

Middle Chinese, Old Japanese, and the Senmyō: A Brief Overview

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The 62 canonical *senmyō* (宣命), usually translated as “imperial edicts”, of *Shoku Nihongi* are written in Old Japanese (*jōko nihongo* 上古日本語). *Shoku Nihongi* is the official court history of the eighth century, presented in two recensions (794 and 797) to the early Heian court of Kammu Tennō; it covers the years 697-792. The text of the history is classical Chinese of the type now broadly identified as Middle Chinese. But the *senmyō* are written in a peculiar orthography of Old Japanese, employing Chinese graphs both semantically and phonetically in a mode often identified as *man'yōgana*, and are notable for using the “large and small character” style in which the small characters are employed to indicate verb endings and particles. These latter comprise one set of precursors to the kana syllabaries. In addition to the *senmyō*, *Shoku Nihongi* contains edicts written in Chinese (*choku* 勅 and *shō* 詔; see [Bender 2007](#)), so that the whole body of imperial edicts in the history approaches 900 in number.

The data set for Old Japanese is fairly well established – the *Bussokusekika* poems engraved in stone (late 7th C?), poems in the *Fudoki* (early 8th C), poems in the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720), the *Man'yōshū* (c. 757), the *senmyō* (in text of *Shoku Nihongi*, 797), the *norito* (prayers) in the text of the *Engi Shiki* (927). In addition to the poems in Old Japanese, there are many ancient Japanese personal and place names, as well as names of deities, transcribed using Chinese characters phonetically in a variety of styles. All of these texts have been partially or fully translated into English; partial translations of the *senmyō* were made by Sir George Sansom 1924 and John Kenneth Linn 1950, and there is a complete German translation by Herbert Zachert 1950.

However, in addition to this bounded set of texts which constitute the traditional corpus of Old Japanese, new samples are continually being recovered from archaeological sites. Most significant of these are the *mokkan* (木簡), “wooden tablets” now numbering in the hundreds of

thousands. While these comprise fragments of documents rather than the traditional texts, there is at least one famous portion of a *senmyō* which has been found in this medium.

The linguistic investigation of Old Japanese began in the 18th century with the *Kokugaku* (National Learning, or nativist school) in Japan. In particular Motoori Norinaga deciphered or invented Old Japanese with his translations of, and commentaries on, *Kojiki* and the *senmyō*. Other Kokugaku scholars did intensive studies on the *Man'yōshū*. It cannot be emphasized enough how significant these studies were; the texts had been largely ignored until then, and modern editions of Old Japanese works are still based to a remarkable extent on this pioneering work.

Twentieth century Japanese linguists have been intensely interested in trying to discover the origins of the Japanese language, and recent American scholars have worked in the shadow of, and in dialogue with, this discourse. However, fundamental questions are still unanswered: whether Japanese is indeed an Altaic language, how close is its genetic affiliation with Korean or Ainu, whether it is a mixed language with an Austronesian substrate and an Altaic superstratum, etc. (See Shibatani's overview 1990). Questions about the phonology of Old Japanese are still unresolved. For example, while there is a strong hypothesis that OJ had an eight-vowel system, even this is not undisputed, and there is still much disagreement about the vowel system of pre-OJ. Most important for the present survey is the partial dependence on reconstructions of Middle Chinese for the understanding of the sounds of Old Japanese.

Western scholars of Japanese literature have done the basic work in translating the histories (*Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, but not *Shoku Nihongi*) and the poetry (*Man'yōshū*). Linguists, particularly Roy Andrew Miller and Samuel E. Martin, have been active in the debate over origins and genetic affiliation. Roland Lange in 1973 published a study of 8th C phonology, and in the last several years there has been a spate of work on the grammar and phonology of Old Japanese (Bentley 2001; Miyake 2003; Vovin 2005) and Proto-Japanese (Frellesvig and Whitman, eds, 2008).

The Reconstruction of Middle Chinese

“By a lucky chance, rich sources of highly varying kinds (rhyme dictionaries, foreign transcriptions, loanwords in Korean and Japanese, and the testimony of strongly diverging daughter dialects) combined to throw light on one definitive state of the evolution of the Chinese language: the language spoken in Changan, the capital, in Sui and early T’ang times (6th and early 7th C AD). This language is most fully represented by the dictionary Ts’ie Yun.”

--Bernhard Karlgren, Grammatica Serica (1940 p.3)

Bernhard Karlgren based his seminal reconstruction of what he termed “Ancient Chinese” on the Ts’ie Yun (Qie Yun 切韻) dictionary of 601, which is not extant although portions of it are embodied in a tradition of similar rhyme books stretching from Sui through early Song times. Baxter (1992, p. 39) lists eight “principal versions” of Qie Yun dating from 601 through 1039, including the famous “corrected and supplemented” version of Wang Renzu (706) and the Guangyun 廣韻 of 1007-8 used by Karlgren. Karlgren also used foreign transcriptions, loanwords in Korean and Japanese, and “daughter” dialects – namely, the evidence of 20th century Chinese “dialects” or languages.

For the student of 8th-century Japanese, of most interest is his use of the rhyme tables of the Qie Yun and the *Kan-on* and *Go-on* pronunciations of Chinese characters imported into Japanese. For Karlgren, the *Kan-on* pronunciations corresponded very closely to his reconstruction of Ancient Chinese, and his explanation is that they represent the language of northern China c. 601 AD. He explained the *Go-on* pronunciations as deriving from the language of southeastern China in the 5th and 6th centuries, and posited a Wu dialect as their source. (See Figures 1 and 2 below)

Figure 1. Karlgren, *Études sur la Phonologie Chinoise*, 15:4 (Dictionary of Chinese Dialects), *Archives D'Études Orientales* 1915-1924, pp 710, 715. "Ach" = Ancient Chinese

		Dictionnaire,						715
Car	25	27	29	40	44	50	56	
Ach	左	磋	嘉	衙	霞	丫	茶	
	tsɕ	ts'ɕ	ka	ɣa	ɣa	'a	ɕ'a	
Co	ʃsa	ʃs'a	ka	a	ha	a	ta	
Ka	sa	sa	ka	ga	ka	a	ta	
Go	sa	sa	ke	ge	ge	e	de	
An	ta	t'a	za	ŋa	ha	a	ʃa	
Ca	tso	ts'o	ka	ga	ha	a	ʃs'a	
Ha	tso	ts'o	ka	ga	ha	a	ts'a	
Sw ¹	tso	ts'o	kia ²	gia	hia	a	ts'a	
Fo	ʃsã	ʃs'ã	ka	ga	ha	a	ʃs'a	
Wt	tsu	ts'u	ko	go	o	o	dzo	
Ch	tsu	ts'u	ka ³	ga	°ã (α)	ã	dzo	
Pk	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Kf	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Hk	ts'o	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Kh	tsã	ts'ã	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Tt	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Ty	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Hh	tsə		ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Tk	tso	ts'o	ʃsiã	iã	ʃiã	iã	ts'a	
We		ts'ɿ	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Ft	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Lt	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Pl	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Sa	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Sc	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
St	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	
Nk	tso	ts'o	ʃsia	ia	ʃia	ia	ts'a	

comme suit.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Co (Coréen) | 14. Kh (Koueihoua) |
| 2. Ka (Kan-on) | 15. Tt (Tat'ong) |
| 3. Go (Go-on) | 16. Ty (T'aiyuan) |
| 4. An (Annamite) ¹ | 17. Hh (Hinghien) |
| 5. Ca (Canton) | 18. Tk (T'aikou) |
| 6. Ha (Hakka) | 19. We (Wenchouei) |
| 7. Sw (Swatow) | 20. Ft (Fengt'ai) |
| 8. Fo (Foochow) | 21. Lt (Lantcheou) |
| 9. Wt (Wentcheou) | 22. Pl (P'ingliang) |
| 10. Ch (Changhai) | 23. Sa (Sian) |
| 11. Pk (Pékin) | 24. Sc (Sanchouei) |
| 12. Kf (K'aifeng) | 25. St (Sseutch'ouan) |
| 13. Hk (Houaik'ing) | 26. Nk (Nankin). |

Figure 2. Karlgren, *Grammatica Serica: Script and Phonetics in Chinese and Sino-Japanese*, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Stockholm, 1940 (Taipei: Cheng-wen, 1966), p 88.

22. Rimes <i>vk</i> etc.		
Ancient Chinese		Kan-on
格 <i>kv</i>	宅 <i>d'vk</i> 百 <i>pvk</i>	<i>ka-ku, ta-ku, pa-ku, (h a k u)</i>
革 <i>kek</i>	賣 <i>tsek</i>	<i>ka-ku, sa-ku</i>
益 <i>'iäk</i>	隻 <i>tš'äk</i> 碧 <i>piäk</i>	<i>e-ki, se-ki, pe-ki (h e k i)</i>
逆 <i>ng'pvk</i>		<i>ge-ki</i>
擊 <i>kiek, tiek</i>	滴 <i>tiek</i>	<i>ke-ki, te-ki</i>
號 <i>kwvk</i>		<i>ku-wa-ku (k a k u)</i>
畫 <i>yvek</i>		<i>ku-wa-ku (k a k u)</i>
鶻 <i>kiwek</i>		<i>ke-ki</i>

Ts'ie yün	Go-on
<i>kvk, d'vk, pvk</i>	<i>ki-ya-ku (k y a k u), di-ya-ku (j a k u), pi-ya-ku (h y a k u)</i>
<i>kek, tsek</i>	<i>ki-ya-ku (k y a k u), si-ya-ku (s h a k u)</i>
<i>'iäk, tš'äk, piäk</i>	<i>ya-ku, si-ya-ku (s h a k u), pi-ya-ku (h y a k u)</i>
<i>ng'pvk</i>	<i>gi-ya-ku (g y a k u)</i>
<i>kiek, tiek</i>	<i>ki-ya-ku (k y a k u), ti-ya-ku (c h a k u)</i>
<i>kwvk</i>	<i>ku-wa-ku (k a k u)</i>
<i>yvek</i>	<i>gi-ya-ku (g y a k u)</i>
<i>kiwek</i>	<i>ki-ya-ku (k y a k u)</i>

Here, just as in the *ng* group, the Anc. Wu has evidently acquired a parasitic *i* before *v* and *s*: *kvk, kek* > *k'pvk, k'iek*, and *kiäk, kiek* have become *kiak* through differentiation.

Karlgren's rhymes of Ancient Chinese had, for example, final "k" to which the Japanese Kan-on had to add a vowel ("kaku", "taku", "haku") since Japanese syllables could not end in a consonant. His Go-on versions are "kyaku", "jaku" and "hyaku", caused by a "parasitic vowel" acquired by the Wu dialect.

Samuel Martin (1953) criticized Karlgren's construct of AC with eleven vowels, arguing that in fact it had only six. Whatever the number of AC vowels, they did not correspond precisely to the Japanese system. Still, Karlgren's insight that AC "-ng" endings, for example, corresponded to

various Japanese vowels depending on the preceding consonants gives an idea of how these shifts must have occurred.

The preface to the *Qie Yun* by Lu Fayan 陸法言 dated 601 AD survives. It describes a meeting of philologists from various parts of the nascent Sui empire who, after comparing their notes about ancient pronunciations collaborated in producing a rhyme book representing elite standards using the *fan qie* 返切 method. According to this preface, “And so we discussed the right and the wrong of South and North, and the prevailing and the obsolete of past and present; wishing to present a more refined and precise standard, we discarded all that was ill-defined and lacked preciseness.” (Baxter 1992 p. 36, adapting Zhou Zumo 1968.)

The question of what language precisely the *Qie Yun* represents has been a focus for one critique of Karlgren – namely that this language cannot be described as “the language of Changan in late 6th C and early 7th” which then became a nation-wide koine among educated circles during the Tang dynasty. Edwin Pulleyblank, who undertook the next major reconstruction of “Ancient Chinese” (1984) spoke instead of an Early Middle and Late Middle Chinese, which was the ancestor of Early Mandarin. Early Middle Chinese was the language of the *Qie Yun*; he summarizes Zhou Zumo’s 1963 study: “[Zhou] shows that the Qieyun represented a standard of correct speech common to the educated classes of north and south China in the sixth century. In other words, it was a cultivated ‘Mandarin’, not narrowly based on a single regional dialect but representing a norm which those in both parts of the country could aim at.” (1984, p. 130) This language was the literary standard “established by the southern [Jiankang] and eastern [Luoyang] literati who flocked to the new capital after the Sui unification”. (1984, p. 61)

According to Pulleyblank, Late Middle Chinese began to appear early in the Tang dynasty and became the later Tang standard, or koine. He somewhat confusingly states that although LMC did not evolve directly from EMC “it makes sense to treat it *as if* it had evolved from EMC.” (1984, pp 129-130) LMC is exemplified in the earliest extant rhyme table, the Yunjing, and for Pulleyblank basically the language of the *Qie Yun* is EMC and that of the Yunjing is LMC. The title of his 1998 article “Qieyun and Yunjing: The Essential Foundation for Chinese Historical Linguistics” highlights his emphasis, although in this article he also avows that there is “no inherent contradiction between the study of living dialects, the study of traditional rhyme

dictionaries and rhyme tables, and the study of all kinds of additional philological evidence.” (1998, p. 200)

Pulleyblank’s 1998 JAOS article is in response to an attack in JAOS by Norman and Coblin who chastise him as a “neo-Karlgrenian.” The Norman/Coblin paper was in effect a response to Pulleyblank’s 1992 article in the same journal, “How Do We Reconstruct Old Chinese?” This series of articles is essential to understanding the state of play in Chinese historical linguistics up through the end of the 20th century. Although the arguments are much too detailed to be summarized here, the gist of Norman/Coblin’s position is a critique of Karlgren and the “neo-Karlgrenian” Pulleyblank, and an argument that Chinese historical linguistics “has become divorced from the study of actual spoken forms of Chinese of various places and periods and has instead focused almost exclusively on the exegesis of abstract sets or ‘systems’ of philological data. A call is therefore issued for a new approach which refocuses the field on its appropriate subject – the comparative and historical study of human speech in China.” (1995, p. 576) (See Lurie 2006 for a recent summary of the “critique of the ideographic myth” debate.)

The term “Middle Chinese” now seems to be accepted generally as the classification for Tang dynasty language. William Baxter, in his 1992 Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology uses this term and opposes it to Old Chinese (Karlgren’s Archaic Chinese). Although Baxter concentrates on Old Chinese, he has a lengthy chapter on Middle Chinese in which he reviews the rhyme books and the rhyme-table tradition, and suggests a new transcription system for MC. (In this paper, I have ignored the issue of Old Chinese, as represented primarily by the rhymes in the Shi Jing. Of course a complete understanding of MC is interdependent with the attempts to reconstruct OC.) The very recent (2006) book The Chinese Rime Tables edited by David Branner, evidences that intensive work continues on these texts, as well as the Qie Yun. Both Coblin and Norman are represented in this volume.

The Reconstruction of Old Japanese

In the early Tokugawa period, a renewed interest in the ancient Chinese classics in Japan stimulated scholars to begin to retrieve Japanese classics which had been neglected for centuries.

The *Kokugaku*, or National Learning, scholars embarked on detailed commentaries to the *Man'yōshū* and the *Kojiki*, and to poetry and imperial edicts embedded in the Chinese texts of the official histories. This work comprised essentially a description and invention of the Old Japanese texts, and a translation into the Japanese of the 18th century. The monk Keichū and the scholars Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori Norinaga are the most famous of these *Kokugakusha*.

Precisely how they arrived at their reconstructions of the Old Japanese language is not entirely clear to Western scholars, as there is still no detailed study in a western language of their philological methods. However, the beginning point was the retrieval of Japanese words found in the Chinese official histories beginning with the *Wei Zhi*. References to the country of “*Yamato*” or “*Yamatai*”, to the border guards known as “*sakimori*”, and to the female ruler “*Pimiko*” constitute these earliest fragments of evidence for Old Japanese (or “pre-“ or “proto-“ OJ). Archaeological evidence such as the Chinese seal dated 52 AD investing a “*Wa*” or “*Wo*” ruler with the Han title “King of Na (or Nu)” has contributed to this reconstruction. J. Edward Kidder, Jr. 2007 offers a new translation of the *Wei Zhi* passage on the *Wa*, including transliterations of OJ words (pp. 12 ff.) and a useful summary of “Himiko’s Language” (pp. 111-113). He begins: “Himiko spoke proto-Japanese, but how widely was she understood at the time?”

Roland Lange’s *The Phonology of Eighth Century Japanese: A Reconstruction Based on Written Records* (1973) was based on doctoral work completed at Michigan in 1968. He used Karlgren’s reconstruction of “Ancient Chinese” as the basis for his approach to OJ phonology, as had several Japanese linguists before him. His approach centered on certain volumes of the *Man'yōshū* which he believed best represented the language of the capital (Nara) in the mid eighth century. Briefly, Lange wanted to reconstruct the sounds of “the dialect of Japanese spoken by the aristocracy living in and around the capital city of Nara in the middle of the eighth century A.D.” (1973, p. 1). (The reference to Karlgren’s notion of “ancient Chinese” is obvious.) The written records he chose were poems from the *Man'yōshū*, but only those poems dated between 729 and 757, and only from the sections of the collection which he deemed to represent the “dialect” described above.

Western scholars working on OJ have similarly chosen a particular section of the corpus to examine. Miller (1975) focused on the *Bussokusekika* or *Bussokuseki no uta* (“Footprints of the

Buddha”), poems carved in stone at the Yakushiji. A good part of his study involved issues of ascertaining correct dates for these poems.

John Bentley (A Descriptive Grammar of Early Old Japanese Prose, 2001) selected as his focus the *norito*, which survive in the *Engi Shiki* (927), but which he describes as “Japan’s oldest surviving religious texts.” (p. 6). In light of the uncertainty in Japanese scholarship which still surrounds issues of dating, this ascription is at best arguable. Miller’s review (2003) takes him to task for this and a variety of other sins. Bentley’s more recent work comprises studies and translations of brief historical texts from the early Heian period (2002, 2006) which are not generally regarded as Old Japanese.

In Old Japanese: A Phonetic Reconstruction (2003), Marc Miyake selects for study the 128 poems in OJ from the *Nihon Shoki*, a court history written in Chinese. Miyake surveys early transcriptions of OJ and divides them into five stages. He includes a chapter on “Old Chinese, Middle Chinese, and Sino-Xenic” (pp. 89-157) and uses for his comparative purposes what he calls “Chang’an Early Middle Chinese” and “Chang’an Late Middle Chinese”, which labels derive from the work of Pulleyblank and Coblin.

More recently, Alexander Vovin (A Descriptive and Comparative Grammar of Old Western Japanese, 2005) ranges over the whole corpus of OJ literary texts (592-797 AD) and adds for comparative purposes fragments of Korean, Tungusic, Mongolic and Turkic, although there are no texts in the latter four languages of even remotely comparable antiquity to OJ. (Although Victor Mair believes that “Orkhon Runic Turkic is as old as OJ” – personal communication.) His sources are defined as those texts “written completely or almost completely phonetically in *man’yogana* syllabic signs, with the exception of the *senmyō* and *norito*, which have few elements written phonetically. Nevertheless these two texts were used extensively in this study, as they are the only representatives of Old Japanese prose.” In effect, his texts are thus primarily poetry from the documents mentioned at the beginning of this paper, although he also adds Heian period texts deemed to contain samples of earlier language and also Ryukuan poetry from much later dates.

The 2008 volume of essays Proto-Japanese: Issues and Prospects, edited by Bjarke Frellesvig and John Whitman, seeks to push back the historical boundaries of Old Japanese and to work at a reconstruction of Proto-Japanese. Of most interest in the context of my overview are the several instances of OJ cited from the *senmyō* (p. 197).

The Reconstruction of the *Senmyō*

Following is the text of the first line of *Senmyō* #1 (Monmu 1:8:17 – 697 AD). The “small characters” are set off by brackets. The full stop at the end of the line is a modern interpolation. Commas inserted in modern versions are omitted. Below are listed three readings of the text observing the word breaks of the modern editions.

現御神 [止] 大八嶋國所知天皇大命 [良麻止] 詔大命 [乎] 集侍皇子等王等百官人等天下公民諸聞食 [止] 詔。

1. Motoori Norinaga p. 195

Akitsumikami to Ohoyashimakuni shiroshimesu Sumera ga Ohomikoto rama to noritamafu Ohomikoto wo ukonahareru Mikotachi Ohokimitachi Omitachi Momo no tsukasa no hitotachi Amenoshita no Ohomitakara moromoro kikoshimesahe to noru.

2. Kitagawa 1982 p. 3

Akitsumikami to Ohoyashimaguni shirashimesu Sumera ga Ohomikoto rama to noritamafu Ohomikoto wo ugonahari haberu Mikotachi Ohokimitachi Tsukasazukasa no hitodomo Amenoshita no Ohomitakara moromoro kikitamaheyo to noritamafu.

3. SNKBT 1989 p. 3

Akitsumikami to Ohoyashimaguni shirashimesu Sumera ga Ohomikoto rama to noritamafu Ohomikoto o ugonahari haberu Mikotachi Ohokimitachi Momo no tsukasa no hitodomo Amenoshita no Ohomitakara moromoro kikitamahe to noru.

Minor differences such as alternative voicing on “*Ohoyashimakuni/guni*” and “*ukona/ugona*” will be observed. Norinaga gives “*ukonahareru*” rather than “*ugonahari haberu*”; “*shiroshimesu*” rather than “*shirashimesu*”; and “*kikoshimesahe*” rather than “*kikitamahe*” for the penultimate

verb. Norinaga gives “*hitotachi*” rather than “*hitodomo*”. Norinaga and SNKBT give “*momo no tsukasa*” vs. “*tsukasazukasa*”.

While these alternative choices are minor, it should be remembered that this is only the first line of the first of sixty-two edicts, some of them quite lengthy. Norinaga’s 18th century work may clearly be seen as foundational, but there is as yet no thorough explanation in Western sources of his choices for basic vocabulary such as “*sumera ga ohomikoto*”. Sansom 1924 pp. 7-8 gives a summary discussion of Norinaga’s readings for this first line. His translation (p.10) of the line reads:

“He says – Hearken all ye assembled August Children, Princes, Nobles, Officials and People of the Realm-under-Heaven to the Word which he speaks even as the Word of the Sovereign that is a manifest God ruling over the Great Land of Many Islands.”

Conclusion

As is obvious, there is currently a boom in Western-language linguistic studies of Old Japanese. All of these studies depend to a greater or lesser degree on the foundational 18th century studies of the *Kokugakusha* and the 20th century work on reconstructions of “Ancient” or “Middle” Chinese. The reconstruction of Middle Chinese has a long history, stretching back to the early 20th century work of Bernhard Karlgren, who pioneered in the reconstruction of what he called “Old Chinese” (the Tang koine) and “Archaic Chinese” (the language of the *Shu Jing*.) Edwin Pulleyblank refined the concept of “Old Chinese” and defined it as “Middle Chinese”, a label which is now widely accepted. Jerry Norman and South Coblin called for a new approach to Chinese historical linguistics focusing less on abstract sets of philological data and a new emphasis on “comparative study of human speech in China”; this lively debate with Pulleyblank was played out in the pages of the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* in the last decade of the 20th century. Most recently William Baxter (1992) and David Branner (2006) have concentrated intense attention on the Chinese rhyme books and the rhyme-table tradition in the reconstruction of Middle Chinese and what is now termed Old Chinese (Karlgren’s “Archaic

Chinese.”) Alex Scheussler’s 2007 publication of the ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese marks a new level of sophistication in the reconstruction of the latter.

Roy Andrew Miller and Samuel Martin focused much of their work on the search for the genetic affiliation of Japanese with the Altaic languages and in particular Korean. Roland Lange’s reconstruction of the phonology of 8th century Japanese followed the practice of earlier Japanese linguists of depending on Karlgren’s reconstruction of “Ancient Chinese”, what is now termed “Middle Chinese”. The 21st century flowering of work on Old Japanese has come from John Bentley and Marc Miyake and their teacher at the University of Hawai’i, Alexander Vovin. The efforts of the many linguists whose essays are collected in the volume on Proto-Japanese edited by Bjarke Frellesvig and John Whitman evidence the further flourishing of the 21st century burst of interest.

It is quite apparent that the Western linguists are further ahead in their investigations than the historians or the literary scholars. While we now have a remarkable body of detail concerning the syntax and phonology of Old Japanese, there has yet to be a complete English translation of the *senmyō*. At this date there is not a single book-length monograph on Nara history.

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