

(1) Is it true that in Japan, gods are believed to exist everywhere, including in nature?

【Eight Million Gods: Polytheism and Monotheism】

In Japan, as the phrase *Yaoyorozu no Kami* (eight million gods) suggests, it has long been believed that *kami* (gods) reside everywhere, including in large trees, large rocks, mountains, rivers, the sea, and mountain passes. In Japanese, this belief is called *tashinkyō* (polytheism) as opposed to *isshinkyō* (monotheism), the belief in only one god. In *waka*, a traditional Japanese form of poetry, various aspects of nature are celebrated, and this may be related to the background of polytheism.

【Waka from the Age of Mythology】

For example, the *Kojiki* (“Records of Ancient Matters”), a book compiled in 712 that records ancient Japanese mythology, contains the oldest known *waka*:

Yakumo tatsu / izumo yaegaki / tsumagomi ni / yaegaki tsukuru / sono yaegaki wo,
Of the many clouds rising / To dwell there with my spouse /
Do I build a many-fenced palace / Ah, that many-fenced palace, *

which is attributed to the *kami* Susanoo no Mikoto. *Waka* have been composed and recited since the age of mythology.

*Translated into English by Donald Philippi

【The God of Tamatsushima and the Spirit of Akanoura】

When Emperor Shomu made a state visit to the area of Wakanoura and Tamatsushima in 724, to preserve the ever-changing landscape of Wakanoura with care, he issued an imperial edict ordering that the God of Tamatsushima and the Spirit of Akanoura be firmly enshrined there.

In this instance, the places known as Tamatsushima and Akanoura were considered as *kami* (the ancient Japanese often employed the word *mitama* (spirit) and *kami* (god) interchangeably). So, it was only natural that these landscapes, which were home to such deities, would become subjects of *waka*.

【The God of Wakanoura as seen in the *Manyōshū*】

The scenery of Wakanoura is also described in the *Manyōshū* (literally “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves”), an anthology of poems written in the 7th and 8th centuries. The

renowned poet Yamabe no Akahito makes reference to Tamatsushima no kami (the god of Tamatsushima):

Kamiyo yori shikazo totoki Tamatsushima-yama

The mountain of Tamatsushima has been precious since the age of the gods.

In this verse, a variety of other deities also appear. For example, a traveler hurriedly crossing Senoyama, a mountain by the Kino River in the Katsuragi area, sings:

Maki no ha no shina fu Senoyama shi no hazute wako yuko wa waga koe ikeba, konoha shiri kemu.

This verse means something along the lines of:

I am sorry I could not talk to you Senoyama, but the Japanese yew trees (these days replaced by Japanese cedar and cypress) standing here understand my feelings.

From these poems, we can see that people in ancient Japan had very close relationships with their gods.

【Kotodama Shinsho】

In ancient times, the Japanese believed that words were also inhabited by gods or spirits (souls). This idea that words have a spiritual power and can influence the real world is expressed by the term *kotodama*, made up of two Kanji characters meaning “word” and “spirit,” respectively. Consequently, it was widely believed that when good words were uttered, good things would happen, and conversely, when bad words were uttered, bad things would happen. Even today, it is usual for people in Japan to greet the New Year by smiling and saying *Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu!* (Happy New Year!) These words are thought to contain a spiritual power that can be activated as a greeting conveying the wish that good things or auspicious events will happen throughout the coming year. In the *Manyoshu*, there is a *waka* that goes:

Atarashiki toshi no hajime no hatsuharu no kyou furu yuki no iya shike yogoto

As the snow falls to-day / At the commencement of the New Year / And with the new-born spring / Ever thick come, good things.

This is a poem that evokes faith in the power of both words and spirits.

So far, we have discussed *waka* from the distant past, but since then, *waka* have come to be composed not only about nature and scenery based on religious beliefs, but also about everyday feelings on subjects such as love and separation. Even today, there are many themes in our lives that lend themselves to *waka*.

(2) What is *waka*?

【What is poetry?】

Over the period from about 1,300 years ago to the present day, the term for describing Japanese poetry has changed first from *Yamato-uta* to *waka* and then to *tanka*.

In the preface to the *Kokin Wakashu* (*Collection of Early and Modern Japanese Poetry*), an early anthology of *waka* compiled between about 905 and 914), there is a very nice explanation. It says, “Japanese poetry has the human heart as seed and myriads of words as leaves. It comes into being when men use the seen and the heard to give voice to feelings aroused by the innumerable events in their lives.”

(<https://simplyhaiku.thehaikufoundation.org/SHv4n3/features/Hulvey.html>)

These feelings, such as joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, sprout outward and become *kotonoha* (words), or *uta* (songs or poetry).

The Japanese word *kotoba*, meaning “word,” is a combination of the character *koto* (言, meaning “to speak”) and the character *ha* (葉, meaning a “plant leaf”). Here, by analogy with the way plants grow, the writer explains that *uta* are a verbal expression of the various inner feelings that arise in a person's daily life.

【What is the relationship between poetry and Chinese literature?】

Japanese poetry has been strongly influenced by Chinese literature. The *Manyōshū*, which was the earliest collection of poetry compiled in Japan (during the Nara Period), could not have been created in the absence of Chinese literature. In the first place, there was no indigenous script in use for writing the Japanese language at the time. For this reason, the poems appearing in the *Manyōshū* were initially written in Chinese characters (kanji), with the result that the original text of the *Manyōshū* is written entirely in Chinese characters. Moreover, the Japanese people of that time learned a great deal from Chinese literature and Chinese thought, not only about the meanings of the words that were recited, but also about the content and the methods of expression of poems.

【How many syllables are there in the poems?】

Unlike the words we use in ordinary conversation, *waka* and other traditional Japanese

poems are recited according to a specific rhythm.

For example, here is a poem representative of Wakanoura that is included in the *Manyoshu*:

Wakanoura ni shio michi kureba kata wo nami ashibe wo sashite tazu naki wataru
When the tide comes in and the tideland disappears,
the cranes cry in unison and fly towards the reedy bank.

If we count the number of syllables in each line of this poem, we get the following:

Wakanoura ni (6 syllables), *shio michi kureba* (7 syllables), *kata wo nami* (5 syllables), *ashibe wo sashite* (7 syllables), *tazu naki wataru* (7 syllables).

This poem conforms to the 6, 7, 5, 7, 7 pattern. The first line has six syllables, making it an example of what is referred to as *jiamari* (literally “extra characters”). Most *waka* follow the 5, 7, 5, 7, 7 pattern, which is the basic form of both *waka* and *tanka* poetry. The following poem is often recited alongside the “*Wakanoura ni*” poem.

Okitsushima araiso no tamamo shiohi michi ikakuri yukaba omohoemu kamo
If I could hide among the seaweed on the rocky shore of the distant island, I would surely think of you.

The syllable count of this poem neatly conforms to the 5, 7, 5, 7, 7 pattern, as follows:

Okitsushima (5), *araiso no tamamo* (7), *shiohi michi* (5), *ikakuri yukaba* (7), *omohoemu kamo* (7).

Structures consisting of groups of five and seven syllables, have long been familiar to the Japanese people as a uniquely Japanese syllabary because they match the tonal structure of the Japanese language.

In classical Chinese poetry, there are also poetic forms such as *lushi* (known as *rishi* in Japanese), which is an eight-line verse form with lines made up of five, six, or seven characters, but the syllabary of Japanese poetry is uniquely Japanese.

【Are traditional poems still recited today?】

From *Yamato uta* to *waka* and then to *tanka*, the forms of poetic expression collectively called *uta* have been familiar to the Japanese people since time immemorial, and have been carefully passed down from generation to generation over many centuries. Even today, *tanka* in particular continue to be widely composed, read, recited, and enjoyed as an important

poetic form that expresses diverse emotions that arise in people's hearts and minds. Accordingly, we can learn something about the state of the Japanese mind from *tanka*.

(3)How has the landscape of Wakanoura changed between 1,300 years ago, when the renowned poet Yamabe no Akahito composed his poem, and today?

[The current scenery of Wakanoura]

Yamabe no Akahito, a celebrated poet who flourished about 1,300 years ago and authored a number of nature poems that are included in the *Manyoshu*, composed poetry here at Wakanoura. At that time, the Tang Dynasty was at its peak in China, and Europe was the midst of the Middle Ages. Several centuries earlier, the Western Roman Empire had collapsed, and the territory it had ruled over subsequently became divided into many smaller countries.

Amidst these worldwide developments, a new era began in Japan with the accession of Emperor Shomu to the throne. In 724, the year of his accession, Emperor Shomu made a visit to Wakanoura, and his retinue included Yamabe no Akahito, who composed the well-known poem *Tamatsushima Sanka* in praise of the beauty of the landscape, writing:

Kamiyo yori shikazo totoki Tamatsushima-yama

Tamatsushima-yama has been noble like this since ancient times.

The landscape that spreads out across Wakanoura today is very different from that of 1,300 years ago. For one thing, the sea in this region penetrated much further inland at that time, but over the intervening centuries the coastline has receded. Also, at that time, the present-day Kinokawa River flowed through Wakanoura into the sea, and it is thought that the main reason for this river changing its course was that sediment carried down from the mountains by the river gradually filled up Wakanoura.

At present, there are six small hills in the area around Tamatsushima Shrine, called respectively Sendoyama, Myokenzan, Ungaisan, Tenguyama, Kagamiyama, and Imoseyama. These hills form a line running roughly from west to east, but 1300 years ago, they were all either islands surrounded by the sea or else small coastal headlands facing the sea. Yamabe no Akahito called this landscape Tamatsushima-yama (in the old Japanese language, *tama* meant a jewel and *tsu* meant a ferry). Today, only Imoseyama remains a true island totally surrounded by the sea. But when viewing the area from the hills near Kishu

Toshogu Shrine or Wakaura Tenmangu Shrine to the west, it is easy to imagine how the scenery of Tamatsushima-yama must have looked in that long-ago era.

【“Ancient” scenery that remains unchanged even today】

There are still some aspects of the Wakanoura landscape that have remained unchanged from the past, such as the scenery formed by the ebb and flow of the tide. When the tide goes out in Wakanoura, the entire area is revealed as a vast expanse of mud flats. Then, when the tide comes in, the mud flats that were spread out until just a short while before are transformed into a vast expanse of sea. This scenery dominated by the ebb and flow of the tide must have come as a surprise to people from the inland capital of Nara, who did not have many opportunities to see the sea. There is a sandbar called Kataonami to the south of Wakanoura. Today, this sandbar remains visible even at high tide, but in the distant past, it would appear when the tide fell, and disappear beneath the waves when the tide rose again. When the poets and compilers of the *Manyoshu* in the late Nara period, as well as the people who lived before them from the late 600s to the mid-700s, witnessed the appearance and disappearance of this sandbar, they composed poems in which they described it as *Watatsumi no Kami ga te*, meaning “the hand of the great god of the sea.”

One landscape that has remained essentially unchanged over the centuries is the grand view of Wakanoura. To the east stands the imposing Nagusayama. Turning your eyes south you can see the steep-sided Nagamine Mountains and the port of Shimotsu across the bay. While to the west, you can see Takozushiyama and Cape Saikazaki in the foreground and, off in the distance, the outline of Awaji Island, as well as a panoramic view of mountains, sea, islands, and sky. This vast landscape has changed very little from ancient times to the present day. By all accounts, the Manyo poets of the Nara period also enjoyed this landscape to their hearts' content.

【Scenery admired by Emperor Shomu】

When Emperor Shomu visited Wakanoura in 724, he commended the scenery of Tamatsushima-yama that stretches out to the sea and the 360-degree view of Wakanoura, and he ordered that this land be cherished forever. Thanks in large part to his edict, we can still enjoy the scenery of the Manyo period today. After the Emperor's visit, Tamatsushima Shrine, Tenmangu Shrine (Heian period), Toshogu Shrine, and Furobashi Bridge (Edo period) were built. All of these structures blend harmoniously with the surrounding landscape, and Wakanoura's scenery has richly evolved with the times while retaining its distinctive beauty.

(4) The relationship between the Kishu Tokugawa family and Wakanoura

[The Tokugawa clan]

A succession of members of the Tokugawa clan governed Japan as its shogun, or supreme commander-in-chief, from 1603 to 1867, throughout the Edo period, which is also known as the Tokugawa period. The Tokugawa shogunate lasted for 265 years, from the rule of the first shogun, Ieyasu, to that of the 15th shogun, Yoshinobu. During the early Edo period, Tokugawa Yorinobu, Ieyasu's tenth son, became the first daimyo, or feudal lord, of the Kishu domain in Kii Province (encompassing regions in present-day Wakayama Prefecture and southern Mie Prefecture). The Kishu Tokugawa family was one of the Tokugawa Go-san-ke (the three most noble branches of the Tokugawa clan).

*The Tokugawa Go-san-ke were the three branches of the Tokugawa clan that were particularly powerful during the Edo period, and the Kishu Tokugawa family was one of them. This family also wielded a great deal of political power.

[Tokugawa Yorinobu's development of Wakanoura]

The importance placed on Wakanoura by the Kishu Tokugawa family is evident from the fact that Kishu Toshogu Shrine, dedicated to the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate Tokugawa Ieyasu, was located in Wakanoura.

In 1648, Tokugawa Yorinobu, who had entered the castle as the first daimyo of the Kishu domain in August 1619, used the occasion of the 33rd anniversary of Ieyasu's death (which had occurred in 1616) to promote the development of the island of Imoseyama and the surrounding area. On Imoseyama, Yorinobu built a two-storied pagoda called Tahoto in memory of his mother, Yojuin (Oman-no-Kata), a raised viewing platform called Kankaikaku, and a stone arched bridge called Sandan-kyo to connect the mainland with the island. Two teahouses (Ashibeya and Asahiya) were also built at the foot of Sandan-kyo Bridge. The teahouses were located in the area where Matsuo Basho's haiku monument stands today.

Yorinobu then developed the Wakanoura area into a large garden with a natural landscape. Sandan-kyo Bridge linking the mainland with Imoseyama was designed and constructed based on the garden scenery of Xihu in Hangzhou, China.

From Kankaikaku, facing the sea, one can enjoy a large, expansive view that takes in Mt. Nagusa to the east, Kataonami Beach to the south, and beyond that the wide-open sea, with the hazy mountains and sky in the distance.

Of course, from Toshogu Shrine, which is located on high ground, you can also see the seascape dotted with six or so small islands that Yamabe no Akahito praised as "Tamatsushima-yama," which "has been noble like this since ancient times."

Yorinobu's improvements to Wakanoura were undertaken out of his deep respect for his ancestors and his refined appreciation of the scenery of Wakanoura, and his efforts were fundamental in preserving the Wakanoura area as a magnificent natural garden down to the present day.

【Wakanoura as a public garden】

Thanks to Yorinobu's initiative, Wakanoura was no longer reserved for the exclusive use of the nobility, but also became accessible to the common people, which was a wonderful thing. The fact that the area was open to the public can be clearly seen in drawings of Kankaikaku included in *Kinokuni Meishozue*, an illustrated guidebook published in 1811 that depicts famous places in Kii Province (the present-day Wakayama Prefecture). We see a family enjoying the view, people having a drinking party while sitting on a carpet-like mat on the floor, a group of pilgrims on a pilgrimage of the 33 temples of the Saigoku region (a pilgrimage in Japanese Buddhism that involves visiting 33 sacred sites in western Japan), a traveler descending the stairs to leave Kankaikaku, and a father and son who are about to go up to Kankaikaku, while behind them we see a group of people in stylish clothes and a huge crowd of ordinary people freely visiting of Kankaikaku and fully enjoying the scenery of Wakanoura. In this way, Wakanoura, which was cherished by the Kishu Tokugawa family, evolved into a public garden that was popular among the common people.

QR code for survey response



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<https://wakanoura.telewaka.tv/form/en>