

# War

Short Song

by

Lady Umm Samin bint Asad al-Isfahaniyya

With Special Thanks to

Kanai-san and Satoko-san

Without whom I could not have produced this

poem in both English and Japanese

Dark and ominous  
The war comes thundering down  
Heroes born that night  
Cherry blossoms in the breeze  
I hide my sorrowful face

## Tanka/Waka

Waka means “Japanese Song” it is the traditional name used for a form of poetry written in Japan for over 1300 years. The modern name is Tanka – meaning “Short Song” (Fielden). As far back as the seventh century these poems existed as oral traditional poems to be chanted to music. They use five phrases in the pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables.

Tanka, like other Japanese poems do not rhyme. Due to limited vowel sounds in the Japanese language (5) rhyming is too simple, so it is not used. The content of the poem carries the merit. Without stress sounds, meter based on stress is not possible. Rhythm, however, is created by sub units of set syllables, with breath pauses at the end of each one. Instead of punctuation, the Japanese use small words consisting of onji (a consonant and a vowel) to indicate these pauses (Reichhold)

In English we can write Tanka using the 5-7-5-7-7 pattern of syllables which will sound similar to the Japanese poem, but be longer.

Tanka poems use metaphor and simile, but do not use the words “like” or “as”. Instead images are placed together and the reader must find the relationship himself.

A defining characteristic of Tanka is to have two parts to the poem, with a change in mood, time or place. The first three lines are called the upper phrase, and usually contains images; last two lines are called the lower phrase and represents the poet’s feelings or ideas (Lineberger).

Tanka is meant to be personal and emotional. It was used as a method of communication, and Tanka poems were often passed between lovers. The themes range from natural beauty, the fleetingness of life, and separation (Tinker).

In my poem I compared birth (of a hero) and death (of a loved warrior) in the images of war and heroes in the upper phrase. The lower phrase relates to

the shortness of life (cherry blossoms blown away) and the woman's feelings about the war, and death, as seen by her mixed emotions, hiding her sadness. In Japan emotions are always hidden from view (Perception of Emotion Is Culture-Specific). This incorporates the themes of love and separation so widely used in Tanka. Cherry blossoms are revered in Japan for their beauty and for their impermanence; they only last a few days. Because of this they are symbolic of the fleeting nature of life. In addition among the samurai class "Cherry blossoms exemplify the noble character of the "Japanese soul" — men who do not fear death" (Rolfes).

Thus cherry blossoms seal the fate of the heroes in my poem and incorporate the Japanese concept of death in war as something to be proud, as demonstrated by the sad woman "hiding" her face to mask her sorrow.

After writing the poem I used my very basic, but limited, knowledge of the Japanese language, and enlisted some Japanese friends to help me translate the poem. See appendix 1.

Once that was done we brainstormed to find the words in Japanese to convey the meaning of the phrases into the 5-7-5-7-7 pattern. See appendix 2. What resulted is the Japanese version of the poem, presented here.

A scroll in the traditional Japanese style of imagery and calligraphy was made to present the poem for this competition. . In doing this I used Japanese tools as much as possible; pen (hane), here it should have been a feather quill, but I did have one, nor could I find a suitable feather with which to make one. I used black ink and a calligraphy brush (fude). The ink is a solid stick (sumi ) that must be mixed on an ink stone (suzuri) with water before using. See appendices 3 and 4. I did use modern paper since I could not find rice paper (hanshi), as would have been used. The image of a cherry tree is often used in Japan as is the seated woman. These were chosen to convey the emotional concept of the poem.

Finally the poem was written in Japanese script, kanji and hiragana. See appendix 5. The poem was signed with my personal stamp. Stamps are used in

Japan instead of a signature and are called “hanko”. Hanko’s were introduced to Japan around 700 AD. At first they were only for the elite, but today everybody in Japan has one. They are used to sign checks, transfer real-estate, or any other situation for which a westerner uses a signature (Sci.lang.Japan.FAQ). See appendix 6.

The final scroll is seen in appendix 7.

Appendix 1

Dark and ominous  
Kuraku fukituna kage ga sinobiyori

The war came thundering down  
Sensou ga hagesiku hurikakaru

Heroes born that night  
Eiyuu to yobareru hana ga sono yoru umareta

Cherry blossoms in the breeze  
Kaze ni sakura ga soyogi

I hide my sorrowful face  
Kanasigeni waga hoho marasu

Literal translation

Appendix 2

Darkness comes  
Ankoku ni

War downpours  
Senka hurisosogu

Aspirations to be born a star  
Kibou no hosi umare

Cherry blossoms in the breeze  
Sakura soyosoyo to

I tame my sorrowful face  
Kanasigeni waga hoho nurasu

## Appendix 3



Equipment; Ink stick and ink stone, brush, pen, personal stamp with red stamp ink, water dish and ladel.

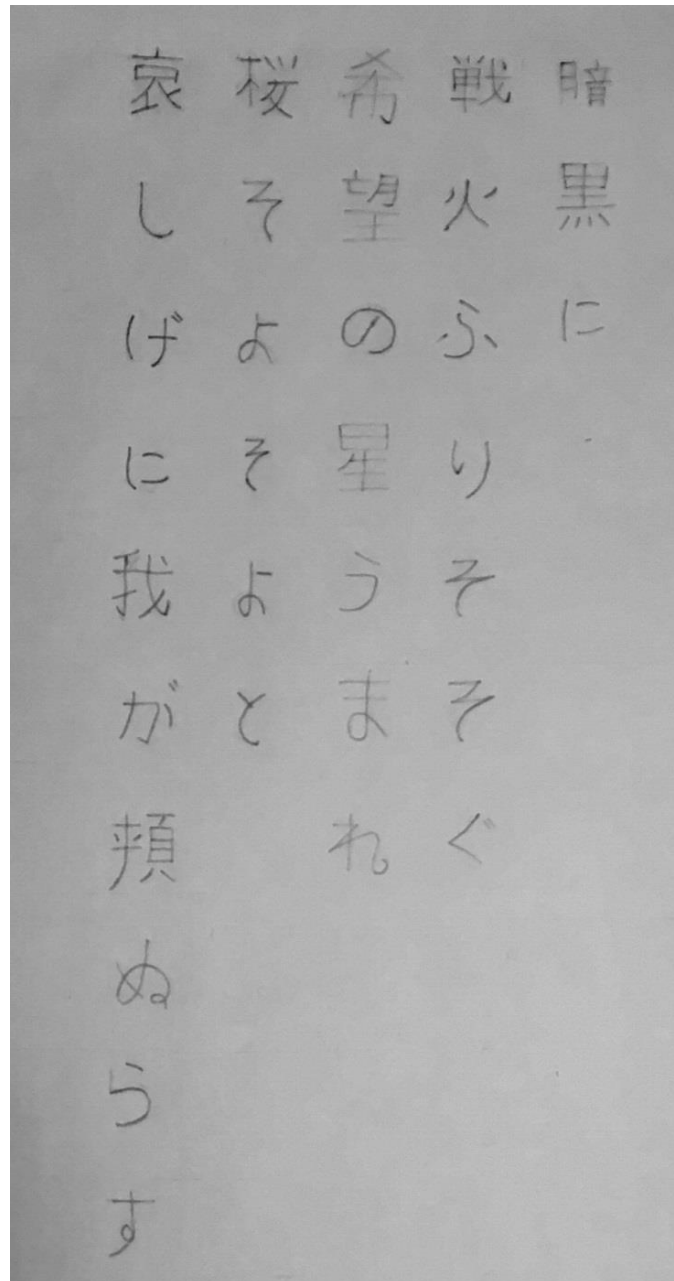


Appendix 4



Mixing ink stick with water on the ink stone to make ink .

Appendix 5



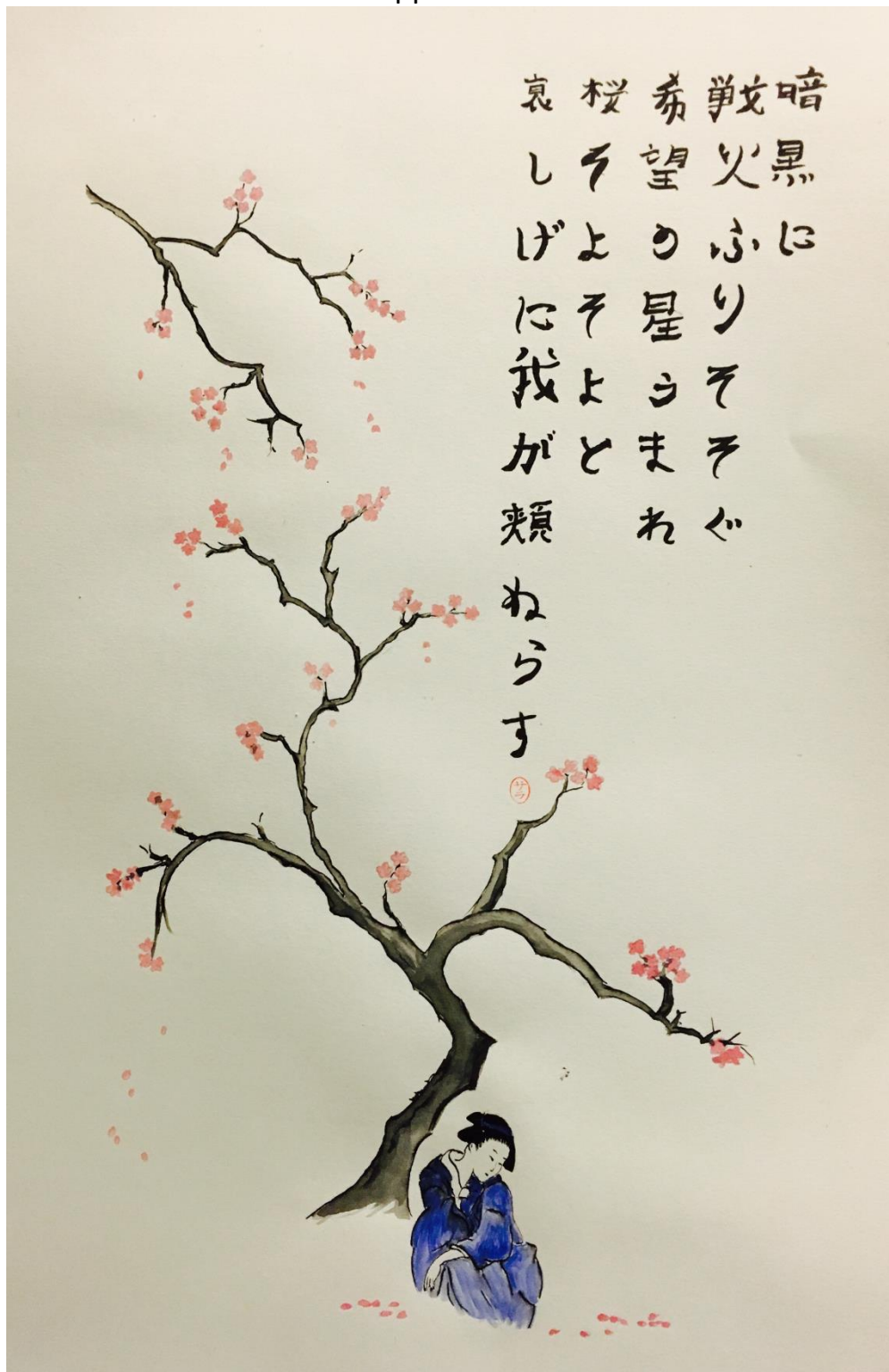
The poem in Japanese hiragana script

Appendix 6



Personal signature stamp

Appendix 7



The finished poetry scroll, brush written in kanji and hiragan

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