

# The Creation and Evaluation of a Website for Learning Japanese Classical Haiku and Painting

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## Abstract

The author's web site devoted to the poet-painter Yosa Buson (1716–84) is divided into three sections: articles on Buson, bibliographic resources, and a pictorial catalogue of the haiku and paintings of Buson and his followers. The site is mostly in both Japanese and English, for the convenience of overseas learners, and it receives an increasing number of hits from both Japan and abroad. Comments in the guestbook and direct e-mails to the site author attest to its popularity. Access trends were analyzed, and in order to improve the structure and content of the site, a formative evaluation by college students has also been undertaken. Online courseware based on this site was also developed as well as a directory for learning Japanese language through haiku using both Italian and English languages.

**Keywords:** haiku, Japanese painting, Yosa Buson, website, online courseware, Japanese language learning

## 1. Purpose and background

The purpose of this project was to create digital resources for the study of art and literature in higher education. The main artist chosen was Yosa Buson (1716–84), a key Japanese haiku poet and painter of the mid-Edo period. The resources first being developed on the Web will later be transferred onto a CD-ROM. Their effectiveness for learning will also be evaluated. These resources are expected to enrich liberal arts education in that they represent a new method of authentic learning in the field of classical Japanese art. The project also stands as a practical model for the development of materials for digital teaching and learning across all fields of the humanities. There were two motivations for the development of this project, one public and general, the other personal and specific.

Firstly, the site aims to make resources accessible to all to facilitate better instruction and learning for teachers and students alike. Digital libraries and museums in many countries now have a presence on the Internet for this very reason. Major projects in progress in Japan include

the Kyoto University Library, the Research Museum at Tokyo University, and the National Diet Library. But in order to realize the full potential of such digital resources a greater variety of sites and contents are needed. Of value are not only those created by institutions, but those built by individuals and groups. Recent advances in software and hardware technology have made building sites easier; the scope of personal sites is now limited only by the availability of materials, time, and good ideas. Web pages thus created may further evolve into a university courseware.

Secondly and more personally, for many years the site's author has been a student of Yosa Buson's haiku and painting, as well as the Western Imagism school of poetry led by Ezra Pound. Pound was influenced by the Japanese haiku tradition; it can perhaps be said that Buson is the classical haiku poet closest to the movement of Imagism. In this sense the site is an attempt to integrate its creator's professional interest in educational media study and his love of poetry and art. In "ABC of Reading" Ezra Pound says: "A classic is a classic not because it conforms to certain structural rules, or fits certain definitions... It is a classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness." Personally, the site creator aimed specifically to present Buson's art afresh in a new environment: on the Internet.

## 2. Subject area and materials

The website covers the tradition haiku form *Haikai* and Literati Style painting from late eighteenth century Japan, from Horeki to Tenmei periods in the traditional chronology. This era saw both the second rise of *Haikai* and a new wave of painting — in both of which Yosa Buson was a key figure. The leading poet and painter established a genuine Japanese form of Literati Style painting, a form which originated in China. Buson's art was surveyed in critical volumes by Cahill (1996) and French (1974). His haiku was translated into English and was the subject of studies by Ueda (1998) and Sawa and Shiffert (1978). These materials were used as references in creating the English text for the site.

In classical Japanese poetry studies, original editions and manuscripts are very important; in many cases published books were printed directly from woodblocks engraved from the author's calligraphy itself. Because of this, not only the visual art but also the literary content often poses problems of authenticity, an issue affecting its interpretation as well as the life history of the author. Buson and his followers are cases in point of the importance of this kind of research and demand to be studied with reference to the original text and images. The Web is eminently suitable for this as text and image can be woven together and pages reused without damage to delicate originals. Original materials available on the site include antique *Haikai* books; calligraphies of letters and poems on hanging scrolls; and paintings on hanging scroll and paper roll. Most are from the site creator's personal collection, thus avoiding any copyright issues. Digital reproductions of these materials are displayed alongside the relevant texts.

### 3. Contexts of the development

This project connects art, classical poetry, and painting to educational media and instructional design studies. It offers practical know-how in areas such as copyright clearance, page layout, and distribution methods. The Internet is an open medium and the resources are accessible to Japanese and foreign researchers, students, and those with a general interest in haiku and Japanese classical painting. When completed, the entire website will be available on CD-ROM and will include high quality photographs and video. This study also includes a formative evaluation of the instructional effectiveness of the resources, the result of which will serve as a model for similar projects in other fields.

In Japan there has been so far relatively little development of instructional multimedia materials in the field of the humanities. One exception was *The Bunkyo Museum of Literature* (Saga, 1992), which successfully utilized HyperCard stacks and film on videodisc. During the first multimedia boom in the 1980's multimedia packages such as *Shakespeare*, *Perseus*, and *Cicero* from the United States were released. The Internet has ushered in a second boom and online courseware developed with tools such as WebCT and Blackboard is flourishing around the world. Nationwide networks such as the Learning Technology Support Network in the United Kingdom were established to support higher education institutions. Yet Japan was in recession during this period and was rather slow to innovate; only now is the country once again seeing a rush to integrate new technologies into traditional culture and society.

### 4. Structure of the Web site

With help from an Education Ministry research grant from 1999 to 2001, the web site for this study has thus been created at <http://ship.nime.ac.jp/~saga/buson.html>. Another top page written in Japanese is at <http://ship.nime.ac.jp/~saga/busonj.html>. It is divided into three main sections: articles on Buson, bibliographic resources on Buson, and a pictorial catalogue of haiku and painting works of Buson and his followers. The first section contains the author's original papers and essays such as "Poetry as an open space for lightening of Being." The second section also includes pictures of the places and monuments concerning Buson. In the third section, certain important materials such as "Shin Hanatsumi" ("New Florilegium"), an illustrated book of Buson's texts and his pupil Gekkei's drawings are to be fully digitized page by page.

In addition, a guestbook is available for visitors to comment on the site. Most links go to pages within the site but some outside related websites are also linked to. The majority of information is available in Japanese and also, for the convenience of international visitors, English. Materials such as classical Haikai books and poem calligraphy on small 'tanzaku' cards are digitized by scanner, and art works in hanging scrolls and paper rolls are processed with digital still camera and video camera. **Figure 1** shows the top page in English and **Figure 2** another top page in Japanese.

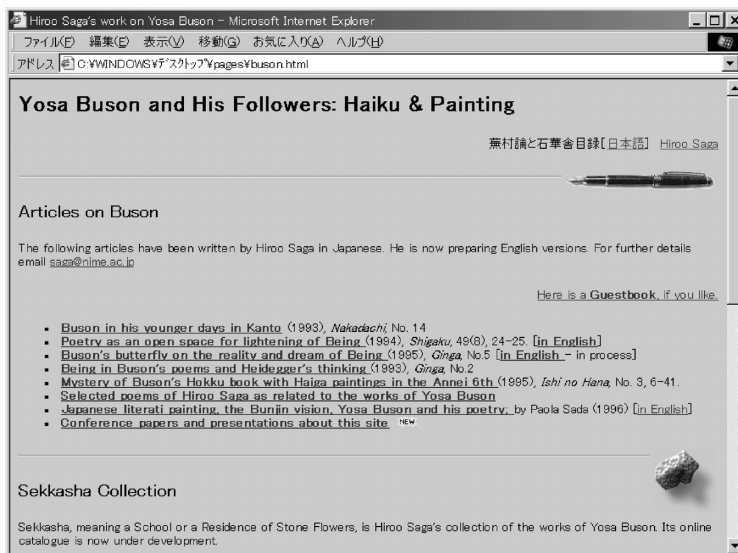


Figure 1 English Top Page

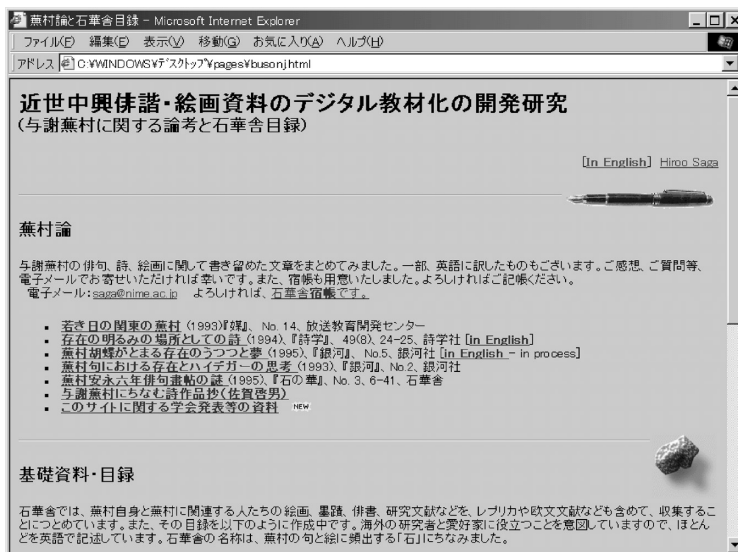


Figure 2 Japanese Top Page

## 5. Pedagogical strategy and learners' responses

The first section of the site, “Articles on Buson,” was aimed to give the visitors detailed analysis of the nature of Buson’s haiku and paintings. It was intended here that the learner-visitors would think and get insights about the rich artistic world of Buson. The second section, “Bibliographic resources on Buson,” compiled texts and images that described Buson’s life history and the literary environment of his poetry and art. The learners are encouraged in this section

to get background information to understand the art and life of Buson. The third section, "A pictorial catalogue of haiku and painting works of Buson and his followers," collected the images of various original materials to give the learners a sense of authenticity and motivate them to learn further about Buson and his followers. The guestbook added an interactive tool for communication between the visitors and the site author.

A formative evaluation of the site was conducted with five undergraduate and four graduate students where they explored the site freely and wrote an essay focusing on what they had learned about Buson and how they felt about the structure of the site. A summary of their responses follows.

- Although their prior knowledge about Buson and his followers was very limited and only general in nature, most of them reported they learned a lot from the site. In particular, they learned from the articles section about how to interpret and enjoy classical haiku poems and the significance of a deep and philosophical examination of the meaning of particular poems.
- The bibliographic resources section was generally useful to the students, but some of them claimed that this section should be located at the first part of the top page and the author should introduce the nature and aim of the site in a more user-friendly manner. They needed an introductory text written in Japanese about Buson, his haiku, and paintings of the Literati Style. On the other hand, a range of different pictures of the places related to Buson's life were considerably attractive to the students and made them feel closer to Buson's life and art. This virtual travel motivated students to further explore the site.
- The pictorial catalogue section was impressive to many students because of its wide variety of pictures of the collected art works and antique books. The painter side of Buson is not known as much as his poet side. In this sense, it was a surprise for many students to explore this section. It gave them visual satisfaction to look at the images of original art works, which in turn motivated them to continue learning about the poet-painter Buson and his followers. In this respect, it seems that the regard for the site as a whole was raised by this section.
- The guestbook section was also very impressive to the students. It was especially so because of the many notes submitted from people of different countries.
- Some students commented that the links within the site were well designed, but some others found the information on the top page to be excessive and thought its structure should be more simplified.

## 6. Access trends

Work on this site began in the spring of 1997 and new information has since been added on a regular basis. The number of hits the site receives has gradually increased. **Table 1** shows the access statistics obtained in every May of 2000, 2001, and 2006. Total average hits to the site include visits to different pages by the same person. Average hits to the English and the Japanese top pages are the estimated actual number of visitors.

**Table 1 Access trends for the three years since 2000**

Access index	May 2000	May 2001	May 2006	2006/2000
Total average hits to site per day	353	745	1,279	3.62
Max.	550	1,446	1,753	
Min.	146	476	688	
Average hits to English top page	45	33	26	0.58
Max.	77	56	38	
Min.	22	17	15	
Average hits to Japanese top page	16	47	51	3.19
Max.	27	69	123	
Min.	5	30	30	

In May 2000, the English page attracted three times as many visitors as the Japanese page, a proportion which reflects the linguistic demographics of Internet users around the world. Perhaps there were also still very few sites devoted to classical Japanese haiku and painting in English, which would explain why the log file showed many visitors come to the page from Yahoo in the United States. However, access to the English page has gradually decreased since then, while the Japanese top page has received more visits, over three times more in May 2006 as compared to 2000. These trends may reflect the fact that more Japanese pages and texts in the pages, with less English, have been added to the site. On the whole, the site received nearly four times more hits in May 2006 as compared to 2000. It is clear that the site has become a more popular Internet destination. Searches for the key word “Buson” on search engines rank the site first in their results in many cases.

## **7. Additional development of online courseware and a directory for learning Japanese language through classical haiku**

While continuing to develop this site, an additional development of an online courseware based on this site was undertaken in 2002. Using WebCT and only Japanese language, the courseware is comprised of ten units and divided into two major parts, the first part for Buson’s painting and the second part his haiku. The top page of the courseware is shown in **Figure 3**. A bulletin board was also created for students’ exchange. Six graduate students participated in a comparative evaluation of the courseware and the open website. They observed that the open site is useful for those who are already interested in Buson to study further about his work and the courseware is more useful for novice students to study about Buson more systematically and also effective for homework before and after the lesson.

Additionally, a special directory within the open Buson site was created for visitors to learn Japanese language through classical haiku. Because the site author knew a professor at the University of Venice, it used Italian for translation and interpretation of the original Japanese haiku poems of Buson. The directory is comprised of the main index page, introduction page, four seasonal index pages, ten haiku pages containing Japanese original haiku characters, roman characters of the original haiku, Japanese visual calligraphy of haiku, audio streaming of the

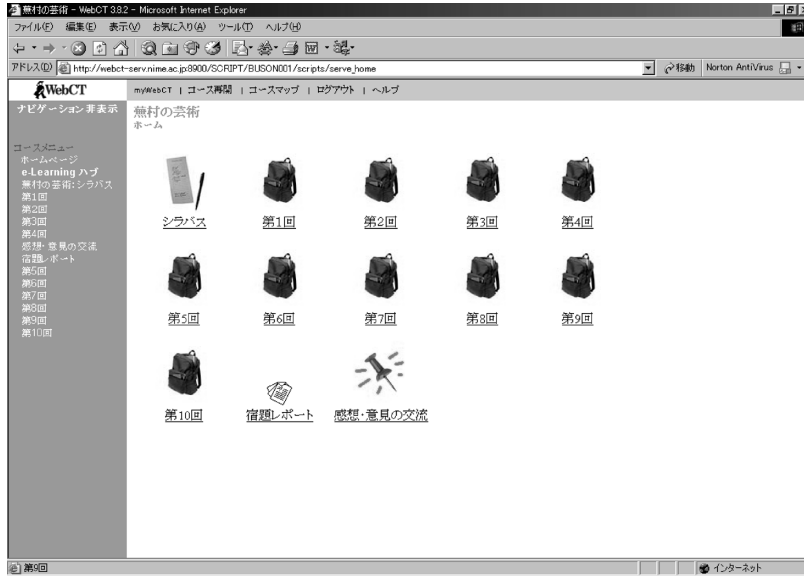


Figure 3 Courseware Top Page



Figure 4 A Haiku Page

Japanese reading of the poem, and Italian translation and interpretation of the haiku poem. An example of such haiku pages is shown in **Figure 4**. It also includes a video streaming page on Buson's life and art. A student of Japanese studies at Venice University observed that this program was of adequate volume for introductory haiku course and the poems were interesting enough and that Buson was very attractive. A similar directory using English is now under development with additional haiku poems.

## 8. Evaluation and conclusion

Visitors write comments in the guestbook and also send e-mails to the site author. The comments are an invaluable insight into visitors' opinion of the site. Overseas visitors have commented and send e-mail more often than Japanese, suggesting perhaps a more general openness or a stronger desire to learn. Comments and e-mails include questions on poem readings and interpretation, comments on the tradition of haiku and painting, requests for help with school-work (especially from American high school and college students), general impressions of the site, and expressions of thanks. The author was also occasionally asked to judge the authenticity of a particular picture from the site visitors. A small number of domestic visitors have e-mailed the author with professional questions, a fact which suggests that the site is of influence in classical *Haikai* and art studies in academia. An example of such e-mails is as follows.

Dear sir/madam,

I am a haiga enthusiast from the Netherlands and just visited your site. It is very nice and shows excellent examples of haiga by Buson, Shiro and Kinkoku. I would like to ask if the museum has issued a book on haiga paintings and if so if I could purchase that publication?

I find it very difficult to get in contact with Japanese connoisseurs of haiga painting and get Japanese publications on the subject. I have a collection of about 130 haiga painting most from the Meiji and Taisho era and would like to get more information on haiga from this period.

Unfortunately I am not able to read kanji so I do not know that the content of the haiku and what the names of the artists are. I tried to contact the Kakimori Bunko museum but could not find an email address. Hopefully you are able and willing to help me. All help and information is highly appreciated.

I hope to hear from you.

Best regards,

In conclusion, the website can be considered a success in that it meets the intellectual needs of a particular group of people both inside and outside of Japan. This view is supported by the fact that a growing number of people access the site from around the world and from the students' positive responses in the formative evaluation as well. Some texts in the articles section, for example, had a deep impact on some people's understanding of haiku. Viewing the images of authentic art works and classical books was a joyful experience to many visitors. The site also plays a meaningful role in terms of cultural exchange in the fields of art and poetry. An



additional online courseware created with WebCT was well-structured and particularly useful for introductory students. A special program within the site for learning Japanese language through Buson's classical haiku added an extra attraction to this site.

Yet the site also needs further improvement and development. Many pages are still under construction. Translating classical Japanese texts into English is particularly time-consuming. In addition, feedback in the guestbook and via e-mail needs to be analyzed in order to make the site more relevant and useful to visitors. Results of the formative evaluation show that the index pages need to be simplified and that a general introduction to haiku and Literati Style painting needs to be included on the page. Although the site is not yet fully developed, the author created a browser-based version of the site on CD-ROM and sent it to classical haiku and painting researchers to obtain an academic view of the site. To date a number of respondents have praised the quality of the articles as well as the fact that authentic art is available in the catalogue section of the site. The creation of this site is meaningful also for professional researchers of Buson.

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**Appendix 1:**

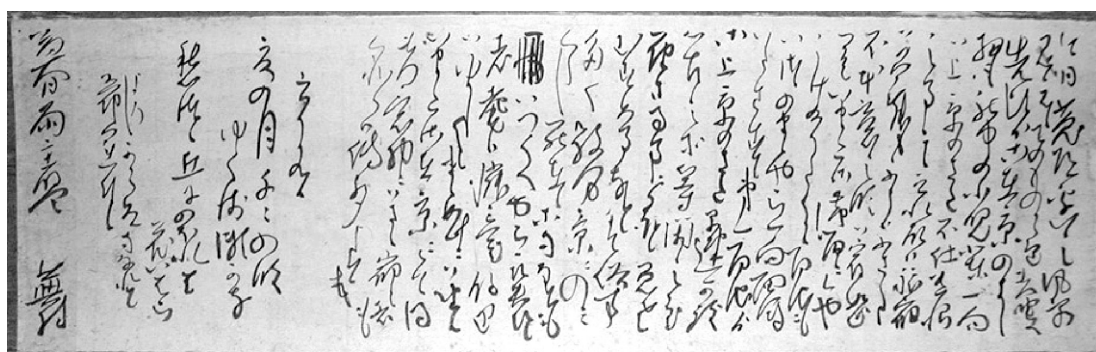
**Examples of Buson's haiku poems — Translation by Sawa, U. & Shiffert, E. M. (1978) —**

A flying kite / as in the sky yesterday / is still there.  
(Ikanobori / kino no sora no / aridokoro)

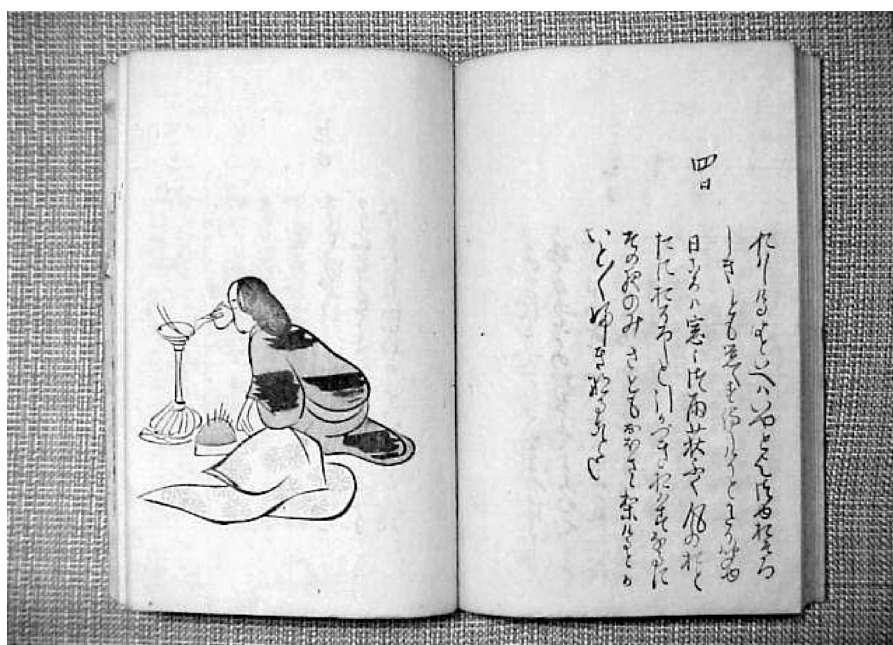
It goes into me — / the comb of my long gone wife / to step on it in the bedroom.  
(Mi ni shimu ya / naki tsuma no kushi o / neya ni fumu)

**Appendix 2:**

**Selected images from the catalogue section of the site**



A letter written by Buson



“Shin Hanatsumi” book with Buson's calligraphy