The Japanese writing systems, script reforms and the eradication of the Kanji writing system: native speakers’ views

Lovisa Österman
Abstract

This study aims to deduce what Japanese native speakers think of the Japanese writing systems, and in particular what native speakers’ opinions are concerning Kanji, the logographic writing system which consists of Chinese characters.

The Japanese written language has something that most languages do not; namely a total of three writing systems. First, there is the Kana writing system, which consists of the two syllabaries: Hiragana and Katakana. The two syllabaries essentially figure the same way, but are used for different purposes. Secondly, there is the Rōmaji writing system, which is Japanese written using latin letters. And finally, there is the Kanji writing system. Learning this is often at first an exhausting task, because not only must one learn the two phonematic writing systems (Hiragana and Katakana), but to be able to properly read and write in Japanese, one should also learn how to read and write a great amount of logographic signs; namely the Kanji. For example, to be able to read and understand books or newspaper without using any aiding tools such as dictionaries, one would need to have learned the 2136 Jōyō Kanji (regular-use Chinese characters).

With the twentieth century’s progress in technology, comparing with twenty years ago, in this day and age one could probably theoretically get by alright without knowing how to write Kanji by hand, seeing as we are writing less and less by hand and more by technological devices. Because by simply knowing the spelling of a word, you can write it phonetically on a mobile phone or computer and the logographic character will appear automatically. That being said, the importance of being able to read Kanji remains the same. However, due to the presence of such technology, it is interesting to see how it may come to affect the logographic writing system of Japanese; and if it already is affecting it. Therefore, this study contains the results of a series of interviews with Japanese native speakers that was arranged in order to find out what they think may become of the future of Kanji.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the majority of native speakers would be against a reform that would eradicate the Kanji writing system, partly due to their affection toward Kanji, but also due to thinking there are many more benefits to using Kanji than disadvantages. Many were, however, in the belief that technology can, and will affect the future of the Kanji writing system.

Keywords: Japanese, writing system, script reform, written language, Hangul, Kanji
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my utmost thanks to the interviewees of this study, Miori Oka, Kiichi Tanigami, Asami Kanomata Jönsson, Hodaka Matsuki, Yuko Motegi, Ko Nagasawa, Shinnosuke Kurakata, Miharu Motoishi and Akemi Kobayashi who took the time to be interviewed for the sake of this thesis; especially Miori Oka, who was so generous in helping me find other Japanese native speakers to interview. I would also like to thank the supervisor of this study, Ishihara Shinichirō who stayed patient and provided help throughout the many changes this thesis underwent, as well as helped with the translation of my interview questions from English to Japanese.
Conventions and abbreviations

In this thesis, when a Japanese terminology is first introduced, for example Man’yōgana, it is written in italics. After the first mention, it is written without italics. Single quotes are used for the translations of Japanese words to English.

Romanization

This thesis uses the Revised Hepburn system.

Most notable characteristics: The long latin Ō instead of Oo or Ou, which also occurs in for example Kyō and Jō et.c. The Revised Hepburn system also writes Wa instead of Ha and O instead of Wo.

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**Terminology**

- **TOP** - Topic marker
- **OBJ** - Object marker
- **Hiragana** - Phonetic writing system
- **Katakana** - Phonetic writing system
- **Kana** - Hiragana and Katakana
- **Kanji** - Logographic writing system
- **Logographic** - Character representing a word
- **Hangul** - The Korean language
- **Rōmaji** - Romanization
  
  Romanization - Japanese written in latin letters instead of in Kana and/or Kanji
- **Onyomi** - Chinese reading
- **Kunyomi** - Japanese reading
- **Jōyō Kanji** - Regular-use Chinese characters
- **Phonogram** - Symbol representing a vocal sound
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1. Introduction

1.1 Topic

The topic of this thesis is what Japanese native speakers think of the writing systems in Japanese, in particular the logographic writing system called Kanji. The research questions are as follows:

- How would native speakers feel about using only phonetic script?
- Does technology affect the use of Kanji, and potentially the future of Kanji?
- Do Japanese native speakers think that being a native speaker in Japanese positively affects one when learning other languages?
- Eradicating Kanji and using only phonetic script: who could it be advantageous for?

Part of the reason for choosing this topic is because it is interesting how the Kanji writing system has persisted despite the many changes that the Japanese written language and writing systems have gone through. Also, there is a language that used to use Chinese characters in a very similar way to how they are used in Japanese: Korean. However, the usage was discontinued in Korean, whereas in Japanese, the Chinese characters are still employed. By conducting this study, I believe that this thesis can provide some further information on why that is.

1.2 Methodology and organization

The thesis starts off with 2. ‘Background’, which purpose is to provide the reader with a background to the history of the Japanese written language. First, a brief introduction to Hiragana, Katakana, Rōmaji and Kanji is given, how they are used and how they work together. In 2.1, the history of the Chinese characters in Japanese is discussed. In 2.2, the history of the two Kana syllabaries is discussed. Then, in 2.3, a brief history of the Korean written language and the usage of Chinese characters in Korean is discussed. Following that, several proposals of script reforms to the Japanese written language are discussed. Finally, the results of a study of similar nature to this one is discussed.

Following the 2. ‘Background’ section comes 3. ‘The study - Native speakers’ views on the Japanese writing systems’, which is divided into 3.1 ‘Purpose’, 3.2 ‘Method’, 3.3 ‘Hypotheses’ and 3.4 ‘The interviews with Japanese native speakers’. In order to find out what native speakers’ opinions are concerning the research questions of this thesis, a qualitative study based on interviews with nine Japanese native speakers was conducted.
The final section is 4. ‘Conclusion’, which is divided into 4.1 ‘Hypotheses and result’s, 4.2 ‘General thoughts’, 4.3 ‘Trial and error’ and 4.4 ‘Future studies on similar topics’. Under the sources section, the interview questions can be found in Appendix A: Interview questions.
2. Background - The history of the writing systems

Introduction

In this chapter, a background to the Japanese written language history will be provided. It will attempt to illustrate how the three writing systems are used and what they are used for in contemporary Japanese, as well as discuss some of the main influences to the evolution of the current writing systems.

The Japanese written language consists of three writing systems. Firstly, the Kana writing system, which consists of two phonetic syllabary systems, called Hiragana and Katakana. Secondly, the Rōmaji writing system which is Japanese written using latin letters. And thirdly, the logographic system called Kanji (Goddard, 2005:198). The logographic system henceforth also referred to as Kanji, consists of Chinese characters and has its roots in China. Below is a table to help illustrate the ways that the three writing systems work and interlace with each other.

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<td>Logographic</td>
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<td>Japanese names,</td>
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<td>verb stems,</td>
<td>山田、 'yamada', name</td>
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| | | adjective stems | 食 - (べる)*
| | | | eat verb stem |
| | | | 赤(い), red |
| Hiragana | Phonetic, 46 characters | Inflections, | (食)** - べる, Inflection, present tense of 'to eat' |
| | Rounded in shape | Particles, such as topic markers, object marker et.c. | は、が、を、へ、に et.c. |
Japanese can also be written with latin letters. This is called *Rōmaji*, romanized Japanese. However, depending on what romanization system you are using, certain syllables and moras are written differently.

*Table 4*

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<th>Hiragana and Kanji</th>
<th>あの犬は赤いりんごを食べた。</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English translation</td>
<td>That dog ate a red apple.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rōmaji Revised Hepburn</td>
<td>Ano inu wa akai ringo o tabeta.</td>
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Since this section also discusses the history of the written language, below is a rundown of the Japanese periods which will be mentioned later on in the text, and between which dates they lasted.

Nara period: 710 – 794
Heian period: 794 – 1185
Meiji period: 1868 – 1912
2.1 Chinese characters and Kanji history

The Chinese written language as well as Buddhism practiced in China have been major influences on the history of the Japanese written language (Habein, 1984:7, 8). The earliest signs of Chinese characters in Korea and Japan are from the 4th century, but it is thought that Korea came in contact with Chinese characters even a hundred years before that. Chinese characters came to Japan through Baekje, an ancient country that existed in what is currently South Korea. The earliest materials found in Japan containing Chinese characters are old artifacts with inscriptions in Chinese characters. This was found most notably on swords and a metal mirror (Svantesson, 1991:87-93). These artifacts are thought to have been imported from China or Korea, sometime before the 4th century. Further information about how and to what extent the Chinese characters were used is hard to say since materials are scarce (Habein, 1984:8). Notwithstanding, during the 6th and 7th century, Chinese characters were employed to a larger extent. Japanese chronicles, such as Kojiki (712) and Nihonshiki (720) were written in Chinese but contained passages in Japanese. Not to be confused, these were still written with Chinese characters (Svantesson, 1991:87-93).

During the Nara period (lasting 710-794), attempts to rendition Chinese texts increased, and by result, soon the Kanbun-Kundoku emerged (Frellesvig 2010:258-260). Kanbun means ‘Classical Chinese texts’ and Kundoku is interchangeable with Kunyomi, ‘Japanese reading’. Under the term Kanbun-Kundoku, there were various methods of transcribing Chinese texts into Japanese. To name one method that falls under Kanbun-Kundoku, there was Kunten. The word Kunten can be broken down into kun and ten. Kun, which essentially means ‘Native Japanese reading of a Chinese character’ and ten, which means ‘mark’. Kunten is actually also a cover-term for further methods that in particular evolved during the Heian period (794-1185). Some of those methods are, for example, the Okoten method, but also Kana glosses, such as Man’yōgana and Kana (Frellesvig 2010:258-260). The matter of Man’yōgana will continue to be discussed in this section. The topics regarding Okoten and Kana, however, will be further explained further in section 2.2.

In the Japanese passages in the chronicles such as the ones previously mentioned (Kojiki, Nihonshiki), a system called Man’yōgana was employed. Using Man’yōgana, there was a way to write Japanese whilst using Chinese characters. Man’yōgana was used to transcribe Chinese to Japanese by using characters which created a similar phonetic reading to Japanese words (Svantesson, 1991:87-93). This created the Japanese-style reading of Chinese words, known as Kunyomi (Habein, 1984:11). Jan Olof Svantesson (Svantesson, 1991:87-93) presents a couple of examples to explain how it worked. If one, for example wanted to write yama, ‘mountain’ in Japanese, you could use the Chinese character which reads as yé (‘night’) with another Chinese character, má (‘hemp’), to get the reading yémá.
Man’yōgana was not employed indefinitely and in all texts, which means that there still was the more traditional style of reading texts even when transcribing Kanbun. This original way of reading Kanbun is called *Onyomi*: Chinese-style reading of Chinese characters. Onyomi focused on the semantic use of the Chinese characters rather than the phonetic reading. Using the same example as before, *yama* would be written with the Chinese character with the semantic meaning for ‘mountain’, and be read as *shān* (Svantesson, 1991:87-93).

Because there was no set way of reading and transcribing Kanbun texts and each transcriber chose whichever style of reading they preferred, reading these texts soon proved to be quite troublesome due to the fact that the characters could be read with either the Japanese reading or the Chinese one. Therefore, during the 9th century (800-900), the Kana systems were beginning to come into existence (Svantesson, 1991:87-93).

2.2 The Kana writing systems

When it comes to the history of the Kana systems, materials on Katakana are much more rich than that of Hiragana, purely due to what the two writing systems was used for and who it was used by. Hiragana was mostly used by women for poems, personal letters, notes and the like, which are more easily lost than other types of materials, whereas Katakana was used in, for example, Buddhist texts by buddhist priests (Habein, 1984:25).

The Heian period, which lasted from 792 to 1192, was a crucial time for the Kana scripts because it was during this period that they were essentially refined. As a result of the four centuries of the Heian period being rather peaceful and that Japan was an aristocratic society, which greatly valued reading and writing, the writing systems flourished in this period (Habein, 1984:21). However, in the beginning of the Heian period, more focus was put on studying and writing in the Chinese-style writing. This was most likely due to the T’ang dynasty in China, which had a great cultural influence on Japan at the time. Not only was the Chinese-style writing in fashion, but writing and studying Chinese was also considered important and most of all highly academic (Habein, 1984:21). Nevertheless, that started to change when the formal diplomatic relations between Japan and T’ang China soon was discontinued (Seeley, 2000:59).

The Katakana syllabary was at first not used the way it is today, nor did it develop completely on its own. Buddhism and the Buddhist priesthood played a large role in the development of the Kana syllabaries, since Buddhism and therefore also Buddhist texts which came from China was considered of great importance in Heian Japan. However, since these texts were written in Chinese, there was a growing need to be able to transcribe these texts to Japanese (Seeley, 2000:62).
Much of how the Kana syllabaries developed can be understood by studying a series of corpus called the Kuntenbo. The Kuntenbo consisted primarily of Buddhist texts from China written in Chinese, but the reason for those particular corpus being a part of Kuntenbo, is because they all contain some level of marking. These markings were used by the Japanese buddhist priests to be able to transcribe the texts into Japanese. However, Kuntenbo did not only employ techniques such as marking; it is also here the Kana syllabaries began to emanate (Seeley, 2000:62).

The process of decoding Chinese texts into Japanese was made with the method mentioned in the previous section, namely Kanbun-Kundoku. However, to use Kanbun-Kundoku did not only mean translating Chinese words to Japanese. It also concerned things such as reading the words in the order needed by Japanese syntax. Following this stage, phonograms were beginning to be employed in these texts, albeit at first without much structure and at random, much due to the fact that the Buddhist priests were transcribing these texts for their own purpose. There was yet a collective movement to create a uniform way of transcribing Chinese to Japanese.

The phonogram principle means using a character to represent a vocal sound, and this principle was employed in early China. The characters were at first primarily used to symbolize complete nouns, but began to be used more extensively as time went on (Seeley, 2000:59-67). Over time, some Chinese characters were starting to be used only for their phonetic properties, discarding their semantic properties. But since many of the characters used a great amount of strokes, seeming inefficient for its use as only phonetics, the characters became contracted and abbreviated, and then simplified (Japan, 1876:133). For that reason, for example, 多 would start to be used as a phonogram to get the sound ta, and later the sign was simplified to the recognizable タ (ta) of the contemporary Katakana syllabary (Seeley, 2000:59-62). The reason for the development of their simplified shapes is that there emerged two different ways to write the Character phonograms. One was to simply write the Chinese character as it was, but the other took only certain parts (radicals) of the character, whilst keeping all the same reading. This is known as isolating. The reason that the latter method became the one to outcompete the first is simply because there was limited space between the text rows, and having to write less strokes for the phonograms meant that it not only proved a more effective way of writing, but also preserved the legibility of the character better.

Hiragana developed in a very similar manner, deriving from isolated and simplified Phonograms, but was not at all used in the same extent as Katakana and its predecessors were (Seeley, 2000:59-67).

Along with the previously mentioned methods of transcribing Chinese texts into Japanese, something called Okoten was used (Habein, 1984:22). The o in Okoten stands for the object marker, koto stands for the nominalization marker and ten means ‘mark’ or ‘spot’. Okoten were placed around the Chinese characters, and depending on where exactly the Okoten is placed, the Okoten meant something different. By simply marking a Chinese character in a certain spot, you could tell what
precedes or follows the character. For example, the placement of the Okoten could reveal if the character marker is a verb, what inflection it carries and what tense it is in et c. (Habein, 1984:22-23).

According to Frellesvig, a simple system of Kunten is taught as a part of the Kanbun curriculum in Japanese schools today (Frellesvig 2010:260).

2.3 Chinese characters in Korea, and the Korean script reform to Hangul

The reason that this section appears in this study is because despite the fact that Japanese and Korean have a common ancestry when it comes to the use of Chinese characters, in Korea, the use of Chinese characters was discontinued, whereas in Japan it was not.

Although contemporary Korean is written using Hangul, a phonetic alphabet, Korean was up until the later part of the 18th century written using Chinese characters, known as Hanja in Korean (Svantesson, 1991:81-83). Similarly to when Chinese characters were found to be first used in Japan, Hanja has been discovered in stone inscriptions in Korea from the 4th century. But it is thought that Koreans came in contact with Chinese script even a hundred years before that (Svantesson, 1991:81-83). During the 6th century, the Hyangchal system was developed. Similarly to how Chinese characters were adapted to the Japanese language using Man’yōgana, the same was done to the Korean language. However, instead of using only Hanja, inflections were added behind the Hanja, using simplified shapes that resemble the signs of the current Hangul script. Hyangchal was then standardized and developed further under the name of ‘Idu’, which became the script system which was used up until the end of the 18th century (Svantesson, 1991:81-83).

Under the rule of King Sejong (1397-1450), a commission invented the Hangul script. The script consists of consonants and vowels, and the consonants have three modes: plain, aspirated, and tense. The script was finally introduced in 1446, in the book Hunmin Chŏng’ŭm, ‘The Correct/Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People’. The reason as to why King Sejong called for this script reform is because he wanted to provide a logical and linguistically well-founded method of writing Korean, as he deemed Chinese characters to be an inefficient and troublesome way of recording Korean (Goddard 2005:185). Although the Hangul script was first introduced in the 15th century, Chinese characters and Idu was still used in official and bureaucratic contexts. Around the turn of the century, movements for a reform to replace the Chinese script and language with Korean arose. However, due to Korea becoming a Japanese protectorate, all matters concerning script reform took halt. It was not until in 1945, when Korea gained its independence, that Korean became an official language with Hangul as its the official script (Svantesson, 1991:81-83).
2.4 Proposals of reforms to the Japanese writing systems

In the early 1870s, Japan went through a great amount of changes, many in attempt to become a modernized nation (Heinrich, 2012:21-30). In this period of change, the emerge of a new elite was necessary to replace the old, which had been defamed by reason of its inability to hold up against Western military. Thus, in order to create a nation able to contend with the West and its progresses, roles of power were filled with men who had recently graduated from Western schools and academies in Japan. As a consequence, modernization became synonymous with Westernization (Heinrich, 2012:21-30).

Upon coming in contact more with the West, its cultures and most importantly Western languages, in particular English, a notion that the Japanese language was in need of change grew stronger. Although often indirect, it was generally thought that Japan struggled with pertaining to the nation's script, and that there in particular was a so-called problem with Kanji. Therefore, simplification and improvement of the Japanese written language was advocated. Although the many suggestions made during this period were turned down or discontinued, Japanese has undoubtedly gone through many changes, even up until the present day (Matsumura, 1977:196).

2.4.1 Eradicate the Kanji script system: Replacement by Kana

There have been several instances where it has been suggested that the Japanese writing systems are in need of a change and even that they should be replaced with only one writing system. Such a reform was suggested by Maejima Hisoka, a Japanese statesman and translator who lived during the 19th century, who proposed the eradication of Kanji (Lee, 2009:24, 25).

In 1866, Maejima came to the Shogun with a petition, titled Kanji gohaishi no gi, meaning ‘Proposal for Abolition of Chinese Characters’ (Seeley, 2000:59). He suggested this change in order for Japan to be able to compete with the faster developing Western countries which only use one phonetic writing system, as he deemed Kanji to slow down the learning process in education. He also wanted education to be available for all, regardless of social class or status. In the opening paragraph of his proposal in Kanji gohaishi no gi, he drew direct parallels with Western countries, saying that Japan should mimic their language by adopting a phonetic script (Kana) (Lee, 2009:24, 25). He further argued that should Japan abolish Kanji, they could save up to three years of “wasted time” which is spent on children in primary school to memorize and learn how to write Chinese characters. Furthermore, he claimed that it could save up to eight years for those students who take specialized higher studies. Maejima was so tenacious in his attempt to make his proposal accepted that he set up a company called Keimōsha in order to publish a newspaper, all written in Kana. It was called Mainichi hiragana shinbun, and did not even survive its first year. But due to the newspaper, Shimizu Usaburō
helped promote Maejima’s proposal (Seeley, 2000:138, 139). There was a movement known as the Kana-only movement which gained more following in the early 1880s. As a result, *Kana no kai*, ‘Kana Club’ was formed. It would seem as that both Maejima and Shimizu were part of Kana no kai, but due to disagreements in the group, activities declined already by 1889. The disagreements surrounded primarily the topic if an all-kana orthography should be of colloquial, meaning more conversational, written style; which was what Shimizu and Maejima had presupposed that it should be. Needless to say, Maejima’s proposal did not come through.

2.4.2 Eradicate the Kanji script system: Adopt Rōmaji

In 1885 the rise of another group occurred, namely the *Rōmaji-kai* (Romanization Club). Similar problems with divided opinions around core values arose even here, such as the matter of exactly what kind of romanization to endorse. What features would it contain? For example, should the long ‘o’ be written as Ō, Oo or Ou? The group finally settled on one type of romanization, and as it turns out, James Curtis Hepburn decided to use it in his third edition of Japanese-English dictionary. His use of the romanization system that the Rōmaji-kai had created lead to it gaining a burst of popularity and became known as *The Hepburn romanization* (Seeley, 2000:140). Despite perhaps a bit more success than the Kana kai, in 1892 the Rōmaji-kai was also discontinued because of the same issues with colloquial style, although this time it seemed unanimous that the language should be colloquial; the question was what exactly the colloquial style would look like. With the growth of following for both the Kana-kai and Rōmaji-kai who were almost enamored with Western culture and language, came the growth of a counter movement which promoted nationalism, and with this, along with previously mentioned issues, came the end of Rōmaji-kai as well. But despite the fall of these two groups, the call for a change of the Japanese written language was very much still strong. If proposals on adopting a single Kana syllabary or writing in Rōmaji were not going to pass, then the amount of Chinese characters used in Japanese can at least be reduced, or so it was thought. Though, due to the history of the Japanese language and in particular its use of Kanji, there was still the notion that the more knowledge one has of Chinese characters, the more educated you are. Thus, there were oppositions to decreasing the amount of Kanji used in Japanese. However, the proposal was celebrated by some, in particular one educationalist, by the name of Fukuzawa Yukichi, who wanted to take this further (Seeley, 2000:140, 141).

2.4.3 Decrease the amount of Chinese characters in the Japanese language

Fukuzawa Yukichi was an educationalist who wrote a three-volume book series for children, which used less than a thousand different Chinese characters, proving that it was in fact possible to write using less characters (Seeley, 2000:141). In the opening section of the book series, Fukuzawa asserted
that putting the more difficult Chinese characters aside, the Japanese language could continue to function without issue, and that using only two to three thousand characters would suffice. Moreover, another person, by the name of Yano Fumio, agreed saying that for ordinary texts, less than three thousand characters would be more than enough. In 1887, Yano compiled a dictionary for three thousand characters, and the dictionary was called as such Sanzen jibiki, ‘The Three Thousand Character Dictionary’. Upon Yano presenting his proposal to reduce the amount of Kanji, the government of the time was not completely unsupportive. Prior to Yano’s proposal, in 1872 a compilation of a dictionary of characters for everyday use had already been commissioned by the first Minister of Education, Ōki Takató. The Japanese language has since been subject to script reforms such as the one commissioned by Ōki, and therefore the amount of Kanji used in the Japanese written language has decreased significantly over time (Seeley, 2000:141, 142).

2.4.4 Language replacement proposal: From Japanese to English

In May of 1872, there was a proposal for a reform which would replace Japanese with English. The man behind this proposal was Mori Arinori (Heinrich, 2012:22). He was one of the first people to enlist at Western universities. He returned to Japan in 1867 and became an ambassador in the US in 1871. While in the US, he released three books: Life and Resources in America (1871), Religious Freedom in Japan (1872) and Education in Japan (1873). During the same time as the proposal, a diplomatic world tour called the Iwakura mission took place in Washington between 1871 and 1873, bringing along 50 members, among many of which were famous Japanese statesmen. The purpose of the mission was to show, in particular the US, how Japan was ready to become a modern country, willing to tie ties with the world. Mori was of great importance during this mission, by working as chief interpreter and aiding in negotiations. Nonetheless, these negotiations did not develop much further since the US did not have any particular interest in what Japan had to offer. However, during the Iwakura mission, Mori sought advice on education in Japan from American educators by writing an open letter. In return, he received a letter from a certain Henry, who wrote three arguments as to why Japanese should be discontinued. Firstly, Henry stated that the written Japanese language is overly complicated, and therein (secondly), that continuing education in Japanese is impossible, and finally, that Japanese is inapt for international communication. These arguments became the pillars of Mori’s later proposals to script reforms (Heinrich, 2012:21-30).

In another letter to a William Dwight Whitney, Mori pointed out what he considered were flaws of the Japanese language, such as the fact that the written and spoken language differs, and even claimed that Japanese is not only insufficient in matters of international communications, but also in communications between Japanese people themselves. However, quite suddenly it seems that Mori became less and less inclined to actually replace Japanese with English by pointing out the many flaws in the English language as well. He stated these to be the complicated orthography, irregular
verb and nouns inflections et c. What he proposed instead, was a reform to simplify English and therein remove and correct for example these irregular verb and noun inflections before replacing the Japanese with English. It also seems that before all of this, Mori was a supporter of romanization as a reform to the Japanese language; meaning that the Japanese written language would adopt the latin alphabet instead of using Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji. But as we know he later became fixated with using English as a replacement for Japanese (Heinrich, 2012:21-30).

The reply Mori received from Whitney seemed rather harsh, and was most likely due to the notion that Mori carried, which was that English belongs to no one and therefore is open to be reformed by anyone, not English speakers alone. What Whitney pointed out as the biggest flaw in the reform was that speakers of the simplified English would become subject of mockery by English native speakers. Whitney was far from the only person against such a reform, and Mori was criticised heavily, and so, when Mori returned to Japan, he discontinued his attempts of replacing Japanese with simplified English (Heinrich, 2012:21-30).

2.4.5 A completely new script all together

In 1874, a Confucianist scholar by the name of Sakatani Hajime spoke of creating a new language and script for all of the world to use. It would take all of the best features from already existing languages and leave out the flaws. His proposal passed almost completely unnoticed, however in 1885, another man came with a similar proposal. His name was Hiraiwa Nobuyasu, and he had made a set of nineteen symbols, which was based on the god age script. Proposals such as these raised a lot of discussion in the late 19th century, but rarely became anything more than conversation starters (Seeley, 2000:142).

2.5 Native speakers’ attitudes toward script reforms: Malm’s study

In 2016, a similar study to this one was conducted at Lund University, titled: ‘Simplified characters are complicated - a study on attitudes toward script reforms in Japan’ written by Patrick Malm (original title in Swedish: Förenklade tecken är komplicerade - en studie om attityder till språkreformer i Japan). He conducted a quantitative study by creating a questionnaire in which he asked various questions about the Japanese writing systems. The questionnaire received answers from around 30 native speakers who had to answer using the Likert scale. The scale consisted of 5 levels: Agree wholeheartedly
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Wholly disagree
Malm wrote two statements on the matter of romanization, to which the native speakers had to react and answer using a likert scale. The first statement being: “Romanization of the Japanese language would be a good reform”, and the latter: “Japanese would be easier to learn if it were romanized”. The answers to both of these questions were similar in style, as the majority answered that they did not agree.

Upon being presented the statement: “Increase the amount of Chinese characters taught in school”, a majority of 43% opposed. A fifth answered that they supported the statement, another fifth had no opinion and 17% were completely against it.

To the statement “Japan should adopt the same simplified characters that are used in China”, 33% opposed, 27% opposed entirely, 23% were neutral and 10% agreed wholeheartedly. Malm himself says that a majority (60%) were supposedly against such a reform, but that all of the ones who voted that they would wholeheartedly agree to the reform, appeared to be part of the two oldest age-group. However, none of the younger age-groups were in accord to such a reform.

Upon reading the statement “The Japanese language is in need of reforms”, 40% were neutral, 27% disagreed, 20% agreed, 7% agreed wholeheartedly and 6% wholly disagreed. Malm states that just like before, it is the oldest generations that are for the script reforms, whereas the younger generations are against them.

In Malm’s final discussion topic, it was revealed that most native speakers do not believe that the Japanese language is in need of a reform. By making it subject to reform, the Japanese language would lose the features that are the core charm of it.
3. The study - Native speakers’ views on the Japanese writing systems

3.1 Purpose

The goal of this study is to provide further information on where Japanese native speakers of today stand in regards to the Japanese writing systems. This is to say that, despite the fact that the Japanese written language has been subject to many changes and reforms, are there native speakers who believe that the Japanese language could benefit from certain script reforms.

3.2 Method

For this study, nine interviews were conducted. Five of the interviews were executed in Japanese, three in English and one in Swedish. Six of the interviewees were around the age of forty, and the remaining three were in their twenties. All of the interviewees who were in their twenties were males, whereas only one of the older interviewees was male.

Since these interviews were conducted in Sweden, some of the answers to certain questions are directly affected by the fact that the people interviewed are currently living in Sweden. However, that will be further discussed with the relevant questions in the next section (3.3). The interview questions were not asked in the exact order listed in the appendix attached at the end of this document, nor were they always asked in the same wording. The order of questions and wording were flexible for the sake of making the interview and conversation carry on more naturally than it had, had one stuck to the exact layout of the interview questions. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees permission.

The reason for doing interviews for this study is because it not only offers further insight to exactly what the interviewees opinions are, it also gives answers as to why they think the way they do. Using a questionnaire, you are able to get more answers. However, say that you receive data, saying that out of 30 people, 10 people ‘agree’ to, for example, a Rōmaji reform. Among those 10 people, although they all share the same answer, their motivations to agreeing may be vastly different.

What could be negative about interviews is that the person being interviewed might want to give the answers they sense that the interviewer is looking for. For example, they may strongly disagree with a question but tone down their actual opinion in fear of making the interviewer feel uncomfortable. The language that is used in the conversation may also affect the answers. Since I, the interviewer, am not fluent in Japanese, I may not be able to delve deeper into some questions as well
as I would be able to had I spoken English. But the same goes for the reverse; had I spoken English, the interviewees may not be able to express their feelings as well as they can in Japanese.

Below, I have added the interview questions. An appendix of the interview questions in both English and Japanese can be found attached at the end of this essay.

Gender
Age
Occupation/Major
Languages able to speak
Time spent abroad/exchanges

Q: What personal impression do you have of Kanji?

Q: Do you find it fun to write Kanji?

Q: Do you ever struggle with reading Kanji?

Follow up if Yes/Sometimes: Q:
In what situations do you struggle with reading Kanji?
For example when reading newspapers, books.

Q: In a week, how many times do you find yourself writing Kanji by hand?

Q: Do you ever struggle with writing Kanji?

Follow up if Yes/Sometimes: Q:
In what situations do you struggle with writing Kanji? How come you struggle?

Q: Do you write Japanese using your phone and/or computer?

Q: In a week, how many times do you write Japanese using your phone or laptop?

Q: Do you think that due to modern technology, one might make forget how to write Kanji? Do you think that younger people might struggle more with this, due to growing up with the technology available today?

Q: Do you think that the written language should be the same as the spoken language?
Q: Would you be opposed to using only phonetic writing systems such as hiragana and katakana?

Q: What could potentially be an advantage to using only phonetic scripts?

Q: What could potentially be disadvantageous with getting rid of the Kanji script system, and using only phonetic scripts?

Q: Could one ‘fix’ those problems/disadvantages? If so, how?

Q: Some words that used to be written with Kanji are now written using Hiragana (for example…). Do you think this will continue to happen? That Kanji will be used less it comes to certain words?

Q: Do you personally think it is good that less words are written with Kanji nowadays?

Q: What do you think is good about Kanji?

Q: Do you think that the amount of Kanji being taught in school will grow or lessen? Or that the way Kanji is taught will change.

Q: Do you think there could come a day where how to write Kanji is stopped being taught at school, but you’re still taught how to read it? If so, why? If not, why not?

Q: When learning other languages, such as English, did you think it was more difficult or easier to use only one writing system (a phonetic one)?

Q: Have you ever thought about the fact that you use three script systems when most languages only use one? If you think about it, how do you feel about it? Do you think it is a good thing?

Q: Do you think that having grown up learning Kana and Kanji affects the way that you learn languages? For an example, do you think that having grown up as a Japanese, it gives you an advantage in learning languages to have grown up learning to use three script systems when learning a new script system?
3.3 Hypotheses

Seeing as languages are ever-changing, there was no doubt in my mind that the Japanese language too will inevitably change. Considering that, I was convinced that the biggest change that can come to the Japanese written language would revolve around the Kanji writing system.

Being a native speaker of a language which uses a single phonetic alphabet, learning Japanese, and in doing so also learning how to read and write Chinese characters, it soon came to me that to write in Japanese is a lot more work than to write using only a phonetic alphabet. That being said, I often enjoyed the process of learning and writing Chinese characters. However, as previously mentioned, being native in a language that does not use logographic signs, there have been times where I have wondered what it would be like if the Japanese language stopped to use the Kanji writing system. I felt that there could potentially be some advantages to eradicating the Kanji writing system, such as that it could save time in education for both Japanese learners and Japanese native speakers. Due to this, in combination with the rapid development in technology which has left most of the people living in first world countries writing more using smartphones and computers than by hand, I felt that there should be some Japanese native speakers who would agree with me. However, as I expected many native speakers to feel as well, I believe that Kanji are a big part of the Japanese culture and getting rid of the Kanji writing system would essentially be a shame. I believed that a majority, if not all of the interviewees would be against a reform that would eradicate Kanji. However, I was curious to see if there would be anyone who was not against it.

On the topic of Kanji education in school, I believed that a majority would think that in the future, the amount of Kanji that is taught will be decreased. The reason for thinking so is simply because the amount of Jōyō Kanji has been decreased over time, and I believe it will continue to do so.

I also believed that since Japanese native speakers must learn three writing systems as children, it could prove to be an advantage when learning other, foreign script systems. Why I thought so is because I believe that should the brain be used to using more than one script system, it should also have an easier time learning other writing systems.

In general I believed that the answers from the older interviewees would be more conservative than those from the younger interviewees, meaning that the older interviewees would in a greater extent be against, for example, a script reform that would eradicate Kanji.
3.4 The interviews with Japanese native speakers

3.4.1 Opinions on Kanji and using only phonetic writing

Out of the Japanese native speakers interviewed, the majority stated that as a child, they had had a different opinion of Kanji than the one they have currently. When in school, they thought Kanji were a menace to memorize and learn to write. However, upon graduating and not having to learn Kanji anymore they began to appreciate the Kanji script system. A common opinion was that Kanji are very beautiful and therefore is fun to write, but some native speakers also stated that they sometimes disliked writing Kanji. That was in particular in opinion to “difficult” Kanji which have many strokes, and therefore are harder to remember and write.

When asked if they think the Japanese language would be easier to write or read without using Kanji, and only using the phonetic scripts hiragana and katakana, most native speakers objected, saying that without Kanji, a sentence is much harder to read. Even when asked if adding spaces between the words could facilitate reading, they still thought that it would be more difficult without Kanji. Some mentioned that in children’s books, stories are written only using hiragana, and that as an adult, they found it very challenging to read and grasp the meaning of a sentence if it did not contain Kanji. They would have to re-read the sentence multiple times to properly understand what they were reading. Something also mentioned frequently was that some words are phonetically written the same, i.e. homonymous, and therefore without Kanji, it is hard to tell which meaning of the word you are supposed to interpret. For example, ame can mean either ‘rain’ or ‘candy’. Some also stated that the Kanji itself could provide more information, or rather more often described as “feeling” by the interviewees, than it can in comparison with only being written phonetically. Some interviewees gave more concrete examples, saying that even if you do not know a Kanji or a word’s meaning, you can still guess its meaning by looking at the radicals that the Kanji is composed of.

It was a renowned opinion that Kanji is very convenient, for many a different reasons. Many of the interviewees, when asked what they think is good about Kanji, answered that texts that contain Kanji are faster to read; and some also said that it is faster to write as well. One of the interviewees also mentioned that novels and books are significantly thinner in size when they are written in Japanese, due to the fact that words written with logographic signs take up less space than if they are written phonetically. Another interesting opinion came from the twenty year old interviewees. Two of them expressed that they thought that Kanji can reveal much of the person writing it. For example, by seeing someone’s handwriting, in particular that of writing Kanji, you can tell if they are an orderly or messy person. One of the twenty year olds also said that they enjoyed learning more difficult Kanji, saying that they were under the impression that knowing more Kanji means being more academic.
3.4.2 The effect of technology on Kanji

When asked how frequently in a week they write Japanese by hand, most answered either never, or very seldom. They did, however, write daily using their phones and computers. The things they still write by hand are usually just small notes for themselves, their partners or shopping lists. But when writing such things by hand, they more often used only phonetic script and did not use Kanji.

Nearly all of the interviewees expressed that they are convinced that one’s ability to write and remember how to write Kanji can be affected by the presence of modern technology. This, as a result of only having to write a word phonetically on your device for the Kanji of that word to pop up, in addition to using these devices to write with much more frequently than they write Japanese by hand. Notwithstanding, these native speakers did say that when they are in Japan, they are likely to write Japanese more often by hand than they currently are, residing in Sweden. If in Japan, by reason of taking either classes that are taught in Japanese, or in relation to their occupation, they are simply bound to read and write more Japanese by hand. However, being and living in Sweden, which they were and had been for at least a year (some up to 7 years) when these interviews took place, there is not the same urgency to write Japanese in their everyday life. Therefore, if these interviews had taken place in Japan, the results may have differed.

All of the interviewees admitted to, more or less, struggling with remembering how to write certain Kanji by hand. They said that they probably will not forget the most commonly used Kanji, but Kanji that are more seldomly used they forget how to write. What seemed to affect how gravely they forgot Kanji was how they spent their free time and what their hobbies and occupations were. One of the interviewees for example liked to write a diary, and therefore had a reason to write Kanji on a more daily basis than others. Another mentioned that, as soon as they found themselves struggling with writing a Kanji, they looked it up with a dictionary to make sure they wrote it correctly.

Since the general opinion seemed to be that technology does affect how well you remember how to write Kanji, the interviewees were also asked if they think that particularly younger generations run at risk of not remembering Kanji as well as older generations. This accumulated many different answers, but essentially half thought that it will not affect younger generations any more than it affects older generations. The other half thought the opposite, that they probably will be more likely to struggle with remembering how to write Kanji.

Upon being presented questions on the future of Kanji, there was a wide range of answers. A common consensus was that the amount of Kanji taught in school will decrease, although the reason for these statements varied from person to person. However, about a third of the interviewees
answered that they think the amount will remain unchanged. When asked for the motivation of the previous statement, most expressed that they think the Japanese written language is already rather set in stone and will not go through many changes from now on. For example, since the amount of Jōyō Kanji has already decreased, and the Kanji in that list are frequently used in books, newspapers and textbooks, there would be no reason to remove those Kanji because they are in fact frequently used. Among the people who answered that they think it will decrease, about half of them said it would be due to having to increase classes about technology, and therefore, would have to take of the hours used in learning Kanji and change them to classes about technology. This means that the possible decrease in Jōyō Kanji would not be in direct consequence of anything that has to do with Kanji, but simply because of the growth of technology, and in so the growing requirement to be able to handle technology. Since education in Kanji takes up a lot of time in Japanese schools, as a follow up question, I asked what they would have liked to use those hours for instead, had Kanji education been discontinued. Here, many answered languages, saying they felt limited in only being able to speak Japanese fluently. Some said they knew how to speak English, but were not confident in their abilities, and thought it could have been nice to have had more education in English; specifically in speaking English.

Although many thought the amount of Kanji could come to be decreased, there was only one person out of the interviewees who thought that, in the future, classes in school on how to write Kanji altogether could be completely eradicated. When asked why the majority thought it would never stop being taught, many answers resembled the ones given to why Kanji is useful or why they like it; simply because it is part of Japanese culture, that it is useful and because they are beautiful. However, an additional answer emerged quite a lot here, which was that Japanese names are written using Kanji, and according to the interviewees, this tradition would of course continue no matter if the education system changed. It was also suggested that by learning how to write Kanji, you memorize Kanji better, meaning that should the curriculum on how to write Kanji be disengaged, it could potentially take longer to memorize how to read Kanji as well.

The native speakers said that extremely rarely did they struggle with reading Kanji. But if they did struggle, it was usually when reading older books, although some also did say that there times when they do not know how to read some of Kanji in newspapers as well. The ones who admitted to struggling with reading certain Kanji also mentioned that it is not uncommon to struggle with reading Japanese names, since many different Kanji can be used for one and the same name. Seeing as some mentioned struggling with older books, there was also a question about how certain words which used to be written with Kanji, in for example older books, are in contemporary Japanese written with Hiragana. Some thought that this could continue to happen, meaning that some words will over time be written with Hiragana instead of Kanji. But those who thought so expressed that
even if it did, it would probably be a slow process. Much like they had answered before, the Japanese language is already a fully functioning language, and despite the many modifications it has gone through, is no longer in any particular need of any more changes; nor do they think that any larger changes will arise naturally either. When asked if they thought it was good that some words no longer were written with Kanji, most agreed, but only if it were a difficult Kanji with many strokes.

3.4.3 How being a native speaker in Japanese affects learning other languages

Seeing as how the Japanese written language differs from most languages, since it consists of three writing systems as opposed to only one, further questions on this matter were asked.

The majority of native speakers of Japanese stated that they had not thought about the fact that Japanese uses three script systems prior to being asked during the interview. Some did however mention having a moment of realization when learning, for example, English.

When asked if they thought learning English and other language was difficult, there were many different answers. But what could be concluded from the answers was that there are things about English that are relatively easy, and others that are harder. One of the interviewees said that, indeed, because English only uses the 26 latin letters, it is and technically should be easier to learn than for example, learning Japanese, which has Hiragana (46 characters), Katakana (46 characters), and Kanji (Jōyō Kanji being 2136 characters). However, since Japanese writing is built on a syllabary system, they found it hard to grasp that signs could stand on their own; meaning the separation of consonants and vowels.

One of the interview questions asked if they thought that due to having to have learned three writings systems as a child, it has affected how they learn other languages; in particular, if they think they have an easier time learning new script systems than non-Japanese native speakers. Here, most if not all answered that they did not think it gave any advantages, for reasons such as the ones mentioned before; Japanese is simply very different from, for example, Western languages. Having to learn three writing systems simply means having to learn three writing systems, and there is nothing more to it, some expressed. However, among the interviewees there were those who had visited parts of China. They expressed that due to knowing Kanji, they could more or less understand restaurant menus, and therefore, having learned the Kanji script system was a perk when it comes to, for example, visiting or living in China.

3.4.4 Eradication of Kanji: who would it be advantageous for?

As seen previously in section 3.3.1., most native speakers answered that there are more disadvantages to removing the Kanji script system than there are advantages. However, there is one group that almost every interviewee said could benefit from such a reform: Japanese learners. Some said that,
since Japanese learners are not native speakers in Japanese, they have to, besides learning the Jōyō Kanji, actively learn the grammatical structures of Japanese. Although native speakers of almost all languages usually have to learn the grammar of their mother tongue in school, at least to some extent, since it is their mother tongue, they generally do not have to actually learn it in the same way that learners have to. Adding the Jōyō Kanji on that, it is quite a lot for the learner to learn. So, by eradicating the Kanji, learners’ learning process would most likely speed up.
4. Conclusion

4.1 Hypotheses and results

Before meeting with the interviewees, I was rather confident in my hypotheses, and many of the answers given in the interviews confirmed most of my expectations. There were, however, also many answers that were surprising and unexpected.

Unsurprisingly, few native speakers were positive toward a script reform that would remove the Kanji script system. Their motivations were also rather expected, saying that Kanji is part of the Japanese culture, but also facilitates reading and writing. Although there have been many proposals to script reforms, few of them have actually been executed. The answers collected from the interviews seemed somewhat similar to attitudes toward previous script reforms (see: section 2.4), such as the fact that the majority did not want to do away with the Kanji script system, but are open to a decrease of difficult characters.

Almost all of the interviewees expressed that technology indeed is affecting the way they interact with Kanji, and that they have begun to struggle more with writing it since the arrival of modern technology, such as smartphones and laptops. These answers were not unexpected. Many also thought that the amount of classes on Kanji taught in school could come to be diminished to give more time for other subjects, such as classes on technology. Therein, it would not be decreased as a consequence of Kanji itself, but simply because of the progress in technology. I believed that if there were answers saying they think that Kanji classes could be decreased, it would be either because of thinking that the Kanji curriculum takes up too much time in school, or due to a disdain for Kanji.

I was under the belief that Japanese native speakers could have an advantage when learning other, foreign script systems, simply because they had to learn three of them as children. However, at least from the native speakers own views, there was no such case. They expressed that it was mainly due to how different Japanese is to other languages. However, they did say that having learned Kanji could be beneficial if one studies Chinese or visits China.

Lastly, a group which the native speakers considered could benefit from a reform that would abolish Kanji was Japanese learners.

4.2 General thoughts

Interestingly enough, the majority of the informants in their forties seemed more positive and open to the possibility that the Japanese written language can come to change more in the future, whereas all three of the informants in their twenties were less in belief and more negative toward such a scenario.
The informants in their twenties in general also seemed more conservative when answering these questions than the informants in their forties, as they were more often negative toward changes to the language. A similar result was seen in Malm’s study, on, for example, the topic of adopting the Chinese simplified characters: the only ones who were positive to such a reform were the older generations. The same happened upon being presented the statement “The Japanese language is in need of reforms”, as it was primarily the older generations that answered that they agreed. These results went against my expectations, as I believed the opposite would occur; that the younger generations would be more positive to reforms than the older generations.

Only two of the interviewees were truly confident in their abilities of speaking English, mainly because of having grown up abroad, but I would say that all of the five people who wanted to have the interview in English handled the language very well. Another of the interviewees, namely the one who wanted to have the interview in Swedish, had spent 7 years in Sweden and could therefore speak Swedish very well. The reason for bringing language abilities up is because I thought it may affect one’s opinion of language in general, however it seems it was not the case, at the very least not so much that it could be noticed in the interviews.

4.3 Trial and error

I believe there are many things that could’ve been improved in this study. For one, before the interviews took place, I wish I had known what I later came to add in section 2, particularly 2.4, which discusses various proposals of script reforms. Had I known about these beforehand, I definitely would have liked to ask the interviewees for their opinions on those exact proposals. I would have also liked to ask what they think of groups such as the Rōmaji-kai and the Kana-kai, as they had rather radical ideas on what the Japanese written language should be. Secondly, I would have liked to delve deeper into the evolution of the script systems, because I believe I may not have covered the area as well as I could have. Along with the previously mentioned issue, I also wish I had had the time to use more sources, because as it turns out, many of the sources I thought I would use wound up not being relevant to the study. Finally, I am aware that nine interviews with Japanese native speakers who live in Sweden cannot provide an accurate image of what the majority of Japanese native speakers think of the Japanese writing systems. Had I had the time, I would have liked to compare more of my results with Malm’s study to provide more validity to the answers received through this study. I suppose this thesis can be considered a mere passage into this topic and perhaps help inspire someone else to delve deeper into it.
4.4 Future studies on similar topics

What my study provides is only a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg of what native speakers think of the Japanese writing systems. What would be interesting is to see if the answers derived from the interviewees in Sweden actually differ that much from the answers one could get from native speakers living in Japan. Something that would be interesting as well would be to ask native speakers what they think of previous proposals for script reform, such as the ones discussed in section 2.5.
Sources


Appendix A: Interview questions

This appendix contains the interview questions used for this study. The questions were written in both English and Japanese, should the interviewees want to have their interviews in either.

Gender
Age
Occupation/Major
Languages able to speak
Time spent abroad/exchanges

Q: What personal impression do you have of Kanji?  
「漢字」に対して、どんなイメージを持っていますか。

Q: Do you find it fun to write Kanji?  
漢字を書くことは特に楽しいと思いますか。

Q: Do you ever struggle with reading Kanji?  
漢字を読むときに苦労することがありますか。

Follow up if Yes/Sometimes: Q:  
In what situations do you struggle with reading Kanji?  
それは、どのような時ですか。
For example when reading newspapers, books.  
例えば、新聞を読む時か、古い本を読む時。。。  

Q: In a week, how many times do you find yourself writing Kanji by hand?  
一週間にどれぐらいの頻度で手書きで漢字を書くことがありますか。

Q: Do you ever struggle with writing Kanji?  
漢字を書くときに苦労することがありますか。

Follow up if Yes/Sometimes: Q:  
In what situations do you struggle with writing Kanji? How come you struggle?  
それは、どのような時ですか。

Q: Do you write Japanese using your phone and/or computer?  
コンピュータや携帯で日本語を書くことがありますか。

Q: In a week, how many times do you write Japanese using your phone or laptop?  
一週間にどれぐらいの頻度で携帯かコンピュータで日本語を書くことがありますか。
Do you think that due to modern technology, one might make forget how to write Kanji? Do you think that younger people might struggle more with this, due to growing up with the technology available today?

近代技術の影響で、漢字の書き方を忘れてしまう可能性があると思いますか。特に若者たちが漢字の書き方を忘れてしまう可能性があると思いますか。

Q: Do you think that the written language should be the same as the spoken language?
あなたは、書き言葉と話し言葉は同じであるべきだと思いますか、それとも違っているべきだと思いますか。それはどうしてですか。

Q: Would you be opposed to using only phonetic writing systems such as hiragana and katakana?
漢字をなくして、ひらがなやカタカナだけで日本語を書くようにしてしまったらいいと思いますか。それともそれは良くないことだと思いますか。それはどうしてですか。

Q: What could potentially be an advantage to using only phonetic scripts?
表音文字だけで文章を書くことに、利点があると思いますか。

Q: What could potentially be disadvantageous with getting rid of the Kanji script system, and using only phonetic scripts?
それか、表音字母だけで書いたら、不利があると思いますか。
表音文字だけでなく文章を書くことに、不利な点があると思いますか。

Q: Could one ‘fix’ those problems/disadvantages? If so, how?
表音文字だけでなく書いたら、それに、もし不利があったら、その不利はどうやって治せられると思いますか。どうやって治せばいいと思いますか。
表音文字だけでなく書くことに何か不利な点があるとしたら、その不利な点はどうやって治せると思いますか。

Q: Some words that used to be written with Kanji are now written using Hiragana (for example…). Do you think this will continue to happen? That Kanji will be used less it comes to certain words?
日本語には、元々は漢字で書かれていたが、現在はひらがなで書かれている言葉があります。このような現象はこれからも起こっていくと思いますか。漢字が使われることは、これから減っていくと思いますか。

Q: Do you personally think it is good that less words are written with Kanji nowadays?
現在に、漢字でなくて、もっと言葉はひらがなで書かれてくるといいことだと思いますか。

Q: What do you think is good about Kanji?
漢字にいいところがあると思いますか。それは何ですか。

Q: Do you think that the amount of Kanji being taught in school will grow or lessen? Or that the way Kanji is taught will change.
学校で教えられている漢字の数は、これから増えていくと思いますか。それとも減っていくと思いますか。それはどうしてですか。
Q: Do you think there could come a day where how to write Kanji is stopped being taught at school, but you’re still taught how to read it? If so, why? If not, why not?
将来、学校で漢字の書き方を全く教えなくなり、読み方だけを教えるようになる可能性があると思いますか。どうしてそう思いますか。

Q: When learning other languages, such as English, did you think it was more difficult or easier to use only one writing system (a phonetic one)?
英語などの外国語を学んだとき、表音文字だけで文章を書くことは難しかったですか、それとも簡単でしたか。そう思ったのは、どうしてだと思いますか。

Q: Have you ever thought about the fact that you use three script systems when most languages only use one? If you think about it, how do you feel about it? Do you think it is a good thing?
日本語には3種類の文字体系（漢字、ひらがな、カタカナ）がありますが、他の言語の多くは普通一つの文字体系のみが使われていることを意識したことがありますか。それについて、どう思いますか。3つの文字体系があることはいいことだと思いますか。

Q: Do you think that having grown up learning Kana and Kanji affects the way that you learn languages? For an example, do you think that having grown up as a Japanese, it gives you an advantage in learning languages to have grown up learning to use three script systems when learning a new script system?
3つの文字体系を学んで育ったという経験は、他の言語を学ぶときに何か影響を与えると思いますか。例えば、日本人として3つの文字体系を学んだことが、他の言語の新しい文字体系を学ぶときに役に立つとおもいますか。