INTRODUCTION

1 Aim

This newly revised edition is designed for students and others who have at least an elementary knowledge of spoken Japanese and are wanting to acquaint themselves with the Japanese writing system. To this end, this book sets out the 1,945 Chinese characters contained in the officially approved character list—the *Jōyō kanji* (General Use Characters) List—which in 1981 replaced the earlier list approved in 1946.

2 This Book and the Modern Japanese Writing System

2.1 About the Characters Selected

While the *Jōyō kanji* List (hereafter abbreviated to JK List) does not represent an exhaustive list of Chinese characters which the student will encounter in modern Japanese texts, in combination with the two syllabaries (hiragana and katakana) it does nevertheless provide a very sound basis for reading and writing modern Japanese. In Japanese schools, 1,006 of the more commonly used JK List characters are taught in the six years of elementary school, the balance of 939 characters being spread out over the intermediate and high school curriculum. The JK List characters also form the basis of character usage in modern newspapers, though sometimes the Japan Newspaper Association chooses to deviate from the List in some ways. At the end of 2001 the following 39 characters in addition to those in the JK List were adopted by the Association for active use in newspapers: 闇 鍋 牙 瓦 鶴 玩 磯 臼 脇 錦 駒 詣 拳 鍵 虎 虹 尻 柿 餌 腫 袖 腎 須 誰 腺 曽 酎 枕 賭 瞳 頓 丼 汎 斑 釜 謎 妖 嵐 呂 . We simply list these here for readers' possible future reference, and do not go into readings or meanings.

For writing the names of their children, Japanese today can choose from a corpus of characters consisting of the JK List together with a supplementary list of characters for use in given names. The first such name character list, approved in 1951, consisted of 92 characters, but that has been expanded on repeated occasions (and not without some controversy) to 285. We do not list these here.

This book is divided into two main sections. Section One presents the 1,006 characters designated by the Japanese Ministry of Education to be taught during

the six years of elementary school—termed here 'Essential Characters'. The choice of these characters is the result of extensive research and deliberation by the Ministry. For these characters, the editors of this volume have endeavored to give illustrative character compounds that are in common use.

Section Two of this book sets out the 1,945 characters designated for general everyday use (including the 1,006 characters taught at elementary school). In 1946 the Japanese writing system underwent fairly radical reform in the direction of simplification, but the 1970s onwards saw some movement away from what some saw as an over-simplification, and the trend towards use of a bigger range of Chinese characters has been encouraged by the development and popularity from the mid-1980s of word-processors and computers that can handle conventional Japanese text. Despite this trend, the major impact of the orthographic reforms of the late 1940s has meant that the Japanese writing system of today still remains much simpler than it was before 1946.

2.2 How Characters are Read in Japanese

Typically, each Chinese character has two types of readings—*on-yomi* and *kun-yomi*. The *on-yomi* (*on* reading, i.e. Sino-Japanese reading) is a reading originally based on the Chinese pronunciation associated with each character, and reflects the fact that the Chinese script was adopted from China the best part of 2,000 years ago, when the Japanese themselves did not have a writing system. Contrasting with the *on-yomi* is the *kun-yomi* (*kun* reading, i.e. native Japanese reading). In some cases, a given Chinese character has several *on* readings, reflecting different forms of underlying Chinese pronunciation. A given character may also have more than one associated *kun* reading. Context and the use or absence of accompanying kana *(okurigana)* are the pointers as to which reading is appropriate in a given case.

In this book, the majority of the readings set out in the JK List as it appeared in the *Kanpō* (Official Gazette) of 1 October 1981 have been included, but some readings have been excluded, bearing in mind the aim of this book, because they are archaic, obsolescent, or not common (e.g. *nagomu* [to soften] for 和). Also excluded from among the formal readings listed in this book are the sort of common minor—or relatively minor—variations in character readings which are found only in certain environments in compounds. For instance, the character 学 has the *on* reading GAKU, which is truncated to GAK- in the compound 学校 *gakkō* [school, college], the *kun* reading *ame* [rain] of 雨 changes to *ama-* as the first element in compounds such as 雨戸 *amado* [rain-shutters], and the character 合 GŌ is read GAT- in the compound 合点 *gatten* [understanding, consent]. It was considered best for readers of this book to learn such changes gradually as they progress.

In modern Japanese usage there are quite a number of characters which lack either an *on* reading or a *kun* reading. For instance, nowadays the character 糖 [sugar] is employed only for its *on* reading TŌ, while the character 箱 [box] is used only for its *kun* reading *hako.*

2.3 Writing Characters

Firstly, the student should make every effort to practice so as to keep the characters of uniform size in relation to one another. Thus, the 2-stroke character 刀 *katana* should be written within the equal-sized imaginary square or circle as the 15-stroke 論 RON [argument, opinion], and by the same token the element 言 should be written larger when used as an independent character (read GEN, GON, [speech, word]) than when used as a radical / component in a more complex character such as 論 RON above.

Secondly, bear in mind that Chinese characters sometimes consist of just a few strokes, sometimes many, but the characters are always written according to a set stroke order. Listed below are some principles that will be of assistance with regard to priority in the order of strokes.

1. Top to bottom:
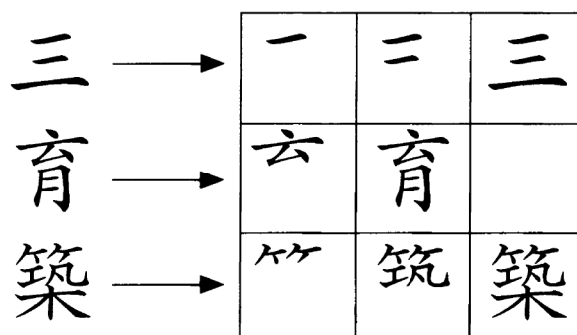
2. Left to right:
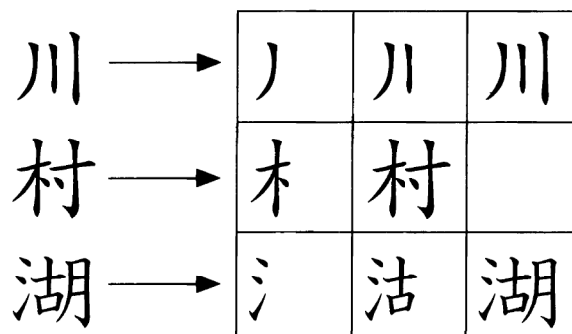
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Other rules are:

3. When two or more strokes cross, horizontal strokes usually precede perpendicular ones:

十 ⟶ | 一 | 十 | |
共 ⟶ | 一 | 卄 | 共 |
末 ⟶ | 二 | 丰 | 末 |

4. Sometimes perpendicular strokes precede horizontal ones:

田 ⟶ | 冂 | 由 | 田 |
王 ⟶ | 丁 | 干 | 王 |
里 ⟶ | 日 | 甲 | 里 |

5. Center first, then left and right:

小 ⟶ | 亅 | 小 | 小 |
承 ⟶ | 孑 | 孖 | 承 |
楽 ⟶ | 白 | 泊 | 楽 |

6. Perpendicular line running through center written last:

中 ⟶ 口 中

車 ⟶ 亘 車

書 ⟶ 三 聿 書

7. Right-to-left diagonal stroke precedes left-to-right:

人 ⟶ ノ 人

文 ⟶ 亠 宁 文

支 ⟶ 十 ㄗ 支

While the above may all seem rather complicated, the student might find solace in the fact that, as noted above, the writing system has been simplified to a considerable extent compared with the past, and has been mastered by many thousands of students having neither native speaker competence in Japanese nor prior background knowledge of the Chinese script.

2.4 Romanisation

There are several different systems of representing Japanese using the Roman alphabet. This book employs a slightly modified form of the Hepburn system, this being a system which is widely used and which is based on conventions associated with the spelling of English. The minor modification involves using the letter *n* rather than *m* to represent the syllabic nasal ん when the latter occurs immediately before the consonants *m*, *b* or *p* (thus, for instance, *shinbun* [newspaper], not *shimbun*, and *kenpō* [constitution], not *kempō*). Other points to note are:

1. use of a macron to indicate vowel lengthening for *o* and *u*, e.g. *gakkō* [school], *renshū* [practice];

2. use of a hyphen in cases where it is considered that this might facilitate understanding of boundaries between constituent elements in a Japanese word, e.g. *sara-arai* [dishwashing], rather than *saraarai*; and

3. use of the apostrophe ' instead of a hyphen after a syllabic nasal ん, such as *tan'i* [unit] (a word of three short syllables, which in kana would be written た んい) as opposed to *tani* [valley] (a word of two short syllables, written たに in kana).

2.5 Kana Signs and Combinations

The two main sections of this book are followed by a section setting out individual symbols in the hiragana and katakana syllabaries, and illustrations of stroke order for each of those symbols. Each of the two syllabaries evolved and became established over a period of many centuries, thereby becoming cemented as integral components in the modern writing system.

Katakana, which are more angular in appearance than hiragana, are today used first and foremost to represent loanwords of European origin, e.g. パン *pan* [bread] and ビール *biiru* [beer]. Hiragana are used widely and variously elsewhere to represent such elements as grammatical particles, inflectional endings of verbs, and frequently to represent in writing words which would otherwise need to be written with intricate or uncommon characters such as those for *ōmu* [parrot] (鸚鵡) or for the *ken* of *sekken* [soap] (石鹸).

For the convenience of users of this book, the final part consists of an alphabetical index of readings for the 1,945 JK List characters.

3 Layout Details

The 1,006 most essential characters are set out in Section One in accordance with the Education Ministry's division into six grades. These are in running sequence, but note that the grade divisions are:

1–80	= Grade One		81–240	= Grade Two
241–440	= Grade Three		441–640	= Grade Four
641–825	= Grade Five		826–1,006	= Grade Six

Characters within each grade are set out in the traditional '50 sounds' *(gojūon)* order which is commonly used for reference-type works in Japanese, except that the characters in Grade One alone are ordered on the basis of semantic groupings. Each character is typically accompanied by the *on* reading, then the *kun* reading and English meaning(s). The context is the best guide as to which reading is appropriate in a given case.

Also included for each of the 1,006 characters is information regarding the total number of strokes (the stroke count) and the set order to be followed in writing individual strokes. In most cases, three examples of character compounds are provided for each of these Essential characters.

Section Two, which presents the total 1,945 General Use characters, gives them with their *on* and/or *kun* readings, and English meanings, but without illustrative compounds. In many cases, however, compounds containing characters which are among the 939 'non-essential' characters may be found among the compounds given for each of the 1,006 characters in Section One. The order adopted for listing the corpus of 1,945 characters is that of stroke count (and, within a given stroke count, by radical). So as to avoid undue repetition, each of the 1,006 Essential characters appearing in Section Two is given with the corresponding reference to Section One, to which the reader can refer for details.

With regard to the typographical conventions employed in giving readings and meanings for characters, these are explained by means of the example below.

見 KEN[1]; *mi(ru)*[2], to see, look[3]

[1] *On* reading in upper case.

[2] *Kun* reading in lower case italics. Parentheses used to indicate end-syllable(s) to be written in kana (thus, *mi(ru)*, since this word is conventionally written 見る).]

[3] English meaning(s) given in regular lower case.

Also note the use of a comma after a single *on*-reading to indicate that it can be used as a stand-alone word, e.g. "ZA, seat..." (i.e. 'za' exists as a word meaning 'seat'), as opposed to "U canopy..." (i.e. 'u' does not exist as an independent word).

4 Final Notes

Good luck with your study. For aspects of the modern Japanese language such as grammar, vocabulary, or style, you should refer to other appropriate textbooks and reference works, a variety of which are now available from Tuttle Publishing.

5 Select Bibliography of Main Works Consulted for this Edition

Note: All the books in Japanese listed below have been published in Tokyo.

Haig, J.H. et al. (ed.), *The New Nelson Japanese-English Character Dictionary.* Charles E. Tuttle, Tokyo, 1997.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS