

Sadako Kurihara (1913-2005)

Nick Heath

2020

Sadako Kurihara was born Sadako Doi in Hiroshima on March 4th, 1913. She was the second daughter of a peasant family. She started writing poetry and especially tanka (normally a 31-syllable poem written in a single line) at the age of thirteen.

She attended Kabe High School from the age of 17 and began writing tanka and western-style poetry there.

Returning to Hiroshima in 1931 she met the 25-year-old anarchist Tadaichi Kurihara and they fell passionately in love. Tadaichi had been involved in the movement in Tokyo and after the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923 had fled to Hiroshima. Sadako shared Tadaichi's anarchist ideas.

She fled with Tadaichi to Matsuyama, and then Shikoku, where they lived for a brief period until their money ran out and they were forced to return to Hiroshima. Sadako's family had always been opposed to the relationship. They were secretly married on 26th December 1934. From 1932 to 1937 they lived a life of vagabondage, moving from one city to the other, Osaka, Tokushima and Matsuyama, without money and without fixed work, always one step of the police, and living in friends' and comrades' homes. In 1932 Sadako gave birth to her first child, which died of malnutrition two years later. In 1935 their second daughter Mariko was born and in 1939 their third daughter Junko. After her birth, Sadako was able to renew relationships with her family.

At the end of the 1930s the couple ran a shop selling household goods in Hiroshima. Tadaichi was conscripted into the Army in July 1940 and served in Shanghai, where he witnessed atrocities carried out by the Japanese Army. On his return after contracting beriberi he angrily spoke about these atrocities on a bus and was arrested. During a fifteen-year period until the end of the war, neither were allowed to publish their works.

Sadako started writing anti-war poems in 1941. During the period of repression, they had to hide their copies of Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*, *Appeal to the Young*, and *Fields Factories and Workshops*.

When the atomic bomb that killed 200,000 people was exploded over Hiroshima, she was in her home four kilometres north of the epicentre and witnessed terrible events.

A leading light in Japan's proletarian literature movement, the novelist Tamiki Hosoda, and also a resident of Hiroshima, visited the couple three days after the dropping of the bomb. Hosoda was strongly influenced by Tolstoy and had developed anti-militarist themes in his writings. Like

the Kuriharas, he had maintained his ideas during the fifteen years of repression, unlike, for example, the female anarchist poet Takamura Itsue, who had published pro-imperialist poems during the war. In conversation, they came to the conclusion that there was a need for a cultural revival. This led to the setting up of the Chugoku Bunmei Renmei (Chugoku Cultural Association) and its mouthpiece magazine Chugoku Shimbun, which came out in March 1946. This appeared despite tight regulations by the American occupying authorities. The first issue was subtitled Special Issue on the Atom Bomb and was the first time that the Japanese public experienced a literary treatment of the Hiroshima bombing, a brave move at that time.

Sadako put great emphasis on the literary section of the magazine, believing that creative activity and social activity were inextricably intertwined.

The US authorities soon acted against Chugoku Shimbun. Tadaichi was submitted to a severe interrogation in the town of Kurashiki by officials of the Civil Information Department of the Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC), the secret police outfit operating within the US Army. He was accused of creating obstacles to the implementation of the occupation policy of the US Army, putting too much stress on the anti-human nature of the atom bomb!

The first issue contains Sadako's rightly celebrated poem, Umashimenkana, Bringing Forth New Life, which recounts the experience of seeing a dying midwife help with the birth of a new child immediately after the dropping of the atom bomb. It is based on a real incident which Sadako saw in the shelter beneath the post office in the shelter beneath the post office in Sendamachi, a district of Hiroshima. In reality the midwife survived and was later re-united with the child she had delivered. Hiroshima (in reality the midwife survived and later had a reunion with the child).

Shortly afterwards Sadako produced her first collection of poems, Kuroi Tamago, Black Egg, Black after the colour of the anarchist flag, and Egg as a metaphor for a new world which does not hatch easily. Again, this publication fell foul of the US authorities who stripped out 11 tanka and 3 poems. The collection contains many anti-war poems she had written during the war years.

The Kuriharas assisted in the re-creation of the Japanese Anarchist Federation in May 1946. Writing to the paper of the French Federation Anarchiste in 1949, as a member of the Local Council of the Japanese Anarchist Federation, Sadako said that Chugoku Shimbun had been retitled Freedom and had become a mouthpiece of her federation, and that furthermore a local anarchist paper Hiroshima Heimin Shimbun was being produced. However, controversies between anarchosyndicalists and anarchist communists caused the collapse of the Federation. Tadaichi appears to have renounced his anarchism, becoming a local town councillor in April 1951, and was elected to the Hiroshima Prefecture as a Socialist Party candidate in April 1955 and three times after.

Sadako continued with her anti-war agitation and in 1969 founded the Hiroshima Mothers' Group Against A-Bombs and H-Bombs and brought out an anthology of poems about the Hiroshima bombing. In 1970 she published the magazine The Rivers in Hiroshima, of which five issues appeared. She continued to bring out publications about the Hiroshima bombing into the 1990s. As an internationalist, she did not forget in her poetry and essays the many thousands of Koreans who had died in the Hiroshima bombing. She was often on anti-war demonstrations and pickets and was not intimidated by threatening phone calls she received from members of the far right.

She died of a terminal illness in her home on March 6th, 2005.

Nick Heath

Sources:

Letter from Sadako Kurihara to the French anarchist paper *Le Libertaire*, 1949:

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/0zpd5h>

Kutka, Karol. The first works of Japanese postwar literature presenting the atomic tragedy of Hiroshima and their significance:

<http://orient.sav.sk/wp-content/uploads/aas/1986.pdf>

Hiroshima in Four Poems:

<http://orient.sav.sk/wp-content/uploads/aas/1986.pdf>

La voce di Kurihara Sadako:

<http://www.aracneeditrice.it/pdf/9788825523942.pdf>

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Nick Heath
Sadako Kurihara (1913-2005)
2020

Retrieved from <https://libcom.org/article/sadako-kurihara-1913-2005> on 23-04-2024
A short biography of Japanese anarchist poet Sadako Kurihara

theanarchistlibrary.org