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The Chinese Scriptworld and World Literature

Guest-editor: Sowon S. Park

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Introduction: Transnational Scriptworlds

Sowon S. Park
Oxford University
sowon.park@ccc.ox.ac.uk

The Chinese Scriptworld and World Literature

This special issue brings into focus the "Chinese scriptworld," the cultural sphere inscribed and afforded by Chinese characters. Geographically, it stretches across China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, all of which use, or have used, Chinese characters with which to write. This region has long been classified in Western as well as East Asian scholarship as the East Asian Cultural Sphere, the Sinosphere, or the Sinographic sphere. But, to date, attention has been directed primarily towards language and literature with too little consideration of the fundamental role of the scripts that have done so much to shape both writing and reading throughout the region.

Proposing the Chinese scriptworld as a subject of literary analysis is not to suggest that it is linguistically or culturally monolithic. All the countries that make up this scriptworld have their own native language(s) quite distinct from the others - scriptworld is a many-layered overlapping complex of multiple linguistic, political and cultural systems. However, Chinese script provides a common intellectual edifice. For aspects of literacy and learning were historically shared and developed within the varied, yet constrained parameters of the common writing system.

Script is an issue that still remains virtually undebated in today's discussions of world literature, notwithstanding the vital diagnosis by David Damrosch in 2007 of "global scripts" as a term missing from world literary discourses (Damrosch 200). And despite the predominance in the twentieth century of thinking on how language relates to thought, the "linguistic turn" did not revolve sufficiently to cover the more specific question of how scripts organize, produce and circulate knowledge.

The cultural fields created by the Chinese writing system are particularly fertile ground from which to explore the relations between script and world literature. For the borders of "ideographic" Chinese have often been considered impenetrable by those in "phonetic" script cultures. Various differences between Chinese script and the Roman alphabet have led western thinkers as diverse as Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound, A.C. Graham, Chad Hansen, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and John Gray to assert, in different contexts, the effects produced on thought and culture by the different script systems. For example, it has been hypothesized that

the "ideographic" Chinese script shapes nominalist thought while the sound-based Roman alphabet renders the kind of abstract thinking that comprises western realist philosophy. Of the various proposals, the strongest expression is by the philosopher John Gray, who has gone so far as to state that: "Europe owes much of its murderous history to errors of thinking engendered by the alphabet." (Gray 58) Such culturalist observations on script have prompted many counter considerations and contestations, for example those by Zhang Longxi (1992) and Jing Tsu (2010) to name but two.

The essays collected in this issue bring some of the commentary and debates on writing systems to thinking about world literature in the twenty-first century, offering Chinese script as a distinctive agency not only within the East Asian literary world, but also in a broader field of world literature. By analyzing and demystifying the differences and the similarities between the Chinese scriptworld and the alphabetic world, it aims to provide a starting point for comparative studies between various scripts cultures across the world, as well as between scripts within the borders of the Chinese scriptworld. In doing so, this issue will broach the central concern: of what significance is script to world literature?

So what this issue does not present is a study of the origin and the development of Chinese writing within China, or East Asia, on which excellent and voluminous scholarship already exists. This issue is intended for scholars and students of world literature. By elucidating the validity of the Chinese scriptworld as an empirical and theoretical structure for articulating a region of world literary history, it offers a base for research into other script regions and to illuminate the opportunities that such inquiries bring to world literary discourses. This will allow us to move constructively beyond studies of literature drawn along national – indeed, nationalist – boundaries and on to forming practical, informed strategies for gauging the interrelations, translations and adaptations between and within scriptworlds.

"Speech-writing" and "Idea-writing"

Implicit in the long-standing theoretical and philosophical discussions about Chinese script is a distinction between "speech-writing" and "idea-writing," or between "phonetic" writing and "ideographic" writing. This distinction problematises the assumption that there is a natural fit between spoken language and the encoding of the sound of speech in a phonetic alphabet, that writing is "visible speech".[1]

[1] See John Defrancis, *Visible Speech* (1989). The idea that written language is a visual representation of speech can be traced at least as far back as the seventeenth century French poet and translator, Georges de Brebeuf's assertion ,'Writing – this ingenious art to paint words and speech for the eyes.'

For is writing always visible speech? To define all writing as "speech for the eyes" is not only limiting but actually untrue, concealing a number of assumptions under a layer of habituation. The literary conception of writing as visible speech only characterizes one feature of writing, which Derrida problematized as phonocentric in *Of Grammatology* (1967). By naturalizing the specific cultural conventions of alphabetic writing systems, whether that be Greek, Roman, or Cyrillic, we limit our perspective to just one end of the spectrum of written language instead of seeing the full range.

In recent years, the traditional classification of world literature drawn along national boundaries has been broadened by a more capacious language–based category, such as anglophone, francophone, lusophone, hispanophone, sinophone and others. But while these have successfully exposed the permeability of national boundaries, revealing the transnational interrelations that had gone neglected, the label that is "phone" tends to inhibit the development of another substantial foundation upon which to build a literary model of the world: script.

The conflation of speech and text has consequences most immediately and clearly when applied to translation, a key issue in world literature. Etymologically, translation is the "carrying across" of meaning from one language to another. This description does not take into account script as a factor in the practice of translation. And the "carrying across of meaning" from one written text to another gets mired in the incongruent mix of speech and text. What often results is a problem that is essentially phonocentric.

A Phonocentric Translation Problem over Which We Need Not Despair

So for example, in post-reformation Europe, there has been a strong preference for, and a continual development of, a literary style that is vocal. A written form of language that gives the effect of a speaking style has been a key standard from at least Romanticism onwards. From Wordsworth to Yeats, "natural words in their natural order" has been the peak that the writer must scale. But if the highest form of literature is that which captures the sound and the rhythm of spoken language, what exactly is the value of *Tintern Abbey* or *No Second Troy* when they are mapped onto different phoneme classifications which cannot in any satisfactory way mimic the sound or the rhythm of spoken English?

The inevitable loss of tone, rhythm and sound in the course of translation often leads many literary translators to despair and some straight to the conclusion of untranslatability – what has been called the "despair of translation." But the problem that the sound of speech cannot be carried over to another language is not so much the limit of translation as something inherent in the nature of writing systems. Even a most elaborate writing system, like the

International Phonetic alphabet, which has 107 letters as opposed to the English 26, is unable to accurately and exhaustively transcribe actual speech.

Speech sounds vary too widely for one thing, whether due to variations within a single phonological system or to dialect variation. As Saussure pointed out, the "same" phoneme pronounced twice or by two different people is not identical with itself. Its only identity is in its difference from all other phonemes. (Saussure 66). And English is now spoken in so many places, evolving in so many different directions, that even native speakers have trouble understanding each other. The phonemes of a Liverpudlian are quite unlike a Texan's. Glaswegians, Singaporeans and Calcuttans may not understand every word of each other"s sentences in real time but the written text of their speech will indicate little difference between them.

Great writing often sounds spoken to the ear but this isn't the same as sounding colloquial. Writing that sounds spoken does not actually reproduce the tone, pitch or sound of speech. It only creates an effect of doing so. What we call "voice" is produced by our culturally-acquired cognitive ability to convert letters into imaginary sound patterns. The iambic metre is purportedly as natural as a footstep, or as fundamental as a heart-beat. But this prosody is founded on exposure to written English, not only speech, and certainly not on gait or blood flow. Prosody is an art of creating an acoustic effect, not a transcription of actual sounds, speech or otherwise. In classical Sino-Korean, what would register as natural to the cognitive "ear" would be close to the trochee or even the dactyl. The most perfectly paced English prose may sound merely ponderous to an "ear" trained in a different linguistic environment.

What is invoked when prosody is variously expressed in terms of voice or ear or gait is the speaking subject. So it is easy to think that prosody is about being faithful to the actual speaker, the essence of whom must be carried over to the target language, the failure of which is an indicator of the untranslatability of the original utterance. What the models don't imply is that prosody is actually an acoustic effect produced in the brain by a switching of codes in the mind from vision to sound. The cognitive re-coding may feel natural but the process is anything but. Even when writing closely approximates speech, writing - and by extension, translations of writing – can exist autonomously as a distinct form of visual communication in and of itself, beyond its capacity to capture speech. Undue emphasis on sound negates a basic truth about writing, which is that there is always a gap between speech and text.

The Chinese Script

This gap is easier to see in Chinese script, or 漢字, *"Han* characters." The two characters that translate into the words "Chinese script" are pronounced *hanzi* in Mandarin Chinese, *kanji* in Japanese, *hanja* in Korean and *hántự* in Vietnamese. Though this two-character compound is pronounced differently according to the language of the speaker, its lexical content remains roughly constant across the linguistic borders.

For over a millennium, it was the norm in "sinoxenic" countries – that is to say, Korea, Japan and Vietnam – to speak in the vernacular but to write in Chinese script, as Chinese characters were the primary, and for centuries the only, written language used across the multilingual terrain that is China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Here reading is often so distant from speech that the gap has to be painstakingly bridged by acquired association.

Of course, written Chinese is not purely "ideographic." Chinese characters represent sounds as well as ideas at the same time. And when I refer to the literature of the Chinese scriptworld, I am not saying that Chinese characters were the only script used in China. Nomadic and semi-nomadic cultures within and nearby China have traditionally not adopted *hanzi*, using instead their own scripts like Manchurian, Tibetan, Mongolian and Uyghur. It was mainly some of the agricultural civilizations geographically surrounding China that adopted *hanzi* writing.

Today, even with the extremely complex and multidirectional evolution that *hanzi* has undergone over the course of thirty-five centuries, there are at least 808 Chinese characters commonly used in everyday life across China, Japan and South Korea and Taiwan, which were charted in 2014 by the Northeast Asia Trilateral Forum (see Tyson). The characters will sound differently in China, Korea and Japan, as well as within these countries. To an alphabetic reader, the variation in sound might be perplexing and thus reasonably ask: how can one write if not by transcribing the sound of speech? More pertinently, what relevance has script for theories of world literature and translation?

"Idea-writing"

Chinese writing was already a fully developed system in the seventeenth century BCE. In this region it became the universal script because it was an imperial script. It was the writing system of hegemonic China, adopted in colonial Vietnam from roughly 2100 years ago, in nearby Korea roughly a hundred years after that and then in more distant Japan approximately four hundred years thereafter.

To an alphabetic reader, the main difference about this writing system is that there is no general sound-to-letter law that governs it. Related to this feature, is the use of "logographs" (characters that represent words) and "ideographs" (characters that represent ideas). That is not to say that written Chinese only uses "logographs" and "ideographs". On the contrary, most Chinese characters are a combination of logographic, ideographic, phonetic, and other elements, so they indicate sound as well as meaning. Some characters are ideographic in terms of their formation, but no character is purely ideographic, that is to say, a character does not represent an idea without also being part of a lexical structure of meaning.

But if learning to read in the alphabetic system is acquiring the skill to map letters onto sounds, learning to read in Chinese is a process of learning to correlate not only the sound to the letter but the shape (形) of the character to the meaning (意) to the sound (音), forming a cognitive association of the three components of each sign.

So here are some basic examples. First there are Chinese characters that are visually self-evident pictograms (象形: imitating shape), like numbers: 一 (one), 二 (two), and 三 (three). There are the pictographic characters that may not immediately yield a clear meaning, for instance, the character, 田, for paddy field, the character, 女, for woman, the character, 子, for child and the character, 力, for power. But once it is pointed out that 田 is shaped like rice fields, that 女 is the outline of a female body, that 子 looks like the foetal position and that 力 is a simplified form of a plough, the visual signifier powerfully attaches itself to the signified.

In addition to the pictographic, some *hanzi* characters are ideographic abstractions of thought (指事: indicating event), some of which are fairly straightforward. Representative examples of these are characters that refer to space and time. So the character, 上, meaning "above/top" is indicated by the two strokes above the surface; the character, 下, meaning "below/bottom" is indicated by the two strokes below the surface; and the character, 中, meaning "middle/ centre," is denoted by a stroke through the middle of the object.

Another type is the compound character (會意). These often reverberate with the cultural assumptions of the time in which they were coined. So if one combines the character for paddy field, 田, with that for power, 力, the compound sign, 男, means "man," defining man as someone who has the power to plough the field. When we combine the character for woman, 女, with the character for child, 子, we produce the adjective, 好, meaning "good," reflecting the shared belief that a mother holding a child was simply beautiful, and therefore "good." Assemble together the character for woman, 女, with another woman, 女, and another woman,

女 then the assemblage of three women, 姦, swiftly transforms into other meanings, one of which is "adultery," the underbrush of the signified prickling with patriarchal prejudice.[2]

One might pause here to note that in this basic description of *hanzi*, the sounds of the characters were not mentioned. All the characters discussed above will be spoken differently in each of the four countries.[3] But because they are not tied to sound alone, they have been used to represent different spoken languages, albeit with enormous effort, as the history of writing in Vietnam, Korea and Japan demonstrate. What is relevant to world literary discussions is that Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese speakers have written in Chinese. Historically, *han* characters have crossed speech and political boundaries, hence the frequent and casual, labeling of them as "idea-writing" or "ideographic" writing.

As we have seen, the characters are ideographic not in the sense that there is a logical or an exclusive link between the signifier and the signified but in the sense that the signifier provides a visual cue, a mnemonic, for prompting the signified. Learning to read and write in Chinese characters is thus a different experience from alphabetic reading and writing. Literacy is a process of acquiring the recognition of several thousand visual units, one by one, as opposed to the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet. In premodern societies in East Asia, advanced literacy took at least a decade of solid memorization of the classics, which historically only a tiny minority ever achieved. Even basic literacy, roughly 3000 characters, was traditionally confined to the literati class, which was primarily comprised of the male elites.

Meanwhile, a parallel development has progressed throughout history across the Chinese scriptworld, to make the system more phonemic/phonological and more practical. So in Korea, there emerged *hangul* in the fifteenth century, a phonemic writing system, after a series of more conservative attempts to make Chinese more Korean friendly – known as *hyangchal*, *idu* and *gugyeol*. There emerged in Japan *kana* – *hiragana* and *katakana*, and in Vietnam, *Chữ Nôm*. In China itself, efforts to alphabetize and simplify Chinese go back to Matteo Ricci's Chinese–Portuguese dictionary in the sixteenth century, culminating in the major and successive linguistic reforms in the twentieth century.

Sketched out in this way, the history of the Chinese writing system might appear as an inevitable progress towards phonetic simplification. But this would be to present an unbalanced

[2] Most *han* characters have multiple meanings, many of which are regionally specific. For a detailed discussion of traditional pedagogy classified into six types of *han* characters or six writings (六書), see McDonald in this issue.

[3] Many *han* characters yield a range of pronunciations *within* a single language, depending on the context in which they are used. In addition, they are frequently spoken differently according to regional variation, most notably in China.

picture. While few would contest the benefits of making Chinese more accessible, it would be limiting to see phonetic writing as the end towards which all writing must evolve. Not only because the attributes of "ideographic" writing in Chinese are lost in that judgment but because one loses sight of the fact that alphabetic writing is not really completely phonetic either.

In English, for example, we can think of reading practices where we go straight from the written word to meaning without converting the letter into sound and then sound to meaning. There are plenty of words the definitions of which one could accurately give, words that one might even occasionally use in writing, without knowing how to pronounce them. Technical terms, unusual proper names, loan words and ancient Greek words are usually not converted to phonemes. We all read a great deal without necessarily knowing how the words are said. Plenty of very accomplished translators cannot speak the languages they write in. Reading and writing a language does not necessarily mean you can speak that language and of course the same is true the other way round.

English is also well-known for its poor grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Often in the case of irregular spelling, we find that it is to preserve the etymology of the word, that is to say, to preserve the visual unit of meaning in the word. So for example, the unit "col," meaning pillar, is preserved in colonel and column though they sound very different. The same goes for "san," meaning health, in sanity and insane. This is a kind of "idea-writing" albeit a very weak version.

Finally, there is the writtenness of text that cannot be converted into sound. The flexing of two fingers to mime quotes in conversation is the most obvious case in point. But there is also the impact of italicization and capitalization, the indentation and the paragraph, the colon and the semicolon, the period and the comma, the ellipsis and the dash, the line break and the *enjambment* – in short, all the typographical choices, the spacing and the structuring of text that produce meaning independently of speech.

This awareness that there is a directly visual route to meaning even in phonetic writing helps us see the importance of script in discussions of world literature. It encourages us to read with both the visual and the auditory processes in mind even when we read alphabetic writing. Translating well and reading well means paying attention to both aspects of writing, which may be more evident in Chinese but are not limited to it. In fact one should say that all writing systems are a mix of phonetic and non-phonetic elements and that there is no absolute distinction between the "ideographic" and the alphabetic. This is not to subsume writing under the overarching category of speech but to open up our reading to a more visually inclined prism and to pay attention to how writing encodes meaning in parallel with but separately from speech.

Seen this way, the inevitable loss of voice in translation can be seen not as evidence for untranslatability but a symptomatic juncture at which the phonocentric bias reveals itself and from which countless opportunities present themselves for the unearthing of textual meaning.

Literature, by Pater's injunction, aspires to the level of music. We are used to being guided by our ear when we write, to try and capture clear vocal cadences, to use our auditory imagination. But literature can also aspire to the level of the visual arts. We might also recognize the ways in which our writing and thought are organized spatially and through visual structure, interplay of patterns and sequence. Calligraphy can be as much help as prosody. By bringing into focus the extraordinarily creative ways in which we can and actually do encode and carry over linguistic meaning visually, we open up translation to all its possibilities.

The Chinese Scriptworld

No less significant is the flow of communication across the borders of spoken language, nationality and ethnicity that is made possible by script. The Chinese script recorded different languages in the sinoxenic cultures, as well as scores of different Sinitic languages, which in turn divide into scores of dialects and subdialects. The result is a shared scaffolding of concepts derived from canonical texts through which literacy was often acquired. The interconnections built through a common script – a "scriptworld" – are more robust than is usually recognized.

The ten essays in this volume explore the scaffolding that script provides, which complicate even as they clarify the thinking on the interrelations between writing, speech and thought. In "Scriptworlds Lost and Found," David Damrosch returns to his 2007 thesis that "writing systems profoundly shape the thought-world of those who employ them" (Damrosch 200). Excavating the history of the two and a half millennia of cuneiform writing and its rival relations with hieroglyphic and alphabetic writing, Damrosch discusses with reference to modern Vietnam and Korea how a change in the writing system impacts on the reading subject, creating a turmoil of subjectivities.

This sets the stage for Charles Lock's investigation into phonocentric distortions in western thought in "On Roman Letters and Other Stories: An Essay in Heterographics". Considering rock-carvings, cuneiform, numerals, punctuation, lettering and word-spacing, Lock delineates a counter-tradition of thinking about alphabetic writing, exposing the ways in which Roman script, despite being enrobed in an aura of natural speech, is often resistant to phoneticization and, in doing so, revealing the hegemonic dimensions and iconic value of script.

The alphabetic bias is picked up and examined in relation to translation practices by Judy Wakayabashi in "Script as a Factor in Translation". Illuminating under-theorized issues

that emerge in translation practice, ranging across graphological, bibliographic, textual, physical, orthographic, aesthetic, ideological and semiotic concerns, Wakayabashi analyses not only the issues that arise in translations between East Asian languages but points out those regions where, often for political reasons, a common spoken language is written in more than one script, such as the multiple written versions of Sanskrit, spoken Malay written in Arabic and Turkish, and the different writing systems that divide Serbian and Croatian, and Hindi and Urdu.

The immense complexity of the relations between spoken language and script is brought to bear on the historical reception of Chinese in western and Chinese scholarship in Edward McDonald's "The Chinese Scriptworld in the Chinese Scriptworld: Chinese Characters in Native and Borrowed Traditions." Taking us through the competing ideological and disciplinary claims that run through the reception of Chinese writing in western scholarship, he grounds the debates in a detailed linguistic discussion of the six key features of written Chinese, challenging some of the misconstruals and cultural projections and allowing us to move constructively beyond them for a developing dialogue between literary theorists, philosophers, linguists, archeologists and anthropologists.

The next two essays, by Karen Thornber and Andrea Bachner, draw deliberately on scripts that had minor status in relation to hegemonic Chinese. Thornber's "The Many Scripts of the Chinese Scriptworld, the Epic of King Gesar, and World Literature" considers the publication and translation history of the world's longest epic, the early Tibetan work, the *Epic of King Gesar*, and brings to the frame of the Chinese scriptworld the silenced orality and the overlooked minor scripts of the multilingual and multigraphic region that is East Asia. In parallel, Bachner's "Cultural Margins, Hybrid Scripts: Cultural Margins, Hybrid Scripts: Bigraphism and ranslation in Taiwanese Indigenous Writing" brings to the fore the dynamic between indigenous cultures and the dominant sinographic culture, by examining two recent texts by Taiwanese indigenous authors, Badai and Rahic Talif.

Bachner's question of whether the indigenous cultures appear as tokens of difference, quickly subsumed in and framed by hegemonic Chinese, is investigated through the prism of the history of writing in Korea by Lim in "From the Universal to the National: The Question of Language and Writing in Twentieth Century Korea." Locating Korea as the periphery to the literary centre that was China, Lim outlines how the writing system in Korea transitioned from classical into the vernacular, pointing to the larger cultural and political implications of this change.

Moving from Korea to Japan and taking the issue of transfers and exchanges between scripts into a broader domain is Matthew Chozick's "Eating Murasaki Shikibu: Scriptworlds, Reverse-Importation, and the Tale of Genji". *Genji* is often hailed as the world's earliest novel. But before translations of *Genji* appeared in English, Chozick reminds us, it had been out of print for nearly two centuries in Japan. He examines how the critical and popular negotiations involving scripts and translations contributed to its success.

Finally, John Duong Phan's essay "The 20th Century Secularization of Han Characters in Vietnam, and their Demotion from the Cosmological to the Aesthetic" charts the history of writing in Vietnam, where, by the early twentieth century, Chinese script was totally eliminated in favour of the alphabetized Vietnamese vernacular. By reflecting on the series of script reforms in the twentieth century, Phan illuminates the cultural and political role that script performs.

Scripts are embedded in their historical and cultural provenance. They manifest in material form the highly specific ways in which cultures record and produce experience. The aim of this special issue is to shed light on the extremely complex literary pattern that evolved within and against the constraints of Chinese script. It is hoped that the basic contours of the Chinese scriptworld help the tracing of a different "figure in the carpet" in the world literary map.

Acknolwedgements

Earlier versions of this introductory essay were given at two conferences, both in 2015: the *Prismatic Translation* conference in Oxford and the *Literary Transnationalism(s)* conference at University of Leuven. I am indebted to the organizers at the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation Centre and to Theo D'Haen. I also owe much to those from whom I received valuable criticism and feedback at various stages during the last two years while preparing this issue, not least to the editors of *JWL*, to my scriptworld authors, especially Ed McDonald, and to my OWRI colleagues. Ultimate responsibility for all ideas in this essay are mine.

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Scriptworlds Lost and Found

David Damrosch
Harvard University
ddamrosc@fas.harvard.edu

Abstract

When writing systems spread beyond their language of origin, they bring literacy to formerly oral cultures or intrude on or displace an existing system. The process of learning a new script often entails learning a good deal about the source culture and its literature, sometimes overwriting earlier local traditions, other times creatively stimulating them. This essay looks first at some of the literary consequences of the spread of cuneiform writing in relations to its hieroglyphic and alphabetic rivals in the ancient Near East, and then discusses the advance and later loss of Chinese script in Vietnam and Korea, in the examples of the foundational work of modern Vietnamese literature, Nguyen Du's *The Tale of Kieu*, and poems by the modern Korean poet Pak Tujin.

Keywords

Scriptworlds- writing systems- cuneiform- Sinosphere- Nguyen Du- Pak Tujin.

It was an archaeological map that first led me to think about the shaping force of writing systems on literary cultures. This was a map showing the various sites from which texts of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* have been recovered. *Gilgamesh* can fairly be called the first true work of world literature, as it circulated over many centuries far beyond its origins in southern Mesopotamia, and it is the earliest literary text known to have been translated into several languages. Portions of the epic have been found in Hittite and in Hurrian, and the Akkadian original itself is an expansive adaptation of an earlier Sumerian song cycle commissioned by King Shulgi of Ur (r. 2094-2047 BCE), the world's first known patron of literature. Gilgamesh appears, in fact, to have been the most popular literary hero of the ancient Near East; texts and related artifacts about him have been recovered so far from two dozen sites. These are located not only around Mesopotamia but eastward in the Elamite capital of Susa in what is now Iran, and as far away as the Hittite capital at Boghazköy in northern Anatolia and in the Canaanite stronghold of Megiddo, some fifty miles north of Jerusalem.

Looking at this map, I was struck me not only by the extent of the epic's circulation but also by its limits: this most famous Mesopotamian text was bounded by – and almost co-extensive with – the spread of cuneiform writing. Every text about Gilgamesh that we have, written in four different languages (Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, and Hurrian) over the course of a millennium and a half from around 2100-1200 BCE, is in cuneiform. The fragment found at Megiddo had reached roughly the farthest point of cuneiform's daily use south of the Syrian city-state of Ugarit, a major center of cuneiform writing. Despite the epic's immense popularity across several languages and many centuries, there is no evidence that it was ever translated into any non-cuneiform script until after its recovery in the nineteenth century. In this respect *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is typical of all literary texts written in cuneiform, which vanished in the late first millennium BCE, when people across the region became seduced by the ease of alphabetic writing and stopped inscribing wedge-shaped symbols on clay tablets. As the Assyriologist Andrew George has said, "the epic that we know died with the cuneiform writing system, along with the large portion of the scribal literature that was of no practical, scientific, or religious use in a world without cuneiform" (George, *Babylonian Epic* 1:70).

I'll begin by outlining some key features of cuneiform and its rivals, as this long-lost set of nested scripts can provide suggestive comparisons for subsequent developments in East Asia. During the two and a half millennia of cuneiform's reign, political and economic affairs could be conducted in cuneiform even beyond the regions where the script was truly at home. A large cache of cuneiform tablets dating from the fourteenth century BCE, found at Amarna in northern Egypt in the 1880s, shows that the pharaohs had scribes trained to read and write both in Akkadian and in Hittite, which was long used as a diplomatic language in the Levant. Yet no literary texts in cuneiform have been discovered at Amarna, and though several books of the Bible, such as Genesis and Job, show clear awareness of Babylonian literary predecessors, none contains any actual translation of a cuneiform text or passage. Throughout the ancient Near East, poems and prose narratives evidently circulated largely within the broader script system in which they were first composed. If this is so, it may be better to speak of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* as circulating around "the cuneiform scriptworld," rather than the smaller region of Mesopotamia or the larger territory of the ancient Near East.

The Near East contained three principal literary systems, each based in a different script or family of scripts. Nearly as old as cuneiform writing were the elaborate Egyptian hieroglyphs, little used outside Egypt, and several societies along the eastern Mediterranean coast used variations of a West Semitic alphabetic system, principally comprising Hebrew, Aramaic,

alphabetic Ugaritic, and Phoenician.[1] The separations between these groups weren't watertight; scribes were often competent in more than one system, and the hieroglyphic and cuneiform systems themselves were markedly phonetic. Cuneiform had a syllabic base (with some signs used instead as logographs, for their sense rather than their sound), and the Egyptians early on began to use some two dozen hieroglyphics purely for their phonetic value (a foot standing for "b," a hand for "d," a feather for "y"). A typical word in Egyptian is written with three signs expressing the word's triliteral base, followed by one or two ideographs indicating the category of objects to which the word belongs (a sun for words having to do with time, a little person in an appropriate pose for an occupation or emotion). In their mixture of phonetic and pictographic elements, cuneiform and hieroglyphics are comparable to the Chinese script, with its substantial phonetic dimension even amid its tens of thousands of characters. The West Semitic alphabetic systems actually derived from cursive forms of the phonetic hieroglyphs, and in Ugarit a purely alphabetic version of cuneiform was sometimes employed. Yet a reader trained only in the two dozen signs of alphabetic cuneiform would have no way at all to read the six hundred signs of syllabic cuneiform, the standard script used for Sumerian and Akkadian literature.

Conversely, though, as *Gilgamesh*'s impressive distribution shows, a widespread writing system could open up boundaries of other sorts, easing a work's entry into new regions and new languages. A script also has subtle but far-reaching effects on what is written to begin with. It is no coincidence that several of the recovered fragments of *Gilgamesh* were selections in school texts used for practicing cuneiform. The poem had everything a teacher could wish: sex, death, adventure, and good vocab.

The corpus of Sumerian poetry was preserved for a millennium after no one still spoke the language, because Sumerian was the origin of the cuneiform script used for the dominant (and linguistically unrelated) language of Akkadian. Akkadian words often contained characters that needed to be read for their Sumerian sound value and meaning rather than for their Akkadian values. Mastering this bilingual but monoscriptural system was an arduous

[1] Linguists often speak of the West Semitic alphabets as "abjads," considering them as not yet full alphabets, since these scripts recorded consonants and semi-vowels (y and w) but not full vowels. I prefer to regard them as true alphabets, as the nineteenth-century linguists who credited the Phoenicians and the Greeks with inventing the first "true" alphabets were all too interested in separating Classical – or even Aryan – culture from the unenlightened Semites. The Greek letters alpha and beta, the root of our term "alphabet," correspond directly to the Hebrew and Arabic aleph/alif and beth/bet at the head of their respective word-lists, and while the aleph and alif can carry a range of vowels, this is only a difference of degree from the variability of the signs "a," "o," and "u," which in many languages can exchange their phonetic value depending on placement, stress, dialect, and the vagaries of etymology.

process. Employing a reverse psychology that a modern teacher can admire, one Babylonian school text had students practice with a text that comically staged their own complaints:

> The door monitor said, "Why did you go out without my say-so?" and he beat me.
> The water-monitor said, "Why did you help yourself to water without my say-so?" and he beat me.
> The Sumerian monitor said, "You spoke in Akkadian!" and he beat me.
> My teacher said, "Your handwriting is not at all good!" and *he* beat me.
> (George, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, xviii)

Those scribes who had survived the long apprenticeship in writing possessed a rare and prestigious knowledge, and these adepts seem to have taken little interest in the literatures of the smaller and poorer societies that employed alphabetic scripts. The very simplicity of the alphabetic scripts, the basis of their eventual victory over cuneiform and hieroglyphics alike, probably seemed to the cultivated Egyptian or Babylonian scribe to be a mark of lesser refinement and weaker expressive power. As with Chinese script, this power was visual as well as verbal. As early as Egypt's Fifth Dynasty in the early third millennium, hieroglyphs were being carved and painted on temples, tombs, and palaces in exquisite detail, down to the wrinkled feet of a little chick whose every feather could be lovingly highlighted, even though the chick simply stood for "w." More abstracted from their originally pictographic forms, the Sumerian/Akkadian signs were still used to great visual effect, with many styles of presentation and often running right across the bodies of kings and gods on relief carvings.[2]

These elaborate scripts enjoyed more than literary and artistic prestige. Not unlike Latin and classical Chinese, they had political value as elite writing systems, only available to people of substantial education and social standing, their complexity shielding messages from commoners' eyes. When a provincial governor wrote to Assyria's Sargon II in 710 BCE, asking if he could use the more convenient Aramaic instead of Akkadian, Sargon sharply reproved him: "[As to what you wrote]: . . . 'if it is acceptable to the king, let me write and send my messages to the king on Aramaic parchment sheets' – why would you not write and send me

[2] It may be an oversimplification to speak of cuneiform as "a" script at all, as the system was never standardized. Different cities, and even particular scribal schools or families within a city, could have markedly different styles, the graphic equivalent of a local dialect; deciphering an unfamiliar style must often have been difficult for readers then as now. Carved hieroglyphics would be much easier going, but scribes in different Egyptian cities had very different styles for writing in the abbreviated cursive known as "hieratic."

messages in Akkadian? Really, your message must be drawn up in this very manner – this is a fixed regulation!" (Dietrich 5).

As Sargon's letter shows, scripts developed in tandem with the materials on which they were typically inscribed. Papyrus was plentiful in Egypt but rare elsewhere; the hieroglyphs fluently written with a brush on papyrus couldn't readily be inscribed on clay, the ubiquitous medium in Mesopotamia. Clay was easily formed into unbaked tablets, small or large, on which a reed stylus could quickly inscribe cuneiform signs. Cuneiform may look daunting today, but Mesopotamian and Hittite scribes were massively productive (libraries could contain tens of thousands of tablets), and literacy extended beyond court and temple circles to include merchants. Women as well as men might learn to write, with wives managing business at home and exchanging letters with their husbands on the road. A major court or temple library could contain tens of thousands of documents, and Mesopotamian scribes lived to write memos. No occurrence at court was too minor to record, as we see from the extensive documents recovered from the archives of Assyria's kings Esarhaddon and his son Ashurbanipal, who reigned in the seventh century BCE: "To my lord the king . . . . Idri-aha'u came and brought the shoes in the evening of the 16th" (Luukko and Van Buylaere 124). Almost anything could provoke a dispute between rival bureaucrats, and the rivals regularly appealed to the king. When a new shipment of wine arrived at a time when the wine cellars were already full, the wine steward wrote that the king should command "that storage rooms be shown to us, so that we may proceed. There is much wine for the king – where should we put it?" (102).

Babylonian scribes in the second millennium freely translated back and forth between Sumerian and Akkadian, and as Akkadian became the lingua franca across the Fertile Crescent, scribes throughout the region developed multilingual abilities based in a single script. They might also employ Aramaic on parchment as a kind of shorthand for everyday purposes, but serious writing was expected to be done in cuneiform, on tablets that could be preserved indefinitely if baked. The scribal culture that was grounded in cuneiform created a strong bond across societies like the Babylonian, Assyrian, and Hittite empires, whose leaders were often at each others' throats. As a result, even when Mesopotamia and the broader Fertile Crescent were politically fragmented under various competing regimes, it is appropriate to speak in literary terms of a single "cuneiform scriptworld."[3]

[3] On the development and uses of cuneiform, see Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, and Clarisse Herrenschmidt, *Les Trois écritures*.

The early case of cuneiform shows a pattern that can be found in the spread of the Chinese writing system and other very successful scripts since then: a hegemonic script can far outrun the boundaries of its homeland. Once adopted in satellite or peripheral areas, a dominant script often functions in two quite different ways at once, both suppressing local traditions and yet often also stimulating them in new ways. The introduction of literacy, or simply the adoption of a more practical or prestigious technology for writing, brings in foreign texts and traditions that may override the indigenous tradition. Yet it can also become a powerful force for cultural cohesion in its adopted territory, giving a common literary culture to groups who formerly had differing scripts or none at all. When they were forced to adopt the Roman alphabet in colonial New Spain, the Mexica, Zapotecs, and Maya gained a common writing system far easier to learn and employ than their incompatible hieroglyphic systems. They could more readily learn and read each others' languages, and over time, literacy could spread far beyond the elite circles that had formerly mastered the old glyphs. In northern Europe, runes had been developed in angular forms suitable for carving on branches or grainy boards, but weren't thought of as a vehicle for extended literary composition. When the Roman alphabet and the attendant use of parchment spread northward toward the end of the first millennium CE, Scandinavian and British writers realized the advantages of preserving formerly oral tales and poems in writing – a discovery that stimulated new compositions in runes in the ninth and tenth centuries before the Roman alphabet definitively won out.

As the essays in this issue show, Chinese literrary compositions had an enormous influence on writers beyond China's own borders, an influence increased by their ability to revocalize the Chinese characters to suit their own languages. Thus Japanese literati developed elaborate diacritical marks to indicate preferred readings of Chinese characters, enabling them in effect to transpose Chinese texts into Japanese without having to translate them, as would have been necessary with a more purely phonetic system (Denecke, chapter 1). Around East Asia, the Chinese characters were adapted to local uses, and Japanese or Korean or Vietnamese literati could choose to write either classical Chinese or their own vernacular in their modified or mixed scripts. Even these localized versions of writing retained a strong awareness of connection to culture of classical Chinese.

As an example, consider "A Record of the Bamboo in the Bamboo Arbor of the Wŏltŭng Monastery," a prose text written in Chinese by a Korean monk named Sigyŏngam (c. 1270-1350). In this text, Sigyŏngam's teacher is contemplating a bamboo grove on a hillside, and he asks his disciples to describe the qualities of bamboo. One praises its usefulness, one praises its

beauty, one its delicious taste, one its ability to endure in all kinds of weather. Finally Sigyŏngam speaks up, opting for a more spiritual meaning:

> Sigyŏngam said, "If I love the bamboo for its flavor, its usefulness, elegance, and integrity, all I get is externals, not its essence. When I look at the grace and height of a shoot since its sprouting, I realize how the embedded seed, once awakened, makes sudden progress. I look at it growing tougher as it ages, and I understand how cultivated power increases gradually. Its hollowness indicates that nature is empty. From its upright appearance, it is possible to deduce the true form of things. . . . My love of the bamboo stems not from what the four gentlemen have said, but from my own observations.
>
> The master remarked, "How profound! You are indeed a devoted friend of the bamboo."
>
> I hasten to write these remarks down on the board as a model for future lovers of bamboo. (Lee 55)

In hastening to write down his observation, Sigyŏngam illustrates the interplay between the local and the regional within the broad sinographic world. He stresses that he is reporting the fruits of his own direct observation, but the entire dialogue is composed within the tradition of Chinese philosophical discourses that came to Korea in the wake of Buddhism, with the master pleased by his most perceptive follower's reply. Sigyŏngam's "own observations" embody Buddhist ideas of emptiness, enlightenment, and the power of discernment of the true nature of things beneath the surface, which he can make his own by the combination of his personal experience and his ability to record this experience in the Chinese language and script. Further, this dialogue may have a material as well as a cultural basis. At the time he was writing in the early fourteenth century, a period of drought in northern China was limiting the growth of bamboo, which continued to flourish in Korea, and there may be an element of local pride in Korea's ability to produce this essential plant, used for the brushes employed by painters and poets alike; he then writes his text on a home-grown.[4]

In East Asia as elsewhere, the imported literary tradition could become a resource for the creation of a newly independent national literature. This possibility is exemplified by the foundational work of modern Vietnamese literature, Nguyen Du's *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* (斷腸新聲, "A New Cry From a Broken Heart"), usually called *Truyện Kiều* (傳翹,, or ***The***

[4] I owe the observation on the drought in China and the flourishing of Korean bamboo at this time to discussion following a presentation to the Research Institute for Korean Studies at Korea University in August 2010.

Tale of Kieu (c. 1810), a verse adaptation of a seventeenth-century Ming Dynasty novel, *Jin Yun Qiao* (金雲翹), written in classical Chinese by a writer using the pen name Qingxin Cairen (青心才人, Pure-hearted Man of Talent). In creating his verse narrative, Nguyen Du made far-reaching changes to his source. He wrote *The Tale of Kieu* not in Chinese but in Vietnamese, using Chữ Nôm, the Vietnamese script derived from the Chinese script, and he employed a local oral form known as the *lục bát* or "six-eight," with couplets of six syllables in the first line and eight in the second. Nguyen Du's ambitious reframing of his Chinese source text was part of a general movement by the writers of his era to create a literature of their own by refashioning the Chinese literary heritage in which they had been trained. As John Balaban has noted,

> While concurring on the prestige of Chinese writing, Vietnamese literati were intent on establishing the independence of Vietnamese writing, even as they accepted models from the full range of Chinese literary forms, especially the "regulated verse" form, or *lüshi*, of the Tang dynasty. . . . The form reached aesthetic heights in Vietnamese hands in the 19th century, with poets such as the concubine Ho Xuan Huong, who composed regulated verse poems that were complete double entendres, filled with tonal puns (*noi lai*). Still others created regulated verse palindromes that would be in Vietnamese from start to finish but then, going backward, ideogram by ideogram, became poems in Chinese, switching languages on the reversal (Balaban).

As an adaptive transformation of a Chinese novel, written in Chữ Nôm, *The Tale of Kieu* is a major document from the Chinese scriptworld – though it has been little discussed by scholars in China, who (if they know of it at all) mostly consider it as a mere translation of a minor work of Chinese fiction.[5] Yet Nguyen Du turned the story to dramatically new uses for himself and his culture. In his hands, the tale reflects Vietnam's long struggle for independence from China and also the new reality of the growing influence of the French, who had provided support to overthrow the Le Dynasty in Vietnam not long before Nguyen Du began his poem. Having worked as an official in the older dynasty, Nguyen Du had reluctantly begun working for its successor, the Nguyen Dynasty (no relation to Nguyen Du himself), evidently concluding that lingering loyalty to the deposed dynasty would not help rescue the country from chaos.

In retelling the story of Kieu, Nguyen Du not only adapted a novel from Chinese prose into Vietnamese verse, but he translated his own experiences into hers. Kieu's romantic

[5] I thank Professor Nam Nguyen of Ho Chi Minh City University for this information.

struggles implicitly reflect his own political turmoil; she has to sell herself into prostitution to redeem her family from gambling debts, then she has a series of misadventures and love affairs before finally becoming reunited with her first love. The political dimension is made explicit when Kieu advises one of her lovers, a rebel warlord, to submit to the Emperor, an accommodation that she hopes will brie g some stability to her own life as well as that of her lover:

> "A fern that floats on water," she now thought,
> "I've wandered long enough, endured enough.
> Let's swear allegiance to the Emperor's throne –
> We'll travel far up fortune's royal road.
> Public and private ends will both be met. (274)

Kieu is tragically mistaken, however, as the Emperor's seeming overture of peace and reconciliation is in reality a fatal trap for her lover.

Even as he shapes Kieu's story to reflect his own circumstances, Nguyen Du makes clear his deep connection to the Chinese tradition throughout the novel. It is interesting that as a male poet on the periphery of the Sinophone world, Nguyen Du more than once identified himself with female Chinese artists. Not only is the fictional Kieu an accomplished poet, calligrapher, and lutenist; Nguyen Du also identified with an actual woman poet, Hsiao-Ching, a seventeenth-century poet who was forced to become a concubine to a man whose jealous primary wife burned almost all of her poems. In a poem called "Reading Hsiao-Ching," Nguyen Du reflects on her fate, and his own:

> West Lake flower garden: a desert, now.
> Alone, at the window, I read through old pages.
> A smudge of rouge, a scent of perfume, but
> I still weep.
> Is there a fate for books?
> Why mourn for a half-burned poem?
> There is nothing, there is no one to question,
> and yet this misery feels like my own.
> Ah, in another three hundred years
> will anyone weep, remembering my fate?
> (Nguyen 252)

Nguyen Du's identification with a great female predecessor is mirrored in the opening scene of *The Tale of Kieu* itself, in which Kieu goes to visit the shrine of a famous lutenist, Dam Tien, who had died shortly before her message to a suitor (interestinbgly, someone who had come "from overseas" to woo her, 254). Feeling a kindred spirit in Dam Tien, Kieu pulls out a hairpin and engraved "four lines of stop-short verse" (a Vietnamese folk form) on a tree beside her predecessor's tomb (255). Miraculously, this act of poetic piety causes Dam Tien to manifest herself, and to write an answering poem of her own:

> A poet's feelings, rife with anguish, flowed:
> She carved an old-style poem on the tree. (256)

Still fully within the Chinese scriptworld in the early nineteenth century, Nguyen Du is keenly aware of the ancient authority of the imperial center of "the Middle Kingdom" and the novelty of his poetic enterprise.

In a key scene in the novel, Kieu's poetic ability saves her before a judge who is about to condemn her to be returned to the brothel where she's been forced to work. Her lover pleased that "though just a lowly woman," she is skilled both as an artist and as a poet.

> "But she must be perfection!" laughed the judge.
> "Well, write a piece, The Cangue, and strut your art."
> The girl complied – she raised the brush and wrote,
> Then laid the sheets if paper on his desk.
> "It tops the height of T'ang!" he cried in praise. (267)

The act of writing is here emphasized if anything more than the content being written.

While *The Tale of Kieu* broadly follows the outlines of its Chinese source, Nguyen Du elevated Kieu to be his central character, over her warlord lover who dominates the Chinese novel, and he significantly changed the story's ending, having Kieu finally renounce her still loyal first love, Kim. She persuades him to marry her sister, so that she can live with them as a Buddhist nun, free from romantic attachments – a notable departure from the reunion and marriage with which the Chinese novel ends. Throughout the poem, Nguyen Du emphasizes Kieu's exceptional physical charms along with her artistic ability, often comparing her to a blossoming flower, but these images are given a Buddhist emphasis on transience and renunciation rather than on erotic fulfillment: flowers bloom but then fade, bees invade their innermost recesses, reeds are flattened by the north wind, bamboos split and tiles slip from roofs.

A founder of vernacular Vietnamese poetry written in Chữ Nôm, Nguyen Du was also a devotee of the classical Chinese canon that he evokes on every page. Yet in making Kieu an emblem for an oppressed people, he envisions a country very different from imperial China – or from Napoleonic France, with their quest for economic gain and political dominance. Nguyen Du is at once a proud member of the "Sinitic cosmopolis" and an innovator in Vietnamese verse, a poet of passion and of renunciation, political engagement and withdrawal, his creative innovation fuelled by the interfusion of foreign and local traditions.

A century later, during the period of anticolonial struggle against the French, *The Tale of Kieu* was transliterated from Chữ Nôm into the newly dominant alphabetic script, chữ Quốc ngữ ("National language script"). Though this script had been developed in the sixteenth century by Jesuit missionaries for purposes of conversion (see Phan in this issue), it gained little purchase before the early twentieth century, when it came to be embraced by anticolonial intellectuals as helping them to reach the masses and promote political action against the very foreigners who had introduced the alphabet, and by 1930 it was the sole script in general use. Resding *The Tale of Kieu* in the new transliteration, the activist poets of mid-century Vietnam looked back to Nguyen Du as an inspiring figure in the struggle for Vietnamese independence from foreign control. A good expression of this view is "Thoughts on Nguyen," by Che Lan Vien (1920-1989), who was active in the struggle for independence from Japanese rule in the 1940s and then became a leader in the leftist Vietnamese Writer's Association:

> Born into those foul times of dusk and dust,
> you reached and touched no soul mate by your side.
> Your sorrow matched the fate of humankind:
> Kieu spoke your thoughts and crystallized your life.
> Kings rose and fell – the poem still abides.
> You fought and won your feats on waves of words.
> You planted stakes in the Bach-dang of time:
> our language and the moon forever shine.

Che Lan Vien here associates Nguyen Du with the great commanders Ngô Quyền and Trần Hưng Đạo, who in 938 and 1288, respectively, had planted stakes in northern Vietnam's tidal Bach Dang River to impale invading Chinese ships and preserve their country's independence. Proud though he is of his poetic ancestor's accomplishment, Che Lan Vien isn't so happy with Nguyen Du's choice of a Chinese source for his work. He goes on to ask:

> Why borrow foreign scenes? Our land flows not

with one Ch'ien'-t'ang but many fateful streams.
Why split yourself? Nguyen Du, To Nhu, Thanh Hien:
the tears in Kieu merge all three into one.

Need we one century more to feel for Nguyen?
Mourning our nightfalls, we soon grieve for his.
We love kings's calls to arms, yet we shall not
forget those frost-white reeds along Kieu's road.
(Che Lan Vien 282)

As a committed nationalist, Che Lan Vien would have preferred for the foundational work of modern Vietnamese literature to have used local traditions rather than a foreign source at all. Recalling the several pen names that Nguyen Du used (partly to avoid censorship), Che Lan Vien suggests that his predecessor unduly "split himself" between Chinese and Vietnamese traditions.

Nguyen Du himself would never have experienced his writing as such a "splitting," since Vietnamese literati of his era proudly considered literary Chinese as part of their own heritage. Even though he was writing in Vietnamese and using a local verse form, he was still very much a part of the Chinese scriptworld, both in terms of the script itself and of the educational system that conveyed so much cultural knowledge together with literacy. But Che Lan Vien, writing – and reading *The Tale of Kieu* itself – in Quốc ngữ rather than the abandoned Sinitic Chữ Nôm, understands the poem as an act of resistance to the very culture from which it took its literary model.

Comparable struggles over identity and cultural memory occurred in Korea as a rising nationalism led to a substantial (though never total) shift away from the Chinese scriptworld. The alphabetic Korean script commissioned by King Sejong in the 1440s didn't displace Chinese script for many years. For centuries, Korean writers such as Sigyŏngam continued to think of themselves as part of the Chinese scriptworld, but by the 1920s the ability to read the classical Chinese script was becoming a thing of the past for all but a few Korean intellectuals. As most surviving premodern Korean literature is written in Chinese characters, this change made the majority of earlier texts by Korean writers unreadable to their successors, a loss paralleling that entailed in what Geoffrey Kewis (1999) as well described as the "catastrophic success" of the Kemalist language reform in Turkey during the same period. A vivid expression of the sense of foreignness of writing in Chinese script can be seen in a poem by Pak Tujin (1916-1998), entitled "Book of Poems":

A book of poems lay open
white on the sand before the blue sea.
Wind turned the pages,
ruffling them one by one.
The warm words in the book had etched within them
a sad and beautiful heart.
Those printed words became birds, began to fly.
One, then another,
a hundred, a thousand,
higher, higher, glimmering, drawn into the sky
white poems of birds, birds of poems.
Flower petals fell trembling from the sky.
Those birds that had recited poems in the sky
forgetting, unable to speak the verse they knew
became flowers falling above the sea.
Then they became stars in the far distant sky.
Those birds that had recited poems in the sky
the world's sad and beautiful poems,
recited the poems in the book so brightly
they twinkled now, stars in the world of stars.
(McCann 128)

A hegemonic script creates a scriptworld during the centuries of its use, and it can linger in memory even if a new script comes to take its place, as the Ottoman script continued to do for Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Orhan Pamuk, and other modern Turkish writers (see Ertürk, *Grammatology*), or Hebrew script for assimilated Jewish-American writers, as Hana Wirth-Nesher has shown in *Call It English*. As Proust remarks near the end of the *Recherche du temps perdu*, the true paradises are those that we've lost. Though Pak Tujin was a leader in the struggle for Korea's independence and its cultural integrity during the period of Japanese occupation, several of his poems voice his concern for the loss of cultural memory following the eclipse of Chinese in favor of the Hangul script. His poem "Inscription Etched by Water" can provide a closing image of the persisting power of the Chinese scriptworld, even for a poet who can no longer read the script:

One stroke at a time, now and then in spare moments

retracing the strokes with water
during ten times a hundred thousand years
I wrote
one word.
After a time, later again
quietly searching out the place, then
my hand's touch exploring gently,
retracing each of the strokes,
after passing yet again ten times a hundred thousand years,
I wrote one word.
In the etched form of each stroke gleamed
a gorgeous rainbow,
in the sun's rays lighting the water
a rainbow of the currents.
There were the times once when I listened,
inclined my ear to the messages, but
having heard
then afterward, and afterward
recorded the inner sense of those words,
now I find that
after carving a few ancient characters
year upon year, for too long,
I have completely forgotten
what words I wrote.
(McCann 126-27)

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On Roman Letters and Other Stories: An Essay in Heterographics

Charles Lock
Copenhagen University
lock@hum.ku.dk

Abstract

This essay questions the assumption that the roman alphabet is more purely phonetic than any other, and that other scripts and writing-systems are less efficient, whether for the production of texts or for their comprehension. Those who habitually use roman letters are asked to consider their competence to understand other writing systems. The work of Stanley Morison emphasizes the ideological significance of alphabets and of particular-letter forms. M. B. Parkes and Paul B. Saenger are cited to indicate how punctuation and spacing are aspects of the roman-letter writing system that cannot be treated as purely phonetic. Beyond the world of roman letters there is a focus on Syriac and the Xi'an stele, which was printed by Athanasius Kircher in 1667 and marks the first publication in the west of a text in Chinese.

Keywords

Heterographics- roman alphabet- writing systems- Stanley Morison- Syriac- Xi'an stele- punctuation

Humans, characters, move, taking with them not only their languages but also their writing systems. The crisis of refugees that confronts Europe today may be figured "literally" in terms of scripts: for the Roman alphabet is universal throughout the nations of the European Union (excepting Greece and Bulgaria), yet some of those seeking a new life in Europe are not only other-tongued; they may also be other-lettered. When two writing systems meet, each ought to recognize the limitations not only of the other but, more challengingly, of its own. Such is the heterographic (Lock "Heterographics").

The principle of order and sequence is enshrined in the very word "alphabet", from the sequence of the names (in Greek, from Hebrew) of its first two characters: the alphabet enforces sequence as rigorously as numbers do (Sampson 109). Thus an alien "alphabet" holds a threat rather more serious than does a foreign tongue. A different writing system poses a fundamental

alternative to the very idea of alphabetical order and sequence that—often enforced by rhyme—is instilled in every "roman" child.

A graphic system that we lack competence to read can hardly be identified as an alphabet, or even as a writing system. For what are the markers that, for the uninformed, might distinguish the graphic from the decorative? If we do not even know the direction that reading should follow, a script cannot be distinguished from ornament, as in a scroll or frieze that only the informed can read, though all can admire. The difference here exposed by ignorance is one that tests all our attempts to understand and define writing.

There are many "purely phonetic" writing systems, but by far the most familiar, globally, is the roman. Western scholarship on writing-systems and scripts tends to take roman for granted, and then to describe other systems—notably Chinese and Japanese—in iconic terms, using such composite words as pictogram, ideogram, hieroglyph. Each of these words draws attention to a property of written signs that cannot be reduced to the phonetic.

The prestige of the roman alphabet is such as to render other writing-systems, to its "native readers", eccentric and, in many accounts, inferior; what remains visible, what is not subsumed in voice, belongs to a mode of writing that, still bound by material and the iconic, has not yet attained to the purely conceptual. However, readers of roman may see rather more than they acknowledge; this, the iconic repressed, makes the Roman alphabet a writing-system like any other.

The triumph of the West can be construed as the triumph of roman lettering: Rome's empire declined and fell, but its successor-states retain its alphabet. In this respect at least, Horace's line rings hollow: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit* (Horace, *Epistles* II i 156). Captive Greece captured its wild conqueror in all sorts of ways, but not at the level of script, even though it would be many centuries before Greek script was thoroughly subjugated. "Roman" is a late appellation, dating from the Renaissance, prompted by the new concern with scripts brought about by printing, and motivated by the realization that, exceptionally, this alphabet is used by other languages than Latin.

"Roman" as a modifier in these contexts indicates what in English is often called "Romanesque" or, of languages, "romance" or "romanic": Roman as "Romanesque" signifies a decline into a derivative mode, epitomized in 800 by Charlemagne's "Roman Empire"—though not modified as "Holy" until 1157. It was only in 1535 that the word "Roman" was used to modify "Catholic"; such a contradictory and belittling nomination was Calvin's. The term "Roman Catholic" thus emerged after "*lettre rommaine*" (*sic*), first attested in 1528. (OED sv. "Roman" *adj. 1*, etymology).

The Eternal Letter, published in 2014, celebrates "Two Millennia of the Classical Roman Capital". Though its editor, Paul Shaw, argues that the Roman capital was established canonically with Trajan's Column in the year 14 CE, he has trouble explaining the breaks in continuity between the collapse of Rome and the brief Carolingian revival of the lettering, and then between c. 800 and the Renaissance. The accepted date of the revival is 795, when Charlemagne commissioned the epitaph for Pope Hadrian I in St Peter's; the epitaph's significance was recognized in the sixteenth century by its conspicuous preservation. Bernini's St Peter's bears within it—displayed as an anachronism, a "literal" relic—the inscription of Hadrian's epitaph made seven hundred years before: the lettering chosen by the first (Holy) Roman Emperor thus appears to span the ages from Classical Rome to the neo-Classicism of a Christian Basilica.

Shaw acknowledges that "the earliest examples of "ancient" Roman capitals' in Florentine humanist lettering "were actually Romanesque in origin" rather than classical (Shaw 2-3) while overlooking the lacunae in the lettering's history. That it was largely unused for four hundred years before c. 800, and was then redundant for a further seven centuries, must not spoil the celebration of its success over "two millennia". Yet throughout that period its prominence is evident for at most, in total, one thousand years.

For Shaw's the failure of the Carolingian reforms, at least in lettering, is because "Charlemagne's heirs lacked both his political skills and his passion for the ancient world". (Shaw 2) Such an account ignores entirely the heterographic argument put forward in 1957 by Stanley Morison: that the roman-lettered world of western Christendom accommodated itself to the more powerful Greek-scripted world of Byzantium.

For the commemorating of Christian martyrs, Damasus, Pope in Rome from 366 to 384, had ordered a new script to replace the Roman lettering associated with their persecutors: the lettering of the Church ought to differ from that of the pagan Empire (Morison 93). Damasian script, adopted by the Church throughout the West, weakened the authority of Roman capitals, and led to the devising of an alphabet designed to be "effective in the service of a Greek-speaking population dominated by a Latin-speaking administration" (Morison 102).

This is a case of letters being designed to "look like" other letters, and for two reasons. First, a Latin alphabet that does not look Classical begins to look distinctively Christian, as uncials still do. Second, a Latin alphabet intended for Byzantine readers must assimilate its letter-forms to those of the Greek alphabet. Damasian script was designed to mediate between Greek and Latin. The letters might be phonetic, but their overall type or set would be visually

distinct, iconic in the sense not of a letter resembling an object, but of one letter-form resembling another.

Thus features of form, design and layout can be exploited to indicate political and ideological allegiances:

> The design of the letters was evidently formed after careful consideration…. The script [was] devised within two generations of Constantine's proclamation of Byzantium as his new capital…. It is not surprising that the lettering devised to eulogize the martyrs who had perished only fifty years before Damasus was born [c. 305] should be in contrast with the persecutors (Morison 93).

The eventual consequence of Damasus's innovation was Uncial or what Morison terms "Graeco-Latin script", legible whether one's native letters are Greek or Roman.

Although Gregory the Great (590-604) reverted to Classical or "Square Latin" inscriptions, the revival of this lettering hardly extended outside the city of Rome: the "principal scriptoria in the Western patriarchate are to be found … using Greek symbols, ligatures or conventions." (Morison 126) Such lettering, devised for "theological comprehensiveness," must not be thought merely a decorative or provincial variant of roman script. These are roman letters heterographically designed for the benefit of Greek readers.

This conciliatory script became over time standard for titles, headings and inscriptions—display contexts—while continuous text reverted largely to roman. Thus, perhaps, the Greek-speaking population could read the headlines while Byzantium's Latin-speaking administrators could also read the fine print.

Much about scripts must remain speculative, given that so little evidence survives from before the ninth century. Most of what we have from the ancient world, in Latin or Greek, is copied from the ninth century onwards, and what copyists very seldom do is to respect the exact form of the letters. No more would a scholar today, in citing a passage from Shaw or Morison, set the word-processor's font to accord with that in which the passage had been set in print. Quotations are permitted in other scripts (Greek, Chinese), though almost never (unless by way of illustration) in a variant font of the one (roman) script. There are clearly demarcated conditions in which *italic* is required, but otherwise the look of the page, the homogeneity of the lettered text, takes precedence over any scholarly request for a diversity of fonts.

Accuracy is reckoned a virtue in scholarship; we strive for a precise transcribing of words and punctuation. However, palaeographers apart, we are not expected accurately to reproduce either the typography or the hand. Editing might be defined as the pursuit of accuracy

in the reproduction of texts, made possible only by eschewing the accurate representation of the forms of letters.

This may account for a general indifference to script in western scholarship and, outside of palaeography, an ignorance of its history. It is hard to reflect in a scholarly manner on what cannot be displayed according to the conventions of scholarly presentation. The founding figures of palaeography are Jean Mabillon (1632-1707), Bernard Montfaucon (1655-1741), who coined the discipline's name in 1708, and Humfrey Wanley (1672-1726). Each understood, independently, that copying a "text" is not the same as copying the "hand". Medieval scribes aimed to record the words but not their shapes. Scribes pay no attention to letter-forms and not much to orthography: what they provide is not a visual representation of a document but a phonetic account of a text whose accuracy need be judged by the ear alone. This dereliction of duty to accuracy—copying, but not tracing—might be ascribed to the presumption of the "exclusively phonetic" nature of roman letters: what really matters is what cannot be seen.

The short duration of the Carolingian revival of roman lettering can be attributed to the general abandonment of upper-case or majuscule forms when cursive emerged, during the ninth century, independently in three distinct writing-systems: Greek, Latin and Arabic (Louth 96). The use of minuscule increased the speed of writing as well as the ease of reading, presumably by encouraging silent modes of textual ingestion (Parkes "Set in Their Own" 87-93; Saenger). The Arabic term for cursive script, distinct from the more formal *kufic*, is *naskhi*, "copying", suggesting a rate of textual production more rapid than that of composition. By "composition" may be implied either the discursive sense of making a text or the display, layout and arrangement of letters. Because scribes attended almost exclusively to the discursive sense, we have very little evidence of letter-forms before the ninth century; we remain in the early days of scholarship, in literal and scribal terms.

Greek and Latin were not the only languages of Christianity, nor Greek and roman the only scripts. Other letters were used in the non-Chalcedonian or "Miaphysite" churches: Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian and Armenian, and the Malankara church of India. In contrast to the use of roman across the west—and of Greek across the Byzantine Empire—each of these churches preserves its own script. It may be the determination to retain a script that contributed to the survival of each as an autonomous church. In rejecting the Council of Chalcedon (451), they resisted not only Byzantine authority but also Greek lettering; preserving their scripts, each used for one language only, the Miaphysite churches have remained outside the "Graeco-Latin" sphere.

Yet very little attention has been paid to these scripts in their graphic and heterographic contexts. J. F. Coakley, a historian of Syriac typography, asks about this neglect:

> considering that most Syriac scholars read printed texts, not manuscripts, most of the time, it is surprising that there has never been a study of Syriac typography by someone in our field. I suppose it is simply not part of the western scholarly tradition to comment on the design or the source of the types in which one's own or others' publications are set (Coakley [xiii]).

Among the very earliest books to be printed in Syriac was the New Testament (Vienna, 1555). The title page states that this book is printed "characteribus & lingua Syra, IESU CHRISTO vernacula" (Coakley 1, n. 4). That Syriac was the vernacular spoken by Jesus may be disputed, but not that Syriac is close to Aramaic, and that its *script* would have been legible to Jesus. It is perplexing that so few Christians have thought it worth studying the "native" or "mother-script" of Jesus. The triumph of roman lettering has occluded even such a literal salience as this.

The imposture of the supremacy of roman across two millennia has also obscured the influence of Syriac on the development of various scripts in India and China. It was another Pope from Syria, Gregory III (731-41), who gave new purpose to the Graeco-Latin script; he might well have been tri-scribal, that is to say, fluent in three scripts and thus attentive to the politics of lettering.

It might be supposed that churches, language and writing systems excluded from the Roman empire (Eastern and Western) would have little to do with Greek or Latin. Yet scripts can survive and flourish in heterographic rivalry and distinctiveness. Syriac was particularly important in the rise and spread of Christianity. The concern of Gregory III to maintain the "Graeco-Latin script" is attributed to the weakness of Rome, then under threat from the Franks. (Morison 126) This threat would be realized in 774 when Charlemagne conquered Italy and restored roman capitals. As a Frank, Charlemagne rejected all Rome's accommodations with Byzantium, including those involving alphabets and scripts. After Charlemagne the Western Church ignored the Eastern (formally so after 1054), and barely acknowledged the non-Chalcedonian churches. Latin alone would become the language of the west, and "roman" its single alphabet and writing system.

The lettering and the language of three of the Miaphysite churches—Ethiopian/Ge'ez, Coptic, Syriac—is Semitic, related to Hebrew and Arabic. A language and a script marginalized in the history of the West may yet be central in other figurations. Syriac has a writing-system derived (like Hebrew) from Aramaic; its influence may be detected in the development of

scripts across Asia. Today, apart from the diaspora, the regular use of Syriac script is largely confined to the monastic communities of Tur Abdin and the surrounding area, where it is now in grave peril. Yet Syriac lettering once extended its reach to Rome and further west (to Gaul, perhaps Britain) and eastwards across India to China. In the early years of the Tang Dynasty (c. 640 CE) Nestorian texts were translated from Syriac; this event was recorded on the Xi'an stele in c. 781; the stele was buried for safety c. 845 and discovered c. 1625. (Jingyi Ji 41-2) The letters and marks incised on the Xi'an stele were first published by Athanasius Kircher in 1667. Kircher was careful to represent accurately the Chinese characters as well as the Syriac. This is therefore the first substantial text in Chinese to be published in Europe.

How are we to measure the significance of this: that these, among the first Chinese characters printed in Europe, were glossed by Syriac? The Xi'an stele has often been compared to the Rosetta Stone, though only a few of the nineteen hundred Chinese characters are glossed in Syriac, of which there are some fifty words. (Keevak 23-24) One factor to be considered is that Sogdian, the *lingua franca* of central Asia during the Tang Dynasty (c. 600-900 CE), was written in a script derived, like Syriac, from Aramaic. Thus through the Nestorian missionaries, the Christian message may have been welcomed in China on account of the letters, recognizable to readers of Sogdian. Such a claim must be hypothetical, but the Xi'an stele deserves study in a wider context.

A further hypothesis suggests that the discipline of palaeography in Europe owes its founding to the Xi'an stele: that it was Athanasius Kircher's careful representation of Chinese and Syriac characters in 1667 that led Mabillon, Montfaucon and Wanley, in the years following, to reckon roman characters as no less deserving of meticulous accuracy in the copying.

On the Xi'an stele many of the proper names in Syriac (and Persian and Sanskrit) are "left untranslated". This has scribal consequences. There are always difficulties in transliterating proper names from one alphabet to another, and those difficulties can leave their marks, just as French proper names—or terms taken rather than translated—"taint" English letters with their diacriticals: is François in the café? It cannot be said that there is transliteration between Syriac and Chinese, but a sort of "phonetic transposition" between two different orders of signs. The Chinese writing-system was presumably inflected, to some degree, by the representing of such proper names as Allaha, Mshiha and Satana.[1]

[1] "Mshiha" is the roman transliteration of the Syriac "Messiah"; the influence of Syriac on Chinese may also be registered through the 9th-14th centuries by the proximity of Old Uyghur, an alphabet derived ultimately, through Sogdian, from Syriac. The present status of the Uighur in Xinjiang is, not least, a heterographic matter.

The occlusion of Syriac is but one instance of what is lost when the story of Roman lettering is told as a triumph of visual clarity ("transparency") and phonetic efficiency. Stanley Morison, himself the designer of Times New Roman, is one of the very few historians of writing and printing to have understood the part played by ideological considerations. Writing systems do not develop only with reference to phonetics and technology, though that is the assumption of most general accounts. (Diringer, Coulmas, Fischer) Morison apprehends the ideological force of script, where political considerations may be allowed to interfere with communication. Morison presents some cases of letters whose clarity and efficiency in the reading were deemed less important than their distinctive appearance, and some in which ease of "native reading" was sacrificed so as to make the letters more accessible to non-native readers.

We have seen that each of the Miaphysite churches has its own language and its own script. Though we may think of it as "normal", the roman script is unusual in representing many different languages, in serving a diversity of phonetic and philological needs. It was only on account of its political and cultural prestige, its geographical extensiveness and the scribal authority of the western Church, that the roman alphabet was adapted to give scribal representation to the vernacular languages of western Europe. The suppression of runes, the excision of now archaic letters, would inconvenience native readers while making each language of Western Europe at least literally accessible to readers of all of them.

Paul Saenger argues that English was the first vernacular to use the roman alphabet for its writing system, c. 800. (Saenger 96-7) The priority accorded thus to English, followed by German, may be due to the fact that among the vernacular languages spoken within and around *scriptoria*, only these were considered distinct from Latin: "there is no evidence before about 950 of a conscious awareness that the spoken Romance dialects were languages different from Latin" (Saenger 101).

While roman lettering may appear universal and normative, its very reach and versatility make it truly exceptional. Most writing-systems serve one language only. The Greek alphabet has served diverse texts, from Homer and Plato to the Gospels, and is now the official script of a nation within the European Union. Yet only on very few occasions has Greek been used for the writing of another language. Greek typography has changed little since its earliest printing in Venice by Aldus Manutius, c. 1490; the consistent look of Greek typography over five hundred years—when contrasted with all the changes in roman letters—may be due to the limited demands made on any one script by a single language.

Cyrillic, by contrast, was first created, for missionary purposes, in the ninth century, just as the Greek, Latin and Arabic systems were developing cursive forms, and when English was

first being written in roman letters. Cyrillic was a missionary script, based on Greek letters modified to accomplish what the Greek alphabet habitually fails in, the representing of another language.[2]

Thus Cyrillic became the writing system for a number of Slavic languages and is today the native script of some 250 million people, the fifth most widely used writing-system in the world; it has also been subjected to national modifications, notably in Russian after the Revolution of 1917. Yet Cyrillic is not used in those Slavic nations such as Poland whose church is not Greek but Roman: letters follow the faith. The look of certain Polish or Czech names, and the profusion of diacritical marks in those Slavic languages that use roman letters, suggest that Cyril and Methodius (themselves of the Latin Church, not the Greek, to whose devising the script is traditionally assigned) understood letters and their proper limits. Though Christianity must be preached to the ends of the earth, even the phonetic versatility of roman could not adequately represent Slavic tongues.

It is political and economic considerations, along with cultural prestige—rather than any philological principles—that continue to drive the global extension of the roman alphabet, sometimes controversially. As in Polish or Hungarian there can be an obtrusiveness of names created by the squeezing of unfamiliar sounds into familiar letter-forms, and those familiar letters into unfamiliar combinations.

For those tentatively reading a text in a foreign language that uses the roman alphabet, proper nouns can afford security, an immediacy of recognition and understanding: this is the assimilative advantage of the roman letters for non-native readers. (Lock "Conveying") Yet in a translation of a text from a language that uses another writing-system, proper nouns create serious problems. We can hardly speak of "transliteration" where there's no equivalence in the status of "letters," as in the "phonetic transposing" of Syriac names into Chinese. Its challenges leave a permanent mark on the writing system into which the transposing is made. This need not be a diacritical mark but, between alphabets, merely an unprecedented sequence of letters, such as, from Cyrillic, initial "Tch" for Tchaikovsky—though not for Chekhov: an index can be a transliteral vexation. An alternative is to "translate" a proper noun according to its common meaning, as the name Cephas (meaning "stone" in Aramaic) becomes Peter in Greek (and later, in Danish, Steen). But when no such semantic equivalent is available the writing system needs to incorporate a name as strange as the letters of which it's formed. And where there is

[2] It may be because the Greek alphabet is universally familiar yet has so seldom been used to represent another language that its characters can function as symbols in mathematics and other non-vocalic codes.

"transcription between writing systems", or "phonetic transposition," there is a possibility, even an inevitability, of interference in the receiving system.

Nowhere has "phonetic transposition" been more tried and tested than in the most translated of all the world's texts, the Bible, one part of which uses Hebrew letters, the other, Greek. As Greek letters correspond quite closely to Roman letters, transliteration poses relatively few difficulties: should phi be transliterated as f or ph; kappa as k or c? The problem becomes serious, however, with the transcription into Greek, and then into Latin, of Hebrew names. As Jesus does not appear in the Hebrew scriptures, nor in Hebrew script, but only in Greek, we know him (in English) as Jesus; he does however have a namesake in the Old Testament, though we are unlikely to identify him as such, for there the Hebrew form of the name is transliterated as Joshua. It is as though, rather than think about what it might mean to call Joshua by the name of Jesus or to address the son of God as "Joshua Christ", we would prefer to remain graphically indifferent.

Difficulties are more likely to become evident elsewhere than in a canonical text venerated into a semblance of stability. The pursuit of scientific systems of transliteration engaged some of the most brilliant minds among the scholars and the administrators of the British Empire, notably in India, with effects sometimes comic, usually cumbersome, and always visually disruptive. Few were of much value to those who for whom they were intended (Majeed; Lock 105). We are inclined to suppose that the roman alphabet in all its logic and phonetic purity has no problems of its own. The problems arise when one must transliterate into roman from writing-systems that are supposedly "less efficient" than the roman: either because they lack vowels or because (as with Chinese) it is thought by roman readers to use "pictures" or "ideas": not quite "proper writing" as the roman alphabetical triumphalists would have it. Hans Saussy warns against speculations over Chinese script by those who see it as an example of "what can go wrong with language when it is not adequately released from its debt to materiality" (Bachner 20).

The alphabet devised within Latin has extended its reach to dozens of languages, often with a conspicuously ill-fitting appearance. Even if we consider only the languages of western Europe we may notice instances of frustration with the roman alphabet. The familiarity of these writing systems conceals from us a series of literal constraints and diacritical rebellions. These ought properly to be understood as difficulties of transliteration.

English, first among all the Germanic languages to adopt roman letters for its writing system, never thereafter found a more precise way of representing either **þ** (thorn) or *ð* (eth) (or the difference between the voiced and unvoiced dental fricative) than "th." Icelandic was among

the last to adopt roman letters, and it preserves these "archaic" characters in all its fonts. English has been remarkably restrained in its workings with the roman alphabet; for centuries it has found no reason to add other letters than those (J, U, W) in excess of the twenty-three characters of the Latin alphabet. Even more strikingly, English has entirely eschewed diacritical marks. They certainly order these matters differently *à la française*, and in almost every other adaptation of roman letters to a western European language. Every time a change is made to a national writing-system there is a new challenge for transliteration. That challenge is particularly acute for those transliterating into English not only because it is the "global target language" but also because, thanks to its resistance to diacriticals, English remains closest to Latin in its graphic resources, in both their economy and their versatility. Almost every reform of another language introduces a distinction therein, and yet another sign has to be rendered into one of the constant twenty-six of English.

The dominance of English has consequences for digital writing systems; though many accents are optional on keyboards, there are extra keys available, in Denmark, for Ø, Å and Æ. Those keys should be avoided in writing by email to an outsider, for there's no transliteration at the other end. And so transliteration becomes a daily concern, even between and among writers of languages all of whom use the roman alphabet.

Or do they? One grows wary of claims for the global validity of the roman alphabet. The Universal Postal Union formed in Berne in 1876 was among the first institutions to give the weight of international mandate for the use of roman letters: even today the U.P.U. instructs the world that all addresses, regardless of nation, must be written "in roman letters and Arabic numerals". (Note the respective upper- and lower-case initials, here carefully replicated.) Would it be quibbling to ask how many letters the U.P.U. considers "roman"? And what of accents, supplied in each language (English excepted) to make good some of the phonetic deficiencies of roman letters registered by speakers and listeners in diverse vernaculars?

Though so many European languages seem to share the roman alphabet, how many of them can be said actually to share a writing-system? Are there any two languages that use the roman alphabet and share a single set of characters with one set of accents, diacritical marks, pointings and other extra-alphabetical signs? There is no major European language today that confines itself to the 23 letters of the Latin alphabet, and all except English use diacritical marks as well. And there are no two languages using the roman alphabet that have identical graphic sets. The heterographic is not only present between roman and Greek, Arabic and Chinese, Cyrillic and Syriac; the heterographic mediates English and French, French and German, Latin and all its "successor alphabets" (Lock "Heterographics" 110-12).

The overlooking of the graphic has endured far too long, and has obscured a major instrument of ideological power and control, as we have seen in the elision of Damasian and its uncial and Byzantine consequences, the better to tell the story of the continuity of Roman Capitals. Attentiveness to the graphic can also disclose important matters of a strictly linguistic nature: it may be that "a language" is constituted, and can best be defined, not by any distinctive set of phonetic or even philological features, but rather by a unique set of graphic marks. One might argue that among the users of roman letters there are precisely as many writing-systems as there are languages. This would make clear the distinction between letters as independent characters and letters as members of an alphabetical set. Instead of supposing that so many languages use the roman alphabet, we might more accurately say that while most of the characters used are to be found in the roman alphabet, each language has its own.

The letters of the roman alphabet, intended for Latin, now offer graphic hospitality to many languages. The standard modern western histories of writing and script—e.g. Diringer, Coulmas, Fischer—invariably invoke a modifier such as "writing proper", or "true" or "complete" writing, by which to distinguish what is written in a "phonetic alphabet" from what is termed "incomplete writing" or "pre-writing".

Yet there is an indispensable aspect of roman letters so obvious as to have blinded all enquiry: what is punctuation but the non-phonetic supplement to phonetic signs? Does any other writing system depend so heavily as roman on punctuation? Many others do without it entirely. Punctuation asserts itself in the West, in the early Middle Ages, precisely when roman letters are being deployed to represent languages other than Latin. The development of cursive in the ninth century comes with punctuation, and with the emergence in writing of languages identifiably not Latin, first among them English.

Any writing-system must combine phonetic with non-phonetic features. There will always be signs—including spaces—that cannot be subsumed in voice, and which form a "visual residue". Simultaneously with the development of cursive came a visual system of pointing that is now a fundamental part of all writing-systems that use roman letters. It is easy to celebrate the purely phonetic nature of the roman alphabet as long as one avoids the term "writing system". But in considering the system of writing of which roman letters are a part, there is no hiding the importance of punctuation. Nor that of those white spaces that also emerged in the ninth century, opening up gaps between words to ease their reading in silence (Parkes *Pause*; Saenger *Space*).

How do we distinguish marks of punctuation from the letters? Scholars for whom the letters of the roman alphabet form their native script devised the term "writing-system" (in the

mid twentieth century) to describe all those scripts less phonetic than their own. Yet punctuation is integral to all the writing-systems that use the characters of the roman alphabet. The power of the west and the hegemonic force that roman letters have exercised over international scholarship seem to have inhibited a due degree of criticism and analysis. Scribes and readers of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Pali, Devanagari, Armenian, Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, Cyrillic, Ge'ez, suffer no phonetic deficiency with regard to roman readers and writers. To the contrary, it might be asked whether there is another writing system, apart from roman, that has so many signs that cannot be voiced—including spaces. Punctuation holds words apart, and it holds the page together; it is a visual code that guides the voice but cannot be reduced to the voice or subsumed within it. One does not ask how to pronounce a comma.

That we have so long believed ours to be a phonetic alphabet is a vast ideological imposture. The suppression of the graphic and the non-phonetic has enabled native readers of roman to argue for the supremacy of their letters over all others, and (since "the Phoenician miracle" so often invoked by western historians of roman writing) to present the roman alphabet as having developed only in the service of technical efficiency and phonetic accuracy. Stanley Morison argues that there is no writing system free from ideological purpose, nor one whose developments are not motivated by political considerations. Morison has been largely neglected; instead we continue to suppress our sense of how writing *looks*. We have thus blinded ourselves to their implication—through their very forms—in the ideological and the material. Those who *look* at scripts, instead of "merely reading" them, will discover that there is nothing neutral in their constitution and that their use can never be wholly innocent.

My interest in Syriac has been stirred by the plight of other-lettered refugees, and informed (however inadequately) by Coakley on Syriac typography. That one working in Syriac should observe that it is "not part of the western scholarly tradition" to attend to the font or typeface of what we study, nor of what we publish, is a telling lament. For this is no slight dereliction. Its effect is to occlude the heterographic as a historical force, and to render roman letters almost impervious to analysis or challenge. Yet on account of our letters—first called "roman" just five hundred years ago—we still owe a debt to materiality; they remain immersed in the contestings and displacings of this world and its empires.

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The Chinese Script in the Chinese Scriptworld
Chinese Characters in Native and Borrowed Traditions

Edward McDonald
Sun Yat-Sen University
mcdonald3@mail.sysu.au.cn

Abstract

The exclusivist ideology that characterizes Chinese writing system as "ideographs" was constructed in the West, and later reimported into China where it influenced popular and nationalistic understandings of the characters. For the West, the Chinese script held out the promise, embraced particularly eagerly by the literary and artistic worlds, of a visual language not complicated by questions of sound, and thus by the arbitrary impositions of individual languages (Bush). For China, the Chinese script came to function as one of the key cultural characteristics marking the Chinese off from the rest of the world (Shen). This paper will attempt to provide some conceptual groundwork for understanding these complex and overlapping discourses, and set out the fundamental graphological basis through which the differing functions of Chinese characters in both the historical and the contemporary Chinese Scriptworld (Handel) can be understood.

Keywords

Chinese characters- ideograph- graphological linguistic sign

Orientation

Cultural evolution is multi-dimensional and unpredictable. Cultural practices, like material objects, can be passed on from culture to culture and take on completely new meanings in new contexts. The modern academy tends to valorize this process as one of "hybridity", but whether this should be celebrated as a good in itself, or to what extent the competing pull of native and borrowing cultures should be acknowledged, is perhaps still problematic. The script known in English as "Chinese characters" proclaims in its very name its status as a cross-cultural product. Like the many foodstuffs in Chinese prefixed with terms indicating their foreign origin, such as the humble *tomato*, whose original Nahuatl name *tomatl* was imported barely changed into English, but which turns up in Chinese as either "Western red persimmon" *xihongshi* 西紅柿 or "foreign eggplant" *fanqie* 番茄, Chinese characters as they are understood today in both

China and the West are the joint creation of a number of competing discourses over several centuries, borrowed from one culture into another, and then borrowed back more or less transformed.

In the West, the discipline of sinology, in effect a branch of philology as applied to Chinese texts, developed from the 18th century predicated on the mastery of Chinese characters (Honey). In the second half of the 20th century, this content-based and methodologically-defined area of study began to give way to a new multi-disciplinary field of Chinese Studies, which nevertheless continued to stress the importance of dealing directly with Chinese texts and hence with Chinese characters (McDonald "Ideolatry"). The discipline of linguistics, however, as it took shape from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, did not coexist comfortably with either the old or the new of these dispensations, as it struggled to free the study of language from its traditional focus on the written word, and for much of the 20th century was relatively uninterested in writing systems except as more or less efficient representations of sound (DeFrancis "Ideographic"). At the same time, in providing a "scientific" vantage point on both Chinese characters and traditional Chinese understandings of language, linguistics competed with more "humanistic" approaches within Chinese Studies for authority over language and writing (Lurie).

During this same period in the West, Chinese characters had to some extent escaped from the experts to become part of the wider scholarly landscape, with philosophers of the stature of Francis Bacon, Wilkins, and Leibniz incorporating them, often in misunderstood or only partially understood versions, into their own philosophical and ideological projects (Porter). At the beginning of the 20th century, the unlikely combination of a deceased Japanologist and an avant garde poet gave the characters a putative new role as a visual language released from the mediation of sound, and therefore with a direct link to the materiality and agency of the natural world (Fenollosa & Pound). This (purely) visual understanding of the characters, never a significant feature of the native Chinese linguistic tradition, was perhaps reinforced by the discovery in the late 19th century of the earliest forms of the characters in the *jiaguwen* 甲骨文 or "oracle bone texts" in which the characters' pictorial origins were more obvious, and then fed back into Chinese Studies, in an effective scholarly line of succession from Creel et al. (*Literary*) to Rosemont Jr. ("On Representing"), Hansen (*Language, Writing*) and Ames & Rosemont Jr (*Analects*).

In dealing with this complex of competing discourses from a broadly graphological point of view, rather than attempt to lay down an "argument" as to "correct" or "incorrect"

understandings of Chinese characters, I have chosen rather to lay out a "narrative" of some of the key "themes" that can provide insights into the forms these discourses have taken over the years. It is for this reason that the individual sections of the paper are named according to the stages in Labov & Waletzky's famous model of the narrative ("Narrative"), which came out of linguistics but has been found useful by many outside that discipline, a fate I may hopefully envisage for the current paper. This aim also explains a perhaps rather more "literary" cast to the language of the present text than might be expected in a paper of this kind.

Complication

Controversies such as the so-called "Creel-Boodberg debate" (Creel; Boodberg; McDonald "Ideolatry"), or the cross-generational critiques of Ezra Pound (Kennedy; Yip) provide some insights into the complexity of the cross-cultural influences involved in understandings of Chinese characters, the competing ideological and disciplinary complexes at play, and the sheer possibility of misconstrual and misunderstanding across different schools of thought. But it is perhaps worthwhile putting the question: does this really matter? If Creel and Pound got Chinese characters "wrong," as Boodberg and Kennedy and Yip argue very forcefully that they did, wasn't this error a very fruitful one which has had highly creative effects in their respective fields? Aren't the sinologists or the linguists simply attempting to play the role of prescriptive gatekeepers of knowledge, reinforcing the purity of their own boundaries and cramping the free growth of ideas?

As I explained earlier, it is not the aim of this paper to pronounce on these issues; and as a linguist myself, I might fall under suspicion of having, as our publishers commonly require us to state these days, "competing interests". But what I will say is that many of those arguing for, as it were, a "free trade agreement" across cultural borders often want to have it both ways. Pound, for example, was not only drawing on Chinese characters as a model for his theory and practice of Vorticist poetry, whose foreign origins – like, it seems, the Sanskrit origins of Chinese "recent style verse" *jintishi* 近體詩 or "regulated verse" *lüshi* 律詩 (Mair & Mei; Klein) – could be regarded simply as a jumping-off point; he was also drawing on the cultural authority of the "China" which had held such a key role in the European imagination since at least the 16th century; even if he was putting forward a much more materialist interpretation of the characters than the idealist ones more common before his time. So when he famously translated the opening of *The Analects* as "to study with the seasons winging past", based on a quite ill-informed confusion of the graphic and the lexical in written Chinese relating to the word *xi* "practice," whose character 習 does indeed have two "feathers" perched on top, he was making

an interpretation which may have appealed to many of his English readers as exotically Chinese; but which would have struck any Chinese readers as nonsensical, particularly given the characteristically Confucian linking of "study" and "practice" emphasised in the original Old Chinese saying: *xue er shi xi zhi* 學而時習之 "to study and in a timely fashion put into practice."

Resolution

So, in laying out, rather than laying down, these conceptual foundations for an understanding of the Chinese script at the heart of the Chinese Scriptworld, I am not arguing for anything like a monolithic interpretation of Chinese writing. The literary practitioners and theorists and the philosophers and the archeologists and the linguists will all quite rightly have their own "takes", and I am in no way putting forward exclusive claims for any one of these groups. What I am arguing is for *communication* between the different groups; and an *informed* understanding of all of the practices associated with the Chinese script, practices which in their different ways help to define what kind of complex cultural object the script is. I will, however, insist that what we are dealing with here is a *script*, and thus something ultimately meaningful only in relation to a particular language or variety of a language (see the discussion of "meaning" versus "idea" below). I will also point out that it was the nature of what is variously called Old Chinese or Archaic Chinese or *Shanggu Hanyu* 上古漢語 as a largely "monosyllabic" language that determined the fundamental feature of the script whereby each character represented a syllabic-morpheme. This feature of the script shows up very clearly when it was borrowed to represent its neighbouring languages of Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese, where the characters were used to represent either syllabic-morpheme combinations, or separately syllables or morphemes. (All these terms will be explained below.) What I am recommending, in sum, is a version of British linguist J.R. Firth's call for "renewal of connection" between theory and data; or perhaps in a broader sense, in line with our collective responsibility as scholars, stressing the message of Firth's literary contemporary E.M. Forster, "only connect".

So I will be emphasizing here a number of key characteristics of *hanzi* 漢字 that I believe need to be at least acknowledged in any discussion of the characters, in whatever area of application. These characteristics are graphological in the first instance, and more broadly, linguistic. To put my own convictions on display from the outset, I do not believe that a cogent case has been put forward for Chinese characters as somehow representing a purely visual writing system, particularly in relation to the traditional written standard Literary or Classical Chinese (Creel; Rosemont Jr); nor do I accept, regardless of Derrida's broader philosophical aims, that Chinese characters can be used as some kind of evidentiary base for proposing a new

kind of disciplinary approach to language in the form of "grammatology" (Derrida). I do, however, recognize that Chinese characters, like writing systems in most literate cultures, have become the repository of much cultural value, and have therefore given rise to a great deal of "myth-making" which often credits them with more value or capabilities than they can actually bear. My account will thus leave itself open to differing possibilities, but insist on an ultimately graphological connection to all interpretations.

Many accounts of Chinese writing (e.g. Zuo, xii) draw a misleading dichotomy between two types of writing systems: on the one hand, "semantic," Chinese *biaoyi* 表意 "expressing meaning," such as Chinese characters; and on the other "phonetic," Chinese *biaoyin* 标音"notating sound," as with alphabetic writing systems. In fact, as the same author earlier states, *all* writing systems represent "vocal language" *yousheng yuyan* 有聲語言: where *sheng* 聲, like its almost exact equivalent in Latin *vox* "voice" from which our term "vocal" is derived, refers to "meaningful sound." It may therefore be more useful to think of the ultimate goal of *all* writing systems being to represent *wording*, in the sense of meaningful combinations of sound, rather than sound *per se*, as has been the tendency in many linguistic accounts of writing systems in the Chinese Scriptworld (e.g., DeFrancis *Visible*; Hannas).

As recognized by Saussure in his notion of the "linguistic sign," wording is that quintessentially linguistic phenomenon whereby stretches of sound are mutually delimited with stretches of meaning (Saussure *Cours*). Wording is the meat at the heart of the linguistic sandwich, it is the daily currency of ordinary speakers, it is what readers grapple with in interpreting the graphic symbols of writing, as well as what professional writers and editors worry over ("I'm not sure about the wording of this paragraph"). But Saussure's linkage of meaning and sound in the linguistic sign, as reflected in the distinction between *signified* and *signifier*, goes further than is normally understood, in showing that linguistic meaning cannot exist without sound, or vice versa: as combined in units of wording, the two are reciprocally defining. If sound is *not* linked to meaning, as when we hear a language we do not understand, it becomes merely noise. As for the opposite linkage, that between meaning and sound, it is important to distinguish between *meanings*, which are necessarily linked to sounds, and *ideas*, which need not be. This is not merely for some reason of definitional convenience, but because what are represented by writing systems are precisely *meanings*, not ideas. This explains the long-running objection of linguists within Chinese Studies to the use of the term *ideograph*, literally "written (representation of) idea," since it elides the crucial contribution of sound to the linguistic sign; and their recommendation of terms such as *logograph* "written

(representation of) word" as a more accurate alternative (du Ponceau; Lurie).

In the current context, moreover, if we characterize *all* writing systems as "expressing wording," Chinese *biaoci* 表辭, then this has the happy effect of putting them on the same level playing field from the start. Differences then emerge when a writing system evolves, or is devised for a particular language, as to which of the number of possibilities is chosen in how it represents wording. Halliday represents these options very clearly in the figure below (reproduced from Halliday *Spoken*, Fig. 3.2: 43):

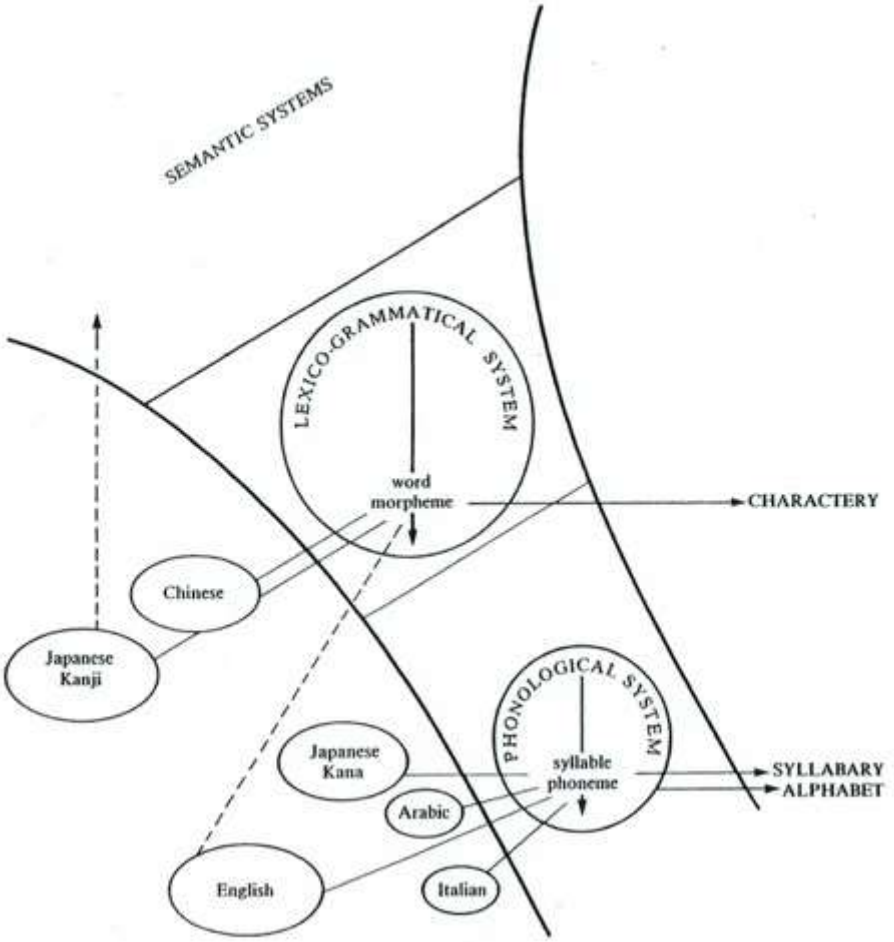

FIGURE 1

How writing systems represent language

The individual written symbols of a writing system, technically known as its *graphs*, may represent units of wording themselves, in the form of *words* or their constituent parts, *morphemes*: historically, this seems to have been the initial option for all the originally devised writing systems known or so far deciphered, such as Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Mayan glyphs, and of course Chinese characters (Boltz, Ch. 3). Often the next development for a writing system is to represent the minimally pronounceable units of sound, *syllables*. Syllables

are the counting units of language, they – are – what – we – fall – back – on – when – we – need – to – as – it – were – *ex-pec-to-rate* our message. A possible next stage is to "reduce" each syllable to its minimal component parts, mostly not pronounceable in isolation and therefore more "counterintuitive" in that sense. Historically this development only took place once in the particular historical context of the Semitic languages: firstly by representing only the *consonants* of each syllable, nd lvng t th vwls, a procedure which works efficiently only for certain kinds of languages; and then when the Greeks took over one Semitic alphabet, by "reinserting" the *vowels*, t-o p-u-t a-ll th-e s-ou-n-d u-n-i-t-s o-n d-i-s-p-l-ay.

The above "sequence" does not represent any sort of inevitable historical development, though again all the writing systems to which we have access went through at least the first two or three stages. The reasons why writing systems evolve more often have to do with them being adapted to other languages which they don't fit quite as well as their original language than for any reasons of "efficiency". The users of writing systems are notoriously reluctant to change them even when the original language has changed radically: we need only mention the case of the English writing system, which still pretty well matches the spoken language of Chaucer's day (i.e., c.1400 CE). I should also stress that the above represents an ideal schema, and many writing systems draw on more than one kind of system to represent the wordings of their languages: in the context of the Chinese Scriptworld, Japanese is the classic example of a mixed system. It is also important to stress, particularly in the light of claims that Chinese characters represent some sort of supralingual means of communication, that all four polities historically been part of the Chinese Scriptworld – China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan – have in the past been joined by the common use in education, literature, and diplomacy of not just Chinese *characters* but also Chinese *language*: so-called Literary Chinese or Classical Chinese – in Chinese *wenyan* 文言. This standardized syncretic form of Old Chinese started to take shape from the beginning of the Imperial period in around 200 BCE, and was of course written in Chinese characters.

The Chinese character writing system, which as far as we know was a local development, was fundamentally shaped by the nature of the language it set out to represent, as is inevitably the case with any writing system. As already noted above, a prominent feature of the earliest forms of Chinese known to us is an almost complete identity between the minimal unit of wording, in the Chinese case the *word*, and the minimal unit of sound, in the Chinese case the *syllable* (Boodberg): that is to say, the huge majority of words were a single syllable long, and therefore the minimal unit of writing, the *character*, could represent both at the same time. So

when a reader read (out) a text, they would simultaneously be sounding the syllables and articulating the words of the text. This forms the basis of the reading practices associated with Classical Chinese, although these practices become more complex as the writing system is carried over to Modern Chinese, where the one syllable–one word principle is hugely diluted, and where one of the main challenges is hence working out where the word boundaries are.

In terms of devising individual characters to represent each syllable/word, there were two basic options, and a third which was a combination and a later historical development of the two: represent the meaning, using a *semantograph*; represent the sound, using a *phonograph*; and represent both sound and meaning, using a *semanto-phonograph*. In this case, however, this does seem to have involved an evolutionary trajectory. Although in the earliest texts to which we have access, the writing system is already more or less fully developed, it seems clear that the semantographs came first, in the form of, to use renderings of the traditional terms, concrete pictographs (*xiangxing* 象形 "imitating shape,") abstract pictographs (*zhishi* 指事 "referring to events,") and composite semantographs (*huiyi* 會意 "combining meanings"). At this point, however, we need to reiterate our mantra: *writing systems fundamentally represent wording*. Given that wording is defined as meaning + sound, this means that semantographs can only represent meaning as attached to sound. So although the formation of these graphs was on semantic principles, the fact that they were graphs meant that in usage in actual texts they were attached to specific *words* with particular pronunciations in Old Chinese.

One of the main pieces of evidence for this is that, in the earliest texts, many of these semantographs assume a derived function as phonographs: that is, they are used to represent other words which have the same or similar sound as the original word for which the character was devised. This is known in graphology as the *rebus principle*, and is again a feature of all original writing systems: it is often seen as the point when conceptually for its devisers the writing system comes to be understood as representing *wordings* rather than things or notions. In the case of Chinese, many of the grammatical words of Old Chinese are represented by such phonographs, known traditionally as "borrowings" *jiajie* 假借: for example, *zhi* 之 "go" was borrowed in this way to represent the 3rd person pronoun *zhi* 之, with both original and borrowed usages continuing to exist side by side.

In other cases, the character came to be exclusively attached to the borrowed usage, and a new character was devised for the original by adding an extra semantic element: for example, the character 其 for *ji* "winnowing basket" was borrowed to represent *qi* "possessive pronoun" and a new character was devised for *ji* by adding the semantic element 竹 *zhu* "bamboo" on top

– thus 箕. This third kind of character, the semanto-phonograph, or *xingsheng* 形聲 "form and sound" proved to be the most efficient way of devising new characters, and is now by far and away the most common type, at about 90% of existing characters. In some cases, phonographs and / or semanto-phonographs continued to be exchangeable across a range of similar sounding characters, and this multiple usage long remained a feature of the written language, for example, the second half of the Confucian saying (mis)translated by Ezra Pound above runs *bu yi yue hu* 不亦說乎 "is this not a pleasure?" with the third character *shuo* 說 "explain" "read as" *yue* 悅 "please."

As explained in Handel and covered in more detail in other papers in this special issue, when the Chinese script was borrowed to represent other languages in what we might call the "Chinese Character Region" or 漢字地域, the characters were borrowed either for their *meaning* or for their *sound*, or *both*. The final possibility meant that in effect the whole *word* was borrowed, as adapted to the sound system of the borrowing language: these are the so-called *onyomi* 音讀 or "sound readings" of Japanese such as san 山 "mountain," corresponding to modern Mandarin *shan*. The extensive Sino-Vietnamese, Sino-Korean, and Sino-Japanese vocabulary in these three languages provides good evidence of this phenomenon, as can be seen from the names of the three respective countries, which have a distinctly Sinocentric flavour: 越南 Vietnam / *Yuenan* "Beyond the South," 朝鮮 Chosun / *Chaoxian* "Morning Calm," 日本 Nippon / *Riben* "Source of the Sun."

The second possibility was basically an extension of the *jiajie* "borrowing" technique already widely used in Chinese texts: this was probably the earliest strategy used to represent native words; and its present day descendant is the Japanese *kana* 假名, whose title "borrowed names" references the Chinese category, whose shapes are simplified or partial versions of particular Chinese characters, and whose syllables – again following the Chinese model in taking this as the basic sound unit – are Japanised versions of the original Sino-Japanese words. The first strategy can be seen in the so-called *kunyomi* 訓讀 or "interpretation readings" of Japanese, where the Chinese character is matched to a synonymous native Japanese word, such as *yama* 山 mountain.

In the modern period, while Japan held on to a mixed script of characters (*kanji*) and syllabic graphs (*kana*), both Vietnam and Korea took new routes in adopting for their languages writing systems which have little or no connection with Chinese characters. Nevertheless, in the pre-modern period, both had developed writing systems very closely based on the Chinese

script and the logic of its formation and use, so that again, the borrowing / adaptation was always one of either meaning or sound, never of what Boodberg called a "disembodied word" (332 n.5). The reading practices associated with Chinese character texts across the Chinese Scriptworld would have driven home the fact that each character had one or more *readings*: there was thus never any basis for the misinterpretation later made by European scholars that the characters were purely visual signs without attached words. Hence any transfer via Chinese characters was always made from the wordings of one language to the wordings of another: there was no superlingual realm of "ideas" through which such an transfer might be effected (McDonald "Getting" 1200, original emphasis):

In either case, the transfer was made from a word or word element in one language to a word or word element in the other: at no stage did the process take place directly through *ideas*.

Evaluation

The "problem" of the Chinese writing system, by some quirk of history or typology, touches on two of the areas in which modern linguistics has been most deficient: writing, and meaning. As the brief account above should suggest, the whole topic of *writing systems* is much more complex than it has been given credit for, either within linguistics, or across the range of other disciplines and fields which have shown an interest in Chinese characters. If I might take the lead in being critical of my own discipline, I would suggest that one of the reasons for this is not so much a supposed "phonocentric" bias that sees the written form as derived and therefore secondary (Derrida), but rather a reluctance to deal directly with the issue of *meaning*, and therefore an incomplete understanding of the function of writing systems as representing the combination of meaning and sound that is embodied in *wording* rather than simply representing *sound*. This reluctance, characteristic of Leonard Bloomfield and the traditions in North American linguistics influenced by him (but not those stemming from Edward Sapir, or for the majority of European traditions such as the Prague, Copenhagen, or London schools among others), can be seen as an inability, for whatever reason, to follow through the implications of the conceptualisation of meaning put forward by the putative Father of Modern Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure.

Saussure was insistent that the word as linguistic sign must incorporate *both* meaning *and* sound, and if either was looked at isolation, it ceased to be of linguistic significance: (Saussure *Écrits* 68, original emphasis):

> The one *a priori* truth whose validity rests on simple common sense is that while there may be **psychological facts**, and while there may be **phonological facts**, neither of the

> two series alone would ever be capable of giving rise to any linguistic fact whatsoever. **For there to be a linguistic fact, the two series must exist in union**….
>
> The same logic applies when we add graphological facts to this mixture. Any Chinese character, therefore, exists meaningfully only as part of a whole complex of meaning-sound-graph: in Boodberg"s terms, semanteme-phoneme-graph, a connection which must be established through convention (Boodberg 332).

The habitual association of a graph (G) with the corresponding semanteme and phoneme (SP) which culminates in the apprehension of the graph by the reader of the language of which it forms an element as a single complex GSP can be achieved only through a long usage of the language and the particular graph and only after conventions have been firmly established.

The importance of convention was maintained when Chinese characters were borrowed into the neighbouring cultures of the Chinese Scriptworld. Unlike an alphabetic script, whose graphs come attached to individual sounds of a language, and can therefore be "detached" relatively easily to be applied to the sounds of another language, Chinese characters came attached to wordings, which are more resistant to being "detached" in this way, although the sounds may be adapted to the phonology of the borrowing language to give what we might loosely think of as an "accent". For example, to this day the *Chan* 禪 Buddhist writings taken over for use in Japanese *Zen* 禪 Buddhist rituals are read aloud using the Sino-Japanese pronunciations of the characters, giving a "language" which aurally is *neither* Chinese *nor* Japanese; but which, nevertheless, as a kind of oral equivalent of the character text, still maintains the essential S-P-G links of the original. A similar phenomenon may be seen in Cantonese pop songs, whose lyrics are in standard written Chinese, i.e. Mandarin, but pronounced according to their Cantonese "readings", including not only the lexical words, which are often cognate in Mandarin and Cantonese and thus represented by the same characters, but also the grammatical words which are more often than not different between the two. So while the positive statement "I love you" 我愛你 *wo ai ni ~ ngo oi lei* translates more or less directly across, when we get into the third person and become negative, "He doesn't love me" 他不愛我 *ta bu ai wo*, we get a Cantonese reading *ta bat oi ngo*, which is quite distinct from its genuine Cantonese equivalent 佢唔愛我 *kui m oi ngo*.

It is worthwhile stressing the importance of the inextricably linguistic process of the transmission of Chinese characters – or in reality, the transmission of Chinese *texts*, i.e. for most of the historical period, texts written in Literary Chinese using Chinese characters, across the Chinese Scriptworld. Related to this is the crucial distinction, already mentioned above,

between “ideas”, which are not necessarily linguistic, and “meanings” which must be. Since this is a topic for which Saussure has hitherto provided the most cogent explanation, we should briefly revisit it.

Saussure’s model of the linguistic sign as a combination of mutually defining concept or *signified* and sound or *signifier* does not posit “meanings” as some sort of “semantic primes” which lie behind all language use and are stored in some form in the brain. Such an older conception of meaning goes back in the Western tradition to Aristotle’s notion of “ideas” existing in the mind which are “likenesses” of events in the world and which may be “symbolized” by spoken or written words. Instead Saussure’s model recognizes “wordings”, each of which consists of a stretch of meaning mutually delimited with a stretch of sound. In other words, meanings are not simple *elements* in the form of psychological “objects” like Aristotle’s “likenesses”, but rather *relations* between two very disparate human faculties, the brain which makes sense of our experience and the vocal tract which provides one way of expressing our feelings and thoughts (Saussure *Écrits* 3, original emphasis):

> A *linguistic entity* is unique in that it involves the association of two distinct elements. If we were invited first to determine the chemical classification of a sheet of iron, gold, or copper, and then the zoological species of a horse, cow, or sheep, these would be two easy tasks. But if we were asked to determine what “species” is represented by the odd combination of an iron plaque attached to a horse, a gold plate on a cow, or a sheep adorned with something copper, we would exclaim that the task was absurd. The linguist has to realize that it is precisely this absurd task that faces him right from the very outset.

The kind of relational thinking proposed by Saussure goes against the atomistic reductivist approach to complexity characteristic of Western thinking since the time of the ancient Greeks; though interestingly it seems much more consonant with the correlative style of thinking characteristic of ancient Chinese thinkers.

The two main implications of this model is that meanings *cannot* be either “disembodied”, or “natural”. So on the one hand, if there are no such things as “ideas without expressions” or “meanings without sounds” (sign languages are exactly comparable to spoken languages in this sense, merely replacing sound with gesture), then the only way these two separate regions can be brought together is through social interaction (Saussure *Écrits* 120, original emphasis):

> Language is always being considered within the *human individual*, a false viewpoint. Nature gives us man *ready made for articulated language*, but not actually in possession

of it. The *language system* is a social fact. The individual, organized with a view to speaking, may only use the vocal apparatus in the context of his community – moreover, the individual only feels the need to use it when interacting with that community.

On the other hand, rather than language merely taking on a labelling or recording role in relation to reality, each language takes an active role in dividing up the continuum of reality in ways that are functional for its speakers, with particular wordings being only "negatively" distinguished from other wordings; and hence meanings or ideas also share this fundamentally negative, contrastive quality (50).

It is fundamental that a word may only approach a material object through an idea which is both quite insufficient when taken in relation to the object, and boundlessly vast when taken outside the object (it is always too wide and not comprehensive enough to use…). This idea being fundamentally negative, the "literal" meaning becomes merely one of the manifold manifestations of the general meaning. This general meaning is simply a fortuitous boundary born of the simultaneous presence of other items.

Coda

To finish up by drawing out the implications of our "narrative", how is all this relevant to the Chinese Scriptworld? Well, just as in crime stories the detective is encouraged to "go for the money" in trying to solve a crime, I would recommend all scholars working on Chinese characters to "go for the meaning" in trying to understand how characters work. Historically speaking, while acknowledging the persistent conceptualization of Chinese characters in European scholarship and culture as what Bacon called "characters real," "which express neither letters nor words in gross, but things or notions," more commonly known in the last two centuries as "ideographs," we cannot deny that for all traditions where Chinese characters were in active use as a writing system, whether for one or other varieties of Chinese or for the neighbouring languages of Vietnamese, Korean or Japanese, they *did* in fact express either "letters" (in pre-modern European usage equivalent to "sounds" and thus in a Chinese context comparable to "syllables") or "words," *not* "things or notions."

We must also admit that understandings of the characters in the Chinese tradition are quite different to their Western appropriations, particularly in relation to the so-called "pictographic" nature of characters, something which was never accorded particular attention by pre-modern Chinese scholars. But theoretically speaking, I believe we must also face up to the fact that for no language or writing system is there any plausible mechanism whereby "ideas" can exist without wordings to express them, and so the notion of "ideograph" in this context is

both practically unworkable and theoretically incoherent .You will note that I specify "for no language or writing system." I am obviously not denying the possibility of being able to express "ideas" visually without involving the medium of sound. But the whole point about Chinese characters, like other supposedly "pictographic" writing systems like Egyptian hieroglyphs, is that they are *not* pictures, let alone graphic shapes which somehow correspond directly to ideas: they belong to writing systems and hence represent wordings, i.e. combinations of meaning and sound.

Around the middle of the last century, there was a fashion for so-called "inductive" methods of learning Chinese characters as demonstrated in a popular series of textbooks of Classical Chinese (Creel et al.) which aimed to uncover the "graphic logic" of characters. These kinds of "inductive" interpretations of characters that have been such a feature of sinological and popular discourse since at least Creel's time are completely misnamed. They are not in fact inductive but *deductive*: they work *backwards* from the meaning of the relevant word in order to explain the formation of the character. A truly inductive interpretation of Chinese characters, one that treated them as purely graphic forms, would be a completely unconstrained one, generating a plethora of possible interpretations with no way of working out which was the correct one. So if we "go for the meaning," we still need to "go for the wording," and that involves the particular linkage of meaning and sound provided by a particular language or variety of a language.

The dream of the "ideograph," the "universal character," the symbolic system which could represent "reality" directly, without needing to go through any particular and partial language, has indeed been a beautiful dream, but it seems to me it is time to wake up. It is time to acknowledge the native contexts and traditions of Chinese characters, and while not discounting the historical significance of their borrowings into other traditions, to admit that when all is said and done, what we are dealing with is a writing system. This writing system has not only inspired the fantasies of generations of philosophers and writers, it has also presented a severe challenge to the biases of an alphabetic-derived tradition of linguistics. It is now time for scholars to set an example by recognizing the nature of reading practices on both sides of the complex processes of cultural borrowing, to admit that when it comes down to it writing systems across the whole Eurasian continent share more similarities than differences, and to give up the hope, once and for all, that any one side can claim some sort of exclusivity or incommensurability when it comes to cultural production.

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Script as a Factor in Translation

Judy Wakabayashi
Kent State University
jwakabay@kent.edu

Abstract

Translators usually pay little or no heed to the script embodying the meaning of a text, yet at times the script itself makes a significant contribution to a text's meaning, aesthetics or ideology, for instance. In such cases translators need to consider the writer's orthographical choices, as well as if and how these can or should be reflected in the target text. This presents particular challenges when the two languages use different scripts. With its four scripts, Japanese offers an emblematic instance of the role of script in writing and translation. Focusing on this striking case can raise awareness of instances where script plays a role even in alphabetic languages, although to a lesser degree, and it also suggests some techniques that can be used for handling script issues in translation.

Keywords

Script- translation- Japanese- orthography

Introduction

Alongside its communicative and social functions, written translation also entails physically changing one writing system into another, a process that sometimes also involves a change in script. Yet this orthographic dimension has received scant attention—a neglect that Yamamoto ("Hon'yakugaku") attributes to the alphabetic bias in the translation discourse. However imperfectly, alphabetic writing represents a language's sounds, so script has been regarded in many cultures as a mere tool for textualizing the phonological structure of a language, and the significance of other aspects has been largely overlooked.

Admittedly, the written representation does usually function as a mere interface for transmitting oral or written texts. Occasionally, however, this mediating device transcends this auxiliary function, acting as a communicative mode in its own right and affecting "broader cultural patterns of whether, why, and how translation occurs" (Denecke 206). More than just a transparent technology of writing, script is a nexus between writer and reader—a paratextual device that helps shape our interpretation of the content. Hence a change in script in the process

of translation can reconfigure the meaning embodied in the script, affecting the interplay between form and content. When more than one script option is available, choices take on meaning, making translation into a different representational system challenging. Kendall (130) stresses that "The orthography is not an invisible container of the work but influences it and helps to form it. The connection between the two is so close that the use of a different orthography results in a different text."

Asian writing systems based on Chinese characters offer a useful entry point for examining how scripts shape translation practices, because these writing systems throw into sharp relief aspects that are less prominent or absent in other writing systems. Chinese logographs represent words or morphemes (*not* ideas directly), while also providing phonetic clues, although the script-sound correspondence is much less transparent than with alphabetic languages. The fact that "one Chinese character allows for very different Sinophone actualizations depending on linguistic and regional context" (Bachner 127) has enabled the script to be used with different Sinophone languages beyond China's borders, such as Hakka, Taiwanese and Cantonese, as well as with sinographic languages that adopted Chinese characters, such as Japanese, classical Korean and Vietnamese and some now-obsolete Asian writing systems—even though they did not share a spoken language. Character-literate people from different language groups within and beyond China could communicate in writing through "brush talk" or practices such as *kanbun kundoku*—a key script-based practice in Japan (with a Korean counterpart) that sidestepped the need for conventional translation for centuries and helped shape the Japanese conceptualization of "translation."[1] The prestige of the reference culture's "scripta franca" (Denecke 209) underpinned its longstanding impact, although today the shared heritage of Chinese characters is considerably diminished.

Eventually, the Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese devised their own scripts, albeit long used in tandem with Chinese characters. When translation from Chinese into these sinographic languages did occur, it was facilitated by the ability to retain words written in Chinese characters, and even an approximation of the Chinese pronunciation. Although the unchanged lexical form arguably contributes to accuracy, the "character illusion" effect also makes any shifts in meaning or function more difficult to detect.

The prominent coexistence of four scripts in Japanese helps alert us to the lesser but still occasionally significant role of script in other languages, including alphabetic languages, which have some partly analogous though more limited resources that can be exploited by writers and

[1] See Wakabayashi, "Marginal."

translators. The degree of relevance of script within and across different languages and writing systems merits further investigation than it has been accorded so far in Translation Studies and related fields.

Japanese: A Paradigmatic Case

Japanese merits special attention because of the coexistence of four scripts—kanji, hiragana, katakana and the Latin alphabet (rōmaji)—used for complementary purposes in a complex yet "fully functional" (Smith 214) writing system. Broadly speaking, kanji (Chinese characters) are used for content words, while hiragana are mainly used to express grammatical morphemes as well as for Japanese words without kanji and for "expressive and mimetic items" (Backhouse 222). Katakana are generally reserved for transcribing non-Chinese loanwords, visually conveying a sense of linguistic and cultural otherness. The Latin alphabet is used for "European names, citations and addresses, for many abbreviations, and increasingly for slogans and quotations" (Bringhurst 51), and also as a decoration (a phatic rather than communicative function)—so simply reproducing these expressions when translating into a language using the Latin alphabet might fail to achieve an equivalent feeling about the style. Robertson (205) comments that

> As each of these [four scripts] has the theoretical ability to represent any word in the language, Japanese writers have a potential for orthographic flexibility at their disposal which is not available in other languages. This is not to say that selection of script is disorganized or capricious, but rather that creative or nonconventional uses of script represent an undeniably rich, involved, and longstanding aspect of written Japanese.

This hybridity gives rise to the question of mutual "translation" among these scripts, each of which has not only a different appearance but also a different "feel" (even though the pronunciation is the same). Iwahara, Hatta and Maehara (393) note that "reading experiments have suggested that when the Japanese see the Kanji word for chair, 椅子, an image of an old-fashioned strongly-built chair is usually generated, and the Katakana word for chair, イス, generates an image of a modern-elegant chair. The Hiragana chair, いす, is associated with a simple wooden chair". Kendall (127) adds that "The orthography chosen can directly affect such considerations as rhythm, puns, subtext, atmosphere, emotion, the speed at which the reader assimilates the work of art and the order in which it is assimilated." Hence translators of Japanese works need to consider the function played by a writer's script choices and how to convey this in a language with different and more limited script resources. Lurie (7) notes that

"similar uses of writing are apparent in such Chinese practices as the selection of semantically appealing or pejorative characters for the phonographic transcription of non-Chinese words."[2]

In fact, a feature of scholarly translations of Dutch, the main European language in early modern Japan, was the emphasis on *yakuji* (appropriate *characters* to express the meaning or Dutch pronunciation), rather than selecting a suitable *word* (*yakugo*) as equivalent. Here the aspect of translation-as-writing was important, and it suggests that at least until the late nineteenth century the Japanese equated the signifier and the signified to some extent. In early modern Japan, translation was in fact sometimes conceptualized as a change in script (Clements 32)—e.g., from kanji to a mixture of kanji and hiragana—and *waji* (literally, Japanese characters) was one word used to refer to translation.

Script as a Material Factor

Commenting on differing attitudes towards the Chinese script, Bachner (30) notes views of Chinese characters as highlighting "a resistant materiality erased or neglected in Western theories of signification". She rightly stresses the impossibility of "distinguishing neatly" between the medium and message, given their interaction (2). Although the tangible basis of writing has often been relegated to a matter of form divorced from meaning, their inseparability highlights the need to recognize script as having the capacity to shape writing and translation.

Emmerich ("Translating" 609) mentions several examples of how "form itself is translated". One example is transcription into a different script or script mixture in the *same* language. By contrast, interlingual translation involves a different writing system (which may or may not involve a different script). Although this change in writing system is usually a straightforward procedure, when a writer pays heed to textual physicality, translators working into another writing system need to consider whether and how to replicate this feature. Georges Perec's novel *La disparition* is a lipogram, a kind of constrained writing where he avoided using words containing the letter *e*, possibly as a metaphor for the disappearance of Jewish people during World War II. Shiotsuka Shūichirō;s translation *Enmetsu* does not use the hiragana *i* い (a somewhat similar pronunciation to *e*) or hiragana ending in the sound *i* (き・し・ち・に・ひ・み・ゐ・り). Making *i* disappear (*nakunaru* なくなる) evokes the word *inakunaru* いなくなる (referring to a person disappearing), linking to the metaphor of loss in Perec's text. Other kinds of formal constraints that relate to the *use* of a particular script (rather than its

[2] A related practice in Japan is *ateji* (attributed characters or rebus orthographies), "the practice of substituting an ideogram with a homophone having a different meaning, to play on the visual aspects of the characters" (Suter 63).

inherent nature) include anagrams, pangrams and palindromes, which raise the spectre of untranslatability. Another relatively rare case is graphological translation—substituting letters in another language that closely resemble the *appearance* (not sound) of the original letters.

Another way in which form takes on significance is through repetition of graphic components. If a writer deliberately chooses Chinese characters sharing the same radical, the translator should ideally indicate this somehow so that readers can appreciate the connection. Kendall gives an example in which the *effect* conveyed by the repeated "tree" radical that is *visually* important in a particular haiku—i.e., its function as a "strong, if partially hidden, reminder of trees" (132)—is conveyed *verbally* by an English semantic allusion ("branches").

Script as a Semiotic Factor

Even in less extreme cases, script has generative potential as a kind of "visual grammar". How meaning can be contingent on script is particularly apparent when a *choice* is available, since script can "express rhetorical behaviour" such as register—e.g., emphasizing kanji rather than hiragana for "formal and polite communication" (Grabowsky 16). Kanji choice disambiguates homophones with slightly different meanings—*miru* 見る (to see) vs *miru* 診る (to see a patient). Even with contextual help, without kanji it can be difficult to understand a hiragana word such as *kikō* きこう, which can be written in kanji in about 70 different ways.

Often the choice between kanji and kana (the collective name for hiragana and katakana) is governed by convention, so contravening expectations can have rhetorical impact. In his novel *Torikaeko*, Ōe Kenzaburō repeatedly writes the demonstrative pronoun *are* (normally written in hiragana) in katakana to refer to a traumatic incident. In her translation *The Changeling*, Deborah Boehm renders this in all-caps as THAT. In Japanese a katakana name might be romanized or written in kanji to convey sarcasm, or *Japanese* product names or business names might be romanized to catch attention. Writing Sino-Japanese words in katakana gives a more "colloquial, casual, and humorous tone" (Ezaki 199) or highlights the word, similar to italics or capitalization in English. Below the unusual impact of the katakana is rendered by a Latin phrase:

> なるほどなるほど。ノリウツリか。(Tsutsui 108)
>
> *"I see, yes, I see.* Mutatis mutandis*."* (Driver 252)

In a different context, Smith and Schmidt (67) note that writing *naruhodo* (*I see*) in katakana instead of hiragana would impart "a marked sentence intonation pattern" if spoken. In translation this might be indicated by italics or word elongation.

Regarding such choices as a matter of mere taste underestimates their rationale and impact. Exploitation of orthographic possibilities in Japanese is prompted not only by the stylistic effect or a desire to conform (or otherwise) to the official list of characters in regular use or to mass media styleguides, but also by extralinguistic factors such as the subject of the text, the genre,[3] audience age and literacy level (Smith & Schmidt 67), and "the environment, medium, and author's intent" (Robertson 208).

The script mixture or use of non-standard characters can convey semantic, rhetorical or emotional effects—e.g., cuteness, irony, (in)formality or colloquiality, an intellectual or archaic image, or euphemism.[4] Iwahara, Hatta and Maehara (394n1) observe that the *semantic emotional information* conveyed by different types of script or print may derive from "their appearance, situations in which they are used and guidelines for use." They conducted a study of the associations of different Japanese scripts and concluded that "Kanji is associated with emotional semantic images such as active, strong, masculine, integrity, honesty, uprightness and so on, and Hiragana corresponds to semantic images such as mellow, gentle, graceful, mild, sweet and so on." (383). Kanji convey a stiff or learned (even pedantic) air, whereas hiragana give a softer, more feminine or intimate impression (suited to expressing personal thoughts and emotions). Katakana have a more austere but also foreign and modern air than hiragana.[5] Writers use these differential features to achieve a desired effect. Discussing a passage in Futabatei's *Ukigumo* in which Bunzō says he has been sacked (ム、めん職になりました), Levy (51) comments that

[3] Smith and Schmidt (59) found that the use of different Japanese scripts varies significantly by genre:

	High				**Low**
Hiragana	comic	romance	mystery	SF	business
Kanji	business	mystery	romance	SF	comic
Katakana	comic	SF	romance	business	mystery

Comics and romances made significantly less use of katakana for loanwords and significantly *more* for features such as "emotional or evaluative elements" (66). Certain genres (e.g., newspapers) are also more likely to adhere to conventional script usage.

In early modern Korea the ruling *yangban* class looked down on fiction and theater "as the expression of vulgar notions" (Suh 24), so most works in these genres were written in the vernacular Hangeul script associated with the lower classes, rather than in the higher-class mixture of Chinese characters and Hangeul. Today the use of Chinese characters in Korea has been "typically relegated to academic and ceremonial domains" (Silva 71).

[4] An example is the recent trend in Japan to write *shōgaisha* 障害者 (a person with a disability) as *shōgaisha* 障がい者 to avoid the associations of *gai* 害 (impairment). Critics have argued that this actually accentuates these negative associations and constitutes excessive "political correctness".

[5] See Robertson (207) for a table showing the associations ascribed to hiragana, katakana, kanji and rōmaji.

> While this statement could be translated into English as "I was di-dismissed," the Roman alphabet cannot approximate its particular orthographic configuration. The first sound, "*mu*," is written in *katakana* to emphasize its quality as a stuttering sound rather than a morpheme. Of infinitely greater significance, however, is the fact that when Bunzô does manage to blurt out the two-character compound "*menshoku*," it is rendered half in *hiragana,* as though to reflect the speaker's desperate desire to strip the word of the meaning visually fixed in its ideographic form.

In his novel *1Q84* Murakami Haruki used a hiragana-katakana mixture to indicate a character's dyslexia. In her Polish translation, Zielinska-Elliott wrote this dialogue in lowercase even at the start of sentences, while the Swedish translator divided all the words "into syllables using hyphens in order to stress the monotony of Fukaeri's diction" (Zielinksa-Elliott & Holm 13). The Russian translator used italics with hyphens between the words. Although I do not have the competence in these languages to evaluate the effectiveness of these techniques, they at least mark the non-normative nature of this character's speech.

> 少女はシホンシュギ（時にはブッシツシュギという言葉が使われる）が何であるかを知らない。(Murakami 171)
>
> *The girl does not know what they mean by "cap-i-tal-izum" (or the other word they sometimes use, "ma-teer-ee-al-izum") ...*. (Rubin 532)

When translating from Japanese, these semantic aspects of script choice need to be conveyed by some means. Devices such as fonts, italics, upper or lower case, and non-standard spelling can sometimes offer *partial* solutions to the translation challenges presented by semiotic uses of Japanese scripts, although they cannot always fully convey the meaning, as demonstrated in the *Ukigumo* example. For instance, Robertson (206) notes that

> Unlike with font, the use of multiple scripts is an important aspect of normal Japanese and something all literate Japanese are already familiar with. [….] Furthermore, the impressions native Japanese speakers have of each script can function in addition to any they may have of a particular font, and are substantially deeper and more detailed.

Manipulation of font size is another resource available to translators, as is the use of a font combination, which "in the West gives the text a distinctly modern feel" (Kendall 135).

Conversely, translators working *into* Japanese can use script for effect by exploring possibilities not available to those working into monoscriptal languages. When translating Anaïs Nin's *Winter of Artifice* as *Jinkō no fuyu*, Kimura Junko rendered italicized passages

describing the heroine's emotions in hiragana and used kanji for difficult words or abstract expressions of Latin origin so as to give "a detached and formal impression" (Kimura 214). She notes that kanji convey an "exotic mood", a technique often used in translations of European modernist poetry.

In addition to script choice, the Japanese writing system includes symbols "to indicate variations in vowel length, especially nonphonemic but emotive variations [….] All these devices express linguistic (phonetic) or paralinguistic information conveyed in spoken language, but not represented in conventional writing" (Tranter 141). For example, a half-sized kana vowel can be used for emphasis—おわりましたかぁ. Gottlieb (397) comments that such usages are typically aimed at conveying informality or cuteness.

Script as a Creative Factor

Some have criticized Chinese characters as an obstacle to creativity, yet their versatility offers inventive potential in original and translated works. In Japanese, kanji can be used "for meaning, for sound when read in Chinese, and for sound when read in Japanese" (Denecke 207), enabling "a literary playfulness impossible with alphabetic languages where graphs are more closely linked to pronunciation" (208). Maynard (148) gives the example of a pun involving 骨折, which can be read in its Sino-Japanese pronunciation *kossetsu* (broken bone) or its Japanese pronunciation *hone-ori* (effort).

Japan has a long tradition of orthographic puns, exploiting the tension between form and content. The fact that kanji express sound and meaning enables wordplay where a kanji is replaced with a homophone. Kanji's visual aspects come to the fore in advertising, often through playful use of the shape or parts of characters—e.g., drawing on the literal meanings of disassembled kanji parts. In a hair restoration lotion advertisement, the character *kami* 髪 (*hair*) is deconstructed into its three main components—長 (long), 彡 (the radical for hair) and 友 (friend)—so as to play on the idea that using this lotion will make one's hair a longlasting friend (see YouTube). Similar script literalization is impossible in a non-sinographic language (although graphic art might sometimes convey a comparable effect), so rewriting or creation of a new advertisement altogether is necessary. Writers and translators also sometimes use hiragana to allow different semantic possibilities to come into play. The fact that alternative homographs might "hover" over a particular phonetic reading (Kendall 137) adds interpretive richness.

Pseudo-characters use "ideographic principles to craft new characters whose meaning — though not part of the lexicalized vocabulary — is easy to guess" (Bachner 176). An extreme

example of such creativity (one where the individual pseudo-characters have no decipherable meaning) is Xu Bing's literary art work titled *Tianshu* or *A Book from the Sky*. This involved inventing over 4,000 pseudo-characters, resulting in a text whose intent is "to subvert the institution of writing" (Lee "Visuality" 47). Surprisingly, this otherwise meaningless text has been translated in part by Bruno (2012), who invented an alien-yet-familiar pseudo-English by using such devices as misspelled words, non-words and falsely derived compounds to "reproduce the overall aesthetic force" (Lee "Visuality" 50). She also used Old English typeface and the layout of old institutionalized texts and imitated the "decoration in ancient, canonical English manuscripts" (Lee *Experimental* 110). Lee describes Bruno's work as an intersemiotic translation "employing verbal, visual, and paratextual cues to reproduce the overall aesthetic effect". Elsewhere, however, Lee points out that it fails to replicate the text's cultural critique and intersemiotic tension because it is decontextualized ("Visuality" 51).

Script as an Aesthetic and Visual Factor

Script also embodies aesthetic elements that constitute an aspect of visual communication, where form and complexity (or simplicity) signify. The most obvious manifestation is Chinese calligraphy, a tradition that "values scriptural beauty, sometimes at the expense of discernible meaning" (Bachner 170).

The visual aspects can also be crucial in literature. Meaning can be generated by formal qualities such as "the shape and arrangement of the script used, the size of letters, the legibility and readability of the inscription" (Eastmond 3). In turn, script-related choices affect readability and the aesthetic effect. Kanji variation fulfils a poetic function (Tranter 146), while hiragana are regarded as more aesthetically pleasing than katakana. Hence translators might need to take into account not just the appeal to the reader's ear but also the visual appeal, so that "onlookers" act as *viewers*, not just readers (Eastmond 3).

One aspect of how visual form contributes to meaning-making is the physical styles of writing a script. Styles of script constitute a secondary language that encodes a text with social significance beyond the graphemic and lexical values of the letters. Stanley Morison has shown that the styles of script and letter design in the history of writing were functions of political and institutional authority. The type of script in which a text appears thus provides an irreducible first context of reception and interpretation for a text (Irvine 383).

Chinese calligraphy has five basic styles: "bold and elegant" seal script; "dignified and serious" clerical script; "formal and controlled" standard script; "graceful and polished" running script; and "fluid, individualistic" grass script (Stevens 247). When a handwritten script

style or a typeface (the far more common form encountered by translators today) departs from the norm, translators need to consider evoking a similar "personality". For example, Garamond embodies a "classic and easy-going beauty", while Monotype Corsiva mimics the effect of handwritten text and is suitable for conveying heartfelt sentiments (see Purdue OWL). The Kocho kanji typeface represents "the aesthetic values seen in Bodoni, its Western counterpart" (Takagi 13). Noting the neglect of such aspects by translation scholars, O'Sullivan (4) points out, for example, that sans serif fonts are usually preferred for subtitles.

It is challenging to emulate in an alphabet language the balance or interplay among kanji and kana on a page—what Mishima Yukio referred to as "the beauty of the disposition of the "dark" and "light" (quoted in Seidensticker 30). This contrast also contributes to the impression of a text's density, difficulty or fluidity. Kana interspersed among kanji function "almost as breathing spaces that tie the whole together. In short, the kana serve as *ma*"—"intervening empty space" (Arata 59), which is an underlying aesthetic principle in Japan. Shelton and Okayama (169) note that in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's short story "Mōmoku monogatari", "For the text depicting the blind man's movement and sensing of the light, the sparser and more abstract kana is used: but where objects are encountered and touched to reveal shape, texture and meaning, kanji appears on the page." They conclude that Tanizaki produced "an aesthetic-cum-pictorial reinforcement of the text" (170)—although the English translation does not replicate this. Hibbett (40) has commented on the difficulties he faced in translating Tanizaki's novel *Kagi*, where the secret diaries were written in "square *katakana* for the man's diary and flowing *hiragana* for the woman's." Hibbett"s partial solution in *The Key* was to adopt a feminine style of writing for the woman's diary.

A Japanese saying describes translation as an act of converting horizontally written text into vertical text (or vice versa). Although translation involves far more than the merely mechanical act implied by this saying, even text direction does have "meaning" when a choice is available. Kendall (136) notes the multidirectional flexibility of Japanese writing—"horizontally from left to right", "horizontally from right to left (rarer these days, but still used, for example, on goods vehicles)", and "vertically from right to left". The direction influences the aesthetic impression, so "a Japanese reader is likely to be more aware than a reader accustomed to a Latinate script, not only of how a text is organized, but of how it is not organized; of the alternatives not selected" (137). Distinctions deriving from text directionality are, however, usually elided in translation.

Script in Poetry

Visuality has particular appeal in poetry, making translation into a different linguistic form even more challenging. Most famous in this respect is concrete poetry, which involves "activating the graphic, material expressivity of language" over and above linguistic signification (Bachner 80).

A change in script (e.g., from hiragana to a mixture of kanji and kana) can alter the interpretation or impression of a poem. In Hagiwara Sakutarō's free-verse "Ryojō," *France* was written as ふらんす to indicate his longing for France (rather than referring to the geopolitical entity, usually written in katakana). When Arthur Binard translated this as "On the Way", he rendered the impact by deciding to "infuse the entire poem with the feeling of France representing the longing to go someplace far away with a lot of imaginative power for the poet" (Takemori 42). In a poem by Minashita Kiryū, katakana are arbitrarily inserted within hiragana words. In Sawako Nakayasu's translation "Border Z / Delete, and Rewrite", capital letters are used in the middle of English words to impart a similar unsettling effect.

Script as an Exoticizing Factor

Script can accentuate the foreignness of elements (e.g., borrowed words, or speech by non-native Japanese). The aura surrounding katakana loanwords contributes to a foreignizing translation (not necessarily a bad thing). This can hinder "real integration" (Suter 65) or, conversely, pave the way for domesticating these foreign elements. Bachner (94) identifies two features of Chinese characters when viewed from *outside*: "as pure ornament or cipher of cultural difference". Unconventional script use has a similar defamiliarizing effect. Traces of the allure of European scripts in East Asia linger in the use of often-nonsensical alphabet expressions, here suggesting Western provenance or "coolness".

Mizumura Minae's novel *Shishōsetsu from left to right* has English expressions and sentences intermingled with the Japanese on nearly every page, integral to this story of two Japanese sisters in New York. The worlds expressed by the novel's bilinguality would be lost if unified into English in translation. This linguistic interplay in orthographic (as well as lexical and syntactic) form represents a meaningful or motivated strangeness that makes demands on Japanese readers. In his translation *An "I" Novel, from Left to Right,* James E. Lipson sought to achieve something of a similar impact by using italics to indicate the original English.

Script's Ideological Freight

Ricci (80) argues that "Scripts, often viewed as technical devices in the service of meaning, are in fact sites of power: religious, social, and political." This raises questions of their function

(e.g., to unite or divide) and who is entitled to use them. Scripts can be implicated in (de)colonization or the introduction of a foreign religion; discourses of hindering or promoting modernization; or use by a particular group, gender or generation. They can be used—or banned—on various ideological grounds, and a script's foreign origin can be respected or distrusted. In Japan, kanji"s links with China imparted great cachet. Chinese civilization was regarded with such esteem that some kana texts were rescripted into Chinese characters. Ideological uses of script are not, however, confined to ideographic languages, as witnessed by the choice between Cyrillic or Latin scripts to write different Slavic languages.

Although script can act as a badge of cultural (as distinct from national) identity, Chineseness is not necessarily represented by Chinese characters, even within China.[6] For those on the Sinosphere's periphery, moreover, the script has "nationalistic overtones" (Tsu 211). The lack of fit between a "central" script and regional vernaculars can cause problems, including a sense of ambivalence about (and technical difficulties in) writing or translating in a dominant script that does not encapsulate local linguistic and cultural identity.

Scripts can carry a symbolic or mystical value separate from their content or readability. Some, particularly archaic scripts, have a power deriving precisely from their *non*-readability. Stevens (244-245) notes that "even when the sutras were translated into Chinese, *mantra* (esoteric formulas) were reproduced in the Siddhaṃ script", which was "venerated for its beauty and magic". The ties between a religion and a script are also evident in how, although Buddhist classics were published in Hangeul soon after its invention in 1443, Buddhism was too embedded in Chinese literary culture for the Hangeul versions to be handed down (Kim 44). Christianity, however, entered Korea "exclusively and initially through Bibles translated in Korean using hangeul-only orthography" (45). Missionaries' encouragement of Hangeul around the turn of the twentieth century was partly driven by a desire "to turn Korea away from Confucian China" (Silva 58). Conversely, ties between a particular script and missionaries can act as a disincentive to use that script. In the early decades of the twentieth century translations of the New Testament were printed in the Pollard script developed for writing Miao, the language of a Chinese ethnic minority, but after the adoption of Pinyin for writing standard Chinese, the Pollard script lost status, partly because of its missionary ties.

[6] Apart from Pinyin, the Arabic script is used for writing the Uyghur language in Western China, and the Cyrillic and Latin scripts are also used in China.

Some scripts have been used solely or predominantly by a particular gender.[7] In southern China the Nüshu script was used exclusively among women in a few villages in Hunan province. The last original writer of the script died in 2004, but the Chinese government has initiated preservation efforts. Liu (241) argues that women used this script to "construct meaning, experience autonomy, and acknowledge the androcentric impositions made upon them". Nüshu writings have been translated into Chinese, but without paratextual contextualization in the form of a preface, for example, translations cannot convey this scripts' gendered associations.

Changing or Abandoning a Script

Scripts are "embedded in particular cultures and histories" (Ricci 170), so adopting a different script is "akin to translation in the guise of transliteration" (180), since it involves new "modes of expression". It also makes it difficult to access a society's heritage; such distancing from the past or others is sometimes the very intention. In 1446 King Sejong promulgated Hangeul, rejecting Chinese characters as unsuitable for Korean. Adopting a script that more closely reflects vernacular language has the potential to offer "alternative avenues for expression closer to native feelings" (Fogel 501), but there was considerable resistance, particularly among the Korean elite, partly because of the large body of existing texts in Chinese characters. Even after Hangeul finally became the national script in 1894, Chinese writing remained dominant for a few decades. Eventually, however, existing works became inaccessible to untrained readers, therefore requiring translation or at least transcription.

Some people regarded Japan's complex writing system as an obstacle to modernization and a sign of the language's inferiority. The postwar Occupation witnessed proposals to ban kanji in favor of katakana or to adopt the Latin alphabet, on the grounds that it would foster a democratic spirit and international understanding. Yet kanji's productive capacities have allowed translators to coin words as equivalents for imported concepts, making the lexicon more suitable for expressing modernity.

[7] Different genders (and generations) of Japanese writers tend to favor one script over another. The study by Smith and Schmidt (50) identified the following script stereotypes:

	Writer/Reader Features
Kanji	male, middle-aged and older
Hiragana	female, young
Katakana	young, especially male
Rômaji	young, especially female

Translation and contact with foreign languages can themselves sometimes lead to a changed textual environment. Around 1686 new writing systems (the Soyombo alphabet and the horizontal square script) appeared in Mongolia, "intended in part to enable better translations of the Buddhist religious texts, and to give a more accurate rendering of Tibetan and Sanskrit words of liturgical importance" (Grivelet 76).

Older writing conventions convey an archaic air. Historical kana usage such as てふ (pronounced *chō*, not *tefu*) and old-fashioned kanji (e.g., 國) evoke a bygone era. Old texts were written in the language of their times, which suggests using current language in a translation, particularly if it is simply for informational purposes. Nevertheless, this can sound anachronistic, and old Japanese writing no longer seems contemporary to modern Japanese readers. The use of old orthography in a *present-day* text has a particular rhetorical effect. Strategies for translating antiquated diction as signified by script include using archaic spelling (e.g., *childe*); an artificial hybrid that imparts a patina of age but is not off-putting to contemporary readers; a form that is "modern enough to be read without difficulty but unmarked for modernity" (Robinson 115); a description (e.g. *Using an old-fashioned turn of phrase, ...*)—or contemporary language. The decision depends on the type of text and the intended purpose of the translation.

Glosses and Metalinguistic References

Chartier (ix) stresses the need to pay attention to the "technical, visual, and physical devices that organize the reading of writing." One such distinctive Japanese practice is the *rubi* glosses embedded in small-sized font alongside words, usually in a different script. Readers read the contrapuntal representations (two pronunciations and two layers of meaning) more or less simultaneously. Irvine (392) stresses that "text and gloss are mutually dependent, and the gloss is quite clearly presented as a text with its own pre-assigned space on the page, a genre with its own textual status." Kamei (70) argues that the act of adding *rubi* can itself be regarded as translation. The amalgam's resulting polyphony and polysemy, as well as the defamiliarizing effect are, however, virtually impossible to reproduce in a single word in another language. Tranter (139) gives an example of *rubi* used to show "the speaker's *attitude* to the referent" and describes this as "a graphic way of reproducing tone of voice" (140), while Suter (73) comments

that such glosses raise "the reader's awareness of the existence of different linguistic realities and the textual nature of the text itself".[8]

Expressions that refer to the orthography itself present a challenge for translators working into a different script. The bilingual writer Tawada Yōko seeks to create new literature by focusing on script and sounds:

> きのこさんは力なく微笑んで、「あら。それは、ごしゅうしょうさま。」と答えた。何か傷があると思って慰めてくれているらしい。耳を切り取られた後の傷口に、秋の心が染まる。そう思った途端に、はっとした。「ごしゅうしょう」という漢字が一瞬ひらめいていたような気がしたのだ。 (Tawada 32)
>
> *Kinoko-san smiled weakly and said, "Oh, my dear. How lamendacious, to lose your ear."* (Selden 77)

Here the extended play on the graphic elements of the word *shūshō* 愁傷 (condolences) is replaced by the made-up word *lamendacious*, in line with Kinoko's habit of mis-rendering words. Kaindl (90-91) suggests that for Tawada "it is not the word, but the script and the character that represent the actual translation unit and the actual translation problem".

If the item is not of importance, translators can simply add a phrase such as *in Japanese*, or a reference to the *two characters* of a word could be replaced with a reference to the *six letters* of the equivalent. In Japanese the practice of three people sleeping side by side is referred to as sleeping in the shape of the character for "river" (川), and this was handled differently by these translators:

> *... we all slept in a row. Holding hands, like the three strokes of the character for "river."* (Emmerich, *The Lake* 169)
>
> *... all snuggled up on the floor together like the Roman numeral III* (Shimokawa 55)

At other times it might be preferable to mask the reference's script-based nature if that would confuse readers or be of no interest or relevance:

> … 株の「か」の字も知らなかった。(Taguchi: 72)
>
> *I didn't know the first thing about stocks* .... (literally, the *ka* of *kabu* [stocks])

Conclusion

I acknowledge that in many cases script is indeed largely a neutral vehicle for meaning, and we should be careful not to fetishize "a script essence that will survive and resist translation

[8] See Wakabayashi ("Translating") for further discussion.

between languages and cultures as well as between different media" (Bachner 206). Nevertheless, script does sometimes become a mediating force in its own right, and these cases have been under-examined in Translation Studies. Kendall (143) declares that

> The nature of translation as a creative act is made even clearer when it occurs … from one orthography to another …. It is not possible to find equivalents when dealing with such diverse orthographies. There are none. The translators have to create in new spaces and form a text that is suitable for them.

Script-based features of particular relevance in a source text call for creativity and a range of compensatory techniques. Although the effect might not be exactly the same as that of the original feature, translation inevitably entails some degree of difference. The techniques identified in the examples mentioned here include *visual* devices such as decorative and graphic art, as well as visual→verbal intersemiotic translation. They also include *typographical* devices—e.g., fonts and typefaces; layout; unconventional use of upper or lower case; italics; word elongation; hyphenation. Another technique involves *lexical* devices—e.g., (mis)spelling or archaic spelling; difficult or abstract expressions (e.g., Latin or Latin-derived words rather than Anglo-Saxon equivalents); non-words; falsely derived compounds. Other techniques include the use of gendered style, tone of voice, paratextual cues, explanatory descriptions, artificial hybrid language, and a holistic infusion of the effect—or a combination of two or more of the above techniques, which by no means exhaust the possibilities. Although these techniques might fail to make readers aware of the exact nature of the *scriptness* of the source text, they succeed in revealing the marked (unconventional) nature of the pertinent passages. The *converse* of these techniques can at times be used when translators working into sinographic languages seek to exploit the possibilities of script.

The relevance of script in translation involving sinographic languages applies in varying degrees to other languages where script choices are available or there has been a change in script, and even to monoscriptal traditions, where translators could benefit from paying greater attention not only to a writer's constrained orthographical choices, for example, but also to the related areas of visual and typographical choices. Script is of particular interest in languages which, often for political reasons, are written in more than one script, such as Sanskrit (written in Devanagari and many regional scripts), Malay (Arabic and Latin) and Tajik in Central Asia (Arabic and Cyrillic). When near-identical languages use different writing systems (e.g., Serbian and Croatian, Hindi and Urdu), "translation" largely equates with script change—yet with broad implications. Kothari (95) asks how do we understand translation when what appears

as “Hindi” by some gets labelled as “Urdu” elsewhere? Is that the same “thing” but with different labels and therefore not in need of translation? On the other hand, Urdu and Hindi are polarized along political ideologies and seek mediation that foregrounds the common roots, an act made possible by both translation and interpretation. How do we theorize language, script and translation in such contexts?

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The Many Scripts of the Chinese Scriptworld, the *Epic of King Gesar*, and World Literature

Karen L. Thornber
Harvard University
thornber@fas.harvard.edu

Abstract

The idea of an East Asian cultural "bloc" united in no small part by the Chinese script has long been widely held; through the end of the Qing dynasty Chinese characters served as the scripta franca for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese intellectuals. Yet writing in East Asia has almost always involved more than Chinese characters and their offshoots. The purpose of this article is twofold. First is to introduce readers of world literature unfamiliar with East Asia to the wide variety of the region's languages and scripts. The second objective is to demonstrate that when we associate writing in China only with Chinese characters, as often has been the case, we overlook some of the region's, and the world's, most significant works of world literature. These include the twelfth-century *Epic of King Gesar*, a living epic which at twenty-five times the size of the *Iliad* is the world's longest.

Keywords

Alai – *Epic of King Gesar* – *Iliad* – *Mahabharata* – Mongolia – Tibet

The idea of an East Asian cultural "bloc" united in no small part by the Chinese script has long been widely held; through the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) Chinese characters served as the scripta franca for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese intellectuals.[1] Yet writing in East Asia has almost always involved more than Chinese characters and their offshoots. The purpose of this article is thus twofold. First is to introduce readers of world literature unfamiliar with East Asia to the wide variety of languages and scripts present in the region. The second objective is to demonstrate that when we associate writing in China only with Chinese characters, as often has been the case, we overlook some of the region's, and the world's, most significant works of world literature. The article begins with an overview of language and script

[1] Chinese characters were also used to transcribe Mongolian and Manchu, facilitating transmission of texts including the *Secret History of the Mongols* (Mong. Mongγol-un niγuča tobčiyan, c. 1228), the most celebrated "native" story of Genghis Khan (Chinggis, c. 1162-1227) (Thornber "Neglected").

contestations within the borders of today's China. It then turns to the colorful transmission history of the twelfth-century *Epic of King Gesar*, which at twenty-five times the size of the *Iliad* is the world's longest epic. *Gesar* continues to thrive today in numerous oral forms and multiple languages and scripts, but despite its proliferation for centuries in Mongolian and Tibetan, it was translated only belatedly into Chinese. I conclude with thoughts on how *Gesar*, a central part of the lives of numerous peoples across Asia and beyond, has been neglected in world literature scholarship; and I invite us to include *Gesar* and other well-traveled but understudied texts in our new compasses of world literature.

The linguist Linda Tsung argues that "the different languages [and scripts] of the peoples of China's vast territories contested for supremacy as far back as the Archaic era" (34). For most periods "supremacy" is an overstatement, but across the millennia the territory of today's China has been home to multiple and often competing languages and scripts. There are a number of watershed events/periods in Chinese history that significantly changed the status and use of languages and scripts and that are crucial to understanding their complexity in East Asia.[2]

First, in order to integrate non-Han tribes into his empire, the Qin emperor Qin Shi Huang (260-210 BCE) devalued non-Han scripts; a number of prominent local scripts fell into disuse under the Qin's centralization and expansion policies (Tsung 36). The Qin policy of Chinese script unification (*wenzi tongyi*) itself standardized different variants of the Chinese script. The efforts of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) were followed by further script consolidation during the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) to ensure that local officials could read imperial edicts. A second important period was the introduction of Confucianism in the civil service examinations (121 BCE), revived by the Sui emperors (589-618) and refined during the Tang dynasty (618-907), which required Han and non-Han elites alike to master tens of thousands of Chinese characters.[3] Non-Han students continued to learn non-Han languages and scripts, however, including at the Imperial College in Chang'an; familiarity with two or more languages and scripts was not uncommon among non-Han elites. Likewise, as Evelyn Rawski notes, in the following centuries, even while using Chinese characters for government decrees, the Liao (907-1125), Jin (1115-1234), Xixia (1038-1227), and Yuan (1279-1368) regimes also "created their own national scripts." To give one example, the tenth-century

[2] Tsung identifies and elaborates on these events/periods (34-52); Zhou summarizes the multiple scripts present in China.
[3] The civil service examination system developed gradually over the centuries and was limited primarily to elites.

Khitan scripts served as the foundation for the twelfth-century Jurchen large and small scripts (Rawski "Reenvisioning" 837).

The third watershed event in language and script use was the Mongol conquest of Han Chinese peoples and establishment of the Yuan dynasty, where imperial edicts were written in Mongolian, and Mongolian, Arabic, and Persian held the highest status.[4] But Chinese characters retained an instrumental value for Mongol rulers to communicate with local officials, albeit via a translation service since most Mongols were not proficient in the Chinese script. Although non-Han languages in the south and southwest of the empire, including Tibetan, had no official status, they were not suppressed by the Yuan court.

Han Chinese overthrew the Yuan in 1368, creating the Ming Dynasty, which itself was toppled in 1644 by non-Han Manchus who established the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). A fourth landmark in language and script use occurred when Qing rulers required documents submitted to the emperor to use both Manchu and Chinese languages; academics not proficient in the Manchu script were demoted. Although Manchu was designated as the national language, the Qing also granted official status to Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan, and all four languages enjoyed a publishing boom. Multilingual materials were common, with Manchu often serving as a "bridge language" – "the language that Mongols and other non-Han peoples could use to access Chinese-language works" (Rawski "Qing Publishing" 324). Manchu was particularly convenient for the Qing' s Mongol population, given the close connections between Manchu and Mongol writing systems. Even though translation of Chinese fiction and drama was officially prohibited, Chinese novels circulated widely, with some manuscripts featuring "phonetic transcriptions of Chinese texts in Manchu letters, so that they could be read aloud to bannermen who could not read Chinese but understood the spoken language" (319). Languages other than Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan were generally prohibited during the Qing except for religious activities, including in southwest China the Dongba and Geba scripts of the Naxi people and the Yi script of the Yi people.

A fifth transformative period was the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Chinese worked on reforming their writing system, believing the Chinese script inconsistent with modernity. As Jing Tsu observes, "China almost lost its script just as its modern language was taking place. . . . Script inventors and language reformers . . . responded with an array of imaginative – and at times esoteric – prescriptions." These included alphabet letters, shorthand,

[4] Haw reappraises the place of Persian in the Yuan, arguing that it was never a "genuine *lingua franca*" and instead was confined to commercial and official circles within the Muslim community (5).

notations for deaf-mute persons, and numeral-based diagrams (19, 21).[5] In addition, some Chinese also began to write prolifically in English and other European languages.[6] The Qing and early Republican (1912-1949) periods likewise witnessed efforts by foreign missionaries to promote phonetic scripts among China's many minority groups. China's sixth historical watershed moment in language and script use was Japanese colonization of Taiwan in 1895 and enforcement of the Japanese language there, as well as in northeast China, where the Japanese established the informal colony of Manchukuo in 1932.[7]

In the decades since Japanese defeat in 1945 and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government has enforced changes to the Chinese script and enacted a broad array of policies toward the many languages and scripts of their minority peoples (Beckett and Postiglione, Tsung). At times Chinese authorities have encouraged or at least not impeded use of non-Chinese scripts – including Dongba and Geba, Dungan (Hui), Hangeul (Korean), Latin (for Bai, Bouyei, Hani, and others), Lisu, Miao, Mongol, Pai, "Women's Script" (*nüshu*, Hunan Province), Tai, Tibetan, Uyghur, Yi, and Zhuang[8] – but in recent years Chinese officials have notably reduced and in certain sites even eliminated the teaching of ethnic minority languages (Bender, Wong "Tibetans", Zhou). Manchu, for instance, once the language of the Chinese empire, is now spoken only in a small corner of Xinjiang near the Kazak border, by the Xibe, with very few young Xibe able to read the Manchu script (Jacobs). The internet has also changed how Chinese write, with romanized Cantonese, Shanghaiese, Mandarin, and Taiwanese as well as numerous other languages readily found online (Mair 54-56).[9]

Over the millennia, as classical Chinese literature flourished, many of China's numerous non-Chinese scripts were also used to write creatively. While to the east and southeast, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and later Taiwanese developed literatures in Chinese characters and their offshoots, ethnic minorities across what is today's China developed vibrant creative traditions written for the most part in separate and often multiple languages and scripts.

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[5] Romanization of the Chinese script dates to the Italian Jesuit priests Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), who co-authored the first Portuguese-Chinese dictionaries.

[6] Lin Yutang (1895-1976) is a principal early example. Needless to say, Chinese based outside China have written in countless languages and scripts.

[7] For more on script use in Taiwan see Bachner.

[8] Several of these scripts are used to write multiple languages, including the Tibetan script, which is of Indic origin and used, with adaptation, to write Tibetan languages, Dzongkha, Sikkimese, Ladakhi, and sometimes Balti, and the Mongolian script, which comes from Old Uyghur and has been used, with adaptation, to write Mongolian, Buryat, Kalmyk, Oirat, Manchu, Xibe, and others. Many languages in China, including Mongolian, have used multiple scripts.

[9] Mair also outlines the use of Roman letters in modern Chinese-language literature (54-55).

Among these, most notable are China's Mongolian, Uyghur, and Tibetan peoples, whose literatures bespeak a creative efflorescence well beyond the pale of Han Chinese culture (Bender). An especially remarkable example of this literary flowering is the twelfth-century *Epic of King Gesar* (Tb. *gLing Gesar*, lit. Gesar of gLing). Just as there is no one definitive title,[10] so too is there no single official version or even a standard collection of versions of this text. A living epic that continues to circulate broadly worldwide in multiple Central, East, South, and Southeast Asian as well as Eastern and Western European languages and scripts, *Gesar* is a massive and constantly changing narrative; as codified in its most complete Chinese version, the epic comes to some 20 million words of poetry and prose in 120 volumes.[11] Yet this narrative is barely known among scholars of East Asian literatures, much less among scholars of world literature. The following pages therefore first summarize the background and story of *Gesar* and then discuss several of the major languages and scripts in which it has appeared, both in East Asia and in the West; I note some of the fundamental changes to the epic as it migrated among peoples, languages, and scripts. The article concludes with a brief discussion of *Gesar*'s place in world literature.

Expounding on the heroic deeds of the seventh-eighth century Gesar, the legendary King of Gling, *Gesar* consists of a series of narrative songs centering on Gesar's battles against enemies of the dharma and success in bringing order to the land.[12] In most of its versions the epic follows Gesar from his miraculous birth and early years to his acquiring supernatural weapons, armor, and horse, as well as a beautiful wife (or wives), through his countless military campaigns and battles with demons on behalf of his family, people, and other communities, to his departure to another realm.

Gesar generally is believed to have been transmitted orally beginning in the twelfth century.[13] Parts of the epic likely were codified in the Tibetan language and script as early as the fifteenth century (Maconi 374), but the earliest extant handwritten version dates to 1779, transcribed in Tibetan, using Tibetan script (Yang 294). The first printed version, which

[10] Thank you to Norzin Dickyi for this observation.

[11] Robin Kornman and a team of translators are currently working on a "complete" English translation based on a typewritten copy in Tibetan script, which itself comes from a woodblock carved in Eastern Tibet (Lama xiii). When in Tibet, Kornman taped hundreds of hours of performances of *Gesar* and of discussion of the epic (McLemee).

[12] Much Gesar scholarship both in China and abroad has focused on the historical accuracy of the tale, including the relation of Gesar to the Tibetan King Trison Deutsen (c. 742-797) (Li).

[13] Today the story is recited by professional bards – literate and illiterate – throughout Tibet, as well as in neighboring countries including Nepal, India (Ladakh), Mongolia, Russia, and elsewhere in central Asia, in addition to numerous ethnic groups within China such as the Bai, Lisu, Mongols, Naxi, Pumi, Tu, and Uyghur (Bender 1045).

contained only seven chapters, was produced in Beijing in 1716, but in neither the Tibetan nor the Chinese language or script. Instead, it appeared in the Mongolian language and script, commissioned by the Qing Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722).[14] Interestingly, the top of every page of the 1716 Mongolian version contains the Chinese characters for *Sanguozhi*, mistakenly labeling the text a copy of the celebrated fourteenth-century Chinese historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguozhi tongsu yanyi) (Ratcliffe), what later became one of the nation's so-called Four Great Masterpieces (*si da mingzhu*).

The 1716 and other Mongolian (including Buryat) and Tibetan language and script versions of *Gesar* have much in common, but not surprisingly, they are also informed by numerous indigenous tales, folklore, and mythology, as well as popular religious beliefs including different forms of Buddhism and local histories familiar to varying Mongolian and Tibetan communities, respectively. More notably, the 1716 Mongolian version has Gesar summoned from Tibet to China to bring solace to its grieving ruler and restore peace to the kingdom.[15] Furious that Gesar removes his deceased wife from his grasp while he is sleeping, China's emperor attempts to destroy him by casting him into the Hole of Wasps, the Pit of Serpents, and the Den of Wild Beasts. Gesar survives these trials unscathed, so the emperor has him taken to the ramparts to be executed. But shortly before the first spear is thrown, Gesar releases his parrot, which he commands to fly to Tibet and order his brother to raise an army to destroy China to avenge his (Gesar's) death. Terrified, the emperor of China not only spares Gesar's life but also grants Gesar his daughter in marriage and agrees to take another wife himself, thereby bringing order to the realm. After spending three years in China, Gesar returns home to Tibet.

The Mongolian chapter on visiting China stands out in an epic replete with heroic battle scenes, demon slaying, and subjugating opponents. It also has little resonance with oral and written Tibetan-language versions of Gesar, which when they include a visit to China, tell a very different story. For instance, in the Lower Ladhki (western Tibet, northern India) version of the text, transcribed into Tibetan script between 1905 and 1909 by the Moravian missionary August Hermann Francke (1870-1930), Gesar also travels to China.[16] But whereas the

[14] It has been argued that the 1716 Mongolian edition is a transcription of oral stories circulating in Qinghai (western China) in the 1630s (Rawski "Qing Book" 220).

[15] Tibet was part of China during the Yuan dynasty, when the epic is believed to have originated, but during the seventh and eighth centuries, when the epic is likely set, the Tibetan empire stretched far into today's China as well as Central and South Asia.

[16] Francke was one of a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europeans who recorded local performances of *Gesar*. Also noteworthy was the Belgian-French Alexandra David-Néel (1868-1969) and her adopted stepson Arthur Yongden (Lama Yongden), who collected pieces of oral performances

Mongolian version remains relatively silent about the journey itself, the Lower Ladhki version depicts travel to China as treacherous and Gesar as relying on his superhuman powers to overcome a series of punishing obstacles. Furthermore, whereas in the Mongolian version Gesar brings order to China, in the Tibetan version he afflicts all of China with leprosy. The Tibetan version emphasizes Tibet's distance from as well as its potential destructive power over China.

Gesar first caught Western attention in the 1770s, when the German zoologist and botanist Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811) spoke of the Temple of Gesar in his travelogue *Reisen durch verschiedene Provinzen des Russischen Reiches* (Travel through Different Provinces of the Russian Empire, 1771-76) (Hummel). Three decades later, in his ethnographic *Nomadisch Streifereien unter den Kalmüken in den Jahren 1802 und 1803* (Nomadic Rambles among the Kalmuks in 1802 and 1803, 1804), Benjamin Bergmann summarized in German some of the Kalmyk-language version of *Gesar*, marking the first appearance of the epic in a European language; Kalmyk was originally written in the Uyghur script and then between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries in Clear Script (an adaptation of the Classical Mongolian alphabet). As its title *Bokdo Gässärchan: Eine mongolische Religionsschrift in 2 Büchern* (Lord Gesar: A Mongolian Religious Writing in Two Books, 231-84) suggests, Bergmann's translation emphasized religious elements of the tale. Some years later, in 1836, the Moravian missionary and Mongolian and Tibetan specialist Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1779-1847) prepared a new edition of *Gesar* in Mongolian, which he then translated into German as *Die Thaten Bogda Gesser chan's, des Vertilgers der Wurzel der zehn Übel in den zehn Gegenden. Eine ostasiatische Heldensage* (The Deeds of Lord Gesar: Eradicator of the Root of the Ten Evil Things in the Ten Regions – An East Asian Epic) and published in St. Petersburg and Leipzig in 1839. Bergmann's and Schmidt's versions provided the basis for the epic's first English translation, Ida Zeitlin's *Gessar Khan,* published in New York nearly a century later (1927).[17]

As Zeitlin notes, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western-language translators of *Gesar* were particularly captivated by the epic as a source of "living material, hitherto inaccessible to Europeans, on the modes of speech and matters of life of the nomad tribes" (vi),

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of *Gesar* in eastern Tibet which they then adapted into French as *La vie surhumaine de Guésar de Ling, le héros tibétain* (The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling, Tibetan Hero, 1931). Three years later their retelling was translated into English and published in London. Like many Tibetan versions, David-Néel's does not include Gesar's visit to China. I discuss Western translations of *Gesar* in more depth below.

[17] Francke's text includes an English-language summary of *Gesar*, but Zeitlin's was the first book-length *Gesar* in a Western language.

and their renditions accentuated these aspects of the tale. But they also embraced *Gesar*'s supernatural features. Especially noteworthy is how Zeitlin's nine-chapter translation expands on Schmidt's seven chapters to create a text that a contemporary reviewer called "intoxicating to the imagination and comparable in splendor to the Arabian Nights" (Ewing 204). For instance, Zeitlin includes more on Gesar's battles with the twelve-headed monster. She also wraps up the translation with Gesar having "uprooted the tenfold evil and restored gladness to the hearts of men . . . [he ruled] over his people as the sun rules in the heavens and as the mountain rules over the valley below" (200), overshadowing Schmidt's ending, which describes Gesar's journey to the underworld to rescue his mother followed by his successful homecoming.

Even though *Gesar* existed in the Tibetan and Mongolian languages for centuries in various regions of today's China, and in Western languages since the early 1800s, it was only in 1934 that the epic first appeared in Chinese, when the Tibetologist Ren Naiqiang, generally credited as China's first Han Chinese scholar of *Gesar*, translated a section into Chinese. Naming the epic *Man sanguo* (The Foreign Version of the Three Kingdoms), Ren posited it as a "foreign" version of China's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Maconi, 389-90). In so doing, he signaled both *Gesar*'s importance and its marginalization from classical Chinese literature; despite its strong impact in many parts of Asia, *Gesar* does not appear to have been known to classical (Han) Chinese writers.

Subsequent Chinese-language translations of Gesar were based on Mongolian, Tibetan, and even European-language versions. To give one example of the latter, in 1948 Chen Zongxiang published a Chinese-language translation of two sections of David-Néel's version (Maconi 390). Chinese-language studies of *Gesar* soared in China in the 1950s, following the founding of the People's Republic of China, with scholars and other investigators fanning out to the far reaches of the nation to collect materials from China's dozens of ethnic minorities. Significantly, just as *Gesar* began to appear more frequently in Chinese, additional versions were being published, with state sponsorship, in Mongolian and Tibetan. Work on *Gesar* came to a near halt during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 (Robin 149), but the 1980s witnessed the first sustained effort to produce quality Chinese-language translations of the epic. Wang Yinuan's multivolume 1980 *Gesa'er wang zhuan* (Tale of King Gesar) was pioneering in this regard, although like most versions it is greatly abridged. In the preface to one of the volumes, Wang proclaims that this "heroic epic" not only is known throughout China but also is one of

the world's "monumental works," and he points out to his readers that it is many times longer than the Indian *Mahabharata* (1).[18]

Today, in addition to being a massive scholarly enterprise in China, *Gesar* is also a thriving cultural industry, with additional translations into both Chinese and Tibetan, DVDs, and a steady stream of films and cartoons.[19] The Chinese government even has used *Gesar* as proof that Hegel was mistaken when he asserted that there is no national epic in China, one website arguing that *Gesar* overturns "the long-held academic belief that Chinese writers have never created a Chinese epic. In fact, China boasts the longest epic in the world" (Raine).[20] Some have accused these projects of cultural imperialism, as part of Han Chinese efforts to manipulate and profit from Tibetan and other minority cultures, despite the active participation of ethnic Tibetans and Mongolians in recording *Gesar* performances and collecting written materials related to the epic. But contemporary creative works such as the ethnic Tibetan Chinese writer Alai's (A Lai, 1959–) Chinese-language novel *Gesa'er wang* (King Gesar, 2009) reveal a much more complicated dynamic.

Alai's *King Gesar* brings the *Epic of King Gesar* to modern times, intertwining history, myth, and fiction. The novel depicts Gesar as a celestial being who is sent down from heaven to relieve people of their suffering (*kunan de renjian*, 30) and who haunts Jigmed, a contemporary shepherd turned storyteller. Gesar vanquishes various pockets of evil, after which he quickly becomes bored with the apparent tranquility of earthly life. Yet despite Gesar's successes and his belief that all has been resolved, the novel repeatedly emphasizes that human suffering continues. Among those in distress are the people of Qieguo (a small tribal power that clashed with Gling), whose emperor blacks out the sun, forcing his subjects to live in darkness. Furious that one of Gesar's generals wins a horserace against one of his generals and that Gesar spirits away the deceased empress's body, the emperor of Qieguo subjects him to four trials. But rescued by birds, scorpions, and even vegetation, Gesar emerges victorious, ultimately dispelling the demons, stabilizing the country, and even having the emperor offer him his throne. Howard Goldblatt's English version of Alai's *King Gesar* (trans. *The Song of*

[18] Chinese authorities also sought to bring *Gesar* to the attention of the Chinese public through popular culture; open air performances became frequent in the 1980s, and in 1990 Chinese state television broadcast eighteen episodes of the epic (Maconi 397).

[19] For more on Han Chinese interest in and manipulation of *Gesar* and Tibetan culture, including the "Tibet craze," (*Xizang re*) see Buffetrille, Raine, Upton, and Wong "Showcase."

[20] *Gesar* typically has been considered not a Chinese, or even East Asian epic, but rather an Inner Asian epic, of which there are many, with far more ties to the Turkish *Dede Korkut* than to anything in Han Chinese literature. Thank you to Steve Owen for this insight.

King Gesar) rewrites the Qieguo episode as a visit to China by replacing "Qieguo" (伽國) with "China." The English version thus changes the meaning of the Chinese version; it depicts China not only as a minor kingdom blanketed in darkness – an allusion perhaps to China's severe pollution – but even more controversially, as powerless to subdue a Tibetan king.[21] Both the Chinese and the English versions of Alai's *King Gesar* conclude shortly thereafter with the reassurance, or threat, that even though Gesar ultimately leaves earth for good, "The story of his heroic deeds continues to be told" (353). Gesar flees to a more permanent heavenly tranquility, but his powerful impact on earth endures.

More than half a century ago, in "Faut-il reviser la notion de Weltliteratur?" (Do We Have to Revise the Notion of World Literature, 1964), French literature scholar René Étiemble (1909-2002) stridently criticized relentless Eurocentric constructions of world literature and pleaded with the field to broaden its perspective. Among the many examples he gives of Eurocentrism is the absence of *Gesar* in Elizabeth Frenzel's *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Ein Lexikon dichtunggeschichtlicher Längsschnitte* (Themes of World Literature: A Longitudinal Literary-Historical Lexicon, 1962). Yet ironically, what troubles Étiemble is not that Frenzel failed to discuss *Gesar* as an example of world literature, but instead, himself succumbing to Eurocentrism, that she failed to speak of the epic in her article on *Cäsar* (Julius Caesar): "I looked in vain for any reference to the Tibetan *Gesar*, an epic on which a lot of work had been done . . . And yet this is an exciting theme: a Roman Emperor that dominates the great epic of Tibet!" (98).[22]

Much has changed in the last fifty years, with European texts and languages still disproportionately favored in world literature scholarship but writing from other parts of the globe having made significant inroads. Just as Chinese-language texts, including classical Chinese poetry, the Four Great Masterpieces, and works by celebrated modern writers such as Lu Xun (1881-1936) and Mo Yan (1955–), have garnered substantial attention, so too have contemporary ethnic Tibetan writers, including Tashi Dawa (1959–) and Alai, who publish in Chinese, and Jamyang Norbu (1949–), who publishes in English.[23] Yet *Gesar*'s sheer size,

[21] These elements are not included in Alai's Chinese version, tacitly or otherwise; unlike many early versions of the epic, Alai's Chinese version does not have Gesar travel to China.

[22] Specialists believe a connection exists between Gesar and Caesar (Orofino 175), among other heroic figures such as Genghis Khan and Guandi (the mythical Chinese god of war), but not that *Gesar* is actually about the Roman emperor.

[23] As suggested by the global preference for Chinese- and English-language Tibetan writers, the importance of the Tibetan language to Tibetan literature is sometimes minimized (Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani; Venturino *Contemporary*; Venturino "Where").

unwieldiness, and complexity, and perhaps too, paradoxically, its presence across numerous diverse places, languages, and scripts for centuries combined with its longtime status as an outsider to the Han literary tradition have heretofore excluded it from canons of world literature.

This article has outlined the proliferation of languages and scripts within the borders of today's China, demonstrating that writing there has nearly always involved more than the Chinese language and characters. More important, it has revealed that when we associate writing in China only with Chinese characters, we neglect one of the planet's most dynamic works of world literature. Many of *Gesar*'s translators have likened this text to the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, *Arabian Nights*, *Song of Roland*, *Mahabharata*, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The time has come to give *Gesar* the same attention in our own scholarship. So doing promises to bring into clearer perspective global histories of the epic and the fluid dynamics of transcultural negotiation both within and far beyond the modern multi-ethnic nation-state. It also promises to invite renewed respect for *Gesar* as an opus of near unmatched scope and unsurpassed scale. And it reminds us of the humbling task we face as we seek to engage with the multiplicity of texts that, however neglected in certain circles today, are consummate works of world literature.

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Eating Murasaki Shikibu
Scriptworlds, Reverse-Importation, and *the Tale of Genji*

Matthew Chozick
Temple University, Japan Campus
chozick@tuj.temple.edu

Abstract

The fifth century transmission of China's sophisticated writing system to Japan prompted a cascade of textual and literary developments on the archipelago. Retrofit to support Japanese phonetics and syntax, a hybrid script and literature evolved; from this negotiation of texts emerged Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* in eleventh century Kyoto. While *Genji* is celebrated today as Japan's enduring national classic, it fell out of print for much of two centuries preceding its first translation into Victorian era English. This paper examines how interregional exchanges of translations and scripts have amplified the critical and popular success of *Genji*. It will be argued that English translations of *Genji* helped to provide a stylistic and typographic model for reintroducing the text to modern Japanese readers as a mass-market novel. In theorizing about such matters, the Japanese concept of reverse-importation will be introduced and intercultural transferences are contextualized within Oswald de Andrade"s notion of cultural cannibalism.

Keywords

Murasaki Shikibu- *The Tale of Genji*- translation studies- reverse-importation- Japanese literature- Hannibal Lecters

> Genji attracts patrons with both the quality and variety of the food on offer with its unique décor. Diners who wish to enjoy the full Japanese experience can reserve the Tatami Room, where the floor is covered in dried rushes, in accordance with the ancient Japanese tradition. (*Eyewitness Travel Krakow* 192)
>
> [Translation is to] what end? In order to be rescued, from death or extinction. (Sontag 339)

Introduction: From Brazil to Hollywood to Kyoto

With its shocking title, the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade's 1928 "Manifesto Antropófago" has gained attention in recent years among Anglophone literary scholars. Published originally in a script brought to Brazil by Portuguese Jesuits, the manifesto celebrates the creative potential of cultural cannibalism, which Andrade described as an "[a]bsorption of the sacred enemy… to transform him into totem" (43). Using this metaphor of anthropophagia, Andrade advocated for his fellow Brazilian writers to nourish their national literature by symbolically devouring—and incorporating—admirable qualities of foreign texts. On such a dietary regimen, figurative cannibals were tasked to hunt for "the best ingredients from the cultural corpus of the Old and New Worlds in order to create something unique" (Williams 77). In this way, Andrade's manifesto charged Brazilian writers to strengthen national literary traditions without indiscriminately rejecting Anglo-European culture.

After a delay of nearly seventy years, the otherness of Andrade's manifesto was translated into English in 1991. That same year, at box offices, a parallel interest in cannibalism followed the release of the Oscar-winning film *Silence of the Lambs*. The movie's anthropophagic plotline—fleshed out in prequels, a sequel, novels, and a television series—centers on a man-eating psychiatrist, who happens to have been the protégé of a Japanese martial arts master named Murasaki Shikibu[1]. Yes, Murasaki Shikibu. Bibliophiles watching or reading the series are left to puzzle over the reference: what is Japan's national literary hero, who lived a millennium ago, doing in Hollywood cavorting with a cannibal?

This paper examines the spread of Murasaki's reputation to noughties Hollywood from ancient Japan, and we will draw upon the image of the cannibal—of Oswald de Andrade's anthropophagia—to emphasize how Murasaki's writing was first composed, and then later enriched, with a great many of foreign ingredients. In particular, our discussion focuses on interregional flows of scripts and translations between Japan, China, and the West. In broadly tracing a millennium of geographic and diachronic movements in relation to *Genji*, we will encounter a lacuna of nearly two centuries during which complete novelistic versions of the tale had fallen out of print. As G. G. Rowley has argued about the *Genji* publication history in Japan, "[a]ccording to the most comprehensive modern catalogues, not a single new edition of a complete text of *The Tale of Genji* appeared between 1706 and 1890" (2). Following upon Rowley's research, this paper examines how from 1882 onwards, early English translations of

[1] Played by the actress Li Gong, a samurai sword brandishing Murasaki Shikibu is featured most prominently in the 2007 film *Hannibal Rising*, which was based on the eponymous 2006 novel by Thomas Harris.

Genji reinforced the classic's standing in Japan and provided formal models that helped publishers to popularize it on the archipelago.

To describe this complex trajectory of cultural flow, I will introduce the Japanese term 逆輸入 (*gyakuyunyū*), literally meaning "reverse-importation." Reverse-importation designates a process by which sales of a domestic commodity rise in a native market due to popularity achieved in a foreign market. While the term is frequently used by Japanese in the context of industrial or commercial products, it is increasingly employed for cultural and artistic output[2]. Although there has been little scholarship in English on reverse-importation to date, there are several famous cases of it in Western cultural history. An example relevant to our discussion is *Conversations with Goethe*, which secured a readership in nineteenth century Germany only after finding a market overseas in translation. Ironically, the text that popularized *weltliterur* may have been lost to us if not for a "reception abroad [that] set the state for its subsequent revival at home" (Damrosch 32). Similarly, in Japanese cultural history, I contend below that an important reverse-importation phenomenon is the reception of *Genji.* But before we further examine the reappearance of *Genji*, it would be helpful to situate our discussion within the regional network of texts and scripts from which the classic first emerged about a millennium ago.

(Con)textualizing *Genji* before Reverse-Importation: Nourishment via Foreign Ingredients

The longevity of Murasaki's literary presence would probably have surprised the devout Buddhist, who sought to capture an aesthetic of ephemerality in her work. Notions of impermanence and transience permeate Murasaki's prose, and such ideas spread onto the Japanese archipelago via Sanskrit sutras, relayed in Chinese translation, around the turn of the sixth century. Approximately five centuries later, in 978, Murasaki is thought to have been born; she spent much of her life—which continued until 1014 or perhaps even as late as 1025—writing of Kyoto's imperial court. In Murasaki's day, chapters of her opus circulated among elite concubines and consorts, who also helped to hand copy and edit it. Editor-scribes passed down *Genji* primarily in the Japanese phonetic script of *hiragana*, which probably allowed them to render the textures and tenor of their spoken language more precisely than with Chinese ideograms. This usage of *hiragana* contributed to the lasting power of *Genji*, because early

[2] A common example of *gyakuyunyū* given by scholars are ukiyo-e woodblock prints, which were "recognized as highbrow in Japan only after being valued abroad and then reverse-imported" (Sugimoto 30).

editor-scribes were mostly women, and therefore many lacked training in written Chinese.

While none of the original *Genji* manuscripts survive today, they are, nevertheless, recognized as a "high point of works written in [the phonetic] *hiragana*-type script" (Seely 71). Such recognition was not immediate, and before modern printing technologies it was difficult to distribute, preserve, and standardize the *hiragana* of Murasaki's tale. Copies of *Genji* first reached relatively small audiences and chapters were historically challenging to acquire[3]. Moreover, within the literary hierarchy of Murasaki's day, *Genji* was largely dismissed, since, by ancient Japanese Buddhist standards, fiction was viewed as a form of deception. In contrast, literati valorized the truthfulness of poetry and histories. Fortunately for us, by the thirteenth century, nobles from Murasaki's ancestral clan started to employ her work to study its poetry. Heirloom editions of *Genji* were compiled by aristocrats and eventually knowledge of the work's motifs—circulating through poems, summaries, and adaptations—spread amongst "more people than had actually read it as a whole" (Bowring 86). For much of the classic's premodern history, complete access to the chapters was limited to a relatively small and highly educated audience.

It is often assumed that to understand how *Genji* had been written and historically circulated in Japan, there is no need to look beyond the archipelago. One of many reasons for this is that the phonetic script of *hiragana,* in which *Genji* was primarily written, has come to be associated with Japan's national linguistic identity. Notably, Japanese school curricula have portrayed the script as foundational since the 1890s for a "new notion of a national language" (Shirane 237). Efforts to promote a national language coincided with a shift in the Japanese literary canon towards anthologizing "national language texts" (Shirane 237). Not surprisingly, in 1882, the first English translator of *Genji*, Kenchō Suematsu, described *Genji* as "written in pure classical Japanese . . . [which came about] quite independently of any foreign influence" (15). While *Genji* may be recognized, a posteriori, to have been written in the national language without foreign influence, its classical phonetic script of *hiragana* was clearly devised with influence from Chinese characters. According to David B. Lurie, "the trend from around the early ninth century onward was toward formal simplification, which eventually yielded loosely organized sets of phonographs that were visually distinct from their original Chinese characters" (314). Other scholars have gone further and questioned the visual distinctions between the

[3] The eleventh century diary known today as the *Sarashina Nikki* contains detail about difficulties in acquiring and reading all of the *Genji* chapters outside of the court. An English translation is available. See Sarashina. *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams: Recollections of a Woman in 11th-Century Japan*. Trans. Ivan Morris. New York: Penguin Classics, 1989.

Chinese script and Japanese *hiragana*. Christopher Seeley, for example, has argued that "*hiragana* include a number of signs which are little if at all different from cursive forms used by famous native Chinese calligraphers" (71). In any case, notions of *Genji* being purely Japanese and without foreign influence undervalue the text's rich relationship to China, which was essential to the transmission of Murasaki's work as well as to its cultural ethos.

Arguments evincing the pure Japaneseness of *Genji* were raised to a fevered pitch during the Second World War, when cultural chauvinism and territorial expansion motivated some Japanese scholars to deny Murasaki's cultural indebtedness to China. In 1944, for instance, the anthropologist Shinobu Orikuchi attempted to repudiate Chinese influences from *Genji* by posing distinctions that read like stock examples of Freud's narcissism of small differences:

> ancient Chinese tales and *Genji* are completely different. While they both depict the court, *Genji* imaginatively extends to include landscapes beyond it… whereas Chinese literature is limited to the areas surrounding the dwellings of aristocrats (50-51).

Here and elsewhere, arguments on the essential Japaneseness of *Genji* conceal how the classic owes as much to enrichment from ancient Chinese culture as it does to the writing system. Murasaki's diary suggests that she read Chinese characters well enough to teach an empress[4] Chinese poetry, and this literacy provided Murasaki with access to foreign texts that are referenced throughout her own. With reverence for Chinese culture, for example, Murasaki wrote in *Genji* of the *Lotus Sutra* and the Chinese story *Dwelling of Playful Goddesses (You xian ku).* Moreover, the very first passage in *Genji* contains an allusion to the Chinese poetry of Bai Juyi, who was so popular among aristocrats in Murasaki's day that the homage would have been easily recognizable to them. While such intertextualities in *Genji* are difficult to identify for readers untrained in the Chinese classics, confluences between ancient Chinese and Japanese literature interested early Western Sinologists—particularly Arthur Waley, who published a collection of Bai Juyi's poetry (1919) before his bestselling translation of *Genji* (1925-1933).

In addition to incorporating myriad linguistic and cultural ingredients from ancient China, more recently Murasaki's classic has acquired elements from Western literature. Murasaki composed *Genji*, for instance, without punctuation or other typographical features of Latin scripts, yet so-called "original editions" of *Genji* for sale in Japan today virtually all contain features that entered Japanese only after contact with the Latin scriptworld of the late

[4] An excellent English translation of her diary is available. See *The Diary of Lady Murasaki*. Trans. Richard Bowring. New York: Penguin Classics, 1999.

nineteenth century. Tokuhei Yamagishi, editor of a classical Japanese edition of *Genji* that has been republished many times since 1965, has explained that adding modern punctuation makes his edition of the ancient text easier to "decipher" (3). Similarly, the introduction for another untranslated version of *Genji* that has been republished since 1995 notifies readers of Western typographical insertions, but alleges that "on principle nothing is added" (Yanai et al. 3). Such claims are deceptive because the introduction of periods, quotation marks, and commas serve to tidy Murasaki's script into discrete semantic units. Likewise, the insertion of quotation marks in "original" *Genji* editions neatly separates narration from dialogue through modern conventions, thereby increasing an aesthetic of novelistic heteroglossia.

Even if the insertion of foreign typographic elements into *Genji* helps modern readers to "decipher" Murasaki's ancient prose, the tale remains challenging to read in Japanese without translation. It is more difficult for Japanese to slog through the millennium-old work of Murasaki than it is for English speakers to, for example, read the 400-year-old texts of Shakespeare. In fact, it may even be easier for Japanese to read Shakespeare than Murasaki. A 2003 Japanese book on *Genji* – which sold over a million copies according to its publisher's website – explained Murasaki's plot construction vis-à-vis familiar Shakespearian tragedies:

It would be helpful to imagine one of the many Shakespeare dramas, but with its homicide removed. What kind of story would it become? The Heian era [794-1185] Japanese people constructed incredible narratives without murder plots (Kawai 87-8)

Here Japanese readers are assumed to be more conversant with the Bard's literary culture than that of Murasaki's. It is telling that Shakespeare's plays are staged throughout Japan today and some have been available in Japanese translation since the 1870s (Toyoda 90). In contrast, complete *Genji* editions were out of print in the 1870s and it took decades for them to become as widely available in modern translation as the works of Shakespeare.

It so happens that one of the early Japanese translators of Shakespeare, Shōyō Tsubouchi, criticized his countrymen for not considering *Genji* a must-read novel. While such descriptions of *Genji* are plentiful today, genre divisions made it difficult to conflate the largely unreadable *Genji* with the foreign genre of the novel in 1885, when Tsubouchi published his influential *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*Essence of the Novel*). One of Tsubouchi's arguments was that "many Japanese classicists falsely consider *Genji* to be a didactic work" (64). Tsubouchi suggested that *Genji* ought to be seen as a native antecedent of the Western novel, a form that he claimed to be the most advanced in the global hierarchy of literature. Tsubouchi advocated for Japanese writers to emulate the novel, a term that he translated into Japanese as *shōsetsu,*

which he adapted from *xiao shuo* – a Chinese word for fiction that he redefined with quotes from Anglophone scholars.

Tsubouchi's thinking was highly influential. His use of the term *shōsetsu* to translate the word novel is now customary, but his argument for *Genji* being Japan's pioneer novel was not as quickly accepted. Tellingly, in 1905, two decades after Tsubouchi's book, Tokyo University Professor Sakutarō Fujioka wrote in *Kokubungaku zenshi* (*Complete History of Japanese Literature*) that "the first Japanese novel was *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*… the absolute greatest novel" (136). While similar, alternate interpretations of Japanese literary history are not out of the question today, they seem to have fallen from fashion once *Genji* garnered acclaim in English. At the time of its first English translation in 1882, the classic's readership in Japan had been comprised for about two centuries almost exclusively of elites with special training in a commentarial tradition. While Japan's literate public enjoyed a vibrant print culture in the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1890s that publishers sought to "rescue *Genji* from obscurity" (Rowley 3). What created interest in reviving *Genji* at this time, G. G. Rowley has convincingly argued, was Westernization that placed the "very notions of "Japan" and "Japaneseness"… under construction, as a variety of interest groups vied with one another to build their version of national identity" (3). Indeed, and I will proceed to argue that as the Japanese forged a shared vision of national identity at home, a parallel project sought to project a cohesive identity internationally. This parallel endeavor had the consequence of adding new foreign ingredients to *Genji* that would help it to become a bestselling novel in Japan.

Reverse-importing *Genji*

In 1878, a mere ten years after Emperor Meiji opened Japan and ended centuries of quasi-isolationist policies, a young man with a penchant for ancient literature was sent to Britain as a member of the Japanese legation. That young man, Kenchō Suematsu, would seek to prove the sophistication of Japanese culture in England, in part for political reasons. Meiji era Japanese were viewed by Western leaders as inferior and thereby relegated to "unfair" international treaties that placed the archipelago at a financial disadvantage (Auslin 17). As a result of unequal treaties, a goal of Japan's Meiji era foreign policy at this time was proving its cultural equality. In the realm of literature, such a task would not be simple. Like new nations on the world stage, translations too can be subject to "unequal exchange" occurring in a strongly hierarchized universe" (Casanova 288).

In 1882, under the aegis of Trübner & Company, the politically driven Kenchō Suematsu, who was then studying law at the University of Cambridge, published the first English translation of *Genji.* Since *Genji* had been out of print in Tokyo, Suematsu's choice to translate the work may appear peculiar, but his decision makes sense if we take into account his aims as described in his book' s preface:

On the whole my principal object is not so much to amuse my readers as to present them with a study of human nature, and to give them information on the history of the social and political condition of my native country nearly a thousand years ago. They will be able to compare it with the condition of mediæval and modern Europe (17).

If we are to believe the words of Suematsu, he did not strive to produce a masterpiece of world literature, but rather he offered *Genji* as historical proof that fin-de-siècle Japan, a new nation entering global politics, was culturally on equal keel with the colonial powers. At this time, comparatively little was known about Japanese civilization, since leaders had long eschewed foreign contact. Suematsu was thus positioned to potentially play a large role in cultivating perceptions of his nation. As Lawrence Venuti has argued, "[t]ranslation wields enormous power in constructing representations of foreign cultures" (67).

Though never explicitly mentioned in Suematsu's preface, the novel provided an opportune typographical model for his project. Suematsu recreated *Genji* in English by horizontally flipping Murasaki's vertical waves of Japanese text and organizing them into indented paragraphs; he also inserted punctuation, separated dialogue from narration with quotes, and standardized tenses as well as names. In this way, like the aforementioned "original" editions of *Genji* available in Japanese bookstores today, Suematsu's translation tidied Murasaki's text into discrete semantic units that were split up by Western novelistic conventions.

Suematsu's critics focused less on his formal achievements than on the plot of *Genji*. A reviewer, for example, wrote in *The Spectator*: "[t]he story, if story it may be called, when there is not a vestige of anything like a plot, is exceedingly tedious" (571). Yet the novelistic formatting and ideological basis for Suematsu's resurrection of *Genji* in England coincided well with efforts to project a modern Japanese cultural identity. By 1890, "excessive Westernization [in Japan] soon led to a more conservative response that stressed national pride and native culture in the effort to modernize" (Caddeau 2). To such ends, Suematsu's ideological use of *Genji* fit well with larger discussions taking place among Japan's elites. Suematsu's translation was well received by key figures, including at least one powerful member of the Tokugawa family, who had famously helped Suematsu fund the English *Genji* publication (Clements 44).

A second edition of Suematsu's partial *Genji* translation was released in 1898 and this new printing helped further spread word of *Genji* despite more negative publicity. A *New York Times* reviewer lambasted the tale as "difficult to appreciate…. [the verses are] utterly meaningless" ("Japanese" 257). Perhaps due in part to a spate of poor reviews, the importance of Suematsu's *Genji* translation has not received a great deal of attention. Ouchi Hidenori claimed about Suematsu: "in terms of literary accomplishments, naturally Suematsu cannot be said to be well-regarded" (10). With less subtlety, Donald Keene wrote that Suematsu's *Genji* "exercised no influence on Western readers" (314). And Richard Bowring has asserted: "to all intents and purposes the *Genji* simply did not exist until Arthur Waley's translation, finished in 1933" (95). While the first English translation of *Genji* did not become a bestseller like subsequent translations, Suematsu succeeded in providing a model for modernizing the classic and bringing it back into print. Suematsu's English translation was followed by the first modern movable Japanese type editions of *Genji* in 1890, and he influenced future translators in conceiving of the tale as a novel.

The second English translation of *Genji* (1925-1933) was undertaken by the autodidact Arthur Waley, who taught himself classical Chinese and Japanese while working in the British Museum's division for Oriental Prints and Drawings. Waley's knowledge of East Asian scripts combined with his masterful English prose put him in an extraordinary influential position. Before attempting *Genji*, in the late 1910s, Waley was publishing translations in several distinguished literary magazines, including *The Little Review*, which printed his work contemporaneously with James Joyce's serialization of *Ulysses*.

Waley's translation of *Genji* was the first in any language to become a massive bestselling novel, and, like Suematsu, Waley had no misgivings about presenting *Genji* as a novel. He denoted the book's genre in his unabridged title, *The Tale of Genji: A Novel in Six Parts*. John Walter de Gruchy has suggested that Waley's choice to translate *Genji* as a novel was influenced by Suematsu's earlier decision:

> *The Tale of Genji* had already been presented as a masterpiece in novel form to English readers in 1882 by a Japanese translator, Kenchō Suematsu, and so Waley felt free to recreate it once again and offer it to his own contemporaries as a modern novel (118).

Indeed, Waley was familiar with Suematsu's translation and liked it enough to recommend it in a 1921 article for *New Statesman*. Moreover, Waley's motivations for translating *Genji* were closely akin to those of Suematsu. According to biographer Sukehiro Hirakawa, as a Jew in British society, Waley identified with colonized groups and aimed to use East Asian

masterpieces to peacefully subvert notions of Western cultural superiority: "the book [*Genji*] would present doubts against the supremacy of European civilization" (13). In this way, the ideological project started by Suematsu was continued by Waley, who offered a more extensive translation of *Genji*.[5]

When Waley's *Genji* was climbing up bestseller lists in 1920s Britain and America, Japanese readers were gaining a parallel appetite for Western literary classics. At this time it was still relatively new for Japanese to be able to enjoy foreign novels in translation. And in the 1920s, the book market started to be flooded with affordable translations of Western classics. Between 1927 and 1930, the publisher Shinchōsha, for example, sold half a million 38-volume sets of a translation series titled the *Sekai bungaku zenshū* (*World Literature Complete Collection*) (Fowler 141). These books retailed with other translations for an affordable single yen, and their literary penetration was nothing short of a historic turning point, which is precisely how one manufacturer of the books described them: "they were a turning point, a phenomenon that left their historical mark, because no one before had ever put out over a hundred thousand book copies" (Dynic Group). The sheer number of single yen translations led to surpluses, and the already affordable publications were discounted further (Nagamine 202). Such price reductions enabled many Japanese to newly acquire foreign novels and to gain an appetite for world literary classics. Opportunely, Waley had already been cultivating a Japanese national classic that was being read abroad on par with how the *World Literature Complete Collection* was being read in Japan.

Yūsaku Shimanaka, the then president of book publisher Chūōkōronsha, took notice of the popularity *Genji* enjoyed abroad and he saw it as a chance to create a similar boom in Japan (Mizukami and Chiba 346-349). Shimanaka contacted his friend, the celebrity novelist-turned-translator Junichirō Tanizaki, and sent him a copy of Waley's translation along with a request to place his clout behind the first comprehensive modern Japanese translation of *Genji*[6]. Tanizaki was an ideal choice to popularize *Genji,* insofar as he was a celebrity who embodied the contradictions of Japanese literary modernity: Tanizaki was famous for his foreignized writing style, yet he openly criticized contemporaries for abandoning traditional Japanese literature.

[5] Suematsu published seventeen chapters, whereas Waley translated—albeit with omissions—all but one of the fifty-four *Genji* chapters.

[6] Akiko Yosano published the first modern translation of *Genji* in an abridged format between 1912 and 1913. See G. G. Rowley. *Yosano Akiko and the Tale of Genji*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000).

Tanizaki's first novelistic translation of *Genji* in modern Japanese (1939-1941) catapulted Murasaki Shikibu's tale into the popular imagination. It was sold in 26 volumes by subscription at a price of a single yen, repeating the reasonable cost of the 1920s *World Literature Complete Collection*. However, after a decade of inflation, the price was now more affordable. Tanizaki and his publisher did not seek a wealthy, elite audience; rather, they aimed to duplicate the popular success of *Genji* abroad. Tanizaki made such intentions clear in a promotional *Mainichi Shinbun* newspaper interview in 1938: "I have sought over this long haul to bestow an understanding of the substance in *Genji*, the world's pride, among the many citizens of our country Japan" ("Koten" 7). In this remark, we can glimpse how Tanizaki aimed to present his compatriots with what Anglophones readers had already enjoyed for about a decade – an accessible novelistic version of *Genji*.

Tanizaki's translation sold so well in the days following its launch that suppliers failed to meet demand. Roughly a quarter million late subscriptions exceeded production capacities (Shiozawa 64-65). As compensation in 1939 to empty-handed subscribers, Tanizaki's publisher ran a hybrid advertisement/apology campaign. In the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, Japan's largest circulating newspaper, the print delay was explained in a relatively small font while bold, prominent text proclaimed *Genji* to be "A Masterpiece in the History of World Literature" (3). This description would have reminded readers of the book's popularity abroad as well as of its place among esteemed works of the *World Literature Complete Collection*. Suffice to say, Tanizaki's translation went on to perform as a top book in 1939 and was well received by critics at large. A columnist in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* wrote an article with the telling title: "Well Done Master Tanizaki" (2). A writer at the *Asahi Shimbun* commented that Tanizaki's efforts made Murasaki's work accessible despite it originally being a "difficult read" (Okazaki 7). Another critic in the *Asahi Shimbun* argued that Tanizaki had succeeded in delivering *Genji* to the general public (Nagao 7). Indeed, Tanizaki's translation could be read by masses of Tokyoites in a similar fashion to how New Yorkers and Londoners had been indulging in Waley's translation, without knowledge of classical Japanese, since 1925.

Conclusions

Although we are fortunate to have many extraordinary *Genji* translations available today, they remain somewhat misunderstood in popular culture.[7] Perennial claims about *Genji*—that it is

[7] Dennis Washburn's outstanding 2015 English translation of *Genji* is the first to include an introduction with analysis on presenting the work as a novel:

> [Calling *Genji*] the world's first novel is, from a historical standpoint, anachronistic and critically problematic, since it gives priority to a Western genre that arises much later and has no connection

the first novel, that it has exerted influence for a thousand years, that there is an original, that it is purely Japanese – remain and belie a more complex history. As we have seen, the reception of Murasaki's classic is larger than any single national tradition. Despite the position of *Genji* in Japan as a staid bastion of cultural and linguistic tradition, its creation, fame, and textual presentation owe much to exchanges between foreign writing systems and literatures. To draw attention to these connections, in this paper we have broadly retraced the reception of *Genji* across a millennium of cultural intersections—focusing on ancient links to China as well as more recent links to the West. Moving geographically and diachronically, we have seen shifts in perceptions of *Genji* in terms of canonicity, genre, and formal attributes. We have also observed that the critical and popular success of *Genji* in English helped it find a Japanese readership via reverse-importation[8].

The phenomenon described in this paper as reverse-importation has previously been examined in the West without a critical term to serve as a reference point to link research on the topic. James English, for example, wrote compellingly about international exchanges of culture that provide "symbolic profit that can only be realized outside strictly domestic markets" (266). We have observed a similar transmission of symbolic profit, and it is my hope that the term employed to describe it, reverse-importation, proves helpful for conceptualizing this complex topic, which could benefit from more attention.

By connecting the modern translations of *Genji* in English with its reception in Japanese, perhaps most significantly in this paper, we found that translators learned from one another and built upon each other's legacies both intralinguistically and cross-linguistically. Suematsu's first English *Genji* shaped the formal and ideological underpinnings of Waley's hit follow-up, which in turn inspired Junichiro Tanizaki's bestselling Japanese version, and – while there was not room to cover the topic – subsequent English translators have also consulted Tanizaki's translation for their own.[9] With no definitive source text, *Genji* translators have creatively built

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with Murasaki Shikibu's stylistics. Still, it is difficult completely to discount all of the qualities… that seem familiar to modern readers (xxxii).

[8] It is worth noting that when much of this research on the reverse-importation of *Genji* was being completed as part of a doctoral thesis, Michael Emmerich published an exceptional book on *Genji,* arguing that Murasaki's classic "was re-created first as a masterpiece of 'world literature'… and only afterward as the quintessential masterpiece of Japan's national literature" (37). This conclusion of Emmerich's parallels those found independently in this research, although the current paper examines the international reception of *Genji* through its typographic and formal history, whereas Emmerich's focus is more on shifts in media and visual images associated with *Genji*.

[9] Edward Seidensticker, for example, noted in his translator's introduction to *Genji* (1976) that he had consulted one of Tanizaki's translations as a reference (xii) and that he had also read Waley's translation an uncountable number of times (xiv).

on each other's work, adding to Murasaki's global reputation, which has come to underpin a massive multi-sectored economy, not only of books but also of commercial goods.

Murasaki enthusiasts can now dine internationally on Genji Sushi, pamper themselves at a *Genji*-inspired Ritz-Carlton, dance to J-pop of the boyband Hikaru Genji, indulge in clothing from a Genji fashion label, and see *Genji* movies. Incidentally, this paper began with a description of Murasaki moonlighting on the silver screen and cavorting with a cannibal psychiatrist. This portrayal of Murasaki was juxtaposed with Oswald de Andrade's notion of cultural cannibalism. For Andrade, national literatures were strengthened not by their purity, but through their blending with ingredients from all over the world. And now we have seen many instances of Murasaki's legacy, vis-à-vis China and the West, being enriched by foreign cultural elements. The ancient tale partakes in its own kind of cannibalism—while being passed down in new, blended forms.

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From the Universal to the National
The Question of Language and Writing in Twentieth Century Korea[1]

Lim HyongTaek
Pusan University
lim1767@skku.edu

Abstract

With the advent of western modernity towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Chinese scriptworld deconstructed. This was the greatest transformation to take place in this region in all of its recorded history, for that history began in Chinese script. China, Japan, Vietnam, and Korea all used the Chinese script but used it in different ways. The universal system was developed uniquely in each case in interaction with the vernacular. This paper will examine the ways in which Korea adopted and negotiated with the Universal script and how Chinese writing developed with respect to Korean speech. It will conclude with some observation on the tensions brought to bear on the Chinese scriptworld by nationalization and westernization.

Keywords

Chinese Scriptworld- Nationalization- Westernization- Korean National Language

1.

The "universal" language as stated in the title refers to the Chinese script system used commonly in East Asia, known in Korea as *hanja* and *hanmum.*[2] Chinese characters were first developed for writing the Chinese languages, or *hanyu* (漢語), but they were then adopted by China's neighbouring cultures and used across East Asia as the main system of writing for a

[1] Translated by Sowon S. Park. Translator's note: This translation is a slightly shortened version of the Korean original, which is a revised and expanded version of the paper presented by the author at the 2015 East Asian Critical Journal Conference held at Lingnan University in Hong Kong on 30-31 May on the theme of "Colonialism in Asia (殖民亞洲)". While the essay refers to texts most of which have not been translated into English, readers need not be familiar with the literature cited in the essay for them to follow the argument. In undertaking the translation of this essay, every attempt was made to preserve the author's tone and style wherever possible. I am greatly indebted to Emeritus Professor Paik Nak-chung (Seoul National University) for his guidance and instruction on earlier versions of the translation. The responsibility for any mistakes that may remain are mine and mine alone.

[2] Translator's note: The Korean use of Chinese script is classified into the use of *hanja* (漢字) and *hanmun* (漢文). The former refers to the characters themselves and the lexical content that they signify while the latter indicates classical Chinese language.

millennium. Prior to the twentieth century classical Chinese was the "universal written language" of China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The dissolution of the universal Chinese scriptworld launched the age of national scripts and national literatures.

Chinese script was adopted in Korea during the early days of the Period of Three Kingdoms, approximately two thousand years ago; and in Japan at least thirteen hundred years ago as evidenced by the texts, *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀) and *Kojiki* (古事記). By contrast, Mongols, Turks, and Tibetans did not take up the Chinese writing system, even though they had much closer geopolitical ties with China throughout history. The Chinese scriptworld is not identical with the sinocentric sphere of imperial China. The relations between the Chinese scriptworld and the Chinese empire are multi-layered and complex. (Lim "Center" 301). As I have discussed elsewhere, the precondition for the dissemination of Chinese script is an agricultural foundation for the society (Lim *Silhak* 23; Lim *Korean* 56-58).

This cultural sphere was dismantled towards the end of the nineteenth century. In my view, this was the greatest transformation to occur in this region in all of its recorded history - for that history began in Chinese script. With the advent of western modernity, the writing system common to this region was damaged, weakened, and altered.

From a linguistic perspective, the history of East Asia in the twentieth century is one of transition from the Universal to the National. In Korea, its *hanmun* culture, accumulated through nearly two thousand years' usage of *hanmun* and *hanja*, was not only a great legacy but also a historic burden. The challenges posed by the legacy of the *hanmun* culture are yet to be fully resolved. While the transitional history of language and writing is clearly a linguistic issue, it is not an issue restricted to the linguist: a transition in language and writing systems accompanies a shift in civilization, impacting on every aspect of its culture. Hence a broad historical and cultural perspective is required to do the question justice.

The much debated issue of script at this transitional point in history is testament to the role script played in the formation of a new order. What was revolutionary was the new and growing perception of the Chinese script as foreign. In Japan and Korea, the belief in the necessity of a written language for one's own nation grew, while faith in the script that had been used for thousands of years weakened. In Vietnam, it was officially abolished. The movement to establish a modern nation-state coincided with these changes. In China the written vernacular Chinese (白話) movement and the Cultural Revolution drastically changed the orthography of Chinese.

While East Asian countries do not share an identical trajectory of modernization, a shared route can nevertheless be traced. One common factor is that the region was subsumed into the West-centric world order; and second, the region was reformed into a modern imperial system. That is to say, Japan colonized Korea, and China became an object of Japanese imperial aggression. Providing an exception to modern West-centric imperialist order, the Japanese empire overturned the traditional sinocentric world. Korea's issues about language and literature in the twentieth century encapsulated the overlay of the two orders, upon which the focus of this essay lies.

2.

Let us first consider the eighteenth century Joseon scholar, Hong Daeyong 洪大容 (1731-1783).[3] Hong is now celebrated for his advanced theories on heliocentrism and a spherical earth, an uncommon position to hold in East Asia at that time. Based on his astronomical observations, Hong forwarded skepticism about the prevailing sinocentric beliefs of the time. In his travelogue of China, *Damheon yeongi* (湛軒燕記), he records his conversations with western and Chinese intellectuals, part of it about scripts. One western intellectual that Hong met was the missionary, Augustin von Hallerstein (1703-1774), also known as Liu Songling (劉松齡), who was working in the observatory of Yenjing. In the travelogue, Hong asks Hallerstein whether Europeans also use Chinese characters to write. Hallerstein's reply is "In my country, we use speech-writing. As we have our own speech, it follows that we have our own writing." Elsewhere a Chinese scholar asks Hong: "Do you have your own writing in your country? … Do women and children also read?" To which Hong replies, "We do have a separate writing system. The form differs from Manchu characters but the characteristics are the same. Women and children do not read but know speech-writing." From this we can infer that *hanja* and *hanmun* were regarded as universal writing. One of the scripts of the Qing dynasty, which effectively ruled over Joseon, was Manchu writing. Since *hanja* and *hanmun* are considered the universal norm, both Manchu writing and *hangul* are defined against it and classified as the same.

At that time in Joseon, public and official documents were written in *hanmun* while the native writing system *hangul*, or speech-writing, was relegated to the private sphere. No objection to this hierarchy is expressed by Hong. Though he refuted sinocentrism, his critique did not extend to the sinocentric writing culture.

[3] Translator's note: Korea was the Kingdom of Joseon between 1392 and 1910.

Writing poems and prose in classical Chinese is never easy for the non-Chinese speaker. To be literate, Koreans had to undergo intensive training. Hence, Choi Hae 崔瀣, a member of the literati in the Goryeo dynasty, once lamented: "We, easterners, even with outstanding talent, must endeavor a hundred or a thousand times more than the Chinese" (Choi vol 2, 27-8). Confronting the task of transcribing Korean language into Chinese script, Koreans devised several methods. This was done by treating Chinese characters both ideographically and phonetically. The first system was *hyangchal* (鄕札), meaning vernacular letters, the second was *idu* (吏讀), meaning "official's writing", and the third *gugyeol* (口訣), a form of glossing Chinese texts for reading in Korean.

The *hyangchal* method gave a Korean pronunciation of the characters based on syllables associated with the Chinese character and was used to transcribe both the words that came with the Chinese writing system and native Korean words. The association was both phonetic and ideographic and could almost fully realize the syntax and semantics of Korean. Vernacular poetry, *hyangga* (鄕歌), was composed using this method, with many poets making full use of native Korean words. It is the earliest form of written Korean. These poems are also sometimes known as "Silla songs" as they originated in the Silla dynasty (BC - 935 AD).

The earliest extant *hyangga* is thought to have appeared in about the sixth century in the Silla dynasty and the last one is from the tenth century during the Goryeo dynasty. They typically consist of four, eight or ten lines and the most popular ten-line poems are structured into four, four, and two-line sections. Important works were written by monks, so Buddhist themes permeate the genre, but the poetic range is wide and many of them are highly lyrical. Twenty-five *hyangga* survive today, most of them in *Samguk yusa*. The following is the last line of *Seodongyo* 薯童謠 (*The Song of Seodong)* from *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事 vol 2): 夜矣卯乙抱遣去如.

The characters are all Chinese but the writing is in fact a mixed system of ideographic and phonetic transcription of Korean. Translated, the line reads, "what/who (did she) embrace and go to in the night?" This translation is made possible only if one reads each character phonetically as well as ideographically to determine which reading is appropriate. So 夜 (night), and 抱 (embrace) are read for their lexical meaning but the other characters are read phonetically: 矣 as 에(in), 卯乙 as 뭘(what), and 去 as 가(go). Here the Chinese characters are given a Korean sound which approximates the sound of the Chinese syllables.

The *idu* script also represents Korean phonemes through Chinese characters. *Idu* used symbols alongside Chinese script to indicate Korean grammatical markers. In that sense *idu* includes *hyangchal* and *gugyeol*. In a narrower use of the word, it refers to the system used mainly by the *jungin* class in the Goreyo dynasty to document public and private texts in Chinese. *Idu* uses almost the same methods as *hyangchal* but its uses are more limited to propositions, particle endings and certain technical terms. Moreover, while *hyangchal* can inscribe Korean syntax and semantics, as we saw in *hyangga*, *idu* follows the dictates of Chinese syntax. *Hyangchal* disappears in the early twelfth century. On the other hand, *idu* was continuously used in diverse public and private documents till the late nineteenth century for its practical value.

The third system is *gugyeol*. This is a method that uses the phonetic elements of Chinese characters and simplifies them. As such it corresponds to Japanese *kundoku* (訓讀) (Saito 87-89). What differentiates them is that *gugyeol* is divided into a process of *hyeonto* (懸吐; adding postpositions and ending particles to *hanmun* texts) and *eonhae* (諺解; Korean translation of *hanmun* texts) while *kundoku* is a single process.

Despite parallels, such as the adoption of Chinese as the official written language and the borrowing of structural and characteristic elements from its script, Korea and Japan's use of Chinese diverge. Korea accepted the Chinese script as the universal lettering and sustained a form of literacy made possible by intensive training and the assistance of the three techniques outlined above. Not having one's own writing system is obviously the primary reason for such a cumbersome system. But that does not satisfactorily explain the culture of Chinese writing in Korea. After the invention of *hangul* in the fifteenth century, tailored for the Korean language and phonetics, Korean culture continued to revolve around Chinese script. Literature and literary convention did not change much. There can be many reasons but the main one, put simply, is that Korea never wanted to escape from the Chinese scriptworld before the twentieth century.

3.

In 1908, two years before the annexation of Korea by Japan, the great Korean linguist, Ju Sigyeong (周時經, 1876-1914) proclaimed "Land is the foundation for independence, *minjok* is the body of independence and language is the spirit of independence" in his book, 國語文典音學 (*The Grammar and Phonology of Korea*). He links land, people, and language as the three primary elements for a nation-state, and elevates language as "the spirit of a nation" (國性).

The royal road to forming and shaping a nation is "to treasure national language and literature," he argued, promoting the concept of a "national language" (Ju 2).

The idea of a "national language" was modern but its roots can be traced to King Sejong's invention of *hangul* as set out in *Hunmin jeongeum* (訓民正音), literally translated as "Correct Sounds to Instruct the People." In Sejong's manifesto for the establishment of a new alphabet, he declares boldly that "our national language is different from China's." The modern movement for claiming language and literature as "national" began in 1894, the year of three historic incidents that occurred in rapid succession: the Donghak Peasant Revolution, the first Sino-Japanese War and the Gabo Reform. With the defeat of China in the war, the traditional sinocentric order rapidly dissolved. Among the many changes were laws to replace classical Chinese with a "national language." As the testimony of the era, *Maecheon yarok* by Maechon Hwang Hyeon states: "until 1894, we used to call *hanja* true letters (眞書) and the *eonmun* (諺文, vernacular) in *Hunmin jeongum* (訓民正音) as colloquial letters. However, after 1894, we treasure the latter as our national letters and call the former, *hanmun*, a foreign script" (Hwang 424).

From the start of the Gabo Reform, *hanmun* was branded as a foreign script, losing its status as the universal script. Yet, *hanja*, while being stripped of its position as "true letters," was not completely abolished because one of the Gabo provisions stated that though "national letters are principal for national language, *hanja* can be supplemented occasionally." This produced what is known as *gukhanmun* (國漢文, mix of Chinese and *hangul*) style. Therefore, in the twentieth century, the two styles coexisted to various degrees. Hangul (Korean script) and *gukhanmun* (mixed Chinese and Korean scripts) coexisted in the pre-modern era too but their position in relation to the other was changed drastically by the Reform.

By having the status of the "national script" conferred on them, *hangul* and the *gukhanmun* style were reborn as the twin writing systems of the Korean enlightenment. *Gukhanmun* was used mainly in the more serious media, like national newspapers, literary and intellectual magazines, books and translations of western science, and official textbooks. Pure *hangul* texts were still for women, so a hierarchy of language along gender lines was maintained in the early twentieth century. If one takes a longer view, one can see that during the Patriotic Enlightenment Movement (1905-10), *gukhanmun* took over the previous role of Chinese script.

4.

As the Chinese scriptworld gradually dissolved between the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century, a linguistic bridge was required to facilitate the incorporation of modern East

Asian nation-states into the western order. The communication between the west and this cultural sphere was not a simple matter of translating existing words into their equivalent. At that time, there were few words that were sufficiently comparable. Of course this posed greater problems for the East Asians as they were scrambling to understand and absorb western knowledge and culture.

In order to assimilate western culture successfully, new words had to be invented. Each of the countries had its own particular trajectory in this regard. Missionaries played a significant role in introducing western culture to this region and their contributions vary from country to country. Overall, it is undeniable that Japan led the way. Japan was the most successful state to transition into the modern era as well as the first. Tokyo became the new centre of the former sinosphere, and it was the very place where a whole new vocabulary for adopting western knowledge was invented. By 1908, the number of foreigners studying in Tokyo exceeded ten thousand Chinese and between four hundred and five hundred Koreans (Kaneko 15). Modern Japan was the training ground for modernity for East Asians. Thus Tokyo found itself as the new centre of East Asia.

The process of coining new words to transfer western civilization and institutions into indigenous language systems was frequently and furiously debated by modern Japanese scholars, who undertook the task of adapting Chinese to the new order. New words were rooted in existing Chinese, but they had to be reconstituted so as to be compatible and understood within a western frame of knowledge. Needless to say, this required a great deal of creativity and innovation. The procedure is defined by the Japanese scholar Koyasu Nobukuni as "re-possession" because Chinese script was regained after being passed through foreign western structures of knowledge for the development of modern Japan. (Koyasu 55).

The differences in adopting Chinese script in Japan and Korea were discussed above. Parallel to these differences are the different ways in which Japan and Korea adopted western structures of knowledge. What differentiates them is something that can be called a "pure" system. The development of a "pure" Korean style that flourished in the twentieth century is specific to Korea alone. In Japan, there is no equivalent to Hangul style – there is no Japanese prose style that is free of Chinese script and as widely used as the Hangul style.

Despite branding Chinese script as foreign, the Japanese integrated it into their national language, *kokugo* (国語), and used mixed style, *wakan konkōbun* (和漢混交文; Japanese-Chinese mixed style), widely. In the Japanese empire, the presence of the Chinese script in *kokugo* becomes more dominant than the presence of *kana*, the Japanese alphabet. This

strikes observers as paradoxical. Considering the intensive effort to raise the national language, *kokugo,* as a key feature of the new imperial ideology in the Japanese Empire (Yi 1996), the proportion between *kanji* and *kana* seems to undermine the nationalist ethos. Why do the Japanese publicize *wakan konkōbun* as the official writing system when it is heavily dominated by Chinese script? The Japanese re-possession of Chinese is attributable to a national orientation and volition. I refer to two books, as representative of two literary societies, *Enlightenment History of Chōsen* (朝鮮開化史) by Tsuneya Seihuku (恒屋盛服, 1855-1909), published in 1904 in Tokyo by Tō-a dōbunkai (東亞同文會; Society for Shared Script in East Asia) and the *New Dictionary of Common Letters* (同文新字典) by Kaneko Gentaro (1853-1942), published in 1909 by Kanji tōitsukai (漢字統一會; Society for Unifying Chinese Script). Both typify the Japanese orientation and volition toward the *dongmun* (同文; common letter) and *hanmun* (Chinese).

Tō-a dōbunkai was a Japanese society organized in 1898. Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977) has written about its activities in China (Takeuchi 358-375). Though its activities in Korea have yet to be fully examined, I have written about the imperial nature of its enterprise elsewhere (Lim 2014). Two of its slogan-like doctrines give a succinct summary of their principles: "Work towards the improvement of China and Chōsen (Korea)" and "Act upon the current affairs of China and Chōsen."[4] They are both linked to the task of "helping Chōsen"s independency and developing the Chōsen civilization." (Takeuchi 358-375) These are thinly-veiled justifications of Japan's colonization of Korea.

The *Enlightenment History of Chōsen* states that "Japanese culture directly advances the peninsula's, and Japan's newly translated words are used widely in Korean politics and learning indicate this." As evidence, the text presents 24 words (Tsuneya 320-321). They are as follows:

> **Thought**: 主義 (ideology, -ism), 目的 (purpose), 自由 (freedom), 權利 (right), 進步 (progress), 開化 (enlightenment).
>
> **Social System:** 憲法 (constitution), 社會 (society), 演說 (formal speech), 輸出 (export), 輸入 (import), 豫算 (budget), 決算 (balancing accounts), 新聞 (newspapers), 株式 (stock), 會社 (company), 協會 (association), 銀行 (bank), 用達 (delivery service), 義務 (duty), 運動 (movement),

[4] Translator's note: Chōsen is the Japanese rendition of Joseon (朝鮮), now Korea.

Science: 植物 (plants), 動物 (animal), 化學 (chemistry).

As the list makes clear, the translated words are actually newly-coined Chinese words. Among them, "freedom 自由" and "society 社會" were words that existed before the advent of western culture but were given a new meaning. "Budget 豫算", "balancing account 決算" and "bank 銀行" were completely new inventions. The examples given in the text are just 24 but they represent the cornerstones of western civilization.

What was behind the Japanese policy of disseminating new western concepts in Korea? They are in ideographic Chinese yet there is no denying that they embody the western order of knowledge. The statement by the author, Tsuneya Seifuku, Secretary of Tō-a dōbunkai, provides an explanation: "Unless we do not stop the development of Chōsen by supplying new words to transfer western civilization, Japan's power will not just be for today." (Tsuneya 320-321) Tsuneya Seihuku was also Secretary of Kanji tōitsukai (East Asian Common Literary Society). He had been coming to Korea since 1875 for what was called "colonial business". On the surface this was to "help Chōsen realize its independence and aid its development" (Tsuneya, 320-321) but, as history has proved, what it actually intended was to pave the way for colonization.

The founding of Kanji tōitsukai in April 1907 is significant and demands closer inspection. This was immediately after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war. The preface states that "now is the time for closeness between Japan, China and Chōsen as the result of the great war" and to foster closer relations, in education, politics and business. In all aspects the general consensus was that Chinese script was considered indispensable to all relevant threads of society (Isawa 9). Therefore, the policy of providing a unified system of Chinese writing was essential. Though Tō-a dōbunkai and Kanji tōitsukai are called by different names they are executing the same policies and are essentially the same organization.

The president of Kanji tōitsukai was Kaneko Gentarō (1853-1942), who studied at Harvard and served as the minister of agriculture and commerce in Itō Hirobumi's cabinet. Itō Hirobumi was himself the official head of the society. This reveals its underlying political nature. The aims of Kanji tōitsukai are found in a Korean document published in the magazine *Seou* (西友), written by Kaneko and entitled "My View on the Founding of Kanji tōitsukai." This article was originally published in the Japanese journal *Taiyo* (太陽) and translated in *Seou* but gives little of the political intentions away. However, the activities of Kanji tōitsukai can be traced in the *New Dictionary of Common Letters,* a dictionary of Chinese characters with the

phonetics and the semantics in spoken Chinese, Korean *hangul* and Japanese *kana*. It also has a fourth romanized version for defining the sound and meaning. In it we see the aim of unification by means of Chinese script. Among the seven advisors, we see listed Isawa Shuji. Kaneko Gentaro does not appear to have been directly involved in the compilation, merely contributing with a preface. But his preface is a historically significant document. The comparison between various schools in the Chinese classics and western thought is particularly penetrating.

At this time, one of the central debates within Japanese society was whether Japan should abandon Chinese in favour of the Roman alphabet. Kaneko frames his position in the debate with a comparison between eastern and western modes of knowledge. Across the sea, Korea was engulfed in a similar debate. Here the discussion revolved around whether *gukhanmun* or pure *hangul* should supersede classical Chinese.

The way in which the two nations dealt with the script question points directly to their respective aspirations and situation. Korea had limited access to global information and current affairs and kept its focus on maintaining its special relationship with China. Thus the issue was dealt with in a passive and defensive manner. The understanding was insular and ideological. Japan, on the other hand, kept a broad, multinational perspective, and was strategic and practical, with a wide information-base from diverse global sources. What really distinguishes the two is that in Japan the two opposing schools of thought on script, the pro-western and the pro-classical Chinese, were already in profound agreement on actively embracing western culture and civilization. Their disagreement hinged merely on which script to use. The pro-western school proposed that "In these times, the obscure Chinese script should be abandoned for the simple roman alphabet." The pro-Chinese school argues for a continuation of the tradition and accumulation of script culture to absorb western knowledge. As they argued:

> It hardly needs saying that we must actively absorb western culture. Thus our reliance on the roman alphabet will increase as time goes by. However, to fully ingest, we must thoroughly masticate and digest. Furthermore, we must bring the digested western imports to bear on the East Asian continent, to be able to export to both China and Korea, what they culturally lack. Who else is equal to this task? (Kaneko 13)

Modern Japan set itself up as the leader of East Asia on the path to westernization. Under the superficial guise of helping under-developed countries, there actually lies a nationalist strategy.

This aim is revealed in the script debates, as when Kaneko claims that Chinese script must be used in East Asia to "promote diplomacy and trade among Japan, China, and Korea"

because the Chinese script "provides a competitive advantage for Japan. We have an advantage over western imperialists to dominate this region." He gives case studies in China to demonstrate his thesis. "Those who argue that Chinese script be abolished in these west-centric times in favour of the roman alphabet are proposing that we replace a sharp dagger with the blunt kitchen knife" (Kaneko 9-10). The climax of the argument comes in the following section: "If the three East Asian countries join together as one mind to manage East Asia, westerners will be driven out from our continent in the near future" (9-10).

"Management of East Asia" reverberates with the Japanese imperial propaganda for Pan-Asianism. For the main agent of the so-called management of East Asia was Japan. Pan-Asianism is another way of describing a Japan-centric new Asian order, where slogans announcing mutual benefit and friendship between East Asian countries executed the Japanese imperial agenda in Great East Asia, justifying the invasion of mainland China, Southeast Asia, Korea and Taiwan. Tō-a dōbunkai and Kanji tōitsukai need to be read within this imperial context. This adoption of modern *wakan konkōbun*, that is Chinese characters integrated with Japanese, can be seen as the writing system best suited for Japan-centric Pan-Asianism, and, in turn, for colonialism. Under Japanese colonial rule, Korean language takes on a symbolic role in retaining its national identity. Using Chinese was regarded as foreign to vernacular Korean since the nation's essence is captured in its national language and its letters. Retaining Chinese in Japan was an imperial strategy; abolishing Chinese in Korea was a resistance against that violence. Thus Japanese colonial rule intensified the debate between those who favoured *gukhanmun* style and those who advocated pure *hangul*.

5.

To conclude, I will observe three main issues related to the state of script in the Chinese scriptworld. They are directly relevant to the linguistic reality of South Korea but are also applicable to all East Asian countries. First is the issue about coining new words. In the transition into modernity and the western world order, newly-coined words are a continuing necessity, which has not changed in the twenty-first century. Western technology continues to dominate and necessitate a continual flow of western concepts. In the twentieth century, both North and South Korea rapidly shed their Chinese, to the point that now the situation appears irrevocable. Among the challenges that this has brought is how to create new words. In an ideographic culture, coining new words without recourse to Chinese is extremely difficult and unsatisfactory. In the early twentieth century, most of the loanwords came from Japan and were in ideographic Chinese inflected by the Japanese vernacular. The words are generally still used

today. This is not a satisfactory linguistic settlement. Resorting to existing loan words with Japanese roots is not ideal but without ideographic Chinese we have lost the capacity to create new words.

Second, there is the issue of English. In pre-modern East Asia, Chinese was the language of the empire, but English may be called today's global imperial language. There was a proposal in South Korea to make English an additional official language, which was met with public outrage. But paradoxically, the learning of English is sweeping through South Korean society like a forest fire. Here a distinction needs to be made between the two imperial languages. Even though Korea was diglossic for thousands of years and Chinese was a universal script of culture and learning in East Asia, there remained ample space for the development of the vernacular because of the ideographic nature of Chinese writing. English does not offer comparable autonomy. The ascendency of English is reducing the space for vernacular Korean. This is a grave concern for today's intellectuals.

The third issue pertains to the standardization of Chinese script. As Chinese loses its standing as the universal lettering in East Asia, there is no longer a means for intra-regional communication. In the future, we may well face a situation when we will read each other's literatures in English translation. Though for centuries spoken languages divided this region, we had a common literary base. But in the twentieth century, the writing system itself has diverged. We currently have different-states officially using different types of Chinese scripts: the Chinese *jianziti* (简字体: simplified Chinese), the Japanese *ryakutai* (略体) and the Korean and Taiwanese *beonchae* (繁體: unsimplified Chinese). This modern phenomenon may be redirected in future.

The Chinese scriptworld is an historic rather than a current entity. But the historic legacy calls out for recognition. Recognition is key to dialogue and interchange between East Asian nations. Though East Asian literature is separated by the borders of nations and national languages today, they emerged from the ruins of a once cohesive Chinese scriptworld. For a renewal of an East Asian literature, the borders of nations and languages must once again be crossed. To pave the path of reconnection, it is imperative for East Asian intellectuals to reclaim our common heritage of communication and exchange.

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Cultural Margins, Hybrid Scripts
Bigraphism and Translation in Taiwanese Indigenous Writing

Andrea Bachner
Cornell University
asb76@cornell.edu

Abstract

Since its emergence in the 1980s, Taiwanese Indigenous writing has constituted a case of minor literature that mostly uses the culturally dominant language of Chinese, rather than indigenous languages, for literary creation. Framed conventionally as cultural traditions without writing in spite of the existence of Romanized script systems for Taiwan's indigenous languages, the literary expressions of Taiwan's first cultures face a situation of linguistic diglossia accompanied by that of bigraphism, one of profound inequality between two languages as well as between their script systems. This essay analyzes two recent texts by Taiwanese indigenous authors, Badai's *Diguwan: Damalagaw during the Taisho Years* (2007) and Rahic Talif's *Turbidity* (2006), for their textual strategies of linguistic and script mixing, in order to explore the complex politics of translation at Taiwan' s cultural margin and beyond.

Keywords

Indigenous writing- Taiwanese literature- script mixing- translation- Badai- Rahic Talif

"Savage" Writing

One of the anagrammatic poems in the 2007 collection *Light/Slow* (輕／慢) by Taiwanese poet Chen Li 陳黎, "Clan" (氏), addresses the question of Indigenous writing in particularly glaring terms. From the perspective of an Indigenous individual who reflects on and refutes the Han-centrism that casts him or her as savage, the poem sets up a binary between the Indigenous margin and the Chinese center. The disadvantaged position of Indigenous cultures that the poem contests is not only expressed in terms of high and low or human and inhuman. It resides most importantly in access to writing—the hallmark of civilization for Chinese (as well as other) cultures. Deprived of a name and of written language – "I have no name, I have no writing" (我沒有名字， 沒有文字) – the lyrical I still resists the center that establishes its exclusive vision of civilization, even "with broken hands, without a brush" (斷手缺筆) (59-60). And yet, in Chen Li's poem, the apparent binary between Chinese culture, characterized by writing, and

indigenous culture, characterized by the lack of writing, is bridged by a poetic sleight of hand. Even though the voice of the poem does not have a personal name, s/he claims another, more important name, that of his or her clan: "My face is my clan name/From the tattoo on my lower jaw/I derive my name, see clearly – /Di" (我的臉就是我的姓氏/我在我的下顎刺青/自我命名，看清楚——/氐). Through an anagrammatic play with the Chinese characters "氏" ("clan") and "氐" ("Di"), the text gives not only voice, but also, in a supplemental turn, writing to the subaltern subject thematized in the poem. In Chen Li's "Clan," the Di ethnicity are given a name through the graphic materialization of the imaginary of tattooing: a spot or line added to the lower jaw, i.e. to the character for clan, "氏," that results in "氐" and constitutes the solution of this anagrammatic riddle poem. By crafting a link between Chinese writing and tattooing, Chen Li breaches the chasm between writing and non-writing, between civilization and its (alleged) others. By the same token, however, he brings Chinese cultures closer to Indigenous cultures by equating writing and tattooing, albeit imaginarily.[1]

The Di of Chen Li's poem constitute one of the "Five Savages" of ancient China. And yet, the poet's sustained interest in Taiwanese Indigenous cultures suggests that the Di of "Clan" speak to the tension between Chinese cultures and its Indigenous others in general, and thus also to the fraught relationship between Taiwan's Indigenous cultures and its Sinophone settler culture. Chen Li's poetic connection between tattoos and Chinese characters is profoundly ambivalent. Although it critically relativizes the difference between cultures with writing and those deemed without writing, it can also be read as perpetuating cultural inequalities by way of a problematic equation.[2] On the one hand, the Indigenous practice of tattooing, or so it seems, accrues value only through its similarity with Chinese writing—almost the same but not quite. On the other, through this imaginary link, Taiwanese culture can claim, as Chen Li formulates it in the 1995 postface to his collection *The Edge of the Island* (島嶼邊緣), "a kind of vitality that springs from a ceaseless hybridization and inclusion" (192). Chen Li's "Clan" thus points to the fraught, yet potentially productive friction between Chinese script culture and Indigenous cultures traditionally reliant on orature. For my purpose, "Clan" addresses the tension inherent in the emergence of Taiwanese Indigenous writing over the past decades, not only between Indigenous languages and the dominant Sinophones (standard

[1] Chen Li might be alluding here to one of the hypotheses for the origins of the character for writing (*wen*) that embodies the cherished tradition of Chinese civilization: pattern and tattoo, see James J. Y. Liu's discussion and refutation of this theory in *Chinese Theories of Literature* (7 and footnote on 142).
[2] In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida famously challenged the anthropological bias toward cultures without writing by proposing a more capacious definition of writing.

Mandarin and Taiwanese), but also between two different scripts, Chinese characters and the Romanized writing systems developed for Taiwan's Indigenous languages.

The current climate in which Indigenous cultures have emerged as an important symbolic component of Taiwanese identity marks only the development of the past few decades and comes in the wake of several hundred years during which Taiwanese aborigines – often labeled as uncivilized savages – were deemed obstacles to the interests of colonization and modernity at worst, or treated with indifference or neglect at best. From the influx of Han Chinese in the seventeenth century, throughout Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945), the period of Chinese Nationalist control of Taiwan after 1945, and up to the 1980s, Taiwan's Indigenous population, part of the Austronesian peoples, who had lived on the island for about eight thousand years, were deemed expendable, facing repression, decimation, as well as loss of land and cultural traditions. Taiwan's turn toward a strategically hybrid self-understanding in the face of the PRC's hold on an ideal of Chineseness also found an imaginary place for its Indigenous populations – in public and political discourse as well as in intellectual and artistic practices.

The recent interest in Taiwan's Indigenous cultures has been accompanied by improvements in the material and cultural lives of Indigenous communities, such as increased opportunities for learning their mother tongues in schools, TV programs in Indigenous languages, scholarly interest in and forums for preserving Indigenous cultures, or literary prizes and access to publishing venues for Indigenous literature. And yet, in a climate of cultural, political, and economic inequality, Indigenous languages are only gradually emerging from a situation of suppression at worst and diglossia at best. Given the predominance of Chinese script culture in Taiwan and the relatively recent creation of standardized writing systems for Indigenous languages, they still tend to be confined to local or domestic use, whereas standard Chinese and Taiwanese garner more linguistic prestige as official languages and vehicles of education and culture. This effectively extends a diglossic situation to one of bigraphism, a situation of unequal bilingualism that involves two different scripts—the elite vehicle of Chinese characters against the secondary, newly fledged Romanized writing systems of Indigenous languages.[3]

[3] I am not using the term "digraphia" for this phenomenon, even though it would make for an elegant parallel to diglossia that might carry some notion of the unequal prestige between two different scripts (associated with two different languages). However, "digraphia" is used to indicate a situation in which one and the same language is written in two different scripts (either diachronically or synchronically).

This has a profound impact on the conditions for Indigenous literary production. In spite of the advances in preserving and promoting Taiwan's Indigenous languages and cultures, only a small fraction of Taiwan's Indigenous literature (原住民文學), which has experienced an unprecedented boom since the late 1980s, is written in Indigenous languages. Its vast majority, although crafted by members of Indigenous ethnicities and often by definition circumscribed to "Indigenous" topics, is written in Chinese. Because of the long history of colonial assimilation and the suppression of Indigenous languages, Chinese has become the "native" language of many Indigenous individuals, while communities of fully functional users of Indigenous languages are in decline. The linguistic politics of Taiwanese Indigenous writing are particularly complicated because of the strong contrast between Chinese writing with its long script history and the status of Indigenous traditions deemed to be cultures without writing. In fact, with their rich traditions of storytelling, songs, enchantments, and rituals, indigenous cultures have traditionally relied on orature rather than on written traditions, and their relatively recent history of writing has often coincided with a history of disenfranchisement. Following Taiwan's multi-layered colonial history, Indigenous expressions were being transformed from oral performance into written documents by way of different transcription systems – ranging from names to entire texts and finally, in the last decades, to the development of official, systematic Romanized transcription systems for each of the extant Indigenous languages of Taiwan.[4] The choice of Chinese as literary medium for Taiwanese Indigenous literature responds to the unequal distribution of linguistic power and educational pressures, as well as to questions of cultural circulation: since the extant Indigenous languages of Taiwan (and sometimes even their variants) are not mutually intelligible and the different Indigenous cultures constitute only about two percent of Taiwan's population, writing in an Indigenous language can only reach an extremely small readership.

But even as the use of the more widely read medium of Chinese for the minor literatures of Taiwan's Indigenous cultures might be pragmatically warranted, Indigenous writing in Chinese might never amount to more than an extremely marginal part of Taiwanese and an even more marginal part of Chinese literature either, as Atayal 泰雅 writer Walis Nokan 瓦歷斯·諾幹 argues (Lü 36). In contrast, for Puyuma 卑南 writer and critic Sun Dachuan 孫大川, indigenous writing needs to escape the "trap of essentializing the mother tongue" (23), but the questionable treatment of language as mere instrument of communication involves reifying

[4] For an overview of a history of different transcription systems for Taiwan's indigenous languages, see Zeitoun and Hua 171-4.

other increasingly problematic categories, from ethnicity to cultural knowledge or an Indigenous "mindset." After all, Sun also calls for Indigenous writing to inflect and reshape its Chinese medium, a concern that resonates with theoretical reflections on minor literatures in major languages, as well as with an interest in Sinophone articulations that pit the hybridity of cultural expressions in Sinitic languages against Han- and sinocentric ideals (Huang 252). But while Indigenous writers undoubtedly continue to reshape the language of the colonizers, their own cultures continue to be affected by the hegemonic position of Chinese. Rather than reactivating binaries such as orality and writing, or resistance and assimilation, in what follows, I will consider two recent examples of indigenous literature that espouse experimental ways of writing in Chinese without only writing in Chinese: the 2007 novel *Diguwan: Damalagaw during the Taisho Years* (笛鸛：大巴六九部落之大正年間) by Puyuma writer Badai 巴代 and the 2006 anthology *Turbidity* (*Mangotaay/*混濁) by Amis writer Rahic Talif 拉黑子·達立夫.[5] Both texts, as many other contemporary Taiwanese Indigenous texts, mix Indigenous languages and standard Chinese. What sets both texts apart and makes them particularly interesting for my purpose here is their use and scrutiny of textual registers that script modes of bilingualism and translation: anthropological texts for Badai and bilingual poetry editions for Rahic Talif. Consequently, the co-presence of two languages and their two scripts produces texts that, even at a first glance, are fairly hybrid. And yet, the politics of translation adopted by Badai and Rahic Talif in their bilingual and bigraphic works that I will read closely in what follows also destabilize overly optimistic notions of the creative or resistant force of bilingual literature. In *Bilingual Games*, Doris Sommer strategically turns the "busy borders between languages," the precarity of living in or between two languages and cultures into an aesthetic asset, where code-switching, lateral moves between languages, and linguistic poaching constitute not only creative survival, but indeed drive aesthetic innovation (1-2). But not all bilingualisms are equal—and the bilingual aesthetics of Latino writers between English and Spanish, for instance—two languages of global importance, though not of equal prestige—look very different when one of the languages, for instance Badai's Puyuma, is used by a very small

[5] Both writers are fairly well known on the Taiwanese cultural scene – with the publication of their works in the Ryefield Indigenous Writers Series, one of the foremost publishers on Taiwan's literary scene, providing them with visibility – as well as vocal advocators for and teachers in their communities. Badai was born in 1962 to the Damalagaw tribe of the Puyuma in Taitung, southeast Taiwan. Before starting his writing career with his first novel *Diguwan*, which won the 2008 Taiwan Literature Award's Gold Prize, Badai worked in the Taiwanese military and earned an MA in Cultural Studies from the National University of Tainan with a thesis on shamanic rituals among the Puyuma. Rahic Talif was born in 1962 and moved back to his native Makuta'ay in eastern Taiwan in 1992. He is an Amis age-class leader, as well as a renowned sculptor. *Turbidity* (2006) is his first published anthology.

community of speakers. In contrast, Walter Mignolo's term bilanguaging, drawing on Latin American examples, especially the friction between the Spanish-language culture of the colonizers and the cultures of Indigenous populations, underlines that practices in the contact zones between different cultures and languages constitute a struggle rather than a game, "as a way of living in languages in a transnational world, as an educational and epistemological project [that] rests on the critique of reason, of disciplinary structures and cultures of scholarships complicit with national and imperial languages" (273).

What an analysis of Badai's and Rahic Talif's works shows is the unequal terrain of bilanguaging, one in which—given existing language politics, the unequal distribution of cultural and linguistic prestige, as well as existing literary (and non-literary) patterns, styles, and genres, as well as transnational networks for the circulation of literary works profoundly shape and predetermine the choices of bilingual (and bigraphic) writers. By scrutinizing specific instances of Indigenous-Chinese cross-pollination we can start to put pressure on notions of hybridity and explore the complex politics of Indigenous writing and script mixing in Taiwan in ethnic, national, and global contexts instead.

Bigraphic Boundaries

Badai's novel *Diguwan* opts for a peculiar mixing of languages and scripts. The novel focuses on the Puyuma Damalagaw during the Japanese occupation in the early 1910s and their complex interactions with the colonizers, the local Chinese, and other Indigenous peoples. In preparation, its author, Badai, consulted Japanese documents and sought out oral accounts of the time among the Puyuma, realizing that both versions differ in almost every instance. The novel thus constitutes an attempt at countering the official narrative handed down in writing by the Japanese with a history produced from a Puyuma perspective, not merely one in which the Puyuma are subjects of history only by being subject to colonial rule and ideology. Such an alternative, unofficial history, a "野史," with its reference to "fieldwork (田野)-derived history" and as a kind of "wild (野) history" (13), straddles the realms of the written and the non-written by means of the literary genre of the historical novel. With its maps of Puyuma territory and its photographs of objects and rituals, *Diguwan*, while clearly labeled as a novel on its cover, ventures into the realms of historiography and anthropology. While this strategically stretches the boundaries of fiction, as a means of challenging the truth-status of historical documents as well as an alternative way of producing history, it also forces Badai's text to confront the ideological baggage of the discourses it subsumes, even as it critiques them.

The author's choice of narrative perspective speaks to its discursive and generic intertexts. In spite of the focus on an Indigenous perspective, stated clearly in the author's preface and adumbrated in using Diguwan, the name of a Puyuma shaman in the text, as title of the novel,[6] the narrative is carried by an impersonal omniscient perspective that provides descriptions of characters, settings, and actions, often with explanations, but does not enter a character's perspective or thoughts. Since all dialogue is rendered as direct speech and is juxtaposed with an omniscient, though impersonal and neutral-sounding narration, the text creates the impression of an anthropological account that combines the anthropologist's explanatory framework as well as renditions of the voices of native informants. This narrative structure inflects some of the word choices in the novel. For instance, the seven Puyuma men who protagonize the opening scene are introduced as "七個漢子" ("seven men"). But while "漢子" can be translated as "man" in general, often with a connotation of strength and manliness, its use of the character "漢," or "Han(-Chinese)," gives the term an ethnic overtone that conflicts strangely with the novel's description of a group of manly Puyuma. In addition, the use of the term "頭人" ("headman") which, as the author glosses, is an anthropological term for the leader of a tribal village (21, note 6), rather than that of a Puyuma term, is another – however small – instance of the sustained presence of an anthropological discourse with its advantages and pitfalls.

The gap between the narration and the characters' voices determines the language politics of the novel. While the novel's narrative is held entirely in standard Chinese, all dialogue appears first in the original language, namely in Puyuma (or in some cases in Taiwanese), followed immediately by a version in standard Chinese. On the one hand, this leads to a strongly visible presence of Puyuma text – in its Romanized transcription – in the novel, without sacrificing the text's legibility for readers of standard Chinese. In fact, Badai insists on the hybridity of his target audience as the novel not only attempts to give historical grounding to Puyuma culture, but also seeks to further intertribal dialogue and allow the general public to learn about Indigenous traditions (14). On the other, it also introduces a clear divide between the standard Chinese narration and Indigenous dialogue, compounding a difference in perspective with one of language and script.[7] As the series editor Wuhe 舞鶴, a well-known

[6] The fact that Badai opts to leave the title in Chinese, thus transcribing the Puyuma name Diguwan in Chinese as "笛鸛" already signals the importance of standard Chinese as the novel's main linguistic medium.

[7] In the second volume of Badai's Damalagaw series, *Mazizir* (馬鐵路), published by Yelu in 2010, the Puyuma dialogue is further marginalized. Instead of the arrangement of text in *Diguwan* (front to back,

Taiwanese writer whose work often engages topics of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples while he himself is not an Indigenous writer, underlines in a note (19, editor's addition to author's note 4), that the parts of the novel that are crafted in direct discourse were written in Puyuma (or for the dialogue of local Chinese in Taiwanese) first and then translated into standard Chinese.[8] But whereas this underscores the authenticity of the Puyuma characters' voices, since standard Chinese is only the translation of the Puyuma original, the novel's direct discourse is still enclosed within a narrative framework written in standard Chinese.[9]

The intriguing choice of introducing direct dialogue in the mode of parallel translations is accompanied by a strange linguistic purity in the text on another level. The narrative text in standard Chinese is completely devoid of Puyuma terms, with the exception of names transcribed in Chinese characters and underlined to signal that these are proper names. The embargo on Puyuma words in the parts of the novel that are not in dialogue even applies to terms specific to Puyuma objects, such as typical weaponry or items of clothing. In the Chinese text, these appear usually as translations (rather than only transcriptions) into Chinese, while their Puyuma term is only provided in marginal notes, often both in Romanized form and Chinese phonetic transliteration, sometimes accompanied by a photograph. For instance, the traditional long knife, which appears in Chinese (as "長刀") is glossed in a note which provides an explanation of the object with its Puyuma name, both in Romanized transcription ("daraw") and in a Chinese phonetic transliteration ("搭繞," i.e. "darao") (19, note 2). In fact, the notes showcase different options of negotiating between Puyuma and Chinese, as translation or by explaining non-translated terms that can themselves appear either in Romanized script or as phonetic transcriptions in Chinese characters. In contrast, the main text eschews the introduction of terms unfamiliar to a non-Puyuma reader of standard Chinese.[10] Even exclamations are rendered either only in Chinese or in Puyuma with Chinese translations. In

top to bottom, left to right), in which the Puyuma text is followed by the Chinese translation in comparable font sizes, *Mazizir* returns to the format typical for literary texts published in Taiwan: back to front, right to left, top to bottom. The Puyuma original is pushed to the bottom of the page and printed in smaller font—almost like an afterthought of the Chinese translation.

[8] Meanwhile, the direct discourse of Japanese or the indigenous Bunun 布儂 characters is rendered only in Chinese.

[9] That the Chinese language is not merely an instrument of translation that erases its own linguistic specificity becomes clear in the "translations" of songs or incantations, since their rendition into Chinese produces Chinese versions with equal character lengths, at times even with rhymes, that are evidently carefully crafted with a view to Chinese poetic standards (see 52-3, 177-8, 301-2).

[10] In contrast, Badai's anthropological study of Puyuma shamanism, *Daramaw*, written in standard Chinese, provides readers with Puyuma terms, accompanied by Chinese translations or glosses in brackets initially, then presupposes a reader's familiarity with the Puyuma terms thus introduced for the remainder of the text.

this way, counter to the more common practice of leaving an unfamiliar word in a text and glossing it in the margins or providing an appendix, Badai's text opts to bracket Puyuma words, leaving it to a reader's interest to seek out the original term and its cultural meaning. In spite of the significant presence of Puyuma text in the dialogue-heavy parts of the novel, which clearly advertises the status of the novel as an Indigenous text, it can still be read as if it were just another piece of Chinese literature. The Puyuma text, though clearly visible, need not influence or encroach upon the reading process itself, unless a reader chooses to trace and activate the information about Puyuma language and culture that the author provides in the margins.

Badai's choice of leaving standard Chinese largely isolated from and untroubled by Puyuma even elicits the series editor's criticism in his epilogue to the novel. While lauding *Diguwan* as an important attempt at the form of a long novel, series editor Wuhe also takes it to task for its lack of hybridity, rendering *Diguwan* "a Chinese (漢文) work written from a Chinese-language mindset (漢語思考)" (379). For Wuhe, an Indigenous mindset would have to infuse Chinese with Indigenous structures and energy, thus troubling standard Chinese, while also ultimately enriching it (379-80). But even as Wuhe's critique resonates with theoretical celebrations of cultural hybridity as a strategy of resistance, its argumentative strategy gives new vigor and rigor to the binary of a Chinese against an Indigenous mindset, even as it advocates for linguistic mixing (although in the shape of a unidirectional impact of Puyuma on Chinese, half parasitic, half nurturing). Badai's stubborn, at times quite problematic linguistic and script mixing (or non-mixing) keeps Chinese and Puyuma apart, but also offers different modes of reading for different readers: as a novel in standard Chinese on Puyuma history, as an unofficial anthropological account, or as a sourcebook of spoken Puyuma. We can certainly critique *Diguwan's* carefully delimited bilingualism with its unidirectional translation from Puyuma to Chinese, since it reduces cross-cultural friction and linguistic alienation to a minimum for readers of the dominant literary language of standard Chinese.

We can also read it as an experimental, yet effective way of putting into action Taiwanese cultural and script politics, precisely because it showcases the starkly uneven position of standard Chinese and Puyuma.

Multiple Translations

In marked contrast to Badai's closely policed Chinese-Puyuma bigraphism in *Diguwan* stands Rahic Talif's book *Turbidity* (*Mangotaay* 混濁), a work whose publication in 2006 precedes that of Badai's novel in Ryefield's Indigenous Writers' Series. From the outset, with its bilingual title in Chinese and the Amis language Pangcah, *Turbidity* announces itself as a hybrid

work. Its pages reunite shorter pieces of various literary genres, such as poems, prose texts, and short stories, as well as featuring multiple reproductions of drawings by the author. While some of these are of village scenes, most sketches show abstract sculptures, the author's own artwork, thus folding a non-verbal, three-dimensional art form into the pages of the book.[11] The occasional use of page backgrounds in different shades of grey, the use of different fonts, the inclusion of some handwritten manuscript pages, and the varied distribution of poetic text on the pages further underline the hybrid nature of the book, suggesting its status as art object that invites its reader to peruse its different facet at will rather than mandating a linear process of reading.

A similar approach characterizes *Turbidity's* language and script politics, as the distribution of Chinese (and thus Sinitic script) and of Romanized Pangcah differs from piece to piece. While some shorter, typically poetic texts are written entirely in standard Chinese and some few entirely in Pangcah, most texts show various forms of linguistic and script mixing.[12] For instance, proper names and place names are usually rendered in Romanized Pangcah and capitalized. Throughout, individual Pangcah terms reoccur in the standard Chinese texts, although their use is by no means systematic, after all, the book is not conceived of as a linear structure. While most of these terms, such as "ina" ("mother,") "mama" ("father,") "kapah" ("youth") are glossed at some point in the text—it remains unclear if all the notes are by the editor, as the wording of some suggests, or if some are the author's choice—a word might have recurred several times without gloss in a linear reading of the text before the reader arrives at an explanation.[13] This invites a reader to be attentive to lexical repetitions throughout *Turbidity*, with the result that one comes away with a small vocabulary of Pancah words even after a superficial reading of the text.

There where *Turbidity* presents text in Pangcah that goes beyond single terms to form expressions and sentences it is usually followed by a translation or a short explanation in standard Chinese, but Pangcah is not limited to direct discourse and can, in fact, complete a sentence begun in standard Chinese. While the volume's mixed prose texts usually follow the pattern of parallel translation, although the flexible integration of Pangcah phrases with the Chinese text makes for less rigid transitions between the two languages and scripts, the bilingual poems of the volume multiply contest a smooth translatability assumption. For instance, while

[11] In fact, in Rahic Talif's volume, writing is often equated with artistic and artisanal pursuits such as sculpting or rattan weaving.
[12] In most cases, monolingual texts follow a title provided in both languages.
[13] Glossed terms are printed in bold letters, but only upon their first mention on a page that contains their explanation.

the parallel arrangement of poetic text in standard Chinese and Pangcah on one page or on two opposite pages suggests that one is a translation of the other—though it remains unclear which one is the original, which one the translation—some similarly arranged poems contest this structure. For instance, the poem "做釣竿" ("Making a Fishing Rod") and "tata'ang ko hakhak no cidal" ("Glutinous Rice Galore under the Sun"), for which no Chinese title is provided, as would be expected for poems in Pangcah with no Chinese equivalent, are placed on opposite book pages, suggesting that they maintain a relationship of translations (16-17). But "Making a Fishing Rod" features Pancah terms and phrases that differ recognizably from the text of the Pangcah poem on the next page. For a reader of standard Chinese without knowledge of Pangcah it is precisely because of the Pangcah elements, rather than because of Chinese translations, that both poems can be identified as independent from each other. Thus, even though standard Chinese is still the dominant language throughout *Turbidity*, either as medium of creation or of translation, the text uses mechanisms that do not allow a reader to dispense completely with Pangcah.

Even there where translation happens between Pangcah and standard Chinese, Rahic Talif reflects critically on the possibility of a seamless movement from one language to the other. The poem "dongec" (the name of a plant used in Indigenous cooking and weaving) for instance, comes with two translations into Chinese, one designated as "字譯," i.e. a literal translation, the other as "意譯," i.e. a translation that focuses on conveying the meaning of the original. While both Chinese texts are readable, the literal rendition, somewhat less syntactically elegant, without being grammatically incorrect, weaves a hybrid imaginary in which the dongec plant constitutes the core of Amis culture, as something the young have to learn how to plait as well as a model that can guide them, and finally as an oblique metaphor for the role of the young for the future of the community. The freer translation concretizes the analogical relationship between the dongec and the Amis youths by describing the development of personal and social maturity explicitly as a process like the complex plaiting of the dongec that is rooted in and sustains tribal culture. The presence of two different translations of one text from Pangcah into standard Chinese underlines the multi-layered complexity of textual transfer between standard Chinese and Pancah, not merely a question of choosing words in another language that carry the same meaning or writing them in a different script, but the construction of a precarious bridge, constantly teetering between the too-familiar and the too-foreign, between two cultural spheres with their unequal, yet intertwined histories.

Two other poems, “Lekal Makor 老頭目” (“Old Headman”) and “kongko 口傳” (“Orature”) espouse yet another strategy to highlight the complexities of translation. Here, the Chinese text of each poem, with its bilingual title, is accompanied by a version in Pangcah with Chinese words underneath each poetic line, spaced so as to show the equivalences of each single word.[14] This provides a non-Pangcah reader with a sense of Pangcah’s linguistic structure, without parsing grammatical structures and particles, as a full linguistic analysis would require. But whereas “Old Headman” shows many instances of differences in syntax and word order between Chinese and Pangcah, for “Orature” the literal parsing differs only slightly from the translated version. In fact, some parts of the Chinese text of “Orature,” such as its last three lines, coincide in both versions:

ko matengilay
聽到的
that hear/is heard
painiay tono toas
　　詮釋　　祖先
　　explain　ancestor
papeloay
表說者
storyteller (249)

This is no longer due to a felicitous coincidence in word order and syntax of the Chinese and Pangcah versions as in the rest of “Orature”—after all the two languages belong to different language families and function quite differently. Rather, the translated version intentionally reproduces the ungrammatical structure of the parsed version, one in which the relationships between the two verbs (“to hear” and “to explain”) and the two nouns (“ancestor” and “storyteller”) remain ambiguous. Rather than providing a smooth, idiomatic, and grammatically correct standard Chinese translation for which the word glosses of the literal translation are only a preparation or an expendable surplus, it is precisely the occasional lack of difference between these two types of translation that signals how Pangcah intentionally interferes with standard Chinese syntax. From a different vantage point, however, apparently a complex interlingual,

[14] This practice of double translation only appears in two of Rahic Talif’s poems in this volume, but it accrues special significance, since the very first text of the volume, a preface by Sakuma 蕭清秀, Pangcah teacher at the local elementary school, uses the same strategy, i.e. it is written in Pangcah with word glosses in Chinese followed by a Chinese translation (2-3).

translational maneuver is needed in order to produce a Pangcah inflection of standard Chinese, especially for it to be perceived as an intentional intervention, rather than a consequence of inadequate Chinese literacy. In fact, "Orature" shows that the hybridization of Chinese by way of Indigenous languages that critics of Indigenous, Taiwanese, and Sinophone literatures are wont to invoke requires hard work and translational astuteness on the part of the Indigenous author.

Moments like these in the context of multiple experiments with and between Pangcah and standard Chinese in *Turbidity* force a reader to question the boundaries between creation and translation, as well as between original and translation. Even as Rahic Talif models some of his poems on the form of bilingual poetry editions, he effectively troubles the illusion of equality that the side-by-side placement of text in two languages suggests, but that usually obscures a relation of inequality—between original and translation, between different languages and their unequal status. Is standard Chinese in the parallel poems of *Turbidity* the host or the guest language, does it reshape the creation or translation in Pangcah or is it itself reshaped in the process? Chinese remains the dominant language throughout *Turbidity*. After all, Rahic Talif's work features more Chinese than Pangcah texts and Pangcah elements are normally placed within larger portions of Chinese texts, while Chinese text usually dispenses with a translation into Pangcah, whereas the instances of untranslated or unglossed Pangcah are relatively few. And yet, the multiplicity of strategies of mixing and translation between Pangcah and standard Chinese already complicates the assumption of a general, unspecific hybridity. After all, as *Turbidity* shows, even as both languages remain starkly unequal, the stakes of writing in standard Chinese and Pangcah are stacked anew with each literary endeavor that creates a new literary contact zone, thus opening up the extremes of assimilation or resistance to a multitude of specific linguistic interventions.

Global Transcriptions

Badai's and Rahic Talif's works find different ways of navigating the complexities of literary and linguistic marginality, as their experiments of translation, transcription, and linguistic mixing also depend strongly on each work's generic, formal, aesthetic, and political aims. Meanwhile, they tread the fine line between two different languages and scripts in a context in which the distribution of linguistic hybridity and hegemony is closely policed, both by national interests and economic realities. To assure their circulation on the Taiwanese literary scene, which also functions as one of the global distribution centers of Sinophone literature, even such hybrid Indigenous works have to rely on standard Chinese as a medium of creation and

translation. But these two texts show that bilingual and bigraphic works and their politics of translation are not only determined by the interaction of a dominant (standard Chinese) and a minor (Pangcah or Puyuma) language and their respective cultural traditions.

Taiwanese Indigenous literature addresses the problem of uneven, disparate minority statuses in Taiwan, both synchronically and diachronically. For instance, Badai's *Diguwan* narrates a situation of tension between Japanese, the language of the colonial force, and Puyuma (and at times Bunun) as well as Taiwanese in the early decades of the twentieth century. But his novel, written for readers of standard Chinese, effectively translates this into a textual predominance of standard Chinese over Puyuma and Taiwanese. Even though Badai does not provide dialogue in the original Bunun and Japanese, given the topic of intertribal friction and colonial oppression in *Diguwan*, the novel questions the relationship between different colonized and marginalized traditions and languages as well as between colonizer and colonized cultures. Effectively, *Diguwan* thus paints a panorama of the complex cultural interactions in Taiwan in the past and the present, a network of hierarchical and lateral links. In fact, the work of Taiwanese Indigenous writers always points beyond its own specific bilingual or bicultural situation, as one node in the multiethnic, multilingual context of contemporary Taiwan, and, given Taiwan's multiple colonial legacies, to a global history of contact and transculturation.

The very patterns of bilingual expressions espoused and contested by the authors analyzed here already place these works in the context of global textual regimes – such as the historical novel, the anthropological text, or bilingual poetry editions. These structures shape these bilingual texts – intended to circulate beyond their Indigenous linguistic locales – before they travel further in translation. Even though Indigenous communities can claim an equal share in the hybrid cultural legacies of Taiwan and stake such a claim in increasingly vocal ways, the patterns of readership of Taiwanese Indigenous texts still remains unequal. But if non-Indigenous Taiwanese readers (or other readers of Chinese but not of Indigenous languages) often expect a readable text (in standard Chinese) that nevertheless delivers an authentic vision of Indigenous cultures, such essentializing and exoticizing visions of Indigeneity are increasingly contested in Taiwanese Indigenous writing, as Indigenous communities espouse a hybrid, bicultural, and bilingual Taiwaneseness without jettisoning their Indigenous roots.

If Taiwanese Indigenous texts put pressure on the relationship between the local (Puyuma, Amis etc.) and the national (Taiwanese), they also reframe patterns of global circulation beyond and outside of expected, trodden paths. The usual frameworks used for thinking about Taiwanese Indigenous literature in transnational terms are twofold. On the one hand, these texts are being treated as examples of Sinophone texts, as expressions (mainly) in

Chinese whose minor inflection of a major language contests the monolithic essence of Chinese culture. While this has been a productive way of drawing more attention to this corpus of texts it also threatens to overemphasize the resistant potential of marginal texts in a minor key in the face of linguistic and cultural inequality and to treat the non-Chinese textual elements as an expendable extra. On the other, Taiwanese Indigenous literature has started to garner international interest beyond Taiwan or other Sinophone contexts, exemplified by criticism in non-Sinophone academia and by translations into English. English translations that do not only target a specialized audience often market Taiwanese indigenous works as part of world literature, as of global importance because it brings local histories and traditions to readers of English around the world.

The translations of Taiwanese Indigenous literary works into English are inevitably driven by difficult choices. After all, as Jacques Derrida claims in *Schibboleth*, bilingual texts are truly untranslatable. They can be rendered into other languages, but a translation will never be able to reproduce the relationship between the two (or more) languages of the original (54-55). Bigraphic texts increment the problem of translation, since they represent not only the unequal relationship between two different languages, but the concomitant tension between two different scripts. Much like the interaction between the Romanized scripts of Indigenous languages and the Chinese writing system such a translation also consists of a movement between two different scripts, a transcription that is more than simply a change of writing system. But even as the Romanized script (shared by Indigenous writing systems and many other global languages) shows its hegemonic power vis-à-vis the Chinese script, as the dominant and indeed only script of a translated version, it also potentially erases one of the most powerful features of Taiwanese Indigenous writing: its multi-scriptural (and indeed multi-transcriptural) politics. As Taiwanese Indigenous texts circulate in English translations, the initial imbalance between the prestigious Chinese script and the Romanized transcription systems of Indigenous languages is brought into the fold of English, the language of global prestige par excellence, their original script difference swallowed up by the global alphabetic monopoly in which Indigenous terms barely stand out among their alphabetic frame in English.[15] With a view to allowing Taiwanese indigenous texts to travel well in English, translators often have to choose to downplay elements that make these texts particularly

[15] Arguably, my own work, that of an academic working and publishing mainly in an Anglo-American context who reads in standard Chinese, but can only precarious parse a couple of sentences in Pangcah also partakes of the potentially problematic global circulation of Taiwanese Indigenous literature, bringing it into the fold of western academic discourse in English, while insisting on its bilingual and bigraphic creativity.

intriguing to a reader. For instance, John Balcolm, the translator of the first anthology of Taiwanese Indigenous literature into English, professes to have eschewed a rendition of non-grammatical or non-standard constructions of Chinese in the texts, opting for a translation into "normal American English," while maintaining the Indigenous terms used in the original text (xxii). While it might be difficult to imagine the use of a minored English to imitate the minored Chinese of the originals – after all, such minor uses of English are never neutral but come with their specific local, colonial, and transcultural histories – the outcome of Balcolm's translations, laudable for their elegance and for the scope of the project, seems to zoom too quickly from linguistic friction to a smooth (almost) monolingual, unmarked English. The English translation of Badai's novel *Diguwan* even chooses to omit the dialogues in Puyuma and Taiwanese and translates their translations into standard Chinese only, while omitting all notes, explanations, and photographs that endow *Diguwan* with its anthropological flavor.[16]

But, as Walter Mignolo points out, "If English is the hegemonic language in a transnational world, English can also be the transnational language in which positions of subalternity are rearticulated" (31). For Taiwanese Indigenous writing, such a rearticulation of marginality in English might start by paying attention to and targeting specific, strategic transcultural networks that break down the deceptive unity of the global. One such venue, in the key of a minor transnationalism (Lionnet and Shih) that effectively contests national boundaries, is the framework of the trans-Indigenous, of speaking to and resonating with the cultural expressions of Indigenous peoples around the globe. An anthology of English translations of selected works by the Taiwanese Indigenous writers Husluman Vava 霍斯陸曼·伐伐, Auvini Kadresengan 奧威尼·卡露斯, and Badai, effectively makes such a claim in its afterword, namely that these translations "make the stories accessible for a wide range of English-speaking readers, including academics fluent in English as a second language and many native peoples throughout the world who have been colonized by the British and Americans and speak fluent English as a result" (Anderson 172). From this perspective, English – much like Chinese that, for instance for Badai, can enable the communication between the different Indigenous peoples of Taiwan – can provide a common medium for trans-Indigenous circulation, highlighting the "mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures,

[16] Only a few parts of Rahic Talif's *Turbidity* have been translated into English, and notably the translator's choice has not singled out the author's textual games with bilingual poetry editions, see Russell.

histories, and texts," "the complex, contingent asymmetry and the potential risks of unequal encounters" (Allen xiv).[17]

Indigenous works – even those that are written in one language only (most often the language of the colonizer) – are already involved in multiple translational processes before their translation into another language. As such, their production and circulation has the potential to challenge cultural and linguistic boundaries and contest the definition of the local, the national, and the global. Texts such as Badai's *Diguwan* and Rahic Talif's *Turbidity* with their selective bigraphism and translational strategies, mediated by transcultural textual forms like anthropological writing or bilingual poetry editions, in fact teach us that untranslatability is not an absolute threshold. Instead, strategies of textual production and circulation between languages, cultures, and scripts are specific and unequal, even as they can be productively brought to bear on other contexts. But these texts also show us that the potential for resistance to oppressive language politics – be they local, national, regional, or global – does not reside in language or script mixing *per se*. Often global commodification and cross-cultural alliance, exoticizable hybridity and transcultural disruption are only a step apart, brokered by the author's textual choices that are themselves determined by a multiplicity of contexts, but also dependent on the strategies of reading we espouse. Even as texts can set us on a bilingual or bigraphic road, it is also up to us, as readers and critics, to play our part by engaging in ethical practices of bilanguaging and indeed biscripting.

[17] One can nevertheless hope that future translations, maybe inspired by the bilingual and bigraphic texts of Taiwanese Indigenous writers, finds new ways of dealing with the complexities at the intersections of different languages and scripts even as they mediate between and bridge different linguistic and cultural contexts.

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The Twentieth Century Secularization of the Sinograph in Vietnam, and its Demotion from the Cosmological to the Aesthetic

John Duong Phan
Rutgers University
john.phan@rutgers.edu

Abstract

This article examines David Damrosch's notion of "scriptworlds"—spheres of cultural and intellectual transfusion, defined by a shared script—as it pertains to early modern Vietnam's abandonment of sinographic writing, in favor of a latinized alphabet. The Vietnamese case demonstrates a surprisingly rapid readjustment of deeply held attitudes concerning the nature of writing, in the wake of the alphabet's meteoric successes. The fluidity of "language ethics" in early modern Vietnam (a society that had long since developed vernacular writing out of an earlier experience of diglossic literacy) suggests that the durability of a "scriptworld" depends on the nature and history of literacy in the societies under question.

Keywords

Vietnamese literature- Vietnamese philology- Chinese philology- script reform- language reform- early modern East Asia/Southeast Asia

Introduction

In 1919, the French-installed emperor Khải Định permanently dismantled Vietnam's civil service examinations, and with them, an entire system of political selection based on proficiency in Literary Sinitic.[1] That same year, using a controversial latinized alphabet called Quốc Ngữ (lit. "National Language" 國語), one Vietnamese intellectual declared that "today, our nation must learn Quốc Ngữ letters and French writing, but Chinese characters should also not be abandoned."[2] Despite his plea, all forms of sinographic writing would effectively

[1] I follow the conventional translation of 文言 as "Literary Sinitic," which I prefer to both "Literary Chinese" (a term that occludes the importance of this language to Korea, Japan, and China), and "Classical Chinese," which properly only refers to the language of the Zhou Dynasty Classics, composed in the first millennium BCE. Literary Sinitic may be understood as the high, literary language of a cosmopolitan East Asia (functionally analogous to Latin or Sanskrit in Europe and South Asia respectively).

[2] Phạm Huy-hổ: "Nước ta ngày nay nên học chữ quốc ngữ và chữ Pháp, mà chữ Hán cũng không nên bỏ" (Phạm 416).

disappear over the next two decades or so, replaced by Quốc Ngữ. Today, Vietnam is the only culturally East Asian nation that uses a Latin alphabet.

David Damrosch ("Scriptworlds") draws attention to the role of script as a vehicle for cultural and literary transfusion, and raises the question of how script may define or constrain that transfusion. In one example, Damrosch describes how the circulation of the epic *Gilgamesh* was strikingly restricted to societies employing Cuneiform, and that despite evidence of some exposure to *Gilgamesh* among Hellenistic peoples (using a Phoenician derived alphabet) later in history, no direct literary transfusion appears to have obtained (Damrosch 198). In another, contrastive example, Damrosch describes the "grammatological sovereignty" with which Icelandic poets such as the 14th century Snorri Sturluson experimented with Latin and Christian motifs, freely hybridizing them with Pagan themes associated with a runic past (209-213). Damrosch's work casts focus on to script as an important determiner of cultural geography, alongside shared language, religious affiliation, or political control. While I agree with the importance of script as both a vehicle and constraint of cultural transfusion, I suggest that any understanding of that importance must account for the nature and history of literacy, in the cultures under question. The two cases cited above, for example, seem to represent vastly different linguistic conditions of exchange. Damrosch's otherwise illuminating notion of "scriptworlds," unfortunately does not to consider the work Sheldon Pollock has done on arguably universal principles of vernacularization, in diglossic societies long accustomed to the presence of a prestigious "cosmopolitan" language, distinct from the predominant spoken form.[3] Furthermore, a glance at modern "switching" from one script to another (as occurred in Soviet-era Chechnya, under Atatürk in early 20th century Turkey, and as discussed in this article, at the end of colonial rule in 1920s Vietnam), suggests a culturally and politically charged, frequently controversial process, which nevertheless does not seem to initiate a new cultural hegemony based on the adopted script, nor necessarily abort the circulation of texts written in the rejected script.[4] I suggest, therefore, that a particular society's engagement with script as a cultural phenomenon is meaningfully correlated with whatever stage of literacy that society has achieved at the point of contact. A society developing patterns of literacy for the first time in a foreign script—and language—is likely to absorb a broad spectrum of cultural, intellectual, religious, and/or political attitudes as a bundled package, and is less likely to demonstrate the

[3] See Sheldon Pollock. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

[4] Though certainly, there were intellectual casualties accrued through the abandonment of a sinographic education.

kind of "grammatological sovereignty" that Damrosch attributes to the Icelandic case. By contrast, a literate, and critically, *vernacularized* society that "switches" from one script to another has already developed categories for language and writing that are innately fluid, and which dilute the power of a new script to determine broader cultural or intellectual values. Thus while such a transition may ignite great political and intellectual controversy (as I will describe in the Vietnamese case here), it may not define the same kinds of durable boundaries to cultural transfusion that the initial adoption of a script (or "entry" into a scriptworld) might engender.[5]

This model would certainly explain the Vietnamese case. Like the vast majority of societies in the history of the world, the Vietnamese first experienced literacy in a language different from their predominant spoken form. For over a thousand years, the only language read or written in the area of northern Vietnam was Literary Sinitic. This condition obtained naturally as the result of Han colonization of the region in the last century BCE, and would only change after the disintegration of Tang control eleven centuries later. The Vietnamese vernacular was first cast into a systematic written form some time in the early 2nd millennium CE. That system, called Chữ Nôm (𡨸喃, 𡨸喃, or 字喃; hereafter, "Nôm"), may be understood as an extension of the sinographic script designed to represent the Vietnamese lexicon. No substantial innovation of, or deviation from the basic *six grahs* 六書 principles of sinographic writing was attempted.[6] In fact, a conscious effort to avoid a fully phonographic system, in favor of more "semantosyllabic" 形聲 characters (combining a semantic and a phonetic element) arose, as Nôm gained in popularity over the 17th – 19th centuries. Thus, Vietnam's initial experience of literacy was shaped by Literary Sinitic, and its development of a vernacular script likewise followed the mold of Chinese characters.

This history is shared, in broad strokes, with Korea and Japan as well, and the consumption and production of Literary Sinitic texts formed the basis for what Ross King has called a "Sinographic Cosmopolis."[7] If, as Damrosch suggested, the adoption of a script meant the adoption of "a whole complex of values, assumptions, and traditions," then King's "Sinographic Cosmopolis" describes the intellectual and literary space self-consciously shared betwen members of the sinographic scriptworld. This Sinographic Cosmopolis was built on a

[5] Assuming reasonable continuity in the society in question. I would add here that the force of script to determine the nature of cultural transfusion in cases of diglossic vernacularization likely derives from a culturally mandated education in the cosmopolitan language, to which the script promised access.
[6] Please see the full version of this article for a description of the *six graphs.*
[7] Ross King coined this term for a series of international workshops beginning in the summer of 2012, in response to Sheldon Pollock's revolutionary work on the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" of South Asia.

concept of Chinese writing as the projection of a cosmologically ordered pattern (Viet. *văn* 文), believed to be interpreted and then transmitted by the classical sages (*hiền nhân* 賢人, "worthy men"; or the slightly broader term *thánh hiền* 聖賢, "sages and worthies"), whose wisdom in turn laid the foundation for society, governance, and culture. This concept served as a kind of cosmological underpinning to the practice of writing, one tied not merely to the canon of literature written in Literary Sinitic, but also to the sinograph itself, as an emblem and manifestation of *văn.* Thus, the Japanese went to great lengths to maintain the illusion of pure sinographic writing through methods such as *kundoku* 訓読, while vernacular Korean did not eclipse Literary Sinitic until the modern era (despite the innovation of a uniquely elegant alphabet in the form of *Hangul*).

In Vietnam, it was not until the aforementioned abandonment of the civil service examinations in 1919, and the rapid adoption of the latinized alphabet known as *Quốc Ngữ* over the 1920s, that the vernacular finally came to displace Literary Sinitic as the written language of choice. Although blindingly fast, and ruthlessly thorough in its displacement of sinographic writing, the alphabet predictably clashed with deeply rooted concepts of *văn* as the basis of humanity, learning, and nature. As described briefly below, the question of abandoning sinographic writing consequently struck an almost religious nerve, while the adoption of the *Quốc ngữ* alphabet was perceived by some as a harbinger of the final eradication of Vietnamese language and culture.

Yet despite these fears, the alphabet displaced both Hán and Nôm writing within a couple decades. Vietnamese culture was not eradicated, and indeed, Vietnamese vernacular literature flourished in ways it never had before. Most significantly, the adoption of the Latin alphabet failed to lock the Vietnamese into a new cultural space defined by Roman letters, as the initial adoption of sinographic writing arguably had. Instead, what we find is a sort of measured cognitive dissonance evolving in the intellectual discourse, one that increasingly secularized the concept of writing until the adoption of an alien script was leeched of cosmological significance. This curious, rationalizing process is best observed in a series of script experiments rapidly produced just as the alphabet was coming into its own. This article will describe these script experiments in detail, and demonstrate how their increasingly secular conceptualizations of writing, in fact express an immunity to membership in a new "scriptworld," despite the salient adoption of a new and prestigious script.

Section 1 briefly examines revisits the long-held reverence for the sinograph. Section 2 then turns to three script experiments, published in 1929, 1932, and 1933 respectively, which

articulate a rapid reorientation of values regarding script. Finally, Section 3 discusses these four texts as an exemplification of the "secularization" of the sinograph in Vietnam over time, and considers what such a process might reveal about the nature of scriptworlds in a modern, multiliterate world.

Vietnamese Reverence for a "Sagely Script"[8]

By the mid 1600s, French, Portuguese, and Italian missionaries had already developed what would later be known as the *Quốc Ngữ* alphabet for Vietnamese.[9] Yet despite the phonographic accuracy and easy learnability of the alphabet, it would remain, for the next 350 years or so, restricted to Catholic circles and virtually ignored by educated Vietnamese. Instead, Vietnamese literati continued to compose primarily in Literary Sinitic, and when they did indulge in vernacular writing, they preferred the sinographic script known as Chữ Nôm. There were thus two layers of sinographic preference that insulated the Vietnamese from latinized writing: 1) a devotion to Literary Sinitic as a cosmopolitan language (over any vernacular language and script); and 2) a preference for Nôm, when engaging in vernacular composition.

This devotion to the sinograph was rooted in a conceptualization of true writing as the invention of the ancient Sages—exemplary figures who fundamentally improved human society in one manner or another. The association of script with these founders of civilization is clearly expressed in a 17th century Sino-Vietnamese dictionary, entitled *Explication of the Guide to Jeweled Sounds* 指南玉音解義 (Viet. *Chỉ nam ngọc âm giải nghĩa*). The 2nd preface of the dictionary opens as follows:[10]

> Lo, when the positions of the Three Fundamental Powers were established, all was a jumbled vastness, [and] men and phenomena were difficult to name… The numerous categories were extremely complex. With neither writing nor [the wherewithal to] indicate names, the multitude of ignorants found it difficult to discern [things]. Thus, since ancient times the Sages have established the side to indicate meaning, thereby rectifying the speaking of names.
>
> 夫，三才定位，盖混茫，人物難名… 庶類甚繁。非文字亦非指名，群蒙難識。夫，自古聖人立傍說義，以正言名。(my translation, manuscript AB372)

[8] Due to space constraints, this section has been greatly abbreviated. Please see the complete version of this article for a fuller treatment of these issues.

[9] Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) published a Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary using the alphabet in 1651.

[10] There are two prefaces to the dictionary. The first preface is written in Vietnamese (Nôm).

The idea of "rectifying names" is an oblique reference to the *Analects* 13:3, where Confucius discusses the importance of proper language to the welfare of the state; but here it also functions as a description of semantosyllabic writing—i.e. the exemplary sinograph—with semantic radicals placed "to the side" of a phonetic base. The human condition is thus described as fundamentally improved by the sagely invention of sinographic writing.

Given this deeply held reverence for a "sagely scipt," it is not surprising that many early-modern intellectuals viewed the abandonment of Chinese characters as a threat to the civilized state. In 1918, the Grand Secretariat of the Eastern Hall, Tôn Thất Tổ, issued the following statement in protest to Emperor Khải Định's proposal to abandon Chinese characters:

> For hundreds and thousands of years, our nation has continued to teach and learn through books of Chinese characters. We use them to transmit moral principles, and to illuminate proper relationships. Chinese characters have become a golden compass for the people of our nation, and thus I must beg to argue and urge for their maintenance and safeguarding, and that they may not be abandoned arbitrarily (my translation; Nguyễn, 355).
>
> Nước ta từ hàng trăm nghìn năm nay vẫn giảng dạy học tập bằng sách vở chữ Hán, dùng để chuyền tải đạo lý, làm tỏ luân thường. Chữ Hán đã trở thành kim chỉ nam cho người nước ta, vậy phải xin bàn bạc thương lượng cho duy trì giữ lại mà không thể bỗng dưng phế bỏ đi được.

For men such as Tôn Thất Tổ, civilized society was inextricably bound to sinographic culture. Abandoning Chinese writing meant abandoning the wisdom of the Sages and Worthies, a critical blow to Vietnamese culture in an already compromised time (i.e. of colonization).[11] Very similar sentiments were expressed in contemporary Turkey, also in the face of adopting the Latin alphabet. In 1923 the Turkish general Kâzim Karabekir (1882-1948) declared that adopting the Latin alphabet would place "a splendid weapon in the hands of all Europe; they will declare to the Islamic world that the Turks have accepted the foreign writing and turned Christian…[t]he diabolical idea with which our enemies are working is precisely (this)" (Lewis

[11] Here, as in the Emperor's response to Tôn Thất Tổ discussed below, "Chinese characters" refers both to script and Literary Sinitic education in general. The idea that script or language was somehow tied to the welfare of the state (itself a reflection of Confucius' sentiments in the *Analects* 13: 3), is critically expressed in a 1921 script experiment called *New Characters for the Nation's Sounds* 指南玉音解義, and it is precisely this notion that evaporates in the following decade or so. For a discussion of this important text, please see the full version of this article.

32). Like Karabekir, Tôn Thất Tổ perceived script as the bulwark of a society under siege, and considered the alphabet to be the vanguard of a cultural invasion.

The Secularization of the Sinograph

But despite the vehemence of such protests, the alphabet proved immensely popular, and over the 1920's and 1930's, enabled Vietnamese to displace both Literary Sinitic and French, as incumbent and potential "national languages" respectively. The rapid spread of the alphabet continued to stimulate a philosophical debate among the Vietnamese, which, in inverse proportion to the success of Quốc Ngữ, rapidly *decreased* in urgency and consequence. Marr (1981) briefly lists three experiments with script that were published over the late 1920s and early 1930s. When examined against the reverence for sinographic writing discussed above, these script experiments articulate an increasingly mundane attitude toward sinographic writing that indirectly rationalizes the adoption of Quốc Ngữ (post factum), and suggests a disintegration of the meaningfulness of scriptworld boundaries.

A technical objection to the alphabet

The earliest "post-alphabetical" script experiment, published in 1929 and entitled *Viet Characters: A Style of Writing Annamese* (*Việt Tự: Một lối viết tiếng An Nam*), already exhibits a vastly different attitude toward non-sinographic writing than suggested by, for example, Tôn Thất Tổ's impassioned protest discussed above. Most saliently, the preface was written in French rather than Literary Sinitic—a clear token of French education. In fact, the author (Vi Huyền-Đắc, 1899-1976) quickly explains that his main complaint about Quốc Ngữ is merely that it cannot elegantly represent the rich vocalic and tonal inventories of the Vietnamese language:

> The Latin alphabet can only give us 12 vowels, but Annamese, which has a great phonic richness, requires sixty others. To fill in this lacuna, one must resort to the subterfuge of the five tonal accents. Thus (lit. *et*, "and") of twelve vowels, one has made 72, which combine with the consonants to form almost all the syllables of the language (my translation; Vi, A).
>
> L'Alphabet latin ne peut nous donner que 12 voyelles mais l'annamite qui a une grande richesse phonique en demande soixante autres. Pour combler cette lacune, on a eu recours au subterfuge des cinq accents toniques. Et, de 12 voyelles on en fait 72, qui combinées aux consonnes forment presque toutes les syllables de la langues.

In almost the same breath, however, Vi also admits his own admiration for Quốc Ngữ:

> Certainly, this amiable exchangeability [of vowels] is not devoid of ingenuity, and for 50 years, Latin Quốc Ngữ has provided palpable proof of its marvelous flexibility of adaptation (my translation; Vi, A).
>
> Certes, cet affablement interchangeable n'est point dépourvu d'ingéniosité et depuis 50 ans, le Quốc-Ngữ latin a donné une preuve palpable de sa merveilleuse souplesse d'adaptation.

Vi clearly respects the elegant design of the Latin alphabet. At the same time, since Latin letters were not uniquely created for Vietnamese, Vi suggests that they introduce undesirable inefficiencies that ought to be corrected:[12]

> But the simplicity of the script and the shifting method of its use of accents induce us, at the least inattention, to grave and incredible confusions. Writing no longer possesses the immutable character that it has in other languages (my translation; ibid).
>
> Mais la simplicité du graphique et la façon mouvante de l'emploi de ces accents nous induisent, à la moindre inattention, en graves et incroyables confusions. L'écriture n'a donc plus ce caractère d'immuabilité qu'nt celles des autres langues.

Vi's system ultimately proposes discrete graphs for initial consonants and rimes (vowel + coda + tone), which may be combined in a way intriguingly reminiscent of the syllable-block arrangement of (alphabetic) *Hangul*. This results in 77 discrete syllabograms, similar in effect to Japanese *Katakana* or *Hiragana* (and it is tempting to speculate that either Korean or Japanese writing, as phonographic alternatives to the Latin alphabet, may have played some role in Vi's thinking here).

[12] Vi Huyền-Đắc had studied Literary Sinitic as a child, but soon shifted to a Quốc Ngữ education. He went on to become one of the most prolific contemporary playwrights of Vietnam. Although much of his work seemed to value pre-colonial customs and mores, he was also deeply influenced by French romanticism (as were many of his contemporaries), and we see this ambiguous relationship to French culture here in his response to Quốc ngữ as well.

FIGURE 1

Some examples of consonant + vowel syllabograms, in the *Viet Characters* system

Regardless of the mechanics of his system, what is notably lacking in *Viet Characters* is the belief that writing carries any kind of cosmological significance. Of course, by 1929, Quốc Ngữ was already arguably more popular and widespread than Chữ Nôm had ever been, a reality that was irreconciliable with a sinocentric view of script and culture. The question of script was still important to the Vietnamese at this point, but it had become transmuted into a matter of how most efficiently to represent the vernacular language. While Vi considered the alphabet intrinsically unsuited to the Vietnamese language, the issue for him was technical rather than cosmological.

A cultural need or a matter of taste

The other two texts, published in 1932 and 1933 respectively, take this "secularization" of the sinograph a step further, by relegating the need for some kind of sinography merely to the realm of ritual and aesthetics. Note first that the preface of the next script experiment, *New Chữ Nôm* (*Chữ nôm mới*) by Nguyễn Kinh-chu, is written neither in Literary Sinitic nor in French, but in Vietnamese *Quốc Ngữ*. In other words, Vietnamese—written in Quốc Ngữ—was now presumed as the language of intellectual expression (over both Literary Sinitic and French). For Nguyễn Kinh-chu, not even the technical compatibility of Quốc Ngữ was of any concern, but only its poor suitability to the cultural needs of the Vietnamese:

> In our country, we have the custom of using couplets (in the form of calligraphic scrolls) to honor, joke with, bestow, congratulate, or bring offerings to dear friends and old companions. In the past, we used Chinese writing exclusively [for these purposes].

> Today, fads have changed, French writing is in vogue, Quốc Ngữ is commonplace, and few people study Han writing. Han writing in this country is becoming more and more degenerate; in the future, it will be difficult to find anyone versed enough to write couplets or banners in Literary Sinitic. Surely then, one must write in the vernacular for couplets and banners.
>
> But how does one write the vernacular so that it is convenient? Should we write in Quốc Ngữ or in old Chữ Nôm? One cannot write Quốc Ngữ vertically; as for old Chữ Nôm, each person writes it differently, and one must be versed in Chinese writing to be able to read it. Neither of these scripts is convenient. (My translation; Nguyễn, 1933, 3).
>
> Nước ta có tục dùng đối chướng để thờ, chơi, tặng, mừng, phúng, thân bằng cố hữu. Xưa nay toàn dùng hán-tự.
>
> Ngày nay phong trào thay đổi, chữ pháp thịnh hành, chữ quốc ngữ phổ thông, ít người học hán-tự. Hán-tự ở nước ta càng ngày càng sui đối; sau này khó kiếm được người thông làm nổi bài đối, bài chướng bằng hán-văn. Tất phải dùng văn nôm vào đối chướng.
>
> Song dùng văn nôm thì viết thế nào cho tiện? Viết bằng chữ quốc-ngữ hay chữ nôm cũ? Quốc ngữ không viết dọc được; chữ nôm cũ mỗi người viết một cách, mà phải thông hán-tự thì mới đọc viết được. Hai lối chữ ấy đều không tiện cả.

Fascinatingly, Nguyễn expresses not only a clearly secularized attitude on writing, but also a highly practical (and un-Confucian) attitude on ritual and culture in general. Calligraphy is a social necessity, but nothing more than that. Structurally, "New Chữ Nôm" simply consists of Han-Nôm radical-like forms that map more or less directly on to Quốc Ngữ. There are a total of 39 characters, plus 5 diacritics for tone. The 39 characters are divided into 21 consonantal onsets and 18 vowels (including diphthongs, plus a system of alternation in order to capture finals). The five diacritics are for each tone, with high-level *ngang* tone unmarked. The consonants and tones are represented by radicals (consonants by left-side radicals and tones by radicals placed on top of the character), and the vowel/rime graphs occupy what would correspond to the phonetic graph in a traditional Han semantosyllabic character. Thus, when joined, "New Chữ Nôm" looks indistinguishable from "old" Chữ Nôm, but—as the author proudly points out—it relies on knowledge of Quốc Ngữ, and anyone who knows Quốc Ngữ can teach himself to read and write the script in only twelve days or so (Nguyễn K.-C., p. 3).[13] The author ends his preface by emphasizing his harmless, depoliticized intent: "This *New Nôm*

[13] "Thứ nôm mới này...tỉnh thần theo quốc-ngữ, biết quốc ngữ rồi tự học lấy được; chỉ học độ 12 hôm là đọc và viết được."

is a script for enjoyment…When writing, one should use a brush for characters to be beautiful" (5).[14]

FIGURE 2

Sinographic Radicals used for initial consonants, in *New Chữ Nôm*

The last of the three script experiments, published in 1933 (only a year after *New Chữ Nôm*), is largely the same kind of project. Entitled *Viet Characters, Quốc Ngữ displayed in Chinese characters* (*Chữ Việt, Quốc Ngữ lòi chữ Nho*), the script was designed specifically for use in writing parallel calligraphic verses or couplets (*câu đối*). The system is quite similar to *New Chữ Nôm*, and consists of 24 initial consonents, 10 open vowels, and 145 rimes.

FIGURE 3

Sinographic radicals used for initial consonants in *A Sinitic-style Quốc Ngữ*

[14] "Thứ *nôm mới* này là thứ chữ chơi...Viết phải dùng bút lòng thì chữ mới đẹp."

Instead of separate radicals used as diacritics to represent tone, distinct tonal rimes are included among the set of 145, but the basic principle of using sinographic radicals to represent initials and rimes, and then combining them into square graphemes that mimic Hán (or Nôm) writing remains the same. The author, Nguyễn Khắc-tỏan, also includes a preface written solely in Quốc Ngữ Vietnamese, which identifies the narrowly aesthetic purpose of the script:

> The graphs of this style are all Chinese characters bearing excellent meanings, yet also render rimes and are capable of translating 16,238 sounds, just as the letters of Quốc Ngữ. [My] intention is for them to be used to write parallel couplets conveniently. (my translation; Nguyễn, 1)
>
> Chữ cái lối chữ này toàn chữ nho có nghĩa hay, cũng đánh vần và cũng dịch được 16.238 tiếng như chữ quốc-ngữ, mục đích dùng để viết câu đối cho tiện.

Compare this narrow practicality with the reverence for sinographic writing expressed in the *Explication of the Guide to Jeweled Sounds,* Tôn Thất Tổ's impassioned defense of Chinese characters, the technical discussion in *Viet Characters* (1929), or even the discussion of Vietnamse cultural habits in *New Chữ Nôm* (1932). The selling point of this script, like *New Chữ Nôm,* is that it maps easily on to Quốc Ngữ; but as if to one-up his competitor, Nguyễn Khắc-toản even claims that "anyone who knows Quốc Ngữ can understand [this script] after examining it for just a few hours" (Nguyễn K.-T., p. I).[15]

Dissolving scriptworlds?

Each of the texts discussed briefly in this article expresses an evolving statement on what could be called the "language ethics" of Vietnamese literati, from the overtly sinocentric values of the 1641 *Explication of the Guide to Jeweled Sounds* (echoed in Tôn Thất Tổ's 1918 protest to Emperor Khải Định), to the narrowly aesthetic intentions of the 1933 *Viet Characters: Quốc Ngữ displayed in Chinese Characters.*[16] When examined together, these texts articulate a secularization of the concept of *văn* and its relationship to the written sign, occurring rapidly over the late 1920s-30s. Again, a striking parallel may be drawn with the Turkish debates of the same period. In 1926, Kiliçzade Hakki argued that the sacred nature of the Quran did not apply to the Arabic alphabet, in an article dryly entitled "Gabriel didn't bring the Arabic letters

[15] The two books were both printed in Nam Định at what appears to be the same publishing house (Mỹ Thắng).
[16] As discussed in note 11, the views of the 1641 *Explication* were also powerfully expressed in the 1921 *New Characters for the Nation's Sounds*.

too, you know" (Lewis, 32).[17] These secularizing responses suggest that previously monolithic attitudes on script and culture were forcibly readjusted in a multi-literate and increasingly globalized world.

But does this process of secularization describe both the "exit" from a sinographic scriptworld as well as the "entry" into a latinized scriptworld? Did the adoption of a latinized script lead to the same kind of defining cultural paradigms that the initial adoption of sinographic writing had? What would a vernacularized, literate society's "entry" into a new scriptworld actually mean? It is tempting to aggrandize the adoption of the alphabet into a kind of broad westernization of Vietnamese culture—not least of which because that kind of rhetoric was often used either to justify or condemn it. In response to Tôn Thất Tổ's vehement defense of Chinese characters discussed above, Emperor Khải Định (r. 1916-1925) painted a sweeping vision of the road to modernity, paved with French letters:

> We have discussed this many times already; they [erudites of the court] trepidatiously dither and speak endlessly, and yet in the end still hear nothing. If the Treasured Protectorate wishes to abandon Chinese characters, it is for three reasons. First, although from youth, the people of our nation study the books of the Worthies and Sages, yet when grown, they do the opposite, and in terms of logic contradict each other. Secondly, today is an era of communication, and French letters are a form of script both fine and commonly used. In abandoning Chinese characters, students will focus wholeheartedly on French letters, making it easier for communication thereafter. Thirdly, [when] the people of our nation only and wholeheartedly study French letters, and thinking is already focused on the thorough and deep, then standards will certainly improve very swiftly, so that our future will spread out, beat its wings and fly to the high peak of civilization. Our Vietnam, like the whole realm of the Eastern Seas[18], is becoming a small France; [is this not] simply excellent and beautiful?" (my translation; Nguyễn, 355).[19]
>
> Cũng đã thương lượng nhiều lần rồi, chỉ e ra rả nói mãi mà rồi họ vẫn bỏ ngoài tai. Quí Bảo hộ sở dĩ muốn bỏ chữ Hán là bởi có ba nguyên nhân. Thứ nhất là mặc dù người nước

[17] This article was written in response to proponents of the Arabic-Persian alphabet. As Lewis notes, this rejoinder was not entirely fair, since it ignored a major argument of those defending the Arabic-Persian script—that literacy in the Quran would plummet if the Latin alphabet were adopted (see Lewis *Turkish* 32).

[18] Here, the Indochinese Peninsula.

[19] At the time of writing, I was unable to access the original (Literary Sinitic) text, currently stored at the Paris archives of the École française d'Extrême-Orient. Thus, my translations are based on Nguyễn Văn Nguyên's translation into Vietnamese, published in 2010.

> ta từ nhỏ đã đọc sách Thánh hiền...nhưng khi lớn lên lại làm ngược lại, về nghĩa lí trái ngược nhau; Thứ hai là ngày nay là thời đại giao thiệp, chữ Pháp là thứ chữ vừa tinh vừa thông dụng. Bỏ chữ Hán đi học trò sẽ chuyên tâm vào chữ Pháp, dễ dàng cho sự giao thiệp sau này; Thứ ba là người nước ta chỉ còn chuyên tâm học chữ Pháp, tư tưởng đã tập trung chuyên sâu thì trình độ ắt tiến bộ rất nhanh để tương lai phơi phới vỗ cảnh bay tới đỉnh cao của sự văn minh. Việt Nam ta cũng như cả cõi Đong Dương trở thành một nước Pháp con há chẳng tốt đẹp hay sao.

It is difficult to ignore the overtly pro-colonial language here. However, the basic logic of the Emperor's edict—that French letters lead to French knowledge, which unlocks a broader world and paves the way to modernization (in France's image)—was shared even by anticolonial intellectuals striving for independence.[20]

Yet Emperor Khải Định's very appropriation of script as a symbol of culture suggests a fluidity of language ethics that presupposes any truly exclusive membership in a new scriptworld. Note, for instance, that the Emperor closes his arguments with an appeal to move slowly on the transition, in order to safeguard the body of knowledge and culture represented in sinographic writings:

> Nevertheless, in terms of ideology, our nation has revered and esteemed Chinese learning for a long time, and ancient texts and scriptures are many. The time in which ancient books have been able to be translated into Quốc Ngữ and French letters, to date has not amounted to many years, and thus Chinese characters may not be abolished hastily (my translation; Nguyễn, 356).
>
> Tuy nhiên, xét về lí thì nước ta vốn sùng chuộng Hán học đã lâu, thư tịch cổ rất nhiều...trong khi sách cổ được dịch ra chữ Quốc ngữ và chữ Pháp hiện chẳng được bao Năm, nên chữ Hán không thể mau chóng phế bỏ đi được.

Not even Khải Định, who gained notoriety as a mouthpiece for the colonial regime, imagined the adoption of the alphabet as requiring any kind of radical abandonment of Vietnamese culture, literature, or philosophy—steeped as they were in a sinographic heritage.[21] Though the

[20] Note the conflation of language and writing committed by Khải Định in expressing these sentiments. In many places, writers refer to "chữ Pháp" (French letters) but seem in reality to mean the French language, and more broadly, French learning. This is similar to Tôn Thất Tổ's use of "Chinese characters" to refer both to sinographic writing and Literary Sinitic learning in general. Please see the full version of this article for a discussion of the confusion of *scripts* and *languages*, as well as a comparison with relevant processes of modernization and script/language reform in contemporary China.
[21] In this way he was quite measured in his arguments to abandon sinographic writing (see previous note).

Emperor viewed the alphabet as a passport to European civilization, he did not associate the abandonment of sinographic writing as the eradication of traditional culture, since the canon of sinographic knowledge could be translated and/or transliterated where necessary.[22] All that was needed was time. The Emperor thus foreshadows a secularized view of script that rejected, whether intentionally or not, a concept of *văn* underpinning the practice of writing. Crucially, this secularized view (which as we have already seen ultimately wins out) permits a diversity of script practices, where belief in the cosmological significance of the sinograph demanded one true form of writing (or the endless struggle to recapture it). Tôn Thất Tổ probably found this edict appalling. Yet, as predicted by Khải Định, one of the major literary preoccupations of the next few decades was the translation of Literary Sinitic texts, and the transliteration of vernacular Chữ Nôm texts into Vietnamese Quốc Ngữ.[23] This occurred *alongside* numerous translations of French, English, Russian, and Japanese texts into Vietnamese as well. Thus, the adoption of the alphabet failed to insulate Vietnamese culture within a latinized circuit of literature, but rather fostered productive industries of translation and transliteration.[24]

In other words, the adoption of a latinized alphabet may have signaled Vietnam's emergence from an insulated sinographic scriptworld, but it did not really herald her entry into a similarly insular Latin scriptworld. Rather, this transition, like many processes of modernization, involved the dismantling of a set of perceived cultural paradigms—in this case, the importance of *văn* as it related to the practice of writing. The adoption of a new script by an already literate Vietnamese society meant the broadening of modes of cultural transfusion, not the swapping of one mode for another. Thus, the intellectual secularization of sinographic writing described in this article, seems to suggest a breakdown in the importance of scriptworld boundaries, and ultimately, the dissolving of cultural imperatives founded on the form and figure of writing.

[22] It is likely that this rhetoric was designed to appease opposing factions at court. However, the politics behind the statement do not affect the point that such an argument was conceivable at the time.

[23] For more on these activities and their relationship to the end of colonial power in Vietnam, see David Marr (1981), *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*; Hue-tam Ho Tai (1992), *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*; and Shawn McHale (2004), *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam.*

[24] Certainly, the rapid abandonment of training in Literary Sinitic language, as well as Chữ Nôm script, did result in some losses. Indeed, by the second half of the 20th century, the number of people trained to read Nôm plummeted to only a handful worldwide, and Nôm literature (often a low priority for translation) did suffer from a great lack of attention for decades. However, this neglect of Nôm literature was perhaps due more to a reverence for Literary Sinitic (over vernacular Vietnamese), than any francocentric opprobriation of sinographic literature.

In conclusion, the Vietnamese case suggests that a concept of "scriptworlds" must account for the singularity of a culture's initial experience of literacy, and especially the role played by diglossia in the secondary development of a vernacular tradition. In subsequent script adaptations, while the form of writing may be treated as a symbol of culture, it does not appear to determine cultural transfusion in the same manner as initial experiences of writing may. The precedent of diglossic literacy, and the adaptation of one script designed for one language to represent another, seems to engender an awareness of the promiscuity of language and writing—which in turn, naturally leads to a dilution of the capacity for script to determine cultural diffusion. The secularization of the sinograph in 1920s Vietnam suggests a pruning of cultural values inconsistent with an increasingly "heteroglossic"—and indeed, heterographic—world. One potential counterexample might be found in the spread of the Arabic alphabet to previously literate cultures; though in these cases, I would again question whether or not processes of cultural transformation were truly driven or determined by script. The case of Egypt might be particularly interesting to examine. In any case, the correlation may be scalar. Finally, the effect of modernity on scriptworlds seems particularly solvent. Future work on the concept of "scriptworlds" should not only compare cases of initial, diglossic literacy (such as the Akkadian adoption of Cuneiform or the Thai adoption of a Cambodian Pallava script) versus secondary or tertiary script adoption, but should also investigate the special role that modernization, and an increasingly interconnected and global experience, may play in the erosion of scriptworlds, and the dismantling of their walls.

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