

# The Prose of Our Land: Ban Kōkei, Translation, and National Language Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Japan

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**Abstract:** Today, Ban Kōkei 伴蒿蹊 (1733–1806) is mostly known as the author of a collection of biographies, which became one of the best-selling books of Japan's late eighteenth century. However, he also devoted much of his career to developing the expressive potential of Japanese prose writing. This article locates Kōkei's promotion of language reform within the context of contemporaneous developments in translation from classical into vernacular Japanese and explains the role of translation in Kōkei's attempts to develop Japanese prose writing nearly one hundred years before the better-known national language advocacy of the "Unification of the Spoken and Written Languages" (*Genbun itchi* 言文一致) movement of the Meiji period (1868–1912). Considered alongside canonical figures like Motoori Norinaga and Ogyū Sorai, Kōkei's lesser-known work is evidence of a nascent "national" language consciousness among Japanese intellectuals prior to the Meiji period.

**Keywords:** Japanese language, language reform, language fascination, Kokugaku, translation

## Introduction

The scholar Ban Kōkei 伴蒿蹊 (1733–1806) is best known today for his published collection of biographies of eccentrics, *Eccentrics of Our Times* (*Kinsei kijinden* 近世畸人伝, 1790), which was one of the best-selling books of Japan's late eighteenth century (Kameya 2009). Less known, however, is that Kōkei was also an ardent proponent of writing new and richly expressive forms of Japanese-style prose, for which he coined the expression "the prose of our land" (*kunitsubumi* 国つ文) (or "prose in the style of our land" *kuniburi no fumi* 国ぶりの文) rather than employing the conventional Sino-Japanese term, *wabun* 和文. This project occupied several decades of his scholarly life, involved numerous students and disciples, and resulted in the founding of a Japanese prose society. Although largely forgotten as anything other than the author of *Eccentrics*, Kōkei was a highly regarded scholar in his adoptive hometown of Kyoto during his day, and his prose project constituted a major part of his scholarly endeavors—a significant but often overlooked chapter in the history of the Japanese language.

At a time when most prose writing in Japan used either the medium of Literary Sinitic or hybridized mixtures of Chinese and Japanese elements, Kōkei was one of a growing number of writers who used Japanese with much of the Chinese

vocabulary expunged (Kazama 1998; Burns 2003). One way in which Kōkei differs from other writers of Japanese prose, however, was in his proposed method for the creation of such a style. Much like the well-known European example of Cicero, who developed his rhetorical Latin-language skills centuries earlier by translating from classical Greek (Copeland 1991: 1–8), the main methodology advocated by Kōkei for the cultivation of skillful prose was translation, or as he called it in a term unique to himself, “*utsushibumi*” (うつしづみ, “transferred text”). The source languages from which Kōkei advocated practicing *utsushibumi* were drawn from the spectrum of written languages used in Japan in his day and involved intralingual translation from classical and written forms of Japanese, as well as translation from Literary Sinitic.<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual climate in which Kōkei produced his writings on Japanese prose was one in which increasing attention was paid to the question of language (Sakai 1992; Burns 2003), and the significance of his work is better understood by being placed in this context. Much like early modern Europe, where Peter Burke (2004: 15–42) has noted a “discovery of language” (which others have described as “language fascination” [Haar 2019: 13–16]), the rapid changes that occurred in the Tokugawa period—urbanization, increasing literacy rates, and the advent of a commercial print industry (Kornicki 1998)—rendered language visible in ways that had never before been experienced in Japan and involved a much wider cross section of society; this in turn was cause for greater debate, study, and abstraction (Clements 2015: 16–46). Indeed, Naoki Sakai has argued that the Japanese language was “born” in the eighteenth century as a result of the discursive practices of scholars like Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728), who is discussed below.<sup>2</sup> As new classes of readers emerged and engaged with the Chinese and Japanese classics, consumed popular print works, and had their language captured on the page in print, anxieties grew about the correct use of language and whether canonical texts should be translated into the vernacular or made otherwise accessible (Clements 2014). Grammarians for the first time began to look at the Japanese language as a whole (e.g., Takeoka 1961). In addition, there was an influx of vernacular Chinese novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as hundreds of books in the Dutch language (Ōba 1967; Kornicki 1998). Both vernacular Chinese and Dutch also became objects of study and debate (Ishizaki 1940; Asō 1946; Clements 2015).

It was within this intellectual climate that Kōkei turned his attention to the question of how to create expressive and useful Japanese prose for the present, something he felt did not at that time exist, despite the achievements of Japan’s linguistic past. This article examines Kōkei’s ideas of translation and the creation of Japanese prose through a close reading of his published works on the subject. I will also put Kōkei’s efforts at language reform in the context of eighteenth-century developments in intralingual translation from classical into vernacular Japanese and explain the role of translation in his attempts to develop Japanese prose language nearly one hundred years before the better-known national language advocacy of the “Unification of the Spoken and Written Languages” (*Genbun itchi* 言文一致) movement of the Meiji period (1868–1912). My aim is to reintroduce Kōkei and these neglected aspects of his scholarship, and in so doing, to add further details

to our understanding of Japanese language consciousness prior to the linguistic nationalism of the Meiji period.

### About Ban Kōkei

Ban Kōkei is not currently considered a major figure in the intellectual history of Tokugawa Japan. However, he was a talented polymath who enjoyed an excellent reputation in his day for his Japanese poetry and was also respected for his knowledge of Literary Sinitic (Mori 1988: 55–59). Although many Edo-period scholars were active in two or more fields of endeavor, Kōkei's own approach to scholarship had a strongly individual flavor—unsurprising for the man who composed a best-selling book about eccentrics—as seen in his unique advocacy of translation to create Japanese prose. This originality no doubt owed much to the circumstances of his birth and the financial freedom those circumstances afforded for pursuing his interests unfettered by the need to please a patron or paying students.

Born into a wealthy merchant family based in Hachiman in the province of Ōmi, Kōkei was adopted as the heir of the family's main branch and succeeded to that role at age eighteen. Although he was successful in business, eighteen years later, in 1768, he took the tonsure, handed over the management of the family business to an adopted son, and spent the remainder of his thirties in Kyoto establishing his reputation as a poet of *waka* (和歌, “Japanese [as opposed to Sinitic] poetry”) (Beerens 2006: 52–53). A contemporary, the writer Tachibana Nankei 橋南谿 (1753–1805), considered Kōkei to be one of the “four kings of *waka* poetry in the capital [i.e., Kyoto]” (Kazama 1992: 50n2), and Kōkei was included in the salon of Prince Shinnin 妙法院宮真仁法親王 (1768–1805), which “consisted of the crème de la crème of late eighteenth-century art, poetry and scholarship” (Beerens 2012: 35), indicating just how highly Kōkei was regarded as a literatus during his lifetime. In the An'ei period (1772–81) he began to lecture about Japanese prose (*wabun* 和文) and founded a society for the study of Japanese prose, the Society of Letters (Fumi no Tsudoi 文の会), in 1772 (Kazama 1992; 1998: 91–113). In 1774, when he was forty-three, Kōkei completed his first work on the subject, *The Prose of Our Land from Age to Age* (*Kunitsubumi yoyo no ato* 国文世々の跡), which was published in print in 1777, and he followed this with *Translation for the Enlightenment of Little Children* (*Utsushibumi warawa no satoshi* 訳文童諭) in 1794, both of which have been reproduced in modern printed form (Kazama 1993). Kōkei continued his prose project until his death in 1806, and the Society of Letters continued to meet until then.

However, Kōkei was not long outlived by his adopted son and intellectual heir, Ban Sukenori 伴資規 (?–1810), and in the years that followed, his adopted hometown of Kyoto was increasingly eclipsed by Edo as Japan's premier center of intellectual activity and prestige. Kōkei's prose project thus lost momentum after his death and, with the exception of the modern scholar Kazama Seishi (1992, 1993, 1998), has not been of interest to modern historians.

### Kōkei and Tokugawa-Period Language Study

Kōkei's work has a strongly individual flavor, but his preoccupation with Japanese prose may nonetheless be clearly understood in the context of his day. As

Japanese debates about language use grew in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a corresponding interest in translation among scholars associated with the Kokugaku nativist tradition and those who studied Chinese. The earliest Tokugawa-period scholars to focus closely on language were sinologists. Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627–1705) and Sorai were particularly important in this respect. Both these leading intellectuals advocated translation as a teaching method in their academies and, as will be discussed below, the legacy of their influence descends to Ban Kōkei via the grammarian Fujitani Nariakira 富士谷成章 (1738–79).<sup>3</sup>

Much like Kōkei with Japanese prose more than a century later, Jinsai advocated the practice of translation in an attempt to improve the Sinitic writing abilities of the students in his academy. He was particularly concerned with what he called provincial (or “national”) habits (*kokushū* 国習) of writing that Japanese scholars fell into when composing Sinitic. In order to remedy these *kokushū*—a term that could also be written with characters meaning “the stench of Japanese”—Jinsai had his followers translate from Sinitic by first making a transcription of the Japanese reading based on glosses (*kundoku* 訓読), and then translating that transcription back into Sinitic. The back-translated version was then compared with the Sinitic original and any errors were corrected (Li 2002; Clements 2015: 38).

Jinsai’s work influenced that of Sorai, who likewise focused on understanding the true meaning of Chinese texts. Thanks to the work of postwar scholars like Maruyama Masao (1952), Sorai is now the best-known example of a Tokugawa scholar who advocated translation. Sorai famously made the radical claim that Sinitic, which had been such a part of Japanese scholarship for centuries that it was no longer regarded as foreign, was in fact Chinese and ought to be read as such. The habitual readings (now known as *kundoku*, meaning “reading by gloss” or “vernacular reading”) that Japanese scholars allocated to sinographs were archaic, he argued, and obscured the true meaning of the characters. For pupils who were not yet at the level of being able to read Sinitic as Chinese, Sorai advocated instead that Sinitic be explained using a natural, vernacular Japanese translation (Pastreich 2001). As will be discussed below, Kōkei adopted an approach very similar to Sorai’s recommendation to translate sinographs “using one’s mind” to “grasp the meaning,” choosing Japanese equivalents rather than relying on the traditional Sino-Japanese readings.

In addition, Kōkei’s interest in translation as a methodology has echoes of the work of the Kokugaku (国学, “National Studies”) scholars. Prior to Kōkei’s publications on the topic, the philologist Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769) urged his students to recover the spirit of ancient Japanese by writing poems and prose in the style of the eighth-century *Collection of a Myriad of Leaves* (*Man’yōshū*). Among Mabuchi’s disciples, Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) went even further than his teacher, attempting to reconstruct the ancient language of Japan’s past and to free ancient Japanese texts like *Record of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki* 古事記, 712) from what he saw as the taint of Chinese influence. The *Record of Ancient Matters* was written using sinographs, but Norinaga argued that the text buried beneath

these characters was in fact a form of ancient Japanese, and he spent years of his scholarly life resurrecting that “original,” effectively producing what one modern scholar has called a “free translation” into Japanese prose, *Commentaries on the Kojiki* (*Kojikiden* 古事記伝) (Burns 2003: 68–101, 79, quoting Nishimiya 1970). Although Kōkei does not cite Norinaga directly as an influence, Kōkei’s free translations from Sinitic texts into Japanese prose, which involved finding indigenous equivalents for Chinese compounds, echo Norinaga’s earlier efforts.

There are likewise similarities between Kōkei’s advocacy of translation from classical Japanese into the vernacular, which appeared in his *Translation for the Enlightenment* in 1794, and Norinaga’s use of intralingual translation from classical Japanese into the contemporary vernacular. In 1793 Norinaga produced the first vernacular Japanese translation of *The Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, titled *A Telescope for the Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (*Kokinshū tōkagami* 古今集遠鏡), which was published in print in 1797 (Harper 1996).

Kōkei’s and Norinaga’s work on translation from classical Japanese into the vernacular came at the end of the eighteenth century, when there were already several vernacular translations of the Japanese classics circulating in manuscript and in print. Beginning in the seventeenth century, woodblock-printed texts, digests, and commentaries of Heian court classics such as *The Tale of Genji* and *Tales of Ise* became available for purchase in the commercial print industry. For the first time, knowledge of these works became a mark of culture beyond aristocratic and high-ranking warrior circles as the texts were digested, parodied, illustrated, and adapted for the commercial press (Ii 2001; Shirane 2008; Yamamoto and Mostow 2009). A product of this phenomenon was vernacular translation, the first large-scale attempt at which was published in 1678 with *Tales of Ise in Plain Language* (*Ise monogatari hirakotoba* 伊勢物語ひら言葉). This was followed by several vernacular *Genji* translations. Then, from the mid-eighteenth century, a shift may be observed in which vernacular translation began to be used by scholars as a tool for better understanding the Japanese classics and the classical language (Clements 2015), an approach that was consolidated by Norinaga in *A Telescope for the Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (Clements 2014). Norinaga argued that vernacular translation was a better method for understanding the classical language of Japan’s past than traditional commentaries, a “telescope” that brought the texts of the past closer. After Norinaga’s translation, scholarly vernacular translators of the classics no longer expressed anxiety about the act of rendering a classical text in “vulgar” language (Clements 2015: 47–93).

Kōkei’s first work that included the subject of translation, *The Prose of Our Nation*, was published in 1774, predating by nearly two decades Norinaga’s translation of *The Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (manuscript, 1793), with its exhortation to translate *waka* poetry from classical into the vernacular. Kōkei’s prose society was founded even earlier, in 1772. However, Kōkei’s later work *Translation for the Enlightenment* was published in print the year after Norinaga’s translation of *Collection of Poems* was finished and began circulating in manuscript form, so he may have been inspired by Norinaga’s exhortation to use vernacular translation as a means of better understanding the language of Japan’s past.

Although Kōkei's work echoes and was possibly motivated in part by Norinaga, further evidence suggests that the idea may in fact have come to Kōkei as a result of the earlier work of a grammarian, Fujitani Nariakira, whose pioneering attempt to systematize a grammar of the Japanese language and to delineate the changes in the Japanese poetic language over time are the first such attempts in Japanese history (Clements 2019). As discussed in more detail below, in 1774 in *The Prose of Our Nation* Kōkei periodized Japanese prose into different historical eras, noting the change in prose styles over time. In this, he seems to have been inspired by Nariakira's pioneering work, which had already been published in print in *Commentary on Hairpin Words* (*Kazashi shō* かざし抄, 1767) and was later revised in *Commentary on String Words* (*Ayui shō* あゆい抄) of 1778 (these texts are reprinted in Takeoka 1961). Like Kōkei's interest in prose, Nariakira's interest in Japanese grammar grew out of his study of Japanese poetry. As a prominent Kyoto-based *waka* poet, Kōkei would have been familiar with the groundbreaking work of Nariakira, who was also based in Kyōto (Clements 2019).

Like Kōkei, and later, Norinaga, Nariakira advocated using vernacular translation of classical Japanese as a way of studying classical Japanese itself (Takeoka 1962: 1042–97). It is in this use of vernacular translation as a means of studying a classical language that Kōkei's links to Jinsai and Sorai come full circle. As Tokieda Motoki (1932: 128, 151–52) has shown, Nariakira's inspiration vis-à-vis vernacular translation as a way of studying language came from his brother the sinologist Minagawa Kien 皆川淇園 (1734–1807), who in turn drew on the traditions of Jinsai and Sorai. It was thus through Nariakira that Kōkei drew further on the sinological tradition of Jinsai and Sorai.

The only modern scholar to work on Kōkei in depth, Kazama Seishi, has argued convincingly that Kōkei's interest in Japanese prose chimes with developments by contemporary writers of fiction, such as Ueda Akinari 上田秋成 (1734–1809), who sought to develop their Japanese language expression in order to better their fiction compositions (Kazama 1998). Indeed, Akinari, who also engaged with Kokugaku scholarship (Burns 2003: 102–30), briefly participated in Kōkei's prose society, and the two phenomena—developments in fiction, and nonfiction prose—are undoubtedly part of the linguistic change, study, and experimentation that took place in the Tokugawa period. However, it is also important to note that Kōkei was writing mainly about nonfiction prose composition, and his intellectual lineage descends, via Nariakira, from the scholars Jinsai and Sorai. This scholarly intellectual project forms an important part of understanding Kōkei's work in its contemporary context.

### ***The Prose of Our Land from Age to Age* (*Kunitsubumi yo yo no ato* 国文世々の跡, 1774)**

Before embarking on an analysis of Kōkei's use of translation it is necessary to understand the wider project within which he advocated that practice. This wider project was his main aim: the study, improvement, and promotion of good-quality prose writing in Japanese. *The Prose of Our Land from Age to Age* was the first of Kōkei's published pieces on the Japanese language; it is a three-

volume work in which he sets out his manifesto on Japanese prose and provides a description of different styles (which he calls *sugata* or *tai* 体) of Japanese prose throughout history. Kōkei begins by lamenting the fact that people concentrate only on improving their Japanese poetry or Sinitic prose writing, and he says that people of the current age do not write well in Japanese. He dismisses the possible criticism that Japanese prose, which is written using the phonographic cursive script (*kana* 仮名), was only suitable for women, arguing that the perceived gentleness of *kana* writing is what leads some to consider it feminine, incorrectly in his opinion.

It is clear from the introductory remarks to *The Prose of Our Land* that Kōkei's interest in Japanese prose grew out of his expertise as a *waka* poet. The introduction is framed as a typical question-and-answer dialogue (*mondō* 問答) used in premodern East Asian educational texts, and in answer to the first question, "Why do so few people write prose in the style of our land?," Kōkei replies: "Well, the first thing is that people who compose *waka* poetry concentrate only on poems and say they do not have much time for anything else. . . . Moreover, they only ever compose poems on set topics (*dai* 題) and so there are hardly any opportunities to write a headnote (*kotogaki* 言書). Thus, I suspect they do not think that prose is something useful" (Kōkei [1774] 1993: 7). *Kotogaki/kotobagaki* headnotes are short prose explanations, a few lines long, that provided context or the background story to a *waka* poem, which due to its thirty-one-syllable form was often too brief for its greater significance to be understood at face value. Kōkei's point about set topics is that when a poem was composed in response to a set topic rather than the poet's personal circumstances, there was usually no need for an explanatory headnote. In Kōkei's view, people therefore concentrated too much on writing poetry and either did not need headnotes or, when they did require one, were not concerned with writing it well.

However, in Kōkei's opinion, good Japanese prose writing would in fact enhance the poetic experience: "How will they understand the meaning of the poems later without a [prose] headnote? Moreover, although in the moment there is nothing better than a poem for capturing the heart's overflow, headnotes should also be able to capture poignant feelings" ([1774] 1993: 7). In *The Prose of Our Land* the anonymous questioner wishes to know which of three historical styles of Japanese identified by Kōkei should serve as a model: "In this book you divide [Japanese prose] into three styles (*sugata* 体): ancient (*ōmukashi* 大むかし), medieval (*nakamukashi* 中むかし), and recent (*chikakiyo* 近き世). Which is best to follow?" ([1774] 1993: 15). Kōkei's answer is that, just as there are different poetic styles, which people follow according to their interests and abilities, so too there ought to be different styles of prose writing: "All three types are attractive and so it is difficult to point to one of them. They are like the heart and the appearance of a person, and so one ought to follow one's tastes, just as, for example, one can study either the elegant (*yasashiki sugata* 艶体) or forceful (*onitorihishigu sugata* 鬼拉体) poetic styles depending on where one's talents lie" ([1774] 1993: 15).<sup>4</sup> He does, however, go on to recommend that beginners should at least study the style of medieval (i.e., *nakamukashi*) Japanese, since mastery of this offers access to both the more ancient form and the more recent form.

The ultimate principle of composition that Kōkei urged his students to follow was that of clarity. “Prose is for understanding things and so clarity of logic (*kotowari* 理) is of the utmost importance. It should not be like peering at a mix of colors through a reed blind or listening to a voice carried by the wind. Words are at their best when the thread [of argument] is clear, and even if you only hear them in passing you should be able to discern what they are about” ([1774] 1993: 14). In fact, apart from these comments, Kōkei’s works on the subject spell out very little. Rather, he relied on a practice-based approach, founding a prose society and exhorting his followers to exercise their composition skills by translating, a practice he called *utsushibumi*.

The first published record of Kōkei proposing the use of translation to hone one’s prose-writing skills appears in the aforementioned *Prose of Our Land*. Although the main focus of this work is to argue for the importance of developing and maintaining the ability to write in Japanese, as well as providing an overview of the different historical prose writing styles in Japan, Kōkei also includes a final section titled 訳文之条, “A Section on Translation.” It is not clear exactly how these four characters should be pronounced since Kōkei leaves them unglossed and then uses both the Sinitic loan word *yakusuru* 訳する and the Japanese word *utushi* うつし to describe his methodology in the main body of the text. In his later work *Translation for the Enlightenment of Little Children* (1794), discussed below, Kōkei glosses the Sinitic compound 訳文 as *utsushibumi*, a reading unique to himself and one that uses Japanese rather than Sino-Japanese morphology (which would see the compound read as *yakubun*). This is consistent with Kōkei’s attempt to improve the expressive power of the Japanese language without the need to rely on Sino-Japanese words.

Traditionally, 訳文, read in Sino-Japanese as *yakubun*, refers to translation of a fairly close kind rather than to paraphrase or adaptation (Clements 2021). However, it is clear from the examples in *The Prose of Our Land*, where the idea first appears in Kōkei’s writings, and later in his *Translation for the Enlightenment* that what Kōkei has in mind encompasses something broader. Kōkei envisages *utsushibumi* as including translations that capture the sense of the phrase concerned, rather than traditional Sino-Japanese readings of individual sinographs; in some cases, he even means something much more closely approaching paraphrase.

Here we encounter an important intersection between Kōkei’s work and the sinological tradition in Japan. *Kundoku* (訓読, “glossed/vernacular readings”) were the traditional Sino-Japanese pronunciations associated with classical Chinese words when classical Chinese or Sinitic was read mentally or aloud in Japan. In addition to affixing Sino-Japanese glosses, *kundoku* involved orally or mentally rearranging the syntax of the original to correspond more closely with the norms of Japanese (Wakabayashi 2005; Clements 2015: 104–19). In the first half of the eighteenth century, the sinologist Ogyū Sorai famously advocated reading Chinese using contemporary Qing-period pronunciation and the original word order (Pastreich 2001). As noted above, in cases where a Chinese reading was not possible, such as where the reader did not speak Chinese, Sorai promoted translation into more easily understandable forms of Japanese.



Following an approach similar to Sorai's and explaining that the traditional *kundoku* readings of sinographs can obscure the meaning, in *The Prose of Our Land* Kōkei gives the following examples of *utsushibumi* translations of Sinitic compounds that go beyond traditional *kundoku* readings, requiring one to “use one's mind” (*kokoro o mochii* 心を用ひ) and “grasp the meaning” (*jigi o kokoro* 字義を心得):

1. Sinitic term in source text: 曆運. Kōkei's suggested translation: *yo* 世.
2. Sinitic term in source text: 分布. Kōkei's suggested translation: *makihodokosu* まきほどこす.
3. Sinitic term in source text: 姿則. Kōkei's suggested translation: *utsukushiku* うつくしく ([1774] 1993: 49).

Examples 1 and 2 are from the early Japanese quasi-historical text *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, 720), and 3 is from the Tang dynasty work of prose fiction *The Grotto of Immortals* (*Youxian ku* 游仙窟, ca. seventh century). Both were written in forms of Literary Sinitic and, if read according to the conventions of Japanese *kundoku*, their vocabulary would be pronounced as Sino-Japanese compounds: example 1 would be read as *rekiun*, 2 as *bunpu*, and 3 as *shisoku*. Kōkei is suggesting the substitution of Japanese equivalents instead, which convey the same or very similar meanings as the Sinitic compound but are not derived from Chinese loan words or morphology. *Kundoku* Sino-Japanese readings are arguably already a form of translation but, like Sorai before him, Kōkei here is advocating for translation into natural-sounding, native Japanese.

He takes this further in the remaining examples from the “Section on Translation” in *The Prose of Our Land*, broadening the definition of translation by quoting cases in which a poem or phrase from a Chinese work is paraphrased in Japanese-language works such as *The Tosa Diary* (*Tosa nikki* 土佐日記, ca. 935) and *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, ca. 1008). For example, the following poem by the Tang dynasty poet Jia Dao 賈島 (779–843) is paraphrased in *The Tosa Diary*:

**Tang dynasty source as quoted by Kōkei:** 棹穿波底月、船圧水中天 (Kazama 1993: 50)

**English translation:** Oars pierce the moon beneath the waves; the boat bears down upon heavens in the water.

**Translation/paraphrase from *The Tosa Diary* as quoted by Kōkei:** *sao wa ugatsu nami no ue no tsuki o, fune wa osou umi no uchi no sora o* さをうがつ波の上の月を、舟はおそふうみのうちの空を (Kōkei [1774] 1993: 50)

**English translation:** Oars pierce the moon on the waves; the boat bears down upon the sky in the water.

In the *Tosa* translation, the poem is rewritten in Japanese but with slight modifications. In the Chinese original the moon is “beneath the waves” (*bo di* 波底) but in the Japanese, the moon is “over the waves” (*nami no ue* 波の上), for example. In other words, this is not a strict translation but a rewording involving both translation and changes for stylistic reasons.

Kōkei continues to use this type of translation and goes on to cite as examples of *utsushibumi* the famous Japanese *kana* and Sinitic *mana* (真名) prefaces of *The Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern (Kokin wakashū 古今和歌集, ca. 905)* (Kazama 1993: 50–53). The *kana* preface (written in Japanese in cursive, phonographic *kana* characters with very few sinographs) and the *mana* preface (written in Literary Sinitic using sinographs or *mana* characters) contain broadly the same content, although they are not exact copies. The two prefaces can be described as “translations” only in the broadest sense. From these examples, it may be seen that Kōkei’s idea of what he called *utsushibumi* was about translating—*paraphrasing* would perhaps be a better word—in such a way as to produce a natural, well-expressed version of the source text, prioritizing skill in expression over strictly accurate transfer of content. He developed this idea further in his next work, *Translation for the Enlightenment of Little Children*, expanding his discussion of translation to include intralingual as well as interlingual practices.

***Translation for the Enlightenment of Little Children (Utsushibumi warawa no satoshi 訳文童諭, 1794)***

As discussed above, the main examples that Kōkei gives in *The Prose of Our Land* of how to cultivate a skillful Japanese prose style are of translation or paraphrase from Sinitic into Japanese. His next work to deal with the subject, *Translation for the Enlightenment of Little Children*, contains considerably more detail and is devoted to reasons for practicing translation and examples of translation. In addition to translation from Sinitic, Kōkei also included two other categories: translation from *ga* forms of Japanese into *zoku* forms, and translation from *zoku* forms into *ga*.

*Ga* 雅 and *zoku* 俗 (deriving from the Chinese terms *ya* and *su*) are aesthetic categories that came to embody a wide range of meanings in Japanese literature and art. Broadly speaking, in the conceptualization of aesthetic categories in this period *ga* refers to that which is classical, elegant, and refined, while *zoku* refers to the vulgar, commonplace, unrefined, and nonclassical. These terms, and the literary registers they represented, came to be debated in earnest during the Tokugawa period, in particular as they applied to poetic composition (Thomas 1994). They were also the terms most commonly used to delineate the differences between the prose style of Heian court works such as *The Tale of Genji* and *Tales of Ise* versus the Tokugawa-era prose into which intralingual translators transposed these works for both the popular publishing industry and the consumption of scholars (Clements 2015: 47–93; 2014). In Kōkei’s case, he used the terms *ga* and *zoku* in the sense understood by the intralingual translators of *Genji* and *Ise* as a contrast between classical and vernacular styles, as shown by the following sentences from *Translation for the Enlightenment of Little Children*: “Nowadays there are *ga* and *zoku* [types of prose]. *Ga* are the words of the past. *Zoku* refers to the words that are in current use today. This is what you begin to speak twenty days after your birth—things like calling your mother and your father papa (*toto*) and mama (*kaka*) . . . and is simply the result of common use” (Kōkei [1794] 1993: 64–65). The examples he gives of *ga* texts include *Genji*; the texts which are *zoku* include contemporary Tokugawa period works such as *Record of Kiso Road*

(*Kisoji no ki* 木曾路之記, 1709), a travel account by the literatus Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714).

After explaining the need for *utsushibumi* translation, Kōkei spends the rest of the work giving examples to illustrate what this means. I will focus here on the two types of translation that he adds to his technical arsenal in addition to translation from Sinitic, which was discussed above: intralingual translation from classical Japanese into vernacular Japanese and from vernacular Japanese into classical Japanese. The following example of translation from the “Hahakigi” chapter of *Genji* illustrates Kōkei’s approach:

Classical source quoted by Kōkei: *onoko no ōyake ni tsukaumatsuri, hakabakashiki yo no katame narubeki mo, makoto no utsuwanaru beki o toridasan ni wa katakaru beshi kashi* のこのおほやけにつかうまつり、はかばかしき世のかためなるべきも、真のうつはものとなるべきをとり出さんにはかたかるべしかし。(Kōkei [1974] 1993: 66)

English translation: It is probably just as difficult to find a truly capable man to uphold the realm in His Majesty’s service. (Tyler 2001: 24)

Kōkei’s example of translation: *otoko no chōtei ni tsukaetatematsuraruru mo Kanpaku Daijin nado tote, onseimu o azukaritamau makoto no kiryō aru hito o toridasan ni wa mare narubeshi* 男の朝廷に仕へ奉らるゝも、関白大臣などゝて、御政務をあづかり給ふ真の器量ある人をとり出さんには、稀なるべし。(Kōkei [1794] 1993: 67)

English translation: It is probably rare, too, to find a truly skillful man to serve at court as a regent or minister taking care of affairs of state.

This sample exemplifies Kōkei’s idea of *utsushibumi* as translation that captures the spirit of the original but is not strictly word-for-word. The translator has used more sinographs and has clarified what “upholding the realm . . . in His Majesty’s service” (*ōyake ni tsukaumatsuri*) means in more specific terms: “serve at court as a regent or a minister” (*chōtei ni tsukaetatematsuraruru mo kanpaku daijin nado tote*). The classical expressions *utsuwa mono* (“truly capable man”) and *katakaru* (“difficult”) have been changed to the more prosaic *kiryō aru hito* (“skillful person”) and *mare naru* (“rare”). Kōkei’s idea of translation is similar to the idea of intralingual translation proposed by Roman Jakobson and adopted by the modern translation studies discipline, which has broadened the centuries-old idea of translation and encompasses translation beyond a word-for-word translation practice to something closely approaching adaptation (Bassnett 2002). Kōkei’s translation practice was not strictly word-for-word but rather an exercise in expressive power, in flexing one’s compositional muscles to learn how to communicate ideas clearly, not only in Sinitic or in poetry but in Japanese prose as the occasion demanded.

The final example I will use here demonstrates what Kōkei advocated when translating from vernacular Japanese into classical Japanese, and why.

Vernacular source: *Asama no dake wa, kiwamete takashi to iedomo, fumoto no chi takaki yue, hanahada takaku miezu. Sanjō ni tsune ni keburī tatsu koto, koshiki no ikinoboru ga gotoku, mata kumo no gotoshi.* 浅間の嶽(だけ)は、きわめて高しといへども、麓の地高き

ゆゑ、甚高くみえず。山上につねに烟たつ事、こしきのいきの上のごとく、またくものごとし。(Kōkei [1794] 1993: 73)

English translation: The slopes of Mount Asama are very high but since the foothills are high they don't look particularly high. The mountaintop is perpetually smoky, like vapor rising from a rice steamer, or like clouds.

Kōkei's translation: *Asama no take wa itodo takakeredo, fumoto mo onozukara ni noborimotekureba nan, me odoroku bakari wa miezu. Mine ni wa towa ni keburi tachi noborite, iikashigu o miru ga gotoku. Mata kumono no iru ni mo nitari.* 浅間のだけはいとゞ高けれど、ふもともおのづからにのぼりもてくればなん、めおどろくばかりはみえず。峰にはとはにけぶり立のぼりて、いひかしぐをみるのごとく、又雲のゐるにも似たり。(Kōkei [1794] 1993: 74)

English translation: The slopes of Mount Asama are extremely high. However, since the foothills rise up to meet them, they do not astound the eye. On the peak it is eternally smoky, as if one were looking at something steaming or at clouds.

The differences between the two quotations are clear: in the first text, the language uses a narrower range of vocabulary (note the repetition of *takashi* “high”) and refers to prosaic, everyday items such as a rice steamer. The classical translation, on the other hand, has more flow, uses longer words and fewer sinographs, and avoids a direct reference to the rice steamer in favor of the verb *iishigu* (to cook something by steaming). The vernacular source text here is Kaibara Ekiken's *Record of Kiso Road* (*Kisoji no ki* 木曾路之記, 1709). Kōkei writes that “[*Kisoji no ki*] is good as a guide to the road but in the main it sounds very ordinary (*zoku*) and the language is not well put together. If one was to insert one's poetry compositions into it they would not match at all” ([1794] 1993: 74). Again, we see the concern with poetry, something which Kōkei cites, in *The Prose of Our Land*, as a reason for improving one's prose-writing style to provide a fitting headnote for a poem. In *Translation for the Enlightenment* he goes further, including travel accounts and citing an acquaintance who complained: “When I read the travel accounts of our contemporaries who have made a name for themselves writing poetry (*waka*), one finds that their prose is always vernacular (*tadagoto*), and one wonders whether they are really by those people at all. Writing classical (*masagoto*) poetry and vernacular (*tadagoto*) prose is like wearing a brocade sash with a worn-out kimono” ([1794] 1993: 72). Travel accounts usually included prose descriptions interspersed with poems supposedly composed by the author during the course of their travels as the scenery and their experiences provided inspiration. It is clear from Kōkei's repeated references to poetry that he sees his prose project as a complement to poetry and that his work as a prose advocate was integral to his work as a poet.

### Replacing or Supplementing Chinese?

As noted above, Kōkei had intellectual links to the work of well-known Kokugaku scholars such as Motoori Norinaga, but was he a practitioner of Kokugaku himself? And how did he view his project in relation to the authority of the Chinese tradition? The answer to these questions is complicated by the fact that, as recent studies have shown, “Kokugaku,” which is sometimes translated as “nativism,” has carried with it a variety of meanings within the Tokugawa period and in

modern scholarship (Burns 2003; McNally 2005). Mark Teeuwen (2006: 227) makes the point that Kokugaku and “nativism” are not necessarily one and the same; he defines nativism as “the ambition to revive or perpetuate aspects of indigenous culture in response to a perceived threat from other cultures” while noting that not all Kokugaku adhered to this notion (for an overview of scholarship, see Flueckiger 2008: 212). In this sense, Kōkei’s work does have nativist overtones. As the following extract from *The Prose of Our Land* demonstrates, he regarded Japanese prose writing as a neglected field that was not considered as important as Chinese learning and was therefore under threat:

In the present age people who have studied for many years read only Chinese prose works (*morokoshi no fumi* もろこしの文). They have exhaustive knowledge extending from the ways of the sage kings to the world of the present Qing dynasty, and they know the sound of the foreign words of that country well, but when it comes to our own imperial realm they dispense with details, and there are many who do not even know the names of our august emperors and their reigns. They think the only prose is Chinese prose and do not know about the existence of the national style. And of course they do not attempt to write it. (Kōkei [1774] 1993: 7)

Moreover, as noted above, in attempting to find Japanese equivalents for Sinitic compounds Kōkei was following the lead of scholars from the Kokugaku lineage descending from Kamo no Mabuchi, the most famous of whom is Motoori Norinaga.

Nevertheless, the overall picture that emerges from Kōkei’s writings and scholarly practice does not reveal the ideological tendency to privilege Japanese language and literature over Chinese that was characteristic of so much of Kokugaku; to label Kōkei a nativist would be to reduce his work to one dimension only. After taking aim at Sinocentric scholars in the extract quoted above, Kōkei then criticizes Japanese *waka* poets for their neglect of Japanese prose writing (Kazama 1993: 7–8). In the preface to the collected writings of his school, *Writings from the Quiet Fields* (*Kanden bunshō* 閑田文章, 1803), Kōkei is quoted as saying: “When the headnote to a poem is written in everyday language (*tadagoto*) but the poem itself is not bad, this is all the more unsightly, like a woman with a beautiful face and grey hair” (Sukunori [1803] 1993: 103). His interest in improving Japanese prose thus came from his role as a *waka* poet and his desire to perfect that art form, rather than from a desire to weed out Chinese influences from Japanese scholarship. In addition, it is important to remember that during the time he was promoting Japanese prose, Kōkei continued to be an active practitioner of Sinitic himself and was well regarded for this in his day (Mori 1988: 55–59).

Kōkei’s clearest statement on the question of Japanese versus Chinese learning came when asked by a (possibly fictional) student in the preface to *The Prose of Our Nation* whether people with “Japanese spirit” (*yamatogokoro* やまと心) should not bother with Chinese writings. In response, Kōkei made it clear that in advocating for Japanese prose he was not denying the necessity or desirability of Chinese learning in Japan. To neglect Chinese learning in favor of Japanese, he argues,

would be like loving your hands and hating your feet. Why should it be so? It was all very well in times past when knowledge of other countries had not reached us, but after knowledge of other countries arrived you had to learn it. If there would be some benefit to the way of our realm then sage kings would order the wise men of Paekche to instruct the people serving them. From controlling the body to the minutest details of administering all under heaven they did not fail to make use of this knowledge. And people now regard this as good and all affairs are in accordance with this. Why should one not study it? There are people who promote the way of the kami; sometimes they treat [Chinese ways] as bad and they may say that one should not follow the teachings of the sage kings. However, I will not go into detail here about these academic principles. . . . If you understand the prose writings of people of that country [i.e., China], when you compose prose then [your writing] will have all the more elegance about it, and its rules (*nori* 法) will be all the more correct. (Kōkei [1774] 1993: 12–13)

Thus, according to Kōkei, Chinese learning was vital, and moreover, Chinese prose writing was an important model to improve the quality of written Japanese as well.

Kōkei's project was thus to use translation and raise Japanese prose writing to the level of *waka* poetry together with Sinitic poetry and prose, so that Japanese prose would have at least a status and usefulness equal to these prestigious traditions, and so that contemporary *waka* poets could produce well-written headnotes to accompany their poetry. He did so by means of translation, broadly conceived, between Sinitic, vernacular, and classical Japanese.

### Kōkei and Kokugo

There is an obvious modern point of comparison with Kōkei's prose project: the creation of *kokugo* (国語, "national language") during Japan's Meiji period, including the "Unification of the Spoken and Written Languages" (*Genbun itchi*) movement. As is clear from his remarks in *The Prose of Our Land* and *Translation for the Enlightenment*, what Kōkei has in mind by *kunitsubumi* ("the prose of our land") is prose of a local kind, or what would now be called "Japanese." However, as was common in his day, Kōkei does not use the term *Japan* (Nihon 日本), preferring the character 国, glossed *kuni*. At this time, before the development of a modern nation-state, this could mean "country," "province," or "land," and it should be understood in the first instance as a means of distinguishing Kōkei's local, Japanese prose from Chinese writing from China, or Sinitic writing composed in Japan, rather than as a statewide tool of national education like Meiji-era *kokugo*.

Moreover, there is no evidence that Kōkei had recognizably nationalist ideas in mind for the prose style he was trying to create. He was not attempting to create one unified prose style. Rather, as suggested by the variety of Japanese styles contained in *Writings from the Quiet Fields* and by his exhortation in *The Prose of Our Land* that people should choose a prose style based on either the ancient, medieval, or contemporary forms of Japanese, according to their taste, he wished to better the potential for written expression in Japanese in a variety of formats and with a variety of grammatical and lexical options. This plurality stands in

contrast with the aims of *kokugo* nationalists in the Meiji period, who sought to provide the nation-state of Japan with a unifying national language in which all citizens could be educated and which would serve as the common language of communication (I 1996; Lee 2013). It is also noteworthy that Kōkei was a private, independent scholar, working with other individuals toward the improvement of their personal writing styles. In this he was different from the Meiji proponents of language reform, who were largely oligarchs and government scholars seeking to develop a common written language for the new, nationwide education system of the Japanese nation-state in its modern, bureaucratic form.

Although Kōkei was not a nationalist in the modern, Meiji sense of the word, it is still worth noting the emergence of language consciousness prior to Meiji, of which Kōkei was a prime example. It was during the Tokugawa period that he, and others like him, for the first time catalogued, studied, and mapped the history and structure of the Japanese language or sought to develop it. As Susan Burns (2003) has argued, through the process of textual exegesis in the eighteenth century, Kokugaku practitioners like Norinaga had already begun to constitute “Japan” as the primary mode of community, transcending other sources of identity, engendering the beginnings of an imagined community through language. Kōkei’s “prose of our land” is further evidence of a nascent “national” language consciousness among Japanese intellectuals prior to the Meiji period.

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## NOTES

1 This article uses the term *Sinitic* as an alternative to *classical* or *literary* Chinese to describe the Chinese writing system as it was used in early modern East Asia more broadly than just in China. In particular, I will use it to refer to Chinese-style writings produced in Japan.

For a discussion, see Mair 1994 and Kornicki 2010. The translation of Sinitic into Japanese is a practice which may perhaps itself be conceived of as a form of intralingual translation, given the domestic status of Sinitic in Edo-period Japan and the possibility that Sinitic texts written in Japan actually inscribe Japanese rather than Chinese. On the question of whether Sinitic written in Japan may be conceived of as a form of Japanese, see Lurie 2011.

2 While Sakai's readings of Tokugawa sinology have been subsequently questioned (Ooms 1996), he was the first to note the significance of the eighteenth century in the history of Japanese language consciousness.

3 Sorai's and Jinsai's focus on language and the interpretation of terms was inspired by the work of late Song-dynasty lexicographers Chen Beixi 陳北溪 (1159–1223) and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–93), in particular Beixi's *The Meanings of Neo-Confucian Terms* (*Xingli ziyi* 性理字義, ca. 1226) (Tucker 1993).

4 The *yasashiki sugata* (usually read in Sino-Japanese as *entai*) was a poetic style established in China's Six Dynasties period. "*Onitorihishigu sugata*" (usually read in Sino-Japanese as "*kirōtai*") was one of the styles of Japanese poetry delineated by the Japanese scholar aristocrat Fujiwara no Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241).

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