

To what extent did Chinese characters affect Korean and Japanese?

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Abstract. The research question is that to what extent did Chinese characters affect Korean and Japanese. The specific aspects that will be discussed are the history of Chinese characters, Korean alphabet and Japanese writing system, the connections between Chinese, Korean, and Japanese languages, and the influences on the cultures and developments. There are some significant reasons to do such a project. Learning about the relationships among East Asian languages would make it easier to understand the special links between Asian countries and, therefore, find solutions for cultural conflicts. Also, it is related to my personal interests. The methodologies mainly used in this project were to search for previous papers and collect data from some official databases. This project is greatly related to historical aspects, so the research done by others was essential. Some data from reliable data sources were also required to list some figures to support my idea. From this project, it is shown that there were very close relationships among East Asian countries in both linguistic and cultural aspects. Chinese characters were the root of the languages in China, Korea, and Japan. Therefore, it is important to know about Chinese characters when learning Chinese, Korean, or Japanese.

Keywords: Chinese characters, East Asian languages, Korea, Japan

1. Introduction

Chinese is a very influential language. It is the official language of China, one of the official languages of Singapore, and one of the official six languages of the United Nations. Due to the growing economic and political status of China, now Chinese is widespread, and Western society also has a growing interest in it [1].

Chinese characters, which are the basis of modern Chinese, are influential in terms of historical aspects. The Chinese characters had spread to countries in Southeast Asia and Central Asia, which means that Korean and Japanese languages had also been affected a lot. Before the invention of Korean alphabet, which is the official language of Korea invented in 1446, the official language of ancient Korea was Chinese character. Kanji and kana, the components of the Japanese writing system, both originated from Chinese characters [2]. The Chinese characters have been used in various countries in different forms, but they were all from the same basis. Chinese characters have been a very influential alphabet system and have been affecting many Asian countries' lingual, cultural, and even economic development. It is very interesting to do research on such an important thing and to find its further effects.

The cultural development of the nation must be related to its language. The usage of language is closely related to interpersonal communication, which is one of the significant parts of forming a community. The same language learners are likely to gather and form their community [3]. Therefore, some of the Asian countries, which all have a close linguistic relationship with Chinese characters, are more likely to share a similar cultural feeling. These similarities have boosted these countries' similar cultural development to a certain extent. However, sometimes these similar but not the same relationships could be the point of argument. Also, as there have been many changes in Chinese characters while it was introduced into different countries, sometimes there are arguments on these differences. These linguistic arguments sometimes even lead to cultural conflicts. If there is more clear research on the linguistic development of these Asian countries, these linguistic arguments can be discussed in a more reasonable way and the conflicts between nations could also be reduced.

Next, this project is going to research about to what extent did Chinese characters affect Asian countries. This project is going to research the origin of the Chinese characters and how Asian languages deviated in the literature review, and this project is going to discuss the connection between Chinese language and other Asian languages and how these relationships could be seen in the Asian countries in the discussion.

2. Research review

People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea, and Japan are the three main countries in East Asia. Although there are various languages used in East Asian countries, their scripts are all related to Chinese characters, one of the oldest scripts all around the world.

2.1. History of Chinese characters

Chinese characters are logographs used to write Chinese languages and any other languages influenced by Chinese languages. It is an ancient alphabet system that originated in East Asia, which now is the region of China. It has developed since the Shang dynasty and experienced various changes throughout the passage of time.

2.1.1. Oracle bones inscriptions

According to historians, Chinese characters first appeared during the Shang Dynasty in the 13th century BC. These early Chinese characters were first developed in modern-day Anyang, Henan Province. The first forms of Chinese characters were known as oracle bone inscriptions. These inscriptions were usually carved on shoulder bones or tortoise shells. The oracle bone inscriptions contain the names of the last nine kings of the Shang dynasty [4], which can prove that this language was the official language of the Shang Dynasty. Oracle bones inscriptions were continuously used in the Zhou Dynasty too [5]. They are known as the earliest Sinitic languages [6], therefore have a very significant status in the historical study of linguistics.

Oracle bones inscriptions were the first type of Chinese characters. Their invention is a milestone of historical development in linguistics. They were the prototype of later Chinese characters.

2.1.2. Small seal script

Throughout the passage of time, Chinese characters developed into the next stage. In 221 BC, the Qin Dynasty was formed after an era full of war. Chinese characters and other units of measurement were diverse when Qin was just built. The script used before the Qin dynasty was called "large seal script", which was diverse in different areas [7]. To unify the languages and other standards, Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor in the Qin dynasty and Chinese history, created a systematic standardization, including language. Therefore, the only official script in the Qin dynasty was small seal script [8]. This development was meaningful in both Chinese history and the development of Chinese characters, as it was the first time that unification on all aspects was achieved in China and only one type of Chinese characters was officially promoted. Although the Qin dynasty only existed for less than two decades, its role in unification is still very significant.

The small seal script is usually rectangular in shape and is usually written with a curved brush. Its structure is mostly symmetrical and is therefore known for showing the beauty of balance [7]. However, its structure and writing were complicated, which caused innovations in later dynasties.

2.1.3. Clerical script

According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, a Chinese dictionary used in the Eastern Han dynasty, Qin Shi Huang not only promoted the small seal script but also another type of character called "clerical script". Its writing is not as complicated as the small seal script, and some historians believe that the invention of the clerical script was aiming to record things in a less complex way. However, there is also an argument that clerical script was developed naturally from small seal script among the public as it must be easier to write for most poor people who have little access to a higher quality of education [9].

In the Qin dynasty, although the clerical script had appeared, as the official language was the small seal script, only people with low social status would use clerical script. However, over time, clerical script matured and stabilized in the Han dynasty and became the main script [9]. During the development of the script in the Han dynasty, the clerical script gained some unique visual features. The characters became wider than the previous one, the ends of the strokes with heavy feet falling right were moderately upturned, and the horizontal strokes were sometimes thick and drooping at the end, and upturned at the end as well [9]. These features can be used to classify which period the clerical scripts were developed. Clerical scripts with features listed above were defined as clerical scripts developed since the Han dynasty, while those that did not have such features were defined as those developed since the Qin dynasty. Han script was the basis of most of the later clerical-style calligraphy.

One of the resources for research on Han script is the later Han stone inscription. These inscriptions were written in Han script and some of them were preserved well, which could help in the study of scripts. These inscriptions were made for various reasons, such as funerals and agreements [10]. According to these stone inscriptions, the structure, visual features, meaning, and other information about Han script and clerical script could be found.

2.1.4. Regular script

In the Eastern Han dynasty, a new type of clerical script called "regular script" arose. This script abandoned the heavy tails in Han script, so it was more convenient to read and write. Regular script became popular in the Six Dynasties period, and in the Northern and Southern dynasties, it matured and replaced clerical script [9].

Regular script flourished since the Tang dynasty. The early Tang's Four Great Calligraphers increased the popularity of regular script, and consequently, it became very popular. During the Northern Song dynasty, Song Huizong, the emperor who was talented at arts, created a new iconic style of writing called "slender gold" [11]. In the Yuan dynasty, the style called "Zhaoti" was created. All such different types of styles are parts of regular script, showing how mature it was. In the Qing dynasty, regulations on structures of regular script were established and regular script enjoyed a more sophisticated use.

Based on the size of the characters, regular scripts were classified into three categories. Regular script characters measuring more than 5 cm were usually classified as "large", those smaller than 2 cm were usually classified as "small", and those in between were classified as "medium" [12].

The regular script was the latest major types of Chinese characters. It is used until now, only divided into simplified Chinese characters used in mainland China and traditional Chinese characters used in Taiwan and some other areas [13]. It is undoubted that regular script is a type of script with deep history and culture.

2.2. Korean alphabet

2.2.1. The invention of the Korean alphabet

Chinese characters enjoyed a dominant status in the scripts of Korean until 1443, when King Sejong the Great, the king of the Joseon dynasty, and some scholars invented Korean alphabet [14]. King Sejong the Great thought that Chinese characters were too complicated for most public to learn and use, so he decided to promote an easier script for Koreans. Therefore, he promoted a manuscript called "Hunminjeongeum", which means "The Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People" [14].

Korean alphabet was much easier to learn than Chinese characters, so it soon became popular among people. It started to be used in letters, poetry, novels, and many other non-official literatures and documents. However, it was lowly regarded amongst the ruling class. Due to the difficulty of learning Chinese characters, only the ruling class had access to the learning of Chinese characters, and they saw this as a symbol of power [15]. As a result, Korean alphabet was not used as the main script of the Joseon dynasty because of the opposition of the ruling class, and Chinese characters were still mainly used in official documents.

2.2.2. The domination of Korean alphabet

In 1894, King Gojong ordered that "all legal edicts should be based on the Korean alphabet, with Korean translations or a mixture of Korean alphabet and Chinese characters". Since then, Korean alphabet started to be used with Chinese characters in some official documents [16].

Since 1937, when The Empire of Japan started the Second Sino-Japanese War, there were strict regulations on the teaching of Korean alphabet [17]. It was a great risk for the development of Korean alphabet, but since the liberation in 1945, Korean alphabet has been retaken. Since then, Korean alphabet has been used as the official script of Korea until now.

2.3. Japanese writing system

Japanese writing system consists of kanji and kana. They are different, but both are used in a writing sentence and sometimes make it very difficult to understand Japanese writing system [18].

2.3.1. Kanji

Kanji, which are Chinese characters used in Japan until now, are logographic Chinese characters. Kanji are not the same as Chinese characters used in China, but they originated from Chinese characters.

Most commonly, scholars believe that although Chinese characters became popular in the 4th century AD, the first time Japanese encountered Chinese characters was in the 1st century AD [19]. Since the popularization of Chinese characters, kanji was developed to help the understanding of Chinese characters in around the 8th century. Kanji is still in use now and is taught at school.

2.3.2. Kana

Kana, which can be divided into hiragana and katakana, is the syllabic script. It is used in Japanese writing system and is also rooted in Chinese characters.

Hiragana is mainly used for native or naturalized Japanese words and grammatical components. It represented a relatively lower status when it was developed [20]. It was mainly used by female writers, and even now, it is still recognized as a feminine script [21]. However, now it gets rid of the icon of low status and is also an indispensable part of kana, and even the whole Japanese writing system.

Katakana is mainly used to write foreign words, names, loanwords, onomatopoeia, and sometimes to emphasize some specific expressions. It is thought to have been created by Buddhist monks in Nara around the 9th century [22], but there have not been any absolute results on its exact origin.

3. Discussion

Script is one of the main components of a language. Due to historical factors, Chinese characters became a very important part of East Asian scripts. Not only do Chinese use Chinese characters as scripts, but Japanese also use kanji, Chinese characters in Japanese forms, and Korean is greatly influenced by Chinese characters. Next, the connection between Chinese, Korean, and Japanese will be discussed.

3.1. Relationship between Chinese characters and Korean script

The current Korean alphabet, also called "hangul", was invented and promoted in 1443 by King Sejong the Great. After the invention of the Korean alphabet, there was still great opposition to the promotion of the new script. It is fascinating to think about the script Koreans used before the invention of the Korean alphabet and how it is impacted from the perspectives of history and culture.

3.1.1. Historical relationship

The historical relationship between Chinese characters and Korean alphabet started since a very long time ago. According to archaeological research, there were some Chinese characters carved or written on artefacts from the Gojoseon dynasty, a dynasty that existed from around 2333 BC to 108 BC [16]. There were also some ancient Chinese works of literature recorded that there were some trades and communications between the Gojoseon dynasty and the countries using Chinese characters from the same era [16]. By comparing the timeline, the oracle bones inscriptions are most likely to be the type of Chinese characters that had spread to the Korean peninsula in that era. It is commonly believed that Chinese characters have been used in Korean peninsula since that time. This could be evidence showing how long the communication between China and Korea has existed. However, there are also some other ideas suggesting that small seal scripts are the first type of Chinese characters used in the Korean peninsula. Despite the arguments, there has not been a certain result.

After the disappearance of the Gojoseon dynasty, there were an increasing number of conflicts and communications within the Three Kingdoms of Korea and the Han dynasty. Most linguists and historians believe that even though Chinese characters were occasionally seen in the Korean peninsula before, most Chinese characters made their way into Korean language since this era [23]. The kings of the Korean Peninsula began to use Chinese characters as a tool for ruling the country, and Chinese characters became the medium for what is known as "advanced literature". During the Silla Dynasty, the development of a dictionary system, the "Idu script", helped to convert some Korean words into Chinese characters with the same meaning or similar pronunciation [24]. Besides, the investigations on works of literature from that era could prove that not only the oracle bones inscriptions but also small seal script, clerical script, and regular script which appeared afterward might also spread to the Korean peninsula. This finding could be an evidence of how consistently Chinese characters were used in the Korean peninsula. Since then, Chinese characters became the official writing script in the Korean peninsula until the fall of the Joseon dynasty.

With the passage of time, Korean alphabet was invented and promoted and finally overtook the dominance of Chinese characters. Nowadays, Korean alphabet is the official script of Korea and Chinese characters are rarely seen in Korea. However, Chinese characters are still used occasionally to indicate homophones, abbreviations, academic terms, and personal names whose meanings are not easily understood from the Korean alphabet alone.

3.1.2. The influences of Chinese characters on Korean language

Although the official script of Korea is Korean alphabet now, Chinese characters still influence the Korean language for a great extent.

As Chinese characters were used in Korea for more than three millennia, there have been countless connections between Chinese characters and Korean alphabet caused by historical factors. At the time when Korean alphabet was invented, the officially used words that were expressed in Chinese characters were translated into Korean alphabet literally. Although there were still numerous local words, mainly used among the public and could not correspond to Chinese characters, a great number of Korean words could be translated letter-to-letter into Chinese.

According to the figure from the National Institute of Korean Language, 57% of current Korean words are rooted in Chinese characters, which could be translated literally from text to text. Although some of them are not used daily or their meanings have already changed completely, it is still an astonishing figure. The function of the literal translation acts like the following form. For example, the word "天地", which is written in Chinese characters, means the world (literally means "sky and ground"). When this word is translated into the form of Korean alphabet, it could be written as "천지", which exactly means the same both literally and meaningly. In this case, "天" can match "천", while "地" can match "지". Although not all words could be matched and kept the same meaning as the words written in Chinese characters, similar cases could be easily discovered. In the Korean peninsula, children even memorized the Thousand Character Classic, a story consisting of a thousand Chinese characters, by singing out with Korean alphabet literally matched in the past.

Besides, because of the availability of text-to-text translation between Chinese characters and some Korean alphabet, Chinese characters are now widely used as the notation of some names. Because of the limitation on the number of Korean alphabets, there are usually some repeats in people's names. For example, "최민서" is a very common name in South Korea even if they have various implied meanings. To minimize the confusion caused by the homonymous situation and to clarify the implied meanings of the name, Chinese characters will be used together on many official occasions in the form of "최민서 (崔珉瑞)". This kind of co-existence of Chinese characters and Korean alphabet can be seen in the resident registration certificate, which is a very official and important personal document.

Furthermore, Chinese characters are usually used in some official publications to emphasize some information or to explain some homophones. In the past few decades, Chinese characters were used in Korean newspapers especially in part of titles to emphasize the importance of news and to attract people's attention. For example, the title of one piece of news in 1980 was "申(심)총리, 두 김(김)총재에 微笑(미소)작전". It was very common that both Chinese characters and Korean alphabet were used together in the title and even the content of news. However, such events are not common now; most newspapers only use the Korean alphabet. In contrast, another use of Chinese characters in South Korea is still in use, which is the explanation for homophones in the Standard Korean Language Dictionary. To clarify some words or expressions that have multiple meanings, the Standard Korean Language Dictionary adds the words written in Chinese characters with those written in Korean alphabet to distinguish the various meanings. For example, the word "회의", which is written in Korean alphabet, has four different meanings, and there are four words "回議", "會意", "會議", "懷疑", which are written in Chinese characters, added in the dictionary.

Because of such connections, Chinese characters were even considered as a subject learned in curricular course in Korea before. There have been also many books, videos or online courses about Chinese characters, like "마법천자문", a series of book sold a total of 22 million copies that teaching young readers how to write some basic Chinese characters. It is undeniable that Chinese characters-related education program has become a new industry and injected fresh blood into the overall education market and therefore have a huge effect on Korean economy. It could be seen that Chinese characters have also affected educational and economic aspects in Korea.

However, there are also some different ideas on such relationships between Chinese characters and Korean alphabet. The main argument is that although there might be some linguistic relationship caused by historical links, nowadays Chinese characters play little role in Korea, so it is not important to consider deeper about the relationship between Chinese characters and Korean alphabet. In current Korea, Chinese characters are hard to be found in daily lives except for certain names. It is true that most people do not actually use Chinese characters at all, and most Chinese characters are rarely seen. What influences more is the development of internet. Through the internet, some new words have replaced the meaning of some existed words which are based on Chinese characters. Some Koreans think that there is little significance to know more about Chinese characters. As a result, the importance of learning Chinese characters seems to be less and less in Korea, and even some the linguistic connections are not that significant now.

Although there are some different arguments on connections between Chinese characters and Korean alphabet, most people still see Chinese characters as part of Korean language system. Because of the historical connections, many Korean alphabet can be literally matched to Chinese characters, which has enabled their interchangeability. This special relationship has improved the convenience of the usage of both languages.

3.1.3. The influences on culture and relationships

Due to the close historical relationship, China and Korea have enjoyed various similarities, not only on linguistic aspects but also on cultural sides. The history of Chinese characters used in Korea has also improved such cultural relationships.

China and Korea usually enjoy similar cultures, like festivals, celebrations, dietary habits, and so on. For example, both Chinese and Korean celebrate the 15 August Lunar Calendar ("中秋节" in Chinese characters and "추석" in Korean alphabet). Such similarities have improved the cultural resonance between the two countries but also caused some arguments. There are some arguments about the origin of some mutual cultures and these arguments have even become the disparagement of other cultures. It is undeniable that the relationship between Chinese and Koreans is becoming worse due to these conflicts.

This is not the only case of cultural argument between China and Korea. Such tension between the two countries' residents will influence the development of these countries. Although conflicts are between the public but not the government and the countries, there still will be influences on how the governments act to each other in the future. The interrelationship between these two countries will be seriously threatened if these conflicts are not solved, and the economic and cultural development of both countries may be negatively affected in the long term.

3.2. Relationship between Chinese characters and Japanese writing system

Japanese writing system consists of the logographic script kanji, which is Chinese characters used in Japan, and the syllabic script kana, which the characters are also from parts of Chinese characters. The relationships between Chinese characters and Japanese writing system are very deep. It is interesting to think about their historical connections and how did this affect them from the perspectives of history and culture.

3.2.1. Historical relationship

The first introduction of Chinese characters into Japan is thought to have occurred in the 1st century AD thanks to the discovery of the "King of Na gold seal", a solid gold seal thought to be evidence of early communication between the Han Dynasty and Japan, on which Chinese characters were written in small seal script [19]. However, the actual era in which Chinese characters became popular in Japan seemed to be the 4th to 5th century AD, when someone brought knowledge about Chinese characters and Confucianism from the Korean peninsula [19].

Kanji appeared around the 8th century AD in a system called "kanbun", which allowed Chinese texts to be read in the way and the grammar of Japanese. The Chinese characters were rearranged to fit the grammar of the Japanese language, and diacritic marks, which are marks added to some letters to change the way they are pronounced or to distinguish similar letters, were added. This can be seen as an early form of translation. The earliest written history of Japan, the Kojiki, was also written in kanbun.

The full Japanese writing did not appear until the invention of man'yōgana, which could be seen as the earlier form of kana. It focused on the phonetic factors of Chinese characters rather than their semantic aspects. There are some different arguments about the origin of man'yōgana, which some believe was from Baekje, a kingdom that existed in the Korean peninsula, while others disagree with that idea.

Kana was known to be developed in the 8th and 9th centuries, based on Chinese characters [25]. It was developed to convey the pronunciation of words rather than to show their meaning. Before the currently used hiragana and katakana officially became part of the Japanese writing system in the 1900s, there were various forms of kana, which were collectively known as "hentaigana". Although most of these hentaigana are no longer in use, some of them are still sometimes used, especially in specific words, such as signboards, calligraphy, place names, and personal names [26].

In 1986, modern kana usage, also called Gendai Kanazukai, was instituted. It was an amended form of which was publicized in 1946. It regulated grammar and usage of kana. Despite the overall adjustments to Japanese writing system, there are still some criticisms that this invention has destroyed the language itself [27]. Regardless of such arguments, modern kana usage has been used until today as the regulation for usage of kana.

3.2.2. The influences of Chinese characters on Japanese language

Due to the strong historical relationship between Chinese characters and Japanese writing system, the whole Japanese language has been very closely connected with Chinese characters until now.

Kanji is Chinese characters used in Japanese writing system. It is a logographic script that looks like traditional Chinese characters used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and a few other places as they were all rooted in small seal scripts. Kana is a collection of hiragana and katakana, which both were rooted in parts of Chinese characters. Hiragana was known to be developed from the cursive script of Chinese characters, while katakana was mainly thought to be derived from components or fragments of kanji, Chinese characters. As a group of kana, both hiragana and katakana have been used for showing the pronunciations of kanji which are much more complex. It could be easily found that both the logographic and syllabic parts of Japanese writing system are all very close to Chinese characters and therefore they also share similarities with Chinese language.

To prove their similarities, here is an example. In kanji, "図書館" is the word which means the library. In traditional Chinese characters, the library can be written in "圖書館". Not only the writing but also their pronunciations are quite similar. In kana,

this word is written as "としょかん", which has the pronunciation of "toshokan". In Chinese, the pronunciation of the word is "tushuguan", whose components are mostly similar to the one in Japanese. This type of comparison can be easily made between many Japanese words and Chinese words and will usually bring a similar result.

Because of such similarities and connections, teaching Chinese characters, or kanji more precisely, is very important in Japanese education system. Mostly, Japanese students learn kanji since they are in primary school, and they are usually able to learn the most frequently used kanji in middle school. As kanji is very usual in daily life, such education is essential if one wants to live in Japan.

Chinese characters are an indispensable part of Japanese writing system and even the whole Japanese language. It is used almost every day and should always be learned if one wants to learn Japanese.

3.2.3. The influences on culture and relationships

Because of the share of scripts, there are various common or similar aspects in overall conditions in both China and Japan. It is very significant in some cultural respects, just like the cultural relationship between China and Korea which was mentioned above.

For example, tea is a cultural symbol in both countries. Although tea culture was introduced from China to Japan, there were different developments of tea culture in both countries as Chinese tea culture and Japanese tea ceremony, also called Sadō or Chadō. Through the passage of time, tea culture has developed as a very gorgeous culture in both countries.

However, since tea culture became famous all over the world, there were also some arguments about it. Some believe that Japanese tea ceremony originated from Chinese tea culture, so the influence of China should not be forgotten. However, some see Japanese tea ceremony as an individual culture that differ from Chinese tea culture and consider Japanese tea ceremony as one that can represent East Asian tea culture. These arguments have caused some further conflicts, and some people even see this as a conflict related to cultural purity.

Such conflicts are common between China and Japan. There are always some sharp cultural conflicts between China and Japan because of some historical factor, like the influence of war. Therefore, these conflicts seem to be much more difficult to address. If such conflicts cannot be solved peacefully and logically, the development of both countries will be blocked.

3.3. Conclusion

Chinese characters have brought a great number of connections to the three East Asian countries. Due to the historical factor, all three countries' scripts are rooted in Chinese characters, and their cultures are even influenced. By looking at these relationships, it is clearer that sharing these connections and similarities may improve the interrelationships within the three countries and bring a bigger benefit to all three countries. The improved relationship between China, Korea, and Japan is still a task for people to achieve.

4. Conclusion

Chinese characters have affected Korean language and Japanese language to a great extent. It is mainly because of the historical relationship between these three countries. There were complex connections among all three countries throughout history, which have contributed to the spread of Chinese characters in East Asian countries.

Chinese characters have a very long history. It has experienced various changes, from oracle bones inscriptions to regular script, its development has crossed over thousands of years. Each stage of development could represent a certain period of Chinese history. Oracle bones inscriptions, which first appeared in the 13th century BC, were the first systematic scripts ever in the Chinese mainland. The first promotion of the small seal script in the Qin dynasty during the first unification of scripts became a milestone in Chinese scripts' history. The growing publicity of simpler clerical script showed how a simple script could become popular because of its accessibility. A great amount of Chinese history and culture were recorded in the regular script because of its long and powerful dominance with numerous literatures.

Korea had its scripts since 1443 when the Korean alphabet was invented by King Sejong the Great. Before this invention, the official script in the Korean peninsula was Chinese characters. Oracle bones inscriptions were considered to be the first type of Chinese characters used in Korea. However, Chinese characters were difficult to learn especially for those of low status, so the invention of a simpler Korean alphabet became very popular among the public. In 1984, the Korean alphabet became the official script in Korea. Although there were some other challenges like the invasion of The Empire of Japan, Korean alphabet survived and is still in use.

Although Chinese characters were considered to have been introduced to Japan in the 1st century, they were officially used in Japan around the 4th century. The Japanese Chinese characters, kanji, was formally developed in the 8th century with kanbun. It was a logographic script that showed the meaning of words. Kana, which was a syllabic collaboration of characters that also

originated from Chinese characters, was considered to be developed in a similar period as that of kanji as the former form called man'yōgana. There were more developments, and the current Japanese writing system was set up after the promotion of modern kana usage in 1986. Chinese characters are still in use in the form of kanji and kana in Japanese writing system.

Because of such historical relationships, there are also many linguistic and cultural relationships among East Asian countries. Many Korean and Japanese words could be literally translated into Chinese characters, and these three countries usually share similar cultures like festivals and celebrations. These connections could form a mutual cultural feeling. However, sometimes there are some arguments about where such cultures originated or what the "correct" form of culture should look like. These conflicts had some negative impacts on the development of Eastern countries as they sometimes prevented them from communicating.

In overall conclusion, the special historical connections between China, Korea, and Japan have caused further cultural relationships. It is undeniable that the current society is becoming more and more hostile, and there have been many conflicts caused by some cultural similarities and differences. Such connections should be the bridge to build friendly relations but not the trigger of fights, especially for the countries that are so closely located. For the better future development of all three countries, these conflicts should be solved. This goal may be achieved by further research on other cultural relationships among East Asian countries to find out more common aspects and communicate peacefully.

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