



<Book Review> Modern poems of the Mount Ogura
Utamakura: One Hundred Poets on Mount Ogura,
One Poem Each

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**Modern poems of the Mount Ogura *Utamakura*:
One Hundred Poets on Mount Ogura, One Poem Each**

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Abstract

Mount Ogura in Kyoto city is a place of utamakura (pillow poems) with a long history of waka (Japanese traditional verse) and even now is visited by many modern haiku and tanka poets. A group of contemporary tanka and haiku poets have compiled a modern anthology for Mount Ogura. Originally a nature-oriented genre of poetry, waka, tanka and haiku are sometimes classified as 'nature writing'.

Keywords: *utamakura, haiku, sense of place, One Hundred Poets on Mount Ogura One Poem Each, nature writing*

要旨

日本の伝統的な詩歌の歌枕である京都嵐山の小倉山には、現代でも多くの歌人や俳人が訪れる。彼らは小倉山のために一冊のアンソロジーを編んだ。和歌、俳句や短歌は本来自然と親しむ文芸として、海外でも人気があるが、例えば、環境や自然に目を向ける環境文学 (**nature writing**)として捉えなおすことも可能である。別の視点から捉え直すことで、新たな文学としての展開の可能性も見出せるように思える。

キーワード：歌枕、俳句、センス・オブ・プレイス、小倉山百人一句一首、ネイチャーライティング

Japanese classical verse *waka* strives to express the beauty and soulfulness of nature and since early modern times, Japanese *tanka* and *haiku*, poetic forms derived from *waka*, also try to express feelings and thoughts through a description of nature¹. Today, however, when we try to express such feelings of Mount Ogura we face a sad reality. For, if we write poetry about our impressions in this way, what should be our reference? Unfortunately, these days we cannot just describe our love and admiration of Mount Ogura, but we must also express our worry and anxiety for nature. This is the reality. If the mission of literature is to express deep-seated feelings, ideas and all things in human society as well as in the natural world, Japanese poetry must also express this anxiety despite its traditional nature.

The anthology *One Hundred Poets on Mount Ogura, One Poem Each* gives a selection of modern poems of Mount Ogura in the Arashiyama district of Kyoto. Forty *haiku* in English are translated into Japanese verse and thirty *haiku* and thirty *tanka* in Japanese are translated into English short poems. Hence, all the poems are in both languages, as are the annotations at the bottom of almost every page.

Mount Ogura is a special place for *waka*. Here, about eight hundred years ago, Fujiwara no Sadaie (or Teika) compiled an anthology of Japanese traditional verse entitled *Ogura hyakunin isshu - One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each*. Originally, Fujiwara no Sadaie collected the hundred poems written in refined calligraphy to decorate the screens of the Okouchi-sanso residence on Mount Ogura; later the collection of poems became known as the *Ogura hyakunin isshu (One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each)*. In Japanese traditional verse, the concept of special place such as *utamakura* is important. The term *utamakura* means ‘pillow poem’ or ‘poem of the pillow’. Many Japanese *waka*, *tanka* and *haiku* poets visit the places where their predecessors wrote fine *waka* to compose their own associated *utamakura* verses. Mount Ogura is a typical *utamakura* site.

On the first page of the anthology we can read the following words: “Of mountains, firstly, Ogura やまは をぐらやま (*Yama wa ‘O’gura yama*)”. This phrase is taken from the classic Japanese essay *Makuranosoushi (The Pillow Book)*, chapter 10, written

by Sei Shōnagon in the early eleventh century. The foreword opens with the following *waka* by the Priest Saigyō:

大井河をくらの山のほと、きすゐせきに声のとまらましかは

Ohowikaha wokurano yamano hototokisu wisekini koweno tomaramasikaha

Along the Ōi River a laughing cuckoo's call echoes from Mount Ogura: might this sound now come to lodge in the posts of the weir?

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 7-9)

Koji Maeda who published this collection of poetry and who also runs the NPO People Together for Mt. Ogura writes:

Mount Ogura is a hill of graceful form, situated a day's walk northwest of the ancient Japanese capital, Kyoto. Favoured by nobles and poets, its praises have long been sung in literature. It can be viewed from Moon-crossing Bridge at Arashiyama, as well as from most of hill-foot Sagano. I wonder, though, if we could honestly still include it in that traditional epithet for Kyoto, 'of shining purple hills and clear waters'?²

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 9)

The poems selected for the anthology were written by both young and old (from seven to eighty-nine years old), by men and women, all coming from different countries. The versification is full of wonder, sadness, prayer, humour and romance; the anthology itself is a wonderful written celebration of Mount Ogura. The *haiku* and *tanka* poets featured journeyed to Mount Ogura (such journeys for the purpose of writing poetry is called *ginko*) to write their verses, some of them coming from afar, some from nearby Sagano in Kyoto City.

To give a few examples:

小倉山西へと巡る湿り道定家通りし昔偲ばる

Ogura yama nishiheto meguru shimerimichi teika kayoishi mukashi shinobaru

A damp path winds the west face of Mount Ogura: thinking of the olden days when Teika walked here, too

Eiko KIKUOKA

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 16)

やがて辿り着きたる車道ざらざらと不法投棄の現代がある

Yagate tadoritukitaru shadou zarazarato fuhoutoukino gendaiga aru

Through mountain woods ... reaching at last a roadway, dry and hard: here,
fly-tipping has become the norm

Hiroko OZAKI

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 40)

小倉山風吹き抜ける竹の径

Ogurayama kaze fukinukeru takeno michi

A summer breeze flowing down a path through bamboo thickets- Mount Ogura!

Youhei NAKAMOTO

(ibid. 2010: 62)

誰が知る紅き嵯峨野の美しさ哀しさ隠す落ち葉の下に

Darega shiru akaki saganono utsukushisa kanashisa kakusu ochibano shitani

Who is there who really knows the beauty of Sagano dressed in autumn colours?
Sadness lies hidden beneath its fallen leaves

Keiko NISHIO

(ibid. 2010: 63)

落ち葉踏む音日本語でも英語でもなく

Ochiba fumu oto nihongo demo eigo demo naku

Neither Japanese, nor English... this sound of treading the fallen leaves

Yumi OCHI

(ibid. 2010: 99)

いにしえの歌人の道に新神社風は昔も今も変わらず

Inishieno kajinno michini shinjinja kazeha mukashimo imamo kawarazu

A new shrine has been built along the ancient path where once our poets walked:
the wind that blows, same now as long ago

Ayako ITO

(ibid. 2010: 107)

Haiku enjoys a remarkable international popularity. Today about two million people in fifty countries write and share *haiku* in their own languages as well as in English (see

the ‘Haiku International Association’ for example). *Haiku* written in English is especially popular and certain Japanese poets compose *haiku* in English as well as in their native Japanese.

Stephen Gill, an editor of the anthology, heads the two *haiku* groups ‘*Haiku in English*’ and ‘Hailstone *Haiku* Circle’; his *haigo*³ is Tito. Gill studied Japanese Language and Culture at London University and now lives in Sagano, Kyoto. Seven years ago, Gill wrote a book of poetry entitled *One Poet on Mount Ogura*⁴. The poems, named after the face of the hill they were written on, are composed of several lines written in English, translated into *tanka* of thirty-one letters by Akiko Takazawa, a Japanese haikuist⁵. Though both Tito and Akiko Takazawa are renowned haikuists, they do write *tanka* as well. A selection of the poems are given in the last part of the anthology. To cite a few:

Acknowledging firstlight the owl of Mount Ogura - its own chill tone.

明けを見て/小倉の山の梟は/声を震わせ冷え冷えと鳴く

Akewo mite ogurano yamano fukurouwa koewo furuwase hiebieta naku

Dragon face

Different parts of the city gleaming, glistening through branches of dead pine.

市街地の遠近/きらめき光りおり/枯れたる松の枝の間に

Shigaichino ochikochi kirameki hikariori karetaru matsuno edano aidani

Turtle face

There is a deeper trail, cut between sandbanks by millions of feet - the forest knows.

森ぞ知る/深き道筋/砂土の間に/幾百万の足/踏みゆきし

Morizo shiru fukaki michisuji sunatsuchino mani ikuhyakumanno ashi fumiyukishi

Tiger face

Across a great, wide, brooding, wooded hillside... Summer rain falls.

広大な/暗鬱たりし/森の丘/よぎりて/夏の雨の降りおり

Kodaina anutsutarishi morino oka yogirite natsuno ameno furiori

Phoenix face

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 120-123)

Many people who love Mount Ogura wrote poems for the anthology. Some are students, others Mount Ogura hikers.

Haiku and *tanka* are Japanese poetic forms which anyone who wants to enjoy verse can write. In Japan, a large number of people contribute regularly to *haiku* or *tanka* magazines. Young students learn to read such poetry as literature and sometimes learn to write it in their Japanese language classes at elementary school, junior high school or high school. A seven-year-old volunteer at one of the clean-up events composed the following *haiku*.

We clean up this mountain: our whole Earth, too please, become clean!

びかかつどうちきゅうきれいになってよね

Bikakatsudo chikyu kireini natteyone

Minori KUWABARA

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 100)

A nine-year-old volunteer wrote a *haiku* expressing his frank feelings. Like Kuwabara, he participated in the event with his family.

Having just been cleaned the mountain path - how good it feels!

そうじしてきれいな道がきもちいい

Souji shite kireina michiga kimochiii

Shou ISODA

(Gill and Maeda, eds. 2010: 78)

Many tourists visit Arashiyama and the other numerous historical and cultural heritage sites, especially temples and shrines. In recent years there has been considerable degradation with the selfish acts of some dumping huge quantities of rubbish on the mountain slopes, the boring of a railway tunnel so the water now struggles to flow out towards Sagano Vale and the great red pine trees which have died from an insect-born plague.

The co-existence of human beings with nature is an important issue common to all other areas of Japan and to the world as a whole. Kyoto city and volunteer citizens are trying to preserve the beautiful landscapes. They work in collaboration with Ritsumeikan University students to clean the mountain paths, regularly felling the dead trees. They also help Okōchi Sansō and Kyoto City repair the fences of the Sagano bamboo groves (the fences must be strong and kept in good repair in order to keep out the wild boars which otherwise would eat the bamboo shoots in spring). Now, most of the litter has been cleaned up by volunteers, but there are still tons of rubbish illegally tipped on the oakwood slopes.

Once I had the opportunity of participating in the Mt. Ogura activity as a *tankaist*. I was so impressed climbing the narrow paths to the summit and feeling the air of Mount Ogura; the air which has remained the same since the Heian and Kamakura eras or even since the ancient times that went before. But I felt so sad at the sight of mounds of garbage and the dead pine trees. The landscape of the valley seen through the trees was like drawings or pictures of scenes from Japanese old literature and seemed to be exactly fitting of the English word 'picturesque'.

In Japanese culture, landscapes in nature and the scenery of natural gardens are treated just like painted pictures, and have long been the inspirational material of poetry. Words used in poetry and landscape have a close relationship. From the beginning, Japanese *waka* and *haiku* have been a poetic form based on the love of nature but which includes human beings, so it seems a little ridiculous to make a distinction now and treat such poetry as 'nature writing'. (*Booklist of Environmental Literature* 2010: 5). However, this anthology takes such a strong ecological stand that it can be read as 'eco-poetry', 'nature writing' or 'environmental literature'. The poems express the different aspects of the site and the footnotes explain the reality of today's Mount Ogura including the problems of environmental degradation.

Nature writing is a new genre of literature which was first defined in America as non-fiction writing about the natural environment in the early twentieth century. In recent years it has come to include a wide range of literature related to nature but little attention has been given to the idea of Japanese literature, i.e. *waka*, *tanka* and *haiku*, being also defined as nature writing. Sense of place, one of the features of nature writing, is an important concept. People value common places spiritually and try to keep their identity through their feelings and perceptions of the places. *Utamakura*, such as Mount Ogura, are important referents for many Japanese *waka*, *tanka* and *haiku* poets. They value these places and their poetry shares a common expression of 'sense of place' in nature writing.

In studying and composing verses, when our conscious egoism is brought to a standstill, having another perspective could point the way towards evolution. Different perspectives are necessary for progress in literature or in any other human activity for that matter. This is why both Japanese speakers and non-Japanese speakers alike love the Japanese *haiku* and *tanka* form of poetry. The anthology *One Hundred Poets on Mount Ogura One Poem Each* is an experimental work but it presents a meaningful discussion of our modern reality.

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- ¹ *Waka* 和歌, literally “Japanese poem”; *tanka* 短歌 a poem of 31 syllables in lines of 5-7-5-7-7; *haiku* 俳句 a poem of three lines of 5-7-5.
- ² ‘of shining purple hills and clear waters’; the word 山紫水明 *san shi sui mei*, consisting of four Chinese letters means beautiful landscape of mountains and water, or a place of outstanding natural beauty.
- ³ *haigo*; the nom de plume, pen name of a *haiku* poet.
- ⁴ The book *One Poet on Mount Ogura, One Hundred Verses in a Day* was written during sixteen hours of exploring Mount Ogura on the 13th August 2003 and published as a limited edition artist’s book for sale at the stone arrangement installation ‘Pilgrim of Mount Ogura’. The poems were named after the face of the hill they were written on: Dragon, Tiger, Turtle and Phoenix.
- ⁵ *Haikuist*; *haijin*, a man (or woman) of *haiku*, *haiku* poet; *tankaist*; *kajin*, a man (or woman) of *tanka*, *tanka* poet

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