



Optative *namu* and its Variant *namo* in Old Japanese Sources

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Abstract The prevailing view that *namo* represents an older form of the optative suffix *namu* emerged in the early twentieth century and has since achieved widespread acceptance, becoming nearly unquestioned in modern commentaries and dictionaries. However, such a view rests on tenuous foundations. This paper reexamines several contested attestations in Old Japanese sources as well as long-standing semantic theories that continue to shape scholarly discourse. The findings indicate that *namo* cannot be easily regarded as an antecedent of *namu*, a conclusion with theoretical implications for its etymology that will also be explored.

Keywords Old Japanese. History of grammar. *Namu*. Optative modality. Man'yōshū.

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1 *Namu* or *na-mu*?

The homophony between optative *namu*,¹ bound *namu*, and conjectural *na-mu* is one of the most confusing grammatical aspects for learners of classical Japanese.² In particular, optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu* are difficult to distinguish after *ichidan* and *nidan* verbs, since the *mizenkei* and *ren'yōkei* forms are identical for these conjugations. Their similarity is not only troubling beginners or desultory readers of classical texts, however. Japanese speakers of the Kamakura period seem to have been confused regarding their use too, as documented by two passages of the *Uji shūi monogatari* 宇治拾遺物語 (A Collection of Tales from Uji), both of which, from a grammatical point of view, are idiosyncratic.

- (1) *Sono ie ni ayumi yorite, "Inaka yori noboru fito no yuki tomaru beki tokoro mo saurawanu wo, koyoi bakari yadosase tamawanan ya" to ieba.* (Gosho-bon *Uji shūi monogatari* 4.5)³

He approached that house saying, "Since there is no other place where someone coming from the countryside may stay, pray let me just lodge here tonight".⁴

However, optative *namu* is generally never connected to bound *ya*. Here, the *ren'yōkei* would be appropriate (Negoro 1962), since conjectural *na-mu* + *ya* express request. One might add to Negoro's observation an inverse example, in which conjectural *na-mu* appears in a context where optative *namu* would be expected.

- (2) *Ikitaraba yangotonaku narinu beki mono nareba, "Ikade naku mo narinan".* (Gosho-bon *Uji shūi monogatari* 10.9)

Since, if he (=Mosuke) had lived, he would certainly become a high-ranking official, there were people even thinking: "If only he could somehow disappear!".

The expected form in this context would be *naranan* as the relevant proposition appears to represent a form of desire rather than a 'confident supposition', which is how conjectural *na-mu* would be interpreted. The interpretation of *nan* as a volitive here seems hardly plausible due to the intransitivity of the verb, which is likely

1 The invariant suffix *namu* is referred to as either optative or desiderative in Western grammars. Here, it is defined as optative, as this term more precisely conveys that the realisation of the desired outcome lies outside the speaker's will or agency.

2 The combination of perfective *nu* with conjectural-volitive *mu* serves many functions beyond mere conjecture but will, for convenience, be labeled as 'conjectural *na-mu*', similar to its designation as *suiryō no namu* in Japanese.

3 All quoted passages are transcribed phonologically, with phonetic adjustments to approximate the pronunciation of each period.

4 All translations are by the Author.

the reason why Kobayashi-Masuko (1996) emended the text into *naranan*. In addition, bound *mo* is generally employed in optative *namu* sentences (Koike 2023), while its use with conjectural *na-mu* is unconventional. On the other hand, *ikade* frequently occurs with conjectural *mu* (Yu 1997) but is not generally found with how optative *namu*, which suggests that the author struggled to tell the two constructs apart both in their connection and in the syntactical structure of the sentence they were originally employed in.⁵ These examples prove that optative *namu* had already declined in early Kamakura.

To the aforementioned categories of learners, casual readers, and medieval Japanese speakers, one could introduce an additional group of people confused by the morphological identity of optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu*: scholars. In fact, even modern grammarians and exegetes of classic Japanese texts struggle in some particularly ambiguous instances, where the context does not readily allow for the exclusion of one of the two forms. As a result, the body of sentences containing optative *namu* varies depending on whose interpretation one is relying on. This applies to both Old Japanese and Heian-period Japanese texts. Other factors, such as differing interpretations of a corrupted text, may also have a minor impact on the resulting corpus. Hence, the first essential step is to review these problematic instances to consolidate a stable dataset of attestations. Since this article focuses on the origins of optative *namu*, only Old Japanese texts will be here considered.

2 Optative *namu* in Old Japanese Sources

One notable example of ambiguity arising from the identical morphology of *ichidan* and *nidan* verbs in their *mizenkei* and *ren'yōkei* forms appears in the third poem of the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Record of Ancient Matters).⁶

- (3) *Awoyama ni pi, ga kakuraba nubatama no₂ yo₁ pa idenamu* [伊伝那牟] *asapi, no₂ wemi, sakaye ki, te [...] i pa nasamu wo.* (*Kojiki* 1; 3)

⁵ An alternative approach is to posit a shift in the meaning of optative *namu*, as outlined in Satō 1974.

⁶ Also counted as fourth, as in Takeda 1956; Tsuchihashi 1957; Sasaki 2010 etc. or labeled 3b, as in Sakata 2015. The preceding text is also a poem by Lady Nunakawa, though it ends with *ko₂to₂ no₂ katarigo₂to₂ mo ko₂ wo ba* ‘thus I voiced the happenings’, a formula employed at the end of a few *Kojiki* poems. Here and below the numbering follows Yamaguchi, Kōnoshi 1997 for the *Kojiki*.

This poem is Lady Nunakawa's response to the courtship of the god Yachihoko no Kami, who in the episode had recited the preceding poem outside her abode hoping to be allowed entry. After alluding to her consent to the god's advances, the poem continues with the quoted passage, in which Lady Nunakawa promises herself for the following night. The quoted passage is cited in the entry for the optative *namu* in the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* as the earliest documented example found in the sources. In addition, *idenamu* is interpreted as an optative by Aiso (1939; 1962), Tsuchihashi (1957), Kurano (1958), Ogiwara and Kōnosu (1973), and Nishimiya (1979) among others, all of whom identify Yachihoko no Kami as the subject of the sentence. However, it is difficult to imagine what Lady Nunakawa might be asking Yachihoko no Kami to 'go out of' if *idu* is interpreted literally, nor does it seem plausible to construe the phrase as an invitation for a further visit after dusk, since the following paragraph explicitly states that the god did not enter her room that night.⁷ The absence of honorifics is also telling. The conjectural interpretation, e.g. seen in Takeda (1956), Yamaguchi (1980) and Yamaguchi and Kōnosu (1997) is contextually viable, yielding a meaning as follows.

When the sun hides behind the green mountains, the night shall draw near, dark as the seed of an iris. [...] Only then shall you rest (beside me).

The primary critique of this approach lies in the fact that the phrase **yo₁ idu* 'the night comes out' is not commonly attested in Old or Heian-period Japanese, leading some scholars to view skeptically the possibility of *yo₁* serving as the subject of the verb *idu*. Todani (1961) attempted to address this by identifying *yo₁go₂mori* as an analogous example in which the night is conceptualised as a physical entity, concluding that such construct is indeed plausible. However, his interpretation of *namu* as an optative - 'If only the night would draw' - is questionable, since *namu* typically conveys a counterfactual desire whereas the night drawing is an unavoidable event.⁸ On the other hand, Sakata (2015) proposed an implied *tuki₂* (moon) as the subject of the verb paired with a conjectural interpretation of *namu*. Ōta (1922; 1926), Kurano (1976), Fukunaga (1988) and Nishioka's

⁷ *Kare so₂no₂ yo₁ pa apazu site akuru pi₁ no₂ yo₁ ni mi₁-api siki*; 故其夜者不合而明日夜爲御合也 (Therefore, they did not meet that night, but they met on the night of the next day) (*Kojiki* I).

⁸ When optative *namu* marks an event that will certainly occur, like the drawing of night, the counterfactuality is typically conveyed through adverbs such as *paya*, as seen in *ko₂yo₁pi₁ pa paya mo...* *ake₂namu* 今夜者早毛明者將開 (May tonight end as swiftly as possible) in *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) 12.2962 (see (9) below). However, there is no trace of such an adverb in the poem under discussion.

(1997), among others, more traditional interpretation of *idenamu* as a volitive with Lady Nunakawa set as subject – originally advanced by Keichū 契沖 in the *Kōganshō* 厚顔抄 (Brazen Notes) and later developed by Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 in the *Kojikiden* 古事記伝 (Commentaries on the *Kojiki*) – is also problematic, as the resulting meaning of ‘I’ll be coming out at night’ appears contradictory to the setting in which the two characters are expected to meet indoors. Even so, it cannot be ruled out that Nunakawa intended to meet the deity outdoors, as she might have been hindered from doing so indoors by the presence of her parents, a theme recurrent in other contexts.⁹ Ultimately, both the conjectural and volitive readings are more convincing than the optative in this case.

Another problematic passage including the form *namu* in the *Kojiki* is found in a poem belonging to the annals of the legendary emperor Keikō 景行.

- (4) *Aratama no₂ to₂si ga ki₁pureba aratama no₂tuki₂pa ki₁pe₂yuku ube na ube na ki₁mi₁ matigata ni wa ga ke₁seru osupi₁ no₂ suso₁ ni tuki₂ tatanamu* [多多那牟] *yo₂*. (*Kojiki* II; 28)

Unlike the previous case, the only apparent interpretation of *tatanamu* from a morphological standpoint is as an optative. Still, it is difficult to see how such meaning would fit within the context of this poem. Like the previous case, this poem is presented in the narrative as being recited by a lady – Lady Miyazu – in response to the preceding composition delivered by the male counterpart, Yamato Takeru. Upon reaching Owari, Takeru is warmly welcomed by Lady Miyazu with a lavish banquet, during which he recites his poem after noticing that her dress is stained with menstrual blood.¹⁰ From this context, it seems that *tatanamu yo₂* should be in some way responding to the ending *tatinike₁ri* of Takeru’s poem, but it is unclear how an optative construct may achieve this. The presence of the interjection *ube (na)* (indeed) is also a hurdle to an optative interpretation, as this expression occurs elsewhere with conjectural *mu* but never with optative *namu*. For this reason, most commentators, beginning with Keichū and Norinaga, have emended the text into *tatinamu*, though this should be left as a last resort since *tatanamu* appears consistently in all manuscripts. Many interpretations that do not involve altering

9 E.g. in *Man’yōshū* 13.3312, as pointed out by Norinaga: *okuto₂ko₂ ni papa pa inetari to do₂ko₂ ni titi pa inetari okizataba papa sirinu besi idete yukaba titi sirinu besi* 奥床仁母者睡有外床丹父者寐有起立者母可知出行者父可知 (My mother sleeps in the inner bed, my father in the outer. Should I rise, my mother will know; should I leave, my father will know).

10 *Na ga ke₁seru osupi₁ no₂ suso₁ ni tuki₂ tatinike₁ri* (The moon has risen on the hem of the vest that you’re wearing!) (*Kojiki* II; 27).

the text have been attempted: Aiso (1939; 1962) mentions that the peculiar form might be either due to the sound change *tati*→*tata*, or the insertion of *na* in *tatamu*; Yūkichi (1956) proposes that it reflects an older form equivalent to *tatinamu*; Tsuchihashi (1957) postulates an elision of *ri* from the form *tatarinamu*, which in turn would be the reduction of *tatiarinamu*; Kinoshita (1972; 1974), believing that *namu* is the dialectal variant of *ramu* also attested in the *Man'yōshū*, speculates that *tatanamu* might be an erroneous transcription of *tatunamu*; Kasuga (1992) advocates for the sound change *tati*→*tata*, first proposed by Aiso, pointing out that it might be caused by vowel harmony, which is more common in Eastern Japanese; Gotō (1967) claims that an optative interpretation of *namu* is viable, but his reasoning failed to persuade later scholars, and the view was not adopted in subsequent commentaries. Other attempts have been made but the resulting theories appear even less likely. It is hard to judge whether any of these speculations is more plausible than positing a textual corruption. While the construct *mizenkei* + *namu* is only attested as an optative elsewhere, an additional morphologically plausible interpretation, though speculative, is that *na* is a conjugated form of the negative auxiliary *zu*. According to this interpretation, seen in Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi (1997), *tatanamu* would constitute the predicate of a negative rhetorical question, yielding a meaning as follows.

Since the new year arrived, new moons have waxed and waned.
Ah, indeed, indeed, how can the moon not rise upon the hem of my
vest, while so desperately waiting for you?

The obvious criticism of this view is that the sentence lacks an interrogative pronoun or bound particle (Sasaki 2010). However, interrogative pronouns or bound particles are not strictly necessary for forming a rhetorical question. Textual corruption or a vowel shift might be the other best candidates.

A third problematic use of *namu* is found in the first poem of the *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* 常陸国風土記 (Records of the Hitachi Province).

- (5) *Ko₂titate₁ba wo-Batuse-yama no₂ ipaki₂ ni mo wite ko₂moranamu* [許母郎奈牟]
na ko₁pi₂ so₂ wagi₁mo. (*Hitachi no kuni fudoki* 1)

Here, the problem with *ko₂moranamu*, which morphologically can only be construed as an optative, is that the context seems to require that both the author of the poem and the counterpart participate in the action of the verb. What appears to be the response to this poem, found in *Man'yōshū* 16.3806, includes the wording *tomo ni* (together), further solidifying this read, while *ko₂moranamu* implies that only the counterpart *wagi₁mo* ‘my beloved lady’ would perform

the action. Further investigation reveals that the form *ko₂moranamu* is the result of a later interpolation, specifically the addition of *na* 奈 during the textual revision conducted by Nishino Nobuaki 西野宣明, a Mito scholar who produced the proofread version currently used as source book in most modern editions. The three primary manuscripts of the *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* – the *Kan-bon* 菅本, *Takeda-bon* 武田本, and *Matsushita-bon* 松下本 – uniformly present the form *ko₂moramu*, allowing the following translation of the poem.

Since the rumors (of our love) cause us such distress, let us seek
refuge in the rocky fortress of Small Hatsuse mountain. Do not
pine, my beloved.

In conclusion, the above poem should not be considered an example of optative *namu*, as the addition of *na* was conducted by Nishino probably to correct a hypometric verse. Although the anomalous use of *namu* was pointed out more than one century ago by Saitō Mokichi 斎藤茂吉 (1917) and was later discussed by Kinoshita (1972; 1974), mainstream commentaries like Akimoto (1958) and Uegaki (1997) continued to employ Nishino's text.

Next, a few debated instances in the *Man'yōshū* will be discussed. In addition to the exegetical and textual issues of previous texts, the *Man'yōshū* introduces an additional layer of complexity, as the text is typically not rendered phonetically, leading to ambiguity regarding the correct reading of the text. For example, Yamaguchi (1980) doubts whether 夜長有 in 7.1072 should be read *yo₁ru nagaku are*, rather than the more conventional *yo₁ nagakaranamu* (or *yo₁ nagaku aranamu*).

- (6) *Asu no₂ yo₁pi₁ teramu tukuyo₁ pa katayo₂ri ni ko₂yo₁pi₁ ni yo₂rite yo₁ nagakaranamu*
[夜長有]. (*Man'yōshū* 07.1072)¹¹

If only the moonlit night of tomorrow could draw near and unite with tonight so
that the night might be longer!

Yamaguchi's observation is grounded in the fact that elsewhere *namu* is consistently represented in the notation, either through phonographs or the logograph 將. Both the imperative form and the optative *namu* are sufficiently appropriate for the context in this instance, making it difficult to determine the correct reading from a semantic standpoint. Traditionally *nagakaranamu* has been favored as it is found in *jiten* 次点 manuscripts,¹² but the presence of verses as *ko₂yo₁pi₁ no₂ nagasa ipoyo₁ tugi₂ko₂so₂* 'May the length of tonight

¹¹ Unless otherwise specified, the *kun* reading for the *Man'yōshū* is drawn from Kojima, Kinoshita, Tōno 1994-96.

¹² Manuscripts predating the collation of Sengaku 仙覚 in the Kamakura era.

be that of five hundred nights!' in 6.985, featuring benefactive imperative *ko₂so₂* in an extremely similar context, certainly favors Yamaguchi's view. I would exclude this instance from the corpus of attestations.

To a larger extent, the conventional readings of 7.1254 and 11.2829 have also been debated.

- (7) *Opobune ni kadi si mo aranamu* [有奈牟] *ki₁mi₁ nasi ni kaduki₁ seme₂ya mo nami₁ tatazu to₂mo*. (*Man'yōshū* 07.1254)

In this poem 有奈牟 has generally been read *aranamu*, although the enigmatic nature of the composition complicates any definitive judgment. It remains unclear what the author – portrayed, at least within the poetic fiction, as a diver from Lake Biwa – intended to convey through this composition, which serves as a response to the preceding poem (07.1253). Interpretations differ regarding both the gender of the (fictional) author and the overall meaning of the composition, though they generally converge on interpreting *namu* as optative. Once again, Yamaguchi (1980) observes that an optative interpretation would be anomalous in this context, as the resulting meaning of 'If only ships had oars!' conflicts with the fact that ships indeed have oars. This makes the use of *namu*, an expression of counterfactual desire, inappropriate in this situation. His view is that here the correct reading is *arinamu*, leading to an interpretation along the lines of 'As ships (obviously) have oars, I would (obviously) not dive without you'. Nevertheless, interpreting *kadi* as a metaphor for a serious commitment, as seen in Kojima, Kinoshita and Tōno (1995) etc., seems more straightforward, especially when considered alongside 'diving' as a metaphor for physical intimacy, and by extension, adultery, as seen in Watase (1985). This would yield approximately the following meaning:

If only this ship had oars! How could I possibly dive without you, even when the surface lies still? (If you were truly committed, how could I ever betray you? Even if the chance arose.)

I would therefore consider the above as an attestation of optative *namu*.

Regarding 11.2829, a conjectural interpretation is presented by Tsuchiya (1951), later adopted by the *Man'yōshū taisei* (Treasure of the *Man'yōshū* 1953) and backed by Tsunochi (1979). The mainstream reading is as follows.

- (8) *Ko₂ro₂mo si mo opoku aranamu* [多在南] *to₂ri kape₂te ki₁reba ya ki₁mi₁ ga omo wasuretaru*. (*Man'yōshū* 11.2829)¹³

Tsuchiya here reads *arinamu*, resulting in the first two verses roughly meaning ‘You should naturally have many clothes (but only one lover)’. The issue with the interpretation of this poem, which Tsuchiya’s reading does not help to solve, is that while the author appears to criticise the counterpart for having numerous lovers, metaphorically compared to garments in the second half of the composition, the first two verses instead express a desire for the very multiplicity of those garments. As a consequence, *ko₂ro₂mo* must be interpreted as referring simply to garments in the first part and metaphorically to lovers only in the second part for the poem to remain coherent.

If only you had many garments (instead than lovers)! For, by changing them again and again you have forgotten my face.

Probably to avoid this mismatch, many early commentators, e.g. Keichū in the *Man'yō Daishōki* 万葉代匠記 (Apprentice of the *Man'yōshū*), set the first-person as the subject in the first two verses, thereby resolving the mismatch by interpreting *ko₂ro₂mo* as a metaphor for ‘lovers’ throughout the poem.

If only I had many garments (as you do)! For, (as) by changing them again and again you have forgotten my face (I might forget yours).

Whether this is a more natural interpretation is debatable, but it does avoid the mismatch. Another possible way to resolve said mismatch is to retain the first-person subject in the latter part. This would require interpreting *namu* as an expression of counterfactual past, an unusual – but not entirely implausible – usage, as will be seen below.

If only I had many garments (=lovers)! So that, by changing them again and again, I might have forgotten your face.

As to Tsuchiya’s reading, while it appears fitting for the first two verses – despite Inaoka (1998) calling it as ‘inappropriate’ without further elaboration and Omodaka (1961) also dismissing it – it still requires the aforementioned double interpretation of *ko₂ro₂mo*. Aside from that, Tsuchiya’s reading could be viable, were it not for the fact that *si mo... namu* should be interpreted in the same manner as the

13 The reading of 多 is debated, with *amata* and *sapa ni* indicated as possible readings, but none of these would affect the following discussion.

previously discussed 07.1254 (7), owing to their structural similarity.¹⁴ Conclusively, 11.2829 (8) should be accepted as an attestation of optative *namu*.

In addition to the instances discussed above, Yoshida (1967) contends that, contrary to the interpretations found in most commentaries, *namu* found in poems 7.1402, 10.2317, 12.2962, and 13.3346 reflects conjectural usage. These poems share a common structure, featuring the repetition of a verb followed first by the conjunctive particle *...ba* and then by *...namu*, and are thus grouped and discussed together by Yoshida:¹⁵ more concretely, the specific wording are *ko₂to₂ sakeba ...sakenamu* in 7.1402 and 14.3346, *ko₂to₂ puraba ...pur?namu* in 10.2317 (10) and *ake₂ba...ake₂namu* in 12.2962 (9). Unfortunately, in 10.2317 (10), where the conjugation of *puru* would reveal whether *namu* is attached to the *mizenkei* or *ren'yōkei* base, the conjugated form is not recorded phonetically. At the time of Yoshida's work, the only case among these four generally interpreted as a conjectural use was precisely that in 10.2317 (10), where 將落 was read *purinamu* (see Takeda 1956; Omodaka 1962). Yoshida's attempt aims to extend this conjectural interpretation to the other three cases.

Yoshida's argument is certainly viable for 7.1402 and 13.3346, where the phrase *ko₂to₂ sakeba ...sakenamu* can be interpreted either as an optative 'If he/she really has/(had) to leave... I wish he/she would leave/(had left) (in such and such manner)' or conjectural 'If you/he/she really have/has to leave... you/he/she should leave (in such and such manner)', without causing major contextual conflicts. However, 12.2962 seems to possess the clear tint of unattainable desire typical of optative *namu*.

- (9) *Siro₁tape₂ no₂ so₁de karete nuru nubatama no₂ ko₂yo₁pi₁ pa paya mo ake₂ba ake₂namu* [明者將開]. (*Man'yōshū* 12.2962)

If this pitch-dark night, where our white mulberry sleeves lie far apart, truly must come to an end, may it end as swiftly as possible!

This poem conveys the author's desire for the night spent apart from a lover to come to a swift end. As Yoshida himself admits, it is difficult to see how conjectural *na-mu* may fit the context here, especially considering the presence of bound *mo*, which, as previously noted, typically occurs with optative *namu*. Through this usage, one can

¹⁴ In this context, *si mo* seemingly conveys an exclusion of other options, resembling bound *ko₂so₂*.

¹⁵ Yoshida adds to these four instances also the structure found in poem 16.3788, although in that case *...ba...namu* appears with different verbs: *...kadukaba mi₁du pa karenamu*. This poem will be discussed more in detail in section 3.

infer that the structure ...*ba...namu* incorporates the optative *namu*, which in turn can be applied to the above discussed 7.1402 and 13.3346. Further evidence of the optative nature of *namu* in the structure ...*ba...namu* can be found in later literature, such as *sakurabana tiraba tiranamu* 'If cherry blossoms really must fall, let them fall!' from *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) 1.74, among other examples.

As for *namu* in 10.2317 (10), previously interpreted as a conjectural, an optative read is now seen in commentaries such as Kojima, Kinoshita, Tōno 1995.

- (10) *Ko₂to₂ puraba so,de sape nurete to₂poru beku puranamu* [将落] *yuki, no₂ so,ra ni ke₂ni tutu*. (*Man'yōshū* 10.2317)

If it must fall, let it fall until my sleeves are soaked through! Oh, snow that melts while still in the sky!

The main reason why the reading *purinamu* was formerly preferred is that it allows the first part of the poem to be interpreted as a subordinate clause modifying the noun *yuki* – 'Oh snow that, if it must fall, should fall until my sleeves are soaked through' – thus preventing an awkward break in the sentence at the middle of the fourth verse, which is unavoidable if *namu* is interpreted as an invariant suffix.¹⁶ Even so, accepting an unusual break in the sentence appears to be a better compromise, once it is established that ...*ba...namu* typically occurs with the optative, as demonstrated above, and given that the optative fits the context exceptionally well here.

Finally, tracing further back in time, Miyajima (1932) questions certain conventional readings, such as those of 3.335, 8.1655, and 16.3886.

- (11) *A ga yuki, pa pi,sa ni pa arazi ime₂ no₂ wada se ni pa narazute puti ni ariko₂so₂* [有毛]. (*Man'yōshū* 3.335)

My journey shall not last long. Meander of Dreams, do not grow shallow; do remain a pool profound!

Ōtomo no Tabito 大友旅人 composed this poem as he departed for his post as governor of Dazaifu. The present prevailing reading *ariko₂so₂* assumes textual corruption, with 毛 emended into 乞, read

16 Optative *namu* is generally categorised as a 'final particle' – *shūjōshi* 終助詞 – in Japanese historical linguistics, although the fact that it connects only to a specific conjugated form of inflectable words makes it more akin to an auxiliary suffix rather than a 'final particle' as intended within the grammar of modern Japanese. Optative *namu* more closely resembles modern Japanese 'invariant auxiliary suffixes' – *fuhenka jodōshi* 不変化助動詞 –, i.e. -ō and -yō.

ko₂so₂. No manuscript, however, records 乞. The only textual variant is 淵有如 found in the *Ruiju Koshū* 類聚古集 (Classified Collection of Ancient Rhymes), a manuscript from the Insei period in which poems are organised by theme. The conventional reading thus rests on the assumption that 毛 is an error, with 如 *goto* thought to be a wrong, inverse assumption from an earlier *kana* source recording *koso*, at least according to Omodaka (1958). Alternative readings, such as *aramu mo* (Takeda 1949), were proposed, though they are less fitting in the context compared to the benefactive imperative *ko₂so₂*. One of these alternative readings is *aranamo*, proposed by Miyajima in the attempt to respect the received text. The reading *aranamo*, however, has two major flaws: first, *na* is never omitted by the notation elsewhere, unless *namu* is written logographically; secondly, the resulting counterfactual desire would conflict with the interpretation of the toponym as indeed referring to a deep pool, as suggested by a verse in *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻 (Fond Recollections of Poetry) 80.

Similarly, Miyajima's reading of 腊賞毛 in 16.3886 as *ki,tapi₁payasanamo* is questionable, again due to the absence of *na* in the notation. His comparison with *mawosi payasane* from the previous poem (16.3885) offers no additional support for this reading, since *ne* functions as an imperative there, while *namu* does not generally function as an imperative. The conventional reading of *ki,tapi₁payasu mo* 'Turn me into dried meat!' ¹⁷ is certainly more reliable.

Finally, Miyajima reads 跡可曰毛 as *to ipanamo* in 8.1655. While the proper reading of this string is debated, there is no doubt that his proposal is not a promising candidate. Conclusively, Miyajima's pioneering attempts to identify additional uses of the form *namo* should be interpreted in the context of the newly established reading of 南畝 in 1.18 as *namo* by Yamada (1928) and Kōnosu (1930) but, due to the issues outlined above, were not adopted by later commentaries.

After the above consideration, we are left with nineteen certain attestations of optative *namu* in Old Japanese sources, along with two instances of the variant *namo*, all of which appear in the *Man'yōshū*. An additional attestation – *Man'yōshū* 1.18, read either *namo* or *namu* – will be treated below. ¹⁸

¹⁷ This poem is a playful piece written from the perspective of a crab.

¹⁸ The other sources reviewed are the poems contained in the *Kojiki*, *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), *Hitachi no kuni fudoki*, *Kakyōhyōshiki* 歌経標式 (The Canon of Poetic Composition) and *Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀 (Continued Chronicles of Japan) along with the *Bussokusekika* 仏足石歌 (Buddha's Footprint Stone Poems). The main survey was conducted using Tsuchihashi-Konishi (1957) for the poems in the *Kojiki*, *Nihonshoki*, *Hitachi no kuni fudoki*, *Shoku nihongi*, and for the *Bussokusekika*; Kojima-Kinoshita-Tōno (1994-96) for the *Man'yōshū*; the *Corpus of Historical Japanese* (CHJ) for the *senmyō* of the *Shoku nihongi*; and Okimori (1993) for the *Kakyōhyōshiki*.

3 Semantic Analysis of Old Japanese Optative *namu*

The consensus holds that the desire expressed by *namu* has two defining characteristics: the agent must be different from the speaker – most often limited to the third person –, and the desire must be counterfactual, meaning that the desired action or state must be regarded as an impossible outcome. These characteristics distinctly differentiate *namu* from other optative expressions, such as Old Japanese optative *ne*, which conveyed desire directed toward the second person, thus closely resembling an imperative. Historically, this distinction was not always recognised. For example, Fujitani Nariakira 富士谷成章, in his *Ayuhishō* あゆひ抄, clearly states that although optative *namu* was often defined *negai no nan* ‘optative *namu*’, it did not convey desire but rather functioned as an imperative, comparable to the spoken *-te kure yo*. From then, it became clear that *namu* must be understood in connection with the above delineated two characteristics. In particular, the latter of these two has been the focus of studies such as Gotō (1967), Kinoshita (1974) and Yamaguchi (1980).

Gotō and Kinoshita both agree that the meaning of *namu* is rooted in the counterfactual nature of the desire expressed, which was already well established by then. However, while Gotō confines himself to defining the resulting semantics without attempting a reevaluation of the prevailing view, Kinoshita takes a more nuanced approach by distinguishing between two types of counterfactuality: *hangezai* ‘counterfactual present’ and *hankako* ‘counterfactual past’. The former is defined as the expression of a present (or future) state different from the one expected, whereas the latter indicates the expression of a state that differs from the current one as a result of the occurrence (or not occurrence) of a past event. For instance, a concrete example of ‘counterfactual present (desire)’ would be ‘If only it stopped raining!’ while facing heavy rain; meanwhile uttering ‘If only it had stopped raining!’ while facing a flood would constitute an example of ‘counterfactual past (desire)’. Kinoshita proceeds to argue that, while in the more familiar Heian-period Japanese *namu* expressed counterfactual present as conventionally thought, in Old Japanese its main function was that of counterfactual past. This hypothesis is based mainly on poem 16.3788, already mentioned above.

- (12) *Mi,mi,nasi no₂ ike₂ si urame,si wagi,moko₁ ga ki,tutu kadukaba mi,du pa karenamu* [潜者水波将瀬]. (*Man'yōshū* 16.3788)

How hateful is the pond of Miminashi! If only its waters had dried up when my beloved came and dove in!

This poem is part of a triad based on the tale of Lady Kazura. According to the preface, Lady Kazura was courted by three men

but, unwilling to settle for any of them and unable to make them desist, resolved to end her life by throwing herself into a pond. This tale resurfaces in the *Yamato Monogatari* 大和物語 with a modified narrative: Lady Kazura falls in love with the emperor, who, however, fails to summon her promptly after their first encounter, driving her to despair and resulting in the same tragic outcome as in the earlier version. Beyond the narrative differences, the version in the *Yamato Monogatari* features a significant grammatical variation, as *namu* is replaced by the auxiliary *masi*, resulting in the phrase ...*kadukaba midu zo finamasi*. The use of *masi* in the *Yamato Monogatari* is significant as it contrasts with the string 将洵 from the *Man'yōshū*, which cannot be read as *karemasi* because *masi* is never rendered logographically, at least according to mainstream readings. Kinoshita contends that this shift signals a transition in the expression of counterfactual past from *namu* to *masi*. Based on this reasoning, most instances of *namu* in the *Man'yōshū* are then by him re-interpreted as reflecting a counterfactual past, with only a few exceptions,¹⁹ which he suggests are later examples that no longer retain the original meaning of counterfactual past. From the Heian period onward, with some rare cases where both readings are plausible, *namu* predominantly expresses counterfactual present. Kinoshita concludes that the semantics of *namu* gradually shifted from counterfactual past to counterfactual present sometime between Old Japanese and Heian Japanese, with a handful of early cases already showing in the *Man'yōshū*. Kinoshita's theory, although insightful, presents several weak links. Just to mention one, counterfactual past in the *Man'yōshū* is typically expressed precisely through *masi* (wo), as it is in Heian Japanese. For example, the next poem in the triad (16.3789), which in the tale's fiction appears to belong to Lady Kazura's second wooer, uses *masi wo* to express counterfactual past.²⁰ Thus, if Kinoshita's hypothesis held true, counterfactual past would be expressed by both *masi* and *namu*, with the former also attested with third-person subjects.²¹

Yamaguchi (1980) challenges Kinoshita's interpretation by suggesting that in the first poem of the Lady Kazura triad (12), the two characters 潜者 should be read as *kadukeba* rather than *kadukaba*, thus leading to an interpretation of *karenamu* as an expression of counterfactual present. Although the counterfactual past seems to fit

19 Specifically, 7.1212, 12.3138, and 20.4437, where *namu* unquestionably refers to an event that has yet to occur.

20 *Man'yōshū* 16.3789: ...*ke:pu yuku to₂ ware ni tuge:seba kape:ri ki:masi wo* (If only you had told me that today you would go (to die), I would have come back (to stop you)!).

21 See *Man'yōshū* 2.91: ...*Yamato naru Oposima no₂ ne ni ipe₂ mo aramasi wo* (If only the house (of my beloved) was on top of the Mount Ōshima in Yamato!).

the context best, Yamaguchi's reading could be plausible if the phrase is taken as a kind of timeless statement: 'If only the pond's waters would dry up as my beloved dives'. After addressing this particularly problematic poem, Yamaguchi applies the counterfactual present interpretation to all remaining instances of *namu*, also denying any future nuance in the action or state conveyed by the marked verb.

Yamaguchi's interpretations of *namu* sentences are overall plausible; however, limiting the semantic range of *namu* exclusively to the present tense is somewhat arbitrary. Both past and present interpretations are viable in most cases, with the specific temporality determined by other elements within the sentence, such as temporal adverbs. Consequently, in the absence of clear indicators like temporal adverbs or contextual clues, judging whether a statement conveys counterfactual past, present or future becomes technically impossible. For instance, let us consider the following poem.

- (13) *Wagi, moko₁ pa kusiro₂ ni aranamu* [有奈武] *pi?darite no₂ wa ga oku no₂ te ni maki, te inamasi wo.* (*Man'yōshū* 9.1766)

If only my beloved lady were a bracelet! If so, I would don her round the top of my left wrist and carry her away!

Here, Yamaguchi interprets *aranamu* as an expression of counterfactual present, whereas Kinoshita as counterfactual past (in which case a more fitting translation of the latter part would be 'I would have donned... and carried...'). Both interpretations are equally viable since there are no temporal adverbs or contextual clues to determine a precise temporality. I would argue that *namu* as a grammatical structure does not offer data on the temporality of the verb, but rather simply expresses 'atemporal' counterfactual desire. The expression is then concretely employed predominantly in present contexts, but occasionally also appears in past contexts, as in the above discussed 16.3788 (12) or, according to my interpretation, 11.2829 (8).

Likewise, the temporality of *masi* is not inherent to *masi* itself but rather emerges from its interaction with other elements of the sentence. Whether in optative contexts or not, *masi* generally appears in structures with two temporal clauses (e.g. 'if A happens, then B happens', 'if A had happened, B would have happened' etc.). In contrast, *namu* typically operates within sentences involving only a single temporal term. This leads *namu* to appear predominantly in present or future-oriented contexts, while counterfactual past, which generally requires two temporal terms, is mainly the domain of *masi*. In conclusion, I would argue that neither *namu* nor *masi* possess intrinsic temporality. Their association with verbs conveying present/future actions or states in the case of *namu*, and past/present actions or states for *masi*, arises from the syntactic structure of the

propositions in which they occur. This concept might be extended to other expressions of the same sort, e.g. *nu ka*, which Kinoshita considers as antithetic to *namu* in that it relates to present/future actions. Although largely ignored, likely because his argument is again based on subjective interpretations, the differentiation he established left some influence, which persists even in recent years (see Kuroda 2017; Moriwaki 2021). Nevertheless, since *namu* is here viewed as devoid of a temporal quality, positing an antithesis with *nu ka* becomes unnecessary.

4 The Variant *namo*

Concerning the relation between *namu* and its variant *namo*, it is clear from the number of attestations that in Old Japanese the main form was *namu*. The following are the only three generally accepted attestations of the form *namo*.

- (14) *Mi₁wayama wo sika mo kakusu ka kumo dani mo ko₂ko₂ro₂ aranamo* [有南畝]
kakusapu besi ya. (Man'yōshū 1.18)
Must Mount Miwa really be hidden thus? Oh, I wish at least clouds had a heart!
Ought they truly conceal it so?
- (15) *Kami₁ tu Ke₂no₁ Wodo₁ no₂ Tado₂ri ga kapadi ni mo ko₁ra pa apanamo* [安波奈毛]
pi₁to₂ri no₂mi₂ site. (Man'yōshū 14.3405)
How I long for my beloved to meet me on the path to the Tadori river in Wodo of
Kamitsukeno! Just her, all alone!
- (16) *Kami₁ tu Ke₂no₁ Wono₁ no₂ Tado₂ri ga apadi ni mo sena pa apanamo* [安波奈母]
mi₁ru pi₁to₂ nasi ni. (Man'yōshū 14.3405)
How I long for my man to meet me on the path to the Tadori river in Wono of
Kamitsukeno! Without anyone seeing us!

The first poem is part of a dyad that includes a long poem and its envoy, of which it constitutes the latter.²² According to the preface shared with the preceding *chōka*, the poem was composed by Nukata no Ōkimi 額田王 upon her descent into the Ōmi province, where Emperor Tenji 天智 had relocated the capital in 667. Conversely, the left annotation of the poem attributes authorship to Emperor Tenji himself, suggesting that he may have composed it during an imperial visit to Yamato shortly after the relocation. While most

²² 'Envoy' is the English term commonly employed to translate the word *hanka* 反歌, which refers to a *tanka* 短歌 (short poem) that is attached to a *chōka* 長歌 (long poem) of which it summarises the content.

scholars accept Nukata no Ōkimi as the author, opinions on the matter remain divided, with some, most notably Omodaka (1957), arguing in favor of Tenji's authorship. Furthermore, the classification of the present composition (1.18) and the following (1.19) as *hanka*, despite their clear departure from merely summarising the content of the preceding *chōka* (1.17), complicates the assessment of their composition context. Some scholars argue that the *hanka* label is a later addition that does not accurately reflect the author's original intent (Kimura 2007; Inaoka 1993). In any case, as far as 1.17 and 1.18 are concerned, the dyad represents an expression of the author's nostalgia for the land of Yamato, their homeland and former abode before the relocation of the capital.

As for the remaining two poems, the final composition (16) is not treated by the compiler as a separate work but rather as a variant of the preceding one (15). This appears to be incorrect, as the respective use of *koira* 'my beloved (woman)' and *sena* 'my beloved (man)' suggests that the authors, at least within the fictional context, were respectively a male and a female, meaning that the two poems must have originally been distinct compositions. These poems lack both preface and left annotation, leaving contextual information unavailable. However, their placement in the 14th book and the phonographic notation clearly indicate that they belong to the *azuma no uta* 東歌 (eastern poem) corpus. More specifically, the toponym within the text suggests that the authors, whether fictional or not, were from the Kamitsukeno province, later known as Kōzuke and corresponding roughly to present-day Gunma Prefecture.

These three poems contain the only attestations of optative *namo* found in Old Japanese sources, with no occurrences found in later texts either. The prevailing view on the relationship between this rare form and the more common one is that *namo* represents an older form, which by the time of the earliest sources had already transformed into *namu* through an *o*→*u* vowel shift. Yamada (1913) is seemingly the earliest grammarian of the modern era to suggest, albeit without confidence,²³ that *namo* represents the older form. That is instead given as granted in subsequent technical studies, notably those by Miyajima (1932), Hamada (1948), Tabe (1953), Hayashi (1953), Negoro (1959), Gotō (1967) as well as by Yamauchi (1967) and Moriwaki (2021), who explicitly note that *namo* is broadly regarded as the earlier form. Major dictionaries, such as the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* and *Jidai-betsu kokugo daijiten*, also reference this

23 Although Yamada, in his 1913 grammar, cautions that discerning between the two sounds /u/ and /o/ is difficult due to the interchangeability of certain phonographs, the assertion that *namo* is older follows inevitably from the etymology he proposes, which views the optative *namu* as the manifestation of the bound particle in final position. In his 1928 commentary, Yamada demonstrates significantly greater confidence.

perspective in the entries for the respective terms. The derivation of *namu* from the form *namo* is thus upheld as the mainstream view, albeit with varying degrees of confidence, and it has been so for around a century.

A key reason why this view is widely held is that the earliest attested form of the morphologically identical bound particle *namu* is, indeed, *namo*. As a bound particle, *namo* appears frequently in the *senmyō* 宣命 (edicts) of the *Shoku nihongi*, where it is recorded in phonographic writing nearly one hundred times. Bound *namo* is also attested in the *Man'yōshū* itself, although in only one instance (14.3447). The parallel between the two particles, bound and final, tacitly implies that the same vowel change must have occurred in both cases. Nevertheless, several factors complicate interpreting optative *namu* as a straightforward derivation from *namo*.

- Firstly, drawing parallels between the bound particle and the final particle *namu* is questionable. Regardless of their etymologies, the two particles are unlikely to share a common origin. The proposed etymology linking the two words as cognates, suggested by Yamada (1913) and supported by Tabe (1953) has multiple shortcomings, which will be discussed below, and has never gained much acceptance. Consequently, the presence of a vowel shift in the bound particle does not necessarily indicate that the same shift occurred for the final particle as well, as their respective structural components, if any exist, would presumably differ.
- Secondly, since the bound form *namu* first appears in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (Veritable Records of Three Reigns of Japan) – the last of the *Rikkokushi* 六国史 (Six National Histories), completed in the first year of the Engi era (901) – it can be assumed that the bound particle underwent the vowel shift in the early Heian period. In particular, the first appearance of the form *namu* is found in a *senmyō* from the year 875, although *namo* remains the predominant form until the end of the text.²⁴ This suggests that the vowel shift in the bound particle occurred in the second half of the ninth century, though it is possible that it took place earlier in spoken language. As Yamaguchi (1980) notes, this assumption is further supported by the observation that other words underwent the same vowel change during this period, such as *nemo₂ko₂ro₂* evolving into *nemugoro/nengoro* and *akato₂ki₁* transforming

24 One earlier example appears in a *senmyō* from the year 868 contained in the *Ruiju Kokushi* 類聚国史 (Categorised National History of Japan), a history ordered thematically and traditionally attributed to Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真, said to have been completed in 892. However, the *Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku* reports the same *senmyō* with the spelling *namo*.

into *akatuki*, among many others. Consequently, if the optative *namu* experienced the same vowel shift, it would be expected to have occurred during the early Heian period rather than at any earlier stage. This applies specifically to the vowel shift from *o*₂ to *u*.²⁵ As to the vowel alternation between *o*₁ and *u*, as seen in forms like *sino*₁*bu* and *sinubu*, or *yo*₁/*yo*₁*ri* and *yu*/*yuri*, which was already present in the Old Japanese stage, the direction of the change remains uncertain. The notation of several words oscillates between *o*₁ and *u*, creating the impression that these sounds represent synchronic variants rather than being the result of a diachronic shift. Yamaguchi concludes that if *mo* belongs to the *kō* 甲 series, it is just as plausible that *namo* is a derivative of *namu* as the reverse.

- Finally and most importantly, the latter two attestations in 14.3405 (15)(16) of the form *namo* belong, as mentioned, to the corpus of the eastern poems. In Eastern Old Japanese poetry, the sound /u/ often shifts to /o/, as seen in forms like *araparo*₁ ‘to appear’ (14.3414) and *hararo*₁ ‘to be overgrown (by trees)’ (14.3546) which, in the case of auxiliaries *mu* and *ramu*, results in their respective representation as *mo* and *namo*, e.g. in *wataramo* ‘let us cross’ (14.4355) and *ko*₁*pu namo* ‘be (probably) yearning’ (14.3476) as well as in various other instances. This suggests that the *u*→*o* shift in the two eastern poems is a diatopic, rather than diachronic, variation. The standard *namu* is also found once in an eastern poem (14.3463), but so are the standard *mu* and *ramu*. Naturally, it is more logical to attribute the occurrence of a phenomenon to a well-documented cause in the sources as the *u*→*o* shift in Eastern Old Japanese, rather than to the speculative existence of the older form *namo*.

Given these considerations, one might question whether *namo* truly existed in Western Old Japanese to begin with.

4.1 The Reading of 南畝

The doubt above presented is particularly reasonable given that the text of the unique attestation of *namo* in Western Japanese in 1.18 (14) is notably idiosyncratic. The text from the *Kan'ei* 寛永 manuscript, which is commonly used as sourcebook, is as follows.

25 Yamaguchi also notes that if *mo* belonged to the *otsu* 乙 series, an etymological composition of *na* + *mo* would be more plausible than a single morpheme structure, as the combination CaCo2 is uncommon due to the constraints imposed by the Arisaka-Ikegami law.

(17) 三輪山乎然毛隠賀雲谷裳情有南畝可苦佐布倍思哉 (*Man'yōshū* 1.18)

The notation employs the two characters 南畝, suggesting a phonographic rendering. However, while 南 is a commonly used phonogram, 畝 is never employed as a phonogram in the *Man'yōshū* or in other Old Japanese sources, making the combination highly unusual.

As to textual variants, the above mentioned *Ruiju koshū* – the oldest extant manuscript that contains most poems of the first volume and dating to before the year 1120 – records instead the notation 南武, which reflects a more conventional use of phonograms. This notation also appears as a variant in the collated text of the *Nishihonganji* 西本願寺 manuscript from the mid-Kamakura period, as well as in later manuscripts belonging to its lineage. On the other hand, the collated *Genryaku* 元暦 manuscript – dated 1184 and chronologically second to record the first volume – reads 南畝, which is also the notation found in the *Kishū* 紀州 manuscript, the first ten books of which were copied in the late Kamakura period but do not belong to the *Genryaku* lineage. Finally, the lineage of *Reizei* 冷泉 and *Hirose* 廣瀬 manuscripts, respectively hailing from late Muromachi and Edo period but unrelated to both the *Kishū* and *Genryaku* manuscripts, also agree with the notation 南畝. In short, the manuscript evidence suggests that 畝 may indeed be the original character, as it appears across manuscripts of different lineages. The character 武, instead, could be the result of a copying error (or intentional interpolation)²⁶ that first appeared in the *Ruiju Koshū*, which Sengaku may have then consulted during his textual revision, later transmitted in the *Nishihonganji* manuscript. As to the use of phonograms, although it is indeed the case that 武 frequently serves as a phonogram for *mu*, it is also true that the character 南 is generally employed alone to transcribe both the optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu*, since this character ended with a bilabial nasal in Middle Chinese. In fact, optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu* are transcribed by this sole character respectively 6 and 23 times, while *mu* after 南 is found transcribed only once in an eastern poem, specifically as 南牟 in 14.3390. In other words, the character 南 is rarely used as a *ryakuongana* 略音仮名 – phonograms that ignore the final consonants of the Chinese pronunciation – but is commonly used as *nigōkana* 二合仮名, phonograms that represent two morae with a single character. Adding a standalone phonogram to express *mu* would thus be rather unusual and resemble more the usage of this character found in the

²⁶ The latter is the view put forth by Omodoka (1957), who suggests that the editor of the *Ruiju Koshū* may have occasionally replaced characters unfamiliar to the Heian reader with familiar ones, e.g. 激→灑 in 8.1418.

phonographic eastern poems rather than that of the logographic-mixed style of the present composition. In conclusion, both 南畝 and 南武 are idiosyncratic in terms of character transcription, though in different ways.

Nowadays, most commentaries accept 南畝 as the correct text, but the agreement on its actual reading is not likewise universal. On the contrary, the conventional reading was *namu* until the beginning of the last century. Yamada (1913, 1928) appears to be the first to advocate for the reading *namo*, challenging earlier scholars by arguing that, since the *go* 呉 reading of 畝 is *mo*, the two characters should be read together as *namo*. From today's perspective, Yamada's argument might initially seem lacking, since modern *kanji* dictionaries list *mu* alongside *mo* as a *go* reading.²⁷ However, the character 畝 in both the Song rhyme dictionaries *Guangyun* 廣韻 (Expanded Rhymes, completed in 1008) and *Jiyun* 集韻 (Collected Rhymes, 1037) is listed in the 厚 rhyme, which includes 母, read *mo* across all Old Japanese sources when employed as a phonogram. The natural conclusion is that 畝 should be read *mo* as its homophone 母. Japanese early dictionaries such as the *Tenrei banshō meigi* 篆隸万象名義 (The Meaning of Characters in Seal and Clerical Script, around 830) and the *Shinsen jikyō* 新撰字鏡 (Newly Compiled Mirror of Characters, around 900) provide the same information, recording 走, belonging to the 厚 rhyme, as final for 畝. Possibly for these reasons, most commentaries followed Yamada (1928) in reading the string in question as *namo*.

Takeda (1956), on the other hand, drew a comparison with the unique example 来二計謀 *kinikemu* in 4.509, in which 謀 is read as *mu* despite frequently representing *mo* in the *Nihonshoki*. This comparison subtly suggests that 畝 may have followed a similar pattern, i.e. might have been read as *mu* in the *Man'yōshū* and only later have come to represent the phoneme *mo*, which led Takeda to conclude that *namu* is the correct reading in this context. Nevertheless, Takeda's view was not adopted by later commentaries, likely because 謀 belonging to the 尤 rhyme in the *Guangyun* – thereby differing from 畝 – posits a serious challenge to this perspective. It is clear that 謀²⁸ shifted to the 侯 rhyme, distinguished from 厚 only by tone, sometime during the Tang period. This shift is evidenced by their reassignment to the 侯 rhyme in the *Jiyun*, which contrasts with

27 E.g. the *Gakken kanwa daijiten*, which is a dictionary that pays particular attention to phonetics, including the reconstructed Chinese pronunciations from various periods.

28 Even more significantly so the character 牟, homophone of 謀 and frequently used as a phonogram for the sound *mu* in both the *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū*.

its earlier placement in the 尤 rhyme in the *Guangyun*.²⁹ In contrast, the character 畝 belonged to the 厚 rhyme from the origin. Even so, Takeda's comparison is still insightful because both 計謀 and 南畝 are meaningful lexical compounds in Sinitic, which suggest that the choice of these characters must have been partially based on their semantics, though the meaning they convey appears unrelated to the content of the poem itself. In particular, the compound 南畝 (field facing south)³⁰ appears several times in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry), the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han), the *Wenxuan* 文選 (Literary Selections) and other Chinese classics, which raises the possibility that the author might have employed it for a purpose other than phonographic transcription. The term is also present in the later *Shoku nihongi*, demonstrating that it was to some extent in use in Japan. This observation is important insofar as it explains why an uncommon character such as 畝 was used instead of the sole phonogram 南 or a more conventional combination of phonograms.

Similarly to Takeda, Ōno T. (1962; 1977) supported the reading *namu*, particularly aiming his criticism at Takagi, Gomi and Ōno (1957), whose commentary (the so-called old *Taikei*) was highly influential at the time and played a significant role in establishing the reading *namo*. Ōno T. addressed the issue of the Chinese reading by noting that characters belonging to the 厚 rhyme could be used to transcribe both Japanese /o/ and /u/ sounds. He argues that 母 is an exception due to its high frequency of use, which usually leads to the stabilisation of a single reading. Similarly to Takeda, Ōno T. tries to corroborate his statement by comparing the use of 畝 with that of 謀 but avoids the mentioned problem by stating that 謀 (and 牟) originally did not belong to the 尤 rhyme, as might be concluded by their position in the *Guangyun*, but rather to the 侯 rhyme. This would suggest that characters in the 侯 rhyme were also read with vowel /u/ in Old Japanese, leading to the conclusion that characters in the 厚 rhyme, such as 畝, could have shared the same pronunciation. This statement is based on evidence found in a fragment of the *Qieyun*³¹ 切韻 (Cut Rhymes) – a rhyme dictionary of the Sui era of which only edited fragments remain – where the *fanqie*³² of 謀 is found as 莫侯.

29 The *Jiyun* was compiled in 1037, approximately three decades after the *Guangyun*, and is said to reflect a more modern standard of pronunciation.

30 In ancient times, lands facing south were generally chosen for agriculture due to their better exposure to the sun. As a result, the term 'south field' also came to signify a luxuriant field, or more broadly, to be used as a eulogistic term for fertile land.

31 Ōno T. specifically refers to the third fragment of the *Tang xie Qieyun* 唐寫切韻, an edited version of the *Qieyun* hailing from the early Tang. The fragment is generally referred to as *Qiesan* 切三 and is now preserved at the British Library.

32 *Fanqie* 反切 is a traditional Chinese method for representing pronunciation, where two characters are used to indicate the initial and final sounds of a given character.

Ōno T.'s observation can be complemented by the following data.

- In the *Qiesan* fragment, 謀 is listed under the 尤 rhyme, despite its *fanqie* suggesting that it should rhyme with 侯.
- In Wang Renxu's 王仁昉 *Kanmiu buque qieyun* 刊謬補缺切韻 (Revised and Expanded Rhyme Dictionary) – an edited and enlarged version of the *Qieyun* from the early eighth century and conserved in its complete form – 謀 location and *fanqie* agrees with the *Guangyun*.
- In the glosses of Lu Deming's 陸德明 *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (Textual Explanations of Classics) – a collection of annotated pre-Qin classics likely dating to the late sixth century – the *fanqie* of 謀 is found as 莫浮 and 亡侯 but also as 莫侯.
- The *Tenrei banshō meigi* – based on the Chinese dictionary *Yupian* 玉篇 (Jade Chapters) completed in 543 – records the *fanqie* 莫侯.

This data shows contradicting information on the final of 謀 (and 牟) from sources of the same period or even from the same source. While Ōno T. emphasises that the reading *mu* of 謀 derives from the 侯 rhyme, it remains unclear to the author how he addressed the data from the *Guangyun* and similar sources. The opposite view, for example held by Ōta (2023), is that 謀 belonged to the 尤 rhyme in the *Qieyun* but had already shifted to the 侯 rhyme prior to the *Yupian*. The *Qieyun* and *Guangyun* would thus be retaining either an earlier or a diatopic standard. From this perspective, one might infer that the *mu* reading of 謀 and 牟 derives from the 尤 rhyme, antithetically to Ōno T.'s claim but similarly to how the *go* reading of 求 or 留 is respectively *ku* and *ru*.

Ultimately, resolving the issue of the pronunciation of 畝 by examining the pronunciation of 謀, as Ōno T. proposed, is challenging due to the unclear phonetic history of this and other /m/-initial characters that in the *Guangyun* belong to the 尤 rhyme. However, Ōno T.'s assertion that characters of the 厚 rhyme were also read with vowel /u/ can be supported from an alternative perspective. For example, the 侯 rhyme – differing from the 厚 and 侯 rhymes only in the tone – includes the character 豆, which is extensively used as a phonogram for the sound *du* in Old Japanese sources. Another example is 頭, which belongs to the 侯 rhyme and is read *du* in the *Man'yōshū* and *Nihonshoki*, as well as preserving the *go* reading *zu*. Additionally, 斗 belonging to the 侯 rhyme is read /tu/ in poem 43 of *Kojiki*, although being read *to*₁ elsewhere.³³ Given these examples, even in the case the sound *mu* of 謀 and 牟 originated from the 尤

33 Concretely, 美志麻遲斗岐 *mi-i-sima ni tuki*₁ in *Kojiki* II; 43. This, however, could be attributed to the o-i-u fluctuations mentioned earlier.

rhyme – which to the author seems most likely – it is still reasonable to assume that 畝 could be read *mu* in Old Japanese, similarly to how characters of the 侯 and 候 rhymes are occasionally read with the /u/ vowel.

5 The Form *nimo*

As discussed above, the form *namo* cannot be easily considered attested in Western Old Japanese. However, the morphologically similar form *nimo* appears twice in the *Man'yōshū* and thus merits consideration.

- (18) *Ware no₂mi₂ si ki₁ke₁ba sabusi mo poto₂to₂gi₁su Nibu no₂ yamabe₁ ni iyuki, nakanimo* [鳴尔毛]. (*Man'yōshū* 19.4178)

Oh, how lonely it is to hear it alone – Cuckoo, fly to Mount Nibu and cry there too!

- (19) *Ki₂ no₁ kuni ni yamazu kayo₁pamu tuma no₂ mori tuma yo₂siko₂sene tuma to₂ ipi nagara (tuma tamapanimo* [賜尔毛]). (*Man'yōshū* 9.1679)

Let us journey again and again to the land of Ki! O Shrine of Lovers – fetch me a lover! For it is borne in your very name.

In the latter example (19), the bracketed text is recorded as a textual variant. In both examples, the text is relatively stable: although minor variations occur, they do not compromise its overall integrity. Some commentaries accept the received text, while others emend it – identifying 尔 (also written 尔), read *ni*, as a scribal error for 奈 *na*. However, the recurrence of the spelling 爾毛 lends support to the possibility that the form *nimo* may have genuinely existed. The suffix *ni* is also attested following the *mizenkei* form in 5.801 (*nari wo simasani* ‘do your work!’), where it is thought to carry a meaning equivalent to the desiderative-imperative suffix *ne*. Nevertheless, the theoretically corresponding form *nemo* is virtually unattested; only a single potential instance is found in 14.3432, though the passage in which it appears is obscure and may reflect a different lexeme altogether.

Another difficulty lies in the semantic interpretation of *nimo* in the cited poems. That is because, while in 5.801 *ni* appears to parallel the function of *ne*, in 19.4178 (18) *nimo* seems instead to express counterfactual desire, in line with the function of *namu*. Indeed, (*poto₂to₂gi₁su*) *nakanamu* is found in 8.1509 and 20.4437, and similar expressions appear elsewhere in the *Man'yōshū* and later sources. This poses a problem because, as mentioned above, *ne* and *namu* differ significantly in both meaning and usage, although they share the feature of expressing a desire for the realisation of an action or state not carried out by the speaker.

The text in 9.1679 (19) is even more perplexing. If the textual variant is paraphrasing *yo₂siko₂sene* ‘fetch me ...!’, then *nimo* would semantically align with the desiderative-imperative *ne*. On the other hand, a counterfactual interpretation along the line of *namu* (‘if only you would fetch me a lover!’) is also plausible, though the form **tamapanamu* is unattested in Old Japanese. Additionally, it is also problematic to view *nimo* merely as a chronologically prior form as some have proposed, as neither of its two occurrences appears particularly early; quite the contrary, 19.4178 (18) is dated to 750, belonging to the latest stage of the *Man’yōshū*.

In short, while the construction *nimo* is clearly related to the other Old Japanese *n-* desideratives, its connection with the speculative form *namo* in Western Old Japanese remains uncertain. Nonetheless, it does show that the bound particle *mo* may occur in constructions that bear semantic equivalence to *namu*.

6 Theories on the Etymology of *namu*

It goes without saying that identifying one form as older has significant implications for the possible etymologies of optative *namu*. Numerous etymological theories emerged in the first half of the last century, but waning interest in speculative theories appears to have long brought that momentum to a halt. Most of the theories advanced reflect the then-recent belief that, among the two forms, *namo* represents an older form. Yet, the above considerations, highlighting the weaknesses underlying this premise, further undermine the already questioned validity of these theories. According to some of the proposed ones, *namu* could be analysed as:

- The optative particle *na*, in turn originating from the *mizenkei* form of the negative auxiliary *zu*, combined with the bound particle *mo* (Miyajima 1932)
- The final use of the bound particle *namo* (Yamada 1913; 1936)
- The *mizenkei* form of the negative auxiliary *zu* combined with the conjectural auxiliary *mu* (Hamada 1948)
- The result of a vowel shift from *nimo* where *ni* is the *ren’yōkei* form of the negative auxiliary *zu* and *mo* is the bound particle (Hamada 1948)
- The result of a vowel shift from *nemo* where *ne* is the optative particle and *mo* is the bound particle (Hamada 1948)
- The optative particle *na* combined with the intentional auxiliary *mu* (Tokuda 1936, 206; Okuzato 1943, 210)

Of these, only *iii* and *vi* predicts *namu* as the original form.

Etymology *i* was first proposed by Miyajima and later adopted by some scholars, such as Gotō (1967), as well as by certain dictionaries,

including the *Iwanami kogo jiten*, which references this etymology. An obvious critique of this theory is that the morphological binding of *mo* to the *mizenkei* form is highly idiosyncratic; moreover, it fails to address the semantic gap between the first-person optative *na* and *namu*. Neither Miyajima nor Gotō offered any rationale for how the addition of an exclamatory particle would alter the perceived performer of the action.

Etymology *ii*, briefly mentioned above, was first proposed by Yamada and later backed by Tabé (1953), but presents even greater challenges: while bound *pa*, *mo*, *so₂(/zo₂)* and *ko₂so₂* all have their final uses, none can connect to a specific form of inflectable words,³⁴ nor generate a nuance even remotely related to that of the optative *namu*, not to mention that it implies that bound *namo* underwent the same vowel shift in different eras depending on the position within the sentence.

The following three potential etymologies were first presented by Hamada (1948), who ultimately chooses to support the latter, though the rationale for this preference remains somewhat unclear. Among these, theories *iv* and *v* assume that *namo* is the older form, with the former positing the sound change *i*→*a* and the latter *e*→*a* to align with the attested form. Aside from the tentative speculations on the vowel shift, the lack of semantic equivalence between the optatives *ne/ni* and *namu* presents an additional challenge to the theories, as it leaves unexplained how the addition of the exclamative particle *mo* can transform an imperative into a prominently third-person expression.

Etymology *vi* was proposed independently by Tokuda (1936, 206) and Okuzato (1943, 210), and later further developed by Yoshida (1966; 1967). Following Tokuda, Yoshida argues that the morphemes *na*, *ni*, *nu*, and *ne* are the surviving inflected forms of an optative suffix that followed the *yodan* conjugation. Okayama (1977) criticised this theory, identifying several critical issues with the etymology: the absence of an attested *shūshikei* form, the lack of such forms in adnominal position, and the difficulty of explaining the semantic differences among at least *na*, *ni*, *nu ka*, and *namu* based on this assumption. Although absent from Japanese scholarship after Yoshida, this theory has resurfaced in recent Western grammars, such as in Vovin (2020, 599, 602) and Kupchik (2023, 345), neither of which, however, address Okayama's criticisms. Even setting aside the morphological issues with this assumption – such as why intentional *mu* can follow what is generally considered a final suffix,

34 Tabé argues that the *mizenkei* was originally noun-like, allowing bound particles to connect to it. However, it is not found connected to other bound particles aside *pa*. Moreover, as with etymology *i*, the theory does not explain why the addition of *mo* would affect the meaning of the expression, given that Tabé also considered optative *na* to be a final use of the bound particle *na*.

or why it follows *na* despite negative suffix *zu* preceding it in the form *na-na* – this view fails to account for how the peculiar meaning of *namu*, as outlined above, could arise from the combination of the desiderative *na* and intentional *mu*.

Etymology *iii* stands out as the most straightforward approach to explain the formation of the term *namu* from a morphological standpoint. By refraining from positing *namo* as the original form, one can account for the absence of reliable attestations and eliminate the need to assume vowel shifts and morphologically ‘ungrammatical’ constructs. Structurally it would result in the morphologically familiar construct negative auxiliary *zu* + conjectural auxiliary *mu*, thus equating the morphology of *zaramu*. The existence of the dialectal auxiliary *napu*, believed to be a combination of the *mizenkei* conjugated form of *zu* and the reiterative *pu*, demonstrates the theoretical feasibility of such a construct. This approach thus leaves semantics as the only issue to be addressed. Even so, solving this issue is not an easy task.

From a semantic perspective, the possibility that *na* may be an inflected form of *zu* is entirely plausible, especially considering that the construct *nu ka*, widely recognised as morphologically including the negative suffix *zu*, has equal semantic value to *namu*.

- (20) *Oto₂ no₂ sukunaki, mi₁ti ni apanu kamo [相奴鴨] sukunaki, yo₂ mi₁ti ni apasaba iro₂ge₁seru suge₂kasa wogasa waga unage₁ru tama no₂ nana tu wo to₂rikape₂ mo mawosamu mono₂ wo sukunaki, yo₂ mi₁ti ni apanu kamo [相奴鴨]. (Man'yōshū 16.3875)*

Oh, how I yearn for him to meet me upon the silent road! Silent! Is the road where, if only he would meet me, I could ask him to barter that tiny sedge hat of his, tinged with color, for the seven strings of jewels I have strung round my neck. Oh, how I yearn for him to meet me upon that silent road!

- (21) *Mato₂poku no₂ no₁ ni mo apanamu [安波奈牟] ko₂ko₂ro₂ naku sato₁ no₂ mi₂naka ni ape₁ru sena kamo. (Man'yōshū 14.3463)*

If only he could meet me on a field far away! My lover, who meets me so indiscreetly in the heart of the town!

For instance, in the two poems above, *apanu ka* and *apanamu* seem to convey equivalent meanings, both expressing a longing for a secret meeting with the beloved. One more example.

- (22) *Iso₁ no₂ Kami₁ Puru no₂ Mi₁ko₂to₂ pa tawayame₂ no₂ mato₂pi₁ ni yo₂rite uma-zi-mono₂ napa to₂rituke sisi-zi-mono₂ yumi₁ya kakumi₁te opoki₁mi₁ no₂ mi₁ko₂to₂ kasiko₁mi₁ amazakaru pi₁nape₂ ni makaru puru-ko₂ro₂mo Matutiyama yo₁ri kape₁ri ko₂nu kamo [還来奴香聞]. (Man'yōshū 6.1019)*

Oh you, Isonokami no Furu, who enticed by a gentle lady, were yoked as a horse and encircled by hunters' bows and arrows as a deer, you who are now forced to leave to the uncouth regions far from the Heavens by his lordship's awesome

decree! May you go only as far as Mount Matsuchi on your path and then return straight back!

- (23) *To₂si mo pe₂zu kape₂ri ko₂namu* [来嘗] *to₂ asakage₂ ni matu ramu imo si omokage₂ ni mi₁yu*. (*Man'yōshū* 12.3138)³⁵

I glimpsed, in a vision, my beloved lady waiting in the morning light and thinking, 'If only he would return before the year is out!'

The first poem recounts the exile of a courtier named Isonokami no Otomaro 石上乙麻呂, who was banished to Tosa by Emperor Shōmu 聖武 following an illicit affair with Lady Kume no Wakame 久米若売. The author – possibly a retainer, family member, or even Otomaro himself writing in the third person – expresses a longing for Otomaro's swift return from the exile, hyperbolically hoping that he might turn back as soon as Mount Matsuchi, which lies along the route to Tosa, is reached. Similarly, in the second poem the author expresses a similar longing, this time through the thoughts of a lady awaiting his return.³⁶ When comparing the analogous contexts in these two poems, it is difficult to see how *ko₂nu ka* and *ko₂namu* may carry distinct nuances. A final example.

- (24) *Mono₂no₂pu no₂ lpase no₂ mori no₂ poto₂to₂gi₁su ima mo nakanu ka* [鳴奴香] *yama no₂ to₂kage₁ ni*. (*Man'yōshū* 8.1470)

If only the cuckoo of the sacred lpase wood would cry now, in the eternal shade of the mountain!

- (25) *Poto₂to₂gi₁su napo mo nakanamu* [奈賀那牟] *moto₂ tu pi₁to₂ kake₂tutu moto₂na a wo ne si naku mo*. (*Man'yōshū* 20.4437)

If only the cuckoo would still cry, as I long for my beloved of old! Alas! Yet it is only me who keeps crying.

Again, the forms *nakanu ka* and *nakanamu* here occur in analogous contexts and seemingly convey the same nuance of counterfactual desire. Clearly, *nu ka* and *namu* bear a striking semantic resemblance, on top of their morphological similarity. Positing a morphological

35 The Old *Taikei* (Takagi, Gomi, Ōno 1959) reads *ki₁namu* here. This instance was not addressed in section 2 because the consensus overwhelmingly favors *ko₂namu*. The New *Taikei* (Satake et al. 2000) emended into *ko₂namu*.

36 Earlier, I dismissed the thesis upheld by some scholars (Kinoshita 1974; Moriwaki 2021) arguing that *nu ka* and *namu* differ in temporality, noting that this interpretation largely hinges on the reading of poem 16.3788 (12). The latter of these two poems provides yet another example where a counterfactual present/future interpretation of *namu* better fits the context, so much so that Kinoshita admitted this example (23) to be an exception.

connection – specifically the presence of a conjugated form of the negative suffix *zu* – is therefore a most natural solution.

Yamaguchi (1980) supported etymology *iii* but also pointed out that the absence of an interrogative adverb co-occurring with *namu* constitutes an issue to the theory, given that *ka* in *nu ka* is always omitted in the presence of an interrogative pronoun, as below.

- (26) *Asipi₁ki₂no₂yama mo tikaki₁wo poto₂to₂gi₁su tuki₂tatu made ni nani ka ki₁nakanu*
[奈仁加吉奈可奴]. (*Man'yōshū* 17.3983)

Why does the cuckoo not come calling before the moon has risen, though the steep mountain lies so near?

From this phenomenon one might anticipate **namu ka* as the original form, with *ka* subsequently omitted. If that is the case, the absence of an interrogative adverb is certainly suspicious, considering that final *ka* is never omitted in the absence of an interrogative adverb, at least as far as the construct *nu ka* is concerned. One might wonder whether a negative rhetorical sentence can form without an interrogative pronoun at all. Since according to this etymology *namu* would have equal structure to *zaramu*, it might prove useful to see if and how *zaramu* forms negative rhetorical sentences.

The construct *zaramu* is attested in the *Man'yōshū* in a fair number, mostly expressing negative conjecture. However, *zaramu* appears to approach an optative nuance when paired with bound *ya* to form a rhetorical question.

- (27) *Ki₁ri₂me₂yama yuki₁kapu mi₁ti no₂asagasumi₁pono₂ka ni dani ya imo ni apazaramu* [妹尔不相牟]. (*Man'yōshū* 12.3037)

Will I not meet my beloved lady, not even as faintly as the morning mist that cloaks the winding paths of Mount Kirime?

A negative conjectural interpretation is technically viable here, but it is not difficult to see how in this context an optative nuance emerges from the presence of the minimal particle *dani* combined with the rhetorical negative question formed by bound *ya* + *zaramu*, since the content of the conjecture – not meeting one's beloved – is undesirable. Similarly, an optative nuance seemingly arises also in the presence of the maximal particle *sape₂*.

- (28) *Tukuyo₁yo₂mi₁kado₂ni idetati asiura site yuku to₂ki₁sape₂ya imo ni apazaramu* [妹二不相有]. (*Man'yōshū* 12.3006)

Even as I step out for a walking divination, drawn by the beauty of the moonlit night, will I not be able to meet my beloved?

Although optative expressions are generally said to co-occur with minimal particles – in particular bound *mo* – the predicate can hardly

be interpreted as a simple negative conjecture in this poem. Like the previous example, the rhetorical question formed by *ya... zaramu* indirectly conveys an optative nuance. Furthermore, the optative nuance of these instances reflects a counterfactual desire, similar to *namu*, since a rhetorical question negates its content by definition. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the optative nuance emerges also in the absence of both minimal and maximal particles.

- (29) *Tama no₂ wo no₂ utusigo₂ko₂ro₂ ya to₂situki₂ no₂ yuki₁ kaparu made imo ni apazu aramu* [妹尔不逢将有]. (*Man'yōshū* 11.2792)

Will my sanity, the lifeline of my soul, endure, if I do not meet my beloved lady before months and years slip past?

For example, while this whole poem indirectly expresses a desire to meet the lover, it should be noted that *ya... apazaramu* (or *ya... apazu aramu*), though structured as a rhetorical question, can be here interpreted as a mere conjecture, rhetorically negating the possibility of meeting the beloved lady. In other words, the rhetorical question – reducible to ‘will I retain my sanity?’ – while implying a negative response, does not necessarily have to be interpreted as conveying a wishful meaning akin to ‘If only I could retain my sanity!’, as instead was the case in the presence of a minimal or maximal particle. However, it is also true that while the readings *apazaramu* or *apazu aramu* seem to be considered equivalent, they do differ in that in the latter the verb *ari* is a free morpheme, which could be affecting the possible interpretations of this particular case.

Conclusively, it appears that in the *Man'yōshū*, an optative meaning similar to that of *namu* is produced by *zaramu* under specific conditions: the presence of a minimal (or possibly maximal) particle and a rhetorical predicate bound by *ya*. While *namu* sentences often include the minimal particle *mo*, there are no instances of optative *namu* bound with *ya*. This means that if *namu* originates from a negative rhetorical question it must have lost the bound particle only at a later stage. The absence of conjectural attestations of *namu* in Old Japanese sources, where negative conjecture is consistently conveyed by *zaramu*, implies that if such a usage ever existed, it had already disappeared by the time of the earliest records. Still, if the above-presented interpretation of *Kojiki*'s poem 28 (4) by Yamaguchi-Kōnishi (1997) is accepted, it is worth noting that the form *tatanamu* would constitute a non-optative instance of *namu*, thereby equating *zaramu* in its negative conjectural meaning.

One additional problem of theory *iii* is the semantic limitation of *namu*, which exclusively permits third-person subjects. This limitation is shared with the negative suffix construct *nu ka*, but not with *ya... zaramu*, as can be seen from the uses in 12.3037 (27) and 12.3006 (28) provided above. In modern Japanese, optative structures

including the negative suffix do have a similar limitation, but the first person is admitted on the condition that the verb carries a nuance of potentiality. This does not seem to be the case for *namu* and *nu ka*. One explanation might be that, while these forms could originally be used with a first-person subject when the verb conveyed potentiality, they solidified in the more frequent third-person context, perhaps also due to the relative paucity of potential *yu* and *rayu* in poetry.³⁷

7 Conclusions

In this article, I analysed the ambiguous and debated instances of optative *namu* in Old Japanese texts, examined its semantic range, and reconsidered the widely accepted view that it derives from the older form *namo*. I also reevaluated the proposed etymologies, offering a deeper analysis of one of them (etymology *iii*). The conclusions drawn from the analysis are as follows.

- Only nineteen certain attestations of *namu* and two attestations of *namo* are found in Old Japanese texts. To these I would add one more attestation of *namu*, bringing the total to twenty, based on my reading of 南畝 in *Man'yōshū* 1.18 as *namu*.
- Optative *namu* does not have intrinsic temporality but is mainly used to express counterfactual present. There is no semantical distinction based on the temporality between *namu* and *nu ka*.
- The character 畝 in *Man'yōshū* 1.18 is not merely functioning as a phonogram because (a) *namu* was typically conveyed by the sole character 南; (b) the author had access to a range of more common phonograms for the sound *mo* or *mu*; (c) 南畝 is a meaningful compound in Sinitic. Consequently, it cannot be considered strong evidence for a hypothetical reading, as the primary purpose of its use is logographic rather than phonetic.
- Regarding the character 畝 in *Man'yōshū* 1.18, the reading *mu* is more plausible than *mo* because (a) the reading *mu* should be regarded as standard because *namo* appears exclusively in eastern poems, meaning *mo* warrants support only if backed by compelling phonetic evidence; (b) *mu* cannot be excluded as a plausible option among the potential Sino-Japanese readings because in Middle Chinese 畝 shared its final with characters which in Japanese were read with vowel /u/, such as 豆 and 頭.
- Among the proposed etymological theories, the one positing *namu* as the original form appears to be the most plausible, as

37 As for the verb *apu* in *ya... apazaramu*, this verb classically had inherent potentiality, as it carried the nuance of 'meeting by chance or opportunity', rather than 'intentionally meeting' as is mostly the case in modern Japanese.

it avoids speculative assumptions about morphology and aligns with the observation that negative rhetorical questions can yield optative nuances under specific conditions. The required conditions, observed through the comparison with *zaramu* are (a) the presence of a minimal (or possibly also maximal) particle; (b) the presence of bound *ya*, rather than of an interrogative pronoun. Nevertheless, two significant questions remain: (i) whether a negative rhetorical question can form in the absence of bound *ya*, and whether such absence can occur frequently enough to develop into a standardised expression; (ii) whether constraints of the poetic form or a process of semantic narrowing sufficiently explain the absence of first-person subjects in *namu* (and *nu ka*) phrases.

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