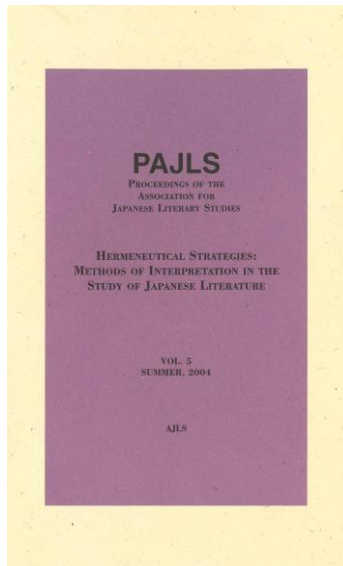


“In Search of the Absolute Origin: Hermeneutics of Language in Ogyū Sorai”

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## IN SEARCH OF THE ABSOLUTE ORIGIN: HERMENEUTICS OF LANGUAGE IN OGYŪ SORAI\*

Aiko Okamoto MacPhail

The *New Anthology of Tang Poems Selected by Two Teachers, Li and Yuan* (Xin ke Li Yuan er xian sheng jing xuan Tang shi xun jie/Shinkoku Li En ni sensei seisen Tōshi kinkai) is an anthology of Tang-dynasty Chinese poems selected by the mid-Ming poet Li Panlong (1514-1570) and revised by the late-Ming poet, Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610) and published in 1618.<sup>1</sup> This *New Anthology of Tang Poems Selected by Two Teachers, Li and Yuan* (abbreviated as *New Anthology*) is an annotated edition of the *Selected Tang Poems* (Tang shi xuan/Tōshisen) compiled by Li Panlong.<sup>2</sup> The *Inventory of Books in China* (Si ku quan shu zong mu ti yao/Shiko zensho sōmoku teiyō)<sup>3</sup> compiled in 1782 by order of the Chinese Emperor identifies *Selected Tang Poems* as a falsification or false attribution of authorship by the publisher.<sup>4</sup> There is an on-going debate in Japan about the genesis of the *New Anthology* and the *Selected Tang Poems*, no doubt because of the importance of this book for the study of Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728).<sup>5</sup> Is the *New Anthology* based on the *Selected Tang Poems* by Li Panlong? Ogyū Sorai believed that the real *Selected Tang Poems* compiled by Li Panlong existed, yet his first exposure to *Selected Tang Poems* may have been, as we will see later, through the *New Anthology*, which is known in Japan as *Tōshi kinaki*.<sup>6</sup> Sorai believed that by eliminating later additions in the *New Anthology*, the original selection in the *Selected Tang Poems* by Li Panlong can be recovered, and Li Panlong's esthetic judgment of the best Tang poems can be correctly understood. While reading Li Panlong, Sorai discovered the distance between China and Japan, and while thinking about the difference between

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\* I thank Wen-Ling Diana Liu for helping me with the English transcription of Chinese names in Pinyin.

<sup>1</sup> 李攀竜選 袁宏道校 唐詩訓解 別名：新刻李袁二先生精選唐詩訓解

<sup>2</sup> 唐詩選

<sup>3</sup> 四庫全書總目提要

<sup>4</sup> See the entry of "Tang shi xuan" in *Si ku quan shu zongmu ti yao*, volume 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1981), p. 1749.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see "Kaidai" by Saitō Shō in *Tōshisen* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1964), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> 唐詩訓解 *Kokusho sōmoku* reads this title as "kunkai" as many Japanese automatically do today.

classical Chinese as practiced in China and Japan, Sorai, paradoxically, came to believe in his connection to Chinese antiquity. He recorded this belief in his own hand in the copy of the *New Anthology* in the pre-Meiji Japanese collection of the Library of Congress.<sup>7</sup>

Sorai's copy of the *New Anthology* in the Library of Congress affords a unique testimony to the nature of his literary antiquarianism: on the verso of the back cover of the seventh volume of this book, Professor Konishi Jin'ichi recognized Sorai's hand-written *shikigo* or reader's note.<sup>8</sup> This hand-written note has more meaning than a simple memorandum jotted on the cover of a book. For the same exact note appears, this time printed, in the Japanese edition of *Selected Tang Poems* edited by Hattori Nankaku (1683-1759) and in the *Selected Tang Poems with Japanese Annotations* (Tōshi sen kokuji kai) which was published after both Nankaku's and Sorai's death by their disciple Hayashi Genkei. Apparently, Sorai wrote his note as an introduction to Nankaku's Japanese edition of *Selected Tang Poems* (1724), which was published before *Selected Tang Poems with Japanese Annotations* (1781); and the first draft of Sorai's introduction to Nankaku's *Selected Tang Poems* was scribbled on the copy of the *New Anthology* he had then at hand and which is now in the Library of Congress. The study of these three books, Nankaku's *Selected Tang Poems*, the *New Anthology* arguably selected by Li Panlong and Yuan Hongdao, and Sorai's copy of this *New Anthology*, carries us to the heart of Sorai's philosophy of language. That philosophy I would call the hermeneutics of the original language in ancient China.

The goal of Sorai's hermeneutics is "*sennō no michi*" or the Way of the ancient kings.<sup>9</sup> That goal is reached by reading the Six Classics with a correct knowledge of how to decipher the old language. Sorai writes: "the greatness of the Way cannot be known by ordinary people. A sage's mind is understood only by sages, and not by modern men. The only thing which modern men can ponder is phenomena and linguistic expression."<sup>10</sup> In Sorai, the way of the ancient kings is not a divine way, but a human invention directly commanded by the Way of heaven.<sup>11</sup> The Way of heaven, as the ultimate culmination of the Way of the ancient kings, is a secular creed based on the socio-political works done by the legendary

<sup>7</sup> Library of Congress collection number IN: 2721/LCCN: 696159

<sup>8</sup> *Pre-Meiji Works in the Library of Congress*, edited by Shōjō Ohta, annotated by Konishi Jin'ichi (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> "Bendō," in *Ogyū Sorai zenshū*, ed. Imanaka Kanji and Naramoto Tetsuya (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1973) volume I, p. 413.

<sup>10</sup> "The letter to Asaka Tanpaku" in *Ogyū Sorai, Nihon no meicho*, volume 16 (Tokyo: Chūōkōron-sha, 1974), p. 288. My translation.

<sup>11</sup> "Bendō," op. cit., p. 414.

sage kings.<sup>12</sup> For modern men, the way of heaven is unknowable, and the only path to the way leads through ancient texts which describe the way of ancient kings. Thus, Sorai's philosophy of language is the hermeneutics of the Six Classics, which are the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Book of Music*.<sup>13</sup>

Of the Six Classics, the *Book of Music* is long lost, and even though Sorai does not count it among Six Classics, Confucius' *Analects* is, in a way, a substitute.<sup>14</sup> *The Analects* were the teaching records of the last sage Confucius, who missed the chance to establish the Way as a system of governance in real life because he did not meet the ideal monarch. In that respect, according to Noguchi Takehiko, Sorai felt an empathy for Confucius.<sup>15</sup> The way is not, as I wrote, an abstract cosmogony of Neo-Confucianism, but a concrete socio-political system practiced by legendary sage kings.<sup>16</sup> For Sorai, the sage kings' social works can be recovered from ancient texts only if the correct knowledge of old language is mastered, and the task of deciphering old language goes hand in hand with debating the working principles of these kings. *The Analects* is the first and the last book of argument (*lun/ron*) which boils down the sage kings' deeds expressed in poetry, history, rites and music into arguments on their working principles,<sup>17</sup> but with the defect that *The Analects* do not contain much information about rites and music.<sup>18</sup>

The word argument for *ron* is a tentative translation, and Sorai's dictionary of Chinese characters, *Yakubun sentei* gives the following meanings: to get together and talk about this and that; to examine and poke into meanings by exhausting the logic of things; to determine the guilt of criminals or to argue over their punishment; and thus to settle by

<sup>12</sup> "Sorai sensei tōmonsho" in *Ogyū Sorai Zenshū*, op.cit. volume VI, 192.

About detailed analysis of Sorai's interpretation on the way of heaven and the way of kings, see Tahara Tsuguo, *Tokugawa shisōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1992), pp. 354-362.

<sup>13</sup> For the translation of the titles, I relied on *Tokugawa Political Writings* edited by Tetsuo Najita (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. lxxi. Also, in many aspects of interpreting Sorai, I got insights from this book.

<sup>14</sup> For the importance of *The Analects* in Sorai's thought, see Imanaka Kanshi's *Soria gaku no shiteki kenkyū* (Kyoto: Shibun Kaku, 1992), pp. 195-99.

<sup>15</sup> Noguchi Takehiko, *Ogyū Sorai, Edo no Don Kihōte* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1993), pp. 240-44.

<sup>16</sup> "Sorai sensei tōmonsho," op.cit., p. 176.

<sup>17</sup> "Rongo chō," in *Ogyū Sorai zenshū*, op.cit., volume II, p. 487.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488.

argument.<sup>19</sup> Sorai's use of the word *ron* indicates something more than a simple debate when he writes:

The meanings of the sage kings' poetry, history, rites and music were transmitted by scholars already before the time of Confucius, but each person said different things. When Confucius came, for the first time the argument (*ron*) was settled. Because of this, the name which means arbitrating (*ron*) is applied only to Confucius' work.<sup>20</sup>

This passage shows Sorai's awareness of the complex genesis of *The Analects*. Sorai writes: "*The Analects* is the book of Confucius' speech and his disciples' writings. Those who say that *The Analects* were written by Confucius are misguided."<sup>21</sup> With this reservation, Sorai's trust in *The Analects* is as much the trust in Confucius the last sage as in the language of *The Analects* written in old Chinese. Both Confucius and the language of *The Analects* are closer to the time of ancient kings than Sorai, born in the mid-Edo period, could ever hope to get. Confucius' speech adheres to the Way of the ancient kings by using an old Chinese which is continuous with if not identical to the sage kings' language. Studying Confucius offers a possibility, however remote, to learn the old language of criticism on the Way of the ancient kings.

The starting point of Sorai's hermeneutics is his education. Sorai writes in the Preface to *Yakubun sentei* that when he was a child, he was puzzled by the fact that people in ancient China could read before knowing the meaning (*gi*).<sup>22</sup> This puzzle, Sorai writes in the same passage, was solved when he understood that native speakers could read Chinese, as we read Japanese, from top down without putting any *kaeriten* or reverse-reading marks. When putting reverse-reading marks, the reader needs to know the meaning before reading. This Japanese custom, which Sorai later condemns, was identified as authentically Chinese by Sorai's contemporaries as well as by Sorai himself at first. Sorai lived in seclusion in Kazusa from his fifteenth year to his mid-twenties, and these years, which he devoted to close reading of the limited number of books he could find at hand, became the fertile ground of his thoughts as well as his linguistic ability to read Chinese.

In *Tōmonsho* or the *Book of Answers to Questions*, Sorai records his seminal experience of text criticism: after he came back to the capital by

<sup>19</sup> "Yakubun sentei," in *Ogyū Sorai Zenshū*, *ibid.*, volume V, p. 262.

<sup>20</sup> "Rongo chō," *ibid.*, p. 487. My translation.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488. My translation.

<sup>22</sup> "Yakubun sentei," in *Ogyū Sorai Zenshū*, *ibid.*, volume V, p. 16.

order of the fifth shōgun Tsunayoshi, Sorai assisted the shōgun's pages everyday from six in the morning to ten at night by having them read out loud in *sodoku* or Japanese reading of Chinese text with reverse-reading marks, in order to check their readings.<sup>23</sup> At the end, out of exhaustion, Sorai ended up by staring at the Chinese book unconcerned with the progress of the shōgun's pages, and this experience awakened him to the reality that these passages, if accessed directly without passing through annotations, commentaries and reverse-reading marks, can be read quite differently in a way that even the most prominent Neo-Confucian commentaries by Zhu Xi did not disclose. Sorai does not date this experience, but it was probably around the same time that he wrote a letter to Itō Jinsai dated 1703 to 1704.<sup>24</sup> He wrote: "In this wide world, how many men are truly audacious? There is no one who understands my thoughts, and only you seem to be my peer. If not in you, I can only find my friends in ancient people."<sup>25</sup> Judging from this passage, Sorai had already started his nostalgic quest for the original text by this time, and he sensed the same scholarly agenda in Jinsai.

Sorai supposedly emerged from his life at Kazusa and went with his father to the capital around 1690. In 1692, his first book *Yakubun sentei* was written down by his disciples, and this hand-copied book made Sorai famous. In 1696, Sorai was employed by Yanagiwasa Yoshiyasu, who was then the Grand Councillor of the shōgun Tsunayoshi, and Sorai's experience to coach the shōgun's pages in the reading of Confucian texts may have come any time after this year. Around 1704, Sorai read a book edited and annotated by Li Panlong and Wang Shizhen (1526-1590)<sup>26</sup>, probably the *Abridged Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems* (Gu jin shi shan/Kokon shisan),<sup>27</sup> and he understood for the first time the meaning of the Chinese quest for old languages. Thanks to heaven's blessing, Sorai wrote in *Bendō* or *A Discourse on the Way*, he encountered the writings of Li Panlong.<sup>28</sup> In 1707, Sorai tried his first conversation with a Chinese priest of the Ōbaku School, Eppō Dōshō (1655-1734) at Shiba.<sup>29</sup> Their conversation was a written exchange, not a spoken one, but this written

<sup>23</sup> "Sorai sensei tōmonsho," *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>24</sup> "Sorai-shū," in *Ogyū Sorai, Nihon no meicho*, volume 16, *op.cit.*, 285, note 285 (1).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286. My translation.

<sup>26</sup> 王世貞

<sup>27</sup> 古今詩刪

<sup>28</sup> "Bendō," *op.cit.*, p. 413.

<sup>29</sup> Yoshikawa Kōjirō, "Kaisetsu," in *Ogyū Sorai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), p. 658.

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conversation was carried on in contemporary vernacular Chinese, which proves that Sorai could write both ancient and contemporary Chinese by this time. In 1711 in the "Preface" to *Yakubun sentei*, Sorai vows never to learn even a word from Yuan Hongdao, who was a staunch enemy of Li Panlong's esthetic in China.<sup>30</sup>

This genealogical evolution should help us to understand better the place held by the *New Anthology* in Sorai's thought. In the preface to Hattori Nankaku's *Selected Tang Poems* first written on the back cover of his copy of the *New Anthology*, Sorai condemns the *New Anthology* as a book which falsifies the authorship of Li Panlong because Li's name is put together with Yuan Hongdao. His condemnation shows Sorai's maturing knowledge of Chinese text criticism. For, in fact Sorai encountered the *New Anthology* very early in his life when he was still living in Kazusa with his father, where he studied it carefully, for he copied it by hand, with his own comments and explanations, and added a poem and a short prose to it with the date of 1690.<sup>31</sup> But at this stage, he was not aware of who Li Panlong was and what his literary ideology was. For Yoshikawa Kōjirō evaluates the Chinese poem which Sorai wrote on this occasion as an example of the Mid- and later-Tang style which Sorai condemned in his mature period.<sup>32</sup> Sorai's real discovery of Li Panlong took place a little more than ten years after that first devoted reading of the *New Anthology*.

Here we can pause to explain who Li Panlong and Yuan Hongdao were. Li was one of seven late-Ming poets and a follower of Wang Shizhen, who thought that true poetry came to an end after the early, prosperous Tang dynasty, and that the best prose was written in the Qin and Han dynasties. Ming poets who participated in the movement to return to old styles thought that the best poems can be written only by imitating poetry from the first half of the Tang dynasty. Among these poets, some thought that imitation is but a means to achieve one's own creative works, while others felt that only by strict repetition and partial variation of Tang poems can poets write good poems. Li Panlong belonged to the latter group.<sup>33</sup> Yuan Hongdao appeared after this movement to set up against their artificial style of imitation, and as a consequence of Yuan's campaign, Li's effort to return to the first half of the Tang in poetry was subsequently forgotten as a minor movement without consequence in China.<sup>34</sup> Sorai was following this short-lived Chinese movement one century behind.

<sup>30</sup> "Sorai-shū," op.cit., p. 253.

<sup>31</sup> Yoshikawa Kōjirō, op.cit., p. 646.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Maeno Naoaki, "Sorai to Chūgoku-go oyobi Chūgoku bunka," in *Ogyū Sorai, Nihon no meicho*, volume 16, op.cit., p. 81

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

Some critics take Sorai's words at face value and state that Sorai's originality is to have applied mid-Ming Chinese poetics of archaic style to the Confucian Six Classics.<sup>35</sup> While it is important to correctly assess Chinese origins and influences in Japan, Japanese criticism has a flaw in that the investigation stops once the origin is attributed to China, which expresses nothing other than an *impensé* or a lacuna of thought. China and Japan are two different countries, and each has an internal structure as complex and ramified as the other. Sometimes, the same movement shows an entirely different meaning in different societies, and Li Panlong's antiquarianism is one example. When the Chinese movement was integrated into a Japanese social context, the political implications associated with Li Panlong's movement were forgotten.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, Chinese archaism operated within China and its own historical continuum. Sorai's archaism positioned the Japan of Sorai's time in relation to different periods of Chinese history.

In Asia, there is not one origin, but as many origins as there are countries or regional and geographical groups, and once Chinese civilization came in, various forms of national and regional thoughts reasserted themselves, their identities and their independence, by using Chinese rhetoric. Sorai is one example. Just as we use Western rhetoric today to talk about Japan, Sorai believed in the use of Chinese rhetoric of thoughts. For this reason, insights acquired from studying Sorai may cast some light on our situation of criticism today, even though the world where Sorai lived is very different from ours. Based on the books available in his time, Sorai situated his contemporary Japanese language in relation to contemporary and ancient Chinese. In order to assess the difference between ancient and contemporary Chinese, he used Sung-dynasty Neo-Confucian Chinese, especially as written by Zhu Xi (1130-1200), as a stepping-stone to make a tri-partite division within Chinese: Sung-dynasty Chinese is different both from ancient Chinese, and his contemporary Chinese. Jinsai's argument that Sung Neo-Confucians made mistakes of text interpretation provided a support for Sorai, and Li Panlong's ambition to return to the original Chinese by skipping poetry written after the last half of Tang dynasty provided another justification for Sorai's relativism. Sorai is not building his critical thinking *ex nihilo*, for both Jinsai and Li Panlong confirmed Sorai's own personal doubts and justified the direction he chose to take.

On top of this positioning of classical Chinese within the historical spectrum of the Chinese language, Sorai positioned himself as an admirer

<sup>35</sup> Hino Tatsuo, *Tōshi sen kokuji kai*, op.cit., p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Maeno Naoaki, "Sorai to Chūgoku-go oyobi Chūgoku bunka," op.cit., p. 79.



of China and Chinese classics in the age of positivism which dominated the Japanese scholarly scene from the seventeenth century. One guiding principle for Sorai is to interpret ancient China based on the observation of equivalent phenomena in Sorai's contemporary Japan. To skip to the main principle of Sorai's method, he believed it possible to live in true empathy with ancient Chinese thoughts by studying the exact meaning of classical Chinese; and for that purpose, the Chinese late-Ming literary and poetic revival of antiquity, which in China itself was but a passing trend of little consequence, represented for Sorai an absolute approach to the knowledge of the ancient mind. In this discovery, as Sorai himself states, Li Panlong's writing was an eye-opening experience because Li's method shows that by imitating the form of ancient language, anyone can read the mind of the ancients.

Sorai's relative positioning of ancient and modern was supported by the flood of Chinese-speaking Buddhist monks in Nagasaki and by the Japanese monks and intellectuals who learned from them. Among Sorai's precursors in Japan, Takahashi Hiromi puts the Buddhist priest Dokuan Genkō (1630-98) and a mathematician and Sorai's disciple Nakane Genkei (1662-1733) on a par.<sup>37</sup> Genkō, as many other Japanese Buddhists of his time, was familiar with Ōbaku monks from China, who came to live in Nagasaki fleeing the dynastic turmoil from Ming to Qing, in the generation prior to Sorai. It is most interesting to read in Takahashi's book the parallel tendencies in Buddhism and Confucianism especially regarding their interest in "things" and "names," terms used both by Sorai and Genkō, and also their shared affinity for ancient languages and texts. As for Genkei, even though Takahashi's book does not refer to him with the family name of Hayashi, it is tempting to speculate that it is this Genkei whose name is printed as "Hayashi Genkei" on the first page of *Selected Tang Poems with Japanese Annotations* as a recorder of Hattori Nankaku's oral lecture.<sup>38</sup> Coming back to Takahashi, a certain Genkei whose identity is unknown may have published the first printed edition of Sorai's *Yakubun sentei* in 1695 and, much later, helped Sorai to calculate the musical harmony of *gagaku* from a mathematical point of view.<sup>39</sup> Genkei preceded Sorai by compiling and publishing the Chinese-character dictionary entitled *Itai jiben* as early as 1692, which is a precursor to Sorai's *Yakubun sentei* and *Kunyaku jimō*, for its encyclopedic effort to

<sup>37</sup> Takahashi Hiromi, *Edo no barokku* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1997), p. 55.

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<sup>38</sup> Hino, op.cit., p. 23. Hino writes that this Genkei in *Toshisen kokuji kai* is unidentified.

<sup>39</sup> Takahashi, op.cit., pp. 148, 162.

classify Chinese according to spoken or written, ancient or modern vocabularies.<sup>40</sup>

Examined under the light of this generally evolving interest in language, the Chinese literary movement of Tang archaism has quite a different meaning. Coming back to the three Tang poetry books mentioned at the beginning, all three books carry the name of Li Panlong as editor and/or annotator. Now I wrote at the beginning that Sorai believed that there was an original *Selected Tang Poems* truly edited by Li Panlong, which implies that Sorai did not trust the attribution to Li Panlong of the *Selected Tang Poems* he knew, probably because the earliest edition of Chinese *Selected Tang Poems* available to him was the *New Anthology*. The Tokugawa ban on foreign books was placed on Chinese rather than western books: since few Japanese read western languages, a ban on western books was not necessary. On the contrary, writings by Jesuits in China and published in Chinese posed the danger of importing Christianity in Japan because books written in Chinese were accessible to a much wider Japanese audience. A sudden increase of Chinese books imported into Japan is marked in 1723, possibly because of the shōgun Yoshimune's Kyōho Reform.<sup>41</sup> Sorai's thought developed before this relaxation of the ban on Chinese books, and he had to use what was available to him of Li Panlong's writings. shōgun Tsunayoshi's interest in Chinese conversation with Sorai and the Grand Councillor Yoshiyasu was another factor which opened Sorai's eyes to the distance between classical and contemporary Chinese. The increasing importation of books from China toward the end of Sorai's life prepared the ground for public acceptance of contemporary Chinese, which may well have resulted in the vogue of Chinese vernacular fictions toward the end of the eighteenth century in Japanese mass culture. In this general trend, Nankaku's *Selected Tang Poems* was published in 1724 with Sorai's *shikigo* or reader's note jotted down on the back cover of Sorai's *New Anthology* to praise archaism in Chinese poetry.

Both for Jinsai and Sorai, the critical attitude which was first nurtured in response to the Sung Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi naturally led them to the conclusion that the distance from ancient Chinese language which eighteenth-century Japanese Confucians faced was equal to that facing their contemporary Chinese Confucians. In their linguistic positioning between the past and the present, Jinsai's *kogigaku* and Sorai's *kobunji* exemplify historical essentialism built on an optimism that the origin is accessible if approached correctly through the study of the languages of

<sup>40</sup> Takahashi, *ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>41</sup> See the list of imported books from China in *Kanseki yunyū no bunkashi* by Ōba Osamu (Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan, 1997), pp. 216-217.

old texts. Anchored in the ancient past of sage kings as the absolute goal of hermeneutics, Sorai put contemporary Japan and China on the same footing.

In this context, what is special about Sorai's philosophy of language? Sorai's originality over Jinsai is his emphasis on the form of language in opposition to Jinsai's emphasis on the meanings. Sorai believed in an audio-visual approach or, if we switch the word order in order of importance, a visual-audio approach. Sorai's method is first to teach a block of two to three words in Chinese without reverse-reading marks, then advance to reading a book in Chinese pronunciation, and he called this method the Nagasaki method of Study.<sup>42</sup> In the "Preface" to *Yakubun sentei* Sorai writes:

*The Book of Odes* collects popular songs, *The Book of History* shows public announcements posted on the boards, *Spring and Autumn Annals* are news columns announced by government offices, *The Book of Rites* is an etiquette commentary, and *The Book of Changes* is a book of fortune-telling. Had ancient sages been born in Japan, could they make any other deeper more difficult language than our mother tongue? The way of ancient kings is high and profound, but the language to express it is an ordinary language. That which is high and profound exists in man.<sup>43</sup>

Even though Sorai argued for spoken language, for him to read books always meant to look at pages (*kansho*) rather than to pronounce them (*dokusho*).<sup>44</sup> By looking at pages, Sorai made a distinction between Tang and Sung poetics on the one hand and a distinction between poetry and prose on the other, and he identified the nature of poetic language as the primacy of form over meaning. As for Tang poems, their "pursuit of language looks shallow, but is in fact profound," while for Sung poems their "pursuit of meanings looks deep, but their pursuit has gone off course" because Sung poems are written by poets who learned their language first from Confucian prose and thus value meaning over forms of language.<sup>45</sup> Here, by looking at characters, Sorai is sensing a radical

<sup>42</sup> "Yakubun sentei," op.cit., pp. 19-20.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.18. My translation.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 21. "People in China emphasize reading, but in my opinion it is better to call it looking at books rather than to read it. Because China and Japan use different pronunciations, our ear and mouth are useless. Only through a pair of eyes can the people of three thousand worlds meet." My translation.

<sup>45</sup> "Yakubun sentei," op.cit., p. 22. My translation.

difference, "ultimate lack of any contact" he writes,<sup>46</sup> between the poetic use of language which respects formal features of language such as rhythm and sound, and the instrumental use of language in prose in which the meaning has the primary importance. By endorsing Tang poetics, Sorai states that the formal and acoustic feature is the primary function of poetic language, and Tang poems are held to be superior to Sung poems for that reason.

To write like a Tang poet, Sorai advises us to make a card box of characters taken exclusively from Tang poems, and when composing poems of Tang style, to look for vocabulary from that box alone.<sup>47</sup> Language has a natural order, or spontaneous growth which should not be disturbed.<sup>48</sup> Sorai looked for that natural order in ancient writings. Sorai wrote to Taniguchi Taiga that for ten years he did not read any Chinese written after Sung until he finally understood that there is ancient Chinese which is not the same as Chinese of later periods.<sup>49</sup> Sorai says in the same passage that if we read ancient texts in ancient language, not a single Sung interpretation of Confucian texts is correct.<sup>50</sup>

Based on this cognition of language, Sorai establishes written language as the only way of his hermeneutics:

There is no other way of study than written language. The way of ancient sages is found only in books. Books equal written languages. Therefore, if you understand written languages exactly as they are written, without mixing any of your own ideas, that which the ancient sages would like to say becomes clear.<sup>51</sup>

Then what is the ultimate aim of Sorai's hermeneutics? Mastery of Chinese poetry is the best way to acquire the linguistic ability to decipher the Way of the ancient kings from the ancient people's point of view, because "we cannot learn language if we do not become one with the mind of ancient people who composed books. If we do not compose poetry and practice written language, there are many things which we cannot truly understand."<sup>52</sup> What Sorai is ultimately aiming

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> "Letter to Taniguchi Taiga," in *Ogyū Sorai, Nihon no meicho*, volume 16, op.cit., p. 279.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Sorai sensei tōmonsho," op.cit., p. 204. My translation.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

at with his hermeneutics is an affective or emotional state of mind. That is why the reconstruction of Li Panlong's *Selected Tang Poems* was so important.

Let us come back to the *New Anthology* with which we started, and read Sorai's note about Nankaku's brand-new edition of *Selected Tang Poems*. The following is the complete translation:

The venerable Yan [Wang Shizhen's penname] compared Cangming's [Li Panlong's penname] poems with Mount Emei<sup>53</sup> standing in the snow high in heaven. Tang poems selected by Li are equally lofty. However, one recent lamentable thing I discovered while looking at various books of *Selected Tang Poems* is that the majority of them are good for nothing. What kind of rascal attempted to blur the mountain in the fog? Even Mount Fuji, if standing right in front of one's nose, cannot be measured as tall. Now, if I check this new edition, the book, by shedding off dubious poems, has recovered the true ancient appearance. Three mountains are clearly visible to the eye. Isn't it pleasant? Once upon a time Cangming said that what cannot be clouded is the mind. Think of his words, they must have been pronounced one hundred years ago for Shisen [Nankaku's penname].<sup>54</sup>

This preface is Sorai's maximum homage to Nankaku's edition of *Selected Tang Poems* at the same time as it expresses Sorai's and Nankaku's pride that they are the ones who have recovered the original intention of the *Selected Tang Poems* by Li Panlong.

In fact, Sorai's optimism is derived from the misconception that a single-layered return to the past is possible. The multi-fold nature of his problem starts with Sorai's concept of the real ancient Chinese. For Sorai, to return to the past means, as I stated before, to know ancient language as it was lived by ancient people, and from this perspective, the spoken Chinese of ancient times was thought to reflect best the reality of old thoughts. Hence his theory of translation into spoken Japanese, and his emphasis on classical Chinese poetry. Sorai thought that the most beautiful language reflects the reality of people's heart the best. *The Analects* consists of fragmentary dialogues and gives us an impression of recorded speech. However, as Kaizuka Shigeki and

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<sup>53</sup> 峨眉山 (Emei shan/Gabi san)

<sup>54</sup> *Tōshi kinaki*, (Library of Congress, op. cit.) verso of the back cover in the seventh volume. My translation.

Yoshikawa Kōjirō mention in their commentaries, certain dialogues contain Confucius' regional dialect of Wei, which probably better reflects speech, whereas *The Analects* tell us that Confucius used for his teaching a Zhou dialect, which was probably already an archaism in Confucius' own time, and so we can only wonder to what degree Confucius' archaism was close to the language of the ancient sages. The nature of Confucius' speech act and the situations to record it are an enigma despite Sorai's effort to decipher them in *The Analects*.

The manifold nature of his problem becomes further complicated with Sorai's attempt to approach ancient Chinese through the study and imitation of Li Panlong's writing style, which is none other than an artificial archaic style practiced in the mid- to late-Ming period. Sorai's trust in Li Panlong's style is total as he writes: "convinced by Li Panlong's teaching, I studied rhetoric of ancient Chinese, and trained myself repeatedly. The more time I put into it, the more I became one with antiquity, and finally all of my expressions and spirit are similar to it."<sup>55</sup> Maeno Naoaki comments on Sorai's writing style as quite similar to Li Panlong's style. So, what Sorai understood as ancient Chinese is Li Panlong's style, and Li's style is made against Sung style, which is in turn an archaic prose and poetry aiming at an antique air of Tang. Li argued that Sung style is not authentically ancient and tried to create an authentically antique style. Maeno writes that he was lost when he tried to read Li's prose for the first time because he did not know where to cut his sentences.<sup>56</sup> Apparently, Li's prose is his version of old style, which does not allow an easy access even for those accustomed to reading ancient Chinese. Following on Li's antique baroque, Sorai's own style is further twisted. Maeno argues that Sorai's writing style, even though generally very similar to Li's prose and grammatically perfect, reflects in its structure Japanese modes of thought, which makes his imitation of Li's already difficult style all the more inaccessible.<sup>57</sup>

Then what did Sorai do? Is his hermeneutics a wasted effort? What Sorai did was to enter the jungle of Chinese popular press, and to critically evaluate various publications of *Selected Tang Poems* of which there appears to be no original edition truly edited by Li Panlong, contrary to Sorai's belief. However, the fact that Sorai believed in the existence of a true *Selected Tang Poems* does not diminish the value of his text criticism. On the contrary, his note

<sup>55</sup> "Gakusoku," in *Ogyū Sorai, Nihon no meicho*, volume 16, op.cit., p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> "Sorai to Chūgoku-go oyobi Chūgoku bunka," op.cit., p. 84.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

proves the accuracy of his assessment. Hino Tatsuo writes in the preface to his modern edition of Nankaku's *Selected Tang Poems with Japanese Annotations* that from the late-Ming to the early-Qing, more than ten editions of *Selected Tang Poems* were published with slightly different poems selected in each edition, and from the beginning the *Selected Tang Poems* simply used Li Panlong's name without ever being his work.<sup>58</sup> Sorai and Nankaku compared available *Selected Tang Poems*, and concluded that none of them was authentic: they judged correctly the editions they consulted. Since no *Selected Tang Poems* truly compiled by Li Panlong came within their reach, they never claimed to have found the original. Instead they decided to make one.

The first Japanese print of *Selected Tang Poems* is Nankaku's critical edition published in 1724, whereas the *Selected Tang Poems* was already known to the Japanese public in the form of the Chinese annotated book of the *New Anthology* that was reprinted in Japan between 1661 and 1672.<sup>59</sup> For Sorai, who lamented the "blurred mountain in the fog", the *New Anthology* and especially the fact that Li's book claims to be co-authored by Yuan Hongdao must have been the definitive blow to discredit the already dubious *Selected Tang Poems*. It is with reason that Sorai wrote his lamentation in the note on the back cover of his copy of the *New Anthology*. Sorai's claim for Nankaku's *Selected Tang Poems* is high: it recovered the original. Is Sorai wrong because he believed there was an authentic *Selected Tang Poems* buried somewhere in China? Sorai and Nankaku are probably more modern than their hermeneutics would suggest. The origin is that which exists only in the process of making. The origin is a prerequisite of hermeneutics, for hermeneutics creates the origin as that which precedes it: the past is projected. Sorai is right in his note jotted on the back cover of his copy of the *New Anthology*: the original is recovered because the origin is a *pro-jet* or leap-forward conceived in the form of recapitulation.

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<sup>58</sup> Hattori Nankaku, *Tōshisen kokuji kai*, commented by Hino Tatsuo (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1982), pp. 6-7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

弇先評滄滄詩、我眉天外雪中看、其迂唐  
 詩亦漫角、粗奈近來坊間諸本、卒屬孟  
 浪、不則何物、狡兒巧作五里霧、芙蓉  
 咫尺、殆不可弁矣、今閱此、刺剔抉幾尺之  
 頤、復舊觀、三峯宛然在人目睫、豈不愉  
 快乎、滄溟嘗謂不昧、吾心想當百年  
 前、乃子迂道、

物為心