

# Nobutsuna Sasaki and Kenichiro Tomonaga

## Kazuhito Komiya

When I was a university student, I learned *tanka* from a poet and professor by the name of Yukitsuna Sasaki. Professor Sasaki's grandfather on his father's side was the poet and Japanese literature scholar Nobutsuna Sasaki, a doctor of literature. He was a member of both the Imperial Academy and the Imperial Art Academy, and a recipient of the Order of Culture. Nobutsuna Sasaki enrolled in the Faculty of Letters in the University of Tokyo

(then known as Tokyo Imperial University) at the age of twelve, lying about his age. According to Professor Sasaki, his grandfather may actually hold the record as the youngest person to ever enroll in the University of Tokyo. Professor Sasaki's aunt was Nobutsuna Sasaki's eldest daughter, Tsunako Sasaki, who married a man named Kenichiro Tomonaga.

Kenichiro Tomonaga was born into and raised by a family of scholars. His father, Shozo, graduated from Kyoto Imperial University's Department of Mechanical Engineering as a doctor of engineering, and was a professor emeritus of Kyoto Imperial University. His uncle, Sanjuro, graduated from Tokyo Imperial University's Department of Philosophy as a doctor of literature, and also became a professor emeritus of Kyoto Imperial University.

Sanjuro's eldest son, who was Kenichiro's cousin, was Shinichiro Tomonaga, a winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics. Kenichiro Tomonaga also graduated from Tokyo Imperial University's

Department of Mechanical Engineering with a doctorate in engineering. After serving as a rear admiral specializing in naval engineering, he became a professor in Tokyo Imperial University's Department of Engineering. Although he was removed during the purge of public officials the occupying Allied forces conducted after the war, once the purge was overturned he became the head of the Chiba Institute of Technology's Department of Mechanical Engineering.

Kenichiro Tomonaga left behind many books and research papers as a specialist in thermodynamics, marine engines and steam turbines, but he also loved music. He composed and arranged his own music while also translating the lyrics of choral pieces from around the world.

Nobutsuna Sasaki wrote a tribute to Kenichiro Tomonaga in the literary journal of *tanka* poetry *Kokoro no Hana* (Flower of the Heart), which Nobutsuna had founded, saying: "Both sincere and

dignified, Kenichiro Tomonaga loved justice more than anyone, and as a rare person of character in these modern times, he had the admiration of the people. The strength of his sense of responsibility as an educator was such that even on the afternoon of the day he was to pass away, he gave his final lecture of the school year in spite of his illness. Nothing gave him more joy than his love for music...”

The Chiba Institute of Technology’s school song includes a modified version of lyrics penned by students and faculty members, selected by Nobutsuna Sasaki and set to music by Professor Kenichiro Tomonaga when he taught at the institute. When you sing the school song, consider the brilliance of the two individuals who created it.

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