



MACHI TAWARA AND SALAD ANNIVERSARY: THE MODERNIZATION OF JAPANESE TANKA

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Introduction

Japanese literature has a long tradition of poetry, among which *tanka* is one of the oldest and most influential forms. Traditionally, *tanka* was often associated with classical language and aristocratic culture, making it difficult for ordinary people to appreciate. However, in the late twentieth century, Machi Tawara transformed the image of *tanka* through her innovative style. Her poetry collection *Salad Anniversary* became a social phenomenon and introduced a new generation of readers to Japanese poetry. This report examines Tawara's life, her contributions to modern *tanka*, the characteristics of *Salad Anniversary*, and the reasons why her works continue to attract readers today.

The Life of Machi Tawara

Machi Tawara was born in Osaka in 1962. She began writing *tanka* while studying at Waseda University, where she developed her interest in traditional Japanese poetry. After graduating, she worked as a high school teacher while continuing her literary activities. Her educational background and experience as a teacher influenced her ability to express complex emotions in simple and accessible language.

Unlike many traditional poets, Tawara wrote about ordinary people and everyday experiences. This approach allowed readers to feel that *tanka* was not merely an old literary form but something closely connected to their own lives.



Tawara's Contributions to Modern Tanka

Machi Tawara's greatest achievement was making tanka accessible to contemporary readers. Before her debut, many people regarded tanka as old-fashioned and difficult to understand. Tawara changed this image by using everyday vocabulary, conversational expressions, and even katakana words commonly used by young people.

Her poems describe ordinary experiences such as conversations, love, friendship, family, and daily life. Rather than focusing on historical events or elegant court culture, she celebrated small moments that everyone could recognize. As a result, her works resonated strongly with younger generations and were later included in junior high school textbooks, introducing many students to modern tanka.

Salad Anniversary and Its Popularity

Published in 1987, *Salad Anniversary* quickly became a bestseller and a social phenomenon in Japan. The title poem begins with the famous line:

"You said, 'This tastes good,' so July 6 became Salad Anniversary."

This poem illustrates Tawara's ability to transform an ordinary conversation into a meaningful personal memory. Instead of celebrating a traditional holiday or historical event, the speaker creates a special anniversary from a simple moment shared with someone important.

Many other poems in the collection express everyday emotions such as love, loneliness, happiness, uncertainty, and hope. Their simplicity allows readers to connect the poems with their own experiences. This accessibility explains why *Salad Anniversary* became so widely loved by readers of all ages.

Characteristics of Tawara's Poetry



One of the most important characteristics of Tawara's poetry is its conversational style. Her poems often sound like natural spoken language rather than formal literary expressions. This makes them easy to understand while preserving the traditional 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic structure of tanka.

Another characteristic is her focus on everyday life. She writes about simple conversations, relationships, seasons, and familiar places. Through these ordinary subjects, she expresses universal human emotions. Readers realize that even seemingly insignificant moments can become meaningful memories.

In addition, Tawara frequently portrays romantic relationships from a fresh and honest perspective. Instead of idealizing love, she describes its joys, uncertainties, misunderstandings, and quiet happiness. These realistic portrayals make her poetry emotionally convincing and highly relatable.

The Influence of Machi Tawara

Machi Tawara played a significant role in revitalizing modern Japanese poetry. Thanks to her success, many young people who had never read tanka became interested in the genre. Her works demonstrated that traditional poetic forms could still express contemporary life without losing their artistic value.

Today, her influence extends beyond books. She continues to contribute to Japanese culture through various media, including television and social networking services. Her works remind readers that poetry is not limited to extraordinary experiences but can be found in the small events of everyday life.

Personal Reflection

Learning about Machi Tawara has changed my understanding of Japanese poetry. Before reading about her, I thought tanka was mainly a classical literary form



that required specialized knowledge. However, Tawara demonstrates that poetry can emerge from ordinary conversations and daily experiences.

I was especially impressed by the title poem of *Salad Anniversary*. It shows how a simple compliment about food can become a precious memory. This reminds us that happiness often comes from small moments rather than extraordinary events. I believe her works are also valuable for learners of Japanese because they introduce natural expressions, contemporary vocabulary, and Japanese culture in an enjoyable way.

Conclusion

Machi Tawara transformed modern Japanese tanka by making it accessible, relatable, and relevant to everyday life. Through *Salad Anniversary*, she introduced a new style that combined traditional poetic structure with modern language and contemporary themes. Her poetry demonstrates that even ordinary conversations and daily experiences can become beautiful literary works. As a result, she has become one of the most influential poets in modern Japan, and her works continue to inspire readers both in Japan and abroad.

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