

# Hawaii Plantation Haiku Series

TYLER A. LAU

ITE 440 (Curriculum Implications of Multicultural Education)

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*My name is Tyler Lau and I am a student at the University of Hawaii Post-Baccalaureate Certification in Secondary Education focusing in Japanese. Originally these haiku were for a reading response assignment for ITE 440: Curriculum Implications of Multicultural Education, a course taught by Dr. Patricia Espiritu Halagao. The assignment was to do a poem, drawing, or song response to a book by Milton Murayama and a chapter from a book by Ronald Takaki. Both authors describe the racially-based harsh treatment and working conditions of plantation workers in Hawaii. Takaki talked about the history of sugar cane plantations in Hawaii and the life and working conditions of plantation workers from different countries. Murayama's work is fictional but accurately depicts plantation life from a Japanese plantation worker's view, utilizing local pidgin to narrate the story. Because of that I decided to do the haiku poems in the standard 5-7-5-syllable format, while putting myself in the shoes of a Japanese plantation worker. I referred to Murayama's book for the Japanese and pidgin language usage and Takaki's book for historical background and details. Like my teacher and classmates, I hope you will enjoy these haiku and maybe learn, laugh, or even cry.*

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Back from the cane fields  
My "Tadaima" to Mom  
A red dirt shirt soup  
(*Ta-da-i-ma* <"I'm home"> Japanese)

A quarter a ton  
A cut down to twenty two  
Shikata ga nai  
(*Shi-ka-ta-ga-na-i*  
<"There is no helping it"> Japanese)

Working like the wind  
Is like fooling with a king  
Three to one fifty (\$3-\$1.50)

One language at home  
One at school and one at work  
Is my tongue twisting



I am currently a student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Post-Baccalaureate Certification in Secondary Education focusing in Japanese. My goal is to earn my certification, to get a Master's degree, and to teach Japanese at a high school. These haiku were originally for ITE 440: Curriculum Implications of Multicultural Education, a course taught by Dr. Patricia Espiritu Halagao, who suggested that I submit my work to *Mānoa Horizons*. It was difficult to make these haiku socially and historically accurate and relevant, but I enjoyed writing them while also learning a lot about the history of plantations in Hawai'i and how that history influenced what Hawai'i is today.

When one guy has beef  
Best to give it to a friend  
And not a Luna  
(Luna <overseer>)

As I hoe the weeds  
"Yosh! Kakkate koi!"  
The voice in my head  
(*Yo-shi-Ka-kka-te-ko-i*  
<"Right! Come at me!">  
*Japanese*)

Though I have a blade  
Though I cut down many  
cane  
I end up bloody

A red mist comes up  
I think of chocolate dust  
Though it not be sweet  
(*When cutting the cane, the  
dust from the red dirt flies out  
from the cane, looking like  
chocolate dust*)

The burn of the sun  
The heat of soulless  
machines  
A vision of hell

The boss cultivates  
Loyalty and discipline  
Least he has a chair

The kings have kindness  
But behind their kind actions  
Is a mosquito

Today, we work hard  
Today, we will cut down cane  
Like puppets on strings

Five bucks to gamble  
In Japan or in China  
To the Philippines  
(*Gambling was not allowed in the Japanese and Chinese  
Plantation Camps*)

The blade of cane leaves  
The sharp bite of a black snake  
A prison of pain

One needs food to live  
But can you call it living  
If you owe the bank

Though I may earn more  
While the others earn much  
less  
I cannot climb up

I hear the whistle  
At the beginning and end  
The pain and relief

Though tired I run  
To the furo to bocha  
So I don't turn red  
(*fu-ro <bath> Japanese, bo-cha  
<bathe> Japanese*)

Though I have a name  
It seems I have another  
My own bango  
(*ba-n-go <number> Japanese.  
Rather than calling the plan-  
tation workers by their names,  
the plantation bosses and over-  
seers called them by the number  
tag, the bango, given to them.*)

Around the fire  
We tell our many stories  
The pain goes away



Like a can of fish  
We sleep shoulder to shoulder  
Waking to be fried

A doctor wears white  
But they should wear a black cloak  
With a scythe in hand

I will bet on cocks  
Though I don't bet on talking  
When I hoe the weeds

Though try as I might  
 A strong cane samurai  
 Life is not a film  
 (*sa-mu-ra-i* <Japanese warrior>)

“Emperor Banzai!”  
 Cried out the Japanese camp  
 Until Pearl Harbor

When I eat my lunch  
 My own ume musubi  
 Is salting the pain  
 (*u-me* <plum> Japanese, *mu-su-bi* <rice ball> Japanese)

Lunch is a bento  
 Musubi with good bagoong  
 A fusion of tastes  
 (*ba-goong* <Filipino fish paste> Tagalog)

Though far away home  
 We have brought both our baggage  
 And our home culture

When talking at work  
 The bagga don't understand  
 Takusan words  
 (*bag-ga* <person> Hawaiian Creole English, *ta-ku-sa-n*  
 <many> Japanese)

Backs in constant pain  
 As we hoe weeds endlessly  
 Least we have baseball

I kotsun cane  
 Day after day, after day  
 Kotsun again  
 (*ko-tsu-n* <Japanese onomatopoeia for the sound of hitting  
 something hard>)

Cutting sugar cane  
 Though I can look above it  
 I dare not try to

The Kaminari-san The Luna's whip  
 The sound of thunder  
 (*Ka-mi-na-ri-san* <Mr. Lightning> Japanese)

After cutting cane  
 I return looking like a  
 Red chorinbo  
 (*cho-ri-n-bo* <bum> Japanese. Plantation workers in the  
 cane fields would be covered in red dirt by the end of the  
 work.)

## Bibliography

- Murayama, Milton. *All I asking for is my body*. University of Hawaii Press, 1988, Honolulu.
- Takaki, Ronald. *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii 1835–1920*. University of Hawaii Press, 1983, Honolulu, pp. 57–125. PDF file. Accessed 11 April 2017.