

Preview

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A learning
handbook
for Jōyō Kanji

漢字

available on Amazon worldwide

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- Presentation of the ideographic system.
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• Essential components are also arranged into thematic categories.

1. Numbers

一 八、*丷 九 十

2. Generic

小、*㇇ 白 丸 *勺 *女、*支 *冫 *辶、*辵、*边 *彳 *厶 己 方 *爻

3. Human beings

人、*亻、*亼 大 士 女 子、*宀 立 *卩、*卪 *疒

4. Body parts

心、*忄、*小 頁 口 *日 言 目、*目 耳 *彡 力 *歹 *尸 欠

5. Hands, feet and legs

手、*扌、*扌、*又、寸、*㇇ *升 *儿 止 足、*疋 走 *夂 *辵 *夂

6. Animals

犬、*犴、*豸 羊、*羊 馬 虫 *卜 貝 肉、*月 *隹

7. Nature

*艹 生、*艹 木 竹、*𪗇 水、*氵、*氷 氷、*冫、*冫 川、*巛 田 *禾 米 土

*厂 山 *冫 穴 金 石 *业 日 月 雨 火、*灬

8. Things

匕、*匕 斗 皿 *一 食、*食 *酉 西 豆 示、*示 *冂、*冂、*冂 辛

玉 糸 *纟 巾 衣、*衤 車 舟 工

9. Buildings

*广 *宀 *人 *人 門 戶

10. Weapons

刀、*刂 戈 弓 矢 斤 *殳

1. Numbers

一	八、*丷
One. It can be used graphically to indicate a <u>surface</u> (e.g. the water in a plate in 監 “to oversee”) or a <u>precise point</u> (e.g. a tree’s roots in 本 “origin”, the horizon in 旦 “dawn”).	Eight. As a radical, it always indicates <u>separation</u> , well suggested by its shape.
九	十
Nine. Graphical representation of a <u>bent elbow</u> .	Ten. Originally, the pictogram of a <u>needle</u> . It often conveys a sense of <u>completeness</u> or <u>gathering</u> , due to the image of all ten fingers.

• Each component is explained in details, including the main meanings and the implicit ones that can be conveyed to other kanji containing them.

貝	肉、*月
Seashell. As a radical, it is used to indicate <u>money</u> and everything that can be associated with <u>trade</u> , <u>precious</u> objects and <u>riches</u> . In the past, shells were indeed used as an exchange currency.	A slice of <u>meat</u> . As a radical, it often appears simplified identically to the kanji of 月 “moon” and it is used to indicate a <u>body part</u> , an <u>internal organ</u> or the whole <u>body</u> .
*隹	
A small <u>bird</u> in flight seen from the side. As a radical, it sometimes suggests a <u>forward movement</u> .	
7. Nature	
*艹	生、*艹
Derived from the pictogram of *艸 “grass”, it can refer to any <u>plant</u> or <u>vegetation</u> in general. In few kanji *艹 represents a bird’s <u>crest</u> or <u>tuft</u> (e.g. *藿).	Sprouts <u>coming out</u> of the ground > <u>life</u> , <u>birth</u> .

• Here comes an example from chapter “Ear” (macro-chapter “Head”, section “Human Body”)

• The first Kanji highlighted of the table defines the whole table allocation within the thematic subdivision. In this case, it is a human ear seen from the side, conveying a sense of softness and suppleness due to its shape and meaning.

*乃	An ear seen from the side, with its <u>soft and supple shape</u> emphasized.	
携	たずさ 携える、たずさ 携わる to engage in, to be involved in、けいたい 携帯 handheld, portable/mobile telephone、けいたいでんわ 携帯電話 mobile phone	
/	*隹 shows a chubby *隹 bird. The addition of *扌 “hand” evokes the meaning of a chubby bird carried in the hand > portable.	
秀	ひい 秀でる to excel、しゅうさい 秀才 bright person, talented student, prodigy、ゆうしゅう 優秀 superiority, excellence	
/	An *禾 ear of grain, folding softly on the top > an ear with a head larger than normal > to excel.	
誘	さそ 誘う to invite、ゆうかい 誘拐 abduction, kidnapping、ゆうわく 誘惑 temptation, lure	
/	> to entice someone with excellent (秀) words (言) > to invite, to call for > to induce.	
透	す 透く (intr.)、す 透かす (tr.)、す とお 透き通る to be transparent、しんとう 浸透 osmosis/permeation、とうめい 透明 transparent、ふとうめい 不透明 opaque/opacity	
/	> a person who 秀 excels compared to others, who leads them along the way (*し) > to clear the way > to make an opening, to leave a space, to look through > transparent, to permeate.	

携	たずさ 携える、たずさ 携わる to engage in, to be involved in、けいたい 携帯 handheld, portable/mobile telephone、けいたいでんわ 携帯電話 mobile phone
/	*隹 shows a chubby *隹 bird. The addition of *扌 “hand” evokes the meaning of a chubby bird carried in the hand > portable.

• Now looking at the first Kanji derived from the table’s main one, its etymology is briefly explained. In this case, the sense of 乃 “soft and supple”, combined with the basic component 隹 “bird” (already learnt from the Essential Components) returns the image of a “chubby bird” carried in the 扌 “hand”, from which the current Kanji meanings of “to carry in the hand” and “portable” come.

- Therefore, current Kanji meanings are words in bold only, to be found inserted directly within the etymological explanation.
- On top, there are common Keywords in which the kanji can be found.
- Kun and On Readings are written above the Kanji. In this case, there are only two different readings for 携: “tazusa.eru/waru” and “KEI”.
- Note that Japanese syllabaries can be found in the appendix.

秀	ひい 秀でる to excel、 しゅうさい 秀才 bright person, talented student, prodigy、 ゆうしゅう 優秀 superiority, excellence
/	An *禾 ear of grain, folding softly on the top > an ear with a head larger than normal > to excel .
誘	さそ 誘う to invite、 ゆうかい 誘拐 abduction, kidnapping、 ゆうわく 誘惑 temptation, lure
/	> to entice someone with excellent (秀) words (言) > to invite, to call for > to induce .

- Going on, the idea of 乃 “soft and supple” is now combined with the basic component 禾 “ear of grain”, pointing out an ear of grain’s head larger than normal. The current abstract meaning derived from that idea is “to excel”.
- In the subsequent Kanji, the whole 秀 “to excel” is used combined with the basic Kanji 言 “to say” (here suggesting “words”), leading to the current meanings written in bold.

• Now looking at an easier example:

犬	いぬ こいぬ 犬、子犬 puppy, small dog、 ぼんけん 番犬 watchdog、 やけん 野犬 stray dog、 りょうけん 猟犬 hunting dog, hound				
I	From the pictogram of a dog with pointed ears (the top right stroke). As a radical, it can be found as *犴, to indicate any <u>animal</u> , or as *犴, to indicate more precisely an <u>animal with prominent claws</u> .				
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>吠</td> <td>ほ 吠える、 とおほ 遠吠え (distant) howling</td> </tr> <tr> <td>//</td> <td>A barking dog (口) > to howl.</td> </tr> </table>	吠	ほ 吠える、 とおほ 遠吠え (distant) howling	//	A barking dog (口) > to howl .
吠	ほ 吠える、 とおほ 遠吠え (distant) howling				
//	A barking dog (口) > to howl .				

- The main Kanji of the table is 犬 “dog”, graphically derived from a pictogram. The readings are “inu” and “KEN”.
- In the etymology, the underlined words emphasize a certain nuance of meaning that can show up when the kanji is used as component of a more complex character.
- Combined with 口 “mouth” in 吠, it simply returns the meanings of “to howl, to bark” (the reading is “ho.eru”).

- The roman number (or slash) underneath each Kanji identifies the School Grade as taught in Japan.
- Groups I - II - III - IV - V - VI make up the 1.006 Kyōiku Kanji, that is half part of the Jōyō Kanji taught during the six classes of the primary school. All the remaining 1.130 characters are learned in lower and upper middle schools and are marked with a slash (/). Since these are so many, two slashes (//) mark those Kanji used very seldom.
- This subdivision is exceptionally important, as the learner is able to skip the upper-grade Kanji, saving them up for subsequent readings of the handbook.

• With all this information in mind, two last examples follow.
The first one it is from “Numbers” chapter:

• Note that the main Kanji 十 “ten” can convey various different meanings when used as a component, due to its etymology and basic shape.

十	じゅう とお とおか 十、十、十日 ten days, the tenth day of the month、 はつか 二十日 twenty days, the twentieth day of the month、 じゅうじ 十字 cross
I	Pictogram of a sewing <u>needle</u> . It has been chosen as a substitute for the more complex ^{じゅう / しゅう} 拾, showing “*才 hands 合 together” > the ten fingers of the hands. As a radical, it often conveys ideas of “ <u>completeness</u> ” and “ <u>be collected</u> ”.
計	はか 計る to design、 とけい 時計 clock、 めざ 目覚まし時計 alarm clock、 どけい 計画 plan, project、 けいかく 合計 total、 せつけい 設計 project、 とうけい 統計 statistics、 けいさん 計算 calculation、 よけい 余計 superfluous、 おんどけい 温度計 thermometer
II	To count on fingers (十) aloud (言) > to take measurements > to design .
針	はり ししん 針、指針 needle-hand (e.g. clock)
VI	A metal needle (金). The reading is linked to 辛 (“painful/spicy”), also derived from the pictogram of a needle.
汁	しる みそしる かじゅう 汁、味噌汁 <i>miso</i> soup、 果汁 fruit juice
/	Liquid (*彡) collected in a bowl > soup, juice .
叶	叶 かなう to come true, to become reality (e.g. desire, dream)、 かなえる to be granted
//	Voices (口) joined in a supplication that will be granted .

• Second example from “Sky and Weather” chapter:

• Note that Kanji readings can sometimes have a role in the etymology.
All these occurrences are always **highlighted**.

夕	ゆう ゆう ゆうがた ゆうぐ ゆうや ゆうしょく こんせき 夕、夕べ、夕方 evening, dusk (夕暮れ)、 夕焼け afterglow (of sunset)、 夕食 dinner、 今夕 tonight
I	A <u>crescent moon</u> that lights up the evening . Originally, 夕 corresponded to the kanji of 月 “moon” but without the central stroke symbolizing the craters. The reading refers to *皙 “clear-white”.
外	はず 外す to remove、 そと 外 outside、 ほか 外 other, the rest、 がいこく 外国 foreign country、 かいがいのう 海外 abroad, overseas、 がいこくじん 外国人 foreigner (外人)、 がいじん 以外 excepting、 いがい 意外 unexpected, surprising、 おくがいのう 屋外 outdoors
II	*ト represents cracks on a turtle shell used for divination purposes. The not full “crescent moon” (夕) emphasizes the meaning of “cracks”. The sense of outside derives from the cracks’ outer position on the turtle shell.
名	な なまえ 名、名前 name、 あだ名 nickname、 ゆうめい 有名 famous、 だいめい 題名 title、 めいせい 名声 fame, reputation、 むめい 無名 unnamed, anonymous/not famous、 めいあん 名案 good idea、 しめい 氏名 (full) name, identity、 しよめい 署名 signature (サイン)、 こうみょう 功名 great achievement, (gaining) fame、 かな 仮名 <i>kana</i> (Japanese syllabaries)
I	To state (口) one’s name in order to be recognized in the 夕 evening’s darkness. The reading calls up 鳴 “to make a sound”.

“A learning handbook for Jōyō Kanji” is a complete reference book to learn and memorize the 2.136 kanji for common use in Japan.

The method approaches the writing system through etymological studies and a unique arrangement of Japanese characters, organized by thematic categories and graphic components.

A wide, yet perfectly balanced and interconnected quantity of notions are embedded in the innovative graphic and etymological subdivision, capable of enriching the overall vision and leading the learner through a real understanding of the subject.

Nevertheless, Japanese writing system is a complex subject.

The handbook schematic approach could be hard for beginners at first, giving them so much freedom, but in the author’s experience it is the only method that really pays off in the long run. This is because Kanji soon tend to become so much numerous and intricate for the brain, that only this kind of freedom and ordered complexity can truly reflect their nature and unfold them to the core, without never missing out the big picture.

This kind of freedom gives a lot of responsibility to the learner, but the handbook promises to never leave out any information that eventually will come to a help to masterfully complete this fascinating puzzle of symbols.

It is understood that the handbook’s versatility can also be perfectly exploited to meet specific needs of the moment, without an overall reading.

This is especially useful for people with a certain knowledge of the language already, who want to consult and learn individual kanji in-depth time after time or to remove doubts about previously learned Kanji.

Anyone who undertakes the study of Japanese out of passion or necessity will have to face the charm and enormous complexities of ideographic writing. I wish them the best of luck and success, hoping that my work will be of help and incentive.

Daniele Minnone

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