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## Esoteric Buddhist Theories of Language in Early Kokugaku

*The Sōshaku of the Man'yō daishōki*

The early modern renaissance in the study of ancient texts, Kokugaku, has been described as a nativist movement that developed as the antithesis of Neo-Confucianism. This paper starts from a different premise. It follows KUGINUKI's (2007) argument that the introduction of a new framework for the study of the Japanese language by Keichū, the Esoteric Buddhist scholar-monk and “father” of Kokugaku, raised new questions about the ancient Japanese language. Through a close analysis of his discussion of language, this article examines Keichū's explanation of his radical shift in framework, revealing the importance of Esoteric Buddhist ideas in early Kokugaku.

KEYWORDS: Keichū—Kokugaku—Edo-period Buddhism—*kanazukai*—*Man'yō daishōki*

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THE EMINENT historian of linguistics, KUGINUKI Tōru 釘貫亨, in his recent book, *Kinsei kanazukairon no kenkyū: Gojūonzu to kodai Nihongo onsei no hakken* (2007), argues that the replacement of the *iroha* poem with the fifty-sounds chart as the framework for discussing the ancient use of the phonetic script (*kanazukai* 仮名遣い) transformed the study of ancient Japanese texts in the early modern period (2007, 10). He shows that *kanazukai* shifted from simply a model for transcription in commentaries on and compositions of Heian style poetry to a visual grid that sparked heated questions about a rational and unique order of sounds in ancient Japanese. It is to the work of the “father” of this early modern renaissance, Keichū 契沖 (1640–1701), that Kuginuki traces the origins of this shift. In Keichū’s work, for the first time, the fifty-sounds chart was employed explicitly for the study of Japanese. This article builds upon Kuginuki’s argument, looking closely at Keichū’s discussion of language in his first major work, the *Man’yō daishōki* 万葉代匠記, in which he reveals the logic behind his revolutionary shift.

After a brief summary of the history of the study of phonetics in Japan, which makes clear the importance of Keichū’s innovation, this article provides some background on the image of Keichū as found in the literature on Kokugaku. It then looks at a single text which is critical in understanding Keichū’s introduction of this new framework for analyzing ancient literature. It will conclude that this deeper understanding of Keichū’s thought exposes gaps in previous theoretical frameworks for explaining early modern intellectual history.

### *The Rise of Early Modern Language Studies*

The origins of the study of phonetics in Japan are found in Siddham studies<sup>1</sup> imported by Kūkai and in the analysis of the pronunciation of Chinese characters, but it was not until the seventeenth century, with Keichū’s revolutionary work on the historical use of the phonetic script (*kana*), that research in specifically Japanese phonetics began.<sup>2</sup> The poetry of the tenth and early eleventh cen-

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1. For an overview of Siddham studies in East Asia, see VAN GULIK 1980.

2. The following summary is based on KUGINUKI 2007.

tury, which became a model for later poetry composition, tended to be recorded in the phonetic script and, for this limited period of time, the spelling and pronunciation of words displayed a high degree of homogeneity. However, by the end of the Heian period the pronunciation of some sounds had merged: /ye/ and /we/ becoming /ye/, /o/ and /wo/ becoming /wo/ and /i/ and /wi/ merging into /i/; and during the same period, the middle and ending sounds /fa/, /fi/, /fu/, /fe/, /fo/ had shifted into the /wa/ line. From the end of the Insei period,<sup>3</sup> the people of Kyoto could no longer spell the poetry of the Heian court style according to their contemporary pronunciation. The origins of *kanazukai*, the study of the ancient use of the script, are found in the intellectual curiosity that this obstacle generated concerning Heian period writing. The *Gekanshū* 下官集 by Fujiwara no Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241) is the first record of this kind of study; especially after its systemization by poet and linguist Gyōa 行阿 (dates unknown) in the Kamakura period, Teika's system of *kana* usage became the chief authority for poetic composition and interpretation of ancient texts in medieval poetic studies. The medieval study of ancient literature, which relied on the Teika system, was passed down within a system of secret transmission from master to disciple among aristocrats and those elite samurai who were culturally close to them.

This situation changed in the Edo period with the appearance of provincial cities, the establishment of a monetary economy, and the improvement of regular consumer life. Interest in academics and cultural activities expanded to include the emerging middle class throughout the country, leading to a diffusion and popularization of scholarship. These scholars rejected traditional poetry studies and introduced new methods, which relied on rational reasoning and literary evidence, bypassing the authority of secret transmissions.

Keichū's *Man'yōshū daishōki* (1690), a monument to this sort of evidential research, began the process of undermining the authority of the secret transmissions (*Dōjō-ha* 堂上派).<sup>4</sup> The early modern study of ancient texts developed from this starting point, as seen in Kamo no Mabuchi's 賀茂真淵 research on the *Man'yōshū* and Motoori Norinaga's 本居宣長 commentary on the *Kojiki* 古事記. In contrast to those within the secret transmission lineages, these provincial scholars focused on the literature of the Nara court, finding their own images reflected in the idealized roughness and simplicity of the legends, myths, and poetry of the *Kojiki* and the *Man'yōshū*. By elevating an alternative ideal, this early modern renaissance in rational and evidential research of the ancient texts, called "Kokugaku," fueled the rise of a new populism.

3. The Insei period refers to the end of the Heian period during the dominance of the retired emperors Shirakawa 白河, Toba 鳥羽, and Goshirakawa 後白河 (and in some explanations, Gotoba 後鳥羽).

4. For more on medieval studies of ancient literature see KLEIN 2002.

The “father” of Kokugaku, Keichū, noticed a disparity between the Teika system of *kanazukai* and the ways that *kana* was used in the texts he had studied for his commentary on the *Man’yōshū*. His *Wajishōranshō* 和字正濫抄 (1695) provided a new interpretation of the use of *kana* in antiquity based on a sense of historical sound change and an evidential approach. Though this text was not well understood at the time, with the appearance of the *Kogentei* 古言梯 (republished in 1979) by KATORI Nahiko 楫取魚彦 (1723–1782), which reorganized and advocated Keichū’s innovative approach, Keichū’s historical *kanazukai* increasingly gained supporters. Whereas Teika’s system provided a model for transcription, Keichū asked larger ontological questions regarding *kana* usage based on a supposition that a unique order of sounds existed in the ancient language.

Key to Keichū’s project was a shift in the framework for studying the *kana*—from the *iroha* poem to the fifty-sounds chart. Prior to Keichū, this chart was not understood as arranging Japanese syllables and never employed for studying ancient Japanese sounds. Although the history of the fifty-sounds chart is complex, its model was not originally a chart, but rather a linear arrangement of sounds used in Siddham studies, called the *gōon* 五音. Transmitted orally by an Indian monk to China, it was Ennin 円仁 (794–864) who introduced the *gōon* to Japan. The order of this linear arrangement of sounds, a-i-u-e-o-ka-sa-ta-na-hama-ya-ra, is reflected in the lines and rows of the fifty-sounds chart.

Keichū’s introduction of the fifty-sounds chart as the explicatory framework for ancient Japanese sounds, because it arranged them in a rational manner with vowels in the vertical axis and consonants in the horizontal axis, allowed for the logical order of previously “problem” sounds—like the distinctions between i-fi-wi, e-fe-we, and o-fo-wo—to become clear. Modern linguists have understood the early modern *kanazukai* as characterized by an evidential method that stood in contrast to the Teika system that was transmitted without textual evidence. Kuginuki supplements this view of early modern *kanazukai* with the suggestion that Keichū’s replacement of the *iroha* poem with the fifty-sounds chart was critical in sparking a theoretical debate about the existence of a unique order of sounds in the ancient Japanese language. In other words, he maintains that because it arranged vowels and consonants in a consistent pattern along vertical and horizontal axes, the fifty-sounds chart suggested an order in the sounds of the ancient language, which in turn provided momentum for the development of a science aimed at restoring these sounds.

#### *Keichū: The “Father” of Kokugaku*

Despite the importance of Keichū’s work, he has not received much attention in the modern scholarship on Edo period intellectual or religious history. He has been largely overlooked by scholars of Buddhism and intellectual historians

have tended to give him passing mention as standing at the forefront of major changes in the intellectual landscape while maintaining a focus on later practitioners. Keichū was early identified as a member, or even the father, of what came to be understood as an anti-Buddhist movement, Kokugaku, when its most prominent figure, Motoori Norinaga, declared that Keichū had opened the path of the study of the ancient texts. Norinaga wrote:

Some people say that the writings of the Confucian scholars who study ancient words and terms are responsible for the birth of Ancient Learning, but that is incorrect. Our school of Ancient Learning was founded by Keichū. As for the origin of the Confucian school of Ancient Learning, Itō was active about the same time as Keichū, but the latter preceded the former somewhat. Ogyū was active still later. How then could National Learning have been modeled on them?  
(MARUYAMA 1974, 145)

Norinaga was abundant in his praise of Keichū's work suggesting that in contrast to scholars of poetry, who simply "protect the family explanation and think of nothing outside of it," Keichū "worked against the current of the times, and approached ancient texts directly in order to uncover [their meaning]" (ŌKUBO 1964, 200–1). He also lauds Keichū's method:

In recent years, there has emerged ... a master of this study named Keichū, who, taking evidence from all the ancient texts, destroyed the false explanations transmitted since the middle and ancient times and made right hundreds of wrongs. Starting with the *Man'yō*, his annotations have clarified many confusions.  
(ŌKUBO 1964, 200)

However, Keichū's place within Kokugaku was tinged with ambiguity. Despite these accolades, Norinaga differentiated Keichū from other Buddhists: "unlike the discussions of [other] Buddhists ... Keichū's words are extremely precious" (ŌKUBO 1964, 203). Some scholars have even suggested that it was the fact that Keichū was a Buddhist monk that led the later Kokugaku scholar, Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤, to expunge him for the list of the "great men" of Kokugaku.<sup>5</sup>

Modern scholarship on Kokugaku is the heir to this tendency, often differentiating between Keichū's Buddhism and his evidential and rational scholarship.

5. Writing a short essay on Keichū that is appended to the first volume of the *Keichū zenshū*, Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎 discusses this conundrum:

When I was young and heard of the four great men of Kokugaku, there was no problem in identifying Mabuchi, Norinaga, and Atsutane, but from time to time, I would wonder whether the first was Keichū or Azumamaro 春満. Thinking about it later, it seems like nothing. After all, the notion of four great men started with the people of the Hirata school, and they—haters of priests—would not have included Keichū. I'm embarrassed that I didn't realize such a simple thing, but even so, I still cannot get rid of the feeling of being dissatisfied. In the true meaning of the study of Kokugaku,

With the troublingly common caveat, the prominent scholar of Kokugaku and Edo period intellectual history, Peter NOSCO, writes, “despite his vocation as a Buddhist priest, Keichū’s scholarly career was in many ways emblematic of this convergence of nativist and Confucian goals” (1990, 65). The subsuming of Keichū within Kokugaku, in turn, has led to the emphasizing of points that seem to support this position. NOSCO, for example, insists that Keichū described “ancient Japan in a manner suggestive of the eighteenth-century divergence of nativist ideals” (1990, 61).<sup>6</sup> He relies on the following limited excerpt from Keichū’s *Man’yō daishōki*:

Japan is the land of the gods. Therefore, in both our histories and our administration, we have given priority to the gods and always placed men second. In high antiquity, our rulers governed this land exclusively by means of Shinto. Since it was not only a naïve and simple age but an unlettered age as well, there was only the oral tradition which was called “Shinto,” and there was no philosophizing of the sort one finds in Confucian and Buddhist writings.

(NOSCO 1990, 61)

A reading of the rest of the introduction reveals that in fact even this seemingly nativist sentiment was couched in a Buddhist framework in which the native gods are understood within a logic of equivalence as the avatars of Buddhas. Indeed, as we will see in the close reading of Keichū’s discussion of language, *waka* and the Japanese syllabary gained a heightened level of importance and urgency in his work precisely because they were seen as exemplifying Buddhist truths.

Christopher Seeley, a leading Western scholar of Japanese linguistics, also points to the ambiguous place of Buddhist theories of language in Keichū’s scholarship:

That Keichū should on the one hand have such an esoteric view of language in general, and on the other hand carry out objective research in *kana* usage does on the face of it appear inexplicable and contradictory; but, just as Keichū’s philosophy is eclectic, so too are his ideas on language. During his Buddhist training Keichū acquired a number of mystical concepts concerning language, and then later developed an independent academic approach.

(SEELEY 1975, 61)

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wasn’t Keichū the father? If it is hard to discard Azumamaro, who penned the request to establish a school, then, how about not saying “four great men,” and instead saying “five great men”?  
(Sakamoto article appended to KZ 1: 1).

6. This tendency is seen also in the work of other scholars. See especially MURAOKA (1988, 80–81). For the ambiguous place of Buddhism in discussions of Keichū, see for example, TAKAGAMI 1982 and JINJA HONCHO 1975.

The disjunction assumed between his Buddhism and his scholarship may reflect a modern bias, but it is one that found its roots in the discomfort of early modern Kokugaku scholars with tracing their origins to the revolutionary work of a Buddhist monk. By attending closely to the logic of Keichū's work, this article begins the work of shedding the obfuscating layers that have hidden the importance of Buddhist conceptual frameworks and cognitive strategies in bringing about this major shift in the study of ancient language and texts.

Keichū was a member of the new provincial elite that developed in the early modern period. Born in Amagasaki, the third of eight children in a samurai family called Shimokawa 下川, Keichū joined Myōhōji 妙法寺 in Osaka at age eleven.<sup>7</sup> He was sent at age thirteen to study at Mt. Koya, where he would meet the Esoteric Buddhist scholar-monk, Jōgon 淨嚴, who was one year his senior and whose studies of Siddham would greatly influence Keichū's work on ancient Japanese. It is said that he quickly rose to the position of *ajari* and, after ten years at Mt. Koya, left to become the abbot of Mandara'in 曼陀羅院 at Ikutama. While living at Mandara'in, Keichū enjoyed composing poems with friends and, through this connection, came to know Shimokōbe Chōryū 下河辺長流 (1627–1686), the scholar of Japanese classics who later recommended Keichū to Tokugawa Mitsukuni 德川光圀 for the project of annotating the *Man'yōshū*, which resulted in the *Man'yō daishōki*. In 1690, Keichū went into retreat at Enjū'an 円珠庵,<sup>8</sup> and until 1701 when he passed away, he produced a number of commentaries on ancient texts and studies of ancient Japanese.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Differentiating Similar Sounds: The Fifty-Sounds Chart and the Man'yō daishōki*

Keichū's discussion of language in the *Sōshaku* (General Introduction) of the *Man'yō daishōki* begins by differentiating the similar sounds, /o/ and /wo/, /e/ and /we/, /i/ and /wi/. It presents a vision of difference as necessarily dependent rather than absolute.

Myōgi Hōshi 明魏法師 says that types like /o/ and /wo/, /e/ and /we/, /i/ and /wi/ all should be written without differentiating. [However,] this is seeing similar-

7. This summary is based on HISAMATSU Sen'ichi's *Keichū-den* (1969).

8. At this point, Keichū declined an invitation by Tokugawa Mitsukuni to enter the service of the Tokugawa family.

9. During this time, he wrote a commentary on the poems in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, called the *Koganshō* 厚顔抄; a commentary on the *Hyakunin isshū*, entitled the *Hyakunin isshu kaikanshō* 百人一首改観抄; a commentary on the *Ise monogatari*, the *Seigo okudan* 勢語臆断; and a commentary on *Genji monogatari*, the *Genchū shūi* 源註拾遺. He also produced works on language, including his most important works on *kana* usage, the *Wajishōranshō*, the *Wajishōransūbōshō* 和字正濫通妨抄, and the *Wajishōran'yōryaku* 和字正濫要略.

ity and not knowing difference. The distinction between similarity and difference are like the warp and woof of a cloth. Difference is horizontal. Similarity is vertical. If there weren't the horizontal of difference, there would be nowhere to plot the vertical of similarity. When you look at the cloth horizontally, the warp becomes the woof. This is the similarity within the difference. Even when you view it horizontally, the qualities of each of the warp and woof are not mixed. When it is similarity, it does not lose difference. Similarity and difference, like two wheels or a pair of wings, are mutually dependent. (KZ 1: 206)

As Keichū notes, the fifteenth-century scholar of the *Man'yōshū*, Myōgi (??-1429) did not differentiate when writing the similar sounds, /o/ and /wo/, /e/ and /we/, /i/ and /wi/. Keichū suggests that one can avoid this mistake by imagining similarity and difference on analogy of the “warp and woof of a cloth.” This framework provides a more accurate and systematic approach that enabled writing to reflect the differences between similar sounds. As interwoven horizontal and vertical threads, opposites are not reduced to each other nor are they allowed to exist independently of each other. Like “two wheels or a pair of wings,” opposites are envisioned as “mutually dependent.” This conceptual framework provides Keichū a critical tool in deciphering language of the *Man'yō* poems, allowing him to attend to differences among similar sounds as well as changes in *kana* usage over time.

However, Keichū is not simply concerned with the differences among individual sounds; he extends this framework to consider the temporal and spatial dimensions, revealing its applicability not only for a systematic approach to language, but also to knowledge more generally:

Now if we expand upon this, what we call “difference” refers to a perspective that discriminates [between things] and “similarity” is one that sees equality [among things]. The Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings are innumerable, but in the end they can be divided in two. The two are the inherent and the temporary; from the beginning there is nothing outside of these. When one discriminates between heaven and earth, then the four directions are viewed from the perspective of equality. By envisioning the past, present, and future along the vertical axis, one differentiates among them. In this case, the ten directions form the horizontal axis and are viewed equally. (KZ 1: 206)

In this passage Keichū shows that time (the past, present, and the future) and space (the ten directions) can be imagined as forming the vertical and horizontal threads of a cloth. By applying the same conceptual tool for language and the world, Keichū reveals a cognitive strategy that he employs later in the text, namely the commensurability of the micro and the macro. Here the study of language becomes a microcosm for the study of the world. The same framework

is applicable to both: imagining opposites as crisscrossing threads enables more accurate examining of both language and the world.

Further, this horizontal-vertical matrix provides a framework from which Keichū suggests the limitations of the various teachings of his day. The two extremes—clutching to difference without recognizing similarity or flattening out all difference and holding only to similarity—are both seen as unsustainable:

Even so, despite recognizing equality, teachings that range from non-Buddhist to Hīnayāna and even to some Mahāyāna schools, privilege a discriminating viewpoint. They say that since the common people differentiate between noble and vulgar, if one does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular when teaching them, they will not be able to enter the way. [In contrast,] the schools of Mahāyāna above Sanron teach the principle of suchness being free of aspects, equal in all things. By showing this, they removed discrimination from [sentient beings].

(KZ 1: 206)

According to Keichū, the limitations of these schools consist in a perspective that does not equally perceive the warp or the woof, difference and equality. He asserts that non-Buddhist, Hīnayāna, and those Mahāyāna schools prior to Sanron put the discriminating perspective first and underemphasized its dependent other, the equal. In contrast, the Mahāyāna schools above Sanron held tightly to equality and underemphasize the discriminating perspective.

In Keichū's view, the Esoteric Buddhist teachings rise above these limited perspectives precisely because they find balance between the similar and the different.

Above these are the Dharmakāya's inner proof, the unsurpassed secret yogic Buddhayana, the Great Mandala Teaching, and the Dharma gate of *Dhāraṇī*. Taking as substance the six constantly present elements that sentient beings are able to perceive and as function the three naturally existing mysteries, then the two realms of Vajra and Matrix each preside over discrimination and equality with nothing to discard and nothing to take... In the Vajrayana, practitioners abide in their self nature and establish their selves, revealing innumerable vehicles with one flavor, each not impeding the other.

(KZ 1: 206)

According to Keichū, it is precisely because the Vajra vehicle of Esoteric Buddhism recognizes the inevitably interdependent nature of opposites that it rises above earlier forms by showing an immediate means toward the realization of truth through ritual practices. Underlying this teaching is the recognition of the Dharmakāya as the substance of all things (to be discussed later). Keichū explains that the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind are the functioning of the Dharmakāya. The two realms of the Vajra and the Womb attend both to equality and discrimination, substance and function, providing a superior complete perspective. In other words, the Esoteric teaching recognizes many forms but one content ("innumerable vehicles with one flavor").

Next, pursuing further Buddhist understandings of language, Keichū distinguishes between the Exoteric and Esoteric interpretation of the *iroha* poem.

1. I Ro Ha Ni Ho He To

Chi Ri Nu Ru Wo

2. Wa Ka Yo Ta Re So

Tsu Ne Na Ra Mu

3. U Yi No O Ku Ya Ma

Ke Fu Ko E Te

4. A Sa Ki Yu Me Mi Shi

Ye Hi Mo Se Su<sup>10</sup>

1. Although its scent still lingers on  
The form of a flower has scattered away
2. For whom will the glory  
Of this world remain unchanged?
3. Arriving today at the yonder side  
Of the deep mountains of evanescent existence
4. We shall never allow ourselves to drift away  
Intoxicated, in the world of shallow dreams.<sup>11</sup>

He notes that a superficial parsing of its lines reveals the teaching of impermanence; the first two lines speak of the evanescence of things and the third line alludes to the sentient being who realizes the truth. The phrase “deep mountains of evanescent existence” in the following line refers to the eight sufferings of the secular world. This realization of transience, he notes, has led Exoteric Buddhists to interpret the last line as affirming the secular world as consisting of “intoxication” and “shallow dreams.” But this interpretation is impossible in Esoteric Buddhism because there was originally no saké to inebriate the sentient being, nor even any being to drink this saké. Instead, Keichū maintains that the last line (“We shall never allow ourselves to drift away intoxicated, in the world of shallow dreams”) refers to a fundamental Esoteric Buddhist teaching:

This last line points to the ultimate teaching of the Buddhist Dharma. Even though we think the common person drinks intoxicating saké and has from beginningless time slept in the deserted fields of transmigration, in fact, neither the muddling saké nor the inebriated person exist, [as the *iroha* says,] originally

10. This transcription does not reflect the distinction between hard and soft consonants.

11. This translation is from ABÉ 1999, 392. Keichū notes that line two has two potential interpretations: the above, and “who in this world lasts forever?”

“there is no drunkenness.”<sup>12</sup> Following this, one distinguishes between the essence of Exoteric and Esoteric. (KZ 1: 209)

Keichū suggests that Exoteric Buddhism envisions that the realization of the truth will reveal the secular world as false, the result of misperception due to dreams or intoxication. Esoteric Buddhism, on the other hand, affirms the secular as the sacred, rejecting a view that differentiates between the two. Since this poem was attributed to Kūkai, who introduced Esoteric Buddhism to Japan, Keichū asserts that it should be seen from within an Esoteric Buddhist framework as a ritual gate toward realization of the truth:

Since Kūkai was the father of Esoteric Buddhism, the poem is invested with a secret, deep meaning. The *Shasekishū* 沙石集 says it [the *iroha* poem] is truly a great *dhāraṇī*, with the eight lines forming two gates. (KZ 1: 209)

The term *dhāraṇī* was often translated into Chinese as *sōji* 総持 or “container,” its potency deriving from encapsulating within a short string of syllables the whole sutra.<sup>13</sup> The power of *dhāraṇī* was founded in the plurivocality of each of its syllables, the robust fertility of each sound resisting attempts to pin down its meaning. Short, but seeped with meaning, *dhāraṇī*’s form—often including a series of incomprehensible syllables—point to a mode of reading less literal than experiential. Ahistorical in the sense that they resist a single, historically-specified meaning, *dhāraṇī* were a part of a ritual system aimed at bringing one’s speech in accord with that of the cosmic Buddha.

In suggesting that the poem which strings together the Japanese phonetic script was equivalent to a *dhāraṇī*,<sup>14</sup> Keichū relies on two critical strategies. First, there is an assertion of their equivalence based on a dividing of their form, which differed, and from their content, which was viewed as the same. Second, there is an insistence on relating the large and the small metonymically. This insistence on seeing a metonymic relationship between the part and the whole allows for the brief and fleeting to be seen as a passageway to the broad and all-encompassing.

Keichū’s analysis of the *iroha* poem leads to a discussion of the Buddhist idea of expedient means (*hōben*), in which he affirms that the syllabary itself functions to bring the Japanese people closer to Buddhism. He first differentiates between the understanding of expedient meanings in Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism:

12. The last line of the *iroha* poem, “Ye Hi Mo Se Su,” can be most literally translated as “there is no drunkenness.”

13. Here I interpret *dhāraṇī* according to Keichū’s use of the term. It also referred to magical formulas meant to bring rain, and so on. For more on *dhāraṇī* see ABÉ 1999, 5–6.

14. As Keichū notes, he was not the first to view the *iroha* as a *dhāraṇī*.

In Exoteric Buddhism what is called expedient means is like stopping a child from crying with empty hands. Esoteric Buddhism is not like this. For example, if an adult who has a beloved child gives him gold when he is young, the gold will be treated as toys ... [the child] not yet knowing how valuable it is. Therefore, the adult transforms his gold into animals and fish and so on, to give to the child. [The child] will be delighted and play [with the gift], only realizing when he is older that they are treasures allowing him to never exhaust his wealth. Though they are called toys, truly expedient means are the ultimate reality. (KZ 1: 209–10)

Keichū compares expedient means in Exoteric Buddhism to approaching a child with empty hands because language in Exoteric Buddhism was understood as incapable of expressing the ultimate truth. Here he is pointing again to the mistaken perspective that divorces language from reality, ultimate reality from everyday reality. According to Keichū, it is only when language is recognized as itself imbued with reality that expedient means become a positive tool capable of guiding people, whatever their stage in life. The equation of language with reality ensures that the parents' hands are not empty; they have a potent tool for helping their children.

Whereas Exoteric Buddhism viewed the ultimate truth as separate and beyond language (and thus language could only point in the direction of the truth), Esoteric Buddhism envisioned the world as a manifestation of the ultimate truth (thus, with the correct understanding, language also could be seen as a manifestation of reality):

*The Collection of Essentials of the Perfect Buddha Mind in Kenmitsu (Kenmitsu entsū jōbutsu shinyōshū 顯密圓通成佛心要集)* compiled by the monk Daodian (Jp. Dōden Hōshi) 道殿法師 of the Kegon temple Jinkesi (Jp. Kinkaji) 金柯寺 of the Liao dynasty gives the following example for Esoteric Buddhist expedient means: When one tries to make a sick child take medicine and the child refuses, one can smear it on the mother's breast. The child, not knowing there is medicine [on the breast], will take it along with the milk and the illness will be banished. The benefits of the *iroha* function in the same way. (KZ 1: 210)

Keichū's insistence that the syllabary of the *iroha* poem be grasped as expedient means as understood in Esoteric Buddhism is an affirmation that the syllabary itself can function to demonstrate the Esoteric Buddhist teaching of nonduality. In other words, the hearty fecundity of the syllables, which combined to produce the seemingly limitless quantity of Japanese literature, were a microcosm of the world, where the small and the large are always related, as if dependent opposites.

After confirming the force of reality invested in the *iroha* poem, Keichū employed linguistic tools from Esoteric Buddhist studies of Sanskrit to introduce a systematic way of thinking about the sounds of the Japanese

language.<sup>15</sup> Sanskrit studies as it developed in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism prior to Jiun Sonja (1718–1804) did not teach the grammar of Sanskrit, but rather the Siddham script and a science of sounds aimed at correct pronunciation of *dhāraṇī* and *mantra*. As introduced by Kūkai, the sounds of Sanskrit took on an elevated stature as a model for Buddhist teachings because, in contrast to Chinese ideographs that reflected a premise of the independent reality of external objects, Sanskrit sounds were seen as spiraling out of the original sound, /a/, through a process of differentiation. Keichū extends this vision to include the phoneticism of the Japanese language, arguing that the identity of each sound was determined through differentiation, existing relationally rather than substantially:

According to Sanskrit (*bongo* 梵語) [studies], there is a fundamental significance to the character and sound /i/. The first sounds of the fifty-sounds chart are a-i-u-e-wo.<sup>16</sup> The origin of all teachings is /a/, the sound that starts in the throat but is not yet differentiated. With the movement of the tongue this vibration becomes /i/, which is fundamentally the beginning of voice. /A/ is like a seed. /I/ is like the root that grows from the seed. Since the branches, leaves, flowers, and so on are all based on the root, it can be called the basis of voice. Now, though they discuss various meanings in the sūtras, here I speak of it in reference to Japanese. (KZ 1: 210)

By describing /a/ as the “origin of all teachings,” he alludes to Kūkai’s 空海 development of a theory of language as a semiotic web of differentiation imbued with the force of emptiness.<sup>17</sup> In this view, the sound /a/ is the origin of no origin, a vibration in the throat prior to the differentiation of voice. With a movement of the tongue this vibration gives rise to voice in the basic vocalized sound, /i/. The sound /a/, Keichū writes, is the “seed” and /i/ the “root.” From this base, the rest of the sounds of the Japanese language grow through a process of differentiation.

This vision of the dependent production of sounds reinforced one of the key moves in Keichū’s innovative approach to the Japanese syllabary. Lacking in the Teika *kanazukai* system, which relied on the *iroha* framework, was the logic of differentiating between vowel and consonant sounds in the phonetic script. This Esoteric Buddhist tradition of envisioning sounds forming in combination provided a key to advancing the study of Japanese phonetics. Keichū explains that “all sounds derive from the fifty sounds,” which could be plotted along a five-by-ten grid, ranging “from a-i-u-e-wo through wa-wi-wu-we-o” (KZ 1: 211). Keichū

15. Keichū, in other words, did not have a mastery of the Sanskrit language, but he had gained a strong grasp of the linguistic technologies applicable for precise analysis of sounds and writing at Mt. Koya and from his friend, Jōgon, the eminent scholar of Siddham of the seventeenth century.

16. It was not until Norinaga that the inversion of the /o/ and /wo/ was rectified.

17. For more on Kūkai’s discussion of this, see ABÉ 1999, 385–98.

underlines the connection between all that is said and written with these base consonants and vowels with a reference to the following passage from the chapter on letters in the *Nirvana Sutra* 涅槃經.

The Buddha again told the Bodhisattva Kāśyapa 迦葉菩薩 that all the various discussions, spells, languages, and letters are the explanations of the Buddha and not heretical teachings.

Kāśyapa faced the Buddha and said, “World Honored One, tell me how the Tathāgata explains the root of letters.”

The Buddha said, “Good man, by first explaining the half letter as the root, one can grasp the various records, spells, discussions, and the various true Dharmas. The common person studies the correct root of letters and then can discern the correct law from the incorrect law.”

Kāśyapa again faced the Buddha and said, “The various letters of which you speak, tell me their meaning.”

“Good man, there are fourteen sounds and the significance of letters is giving names to these sounds. All that is said, written, and named is the constancy of nirvana and therefore eternal. If something is eternal, it is inexhaustible. That which is inexhaustible is precisely the Vajra body of the Tathāgata. This is the root of letters which gives name to the fourteen sounds.” (KZ 1: 212)

In this description, the thirty-six characters are formed by systematic combinations of the basic fourteen letters providing an example of the Buddhist teaching of interdependence. The *Nirvana Sutra* thus sees the fourteen as ever-present, whether standing alone or in combination. It equates that which is ever-present and inexhaustible with the Vajra body of Tathāgata. Thus, understanding language on a concrete micro level (as the Vajra body of the Tathāgata) also provides a means of differentiating between correct and incorrect teaching. (“The common person studies the correct root of letters and then can discern the correct law from the incorrect law.”) Through this method, Keichū affirms that language itself is a guide for understanding the world.

As noted above, Keichū described sound formation using the analogy of a tree that grows from the seed, /a/. In the following passage, he uses the metaphor of a mother and father producing thirty-six children; the nine “consonants” *ka-sa-ta* on and so on. function as the “father” combining with the “mother,” the five vowels *a-i-u-e-wo*, to form the “children,” the other thirty-six sounds. These metaphors underline his argument that both sound and writing find their identity via interrelation.

This sutra explains the fifty characters not the fifty sounds. The fourteen sounds form the fifty characters [in Sanskrit]. Although there are various explanations of this among Japanese and Chinese scholars, who are never in agreement, there is none that cannot be applied to the Japanese language.... The fourteen

sounds are the five a-i-u-e-wo and the nine ka-sa-ta-na-fa-ma-ya-ra which together add up to fourteen. When the nine form the consonant and the five the vowel, the thirty-six sounds are produced, and adding together the thirty-six and the fourteen makes a total of fifty sounds. The nine are like the father, the five like the mother, and the thirty-six like the children. (KZ 1: 212)

Here Keichū introduces a simple way of understanding the consonant-vowel combinations of the Japanese syllabary. Keichū’s argument for the superiority of the fifty-sounds chart begins from this vision of sounds forming in combination. In his discussion in the *Man’yō daishōki* and again the *Wajishōranshō*, Keichū reinforces this argument for the interdependence of sounds by using *kanji* combinations for letters to reflect sound combinations. Since Siddham writing patterns make these interrelations particularly visible, Keichū next introduces a fifty-sound chart for the Japanese sounds which follows Sanskrit rules of inscription. As can be seen in the FIGURE below, Keichū explains these sound combinations using *hansetsu* 反切, a technique traditionally used in determining the sound values of Chinese characters.

Keichū explains, “Now following the rules of Sanskrit characters (*bonji* 梵字) and tentatively using *kanji*, I will draw the way the fourteen sounds produce the

カ	キ	ク	ケ	コ
カ カ以初	キ キ以初	ク ク以初	ケ ケ以初	コ コ以初
カ カ以初	キ キ以初	ク ク以初	ケ ケ以初	コ コ以初
カ カ以初	キ キ以初	ク ク以初	ケ ケ以初	コ コ以初
カ カ以初	キ キ以初	ク ク以初	ケ ケ以初	コ コ以初
カ カ以初	キ キ以初	ク ク以初	ケ ケ以初	コ コ以初

一 五十音圖  
聲各行五音相通 横各行同韻相通

FIGURE 1. The fifty-sounds chart found in Keichū’s *Man’yō daishōki* and *Wajishōranshō*.

thirty-six” (KZ 1: 212). The chart used *kanji* for their sound values to express the first nine sounds, *ka-sa-ta*, and so on. The next line down (the /i/ line) kept the *kanji* from the above /a/ line, but added to it a character that symbolized the sound /i/. The resultant combinations represented the /i/ row (*ki-shi-chi*, and so on). For example, /ka/, written with the character for “to add” 加, changed into /ki/ when the character 人 was written just below it. Following this pattern, he created a chart of the fifty sounds that were recognizably representative of Japanese syllables (using the /e/ 江 from “Edo,” for example) and set forth in a form that visibly manifested a vision of interdependent sound production.

By applying the linguistic technology that he had gained in his studies of Siddham to the study of the Japanese sounds,<sup>18</sup> Keichū was able to introduce a systematic way of differentiating between similar sounds. The *iroha* had functioned well for hundreds of years as a mnemonic device providing a standard for normative *kana* use. However, the *iroha* provided no way to think through historical sound change, nor did it help in approaching texts written prior to its introduction. In contrast, the fifty-sounds chart, especially as Keichū wrote out the chart, showed visibly and precisely sounds forming in combination. This tool allowed for even the earliest Japanese writing to be parsed, teased apart according to its root phonemes.<sup>19</sup>

Keichū rejoices that even though Japan “borrowed writing from China,” the Japanese sounds were “closer to Indian” (KZ 1: 213).<sup>20</sup> It is possible that he is here referring to Kūkai’s elevation of Sanskrit over Chinese mentioned above. Kūkai had argued that whereas Chinese started from the incorrect premise that names identified external realities, Sanskrit was grounded in an understanding of the origin of no origin, the sound /a/, from which names and things arose through a process of differentiation (ABÉ 1999, 395). From Kūkai’s perspective, Sanskrit provided a clearer model for correctly understanding the world. In light of Kūkai’s elevation of Sanskrit over Chinese, Keichū’s celebration of the similarity of Japanese sounds to Sanskrit suggests that he thought that Japanese sounds also provided a clear model for a Buddhist understanding of the world.

This introduction to the advantages of the fifty-sounds chart in deciphering the ancient use of *kana* was perhaps Keichū’s most innovative and most lasting contribution to the study of the Japanese language, but he supports it with

18. Keichū acknowledges his debt to the Esoteric Buddhist scholar-monk and Sanskrit scholar, Jōgon, in his research on the Japanese language. Further, he recommends the reader of this text to peruse pages 19–40 of Jōgon’s *Shittan sanmitsushō* 悉曇三密鈔 and encourages the reader to ask a Sanskrit scholar if they have any points of confusion (KZ 1: 213).

19. This is not to undervalue linguistic tools used in the study of Chinese, like *hansetsu*, which are not the focus of this paper.

20. Keichū writes, “this is how we know ours is a superior country!” (KZ 1: 213).

an extensive discussion of Esoteric Buddhist theories of language. Keichū turns now to the status of language itself, beginning with an assertion that Indian writing was not created by Brahma 梵天 but rather originates in the Dharmakāya.

Saying that the writing in India was created by Brahma and that the writing of China was created by Cangjie 蒼頡 (Jp. Sōketsu)<sup>21</sup> is to not know the principle of eternal constancy of the Dharmakāya when looking for their origins. Consider the Bodhisattva Nagārjuna's 龍樹菩薩 line in his *Makaenron* 摩訶衍論 [On the Interpretation of Mahāyāna]: “now [the reason] that one first gives rise to a virtue is because one originally had it.” (KZ 1: 214)

Keichū follows Kūkai in rejecting the view that separates humans from their products, here insisting that the writing of India finds its origin in the eternal constancy of the Dharmakāya and was not created by Brahma (ABÉ 1999, 396). This vision of writing originating in the Dharmakāya is a radical assertion of unity based on an expansion of the concept of writing to include all forms of visible differentiation.

Taking this point further, Keichū asserts that writing in Chinese and Sanskrit “both arise from the suchness of the Dharma and are not human products” (214). He rejects the premise informing the dualistic perspective where humans bring into being something that did not exist earlier:

Generally the understanding according to which you have now what you did not have originally is a heretical understanding. For this reason, the *Nirvana Sutra* destroyed this way of thinking by insisting that both having and not having are empty. (KZ 1: 214)

Keichū explicitly fights a view that starts from a premise of duality, the self versus the external world, the secular versus the divine. He argues that the idea that humans created something relies on the dualistic perspective that they brought into being something that did not exist before. In contrast to this incorrect standpoint, Keichū insists that all writing, whether Chinese or Sanskrit, “arises from the suchness of the Dharma and is not a human product.” According to Keichū, writing arises according to causation:

However, since the suchness of the Dharma appears always according to causation, in the trace of a bird is expressed the originally inherent letter, so it is called “created.” Actually, it is like Confucius' saying “recorded—not created.” Consider the lines from the preface of Kūkai's *Bunkyō hifuron* 文鏡秘府論: “the original letters arise in the particle of dust in the air, just as the originally

21. A legendary person from ancient China who was said to have invented writing (NICHIGAI ASSOCIATES 1993, 348).

existing language is formed on the turtle and in the [scales of] the dragon.”  
This is Kūkai’s assessment, not mine. (KZ 1: 214)

Keichū now insists that language, as a guide for understanding the world, was originally a form of visible differentiation. In Kūkai’s words, “the original letters arise in the particle of dust in the air, just as the originally existing language is formed on the turtle and in the scales of the dragon.” Rather than the invention of humans to describe the external world, letters and words are seen as an act of recording the movements of the Dharmakāya.

This specifically Esoteric Buddhist perspective sees the vibrant constancy of the cosmic Buddha in the differentiation that forms both writing and the world. By seeing language and writing as originally one with the cosmic Buddha, both the inner and outer (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) teachings become manifestations of the truth. This assertion is a confirmation of language itself as saturated, overflowing with the ultimate teaching of Esoteric Buddhism.

According to the clear writing of the sutra, expressing the actual meaning of the *dhāraṇī* gate 総持門, it says that both the inner and the outer teachings derive from reality. (KZ 1: 214)

Properly understood, language provides a ritual means for realizing the identity of the secular and the sacred. In this Esoteric Buddhist theory of language, human language and the secular world as a manifestation of the cosmic Buddha did not have substantial, independent identity but rather dependent relational identity. Conveying his message through the use of the metaphor of weaving cloth or the organic growth of a tree or family, Keichū insists on the impossibility of divorcing language from ultimate reality, and places this view of language within a broader context of Buddhist and non-Buddhist estimations of the potential for language to express the truth.

In the *Analects*, it says “I desire no speech”; in the *Book of Changes*, it says “writing does not exhaustively express speech, nor speech exhaustively express intent”; surpassing even Laozi’s “the wise one does not speak,” followers of Zen say, “do not establish letters” and in the *Lotus Sutra*, it says, “the ultimate reality is so subtle the Dharma ceases and therefore it cannot be discussed.” (KZ 1: 214)

According to Keichū, the *Analects*, the *Book of Changes*, Laozi, Zen, and the *Lotus Sutra* all find language a crude and limited tool, incapable of expressing the truth. Despite these perspectives, Keichū insists that to search for truth outside of language is ineffective, and that these views of language are fruitless precisely because they do not recognize that the truth is close by rather than far away.

Approaching the realm of subtle extinction via the idea of “transcending speech and mental activity” (*gondan shinmetsu* 言斷心滅) is like observing the wheel of a cart as it rolls farther and farther away, not to return. (KZ 1: 214)

In other words, if one starts from incorrect understandings of language, a search for truth will be futile. Since language is here viewed as a microcosm of the world, divorcing truth from language would in turn insist on two realms—the secular and the sacred. Such a premise, according to Keichū, is precisely what leads to an unproductive search for truth outside of language.

By contrast, the teaching gate of the three mysteries is like a fence—proceeding around it, one finds oneself at the original ground, where whatever one encounters is none other than the way (*tōsō zokudō* 當相即道) and the secular is the truth (*sokuji jishin* 即事而真). How true it is. For this reason, the *Dainichikyō* 大日經 says: “raising and lowering the foot all are *mudras*. The movements of the tongue all are *mantra*.” (KZ 1: 214)

Here Keichū explains that the ritual language of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind provide a means to realize the truth in the present. One does not search for something far away but rather realizes the true identity of the nearby. With this realization, one’s own movements come to be seen as a particular manifestation of the cosmic Buddha. This vision of humans as manifestations of the cosmic Buddha accounts for Keichū’s insistence that humans do not create new work, even as he produced an innovative study of ancient Japanese texts. Keichū supports this argument with a citation from the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana Sutra* (*Dainichikyō-sho* 大日經疏, T no. 1796).

Śubhakarasiṃha’s explanation ... says, World Honored One, because sentient beings in the future will be dull in capacity, they will be befuddled by the two teachings, not knowing that the secular is identical to the truth (*sokuzoku-jishin* 即俗而真). Therefore, thoroughly discuss this issue. Lord of Mystery, what is the way of *mantra* (Jp. *shingon* 真言)? The way of the Tathāgata’s *mantra* is the empowering of letters as they are written. The letters and speech of the world are identical to reality. Precisely because of this, they are able to empower the true meaning of *mantras*. If one attaches to language and does not understand it, this is the wrong view developed by a deluded mind that seeks something that lacks reality; if one believes that Buddha with supernatural power changes [language] into [*mantras*] then one really falls into perversion and what one attains has nothing to do with *mantra*. (KZ 1: 214)

Glossing a section of the *Mahāvairocana Sutra*, Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735) explains here that it is a misunderstanding to think of the Buddha as a separate supernatural being that changes language into *mantra*. Language is *mantra* because it originates in, and is an embodiment of, the Tathāgata. Precisely because the secular is identical to the truth, language as *mantra* provides a means toward realization of the truth.

Keichū supports this citation from the *Commentary on Mahāvairocana Sutra* with an allusion to Kūkai’s work, *Voice, Letter, Reality* 声字実相義 (KBZ 1: 521–534),

where Kūkai most fully explained his understanding of the mystery of speech. Keichū may have had the following section of that work in mind:

What did the *mantra* king say? It is precisely the wheel of words and the Sanskrit alphabet explained in the *Mahāvairocana Sutra* and the *Vajraśekhara Sutra* 金剛頂經. The Sanskrit alphabet is precisely the syllables “a” through “ka” in Sanskrit texts. These syllables, then, are each precisely the secret names of the Dharmakāya Tathāgata. Further, the heavenly beings, the *nagas*, and the demons, all embody these names. At root, these names have the Dharmakāya as their fount. From him they flow forth, twisting and turning, finally becoming the speech that pervades the world. If one understands reality, then these [speeches] are called *mantra*. If one does not understand the source, then they are called delusory speech. (YORITOMI 1988, 264)

Here Kūkai identifies the syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet with the Dharmakāya. Further, the world, in this vision, becomes the cosmic text, a palpable manifestation of the Dharmakāya. Understanding that the language of the world finds its origin in the Dharmakāya leads to a realization that all language is *mantra*. This positive evaluation of the religious potency of all language, including Japanese, helps in explaining Keichū’s extensive study of “non-Buddhist” texts.

The passage of the *Commentary on Mahāvairocana Sutra* that Keichū cites is also quoted by Kūkai at the end of his *Ten Abiding Stages of Mind According to the Secret Mandalas* (*Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron* 秘密曼荼羅十住心論) (KBZ 1: 125–415). By alluding indirectly to this section of Kūkai’s *Ten Abiding Stages of Mind* that refers to the above section of the *Commentary on Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, which in turn cites the *Mahāvairocana Sutra* itself, Keichū situates his own work in a multi-tiered authoritative structure grounded in Shingon Esoteric theories of language.

Keichū was not privy to the authoritative interpretations of the ancient texts transmitted in secret elite lineages, but he seems to have found an alternative source of authority to supplement his evidential approach. Significantly, Keichū notes that the understanding of language as truth is not limited to Esoteric Buddhism:

In discussions on sutras in Exoteric Buddhism (*kengyō* 顯教), too, the teaching of language as truth itself (*nyogi gonsetsu* 如義言説) explains the realization of the unconditioned truth as clearly as the sun or moon. Those who cling to transcending speech and mental activities (*gondan shinmetsu*) are like those who are stuck to a pillar and cannot turn their heads. Look at the lines in the *Benkenmitsu nikyōron* 弁顯密二教論. (KZ 1: 215)

The phrase, “transcending speech and mental activities” is discussed in Kūkai’s *Distinguishing the Two Teachings of Exoteric and Esoteric* (*Benkenmitsu nikyōron*; KBZ 474–505), which presents a gloss on the five interpretations of language

found in Nagārjuna's work, *On the Interpretation of Mahāyāna* (*Shakumakaenron* 釈摩訶衍論; T 32: #1668). This citation reveals that the concept of “transcending speech and mental activities” (*gondan-shinmetsu*), which Keichū insisted would inhibit one's vision of the truth, is based on the first four explanations of language as phenomena, dreams, delusory attachment, and as beginning-less. He notes, however, that the fifth explanation of language allows for the truth to become expressible. Keichū will return at the close of his discussion of language to this Exoteric classification of language as truth itself (*nyogi gonsetsu*), the fifth of five classifications of language found in *On the Interpretation of Mahāyāna*, emphasizing that a correct understanding of this last explanation allows for both Buddhist and non-Buddhist works to express the truth.<sup>22</sup> It is after this argument about the status of language that Keichū turns again to the potency of the Japanese language specifically.

22. Keichū ends his discussion of language by asserting that truth can be found in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist works. The claim again relies on a passage found in *On the Interpretation of Mahāyāna* which refers to the five types of language:

Commentary on the *Book of Changes* 易繫辭 says: one asked: Writing does not exhaustively express speech, nor does speech exhaustively express intent. Therefore can the intent of the sages not be discovered? Another answered: “the sages established signs in order to exhaustively express intent, and hexagrams in order to exhaustively express true and false, idioms in order to exhaustively express speech, changing and transmitting them in order to exhaustively bring benefit, and dynamically applying them in order to exhaustively express mind.” In these lines, “writing does not exhaustively express speech, nor speech exhaustively express intent” is equivalent to the four types of understanding of language, as phenomena, dreams, attachment, and beginning-less, found in the five explanations of language in *On the Interpretation of Mahāyāna*. From “the sages establish signs” onward is like truth of the fifth explanation of language as truth itself (*nyogi gonsetsu*). Those who understand the significance of this [last explanation,] find truth in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist works. Those who only think of separating from language never reach the deep meaning of either. *Waka*, too, should be compared to this. There are all sorts of deep meanings, among all those who study *waka*'s deep meanings, who will be able to attain them? If one leaves behind falsehood and makes one's mind in accord with that which inspires truth, then that truth becomes so important that even gods will reverently receive them. (KZ 1: 216)

Keichū is explicit: “Those who understand the significance of this [last explanation,] find truth in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist works.” In his view, it is the mistaken premise that divides truth from language which leads to misunderstandings. He explains, “those who only think of separating from language never reach the deep meaning of either.” Therefore the fifth explanation, of language as truth itself (*nyogi gonsetsu*), allows Keichū to justify his studies of non-Buddhist texts. He continues, “*waka*, too, should be compared to this.”

It is clear that if one “leaves behind falsehood” and aspires to the truth of the fifth explanation, then the study of *waka*, too, is the study of language as truth itself. As a form of *dhāraṇī*, *waka* becomes an exemplary guide for realizing the original unity of voice, letters, and reality.

In the *Shasekishū* 沙石集, Mujū 無住 said that *waka* poetry is the *dhāraṇī* of our country. *Dhāraṇī* is translated as *sōji*; it has many meanings. *Waka* also is replete with meanings. (KZ 1: 215)

Although *waka* superficially appear different than *dhāraṇī*, Keichū follows Mujū in claiming that they are equivalent. Just as he understood the gods of Japan as avatars of the Buddhas, the *waka* were *dhāraṇī* composed in the Japanese language for the Japanese people. *Dhāraṇī*, as discussed above, pointed to metonymic relations between part and whole, encapsulating in a few syllables the entirety of the sūtra. Although modern scholars have used this assertion as proof of Keichū's "medieval" religious ideas, this vision of the *waka* is less "mystical" than it first appears.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the main thrust of Keichū's argument seems to be a view of the world as a matrix of interrelations, which while not perhaps a concept in general acceptance now, is far from "mystical" or "medieval."

It is this logic of equivalence that allows Keichū to elevate the Japanese language, viewing it as particularly efficacious for the Japanese people. Keichū insists that there is a "yogic correspondence" between the Buddhas and *kami*, between Japanese and Sanskrit, and that *waka* poetry, like *dhāraṇī*, function to point toward the Buddhist teaching of emptiness. Short but pregnant with meaning, *waka* poetry revealed the interdependence and interpenetration of all reality. Adding further support to this positive evaluation of *waka* as turning the wheel of the Dharma, Keichū refers to the statement by Saigyō 西行 (1118–1190) that composing a poem was equivalent to creating a *stupa* (KZ 1: 215).

### Post-Keichū Developments

Even though, as shown above, the logic of the fifty-sounds chart dominated Keichū's thought on the differences in the sounds of ancient *kana*, he nevertheless arranged his study of *kanazukai*, the *Wajishōranshō*, in the *iroha* order. Kuginuki shows, based on unpublished versions of this text, that Keichū justifies this choice by saying it was or the convenience of his contemporary readership, who would not be familiar with the order of the fifty-sounds chart (KUGINUKI 2007, 57–59). By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the dominance of the *iroha* poem had begun to fade and KATORI Nahiko's work, the *Kogentei* (1979), which was so important in making Keichū's ideas known, dropped all mention of the *iroha*.

The central question of later studies of ancient *kana* was the pronunciation of the three guttural lines, /*a*/, /*ya*/, and /*wa*/—a problem first raised by Keichū.

23. ŌKUBO (1964), for example, states: "Even as Keichū began to grasp *waka* as a unique realm of inner human sentiment," nevertheless "his consciousness, which viewed *waka* as 'pearls in the dust' and 'the truth in the secular,' remained reactionary, fettered to medieval (*chūsei*) and Buddhist (*bukkyōteki*) understandings of *waka* as the *dhāraṇī* of Japan" (204–205). SEELEY (1975) describes Keichū's Stoic Buddhist understanding of language as "mystical," as noted above.

These scholars guessed that behind the seemingly redundant sounds (the /i/ of the /a/ and /ya/ line, the /e/ of the /a/ and /ya/ line, and the /u/ of the /a/ and /wa/ lines) there was in ancient times a distinction in pronunciation. This problem—the pronunciation of these three guttural lines—sparked a heated debate that involved such scholars as Monnō 文雄 (1700–1763), Tanaka Taikan 田中大観 (1710–1735), Arakida Hisakata 荒木田尚賢 (1739–1788), Motoori Norinaga, Ōta Zensai 太田全斎 (1759–1829), and Tōjō Gimō 東条義門 (1786–1843). Most famously, Norinaga in his *Jion kanazukai* 字音仮字用格 (1776) corrected the mistaken inversion of the sounds /o/ and /wo/ in the fifty-sounds chart. Arguing that there existed a single line of pure vowel sounds, consisting of *a-i-u-e-o*, he showed that /o/ and /wo/ originally had separate pronunciations. Based on rational theses, Norinaga's work infused the discussion of the three guttural lines with an estimation of their concrete sound values. Although Tonami no Imamichi 磯波今道 (1722–1805), Ōta Zensai, and Okumura Teruzane 奥村榮実 (1792–1843) each inherited Norinaga's rational and philological approach and solved questions raised by the fifty-sounds chart, they never established their own school.

The Kotodama 言霊 school, which claimed to be heir to Norinaga's scholarship, embraced his exclusionary posture, found most notably in his extreme text, *Kanji san'onkō* 漢字三音考 (1785). This school developed an abstract theory of sounds based on a xenophobic populism. The representative figure of this school was HIRATA Atsutane, whose *Koshi honjikyō* 古史本辭經 (1839) insisted on the absurdity of the idea that ancient words might have been borrowed from Hangu. In his hands the fifty-sounds chart came to be understood as a divine scripture transmitted from the time of Emperor Ōjin 応神.

Embracing this position, the *Gojūon shōsetsu* 五十音小説 (1842) by TACHIBANA Moribe 橘守部 (1781–1849) further developed an abstract hermeneutic whereby the “a” row was understood as the “lord,” the “ka” row the vassal, the “ya” and “wa” rows as their assistants. According to KUGINUKI (2007), the *Kaisei gojūonzu* 改正五十音図 (1822) adopted this sort of interpretative mode, overlaying each of the chart's rows with specific meanings. The fifty-sounds chart, which had transformed the study of *kana* usage providing a rational and systematic approach to the syllabary, was in the end converted into an object of mystical reverence, a divine scripture. Amid the social and political turmoil of the Bakumatsu period, the academic tradition of ancient Japanese phonetics died. Current Japanese phonetics finds its source in the linguistics that entered Japan since the Meiji period.<sup>24</sup>

24. For a history of the fifty-sounds chart, see KUGINUKI 2007, MABUCHI 1993, and YAMADA 1938.

### Conclusion

Following Kuginuki's argument that the fifty-sounds chart was critical in sparking a new interest in the study of the ancient Japanese sounds, this paper has examined Keichū's way of explaining his radical shift in framework. Aware that there was a discrepancy in the ancient use of *kana* and Teika's system, Keichū found that the tool traditionally used in Siddham studies, which allowed for sounds to be arranged according to consonant and vowel combinations, provided a means of clarifying those similar sounds that had created such problems in Teika's system. The vision of the interdependent origination of sounds, as a microcosm for the interdependent origins of all phenomena, which had a long history in Esoteric Buddhist literature, provided a starting promise for Keichū's work. He developed the long established logic of equivalence (seen in, for example, *honji-suijaku* thought) to a new degree, elevating the study of non-Buddhist texts like the *Man'yōshū* to a religious practice as perhaps the most effective way for Japanese to realize the Buddhist truth of emptiness.

For Keichū, the fifty-sounds chart formed a visible grid of sounds forming in relation to other sounds. It was the pinnacle of the visible representation of the Esoteric Buddhist teaching of the cosmic Buddha manifesting itself in language; at the same time, it provided a systematic and rational means for correcting the errors in the Teika system of *kanazukai*, which had relied on the *iroha* arrangement of the syllabary. And as Kuginuki has demonstrated, the orderliness of the arrangement galvanized a heated debate about the ancient Japanese language and contributed to the rising populism of the Edo period. Ironically, this chart, which was so critical in introducing a science of sounds in the early Edo period, was by the end of the period enveloped in mystery.

Despite the disjunction that previous scholars have seen between Keichū's work and his religious view of language, this article has shown that in fact Keichū drew from Esoteric Buddhism a positive evaluation of the potency of language to express the truth, which galvanized his scientific approach. This valuation of language was couched in conceptual frameworks that emphasized relational identity and was grounded in a vision of the world as arising via dependent origination. The metonymic relationship he envisioned between language and the world invested his study of the native texts with a sense of urgency. His application of a logic of equivalence elevated the study of Japanese to a religious practice.

MARUYAMA Masao's (1974) groundbreaking study of Edo-period intellectual history employed a Hegelian framework in which Kokugaku arose as the antithesis of Neo-Confucianism. Even as later scholars introduced new approaches to the discussions of Kokugaku scholars, this fundamental pairing of Neo-Confucianism and Kokugaku as thesis and antithesis has not been adequately questioned. Indeed, many scholars have reiterated this basic framework even

as they added significant nuance to each of their case studies (NOSCO 1990; HAROOTUNIAN 1988; NAJITA 1997).

This article has started from a different premise, looking at Keichū's introduction of the fifty-sounds chart as a critical move in shifting toward a more rational and evidential approach to study of the ancient literature and away from the secret transmissions of the medieval period when a Kyoto elite dominated literary production. It argued that Keichū's Esoteric Buddhist understanding of language and cognitive strategies born in Buddhism's long tenure in Japan provided the keys to his study of non-Buddhist texts.

Somewhat ironically, this argument is supported by those tropes that scholars have shown to be characteristic of Kokugaku as they differentiated it from Neo-Confucianism. HAROOTUNIAN (1988), for example, constructs a vision of Kokugaku as an alternative discourse to Neo-Confucianism. In his discussion, in contrast to Neo-Confucianism's apprehension of the world as a series of resemblances, Kokugaku advocated a primacy of difference, relational rather than substantial identity, the commensurability of the micro and macro, and plotting these along horizontal and vertical axes, all of which have been shown to be central tenets of Keichū's vision of Esoteric Buddhism.

As Maruyama's Hegelian framework loses its momentum, new areas of research are opened up. For example, this article has pointed to the importance of ritual in Keichū's work, but has not attempted to develop the concept fully. Further, viewing the interest in language and history as a more general concern of the period rather than characteristic of a specific nativist group, the article raises questions about the commonalities (and differences) in similar developments across the globe in the early modern period.

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