

## Poet Profiles

### YU CHANG

by Ty Hadman

This month's poet profile is on a poet who even though relatively new to haiku, has impressively won the top award in some of the more important haiku contests. Yu Chang was the grand prize winner of the Shiki Internet Haiku Contest, winning the contest back to back in 1996 and 1997; he won the Museum Of Haiku Literature Award in 1998, the Harold G. Henderson Haiku Award in 1999 and has work that has been included in five different Red Moon Press publications and anthologies (published and edited by Jim Kacian) from 1997-2001.

Yu's interest in haiku began about five years ago when he saw a presentation of *ee i sing* on the college campus at Union College in Schenectady, New York, where he has been on the electrical engineering teaching staff since 1974. Upon returning to his office, full of inspiration, Yu immediately began searching the Internet for more of e.e.cummings' poems and discovered the Shiki Salon list instead! He has been in love with haiku ever since.

Much of what Yu has learned about haiku has been from contact with haiku poets in discussion groups on the Internet such as the Shiki Salon and Raku Teapot, through personal contact and association with haiku poets at the North American Haiku Conference in Chicago in 1999, in his monthly meetings with Hilary Tann and John Stevens beginning in spring last year, and from his reading of *Speculations* by Robert Spiess. Yu is very humble. It is this personality trait that distinguishes him as a haiku poet and a remarkable human being in my eyes. He listens carefully and learns quickly. He is truly thankful for the support he has received from many members of the haiku community and wants to give special thanks to the following poets who have become his friends and have helped him along the haiku path: Jeanne Emrich, Jane Reichhold, Keiko Imaoka, Francine Porad, Jim Kacian, Robert Spiess, Andrea Missias, Richard MacDonald, Kim Komurasaki, John Polozzolo, and Hilary Tann and John Stevens who I've already mentioned.

It is my belief that Yu's friends have helped him to recognize his own natural and latent talent that goes way beyond any learning or guidance which is not to take away anything from anyone. The creative process is stimulated through association. The best teachers teach by first listening to and learning from their so-called students and then by interacting with them. The best teachers share some of their key experiences in their own development and often serve as good mirrors. The best teachers don't answer many questions for people who want to learn; they let the so-called students find out the answers to those questions for themselves. Once the answers are discovered, results can then be compared and discussed. The best teachers provide tools, interact, share the work and points of view of others as examples, mutually explore and experiment, encourage, inspire, sharply challenge, and express and demonstrate the love and devotion for the art they cultivate. I think Yu has had this type of haiku poets helping him, and being a professor himself, knows what kind of help he wants and

has chosen who he learns from wisely. The haiku community as a whole has helped all of us to one degree or another despite haiku politics, unfairness, prejudice, disagreements, and all the other reasons that sometimes divide us. But it is our love of the developing genre and our sincerity and devotion that has conquered in the end as new haiku poets join the growing community that is now worldwide. The haiku poets that have passed away have left behind a treasure chest of haiku poetry and knowledge that is available to us and future generations to appreciate, add to, and deviate from. It is my opinion that Yu Chang is one of the poets currently writing haiku that are not only being appreciated today but will also be added to that treasure chest of haiku classics in English to be preserved for future generations.

Yu has been meeting monthly to discuss haiku for three to five hours with Hilary Tann and John Stevenson during their leisurely meals at the Tai Pan restaurant on Route 9 in Halfmoon, New York, for well over a year now. As a result, they collectively decided to set aside for publication the best of the haiku that were discussed and revised during these intimate meetings and to include the work of a guest haiku poet in each edition. The name of their publication is *Dim Sum*, a Chinese specialty consisting of meat, vegetables, and sweetmeats served in tidbit portions of a bite or two and literally means "little hearts".

The first issue of *Dim Sum* from the Route 9 Haiku Group has been published very recently. It is a semi-annual publication that costs \$8.00 a year or \$5.00 for a single issue. Subscription information can be obtained by contacting John Stevenson at P.O. Box 122, Nassau, NY 12123. I highly recommend it. The layout, design, and printing are of excellent quality.

Here are two excerpts from *Dim Sum* of each of the 3 members Yu Chang (yc), Hilary Tann (ht), and John Stevenson (js):

biology conference room  
all eyes  
on the stuffed owl  
  
yc

Most of Yu's best haiku contain very strong and vivid images as in the haiku above. The dead owl's stare and those in the conference room staring back is the type of humor I really appreciate in haiku. It goes deep.

new dean  
all blackboards  
turn white  
  
yc

The mention or suggestion of colors, black and white images, and light and shadow, often play a key role in Yu's haiku as in this one above. Colors, light, movement, etc. often take on

extended or multiple meanings that go beyond the sense of sight, so his haiku are never just pretty snapshots. Aesthetics is frequently blended with the metaphysical in Yu's haiku and it is this unique blending that contributes to the powerful impressions left upon the reader. The third-line in the haiku above, "turn white", is full of diverse meanings that extend the haiku far beyond the last spoken or written word. The simple two-word phrase implies and communicates a lot about the new dean, the old dean, the students, the faculty, the past, the future, and more. It is this multi-dimensional quality that distinguishes really good and great haiku from others.

• • • •

first day of school  
another crayon  
for the sunrise

ht

• • • •

first  
snow  
then  
rain  
then  
snow

ht

• • • • •

the tethered dog  
watches a guide dog  
enter the deli

js

• • • •

turkey leg –  
part of it  
part of me

js

• • •

A sampling of Yu's haiku follows:

cattails  
stalling the sunset  
in the marsh

"Stalling" is an interesting word here. It's an accurate description, so it works well for me. All the play and most of the action in the haiku revolves around this word. The dancing of shadows, the filtering of the last rays of light, the rapid changes in the various shades of sunset colors being reflected in the marsh waters and grasses, the afterglow, and how the presence of the cattails adds to the effect of colors, light, and shadows on the marsh make this haiku quite delightful. Instead of extended meanings, we have extended effects energized by the word "stalling" which makes this haiku active and alive in a subtle way. The overall mood that is produced moves the reader into the calm and peaceful realms within. Again, Yu has displayed his talent in the art of extension in haiku.

moonless night  
the darkness deepest  
where the snowy owl was

The degrees of darkness, the occupation or non-occupation of space, and absence and presence are metaphysical themes. I think Yu chose the best possible word, "snowy ", in describing the owl to convey the contrast.

insomnia –  
the train tracks are silent  
all night long

Once one has become accustomed to the sound of passing trains in the night they are no longer disturbing and one can sleep soundly. Then when there is an unusual absence of this occasional routine sound, the silence becomes mysterious or alarming and keeps one awake.

I wrote a similar haiku on the disturbing absence of sound that was published in a long sequence titled "Dong Ha Haiku":

crickets stop chirping  
I awake  
with a start!

(Dong Ha, Quang Tri, Vietnam)

• • • • •

summer sunset  
a trail of red ants  
in the rusty freight car

There is an interesting color and movement relationship between the red sun of the slow summer sunset and the marching of the red ants into the rusty freight car. This haiku has tremendous scope and depth. There are five paths here, each very spatially different from one another and yet uniquely and metaphysically interconnected with each of the others in this haiku: the path of the earth in its orbit around the sun, the path of clouds moving along the western horizon, the trail of red ants, the parallel railroad tracks where freight cars move in opposite directions, and the path of the haiku poet.

different pace  
at the water's edge  
the sandpiper and I

I think it may be of some interest to many haiku poets to mention here a work titled *Studies of Nature* by Bernadin de Saint-Pierre translated by Henry Hunter and Joseph J. Woodward in 1836 and can be downloaded on the [Internet](#) . The part of special interest to haiku poets begins on page 166: *Some General Laws of Nature: Physical Laws of Conformity, Harmony, Colors, Forms, Movements, Consonances, Progression, Contrasts, The Human Figure, Concerts, and Other Laws of Nature Imperfectly Known.*

The movement of the sandpiper's short quick steps is rather amusing in comparison to Yu's slower paced movements. But there is a third movement here that for me, is fundamental in appreciating this haiku fully, the movement of the incoming waves which vary in force and size. The choice of seabirds, the sandpiper, is an excellent one. It best exemplifies the harmonic relationship between wave and shore in the sandpiper's avoidance of becoming all wet in its amusing back and forth movements. The sandpiper is intensely alert at every moment, fully aware of each incoming wave after it breaks upon the shore. Yu moves at a slower pace, less concerned than the sandpiper and a less better judge of distances and the seawater's movements. But if he also wants to avoid getting really wet when a bigger wave rolls in, then he will have to make his move much sooner than the sandpiper that waits until the broken wave is practically upon it.

summer heat –  
into the shade together  
the scorpion and I

As in some of Yu's other haiku, there is a wonderful interaction between light/shade, shapes, and movements, this time with the added intensity of the summer heat at its peak which affects both appearances and movements. It is interesting to compare this haiku with the previous one.

still thinking of her  
the sticky threads  
of the severed lotus root

An end to their relationship, which is now dead, cannot easily be symbolized and emotionally expressed better than Yu has done in this haiku. One of the most beautiful of all flowers is gone from his life. The sexual allusion is very strong. Even though Yu says he is still thinking of her, it is what he feels, not thinks, that is important here.

stepping out  
with my holey socks  
summer stars

I really love the humor in this one. There is a definite relationship between the holey socks and the holy man wearing them.

almost dusk  
the raspberry stalk bends  
with a purple finch

Yu blends and contrasts colors, shapes, and movements with a master's delicate touch. Incredibly beautiful.

a scorpion emerges  
from a pile of chilies  
desert sunset

This haiku is one of my personal favorites. The play of color, form, and movement have once again joined forces in interacting to produce a strong haiku image with powerful sensations.

bumblebee  
deeper in the petunia  
summer heat

Another nice haiku of colors, sensations, and contrasts.

starry night –  
biting into a melon  
full of seeds

The relation between the seeds and stars, the coolness of the summer night and the coolness of the melon, the enjoyment of eating a juicy melon and the enjoyment of stargazing and how all these elements interact with one another with the poet as the central figure make this a remarkable and very enjoyable haiku to read. The subtle humor is quite good too: eyes full of stars + a mouthful of melon seeds = a poet filled with joy

first frost  
a homeless man appears  
in the new development

The use of the phrase "new development" is quite good with its double meaning.

