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University of Sydney
Visible Language 40.2
Shelton and Okayama, 135-176

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ABSTRACT

Starting with the brush as the common instrument for rendering both word and picture, the paper outlines various visual characteristics of Japanese script. It also demonstrates how combinations of words and pictures have been used interchangeably and occupied the same space in every form of Japanese creative production—from story writing to advertising. These characteristics are shown to have encouraged leading novelists to think graphically and artists to think textually. Finally, it reflects on this Japanese condition to question the commonly held view that there is a clear divide between script and picture.

"Japanese culture is primarily visual, not verbal." — Masao Miyoshi (1974, p. xv)

Between Script and Pictures in Japan

Barrie Shelton and Emiko Okayama

EVER SINCE SAUSSURE AND THE RISE OF MODERN LINGUISTICS, research in the field has emphasized the spoken over the written aspect of language. Viewed mostly as a means of transcribing speech (and therefore as a secondary form of language) the main concerns about writing have been phonological. This approach to language may be the natural outcome of a discipline that arose from within the confines of the Indo-European family of languages—and particularly from within the confines of alphabetic transcription.

It seems far less appropriate to apply this view to those Eastern languages that have shared Chinese characters of pictographic and ideographic origins—*kanji* to the Japanese. In these languages the phonological representation is neither the only, nor primary, function. It is only a *part* of the language and the other aspect, *visual representation*, is also a key component. This is reflected in the ways that the territories of writing and pictures have overlapped in the China-influenced Eastern cultures, having been most pronounced in Japan. Indeed, one might say that word and picture are simply part of a continuum where there are no distinct boundaries.

It would be unfair however to point only to the twentieth century and, even more misleading, to Saussure when commenting on the West's phonocentric bias. It is the view of Hasumi Shigehiko (1980, 138–142) that phonocentricism is but a reflection of a system of thought that has governed Western theological and theoretical history for at least two millennia; and it is in linguistics where this is most apparent. Indeed, for both Plato and Aristotle, writing was just a representation of speech: 'written words are the signs of words spoken' wrote Aristotle (Harris, 1986, 26).

In Japan however, writing and speech enjoyed considerable autonomy until the late nineteenth century "almost to the extent of there being two distinct stages of linguistic development" (Miyoshi, 1974, viii). In such a situation, the idea of writing as being a mere shadow of the spoken word is not applicable. Put simply, people did not write as they spoke. Miyoshi (1974, 10) speculates that written documents were "meant primarily to be read silently, not read aloud or heard." Further, he linked this to the visual nature of Chinese ideograms as a writing system: for "it is quite possible for the speaker of Japanese to recognize the rough meaning of a given ideogram without knowing for certain how to pronounce it" (Miyoshi, 1974, 23). Characters speak to the eye without articulation of sound, similar to pictures. Indeed character recognition precipitates right hemisphere brain activity in the manner of pictures.

In contrast, words and pictures have occupied different territories in the West since antiquity. According to the Bible (Deuteronomy) a man would be cursed if he engraved an image of the Lord, but was able to engrave words *ad infinitum*. Until

Modern times the only significant Western incursion of the picture into writing was in the Early Christian illuminated manuscripts but, as the name implies, it was a mostly a case of pictorial elements illuminating or decorating words. That is, it was more a matter of pictures beautifying the Word than one of words and pictures occupying the very same space on equal terms with true equality of presence and meaning.

It is no coincidence that, in the West, cinematographers were among the first to appreciate the power of Chinese characters to evoke image. Both Sergei Eisenstein and John Sturges were not only acutely aware of the nature of *kanji* but also of Japanese syntax. They likened cinematic representation to ideographic language citing their direct appeal to the eye without the medium of the sound (Yamaguchi, 1987, 111). Eisenstein even attributed his appreciation of montage to the nature of Chinese characters (Schodt, 1986, 25).

It is also no coincidence that a single instrument, namely the brush, has been used for both painting pictures and writing text in the East, whereas two very different instruments (brush and stylus) have been employed for the two forms of expression in the West. It was the (Japanese) brush's perpendicular suspension in the volume of the air and its capacity to 'glide, jump and twist' in any direction for both picture and text that so fascinated Roland Barthes (Jean, 1992, 182). The soft brush with its loose multidirectional capacity stands in marked contrast to the hard stylus or pen that was designed to scratch away repeatedly in lines across the Western page.

In the East, calligraphy and painting hang alongside each other and, as a matter of course, are part of the same graphic compositions. It reflects a cultural eye that does not differentiate sharply between script and picture. And this is nowhere more apparent than in Japan where they are mixed freely and appear commonly in hybrid forms. Further, this is not a modern phenomenon but a centuries-old tradition. Seamless combinations of script and picture have invaded every form of creative production for centuries—poetry, novels, painting, theater, print-making, *manga*, advertising, etc. such that the two rarely exist in what might be termed their pure forms.

This paper will show that novels have been produced to be seen, and pictures to be read. It is an exploration of these

FIGURE 1

Evolution of a compound *Kanji*.

phenomena, and of the characteristics of both *kanji* and Japanese language that suggests that script is much more than phonological representation, and the boundaries between script and picture are far less distinct than many would like us to believe.

Visual Dimensions of Japanese Writing

Kanji—Chinese backcloth

THE FORM OF KANJI AND THEIR COMPONENTS are derived from pictures. They commenced as cartoon-like drawings that captured the essence of an object with minimum structural lines to give realistic representation. Sometimes the drawing was to represent directly the object (pictograph) and sometimes an idea associated with the object (ideograph). Later, these 'graphs' underwent further stylization into squarer forms. Also, two or more were combined with each other to make more complex ideographs: this meant compacting and juxtaposing the originals into the same square area that each of the originals had occupied previously on its own. Further, unlike views were often juxtaposed in the same 'picture.' For instance the character for thunder (雷) combines those for rain (雨) and field (田): the former shows a cloud with raindrops in elevation while the latter shows fields in plan (see figure 1).

It was a process more akin to montage in art than to the stringing together of letters of an alphabet to represent sounds in words. This difference is reinforced by the fact that it is the brain's right hemisphere that is activated for the recognition of *kanji*—the same as for visual and spatial tasks such as picture recognition. For alphabet users it is the left side and language functions that go together.

In addition, each character was conceived within the area of a square and given a balance around an invisible center.

And it had independent meaning. All of these qualities endowed characters with powerful and independent (picto- and ideo-) graphic forms.

However, there were at least two major ways of forming compound characters. One, as already indicated, was to combine two or more existing pictographs or ideographs into more complex ones. In other words each graph would be taken for its semantic value and the new association would generate a new meaning in compound form—as with thunder above (雷). The second was where the semantic value of one character (known as a radical) was combined with the phonetic value of another to give a new character with new meaning. For example, 人, meaning ‘man,’ was combined with 足, pronounced *soku*, to make 促, meaning ‘to urge’ and pronounced *soku* as in the original character: 足 meant ‘foot’ but is not directly related to the new meaning.

It is here that linguists turn to the first comprehensive Chinese dictionary of characters, the *Shuowen jiezi* written by Xu Shen in (A.D.121) to suggest that Chinese (and in turn Japanese) writing is essentially phonetic. For out of 9,353 characters listed in the dictionary, pictographs number only 364 or four percent of the whole. Indeed the majority of *kanji* (eighty-two percent) were shown to be combinations of radical and phonetic parts. This method of generating a new *kanji* revolutionized the Chinese writing system and their number increased dramatically. By 1722, a dictionary commissioned by the Chinese Emperor of the time lists over 42 thousand *kanji*.

As Shirakawa (1999, 13) has noted, the *kanji* system reinvented itself by incorporating previously pictographic elements within new compound characters for phonetic purposes. But far from interpreting this as some kind of conversion to a phonetic system, he viewed it as strengthening the pictographic system by extension into new territory. Clearly, the change was drawn-out and only partial—more partial than most scholars seem willing to recognize. In fact, it is quite misleading to suggest that Chinese is a phonetic language because of the dominance of these radical-phonetic compounds. Even when a character is a radical-phonetic compound, a component of pictographic or ideographic origin remains with a high measure of semantic association—that is, bearing strong pictorial clues to meaning.

Within the so-called radical-phonetic category of compounds, some groups of characters share phonetic components that give them their sounds *and* convey meanings. For example, 包 originally meant *to wrap*: in compounds such as 抱 (to hug) and 胞 (membrane): both are pronounced *hou*: thus 包 has the association with ‘wrapping around’ as well as representing the sound, *hou*.

Distinguished Japanese scholar of Chinese, Todo Akiyasu (1962, 33-36), offers many such examples. Further, he groups his examples according to the meaning of their common phonetic components. For example, *sho* (状), *sho* (将) and *sho* (牆) meaning a long-bodied dog, middle finger and long storehouse respectively, all gain their sound from the phonetic, *sho* (seen consistently as the left-hand component of the three characters). However, this nominal phonetic also attributes a common meaning to all three characters (and others too) for they all fall into the category of long thin things—which is a category related primarily to the object’s visual or physical characteristics.

Thus, to elevate the phonetic value at the expense of the semantic is altogether too hasty and simplistic. Even when components are identified for their phonetic function, they are rarely free from meaning for that was also a factor in their selection and they cannot escape their image-rendering origins.

What was also crucial to Chinese writing was the coexistence of the visual and the verbal in each and every element of the system—namely, in each character. It was made up of autonomous entities of more or less the same value—like a building made entirely out of the same sized blocks. This kind of writing reflected a language (Old Chinese) that was monosyllabic and isolating. The mechanism of allocating one *kanji* for one word was entirely suited to this. Grammatical functions were expressed directly through word order: the same *kanji* could be a noun, verb, adjective or adverb depending simply on its position in a sentence (Sakai, 1991, 227). This was not so in Japan.

Kanji in Japan

ASPECTS OF CHINESE CULTURE, *kanji* included, started to travel via the Korean peninsula to Japan by the Fifth Century. When the Japanese started to write their native language with *kanji* some two hundred years later, writing took another turn, for

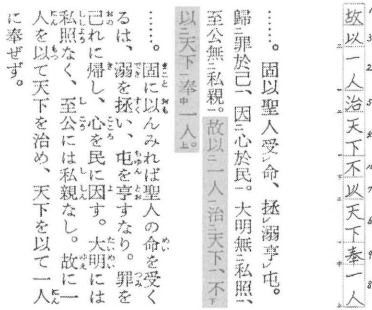


FIGURE 2

An example of Chinese text (center right) and its transcription by the addition of *waku* (left). The far right-hand column shows the non-sequential order by which the Chinese characters within the shaded columns would have been read by the Japanese reader.

Japanese is not monosyllabic. It is inflected and agglutinative. When adapting Chinese writing for the transcription of Japanese, grammatical terms and inflections had to be added to the text.

An important and fascinating aspect of this is that the Chinese word order would remain unchanged on the page, but the words were read in the order of Japanese speech, the two being quite different. This transformation from text to speech was made possible through the use of annotations (or *waku*) that were added to the Chinese text. Of special interest here is the numbering system (*kaeriten*) that indicated reading order. Also Japanese particles (e.g., *te*, *ni*, *o* and *ha*) and auxiliary verbs (e.g., *nari*, *tari* and *keri*) were sometimes added. The Chinese textual structure remained visually unchanged while the *waku* disturbed this linear order the moment the text was vocalized in Japanese. The reader's eye was obliged to hop back and forth amongst the *kanji* irrespective of their order upon the page. Thus 'the given linear order was destroyed' (Sakai, 1991, 227) and the linear synchrony between voice and eye was lost. Not only were there pictographic and ideographic components to look at, but the eye was starting to jump about the page—more in the manner of a picture (see figure 2).

Also, when the particles and auxiliaries were not added, which was often the case, the reader had to insert these as the text was read following the numbering marks. This is in fact a form of translation, as many scholars have noted. It is however not viewed as translation by most Japanese, for the original Chinese text is not altered if one can ignore the small print

FIGURE 3
Origins of Kana.

In modern Japan, *katakana* is used primarily for representing foreign words, while *hiragana* is used for Japanese words not covered by *kanji*, clarifying *kanji* pronunciation where necessary and for certain grammatical functions.

kunten marks added on the either left or right bottom corner of *kanji*: “the foreignness of the Chinese language is disguised by being familiarized into the already established mode of conceptualization” (Sakai, 1991, 227) with Japanese annotations.

It is likely that it was the need for this supplementary annotation that gave rise to Japan’s two phonetic scripts that were well established by the middle of the Tenth Century. Each script consists of fifty-one characters representing the same fifty-one syllabic sounds. While one is a squarish script (*katakana*) derived from fragments of *kanji*, the other is a more curvaceous stylized form (*hiragana*) of *kanji* selected similarly for their sounds. The appearance of these two systems did not however displace *kanji*. To the contrary, *kanji* remained at the core of the writing system, but was supplemented by the two *kana* scripts (see figure 3), each having taken on a niche role within the modern text.¹

Visually, the more angular qualities of *katakana* contrast with the flowing curves of *hiragana*, and as fragments and abstractions of more complex *kanji*, both sit lightly on the page when compared with most *kanji*. Typically the written or printed surface in Japan is a mix of all of three sets of characters—simple square and curvilinear abstractions representing sounds and usually denser characters of pictographic and ideographic origins, sometimes consisting of more than twenty strokes. In effect, it is this *surface of interposed scripts* with different graphic qualities that offer real opportunity for even novelists to think graphically and artists to think textually. It is a situation that seems as natural to a Japanese as it appears strange to most foreigners.

This mix of borrowed and homegrown scripts has led to some intriguing relationships between text and eye—well illustrated

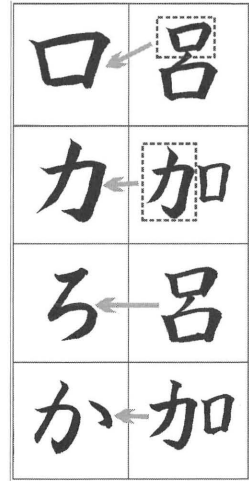




FIGURE 4

Unvoiced communication in *Manga* (Source: *Kiro Densetsu*)

by the common practice of *monzen-yomi* in Eighteenth Century Japan. It was an era when education would have been considered incomplete without the reading of Chinese classics and *monzen-yomi* was a method of reading these. A student was presented with a text written in the original Chinese (entirely *kanji*) script. When reading aloud they read short pieces first in (Chinese) *on* and then repeated these in (Japanese) *kun*. The *on* version would have provided sound but not necessarily meaning. The *kun* version would have given Japanese sound plus substantial though not precise meaning to the listener for the sound alone would have been insufficient to generate clear images without *kanji*.

The example of *monzen-yomi* with its multiple (sound) readings is an indicator of the complexity and distance between written text, sound and meaning. Much contemporary art and literary expression feeds off these rich traditions. For instance, unvoiced communication in *manga* uses geometric symbols (including the underlying geometries of various *kanji*) and unorthodox characters to powerful effect. In the example shown here, there are symbols '○△□!' upon the page (see figure 4) that represent no particular sound but which are nevertheless understood by the reader.

FIGURE 5

This extract from a *Shinwa Shoken* advertisement (1994) shows a pictorial variation on the character *hashiru*, meaning 'to run.'



FIGURE 6

Realism substitutes for abstraction in one component of a compound character in this poster fragment. (Source: *Encyclopedia of the Japanese Language*. Tokyo: Taishukan 1988).



The many characteristics of Japanese script introduced above (and more) facilitate and encourage its easy extension into the pictorial domain and vice-versa. They include the strongly stylized nature of the script's characters and their related pictographic and ideographic origins; their semantic independence; their montage composition; the mixing of phonetic and other types of character on the same page; their graphic power; their geometry and placement within the square (as opposed to on or between lines); and the experience of non-linear and multidirectional arrangements.

When in Japan, the constant 'slipping' between words and pictures is always evident—in paintings and prints, on pottery and lacquer work, in newspapers and magazines, on packaging, in advertising, in poetry, in fact just about everywhere. It is a prominent part of the nation's culture.



FIGURE 7

This 1855 print shows the *kanji*, *Taira*, as the central object of the picture.

Script and Pictures

FOR THE WRITER USING A RANGE OF CHARACTERS whose elements are composed of pictographic components, the temptation to slip into greater realism is always present in a way that escapes the user of McLuhan's (1987, 81) 'semantically meaningless letters' representing 'semantically meaningless sounds.' And conversely, for the artist who has learned the pictographic and ideographic origins of *kanji*, the pull towards stylization when making pictures is likewise strong, and even the inclination to substitute characters for objects in the picture.

In art and advertising, the extension of *kanji* into more realistic forms is commonplace. For instance, the racy character depicted in figure 5 is a transformation of *hashiru* (走) meaning 'to run' in a modern investment advertisement.

Because characters are often in compound montage form, realistic transformations may not always extend to a whole character but for a component only. An example is the 'shell' 貝 component of the word 賞 meaning 'prize' as it appeared in a banking poster designed to attract the attention of inquisitive young minds (see figure 6).

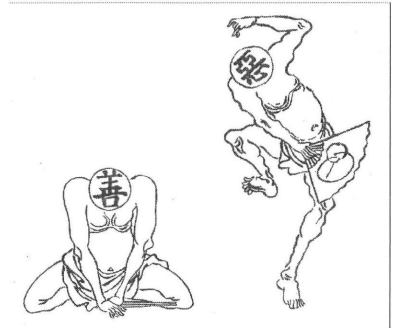
FIGURE 8

Hiroshige's 1857 print of 'Tsukudajima Sumiyoshi Festival' has a script-bearing banner dominating the scene.



FIGURE 9

Figures with *kanji* faces representing good and evil from Santo Kyoden's *Shingaku hayasome kusa*, originally published in 1790.



The Japanese examples are very different from the type of picture substitution for alphabet words we sometimes see in children's English books. In the latter case, replacement is one of kind but in the Japanese case, one of degree. In other words, the original characters and the shell and running figure substitutes are simply variations on a scale of pictorial abstraction.

The next figure shows yet another phenomenon: namely, the introduction of characters into a picture—in this case a singular character as a featured object. In this mid-nineteenth century print, *Taira no tatemai* ('Erecting *taira*'), it is the character for peace 平 (*taira*) that stands boldly as the towering central object of the picture, as humans scramble over and around it in the process of erection (see figure 7).

In Hiroshige's print, 'Sumiyoshi Festival, Tsukudajima' it is a huge banner bearing both ancient and modern text that bisects the picture and steals the show as the main clue to place, event and identity. Without this text-bearing feature, the scene would be ordinary to say the least (*see figure 8*).

In the eighteenth century illustrated story, *Shingaku haya-some kusa* (1790), *kanji* make their appearance in yet another way. Circles containing a single *kanji* indicating the qualities behind 'the masks': 'evil' and 'goodness' represent the faces of the figures. In the story, evil and goodness compete to exert influence upon the story's central character (*see figure 9*).

Displayed in a somber corner of the Tokyo's National Museum is Japan's best-known Maki-e writing box. It bears a poem from which two characters for boat bridge 舟橋 (*funa-bashi*) are omitted: The omission results not from carelessness but from an assumption that the characters are superfluous as the bridge is already present on the lid of the box in pictorial relief. In other words, pictures and words are inter-changeable.

Known for his acute visual sensibility, one of Japan's best-known novelists, Tanizaki Junichiro, wrote about the visual qualities of Japanese writing and applied this appreciation to visual effect. An example is *Mohmoku monogatari* (The story of a blind man) of 1931. For the text depicting the blind man's movement and sensing of the light, the sparser and more abstract *kana* is used: but where objects are encountered and touched to reveal shape, texture and meaning, *kanji* appears on the page. In other words, the text exploits the contrasting visual qualities of the phonetic and pictographic scripts. Where place is indistinct and the experience is essentially that of light, shade and atmosphere, the page is lightly covered (presenting a kind of mistiness), but where there are objects to be encountered, then the more powerfully graphic and usually denser *kanji* appear (introducing a sort of tangibility). It is perhaps slightly ironic that the author's script should drift more into the phonetic mode to enhance the pictographic effect—but it is in such contradictions that the graphic capacity of the script lies. *Kanji* are also used sparingly and at strategic places in *Ashikari* (Reed Harvesting, 1932). And in *Kagi* (The Key, 1956) which consists of the alternating entries of a couple's diary, the husband's are in angular *katakana* and *kanji* while the wife's are in the more rounded

z It is significant that there is a similar sound, *kaku*, for both 'to paint' and 'to write' in Japanese, although the characters are different. Similarly there has been a common instrument, the brush, for both tasks.



FIGURE 10

Calligraphy: toro or mantis by Nishikawa Tasushi (Courtesy: Nishikawa Kyotaro)

hiragana and *kanji*, emphasizing masculine and feminine sensibilities.

Thus Tanizaki was not merely an author, writing texts to be read but also (at one and the same time) to be seen! The writer's eye is not merely scripting the text for the purpose of description but shaping it into abstract pictorial form—an aesthetic-cum-pictorial reinforcement of the text.

Like most educated Japanese of his age, Tanizaki was skilled in the art of calligraphy. And in Japan, unlike China, this is the field in which any distance between word and picture can really disappear.² A painter or calligrapher may freely use words and pictures in the same composition, superimpose one upon the other, or indeed fuse word and picture as one. From a pictorial view (*figure 10*), there is in essence little difference between the levels of abstraction in Nishikawa's calligraphic mantis 螳螂 (*toro*) and say, the line paintings of Paul Klee such as 'Sportswoman' or 'Blue Fruit.' But in the case of the mantis, one can genuinely question whether what we see is a picture or writing and validly answer that it is 'both.' And there is incidentally, even less difference between some of the early versions of Chinese characters and Klee's line figures.

In fact, Japan has a long history of picture novels where words and pictures occupied the same graphic space—not separated by borders as has been usual in the West, but where images as a matter of course combined pictures and words. In late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Edo, literacy levels were high by the standards of the time with booksellers and lenders a common sight across the city. At the time, most reading



FIGURE 11

A typical cover of the children's magazine, *Tanoshii Yochien* (No. 10, 1995).

involved picture novels and stories (or *eiri shosetsu*). According to Nozaki (1927, 146), the common approach to reading these works was to first scan the pictures and so glean the main story: a second reading of the text would follow to elaborate on the first-round of predominantly pictorial interpretation. Indeed, they may be better described as pictures with elaborate annotations where the latter might even form a vital part of the picture—as with the earlier cited bodies sporting good and evil *kanji* faces.

In the early modern period there was a decline of the picture novel. This is mainly attributed to the changing nature of print technology that favored words at the expense of pictures, but this may have also been under the influence of the Western novel. The picture-novel tradition was however too strong to wither, and was sustained in *manga* form. Real revival came with

yet further technological change by way of the computer and digital imaging. The collage, multidirectional, mixed system and related traditions surface in today's stunning graphics that we associate with Japan's *manga* and *anime* productions.

Indeed the graphic diet upon which young Japanese visual sensibilities are nourished is staggering. Pre-school comics such as *Tanoshii Yochien* produce perhaps the most intricate and densest magazine covers found anywhere. Words, pictures and hybrid forms litter their surfaces with no dominant center and no obvious periphery. They exemplify the surface that privileges neither word nor picture within collage forms that embrace mixed texts, multiple directions and so on. They are *read* not by linear progression, but random scanning as in a mixed mosaic or map. They are not completed in one reading, but returned to again and again for more detailed inspection (*see figure 11*), and each time explored by a different route or series of helicopter-like 'landings.'

Conclusion

WRITTEN JAPANESE IS A UNIQUE SCRIPT that results from an unusual history and experience. Consisting of a mix of characters of phonetic and picto-ideo-graphic origins, the further mixing of script and pictures is but a natural extension of the writing system and this has occurred in many and fascinating ways. With elements of montage and collage embedded within individual characters and across the wider script, it seems that there is a readiness by its users to further embrace the mixing of pictures and script and fragments thereof on a grand scale. Further, the distance between writing and speech in Japan has often been wide and always elastic.

In Japan, the boundaries between script and picture are clearly blurred, and the connections between speech, script and meaning are both looser and more complex than in the West. The linguistic history of Japanese reveals an unusual evolution of a script, and an equally unusual relationship between words and pictures that raise a range of important issues and questions.

It is suggested that it may be far more useful to view script and pictures as part of a continuum rather than in some kind of binary opposition. Further, the view that the 'meaning-sound-written word' relationship is a simple linear construct with

script as the subordinate is quite unsatisfactory. The view of the world as seen through the alphabet spectacles of Bloomfield in which written words provide 'mere memory tags which help to capture and record evanescent vocal sounds uttered in human speech' (quoted in Suzuki 1977, 408) does not embrace Japanese. It is a view that is questioned implicitly or explicitly by many Japanese including Hasumi (1980), Miyoshi (1974) and Shirakawa (1999), all quoted here. Such work deserves wider attention, but tends unfortunately to bypass Western readers as comparatively little is written in English or available in translation. Such examples indicate both the distance between sound, meaning and script, and the preoccupation with the visual-aesthetic dimension of writing.

If Shelton's (1999) work on script and built form is any indication, more attention to the spatial and related visual dimensions of writing can open up new avenues for exploration. He suggests that there are consistent spatial patterns and related visual characteristics that cross the boundaries of Japanese script, painting, buildings and even cities. If he is right, it raises the question of whether and how much the visual dimensions of the writing system we learn, influence our wider sensibilities? After all, writing and cities emerged at the same time in history, and are viewed inseparably as hallmarks of civilization. It would seem that the nature of Chinese and particularly Japanese scripts requires both the designer's or artist's eye as well as the linguist's ear to be more fully comprehended and restore a more balanced appreciation.

In the West, Roy Harris is a scholar who has shed a good deal more light on the vexed issue of writing and pictures than most. He has been an arch-critic of the phonological bias in linguistics and champion of a view that shows writing to be independent of, albeit commonly inter-related with speech, and therefore possessing equality with it. He also points out that there are cultures that have had a single word for writing and drawing. Indeed, that writing was originally a term that meant 'the process of scoring or outlining a shape on a surface' (that is, one that could include writing and drawing) and that this definition survived even in English until at least five hundred years ago (Harris, 1986, 29). At the end of his book, *The Origin of Writing*, he says that it would be wrong to

force what he terms a 'Bayeux Tapestry interpretation' (where writing and script are seen to co-exist) upon examples from civilizations that may not have made our distinction between 'the scriptorial and pictorial'—for instance, on the pre- (European) Conquest Mixtec codices of Central America (Harris, 1986, 150).

We cannot help but ask if the Western preoccupation with writing as phonetic expression is simply an outcome of a discipline that has grown largely within the confines of alphabetic, that is phonological, transcription? Further, how much does this narrow phonocentric experience hinder the Western eye from appreciating the many pictorial dimensions of a writing system from a 'more visual than verbal' culture with very different word-picture horizons?

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