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Peter Kornicki "A note on Sino-Japanese: a question of terminology" *Sino-Japanese Studies* 17 (2010), article 4.

Abstract: This article explores the concepts of "sino-japanese" and "kanbun" from a number of perspectives. These include the analogy with Latin, the dissemination of texts throughout East Asia, the broad range of styles and registers and the important distinction between script and reading practices. The author argues that to label all kanbun texts produced in Japan "sino-japanese texts" is to overlook the fact that some of them were or could have been read in other parts of East Asia with no difficulty.

A note on Sino-Japanese: a question of terminology

Peter Kornicki

The following remarks arise from reflecting on the vast corpus of texts in literary Chinese and their circulation, not just in Japan but in the whole of East Asia. A useful starting point is the article which Timothy Wixted contributed to *Sino-Japanese Studies* twelve years ago. As he rightly remarked, “In terms of its size, often its quality, and certainly its importance both at the time it was written and cumulatively in the cultural tradition, *kanbun* is arguably the biggest and most important area of Japanese literary study that has been ignored in recent times, and the one least properly represented as part of the canon”.¹ This assertion is unexceptionable, and so is the thrust of his argument, which is that some constructions of “Japanese literature” common in Japan and in Western japanology are skewed and all the poorer for their tendency to write *kanbun* out of the Japanese literary tradition. The situation in Korea and the study of Korean literature is not dissimilar, as Xin Wei has recently lamented.² For this neglect in the Japanese case Wiebke Denecke has given a discouraging prognosis: “[i]t is hard to imagine how the marginalized role of Chinese impact and of the history of Sino-Japanese literature could be brought into focus, because it is conflicted territory for Japanese consciousness and an implicit reproach

*I am grateful to Wiebke Denecke and David Lurie for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

¹ John Timothy Wixted, “*Kanbun*, histories of Japanese literature, and Japanologists,” *Sino-Japanese studies* 10.2 (1998), p. 23.

² Xin Wei, “Song China’s role shaping late Koryŏ literature: an analytical survey of the *Tongmunŏn*,” *Acta Koreana* 10 (2007), p. 38.

to current national literary history”.³ In other words, the present situation is going to be difficult to reverse so long as perceptions of language, literature, and national identity remain closely intertwined.

Denecke and Wixted refer to Sino-Japanese and *kanbun*, but what actually do these words mean? Sino-Japanese we will come to in a moment, but *kanbun* is of course a word coined outside China and therefore has no historical roots in Chinese usage. In that respect it is no different from its Korean equivalent, *hanmun*, or its Vietnamese equivalent, *hán văn*. In all three societies these words are still used indiscriminately to refer both to writings in literary Chinese transmitted from China and to writings in literary Chinese produced by Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese. Is it satisfactory to use *kanbun*, a Japanese term, to refer to literary Chinese written in, say, Korea or Vietnam? Consider the following sentence taken from a recent article on Korean literature: “*Hanmun*, as the lingua franca of pre-modern East Asian literary production, has a history of continuous development in Korea”.⁴ Generalising the Korean term like this strikes scholars of Japan as odd, but it is no odder than our tendency to generalise the use of *kanbun* as a term to apply to the literary Chinese in use for more than a millennium throughout East Asia.

One of the ambiguities of the Japanese term *kanbun* is illustrated by Katō Tōru’s recent, and at first sight preposterous, claim that *kanbun* was invented in Japan in the Edo period. He is, of course, referring to Japanese techniques for reading literary Chinese, but it is precisely this kind of confusion that renders the term analytically

³ Wiebke Denecke, “Janus came and never left: writing literary history in the face of the other,” in Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, ed., *Studying transcultural literary history* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p. 286.

⁴ Xin Wei, p. 38.

imprecise.⁵ The question, then, is this: is the imprecision inherent in the word *kanbun* a problem, and if so what can be done about it? Wixted argues that it is indeed a problem and offers a solution:

I would like to see a distinction maintained in English when referring to *kanbun*. When speaking of *kanbun* works by Japanese, I suggest that the language they use, one based on the classical language of China, be called “Sino-Japanese.” And only when referring to Chinese traditional texts written by Chinese would we say that they are written in “Chinese.” ... Of course, the 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.⁶

There is much to be said for making such a distinction. In Japanese writing it is not infrequently unclear whether *kanbun* is being used to refer to all texts in literary Chinese, or only to classical texts produced on the mainland, or alternatively only to texts written in literary Chinese by Japanese writers; the same problem, it need hardly be added, is encountered in Korean and Vietnamese writing as well. But is that a good enough reason for making a hard and fast distinction?

The term “Sino-Japanese” has the patina of established usage, going back to Bernard Karlgren’s use of the term in 1923, though it should be noted that he was using the term solely to refer to the Japanese pronunciations of Chinese characters.⁷ However, “Sino-Japanese” implies to me that the language is being described as a variety of Japanese influenced by Chinese; yet if we follow Wixted and describe it as “based on the classical language of China” then that rather suggests a variety of

⁵ Katō Tōru 加藤徹, “Meiji ishin o kanō ni shita nihon dokuji no kanbun kundoku bunka” 明治維新を可能にした日本独自の漢文訓読文化, *Chūō Kōron* 中央公論 June 2008, pp. 198-208.

⁶ Wixted, p. 23.

⁷ Bernard Karlgren, *Analytic dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1923).

Chinese influenced by Japanese. Which is it that Sino-Japanese connotes, a kind of Chinese or a kind of Japanese? There is a startling lack of clarity here about the linguistic identity of “Sino-Japanese” texts, but that is partly a result of culturally-bound reading traditions applied to texts that may on the surface appear to be in “Chinese” but can be “read” in Japanese. What is more, the binary opposition of “a kind of Chinese” and “a kind of Japanese” is itself unsatisfactory: we are not dealing with an either-or, EITHER literary Chinese OR Japanese, but with a range of possibilities lying between, and the choices are as much ones of style and register as they are ones of language. A further sign of the complexities of these issues is that some “Sino-Japanese” texts can sometimes legitimately be described as being BOTH in literary Chinese AND in Japanese, in the sense that they were open to being read in either language.

In the passage cited above Wixted draws the parallel with Latin, and of course he is quite right to draw attention to the influence of the writer’s vernacular.⁸ It goes without saying there were vernacular influences both on the forms of spoken Latin and the forms of written Latin, including the influences exerted by written forms of the vernaculars; this was particularly so after the fall of the Roman Empire and the decline of Latin as a living language. Thus it is common to refer to the Latin written in the British isles in the second half of the first millennium as “Insular Latin”, and even to refer to Cambro-Latin, Hiberno-Latin, and Anglo-Latin poetry.⁹ Nevertheless, once we reach the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, these local differences

⁸ For the impact of the vernaculars on local forms of Latin see Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the empire of a sign: from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2001).

⁹ Michael Herren, “Hiberno-Latin philology: the state of the question,” and Michael Lapidge, “The present state of Anglo-Latin studies,” both in Michael W. Herren, ed., *Insular Latin studies: Latin texts and manuscripts of the British Isles, 550-1066* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), pp. 1-22 and 45-82; David Howlett, *Cambro-Latin compositions: their competence and craftsmanship* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998) and “Early insular Latin poetry,” *Peritia* 17-18 (2003-4), pp. 61-109.

diminish or at least are regarded as less important, partly because of the standardising effect of print, travel and centres of learning which drew students from all over Europe. Thus we do not describe the Latin of Erasmus as Dutch-Latin, that of Francis Bacon as Anglo-Latin, that of Descartes as Franco-Latin, that of Dante as Italo-Latin, that of Leibniz as Germano-Latin, that of Comenius as Czech-Latin, or that of Janus Pannonius as Magyar-Latin. “Latin” alone suffices, as it does in Wixted’s sentence quoted above.

At least in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, pupils all over Europe were using the same primers and were studying the same texts. Once they came of age, the learned tended to maintain correspondence in Latin with fellow scholars in various parts of Europe and even sometimes farther afield. What is more, their published writings were produced for what we would now call an international audience, that is to say an audience composed of people who could read Latin but spoke different vernaculars. It is in this context and in these circumstances that, in the fifteenth century, the notion of the *respublica litteraria* (Republic of Letters) developed in the world of Latin discourse, signifying the common project of scholarship and learning.¹⁰ Thus the term “Insular Latin” is not applied to the writings of Thomas More and Francis Bacon, who were both English participants in the Republic of Letters. Similarly, while we recognise that Erasmus was born and lived for the first part of his life in the United Provinces where Middle Dutch was spoken, it does not seem helpful to define the Latin he wrote either with reference to his mother tongue or to the political entity in which he happened to have spent his formative years. He spoke and wrote Latin to communicate in the Republic of Letters, with people like

¹⁰ Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet, *La Repubblica delle lettere* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005; translation by Roberta Ferrara of *La République des lettres* [Paris: Belin, 1997] with enlarged bibliography).

Thomas More and Francis Bacon and with others in Rome, Venice, Prague, Cologne, Nuremberg, Paris, Geneva, and Constance.¹¹

So we need to be aware that if we draw a distinction between “Chinese” and “Sino-Japanese” as suggested by Wixted, then as a result we draw a line between, on the one hand, Chinese classical and post-classical texts and Chinese Buddhist texts, all composed in mainland China, and on the other hand the domestic production of texts in literary Chinese in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. In other words, we reify the literary Chinese written by Japanese as a distinct entity and distinguish it hermetically from the literary Chinese written in China, Korea, Vietnam and even the Ryūkyū kingdom, something we do not do in the case of the European varieties of Latin. Do we have good reason for doing so?

It is, of course, perfectly true that in East Asia there was nothing like the extensive movement of texts and sense of common purpose that generated the idea of the Republic of Letters in Europe. And yet there were a few who travelled and maintained long-distance correspondences, such as the Korean envoy and scholar Hong Taeyong 洪大容 (1731-1783).¹² Also, in the seventh and eighth centuries in the context of Buddhist learning, and later on in the contexts of Confucian learning or Chinese poetry, there were indeed texts that moved from the periphery to China or from one peripheral state to another, in other words texts designed to cross the borders created by vernacular languages. In the case of envoy poetry, exchanged with visiting envoys, it was not only the poems but also the poets that crossed borders.¹³ Buddhist texts

¹¹ Richard J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: the prince of humanists, 1501-1536* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1993). For the spread of his correspondents see Schoeck, pp. 241-69, and plate 3 in Bots and Waquet.

¹² JaHyun Kim Haboush, ed., *Epistolary Korea: letters in the communicative space of the Chosŏn, 1392-1910* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 205-9.

¹³ See for example Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the bronze pillars: envoy poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese relationship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Kamigaito Ken'ichi 上垣外憲一,

produced in Japan and Korea were transmitted to China in the eighth century, and much later the writings of Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 and Yamanoi Konron 山井昆侖 crossed the seas to both China and Korea. On other hand, the writings of Yi T'oegye 李退溪 (1501-1570), the great Korean Confucian thinker, reached China and Japan; indeed, although the extent of this traffic is yet to be fully documented, many writings in literary Chinese by Koreans were reprinted in Japan in the seventeenth century, and in most cases they were equipped with the *kunten* to render them amenable to *kundoku* reading, about which more later.¹⁴ The movements of texts complicates the issue considerably: should we consider the Japanese editions of Yi T'oegye's works to be written in literary Chinese or in Sino-Korean, or perhaps even in Japanese since they were equipped with *kunten*?¹⁵

Denecke reports that in 2000 the Library of Congress adopted "Sino-Japanese literature" as a classification heading.¹⁶ This solves the problem of where to put Japanese *kanbun* writings in library systems that focus on the language of inscription rather than the country of origin of the author. Thus Joseph Conrad, of course, counts as English not Polish literature, and Irène Némirovsky counts as French literature. In this context, Japanese *kanbun* writings are indeed difficult to describe or classify as "Japanese literature" without stretching our definition of what constitutes the Japanese language, and equally difficult to classify as "Chinese literature" if neither the texts nor their authors ever travelled to China and if the language is far removed from the norms of literary Chinese. "Japanese literature in Chinese" is equally unsatisfactory

Amenomori Hōshū: Genroku Kyōhō no kokusajjin 雨森芳洲-元禄享保の国際人 (Chūō Kōronsha, 1989), pp. 34, 58, 137; Kate Wildman Nakai, "The naturalization of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan: the problem of Sinocentrism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40 (1980), pp. 171-2.

¹⁴ Abe Yoshio, *Nihon shushigaku to chōsen* (Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1965); Yamaguchi, "Tokugawa jidai ni okeru chōsen shoseki no honkoku," *Bunkyo no chōsen* 48 (1929): 52-70.

¹⁵ See the facsimiles contained in Abe Yoshio, ed., (*Ilbon kap'an*) *Yi T'oegye chōnjip* (日本刻版) 李退溪全集, 2 vols. (np: T'oegyehak Yōnguwōn, 1983).

¹⁶ Denecke, p. 280, n. 1.

unless the language is recognisably literary Chinese. As a classification heading, then, this makes some sense. But this does not necessarily require us to reify Sino-Japanese as a language.

Another angle to consider is the composition of texts in pre-modern Japan, Korea and Vietnam. When the learned were writing in literary Chinese in those three societies 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? Some of them may not have been able to manage as well as Amenomori Hōshū 雨森芳州, Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋, Ogyū Sorai, Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 or Yamanoi Konron, but they supposed that they were writing literary Chinese, and they could be sure that at least their compatriots would be able to understand it.

In the case of a handful of non-Chinese writers, we can point to the fact that their works received the accolade of being included in authoritative mainland collections: the ninth-century Silla poet and scholar Wang Kōin 王居仁 had a verse included in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, Yamanoi Konron's *Shichikei Mōshi kōbun hoi* 七經孟子考文補遺 was included in the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 and several poets from the Ryūkyū kingdom had their verses included in *Huang Qing si xuan* 皇清詩撰 (1705), which also contained verses by Vietnamese and Korean poets.¹⁷ In such cases as these, where there is little or no trace of the writer's vernacular and the result is acceptable

¹⁷ Emanuel Pastreich, "The reception of Chinese literature in Korea," in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia history of Chinese literature* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 1068; Ōba Osamu and Wang Yong, *Tenseki* (Taishūkan Shoten, 1996), pp. 292-300; Roy Andrew Miller, "Some Japanese influences on Chinese classical scholarship of the Ch'ing period," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 72 (1952), pp. 56-67. The Ryūkyūan poems in *Huang Qing si xuan* are included as a supplement to Uezato Ken'ichi 上里賢一編, ed., *Kōteibon Chūzanshi bunshū* 校訂本中山詩文集 (Fukuoka: Kyūshū Daigaku shuppankai, 1998). The Ryūkyūan scholar Tei Junsoku 程順則 (1663-1734) brought ten copies of *Huang Qing si xuan* back from China in 1721 and distributed them to government institutions and friends: 'Tei Junsoku kafu' 程順則家譜, in *Naha shishi* 那霸市史, shiryōhen vol. 6 'Kafu shiryō ge' (Naha, 1980), p. 559.

even to learned Chinese readers, are we justified in saying, simply because the writer had learnt literary Chinese in something other than a Chinese-speaking background and had, except for the Ryūkyūans and for Korean and Vietnamese envoys, never visited China, that the result is “Sino-Japanese” or “Sino-Korean” or “Sino-Ryūkyūan” rather than simply “literary Chinese”? Would it not be akin to regarding Conrad’s novels as written in Polish-English simply because English was for him a learned language, and Irène Némirovsky’s writings as Russo-French for a similar reason? And what about the writings of those who resided in China for a long time, such as the Korean monks Musang 無相 (680?-756?) and Wōnch’ūk 圓測 (613-696), and the Japanese scholar and administrator Abe no Nakamaro 阿倍仲麻呂 (698-770)? After all, a sūtra commentary written by Wōnch’ūk was even translated into Tibetan and was known in Tibet as “the great Chinese commentary”.¹⁸ Surely we cannot describe their writings as written in anything other than literary Chinese? In such cases “Sino-Japanese” and “Sino-Korean” will not do, I suggest.

The difficulty such examples raise has been addressed by Wiebke Denecke, who writes that, “[i]t is impossible to describe this Sino-Japanese ‘third space’ on pure linguistic grounds”.¹⁹ This is clearly so, because some of the literary Chinese writings of Japanese, like those of Koreans and Vietnamese, are indistinguishable from the literary Chinese written in China. But not all of them, of course. In other words, Sino-Japanese as a language – and the same is true of the Korean and Vietnamese equivalents – is perhaps too chimerical to reify. Denecke again:

¹⁸ Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism: conversion, contestation, and memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 69-84; Bernard Faure, “Ch’an master Musang: a Korean monk in East Asian context,” and Cho Eunsu, “Wōnch’ūk’s place in the East Asian Buddhist tradition,” in Robert E. Buswell, ed., *Currents and countercurrents: Korean influences on the East Asian Buddhist traditions* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), pp. 153-72 & 173-216; P. Daudin, “Un japonais à la cour des T’ang: Gouverneur du Protectorat d’Annam Abe-no Nakamaro alias Tch’ao Heng (698-770),” *Bulletin de la société des études indo-chinoises* 40 (1965), pp. 215-280.

¹⁹ Denecke, p. 280.

Sino-Japanese is a highly hybrid language, because, although written in Chinese syntactical order, it encompasses a rich spectrum of registers that are genre-dependent and range from Sino-Japanese poems that could well have been written by a Chinese author to prose diaries that could come close to Literary Japanese.²⁰

The argument here relates to the range of registers and the range of what we might call the authenticity of the literary Chinese written. While it is undoubtedly the case that Jinsai, Sorai and Konron wrote expert literary Chinese, it is impossible to deny that many others did not and that some forms of Japanese *kanbun* are very far removed from the norms of literary Chinese, and this is the nub of the problem. To some forms of this non-standard Chinese the name *hentai kanbun* 変態漢文 (variant *kanbun*) has been applied and the conditions that governed the production and signification of such texts have been elaborated in the West by Judith Rabinovitch and Aldo Tollini.²¹ Texts written in *hentai kanbun* appeared on the surface to be written in Chinese but contained non-standard features that did not conform to the norms of literary Chinese, such as, for example, Japanese honorifics. They were perfectly comprehensible within the society in which they were composed, at least to people familiar with the conventions in use at the time, but it is assumed that these non-standard features rendered them difficult if not impossible to understand outside Japan. Note that this is merely an assumption. It is important to remember that this was not put to the test at the time, for to my knowledge no such texts were exported either to China or Korea, and it has not been put to the test since. What is more, the precise

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

²¹ Minegishi Akira 峰岸明, *Hentai kanbun* 変体漢文 (Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1986); Judith N. Rabinovitch, “An introduction to *hentai kanbun* (variant Chinese)”, *Journal of Chinese linguistics* 24 (1996), pp. 98-126; Aldo Tollini, *La scrittura del Giappone antico* (Venice: Cafoscarina, 2005), pp. 146-75.

ways in which the vernaculars in Japan, Korea and Vietnam influenced literary Chinese at different times have yet to be satisfactorily elaborated.

One of the difficulties in all this comes from the focus on the bare fact of the “written” language before us. Wixted’s argument is that, even when the appearance of a text is that of literary Chinese, the native language and country of origin of the author require us to distinguish it as Sino-Japanese. This is because of the influence of the vernacular on the literary Chinese written by speakers of Japanese. If we shift the focus from the written text to the reader, the linguistic problems assume a different aspect. In the first place, it is difficult to deny that the phonological systems of Japan, Korea and Vietnam produced conventions for pronouncing Chinese characters that differed markedly from the various ways in which those same characters were pronounced in different parts of China, to say nothing of the other peripheral states. Thus when reading aloud or silently voicing a Chinese text, Japanese readers did so in accordance with Japanese phonology, and Korean and Vietnamese readers similarly followed the conventional readings that fitted the phonologies of their languages.

Secondly, there are the practices of *kundoku* to be considered, the specialised form of “bound translation” or “highly source-oriented approach to translation” that originated in Korea and was transmitted to Japan in the eighth century.²² Sorai insisted that in fact most Japanese tended to read *kanbun* texts of all kinds in *yomikudashi* relying on *kunten* (*wakun* in his terminology) to generate a *kundoku* translation.²³ Once we take such a reading strategy into consideration, then the

²² The second term is that of Judy Wakabayashi in “Translation in the East Asian cultural sphere: shared roots, divergent paths?” in Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi, eds, *Asian Translation Traditions* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2005), p. 24. On Korean *hundok* (*kundoku*) see Fujimoto Yukio 藤本幸夫, “Richō kundokuhō sono ichi: Bokugyūshi shūshinketsu o chūshin ni shite” 李朝訓読法其一—『牧牛子修身訣』を中心にして, *Chōsen gakuō* 朝鮮学報 143 (1992), pp. 109-218.

²³ In *Yakubunsentei*: Emanuel Pastreich, “Grappling with Chinese writing as a material language: Ogyū Sorai’s *Yakubunsentei*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61 (2001), pp. 144, 147.

argument shifts the other way, and we find ourselves looking even at literary Chinese texts produced in China as a form of Japanese, if that is actually how they are being read. The production of texts is thus quite a separate issue from the ways in which they are consumed. This is especially so when we remember some of the peculiarities or shortcomings of the *kundoku* method of reading, such as ignoring some Chinese particles altogether, ignoring the differences between others and rendering them the same way in Japanese; reading ancient texts in this way was, in Sorai's earthy image, "like scratching at an itch through a boot".²⁴ And that is to say nothing of the not infrequent cases when the Chinese is incorrectly construed and the *kundoku* translation generated by the *kunten* is simply wrong.²⁵ This "gap" between the literary Chinese of imported texts and the *kundoku yomikudashi* translation of the same text has yet to be the subject of serious study, unfortunately.

What is the way out of this morass? Instructive and helpful here is Paul Rouzer's innovative textbook of literary Chinese, published in 2007. He explains in his introduction:

[Since the end of the nineteenth century] Chinese intellectuals have tended to claim it [literary Chinese] as China's own, distinctive, premodern form of self-expression (often dismissing its composition outside China as pale imitation), while the other countries have often excluded native writings in literary Chinese from their canons, seeing them as alien and artificial, the symbol of their

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147. For Sorai's analysis of the gaps between *kundoku* and the original, see p. 148. See also the strictures of Basil Hall Chamberlain in 1886 and of Aoki Masaru later: Tao Demin 陶徳民, "Kindai ni okeru 'kanbun chokudoku' ron no yuisho to yukue – Shigeno, Aoki, Kuraishi o meguru shisō jōkyō" 近代における「漢文直読」論の由緒と行方—重野・青木・倉石をめぐる思想状況, in Nakamura Shunsaku 中村春作, Ichiki Tsuyuhiko 市來津由彦, Tajiri Yūichirō 田尻祐一郎, and Maeda Tsutomu 前田勉, eds, *Kundokuron: higashi Ajia kanbun sekai to nihongo* 訓読論—東アジア漢文世界と日本語 (Bensei shuppan, 2008), pp. 52, 58-99.

²⁵ For some examples see Kanaoka Shōkō 金岡照光, *Bukkyō kanbun no yomikata* 仏教漢文の読み方 (Shunjūsha, 2000), pp. 24-7, and Kim Yōngho 金永昊, "Asai Ryōi no *Sankō kōjitsuzu* hon'yaku – wakokubon, wayakubon no teihon to Ryōi," *Kinsei bungei* 91 (2010), pp. 20-26.

countries' servitude to a foreign tradition. Recently, however, an increased sensitivity to the links that bring the societies of East Asia together into a shared cultural space has suggested that the study of literary Chinese independent of the study of the modern Chinese language may be of great advantage.²⁶

In pursuit of this goal, Rouzer provides not only the modern Mandarin pronunciations of the graphs but also the modern Korean and Japanese pronunciations, apologizing for not having provided Vietnamese pronunciations as well. This is justified, he points out, by the fact that there is no “authentic” or “correct” way of pronouncing literary Chinese; rather, it was pronounced or “read” in a variety of dialects and languages.²⁷ In other words, as a written medium of communication it functioned efficiently, but could not form the basis of oral communication, except between speakers of the same Chinese languages or dialects. In similar vein, but writing from the perspective of the cultural history of Vietnam, Keith Taylor has argued that, “‘Classical Chinese’ ... is as much Vietnamese, Japanese or Korean as it is Chinese”.²⁸ It is precisely for reasons akin to these that Victor Mair has argued for the use of a term that avoids any mention of “Chinese,” a word after all that for us confuses language and nationality, and opts instead for “Sinitic”.²⁹ This is really a *hōben* 方便, a “convenient device” to disconnect the written language before us from the name of any spoken language or nationality, but it is a useful one. We can use it to designate a whole corpus of texts that either circulated widely or had the potential to do so, wherever they were produced, without implying that they had anything to do with “China”. But it is no

²⁶ Paul Rouzer, *A new practical primer of classical Chinese* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), pp. xiv.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xiv-xv.

²⁸ K. W. Taylor, “Sino-Vietnamese translations from classical to vernacular,” in Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi, eds, *Asian Translation Traditions* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2005), p. 173.

²⁹ Victor H. Mair, “Buddhism and the rise of the written vernacular in East Asia: the making of national languages,” *JAS* 53 (1994), pp. 707-751.

more than a *hōben*, and should not be taken to consecrate Sinitic as a written language totally isolated from spoken languages and immune to influences.

I have suggested above that in the case of texts that circulated and that were written in perfect or well-nigh perfect Sinitic (literary Chinese), it may not be helpful to describe them as being written in Sino-Japanese since they were amenable to being read in a variety of ways and that includes being read as Sinitic texts in other parts of East Asia. That leaves a residue of texts produced in Japan (and elsewhere) that were not amenable to being read as Sinitic and did not have the potential of circulating in East Asia. What is the full range of these texts that encompass the “rich spectrum of registers” referred to by Denecke? Obvious examples in the case of Japan are correspondence, diaries, legal codes, and literary works such from the *fudoki* to the writings of Narushima Ryūhoku 成島柳北 in the Meiji period, so the range runs from private documents to public notices, and from formal texts to literary works. Are they all, or would they have been, totally incomprehensible as Sinitic, or only partly so? What precisely are the obstacles to their comprehension as Sinitic? Do those obstacles derive from literary Japanese, as Denecke plausibly suggests, or do they sometimes derive from other written or spoken forms of Japanese? For what audiences were they written?

It may well be appropriate to refer to all such texts as texts written in Sino-Japanese, that is, as texts that on the surface appear to be written in a form of Chinese peculiar to Japan but constitute, from the reader’s perspective, a form of Japanese influenced by Chinese rather than a form of Chinese influenced by Japanese. But it will be obvious that there is a continuum of possibilities here and that “Sino-Japanese” is not a neat category. Similarly, a descriptor such as *hentai kanbun* is insufficient to grasp the variety we encounter or the contours of the historical development of such forms

of language. We need something like sinological litmus paper to measure where any given text falls on the gamut between natural Sinitic at one extreme and at the other extreme written texts that are incomprehensible as Sinitic. Even that will not be enough, though. Take a text written by Yi T'oegye: in China it would be read as literary Chinese, in Korea either as Sinitic with Korean phonology or as Korean in the Korean form of *kundoku*, and in Japan either as Sinitic with Japanese phonology or as Japanese in *kundoku*; in other words, in Japan it would have been treated as *kanbun* and would to this day be described as *kanbun*. To some extent it might also be supposed that the readings of his text would vary: at least marginal differences would be generated as a result of semantic shifts and scholarly nuances applying to different language communities, and sometimes more substantial differences might arise, especially in the Japanese case if *kunten* are misapplied or imply one interpretation rather than another. So the issue of terminology is as much a question of the language in which in which a text is read as it is of the language in which it is written. It is bizarre but true that writers who knew not a word of Japanese could produce texts that in Japan were read as Japanese: such was the reality of Sinitic reading traditions.

The terms Sino-Japanese, Sino-Korean and Sino-Vietnamese are probably here to stay, and they do certainly have their uses, but I suggest that they need to be used selectively and with caution, principally to denote texts that depart from Sinitic norms and were therefore not portable to other societies in East Asia. The use of these terms should not obscure the facts that some writers in Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Ryūkyū could and did produce Sinitic writings which could and did circulate outside their country of origin, irrespective of how they were read at home.³⁰ Nor should it be

³⁰ See the instructive debate between James McMullen and John Tucker on the language of Itō Jinsai's *Gomō jigi* and how it should be read: I. J. McMullen, "Itō Jinsai and the meaning of words,"

forgotten, as Denecke reminds us, that they cover a range of registers and genres, as well as a range of accommodations between Sinitic and Japanese. Let us agree that, like the citizens of the Republic of Letters in Europe with their Latin, figures such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 in China, Ogyū Sorai in Japan, Yi T'oegye in Korea, Sai On 蔡温 in Ryūkyū, and Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 in Vietnam all wrote in Sinitic, or literary Chinese. They may not have corresponded with each other as their counterparts in Europe did, but their works could be understood throughout East Asia, even if they were read in various ways in different language communities. For other texts that do not fit these criteria – and they cover a range of possibilities rather than constituting a neat category – we have to be more discriminating in our choice of language, and to identify more clearly both vernacular influences and historical developments.

Monumenta Nipponica 54 (1999), pp. 509-20, and John Allen Tucker's reply in *Monumenta Nipponica* 55 (2000), pp. 321-3.