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文学 / **Bungaku / Literature**

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Since the late nineteenth century *bungaku* has come to refer primarily to “literature” in the sense roughly equivalent to contemporary English usage—that is (to paraphrase the definition in Webster’s *New World Dictionary*), to writing of a creative or imaginative character that is distinct from historical narratives, scientific writings, and news reporting, that implies a notion of cultural value, or that suggests writing defined by period or national origin.¹ This particular definition of *bungaku*, which was fixed more than a century ago and has changed little over that span of time, is readily apparent in a large number of common phrases that, taken together, provide an outline history of modern Japanese literature: *kokubungaku* (national literature); *Nihon bungaku* (Japanese literature); *kindai bungaku* (modern literature); *gendai bungaku* (contemporary literature); *taishū bungaku* (popular literature); *junbungaku* (pure literature); *puroretaria bungaku* (proletarian literature); *seisan bungaku* (productivity literature); *nōmin bungaku* (rural or peasant literature); *dōwa bungaku* (children’s literature); *joryū bungaku* (women’s literature); *posutomodan bungaku* (postmodern literature). A more recent usage has arisen in the phrase *conpyūtaa bungaku* (computer-generated literature), which in turn has given rise to an intriguing complementary phrase, *ningen bungaku* (human literature). In all of these examples the meaning of *bungaku* is so fundamental, so obvious

¹Webster’s *New World Dictionary of the American Language*, Second College Edition, Cleveland: William Collins and World Publishing Co., 1976, 826. Similar definitions are found in the *OED* and the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition*. See the following links: www.oxfordreference.com/views/SEARCH_RESULTS.html?y=0&q=literature&category=t140&x=0&ssid=481202906&scope=book&time=0.735562147511693; and www.bartleby.com/61/96/L0.html

and given, that the word seems to bear relatively little of the semantic load compared with the terms that modify it. As a result, it may be easy to overlook the work performed by the word, which is to convey a conception of knowledge crucial to the notions of national identity and modern culture.

Just how fundamental and firmly established this definition of *bungaku* has become is apparent in the following passage from the preface to Kobayashi Hideo's *Letters of van Gogh* 『ゴッホの手紙』 (published in 1952).

Reading literature (*bungaku*) in translation, listening to recorded music, viewing pictures through reproductions... we all do these things nowadays. Indeed, our initial awakening to the modern arts depends for the most part upon such experiences. And yet the derogatory phrase "translation culture" is now being heard more and more frequently. Perhaps it's a natural distinction to make, but no matter how natural it may be, if carried too far it becomes a distortion. Saying that modern Japan is a translation culture is one thing, but to then say that our joys and sorrows can exist only within a translation culture, that there is no longer a Japanese culture, is an entirely different matter.²

Kobayashi's understanding of the word *bungaku* as pointing to writings of an artistic nature conforms to common contemporary usage. However, it is noteworthy in this particular context that Kobayashi's usage fails to extend his own awareness of the hybridity of modern Japanese culture to the meaning of *bungaku* itself. After all, the recently acquired sense of the word as "literature" was a product of a process of translation that both reflected and promoted profound political and cultural changes, which in turn determined the course of development of Japanese society during the Meiji period. Although Kobayashi conjures associations between *bungaku* (and the arts in general) as a consumer product and the anxieties produced by the so-called translation

² Kobayashi Hideo, *Gohho no tegami*, in *Kobayashi Hideo zenshū*, v. 10, Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1979, 20.

culture of modern Japan, his observation nonetheless renders invisible the recent etymology of the word.

That a writer so acutely aware of and sensitive to the ironies of cultural synthesis as Kobayashi would fail to remark on the foreign origins of the word *bungaku*, which, given the force of his own analysis, makes the phrase “literature in translation” something of a redundancy, suggests how easy it is to overlook the primary work performed by the word. The association of *bungaku* with the process of translation is now deeply embedded within current standard definitions, and this association becomes apparent when we consider the history of the word. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* glosses the earliest meanings as *gakugei*, “literary arts/letters,” and *gakumon*, “learning” (definitions found also in the *Daikanwa jiten* and the *Dai Nihon hyakka jiten*). These two senses of the word—“learning” and “letters”—were fused early on in Japan when *bungaku* came to be applied in the Nara period in an institutional sense to name a bureaucratic position for scholars of written documents. A similar institutional sense emerged during the Edo period when Confucian scholars employed by local feudal domains (*han*) were given the administrative title *bungaku*. It was not until relatively recent times that the word came to refer more and more exclusively to genres of creative writing (fiction, poetry, and drama) as a way to distinguish them from other kinds of writing (particularly in history and the sciences), to signify new institutional divisions in the field of education, and to promote the idea of unique national cultures.

This shift in the usage of *bungaku* does not simply parallel, but also closely emulates the change in the meaning of the word “literature” that occurred in modern Western European languages. The word originates in the Latin “*litteratura*,” a term whose

original meaning Quintilianus, in the 4th section of the 1st chapter of Book 2 of his *Institutio Oratoria*, traces to the Greek notion of grammar, or rhetoric — that is, to “the study of words.”³ This general concept was subsequently Latinized, acquiring the meaning of “learning by the written word” to differentiate it from the meaning of poetics. In the course of the Renaissance revival of the study of the classical works of antiquity, the medieval traditions of education, which had divided fields of knowledge into the three literary arts (Grammar, Oratory, and Logic) and the four disciplines (Religion, Philosophy, Law, and Medicine), survived; and under such discursive categories “literature” denoted learning in the broadest sense of “letters.” The use of this rich, generalized concept of learning (captured by the Japanese term *gakugei* 学芸) remained relatively stable until the end of the 18th century. For example, under the item “literature” in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language*, the sole meaning listed is “learning: skill in letters.”

The meaning of “literature” began to shift in Europe to its current, more specialized usage during the latter half of the eighteenth century. This shift was the product of a wider change in the conception of how knowledge should be classified. The kinds of technological developments that made possible the specialization of production and social roles found a parallel in print and communication technologies that fostered the growth and availability of information. The possibility for a surplus of material goods was felt to exist for knowledge as well, and that possibility is reflected in the tendency to classify (and thus delimit) specialized fields of knowledge as particular disciplines:

³ For the original Latin text and an English translation, consult the following links: www.thelatinlibrary.com/quintilian/quintilian.institutio2.shtml; and http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/home.html

knowledge of the spiritual as religion; of the material world as science; of the body as medicine; of the mind as psychiatry; of politics as sociology; etc.

Each of these (and other) disciplines, though seemingly natural orderings of knowledge, is arbitrary to some extent. They are, to borrow Foucault's phrase, discursive formations, divisions that "are always themselves reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types; they, in turn, are facts of discourse that deserve to be analysed beside others; of course, they also have complex relations with each other, but they are not intrinsic, autochthonous, and universally recognizable characteristics."⁴ Foucault's observation points to a deep-rooted tension in modern conceptions of the categories of knowledge. These disciplines share a common underlying assumption that truth is attainable through rational inquiry, an assumption that generates the belief that specific realms of knowledge are universal, natural, common sense. At the same time, the very specialization that these categories make manifest suggests that knowledge is the product of relative understandings of the world and of particular discursive practices and conventions.

This tension is apparent in modern conceptions of literature, which treat it as a branch of learning, or discipline, concerned with the realm of individual consciousness, subjectivity, and the figuration of identity according to cultural, national, or ethnic categories. There are several reasons why literature came to be understood in this manner. One was the growing popularity of the novel as a genre, a trend that reflected the enormous changes in social and economic organization brought about by new modes of production and by the rise of national institutions. As the novel was consumed by a

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, 22.

growing segment of an increasingly literate population, awareness of prose fiction as a cultural form distinct from poetry and drama increased, and a broader term that would subsume all these genres was needed. A second reason may be found in the impact of the conceptions of sincerity and transcendence, which had emerged by the beginning of the 19th century with the Romantic Movement in Europe. These notions led to an aesthetics that valorized the creativity of the individual artist as a uniquely special form of knowledge—a separate discipline that needed its own term to be denoted. The concept of imaginative writing as a branch of knowledge thus contributed to the increasing specialization of the meaning of the word, and separated it from the writing of history, which came to be regarded as a more rigorously objective field.

The implications of this change in meaning are apparent, for example, in Madame de Staël's *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions*, which was published in 1800.⁵ Although writing within an Enlightenment worldview that gave priority to reason in aesthetic judgment and that continued to emphasize a classical notion of the ethical function of literature, de Staël's championing of individual rights and liberty indicates the influence that the ideals of the Romantics had on her—an influence seen in her understanding of "literature," which in this work not only denotes imaginative writing, but also refers to a specific range of genres.⁶ Perhaps more important, Madame de Staël brings together in a coherent form a number of ideas that would have a profound effect on the ways in which the concepts of literature and of the individual author have

⁵ Germaine de Staël, *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions in Politics, Literature, and National Character*, trans. & ed. Morroe Berger, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2000, 139-256.

⁶ See in particular Part One, Chapter XV, "English Imagination in Poetry and the Novel" and Part Two, Chapter V, "Works of the Imagination." de Staël, pp. 203-08 and pp. 236-242. See also her *Essay on Fiction*, 257-265.

come to be understood in the modern world.⁷ She argued that an artist must be of his own time, and that a literary text is an expression of the moral character and historical reality of a nation or people.⁸

By the nineteenth century, then, the word “literature” began to assume a new significance based on a conception of the artist as a person whose powers of imagination and heightened aesthetic sensitivity and judgment provided access to a transcendent realm of knowledge, marking out a disciplinary field in response to the ability of the sciences to explain the workings of the material world. This semantic transformation is on full display in Matthew Arnold’s 1882 lecture, “Literature and Science.”

Arnold’s lecture was intended to counter Thomas Huxley’s 1880 essay, “Science and Culture,” in which Huxley calls for a reform of education in order to give greater emphasis to the teaching of science. Although Arnold is not entirely opposed to Huxley’s views on the teaching of scientific methods, he self-servingly defends the primacy of the study of literature, especially the classics, on the grounds that culture is the pursuit of perfection requiring knowledge of the best that has been thought and said in the world. Arnold is certain he knows what the *best* is, though his formulations remain maddeningly vague—he simply asserts that the cultured individual (meaning, of course, someone like Arnold) knows the difference between sweetness and light on the one hand and Philistinism on the other. His defense of literary studies thus reveals an idealistic conception of literature as a field of knowledge that enables society to relate the “instrument-knowledges” of science to fundamental human impulses for moral conduct

⁷ Ibid., 151-53; and 231-235.

⁸ Ibid., 191-95. To make her case, she compared German folk literature with the classical tradition, concluding that these works reveal basic differences between Nordic and classical cultures and values. Her approach owed a great deal to Montesquieu’s theory of climate, but she extended his work with a critical approach that took more detailed account of factors such as nationality, history, and social institutions.

and the appreciation of beauty.⁹ Because science severed modern culture from old habits of thought that had formerly related knowledge to morality and aesthetics, literature must serve to reestablish that connection.

But now, says Professor Huxley, conceptions of the universe fatal to the notions held by our forefathers have been forced upon us by physical science. Grant to him that they are thus fatal, that the new conceptions must and will soon become current everywhere, and that every one will finally perceive them to be fatal to the beliefs of our forefathers. The need of humane letters, as they are truly called, because they serve the paramount desire in men that good should be for ever present to them, — the need of humane letters, to establish a relation between the new conceptions and our instinct for beauty, our instinct for conduct, is only the more visible.¹⁰

By “humane letters” Arnold does not mean simply *belles lettres*, which he considers a superficial humanism, but a more rigorous notion of “literature” (which he uses as a synonym for “humane letters” throughout “Literature and Science”) as a discipline that, in an increasingly secular society, assumes the spiritual and moral roles once performed by religious institutions and rituals, and thereby complements science by connecting knowledge of the material world to ethics, aesthetics, social institutions, national character, and cultural identity.

Arnold’s views on the place of literature in education were enormously influential—even now his assertions continue to serve as a basic rationale for liberal education in the United States—and his conception of “literature” as a category of knowledge was already becoming dominant at the moment when Japan began to absorb Western thought (especially Enlightenment thought, *keimō shisō*) as part of the

⁹ Matthew Arnold, “Literature and Science,” in *Prose of the Victorian Era*, ed. William E. Buckler, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958, 494.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 496.

movement toward “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika*) at the beginning of the Meiji period. The literary critic and cultural historian Isoda Kōichi maps out in detail the process by which the word *bungaku* became a translation of Western conceptions of “literature” in the nineteenth century in his essay, 『訳語「文学」の誕生—西と東の交点』 (The birth of the translated term “bungaku” — the intersection of West and East).¹¹ What follows is a brief summary of his analysis.

Awareness of the shifting conceptions of learning, knowledge, and literature is apparent as early as the 1860 Embassy to the United States headed by Shinmi Masaoki. Tamamushi Sadayū, from the domain of Sendai, was one of more than seventy members of the Embassy, and when the party stopped in Hawaii on its way, Tamamushi became acquainted with a Chinese pharmacist, Li Bang. He recorded their conversations, which they carried out by exchanging notes in Chinese characters, and included them in his account of the trip, *Chronicles of a Voyage to America*.

Tamamushi: The only nations where learning (*bungaku*) still flourishes are China and Japan. However, in recent years Western learning (*yōgaku*) has flooded in, damaging the way of righteousness. I wonder if your country has escaped this affliction?

Li Bang: At present learning (*bungaku*) exists in our two nations only. The learning of the West deviates from ethical norms and is not especially impressive. What makes me apprehensive is that the hearts and minds of people nowadays will grow weary of virtues, will rejoice in novelties, and will follow blindly after others. This will transform public morals so that people will no longer tolerate the deep thoughts and emotions of those who believe in righteousness. (Isoda, p. 7)

Bungaku/“learning” in this context is set in opposition to materialistic Western culture, which is referred to by the mildly dismissive neologism *yōgaku*, and is connected with

¹¹ Isoda Kōichi, “Yakugo ‘bungaku’ no tanjō: nishi to higashi no kōten,” in *Rokumeikan no keifu* (The genealogy of the Rokumeikan), Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1991, 7-40. Hereafter, in citing the examples Isoda gives to support his analysis, I will provide page numbers from Isoda in the body of the text.

traditional notions of the way of righteousness and with ethical norms (Tamamushi is obviously unaware that the study of literature in the West was also being justified on moral grounds). However, this exchange also implies that Tamamushi, who left Japan on a political mission dictated by the Japan-US treaty, had already acquired a hybrid notion of the meaning of *bungaku*. When he asserts that Western learning will undermine the way of righteousness, he means not only the way of virtue of the past, but also the spiritual values rooted in a consciousness of national character. Tamamushi's account thus depicts an encounter between "literature" in the modern (i.e. nationalist) sense of the word and a long tradition that understood *bungaku* as "letters" or "learning;" and this encounter exemplified the ongoing change in consciousness that initiated the process of cultural mediation, or translation, of the term *bungaku*.

To understand the full implications of this change in consciousness, we need to return to the history of the word *bungaku* in East Asia. One of its earliest occurrences is found in the third section of Chapter Eleven of the *Analects*, where exemplars of the four branches of learning are given: "For *bungaku* there are Zi You and Zi Xia (Tzu-yu and Tzu-hsia)." ¹² (Isoda, p. 8) Here *bungaku* is numbered among the four branches of learning together with ethics (virtue), language (rhetoric), and politics (governance), and the word has the sense of "letters." Zi Xia, who was given his name by Confucius, is claimed to be the founder of this branch of learning, which gave close scrutiny to the reading and appreciation of ancient texts.

This meaning of *bungaku* is extended by the usage of the word in the *Wu di zhi* (Records of the Emperor Wu, the seventh emperor of the early Han dynasty) and the *Yi wen zhi* (Records of the Literary Arts) contained in the *Han shu* (one of the Twenty-Four

¹² *Confucius: The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau, New York: Penguin Books, 1979, 106.

Histories that focuses on the early Han period).¹³ (Isoda, pp. 8-9) Following a long interval after the burning of books and the killing of scholars by the first Chin emperor, the Emperor Wu undertook to collect writings that had been scattered and to promote the arts of learning. The Emperor Wu set forth his order: “Select and employ great and talented men, have them memorize *bungaku*, and have them think deeply about and participate actively in affairs of state.” (Isoda, p. 9) The people who organized and classified the huge number of texts that the Emperor Wu collected were the father and son Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, who did their work during the reign of Emperor Cheng. The records of the literary arts in the *Han shu* are thus a classified catalogue of “literature” in its broadest meaning, which in this case refers not just to “letters,” but also to “learning” in the sense of the Japanese word *gakumon*.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, then, *bungaku* did not refer at all to “literature” in its modern sense. In the Japanese-Portuguese dictionary of 1603, the definition for *bungaku* is “Fumi manabu: the study and practice of excellent style for volumes and epistles, or again that specialization.” (Isoda, p. 11) Later, Léon Pages’s 1868 *Japanese-French Dictionary* contains the following definition: “Étude et science des livres, et style élégant des lettres, etc.” (the study and learning of books and of beautiful style in writing).¹⁴ Looking at the word *bungei* in the same dictionary, we find: “Art de rédiger et de bien écrire les lettres” (the techniques of letters and of writing beautifully). (Isoda, p. 11) In both cases the notion of the methods or art of composition strongly colors the definition.

¹³ Ban, Gu, *Han shu yi wen zhi*, Xianggang: Tai ping shu ju, 1963; and *The history of the former Han dynasty, A critical translation, with annotations*, by Homer H. Dubs, vol. 2, Baltimore, Waverly Press, 1944.

¹⁴ *Dictionnaire japonais-français: traduit du dictionnaire japonais-portugais composé par les missionnaires de la compagnie de Jésus*, Tokyo: Hakuteisha, 1968. (Reprint)

In Medhurst's *English-Japanese, Japanese-English Dictionary* of 1830, *bungaku* is defined as "literature;"¹⁵ and Tsuda Sen's edition of the *English-Chinese-Japanese Translation Dictionary* of 1876 also gives the translated meaning of *bungaku* as "literature." However, these particular definitions of *bungaku* are not really equivalent to contemporary notions. This becomes apparent when we look at how the English word "literature" is translated into Japanese at the time. Various terms are used: *jishiri* (字知り literally, knowledge of characters) in the *English-Japanese Co-translated Pocket Dictionary* of 1862; *monji* [sic] (文字, literally, written characters) in the first edition of the *Satsuma Dictionary* of 1869; and *bundō* (the way of writing) in Ernest Satow's *English-Japanese Dictionary of the Spoken Language* (both the first edition of 1876 and the revised edition of 1879).¹⁶ (Isoda, p. 12)

These particular translations reflect the fact that in Japan at the time "literature" as the term is understood now was not necessarily considered worthy of study on its own, and that references to the literary arts, or way of literature, were much different in conception. In *The Complete Collection of Bakumatsu-Meiji Newspapers*, there is not a single article up to 1872 that deals with "literature" as we think of it, because the literal meaning of *bungaku* was not "literature."¹⁷ Indeed, at the time, Fukuzawa Yukichi used the word in the first edition of his book *Conditions in the West* (1866) as a synonym for *gakumon*, or learning.

The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* gives the following citation from Nishi Amane's encyclopedia, *Hyakugaku renkan*, as the first example of the usage of *bungaku* to refer to

¹⁵ See also Walter Henry Medhurst, *An English and Japanese, and Japanese and English vocabulary: compiled from native works*, Batavia: 1839.

¹⁶ Ernest Satow, *English-Japanese Dictionary of the Spoken Language*, London: Trubner, 1879.

¹⁷ *Bakumatsu Meiji shinbun zenshū*, edited Meiji Bunka Kenkyūkai, Tokyo: Sekai Bunko, Shōwa, 1961-1962.

an artistic genre: “Let us consider what sorts of things mark the boundaries of literature/*bungaku*.” This citation is a dictionary-style (i.e. circular) definition of a generalized concept, and so some contextualization is needed. Even though the manuscript for *Hyakugaku renkan* was written in the early years of the Meiji period, it was not published in Nishi’s lifetime. Moreover, there is a passage in the work that contains the following statement: “Because Literature [the English word is used in the original], namely sentences (文章), is deeply connected with the arts/techniques of learning (學術), one must categorize authors by way of reference to styles.” (Isoda, p. 13)

The lack of a consistent translation of the word “literature” in the early Meiji period is hardly limited to Nishi Amane’s writings. There was another, practical need that influenced the process of creating and fixing the translation of the term. Terada Tōru has argued that *bungaku* is connected to the creation of departments of literature in universities.¹⁸ In 1862 Nishi was preparing to study abroad in the United States, but because of the Civil War, the *bakufu* government sent Nishi to the Netherlands instead. According to Mori Ōgai’s biography, Nishi studied Dutch with a Mr. van Dyke for three months and then received lessons in various branches of political science from Professor Vissering of Leiden University. (Isoda, p. 14) Japanese students studying abroad at the time were expected not only to immerse themselves in their Western studies and language, but also to carefully observe various institutions. Nishi expressed great admiration for the university system in particular, and produced a translated work about it titled *Japanese-Dutch Rules and Regulations of Universities*. In this work the section that

¹⁸ Terada Tōru, *Bungaku no unmei* (The fate of literature), Tokyo: Kōsōsha, 1980.

corresponds to a department of literature is referred to as “the course (section) of letters/writing (文章の科).” (Isoda, pp. 14-15)

In early Meiji, *bungaku* was also used as a translation for rhetoric, as in the following statement from Nishi’s *Chisetsu* (On knowledge): “Here in Japan *bun*/letters refers to those who study the arts/techniques of language and the words of a sentence; if we follow the distinctions made in Western nations, one meaning is ‘grammar’ (*gogaku*), the second is ‘rhetoric’ (*bungaku*).”¹⁹ (Isoda p. 15) These translations may seem somewhat arbitrary now, but they suggest a degree of sensitivity to the nuances of meaning at a historical moment when Japan was moving into the global political economy. The European understanding of “literature” was only becoming fixed in its modern conception, and was used interchangeably with older meanings; and so to attribute any confusion over the translation of terms by Nishi Amane and others in early Meiji to a lack of understanding is simply not correct, since their translations reflected the instability of the Western term “literature”, which itself had just undergone a profound shift in usage.

While older conceptions of *bungaku* survived well into Meiji, one of the earliest examples where the word appears as a translation for the meaning of “literature” as an artistic genre is the following passage from an editorial in the *Tokyo Nichinichi shinbun* written on April 16, 1875 by Fukuchi Ōchi.

Although it is said that the type of writing called the romance/novel is harmful to public morals, its purpose is hardly the chastisement of good and the promotion of evil. If we consider the matter fairly, we may say that it seems that reading such works is perhaps about 70% profitable and 30% harmful.... Still, over the past decade this romance/novel has not

¹⁹ Nishi Amane, “Chisetsu” in *Meiroku zasshi* 25 (December 1874). Published in vol. 1 of *Nishi Amane zenshū*, Tokyo: Munetaka shobō, 1960.

prospered significantly, and has fallen from favor. This is a sign to the world of the tremendous corruption of *bungaku*. Dramatic texts, namely the complete scripts of *Jōruri*, are the most valuable things now.... (Isoda, p. 18)

Bungaku in this case clearly refers to “literature” in the sense of genres that include novels, drama, and poetry. The attitude in the piece toward the “romance/novel” anticipates the heavily specialized genre analysis that would later mark Tsubouchi Shōyō’s *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The essence of the novel, 1885). Ōchi’s lamentation of the corruption of modern “literature,” which he compares unfavorably to the richness of Japan’s classical canon, suggests that the earlier sense of *bungaku* was beginning to fall away following the Meiji Restoration. The concept of *bungaku* in this case, while including classical literature, goes further to include an understanding of “literature”/*bungaku* as genres. This usage differs from the way *bungaku* was used prior to the Restoration, and this definition situates the concept of “literature” that was evolving in 19th century Europe within a Japanese context. Because Ōchi refers to historical writings apart from novels, plays, and poetry, his use of the word *bungaku*, while centering on artistic genres, still includes types of historical writings and biographies.

It is clear from these examples that the translation of *bungaku* as “literature” did not follow a straight path and was not fixed within a short period of time. At about the same time Ōchi wrote his editorial, Fukuzawa Yukichi made the following statement in his *Outline of a Theory of Civilization*: “I am of the opinion that intellectuals will definitely attain civilization by enlisting the help of erudite Christian teachers and by studying their liberal arts (*bungaku*) and practical arts along with their religion.” (Isoda, p.

19) *Bungaku* in this case refers to a more generalized course of study, in contrast to the vocational study of crafts and arts (*gigei*) more typical of a polytechnic, and that definition was in general use at the time.

Similarly, Nishi Amane writes in his “Proposal to Establish a Bureau of Japanese Learning”: “For example, if we take history, politics, law, philosophy, economics, etc. to be the fields of study of humanity, we see that they have numerous connections with *bungaku*; and so in spite of the differences among their respective methodologies and principles, we should be able to generally unify them.”²⁰ (Isoda, p. 20) Here the meaning of *bungaku* is akin to the phrase “humane letters,” as Matthew Arnold understood it, which signified knowledge in both the arts (humanities) and the sciences.

At this stage the usage of *bungaku* continued to remain semantically unstable, but the final transition in meaning was soon apparent in the following remarks in Taguchi Ukichi’s *History of the Japanese Enlightenment* (published between 1877 and 1882).

Bungaku is a manifestation of the human mind-heart. Generally there are numerous manifestations of the human heart in the world—things that are related to governance, or things that are related to customs and manners. *Bungaku* is related to writing/sentences, which can be either intellectual or emotional. Writings that express emotions are classified as “*kijitai*—factual/reportorial style. History and novels belong to this type. Writing (sentences) related to reason or science, are called theories or theses – academic studies and editorials belong to this type.”²¹ (Isoda, p. 20)

Taguchi’s conception of *bungaku* is based on a classification of genres that supports a theory of affective representation. His distinction between the expression of emotion and the expression of the intellect indicates the specialization of *bungaku* as a particular type of learning (i.e. as “a manifestation of the human mind-heart”). Taguchi is in fact

²⁰ *Tokyo Gakushi kain zasshi* (Tokyo journal of the Association of BAs), No. 1, Vol. 5, 1880.

²¹ Taguchi Ukichi, *Nihon kaika shōshi*, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1934. (Reprint)

theorizing a change in the meaning of the word that straddles both old and new senses; and his concept of *bungaku* was closer to something that could be called *bungei*, liberal arts, than to the more traditional definition of the word as “learning.”

By the time *Shōsetsu shinzui* appears a few years after Taguchi finished his history, the bivalent sense of *bungaku* as genres of literary art and as a discipline, or field of knowledge, is set, and the meaning of the word begins to converge with its Western counterpart, “literature.” It is ironic that in settling on *bungaku* as the translated term for “literature” the character for learning (学) remained plainly in sight, for that trace of earlier understandings of the word throws into question the unidirectional force of the “translation culture” that Kobayashi assumed defined modern Japan. The process of translation that created this convergence is representative of Japan’s larger experience of modernization. The drive to emulate the culture and institutions of the West brought with it Enlightenment assumptions that knowledge and truth were universal categories. At the same time the material transformations that marked the emergence of a global modernity led to a sense that there was a surplus of information that could only be given order through the fragmentation of learning into various fields of specialization. *Bungaku* references these disparate notions of knowledge, which tie Japan into a global, universal culture while connoting the unique, parochial nature of Japan’s national identity. The word does its work by replicating, through the semantic tension it signifies, the complex history of Japan’s encounter with modernity.