Conceptualizers in Japanese Kango

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Looking at the Sino-Japanese (kango) part of the Japanese vocabulary we can see numerous examples of conceptualization within the frame of one niji kango that is a noun compound consisting of two characters (kanji). General notions like, for example, "consideration" (kō or kangae) or "thought" (sō or omoi) have been particularized by "attributes", i. e. the preceding characters, suggesting the whole range of "considerations" (sankō, suikō, senkō, etc.) or "thought" (rensō, kansō, risō, etc.) and offering us vivid pictures of what particular meanings have contributed to forming a given concept. Semiotically-indexed configurations of the most richly attributed "conceptualizers" indicate a network of semantic nests that would eventually form a complex whole, i. e. a conceptual system. The potential of Japanese kango to distinguish structural parts of various concepts represents a rare means for pondering what linguists like George Lakoff call "the way all human beings think".

Kanji (　　), the semantic elements of *kango* (　　), lost – in Japanese usage – their original distinctive tones and have developed as morphemes remarkably strong in suggesting the intended meanings rather than in detecting the genuine tones of the speakers' voices. As the distinct language units, the Sino-Japanese words *kango*, represent an indispensable part of the Japanese vocabulary. They are restricted to nouns and dominate within this part of the words. *Kango* represent about sixty percent of Japanese nouns (both concrete and abstract) and within this group they outnumber the abstract *wago* (　　) by approximately two to one (Miyajima, 1994).

The *niji kango* (2　　　), or the *kango* compounds consisting of two characters, have been described as compositions of one "rear element", the *kōyōso* (　　　), and one "front element", the *zen'yōso* (　　　). In his *Studies in Lexicography* (　　　　), Miyajima Tatsuo offers many examples of *niji kango* compounds to show that a great number of them follow the pattern usual also in the case of the similar *wago* or *gairaigo* (　　　) compounds with the rear element standing for a "superior concept", the *jōi gainen* (　　　　), and the front element standing for its attribute or determiner, the *genteishi* (　　　).

Because the rear element denotes a specific concept, it can be referred to as a conceptualizer implying specific contents that have been fostered by a community's

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language experience. The front element, on the other hand, denotes a special determiner that can be described as a kind of "i m a g e - m a k e r" suggesting a special and at the same time semantically appropriate *niji kango* expression appearing and becoming diversified in accordance with the growth of a language users' potential to cognize more and more detailed properties of the ever widening and deepening referential space. If, for example, we decide to analyze the words *hy ron* (   ), the "critical essay", and *ronpy* (   ), the "essayistic criticism", we would check the diversity of the implied contents asking: "What kind of essay?" and "What kind of criticism?" while the appropriateness of the suggested images would be checked by asking: "What's critical about the essay?" and "What's essayistic about the criticism?"

We are, for example, able to decode the concept of the "clear-cut mental deed" in the rear element "dan" (   ) of the word "ketsudan" (, "resolution", "decision"). In this case, the front element "ketsu" (   ) would be cognized as a factor suggesting the image of "decisiveness". Thus, on the one hand there is the rear position reserved for the substantial, integrating notions codified as a specific contents-related category, and on the other hand there is the front position reserved for the essential, identifying elements that can assign special image-related classifications to the rear elements. In most of the *niji kango* compounds the two elements are complementary and inseparable. The above word "ketsudan" would therefore suggest a coherent image of a potential "decisive clear-cut mental deed" and at the same time imply the concept of a particular mental activity, a human being's ability to make this "decisive clear-cut mental deed". If "conceptualization" means the "process enabling us to grasp mental objects [images]" (, Ohori, 2000), then the *kango* phenomenon seems to testify to this definition in that a concept, having been often determined by more than one "image-maker", resembles a kind of denominator common – in some cases – to tens of "grasped" images.

Many individual *kanji* can occupy both the rear as well as the front position within a particular *niji kango* compound. We have, for example, a *kanji* denoting the concept of "naturalness" or *sei* (   ) determined and therefore cognizable in special cases as "original nature" or *honsei* (   ). But we have also a concept of "origin" or *hon* (   ) determined and cognizable in special cases as the "fundamental origin"or *kihon* (   ). This and many other examples show the potential of an individual *kanji* to play alternatively an essential part of a distinct (formative, image-making) determiner as well as a substantial part of the "superior concept", the *j i gainen*, which represents the true contents of a given *kango*. Examples like the above "honsei" and "kihon" demonstrate an individual *kanji*'s freedom in functioning either as determiners related to images, impressions, illusions, or as conceptualizers related to concepts, ideas, reflections. Examples like *ny shitsu* (   ), or "entering a room", on the one hand and *sh ny* (   ), or "income", on the other hand show the difference between the "front *ny* " as one of the variable elements that can determine a specific place conceptualized

in the language users' minds, and the "rear *ny* " referring to the established concept of "entering".

Though in theory the chances to combine various *kanji* elements seem to be boundless, in practice we do not make full use of them. In fact, speakers and writers are advised to avoid deliberate creations of the new *kango* compounds. This is partly due to the fact that it is now easier and sometimes more fashionable to adopt a *gairaigo* in case a newly recognized concept or a freshly suggested image requiring an apt designation and partly because we do not recognize and agree upon new concepts that often. Yet, in case of *kango* we can argue that the chance to create and introduce a fresh compound is greater than the chance to introduce a newly created *wago* or a *gairaigo* compound. The obvious reason is that each particular *kanji* element of a would-be compound has, in comparison with the other two groups, the most definite and terse meaning. As Miyajima Tatsuo has pointed out: "The shortness of the semantic units (morphemes) of *kango* not only makes the *kango*'s existence as analytical expressions possible, but it also seems to necessitate it."–

(p. 32).

In the similar manner, the *niji kango* compounds themselves – as analytical expressions – may necessitate our wish to decode some of their truly suggestive configurations, for example, "*seijitsu – setsujitsu – kakujitsu – shinjitsu – chakujitsu – genjitsu*" (= [sincere reality] – [acute reality] – [trusted reality] – [true reality] – [trustworthy reality] – [actual reality]) in order to achieve a better understanding of both the substantial mode of conceptualizing as well as the essential urge of determining. In other words, the two parts of a *niji kango* reflect the human beings' potential and ability to connect (associate) the "established" concepts with the "suggested" images. In case of the above configuration, the established rear element, the conceptualizer *jitsu* ( ) or "reality", occupies the position of common denominator and can be seen as a key helping us to decode the true perception of the "reality's" substance which can be fully recognized when projected onto the network of the suggested determiners like *sei – setsu – kaku – shin – chaku – gen* (= [sincere] – [acute] – [trusted] – [true] – [trustworthy] – [actual]) designating its essential attributes. For contemplating the concept of "reality", there are more than thirty *niji kango* with "jitsu" in the "rear" position (cf. Sphan, Hadamitzky, 1989).

Let us consider yet another of the many possible *niji kango*'s configurations with an identical rear element and a variety of determiners. A middle size *kanwa jiten* (T d , 1972) offers fifteen compounds with the character *ken* ( ) for "right" or "power" as an established, conceptual "rear" element and eight compounds with the same character as a suggested determining "front" element. Out of the fifteen "ken" conceptualizers, six have been chosen for a configuration similar to the one above. This one would read:

"*jinken – d ken – shinken – jikken – seiken – shuken* " (=   [human rights] –
  [equal rights] –   [divine right] –   [real power] –   [political
power] –   [sovereign power]). In comparison with the conceptualizer "jitsu",
the conceptualizer "ken" seems to be semantically less stable. We can see the shift from
"rights" to "power" under the influence of the six determiners inducing various
"properties" on the scale: "natural [human rights] – genuine [equal rights] – genial
[divine right] – authentic [real power] – cultured [political power] –
accomplished [sovereign power]". The "natural / genuine / genial / authentic /
cultured / accomplished" sequence of semiotic "indexes" should be seen as one of
many possible sets of indexes that can be employed in order to achieve a better
recognition of concepts like "ken" (   ) or "jitsu" (   ), and a better understanding of the
contents of words like "shinken" (   ), "seijitsu" (   ) and all the similarly
structured *niji kango*. Using an analogous set of indexes, for example: individual –
mutual – free – restricted – general – particular makes it possible for us to
generate the following suggestive statements:

individual	*natural*	human rights	(sincere reality)
mutual	*genuine*	equal rights	(acute reality)
free	*genial*	divine right	(trusted reality)
restricted	*authentic*	real power	(true reality)
general	*cultured*	political power	(trustworthy reality)
particular	*accomplished*	sovereign power	(actual reality).

An analysis based on arranging the above kind of configurations would not,
however, suit some other types of the *niji kango*. Generally speaking, there is the
operative (function-related) aspect, the cognitive (contents-related) aspect and the
creative (properties-related) aspect recognizable in the respective features, forms and
structure of these kinds of Japanese nouns. Though all these aspects are inherent to each
of the *niji kango* compounds, the dominance of one of them on the one hand, and the
latency or deficiency of the remaining two on the other, depend on the type of a
particular *niji kango* compound. Clearly, the creative properties-related aspect is
characteristic of the "shinken" (   ), "seijitsu (   ) and all the other compounds
presented in the above two configurations.

However, there are also cases like "kajitsu" (   ) – literally "flower and fruit",
figuratively "form and contents" – that can be described as suggesting complementary
images and implying a basic cognitive pattern, the "outside / inside" principle known in
Japanese as the *soto / uchi* (/   ) fundamental basis of perception. "Kajitsu"
therefore is an example of a type of the *niji kango* compounds where the cognitive
aspect is dominant.

The operative – function-related – aspect becomes obvious when we analyze
contrasting (*niji kango*) impressions like *ij* and *ika* (,   ) – "more than" and
"less than" – indicating the "up" and "down" shifts in relation to a certain standard
which is determined but not denoted by the front element "i" (   ) and becomes fully

comprehensible only together with a preceding language unit; for example, in the nominal expression *jūnin ijō* (   ) – "more than ten persons". The whole expression could be defined as a language unit with the significant, cognizable and explicit contents. When we look for the particular properties that would represent the non-dominant creative aspect of the expressions *ijō* and *ika*, we may point out the very brevity and simplicity of their structure making a user of Japanese language prefer the word *ijō* to its longer equivalent, in this case to the expression *jūnin yori ōku...* (…), a language unit with a more complicated structure. *Ijō* and *ika* can therefore be described as a type of the *niji kango* with the dominant operative aspect, the deficient cognitive aspect and the conditional creative aspect.

The cognitive – contents-related – aspect of a particular *niji kango* becomes obvious when we analyze the allied expressions like *kaiyō* (   ) and *kaigan* (   ) – "ocean" and "shore"; the nouns denoting two inseparable places. Unlike the above *ijō* and *ika* operative types of the *niji kango*, *kayō* and *kaigan* can be labeled as the cognitive type of the *niji kango* because their front element, the determiner, denotes an immensely broad image – the sea – resembling a screen against which the many concepts like "ocean" and "shore" are being perceived. Although the traces of the operative aspect inherent in this type of the *niji kango* can be seen when we try to compare the inside relations between the rear and front elements, that is *kai é yō* and *kai Ñ gan,* these, in fact, would be inside operations serving the purpose of recognizing the genial links that connect the established concepts with the respective suggested images. In case of *kaiyō*, the link (é) is perceived as an integrating factor represented by the concept of "large ocean shared with the other (foreign) inhabitants of the world" determined by an identifying factor of "kai" (   ), or the "our, fertile, familiar mother-sea". In the case of *kaigan*, the link (Ñ) is perceived as an integrating factor represented by a concept of "shore" as the "contact zone where the sea touches the land". This concept is determined by an identifying factor represented by the image of the "sea – an indispensable part of the sea/shore symbiotic living".

It can be concluded that in the case of the *kayō* and *kaigan* type of the *niji kango*, (1) the dominant cognitive aspect can be distinguished thanks to the mutual inseparability of the rear and front elements' contents; (2) the evident operative aspect can be distinguished thanks to the flexibility of the relations between the rear and front elements within the boundaries of speakers' cognitive ability and imagination; (3) the latent creative aspect is to be sought behind the hidden meanings suggested by the semantic aura of each of the two interdependent elements.

The creative – property-related – aspect of a particular *niji kango* becomes obvious when we arrange and analyze the *niji kango* configurations similar to those introduced above. Both the native speakers as well as the learners of Japanese language and culture would agree that perhaps the most significant concept inculcated in the Japanese psyche is the concept of "kokoro" or "shin" (   ) – the "mind", "heart",

"thought", etc. T d offers 49 and Spahn & Hadamitzky 112 compounds with the "shin" conceptualizer. Such an amazing scope of attributes determining the "shin" or "kokoro" concept testifies to the importance and steadiness of the "kokoro" concept on the one hand and to the versatility of the "kokoro" images on the other. Generations of Japanese speakers having adopted the originally foreign words, created a huge mosaic image of human beings' sensual, emotional, spiritual, physical, rational and intellectual condition. It is the richly attributed *shin*-concept that makes us perceive, recognize and understand the human condition as one "organic whole" (Nakanishi, 1991).

The linguistic, cognitive and semiotic views and the studies of either the partial or the (relatively) complete configurations of the *niji kango* compounds with the *shin* ( ), *chi* ( ), *nen* ( ), *kaku* ( ) and similar rear elements (the conceptualizers) will tell us an important part of a story about our senses, feelings, instincts, intuitions, needs or insights as well as about the reception of signals, perception of signs and interpretation of gestures, especially those belonging to the repertoire of our human language.

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