

Zoku as Aesthetic Criterion

Reforms for Poetry and Prose

The rise of the *kokubun* movement coincided historically with the efforts by fiction writers Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935) and Yamada Bimyo (1868–1910) to produce a new language. Critics often seamlessly link these two movements, suggesting that their emphasis on *zoku*¹ reflects a common goal to produce a “shared language” through a medium most familiar to and easiest to understand for the widest readership.² This is not entirely unwarranted, as *kokubungaku* scholars sought to adopt what they referred to as “common conversation” (*tsūjō no danwa*) and “everyday language” (*nichiyō no bun*), while Shōyō sought to embrace “the spirit of *zokugo*” (*zokugo no seishin*), and Bimyo argued strongly for *zokubun* in his fiction. In fact, Bimyo himself supported such a view; he recalled in his 1910 memoir that he had been inspired by, for example, the *kokubungaku* scholar Mozume Takami’s famous call for *genbun’itchi* (typically translated as the “unification of spoken and written languages”) and the advocacy of the spoken language.

However, Kamei Hideo, in his *Meiji bungakushi* (*History of Meiji Literature*) provocatively claims that the efforts at *kokugo* and the *genbun’itchi* movement (in a discussion of which he included works of Shōyō) had nothing to do with each other.³ I am not entirely convinced that they are unrelated, but I agree they did not share the same agenda, clearly differing from one another in their views of what constituted an ideal language. An uncritical equation of the *kokubun* scholars’ call for “common conversation” with Shōyō and Bimyo’s advocacy of *zoku* ignores too many differences. While *kokubun* scholars sought what they called authentic or “correct” elegance (*gasei*) in the current language, a language that would constitute a manifestation of a “pure original voice” of the past, fiction writers embraced *zoku* as a means to inject the vigor of *zoku* into the current language in order to break with the past. In this sense, Ueda Kazutoshi’s *kokugo* (national language) reform interestingly resonates with the fiction writers rather than the *kokubun* scholars

with which he is associated. In this chapter, I will thus bracket the notion that these writers were searching for a “shared” or “popular language” and examine the specific goals and agendas inscribed in their efforts at reform. I will identify areas in which they in fact converged, as well as those in which they differed, and further reveal areas in which they inadvertently replicated each other, hence supporting each other even when they did not have a shared objective.

With such an aim in mind, I wish to engage with reforms that addressed the intersection between prose and poetry. These shed important light on the ways in which the terms *ga* and *zoku* were mobilized in the evaluation of prose and poetry, and we shall see that *ga* and *zoku* were first and foremost aesthetic criteria for these writers. This is often forgotten in the study of language reforms, because there is an assumption that the realm of aesthetics is reserved for “literature” and does not apply to “language.” However, we must remind ourselves that we are dealing with a time when such a division had yet to exist. *Bungaku* constituted language: the understanding of *bungaku* as one artistic manifestation of “language” as *langue* had yet to emerge.

In what follows, I will offer a brief prelude to *kokubungaku* scholars’ references to *tsūjō no danwa*. I will then look at the prevalent *waka* poetic reform movement of the late 1880s and early 1890s, which was led by many of the same *kokubungaku* scholars who were involved in the *kokubun* movement, such as Hagino Yoshiyuki, Takatsu Kuwasaburō, Ochiai Naobumi, and Mikami Sanji. I examine the calls for *waka* reform by focusing on the manner in which they sought to appropriate the space of new-style poetry (*shintaiishi*) and how that affected the definition of *zoku*. I then turn to works of Tsubouchi Shōyō and Yamada Bimyō, the leading advocates of *zokugo/zokubun* in their search for fictional prose, such as “Bunshō shinron” (“New Theory of Writing,” 1886) and *Nihon inbunron* (*Theories of Japanese Poetry*, 1891).

A PRELUDE: THE KOKUBUN MOVEMENT AND “TSŪJŌ NO DANWA”

In the previous chapter, we saw that the *kokubun* movement designated *kanbun kundokutai* as “imperfect” *kokubun* and sought to take over the linguistic terrain opened up by the popularity of *kanbun kundokutai*. That was, however, but a part of the story. *Kokubungaku* scholars further sought to rename this “imperfect” *kokubun* the “commonly spoken language.” Here is an example from the “Gengo torishirabejo hōhōsho” (“Guidelines of the Office of Language Inspection,” 1888). After repeating a by-then clichéd narrative of *kanji* and *kanbun* as the origin for the disparity between the written and spoken languages, it claims that it must identify “the most commonly used linguistic style of our country”: “What we refer to as the commonly used linguistic style is what the Japanese people now in the Meiji period use in common conversation; we will use that as the base and correct

any deviations and supplement any shortcomings to standardize it.”⁴ We must not essentialize the use of “common conversation” and assume that *kokubungaku* scholars are referring here to actual spoken language. It is much more likely that it is on a par with Mozume Takami’s famous call for *genbun’itchi*. Mozume has been considered one of the most radical of the *kokubungaku* scholars in terms of the advocacy of “writing as we speak” (*kuchi de iu tōri o kaku*). He claims, “It would be best to write the lively spoken language that naturally and purely spills out of one’s mouth.”⁵ What lies at the core of his argument is the dichotomy between the “spoken” (“Japanese”) and the “written” (the foreign, that is to say, *kanbun*). He consistently defines the spoken language, which “*naturally* and purely spills out of one’s mouth” (emphasis added), in opposition to what he calls “borrowed language.” The “spoken language” to which he refers is not the actual spoken language, but one that is specifically defined in opposition to the invariably *foreign* written language. In the 1890s, however, *kanji* and *kanji* compounds were no longer considered “foreign” for *kokubungaku* scholars. “Foreign written language,” therefore, refers to *kanbun* syntax, while “spoken language” refers to *kundoku* syntax, which had been deemed more “natural” and hence closer to “our own.”

If these *kokubungaku* scholars did not advocate the transcription of the spoken or a use of the current language “as is” in spite of their arguments for the “spoken” language and “common conversation,” what, then, did they advocate? Take, for instance, the following from a bulletin published by Nihon bunshōkai (the Society of Japanese Letters), a group made up of prominent *kokubungaku* scholars such as Hagino, Ochiai, Sekine, Mozume, Ōki Fumihiko, as well as Nishimura Shigeki and Nishi Amane, the original Meirokusha members.⁶

It goes without saying that the spoken and written languages of a nation represent its independence and hence they must be standardized. The language must be based on the natural language of the nation’s people that is easiest to understand for all. . . . This does not mean that we ought to employ classical or elegant language (*kogen*, *gagen*). But neither should we limit ourselves to current language (*kingen*) or *zokugen*. We ought to strike a balance and avoid excessively vulgar current language, as well as remote classical language. . . .⁷

Reiterating the need to develop a new language based on “natural” wording and grammatical structure (that is, *kundoku*), they sought to “strike a balance” between *ga* and *zoku*.⁸ This statement is typical of *kokubungaku* scholars. See, for example, Sekine Masanao’s “Kokugo no hontai narabi ni sono kachi” (“The Basis of *Kokugo* and its Value,” 1888). Despite his insistence that the “basis of *kokugo*” is in “language currently in use today,” he advocates a standardization of the language based on what he calls “authentic or ‘correct’ elegance” (*gasei*).⁹ Yet “striking a balance” between *ga* and *zoku* certainly did not mean balancing numerically; it signified a process of identifying so-called *gasei* in the “current language” and using that as the standard by which to “correct” the “imperfect *kokubun*.” The “Gengo

torishirabejo hōhōsho” that I quoted earlier will help us understand this further. It claims that its goal is to produce two types of language, one “common language” and one “lofty style”:

The lofty style is the language of our imperial country, used by all the people of this land before foreign language entered. It has changed over the years, but it is still correct (*tadashii*). . . . The common language of the present is fundamentally derivative of this lofty language.¹⁰

What *kokubungaku* scholars called “lofty” was an ideal form of language retrospectively posited as that which existed prior to the intervention of the “foreign.”¹¹ Given that the common language—or what would be *kokugo* once reform was complete—was posited as derivative of the lofty language, such language in effect signified the “standard” (the authentic elegance) as a manifestation of the “pure” voice of the past.¹²

The seeming contradiction between advocating “common conversation” and “writing as we speak” on the one hand, and arguing to “strike a balance” between *gagen* and *zokugen*, on the other, can now be put to rest. Such a contradiction is but the result of an essentialized understanding of “common conversation.”¹³ Yet such a narrative of contradiction, inevitably resulting in an overemphasis on the *zoku*, helped to conceal the fact that the “standard” (authentic elegance) was in itself in the making. They had to invent this “standard” underlying the “current language”: a supposed manifestation of a pure voice that existed prior to the introduction of the “foreign” (*kanbun*). Thus, the main aim of *kokubungaku* scholars was not to reform *zoku* (the “imperfect” common conversation), but to establish the standard language, which could only putatively be constructed by designating the realm of *zoku* as that which needed reform.

WAKA POETIC REFORM: APPROPRIATING SHINTAISHI

Kokubungaku scholars did not limit their discussions of *ga* and *zoku* to prose, but also applied them to *waka* reform, which began in the late 1880s. There had been, of course, earlier attempts at poetic reform, most notably that of new-style poetry (*shintaiishi*), which is considered to be the origin of modern Japanese poetry. The *shintaiishi* reform played a large role in the *kokubungaku*-led *waka* reform, as *kokubungaku* scholars inherited the reforms started by *shintaiishi* poets and made them their own to institute reform in *waka*.¹⁴

Debates on *waka* reform began with Hagino Yoshiyuki’s “Kogoto” (“Trivial Renderings,” 1887), which appeared in *Tōyō gakkai zasshi* (*Academic Journal of Japan*), the main outlet for the publication of many *kokubungaku* scholars’ works. In it, Hagino called for poetic reform in the following manner:

The language for the portrayal of the many things in the world that arouse emotions differs with any given historical time. The *Kojiki* was written in the language of its

time, as was the *Man'yōshū*. This is so not only for works of our country, but also with regard to the old poetic forms of China and the West. . . . Our emotions ought to be portrayed in the current language. With this in mind, we ought to break the mold of our old practices and embark on a new path.¹⁵

In addition to this call for a new poetic language, Hagino sought to push poetic boundaries by exploring new topics for *waka*, stating that love and ephemerality ought not be the central themes; he further advocated the structural reform of *waka*, claiming that thirty-one syllables only limited the poetic form.¹⁶ Perhaps predictably, these ideas for reform provoked much criticism in *kokubungaku* circles. Hattori Motohiko, for example, specifically targeted Hagino's call to incorporate the “current language,” claiming that *waka*, which ought to be “composed with elegant language,” would not be *waka* anymore if composed in the current language; it would only be “local folk songs” (*zokuyō*) or “wild poetry” (*kyōka*).¹⁷ A series of essays on the topic followed. Emphasizing the limited scope of *waka* diction, theme, and form, Mikami Sanji, another *kokubungaku* scholar, stated that *waka* ought to use the “elegant language” of the day (as opposed to the “elegant language” of the past) and agreed with Hagino that it was crucial to “pay attention to poetic diction and theme, not to mention the length of poetry” so that Japan could produce works like “Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.”¹⁸ The central issues of the debate, therefore, revolved around the use of “current language,” the length of verse (beyond thirty-one syllables), and poetic themes.

Very similar calls for reform had begun five years before, when *Shintaishishō* (*An Anthology of New-Style Poetry*, 1883) was compiled by Toyama Masakazu, Inoue Tetsujirō, and Yatabe Ryōkichi, all of whom were scholars of “Western learning.”¹⁹ Take for example, Yatabe's following passage in his preface: “There were several of us who lamented that our countrymen rarely used commonly used language to compose poetry; we thus decided to produce new-style poetry (*shintaiishi*) by imitating our Western counterparts.”²⁰ Inoue argued the same in his call for a poetic form that used “current language.”²¹ Toyama, in his preface, criticized existing poetic forms, be they *tanka* (short verse, typically composed of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables) or *chōka* (long verse, composed of a series of 5-7 syllables and ending with 7-7), as “quite shallow in theme” and charged that that “a theme that can be expressed within [*tanka*’s] thirty-one syllables is something like a small sparkling firework or a falling star; [*tanka*] cannot express a continuous thought.”²² *Shintaishishō* thus employed a series of 7-5 metrical structure in all their verses. With regard to theme, too, we find, for example, Toyama's “Shakaigaku no genri ni daisu” (“On the Principles of Sociology”) attempting to push poetic boundaries.²³ The three compilers' criticisms of existing poetry and Hagino's later criticism of *waka* are strikingly similar. All focus on the limitations of poetic theme and syllabic length and seek to incorporate “current language” to expand poetic horizons.

Despite such similarity in their calls for reform, many *kokubungaku* scholars looked down on *shintaiishi* and sought instead to develop *chōka* (long verse), which belonged to the *waka* tradition. Ochiai Naobumi says the following in the preface to *Shinsenkatens* (*New Collection of Poetry*, 1891):

Recently there are an increasing number of compositions in *shintaiishi*. The authors' claim is that it is impossible to portray complex thoughts and emotions in *tanka* (short verse). I do not disagree. They are right. But they do not realize that we also have *chōka*. What we seek is to develop *chōka* and reject the tasteless and primitive *shintaiishi*.²⁴

As the contemporary literary critic Shinada Yoshikazu has convincingly shown, however, whether it was the adoption of a 7–5 metrical rhythm as opposed to the 5–7 metrical rhythm of *chōka*, or the willingness to expand the range of poetic theme and diction, what the *kokubungaku* scholars sought for *chōka* was exactly what *Shintaishishō* had proposed.²⁵ Without openly admitting this, *kokubungaku* scholars forcefully situated *shintaiishi* as an extension of *chōka*.²⁶ Moreover, such an appropriation of *shintaiishi* also allowed the *kokubungaku* scholars to locate an “imperfect” *chōka*. In essence, the main objective was not to denigrate *shintaiishi*, but to posit a “standard” poetic form (which the *kokubungaku* scholars sought to name *kokushi*, that is, national poetry) by representing *shintaiishi* as a deviation from the “standard.”²⁷ This parallels the manner in which the *kokubungaku* scholars designated *kanbun kundokutai* as an “imperfect” *kokubun*, then posited the “standard” by which to “correct” it.

What is important for our purposes is how *zoku* was reconfigured as *shintaiishi* and appropriated in *waka* reform, as well as what *waka* reform perhaps inadvertently inherited in this process. Two things warrant special attention: how the *kokubungaku* scholars redefine *shintaiishi*'s use of “*heijō no go*” and “*ima no go*” and their adoption of the 7–5 metrical rhythm (instead of reverting to the 5–7 metrical rhythm of *waka*).

While two of the compilers of *Shintaishishō*, Inoue and Yatabe, advocated the use of “current language,” the third compiler, Toyama, reiterates their position as follows: “Instead of using elegant language and stiff Chinese expressions²⁸ to display poetic skill, we have decided not to differentiate between the new and the old, or *ga* and *zoku*, and have decided to mix up words from *wa*, *kan*, and the West, with the main aim of making it easy for people to understand.”²⁹ For many *shintaiishi* poets, *zoku* signified a medium that was “easy to understand.” In this sense, *zoku* was not something that *shintaiishi* poets sought to disparage; it was in fact something they wanted to embrace.³⁰ In contrast, *kokubungaku* scholars—to whom such mixture of *wa*, *kan*, and Western words signified *zoku*—sought to “strike a balance” again, this time between the styles of language used in *waka* and *shintaiishi*. Take a look at the following passage from Hagino's “*Waka oyobi shintaiishi o ronzu*” (“On *Waka* and *Shintaiishi*”), where he discusses the disadvantages

of both forms of poetry. While criticizing *waka* for being too “old-fashioned” and reasserting the need to use “existing ‘living’ language,” he says the following:

There are, however, *ga* and *zoku* in today’s language. One must not uncritically use *zokugen*, vulgar diction, regional dialects, and the like and produce poems of *genbun’itchi*. . . . Poetry is a lofty form. It ought not be vulgar. In order for a poem to be lofty, poets must use correct and elegant diction. . . . *Shintaishi* does not use correct grammar. Where there is language, there are rules. Certain rules should not be broken.³¹

The “current language” that had been embraced by *shintaishi* were thus relegated to the realm of *zoku* (as that which needed reform), and “today’s elegant language,” the contemporary manifestation of the “pure original voice,” was privileged as the “correct” medium for *waka* poetry.

However, the problem with this argument becomes apparent when we examine the 7–5 metrical rhythm they adopted, because the 7–5 metrical rhythm is inextricably linked to the very “current language” the *kokubungaku* scholars relegated to the realm of *zoku*. First, the 7–5 metrical rhythm was linked to Bakin-esque prose, rampant in the mid-1880s, especially as Bakin was being rediscovered in the political arena, where political fiction (*seiji shōsetsu*) was being written in such prose.³² Such rhythmical prose in effect carried the energy of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, and was hence heavily reliant on *kanbun kundokutai*, the primary language of the politically oriented intellectuals. As Sugaya Kikuo claims in his *Shiteki rizumu: onsūritsu ni kansuru nōto* (*Poetic Rhythm: Notes on Meters*), *shintaishi* poets specifically catered their poetry to the political arena.³³ It is not a coincidence that someone like Yano Ryūkei referred to Bakin’s prose as *zokubuntai*.³⁴ In addition, *shintaishi* poets also integrated “folk songs” (*zokkyoku*) as they incorporated rhythmical stereotypical phrases like “ame no furuhi mo kaze no hi mo” (even on rainy and windy days) and “kane no otosuru tasogare ni” (at dusk one hears the temple bells), both of which are fixed expressions prevalent in *zokkyoku*, making them “easy to understand.”³⁵ These expressions invariably were in 7–5 metrical rhythm. In short, what the *kokubungaku* scholars rejected—*zoku* diction and “incorrect” grammar—were integral to the 7–5 metrical rhythm they adopted. The 7–5 metrical rhythm of the *shintaishi* thus introduced an entirely new discursive dynamic to *waka* poetry.

There were several reasons that *kokubungaku* scholars adopted the 7–5 metric structure despite its inextricable link to the very *zoku* diction and grammar they sought to reject. First, the 7–5 metrical rhythm allowed them to push poetic boundaries. *Waka*, with its 5–7 metrical rhythm, was often criticized for “lacking energy” and its inability to represent concepts like “gallantry” and “strong resentment,” prevalent in prose in the 7–5 metrical rhythm.³⁶ Moreover, as the literary critic Kamei Hideo aptly stated, 7–5 rhythm was “haunted” by “pivot words” (*kakekotoba*) and “associated words” (*engo*) integral to the *waka* tradition, from which 6–8

metrical rhythm would have been free.³⁷ In effect, because of such advantages, the use of another metrical rhythm would have been unthinkable.

Kokubungaku scholars clearly faced a dilemma, given that the 7-5 metrical rhythm inevitably brought in the *zoku* they sought to eradicate from *waka* to retain its elegance. To resolve this, they sought to emphasize “tone” (*onchō*) or “rhythmical tone” (*chōshi*) as an *aesthetic* principle. The *kokubungaku* scholar Takatsu Kuwasaburō, in his “Shiika o ronzu” (“On Poetry,” 1888), begins his definition of poetry with *chōshi*, designating it as one of poetry’s defining characteristics. According to Takatsu, poetry is something that is chanted; as such, he argues, *chōshi* has to retain its elegance: “If the *chōshi* is bad, even when the ideas and things portrayed are lofty and elegant, no one will be impressed . . . but if the *chōshi* is good, people will be impressed even when the ideas and things that are portrayed are not that lofty or elegant.”³⁸ Here, he carefully divorces *chōshi* from the poetic theme and makes it an independent characteristic that makes poetry elegant. Such an argument seeks to define poetry formally through *chōshi* and not through the ideas or themes it expresses. In this definition, the 7-5 rhythm is a sheer meter; it putatively (and logically) sanitizes the 7-5 rhythm of the Bakin-esque prose and the folk song expressions that came along with it. In this manner, *kokubungaku* scholars sought to downplay the difference between the 5-7 and 7-5 rhythms.³⁹

What *kokubungaku* scholars inherited by appropriating *shintaiishi* was perhaps more than they had anticipated. They sought to assert the superiority of “authentic elegance” over *zoku*, but they adopted the metrical structure that invariably activated the very *zoku* they sought to reject. Yet the 7-5 metrical rhythm was necessary not only to reform *waka* but to retain continuity with past discourse, given its link to techniques in the *waka* poetic tradition. “Authentic elegance,” after all, was a link to the “pure original voice” of the past, and its poetry, for it to have the rightful status of national poetry, needed to retain that continuity. It was, in effect, vital that the 7-5 metrical rhythm be severed from *zoku*. Surprisingly, perhaps, the *kokubungaku* scholars’ endeavor found support in the works of Bimiyō and Shōyō. In an entirely different context and with different agendas, these fiction writers, too, sought to sever the connection between what they referred to as “*zoku*” and the 7-5 metrical rhythm.

ZOKUBUN AND READING PRACTICES: SHŌYŌ’S AND BIMYŌ’S LINGUISTIC EXPERIMENTS

In *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*, 1885–1886), Shōyō explains the reasons to embrace *zokugo* as such: “Speech is spirit; writing is form. Emotions are expressed with complete frankness in *zokugo*, whereas in writing they are overlaid with a veneer that to a certain extent camouflages their reality.”⁴⁰ Designating *zokugo* as the language that best represents emotions, Shōyō here posits *zokugo*

(equated with speech) in direct opposition to writing.⁴¹ Writing, he claims, takes away the "frankness" of *zokugo*. Although Bimyō does not emphasize the link between *zoku* and emotions as Shōyō does, he too posits *zokugo* and "everyday conversation" in opposition to writing when he discusses the need for reform. Such an understanding of *zoku* differs from that of *kokubungaku* scholars, because the latter sought to define their "common conversation" against *kanbun* (and hence the "foreign"), rather than against written language in general. This difference appears slight, but it has great implications. While *kokubungaku* scholars emphasized the "naturalness" of common conversation, with its link to "our own" (which manifests itself as "authentic elegance") vis-à-vis the "foreign," the fiction writers' definition of *zoku* was speech vis-à-vis writing. This greatly expanded the horizon of *zoku*. For Shōyō, for example, *zokugo/zokubun* included many words and phrases that were yet to be "textually registered." In other words, it included not only regional dialects, but also words and phrases that had yet to be introduced to a system of agreement in which writing became possible. Such a realm of *zoku* was, in more ways than one, uncharted territory, severed from earlier forms of writing. Shōyō's criticism of *zokugo*'s verbosity, appearing in several of his essays, in part arises from the need to explain these words when textualized.⁴² In this *zoku* he saw "animated qualities" of "vigor and passion" that were capable of expressing emotions and the seeds for his artistic language.

This is, in effect, a decisive difference. While *kokubungaku* scholars, through their identification of *zoku*, sought to posit authentic elegance as the contemporary embodiment (and hence continuous extension) of the "pure voice" of the past, Bimyō and Shōyō sought to embrace *zoku* for its power, the energy and animated vigor that earlier writing lacked; thus they aimed for a rupture with the past. In the realm of *zoku*, therefore, we find two contradictory impulses at work. As we shall see below, these contradictory impulses also appear tellingly in the "tone" (*onchō*) they seek to promote in their reforms.

Despite this difference in their definitions of *zoku*, we find that *kokubungaku* scholars and fiction writers deployed similar logic in addressing the issue of the 7-5 metrical rhythm. We see that both Shōyō and Bimyō also sought to treat the 7-5 metrical rhythm as a simple matter of rhythmical tone (*chōshi*). Look at Shōyō's statement in "Bunshō shinron" ("New Theory on Style," 1886):

Those who prefer Chinese poetic verse or those engrained in rhythms inscribed in syllables of fives and sevens compose not for the meaning but for the language itself. That is why they value verse even if it means bending the idea, privileging a fluent flow. . . . Kyokutei Shujin, the founder of Bakin-esque writing, can be said to embody a fluent flow; however, [although he skillfully hides this,] we can see a trace of him bending the idea for the sake of flow, to say nothing of the recent novices. I, too, was a slave to rhythm until recently.⁴³

The object of criticism here is Bakin-esque prose, which dominated the realm of the *shōsetsu* in the mid to late 1880s.⁴⁴ In Shōyō's argument, the metrical rhythms

of fives and sevens or of Chinese poetic verse, which constitute the “fluent flow” of the sentence, exists independently of the “idea” presented—just as *kokubungaku* scholars defined rhythmical tone. The difference is that Shōyō defines these rhythms as a structural *restriction* that interferes with the expression of the “idea,” rather than an aesthetic principle by which to judge a given verse.

While Shōyō’s primary target was the 7–5 metrical rhythm, Bimyō went so far as to argue against metrical rhythm altogether, at least in prose. In response to the critics of *genbun’itchi*, who denounced the new prose as “inelegant,” Bimyō claims that their characterization is based on “tone” (*onchō*), which should not be applied to prose. There is, he asserts in “Genbun’itchiron gairyaku” (“On the Theories of *Genbun’itchi*,” 1888), “a *waka*-like tone” that is inscribed in the classical language by which the critics evaluate *zokubun*:

That which takes *onchō* as its defining characteristic is poetry, but that which does not is prose. . . . Poetry is something that is chanted. Prose, however, is not. In order to recite a verse, it is necessary to have *onchō*. For something that is not chanted, *onchō* is useless. It is unfortunate that even Bakin lacked such a perspective. He disseminated language with a 7–5 metrical rhythm. It is then that the difference between poetry and prose was erased.⁴⁵

Bimyō is in fact referring to two types of *onchō* here, one of *waka* (a 5–7 rhythm) and the other of *shintaiishi*/Bakin-esque prose (a 7–5 rhythm), but he does not distinguish between them. In light of what we saw earlier in the works of *kokubungaku* scholars, his logic has two contradictory implications. On the one hand, he is arguing against the idea that his new language—the adoption of *zokubun*—is “inelegant,” a typical criticism by *kokubungaku* scholars. On the other hand, he does so by submitting to their view that treats metrical rhythm, be it 5–7 or 7–5, monolithically, hence nullifying the difference between *waka*-like tone and Bakin-esque rhythm, which is exactly what *kokubungaku* scholars argued. Bimyō is instead attempting to define his prose away from any sort of metrical rhythm, making rhythm a quality specific to poetry, the beauty of which ought not be used in examining prose. In short, in criticizing the 7–5 rhythm, both Bimyō and Shōyō most likely inadvertently reinforced the linguistic scheme posited by *kokubungaku* scholars in their call for *waka* reform.

Why this criticism of metrical rhythm by these fiction writers? What lies at the core of this is the existence of *onchō* inscribed in the practice of reading/recitation. Maeda Ai’s famous essay on reading practices, in which he brilliantly describes a shift from “oral reading” (*ondoku*) to “silent/solitary reading” (*mokudoku*), will be our guide here.⁴⁶ Oral reading practices and communal recitation were dominant forms of reading in the early Meiji period; this was especially so for the many politically oriented *shōsetsu*, which deployed the 7–5 metrical rhythm. Maeda shows that this was a practice governed by a shared rhythm of the sentences, traceable to the practice of *sodoku*, a form of learning of the *kangaku* classics that declaimed words and phrases without knowing their meaning. Maeda contends that such

a rhythm constituted a “spiritual language” that fostered solidarity among those who shared it. Such reading practices were, he argues, gradually supplanted by solitary reading, which constituted the modern practice.

Shōyō and Bimyō, in their search for new artistic prose, were trying desperately to leave behind a form of prose integral to such communal reading practices. Bimyō, in “Genbun’itchiron gairyaku,” specifically takes up the issue of oral reading in arguing against the use of tone in evaluating the “elegance” of a given style of writing. He claims, “The Japanese have a way of reading that is very different from conversation; it is rather close to singing. This is one of the hindrances to *zokubun*.”⁴⁷ He thus argues that what is considered beautiful is based on this “reading that is like singing,” hence calling into question the set of criteria by which critics of *zokubun* evaluated “beauty.”⁴⁸ Such criticism of “reading like singing” proved itself a good strategy for differentiating between prose and poetry because of poetry’s increasing association with actual singing in the late 1880s.⁴⁹ Since many *shintaiishi* were adopted as “school songs,” many of the compositions were literally sung. This was also a time when many “military marches” were produced through *shintaiishi*, further inscribing a music-centered character on poetic composition.

What Bimyō and Shōyō sought, therefore, was to sanitize prose, stripping it of an *onchō* associated with existing reading practices, and to relegate *onchō* to the position of a musicality reserved for the realm of poetry. This *onchō* was precisely what defined the “writing” that they sought to leave behind in their efforts to adopt *zoku* (or “speech”); hence it was vital that they sever the 7–5 metrical rhythm from the realm of *zoku*. In the process, Shōyō and Bimyō replicated *kokubungaku* scholars’ solution to the dilemma that resulted from appropriating *shintaiishi*. This certainly does not mean that they endorsed or consciously supported the *kokubungaku* scholars’ poetic project. Far from it. Bimyō and Shōyō severed the 7–5 metrical rhythm and Bakin-esque prose/*shintaiishi* so that they could embrace their *zoku* (and relinquish the past associated with it), while *kokubungaku* scholars sought to sever them so that they could retain the 7–5 metrical rhythm (and the “voices of the past” it made manifest) as an aesthetic form. Nevertheless, whatever their agendas and goals, we cannot deny that Bimyō and Shōyō’s search for a new prose form facilitated the severance of the 7–5 metrical rhythm from *zoku* that *kokubungaku* scholars sought to institute.

Bimyō and Shōyō did not seek to eradicate *onchō* completely. In fact, they sought a new *onchō*, one that was free of the 7–5 metrical rhythm that defined past “writing.” Note that solitary reading did not signify lack of *onchō*.⁵⁰ The clue to understanding the new *onchō* that they sought lies in how they reiterate the term: in *Shōsetsu shinzui*, Shōyō glosses *onchō* as the “voice of reading” (*yomigoe*), while Bimyō refers to a “tone of voice” (*seichō*).⁵¹ With these terms they refer to another orality, vital for their “artistic” prose.

BIMYŌ'S GENBUN'ITCHI AND INBUN

Bimyō's struggle for reform comprised two seemingly independent endeavors. On the one hand, he sought to produce a new form of prose by adopting *zokubun*.⁵² On the other hand, he tackled *inbun* (lit., the "language of rhythm"), the very negative reference point against which he defined his prose. He continued to write fiction and is now better known for his prose reforms, but his theoretical interest began to shift toward *inbun* in the early 1890s.⁵³ Despite the difference in genre, I believe that a common drive governs his efforts in prose and poetry, linked specifically to the issue of *onchō* as aesthetic criterion. Both of these efforts are marked by the need to produce an alternative *onchō* by which to evaluate both poetry and prose.

In "Ware ware no genbun'itchitai" ("Our *Genbun'itchi* Style," 1891), Bimyō writes:

When language is recited and its flow interrupted and its true meaning lost, it is "a blockage" (*jūtai*). When it is recited and its flow smooth and true meaning conveyed, it is "non-blockage" (*fujūtai*). *Fujūtai* should be differentiated from melody (*rakuchō*).⁵⁴

Here, Bimyō continues his efforts to differentiate between prose and poetry by introducing a new concept called *fujūtai* or "non-blockage." As Maeda has aptly pointed out, Bimyō's concept of "blockage" here is inextricably linked to how meaning is received by the reader.⁵⁵ In other words, if and when a given "flow" introduces breaks where they are not supposed to be (for example, in the middle of a word) and hence interferes with the communication of meaning, then it constitutes "blockage." The flow in "non-blockage" does not interfere with meaning.

Notably, "non-blockage" has an oral component: "When prose is orally read, the best is "non-blockage." When poetic verse is sung, the best outcome is melody."⁵⁶ Bimyō, therefore, may have been against recitation (the old form of oral reading), but he did not reject *onchō* in his prose. In 1890's "Bun to gochō no kankei" ("On the Relationship between Language and Tone"), he discusses "spiritual tone" (*seichō* 斎調), which is "the sound of words that brings joy to the ear," and "non-spiritual tone" (*fuseichō* 不斎調), "the sound that brings unpleasantness to the ear."⁵⁷ What he has in mind is the sound of a sentence independent of metrical rhythm. Bimyō thus sought a prose with *fujūtai* that would bring "joy to the ear."⁵⁸ Such attention to sound is also reflected in his adoption of the suffixes *desu/masu*. Although he first chose to use the suffixes *da/datta* in his prose for efficiency, he reverted to *desu/masu*, he said, because he considered the sound of *da/datta* too "vulgar."⁵⁹

What then constituted the sound of "non-blockage"? For Bimyō, it was none other than the sound of "everyday conversation." In "Genbun'itchiron gairyaku," he says: "Leaving classical language aside, *zokubun* is a language that copies the way we speak, so in reading it, we ought to read it just like everyday conversation"

instead of singing it.⁶⁰ Yet he knew that such artistic language could not simply be achieved by “transcribing *zokugo*.” This is the most evident in Bimyō’s response to Uchida Roan (a.k.a. Fuchian)’s criticism of his experimental prose: “If we transcribe our everyday conversation and make it our written language, who—with the exception of some philosophers—would consider that a language of beauty? . . . Is our everyday conversation complete in form? That certainly isn’t the case.”⁶¹ Bimyō thus implies that “everyday conversation” must be “made complete” in order for it to be a language of beauty. In effect, he was not advocating the “spoken language” as it was; he was clearly seeking to produce a written language that was a *representation* of everyday speech.

His choice of *desu/masu* for suffixes further supports such a view.⁶² As Yamada Shunji argues in depth in *Taishū shinbun ga tsukuru Meiji no “Nihon”* (*Meiji “Japan” through Popular Newspapers*), *desu/masu* was an integral part of what was established as the “conversational style.” This was prevalent in the miscellaneous section of newspapers at the time; inscribed in it were “the writers’ voices” with the result that it was a language that gave the readers the illusion that the reporters were talking to them.⁶³ This *desu/masu* prose thus clearly mobilized an orality, which, for Bimyō, featured a possibility for a new language. From the time he adopted *desu/masu*, his fictional works increasingly featured dialogue that could be “read as it was spoken,” producing a prose that had an orality independent of metrical rhythm.⁶⁴

In “Genbun’itchiron gairyaku” and elsewhere, Bimyō constantly argued against the criticism that *zokugo* style was “unruly” and “ha[d] no system of grammar,” a criticism that was repeated not only by *kokubungaku* scholars, but by Shōyō as well.⁶⁵ What this shows is that Shōyō and Bimyō did not have the same *zoku* in mind. Despite the fact that they both posited *zoku* in opposition to writing and sought a prose form that severed itself from the past, Shōyō had a broader conception of *zoku* that included “unregistered” language, language that had yet to be textualized. But Bimyō had found a more orderly form of writing—a representation of oral dialogue—already in the making. And this prose, as far as he was concerned, was imbued with an orality of its own that was divorced from metrical rhythm.

Bimyō continued to critique the validity of metrical rhythm as an aesthetic criterion for prose, which, much to his dismay, remained quite dominant. This, I believe, is one of the main reasons that Bimyō sought to treat *inbun* concurrently with prose reform. His project on *inbun* is of particular interest to us, because it reengages the issue of 7–5 metrical rhythm, the criticism of which facilitated the *waka* reform conceptualized by *kokubungaku* scholars. Perhaps not surprisingly, we shall see that Bimyō’s criticism of the 7–5 metrical rhythm in the realm of poetry ultimately undermined the efforts of *kokubungaku* scholars at *waka* reform.

In a series of essays he wrote on *inbun*, Bimyō asserted the flexibility of rhythm inscribed in a given verse. The existing metrical rhythm, according to Bimyō,

was not the absolute. In order to challenge its dominance, he sought to break up the 7-5 metrical rhythm by introducing an alternate rhythm. In *Nihon inbunron*, he says:

[In terms of metrical rhythm,] 7 is not necessarily 7; it could be “3 and 4” or “4 and 3.” It could also be “2 and 5,” or “5 and 2.” “2 and 5” could also be “2 and 2 and 3” or “2 and 3 and 2.” To say that this is all 7 is very sloppy indeed.⁶⁶

Since there are rarely words that take up 7 syllables, Bimyō suggests, it is possible to mobilize such variation. What he highlights here is the existence of a semantic structure within the metrical structure. For example, “Daichi yōyaku nubadama no” should not be understood as a simple 7-5, but as 3-4-4-1, all of the semantic units having breaks in between. Bimyō’s textual experiments incorporated such views, as he visually represented such semantic breaks. Here is an example from his *Shinchō inbun: seinen shōka shū* (*New Forms of Poetry: Anthology of Youth Poems*, 1891).

万象 の ゆめ いま 覚めて
大地 やうやく むば玉 の
闇 の ころも を 脱ぎ 去りぬ
薄むらさき の よこ雲に
誰 が 織りまぜ の 唐にしき
こがね の 色 の 目眩さ よ。

Banshō no yume ima samete
Daichi yōyaku nubadama no
Yami no koromo o nugi sarinu
usumurasaki no yokogumo ni
Dare ga orimaze no karanishiki
Kogane no iro no mabayusa yo

The universe awakens from a dream
The earth finally divests itself
Of blackberry darkness.
On the light-purple clouds
Who quilted the colors of brocade?
How bright the golden colors!⁶⁷

The original text would normally have been strung together without being parsed in this manner, the strangeness of which is lost in the Romanized text. Despite the fact that this verse has a 7-5 metrical structure, such visual parsing, as Kamei has rightly noted, allows for the reader to reorient him or herself to the rhythm and to project new breaks.⁶⁸ In other words, he or she could read “Banshōno yume ima-samete” (5-2-5) or “Banshō no yume ima samete” (4-1-2-2-3) or any other variation he or she chooses. Bimyō thus sought a way to redefine the various breaking points and repetitions and internally undermine the dominance of the 7-5 metrical rhythm. In other essays, he even proposed that metrical rhythm need not be limited to 5-7 or 7-5; it could be 6-8, 8-6, further suggesting that lines could be divided 3-3, 4-4; 4-4-3-2-1.⁶⁹

In addition to undermining the dominant metrical rhythm, Bimyō sought to introduce another aural element to the poetic mixture. This time, it was accent. He attempted to adopt Western poetic techniques such as the iambus, trochee,

and anapest in his poetic composition. In effect, the poetic sound, which he called “musical rhythm” in *Nihon inbunron*, was a combination of metrical rhythm (in all its variations, parsed according to semantic units) and accent.⁷⁰

In an instance of iambus from *Nihon inbunron*, he takes the word *yume* (dream) as an example and claims that the accent lies in “*me*”—*yu* is the “low sound” while *me* constitutes the “high sound.” Trying to compose a verse with such iambus, he proposes: *yume yume kimi no, tama kura ni* (all of the words that repeat the same iambic structure as *yume*).⁷¹ By highlighting such accent repetition, he thus sought to introduce another set of *onchō* to poetic verse. However, not all such poetic techniques are applicable to the Japanese syntactic structure, which is apparent, for example, in his attempt to adopt anapest, in which “two short sounds are followed by one long one, such as *yanagi* (willow). The high sound is *gi*, while *ya* and *na* have the same tone.”⁷² Here is an example transcribed in the way Bimyō parsed the verse: “*Yanagi ninemu rerutoho kefuri*,” the high sound being “*gi*,” “*mu*,” “*toho*,” and “*ri*,” respectively. Such parsing follows the structure of the anapest, but semantically it should be parsed as “*Yanagi ni nemureru tohoke furi*.” As such an example shows, the forced use of these methods directly imported from Western languages and their poetic traditions shatters the semantic structure of the Japanese words, making the poem incomprehensible. In this sense, such methodology produced what he earlier called “blockage” in meaning.

Bimyō was therefore successful in some experiments, yet not so successful in others. But one thing is certain. His work on *inbun* was an incessant search for new sets of rhythm that could undermine the dominance of the 7–5 metrical rhythm while also introducing new means to create *onchō*. Predictably, such proposed reforms did not sit well with *kokubungaku* scholars, who sought a use of diction and semantic structure based on “authentic elegance.” Bimyō’s efforts to destabilize the 7–5 metrical rhythm were a source of much frustration for someone like Ochiai, who wrote in “*Kokubun kokushi o ronjite yo no bungakusha ni nozomu*” (“On National Letters and Poetry: A Request to Men of Letters”):

The general consensus among men of letters is that the thirty-one-syllable form must be changed. They also say that the 5–7 metrical rhythm is passé; poetry must now be in a 7–5 metrical rhythm; they generally say [compositions] should not be limited to 5s and 7s; one should compose freely and use 1–2, 3–4, 5–6–7, or 8–9–10. Fine. Change the thirty-one-syllable form, forget 5–7, and even relinquish 7–5. What is the alternative metrical rhythm? What kind of poetry would that be? I’d like to know, I’d like to see it.⁷³

This article was published as Bimyō was publishing his series of articles on *inbun*. What is at the core of Ochiai’s frustration is the lack of a standard form by which to define poetry, which is precisely what the *kokubungaku* scholars were seeking. Bimyō’s proposed reform in poetry obviously ran counter to those of *kokubungaku* scholars, who sought to establish rules based on authentic elegance, or more

accurately to project authentic elegance onto the standard, rather than to destabilize them.

In both his work on prose and *inbun*, Bimyō, whether consciously or otherwise, challenged the *kokubungaku* project. His first set of negotiations was to sever prose from what he called a “musical” rhythm, and endow it with an entirely different orality. His works on *inbun* featured his effort to destabilize the dominant 7–5 and 5–7 metrical rhythms and introduce a new set of rhythm and poetic sound as an alternative aesthetic principle. In so doing, he questioned what constituted “elegance” in *onchō*, the concept that firmly governed those “artistic” criteria based on which his *genbun’itchi* and poetic experiments were belittled by *kokubungaku* scholars.

SHŌYŌ AND THE “ELOCUTIONARY” METHOD

While Bimyō busied himself with *inbun*, Shōyō took an entirely different path in his search for a new orality. For Shōyō, the *yomigoe* (lit., “reading voice”) with which he glossed the characters for *onchō*) referred to an orality inscribed in the practice of “elocution.” Here is a passage from “Bunshō shinron”:

The main goal of language is to represent emotions. Language that fails to do so does not encompass perfect beauty. . . . Then, what kind of language is most appropriate to represent emotions? In answering this question, I would say that a language that applies what in English they call elocution is the most appropriate. . . . Elocution is a method of reading wherein intonation and tempo are based on the meaning of the sentences.⁷⁴

As Maeda has argued, this elocutionary reading that Shōyō proposed in “Bunshō shinron” is the absolute opposite of “raw” reading, through which students recited and memorized the sentences without knowing the meaning.⁷⁵ This move, on Shōyō’s part, thus aligned with his argument against the Bakin-esque narrative and the practice of communal recitation that prioritized metrical rhythm over content. Yet just like Bimyō, Shōyō was not conceptualizing a form of prose devoid of orality. He sought a new language that had, inscribed within itself, a new orality based on intonations that adhered to meaning rather than formal structure (such as the 7–5 metrical rhythm) and that would replace earlier reading practices. This was on a par with Shōyō’s claim that the “elocutionary method” was a type of reading that should not necessarily be adopted when a text was orally delivered. Instead, he described it as “a reading that had to be adopted during solitary reading.”⁷⁶ In effect, such orality had to be discernible in the language in which the works were written without the oral delivery of the texts themselves.

Shoyō’s orality differed from what Bimyō had in mind for his prose. In “Bunshō shinron,” Shōyō raises two examples, “*anata Asakusa e ikimasuka*” and “*kono shina wa oyasuu gozaimasu*,” and says the following:

What is most troublesome in our language are the suffixes. We add something so strange, which no other language has, to the end of the sentences. In the above examples, I'm referring to the 'masu' of 'gozaimasu' and 'yukimasuka,' which is utterly unnecessary. We can just say 'yuku ka' and 'oyasui,' but we add instead 'gozaimasu' and 'yukimasuka.' This is commonly called an honorific and has been our custom for quite some time, but it is entirely unnecessary. When it is used in written form, it especially interferes with the force of the language. In writing in the 'descriptive style' or 'epic narrative,' or even in speech, if we use such suffixes and write exactly like everyday conversation, the language will be unnecessarily long and will lose the refined intonation and tone.⁷⁷

Here, Shōyō targets “honorifics,” which form part of the reason that language “becomes unnecessarily long,” a criticism he leveled against *zokubuntai* in *Shōsetsu shinzui*.⁷⁸ His examples show that his criticism specifically targets the suffix *masu*. Shōyō thus set his new prose against the “voice” of the “oral dialogue” that Bimyō advocated. In effect, he rejected two forms of orality available to him in the mid-Meiji period: that of the 7–5 rhythm and that of the “conversation-style” prose that featured a representation of an oral dialogue.

Shōyō further developed his theory in another essay, “Doppō o okosan to suru shui” (“On the Aim to Popularize Methods of Reading,” 1891), which is of special interest, because he consciously differentiated his position via Sekine Masanao, the *kokubungaku* scholar who also advocated elocutionary method in promoting the language of authentic elegance. In the essay, Shōyō first describes three types of reading: mechanical reading (*kikaiteki doppō*), grammatical reading (*bunpōteki doppō*), and logical reading (*ronriteki doppō*).⁷⁹ Mechanical reading is the equivalent of “raw” reading, “a reading in which they pay no attention to word/phrase breaks and simply utter the sounds of characters in written order.”⁸⁰ It is otherwise named “dead reading,” devoid of “emotion, warmth, and activity.”⁸¹ The grammatical reading is one that Shōyō claims that Sekine advocates, which he describes in his “Kokubun rōdokuho” (“Elocutionary Methods of *Kokubun*,” 1891). In fact, this is seemingly what Shōyō was advocating in his earlier essay, “Bunshō shinron,” as it is also referred to as “correct reading,” which pays close attention to “pronunciation, rules of grammar, word/phrase breaks,” while the intonation and tone adhere closely to the meaning of the sentences.⁸²

Before examining the third and final form of reading, which Shōyō dubbed “logical reading,” let us first briefly look at Sekine’s “Kokubun rōdokuho.” Sekine, like Shōyō, takes as his negative reference point “monotonous reading,” the equivalent of mechanical reading, and claims that a reader must pay attention to pronunciation, phrase, elocution, and vocal tone.⁸³ First, Sekine sought to standardize pronunciation by renouncing regional dialects. In addition, he claimed that this would further standardize spelling, which, according to Sekine, had not been standardized because people tended to follow pronunciation in spelling. As long as people pronounced words incorrectly, he suggested, spelling would also be

irregular. The elocutionary method, therefore, would teach not only proper pronunciation but also spelling. Sekine further argued that the reader needed to pay close attention to phrasal units and understand clearly “the grammatical structure prior to enunciation.”⁸⁴ In promoting elocution, Sekine sought to advocate a reading based on meaning, one that for example used “high pitch to express words of interrogation, suspicion, and excitement” while “naturally using low pitch to express acceptance, conclusion, and interpretation.”⁸⁵ And finally, with vocal tone, Sekine envisioned a relationship in which intonation and tone adhered closely to meaning.

To the extent that they were arguing against mechanical reading, Shōyō and Sekine appear to be in agreement. However, what is strikingly different is the absolute position that the text intended for elocution occupies in Sekine’s essay. Take, for example, Sekine’s discussion on pronunciation. In his logic, the chosen text displayed the standard spelling, which, he claimed, was too often irregularized by “mistaken” pronunciation, whether as a result of regional dialects or a faulty memory. It embodied correct grammatical structures and phrasal units. Sekine’s essay thus features an unconditional valorization of the text for elocution, which invariably constitutes prose of “authentic elegance” as that which governs “correct elocution.” Or, more accurately, in such a scheme, oral delivery is relegated to a position secondary to that of the *gasei* language inscribed in the text for elocution. Elocution thus ought to make manifest the *gasei* prose buried in the passages.⁸⁶

In contrast, Shōyō did not place such emphasis on “correctness” in promoting his “logical reading.” Here is a passage from “Doppō o okosan to suru shui”:

I seek to develop what one elocutionist called ‘fine reading.’ Fine reading does not simply clarify the meaning of the sentences (grammatical reading) nor make it forceful and agreeable (Whately). . . .⁸⁷ If the emotion inscribed in the language is beautiful, it ought to sound beautiful, if the emotion inscribed in the language is hurried, it ought to sound hurried. . . . The voice’s sound should adhere to the emotions inscribed in the language as closely as possible.⁸⁸

The orality of elocution here adheres not to the text itself but to the “emotions inscribed in the language.” To access this “emotion inscribed in the language,” Shōyō claims that “even when grammatically it makes sense to read [a given sentence] without any breaks, if, logically speaking, there appears the need to express strong feelings, and one can only do so by introducing breaks, one ought to be flexible and address it accordingly.”⁸⁹ “Grammatical correctness” can thus be sacrificed to foreground the emotions inscribed in the language.

Perhaps surprisingly, Shōyō further claims that “logical reading” offers “a means to analyze life and human beings and also a means to teach the very thing one has learned.”⁹⁰ This language, in other words, ought to be imbued with an orality that would assist the interpretation of “life.”⁹¹ In other words, the orality of a given text, even read silently, should carry with it an interpretive scheme.

Obviously, such prose had yet to exist. As was the case in *Shōsetsu shinzui*, where his ideas were prescriptive of the *shōsetsu* despite the appearance of being descriptive, the new form of prose with an orality of “logical reading” had yet to be produced. This was in keeping with his adoption of textually unregistered *zokugo* as a means to invigorate fictional prose. The search for a new orality thus marks his attempt to break with earlier forms of writing. The elocutionary language that Shōyō promoted was not a method to access the standard *gasei* language (that linked itself to the past “voice”) seemingly “buried” in (or more accurately projected onto) the text of elocution as was the case in Sekine, but first and foremost a language that was discontinuous with the existing practices of reading and writing.

CONCLUSION

We have taken multiple steps to examine the intersections between reforms in poetry and fiction by focusing on works of *kokubungaku* scholars and two leading fiction writers who advocated *zokugo* in their prose. They intersected at unexpected places, and at the same time differed completely at areas of apparent superficial convergence. Despite the seeming similarity in advocating “*tsūjō no danwa*,” they differed in what they argued against (*kanbun* for *kokubungaku* scholars and writing in general for fiction writers). The difference, though in appearance minor, was striking. While *kokubungaku* scholars sought to identify authentic elegance, the contemporary embodiment of a pure original voice, in the “current language,” fiction writers strove to generate a new language of the present, one severed from the past (a “past” represented by Bakin and the practices of communal recitation through which his works were consumed). This difference, I believe, is at the core of Kamei’s statement that *genbun’itchi* and *kokugo* reforms had nothing to do with each other.

Yet this difference produced an unexpected overlap, which facilitated a linguistic turn that both sought to achieve, despite lacking any real shared goal or agenda. The severance of the 7–5 metrical rhythm from what they each called *zoku* was one such example. *Kokubungaku* scholars embraced the 7–5 metrical rhythm as a “standard,” the manifestation of the past they sought to recover in the present, while the fiction writers sought to relinquish the past (Bakin-esque prose and communal reading practices) inscribed in the 7–5 metrical rhythm.

In effect, their searches for voices continuous with and discontinuous from the past converge in *onchō*. They shared the conviction that *onchō* was precisely that which defined language and that the past was firmly inscribed in it. To produce continuity with the past, *kokubungaku* scholars could not relinquish the 7–5 metrical rhythm. In contrast, fiction writers—be it in the form of Bimyō’s “conversation-style” language or that of Shōyō’s “elocutionary” language—desperately sought a new *onchō* that would replace the 7–5 rhythm that defined past practices of reading and writing.

When we deem *zoku* as a populist choice, it is easy to seamlessly link the efforts of the *kokubungaku* scholars and fiction writers. However, once we bracket the notion that these writers were in fact in search of a “shared language,” we begin to see the multiple linguistic operations that go into their references to *zoku*. The aesthetic aspect of language is too often glossed over in a narrative that emphasizes *zoku*’s populist character. None of the writers denied that they sought an artistic language; in fact no one even questioned it. Without considering *zoku* as an aesthetic category, we lose sight of the importance that *onchō* played in their arguments.

The typical narrative of *kokugo* reform says that we must wait until the emergence of Ueda Kazutoshi to completely sever *kokugo* from *kokubun*.⁹² The assumption is that *kokubun* scholars subjugated *kokugo* to *kokubun*; hence any effort to cater to aesthetics is seen as a lingering attachment to the *kokubun* era. The following chapter will question such a division between *kokugo* and *kokubun*. Such an inquiry will show that the division between speech and writing that fiction writers produced in defining *zoku* came to be appropriated in Ueda’s discourse on *kokugo*, wherein he set out to define *kokugo* as a mode of expression via voice, all the while defining *bungaku* as a mode of expression via letters.

Furthermore, I will attempt to take a step back and introduce another perspective by which to examine language reforms in the following section by specifically examining the issue of racialization. I believe race plays a vital role in the formation of “national language” and is significant in understanding the global context in which these language reforms were advocated, debated, and implemented.