

Basic knowledge of Manyoshu

The details of the originator and purpose of the creation of the Manyoshu are unknown. The collection contains many different forms and types of poems. Knowing how to differentiate them is part of the fun of the Manyoshu.



Indigo-paper version of the Manyoshu (Replica)
(Photo: Courtesy of the Tottori Inaba Manyo Museum)

Types of Manyoshu Poems

Main poetic categories	Zoka (Miscellaneous poems)	Zoka-style poems are not categorized as somonka or banka. They are about nature, court ceremonies, or written while traveling. They are often presented in public spaces.
	Somonka (Love poems)	Many somonka-style poems are about love between men and women. Unlike zoka-style poems that depict every day or public affairs, somonka-style poems express personal matters.
	Banka (Elegy)	Banka-style poems express feelings related to death and include mourning poems, deathbed-related poems, and poems cherishing the memory of the dead.

Forms of Manyoshu Poems

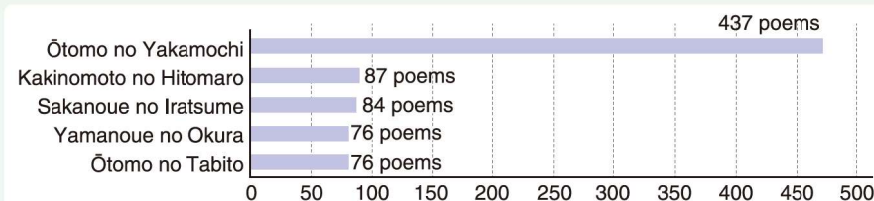
Choka (about 260 poems)	Choka is a form of poetry that consists of alternating lines of five and seven syllables and ends with an extra line of seven syllables. However, some choka poems end with five, three, and seven syllables or repeat the last phrase. The Manyoshu includes answer poems (in tanka form) to choka poems to summarize the theme or add words.
Tanka (about 4,200 poems)	Tanka is another form of poetry with a syllable pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. Some tank-form poems include an extra syllable.
Sedoka (about 60 poems)	Sedoka is a form of poetry composed of two sets of 5-7-7 syllables. Many folksong-type sedoka poems repeat the same phrase.
Bussoku sekika (one poem)	Bussoku sekika is a form of poetry engraved in stone in Yakushi-ji Temple in Nara and composed of six phrases with a syllable pattern of 5-7-5-7-7-7. It is said to have originated from ancient songs.

Poems Characteristic to Each Volume

The Manyoshu did not organize poems in chronological order in its 20 volumes; it grouped them around a central theme.

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| Vol. 1: Zoka poems centered on the Court. | Vol. 14: Poems of eastern provinces |
| Vol. 2: Same as Vol. 1, somonka, and banka | Vol. 15: Poems of Japanese missions to Silla |
| Vol. 3: Poems to supplement Vols. 1 and 2 | Vol. 16: Poems of sad love between Nakatomi no Yakamori and Sano no Chigami no Otome |
| Vol. 4: Same as Vol. 3. Poems of love exchange | Vol. 17: Legendary poems and humorous poems |
| Vol. 5: Poems centered on Dazaifu | Vol. 18: Poems from before and after Ōtomo no Yakamochi's transfer to Ecchu Province |
| Vol. 6: Poems centered on the Court | Vol. 19: Ōtomo no Yakamochi's poems during his assignment as Governor of Ecchu Province |
| Vol. 7: Mainly travel-related poems | Vol. 20: Mainly Ōtomo no Yakamochi's poems during his assignment as Governor of Ecchu and after his return to the Capital |
| Vol. 8: Poems about each season | |
| Vol. 9: Travel- and legend-related poems | |
| Vol. 10: Seasonal poems | |
| Vol. 11: Poems of love and somonka exchange | |
| Vol. 12: Same as Vol. 11 | |
| Vol. 13: Mainly folksong-type choka poems | |

Number of Poems for Respective Poets in the Manyoshu



References: Tanoshiku Wakaru Manyoshu, supervised by Susumu Nakanishi (2011), Natsumeha Zusetu Chizuto Arasujide Yomu Manyoshu, supervised by Masaru Sakamoto (2006), SEISHUN PUBLISHING
Manyoshu Inishieno Utawo Tabisuru, edited by Keiho Nashimoto (2017), Yosensha
Yomitai Manyoshu, supervised by Migifumi Murata (2015), Nishimihon Publisher
Manyono Uta—Hitoto Fudo@ Chugoku/Shikoku, authored by Tadashi Shimoda (1986), HOIKUSHA Publishers

Manyo Cuisine—Meals in the Nara Period

Literature and excavated mokkan (wood tablets) reveal the state of meals in the Nara period.

People ate boiled or baked vegetables, such as eggplant, lotus root, cucumber, radish, root vegetables, as well as meat, such as venison, duck, and fish and shellfish, such as salmon and abalone, and seaweed, such as wakame. They used seasonings, including salt, soy, vinegar, and miso (fermented bean paste). Soy, vinegar, and miso were valuable, and ordinary people could not use them.

A wooden tablet excavated at Heijokyo was the tag of a shipment from Inaba Province, and it listed foodstuffs, such as seaweed, dried sweet fish, salmon, and dried meat. From this, we know it was a tribute of local specialties.

Example of Menu for Ōtomo no Yakamochi, Governor of Inaba Province

He must have enjoyed the seafood from Inaba Province. It must have gone well with sake. "Oh! I have a great idea for a poem!"

[Sake]
[Staple food] White rice
[Soup] Turnip soup
[Main dish and side dish] Grilled yellowtail, boiled abalone and radish, yam, taro, cooked beans, venison, duck, and edamame, etc.
[Pickles] Ginger pickled in soy
Gourd pickled in sake lees
[Dessert] Persimmon, chestnuts, and walnuts
[Seasoning] Soy and salt

Example of Menu for a Government Official of Inaba Province

Grilled mackerel, Stewed taro and burdock, Salted radish, Rice (brown rice), Salt, Wakame soup

Brown rice, soup, vegetables with dressing, stewed dishes, and grilled fish. Seaweed was also found on shipping tags from Inaba Province.

Example of Menu for Common People

Grilled sardine, Green vegetable soup, Rice (Brown rice and red rice), Salt

A simple soup and one dish. The staple food was mainly brown rice and millet. No soy or vinegar was provided, and the only seasoning was salt.

*Photo of reproduced dinner: Courtesy of the Tottori Inaba Manyo Museum