

Language, Literacy, and Nationalism in Han Sphere

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Abstract

The Han character sphere, including Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and China, adopted Han characters and classical Han writing as the official written language before the 20th century. However, great changes came with the advent of the 20th century. After World War II, Han characters in Vietnam and Korea were officially replaced by the romanized *Chu Quoc Ngu* and phonemic Hangul, respectively. In Japan, the number of Han characters in use decreased and the syllabary *Kana* system was promoted to a national status. In Taiwan, although romanization has developed centuries ago, Han characters remain the dominant orthography in current Taiwanese society. As for China, simplification of Han characters seems the only harvest after China's efforts at reforming characters for over a century. This paper examines the orthographic transition within the Han sphere. Both internal and external factors have contributed to the different outcomes of orthographic reform in these countries. Internal factors include the general public's demand for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy. External factors include the political relationships between these countries and the origin of Han characters (i.e. China).

1. Introduction

The Han character sphere, including Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and China, adopted *Hanji* (Han characters) and classical Han writing as the official written language before the 20th century. However, great changes came with the advent of the 20th century. In Vietnam, Han characters and their domestic derivative characters, *Chu Nom*, which had been adopted as the writing systems for more than a thousand years in Vietnam, were officially replaced by the romanized *Chu Quoc Ngu* in 1945, the year of the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. Han characters in Korea were finally replaced by phonemic system *Hangul* after World War II. In Japan, the syllabary *Kana* system was gradually developed after Japan's adoption of Han characters; the number of Han characters used by Japanese decreased from

thousands to 1,945 frequently used characters in 1981 (Hannas 1997).

In Taiwan, although romanized systems, such as *Sinkang Bunsu* and *Peh-oe-ji*, were developed centuries ago, Han characters remain the dominant orthography in current Taiwanese society. As for China, simplification of Han characters seems the only harvest after China's efforts at reforming characters for over a century.

This paper examines the orthographic transition within the Han sphere in terms of linguistics and sociolinguistics. It centers on two issues: 1) the development and trend of linguistic structure of the later devised scripts, and 2) the factors which contributed to the transition.

From the perspective of linguistics, the orthographic structure in evolution tends to represent smaller sound units, that is, from morphosyllabic, syllabic, to phonemic writing; and from two dimensions to single dimension.

Both internal and external factors have contributed to the different outcomes of orthographic reform in these countries. Internal factors include the general public's demand for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy; external factors include the political relationships between these countries and the origin of Han characters (i.e. China).

2. Historical background within the Han sphere

The Chinese attitude towards their neighbors and foreigners can exactly be expressed by an old Chinese philosophy, the Five Clothes System (*Wufuzhi*; *Ngou-hok-che*). The Chinese empire set up a world outlook: the capital is great, civilized, and the central point of the world. Further, the empire used the capital as the center of a circle, to draw five circles per 500 kilometers of radius. The farther barbarians are from the central capital, the more barbaric they are. Chinese people call the barbarians from the east as "*Dong-yi*," barbarians from the south as "*Nan-man*," barbarians from west as "*Xi-rong*," and barbarians from the north as "*Bei-di*." All the

words are different animal names.

In such thought of Five Clothes System, the Chinese empire always tried to conquer the “barbarians” and brought them under the domination of China in order to “civilize” them. As a consequence, the “barbarians” were either under China’s direct domination or were demanded to pay tributes every certain of years to recognize the empire’s suzerainty (i.e., become a vassal state under China).

In this pattern, Vietnam, Korea and Taiwan had been directly occupied by China for long periods. Although later on they were no longer under direct domination, they became China’s vassal states until modern times. For example, Vietnam was brought under China’s direct domination in 111 BC by *Han Wu Di*, the Chinese emperor of *Han* dynasty. Vietnam could not liberate itself from China until AD 939, during the fall of the powerful Chinese *Tang* dynasty (Hodgkin 1981). Thereafter, although the Vietnamese established their own independent monarchy, Vietnamese had to recognize the suzerainty of imperial China to exchange a later millennium of freedom until the late 19th century (SarDesai 1992: 19).

Although Japan was not under China’s direct domination, due to China’s powerful regimes during the times of Han and Tang dynasties, China was the model of imitation for Japan until the 19th century. For example, Japan’s *Taika* Reform in the seventh century “marked the first step in the direction of the formation of a Chinese-style centralized state” (Seeley 1991: 40).

In general, China’s main influences on these sinitic countries include: 1) The adoption of Han characters and classical Han writing (*bun-gian*; *wenyan*) to write Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese, and 2) Imported Buddhism, Confucianism, the civil service examination and the government official system.

According to the civil service examination system, the books of Confucius and Mencius, which were written in classical Han, were accorded the status of classics

among scholars and mandarins who assisted the emperor or king in governing his people (Taylor and Taylor 1995: 144-152). Everyone who desired to become a scholar or mandarin had to learn to use Hanji and read these classics and pass the imperial examination, unless he had a close relationship with the emperor. Consequently, as Coulmas (2000: 52) has pointed out that such literacy skills functioned “as a crucial means of social control,” and “the Mandarin scholar-bureaucrat embodied this tradition, which perpetuated itself above all through the civil service examination system.” Han character and its classical Han writing thus became the orthodoxy of written language in the Han sphere for over a thousand years. The influence of Han characters on these counties was reflected on such a case that the first historical annals compiled by their governments to record their early history were all written in classical Han. They are *Kojiki* (AD 712) and *Nihon shoki* (AD 720) in Japan, *Samguk sagi* (AD 1145) in Korea, and *Dai Viet Su Ky* (AD 1253) in Vietnam.

From the perspective of literacy, the classics were not only difficult to read (i.e., Hanji), but also hard to understand (i.e., the texts), because the texts were written in classic literary style instead of colloquial speech (*peh-oe; baihua*).¹ In other words, because most of the people were farmers who labored in the fields all day long, they had little interest in learning Hanji and classical writing. As a consequence, a literate noble class and an illiterate peasant class were formed and the classes strengthened the feudal society. This complication of Hanji could be well expressed with the old Taiwanese saying, “*Hanji na thak e-bat, chhui-chhiu to phah si-kat.*” It means that you cannot understand all the Han characters even if you studied until you could tie your beard into a knot. Or another saying, “*Si-su Ngou-keng thak thau-thau, m-bat ku pih chau,*” which means you still can not distinguish the characters of tortoise, turtle, and cooking stove (because they look so similar in shape) even if you have studied all of the classics.

In short, as Chen (1994: 367) has pointed out that high illiteracy and low efficiency caused by the use of Han characters have hence become impediments to nation's modernization, the demand for widespread literacy was one of the advising factors pushing orthographic reform in Han sphere.

3. Orthographic tradition and transition

After Han characters were introduced to Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, the local people found that it was extremely difficult to write their vernacular in classical Han writing. They gradually developed various domestic writing schemes, such as Chu Nom in Vietnam, Hangeul in Korea, Kana in Japan, and *Koa-a-chheh* in Taiwan. Nevertheless, none of those newly devised schemes ever successfully replaced the orthodoxy status of the Han characters until the 20th century.

3.1. Vietnam

In Vietnam, Han characters were employed since 207 BC during the *Nam Viet* (South Viet) period (Nguyen 1999: 2). Thereafter, Han characters retained their orthodoxy status during the millennium of Chinese occupation. Not until the tenth century when Vietnam achieved liberation, could the domestic scripts Chu Nom have been prominently developed (DeFrancis 1977: 21). Chu Nom, or Nom scripts, means southern writing or southern orthography in contrast to Chu Han, Han writing or Han characters. Chu Nom in the early period was used as an auxiliary tool of classical Han to record personal or geographical names and local specialties (Nguyen 1999: 2). After a few centuries, the 13th century was marked by the date of the first literary writing in Chu Nom (DeFrancis 1977: 23). Literary works in Chu Nom achieved popularity from the 16th century to the 18th century, and reached their peak at the end of the 18th century (DeFrancis 1977: 44). For example, *Truyen Kieu*, a novel in Chu Nom considered the masterpiece of Vietnam, was published at the end of the 18th

century.

Generally speaking, ordinary people, monks, relegated mandarins, and very limited ultra-anti-Chinese nationalist elites were in favor of Chu Nom. In contrast to official domains dominated by Han characters, such as governmental administration, education, academia, and classic literary works, Nom scripts were mainly used for the purposes of recording folktales, composing literary works in pure Vietnamese, translating the Buddhist Scripture, and being used as an auxiliary tool to read classics in Han characters (Nguyen 1999).

The orthographic structure of Nom scripts consists of two main categories (DeFrancis 1977: 24-26). The first one may be called “simple borrowings,” which is in accordance with the existing Han characters in shape, but different in sound or semantic meaning. In other words, Han characters were borrowed for their phonetic or semantic value to represent Vietnamese words. For example, in the case of phonetic borrowings, 昆 originally meant “insect” in Chinese and had a Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation /kon/, was borrowed to represent the Vietnamese word *con* (pronounced as /kon/ and means child or offspring). In such a case, the original Chinese meaning of Han characters was ignored and only their Sino-Vietnamese sound was preserved to indicate the pronunciation of the corresponding Vietnamese words. On the contrary, the pronunciation of characters was ignored and only their semantic meaning was preserved in the case of semantic borrowings.

The second category may be called “composite creations,” which was developed relatively later than the first one (personal communication with Nguyen Quang Hong). In this category, Nom scripts were made by combining two Han characters, usually where one was taken over for its meaning and the other for its pronunciation (DeFrancis 1977: 25). For example, the Vietnamese word *con* was also written as 子昆 at a later time. It comprises two Han characters 子 (with Chinese meaning child or

offspring and Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation /tu/) and 昆. In this case, 子 refers to its meaning and 昆 indicates its pronunciation.

Although Nom scripts have been developed at least for a thousand years, they are still far away from standardization (The Anh 1999: 5; DeFrancis 1977: 24-30). Because of inconsistency, a Vietnamese word may be written in different Nom scripts, such as 字字 字南, 字喃, and 字宁 字南, which are all referring to the same word Chu Nom. The major causes of inconsistency are 1) without institutional support since the mandarin and scholar class as a whole looked with disdain on the Nom literature, 2) Nom scripts were not devised under well linguistic planning as Hangeul was in Korea; instead, Nom scripts were created by individual authorship in different time and places, and 3) the inconsistency was inherited from Han characters.

Although the domestic Nom scripts have been around since the 10th century, they neither reached the same prestige as Han characters, nor replaced the classical Han writing. In contrast, Chu Nom was generally regarded as a vulgar writing, which refers to the low language in digraphia. Moreover, Nom scripts were eventually forced to yield themselves to the *Chu Quoc Ngu*, a romanized writing system originally devised in the early 17th century, which finally became the only official orthography of Vietnam in 1945. The factors that contributed to the fate of Chu Nom are as follows:

First, the Vietnamese were deeply influenced by the Chinese value with regard to Han characters. Since Hanji was highly regarded as the only official orthography in China, which was the suzerain of Vietnam, the Vietnamese people had no choice but to follow this traditional value. As a consequence, the Vietnamese rulers in all dynasties, except a few short-lived strongly anti-Chinese rulers, such as *Ho Quy Ly* (1400-1407) and *Quang Trung* (1788-1792), had to recognize Han characters as the institutional writing criteria.

Second, writing in Nom scripts was restricted by the civil service examination. Because the examination system was held exclusively with the contests of Chinese classics written in Hanji, all the literati that wished to pass the exam had to study the classics. Once they passed the exam and became bureaucrats, they had to maintain the examination system to ensure their monopoly of power and knowledge in the Chinese style feudal hierarchy (DeFrancis 1977: 47).

Third, the development of Nom scripts was highly restricted by the nature of their orthographic structure. Because Chu Nom comprises one or two Han characters to form a new Nom script, it has inherited all defects of Han characters (DeFrancis 1977: 25). The much more complicated structure has even caused Nom scripts more problems in such aspects as efficiency, accuracy, and consistency. Normally, one has to learn Han characters first before s/he could fully master Nom scripts (personal communication with Nguyen Quang Hong). Consequently, learning to read and write in Nom scripts is more difficult than in Han characters.

In the late 16th century and the early 17th century, European missionaries, from countries including Portugal, Italy, and France, gradually came to preach in Vietnam. To get their ideas across to the local people, it was recognized by missionaries that knowledge of spoken Vietnamese was essential. The romanized writing system was thus devised to assist missionaries to acquire the Vietnamese language (Do 1972). It is apparent that the Vietnamese romanization resulted from collective efforts, with the influences of diverse backgrounds of missionaries (Thompson 1987: 54-55; Ly 1996: 5). Among the variants of Vietnamese romanization, Alexandre de Rhodes is usually referred to as the person who provided the first systematic work of Vietnamese romanization (DeFrancis 1977: 54). In 1651, Alexandre de Rhodes published the first romanized dictionary, *Dictionarium Annamiticum, Lusitanum et Latinum* (Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin), and a Vietnamese catechism *Cathechismus*. De

Rhodes' romanized system, with some later changes, became the present Chu Quoc Ngu (literally, national scripts).

The development of romanized writing in Vietnam can be divided into four periods: 1) Church period, from the early 17th century to the first half of the 19th century. Roman scripts were mainly used in church and among religious followers. 2) French promotion period during the second half of the 19th century after the French invaded Vietnam in 1858 (Vien Van Hoc 1961: 21-23). In this period, romanized Vietnamese were intentionally promoted by the French aiming to replace the classical Chinese with French ultimately (DeFrancis 1977: 129-134). 3) Nationalist promotion period during the first half of the 20th century. Vietnamese romanization was promoted by anti-colonialism organizations, such as the *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc*² and *Hoi Truyen Ba Quoc Ngu*³ (Vien Van Hoc 1961: 24). Because roman scripts were no longer associated with the French colonialist, but considered as an efficient literacy tool, romanization has thus received much more recognition by the Vietnamese people than in the period of French promotion (DeFrancis 1977: 159). 4) National status period after 1945, when Ho Chi Minh declared the exclusive use of Chu Quoc Ngu (Ho Chi Minh 1994: 64-65).

How could Vietnam successfully replace Han characters and Chu Nom with romanized Chu Quoc Ngu? I would attribute the consequence to two crucial factors: 1) internal factors of social demand for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy, and 2) external factors of political interaction between Vietnam and China in the international situation during the first half of the 20th century. These two crucial points can also apply to all the cases of language and orthographic reform in Han sphere.

The internal factors of social demand for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy are understandable. Recall that China was the only major threat to the traditional feudal society of Vietnam prior to the 19th century. In that situation, although the adoption of

Han characters could cause the majority of Vietnamese to be illiterate, it could, on the other hand, minimize the potential invasion from China, and more importantly, preserve the vested interests of the Vietnamese bureaucrats in the Chinese style feudal hierarchy. However, with the advent of the 20th century, Vietnam has faced a train of international colonialism. Since Ho Chi Minh claimed that 95 percent of Vietnam's total population were illiterates, it was important to equip the people with primary education, which was considered essential to modernization in order to fight against imperialisms (Ho Chi Minh 1994: 64-65). Although the domestic-made Nom scripts, to some extent, represented the Vietnamese spirit, their fatal weakness in literacy had withdrawn themselves from the candidates of being a national writing system in the modern time. Thus, the efficient and easily learned romanization was the best choice for literacy in contrast to the complexity of Han characters and Nom scripts. Since the majority of Vietnamese were illiterates, and only a few elites were skilled in Han writing or French during the promotion of Quoc Ngu, it was clear that romanized Vietnamese would be favored by the majority, and thus win the literacy campaign.

The external factor involves the complexity of international situation in the 1940s, as Hodgkin (1981: 288) stated that the Vietnamese "faced with a varying combination of partly competing, partly collaborating imperialisms, French, Japanese, British and American, with *Kuomintang* China." At that time, Vietnam was considered an important base to attack southern China⁴ when Japan's invasion of China became more apparent and aggressive since the 1930s (Hodgkin 1981: 288). The Japanese military eventually entered Vietnam and shared with French the control of Vietnam in the early 1940s. From the perspective of China, suppression against Japan's military activities in Vietnam was desired. However, in the viewpoint of the French, they were afraid that China would take over Vietnam again if Chinese troops entered Vietnam on the excuse of suppression against Japanese forces (Jiang 1971: 181). For the

Vietnamese people, how to maintain their national identity and achieve national independence from the imperialisms were considered priority by their leaders such as Ho Chi Minh. Ho's Chinese strategy was to keep Chinese forces away from Vietnam, and minimize the possibility of a Chinese comeback in Indochina. Politically speaking, Ho refused Chinese army entering Vietnam (Jiang 1971: 107) as well as instigating anti-Chinese movement (Jiang 1971: 228-240); Culturally, romanized Vietnamese was considered a distinctive feature of cultural boundary between Vietnam and China. These considerations have impelled Ho in favor of romanization rather than Han characters which are used in China.

3.2. Korea

Han characters were probably introduced to Korea by the Chinese immigrants initiated by China's civil wars during the period of Warring States (BC 403-221) (Ledyard 1966: 22-23). Han characters became institutionalized after Han Wu Di brought northern Korea under Chinese direct domination in 108 BC (Ledyard 1966: 23). China's control of northern Korea lasted until the fourth century. Meanwhile, the deposed Korean people migrated south and spilt into three kingdoms: *Silla* (BC 57-668 AD), *Paekche* (BC 18-660 AD), and *Koguryo* (BC 37-668 AD), which were all unified by Silla in 668. In addition to the territory of Chinese domination, Han characters were also used among the elites in the three kingdoms (Taylor and Taylor 1995: 203). In 958, the Chinese-style civil service examination system was established by the *Koryo* kingdom, which had replaced the Unified Silla in 935. The state examination system lasted in Korea for a thousand years until 1894 (Taylor and Taylor 1995: 255-259).

Once Han characters were adopted by the Koreans, they encountered difficulties in understanding the classical Han writing. They gradually developed their own

remedial measures to make the writing in Han characters more approachable to the Korean-speaking people. Beginning in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, two major remedies were developed, and they were later known as *Hyangch'al* and *Idu*. *Hyangch'al* was mainly applied in transcribing vernacular poetry. *Idu* served as a bureaucratic tool for the clarification of administrative documents written in literary Chinese, and it lasted until the end of the 19th century (Ledyard 1966: 34). Texts in *Hyangch'al* and *Idu* were both written in Han characters. The arrangements of word order in *Hyangch'al* were in accordance with the Korean language. However, the text of *Idu* “wavers between Chinese and Korean syntax and is marked by the insertion of Korean grammatical forms intended to aid Korean readers” (Ledyard 1966: 33). In both types, either “sound borrowings” or “semantic borrowings” were adopted while choosing Han characters to represent Korean language (Taylor and Taylor 1995: 204-207).

Although the Korean elites had developed *Hyangch'al* and *Idu*, the demand for a more accessible writing system grew stronger as the 15th century progressed (Ledyard 1966: 70). In the 15th century, the Korean King *Sejong* and his scholars undertook a project of new scripts for writing the Korean vernacular. The project was carried out in 1443, and was officially proclaimed in the title of *Hun Min Jong Um*⁵ in 1446 (Ledyard 1966: 91-99). The scripts of the *Hun Min Jong Um* were known in the 20th century as *Hangul*, the Korean alphabets, consisting of 28 letters to write Korean in a phonemic way (Shin et al. 1990).

Although the new system of *Hangul* was very efficient, and made it possible for widespread for literacy, it soon had opposition from the privileged bureaucrat and literate classes. For example, the most well known anti-*Sejong* faction was led by *Malli Choi*, the highest purely academic rank in the College of Assembled Worthies (Ledyard 1966: 99-114). In 1444, *Choi* presented *Sejong* a petition against the new

orthographic invention, as follows:

In the first place it is a violation of the principle of maintaining friendly relations with China, to invent and use letters, which do not exist in China...Those who seek position in the government will not seek to learn Chinese characters with patience, and consequently, Chinese literature, which is our only study and sole literature, will flourish no longer. The Vulgar Script [i.e., Hangul], which is a mere novelty will cause hindrance to study, disadvantage and inefficiency to administration...(Lee 1957: 30-31).

The opposition to the new scripts lasted decades even after the death of Sejong. Moreover, writing in Hangul was banned by the regent *Yonsan'gun* after the literati purge of 1504 (Ledyard 1966: 322). Consequently, Hangul was used in very limited circles and domains. For centuries after its creation, Hangul was variously called “*onmun*” (vulgar script), “women’s letters,” “monks’ letters,” or “children’s letters” (Taylor and Taylor 1995: 212). For most of its history, Hangul was “regarded as a poor person’s substitute for real writing, which was either classical Chinese written in characters or stilted Korean written in Chinese characters” (Hannas 1997: 51).

The inferior development of Hangul reached a turning point with the emergence of the 20th century. During the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945), Japan’s harsh policy to restrict the use of the Korean language had enhanced the Korean identity of Hangul (Coulmas 2000: 56). Moreover, the user-friendly characteristic of Hangul made itself favorable to the Korean nationalists in the consideration of literacy. In other words, Hangul, as it was Chu Quoc Ngu in Vietnam, was chosen as the tool to eliminate illiteracy in order to fight against the Japanese imperialism. As Hangul gained more recognition and had become wider spread than ever before, it was thus further promoted to the official national script when the Korean people built their modern nation-state(s) after the World War II.

After the war, Han characters in North Korea were officially abolished in favor of the exclusive use of Hangul. As for South Korea, although the policy on the abolition of Han characters were not consistently executed, the use of Han characters did dramatically declined over the past decades (Taylor & Taylor 1995: 208-210). In short, Han characters have shifted from a dominant status to a supplementary tool to the Hangul.

3.3. Japan

It is estimated that around the fifth century, Han characters were brought over to Japan through Korean scholars (Seeley 1991: 6). Thereafter, due to an increasing cultural dependence on China, such as the Taika Reform (645-649), Han characters and their classics became more prominent and prestigious in the Japanese society by the seventh century (Seeley 1991: 40).

Once the Japanese embraced the classical Han writing, they encountered difficulties in reading the Chinese classics as it occurred in the cases of Vietnam and Korea. Again, the Japanese utilized “sound borrowings” and “semantic borrowings” to overcome the problems. Those remedies were both well adopted in the famous *Man'yōshū*, Collection of a Myriad Leaves, a collection of Japanese poems compiled around 759. In the method of sound borrowings of the *Man'yōshū*, the original meaning of Han characters was disregarded, while their Chinese pronunciation or Japanese *kun* pronunciation in accordance with the characters was borrowed. The sub-methods based on characters' sounds were called *shakuon* and *shakukun* respectively. Because *shakuon* and *shakukun* are the prominent features in the writing of *Man'yōshū*, they are generally called *man'yōgana*, a combination of *man'yō*, from the title of *Man'yōshū*, and *kana*, the syllabary (Habein 1984: 12).

Because of complication and inconsistency, starting in the ninth century, the

man'yogaga-like systems were moving toward a process of simplification to Han characters used as phonograms (Seeley 1991: 59). Among the various simplified syllabaries, *Katakana* and *Hiragana*, which are currently in use after modern standardization, were well developed and widely used at least by the 10th century (Habein 1984: 22-35; Seeley 1991: 69-75). *Katakana* was called imperfect kana, which was developed by priests. *Hiragana* was called *onnade* (woman's handwriting) or *onnamoji* (woman's letters). Because women were excluded from the study of literary Chinese, they were most likely to use hiragana (Habein 1984: 25).

The Heian period (794-1192) was the history of introduction of reading and writing to the noble class. In the later centuries, literacy was brought to broader public, leading to diversification and complication of writing styles, which include literary Chinese, Kana, and a hybrid of Han characters with Kana (Habein 1984: 4).

The issue of script reform was raised, and people were highly concerned again with the opening of Japan to the West from the later part of the 19th century onwards. After the imperial regime was restored in 1868, Emperor Meiji opened his door to foreign countries, which resulted in enormous changes in daily life. Among the changes was the increase of new words coined for the overwhelming unfamiliar concepts and objects from the West. In this situation, the intellectuals arose the issues of language reform in the consideration of better literacy and education. There were three major proposals in such a reform: 1) to replace the current chaotic systems with Kana-only system, 2) to replaced the existing systems with romanization, and 3) to limit the number of Han characters in use (Seeley 1991: 136-142).

After the successful political reform of Emperor Meiji, which was manifested in the two victorious wars, i.e. the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, the Japanese were stimulated by the victories and resulted in the thought that the nation could be mobilized through more effective

education, to which script reform was considered important (Gottlieb 1995: 25). This belief eventually brought language reform into practical trials in the early part of the 20th century. Because using Kana-only or romanization was considered too radical, the orthographic reform was thus, in fact, centered on restricting the number of commonly used Han characters and the standardization of the Kana usage (Seeley 1991: 142). Such efforts were reflected in the examples: new regulations aimed at simplifying the teaching of written Japanese at the primary schools were issued by the Education Ministry in 1900; *Kanji seirian* “Proposed Modifications to Han Characters” was published in 1919 by *Hoshina et al.*; *Kanazukai no Kaitei An* “Proposal for the Revision of Kana Usage” was released by the Interim Committee on the National Language in 1924; *Toyo kanjihyo* “List of Characters for general Use” was proposed by the Interim Committee in 1923, and a later revised *Toyo kanjihyo* in 1931, which consists of 1856 characters.

As time went on, Japan’s language policy was driven by imperatives from modernization to imperialism in the first half of the 20th century (Gottlieb 1995: 21). The influence of the military and the ultranationalists became more and more powerful when Japan became more aggressive in preparation for conquering China. The influence was substantial especially after the Manchuria Incident of 1931, in which three northeast provinces of China were under Japan’s occupation. From the perspective of the military and ultranationalists, Han characters and historical Kana usage were *kotodama*, the “spirit of the Japanese language,” which constitutes the essence of the Japanese national spirit. Therefore, reform proposals, such as abolition of Han characters, romanization, or new Kana usage, were considered attempts to tamper Japan’s spirit, culture, and history. For example, the Interim Committee’s proposals of 1931 to restrict characters and to carry out a new Kana usage were dismissed because of fierce oppositions from the conservatives. In another case in

1939, a number of romanization advocates were arrested on the charge of anti-nationalist sympathies (Gottlieb 1995: 75-88; Seeley 1991: 147-148).

Although many efforts were brought to the script reform, wider adoption of reform proposals could not become reality until the end of World War II, when the Japanese army surrendered to the Allied Forces (Seeley 1991: 151; Hannas 1997: 43). After the war defeat of 1945, the arrogant military and ultranationalists were suppressed. As Eastman (1983: 23) has pointed out, without any social, cultural, or political changes, orthography reform is not likely to succeed. Japan's dramatic changes after the war thus created the atmosphere and conditions to carry out script reform. In 1946, under the supervision of the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP), Japan's cabinet promulgated *Toyo kanjihyo*, the list of 1850 characters for daily use, and *Gendai kanazukai*, the new modern Kana usage, as the first step of script reform after the war (Unger 1996: 58; Seeley 1991: 152).

At present, Han characters and Kana syllabary all serve as the official scripts in the hybrid Japanese writing system. This fact makes Japan the only case, among Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, that Han characters were not officially abolished after domestic scripts were promoted to national status. Why were Han characters not abolished in Japan? Both internal and external factors have contributed to the outcome. From the perspective of literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy, by the early 20th century, Japan has reached a much higher degree of literacy and modernization in comparison with other Asian countries.⁶ This achievement gave the conservatives the impression that Han characters were not necessarily to be abolished as long as Kana syllabary was in actual use. Furthermore, although Han characters were originally imported from China, they were converted from a pure foreign invention to an indigenized writing system after more than a thousand years of adoption. In other words, Hanji was regarded by the Japanese as part of their language, in which situation it was

totally different from the case of Vietnamese, where they considered Han characters as Chinese scripts and Chu Nom as their own. Why did Japan and Vietnam have reverse perceptions on Han characters? Recall that Japan historically has never been under China's direct control. On the contrary, Japan's imperialism and militarism became a fateful threat to China in the modern history. However, battles against China frequently occurred in the history of Vietnam. That is to say, for the Japanese, they did not consider the use of Han characters as an association with the potential invader (i.e., China). As a matter of fact, the use of Han characters was even considered necessary once Japan launched invasion of China. For example, the Interim Committee's proposal, *Toyo kanjihyo* of 1931, was strongly opposed by the military for the practical need to write a large number of Chinese personal and place names of the newly occupied Chinese territories (Seeley 1991: 147).

3.4. Taiwan

Although Taiwan is currently a Hanji-dominated society, romanization once was the unique and first writing system used in Taiwan (Chiung 2001c). This system of romanization was introduced by the Dutch missionaries in the first half of the 17th century. Thereafter, Han characters were imposed in Taiwan by the Sinitic Koxinga regime in the second half of the 17th century. As the number of Han immigrants from China dramatically increased, Han characters gradually became the dominant writing system in Taiwan. At present, only Han characters and modern standard Chinese are taught in Taiwan's national education system. In contrast, romanization is excluded from school education.⁷

Taiwan is a multilingual and multiethnic island country. There are currently more than twenty languages in Taiwan, including indigenous languages, Hakka, Holo Taiwanese, and Mandarin Chinese (Grimes 1996). Generally speaking, Taiwan's

population can be divided into four primary ethnic groups: indigenous (1.7%), Hakka (12%), Holo (73.3%), and Mainlanders (13%) (Huang 1993: 21). Hakka and Holo are the so-called Han people. In fact, many of them are the descendants of intermarriage between sinitic immigrants and local Taiwanese aboriginals during the *Koxinga* and *Qing* periods. Mainlanders are the latest immigrants from China, who came to Taiwan with the Chiang Kai-shek's KMT regime in the late 1940s. Although Hakka, Holo, and Mainlanders are all immigrants originally from China, they do have different national identities. For example, most of the Holo and Hakka people identified themselves as Taiwanese, However, according to Ong's investigation, 54% of the surveyed Mainlanders still identified themselves as Chinese. Only 7.3% identified themselves as Taiwanese, and the rest were neutral (Ong 1993: 87). Their divergent identity on Taiwan is also a factor influencing the promotion of Taiwanese language(s).

In addition to being a multiethnic society, Taiwan has been colonized by several foreign regimes since the seventeenth century. Prior to foreign occupation, Taiwan was a primitive society with many different indigenous tribes, which did not belong to any countries, such as China or Japan. In 1624, the Dutch occupied Taiwan and established the first alien regime in Taiwan. Roman scripts were then introduced to Taiwan by the Dutch. The first romanization was used to write the indigenous Siraya language, which has become extinct nowadays. In 1661, Koxinga, a remnant force of the former Chinese *Ming* Dynasty, failed to restore the Ming Dynasty against the new Qing Dynasty, therefore, he retreated to Taiwan. Koxinga expelled the Dutch and established a sinitic regime in Taiwan as a base for retaking the Mainland. Confucianism and civil service examination were thus imposed in Taiwan during Koxinga's regime and at a later time Qing Dynasty. The Koxinga regime was later annexed by the Chinese Qing Dynasty in 1683. During the late Qing period, *Peh-oe-ji*,

or Scripts of Vernacular Speech, the second romanization in Taiwan, was introduced by western missionaries in the second half of the 19th century (Tiuⁿ 2001; Chiung 2001b). Peh-oe-ji is mainly used for Holo Taiwanese, which constitutes the majority of Taiwan's current population. Two centuries later after Qing's occupation, the sovereignty of Taiwan was transferred from China to Japan as a consequence of the Sino-Japanese war in 1895. At the end of World War II, Japanese forces surrendered to the Allied Forces. *Chiang Kai-shek*, the leader of the Chinese Nationalist (KMT⁸ or *Kuomintang*) took over Taiwan on behalf of the Allied Powers under General Order No.1 of September 2, 1945 (Peng and Ng 1995: 60-61). Simultaneously, Chiang Kai-shek was fighting against the Chinese Communist Party in Mainland China. In 1949, Chiang's troops were completely defeated and then pursued by the Chinese Communists. At that time, Taiwan's national status was supposed to be dealt with by a peace treaty among the fighting nations. However, because of Chiang's defeat in China, Chiang decided to occupy Taiwan as a base and from there he would fight back to the Mainland (Kerr 1992; Peng and Ng 1995; Su 1980; Ong 1993). Consequently, Chiang's political regime Republic of China (R.O.C) was renewed in Taiwan and has remained there since 1949.⁹

National Language Policy or monolingual policy was adopted both during the Japanese and KMT occupations of Taiwan (Huang 1993; Tsao 1999; Png 1965; Tiuⁿ 1974). In the case of KMT's monolingual policy, the Taiwanese people were not allowed to speak their vernaculars in public. Moreover, they were forced to learn Mandarin Chinese and to identify themselves as Chinese through the national education system (Cheng 1996; Tiuⁿ 1996). As Hsiao (1997: 307) has pointed out, "the usage of Mandarin as a national language becomes a testimony of the Chineseness of the KMT state," the Chinese KMT regime is trying to convert the Taiwanese into Chinese through Mandarin monolingualism. Consequently, research

by scholars such as Chan (1994) and Young (1988) has revealed that a language shift toward Mandarin is in progress. Huang (1993: 160) goes so far as to suggest that the indigenous languages of Taiwan are all endangered.

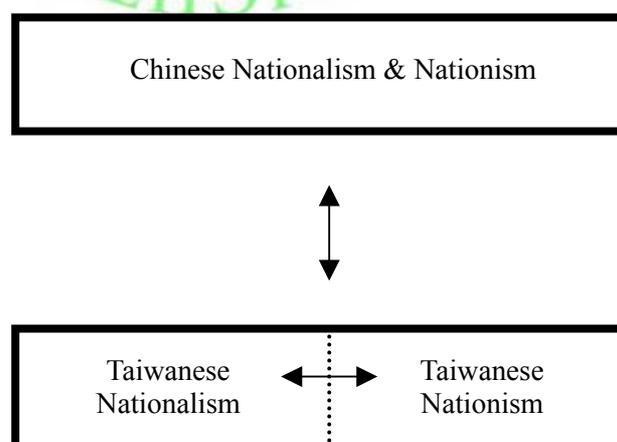
In response to KMT's National Language Policy, Taiwanese promoters have protested against the monolingual policy, and have demanded bilingual education in schools. This is the so-called *Taigibun Untong* "Taiwanese language movement" that has substantially arisen since the second half of the 1980s (Hsiau 1997; Erbaugh 1995; Huang 1993; Li 1999; Lim 1996). There are two core issues for the Taiwanese language movement. First, the movement wishes to promote spoken Taiwanese¹⁰ in order to maintain people's vernacular speech. Second, the movement aims to promote and standardize written Taiwanese in order to develop Taiwanese (vernacular) literature.¹¹ Because written Taiwanese is not well standardized and not taught through the national education system, Taiwanese speakers have to write in Modern Written Chinese (MWC) instead of Written Taiwanese (WT). In other words, people speak in Taiwanese, but write in MWC. Although more than a hundred orthographies have been proposed by different persons enthusiastic for the standardization of written Taiwanese, most of the designs have probably been accepted and used only by their own designers. Moreover, many of the designs were never applied to practical writing after they were devised. Because of the wide use of the personal computer and electronic networks in Taiwan since the 1990s, most orthographic designs, which require extra technical support other than regular Mandarin software, are unable to survive. Therefore, the majority of recent Taiwanese writing systems are either in Han characters, Roman alphabet or a mixed system combining Roman and Han, as Cheng (1990) and Tiuⁿ (1998) have documented.

The orthographic situation in Taiwan is as complicated as Taiwan's political status and people's national identity. Linguistically, people in Taiwan have to face the issue

that whether to use MWC or WT as their written language. Further, people who choose WT, have to decide which scripts will be adopted while they are writing in Taiwanese. Politically, Taiwan is currently in an ambiguous political status, i.e., neither nominally an independent Republic of Taiwan nor substantially a province of the People's Republic of China (Peng and Ng 1995). This political ambiguity mirrors people's divergent national identity, which is usually categorized as 1) Taiwanese-only, 2) Chinese-only, and 3) both Taiwanese and Chinese.¹² Consequently, the diversity of the public's national identity led to different political claims, i.e., independence, unification with China, or maintaining the status quo.¹³

The contemporary Taiwanese language movement since the 1980s reflects Taiwan's socio-political complexity and its colonial background. In terms of Fishman's (1968) nationalism¹⁴ and nationism,¹⁵ it reveals the controversial relationship among Chinese nationalism-nationism,¹⁶ Taiwanese nationalism and Taiwanese nationism as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Relationship among Chinese nationalism-nationism, Taiwanese nationalism, and Taiwanese nationism.



In the dimension of nationalism and nationism, it reveals the political tensions between Chinese and Taiwanese. Chinese nationalism can be inherited from the internal Chinese KMT and as well as external People's Republic of China. The strong conflicts between KMT's Chinese nationalism and Taiwanese nationalism were overt in the anti-KMT movement¹⁷ during the second half of the 1980s and the entire 1990s. The conflicts between PRC Chinese nationalism and Taiwanese nationalism started in the late 1980s¹⁸ and reached the climax in 1999 when the former president Teng-hui Lee claimed that Taiwan and China hold "special state to state" relationship.

In the dimension of Taiwanese, it shows the expanding tension between Taiwanese nationalism and Taiwanese nationism. Some Taiwanese politicians and intellectuals who lead socio-political movement, such as *Hong-Beng Tan*, *Sui-kim Phenn* and *Chhun-Beng Ng*, do not value Taiwanese language movement as a necessary step even though they identify themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. In their ideology, they disapprove with KMT's strict national language policy; however, they have come to the stage to accept the results of the national language policy. In other words, they recognize the legitimate status of the colonial language, i.e., Mandarin Chinese as the official language since it has been widespread in Taiwan after more than fifty years of promotion. However, they are criticized by Taiwanese nationalists that the Taiwanese nationists have ignored the threat of Chinese nationalism from China. From the perspective of Taiwanese nationalism, Taiwanese language is not only a medium for communication, but also a part of history and spirit of Taiwan. Moreover, it is considered a national defense against Chinese nationalism of the PRC and the ROC (Lim 1996, 1997, 1998; Li 1999; Chiuⁿ 1996).

The complexity of the social-political background has prevented Taiwan's domestic scripts from being promoted to a national status. Therefore, in contrast to Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, Taiwan has the unique case that the vernacular writing is

still under development. Both internal and external factors, as I proposed, have contributed to the inferior development of Taiwanese orthography.

In terms of internal demands for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy, written Taiwanese was not effectively promoted at the right timing when the public met their demands in the early 20th century during the Japanese occupation.¹⁹ Nowadays, Taiwan has shifted from a traditional feudal society to a modern one, in which a minimum of 9 years of compulsory education has been executed since 1968. It is claimed that Taiwan's current population has reached a literacy rate of 94%.²⁰ That is, the majority of people in Taiwan, to some extent, have acquired literacy skills in Han characters and Modern Written Chinese. This fact has thus reduced the public's literacy demands for a new orthography.

From the perspective of external factors, because of the complexity and ambiguity of the political relationship between Taiwan and China, Han characters are not substantially regarded as foreign scripts by the people in Taiwan. In contrast, roman scripts are generally considered as foreign invention even though romanized writing has appeared in Taiwan for hundreds years (Chiung 2001). As Gelb (Gelb 1952: 196) has pointed out, "in all cases it was the foreigners who were not afraid to break away from sacred traditions and were thus able to introduce reforms which led to new and revolutionary developments." The weak awareness of national identity by Taiwanese people from Chinese people has thus shaken the promotion of roman scripts and written Taiwanese.

4. Orthography, literacy, and socio-political identity

Regarding the orthographic issues, Gelb (1952) and Smalley (1963) have developed a remarkable classification of the world's writing systems. That is, orthographic systems should be classified based on the sound units they represent.

According to this norm, orthographies can be grouped into four linguistic levels, i.e. morphemic, syllabic, phonemic, and phonetic writing systems, corresponding to the sound units of morphemes (or words), syllables, phonemes, and phonetic features. Han characters are the best example of morphemic²¹ writing, because almost every Han character can symbolizes a morpheme or a word and can combine with other characters to form new words. Japanese Kana is an example of syllabic writing (syllabary). Examples of phonemic²² systems are Taiwanese *Peh-oe-ji*, Vietnamese Chu Quoc Ngu, Korean Hangul, English, and many other languages using Latin scripts. In phonemic writing, the symbols represent corresponding phonemes.²³ Among the various types of phonemic systems, they can be further categorized based on their arrangement of sound symbols. For example, Korean Hangul has a two-dimension orthographic structure. *Peh-oe-ji* and Chu Quoc Ngu both have a single-dimension linear structure. However, Chu Quoc Ngu has three horizontal layers, which represent phonemes, acoustic features, and tones. In contrast, *Peh-oe-ji* has only two layers consisting of phonemes and tones. As for phonetic writing, all the detailed features of sound differences are reflected in the transcription. This kind of script is usually the tool of a phonetician who wishes to transcribe spoken language data into written form for linguistic analysis.

Generally speaking, phonemic writing is the most efficient system because it requires the learning of the fewest number of symbols to represent the full range of speech. In contrast, the least efficient is morphemic writing, since in that writing system every morpheme has to be individually learned (Smalley 1963:7). For example, all English lexical items can be expressed by the 26 alphabet letters. In contrast, the number of Hanji learned by elementary students in Taiwan is about 2669 (Chiung 2001a: 505). Norman (1988: 72-73) has pointed out that an ordinary literate Chinese person knows and uses somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 Han characters. In other

words, literacy learners have to learn at least 3,000 characters to be able to achieve certain levels of literacy in Chinese. Compared to the limited number of letters in English, the Chinese writing system has a greater number of characters to be individually learned. Even if one does not count the number of characters, but only the number of components decomposed from the characters, there are still approximately a thousand radical and phonetic components that are required of a fluent speaker.

With regard to the orthographic transition in Han sphere, the evolution of orthographic structure tends to represent smaller sound units; that is, from morphosyllabic (i.e. Hanji) to syllabic (i.e. Kana), to phonemic writing (i.e. Hangul, Chu Quoc Ngu, and Peh-oe-ji). It also goes from two dimensions (i.e. Hanji and Hangul) to a single dimension (i.e. Kana, Chu Quoc Ngu, and Peh-oe-ji). In short, these changes represent a move towards a simpler and more efficient writing system in terms of literacy.

In addition to linguistic factors, nationalism also is a driving force in East Asia's orthographic transition. Although nationalism may or may not consist of a linguistic component as Edwards (1985: 37) noted, it is definitely the case in Han sphere that language and scripts play a substantial role in nation-building. For more than a millennium, Han characters and classical Han writing have served as the hallmark and tie between China and the sinitic countries in Han sphere. From the nationalistic viewpoint, abolition of Han characters was thus considered an important step to the construction of a newly independent nation-state. On the contrary, nationalism has prevented China from success in orthographic reform. For example, Latinization, known as *latinhua* in China, was finally aborted in the consideration of China's cultural and political unity (Norman 1988: 257-264; DeFrancis 1950: 221-236; Barnes 1974).

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the orthographic transition within the Han sphere in terms of literacy and nationalism. The survey reveals that both internal and external factors have contributed to the different outcomes of orthographic reform in the Sinitic countries. Internal factors include the general public's demand for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy. External factors include the political relationships between these countries and China.

In the case of Taiwan, it is apparent that external factors remain variable and will play a crucial role in the current development of the Taiwanese language movement. Chiung's survey of 244 college students reveals that Taiwanese identity and assertion of Taiwanese independence are two significant factors that effect students' attitudes towards written Taiwanese (Chiung 2001a). Although writing in Taiwanese is still far removed from the main stream in Taiwanese society, it is not surprising that as conflicts between Taiwan and China increase, that people's enthusiasm about written Taiwanese will be mobilized. For example, the Association of Taiwanese Romanization (ATR) established in 2001, and the first non-religious organization, aims to promote writing in romanized Taiwanese. The establishment of ATR can be considered Taiwan's reflection of the increased military threat in recent years from China.

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Notes

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- ¹ For more details about classical Han writing, see Norman (1988: 83-132).
- ² Dong Kinh Free School.
- ³ Association for Promoting Chu Quoc Ngu.
- ⁴ In the view point of Japan, domination of Vietnam and its northern trade-route was essential for effective control of southern China since the *Tonkin* Railway from *Haiphong* to *Yunnan* was a vital source of supplies for Kuomintang China (Hodgkin: 288).
- ⁵ Literary, Correct Sounds to Instruct People.
- ⁶ For example, Koji Taira estimated that “male and female literacy rates rose from about 35 and 8 percent, respectively, to about 75 and 68 percent between the beginning and end of the Meiji period (1868-1912)” (quoted in Unger 1996: 35). Aso and Amano reported that 86.9 percent of Japanese children attended four-year compulsory schooling in 1905 (quoted in Okano and Tsuchiya 1999: 19).
- ⁷ Starting Fall semester 2001, a one-hour mother tongue elective course is added to the curriculum of elementary schools. Teachers may choose to teach romanization or other scripts for written Taiwanese.
- ⁸ KMT was the ruling party in Taiwan since 1945 until 2000, in which year Chen Shui-bian, the presidential candidate of opposition party Democratic Progressive Party, was elected the new president.
- ⁹ Republic of China was formerly the official name of the Chinese government (1912-1949) in China, but was replaced by the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C) in 1949. Once the R.O.C was renewed in Taiwan, the ruling party KMT claimed that R.O.C has sovereignty over Mainland China and is the only legal government, which represents all of China. This extravagant claim was not changed until 2000, when the

opposition party DPP won the presidential election.

¹⁰ The broad definition of Taiwanese includes all the indigenous languages, Hakka, and Holoee. Occasionally, Taiwanese refers to Holoee only, which is the language spoken by the Holo people. Holoee is also called Holo Taiwanese, Taigi, Tai-yu, Holoee, Southern Min, or Min-nan.

¹¹ Although the issues of written Taiwanese include Hakka and indigenous languages, most literary works are written in the Holo language. This fact makes the Holo language the focus of the written Taiwanese. Therefore, the term “written Taiwanese” in this paper refers only to the written form of the Holo language, if not specified.

¹² Taiwanese-only means that people identify themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. “Both Taiwanese and Chinese” refers to people who identify themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese. For more information about the identity issue, readers may refer to Chang (1993), Si (1994, 1996, 1997, 1998), Huang (2000), and Tse (2000).

¹³ Their proportion of supporters may vary slightly from poll to poll, but in general, less than 20% of Taiwan’s populations in recent years are in favor of unification with China (Huang 2000; Tse 2000).

¹⁴ Fishman (1968:41) defines nationalism as the “process of transformation from fragmentary and tradition-bound ethnicity to unifying and ideologized nationality.” The role of language in nationalism is that it serves as a link to the glorious past and with authenticity. A language is not only a vehicle for the history of a nationality, but also a part of history itself (Fasold 1984: 3).

¹⁵ Fishman (1968: 42) describes nationism as “wherever politico-geographic momentum and consideration are in advance of sociocultural momentum and consideration.” The role of language in nationism is that whatever language does the job best is the best choice (Fasold 1984: 3). In other words, language in nationism plays a more instrumental role. For example, considering government administration and education, a language or languages which do the job best must be chosen.

¹⁶ At the beginning of Chinese KMT’s occupation of Taiwan, Chinese nationalists may have held different opinions from Chinese nationalists. However, later on when the use of Mandarin by people in Taiwan dramatically increased, the objects of Chinese nationalism and Chinese nationism became the same. That is, to keep using Mandarin since it has dominated educational and governmental functions in Taiwan. Therefore, I do not distinguish Chinese nationalism from Chinese nationism here.

¹⁷ In this paper, I consider 1986, when the first native opposition party Democratic Progressive Party was born, the beginning of anti-KMT movement though its origin can be traced back to the 1970s. KMT lost its ruling status in the 2000 presidential election; therefore, 2000 was considered the end of the anti-KMT movement.

¹⁸ For example, Iu-choan Chhoa, Cho-tek Khou, and Lam-iong Tenn claimed the independence of Taiwan to the public in 1987.

¹⁹ The causes are complicated. On one hand, it was because of the opposition from the Japanese colonialist; on the other hand, the elites’ preference for Han characters was caused by their internalized socialization and misunderstanding of the nature and function of Han characters (Chiung 2001a).

²⁰ Based on the statistical data of Taiwan’s Minister of Interior.

²¹ In terms of DeFrancis (1990), the Han writing system is a form of morphosyllabic writing.

²² Phonemic writing should be distinguished from phonetic writing. Many people confuse phonemic with phonetic writing, and treat phonemic writing as phonetic

writing. In fact, in most cases, what people call phonetic writing is actually a phonemic writing system (Smalley 1963: 6).

²³ Whether or not symbols and phonemes have a one-to-one relationship, varies depending on each language. In Peh-oe-ji, the Taiwanese romanization, each symbol represents only one phoneme in general. In contrast, English has more than one corresponding relationships.

