

Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading (2021) : ZITSU (FRUIT)

His Majesty the Emperor

I sincerely pray that
The hope and efforts of the people
Bear beautiful fruit
Leading us to peaceful days

(Background of the poem)

Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress are deeply saddened to have learned that the spread of COVID-19 last year has claimed many lives all over the world, and that people are still being confronted with enormous challenges.

Under these circumstances, wishing to further understand the situation of and turn their thoughts to the many people who are faced with these difficulties, Their Majesties have listened to experts in various fields and to those actually involved in handling the situation.

His Majesty the Emperor composed this poem, sincerely praying that the peoples' hopes and the efforts of those working together to overcome the difficulties bear fruit and thus the pandemic will come to an end.

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Her Majesty the Empress

As I stand in the garden
Yearning for
The end of the infection's spread,
The fruit of the *ume*
Are a hopeful green

(Background of the poem)

Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress have been hoping earnestly for the containment of the infection ever since the COVID-19 breakout. Last May, during the time when the state of emergency was declared, Her Majesty the Empress Masako was taking a walk in the Akasaka Palace grounds. As she paused by the Japanese apricot (*ume*) trees, she found that the fruits had grown and become fresh green. Even though the daily lives of people had changed greatly in many ways by the spread of the infection, the Japanese apricot trees had bloomed and were bearing fruit just as in years before. Her Majesty was moved by the unswerving vitality of the workings of nature. This waka poem was composed to express Her Majesty's impression at that time.

His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino

On a summer's day
flowers of the rice plants
blossom over the field,
brightening towards
a rich autumn harvest.

(Background of the poem)

On a hot summer day His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino happened to see some rice plants. Ordinarily one pays little attention to the flowers blossoming on the rice plants. But, taking a closer look, the Crown Prince noticed how the flowers were blooming with a graceful modesty. And he sensed that the flowers, in their very restraint, seemed to be preparing for the plants to be richly laden with rice in the autumn.

In this poem Crown Prince Akishino expresses the feelings he had as he viewed the rice plant flowers and hoped for an abundant ripening of golden ears of rice in the autumn.

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Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino

In a *take* basket
ripening are the yellow
fruits of the *karin* ;
their sweet permeating fragrance
is deeply affecting.

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino often walks together with His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince in the Akasaka Imperial Grounds, where she enjoys the ever-changing natural scenery. The *karin* (*Pseudocydonia sinensis*) trees on which beautiful pink flowers had blossomed in the spring come to bear abundant yellow fruit in the autumn. As the Crown Princess put the ripened *karin* fruit in a *take* (a plant similar to bamboo) basket she found herself enveloped in a subtly sweet aroma. And in the room where she placed the basket the fragrance of the *karin* gave her a peaceful feeling, along with a deep sense of gratitude for the blessings of nature around her. It is such feelings that the Crown Princess has expressed in this poem.

