Heidi Buck-Albulet*
Temporality in *Renga*

Abstract: This paper highlights time concepts and the organisation and structure of time in the practice of *renga*, Japanese 'linked poetry'. As *renga* is a genre of poetry created in groups, the study will not only focus on the poems themselves (the texts produced), but on the meetings that bring forth the texts (the performance), the manuscripts that are written there (the material) and the social environment in which the performances take place (the setting). By analysing the main features of each of these four areas and focusing on time, change and persistence, I aim to show how closely they are interconnected and also provide the reader with the knowledge necessary to appreciate the complexity of *renga* as an integral *Gesamtkunstwerk*. While my focus is on contemporary *renga* poetry here, I will also consider aspects of its history, which is a vital key to understanding this art.

Keywords: contemporary *renga*; history of *renga*; linked poetry; new media; performance; temporality; written artefacts

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きざはしや薄霜おけるあしたかな　　　忠夫
Kizahashi ya/ usujimo okeru/ ashita kana　*Tadao*[1]
On the steps
hoarfrost descended
this morning

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1 Introduction

Imagine you read a book containing poems that someone else has written at their desk – possibly years ago – and which he or she then got published. This is probably the normal case when Europeans think of the common processes of literary production and reception. Even though there are performative events such as readings by the author or poetry slams, there is still a single author on one side

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[1] *Hokku* by Shimazu Tadao (1926–2016), dated 7 November 2004. See Kokumin Bunkasai Yukuhashi Shi Renga Kikaku Iinkai 2005: 110.

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*Corresponding author: Heidi Buck-Albulet, University of Hamburg, Warburgstrasse 26, 20354 Hamburg, Germany, E-mail: heidi.buck-albulet@uni-hamburg.de

and an audience on the other, and there is also a time gap between production and reception. *Renga* 連歌 is different: it is poetry that is created in groups with the participants taking turns to contribute the next verse. In this procedure, the producers and their first readers, or, more precisely, listeners, are all gathered in the same place at the same time. In addition, most of the participants constantly change their roles: from the role of a producer to the role of a recipient, and vice versa. Only two roles remain constant: (i) a scribe (*shuhitsu* 執筆) continually records the verses as they emerge,[2] and the circle of participants is supervised by (ii) a *renga* master (*sōshō* 宗匠), who judges the verses together with the scribe and decides whether they should be accepted and added to the poem. The outcome of these meetings is not just a poem, but a written artefact. A systematic examination of time and temporal concepts in *renga* poetry therefore needs to cover four dimensions, the first three concerning the poem itself (the text), the meeting that brings forth the text (the performance), including its actors, and the manuscripts that are written during the meetings (the material aspect). The fourth dimension is the setting that provides the framework for the first three aspects: the historical and social environment in which the performance takes place, where the work of art is created, the paper is written on, where the manuscripts are bound together and where they are read or stored. In the case of votive *renga*, the setting includes the subsequent recitation ceremony by which the poem is dedicated to the deities of a shrine or temple and a calligraphic copy is donated. The various dimensions and how they are linked are shown in Figure 1.
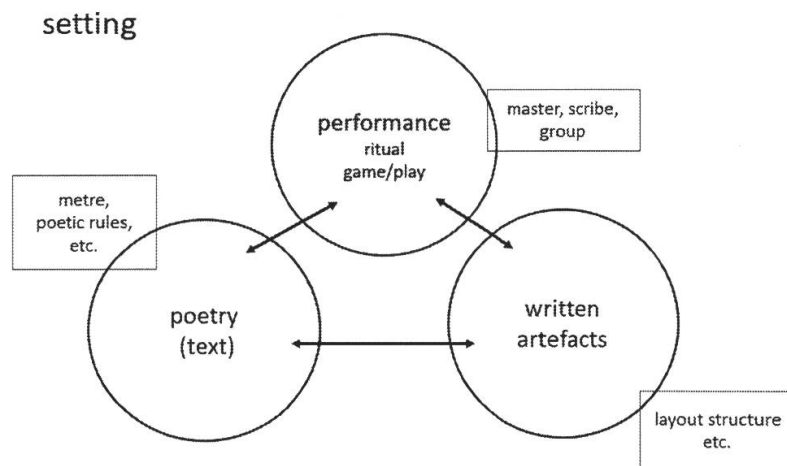

Figure 1: The four dimensions of *renga*.

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2 In pre-modern *renga*, the only person to make a record of the poem was the scribe. In contemporary *renga* circles, a *sōshō* and a scribe are still involved, but every member of the circle makes a record of the emerging poem as well now.

This model allows specific questions to be asked regarding the changes and transformations occurring in each of the areas described above, such as the following: if there are changes in one dimension, for example due to political or economic developments or the invention of new technologies, does this affect the others, too, and if so, to what degree? Are all the dimensions affected in the same way or do some of them change more slowly than others (or even resist change)? After a brief historical overview of the genre, this paper will address the most time-related categories for each of the four dimensions. I will argue that a description of the temporal aspects of *renga* is particularly helpful in clarifying the specific characteristics of *renga* poetry. It may have become clear now what this paper is *not* about primarily: the chronographic descriptions *within* the poetic texts.[3] Rather, it is about pragmatic aspects in dealing with the texts and material artifacts, many of them related to what might be described as 'chronopolitics'.

2 Time and history, or in search of the origin

Renga is a literary genre with a tremendously long history. This is one of the first things one notices when it is looked at from the perspective of time. A historical approach – which is one way of perceiving temporality[4] – suggests a search for an origin, viz. a starting point on a timeline, which is often found where it is set. Deciding on a starting point may serve various functions: it can provide a time orientation, give meaning to the present, contribute to a collective memory or – as medieval *renga* poetics has done – bestow dignity and authority on a certain tradition. Like other arts, *renga* has more than one origin. The search for its beginnings may go back as far as the predecessors of the genre, for example to antiphonic forms of poetry in general, or to forms of Chinese collaborative poetry (*lianju* 聯句) that flourished between the era of the Six Dynasties (220–589) and the Tang era (618–907). Mythical historiography claims *renga* poetry began with a dialogue between Yamato Takeru no mikoto 日本武尊 and an old 'lamp-holder' (*hitomoshi no okina* 火ともしの翁) that is included in the oldest chronicles of Japanese history, *Kojiki* 古事記 ('Records of Old Matters') and *Nihongi* 日本紀 ('The Chronicles of Japan'):[5]

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3 For chronographical aspects in texts, see Steineck 2018.

4 See Grethlein 2014.

5 Cf. the translation in Aston 1973: 207. German translations can be found in Naumann 1967: 7 and Antoni 2012: 150–151. Also see *Kojiki*, NKBT 1: 229; Tsurusaki 2010: 32–33. Antoni translates *hitomoshi* as 'der Mann, welcher das erlauchte Feuer hütete' ('the man who guarded the august fire').

新治筑波を過ぎて幾夜か寝つる

Niibari	Since we passed Niibari
Tsukuba wo sugite	and Tsukuba
iku yo ka netsuru	how many nights have we slept?

日々並べて夜には九夜日には十日を

Kaga nabete	Counting the days,
yo ni wa kokonoyo	of nights there are nine nights,
hi ni wa tōka wo	of days there are ten days!

Although this dialogue is *not* a *renga* but a pair of *katauta* 片歌 ('half-poems'[6]), in *renga* poetics this episode marks the beginning of a 'way', the 'way of *renga* poetry' (*renga no michi*)[7] or *Tsukuba no michi* 筑波の道, the 'way of Tsukuba'. The expression is attested in the two prefaces of the 'Tsukuba anthology' *Tsukuba shū* 筑波集 (1357),[8] compiled by Nijō Yoshimoto 二条良基 (1320–1388) in collaboration with Gusai (or Kyūzei 救済, 1284–1378). The episode was also mentioned in a poetic treatise whose title likewise alludes to it: *Tsukuba mondō* 筑波問答 ('Questions and Answers Concerning the [Way of] Tsukuba', 1373). Nijō Yoshimoto 二条良基 apparently endeavoured to ennoble *renga* by saying it was equivalent to the time-honoured *waka* 和歌 poetry, the 'Way of Shikishima' (*Shikishima no michi* 敷島の道).[9]

'Short *renga*' (*tanrenga* 短連歌) is also part of the early history of *renga*. There is no formal difference to a *waka* in terms of the metre, at least, but in a *tanrenga*, the two parts of a *waka* constitute separate verses and are written by different poets.[10]

As a next step, the first extant chain of three 'links' can be found in the *Imakagami* 今鏡 ('Mirror of the Present'), a historical tale written in the first half of the Insei era (1086–1221). This suggests that the beginning of 'chain *renga*' (*kusari renga*)[11] was around the eleventh to twelfth century.

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6 A short poem with the metre 5-7-7.

7 The *renga* master Sōgi 宗祇 (1421–1502) uses the expression *renga no michi* in his treatise *Azuma mondō* 吾妻問答 ('East Country Dialogues'). See *GR* 303, 17; NKBT 66: 207.

8 The *Tsukuba shū* has a 'Chinese preface' *manajo* 真名序 and a 'Japanese preface' *kanajo* 仮名序, just like the *waka* anthology *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 ('Anthology of Old and New *waka*', 905). See *Tsukuba shū*: 22 and 36.

9 NKBZ 88: 19. *Shikishima* (lit. 'spread islands') is an *epitheton ornans* for Japan, or, in the expression *Shikishima no Yamato* 敷島の大和 for Yamato, in this case an old name for what was Japan in the respective eras. The expression *Shikishima no michi* can be traced back to the early twelfth century. See NKD, lemma *Shikishima no michi*.

10 A poem in Japan's earliest extant anthology, *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 ('Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves', eighth century), has been discussed as a possible early example; see *Man'yōshū* 8: 1635, *NKBZ* 7: 369.

11 Longer chains of three or more verses, but without a fixed number of them. Hiroki 2010: 26–27.

奈良の宮こを思ひこそやれ   藤原公教

Nara no miyako wo
omohi koso yare

Nara, ancient capital,
Oh my heart yearns for you!
Fujiwara Kiminori

八重桜秋の紅葉やいかならむ   大将殿 (有仁)

Yaezakura
aki no momiji ya
ikanaramu

Eightfold cherry blossom
Its scarlet leaves in autumn –
Are they not splendid?
Minamoto Arihito

時雨るる度に色や重なる   越後乳母

Shigururu tabi ni
iro ya kasanaru

Every time that drizzle falls
Do their colours grow still deeper?
Wet-nurse Echigo[12]

In the course of time, the number of verses came to be standardised. The first mention of a *hyakuin* 百韻 ('a hundred verses', lit. 'rhymes'[13]), the standard form of pre-modern *renga,* can be found in a diary kept by Fujiwara no Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241), the *Meigetsuki* 明月記 ('Record of the Clear Moon', 1200). This suggests that poems consisting of a hundred verses may have been established for several decades by that time.

The actual heyday of *renga* poetry lasted from the fourteenth to the early seventeenth century, but the practice continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. It was practically abandoned throughout Japan by the beginning of the twentieth century, with only one community in Yukuhashi (Fukuoka Prefecure, Kyūshū) claiming a continuous tradition of votive *renga* (*hōraku renga* 法楽連歌 or *hōnō renga* 奉納連歌) since 1530.[14] It was from there that a revival movement started in the 1980s.

Wherever the beginnings are located or 'temporalised', during this long period of its existence, the genre has experienced several – sometimes profound – developments and periods of decline and renewal. Nonetheless, there are a number of formal features that seem to have defied the ages and persisted as elements of continuity.

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12 Naumann 1967: 31–32; *SKT* 5: no. 111 (Japan Knowledge). English translation based on Konishi 1991, 88.

13 The term *hyakuin* is said to have been influenced by Chinese poetry, as Chinese poems have rhymes.

14 See Buck-Albulet 2020 and 2021 (forthcoming).

3 The *za* as a chronotope

As mentioned above, one of the principal features of *renga* is that it is a collaborative activity that requires people to meet and interact in a specific place at a specific time (Figure 2), hence Japanese researchers have argued that it is an 'art of the place' (*ba no geinō* 場の芸能), like, for instance, tea ceremony.

This is related to the second feature, the fact that, unlike other lyrical genres, not only the text, but the *process* of creation – the performance – plays a significant role. The *za* 座 ('seat') or *ba* 場 ('place') is therefore a real-world *chronotope*.[15] Hence, in Japanese literary studies, *renga* is called an 'art of the place' (*ba no bungei* 場の文芸 or *za no bungei* 座の文芸). *Ba* and *za* do not only refer to a physical location, though; the notion of *za* includes the group itself, which 'acts with one mind' (*ichimi dōshin* 一味同心[16]), viz. with the shared intention of creating a joint work of art. The *za* is also a place where a collective experience occurs and a place where people from different parts of society, different parts of the country and of different age groups meet.[17] As mentioned above, different

Figure 2: The monthly *renga* circle at Kumata Shrine 杭全神社, Osaka. Photo: © Buck-Albulet, 2018.

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15 Mikhail Bakhtin coined the term 'chronotope' (хронотопос) in a book first published in 1975 to describe the interconnection between time and space in literature (the first German translation of it appeared in 1986). However, he also mentioned real-world chronotopes; see Bakhtin 2008: 58. For an English translation, see Bakhtin 1981 [1973]. See also Tsurusaki 1987 on the topic of the *ba*.
16 This expression is by Kaneko Kinjirō 金子金次郎, quoted from Hiroki 2004: 216.
17 Kishida 2015: 42.

phases of literary production and reception, which we commonly imagine as spatially and temporally distinct from the viewpoint of modern literature, are united here in one place and one *period* of time,[18] as the assembled members constantly switch between the roles of the producer and recipient.[19] Additional processes of reading and listening may follow as well, however. One of them is reciting the poems before the deities (in case of votive *renga*). As this is done in a way that is different from ordinary speech, the voice contributes to separating the ceremony from ordinary space and time.[20] Needless to say, other acts of reading (of later prints or digital formats, for example), which are spatially and temporally separate from the *za*, can follow as well.

The term *za* is also used synonymously with the unit 'one poem', presupposing that one session at a certain place usually leads to the completion of a poem. Moreover, there are also poetic rules that relate to the *za*: rules that determine that a verse mentioning a famous place (*meisho* 名所), for instance, may only appear once in a *za*, i.e. in one session or *renga* poem (*ichiza ikku* 一座一句), or verses such as those mentioning plum blossom (*ume* 梅) may appear up to five times in one session/poem (*ichiza goku* 一座五句).[21]

Kishida Yoriko has noted that the formative phase of *hyakuin* coincided with the social and religious structural change of the medieval period and that meetings at the time were often held in the grounds of a temple. She particularly points to the ceremonial in Shingon 真言 and Tendai 天台 Buddhism, in which the mandala was a spatial expression of the teaching, while the ritual had the character of its temporal expression.[22] *Renga* ritual, says Kishida, owes much to Buddhist masses (*hō'e* 法会, 'dharma assemblies') and, like the *hō'e*, the *za* creates a kind of *kekkai* 結界 or 'sacred precinct' beyond daily life.[23] Moreover, as *renga*, like *waka*, was not only a written art but a vocal one, it was influenced by Buddhist *shōmyō* 声明 chanting as well.[24]

The *za* is the place of an extraordinary experience. The first verse, or *hokku* 発句, which is the only one that refers to the real-world chronotope, is the starting

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18 Ogata 2008: 310.

19 During a *renga* session, the accepted verses are read aloud by the scribe. All the other participants are therefore the first 'recipients' of the poetry (as opposed to future readers). In oral-style sessions, a participant may make a written draft and then say it aloud. In written or *tanzaku* ('paper strip') style, the poet gives the written draft to the *sōshō* and the scribe. If the verse is accepted, this is announced out loud. In both cases there are repeated sequences of production and reception at the micro level (see below for more on the oral and *tanzaku* style).

20 See the chapter 'Time-space and structure of renga' (*renga no jikū to kōzō* 連歌の時空と構造) in Kishida 2015: 32–51.

21 Hiroki 2010: 43.

22 Kishida 2015: 68.

23 Kishida 2015: 69.

24 Kishida 2015: 73–81.

point from which the participants embark into imaginary time and space.[25] These real-world chronotopes, i.e. the meetings, in turn, were and are often embedded in larger real-world chronotopes (annual festivals, for instance) and are held periodically or just on special occasions.

The choice of time and place is by no means arbitrary when arranging a *renga* gathering: monthly meetings (*tsukinami renga* 月次連歌) take place on fixed dates and at specific locations. *Renga* sessions that are part of larger ritual events also have to take place on certain fixed dates and times such as the *renga* on a festival float depicted in Figure 3, which is held in the evening.

Figure 3: The last part of the four *renga* sessions of the annual *Imai Gion Renga* 今井祇園連歌 is the unique *shajō renga* 車上連歌 or 'renga on a float'. Photo: Buck-Albulet, 2018.

25 Kishida 2015: 44.

4 Extensions of the *za* and follow-up actions

Despite what has been said so far about *renga* as an 'art of the place', there are some extensions of the *za*, which means the time required for composing a poem exceeds the usual duration of a *renga* session. In pre-modern Japan, face-to-face sessions were occasionally preceded by a 'virtual first round' (*ichijun* 一順). A messenger was sent to the invited participants along with a box to collect a verse from each participant. This was called *ichijunbako* 一順箱, or 'box of the first round'.[26] In contemporary Japan, virtual first rounds still take place, but the box has been replaced by electronic means of communication such as a fax machine, telephone, e-mail, text messaging or an instant messenger. A human still manages the procedure, though. During (and after) my research trip in 2018, I witnessed such rounds being conducted after the *za*, but only if it was not essential to finish the poem the very same day. A group that meets on a monthly basis can postpone completion until the next meeting or continue the poem in 'remote mode'[27] using electronic and digital communication tools. In the case of votive *renga* (*hōnō renga* or *hōraku renga*), however, the poems are recited to the deities and therefore have to be ready by the time of the recitation. In 2018, I witnessed recitations performed immediately after the *renga* session (the four parts of *Imai Gion Renga* 今井祇園連歌 in Yukuhashi 行橋[28] and the recitation at Yasaka Shrine 八坂神社 in Yamaguchi), one day later (at Myōken Shrine 明建神社 in Gujō Hachiman, Gifu Prefecture) and even several months after the *renga* session (at Nanshūji 南宗寺 Temple in Sakai).

Another aspect of interest in votive *renga* is the dedication of a calligraphic copy of the *renga* written in the traditional form of *renga kaishi* 連歌懐紙 (see below). In present-day *renga*, the *kaishi* that is to be dedicated is sometimes used for the recitation, but this is not absolutely necessary since the poem can also be read from the scribe's or master's notes or even from a printed version. As I noticed during my research stay, the calligraphy was donated shortly after the recitation was done in some cases, but in others, the manuscript was handed in at a later point in time. If a calligrapher is commissioned with writing the *kaishi*, it might not be ready by the time the recitation ceremony takes place. This was, in fact, the case with the *hōnō renga* conducted in Yamaguchi on 15 July 2018, where the votive ceremony at Yasaka Shrine followed immediately after the poetry session. Thus the calligraphy was handed in later. On the other hand, there are occasions where

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26 Hiroki 2010: 43.
27 During and after my research trip in summer 2018, I witnessed this practice in Hirano Library's *renga* circle in Osaka. As in most of the circles I attended, I was asked to contribute verses myself.
28 See Buck-Albulet 2020.

there is a longer period of time between the *renga* session and the recitation, as was the case in Nanshūji Temple in Sakai, where a 'cherry-blossom *renga*' was performed in the spring, but the recitation of the poem and the dedication of the *kaishi* had to wait until 7 July 2018 (when the annual Miyoshi 三好 festival took place).

Digital extensions of the *za* have been fostered by the coronavirus pandemic, which has affected social life in Japan, as it has worldwide. It was inevitable that 'encountering' (*yoriai* 寄合) in the real-world chronotope of the *za* has come to be regarded as a way of spreading the virus. Some circles suspended their meetings as a result, while others continued them under restricted conditions.[29] This is also due to the fact that there are many elderly participants in *renga* circles. For the same reason, not all members were ready to switch to new media immediately.[30]

Interestingly, for reasons that require further investigation, faxing information to recipients seems to have been more widespread in Japan than in the West, at least until very recently, a fact that has triggered puzzled commentaries in the international media.[31]

In the Hirano ward branch of Osaka's municipal library, members of the *renga* circle were recommended to change over to e-mail when the corona pandemic broke out, and so elderly participants got used to using new media with the help of the younger generation. The oldest participant at the Hirano Library *renga* circle, Oshima Kikuo 小島喜久雄 (98), made his debut on a smartphone and acted as the *sōshō* for the group's virtual meeting a month later.[32]

A 'virtual *za*' (if we extend the notion of 'virtual') does not necessarily mean 'digital media', however: whole sessions have been conducted 'virtually' before,

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29 Occasionally, *renga* sessions have not been held because of the weather. In Gujū Hachiman, the annual *renga* had to be cancelled in 2017 due to a typhoon, for example, and in 2019, the unique '*renga* on a festival float' (*shajō renga* 車上連歌), which is an outdoor event (see Figure 3), was reduced to a meeting in the community's assembly hall because of the rain. In July 2020, the Gion Festival was cancelled in Yukuhashi; only some Shintō rituals were conducted and the circle met to compose the *renga* (See Imai Gion Renga no Kai 2021, 4–5). The monthly *renga* session in Kumata Shrine 杭全神社 have been suspended in April 2020.

30 Some practitioners of *renga* hold that Japan, too, is struggling with a backlog in terms of its digitisation.

31 Reporters at *The New York Times* for instance wondered about Japan sticking to this pre-internet technology in an article printed in 2013; see Fackler 2013. It remains to be seen whether the pandemic and digitisation will accelerate the decline of fax technology in Japan as well. In the Hirano group (see below), in any case, it is the multitude of technologies used that prompts those responsible to push for standardisation of the media used, which also means turning away from the fax machine.

32 I would like to thank Yamamura Noriko 山村規子 for this information.

viz. as 'newspaper *renga*'[33] or 'box *renga*' (*bokkusu renga* ボックス連歌), with the verses being collected from 'throw-in boxes' (*renga bokkusu* 連歌ボックス, a kind of mail box) set up at certain places for use at a particular time.[34]

5 Artefact – text – performance

With regard to face-to-face meetings, what exactly does it mean for the written artefacts if the composition of *renga* poetry is bound by a time and place, as described above?

5.1 The writing surface

In pre-modern Japan, *renga* verses were recorded by the scribe as they were accepted during the session. The recording medium was *renga kaishi* (Figure 4), which was composed of paper sheets about 36 × 52 cm in size,[35] folded once lengthwise, yielding a folded piece of paper (*ori* 折) approximately 18 × 52 cm in size, only the outer part of which was used. *Kaishi* sheets were a medium for recording the result of what was negotiated orally, but they were also more than that. Their layout had a tremendous effect on the structure of the *renga*, not only on the written text, but on the performance of the composing process as well. This

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33 *Asahi Shinbun shijō renga* 朝日新聞紙上連歌 ('Asahi Shinbun Newspaper *renga*'). The first newspaper *renga* appeared in January 1996 in the Osaka edition of the *Asahi Shinbun* and was a regular feature for a whole year, with Tsurusaki Hiro'o 鶴崎裕雄 selecting the best of the verses contributed. The series ran from January to December. A second series ran from September 2001 to July 2002. See Yamamura 2019.

34 *Bokkusu renga* (not to be confused with the 'first-round boxes') was one of the seminal events at the beginning of the revival movement in the 1980s (see Buck-Albulet 2020: 29). In July 2020, another 'box *renga*' was launched, which has been scheduled to run until February 2021 to replace the *Great Yukuhashi Renga* Gathering (*Yukuhashi Renga Taikai* 行橋連歌大会), which was cancelled due to coronavirus. Like the first *bokkusu renga*, there was a real box in Kosumeito Yukuhashi コスメイト行橋 Building and other places in Yukuhashi where sheets of paper could be posted, but it was also possible to send the verses online. For more about the *bokkusu renga* conducted in 2003, see Buck-Albulet 2020: 29.

35 36 cm in height, 52 cm in width. See Hiroki 2015: 90.

structure remained remarkably stable once it was established. Table 1 shows how the layout of *kaishi* corresponds to the text structure:[36]

Table 1: Structure of a hundred-verse *renga* (*hyakuin*), the standard form of a pre-modern *renga* poem. Taking out the two middle sheets yields a forty-four-verse *renga* or *yoyoshi* 世吉, the standard form of contemporary *renga*.

Folded sheet (*ori*)			Number of verses
1	*shoori, hatsuori* 初折*, ichi no ori* 一の折	recto (*omote* 表, abbreviated: *o* 才)	8
		verso (*ura* 裏 or *u* ウ)	14
2	*ni no ori* 二の折	recto	14
		verso	14
3	*san no ori* 三の折	recto	14
		verso	14
4	*nagori no ori* 名残の折	recto	14
		verso	8

In contemporary Japan, new forms of manuscripts have emerged in which this scheme has been transferred to a form in keeping with the times. While only the scribe recorded the verses in pre-modern Japan, in contemporary *renga* circles every member makes his or her own record, making use of a two-sheet form developed by Mitsuta Kazunobu 光田和伸, also called *renga kaishi*. The manuscripts that are created this way are hybrid forms of print and handwriting. Moreover, parts of the complex poetic rules are shown schematically in the form.[37]

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36 Yamada 1980 [1937]: 2–3.

37 Two details of the form are depicted in Buck-Albulet 2020: 26–27. The form is arranged as a table for filling in the verses and the names of the poets. A different number of paratexts are pre-printed, depending on which variant of the form is used: the standardised part of the title, the numbering of the verses, the 'seats' of cherry blossom and the moon, sometimes the *budate* topics (in this case the topic of each verse can just be ticked) and, in certain cases, a small extra table for the tally to summarise which poet has contributed verses and how many. As the scribes now work with Word documents, they may also print the verses of a previous session if the poem was not completed at the time and is to be continued in the current session.
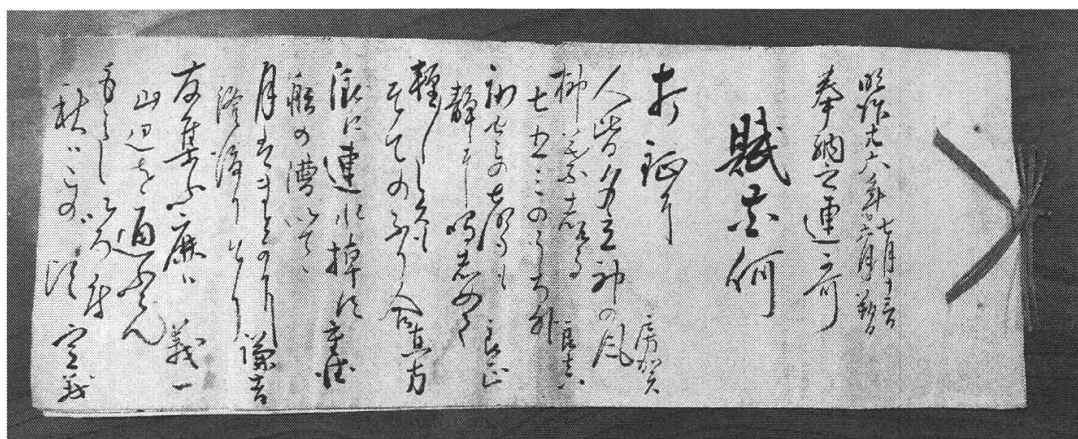
Figure 4: *Renga kaishi* dated to 1893 (Meiji 明治 26), in the possession of Imaitsu Susa Shrine 今井津須佐神社, Yukuhashi. Courtesy of Imaitsu Susa Shrine. Photo: Buck-Albulet, 2018.

5.2 Language and form

Several parameters are particularly relevant for a *renga* text in terms of time: the metre, pace (tempo)[38] and the grammatical categories of tense, aspect and mode.

A metre divides time into regular segments. *Renga* composers adopted the metre of 5-7-5-7-7 'syllables' (or more precisely, morae) from *waka* poetry. The term 'mora' (Latin for 'space of time') has been borrowed from ancient Greek studies to describe Japanese 'syllables', as the Japanese language is considered to be a 'mora-timed' language.[39]

The types of pace called *jo* 序 ('introduction'), *ha* 破 ('breaking apart') and *kyū* 急 ('rushing'), which are applied in other traditional performative Japanese arts as well, contribute to the matrix of parameters that structure a *renga* poem: a slow beginning followed by acceleration and growing suspense, the tempo finally reaching a peak before slowing down again.[40] It is beyond the scope of this paper

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38 Actually, 'pace' is related to all three of the dimensions mentioned above: text, performance and written artefacts. Ogata 2008: 424 and 786.

39 Otake 2015: 518. Regarding the difference between a mora and syllable, see Kubozono 2015, esp. section 4.1.

40 See, e.g. Quinn 1993: 58 on *jō-ha-kyū* in Nō. See Ogata 2008, 424: *Bugaku ni okeru hyōshi no kankyū o, renga ikkan no tenkai ni atehameta mono. Jo wa yuruyakana dōnyūhō, ha wa yuruyakana henka, kyū wa hayai tenpo no kyoku no takamari o shimesu bubun o iu.* 舞楽における拍子の緩急を、連歌一巻あてはめたもの。序は緩やかな導入部、破は緩やかな変化、急は早いテンポの曲の高まりを示す部分をいう (The application of slow and fast tempo in *bugaku* to the progression within one unit (one poem) of *renga*. *Jo* is a gradual introduction, *ha* is a gradual change and *kyū* is the part where the tune/melody rises to a fast tempo.)

to elaborate on musical tempo here, a topic that (like grammatical tense) is not limited to *renga*. Suffice it to say that the early *renga* masters described the scope of each type of tempo in terms of the structure of a *kaishi*. According to Nijō Yoshi-moto's Tsukuba mondô, for instance, the verses of the first sheet should be *jo*, those of the second sheet *ha* and those of the third and fourth sheet *kyū*. This *kaishi structure*, in turn, affects both the text level and the level of performance.[41]

The language of *renga* is also determined by the genre's orientation towards models of the past. While contemporary poets do care about the present and the future of the art, of course,[42] it is equally true that contemporary *renga* – just like pre-modern *renga* and *waka* – is classicistic poetry based on standards of earlier eras. In a previous publication, I called contemporary *renga* a 'neoclassical' art;[43] because the grammar and vocabulary used is pre-modern and so is the orthography. It is important to understand how essential this is.[44] I therefore decided to adapt the romanisation of Japanese *renga* texts in a way that differs from what is normally practised in Japanese studies, viz. romanising pre-modern texts according to modern pronunciation (unless they are explicitly about historical phonology). Instead of doing that, I *transliterate* the texts so that they represent the writing rather than the pronunciation of the verses (which is, indeed, modern) in order to simulate the aesthetic effect of historical orthography. This decision means that non-Japanologists will no longer be able to pronounce the poem correctly, but a contemporary Japanese *renga* poet may consider 'modern' roma-nisation wrong. Using my own approach, the voiced *tsu* つ (*zu* づ) (which is not distinguished from *zu* ず in the Hepburn system) is rendered as *dzu*.

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41 Ogata 2008: 786, 424.

42 See, for example, the subtitles of the books published by Kumata Jinja in 1993 and 2012: *Kako to genzai* ('Past and Present') and *Kako kara mirai e* ('From the Past to the Future').

43 Buck-Albulet 2020: 30.

44 It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on the systems of *kana* 仮名 orthography here, but some basic remarks do seem to be necessary. Despite the importance attached to it, there is surprisingly little literature on orthography in contemporary *renga*. The historical *kana* orthog-raphy is modelled on the writing style and pronunciation of the Heian era (794–1185), at least in terms of an ideal. Two main systems have been distinguished in the history of Japanese *kana* orthography: the *Teika-kanazukai* 定家仮名遣い, based on studies by Fujiwara no Teika, and the *Keichū-kanazukai* 契沖仮名遣い, based on the work of Keichū 契沖 (1640–1701). The *Keichū-ka-nazukai* was widely used until 1946. As Shockey 2016: 304 has noted, when another orthography reform was being discussed in the Meiji period (1868–1912), the literati in particular disapproved of it. Contemporary *renga* circles use Serifu 2018 [2007] and current monolingual dictionaries of Japanese (*Kokugo daijiten*) for reference purposes. See Serifu 2018: 583 and Yamanishi 2004: 19–20.

The verse このことばなゐ; 地震に崩れぬ教へにて composed by Zabō 座忘[45] in June 2018 is therefore romanised as follows:[46]

Kono kotoba	These words are a teaching
nawi ni kudzurenu	that will not tumble
oshihe nite	from earthquakes
	Zabō

6 Poetic rules

Following the writing style of law codes (bulletin lists of laws and legislation, *hōki no kajōsho* 法規の箇条書) in warrior families of the Kamakura era (1185–1333), rules and prohibitions came to be established in poetry, too.[47] In *renga*, these aimed at avoiding repetition and ensuring progress in terms of content within a poem. In contemporary Japan, a set of 17 semantic categories (*budate* 部立, lit. 'classification', 'division') form the basis of the rules: things that shine (*hikarimono* 光物), time of day (*jibun* 時分), things that rise (*sobikimono* 聳物, i.e. fog, smoke, etc.), things that fall (*furimono* 降物, rain, etc.), mountains (*sanrui* 山類), the waterside (*suihen* 水辺), animals (*dōbutsu* or *ugokimono* 動物), plants (*shokubutsu* or *uemono* 植物), human beings (*ningen* 人間), [Shintō] deities (*jingi* 神祇), 'the Buddha's teaching' (*shakkyō* 釈教, in this context Buddhist topics in general), love (*koi* 恋), nostalgia (*shukkai* 述懐), travel (*tabi* 旅), famous places (*meisho* 名所), dwellings (*idokoro or kyosho* 居所) and clothes (*ishō* 衣裳).[48] These categories are further divided into sub-categories.[49] The four seasons form another set of categories to which a fifth category is added ('non-seasonal', or *zō* 雑).[50] These are meant to be distributed in a way that makes a completed poem a harmonious work.

A discussion of the meaning of seasons in Japanese poetry is beyond the scope of this paper,[51] but suffice it to say that they fulfil the task of providing consistent,

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45 Ōtsubo Toshikinu 大坪利絹 (1926–2020). Verse no. 11, second sheet recto, composed in the *renga* circle in Kumata Shrine in Osaka on 27 June 2018.

46 The transcription approximated to modern pronunciation would be *Kono kotoba nai ni kuzurenu oshie nite*.

47 Ogata 2008: 354.

48 Yukuhashi Shi Bunka Isan Kasseika Jikkō Iinkai 2014: 79–81.

49 Yukuhashi Shi Bunka Isan Kasseika Jikkō Iinkai 2014: 24; also see Konishi 1975: 40–41; Carter 1983: 592.

50 There is another category *shinnen* 新年 ('new year') for the first two or three verses at the first sessions of the year in January. See Dazaifu Tenmangū (n.d.): 78 and Imai Gion Renga no Kai (2021): 144, among others.

51 See Shirane 2012 for an in-depth study of seasons in poetry.

all-pervasive structural categories in *renga*, just like the *butate* 部立て motifs. According to the rules that apply to contemporary *renga*, spring, for instance, has to be continued over three verses, but must not be continued for more than five. There has to be a gap of seven verses between all the seasons until the same season can be referred to again in the poem.[52]

The same applies to the *butate* categories. As is appropriate to the topic of this volume, this might be explained by the example of motifs related to time: verses using the categories of *shukkai* ('nostalgia') and *tabi* ('travel') may be continued for three verses, while *jibun* ('time of day') may be continued for two. There are different regulations concerning the required distance to be kept until the *jibun* category can be used again, depending on what the sub-category is (morning, evening or night). In pre-modern Japan, these rules were called *sarikirai* 去り嫌い or *kiraimono* 嫌物 ('things to be avoided'), but in contemporary Japan they are called *ku sari* 句去り ('distance between verses'). The technical term for the seriation rule is *kukazu* 句数 in pre-modern and contemporary Japan (lit. 'number of verses').

'Moon' (*tsuki* 月) and 'flower' (*hana* 花, only cherry blossom in this context) constitute another structural category. By convention, 'moon' represents autumn, while 'flower' represents spring. Both have their designated place (*jōza* 定座) in *renga*, i.e. in the text, and thus in the performance and in the *renga kaishi* as well: *tsuki no jōza* 月の定座, or 'place of the moon', and *hana no jōza* 花の定座, or 'place of the [cherry] blossoms'. In contemporary forty-four-verse *renga* (known as *yoyoshi*), the moon is usually referred to in
- verse 7 on the first sheet recto and
- verse 13 on the second sheet recto,

while 'flower' is usually employed in
- verse 13 on the first sheet verso and
- verse 7 on the second sheet verso.

There is complete symmetry here, at least in theory. In practice, there is sometimes a slight deviation from this – a lunar verse may occasionally appear a little earlier, for example.

On the one hand, these rules serve to guarantee the permanent alternation of poetic images required in *renga*, while on the other, they maintain a degree of suspense; on the text level, they ensure the constant change in the poetic images, 'the movement of the sequence as a whole',[53] which is one of the fundamental

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52 Yukuhashi Shi Bunka Isan Kasseika Jikkō Iinkai 2014.
53 Ramirez-Christensen 1981: 569.

requirements in *renga*. A corresponding notion in *renga* poetics is *yukiyō* 行様, which means 'the way of moving forwards' and develop the poem, and thus refers to the level of the text as well as the level of the performance. Due to the images constantly changing, the poem may freely cross the seasons and go back and forth in time and space.[54]

Renga is not an expression of individuals' real emotions, but fictional poetry describing imaginary worlds. I have observed, however, that the participants occasionally made hidden allusions to current events in the verses. To give an example, the verse by Yamamura Noriko, written in June 2018 at Kumata Shrine in Osaka, *Kami somete/ kau [=kō] wo takishime/ senjō he* 髪染めて香をたきしめ戦場 へ ('The hair dyed, the clothes perfumed, on to the battlefield!') evokes the image of a samurai. It *might*, however, be read in a different way in view of the fact that the football world championship was taking place around this time. Actually, the only place in the poem where a reference to the time and place of the meeting is explicitly required is the *hokku*; it is mandatory for the *hokku* to include a 'season word' (*kigo* 季語) that is appropriate for the current season. Furthermore, the *hokku* often alludes to the occasion of the meeting. It always does so in votive *renga*, where it is meant as a greeting and an invitation to the deities. The *hokku* composed for the deity of Susa Jinja Shrine, *Susa Jinja hōnō no renga* 須佐神社奉納之連歌, in Yukuhashi on 14 July 2018 reads as follows:

片陰を照らす斎杙の鏡かな   辰也
katakage o / terasu ikui no / kagami kana   Tatsuya
Oh the mirror/at the stake/illuminating the shade!

Katakage 片陰 ('shade') is the season word referring to summer and the mirror is the 'august body of the *kami*' (*goshintai* 御神体), so according to the explanation provided by the *sōshō*, Arikawa Yoshihiro 有川宣博, the *hokku* is meant as a greeting to the deity.[55] The final exclamation particle *kana* is a *kireji* 切れ字 ('cutting word', literally, a 'cutting character'), which is a poetic device that is also mandatory in a *hokku*, like a season word. The *kireji* can be seen as a symbol of the difference between the time and space of *hokku* and *wakiku* 脇句 (the second verse) as well as a bridge or mediator between the imaginary world of both of them.[56]

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54 Kishida 2015: 38.
55 Oral explanation by Arikawa Yoshihiro during the session at Kumano Shrine 熊野神社 in Yukuhashi on 14 July 2018.
56 Kishida 2015: 36–37.

6.1 Performance

A *renga* session involves a procedure that follows certain rules and guidelines, which is why it can also be described as a game, just as poetry in general can be seen as a game with words.[57] The game character is even more evident in the earliest forms of *renga*, which were mainly conducted as verse-capping games as opposed to the 'serious' *waka* poetry.[58] It seems appropriate here to recall the social aspect of Japanese poetry in general (*waka* poems were often written in competitive, game-like settings). *Renga* poetry is particularly pronounced in that respect as it requires several players by default, although it is also possible to play alone, i.e. to write a *dokugin* 独吟, or 'solitary *renga*' poem. In medieval and early-modern Japan, the sessions became increasingly ritualised. The participants, especially the scribe (*shuhitsu*), became subject to detailed rules of conduct that defined the order of certain actions, for instance bringing the scribe's desk into the room or rubbing the inkstone. Both rituals and games involve structuring and 'orchestration'[59] in time. In contemporary *renga*, however, most of those procedural rules do not apply any more, which means that gatherings have become much less ritualised. Nevertheless, there are still rules and conventions that involve orchestration in time and space, such as the poetic rules mentioned above, which include aspects of repetition, sequence, seriation etc. and thus apply both on the text level[60] and on the performative level. The procedure rules (*shidai* 次第) of the *Imai Gion Rengakai* 今井祇園連歌会 in Yukuhashi, one of which is mentioned above, are another example. As prescriptive rules of poetry and conduct, they do not just refer to the text, but to the participants' actions as well.

6.2 Length of the poem and length of the meetings

One of the ways *renga* (and consequently the *renga* gatherings) can be classified is by length, i.e. the number of verses produced. In pre-modern Japan, a thousand verses (*senku* 千句) and ten thousand verses (*manku* 万句) were practiced in addition to the standard form of a hundred verses or *hyakuin*. The first two were often employed for prayer (*kitō renga* 祈祷連歌) or as a votive *renga* (*hōraku renga* or *hōnō renga*) in a religious setting. Needless to say, *senku* and *manku* require

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57 Regarding the connection between literature and games/play, see Anz/Kaulen 2009, among others.
58 See Buck-Albulet 2021a.
59 Bell 1992: 99.
60 Steineck 2018: 173.

more time than shorter forms. It became common to spread a *senku* over three days.[61] In *manku*, the task of creating such a long poem may also have been solved by a division of labour such as the *manku* held by Ashikaga Yoshinori 足利義教 (1394–1441) in 1433 at Kitano 北野 Shrine in Kyōto: more than two hundred participants were involved in 20 places at the same time so the *manku* could be completed in one day. Thus, an element of simultaneity was introduced to the procedure.[62]

One key difference between pre-modern and contemporary *renga* is that the standard length is no longer the *hyakuin*, or a hundred verses, but *yoyoshi*, or 44.[63] One reason for this may be that despite successful revival movements since the 1980s, the same level of expertise as in the heyday of the genre between the fourteenth and sixteenth century can no longer be assumed among many of the participants. Moreover, a *hyakuin* would take too much time to make, so pre-existing shorter forms were introduced as the new standard. While the *han hyakuin* 半百韻 (literally, 'half one hundred') was common at the beginning of the revival period, later *renga* poets opted for the *yoyoshi*.[64] The reason for favouring that can be found in the *kaishi*: while a *hyakuin* consists of four sheets, a *yoyoshi* keeps the pattern of eight verses on the first and the last page and 14 on the others, the only difference being that the two sheets in the middle have been taken out.

6.3 Time and place of the meetings

Renga can also be classified according to when, how often and where the meetings take place. Monthly meetings (*tsukinami renga* 月次連歌) used to be held (and still are), along with annual events, some of which are part of religious festivals. In pre-modern Japan, *renga* sessions were held on special occasions like the anniversaries of particular people's deaths. These days, a variety of sessions are held such as the 'first *renga*' (*hatsu renga* 初連歌) of the year (in Yukuhashi), cherry-blossom *renga* in the spring and 'moon-viewing *renga*' (*o-tsukimi renga* お月見連歌) in the autumn. There are also special, one-off occasions in addition to these cyclical events. In pre-modern Japan, sessions were often held before or after a battle, to celebrate a birth, or on the occasion of a death anniversary. *Renga* meetings were also held when someone had a vision in a dream (*musō renga* 夢想連歌),[65]

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61 Fukui 1969: 263.
62 Fukui 1969: 263–264; Hiroki 2006: 101–102.
63 Occasionally, *hyakuin* are still composed in present-day Japan.
64 See Buck-Albulet 2020.
65 A dream vision of a verse was regarded as a divine afflatus. The verse was then used for the *hokku* or the *hokku* and the second verse (*wakiku* 脇句). A dream-vision *renga* was marked on the

especially in medieval Japan. Moreover, in contemporary Japan there is still the practice of conducting a 'memorial *renga*' (tsuizen renga 追善連歌 or *tsuitō renga* 追悼連歌) for recently deceased members of the circle.

A classification according to the place where a session was held will not be discussed in any detail here, but it should be mentioned that certain dates are connected to specific places. The four sessions of *Imai Gion Renga* in Yukuhashi, for instance, are spread over four different locations. Half a *yoyoshi* is composed at each location, and the first two and last two each form a whole *yoyoshi*. In 2018, the first session took place at the Kumano Shrine, the second at the *shato* (in front of the main hall) of Imaitsu Susa Shrine 今井津須佐神社, the third at Jōkiji 浄喜寺 Temple and the fourth – the unique *shajō renga* 車上連歌 – on a festival float in the district of Imai (see Figure 3).[66]

6.4 The temporal procedure of creating poetry

There are also temporal aspects in the procedure of versifying[67] – that deserve attention. First of all, there is the question of pace. In pre-modern *renga* poetics, apart from the three aforementioned tempos, *jō, ha* and *kyū,* a certain speed in linking the verses was also considered important for an atmosphere of lightness in the process of performing, as it helped to create a chronotope distinct from ordinary space and time.[68] In contemporary *renga* circles, the speed of creating the sequence of links does not tend to be very high, especially if some of the participants are inexperienced. Nevertheless, even in these circles, a very special atmosphere emerges, which I would describe from personal experience as highly concentrated, yet relaxed and often even cheerful.

Second, there is the question of time orientation on the micro level. By default, two verses form a semantic unit in *renga*. First of all, the first and the second verse are read as one unit. Then the second and the third verse form another unit, while the content of the first verse becomes obsolete. Next, the third and fourth verse are linked together, and so on. An added verse can change the semantics or connotation of a previous verse in retrospect, so each pair of verses creates a different image.

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kaishi by the title, such as *Musō no renga* 夢想の連歌. Hiroki 2010: 270. For more on dream-vision *renga*, see Fukui 1969: 276–277.

66 See Buck-Albulet 2020 for more details.

67 For a description of a *renga* session as a whole, see Buck-Albulet 2021a (forthcoming).

68 Kishida 2015: 37–38. Kishida quotes Nijō Yoshimoto's *Tsukuba mondō,* among other works.

The technique of linking verses together requires the poets to consider the preceding verse (the *maeku* 前句) carefully and then respond to it in their own verse. At the same time, they have to bear in mind that another link is going to follow their verse. It is therefore important to ensure that the next poet is given enough creative leeway: linguistic ambiguity is desired, as too clear a verse would make the next link difficult. Thus, each participant needs to take the near past into account as well as the near future.[69]

Take the following, for example:[70]

窓を開きてよき知らせ待つ	ともこ	
Mado wo hirakite	Opening the window	
yoki shirase wo matsu	and waiting for good news	Tomoko

外つ国の文字にぞ心宿りける	大輔	
Totsukuni no	The heart dwells	
moji ni zo kokoro	in the letters	
yadorikeri	of foreign countries	Daisuke

雪を聞きつつ物語よむ	直毅	
Yuki wo kikitsutu	Reading a story	
monogatari yomu	while hearing the snow fall	Naoki

The second verse interprets the good news as 'written words' (*moji* 文字, lit. 'characters'), probably a letter from a foreign province or country. But with good reason, the poet does not write 'a letter' (e.g. *fumi* 文), but 'characters', thus leaving semantic space for the next verse, which interprets 'letters' as 'a story'. This may be described as a literary technique of retrospect reframing or reinterpretation.[71]

A third element worth mentioning is how the submission of verses is structured over time. There are two procedures in contemporary *renga* circles, which I call the 'oral style' and the '*tanzaku* 短冊 ['paper strip'] style'. In the oral style, the participant announces his or her verse orally, the scribe repeats it orally and if the

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69 Komura 2019: 57; Kumata Jinja 2012: 235.
70 Composed within a 'first *renga* [of the year]' (*hatsurenga*) on 11 January 2019 in Yukuhashi. See Imai Gion Renga no Kai 2021: 131. My thanks to Tajima Daisuke 田島大輔 for the explanation.
71 On the literary technique of reframing, see Altes 2014 and Nünning (ed.) 2015. There are more terms for similar techniques in Western prose literature, such as *anagnorisis* and 'plot twist' (see Angler 2020, for example), but to what degree they are comparable is yet to be explored. It remains to be seen whether the term 'fracture of expectation' (Ger. 'Erwartungsbruch'; see Frederking 2016) makes sense here, as change is a fundamental parameter in *renga*, in other words, the breach of expectation is *expected* by all the participants. The term 'unreliable narrating' does not apply either for the same reason.

verse is accepted, he or she finally writes it down. In the *tanzaku*-style procedure, by contrast, any participant who wants to suggest a verse writes his or her draft on a strip of paper (*tanzaku* 短冊) and hands it over to the *sōshō* and the scribe for assessment.[72]

The oral style, which resembles the traditional procedure of previous centuries more closely, is still practised in Yukuhashi. The submission follows a defined pattern, which is described as follows in the 'Rules for a Hundred Verses at Imai' (*Imai hyakuin shidai* 今井百韻次第):

> The verses that are linked must be recited in a clear voice. In the case of long verses (5-7-5), the first five syllables are spoken first, and after the scribe has repeated it orally, the whole verse is said again. In the case of a short verse, the first seven syllables are spoken first, then the whole verse is announced.[73]

The consequence of the oral procedure is that only one participant at a time can present his or her verse. All the other participants in the circle listen to it. If the verse gets rejected, another participant can present his verse. This continues until an acceptable verse is found for the respective round. The scribe then writes down the accepted verse and a new round starts.

In contrast to this, several participants can suggest verses at the same time in each round conducted in the *tanzaku* style. The *sōshō* and *shuhitsu* then decide on the best one. After that, the *shuhitsu* reads the verse aloud to announce it to the group. In the *renga* circle at Kumata Shrine in Osaka, for example, the preceding verse is always read together with the new one because, as mentioned above, two verses constitute one semantic unit. Reading aloud creates a simultaneous, shared listening experience. However, unlike the oral procedure, only the winners' verses make it to the acoustic dimension in the *tanzaku*-style procedure.[74] There are didactic *renga* sessions, though, where verses that did not make it into the poem are discussed.

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72 Needless to say, the 'oral procedure' is not entirely oral, while the *tanzaku* method is not entirely a writing procedure.

73 *Tsukeku wa meiryō na onsei o motte nasu. Chōku wa mazu kamigo o dashi, kore o shuhitsu ga kōtō de uketa ato ni futatabi zenku o dasu. Tanku wa mazu kamishichi o, tsugi ni futatabi zenku o hirō suru.* 付句は明瞭な音声をもってなす。長句はまづ上五を出し、これを執筆が口頭でうけた後に再び全句を出す。短句はまづ上七を、次に再び全句を披露する. Susa Jinja Renga no Kai 1997: 8. I would like to thank Kuroiwa Atsushi 黒岩淳 for advice on this matter.

74 *Tanzaku* are also used for another practice in some circles, which is to display the verses (*ku no haridashi* 句の張り出し, lit. 'sticking the verses'): the poet whose verse has been accepted writes on a larger *tanzaku*, which is then fixed to a sliding door or a whiteboard. The number of displayed *tanzaku* increases as the composing process progresses. This also helps to create a joint experience of creative work in the group. See Yukuhashi Shi Bunka Isan Kasseika Jikkō Iinkai 2014: 64.

In summary, it can be said that the oral procedure is a process of making successive contributions, while parts of the *tanzaku* procedure are simultaneous. Speed may matter in both cases: if a participant is slow in coming up with a verse and handing over the *tanzaku*, the *sōshō* may decide to pick another verse that has already been submitted. The first person to suggest an impeccable verse has a good chance of having it accepted in the oral procedure, too. To do this, however, the poet must think of one faster than the others and then signal their readiness to submit the verse.

A fourth point to mention here is that poetry that is heard is different from poetry that is read in terms of the aesthetic experience.[75] Imagine hearing the following verse, for example:

淵瀬には集へる魚の影もなし　　　　　　令子
Fuchise ni ha / tsudoheru uo no / kage mo nashi　　Reiko

The translation could be rendered as

In the depths and shallows/fish that gather/ – [there is] no sign of them.[76]

While being recited, the text gradually unfolds word by word. In the acoustic reception, the hearer needs to hear the recitation out to get the full meaning of the verse, viz. that there are no fish at all, while when reading, the eye could possibly jump to the end.

The acoustic reception, i.e. hearing (Ger. 'hören') a verse is better described as *listening* (Ger. 'zuhören'), a process by which the listener grants the speaker some of his/her own time,[77] or more precisely as *aesthetic listening*. Listening also means perceiving how the speaker of a verse organises the recitation process in terms of time (pace, rhythm, pauses in speech, repetition).[78] Visual reception is also involved in *renga* circles, particularly if the *tanzaku* style is practised, but the oral-acoustic dimension of poetry figures prominently in both cases.

Finally, the *hokku* is a key element in the poem, not only because it is the first verse, but because, as mentioned above, it is the only one to explicitly relate to the real time and place of the meeting; the 'fiction agreement'[79] that works for the rest of the poem is suspended in the *hokku*, so to speak. However, as the *hokku* is often

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75 Imhof 2003: 29.

76 The verse is part of a *renga* that was composed at the library in Hirano ward, Osaka in July 2018.

77 Imhof 2003: 173. See p. 209 on the complexity of listening and the skills required for it, including the perception of non-verbal elements.

78 Imhof 2003: 173.

79 It may be difficult for Western readers to understand when poetry is referred to as 'fiction', but that is what *renga* is all about. I have heard statements like '*renga* is fiction' from participants of *renga* circles several times.

submitted before the session and the dates of the sessions are usually fixed, it can be difficult to create an adequate verse. Therefore, in the collection of *renga* created by the *Imai Renga* circle in Yukuhashi, there are few cherry-blossom *renga* because the *hokku* has to coincide with real cherry blossom.[80] Moreover, climate change has also come to be discussed in relation to the season words (*kigo*).[81]

7 Written artefacts in time

In general, the written record of a *renga* poem can be regarded as a 'fossilisation' of something that has been negotiated orally. As a result of the meeting, it is – at least in principle – no longer subject to change, but fixed and conserved. However, textual criticism teaches us that texts in written artefacts can, indeed, be changed – and have been in many cases; famous *renga* masters are known to have made subsequent corrections to finished poems that were created under their guidance,[82] and in contemporary *renga*, a *sōshō* may make corrections if he or she discovers after the session that a verse was accepted that does not actually satisfy the rules.

Nevertheless, manuscripts are 'carriers' of texts and preserve *renga* poems over time. As Edward Kamens has pointed out, the poetry of the past has come down to us along with the written artefacts that contain it.[83] This does not mean that writing on a *kaishi* always makes a poem immortal or can save it from being lost, of course. Although traditional *washi* 和紙 paper is very sustainable, the quality of the paper used may vary according to whether it is an exercise session or a more formal occasion, for example. Furthermore, the circumstances of storage may be unfavourable, and there is also the danger of loss or destruction by fire or flooding.[84]

A second aspect to be noted is that there are also time indicators on the manuscripts as well as on printed editions. In addition to containing paratexts like *hashizukuri* 端作り ('[text] written in the [right-hand] margin'),[85] which states the date (and – particularly in contemporary *renga* – often the place of the gathering as

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80 My thanks to Inoue Yukiko 井上由希子 for making me aware of this point. See Susa Jinja Renga no Kai 1997 and Imai Gion Renga no Kai 2011.

81 Yamamura Noriko briefly discusses the problem of season words in *renga* against the backdrop of global warming and changes in the flora. See Kumata Jinja 2012: 231.

82 Hiroki 2006: 14.

83 Kamens 2017: 202. See my review in *Japonica Humboldtiana* 20 (forthcoming).

84 For a discussion of the 'materiality of loss' in medieval Europe, see Gagné 2017. Regarding the idea of writing as preservation, see Gut 2020.

85 Rüttermann translates *hashizukuri* in *waka* manuscripts as 'Randgestaltung' ('design of the margin'); Rüttermann 2001: 5.

well) and having liminal text passages like the *hokku*, there are also paracontents like paintings in some cases, which refer to the season mentioned in the *hokku*, along with material indicators like the quality of the paper and the colour of the thread for the binding, which may vary due to the occasion for holding the *renga* session.

A third aspect is the phenomenon of persistence or retention, which can be observed in written artefacts in many cultures. The layout of manuscripts and the structure of the texts may often resist change, sometimes over centuries. Even if the writing surfaces, i.e. the recording media, change in the course of the introduction of new technologies, for example, then text or layout structures are often transferred to the new media, sometimes only with slight modifications. Likewise, the traditional structure of the *renga kaishi*, with eight verses on the first and the last page and 14 verses on all the others, has also become the structure of the text and fulfils a function similar to the parts of speech (*partes orationis*) in classical rhetoric. The traditional manuscript form is still employed, however, but in most cases this does not happen during the session any more as it did in earlier centuries, but afterwards when an experienced calligrapher puts the poem in this form (Figure 5). Consequently, the practice of *renga* contributes to the preservation of traditional cultural techniques like skills in calligraphy and historical writing styles like *kuzushiji* くずし字 (cursive characters) and *hentaigana* 変体仮名 (variant *kana* characters), even though some scribes or calligraphers use them rather sparsely.

Finally, people's attitudes towards *renga* manuscripts have changed over time and can also vary due to the occasion. While the existence of large numbers of
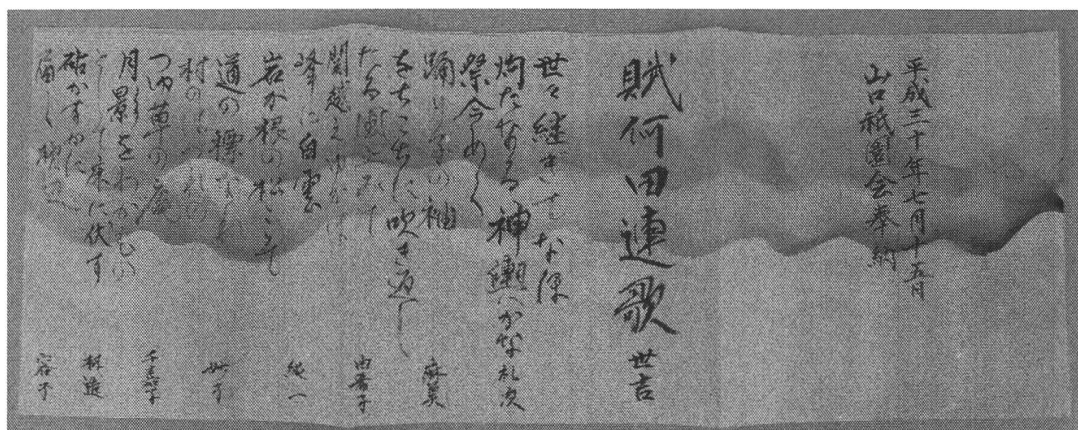

Figure 5: Traditional-style *kaishi* recording a *hōnō renga* composed on 15 July 2018 in Yamaguchi. Calligraphy: Suyama Fumiko 陶山芙美子. Courtesy of Yasaka Jinja 八坂神社, Yamaguchi.

renga kaishi and the fact that some *kaishi* were made into scrolls show that they were valued and meant to be kept, Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644–1694), the eminent master of *haikai no renga* 俳諧の連歌[86] and *haiku*, wrote the following: 'Once [the paper with the poem written on it] is laid down on the writing desk, it is waste paper (*hōgu* 反故)'.[87] While some early pre-modern *renga kaishi* were used to write another text on the back, the fact that *renga* have been included in anthologies and are still printed today indicates that the literary work which is separate from the *za* has always been valued, too.
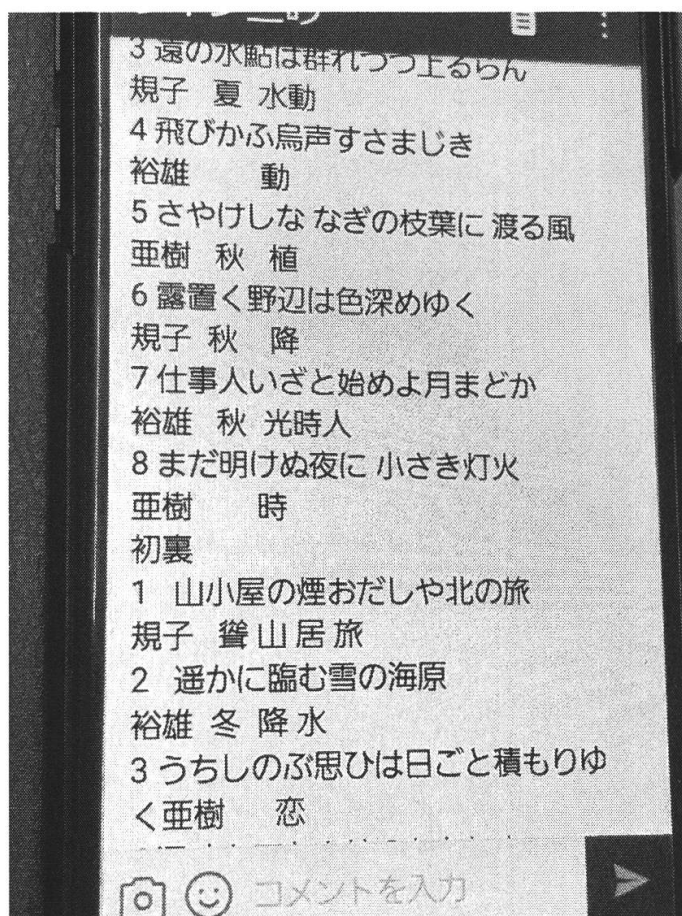

Figure 6: *Renga* composed by communication via cell phone in 2018. Courtesy of Yamamura Noriko 山村規子. The second part of the poem is introduced by the words *sho[ori] ura* 初[折]裏 ('first [sheet] verso'), thus maintaining the structure of a traditional *kaishi*.

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86 A variant of *renga* that developed from the sixteenth century onwards. In contemporary Japan, it is called *renku* 連句. Unlike the orthodox *renga*, it allowed contemporary vocabulary and Sino-Japanese words to be used. It cannot be elaborated on in this paper, but contemporary neo-classical *renga* allows a limited amount of *haikai* or *renku* verses in the inner part of the text/manuscript (after the 10th verse); see Buck-Albulet 2020: 30.

87 *Bundai hikioroseba sunawachi hogu nari.* 文台引き下ろせばすなはち反故なり. Quoted in Hiroki 2006: 100.

8 Conclusion

As an analytical category, time is particularly apt for bringing the complexity and some of the peculiar features of *renga* to light. It reveals social, sacral, aesthetic and material aspects of this art. First of all, the *za* – a chronotope – requires a prescriptive approach to time,[88] such as the scheduling of time and duration of the session, and the timing of actions during the meetings.

A sacred period of time is constituted for the duration of the session, especially in the case of votive *renga*. In the *za*, the process of creation is just as important as the literary product. Poetic rules such as those structuring the use of seasonal topics and other literary motifs are also instructions that determine the order of the participants' actions in advance and additionally provide the criteria for a critical assessment of the literary work later. Rules define temporal aspects such as rhythm, seriation, repetition, intermission and pace. Whether or not one uses 'tools' like *tanzaku* paper strips significantly influences the organisation of actions over time at the *za*. Moreover, a change to online mode and digital communication media (Figure 6) does not affect the structure of the poem, but it does affect the timing and duration of the *za*.

This paper has also shown how deeply the dimensions of *renga* are interconnected. The structure of the literary work, for instance (which has proven to be a particularly conservative element), is not only reflected in the texts and the written artefacts; the artefacts, in turn, have had an effect on the poetological set of rules over the course of history.

As fictional poetry, *renga* allows the members of a circle to make imaginary trips across time and space, with basically only the *hokku* and its 'season word' creating a connection to the real-world chronotope. Given the neo-classical and traditional character of contemporary *renga*, one might suspect that an orientation towards the past prevails. Yet the embedding of the *renga* circles in the seasonal course of the year also shows an orientation towards the present, just as the efforts of contemporary practitioners to maintain and spread this cultural technique reveals an orientation towards the future.

Written artefacts, be they manuscripts, prints or even digital products (Figure 6), can be viewed as 'materialised time' that preserve works from the past for the present and future. Thus, they stand for temporal aspects such as persistence, retention and sustainability, while the performance is rather ephemeral. Written artefacts are not immune to extinction, however. This is one reason why

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88 See Steineck 2018: 173.

they deserve the attention of academic disciplines such as manuscript studies. More attention should be paid to the performative aspects of *renga* as well.[89]

Finally, it may seem trivial at first, but in my own experience, a 'con-temporary' field of study (as opposed to the study of pre-modern texts and manuscripts) holds new challenges in store for the researcher, some of which a literary historian would not necessarily consider. In my case, it is not just the need to listen to and heed the critical judgements expressed by my colleagues from Japanese Studies and Manuscript Studies: in fact, I feel responsible to everyone who allowed me to take part in their *renga* circles and study their activities, including researchers, poets and other individuals in Japan who shared and keep on sharing their knowledge with me. I would like to thank all of them at this point. I encourage their valued comments and am looking forward to receiving them in future.

Abbreviations and primary sources

GR   *Gunshō ruijū* 群書類聚
NKBT   *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系
NKBZ   *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 日本古典文学全集
SKT   *Shinpen kokka taikan* 新編国歌大観
Azuma mondō 吾妻問答 *GR* 303: 17–30; NKBT 66: 205–273.
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Tsukuba mondō 筑波問答 in: *NKBZ* 88 *Rengaron shū* 連歌論集他. Commentary by Okuda Isao 奥田勲. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten 岩波書店, 1966.

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89 On *renga* as performance see Horton 1993.

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