

COMPLETION REPORT

A Comparative Study of Malay and Japanese Haiku

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This study stems from a recent development in Malaysia, that is the profusion of haiku in Malay written by Malaysian writers. The study examines the Malay haiku contained in four anthologies, namely *Cendera Kirana: Haiku in Malay* (1994) by Mohd. Affandi Hassan, *Antologi Haiku* (2007) by Lela Hiro, Tabir Alam, and Dipinggiran, *515 Haiku Melayu* (2012) by Anbakri and Anasuraya, and *Percikan Pelangi* (2012) by Leyla Shuri and Darma Mohammad. The study is geared towards the achievement of four objectives: (1) analysing the form and interpreting the meaning of selected Malay haiku, (2) identifying the traits of Malay haiku, (3) comparing the traits of selected Malay haiku with those of selected Japanese haiku; and (4) summarising Malay writers' conceptions of the haiku genre, and their reasons for creating haiku.

Based on the above objectives, the study finds that the Malay haikus studied adhere quite closely to the form of traditional Japanese haiku, with 17 syllables of a 5-7-5 syllable pattern, and the presence of a *kigo*, or a 'seasonal word'. But there are also Malay haiku that deviate from this form slightly; some believe that these should be called 'three-line poems' instead. In terms of meaning, there are haiku that contain social criticism, philosophical values, and Islamic values, while others focus on depicting nature and the writer's surroundings. Secondly, Malay haiku are found to have varying characteristics, which are closely tied to individual writers' conceptions of the genre. Third, some Malay haiku include but modify the *kigo*, given that Japan has four seasons a year, while Malaysia has an equatorial climate. As such, these haiku use *kigo* that reference Malaysian cultural aspects instead. Fourth, and as stated above, the diversity of form and meaning of Malay haiku is closely tied to individual writers' conceptions of the genre. Mohd. Affandi Hassan, for instance, considers haiku to be a unique genre because it can convey complex meaning in a very condensed form. But he notes that not all forms of Japanese haiku can be realised in Malay, due to the nature of the language. Accordingly, his haiku emphasise ideas and teachings over strict adherence to form. Lela Hiro, Tabir Alam and Dipinggiran, meanwhile, believe that the *kigo* is the defining feature of the haiku, and construct their haiku around *kigo* that reference uniquely Malaysian natural surroundings. Anbakri and Anasuraya hold that Malay haiku should be faithful to traditional Japanese haiku, particularly in terms of the syllable pattern, the *kigo*, and its philosophical nature. With regard to the latter, however, Anbakri and Anasuraya infuse their haiku with Islamic spiritual values, given that Islam is the religion of the majority of the Malay community. Leyla Shuri and Darma Mohammad also find that Malay haiku should be faithful to the form of traditional Japanese haiku, but unlike Mohd. Affandi Hassan, they believe that this form can be realised in the Malay language, and build their haiku accordingly.

Based on these findings, it is clear that writers of Malay haiku are attracted to the form and meaning of traditional Japanese haiku. While some writers debate the degree of adherence to certain characteristics, such as the 17 syllables count, 5-7-5 syllables pattern and the *kigo*, others like Mohd. Affandi Hassan, Anbakri and Anasuraya are drawn to its ability to convey meaning. But as noted above, each writer stresses different aspects of form and meaning. For instance, Mohd. Affandi Hassan's haiku prioritise meaning over adherence to form, whereas the haiku of Lela Hiro, Tabir Alam, Dipinggiran, Anbakri, Anasuraya and Darma Mohammad all accord to the form of

traditional Japanese haiku. Based on this understanding, the study finds that writers of Malay haiku are generally cognisant of the form of traditional Japanese haiku and try to adhere to it as much as possible. However, some haiku writers make minor modifications, such as using *kigo* that are more characteristic of Malaysia, while others writers do not adhere to the shape at all. In terms of meaning, there are writers who use haiku to depict nature, as well as impart social criticism or spiritual values—but based on an Islamic worldview. On the whole, the Malay haiku studied generally accord to the traditional characteristics of Japanese haiku, but with certain modifications included in keeping with Malaysian natural surroundings, as well as the culture and religion of the Malays.

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