# 21

# Language Modernization in the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere

## China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam

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## 21.1  Transcultural Aspects of Chinese Script

The study of sociolinguistics, including that of language standardization, has largely been built on cases from the West. Hence, languages, societies and historical experiences in Western, industrialized and rich democracies have disproportionately contributed to the formation of models and theories. Cases outside of Europe and North America are predestined to test, challenge and expand sociolinguistic theory and methodology (Smakman & Heinrich 2015). In this chapter, I explore how modern vocabulary was coined and shared in the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere (China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam). This case shows that language modernization in this part of the world had very strong transcultural aspects, largely due to Japan's pioneering role in language modernization in Asia and to the shared Chinese writing system. The topic discussed in this chapter has a twofold implication for our understanding of language standardization. First, standardization is not limited to linguistically separated and geographically demarcated states, but may occur across languages and states. Second, the writing system has an influence on the standardization process.

With the onset of East Asian modernization in the mid-nineteenth century, Japan eclipsed for several decades China's position as the cultural centre of the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere. Japan now coined a large number of Sino-Japanese words itself – these types of Sino-Japanese words

are known as <和製漢語> *wasei kango* (literally 'made-in-Japan Chinese words'). From the 1880s onwards, these Japanese-coined Sino-Xenic[1] words started spreading from Japan to China, Korea and, to a lesser extent, also to Vietnam. It is for this reason that these four countries are referred to as the 'Chinese Character Cultural Sphere'. The term has a complicated and political history. King (2014: 2) observes that it is somewhat ideologically loaded because 'Imperial Japan fancied itself the leader' of this sphere. Notwithstanding this, scholars of linguistics in East Asia frequently apply the term when discussing language modernization because there are a number of commonalities between these four countries (e.g. see Henshū I'inkai 2002). These cross-linguistic influences declined noticeably after the end of World War II.[2]

The four polities studied in this chapter constituted a 'script community' at the onset of modernity. The fact that Chinese script functions differently from alphabetic script resulted in unique processes of language modernization and standardization in this region. As is already obvious from the name, Chinese characters <漢字> (Chinese: *hànzì*, Vietnamese: *chữ nho*, Korean: *hanja*, Japanese: *kanji*) originate from China. These characters constitute the oldest script in continuous use in the world. Chinese characters spread across East Asia from around the second century BCE and became used in Vietnam, Korea and Japan (including the then independent Ryukyu Kingdom). Korea, Japan and Vietnam adopted Chinese characters partly because they came into intensive contact with China and Chinese culture and partly because they did not have writing systems of their own, while that of China was already 2,000 years old by that time (DeFrancis 1984: 65). Japan, Korea and Vietnam not only embraced Chinese script but, along with it, a large part of the Chinese lexicon and morphology. As a result, the Chinese influence on each of these languages constitutes a significant and shared cultural heritage.

Let us briefly recapitulate how Chinese script functions and how it can be applied to languages other than Chinese. Chinese script is made up of a set inventory of graphic elements that are combined into more complex graphemes. Characters contain between one and twenty-five strokes, the combination of which would theoretically allow for billions of different graphemes. However, there have always existed groupings of configurations of strokes. Historically, there were 540 such configurations, usually called 'determinatives'. Ever since the early eighteenth century, combinations of strokes have been grouped into 214 basic graphic elements. Each of these elements has variants. In characters that involve more than one such

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[1] Sino-Xenic (China + foreign) refers to the systems according to which Chinese characters are read in Japan (Sino-Japanese), Korea (Sino-Korean) and Vietnam (Sino-Vietnamese).

[2] In Japan and Korea, an immense number of predominantly English loanwords has been borrowed directly since 1945, and in China, new terms have been created independent of Japanese influence. In Vietnam, French terms were directly incorporated during the French colonial period, and recently English has provided loanwords.

graphic element, one of them hints at the meaning while one of the other elements indicates the respective Sino-Xenic reading. <仲>, for instance, is composed of six single strokes but of two determinatives. The left part of <仲> ('relationship') is a variant of <人> ('person') and the right part is <中> ('centre'). The left part, called the 'radical', hints at the semantic meaning ('something involving persons'), and the right part gives an indication of its reading. For example, <仲> and <中> are read, respectively, *zhòng* and *zhōng* in Chinese, and both are read *chū* in Sino-Japanese. Chinese writing thus has a semantic component (the radical) and a phonetic component (a determinative which is not the radical). Chinese script is often called logographic, but since the characters refer to morphemes rather than to words, it is best defined as a 'morphosyllabic script'. Staying with our example above, we find words such as <仲介> (*chūkai*, 'intermediation') in Japanese – in Chinese the word means 'agency' (*zhòngjiè*). While the semantics of these characters is often (more or less) the same across the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere, the phonetic part changes according to the phonological system of the language involved. For instance, <中國> (China) is read *zhōngguó* in Chinese, *chūgoku* in Japanese, *jungguó* in Korean and *trung quốc* in Vietnamese; that is to say, the Sino-Xenic reading of the characters reflects the phonological systems of the four languages in question. Notwithstanding this, the fact that the word is shared between all four languages and knowledge of the Chinese script system allows one to understand <中國> (literally: centre + kingdom) to refer to 'China' even without knowing how to read out <中國> in any of the other languages. Knowledge of the pronunciation is not necessary for comprehension, as long as the same written compound has the same meaning across these languages. In the linguistics of writing, script that includes semantic information such as the Chinese characters is therefore called pleremic ('full'), as opposed to the purely phonetic script such as the Roman alphabet, which is cenemic ('empty') (Coulmas 1996: 521). Last but not least, Chinese characters can also be used to write non-Chinese words. For example, <仲> reads *chū* in Sino-Japanese (and in Sino-Japanese compounds), but it can also refer to the Japanese word for 'relationship', which is *naka*, allowing thus for expressions such as <仲がいい> (*naka ga ii*, 'being on good terms (with someone)'). This sentence thus uses a Chinese script symbol, namely <仲>, in a sentence that is entirely read in Japanese (i.e. does not involve any Sino-Japanese). The remaining script characters are Japanese *hiragana*.

One final note before we start the discussion of language modernization in Japan, China, Korea and Vietnam: in this chapter, 'modernity' is conceived of as a set of attitudes that gained prominence at a specific time in Europe and North America. These attitudes – a prioritization of universality, homogeneity, monotony and clarity – contrast with what became framed as 'pre-modern' during the modernization process (Bauman 1992). Western modernity also required a definition of the 'modern we', and towards this end everything that was not Western was projected on

the 'Orient' (e.g. 'Oriental' irrationality and immaturity versus 'Western' rationality and maturity) (Said 1978). Outside of the West, modernity spread through Western colonization (in China and in Vietnam), under the threat of Western colonization (in Japan) or through Japanese colonization (in Korea). Modernization in Asia therefore involves different historical experiences, different 'others' to define the 'modern self', different building blocks to use for modernization and also different interpretations of modernity itself. Hence, we are dealing with 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000), and for this reason, I use the expression 'Asian modernity' or 'modernity in Asia' in this chapter.

With this in mind, we can now turn to a discussion of the transcultural role of the Chinese script in East Asian language modernization. This chapter discusses first the role of writing in the course of language modernization, then gives an overview of the task to 'translate' Western modernity via Chinese characters. This section is then followed by a discussion of the transnational spread of a modern lexicon from Japan to China, Korean and Vietnam.

## 21.2 The Role of Writing in Language Modernization

The effect that more than 1,000 years of writing Sino-Xenic had on Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese can hardly be exaggerated. To start with, the adoption of Chinese script across East Asia led to diglossia. Before modernization set in, there was a notable schism between writing and speaking, and the written language – based on (classical) Chinese – had not been anybody's 'native language'.[3] The Sino-Xenic vocabulary in Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese is the result of learning how to write and read Chinese in these three polities. Initially, the Chinese language was read (and written) with the closest approximation possible to Chinese but, over time, this type of writing developed into the independent systems of Sino-Korean (*hanmun*), Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) and Sino-Vietnamese (*chữ nho*). One of the reasons for this was that the Chinese writing system needed to be adapted to typologically very different languages – Chinese is isolating, Korean and Japanese are agglutinative and Vietnam is analytic. As an effect of these adaptation processes, Korea, Japan and Vietnam also developed mixed writing systems, combining Chinese characters with native script innovations and conventions. The different readings of the Chinese character compounds and the development of indigenous scripts and mixed writing systems in Korea (*hangŭl*), Japan (*kana*) and Vietnam (*chữ' nôm*) notwithstanding, all four languages share a large amount of shared Sino-Xenic

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[3] The situation in China was diglossic, too, as writing was based on Classical Chinese until the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

Table 21.1 *Shared Sino-Xenic vocabulary in Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese.*

| Chinese character compound | Chinese | Vietnamese | Korean | Japanese |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 形態 ('form') | *Xíngtài* | *hình thái* | *hyeongtae* | *keitai* |
| 形狀 ('shape') | *Xíngzhuàng* | No distinction between 'form' and 'shape' | *hyeongsang* | *keijō* |
| 狀態 ('condition') | *Zhuàngtài* | *trạng thái* | *sangtae* | *jōtai* |
| 狀況 ('situation') | *Zhuàngkuàng* | *trạng huống* | *sanghwang* | *jōkyō* |
| 形成 ('formation') | *Xíngchéng* | *hình thành* | *hyeongseong* | *keisei* |

vocabulary and morphemes from which new words continue to be created right up to the present (see Table 21.1).[4]

The morphophonetic nature of Chinese characters facilitates the creation of new words, making this possible whenever need dictates it. Note in this context that what we are dealing with is not simply 'borrowing a word' from another language. The word and its graphic representation are borrowed and, by doing so, the borrowed word instantly fits seamlessly into the existing lexicon. Consider, for contrast, how language adaption and borrowing functions between the four languages when the Chinese writing system is not involved. 'Computer', for example, is *konpyūta* in Japanese, *keompyuteo* in Korean, *jìsuànjī* in Chinese and *máy tính điện tử* in Vietnamese. In Japanese and Korean, the English term has been adopted into the respective phonological system and then incorporated into the lexicon as an element that is markedly 'foreign' due to, for example, a lack of morphemic productivity or the unusual combination of syllables. In Chinese and Vietnamese, on the other hand, 'computer' has been incorporated into the lexicon via calque translation. Chinese characters (calculate + measure + desk) are applied for the Chinese term, while the Vietnamese term literally means 'machine + calculation + electric + automatic'. There is no shared lexical adaption between the four languages. In the examples in Table 21.1, on the other hand, the representation of the borrowed work in Chinese characters allows for immediate integration of these words into the existing Sino-Xenic vocabulary of each of these languages. Masini (1993: 157) therefore calls these loanwords 'graphic loans'.

Before the Modern period, Chinese culture spread to Korea and Vietnam through direct contact, and mostly via Korea to Japan. With the onset of modernity, this trend was reversed for almost half a century and Japan became the centre from which Sino-Xenic words were diffused. This

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[4] Transcription of Japanese in Latin script applies the Modified Hepburn orthography for Chinese Hanyu Pinyin and for Korean Revised Romanization. The non-simplified 'traditional' fonts of Chinese characters are used in this text, as the examples discussed here predate the character simplifications in China and Japan. East Asian personal names in the text have the surname first.

resulted in a somewhat complicated situation. On the one hand, (language) modernization was inspired by the Japanese experience, and consequently the modernization of Korea, China and Vietnam bears many parallels with 'Japanese modernization'. On the other hand, the Chinese script allowed the newly evolving vocabulary to spread, and all the while these words appeared to be 'native' in each of these four polities. Very few exceptions aside, it did not matter whether these words had been coined in Japan or elsewhere. Furthermore, it was easier for Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese to get a grip on modernity on the basis of Sino-Japanese as opposed to Western languages. After all, Japanese modernizers had already accomplished the work of translating Western modernity via Chinese script.[5]

Japan's role in East Asian language modernization is fundamental for three reasons. Firstly, it was the first non-Western language to modernize. If language modernization means – according to Neustupný (2005: 2219) – that language 'must be adequate to the industrializing economy, society and culture' and that 'relatively equal access to language for all participants is essential', then the earliest example of a non-Western language fulfilling these criteria is Japan at the turn of the twentieth century (Heinrich 2012: 42–82). Japan's linguistic modernization provided a model for other states in Asia to follow, since Japan proved the then dominant view wrong that only 'Western languages' were capable of expressing modernity (Lo Bianco 2001). Paul Garvin writes the following about this bias:

> Traditionally linguists used to distinguish languages such as those of Europe from primitive languages such as those of the native populations of the different regions of the world that were colonized by Europeans. According to this tradition, only civilized languages are capable of a standardization process, while the so-called primitive languages are destined to remain underdeveloped since they do not have the inherent potential for the development of the attributes required for modernization. (Garvin 1993: 45)

Non-Western languages were seen as languages 'poor in grammar', a view which was very much in line with the dominant 'language-as-an-organism' theory promoted by August Schleicher at the time, or Wilhelm von Humboldt's view that diversity in language was related to diversity in intellectual perception and cultural development. Modernizing non-Western languages was also intended to prove such views wrong. We will not discuss this 'emancipative aspect' on non-Western language modernization in detail, but we should bear in mind that all of the languages under discussion here had to prove that they could successfully be modernized, and that this is a task that Japan accomplished first. China, Korea and Vietnam could therefore draw on the Japanese success.

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[5] For more detailed discussions on language modernization in these respective polities, see Heinrich (2012) for Japan, Lee and Ramsey (2011) for Korea, DeFrancis (1984) for China and DeFrancis (1977) for Vietnam.

Secondly, Japan provided a concrete template of language moderniza-tion for other East Asian languages. The task of modernizing Japanese was Herculean, due to the fact that failure would have most likely resulted in Japan's colonization by the West. Language problems in Japan involved a complex combination of obstacles that needed to be solved quickly. These included the facilitation of the writing system and the creation of a stand-ard orthography, the creation of a standard language, the filling of the enormous lexical gaps and a unification of spoken and written language (Carroll 2001). In view of these difficulties, it is unsurprising to see that no fewer than 343 proposals as to how to modernize Japanese were made in the Meiji period (1868–1912) alone (Hirai 1998).[6] China, Korea and Vietnam were faced with the same language problems, and in this way Japan's 'solu-tions' provided them with a shortcut for their own language moderniza-tion efforts.

Thirdly, Japan provided the lexical basis of language modernization for Korean, Chinese and, to a lesser extent, also for Vietnamese. One of the requirements for languages in the course of modernization is their inter-translatability; that is, the possibility to translate everything from and into other modern languages (Fishman 1974: 81). With regard to non-Western languages, Annamalai writes:

> Development status of a language is a relational notion, and it derives from the social, political, economic and technological power of the community speaking it. Communities with only underdeveloped languages have lesser power. The form of a language that reflects its development status is not grammar, but rather its lexicon and discourse forms measured in terms of their size and variety. To have inter-translatability with the language of the community having power is taken to be a mark of higher development of a language. (Annamalai 2005: 1544)

It is truly remarkable that the problem of inter-translatability was settled within half a century. So far-reaching were the innovations of the Japanese lexicon at the time that the words coined in this process still remain ubiq-uitous in the languages of the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere.

## 21.3   Translating Modernity

Inter-translatability is an important aspect of language modernization because it allows for the expression of the two central aspects of modernity, which, according to Bruno Latour (1993: 133), are 'the creation of stabi-lized objects independent of society, [and] the freedom of a society liber-ated from objects'. These are hallmarks of the Modern age, and a modern

[6] Due to limitations of space, we will not deal here with discussions of script and orthography reform (for a detailed treatment, see Gottlieb 1995).

language must be adapted to become the carrier of such an outlook on the world.

The task of language modernization in Japan was daunting, and many doubted that Japanese could ever be modernized. One of the foremost 'language pessimists' in Japan of the nineteenth century was its first minister of education, Mori Arinori (1847–89), who advocated to his compatriots (in English!) for the complete replacement of Japanese by English in Japan in 1873:

> Without the aid of Chinese our language has never been taught or used for any purpose of communication. This shows its poverty. The march of modern civilization in Japan has already reached the heart of the nation – the English language following it suppresses the use of both Japanese and Chinese. The commercial power of the English speaking race which now rules the world drives our people into some knowledge of their commercial ways and habits. The absolute necessity of mastering the English language is thus forced upon us. It is a requisite of the maintenance of our independence in the community of nations. Under the circumstance, our meagre language, which can never be of any use outside our islands, is doomed to yield to the domination of the English tongue. (Reprinted in Ōkubo 1972: 265–6)

Three things are important in this quotation for the discussions that follow: firstly, the threat of colonization if Japanese was not modernized ('maintenance of independence'); secondly, the dependence of Chinese script and its influences on spoken Japanese ('poverty' of Japanese); and thirdly, the belief in an inherent and insoluble weakness of Japanese ('our meagre language'). In hindsight, we now know that Mori was wrong. It was the semantic abstractness and morphological productivity of the Chinese script that allowed for the modernization of the Japanese lexicon, and this 'Japanese solution' then served as a blueprint for language modernization in China, Korea and Vietnam.[7]

The Japanese lexicon consists of three components: Japanese words (*wago* or *yamato kotoba*), Sino-Japanese words (*kango*) and loanwords (*shakuyōgo*). Note that Sino-Japanese words are such a fundamental part of the Japanese lexicon that they are not considered loanwords – the same holds true for Sino-Korean in Korean and Sino-Vietnamese in Vietnamese. This is due to the fact Sino-Japanese has been part of Japanese for more than 1,000 years, and because it accounts for about half of the entire Japanese lexicon (the amount is more or less the same for Korean, and it is slightly higher for Vietnamese). Ever since the adoption of Chinese script in Japan, the amount of Sino-Japanese has been slowly but steadily increasing. However, we can

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[7] For lack of space, I will not go into detail about the people and institutions involved in the 'trial-and-error' language modernization processes of the four states here. It goes without saying, though, that language did not modernize by itself, but that planners actively created, legitimized and spread the modernized language varieties and styles. Readers interested in this aspect may consult Auroux et al. (2000), Coulmas (2016) or Gottlieb and Chen (2001).

find a noticeable and sudden growth of Sino-Japanese in the Japanese lexicon from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Sino-Japanese words were systematically created then in order to fill lexical gaps. A great number of Japanese enlightenment intellectuals and writers such as Nishi Amane, Fukuzawa Yukichi or Katō Hiroyuki coined thousands of new loan translations (*calques*) when writing in Japanese on the West, on science or simply on modernity. A survey of Japanese dictionaries published at the end of the nineteenth century shows the effect of presenting Western ideas and concepts to a Japanese readership, as this required the coining of a large amount of new vocabulary. The survey revealed the following percentages of Sino-Japanese in the Japanese lexicon (Morioka 1969): 1866: 21.5 per cent; 1873: 31.4 per cent; 1882: 36.4 per cent; and 1888: 55.9 per cent. Thousands of new words were coined with the help of Chinese characters in order to adapt Japanese to modernity and to ensure its inter-translatability. We will encounter many of these words in the discussions that follow. Suffice it to point out here that large parts of the linguistic metalanguage used in East Asia were coined in Japan at this time. Basic linguistic metalanguage is often a loan translations from German, because Japanese students studied historical-comparative linguistics in Germany at that time (Heinrich 2002: 48–59). Linguistic terminology includes, for example, <国語> *kokugo* (from German 'Nationalsprache', *national language*), <標準語> *hyōjungo* (from 'Standardsprache', *standard language*), <共通語> *kyōtsūgo* (from 'Gemeinsprache', *common language*), <博言学> *hakugengaku* (from 'Philologie', *philology*) or <科学> *kagaku* (from 'Fachwissenschaft', *academic discipline*) (see also Yanabu 1991). Many of these words were then borrowed into Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. As an effect of the lexical innovation of this time, around 11 per cent of the Sino-Japanese word-stock is made up of Japan-coined Sino-Japanese today (Schmidt 2009: 565). It is precisely this part of the lexicon that subsequently also came to play a crucial role in the modernization of Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese.

Consider some concrete examples. We can find three basic types of lexical innovations that involved Chinese script in Japan. Firstly, there were completely new words that were coined (Table 21.2); secondly, existing but largely obsolete words were reactivated and given modern meanings (Table 21.3); and thirdly, Sino-Japanese words that had been coined by Western missionaries in China before the mid-nineteenth century were incorporated into the modern lexicon (Table 21.4). The majority of modern Sino-Japanese compounds that subsequently spread across East Asia belong to the first category (Table 21.2), thereby filling the lexical gaps that existed in the fields of 'philosophy, economy, politics, education and military affairs' (Masini 1993: 148).

We can see in these examples that the Chinese characters provide for convenient building blocks to create an infinite number of new words, because each of the characters can be applied in a productive way. For example, <質> *shitsu* ('quality') appears not only in *chishitsu* ('geology'), but also in words

Table 21.2 *Original Sino-Japanese words coined in modern Japan.[8]*

| Chinese character compound | Japanese |
| --- | --- |
| 地質 ('geology') | *chishitsu* (ground + quality) |
| 改良 ('improve') | *kairyō* (change + good) |
| 革命 ('revolution') | *kakumei* (reform + command) |
| 観念 ('idea') | *kannen* (appearance + thought) |
| 建築 ('construction') | *kenchiku* (build + build) |

Table 21.3 *Reappropriation of formerly obsolete old Sino-Japanese words.*

| Chinese character compound | Chinese | Japanese |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 大學 ('university'; pre-modern: educational institution) | *dàxué* | *daigaku* |
| 法律 ('law') | *fǎlù* | *hōritsu* |
| 法庭 ('court', 'tribunal'; pre-modern: man temple hall) | *fating* | *hōtei* |
| 管理 ('manage'; pre-modern: official position/title) | *guǎnlǐ* | *kanri* |
| 規則 ('rule') | *guīzé* | *kisoku* |

Table 21.4 *Sino-Xenic words coined by Western missionaries.*

| Chinese character compound | Chinese | Japanese |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 學校 ('school') | *xuéxiào* | *gakkō* |
| 政府 ('government') | *zhèngfǔ* | *seifu* |
| 選挙 ('election') | *xuǎnjǔ* | *senkyo* |
| 保障 ('protection') | *bǎozhàng* | *hoshō* |
| 刑法 ('penal law') | *xíngfǎ* | *keihō* |

such as <上質> *jōshitsu* (above + quality = 'fine quality') or in <本質> *hon-shitsu* (origin + quality = 'essence'). It is this productive quality that allows for an infinite number of new coinages that are both transparent and look familiar from the onset across the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere.

Although all of these words also continue to be used for references to ancient concepts or institutions, the ancient denotation has become marked. <大學> (big + study) may still refer to the ancient institutions were Chinese classics were studied in East Asian feudal societies, but such use is literally to be put between quotation marks today. <大學> refers to 'university' in contemporary society to anyone in Japan (*daigaku*), China (*dàxué*), Korea (*daehag*) or Vietnam (*đại học*). Note also that the contribution from

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[8] Note in this context that some compounds had been used in China before these modern words were coined in Japan, although with a different meaning. <革命> is a case in point. Before the Japanese coinage, it did not refer to 'revolution', but was used as a truncation of the larger compound <革除天命> (*géchú tiānmìng*), which meant 'change the mandate of heaven' (i.e. 'overthrow a dynasty').

Japan is not only in the reappropriation of the word <大學>, but that it was also the first East Asian country to set up modern universities. Japan was the first country to modernize in East Asia, hence its vanguard role also with regard to language modernization there.

Missionaries were the frontrunners of language contact between the West and Asia, and they were active until up to 300 years before the modernization process in East Asia set in. Missionaries usually became fluent in at least one Asian language, and since they were agents of knowledge transfer, they inevitably had to translate the West into Asian languages. Already at that time, Chinese characters were found to be extremely helpful for this task. In the nineteenth century, Japanese modernizers studied these missionary works, as they were quite aware of these linguistic accomplishments. Drawing on missionaries' lexical innovations thus provided a welcome and ready-to-use contribution to Japan's language modernization. Many of these words then also spread across East Asia – 'school' <學校> is such an example. It is read *gakkō* in Sino-Japanese, *xuéxiào* in Chinese, *haggyo* in Sino-Korean and *học hiệu* in Sino-Vietnamese.[9]

Having gained a sense of how lexical gaps were filled and how well Chinese characters served this task, let us next consider how Japan's language modernization 'spilled over' into the Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese lexicons.

## 21.4    The Spread of Sino-Japanese in East Asia

Korea, China and Vietnam had the same language problems as Japan (i.e. diglossia, absence of linguistic unity, lack of a standard variety and a non-modernized lexicon).[10] Contrary to Japan, they were subjected to colonialism. This provides for a different experience of modernization. Japan was directly involved, and it stalled indigenous modernization efforts in Korea and China by colonizing Taiwan (1895–1945) and Korea (1920–45) and later controlling large parts of East Asia. For Vietnam, Japan served as a model of how to ward off the Western challenge and colonization. Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 was particularly inspiring. The Vietnamese were assured that an Asian nation could defeat a Western power. Lo Bianco (2001: 196) describes how the Japanese victory inspired support for language and educational modernization in Vietnam. We will not delve into these details, but instead will restrict our discussions here to the spread of Sino-Japanese in the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere before 1945.

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[9]  *Học hiệu* is now obsolete in Vietnamese and has been replaced by *trường học*, another Sino-Xenic term <場學>.

[10]  Diglossia was perceived as a problem because the H variety – that is, the written variety of the language before modernization – was deemed to be too difficult to be mastered by everyone. Learning how to read and write before modernization was extremely time-consuming and required many years of concentrated study. This situation contradicted the idea of a modern 'national language' – that is, a language that could be equally shared and mastered by all, both in its spoken and written form.

### 21.4.1 Korea

Korea started using the Chinese writing system in the second century BCE, and Chinese words have been borrowed ever since into Korean. This resulted in various historical strata of Sino-Korean words (Sohn 2006; Eom 2015). Just as in the case of Japan, a threefold distinction can be made. There are native Korean words (*koyu-ŏ*), Sino-Korean words (*hancha-ŏ*) and non-Chinese loanwords (*oerae-ŏ*). The majority of Sino-Korean words have been coined in China, but some of them have also been created in Korea. Well-known examples of the latter type include <便紙> *pyeonji* (comfort + paper = 'letter') or <酒煎子> *jujeonja* (drink + boil + offspring = 'kettle'). None of these compounds are intelligible for speakers of Chinese, Japanese or Vietnamese as 'letter' or 'kettle'. The Sino-Korean words that were coined in Japan are more numerous, are shared across the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere and are intricately linked to modernity.[11]

Korea was known as the 'Hermit Kingdom' until the end of the nineteenth century, when it was forcibly opened up by Japan. At this time, Korean was not modernized, and since most writing was in Sino-Korean, the linguistic situation was diglossic. There were various efforts to modernize Korean after its forced opening, but before these could be completed, Japan annexed Korea, colonized it and imposed Japanese as the 'national language' (King 2007). During the next thirty-five years of colonial rule over Korea, resistance against the Japanese colonizers grew, which led to increasingly repressive policies on Korea, including with regard to language (Heinrich 2014). The intense contact with Japanese and the Korean–Japanese societal bilingualism that developed during the Japanese occupation left a lasting influence on the Korean language. So fundamental is the role of Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words in Korean that Koh (2014: 35) aptly writes: 'As long as we Koreans are unwilling to throw down our pens and live without ever opening our mouths, there is no way to cull from Korean all those made-in-Japan Sino-Korean words'. Efforts have been made to purge such words; for example, 'lunch box' <弁当> *bentō* in Japanese and *pyŏntto* in Korean has been replaced by the newly coined *tosirak* in post-colonial Korea. However, it has proved futile to 'rid' Korean of the many Japan-coined words in its lexicon. This is already evident by the fact that the Korean National Language Purification Movement (*kugŏ sunhwa undong*) contains in its name two compounds coined in Japan: <国語> (*kugŏ*, 'national language') and <運動> (*kugŏ*, 'movement'). In Japanese, these terms are read *kokugo* and *undō*, respectively.

Chinese loanwords in Korean have at times also been replaced by Sino-Japanese words in modern Korea, such as the names for weekdays. For example, 'Monday' is <星期一> (*xīngqíyī*, literally: star + period + one) in

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[11] We will not discuss differences that emerged as a result of the division into South Korea and North Korea in this chapter, as they are of marginal relevance for the topic under discussion here. For a discussion on Korean as a pluricentric language, see King (2007) and Yeon (2006).

Chinese and <月曜日> (*getsuyōbi*) in Japanese. The Korean term for 'Monday' is *wŏryoil*, which is the Sino-Korean reading of <月曜日> (literally: 'moon + week + day'). Note in passing that *getsuyōbi* is a Japanese calque of Dutch *maandag*. In addition, the Sino-Japanese sequencing of Chinese characters is often preferred in Korean to the sequencing of the same word in Chinese. For example, Korean *tanch'uk* ('contraction') is the Sino-Korean reading of Sino-Japanese *tanshuku* <短縮> and not that of Chinese *suōduǎn* <縮短>, which has the characters the other way round. Furthermore, where the meaning of a Chinese character compound differs between Chinese and Japanese, the Japanese denotation is usually found in Korean; for example, <生産> means 'giving birth' in Chinese (*shēngchǎn*), but 'production' in Sino-Japanese (*seisan*) and also in Sino-Korean (*saengsan*).[12]

   Table 21.5 shows a very small selection of the thousands of Sino-Japanese terms that have found their way into Korean. Note that many of these terms denote modern institutions ('police'), concepts ('society') or are highly productive ('-ism'). These words are the product of what was then called 'civilization and enlightenment' (*munmyŏng gaehua* in Korean) <文明開化>. This was the major catchword in Japanese modernization attempts that aimed to create modern institutions in order to strengthen the state (read in Japanese as *bunmei kaika*). We can basically see a one-to-one application of these ideas under Japanese colonial rule, with the Sino-Japanese words simply being pronounced in Sino-Korean.

   There is another type of adaptation of Japanese vocabulary into Korean. These are cases where Sino-Korean words are borrowings of Japanese (not Sino-Japanese) readings of Chinese characters. For example, <組> is read as *kumi* in Japanese, but as *so* in Sino-Japanese, while <合> is read as *au* in Japanese but (most often) as *gō* in Sino-Japanese. In Korean, <組合> is read as *chohap* (i.e. as if it were Sino-Xenic), but in Japanese, a word such *\*sogō* ('association') does not exist. <組合> is always read in Japanese as *kumiai* (Table 21.6).

Table 21.5 *Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words in Modern Korean.*

| Chinese character compound | Japanese | Korean |
|---|---|---|
| 博士 ('PhD') | *hakushi* | *paksa* |
| 文明 ('civilization') | *bunmei* | *munmyŏng* |
| 社会 ('society') | *shakai* | *sahoe* |
| 警察 ('police') | *keisatsu* | *kyŏngch'al* |
| 主義 ('-ism') | *shugi* | *chuǔi* |

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[12] Even some words that have been directly borrowed from Japanese have found their way into the Korean lexicon. However, Chinese script is not involved in these examples. These words are written in *katakana* in Japanese and in *hangul* in Korean. Examples include *albait'ŭ* from Japanese *arubaito* ('part-time worker', from German *arbeiter*), *ppang* from Japanese *pan* ('bread', borrowed from Portuguese *pão*) or *komu* from Japanese *gomu* ('rubber', borrowed from French *gomme*).

Table 21.6 *Japanese words (kundoku) borrowed into Sino-Korean.*

| Chinese character compound | Japanese reading (*kundoku*) | Sino-Korean reading (*ŭmdok*) |
|---|---|---|
| 組合 ('association') | *kumiai* | *chohap* |
| 葉書 ('postcard') | *hagaki* | *yŏpsŏ* |
| 入口 ('entrance') | *iriguchi* | *ipku* |
| 割引 ('discount') | *waribiki* | *harin* |
| 立場 ('position', 'standpoint') | *tachiba* | *ipchang* |

This kind of borrowing highlights the mechanism of incorporating new vocabulary into Korean through Sino-Korean readings of Chinese character compounds coined in Japan, even in cases in which the word in question is not Sino-Japanese. These words are rendered Sino-Xenic by mapping a Sino-Korean reading onto the graphemic representation of a Japanese word. This pattern of lexical borrowing underlines the extent to which Korean relied on Japanese in its lexical modernization. It also underscores the flexibility with which Chinese characters can be applied to various languages and their ability to transgress language boundaries.

Japanese colonizers deliberately strengthened the trend to have the same Sino-Xenic vocabulary used in Japanese and Korean, as this was seen as a strategy for paving the way for a complete replacement of Korean by Japanese. When compiling the first-ever comprehensive and Modern Korean dictionary in 1920, the colonizing authorities were actually planning to delete from the manuscript all of those Sino-Xenic words where Japanese and Korean differed (King 2007: 207). For example, <大丈夫> (big + height + man) means 'all right' in Japanese (*daijōbu*) but 'real man' in Korean (*daejanbu*). Such differences are rare, however, and the relation between Modern Japanese and Modern Korean has been aptly summarized by the Korean writer Koh (2014: 74) as follows: 'What has rendered modern-day Korean and Japanese so similar are the foreign elements in both languages – the Other inside Korean and Japanese. The Others inside us Koreans and inside the Japanese bind us together'. To recapitulate, the similarities between Korean and Japanese are based on their shared Sino-Xenic vocabulary. The case is obviously more complex when it comes to the incorporation of Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words in the homeland of the script itself – that is, in China.

### 21.4.2   China

When language modernization started in the nineteenth century, China was a patchwork of spoken languages with a written language based on classic texts that were almost 2,000 years old. Probably nowhere in East Asia was the problem of language modernization greater than in China. Many of the Chinese 'dialects' – actually languages in their own right – have more speakers than Western national languages, and the schism between the spoken language(s) and writing was enormous. As is the case with other

East Asian nations, China dispatched students to Japan to study modern scholarship. These students inevitably came to look at Japan as a model for modernizing Chinese institutions, education and language. Massini (1993: 104) writes that 'Japan was the second home of the Chinese reformists who had tried unsuccessfully to renew the Chinese political system during the 1898 Hundred Days' Reforms'.[13] A large number of influential Chinese intellectuals and politicians subsequently studied in Japan (e.g. the seminal Chinese philologist Zhang Binglin and the famous journalist Liang Qichao). Within a decade, the number of Chinese students would grow to more than 8,000 individuals, and it is largely through these students, and through their translations of Japanese scholarship into Chinese, that Japan-coined words would spread into China. Ramsey observes in this context that

> the seeming speed and ease with which the Japanese had established their national language had made a deep impression upon these [Chinese] students. Here was an East Asian neighbour with a writing system much like their own that had nevertheless modernized with enough success to rival the greatest of the western powers. When they returned to 'old' and 'backward' China, these students were determined to imitate Japanese success. (Ramsey 1987: 4)

The trend to look at Japan as a model for modernization was significantly reinforced in China after the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894–95. More than half of all translation into Chinese was from Japanese at the time. Japan also became directly involved in controlling and governing parts of China. As a consequence of the Japanese victory over China, Taiwan became a Japanese colony, and the Japanese language spread there as a 'national language'.[14] The effects of Japan serving as model for Chinese modernization are clearly present in the Chinese lexicon, where a large number of Japan-coined words entered the Chinese language during this period (Table 21.7).

Table 21.7 *Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words in Modern Chinese.*

| Chinese character compound | Modern Japanese | Modern Chinese |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 百貨店 ('department store') | *hyakkaten* | *bǎihuòdiàn* |
| 博物館 ('museum') | *hakubutsukan* | *Bówùguǎn* |
| 不動産 ('real estate') | *fudōsan* | *bùdòngchǎn* |
| 出版 ('publishing') | *shuppan* | *Chūbǎn* |
| 代表 ('delegate') | *daihyō* | *dàibiǎo* |
| 電信機 ('telegraph') | *denshinki* | *diànxìnjī* |
| 動物学 ('zoology') | *dōbutsugaku* | *dòngwùxué* |
| 工業 ('industry') | *Kōgyō* | *gōngyè* |
| 教員 ('teacher') | *Kyōin* | *jiàoyuán* |

[13] The Hundred Days' Reform refers to a failed reform movement in 1898. The deeply patriotic movement sought to strengthen China through institutional and ideological reforms. These reforms were crushed after a very short time ('hundred days').

[14] For lack of space, we will not discuss this in detail here. There are a large number of excellent Japanese publications on this topic, which are discussed in Heinrich (2014).

As in the case of Korea previously, we can also note for China that these words denote modern institutions or technologies. Even in cases when 'similar' terms were available in Chinese, the Japan-coined words clearly indexed 'modernity' and were therefore embraced by all of those advocating a Chinese modernity and a reform of its ancient institutions. The prevalence of Japanese modern terminology can also be seen in examples where Japanese adopted exiting Chinese terminology but gave it modern meanings. The most famous of these examples is perhaps <文明> ('civilization'), read *bunmei* in Modern Japanese, which meant 'patterned brightness' in Archaic Chinese (*minwan-miang*). In Modern Chinese, the obsolete term <文明> was reactivated by borrowing it from Japanese. Its modern reading *wénmíng* now also means 'civilization', in the same modernist way as discussed above. We can find a great number of such 'return loans' that were borrowed by Japanese from Archaic Chinese, and which were then reborrowed from Japanese into Chinese (Table 21.8).

Communicating modernity had become inevitable in early twentieth-century China, and while modernity as we know it had emerged in the West, Japan provided the model for other East Asian nations to follow. There were three reasons for this: firstly, far more students went to Japan as compared to Europe or the USA; secondly, Japan had modernized its language while making efficient use of Chinese script; and thirdly, Japan had proven that it could keep up with Western powers – it successfully renegotiated the so-called Unequal Treaties with Western nations, and it had beaten a Western nation in war (Russia in 1904–05).[15] A great number of young and educated Chinese students were therefore 'determined to imitate Japanese success' (Ramsey 1987: 4), and there is no doubt that they achieved this with regard to language.

### 21.4.3 Vietnam

There have been two waves during which Chinese vocabulary found entry into the Vietnamese language. The first wave occurred from the Han Dynasty onwards (202 BCE–220 CE) as an effect of intense language contact, and the second wave was during the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), when Chinese texts were widely studied in Vietnam. There are three components in the Vietnamese lexicon: *từ thuần việt* (Vietnamese words), *từ hán-việt* (Sino-Vietnamese words) and *từ vay mượn* (non-Sino-Xenic loanwords). Just as in Korean and in Japanese, there are also Vietnam-coined Sino-Vietnamese words, but their number is rather low. The Sino-Xenic vocabulary that entered Vietnamese in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also included words that were originally coined in Japan (Alves 2001: 228). Therefore, a number of Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words that spread into Korea and China can also be found in the Modern Vietnamese lexicon (Table 21.9). However,

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[15] The so-called Unequal Treaties were treaties signed between Western and East Asian nations at the end of the nineteenth century. These treaties enforced the opening of ports in East Asia and the imposition of extraterritoriality there. They were perceived a deeply humiliating and subsequently served as one of the prime motivations for modernization across East Asia.

Table 21.8 *Chinese–Japanese–Chinese 'return loans' in Modern Chinese.*

| Chinese character compound | Archaic Chinese | Modern Japanese | Modern Chinese |
|---|---|---|---|
| 文化 | * *miwan-xwa* civil transformation | *bunka* culture | *wénhuà* culture |
| 文明 | * *minwan-miang* patterned brightness | *bunmei* civilization | *wénmíng* civilization |
| 文法 | * *miwan-piwap* civil rules | *bunpō* grammar | *wénfǎ* grammar |
| 學士 | * *gok-dziag* scholar | *gakushi* BA | *xuéshì* BA |
| 博士 | * *pak-dziag* erudite scholar | *hakushi* PhD | *bóshì* PhD |
| 階級 | * *kai-kiap* differences in rank | *kaikyū* social class | *jiējí* social class |
| 経済 | * *kieng-tsiei* rule and succor | *keizai* economy | *jīngjì* economy |
| 構造 | * *kau-dzau* make | *kōzō* structure | *gòuzào* structure |
| 教育 | * *kog-diok* teach and rear | *kyōiku* education | *jiàoyù* education |
| 進步 | * *tsien-buo* go forward | *shinpo* progress | *jìnbù* progress |

Adapted from Mair (1992). * Reconstructed pronunciation.

Table 21.9 *Japan-coined Sino-Xenic vocabulary across the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere.*

| Chinese character compound | Sino-Japanese | Sino-Korean | Chinese | Sino-Vietnamese |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 自由 ('liberty') | *jiyū* | *jayu* | *zìyóu* | *tự do* |
| 社會 ('society') | *shakai* | *sahoe* | *shèhuì* | *xã hội* |
| 機會 ('machine') | *kikai* | *gihoe* | *jīhuì* | *cơ hội* |
| 具體 ('tangible') | *gutai* | *guchejeog* | *jùtǐ* | *bê tông* |
| 方法 ('method') | *hōhō* | *bangbeob* | *fāngfǎ* | *phương thức* |
| 科學 ('science') | *kagaku* | *gwahag* | *kēxué* | *khoa học* |
| 原子 ('atom') | *genshi* | *wonja* | *yuánzǐ* | *nguyên tử* |
| 知識 ('knowledge') | *chishiki* | *jisig* | *zhīshì* | *tri thức* |
| 定義 ('definition') | *teigi* | *jeongui* | *dìngyì* | *định nghĩa* |
| 自然 ('nature') | *shizen* | *jayeon* | *zìrán* | *tự nhiên* |

since France pressed Vietnam to abolish its Sino-centric civilization, French colonial policy also shut the door to Japan-coined Sino-Xenic vocabulary. In addition, Vietnam had dispatched students to Japanese universities – Iwatsuki (2013: 263) puts their number at 200 – but a new Vietnamese elite, trained in France and embracing the Latin alphabet, proved more successful in modernizing Vietnam and Vietnamese. All of this resulted in a relatively low number of Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words in Vietnamese (Table 21.9).

Research by Murakami and Imai (2010) traced 188 Sino-Vietnamese words coined in Japan during its modernization. Some Japan-coined Sino-Xenic words were also incorporated from Chinese into Vietnamese. Examples include <共和国> *cộng hòa* ('republic'), <経済> *kinh tế* ('economy', 'economics') and <美術> *mỹ thuật* ('arts') (Nguyen 1997: 79).

While the influence of Japanese lexical innovations on Vietnamese is relatively weak, even these few lexical items underline the transcultural applicability and flexibility of the Chinese script. The case of Vietnam mainly serves to underline the potential productivity of the Chinese script. Japan's influence on Vietnamese was more ideological than linguistic, in that Japan served as a model of how to resist the Western hegemony. The resulting picture for Vietnamese language modernization is therefore somewhat opaque. The few Sino-Xenic words that have been borrowed from Japan have also often undergone a semantic shift in Vietnamese. For example, the Japan-revived 'return loanword' <博士> (extensive + scholar) means PhD in Japanese (*hakase*), in Chinese (*bóshì*) and in Korean (*paksa*), but 'medical doctor' in Vietnamese (*bác sĩ*). The case of Vietnamese also illustrates the weakening of a shared tradition of writing and lexicon development in East Asia. Vietnam is the only polity in the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere where Chinese script has been completely replaced by an alphabet. Vietnamese successfully fended off the spread of the French language, but they did so by using the Latin alphabet (for detailed discussions, see Marr 1984; Lo Bianco 2001).

## 21.5  Conclusions

Europe, East Asia and South-East Asia have long traditions of writing. The scripts employed in these regions differ considerably, and we have seen in the case of East Asia that script has repercussions on language modernization. For the case of the Chinese Character Cultural Sphere, we saw how Japan succeeded in creating a transcultural and transnational model for a modern lexicon on the basis of Chinese script. The Japanese experience of language modernization provided a template for other East Asian nations to follow. This is why Japan, Korea, China and Vietnam took a similar course in language modernization. We can see in this case how language modernization evolved transculturally and transnationally. It did so due to shared language problems, shared historical experiences and a shared script.

Script does not play a prominent role in sociolinguistic theories on language modernization and standardization, but it very well could. This chapter has shown that script is a transcultural and transnational cultural resource, and as such it is influential in shaping language modernization and standardization pathways across languages and nations. The Chinese Character Cultural Sphere should not simply be seen as 'an odd case' in language modernization. In theory-making, every case has the same potential to contribute to theoretical understanding and methodological

development. Sociolinguistics should thus add to its methodological tool-box the question of the extent to which script systems have contributed to the particular developments we find in language modernization and stand-ardization processes around the world. At least when it comes to East Asia, the influence of script is so essential that it should not be ignored.

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