“Beyond Wa-kan: Narrating *Kanshi*, Reception, and Sociolects of Poetry”

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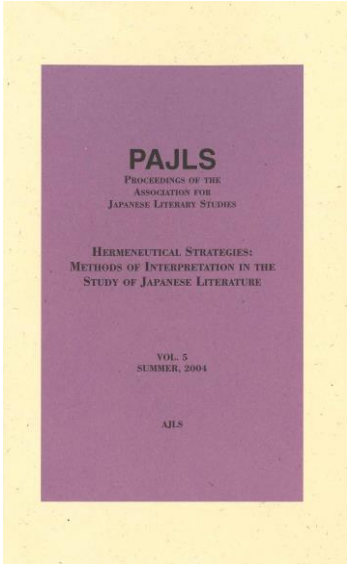

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BEYOND *WA-KAN*: NARRATING *KANSHI*, RECEPTION, AND SOCIOLECTS OF POETRY

Jason Webb

For the purposes of this essay I take *hermeneutics* as a term broadly designating interpretation and the precepts—spoken and unspoken—upon which acts of interpretation are based. My concern here is not so much to acknowledge the possibility of differing interpretations of a single work, such as might be the case, say, for a history of *Genji* commentary. Rather, I seek to consider the structural forces that underlie acts of narration themselves. Ultimately we students of Japanese literature shape our research, and in a sense *tell our stories*, all the while being guided by a variety of available narrative formulae, "narrative tropes" as Hayden White would label them. Of special interest to me, because my own research involves the presence of Chinese-language materials in ancient Japan, is the prominence of one such narrative trope, the so-called *wa-kan* 和漢 dialectic.

Modernity, I will argue, broke the back of *wa-kan*. Its two elements, translated as "Japanese" and "Chinese," or sometimes "Japaneseness" and "Chineseness," simply no longer can be regarded as analogous terms, nor, within the parameters of current discourse about Japan, shall they ever be. Yet the nature of their shattered semantic equilibrium (a problem deeper than just a nativist valuation of things Japanese over those Chinese) provides insights into a range of important issues: the role of the literary canon in the formation of modern Japanese identity, the second-class status typically accorded to *kanshibun* 漢詩文 (by which I mean the Chinese-language prose and poetry composed in the archipelago), and the relentless intrusion of nationalist conceptions into narratives of cultural transmission and reception. Appreciating ways that this famous binary has been misused, I will argue further, may in fact yield new methods for approaching ancient texts.

In modern Japanese, *kan* retains the same semantic flexibility it has demonstrated for centuries, equally capable of signifying time (the Han dynasty); space (portions of the mainland); ethnicity (the "Han race"); language (variously rendered); or an undifferentiated *Chinese culture*. *Kan*, moreover, may just as easily denote *one* of these categories or a conjunction of two or more; thus with *kan* many semantic configurations are possible. Not so with *wa*. Somewhere along its philological journey

into modernity the initial *kan*-like versatility of *wa*—indeed, its semantic restiveness—was stilled, and *wa* came to denote, singly, an *ontological unity* of language, ethnicity, and geopolitical boundaries crafted in accord with the ideology of Japan as a burgeoning nation-state. Current usage of *wa*, chiefly as a prefix announcing all things Japanese, is testament to the vast success of the metaphysicians of Japanese nationalism in melding together these three main components of modern Japanese identity.

Usages of *wa* in Nara and Heian texts, however, tell a more complicated story. In them *wa* flickers with semantic plurality, denoting variously space but not ethnicity, ethnicity but not language, language but not space. Take, for instance, the *Wamyō ruiju shō* 和名類聚抄 (938?; often abbreviated as *Wamyōshō*), a mid-Heian encyclopedia compiled by Minamoto Shitagō 源順. As the title indicates, one purpose of this text was to provide *wa* pronunciations (和名) to difficult characters; thus the usage of *wa* here was foremost linguistic. Shitagō seems to have felt that certain words and phrases had become for his contemporaries difficult to read, and he set out to solve that problem by furnishing brief definitions and phonetic glosses, rendered in *man'yōgana*, for the characters and compounds he saw as most unintelligible.

Yet the manner in which the preface to his encyclopedia describes the sources of these hard to understand items is telling. In his preface, Shitagō characterizes these materials as 和漢之書, "texts of *wa-kan*." Again, all of the items Shitagō included in his encyclopedia were excerpted from texts written in some idiom of Chinese, and felt by him to be in need of explication. The fact that Shitagō categorized some of the sources as *wa* texts indicates that his usage in the preface had a semantic roominess alien to its modern counterpart: put simply, for Shitagō Chinese-language texts produced in the archipelago were *wa.* Thus on the heels of the linguistic-oriented usage of *wa* in the title of *Wamyōshō* comes another usage of *wa* merely signifying *provenance*, irrespective of language.

The point in observing the differences between these proximate usages of *wa* is not to expose a contradiction; rather, it is to argue that *perceiving them as contradictory is anachronistic and beholden to the premises of nationalism.* Taken seriously, Heian semantic norms of *wa-kan* are broad enough to provoke thought about the postulates that are hidden behind a modern day skeptical inquiry such as, "Why would a *wa* text have required a *wamyō* gloss?" In other words, *wa* denoting Chinese-language materials is a Heian usage that defies modern day "common sense" and thereby lays bare its historical contingency and ideological slant. The *wa* of *Wamyōshō* is patently not the modern, nation-based, monolingual *wa*, but rather a semantically changeable term that manifests

tenth-century flexibility of conceptions regarding language, place, and ethnicity.

In this way, Heian *wa-kan* is variable enough to denote at certain times merely two linguistic modes, and at other times simply geographic space—but neither with the conclusive finality that the *wa* side of modern *wa-kan* suggests. Take, as another example, the *Wakan rōei shū* 和漢朗詠集 (1013), a volume that contains verses or verse excerpts composed 1) by mainlanders in a classical Chinese idiom; 2) by Nara and Heian poets in some version of the same; and 3) by Nara and Heian poets in a Yamato idiom. One fundamentally unanswerable question about this anthology is whether category two of these materials, i.e. Chinese-language poetry written by Japanese, belongs strictly to the *wa* or the *kan* designated by the title. If *wa-kan* there denotes language, then category two is *kan*; if, on the other hand, *wa-kan* denotes provenance, then category two is *wa*. According to Heian philological norms, it can go either way. But if it is the case that *wa* here too merely signaled provenance, as exhibited by the *Wamyōshō* preface above, one again would have to confront the rather startling (but I think historically accurate) fact that for compiler Fujiwara Kintō 藤原公任 (966-1041), Chinese-language texts composed in the archipelago were, collectively, a *constituent*, rather than the supposed antithesis, of *wa*.

So long as ancient *wa* is adduced as the proto-national version of the *wa* of the modern nation-state, however, this semantic looseness cannot be tolerated. Scholars whose research is guided in one way or another by Japanese nationalism regularly perform the philological equivalent of a *yokei na sewa*, officiously foisting upon early usages of *wa* the distinctively modern triumvirate of Japanese identity. In the process, the operating presentist/universalist biases are obscured: so *wa* now is, the argument goes, it has always been. With the semantic strangeness of ancient *wa* thus suppressed, appearances of the term in the very earliest of documents are construed as affirmation, ostensibly bestowed by the classical past, of what is in fact a relatively recent philosophical construct, the *wa* of modern Japanese cultural identity.

The skewing of the *wa-kan* dichotomy, with one side retaining its basic historical flexibility and the other transforming into a taut bundle of nationalist precepts, has generated a kind of present-day linguistic neurosis. In modern Japanese, for example, the term *kanshi* is of such relentlessly fluctuating ambiguity that one can hardly use it without immediately appending some sort of a clarification. *Kanshi*: by that I mean poetry from China; *kanshi*: by that I mean Han dynasty *fu* 賦; *kanshi*: by that I mean *wasei kanshi* 和製漢詩; et cetera. Once broached, *kanshi* thus practically

cries out for its own explication. Part of the seemingly irresolvable ambiguity of this word admittedly arises from whether *shi* is meant to denote a historically specific poetic form or the broader modern sense of *poetry*: in modern discourse, ancient poetic genres such as *fu* and *ci* 詞 are often subsumed by the all-encompassing *shi*. But the real problem is that *kan* performs multiple tasks: in the case of denoting poetry composed on the mainland, it represents language *and* place (or possibly ethnicity and historicity, case by case); but when denoting poetry composed in the archipelago, it necessarily represents *only* language.

In that sense the proprietors of nationalist discourse inscribed into modern Japanese language a conceptual double bind, one that is revealed by the still robust historical flexibility of *kan*. Here we see clearly why the symmetry of *wa-kan* has fallen off-kilter. That is, had *kan* been melded into a rigid metaphysical conglomeration of language, place, and ethnicity truly analogous to the modern *wa*, it would have rendered rather awkward the basic question of how "ethnic Japanese" of premodern times could have been so perennially competent in a language that—according to the logic of modern *wa*—should be the sole precinct of "ethnic Chinese;" conversely, were *kan* used *exclusively* to denote a linguistic medium, dissociated from place and ethnicity, then one might eventually demand to know why *wa* too is not similarly divisible. Appreciating the fundamental semantic asymmetry of the modern version of *wa-kan* thus propels us into the very heartland of modern Japanese identity politics, and indeed to the present diminished status of *kanshibun* in the canon of Japanese literature. The question at hand might be posed as follows: do our current conceptions of premodern Japanese literature possess room enough for *kan*?

"CHINA:" PURGE AND RESTORATION

Of late it has become almost a given to regard the *kana*-based canon of classical Japanese literature as an ideologically motivated and institutionally sanctioned construct, an elaborate assemblage intended, like many a "national literature," to showcase cultural achievement within a conceptual order framed by the nation-state. Often overlooked in the scholarly pursuit of the constructedness of the *kana*-based canon, however, are the complex processes of reduction and erasure that also contributed to its now familiar shape. Credit for the clearest articulation of a larger place for *kana* and Japaneseness predicated upon on a degradation and exclusion of the Edo-period mode of research known as *kangaku* 漢学 usually is given to Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801), but in fact the processes of displacement took much longer than his moment of high polemicism. What motivated these processes, and how were they carried out?

As Tomi Suzuki has chronicled, the move to expel *kanshibun* from the canon of Japanese literature gathered intensity in the 1890's, via a confluence of factors including the *genbun itchi* 言文一致 movement; a desire to present, in a manner approximating the conceptions of French historian of literature Hippolyte Taine (1828-93), literature as a manifestation of inherent national "race" and spirit; and the revaluation of works authored by Heian women as demonstrative of private, unmediated Japanese expression.[1] Scholars Mikami Sanji 三上参次 (1865-1939) and Takatsu Kuwasaburō 高津鍬三郎 (1864-1921) declared in their *Nihon bungaku shi* (1890) that "a national literature is the body of writing in which the people of a nation have expressed their particular thoughts, feelings, and imagination *in their national language*."[2]

It is no terrible exaggeration to say that for most of the twentieth century such a conception was the reigning force in the study of Japanese literature, applied (for reasons already discussed) even to times far remote from issues of nation, monolingualism, and the character of the people. Until *kanshibun* was removed from its complicated historical coexistence with *kana* writing, it would seem, the latter would not be able to take its place, alone and in comfort, as the quintessential medium of the Japanese national literary tradition. One might even say that a significant strain of early modern Japanese identity is based on the ostentatious purgation of Chineseness, in whatever form the latter might be perceived.

Even after World War II, the continuing institutional focus on *kana* literature by the *kokubungaku* 國文学 literary establishment so marginalized the value of *kanshibun* that Kojima Noriyuki, pioneer postwar scholar of the Chinese-language writings of the Nara and Heian periods (as well as the role of imported texts), felt compelled in 1968 to entitle his major work concerned with those topics, *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku* 國風暗黒時代の文学, or *Literature of the Dark Age of the Native Style*. Needless to say the notion of a "Dark Age"—like its now obsolescent counterpart in European historiography—is a moniker meant to fill a gap perceived between two poles of cultural brilliance, in this case the period between *Man'yōshū* 萬葉集 (759) and *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (905). Yet what characterizes these years in the Nara and Heian courts can hardly be said to be a dearth of literary activity; rather (especially in the first half of the ninth century) there was a veritable

[1] Tomi Suzuki, "Gender and Genre: Modern Literary Histories and Women's Diary Literature," in Shirane, Haruo and Tomi Suzuki, eds. *Inventing the Classics*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 74-78.

[2] Suzuki, 77. Translation hers, emphasis mine. From Mikami Sanji and Takatsu Kuwasaburō, *Nihon bungaku shi*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kinkodō, 1890), p. 29.

effusion of court-sponsored poetry—albeit in the mode of *kanshi*. Thus the implication of Kojima's title (despite his apparent passion for the topic) is thus that Chinese-language poems, even authored by Heian sovereigns themselves, somehow comprise a discursive category separate from the "native style."

Such a generalized sentiment, together with certain norms of postwar Anglo-American literary studies, contributed to the fundamental omission of early *kanshibun* from the canon of English translations of premodern Japanese literature: notions that these writings were somehow "un-Japanese;" that the predominance of the banquet style, rife with praise for the sovereign, made them difficult to appreciate; and that their heavy allusiveness to Chinese sources prevent a coherent rendering into English without extensive, cumbersome annotations. Even now the reputation of *kanshi* as being a hard read persists among Anglo-American scholars: linguistically difficult, thematically conventional, and, in any case, not representative of the literary achievement of Nara and Heian, much less of Japan as a whole. There is truth to some of these conclusions; others, I argue, say more about prevailing critical approaches and longstanding assumptions about Japanese literature than they do about *kanshi*. In the great postwar enterprise of rendering into English the "greatest hits" of the *kanabungaku* canon, *kanshi*—and by extension *kanshibun*—has remained the pre-eminent Other, consistently suppressed, omitted, or held in low regard for the sake of perpetuating the fabula of a monolingual nation-based Japanese literary tradition.

One might be tempted to draw the conclusion that the first cohort of post WWII Anglo-American scholars simply replicated the generalized disdain among post-war *kokubungakusha* for treating seriously either *kanshibun* or writings from the continent, but clearly there were other factors that affected their work. Little appreciated anymore about foundational studies such as Brower and Miner's *Japanese Court Poetry* is the impulse—heterodox in its time—to research *waka* poetry *at all*, given the status of Japan as a recently dispatched enemy and the perception, then widely held, of Japan's classical culture as basically derivative. The subordination of continental materials and *kanshibun* in that landmark study can be accounted for in part by its authors' sense of their mission as writing against the grain of a heavily institutionalized Anglo-American sinocentrism. There is then some irony in the fact that *kanshibun* now is the preeminent Other of Japanese literary studies, because it was precisely its perceived affiliation with cultural centrality, be it the dominance of Edo-period Neo-Confucianism that Norinaga found repellent, or twentieth-century Anglo-American scholarly preoccupations with the

Middle Kingdom resisted by Brower and Miner, which in each case set the stage for its current marginalized status.

The challenge before us then is one of recuperation, how to "let *kanshibun* in" to the purview of classical Japanese literary studies: what will happen to our notions of a Japanese literary heritage? If the upcoming conference at Harvard University ("New Approaches to Early Japanese Textuality: Boundaries, Genres and Contexts of Sino-Japanese Literature [*kanshibun*]," May 2004) manages to succeed, once and for all, in establishing *kanshibun* research as a kind of official and active "subfield" of Japanese literary studies, what then should this new orientation take as its objects and objectives? In what ways will *kanshibun* research intrinsically call into question long-standing conventions of literary history, ethno-linguistic identity? Moreover, if we identify *kanshibun* research as a kind of *emerging* field, on what principles and assumptions should that emergence be based?

One tactic, whose enactment in a sense already has begun, is to shore up attention to neglected *kanshibun* by methods reminiscent of what Gayatri Spivak has called "strategic essentialism." Though she herself might be surprised to see the term applied to a subaltern that is linguistic rather than human, the parallel desire to reinstate what has been throughout the twentieth century consistently excluded or denigrated seems valid enough. One therefore must applaud anthology projects such as those undertaken by Bradstock and Rabinovich,[3] which provide English translations and commentary to *kanshi* works selected on principles of temporal proximity and linguistic similitude. Such publications are of immediate heuristic value as counterweights to the more entrenched *waka* canon, enabling students to gain exposure to premodern Japanese poetry composed originally in two different languages. In that sense *kanshi* anthologies, like many other anthology projects generated by the salutary logic of strategic essentialism, fulfill an important role of canon supplementation and expansion.

Nonetheless we must consider carefully the implications of sequestering *kanshibun* as an entity unto itself to be anthologized or researched. Should our goal be, in producing translations of *kanshibun*, the construction of a new "parallel" canon? Poetic anthologies all too often present poems with minimal annotations, afloat on an otherwise blank page—"verbal icons" severed from the social contexts that enabled their

[3] Bradstock, Timothy R. and Judith N. Rabinovitch, *An anthology of Kanshi (Chinese verse) by Japanese poets of the Edo period (1603-1868)* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997); I am told that a second anthology focusing on earlier *kanshi* is in the works.

production and through which they acquired meaning.[4] It seems to me rather that a renewed awareness of the *interrelatedness* of *kana* and *kanshibun* idioms, and indeed respective poetic forms, will shed light on both and, hopefully, enlarge conceptions of classical Japanese literature. We must ask, for example, how *kanshi* and *kanbun* functioned alongside of *waka* and *wabun* in various milieux, courtly or otherwise. We must also be attentive to the fact that a great many of those who composed *kanshibun* were steeped in writings from the continent, and often actively engaged in the complex processes of quotation, elaboration, and commentary. How were these imported texts understood? To what degree did such engagements coincide with (or deviate from) mainland and peninsular hermeneutical norms? Queries of this sort, directed at the entire notion of *kanshibun* composition and how it functioned in various social contexts, compel us, on one hand, toward the precise details of the historical moment, and on the other, to a kind of broad perspective of premodern, pan-Asian culture—and to telling stories about culture on-the-move.

NARRATING RECEPTION: ANTI-INFLUENCE AND THE INEXORABILITY OF NATIONALISM

If the modern notion of *wa* designates a *core* of Japaneseness based on a inseparable unity of language, ethnicity, and place, under such a schema it follows that *kan* (either language or a reified culture) is fundamentally *accretive*. Thus the binary of *wa-kan*—in its modern sense—is spatialized as a relationship between interiority and exteriority, and temporalized as something prior versus that which is subsequent. That logic (equally applicable, it would seem, to the modern Japanese individual as to the Japanese state) posits *wa* as innate and *kan* as learned, *wa* as sincere and direct and *kan* as styled and mediated. Hence the fallacious but still occasionally invoked notion that eighth-century *kanshi* anthology *Kaifūsō* 懐風藻 exhibits Japanese *tatemae* (ceremonious, mannered, inauthentic) while its temporal counterpart *Man'yōshū* upholds Japanese *honne* (natural, spontaneous, candid). In other words, *kana* expression is regarded as less mediated, closer to what is essentially Japanese.[5] The same basic idea is expressed in shorthand by *wakon kansai*

[4] Such a format may be more the result of publishers' preferences than of scholarly conviction.

[5] Analogous to this characterization of the *Kaifūsō* and the *Man'yōshū* is Norinaga's construal of a pure Japanese orality in the *Kojiki* 古事記 versus what he regarded as the rampant textualized *karagokoro* 唐心 of the *Nihon shoki* 日本

和魂漢才, "Japanese spirit and Chinese learning," a phrase coined during the Edo period and later, in an act of feckless anachronism, attributed to ninth-century poet and statesman Sugawara no Michizane in a work widely acknowledged as a forgery, the *Will and Testament of the Sugawara House* 菅家遺誡.

Naturally one need not subscribe to the patently nationalist idea that there exists some ahistorical, unchanging core of Japaneseness onto which culture from abroad, in various forms, managed to affix itself. At the same time, sooner or later students of the Nara and Heian periods must stake out a position for themselves regarding the tremendous flow of cultural materials (textual and otherwise) from the continent into the archipelago. In other words the crucial question is one of how to narrate *reception*—the dynamics of cultural transfer. What is the most accurate terminology? influence? appropriation? some mixture thereof?

In Anglo-American scholarship, the old-school notion of Chinese influence exerted upon a passive Japan seems to have been put to rest, replaced by the idea that reception entails more active, dynamic modes of appropriation. In the late 1980's, for example, there appeared a study by David Pollack of what he termed "Japan's synthesis of China."[6] Pollack posited *wa-kan* as a dialectic that enabled Japanese of the Heian and other periods to articulate a (contingent) definition of themselves (*wa*) which was enhanced by their (contingent) understanding of what they were not, (*kan*)—i.e. an ongoing hermeneutical opposition fueled by selective adaptations of continental material. Pollack's argument is that *ideas* about China were invoked by early Japanese to construct and contrast domestically fabricated *ideas* of themselves *as Japanese*. Often the ideas of China with which this process started did not coincide with Chinese ideas of themselves. As Pollack sees it, the precise nature of the definitions of *wa* and *kan* varied from period to period, but the strong urge to differentiate a native identity from China long remained a kind of cultural backbone of Japan, until one half of the binary finally was supplanted by a shift of attention from China to the West. Pollack claims not to be an essentialist as such; instead, he argues that the definition of *wa* at any given historical moment is shaped in part by the equally contingent definitions of *wa* that preceded it.[7]

書紀. See Susan L. Burns, *Before the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 70-78.

[6] David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[7] Ibid, p. 57.

Pollack's book had the unique distinction of raising the ire of Japan scholars across the gamut of intellectual orientations, and was reviewed no less than seven times.[8] Even so there remain things to be said. His claim, for example, that in the eyes of Heianites the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula seemed not to exist (he would have it they were subsumed (conceptually) into the contemporary term for China, *kara* 唐) seems to me untenable.[9] Legerdemain of this sort does much to ensure the tidy symmetry of his *wa-kan* thesis, but at what expense? Passed over are issues such as the massive contribution to the early courts by learned Paekche émigrés; the desire of Kanmu Tennō 桓武天皇 (737-806, reigned 781-806) to reside near the stronghold of his mother's Paekche-descended kinfolk as a factor determining the site of the new Heian capital; and the diplomatic efforts made by the Heian court to engage an otherwise hostile Silla. These and numerous other examples of Nara- and Heian-period official interaction with visitors and immigrants from the Korean peninsula make it difficult to believe that the Korean kingdoms and the Chinese dynasties of the mainland were to Heian Japanese all just one and the same.

Also conspicuously omitted from *The Fracture of Meaning* is any mention of the three hundred and fifty years that elapsed *between* the composition of the *Kojiki* and the *Genji monogatari*, a period generally regarded as that of the greatest influx of continental materials in the entire history of the archipelago. Because Pollack elsewhere has demonstrated considerable expertise in Chinese-language materials, one would have liked to hear how relevant works produced during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries (such as the three royal anthologies of *kanshi*) would have meshed with his ambitious thesis of *wa-kan*.

That being said, I believe Pollack *is* correct in re-orienting the discussion of reception in terms of appropriation rather than influence. To my mind, however, the major shortcomings of his methodology are two-

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[8] Robert E. Morrell, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 42, No. 2. (Summer, 1987), 236-238; Thomas Blenman Hare, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3. (Aug., 1987): 669-671; Steven D. Carter, *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, Vol. 22, No. 1. (Apr., 1988): 108-113; Mark Morris, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1. (Winter, 1989): 275-284; Robert Borgen, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 109, No. 1. (Jan.-Mar., 1989): 114-115; Herman Ooms, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, (Jun., 1989): 266-282; and, in the context of a larger essay, Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: the Problem of Universalism and Particularism," in Miyoshi, Masao and H. D. Harootunian, eds. *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 99-105.

[9] Pollack, pp. 5 and 58.

fold. First is a fundamentally anachronistic application of *wa-kan*. The supposed transhistorical preoccupation of defining *wa* vis-à-vis *kan*, and the accompanying "oppositional" or even "antagonistic" relationship between *wa* and *kan* Pollack claims to see in a text such as the *Genji monogatari*, is much more a Norinaga-esque usage, with all of its nativist presumptions of an ontological unity of race, language, and place, foisted upon early texts. I would argue that a culturally antithetical *wa-kan* would have been incomprehensible to Heianites such as Minamoto Shitagō, or, indeed, Murasaki Shikibu.

My second disagreement is with Pollack's assumption that any given historical point will produce a *uniform* domestic response to imported materials. For him, there seems to be no conflict over what party, in any single timeframe, should be regarded as representing *wa*. In other words, although *The Fracture of Meaning* makes room for variation according to historical period, it leaves none for differences of appropriation *within* a historical period. The notion of a univocal Japanese mode of response to materials transmitted to the archipelago dictated somehow by the mere condition of Japaneseness (for Pollack, a transhistorical obsession with rendering oneselves "not-Chinese") must, I believe, be resisted. A starting point of this sort in effect renders all acts of appropriation merely variations of the same melody—whose keynote is *Nihon-ka* 日本化, Japanization. Viewed as such, Pollack's work simply echoes in more sophisticated terms certain postwar Japanese versions of literary reception that sought to characterize all acts of appropriation as manifestation of the timeless ingenuity Japan's people. This idea is present in texts as early as Kaneko Hikojirō's 1955 tome on the Heian reception of Tang poet Bo Juyi, when he writes that in the "culture of our nation" (我が國の文化)...

> 常に時勢の隆替や国運の変貌等の外に超然として、決して、盲従的模倣や剽窃的文化の類に堕することなく、かの千秋古渝ることなき霊容を以て、東海の天に聳え立つ芙蓉峯と共に、獨自な妙趣と気品とを維持し、異質的な外来文化の輸入攝取に際しても、當初の一時的現像はともあれ、やがて、飽くまで、主體の健全性と批判的精神との発揮とを忘るゝことなく、そこに謂はゆる日本國民的な在り方や、叡知や、性格やの顯現たる、一種の獨創的・特殊化的活動をば、断えず営みつづけて、以て内容の豊富と性質の雅醇と、相識の整備とを齎し来つたこと

> は、やはり我が國民精神の特異な根本性に由来するものと言はねばなるまい。[10]
>
> ... at all times, transcendent, regardless of the rise and fall of periods and changes in the fate of the nation, without ever degenerating into some type of servile imitation or a culture of plagiarism, an unchanged spirit has been present from time immemorial, which, together with Mount Fuji towering in the eastern sky, preserves a unique grace and refinement; even when essentially different culture from abroad is imported and appropriated, regardless of any initial, temporary phenomenon, soon, without once forgetting to bring into full play a vigorousness of autonomy and a critical spirit, there is a ceaseless undertaking of the kind of creative and differentiating activities which manifest the Japanese people's way of being in the world, their wisdom and character; hence it must be said that what has ushered in a richness of content, refined elegance of temperament, and a readiness for acquaintance originates in the peculiar essence of the spirit of our nation's people.

Implicit here (as in the term *Nihon-ka*) is the existence of a vague but somehow centralized, coordinated project, one that presumes that in any given historical moment there will be generated a singular and collective Japanese response to the presence of the foreign, or, in Pollack's more theoretically savvy version, the *idea* of the foreign. The logic of *Nihon-ka*, evident in both in the work of Kaneko and (if less explicitly) Pollack, is that all appropriations occurring in the archipelago are foremost *Japanese* appropriations. A consequence of this blanket characterization is that the unique texture of specific engagements with imported materials is effaced, and the individual "appropriator," regardless of his or her own purposes, is promoted, uniformly, to the posthumous rank of Agent of Japanization.

Need narratives of cultural transfer be framed as operating from political state to state? What can we, as chroniclers of reception, satisfactorily posit as other units of cultural transfer? This problem seems to me a rudiment of historiography: what degree of representativeness can

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[10] Kaneko Hikojirō, *Heian jidai bungaku to Hakushi monjū* (vol. 1, *Kudai waka—Senzai kaku kenkyū hen*) (Kamakura: Geirinsha, 1977, reprint of 1955 edition), p. 4. In reading Kaneko's study one often gets the impression that the writer's portrayal of Heian-era cultural reception is a formula by which he would like to see postwar American influence resisted.

we safely assign to any single item of appropriation? Certainly particular strains of nativist thought would have each act of reception be construed as synecdoche affirming Japaneseness (witness that perceived skill *and* ineptitude in carrying out acts of reception both can be mobilized in the service of that argument). For these and other reasons I believe the entire notion of *Japanese reception* remains a problematic one. There are simply too many historical peculiarities that are silenced by its claims for a univocality of reception, too many instances of discursive multiplicity eradicated by the anachronistic assumption a premodern cultural identity neatly contiguous with the modern-day semantics of *wa*.

What I am trying to get at here is a refinement of appropriationist discourse, a style of narrative that appreciates the plurality of receptions that occur in any given historical moment—by individuals (sometimes operating on behalf of larger entities) who selected materials not in some exercise of Japaneseness but rather to promote their own immediate purposes—often in competition with one another. One might say that what is obscured by narrative formulations such as *Nihon-ka*, *Japanese appropriation*, and indeed the dialectic of *wa-kan* is the swirling heterogeneity of acts of appropriation—and the ways in which these acts played off and against each other. In tracing how contemporaneous acts of appropriation rubbed against—indeed, *abraded* each other—we need as much as possible to disengage from the rhetoric of nation states and master-narratives of cultural absorption and instead pursue the richness, subtlety, and even rivalry inherent to acts of appropriation in any given historical moment.

My argument against a reliance on ethnic- or nation-based units to frame narratives of appropriation does not propose as an alternative simply to atomize the question of what allusion meant for each and every poem (or poet) on an individual basis, though I do not rule out altogether individual acts of appropriation. Nor, in rejecting the vaunted phenomenon of *Nihon-ka*, do I deny the existence of a Yamato polity, or, indeed, other collective sensibilities—intermittent or sustained—based upon lineal, scholarly, political, religious, regional or some such affiliation. Quite the contrary, I argue for the possibility that each of these entities possessed its own (aggregate) motivations to appropriate writing or other forms of mainland culture and technology—thereby creating, at any given historical juncture, a field of variable and competitive acts of reception, be them individual, factional, or institutional. My fundamental premise is that simply labeling all instances of appropriation "Japanese" commits the twin fallacies of analytical reductionism and ethnocentric parochialism.

One can approach the problem of narrating the plurality of reception in many different ways. The method I propose is to focus on how *kanshi*

(or, more accurately, *shi*) and the appropriations of continental materials that they often represent, acquired significance in relation to political authority. In other words, I argue that the poetry of *Kaifūsō* and the three royal anthologies of *shi* should be read amid the complex interplay of four factors: theory, reception, composition, and authority, that together comprise a sociolect of poetry. The manner in which this sociolect configured and reconfigured over the course of the eighth and early ninth centuries largely determined the shape of literature and the literary enterprise at court: how (and how often) poetry composition figured into the procession of the court calendar, what status writing (*monjō* 文章) accrued alongside of other court-sanctioned ideologies such as Buddhism and *kami*-worship, the nature and durability of various norms of allusive practice, and manner in which the court dealt with writing (and its authors) deemed heterodox.

Poetry collected in *Kaifūsō* offers a rich catalog of encounters with continental materials. The primary mode of court-sponsored *shi* was that of the "royal banquet" 侍宴 style, that is, a kind of *shi* composed (or at least declaimed) in the presence of the sovereign. These poems often sang of royal virtues. To what sources did courtiers refer when composing such poems? How did such allusions, gleaned from Confucian, Daoist, and other texts, contribute to a ritualized confirmation of the sovereign's political legitimacy? Contrarily, in what ways were these same allusive sources employed to criticize court decisions or policies? Such questions are among the first that need to be addressed.

As I mentioned before, the early-ninth century court of Saga Tennō 嵯峨天皇 (786-842, reigned 809-823) saw a great burst of poetic production. At the same time, intensive royal participation in poetry meant that, in ways unprecedented, discursive norms were set from above. The result was a narrowing of the allusive repertoire and a stricter custom of how exactly imported texts were to be used—an *orthodoxy of reception*, if you will, presided over by the sovereign himself. In order to understand these developments, we need to pose new questions. With regard to the appropriation of continental materials, for example, we must ask: how do certain Chinese poems come to be designated during the Heian as usable or even *exemplary* allusive grist? What perspectives on them are evident in the allusive and thematic practices of those writing poetry in Saga's court? How do these usages themselves come to comprise officially endorsed conventions of reception? What contrasts emerge between official acts of appropriation versus those possessing some degree of independence, adaptations and allusions executed by poets separate from the court, in contexts such as a "poetic friendship" or regional coterie?

Admittedly, this mode of investigation is hampered by the fact that the available evidence is bound to be biased toward the court: documents extant today are mostly those long deemed worthy of preservation precisely on the basis of the orthodoxy they were perceived to enshrine. All the more reason, I argue, to take seriously the smallest evidence of friction at court, whether regarding departures from the norms of interpretation or composition of poetry, or even protests about its very practice. In a strictly regulated climate, both orthodoxy and heterodoxy tend to show themselves clearly.

There is thus a texture and significance of *kanshi* and reception as it figures into the dynamics of power and authority in the early Yamato courts. Understanding those subtle movements, however, requires that we eschew the anachronistic application of cultural antagonisms and modern obsessions with identity. Furthermore, as we examine with greater care the finely nuanced—but still politically charged—appropriations of ancient Chinese texts such as the *Wen xuan* 文選, favored by Saga, we begin to see numerous intersections at which premodern researchers in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean studies can meet. The stories of *Kaifūsō* and the three royal anthologies of the early Heian, and in fact of most *kanshibun*, have been spoken of very little in English, and it would be especially gratifying if new formulations of so-called premodern Japanese literature were the result of collaborations among hitherto institutionally compartmentalized East-Asianists.