

The Kanji Handbook

「英漢字早覚え辞典」

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Abstract: Through the use of “KanjiHybrids”—a concept invented by the author, learners of Kanji are taught to link the characters mentally with the English words to form one integral and indivisible unit. The innovative mnemonic device has been proven to train the learner to retain each Kanji in the memory much better than simple repetition of the Kanji alone—as well as enabling you to differentiate similar-looking Kanji characters. Specific learning strategies also enable users to progress quickly from beginner to advanced level Kanji, with stroke orders shown clearly for each Kanji characters. The inclusion of a special alphabetical index—specifically invented for English speakers is a boon. The Flip-It Index allows quick and easy look-up searches for any Kanji character. Another invaluable aid is an index whereby Kanji characters may be found based on the meanings alone; this means that as long as the user knows the meaning, he can locate the correct Kanji immediately without counting strokes and looking through a tedious radical list.

Keywords: Kanji characters, non-native Japanese speakers, adult learners, second language learning, subliminal imaging.

Discussion: Linguistic scholars largely agree that Japanese is the most difficult second language to learn. With four different writing systems, those eager to learn Japanese have a long and demanding journey to undergo. Thus, the Kanji Handbook was conceived to map out learning strategies to systematically guide learners from beginner to advanced level in Kanji literacy. Unique learning tools were designed for this book to resolve the many aggravations commonly encountered by Kanji learners. All 1,945 Jōyō Kanji characters—the most commonly used Kanji characters as officially prescribed by the Japanese Ministry of Education since 1981—are available to learn through this book. The Kanji Handbook was fashioned to offer an end to some of the most discouraging problems facing those who study Kanji characters. The biggest struggle in learning the 1,945 Kanji characters is the mission of memorizing them, their shades of meaning, myriad pronunciations and compounds. To encourage memory retention, all Kanji characters in this book appear as KanjiHybrids, or the combination of a Kanji character and its English meaning to form one, integral and indivisible unit. In addition, the pioneering concept of Veemuenics—where similar looking Kanji characters are placed as KanjiHybrids in a rhyming English sentence or phrase—will further help learners remember each Kanji character and the slight differences between them. For example:

KanjiHybrid: 皇mperor, 星tar, 星lanet

Veemuenic: Roman皇mperors shine like

星tars even from 星lanets afar...

The concept of Veemuenics was created to help learners differentiate between the similar looking Kanji characters nearly undistinguishable to beginners. Some Kanji characters may only differ because of a dash or a stroke, or a radical. In many cases, these slight differences only become visible after years of careful study and consistent use. How does one digest the difference between 皇 and 星? To manage this problem, each Kanji character presented in this book has a corresponding list of similar-looking Kanji characters as not to confuse them. Diligent practice of writing the Veemuenics will serve the purpose of differentiating between similar Kanji characters.

The uniqueness of Japanese civilization was reinforced by its insularity as one of the few nations to never have been colonized, when colonization swept three-fourths of the globe. Predating Japanese society, the significance of Kanji characters can be understood as the oldest existing, and most widely-used writing system in the world. The earliest forms of Kanji characters were found on oracle bones made from tortoise shells dating back to 1,700 BC ~ 1,100 BC in Hénán, China. However, the evolution of modern-day recognizable Kanji characters was established in approximately 200 AD, reaching the shores of Japan two centuries later. Though other ancient writing systems, such as the Egyptian hieroglyphics and Sumerian scripts, have become nothing more than museum pieces, Kanji characters have flourished; surviving numerous tests of time. Moreover, attributable to the sheer

population size of its users—China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and the Koreas—Kanji is arguably the world's most widely-used writing system. Yet, in spite of these characteristics, Kanji characters remain a "black hole" to the rest of the world; a situation that need not continue.

Kanji characters and the Roman alphabets are separate and distinct writing systems. The Roman A-to-Z system is based on a combination of letters to form words expanding into sentences. Individually, English letters contain no inherent meaning. One could, therefore, create a new word, like common names or pronouns, without necessarily attaching any meaning. Kanji characters are the exact opposite. Each one already has assigned meanings before combining them to form word compounds. Consequently, one could not form a Kanji word compound stripped of meaning. For highly Kanji literate people, reading Kanji characters is somewhat like reading pictures. That's not entirely an exaggeration since each Kanji character represents an inherent meaning. Also, many Kanji characters resemble their meaning. For example, the characters for "person" and "river" actually look like a walking person, and a streaming river: 人 and 川.

Kanji characters are remarkably complex; the pronunciation of many characters sound alike, and even more numerous are the characters that look alike. The readings of each character can be split in two groups: ON-yomi, the Chinese reading, or KUN-yomi, the Japanese reading. A large number of Kanji characters may have the same ON-yomi reading. For

example, the ON-yomi reading for the following characters can all be read as "kan," though their meanings are completely different: 間、官、感 and 漢. A quick count of the Jōyō (most common) Kanji characters pronounced as "kan" would reach the figure of 64, though their meanings are hardly related. Hence, the key to mastering Kanji characters is to aim for their core English meanings. When one contemplates an object in visual form, its pronunciation becomes secondary. Though Chinese or Japanese people cannot necessarily converse in a common spoken medium, Kanji characters would enable the two vast cultures, nevertheless, to communicate.

In the Kanji Handbook, the easily-confused Kanji characters are grouped together so the learner can notice the subtle differences between the similar-looking characters. The learning process navigates through visually distinguishing one from the other, to identify their unique differences, in order to get the core meaning. This book is a humble attempt toward the mastery of Kanji characters within a meaning-focused framework. The core meanings should be of central importance. The conventional presentation of Kanji characters in contemporary Kanji books has the Kanji characters and English words sitting side by side, such as: 水 = water, 山 = mountain, and 女 = woman. A better way to convey the meaning of each Kanji character, as in the case of universal symbols, needs to exist. Toward that objective, here is a ground-breaking alternative, whereby a Kanji character is combined with its English meaning to create

one single and indivisible unit called, KanjiHybrids. For example: 水ater, 山ountain, and 女oman. Next, to distinguish one Kanji character from another is a frustrating task, yet crucial. To that end, a second component, called "Veemuenics," was created. The method is to identify similar looking Kanji characters, and put them together as KanjiHybrids in a catchy English sentence or phrase.

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