

## Review Essay

Akira Komai and Thomas H. Rohlich. An Introduction to Japanese Kanbun (Nagoya: University of Nagoya Press, 1988). xiv + 146 pp. + index. ¥3000.

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An Introduction to Japanese Kanbun by Akira Komai and Thomas H. Rohlich presents a concise, carefully designed introduction to the major elements of kundoku 訓読 found in Japanese Kanbun 漢文 compositions. The textbook is a very welcome resource for English-speaking students who, without proper guidance, have been compelled to acquire the principles of kundoku haphazardly by deduction, or through the often cloudy medium of Japanese-language texts.

Even a brief overview amply reveals the care the authors have expended in planning their text. Each of the ten chapters comprises a series of five or six key points or patterns, typically organized around the usage of a single character. In addition to schematic depictions of each pattern, the student finds authentic example sentences--in original orthography, fully romanized, and translated into modern Japanese and English. Isolated sentences appear in drill exercises, for practice in punctuation or translation. Finally, each lesson concludes with a continuous reading selection of some length--the majority of those reading selections being excerpts from Nihon gaishi 日本外史, but also including a passage from the mana-bon 真名本 version of the Hōjōji 方丈記, and two ninth- and tenth-century selections from Honchō monzui 本朝文粹. The authors have gone to great pains to ensure that the lessons are of approximately even "density," and that the chapters devoted to relatively difficult topics include fewer points overall. The main text is concise and uncluttered and, one notes, mercifully free from the Japanese propensity to attach labels to every possible category of construction. Though not intrinsic features of the text, one notes also the effective graphic design, and a concern for visual clarity that makes memorizing or relocating past key points far easier. The typography is large and highly legible, and typographical errors few in number--points not by any means to be taken for granted in Kanbun texts, which frequently strain eyes and patience to the limits.

While the excellences of the textbook are many, the student, in particular, will find shortcomings in the text. Most obvious is the overly high degree of knowledge presumed of the beginner in the first few pages. It is not unreasonable for the authors to presuppose on the part of their readers a basic knowledge of the major forms in classical Japanese. Already in the exercises to chapter one, however, the student encounters without any explanation or helps such

unusual vocabulary items as itarite 至リテ , hanahada 甚ダ , nasu 為ス , and motte 以テ , and is expected to supply effortlessly kun readings for such unfamiliar Chinese characters as 且 (katsu), 可 (-beshi), 莫 (nashi), 之 (kore), 遂ニ (tsui ni), 既ニ (sude ni), and many others--most certainly an unrealistic level of expectation even for advanced students. By chapter three, the barrage of curious characters and unexplained readings abates considerably, but the initial lessons require much supplementing of vocabulary to be intelligible. Even with this additional help, however, the student experiences considerable discouragement while still most vulnerable and unsure of his course.

Concision in the presentation of grammatical points is a virtue, but the terseness of the presentations at times becomes extreme. A single sentence of explanation may be enough to refresh the memory of an experienced reader; a beginner would probably desire more detail and repetition to inspire confidence. While the sample sentences go far toward illustrating the key points of the lessons, they often occasion many additional questions. The terminology, too, requires some additional refinement. What the authors intend by "noun phrase" and "verb phrase," two expressions of constant resort, is never completely clear to the user. Not every explanation is skeletal: chapter one devotes an admirable amount of time to explaining the intricacies of kaeriten 返り点 sequence markings--a major hurdle in reading Kanbun, but a feature invariably dismissed with a few cavalier lines in Japanese textbooks. Chapters nine and ten, primarily devoted to authentic and rhetorical question patterns, strike an ideal balance between concision and detail in illustrating a complex subject.

The careful sequence of presentation, from the simplest and most frequent patterns to the less common and more challenging, is a strong point of An Introduction to Japanese Kanbun, but it is not without its oddities. To some extent, the intrusion of less common patterns into the earlier chapters is dictated by the exigencies of the reading selections. Hence, we find the very early introduction of causative constructions in chapter three, in response to their high frequency in Nihon gaishi excerpts, or the discussion of ...(rentaikei) nomi. ...而已。 ...而矣。 ...耳。 patterns in chapter four--a construction particularly favored by Rai San'yō's 頼山陽 protagonists in their more exalted gnomic moments. Less commendable is the presentation of okiji 置(き)字 , characters either entirely ignored or whose vocalization is "displaced" without sequence indicators to a subsequent point in the text, as the first major topic in chapter two. Surely this elevates an exception to the dominant principle in kundoku, the rule of fanatical reproduction of all elements in the original text, to an undesirable prominence, and creates unnecessary confusion from the start. Most of the exercises take care not to include unfamiliar elements, yet one notes the constant occurrence of ...nari. ...也 and verb-mizenkei + -n to hossu 欲 ... in exercises before their formal introduction in the lessons. High-

frequency items like 如 (ch. 5), 可 (ch. 7), 以 (ch. 7), and 能 (ch. 8) all appear quite late in the text sequence, a fact all the more curious in light of the straightforward character of most of the corresponding kundoku patterns. The student finds no complete discussion of tokoro 所 constructions, or of the ubiquitous sunawachi 則, 即, 乃 or noun ni shite/adjective-ren'yōkei shite. In an introductory text of restricted dimensions, clearly it is not possible, still less desirable, to include every possible pattern. At the same time, it is odd that esoterica like ...ni arazaru yori wa 自非 ... ("unless it be..., but for...") find a place in the text (ch. 5), while commonplace constructions like ...ni taru (...ni tarazu) (不)足 or ...ni oyobu (...ni oyobazu) (不)及 fail to occur at any point throughout the ten lessons.

The content of grammar points in each lesson typically shows excellent judgment and moderation; the authors are careful not to introduce too many intricacies at once. Widely divergent uses of a single character often appear separately: the common locative use of 於 (ni; ni oite; ni okeru) appears in chapter two, while the confusingly dissimilar use of 於 before standards of comparison (yori) is deferred to chapter eight. At times, however, the presentation seems excessively eager to demonstrate all possible uses of a single character on a single page, however dissimilar the array or unmatched the range of frequency. In the presentation of 可 (ch. 7), it is not unreasonable to find reference to the secondary but derivative readings ka nari and fuka nari. To introduce at the same juncture the unimportant reading bakari "approximately," though, is an undue burden for the student and dilutes the centrality of the primary readings. Immediately after the high-frequency noun no gotoshi 如/若 N pattern (ch. 5), the learner confronts in the same grammar point the graphically related but semantically very distinct ...ni shikazu 不如 pattern, a juxtaposition bound to cause vexation. Most implausible is the simultaneous display of the unruly multitudes of possible readings for 與 (ch. 2) or for 為 (ch. 7), both characters far better treated in several stages. Although this tendency toward compression increases the comprehensiveness of the text, it exacts some sacrifice of intelligibility.

The exercises and reading selections to each lesson, finally, present the greatest obstacle for the student. The authors' proposal, to use only authentic sentences in the drill exercises, is a fine ideal, but the application raises many problems. With a few exceptions, like the proverbial expressions or aphorisms in chapter five, the resulting exercise sentences are simply too long and involved for students to manage satisfactorily. The difficult vocabulary, riddled with technical military terms, compels many fruitless hours of dictionary quest. Even when the vocabulary and patterns are clear, the complete lack of context for the sentences makes the translation excessively demanding. On the whole, one wishes Professor Komai had contributed some simpler original sentences of his own

devising, a practice he used with great effectiveness and wit in his 1979 A Grammar of Classical Japanese.

The authors' plan to provide incentive and encouragement by exposing students to authentic texts as soon as possible in the reading selections equally is a praiseworthy conception. The choice of texts, however, seems rather turgid and ponderous, more likely to dampen than to whet students' appetites. At the beginning, to be sure, the constraints on text selection are considerable, but the situation does not improve much in later chapters. The selections include no poetry, biographies, essays, or philosophical texts; there is little variety as the reader trudges through one feudal intrigue or bloodbath to the next. Most unsatisfactory, from the learner's perspective, is the authors' deliberate exclusion of all but a sprinkling of Chinese examples. The introductory pages insist, quite justifiably, that many Japanese Kanbun sentences are odd or ungrammatical by the standards of orthodox literary Chinese--but why, on this account, exclude all examples of the latter? Surely the intention of most students using the book is to master the kundoku vocalization system, rather than to perfect their skills in composing Kanbun. The wider spectrum of punctuated texts available to the learner, one would think, the better. To exclude Chinese texts--the most likely context, in fact, for most students' future encounters with the conventions of kundoku--out of a hesitancy to mingle the "pure" and the "hybrid" seems a disservice to learners.

In the classroom, I have used the initial portion of this text twice, as part of a Kanbun unit to conclude a full-year introductory sequence in classical Japanese. In both cases, students at all levels of competence found the text difficult, even with supplementary materials and vocabulary lists. Interest quickly flagged, and resistance mounted visibly. More effective, and more likely to generate a positive response, I found, were anecdotal reading selections from older Kanbun textbooks, supplemented by vocabulary notes and a makeshift dictionary of common patterns. Though not as systematic a presentation as the Komai-Rohlich text, this approach allowed students to devote their time to the major elements of kundoku and not deplete their energies on incidentals.

An Introduction to Japanese Kanbun, in conclusion, has an excellent overall plan and represents a real boon to students venturing into a field where there are few friendly landmarks. By expanding explanations, multiplying examples, and perhaps rethinking the choice of exercises and reading selections, the work could be truly outstanding and not simply meritorious.