

## ***Renga* (Linked Verse)**

*Renga* is a stylized, collaborative form of Japanese linked-verse poetry, involving two or more poets. The form flourished between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was especially popular in court circles and among the educated elite.

Traditionally, the first poet would compose a three-line stanza, with a 5-7-5 syllabic pattern. This would then be answered by the next poet, who contributed a stanza comprising two lines of seven syllables each. This sequence would then repeat, with each author building exclusively on the previous verse—thus ensuring continuing linkage as the work unfolded. Flashes of wit and erudition were especially prized. Recurring themes included nature, the seasons, love, and other emotions.

At Dazaifu Tenmangu, *renga* was used to honor Tenjin, Sugawara Michizane's deified spirit. Shrine historians say stories exist of Tenjin "delivering" the first verse of a *renga* to poets as they dreamed at night. Composing improvised *renga* was more than just a show of wit and intelligence. It was considered a religious practice and the verses were written down as a record for future generations.

A scroll of the *muso no renga*, "dream-inspired linked verses," written in 1598 is displayed here. The text decorated with an image of a plum tree is from a 1,000-linked-verse session that took place in 1382.