

# A Brief Introduction to Japanese Kanji

The Japanese language contains three types of texts: Hiragana(ひらがな), Katakana(カタカナ), and Kanji(漢字). Hiragana and Katakana are similar to single letters A, B, C in English. They represent the sounds.

Kanji, which has the meaning of 'Chinese Characters', are introduced from Chinese writing system 1,500 years ago. Each Kanji has one or more specific meanings, while combining some Kanjis together could represent more complicated items. A single Kanji can have different readings (informally, pronunciations) when representing different meanings and when formed as words with other Kanjis or Hiraganas. Their readings in Chinese system, which is called 'on-reading' (on-yomi, 音読み), and the readings developed later in Japan, which is called 'kun-reading' (kun-yomi, 訓読み) together formed different readings of Japanese Kanjis.

Although there are tens of thousands of Chinese Characters in the Unicode charset, many of them are not used anymore or have been replaced by other characters. In 2010, the Japanese Ministry of Education together with Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs released a chart of 2,136 Kanjis that are frequently used.

Kanji radicals are little pieces of kanji. They could hint a Kanji's meaning, pronunciation and origin.