

A conceptual structure for an historical outline of Kanbun Kundoku

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A CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE FOR AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF *KANBUN KUNDOKU*

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1. Introduction

Kunten materials (*kunten shiryō* 訓点資料), that is to say, texts written in Chinese and then marked or glossed so they could be read in Japanese, are the basic sources for a historical study of the practice of Japanese *kanbun kundoku* 漢文訓読, as a number of published studies based on such materials attests.

These documents provide invaluable linguistic evidence for any study of the synchronic and diachronic evolution of the Japanese language. According to Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕 (1925-2011), more than 5,000 such manuscripts dating back to the Heian period (794-1185) have survived.¹ The study of language by way of *kunten* 訓点 (the marks used to record such vernacular readings), the examination of the manuscripts in which these signs were used, and historical surveys on *kanbun kundoku* all combine to form one extended field of research.

Moreover, the number of High School graduates each year indicates that more than one million young students learn classical Chinese — *kanbun* 漢文 —; many of them will likely continue to appreciate *kanbun kundoku* beyond their school years.

Overall, people interested in the practice of *kanbun kundoku* (“*kanbun kundoku* users”) can be grouped in two categories.

A : Common users who wish to understand a text in Classical Chinese using *kundoku* as a decoding tool.

B : Specialized users (scholars) interested in the inner structure of glossed Chinese texts and in the linguistic evidence provided by such documents.

There are plenty of manuals and textbooks catering to Group A readers; in the reference book corner of any bookstore one can find a variety of volumes titled *Introduction to kanbun*, some of which even established a reputation among specialists. Unfortunately, the same is not true for manuals and textbooks for Group B readers.

* This study presents some of the findings of the research project “Strategic research on *kanbun kundoku* as common intellectual property” 国際的共有知財としての漢文訓読に関する戦略的研究 (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research — Start-up research 2010-2011, project director: Kosukegawa Teiji).

¹ Tsukishima Hiroshi, *Heian jidai kuntenbon ronkō (kenkyū hen)*, Tōkyō, Kyūko shoin, 1996, pp. 26-27.

This does not mean that there are no introductory books on the topic.² However, despite the large number of surviving documents, the main features of *kanbun kundoku* as based on *kunten* materials are not sufficiently studied. Moreover, despite the abundance of explanations these books are especially difficult for beginners and for scholars hailing from other disciplines.

Two more obstacles hinder the popularization of this field of study: one is the lack of a theoretical apparatus explaining the structure of these sources; the other is the absence of studies on *kundoku* as a linguistic activity. Moreover, recent developments and the trend toward specialization in the research of *kunten* materials have made it virtually impossible for any individual scholar to get an overall picture of the historical development of *kanbun kundoku* in Japan. This is probably the main reason why no scholarly works catering to the readers of group B (or even A, for that matter) have been published in recent years.

This paper, which relies on the author's understanding of the current state of the field of Japanese *kundoku* studies and of the results achieved therein in the last few years, will deal with the conceptual structure required to create an historical outline of *kanbun kundoku*.

2. Diffusion of *kundoku* studies

2.1 Diffusion of *kundoku* studies

Fig. 1 outlines the history of *kanbun kundoku* as extrapolated from glossed materials (*katen shiryō* 加點資料) found in East Asia and in some regions of Southeast Asia.

The practice of glossing Chinese texts to make them readable in the vernacular was not unique to Japan. It occurred not only in China itself but also in the countries of the Sinosphere, where texts were rearranged according to the native lexicon and word order. Less familiar to the general public, this tradition has been known to scholars since the late 1960s.

To this extent, the discovery, in the year 2000, of stylus (*kakuhitsu* 角筆) marks inscribed on the surface of a Korean edition of *Yuga shijiron* 瑜伽師地論 (Skt. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*) coincided with a veritable turning point in the world of *kanbun kundoku* studies. The discovery of signs (*tento kugyōl* 点吐口訣) whose function mirrored that of the Japanese morphosyntactic glosses (*wokototen* フコト点) spurred the internationalization of the field.

In reference to the spread of *kanbun kundoku* in East Asia, Ishizuka Harumichi 石塚晴通 “*Kanbun kundoku* appears similar to translation in its rendering one language into another. However, *kanbun kundoku* is not the same as translation, for it does not produce a parallel text in the target language; rather, it leaves the Chinese original unchanged, using it as a ‘visual’ outline to facilitate comprehension. The glossed reading of a Chinese text is a highly refined linguistic technique with a long tradition that stretches beyond Japan into its neighboring East Asian

² See § 5.

countries.”³ Several studies have been published on the history of *kanbun kundoku* in the Sinosphere.

Fig.1. The history of *kanbun kundoku* in the Sinosphere as documented by existing sources

c.	KOREA	JAPAN		CHINA	OTHER COUNTRIES
		Buddhist world	Secular world		
6 th	Three kingdoms 三国時代 Emergence of <i>kundoku</i> and interpretive reading				
7 th	Unification by Silla (676-935) Ūisang 義湘 (625-702) lectures on <i>Hwaōm-gyōng</i> 華嚴經			No extant glossed materials from Central China Dunhuang 敦煌 glossed texts Paragraph marks (<i>kadan</i> 科段) Punctuation (<i>kutoten</i> 句読点) <i>Poyin</i> (Semantic) marks (<i>haon</i> 訛吝) Use of commentaries	<i>Beishi</i> 北史 entry on glossing at Gao Chang 高昌 (Turfan)
8 th	Systemization of Korean <i>kundoku</i> by Sōl Ch'ong 薛聰 according to <i>Samguk sagi</i> 三国史記 and <i>Samguk yusa</i> 三国遺事	Transcription of <i>sutras</i> First <i>kunten</i> materials within Kegon school 華嚴宗 in Nara <i>Zoku Kegonkyō ryakuso kanjōki</i> 統華嚴經略疏判定記, <i>Kegon mongi vōketsu</i> 華嚴文義要決 (destroyed by fire), <i>Kegonkyō daijunanakan</i> 華嚴經卷第十七	No extant <i>kunten</i> materials	Tibetan 吐蕃 domination (786-848)	
9 th		Expansion of <i>kunten</i> materials within religious world (100+ texts) Diffusion within Tendai school 天台宗 of Group 5 <i>wakototen</i> ラコト点; simplified <i>kana</i> 省画仮名	No extant <i>kunten</i> materials. Documents attest to the existence of glossing practice in the secular world Fragmentary <i>kunten</i> materials like <i>Uda tennō shōhinkan shūyakushō</i> 宇多天皇宸翰周易抄 (group 5 <i>wakototen</i> , simpl. <i>kana</i>)	Rebellion against the Tibetan domination led by Zhang Yichao 張彥潮 (799-872) in Sha prefecture 沙州 (modern Dunhuang, 848).	
10 th	Koryō period 高麗時代 (918-1392) Appearance of <i>Sōkdok kugyōl</i> 釋讀口訣 Phonogrammatic <i>chat'o</i> 字吐 glossed texts (mid-10 th c. - 13 th c.) <i>Sōk hwaōm kyōbungi</i> 釋華嚴教分記 (mid-10 th c.)	Adoption of <i>kundoku</i> practice within every school and religious complex	First entirely glossed documents <i>Guwen shangshu</i> 古文尚書, <i>Maoshi</i> vol. 6 毛詩卷第六, <i>Chunqiu jingchuan jijie</i> 春秋經伝集解, <i>Hanshu yangxiang zhuan</i> 漢書楊雄伝, <i>Shishuo xinshu</i> vol. 6 世說新書卷第六		
11 th	<i>kakp'il</i> 角筆 (stylus) glossed texts (mid-11 th c. - 12 th c.) <i>Yogasajiron</i> fascicle No. 8 瑜伽師地論卷第8 (11 th c.) <i>Chu-bon Hwaōm-gyōng</i> 周本華嚴經 fascicle No. 6, (est. latter half 11 th c.)		Diffusion among lay scholars' families (<i>hakaseke</i> 博士家)	Western Xia (Xi Xia 西夏, Tangut Empire) domination (1038 - 1227)	
12 th		More than 5,000 glossed documents	200 glossed documents (9 th - 14 th c.)		
13 th	Appearance of <i>umdok</i> 音讀 (<i>sundok</i> 順讀) <i>kugyōl</i> 口訣 <i>Nūng'ōm-kyōng</i> 楞嚴經 (Phonogrammatic <i>chat'o</i> 字吐 glossed text)				Later Lý Dynasty (1009-1225, Vietnam) Báo Ân's stele (1209) Linh Nam chích quai 嶺南城怪

→ Direct influence ◆ Supposed influence

³ Yoshida Kanehiko, Tsukishima Hiroshi, Ishizuka Harumichi, Tsukimoto Masayuki (eds.), *Kuntengo jiten*, Tōkyō, Tōkyōdō shuppan, 2001, p. 2.

2.2 The diffusion of the notion of *kundoku* (What kind of linguistic practice is *kundoku* exactly?)

Many Japanese *kundoku* specialists may be surprised to learn that a practice similar to existed also in areas that were not under the immediate influence of Chinese language and culture, namely in Europe. According to Whitman, Latin texts were glossed in the vernacular of other European languages since the Middle Ages.⁴ These ancient manuscripts have been the focus of studies that began in the 19th century, marking the beginning of a remarkable and well-established philological tradition in Europe.

Given the current definition of *kundoku* as used among Japanese scholars, someone may object to the identification of the European practice with “*kundoku*”. However, documents such as the *Kegonkyō ryakusho kanjōki* 華嚴經略疏刊定記, a commentary on the *Avatamsaka sūtra* preserved at the Daitōkyū kinenbunko 大東急記念文庫, or the old translation of the *Inwang kyōng* 仁王經 (Jap. *Nin’ō kyō*) at Dongguk University 東国大学校, in which simple keys were used to mark a native syntactic order different from the original text, are commonly recognized as *kunten* materials. Their notation techniques are not too different from the ones found in the ancient European manuscripts, where glosses such as numbers or reading aids inserted next to the original Latin suggested an alternate word order — e.g. from Latin to old English.

With a daring leap of the imagination one can even postulate that commentaries used to decode classical Chinese Buddhist (*buten* 仏典) and secular texts (*kanseki* 漢籍) were brought back to Europe from Asia.

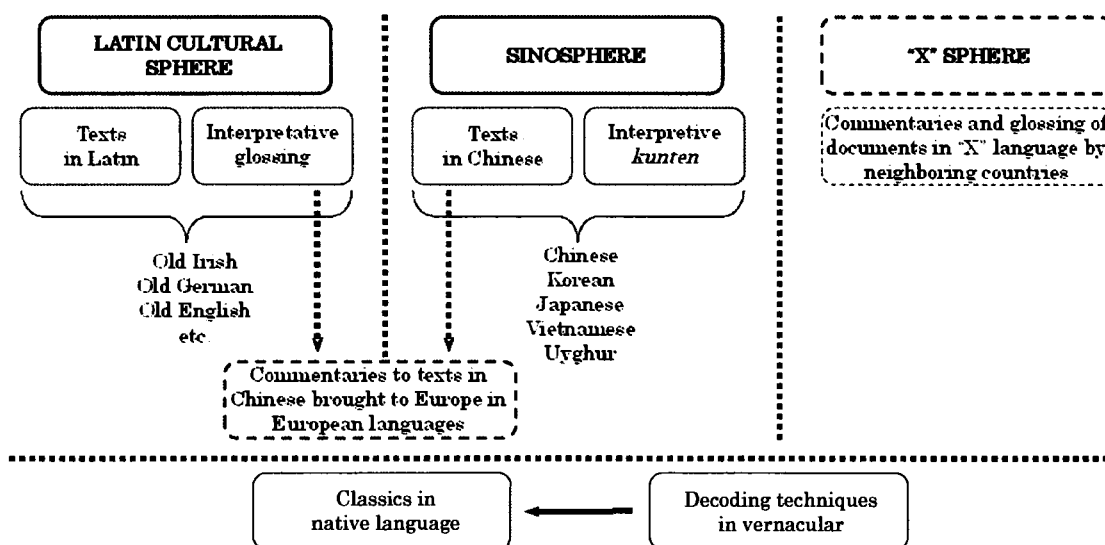
Moreover, if the reading marks in medieval and ancient Chinese found on the surface of some of the Dunhuang manuscripts are considered a form of *kundoku*, then so can be the annotations found in old Japanese documents — e.g. the so-called *Manyōshū*’s “old reading” (*kyūten* 古点), “following reading” (*jiten* 次点) and “new reading” (*shinten* 新点).

The diffusion of *kundoku*, then, is akin to a multilayered universe that evolved from the picture drawn in Fig. 1 to the one schematized in Fig. 2.

A common denominator to each of the aforementioned universes is the text meant to be read, which was always a well known text widely popular at a certain historical junction in a specific region — e.g. Buddhist texts, secular Chinese Classics, the Bible, Japanese Classics, etc. Consequently, *kundoku* was not a simple form of translation, but rather a high-level intellectual activity aiming at a deeper understanding of the text and its content. Ishizuka’s definition thus falls short of comprising all the potential implications of the term *kundoku*, which I would redefine more broadly as “an extra-temporal and spatial way of decoding classical documents in a vernacular.” In this paper I will limit my discussion to the case of documents written in Chinese in the Sinosphere, especially Japan.

⁴ John Whitman, “The ubiquity of the gloss”, *Scripta*, 3, 2011, p. 112.

Fig.2. The diffusion of the notion of *kundoku*



3. *Kanbun kundoku* studies: an endangered field

3.1 Awareness of *kundoku*

Even today, only a handful of scholars are aware that the linguistic practice of *kundoku* was common throughout the Sinosphere. Recently, Kyōto University Professor Kim Mungyong 金文京, published a book by the title of *Kanbun to higashi Ajia – kundoku no bunkaken* 漢文と東アジア—訓読の文化圏 (*Kanbun and East Asia – The cultural sphere of kundoku*).⁵ The volume, marketed with the tagline “*kanbun kundoku* was not exclusive to Japan”, enjoyed a good deal of success and credited with having significantly increased the general public’s awareness of *kanbun kundoku*.

However, a perusal of the entry for “*kundoku*” in the Japanese edition of Wikipedia (taken as an example of a platform that could be easily updated) reveals the persistence of outdated notions. For most of the web users, *kundoku* still means “the reading of a Chinese text in Japanese that relies on the Japanese reading of a Chinese character (*kunyomi* 訓読み) and not on the Sino-Japanese one (*onyomi* 音読み). [*Kundoku* was] commonly used in the interpretation of texts in Chinese, in Korean, or of Buddhist scriptures.” The paragraph entitled “*Kundoku* outside Japan” mentions Kim’s book in a footnote and simply states that, “the *kundoku* phenomenon is seen also in Silla, Khitan, Balhae, Uyghur, and Vietnam.”

A separate Wikipedia entry for “*kanbun kundoku*” gives virtually the same definition: “Reading and comprehending a written Chinese text with the aid of marks and other keys, leaving the original unchanged.” I have written about the general lack of awareness towards *kundoku* on

⁵ Kim Bunkyo, *Kanbun to higashi Ajia — kundoku no bunkaken*, Iwanami shinsho (shin akaban) 1262, Tōkyō, Iwanami shoten, 2010.

several occasions in the past, but the situation appears unchanged.⁶

I suspect there are two reasons for this. The first is that the definition of *kundoku* taught to High School students in Japanese language classes (“reading a Chinese text in Japanese with the aid of marks”) is stereotyped. As a result, each year almost one million potential *kundoku* users go out into the world relying on a misconception. These numbers are especially striking if we consider that the Kuntengo gakkai 訓点語学会, the academic society founded in 1953 and open to all those interested in *kundoku* studies, counts only 413 members as of 22 May 2011.

The second reason has to do with the limited access to original *kunten* materials. While Kim’s book includes pictures, it is still extremely difficult to gain access to Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese glossed manuscripts. To offset this problem, numerous photographic reproductions and excellent online digital archives have popped up in recent years. *E-Kokuhō* 国宝, for example, provides high-definition images of national treasures and of the important cultural properties owned by four Japanese national museums; the IDP (International Dunhuang Project) includes a large image database of manuscripts from Dunhuang and other parts of Central Asia. University libraries and private collections too are increasing their efforts towards the creation of digital archives.

Unfortunately, these digital collections are not meant to support a scientific investigation of glossed materials. They place more value on the appreciation of the original Chinese text, not on the glosses, and the quality of the photographic reproduction reflects such emphasis. In some cases, distinguishing between the different types of notations and their contents is difficult. Moreover, the most *kunten* materials in Japan comprise Buddhist scriptures such as sutras, commentaries, and treatises held by temples. In most cases, their religious value gets in the way of investigation, as temples are generally not inclined to share their sacred treasures with the scientific community.

3.2 The number of specialists

Switching to issues directly related to *kundoku* specialists, the limited number of scholars also strikes me as a serious problem. *Kundoku* studies interest a narrow circle of specialists; the number of young researchers in the field is actually on the decline. The Bibliographic Database of Japanese Language Research (*Nihongo kenkyū – nihongo kyōiku database* 日本語研究・日本語教育文献データベース) run by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyūjo 国立国語研究所) provides a valuable yardstick in this respect. Table 1 presents the results of a search conducted using “*kundoku*”, “*kanbun kundoku*”, “*kunter*”, and “*kunten shiryō*” as keywords in a database of all papers on linguistic topics published in academic journals and

⁶ Kosukegawa Teiji, “Kanbun kundoku kenkyū no kokusaiteki kyōyū to kyōikuteki kangen ni tsuite”, *Tuyama daigaku kokugo kyōiku*, 33, 2008. Kosukegawa Teiji, “Chihō kokuritsu daigaku ni okeru zetsumetsukigu kenkyūshu wo meguru kyōyōkyōiku – senmon kyōiku no torikumi”, 16th Daigaku kyōiku kenkyū forum, Kyōto daigaku kōtō kyōiku kenkyū kaihatsu suishin center, 18 March 2010. Kosukegawa Teiji, “Kanbun kundokushi kenkyū wo manabu gakusei no shiten”, NINJAL joint research project “A descriptive study on the structure of *kunten* materials”, National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, 9 July 2010.

university bulletins in Japan from 1950 to August 2011. The number of hits differs dramatically from search results based on such popular keywords as “*Genji*” 源氏 or “*Genji monogatari*” 源氏物語, “*Man’yō*” 万葉 or “*Man’yōshū*” 万葉集. It is nothing short of astonishing if compared to a search for “*hōgen*” 方言, “dialect”.

Some papers probably should not have listed “*kundoku*” among their keywords. Still the total number of papers published between 1954 and 2011 in the 127 volumes of *Kuntengo to knten shiryō* 訓点語と訓点資料, the official journal of the Kuntengo gakkai, amounts to about 629 (including forewords to special numbers, etc.); a mere 10% of the total number of publications on dialectology. A Google search for syllabi for the academic year 2011 conducted on 19 October 2011 (15:52 – 15:53) confirmed that virtually no classes on “*knten shiryō*” or “*kanbun kundokushi*” were being offered in Japanese universities (Table 2). If these data correctly describe the state of the discipline, it is not a stretch to consider historical studies on *kanbun kundoku* an “endangered field”.

Table 1. Database search

KEYWORD	HITS
<i>Kundoku</i> or <i>kanbun kundoku</i>	413
<i>Knten</i> or <i>knten shiryō</i>	223
<i>Genji</i> or <i>Genji monogatari</i>	1.563
<i>Man’yō</i> or <i>Man’yōshū</i>	1.724
<i>Hōgen</i>	6.290

Table 2. Google search

KEYWORDS	HITS
Syllabus + University + 2011 + <i>hōgen</i>	33.800
Syllabus + University + 2011 + <i>knten shiryō</i>	24
Syllabus + University + 2011 + <i>kanbun kundokushi</i>	2

3.3 Causes for the decline in the number of specialists

Such a decline is not entirely surprising if one considers the current state of academic research in Japan, which is the target of university reforms, budget cuts, and other such weakening factors. Similar problems affect other disciplines as well. However, a look at the aforementioned data suggests that *knten* studies are a particularly unique case. The reasons behind the ongoing decline in the number of *knten* scholars are complex and difficult to assess; still, one may mention three distinctive factors.

(1) *Problems related to the structure of the scholarly community*

The beginning of modern historical studies on *kanbun kundoku* based on the examination of glossed manuscripts can be traced back to the publication of Ōya Tōru’s 大矢透 (1850-1928) *Kanazukai oyobi kana jitai enkaku shiryō* 仮名遣及仮名字体沿革史料 (*Sources on the History of Kana Characters and their Use*) in 1909. Six different generations of scholars have shaped the field since the beginning of the twentieth century.

1st generation (the early period)

Discovery of documents and of their academic potential

2nd generation

Examination of documents, classification, and determination of their linguistic value

3rd generation

Expansion of the field of inquiry (investigation of foreign collections, sinoxenic readings and accent)

4th generation

Critical reexamination of past results, use of computer

5th generation

Internationalization of the field, use of internet

6th generation

Young students; recently or soon to be completed Ph.D.'s

Along with most active scholars, I belong to the fourth generation, which includes university professors in their mid-fifties. The third generation has already retired, but their efforts, focused on gradually expanding and prompting the discovery and publication of rare manuscripts and of detailed descriptions of their main linguistic peculiarities, greatly contributed to the growth of interest on the subject. The achievements of third generation scholars are so monumental that it is nearly impossible for the fourth generation to outdo them. This is not simply my impression, but a reality testified by a trend in the number of papers published in *Kuntengo to kunten shiryō* and in the number of Kuntengo gakkai's oral presentations.

Table 3. Speakers at Kuntengo gakkai per number of presentations

PRESENTATIONS	SPEAKERS (TOTAL PRESENTATIONS)
1 – 5	200 (414)
6 – 10	25 (186)
11 – 15	10 (127)
16 – 20	7 (122)
21 – 25	2 (46)
26 – 30	2 (54)

PRESENTATIONS	SPEAKERS (TOTAL PRESENTATIONS)
31 – 35	1 (32)
36 – 40	2 (75)
46 – 50	2 (95)
56 – 60	0
61 – 65	3 (189)
76 – 80	1 (76)

Kuntengo gakkai
Established: 1954
Journal: 629 papers (number 1-127)
Presentations: 725 (meetings 1-105)
Total 1354 (split by coauthors: 1416)
Total number of presenters: 1416
Members number: 413 (May 2011, present)

As Table 3 indicates, only 13 speakers (authors) have given more than 21 talks at the Kuntengo gakkai. They account for only 5% of the total number of speakers, but, at 567 between papers and presentations, they comprise 40% of all contributions (data based on a total of 1416 divided by single author). Those with five presentations or less amount to 200. They account for 78% of all contributors, but their 414 papers are only 29% of the total. Ninety-one speakers, a remarkable 35%, only have one single presentation, accounting for no more than the 6% of the total number of

presentations.

These data speak less about the monopoly exercised by few selected scholars within an academic society and more about the fact that only a handful of specialists carry on with this kind of research throughout their careers. While I cannot mention specific names, I can say that, among the 13 scholars with more than 21 contributions, 10 belong to the second generation, 1 to the third, and two to the fourth. Once again, these data underscore how difficult, if not impossible, it is for fourth and even fifth and sixth generation scholars to achieve or outdo the results of the first three generations.

In my case, for example, I could theoretically reach a maximum of 76 contributions before my retirement. To achieve such a result, however, I would have to give two presentations a year at the Kuntengo gakkai conference (where submission are reviewed) and I would have to submit two papers each year to the peer-reviewed Society journal.

(2) *Problems with the sources*

Glossed materials are the main sources for historical studies on *kanbun kundoku*. They present two kinds of issues: issues related to the composition of the main Chinese text and issues with the glosses. As far as composition issues are concerned, one needs to take into account the structure of the notation.⁷ There are four different ways in which the main text and the commentaries can relate; they depend on the type of document (Buddhist or secular) and on the presence (or absence) of commentary-like contents within the main text (see Table 3). Other factors further complicate the relation between a text and a commentary that is not embedded therein.

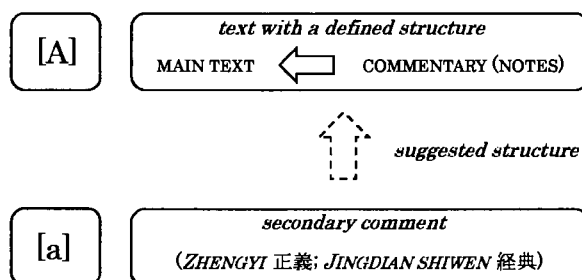
Table 3. Documents in Chinese seen through the relation between the main text and its commentary

	COMMENTARIES		
	WITH NOTES	WITHOUT NOTES	
SECULAR TEXTS	A	B	A: Chinese Classics, Historical texts, B: Others
BUDDHIST TEXTS	C	D	C: Few limited texts, D: The majority of religious texts

In the case of secular texts belonging to group A the relation between the main body of the Chinese Classic and the commentary can be schematized as follows.

⁷ Kosukegawa Teiji, "Kanbun bunken no kaisō kōzō (chūshaku kōzō) to shuten to no kankei ni tsuite", 104th Kuntengo gakkai, Kyōto University, 22 May 2011.

Figure 3. Multilayered structure of a commented Chinese Classic text



Issues related to the nature of the glosses are just as complex. The basic premise is that the *kunten* 訓点 added in the interlinear space resulted from the interpretation of the main text's Chinese contents, and that the main text was already a Classic in most countries of the Sinosphere. Each gloss was, therefore, the product of a long tradition of textual exegesis; it was added to the manuscript by an anonymous glosser only after an accurate selection process. This background intellectual activity and its many layers should not be forgotten when one examines the intentions of the glosser and his choice to add an explanation or a reading next to a specific passage or word.

The large variety of uncommon marks and symbols used in individual annotations further complicates the decoding of *kunten* materials. Different forms of *kana* were used for phonogram glosses, while morphosyntactic glosses, or *wokototen*, were marked with a complex system of dots and other similar keys placed around a character or within its area.⁸

Another main issue in the study of *kunten* manuscripts has to do with the tools and materials used for glossing. A case in point are the so-called *kakuhitsuten* 角筆点 (dry point glosses), which have been widely studied in the last decade.

Kakuhitsuten were symbols scratched on the surface of the paper with the aid of a writing instrument, usually a small rod with a pointed end. In most cases, the glosses inscribed on the text are hardly visible to the naked eye. *Kunten* materials were almost exclusively glossed with black ink (most common) or with colored pigments such as red and vermilion. As a result, the presence of dry point glosses often went unnoticed. In recent years, thorough investigations have revealed the presence of *kakuhitsuten* in sacred texts dating back to the Nara period (710-784) and in sutras brought back to Japan from the continent.⁹

The discovery in 2000 of a number of Korean texts dating from the 11th and 12th centuries and other evidence provided by stylus-glossed texts have greatly impacted the field and have paved the way for the development of a new evolutionary theory of *kundoku* in the Sinosphere. In the future, more care should be paid to these documents, even though their almost invisible marks are not as

⁸ For example, specialists used to distinguish between *seiten* 星点 ("star marks"), or glosses consisting of a single point, and *senten* 線点 ("line marks"), a term of convenience that indicates all other marks.

⁹ For a detailed explanation see Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Kakuhitsu bunken kenkyū dōron — jōkan higashi Ajia hen*, Tōkyō, Kyūko shoin, 2004, p. 260, 353 and passim.

easily identifiable to the untrained eye as the vermilion or black ink glosses. Examinations of dry point glosses hinge on a number of variables: paper surface (quality of the fibers used in the production process, presence of wrinkles, etc.); light (one can easily mistake a shade for a mark, leading to misinterpretation); and, last but not least, the keen eye of the scholar.

Considering all these difficulties in the investigation of *kunten* materials, it is not surprising that the number of young researchers devoted to this field is actually on the decline.

(3) *Problems related to the investigation of the sources*

Issues related to the inner structure of *kunten* materials such as the ones mentioned above should have been eliminated with the creation of digital repositories of high-resolution images. Scholars can survey the manuscripts directly from their Universities or even from home, with no time constraints, taking advantage of such modern technologies as image processing or using databases for statistical investigation. The young generation of scholars could have benefitted from this new user-friendly approach, one especially familiar to their world.

Unfortunately, the freedom and convenience offered by digitalization have come at a price, namely reduced access to the original manuscripts.¹⁰ As one's research progresses and becomes more refined, it becomes increasingly important for a scholar to verify his assumptions by surveying the original documents in person – as in the case of the aforementioned dry point glosses.

This raises a number of key questions on the role and purpose of digitalization in the future of Japanese linguistic studies.

4. Is there a future for *kunten* studies?

Given these premises one wonders, is there a future for the endangered field of historical studies on the evolution of *kanbun kundoku*?

The habit of glossing texts in Japanese began around 1,200 years ago; each year almost one million high school students learn the basic principles of this linguistic practice. The situation will remain unchanged until modifications are made to the *Curriculum guidelines* (*Gakushū shidō yōryō* 学習指導要領) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT, Monbukagakushō 文部科学省).

On the other hand, there is also the remote possibility that, as some speculate, the Japanese and the Japanese language will become extinct¹¹ in the next 1,000 years (AD 3000) (see Table 4).

¹⁰ See Kosukegawa Teiji, "Dejitaruka jidai ni taiō shita kanbun kundoku kenkyū no shakaiteki kyōyū shisutemu no kōchiku", *Toyama daigaku jinbun gakubu kiyō*, 52, 2010.

¹¹ See Kuroki Toshio, *Chiteki bunshō to presentēshon*, Chūōshinsho 2109 Tōkyō, Chūōkōronsha, pp. 167-169.

Table 4. Population decline in the future¹²

YEAR	GENERAL POPULATION (IN MILLIONS)
2009	127,510
2010	127,415
2050	92,544
2100	47,100
2200	12,164
2300	3,142
2400	812
2500	210
2600	54
2700	14
2800	4
2900	1
3000	0

To most, population trends of the next millennium may appear completely unrelated to *kanbun kundoku* studies. Indeed, while one cannot deny the impact of *kanbun kundoku* and of its features (phonological, grammatological, lexical, and syntactical) on the modern language, it is more difficult to make a similar case for its impact on modern society.

But think of it this way: each culture has its own Classics and has made every effort to pass them on to future generations. When seen from this angle, one cannot dismiss the contribution of *kundoku* practice to the diffusion of culture in the countries of the Sinosphere in the past centuries, and through the present day.

It is also important to point out that, as I mentioned above, *kundoku* practice operates according to mechanism that are different from those of translation and oral interpretation. If we define *kundoku* as “an extra-temporal and spatial way of decoding classical documents in a vernacular”, then its historical role as an intellectual activity becomes evident.

One thousand two hundred years have passed since the beginning of glossing in Japan and another ten centuries remain before the Japanese language disappears for good. We are roughly in the middle of this interval and it is my opinion that rethinking the state of the field will help predict the future of “human intellectual activities”.

In 2001 I inaugurated a series of lectures on the history of *kanbun kundoku* at Toyama University both as part of the Liberal Education curriculum and at the Departmental level. At first it was not my intention to present a “history of the intellectual activities of humankind”, but looking back at the results I have achieved both in my teaching and in my research, it appears as if I was ultimately led in that direction.

Opportunities offered by University teaching

(Liberal Arts: General discourse on Liberal Arts “Language and Culture”)

- 2004 first sem.: *Kundoku kara 'kundoku' he* 訓読から kundoku へ (“From *kundoku* to ‘*kundoku*”, 3rd term all Departments)
- 2005 first sem.: *Yōkoso shin kanbun kundoku no sekai he* ようこそ新「漢文訓読」の世界へ (“Welcome to the new world of *kanbun kundoku*”, 1st term all Departments)
- 2006 first sem.: *Yōkoso kanbun kundoku no sekai he* ようこそ「漢文訓読」の新世界へ (“Welcome to the world of *kanbun kundoku*”, 1st term all Departments)

¹² Data from a 2009 survey of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

- 2007 first sem.: *Yōkoso kanbun kundoku no shinshin sekai he* ようこそ「漢文訓読」の新々世界へ (“Welcome to the new ‘new world’ of *kanbun kundoku*”, 1st term all Departments)
- 2010 first sem.: *Michi sekai he no chōsen – Higashi Ajia kanbun kundoku no kōzō* – 未知世界への挑戦 – 東アジア漢文訓読史の構築 – (“Challenge into an unknown world – The construction of the history of *kanbun kundoku* in East Asia – , 1st term all Departments)
- 2011 first semester: *“Kanbun kundoku no sekai” daizukai* 「漢文訓読の世界」大図解 (“The world of *kanbun kundoku*” an overall picture, 3rd term all Departments)

(Faculty of Humanities: Special lecture on Japanese Linguistics)

- 2001 first sem. – 2004 second sem.: *“Kanbun kundokushi no kenkyū”* 漢籍訓読史の研究 (“Studies on the history of *kanbun kundoku*”)
- 2005 first sem. – 2010 second sem.: *“Higashi Ajia gakujutsu kōryūshi to shite no kanbun kundoku”* 東アジア学術交流史としての漢文訓読 (“*Kanbun kundoku* as the history of scholarly exchanges in East Asia”)
- 2011 full year: *“Higashi Ajia kanbun kundokushi gaisetsu”* 東アジア漢文訓読史概説 (“An outline of *kanbun kundoku* history in East Asia”)

For almost all of the above I have recorded the students’ responses to the course using “interactive response cards” (*sōhōkōgata kakunin kādo* 双方向型「確認カード」). At present I am organizing the results of these surveys and plan to present them in the near future.

The broadening of international research projects

Participation and presentations at International workshops and conferences

- 2001: International workshop “Old printed texts in Chinese and their reception (*kundoku*)”, Hokkaidō University
- 2002: International workshop “The international diffusion of Classical texts and their reception (*kundoku*)”, Hokkaidō University
- 2003: International conference “The reception of Chinese characters and Classical Chinese in Japan and Korea”, University of Toyama
- 2004: International conference “New developments in Japanese, Dunhuang and *kanbun kundoku* studies”, Hokkaidō University
- 2005: International symposium of east asianists, “Interpreting classical Chinese documents in vernacular”, The Toho Gakkai (The Institute of Eastern Culture)
- 2005: International Conference “Methods for glossing Chinese texts and the characters of Asia”, University of Seoul

- 2006: International workshop “Classical text exchange (*kundoku*) and logographic information”, Hokkaidō University
- 2007: International Korean Japanese workshop “The old languages and characters of Korea and Japan”, Seoul National University
- 2007: International symposium “The dawn and development of Japanese *kanbun*”, Nishōgakusha University
- 2008: International Korean Japanese workshop “Comparative studies in the languages and cultures of Korea and Japan”, Seoul National University
- 2008: International conference “Globalization and Asia”, Myongji University (Korea)
- 2009: International workshop “Logographic information and *kanbun kundoku*”, Hokkaidō University
- 2009: Japanese Korean *kundoku* symposium, Reitaku University
- 2010: Japanese Korean linguistics conference – Coexistence and mutual understanding between Japan and Korea through Korean language, Reitaku University
- 2011: The 13th EAJS (European Association for Japanese Studies) International Conference, Tallin University (Estonia)

Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (project director: Kosukegawa)

- 2004-2006 (Scientific research B): Demonstrative research on Japanese and Korean *kundoku* materials seen from an international perspective
- 2007-2009 (Scientific research B, Scientific survey abroad): Demonstrative research on *kanbun kundoku* in the Sinosphere seen from an international perspective
- 2007-2008 (Scientific research C): The creation of a standard for the international sharing of Japanese *kunten* materials
- 2010-2011 (Start-up research): Strategic research on *kanbun kundoku* as common intellectual property
- 2011-2013 (Scientific research B): Demonstrative research on a model for the history of *kanbun kundoku* in East Asia

Creation of international research groups and related activities

- Research group for an International Vocabulary for Research on Vernacular Readings of Chinese Texts (from 2009, members: Ita: 1, USA: 1, Kor: 2, Jap: 3)
- EAJS Research group (from 2010, members: Ita: 1, USA: 1, Jap: 3)

Joint research projects with Korean scholars started more than 10 years ago. In recent years scholars from Europe and North America have joined the group, further contributing to the

internationalization of this collaborative project.

Kundoku common users: How to relate

If academic studies on the historical development of *kanbun kundoku* are facing hard times, the exact opposite is true for those who simply use *kundoku* to decode texts in Classical Chinese.

For example, the number of students who attend the *kokugo sōgō* 国語総合 course¹³ (Japanese language – general), where *kanbun* is included as a subject, is estimated to be approximately one million each year (990,000 according to the data on the number of High school students scheduled to graduate in the FY 2011). This means that the number of those who mastered the principles of *kundoku* rises by one million units each year.

On the other hand, in January 2011 the 50,000 candidates at the University Entrance Exam Center test struggled with the fourth section, the one dedicated to Classical Chinese. Moreover, if we include among *kundoku* users those interested in reading and writing Chinese characters, understanding their meaning, and using them correctly in sentences, we could add the candidates for the *Nihon kanji nōryoku kentei shiken* 日本漢字能力検定試験 (Japanese Kanji Aptitude Test, 2,300,000 candidates in the 2010 FY) to the total number of *kundoku* common users. If *kundoku* scholars were able to speak to such wide audience, the field would grow significantly. The same would be true if the *Kuntengo gakkai* were to embark in cooperation projects with associations and groups that are active and interested in scholarly education, for example the *Zenkoku kanbun kyōiku gakkai* 全国漢文教育学会 (National Association for *kanbun* education, founded in 1966, reorganized in 1984, 800 members).

In short, unless specialized users decide to deal and cooperate with the so-called common users, it will become increasingly difficult to expect an improvement of the current situation of *kundoku* historical studies.

5. Visibility and experience required for *kundoku* studies

As I have stated in the introduction, the lack of a master publication on the diachronic evolution of Japanese *kanbun kundoku* does not imply the complete absence of introductory books and papers on the topic. For example, the following publications can be useful to those who want to approach the history of glossing in Japan and its linguistic significance.

- Endō Yoshimoto 遠藤嘉基, *Kunten shiryō to kuntengo no kenkyū* 訓点資料と訓点語の研究

¹³ A required course in the current MEXT curriculum guidelines; it can be chosen as an alternative to *kokugo hyōgen I* 国語表現 I (Japanese language expression I). In the revised edition of the curriculum guidelines, made public in March 2009 and effective beginning April 2013, this figures as the only required course for Japanese language.

(*Kunten materials and their study*), Chūōtoshō shuppan, 1952

• Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕, “Kunten shiryō to sono toriatsukaikata” 「訓点資料とその取扱ひ方」 (“Handling *kunten* materials”), *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 国語と国文学, XXXVII, 10, 1960

• Hirohama Fumio 廣濱文雄, “Kunten shiryō kenkyū no ashiato” 「訓点資料研究の足跡」 (“Following in the footsteps of *kunten* studies”), *Kundokugo to kunten shiryō* 訓点語と訓点資料, 25, 1963

• Kobayashi Yoshinori 小林芳規, “Tokushū Kokugogaku no shinryōiki kunten shiryō – kiroku shiryō” 「特集 国語学の新領域訓点資料・記録資料」 (“Special issue – A new field in Japanese language investigation: *kunten* materials – *kiroku* materials”), *Bungaku gogaku* 文学・語学, 48, 1968

• Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕, *Heian jidaigo shinron* 平安時代語新論 (*A New Thesis on Heian-period Japanese*), Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1969

• Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕, Kana 仮名, Ōno Susumu 大野晋, Maruya Saiichi 丸谷才一 (eds.), *Nihongo no sekai* 日本語の世界 5 (*The World of Japanese*), Chūōkōronsha 中央公論社, 1981

• Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕, “Kuntengo kenkyū no ashiato wo tadotte” 「訓点語研究の足跡を辿つて」 (“Following in the footsteps of *kunten* language studies”), *Kuntengo to kunten shiryō* 訓点語と訓点資料, 93, 1994

• Ishizuka Harumichi 石塚晴通, “Kuntengo kenkyū kongo no tenbō” 「訓点語研究 今後の展望」 (“Studies on the language of *kunten* materials: future prospects”), *Kuntengo to kunten shiryō* 訓点語と訓点資料, 93, 1994

• Kosukegawa Teiji 小助川貞次, “Shinka suru kuntenshiryō” 「進化する訓点資料」 (“*Kunten* Sources in Evolution”), *Nihongogaku* 日本語学, XIX, 11, 2000

• Tsukimoto Masayuki 月本雅幸, “Kuntengogaku kenkyūhō” 「訓点語学研究法」 (“How to conduct research on Japanese glossed manuscripts”), *Kuntengo jiten* 訓点語辞典, Tōkyōdō shuppan 東京堂出版, 2001

While these works explain the complexity of *kunten* materials and of their structure, a complete understanding thereof necessitates a direct examination of the original manuscripts and concrete experience in the field. For example, someone new to pottery would waste his time trying to master the art of kneading clay, using the potter’s wheel, coating, and firing the kiln simply by reading a book. The same would be true for a swimmer: one can learn all the most advanced theories, but in the end one has to get into the water and train. For a beginner in the study of *kunten* materials, existing introductory texts are like a foreign language.¹⁴ Training a scholar requires seeing and touching the documents.

¹⁴ In Kosukegawa Teiji, “Watashi ga susumeru kono issatsu” (Tsukishima Hiroshi, *Heian jidaigo shinron*), *Nihongogaku*, XXX, 12, 2011, I briefly explain how I became acquainted with this discipline.

Likewise, scholars in other disciplines are unfamiliar with the use of *kunten* materials and ignore the appropriate research methods and the proper way of handling the manuscripts. A beginner who unfolds a scroll on the table may not know the proper way to roll it up and put back in the box. Japanese students are trained in the use of basic scientific instruments and tools since Middle and High school, but are never taught how use and handle old books and documents. Adding to the complications are the difficulties involved in the investigation of the original documents and in gaining access to the materials. Most *kunten* materials are national treasures or important cultural properties preserved in public facilities (libraries, museums), in temples, or in private collections. Obtaining authorization to see a manuscript often takes a long time. Libraries and museums usually set their own standard procedures to grant such permission. Things tend to become more complicated when one needs to ask temples for permission to conduct research; in the case of private collectors, oftentimes it is downright impossible even to get in touch with them.

The creation of digital archives helped bypass some of these roadblocks, but at the same time resulted in the loss of crucial information attainable only through the direct examination of the manuscripts.

Expensive DVD sets (200,000 yen each) that introduce job applicants to proper business manners have become popular these days, and career-training centers offer free weekly seminars on the topic. Despite such wide availability of information, university students seem unable to acquire the basics of business etiquette and communication skills, possibly because they lack direct experience. By the same token, one cannot spark the interest of students or entice them to join the field simply by using books. For all the theoretical information we can offer, young scholars still need personal experience and direct exposure. As I have mentioned in section 4, I always record the students' responses to my courses. I do this is because, in addition to experience and visibility, one must also listen to the students' voices to create an accurate outline of *kundoku* and *kundoku* studies.