Introduction

In 1883, thirty years after Matthew Perry’s arrival signaled the start of a new era in Japan’s relations with the outside world, the journalist and Washington-based consular official Charles Lanman compiled a volume titled *Leading Men of Japan*. Interest in Japan was significant among American readers at the time, and Lanman’s book provided them with a basic outline of the country’s history along with biographies of several dozen men who had shaped its emergence as a modern nation. Starting with the emperor who had come to power in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Lanman profiled many of the era’s most distinguished statesmen, including four of the emissaries who had toured the United States in the early 1870s, Iwakura Tomomi (1825–83), Kido Takayoshi (1833–77), Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830–78), and Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), as well as diplomats who had been posted to the United States in the early Meiji period (1868–1912), such as Mori Arinori (1847–89); politicians who guided Japan’s development, such as Kuroda Kiyotaka (1840–1900); and military officials such as Enomoto Takeaki (1836–1908). Lanman’s list contained many eminent men from the private sector as well: successful entrepreneurs such as Shi-busawa Eiichi (1840–1931), leading educators and intellectuals such as Niijima Jō (1843–90) and Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), and pioneering journalists such as Fukuchi Gen’ichirō (1841–1906). If asked to identify Japan’s “leading men” of the mid-nineteenth century, most present-day historians of Japan and members of the Japanese general public alike would name several of these men as well as others on Lanman’s list. Yet at least one of Lanman’s choices might strike both groups as curious, for he extensively treats the career and accomplishments of the writer who is at the center of this book: Narushima Ryūhoku 成島柳北 (1837–84). In fact, only two of the more than fifty individuals Lanman chose have lengthier profiles.

The choice would not have surprised anyone in 1883, however, for at the time Lanman published *Leading Men of Japan*, Narushima Ryūhoku was one of the most prominent figures in Japan’s literary world. The successor to a scholarly family that had served as historians and tutors to the Tokugawa shogunate for generations, Ryūhoku attained
early distinction for his erudition and his skill as a poet. Apart from his official service, he was also an enthusiastic chronicler of contemporary society, turning his discerning eye toward realms of everyday urban life that scholars in his esteemed position typically deemed beneath their notice. Ryūhoku recorded his observations with ironic wit and stylistic flair, inspired by the works of his predecessors, while also experimenting with new forms. After losing his post with the demise of the shogunate, he traveled extensively both domestically and abroad. During these six years, he wrote several poetry-filled travel diaries about his experiences and eventually found an opportunity to transform his longstanding journalistic interests into an avocation. In 1874, Ryūhoku was invited to take charge of a daily newspaper that he quickly transformed into the most influential and successful intellectual paper of the period: one that his contemporaries and later historians alike consistently describe as setting the highest standards for literary quality in the early Meiji press. Ryūhoku was often a spirited critic of the Meiji government; his books were banned repeatedly, and he was even imprisoned for several months when an essay that he and another journalist had written was found to violate the government’s stringent press restrictions. Yet, until his untimely death in 1884 at the age of forty-eight, Ryūhoku remained an outspoken advocate for various reforms and an engaged commentator on Japanese society.

Following his detailed and largely accurate account of Ryūhoku’s early career, Lanman records the formal emergence of the writer as a newspaperman:

He was next called, after the Restoration, to an honorable position connected with the Senate, but declined the office; not long afterwards he became the editor of the Chōya Shimbun (Daily News) in Yedo, which acquired an extensive circulation; he also published a number of valuable books, and did much to promote the cause of literature. . . . Among his countrymen he is reputed to be a very eloquent writer, a man of uncommon sense and sagacity, a true patriot, and an able poet. As to his newspaper, it is to Japan what the London Times is to England—an institution of superior power. 2

Lanman was perceptive in highlighting Ryūhoku’s efforts “to promote the cause of literature,” for that was certainly a major focus of Ryūhoku’s attention. In 1873, just one year before he launched the Chōya shinbun, for example, Ryūhoku addressed the status of the literary arts in a preface he contributed to Tōkyō shashinkyō (Photographs of Tokyo), a new collection of verse that sought to document the whirlwind of changes in material culture, customs, and attitudes that had taken place in the first years of Meiji:

Poetry may be dismissed as nothing more than a minor art, and yet, among all the nations arrayed around the globe, there has never been one that lacks poetry. The nations of Europe and America that are said to be civilized . . . are all accustomed to respecting poetry. . . . Recently, various gentlemen from our country have devoted themselves to mastering Western studies; they have conducted research in the natural sciences, and they have scrutinized Western laws. They have overlooked no domain of study, except for one: poetry, which nine out of ten of them reject as something useless. I find this quite puzzling, for the poetry of our country is quite like the poetry of the West—even though we use different letters. 3
What is particularly noteworthy about this preface is the way in which Ryūhoku frames literature as a discipline unjustly neglected in Japan’s rush to modernize. When *Photographs of Tokyo* was published in the early 1870s, the fledgling Meiji government (led by several of those Lanman featured in his *Leading Men of Japan*) was busily sending hundreds of students and officials abroad to investigate Western industrial, educational, legal, and social institutions. On the basis of the detailed reports these visitors compiled, the Meiji state earnestly set about the business of consolidating central power, single-mindedly striving to catch up with the West and thereby allow Japan to take its place as a modern nation. When the author of *Photographs of Tokyo*, Kikuchi Sankei (1819–91), asked his friend Ryūhoku to compose a preface for it, the latter had just returned from his own world tour, and he pointedly situated the new poetry collection in this context, portraying it as an essential, complementary component of Japan’s nation-building enterprise. In this new era of international intercourse, Ryūhoku envisioned Japanese poets “standing alongside the poetic masters of the West,” and to that end he proposed translating the work “so that the poets of Europe and America would know that our country also has talented poets.”

Yet, in spite of the ringing endorsements of Ryūhoku and other prominent literary men, Kikuchi Sankei’s timely collection of poems on early Meiji Tokyo is virtually unknown today. The reason the work has faded from Japanese memory is not, however, difficult to discover, for it is composed in Literary Sinitic: the classical written language that developed in ancient China and subsequently spread throughout the Sinosphere. From our vantage point today, it might seem strange that this work billed by Ryūhoku as proof that “our nation of Japan” has high-caliber poets should be composed in anything but Japanese, yet such doubts would not have even occurred to him or to other literary figures of the time, when Sinitic poetic composition by Japanese individuals enjoyed unprecedented popularity. Residents of the Japanese archipelago had been composing poetry in Literary Sinitic for well over a millennium, but a tremendous expansion of the practice had taken place around the turn of the nineteenth century. This flowering of Sinitic literary production in Japan came about as the result of several factors. First, newly introduced poetic theories promoted the naturalization of Sinitic verse forms, turning Japanese poets’ attention to their local environment and encouraging individual expressiveness to a degree not seen before. At the same time, the Kansei Reforms of the 1790s put a new emphasis on the mastery of a standardized canon of Literary Sinitic texts. As educational opportunities expanded and as printed reference materials were more widely disseminated, acquisition of literacy and compositional proficiency in Literary Sinitic was brought within the reach of a broader population. These trends continued into Meiji, when poetic societies devoted to Sinitic verse sprung up in both rural and urban areas, the social backgrounds of Japanese poets working in Sinitic forms further diversified, a broader range of female poets came to participate, and new venues were established to showcase poetic production. The first decades of the Meiji period were in fact the historical zenith of Sinitic literary production in Japan: its final spectacular flourish before its even more precipitous decline. The new Meiji media landscape was crucial in enabling this explosion, for it stimulated aspiring poets by providing them ready access to models they could emulate while also fostering novel forms of poetic expression and interaction.
Ryūhoku was absolutely central to these developments. In addition to composing and publishing his own poetry, his newspaper provided the Meiji reading public with its first regular forum for Sinitic verse composition, instruction, and exchange. He would also go on to found one of Japan’s first literary journals, Kagetsu shinshi (New journal of blossoms and the moon), which devoted substantial attention to Sinitic prose and poetry, and was one of the favorite magazines read by literary figures of the next generation.

The Invention of Kanshibun and National Literature

Although Lanman notes that Ryūhoku was a “master of the Chinese and Japanese languages and history” in his biography, it is significant that in his account of Ryūhoku’s contributions to “the cause of literature,” with its references to his ability as a poet and the reputation he enjoys “among his countrymen” as an “eloquent writer,” Lanman does not mention that Ryūhoku established his reputation as a poet working in Sinitic verse forms, that the “valuable books” he published were also written principally in Literary Sinitic, and that Ryūhoku’s efforts on literature’s behalf were mainly undertaken through literature either in Literary Sinitic or in highly Sinified forms of Japanese. Though this omission may simply reflect ignorance on Lanman’s part, it also suggests that it had not occurred to the contemporary Japanese individuals who presumably served as his informants to highlight the linguistic form of Ryūhoku’s writings.

Indeed, Ryūhoku wrote before the creation of the very idea of a “national literature” in Japan. This is evident even in the specific term that he uses to discuss “poetry” in the above preface to Sankei’s Photographs of Tokyo: shifu 詩賦 (shi and fu), which refers to two genres of Sinitic poetry as a collective term for Sinitic poetry in general. In present-day Japanese usage, Literary Sinitic poems are called kanshi (lit., “poems of Han”), Literary Sinitic prose is called kanbun (lit., “prose of Han”), and both are referred to collectively as kanshibun. Whereas the Sinitic modes of Japanese literary expression that terms such as kanshibun designate are nearly as old as writing itself in Japan, the terms themselves are of recent vintage and would have been unfamiliar, perhaps even distasteful, to Ryūhoku and his contemporaries. In contrast to kanshi, the term shifu from the above passage includes no marker of foreignness; there is no sign that the poems constituting the category of shifu belong to any particular nation-state. Whereas the Japanese term shi now refers to poetry in general, during most of Japanese literary history, shi specifically designated Sinitic poetry (whether composed by Japanese, Chinese, or other individuals), and the word was long used in contrast to ka (or uta 歌, the term for Japanese-language poetry). Rarely is it the case that changes in nomenclature are merely superficial phenomena, for they often signal transformations of the ways in which even a stable referent is conceptualized. As Karatani Kōjin and others have pointed out, the prefix kan (Sinitic) can perhaps best be understood as the lingering trace of an epistemological shift in the third decade of the Meiji period through which Sinitic literature came to be reconceived in opposition to other “national literatures”: both those of the West and Japan’s own.
At this time, a decade or two after Ryūhoku wrote his preface for Sankei’s volume, new narratives of Japanese “national literary history” began to be constructed, and these systematically excluded kanshibun from the category of “national literature.” In the year 1890, something of a watershed in the production of the national literary canon, the first comprehensive histories of Japanese literature were published, and the Nihon bungaku zensho, a twenty-four-volume series of modern printed editions of classical primary texts, was launched. Though the standards by which works were selected for inclusion in these histories and anthologies varied slightly, one factor was consistent; as Michael Brownstein observes, “the primary criterion for imaginative literature was style, that is, the use of wabun 和文 or ‘pure’ Japanese as opposed to kanbun 漢文 (writing in Chinese) or the hybrids that emerged after the Heian period.” In the same year that the first volumes of Nihon bungaku zensho began to appear, Ochiai Naobumi (1861–1903), one of its three editors and a founding scholar of the emerging domain of “national literary studies,” published an essay heralding the present triumph of Japanese-language poetic forms over Sinitic and explaining it as the inevitable outcome of Japan’s rising sense of national identity: “Kanbun and kanshi have declined and kokubun and kokushi [prose and poetry in the national language] have greatly flourished. . . . Why have they gained such sway in this manner all at once? It is precisely because each and every member of the populace has felt their necessity. It is because they realize that ultimately kanshi and kanbun are incapable of expressing the thoughts of the nation’s people. The populace has realized the necessity of kokubun and kokushi.” This essay by Ochiai is but a single instance among many similar statements by pioneering kokubungaku scholars of the period, for whom this kind of “linguistic nationalism” constituted the new discipline’s ideological pillar. The idea that the kanshi and kanbun were incompatible with “the thoughts of the nation’s people” retroactively cast the long tradition of kanshibun by Japanese authors in a suspect light, tainting it as somehow inauthentic. Haruo Shirane explains the eventual outcome of this idea that the national language was the embodiment of the “national essence” (kokutai): “This notion of a national language, which was strengthened by the importation of Western phonocentric notions and the genbun-itchi (union of spoken and written languages) movement, was contrasted with kanbun, a written language associated with China, a country that was in decline and that would succumb to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War. The result was a dramatic pedagogical shift away from the Confucian classics and the devaluation of Japanese writing in kanbun, which had been the language of religion, government, and scholarship.”

While Japanese public schools continued to teach basic passive literacy in Literary Sinitic as a required subject, educational reformers in the mid-1890s began to argue against requiring students to attain competence in the composition of original kanshi and kanbun works. In the first years of the twentieth century, the Japanese Ministry of Education precipitated a lively debate when it considered eliminating kanbun instruction from Japanese middle schools altogether or incorporating it in attenuated form as part of the kokugo curriculum. Although public outcry prevented the more radical proposals from being implemented, the number of hours of instruction in kanbun was nevertheless reduced dramatically. Such shifts in the curriculum of the new national school system as well as institutional realignments in higher education steadily eroded the place of
*kanshibun*, producing new generations of readers that came to regard what had always been an integral component of Japanese literary activity as something antiquated, affected, and abstruse. The *kanshi* columns that had been so common in Meiji newspapers began to disappear by the Taishō era (1912–26), though a few magazines continued to feature *kanshi* regularly through the 1940s. At the same time, the technical training necessary to compose *kanshi* increasingly became something acquired only through an individual’s independent initiative. By the mid-twentieth century, *kanshibun* was unambiguously a part of the past but less and less a part of the Japanese past; according to one survey, whereas 41.1 percent of the selections in secondary school *kanbun* textbooks were by Japanese authors before World War II, compositions by Japanese authors declined to just 4.3 percent of the textbook passages in the postwar period.¹⁸

Although Lanman had selected Ryūhoku as a “leading man” of Meiji Japan in 1883, these subsequent transformations meant that it was a distinction he subsequently lost. Ryūhoku remained immensely popular among those who came of age in the late nineteenth century; Nagai Kafū (1879–1959), for example, recalled about Ryūhoku’s best-known work, “There probably wasn’t a student around in the Meiji period who was unfamiliar with Ryūhoku’s *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi.*”¹⁹ Yet a deemphasis on *kanbun* instruction made Ryūhoku’s Sinitic text increasingly inaccessible to later generations. In 1940, Odagiri Hideo observed that Ryūhoku and his *New Chronicles* “had already begun to be forgotten owing to their forbidding *kanbun* style.”²⁰ The editions of the text that have appeared since the Meiji period reflect the escalating levels of editorial intervention necessary to render the text available to contemporary readers.²¹

Outside Japan as well, Ryūhoku has been largely overlooked. Through the end of the twentieth century, one of the very few Western scholars of Japanese literature to devote any attention to him was Donald Keene, whose *Dawn to the West* briefly introduces his career in the context of a chapter on “writing in Chinese of the Meiji era.”²² The extent to which Keene’s scholarship in this domain of modern Japanese literature was pioneering is evident from William Sibley’s review of the work, which lauds Keene’s efforts to engage with “various forms of writing which, from the point of view of the ‘mainstream’ as charted by standard Japanese surveys, would be considered marginal, abortive, or terminal.” Sibley made a point of praising in particular Keene’s attention to “the wonderfully strange Meiji boomlet in ‘popular’ writings in Chinese” as well as to “epicurean hacks like Narushima Ryūhoku” who “were destined to become footnotes in standard surveys.”²³

As the introduction of neologisms like *kanshi* and *kanbun* in the 1890s shows, the status of Sinitic writings by Japanese authors was radically reevaluated under the influence of a “national literature” paradigm. Although obscurity ultimately awaited Ryūhoku and other Japanese of early Meiji who composed in such forms, they would not necessarily have predicted this fate, for the Sinitic expression to which they devoted themselves had long enjoyed an esteemed place at the very center of scholarly endeavor in Japan. The exclusion of *kanshibun* from the canons of national literary study, however, left its position decidedly ambiguous. Some of the scholars who had been part of the effort to establish the domain of classical literature later regretted this development. Haga Yaichi (1867–1927), for example, gave a series of lectures in the early twentieth century on “The
History of Japanese Kanbungaku,” arguing for a reaffirmation of its historical importance as part of Japan’s literary tradition:

The history of Japanese kanbungaku is the history of Chinese literature (Shina bungaku) written by Japanese. I would like to consider this as part of Japan’s literary history. Recently research into national literary history and Chinese literary history has been active, but I have not seen much investigation into the Chinese literature written by Japanese people. So I decided to give lectures on the history of this Chinese literature by Japanese writers. But first things first: should this body of kanshi and kanbun be viewed as Chinese literature? Or should it be viewed as Japan’s literature? . . . Nowadays, when one says “national literature,” it is held to mean exclusively works written in the national language. Of course, I am not saying that such a perception is mistaken, but when we conduct research into Japan’s literature in a broad sense, we must also examine kanshibun. After all, there is no one who includes these works of kanshibun within the category of Chinese literature. And that means that, in the end, these works of literature have no place to go. If we exclude them from the category of Japan’s literature, it will mean that research on the nation of Japan is incomplete.24

As the matter-of-fact declaration that opens this quotation indicates, Haga’s subsequent statement that “no one” includes kanshibun within the bounds of Chinese literature does not mean that he disqualified it on linguistic or technical grounds from membership in the category. In fact, around the turn of the century, many of the commentators who inveighed most vehemently against Japanese kanshibun did so precisely because they had no doubts whatsoever that it was part of Chinese literature. In the course of their survey of the 1897 literary scene, for example, the editors of Teikoku bungaku wrote: “Inasmuch as kanshi and kanbun alike are the literature of a foreign country (gaikoku bungaku), how can [Japanese authors’] imitation and cobbling together produce enduring masterpieces?”25 Rather than arguing that kanshibun somehow fell short as literature in Chinese, Haga sought to draw attention here to how the boundaries dictated by the concept of “national literature” essentially ensured its exclusion from scholarly consideration altogether. Although he was careful to reserve the term kokubungaku, or “national literature,” for works written in the Japanese language, Haga’s effort to include Japan’s kanshibun as part of Nihon bungaku, or “Japan’s literature,” marked an important intervention; still, the concern he expresses here that the tremendous body of Sinitic works by Japanese authors might slip through disciplinary cracks in the academy was prescient.

Haga’s anxiety that the “place” of these literary works was unfixed also describes the situation outside of Japan, where the scholarly community’s collective understanding of kanshibun has undergone several shifts. Perhaps the clearest way to appreciate this evolution is to consider the literal place that Japanese kanshibun occupies within the academy: the location of kanshibun works on its library shelves. Early on in its history of acquiring and cataloging Asian materials, the United States Library of Congress, which created and maintains the cataloging system used by almost all academic libraries in North America, treated Literary Sinitic works written by Japanese authors, published in Japan, and read mainly by a Japanese readership in the same way that it treated Literary Sinitic works by Chinese authors, or in Haga’s terms, as part of “Chinese literature.” And so, if one browsed the shelf space assigned to Qing dynasty (1644–1911) literary figures whose romanized
family names begin with “K,” for example, one would also come across interfiled works by and about Japanese authors who wrote in Literary Sinitic during that time period. Under this rubric, a book concerning the early modern Japanese *kanshi* poet Kan Chazan (1748–1827) might be found alongside books about Qing scholar and statesman Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and late Chosŏn period Korean calligrapher and statesman Kang Se-hwang (1713–91), for all three composed Sinitic works during China’s Qing dynasty.

Under this framework, the region in which the authors lived, the particular cultural milieu in which they produced and circulated their works, is irrelevant. What matters instead is the language in which they wrote. Clearly a certain degree of Sinocentrism underlies this schema, since Korean and Japanese authors were arranged not on the basis of the periodization of their own countries’ literary histories, but by the succession of Chinese dynasties. Yet this approach also has a certain undeniable logic to it. Many Japanese *kanshi* poets aspired to write Sinitic verse that was not linguistically or stylistically marked as the product of a Japanese hand. There are important exceptions, but, for most poets active from the Edo period into Meiji, the term *washū* (meaning something like “in the Japanese custom”) was the worst criticism to receive, for it meant that choices in diction or syntax betrayed the poet’s Japanese origins and training. Borrowing a term from contemporary cultural studies, one might say that these poets aspired to write “culturally odorless” poetry. In his work on the present-day globalization of Japanese consumer products and the marketing of television programs, manga, and anime in Asia, Koichi Iwabuchi has used the suggestive term “culturally odorless” to describe how Japanese marketers sometimes attempt to rid the nation’s exports of attributes that might overtly identify them as Japanese. Composers of Sinitic poetry in Japan in fact hit on the same olfactory metaphor a few centuries earlier, for those *kanshi* poets who were preoccupied with avoiding the stigma of *washū* often wrote the pejorative term with a phonetically identical, yet distinctly more pungent set of characters: *washū* and *washù*, or “Japanese odor.”

This integrationist approach to conceptualizing *kanshibun* was in tension with an additional organizational framework also employed at the Library of Congress. Under this second cataloging rubric, the library gave works composed in Literary Sinitic by non-Chinese authors their own separate category—albeit one at the very end of Chinese geographic space. This marginalizing model recognized the distinctiveness of the discursive sites in which Japanese *kanshibun* authors operated. Yet the frame was still Sinocentric in that the new peripheral category of Chinese literature from Japan was tacked on, along with categories for Chinese literature from Korea, Vietnam, and other peripheral points, as the outermost locus after Chinese literature collections specific to various domestic localities.

In the summer of 2000, however, the Library of Congress adopted a third paradigm, introducing new subject headings that explicitly incorporated *kanbungaku* and *kanshi* into the province of Japanese literature. The same changes were simultaneously applied to the Sinitic poetry and prose of Korean authors. Significantly, the library decided to write the subject headings in the vernacular terms used in the respective languages: *kanbungaku* and *kanshi* in Japan’s case, *hanmunhak* and *hansi* in Korea’s. Though deriving from the same Sinitic compounds (*hanwenxue* and *hanshi*), the use of the domesticated terms reinforces the idea that these Sinitic forms are an organic and inseparable
part of each country’s literary tradition. Now works by contemporaneous Japanese poets appear together regardless of whether the predominant language of their poetry is Japanese or Literary Sinitic. Returning to the example of Kan Chazan, books concerning this Edo period Sinologue that the library has acquired and cataloged since its 2000 decision are now arrayed among the works by and about his Japanese literary contemporaries such as Kamo no Suetaka (1754–1841), a Japanese-language nativist poet and scholar, and Kashiwagi Jotei (1763–1819), a leading Sinitic poet.28

These shifts in the library’s conceptualization of Literary Sinitic texts composed by non-Chinese show how vexed the category of \textit{kanshibun} has been, but they also attest to a revolution in thinking that has been going on outside of the library’s stacks. The 2000 shift in cataloging procedures at the Library of Congress reflects the fact that in recent years the very definition of Japanese literature has expanded to include \textit{kanshibun}. Whereas terms such as \textit{kanbun} and \textit{kanshi} had once been used to jettison Sinitic texts from the category of “national literature,” they are now being employed to reclaim the texts as an essential part of Japanese literary history. This reassignment of \textit{kanshibun} to the field of Japanese literature is the counterpart of ongoing efforts in academic circles to think beyond the conventional boundaries of “national literature”: a framework that is often founded on presumptions of monolingualism and an assumed correspondence between literary practice and a putatively transhistoric ethnic identity. Such a commitment to resist the projection of the modern nation-state of Japan back in time is shared by many working in the fields of literature and history today.29

Closely intertwined with this attempt to rescue literature from the nation has been a recent critical interest in the process of canon formation in Japan. Considering canon production diachronically provides another indication of a tectonic shift in thinking about the place of \textit{kanshibun} in Japanese letters. In the field of classical literature, the \textit{Nihon koten bungaku taikei}, a one-hundred-volume set of annotated primary texts published in the 1950s and 1960s by the prestigious Iwanami Shoten, went a long way toward defining the canon for a generation of postwar scholars. Yet, as the work of Tomi Suzuki, Haruo Shirane, Tomiko Yoda, and others has made unquestionably clear, it would be naïve to assume that the Japanese classical literary canon is pre-ordained: timeless in its stability and inevitable in its contents.30 By tracing in detail the process of canonization from the Meiji period onward, their work has historicized certain assumptions about what constitutes literature, showing how various contemporary ideas, often conceived through comparison with European literary traditions, have informed the criteria employed in selecting or eliminating works from the Japanese canon.

Not surprisingly, reconsideration of the canon has been an active focus of Japan-based academics as well.31 Beginning in the late 1980s, Japan’s preeminent literary scholars were recruited by Iwanami to produce a new version of the classical canon. Although there is some overlap, the contents of the new \textit{Taikei} differ strikingly from the version published a generation earlier. When the one hundredth and final volume at last appeared in 2005, one of the new series’ principal editors, Nakano Mitsutoshi, reflected on the project’s significance. Nakano described the old \textit{Taikei} as “the classics as viewed from a modern perspective” and characterized the new \textit{Taikei}, by contrast, as “the classics as viewed from the critique of modernity.” Offering a specific example, Nakano noted that, whereas “Edo
literature” once called to mind popular writers such as Saikaku, Chikamatsu, and Bakin, “ideas have changed, and people now think that Edo studies should be pursued on the basis of Edo’s own standards.” As a result of this change, the number of works in kanshibun included in the new Iwanami Taikei has increased dramatically.32 A similar effort has begun to reshape versions of the modern canon as well. Several volumes of the new series Iwanami launched in 2001, a Meiji counterpart to the classical Taikei, feature generously annotated editions of works by modern Japanese authors who worked in Sinitic forms.

The traditional neglect of Japanese kanshibun has, until very recently, characterized Western studies of Japanese literature as well, as Sibley’s review of Keene’s Dawn to the West suggests. In an important article from 1998, Timothy Wixted issued a clear call for greater academic attention to this body of literature: “In terms of its size, often its quality, and certainly its importance both at the time it was written and cumulatively in the cultural tradition, kanbun is arguably the biggest and most important area of Japanese literary study that has been ignored in recent times, and the one least properly represented as part of the canon.”33 In addition to Wixted’s articles on Mori Ōgai, recent years have seen the emergence of new work in English on modern kanshibun.34 The first book-length study was published in 2000, when Stephen Addiss and Jonathan Chaves coauthored an engaging and informative monograph called Old Taoist, focused on the life and works of Fukuda Kodōjin (1865–1944). Born in the last years of the Edo period, Kodōjin was a gifted painter who was also accomplished in both haiku and kanshi. The first extensive treatment of a modern kanshi practitioner, Old Taoist is without question a groundbreaking work. In spite of its excellence, however, the absence of much work on other individuals may leave readers with a somewhat skewed view of kanshi poets in the Meiji period. Kodōjin’s self-styled literary name means “man of the old Way,” and, if one takes him to be representative, then it might seem that kanshi poets are best understood as quaint antiquarians, willfully out of step with the world in their devotion to the practice and perfection of an anachronistic lost art.35 Yet it is important to bear in mind that there were also many kanshi poets active in Meiji who saw themselves as being on the very cutting edge of contemporary culture and literary expression. As Iritani Sensuke has pointed out, “at least until 1887, kanshi seemed like the type of poetry that would be most flexible in responding to the new age,” a status he attributes to its much wider variety of forms and its larger vocabulary in comparison to other types.36 Even in 1896, the young critic and poet Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902) straightforwardly observed: “Comparing the development of waka, haiku, and kanshi in the literary world today, kanshi are most advanced, haiku second, and waka third.”37 In his study of Edo and Meiji kanshi, Sugishita Motoaki has also emphasized the adaptability of kanshi to engagement with new sociocultural phenomena, specifically dialogue with Western literature and material culture; he argues that it was in nineteenth-century Japanese kanshi that the sensibility constituting the dividing line between the classical and modern worlds made its first appearance in Japanese literature.38

To view kanshibun as antiquated or “obsolete” in Meiji is thus to retrospectively read the practice through foreknowledge of its eventual decline. Donald Keene’s acute observations on Meiji kanshibun are an important reminder of just how commonplace composition in Literary Sinitic was in Japan during the final quarter of the nineteenth century:
For men of this time, “serious literature” meant neither fiction nor poetry in Japanese, but
the composition of poetry and prose in classical Chinese. Intellectuals who had received the
traditional samurai’s education in the Chinese classics not only esteemed the Confucian
modes of thought and expression but looked down on any form of writing in Japanese as
being unworthy of a gentleman’s consideration. Such men, even those who by temperament
seemed least likely to be moved to compose poetry, felt obliged to display their mastery of
Chinese metrics and allusions. Statesmen and generals took pride on being able to compose
grammatically accurate and nobly allusive kanshi, as poetry in Chinese was called. No sense
of foreignness was felt when writing classical Chinese. In the minds of the educated class of
the time, it was no more associated with China than, say, Latin was associated with Italy by
the Englishmen who composed Latin verses in the nineteenth century.39

Keene’s comments share Nakano Mitsutoshi’s concern to discover and be sensitive to the
literary standards and expectations of the contemporary context. His comparison of Japa-
nese kanshibun to Latin composition in Victorian England is also instructive, but it is an
analogy that must be drawn carefully.40 Perhaps the most important difference between
Latin and Literary Sinitic is that the latter is fundamentally a written language; as Victor
Mair observes, “Latin was both sayable and writable” in medieval Europe, a sharp contrast
to Literary Sinitic, which served as a means for the educated to write but not for them to
speak.41 While Literary Sinitic functioned as an essentially written form of discourse even
within the Chinese context, this inherent feature was if anything more pronounced
beyond China’s borders; only a tiny handful of the Japanese individuals in the Edo and
Meiji period who devoted themselves to composing poetry in Literary Sinitic had any
comprehension of spoken Chinese. As Shirane’s above-cited comments confirm, the move
away from the written language of kanbun was a move toward phonocentrism.

But there are, to be sure, significant similarities. Mirroring the prevalence of Sinitic
composition as a component of instruction in many private and public educational insti-
tutions in nineteenth-century Japan, classical verse composition was a fixture of instruc-
tion in many English public schools of the same period: contests were held, anthologies
were compiled and circulated, and classical texts were often cited in a variety of public
settings. As for what to make of this proliferation of classical versification, one historian
has memorably suggested that “this great nineteenth-century English tradition . . . is
‘what people did before the crossword puzzle was invented.’ ”42 And here too the case of
kanshi is not without a parallel, for poems composed under a variety of truly elaborate
and arbitrary constraints were popular. Drawing on Bourdieu, Christopher Stray has
pointed out how proficiency in Greek and Latin composition also conferred distinction
upon English aristocrats, providing them with a resource to assert their own status and
deny such privilege to others. Likewise, kanshibun composition was largely, though by
no means exclusively, a male enterprise, and the training in the Chinese classics neces-
sary to write it was, at least until the early nineteenth century, in many ways the preserve
of a rarified socioeconomic stratum. It is thus possible to regard Sinitic poems composed
by Japanese men as fulfilling a similar social role.

One of the aims of this book, however, is to show that kanshibun composition was far
more than mere patrician pedantry. For Ryūhoku and many others of his time, compos-
ing Sinitic poetry was a vital means of self-expression. Beyond simple lexical diversion
or intellectual challenge, it provided them with opportunities for literary artistry, intensive self-scrutiny, rich forms of social interaction, engagement in political critiques to which other poetic forms were unsuited, and a host of other purposes. Although the composition of Sinitic verse was part of traditional education for men of Ryūhoku’s generation, many of them did not compose simply out of scholarly obligation. Rather, they pursued it with sincere zeal in part because the act of writing Sinitic poetry enabled them to articulate themselves in reference to the shared cultural heritage that was the foundation of their education. Exchanging Sinitic poems with their peers offered opportunities for dialogue, but even in their own compositions they took part in multifarious forms of interaction with figures from the literary past (and present). The act of writing Sinitic poetry was a means by which they could insinuate themselves into a common textual tradition: a tradition that in many ways structured their worlds.

Plucking Chrysanthemums

In the passage quoted above, Keene calls attention to the use of allusion in Sinitic poems composed by Japanese of the time. Allusion was indeed one important feature of classical verse composition, and the technique’s centrality in part explains the decline of compositional practice when the content of education no longer focused on the mastery of the Literary Sinitic canon. Yet it is important to note that the deployment of such references was not unidimensional, but offered instead opportunities for complex forms of engagement. Consider the following poem that Ryūhoku composed in 1871, a few years after having lost his position in the shogunate:

秋懷十首録六 [2]  
北窓高枕誦陶詩  
大馬長槍彼一時  
病客身邊秋到早  
醒人宅裏月來遲  
少年感慨老應悔  
浮世交情窮始知  
忘却從前榮辱事  
琴書消日不圍棋

Autumn feelings; ten poems, six recorded [2]

By the north window I prop my pillow and chant Tao’s poems;

My great steed and long spear part of times now past.

To the sick man’s body, autumn comes quickly;

In the sober man’s house, the moon approaches slowly.

The sentiments of a young man turn to regret when he gets old;

True feelings in this floating world are first known in times of crisis.

I forget the triumphs and humiliations of the past;

Spending my days with zither and books, waging no battles of go.

In the first couplet, Ryūhoku refers by name to Tao Yuanming (365–427), one of his favorite Chinese poets and a figure to whom he turned repeatedly over the course of his career. By composing this poem, Ryūhoku was joining a rich East Asian tradition in which literary figures through the centuries have declared an affinity with some aspect of the Six Dynasties (220–589) poet, who is without question the best-known Chinese
literary figure of the pre-Tang period. Today Tao Yuanming is thought of primarily as a poet of reclusion, as one who transcended worldly concerns, eschewing public service in the pursuit of an untrammeled life. This was a status he had already attained in the early sixth century, when Zhong Rong wrote in his Shipin (Poetry gradings) that Tao Yuanming was “the lineage-founder of all the eremitic poets from antiquity to the present.” At the same time, he is also remembered as a man who was fond of drink, as a celebrant of simple agrarian pleasures, and as a founding figure of the genre of pastoral poetry.

Several of these associations are brought together in visual representations of Tao Yuanming such as the one in figure 0.1, from the thirteenth century. In depicting the poet grasping a chrysanthemum and gazing off into the distance, the painting references perhaps the best-known poem in Tao’s series “Twenty Poems on Drinking Wine”:

| 結廬在人境 | I built my hut beside a traveled road |
| 而無車馬喧 | Yet hear no noise of passing carts and horses |
| 問君何能爾 | You would like to know how it is done? |
| 心遠地自偏 | With the mind detached, one’s place becomes remote. |
| 采菊東籬下 | Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge |
| 悠然見南山 | I catch sight of the distant south hills: |
| 山氣日夕佳 | The mountain air is lovely as the sun sets |
| 飛鳥相與還 | And flocks of flying birds return together. |
| 此中有真意 | In these things is a fundamental truth |
| 欲辨已忘言 | I would like to tell, but lack the words. |

The chrysanthemum that Tao Yuanming picked from his eastern fence became one of the iconic references both to his person and to his mode of being. In articles tracing the depiction of Tao Yuanming in Chinese art over the centuries, Susan Nelson notes how later painters employed the chrysanthemum as a prop to suggest “Tao-like qualities in a patron or sitter,” an indexical usage she demonstrates with a portrait of the Qing literatus Yuan Mei (1716–98) clutching the flower.

If visual artists plucked the chrysanthemum from Tao Yuanming’s poem to indicate their subjects’ affinity with the poet, it was also common for literary figures to engage in a more lexical form of plucking: endowing the spaces they occupied with such Tao-like qualities by naming them with words appropriated from his poems. The Qing poet and statesman Huang Zunxian (1848–1905), for example, named the study that he built in 1874 Renjinglu 人境廬 (Hut in the Human Realm), taking three characters from the above poem’s first line. But such borrowing was not a practice confined to China. Tokugawa period painter Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800) took the first two characters of the poem’s fourth line when he named his residence in Kyoto the Shin’enkan 心遠館 (Hall of the Detached Mind). Around the time he wrote the above poem, Ryūhoku had established a new residence for himself and seized the opportunity to name it the Shōkikusō 松菊莊, or “Pine and Chrysanthemum Cottage.” As a prose account Ryūhoku wrote at the time explicitly noted, he took the name from a Tao Yuanming text and implicitly drew a connection between his own circumstances and those of Tao Yuanming: a “vassal of a deposed regime.” Just as Ryūhoku lost his post in the collapse of the Tokugawa and refused to serve the Meiji government that had toppled it, so too did Tao Yuanming enter reclusion.
Fig. 0.1 Liang Kai 梁楷 (act. early 13th c.), Dongli gaoshi tu 東籬高士圖 (Scholar of the eastern fence). Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.
not long before the collapse of the Jin dynasty (265–420), a decision that has sometimes been attributed to his sense of loyalty to it and his refusal to serve its successors.

Over the course of his life, Ryūhoku would allude to Tao Yuanming in many other ways, but this particular figuration of Tao is the one that dominates the poem quoted above. The references to “crisis” in line 6 and to “triumphs and humiliations” in line 7 imply such a reading, but the martial equipage that the poet consigns to the past in line 3 as well as the battles of go that he no longer wages in line 8 strongly suggest the sort of military conflict that would give rise to dynastic change. In addition to the reference to reading Tao’s poems in line 1, the identification between Ryūhoku and Tao is further evident in the second line’s “northern window,” which alludes to a Tao Yuanming couplet from his time in reclusion:

新葵鬱北牖
嘉穟養南疇

The new hibiscus blooms by the north window
Excellent grain grows in the southern field.48

The speaker of Ryūhoku’s poem thus constructs himself as reading Tao’s poems while at the same time embodying Tao’s position in retirement. In the word “autumn” from the third line of Ryūhoku’s poem lies an implication that the autumn of the poet’s life has arrived, but it also matches the season of the same Tao poem, which contains a line noting that “already autumn has come.”49 Likewise, the “zither and books” in Ryūhoku’s eighth line are two iconic items associated with reclusion and with Tao Yuanming specifically, as I discuss in chapter 2.

Ryūhoku’s engagement with Tao in this poem is a form of self-fashioning. That he and others, both Japanese and Chinese, would name their residences with allusions to Tao Yuanming demonstrates the latter’s looming presence in East Asian letters and shows also just how widespread the notion was that an appreciation of Tao Yuanming’s poetry says something about a person’s character. Take, for example, the late-eighteenth-century Seiki yohitsu (Superfluous jottings at the Hall of Tranquil Lodging), a treatise on composing Sinitic poetry by the Japanese Neo-Confucian scholar Bitō Jishū (1745–1813). After noting Zhu Xi’s fondness for Tao Yuanming, Jishū declares in blunt terms: “Anyone who does not love Jingjie’s [i.e., Tao Yuanming’s] poetry is invariably a person of vulgar taste.”50

Though innumerable Chinese and Japanese poets have sought to affiliate themselves in one way or another with the figure of Tao Yuanming, the question of what each individual reader saw in his poetry is a different matter. Several recent works by scholars of Chinese literature have approached this issue from a variety of distinct yet complementary perspectives. In her 2005 study of his writings, Xiaofei Tian has illuminated the process by which a certain image of Tao Yuanming came to be constructed. By focusing on manuscript culture and the wide array of textual variants that it produced, Tian shows how these alternative readings, when taken seriously, might conjure entirely different visions of this canonical cultural figure.51 Her careful deconstruction of the subtle feedback loops inherent in the collating and editing process not only recovers possibilities lurking beneath the printed text, but also allows us to see the process by which certain variants are selected or neglected in accord with readerly assumptions and dispositions. Just a few years after Tian’s book, Wendy Swartz produced a detailed study of the reception of Tao Yuanming
over the broad span of Chinese literary history. Sharing Tian’s aim of unpacking the construction of the poet’s image, Swartz observes that Tao Yuanming’s “‘personality’ embodied different virtues and ideals in different periods,” and she argues that Tao Yuanming was a “precious mirror reflecting those who read him and about him.” Most recently, Robert Ashmore looks at the question of Tao Yuanming’s reclusion in the context of the philosophical assumptions of the early medieval period. Devoting particularly close attention to scenes of reading in Tao Yuanming’s own poems, Ashmore’s work shows how these moments mirrored later readers’ engagements with Tao Yuanming’s writings, shedding new light on the question of the special kinship subsequent readers have felt for him.

One point on which all three of these books concur is their recognition of something protean in the figure of Tao Yuanming: a quality that has enabled readers over the centuries to engage with his poetry in strikingly diverse ways. Nineteenth-century Japanese readers such as Ryūhoku approached Tao’s poetry not only at a temporal but also at a cultural and geographical remove, yet they engaged with it in a similarly robust and enthusiastic manner. The collections of Japanese poets from the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods reveal numerous works explicitly framed as inspired by specific Tao Yuanming poems. They emphasize various aspects of his persona, such as his fondness for drink, the pleasure he took in the comforts of his zither, the loyalty he is said to have shown toward the dynasty he served, or the transcendence of the political that he showed in his decision to withdraw from public office. Kondō Tokuzan (1766–1846), a Japanese kanshi poet from Iyo (in Shikoku), engaged with Tao Yuanming to such an extent that the authors of a recent book introducing Tokuzan’s poetry position him as nothing less than “the Tao Yuanming of Iyo.” Yet what they mean by doing so is that Tokuzan found contentment in the pastoral scenery of his rural Shikoku life. That Tao Yuanming remained a vital touchstone even for literary figures of later generations is evident in the many poems, both Sinitic and Japanese, that Masaoka Shiki wrote alluding explicitly to Tao Yuanming, such as the following tanka:

Enmei no shi o yomi yamite
kiku no ne ni hitori tsuchikau
hi wa yūbe nari

Now finished reading the poems of Tao Yuanming,
Upon the chrysanthemum root that I have planted alone,
is the evening sun.

Shiki’s poem enacts one reader’s literal transplantation of Tao’s chrysanthemum from the textual world of the latter’s poetry into both his own lived environment and his own poetic realm. Or consider the use to which Shiki’s close friend Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) puts Tao Yuanming’s chrysanthemum in the 1906 novel Kusamakura (The Three-Cornered World):

Happily, oriental poets have on occasion gained sufficient insight to enable them to enter the realm of pure poetry.

Beneath the Eastern hedge I choose a chrysanthemum,
And my gaze wanders slowly to the Southern hills.
Only two lines, but reading them, one is sharply aware of how completely the poet has succeeded in breaking free from this stifling world. There is no girl next door peeping over the fence; nor is there a dear friend living far away across the hills. He is above such things. Having allowed all consideration of advantage and disadvantage, profit and loss to drain from him, he has attained a pure state of mind.

The early twentieth-century writer and artist who is the narrator of Sōseki’s novel sees in Tao’s couplet about “picking a chrysanthemum” an embodiment of his own spiritual ideal of worldly transcendence. Yet his explanation of the couplet shows that he envisions a pointedly solitary variety of such transcendence: one that echoes Shiki’s usage but departs from the sociability depicted in Tao’s other reclusive poems and even from the implications of this poem’s first line, which locates Tao’s hut in a peopled setting.

All of these East Asian literary figures engaged with Tao Yuanming, each of them “plucking a chrysanthemum” to declare some sort of affinity or bond with the Six Dynasties poet. Yet their allusions were anything but univocal; far from a simple one-to-one correspondence, the particular associations that these individuals implied by their gestures varied. Moreover, even in the case of a single poet, the invocations made of Tao Yuanming were diverse. As will become clear in the course of this book, by emphasizing discrete aspects of the Tao Yuanming tradition on different occasions, Ryūhoku could make the recluse poet’s persona function by turns as the epitome of indifference to public affairs or as an emblem for intensely felt political loyalty, as a symbol of resigned retirement but also as an exponent of aggressive intervention. Although Ryūhoku’s invocations of Tao Yuanming were especially multifarious, he found such possibilities in other literary figures from the Literary Sinitic tradition as well, drawing in various ways on Xie An, Du Mu, Du Fu, Li Bo, Bo Juyi, and many more. The striking transformations in Ryūhoku’s use of Tao Yuanming and these other figures over time demonstrate how the Sinitic literary tradition constituted a referential repository to be shaped, shifted, and variously spun to meet the poet’s emerging circumstances and expressive aims.

**Formal Features of Kanshi**

Taking part in this shared tradition through the composition of Sinitic poetry required not only the ability to make use of such allusions, but also to compose texts that conformed to rules of Chinese grammar and prosody. Sometimes kanshi are casually described as “poems written only in Chinese characters,” and, although this description is not exactly inaccurate, it is also profoundly insufficient. The exclusive employment of Chinese script cannot be the only criterion to use in identifying kanshi, for poems meeting this definition would include all of the Japanese-language works contained in the Man’yōshū, a collection that was compiled before the advent of kana. Such a script-based formulation is distorted and misleading because it overlooks the principal characteristics of kanshi: that they are composed in the written language of Literary Sinitic, that
they observe the formal features of classical Chinese poetry, and that they have an extremely high degree of regional intelligibility. There has been much innovative scholarship in recent years that has attempted to problematize the so-called wakan binary, showing the ways in which the boundaries between Japanese wa and Chinese kan are more permeable than has previously been supposed. Attention to the interpenetration of wa and kan in the content and themes of Japanese literary works is essential and productive, but our understanding will be severely compromised if, in our zeal to deconstruct the wakan dyad, we underestimate or trivialize Japanese kanshi poets’ efforts to write in recognizable Sinitic forms.58

In other words, we must not lose sight of the indisputable fact that a defining principle of kanshi production in Japan (and elsewhere in the Sinosphere) was adherence to the conventions of Sinitic poetry, which can be classified by several formal criteria. One basic distinction is between the often shorter “poems in the modern form,” or jintishi 近體詩 (J. kintaishi), that obey certain rules of rhyme and tonal prosody crystallized early in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the usually longer “old poems,” or gushi 古詩 (J. koshi).59 The former category is further divided into three main types based on the number of lines: quatrains known as “broken verse,” or jueju 絕句 (J. zekku); “regulated verse” octaves, or lüshi 律詩 (J. risshi); and variants of the latter type with ten lines or more, called pailü 排律 (J. hairitsu).60 Each of these types is in turn subdivided based on the number of graphs in each line. Like his contemporaries, Ryūhoku mainly wrote penta and heptasyllabic poems, but composed a few hexasyllabic works too.

Ryūhoku’s poem on reading Tao Yuanming in autumn is a heptasyllabic octave (a poem of eight seven-graph lines, each of which usually has a slight semantic break between its fourth and fifth graphs), and the rules of this form require that the poet observe syntactic parallelism in the middle two couplets. To take the first of these as an example, the structure of the sequence of seven graphs in both line 3 and line 4 can be analyzed as follows: adjective, noun (referring to a person), noun (referring to a place), locative, noun (relating to the natural world and the passage of time), verb (of motion), adjective (referring to speed).

3 病 客 身 邊 秋 到 早
Sick man body side area autumn arrive soon
4 醒 人 宅 裏 月 來 遲
Sober person house inside moon come late

The rules of regulated verse also require that the poet rhyme the poem’s even lines as well as its first line. In Ryūhoku’s poem, the rhyming characters are thus the terminal graphs of these five lines, 詩 (Ch. shi; J. shi), 時 (shi; ji), 運 (chi; chi), 知 (zhi; chi), and 棋 (qi; ki), all of which are part of the rhyme group 韻目 (Ch. yunmu; J. innoku) known as 支 (zhi; shi). These rhyme groups were codified on the basis of their pronunciation in Middle Chinese, and the rhyme categories devised in the Tang (somewhat simplified in the Song) became the basis of composition throughout the Sinosphere. Linguistic change over the centuries means that the rhyme may be difficult to discern when the poem is read out in modern Mandarin, but often the rhyme survives in the Sinoxenic pronunciations of the
graphs that are used in present-day Japan. Rhyme is a feature that is fundamental to the composition of Sinitic poetry, and this most basic feature of Chinese prosody is observed by essentially all composers of *kanshi*.

In addition to end-rhyme, another important consideration in the composition of Sinitic verse forms relates to the patterned distribution of level and oblique tones 平仄 (Ch. *pingze*; J. *hyōsoku*) within each line and also between adjacent lines in a poem. The guidelines that shape this tonal aspect of *jintishi* were likewise established during the Tang era, and they ensured that a poem, when recited aloud, has euphonic variation in pitch. Whereas end-rhyme is readily apparent even to a casual observer familiar with modern Japanese who simply considers the Sinoxenic pronunciations (*on’yomi*) of the terminal graphs, there is little that marks the distinction between level and oblique tones in modern Japanese linguistic experience. However, Japanese composers of Sinitic poems nevertheless tended to observe these rules when writing *jintishi*, recalling the tonal and rhyme categories they had memorized at early stages of their training or relying on rhyme manuals and other reference materials. Such guides were readily available from commercial publishers from the early modern period onward. The degree to which the various rules of level and oblique tone distribution were obeyed varied considerably over time and between individual poets, but the most fundamental principles were widely upheld. To take the above poem as an example, the two cardinal rules of tonal distribution in heptasyllabic regulated verse dictate that the second and fourth characters of any line must be of a different tone and that the second and sixth characters of any line must be of the same tone. A further rule holds that the two lines of a couplet have opposite tones in these second, fourth, and sixth positions. Moreover, between two couplets, the second line of the first couplet and the first line of the second couplet should have opposite tonal values in these positions. In the case of an octave, an additional rule holds that, between the fourth and fifth lines, the same tonal values should be used in these positions. There are also prosodic faults to be avoided, such as ending any line with three graphs of the same tone or having an isolated level tone (a level tone in between two oblique tones) at the fourth position in any line. These core rules are sufficient to determine the basic tonal structure of a poem. For example, if the second character of the first line is to be level, then the tones of about two-thirds of the other characters in the poem are determined as indicated in the following diagram, where ○ represents a level tone, ● represents an oblique tone, ◎ represents a rhyming character, and ◇ represents a position in which either a level or an oblique tone is permitted:

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7
◇○○○●●○◎
◇●●○○○○◎
◇●●○○○○◎
◇○○○●●○◎
◇●●○○○○◎
◇●●○○○○◎
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
●○○○○○○○
●○○○○○○○
●○○○○○○○
●○○○○○○○
●○○○○○○○
●○○○○○○○
5
○●○○●●○●
○●○○●●○●
○●○○●●○●
○●○○●●○●
○●○○●●○●
○●○○●●○●
```
The left side of the diagram indicates the general tonal pattern required for heptasyllabic octaves in which the second character of the first line is a level tone; the right side shows the tones of the characters appearing in Ryūhoku’s poem quoted above. As can be seen by comparing the tonal markers, Ryūhoku’s poem accords with all of the requirements outlined above.

**Kanshibun: What to Call It?**

The last decade has seen a great expansion of scholarly interest in this domain of Japanese literary expression. Inasmuch as such Sinitic forms have been solidly reincorporated into the boundaries of Japanese literature, perhaps the day is not far off when terms such as zekku and risshi will be as familiar to students of Japanese literature as words such as tanka, chōka, haiku, and senryū are. Yet, although there is broad commitment among a diverse range of Anglophone scholars to the notion that kanshibun merits serious academic attention, there is still a lack of consensus about one fundamental question: what is kanshibun and what should we call it? Various proposals have been made. Many of the earliest scholars to discuss and translate kanshibun in English, such as Burton Watson, Donald Keene, Judith Rabinovitch, and Timothy Bradstock, refer to kanshi as “Chinese poetry.”

Another prominent scholar of kanshibun, Timothy Wixted, has argued for using the term “Sino-Japanese” to refer to kanshibun by Japanese and for reserving the term “Chinese” to refer to Sinitic works by Chinese individuals. Still other scholars have used the term “Chinese-style poetry” for kanshi by Japanese authors while retaining “Chinese poetry” for works by Chinese.

In this book, I use “Sinitic poetry” to translate the word kanshi because I believe it provides us with the clearest understanding of what kanshi most fundamentally are and also comes closest to reflecting how the overwhelming majority of Japanese who composed such poems through the centuries understood the enterprise: namely, as a shared practice among the educated throughout the Sinosphere. The Japanese term kanshi has never referred to the works of a particular nationality or ethnicity, but has always indicated verses of a particular linguistic form regardless of who composed them. This simple fact is no inconsequential triviality. As noted above, the term kanshi first became widespread in the late nineteenth century, but the term used before it, shi, also made no distinction between Sinitic verses composed by Japanese and those composed by Chinese. We should also bear in mind that the way the terms kanshi and shi are used contrastively today by some Anglophone scholars to distinguish Japanese compositions (kanshi) from Chinese compositions (shi) in fact departs from the way that these terms have been and continue to be used in Japanese, where both terms denote poetic compositions in Literary Sinitic irrespective of the poet’s nationality. In other words, whether they are called kanshi or shi, Japanese poetic compositions in Literary Sinitic have always been (and are still today) unmistakably identified by Japanese poets and scholars alike as occupying the same category as other works composed in this written language, whether they are produced by Chinese, Koreans, or others. By the same token, when Chinese began to
read, anthologize, and comment on Japanese Sinitic verse in the early Meiji period, they universally referred to the works as *shi*, without seeing any need at all to invent a separate term and thereby distinguish the Japanese works from *shi* composed by Chinese.

Rather than manufacture a distinction in English where none exists in either Japanese or Chinese, I have elected to follow the longstanding practice by which Japanese and Chinese authors and scholars of what I term Sinitic poetry have used the same term to refer to both poetic works by Japanese and those by Chinese authors. Yet it is worth considering why some researchers have proposed alternative translations of the term. There are at least three reasons that can be given in support of Wixted’s recommendation to use “Sino-Japanese” for compositions by Japanese and to reserve “Chinese” for compositions by ethnic Chinese. First, to call *kanshi* “Chinese poetry” may risk placing it outside the bounds of Japanese literature, and it may also impute a certain experiential foreignness to the act of composition that a great many Japanese practitioners clearly did not feel. By using the adjective “Sino-Japanese” for works by Japanese poets rather than “Chinese,” the argument goes, the integral place of *kanshi* in the discipline of Japanese literary study can be affirmed. Wixted’s pioneering work has directed our attention to the tremendous yet often overlooked significance of *kanshibun* in Japanese literary history. Yet I would contend that we can fully embrace his crucial larger point that *kanshibun* by Japanese individuals is written in something other than Literary Sinitic.

A second reason advanced by some supporters of the term “Sino-Japanese” is that it recognizes the distinctive ways in which Sinitic literature took shape in Japanese literary history. Calling for scholars to acknowledge “the independence of Japanese *kanshibun* from Chinese literature,” Wiebke Denecke has presented an eloquent argument against what she sees as a scholarly tendency to read Japanese *kanshibun* solely in light of Chinese standards or to measure its progress merely by its degree of conformity to analogous Chinese literary developments. When such “evolutionist paradigms of literary history” are employed, Denecke warns, “Chinese-language literature in Korea, Vietnam, and Japan is seen as eclectic and ‘imitative’”: she seeks to counter this view by emphasizing the active role that Japanese poets played in negotiating with and appropriating from Chinese canonical texts. As other scholars have pointed out, the types of poetry that became widespread occasionally varied between Japan and China, and the particular poets that proved influential were sometimes different as well. When applied to a particular time period, Denecke’s recommendation to take into account the specific circumstances under which Sinitic poetry grew in Japan is thus eminently sensible. Yet, when we look at the full span of *kanshibun* in Japan, it is undeniable that Japanese poets were perpetually stimulated by the influx of new styles of poetry and new theories of literature imported from the continent—a factor Ivo Smits adduces as a major reason for the discontinuous history of Japanese *kanshibun* and the absence of a “consciously indigenous tradition.”

Denecke’s declaration of independence separating Japanese *kanshibun* from Chinese literary history can certainly help to shed important light on synchronic discontinuities between Japanese and Chinese *kanshibun*, yet denying the role that Chinese literature played (in Smits’s phrase) as “a continuous frame of reference” for Japanese poets risks obscuring the diachronic discontinuities that exist within Japanese *kanshibun*. Moreover,
as her detailed elucidation of the ways in which Nara and Heian period poets used “passages from Chinese classics as libretti to choreograph court spectacles through their kanshi poetry” or how they “were creative in appropriating Chinese culture performatively by reenacting significant gestures in particular from Chinese classical texts, and representing this reenactment in their compositions” shows, Denecke would surely agree that Chinese literature functioned as the dominant frame of reference for these Japanese poets, even though their “reenactments” may have deviated in their particularities from Chinese practice or precedent.70 If the Japanese poets in question had, as Denecke argues, made a point of eliding Japanese references and achieving “the complete naturalization of Chinese temporal narratives,” then this seems to me all the more reason to use the term “Sinitic,” not “Sino-Japanese,” to refer to the poetry they wrote in Literary Sinitic. As Denecke and others have convincingly argued, it is essential to examine the local context in which Sinitic poetry took shape in Japan and to consider the specific ways in which it developed, but I think we can do that best by seeing Japanese Sinitic poetry as one case among several in the Sinosphere, rather than by positing “Sino-Japanese” as an altogether separate category of literary expression. If Japanese composers of Sinitic verse truly saw themselves as engaging in some sort of “independent” enterprise, one would expect that at least some of them would instruct their aspiring disciples to devote themselves above all to studying the exemplary works of this supposedly separate domestic tradition. Yet, although the particular models held in highest regard by theorists and commentators of different eras varied widely, the Sinitic verses of Japanese poets never formed more than a supplement to the Chinese canon, which remained unquestionably central in all recommended curricula.

A third motivation for using the term “Sino-Japanese” relates to the perceived quality of kanshibun composed by Japanese authors. Wixted draws a parallel with the high level of Latin proficiency among the classically educated Westerners of earlier times and observes, “Of course, the Sino-Japanese written by Japanese, like the Latin written by late-medieval, Renaissance, and even later practitioners, often shows the influence of the writer’s vernacular: hence, the insistence on its being called Sino-Japanese.” As Peter Kornicki has pointed out, however, Wixted is inconsistent in insisting on “Sino-Japanese,” on the one hand, while, on the other, using simply “Latin” rather than “Franco-Latin” or “Anglo-Latin” or “Czech-Latin.”71 Although there is no question that Wixted is right when he identifies occasional elements in Japanese kanshi expression that are unusual or ungrammatical, I think these variations are best understood as occasional departures from dominant norms, whether unconscious or conscious, rather than as a feature that defines the practice of Sinitic versification by Japanese individuals. In a more recent article, Wixted reiterates his call for the term “Sino-Japanese,” citing the specific example of a Mori Ōgai poem with several nonstandard usages that leads him to conclude, “This underscores the argument that Sino-Japanese (i.e., kanshi and kanbun written by Japanese) is another kind of Japanese, an alternative modality of expression, in the language broadly defined.”72 Wixted is absolutely correct in pointing out the “linguistic play” of Ōgai writing 浦山敷, which is nonsense in Literary Sinitic but can be read urayamashiku in Japanese. Yet it is also imperative to note that such consciously comic usages are anything but representative of Ōgai’s own work, let alone Japanese kanshi in general. The
source text from which Wixted cites this Ōgai poem clearly identifies it as a kyōshi, or “crazy poem,” rather than an orthodox kanshi. The poem’s manifest outrageousness even prompted Iritani Sensuke to take it up in a brief chapter on Ōgai’s poetry, writing: “As is obvious from a cursory read of this poem, it is in the form of a kyōshi” and thus distinct from “the majority of Ōgai’s poems,” which were “composed in seriousness.” The humor that Ōgai intended in fact requires readers to remain cognizant of such distinctions between proper usage and deliberate deviations from it. The willful absurdity ubiquitous in kyōshi should not be confused with inadvertent infelicities occasionally found in proper kanshi. For the latter case, it is important to recognize the wisdom of Wixted’s general observation that traces of Japanese diction and syntax can sometimes be glimpsed in Japanese kanshi. Although Japanese kanshi poets have shown a range of responses to such grammatical, tonal, and thematic departures from Chinese norms, most have sought to write in basic conformity with what they understood these norms to be. Ogyū Sorai’s fulminations against washū are well known, but even his rival Arai Hakuseki, who dismissed Sorai’s interest in learning spoken Chinese as a misguided affectation, agreed with him that Japanese Sinitic poets should strive for regional intelligibility. As Hakuseki wrote in a letter, “One should seek to write in such a way as to be readily comprehensible to Chinese [J. Tōjin],” noting that, since “poetry and prose are not in their essence something of this country, it is only possible to write them by studying [works written by Chinese].” Whatever differences Japanese kanshi poets showed in terms of how problematic they regarded deviations from Sinitic norms, the underlying sense that Japanese Sinitic poets were taking part in a broader regional practice was foundational.

In addition to “Sino-Japanese poems,” another English term for kanshi has been proposed by Christopher Seeley in A History of Writing in Japan: “Chinese style poems.” Seeley adopts an “agnostic” approach, observing that “it is not always possible to be certain” which language, Chinese or Japanese, the writer intended to represent. Yet, in his review of the book, Roy Miller took Seeley to task for using this term to describe the poems gathered in the oldest Japanese kanshi collection, the mid-eighth-century Kaifūsō. Observing that European and American universities sometimes feature ceremonial addresses in Latin or Greek, Miller argues: “They may have been in bad Latin or good Latin, bad Greek or good Greek. But they were in those LANGUAGES; and a language is not a ‘style.’” Miller’s objection is logical, but it is also true that his comparison to Latin oratory overlooks the fact that Literary Sinitic was fundamentally a written language. The ways in which it was vocalized varied greatly. In the Japanese case, a Literary Sinitic text could be read aloud in an approximation of Chinese pronunciation, or, in those comparatively rare cases when the Japanese reciter had proficiency in spoken Chinese, the text could be read in Chinese pronunciation. But more commonly it would be vocalized using the kundoku reading method, by which a Literary Sinitic text is construed through Japanese syntax and grammar.

The prevalence of kundoku in Japanese oral recitation of Sinitic verse is another factor that some raise in discussing the appropriate English equivalent for the term kanshi. The practice thus deserves our attention. Early on in their encounters with Chinese texts, those on the peripheries of Chinese civilization developed a host of technologies for making a given Literary Sinitic text intelligible in the local languages; though sometimes
assumed to be a unique Japanese approach to reading Literary Sinitic texts, recent research has shown that a variety of strategies similar to kundoku can be found in several other linguistic communities within the Sinosphere. The kundoku process produces forms of highly Sinified Japanese, a kind of translationese that is distinct from mainstream Japanese and that may well not be readily intelligible to a listener who does not have access to the written text. In this book, I use the term “Sino-Japanese” for the Sinified Japanese renditions that kundoku produces and not, as Wixted has proposed, for kanbun texts by Japanese authors that retain their intelligibility as literary Sinitic to individuals who know no Japanese.

One useful way to think about the kundoku reading method is to look at an application of the methodology to reading English. In 1871, Seki Tokudō, an associate of Ryūhoku’s and the younger brother of one of his close friends and literary collaborators, Seki Sekkō (1827–77), produced a work titled Eiri Eigaku mōgyū (Illustrated primer of English study), a translation of an English reader. Seki’s textbook reproduces sentences from the English reader with three levels of glossing. Above each English word, he provides an approximation of the English pronunciation using katakana. In the first example, “It is my cat” is rendered Itto isu muai katto:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Itto</th>
<th>isu</th>
<th>muai</th>
<th>katto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sore wa</td>
<td>aru</td>
<td>ware no</td>
<td>nekode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My cat on a mat.

Beneath each English word, he gives a Japanese semantic gloss for the word, ignoring both definite and indefinite articles. Like Literary Sinitic, English syntax is subject-verb-object and thus requires syntactic rearrangement to conform to Japanese syntax; Seki thus provides circled numerals to indicate the sequence by which the one-to-one Japanese equivalents can be rendered into an intelligible Japanese sentence, such as “Sore wa ware no neko de aru.” Likewise, “My cat on a mat” can be rearranged to “Shikimono no ue no ware no neko” and “Is the cat fat?” to “Neko wa koete aru ka.” This approach to learning English grew out of the efforts of Japanese scholars in the Edo period to apply the kanbun kundoku reading practice to the study of European languages including Latin, Portuguese, and Dutch. When English language study became widespread in the early Meiji period, word-for-word kundoku-inspired direct translation methods as in Seki’s text proliferated, showing the dominance of the kundoku approach in reading and translating foreign languages.
In his recent study of Japanese writing, David Lurie situates logography as the central mode of Japanese inscriptive practice, seeing kundoku as a method for both reading and writing logographic texts. Lurie consistently uses the term “Chinese-style” rather than “Chinese” in reference to kanshibun works. In contrast to Wixted’s, Lurie’s focus is not on the degree to which Sinitic inscriptions by Japanese individuals do or do not deviate from orthodox standards of Literary Sinitic writing. Instead, he observes that, “regardless of how thoroughly a text might conform to literary Chinese style and usage, it could potentially be read in Japanese (or Korean) rather than Chinese.” One of Lurie’s goals is to overturn what he calls the “bilingual fallacy,” and he argues strongly against the notion that kanbun or kanshi texts are written “in Chinese.” If our focus is on reading practices and performance traditions, it only makes sense to conclude that these texts are not exclusively “in [literary] Chinese,” for Lurie’s observation that any Literary Sinitic text could be approached through the kundoku methodology is indisputable. Yet, if in rejecting the notion that kanshi and kanbun are written “in [literary] Chinese,” he is instead arguing that they should be understood as having been composed in some form of Japanese that is then perfunctorily rearranged so as to conform graphically to regional

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Fig. 0.2 Seki Tokudō, *Eiri Eigaku mōgyū*, 1871. Courtesy of the National Diet Library, Tokyo.
standards, then I have questions about the utility of such a framework for understanding the composition of kanshibun texts, especially poetic texts. At one point, Lurie compares kanshibun composition to spelling in European languages: “Just as writers of English or French endure long years of training, and continually consult reference works (or computer programs) to maintain elaborate spelling distinctions that are inaudible when texts are vocalized, Japanese authors writing ‘in Japanese’ were—at least in principle—capable of creating logographic writings elaborately arranged in accord with literary Chinese ordering and usage.”86 There is an assumption here that the Japanese author of a kanshibun text is starting from Japanese and then mechanically rearranging it into Literary Sinitic. As I discussed above with regard to Ryūhoku’s octave on reading Tao Yuanming, the Japanese composer of kanshi attended to a variety of features apparent only in the text as a Chinese text. Consideration of the poem’s meter, rhyme, and tonal features were clearly intimately involved at every stage of its composition, influencing its very content. It is virtually inconceivable that Ryūhoku’s poem was conceived solely as Japanese and was then simply rearranged to accord with Chinese graphic standards in the manner of running spell-check.

Lurie makes a crucial observation about kundoku when he notes that it is interlingual and that the same text could be read in two languages.87 As is clear from the fact that he does not discuss a single Sinitic verse in his study, Lurie’s focus is not on kanshi, yet in one of the text’s few passing references to Sinitic poetry composed by Japanese poets, he notes: “Vocal rendition was one of the principal means of appreciating Chinese-style poetry (probably in ondoku to preserve the rhymes and syllable counts of the Chinese literary forms, but very likely accompanied by kundoku at times).”88 Although kundoku was one means of reciting Chinese poems, as Lurie recognizes here, the only way to appreciate the rhythmic, tonal, and metrical features of Sinitic verse, which were so obviously important to Japanese poets when they composed their works, is through reference to the Sinitic text as a Sinitic text. Though “My cat on a mat. Is the cat fat?” may not seem a rewarding target of literary analysis, it is fair to say that two obvious features of it as English are its rhyme and its rhythm. Even one not fluent in spoken English who recites this text in the manner of Japanese ondoku as “Muai katto on e matto. Isu jie katto fatto” can perceive these features. To insist, however, on viewing the script merely as an elaborate means to deliver a Japanese meaning—“Shikimono no ue no ware no neko. Neko wa koete aru ka”—renders invisible features of the text that obviously guided its composition and offers little insight in return. If “cat” and “mat” are conceived of as just packages for the Japanese words neko and shikimono no, what principle accounts for the Japanese word that follows them as a sentence terminus being “koete” (i.e., “fat”)?

It required a substantial amount of effort on the part of the kanshi poet to ensure that a verse matched the rules of rhyme and tonal distribution. Both composers and readers of Japanese kanshi in the nineteenth century were aware of these rules and sensitive to them; they formed part of the rubric through which the poems were composed and read. Yet Literary Sinitic is fundamentally a written language, one that esteems concision and tends toward abbreviated or compressed forms of expression. In approaching these texts, we must resist the phonocentric assumption that orality is always primary and that some specific bit of speech lurks behind each and every tersely written Literary
Sinitic phrase as its primary cause. When such written texts are vocalized, the manner of articulation varies widely. Consider Ryūhoku's octave:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sinitic Phrase</th>
<th>Ryūhoku’s Octave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>北窓高枕誦陶詩</td>
<td>Hokusō ni makura o takaku shite Tōshi o shōsu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大馬長槍彼一時</td>
<td>Taiba chōsō kare mo ittoki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>病客身邊秋到早</td>
<td>Byōkaku no shinpen aki no itaru koto hayaku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>醒人宅裏月來遲</td>
<td>Seijin takuri tsuki no kitaru koto ososhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>少年感慨老應悔</td>
<td>Shōnen no kangai oite masa ni kuyuru narubeshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>浮世交情窮始知</td>
<td>Fusei no kōjō kyūshite hajimete shiru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>忘却從前榮辱事</td>
<td>Bōkyaku su jūzen eijoku no koto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>琴書消日不圍棋</td>
<td>Kinsho ni hi o keshite ki o kakomazu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have given here three readings of each line from three modern editions. As can easily be seen, there is not a single line in the poem for which all three scholars agree on the reading; there are only three lines in the poem on which any two of them agree. Consider the first two readings for each line. These readings were produced by two eminent scholars (Hino Tatsuo and Ōtani Masao), both of whom were educated at and went on to teach at the same university (Kyoto University) and both of whom were engaged by the same publisher (Iwanami Shoten), to produce kundoku readings of this poem for annotated editions that appeared less than fifteen years apart (in 1990 and 2004). Nevertheless, there are differences in their renderings. Whereas Ōtani adds a copular nari formation to line 2, he takes a similar structure away from line 5; Ōtani prefers the absence of genitive no markers in lines 3 and 4 but adds a topic marker wa to lines 5 and 6. Ōtani also chooses to read a character with its Japanese as opposed to Sinitic reading in line 6. The greatest variation is in the reading of line 6, which differs on whether the verb “forget” is allowed to remain at the beginning (which produces, from the Japanese perspective at least, the effect of anastrophe) or is instead relocated to the end of the sentence (which is more in accord with Japanese syntax). These differences are minor to be sure, but it is also worth remembering that, of the eight lines of the poem, only one has been given an identical reading by these two scholars. There is occasionally an assumption that kundoku is a
mechanical process, but styles of reading have evolved significantly over time. Fundamentally, kundoku is a form of translation, and over the centuries Sinological scholars in Japan have advocated a full range of approaches, from the highly target-oriented (which privilege the intelligibility of the resulting kundokubun reading as Japanese) to the highly source-oriented (which sacrifice naturalness as Japanese in order to preserve features of the original Literary Sinitic text). Even though largely standardized in Japan’s modern educational curriculum, a substantial degree of stylistic variation persists not only in the readings of particular structures, but in broader terms concerning whether Sinitic or Japanese readings are prioritized, the extent to which supplementary Japanese particles are introduced, and other factors. Moreover, the essentially interpretive nature of the act of reading through the kundoku approach should not be forgotten. Rather than posit any of these Japanese kundoku renditions as the underlying “original text,” it seems reasonable to take as our primary object of analysis the one text that is constant and actually written by the poet rather than performed or conjectured by later readers: the Chinese graphs that comprise the Literary Sinitic poem.

A Family of Scholars

Ryūhoku was born in Edo on the sixteenth day of the second month of Tenpō 8, or March 22, 1837, by the Western calendar. The day of his birth corresponded to the first of sixty days in the repeating sexagenary cycle, an auspicious position that was recognized in two of the names by which he was known as an infant and later as a young man: Kine-marō 甲子麻呂 and Kinetarō 甲子太郎. Like many men of the time, Ryūhoku adopted a variety of different names in the course of his life, but, in the interest of simplicity, I use the sobriquet “Ryūhoku” throughout this book, even in reference to Narushima as a young man, when strictly speaking “Ryūhoku” is anachronistic. The Narushima family records list Ryūhoku as the third son of Narushima Yoshimatsu (Kadō, 1802–53), but it seems that he was in fact adopted. It was only as an adult that Ryūhoku learned the circumstances of his birth: that his biological father was a shogunal retainer named Matsumoto Jiemon and that he had been adopted while still a baby. Narushima Kadō’s two biological sons had died in infancy, leaving the Narushima family in need of a male heir to carry on the household and eventually succeed to the hereditary position of okujusha, or “interior Confucian scholar,” the duties of which included tutoring the Tokugawa shoguns in the Chinese classics. At the time, familiarity with the Chinese canon not only was identified with literacy itself, but was furthermore regarded as forming the core of essential knowledge for men of the samurai class. Inasmuch as the Confucian tradition supplied the vocabulary and principles used to justify the social structure and the Tokugawa’s stewardship of the state, the office of okujusha was a prestigious one. Shortly after his birth, Ryūhoku was brought to the Narushima’s official residence along the banks of the Sumida River in Asakusa, where he was adopted into the household (fig. 0.3). From his infancy, he was brought up to think of himself as Kadō’s biological son and eventual successor to this family tradition.
As the family’s eighth patriarch, Ryūhoku inherited a tradition of scholarship and official service that spanned the entire Tokugawa period. The family traced its origins to Narushima village in the province of Kai (modern Yamanashi), the natal village of their ancestor Nobusato, a warrior who had served the powerful sixteenth-century daimyo Takeda Shingen. It was Nobusato’s son, Nobutsugu (1591–1660), however, whom Narushima family records designate the house’s founding patriarch, for it was he who had ventured to Edo to serve the newly established Tokugawa shogunate as a low-ranking castle official, or omote-bōzu. Service to the Tokugawa was integral to the family’s sense of identity, but the nature of this service changed dramatically with the third Narushima patriarch, Nobuyuki (1689–1760).

Born in the northeast province of Mutsu, Nobuyuki came to Edo as a young man and was adopted into the Narushima family, whose headship he assumed in 1705. Nobuyuki served initially as an omote-bōzu like his adoptive father, but his expertise in both Japanese and Chinese learning quickly caught the attention of the eighth shogun, Yoshimune (1684–1751), who occasionally engaged him to lecture on texts, to take part in exchanges of Sinitic poetry with emissaries from the Kingdom of the Ryukyus, and to interpret documents. With Yoshimune, the shogunate came to focus its attention on civil administration rather than military readiness, and his reign was characterized by renewed support for scholarly endeavors. One of the reforms Yoshimune introduced was the formalization of the position of okujusha, a role that Nobuyuki would assume. Among the rewards that the shogun bestowed upon Nobuyuki for his efforts were editions of the core of the Chinese canon: the thirteen classics of Confucian learning and the twenty-one dynastic histories. Moreover, in recognition of Nobuyuki’s deep erudition in Japanese subjects and skill at Japanese poetic composition, he was also called on to compile treatises about the history of certain Japanese court practices and to host members of the Reizei house on their visit to Edo in 1740. From Nobuyuki’s time onward, the subsequent generations of Narushima would all serve the shogun in a scholarly capacity: overseeing official libraries and acting as instructors, chroniclers, and advisors to the shogun. In 1745, Nobuyuki was ordered to serve as tutor to the son of the ninth shogun, Ieshige (1712–61); similarly, Nobuyuki’s son, Kazusada, and his grandson, Katsuo, both served as councilors to the tenth shogun, Ieharu (1737–86), and likewise both provided instruction in reading to the eleventh shogun, Ienari (1773–1841). These various roles were continued by the subsequent heads of the Narushima family down to Ryūhoku’s generation, each of whom was in turn appointed okujusha (see table 0.1).

In addition to their instructional service, the Narushima family also played an important role in the compilation of official historical records. Whereas earlier generations had been rewarded monetarily or with exquisitely wrought gifts for preparing chronicles of shogunal pilgrimages and other specific events, during Motonao’s time, the historiographical role of the Narushima family became even more pronounced. In 1809, Motonao was ordered to oversee the editing of the Tokugawa jikki, a massive annalistic chronicle of the regime from its founding onward. This endeavor to compile a history spanning more than two centuries would occupy Motonao for the next several decades, and, from the project’s inception, the Narushima family’s official residence in Asakusa was designated as the site where the work of editing was to take place. In 1837, Motonao’s
adopted son Kadō was charged with the editing of a separate chronicle, the Nochikagami, a similarly ambitious history of the Ashikaga shogunate. Even after the initial submission of the completed text in 1843, many years of work finalizing and supplementing it remained: tasks that would engage Motonao, Kadō, and Ryūhoku alike.

Ryūhoku’s earliest childhood memories are of a home where the editing of these official shogunal chronicles was taking place. In accordance with the traditional prestige of Chinese learning in Tokugawa Japan, Ryūhoku’s father and grandfather oversaw his training in the Chinese classics and his studies of Sinitic poetry. A preface Ryūhoku wrote much later in life for the posthumously published manuscript of Shinmi Masamichi (1791–1848) offers a glimpse of Ryūhoku’s childhood and the context in which he acquired his competence in Literary Sinitic. After explaining that Masamichi, who used the literary style Bōzan, was a shogunal vassal, Ryūhoku writes:

As a young man, Mr. Bōzan studied under the guidance of my grandfather. My father was also honored to make Mr. Bōzan’s acquaintance. The two of them were constantly working together to refine and polish their skills in writing. When I was a child, I would occasionally overhear my grandfather ask my father, “I wonder if Shinmi isn’t the one these days who is most distinguished in both erudition and virtue.” At the time, I still lacked discernment, but

Table 0.1

Successive heads of the Narushima family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1           | Dōsetsu 道雪 | Nobutsugu 信次 | b. 1591  
d. 09.1660 |
| 2           | Dōsetsu II 二代道雪 | Nobuyoshi 信好 | b.1658  
d.09.10.1715 |
| 3           | Dōchiku 道筑 | Nobuyuki 信遍  Hōkei 凤卿 | b. 01.15.1689  
d. 09.19.1760 | Kinkō 錦江 |
| 4           | Tadahachirō 忠八郎 | Kazusada 和鼎 | b. 1720  
d. 05.05.1808 | Ryōshū 龍洲 |
| 5           | Senzō 仙蔵 | Katsuō 勝雄 (Mineo 峰雄) | b. 1748  
d.07.19.1815 | Kōzan 衡山 |
| 6           | Kuninosuke 邦之助 Kuninojo 邦之丞 | Motonao 司直 | b.02.15.1778  
d.08.02.1862 | Tōgaku 東岳 |
| 7           | Kannosuke 桢之助 | Yoshimatsu 良譲 | b.1802  
d.11.11.1853 | Kadō 種堂  
Chikuzan 筑山 |
| 8           | Kinetarō 甲子太郎 | Korehiro 惟弘 (Hiro 弘) | b.02.16.1837  
d.11.30.1884 | Ryūhoku 柳北 |

source: Ōshima Ryūichi 1943, 3–24. Some of the information presented here differs slightly from Ōshima’s, reflecting corrections identified by Inui 2003 and Kubota 2000. Sixth patriarch Motonao died during the intercalary month, but his death would be commemorated on 08.13 in subsequent years, reflecting the annual eleven-day discrepancy between the solar and lunar calendars. The inscriptions on the Narushima family graves in Zōshigaya give death dates differing by a few days for Kazusada and Katsuo; see Isogaya 1935, 8:1275–83; and Isogaya 1943:39–40. Ryūhoku’s name 弘 may also be pronounced Hiroshi or Hiromu.
I do remember hearing this. When I turned nine years old, I went to meet Mr. Bōzan at Kayama. On New Year’s Day of the following year, I composed my first Sinitic poem. Mr. Bōzan praised it enthusiastically and honored me by presenting me with a composition that matched its rhymes.102

Ryūhoku’s original poem and Bōzan’s response are both contained in the latter’s posthumous collection of verse (fig. 0.4).

Scholars have typically identified another poem that Ryūhoku wrote, supposedly at the age of sixteen, as his earliest extant Sinitic poem. As I discuss in chapter 4, the dating of this latter poem is off by two decades, but the poem he sent to Bōzan at the age of nine, previously unknown to scholars, is his earliest extant work:

丙午元旦
雙親膝下拜春光
随例屠蘇先捧觴
堪愛小園風雪裏
稚梅已放一枝香

New Year’s Day in the forty-third year of the cycle [1846]
At my parents’ side, I welcome spring’s dawn;
Following custom, we first offer cups of spiced wine.
How lovely in the little garden, amid wind and snow,
A tender plum in bloom, the whole branch fragrant.
Narushima Kinemaro, ten years old, composed his very first poem to commemorate the beginning of the New Year. Having been shown it, I composed this following his rhymes.

成島甲子麻呂十歳初賦元旦試毫詩見眎因次其韻

萬戸春回對旭光
一番梅影促吟觴
郵筒遙寄試毫賦
驚看神童風藻香

Spring returns to the myriad houses, as we face the dawn;
The first plum urges us to drink and compose poems.
From far away comes a first-of-year composition by post;
With a start I observe the fragrant words of this prodigy. 103

The practice to which Bōzan refers here, ciyun (J. jiin), involves reproducing the rhyme characters of another’s poem; here, Bōzan matches the graphs ending lines 1, 2, and 4. A longstanding practice throughout the Sinosphere, rhyme matching was one of the many ways in which producers of Sinitic poetry engaged each other socially. 104 In diplomatic contexts, such as when Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) exchanged matched-rhyme poems with visitors from Parhae in the mid-ninth century, the act might affirm a spirit of goodwill or a sense of cultural camaraderie; in the banquets held by early Heian emperors, vassals might express their fidelity to the sovereign by composing poems duplicating the rhyme graphs in one of his compositions. In less official settings, the act of matching another’s rhymes generally served to express feelings of kinship or affinity with an individual or a text, but here we see how it functions almost as a rite of initiation for the nine-year-old Ryūhoku into a world of interaction mediated by Sinitic poetry. From the intimate sentiments expressed in Ryūhoku’s recollection thirty-four years later, one might assume that he had given the poem to Bōzan in person. Yet the reference in Bōzan’s poem to the arrival of Ryūhoku’s poem by post serves as a reminder that Literary Sinitic is fundamentally a written language and confirms that the textually mediated nature of interaction in it by no means compromised its expressive and affective potential. 105

Aside from the poem quoted above and a few examples of childhood waka compositions, Ryūhoku’s earliest extant writings are from Kaei 7 (1854), a pivotal year in his life. His father Kadō had died the previous year, leaving the eighteen-year-old Ryūhoku to assume headship of the Narushima family and also to commence his apprenticeship as a shogunal tutor. Chapter 1, “Book and Sword,” focuses on this year in which Ryūhoku came of age as a poet and entered the shogun’s service. Using the diary and poetry journals that he began to keep at the time, I show how Ryūhoku wrestled with the tensions between two forms of service to the shogunate: the scholarly service that it was his family’s place to provide as historians and tutors, on the one hand, and the military valor that Ryūhoku yearned for, on the other. The issue of Japan’s fate in the face of a foreign threat was an important focus of Ryūhoku’s attention in this year when Matthew Perry made his second visit to Japan, forcing the shogunate to enter into negotiations for a commercial treaty with the United States. Ryūhoku’s poems demonstrate his intense interest in the crisis and also show his spirited rejection of Perry and the civilization he represented. Yet, they also reveal the doubts Ryūhoku was beginning to have about his own place in the shogun’s administration. In addition to his tutorial apprenticeship, Ryūhoku had
taken over responsibility for a poetry gathering that met monthly at his residence. Using his own poetry manuscripts and those of his literary partners that are preserved in the archives of Japan’s National Diet Library, I reconstruct their exchanges and consider what revisions to the manuscripts can tell us about the aesthetic aims and evaluative criteria of Sinitic poetry composition in Japan at the time.

While primarily defining himself as a shijin 士人, or scholar-official, like many of his contemporaries, Ryūhoku also used his poetry to explore the realm of the bunjin, 文人, or literatus. Chapter 2, “Book and Zither,” examines these complementary worlds and how Ryūhoku found his footing between them in the mid-1850s. Whereas the former category emphasized the scholar-official as civil servant and master of the Confucian canon, the latter category emphasized his skill in poetic and prose composition and encouraged the pursuit of literary expression for its own sake. The chapter compares two poetry composition circles in which Ryūhoku took part. The first was convened by the Hayashi family of Confucian scholars and oriented toward the shijin realm. The second was presided over by Ryūhoku himself, attended by his neighbors in the Shitaya district of Edo, and oriented toward the bunjin realm. I discuss the different sorts of poetic topics explored in each, focusing in particular on Ryūhoku’s interest in the theme of reclusion, especially in connection with Tao Yuanming, and his efforts to seek out new domains of Sinitic poetic expression in his immediate environment and inspired by Japanese literature and history.

In chapter 3, “Discovering New Worlds,” I consider two developments that took place in the late 1850s and early 1860s: Ryūhoku’s introduction to the pleasure quarters of Yanagibashi and the friendship that he developed with Japanese scholars of Western learning. In part through the influence of his in-laws and relatives, Ryūhoku began to make frequent leisure excursions to the Yanagibashi district in 1857. He became intimate with several geisha there, one of whom he eventually married. Yanagibashi would also form the subject of New Chronicles of Yanagibashi, a text Ryūhoku wrote in Literary Sinitic to describe the quarter’s denizens and its unique customs while at the same time soberly and satirically revealing its underside. Inspired by both Chinese and Japanese Sinitic texts, Ryūhoku created an amusing disconnect between form and content, willfully misappropriating phrases from the canonical texts it was his duty to teach. In contrast to the orthodox composition that was the mainstream of his literary practice, he introduced various elements of stylistic hybridity and linguistic juxtaposition into this text. Just as he was completing it, Ryūhoku became friendly with a new circle of individuals: scholars of Western subjects, many of whom he met in the course of his leisure trips to Yanagibashi. Whereas Ryūhoku’s earlier rejection of Western learning had been adamant, he experienced a transformation in the early 1860s and now sought to pursue Western study himself. During this time, Ryūhoku was becoming increasingly prominent in Edo’s literary circles and also as a “court poet” for the Tokugawa shogunate. Yet his frustrations with his official position festered, and, in 1863, something happened that caused him to be dismissed from his post and ordered confined to his home. Ryūhoku was evasive about what had prompted his punishment, but among the reasons he suggested as the cause were two that were connected to these newly discovered worlds: his dalliances in Yanagibashi and his advocacy of Western study.
In chapter 4, “Withdrawal and Resurgence,” I address the years that Ryūhoku spent confined to his home, beginning with a consideration of what may have led to his dismissal. During his time in confinement, Ryūhoku spent a great deal of time with Western scholars including Katsuragawa Hoshū, Yanagawa Shunsan, and others. I present a rereading of evidence concerning Ryūhoku’s interaction with these figures and argue that the time Ryūhoku spent with them should not be seen simply as a period of total disengagement. In 1865, Ryūhoku was offered a position as part of the shogunate’s new military training program in Yokohama, giving him an opportunity to draw on the knowledge of the Western world and the proficiency in English that he had acquired during his period of confinement. The military post gave Ryūhoku the chance to fulfill his earlier fantasies, but the shogunate’s days were numbered. In the chaotic final months before the Tokugawa shogunate collapsed, Ryūhoku ascended to the heights of its central administration, but he eventually retired, renounced his samurai status, and went to live in reclusion, styling himself temporarily as a “vassal of a deposed regime” in the manner of Tao Yuanming.

In chapter 5, “Wandering,” I address Ryūhoku’s activities in the immediate aftermath of the Meiji Restoration, focusing in particular on how he came to terms with his status as a former shogunal vassal in the world of the new regime. During these several years, Ryūhoku traveled extensively, both in Japan and abroad. I examine the travelogues he wrote about these experiences as well as the second volume of New Chronicles of Yanagibashi, arguing that in different ways the writing of these texts laid the groundwork for his emergence as a journalist and critical commentator. Previous scholarship on Ryūhoku’s overseas journey of 1872–73, which he undertook as the treasurer and translator for four priests from the Higashi Honganji temple, has tended to understand it as a leisure trip without any particular purpose. Many scholars have proposed to make sense of Ryūhoku’s journey in terms of its contrast to the serious mission of the Iwakura Mission that toured the world at the same time. Yet I show that the Higashi Honganji priests made their journey with the extensive encouragement and support of the Meiji government and that Ryūhoku’s experience on the journey can best be seen as preparation in the short term for his directorship of the temple’s Translation Office and in the long term for his eventual emergence as a newspaper journalist.

Chapter 6, “Ryūhoku the Journalist,” focuses on Ryūhoku’s complete transformation of the struggling Kōbun tsūshi newspaper into the thriving Chōya shinbun in 1874. The Chōya’s success has been attributed by many scholars to the stylistic appeal of Ryūhoku’s zatsuroku: “miscellaneous essays” that he wrote principally in Sino-Japanese. I analyze how Ryūhoku used these columns to articulate a position for himself as a “newspaperman,” a new identity that he fashioned in dialogue with Literary Sinitic texts. One concern Ryūhoku repeatedly emphasized in his columns was the importance of traditional culture and literature in a time when more obviously practical pursuits carried the day. To that end, the Chōya shinbun regularly published kanshi in its literary section, the first to be established by a Japanese daily. By creating this new forum, Ryūhoku pioneered the forms of interaction that would characterize the kanshibun magazines that quickly sprang up in following years. I devote particular attention to how Ryūhoku dealt with the harsh restrictions on the press that the Meiji government imposed in 1875. I discuss
the variety of literary techniques he deployed to fight these restrictions, many of which marshaled canonical Chinese texts in innovative ways. In 1876, Ryūhoku was imprisoned for violating these laws, but I show how the newspaper’s readers wrote *kanshibun* to rally in support behind him and other embattled journalists.

The seventh and final chapter, “After the Wake,” concerns the last several years of Ryūhoku’s career as a journalist. It was once a widely held view that Ryūhoku withdrew from the public sphere after his release from prison, yet this chapter shows that Ryūhoku remained an engaged participant in public discourse right to the end of his life. Another assessment of Ryūhoku’s position in early Meiji situates him as the antithesis of the Meiji government’s state building, but, by introducing a variety of essays that he wrote toward the end of his career, I show that Ryūhoku was in fact deeply interested in these issues. In these essays, Ryūhoku outlined an eclectic approach to modernization, and he sought out additional opportunities to make his opinions known to a wider population when he started writing for the *Yomiuri shinbun* as well. Far from disengaging from public life, Ryūhoku remained committed, and, as I discuss in the book’s conclusion, he developed new readings of Tao Yuanming to mark his involvement.