

Chapter 4

Senzaimaru's Maiden Voyage to Shanghai in 1862: Brush Conversation between Japanese Travelers and People They Encountered in Qing China

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Abstract

The year 1862 marked the maiden voyage by 51 Japanese passengers to Shanghai after Chinese-Japanese official contact was suspended for over 220 years. After that two-month visit, some of the samurais wrote up their insightful observations and detailed recollections in the form of travelogues or diary accounts. A total of 17 texts were produced. Among the rich details gauged through their lens was a rich variety of anecdotes involving brush-talking—using brush, ink and paper—when they were engaged in communication with Chinese street vendors and shopkeepers, but also acquaintances and friends they made. Verbatim records supplemented with recollection of the words improvised during brushed encounters afford us a glimpse into patterned writing-mediated communication between Chinese and Japanese people interactively face-to-face, despite the absence of a shared spoken language. This seems unparalleled in other ancient cultures, thanks to phonetic inter-subjectivity of written Chinese, a morphographic, non-alphabetic script. Meaning is conveyed morphographically without either side having to know or ask: ‘How do you say this in your language?’ The Senzaimaru travelers’ collective experiences suggest that brush-talk was a viable modality of transcultural, cross-border communication between Chinese and Japanese literati of Classical Chinese (*wenyan* 文言) or Literary Sinitic in early modern East Asia.

Keywords: Brush-talk, brush conversation, Literary Sinitic, scripta franca, phonetic inter-subjectivity, Sino-Japanese relations

Few Japanese learned to speak Chinese, but many travelers could read *Kanbun* (Literary Chinese), for centuries the *lingua franca* among all educated men and women in East Asia. This alone enabled a level of communication with the Chinese, particularly intellectuals and officials, that few Westerners ever attained. Even a Japanese visitor to China who knew little or effectively no Literary Chinese could still make some sense of the great majority of sights observed because of the proximity of meaning between the Chinese characters seen and their usually equivalent meaning in Japanese. For those who knew Literary Chinese well enough to communicate in it, communication took place through the medium of the ‘brush conversation’ in which the participants wrote in Literary Chinese on a piece of paper passed between them,

just as they had for centuries. Their instinctive closeness was often referred to as *Kanji bunka*, the shared ‘culture of Chinese characters’. (Joshua A. Fogel 1995: 80, slightly modified)

The greatest advantage of the Chinese script ... is that it enabled literate people in premodern East Asia to communicate directly in the absence of a common spoken language. Chinese-style writing was the East Asian lingua franca, or we should rather say scripta franca, because unlike elites who wrote and conversed in Latin in medieval and early modern Europe, Chinese-style writing was written language, a grapholect. When reading a Chinese text, Koreans, Japanese, and Vietnamese would voice them in their own vernaculars. (Wiebke Denecke 2014: 209)

Introduction

1862 was an auspicious year in the history of Sino-Japanese relations (Fogel 2014). After imposing restrictions on travel and trade – inbound as well as outbound – for over 200 years, the Tokugawa government dispatched a ship to Qing China with the express purpose of getting firsthand information about the Middle Kingdom, which for centuries was admired and looked upon as a source of inspiration by people on the Japanese archipelago. In the face of external pressure demanding the opening of ports to facilitate trade and commerce, plus disturbing rumors that the Qing government had suffered a humiliating defeat in the hands of the British in the First Opium War (1839–1842), followed by the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1865) that preoccupied the Qing army for over a decade, the Tokugawa government desperately needed to weigh various options when dealing with Western powers whose demands were backed by ghastly gunboats and horrific firepower. There was thus an urgent need to find out what policy lines China adopted when dealing with Western aggression, how effective they were, with what particular outcomes as a result of those policy decisions. Above all, to avoid the unenviable fate of what befell Qing China, a good understanding of various sociopolitical institutions that had or had not worked well was a must. That was the background against which the *Senzaimaru* 千歳丸, acquired from the British, purpose-refitted and manned by a European crew of 16 headed by a British captain, set sail to Shanghai on 2 June 1862. On board were fifty-one Japanese passengers who were carefully selected by the Tokugawa government, including eight samurais and their 13 servants, six officials and six merchants from Nagasaki, four interpreters of Chinese and two interpreters of Dutch, two doctors, six cooks and four sailors (Nōtomi 1862/1997: 24). Some were tasked with specific duties. For instance, the ‘secret itinerary’ of Godai Saisuke 五代才助 (1836–1885), was to chart shipping routes from Satsuma to Shanghai and to observe trading activities and conditions (Fogel 1995: 85).

As a historical event, the ‘maiden voyage’ (Fogel 2014) of *Senzaimaru* to Shanghai has been the object of study in a number of book-length treatises (e.g., Feng 2001/2017; Fogel 2014) and several journal articles and book chapters (Feng 1999, 2000; Fogel 1995, 2002, 2008; Sheng 2016). From the point of view of documentation, researchers of the *Senzaimaru* voyage are blessed with elaborate records of the Japanese travelers’ personal experiences, keen observations, and reflective insights they gained during their two-month venture in the most modern metropolis of the time in East Asia. Altogether a total of 17 texts were produced: 16 travelogues or diary accounts by the samurais, plus one by a merchant from Nagasaki, including verbatim records of brush-talk artifacts. Two extended series of brushed encounters were compiled: ‘No cause brush-talk’ (*Botsubi hitsugo* 沒鼻筆語) by Hibino Teruhiro 日比

野輝寬 (1838–1912), and ‘Brush-talk’ (*Hitsudan* 筆談) by Takasugi Shinsaku 高杉晋作 (1839–1867). Such records suggest that from the outset, artifacts produced through brush-talking were consciously collected for record keeping and subsequent dissemination through publication. Written essentially in *kanji*, a form of Literary Sinitic comprehensible to literati speaking different languages elsewhere in Sinographic East Asia (Kornicki 2018; Handel 2019; cf. Clements 2019), these written outputs provide elaborate details on the socio-political and econo-cultural realities of Qing China, which were shocking and thought-provoking in many ways. The Japanese travelers did not just rely on their eyes; much of the information and detailed descriptions pertaining to people, sociopolitical institutions, rituals and customs, livelihood of the locals, and social practices (ways of doing and seeing things) were gathered by communicating with the people they met, mainly Chinese but also some westerners. But how? From the language profile of the Japanese travelers, few except four interpreters had any working knowledge of spoken Chinese, not to mention varieties of the Wu topolect 吳語 widely spoken in and around Shanghai. In a similar vein, with few exceptions (a few merchants whose cross-border trading activities had taken them to Nagasaki on short-term stays) the Chinese people they met spoke hardly any Japanese. Bilingualism being uncommon, how did Chinese and Japanese communicate? Not having a shared spoken language was indeed an inconvenience, but it did little to prevent both sides from making meaning, synchronously and interactively face-to-face.

Morphographic script: Phonetic inter-subjectivity of written Chinese

Whatever the writing system, phonographic or otherwise, the graphic units in writing are mediated by speech (DeFrancis 1984, 1989). On the other hand, in many parts of the world, the language used for writing may diverge lexico-grammatically from the language in speech considerably. There are many communities where the local vernaculars are used alongside a divergent, highly codified and superposed written language associated with a strong cultural heritage and prestige (i.e., ‘diglossia’, Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1967; Snow 2010, 2013). In effect, in a diglossic community, a standardized, high (H) variety is used in writing while a colloquial, low (L) variety is used for communication in speech. Classical examples of such communities include different parts of medieval Europe, where the H variety Latin was used for formal writing purposes while the local vernaculars diverged lexico-grammatically from Latin considerably. A contemporary parallel may be found in different parts of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In German-speaking Switzerland, for instance, Standard German (H) is reserved for formal functions (e.g., education, printed media, news broadcast) while a colloquial (L) variety of Swiss German is used for informal communication purposes (compare also the functional division of labor between Classical Arabic and regional colloquial varieties of Arabic in the Middle East).

China is another frequently cited classical example of diglossia. Until the 1910s, before the vernacularization or ‘plain language’ movement caught on in early republican China, for over a thousand years Literary Sinitic or Classical Chinese (*wenyan* 文言) had been used for all formal communication purposes from imperial decrees to commercial agreements (Handel 2019). Since the Sui dynasty (581–618 CE), familiarity with a prescribed body of Classical Chinese canons was also a *sine qua non* for gaining access to officialdom via the civil service examination system (*kējǔ* 科舉), which was implemented for well over a millennium before being abolished in 1905 (Elman 2014). With its highly condensed lexico-grammar that deviates from the regional vernaculars of practically all Han Chinese speakers, Classical Chinese was taught and learned through reading aloud in the local topolect. This is why whatever the topolect of the literati, they were able to pronounce individual graphic units—Chinese characters or sinograms—according to local pronunciation norms, even though in

speech, a completely different set of lexico-grammatical and stylistic norms were followed. Unlike speakers of alphabetic languages like Classical Greek and Classical Latin, whose word pronunciation is guided by more or less systematic correspondence between the phonetic values of discrete letters and their combinations resulting in regional accents or dialects of the same language, the phonetic value of non-alphabetic sinograms varies inter-subjectively, subject to the preferred pronunciation of speakers of different regional topolects, which may not be mutually intelligible.

What happened when Classical Chinese texts were disseminated and learned in Korean- and Japanese-speaking communities, whose languages are typologically very different from Chinese? For instance, Chinese sinograms are essentially morpho-syllabic, have little morphology and follow a verb-medial normative word order (SVO); by contrast, Japanese and Korean are morphologically agglutinating and verb-final (SOV). Prior to the emergence of their scripts for writing their respective national languages, since the seventh century, Classical Chinese texts had been devoured—acquired through Chinese primers and imitated in their use—through complex reading and writing processes of *kundoku* (訓讀, Kor: *hundok*; Mand: *xùndú*, Lurie 2011) and *idu* 吏讀, the latter being ‘a method of writing that was widely employed in [Korean] official documents, memoranda, and textual annotations up until the early twentieth century’ (Lurie 2011: 202). In terms of linguistic resources, Handel (2019: 110–111) regards *idu* as ‘a highly stylized form of written Korean employing a large amount of Sino-Korean vocabulary’ and, as such, it may be seen as ‘a natural extension of the glossing of Literary Sinitic texts’ (cf. ‘cleric writing’, Taylor & Taylor 2014). There is some evidence that reading and writing practices of *kundoku* were spread from the Korean peninsula to the Japanese archipelago¹ via Korean scribes employed by their Japanese hosts from as early as the fifth or sixth century (Lurie 2011; cf. Handel 2019).

Like their Han Chinese counterparts, when reading aloud, Korean and Japanese literati would assign their local vernacular pronunciation to individual sinograms, while adjusting the syntax and word order to make them conform to the grammatical norms of their own language (Clements 2015). As a result of very similar literacy training processes and practices, the same sinograms—be they monosyllabic or polysyllabic words—would take on rather different phonetic values when used (i.e., pronounced in their own language) by literati from different parts of Sinographic East Asia (Denecke 2014; see Table 4.1 for illustrations). <Insert Table 4.1 here>

Table 4.1. Some examples of sinograms in Literary Sinitic pronounced in Chinese, Korean and Japanese

Sinograms	Meaning (English)	Chinese (e.g., Mandarin)	Korean	Japanese
孔子	Confucius	<i>kǒngzǐ</i>	<i>kongja</i>	<i>kōshi</i>
學生	pupil, student	<i>xuéshēng</i>	<i>haksaeng</i>	<i>gakusei</i>
中國	China	<i>zhōngguó</i>	<i>chung-guk</i>	<i>chūgoku</i>
筆談	brush-talk	<i>bǐtán</i>	<i>p’iltam</i>	<i>hitsudan</i>

While engaged in transcultural, cross-border communication, such literati would each be guided by the pronunciation of their respective languages when invoking specific sinograms, which have a good chance of being intelligible if they were selected from a shared inventory

¹ Including the kingdom of Ryukyu, see Wong, this volume.

of literary canons, thanks to the divergent phonetic incarnations of written Chinese, a non-alphabetic script. In short, this is how, despite a lack of a shared spoken language, for hundreds of years educated literati of Literary Chinese were able to make themselves understood in cross-border communication through brush-talk, without knowing or having to ask how the sinograms they improvised were actually pronounced in their fellow brush-talkers' own language (Kornicki 2018). We will characterize this feature as 'phonetic inter-subjectivity', which is a crucial writing condition for the use and spread of Classical Chinese or Sinitic as a written lingua franca or 'scripta franca' (Denecke 2014: 209; cf. Clements 2017, 2019).

Use of Sinitic as a scripta franca: Brush conversation in Sino-Japanese encounters

Some of the instances of Sinitic brush-talk involved transactional communication, of which the most commonly cited contexts are buying and selling, and requesting factual information, but there were also interactional 'chats' from inquiries and responses to deep intellectual exchange of views on matters of shared literary or sociopolitical interest. The latter was clearly possible only after rapport had been built and friendship cemented in previous encounters.

To illustrate the scripta franca function of Sinitic (Li, Aoyama & Wong 2020), let us begin with one instructive example of brush conversation showing how a Senzaimaru traveler was pleasantly surprised by the communicative potential of his improvisation in writing when buying ink from a proprietor-seller in Shanghai, as noted in his diary account (Hibino 1862b/1997: 65).²

Brush conversation ³	Idiomatic translation
HT: 此墨價若干	'This ink costs how much?'
P-S: 一元	'One yuan'

² An idiomatic translation of this brush conversation episode in English may be found in Fogel (1995: 81, quoted with slight modification): "When I would go to a market, I could not communicate orally there. Replacing the tongue with the brush, though, enabled rapid communication. (...) If I wrote [in *kanbun*], 'How much is this ink?' [the proprietor-seller] might respond, 'One yuan'. If I wrote, 'You're overcharging me', he might respond, 'That's the genuine, true price' or 'That's the real price, none other'. Suppose I wrote, 'I don't like the color of the ink, and it has no aroma. I think it was produced recently'. He might respond, 'All of these goods are aged, and the aroma is within'." (Source: Hibino Teruhiro (1862b/1997), 贅尤録 ['Boredom Notes'] (entry for 5/10), in *Bunkyū ninen Shanhai nikki*, p. 65.)

³ As mentioned, in principle a sinogram is pronounceable in any Chinese or Japanese topolect. This is further complicated by the fact that a sinogram may have multiple reading pronunciations depending on the historical periods when the words they were associated with were imported into Japan, not to mention regional and individual variations of reading preferences or practices. There is no way for us to tell how the sinograms were actually pronounced or heard by individual brush-talkers. For this reason, no attempt will be made to transcribe sinogram-based brush-talk content into Chinese (e.g., Shanghainese or Mandarin) or Japanese (e.g., *on* reading vs. *kun* reading). What is important is to bear in mind that successful meaning-making in transcultural communication through brush-talking was warranted by literacy of writing-mediated sinograms rather than their pronunciation. Put differently, mutual intelligibility would have been blocked if the sinograms were uttered in speech due to phonetic inter-subjectivity. For example, 此墨 ('this ink') in Hibino's first question was instantly understood by the Chinese proprietor-seller despite tremendous diversity in their respective pronunciations: *shi boku* (Jap: *on* reading), *kono sumi* (Jap: *kun* reading), *cǐ mò* (Mandarin Chinese), *cí³⁵ mak²²* (Cantonese), not to mention many other dialectal variations in China. In the rest of the brush-talk examples, the pronunciation of specific sinograms will only be provided if deemed relevant and important.

HT: 虛價	‘Not the real price’
P-S: 真正實價 / 實價不二	‘That’s the genuine, true price’ / ‘That’s the real price, none other’
HT: 墨色不好，且不香，想近製	‘Ink color not good, not fragrant either, I think it was made only recently’
P-S: 都是陳貨，香在內	‘All aged products, aroma inside’

HT: Hibino Teruhiro (日比野輝寬); P-S: Proprietor-seller in Shanghai

At this point, Hibino urged the proprietor-seller to offer a more favorable price, but gave no indication how that speech act of bargaining was expressed in sinograms. That brush-talk episode ended with two sinograms written by the proprietor-seller: 遵命, which was understood inter-subjectively to mean ‘As [you] wish’.

Likewise, having discovered the communicative potential of brush conversation when communicating with Chinese where no interpreting was needed, Takasugi was overcome with joy (Fogel 1995: 91). A similar exhilarating discovery was reported in the diary account of Nakura Anato 名倉予何人 (1822–1901): ‘Travel observations in China’ 支那見聞錄. Encouraged by a shared written language, he initiated to express himself in writing, only to be pleasantly surprised that the sinograms he brushed on paper managed to get his meanings across more or less successfully, as evidenced by the meaningful responses he received from fellow Chinese brush-talkers. What is more, he noted that the same sinograms, if articulated in speech, would sound very strange and funny:

和漢ノ字義同フテ音訓殊ニ言語不通深クアヤシムモノアリ或ハ余ニ請フテ筆語ノ文字ヲ讀マレム余シ乃チ邦讀從テ朗カニ讀起セバ且ツ怪シミ且ツ笑テ掌ヲ撫スルモノアリ(名倉予何人 Nakura Anato 1862/1997: 208)

‘Sinograms in Japanese and Chinese are identical [but] are pronounced very differently, hence not mutually intelligible in speech, something that [we] found very strange. Sometimes I invited my counterpart to engage in brush conversation, and requested that the sinograms be read out loud in Chinese [before] I pronounced the same sinograms in Japanese. As we each read [them] out loud, we were both struck by how strange the other side’s reading sounded, which was marvelous and gave us a good laugh.’⁴

That awareness later led Nakura to conduct brush conversation with refugees he came across near the Qing-Taiping battlefield. Many refugees reportedly wanted to ‘talk’ to him using brush, ink and paper, but it was not always possible partly due to literacy problems (Fogel 1995: 89). While the intended meaning of whatever transpired on paper might be missed and that miscommunication could not be avoided, Nakura’s above observation provides strong evidence that in Chinese-Japanese cross-border communication, each side’s speech sounded strange or hilarious to the other, and was therefore not an option for interactional meaning-making. This is in stark contrast with the communicative potential of a body of shared but phonetically inter-subjective written sinograms in their respective linguistic repertoire. Indeed, in response to a Qing Chinese official, Zhejiang Inspector Fang Yaoqing 浙江巡察 方瑤卿, who expressed regret for not being able to engage in deep talk owing to a lack of a shared

⁴ Our translation; compare Chinese translation by Feng (2001/2017: 198): ‘和漢字同，音訓殊，言語不通，深以爲怪。有時我請對方筆語，又請對方將漢字讀出，我用邦讀。彼此朗朗讀出，互相以爲怪異，都撫掌而笑。’

spoken language, Hibino (1862a/1997: 141) remarked that the brush is a good-enough substitute:

Brush conversation	Idiomatic translation
FYQ: 接閱來字，可謂一見如故。如不相棄，客日定當面領教言也。惜乎，言語兩不會意。	‘Your message was well received, as if we were old friends in our first encounter. If our friendship is not relinquished, I would definitely receive good teaching from your Good Self someday. Regrettably, our respective spoken languages would not be able to get across our meanings.’
HT: 筆端有舌，何待言語。	‘At the tip of the brush is a tongue, what to expect from speech?’

FYQ: Fang Yaoqing (方瑤卿); HT: Hibino Teruhiro (日比野輝寬)

A total of 17 diary accounts were produced by Senzaimaru passengers (Takasugi contributed five). In their portrayal of communication with Qing Chinese people they encountered, brush-talk was the most frequently mentioned modality of communication, which was made possible by the fact that Chinese and Japanese shared the same written language, and that face-to-face interaction between them could take place through writing. This point is nicely captured by one instructive observation of Nōtomi Kaijirō 納富介次郎 (1844–1918) in his diary account:

皇邦ハ諸外夷ト異二聖教ヲ崇ビ文字明ラカナリト聞イテ、樂ミテ我輩ヲ来リ訪ヒ、詩画筆語等ニテ自ラ親シクナリ(納富介次郎 Nōtomi 1862/1997: 20)

‘They [the Chinese] heard that unlike westerners, people from the Japanese kingdom respected and followed the teaching of the sages, and both sides could communicate using the same written words, so many people would take pleasure in visiting [us], indulging in an outpouring of [our] inner feelings through exchange of poetic verses in our brush conversation.’⁵

Regarding the salience of Sinitic brush-talk as a viable lingua-cultural practice in the history of Chinese-Japanese cross-border communication, Feng (2001/2017: 198–201) points out that extensive brush-talk records were produced by the celebrated Ming Chinese scholar Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 (1600–1682) during his visits to Nagasaki.⁶ Being highly respected by his hosts, including many daimyōs 大名,⁷ Zhu was able to give lectures on Chinese classics and responded to their questions, interactively and apparently seamlessly using brush, ink and paper. Plenty of evidence of such a prolific mode of communication, often exuding deep intellectual exchange, may be found in the contextualized examples of brush-talk plus personal notes that were edited and published in ‘Posthumous notes of Zhu Shunshui’ (舜水遺書, cf. ‘Collected works of Zhu Shunshui’ 朱舜水集, edited by Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 1981; extensive records of brush conversation may be found on pp. 381–424. For more details, see Li 2020).

For brush-talk to take place more or less effectively, however, the brush-talkers must be able to read and write hundreds if not thousands of sinograms. While the majority of sinograms

⁵ Our translation; compare translation into Chinese by Feng (2001/2017: 195): ‘他們聽說皇邦與諸洋人不同，崇聖教，彼此文字相通，故有不少人樂於來訪，詩話筆語，交流感情。’

⁶ Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 visited Nagasaki six times for short periods in 1645, 1647, 1652, 1653, 1654, and 1658, before staying there for almost seven years from 1659–1665. In the next seventeen years until his death in 1682, Zhu was invited to serve as a guest teacher 賓師 of the daimyō of the Mito domain 水戸 and an advisor to Tokugawa Mitsukuni 德川光圀 (1628–1701).

⁷ For example, Tokugawa Mitsukuni 德川光圀 (1628–1701), Andō Morinari 安東守約 (1622–1701), Asaka Kaku 安積覺 (1656–1738) and Oyake Seijun 小宅生順 (1638–1674).

are semantically stable and intelligible in cross-border communication, given marked cultural differences in Qing China and Japan, it is not surprising that Senzaimaru visitors would encounter literacy problems occasionally. For instance, upon arrival in Shanghai and shortly after settling down, Hibino recalled being struck by the sinograms displayed in a shop sign, Kroes & Co. 點耶洋行, a Dutch company which was named after the Vice-Consul of the Dutch Consulate, Theodorus Kroes.⁸ Through brush-talk, Hibino was ‘told’ that the first two sinograms 點耶 was the name of the business, while 洋行 denoted a company whose lexical equivalent in modern Japanese was 商社 (Jap: *shōsha*; compare modern Mandarin Chinese: *shāng shè*).

In the diary accounts of some Senzaimaru travelers, the collecting of information through brush-talk was sometimes inconvenienced by the target respondents’ lack of literacy in Sinitic (e.g., refugees who wanted to ‘talk’ to Nakura Anato but could not). On one such occasion Hibino reported a wish to find out what the Taiping Rebellion leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864) was like as a person. Upon learning that a servant 從僕 of Jiangsu merchant Jia Chunling 賈春齡 had been captured by Taiping troops, and had seen Hong Xiuquan before escaping from Suzhou to Shanghai, Hibino requested brush-talking with that servant, only to give up upon learning that it would be impracticable. Coming from a socioeconomically underprivileged background, the servant simply did not have enough literacy in Sinitic to engage in brush conversation (Hibino 1862a/1997: 166):

	Brush conversation	Idiomatic translation
HT:	欲與從僕筆語，可乎？	‘I wanted to engage your servant in brush conversation, is that possible?’
JCL:	彼不知一丁字	‘He hardly knew any sinograms.’

HT: Hibino Teruhiro (日比野輝寬); JCL: Jia Chunling (賈春齡)

All this shows that brush-talk was premised on a sufficiently high level of literacy in Literary Sinitic, which was sometimes mixed with some vernacular elements.

In terms of topics, the diary accounts of brush-talk with Qing Chinese locals encountered cover a wide range. Below is a short list of those salient ones mentioned in two or more diary accounts by Senzaimaru travelers:

- military organization, leadership and training (how drills were conducted)
- how Shanghai’s defense against Taiping rebels was carried out by the British and French army
- adverse social impact of opium and why it was so popular among men and so difficult to curb
- refugees’ place of origin and livelihood
- religion, spread of Christianity, and missionaries’ curing and nursing activities in Qing China compared with strict prohibition of Christianity in Japan
- education system and schooling practice in Qing China
- values of antique Chinese books and paintings

Interestingly, some topics were apparently sociopolitically too sensitive for the brush-talk artifacts to be kept for record and had to be destroyed (Feng 2001/2017: 201). One instructive remark may be found in Takasugi’s diary account:

六月廿日訪陳汝欽，告別，筆話。此日予與陳汝欽談素志，不可記之事甚多，因不錄。

⁸ See <http://godaidon.com/2018/01/31/>.

‘On June 20, I visited Chen Ruqin to bid farewell through brush conversation. On this day Chen Ruqin and I spoke our minds candidly, and so plenty of topics in our brush-talk could not be kept, and so they were not retained.’ (Takasugi Shinsaku 1862/1916: 117)

Apart from diary accounts involving Qing Chinese brush-talkers, brush-talk was also conducted with American and British consulate personnel. For instance, in a diary account focusing on intelligence collected from foreigners (Takasugi 1862/1916), Takasugi mentioned one such ‘conversation’ he had with a few Chinese employees hired by the Dutch at the above-mentioned Kroes & Co. (Feng 2001/2017: 167). As he was about to get his brush and writing kit ready to inquire why Russia was such a formidable power, the brush conversation was abruptly called off due to some urgent matter relayed by a consulate staffer (Takasugi 1862/1916: 106). According to Takasugi, he and Godai Saisuke were engaged in a few other brush conversations in a publishing house *Mohai shuguan* 墨海書館; one of the brush-talkers was William Muirhead (adopted Chinese name Mu Weilian 慕維廉), an American priest well versed in Chinese and English working as an interpreter there.

Sociocultural significance of brush conversation as a modality of cross-border communication

The Senzaimaru diary accounts also contain ancillary evidence of brush-talk being a regular lingua-cultural activity of the Japanese adventurers during their visit. Before departing for Shanghai, paper was among various necessities loaded onto the Senzaimaru (e.g., ‘5,000 sheets of paper’ 形付紙 5000 枚, Matsudaya 松田屋伴吉 1862/1997: 48; cf. Feng 2001/2017: 60). Two months later, paper was among a list of items purchased by Japanese travelers shortly before setting sail for their homeward bound journey (Feng 2001/2017: 185). While we have no evidence what sort of purpose that amount of paper was used for (e.g., commodity versus personal use), it is conceivable that clean paper was needed for personal diary writing and other forms of record keeping. Whether or not the instrumental role of paper in sustaining a ‘brush conversation’ was discovered accidentally by the Japanese travelers after arriving in Shanghai, the paper purchased before their return trip might well serve to tidy up and consolidate the loose sheets and other artifacts arising from their brushed encounters in Shanghai.

One of the indispensable stationery items in the writing kit is an ink stone (硯, Jap: *suzuri*; Mand: *yàn*). Whereas brush, ink and paper are all consumables, an ink stone is more durable and may last a sufficiently long time for personal emotional attachment to develop. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when bidding farewell, an ink stone would be considered a meaningful gift for someone whose friendship was treasured and whom one would possibly never see again. This happened to Takasugi, who had developed deep intellectual communion with Chen Ruqin 陳汝欽 during his visit in Shanghai. To express his profound gratitude to Chen, he offered him his own personal Japanese-polished ink stone, which was accepted, if reluctantly (Takasugi 1862/1916: 117):

	Brush conversation	Idiomatic translation
TS:	固古硯一具呈於足下，是弟所常用之硯。石固疏，然是亦東洋之產，乃贈兄報知己之恩而已。	‘This old ink stone presented in front of your Esteemed Self, is an ink stone used by Younger Brother [my humble self]. The quality of the stone is admittedly not so good, yet given that it is a product of Japan, I would like to offer it to Elder Brother [you] as a token of your favorable recognition of me as a true friend.’
CRQ:	此物諒亦甚珍，賜送與弟恐不得其人也。然卻之，恐蹈不恭之誚。謹拜謝，登受。	‘This object must be extremely precious, not sure if Younger Brother [my humble self] is the right person to receive it as a gift. But to decline it would render me disrespectful. Hence I accept it with sincere gratitude.’

TS: Takasugi Shinsaku (高杉晋作); CRQ: Chen Ruqin (陳汝欽)

In addition to the sharing and exchange of views, Sinitic was also commonly used for literati to improvise aesthetically pleasing poetic verses, which was one affectively loaded genre that allowed for an outpouring of deep emotions and personal feelings triggered by the brush-talk context (see Liu, this volume). Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that in transcultural, cross-border communication, poetry, being a popular genre of choice among literati of Classical Chinese canons and literature in Sinographic East Asia, would be composed for a variety of purposes. As pointed out by Howland (1996: 48): ‘the quintessential practice of this common [brush-talking] discourse was poetry writing, the purpose of which was to concretize past and present in a self-perpetuating and universal Civilization’. Being terse and sublime, poetry allowed such literati to express deep emotions and personal sentiments, or make thoughtful connections with the interactional context at large such as signaling admiration and agreement of intellectual sharing made by the fellow brush-talker, spiritual communion by alluding to works or deeds of prominent literary figures, comparison with well-known historical events in the past, or simply appreciation of colorful aromatic flowers in the vicinity, and the like. Thus, given the emotional bonding with Chen Ruqin which evolved after several rounds of intellectually deep brush conversation, it is not surprising that Takasugi would offer to write him a poem—a hepta-syllabic quatrain⁹—among other things to register his mixed feelings while bidding farewell, knowing full well that their personal bond would likely be severed forever (Takasugi Shinsaku 1862/1916: 85):

臨敵練磨武與文	‘Keep up your martial arts and literary flair in the face of adversaries;
他年應有建功勳	You can expect to win recognition for your achievements and merits.
孤生千里歸鄉後	Upon my lonesome return to my hometown thousands of <i>li</i> away;
每遇患難又思君	My thoughts will be with you whenever my life is imperiled.’
	(Our translation)

In return, Chen requested Takasugi to offer him to autograph, as a souvenir, a calligraphic token of his newly adopted appellation 默生,¹⁰ which was purposely modeled on that of Chen (勉生). Then, beholding Takasugi’s calligraphy, Chen could not help remarking (Takasugi 1862/1916: 118):

書更妙，字亦以英氣建之。	‘Your writing looks even more ingenious, and the characters are permeated with charm and valor.’ (Our translation)
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All this attests to the sociocultural significance of brush conversation as a lingua-cultural practice as well as a viable means of cross-border communication between Chinese and Japanese literati of Literary Sinitic, synchronously and interactively face-to-face.

⁹ In Mandarin Chinese, 七言絕句 *qī yán jué jù*: verses made up of four seven-syllable lines.

¹⁰ According to Takasugi Shinsaku, the appellation 默生 was inspired by a philosophical treatise of the celebrated Ming Confucianist Wang Yangming 王陽明 (Feng 2001/2017: 214).

Coda

The Senzaimaru expedition to Shanghai in 1862 gave the Japanese travelers firsthand information about the Qing Empire. The seventeen eye-witness diary accounts contain rich details of the sorry state of Qing China some two decades after her humiliating defeat by British ‘red-haired barbarians’ armed with lethal gunboats and formidable weaponry. Among the eyesores was the dire state of sanitation in the densely populated areas, where clean water was hard to come by largely because untreated sewage including human feces were disposed directly into the river and the sea. One consequence of such appalling sanitary conditions was that three of the fifty-one Japanese travelers died in Shanghai after contracting a disease. Such observations and experiences as reported by Senzaimaru adventurers had a huge and lasting impact among intellectuals in Japan. Thenceforth, the Middle Kingdom ceased to be a role model to emulate. Above all, the centuries-old Tokugawan diplomacy of strictly controlling foreign trade and residents gave way to a more enlightened open-door policy and learning from the West (Toby 1984; Arano, Ishii & Murai 2012). There was near consensus, especially among the lower social strata of samurais, that such a strategic re-orientation was absolutely necessary and urgently needed if Japan were to avoid being caught in a quagmire like what her once venerable neighbor across the Sea of Japan had to put up with.

In the Senzaimaru travelogues, eye-witness accounts and commentaries are complemented with plenty of information gathered from locals they met in the heart and periphery of China’s most modern metropolis Shanghai, not only commoners and people doing business in the street, but also a few Qing government officials and Westerners. A lack of a shared spoken language made it difficult for Chinese-Japanese encounters and interactive meaning-making to take place in speech, and yet communication did not seem to be a big problem, thanks largely to the option of writing or composing sinograms in Literary Sinitic. Such an option appeared to be functioning well from day one of the Senzaimaru ventures in Shanghai (recall that Hibino Teruhiro found out through brush-talk what the four sinograms that made up the name of a shop near the lodging meant). By far brush conversation facilitated by the use of brush, ink and paper was the most popular modality of communication with locals, despite the presence of interpreters conversant in Chinese and Dutch.

Brush-talking between Chinese and Japanese literati was possible because Literary Sinitic that they shared was written with the same script, which was morphographic or non-alphabetic (Handel 2019; cf. Clements 2017, 2019; Denecke 2014; Kornicki 2018). As the hundreds or even thousands of sinograms were semantically more or less stable when invoked in Chinese-Japanese cross-border communication, a certain level of literacy in Literary Sinitic allowed them to make meaning directly and interactively in writing while a question in speech like “How do you say this in your language?” would be obviated. Such a sinogram-based, writing-mediated modality of cross-border communication, synchronously and interactively face-to-face, seemed to be script-specific and unparalleled in other phonographic languages written with an alphabetic script (cf. the ‘morphographic hypothesis’, Li 2020).

This brings to mind a remark by Masao Miyoshi 三好将夫 (1928–2009), how frustrating it was for the 1860 Japanese diplomatic mission to the United States to communicate in English (Fogel 1995: 94), a problem that Japanese travelers in China—like those visiting Shanghai on board the Senzaimaru in 1862—could mitigate or even get around by resorting to writing as a substitute modality for speech, thanks to the phonetic inter-subjectivity of a shared morphographic, non-alphabetic script. According to recollections of Japanese participants in

the 1860 mission to the US, those communication problems and frustrations they encountered when communicating with Americans in English were in stark contrast with their brush-talk experiences when interacting and exchanging views with the Chinese diasporas in the US as well as others they met during their return journey at trading ports like Batavia and Hong Kong. Like the Senzaimaru passengers' fruitful brush-talk experiences exemplified above, recollections of the literate participants in the 1860 Japanese mission to the US show that writing-mediated, sinogram-based improvisation using brush, ink, and paper allowed them to engage in 'silent conversation' with literate members of the Chinese diasporas effectively (see Aoyama 2020; also this volume).

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