

Question 23: Trilingual characters

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Japanese and Korean both use (or used) the Chinese writing system, and in the process borrowed some words from Chinese. But the sound systems of the three languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) are somewhat different, so when the words got borrowed, they got adapted to the host pronunciation system ... in a systematic way.

Here are some Chinese characters with their pronunciation in Mandarin Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Note that Chinese is a tone language, which means that each syllable has a distinct and meaningful tone, shown here by the accent mark: ´ for a rising tone, ¯ for a level tone, ` for a falling tone and ˘ for a fall-rise. The tones are significant. Treat vowel sequences (uo, eu and so on) as single vowels. The Chinese characters and their English meanings are given only for your interest, and have no bearing on the problem: the character is (was) not necessarily used with the same meaning in Japanese and Korean.

char		C	J	K
福	fortune	fú	huku	bog
室	chamber	shì	shitsu	sil
各	each	gè	kaku	gag
則	then	zé	soku	jeug
托	care	tuō	taku	tag
浴	bath	yù	yoku	yog
北	north	běi	hoku	bug
目	eye	mù	moku/boku	mog
決	decide	jué	ketsu	gyeol

In your answerbook, fill in the gaps in this table.

char		C	J	K
木	tree	mù	(a)	mog
屈	bend	qū	kutsu	(b)
昨	last	zuó	(c)	jag
幕	screen	mù	maku/baku	(d)
膜	film	mò	maku	(e)
錄	record	lù	(f)	rog
託	trust	tuō	taku	(g)
閣	cabinet	gé	(h)	gag
藥	drug	yaò	(i)	yag
特	special	(j)	(k)	teug

密	dense	mì	mitsu	(l)
撥	dial	bō	(m)	bal