

## THE *GENBUN'ITCHI* SOCIETY AND THE DRIVE TO “NATIONALIZE” THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

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The *Genbun'itchi* Society was established in 1900 and disbanded in 1910. In the first few years of its existence, it was the single most important and influential organization championing the cause of language development in Japan. It was responsible for defining issues of language reform, making them a primary concern of the ruling elite and providing an ideological framework for educators, intellectuals and policy makers as they considered the future of the Japanese language. Though opposed by representatives of more traditional elements of society such as the *kangaku* (Chinese learning school), the members of the *Genbun'itchi* Society persevered in their quest to rationalize the written forms of Japanese. Without the support of the *Genbun'itchi* Society, modern Japanese (*kokugo*) would not have come into existence when it did – and certainly not in the form that it did. In spite of its importance, the role of the *Genbun'itchi* Society in the formation of modern Japanese has not been fully illuminated. Most often, Japanese language scholars have characterized the Society as just one more of many language-reform groups in the Meiji era.<sup>1</sup> This perspective obscures the value of the work its members completed. My primary objectives here are to illustrate the motivations of Society leadership and to demonstrate how it was able to finish the task that so many other Meiji-era language organizations left undone.

The Japanese word *genbun'itchi* means “unity of the spoken and written language.” The spoken forms of all languages are organic, however, and evolve at a much faster rate than their written forms. Thus, no written language is in complete accord with its spoken form. Nonetheless, the leadership of the *Genbun'itchi* Society wanted to transform written Japanese into something that more closely resembled the spoken form and which could be used as a tool for the continued development of a more cohesive nation. Indeed, the movement which supported the *Genbun'itchi* Society is best characterized as a central component of the nationalizing campaigns of the 1890s. In particular, the *Genbun'itchi* Society is linked to

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<sup>1</sup> See Nanette Twine, *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese* (New York: Routledge Press, 1991).

the resurgence of the *kokugaku* (nativist school), the discourse of primacy of state, the divinity of the Emperor and absolute devotion by Japanese subjects to the Imperial Household.

### Language Reform and the Imperial Society for Education

The *Genbun'itchi* Society was established by and responsible to Meiji Japan's most prestigious body of educators, the *Teikoku kyōikukai* (Imperial Society for Education). In the late Meiji era, the Imperial Society for Education was without peer among pressure groups interested in educational pursuits. Indeed, it has been characterized as something of a semi-governmental body because of the influence it exercised over education policy and the eminence of its members. The organizers of the Society were focused on the task of building a first-rate education system for Japan and wrote into their charter: "the aim of the Imperial Society for Education is, through the cooperative agency of our society, to reform education and to plan for its advancement."<sup>2</sup> Its president and sponsor was Prince Konoe Atsumaro (1863-1904), President of the House of Peers and highest ranking noble in the land outside of the primary Imperial household.<sup>3</sup> Other leaders included Tsuji Shinji (1842-1915), Director of Educational Affairs in the Ministry of Education and former *Meirokusha* member; Sawayanagi Masatarō (1865-1927), Vice-Minister of Education in 1906 and future president of Kyoto Imperial University; and Izawa Shūji (1851-1917), who is perhaps most well known for his contributions to music education through the publication of Japan's first music textbook.<sup>4</sup> Izawa sought to develop "national music" (*kokugaku*) for the purposes of "moral education," which he believed was insufficient in Japan at that time.<sup>5</sup> Izawa also was one of the first to make known his opinions on language education in the colonies when he was appointed by the first Governor-General of Taiwan to the position of Head of the Bureau of

<sup>2</sup> *Shin kyōikugaku daijiten*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daiichi hōki, 1990), p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> Prince Konoe's renown was eclipsed by that of his son, Konoe Fumimaro, Prime Minister of Japan from 1937-1939 and 1940-1941.

<sup>4</sup> Tsuji and Izawa were influential leaders of two education organizations, the *Dainihon kyōikukai* (The Greater Japan Education Society) and the *Kokka kyōikukai* (National Education Society), which merged in 1896 to create the Imperial Society for Education.

<sup>5</sup> Ury Eppstein, "Musical Instruction in Meiji Education: A Study of Adaptation and Assimilation," *Monumenta Nipponica* 40/1 (1985): 13, 28.

Educational Affairs. Only two days after taking control of the Bureau, he reportedly stated that the primary function of education in Taiwan was to “make the new citizens learn Japanese.”<sup>6</sup> Sawayanagi, Tsuji and Izawa, were all adherents of *kokugaku* philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

In general, the Imperial Society for Education’s main goal was to promote state education. In order to achieve that goal, they delineated their assignments into eight tasks:

- 1) To hold meetings on various kinds of short training courses.
- 2) To publish education textbooks and a society bulletin.
- 3) To recognize individuals with the Distinguished Men of Education Service Award.
- 4) To become associated with a library.
- 5) To study and investigate various (educational) issues.
- 6) To hold general meetings of educators from all over the nation.
- 7) To endeavor to fund fully education.
- 8) To sponsor and to participate in international education conferences.<sup>8</sup>

It is not surprising that the Society should turn its attention to the development of a national language, since its purpose was to reform and develop state education. In contrast to the advocates of the *genbun'itchi* style in literature, however, the Imperial Society for Education was interested in how education might become a more effective tool for the inculcation of state values if a colloquial form of the language were to be used. As indicated by several of the most prominent members of the Society, education was intended to serve the interests of the State. For men like Tsuji, Sawayanagi and Izawa, a standard language written, read and understood by all Japanese was intended to both facilitate communication between teacher and student and to be a means through which state values could be more effectively conveyed in the education system. The Imperial Society for Education thus served to legitimize the efforts of intellectuals

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<sup>6</sup> Si Cheng Hong, ed., *Linguistic Politics and Policy* (Taipei: Chian Ui, 1996), p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Sawayanagi Masatarō, *Sawayanagi zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Sawayanagi zenshū henshū iinkai, 1925), pp. 430-431.

<sup>8</sup> *Shin kyōikugaku dajiten*, vol. 5, p. 231. Information contained within parenthesis has been inserted for the sake of clarity.

such as Shiratori Kurakichi (1865-1942) and linguists such as Ueda Kazutoshi (1867-1937) who sought to cast language reform issues in the education reform paradigm and as an issue worthy of attention at the highest levels of government.

The *Genbun'itchi* Society was not the first organization related to language reform that the Imperial Society for Education sponsored. That honor went to the *Kokuji kairyōbu* (Script Reform Section), which had been established in 1899. The Script Reform Section of the Imperial Society for Education was led by Maejima Hisoka, who by that time had devoted over thirty-five years of his life to various Meiji reform efforts. His long history of activism had afforded him status as one of the most prominent members of the Imperial Society for Education. Incidentally, his first petition to the Tokugawa shōgunate regarding language reform in 1866 was finally published in 1899 and likely coincided with his appointment as the head of the Script Reform Section of the Imperial Society for Education. Other members of the Section were Katō Hiroyuki, Tokyo Imperial University professors Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944), Ueda Kazutoshi and Yatabe Ryōkichi (1851-1899), and future Gakushuin University professor Kanō Jigorō (1860-1938) among others. The Script Reform Section's task was limited in scope. Rather than looking at the various ways in which the language might be reformed on a broad scale, the Script Reform Section considered how characters should be systematized, limited, simplified or abolished.

The Imperial Society established other language investigation groups including the *Kana chōsabu* (Kana Investigation Section), which was instituted in May 1900, the *Gaikokugo kyōjuhō kenkyūbu* (Foreign Language Teaching Methods Study Section), which was established in July 1902, and the *Kanbun kyōjuhō kenkyūbu* (Classical Language Teaching Methods Study Section), which came into existence in December 1902. In addition, the Imperial Society for Education also sponsored the *Kokubun chōsabu* (Language Investigation Section). This section of the Imperial Society was instructed to investigate the colloquial style and to refine the colloquial speech of upper-class Tokyo residents in order to make it capable of becoming the national standard. Later when the Imperial Society determined to afford greater status to the colloquial form, its members established the *Genbun'itchi* Society. Through the work of this last society and its members, the *genbun'itchi* form of Japanese began to take shape as

the national, standard language of modern Japan.<sup>9</sup> However, before the various Sections of the Imperial Society had time to complete their mandates, the Meiji leadership decided to create an organization within the government to research and codify a colloquial form of the Japanese language. This organization would become the *Kokugo chōsa iinkai* (National Language Research Council).

**The *Genbun'itchi* Society: A Portrait of the Membership**

In March 1900, the Imperial Society for Education launched the *Genbun'itchi* Society for the purposes of promoting the colloquial style in fields other than literature. In doing so, the Script Reform and Language Investigation Sections of the Imperial Society were disbanded and their function and membership brought under the administrative umbrella of the *Genbun'itchi* Society. In previous years, the Imperial Society for Education had sanctioned the groups outlined above to study other facets of the language in an effort to determine how the language might be reformed. Their suggestions had helped lead the Imperial Society to consider *genbun'itchi* as the most promising form. Maejima Hisoka, formally chair of the Script Reform Section of the Imperial Society, was named head of the *Genbun'itchi* Society.

The *Genbun'itchi* Society had 223 members, and like its parent organization, counted among them some of the most influential members of society in late Meiji Japan.<sup>10</sup> The majority of the members were either educators or associated with education in some way. In addition to those with a long-term interest in language reform such as Yano Fumio, Ueda Kazutoshi, Haga Yaichi, Inoue Tetsujirō, Ōtsuki Fumihiko, Miyake Yonekichi, and Shiratori Kurakichi, others who held (or would eventually hold) positions of middle to high rank within the government such as Tsuji, Izawa and Sawayanagi were members. Senior statesmen such as Maejima, Prince Konoe, Kikuji Dairoku and Katō Hiroyuki were among a select few who would vie for power on the cabinet level and who were active members as well. Other prominent scholars who were just beginning what would become illustrious careers included Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933), who was to

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<sup>9</sup> *Teikoku kyōikukai gojūnunenshi* (Tokyo: Teikoku kyōikukai hen, 1933), pp. 118-121.

<sup>10</sup> *Genbun'itchikai no kaishi* (Tokyo: Genbun'itchikai, 1903), pp. 45-53. This collection was published in incomplete form in 1903 and can be found in the National Diet Library.

become a Professor at both Tokyo and Kyoto Imperial Universities and eventually Assistant Director of the League of Nations from 1920-1926, Shimonaka Yasaburō (1878-1961) founder of Heibonsha publishing and editor of Japan's first modern encyclopedia, Kanō Jigorō and Tsuboi Shōgorō (1863-1913), first professor of Anthropology at Tokyo Imperial University and founder of the Japanese Anthropological Association. Finally, there were future scholars such as Hoshina Kōichi and Yasugi Sadatoshi who, while still graduate students, were also members of the Society.<sup>11</sup>

A large number of journalists also served in the *Genbun'itchi* Society. This is significant because for the first time since language associations began to form in the middle Meiji years, members of the press, who would be greatly influenced by the creation of a new writing style, began to discuss issues of language reform. Fifteen members of the Society identified themselves as journalists and worked for seven different companies. Perhaps the most prominent journalist who was a member was Nakai Kitarō, editor-in-chief of the *Yomiuri* newspaper. Nakai, who had long been interested in the development of an acceptable colloquial form, reported widely on the activities of the Society. The *Nihon, Kokumin, Hōchi, Niroku* and *Jiji* news organizations were also represented. The newspapers or journals of these organizations all reported, to one degree or another, on the deliberations of the Society. No fewer than forty-eight articles appeared regarding language reform in either newspapers or general reader magazines just between 1899 and 1902. This indicates that not only were non-specialists developing an interest in language reform, but that the general public was also becoming informed about language reform issues and the steps being taken to create a new form of Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

The *Genbun'itchi* Society offered various levels of membership: ordinary, special and honorary. Dues were assessed depending on the level of membership. Many of the ordinary members were teachers and administrators in primary, middle and higher schools. The Society also had a broad membership geographically, with members generally living in the Tokyo or Osaka areas, but extending to other areas of Japan as well. Members even corresponded from locations in Europe and South East Asia. For example, Shiratori, Haga, and Suejima Yasomu, were allowed to maintain membership. It is also significant to note that a number of women

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

were also members of the Society. While they do not appear to have been very active, that they were permitted to join at all is indicative of the importance of reform issues in both education and language nationwide. Among the female members of the Society were Kiyofuji Akiko, Yamawaki Fusako, Tanahashi Ayako, Hatoyama Haruko and Hamao Sakuko. In addition, Prince Konoe's spouse was also a member.<sup>13</sup>

### **Purpose, Rules and Structure**

The Imperial Society for Education had made a bold statement in establishing a language reform advocacy group with the name "*Genbun'itchi*." Indeed, as the appellation indicates, the members of the Imperial Society had already chosen to forsake one of the traditional forms such as *kanbun* or *sōrōbun* in favor of the colloquial form. Most were convinced that even *futsūbun*, the classical standard agreed upon by a consensus of intellectuals and linguists in the early 1890s, needed to be abandoned. The Imperial Society, in sponsoring the *Genbun'itchi* Society, was to act in an oversight capacity, to ensure that the proper steps were taken to develop the new form of the language. Accordingly, the rules and guidelines set forth by the *Genbun'itchi* Society acted as a roadmap which both directed its course and set its boundaries.

At one of the first meetings of the *Genbun'itchi* Society, the goals of the Society were made known. In general, the members were to promote and investigate the colloquial form and to use the colloquial form in writing. They were to use colloquial characters and were free to decide, according to personal preference, what syllabary they would employ as they wrote. The policies of the Society with regard to language were to "rewrite difficult language in the *genbun'itchi* style," to "review *genbun'itchi* styles published in newspapers and magazines," and to "invite authorities on the *genbun'itchi* styles to tell of their experiences."<sup>14</sup> After deciding on a standard language, they were to help diffuse the *genbun'itchi* form by "writing contributions to newspapers and magazines using the colloquial style," by "using the colloquial style in all correspondence," and by "recruiting new members."<sup>15</sup> The order of language investigation was to proceed from a study of ordinary correspondence news editorials, literary

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-53.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

writing, textbooks, official terminology and finally, public notices.<sup>16</sup> Many of the other rules were procedural in nature, setting forth when, where and how meetings would be held, how members would be admitted, membership dues and how officers would be chosen.

Perhaps as important as the rules which actually governed the *Genbun'itchi* Society were the guidelines not expressed in any official communication. Indeed, the tasks of the Society were very limited. The members of the Society were not instructed to investigate any form of Japanese other than *genbun'itchi* nor were they to determine the most pure or most efficient means of communication. The *genbun'itchi* form of the language they were to investigate and study was limited to that spoken by upper-class residents of Tokyo. They were not given the task of deciding upon or codifying grammar nor of determining standard orthography. For all practical purposes, the *Genbun'itchi* Society was to act as a high-powered advocacy group and not to actually determine the specifics of the new language. It is in this capacity as a lobbying organization that the Society had its greatest influence. Secondly, because of the prominence of Society members, it could direct how issues of language reform came to be expressed, to control discourse and to organize the agenda of this reform movement.

#### **Some Presentations, Discussions, and Findings**

Many of the themes and ideas found in the lectures, presentations and deliberations of the Society were well known among long-time advocates of language reform in the Meiji era and had been under consideration for at least two decades. The presentations can be grouped into three categories: authors writing about the general development and history of the colloquial language; practitioners delineating the minutia of specific grammatical points; and *kokugaku* activists writing to promote the colloquial language as yet one more step to strengthen Japan and contribute to efforts to build a more cohesive, unified state. Many of the contributions found in the *Minutes of the Genbun'itchi Society* were short presentations and lectures and of no great original value. The findings of the Society served to reinforce existing models of language reform. Indeed, even though the members of the Society were dedicated to the establishment of the *genbun'itchi* form of the language, there was still some reluctance among several members of the Society to abandon totally the classical

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

forms. For example, in an October 15, 1901 lecture to the *Genbun'itchi* Society, author Ozaki Kōyō (1869-1903) asserted that the colloquial form should be the basis of communication in Japan. He persisted in emphasizing, however, that after mastering this basic form, those with academic, intellectual or literary aspirations should then continue on and become skilled in one of the classical styles. Since for him the colloquial style lacked beauty and grace, this was a compromise he could countenance. In addition, Ozaki, like most authors of the era, was interested in the development of the language, not necessarily for the purposes of advancing a state agenda, but in order to facilitate effective communication. In this lecture, Ozaki also revealed the power the *Genbun'itchi* Society had to initiate the attributive process and to establish a provenance for the language reform movement. Ozaki did not ascribe to Futabatei Shimei the honor of having been the first to create and use the colloquial forms in a significant work of fiction. Instead, he suggested that Yamada Bimyō and Tsubouchi Shōyō were responsible for originating the form.<sup>17</sup>

In a series of short presentations at the November 15, 1901 meeting, three other language reform advocates expressed their opinions. Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871-1918) a scholar and novelist, like Ozaki, was most interested in the general health of the language used in works of fiction. The greatest problem he saw with the colloquial form, other than its lack of clarity, was the choice of copula.<sup>18</sup> Shimamura sought to limit the number of possible verb endings. He outlined the most prominent, attributing to Yamada Bimyō the *desu*, to Futabatei the *da*, and to Ozaki the *de aru* forms. Furthermore, he asserted that *de aru* form originated among fishermen in Yokohama. If true, the written form most prominent today originated not, as expected, among upper-class Tokyo residents, but among poorly educated laborers in a small seaside city. Later, Yokoi Tokio, a well-known Christian of the “Kumamoto Band” and older cousin of Tokutomi Sohō, lectured on the spiritual components of the language. He compared Martin Luther to Confucius, and asserted that since Luther had been able to translate the Bible into the vernacular of the day, and that Confucius had most likely written in the colloquial, Japanese should not be held strictly to outdated modes of communication. Indeed, if the spiritual examples of Confucius and Luther were to serve as a guide, then it was the duty of all

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> The copula is a part of speech in the Japanese language which comes at the end of a sentence and generally indicates tense and level of politeness.

educated Japanese to use a colloquial form of the language.<sup>19</sup> In the same series of meetings, the historian Shiratori Kurakichi outlined how language and the strength of a nation were interconnected. Using the Uralic-Altaic family of languages as an example, he asserted that the decline of the Manchu, Mongolian and Korean societies, among others, stemmed from a slavish devotion to older forms of their languages and an inability to allow their languages to evolve so that the actual thoughts of the people could be expressed. It was after this series of presentations that the *Genbun'itchi* Society decided, as an entity separate from the Imperial Society, to petition the national legislature to immediately establish a governmental agency to investigate issues of language reform and to implement a national language.

Most members of the *Genbun'itchi* Society were already convinced that the Japanese language was in need of reform and that the *genbun'itchi* form was the most promising style. Thus, most of the substantive lectures and presentations focused on how best to mobilize government support for reform. The most influential members of the Society who spoke at meetings did not always direct their message to members, but rather to the public as a whole and, more specifically, to Meiji government officials. For example, Tsuboi Shōgorō presented a lecture entitled “A Petition on the Realization of *Genbun'itchi*” in a February 13, 1901 meeting.<sup>20</sup> This presentation was among the longest found in the *Minutes of the Genbun'itchi Society* and addressed a number of topics related to language reform. Tsuboi asserted that the use of the classical forms of the language contributed to a lack of social cohesion and hindered Japan from fulfilling its “national destiny.”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, he asserted that there must be unity between the written and spoken forms of the language. Maintenance of the status quo, Tsuboi stressed, would leave Japan at a strategic disadvantage with the European powers and result in the continued decline of the nation’s fortunes. Tsuboi argued that the root of the problem was the enormous outlay of time and energy in the classroom necessary to gain mastery of *kanbun*. Unlike many of his predecessors, he characterized *kanbun* as one of the reasons for the decline of the nation, and not as one of the “traditional” art forms which must be protected in order to maintain the identity of the Japanese people. Tsuboi was not pleased that the Imperial Society had for years considered language reform just one more component

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<sup>19</sup> *Genbun'itchikai no kaishi*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

in education reform. Instead, he believed language reform should be the highest priority in education, the centerpiece of a series of reforms in the educational system. In order to carry out these initiatives, Tsuboi proposed the establishment of a government body to investigate and oversee language reforms.<sup>22</sup>

The *Genbun'itchi* Society itself also formally addressed some specific issues regarding language and education. At the February 1901 meeting, these directives were made public:

- 1) The standard language will be based on that spoken by Tokyo residents and the proper accent should be used.
- 2) All other forms of *genbun'itchi* will be abolished.
- 3) There will be compliance with the rules on spelling and orthography decided upon by the *kana* section of the Imperial Society for Education.
- 4) There should be decisions on *okurigana* rules.
- 5) Spoken and written vocabulary should have nationwide uniform meaning.<sup>23</sup>

In an April 1901 meeting, the Society published papers on primary school education. Among the opinions, which originated in an unnamed investigatory section of the Imperial Society for Education, was that both *sōrōbun* and *futsūbun* should be immediately discarded. Another of the findings was that a policy should be developed to ensure the use of *genbun'itchi* style Japanese in primary school textbooks. In particular, with regard to spelling and orthography in these textbooks, all spelling conventions related to *sōrōbun* should be abolished and *genbun'itchi* adopted.<sup>24</sup> Most of these findings handed down by the *Genbun'itchi* Society were implemented in later years by government agencies entrusted with the task of reforming the language and the educational system. If the *Genbun'itchi* Society had succeeded in these ways alone, it would have met its goals and would have been an effective association. However, the ultimate success of the Society rested in its lobbying prowess and its ability to influence government officials to act in establishing a national language organization.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

### The Calls for Action

On January 26, 1900, even before the establishment of the *Genbun'itchi* Society, the Imperial Society presented a petition entitled “A Written Petition Concerning the Reform of our Script, Language and Style” to both houses of the Diet, the Ministry of Education and the staff of all government ministries calling for government sanction of a body to investigate the Japanese language. It was endorsed by Tsuji Shinji, president of the Imperial Society and read, “the government should immediately commence investigations for the purposes of implementing the reform of our script, language and style.”<sup>25</sup> The initiative was well received and both houses passed a resolution supporting its establishment. However, in part due to monetary concerns, the government did not establish an actual body to investigate the language. Instead, an advisory committee composed of seven men was created to investigate the future direction of a government-sponsored agency. Many members of the committee were familiar names among language reformers: Maejima Hisoka (chair), Ueda Kazutoshi, Naka Tsūsei, Ōtsuki Fumihiko, Miyake Setsurei, Tokutomi Sohō and Yumoto Takehiko.

Partly as a result of Shiratori's and Tsuboi's addresses described above, and the actions of the Diet regarding the advisory committee, a petition was drawn up which was to be presented to the Diet. This petition from the Society echoed the opinions found among many of the members and was similar in many respects to the earlier petition of the Imperial Society. It was endorsed by twenty-seven other members of the Society, signed by Prince Konoe, President of the Upper House, and sent to Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi. The petition was relatively short, but was nonetheless descriptive of the goals of the *Genbun'itchi* Society. It is unclear what Itō's position on language reform was, but given the prominence of the signatories of the petition, it had to be afforded serious consideration. The petition was entitled, “*Genbun'itchi no jikkō ni kansuru ken*” (Matter(s) Relating to the Realization of the Colloquial Style) and is below:

The lack of unity between the written and spoken languages has sapped the strength of the nation. There are many examples of this in the past and present. Our nation's written and spoken languages

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<sup>25</sup> *Kokugo kyōiku kenkyūkai*, ed., *Kokugo kokuji kyōiku shiryō sōran* (Tokyo: Hōki shoseki, 1970), p. 107.

are difficult and complex to master and, in comparison with other places in the world, our students' energy is consumed in vain. There (needs) to be reform of the nation's written and spoken languages, especially since reform of the educational system needs to be addressed. Opinion in the Upper House indicates that a national language investigation committee should be established quickly for the purposes of implementing the colloquial form for the good of the State.<sup>26</sup>

No action seems to have been taken as a result of this petition.

In February 1901, another Society petition was drafted by journalist Nakai Kitarō entitled “*Genbun'itchi no jikkō ni tsuite no seigansho an*” (A Petition Regarding the Implementation of the Colloquial Style). In this petition, similar calls were made for the establishment of an advisory council. It is strikingly analogous to Tsuboi's presentation and may have been based on his work. Many themes already introduced in the public arena by the Society appeared a second time. The petition read:

The development of a nation's language is intimately connected to both the unity and destiny of that nation. The fact that the written form of European languages was based on the contemporary speech of the country was one element contributing to the degree of civilization and strength attained in the West, contrasted with the horrible example of certain Oriental countries whose failure to take steps to strengthen and develop their own language was linked with their eventual political decline. Japanese children must not only master their own very difficult language, but also Sino-Japanese and various European languages in order to proceed to higher education. The time and energy thus wasted in struggling with these forms before being able to extract content constitutes not only a personal loss but also a serious economic threat to Japan, now in the arena of world competition. It is therefore both urgent and imperative that the colloquial style be brought into use so that students can divert the time thus saved into attaining other valuable knowledge. The implementation of such a style must be achieved before other educational reforms could be carried out. Previous representations concerning the setting up of a national

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<sup>26</sup> *Genbun'itchikai no kaishi*, pp. 14-15.

language research council have been made without success. *In the belief that there is a strong connection between the state of the language and the fortunes of the nation, and that the implementation of the colloquial style is a matter of the utmost urgency, this present petition renews the request for the formation of such a body and urges that style reform be made a national enterprise.*<sup>27</sup>

The response to this petition, however, was more positive and promising. In March of 1901, the Lower House approved the petition. It was then forwarded to the Upper House where it was scheduled to receive consideration later in the summer of 1901.

The ideas contained within this petition demonstrate the motivation of its authors. Having made the connection between ease of communication and the “fortunes” of a nation, advocates of language reform had succeeded in portraying their struggle as crucial to the future development of Japan. In so doing, they had completed the process of discrediting the classical forms and had attributed to the old forms some of the fault for the present weakness of their nation. Indeed, advocates of language reform even suggested that the relative weakness found among several of the nations of East Asia could, in part, be attributed to the slavish devotion by the ruling elites of those nations to outdated traditions embodied by the classical forms of the Chinese language. For the authors of this petition, only the establishment and implementation of a colloquial form of the Japanese language could remedy the situation. This was to be conducted through the education system. This blueprint, which they sought to carry out with the creation of the National Language Research Council, would lead Japan back to her roots, to the language actually used by Japanese and away from the discredited traditions which emanated from a past age and from a nation recently vanquished in the Sino-Japanese war by the forces of the Imperial Army. For *kokugaku* adherents advocating language reform, only when the Japanese had rediscovered their identity would they be able to compete economically and militarily with the nations of the West.

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<sup>27</sup> Italics are mine and have been inserted to demonstrate the significance of certain passages in this lengthy quotation. Found in Twine, *Language and the Modern State*, pp. 168-169.

### Toward Language Nationalization

Ueda Kazutoshi is often described as the “father of *kokugo*” by contemporary linguists and *kokugo* specialists. As a member of the *Genbun'itchi* Society, he worked tirelessly to promote the *genbun'itchi* form and played a prominent role in the establishment of the National Language Research Council. Though engaged full-time as a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, acting as primary editor of the *Gengogaku* Journal and maintaining his position as head of the Education Ministry's Special Education Bureau, he also defended the *Genbun'itchi* Society's initial petition in the Lower House regarding the establishment of a government-sponsored organization to reform the language in his capacity as Ministry of Education Parliamentary Councilor.<sup>28</sup>

During the crucial years leading up to the founding of the National Language Research Council, Ueda lobbied with great zeal for the government sanction of language reform. The targets of his energies were, by and large, high government officials. Ueda focused particularly on Kikuchi Dairoku, founding member of the Math Department at Tokyo Imperial University, President of Tokyo Imperial University from 1898-1901 and Minister of Education from 1901-1903. He did not have a difficult task. Like many other cabinet-level officials, Kikuchi was a *kokugaku* adherent, though his ideological and nationalist fervor was tempered by a Cambridge education and many years of living abroad. Kikuchi had even written commentaries about the Imperial Rescript on Education and had attempted to explain it to foreign audiences. For example, he addressed the issue directly in a speech to the Civic Forum in New York's Carnegie Hall on February 1, 1910. He explained:

Yamato Damashii (The Soul of Old Japan) means that we Japanese respect the Imperial household and love our country. It is made up of these two elements. Our deep reverence for and loyalty to the Emperor has been handed down over 2500 years. The bond between the Emperor and the people is not just a recent one, but has existed since ancient and mythical times...which has no equal in the world. This is the essence of our national polity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nanette Twine, “Standardizing Written Japanese: A Factor in Modernization,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 43/4 (1988): 447-449.

<sup>29</sup> Kikuchi Dairoku, *Shin Nihon* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1910), pp. 5-8.

Kikuchi had also long been interested in the reform of the Japanese language and was a member of the *Genbun'itchi* Society. He delivered the opening address at the first meeting of the *Genbun'itchi* Society in January 1901. In his address, which was heard by over one thousand attendees, he stressed the importance of the link between the reform of the Japanese language to the development of excellence in the Japanese educational system.<sup>30</sup> Ueda, aware of the influence Kikuchi would wield as Education Minister, sought to convince Kikuchi of the importance of promoting language reform among his cabinet-level peers.

After the February 1901 petition from the *Genbun'itchi* Society to both Houses passed the Lower House in March, the lobbying efforts by Society members were intensified in the Upper House. Ueda and his colleagues had convinced Kikuchi to attend the June 1901 meeting of the *Genbun'itchi* Society in which Kikuchi was implored to vigorously defend the petition among his colleagues. Kikuchi, aware of funding limitations, pledged to do his best. Later, another meeting was held with several members of the Society and both Kikuchi and the new Finance Minister in the Katsura cabinet, Sone Arasuke. For nearly a year, no decision was made in the Upper House. However, in the spring 1902 session of the Upper House, the issue was brought to a vote and was passed in March. The Upper House had approved funds for the immediate establishment of a body to investigate thoroughly the Japanese language.<sup>31</sup> This agency was to be called the *Kokugo chōsa iinkai* (National Language Research Council, or NLRC) and was to answer to and report its findings to the Education Ministry.

For linguists such as Ueda and Ōtsuki, intellectuals such as Shiratori, and high government officials such as Maejima and Katō, the establishment of the NLRC represented a major victory for the *kokugaku*. Even the use of the name *kokugo*, rather than *nihongo*, reflected *kokugaku* ideology. Yet, much of the work remained to be completed. The decision to create the colloquial style and the early attempts to make sense of the various orthographical systems and pronunciations had to be followed up by a more complete, systematic interpretation of the *genbun'itchi* form. It comes as no surprise that *kokugaku* adherents such as Katō, Ueda, Ōtsuki and Sawayanagi would dominate the NLRC as they set about creating modern Japanese.

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<sup>30</sup> Twine, *Language and the Modern State*, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

### Conclusion

With the establishment of the NLRC in 1902, the struggle to determine the direction language reform would take had ended. Henceforth, the strategic ideological framework would be that embodied by *kokugaku* philosophy. Gone were the attempts to characterize *kanbun* or *sōrōbun* as the key Japanese traditions which needed to be protected and propagated in order to maintain the essential Japanese identity. In its place was to be a new, unified national language, one capable of contributing to the continued development of the nation's "fortunes." The vision of the ruling elite was to build a nation capable of not only fending off the imperialistic advances of the Western powers, but also prepared to compete on an equal basis in the imperial game. For advocates of language reform, modern *kokugo* would become the embodiment of "traditional" Japan, taking its place among the pantheon of civil deities such as Shintōism, reverence for the Emperor and primacy of the state. A nation, however, is only as strong and as unified as its people. Any difficulty with communication would hinder the development of national cohesion and affect the proper functioning of the state. Thus, in the final two petitions from the *Genbun'itchi* Society to the Diet, the reform of the Japanese language and the creation of a colloquial style were characterized not in terms of modernization, but rather, the development of a stronger, unified nation.

What set the *Genbun'itchi* Society apart from most other language-related societies was its determination to use the power and influence of the state to develop and codify a written form of Japanese which more closely resembled the spoken forms. Using this strategy, the leadership of the *Genbun'itchi* Society was able to succeed when so many other language-related organizations failed. Of course, it would take several decades to teach the new form of the language to Japan's students after it had been properly standardized. Nonetheless, the prototype which the *Genbun'itchi* Society championed would go on to become modern Japanese because the government had the ability to follow through in a way that no independent language or literary organization could hope to match. This movement did more than create modern Japanese, it made possible many of the nationalizing movements embodied in the continued reforms in education, communication, transportation, the economy and the military.



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