



Tomoshihi Light: Collected Poetry by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko

Emperor of Japan Akihito, Empress Michiko

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Japan's Imperial line is thought to be the oldest in the world, and its associations with poetry can be traced back to its very beginnings. For centuries the Japanese court has patronized the poetic art and participated in the composition of the traditional native verse form known as the waka. The great Imperial poetry anthologies of earlier centuries defined the standards of excellence in Japanese poetry, featuring the contributions of the most gifted Japanese poets, among them many Emperors and Empresses as well as other members of the Imperial family. Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko inherit this remarkable legacy and have preserved it with personal enthusiasm and literary mastery. Tomoshihi, which may be translated as "Light", is a collection of their verse, published in Japanese in 1986 and appearing here for the first time in English. As Crown Prince and Princess before their enthronement in 1990, the Emperor and Empress traveled extensively as ambassadors of good will for the Japanese people. Many of the 306 poems collected here were composed during their travels and reflect foreign climes and scenes in a fascinating manner. Other poems were composed for the annual New Year's Poetry Reading, and still others were composed to mark special events in the Japanese calendar or to record recollections of remarkable people. Painstakingly translated and annotated, the poems in Tomoshihi are indeed illuminating, revealing not only the depth and resonance of the Japanese poetic tradition but also of the characters and sensibilities of the Emperor and Empress with the immediacy that is poetry's special gift. "It is our hope," writes one of the editors of the collection, "that this English translation may lead to a better understanding of the Emperor and Empress, as also of Japan and its people. For it is their cultural traditions that, reflected in the literary activities of the Imperial family, reveal Japan as a land where beauty of spirit is expressed in song."

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