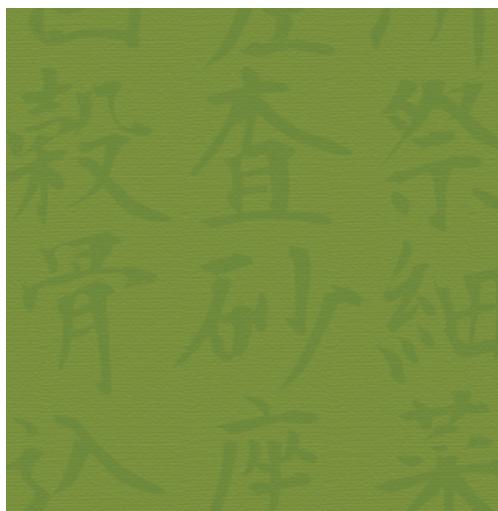


漢字絵解き

THE KEY TO KANJI

A Visual History of 1100 Characters

Noriko Kurosawa Williams



The Key to Kanji

A VISUAL HISTORY OF 1100 CHARACTERS

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About the Author

Noriko Kurosawa Williams has taught Japanese at American University in Washington, D.C., since 2005. A native of Japan, she graduated from Keio University in Tokyo (B. A. in political science) and Georgetown University (M.S. and Ph. D. in linguistics). She has taught at Georgetown University, George Washington University, George Mason University, and Soka University of America. She has also taught at the high school level.

This book, *The Key to Kanji: A Visual History of 1100 Characters*, is the culmination of many years of classroom teaching experience, and was derived from her fascination

with the fact that kanji are a window into the imagination of another era. Her earlier work, *Illustrated Kanji Anatomy*, was well received by teachers in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Japan.

Dr. Williams also developed a visual method for Japanese pronunciation practice, the “Visual Tonal Guide” (目で見る音調), and has made a freeware available on a language-learning software. She is the author of a memoir-essay – “Kitchin Kara Mita Nichibei-Kosho,” published by Bungei Shunju in Tokyo.

Introduction

Before you begin the individual study of 1100 kanji, I recommend that you read the three chapters on the general history of kanji and related issues.

In Chapter 1 “The Historical Development of Kanji Forms,” the historical development of the three major styles of ancient writings into modern writings is examined, looking at how the visible connection between a kanji writing and its meaning, which was obvious in ancient writing styles, faded away as the writings grew to be standardized into a more uniform style. This new style was solidified during the Han (漢) Dynasty, resulting in the writing style called *hanzi* (漢字 “the writing of the Han”) or *kanji* in Japanese, and it has remained for the next two millennia.

In Chapter 2 “Kanji Formation Types and Dictionary Section Headers (*Bushu*),” the four types of kanji formation are discussed. Of the four types, phonetic-semantic composition formation is generally credited with creating a large majority of the kanji. Knowledge of the recurring components in phonetic-semantic kanji provides a powerful tool to expand one’s kanji knowledge. For this reason, a table of all the 184 types of dictionary section headers called *bushu* that appear in our 1100 kanji is provided with

its description and example kanji. These 184 section headers cover virtually all the kanji used in present-day publications in the Japanese language.

Chapter 3 “Development of Japanese Writing Systems” focuses on Japan, which did not have a writing system initially, and discusses how the writings that were born in China influenced the Japanese language, not only in its writing system but also its sound system and vocabulary. In addition, this chapter discusses how two phonetic letter systems of *katakana* and *hiragana* were developed from kanji for different purposes and in different ways, and eventually the writing system of the present-day style emerged.

Main Body

1100 Kanji—History, Meanings, and Use

In addition to providing the missing links between each kanji’s form and meaning, *The Key to Kanji: A Visual History of 1100 Characters* also provides all aspects of kanji study—sound, form, meaning, section header, usage, and stroke order—that learners will need to have for a complete picture of kanji. Each of the 1100 kanji in this book contains the following information:

Sample Kanji Table for 分

① Serial number — 933

② Kanji in *kyokasho-tai* font — 分

③ Meaning in English — to divide; portion; to understand; to realize; minute

④ Origin — ORIGIN: The top 丷 “dividing into two” and the bottom 刀 “sword; knife” or “to cut” indicated not only “to divide” or “portion” but also “minute” because an hour is divided into 60 minutes. Also, when something is explained in a clear-cut manner, it is easily understood. The kanji 分 means “to divide,” “portion,” “minute,” or “to understand; to realize.”

⑤ Header — 刀

⑥ On-kun readings — フン・ブン・ブ・わかる

⑦ Illustration — (a) Drawing of a knife, (b) Ancient writing of 分, (c) Modern writing of 分

⑧ Sample words — わける to divide, 十分に plentifully, わかる to understand, to realize, 五分 five minutes, 分別のある sensible, 七分目 seven-tenths

⑨ Strokes — 4

- ① **Serial number (1 through 1100):** *The Key to Kanji* contains 1100 kanji that are numbered according to the “*on*-reading” of kanji, which are Chinese derivative pronunciations.
- ② **Kanji in *kyokasho-tai* font:** The *kyokasho-tai* “textbook style” typeface is the best approximation of an ideal handwriting style, which students are encouraged to emulate.
- ③ **English definition:** The meanings of each kanji are given in English. Compound kanji words have different meanings, but it is helpful to know the core meaning of each individual kanji.
- ④ **Origin:** The historical development of each kanji is explained in English. To clarify the delineation between ancient meanings and modern day meanings, past tense is used to indicate historical uses while current tense is used to indicate present uses.
- ⑤ **Header (dictionary section header):** A dictionary section header (*bushu*) found in traditional kanji dictionaries is provided for each kanji. *The Key to Kanji* includes 184 kanji section headers. A section header has sometimes been called a radical in English as well.
- ⑥ **On-kun readings:** The *on*-reading (Chinese derivative pronunciation) is indicated in katakana, and the *kun*-reading (Japanese pronunciation) is indicated in hiragana.
- ⑦ **Illustration:** Each kanji’s historical development is illustrated in steps. A drawing of: (a) the image of the original meaning, (b) an ancient writing

form taken from the oracle-bone style, bronze-style, or seal-style, (c) the meaningful components of the kanji, and (d) the present-day kanji form.

- (H) **Sample words:** An average of six frequently used words are chosen per kanji with *furigana* (Japanese phonetic guides) and meanings in English. There are approximately 6500 words in this book. Some of the words that are customarily written in a particular kanji, but not necessarily listed among its corresponding on-kun readings as described in (F), are also included.¹
- (I) **Strokes:** Each kanji's stroke order is fully illustrated in *kyokasho-tai* font in clear precise graphics. The total number of strokes is also provided.

Kanji selection

The total of 1100 kanji in *The Key to Kanji* includes all of the 1006 kanji on the educational kanji list (学習漢字), which is the list of kanji that the Japanese government requires textbook writers to introduce in primary school education in Japan. An additional 94 kanji are selected from the list of commonly-used kanji (*joyo-kanji* 常用漢字)²; these were chosen based on textbooks commonly used in the United States and linked to various proficiency test requirements in the United States and United Kingdom.³

¹A kun-reading is essentially a matching up of an existing Japanese word with the kanji form of the same meaning. However, the use of kanji in some words may vary to some extent depending on the purpose or genre of writing or the individual writer's style.

²The commonly-used kanji list contains 1945 kanji, 1006 of which are designated as educational kanji. In 2010 a change is expected to include some additional kanji.

³With one or two exceptions, the book contains all the kanji introduced in the following materials: 377 kanji from *Japanese as Written Language* (Jordan and Noda 1995); 317 kanji from *Genki I & II* (Banno et al. 1999); 390 kanji from *Nakama 1 & 2* (Makino et al. 1998 & 2000); 500 kanji from *Kihon Kanji 1 & 2* (Kano et al. 1989); 410 kanji from the Advanced Placement Test in Japanese (College Board 2006) in the United States; and 600 kanji from the GCSE, AS and A2 kanji lists (Edexcel Foundation 2006) in the United Kingdom.

Indexes to search for kanji

Being able to locate kanji quickly and efficiently is crucial for a reference book. As noted in A, the 1100 kanji in *The Key to Kanji* are arranged in order of their on-reading (Index 1). We also provide five additional indexes for user navigation in the back of the book. The six indexes are as follows:

INDEX 1: Order of Appearance in *The Key to Kanji* (本書所収の漢字)

This is the list of the 1100 kanji arranged according to its on-reading (Chinese derivative pronunciation) in the order of the Japanese Syllabary, or the Table of Fifty Syllables (五十音図), which is a-i-u-e-o, ka-ki-ku-ke-ko, etc.

INDEX 2: On- and Kun-Readings: Japanese Syllabary Order (五十音順音訓読み)

This index lists all the on-readings and kun-readings (Japanese pronunciation) of the 1100 kanji in this book in the order of the Japanese Syllabary. Following convention, the on-reading is given in katakana and kun-reading in hiragana.

INDEX 3: On- and Kun-Readings in Romaji (ローマ字による音訓読み)

This index is for beginning students who may be using *romaji* (alphabetical rendition). Two types of romaji, the *kunrei* system and the Hepburn system, are included.

INDEX 4: Arranged by Total Number of Strokes (総画数による索引)

This index references the total number of strokes in a kanji. When the pronunciation is not known, you can count the total number of strokes and look it up in this index.

INDEX 5: Arranged by Section Header

(部首による索引)

In the traditional kanji dictionaries, kanji are arranged according to a recurring part of the kanji called the section header or *bushu*, or sometimes known as the radical in English. This book contains 184 dictionary section headers. Look for the stroke number and you can quickly locate the kanji within a category of kanji. The arrangement of the section headers also follows convention.

INDEX 6: Arranged by the Educational Kanji Designation (学年別学習漢字)

This index is useful for heritage students and students who study kanji using textbooks that follow the grade designations from the Japanese government.

Benefits to Students and Teachers at All Levels

The Key to Kanji was written for students and teachers of the Japanese language at all levels. Here are some general thoughts for using this book.

If you are a beginner or a teacher of beginners, this book will serve as a reference accompanying your primary textbook. By using the pronunciation in the textbook as your guide, you can use the index to find the desired kanji.

First, read the explanation on what the kanji consists of and view the corresponding illustrations. After you understand the connection between the kanji's form and its meaning, write out the kanji in the stroke order shown. Keep in mind that the kanji is a result of a writing process that developed over more than three thousand years and the stroke order is a part of the tradition. Using the right stroke order will help you remember the kanji, and believe it or not, Japanese can usually tell from the writing if you did the strokes out

of order. If you have more time, read through the sample words, and get accustomed to the idea that an individual kanji has more than one reading and meaning.

If you are an intermediate-level student or a teacher of intermediate-level students, you have probably studied nearly four hundred kanji already. Now you can learn new kanji in a new way and increase kanji knowledge and vocabulary at the same time.

Re-learn familiar kanji by carefully dissecting them into meaningful components. You will notice that those meaningful units reappear in other kanji that are related in meaning or pronunciation. They give you valuable building blocks for your intermediate-level study and beyond. Then, study sample words that use the kanji that you are studying. Learning to use a familiar kanji in different words is an effective way to increase the breadth of your vocabulary, which is an important goal of your study at the intermediate level.

If you are an advanced-level student or a teacher of advanced-level students, nearly all new vocabulary words that you will learn are compound kanji words. For that reason, knowledge of kanji is crucial to your progress in learning the Japanese language even if you are more interested in speaking than reading or writing.

Sit back, read through this book, and keep your mind open to this new approach to understanding kanji. Study the 184 section-header table carefully, and you will begin to realize that kanji and words that did not seem necessarily connected before are actually connected. Since the majority of kanji are formed by way of "phonetic-semantic composite formation," you have a powerful tool in deciphering a new unfamiliar kanji in its meaning and/or pronunciation to expand your kanji knowledge to all of the approximately 2000 kanji that are currently used in Japanese.

If you are studying for a proficiency test, such as the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, in addition to the suggestions above, it may be useful to keep in mind the following:

Many of the standardized proficiency tests require kanji recognition. This book's focus on the relationship between a kanji's form and meaning is helpful to preparing for these tests because you will be able to recognize the meaning of components of unfamiliar kanji. The 6500 sample words were chosen for its frequent use in Japanese newspapers (on-line media, in particular) and will be useful in expanding your vocabulary along with deepening your kanji study.

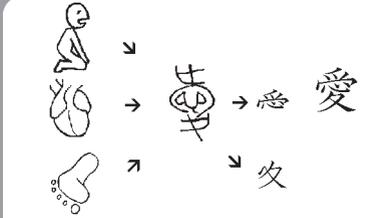
If you are a parent or a teacher of a student in a heritage Japanese language school or supplementary Japanese school (日本語補習校), this book is a good reading book for your student. A gap between fluent speaking skills and lower-level kanji knowledge can hinder further learning of compound words, which is essential in reaching adult-level proficiency. This book will fill that gap. The visual illustration that shows the origin of kanji in this book will motivate younger students to stay interested in kanji and maintain their efforts in Japanese language study. For any student, the visual can only aid in comprehension.

1

ON-KUN READINGS: アイ・まな HEADER: 心



love



ORIGIN: The ancient form had a form that signified a “person kneeling down to eat,” 心 “heart” and 攴 “dragging feet” that pull one back. Together they described a state in which one’s heart was filled with an emotion and it was hard to move on, that is, “love.” The kanji 愛 means “love.”

あい 愛 love あいじょう 愛情 affection れんあい 恋愛 love	あいしょう 愛称 nickname あいちやく 愛着 emotional attachment あいよう 愛用する to use regularly
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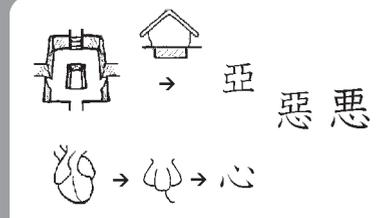
一 亠 冫 𠂇 𠂆 𠂇 𠂆 𠂇 𠂆 𠂇 𠂆 愛 愛 愛 13

2

ON-KUN READINGS: アク・オ・わる(い)・あ(し)き HEADER: 心



bad; ill; evil



ORIGIN: The top of the older form 惡 had 亞 “hollow in the ground,” indicating something “suppressed.” The bottom 心 depicted an anatomical shape of a heart, signifying “heart” or “feelings.” Together they indicated “bad feelings that were suppressed” or simply “bad” or “evil.” The kanji 惡 means “bad or ill.”

わる 悪い bad あく 悪 evil けんおかん 嫌悪感 abhorrence	さいあく 最悪 the worst あくい 悪意 ill-intention あくよう 悪用 misuse
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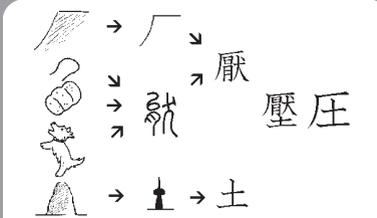
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3

ON-KUN READINGS: アツ HEADER: 土



to press; pressure



ORIGIN: The old form 壓 consisted of 厶 “smothering cover,” 日 “bone joint,” and 月 “meat or flesh” of 犬 “dog or animal,” which indicated sweet meat. After eating sweet meat, one feels full and a pressure in one’s stomach. 土 “soil” added the meaning of pushing down. The reduced current form 圧 means “to press” or “pressure.”

あつりよく 圧力 pressure きあつ 気圧 atmospheric pressure けつあつ 血圧 blood pressure	よくあつてき 抑圧的 oppressive あつ 圧する to weigh on あつとうてき 圧倒的 overwhelming
--	--

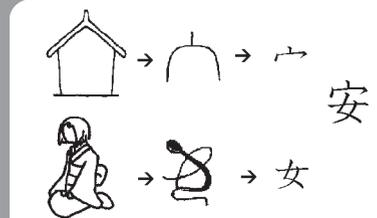
一 厶 尸 斤 圧 5

4

ON-KUN READINGS: アン・やす(い) HEADER: 宀



secure; peaceful; inexpensive; cheap



ORIGIN: The combination of 宀 “house” and 女 “woman” resting at home indicated “safety or at ease.” Inexpensive things are less stressful to buy; hence, another meaning was “inexpensive.” The kanji 安 means “secure” or “peaceful” and also “inexpensive, cheap.”

やす 安い inexpensive, cheap あんか 安価 reasonably priced かくやす 格安な moderately priced, bargain priced	あんしん 安心する to feel relieved ふあん 不安な anxious あんぜん 安全 safe
--	---

一 宀 宀 宀 宀 安 安 安 6

5

ON-KUN READINGS:

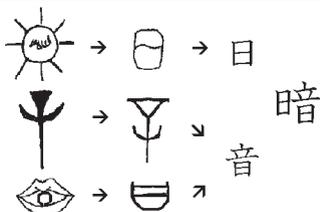
アン・くら(い)

HEADER:

日



dark; unclear



ORIGIN: This kanji consisted of 日 “sun” and 音 “a sharp needle and something inside a mouth.” When people try to speak with something in their mouths, their words often come out garbled or “unclear.” The two forms combine to indicate “sun not clearly seen,” and thus the kanji 暗 means “dark; unclear.”

くら
暗い dark
めいあん
明暗 light and darkness
あんじ
暗示 hint

あんき
暗記する to learn by heart
あんごう
暗号 secret code; password
あんもく うち
暗黙の内に tacitly

丨 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 13

6

ON-KUN READINGS:

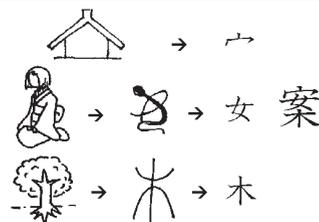
アン

HEADER:

木



plan; proposed idea



ORIGIN: On the top 宀 “house” and 女 “woman” indicated “secure and peaceful,” here used phonetically. The bottom 木 “wood” indicated a “desk.” One thinks of a plan at a desk. The kanji 案 means “proposed idea” or “plan.”

あん
案 proposal
あんない
案内する to show around
あんないしょ
案内所 information desk

あんがい
案外と contrary to what is expected
ていあん
提案する to propose
めいあん
名案 brilliant idea

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7

ON-KUN READINGS:

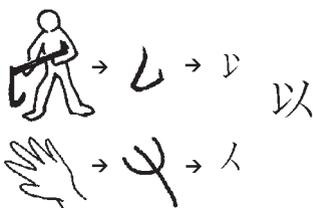
イ・もつ(て)

HEADER:

人



starting point; by means of



ORIGIN: The left side depicted a “plow” and the right side a “hand.” A plow is a tool used at the start of work in the field. The kanji 以 means “by means of” or “starting point.”

さんにんいじょう
三人以上 three people or more
いか
以下 below, less than
い以内 within

いがい
以外 other than
いぜん
以前 before
いご
以後 thereafter

丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 5

8

ON-KUN READINGS:

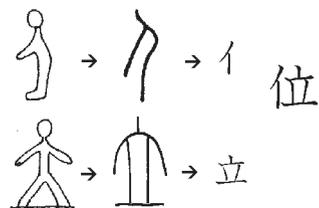
イ・くらい

HEADER:

イ



rank; place; approximately



ORIGIN: This kanji consisted of 亻 a “standing person viewed sideways” and 立 a “person standing, facing front.” Together they indicated a place or approximate area where one stood, according to his rank, before a ruler or in a ceremony. The kanji 位 means “rank, place” or “approximately.”

くらい
位 rank
どの位 how much
だいいち
第一位 first place

いち
位置 location
ち地位 position
かくい
各位 everyone [honorific]

丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 丨 7

