

Sanskrit Grammar in Early Modern East Asia—a Study of Kiben’s *Guidelines for Studying the Eight Cases of the Chinese Language*

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Abstract

The present article is a preliminary study of a little known treatise called *Kango hattenshō gakusoku* 漢語八轉聲學則 (*Guidelines for Studying the Eight Cases of the Chinese Language*) written by Kiben (基辨, 1718-1792), a scholarly priest of the Japanese Buddhist Hossō school. The concept of “eight cases” is derived from medieval Chinese accounts of Sanskrit grammar where it refers to the patterns of noun declension. However, Kiben did not apply this category to Sanskrit, but rather to literary Chinese (*kango* 漢語), the language of Buddhist sutras and doctrinal treatises studied by contemporaneous Japanese monks. Whereas this idea may appear questionable from a linguistic point of view, Kiben’s treatise deserves attention as the product of a well-established intellectual tradition rooted in the historical context of early modern Japan. The present article aims to make clear why someone working within this tradition decided to

turn to ancient Indian grammatical theory in a creative way that appears so unusual. It will attempt to extract the author's main argument from the philological technicalities in which it is seated and to analyse it from the viewpoint of intellectual history—namely, the inspirations Kiben received from his predecessors, his polemical targets, and the reactions of his target audience. It is argued that Kiben regarded the eight cases as universal categories common to all languages and believed that knowledge of these categories could aid Japanese exegetes in reconstructing the true meaning of the Chinese texts they studied. In this way he related the study of grammar to some of the most important intellectual trends of his age: the development of distinctly Japanese methods of philological inquiry into Chinese texts and of distinctly Japanese interpretations of the shared East Asian tradition. For this reason, this obscure work represents a remarkable attempt at “domesticating” the Indian tradition of linguistics in the intellectual setting of early modern East Asia.

Keywords: Kiben, eight cases, Hossō school, Buddhist hermeneutics, Edo period

梵文文法學在近世東亞 ——《漢語八轉聲學則》的初探

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中文摘要

本文旨在介紹由日本法相宗學僧基辨(1718-1792)所撰寫的《漢語八轉聲學則》。「八轉」這一概念源於唐代中國僧人對於梵文語法的敘述，原來指稱的是梵文名詞變化的模式。然而，基辨將「八轉」這一概念用於「漢語」，也就是當時東亞佛教的共同經典語言，而非梵語。雖然由語言學的角度而言，基辨的觀點頗有商榷之餘地，但他的著作代表著當時日本佛教根深蒂固的知識傳統，因此仍值得當代學者的注意。本文所關心的議題是：身為近世日本高僧的基辨對古老印度文法學採取如此創新的運用方式，其目標到底何在？為了回答此問題，本文將不對基辨的文法理解加以太細節的分析，而從思想史的角度來探討《漢語八轉聲學則》的核心論點，包括基辨從前人留下的文獻中得到的靈感，主要的辯論目標以及當時讀者對「漢語八轉」學說的反應。本文認為基辨將「八轉」解釋成某種跨越語言差別的普遍分類方式；據他而言，只有熟悉這些分類方式的日本讀者才能夠精確地掌握「漢語」文本的原義。當時日本有不少學者企圖對漢語文獻採取新的解讀方式或提出新的詮

釋，而基辨將文法學連結到當時日本的主流思潮。因此，《漢語八轉聲學則》這本鮮為人知的著作可被視為一項近世東亞將印度文法學「本土化」的出色嘗試。

關鍵詞：基辨、八轉聲、法相宗、佛教詮釋學、江戶時代



1. Introductory remarks - why is Kiben’s treatise important?

As demonstrated by the growing body of scholarship, the spread of Buddhism in East Asia was not limited to the transmission of religious practices or beliefs. In this complex and multifaceted process, the Chinese and their cultural satellites absorbed a whole plethora of new ideas that originated on the Indian subcontinent. This new body of knowledge included the remarkable tradition of linguistics developed by eminent Sanskrit grammarians. With a few exceptions, such as the famous pilgrim and translator Xuanzang (玄奘, 602-664), pre-modern East Asian Buddhists were not able to acquire first-hand knowledge of this tradition. However, the huge corpus of Buddhist texts translated into Chinese contained a fair number of references to Sanskrit and Sanskrit linguistics. This limited material was at least sufficient to conclude that such a discipline existed in India and that it surpassed anything that East Asian civilisation accomplished in terms of theorizing about language.

Contemporary scholars have duly noted the historical significance of this East Asian encounter with Indian linguistics. However, the outcome of this encounter has never been described in particularly enthusiastic terms. Writing in 1921, Hu Shi opined that traditional Chinese elites never developed much interest in grammar and that Sanskrit appeared to the Chinese as too remote, in both linguistic and cultural terms, to change this approach.¹ This impression was not substantially altered by the subsequent

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¹ Hu Shi 胡適, *Guoyu wenfa gailun* 國語文法概論, in *Hu Shi wencun di yi ji* vol. 3 胡適文存第一集第三卷, *Hu Shi zuopin ji* 5: *Shuihuzhuan yu Hongloumeng* 胡適作品集 5: 水滸傳與紅樓夢 (Taipei: Yuan-Liou chubonshe, 1986), p. 4.

findings of Robert van Gulik², Zhou Yiliang³ or Christoph Harbsmeier⁴, nor by Japanese scholars who investigated their native tradition of Sanskrit studies⁵. It is generally assumed that in pre-modern East Asia the study of Sanskrit amounted to the study of script rather than of language, and that it was confined to the narrow and elitist circles of learned Buddhist monks. These were, for example, scriptural exegetes of Buddhist canon who sought to make sense of transliterated Sanskrit terms; or (especially in the case of Japan) the exponents of Esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教) whose ritual expertise involved the mastery of Indic *siddham* script and vocalization of mantras and *dhāraṇīs*. More often than not, these monastic scholiasts aspired only to a modicum of Sanskrit skills that was sufficient to meet their relatively limited goals. It appears that few of them developed a truly systematic theoretical approach to language in the manner of the Sanskrit grammarians.

An interesting corrective to this well-established opinion has recently been proposed by the Taiwanese scholar Teng Wei-Jen whose studies deal with the 7th century Chinese disciples and successors of the aforementioned Xuanzang. Whereas few, if any, scholarly monks associated with this lineage mastered Sanskrit at a level even remotely comparable with its founder, their comments on Sanskrit grammar are relatively numerous and detailed for

² Robert van Gulik, *Siddham: An Essay on the History of Sanskrit Studies in China and Japan* (Nagpur: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1956).

³ Zhou Yiliang 周一良, "Zhongguo de fanwen yanjiu" 中國的梵文研究, in *Weijin nanbeichao shi lunji* 魏晉南北朝史論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), pp. 323-338.

⁴ Christoph Harbsmeier, *Science and Civilization in China: Language and Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 83-84.

⁵ Watanabe Shōkō 渡辺照宏, *Nihon no bukkyō* 日本の佛教 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), pp. 25-28.

East Asian standards. According to Teng, some of them demonstrated an earnest interest in this subject, particularly in the taxonomy of composite nouns (the so-called ‘six-fold compounds’, *ṣaḍ-samāsa*, *liu li [he] shi* 六離 [合] 釋).⁶ At the same time, Teng concedes that even most accomplished scholiasts of Xuanzang’s lineage preferred to discuss *Chinese* compounds extracted from native translations of Buddhist texts, rather than actual Sanskrit words. In some cases the Sanskrit originals of those compounds were not even composite terms in the first place.⁷

This stubbornly Sinocentric perspective on language, which Teng himself regards as ‘unfortunate’⁸, may well be one of the factors that explain why a full-fledged tradition of Sanskrit studies never developed in pre-modern East Asia. However, the Chinese monks’ lack of concern with the ‘real’ language of India can also be considered from a different point of view. After all, Xuanzang’s successors lived in a cultural sphere where the mastery of literary Chinese was tantamount to becoming a fully civilized person. Even the Buddha’s words were read, commented and expounded upon almost exclusively in this language. In such an environment, applying the categories of Indian grammar—however poorly understood—to analyse Chinese Buddhist texts rendered these categories as relevant to the real concerns of East Asian exegetes. Such application can therefore be regarded

⁶ For details, see Wei-Jen Teng, “On Kuiji’s Sanskrit Compound Analyses: Transmission of Sanskrit Grammar in the Early Tang Dynasty,” in *Buddhism Across Asia. Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, vol.1, ed. Tansen Sen. (Singapore: ISEAS, 2014); idem, “Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies,” *Taida foxue yanjiu* 台大佛學研究 28(2014): 124-136.

⁷ Teng, “Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies,” 127-128.

⁸ *ibid.*, 128.

as the first necessary step towards domesticating the very idea of grammar in the intellectual setting of East Asia. Whether this initial step was followed by further attempts at such domestication is an issue that still awaits scholarly attention. Of course, the potential field of investigation in this case extends far beyond medieval China, where the scholastic lineage initiated by Xuanzang became by and large defunct in the latter half of the Tang period (618-907).⁹ His legacy enjoyed a much better reception in Japan, where it was continued by an independent tradition known as Hossō school (*Hossō-shū* 法相宗). By the middle of Edo (1603-1868) period elements of Hossō scholasticism had been included in the doctrinal curricula of other schools of Japanese Buddhism (for example, branches of the Esoteric Shingon 真言 school) and subjected to new interpretations.¹⁰ All these factors, in addition to the lasting influence of Esoteric traditions mentioned above, contributed to the surprising resilience of Sanskrit studies in early modern Japan.

One particularly intriguing, albeit very little known, document of this resilience is the 18th century treatise called *Kango hattenshō gakusoku* (《漢語八轉聲學則》) (hereafter referred to as KHG), which may be translated as

⁹ However, it needs to be remembered that references to ‘six-fold compounds’ continue to appear in post-Tang Buddhist literature, even in the works of early modern scholiasts of Ming (1368-1644) period. See Chien Kaiting 簡凱廷, “Wanming weishixue zuopin zai jianghu shidai de liuchuan yu jieshou chutan” 晚明唯識學作品在江戶時代的流傳與接受初探, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Studies* 中華佛學研究 16(2015): 61.

¹⁰ Nishimura Ryō 西村玲, “Kyōgaku no shinten to bukkyō kaikaku undō” 教学の進展と仏教改革運動, in *Shin ajia bukkyōshi* vol. 13: *Minshū bukkyō no teichaku* 新アジア仏教史 13. 民衆仏教の定着, ed. Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士 (Tōkyō: Kōsei shuppansha, 2010), p. 192.

the *Guidelines for Studying the Eight Cases of the Chinese Language*.¹¹ The author of this work is Kiben (基辨, 1718-1791), a scholarly priest of the aforementioned Hossō school. As indicated by the title, the work in question is a manual intended for Kiben’s students. It deals with the important grammatical category of a noun case (*tenshō* 轉聲) mentioned in medieval Chinese accounts of Sanskrit grammar.¹² Remarkably, Kiben chose to apply this category not to Sanskrit, but rather to literary Chinese (*kango* 漢語), the language of Buddhist sutras and doctrinal treatises studied by contemporaneous Japanese monks. This choice may appear rather unusual to contemporary readers. Sanskrit cases have traditionally been discussed in terms of inflected noun endings characteristic of some Indo-European languages. Traditional Sanskrit grammar, based on the works of Pāṇini (4th century B.C.) and his continuators, fully exemplifies this approach. Whether, and how exactly, the concept of a case can be applied to non-inflected languages such as Chinese appears to be a debatable issue from the point of view of modern linguistics.¹³

¹¹ The present article is based on the copy of KHG published in 1771 in Kyōto, currently in possession of Tōhoku University Library (Kanō Collection 27954-1). The book was scanned on the request of Chien Kaiting 簡凱廷 and forwarded to the author by professor Lin Chen-kuo 林鎮國 of National Chengchi University in Taipei.

¹² The compound *tenshō* 轉聲 possibly corresponds to the Sanskrit term *vibhakti*. See Teng, “Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies,” 118-119.

¹³ The authors of some early Western accounts of Chinese grammar, such as Joshua Marshman, rather straightforwardly applied traditional paradigms of noun declension derived from Greek or Latin. However, as discussed by Tommaso Pellin, this traditional understanding of a case proved quite problematic for the authors of first modern descriptions of Chinese grammar at least until the early 20th century. Most contemporary linguists chose to abandon this concept altogether or to reformulate it, for example by employing the notion of ‘abstract Case’. See J. Marshman, *Elements of Chinese Grammar With a Preliminary Dissertation on the*

These doubts notwithstanding, the treatise in question deserves to be taken seriously for at least a few reasons. First, its author Kiben is widely recognized as one of the most thoroughly educated Buddhist intellectuals of his age. While he is generally associated with the ancient Yakushiji 藥師寺 temple in Nara, throughout his life he studied and lectured in several prominent temples of other traditions, establishing a reputation of a broadly learned and versatile Buddhist scholiast.¹⁴ His works refer to a wide selection of scholastic treatises of Indian and Chinese pedigree that were no longer transmitted on the mainland, along with Japanese scholarship.¹⁵ Second, the edition of KHG on which this article is based contains an addendum (*fugen* 附言, hereafter FG) by his disciple Kenyō 拳膺 which documents two rather sophisticated controversies surrounding Kiben's theory. The fact that such controversies occurred proves that in their day,

Characters, and the Colloquial Medium of the Chinese, and an Appendix Containing the Ta-Hyoh of Confucius with a Translation (Serampore: Mission Press, 1814), pp. 218-269; T. Pellin, "A Difficult Case: A Sketch of the Different Interpretations of the Concept of 'Case' in the Early Chinese Grammatical Studies," in *History of Linguistics 2008*, ed. Gerda Hassler (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), pp. 317-326; Li Yan-Hui Audrey, *Order and Constituency in Mandarin Chinese* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990).

¹⁴ At the time when the text of KHG began to circulate Kiben was residing in Tōdaiji 東大寺 temple in the ancient capital Nara.

¹⁵ For studies on Kiben's life and work, see e.g. Yamasaki Keiki 山崎慶輝, "Daidōbō Kiben no denki to sono kyōgaku" 大同房基弁の伝記とその教学, *Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 仏教学研究 36(1980): 1-16; Takaoka Yoshihiko 高岡善彦, "Daidōbō Kiben no kenkyū. 'Mu shushō' to sono 'kaiten' ni kan suru mondai" 大同房基弁の研究: 「無種姓」とその「改転」に関する問題, *Ryūkoku daigaku bukkyōgaku kenkyūshitsu nenpō* 龍谷大学仏教学研究年報 13(2007): 1-18; Takatsuki Kishō 高次喜勝, "Daidōbō Kiben no kenkyū. Yakushiji zō 'Yakushiji Daidōbō Kiben risshi den' honkoku" 大同房基弁の研究: 藥師寺藏「藥師寺大同房基弁律師伝」翻刻, *Nanto bukkyō* 南都佛 98(2013): 47-72.

Kiben’s ideas resonated widely enough to elicit reactions from both detractors and defenders.

The above evidence is perhaps sufficient to conclude that Kiben’s work was a product of a well-established intellectual tradition firmly rooted in the historical context of early modern Japan. It remains to be seen why someone working within this tradition decided to turn to the ancient grammatical theory in a way that appears so unusual—and therefore creative. The present article attempts to elucidate this very point. In what follows the main argument of KHG will be extracted from the philological technicalities in which it is seated and analysed from the viewpoint of intellectual history—namely, the inspirations Kiben received from his predecessors, his polemical targets, and the reactions of his target audience. In this way, the article will hopefully throw some light on a little known case of the further domestication of the Indian study of grammar in East Asia, undertaken by an early modern successor of Xuanzang.

2. The background and the main argument of the *Guidelines*...

Most of what Kiben has to say about grammatical case reflects his training as a learned priest of the Hossō school—the Japanese offshoot of Xuanzang’s lineage discussed above. By relying on the sources written by Xuanzang’s Chinese successors, Kiben correctly traces the idea of the eight cases to the uniquely Indian discipline of grammatical studies, the *vyākaraṇa* (*shōmyōkiron no hō* 聲明記論之法).¹⁶ He is also informed that

¹⁶ KHG: 1r. See Huili’s 慧立 account of Xuanzang’s study of Sanskrit in the famous Nālanda monastery in *Da Tang da Ci’ensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏

Indian grammarians classified units of speech into two main categories: the *subanta* (*somanta* 蘇漫多) and the *tiñanta* (*teigenta* 底彥多).¹⁷ However, he does not appear to be aware of the original meaning of this distinction, which corresponds to the one between nominal and verbal expressions, with their respective inflectional paradigms. The Chinese commentators on whose authority Kiben relies mistook this grammatical difference for a literary or rhetorical distinction. According to their account, the *tiñanta* are the words that serve to embellish a literary composition and for this reason are seldom found in ordinary writing (*hanbun* 汎文). The *subanta*, on the other hand, represent the more basic category of words that appear in both elegant or simple prose.¹⁸ Kiben's endorsement of this erroneous interpretation has far-reaching consequences for his understanding of the subject matter of his treatise. From the assumption that the paradigm of noun declension (*somanta shō* 蘇漫多聲) is more universal than the paradigm of verb conjugation he draws the conclusion that *subanta* are the essential building blocks of language that are necessary to convey any meaning whatsoever.¹⁹ Furthermore, he applies this category to the specific circumstances of Chinese literary culture, defining it as a class of words that appear in all kinds of texts regardless of their stylistic register and target

法師傳, CBETA, T50, no. 2053, p. 239, a8-10; Samuel Beal, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li* (London: Kegan Paul, 1911), pp. 121-122 or Johan Frederik Staal, *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), p.8. For an extended discussion of how the term *vyākaraṇa* was used in Chinese sources, see Teng, "Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies," 111-114.

¹⁷ KHG: 1r-2v.

¹⁸ See Huili, *Da Tang da Ci'ensi sanzang fashi zhuan*, CBETA, T50, no. 2053, p. 239, a22-25; Beal, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, p. 123; Staal, *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, p. 9.

¹⁹ KHG: 3r.

readership. Kiben provides several examples of such words, such as: 由 (from, since), 因 (because), 於 (at, in, on), 之 (of), 依 (on the basis of), 為 (for the sake of), 處 (the place which), 中 (within, in the middle of).²⁰ All of these happen to be the so-called ‘empty words’ (to use the traditional Chinese term) which, unlike the actual ‘inflected nouns’, are primarily markers of grammatical relations.²¹ The same set of words is mentioned further in the treatise as the potential markers of the putative eight cases of literary Chinese.

As can be seen, Kiben regards the categories of *subanta* and *tiñanta* as at least roughly applicable to the grammar of Chinese as well as Sanskrit. More controversially, he maintains that the paradigm of eightfold declension of the *subanta* discussed in Sanskrit grammatical treatises can also be recognized in Chinese Buddhist texts. In order to understand Kiben on this point, it is necessary to introduce another distinction characteristic of Hossō scholasticism—namely, the distinction between the signified content (‘that which is expressed’, *shosen* 所詮) on the one hand, and the signifying utterance (‘that which expresses’, *nōsen* 能詮) on the other. In the works of Sinitic scholiasts, whose primary concern was scriptural exegesis rather than general semantics, this distinction was often applied specifically to Buddhist teachings. In this usage, ‘that which is expressed’ corresponds to the ‘principles’ which the Buddha conveyed in his preaching, while ‘that which expresses’ are the words used to articulate and elucidate this content. This, in brief, is the basic conceptual framework which Kiben invokes to justify extending the category of a case to Chinese nouns:

²⁰ KHG: 2v-3r.

²¹ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), p. 12.

唐譯經論之文譯梵語八轉為漢語八轉。是以，能詮、所詮翻語大周備矣。若不爾，則印度既以八轉記能、所詮，所翻漢語無八轉則梵漢義意應別。若不翻能詮，亦應不翻所詮。若不翻所詮，翻傳之功何益之有？若翻所詮，則亦應云翻能詮。能詮、所詮同一時處，不可分離。故若翻能詮，則名此為漢語八轉也。²²

In the sutras and treatises translated in the Tang the eight cases of Sanskrit were rendered as the eight cases of Chinese. For this reason, the language of these translations is thoroughly complete both in terms of expressing words and expressed content. Otherwise, considering that in India both the expressing words and the expressed content were recorded with the use of eight cases, if the Chinese translation was lacking those, then the meaning of the Sanskrit and Chinese [texts] would be different. When the expressing words are not translated, the expressed content will also not be translated; if the expressed content remains untranslated, what benefit is there from translating the scriptures? If the content is translated, then it should be understood that the words are translated as well. The expressing words and the expressed content are one with regard to time and place; they are inseparable from each other. For this reason, as long as the expressing words are translated, these [translated words] should be regarded as the eight cases of the Chinese language.

What Kiben is saying in this dense passage could be interpreted as follows. The historical Buddha and his commentators communicated their

²² KHG: 1v. In this and all following quotes from the KHG the punctuation marks have been added by the author of the present paper. Page numbers refer to the original pagination with the standard abbreviations *r* and *v* referring to the text on the front side (*recto*) and the back side (*verso*) of a page respectively. The original text contains marks and glosses that aid Japanese readers to construe the meaning of classical Chinese sentences in terms of the grammar and syntax of their native language (*kanbun kundoku* 漢文訓讀), which have not been reproduced here.

teachings to his listeners and readers by the means of human language. Language, however, consists of two aspects. On the one hand, there are units of speech, for example the aforementioned inflected nouns of Sanskrit. On the other hand, there is the meaning communicated by means of the aforementioned units of speech. The inflected nouns express the differences in meaning that are essential to understand the content of Indian texts. If the Chinese readers are to grasp this content, they need to be aware of the distinctions in meaning that were originally signalled by different noun cases. A truly complete translation cannot but reproduce these distinctions by the means of a parallel system of cases adapted to the Chinese language.

It needs to be stressed that the idea postulated by Kiben is not backed by any Chinese authority recognized by the Hossō school. He explicitly attributes the discovery of eight Chinese cases to the Japanese monk Dōgen 道玄 of Tōdaiji temple, the author of a work called *Hatten ryakuju* 八轉略頌 (‘Abridged stanza on the Eight Cases’).²³ According to Kiben, Dōgen’s study was written in such a terse and abstruse style that few scholiasts noticed its significance and no one endeavoured to expand on it. Moreover, his argument for the existence of Chinese cases was rejected by many in a mistaken belief that noun cases are peculiar to Sanskrit and have no counterpart in Chinese.²⁴ Kiben’s own work is, therefore, motivated by his

²³ KHG: 1v: “*Dharma-Master Dōgen from the Kegon school, [a monk of] Tōdaiji temple* (東大寺華嚴宗道玄法師)”. This description fits a monk also known as Jōkaku 貞覺 or Kegon Rōsō 華嚴老僧 who lived at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries (mentioned in the 16th volume of the *Honchō kōsōden* 本朝高僧傳). However, the exact identity of this author and the content of his work require further investigation.

²⁴ KHG: 1v. Some arguments against this theory are briefly mentioned in hand-written notes preserved on the first pages (0v and 1r) of the copy of KHG held by Tōhoku

desire to vindicate the obscure and controversial theory advanced by his compatriot. He aims to achieve this by the means of a more systematic and more accessible exposition of Dōgen's claim.

Kiben's defence of Dōgen needs to be considered against the background of the contemporaneous intellectual scene. In Kiben's times classical Chinese texts were circulated, read and interpreted on a scale that was unprecedented in the history of Japan, and in fact whole East Asia. Moreover, the study of Chinese texts was no longer monopolized by Buddhist monks—it flourished as an independent field of inquiry outside of monasteries, in both state-sponsored and private academies.²⁵ Philological methods, partly derived from Buddhist tradition, were now applied to Confucian classics, and even to ancient Japanese literary works.²⁶ To wit, while the concept of Chinese cases may not have been Kiben's original invention, in his days it could already be disseminated among an increasingly literate and increasingly critical audience. Some of his listeners and readers commanded a fair grasp of classical Chinese that was sufficient to evaluate such claims and dispute them. As will be argued later, Kiben's most valuable insights as a scholar of language are contained in his responses to contemporaneous critics. However, in order to appreciate the significance of these polemics, more needs to be said about Kiben's own understanding of the eight Chinese cases.

University Library. Interestingly, the objections are listed according to the Buddhist scheme of the three 'measures of knowledge' (experience, reasoning, authority), which suggests that they were current among educated Buddhist monks.

²⁵ For a recent overview of this intellectual milieu, see Rebekah Clements, *A Cultural History of Translation in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁶ Regan Murphy, "Sanskrit Studies in Early Modern Japan," in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sorensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 985-994.

3. The eight cases of the Chinese language—an attempt at interpretation

In his account of the eight cases of literary Chinese Kiben draws on the paradigm of ‘seven case endings’ (*shichi reiku* 七例句) or ‘seven meanings’ (*shichi gi* 七義) which earlier East Asian exegetes had applied to Sanskrit.²⁷ The list is modelled on a canonical passage from the corpus of *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures translated by Xuanzang.²⁸ The passage appears in the context of a lengthy discussion of the six *pāramitās*, the paramount virtues of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It explains a distinction which the Buddha had earlier made between the so-called ‘worldly’ and ‘supra-worldly’ *pāramitās*—i.e., the more mundane and the more transcendent applications of Buddhist virtues:

「舍利子！世間者，謂彼六種波羅蜜多，是世間故，名為世間；造世間故，名為世間；由世間故，名為世間；為世間故，名為世間；因世間故，名為世間；屬世間故，名為世間；依世間故，名為世間。」²⁹

Śāriputra! This is what is meant by calling [those six *pārāmitas*] ‘worldly’: those six *pārāmitas* are what is worldly, hence they are called worldly; they create what is worldly, hence they are called worldly; they [arise] by the means of what is worldly, hence they are called worldly; they are for the sake of what is worldly, hence they are called worldly; they are because of what is worldly, hence they are called worldly; they belong to what is worldly,

²⁷ The difference in number results from Kiben’s decision to add vocative as the eighth case in addition to the original list of seven. See also Staal, *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, p. 18.

²⁸ Xuanzang 玄奘, trans., *Da bore bolomiduo jing* (*Dai hannya haramitta kyō*) 大般若波羅蜜多經, CBETA, T7, no. 220.

²⁹ *Dai hannya haramitta kyō*, CBETA, T7, no. 220, p. 535, a28-b3.

hence they are called worldly; they are based in what is worldly,
hence they are called worldly’.

At least some East Asian commentators of this passage were well aware that its rhetorical structure follows the standard pattern of noun declension distinguished by Sanskrit grammarians.³⁰ In the KHG Kiben follows this scholastic tradition. However, he illustrates his explanations of particular cases with quotes collected from Chinese texts—Chinese translations of canonical scriptures and Chinese commentaries regarded as authoritative by the Hossō school. Whereas his exposition certainly deserves a more detailed treatment, in terms of the present article it will be enough to summarize its main points:

(1) The first case (nominative, *taishō* 體聲)—as in ‘what is worldly’. Also called ‘the general case’ (*hansetsushō* 汎說聲). It represents the ‘raw’ meaning of a given word or phrase when it stands in isolation, for example in quotes or compounds. When contextualized within a sentence and modified by auxiliary words (*jogon* 助言) this ‘general’ form adopts one of the remaining seven cases. In this sense, the first case serves as the common basis for all other cases.³¹

(2) The second case (accusative or rather agentive,³² *gōshō* 業聲)—as

³⁰ For example, Huizhao (惠沼, 651-714) and Lingtai (靈泰), both authors of Tang-period commentaries to the *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 (the magisterial scholastic treatise of Xuanzang’s lineage) (cf. *Cheng weishi lun liaoyi deng* 成唯識論了義燈, CBETA, T43, no. 1832, p. 674, a14 ff. and *Cheng weishi lun shuchao* 成唯識論疏抄, CBETA, X50, no. 819, p. 148, c18 ff.)

³¹ KHG: 3v-5r.

³² As the following discussion will show, Kiben’s interpretation of this case is very problematic.

in ‘create what is worldly’. Also called the ‘the case of what is said’ (*shosetsushō* 所說聲). It indicates an action or a function that is being performed by a certain agent.³³

(3) The third case (instrumental, *gushō* 具聲)—as in ‘by the means of what is worldly’. Also called ‘the case of who says’ (*nōsetsushō* 能說聲). It specifies the tool or the agent by whose effort a given action is performed or completed.³⁴

(4) The fourth case (dative, *ishō* 為聲)—as in ‘for the sake of what is worldly’. Its basic function is to illustrate the relation of ‘assistance’ (*junjo* 順助) that occurs between at least two objects, where one is subservient to the other.³⁵

(5) The fifth case (ablative, *inshō* 因聲)—as in ‘because of what is worldly’. Also called ‘the case of what follows’ (*shojūshō* 所從聲). It reveals the reason, or the cause, behind a certain entity or state of affairs. It also conveys new information about the subject by indicating a predicate or quality that belongs to it, as in the standard formula of providing a reason (*in* 因) in the so-called Buddhist logic (e.g. ‘sound is eternal, *because of being created*’).³⁶

(6) The sixth case (genitive, *zokushō* 屬聲)—as in ‘belong to what is worldly’. It highlights the relation of belonging or possession.³⁷

(7) The seventh case (locative, *oshō* 於聲)—as in ‘based in what is

³³ KHG: 5r-5v.

³⁴ KHG: 5v-7r.

³⁵ KHG: 7r-8r.

³⁶ KHG: 8r-8v.

³⁷ KHG: 8v-9r.

worldly'. Its primary meaning is that of specifying or classifying (*shabetsu* 差別) an object by indicating its locus or basis. It is applied under two circumstances: to specify that something abides in a certain location (*sho'oshō* 所於聲) or to indicate that something occurs on the basis of something else (*sho'ishō* 所依聲).³⁸

(8) The eighth case (vocative, *koshō* 呼聲). Unlike other cases, it does not express any activity or relation that occurs between things that are spoken of. Its only function is to 'summon' (*koshō* 呼召) a particular object whenever such a need arises. Because everything that can be spoken of can in principle be 'summoned', the vocative is also known as the 'universal case' (*hannishō* 汎尔聲).³⁹ It needs to be stressed that Kiben does not explain how the vocative fits within the traditional scheme of 'seven case endings' discussed above.⁴⁰

The names of the eight cases, their order and their basic descriptions certainly conform to Indian precedents. It is, however, apparent that Kiben is reluctant to delve too deep into the intricacies of South Asian grammatical theory. He does not provide his Japanese readers with any actual example of an inflected Sanskrit noun. He has virtually nothing to say about various paradigms of declension, and next to nothing about grammatical categories other than that of a case. The category of number is not mentioned at all in the KHG, while the reference to the three Sanskrit genders (of masculine, feminine and neuter) is rather brief and vague.⁴¹ Apart from the eight cases,

³⁸ KHG: 9r-10v.

³⁹ KHG: 10v-11r.

⁴⁰ The status of the vocative was already ambiguous in the early East Asian accounts of Sanskrit grammar (cf. Staal, *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, pp. 9, 13).

⁴¹ KHG: 16v-17r. Kiben essentially repeats the descriptions of the three Sanskrit

the only grammatical issue which KHG tackles in some detail is the six-fold classification of compounds. As mentioned above, this particular topic had been relatively well covered by East Asian Buddhist scholiasts. Kiben, who was no exception in this regard, expatiates in KHG on the relations between six types of compounds and respective cases.⁴² These remarks, while worthy of closer examination, contain too many technicalities to allow for a brief presentation and for this reason require a separate treatment.

In terms of grammatical theory, the main subject matter of the treatise are therefore the eight cases that can be attributed to Chinese counterparts of declined ‘nouns’ in Kiben’s peculiar understanding. Even with regard to this topic, Kiben’s presentation is not free from difficulties. Perhaps the most problematic of all is his explanation of the distinction between the first two cases, corresponding to the nominative and the accusative in traditional Sanskrit grammar. In the context of Indo-European languages, the most natural interpretation of this distinction refers to the syntactical functions of the two cases: the primary function of the nominative is to express the subject of a verb, whereas the accusative expresses the so-called direct object of a transitive verb.⁴³ The distinction which Kiben has in mind is, however, of an altogether different nature. It will be remembered that he describes the first case as representing an isolated ‘substance’ (*tai* 體) of an

genders transmitted by the Tang monks. He does not consider this category as relevant to his analysis of the Chinese cases.

⁴² KHG: 13v-16v.

⁴³ See Jerzy Kuryłowicz, *The Inflectional Categories of Indo-European* (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1964), pp. 179-181. Alternatively, the accusative may be defined as a case which expresses a ‘non-locative goal’ of an action or experience attributed to the subject. See John M. Anderson, *Modern Grammars of Case. A Retrospective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 123.

object whose relation to other objects is yet unspecified. His definition of the second case is, on the other hand, very broad, and refers to any expression of action, of function, regardless of the syntactical structure involved. On this interpretation, in the following quote:

一時薄伽梵住如來加持 [廣大金剛法界宮]...⁴⁴

Once the Bhagavān, abiding [in the spacious adamantine Dharma-realm palace] supported by the Tathāgata's aiding power...

Kiben counts the word *Bhagavān* (Sanskrit honorific appellation of the Buddha) as an example of the second case, even though it is difficult to see how a word that expresses the subject of this sentence could be anything else than a noun in the nominative case. Just as in the case of Kiben's misreading of the distinction between verbs and nouns, his apparent confusion with regard to syntactical functions of cases may reflect general shortcomings of pre-modern East Asian Sanskrit studies. A similar explanation of the second case can be found, for example, in the classic compendium *Bongaku shinryō* (梵學津梁) compiled by the famous Sanskrit scholar Jiun Onkō (慈雲飲光, 1718-1804) in the 1760s. It may therefore be argued that Kiben reproduced some prevalent misunderstanding regarding the role of the accusative that possibly originated with the early East Asian accounts of Sanskrit grammar.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ KHG: 3v. A quote from the opening lines of the *Dainichi kyō* 大日經 (*Mahāvairocana-sūtra*), the classic scripture of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. The words in the square brackets are missing in the original text of KHG and have been added for the sake of clarity. Cf. Śubhakarasiṃha 善無畏 and Yixing 一行, trans., *Da Piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing* (*Dai birushana jōbutsu jinben kaji kyō*) 大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經, CBETA, T18, no. 848, p. 1, a9-10.

⁴⁵ Izumi Hōkei 泉芳璟, "Bongaku shinryō wo ronzu" 梵學津梁を論ず, *Ōtani gakuho* 大谷学報 9, 2(1928): 18.

On the other hand, it may be wondered to what extent traditional descriptions of Sanskrit cases in terms of their morphology and syntax were even relevant to Kiben’s own agenda. The author of KHG could demonstrate the syntactic function of the accusative in terms that were readily understandable to his readers: for example, by contrasting the subject and object pronouns of literary Chinese (e.g. *bi* 彼 vs. *zhi* 之) or by adducing the grammatical particles (*joshi* 助詞) used in native Japanese glosses to Chinese texts. That Kiben elected not to do so may, of course, be attributed to his lack of acumen as a linguist. In order to judge his account fairly, however, it has to be pointed out that he explicitly warns his readers against attaching too much importance to the so-called ‘auxiliary words’. Kiben appears to believe that there are no clear-cut correspondences between such words and the eight cases. He states, for example, that one and the same particle 由 (‘from’) can mark either the third or the fifth, and even the sixth case, and that one has to consider the context in which this word appears in order to see which of these cases was actually intended.⁴⁶ This observation is extended to other ‘auxiliary words’, such as 因 (‘because’) or 於 (‘at, in’). According to Kiben such words have no real meaning on their own. They can only express the meaning of a certain case when considered in the light of the meaning of both preceding and following passages of the text.⁴⁷ What such cryptic remarks entail can perhaps be best illustrated with Kiben’s own demonstration—his interpretation of a quote from Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* (*Sanjū ju* 三十頌), a root verse of the magisterial treatise *Jō*

.....
⁴⁶ KHG: 11v.

⁴⁷ KHG: 11v: 「由、因、於」之言，意本泛故，前後所續之義意各成轉義。不一準也。

yuishiki ron (*Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論) studied by Hossō scholiasts⁴⁸:

由假說我法...⁴⁹

On the basis of what has been said above, the particle 由 can be considered as indicating the third (instrumental) case:

By the means of provisional expressions self and phenomena...

However, Kiben explains that by consulting the explanatory prose section which follows these terse verses the reader can establish that ‘self’ and ‘phenomena’ are themselves ‘provisional expressions’ (namely, they are illusory appearances with no ultimately real designates). Considering that these two phrases – ‘self and phenomena’ and ‘provisional expressions’ – do not refer to separate entities, the instrumental interpretation of the problematic particle (as ‘by the means of’) cannot reflect the intended meaning of the treatise. By the way of elimination, the particle in question turns out to represent the fifth (ablative) case:

Because of (being) provisionally expressed self and phenomena...

Kiben also discusses numerous examples of Chinese phrases or sentences where the cases are not explicitly marked at all. One such example can be found in the opening verses of the *Jō yuishiki ron*:⁵⁰

稽首唯識性滿分清淨者⁵¹

I salute those who are wholly or partially purified [in] the truth of Consciousness-only

⁴⁸ KHG: 13r-13v.

⁴⁹ Xuanzang 玄奘, trans., *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論, CBETA T31, no. 1586, p. 60, a27.

⁵⁰ Kiben attributes this quote to Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses*.

⁵¹ *Cheng weishi lun*, CBETA T3, no. 1585, p. 1, a7.

Following Xuanzang’s major disciple Ci’en Kuiji (慈恩窺基, 632-82), Kiben maintains that this sentence can be successfully analysed in terms of the eight cases, even though it is lacking any explicit case markers. According to this analysis, the phrase ‘in the truth of Consciousness-only’ qualifies the phrase ‘those who are wholly or partially purified’ in terms of a certain locus (here probably understood in abstract terms, as: ‘in the matter of’); therefore, it has to represent the seventh (locative) case.⁵² ‘Those who are ...purified’ are those whom the speaker salutes, hence the fourth (dative) case.⁵³ In Kiben’s own words:

大抵考覈漢語八轉之法，先讀經論而視其文義前後所在。不拘「由」、「因」等有無。從以八轉一一繫文，推尋其義。雖距古千載，非親陪譯場，蓋學而得之昭然可觀也。⁵⁴

In general, the method of inquiry into the eight Chinese cases is as follows: begin by reading the sutra or the treatise to see where the main thrust of the whole text lies. Do not stick to the presence or absence of words such as ‘because’ or ‘since’. Subsequently, connect the portions of the text by the means of the eight cases, one after another, and ascertain their meaning. Even though you are thousands years away and you cannot accompany the translators in person at their place of work, if you study and learn, [the meaning] will become perfectly clear.

Kiben repeatedly stresses that proper interpretation of ambiguous passages requires the readers to seek the meaning of the text ‘with their eyes and minds (*kokoro* 心)’ rather than by relying on precedents and rules (e.g.

⁵² KHG: 7r.

⁵³ Kiben follows Kuiji’s commentary to the aforementioned *Cheng weishi lun* (CBETA T43, no. 1831, p. 613, b27-c2).

⁵⁴ KHG: 13r.

KHG: 5r, 6r, 12v). Similar injunctions to follow one's own exegetical intuition rather than written words appear again in the postscripts written by Kiben's students Ryōgen 良嚴 and Kenyō, which attests to the importance which the author attached to this message.⁵⁵ Such warnings were meant, first and foremost, as practical methodological advice for those struggling with the complex syntax of Sinitic Buddhist literature. Nonetheless, they also tell us a great deal about Kiben's understanding of the very category of a case. Apparently, he regards function words as aides of secondary importance, whose presence may even mislead less advanced adepts with regard to the meanings represented in the actual text. What really matters for Kiben are not Chinese words *per se*, but mutual relations between objects, or between states of affairs, that are expressed by these words. In this regard, Kiben's notion of cases comes fairly close to what traditional Indian grammarians would rather call *kāraḥ*—understood by some contemporary authors as 'semantic relations' or 'semantic roles' that underlie the morphology of actual cases.⁵⁶ Indeed, if one excludes the nominative, described by Kiben as a 'neutral' form of a word lacking the regular characteristics of a case, and the ever problematic vocative, the remaining

⁵⁵ KHG FG: 1r, KHG FG: 4v.

⁵⁶ For example, Jonardon Ganeri defines *kāraḥ* as *semantic relation[s] between a verb and a noun* and Parimal Patil as *semantic relations (...) between the nouns in a given sentence and the event that is expressed by the main verb in that sentence*. Cf. J. Ganeri, *Semantic Powers: Meaning and the Means of Knowing in Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 51 and P. Patil, *Against a Hindu God: Buddhist Philosophy of Religion in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 37. For extended discussions of various traditional and contemporary interpretations of this complex notion, see e.g. Madhav M. Deshpande, trans. and annotated., *The Meaning of Nouns: Semantic Theory in Classical and Medieval India (Nāmārtha-nirṇaya of Kaṇḍabhaṭṭa)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1992), pp. 46-53 or George Cardona, *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), pp. 215-221.

six cases can be reasonably well paired with the standard list of the six *kāraḥas*—the *karṭṛ* and *karman* (agent and patient), *karāṇa* (instrument), *saṃpradāna* (beneficiary), *apādāna* (source) and *adhikaraṇa* (location).⁵⁷

However, this observation raises further questions, some of which are not easy to answer on the basis of the text of the treatise alone. For example, contemporary scholars appear to disagree as to whether six *kāraḥas* described by Pāṇini and other Sanskrit grammarians can be abstracted from the rules of Sanskrit syntax.⁵⁸ Moreover, the original theory of *kāraḥas* presupposes a separate category of a case marked by the inflected endings of Sanskrit words (*vibhakti*—the most likely counterpart of Kiben’s *tenshō*). Kiben’s treatise is silent on such distinctions, and it appears to lack a theoretical framework that would allow him to differentiate between the morphological, syntactical and semantical aspects of the eight cases. Kiben’s relative lack of sophistication in this regard may perhaps be explained by his background as a student of literary Chinese, a language whose uninflected grammar may render aforementioned distinctions somewhat problematic.⁵⁹ On the other hand, as will be illustrated below, Kiben eventually did feel compelled to clarify how the cases of literary Chinese differ from the noun inflections of Sanskrit. This clarification does not belong to the original design of his treatise, but was appended by one of his followers so as to

⁵⁷ A similar point has been made by Teng Wei-Jen with regard to medieval Chinese interpretations of the Sanskrit cases. See Wei-Jen Teng, “Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies,” 116-119. See also Staal, *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁸ Cardona, *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research*, pp. 216-219.

⁵⁹ As discussed by T. Pellin, even modern Chinese grammarians struggled to maintain a consistent distinction between the ‘cases’ on the one hand, and the more abstract ‘syntactic/logical functions’ on the other (cf. Pellin, “A Difficult case...”).

quieten the doubts of sceptical readers.

4. Doubts and clarifications

As mentioned above, in 1772 Kiben's student Kenyō expanded the original treatise by writing an addendum which records several doubts raised by unspecified listeners of his lectures based on the text of KHG. The addendum also contains responses to these objections, reportedly based on Kiben's own instructions.⁶⁰ The first of these objections resuscitates the issue which Kiben hoped to settle once and for all by writing his treatise—namely, the issue of whether it is even appropriate to talk of grammatical cases in the context of Chinese:

此書題名《漢語八轉聲學則》。爾入本文云：「印度既以八轉記能、所詮，所翻漢語無八轉則梵漢義意應別」而以翻能詮為漢語八轉。若爾則改書題應云《翻語八轉聲學則》也。若翻語之餘一切漢語有八轉則不應道理。於漢土言音既無八轉之聲故，此義如何通？⁶¹

The title of this book is *Guidelines for Studying the Eight Cases of the Chinese Language*. In the introduction it says: 'considering that in India both the expressing words and the expressed content were recorded with the use of eight cases, if the Chinese translation was lacking those, then the meaning of the Sanskrit and Chinese [texts] would be different'. Accordingly, [the book] labels the translated expressing words as the 'eight cases' of the Chinese language. If it is so, the title of the book should be changed to *Guidelines for Studying the Eight Cases of the Language of Translations*. It would be irrational [to maintain] that

⁶⁰ KHG FG: 1v, KHG FG: 5r.

⁶¹ KHG FG: 1v.

the entire Chinese language apart from the language of translations has the eight cases. Considering that there is no eightfold declension in the speech of China, how could one make sense of this claim?

Apparently, Kiben’s opponent prefers the more literal understanding of eight cases as eight forms of noun declensions that are typical of inflected languages such as Sanskrit. He concedes that Chinese translators might have devised some means that allowed them to reproduce the original distinctions between grammatical cases in Chinese texts translated from the Sanskrit. What he questions is whether ordinary Chinese speech, or texts written originally in Chinese, can be meaningfully analysed in such terms. An objection of this kind required Kiben to come up with a precise answer to a problem that is conveniently glossed over in his treatise—namely, what is actually meant by ‘case’ in the context of the Chinese language, which has no grammatical case markers comparable with the inflected suffixes of Sanskrit nouns.

In response, Kiben (now quoted or perhaps paraphrased in the words of Kenyō) presents two examples of Chinese sentences that have nothing to do with Sanskrit translations, but yet supposedly cannot be properly analysed without taking into account his theory of the eight cases. Both these examples are taken directly from what may be the most emblematic Chinese text of all ages—namely, the *Analects* of Confucius (*Rongo* 論語). The first sentence is a terse observation of the sage noted in the classic’s first chapter:

巧言令色鮮矣仁⁶²

⁶² KHG FG: 1v.

Clever words and a pleasing countenance—little humaneness there!⁶³

Kiben notes that contemporary Confucian scholiasts are in disagreement as to how exactly construe the aforementioned sentence. Some paraphrase it as ‘Clever words and a pleasing countenance are rare among the virtuous’.⁶⁴ Others prefer to understand it as ‘In those with clever words and a pleasing countenance the mind of humaneness is scarce’.⁶⁵ According to Kiben, these different interpretations reflect two possible understandings of the particle *yi* 矣.⁶⁶ On the first reading, *yi* is a marker of the seventh (locative) case. On the second reading, it underlines the ‘activity’ (*gōyō* 業用) of ‘being scarce’ attributed to the ‘mind of humaneness’ of certain people. Therefore, it performs the role which KHG associates with the second case—namely, that of expressing certain activity or function. Kiben further illustrates the difference between these two interpretations by giving two variants of ‘native readings’ (*kokudoku* 國讀)—i.e., explanatory glosses that facilitate the understanding of literary Chinese to Japanese readers.⁶⁷

The second example, taken from the second chapter of the *Analects*, concerns Confucius’s famous endorsement of the *Book of Odes* (*Shikyō* 詩經). The original quote runs as follows:

⁶³ Burton Watson, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 16.

⁶⁴ KHG FG: 1v-2r: 「巧言令色於仁者為所鮮。」

⁶⁵ KHG FG: 2r: 「巧言令色者仁心鮮。」

⁶⁶ Most contemporary translations, either in English or East Asian languages, seem to construe this word as an emphatic particle. Its usual function is that of a perfect aspect. See Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, pp.12, 116-118.

⁶⁷ KHG FG: 2r.

詩三百一言以蔽之曰思無邪⁶⁸

The three hundred poems of the *Book of Odes* may be summed up in a single phrase: Think nothing base!⁶⁹

Kiben admits that in this case the basic purport of Confucius’ statement is not controversial: the formula ‘think nothing base’ exhausts (literally: ‘covers’) the meaning of the three hundred songs contained in the classic anthology. Nonetheless, there is a room for disagreement as to how exactly Confucius phrased his thought. There are, in Kiben’s reading at least, no less than three ways of construing the passage in question, depending on one’s interpretation of the notoriously polysemic particle 以⁷⁰:

(1) Assuming that the particle in question represents the third (instrumental) case (‘by’, ‘with the use of’): The ‘one phrase’, i.e., ‘think nothing base’, is what performs the action of ‘covering’ the ‘three hundred poems’.⁷¹ The ‘three hundred poems’ are ‘covered’ with the use of ‘one phrase’.

(2) Assuming that it represents the fourth (dative) case (‘in order to’, ‘for the sake of’): The aforementioned ‘one phrase’ *serves to* cover the ‘three hundred poems’. There is a relation of ‘assistance’ between them.⁷²

(3) Assuming that it represents the seventh (locative) case (‘be at’): The

⁶⁸ KHG FG: 2r.

⁶⁹ Watson, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ KHG FG: 2r-2v.

⁷¹ KHG FG: 2r: 「思無邪」之一言有蔽「詩三百篇」能作之用。故「以」言此第三具聲。

⁷² KHG FG: 2r-2v: 為「詩三百篇」此「思無邪」之一言蔽之。有順助義，故名為「蔽之」。若無則不可蔽也。

‘one phrase’ (一言) is exactly what ‘covers’ (the three hundred poems) (蔽之). These two expressions refer to one and the same thing and are identified with each other by the means of the particle in question. Taken together, they form an ‘activity-bearing compound’ (*jigō shaku* 持業釋, corresponding to the Sanskrit *karmadhāraya-samāsa*).⁷³

Summing up his demonstration, Kiben concludes:

印度八轉，此言音法爾之式也。所以，漢土雖無斯式，一切語言法然道理所作故，法爾有之。是故，一切漢語應有八轉。故，今題云《漢語八轉聲》而不云《翻語八轉聲》也。⁷⁴

The eight cases of India represent the natural patterns of speech. Therefore, even though in the land of China there are no such patterns, inasmuch as all language is produced by the natural order of things, they exist in a natural fashion. For this reason, the entire Chinese language is supposed to have the eight cases. This is why the present work is called ‘The Eight Cases of the Chinese Language’ rather than ‘The Eight Cases of the Language of Translations’.

With these remarks, Kiben places the subject matter of his treatise on a more solid theoretical ground. He appears to suggest that the template of eight cases, while borrowed from Sanskrit grammarians, is not tied to the inflectional paradigms of Sanskrit nouns. Rather, the distinctions between

⁷³ KHG FG: 2v: 能蔽者「思無邪」之一言外無他。「蔽之」之二字即「一言」。故「以」之為言「即」也。此持業釋也。In the East Asian tradition ‘activity-bearing compounds’ are often understood as compounds whose units designate one and the same thing (cf. Teng, “On Kuiji’s Sanskrit Compound Analyses: Transmission of Sanskrit Grammar in the Early Tang Dynasty,” p. 179; idem, “Medieval Chinese Buddhist Exegesis and Chinese Grammatical Studies,” 132.)

⁷⁴ KHG FG: 2v.

cases represent a universal and ‘natural’ (‘original’ and spontaneously existent) dimension of language that can also be recognized in Chinese and Japanese texts. Kiben emphasizes this latter point in response to the second doubt reported by Kenyō. This objection concerns the status of the seventh (locative) case, which according to KHG covers two sub-categories, namely the locative of ‘place’, and the locative of ‘basis’. The disputant argues that these two instances of a locative ought to be recognized as two separate cases and that for this reason the overall number of cases should be raised to nine. In response Kiben adduces another pair of impeccably Chinese quotations, this time from the third book of Confucius’ *Analects*:

八佾舞於庭⁷⁵

Eight rows of dancers in their courtyard...⁷⁶

獲罪於天無所禱也⁷⁷

If you incur blame with [literally: in] Heaven, you have nowhere to turn for forgiveness!⁷⁸

Kiben explains that both these fragments contain one and the same locative case, marked by the Chinese particle 於 and a corresponding Japanese locative particle in the case of ‘native readings’. Yet, the ‘locus’ implied in these two sentences is not of the same kind. The relation between the dancers and the court they are dancing at is the one between the support (*shoe* 所依) and the supported (能依 *nōe*). On the other hand, in the phrase ‘blame in Heaven’, the ‘blame’ and ‘Heaven’ are two entities that can be

⁷⁵ KHG FG: 3r.

⁷⁶ Watson, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 26.

⁷⁷ KHG FG: 3r.

⁷⁸ Watson, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 28.

considered as ‘inseparable’ from each other (i.e., occupy the same place). Hence, in the second sentence the locative case only conveys a general idea of being somewhere.⁷⁹ The comparison concludes with the following observation:

如是於名名句以目與心謀，則義意炳然為別。然，能轉聲「於」及「依」言但一。梵、漢及和，其式全一。⁸⁰

In this way, when you investigate every term and phrase with both your eyes and your mind, the meaning appears to be manifestly different [in each case]. However, as for the verbal expressions of the case, [such as] ‘in’ or ‘on the basis of’, there is only one word. In Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese this pattern is completely identical.

Kiben’s explanations presented by his disciple are somewhat general and vague, but the general thrust of his counterarguments is not that difficult to discern. The system of eight cases described in the KHG is meant to represent a complete catalogue of universal ‘semantic relations’. These relations are usually expressed by certain grammatical markers (such as Sanskrit noun endings, Chinese ‘empty words’ or Japanese case particles) whose exact form varies from language to language. Nevertheless, for Kiben the study of eight cases is first and foremost an exegetical method aimed at recovering the intended meaning of a Chinese text. What really matters to him as an exegete of Chinese texts are not the specific rules of noun declension formulated by the Indian grammarians with regard to their own speech, and not the exact correspondences between Sanskrit suffixes and Chinese function words, but rather the basic differences in meaning

⁷⁹ KHG FG: 3v-4r.

⁸⁰ KHG FG: 4v.

represented by the distinctions between cases. Those who follow his method should, first and foremost, comprehend this universal dimension of the theory of cases and apply its principles to the study of Chinese scriptures, using their ‘eyes’ and ‘mind’.

5. Conclusion

To a contemporary reader, Kiben’s treatise on the eight grammatical cases of literary Chinese may appear as little more than a historical curiosity. KHG will most likely provide no inspiration to contemporary Sinologists; the task of deciphering the abstruse scholastic jargon in which it is written will not be rewarded by any insight that would not have been covered more thoroughly and competently by any modern studies on Chinese grammar. The significance of this work becomes apparent only in the light of the questions raised in the beginning of the present paper. Kiben’s theory demonstrates how the legacy of Indian linguistics could be creatively reconsidered and domesticated in a distinctively East Asian context in spite of the enormous chronological, geographical and linguistic distance. His work demonstrates a genuine, if somewhat crude, attempt at applying the categories derived from the study of Sanskrit to the living concerns of his intellectual milieu.

The foremost of these concerns is Kiben’s ambiguous status as a Japanese scholiast of Chinese texts. The subject matter of his treatise is classical Chinese, the *lingua franca* of East Asian Buddhists. As a loyal exponent of the scholastic lineage represented by the Hossō school, he humbly acknowledges his indebtedness to the Chinese ancestors of this lineage. Nonetheless, Kiben appears silently dismissive of Chinese Buddhist

tradition that developed after Tang period.⁸¹ He chooses to develop a thread of argument that had been advanced by an earlier Japanese scholiast for whom (as for Kiben himself) Chinese was essentially a foreign language studied in order to understand Buddhist canonical texts. Moreover, Kiben's resolute discussion of the fine grammatical points of Confucius' *Analects* (noted down by his disciple Kenyō) demonstrates how Japanese exegetes could assert their final authority over interpretation of non-Buddhist Chinese classics. It should be noted that Kiben's approach, while possibly rooted in a sense of cultural pride, is not based on nationalistic premises associated with the burgeoning movement of Japanese 'nativist studies' (*kokugaku* 国学). Kiben appeals to the impersonal authority of grammatical theory which, according to his account, intimates universal and 'natural' semantic categories common to all human speech. Though he appears to believe that these categories can become fully manifest only in the process of individual exegesis of a particular text, he clearly assumes that their basic understanding can be communicated by the master to willing students and elucidated by the means of rational discussion. It may therefore be argued that Kiben legitimizes Japanese interpretations of a shared pan-Asian tradition by appealing to rational universal criteria which transcend the boundaries of cultures, doctrines or languages. In this regard, his attitude to Chinese legacy invites comparison with parallel attempts of mainstream Edo-period intellectuals who sought to negotiate the equality, if not

⁸¹ As noted by Chien Kaiting, Kiben did not hold in high regard contemporaneous Chinese Buddhist scholasticism. He criticized Ming dynasty authors, blaming their errors on their lack of access to classical commentaries from the Tang period which had been preserved in Japan, but not in China. See Chien Kaiting, "Wanming weishixue...", 62-63.

superiority, of Japanese culture against those of India and China.⁸²

As the foregoing discussion has made clear, Kiben’s work situates the study of grammar at the intersection of some of the most important intellectual trends of its age—the emergence of distinctly Japanese methods of philological inquiry into Chinese texts and the ‘rationalistic’ (and nationalistic) tendencies⁸³ that preceded Japanese modernity. The role which Buddhist scholasticism, with its ancient Indian and medieval Chinese heritage, played in these new developments may not be sufficiently understood. Kiben’s treatise raises several questions that can help to clarify this particular issue. This fact alone renders this obscure work worthy of further attention—if only as a small footnote to the mainstream intellectual history of East Asia.

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⁸² One potentially interesting point of reference is the much more famous Confucian thinker Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠, 1666-1728) who argued for the ‘inherent diversity’ of the universal Way (political and moral order) common to both Japan and China. It ought to be pointed out, however, that Ogyū’s view of the Way emphasized its artificial, culturally conditioned character, rather than ‘natural’ origin, as in the case of Kiben’s theory of language. See Kiri Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism. A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 63.

⁸³ de Bary et al. , eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 459-498.

Abbreviations

- CBETA Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association electronic edition of the Buddhist canon. Taipei, 2016.
- KHG *Kango hattenshō gakusoku* 漢語八轉聲學則. Kiben 基辨. 1771. Kyōto: Nakano Sōza emon 中野宗左衛門.
- KHG FG *Kango hattenshō gakusoku fugen* 漢語八轉聲學則附言. Kenyō 拳膺. 1772. Kyōto: Nakano Sōzaemon 中野宗左衛門.

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