

## REVIEW EDITOR'S COLUMN

### LEARNING KANBUN

**AN INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE KANBUN**, by Akira Komai and Thomas H. Rohlich. Nagoya: The University of Nagoya Press (Nanzan University Academic Publication Series), 1988. Pp. xiv + 150. ¥3,000.

An earlier draft of this review began with a wallow in autobiographical reminiscence; suffice it to say, rather, that back in the dark ages before teaching was invented, taking a required class in kanbun was not a happy experience; nor, I suspect, did teaching it give much satisfaction to the bored instructor of our tiny group of bewildered undergraduates (sic). I doubt that any of us who struggled through the course believed that we would ever be able to read such awful stuff. Mention the subject, and your colleague shakes his head; yet research on premodern topics in fields ranging from economics to poetry is radically hampered when kanbun sources remain out of reach. If only we had had Komai and Rohlich's book! Everything about its explicit statement of its goals, its thoughtful organization, progressive ordering of its materials, careful but unfussy explanations and definitions, and its exceptionally clear and attractive format and typography instills the confidence that kanbun is learnable. The book is not a self-teacher (although a key to the exercises, if one were provided, would carry it a good way toward being one). For the classroom, however, it furnishes a framework which can easily be built on; and for the scholar who is already dealing with kanbun, in the haphazard way that most of us have come to adopt, it provides valuable review and reference.

The authors' description of their work bears close attention; they are addressing it to a specific task, not attempting to solve all problems of all kanbun readers. The book is "an introductory textbook of Japanese *kanbun* for the foreign student who has already acquired a fair command of modern Japanese and a basic knowledge of classical Japanese grammar." (My own experience suggests that it is better for the student not to undertake kanbun until s/he is quite at ease with classical Japanese grammar, but perhaps few who are not would be tempted to try.) Their subject is "Japanese *kanbun* . . . the written representation of the

Japanese language in the *kundoku* style, not classical Chinese," and they urge "those who wish to read Japanese *kanbun* as a written representation of the Chinese language" to "study classical Chinese directly." They point out that "some Japanese *kanbun* sentences and expressions are unnatural and at times even ungrammatical according to the conventions of classical Chinese, even though they may represent perfectly good Japanese *kanbun*" [p. xiii].

The authors base their efficient presentation on what might be called a "cookbook" approach, with emphasis on the means of dealing with the graphic elements of *kanbun* encountered individually, rather than on underlying grammatical structures. Of their ten chapters, Chapter 1 is devoted to the basic position markers and reading indicators: *okurigana*; *kaeri-ten*, *re-ten* and *iti-ni-ten* (all used to mark inversions in the order of reading); and *tate-ten* (joining the elements of a compound). Chapter 2 takes up *okizi*, corresponding more or less to English prepositions and necessitating (unmarked) inversions in reading; it also takes up negation and the quotation marker. Chapter 6 takes up *saidoku mozi* ("twice read characters"). And so on. Chapters 9 and 10 discuss a variety of question forms and give helpful attention to rhetorical questions, which can pose problems even for experienced readers. The authors' explanations of the differences in meaning or nuance between two (or more) characters read identically are particularly welcome, as are also their remarks on the divergence of *kanbun* from classical Chinese usage.

The authors' thoughtfulness is much in evidence in the illustrative examples, given both in marked *kanbun* and as *yomikudashi* (the *kanbun* reading transcribed in characters and katakana), accompanied by romanization of the *kanbun*, translation into modern Japanese, and English translation. Old character forms, with which students working with *kanbun* texts will need to become acquainted, are used in the *kanbun* examples in the latter part of the book, but not in the accompanying *yomikudashi*, which uses *zyooyoo kanzi* throughout. Where explanation seems skimpy, generally the *yomikudashi* will help one get around any difficulty. Some—not a great amount—of help with vocabulary is provided.

Almost all of the examples, exercises, and reading selections are from Japanese sources, principally *Nihon gaishi* and the *manabon* version of *Hôjôki*. I was delighted to see as the final reading selections two classics of Heian *kanbun*: *Fujisan ki*, by Fujiwara no Michizane's teacher Miyako no Yoshika, and "The Song of the Tailless Ox," by Minamoto no Shitagô (a translation may be found in Burton Watson's *Japanese*

*Literature in Chinese*, Vol. 1 [Columbia University Press, 1975], pp. 65-67). I thought—and I can imagine students who might think—the exercises fun to do: there is a pleasure in seeing the words and meanings fall into place. The exercises include several in reading *hakubun* (unmarked kanbun), whether as a test of the learner's comprehension or to make the learner grateful for *kaeriten* the authors do not say.

I noticed only one misprint (or so I assume it to be): the character 漫 for 侵 in Example 2Bb, p. 133. A more serious weakness is the index, which combines in one alphabetical list topics (e.g., "ability"), paragraph headings (e.g., "genuine alternative questions summary") and characters by their *on* and *kun* readings. Quite often, if you want to look up a character here, it is because you have forgotten the readings in the first place, and it is a nuisance to have to turn separately to whatever *kanwa* dictionary you depend upon. Let us hope that a proper character index will be added to the next edition. Warning: the book does not tell the student what to do in the dread instance that compounds in a given text are unmarked with *tate-ten*; it does not even warn the student that this is likely to occur. I noticed no other significant omission.

**AN INTRODUCTION TO KAMBUN**, by Sydney Crawcour. The University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 1965. Pp. xix + 78. \$2.

Until the appearance of Komai and Rohlich's volume, Crawcour's work was the only systematic presentation of kanbun generally available, and copies can still be purchased from the publisher (the price is not a typographical error). This volume contrasts with Komai and Rohlich in a number of essential aspects. Despite Crawcour's claim that it is "intended to provide an introduction to the *kambun kundoku* style for students whose primary interest is in Japanese studies," its best audience is probably more advanced students, as well as scholars who aspire to make their way through classical Chinese texts through the medium of Japanese. Crawcour, who has himself written a learned and gracious review of Komai and Rohlich (published in *Monumenta Nipponica* 44:2 [Summer, 1989] 256-58), maintains, very plausibly, that