

CHAPTER 1

DOUBTS ABOUT “LITERATURE”: LOCUS OF THE PROBLEM, METHODS OF APPROACH

1.1 The Vagueness of “Literature”

1.1.1 The Difficulty of Defining “Literature”

What is “literature”? Those capable of answering this blunt question confidently are rare. Still, most people have built up some sort of personal idea, however vague, on the subject, derived from their own experience of reading literary works and from opinions they have heard or read elsewhere. On that basis they may recommend a work to a friend as “literarily superb,” or decide that another, while good for passing the time, “is unworthy to be called literature.” Such judgments depend on what the speaker expects from literature, and on what the speaker thinks literature should be. These two broad considerations shape an individual’s concept, or view, of “literature.”

Such a view of “literature” can differ considerably from person to person, from generation to generation, and from age to age. A once-absorbing work can seem tedious on rereading; while it also happens that a work once set aside as boring, then reread under the influence of a friend’s high praise, can suddenly reveal its hidden wonders. One’s appraisal of a work can change with one’s tastes and values; it can broaden; and indeed it can perhaps be said even to shift from moment to moment.

However, this book will not treat “literature” according to any such shifting, individual standards. Instead, it will treat the topic as a range, or category, within which such yardsticks can be applied. In other words, it will aim to discuss the most basic framework for defining what “literature” means, what it is, and what it is not. For example, no one reads an essay on politics in the same manner as a literary work. Some political essays may arouse feelings comparable to those aroused by literature, but it is senseless to expect that sort of experience from such works. Everyone knows that. This book will seek to understand the origins of that apparently self-evident conclusion. It will consider in that connection the concepts and standards of judgment that have long governed the idea of what literature should be.

However, this is a difficult project. It has always been universally recognized that literature is extremely difficult to define. For example, *Bungei daijiten* 文芸大辞典 (1928)¹ contains the following entry under the heading, “Definitions of literature [bungaku].”

The meaning of “literature” seems easy enough to grasp, but it is far too vague

1 Saitō Ryūtarō 1928.

to define with any degree of clarity. Hitherto many writers have proposed many such definitions. Differing as they do among themselves, they can be summarized as follows.²

- (1) The great American lexicographer Joseph Worcester (1784-1865): Literature is “that which preserves in words the fruits of learning, knowledge, and the imagination.”
- (2) The British literary historian Stopford Brooke (1832-1916): Literature is “that which expresses in words, for the pleasure of the reader, the thought and feelings of intelligent men and women.”
- (3) The French critic Alexandre Vinet (1797-1847)³ wrote, “‘Literature’ embraces the totality of works written by men in order to reveal themselves comprehensively to others.”
- (4) The British critic Matthew Arnold (1822-1888): “The term ‘literature’ is vast. It appears to designate the totality of works written in words or printed in books.”
- (5) Bonnet, in France: “‘Literature’ designates all works in prose or verse that are born less of reflection than of the imagination; that attempt less to be uplifting or practical than to please as many readers as possible; and that appeal to general rather than specialized knowledge.”
- (6) Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859): “There exists, first, a literature of knowledge and, second, a literature of power. The function of the former is to teach, while that of the latter is to move.”
- (7) According to Theodore Hunt (1834-1930), a professor at Princeton University in America: “‘Literature’ designates works made up of verbal expressions redolent of thoughts, feelings, pastimes, and so on, set out in a non-technical way so as to be understood and enjoyed by the generality of people.”
- (8) The Shakespeare scholar Edward Dowden (1843-1913): “Exploration, and the investigation of reality, are the goals of science. The function of art is to lift our lives, through the emotions, toward higher consciousness.”
- (9) To summarize the words of Caleb Thomas Winchester (1847-1920), of Wesleyan University in America: “Not only does literature contain universally valid truths, but a literary work itself has universal value.”

This discordant assortment of definitions can hardly help troubling any reader, whether a contemporary of the dictionary in which they appear, or more recent. All come from European or American authors, yet all contain elements that seem to cast doubt on their validity. Among them, the closest to the Japanese commonplace notion of literature are probably (2), (5), (7), and (8). The expression “set out in a non-technical way,” in (7), no doubt refers more to sensibility than to logic. In (8) the term employed is “art” rather than “literature,” but this Shakespearean scholar probably

2 TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The statements quoted below, all given in Japanese in the *Bungei daijiten* article, have been translated here back from Japanese into English.

3 Alexandre Rodolphe Vinet was actually Swiss.

has drama in mind.

In contrast, (1), (3), (4), and (6), which refer to learning, knowledge, and so on, are broader in scope than our own category of “literature.” Most people in contemporary Japan would feel they are too broad. They might well admit even a political essay under the heading of literature. As for (9), it could apply even to a devout Christian’s conception of the Bible, and as a definition of literature it therefore fails. The Christian Bible is not normally treated as literature (see 1.2.3).

Moreover, the authors of definitions (1), (3), and (4), excessively broad as they appear to be, belong to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The definition given by Dowden, who lived into the twentieth century, is the one closest to our own. Perhaps this means something.

1.1.2 A Glance at the Dictionary

It might be of interest at this point to cite the entry for “bungaku” in *Kōjien* 広辞苑 (4th edition, Iwanami Shoten, 1991):

- (1) Learning (*gakumon* 学問). Scholarly accomplishment (*gakugei* 学芸). Mastery of poetry and prose (*shibun ni kan-suru gakujutsu* 詩文に関する学術).
- (2) (“Literature”) Artistic works that employ the power of the imagination to express in language the outer and inner worlds.
- (3) Under the [8th century] *ritsuryō* 律令 legal codes, a family tutor provided at government expense to the household of a prince.
- (4) In the Tokugawa period, a Confucian scholar employed by a feudal domain (*han* 藩).

In principle, *Kōjien* definitions begin with the one closest to the root meaning of the word, which in this case is meaning (1). In other words, (1) describes the meaning of the word “bungaku” (Ch. *wenxue*) when it entered Japan from China. “Poetry and prose” clearly refers to poetry and prose in Chinese. Meaning (2) defines “bungaku” as the word used to translate the English term “literature.” Thus the now commonly accepted meaning of “bungaku” is derived from English. Finally, (3) and (4) are usages too specialized to need further discussion here.

In contrast, *Daijirin* 大辞林 (Sanseidō, 2nd edition, 1995) defines “bungaku” as follows.

- (1) A work of art for which the medium is language. Poetry, fiction, drama, essays (*zuihitsu* 随筆), literary criticism (*hyōron* 評論), etc. Literary art (*bungei* 文芸).
- (2) The study of literary works such as poetry, fiction, drama, etc. Literary studies (*bungei gaku* 文芸学).
- (3) A general term for literary studies, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, history, etc.
- (4) Under the [8th century] *ritsuryō* legal codes, a tutor charged with teaching the [Chinese] classics in the household of a prince.

The first *Daijirin* definition covers the currently most common meaning, followed by more specialized meanings and the meaning in the classical language. Therefore (1) is the meaning

now in common use. Referring as it does to the study of (1), (2) can be assimilated to (1), while (3) defines “bungaku” as it appears in such terms as Bungakubu 文学部 (a university “Faculty of Letters”) and *bungaku hakushi* 文学博士 (“doctor of letters”). The *Kōjien* entry mentioned neither (2) nor (3).

The *Kōjien* and *Daijirin* entries, taken together, suggest that the word “bungaku” referred originally to the learning and literary arts of China, and that once adopted into the Japanese language it became also the name of an official, scholarly position—a meaning totally different from its present one. They also show that it was then accepted as the translation of the English word “literature,” that is to say, linguistic art (*genko geijutsu* 言語芸術), and that understanding of “bungaku” is still current. Below, I will consider step by step whether this schematic evolution of the term is correct.

The entry for “bungaku” in *Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 (Shōgakukan, 1975) gathers the content of the *Kōjien* and *Daijirin* entries into the six following definitions.

- (1) Scholarly accomplishment, learning, or the cultivation of learning.
- (2) Under the *ritsuryō* legal codes, an official tutor to the household of all ranked princes, excluding princesses.
- (3) In the Tokugawa period, the official Confucian scholar of a feudal domain.
- (4) Among the arts, the one the medium of which is language. Poetry, fiction, drama, literary musings, criticism, etc.; artistic works in which the writer expresses his own thoughts and feelings through a fictitious world constructed mainly by the power of his imagination, and appealing to human sentiments and emotions.
- (5) The field of scholarship that studies literary works such as poetry, drama, or fiction.
- (6) Scholarship in fields other than the natural sciences, political science, law, economics, etc. A general term for (5), in addition to history, sociology, philosophy, psychology, religion, etc.

The curious content of (6) obviously refers to the fields covered by a university “Faculty of Letters.”

I should like to return to *Bungei daijiten*. In order to define literature it quotes exclusively European and American writers, no doubt because the current meaning of “bungaku” in Japanese harks back to translations from English. Presumably the cognate French word (*littérature*) meant approximately the same thing. However, with the exception of meaning (8), attributed to Dowden, no writer whose birth and death dates are indicated limits his definition to linguistic art. This raises a number of questions.

- (1) Has not the English word “literature” (or its French or German counterparts) changed in meaning over time?
- (2) Why was the word “bungaku,” which before the English term “literature” was accepted in Japan meant learning and Chinese poetry, or a teacher of Confucian philosophy, used to translate “literature” in the sense of linguistic art? Is not the

- gap between the meanings of the two words simply too wide?
- (3) Before Japan accepted the English meaning of “literature,” did it really have no term corresponding to linguistic art?
 - (4) If it did not, then how were Japanese poetry (waka 和歌), linked verse (renga 連歌), haikai 俳諧 verse, tales (monogatari 物語); later genres such as *ukiyo zōshi* 浮世草子, *yomihon* 読本, or *gesaku* 戯作 fiction; noh 能, kyōgen 狂言, kabuki 歌舞伎, or jōruri 浄瑠璃 scripts; or literary musings regarded and handled?
 - (5) Finally, if the Japanese were unable to treat Japanese poetry, tales, *gesaku* fiction, kabuki scripts, and so on as linguistic art until they accepted the English term “literature,” that situation brings up certain urgent and fundamental questions. Ever since the Meiji period we have read as “bungaku” in the English sense (in accordance with the concept of linguistic art) *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, the noh plays of Zeami 世阿弥 (1363?-1443), the *ukiyo zōshi* fiction of Saikaku 西鶴 (1642-1693), the jōruri scripts of Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653-1724), the *yomihon* fiction of Ueda Akinari 上田秋成 (1734-1809) and Takizawa Bakin 滝沢馬琴 (1767-1848), and the *gesaku* fiction of Shikitei Sanba 式亭三馬 (1776-1822) and Jippensha Ikku 十返舎一九 (1765-1831). Can we really then be said to have understood *Man'yōshū*, *Genji*, and so on, which were written in an age lacking the concept of linguistic art? Or could it be that we committed the absurdity of taking a political treatise for an example of literary art?

I will cite two concrete examples. First, *Kokinwakashū* 古今和歌集 (905) includes a large number of ritual poems. Such poems lack the appeal conferred by the expression of an individual's emotions, and for that reason they have often been ignored or spurned as tedious. However, bore us as they may, their number suggests their importance for the people of their time.⁴ Second, a great poet of the late Heian period, Fujiwara no Shunzei 藤原俊成 (1114-1204), repeatedly identified Japanese poetry with the way of the Buddha.⁵ In the past we have judged quality of the poetry of his time according to the standards of “literature,” that is to say, the Western notion of linguistic art. But is that good enough?

Of course, we who live in the contemporary world are free to adopt any standard to judge the value of a classic. However, in so doing we risk being arbitrary. We risk passing a one-sided judgment on the object of our attention, according to standards unrelated to it, and without ever considering its own.

- (6) Finally, leaving aside the definition of “literature” as the study of literature, why and when did the word come to be used not only for the linguistic arts but for a

4 Doubts about judging the classics according to the modern concept of literature seem to have been shared by the scholars who worked on the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*. See, for example, Furuhashi 1986. See also, on the subject of the ritual poems in *Kokinwakashū*, Takenishi 1993. This and other works take up the issue of their value.

5 Fujiwara no Shunzei assimilated the way of Japanese poetry to the way of the Buddha in *Korai fūteishō* and elsewhere. See *Nihon kagaku taikei*, vol. 2, p. 305.

“Faculty of Letters” that includes philosophy and history, and for the title of a “doctor of letters”?

It will be necessary to answer these questions one by one. Apart from the issue—alluded to in (1) above—of whether the English word has evolved in meaning, not a single book or article has ever been written to answer them comprehensively.

1.1.3 The Range of “Literature”

Raymond Williams began his article on “Literature” as follows:

Literature is a difficult word because its conventional contemporary meaning appears, at first sight, so simple. There is no apparent difficulty in phrases like **English literature** or **contemporary literature**, until we find occasion to ask whether all books and writing are **literature** (and if they are not, which kinds are excluded and by what criteria) or until, to take a significant example, we come across a distinction between **literature** and *drama* on the grounds, apparently, that drama is a form primarily written for spoken performance (though often also to be read). It is not easy to understand what is at stake in these often confused distinctions until we look at the history of the word.⁶

Raymond Williams, who himself published many studies of drama, chose to illustrate the vagueness of “literature” by raising the question of whether drama belongs within it. Drama is certainly written in words and can be read for pleasure. In Tokugawa Japan, before Shakespeare and other European dramatists were ever introduced to the country, there were publications associated with both kabuki and jōruri. From the late Taishō (1912-1926) into the early Shōwa (1926-1936) periods, Kurata Hyakuzō’s 倉田百三 play *Shukke to sono deshi* 出家とその弟子 (1917) became a best seller, and Kikuchi Kan’s 菊池寛 play *Chichi kaeru* 父帰る (1917) was widely read as well. After World War II, Kinoshita Junji’s 木下順二 play *Yūzuru* 夕鶴 (1949) attracted many readers. However, there is no denying that the text of a play is a script for performance, an adjunct to the dramatic space created by the speeches and movement of the actors, the stage scenery, and the music. The play genre known as *lesedrama* is meant only for reading, it is true, but even then, the text is written and read with a dramatic space in mind. In that respect drama clearly differs in kind from poetry or fiction, which stir the reader’s imagination thanks solely to the words on the page.

If drama is to be included under the heading of literature, then why have *kōdan* 講談 and *rakugo* 落語, founded as they are on scripts that many readers enjoy, never been treated in the same way? From roughly the third decade of Meiji into the early Shōwa period (ca. 1900-1930), *kōdan* and *rakugo* played a major role in attracting new readers to newspapers and magazines. The *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 大阪朝日新聞, the top-selling Osaka newspaper, began publishing an evening edition in 1915, the sales of which are said to have been increased enormously by the

6 Williams 1985, pp. 183-84.

inclusion of *kōdan* and *rakugo*.⁷

If the common people enjoyed reading *kōdan* and *rakugo*, and neither is to be considered art or literature, then what sense does it make to include under the heading of literature Chikamatsu’s *jōruri* plays, which the common people both watched and read? Why did this inconsistency arise, and why does it persist?

What all this means is that the very notion of linguistic art is vague. Convention alone classifies drama as literature, and to wonder why is therefore to ask when and how this convention came into being. In short, there is no other option than to look into the history of “bungaku.” To do so is to remove the blinders of convention, to which we have grown so accustomed that we no longer notice them.

In the meantime, I have already quoted Raymond Williams’s statement that “There is no apparent difficulty in phrases like English literature or contemporary literature, until we find occasion to ask whether all books and writing are literature.” Behind it lies the fact that “literature” in English, apart from the meaning we have been considering, also in fact signifies “all books and writing.” This is the definition for “literature” given by the great critic Matthew Arnold in definition (4) of the above-cited *Bungei daijiten*.

The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (fourth edition, 1989), a convenient and reliable dictionary of contemporary English, explains the term “literature” as follows.

- (1) (a) Writings that are valued as works of art, especially fiction, drama, and poetry.
 (b) The activity of writing or studying these.
- (2) Writings on a particular subject.
- (3) (Informal) Pamphlets or leaflets.

(1a) is an exemplary statement of the contemporary meaning. (The 1997 compact edition adds, “as contrasted with technical books and journalism.”) Under (2) the *OALD* gives the following example: “There is now an extensive literature on the use of computers in the home.” (The 1997 compact edition gives the example of “literature on poultry-farming.”) These examples suggest that “literature” can be used for almost all printed texts. Regarding (3), the 1997 edition explanation refers to “sales literature.”

No doubt some have never noticed that, in contemporary English, “literature” can thus designate all books and printed material, so tightly are we Japanese bound to the fixed assumption that “literature” means “bungaku,” which means linguistic art. Such is convention.

The English term “literature” appears to be derived from the Latin *litteratura* (the acquisition of knowledge by reading) and the French *littérature* (same), both of which entered England in the fourteenth century. The German *Literatur* has the same origin. The first meaning of the Latin *litteratura* is simply “letters” (of the alphabet), hence, by extension, written documents, rhetoric, etc. That is why anything written can be called “literature.” Let us call this “literature” in the broad sense. It differs from the modern meaning of “bungaku” in Japanese. In contrast, the 1989 *OALD*,

⁷ Kinbara 1983, vol. 1, p. 271. The rising popularity of *naniwabushi* 浪花節 ballads (also known as *rōkyōku* 浪曲) led to a decline in that of *kōdan*, but purely as reading material *kōdan* became, if anything, more popular than ever.

in definition (1), takes it in the narrow meaning of “writings that are valued as works of art.” This we may call “literature” in the narrow sense.

Let us consider an even more basic and convenient English-English dictionary, the *Thorndike-Barnhart Handy Pocket Dictionary* (1952):

- (1) A written work originating in a particular place or time, especially one of lasting value thanks to the beauty of its style or the ideas it contains.
- (2) All books and articles written on a particular subject.

Definition (1) seems to include works of intellectual as well as artistic value. If so, then one might take it as defining “literature” in the median sense. A mere comparison between these simple dictionaries makes clear how broad the English term “literature” is in range, and how ambiguous in meaning.

1.1.4 The History of the Related Value Judgments

In contrast with these basic dictionaries, the great *OED* (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 1989) defines “literature” as follows.

- (1) Acquaintance with ‘letters’ or books; polite or humane learning; literary culture. Now rare and obsolescent. (Examples drawn from the late fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries.)
- (2) Literary work or production; the activity or profession of a man of letters; the realm of letters. (Examples drawn from the late eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries.)
- (3a) Literary productions as a whole; the body of writings produced in a particular country or period, or in the world in general. Now also in a more restricted sense, applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect. (Examples drawn from the early to late nineteenth century.)
- (3b) The body of books and writings that treat a particular subject. (Examples drawn from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries.)
- (3c) (Colloquial) Printed matter of any kind. (Examples drawn from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries.)⁸

Here, literature as a “work of linguistic art” has no separate entry of its own, but is cited instead as a special case under (3), which defines literature as “literary productions as a whole.” Although clearer, the definitions given in the basic dictionaries are not necessarily unanimous in every respect. This is surprising. Perhaps it is due to a judgment that the distinction between works of linguistic

⁸ This entry is essentially unchanged from the first edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933). The second edition merely adds twentieth-century examples for definitions (3b) and (3c).

art and all other written works remains unclear. Presumably this view agrees with that of Raymond Williams, who wrote of the difficulty of making the same distinction.

Despite such uncertainties, “literature” in the narrow sense is now more common than “literature” in the broad sense of all written or printed works. Moreover, despite the inclusion of ideas in the median definition proposed by *Thorndike-Barnhart* (1), it generally implies the recognition of some sort of value in the work. Conversely, works of linguistic art without recognized value are excluded from “literature” in the narrow and median sense. In other words, it may not be unfair to conclude that the English term “literature” does not cover all works of linguistic art.

It is widely held today that the understanding underlying the *OALD*’s definition (1a) (“Writings that are valued as works of art, especially fiction, drama, and poetry”) was accepted in England, France, and Germany in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. The idea that “literature,” among its other meanings, refers to works of linguistic art that have actual value, arose roughly two hundred years ago, and in the space of a century or so it became the primary meaning of the term. “Literature” in this sense is therefore relatively new.

According to Raymond Williams, the romantic movement in eighteenth-nineteenth century England led to the placing of a high value on the creative imagination, which in turn encouraged the habit of according a special status, among all written works, to poetry, fiction, and drama; and at this point “popular literature,” despite being fiction too, was excluded as being of low value. This matter will be discussed in greater detail later, but “literature” in the narrow sense is founded upon this sort of value judgment.

What Raymond Williams has to say makes it clear that *Kōjien* definition (2) (“Artistic works that employ the force of the imagination to express in language the outer and inner worlds”) reveals a predilection for the creative imagination. However, the notion of “a work of art for which the medium is language,” shared by *Daijirin* (1) and *Kōjien* (2), while close to the restrictive wording of *OALD* (1) and *OED* (3), sets aside the question of value. Of course, one can also say that the expression “a work of art” leaves open the possibility of withholding recognition as “art” from any particular work, even one founded on “the power of the imagination.”

These English dictionaries raise several questions.

- (a) When emphasis is placed on literature as a product of the imagination, or fiction, does it follow that literary musings and essays must be ranked as distant from the essence of literature? Is the content of *Thorndike-Barnhart* (1) to be included, and if it is, how much weight should it be given?
- (b) Further, once the criterion of “fiction” is invoked, one must presumably ask whether Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1966) and other such non-fiction novels are really literature. And what of reportage?⁹
- (c) As a matter of fact, science fiction, which, fiction though it may be, requires science and a scientific mode of thinking, has long been placed in a special category and viewed as being outside orthodox linguistic art. Such has been the case in Japan, where science fiction has flourished ever since World War

9 This book will not take up this question. See Suzuki Sadami 2002a.

II. It is possible to trace the source of this attitude to the view of literature held by Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遙, whose *Shōsetsu shinzui* 小説神髓 (1885-86) established him as “the father of modern Japanese literature.” (See 6.2.2.)

- (d) Again, for those who accept “the faithful depiction of human emotions and life” (*ninjō setai no shajitsu* 人情世態の写実), i.e., the realism championed in *Shōsetsu shinzui*, as the principle of modern literature, the principle of creative imagination upheld in *Kōjien* (2) could be incomprehensible. This is mere conjecture, but that difficulty may explain why the fourth edition of *Kōjien* has, under (2), “Artistic works that employ the power of the imagination to express in language both the outer and inner worlds.”

At any rate, the reason for queries (a) to (d) is that the modern English understanding of “literature” implies various value judgments and invites exclusion and ranking.

- (e) Thus the *Daijirin* (1) and *Kōjien* (2) definitions, centered as they are on the notion of the “work of art for which the medium is language,” conceal, at least on the surface, any value-laden rejection of “popular literature” and “mass literature.” Appearing as they do, at first, to be unrelated to any value, they seem to represent something peculiar to the Japanese “bungaku” that is presumably derived, via translation, from “literature.” Is it possible that some sort of discrepancy has arisen between “literature” in the narrow sense and “bungaku” as a translation term? And if it has, then why? It will no doubt be necessary to investigate and ponder the differences in usage between “literature” in the narrow sense and “bungaku.”

The difficulty of defining literature, whether in English or in Japanese, comes first from the concept’s vagueness of outline; second, from the various value judgments and trends of thought that encourage criteria of exclusion and internal ranking; and, third, from the way convention has rendered the issue all but invisible.

To approach the matter from another direction, the concept of “bungaku” in the narrow sense current nowadays must have been invented at a particular time and in a particular place. How did that come to occur? The answer to that question, if it can be found, should reveal the historically conditioned character of our concept of literature. Moreover, the task of investigating and reflecting on the issue will renew and redefine that concept for us. As a result we should be able at last to remove the blinders of convention. We may then even feel the need to restructure all our thoughts on the matter.

1.2 The Snares of Convention and History: A Critique of Previous Studies

1.2.1 The Discrepancy between Standpoint and Method

It is obvious by now that the only way to understand the meaning of “bungaku” is to examine the history of the word. However it is by no means easy to acquire a clear view of this history. First, by and large the corresponding English term seems to have been adopted into Japanese in the period following the Meiji Restoration. There exist several studies of how this occurred, and when. They are by Yanagida Izumi 柳田泉, a longtime student of Meiji literature; Kobori Keiichirō 小堀桂一郎, a specialist in comparative literature; and Isoda Kōichi 磯田光一, a literary critic and a scholar of English romanticism.

(1) Yanagida’s major work, *Meiji shoki no bungaku shisō* 明治初期の文学思想 (Early Meiji Literary Thought, vol. 1, 1965), traces the changes in ideas concerning literature from the Bakumatsu period into early Meiji. It posits for the Tokugawa period a fundamental distinction between “higher” literature (centered on poetry in Chinese) and “lower” or “elegantly amusing” (*fūryū* 風流) literature (Japanese poetry, *gesaku* fiction), and it explains how the term “bungaku” came eventually to reach the stable meaning of “linguistic art.” In the first stage of this process, the English word “literature” was accepted as a term designating all fields of “science,” that is to say knowledge in general, and it consequently came to refer to scholarly accomplishment (*gakugei*). Thus the “upper” and “lower” realms of literature were merged and restructured so as to come roughly under the same heading, although there remained a distinction between greater (*dai* 大) and lesser (*shō* 小), depending on the aim of the work in question; with the result that, broadly speaking, something very like the earlier division continued to exist. The Tokugawa-period categories of Japanese poetry and *gesaku* fiction both came under the broad heading of scholarship and art, but that “greater” literature (scholarship and art as a whole) continued to include them as “lesser” literature. Between learning in general and linguistic art there is then posited a distinction between “broad” literature and “narrow” literature, or between “greater” literature and “lesser” literature. Finally, in the third stage, the meaning of “scholarship” (*gakujutsu* 学術) splits off from that of “learning” (*gakumon*), with the result that the category of “broad” or “greater” *bungaku* vanishes, and the “*bungaku*” of “modern Japanese *bungaku*” comes into being. This “*bungaku*” involves the lesser absorbing new elements from the greater, adopting others from the West, and thus achieving independence. The completion of this process amounts to the “literary revolution” (*bungaku kakumei* 文学革命) championed by Tsubouchi Shōyō and Futabatei Shimei 二葉亭四迷.¹⁰

10 This summary is based on Yanagida Izumi, “Hashigaki ni kaete” はしがきに代えて, in his *Meiji shoki no bungaku shisō* 明治初期の文学思想, vol. 1, Shunjūsha, 1965. Yanagida did not say here that the key understanding of “*bungaku*” in Japan, namely that of Tsubouchi Shōyō and Futabatei Shimei, was centered on realism, but I have gathered that conclusion from his Section Five (The Influence of Western Literature) of Part Two (The Introduction of Western Literature, especially pp. 169-74) and his Part Three (The Movement of the Literary Revolution, especially pp. 195-96). I discuss his schema further below, under 4.3 (“*Bungaku*” in a Transitional Age).

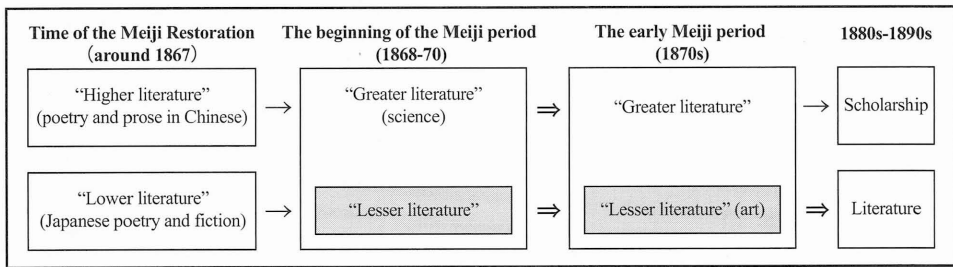


Figure 1 The Evolution of the Concept of Literature in the Meiji Period, according to Yanagida Izumi

(2) Kobori Keiichirō’s “‘Bungaku’ to iu meishō” 「文学」という名称 (1975) is a short article focused on the question of when the term “bungaku” became widely and lastingly accepted as the Japanese translation of the English word “literature.” According to Kobori, “bungaku,” meaning “the sum of learning” (*gakumon bunko* 学問文庫) appears only a few times in medieval and Tokugawa Japan; then, in the first years of the Meiji period it begins to occur sporadically, even haphazardly, in its modern sense as a translation term. Kikuchi Dairoku 菊池大麓 (1855-1917) discussed several examples of usage by Western scholars in his *Shūji oyobi kabun* 修辭及華文 (Rhetoric and Style, 1879), but “bungaku” in the modern sense was not finally accepted until about 1885 or 1886. Kobori based his definition of “bungaku” in this sense on the notions of belles lettres, “polite literature,” that is to say, writings worthy of imitation, writings that invite aesthetic appreciation, and the study of them.¹¹

(3) Isoda Kōichi entitled the first chapter of his *Rokumeikan no keifu: Kindai Nihon bungei shi shi* 鹿鳴館の系譜—近代日本文芸史誌 (1983) “Yakugo ‘bungaku’ no tanjō: Nishi to higashi no kōten” 訳語「文学」の誕生—西と東の交点 (The Birth of Bungaku” as a Translation Term: An Encounter between East and West). Wishing to release the contemporary conception of “bungaku” from its present, narrow confines, he set out to evoke the dramatic encounter between the traditional conception of “bungaku” (learning in general, centered on Confucianism) and its Western counterpart; and to this end he discussed “bungaku” as a translation term from its beginnings to its final acceptance. He found its first use in Fukuchi Ōchi’s 福地桜痴 1875 essay “Nihon bungaku no fushin o tan-zu” 日本文学の不振を嘆ず, and with respect to its acceptance he attached great importance to the founding of the departments of English and German literature at Tokyo Imperial University. Thus he dated it to approximately 1887.¹²

All three discussions of the topic agree that the English term “literature” had both a broad

11 Kobori 1975. Kobori wrote, “The *kabun* mentioned by Kikuchi Dairoku in *Shūji oyobi kabun* (1879) is by the author’s own admission a translation of belles lettres or “polite literature”; but immediately after that the author wrote, “However, the ‘bungaku’ at issue here covers a vast field. His use of the word ‘bungaku’ probably reflects consciously modern Western usage, including the concept of the classics as *literatura*, and no doubt can be seen as the beginning of this usage in Japan.” However, Kobori then cautions that at this stage the modern meaning of “bungaku” was not yet generally accepted. The examples cited by Kobori make it clear that, for him, “bungaku” in its modern acceptance is a general concept based on the ideas of belles lettres and “polite literature.”

12 Isoda 1983. (See also the Kōdansha Bungei Bunko edition (1991); and Isoda Kōichi *chosaku shū*, vol. 5. This topic will be discussed further below, in 4.2 (The Beginnings of “Japanese Literature”).

and a modern, restricted meaning, but each interprets the latter differently. After following the evolution of the concept of “bungaku,” Yanagida Izumi defines it principally as linguistic art (*genjo geijutsu*), meaning realism. Kobori Keiichirō proposes a concept that embraces learning (*gakumon*) and linguistic art based on the ideas of belles lettres and “polite literature”; while Isoda Kōichi favors a broad conception of literary art (*bungei*), that is to say, art the aim of which is fiction. These differences become even clearer when one examines the use of “bungaku” in any particular sentence.

Let us consider these three scholars’ views of how “bungaku” is used in Taguchi Ukichi’s 田口卯吉 *Nihon kaika shōshi* 日本開化小史 (1877-82). The work as a whole discusses the development of Japanese civilization (*bunmei* 文明), but it also devotes a good deal of space to the history of “bungaku.” Taguchi interprets this term in a dual sense: that of wisdom (*chi* 智) and that of feeling (*jō* 情). Of the middle and late Tokugawa period (ca. 1730-1830), when the prestige of Neo-Confucianism was at its height, he wrote that “bungaku” then reached its highest development—that is, “bungaku” in the sense of “wisdom”; while concerning the fiction (*shōsetsu* 小説) of that time he cited Santō Kyōden 山東京伝 (1761-1816), Takizawa Bakin, Ryūtei Tanehiko 柳亭種彦 (1783-1842), Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水 (1790-1843), Shikitei Sanba, and others to observe that “bungaku” began with these writers. “Bungaku” in this sense has to do with the realm of feeling.¹³

These two meanings of “bungaku” correspond nicely to the “higher bungaku” and “lower bungaku” distinguished by Yanagida Izumi. Yanagida would probably recognize them as the two meanings of “bungaku” current in the Tokugawa period.

In contrast, Kobori Keiichirō remarked of *Nihon kaika shōshi* in his “‘Bungaku’ to iu meishō,” that its use of the terms *bungaku*, *buntai* 文体 (style), *ronbun* 論文 (article, thesis), and *bunshō* 文章 (text) is exactly what it is today, and that in that sense the work is unusual enough to deserve special attention. This conception of “bungaku,” including as it does both Neo-Confucian thought and *gesaku* fiction, appears to be one that identifies “literature” as the sum of all knowledge and gathers under that rubric writings worthy of imitation, writings that invite aesthetic appreciation, and the study of these writings.

Isoda Kōichi, for his part, wrote in *Rokumeikan no keifu* that the discussion of the evolution of Japanese literature in *Nihon kaika shōshi* straddles the new and the old meanings of “bungaku,” and that the understanding it reflects is perhaps closer to the concept of *bungei* (literary art).¹⁴ Such, for Isoda, are the “possibilities” inherent in Taguchi’s view of “bungaku.” To call Neo-Confucian writings “bungaku” is to use the term in the old sense, while to use it to refer to *gesaku* fiction is to give its new meaning. To recognize *gesaku*, close as it is to simple entertainment (*yūgei* 遊芸), as “bungaku” is to give the word a meaning nearer to that of *bungei*; such was Isoda’s opinion. Isoda took that view of the matter because he favored enlarging and enriching the concept of “bungaku” to include even elementary school songs and urban popular songs.

Thus differences in method and approach produce divergent evaluations of the same examples of the use of “bungaku.” Seen in this light, the task of defining the dominant sense of the term in

13 Taguchi Teiken *shū*, pp. 59-60.

14 Isoda 1983, p. 97.

any particular historical period appears to be almost impossibly difficult.

1.2.2 How the Blinders Work

There remain to be examined several other influential opinions on the subject of when the now-current meaning of “bungaku” first appeared and gained acceptance. According to Chiba Sen’ichi 千葉宣一 in “Shinkaron to bungaku” 進化論と文学 (1978), it appears for the first time in the two-volume *Nihon bungaku shi* 日本文学史 published in 1890 by Mikami Sanji 三上参次 and Takatsu Kuwasaburō 高津鋏三郎.¹⁵ Yanagida, Kobori, and Isoda agree, each from his own perspective, that “bungaku” as a translation term gained general acceptance only after 1888.

The second chapter of the above-mentioned *Nihon bungaku shi* (vol. 1) is entitled, “The Difficulty of Defining Literature.” The authors first cite the definition given by European scholars:

The term *bungaku*, that is to say, ‘literature’ in English or ‘littérature’ in French, originally meant ‘letters’ [*moji* 文字]. To the extent that “literature” means written texts, i.e., whatever can be expressed in letters, it therefore refers to the full extent of human knowledge and feeling.¹⁶

They then objected that this definition is too broad, since it apparently means that even a hotel guest list or a bank account book would then come under that heading. The authors clearly knew perfectly well that the English word “literature” designates the vast category of all written texts.

Next, the authors noted that although the term “wenxue” (*bungaku*) had been current in Chinese since early times, it, too, had diverse meanings and so remained unclear. They remarked, however, that in China, writing (*bunshō* 文章) had never been separate from morality (*dōgi* 道義). As for Japan, they cited examples of a variety of current uses of the term.

Even today, especially for scholars of Chinese studies, the essence of *bungaku* is to clarify morality. The function of *bungaku* is to support government and education. For some, no doubt, it therefore has nothing to do with polished style or elaborate phrasing. There surely are also those who hold *bungaku* to be founded on the study of the classics and of the classical language. Some, too, will maintain that *bungaku* consists in expounding the teaching of the great masters of the past and in making clear the art of governing the land and pacifying the realm. Yet others will see true *bungaku* in poetry and fiction, while still others will find its essence in *haikai* and *kyōka* (comic *tanka* poems).¹⁷

This exordium introduces Mikami and Takatsu’s own definition of “pure literature.”¹⁸ It is unclear

¹⁵ Chiba 1978, p. 193.

¹⁶ Mikami and Takatsu 1890, vol. 1, p. 9.

¹⁷ Mikami and Takatsu 1890, vol. 1, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ In the original, “pure literature” is written with the characters *jun bungaku*, glossed phonetically as *pyua riterachua*.

where they came across this most unusual term; perhaps they coined it themselves. A detailed discussion of their definition will appear below (7.1.3). Assuming that the key issue for them was “true feeling” (*jitsujō* 実情), it becomes difficult to claim that the acceptance of the modern conception of literature dates to about 1888.

Furthermore, Wada Shigejirō 和田繁二郎 wrote in “Meiji shoki ni okeru ‘bungaku’ no gainen” 明治初期における「文学」の概念 (1963), “From about the early 1880s into the 1890s, European influence tended strongly to have more to do with criticism and rhetoric than with poetry.”¹⁹ Wada went on to demonstrate that this trend continued a good while longer and to suggest that the supremacy of “bungaku” in the sense of linguistic art may well date only from about 1907.

Having reviewed various views on the issue, I would like to return to Mikami and Takatsu’s expression, “pure bungaku.” Isoda Kōichi turned his attention to the situation at Tokyo Imperial University. However, Tsubouchi Shōyō, then a student there, wrote in 1927, “At that time (about 1880) there were very few students at Tokyo University who took an even slightly critical attitude toward Western pure bungaku.”²⁰

This remark appears in a supplementary note to *Hanpō mukashi-banashi* 半峰昔ばなし (1927) by Takada Sanae 高田早苗 (1860-1938). In this work Hanpō (the author’s pen name) wrote that around 1880 Tokyo Imperial University students were introducing to each other such works as *Les Misérables* (Victor Hugo, 1862), *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* (Alexandre Dumas, père, 1845), and *Ivanhoe* (Sir Walter Scott, 1819); and that it was then that Japanese university students began reading Western literature, especially fiction.²¹ Tsubouchi Shōyō was one of those who, under Takada’s influence, began then to take an interest in Western literature.

Now, according to the standards of contemporary criticism, the novels just mentioned are surely for young readers, or else belong to the category of “popular literature.” What, then, can “pure literature” possibly mean?

Nihon kokugo daijiten 日本国語大辞典 (Shōgakusan, 1975) gives the following two definitions under the heading of *jun bungaku* (“pure literature”):

- (1) Literature that appeals to aesthetic sensibility (*biteki jōsō* 美的情操), as distinguished from literature in the broad sense, which includes philosophy and history.
- (2) A literary work that aims at purely artistic interest. Employed in opposition to popular literature.

The entry illustrates (1) with three examples.

- (a) From Kitamura Tōkoku’s 北村透谷 “Jinsei ni aiwataru to wa nani no ii zo” 人生に相渉るとは何の謂ぞ (1883): “Enlarging the field of objects to smash with the hammer of ‘historical theory,’ he began a massive attack on the domain of

19 Wada Shigejirō 1973, p.38 (article originally published in *Ritsumeikan Daigaku Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo kiyō* 立命館大学人文科学研究所紀要).

20 *Meiji bungaku kaikoroku shū*, vol. 1, p. 84.

21 *Meiji bungaku kaikoroku shū*, vol. 1, p. 84.

pure literature.”

- (b) From Ōta Gyokumei’s 太田玉茗 (1871-1927) “Hanafufuki” 花ふふき, in *Jojōshi* 抒情詩 (1897): “Poetry and prose are the two wings of pure literature and stand in contrast with each other.”
- (c) From Natsume Sōseki’s 夏目漱石 novel *Gubijinsō* 虞美人草 (1907): “Philosophy and pure bungaku belong to different domains.”

The quotation from *Gubijinsō* applies to two graduates of Tokyo Imperial University and appears to refer to the subjects in which each majored. In reality, however, Tokyo Imperial University never had a major in pure bungaku; so that the expression is a general one covering English literature, German literature, and so on. Its opposite is therefore the “bungaku” of Bungakubu (Faculty of Letters). The example from Kitamura Tōkoku also suggests that pure bungaku stands in opposition to bungaku in the broad sense, which includes history.

For us today the evident opposite of pure literature (*jun bungaku* 純文学) is popular or mass literature (*taishū bungaku* 大衆文学). (For a detailed discussion of *taishū bungaku*, see 8.2.2.) We have forgotten that it was once bungaku in the broad sense, and for that reason we mistake “pure literature,” whenever the expression appears, for the opposite of “popular” or “mass literature.” The blinders of habit are frighteningly effective. Ignorance of past usage causes a misreading of which we remain unaware.

In any case, at least between 1880 (when Kitamura Tōkoku published “Jinsei ni aiwataru to wa nani no ii zo”) and 1907 (when Natsume Sōseki published *Gubijinsō*), it was clearly “pure bungaku,” not simply “bungaku,” that meant bungaku in the modern and broader sense. In fact, people like Tsubouchi Shōyō used the expression in that sense right up to 1927. That is undoubtedly because the present meaning of the word “bungaku” had not yet gained general acceptance.

Kobori and Isoda’s researches yielded different meanings for the word “bungaku,” but both were interested in it only as a modern translation term and sought above all to discover when that concept of bungaku had become fixed. There is little doubt that one corresponding to the modern meaning became current among scholars of Western cultures, whether in Kobori’s sense or in Isoda’s, roughly in 1880. However, they never noticed that the “greater bungaku” mentioned by Yanagida Izumi, the concept of “bungaku in the broad sense,” remained alive. Moreover, to the extent that Yanagida saw a new beginning in the work of such men as Tsubouchi Shōyō and Futabatei Shimei, even he, who should have been sensitive to this meaning as well, seems to have fallen into the same trap as Kobori and Isoda. As a result of devoting their attention to scholars of Western learning and to circles associated with Tokyo Imperial University, or to the work of novelists, they apparently neglected the usage of the term among society at large.

Natsume Sōseki wrote in “Bungaku ron” 文学論 (1907), “So-called bungaku as used in Chinese studies and so-called bungaku as used in English can only remain mutually alien concepts, irreconcilable within the same definition.”²² Sōseki’s period of study in England (1900-1903) seems to have convinced him that his own concept of bungaku, nurtured by his Chinese studies, and the counterpart modern European concept, were utterly different from each other. If this sharp

22 [Natsume] Sōseki *zenshū*, vol. 9, p. 10.

sense of discrepancy is not peculiar to Sōseki, then the hitherto dominant notion that the modern conception of literature (whatever meaning one may give it) became entrenched about 1888 requires revision.

The history of words shows that when a word used in the past looks the same as one employed nowadays, we fail to notice that its meaning has changed and misread it by projecting our own assumptions onto it; or we ignore it just because it disagrees with them. Without inquiring further we judge it archaic or erroneous. This happens frequently. We often, too, fail to notice another, once-current meaning of a word that may have attracted our attention, or overlook the fact that the same concept can be expressed also with a different lexical item. The history of the word “bungaku” conceals many pitfalls.

1.2.3 Removing the Blinders

Then how to avoid them? The only way is to set aside one’s own ideas about the meaning of “bungaku,” together with all habitual, blindly accepted assumptions, and determine the meaning of the word in each concrete instance in which it appears. For that purpose it is essential to discover what the word meant when the text in question was written, by closely examining both its antonyms and its homonyms.

Yanagida Izumi, Kobori Keiichirō, and Isoda Kōichi all passed different judgments on the modern conception of “bungaku,” on the basis of Taguchi Ukichi’s use of it in his *Nihon kaika shōshi*. In order to avoid such confusion, we ourselves, in pursuing our analysis, must eschew projecting our own ideas and conceptions onto the example at hand. Instead, it is incumbent upon us to grasp the fundamentals of what Taguchi himself had in mind, that is to say, “bungaku” as a concept covering both Neo-Confucian thought and *gesaku* fiction—the former corresponding to the bungaku of “wisdom” and the latter to that of “feeling.” The task then is to discover how this conception was formed.

According to Yanagida Izumi, this dual conception corresponds to the two bungaku (the “higher” and the “lower”) recognized in the Bakumatsu period, but for Isoda Kōichi the inclusion of *gesaku* in the category of bungaku, close as the former is to mere entertainment, represents an innovation. Did the “higher” and “lower” bungaku distinguished by Yanagida then really exist in the Bakumatsu period? If they did, Isoda’s thesis is mistaken, while if Isoda is correct, that part of Yanagida’s conclusion demands revision. Only one of the two can be right. Where, then, did the other go wrong?

Further, while for Kobori Keiichirō, Taguchi’s idea of “bungaku” corresponds at an exceptionally early date to “polite literature,” *gesaku* fiction always belonged entirely to the common people and therefore had nothing to do with the “polite literature” of nineteenth-century England. If both Taguchi and Kobori considered the *gesaku* fiction of the Tokugawa period to come under the heading of “polite literature,” then it is possible that Japanese intellectuals versed in European learning had a conception of “polite literature” different from its European counterpart. If so, from where did it come? To phrase the question more sharply, why did Taguchi espouse a conception of bungaku differing both from the English “literature” in the broad sense and from the narrow, modern meaning of linguistic art, and different as well from the English idea of “polite literature”?

An examination of this matter may yield the answer.

Regarding yet another issue, the words “literature in the broad sense, which includes philosophy and history” (previously cited in definition [1] of “pure *bungaku*” from *Nihon kokugo daijiten*) are roughly equivalent to “a general term for literary studies, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, history, etc.” (definition [3] of “*bungaku*” in *Daijirin*). Both take what one might call a middle position in comparison with the two meanings of “literature” as an English word: the broad (the totality of all written documents) and the narrow (higher linguistic art). Many elements in them correspond to Wada Shigejirō’s statement that “there was a strong tendency for European influence to have more to do with criticism and rhetoric than fiction and poetry.” It is clear that the median meaning of “literature” and the broad meaning of “*bungaku*” played an unexpectedly prominent role at least until roughly 1907.

In fact, “*bungaku*” in that broad sense may well, under certain circumstances, be prominent even today. It is not just a matter of the academic terms *Bungakubu* (Faculty of Letters) and *bungaku hakushi* (doctor of letters). Although we hardly realize it, the “*bungaku*” in the current term *Nihon bungaku shi* 日本文学史 (history of Japanese literature) is close to that of “*bungaku*” in the broad sense. It is by no means restricted to the narrow domain of linguistic art, that is to say, literature appealing to aesthetic sensibility: poetry, fiction, tales, drama, criticism, literary musings, and so on. Whoever doubts this should consult any handy chronology of Japanese literary history. All of them begin with the *Kojiki* 古事記, *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, and *Fudoki* 風土記.

Fudoki are what one might call local gazetteers. Do we classify a gazetteer as “*bungaku*” nowadays? The content of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* is largely myth, which does not come under the modern heading of “*bungaku*” either. Myth, the object of religious faith, never arose as a work of art appealing to aesthetic sensibility, or as fiction. The Old Testament myths were never treated as linguistic art in the past, nor are they today. Of course, the Bible has exerted a great influence on modern and contemporary literature, and one must study it in order to study linguistic art. That necessity exists in the Japanese case as well. However, the myths recorded in these works are not for that reason literature themselves. In the late 1960s a professor at the University of Washington in Seattle created a furor in his family and in local society by approaching the Old Testament as material for literary analysis, and the university had to intervene in order to authorize his teaching on the subject.²³ The issue in this case is not so much a matter of right or wrong as the assumptions that shape people’s consciousness.

Still, the point may not yet be entirely clear. We are just too accustomed to treating *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as *bungaku*. That may be because scholars like the great Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫 (1887-1953) have approached the origins of *bungaku* through myth and Shinto prayers (*norito* 祝詞), and others after them have followed the same line. However, Orikuchi himself believed that *bungaku* proper began after it became separated from Shinto ritual (*shinji* 神事), as he showed in such declarations as “The decadence of Shinto ritual was the beginning of its liberation as art.”²⁴ Perhaps he understood the modern European concept of literature better than we do.

There are other reasons, too, not to question treating *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Fudoki* as *bungaku*.

23 Personal communication from Sumie Jones (Indiana University).

24 Orikuchi 1965, p. 76.

One is that they include many songs. Another, in the case of *Kojiki*, is that one can study the rhythm of the prose itself from the standpoint of its aesthetic appeal.²⁵ One may also find the many folkloric episodes in *Nihon shoki* or *Fudoki* attractive, although it is doubtful that folklore is to be included in the category of *bungaku*.

Seen in the light of our modern conception of literature as linguistic art, these works undoubtedly contain literary elements, but that is all. In the same way it is possible to find literary elements in many Buddhist sutras, in the Old Testament, or in the Koran. There is no relationship between the existence of such elements in works like these, and the fact that the modern category of “*bungaku*” came to exclude myth and local gazetteers.

In Japan, not that much time has passed since the first “history of Japanese literature” was written. Taguchi Ukichi’s *Nihon kaika shōshi*, cited above, treated the history of *bungaku* as an aspect of the development of Japanese civilization. After this pioneering start, the first work explicitly to declare itself a “history of literature” was the two-volume *Nihon bungaku shi* by Mikami Sanji and Takatsu Kuwasaburō, published in 1890. It discusses *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Fudoki*. Naturally, it assumes a concept of “literary history” strongly influenced, like “*bungaku*” itself, by modern European ideas, and a Meiji-period creation.

Why, then, does the “*bungaku*” of “history of *bungaku*” differ from “*bungaku*” in the narrow sense? Does a similar discrepancy exist in Europe? What distinguishes the former “*bungaku*,” as well as the “*bungaku*” of *Bungakubu* (Faculty of Letters), from the latter, and where did this distinction come from? These matters demand serious consideration.

In sum, we need to recognize the existence of various notions of *bungaku*, incompatible both with the word’s broad, older meaning and with its narrow, newer one, and different also from the word as traditionally used in close association with Confucianism. We must ask when and how these notions arose, why they died out (if they did), and why (if they did) they survived. When and how did “*bungaku*” gain general acceptance in the sense of linguistic art, or higher linguistic art? Is there, or is there not, a discrepancy between this acceptance of “*bungaku*” and the modern meaning of the word “literature” in English? It will be essential to answer these questions. To that end, it will be necessary to understand exactly what the modern meaning of the English word “literature” is, and in what sense the Japanese word “*bungaku*” was used before the adoption of “literature.” This is what needs to be done.

- (1) To discover the historical process that shaped the internal structure of the modern concept, or category, designated by the English word “literature”—a concept upon which our own view of “*bungaku*” is founded.
- (2) Next, to grasp accurately what the Japanese word “*bungaku*” meant, and what its conceptual content was, before the English concept was adopted. To that end, to work out the history of “*bungaku*.” After all, words may draw old concepts indefinitely along with them, and sometimes an obsolete word or concept may revive.
- (3) Next, in pursuit of the history of “*bungaku*” it will be necessary to know how the

25 Macé 1995.

concept of “wenxue” (the root of “bungaku” and a perennial influence upon it), together with the category it designated and the value judgments underlying it, evolved in China.

- (4) On that basis, to reflect on the way the Japanese “bungaku” changed in response to the arrival of the Western word and concept, and to consider what understanding was born from that response. It will then be necessary, in connection with these reflections, to sort out the homonyms and antonyms from among the various Meiji-period usages of “bungaku,” and to grasp how the process as a whole evolved.
- (5) Finally, once the subsequent changes to the concept’s basic features are clear, it will at last be possible to determine how our contemporary view of “bungaku” came into being.

The theories already cited, on the issue of how the modern concept of “bungaku” arose and gained general acceptance, were all proposed after World War II. In their background lie earlier debates, as well as various postwar debates on the subject of “modern Japanese bungaku.” What, then, is “modern Japanese bungaku”? It will be necessary to carry out another fundamental inquiry into how the basic framework of the idea took shape.

This book will present the above investigations and reflections in the following order.

1.2.4 The Structure of This Book

Chapter 2: “Literature” in English and Chinese

- 2.1 This section distinguishes the characteristics of the modern English concept of “literature,” diverse as it is in content, and considers the relationship between the notion of national literature and such basic ideas as belles lettres, polite literature, romanticism, realism, and so on.
- 2.2 This section traces the history of the Chinese concept of “wenxue,” which so greatly influenced that of “bungaku” in Japan before the introduction of modern European ideas. At the same time, it examines the position held in different historical periods by what we now treat as bungaku. Neither section may amount to more than a glance through matters considered self-evident by scholars of European or Chinese literature, but the two together lay the groundwork for discussing the historical shifts in the concept of bungaku in Japan.

Chapter 3: The Reception and Reformulation of “Bungaku”

- 3.1 This section asks (1) whether, despite the influence of the “wenxue,” the content of the word “bungaku” changed in Japan from early times through the middle ages; and (2) what position “bungaku” as now defined occupied during that period.
- 3.2 Considers, in particular, the thesis proposed by Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦 (the most influential postwar scholar of Tokugawa literature), to the effect that when the English concept of literature was brought into Japan it was superimposed on the Tokugawa-period

conception of “bungaku,” which was already modern in character. In the process this section will seek to grasp how the period understood the matter of genre.

- 3.3 Reflects on what configuration of ideas functioned as a receptor for notions of cultural nationalism linked to the modern conception of bungaku.

Chapter 4: The Birth of “Bungaku” as a Translation Term

- 4.1 Discusses how the encounter between the English “literature” and the Japanese “bungaku” gave rise to a new, polysemic translation term, and the manner in which this term subsequently evolved.
- 4.2 Considers how the notion of “Japanese bungaku” originated and how the “history of Japanese bungaku” first began.
- 4.3 Examines the thesis of Yanagida Izumi, to the effect that the Tokugawa-period conception of “higher” and “lower” bungaku underlay the birth of “bungaku” as a translation term; and that of Wada Shigejirō, to the effect that this term succeeded to the early-Meiji conception of Chinese studies.

Chapter 5: The Concept and Its Supporting Structure

- 5.1 Considers the Meiji education system, which underlay the evolution of the meaning of “bungaku,” and, in particular, English studies and their interaction with the revival of Chinese and Japanese studies.
- 5.2 Examines how the meaning of “bungaku” changed together with the Tokyo Imperial University curriculum.

Chapter 6: The Rise of Modern “Literature” in Japan

- 6.1 Examines the introduction of the concept of *bijutsu* 美術 (art), indispensable as it was to the formation of that of *gengo geijutsu* (linguistic art), and its connection with the improvement of poetry and fiction.
- 6.2 In connection with the rise of modern “bungaku” in Japan, considers the content of Tsubouchi Shōyō’s (allegedly) influential treatise *Shōsetsu shinzui*, and the reaction to it.

Chapter 7: A Struggle of Ideas

- 7.1 Explores the 1890 debate over the conflict between “bungaku” in the broad and narrow senses.
- 7.2 Follows the succeeding debates of the 1890s in order to explore such then-current terms as belles lettres (*bi bungaku* 美文学), “pure bungaku” (*jun bungaku* 純文学), “hard bungaku” (*kō bungaku* 硬文学) and “soft bungaku” (*nan bungaku* 軟文学), and thus examines what was really at stake in the concept of “bungaku.”

Chapter 8: The Acceptance and Evolution of Modern “Literature”

- 8.1 Through the concept of “history of bungaku” and changes in the use of the term “bungei” (literary art, etc.), reflects on the issue of when the modern concept of “bungaku” as a genre of linguistic art gained general acceptance.

- 8.2 Explains when the subsequent, fundamental bifurcation of the overall concept of “bungaku” into *jun bungaku* (pure literature) and *taishū bungaku* (mass literature) arose, and how the debate over “national literature” (*kokumin bungaku* 国民文学) changed over time.

Chapter 9: The Idea of “Modern Japanese Literature”

- 9.1 Discusses how postwar literary critics, setting out radically to reevaluate “modern Japanese literature,” focused their debate on “I-fiction” (*shishōsetsu* 私小説), in a process that led to the formation of the basic structure of “the history of modern Japanese bungaku”; and on that basis questions the foundations of our assumptions concerning “modern literature.”
- 9.2 Asks when the idea that the Meiji period and after constitute the “modern era” arose; by what process it did so; and when that notion gained general acceptance. Explains when and how the idea of “modern literature” was formed.

Chapter 10: On the Origins of “Modern Japanese Literature”

- 10.1 From that strategic standpoint—i.e., with reference to “modernization” (*kindaikaishugi* 近代化主義)—this section explains the basic flaws in the dominant, post-World War II historical views of “modern Japanese literature,” especially that of Nakamura Mitsuo 中村光夫 (1911-1988, a major postwar literary critic), centered as it is on the “realistic novel” (*riarizumu shōsetsu* リアリズム小説). The section then goes on to demonstrate that Etō Jun’s 江藤淳 *Riarizumu no genryū* リアリズムの源流 (an influential essay on the origin of literary realism in Japan), published in order to counter the accepted view that realism originated in the work of Tsubouchi Shōyō, as well as Karatani Kōjin’s 柄谷行人 equally influential *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* 日本近代文学の起源 (1980), repeat the same errors within the same framework.
- 10.2 Undertakes to explain the relative value and historical character of the *shasei* 写生 (sketch, Fr. *dessin*) principle enunciated by Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867-1902) and Kunikida Doppo 国木田独步 (1871-1908)—one seen as “the source of realism” and “the origin of modern Japanese bungaku”—in comparison with the *shasei* advocated at the same time (the first decade of the twentieth century) by Tokutomi Roka 徳富蘆花 (1868-1927) and Shimazaki Tōson 島崎藤村 (1872-1943).

Chapter 11: Strategies for Restructuring

- 11.1 Argues that the modernist view of history, according to which modernization equals westernization, and the antithetical contention that opposes modernization to anti-modernization, are both invalid. The section proposes a third such axis for analyzing intellectual history (*shisō shi* 思想史), “spiritual history” (*seishin shi* 精神史), and the history of literary expression (*bungei hyōgen shi* 文芸表現史): that of the historical principle of “overcoming modernity” (*kindai no chōkoku* 近代の超克).
- 11.2 Establishes the validity of “transcendence of the modern” as an analytical axis by demonstrating that the first glimmerings of this view are to be found in the years surrounding the Russo-Japanese War and are closely linked in their origins and development to “Taishō life-centrism” (*Taishō seimeishugi* 大正生命主義); that various tendencies in that

direction appeared in the 1920s; but that in the late 1930s these lapsed into unanimity with militarism.

- 11.3 Concerning the warped view taken by historical modernism, that “I-fiction” is the focal point of “modern Japanese literature,” re-analyzes the former from the historical perspective of “transcendence of the modern”; discovers the secret of the origins of the postwar view of I-fiction’s historical centrality in “Watakushi shōsetsu ron” 私小説論 (1935) by Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄 (Japan’s single most famous modern literary critic); and establishes both its logical fallacy and the extent to which it clashes with the then-contemporary will to transcend the modern novel.

Chapter 12: Conclusion

Proposes a way to surmount and restructure the view of “modern Japanese literature [literary history]” formed in the postwar period, and thereafter dominant. Also proposes a restructuring of the concept of “literary art” (*bungei*) in order to replace the modern concept of “literature,” together with the concept of literary expression (*hyōgen gainen* 表現概念) on which the latter is founded.