

山上憶良
Yamanoue no Okura

Yamanoue no Okura was a government official born to a lower aristocrat in the early Nara period (710 – 794), and was also famous as a poet. He left behind approximately 80 poems, which were included in the Manyōshū. Many of Okura's poems, including "Korawo Omofu Uta" (A song for children) and "Hinkyū Mondoka" (Answering for the Poor), describe the lives of common people and people's love for their children and family members. He also dedicated one of his poems to Ōtomo no Tabito (Ōtomo no Yakamochi's father) when Tabito's wife died. With this opportunity, they started deepening their friendship. It is said that this exchange with Tabito led to a life filled with poetry later on.

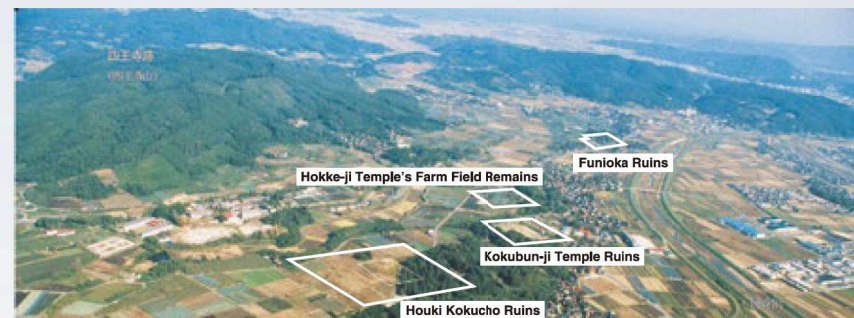
It is estimated that he was born around 660, but there are various views on his origin. He was promoted to the position of secretary of Japanese mission to China during the Tang dynasty at the age of 42, and there, he was exposed to the cutting-edge culture of China before he returned to Japan. He then became a senior official at the age of 54, and served as Governor of Houki Province (presently the midwestern part of Tottori Prefecture) at the age of 57 in 716. He was assigned as Governor of Chikuzen Province at the age of 67.

In 730, four years after he took office of Governor of Chikuzen Province, he attended the poetic gathering in the garden of Ōtomo no Tabito's residence in Dazaifu. The following poem by Okura is listed fourth in the group of 32 poems composed at the gathering: *Harusareba mazusakuyadono umenohana hitorimitsutsuya haruhikurasamu* (I wish I could spend all spring days alone at this residence while I enjoy watching the plum that blooms and tells the arrival of spring). It is considered to be the best poem about plum blossoms in the collection, and is one of his representative works.

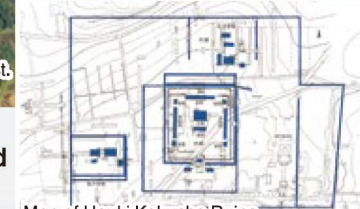
After he retired from his position as of Governor of Chikuzen Province, he returned to the capital city, and died of illness in 733 at the age of 74.

It is said that Okura spent about five years as Governor of Houki Province. The poems written during his stay are not confirmed, but it is believed that his experience and exposure to the nature and culture of Houki during the assignment influenced his poetry.

It is also said that Ōtomo no Yakamochi, who later became Governor of Inaba Province (presently the eastern part of Tottori Prefecture), was strongly influenced by Okura. Okura wrote: *Onokoyamo munashikuarubeki yorozuyoni katarisugubeki nawatatezushite* (As a man, I wonder if it is correct to spend and end my life fruitlessly without leaving my name to posterity). Yakamochi added: *Masuraowa naoshitatsubeshi nochinoyoni kikitsuguhitomo katarisugugane* (A man should succeed and leave his mark so that his name and deeds will be handed down from generation to generation.)



Around the Houki Kokucho Ruins viewed from the southwest. (Photo: Courtesy of Kurayoshi City Board of Education)



Map of Houki Kokucho Ruins (Courtesy of Kurayoshi City Board of Education)



Restoration image of Houki Kokucho

① Houki Kokufu/Houki Kokucho Ruins, Hokke-ji Temple Farm Field Remains, and Funioka Ruins (National Historic Site)

The Funioka Ruins have been confirmed to be related to the ancient Houki Kofuku (provincial office). Located about 1.5 kilometers northeast of the old provincial office and adjacent to the Hokke-ji Temple Farm Field Remains. Collectively, the Houki Kokucho site is designated as a National Historic Site.

The ruins of Kokucho include traces of the local government office which was in use from the Nara period through the Heian period (the 8th century to the 11th century).

The Kokucho, Kokubun-ji Temple, and Kokubun-ji Temple were located close to the Yashiro District of Kurayoshi City, which became the political, financial, and cultural center of Houki Province during that period. Reconstructed image of Houki Kokucho.

At the beginning of the 8th century, when Yamanoue no Okura was assigned as Governor of Houki Province, the Kokucho had not yet been established. It is believed that Okura's office was situated in the earlier Kokufu provincial office found at the Funioka site.

It is believed that Hokke-ji Temple's Farm Field was the original location of the Kokufu government office, which was relocated to Kokubun-ji Temple later.

📍 Kokubun-ji, Funioka and Kokufu, Kurayoshi City

🚶 Take the Yashiro Line/Kitadani Line from Bus Stop #2 at JR Kurayoshi Station. Get off at Kokufu Bus Stop and walk for 10 minutes (walk for 15 minutes to the Funioka ruins).



Hokke-ji Temple's Farm Field Relics with reconstructed west gate



Houki Kokubun-ji Temple Ruins (Photo: Courtesy of Kurayoshi City Board of Education)

② Houki Kokubun-ji Temple Ruins (National Historic Site)

Houki Kokubun-ji Temple was founded in 741 by the order of Emperor Shomu. The ruins are 182 meters wide from east to west and 160 meters long from north to south. The locations of buildings, including the south gate, main hall, auditorium, and pagoda, have been confirmed.

📍 Kokubun-ji and Kokufu, Kurayoshi City

🚶 Take the Yashiro Line/Kitadani Line from Bus Stop #2 at JR Kurayoshi Station. Get off at Kokufu Bus Stop and walk for 10 minutes.

Funioka Ruins

*The traffic information is valid as of October 2019.