

Demystifying Kanji

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Opening Note

While kanji is historically Chinese, I will be using mainly Japanese terms.

History

Chinese as a written language is made of kanji (漢字), or ideograms, rather than an alphabet. Pottery has been found from 5000 B.C.E. that has artwork very similar to some kanji used today, thus possibly making Chinese calligraphy older than Sumerian cuneiform. This writing system followed the Chinese cultural influence spread, and has been adapted for use across Asia.

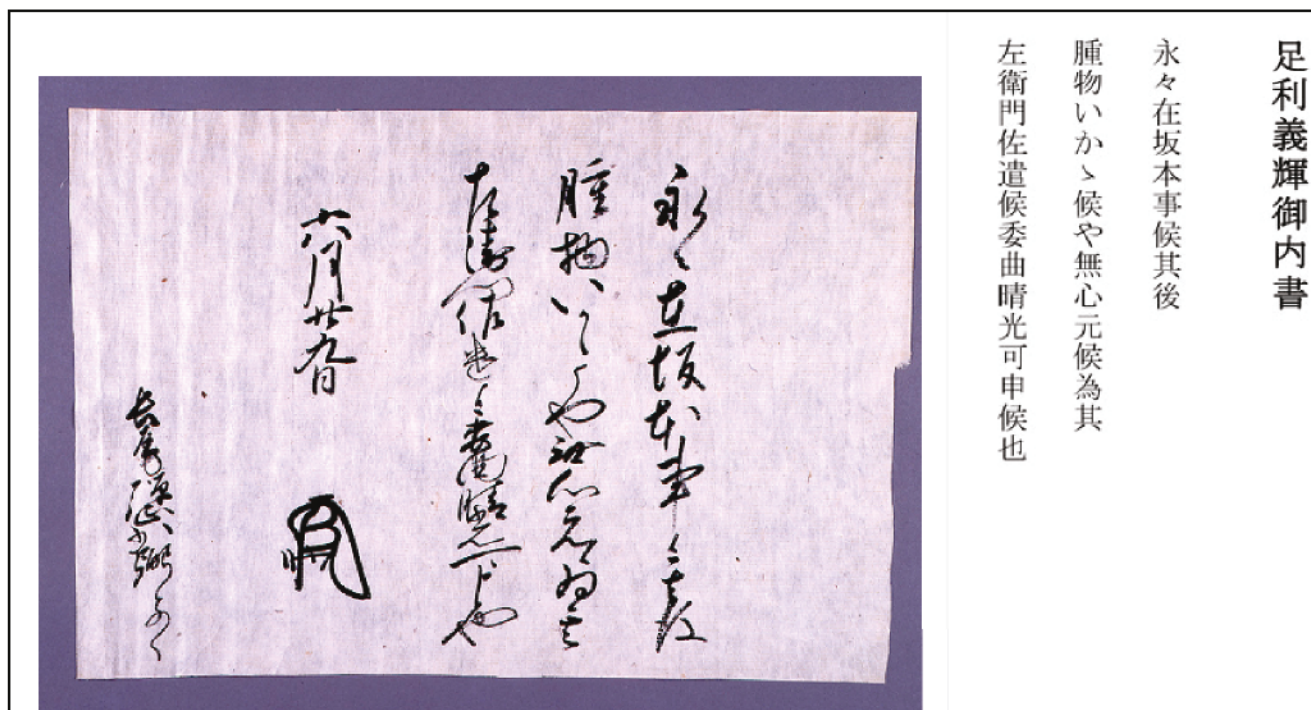
Part 1. Ways to look up kanji

Writing Styles

Kanji is written in five main styles, with varying levels of legibility. For looking up Kanji, the Clerical and Regular Scripts will be the best to use.

Printed	Seal (<i>tensho</i>)	Clerical (<i>reisho</i>)	Regular (<i>kaisho</i>)	Semi-cursive (<i>gyoushou</i>)	Cursive (<i>sousho</i>)
龍					

The best case scenario is having a typed version of text with any handwritten example.



Source: <http://komonjo.princeton.edu/uesugi-01/>

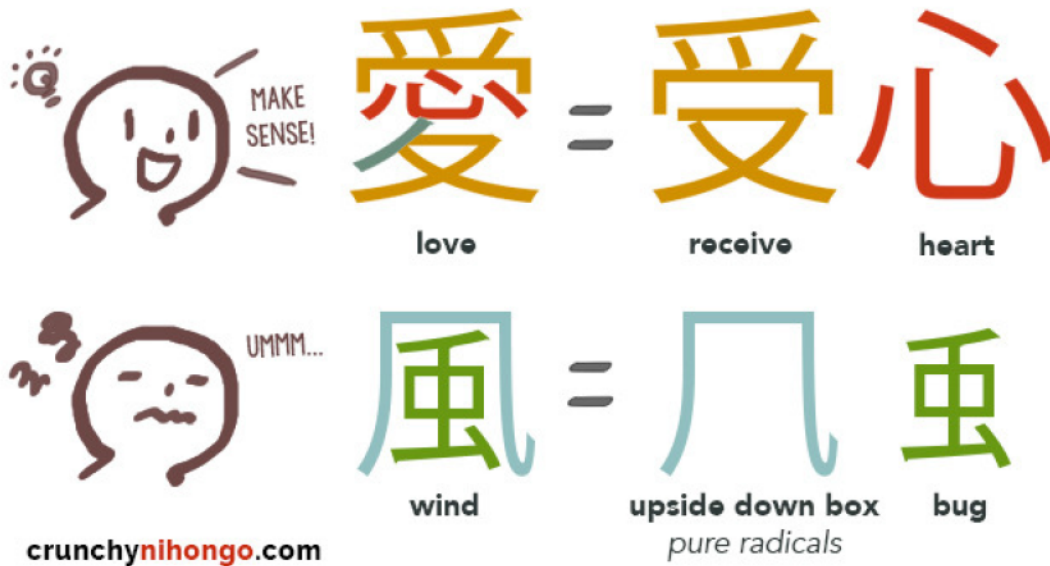
Looking up Kanji

Typed

If you are lucky, and have found the word you want to translate on a computer-accessible place, simply copy and paste into appropriate translation software or website. In the Komonjo example above, the scanned original is accompanied by typed, legible copy.

By radical

From their beginnings as pictograms and ideograms, many Kanji are formed by combining two or more parts, one being a radical which may give a clue to the root of the word. For example, the characters 晴 (sunny), 明 (bright), and 星 (star) all have the radical 日 (day/sun) which is it's own character as well. However, this is not always the case.



Radicals are usually found by position, as shown on the chart below.

Hen	■	私	泳	紙
Tsukuri	□	利	歌	順
Kanmuri	■	安	等	雪
Ashi	■	兎	思	炭
Tare	□	病	庭	厨
Nyō	□	道	延	麵
Kamae	□	回	間	式

Source: <https://www.sljfaq.org/afaq/radicals.html>

In Japanese, there are 214 historical radicals, some of which have variant forms based on position of the radical. Once you identify the radical, the rest of the character can be found. Usually in dictionaries, Kanji ordered by radical are then listed in order of stroke count. Some of the radical variants may have different stroke counts, and dictionaries such as Nelson's *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary* will cross-reference to the full radical version.

THE 214 HISTORICAL RADICALS									
1	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
乙	一	一	一	二	二	二	一	一	一
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
人	イ	八	儿	入	一	一	一	一	一
9 (9)	(9)	(9)	10	11	(11)	12	(12)	(12)	13
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
14	15	16	(16)	17	18	(18)	19	20	21
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
23	24	(24)	(24)	25	(25)	(25)	26	(26)	27
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
162	(162)	(162)	(170)	30	31	32	(32)	33	34
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
35	36	37	(37)	38	39	40	41	42	(42)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(45)	(45)	46	47	(47)	48	(48)	49	(49)	50
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
53	54	55	(55)	56	57	58	(58)	(58)	59
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)	(64)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(63)	64	(64)	(64)	65	(65)	66	(66)	67	68
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(71)	(71)	(71)	72	(72)	73	74	75	76	77
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
79	80	(80)	81	82	(82)	83	84	85	(85)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
87	(87)	(87)	(87)	88	89	(89)	90	(90)	91
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(93)	94	(94)	(94)	(94)	(94)	(103)	(113)	(114)	(113)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
5	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(71)	(71)	(80)	(81)	(82)	(92)	95	96	(96)	(96)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
98	(98)	99	100	101	102	(103)	104	105	106

5	目	矛	矢	石	示	示	示	示	示
109	110	111	112	113	(113)	(113)	(113)	(113)	(113)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
117	(117)	(117)	(122)	(138)	(145)	6	竹	一	一
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(122)	123	(123)	(123)	124	(124)	125	(125)	126	127
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
129	(129)	130	(130)	(130)	(130)	131	132	133	134
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(137)	138	(138)	139	140	(140)	(140)	141	142	143
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(145)	146	(146)	(146)	(146)	(157)	7	臣	一	一
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
151	(151)	152	(152)	153	154	155	156	(156)	157
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
160	(160)	(160)	161	(161)	162	(162)	(162)	163	(163)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(168)	(199)	8	金	金	長	長	門	阜	一
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(173)	174	(174)	175	(184)	(184)	9	面	革	一
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
180	(180)	181	182	(182)	183	184	(184)	(184)	(184)
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
186	10	韋	馬	骨	高	高	影	門	鬯
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(194)	(194)	(212)	(212)	(212)	(189)	195	196	197	198
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
199	(199)	(199)	200	(200)	(200)	(201)	(201)	(215)	12
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
(201)	202	203	(203)	204	(205)	(206)	(211)	13	一
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
207	(207)	208	(208)	14	一	一	一	一	一
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一	一
211	(211)	16/17	龍	一	一	一	一	一	一

Source: *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*

For example, for the character 交, the meaning is found under the two-stroke radical, with four remaining strokes. Compound words follow in order of the stroke count of the following Kanji.

2	交	90	Kō coming and going;	通整理	kōtsū seiri	traffic control	
一		J3872	association; change of	通機関	kōtsū kikan	transportation facilities	
一		M291	seasons. <i>maji(waru)</i> , <i>maji(ru)</i> associate with, mingle with; interest; join. <i>maji(eru)</i> mix; converse with, cross (swords). <i>ma(zeru)</i> mix, blend, mingle; include, let in on. <i>ma(jiru)</i> vi be mixed, be blended; mingle with. <i>kawa(su)</i> exchange (messages); dodge, parry, avoid, turn aside.	10	配	kōhai	mating, crossbreeding, cross-fertilization
4	一			流	kōryū	alternating current; (cultural) exchange; intermingling	
人				流人事	kōryū jinji	personnel shuffle	
イ				差	kōsa suru	to cross	
八				差点	kōsaten	crossing, intersection	
儿				11	遊	kōyū	friend; friendship
入				情	kōjō	intimacy, friendship	
八				接	kōsetsu	sexual intercourse	
				進	kōshū	negotiation, discussion	

By Stroke Count

Most dictionaries have lists of Kanji by stroke count, which can be very tedious, but helps if you can't figure out the radical.

Strokes are every line you can make without picking up your brush/pen, in theory.



However, corners are also sometimes made in one stroke, only if going left to right.



By reading

If by some fortune, you know how the kanji is pronounced, you can look up all the kanji with the same reading in most dictionaries.

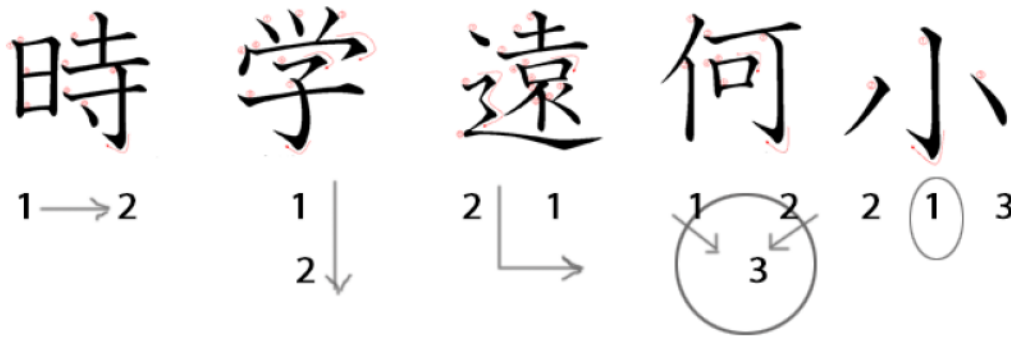
Writing

With the rise of touch-screen and track-pad technology, it has become possible to look up Kanji by direct input via handwriting recognition. Most apps that accept direct input do not care about stroke order. Some apps and websites that accept written input are listed at the end. Modern electronic dictionaries also have track-pads that accept stylus input.



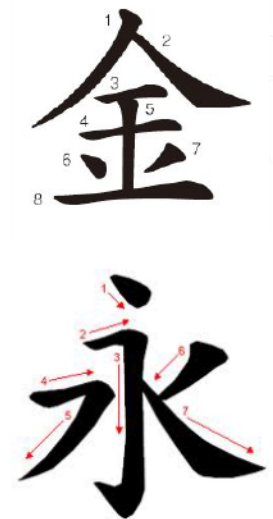
Part 2. Stroke Order

In general, the stroke order is top to bottom, left to right, and from the outside in, **EXCEPT** when there is a central line, such as the three dots above, or the dot and vertical stroke in the character to the right.



Most calligraphy books should give the stroke order numberings with the number at the beginning of the stroke, so you know where to start.

	22	BOKU, MOKU, ki, [ko] – tree; wood	
	4a0.1 <input type="checkbox"/>	木曜 (日) <i>mokuyō(bi)</i> Thursday 19, 5 木こり <i>kikori</i> woodcutter, lumberjack 木々 <i>kigi</i> every tree; many trees 千木 <i>chigi</i> ornamental crossbeams on a Shintō shrine 15 三木 <i>Miki</i> (surname) 4	
	23	KIN, KON – gold; metal; money kane – money [kana] – metal	
	8a0.1 <input type="checkbox"/>	金曜 (日) <i>kin'yō(bi)</i> Friday 19, 5 月・水・金 <i>ges-sui-kin</i> Monday, Wednesday, Friday 17, 21 金メダル <i>kinmedaru</i> gold medal 金ばく <i>kinpaku</i> gold leaf/foil 金もうけ <i>kanemōke</i> making money	
	24	DO, TO, tsuchi – earth, soil, ground	
	3b0.1 <input type="checkbox"/>	土曜 (日) <i>doyō(bi)</i> Saturday 19, 5 土木 <i>doboku</i> civil engineering 22 土人 <i>dojin</i> native, aborigine 1 土のう <i>donō</i> sandbag	



Source: *Kanji & Kana: Handbook and Dictionary of the Japanese Writing System (English and Japanese Edition)*

Part 3. Translation tips and advice

Translation Issues

Writing reforms

China has gone through several writing reforms, most notably with the People's Republic of China (PRC) simplifying characters to increase literacy. These Simplified Chinese characters are used in Mainland China and Singapore. Traditional Chinese characters are used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Japan went through their own reforms. In 1922, the government created an approved Kanji list, which has gone through several revisions. Currently, the Jouyou Kanji (常用漢字) numbers 2,136 characters approved for regular and official use. Along with approving characters for use, some simplifications were made.

How does this affect SCA scribal work?

Since we seek to recreate pre-1600's work, we need to be aware that kanji change, and much of our translation resources will use modern characters.

For example:

	Lightning	Country	Dragon
Traditional Chinese	電光	國家	龍
Simplified Chinese	电光	国家	龙
Japanese	電気光学	国	竜 <i>or</i> 龍

Due to politics, some sites and resources will favor Simplified Chinese over Traditional, or vice-versa. Since most of the reforms are post-period, I always try to default to Traditional Chinese characters. So, if I am writing "Country" in a Japanese piece, I will check my dictionaries to see if 國 was used in period Japan. Nelson's Dictionary and many others will have lists of older, pre-simplified kanji one can check against.

Also, with simplification, some words in Japanese are usually written in kana because the kanji is so difficult to write. However, for period work the difficult kanji is best to use.

Rose	バラ	薔薇
Hawk	たか	鷹

Grammar issues and word breaks

Translations beyond a word or set phrase is tricky at best, as the grammar of Japanese and Chinese is vastly different from English. Google translate and other online sources are better now than in the past, but still problematic. From the Komonjo example above, we have the following line:

永々在坂本事候其後 → Eiyasaka Sakamoto incident after that

Breaking up reveals that 永々在 = eternally or a long time, 坂本 = Sakamoto, 事候 = cause, and 其後 = after that. Princeton translates the text to be "You've been at Sakamoto for quite some time," because the original line is written in *kanbun*, or Chinese-style, where mainly kanji are used, so grammar is implied.

Homonyms

Also, many words in English have more than one meaning, and online sources will translate to modern languages. Also, English words can have different meanings and connotations. If you need to use a translation program to do English to Japanese or Chinese, it is always good to reverse the translation to check.

Order of the Rose → バラの注文 → Rose Order, but checking the meaning of 注文 reveals synonyms of sequence. The proper term would be *shou* 章, such as the Order of the Rising Sun (*Kyokujitsu-sho* 旭日章), but that term is modeled on the European system in the Meiji period.

As Japan didn't seem to have knightly orders in period, other terms need to be used. For orders, I use *gumi* 組, which can have some problematic modern connotations, but has been used as far back as 578 AD for the world's oldest continuously operating company, Kongou Gumi. Therefore, currently I translate Order of the Rose as 薔薇組 (*bara-gumi*).

Dictionaries and other books

- Hadamitzky, Wolfgang and Mark Spahn. *Kanji & Kana: Handbook and Dictionary of the Japanese Writing System (English and Japanese Edition)*. Tuttle Publishing, 1989. ISBN 0804813736 / 978-0804813730
- Nelson, Andrew N. *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*. Tuttle Publishing, 1990. ISBN 0804804087 / 978-0804804080
- Fazzioli, Edoardo. *Chinese Calligraphy: From Pictograph to Ideogram: the History of 214 Essential Chinese/Japanese Characters*. Abbeville Press, 1987. ISBN 0896597741 / 978-0896597747
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Dictionary apps

- Midori (iOS app) - iOS app store – can draw kanji and dictionary will try to match. \$9.99
- Imiwa? (iOS app) – iOS app store – can look up by radicals. Free. Kanji examples from www.tatoeba.org – investigate this site
- Kanji lookup (iOS app) – iOS app store – can draw kanji. Free, but with ads.
- gSho (android) – android store – needs investigation. Free but ads.
- Aedict3 (android) – android store. \$8.99 similar to Midori on iOS.
- Google Translate App – iOS and Android – direct input can be jumpy, but also has photo and voice translation.

Websites

Learning radicals:

<https://kanjialive.com/214-traditional-kanji-radicals/>
<https://www.sljfaq.org/afaq/radicals.html>

Lookup by radical:

http://www.romajidesu.com/kanji_radicals/
<https://kanji.sljfaq.org/radicals.html>
<https://www.kanshudo.com/search?cb=y>

Lookup by stroke count:

<http://www.japaneseverbconjugator.com/KanjiByStrokes.asp>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_kanji_by_stroke_count

Draw it out:

<https://kanji.sljfaq.org/draw.html>

<https://translate.google.com> – handwriting mode (input style in the box)

<http://www.qhanzi.com/index.html>

Others

Years and numbers as well as back-and-forth:

<https://jisho.org/>

General translation:

<https://translate.google.com/>

Kanji learning (Japanese)

<https://www.wanikani.com/>

Documents:

<http://komonjo.princeton.edu>

Other sources:

<https://www.tofugu.com/japanese/look-up-kanji/>

<https://www.tofugu.com/japanese/kanji-stroke-order/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_characters

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanji>