

Muku Tree of the Shimizudani Residence

This venerable muku tree (*Aphananthe aspera*) has stood in the estate garden of the noble Shimizudani family for over 300 years. The Shimizudani were a branch of the influential Saionji family, many of whose members attained renown as poets or political figures. In the Edo Period, the most prominent member of the family was Shimizudani Sanenari (1648–1709), one of the leading poets of his day. Sanenari was known for his fresh, at times even playful, approach to poetry. He had many pupils and apprentices, drawn not just from the aristocracy but also from among the more educated class of common folk.

Waka poetry spread throughout society in the Edo Period and many people composed *waka* poems, including Sanenari's students. This is one of Sanenari's poems:

Flowing on and on
the plaintive sound
of the garden stream,
like the birds and flowers of spring
that also flow quickly on.

(*Nagare yuku/ oto zo sabishiki/ hana tori no/ haru mo tomaranu/ niwa no yarimizu*)

(From the collection *Hoei Sento Chakuto Hyakushu* (1705)) (Poems Read at the Palace of the Retired Emperor Reigen)

In 1864, the Choshu samurai Kijima Matabe (1817-1864) committed suicide beneath this tree. Matabe was the leader of Yugeki-tai, a faction of the radical Sonno Joi group, which supported the restoration of imperial power and the expulsion of foreign influences from Japan.