

## **Waka: Japanese and Peace Poem**

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### **Abstract**

This letter is concerned with Waka, which is 31 syllables poem in Japan. The rules and the way how to appreciate it has been introduced and discussed. It is realized that Waka is a short literal sculpture based on pointillism, and filling enormous amount of contents regarding emotion and scenery. It is suggested that Waka could contribute to create peaceful world, which is entangled at present.

### **Introduction**

Waka is a symbolic poem being short next to Haiku, which is the shortest in the world [1]. Thus, Waka is literal sculpture by engraving and removing odd parts as much as possible from the original material, but has potential to fill enormous amount of contents regarding to emotion, atmosphere and/or scenery. Waka is essentially different from literal architecture, western poetry consisting of various components that are added up during composition. Waka may be considered as poem based on pointillism [2] similarly in painting, quantum mechanics [3], kinetic theory of turbulence [4] and/or meanders [5]. For example, two points having different color interfere with each other, and produce a new color line after removing the space between them. This is the reason why Waka looks as if continuous meandering line(s), though it consists of 31 discrete syllable points. Waka has a simple structure consisting of the first half with 17 syllables, and the second half with 14 syllables, where the former may be considered as a Haiku [1]. Therefore, the first half expresses the principal scenery and/or feeling, while the second half makes their content clearer and evolve into another direction. Historically, the first half and the second half are composed by the different poets, respectively, and sometimes this process is repeated 100 times, which is known as Hyakushu-uta(one hundred Wakas). In case of Waka, the first half and second half are combined and are composed by a single poet, and become an independent poem. Note that there is Waka having more than 31 syllables, and such Waka is called Choka (long poem) in contrast to Tanka (short poem).

The main purpose of this letter is, after translating a popular Waka by Sarumaru Dayu( anonymous person) into English, to interpret and appreciate the Waka.

### **Waka Rules[6]**

Glossary of terms related to Waka composition is summarized in Table 1. In Waka, Makura-kotoba(Note1),Jokotoba(Note 2), Kakekotoba, Engo, Tsuiku, Kugire, Honkadori, Taigendome, as well as Monona(jargon), and/or Mitate(metaphor) appear occasionally, and Waka is independent of language. In addition, poet can put a letter at each the top of 5 phrases in Waka so as to express a flower name, for example, with the 5 letters, and this technique is called 'Oriku'. Refer to Note 3 for the details

**Table 1 Glossary of terms related to waka composition**

Term	Japanese	Definition
Makura-kotoba	枕詞	Literally, "pillow word". Poetic epithets generally not used for their literal meaning but to "connect" with the word (often a place name) that follows
Jokotoba	序詞	Literally, "preface words". Longer versions of makura-kotoba
Kakekotoba	掛詞	Literally, "hanging word". A word deliberately used to convey two meanings, due the existence of separate homophonic words. An example is matsu, which can mean either "a pine tree" (松, matsu) or "to wait" (待つ, matsu).
Engo	縁語	Literally, "linked words". Semantically related words used on different positions of a Waka
Tsuiku	対句	Literally, "paired phrases". Similar to parallelism.
Kugire	句切れ	Literally, "phrase gap". The most significant semantic gap in a Waka.
Honkadori	本歌取り	Literally, "taking from the main poem". Allusion to or quoting one or more lines from a poem written by someone else.
Taigen-dome	体言止め	Ending a poem with a noun or noun phrase. Since Japanese is a subject-object-verb language, complete grammatical sentences typically end with the verb, but in Waka composition this is not necessarily the case.

**Waka by Sarumaru Dayu**

In this section, a Waka composed by Sarumaru Dayu has been featured, for this is one of the most famous and attractive Wakas in the history and it is compiled in "Kokin Wakashu"[7], the first imperially-sponsored anthology of Waka poetry. In 905, under the order of Emperor, Daigo (885-930), Kino Tsurayuki (872-945) was selected as the principal compiler of this anthology, so that he wrote the famous preface. He is also known as a possible author of the "Tosa Nikki(diary)"[8], which was published anonymously.

奥山に もみじ踏みわけ 鳴く鹿の  
声きくときぞ 秋はかなしき

okuyamani momijifumiwake nakushikano

koekikutokizo akiwakanashiki

In the deep forest, I step on maple leaves. Deer are crying.

When I hear thin voices, I feel sad in the autumn.

Note that 'maple' and 'autumn', together with 'crying' and 'voices' are Engo, respectively.

As being stated already, Waka consists of 31 syllable points, the connected line of which meanders from right to left and at 5th, 12th, 17th, 24th points, and stops at 31th point. At these bending points and at the end point, emotional entanglement, twist, vague, afterimage and lingering tone might arise, so there must be leaps of logic as the characteristics in Waka.

The above Waka consists of five phrases consisting of 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables, respectively. There is a pause at each end of the phrases, respectively, but the Waka flows continuously by delineating a sinuous locus and these pauses are corresponding to the bending points of literal river. At the end of the fifth phrase, Waka flows into a wide space or the sea, where it may move freely, but keep the afterimage and/or lingering tone. The first phrase 'In the deep forest' sets up the scenery and atmosphere of the poem and turns to right (left) by keeping afterimage of the forest. After a while, in the second phrase, the poet steps on gorgeous maple leaves having red and yellow colors like textile fabrics or carpets. The word 'maple' provides this poem the season, autumn, so it plays a role as seasonal word. Note that the word, 'maple' and 'autumn' are Engo each other. Alternatively, it is possible to interpret this phrase in such a way that male deer instead of the poet steps on maple leaves. In fact, the argument on this point has been continued since 10th century, but has not been settled down yet. Then, a weak pause appears after the second phrase, and is keeping with afterimage of the maple leaves and even that of forest in the first phrase. The second phrase turns to left (right) and merges into the third phrase, where the poet hears the thin voices of male deer seeking for female deer in the deep forest. At the end of the third phrase, lingering tone of male deer's shin voices goes forward and backward, and vice versa in many times. Then, the third phrase turns to right (left) and proceeds to the fourth phrase, where the poet continues to hear thin voices of male deer seeking for female deer, together with the lingering tone in the third phrase. At this stage, because the subject of hearing thin voices is the poet, it may be natural to consider that the subject of stepping on maple leaves is also the poet. After a while, poet is aware of reality that season is already in autumn by looking at a plenty of maple leaves in the deep forest, and thin voices of male deer seeking for female deer make him feel profound sadness. At the end point of the fifth phrase, the sad feeling of the poet is not stopped, but it is persisting with lingering tone of the male deer's voices seeking for female deer, together with afterimage of the deep forest being full of maple trees with yellow and red color leaves.

### Closing remark

The author is even now sharing this profound sadness and peace with the poet, Sarumaru Dayu, and hope that people in the world find some interest in Waka, which must contribute to harmonize with each other among people crossing boarder of any nation and to create peaceful world under our common Heaven.

Actually, Waka means not only Japanese poem, but also peace poem.

幸せは みんな仲よく 睦まじく

鍋を囲んで 物を食う時

shiawasewa minnanakayoku mutsumajiku

nabewokakonnde monowokuutoki

True happiness! Everybody is friendly and happily enough

by surrounding a table. Dinner time isn't it.

Note 1: Makura-kotoba

たらちねの 親のまもりと あい添ふる

心ばかりは 関などどめそ

tarachineno oyanomamorito aisouru

kokorobakariha sekinatodomeso

As your parent, I would like to hand a message  
worrying about barrier. Guard! Don't stop son.

Phrase, 'tarachineno' is a Makura-kotoba with no meaning, and is the prefix phrase for word, 'oya', which means 'parent'. The composer is mother of Onono Chifuru.

Note 2: Jokotoba

時鳥 鳴くや五月の 菖蒲草

あやめも知らぬ 恋もするかな

hototogisu nakuyasatsukino ayamegusa

ayamemoshiranu koimosurukana

Cuckoos in group are crying in May. There are irises.  
Without knowing any reason, I fall in love indeed.

The first three phrases, which is a Jokotoba, plays a role in drawing out the word, 'ayame', which means 'reason' in this context, though it also means an iris. Thus, word, 'ayame' plays also a role in this poem as Kakekotoba, for it has dual meanings. The composer is anonymous.

Note 3: Oriku

小倉山 峰たちならし 鳴く鹿の

経にけむ秋を 知る人ぞなき

ogurayama minetachinarashi nakushikano

henikemuakio shiruhitozonaki

Mount Ogura. Running over the ridge, deer are crying.

Regarding the past autumn, nobody knows at all.

"o-mi-na-he-shi", which are the front letters for five phrases, respectively, expresses a flower name, called "ominaheshi" or patricia. This is no more than an Oriku. The composer is Kino Tsurayuki.

Extension of Oriku is Kutsukamuri, in which in addition to the front letter, the last letter for five phrases, respectively, provides another name of flower or something.

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### **Appendix 1: Peter McMillan's translation of Sarumaru Dayu's Waka [18]**

Trial 1 Rustling through the leaves

Going deep into the mountains,  
when I hear the lonely deer  
belling for his doe,  
how forlorn the autumn feels.

Trial 2. In the deep mountains

making a path  
through the fallen leaves,  
the plaintive belling of the stag-  
how forlorn the autumn feels.

Note: In the first trial, the subject is clearly defined, while in the second trial it is vague.

### **Appendix 2 Introduction to Waka**

Waka is a type of poetry in classical Japanese literature. Waka are composed in Japanese, and are contrasted with poetry composed by Japanese poets in classical Chinese, which are known as Kanshi.

The word Waka has two different but related meanings: the original meaning was "poetry in Japanese" and encompassed several genres; Up to and during the compilation of the Manyoshu in the eighth century, the word Waka was a general term for poetry composed in Japanese, and included several genres such as Tanka , "short poem", Choka, "long poem", Bussokusekika , "Buddha footprint", and Sedoka , "repeating-the-first-part poem".

However, by the time of the Kokinshu's compilation at the beginning of the tenth century, all of these forms except for Tanka and Choka had effectively gone extinct, and Choka had significantly diminished in prominence. As a result, the word Waka became effectively synonymous with Tanka, and the word Tanka fell out of use until it was revived at the end of the nineteenth century.

The term Waka originally encompasses number of differing forms, principally Tanka and Choka,, but also including Bussokusekika, Sedoka,, "memorized poem"and Katauta ,, "poem fragment"[9]. These last three forms, however, fell into disuse at the beginning of the Heian period, and Choka vanished soon afterwards. Thus, the term Waka came in time to refer only to Tanka[10, 11].

Lesser forms of Waka feature in the Manyoshu and other ancient sources exist. Besides that, there were many other forms like:

Bussokusekika: This form carves on a slab of slate – the "Buddha footprint" or bussokuseki – at the Yakushi-ji temple in Nara. Also recorded in the Manyoshu. The pattern is 5-7-5-7-7-7.

Sedoka: The Manyoshu and Kokinshu recorded this form. The pattern is 5-7-7-5-7-7.

Katauta: The Manyoshu records this form. Katauta means "half-poem". The pattern is 5-7-7.

#### History

Waka has a long history, first recorded in the early 8th century in the Kojiki and Manyoshu. Under influence from other genres such as Kanshi, novels and stories such as Tale of Genji and even Western poetry, it developed gradually, broadening its repertoire of expression and topics.

#### **Ancient**

The most ancient Waka was recorded in the historical record, which was the Kojiki and the 20 volumes of the Manyoshu, the oldest surviving Waka anthology. The editor of the Manyoshu is anonymous, but it is believed that the final editor was Otomo Yakamochi. He was a Waka poet who belonged to the youngest generation represented in the anthology; indeed, the last volume is dominated by his poems. The first Waka of volume 1 was by Emperor Ojin, Nukata no Okimi, Kakinomoto Hitomaro, Yamabe Akahito, Yamanoue Okura, Otomo Tabito and his son Yakamochi were the greatest poets in this anthology. The Manyoshu recorded not only the works of the royalty and nobility, but also works of soldiers and farmers whose names were not recorded. The main topics of the Manyoshu were love, sadness, and other miscellaneous topics.

#### **Heian revival**

During the Nara period and the early Heian period, the court favored Chinese-style poetry, Kanshi and the Waka art form largely fell out of official favor [13]. But in the 9th century, Japan stopped sending official envoys to Tang dynasty China. This severing of ties, combined with Japan's geographic isolation, essentially forced the court to cultivate native talent and look inward by synthesizing Chinese poetic styles and techniques with local traditions. The Waka form again began flourishing and Emperor Daigo ordered the creation of an anthology of Waka[14], where the waka of ancient poets and their contemporaries were collected and the anthology named "Kokin Wakashu" , meaning Collection of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poems. It was presented to the Emperor in 905. This was the first Waka anthology edited and issued under imperial auspices[15], and it commenced a long and distinguished tradition of imperial anthologies of Waka that continued up to the Muromachi period.

### **Rise of Japanese national culture**

The first three imperially-commissioned Waka anthologies, , Sandai-shu were the Kokin Wakashu, the Gosen Wakashu and the Shui Wakashu. The Kokinshu was compiled by Ki no Tsurayuki et al. on the orders of Emperor Daigo in 905. It collected roughly 1,100 waka that had not appeared in the Manyshu into 20 volumes, arranged by theme. The Kokinshu poems are generally considered to be reflective and idealistic[7].

Roughly half a century after the compilation of the Kokinshu, in 951, Emperor Murakami commanded to compile the Gosen Wakashu, in addition to preparing Kundoku readings for the Manyoshu, which by that time was already difficult for even educated Japanese to read.

In 1005, Empero Ichijo commanded the compilation of the Shuishu.

### **Kamakura and Muromachi periods**

After the Heian period, during the Kamakura period and later, Renga, a form of collaborative linked poetry, began to develop. Emperor Go-Toba ordered the creation of a new anthology and joined in editing it. The anthology was named Shin Kokin Wakashu. He edited it again and again until he died in 1239. Fujiwara Teika made copies of ancient books and wrote on the theory of Waka. His descendants, and indeed almost all subsequent poets, taught his methods and studied his poems. The courtly poetry scenes were historically dominated by a few noble clans and allies, each of which staked out a position.

In the Muromachi period, Renga became popular in the court and people around it. It spread to the priestly classes and hence to wealthy commoners. In much the same way as Waka, Renga anthologies were produced under the imperial aegis. As momentum and popular interest shifted to the Renga form, the Tanka style was left to the Imperial court. A tradition named Kokin-denju, the heritage of Kokin Wakashu, was developed. It was a system on how to analyze the Kokin Wakashu and included the secret meaning of words. Studying Waka degenerated into learning the many intricate rules, allusions, theories, and secrets, so as to produce Tanka that would be accepted by the court.

There were comical Waka already in the Kojiki and the Manyoshu, but the noble style of Waka in the court inhibited and scorned such aspects of Waka. Renga was soon in the same position with many codes and strictures reflecting literary tradition. Haiku and Kyoka, comical Waka or Senryu were a reaction to this seriousness[16.17]. But in the Edo-period Waka itself lost almost all of its flexibility and began to echo and repeat old poems and themes.

### **Edo period (1603–1867)**

In the early Edo period, Waka was not a fashionable genre. Newly created Haiku was the favored genre. This tendency was kept during this period, but in the late Edo period Waka faced new trends from beyond the court. Motoori Norinaga, the great reviver of the traditional Japanese literature, attempted to revive Waka as a way of providing "traditional feeling expressed in genuine Japanese way". He wrote Waka, so that Waka became an important form to his followers.

In Niigata prefecture, a Buddhist priest, Ryokan, composed many Waka in a naive style intentionally avoiding complex rules and the traditional way of Waka. He belonged to another great tradition of Waka: Waka for expressing religious feeling. His frank expression of feeling found many admirers, then and now. In the cities, a comical, ironic and satiric form of Waka emerged. It was called Kyoka, crazy poem, and was loved by intellectual

people in big cities like Edo(or Tokyo) and Osaka . It was not precisely a new form; satirical Waka was a style known since ancient times. But it was in the Edo period that this aspect of Waka developed and reached an artistic peak. Still, most Waka poets kept to ancient tradition or made those reformation another stereotype, and Waka was not a vibrant genre in general at the end of this period.