

Waka Poems of His Majesty the Emperor, Her Majesty the Empress and His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino at the Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime* in 2022

“Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime*” (Imperial New Year’s Poetry Reading)*, an annual court event, was held in Seiden-Matsu-no-Ma (State Room) of the Imperial Palace on January 18, 2022. We introduce *waka* poems of His Majesty the Emperor, Her Majesty the Empress and His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino which were read at the *Utakai Hajime*.

His Majesty the Emperor, holding the Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime*, decides the theme of poem. The theme of this year’s poem is *mado* (window).



Their Majesties the Emperor (center) and Empress (right of center), His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino (left of center) and other members of the Imperial Family at the Ceremony



Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime* on January 18, 2022

* See *Highlighting Japan*, June 2021, vol. 157 (https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106_09_en.html)

HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR

*As our contacts with the world
Remain difficult,
I earnestly hope for a day
When the window opens to the world*

(Background of the poem)

His Majesty the Emperor expresses, as he did last year, in the poem his hope that the COVID-19 pandemic will be contained.

Last year, His Majesty composed the poem, praying that the peoples' hopes and efforts to overcome difficulties and challenges would bear fruit and thus the COVID-19 pandemic would come to an end.*

This year, His Majesty expresses in this poem his earnest hope that a day will come, once the pandemic is under control, when the comings and goings of people between Japan and the rest of the world will be revitalized.

HER MAJESTY THE EMPRESS

*Looking through the windows
Of the Fukiage Palace, our new residence,
We enjoy the greenery
Of the great trees around us*

(Background of the poem)

In September of last year, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress and Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko moved from their long time residence the Akasaka Palace to the Fukiage Palace, where Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita used to live for a long time until the year before last. Her Majesty the Empress composed this poem with renewed feelings of appreciation to Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita, as she views the lush green from her new residence.

HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS CROWN PRINCE AKISHINO

*Through the window
I see the children
running about,
and I sense a calmness
growing in my heart.*

(Background of the poem)

There was a time when, due to the spread of COVID-19, many schools adopted staggered attendance and remote learning. And there was also a time when the students were unable to freely participate in extra-curricular activities.

At the university where His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino gives lectures every year, he looked out the window and saw, in the courtyards of the adjacent schools, the cheerful and energetic schoolchildren. As he recalled those times the sight of the children gave him, for a moment, a sense of reassurance.

Source: Website of the Imperial Household Agency, "Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading (2022): MADDO (WINDOW)"
<https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-culture/pdf/utakai-r04.pdf>

Note: This article has been created with the consent of the Imperial Household Agency and on the basis of materials published by the Agency.

* See *Highlighting Japan*, June 2021, vol. 157 (https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106_09_en.html)