his dubious honor. Because *haiku* and *senryu* are written much alike, often on the same subjects and usually by the same authors, great controversies have ensued over which is what. For a time, in America, *senryu* were considered to be faulty haiku. Actually, if one must differentiate, the *senryu* form is satiric, concerned with poking fun at human behavior as opposed to the profound, sublime world of nature where haiku shine. In Japan the distinction is easier to find because all of their haiku contain a season word - *kigo* and *senryu* do not. Haiku are published with the author's name and *senryu* are not - which tells you much about the esteem of *senryu*.

shibumi (SHE-BOO-ME) 1) A favorite flavor of ice cream 2) An acrobatic feat accomplished while dancing backwards on roller skates 3) A description of poetry typifying subdued, classical, or astringent images. Cracked whole wheat flour muffins without oil, eggs, preservatives, additives or coloring as compared to oven-ready frozen croissants.

shinku (SHE'N-COO) - closely related - Two stanza that are related by images that fit closely together. As opposed to *soku*.

shiori (SHE-OH-REE) - bent/withered - A delicate, pathetic quality for an image. Not often talked about. The term can be of use in describing a partner's link.

Shomon (SHOW-MOAN) The name of Basho's school of renga which was located where he was no matter where he was. His competitor was the Danrin school. Basho's teaching is considered to emphasize the profound, reverent way of relating to the world while still having humor and certain oddities.

soku (SO-COO) - distantly related verse - Two links in which made you wonder if the authors were working on the same renga.

sono mama (SO-NO MA-MA) 1)The world's best renga writer, assuming she is a woman 2) as it is - To present an image without flourishes or embellishment.

tanka (TAH'N-KAH)-short poem- Consisting of 31 sound units in five phrases of 5-7-5-7-7, this lyrical form has existed since earliest recorded Japanese literature. Along the way it has also been called *uta* or *waka*. In many ways it is like the first two stanza of a renga or is a tan renga written by one person. For writers who find haiku too plain and lacking in emotion, the tanka is a great way to express feelings and let your love live. The trick is to not sound sentimental and this is usually done by anchoring the thought in the reality of the natural world.

tan renga (TAH'N-RAY'N-GAH) -short linked elegance- A renga consisting of only two linked stanza of 5-7-5 and 7-7, but written by two people.

tsukeai (T'SUE-KAY-AH-EE) - joining together - Linking of verses or linked verses or a renga or a sequence.

tsukeku (T'SUE-KAY-COO)- linked verse - The second stanza or the one which is linked.

tsuki no ku (T'SUE-KAY-NO-COO) Moon stanza. In the kasen renga this feature occurs at links #5, #14, #27 - if everyone is paying attention. It is snazzy to shift this link forward by one stanza when writing of an 'early' moon or the opposite if someone realizes the moon is missing..

ushin (UU-SHE'N) - with heart - See *mushin*.

utsuri (UU-T'SUE-REE) -reflection- The relationship between renga stanza where there is a sense of movement or transference.

wabi (WAH-BEE) - poverty - Beauty judged to be the result of living simply. Frayed and faded Levis have the *wabi* that bleached designer jeans can never achieve.

waka (WAH-KAH) Five-line poem also called tanka, *uta*, and other things when the lines won't link properly.

wakiku (WAH-KAH-COO) - side verse - The official name for the second link in a renga.

yongin (YOE-JEAN) A four-partner renga.

yoyoshi (YOE-YOE-SHE) A 44-stanza renga.

