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Kanbun, Kundoku, and the Language of Literary Sinitic: Terminological Issues in the Study of Sinography in Japan

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Introduction

For students and scholars of Japanese literature, the analysis of *kanbun* 漢文 prose and *kanshi* 漢詩 poetry leads quickly to conceptual and terminological difficulties surrounding language and orthography. Beginning in the mid-1990s, these difficulties motivated several notable adjustments to the nomenclature used by Anglophone scholars of East Asian literatures: where it was once common to see *kanbun* rendered simply as “Chinese” and *kanshi* as “poetry in Chinese,” phraseologies that do not use the word “Chinese,” such as “Literary Sinitic,” “Sino-Japanese,” “Sinitic poetry,” and the like are now prevalent.¹ Even the once dominant term “Chinese character” has been replaced in much recent scholarship by “Sinograph” or “Sinogram,” and for reasons that will be addressed below, the Japanese terms *kanbun* and *kanshi* are themselves sometimes avoided. These changes reflect greater recognition of two fundamental points. The first is that the transnational reach and trans-cultural impact of Sinographic writing makes it useful to develop a nomenclature that does not so readily call to mind the cultural and geopolitical entity of present-day China. The skeptical reader may opine that the shift is mostly cosmetic, since the English word “China,” along with the Japanese *Shina* 支那, Persian *Cīnī*, Sanskrit *Cīna*, and Latin *Sina* (from which is derived the root Sino-), are all thought to have arisen from the same source, viz. the name of the state of Qin 秦 or, conceivably, the state of Jing 荆.² Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that “Sinograph” and similar terms are successful insofar as they seem less tightly bound to a single country or culture. Likewise, just as “Sinograph” and “Chinese character” share the same basic referent, the phrase “Literary Sinitic” is largely synonymous with what has commonly been called in Anglophone writing “Literary Chinese” (C. *wenyanwen* 文言文), a conservative written standard grounded ultimately in Old Chinese



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(600 BCE–0 CE).³ The difference between the two is more a matter of connotation than of denotation: “Literary Sinitic” points to the medium of Literary Chinese as viewed from a specifically transnational perspective, highlighting its role as a translinguistic, pan-Asian mode of logographic inscription.

The second fundamental point is that care must be taken to avoid conflating orthography with language. *Kanbun* reading practices were, via the development of “vernacular reading” or *kundoku* 訓読 methods (addressed in part two of this essay), so thoroughly integrated into Japanese text reception that, in principle, readers of Literary Sinitic prose need never have conceived of themselves as reading in a language that was anything other than “Japanese.” Moreover, as a mode of inscription, *kanbun* had also been adapted in various ways to the Japanese language, mainly through the addition of vocabulary items that, though written with Sinographs, were unique to the Japanese lexicon. This resulted in a style of “variant” Sinitic that still possessed the stylistic gravitas of orthodox Literary Sinitic when read via *kundoku*, but which was also capable of representing a larger range of vernacular Japanese locutions. This type of writing was widely applied in spheres far removed from Japanese high culture or the study of the Chinese classics: to government officials, merchants, and literate warriors throughout the premodern era, it became the standard medium of record for a wide variety of ordinary, workaday purposes. Whether the documents these writers produced used Sinographs in rough accordance with the semantic and syntactic norms of Literary Sinitic, or whether they would have been intelligible at all to denizens of the continent, was immaterial to their utility in Japan.

It is thus unsurprising that the word “*kanbun*” is itself rather ambiguous. In its preponderant usage, *kanbun* is essentially synonymous with Literary Sinitic, and the defining feature of *kanbun* texts produced in Japan is their intelligibility throughout the transnational community of users of Literary Sinitic—what Ross King has memorably termed the “Sinographic cosmopolis.”⁴ This usage is fairly standard in Japanese scholarship today, but other definitions, or at least definitions that are framed quite differently, are also attested. In his *Kokugogaku gairon* 国語学概論, the linguist Hashimoto Shinkichi 橋本進吉 (1882–1945) used the term *kanbun* to refer to a form of *Japanese* writing (日本語文), defining it as “Japanese writing that follows the rules of Chinese writing” (中国語文の方式に則って書かれた日本語文) and “a species of literary language in Japan” (日本の文語の一種).⁵ For Hashimoto, both *kanbun* and the “variant”

Sinitic described above, which he was the first to label “*hentai kanbun*” 変体漢文, were ways of inscribing a formal, stylistically austere kind of Japanese; the difference was that the former inscribed Japanese *and* managed to uphold the syntactic and semantic norms of written Chinese, while the latter did not. Of course, *kanbun* in Hashimoto’s sense is certainly still intelligible throughout the Sinographic cosmopolis. But once it had been placed so squarely within the ambit of Japanese, the need to further specify *kanbun* that really does satisfy the condition of intelligibility outside Japan motivated phraseologies such as *jun kanbun* 純漢文 or “pure *kanbun*.” This type of writing predominates in works such as *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (c. 720), *Honchō monzui* 本朝文粹 (mid eleventh century), and most Japanese anthologies of *shi* 詩 poetry.⁶ Logographic writing that departs in varying degrees from the conventions of Literary Sinitic may then be assigned to categories set in opposition to *jun kanbun*, such as *hentai kanbun* (“variant *kanbun*”), *waka kanbun* 和化漢文 (“Japanized *kanbun*”), *giji kanbun* 擬似漢文 (“imitation *kanbun*”), and the like.⁷ Alternatively, the writing style may be described in reference to a textual category of which it is characteristic, as in the expression *kirokutai kanbun* 記録体漢文 (“document-style *kanbun*”), which on a practical level is synonymous with *hentai kanbun* and is simply an alternative term one encounters in the field of premodern Japanese diplomatics (*komonjogaku* 古文書学). Finally, perhaps because Japan’s oldest extant mythohistorical work, *Kojiki* 古事記 (710), has been the object of special study and veneration since the seventeenth century, its intriguing script is often described in modern school textbooks as “*kanbun* that bends the rules” (*hensoku no kanbun* 変則の漢文), a rather more respectful phraseology than “*hentai kanbun*.”

Works employing any type of *kanbun* may be enunciated or “read out” (*yomi-kudasu* 読み下す・訓み下す) in Japanese via the application of *kundoku* rules. One result of this is that the boundary between *hentai kanbun* and (*jun*) *kanbun*, which is frequently fuzzy by any measure, can blur yet further when the two are considered from the direction of enunciation rather than script. In Japan, all “types” of *kanbun* are unified by the fact that they are Sinograph-based, logographic scripts that can be rendered via *kundoku* into an authoritative register of quasi-vernacular Japanese. Moreover, although *kundoku* is often described as a method of translational reading, it also serves as a set of guidelines for *composing* in *kanbun*. This is possible because *kundoku* entails not just glosses for isolated words, but also conventionalized renderings of complex Literary

Sinitic grammatical structures. More interesting still, the *kanbun* text resulting from such a procedure need not appear “variant” or “Japanized” at all. The power of *kundoku* is thus two-fold: it enables essentially any Literary Sinitic text to be read as if it were encoding meaning in Japanese, albeit in a rather specialized register of Japanese (more on this below), and it enables an author speaking or thinking *in that register* to write Japanese using Sinographs in a manner that is consistent with Chinese linguistic norms. To this extent, it is really *kundoku* that makes Hashimoto’s conceptualization of *kanbun* possible, and it is also why David Lurie has long cautioned against invoking the terms “Japanese” and “Chinese” to distinguish between, say, the language of *Kojiki* and that of *Nihon shoki*. For while it is true that the latter adheres more closely to Literary Chinese conventions and, excepting the occasional Japanese poem (*uta* 歌), can be read smoothly *as* Chinese, both texts are equally realizable through *kundoku* and thus equally readable as Japanese.⁸ Even a work such as the eclectic political treatise *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (c. 139 BCE, an important Chinese source for the compilers of *Nihon shoki*, could in principle be apprehended as a “Japanese” text by a reader who was highly skilled in *kundoku* yet somehow unaware of *Huainanzi*’s continental provenance.⁹

Kundoku is indeed an astonishing achievement in linguistic technology. While interlingual glossing practices designed to facilitate reading are attested throughout the world, Japanese *kundoku* has remained in widespread, continuous use for over a millennium, and its technical complexity is rivalled only by the similarly impressive, though shorter lived, methods of vernacular reading that were developed even earlier on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁰ Moreover, in specifically linguistic (as opposed to cultural or “literary”) terms, the existence of *kundoku* undeniably undermines the common comparison of *kanbun* in Japan to Latin in Europe. As Lurie has observed, while a medieval or early-modern English writer might be extremely proficient in Latin (and might even have made use of Latin texts with English glosses), there was no systematic set of structural and lexical equivalencies allowing this writer to mentally process written Latin *as* English. Nonetheless, I believe a measure of caution is in order when opting for nomenclatures that, in attempting to ameliorate confusion or redress errors in earlier scholarship, automatically eschew reference to “Chinese” (or, for that matter, “*kanbun*”) altogether. My purpose is not to reject well-established English-language alternatives such as “Literary Sinitic,” which provides a particularly good gloss of “*jun kanbun*” and calls to mind the orthodox, “cosmopolitan” style of

Sinographic writing used throughout East Asia until modern times. However, in the remainder of this essay, I will attempt to highlight some potential shortcomings of the new terminology when applied to Sinographic reading and writing in Japan, and to offer a brief defense, within specific parameters, of the old practice of describing Japanese works of Literary Sinitic as being in “Chinese.”

Between Style and Language: *Kundokubun* and Literary Sinitic

“From the vantage point of script, both Bai Juyi’s and Michizane’s poems can be characterized as “Chinese,” but read aloud by [Middle Captain] Tadanobu, they are just as equally “Japanese.” Brian Steininger, 2017¹¹

The scholar and statesman Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903), venerated today as Tenjin 天神, patron saint of students, was among the finest *shi* poets of Heian Japan (794–1185). The degree to which his written works may be viewed as linguistically Japanese, or at least *not* as exclusively Chinese, depends upon the degree to which Sinograph-based, logographic script can be understood to represent the Japanese language. Since *kundoku* clearly lies at the crux of the matter, it will prove useful to expand upon the points broached above and to investigate its properties more closely. To begin, it is important to recognize that a *kundoku* register will be noticeably different from vernacular Japanese registers of any time period, as a *kundoku* register will necessarily exclude a great many ordinary Japanese lexical elements while also generally admitting some phraseologies found nowhere else in the language. Here it might be objected that our current understanding of the *kundoku* conventions taught in different time periods, or at different academies or temples, is simply too incomplete to posit such a wholesale disjunction between *kundoku* and true vernacular Japanese. The *kundoku* methods widely taught today do largely represent conventions current in the late nineteenth century, and the specific techniques of a great many premodern schools of *kundoku* have undoubtedly been lost to history. Some did hew nearer to vernacular diction than others, but as will be shown below, any complete *kundoku* system—which is to say one that permits both the reading (“decoding”) and composition (“encoding”) of logographic locutions—will run up against challenges that make departures from vernacular Japanese essentially inevitable. At bottom, this is because vernacular Japanese cannot be fully inscribed logographically, at least so long as the only logographs at your disposal are Sinographs.¹²

Indeed, a *kundoku* register will typically permit some phraseologies that are awkward or, strictly speaking, even ungrammatical by the standards of vernacular Japanese. A very simple example is the enunciation of the possessive particle *no*, used to gloss the Sinograph 之, in Literary Sinitic relative clauses such as 仕王之人 (“a person who serves the king”) or 可擊之機 (“an opportunity where attack is feasible”). These may be read via current *kundoku* conventions as *Ō ni tsukauru no hito* and *utsu beki no ki*, this despite the fact that the particle *no* is not generally used in either classical or modern Japanese to subordinate nouns to verbs or auxiliary verbs. Instead, such relative clauses are formed by directly modifying the subordinate noun with the verb or auxiliary verb in a specific conjugation called the attributive form (*rentaikei* 連体形). Here, the Japanese verb *tsukau* (*tsukafu*), which is the *kun* reading of 仕 (“to serve”), is already in its attributive form *tsukauru* (*tsukafuru*). Likewise, the second sentence features the auxiliary verb *beshi*, which is the typical gloss for the Chinese modal verb represented by 可 (“can,” “should,” “is possible to”), in its attributive form *beki*. In either case, *no* is semantically superfluous.¹³ This, of course, is only one possible approach, and we might imagine a different style of *kundoku* in which readers were taught to ignore 之 in these and similarly structured sentences. As detailed in the next example, such a strategy would succeed in bringing the *kundoku* rendition closer to a true “vernacular reading,” but as things get more complex, this approach will eventually result in decreased fidelity to the logographic source text and begin to resemble “translation” in its usual sense.¹⁴

While a full accounting of *kundoku*'s idiosyncrasies is beyond the scope of this paper, close examination of one additional example should help clarify both the power and the limitations of *kundoku* as an interlingual medium. As a method of reading, *kundoku* may be applied to a logographic locution such as this: 賢人為民之所尊, which means “the wise man is esteemed by the people.” While different *kundoku* traditions can be expected to produce different renderings, two broad approaches may be identified, namely that of **metaphrase** and that of **paraphrase**. The former seeks to preserve a sense of alterity and to maintain maximum linguistic fidelity to the source text; these priorities will lead to a Japanese rendition such as *kenjin, min no tōtomu tokoro to nasu* 賢人、民の尊む所と為す. The latter, by contrast, will result in a more liberal rendition, such as *sakashibito wa tami ni tōtomaru* 賢人は民に尊まる, which uses ordinary Japanese grammar and betrays little connection to logographic writing or the Chinese literary tradition. Both of these approaches are in

fact taught in contemporary *kanbun* textbooks as equally valid, standard ways of handling the Literary Sinitic passive construction X 為 Y (之) 所 V, which means “X is V-ed by Y.” Yet it is apparent how dramatically the two renditions differ: the metaphrase attempts to account for as many lexical elements in the original sentence as possible and, consequently, it departs somewhat from everyday Japanese usage, particularly in its characteristic (though not ungrammatical) use of *tokoro* to render the relative pronoun 所. The presence of lexical elements redolent of the *kundoku* register is a linguistic punctum reminding the reader that the otherwise Japanese locution “*tōtomu tokoro to nasu*” is stylistically connected to the world of *kanbun*.¹⁵

By contrast, the second reading, *sakashibito wa tami ni tōtomaru*, constitutes a vernacular Japanese paraphrase. The Japonic terms *sakashibito* (“wise man”) and *tami* (“people,” “populace”) are used to gloss 賢人 and 民; this is perhaps an unnecessary indulgence, but it is in keeping with known historical variation in *kundoku* styles. The rendition also features postpositional particles (*wa, ni*) not present in the original, along with a Japanese verb conjugation that expresses the passive voice. Chinese, of course, is an uninflected language and has no verb conjugations whatsoever.¹⁶ Considered together, these two renderings reveal the difficulty in accepting the view that *kundoku* can ever be quite as “invisible” as has sometimes been implied: at least as concerns the use of *kundoku* to read logographic texts (as opposed to its use in helping a Japanese writer compose them), one must either opt for a metaphrase that, in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s terminology, will generate a sense of “alienation” in the target language, or one must opt for paraphrase and thereby “naturalize” the source text.¹⁷ The first approach makes *kundoku* visible by using Japanese words in distinctive or unusual ways, and also by the use of words wrought from Sinoxenic readings even where more common Japonic equivalents are available (e. g., using *shi-su* 死す, “to die,” instead of *shinu* 死ぬ). In the second approach, *kundoku* cleaves closer to vernacular Japanese and is to that extent invisible *qua kundoku*. Yet to readers with access to whatever logographic text is being rendered, this type of *kundoku* becomes immediately visible precisely through its interpolation of Japonic words and grammatical elements with no equivalents in the source text.

Significantly, this same slippage is also seen when *kundoku* is used as a means to facilitate logographic writing. Suppose that a writer seeks to represent the Japanese sentence *muko wa shūto ni homerarekeri* (“the

groom was praised by his father-in-law”) entirely logographically, which is to say in “good” *kanbun* that upholds Literary Sinitic norms. How might he do it? There are many options, but any representation our writer chooses will inevitably end up eliding some elements of Japanese grammar. Sinographs, after all, cannot be declined or conjugated or otherwise morphologically altered, and Chinese prepositions, coverbs (C. *dongjiec* 動介詞), and auxiliary verbs often do not possess precise equivalents among Japanese particles, auxiliary verbs, and supplementary verbs (*hojodōshi* 補助動詞). Even the simplest Japanese sentence will typically involve choices of tense and modality that must either be left unexpressed in *kanbun* or approximated only imperfectly. Many of the most common premodern Japanese auxiliary verbs, such as *ki*, *ri*, *tsu*, *nu*, *rashi*, *meri*, and *kemu* have no conventionalized *kanbun* equivalents, meaning that the vast bulk of Japanese locutions that are not already in the *kundoku* register cannot be fully encoded in *kanbun* at all.¹⁸

While a somewhat wider range of vernacular Japanese locutions can be inscribed in *hentai kanbun*, by definition this comes at the price of introducing lexical elements that are either awkward or nonsensical in Literary Sinitic. For instance, in the thirteenth-century historical chronicle *Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡, we encounter locutions like this: 可停止其儀之趣、武衛令加下知給, which means “The Captain of the Guards issued an order to the effect that (Nakahara Tomochika) must cease his behavior forthwith.”¹⁹ Here, the five Sinographs 令加下知給 comprise a clause that would be read out as *gechi o kuwae shime tamō* 下知を加へ令給ふ, where the construction 令～給 renders the Japanese double honorific expression *~shime-tamō* and indicates that it was an august figure—Minamoto no Yoritomo—who issued the order.²⁰ And with a little imagination, we could go further still. Suppose we were to encounter the following Japanese sentence: *Tokihira-dono wa e-umajikarikeru onna o motometamaikemu*, which means “It would seem Lord Tokihira pursued a woman who was impossible to win.” Such a sentence may of course be translated into *kanbun*, but due to the bevy of inflectional endings it employs, it cannot be *written* in *kanbun*.

Returning, finally, to the somewhat easier challenge posed initially, our hypothetical writer might very well choose to represent the sentence *muko wa shūto ni homerarekeri* (“the groom was praised by his father-in-law”) as 婿為舅之所褒. This sentence happens to share the exact same grammatical structure as the earlier example 賢人為民之所尊 (“The wise man is esteemed by the people”), for which we advanced two possible

kundoku renderings. Note the lack of any explicit marker in the *kanbun* indicating the past tense: again, Chinese is an uninflected language, and it is thus not surprising that locutions written in Literary Sinitic frequently rely upon context and common sense for the determination of tense. This means that any other Literary Sinitic representation for *muko wa shūto ni homerarekeri* our writer chooses, such as 婿褒於舅 or 婿被舅褒, will be equally unable to provide a metaphor of the Japanese auxiliary verb *keri*.²¹

The point of the foregoing is simply to say that if we wish to avoid a nomenclature that overemphasizes the alterity of *kanbun* or implies a simplistic dichotomy between what is native and what is foreign, we must also recognize that as a medium of inscription, *kanbun* by itself can only ever represent a specific register of the Japanese language, and that the closer a *kanbun* locution does come to encoding vernacular Japanese, the further it will need to depart from Literary Sinitic. Even logographic writing classifiable as *hentai kanbun*, which is unambiguously a way of representing Japanese, does not attempt to explicitly indicate most vernacular verbal auxiliaries, and just like *jun kanbun*, it must be enunciated via the application of *kundoku* rules.²² Moreover, while Literary Sinitic is rightly deemed East Asia’s cosmopolitan written language, its relation to true vernacular writing in Japan was in no sense uniformly one of high-prestige to low-prestige. It is true that the use of Literary Sinitic and variants thereof did predominate in official documents, government sponsored histories, and legal statutes, and it was extremely common in religious texts, pledges (*kishōmon* 起請文), family codes (*kakun* 家訓), bequeaths, courtier diaries, and a great many other high-prestige settings. And Sinitic poetry, of course, was practiced assiduously for nearly the entirety of Japanese literary history. But from the beginnings of that history, writing in the “cosmopolitan” Sinitic mode existed alongside a vernacular literature that, while initially set down in partially desemanticized, full-form Sinographs, was also high-prestige. It was not for nothing that Ichijō Kaneyoshi 一条兼良 (1402–1481), widely regarded as the greatest Japanese scholar of the fifteenth century, could remark of Lady Murasaki’s masterwork from almost five centuries earlier, “Among all our country’s greatest treasures, there are none that surpass *The Tale of Genji*.”²³

Hence, if phrases such as “vernacular reading” or “vernacular glossing” are to become standard English equivalents for “*kundoku*,” then the contours of this vernacular should be appropriately sketched, lest readers

conflate it with the morphologically far richer vernacular of classical *monogatari* and autobiographical memoirs (*nikki*).²⁴ Regarding the term “*kanbun*,” I propose that it be retained in English-language Japanological scholarship and allowed a reasonably liberal range of usage, one sufficient to embrace both the usual “Literary Sinitic” sense of the term as well as Hashimoto’s sense of *kanbun* as another variety of Japanese “literary language” (*bungo* 文語). Admittedly, the choice is not without ideological baggage: one downside to the term *kanbun* is that it participates inexorably in the famous dyadic relation of “*wa-kan*” 和漢, most frequently and overtly by being paired with the term *wabun* 和文, “Japanese prose.” In modern usage, the *wa-kan* dyad tends to imply an ontology in which cultural and linguistic phenomena from any era are yoked to an ostensibly transhistorical Japanese identity: *wa* becomes “Japanese” in all the ways salient to the project of uniting language, culture, and ethnicity under the rubric of modern nationhood.²⁵ It need hardly be said that such a view encourages *kan(bun)* to be conceived of as something culturally and linguistically alien—a narrow and anachronistic conception that is belied partly by the interlingual properties of *kundoku* and undermined further by the enormous welter of Japanese historical documents that, while written in (*hentai*) *kanbun*, are *only* understandable as Japanese linguistic artifacts. *Kanbun* was not fundamentally alien, nor was it an adulterant to the efflorescent growth of true vernacular prose writing in the tenth and eleventh centuries; quite the contrary, it lent to the *wabun* tradition a vast stock of tropes and figures drawn from the Chinese classics, which writers like Lady Murasaki drew upon so fruitfully.

Still, an interrogation of the metaphysics informing modern nationhood need not lead to the notion that premodern Japanese literati possessed no sense of “Japan” as a singular geopolitical entity or of “Japanese” as a meaningful cultural and linguistic category. Evidence of a shared consciousness that, absent a convenient adjectival form of the word “country,” might reasonably be called “national” is identifiable among archipelagan elites for as far back as the textual record extends.²⁶ This in itself does not constitute a reason to approve unequivocally of the term *kanbun* or the unselfconscious, retroactive application of it to premodern Japanese works. It is noted only to reject the position that its participation in modern discourses concerning Japanese cultural identity and national literature must fatally compromise it.

Another possible reason to avoid the term *kanbun* is because its literal meaning, “Han writing” or “Chinese writing” (if Han is taken as a

metonym for China), would seem to efface the interlingual character of logographic writing in Japan. This is a fair point, though my own view is that *kanbun* is useful precisely because it does not do this, as it may be understood in Hashimoto's sense to inscribe meaning in Japanese—bearing in mind the limitations outlined above—without making any explicit claim as to whether an individual author thought of himself as writing *in* Japanese or *in* Chinese. That is to say, in contemporary Japanese, the “*kan*” in *kanbun* is more analogous to the term “Sinitic” or the root “Sino-” than to the term “Chinese” or even “Han.” Further, many of the more promising Japan-centered alternatives, such as describing *kanbun* (and *kanshi*) by Japanese authors as being “Sino-Japanese” or “Chinese-style,” are not without downsides of their own. At the most basic level, unless there are identifiable external features of a Literary Sinitic text composed by a Japanese author that unambiguously distinguish it from Literary Sinitic texts composed by Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese authors (such as the presence of uniquely Japanese *hentai kanbun* usages), then the justification for denoting the former with an English term that we would not apply to the latter must lie outside the realm of language. In the case of phraseologies using “Sino-Japanese” as a modifier, such as “Sino-Japanese literature” and “Sino-Japanese poetry,” one justification we might advance is this: the phrases are not meant to impute some covert “Japaneseness” to the language of the Sinographic texts they describe, but simply to name those texts as members of the larger corpus of works that comprise the literature of Japan. In this framing, Michizane's *kanshi* are Sino-Japanese poems not because they are not in the language of Literary Sinitic, but rather because they *are* in that language *and* properly belong to “Japanese literature.” This seems eminently reasonable, though it is a rather different and more cautious rationale for “Sino-Japanese” than that originally proposed by Wixted, which explicitly foregrounded the presumed effects of writers' spoken vernaculars on their compositions in Literary Sinitic.²⁷

Since I am skeptical of making *a priori* linguistic distinctions based not upon manifest features of a text but upon the national provenance or native spoken language of its author, I think “Literary Sinitic” is still probably the best catch-all English phrase available for describing the language of *kanbun* texts; it closely parallels “*kanbun*” in coverage, and unlike “Sino-Japanese,” it does not risk implying non-intelligibility outside Japan.²⁸ And while I have no objection to the use of “Literary Sinitic” in Japan-specific contexts, my desire to retain the term *kanbun*

stems from at least two considerations: First, for most Japanologists, its all-important relation to *kundoku* is more immediately felt than the relation between “Literary Sinitic” and “vernacular reading/vernacular glossing,” phrases that I believe are less successful at capturing the nuances of *kundoku*. Retention of both *kanbun* and *kundoku* in Anglophone scholarship is justified because each is inextricably linked to the other, and together, the terms capture the bidirectional, interlocking relationship between the reading and composition of logographic texts in Japan. Second, I would wholeheartedly echo Matthew Fraleigh’s observation that the use of Japanese terminology helps reinforce the inseparability of *kanbun* from Japan’s broader literary tradition, even as the contemporary contours of that tradition have been shaped by the marginalization of *kanbun* vis-à-vis *wabun*.²⁹

As concerns *kanshi* in particular, I am also inclined to agree with Fraleigh and Ross King that “Sinitic poetry” is generally preferable to other English equivalents for the term *kanshi*, since that word covers poetry by Li Bai and Du Fu just as it covers poems composed by Michizane and Rai San’yō. However, in arguing against this terminology and in favor of “Sino-Japanese” (or “Japanese Sinitic”), Wixted raises the important question of how to handle *kanshi* that breach the traditional norms of *shi*, giving as an example certain “Japanized” features found in some of Mori Ōgai’s *kanshi*.³⁰ These features arose from intentional artistic license, not mere mistakes, and it is interesting to note that there seems to be no generally accepted category of variant Sinitic poetry called “*hentai kanshi*.” As with *kanbun*, *kanshi* that use uniquely Japanese vocabulary, make wordplays or rhymes on Japanese pronunciations of Sinographs, or evince syntactic departures from Literary Sinitic grammar do seem to warrant special designation, since classifying them simply as Sinitic poetry would be analogous to classifying *Azuma kagami*, mentioned earlier, as “*kanbun*” or “Literary Sinitic” with no further qualification. For works that I would be tempted to label “*hentai kanshi*” or “variant Sinitic poetry,” “Sino-Japanese poetry” would also be perfectly apt, though now for reasons of language, not just literary taxonomy; if Michizane’s decidedly non-*hentai* poetry is also to be called “Sino-Japanese,” then some additional means of specifying the difference seems appropriate.³¹

Earlier, I raised the theoretical possibility of a Japanese writer successfully composing in Literary Sinitic entirely by using knowledge of *kundoku* conventions to guide logographic inscription. While I believe that

there were in fact Japanese writers whose mastery of *kundoku* methods as applied to canonical Chinese texts did yield such capabilities, the resulting *kanbun* text would, by definition, lack external indications that its author's inner monologue was in Japanese.³² Moreover, even if one assumes that such compositions are really no more than theoretical possibilities, questions concerning the precise nature and overall extent of *kundoku* mediation in the writing of (*jun*) *kanbun* texts remain important. Not only have they been at the crux of discussions about proper English terminology since at least 1998, when John Wixted first proposed calling the language of Japanese *kanbun* texts “Sino-Japanese,” *kundoku* mediation also relates directly to what is perhaps the thorniest question of all, namely whether works by Japanese authors that do comport with the syntactic and semantic norms of Literary Chinese can ever be legitimately termed “Chinese.”³³

It is a question with practical as well as theoretical implications. In the summer of 2000, the Library of Congress adopted a new classification scheme for *kanshibun* materials, moving from a script-based (and highly Sinocentric) system to one that admits the category of “Sino-Japanese” and thereby takes national provenance into account. Prior to that time, *kanshibun* materials had been shelved according to Chinese dynastic chronology and interfiled with works by Chinese and Korean authors; as Fraleigh observes, such works were unified to Western bibliographers first and foremost by their shared script.³⁴ The change bears significantly upon the investigation of terminology undertaken here, for the new arrangement unmistakably implies that *kanshi*, no less than *waka*, are a part of “Japanese literature,” and it at least leaves open the possibility that the former may even be viewed as *linguistically* Japanese (albeit of the “Sino-” variety). On balance, the new approach seems to me an improvement over the old, though it unavoidably reinforces the nation as the preeminent framework for organizing literary scholarship, something that may be especially misleading when dealing with *kanshibun* works. It is quite conceivable, indeed even probable, that some premodern Japanese literati, such as Zekkai Chūshin 絶海中津 (1336–1405) or Ryūzan Tokken 龍山徳見 (1284–1358), both Zen monks and eminent poets, would have *preferred* their works to appear with those of other writers who, irrespective of ethnicity or national origin, also wrote in Literary Sinitic.³⁵ All such writers were heir to an orthographic *and* a cultural legacy whose fountainhead was China but whose scope was pan-Asian, and all would likely have viewed themselves as operating within the intellectual episteme that, by the Tang Dynasty, was being referenced with

characteristic pith and solemnity as “This Culture” (C. *siwen*, J. *shibun*, K. *simun* 斯文).

The point is simply that we should be open to the possibility that, at least in some cases, the English phrase “in Chinese” might come closest to conveying how premodern Japanese writers using Literary Sinitic actually conceived of their own enterprise. To be sure, the great disadvantage of this phraseology is that it strongly implies an “outward” cultural or ideological orientation that not all Japanese *kanshibun* writers accepted, and a few explicitly rejected.³⁶ But at least as regards language, reference to “Chinese” helpfully underscores something that alternative terminologies may elide, namely the fact that there exist linguistic phenomena in the realm of *kanbun* and *kanshi* that escape representation in *kundoku*. This is particularly true of *kanshi*, where the technical requirements of forms such as the regulated verse (J. *risshi*, C. *lüshi* 律詩) and the quatrain (J. *zekku*, C. *jueju* 絕句) entailed close attention to the distribution of level and oblique tones within each line. Since tonality is a Chinese linguistic feature that is not reflected in *kundoku*, a *kanshi* poet could not compose technically sound, original poetry of this sort solely by transmuting lines crafted via knowledge of *kundoku* into lines of grammatically correct Literary Sinitic. Of course, Japanese poets did not need to know how the tones would have been enunciated by their counterparts in Chang’an or Kaifeng, but they still needed to know which characters carried which tones, meaning that knowledge of some aspects of the Chinese language that escape representation in *kundoku* is implicit in the successful composition of regulated verses and quatrains.³⁷

To be sure, while regulated verse provides a useful limiting case, most Literary Sinitic writing is not bound by such exacting prosodic rules. And while some Japanese *kanshibun* writers might well have imagined themselves as keepers of an explicitly Chinese tradition, this in itself would provide no *linguistic* reason to use the word “Chinese” but not “Japanese” in reference to their works. After all, in elementary terms a language is simply a set of signs accompanied by conventions of usage that, when applied to the signs, enable meaning-making. And as we have already seen, *kundoku* is a system that allows the transmutation of Literary Sinitic into a register of Japanese, and of that Japanese register into a logographic script fully intelligible as Literary Sinitic. This means that a sentence inscribed in *kanbun* must qualify as a *parole* in both languages simultaneously, rendering the terms “Chinese” (or “Sinitic”) and

“Japanese” incomplete by themselves as descriptors of any such inscription.³⁸

Mastery of *kanbun*, even if conceived of along Hashimoto’s lines as a peculiar mode of Japanese inscription, necessarily implies mastery of the rules—syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—of the *language* called Literary Chinese or Literary Sinitic. Here it is important to note that although this language, unlike Old Chinese, Middle Chinese, or Mandarin, is a conventionalized grapholect with no unique phonology, it is still rooted in the Old-Chinese spoken vernacular of the pre-Qin (221–206 BCE) era and most certainly qualifies as a “language.”³⁹ To this extent, a Japanese author capable of producing works of *kanbun* readily intelligible throughout the Sinographic cosmopolis, even if the author does so mainly by recourse to *kundoku* practices, must necessarily “know” the Literary Chinese language. And it is in this sense—of knowing the rules—that it is reasonable to claim, as Edwin Cranston once did, that the most important cultural achievement in early Japan was the “mastery of the Chinese language.”⁴⁰

NOTES

¹ The phrase “Literary Sinitic” seems to have been popularized first by Victor H. Mair; see “Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 53.3 (Aug. 1994): 707–751. “Sino-Japanese” was initially suggested by John Timothy Wixted as a translation of “*kanbun*” when specifying works written by Japanese writers; see Wixted, “*Kambun*, Histories of Japanese Literature, and Japanologists,” *Sino-Japanese Studies* 10.2 (April 1998): 23–31. “Sinitic poetry” is used by Matthew Fraleigh to render *kanshi*; see Fraleigh, *Plucking Chrysanthemums: Narushima Ryūhoku and Sinitic Literary Traditions in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), 20.

² Endymion P. Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 753; Joshua A. Fogel, “New Thoughts on an Old Controversy: *Shina* as a Toponym for China,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 29 (Aug. 2012), passim. Su Zhongxiang 苏仲湘 posited the name of the state of Jing as the origin of the term Zhina 支那, which was first used by Indian monks and, centuries later, gained currency in early-modern Japan. See “Lun ‘Zhina’ yici de qiyuan yu Jing de lishi he wenhua” 论支那一词的起源与荆的历史和文化, *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 4 (April 1979): 34–48, cited in Fogel, 13.

³ Exactly when Literary Sinitic “starts” and what relation it bears to the spoken vernaculars of any era is a matter of ongoing debate. Barbara Meisterernst argues that the consciously “classical” *Hanshu* 漢書 (The history of the Han), completed in 111 CE, may be considered the starting point for the *wenyan* style. See Meisterernst, “Vernacular Elements and Literary Language in Han Period Chinese: A Linguistic Comparison of Corresponding Chapters in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 64.1 (2014): 207–233. Apropos of Wixted’s opposition to the very concept of Literary Sinitic (see note 30 below), in the present essay “Literary Sinitic” is used in the following sense: First and foremost, it is the language of those works of classical Chinese literature that featured most centrally in educational curricula throughout East Asia, beginning with the Four Books and Five Classics (J. *Shisho gokyō*, C. *Sishu wujing* 四書五經), *Xiaojing* (The classic of filial piety), *Zuozhuan* (*Zuo tradition*, a massive commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*), and the *Guliang* and *Gongyang* commentaries on *Chunqiu* 春秋 (The spring and autumn annals). In Japan, these works, along with the histories *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, were widely studied by Heian literati and medieval Gozan monks, and they formed the basis of the *Kangaku* 漢学 curriculum at early-modern domain schools (*hankō* 藩校). Beyond this, “Literary Sinitic” may be thought of as a series of nested circles that would certainly include most of the works by Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan, along with other early “Masters’ Texts” such as *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and would further admit writings by Song-Dynasty “Neo-Confucian” thinkers, this despite the presence of new philosophical vocabulary influenced by Buddhist thought. Idiosyncratic usages traceable to Sanskrit are found in Buddhist Literary Sinitic, but for the purposes of the present essay, the vast majority of Chinese Buddhist texts are considered to be in “Literary Sinitic.” Some of these variations are addressed in Kin Bunkyō, *Literary Sinitic and East Asia: A Cultural Sphere of Vernacular Reading*, edited by Ross King (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 176–178.

⁴ As Ross King and Christina Laffin put it in their preface to the English-language edition of Saitō Mareshi’s 齋藤希史 *Kanbunmyaku to kindai Nihon* 漢文脈と近代日本, “... for us in this book, ‘Literary Sinitic’ and *kanbun* are interchangeable, and refer—however vaguely and indeterminately—to texts composed in sinographs and intended to be intelligible to readers across the Sinographic Cosmopolis.” See Mareshi Saitō, *Kanbunmyaku: The Literary Sinitic Context and the Birth of Modern Japanese Language and Literature*, edited by Ross King and Christina Laffin and translated by Sean Bussell, Matthieu Felt, Alexey Lushchenko, Caleb Park, Si Nae Park, and Scott Wells (Leiden: Brill, 2021), xii. In a related usage, *kanbun* comes close in meaning to *kanseki* 漢籍 and refers not so much to the Literary Sinitic grapholect as to Literary Sinitic *texts*, and in particular the Chinese classics.

- ⁵ Tanaka Sōta 田中草大, *Heian jidai ni okeru hentai kanbun no kenkyū* 平安時代における変体漢文の研究 (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2019), 75–76 and 36. Regarding the second quote, there remains the issue of what exactly Hashimoto meant by *bungo* 文語; I have opted to render it “literary language” for the simple reason that the term is used most frequently to describe the literary language of the vernacular Japanese classics. Linguistically, this covers Early Middle Japanese (中古日本語, 800–1200) and a bit of eighth-century Old Japanese (上代日本語) as represented in the corpus of canonical Japanese literature. Hashimoto’s point is that *kanbun* is simply one (other) type of literary language found in Japan. “Written language” is another possibility, which may be preferred if one feels, as Wixted does regarding the phrases “Literary Sinitic” and “Literary Chinese,” that the word “literary” too strongly connotes *belles-lettres*.
- ⁶ *Honchō monzui* (The literary essence of our country) is a large collection of Literary Sinitic works by Japanese authors. *Nihon shoki* (The chronicles of Japan), commonly known as *Nihongi* 日本紀, is an official court history that also includes material treating deities, legendary heroes, and the creation of the world. For an English translation, see W. G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Publishing, 1989).
- ⁷ A very large number of such terms exist; see Tanaka, *Heian jidai ni okeru hentai kanbun no kenkyū*, 80–81 for an exhaustive listing. Although Hashimoto is generally credited with bringing the compound phrase “*hentai kanbun*” into widespread use, the application of the term *hentai* to Japanized Sinitic prose predates Hashimoto’s work by some decades. As early as 1878, the Meiji polymath Taguchi Ukichi 田口卯吉 (1855–1905) noted the existence in Japan of a “diary style in which the *kanbun* is variant” (漢文の変体なる日記体). Additional examples illustrating the nomenclatural history of *hentai kanbun* may be found in Tanaka, *Heian jidai ni okeru hentai kanbun no kenkyū*, 70–71.
- ⁸ David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 180. *Kundoku* is treated in depth on pp. 169–212. An equally thorough but slightly modified argument may be found in Lurie, “The Development of Writing in Japan,” in *The Shape of Script: How and Why Writing Systems Change*, ed. by Stephen D. Houston (Santa Fe, New Mexico: SAR Press, 2012), 159–185. Vernacular poems appearing in *Nihon shoki* are written using desemanticized Sinographs, with each graph simply representing one syllable.
- ⁹ *Huainanzi* (The masters of Huainan) is a collection of essays on topics germane to effective governance; the conceptual substrate of the work reflects the influence of multiple major schools of early Chinese thought, including “five-phases” (*wuxing*) and *yin-yang* theory, Confucianism, and Daoism. *Nihon*

shoki's cosmogonic account, which is based on *yin-yang* theory, opens with lines drawn from *Huainanzi*.

- ¹⁰ Ross King notes that according to scholars of languages that used cuneiform, glossing practices for individual words (akin to Japanese *kun* readings of Sinographs) are well known, but it is not possible to aver with certainty the existence of systematic, text-level reading approaches analogous to *kanbun kundoku* in the ancient Near East. See King, "Editor's Preface: Vernacular Reading in the Sinographic Cosmopolis and Beyond," in Kin Bunkyō, *Literary Sinitic and East Asia*, xviii. Methods analogous to *kundoku* emerged on the Korean Peninsula prior to their appearance in Japan, and it is likely that émigré scholars from the kingdom of Paekche 百濟 played an instrumental role in developing and popularizing these methods on the archipelago. *Hundok kugyōl* 訓讀口訣 evinces close similarities to *kundoku*, though extant textual examples are fewer and the approach seems not to have been as widely taught in Korea as *kundoku* was in medieval and early-modern Japan. In contemporary Korea, *kugyōl*-like approaches are still found, but *ūmdok* 音讀 (Sino-Korean phonetic reading), which is analogous to Japanese *ondoku*, is predominant. By contrast, Japanese *ondoku* is today mostly associated with the ritual recitation of Buddhist texts, while a style of *kundoku* that was based largely on early-modern reading practices and popularized in the Meiji period remains the principal vehicle through which high-school and university students in Japan begin their study of Literary Chinese. On the terminological challenges facing scholars of pre-modern Korean writing, see Lee SeungJae, "Developing a Terminology for Pre-hangeul Korean Transcription," trans. Marjorie Burge, *Scripta* 8 (Oct. 2016): 25–71. For detailed analyses of *kugyōl*, see Zev Handel, *Sinography: The Borrowing and Adaptation of the Chinese Script* (Leiden: Brill), 62–123 and John Whitman, "The Ubiquity of the Gloss," *Scripta* 3 (2011): 95–121. An overview of glossing practices in many locales, including the medieval West, along with illuminating examples of *kugyōl*, may be found in John Whitman, "The Ubiquity of the Gloss," *Scripta* 3 (2011), 95–121.

In Vietnam, interlineal annotation of Chinese texts by means of a Sinographic script known as *Chữ Nôm* is well attested. However, Handel remains skeptical of the historicity of a systematized Vietnamese vernacular glossing tradition akin to *kugyōl* or *kundoku*; this is due partly to the fact that the historical clues one might adduce to show the existence of a *kundoku*-like system are scant and open to interpretation, and partly to the fact that the typological similarity between Vietnamese and Chinese makes the need for such a system much less pressing. *Chữ Nôm* is discussed at length in Handel's *Sinography*, 124–165, and factors distinguishing vernacular Sinographic writing in Vietnam from the glossing practices that developed in Korea and Japan are reviewed on pp. 226–233.

- ¹¹ Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan: Poetics and Practice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017), 8.
- ¹² As will be clarified later, the assertion is not that logographic writing cannot be *supplemented* in ways that allow a fuller representation of vernacular Japanese; it most definitely can, just not without becoming partly phonographic in the process. Regarding the variance in historical *kundoku* methods, an excellent discussion is given in Kin, *Literary Sinitic and East Asia*, 8–84. On Heian styles in particular, see Kawaguchi Hisao 川口久雄, *Heian-chō no kanbungaku* 平安朝の漢文学 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1996), 92–97. The basic difference between relatively spartan styles heavy on Sinoxenic (*on* 音) readings and styles that were closer to vernacular Japanese remained into modern times. See Atsuko Ueda, “Sound, Script, and Styles: Kanbun Kundokutai and the National Language Reforms of 1880s Japan,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 20 (Dec. 2008): 133–156.
- ¹³ The violation does not compromise intelligibility, and the overall effect is perhaps akin to saying in English something along the lines of “a person who does serves the king.” This is far from the only attested instance of *kundoku* practices that, while perfectly understandable, are a bit awkward in Japanese; others include the transliteration of 既已 as *sude ni sude ni* (“already already”), which is seen in some Meiji-era works. When used adverbially to mean “already,” the Sinographs 既 and 已 are very similar in meaning, and the use of both together was quite common in Literary Sinitic. Each carries the *kun* reading *sude* (*ni*), and not surprisingly, many *kundoku* renditions of 既已 simply gloss the entire expression as *sude ni* (既已). See Kotajima Yōsuke 古田島洋介, “Meiji shoki no kanbun kundoku to *Bunmeiron no gairyaku*” 明治初期の漢文訓読と『文明論之概略』, *Kindai Nihon kenkyū* 16 (1999), 141–161.
- ¹⁴ In the case of *kundoku* (and Korean *kugyōl*), the boundary between reading and translation is notoriously difficult to establish. As Handel points out in an extremely helpful footnote, whether we should consider the reading of a Literary Sinitic text via the application of *kundoku/kugyōl*-type methods as translation, or simply as “the way reading was done,” is almost impossible to answer conclusively because the question is about internal cognitive processes rather than external features of the text. See Handel, *Sinography*, 83, n. 33.
- ¹⁵ As with the term 所 in Old Chinese, the basic sense of the Japanese word *tokoro* is “place” or “location.” It admits a wide range of extended uses, including a “point in time” or a “part” of something (e. g., *omoshirokarikeru tokoro* = “the part they found delightful”). A use that is extremely similar to, and likely derivative of, the Literary Sinitic 所 construction is seen in works of Japanese prose that freely use Sinitic vocabulary (*kango* 漢語) and strike a formal, authoritative tone much like that of *kundokubun*. In Chapter One of *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (fourteenth c.), we have the clause *minkan no ureuru*

tokoro o shirazatsushikaba 民間の愁ふるところを知らざつしかば, meaning “because (those rulers) were ignorant of the fact that the people were aggrieved,”

The use of *tokoro* to make Japanese relative clauses such as *tsukuru tokoro no tera* 造る所の寺, “the temples that were built,” probably stems directly from *kundoku* practices; something very near to “*tsukuru tokoro no tera*” was almost certainly how the Literary Sinitic phrase 所造之寺, which appears in Book 25 of *Nihon shoki* (Taika 1.8.8), was enunciated historically. Occasionally, such relative clauses are even found in works of vernacular prose that are comparatively distant from the tradition of *kanbun-kundoku*, e.g., *korosu tokoro no tori*, “the birds that he killed” (*Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草 sect. 162), which sounds precisely like a *kundoku* rendering of the logographic phrase 所殺之鳥.

- ¹⁶ Much remains unknown about the morphology of Old Chinese, from which Literary Sinitic derives, but there is little evidence that known patterns of affixation were ever grammaticalized into inflectional paradigms. See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “Morphology in Old Chinese,” *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 28.1 (Jan. 2000): 26–51.
- ¹⁷ On the invisibility of *kundoku*, see Semizu Yukino, “Invisible Translation: Reading Chinese Texts in Ancient Japan,” in *Translating Others*, vol. 2, ed. by Theo Hermans (Manchester, U. K.: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006), 283–295.
- ¹⁸ This problem may of course be solved if one departs from Literary Sinitic and allows fully desemantized characters to be mixed in, as in the so-called *senmyō-gaki* 宣命書き or “proclamation style” of writing used during the Nara and early Heian periods. In this style, the locution *muko wa shūto ni homerarekeri* might be written 婿者舅仁褒良礼家利, where the desemantized characters are made graphically smaller (a common technique in *senmyō-gaki*) and function like *okurigana* 送り仮名 in modern Japanese. The approach demonstrates that an essentially modern mix of typographically distinct logographic and phonographic script, ordered according to Japanese syntax, was hit upon quite early.
- ¹⁹ *Azuma kagami*, Jishō 4.8.19.
- ²⁰ Although *hentai kanbun* constructions such as *shime-tamō* 令～給 make no sense in orthodox Literary Sinitic, skilled readers of Literary Sinitic will still generally have some access to *hentai kanbun* texts. Evidence for this is provided by *Azuma kagami* itself, which was sufficiently intelligible to one Qing-Dynasty scholar, Weng Guangping 翁廣平 (1760–1843), to permit him—albeit after seven years’ labor—to write what was then the most substantial historical study of Japan ever produced in China. This impressive work, titled *Wuqi jing bu* 吾妻鏡補 (Supplement to the *Azuma Kagami*), has received modest attention in Japan but awaits detailed explication in Anglophone

scholarship. It is available online through the Chinese Text Project (<https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=487906>), and the general outline of Weng's accomplishments and the importance of the *Wuqi jing bu* is given in Feng Zuozhe 冯佐哲 and Wang Xiaoqi 王晓秋, "Azuma kagami and Wuqi jing bu: Historical Evidence of Sino-Japanese Cultural Interaction," translated by Joshua A. Fogel, *Sino-Japanese Studies* 1.2 (March 1989): 28–40.

- ²¹ Outside the realm of Literary Sinitic, of course, Sinographic representations of several auxiliary verbs and particles may be found. The Sinograph 鳧, which means "duck" (the animal) and is pronounced *keri* in Japanese, is sometimes used in early-modern texts to denote the auxiliary *keri*. I am unsure whether this usage arose to save space or for purely ludic reasons, but it finds precedent in much older *kun-gana* 訓仮名 practices: in *Man'yōshū*, 鳧 appears as the particle *kamo*, which is another word for "duck" (also written 鴨), and the compound *kerikamo* 鳧—*keris* and *kamos*—arose later as a humorous epithet for *waka* poets. Likewise, the combination 間敷 (*majiki*, *majiku*), meaning "ought not," is extremely common in early-modern writing. As is often the case with *kun-gana*, the reader must render 間敷 into the correct conjugation based upon context: *majiki* is an attributive form while *majiku* is continuative.

The verbal prefix 被, seen in the second alternative 婿被舅褒, may indicate the passive voice in modern Mandarin. This usage dates at least to the Six Dynasties era (third to sixth centuries) and was common in Literary Sinitic prose thereafter, though it was most frequently affixed to verbs describing bad or unwelcome things. During Japan's medieval and early-modern periods, 被 became a commonplace marker of the Japanese passive conjugation *~ru/raru* in variant *kanbun*. Since the *~ru/raru* conjugation may also be used as an honorific, 被 was extended to cover this sense as well, with the Japanese honorific verb *nasaru* ("to do") frequently appearing as 被成 or 被為 in historical documents. This departure from Chinese usage is exactly analogous to that seen above in the pattern 令~給: in both orthodox and variant *kanbun*, the Sinograph 令 may represent the inflecting suffix *~shimu*, indicating either the causative voice (in keeping with the Chinese sense of 令) or, in variant *kanbun*, an honorific auxiliary verb unique to Japanese.

- ²² Boundaries, again, are unavoidably fuzzy. While I prefer to reserve the phrase *hentai kanbun* for inscription that is mostly or entirely logographic, *hentai kanbun* is sometimes grouped together with *sōrōbun* 候文, a formal written style used extensively in documents throughout the late medieval and early-modern eras and in letters into modern times. Absent some qualification, however, this is as misleading as grouping *hentai kanbun* with Literary Sinitic. In most cases, *sōrōbun* freely mixes *kanji* and *kana* and often requires few if any syntactical transpositions to read, apart from some very minor conventions such as using 不 before verbs or adjectives to indicate negatives (e. g., writing

shirazu, “I don’t know,” as 不知). Still, it is impossible to establish rigid stylistic boundaries, and we might ask whether a line like the following could be included within the broader ambit of *hentai kanbun*: 表売場衆、随分声を掛、賑々舗可致候 *omote uriba shū, zuibun koe o kake, niginigishiku itasu beku sōrō* (“the floor clerks must address customers in a loud voice and maintain a lively, upbeat demeanor”). The line is from *Eiroku* 永祿, an eighteenth-century set of company bylaws (*tana jōhō* 店定法) for the Shirokiya 白木屋 drapery. Note the use of the Sinograph 舗, which functions like 敷 did in *majiki/majiku* 間敷 (see n. 18) and denotes the continuative form of the adjective *niginigishi* 賑々 (“lively”). It must be read as the continuative form here because it is adverbially modifying *itasu* 致.

- ²³ 我が国の至宝は源氏の物語のすぎたるはなし (*Kachō yojō* 花鳥余情, 1472). Kaneyoshi was not alone in his high valuation of *Genji*. “Prestige” may of course be conceptualized in various ways, but whether measured by the volume of textual production, the social status of a text’s (or a genre’s) readership, or later scholarly attention, true vernacular literature possessed substantial prestige throughout premodern Japanese history. This was especially the case for vernacular poetry (*waka*), but also became so for vernacular prose fiction well before the early-modern *kokugaku* 国学 or modern *kokubungaku* 国文学 movements. In the best cases, premodern Japanese prose fiction attained heights of narrative complexity and psychological interiority akin to that of the modern novel, and while it was not infrequently maligned by Buddhist and Confucian critics, it received considerable approbation—and serious hermeneutical attention—from major medieval literati, including Fujiwara Teika, Asukai Masaari, Abutsu-ni, Yoshida Kenko, and many others.
- ²⁴ Representative examples include *Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記 (c. 975), *Sarashina nikki* 更級日記 (c. 1060), and *Izayoi nikki* 十六夜日記 (c. 1282), rhetorically complex works of vernacular Japanese.
- ²⁵ A detailed analysis of these issues is given in Jason Webb, “Beyond *Wa-Kan*: Narrating *Kanshi*, Reception, and Sociolects of Poetry,” in *Proceedings for the Association of Japanese Literary Studies* 5 (Summer 2004): 245–259.
- ²⁶ It is interesting to note in this connection that the term “international” is widely used in current scholarship to describe intercourse between premodern East Asian polities. Its Westphalian ring notwithstanding, such a description is not inaccurate, for an “imagined community” in the sense of Benedict Anderson need not be held to exist among the general populace for something quite like it to be present among the small cadre of elites involved in domestic administration, diplomacy, and overseas trade. With respect to language in particular, a keen awareness of the linguistic differences between what was spoken on the archipelago and what could be set down in orthodox Literary Sinitic is *possibly* suggested by Ō no Yasumaro’s famous preface to *Kojiki*. I

believe that it is, though Lurie contests this interpretation. For his arguments, see *Realms of Literacy*, 247–250 and especially “The Origins of Writing in Early Japan: From the 1st to the 8th Century C. E.” (Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2001), 300–310, which provides a pathbreaking analysis of Yasumaro’s preface.

- ²⁷ “[T]he Sino-Japanese written by Japanese, like the Latin written by late-medieval, Renaissance, and even later practitioners, often shows the influence of the writer’s vernacular; hence the insistence on its being called Sino-Japanese.” John Timothy Wixted, “*Kambun*, Histories of Japanese Literature, and Japanologists,” *Sino-Japanese Studies* 10.2 (April 1998), 23.
- ²⁸ The reason “Sino-Japanese” carries this risk is because its most common use is probably in the phrase “Sino-Japanese pronunciations,” referring to *on* 音 readings of Sinographs. Though originally based on Chinese pronunciations, in almost all cases, *on* readings are completely unintelligible to those who don’t speak Japanese.
- ²⁹ Fraleigh, *Plucking Chrysanthemums*, 8–9.
- ³⁰ John Timothy Wixted, “‘Literary Sinitic’ and ‘Latin’ as Transregional Languages: With Implications for Terminology Regarding ‘*Kanbun*,’” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 276 (March 2018).
- ³¹ Besides objecting to the belletristic connotations of the word “literary,” Wixted’s opposition to the phrase “Literary Sinitic” is rooted in a deeper skepticism regarding the ontological status of Literary Sinitic itself: “‘Classical Chinese’ (or Literary Sinitic), to say nothing of ‘standard classical Chinese,’ is an abstraction, a fiction” (ibid., 5); “Where does ‘Literary Sinitic’ end and ‘Vernacular Sinitic’ begin?” (ibid., 7). As with *jun kanbun*, *hentai kanbun*, and *sōrōbun*, the parameters of Literary Sinitic are certainly fluid and open to contestation. What counts as Literary Sinitic depends to some extent on stylistic preferences that are inherently subjective: the magisterial *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historian, c. 91 BCE) generally seems to qualify, but sticklers for the strictly “classical” *guwen* (古文) style will object to the presence of various vernacularisms found throughout that work (cf. Barbara Meisterernst’s analysis of *Shiji* and *Hanshu* referenced above). Pragmatically, however, this seems insufficient reason to abandon the concept of Literary Sinitic (or Literary Chinese) altogether, and the question of whether a work of *kanbun* composed in Japan can be adequately classified as Literary Sinitic appears easy enough to answer: Rai San’yō’s *Nihon gaishi* 日本外史 (An unofficial history of Japan, 1827), though famously criticized by some of his countrymen as being untrue to “authentic” Chinese style, was later published in China and appraised there as recalling the spare, archaic register of *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (fourth century BCE). Fully intelligible to Chinese readers who had learned their *wenyanwen* entirely through Chinese texts, and fully intelligible to Japanese readers trained in

kanbun-kundoku, *Nihon gaishi* (An unofficial history of Japan) most assuredly counts as “Literary Sinitic,” even if it might be qualified further as evincing certain minor stylistic quirks.

- ³² That I believe such a *kundoku-to-kanbun* method of Literary Sinitic composition could be successful in real life probably needs a stronger defense than I can presently offer. But I would begin by pointing to works of *hentai kanbun* that are classified as such almost entirely because of deviations in vocabulary, not “grammar” as it is usually conceived. It is a fact that in some medieval Japanese documents, as well as in works such as *Goseibai shikimoku* 御成敗式目 (a thirteenth-century legal statute), we find quite complex sentence structures that comport with Literary Sinitic norms and whose re-vocalization in Japanese requires substantial syntactic rearrangements. Since such texts were always intended to be read in Japanese (their logographic inscription being mainly a matter of formality and tradition), it is reasonable to assume that the writers of such texts were producing them by “thinking” in a kind of *kundokubun* and then writing in a *kanbun* that was Japanized at the level of vocabulary but not syntax. At this point, all that would be needed for such a writer to compose a text fully readable as Chinese and intelligible throughout the Sinographic cosmopolis would be to steer clear of “made-in-Japan” vocabulary items. I fully acknowledge that there is a certain circularity to this hypothesis, since the most likely way he would know which *kango* 漢語 words made perfect sense in Chinese would be through an extensive education in the Chinese classics! However, in this regard, he is really not so far away from his counterparts in, say, Qing-Dynasty China, who would acquire their own sense of what was legitimate *wenyanwen/guwen* 古文 and what was not through precisely the same classical education.
- ³³ Arguing against Wixted’s position, Peter Kornicki (2010) expressed unusually strong support for retaining “literary Chinese” as a descriptor of *kanbun*, asking rhetorically “. . . when the learned were writing in literary Chinese in those three societies [China, Korea, and Japan] or in the Ryūkyū kingdom, is there any room for doubting that they considered themselves indeed to be writing in literary Chinese rather than something different?” See Kornicki, “A Note on Sino-Japanese: A Question of Terminology,” *Sino-Japanese Studies* 17 (2010), 36. Wixted’s 2018 paper cited above is in large measure a response to Kornicki.
- ³⁴ Fraleigh, *Plucking Chrysanthemums*, 7–8. The Library of Congress was not alone in this regard: U. C. Berkeley’s extensive East Asian collection once employed a physical card catalogue organized mainly by Sinographic determinatives (“radicals,” 部首). This entire catalogue was then laboriously redone on a national basis, requiring users to look up texts by Romanized titles.
- ³⁵ Zekkai is often regarded as the greatest *shi* poet in Japanese history. He had the honor of exchanging poems with the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, who was curious about Japan and summoned Zekkai for an audience in 1376.

Ryūzan emigrated to China in 1301 when he was seventeen years old and became well established in the Chinese Chan (Zen) community; he did not return to Japan for almost fifty years.

- ³⁶ An example of such rejection is provided by the “domestic” reorientation of Literary Sinitic that occurred during the middle and late Heian period. As Ōe no Koretoki put it in his preface to *Nikkanshū* (日観集, “Collection of observing Japan”), “Elevating what is distant and denigrating what is close at hand—this is what ordinary people do. . . . Our court has long sought from afar the poetry of Chinese literati while neglecting the writing of Japan” 夫貴遠賤近、是俗人之常情 . . . 我朝遙尋漢家之謠詠、不事日域之文章. *Nikkanshū* itself is no longer extant, but the broader interest in specifically Japanese works of *kanshibun* is reflected in the names of several other Heian collections, such as *Fusōshū* 扶桑集 (995; *Fusō* (Fusang) is an elegant name for Japan), *Honchō reisō* 本朝麗藻 (1010) and *Honchō monzui* 本朝文粹 (1060). See Kawaguchi, *Heian-chō no kanbungaku*, 202–203. Actual poetic praxis changed too. As detailed in Wiebke Denecke’s seminal paper on Heian-era *kudaishi* 句題詩 (“topic poetry” in which one composes in response to a single line from an existing Sinitic poem or on a “topic phrase” known as a *kudai* 句題), over the course of the Heian period, Japanese *kanshi* poets shifted away from topical compositions on lines from canonical Chinese poems and towards composing on invented topics; this took them away from the Chinese tradition as such and brought them into closer dialog with the vernacular *waka* tradition. See Denecke, “‘Topic Poetry is All Ours:’ Poetic Composition on Chinese Lines in Early Heian Japan,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67.1 (June 2007): 1–49. Notwithstanding my reservations about the rationale informing Wixted’s original use of the phrase “Sino-Japanese,” in light of the unique developmental trajectory of *kudaishi*, it is difficult to think of a better rendition of it into English than Denecke’s “Sino-Japanese Topic Poetry.”
- ³⁷ The situation is different for so-called “ancient-style poetry” (*J. kōtaishi*, *C. gutishi* 古体詩), in which close attention to the distribution of level and oblique tones is not required. This type of prosodically freer poetry developed in response to the complex requirements of regulated verse, which along with quatrains and extended regulated verses (*J. hairitsu*, *C. pailū* 排律), comprised “recent-style poetry” (*J. kintaishi*, *C. jintishi* 近体詩). Ancient-style poetry gained popularity in medieval Japan and, at least in a technical sense, was easier to approach than recent-style verse. However, ancient-style poetry still requires rhymes on even-numbered lines, and not all Chinese rhymes correspond neatly to rhymes in Japanese Sinoxenic pronunciations.
- ³⁸ While *parole* may simply mean “speech,” the Saussurean sense of the term subsumes both written and spoken uses of language.

- ³⁹ Michael Fuller, *An Introduction to Literary Chinese* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 1.
- ⁴⁰ Edwin Cranston, “Asuka and Nara Culture: Literacy, Literature, and Music,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 453.