Routledge Studies in the Early History of Asia

BRUSH CONVERSATION IN THE SINOGRAPHIC COSMOPOLIS

INTERACTIONAL CROSS-BORDER COMMUNICATION USING LITERARY SINITIC IN EARLY MODERN EAST ASIA

Edited by
David C. S. Li, Reijiro Aoyama and Wong Tak-sum

ROUTLEDGE

Grounded in the most recent research on language, writing, and literary culture in premodern sinographic East Asia, David C. S. Li et al.'s exciting new Brush Conversation in the Sinographic Cosmopolis *breaks new ground in this heretofore neglected field of study at the intersection of Literary Sinitic, sinography, diplomatic history, and East Asian cultural and intellectual exchange. The first book-length collection in English on the topic, this volume mobilizes an impressive range of East Asian brush talk scholars and covers numerous pre- and early modern East Asian polities. The results force us to take seriously pre- and early modern East Asian 'synchronous writing-mediated cross-border face-to-face communication' and the multi-faceted written records that this unique cultural practice produced.*

– Ross King, Professor of Korean, Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

Everybody working on East Asia knows what brush talk is, the use of Sinitic (literary Chinese) to conduct a silent conversation, and everybody knows how useful it was (and still can be) for communication between speakers of different languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. But that is the limit of what everybody knows, for brush talk has been extraordinarily neglected by historians, in spite of the fact that plenty of records of these written conversations survive today. This enthralling collection of essays redresses the balance by focusing on the phenomenon of brush talk in all its extraordinary variety. Koreans, Japanese and Ryukyuans shipwrecked on the Chinese coast had no alternative but to resort to brush talk to explain who they were and to find out where they had landed, so long as at least one member of the crew had some command of Sinitic. Vietnamese diplomats, like most diplomats in premodern East Asia, had little or no knowledge of any form of spoken Chinese and were forced to rely on interpreters, but for social interactions as well as for more intellectual exchanges they turned to brush talk. The essays in this pathbreaking book explore the uses of brush talk in different contexts and between speakers of various languages, they consider the value of the written records of brush conversations that survive and they weigh up the implications for attitudes towards spoken languages in premodern East Asia. This is a stimulating and fascinating book, and one that rightly draws attention to a crucially important means of communication between peoples in East Asia.

–**Peter Kornicki,** Professor

Brush Conversation in the Sinographic Cosmopolis *presents a fascinating, in-depth view of an under-studied mode of written communication that was once widely employed across East Asia. Through "brush talk", conversational interactions in written Classical Chinese, people from various parts of the "sinographic" world were able to communicate in real time despite their inability to speak or understand each other's languages. Brush talk conversations ranged from the simple communication of basic information — as in the interrogation of "boat drifters" washed ashore after maritime accidents — to formalized and emotionally rich exchanges of poetry. Brush talk was sometimes preferred to spoken*

conversation even when interpreters were readily available, indicating its power and attraction as an expression of erudition and cultural status.

In this ground-breaking volume, scholars specializing in the languages and cultures of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, China, and the Ryukyus (Okinawa) plumb the historical record to reveal and analyze the fascinating array of written conversations that survive in the historical record. These conversations provide insights into the worlds of diplomacy, travel, espionage, and war, bringing to life a now-vanished cross-national culture with a shared foundation in Classical Chinese language and texts. At the same time, these historical records reveal to us that while a common written language could successfully bridge linguistic divides, they also throw into sharp relief vast cultural differences that were not always so easy to overcome.

The different book chapters, despite their separate authorship, are unified by a sophisticated theoretical framework. Combining scholarly rigor with dramatic storytelling, this book is the only scholarly investigation of brush talk that looks at the phenomenon with such a wide lens. As part of the current interest in the "Sinographic Cosmopolis" prior to the 20th century, this book is sure to be of interest to scholars of East Asian history, culture, language, and texts.

– **Zev Handel**

Brush Conversation in the Sinographic Cosmopolis

For hundreds of years until the 1900s, in today's China, Japan, North and South Korea, and Vietnam, literati of Classical Chinese or Literary Sinitic (*wényán* 文言) could communicate in writing interactively, despite not speaking each other's languages.

This book outlines the historical background of, and the material conditions that led to, widespread literacy development in premodern and early modern East Asia, where reading and writing for formal purposes was conducted in Literary Sinitic. To exemplify how 'silent conversation' or 'brush-assisted conversation' is possible through writing-mediated brushed interaction, synchronously face-to-face, this book presents contextualized examples from recurrent contexts involving (i) boat drifters; (ii) traveling literati; and (iii) diplomatic envoys. Where profound knowledge of classical canons and literary works in Sinitic was a shared attribute of the brush-talkers concerned, their brush-talk would characteristically be intertwined with poetic improvisation.

Being the first monograph in English to address this fascinating lingua-cultural practice and cross-border communication phenomenon, which was possibly *sui generis* in Sinographic East Asia, it will be of interest to students of not only East Asian languages and linguistics, history, international relations, and diplomacy, but also (historical) pragmatics, sociolinguistics, sociology of language, scripts and writing systems, and cultural and linguistic anthropology.

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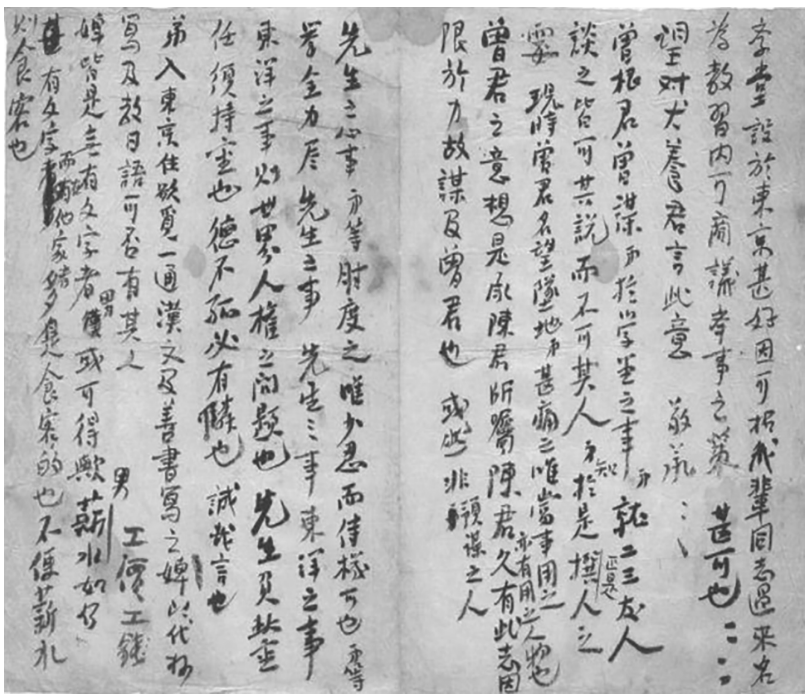

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Foreword to *Brush Conversation in the Sinographic Cosmopolis*: the second miracle

The great Galileo once expressed his awe at the invention of writing in these words:

> *But of all other stupendous inventions, what sublimity of mind must have been his who conceived how to communicate his most secret thoughts to any other person, though very far distant, either in time or place? And with no greater difficulty than the various arrangement of two dozen little signs upon paper? Let this be the seal of all the admirable inventions of man*.

However, without the prior invention of spoken language, there would be no way of arranging '*little signs upon paper*'. Speaking indeed was the first miracle that firmly set us upon the trajectory which made our species unique, though that invention happened too long ago to allow for a clear understanding of how it happened. However, the sounds of speech do not travel far or last long. They vanish the instant after they are spoken. The second miracle was to inscribe spoken language in visible symbols that can last for millennia, and that can be carried over great distances.

The earliest samples of such symbols date back not much beyond six millennia from Western Asia, inscribed variously on tablets, pottery, or animal bones. These symbols became increasingly refined over the centuries, and their use grew from an elite few in the community toward ever greater mass literacy. Although there still remain millions of people today who lack the foundational skills to read and write, the growth of literacy in the world over the past 60 years has been a fundamental transformation of our species.

But in the world's thousands of languages, not all symbols work the same way as Galileo's '*two dozen little signs*'. It is true that the Latin alphabet and its several historically related alphabets, which all trace back to the Phoenicians, have spread over much of the world, especially as a product of European expansions in recent centuries. But there are other ways of writing language down, such as the system invented in ancient China, which is the subject matter of this volume. While alphabetic writing is based exclusively on how a language sounds, the system of symbols invented in China, or sinograms, are mostly based on a hybrid combination of both the sounds and the meanings of the language, where individual

meanings may be represented by various methods. These methods were explained in the first major Chinese dictionary, 'Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters' (說文解字, *Shuowen Jiezi*), which was compiled by Xu Shen 許愼 some two thousand years ago (c. 100 CE).

Sinograms – more commonly known as Chinese characters – are a great deal more numerous than the letters of an alphabet; so they require more time to learn. For more than a century starting in the mid-1840s, when China's self-esteem was almost wiped out by wars with the Western powers and Japan, sinograms were blamed to be a cause of illiteracy. Many well-known writers even advocated abolishing sinograms altogether, and to adopt alphabetic writing. Fortunately, such surreal moments have all passed. Recent studies in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics have greatly increased our understanding of the subtle relations among sound, sense, and script. Many factors enter into the question as to what an optimal script is – how best to write a language down. These include the amount of homophony in the language, how many affixes there are and how frequently they are used, and so on. At any rate, learning several hundred sinograms is not a serious problem for young children – they are remarkable learning machines. Such learning presumably nurtures the growth of their memory as well.

An early report in this area of research was published by Rozin et al. (1971) in the prestigious journal *Science*, with the intriguing title: '*American children with reading problems can easily learn to read English represented by Chinese characters'*. For dyslexic children in Philadelphia to learn to read English written in sinograms must have been an exhilarating experience. Many of the problems in dyslexia arise because of sequential ordering of the letters. A typical dyslexic child has difficulty distinguishing WAS from SAW or DOES from DOSE. Although individual sinograms can get graphically very complex, their recognition does not critically depend on such left/right decisions.

Perhaps more important, for some children it just seems more natural to look for meaningful parts in a holistic sinogram, than to attend to meaningless letters in an alphabetic word. This was the case with my daughter. We lived in California then, and our home language was English. But we tried to give her an early start learning sinograms, by treating English as though it was written in sinograms. So she learned that *Mama* was written with the sinogram 媽, and *Sister* with the sinogram 姐, without any accompanying explanations.

When she was about fifteen months old, we got her a female puppy, named *Xiaobaijin*. The name means *little white gold*, because it was colored like a mixed collie, brown with patches of white; in sinograms, the name was 小白金. The surprise came when she raised the question shortly after the puppy came. Why, she asked, since 小白金 was a girl, wasn't there the 'girl' part in her written name? At fifteen months, she had independently factored out the female radical on the left side of the 媽, and 姐, and was asking why this feature was not in the name of her puppy? The human mind is constantly searching for meanings, especially when it is young.

Turning now to *Brush Conversation in the Sinographic Cosmopolis*, sinograms are of course the underlying theme in this fascinating volume, but it is so much

more! While illustrating profusely the communicative power of a writing system that is based on meaning rather than sound, it also brings to life vivid aspects of the cultural history of East Asia over several centuries. Although sinograms were invented in China, her neighbors adopted them extensively at times, especially Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, even as the sociopolitical backgrounds underwent major changes as the world's powers waxed and waned over a half millennium. At times these neighbors were proud to be joint inheritors of this great Sinographic tradition, gateway to centuries of the best moral and political philosophies as well as time-honored novels and poetry. Now, however, a combination of national pride and European domination has led to the virtual abandonment of sinograms in Korea and Vietnam, though thousands are still being actively used in Japan.

An interesting observation I gleaned from these pages is that in certain contexts, brush conversations were actually preferred over spoken language on certain occasions of international diplomacy, even when official interpreters were present. Perhaps intangible values of the sinograms, their associated heritage of Confucian learning, poetic tradition, and the art of calligraphy, were all in the psychological background to lead to such a preference. More generally, writing seems to bestow an added dimension of sharing.

This calls to mind a passage from *Anna Karenina* that I found particularly romantic and touching. It was when Levin and Kitty finally professed their love for each other by writing in chalk on a tablecloth. Their minds were so closely set that they were able to communicate with just the first letters of the words. The story became all the more moving when I learned later from reading Lev Vygotsky that "*In just this way, Tolstoy told his future wife of his love for her*" (1962: 141, 2012: 252). Instead of merely representing sounds that vanish instantly from the ear, writing has taken on an added dimension of sharing meaning by communicating to the eye.

A few months ago, I was reading *Zhai Zi Zhongguo* 宅茲中國, authored by Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 (2011, cf. Ge 2017). Ge mentioned that China, with her prestigious culture widely spread and highly appreciated in neighboring countries, used to view herself as equivalent to the East. He argued that starting from the mid-seventeenth century, however, the three nations (China, Chosŏn, and Japan) underwent a process from 本是一家 (we are family) to 互不相認 (non-recognition of each other), which reflects the collapse of a common cultural identity in East Asia. These remarks are thought-provoking, given that conflicts arising from territorial dispute or trade war among these nations are getting increasingly common. On what ground can we claim that for centuries, there did exist a relatively homogeneous East Asian culture historically? This is one main theme explored in *Brush Conversation in the Sinographic Cosmopolis*.

As the epigraph of the volume ingeniously makes the point: 'At the tip of the brush is a tongue, what to expect from speech?' (筆端有舌 何待言語). In fact, this phenomenon of brush conversation was early noted by the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci, as WANG Yong mentioned in Chapter 2. There is one crucial requirement for the use and spread of sinograms: the 'phonetic intersubjectivity' as Li and Aoyama characterize it in Chapter 4. In other words, sinograms can function

as a scripta franca because they can be pronounced differently by speakers of various regions. A simple example for illustration: the surname 林 is read *Lin* in Mandarin, *Im* in Korean and *Lâm* in Vietnamese, but *Hayashi* in Japanese, not to mention multiple other readings in the diverse Chinese dialects.

One may get the impression that brush conversations, being something done spontaneously, must be short in duration and simple in content. Chapter 7 by Nguyễn and Nguyễn tells us that brush-talks involving conversational routines or poetic improvisation are indeed shorter in length, but those concerning academic exchange of viewpoints tend to be longer and more elaborate. In fact, such a mode of communication can last for hours, as Liu quoted from *Miyajima Documents* 宮島文書 in Chapter 9: 'the literary talents well-versed in Sinitic . . . drank jubilantly and wielded their writing brush generously, meeting up at noon and breaking up late at night'.

Although there have been numerous written brush conversations published so far, the editors cautioned in their introductory Chapter 1 that we must not be deceived to think the original notes are as tidy and orderly as what they appear to be. As a matter of fact, many of the notes are polished and edited before publication, with unavoidable addition or deletion. Jang addressed the competing attitudes between Chosŏn envoys or *t'ongsinsa* 通信使 and Tokugawa literati in Chapter 11. The Japanese Confucianist Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 challenged Chosŏn's status as the guardian of Chinese civilization, but he did not express his derogative thoughts in the face of the Chosŏn Chief-Envoy. There are two published versions of his brush-talk records with the Chosŏn diplomats, one edited by the Chosŏn Vice-Envoy and the other compiled by Hakuseki himself. As Jang noted,

> Hakuseki's deprecating remarks are found . . . not in the Korean version, suggesting that such remarks were subsequently inserted while the Japanese edition was edited. . . . It was through those post-*t'ongsinsa* exchange remarks that we learned about the critical stance of Japanese intellectuals for the first time in 1711.

Chapter 10 by Koo and Joo also deals with the Japanese-Korean brushed exchange. They mentioned that even if many Tsushima islanders spoke fluent Korean and often acted as interpreters for the Korean envoys, 'brush-talk was preferred probably because it was an opportunity for both sides to showcase their erudition as well as membership within the Sinosphere'. This idea is echoed in WANG Baoping's Chapter 8, and Clements' Chapter 13. In Wang's investigation of the *Ōkōchi Documents* 大河內文書, he explained that 'for Ōkōchi, engaging a go-between for speech-based interpretation was no match for the direct heart-to-heart communication mediated by a talking brush'. Clements, in her final chapter that concludes this volume, also maintains that 'as well as being a necessary expedient, brush-talk could also be a deliberate choice'.

This monograph is full of captivating anecdotes. Thumbing through the pages, one not only learns about the historical and diplomatic relationships between

several nations but also gains linguistic insights. For example, two foreign languages, Chinese and Dutch, played a significant role in the nineteenth-century USA-Japan negotiations. In Chapter 12, Aoyama calls our attention to an essential figure in Japan's diplomatic event with the Americans. A Cantonese businessman by the name Luo Sen 羅森 was recruited to act as the assistant translator to the chief interpreter Samuel Wells Williams in the Black Ships expedition led by the American naval commander Matthew C. Perry, who ended Japan's seclusion policy for more than 200 years. As Aoyama commented,

> Luo Sen's ability to compose erudite phrases . . . helped more than just to overcome a language barrier; . . . his agility and literary flair in Sinitic brush-talk provided the wherewithal to earn goodwill from the Japanese side, and helped to allay latent suspicion of the samurai officials and extenuate some of the tension that inevitably afflicted the initial negotiations.

In addition to such accounts, which give us glimpses of debates on cultural superiority and political confrontations between bureaucrats and scholars of different origins, brush-talk records are usually characterized by a mixture of written and spoken elements, which is of particular interest. For instance, Matsuura and Aoyama in Chapter 3 gave examples of both Classical Chinese and vernacular or topolect expressions from brush conversation between Korean maritime officials on Cheju Island and Chinese seafarers. The former includes sentence-final particles like 耳 and 矣, or the question marker 耶, and the latter includes first-person plural pronouns 俺等 and interrogative pronouns 多少. A similar mix of Classical Chinese and vernacular elements is also attested in Wong's study of Sinitic brush-talk between Ryukyuan, Japanese and Korean literati in Chapter 6.

I was also fascinated by a reconstructed fifteenth-century brush-talk record by Ch'oe Pu 崔溥 from Chapter 5 by Hur Kyoung-Jin. Ch'oe served as an official at Cheju and was supposed to return home on the Korean Peninsula from the island for a period of mourning after hearing of his father's death. The ship was blown off course and ended up on the Zhejiang shores, where he began a five-month travel in China along the Peking-Hangzhou Grand Canal before finally reaching home. In his travelogue, Ch'oe mentioned how he was warmly received by some Liaodong merchants. Because of geographical proximity, these merchants came to visit him with some gifts, and remarked that they were like a single family, since Liaodong was adjacent to Chosŏn. Upon hearing these friendly words, Ch'oe responded that Liaodong used to be the capital of Old Koguryŏ, and Koguryŏ now belonged to the land of Chosŏn, so they were indeed one and the same country. I was especially interested in this account, because there was once an immensely popular Korean TV series, which depicts the story of *Chumong* 朱蒙, the founder of the Koguryŏ Kingdom. This drama series caused some controversy in China, since the whole screenplay is written from a Korean perspective, where *Chumong*'s father was hailed as a hero fighting against the tyrannic rule of the Han dynasty. From the Chinese viewpoint, however, *Chumong* was a member of a Chinese ethnic minority and Koguryŏ was never an independent state, but

simply a local regime of China. With such diverse conceptions between the two nations, I cannot help but wonder how mutual respect and tolerance would contribute to a more fruitful and reciprocal cross-border relationship, just like Ch'oe's pleasant encounter with those amicable businessmen from Liaodong.

This volume is a valuable contribution to linguistics to be sure; in contrast to the abundant studies on spoken language, there is a dearth of attention paid to written language as a medium of communication *per se*. As the world gets increasingly wired up for communicating via the screen, WeChat, WhatsApp, Line, etc., as well as its numerous emojis, we are grateful that this volume offers us a look back at past centuries, at how sinograms served communication in East Asia within a rich tapestry of cultural history of an important region of the world.

As I was writing this foreword for this volume, one of its editors, Professor David C. S. Li, told me that a follow-up project of the same topic is in the works. It will be a penta-lingual manga project (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese, in addition to English), featuring at least two (possibly three) stories, one each involving the three recurrent contexts in which 漢文筆談 was commonplace historically in East Asia, involving boat drifters, diplomats, and traveling literati. I am elated that the editors have initiated a new paradigm of linguistic research, one that takes into consideration not only historically preserved texts but also promotes a multidisciplinary approach.

In the evolution of our species, cooperation, rather than competition, has been a critical feature for our success, as discussed by Edward O. Wilson in *The Social Conquest of Earth* (2012). As the eighteenth-century Vietnamese scholar-official Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 (Chapter 7) remarked: '*to get to know each other through writing, then we are all brothers within the four seas*' (以文字相知，卽四海皆兄弟也). Let us hope that academically and geopolitically, kindness and collaboration will soon return to displace rivalry and conflict, and lead us back to a more united East Asia, building upon the time-honored cultural values of harmony carried across millennia by the shared sinograms.

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Preface

For well over a millennium until the early twentieth century, Sinitic brush-talk 漢文筆談 was a salient lingua-cultural communication pattern in Sinographic East Asia 漢字文化圈, which is also known as the Sinographic cosmopolis (Koh & King 2014). Being writing-mediated, 'silent conversation' using brush, ink, and paper could take place in cross-border communication contexts between literati of Classical Chinese or Literary Sinitic (文言 *wényán*, hereafter Sinitic) with no shared spoken language.[1] Instead of vocalized speech, there is ample documented evidence of brush-talkers relying on the semiotic potential and sociopragmatic affordance of Sinitic, which was written orthographically with morphographic, non-phonographic characters or sinograms 漢字, and lexico-grammatically with sparse and simplex morphologies. Its Han Chinese heritage being rooted in the Middle Kingdom, Sinitic was functionally designed not for speaking but for formal writing purposes.

For historical reasons, since the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) large quantities of Sinitic texts produced in dynastic China were successively imported via different means into neighboring polities that correspond geographically with today's North Korea, South Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Acquired and used by the politically influential elites and socioeconomically affluent aristocrats, literacy in Sinitic was also a hallmark of social standing as well as the extent of being educated. Before the emergence of indigenous phonographic scripts for writing their respective national languages (i.e., Korean *hangŭl* 한글; Vietnamese the *chữ Quốc ngữ* script; and Japanese *hiragana* ひらがなand *katakana* カタカナ, which are mixed with non-phonographic kanji), Sinitic had been adapted locally for writing purposes (Handel 2019; Kornicki 2018; cf. Clements 2015). This is by and large the historical background, how literati of Sinitic from different parts of Sinographic East Asia were able to get around the modality of speech-based communication

1 In this book, the terms 'sinogram' and 'Sinitic' will be used when reference is made to the historical, transnational and transcultural use of Chinese characters and Literary Chinese, respectively, which are distinct from the contemporary use of Chinese characters in China and kanji in Japan. For terminological differences between Literary Sinitic and Classical Chinese, see Kornicki (2018: 19) and Handel (2019).

and make meaning through writing synchronously, interactively and face-to-face (i.e., Sinitic brush-talk 漢文筆談; for historical background, recurrent cross-border contexts, and the variety of data in the brush-talk literature, see Chapters 1 and 2). The epigraph captures a slice of life involving a brush encounter of two literati of Sinitic – one from China, the other from Japan in 1862 Shanghai. More details may be found in Chapter 4 (Li & Aoyama, this volume).

The papers in this volume were conceived shortly after the *Two-day International Symposium on Cultural and Linguistic Interactions across Sinographic East Asia* 東亞漢字文化圈中的語言文化交流國際研討會 at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in June 2019 (http://wongtaksum.no-ip.info:81/brush-talksymposium.htm). About two dozen experts from China, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam came together to share their research insights. The participants were plurilingual to different extents. They each gave a presentation in their preferred language – Japanese, Korean, or Mandarin Chinese – which were translated into the other two East Asian languages through simultaneous interpretation. Interestingly, 'pen-talk' in Sinitic – the twenty-first-century equivalent of sinogram-based brush-talk – was found useful to overcome the language barrier occasionally. Contributions for this volume were then solicited from the participants; for various reasons, not all invitations to contribute were accepted. Except for Chapter 2 (WANG Yong), which is adapted from his (Wang 2018) book in Chinese, the rest of the twelve papers in this volume represent original work that has not been published before. English being the target language, most of the original drafts were first written in the authors' preferred language before being edited and/or rewritten in English by the editors.

Each of the papers has gone through successive drafts interactively with the authors not only for 'fact check', but also to address miscellaneous questions related to coherence, consistency, filling information gaps, keeping to stylistic preferences, and so forth. Li assumes primary responsibility for rendering the following chapters from Chinese into English: Chapter 2 (WANG Yong), Chapter 8 (WANG Baoping), and Chapter 9 (LIU Yuzhen). Despite rigorous cross-checking with the authors in the drafting process, responsibility for any inadequacies that remain in these three chapters rests with the editors.

Whereas the editors of this book were organizers of the aforementioned International Symposium, none of us was professionally trained in East Asian studies. Our expertise by training is, respectively, linguistics and sociolinguistics (Li), cultural anthropology (Aoyama), and historical and corpus linguistics (Wong). The inspiration to conduct research in Sinitic brush-talk that culminated in the compilation of this volume was derived somewhat accidentally in summer 2017, when Li was reading into late-nineteenth-century Vietnamese anti-colonial history (*Vietnamese anticolonialism 1885–1925*, Marr 1971; *Colonialism and language policy in Viet Nam*, DeFrancis 1977; see Li et al. 2020 for details). There, brush conversations between politicians from Japan, monarchists and revolutionaries from Qing China and Vietnam were outlined in some detail. That their primarily writing-mediated brush conversations on topics of considerable complexity was described as seamless was linguistically and pragmatically intriguing. After being

briefed about this fascinating lingua-cultural phenomenon, Aoyama and Wong accepted Li's invitation to probe more deeply into such a unique, apparently script-specific modality of communication. This was followed by regular meetings to update and learn from what we found, leading to ideas for journal papers and a research project. Looking back, we are pleased to see our collective efforts bear fruit as our submissions to international journals and conferences, a proposal for a competitive research grant (General Research Fund, Hong Kong Research Grants Council), including the proposal for the present book, were mostly successful. What is presented within the covers of this volume represents the fruit of our joint intellectual endeavor in the last four years, which would not have been possible without the fine contributions and patience of all the contributors. Their input, critique, trust, and cooperation are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

Like other works on East Asian studies, we had to decide upon a number of typographic conventions. Regardless of the number of syllables, personal names in East Asia generally begin with a family name followed by a given name. Such an order is the opposite of the general practice in English and other European languages, where the first name precedes the last (family) name. In this book, we will follow the *East Asian order*: family name – given name.[2] Where ambiguity may arise, the family name will be romanized in upper case. This order is maintained for not just the historical figures and protagonists of Sinitic brush-talk, but also for the East Asian researchers cited, except when a Western-style author name is preferred (e.g., WONG Tak-sum, Reijiro AOYAMA). Wherever possible, the original sinogram-based names appearing in the data sources will be provided when first mentioned. The same applies to dynasties and rulers, and the duration of their reign will also be indicated. Likewise for names of places that are likely to be obscure to the reader, which will appear in both romanization and sinograms, if available. Where specific dates are mentioned, most of the chapters follow the Gregorian calendar. There are several exceptions, however. Where the dates are recorded according to the lunar calendar, for convenience's sake, the lunar months and days will be presented in digits, with the month preceding the day separated by a colon. Thus, '10:05' would mean 'the 5th day of the 10th lunar month'.

Regarding the in-text citation of literary works or publications written in Sinitic, a free translation of their titles into English will be introduced, followed by the original titles in sinograms. In terms of typeface, the English translation of such titles will be put within single quotes when first mentioned. In the subsequent citation of the same works or publications in the chapter, the titles in English translation will appear in *italics* but the original titles in sinograms will be spared.[3]

2 Except when preference for the opposite 'given name – family name' order was conveyed to us explicitly.

3 For instance, the idiomatic translation of the book 'A complete record of an embassy to the North' will appear before the original title in Sinitic 北使通錄. Subsequently, the book will be referred to in italics as *A complete record of an embassy to the North*.

As for romanization of lexical items in East Asian languages, although historically most sinograms were pronounceable across East Asian languages, their regional pronunciation was usually unintelligible to people who were unfamiliar with the speaker's native language. Such an intelligibility problem in cross-border communication is partly reflected in the romanization of the same characters (e.g., consider the bisyllabic word meaning 'Chinese character' or 'sinogram', 𡨸漢: Mand: *hànzì*; Jap: *kanji*; Kor: *hanja*; Viet: *chữ Hán* 𡨸漢). In this book, pinyin will be used for romanizing the names of Chinese people and places, historical terms, book titles, and so forth. Those in Japanese and Korean will follow the romanization convention of Modified Hepburn and McCune-Reischauer, respectively. Vietnamese historical figures and places will be romanized using the Roman script *chữ Quốc ngữ*, which was widely used in Vietnamese society since the early twentieth century. As for Chinese topolects mentioned occasionally, sinograms pronounced in Cantonese 粵語 will be romanized using Jyutping 粵拼 devised by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong,[4] while those in Southern Min (Minnanhua 閩南話) will follow the romanization system proposed by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan.[5]

As is different from earlier scholarly works in East Asian studies, rather than displaying sinograms in the end matters (e.g., presented as a glossary in an appendix), wherever possible Chinese characters or sinograms will be displayed *in situ* for quick reference. For the sake of convenience, sinograms meant to be read in Chinese will be printed in traditional (as opposed to simplified) Chinese characters, while those in Japanese *kanji*, Korean *hanja* and Vietnamese *chữ Nôm* (𡨸喃, literally 'southern characters') will follow the actual written forms as shown in the historical data sources or reference works as closely as possible.

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- Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics 韓國古典飜譯院: 'Yugu sasin chŭngdamnok' (琉球使臣贈荅錄, 1633), *Comprehensive Database of Korean Classics* 韓國古典綜合 DB.

4 LSHK, see www.lshk.org/jyutping. Instead of using a single digit 1–6 to represent the tone marks of six distinctive tones in Cantonese, we will use two digits in superscript to indicate the tone contours: 'high level tone' (55), 'mid level tone' (33), 'low level tone' (22), 'high rising tone' (35), 'low rising tone' (23), and 'low falling tone' (21). For instance, 漢文筆談 ('Sinitic brush-talk') will be romanized as hon^{33} man^{21} bat^{55} taam^{21}.

5 See 臺灣閩南語羅馬字拼音方案 [簡稱臺羅], https://twblg.dict.edu.tw/holodict_new/compile1_3_9_3.jsp.

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Who will benefit from reading this collection of papers? This book was conceived to introduce the semiotic affordance and interactional dynamics of writing-mediated cross-border communication between literati of Sinitic in premodern and early modern Sinographic East Asia, interactively and face-to-face. It is the first monograph written in English to address this salient lingua-cultural practice and phenomenon. As such, the book will be of interest to students of East Asian languages and linguistics, especially (historical) pragmatics, sociolinguistics, sociology of language, scripts and writing systems, cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, recorded history, and of course East Asian history, international relations and diplomacy.

In the process of editing the papers for this volume, we have received generous assistance from many colleagues. First and foremost, we are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of our book proposal and the most helpful suggestions they provided, which we believe have been acted upon. A number of contributors have provided kind assistance by serving as reviewers of multiple draft chapters. In particular, special thanks are due to Jang Jin-youp 張眞熀 (author of Chapter 10) and NGUYỄN Tuấn Cường 阮俊强 (first author of Chapter 7) for their critical comments and constructive suggestions for improvement. We are also indebted to a few colleagues who similarly have provided insightful feedback to our questions and selected earlier drafts, including Han Xiaorong 韓孝榮, Hartmut Haberland, Jens Høyrup, and Oh Sunyoung 吳宣榮. We would like to thank their timely feedback and insightful response to our questions. Special thanks are due to Hartmut Haberland and John Whelpton, who helped us translate excerpts of Latin into English in Chapter 1. Our heartfelt gratitude is also extended to Fuma Susumu 夫馬進 of Kyoto University, who took the trouble to meet with Li and Aoyama at his residence, and to LIN Shaoyang 林少陽 and Iwatsuki Jun’ichi 岩月純一 in their Tokyo University office at the formative stage of our Sinitic brush-talk project. As we were new to ‘brush conversation’ in premodern and early modern East Asia, several colleagues’ sharing of insights at the aforementioned two-day symposium in 2019 has greatly enriched our understanding of Sinitic brush-talk as a writing-mediated transcultural communication phenomenon in cross-border contexts. They include NGUYỄN Hữu Tâm 阮友心, ZHANG Bowei 張伯偉, CHAN Shui-Duen 陳瑞端, Machi Senjūrō 町泉寿郎, and XU Yuji 徐雨霽. To our student helpers, HO Ka Lun Harry and LAU Sze-ming, we thank them for their efficient and unfailing completion of tasks. To Ms. WONG Chi Man 黃芷汶, we are indebted to her calligraphy that she improvised so elegantly with an artistic

brush for our epigraph. Also, throughout the 18-month editing and writing process, we are immensely grateful to Mr. Simon Bates, editor of Routledge, whose encouragement and trust meant a great deal to us – indeed instrumental for keeping us focused and on track to meet the deadline, which had to be postponed three times due to extraneous circumstances beyond our control. Simon's kind understanding, patience, and trust are much appreciated. Finally, the work described in this collection of papers was partially supported by a General Research Fund (GRF) award from the Research Grants Council (RGC) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (15603420, 2021–2022). The RGC support is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

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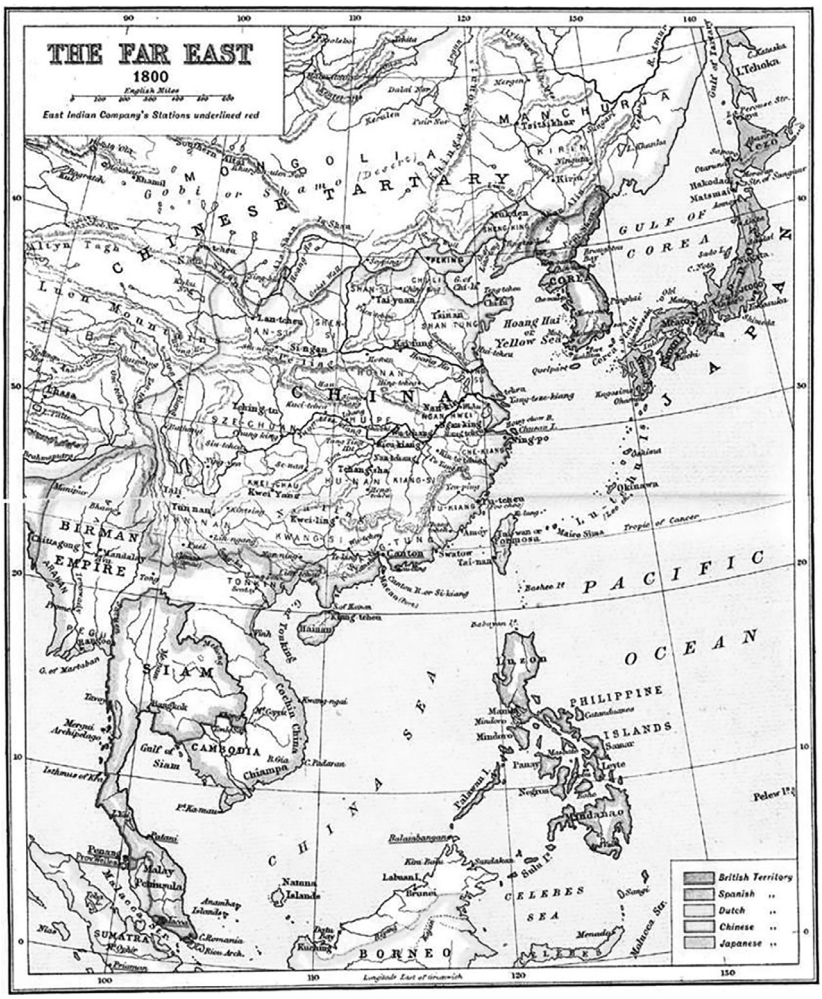
Epigraph

惜乎言語兩不會意
筆端有舌何待言語

'Regrettably, our respective spoken languages would not be able to get across our meanings.'
'At the tip of the brush is a tongue, what to expect from speech?'

1862, Shanghai

Map



Map 1 A map of East Asia dated 1800.

1 Writing-mediated cross-border communication face-to-face

From Sinitic brush-talk (漢文筆談) to pen-assisted conversation

David C. S. Li, Reijiro Aoyama and Wong Tak-sum

Synchronous writing-mediated communication before the advent of the Internet

The last decade of the twentieth century ushered in the age of the Internet. Advances in computing technologies along with the popularization of personal computers (PCs) since then have revolutionized the way people communicate and the speed with which information is sent and received. Today, subject to the only constraint of the quality of Internet connection, especially high-speed Wi-Fi, real-time synchronous communication over a long distance can take place instantly using e-gadgets such as a mobile phone, laptop, or a tablet like an iPad. By eliminating the space barrier to synchronous telecommunication, be it in audio-visual mode, voice-only telephone mode, or entirely writing-mediated, e-applications (apps) like Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, and WeChat have made the world literally smaller. To digital natives, especially millennials and members of Generation Z born and growing up with such a barrier-free telecommunication landscape, it is hard to imagine a world in which physical distance would impose such a big constraint for people wishing to stay connected, not to mention that old, asynchronous communication technologies like telegram or telegraph – a speedier alternative to regular postal service – was not widely available and only accessible at a considerable cost. Today, given the convenience and popularity of emails, messaging systems, and sundry social media e-platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter that are accessible at one's fingertips, sending stamped postcards or personal letters to loved ones is probably still practiced by people in their 50s or above, if not already a thing of the past.

For talking humans, writing is in general secondary to speaking and would normally be adopted when speech is not an option, for example, due to separation by a physical distance. In face-to-face encounters, on the other hand, writing as a mode of synchronous social interaction would normally not be considered by talking humans as an alternative to speech, even though anecdotes of impatient parents sending a WhatsApp or email reminder like 'dinner's ready!' (French: 'à table!') to family members hooked to their respective e-devices at home are not

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uncommon. Still, relative to uttering those same words in speech – pitch level likely varying with the degree of impatience – the writing mode would be perceived as unusual or marked, for the general unmarked perception among talking humans is: if we can talk face-to-face, why write?

Speaking, however, is premised on the speakers having at least one shared spoken language. What happens when none is available, as in cross-border communication contexts? And, when speech is not an option in face-to-face interaction, would writing be able to function as a substitute modality of communication by helping the writers 'speak' their mind, interactively in real time? To our knowledge, this does not seem to be so common in Anglo-American and European cultures.[1] The same is not true of speakers whose linguistic repertoire includes literacy knowledge of Chinese characters or 'sinograms' (Wang & Tsai 2011). For instance, speakers of Chinese and Japanese may use written Chinese or kanji to facilitate meaning-making, synchronously and face-to-face. To date, there has been a dearth of empirical research on this communication pattern (Hwang 2009 being a rare exception, see later in this section), but there is ample anecdotal evidence showing how East Asians with no or limited knowledge of each other's spoken language could resort to writing for effective communication. Following are a few instructive examples of East Asians composing sinograms to make meaning interactively and effectively in face-to-face encounters, sometimes making it serve as an auxiliary communication tool.

The first example, adapted from a Korean blog (Kim 2008), involves two separate situations in which a Korean equipped with a certain level of literacy in Sinitic wrote sinograms (i) to buy medicine while traveling in China; and (ii) to alert some Vietnamese villagers to run for their lives in the face of an imminent US air raid during the Vietnam War (1955–1975):

> During a trip to China, I visited a pharmacy after consuming unfamiliar food. I handed a note to the pharmacist written with 腹痛 ('abdominal pain') and 消化不良 ('indigestion'), and the Chinese pharmacist understood and prescribed the medicine. There is also a true story from the Vietnam War [attributed to Song Yŏng-ho, also known by the blog name 燒燻 So-hun]. Accordingly, a Korean platoon leader wrote a few Chinese characters to a Vietnamese village headman alerting him to an imminent US air raid, which helped save the lives of many innocent villagers at a critical moment.
>
> (Kim 2008, original in Korean, our translation)[2]

1 Consider a typical if not universal example of a kidnappee scribbling a word like 'Help!' or its equivalent in other languages on a piece of paper, hoping that someone would pick it up and inform the police for assistance, but that is unilateral, delayed, and asynchronous communication (compare the 'bank hold-up' example in the following).

2 Original blog in Korean: "중국 여행중, 익숙지 않은 음식 때문에 약국에 들른 적이 있다. '복통 (**腹痛**) 소화불량 (**消化不良**)' 이라고 적은 쪽지를 약사에게 건넸더니 중국인 약사가 약을 처방해 주었다. 베트남전 때의 실화도 있다. 미군기의 공습이 예정된 지역의 베트남인 촌장과 한국인 소대장은 긴급한 순간에 한자로 필담을 나눴고, 그 덕분에 무고한 베트남인들

In both cross-border communication contexts the interactants had no shared spoken language, but Sinitic-based writing turned out to be very effective in getting the speaker's meaning across. While it is unclear what Chinese characters or sinograms the Korean platoon leader wrote in that life-and-death situation that alerted the innocent Vietnamese villagers to flee, the blogger Song indicates that he wrote down '腹痛' ('stomach ache') and '消化不良' ('indigestion') when buying medicine from a Chinese pharmacist, which successfully helped him procure the medicine he needed.

The next example, also an anecdote, is adapted from a battlefield report written by an acclaimed Japanese novelist Kunikida Doppo 國木田獨歩 (1871–1908),[3] reminiscing an event that he had witnessed while working as a war correspondent during the early stage of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). According to his recollection (1966: 31–33), after assaulting a village on the northeastern part of Liaodong Peninsula in the early morning of October 24, 1894, the Japanese lieutenant Asano 淺野, leader of some fifty troops, conducted a Sinitic-based 'brush conversation' (筆談, *hitsudan*) with the oldest civilian that he singled out from the frightened and curious villagers for investigation. Writing was attempted because they did not have a shared spoken language. Following is a verbatim reconstructed version of what the two men had purportedly written, interlaced with Kunikida's own sarcastic comments (English translation on the right adapted from Morris 1989):

Writing-mediated conversation reconstructed and interlaced with comments by Kunikida	*Free translation adapted from Morris (1989: 275)*
少尉先づ問ふて曰く . . .『官人は何れにあるか』	'Where are your officials?' asked Lt. Asano first of all.
『無し』然るに渠問ふて曰く『何國の人なるや』	'There are none.' The man then asked in turn, 'what country are you from?'
少尉反問して曰く『爾、之れを知らざるか』	Lt. Asano asked, 'You don't know?'
『知らず』(見よ、彼れ日清戦争を知らざるに似たり)	'No, we don't.' (Look at that – as though not knowing about the Sino-Japanese War!)
少尉乃ち答えて曰く『吾はこれ大日本帝國の人なり』(意氣堂々!)	'We are men from the Great Empire of Japan.' (And with that magnificent spirit!)
彼れ問ふて曰く『此地に来る、何事を爲すぞ』	Then the man asked, 'What have you come here to do?'

(*Continued*)

의 생명을 구했다는 이야기다." (金榮旭, 2008, retrieved October 6, 2020, http://m.blog.daum.net/thddudgh7/16510273).

3 Based on one of Kunikida's field reports for 国民新聞 'Citizen times' or *Kokumin Shimbun*. As a war correspondent, he wrote those reports in a frank and intimate manner as if he had written to his own sick younger brother. They were compiled under 'Correspondence with my beloved brother' (愛弟通信 *Aitei tsūshin*), which were published posthumously (see Kunikida 1966).

Writing-mediated conversation reconstructed and interlaced with comments by Kunikida	*Free translation adapted from Morris (1989: 275)*
是に於てか、少尉筆を執て、大いに氣焔を吐く、曰く『淸國われと兵端を開らく、吾れ今来りて之れを討たんとす。然れども安ぜよ。吾れ猥りに無辜の民を害する者に非ず』	At which point the lieutenant grabbed the brush and, spitting forth his anger, said, ‘The Qing nation had opened hostilities with us; we have come to punish it. Yet, be at ease – we would not bring harm to innocent people.’
. . .	. . .
『此処に来る、誰れと戦んと欲するか』(愚!)	‘Now that you are here, who do you intend to fight?’ (Stupid!)
『此地に於ては戦争せず』	‘We shall not do battle here.’
『然らば此に到る何事をかなす』	‘If that is so, what, now that you are here, will you do?’
少尉少しく窮す、誤魔化して曰く『吾兵を休養せんが爲めなり』	The lieutenant, somewhat perplexed, prevaricated: ‘We shall give our troops a rest.’

Given that the elderly civilian had no knowledge of Japanese literacy, his input in the original silent conversation was most certainly written in Chinese consisting of sinograms only. On the other hand, it is unclear whether the Japanese lieutenant had interspersed his kanji input with kana; in any case, no literacy problem on the part of the Chinese conversation partner was reported. Kunikida’s (1966: 31–33) version adapted verbatim earlier is thus a Japanese reconstruction re-written using *kanbun kundoku* 漢文訓讀, or Japanese reading of a passage in Sinitic. Still, we can get a taste of what that original Sinitic-based writing-mediated conversation might have looked like by cleansing the narrative and comments, as follows:

Writing-mediated conversation in Sinitic, reconstructed in modern Japanese (Kunikida 1966: 31–33; translation in English based on Morris 1989: 275)			
少尉:	官人は何れにあるか	Lieutenant:	‘Where are your officials?’
長者:	無し 何國の人なるや	Old man:	‘There are none.’ ‘What country are you from?’
少尉:	爾、之れを知らざるか	Lieutenant:	‘You don’t know?’
長者:	知らず	Old man:	‘No, we don’t.’
少尉:	吾はこれ大日本帝國の人なり	Lieutenant:	‘We are men from the Great Empire of Japan.’
長者:	此地に来る、何事を爲すぞ	Old man:	‘What have you come here to do?’
少尉:	淸國われと兵端を開らく、吾れ今来りて之れを討たんとす。然れども安ぜよ。吾れ猥りに無辜の民を害する者に非ず	Lieutenant:	‘The Qing nation had opened hostilities with us; we have come to punish it. Yet, be at ease – we would not bring harm to innocent people.’
	. . .		. . .

長者:	此処に来る、誰れと戦んと欲するか	Old man:	'Now that you are here, who do you intend to fight?'
少尉:	此地に於ては戦争せず	Lieutenant:	'We shall not do battle here.'
長者:	然らば此に到る何事をかなす	Old man:	'If that is so, what, now that you are here, will you do?'
少尉:	吾兵を休養せんが爲めなり	Lieutenant:	'We shall give our troops a rest.'

While it is impossible to reconstruct the original writing-based exchange entirely in Sinitic, it seems safe to assume that most of the sinograms in the Japanese text were derived from the original writing-mediated conversation. Notice that apart from the fact that it is writing-mediated, the question-and-answer turn-taking or mode of interaction is not so different from that in speech-based dyadic conversation.

The third example is derived from Hwang (2009), an empirical study of partly writing-assisted conversation which the researcher refers to as 'brush-talk' 筆談, in keeping with that age-old traditional lingua-cultural practice in Sinographic East Asia 漢字文化圈. It was the topic of a doctoral dissertation[4] that adopted the standard methodologies and analytical framework in conversation analysis (CA) research. Hwang (2009) is to our knowledge the only empirical study of Sinitic brush-talk (or 'pen-talk') to date, which was characterized as communicating via writing morphographic, non-phonographic characters, 'a unique and effective repair mechanism to facilitate interactions between Chinese and Japanese users' (p. 48). Based on 28 hours of audio and video recordings of writing-assisted conversational interaction in small groups between Mandarin-L1 speakers (n=25) and Japanese-L1, Chinese-L2 speakers (n=36) collected at different universities in the USA, mainland China, and Taiwan, Hwang (2009) demonstrates how Chinese and Japanese speakers who are trilingual to different extents in Chinese, Japanese, and English would spontaneously resort to writing sinograms for clarification or disambiguation purposes.[5] This happened frequently and spontaneously when speech – in Mandarin, Japanese, or English, or in any combination – failed to get across their intended meanings. For instance, the Japanese word *kaimono* was obscure to Chinese interlocutors, but its meaning was instantly recognized as soon as they saw 買物 written on paper (compare Mandarin *mǎi dōngxi* 買東西, 'to buy thing', i.e., 'shopping', Hwang 2009: 52). In a similar vein, Mandarin *guì*, 'expensive' created an intelligibility problem to the Japanese interlocutors, but its meaning became clearer in context (talking about prices) after the Chinese character 貴 was written down, as evidenced by the Japanese interlocutor's remark that the corresponding meaning in Japanese was expressed by the sinogram 高 (i.e.,

4 Dissertation title: 'Brush talk at the conversation table: Interaction between L1 and L2 speakers of Chinese'.

5 Writing is usually done on paper, but when no paper is available, it may also be performed by finger-dancing in the air or finger-drawing on a flat surface like a table using tea or water.