# ESSAYS

## A Short Biography of Hino Sōjō with Selected Haiku

*Masaya Saito*

Hino Katsunobu was born in 1901 in Ueno, Tokyo, but grew up in Seoul, which was then called Keijō, during the period when the Korean peninsula was annexed by Japan. Katsunobu's pen name, Sōjō, is written as "草城," using two kanji characters—the first meaning "grass" and the second "castle." Sōjō said of the pen name: "I like the color of grass and the way the kanji character looks. '城' (pronounced as "jō") mainly derives from the fact that in those days I was living in Keijō (京城) in Korea."[1] Sojō's father worked for a railway company funded by Japanese capital. It was in 1918, when Sōjō was only seventeen years old, that some of his haiku were first accepted by *Hototogisu* (Cuckoo), the most authoritative Tokyo-based haiku periodical in those days, under the supervision of Takahama Kyoshi (1874–1959), a notably conservative haiku poet.

Back in Japan, in 1918, Sōjō entered the Third High School, an elite national institution in Kyoto under the prewar educational system. In March 1920, in cooperation with Igarashi Bansui (1899–2000) and a few other poets, he founded a haiku group which consisted of students from the Third High School and Kyoto Imperial University (now Kyoto University). When they held their founding ceremony at Kyoto Imperial University, Kyoshi honored them with his attendance, having been invited out of respect as their mentor. In November of the same year, Sōjō began to publish the haiku periodical *Kyōganoko* (Japanese Meadowsweet), which became the voice of the *Hototogisu* school in the Kansai region. In 1921, he entered the Law Department of Kyoto Imperial University. After graduation in 1924, he joined an insurance company, still continuing to submit his haiku to *Hototogisu*. The renowned literary

critic, Yamamoto Kenkichi (1907–1988), said, "The poets of *Kyōganoko* amply demonstrated their talents in *Hototogisu*.... But it was Sōjō alone who gained the most attention as a breath of fresh air. In contrast to the antiquated, dull haiku based on an objective portrayal of things common up to then, [his haiku] were really light-hearted, flexible, quick-witted, and refreshing."[2] Indeed, in the 1921 April issue of *Hototogisu*, eight of his haiku appeared on the opening page as the best works.

The name Hino Sōjō is often associated with "Miyako Hotel," his ten-haiku sequence published in the 1934 April issue of *Haiku Kenkyū* (Haiku Studies), one of the few general haiku magazines published by a commercial house in those days.

MIYAKO HOTEL:

けふよりの妻と来て泊つる宵の春
*kyōyori no me to kite hatsuru yoi no haru*

My wife from today ...
brief stay,
spring dusk

夜半の春なほ処女なる妻と居りぬ
*yowa no haru nao otome naru tsuma to orinu*

Midnight in spring
with my wife,
still a virgin

枕辺の春の灯は妻が消しぬ
*makurabe no haru no tomoshi wa tsuma ga keshinu*

By the pillow,
a spring lamp
my wife put out

をみなとはかゝるものかも春の闇
*omina towa kakaru mono kamo haru no yami*

A woman
ah, like this —
spring darkness

薔薇匂ふはじめての夜のしらみつゝ
*bara niou hajimete no yo no shirami tsutsu*

Scent of a rose —
first night,
glimmers of dawn

妻の額に春の曙はやかりき
*me no gaku ni haru no akebono hayakariki*

On my wife's brow,
spring dawn —
already

うらゝかな朝の焼麺麭はづかしく
*ururakana asa no tōsuto hazukashiku*

Spring morning,
toast,
she shyly eats

湯あがりの素顔したしく春の昼
*yuagari no sugao shitashiku haru no hiru*

After a bath,
her intimate face —
spring noon

永き日や相触れし手は触れしまゝ
*nagaki hi ya aifureshi te wa fureshi mama*

A long day —
hands touch one another ...
remain touching

失ひしものを憶へり花ぐもり
*ushinaishi mono o omoeri hana-gumori*

Reflecting on
what I have lost ... clouds
above cherry blossoms

Haiku sequences, or "rensaku haiku" in Japanese, had already been initiated by Mizuhara Shūōshi (1892–1981), Takaya Sōshū (1910–1999), one of Shūōshi's chief disciples, and Yamaguchi Seishi (1901–1994), among others, long before "Miyako Hotel" appeared. However, it was Sōjō who first dared to depict intimate themes, such as a honeymoon, and that with a certain degree of eroticism. These depictions were not only unfamiliar to haiku readers at that time, but also, to many of them, even sensational. Hence, this sequence received praise as well as harsh criticism. This liberal attitude, which Sōjō adopted and spearheaded, led to his later deep involvement in *Shinkō Haiku*, or the New Rising Haiku.

From the 1910s, Kyoshi, the conservative publisher of *Hototogisu*, had retained dominance over the world of haiku. He advocated that a haiku should be a 5-7-5 syllable poem composed as an objective portrayal of the beauties of nature. This stifled many haiku poets, young intellectuals in particular, who were eager to express their emotions more freely. One of the most conspicuous examples was Mizuhara Shūōshi, one of Kyoshi's most distinguished disciples, who left his master in 1931 in order to pursue his own, more lyrical style. Shūōshi's break from Kyoshi is often regarded as the onset of the New Rising Haiku movement. However, in a broader sense, it was also the result of liberal haiku poets' general awareness that haiku at large were not keeping pace with the rapid changes

brought about by modernization. As modern men and women, they wanted to update haiku to the point where the poetry would come into tune with the zeitgeist they saw in their daily lives. Hence, they formed a new literary force during the 1930s.

A variety of New Rising Haiku periodicals were published all over Japan. *Kikan* (Flagship), which Sōjō launched in January, 1935, was one of them. In the first issue of the magazine, he declared "I believe in a new spirit and liberalism," and added:

> The phrase 'new spirit' is naturally opposed to the phrase 'old spirit.' As a rule, old spirit has a tendency to dote upon and be obsessed with convention. It is submissive to tradition and has an aversion to change. As a rule, new spirit has a tendency to go against this. New spirit, of course, respects and is interested in convention and tradition, but it does not allow itself to get tied up to or submit to them.[3]

Further he mentioned:

> There is no concrete definition whatsoever regarding the phrase 'New Rising.' Instead, it includes anything that has newly risen in opposition to things conventional. 'New Rising' can be applied to any kind of new haiku, and discrimination or criticism is not going to be applied to them. Such a term is used sometimes with respect, and at other times with disgust, depending on the user, who may want to attach any sentiments he or she pleases. Without allowing ourselves to be caught up in the name 'New Rising Haiku' or 'New Rising,' we should always aspire to lead ourselves towards self-innovation.

*Kikan* surprised people—not only by its title, which sounded conspicuous to those who were accustomed to traditional titles chosen from season words, such as Kyoshi's *Hototogisu*—but also by the content itself. The haiku which Sōjō selected for *Kikan* obviously showed very liberal tendencies, with a lot of emotional and reflective elements and, in many cases, a lack of a season word. A few examples:

夢青し蝶肋間にひそみゐき
*yume aoshi chō rokkan ni hisomi-iki*

Blue dream ...
a butterfly hiding
between my ribs

*Kita Seishi (February 1936 issue)*

白馬を少女けがれて下りにけむ
*shiro-uma o shōjo kegarete orini ken*

A girl gets off
a white horse ... perhaps
no longer stainless

*Saitō Sanki (June 1936 issue)*

昼飯タイム禁苑の鶴天に浮き
*ranchi-taimu kin-en no tsuru ten ni uki*

Lunch time —
a crane over the Imperial Gardens
afloat in mid-air

*Saitō Sanki (June 1936 issue)*

砲身は灼けつつ微動だにせざる
*hōshin wa yaketsutsu bido dani sezaru*

An artillery gun ...
its barrel scorched in heat
without a tremble

*Takami Rojō (August 1936 issue)*

秋の昼ぼろんぼろんと艀ども
*aki no hiru boron boron to hashike domo*

Noonday in autumn ...
bumping, bumping, barges
moored side-by-side

*Kamio Saishi (October 1937 issue)*

闇ふかく兵どどと著きどどと著く
*yami fukaku hei dodo to tsuki dodo to tsuku*

Deep in darkness
soldiers unloaded in a rush
unloaded in a rush

*Katayama Toshi (January 1939 issue)*

椿散るああなまぬるき昼の火事
*tsubaki chiru ā namanuruki hiru no kaji*

Camellias fall ...
Ah, such a lukewarm inferno
during the daytime

*Tomizawa Kakio (June 1940 issue)*

蝶墜ちて大音響の結氷期
*chō ochite dai-onkyo no keppyō-ki*

With a butterfly's
plummet, a deafening crash ...
the freezing season

*Tomizawa Kakio (March 1941 issue)*

Obviously, few of these haiku reflect Kyoshi's teachings; in fact, they openly fly in their face. That is to say, they are not direct portrayals of natural beauty, while some of them do not contain a season word. Although it cannot be proved that Kyoshi read *Kikan*, it is possible to assume he did, and probably with bitterness and anger towards his disciple, Sōjō. This would certainly explain why, in the 1936 October issue of *Hototogisu*, he announced the forced exile from the *Hototogisu* group of Sōjō, along with Yoshioka Zenjido (1889–1961), another New Rising Haiku poet.

Meanwhile, much of the world was growing darker and darker. In July 1937, the second Sino-Japanese War broke out. In November the same year, the Anti-Comintern Pact was signed by Japan, Germany, and Italy, after which the government began an intensified crackdown on communists. In April 1938, with the growing intensification of the war and international tensions, the National General Mobilization Act was issued, which allowed the government to control all human and material resources. The eminent haiku poet Yamaguchi Seishi (1901–1994) later wrote "The reds were of course banned and liberalism likewise. None of those who were liberal-minded or anti-traditional were tolerated."[4] In 1940, the Special Higher Police prosecuted poets who were members of various New Rising Haiku groups, such as *Kyōdai Haiku* (Kyoto University Haiku), *Dojō* (On the Soil), and *Ku to Hyōron* (Haiku and Criticism), among others, on possible violation of the Maintenance of Public Order Law. Sōjō's recollection of those days reads as follows:

> The oppression by the authorities of those who wore even a faint scent of liberalism gradually became blatant. Around the time when I heard that some haiku poets who were senior to me, or were my friends, were treated in a cruel manner, an eerie air began to float around me. This extended to the point where I repeatedly received a menacing remonstrance from someone who had a certain connection with the authorities. It was then that I decided to give up writing.[5]

These words by Sōjō and Seishi strongly indicate that the Japanese authorities in those days regarded the New Rising Haiku poets' liberalism

as being rather harmful to their policy of inspiring the national spirit for the Second World War.

On 15th August, 1945, the war ended. In the post-war turmoil, Sōjō continued working at the office of the insurance company in Kobe. Although fellow haiku poet Igarashi Bansui (1899–2000), who was a doctor, had advised Sōjō to take sick leave for a few months, he dared not, due to his position as branch manager. Sōjō, who had a weak constitution, caught a cold in January the next year, which soon developed into pneumonia. He was finally obliged to stay in bed. He recalls:

> Within my head was confusion. Like a clock ticks the seconds, I heard some corner of my head ceaselessly keep whispering "Uh Oh, Uh Oh." I was troubled about my duties as branch manager, about my financial situation, about haiku, about life ... whichever way I looked, it was really "Uh Oh, Uh Oh." For my family that didn't have any assets or savings and, furthermore, had lost all their fortune in the air raids, the loss of my job would mean destruction.[6]

Fortunately, his company was generous enough to grant him long term leave and continued to pay him a salary until April, 1949. It was then that he finally had to quit, but he received a severance payment which allowed him to buy a house in Ikeda City, Osaka.

In October that same year, Sōjō founded the haiku periodical *Seigen* (Blue Sky) by request from his disciples. By then, however, his health had further deteriorated with the onset of pneumonia, and he began to be confined to bed. Sōjō's wife Yasuko (1906–1987) took care of him, not only tending to his physical needs, but also transcribing his words for a variety of literary writings and letters, and receiving visitors to his sickbed. On the front page of *Seigen*'s founding issue, Sōjō wrote:

> Dear Yasuko
>
> Without your support, my life could not have lasted until today.
> Let me dedicate this humble publication to you.
> All that I can do now is offer my heartfelt gratitude.
>
> Sōjō[7]

In 1951, Sōjō lost the eyesight in his right eye due to glaucoma. Bedridden, he kept on composing haiku and working as editor of *Seigen*. He described his sick life:

> Bedridden, reflecting upon things, lonely has become my life. I can be lost in thought to my heart's content, taking time slowly ... looking back on those days when I was healthy and was living while being swamped with things to do and things to catch up with. Not only am I surprised by the huge difference between then and now, but I also wonder which on earth is the real life. Although I cannot think that being sick in bed is the real life, I cannot possibly think, either, that a life in which one does not reflect upon things, and simply larks about, is a complete life.[8]

After the war, Sōjō's haiku assumed a down-to-earth nature, focusing on his resignation to his fate as a sick man living in poverty. They were no longer fictional, youthfully lyrical, erotic, elegant, sophisticated, or based upon direct portrayals of nature. Sōjō, who used to be extroverted in his youth, now became introverted, accepting his life as it now was, due to a variety of hardships he had to experience during and after the war. He seemed to reach a state of equanimity. As he stated on the front page of *Seigen*, "Haiku is poetry about the mundanity of the day in and day out for all sorts of people."[9]

Bed-ridden, Sōjō handled the jobs as a haiku selector and commentator for *Seigen*, other haiku magazines, and newspaper haiku columns. He wrote essays at the request of various publications. He enjoyed reading letters received from numerous haiku poets. Also, he enjoyed receiving guests; one of them was Kyoshi, who once kicked him out of *Hototogisu*. Perhaps, what Sōjō most enjoyed was to be with his wife Yasuko who loved and very attentively took care of her sick husband.

Sōjō passed away on January 29th, 1956, at the age of 54.

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His collections of haiku published in his lifetime include: *Sōjō Kushū: Hana-gōri* (Sōjō Haiku Collection: A Flower within a Column of Ice), 1927; *Ao-shiba* (Green Lawn), 1932; *Kinō no Hana* (Flowers of Yester-

day), 1935; *Tentetsu-shu* (Railway Switch Operator), 1938; *Tanbo* (From Dawn till Dusk), 1949; *Jisen-kushū: Hino Sōjō Shū* (Self-Selected Haiku Collection of Hino Sōjō), 1950; *Jinsei no Gogo* (An Afternoon in My Life), 1953; and *Sōjō 360 Ku* (360 Haiku of Sōjō), 1955. His posthumous collections include *Shirogane* (Silver), 1956; *Hino Sōjō Zen-kushū* (The Collected Works of Hino Sōjō), 1988; and *Hino Sōjō Zen-Kushū* (The Collected Works of Hino Sōjō), 1996. The last two volumes shared an identical title, but were slightly different compilations; both were published by Chūseki-sha.

## from *A Flower within a Column of Ice* (1927)

冴返る面輪を薄く化粧ひけり
sae-kaeru omowa o usuku kehai keri

Spring chill again ...
her face lightly
made up

春の夜やレモンに触るゝ鼻の先
*haru no yo ya remon ni sawaru hana no saki*

Spring night —
the tip of my nose
touches a lemon

淡雪や昼を灯して鏡店
*awa-yuki ya hiru o tomoshite kagami-mise*

Spring snowfall —
lit during the daytime,
a mirror shop

物種を握れば生命ひしめける
*mono-dane o nigireba inochi hishimekeru*

Seeds
in my fist; their lives
jostle within

雷に怯えて長き睫かな
*ikazuchi ni obiete nagaki matsuge kana*

Scared of
thunder, her long
eyelashes

日盛の土に寂しやおのが影
*hizakari no tsuchi ni sabishi ya onoga kage*

Noon sun …
lonely on the ground,
my shadow

月明や沖にかゝれるコレラ船
*getsumei ya oki ni kakareru korera-sen*

Moonlight —
the cholera ship anchored
far out to sea

かはほりや晒布襦袢の肌ざはり
*kawahori ya sarashi-juban no hada-zawari*

Bats flitting…
bleached cotton undershirt
on my skin

朝寒や夜行汽車着く海の駅
*asa-samu ya yakō-kisha tsuku umi no eki*

Morning cold —
the night train arrives
at a seaside station

秋の夜や紅茶をくゞる銀の匙
*aki no yo ya kōcha o kuguru gin no saji*

Autumn night —
my silver spoon slips
into my tea

短日や裁物板は傷だらけ
*tanjitsu ya tachimono-ita wa kizu-darake*

Days growing shorter —
a tailor's worktop
full of grooves

日の当る紙屑籠や冬ごもり
*hi no ataru kami-kuzukago ya fuyu-gomori*

In sunlight
a wastepaper basket —
winter seclusion

青空に焔吸はるゝ焚火かな
*ao-zora ni honō suwaruru takibi kana*

Absorbed into
blue sky, the flames
of a bonfire

見てをれば心たのしき炭火かな
*mite-oreba kokoro tanoshiki sumibi kana*

Finding my heart
joyful, while gazing at
the charcoal fire

早寝して夢いろいろや冬ごもり
*hayane shite yume iroiro ya fuyu-gomori*

Early to bed,
a variety of dreams —
winter seclusion

## from *Green Lawn* (1932)

朝の茶のかんばしく春立ちにけり
*asa no cha no kanbashiku haru tachini keri*

Morning tea
so fragrant
spring has come

わが船の水尾をながむる遅日かな
*waga fune no mio o nagamuru chijitsu kana*

Watching
my ship's wake ... a long
spring day

手をとめて春を惜めりタイピスト
*te o tomete haru o oshimeri taipisuto*

Pausing her hands
to mourn the passing of spring…
a typist

わが思念月光となり太虚に満つ
*waga omoi tsuki-kage to nari sora ni mitsu*

My longing
becomes the moonlight
flooding the sky

手袋をぬぐ手ながむる逢瀬かな
*tebukuro o nugu te nagamuru ōse kana*

Gazing at her hand
taking off her glove…
a tryst

## from *Flowers of Yesterday* (1935)

かいつぶりさびしくなればくぐりけり
*kaitsuburi sabishiku nareba kuguri keri*

A grebe
beginning to feel lonely
dives into the water

寒灯や陶は磁よりもあたたかく
*kantō ya tō wa ji yori-mo atatakaku*

Cold lamplight —
earthenware warmer
than porcelain

## from *Railway Switch Operator* (1938)

熱退きぬ空漠として黄の疲弊
*netsu hikinu kūbaku-to shite ki no tsukare*

My fever has gone …
within, the boundless void of
yellow exhaustion

アダムめきイヴめき林檎噛めるあり
*adamu-meki ibu-meki ringo kameru ari*

Like Adam
like Eve, a couple
shares an apple

マンドリンやさしき膝に載りそろふ
*mandorin yasashiki hiza ni nori-sorou*

Mandolins
in ensemble, each on
a gentle knee

うごかんとして静かなる銀の指揮棒
*ugokan to shite shizuka naru gin no takuto*

About to begin
movement, the quiet
silver baton

掌中の手のやはらかき夜霧かな
*shōchū no te no yawarakaki yogiri kana*

In my hand,
her hand so soft…
mist at night

ひと拗ねてものいはず白き薔薇となる
*hito sunete mono iwazu shiroki bara to naru*

A woman sulks,
saying nothing, transforming
into a white rose

いなづまにまばたきしたる枯木達
*inazuma ni mabataki shitaru kareki-tachi*

A flash of lightning—
the leafless trees
blink their eyes

冬の雲はびこり鉄の骨育つ
*fuyu no kumo habikori tetsuno hone sodatsu*

Winter clouds
rampant, iron bones
keep growing

春の夜の自動拳銃夫人の手に狎るゝ
*haru-no-yo no koruto fujin no te ni naruru*

Spring night —
a Colt looks intimate with
the lady's hand

白き掌にコルト凛々として黒し
*shiroki te ni koruto rinrin to shite kuroshi*

In her hand so white
the Colt valiantly
black

## from *From Dawn till Dusk* (1949)

国破れ人倦みて年新たなる
*kuni yabure hito umite toshi arata naru*

My country defeated,
its people exhausted …
the year is new

新緑やかぐろき幹につらぬかれ
*shin-ryoku ya kaguroki miki ni tsuranukare*

Early summer greenery
pierced by
black tree trunks

新緑やうつくしかりしひとの老
*shinryoku ya utsukushikarishi hito no oi*

Early summer greenery —
such a beauty she was,
now in her old age

冬の蠅しづかなりわが膚を踏み
*fuyu no hae shizuka nari waga hada o fumi*

A winter fly
quiet, stepping
on my skin

## from *An Afternoon in My Life* (1953)

かかりたる鼠と動く鼠捕り
*kakaritaru nuzumi to ugoku nezumi-tori*

Entrapped,
a mouse moves with
a mousetrap

ちちろ虫女体の記憶よみがへる
*chichiro-mushi nyotai no kioku yomigaeru*

Cricket chirping…
a woman's body is revived
in my memory

死と隔つこと遠からず春の雪
*shi to hedatsu koto tōkara-zu haru no yuki*

Death
not far away …
spring snow

高熱の鶴青空に漂へり
*kōnetsu no tsuru ao-zora ni tadayoeri*

High-fevered,
a crane drifts about
the blue sky

露寒し猫が鼠を食ひ残す
*tsuyu samushi neko ga nezumi o kui-nokosu*

Dewy chill —
a cat leaves a mouse
half eaten

柿を食ひをはるまでわれ幸福に
*kaki o kui-owaru made ware kōfuku ni*

Until I finish
eating a persimmon —
happiness

われ咳す故に我あり夜半の雪
*ware seki-su yue-ni ware ari yowa no yuki*

I cough
therefore I am …
snow at midnight

暮春の書に栞す宝くじの殻
*boshun no sho ni shiori su takara-kuji no kara*

Late spring —
a losing lotto ticket
as a bookmark

妻が持つ薊の棘を手に感ず
*tsuma ga motsu azami no toge o te ni kanzu*

My wife holding
a thistle … its prickles I feel
in my hand

夏蒲団ふわりとかかる骨の上
*natsu-buton fuwarito kakaru hone no ue*

Summer futon,
so light and so soft
on my bones

猫の子を妻溺愛すわれ病めば
*neko no ko o tsuma dekiai su ware yame-ba*

A kitten
doted upon by my wife —
me, sick in bed

菊見事死ぬときは出来るだけ楽に
*kiku migoto shinu toki wa dekiru-dake raku-ni*

A chrysanthemum
splendid … oh that I could die
as peacefully as possible

ただ生きてゐるといふだけ秋日和
*tada ikite-iru to iu-dake aki-biyori*

Alive
is all that I am —
clear autumn day

見ゆるかと坐れば見ゆる遠桜
*miyuru-ka-to suware-ba miyuru tō-zakura*

Wondering if
I can see, I sit up …
distant cherry blossoms

## from *Silver* (1956)

妻子を担ふ片眼片肺枯手足
saishi o ninau kata-me kata-hai kare-te-ashi

Bearing responsibility
for my wife and child … one eye, one lung,
withered limbs

こほろぎや句を考へる妻の顔
*kōrogi ya ku o kangaeru tsuma no kao*

A cricket chirping …
my wife's face, trying to
compose a haiku

## Notes:

While translating the haiku in this article into English, I made reference to the following materials: For Sōjō's haiku, *Hino Sōjō Zen Kushū* (The Collected Haiku of Hino Sōjō) edited by Murō Kotarō, Chūseki-Sha, 1988; and for haiku published in *Kikan*, *Shinkō Haiku Hyōgenshi Ronkō* (A Treatise on the History of the New Rising Haiku Expressions) by Kawana Hajime, Ôfu-sha, 1979.

[1] Itami, Mikihiko. "Hino Sōjō." *Haiku Kōza* 8: *Gendai Sakka-ron* (Haiku Lectures 8: Criticisms of Modern Haiku Poets). Meiji Shoin, 1958, 414.

[2] Yamamoto, Kenkichi. *Gendai Haiku* (Modern Haiku). Kadokawa, 1964, 143.

[3] Ejima, Sakyū. "Kikan Sōkan no Koro." (When Kikan Was Founded). *Haiku Kenkyū*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1972, pp. 106.

[4] Sawaki, Kin'ichi, and Murio Suzuki. *Saito Sanki.* Ôfu-sha, 1979, 57-58.

[5] Murō, Kotarō. "Hino Sōjō: Bannen, Enjuku e no Michi." (The Way to His Maturity) *Haiku Asahi*, October 2004, 53-54.

[6] Ibid. 56

[7] Ibid. 59

[8] Ibid. 58

[9] Ibib. 58