

“A Land Blessed by Word Spirit”: Kamochi Masazumi and Early Modern Constructs of *Kotodama*

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Attitudes toward language—whether native or foreign tongues—often provide keys to a people’s intellectual history. From the perspective of European cultural history, Umberto Eco claims in his *The Search for the Perfect Language* that many scholarly fruits of modernism—ranging “from taxonomy in the natural sciences to comparative linguistics, from formal languages to artificial intelligence and to the cognitive sciences”—were born as “side effects” of this very search.¹ A quest for the perfect language is also observable in Japan, where it has often been associated with *kotodama* (literally “word spirit”), a concept of ancient vintage that was resuscitated and variously interpreted during the early modern period. Studies have also demonstrated how theories of language can lay intellectual groundwork supporting ideas of emerging nation-states.²

Various beliefs in the incantatory quality of particular kinds of utterances are found around the globe, but an examination of the role of *kotodama* in Japanese intellectual and literary history suggests that there it became an important element of the “linguistic arm” of certain ideologies, most of them of a highly ethnocentric bent. Indeed, from the early modern period down to the present, *kotodama* has played a prominent role in what could be called “linguism” in Japan.³ The present study

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 19.

² The most noteworthy study examining the relationship between language theories and nascent concepts of “nation” in early modern Japan is Susan L. Burns, *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community* (Druham: Duke University Press, 2003).

³ W. Martin Bloomer, in his “Introduction” to *The Contest of Language: Before and Beyond Nationalism*, ed. W. Martin Bloomer (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 2, defines linguism as “the most developed form” of “the habit of identifying patterns of life, allegiances, and

will begin with an overview of the ancient background of *kotodama*, but will concentrate mainly on its revival and development in the thought of several early modern figures, particularly in the writings of Kamochi Masazumi 鹿持雅澄 (1791-1858), a Tosa scholar whose theories about language are a broad synthesis of much earlier thought, both nativist and Confucian, and whose prodigious corpus of writings exhibit a wide-ranging awareness of and interaction with contemporary intellectual activity in many parts of the country. Moreover, he is a foremost example of the Bakumatsu momentum toward ruralization of scholarship and the arts.⁴ In terms of the present discussion, his views on *kotodama* may be seen as an illustrative summation of much that had gone before, and our investigation must begin with an examination of these precedents. In conclusion, some possible reasons will be suggested for the enthusiasm with which this ancient belief was revitalized, and some of the ongoing repercussions of its revival will be noted.

Kotodama in Ancient Japan

After all that has been said and written about *kotodama*, many are surprised to learn that only three examples of its usage are found in pre-Heian writing, all in the *Man'yōshū*. Any discussion should begin by examining these. Most famously, Yamanoue no Okura (660-733) uses the word in a *chōka* addressed to a departing ambassador to China in 733:

... kamiyo yori / iitsute kuraku / soramitsu /
Yamato no kuni wa / sumekami no / itsushiki
kuni / kotodama (言霊) no / sakiwau kuni to

...

... from the age of the gods / it has been told
and retold / that the sky-vast / land of Yamato
/ is an august land, / its rulers of divine descent,
/ a land blessed / by word spirit ...
(MYS no. 894)

identities with the language itself,” to the extent of “the identification of the linguistic group as the political group.”

⁴A general overview of this trend toward ruralization of culture is provided by Tsukamoto Manabu, *Chihō bunjin* (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1977).

It also appears in an anonymous *tanka*:

Kotodama (事霊) *no* / *yaso no chimata ni* /
yūke tou / *uramasa ni noru* / *imo wa aiyor-*
amu

At the intersecting roads / of word spirit / I
do evening divination / the true oracle tells
me / I shall see my beloved. (MYS no.
2506)⁵

Finally, in a verse possibly by Hitomaro, the word appears in an envoy (*hanka*) following a short *chōka* in which the poet significantly declares he will perform *kotoage* (apparently a type of ritual incantation) in spite of the dangers of doing so:

Shikishima no / *Yamato no kuni wa* / *kotoda-*
ma (事霊) *no* / *tasukuru kuni zo* / *masakiku*
ari koso

The land of Yamato / in the region of Shiki /
is a land / aided by word spirit— / may good
fortune be with you. (MYS no. 3254)

What generalizations can be based on these three usages of the word?⁶ Obviously they indicate that *kotodama* was part of a broader cultural construct that obtained among Nara-period Japanese, though just how pervasive a role it played is difficult to determine. The usage of both graphs 言 and 事 to record “*koto*” may be taken to suggest either that *kotodama* encompassed both mean-

⁵ Evening divination (*yūke*) was performed by standing at an intersection at sunset and listening to snatches of the conversations of passers-by. One’s fortune was based on what one heard. I am grateful to Iori Joko, whose unpublished paper “Reassessing *Kotodama*: Usages and Interpretations” (Columbia University, 1993) led me to some of the sources I investigate here. Her analysis of ancient usages of the word (pp. 55-93) is the most thorough and comprehensive of any in English.

⁶ Roy Andrew Miller takes the analysis of these three verses as far as the evidence permits—and even somewhat beyond what it permits. See his “The ‘Spirit’ of the Japanese Language,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 3:2 (1977), 241-298.

ings, or that the early Japanese mind made no distinction between “word” and “phenomenon” (a claim advanced by certain early modern nativists), but neither interpretation can be said to be conclusive. The second example above suggests a relationship with divination, and the third, with the better-documented practice of *kotoage*, which is generally understood as a ritual pronouncement to bring about either blessing or cursing. A full analysis of *kotoage* lies outside the scope of the present study, but it is worth noting in passing that in some sources (e.g., MYS nos. 972, 1113, 2918, 3250, 3253, and 4124), the practice is viewed either ambiguously or negatively as dangerous, and according to legend, Empress Jingū forbade her troops from performing *kotoage* during her military campaign against Korea.⁷ But exactly what relationship, if any, obtained between *kotoage* and *kotodama* is difficult to ascertain; only one usage of the former is accompanied by mention of the latter.

Nor do the six known usages from the Heian period support definitive pronouncements. The earliest of these is in a *chōka* dated 849 and recorded in the *Shoku Nihon kōki* 続日本後紀. In this exceptionally long poem, the monks of Kōfukuji offer their felicitations to Emperor Ninmyō 仁明天皇 (810-850; r. 833-850) on the occasion of his fortieth birthday. In a section explaining why they chose to use a Japanese verse form and not Chinese is found the following:

... *ō-mi-yo o* / *yorozuyo inori* / *hotoke ni mo* /
kami ni mo maoshi / *tatematsuru* / *koto no ko-*
toba wa / *kono kuni no* / *mototsu kotoba ni* /
oiyorite / *morokoshi no* / *kotoba o karazu* /
fumi shirusu / *hakase yatowazu* / *kono kuni*
no / *iitsutauraku* / *hi no moto no* / *Yamato no*
kuni wa / *kotodama* (言玉) *no* / *sakiwau kuni*
to zo / *furukoto ni* / *nagare kitareru* ...

... that your reign / may last myriad ages / we
offer prayers / to the buddhas / and to the
gods / using / for words / the primeval lan-
guage / of this country / neither borrowing /
from the words of China / nor employing /
scholars to record— / thus has it been / hand-

⁷ “Harima no kuni fudoki,” in *Fudoki*, ed. Akimoto Kichirō, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), p. 299.

ed down in this country: / the land of Yamato
/ where the sun starts its course / is a land
blessed / by word spirit— / in ancient lore /
so has it come down ...⁸

Here, *kotodama* is juxtaposed with statements describing two qualities of the prayers offered for Ninmyō's reign: they used the Yamato language rather than Chinese, and; they were not "recorded." What, if any, connection these two conditions have with *kotodama* is not immediately clear, but some have suggested that it indicates *kotodama*—however defined—was efficacious only in the Yamato language, while others have taken the supposition even further and argued that it demonstrates that the traditional rejection of all but pure Yamato diction in *waka* demonstrates a relationship between *kotodama* and native verse.⁹ The meaning of the second condition—that the verse was not "recorded"—is even less clear, because it was, after all, written down. Perhaps it means that it was not "composed" by scholars, as a Chinese poem would be, but was only recorded afterwards. This has given rise to the suggestion that the act of writing inhibited the working of *kotodama*. These suppositions might indeed be true, but ultimately rely on a good deal of speculation.

The second instance of Heian-period usage is found in a verse by Emperor Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885-930; r. 897-930) as recorded in the *Ōkagami*. Responding to a *tanka* by Fujiwara no Korehira 藤原伊衡 (878-939) celebrating the birth of one of the emperor's sons:

*Hitotose ni / koyoi kazouru / ima yori wa /
momotose made no / tsukikage o mimu*
Counting this night / as one year, / from
henceforth / for a hundred years / you
shall see the light of this moon.
the Emperor recited:

⁸ From *Shoku Nihon kōki*, in *Zōho Rikkokushi*, ed. Saeki Ariyoshi, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1940), p. 364.

⁹ According to Konishi Jin'ichi, among others, the belief obtained that *kotodama* was incompatible with foreign tongues. See his *A History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 205.

*Iwaitsuru / kotodama naraba / momotose no
/ nochi mo tsukisenu / tsuki o koso mime*
If word spirit resides / in the blessing you
have made, / a hundred years / from now we
shall see / the unfading light of the moon.¹⁰

Although a connection is implied between *kotodama* and Korehira's felicitous words, there is no suggestion of any kind of ritual. Moreover, the conditional "if" in the emperor's reply "can therefore be read as casting a shadow of doubt over the effectiveness of Korehira's blessing, which would have been both offensive and imprudent had the two men truly believed in the power of *kotodama* and its ritual efficacy."¹¹ Rather than being part of a serious belief system, *kotodama* appears to be little more than a vague literary allusion in the polite social exchange that *waka* had become; such usage also characterizes the remaining four Heian-period applications of the word, the latest of which appears in the private collection of Fujiwara no Kiyosuke 藤原清輔 (1104-1177). Aside from some scattered citations of earlier usage, for almost six centuries thereafter *kotodama* effectively disappeared from the active lexicon, leaving no further clues to its original semantic burden.¹²

Kotodama in Early Modern Japan

In spite of its obscure origins, by the nineteenth century, *kotodama* had become a household word with sundry literary, scholarly, and religious schools applying it to various ends.¹³ In just the

¹⁰ *Ōkagami*, ed. Tachibana Kenji, *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 20 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1974), p. 55.

¹¹ Joko, p. 81.

¹² One example of a citation is the inclusion of Emperor Daigo's verse in the fourteenth-century *Gyokuyō wakashū*.

¹³ A concise but insightful overview of early modern thought focusing on different figures than those treated here is provided by Ann Wehmeyer, "The Concept of *Kotodama* in Edo Period Nativism," *Annals, Association for Asian Studies, Southeast Conference* 13 (1991): 71-80. See also her "The Interface of Two Cultural Constructs: *Kotodama* and *Fūdo*," in *Japanese Identity: Cultural Analyses*, ed. Peter Nosco, Japan Studies,

half century following Bunsei 1 (1818), no fewer than fifty names of books beginning with this word are listed in *Kokusho sōmoku*, and it may be assumed that at least as many more include the term elsewhere in their titles.¹⁴ Of the many Bakumatsu thinkers who frequently used the word, Masazumi was arguably the most broadly synthetic in his approach, but in order to understand the elements of that synthesis, it is necessary to examine some representative preceding theories.

Keichū's 契沖 (1640-1701) role in the revival of *Man'yōshū* scholarship and his contributions to the nativist movement are widely recognized; moreover, his pioneering work in the reconstruction of the sounds of the ancient language has also received some attention.¹⁵ Many appear, however, to be unaware that it was he who not only reintroduced the word *kotodama* into active usage, but also endowed it with enduring semantic content. In the *kanbun* preface to his 1695 work on *kana* usage, *Waji shōran shō* 和字正濫鈔, he writes:

Our land is a mysterious region where the Shining Spirit (曜靈) condescends to reign, a superior state to which the Son of Heaven descended. Though on the remote eastern fringes [of the world], the sounds [of its language] are most clearly resonant and elegant, compatible (能通) with those of China and India. Therefore its words have marvelous efficacy (靈驗), with blessing or cursing following as one desires. On the day Emperor Kamu-Yamato-iware-hiko [i.e., Emperor Jinmu] subdued the crafty rebels of the Middle Land (*uchitsukuni* 中洲), in worshipping the deities of heaven and earth he changed the names for firewood and water,

completing the great task and thereby demonstrating his august power. Many such marvels are recorded in our country's history, both from the age of the gods and from the age of mortals, and are too numerous to list. Where the *Man'yōshū* speaks of "a land blessed with *kotodama*" and "a land aided by *kotodama*," it is referring to such things.¹⁶

Actually, in the account Keichū cites from the *Nihon shoki*, Jinmu first performs *ukei*, an act of divination to determine the divine will or to discover whether something is auspicious or inauspicious. It was that ritual which predicted the outcome of the battle; the renaming was performed only after that, but Keichū appears to imply both that the renaming was efficacious in bringing it about, and that this is an example of the power of *kotodama*, though that word does not appear in the *Nihon shoki* account. With his *Waji shōran shō*, the term was not only resurrected with a new mantle of meaning, but it also came to be associated with philological and phonological inquiry, a connection that would remain strong throughout the early modern period. Keichū regards the Japanese language as refined and on par with such other cultivated languages as Chinese and Sanskrit, though unlike later nativists, he did not invoke the concept of *kotodama* to assert its superiority.

no. 2 (Denver: Center for Japan Studies at Teikyo Loretto Heights University, 1997), pp. 94-106.

¹⁴ Toyoda Kunio, *Nihonjin no kotodama shisō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980), p. 182.

¹⁵ H.D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 50-56; Burns, pp. 49-51; Roger Thomas, "Sound and Sense: Chōka Theory and Nativist Philology in Early Modern Japan and Beyond," *Early Modern Japan* (2008);6-7.

¹⁶ *Keichū zenshū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), p. 110. Regarding the "compatibility" of the sounds of Japanese with those of Chinese and Sanskrit, Keichū, criticizing those ignorant of proper *kana* usage, writes: "They know nothing of Chinese prosody (韻学), and have only learned to write a few letter of the Indian Siddham script ... while this country is far from India, the sounds [of their languages] are compatible." (p. 113) In the *Nihon shoki*, Jinmu says: "The fire shall be called Istu-no-Kagutsuchi (又火名為巖香来雷) and the water, Itsu-no-Mitsuha-no-me (水名為巖罔象女). The food shall be called Itsu-no-Uka-no-me (粮名為巖稻魂女), and the firewood, Itsu-no-Yamatsuchi (薪名為巖山雷). Other objects are also given new names. *Nihon shoki, jō*, ed. Sakamoto Tarō et al., *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 67 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1967), p. 203.

Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697-1769), for whom “the possibility of recovering [the primeval seamless relation of man/nature/sound] rested upon recovering the language of the ancient period,”¹⁷ charged the word *kotodama* with new semantic content by associating it with the “fifty sounds” of the syllabary, all of which naturally bore specific meanings in a manner similar to what is now understood by the terms “sound symbolism” or phonosemantics. Though Mabuchi is not usually associated with the later so-called phonosemantic school, or *ongiha* 音義派, in many respects his ideas anticipated that movement. He begins his tract on philology, *Goi kō* 語意考 (1769, published 1789) with a comparison of three Asian civilizations:

In this Land of the Rising Sun words are formed according to the fifty sounds (*itsura no koe*) and the myriad things are conveyed orally. In the Land of the Full Sun [i.e., China] the myriad things are recorded using pictograms (*kata o kakite*). In the Land of the Setting Sun [i.e., India] only the fifty sounds are written [alphabetically] for use in [dealing with] the myriad things.

Mabuchi continues with a claim that, while many have slighted ancient Japan for its lack of writing, this was rather a virtue born of the purity and simplicity of its people, who had no need for the complication and artificiality of writing. “Father and Mother Heaven and Earth taught them to speak, and the fifty sounds appear to have come about without conscious thought.”¹⁸ He then continued with an abbreviated description of what some of these sounds “naturally” mean:

Now from ancient times in this country, the division of established words has lain in their horizontal sounds [i.e., vowels]. The first of these [i.e. *a*] is the sound of beginning; the second [i.e. *i*] is the sound of motionlessness;

the third [i.e. *u*] is the sound of motion; the fourth [i.e. *e*] is the sound of commanding; the fifth [i.e. *o*] is the sound of giving aid. Our language becomes clear only when one understands these distinctions. That being the case, one should realize that our language is one that was taught [to us] by our founding deities, the gods of heaven and earth, something that does not exist in any other country. Thus, the organization of these fifty sounds is not just [the result of] a refined activity people of the middle [i.e. Heian] period, but dates from the most exalted age of the gods. From the reign of the heavenly grandson [i.e. Jinmu], the foundations of our language will remain unchanged for countless generations. Therefore, from ancient times this has been called “a land blessed by *kotodama*.”¹⁹

Mabuchi does not state specifically what relationship *kotodama* bears to the heaven-ordained sounds of the Japanese language or to how these sounds are mysteriously bound to specific meanings, but the association is nonetheless clear. The link is further suggested in his *Man'yō kō*, a commentary on the *Man'yōshū*. Referring to Okura's verse, he glosses *kotodama*: “Our imperial land is a land of [spoken] words, not one of [written] characters, and thus [the word *kotodama*] refers to the august presence of a spirit (*tamashii*) in those words.”²⁰ Orality thus appears to be a condition for the presence of that spirit.

The term became even more nuanced under Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801) who in his approach to language adopted Keichū's methodology but Mabuchi's spirit.²¹ In his *Kuzubana* (1780), Norinaga responds to a critique of his *Naobi no mitama* by the Confucian scholar Ichikawa Tazumaro 市川匡麿 (1740-1795). Ichikawa opines that accounts transmitted orally for such a long time could not be counted reliable, to which Norinaga counters that the ancients “got by very well without writing,” and that “an age

¹⁷ Burns, p. 57.

¹⁸ Kamo no Mabuchi, *Goi kō*, in *Kamo no Mabuchi zenshū*, ed. Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, vol. 19 (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruiju Kanseikai, 1980), p. 124.

¹⁹ *Goi kō*, p. 125.

²⁰ Kamo no Mabuchi, *Man'yō kō*, in *Kamo no Mabuchi zenshū*, 3:278.

²¹ Uchimura Kazushi, “‘Gojūon shisō’ sobyō: *Gojūon wakai o megutte*,” *Bungei kenkyū* 95 (2005):47.

without writing had its own way of understanding, and therefore even its oral transmissions were quite different from oral transmission in an age of writing, and did not include careless errors.” Moreover, this was especially true in Japan since it is “a land aided by and blessed by *kotodama*,” and this “can be called the power of transmitting by wondrous *kotodama* rather than with the cleverness of writing.”²² In ancient Japan, then, orality and *kotodama* were mutually reinforcing, the former being a necessary condition for the latter, and the latter insuring the correctness of the former.

Norinaga also charges the word with a very different meaning in his work on grammar, *Kotoba no tama no o 詞の玉緒* (1785). In a section describing *kakari-musubi*, he marvels that the mere change of a particle can alter the meaning so thoroughly, and concludes that “it is a most wondrous precept (*sadamari*) of *kotodama*, and is moreover its indisputable feat (*waza*).”²³ Here, the effects of *kotodama* are seen in the grammatical structures of the Japanese language. This connection was further developed by Norinaga’s disciple, the *kokugakusha* poet and grammarian Kurosawa Okinamaro 黒沢翁満 (1795-1859), who in 1852 authored an analysis of syntax entitled *Kotodama no shirube*. After describing some basic conjugations, he marvels that they are a “truly wondrous and subtle thing,” adding that “it is fitting that from antiquity this imperial land has been called a land of words (*kotoba no kuni*), a land aided by *kotodama*.” He concludes the first half of the treatise with an appeal for the correction of the erroneous conjugations that had crept into usage, and enjoins readers to bear in mind the “virtue of *kotodama*, which, never erring, marvelously and subtly facilitates conjugation.”²⁴

Another nativist scholar who had much to say about *kotodama* was Fujitani Mitsue 富士谷御杖 (1768-1822), a maverick in the *kokugaku* tradition

whose writing has had an ambivalent reception. On the one hand, he has been accused of “using terminology after his own fashion, coining numerous neologisms, and employing unusual locutions,” his opaque use of jargon accounting for the obscurity into which he fell in the succeeding generation.”²⁵ On the other hand, the twentieth century has witnessed a marked revival of interest in his work, some even seeing in it an almost prescient anticipation of postmodernism.²⁶

The independence of Mitsue’s thinking from mainstream nativism is seen already in his estimation of one of its revered founders, Keichū, and of Keichū’s interpretation of *kotodama*. Aside from his criticism of Keichū’s erudition as “too broad . . . neglecting the details of our great imperial land’s customs,” Mitsue rejects the notion that *kotodama* caused blessing or cursing. He notes that of course “it is generally the case that there is happiness when good things [happen] and misfortune when bad things [happen],” but queries: “Ought one to bless that there be happiness in something that was originally not meant for happiness (*moto sachi arumajiki koto*).”²⁷ Mitsue casts a critical eye on all preceding scholarship treating early native texts, claiming that it “has neglected the *kotodama* [of those texts] and, betraying dissatisfaction that our imperial land has nothing like sacred classics (経), has resorted to forced analogy to and embellishment from Buddhist and Confucian works.” He further maintains that such scholars “treat [these texts] either as sacred classics or as histories (史), consisting of things either to be believed or disbelieved.”²⁸ Just how far Mitsue’s thought was from mainstream *kokugaku* is thus evident in his view of the *Kojiki*, which he viewed as a product of *kotodama*; it was “not a record of actual events during the Divine Age, but rather a ‘teaching’ that explained” both the establishment and unification of the country—in other words,

²² From *Kuzubana*, in *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, ed. Ōkubo Tadashi, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1972), pp. 124, 125.

²³ From *Kotoba no tama no o*, in *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, 5:21.

²⁴ Kurosawa Okinamaro, *Kotodama no shirube*, in *Kokugogaku taikei*, ed. Fukui Kyūzō, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975), pp. 12, 20, 70.

²⁵ Kawamura Minato, *Kotodama to takai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2002), p. 80.

²⁶ Burns, p. 133, describes some of these approaches in passing, but does not adopt them.

²⁷ From *Kojiki tomoshibi*, in *Shinpen Fujitani Mitsue zenshū*, ed. Miyake Kiyoshi, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1993), p. 60.

²⁸ From the opening lines of *Kojiki tomoshibi*, p. 37.

“the production of Japan as a community.”²⁹

Mitsue’s most withering attacks are aimed at Norinaga who, “failing to understand that the language of our imperial land makes *kotodama* its principle (*kotodama o mune to suru*), has instead made elegance (*miyabi*) fill that role.” Even Norinaga’s works on the gods “look only at the surface of the words” and claim that “our language has nothing hidden about it.”³⁰ For Mitsue, then, *kotodama* and the power that inheres in the Japanese language could not be sought exoterically, as Norinaga is specifically faulted with doing. Such a superficial understanding leads to embellishment, “but if you look at the words (言) and embellish them with spirit (靈), they will die, and if you kill them, what profit have you?”³¹

Rather than in embellishment, Mitsue sees *kotodama* at work in what he calls “inverted language” (*tōgo* or *sakashimagoto* 倒語). If one consults a standard dictionary for the definition of this term, it appears to be commonly used to refer to the practice of reversing syllables—for example, *neta* instead of *tane* or *kone* instead of *neko*—to create code words. Mitsue, however, bases his usage on what he takes to be the meaning of its sole appearance in the *Nihon shoki*, where it is used to subdue unruly spirits. Mitsue writes:

Inverted language is something between what is said and what is not said. [It comes forth] when you suppose you have said what is on your mind but you [actually] said something you never thought, or you suppose it is about that, but when you look at it, it is not. This is the essential point of inverted language.³²

²⁹ Burns, p. 133.

³⁰ From *Kojiki tomoshihi*, p. 38.

³¹ *Kojiki tomoshihi*, p. 43.

³² From *Kojiki tomoshihi*, p. 53. The relevant passage in the *Nihon shoki* is from *kan* 3 of that work: “On the day when the emperor [Jinmu] first began [reigning] as the Son of Heaven, Tōtsuoyamichi-no-omi-no-mikoto of the Ōtomo clan, leading [a band of] the Kume [clan], received the secret plan [from the emperor] and, using an allegorical poem as code (能以諷歌倒語), was able to ward off the evil. This was the first use of coded

Now this seeming discord between rhetoric and thought cannot be described as “aporia” in the Deridean sense, because it is employed intentionally. For Mitsue, “inverted language takes what was originally direct [speech] and forms speech as spirit (*tamashii to shite koto o tsukuru*) so that from that speech, the other party determines to know what your thoughts are. This is what is meant by the aiding and blessing of *kotodama*: that which is vivified outside the speech (*sono koto no soto ni ikashi-okitaru tokoro*) is called *kotodama*.”³³

There is thus a third party—or parties—at play in such acts of communication: *kotodama*, of course, but also “the gods, too, [who] take pity on the anguish of a mind that has been very circumspect about articulating what it wants to say,” for such circumspection is an essential part of “inverted language,” which he further defines as “expressing sorrow for joy, or calling short long,” or of “saying one is not going when one goes, or saying one does not see when one sees.”³⁴ Mitsue further illustrates the involvement of the gods where he refers to MYS no. 3100:

*Omowanu o / omou to iwaba / matori sumu /
Unade no mori no / kami shi shirasamu*
If you say you think so, / though indeed you
do not, / then the God of Unade Shrine /
where the eagles dwell, / will see through
your words.³⁵

Mitsue writes that “when, entrusting all the threads of one’s thoughts to this God [of Unade Shrine], one creates words as if they can start from the human, the tutelary deity (氏神) will bless and aid [what lies] outside the words and will not fail to make others understand. This is what is meant by ‘a land blessed,’ ‘a land aided,’ and ‘a true land’ (*masaki kuni*).”³⁶ And this aiding and blessing

language (倒語之用、始起乎茲)” *Nihon shoki*, *jō*, p. 215.

³³ From *Kojiki tomoshihi*, p. 53.

³⁴ From *Man’yōshū tomoshihi*, in *Shinpen Fujitani Mitsue zenshū*, vol. 2, pp. 86-7; *Kadō kyo-yō*, in *Shinpen Fujitani Mitsue zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 766.

³⁵ Unade Shrine is in Kashihara City, Nara Prefecture.

³⁶ From *Man’yōshū tomoshihi*, p. 86. The phrase *masaki kuni* appears in the afore-cited

is inextricably linked to “*kotodama*, [which] refers to the spirit of the gods that know our thoughts beyond speech, those unsaid things that are confined [within us].”³⁷

According to Susan Burns’ analysis of Mitsue’s poetics, in arguing that the “public” and the “private” are both realms internalized in the psyche of each subject—and that poetic language thus arises from a dynamic internal tension—he “introduced a new complexity into the discussion of the subject-social relation.” His employment of devices like *tōgo* “to convey the expressive power of a wide range of linguistic forms in which words were used for other than their strictly referential value” resulted in a “‘poetic language’ in which various forms of semiotic slippage were deployed to convey meaning.” And, for Mitsue, *kotodama* referred to “the power of metaphor and metonymy to convey the *kami* within one speaker to another.”³⁸ The contrast could hardly be more stark between Mitsue’s theory of “inverted language” and the advocacy of direct and unmediated language implicit in Norinaga’s claim in his *Kojikiden* that *koto* 言, *koto* 事, and *kokoro* 意 were essentially identical.³⁹

The afore-mentioned phonosemantic school, or *ongiha*, which had its roots in the thought of Mabuchi’s later years, did not become an important current in nativist philology until much later, and is represented most notably by Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776-1843) and Tachibana Moribe 橘守部 (1781-1849). Typical of their views on *kotodama* is what the latter wrote in his *Gojūon shōsetsu* 五十音小説 (1842), where he claims that “these fifty syllables were not created by anyone,” but rather “are something spontaneously transmitted from the beginning of the age of the gods,” and “the full range of all things in heaven and earth find voice therein.” Moreover, “the source of that which from antiquity has been called *kotodama* is none other than the fifty syllables.” They are the

chōka of the monks of Kōfukuji as recorded in the *Shoku Nihon kōki*.

³⁷ From *Man’yōshū tomoshibi*, p. 86.

³⁸ Burns, pp. 135, 139.

³⁹ “Meanings, things, and words are all in mutual accord, and are all the truth (*makoto*) of the ancient age.” *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, 9:6.

source of pure language and the basis of linguistic study in general; while some have linked their conception to the sounds of Sanskrit, “in reality they should be called *kotodama* [itself], and there is no [true] study of language that does not proceed thence.”⁴⁰ Indeed, it was a hallmark of many of the *ongiha* writers that they glossed the characters for *gojūon* 五十音 with the reading *kotodama*, indicating that they considered them to be identical.

Finally, one movement that took phonosemantic school thought in a decidedly mystical direction and that deserves mention in view of its enduring legacy in popular conceptions of *kotodama* in post-Restoration Japan is best represented by the works of Yamaguchi Shidō 山口志道 (1765-1842) and Nakamura Kōdō 中村孝道 (b. 1772). The former linked each sound of the syllabary with the birth of a god in the *Kojiki*, while the latter regarded “*su*” as the “seed syllable” of the language, as opposed to Atsutane’s claim of “*u*” for that role. One of Nakamura’s influential works, *Kotodama wakumon* 言靈或問 (1834), employs a question-answer format to unfold its views:

Q: What exactly is this thing called *kotodama*?:

It is the spirit of the human voice. When people produce each of the seventy-five sounds [i.e., syllables], each is endowed with meaning (義理), and that meaning (義) is called *kotodama*. With the spirit that is in each of these sounds, when two or three—or even four or five—are combined together, they become the myriad words and names, and there is nothing in the world that they cannot express, and nothing of which they cannot give understanding. And that which teaches the functions of language is the “perfectly clear mirror” (*masu-kagami* 真須鏡).⁴¹

⁴⁰ From *Gojūon shōsetsu*, in *Shintei zōho Tachibana Moribe zenshū*, ed. Tachibana Jun’ichi and Hisamatsu Sen’ichi, vol. 13 (Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu, 1967), p. 197.

⁴¹ Nakamura Kōdō, *Kotodama wakumon*, 1834, unpaginated manuscript in Waseda University Library. Toyoda Kunio, *Kotodama shinkō: sono genryū to shiteki tenkai* (Tokyo: Hachiman Shoten, 1985), p. 604, addresses the meaning of *masu-*

When asked if these teachings of *kotodama* were his own creation, his response hints at the beginnings of a secret transmission that in fact came to characterize this “mystical” movement. He writes: “This Way of *kotodama* was transmitted to me when I was a young man in the capital by an old man from the province of Hyūga.” But during the intervening years, he had become unsure of some things and had forgotten others, and had studied night and day to restore those, but insisted that the basic principles were unchanged. When asked about his pedagogical approach, he responded:

“First, I teach *kotodama*. This is the basis for all teaching ... Next, I teach the *masukagami*. This is a mirror of the human voice, differentiating the three sounds and the five vowels (三音五韻) ... Next, I teach the Way of words ... [Finally], I teach the origins of the three types: the origin of *kotodama*, the origin of *masukagami*, and the origin of *uta*. The origin of *kotodama* is none other than the origin of the spirit with which the seventy-five sounds are endowed.”⁴²

Writings of the “mystery” branch of *kotodama* studies would eventually prove to be profoundly influential in such new religious movements as the Ōmoto-kyō 大本教 of Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871-1948) and the Sūkyō Mahikari 崇教真光 of Okada Kōtama 岡田光玉 (1901-1974), informing much of their cosmology.⁴³

kagami in Nakamura’s writing: “The name ‘*masukagami*’ appears frequently in the late Tokugawa period in relation to ... *kotodama*. ‘*Kagami*’ implies history as something that reflects the past. Together with the eulogistic prefix ‘*masu*,’ it seems to mean a mirror that clearly illumines the historical changes in words and human sounds of speech.”

⁴² In early modern phonology, *goin* generally refers to the five vowels, and *san'on* to the three readings of Chinese characters (*kan*, *go*, *tō*), but it appears to have a different meaning here.

⁴³ On the influence of Yamaguchi Shidō and Nakamura Kōdō on the development of doctrine in Ōmoto-kyō, see Nancy K. Stalker, *Prophet Motive*:

A fully representative overview of early modern *kotodama* ideology would require a hefty volume, and is beyond the scope of the present project, but the foregoing perhaps serves to give a sense of the various meanings and emphases with which the term was charged. One thing they all had in common was exclusive focus on the archaic language. As Lee Yeounsuk has noted, “it is indeed the case that *kokugaku* clearly connected the ‘Japanese spirit’ and the Japanese language,” but it was not just any Japanese language; what they “idealized was *yamato kotoba*, the ancient language of Yamato free from *karagokoro*, ‘the Chinese mind’ ... it was neither *kokugo* nor even the Japanese language (*nihongo*).”⁴⁴ Aside from that commonality, the Bakumatsu period saw some attempts to synthesize the other various strands into a sort of “field theory” of *kotodama*, and of these one of the most broadly conceived was that of Kamochi Masazumi.

Kamochi Masazumi and *Kotodama*

Masazumi was descended from a court family that had relocated to Tosa to escape disturbances in the capital during the Bunmei 文明 era (1469-1487).⁴⁵ Asukai Masakazu 飛鳥井雅量 (dates unknown), grandson of the Middle Counselor Asukai Masayasu 雅康 (1436-1509), became the governor of Tosa. When the Yamauchi 山内 clan

Deguchi Onisaburō, Ōmoto, and the Rise of New Religions in Imperial Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ Lee Yeounsuk, *The Ideology of Kokugo: Nationalizing Language in Modern Japan*, trans. Maki Hirano Hubbard (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), p. 4.

⁴⁵ This biographical sketch is indebted primarily to information found in Ozeki Kiyooki, *Kamochi Masazumi kenkyū* (Kōchi: Kōchi Shimin Toshokan, 1992), but other sources have also been consulted, including: Irimajiri Yoshinaga, “Bakumatsu Tosa-han ni okeru kokugaku no hatten to Kamochi Masazumi,” *Shakai keizai shigaku* 24:4 (1958), pp. 1-10; Ogata Hiroyasu, *Kamochi Masazumi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 1949); Ogata Hiroyasu, *Man'yōgaku no taisei: Kamochi Masazumi no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Sanwa Shobō, 1954).

was enfeoffed there in 1689, the Asukai family entered their service, Masakazu's grandson Masaharu 雅春 (d. 1687) adopting the surname Kamochi, which was used along with Fujiwara and Yanagimura down to Masazumi's generation.⁴⁶ With the change in command, however, most of the Asukai/Kamochi family ended up becoming *rōnin* and eventually leaving Tosa; by the second generation, only Masaharu's grandson Yanagimura Yasuharu 安治 (d. 1730) remained, settling in Fukui Village where his great grandson Masazumi would be born.

Masazumi's father, Korenori 惟則, held the rank of assistant (*goyōnin*) in Tosa's rigidly stratified samurai society, serving as keeper of the Yamauchi family cemetery. By all accounts, Masazumi showed little interest in books when he was a child, but in his seventeenth or eighteenth year developed a passion for learning and began to study under Miyaji Nakae 宮地仲枝 (1768-1841), one of the prominent scholars in the domain. Thus, Masazumi's intellectual pedigree drew on the eclectic nativist and Confucian tradition of Tani Mashio 谷真潮 (1727-1797) under whom Nakae had studied, as well as the Suzunoya school of nativism through Nakae's father Haruki 春樹 (1728-1785), a direct disciple of Motoori Norinaga. Masazumi continued to consider himself a student of Nakae's until the latter's death, and his eclectic intellectual background is also attested by his close associations with the historian Nakayama Izumi 中山巖水 (1764-1832), the Confucian scholar and Mashio's nephew Tani Kagei 谷景井 (1798-1870), and the nativist and poet Yasunami Masakage 安並雅景 (1780-1851).

Masazumi's devotion to the *Man'yōshū* is difficult to ascribe to any single source of influence, but an unusual degree of interest in that anthology had been part of the intellectual milieu of Tosa since Mashio's time, and is reflected in the massive annotated edition *Ko Man'yōshū* 古万葉集 produced in 1803 under the direction of the local scholar Imamura Tanushi 今村楽 (1765-1810). Masazumi's first work devoted to that ancient an-

⁴⁶ The surname Kamochi was taken from Kamochi Village, which had been the site of Masakazu's castle, Kamochi-jō 鹿持城.

thology, *Man'yōshū kibun* 万葉集記聞, a detailed annotation of the first *kan*, appeared in 1813 when he was twenty-three years old. This early work draws on such preceding studies as Kamo no Mabuchi's *Man'yō kō* 万葉考, Katō Chikage's 加藤千蔭 (1735-1808) *Man'yōshū ryakuge* 万葉集略解, and Norinaga's *Man'yōshū tama no ogoto* 万葉集玉の小琴, as well as the writings of various local scholars.⁴⁷ No sooner had he completed *Man'yōshū kibun* than he began working on what would be his *magnum opus*, *Man'yōshū kogi* 万葉集古義, a labor that would occupy much of the rest of his life. *Man'yōshū kogi* ranges much more widely than the earlier work in sources cited and theories addressed, and demonstrates a remarkable breadth of erudition for a scholar who never once set foot outside his native Tosa. *Man'yōshū kogi*, as will be demonstrated in the following pages, also illuminates much concerning Masazumi's theory of *kotodama*.

In 1816, Masazumi was given his first assignment in the *han* school, the Kyōjukan 教授館, and worked there in various capacities until his thirty-first year. In 1821, he was assigned to instruct the daughter of the retired domain lord Yamauchi Toyokazu 山内豊策 (1773-1825) in waka poetry and calligraphy. A verse, recorded in his usual *Man'yō-gana*, expresses his reaction:

倭文手纏賤吾乎殿上爾召上而在乎恐懼
毛有香

Shizutamaki / iyashiki ware o / tono no e ni
/ meshiagete areba / kashikoku mo aru ka
That I, / the lowest of the low, / should be
summoned / by our lord— / how it humbles
me with awe!⁴⁸

Masazumi served in this position for six years,

⁴⁷ These include various studies by Tani Mashio, as well as Haruki's *Man'yōshū shikō* 万葉集私考. For a survey of Mashio's work on the *Man'yōshū*, see Yoshino Tadashi, "Tani Mashio no *Man'yōshū kenkyū*" *Kōchi Daigaku gakujutsu kenkyū hōkoku* 13 (Mar. 1965), pp. 83-100.

⁴⁸ Kamochi Masazumi, *Sansaishū*, ed. Yamamoto Shūzō (Tokyo: Yamamoto Shūzō, 1908), p. 59.

after which he received various teaching assignments for the Yamauchi family. Most of his students, however, were from lowly *gōshi* (郷士) or *shōya* (庄屋) families, and exposure to Masazumi's radical nativism in his *juku* was a factor in turning many of them—including his nephew, Takechi Zuizan 武市瑞山 (1829-1865)—toward the loyalist movement.⁴⁹

The Tenpō 天保 years (1830-1844) were fruitful ones for Masazumi's writing. In addition to his continued work on *Man'yōshū kogi*, he produced such noteworthy studies as an analysis of poetic and rhetorical devices in Nara and Heian language, *Gagen seihō* 雅言成法 (1835), a collection of and commentary on folk songs, *Kōyōhen* 巷謡編 (1835), a study of the poetic structures (歌格) employed in pre-Heian poetry, *Eigenkaku* 永言格 (1837), and the miscellany *Kokemushiro* 苔席 (1842) among scores of other titles. Of particular importance for the present study, *Kotodama no sakiwai* 言靈徳用 (1838) also appeared during this period.

Along with a remarkable degree of scholarly productivity, this stage of Masazumi's life was also marked by many personal hardships, as is described in a verse larded with *Man'yōshū* diction:

取懸之肩之加々布乃如海松和々氣那賀良
爾年者竟去寸
*Torikakeshi / kata no kakafu no / miru no
goto / wawakenagara ni / toshi wa hateniki*
The tattered rags / draped over my shoulders,
/ looking like strips of kelp / and hanging
torn and in wild disarray— / the year comes
to an end.⁵⁰

The hardships he endured were multiplied by the death in the twelfth month of Tenpō 7 of his wife, Kiku, which was devastating not only because he had always been very devoted to her but also because with her passing, the care of his aged

father and his young children fell on his shoulders.

The nexus between Masazumi's views on language and his theories on belletristic writing is found in his poetics, which focuses almost exclusively on ancient verse, especially the *Man'yōshū*. There were two strands of *Man'yōshū*-centered poetics during the early modern period. One idealized *makoto* (sincerity), a quality thought to obtain in ancient verse which allowed no mediation between feeling and expression. In the dual emphases of traditional poetics—*kokoro* (feeling) and *kotoba* (diction)—it clearly gave priority to the former, and its ideals were most notably articulated by Kamo no Mabuchi. The other strand gave pride of place to poetic “frameworks” (*kakaku* 歌格), formal features that were thought to enhance auditory effects as well as sense, and it placed more emphasis on *kotoba*.⁵¹

Given his many exhaustive studies devoted to explication of *kakaku*, it would not be incorrect to place Masazumi squarely in that camp, but it is important to note that he did not slight the ideal of *makoto*. In his commentary on Hitomaro's famous *chōka* lamenting the death of his wife (*MYS* no. 207), Masazumi writes:

Even in times of extreme grief, to put on a manly facade and act as if it were nothing [may sound] true, but is rather of irresolute intent. When one thus reaches a point where one is pressed unbearably by feelings and expresses them in their real form, it [may] sound irresolute in intent, but is [actually] true (*makoto*). Who but this noble man (*ason*, i.e. Hitomaro) would have been able to tell the truth [of his feelings] without revision?⁵²

Scattered through his commentaries on verses in the *Man'yōshū* are many passages that praise a poem as an example of unmediated expression. For example, speaking of Akahito's famous verse on snow falling on Mt. Fuji (*MYS* no. 318),

⁴⁹ See Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 35-39.

⁵⁰ *Sansaishū*, p. 133. Some of the phrases in this verse are taken directly from Okura's famous “Hinkyū mondō” 貧窮問答, *MYS* no. 892.

⁵¹ Ozeki, p. 240. For an overview of *kakaku* in early modern *waka* poetics, see my “Sound and Sense.” Many of the examples cited below are also mentioned by Ozeki.

⁵² Kamochi Masazumi, *Man'yōshū kogi*, vol. 15 (*kan* 2, *ge*), (Tokyo: Kunaishō, 1891), 38r-38v.

Masazumi writes:

[Akahito] has composed a verse on a scene exactly as he had seen it, with no complications, but making it seem as if that same sight appears before [the reader's] very eyes: such is an excellent poem.⁵³

While there is no lack of passages extolling *makoto*, it must be conceded that on balance Masazumi's poetics lay relatively greater stress on the formal features of poetry: diction, phrasing, lineation, in short what is generally understood by *kakaku*. Here his ideas show evidence of a diverse pedigree, including most importantly Norinaga. It is typical of Masazumi that what applies to poetry applies to language in general; he argues that “generally, in the ancient age it was the practice to take delight in verbal communication (*kotodoi*) that had an elegant tone and was embellished (*aya aru*),” because “the gods are deeply moved by the embellishment of words.”⁵⁴ This was all the more true for poetry. Even more than the sense of a verse or its affective qualities, Masazumi argued that “in *waka* (*uta*), words are primary,”⁵⁵ and that since “*waka* (*uta*) is something that is sung (*utau mono*), elegantly embellishing [those] words is the main objective.”⁵⁶ In similar terms, the purpose of *makurakotoba* in the ancient age is described “not as something to supplement the tone (*shirabe*),” as was thought in later ages, but rather “elegantly to embellish (*kazarite* [written 文りて]) the words.”⁵⁷ The emphasis that Masazumi places on embellishment throughout his writings marks him as the spiritual descendent of Norinaga, who similarly gave pride of place to *aya* (文 “patterning”) as primary in *waka*, though Masazumi applies it to the *Man'yōshū* in contrast to Norinaga's idealized anthology, the *Shin Kokinshū*.

At the same time what Masazumi understood by “embellishment” (*aya*, *kazari*, and other related terms) appears to be qualitatively very different

from what Norinaga and most others meant by that concept. It is impossible to speak of Masazumi's ideas of “embellishment”—or of frameworks generally—apart from his views on the “perfect” primal language, which are embodied in his concept of *kotodama* and what he often refers to as “the elegance (*miyabi*) of *kotodama*.”⁵⁸

In spite of the paucity of its appearance in his venerated *Man'yōshū*, the word *kotodama* appears with remarkable frequency throughout Masazumi's writings. Commenting on Okura's famous verse in this anthology (MYS no. 894, cited above), Masazumi defines *kotodama* as “the divine spirit (*shinrei* 神霊) of words, the marvelous spirit (*kushibi naru mitama* 微妙霊徳) that exists naturally in uttered words.”⁵⁹ His commentaries on the two other appearances of the word, MYS nos. 2506 and 3254, add that it is “the miraculous virtue (*tama no shirushi* 霊験) present in language,” and that it is “the mysterious spirit that is naturally present in human language.”⁶⁰ Some of Masazumi's own poems suggest meanings he attached to the

⁵⁸ See, for example, *Man'yōshū kogi*, vol. 3 (*sōron*, *kan* 3), 53r.

⁵⁹ *Man'yōshū kogi*, vol. 30 (*kan* 5, *ge*), 81r. Commenting on this same verse the manuscript of his miscellany *Kokemushiro* 苔席 (unpaginated, in Imperial Household Agency Archives and Mausolea Department), Masazumi further argues: “Blessed by *kotodama*’ means that our imperial realm endows the language spoken by its people with a wondrous and subtle divine spirit (神霊) that makes all things to prosper (*yorozu no koto o nashisakiwau*). Ever since scholars of ancient studies have in recent times revealed this meaning, many have been drawn in that direction. Now of course ‘blessing’ means to derive two or three [advantages] from one thing, to make it prosper, to avoid misfortune, and to bring happiness. This refers to what is provided and performed by that divine spirit of language. In their correctness and beauty, the vocal sounds and verbal communication (*kowatsuki kotodoi* 音声言語) of people in [our] imperial realm, being subservient to *kotodama*, are far superior and more noble than [what is found in] all other nations.”

⁶⁰ *Man'yōshū kogi*, vol. 11 (*kan* 55, *chū*), 61r; vol. 66 (*kan* 13, *jō*), 64v.

⁵³ *Man'yōshū kogi*, vol. 18 (*kan* 3, *jō*), 137r.

⁵⁴ Kamochi Masazumi, *Man'yōshū makurakotoba kai*, vol. 1 (published as vol. 108 of *Man'yōshū kogi*), 3v.

⁵⁵ *Man'yōshū kogi*, vol. 9 (*kan* 1, *ge*), 26v.

⁵⁶ *Man'yōshū makurakotoba kai*, 1:4r.

⁵⁷ *Man'yōshū makurakotoba kai*, 1:5r-5v.

word. One that implies a link to *makoto* is:

*Yononaka no / aware shirite mo / kotodama
no / tasuke shinaku wa / munakoto naramu*
Though one may know / the pathos of the
world, / without the aid of *kotodama* / all is
but falsehood.⁶¹

It is in his essays and critical works, however, that we begin to see not only a broader range of meanings attached to the word, but also how he viewed its relation to *waka* poetry. In his collection of essays *Yamiyo no tsubute* 闇夜の礫, he maintains that “poetry (*uta*) is a practice whereby *kotodama* blesses and gives aid.” It is so utterly different from the poetry of other lands that “it should not even be discussed on the same day as the tongues of foreign peoples, with their sounds like birds, insects, and instruments.”⁶² Here, it is the *sound* of the poetic language that is important, more than the sense or perhaps even than *makoto*. But it is not just the raw sounds of the Japanese language that make it suitable for poetry conducive to *kotodama*:

The poetry (*uta*) of our divine land ... having once been established in the Age of the Gods to accord with sacred *kotodama*, is naturally endowed with both frameworks and faultless rules, all without the aid of human power.⁶³

The proper prosodic forms of *waka* poetry were also of divine provenance, their existence owing to *kotodama*, which could be invoked by their observance.

Masazumi devoted one of his major works, *Ei-*

⁶¹ From *Chiuta no kurigoto* 千首のくり言, in *Kōhon sōsho*, ed. Oyama Tokujirō, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kōhon Kankōkai, 1927), p. 135. Unlike most of his collections, this one is recorded in the conventional mixture of *kanji* and *kana*.

⁶² Quoted in Ozeki, p. 247. In the previously cited manuscript of *Kokemushiro*, following an admonition to study *waka*, Masazumi adds that “since this is a divine country blessed by *kotodama*, it [i.e. *waka*] cannot be discussed as if it were [merely] equal to Chinese poetry.”

⁶³ Quoted in Ozeki, p. 249.

gankaku, to explication of those formal features falling under the rubric of what early modern theoreticians meant by *kaku*, and it is telling that the concept of *kotodama* also figures prominently in this treatise. Surprisingly, its lengthy preface advances another characteristic of *kotodama* that appears to be unique to Masazumi: the necessity of a hierarchically structured society headed by the legitimate heir to the divine throne. He explains why China fails in this regard:

In China, that country’s beginning is called *honghuang caomei* 鴻荒草昧 (“wild and uncivilized”); in that age, there was no distinction between ruler and subject, and their actions were no different from those of beasts. Later, there appeared those called sages who taught some sort of rules, but they seem to have established them according to their own private feelings (*watakushi no kokoro*). From the beginning of heaven and earth in our divine land, there were already established ranks of ruler and subject, of high and low. The hearts of the people were upright, and their actions were proper ...⁶⁴

Conditions in China’s earliest history parallels the lack of *kaku* in its early verse, while it is allegedly present in ancient Japan. Speaking of the *Shijing*, Masazumi writes:

In ancient [Chinese] verse, the number of phrases was not fixed and there were no laws governing tones and rhyme. It was only much later that poetic framework and rules were clearly provided. The poetry (*uta*) of our divine land from the beginning of heaven and earth both was naturally endowed with frameworks and rules ...⁶⁵

It was no mere accident that Japanese poetry could claim *kaku* from the very beginning, while Chinese

⁶⁴ Kamochi Masazumi, *Eigenkaku*, Preface, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kunaishō, 1893), 4r. The phrase *honghuang caomei* appears in several Chinese texts referring to the social chaos of the earliest human societies.

⁶⁵ *Eigenkaku*, Preface, 1:4v.

verse allegedly could not; this difference owed to none other than *kotodama*:

Now the speech of our divine country was, from the time it first came from the mouths of the imperial deities at the creation of heaven and earth, endowed with a strange and marvelous spirit, and [our country] is thus lauded as “a land blessed by *kotodama*,” or “a land aided by *kotodama*” ...⁶⁶

And comparing the “benefit” to be derived from “composing” (*tsukuru*) Chinese poetry and “reciting” (*yomu*) Japanese verse, he writes:

When you recite a good *uta*, both gods and mortals will sense the elegance of its *kotodama*, and you too will have profited from expressing what is in your heart. Is there such a benefit to be had from composing a good Chinese poem?⁶⁷

Masazumi leaves no doubt that the answer to his rhetorical question must be negative, and not just because Chinese poetry is too “contrived,” but more importantly because it cannot be a vehicle for *kotodama*.

The formal features of non-poetic language in antiquity were also expressions of the workings of *kotodama*. In his *Yōgen henkakurei* 用言変格例 (Examples of Predicate Conjugation)—a grammar book written in 1840 and revised in 1856—Masazumi argues that “apart from these rules [of conjugation], the distinction between elegant and vulgar (*ga-zoku*) is lost, and all becomes confused.” Beyond that, “the fact that the sounds produced by those conjugations are felicitous and unadulterated by anything that would grate on the ears ultimately owes to the marvelous effects of *kotodama*, which exists in an unfathomable sphere (*hakarigataki tokoro*).”⁶⁸

It is apparent, too, that for Masazumi not all Japanese language is equally amenable to the workings of *kotodama*; the ancient language was

more conducive to that elusive effect not only because of the putative purity of its sounds, but also because of the subtlety of its semantic distinctions. Responding to an unfriendly question asking if use of archaic language was not just a way of sounding novel or showing off, Masazumi responds:

It is childish to think that the ancient language is used to startle people’s ears. Unless you try using it yourself, there is no way to know the nuances with which the ancients used the words ... and unless you know the nuances of the ancient language, you cannot know the Way of *kotodama*.⁶⁹

That Masazumi viewed both the superior qualities of the ancient language of Yamato and the effects of *kotodama* in terms of sounds is nowhere better illustrated than in his *Kotodama no sakiwai* 言靈徳用 (1838), a work whose title may have been inspired by Norinaga.⁷⁰ This treatise begins by repeating many of the definitions of *kotodama* that he has articulated elsewhere, adding emphasis to the role of the imperial line in bestowing and transmitting that elusive quality. He exalts the Yamato language above all other tongues of the earth, which he repeatedly dismisses as producing sounds worthy only of birds, beasts, or objects. Further distinctions are made within the native tongue itself, assigning the “purest” sounds to the highest classes: “... unvoiced [i.e., “pure”] sounds are ranked at the top, and belong to the Son of Heaven.” Masazumi contends that the sounds of the *ka*, *sa*, *ta*, and *ha* lines are never voiced in initial position, and in the speech of the Son of Heaven (and presumably of the entire imperial family) not even when they are repeated in sequence.⁷¹ The language of ministers and officials allows for “provisional” voicing in compound words, “such as the *ga* of *yamagawa* 山川 or the *gi* of *asagiri*

⁶⁹ From the afore-cited manuscript of *Kokemushiro*.

⁷⁰ Toyoda Kunio, *Kotodama shinkō: sono genryū to shiteki tenkai* (Tokyo: Hachiman Shoten, 1985), p. 563, points out that the use of *toku* 徳 to transliterate “*sakiwai*” appears in Norinaga’s *Kuzubana*, but not in Okura’s original poem.

⁷¹ Kamochi Masazumi, *Kotodama no sakiwai* ([Tokyo]: Kunaishō, 1893), 12v.

⁶⁶ *Eigenkaku*, Preface, 1:5v.

⁶⁷ From the afore-cited manuscript of *Kokemushiro*.

⁶⁸ *Yōgen henkakurei* (Tokyo: Kunaishō, 1893), 22r-22v.

朝霧.”⁷² In the language of commoners, voiced and liquid consonants are permitted “in medial or final syllables,” as in the “*gi* of *kagiru* 限” or the “*ra* of *hara* 腹,” but again never in initial position.⁷³ One can only wonder how Masazumi would have the Son of Heaven pronounce *kagiru*, but at this level it must perhaps be read as an expression of an ethereal ideal rather than as a literal description.

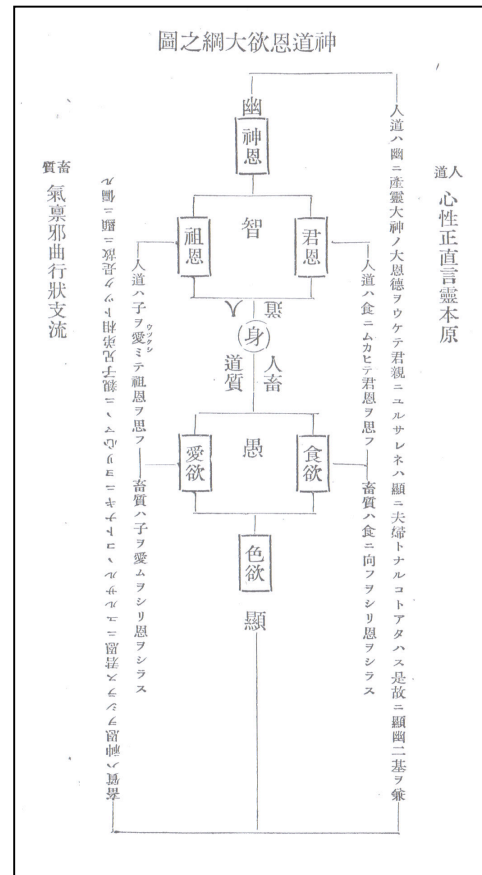
The categorization of the Yamato language is followed by an analysis of the “incorrect” sounds of foreign speech. It is unclear which languages he has in mind where he argues that “all words consisting of one syllable are voiced, and words of two or three syllables voice the initial.” Labio-velarized sounds (e.g., *kya*, *sha*, etc., or *kwa*, *mwa*, etc.) “are found only in foreign languages and in [the noises] of birds, insects, and instruments,” but not in the Yamato language. He offers as evidence the fact that the ancients adapted the pronunciation of words like *shukuse* 宿世 to *sukuse*. The syllabic “n” (ん) is also seen as a foreign pollution, responsible for having corrupted the original *omina* 女 to *onna* and *nemokoro* 懇 to *nengoro*. Foreign tongues use liquid sounds indiscriminately, including initial syllables, and all use of the so-called “semi-voiced” sounds (the *pa* line) is viewed as a vulgarism arising in medieval “military writings, and in the glossed readings of Chinese books with such words as *nanpito* or *appare*.” Doubled consonants are likewise held to be a corruption of later ages.⁷⁴

The sounds of the Chinese language are impure not only because they cannot accommodate *kotodama*, but also because the Chinese people lack a proper ability to recognize and maintain the high and the low.

The Chinese emperor pretentiously refers to himself as the “son of heaven” and without equal, [but] when the time [for change] comes and his virtue wanes, his country will be taken by another, and he will be driven out, descending to [the ranks of] the lowest commoners. And when the time

comes for one among the ranks of the lowest commoners to rise in power, then that person will take the country, ascend the throne, be revered as its ruler, and proudly call himself the “son of heaven.” That is the usual state of affairs there, but in reality they are unable to distinguish the high from the low.⁷⁵

The implication is clear: whether cause or effect, China’s unstable social class structure is closely related to the corrupt state of its language. Japan, with its unbroken imperial line and its “correct” division of social castes, is a perfect environment for *kotodama* to take effect.



A somewhat later work, *Yamaguchi no shirube* 山口郷導 (1844)—inspired by Norinaga’s *Ui-*

⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ Ibid., 13r.
⁷⁴ Ibid., 15v-17r.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11v-12r.

yamabumi and obviously intended to serve a similar purpose—takes these ideas further in associating *kotodama* with a higher moral order. As in earlier works, he makes the claim that “all nation of the earth have language, but they do not have the divine spirit (神靈).” He adds a new dimension by connecting it to “debt of gratitude” (*on* 恩): “The people of our imperial realm naturally embrace the divine spirit of language, revere the transmission of language, and give priority to the three great *on* of gods, sovereign, and ancestors.” As he illustrates in this graph, in which the “human way” is linked to *kotodama*, followers of that way not only eat, but feel a debt of gratitude to the sovereign for their food; they not only love their children, but feel a debt of gratitude to the ancestors. Those with an animal nature (畜質) also eat and love their children, but feel no debt of gratitude, and the clear implication is that the virtue of *on* is lacking in foreign countries.⁷⁶ Thus, *kotodama* is efficacious in Japan not only because of the purity of the language, but also because of a higher moral order that prevails there.

The most immediately apparent element of Masazumi’s broad synthesis may be seen in Norinaga’s influence. Not only was Masazumi in a direct line of Suzunoya teachings through his mentor Miyaji Nakae, but the fact that one encounters phrasing and emphases—including such things as a preoccupations with *aya* 文 and *kazari* 文り—at every turn bespeaks the extent to which Masazumi regarded Norinaga as authoritative. (The similarities in phrasing between Norinaga’s *Kanji san’on kō* and Masazumi’s *Kotodama no sakiwai* could hardly escape a reader of both texts.) But significantly, Masazumi never formally joined the Suzunoya-ha, or any other school for that matter. Throughout his magnum opus, the *Man’yōshū kogi*, he cites and often argues with a breathtakingly broad range of earlier scholarship, including those treated in the previous section.⁷⁷ His views on

⁷⁶ From *Yamaguchi no shirube*, as reproduced in Ogata Hiroyasu, 1949, pp. 222-224.

⁷⁷ Kōnosu Hayao, *Kamochi Masazumi to Man’yōgaku* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1958), pp. 241-49, meticulously enumerates all citations in the *Man’yōshū kogi* according to the sources, and the

kotodama also reflect this breadth, revealing familiarity with all preceding approaches including the *ongiha* and the mystics. In many respects, his theory of *kotodama* thus serves as an overview of early modern developments in the meaning of that term.

Conclusion

In spite of the breadth of their erudition, most of the claims of early modern scholars regarding *kotodama* are textually unsubstantiated and are driven rather by ideological imperatives. Moreover, they left a legacy of misreading that is still very much with us; many assertions made about *kotodama* even in recent scholarly writing arguably owe more to early modern constructs than to dispassionate assessment of the few extant ancient examples of its usage.⁷⁸

result is a list of all *kokugaku* luminaries ranging from Azumamaro to Ōhira.

⁷⁸ A comprehensive treatment of this early modern legacy in contemporary academic discourse is beyond the scope of the present study, but a few illustrative examples are worth citing. Konishi Jin’ichi’s widely influential *Nihon bungeishi* (translated by Aileen Gatten et al. as *A History of Japanese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984-)) offers the following definition: “In ... the Ancient Age, there remained no distinction between literature and religion; both narratives and songs drew on *kotodama*, the concept of words as incantatory and divine, so that poets not only transmitted meaning but imparted a sense of the supernatural.” (I:61) He links *kotodama* with the better documented practice of *kotoage*, maintaining that the former was the spiritual force that made the latter efficacious (I:104-6), but he is forced to buttress his argument by citing parallels to similar concepts in other early societies. Moreover, he boldly asserts that *kotodama* was a literary ideal, one that was displaced by continental notions of *ga* (I:203-5). Others read much more into the term than the scant record of its use warrants. H. D. Plutschow, in his *Chaos and Cosmos: Ritual in Early and Medieval Japanese Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), claims in the context of the Hitokotonushi myth that “*kotodama* was believed

But for our purposes, a more important question is: why was the relatively obscure term *kotodama* picked out of the historical dustbin in the early modern period and reinstated to common use? And more importantly, how does one account for the recruitment of the word to describe such a diverse range of linguistic and spiritual phenomena, a movement that gained striking momentum over the first half of the nineteenth century? Even if one sees the *kotodama* revival as illustrating Hobsbawm's argument that many traditions are "invented"—some using "ancient materials" to create new traditions "for quite novel purposes"—we must still ask what it was about the intellectual climate of the time that proved to be fertile soil for the resurgence of what purported to be an ancient faith.⁷⁹

Toyoda Kunio has noted the shift that occurred in nativism over the course of the early modern period, beginning with emphasis on ancient language (古語), then on ancient meanings (古義), and finally on the "Ancient Way" (古道), and adds that "a *kotodama*-like view of language was gradually generated as a result of this" course of development.⁸⁰ The conception of *kotodama* itself also shifted in parallel fashion during this period toward greater mysticism, tending to move from *kotodama shisō* toward *kotodama shinkō*. The methodological framework established by Keichū's monumental *Man'yō daishōki* virtually assured that every fragment of life and language in early Japan was destined to be reexamined and reevaluated. Of course, since every ancient term and concept was

to be a divine language taught to man in *illo tempore*" (p. 11), and referring to the preface of the *Kokinshū* asserts that "Tsurayuki almost seems to define *kotodama* as a ritual language which has power to maintain the human order" (p. 12). The word *kotodama* itself appears in neither of these texts, and an assumption that it was the operative concept in these contexts appears to accord closely with the theories of its *kokugaku* revivalists.

⁷⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 6.

⁸⁰ Toyoda Kunio, *Kotodama shinkō: sono genryū to shiteki tenkai* (Tokyo: Hachiman Shoten, 1985), p. 550.

not similarly resurrected, the explanation still begs the question: why *kotodama*?

Roy Andrew Miller suggests that the early modern *kotodama* revival was heavily influenced by the work of Qing dynasty philologists and the "speculation about a philosophical entity existing between the phonological shape of words ... [音] and their semantic content ... [義]," and that "fortified with these massive latter-day borrowings from China, the Edo *kokugakusha* proceeded to buttress their own revival of the *kotodama* into impressive proportions."⁸¹ As Miller himself concedes, definitive pronouncements on the extent of such influence requires more research on the currency of continental ideas among nativists. Those considered in this study, however, evince little familiarity with Sinocentric philology. It is nevertheless safe to say that an *awareness* of China was a major factor, if only as something eliciting reaction.

Another possible explanation may be sought in the tendency to link *kotodama* to spoken rather than written language. According to Naoki Sakai's cogent study, "a typically phonocentric view of language developed" over the course of the eighteenth century following Keichū's death.⁸² A heightened preoccupation with the sound of the language is evident in the growth of phonology during this period and in the many attempts to reconstruct the ancient tongue, and theories of *kotodama* certainly lent an aura of authority and mystery to such enterprises. Karatani Kōjin also addresses this phenomenon, advancing the view that "the phonocentrism of Japan's eighteenth-century nativist scholars contains within it a political struggle against the domination of Chinese 'culture,' or a bourgeois critique of the samurai system since Chinese philosophy was the official ideology of the Tokugawa shogunate." Though Karatani does not use the term *kotodama*, he seems to have something very much like it in mind when he compares nativist ideas of language to the Saussurean "*langue* which isn't born, doesn't age, doesn't die,

⁸¹ Miller, p. 291.

⁸² Naoki Sakai, *Voices of the Past: The States of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 240.

but simply ‘is.’”⁸³ Beyond the many examples Sakai and Karatani cite, one might also mention what appeared to be a heightened awareness of spoken foreign tongues—the *rangakusha* and the activity of the *tsūji* (通詞/通辞) in Nagasaki, use of Chinese colloquialisms in *yomihon*, and so forth—that moved beyond the *kanbun-yomikudashi* approach to other languages and demonstrated a consciousness of what they sounded like. The question remains, however, why an ancient and poorly documented concept should be pressed into the service of the new phonology.

One persuasive reason is suggested in Uchimura Kazushi’s study of *gojūon* ideology, which from the beginning had a “metaphysical (形而上学的) character.” He argues that the preoccupation with “seed syllable” and the like seen in *gojūon* theories has its roots in “the cosmology of Shingon esoteric Buddhism, the matrix of which was [in turn] the study of Siddham characters (悉曇学).”⁸⁴ Although he mentions *kotodama* only in passing, the possibility is strongly implied that, just as this word disappeared from the active lexicon with the ascent of esoteric teaching and its mantras, dharanis, and seed syllables, so also *kotodama* made a comeback with the declining influence of Buddhism in intellectual discourse, and its resuscitation was accomplished by none other than a Shingon priest. The view of *waka* as a form of native *dharani*—an idea formulated notably by Mujū 無住 (1226-1312) in his *Shasekishū*—is a medieval attempt to amalgamate Buddhist and native concepts about the power of language. It would follow, then, that *kotodama* played a role similar to that of the esoteric verbal formulae. This theory is appealing, and may provide a partial explanation, but it still begs many questions.

These questions may be answered in part by an application of Philip Rieff’s theory of culture, in which he describes both mana and taboo as characteristic of “first cultures,” as he refers to those not yet affected by an interdictory symbolic. Central to Rieff’s analysis is the term “primacy of possibility,” which “implies the efficient transferable force recognized in all remarkable things”—put

more simply: primeval chaos, or a state of unbounded possibilities. This force may portend either good or ill. “Mana refers to the positive aspects of the primacy of possibility, while taboo refers to the negative aspect.” The question remains whether ancient (or “first culture”) *kotodama* is best understood as mana or as taboo. As argued above, a definitive answer to this question may not be possible, and in any case is beyond the scope of the present study. More amenable to analysis is the question of how *kotodama* was understood when revived in the latter part of the early modern period, an age on the threshold of what Rieff refers to as a “third culture,” or one at some stage in the process of shedding an earlier interdictory symbolic. He argues that third cultures have a tendency to resurrect motifs from first cultures, but that they invariably understand them anachronistically; hence, the “third culture is a fictional superimposition upon the first.”⁸⁵ These various early modern “fictional” interpretations of *kotodama* were thus entirely in keeping with the increasing “third culture” spirit of the age, in which “first culture” terms and concepts were avidly taken up.

Similarly, in the context of his analysis of Baudelaire’s Paris of the 1850s, Walter Benjamin famously observed that “it is precisely the modern which always conjures up prehistory” (... *immer zitiert gerade die Moderne die Urgeschichte*).⁸⁶ That is, it is modernity’s appetite for the new that, paradoxically, produces a longing in many for a past Golden Age rather than a future utopia. The adoption of Western historiography’s term of periodization “early modern” to describe Tokugawa Japan was entirely apt, because though situated slightly later chronologically, it describes similar conditions of growing rationalism and secularism, increased mercantilism replacing an older manor

⁸⁵ Philip Rieff, *The Crisis of the Officer Class: The Decline of Tragic Sensibility, Sacred Order/Social Order* vol. 2 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp. 21-23.

⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, tr. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 171; Walter Benjamin, “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann, vol. 5, pt. 1 (Frankfurt: Shurkamp, 1982), p. 55.

⁸³ See his “Nationalism and *Écriture*,” *Surfaces* v. 201 (1995), pp. 16-17.

⁸⁴ Uchimura, pp. 44-45.

system, the beginnings of the modern nation state, and a gradual breakdown of earlier social castes (the trend in Western societies from a patronymic system to use of surnames for commoners occurred earlier than the growing practice in many *han* to permit surnames and swords for prominent *chōnin*, but the parallels are close and in both cases “early modern”). For many Japanese—but particularly for those of a nativist stripe—the anxieties generated by what were seen as the leveling forces of incipient modernity drove them to “prehistory” in a quest to shore up their identity. The revival of *kotodama* may also be understood in this context.

Appendix: A Land Blessed by Kotodama (*Kotodama no sakiwai*)

“A land blessed by *kotodama*” and “a land aided by *kotodama*” are ancient expressions that have been transmitted from the Age of the Gods.⁸⁷ What is meant by “*kotodama*” is that the words one speaks are of their own accord endowed with a wondrous spirit. To be “blessed” (*sakiwai*) means, for example, to prosper by doubling or tripling the benefits obtained from one thing, or to evade misfortune and receive good fortune. To be “aided” means, for example, to be rescued when one is faced with disaster or about to fall into a dangerous situation, and to be brought to safety. These two [examples] refer to the process of arranging [things] (*torimakanaikonau*) by the divine spirit of language. This much is obvious to anyone adept in the ancient language and would hardly beg comment, but is mentioned in detail here for the instruction of beginners.

Thus the work of this blessing and aiding *kotodama* touches every one of the myriad things between heaven and earth, and yet after the ancient age, teachings of foreign sages came to be practiced and for all things under heaven, reason was made primary (*moto*) and language usage secondary (*sue*). That of course affected people’s thinking, and with the passing years the most noble, mysterious, and exquisite principle of *kotodama*

came to be buried. Later, when the warrior class assumed control of the government, investigation of etymology became a sort of pastime among poets. Their own compositions, however, came to be like those of aristocrats or of hermits; their poetry turned into an effeminate and overly refined pastime unworthy of warriors, reflecting the enormous change that had taken place in the world. However, in recent ages since the way of ancient learning has been opened and has now spread to all corners of the realm including the remote countryside, we are truly fortunate that there are now believers in the ancient style. As a result, the *kotodama* that had lain buried for centuries has also begun to appear in many ways, almost making possible a return to antiquity. This is evidence of the blessing and aiding of *kotodama*, which is worthy of all our reverence and respect.

Now what reveals *kotodama* to be superior, pure, clear, correct, and noble is that the descendants of the Great Goddess Amaterasu, who illumines every land between heaven and earth, have continued ruling through myriad ages, passing down [their authority] in perpetuity in perfect accord with the movements of the universe. His majesty the emperor is unrivaled among the nations of the earth, none of whose rulers could make the slightest claim to be his equal. Moreover, since this is accordingly the matrix [*oya* 宗] of all nations—a land where grain, the thousand things and the myriad doings (*chi no mono mo yorozu no koto mo*) are all superior and auspicious—the sounds of its language are likewise correct and auspicious, far superior to those of other lands. As mentioned before, this land is subservient to *kotodama*; it is a land where *kotodama* coincides with the flourishing of the imperial grandeur (*itsu*) and where the blessing and aid of *kotodama* are as eternal as heaven and earth. No one will understand this with a smattering of ancient studies. Chirping foreign tongues are all full of turbid (i.e., voiced) sounds and various other impurities, and are utterly base, on par with the calls of birds or insects, or sounds emitted by utensils. The superiority of our divine land’s language to those of foreign countries has already been recognized by Motoori Norinaga in his *Kanji san’on kō*, and so all would appear to have been said on the correct-

⁸⁷ In Masazumi’s treatise, where the word appears in *kana* it is consistently written “*kototama*.” While recognizing his dislike of voiced consonants, I have used the more familiar “*kotodama*” in this translation.

ness or incorrectness of language.⁸⁸ But this *ko-todama* shines together with the majesty of the Son of Heaven, which is exalted by the blessing of *ko-todama* and which should not be thought of apart from this revered principle [of *kotodama*]. Now the ancient language of our divine land includes no improper sounds outside of the fifty syllables. When the twenty voiced sound of the “*ka*,” “*sa*,” “*ta*,” and “*ha*” lines are added, it comes to seventy syllables, but in the ancient language of our divine land, voiced sounds were altogether few in number, and had correct, prescribed forms. There were no examples of interchanging of voiceless and voiced sounds, and unlike later ages, there was simply no mistaken pronunciation of them. There was no confusion [on this matter], and there was certainly a reason why those voiced sounds always followed the fifty unvoiced sounds.

Now as proof that voiced sounds were prescribed in form and not used indiscriminately, [we see] that all monosyllabic words are unvoiced, as in “*ka*” (香) and “*ki*” (木). In disyllabic words, the first syllable is always unvoiced, as the *ka* of *kami* (神) or the *ki* of *kimi* (君). Trisyllabic and tetrasyllabic words may also be understood according to this [same pattern]. Voiced sounds appear only for euphony in compound words and in the middle or final syllables of disyllabic or trisyllabic words. Now examples of voicing in compound words include [such things as] the provisional voicing of the *ka* of *kawa* in *yamagawa* 山川, or the *ki* of *kiri* in *asagiri* 朝霧. Voicing in the middle or end of a word is seen in such examples as the *ga* of *naga* 長, the *ga* of *nagaru* 流, the *gi*

of *tagi* 瀧,⁸⁹ and the *gi* of *kagiru* 限.

Now in disyllabic and trisyllabic words—of course, not to mention monosyllabic words—there are no examples in the ancient language of the voicing of the first syllable, and even down to the present age there is not even one instance of it in a hundred in elegant poetic diction. In the tales of the middle [i.e., Heian] period the occasional examples of initials that are supposed to be voiced owe incontrovertibly to the rapidity with which the words of China (*Karakuni*) and India (*Hotokekuni*) became acculturated in common speech, and [their voiced initials] were adopted intact. Moreover, such [native] words as *gōna* 寄居子 (hermit crab), *beni* 紅 (rouge), or *buchi* 斑 (speckle) are all vulgarisms of a later period; no such examples are to be found anciently, and these do not amount to sufficient evidence [to the contrary]. Also, there are a few lines in *Man'yōshū* poems such as “*Damuochi ya shika mo na ii so* (Donor, don't say such things)”⁹⁰ or “*Baramon no tsukureru oda o* (The field that the priest made)”⁹¹ which use foreign words with voiced initials, but in the language originally spoken in our divine land, we must suppose that [such sounds] were exceedingly grating on the ears, and that they must have sounded vulgar and loathsome. It only stands to reason that such words ought not to be employed at all in poetic diction. In the *Kokinshū* those poems [that used such words] are classified as so-called *haikai-ka*; they now stand out as amusing, and since they were deliberately composed using base words to elicit laughter, they are something quite different from the beautifully composed verses with proper, elegant language. Since verses using vulgar diction were only for momentary amusement, they ought not to be included in respectable collections. That collection [i.e., the *Kokinshū*] was not originally compiled according to pure [principles]. Yet it was put together as things were heard and seen, and hence it is not particularly blameworthy.

Setting aside for now the matter of foreign

⁸⁸ In *Kanji san'on kō*, Norinaga says for example: “Among the myriad things and affairs that are all felicitously of a higher order, it is especially the fact that the sounds of our language are correct and beautiful that is far superior to all lands. Its sounds are pure and clear, like looking up at the sky on a perfectly clear day; there is not a trace of clouds. It is simple and direct, with no bending, and is the sound of pure and true elegance between heaven and earth.” *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, ed. Ōno Susumu, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1970), pp. 381-2.

⁸⁹ The second syllable of *taki* (waterfall) was voiced in the archaic language.

⁹⁰ MYS #3847. *Damuochi* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit *dānapati*.

⁹¹ MYS #3856. *Baramon* is from the Sanskrit *Brāhmana*. Here, it has the meaning of “priest.”

words, for present purposes let us establish for the language of our divine land categories consisting of four types and three levels, [the four types being] voiceless, provisionally voiced, voiced, and liquid.⁹² Their relative levels of high and low—of superiority and inferiority (尊卑優劣)—are: voiceless = highest; provisionally voiced = middle; voiced and liquid = lowest. [The unvoiced] is placed highest because that corresponds to his august majesty, the Son of Heaven, the middle rank corresponds to counselors, and the lowest rank corresponds to commoners. Now the principle obtains in every land that all things purely resplendent and elegantly correct are revered, but just as the thousand things and myriad doings (*chi no mono yorozu no koto*) are not purely resplendent, neither are the sounds of human speech. It stands to reason that if the thousand things and myriad doings were purely resplendent, the sounds of human speech would be also. But in fact, since that [principle] appears to be mysteriously accompanied by the august powers of the imperial deities, [purely resplendent speech] lies all the further beyond the powers of human beings.

The reason why the august Amaterasu Ōmikami identified herself as Tsukisakaki Itsu no Mitama (撞賢木蔽之御魂)⁹³ is because her divine light illumines and penetrates all of heaven and earth, leaving no place untouched. *Itsu* (蔽) is an ancient word referring to the full extent of bright purity and immaculacy. Abiding in the flourishing of the divine light as the progeny of the boundlessly pure Goddess of the Sun, [the Son of Heaven

occupies] the imperial throne which is passed on eternally in perfect accord with the movements of heaven and earth, and is the supreme ruler over the myriad lands under heaven. It stands to reason, then, that [even] the various heads of foreign lands should actually be called his subjects and pay him proper obeisance. How much less, then, can those who live in this divine land transgress even for an instant by turning their backs to the imperial court. The pure and noble truth is strikingly apparent that from the beginning of heaven and earth this is the apex of all gatherings, a country of great peace with no trouble in any part. Thus, the bright purity shines forth, and there is neither intimidation nor embellishment of language and flattery.

The Chinese self-importantly refer to the land they rule with such names as “Great Civilization” (華夏)⁹⁴ or “Middle Kingdom” (中国), and yet even the one there who is pleased to be called the “Son of Heaven” always refers to himself humbly with such terms as “One of little virtue” (寡人) or “Not good” (不穀).⁹⁵ That was originally a strategy used to make the people submissive, or to intimidate or flatter them, and it is not pure in spirit. It is an impure practice, and it is important to realize that it produces an effect quite opposite to what is found in our divine land. Now it is true that, since ancient times, our land has occasionally been referred to by such names as “Middle Kingdom” (中国) or “Great Civilization” (華夏), but there were reasons why it was unavoidable, and the occurrences were rare. Since antiquity we have not hesitated to refer to our land by such names as “The Great Eight Islands” (*Ōyashima*) or “The Central Land of the Reed Plain” (*Ashihara no nakatsukuni*), and it was an established practice to call the emperor “Sovereign” (*sumera mikoto*) or “Great lord” (*ōkimi*), though he attempted neither to intimidate the people nor to flatter them. It has become usual in recent ages for those who pursue ancient studies to use such words as “Imperial

⁹² This appears to refer to the liquid consonant “r.” In traditional Chinese phonology, *bansheyin* (半舌音) refers to “r.”

⁹³ This appellation appears only in *kan 9* of the *Nihon shoki*, where Empress Jingū 神功皇后 prayed for seven days and nights in a specially built shrine in order to discover the identity of the deity who had instructed the former sovereign. The answer came: “I am the deity who dwells in the shrine of fifty bells, in the district of Watarai of a hundred legends, in the province of Ise, blown by godly winds (神風伊勢国之百伝度逢県). My name is Tsukisakaki-Itsu-no-mitama-Amasakaru-Muka-tsu-hime-no-mikoto (撞賢木蔽之御魂天疎向津媛命).” *Nihon shoki*, *jō*, p. 331.

⁹⁴ 華 means 文華, or “civilization,” while 夏 means “great.”

⁹⁵ 寡人, meaning 徳の寡 (すく) ない者, was a humble self-appellation used among the Chinese aristocracy. 不穀, also written 不谷, had the meaning of 不善, and was similarly used among the nobility.

Land” (*mi-kuni*), “Sovereign Land” (*sumera mi-kuni*), or “Great Sovereign Land” (*sumera ō-mi-kuni*), but these are unavoidably used in order not to be confused with appellations employed in foreign lands. Those who, lead astray by the theories of later self-styled Confucian scholars, make bold to use such names as *Wakoku* (倭国) or *Nittō* (日東)⁹⁶ certainly intend to be provocative, but it is not a matter of their disparaging those who are lower since in China they arrogantly call the land they rule *Chūka*.

Although [we are privileged] to have the august great lord of all nations between heaven and earth, there have always been base types who, collaborating in the evil deeds of wild *kami*, have impertinently played tricks on his majesty’s court. Hence, there have been times when the august mind of the great lord has been troubled. But is it not marvelous that ultimately [the evil forces] have been overpowered by his great virtue and have perished without a trace? Thus, since it is the great virtue of the Son of Heaven which both illumines and penetrates with pure clarity to the ends of the earth⁹⁷ and as far as clouds lying along the distant horizon, as mentioned before the unvoiced [“pure”] sounds of human language at the highest level belong to him. Therefore, in words ranking at the very top, from ancient times down to the present there was not even one in a hundred that had a voiced sound, and the fact that the emperor occupies an unequalled and august position between heaven and earth has long been obvious through the subtly pure and bright principle of *kotodama*.

From the Age of the Gods this has been lauded as a land of *kotodama*, but even those who study antiquity have not been mindful of that; comprehension of ancient language has been understood as proper only to old-fashioned poets or to the writing of prose. Even pronouncements by Shinto scholars give priority to reason, and this shows that bad habits have hardly been eliminated. And that is not all; beneath heaven there are hundreds and

thousands of “ways.” It is difficult to determine which is good and which is bad, and so one ought not to make definitive statements. All are accustomed to follow their desired path and to revere their own side exclusively, indiscriminately looking down upon and despising the other side. It is like the proverb “Our family’s buddhas are exalted” (*wagaya no hotoke tōtoshi*). It is difficult when addressing any matter to divide the superior from the inferior or the noble from the base, but for the Chinese sages to revere their own country and despise others is well suited to their own teachings, and to suppose that such reasoning is correct is the result of weak faith in antiquity and insufficient scholarly mettle.

Beyond the necessary reasoning for what is superior or inferior in anything, of the various countries the only one that is superior and truly correct in everything is [this] divine land. Especially with regard to the sounds of its language, as I have argued in detail above, it is without equal among the nations of the earth and vastly superior to all of them. Even after ten thousand ages it will always be true that the most exalted sounds of language are those that are subtly pure and bright, and this is precisely the same principle whereby the divine imperial light will continue for countless ages, neither diminishing nor weakening. Although language changes continually with each age passing from antiquity to the present, yet what a marvelous and fortunate thing it is that among the highest ranking sounds there is not even one that is voiced. This divine land ranks as both the center (*mune*) and the head (*kashira*) of all countries. It is a subtle manifestation of *kotodama* that everything here, including the grains, is superior to other lands and is auspicious and fine.

Next, provisional voicing is ranked in the middle, and is assigned to retainers. The reason these words are ranked in the middle is that, while they were originally voiceless, they came to be provisionally voiced for euphony in repetition of syllables. It works on the same principle as those holding office in the imperial government who, though of illustrious descent and prospering, having excelled in virtuous deeds, are nevertheless no match for those who have the divine light of the imperial line. Now those who administered in the government anciently included ranks ascending even to the imperial. Even if they later left the

⁹⁶ Both of these are names for Japan that were used among the Chinese.

⁹⁷ 谷ぐゝのさわたるきはみ, a phrase from *Man’yōshū* no. 800 by Yamanoue no Okura, literally meaning “as far as toads hop.”

imperial ranks, their lines of descent were correct and pure, and it was thus only natural that there should be restrictions making those of other families unworthy to administer. No matter how much time had passed or how much moral virtue they had attained, if they were not of [the privileged] families, they were not able to ascend [to court rank]. However, in later ages, there were some examples of people of uncertain lineage who, taking advantage of the conditions of the times, were able to ascend [to court rank] replacing those who left. Now to begin with, whether for good or bad [purposes], no person [of] another [rank] is worthy to look upon the emperor. One who does not belong to the highest imperial ranks cannot even for one day set the throne at naught, and yet in spite of such strict regulation, those who administer in the government take advantage of the conditions of the times and have occasionally been able to set [the throne] at naught for a period. According to principle, this lies outside the Way and is contrary to righteousness. And yet, the fact that [those ministers] are replaced even within a day makes it evident how unapproachable the imperial line is. Therefore, it stands to reason that if one were even provisionally to voice a sound that is naturally pure and unvoiced, one would be overawed by the divine light. Since it is an unimpeachable principle that the pure unvoiced sounds have ranked supreme from antiquity down to the present and have never been carelessly voiced, [the practice of provisional voicing] may be said to be of the middle rank.

Next are the voiced sounds and liquid sounds, which are found at the lowest rank among the commoners [of the realm]. Now these voiced sounds which rank at the bottom were determined from the beginning to be voiced, and their voiced sounds may include the second syllable, the third syllable, or even several syllables including the final, but not one of them voices the initial syllable.⁹⁸ As noted above, it is very obvious that this

⁹⁸ Somewhat later, Kurosawa Okinamaro would note in his *Kotodama no shirube*: “There are very few voiced sounds that were anciently not the correct [i.e. unvoiced] sounds, but one after another the numbers of the voiced sounds grew because they were easy to pronounce. But no voiced or liquid sound should come at the

practice corresponds to that of the commoners. The same is true for liquid sounds. Thus, the frequency with which voiced or liquid initials occur in foreign words [shows that] the leaders of those countries are no different from the commoners of this divine land. Although in our divine land voiced and liquid sounds appear only in the middle or end of a word, in foreign lands no distinction is made between beginning, middle, or end, and thus their rulers rank together with our commoners. Now in language this is a very base [practice], not so very different from the sounds emitted by birds, insects, and objects, and so in the present essay I have ranked it lowest among the beasts. Thus, in such countries as China, where [their leader] pretentiously refers to himself as the “son of heaven” and without equal, when the time [for change] comes and his virtue wanes, his country will be taken by another, and he will be driven out, descending to [the ranks of] the lowest commoners. And when the time comes for one among the ranks of the lowest commoners to rise in power, then that person will take the country, ascend the throne, be revered as its ruler, and proudly call himself the “son of heaven.” That is the usual state of affairs there, but in reality they are unable to distinguish the high from the low [in social classes]. Seen from our perspective, such practices bear little difference from those of the beasts. Thus, along with the bright purity of the imperial line, one should firmly bear in mind the noble principle of *kotodama* as one looks at the abbreviated charts below.

Charts of the Correct Sounds

Son of Heaven (high rank, unvoiced 清音)

There are no examples of the voiced sounds of the four lines *ka*, *sa*, *ta*, and *ha* occurring even when these sounds are repeated, as in *kaki* 香木, and in disyllabic words such as *kami* 神 or *kimi* 君, the first syllable is never voiced. Each of these can be understood by analogy. Trisyl-

天子 位上			
○ ^h	○ ^s	○ ^t	○ ^h
○ ^z	○ ^f	○ ^r	○ ^t
○ ^z	○ ^r	○ ^h	○ ^s
○ ^h	○ ^f	○ ^z	○ ^r
○ ^s	○ ^h	○ ^r	○ ^z

beginning of a word, for this is a vulgar sound. Regarding this, one should remember that our imperial land is a land of elegant words.” (p. 62)

labic and tetrasyllabic words are also analogous to these, and it goes without saying that the same applies to ancient words. In later ages down to the present, in elegant poetic diction not one word in a hundred is voiced. Therefore, unvoiced sounds are ranked at the top, and belong to the Son of Heaven.

Counselors (middle rank, provisional voicing 仮濁音)

保 佐 位中			
カ	タ	サ	ガ
チ	ジ	カ	ギ
フ	ブ	ハ	バ
ヘ	ベ	セ	ゲ
ホ	ド	ゾ	ゴ

Syllables of the *ka*, *sa*, *ta*, and *ha* lines which were originally unvoiced are sometimes provisionally voiced in compound words, which one may know by comparison to such [syllables] as the *ga* of *yamagawa* 山川 or the *gi* of *asagiri*

朝霧. Thus, provisional voicing ranks in the middle, and belongs to counselors.

Commoners (low rank, voiced and liquid 濁音・半舌音)

Original voicing of the sounds of the *ga*, *za*, *da*,

臣 下 位下			
ラ	ワ	ヰ	ヱ
リ	ヱ	ヰ	ヱ
ル	ヰ	ヱ	ヱ
レ	ヰ	ヱ	ヱ
ロ	ヰ	ヱ	ヱ

and *ba* lines occurs only in the medial and final syllables of words. This can be known by such comparisons as to the *ga* of *naga* 長 or *nagaru* 流, or the *gi* of *kagiru* 限. The five liquid sounds of *ra*, *ri*, *ru*, *re*,

and *ro* never appear in monosyllabic words. These sounds never occur at the beginning of disyllabic and trisyllabic words, but only in medial or final syllables, which can be seen in such examples as the *ra* of *hara* 腹 or *haramu* 孕 or the *ri* of *chiri* 塵 or *hirifu* (*hiriyū*) 拾. Both voiced and

liquid sounds are ranked lowest, and belong to the commoners.

Having understood the above three types and distinguished the high and low ranking, when one attempts to recite the ancient language the passages are smooth, none cause doubt, and all are pure and correct. Now the language of our divine land consists of fifty syllables arranged by phonemes vertically and horizontally in five rows and ten columns with no disorder. Since those sounds are simple and elegantly correct, they do not merge with each other to create confusion. Myriad words are created when they are inflected according to [sense] or when they are expanded or contracted, and yet there are no words for which these fifty syllables are insufficient. Neither is there any surfeit; not one [syllable] could be deleted or added. All of the correct sounds for human beings are provided therein. One should understand that apart from these fifty syllables, all sounds are from foreign lands and belong to the same category as the sounds of birds, insects, and utensils; they are both incorrect and base. When one understands this principle one can rest easy, because there is no need to borrow foreign [models] of phonology or Siddham [characters].⁹⁹ In all foreign lands, they have the practice of stating principles in a pretentious and complicated manner, and thus will apply phonology to such things as the five pitches, the five elements, the five directions, and the five changes of seasons.¹⁰⁰ They become

⁹⁹ The study of Sanskrit and Siddham script (*Shittangaku*) grew in Tang dynasty China along with the rise of Esoteric Buddhism, and was furthered in Japan by the Tendai monks Annen 安然 (841?-915?) and Myōgaku 明覚 (1056-?), whose respective works *Shittanzō* 悉曇藏 (880) and *Shittan yōketsu* 悉曇要訣 (1101) are widely regarded as contributing to the idea of the fifty syllables.

¹⁰⁰ The “five pitches” are the five notes in the Chinese pentatonic scale: *gong* 宮 (do), *shang* 商 (re), *jiao* 角 (mi), *zhi* 徵 (sol), and *yu* 羽 (la). The “five elements” were wood 木, fire 火, earth 土, metal 金, and water 水, which were thought to generate each other in cyclical fashion. The “five directions” were east, west, north, south, and center. The “five changes of seasons” included the

lost in their explanations of these and various other details. It is an extraordinary misunderstanding for them to think of the sounds of [the language of] China as the “sound of civilization” (*kaon* 華音), and of the sounds of [the language of] our divine land as “shrike tongues” (*gekizetsu* 駭舌).¹⁰¹

Now the principle of the simplicity and correctness of sound is not to be found anywhere in the world outside of our divine realm. What kind of delusion is it to forget all of that and incline one’s heart to foreign lands? Distinguishing among the three applications of language described above, one should also understand that the human language transmitted from the Age of the Gods is superior and noble. Those three types do not go outside the fifty [syllables]; that which goes beyond the fifty [syllables] is the language of foreigners, the sounds of which are like birds, insects, and objects, and one should realize that [those sounds] are base. This is because outside of the fifty [syllables] base and confused sounds are mixed in and it is disagreeably complex; because it is disagreeably complex, all kinds of detailed meanings are established [so that] things can be said pretentiously. Certain people think that the chart of the fifty syllables was created [on the model of] the Siddham alphabet, that [such an idea] did not originally exist in our divine land, and that it was only after this chart existed that we realized the wondrous effect of [our] language. This is really absurd. The *chart* of the fifty sounds was [indeed] modeled after that alphabet, but it does not transcribe the sounds of that country. Since

beginning of spring 立春, the beginning of summer 立夏, midsummer 大暑, the beginning of autumn 立秋, and the beginning of winter 立冬.

¹⁰¹ In the “God of Agriculture” 神農 section of the “Duke Wen of Teng” 滕文公篇 chapter of *Mencius*, Mencius uses this description of foreign tongues where he berates a man named Xu Xing 許行 for abandoning the teachings he had received: “Now some tribesman with a twittering shrike’s tongue comes from the south condemning the Way of the ancient emperors, and you turn against your teacher and go to study with him.” (今也南蠻鳩舌之任, 非先王之道; 子倍子之師而學之) *Mencius*, tr. David Hinton (Washington: Counterpoint, 1998), p. 94.

there were fifty of those sounds, [the chart] is naturally suited to the correct sounds of our divine land, and thus in the ancient language there are no incorrect sounds that go beyond the fifty [syllables]. Since that ought to be well known to anyone who is familiar with the wondrous effects of the ancient language, it goes without saying. If all of us had merely imitated others, then wouldn’t we be mixing incorrect sounds [in our speech], just like foreign lands, not limited to the three types described above?

禽獸									
カ	ク	ケ	コ	カ	ク	ケ	コ	カ	ク
キ	ク	ケ	コ	キ	ク	ケ	コ	キ	ク
ガ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ガ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ガ	グ
ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギ	グ
カ	ク	ケ	コ	カ	ク	ケ	コ	カ	ク
キ	ク	ケ	コ	キ	ク	ケ	コ	キ	ク
ガ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ガ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ガ	グ
ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギ	グ
カ	ク	ケ	コ	カ	ク	ケ	コ	カ	ク
キ	ク	ケ	コ	キ	ク	ケ	コ	キ	ク
ガ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ガ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ガ	グ
ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギ	グ

Charts of the Incorrect Sounds

Birds and Beasts
(voiced sounds
濁音)

All words consisting of one syllable are voiced, and words of two or three syllables voice the initial syllable, which is the voice of foreign words as well as the

sound of flutes and drums. It is found in the likes of the cry of birds and insects, but never in the language of our divine land. Thus, anciently when they heard the language of foreigners, they called it “Korean chirping” (*Kara saezuri*), or they said “How they chirp, these Chinese” (*saizuru ya Kara*).¹⁰² This was because their language was base and difficult to understand, and only sounded like the chirping of birds. The next lowest all take after this, and thus these voiced sounds now belong to the birds and beasts.

¹⁰² This description appears in the “Bidatsu Tennō ki” 敏達天皇紀 chapter (*kan* 20) of the *Nihon shoki*, where an imperial envoy to Paekche was able to understand a Korean woman’s “chirped” words. (*Nihon shoki*, *ge*, pp. 142-3.) In later poetry, *saizuru ya* became a pillow word associated with China or Korea (cf. MYS no. 3886: ... *saizuru ya / Kara usu ni tsuki* ...).

Birds and Beasts (palatalized/labio-velarized sounds 拗音)

The top row shows open palatalized sounds (開口拗音) for the “a” line while the bottom row shows labio-velarized sounds (合口拗音) for the “a” line. There are various other details

[not illustrated here], but in general the language of our divine land is only simple and straightforward, containing no palatalized or labio-velarized sounds. Now such sounds are found only in foreign languages and in [the noises] of birds, insects, and instruments; even in later ages, not one of these [sounds] was combined in elegant poetic diction. Even in books of the middle period, the palatalized or labio-velarized readings of Chinese characters were frequently converted to “true” sounds 真音. [For example,] *byōsha* “sick person” 病者 was read *bōza* バウザ, *zuryō* “provincial governor” 受領 was read *zurō* ズラウ, *shukuse* “fate” 宿世 was read *sukuse* スクセ, *jūsha* “follower” 従者 was read *zusa* ズサ, *shijō* “reception” 祇承 was read *shizō* シゾウ, and so forth. This was because palatalized/labio-velarized sounds were so unlike the language of our divine land. Therefore, they belong to the birds and beasts.

Birds and Beasts (closed finals 閉口音)

These are the so-called “closing *kana*” (*hanekana* 跳仮字).¹⁰³ skritists generally call these “empty marks” 空点, and indicate them by placing a circle at the head of the Sanskrit letter. Now the sound “*n*” does not belong in the five rows or ten

¹⁰³ *Haneru* in the same sense as “closing” of a theatrical performance.

columns, and is an independent sound. None of the [other] sounds are produced with the mouth closed, but only this “*n*” is pronounced with the mouth completely closed, and it is entirely a nasal sound. Thus, this sound is also classed together with foreign words and the sounds of birds, insects, and instruments, and is incorrect. In the ancient age, this sound was never combined with words. Such practices as pronouncing *omina* 女 as *onna* ヲンナ, *kamukaze* 神風 as *kankaze* カンカゼ, or *nemokoro* 懸 as *nengoro* ネンゴロ are euphonic adaptations dating from the move to the present capital, and do not belong to the ancient age. Also, such words as *mimu* (見), *kikamu* (聞), *yukamu* (行), or *komu* (来) are all now pronounced *min*, *kikan*, *yukan*, and *kon*, but anciently they all definitely ended with *mu*. Thus, when reciting ancient texts, the sound of this syllabic “*n*” should not be mixed in. Thus, closed finals belong to the birds and beasts.

Birds and Beasts (liquid sounds 半舌音)

The five sounds *ra*, *ri*, *ru*, *re*, and *ro* are not used in monosyllabic words [of the Yamato language]; neither are they used in the first syllable of disyllabic or trisyllabic words. That is found only in foreign words, and in the sounds of birds, insects, and instruments. Thus, these liquid sounds also

belong to the birds and beasts.

Birds and Beasts (repeated voiced sounds 疊濁音)

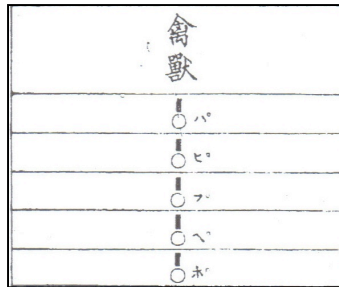
This voicing is not limited to monosyllabic words, but also extends to disyllabic and trisyllabic words which begin with a voiced sound. As stated previously, this is not found in the ancient language.

Even if voicing occurs in medial or final syllables, there are no ex-

amples of repeated voicing. Thus, such current pronunciations as *tabibito* or *Ujigawa* are in error, and one must realize that this is also found only in foreign words and the sounds of birds, insects, and instruments. Therefore, repeated voicing also belongs to the birds and beasts.

Birds and Beasts (“semi-voiced” sounds 半濁音)

These sounds are halfway between the voiceless and voiced sounds of *ha*, *hi*, *fu*, *he*, and *ho*, and are produced by [closing the mouth] as if to make a voiced sound but then producing a voiceless plosive with the lips. These

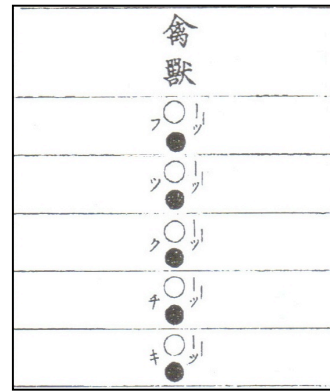


are known as “semi-voiced” sounds 半濁音. In China, this sound is also thought to be voiceless. These sounds include the *pa* of *keppatsu* 結髮, the *pi* of *kippi* 橘皮, and the *pu* of *happu* 髮膚. These appear only in the vulgar language of later ages, in military writings, and in the glossed readings of Chinese books with such words as *nanpito* or *appare*, but it is hardly necessary to mention that in the *waka* poetry books even of the present age one does not find a single example. These must be classed along with doubled consonants (急切音) and closed finals (閉口音). Because anciently there were no such incorrect sounds as doubled consonants or the syllabic “*n*,” neither was there any “semi-voiced” sound.¹⁰⁴ It is clearly

¹⁰⁴ While modern research in historical linguistics does corroborate many of Masazumi’s arguments, it does not support this one. Most linguists are convinced that anciently the initial consonant of the *ha* line was some kind of bilabial sound, some even arguing that it was a *pa* line. Samuel E. Martin, in his *The Japanese Language Through Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 10-13, argues that a *fa* line coexisted with a *pa* line. More recently, Marc Hideo Miyake, in his *Old Japanese: A Phonetic Reconstruction* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 164-66, maintains that this sound was a

derived from the above incorrect sounds [of doubled consonants and syllabic “*n*”]. Thus, the “semi-voiced” sound also is one of foreign words, birds, insects, and instruments, and belongs to the birds and beasts.

Birds and Beasts (doubled consonants 急切音)



When the entering tone (入声) of the sounds *fu*, *tsu*, *ku*, *chi*, and *ki* are doubled—as in *fukki* “wealth and fame” 富貴, *keppatsu* “hairdressing” 結髮, *akkō* “slander” 悪口, *kisshō* “propitious sign” 吉祥, or *sekka* “barnacle”

石花—where *fu*, *ketsu*, *aku*, *kichi*, and *seki* are always shortened to *fukk-*, *kepp-*, *akk-*, *kissh-*, and *sekk-*.¹⁰⁵ As for the reading of the character, this was always limited to the entering tone. In the language of later ages, this was not limited to the entering tone, but there are frequent other examples, such as *matto* for *mahito* 真人, *otto* for *ohito* 夫, *notto* for *norito* 祝詞, or *hossu* for *horisu* 欲. This belongs only to the vulgar language of later ages, or to the glossed readings of such things as Chinese books, and was not used in the ancient language. Even well into the middle period, it was not found in elegant language. Even in the present age, not a single [instance of this practice] is found in such things as *waka* poetry books, and so [the incorrectness of] it does not need elaboration. Thus, these doubled consonants may also be likened to the sounds of foreign words, birds, insects, and instruments, and belong to the birds and beasts.

voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop, closer to “*p*” than to other sounds that have been suggested.

¹⁰⁵ In modern terminology, doubling of consonants is referred to as *sokuon* 促音. *Nisshō* 入声 refers to one of the four tones in classical Chinese phonology which, significantly for the present discussion, always ended with *p*, *t*, or *k*.