

REMEMBERING THE KANJI

VOL. 2

A Systematic Guide to Reading Japanese Characters

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Contents

Introduction	1
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PART ONE: Chinese Readings

1. The Kana and Their Kanji	11
2. Pure Groups	20
3. One-Time Chinese Readings	80
4. Characters with No Chinese Readings	86
5. Semi-Pure Groups	91
6. Readings from Everyday Words	124
7. Mixed Groups	154
8. Readings from Useful Compounds	203
9. A Potpourri of Readings	231
10. Supplementary Readings	261

PART TWO: Japanese Readings

11. A Mnemonics for the Japanese Readings	301
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Indexes

I. Signal Primitives.	319
II. Kanji.	322
III. Chinese Readings	334
IV. Japanese Readings	348
V. Cross-Reference List.	373

Introduction

AS THE TITLE SUGGESTS, the present book has been prepared as a companion volume to *Remembering the Kanji: A Complete Course on How Not to Forget the Meaning and Writing of Japanese Characters*. It presumes that the material covered in the first book has already been mastered and concentrates exclusively on the pronunciation of the Japanese characters. Those who approached the study of the kanji in a different manner may find what is in these pages of some use, but it has not been designed with them in mind.

As I explained in the Introduction to the previous volume, if it is the student's goal to acquire proficiency in using the Japanese writing system, the entire set of "general-use characters" (常用漢字) need to be learned. To insist on studying them in the order of importance or frequency generally followed in Japanese schools is pointless if some other order is more effective as a means to that final goal. A moment's reflection on the matter is enough to dispose of the common bias that the methods employed by those who come to Japanese as a foreign language should mirror the methods used by the Japanese themselves to learn how to read and write. Accumulated experience and education—and in most cases an energetic impatience with one's own ignorance—distinguish the older student too radically from Japanese schoolchildren to permit basic study habits to be taken over with only cosmetic changes. A clearer focus on the destination should help the older student chart a course more suited to his or her time, resources, and learning abilities—and not just run harder and faster around the same track.

Perhaps the single greatest obstacle to taking full advantage of one's privileged position as an adult foreigner is a healthy fear of imposing alien systems on Japanese language structures. But to impose a system on ways of learning a language does not necessarily mean to impose a system on the language itself. To miss this distinction is to risk condemning oneself to the worst sorts of inefficiency for the worst sorts of reasons.

Obviously the *simplest* way to learn Japanese is as the Japanese themselves do: by constant repetition, without interference, in a closed cultural environment. Applied to the kanji, this involves drilling and drilling and drilling until the forms and sounds become habitual. The simplest way, alas, is also the most

time-consuming and frustrating. By adding a bit of organized complexity to one's study investments, the same level of proficiency can be gained in a fraction of the time. This was demonstrated in the first volume as far as the meaning and writing of the characters are concerned. By isolating these skills and abstracting from any relationship they have to the rest of the language, a firm foundation was laid for the next step, the assignation of sounds or "readings" to the individual characters. That is the subject of this book.

The earlier volume was described as a "complete course"; the present volume is offered as a "guide." The differences between the two books are as important as the similarities. While both books are intended to be self-taught and allow individual readers to progress at their own pace, the former traced out a path step by step, in a clearly defined order. Here, however, the material is presented in such a way that it may be followed frame by frame or may be rearranged freely to suit the particular student's needs. The reason is that the readings of the kanji do not allow for any more than a *discontinuous* systematization: blocks of repeating patterns and clusters of unpatterned material organized under a variety of rubrics. In fact, the only thing ironclad about the method is the assumption that the student already knows what the characters mean and how they are written. Without that knowledge, the systematization becomes all but opaque. In any event, it is important to gain some understanding of how the book as a whole is laid out before deciding how best to make use of it.

The book falls into two parts of wildly disproportionate length. The first ten chapters cover the Chinese or *on* readings (音読み); the last chapter, the Japanese or *kun* readings (訓読み). This should not give the impression that the *on* readings themselves are so much more difficult than the *kun* readings, but only that their systematization requires much more attention. What is more, the method followed in CHAPTER 11 is closer to that followed in volume 1 and can thus be treated in relatively short shrift.

One of the chief reasons for frustration with the Chinese readings is not that there are so many kanji to read, but that there are so few readings to go around, creating a massive confusion of homonyms to the uninitiated. No sooner does one attempt to establish a set of rules to rein in this phenomenon than exceptions begin to nibble away at one's principles like termites until the entire construction begins to look like a colossal waste of effort.

True enough, there are exceptions. A lot of them. But there is also a great deal of consistency which can be sifted out and structured for the learning. The principal aim of the first ten chapters is to isolate these patterns of consistency and use them to the fullest, holding brute memory at bay as long as possible. To this end I have introduced what are called "signal primitives." By this I mean *primitive elements within the written form which signal a particular*

Chinese reading. Since most of these primitive forms were already assigned a meaning in the first book, the strategy should come as a welcome relief and carry you well over one-third of your way through the *on* readings. Whatever readings fall outside the compass of this method are introduced through a variety of devices of uneven difficulty, each assigned its own chapter.

CHAPTER 1 presents 56 kanji which form the parent-kanji for the forms of the *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries and whose readings are directly related to the modern *kana* sounds. 49 of them are Chinese readings, 7 are Japanese.

CHAPTER 2 covers a large group of characters belonging to “pure groups” in which the presence of a given signal primitive entails a uniform sound.

CHAPTER 3 presents the small group of kanji whose readings are *not* homonyms and may therefore be learned in conjunction with a particular character. CHAPTER 4, conversely, lists characters with no *on* reading.

CHAPTER 5 returns to the signal primitives, this time gathering together those groups in which a signal primitive entails a uniform sound—but with a single exception to the pattern. These are called “semi-pure” groups.

CHAPTER 6 brings together readings drawn from everyday words, all or nearly all of which should have been learned during the course of a general introduction to Japanese conversation. Allowing for occasional slight shifts of meaning from those assigned the kanji in the first volume, the only work that remains to be done is to see how Japanese puts the pieces together to create new meanings.

CHAPTER 7 returns one final time to the use of signal primitives, picking up what characters can still make use of the device and subdividing them into three classes of “mixed-groups” where a given primitive element can signal two or more different sounds.

CHAPTERS 8 and 9 follow the pattern of CHAPTER 6, except that the compounds will be less familiar and require learning some new vocabulary. The only thing these kanji have in common is that they do *not* belong to any natural phonetic group. The most useful compounds are presented in CHAPTER 8. The generally less useful compounds of CHAPTER 9 are all introduced with explanatory comments.

CHAPTER 10 is a wastepaper basket into which I have thrown the remaining readings: uncommon, rare, or generally restricted to proper names.

All the kanji from CHAPTERS 1 through 10 are arranged in a frame of uniform design (see FIGURE 1 on the following page). Taken together, they cover the entire range of *on* readings established as standard by Japan’s Ministry of Education. Five indexes have been added to facilitate reference and review.

INDEX 1 lists all the signal primitives, arranged according to number of strokes, and the frame in which they first appear.

- INDEX II presents a listing of all the kanji treated in this and the former volume, arranged according to the number of strokes.
- INDEX III lists, in syllabic order, all the *on* readings, their respective kanji, and the number of their respective frames.
- INDEX IV lists all the *kun* readings and their respective kanji. Together these two indexes constitute a complete dictionary of readings for the general-use kanji.
- INDEX V follows the frame sequence of the first book, giving the *kun* readings and the frame(s) in which the *on* reading is introduced in this book.

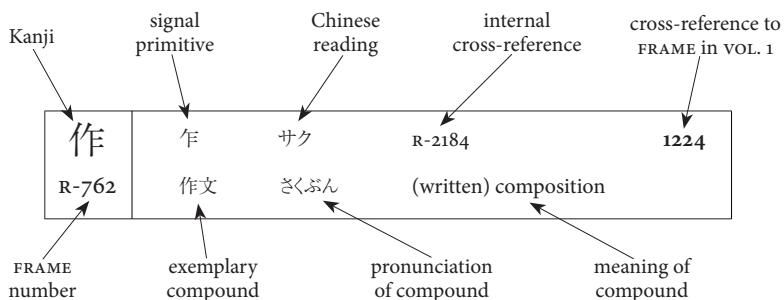


FIGURE 1

The frames have been arranged to facilitate reviewing: if you block out everything to the right of the compound used as an example, you are able to run a simple self-test from time to time. For more thoroughgoing review, the flash cards that were prepared according to the design given in CHAPTER 5 of the first volume can be completed, with the aid of the indexes. A complete explanation is provided in CHAPTER 11.

Although the principles that govern the structure of this book will become clearer as the student grows more familiar with the content, there are a few points that seem worthy of mention at the outset. They represent both the courtesies I paid my own memory in learning to read Japanese and the pitfalls I watched fellow students fall into following other methods. As time goes on, you may or may not choose to follow them, but at least you should know what they are.

First, relating one compound to another by means of similarities of sound is to be avoided at any cost. It merely clutters the mind with useless information. The fact that the two syllables *sensei* can mean teacher (先生) or astrology (占星) or despotism (専制) or oath (宣誓), depending on the kanji assigned to

them, may come as such a surprise that you are tempted to make some use of the coincidence. Resist the temptation.

Second, it is best not to try to learn *on* and *kun* readings at the same time for the same character. The idea of “conquering” a character in its entirety will be supported by nearly every textbook on the kanji that you pick up, but is nearly as mistaken as trying to learn to write and read the kanji at the same time. Once you have learned the general-use characters, you will have a much better base from which to learn the meaning, writing, and readings of new characters *en bloc* as you meet them. Until then, cling to the Caesarean principle of “divide and conquer.”

Third, with few exceptions, it seems preferable to learn the several possible Chinese readings of a given character as they come up, in isolation from one another. When second or third readings appear, reference to earlier frames will inform you of the fact. You will no doubt notice that the quickest way to complete the information on your flash cards is to rush to INDEX V and start filling them in. If you do, you might end up with a tidy set of cards that are no longer of any use for review, or else find yourself reviewing what you haven’t yet studied. In either case, you would be sidestepping the entire method on which this book is based. Be sure to read the instructions on pages 297–99 before doing anything with your cards.

Fourth, certain Japanese sounds undergo phonetic alterations when set alongside other sounds. For example, 一本, 二本, 三本 are read *ippon*, *nihon*, *sambon*, the syllable *hon* being like a chameleon that changes to suit its environment. Some of these alterations are regional, some standard. In any case, they are best learned by trial-and-error rather than by a set of rules that are more complex than they are worth.

Fifth, a word about Chinese compounds (熟語, じゅくご). With a grain of salt, one might compare the blend of Japanese (*kun*) and Chinese (*on*) words to the blend of Anglo-Saxon and Latin-Greek words in English. Generally, our words of Anglo-Saxon root are richer in meaning, vaguer, and more evocative than those of Latin-Greek root, which tend to precision and clarity. For instance, the word “glass” can suggest a whole range of possible images and meanings, but as soon as we substitute its Latin equivalent, “vitrine,” we have narrowed it down to a more concrete meaning. The presence of Chinese words (generally a compound of two or more *on* readings) in Japanese performs a similar narrowing, specifying function, while the native Japanese words reverberate wider and deeper meanings.

In much the same way that we combine Anglo-Saxon words with Latin and Greek words (for example, in the term “fiberglass”), Japanese will occasionally mix *on* and *kun* readings in the same compound. As a rule, I have avoided

these in the exemplary compounds. The order of preference in choosing examples was roughly as follows:

1. a compound that includes a reading appearing in a previous frame;
2. a compound in ordinary use;
3. a compound that uses a reading to appear soon after the frame in question;
4. the most common or instructive compound;
5. a name of a person or place;
6. rare or archaic compounds.

The student is encouraged to substitute familiar compounds at any time for the examples I have chosen.

Sixth, the use of signal primitives demands the same rigor applied to primitive elements in volume 1. Where a single jot or tittle of difference is present, the element is excluded. Additional attention will have to be paid to the *position* of the primitive, which was not important in the earlier book.

Seventh, I would register a plea against trying to begin with the two volumes of *Remembering the Kanji* at the same time. I wash my hands (or as Japanese would have it, my feet) of all responsibility for the results. That having been said, there is no reason that these pages cannot be used in conjunction with a set of graded readers. I would only advise that you begin this *after* having worked your way through CHAPTERS 2 and 5. The benefit of such an approach is that it enables you to take full advantage of the grammatical and vocabulary drills that such readers provide.

At the same time, the commonly heard advice about learning characters “in context” is one that is not as sensible as it sounds. Even if I learn the English word “troglodytic” in sentences such as “I can trace my ancestors back to the troglodytic age” or “There’s a family of troglodytes in my tool shed,” the word still needs to be learned in the first place. New Japanese vocabulary falls on the foreign ear with much the same impact—totally unrelated to anything we already know. The benefit of a context is that it enables one to drill a number of words and assimilate something of how they relate to one another grammatically and connotatively. Context defines the finer nuances that usage and tradition have affixed to the kanji, but the compounds themselves still need to be learned. For this reason, students who wish systematically to make their way through this book frame by frame need not trouble themselves over the absence of context provided they do not abandon all reading practice in the process.

Eighth and finally, a vigorous warning against the use of *rōmaji* in learning to read Japanese kanji. Get the idea out of your mind that the Roman alphabet is a “crutch” to help you hobble along until you master the *hiragana* and *kata-*

kana syllabaries. It is nothing of the kind. It is rather a slow and self-inflicted amputation that will leave you crippled for the rest of your Japanese-reading years. Not only does the Roman alphabet inflict quirks on your pronunciation, it cultivates a systematic bias against the *kana* that gets harder and harder to uproot. Be patient with the *kana*, and never write Roman letters beneath them. The stricter you are in expelling all *rōmaji* from your study of Japanese words, the quicker you will find that Roman letters become an obstacle to reading and writing, which they are for the Japanese and should be for anyone learning the language.

In the fall of 2010, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports, Science, and Technology approved the addition of 196 new kanji to the official list of 1,945 established in 1981. These changes were reflected in the sixth edition of volume 1 of *Remembering the Kanji*, which now comprises 2,200 characters. The readings for all these kanji are covered in this fourth edition of volume 2.

Nagoya, Japan
1 August 2011

CHAPTER 2

Pure Groups

THE EASIEST groups of character-readings to learn are those that share common *on* readings by virtue of the presence of a common primitive element, called here a signal primitive because it “signals” a particular sound for each character in which it appears. Let us begin with a concrete example.

中	チュウ	R-1113	39
R-57	中国	ちゅうごく	China

As you learned in VOL. 1, the character in the above frame serves as a primitive element in a number of other characters with the *meaning* of “in.”

Conveniently, the character itself also provides those characters with a common *on-yomi*, namely チュウ. In other words, each time you see this primitive element, you can be sure what the Chinese reading will be. Among all the kanji treated in VOL. 1, there are three characters that fit this pattern. All you need do to learn their Chinese reading is to recognize them as possessing the signal primitive.

If all the primitive elements served as signal primitives, things would be easier. It might even make sense to study the reading and writing of the kanji together. Alas, this is not the case, so it is best to forget about primitive elements throughout this book.

忠	チュウ	648	
R-58	忠告	ちゅうこく	admonition; warning

沖	チュウ	146
R-59	冲天 ちゅうてん ascendancy; rising to the sky	
仲	チュウ	1029
R-60	仲介 ちゅうかい agency; mediation	

There are other “pure groups”—and these are clearly the majority—in which the signal primitive is not itself a kanji, or at least not one included in the list of those we studied. In these cases, the signal primitive is set off immediately to the right of the kanji treated in the frame. An example follows immediately.

Unless some other explanation is given, the use of proper names for exemplary compounds is meant to indicate that this reading is used exclusively or chiefly for names in modern Japanese.

舗	ホ	R-1011	1982
R-61	店舗 てんぽ a shop; store		
補	ホ		1983
R-62	補助金 ほじょきん financial subsidy		
捕	ホ		1978
R-63	逮捕 たいほ arrest; capture		
哺	ホ		1979
R-64	哺乳動物 ほにゅうどうぶつ mammal		

The size of particular “pure groups” varies. Some are as large as 8, others as small as 2. Since the larger groups are, obviously, easier to learn, we begin with those containing 4 or more kanji. Be careful to note the special conditions that occasionally accompany the signal primitives.

長 R-65	社長 しゃちょう	チヨウ company president	2070
張 R-66	主張 しゅちょう	チヨウ emphasis; insistence	2071
帳 R-67	通帳 つうちょう	チヨウ bankbook; passbook	2072
脹 R-68	膨脹 ほうちょう	チヨウ swelling; inflation	2073
付 R-69	付与 ふよ	フ an allowance; grant	1075
府 R-70	政府 せいふ	フ government	1077
符 R-71	符号 ふごう	フ cipher; mark; symbol	1076
附 R-72	附近 ふきん	フ vicinity This character is still used today as an alternative to that in FRAME 70, as the example illustrates.	1400
腐 R-73	豆腐 とうふ	フ bean curd; tofu	1099

義 R-74	義理 ぎり	ギ	social duty; obligation	691
議 R-75	会議 かいぎ	ギ	meeting; conference	692
儀 R-76	礼儀 れいぎ	ギ	etiquette; courtesy	1059
犧 R-77	犠牲 ぎせい	ギ	sacrifice	693
青 R-78	青年 せいねん	セイ	R-1645 young man; youth	1654
精 R-79	精神 せいしん	セイ	R-1646 mind; psyche	1655
清 R-80	清潔 せいけつ	セイ	R-1647 clean; cleanliness	1659
晴 R-81	晴天 せいてん	セイ	R-1649 clear skies	1658
静 R-82	静止 せいし	セイ	R-943, 1650 a standstill	1660

請 R-83	セイ 申請 しんせい	R-1648 application; petition	1656
情 R-84	セイ 風情 ふぜい	R-1651 air; appearance	1657

五 R-85	ゴ 五人 ごにん	5 people	5
吾 R-86	ゴ 吾人 ごじん	we [rare]	17
悟 R-87	ゴ 覚悟 かくご	resolve; preparedness	669
語 R-88	ゴ 日本語 にほんご	Japanese language	371

白 R-89	ハク 白人 はくじん	R-610 white people; Caucasians	37
泊 R-90	ハク 一泊 いっぱく	a night's stay	158
迫 R-91	ハク 切迫 せっぱく	to be tense; be imminent	300
拍 R-92	ハク 拍手 はくしゅ	R-2190 applause	704

舶 R-93	舶来品	ハク はくらいひん	imported goods	2013
伯 R-94	伯仲	ハク はくちゅう	to be equal to; be a match for	1041
包 R-95	包丁	ハウ ほうちょう	kitchen knife; cleaver	569
砲 R-96	鉄砲	ハウ てっぽう	cannon	571
泡 R-97	水泡	ハウ すいほう	bubbles; foam	572
抱 R-98	介抱	ハウ かいほう	nursing; care	697
胞 R-99	同胞	ハウ どうほう	compatriots; countrymen	570
飽 R-100	飽食	ハウ ほうしょく	saturation; gluttony	1592
嬢 R-101	裏嬢	ジョウ じょう	daughter; girl	1650

讓 R-102	ジョウ 譲歩 じょうほ concession; compromise	1648
壤 R-103	ジョウ 土壤 どじょう the soil	1649
釀 R-104	ジョウ 醸造 じょうぞう brewing; distillation	1647
可 R-105	カ 可能 かのう possibility	97
何 R-106	カ 幾何学 きかがく geometry	1087
苛 R-107	カ 苛酷 かこく rigor; severity	240
荷 R-108	カ 出荷 しゅっか shipping; consignment	1088
歌 R-109	カ 校歌 こうか school song	510
河 R-110	カ 河川 かせん rivers; rivers and streams	157

化 R-111	カ 化学 かがく	R-1692 chemistry	1083
	The signal primitive must stand alone, with nothing to its right, in order to carry the sound.		
花 R-112	カ 花壇 かだん	1084 flower bed; flower garden	
貨 R-113	カ 貨物 かもつ	1085 freight	
靴 R-114	カ 製靴 せいか	2042 shoemaking	
工 R-115	コウ 人工 じんこう	R-1673 man-made	80
	The signal primitive in this group must assume a “prominent position” in the character in order to carry the sound with it. When it is tucked away in a corner of the character as a minor element, as in the kanji 築, it loses that function.		
功 R-116	コウ 成功 せいこう	R-2348 success	927
攻 R-117	コウ 専攻 せんこう	352 field of specialization	
江 R-118	コウ 長江 ちょうこう	R-28 long river	148