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Traveling Overseas in Search of Characters

It is said there are more than 100 different kinds of characters and letters in the world. I set off on overseas journeys driven by an ambition to “conquer” all of these foreign characters and letters sometime in the future.

Luxor (Egypt)

When asked about ancient characters, the first thing that comes to your mind may be hieroglyph. Shown in photo is the Mortuary Temple of Rameses III in Luxor. It was so huge and magnificent I was simply overwhelmed by it. Even today, it is possible to see hieroglyph in various parts of Egypt, impressing the visitor with the “strength” of characters that have survived countless years. Do you know hieroglyph was the model for the alphabet?



Chicago (U.S.A.)

I once studied in the City of Evanston in the suburbs of Chicago, so I frequented Chicago to hang out there. This metropolis is skylined by numerous skyscrapers, each with its individual beauty. Its population consists of many immigrants from Poland, Ireland and Israel, hence various languages can be heard as you walk along the streets. Its winter is as cold as freezing Lake Michigan shown in my background.



Chichén Itzá (Mexico)

Another ancient character as great as hieroglyph is the Mayan script. Though the Mayan script is very complex in design, some of its meaning can be understood if you come face-to-face with it patiently and character by character with a manual in your hand, which is exciting. Photo shows the Kukulcan Pyramid in the prehistoric city of Chichén Itzá. Though it is forbidden to climb it now, the steep stone steps were very fearful.



Phnom Penh (Cambodia)

Southeast Asia is a treasure-trove of characters, most of which have their origins in Brahmi script, the first ever characters that ancient India had. Brahmi script was also introduced into Japan many centuries ago as Sanskrit characters (Bon-ji) and contributed significantly to the completion of the table of the Japanese syllabary. By the way, the vitality of local Southeast Asian people was amazing! Following suit with the locals, I also traveled around Cambodia on the rear seat of a motorbike.



Xinjian-Uygur Autonomous Region

This region is where Chinese and Arabian characters meet. Even today, we can feel the atmosphere of a cross-cultural intersection along the ancient Silk Road. In the town of Kashgar, once perceived to be the farthest land, the streets are flooded with signboards using Chinese characters as phonetic symbols for Uighur words. It looked like a world of another dimension as if surrounded by ancient Japanese words written in “man'yo-gana” – Chinese characters used as phonetic symbols for Japanese words. The sand storm in the Takla Makan Desert was also furious.



Machu Picchu (Peru)

It is said that the Inca civilization did not have characters for writing, but superb masonry was breathtakingly marvelous as it created structures by heaping up rocks so precisely as not to allow even a sheet of paper to come through. Set among precipitous mountains, Machu Picchu unfolds remains of Inca rock works here and there. It is indeed a site where ancient history is still alive. The City of Cusco near Machu Picchu is a very beautiful town and one of the most beautiful cities I've ever visited.

