



Introduction: Sinographic and Literary Sinitic Education in East Asia

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Sinographs and Literary Sinitic constitute one of the most important foundations for understanding the languages, writing systems, literatures, and cultures of East Asia. Sinographs functioned for centuries as a shared script across various regions of East Asia, and they continue to shape the lexical systems and written cultures of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Literary Sinitic, although no longer used as an everyday written language, served until little more than a century ago as a common written medium for intellectuals across East Asia. For this reason, any serious engagement with East Asian classical texts, thought, history, institutions, literature, and linguistic culture requires a sound understanding of both Sinographs and Literary Sinitic.

This point is especially clear in the case of Korea. Modern Korean is written in *han'gŭl*, yet a substantial portion of its vocabulary and conceptual system remains deeply connected to Sino-Korean words. Many academic, legal, administrative, philosophical, ethical, and formal expressions were formed against the background of Sinographic and Literary Sinitic contexts. Thus, Sinographs and Literary Sinitic are not merely tools for reading premodern texts. Some knowledge of them is also necessary for the precise comprehension and use of modern Korean. Advanced literacy, lexical competence, and conceptual understanding in Korean cannot be entirely separated from knowledge of *hanja* 漢字 and *hanmun* 漢文.

In Japan as well, Sinographs remain a core element of contemporary written life, while *kanbun* 漢文 is taught as part of classical education within the Japanese-language curriculum. In China, Chinese characters continue to function as the basic script for writing the national language and therefore occupy a central place in education. Moreover, in Chinese diasporic communities outside East Asia, questions concerning Sinographs, Vernacular Chinese, the National Language, and *huayu* 華語 have long been intertwined with cultural identity and community formation. Sinographs and Literary Sinitic, therefore, are not simply relics of the past belonging to particular nation-states. They are linguistic and cultural resources that traverse East Asia and its diasporas.

Since the modern period, however, the status of Sinographs and Literary Sinitic has changed dramatically across East Asia. Western-style academic disciplines, modern nation-states, standard-language policies, mass education, vernacularization, script reform, colonial experiences, and postcolonial nationalism all contributed to the repositioning of Sinographs and Literary Sinitic. In Korea, *hanja* and *hanmun* moved

increasingly toward the margins of school education under a *han'gŭl*-centered script policy. In China, the transition from Literary Sinitic to Vernacular Chinese, the simplification of characters, the promotion of *putonghua* 普通話, and the standardization of modern Chinese characters reshaped the field of character education. In Japan, *kanbun* has remained within the domain of classical education in the Japanese-language curriculum, even as its function has been reorganized in relation to modern curricula and university entrance examinations. In the Nanyang Chinese diaspora, Vernacular Chinese and the National Language Movement became means of overcoming dialectal fragmentation and constructing a new diasporic identity.

These transformations do not mean that Sinographs and Literary Sinitic disappeared. Rather, they were rearranged in new ways within language policies, educational systems, textbooks, pedagogical methods, literacy debates, and cultural identities. It is precisely at this point that Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education must be reconsidered. Such education cannot be reduced to a binary debate over whether tradition should be preserved or whether it constitutes an unnecessary burden in modern schooling. It is connected to the broader question of how East Asian script cultures and knowledge systems have been reconfigured since the modern period, and how they should be taught and learned today.

This special issue, “Sinographic and Literary Sinitic Education in East Asia,” has been organized with these questions in mind. The phrase “Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education” is used here in a broad sense. It does not refer only to the memorization of individual characters or the reading of classical texts. Rather, it encompasses Sinographs as a script system, Literary Sinitic or written Sinitic as a classical written language, modern language reform and standard-language education, Sino-xenic vocabulary education, textbook development, teaching and learning methods, assessment, and the formation of cultural identity through scripts and languages. Accordingly, while the special issue focuses primarily on Korea, China, and Japan, it also includes the diasporic development of Chinese linguistic reform in order to approach Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education in a broader framework. In discussing Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education, it is not sufficient to consider only the internal situation of a single country. Korea, China, and Japan have all used Sinographs and Literary Sinitic over long periods of time, and each has developed its own institutions and methods of education under different historical conditions. China, where Chinese characters are the principal writing system for modern Chinese, has accumulated extensive research and practical experience in the selection of educational characters, methods of character recognition, analysis of character structure, and digital learning materials. Japan has institutionalized *kanbun* within classical education in the Japanese-language curriculum and has maintained a distinctive form of *kanbun* education suited to a writing system in which *kanji* 漢字 and *kana* 仮名 coexist. Korea, under a *han'gŭl*-centered script policy, has continuously reconsidered the educational necessity and status of *hanja* and *hanmun*. These cases differ from one another, but precisely for that reason they are worth comparing.

Recent attempts in North America and Europe to develop new textbooks for Literary Sinitic also make such comparison necessary. When teaching Sinographs and Literary Sinitic to learners in Western contexts, it is essential to consider their linguistic backgrounds, learning habits, prior experience with grammar-based instruction, and degree of familiarity with East Asian classical culture. At the same time, it is equally important to examine and benchmark the educational experiences accumulated in the East Asian Sinographic sphere. For example, the Chinese method of teaching characters through their structural principles, known as “zili shizi fa” 字理識字法, may prove especially useful for Anglophone learners encountering Sinographs for the first time. Pedagogical approaches developed within East Asia can therefore provide important reference points for designing new models of Literary Sinitic education beyond East Asia.

The seven articles collected in this special issue address these concerns from different perspectives. The three articles on Korea examine, respectively, changes in the status of *hanja* and *hanmun*, the evolution of *hanja* education policy, and the characteristics of university-level *hanmun* textbooks in Korea. The China-related articles discuss methods of Chinese character education, the classification of modern Chinese characters, and the Vernacular Chinese and National Language movements in the Nanyang Chinese diaspora. The article on Japan surveys the direction of *kanbun* education and the current state of *kanbun* education research since 2010. Although these articles differ in region, method, and scope, they all show how Sinographs and Literary Sinitic acquire meaning and are reconfigured within educational institutions and social practices.

Heo Chul’s article, “A Study of the Mechanisms Behind the Changing Status of *Hanja* and *Hanmun* in Korean Society: An Epistemic and Power-Knowledge Perspective,” analyzes the changing status of *hanja* and *hanmun* in Korean society not simply as a shift in script use, but as part of a broader reorganization of knowledge and power. Drawing on Foucault’s concepts of episteme and power-knowledge, the article explains how *hanja* and *hanmun* functioned in premodern Korea as central media of canonical knowledge and elite authority, but were marginalized and reclassified in the modern period under Western-style academic systems, modern national schooling, and *han’gŭl*-centered script policies. Yet the article does not regard *hanja* and *hanmun* as having simply disappeared. Rather, they came to acquire new educational functions in relation to modern Korean vocabulary, traditional culture, classical textual access, and the understanding of East Asian knowledge systems. This article serves as a theoretical point of departure for the special issue as a whole by situating *hanja* and *hanmun* education within the larger framework of the selection and reclassification of knowledge.

Kim Young-ok’s article, “The Evolution of Hanja Education Policy in Response to Changes in Language and Script Policy in Korea since the Twentieth Century,” examines how changes in Korean language and script policy have shaped *hanja* education policy since the modern period. Taking the 1894 Royal Edict of King Kojong 高宗, the 1948 Act on the Exclusive Use of *han’gŭl*, and the 2005 Framework

Act on the National Language as major turning points, the article shows how *hanja* education underwent cycles of abolition, reduction, parallel use, reintroduction, and incorporation into the *hanmun* subject under a *han'gŭl*-centered script policy. The author also distinguishes *hanja* from *hanmun*, emphasizing that *hanja* concerns script-level notation and vocabulary comprehension, whereas *hanmun* concerns the education of classical written texts at the sentence and discourse level. By tracing the institutional path of Hanja education in Korea, this article clarifies the policy conditions under which Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education has been shaped.

Kim Soeun and Kim Seyeon's article, "A Study of Literary Sinitic Textbooks in Korean Universities: Concepts and Scope, Pedagogical Approaches, and Selected Texts" examines major *hanmun* textbooks used in Korean universities since the twentieth century. With the practical aim of developing Korean *hanmun* textbooks for Anglophone learners, the article analyzes how existing textbooks have defined *hanmun* and *hanmun* literature, what pedagogical methods they have employed, and what kinds of works they have included. The authors identify grammar explanations, diagrammatic methods, punctuation exercises, translation practice, and staged learning as important tools for teaching *hanmun* to modern learners. They also suggest that future textbooks for Anglophone learners should include clear grammatical explanations, interactive exercises, Korean *hanmun* materials, and a more diverse range of texts. Among the Korea-related articles, this contribution most directly addresses textbooks and pedagogy, thereby highlighting the practical orientation of the special issue.

Wonseok Yang's article, "Characteristics and Implications of Chinese Character Education in China," examines the methods and institutional features of Chinese character education in China. Because Chinese characters are used in China as the script of the native language, research and practice in character education have been accumulated in a highly systematic manner. The article analyzes the "Basic character list for literacy and writing instruction" 識字寫字教學基本字表 and the "Commonly used character list for the Chinese language curriculum in compulsory education" 義務教育語文課程常用字表, explaining how the 300-character basic list and the 3,500-character commonly used list function as national standards for determining the scope and sequence of character learning in compulsory education. It also introduces a range of character-recognition methods developed in China, including the concentrated, distributed, phonetic-notation-based, component-based, character-principle-based, and root-character-based methods. Although Chinese approaches cannot be transferred directly to Korea, the article demonstrates that they offer important insights into sequencing, structural analysis, level-based instruction, and digital resources for Hanja and Sinograph education.

Levente Li's article, "Reconstructing the Classification System of Modern Chinese Characters: A Pedagogically Oriented Approach," reconsiders the classification of modern Chinese characters from a pedagogical perspective. The author argues that the traditional *liushu* 六書 theory is useful for explaining the historical formation and etymological origins of ancient characters, but has limitations when applied to the

analysis and teaching of present forms of modern Chinese characters. The article therefore proposes a revised fivefold classification of modern characters into pictographic, indicative, associative, phono-semantic, and symbolic characters, together with a tripartite model of semantic, phonetic, and symbolic components. The category of symbolic characters is introduced to account for characters whose present forms no longer display stable relationships among components, meaning, and pronunciation. This article shows that character education is not simply a matter of selecting and memorizing a certain number of characters, but is also connected to the philological and pedagogical question of how the structures of modern character forms should be explained.

Lok-yin Law's article, "Remaking the Tongue: Linguistic Standardization and Chinese Identity in the Post-May Fourth Nanyang Diaspora," examines how Vernacular Chinese and the National Language Movement after May Fourth were received and localized in the Chinese communities of Malaya and Singapore. By distinguishing *baihua* 白話, *guoyu* 國語, and *huayu* 華語, the article shows that linguistic standardization in the Nanyang Chinese diaspora was not merely a matter of stylistic reform or educational policy, but also a tool for diasporic identity formation and social integration. Newspapers and periodicals served as media vanguards in the spread of vernacular Chinese, while formal schools, night schools, tutorial classes, and clan or community organizations helped create a new Chinese identity that crossed dialectal boundaries through *guoyu* and *huayu* education. This article expands the scope of the special issue beyond Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education in the narrow sense to include modern Chinese language reform, linguistic standardization, and diasporic education.

Song Ho-bin's article, "Direction of Classical Chinese Education in Japan since 2010 and the Current Status of Classical Chinese Education Research," surveys recent developments in Japanese *kanbun* education and *kanbun* education research. The author examines the implementation of the "Shin jōyō kanji" 新常用漢字 in 2010, the revised national curriculum guidelines of 2017–2018, high-school *kanbun* education, *kanbun* in university entrance examinations, and research articles and classroom practices published in specialized journals on *kanji* and *kanbun* education. In Japan, *kanbun* is not taught as an independent subject, but as part of classical education within the Japanese-language curriculum. The scope of classical education includes not only Chinese *kanbun*, but also Japanese *kanbun* and Literary Sinitic texts and Sinitic poetry written in and after the modern period. At the same time, traditional reading practices such as *ondoku* 音讀, *kundoku* 訓讀, and *kakikudashibun* 書き下し文 are maintained while new methods such as active learning, media use, integration with modern Japanese, and continuity across elementary, middle, high school, and university education are being explored. This article shows that Japan provides an important comparative reference point for rethinking *hanmun* education in Korea.

Taken together, these seven articles become more meaningful when read in relation to one another. The Korea-related articles show how *hanja* and *hanmun* were repositioned under modern knowledge systems and policy conditions. The China-

related articles show how educational character lists, structural analysis, character-recognition methods, and linguistic standardization have been discussed in a society where Chinese characters function as the native script. The article on the Nanyang Chinese diaspora reveals how Chinese linguistic reform became a means of constructing new forms of identity beyond the mainland. The article on Japan presents another model in which *kanbun* has been institutionalized as part of classical education within the national-language curriculum.

These studies demonstrate that the field of Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education in East Asia cannot be explained as a single unified system. In Korea, *hanja* and *hanmun* education is linked to *han'gŭl* exclusivity, literacy, Sino-Korean vocabulary, traditional culture, and the institutional status of the *hanmun* subject. In China, character education is directly tied to the modern Chinese writing system, with character structure and recognition methods at its core. In Japan, *kanbun* education is situated within the framework of national-language and classical education, alongside Japanese classical prose. In the Nanyang Chinese diaspora, Vernacular Chinese, *guoyu*, and *huayu* education served to integrate dialect communities and shape diasporic identity. Even within the Sinographic sphere, the meaning of Sinographs and Literary Sinitic differs according to historical conditions, writing practices, educational institutions, and political contexts.

Yet these cases also share important common ground. They all show that Sinographs and Literary Sinitic are not merely scripts or classical languages, but media connecting knowledge and authority, literacy and education, tradition and modernity, region and world, nation and diaspora. Sinographs and Literary Sinitic are tools for understanding East Asia's past, but they are also resources for understanding the linguistic culture and educational realities of modern East Asia. Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education, therefore, should not be understood as a nostalgic attempt to restore traditional education. It is a contemporary task of reinterpreting and teaching script culture and knowledge traditions under present social and educational conditions.

Of course, this special issue cannot claim to cover all aspects of Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education in East Asia. Because the topic is broad, many areas could not be treated in greater detail. Curriculum design, teaching and learning methods, textbook analysis, assessment, digital resources, the development of Literary Sinitic textbooks for Anglophone learners, criteria for selecting educational characters in East Asian countries, assessment of Literary Sinitic reading ability, and Chinese-language education in diasporic communities are all important topics that could each form the basis of a separate special issue.

Nevertheless, this special issue seeks to provide a forum for further discussion. Rather than treating *hanja* and *hanmun* as merely internal problems of Korean education, it attempts to situate Sinographs and Literary Sinitic within the broader contexts of East Asian and diasporic script culture, language policy, classical education, textbook development, learning methods, and identity formation. I hope that more specific and in-depth studies will follow under this broader theme. In particular, comparative work on the educational experiences of East Asian countries, and the

critical and selective adaptation of their pedagogical achievements to contemporary *hanja* and *hanmun* education in Korea as well as to Literary Sinitic education for Anglophone learners, will be especially valuable.

Sinographs and Literary Sinitic are traces of the past, but they are also living pathways of knowledge. They are scripts through which East Asia's past can be read, keys to the deeper layers of modern East Asian languages, and media through which different regional cultures can be compared and connected. I hope that this special issue will provide an opportunity to rethink the necessity and possibilities of Sinographic and Literary Sinitic education.