

# *A History of Tanka in English Pt I : The North American Foundation, 1899 - 1985*

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## **Introduction**

In 2006 I started compiling a tanka timeline because I was curious to see what had been published in the West and when. I excluded translations from the Japanese except when I determined they were works by poets located in the United States and Canada; my goal was to trace the history of tanka in English. At the time many poets, editors, critics, and readers labored under the impression that tanka was a minority genre of limited practice and only recent interest in English. In particular, it was often thought that tanka in North America began when it was discovered by haiku poets in the 1970s and 80s. My research demonstrates that the field of tanka publication is large (more than one thousand titles so far), more than a hundred years old, and inadequately known and appreciated.

Understanding the historical development of tanka in English is difficult. Translations of famous Japanese poets dominate the tanka discourse, but even so, these translations have been subject to only limited critical analysis and publication. Very little attention has been given to Anglophone tanka, although that is slowly changing. Even within the tanka community itself the emphasis is on praxis rather than theory or history. Yet clearly the mass and impetus of tanka development in English deserves examination on its own merits and not as marginalia in the fields of haiku or Japanese tanka.

Before meaningful analysis can be accomplished, certain basic facts of tanka history must be ascertained and made public. Therefore this series of articles draws heavily on my *Bibliography of English-Language Tanka*, available in the *Tanka Teachers Guide* (Modern English Tanka Press, 2007) or at the *Atlas Poetica* website <<http://AtlasPoetica.org>> where it is updated periodically.

## **Methodology**

By examining multiple existing bibliographies (none of which were complete or up to date), using publisher catalogs, book reviews in journals, author biographies, used booksellers, the Library of Congress, the Worldcat.org catalog, university and library catalogs and collections, and where possible, contacting poets, editors and small presses directly for information, I compiled a list of over fifteen hundred books, chapbooks, journals, ephemera, and organizations, published in print, online, or other media, which are compiled in the *Bibliography of English-Language Tanka*. Where items in this article differ from the published *Bibliography*, it is because my researches are ongoing and supersede old information.

In addition to books, I have identified over a thousand issues of periodicals that frequently published tanka in English (although not necessarily in every issue.) My principal source of information regarding relevant periodicals is the ‘Tanka and Related Venues’ list I compiled

during my researches. I did not attempt to identify the quality of the works documented, merely their existence. The survival and professionalism of the better journals can only be understood in comparison with developments (and failures) within the field.

I did not include translations of books published in Japanese with certain exceptions: I included books known to be by North American poets who published in Japan due to not having any other outlet. Some of these early books were published in bilingual Japanese-English editions, but some were probably only in Japanese. I have erred on the side of inclusion when uncertain. In recent years, Japanese poets have become aware of English-language tanka and have authorized translations in order to reach this audience. As they are part of the tanka writer's environment today, they are included.

A major caveat regarding publications is that titles known or believed to contain a 'significant' amount of tanka have been included. 'Significant' was arbitrarily set at six or more tanka for books, and one or more tanka for journals. Journals were included if they frequently published tanka, that is to say, if a subscriber was likely to encounter tanka within its pages on a recurring basis. Due to the widely varying size, frequency and regularity of periodicals, it was deemed wiser to include than exclude. Even the smallest journals typically had print runs larger than most books—some of the online journals have readerships in the tens of thousands. Aside from a few high-prestige anthologies, websites and journals will have had the most impact on the audience's perceptions and knowledge of tanka.

Since I have not been able to directly examine most of the works in question I have had to rely on secondary and tertiary information, so listings may not be correct. Oftentimes I had to simply guess; if a book or periodical included the word tanka, waka, kyoka, gogyohka, or gogyoshi in its title, subtitle, cover matter, or blurbs, it was included, even though it was impossible to determine how much of the content was tanka. Likewise, in examining many small press catalogs, I discovered that they often did not identify the type of poetry within a given book or chapbook. Tanka works that did not identify themselves as such have probably been missed.

This methodology has identified a body of literature that forms the basis for research. Although such a large and growing body of literature will require extensive effort before it is thoroughly understood, at more than fifteen hundred items it provides a fecund body of data from which trends and possibilities can be identified.

### **Tanka Book Publication by the Numbers**

This list does not include works published solely in Catalan, Spanish, French, German, Romanian, or other Western languages. Mexican poets picked up tanka in the late 1890s, and various books were published, but this article does not include them. Neither does it include earlier French-Canadian books that did not appear in English translation. References to tanka in other languages are merely contextual and not intended to represent the fullness of those literatures.

<b>Years</b>	<b>Half Decade</b>	<b>Decade</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
<b>1898</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1900-1904</b>	1		
<b>1905-1909</b>	1	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1910-1914</b>	0		
<b>1915-1919</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1920-1924</b>	4		
<b>1925-1929</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>1930-1934</b>	2		
<b>1935-1939</b>	0	2	<b>23</b>
<b>1940-1944</b>	7		
<b>1945-1949</b>	6	<b>13</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>1950-1954</b>	3		
<b>1955-1959</b>	<b>11</b>	14	<b>50</b>
<b>1960-1964</b>	11		
<b>1965-1969</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>1970-1974</b>	<b>28</b>		
<b>1975-1979</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>1980-1984</b>	34		
<b>1985-1989</b>	<b>36</b>	70	<b>212</b>
<b>1990-1994</b>	<b>91</b>		
<b>1995-1999</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>475</b>
<b>2000-2004</b>	<b>250</b>		
<b>2005-2009</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>1154</b>
<b>2010-2013*</b>	<b>347</b>	347	<b>1501</b>
<b>undated</b>	20	20	<b>1521</b>

**Bold:** tanka publication high points.

\* As of mid-2013.

Prior to 1960, most of the works documented were by Japanese North Americans in Canada and the United States. Most, but not all, of their publications were in Japanese. During this period tanka publication was sporadic, and the documentation on what was actually published was poor; Tomoe Tana documented a great deal of activity in this period that is not reflected in the numbers here. It is presumed, for example, that Japanese tanka circles published journals and members anthologies, although few of those titles have been discovered and included in my bibliographic resources. Even tanka published in English is very poorly documented with almost nothing surviving, while what does survive is rare and in the hands of special collections in libraries or private collectors, few of whom have any actual interest in tanka history.

A unique element of this early period is the adoption of tanka by African American poets of the Harlem Renaissance, but this has not yet been explored to discover its extent and impact. The tanka by Alexander Lewis appearing in Countee Cullen's *Caroling Dusk* (1927) are devoid of the Orientalism seen in work of Caucasian poets from the era. In his most modern tanka, Lewis likens himself to a field paved with cement waiting for seed. His other tanka are nature poems with a conscious poesy, but while they address topics popular with the Japanese, such as moon and birds, they do so in a Western way. All the poems are lyrics in sanjuichi<sup>1</sup> form. We will see this with later African American poets such as Sonia Sanchez and Quincy Troupe: they adopt tanka as a formal lyric and fill it with their experiences.

As can be seen, the 1960s were a turning point for tanka publication in English. Tanka publishing prior to 1960 was limited and erratic, but starting in the 1960s we have a steadily increasing stream of tanka publication in English, so that after 1960 Japanese language publications constitute only a fraction of the publishing record. The 1950s are when tanka switched from being predominantly written and published by the Japanese minority in North America to being predominantly written and published by the non-Japanese majority. Further, tanka in English was principally a North American activity with very little tanka publication in the rest of the English-speaking world. In the 1950s tanka was developing in the Catalan language, but little research has been published in English.<sup>2</sup> Tanka was also developing in Romania during the 20th century and followed a similar growth pattern to North America with sporadic publishing through the first half of the century and steadily increasing growth in the latter years. Romanian appears to be the oldest and most robust tanka tradition in the world after Japanese and English.<sup>3</sup> In France, *L'Art du Tanka Methode Pour La Composition Du Tanka Suivie De Tanka Inedits* appeared in 1957.

Tanka was also being published in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, but at a later date. The first known tanka publication in the United Kingdom was 1915 with *A Bishop's*

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<sup>1</sup> 'sanjuichi' Japanese for 'thirty-one'; in others words, the pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, or close to it.

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to Catalan tanka, see Margaret Dornaus. 'Carles Riba and Catalonian Tanka.' ATPO 10.

<sup>3</sup> See Magdalena Dale and Vasile Moldovan, '25 Romanian Tanka Poets, in Romanian and English.' 2010. <<http://AtlasPoetica.org>>

*Pleasance*, but nothing more until 1965, which must therefore be regarded as the actual start of tanka development in Great Britain. The first known publication of tanka in Australia was 1988 although lectures on tanka were being given as early as 1985. The first publication of tanka in New Zealand was 1991.

By contrast, the first known tanka publication in Canada was by Japanese Canadian internees during the war. The work was *Tessaku no Seki (Loneliness Within the Barbed Wire Fence : Haiku and Tanka)*, in Japanese only, copied by hand, and circulated in a private edition of three dozen copies in the Angler Internment Camp.<sup>4</sup> A second edition was later translated into English and published after the war. Internee poets and editors were part of previously existing tanka circles that had probably been publishing in Japanese as early as the 1920s. The Kisaragi Poem Study Group published the first known tanka in Canada with their anthology *Kaede / Maple*, inspired by the 1963 publication of *Sounds from the Unknown* in the United States. The first anthology (1972) was Japanese only, but the second (1975) was bilingual.<sup>5</sup> A third anthology may have been published (1981).

Thus it was the United States where the earliest and most sustained tanka publishing began in both Japanese and English, and to a fair extent, it was the American example that helped to encourage the establishment of Canadian and other national tanka literatures.

### **The Pioneering Phase**

It was previously reported that the earliest known book of tanka was Ida Henrietta Bean's *Tanka*, but this book has since been tracked down. It turned out to be a novel about Native Americans. Currently, the earliest known publication in English is F. Victor Dickens' translation of *A Hundred Japanese Odes* in 1898.

In North America, the documented portion of the English-language pioneering phase was ushered in by Sadakichi Hartmann, a Japanese-born poet of German and Japanese ancestry resident in the United States. Today Hartmann is best known as an art critic because he was one of the first to recognize photography as an art form and the value of American artists such as Winslow Homer. He self-published a sequence of books in various forms, including tanka. His 1904 book, *Drifting Flowers of the Sea and Other Poems*, garners him the distinction of being the first poet in North America to publish tanka composed in English. His tanka have often been anthologized in retrospectives of Asian North American and Japanese American poetry anthologies. He revised and republished his 1915 book, *Tanka and Haikai : 14 Japanese Rhythms*, several times until 1933.

Ah, were the white waves  
Far on the shimmering sea,  
That the moon shine laves,  
Dream flowers drifting to me —

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<sup>4</sup> Nakano, Takeo Ujo, and Leatrice Nakano. *Within the Barbed wire Fence*. Halifax, NS: Formac Publishing Company, Ltd, 1983, p 71.

<sup>5</sup> Nishimura, Tomi. 'Preface.' *Kaede / Maple : Poetry by Japanese Canadians with English Translation*. Toronto, ONT: The Continental Times, 1975, p iii.

I would cull them, love, for thee.<sup>6</sup>

That Hartman named his collection after this poem and published it in his later *Tanka and Haikai* (1915), indicates that he must have held it in high regard. Therefore we can take it as typifying his ideal of tanka.

Tanka from *Drifting Flowers* and *Tanka and Haikai* are in sanjuichi form (5-7-5-7-7 syllables) on conventional topics, such as cherry blossoms. This is rather surprising because his works in the Western style are marked by an almost hallucinogenic quality, placing him as an early Symbolist. (He worked passionately to introduce Symbolism to America.) Hartmann was a friend and colleague to many of the Imagists, such as Ezra Pound, and so was one of the influences that helped to shape modern English-language poetry. Hartmann's tanka are metered and rhymed, use artificial poetic diction, and depend upon conventional poetic symbols. Although Hartmann called his work 'tanka,' there is no evidence of the tanka reforms of the Meiji period in his work. He clearly conceived of tanka as a formal and conventional poetry, in other words, there is little to distinguish his work from the moribund waka of the pre-tanka era. He has had zero influence on the development of tanka in English, in spite of being widely anthologized in Asian American retrospectives. Nonetheless, his conceptualization of tanka was a common one until the 1920s.

Yone Noguchi was another peripatetic Japanese-American poet who traveled to Europe and published extensively. His 1914 book, *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*, was an important sourcebook for the Imagists. Noguchi was a fan of haiku and had nothing but contempt for tanka, which he called *uta*. "I confess that my poetical taste desires far more intensity than the Uta poems, whose artificial execution often proves, in my opinion, to be their weakness rather than strength."<sup>7</sup> He also called *uta* poets, "dilettantes who did no small harm to the development of our Japanese poetry."<sup>8</sup> Noguchi's discussion of tanka shows no awareness of the reforms carried out by Shiki and others in the late 1800s and early 1900s; but his criticism certainly applies to works like Hartmann's, although it is not known if he was familiar with Hartmann's tanka.

Another early pioneer was Japanese-born Jun Fujita (1888–1963), a Japanese-Canadian photojournalist who eventually became a US citizen. Born in Japan, he migrated to British Columbia as a young man and was variously employed as a "construction camp laborer, domestic slave, train porter, and valet."<sup>9</sup> He migrated to Chicago in the United States and attended school and became a highly regarded photojournalist. He published tanka and criticism sporadically in the pages of *Poetry Magazine* from 1919–1928.

Against the door dead leaves are falling;

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<sup>6</sup> Hartmann, Sadakichi. *Drifting Flowers of the Sea and Other Poems*. Self-published, 1904, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Noguchi, Yone. *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006 [1914], p 12.

<sup>8</sup> Noguchi, Yone. *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006 [1914], p 12.

<sup>9</sup> Oppenheim, Jack. 'Jun Fujita, Poet Who Escapes Photography in his Emotional Images.' *The Circle*. Vol. 2. No. 1. <<http://www.smallbytes.com/~4lees/JunFujita/articles/thecircle.html>> Accessed 1 November 2007.

On your window the cobwebs are black.  
Today, I linger alone.

The foot-step?  
A passer-by.<sup>10</sup>

Fujita's book *Tanka : Poems in Exile* (1923) is arguably the first mature work of tanka written in English. He adapted tanka to English without regard for the sanjuichi pattern. He also wrote some of the earliest commentary on Japaniform poetry in English. He complained that Noguchi (and others) were adopting the "carcass" but not the "essence" of Japanese poetry.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after *Tanka : Poems in Exile* came out, it was reviewed by Llewellyn Jones:

They are poems which ask that the reader shall become a poet and complete them—rather extend them—for himself. For while each poem is as complete as the circle made by a stone thrown into still water, the circle keeps expanding in the imagination of the sympathetic reader.<sup>12</sup>

The 'art of implication' identified by Jones is the quality named eighty years later by Denis Garrison as 'dreaming room,' by which he means "some empty space inside the poem which the reader can fill with his personal experience, from his unique social context."<sup>13</sup> Other writers have described it as 'multivalence' (McClintock)<sup>14</sup> and 'the labyrinth of the poem' (Kei).<sup>15</sup> Jones also discarded the notion of counting syllables as the defining characteristic of Japanese poetry:

Many but not all of these poems are done in a very short form, and their perusal shows how vain is the occidental effort to write in Japanese forms when the writer's idea of those forms is confined to the knowledge that they contain so many syllables. For the important thing about these poems is not what they say in the syllables that are there, but what they imply without the use of any words at all.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fujita, Jun. *Tanka : Poems in Exile*. Chicago, IL: Covici-McGee, 1923, p 52

<sup>11</sup> Fujita, Jun. 'A Japanese Cosmopolite.' *Poetry Magazine*. Chicago, IL. June, 1922, p 162-164.

<sup>12</sup> Jones, Llewellyn. 'The Art of Implication : *Tanka : Poems in Exile*, by Jun Fujita .' [review]. Source unknown. Dating based on internal evidence, 1923. Copy in author's possession.

<sup>13</sup> Garrison, Denis M. 'Dreaming Room.' *Modern English Tanka 3*. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, Spring, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> McClintock, Michael. 'Tanka in Collage and Montage Sets: Multivalence, *Duende*, and Beyond.' *Modern English Tanka 1:4*. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, Summer, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Kei, M. 'The Labyrinth of Tanka.' *Modern English Tanka 7*. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, Spring, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, Llewellyn. 'The Art of Implication : *Tanka : Poems in Exile*, by Jun Fujita [review]. Source unknown. Dating based on internal evidence, 1923. Copy in author's possession.

This succinct and accurate summation of the Japanese forms shows that poets familiar with tanka in English had already grappled with and solved problems that continue to plague us today: counting syllables, defining tanka, and adapting Japanese forms to the very different English language. While some readers will no doubt argue with their answers, it is clear that poets and critics of the first quarter of the 20th century thought deeply about tanka, understood it, and drew intelligent conclusions. Having watched my colleagues struggle to identify key elements of tanka, debate their significance, and to invent words to name them, I can only wonder how much greater our understanding would be if we had better access to the knowledge of previous generations. The goal of this article is to remedy this lack of collective memory.

During the first quarter of the 20th century, poets not of Japanese ancestry were also writing and publishing tanka. Samuel H. Wainwright published *Short Poems : A Collection of Tanka in English* in 1917. Adelaide Crapsey (1878–1914) posthumously published *Verse*, in which she introduced the cinquain derived from the Japanese tanka. Alexander Lewis' tanka have already been mentioned. Given the slow trickle of discovery, it is likely that journals and other books of the time included tanka, given the attention it was receiving from more prominent poets, but further research is needed.

In 1931, Edith Brown Mirick, a minor literary figure of the time, edited *Tanka and hokku, a collection of poems*. Tanka (along with *hokku*) also appeared in the *Poets Handbook* of 1940 (reprinted 1946) under a discussion of 'Japanese Forms.' The 1946 edition devoted three pages to *hokku*, tanka, and their variations. The vast majority were simply syllabic variations of the tanka including the cinquain, double cinquain, cinquino, shadorma, hotan, cinquaino, quintine, and a dozen or so others, culminating in the grandiose 'inverted double tanka' of twenty lines. This suggests that tanka was well known to Anglophone poets before WWII, although little of their material survives today.

Amy Lowell's *Ballads for Sale* (1927) also experimented with tanka. Later, in 1997, ai li in Britain would invent another tanka off-shoot, the six line cherita. Renga and tanrenga were sometimes published, and *APA Renga* (later renamed *Lynx, a journal for linking poets*), was founded by Jim Wilson (aka Tundra Wind) in 1986. Short tanka sequences were being attempted by Anglophone tanka poets in *Tanka* in 1975, published by the Tanka Chapter of the Chaparral Poets Society, and later still, journals devoted to tanka prose and haibun appeared in the early 21st century. Shaped tanka, in which the tanka are laid out in some sort of visual pattern have been published, and so have double tanka, woven tanka, tanka acrostics, and other forms. This is no surprise; in Japan tanka spun off numerous forms and variations of which the most famous is haiku. Tanka in English has been marked by experimentation from its earliest days to the present time.

Japanese Americans in Hawai'i and California formed tanka circles starting in the 1880s, publishing in Japanese language newspapers and member anthologies,<sup>17</sup> and continued up through and even after WWII. The first known formal establishment of a tanka circle was the Kayōkai tanka circle in Seattle, Washington, in 1926. It published a member anthology (including some Canadian poets), *Renia no yuki (The snow of Mt. Ranier)* through Chōonsha in

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<sup>17</sup> Tana, Tomoe. *A History of the Japanese Tanka Poem in America*. San José, Ca: San José State University, 1985.

Japan the same year.<sup>18</sup> In 1927 Yoshihiko Tomari founded the Nan'ekai tanka circle in Los Angeles,<sup>19</sup> and edited what is believed to be the first open-call tanka anthology in North America, *Seiun (Blue Cloud)*. It was a Japanese-language anthology open to any poet who wanted to submit.<sup>20</sup> In 1935 so many tanka poets throughout the United States had joined his tanka circle that it was renamed Totsukuni tankakai (tanka circle in a foreign land).<sup>21</sup> The *Kakushū Jiji (Colorado Times)* was a central resource for connecting these poets. Tomari would continue his literary works in Japanese through the 1930s and even while interned during WWII up until his death in 1958. No known copies of these pre-war works remain.

### **The Middle Phase : The WWII Generation**

During the middle of the 20th century, tanka publication in North America was dominated by Japanese-Americans and Japanese-Canadians. Tanka circles existed wherever there were Japanese communities. Of the tanka groups, Cho-on-shisha of Hawai'i deserves special note. Founded in 1922 by Keiho Yasutaro Soga, Dr. Taisanboku Mori, and fifteen other poets,<sup>22</sup> it is still going strong. Originally publishing only in Japanese, it produced both a journal and at least two anthologies. Various poems by its members have been translated into English and have been anthologized, principally in showcases and retrospectives of Japanese or Asian North American literature. Members, such as Choko Ishigaki, have also published personal collections variously in Japanese, English, or bilingual editions.

Many of these poets continued their writing and editing even while interned in relocation camps during WWII. Sojin Tokiji Takei published *Areno (Wilderness)* in 1944 and co-edited *Nagareboshi (Shooting Star)* with Taisanoku Motokazu Mori while they were interned in Texas. They were originally from Hawai'i, but were separated from their families and shuffled around to various camps. Later Takei edited the Japanese-language anthologies *Yamakai (Valley) I* (1966) and *Yamakai II* (1972) for Cho-on Shisha in Hawai'i.

Yoshihiko Tomari (fl. 1927–1958) of California published *Uzumaki (Water Whirl)*, and *Kogen (The Meadow)*, a tanka journal, while interned. At times he had to cut the stencils by hand.<sup>23</sup> Other internees reported writing in such minuscule handwriting they could fit two hundred poems on a single page and hide it in their clothes.<sup>24</sup> Conditions were harsh for internees, and their poetry often recorded miseries ranging from insects to suicide. Worse, the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p 17.

<sup>22</sup> Nakano, Jiro & Kay Nakano, eds. *Poets Behind Barbed Wire*. Honolulu, HI: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1984 (2nd edition), p 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Tana, Tomoe. *A History of the Japanese Tanka Poem in America*. San José, Ca: San José State University, 1985, p 16.

<sup>24</sup> Nakano, Jiro & Kay Nakano, eds. *Poets Behind Barbed Wire*. Honolulu, HI: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1984 (2nd edition), p 5.

writing of Japanese poetry was taken by authorities as proof that they were incorrigible recidivists who clung to their Japanese loyalties.<sup>25</sup> Tanka was treason.

Tomari published several translations of classic Japanese poetry, including one of women poets, and served as the teacher of the Totsukuni Tanka Circle based in southern California until his death. The group's journal was *Nichibei Tanka*. In 1958 Tomari published collection of his own work, *Ryojin (Traveler)*, and in 1958 or 1959 edited *Ishokurin (Transplanted Forest)*, both of which were bilingual editions with translations by Lucille Nixon, Tomoe Tana, and others.<sup>26</sup> These are the first known Japanese-English books by Japanese North Americans. Other internees also published books and edited anthologies after their release. As of yet, no systemic analysis of internee literature exists.

During this period, the Imperial Poetry Contest and Japanese tanka contests in general garnered attention in America. *Time Magazine* published an article entitled, 'Japan : War Verse' in 1939. They commented,

“No Japanese newspaper is complete without its sprinkling of wartime poetry. No battle is too insignificant, no soldier's deed too small to be unworthy of recording in the stylized, form-bound Japanese lyrics. Under this stimulus, the soldiers themselves have turned to writing poetry, and a favorite Japanese magazine stunt is to hold contests for soldier-poets.”<sup>27</sup>

*Time* gave sporadic coverage to the Imperial Poetry Contest from 1929 to 1945 and none of its remarks were any kinder those quoted here. Attitudes like this explain why writing tanka was grounds for deepest suspicion against interned poets, and also makes it imperative for modern poets to realize that their safe and comfortable hobby was preceded by considerable sacrifice and danger on the part of Japanese tanka poets in North America.

In spite of the unfriendly press, Americans participated in and several won the Imperial Poetry Contest. The first was in 1947, when Shōhei Takayanagi's poem on the theme of *akebono* (dawn) was selected.<sup>28</sup> In 1949, Tomoe Tana won. In 1955, two Americans, including the aforementioned Takayanagi, and Tomiko Matusmoto, were winners. The first American not of Japanese descent, Lucille Nixon, won in 1957. This was the first year in which the winners were invited to the palace and Nixon attended. Her visit garnered the attention of the State Department and national press.<sup>29</sup> This may have been the impetus for the Totsukuni Tanka Circle (of which she was a member) to publish *Tanka translated to English Poem* in 1958, about which nothing further is known.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 12.

<sup>27</sup> 'Japan: War Verse.' *Time*. February 13, 1939. Reprinted <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,771518,00.html>>. Accessed 21 December 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Tana, Tomoe. *A History of the Japanese Tanka Poem in America*. San José, Ca: San José State University, 1985, p 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Tana included winning poems from the Imperial Poetry Contests with translations in an appendix of her master's thesis (1985). Father Neal Henry Lawrence was a winner, but Tana does not tell us in what year; likewise, several other Japanese Americans won. Another American, Jane Reichhold, was a winner in 1998 and wrote about it in her book *Invitation*. It would be a useful addition to the field for some one to compile all the American winners and their poems into a single document.

In 1951 Tana was part of a contest for Japanese North Americans. The contest was judged by three well known Japanese tanka poets: Saitō Mokichi, Kubota Utsubo, and Shaku Chokū. Mokichi was the author of *Red Lights* and one of the great modern tanka poets.<sup>30</sup> The contest was probably able to make the arrangements with the poets because Tomari had been a student of Utsubo and was a member of his poetry circle.<sup>31</sup> The winning poems from the contest were compiled in *Zaibei Dōbō Hyakunin Isshu (One poem each from 100 of our countrymen in America)*, but it was only published in pieces in various Japanese venues.

Tana undertook to translate all the poems and the judges' comments in an appendix to her master's thesis (1985). This is the only known record of poems composed by Americans being critiqued by any of the great Japanese tanka poets. In several cases, the judges contradicted each other in commenting on what they regarded as strengths and weaknesses of the poems and the relevance of the American settings. For example:

Machimoto wo  
Toki ni mihokete  
Yume wo ou  
Jūsangai no  
Kōjō no mado

I follow my dreams  
When sometimes I look idly  
At the streets below  
From the factory window  
On the thirteenth floor.

Yuriko Naganuma, Chicago, Illinois<sup>32</sup>

“Telling about a thirteen story factory that overlooks the streets among the skyscrapers of Chicago, this poem's characteristic qualities are its heroic scale and complexity. A whole new mood emerges just from the fact that the theme (location) is Chicago.” Mokichi<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 44.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 49.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p 49.

“A poem like this communicates the tone of poems of contemporary women poets in Japan to the degree that one forgets the distance that separates America and Japan. The reality of ‘Jūsangai no kōjō no mado’, while remote from Japan, does not particularly connote a feeling of American life, so I think it is better to savor this poem by emphasizing the romantic notion of ‘following dreams while looking idly’ out the factory window.” Chokū<sup>34</sup>

The Imperial Poetry Contest was a stimulus to North American tanka poets. A win in 1964 by a Japanese Canadian poet, Takeo Nakano, led to the founding of a Canadian tanka circle, the Kisaragi tankakai (also known as the Kisaragi Poem Study Group). The Canadian government included his winning poem in a high school textbook. The second Canadian winner, Toyoshi Hiramatsu, had his winning poem immortalized by being placed on permanent display in his hometown in Ontario.<sup>35</sup> He is the only North American tanka poet to be honored in this fashion as far as I am aware.

Nixon was a tireless promoter of tanka to American audiences. Together with Tomoe Tana, Yoshihiko Tomari, and his tanka circle, they reached out to all the tanka poets in North America that they could find. They collected and translated their work in *Sounds from the Unknown*, edited by Lucille Nixon and Tomoe Tana. After Nixon was killed in a car accident in December, 1963 and the only copy of the manuscript lost, Tana reconstructed it and brought the book out in January, 1964. It appeared in both hardback and paperback. Contributors to *Sounds* donated copies to university libraries, thereby showing a conscious intention to promote and preserve their poetry. From there tanka were picked up for school textbooks and other purposes.

In her Introduction to *Sounds from the Unknown*, Nixon wrote about what made a good tanka:

The most important requisite for a good poem is that it come from the heart, that the expression must be real and sincere. The image, in other words, the sensory intake, must be clear, but there must be enough space around it so that the reader may delight himself with it by using his own associations.<sup>36</sup>

Here again the quality we know as ‘dreaming room’ is listed as the essential element of tanka. Nixon also wrote about the importance of prosody, sensitivity, sincerity, and brevity in tanka. The poems selected for inclusion in *Sounds from the Unknown* reflect these virtues; they are almost completely devoid of the neo-classical romanticism that marks much of late 20th century English-language tanka. This is not surprising; Nixon noted that the realist school of tanka was much more popular (with poets of Japanese descent) in the United States than the Symbolist

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p 49.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p p 39-40.

<sup>36</sup> Nixon, Lucille, ed. *Sounds from the Unknown*. Denver, CO: Alan Swallow, publisher, 1963, p xix.

approach.<sup>37</sup> A tanka by Hagino Matsuoka will illustrate the Japanese North American approach—no overt Zen, no Orientalism, just a direct and unadorned reality.

Today at Pearl Harbor,  
From the shore line,  
At highest tide,  
A gossamer mist,  
With the deepest stillness.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of anti-Japanese sentiment inspired by World War II, non-Japanese poets were working with tanka. In 1948, Noel D'Arpajon edited *Tankas (Contemporary poets of Dorrance)*, and in 1949 Eleanor Chaney Grubb published her collection of haiku and tanka, *Blue Is the Iris*, in Baltimore. 1959 saw the publication of *Japan : Theme and Variations : A Collection of Poems by Americans*. It was edited by Charles E. Tuttle, founder of the publishing house that bears his name. It marks the first time a major publishing house issued an anthology containing tanka written in English. Unfortunately, most of the tanka poetry makes mechanical use of the tanka as a stanzaic form and/or are rife with *japonisme*. However, it does include some early examples of tanka prose and tanka sequence. In addition, the Tanka Chapter of the Chaparral Poets Society was established in the early 1960s in California, making it the first known time poets not of Japanese descent formed a tanka organization. According to Nixon there were several tanka chapters operating in California in the early sixties.<sup>39</sup> In 1975, the Tanka Chapter published a member anthology entitled simply *Tanka*. It is assumed that a newsletter was published prior to the anthology, but inquiries to the Chaparral Poets did not turn up any further information about it.

Already geographic patterns were beginning to emerge: California, the Pacific Northwest, the Chesapeake Bay area, and a little later, Toronto and Montreal in Canada, would prove to be major locales for tanka publishing, either as the home of poets and/or of small presses and journals. New York City and Hawai'i are in the second tier of locations, behind Baltimore, but ahead of Chicago. When Japanese-only publications are included, Hawai'i moves to the top tier. Similar patterns persist in the 21st century, illustrating the way tanka has been typically published outside of the mainstream of the American publishing business.

Tanka was undergoing a much slower development in the United Kingdom. William E. 'Bill' Wyatt published *Songs of the Four Seasons* in 1965, and *Wind Blown Cloud Poems* in 1968. Both were mixed works of haiku and tanka. These are the first known British publications to include tanka since George Horsfall Frodham's *A Bishop's Pleasaunce* was published in 1915. Wyatt edited the *Starving Sparrow Temple Anthology* on behalf of the Sarum House Buddhist Community in 1971. George MacBeth published *The Hiroshima Dream* and Patricia Alanah Rosenfield published *Cat in the mirror*, both in 1970. British publication continued intermittently

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p xvii - xviii.

<sup>38</sup>Hagino Matsuoka. In *Sounds from the Unknown*. Lucille Nixon and Tomoe Tana, eds. Denver, CO: Alan Swallow, Publisher, 1963, p 43.

<sup>39</sup> Nixon, Lucille, ed. *Sounds from the Unknown*. Denver, CO: Alan Swallow, publisher, 1963, p xxii.

until the founding of the British Haiku Society (BHS) and its journal *Blithe Spirit*, in 1990. The BHS fosters tanka as well as haiku. Tanka publication has been more regular since then with several journals and small presses publishing it, but a detailed discussion will wait for the History, Part II.

### **The Transitional Phase : 1960 - 1985**

Second and third generation Japanese-North Americans did not adhere to the tanka tradition as ardently as their parents and grandparents, so tanka during 1960-1985 underwent a period of disorganization. The period was marked by continued publications by Japanese North Americans, Orientalist tanka by non-Japanese, translation of tanka from other Western languages, translations of modern Japanese tanka into English, and the development of native English-language tanka. Eventually the latter would triumph, but that could not be predicted during the transitional period.

In 1960 Heihachiro Honda published *From spring to winter* in Japan, while in 1961 Carolyn Kizer published *The Ungrateful Garden* through the University of Indiana Press. They were followed in 1963 by Frank Ankenbrand Jr's *Haiku and Tanka*. In 1964 Foster and Rhoda DeLong Jewell started *SCTH (Sonnet Cinquain Tanka Haiku)* as a supplement to the journal *Janus*. This appears to have been the first time an English-language journal saw publishing tanka as part of its mission. It ran from 1964–1980. In 1969, Henry Zimmer published his book, *Tanka*. Tanka poetry was well known enough that it even appears in a high school literary journal, *Ink Spots*, by the Tabor City High School in North Carolina (1969). As already mentioned, it was taught in schools in Canada and the United States.

In 1970 Kisaburo Konoshima (1893–1983), one of the contributors to *Sounds From the Unknown*, published *Hudson* in Japanese in Japan. It was translated and published in a bilingual edition by his grandson, David Callner, in 2004, one of the few North American tanka books to be reprinted. Konoshima, born in Japan and originally resident in the western United States, was interned during WWII. Afterwards he moved to New York City, but that was tragic too: some of his grandchildren and their family died in a fire in 1965. Eventually he retired to live with a daughter in Hawai'i.

クリスマスを間近に控へ幼児九人おとな三人が災火に呑まる  
With Christmas waiting just ahead  
nine little children and three adults are swallowed up in a fire

灰色に浮氷動かずハドソンは丘真黒く夕月かか  
Over an ashen Hudson motionless with floating ice  
the evening moon rests on jet-black hill<sup>40</sup>

In Canada the publication of *Sounds from the Unknown* inspired the establishment of the Kisaragi Poem Study Group in 1964. According to Tana there had not been any Canadian tanka

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<sup>40</sup> Konoshima, Kisaburo. 'Chronology and Tanka.' David Callner, trans. *Atlas Poetica : A Journal of Poetry of Place in Contemporary Tanka 7*. Perryville, MD: Keibooks, Autumn, 2010.

circles until then. Its leader was Takeo Nakano who had won the Imperial Poetry Contest that year. The Kisaragi Poem Study group published a total of three member anthologies, all named *Kaede / Maple* (1972, 1975, 1981?).

The 1960s saw twenty-nine tanka venues and the 1970s saw sixty-three. These were typically mixed collections of short form poetry, including haiku, tanka, sijo, free verse, and other forms, but occasionally tanka-only books were published. *The Silver Cuckoo : Poems in Japanese Verse Forms : Haiku, Tanka* (1975) was published by Catherine M. Buckaway, the first Canadian tanka book by a person not of Japanese descent. Not all poets were approaching tanka from the same direction; 1970 saw the publication of Anne Waldman's *Baby Breakdown : 13 Tanka in Praise of Dope and Other Poems*. Another unusual offering was George MacBeth's *The Hiroshima Dream : A Tanka Sequence* in 1970 (UK). It intercut prose pieces by a Hiroshima survivor with tanka, making it an example of both tanka sequence and tanka prose.

Another element of the transitional period was tanka written in a strict syllable pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 in English, now known as the 'sanjuichi' (lit. 'thirty-one') form. Sanjuichi tanka of this period often featured deliberately Oriental motifs, such as cherry blossoms and kimonos. The best known of these poets was Father Neal Lawrence (1908–2004), whose *Soul's Inner Sparkle : Moments of Waka Sensations* was published in 1978. Father Lawrence asserted, "Like Japanese tanka, tanka in English must never be vulgar, but always in good taste."<sup>41</sup> Father Lawrence published several books and was and still is very well-regarded in Japan, but his poetry does not enjoy the same reputation in the English-speaking world.

James Kirkup, translator, poet, editor, and literary judge, also adhered to a strict 31 syllables. An openly gay poet, Kirkup once stirred the public ire in Britain by publishing a poem (not a tanka) entitled "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name" about Jesus Christ and a Roman soldier—a topic Father Lawrence probably would have found to be in bad taste. Kirkup was prosecuted for blasphemy in 1977. Thus even adherents of the most conservative tanka form varied widely in outlook and practice.

In 2002 Kirkup translated classic 19th century French poets into English tanka and published a virtual book, stating, "my aim as a translator of poetry 'in transcription' is to reconstitute the bland rhyming forms of French alexandrines, quatrains and sonnets by passing them through the revitalizing modern mincer of the centuries-old, 31-syllable Japanese tanka."<sup>42</sup> The result was not met with critical acclaim.

Kirkup was a successful mainstream poet and active in the tanka community of his day, but he is barely known today. Although his judging of contests must have influenced the tanka of his day, he has left no discernible mark on the literature (aside from being the occasional target of parody), even though his tanka continued to be posthumously published in *The Tanka Journal* and part of his work remains available on the Internet.

The 70s and 80s saw the first tanka books by names that would eventually become very well established in English-language tanka. Michael McClintock's 1972 *Thief : Diary Notes*, a tanka

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<sup>41</sup> Lawrence, Father Neal, quote by Sanford Goldstein in 'From This Side of Five Lines Down.' *Five Lines Down : A Landmark of English Tanka, a Compilation of All Issues 1994-1996*. Denis M. Garrison, ed. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, 2007, p 20.

<sup>42</sup> Kirkup, James. 'French into Tanka.' <<http://colecizj.easyvserver.com/vb3.htm>> Accessed 4 January 2011.

supplement to *Haiku Magazine*, predates his better known *Man with No Faces* collection of mixed forms published in 1974. Janice Bostok's collection, *Walking into the Sun : Haiku and Tanka*, was also published in 1974. They were followed by Pat Shelley's *As I Go* (1976) and Sanford Goldstein's *This Tanka World* (1977). Kenneth Rexroth, who was a major figure in the San Francisco Renaissance, published *Love Poems of Marichiko* (1978), which he at first passed off as a translation of tanka by a previously unknown Japanese poetess, but which was later shown to be his own work.<sup>43</sup>

Goldstein, along with his translating partners, introduced an extensive amount of modern Japanese literature, including the major tanka poets of the Meiji period. Goldstein and Shinoda's translation of *Tangled Hair* in 1971 has already been mentioned. In addition, he co-translated Takuboku Ishikawa's *Romaji Diary and Sad Toys* (1977), Mokichi Saitō's *Red Lights* (1989), Masaoka Shiki's *Songs from a Bamboo Village* (1998), and other works.

Goldstein's own style is spare, direct, and lacking in sentimentality and ornament. A long term resident of Japan, his work is also lacking in *japonisme*, even though he, like many early practitioners of Japanese forms, was a student of Zen.<sup>44</sup> He was heavily influenced by Takuboku in writing autobiographical tanka drawn from direct, lived experience. He eschewed a fixed form and his tanka include some of both the shortest and longest, and most irregular formats in the English-language.

The importance of *shasei* was a modern concept and part of the tanka reforms of the late 19th and early 20th century. Mokichi defined *shasei* as "to penetrate reality and depict life as the unity of nature and self; this is shasei in terms of tanka."<sup>45</sup> Shiki gave a more straight forward definition of *shasei* as "to depict reality as it is."<sup>46</sup> Nowhere in English is this principle more clearly manifested than in Goldstein's work:

like an assassin  
I too  
aim for the head  
striking  
my child<sup>47</sup>

Goldstein and Kirkup were sometimes published side by side in *The Tanka Journal*, enabling the reader to see at a glance the opposite ends of the spectrum of tanka in English.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Kenneth Rexroth.' Wikipedia.org. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth\\_Rexroth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Rexroth)> Accessed 6 October 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *At the Hut of the Small Mind*, 1992, a book-length tanka sequence detailing Goldstein's experiences at the farm of a Zen master.

<sup>45</sup> Heinrich, Amy Vladeck. *Fragments of Rainbows : The Life and Poetry of Saitō Mokichi*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983, p 32.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p 32.

<sup>47</sup> Goldstein, Sanford. *This Tanka World*. West Lafayette, IN: A Purdue Poets Cooperative Book, 1977.

These hooded houses  
raising their great eyebrows on  
calm wooden façades  
have a comfortable look of  
protective meditation.

James Kirkup<sup>48</sup>

The first consciously historical North American tanka retrospective was the cumbersome but useful *Tomoshihi : Lucille M. Nixon's Japanese poem, tanka collection and biography with her study of Japanese tanka poetry* published in 1978. Written and edited by Tomoe Tana, it was a tribute to her friend and colleague Lucille Nixon. Tana included sizable excerpts from *Ryojin (Traveler)* (1958) and *Ishokurin (Transplanted Forest)* (1959) which would otherwise be unknown, and which she had helped to translate. She also translated other Japanese American tanka books. Tana went on to earn her master's degree and wrote her thesis on *The history of Japanese tanka poetry in America* (1985), making her the first historian of North American tanka. Tana has in turn been the subject of study with Gary D. Snider profiling her in a master's project at San José State University (1997).

Tana was followed in 1980 by Takeo Ujo Nakano's *Within the Barbed Wire Fence : A Japanese Man's Account of in his Internment in Canada*, which includes tanka. Then came a more academic treatment, Gerry Shikatani and David Elwards' *Paper Doors : An Anthology of Japanese Canadian Poetry* (1981), then Jiro and Kay Nakano's *Poets Behind Barbed Wire* (1983) which documented the work of Japanese-American poets in Hawai'i who were interned during WWII. (Jiro Nakano went on to publish several other anthologies.) 1989 brought Samuel Toyozo Sakura and Howard Shigeru Sakura's *Early immigrant poems : waka tanka haiku*. Later, in 1996, Juliana Chang compiled *Quiet Fire : A Historical Anthology of Asian American Poetry, 1892 - 1970*. Thus a body of preservationist literature was developed by Asian North American poets and editors themselves.

UK tanka history begins with William Wyatt's *Songs of the Four Seasons (Original and Translated Haiku and Tanka)* in 1965 and *Wind Blown Cloud Poems, Haiku and Tanka* in 1968. In 1971 he edited the *Starving sparrow temple anthology : haiku, tanka, linked verse and other pieces dedicated with gassho to Rev Jixu Kennett Roshi*, the first English-language anthology published in the UK to contain tanka. A smattering of collections containing tanka were published in the UK during the 1970s, then dried up and nearly disappeared. Only one tanka work was published during 80s. Tanka did not reappear in the UK until the founding of the British Haiku Society and its journal, *Blithe Spirit*, in 1990. Journals and collections were typically composed of mixed forms. Not until Brian Tasker published his *The Wind Blown Clouds : tanka 1990-1995* (1996) did a tanka-only publication appear.

At the same time, tanka was being written in other Western languages and taken up by major poets. Noteworthy was the 1972 publication of *Tigres de Oro*, by Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) in Buenos Aires. This was translated into a bilingual Spanish-English edition and published in

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<sup>48</sup> *The Tanka Journal* No. 27. Tokyo, JP: Nihon Kajin Club, 2005, p 5.

the United States in 1976. Although there were only a few tanka in the book, it was one of the tanka that gave the book its title. Occasionally other bilingual Spanish-English tanka books have been published, but Spanish-only tanka goes as far back as the 1938 *cosmos indio : hai-kais y tankas*, by the Guatemalan, Flavio Herrera (1895–1968), and even earlier to José Juan Tablada (1871–1943), a Mexican poet who traveled in Japan, France, and the United States. These and other early Spanish-speaking poets appear to have had a regional influence on the poetry of the American Southwest, but were not absorbed into the broader North American literary movement until much later.

In France, René Galichet and Lionel Le Barzig achieved success as tanka poets, and Barzig proposed a form he called *tankème* based on a pattern of 2-3-2-3-3 tonic accents.<sup>49</sup> Giselle Maya in France started publishing her anthologies in 1998, starting with *CATS - tanka, haiku & cat tales / CHATS - tanka, haiku & contes de chat*. Pauline Regensburg-Burck published *A collection of tanka* in the Netherlands in 1985. Haiku societies were established in Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium and included a marginal interest in tanka. The Romanian Society of Haiku established their journal, *Haiku* (1990–) and in Croatia, the Croatian Haiku Society, published a journal for Japanese forms, *Vrabcic (Sparrow)* (1992–2008). The Haiku Društo Slovenije (Haiku Club of Slovenia) published their journal, *Letni časi/The Seasons magazine* (1997–2007). Kirkup published several books through the University of Salzburg, Austria. Very little tanka was published in Europe until the New Wave; prior to 1990 tanka was principally a North American and English-language literature. Romania is notable for having continual development to the present day, making it the major European scene for tanka.

## Conclusion

The first nine decades of tanka in English were marked by tangents, experiments, possibilities, and innovations. Poets, and sometimes editors and critics, wrestled with the central problem of tanka in English: how to adapt the Japanese form to the English language. Effective solutions were found early in the process, but lack of institutional structure, poor communication, and minimal record-keeping meant that almost everyone who came to Anglophone tanka throughout the period was coming anew with no access to previous developments. The readily available models were Japanese classics, and this would have significant impact on the development of the New Wave.

Next : A Tanka History in English Pt II : The New Wave, 1986 - 2005 (forthcoming)

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<sup>49</sup> Friedenkraft, Georges C. 'Style and Spirit in French Haikus.' Belgium: TempsLibres.com, undated. Accessed 4 January 2011.