

JP

JAPANESE LESSON

Song Shinano No Kuni

信濃の国 — Shinano no Kuni

The Nagano Prefectural Anthem

Lyrics: Asai Retsu (1899) · Music: Kitamura Sueharu (1900) · Official prefectural song since 1968 · Public domain

A candid note before starting: this song is written in **文語体 (bungotai)** — formal, classical literary Japanese from the Meiji era, full of kanji and grammar forms (archaic verb endings, classical particles) that don't appear in everyday modern Japanese at all. This is well beyond hiragana-only beginner level — treat this as a cultural immersion piece to enjoy and admire, not something to expect to parse unassisted yet. Every kanji-choked line below has its own romaji and English gloss specifically so it stays approachable regardless.

Each original written line of the song is actually two paired phrases (a common structure in this kind of formal anthem verse) — each phrase is broken out as its own line below, in the target-language / romaji / English groups of three the lesson format uses.

Verse 1 — The Land of Shinano

信濃の國は十州に

Shinano no kuni wa jissshū ni

The province of Shinano

境つらぬる國にして

sakai tsuranuru kuni ni shite

is a land whose borders touch ten provinces,

聳ゆる山はいや高く

sobi-yuru yama wa iya takaku

the towering mountains are ever so high,

流るる川はいや遠し

nagaruru kawa wa iya tōshi

the flowing rivers stretch ever so far.

松本伊那佐久善光寺

Matsumoto Ina Saku Zenkōji

Matsumoto, Ina, Saku, Zenkōji —

四の平は肥沃の地

yon no taira wa hiyoku no chi

these four plains are fertile land.

海こそなけれ物さはに

umi koso nakere mono sawa ni

Though we have no sea, goods are abundant —

よろづ足はぬ事ぞなき

yorozu taranu koto zo naki

there is nothing at all that we lack.

Verse 2 — Mountains and Rivers

四方に聳ゆる山々は

shihō ni sobiyuru yamayama wa

The mountains towering on every side

御嶽乗鞍駒ヶ嶽

Ontake Norikura Komagatake

are Ontake, Norikura, Komagatake —

浅間はことに活火山

Asama wa koto ni kakkazan

Asama especially is an active volcano;

いづれも國のしづめなり

izure mo kuni no shizume nari

each of them is a guardian of our land.

流れ淀まずゆく水は

nagare yodomazu yuku mizu wa

The waters that flow on without stagnating —

北に犀川千曲川

kita ni Sai-gawa Chikuma-gawa

to the north, the Sai River, the Chikuma River,

南に木曾川天龍川

minami ni Kiso-gawa Tenryū-gawa

to the south, the Kiso River, the Tenryū River —

これ又國の固めなり

kore mata kuni no katame nari

these too are the strength of our land.

Verse 3 — Industry and Livelihood

木曾の谷にはま木茂り

Kiso no tani ni wa maki shigeri

In the valleys of Kiso, the cypress grows thick;

諏訪の湖には魚多し

Suwa no umi ni wa uo ōshi

in the lake of Suwa, fish are plentiful.

民のかせぎは紙麻綿

tami no kasegi wa kami asa wata

The people's trade is paper, hemp, and cotton —

五穀の實らぬ里やある

gokoku no minoranu sato ya aru

is there a village where the five grains don't ripen?

しかのみならず桑とりて

shika nomi narazu kuwa torite

Not only that — taking mulberry leaves,

蠶養の業の打ひらけ

kobiki no gyō no uchihirake

the trade of silkworm-raising has flourished.

細きよすがも軽からぬ

hosoki yosuga mo karokaranu

Even this slender livelihood is not a light thing —

國の命を繋くなり

kuni no inochi wo tsunagu nari

it sustains the life of our land.

Verse 4 — Scenic Places

尋ねまほしき園原や

tazune mahoshiki Sonohara ya

Sonohara, which one longs to visit —

旅のやどりの寐覺の里

tabi no yadori no Nezame no sato

Nezame, the village where travelers lodge.

木曾の棧かけし世も

Kiso no kakehashi kakeshi yo mo

Even in the age when the Kiso suspension bridge was built,

心してゆけ桑路橋

kokoro shite yuke Kumaji-bashi

go with care, Kumaji Bridge.

くる人多き筑摩の湯

kuru hito ōki Tsukama no yu

Tsukama hot springs, where many visitors come —

月の名にたつ姨捨山

tsuki no na ni tatsu Obasute-yama

Obasute Mountain, famed for its moon.

しるき名所とみやびをが

shiruki meisho to miyabi o ga

These well-known scenic places, and their elegance —

詩歌によみてぞ傳へたる

shiika ni yomite zo tsutaetaru

poets have sung of them in verse and passed them down.

Verse 5 — Notable People

旭將軍義仲も

Asahi Shōgun Yoshinaka mo

General Asahi, Yoshinaka, too —

仁科の五郎信盛も

Nishina no Gorō Nobumori mo

Nishina no Gorō Nobumori, too.

春臺太宰先生も

Shundai Dazai sensei mo

Master Dazai Shundai, too —

象山佐久間先生も

Shōzan Sakuma sensei mo

Master Sakuma Shōzan, too.

皆この國の人にして

mina kono kuni no hito ni shite

All of them are people of this land —

文武の譽たぐひなく

bunbu no homare tagui naku

their honor in letters and arms has no equal.

山と聳えて世に仰ぎ

yama to sobiete yo ni aogi

Like mountains they tower, revered by the world —

川と流れて名はつきず

kawa to nagarete na wa tsukizu

like rivers they flow, their names never fading.

Verse 6 — Learning and Legacy

吾妻はやと日本武

Azuma wa ya to Yamato-takeru

"My wife..." — thus Yamato Takeru

嘆き給ひし碓氷山

nageki tamaishi Usui-yama

lamented, upon Usui Mountain.

穿つ隧道二十六

ugatsu zuidō nijūroku

Twenty-six tunnels bored through it —

夢にもこゆる瀧車の道

yume ni mo koyuru kisha no michi

a railway now crosses it, beyond even dreams.

道ひとすぢに學びなば

michi hitosuji ni manabinaba

If we devote ourselves single-mindedly to learning,

昔の人にや劣るべき

mukashi no hito ni ya otorubeki

would we truly fall short of the people of old?

古來山河の秀でたる

korai sanga no hūdetaru

From ancient times, it has been the custom

國は偉人のあるならひ

kuni wa ijin no aru narai

that lands whose mountains and rivers excel produce great people.

Vocabulary — ごい

Selected words drawn from across all six verses, grouped by part of speech. Many are classical/literary forms not used in everyday modern Japanese — noted where relevant.

Verbs

#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	TYPE
1	聳える (聳ゆる, classical)	sobieru (sobi-yuru)	to tower, to rise up	verb
2	流れる	nagareru	to flow	verb
3	足る (足はぬ, classical negative)	taru (taranu)	to be sufficient	verb
4	實る (實らぬ, classical negative)	minoru (minoranu)	to bear fruit, to ripen	verb
5	繋ぐ	tsunagu	to connect, to sustain	verb
6	尋ねる (尋ねまほしき, classical desiderative)	tazuneru (tazune mahoshiki)	to visit, to seek out (one longs to visit)	verb
7	傳へる (傳へたる, classical)	tsutaeru (tsutaetaru)	to pass down, to hand down	verb
8	仰ぐ	aogu	to look up to, to revere	verb
9	嘆く (嘆き給ひし, classical honorific-past)	nageku (nageki tamaishi)	to lament, to grieve	verb
10	學ぶ (學びなば, classical conditional)	manabu (manabinaba)	to study, to learn	verb

#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	TYPE
11	劣る (劣るべき, classical "should")	otoru (otorubeki)	to fall short, to be inferior	verb
Nouns				
#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	TYPE
1	國 (国, older form)	kuni	country, province, land	noun
2	山	yama	mountain	noun
3	川	kawa	river	noun
4	境	sakai	border, boundary	noun
5	地	chi	land, ground	noun
6	海	umi	sea	noun
7	火山	kazan	volcano	noun
8	水	mizu	water	noun
9	谷	tani	valley	noun
10	湖	umi / ko	lake	noun
11	魚	uo	fish	noun
12	民	tami	the people, citizens	noun
13	里	sato	village	noun
14	命	inochi	life	noun
15	旅	tabi	journey, travel	noun
16	湯	yu	hot spring, hot water	noun
17	月	tsuki	moon	noun
18	名所	meisho	famous/scenic place	noun
19	詩歌	shiika	poetry, verse	noun

#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	TYPE
20	人	hito	person	noun
21	先生	sensei	teacher, master	noun
22	文武	bunbu	letters and arms (scholarship and military skill)	noun
23	譽 (誉, older form)	homare	honor, glory	noun
24	隧道	zuidō	tunnel	noun
25	瀛車 (汽車, older form)	kisha	steam train, railway	noun
26	道	michi	road, path; (fig.) the way (of learning)	noun
27	偉人	ijin	great person, notable figure	noun

Adjectives

#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	TYPE
1	高い (高く, adverbial form)	takai (takaku)	high, tall	adjective
2	遠い (遠し, classical)	tōi (tōshi)	far	adjective
3	肥沃	hiyoku	fertile	adjective
4	多い (多き, classical attributive)	ōi (ōki)	many, plentiful	adjective
5	細い (細き, classical attributive)	hosoi (hosoki)	slender, thin	adjective
6	軽い (軽からぬ, classical negative)	karui (karokaranu)	light (in weight/importance)	adjective
7	しるき (classical, = 著しい)	shiruki	notable, well-known	adjective

Others (Classical Particles & Endings)

#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	FUNCTION / ENGLISH	TYPE
1	は	wa	topic marker ("as for...")	particle
2	に	ni	location/direction marker ("in, at, to")	particle

#	JAPANESE	ROMAJI	FUNCTION / ENGLISH	TYPE
3	と	to	"and"; also "like/as" in similes (山と聳えて, "tower like a mountain")	particle
4	も	mo	"also, too" — used repeatedly in Verse 5 to list names	particle
5	こそ	koso	emphatic particle ("even though... it is precisely...")	particle
6	ぞ	zo	classical emphatic particle, no direct modern equivalent	particle
7	なり	nari	classical copula ("is/are") — modern だ/です	particle
8	べき	beki	classical "should/would" ending	particle

Why classical Japanese, and not modern? Meiji-era prefectural/school songs like this one were deliberately composed in 文語体 to sound dignified and timeless — the same reason a national anthem often sounds more formal than everyday speech. Recognizing endings like **-なり** (classical "is"), **-べき** ("should"), and negative forms ending in **-ぬ** instead of modern **-ない** is the single most useful skill for reading this kind of text, more than any individual vocabulary word.

A living song, not a museum piece. "Shinano no Kuni" has been Nagano's official prefectural song since 1968, but it's far older and far more beloved than that date suggests — schoolchildren across Nagano learn to sing all six verses by heart, and it's said most Nagano natives can still sing the whole thing from memory as adults. It's even played as a train departure melody at certain Nagano stations.