
The Pandemic Through Japanese Eyes: Covid-19 Reflected in Digital Haiku

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ABSTRACT: Since the COVID-19 outbreak, cyber literature, particularly digital poetry, has seen substantial growth. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, and spread globally in 2020, has altered people's livelihoods. The requirement to wear masks and the policy of enforcing home quarantine have transformed society. People can stay up to date with COVID-19 developments every day thanks to the rapid flow of information made available via social media and the internet. Schools are closed, and instruction is delivered via the internet. Many organizations have introduced work-from-home policies for its staff. This social transformation has had an impact on society's online culture. During the epidemic, social media and the internet have become one of the primary means of communication, news gathering, study, and working. COVID-19 has influenced not only the world's social patterns, but also Japanese poetry, including haiku. During the COVID-19 pandemic, haiku became a way for Japanese people to cope with despair and aggravation caused by having to work from home or limits on activities outside of the home. Haiku is a brief form of Japanese poetry that evolved from the game haikai no renga, a chain poetry game popular in the fourteenth century. Haiku is thought to be able to capture the mood of the Japanese people. This study looks at how the Japanese perceive the COVID-19 epidemic through digital haiku on the jphaiku.jp portal. The data used is a collection of pandemic-themed haiku from 2020-2021. The data analysis method is based on van Dijk's critical discourse analysis theory. The study's findings revealed that the COVID-19 epidemic was initially viewed as a brief pause in activity before evolving into a terrible beast that was expected to vanish soon.

KEYWORDS: pandemic, haiku, COVID-19, representation, Japanese.

I. INTRODUCTION

Haiku is a brief poetic form that originated in Japan and has since become one of the most well-known and respected genres of poetry worldwide. Haiku, which have a 5-7-5 syllable structure, are typically used to describe the beauty or simplicity of nature, with the goal of capturing the essence of a moment in nature. Haiku, which are renowned for their emotional profundity and simplicity, are a reflection of Zen philosophy and a life philosophy that stresses mindfulness of the present moment. Haiku is a brief form of Japanese poetry that evolved from the game haikai no renga, a chain poetry game popular in the fourteenth century. Haiku is thought to be able to capture the mood of the Japanese people. Haiku has developed over time and spread beyond Japan's borders to become a part of world literature.

Haiku has seen considerable changes as digital technology has advanced. Digital haiku evolved as a variation on conventional haiku that uses digital media for distribution and development. In today's increasingly technologically connected world, digital haiku can be found on social media, blogs, and other websites. Haiku's brief and simple nature makes it ideal for the digital media, where users frequently ingest little amounts of information in short periods of time. Digital haiku not only preserves the core of traditional poetry, but also allows for greater creative expression through the use of visual and multimedia elements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on people's lives all around the world. The social separation, isolation, and uncertainty caused by the pandemic have altered how individuals connect, work, and express themselves. Many people in this atmosphere are looking for artistic outlets to help them cope with stress and worry. Haiku, with its quiet and introspective tone, has become one of the most popular ways to convey emotions throughout the pandemic. The birth of haiku reflecting the experience of living in the shadow of COVID-19 exemplifies how art and literature may serve as a reflection of social reality.

Haiku has always focused on capturing small, significant moments in ordinary life, and the pandemic emphasized this deliberateness. As many individuals were compelled to stay at home and isolate, their attention was drawn to the tiny things—a glance out the window, a change in the seasons, a conversation with a family member, or the silence of a normally busy urban setting. The pandemic led many people to reconsider everyday events and how they take on new significance at times of disaster.

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to analyzing haiku in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates a thorough understanding of how these short texts are not only works of art, but also tools for reflecting on, constructing, and

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potentially challenging the power structures and social realities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic. Digital literary texts are subject to the same ideology and power dynamics as conventional texts. Through CDA, scholars may demonstrate how digital writings can either support or contradict prevailing societal norms and ideas. Discourse analysis can indicate, for instance, how societal issues or opposition to government policies may have been reflected in digital haiku written during the COVID-19 outbreak. This study looks at how the Japanese perceive the COVID-19 epidemic through digital haiku on the jphaiku.jp website.

II. METHODS

This study is qualitative descriptive research. Descriptive qualitative research, according to Bungin (2007: 68–69), seeks to draw reality to the surface as a feature, character, nature, model, signs, or description of particular conditions, situations, or phenomena. It also seeks to describe and summarize various forms of societal conditions, situations, and phenomena that are the objects of research.

This study utilizes digital haiku text from the Japanese-language website jphaiku.jp. The haiku analyzed were written during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically from March 2020 to December 2021. The search yielded a substantial number of haiku. Given the large sample size, a selection technique was necessary. Purposive sampling was employed for this purpose.

Cresswell (2016) defines purposive sampling as a method for selecting participants based on pre-defined criteria aligned with the research objectives. In this study, the following criteria were used to select haiku for analysis:

1. **Thematic Relevance:** The haiku must explicitly address the COVID-19 pandemic and incorporate terms commonly associated with the pandemic, such as "COVID," "mask," "quarantine," "work from home," or "vaccine."
2. **User Engagement:** The haiku must have received a high number of "likes" from users on the jphaiku.jp platform. This platform allows users to express real-time appreciation for other users' uploaded haiku. Haiku with the most "likes" have a higher chance of remaining on the front page for a week.
3. **Editorial Recognition:** The haiku must be labeled "佳作 (kasaku)," signifying it as a "best work." Unlike other digital haiku platforms, jphaiku.jp utilizes curators and editors who directly select exceptional haiku for designation as "best work." These recognized haiku are displayed on the platform's front page for a week.

III. RESULTS

Teun A. van Dijk is a leading figure in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). He believes that CDA is a way to study how language (like writing, talking, or pictures) can create or keep unfair power structures. Van Dijk says that language isn't just words; it's also a tool for power. It can affect how society is organized and who has control. Van Dijk thinks that discourse is communication that is influenced by things like society, politics, and beliefs. He sees discourse as a tool that powerful groups can use to stay in control and influence others.

CDA doesn't just look at words; it looks at how those words are used to create and change power relationships. This study tried to figure out how COVID-19 pandemic changed the lives of Japanese people. We, as researchers, can gain a deeper understanding of how digital literary texts, for example, digital haiku, are not only creative creations but also instruments for influencing, replicating, or even challenging power structures and ideologies in contemporary society by applying the CDA principles, particularly as seen from Van Dijk's viewpoint. Below is the table of key words of Japanese digital haiku during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Japanese Digital Haiku during COVID-19 Pandemic

No.	Haiku in Japanese	English translation	Writer	Published at
1	春彼岸コロナ来るなと香あげる Haru higan korona kuruna to ka ageru	Spring equinox, Covid go away I said rising incense	Rine no Takuji	March 21 st , 2020
2	コロナ禍の開けゆく雲に秋風 Korona ka no akeyuku kumo ni akikaze	Post pandemic begins clouds drift autumn wind	Inoue Hirou	November 22 nd , 2021
3	夏場所やコロナ相手に不戦敗 Natsu basho ya korona aite ni fusenpai	Summer places will not lose against Corona	Fujihiko	May 6 th , 2020

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4	夏安居コロナ撲滅祈念しつ Natsu ango korona bokumetsu kinenshitsu	Meditation in summer hoping COVID will be gone soon	Tanimura	May 23 rd , 2021
5	コロナ禍に今年はありか夏祭り Korona ka ni kotoshi wa arika natsu matsuri	Still a pandemic, will there be a summer festival this year?	Nenneko	May 31 st , 2021
6	短夜や夢の中までテレワーク Mijikayo ya yume no naka made terewaaku	Short summer night work from home until in dream	Nogihen	May 18 th , 2021

Here is the analysis of each haikus using Van Dijk's critical discourse theory. To analyse the haiku using Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analytic theory, we need to break down the haiku into its various components and examine them through the lens of van Dijk's three-dimensional model: text, social cognition, and social context.

Data [1]

春彼岸コロナ来るかと香あげる

Haru higan korona kuruna to ka ageru

“Spring equinox, COVID go away I said rising incense”

(Rine no Takuji)

The haiku's macro structure can be seen as a poetic expression that conveys a message about the arrival of spring and the hope that corona virus will not come. The structure of the haiku follows a traditional Japanese form with syllable count of 5-7-5. The super structure involves the themes and schemes that underlie the haiku. The theme here is the arrival of spring and the hope for a virus free season. The phrase 香あげる (rising incense) metaphorically suggest the hope for a better season. The word *korona* is used to refer to the virus and the word *kuruna* (do not come) is a negative imperative, emphasizing the speaker's hope. The poet's cognition influences the creation of the haiku. The poet's understanding of the virus and its impact on society likely shaped the message being conveyed. The haiku can be seen as a form of resistance or hope against the power of the virus. By using poetic language, the poet is able to convey a message that may not be as direct or forceful as other forms of communication. This haiku is not just a simple poem but a complex expression of hope and resistance against the virus.

Data [2]

コロナ禍の開けゆく雲に秋風

Korona ka no akeyuku kumo ni akikaze

“Post pandemic begins clouds drift autumn wind”

(Inoue Hirou)

The imagery of 開けゆく雲 (opening clouds) and 秋風 (autumn wind) creates a vivid picture of nature's cycle and the hope for a new season. Opening clouds suggest a transition from a difficult period to a new beginning. The super structure in this haiku is by using natural imagery to describe the transition from pandemic to autumns implies a shift from human control to natural cycles, subtly critiquing the power structures that have been disrupted by the pandemic. The structure of the haiku is carefully crafted to create a sense of progression from the opening clouds to the autumn wind, emphasizing the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life. This haiku reflects the social context of the time. The mention of コロナ禍 (post pandemic) indicates that it is a significant issue in the society at the time of this haiku is created.

Data [3]

夏場所やコロナ相手に不失敗

Natsu basho ya korona aite ni fushippai

“Summer places will not lose against Corona”

(Fujihiko)

The theme of the haiku is the defeat without a fight, metaphorically comparing it to a summer sumo wrestling tournament (夏場所 *natsu basho*) and COVID-19 pandemic (コロナ). The super structure of this haiku lying in the comparison between the sumo wrestling tournament and the pandemic. This comparison implies a critique of human control over natural or global events. It highlights the powerlessness of individuals against such large-scale challenges. The use of 不失敗 (unwinnable defeat) suggests a sense of hopelessness. In the micro structure, the juxtaposition of traditional Japanese culture (summer sumo wrestling) with modern global health crisis (COVID-19) creates a powerful metaphorical connection between the two, emphasizing the idea that

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even traditional strengths are no match for modern challenges. For the social context, the haiku can be seen as a form of resignation or critique against the power of pandemic. By using poetic language, the poet is able to convey a message that may not be as direct or forceful as other forms of communication but still carries significant ideological weight.

Data [4]

夏安居 コロナ撲滅祈念しつ

Natsu angu korona bokumetsu rinen shitsu

“Meditation in the summer hoping the COVID will be gone soon.”

(Tanimura)

From the macro structure perspective, the imagery of コロナ撲滅 (eradication of COVID-19) and 祈念しつ (prayer) creates a vivid picture of hope and resilience. The super structure involves an ideology of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. The use of コロナ撲滅 suggests a desire for a return to normalcy, while 祈念しつ indicates a spiritual or communal effort to achieve this goal. Micro structure can be seen on semantic analysis of the word 夏安居 (summer meditation), is used metaphorically to represent a period of rest and relaxation. The haiku can be seen as a form of hope and resilience against the power of pandemic. The word 祈念しつ is symbolic of collective prayer, emphasizing the idea that overcoming adversity requires communal effort and spiritual support.

Data [5]

コロナ禍に今年はあるか夏祭り

Korona ka ni kotoshi wa arika natsumatsuri

Still pandemic, will there be a summer festival this year?

(Nenneko)

To analyze this haiku using Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, we need to break down the haiku into van Dijk's three-dimensional model: text, social cognition and social context. From text dimension, we can see the super structure involves the comparison between pandemic and the festival implies a critique of the power of global health crises to disrupt traditional events. It highlights the resilience of communities in continuing to celebrate despite adversity. The word コロナ禍 (COVID-19 pandemic) directly references the ongoing health crisis, setting the context for the rest of the haiku. 今年はあるか (this year too) indicates that despite of pandemic, sparks question, will be a festival or not? 夏祭り (summer festival) is a traditional event that symbolize community and celebration.

Data [6]

短夜や夢の中までテレワーク

Mijikayo ya yume no naka made terewaaku

“Short summer night, work from home until in dream”

(Nogihen)

For the macro structure, the theme of this haiku is the contrast between a short night and working remotely in a dreamlike state. The super structure, the use of 短夜 suggest a brief but intense period of work, while 夢の中まで implies a state of being in dreamlike state, which can be both productive and surreal. Van Dijk's CDA is a theory that analyzes how texts (here haiku) reflect and reproduce social power relations. When analyzing this haiku from the perspective of CDA, the following points emerge. The widespread use of テレワーク (work from home) during COVID-19 pandemic, has blurred the boundaries between work and private life, reflecting the situation in modern society where individual feel pressured to work 24 hours a day. The lack of sleep and mental fatigue suggest the excessive burden that modern society places on workers. Ideology in this haiku is modern social values such as productivity and efficiency have permeated individual lives, justifying the sacrifice of personal time. It suggests that the power imbalance between workers and companies creates a situation in which workers are forced to work long hours. This haiku expresses the author's fatigue, anxiety and a certain resignation to modern society.

CONCLUSIONS

Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis reveals that digital haiku during COVID-19 pandemic is not just a simple poem but a complex expression of hope and resistance against the virus. The analysis highlights the importance of considering the social context and cognition in understanding the meaning and impact of the haiku. This analysis demonstrates how van Dijk's CDA can be applied to a haiku to uncover its deeper meanings and ideological implications, providing insights into how poetry can reflect and critique societal issues. In the last haiku, it express in simple yet striking terms the impact that pandemic in modern society has on individual life. By analysing it from van Dijk's CDA perspective, we can see that this haiku is not merely an expression of personal emotion, but reflects the structural problems of modern society.

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