

Japanese and Western Perspectives on Time in Photo-Haiku

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Introduction

Culture influences the cognition, motivation, emotion, and behaviors of individuals (Hall, 1959). This study adds to the growing body of research that claims Japanese and Westerners literally perceive time differently (Masuda and Nisbett, 2003; Gutchess, Welsh, Boduroglu, and Park, 2006; Miyamoto, Nisbett, and Masuda, 2006; Iyengar, 2010). Applying research methodology similar to a previous study (McMurray, 2020) photo-haiku revealed different cultural concepts of time measurement. Words are important, “but they are the least part of any poem” pined Kirkup (2020) who claimed “It is the spirit behind the words that counts: the pauses, hesitations, and the silences between the lines.” The source data for this study did not rely solely only words but also included photographs, photo-haiku from participants from 47 countries. A sampling of 1,206 participants who wrote haiku in reaction to photographs were categorized according to pace, monochronic or polychronic perspectives of time. A photograph catches a moment in life. A haiku can focus on a moment in everyday life. In this study photographs were shown to participants who were asked to interpret what they saw by composing a haiku. Cultural differences correlated to the way Japanese and Western poets perceived and wrote about photographs. Results confirmed that it is possible to differentiate a culture by the way its individual members interpret photographs to compose haiku to frame references to time.

1. Questions that Guided this Study

This research was guided by the hypothesis that Japanese perceptions tend to differ from those of Westerners when they think about time. This difference was tested by asking Japanese and Westerners to compose photo-haiku. Antecedents for these cross-cultural differences in temporal perceptions were uncovered to explain why Japanese and Westerners write about time differently. Different values, religions, languages, natural climates, social and economic conditions are inherent cultural factors within cultures that rise in mind when photo-haiku are crafted. If photographs and haiku can describe how different cultures perceive different aspects of society, photo-haiku can illustrate the abstract concept of time.

Keywords: photo-haiku, comparative culture, P-time, M-time, Matsuyama



Figure 1. Dogo Onsen Honkan was closed for repairs from Jan. 2019.

How would you describe the above photograph? Your answer might be related to the culture in which you were raised and its concept of time. Master haikuist Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902) frequented the spa and composed this haiku about it.

寒けれど酒もあり温泉もある処
samukeredo sake mo ari yu mo aru tokoro

It is cold, but
we have sake
and the hot spring

Figure 1 is a photograph of Dogo Onsen that was shot in Matsuyama in 2019, during its conservation and repair. The source data, photo-haiku, used in this study was conducted during the same time. Notably, the first floor to the historic spa remained open so the public could enjoy a hot bath, while the upper floors were closed so that repair work could be completed in a timely manner. This repair site seems to be representative of a polychronic culture, where the person in charge might typically have an open door, hear the sounds of a ringing phone and hammering nails, and speak at a meeting all going on at the same time. While the Japanese primarily use polychronic time, they use strict monochronic time when dealing with foreigners. Monochronic

time systems allow for things to be done one at a time. The Japanese concept of time combines monochronicity and polychronicity, M-time and P-time. Japanese are therefore considered to be time-flexible, a hypothesis that will be tested in this research study.

2. Previous Studies on Cross-cultural Concepts of Time

Cultural theories about time contain conceptual elements, subjective constructs. Hall (1959) inspired anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists to examine constructs to explain the divergent ways in which cultures view time. These researchers defined and examined divergent temporal orientations across cultures, including pace of life, monochronicity and polychronicity, the past, present, and future orientation, the use of clock time and event time, and cultural metaphors (Gannon, Locke, Gupta, Audia, Kristof-Brown, 2005).

2.1 Concept of Pace of Life

The experience of time is universal. Time is in the daily lives of people in developed and developing countries. Werner, Altman, and Oxley (1985, p. 14) defined the pace of life as “the race, speed and relative rapidity or density of experiences, meanings, perceptions and activities.” Examining the pace of life in 31 countries, Levine and Norenzayan (1999) claimed that Japan and Western European countries had the fastest pace of life. The Japanese writer Satoru Kanematsu remained confined at home, accepting his fate believing there was nothing he could do against the force of nature. He nonetheless shared his sense of frustration. This poem reflects how the COVID-19 crisis doubled down on the writer’s perception of passing time.

COVID rain
a cancelled meeting
haikuists

Western Europeans in countries such as Germany were found to be better at slowing down after work, or when prevented from doing work, than Japanese (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). Lothar M. Kirsch happily extended his time away from work in Meerbusch, Germany. Unable to catch a ride, he postponed beginning work, the next event in his life.

After the holidays
Succeeding
Not getting the train

The pace of life in the U.S., Canada, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong ranked middle. Individuals from urban areas tended to write about faster paces of life than did haikuists in rural areas. Forced to stay home during the coronavirus pandemic, Meghan Elizabeth Jones’ life had never been slower in Calgary, Canada.

always indoors
life slowed in fear
empty hands

Participants from non-industrialized countries set the slowest pace. Indian writer Vandana Parashar in Panchkula felt she owned a slow pace of life.

rain clouds
the child in me refuses
to hurry home

Unperturbed by the fact that time passed slowly during childhood in Lagos, Nigeria, Taofeek Ayeyemi composed this haiku.

unfolding a letter--
kids counting the fowl prints
in the mud

How much someone believes they can control the pace of life and control nature may also explain why people perceive and approach time differently across cultures.

2.2 Concept of M-time

Monochronic time (M-time) means paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time. The concept of monochronic time (M-time) identifies cultures that view time as linear and separable, and divided into units. M-time cultures therefore emphasize doing “one thing at a time.” Monochronic individuals wait until one event is over before beginning the next one. Western cultures emphasize schedules, punctuality, and preciseness, and a monochronic sense of “time as money” may overshadow interpersonal relationships. M-time cultures include the United States, Germany, and Scandinavia (Kaufman, Lane & Lindquist, 1991). An educator in Princeton, New Jersey, Shelley Krause, like many monochronic individuals in American culture, wrote this haiku about waiting until one event was over before beginning the next one.

rain at the window--
I ask my mother
how long it will last?

2.3 Concept of P-time

Polychronic time (P-time) means being involved with many things at once. Polychronic time (P-time) cultures view time as naturally reoccurring, and therefore emphasize doing “many things at one time.” P-time

cultures focus more on the naturally occurring flow of time. Time isn't wasted because multiple goals can be completed at the same time. Polychronic individuals consider time to be fluid and malleable, and as a result are able to adapt and "go with the flow" (Nonis et al., 2005). P-time cultures focus on human interactions. Time spent with others is a task that helps build bonds that may be useful in the future. Collectivist cultures tend to be polychronic (Leonard, 2008; Billing et al. 2010). A Polychronic person is good at multi-tasking, and prefers to work on multi-tasks and interact with other people. Japan, Middle Eastern, and South Asian countries tend toward a polychronic sense of time. India is a polychronic culture whose people tend to change priorities depending on their importance; attitude towards punctuality are in flux. Indian haikuist Madhuri Pillai let her flowers go with the flow of time.

old home
I let the wisteria
have its way

2.4 The Past, Present, and Future

M-time correlates to a strong future orientation and the notion of P-Time implies present and past orientations (Ko & Gentry, 1991). Collectivism and individualism can also explain why people perceive and approach time differently across cultures. Shirai and Beresneviene (2005) found that individualistic cultures in Western countries (Canadians, Americans, and Northern Europeans) tend towards being future-oriented. Californian culture is very future-oriented, constantly focused on what needs to be done and by when, in order to keep moving on and to be the most productive. Aileen Cassinetta, the San Mateo Poet Laureate, worked with a group of writers including Garry Gay who composed the next haiku to evoke the historic formal gardens of Filoli in Northern California, which closed due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This poem shared a way forward.

daffodil garden
a path into the sunshine
with a bumblebee

Individualists focus more on abstract events and universal rules that apply across situations. Collectivist cultures such as Japan tend to be more present-oriented and focus on current events and the "here and now." Past-oriented societies include China, Britain, Korea and Spain.

Individualism and collectivism points of view were shown to have an effect on how 1,206 individuals attended to context and background when looking at photographs to compose photo-haiku haiku (McMurray, 2020). Countries considered to have individualistic cultures that affect the way haikuists intuitively responded to a photograph to write haiku were identified as the United States, Canada, Germany, Ireland, South Africa, and Australia. Collectivistic countries included Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Venezuela, Guatemala, Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina.

3. Methodology

This study observed how 1,206 participants viewed and responded to photographs. Participants were asked to compose photo-haiku based on a set of 12 photographs. For this study only those photo-haiku related to time were analyzed.

3.1 Haiku as Testing Instruments

As research instruments, photographs and haiku are simple, yet they can uniquely demonstrate the concepts: pace of life; monochronic time; polychronic time; and past, present, or future time.

3.2 Participants

Japanese and Western perception variables were measured by holding a photograph--the visual prompt--constant. Participants were asked to respond to what they perceived in the photo. This data was obtained from photo-haiku entries in the English language to the 9th Matsuyama Photo-Haiku Contest. Participants from Japan and from 46 other countries submitted 1,206 haiku in the English language related to 12 set photos provided by the contest organizers (Table 1). As judge of the photo-haiku in English, I was able to assess all of the English language submissions and correlate them to country.

4. Observations

There are manifestations of time that have proved to be stumbling blocks at the cultural interface. Examining cultural metaphors about time can be an effective way to understanding different temporal issues across cultures. Through photo-haiku, it may be possible to describe a culture and its frame of reference.

4.1 Observations on Pace of Life

From the beginning humans have been tied to growing seasons and were dependent on the forces and rhythms of nature. Out of this background two time systems evolved--one as an expression of our biological clocks, the other of our environmental cycles. The concept of time as structure symbolizes our biological clocks. Time as communication, which is explicit in all societies and cultures, is based on natural rhythms--the solar, lunar, and annual cycles. The natural rhythms of time are associated with daily, monthly, and annual cycles. When asked what is unique about Japan, a Japanese person might respond, "It has four seasons." To a Westerner this answer may seem surprising, because every part of the planet technically has four seasons. However, Japan's archipelago has clearly defined seasons. Rhythm ties the people of a culture together, yet it can also isolate them from members of other cultures.



Figure 2. Yokohama Port

When Japanese photo-haikuist Yukiko Yamada shot Figure 2 she was keenly aware of the natural rhythms of time and the beginning of the year. Photo-haiku can remind people of the preciousness of the present moment. Photo-haiku for the Japanese is best when it focuses on milestones or seasonal demarcations by describing a moment of time in everyday life. Japanese culture focuses on the transient moments of daily life. Perhaps to rebuke a busy partner who overworked during the holidays and missed an important demarcation of time, she penned the following haiku.

to the world
that you couldn't see
new year starts

4.2 Observations on M-Time



Figure 3. Kyoto Temple

For this peaceful photo of a butterfly on a flower in Figure 3, Monica Wang from Germany viewed it as an example of reaching a goal. A well-deserved rest could be taken only after a mountain had been climbed. A

German colleague, Deborah Karl-Brandt emphasized the need for productivity.

swaying
a climber basks in warmth
on the peak

metamorphosis
from egg to butterfly
and back again

A Japanese participant, Satoshi Akimoto, considered this photographed moment in time as the beginning of time itself in Japan.

village to which
the temple belongs
beginning of this country

The concept of M-Time is a product of northern European culture. Monochronic time is arbitrary and imposed. Germany and Switzerland represent classic examples of M-time cultures, where the individual believes in finishing one task at a time. In their time culture, time is a valuable commodity that shouldn't be wasted and sticking to one task at a time ensures that it's well-managed.



Figure 4. Yokosuka Park

To the American haikuist Marita Gargiulo, time should focus on something more important. M-Time emphasizes how an American specifies that time moves from point A to point B in a linear fashion. Looking at the photograph in Figure 4, the photo-haikuist therefore tried to distract the man's measured focus on war, as represented by the warship, and set him in the direction of peace, as represented by the peace roses, by

composing this haiku.

ah, but
smell what the roses
have to offer

To a Filipino participant who saw the same photograph, time was lost waiting.

biding my time...
the flowers witness
the agony of waiting

To a Japanese haikuist, Teiichi Suzuki, the photograph of someone on a bench implied the person was patiently waiting.

seaside bench--
the woman in red
waiting for someone

Japanese participants also tended to think about time in the past. The warship stirred memories of previous world wars.

an esplanade
everyone takes a walk
with their memories

4.3 Observations on P-Time

Haiku often utilize the metaphor of the cherry blossom's short lifespan: a flash of beauty followed by a withering and falling death to the ground.

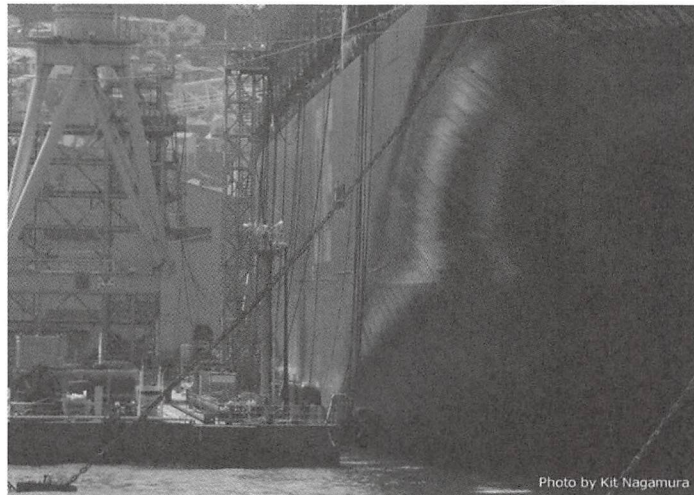


Figure 5. Hiroshima Port

An Italian participant, Pasquale Asprea viewed a photograph (Figure 5) of Kure Shipyard in Kure City, Hiroshima Prefecture, and penned this poem that provides a perfect example of P-Time. The Italian shared a concept of time in which interruptions are acceptable.

A rainbow--
the welder takes off
his protective glasses

A Japanese participant, Hiroshi Kawane chimed in with a similar P-Time response suggesting the welder in Hiroshima should take a break for a health-check.

stethoscope
shipyard employees
health checkup

An American participant, Susan Burch, was willing to wait until one event is over before beginning the next one. When she is lucky and wins some money, she will move full steam ahead in M-Time.

90th birthday
still waiting
for my ship to come in

4.4 Observations on the Past, Present, Future

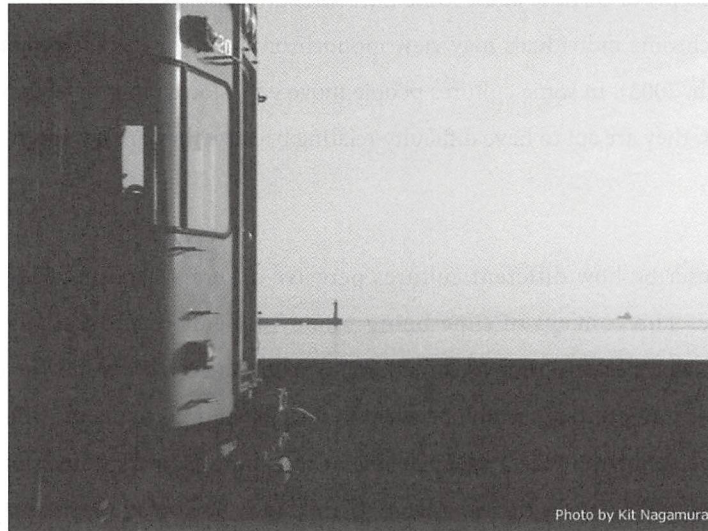


Figure 6. Matsuyama on the Seto Inland Sea

An American poet who goes by the penname Oz, looked at a photograph (Figure 6) of a train rolling by the seaside and penned this response that is clearly future oriented.

Rolling wheels and waves
Will it be that I find rest
In Matsuyama?

A Japanese haikuist interpreted the timely moment as a metaphor for life.

beautiful sunset
train advances toward the light
like our life

5. Discussion

Why did the photo-haikuists who participated in this study perceive of time differently? Finding the answer could benefit from the work of Fulmer, Crosby and Gelfand (2014) who determined the antecedents to temporal orientations by identifying cultural values, social structure, and language, as well as the effects of environmental factors such as natural climate and social and economic conditions.

This research provided a fascinating look at the perception of time by photo-haikuists from 47 countries around the world. They shared stories about how they passed a moment of their time. While some photo-haikuists seemed happy to be spending more time alone or with family, others wrote in frustration. Some photo-haikuists wrote that they had lost track of time, they had forgotten what day of the week it was. Haiku after haiku, time after time, the psychological process of changing behavior equated to an expected cultural

response.

Though the two concepts of M-time and P-time have strengths and weaknesses, proponents of these views sometimes clash. Polychronic individuals may view monochronic concepts as inefficient and narrow-minded (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2003). In some cultures people move very slowly; in others, they move rapidly. When two such cultures meet, they are apt to have difficulty relating because they are not in sync.

6. Conclusion

Photo-haiku can describe how different cultures perceive different aspects of society, and an abstract concept such as time. The concept of time being money appeals to individuals from monochronic industrialized societies who perceive time as something to spend, invest, or waste. The concept of time as an empty void that humans travel through from one event to the next appeals to people who run on what is called event-time. Cultural metaphors provide a valuable lens to reveal unique perspectives of culture on time, and photo-haiku by Japanese and Western photo-haikuists in this study illustrated their sense of time.

The photo-haiku was analyzed in a previous study on cultural context (McMurray, 2020a), however the hypothesis and methodology in this current study on time was updated. This research focussed on how culture may have affected the way a sample of 1,206 participants wrote photo-haiku about time when they looked at the same photo. Although Japanese haiku is itself a form of culture, international haiku is composed in English in at least 47 countries around the world. The results of this study suggested that culture did affect the way these photo-haikuists perceived time.

Table 1.
Photo-Haiku in English on set photos

	Country Name	Entries
1	Australia	54
2	Belarus	1
3	Brazil	1
4	Bulgaria	9
5	Canada	55
6	China	47
7	Colombia	1
8	Croatia	52
9	Finland	1
10	France	27
11	Germany	6
12	Ghana	2

13	Greece	10
14	Hungary	2
15	India	92
16	Indonesia	15
17	Ireland	1
18	Israel	1
19	Italy	17
20	Korea	1
21	Macedonia	1
22	Malaysia	11
23	Malta	13
24	Montenegro	6
25	Nepal	1
26	New Zealand	23
27	Nigeria	19
28	Northern Ireland	12
29	Pakistan	11
30	Philippines	20
31	Poland	5
32	Portugal	3
33	Romania	70
34	Russia	25
35	Serbia	6
36	Singapore	2
37	Slovenia	1
38	Spain	12
39	Sri Lanka	3
40	Sweden	4
41	Switzerland	1
42	Taiwan	6
43	Turkey	1

44	UK	33
45	USA	105
46	Vietnam	1
47	Japan	415
	Unidentified	1
47 Countries Total		1,206

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