

Two Reference Books on Written Japanese

- *A guide to Reading and Writing Japanese* (revised edition)

by Florence Sakade, Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1961, 312 pages (\$11.95)

- *Kanji and Kana: A Handbook and Dictionary of the Japanese Writing System* by Wolfgang Hadamitzky and Mark Spahn, Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1981, 392 pages (\$19.50)

Eventually you have to deal with kanji. If you are in Japan and can't make sense out of the kanji and kana on every public notice, newspaper, magazine, book, advertising poster, package label, restaurant menu, neighborhood map, and city bus, you must continually depend on the "kindness of strangers" to get you through the day. Learning kanji is definitely a good idea, but it is not easy.

The first obstacle is finding a textbook which recognizes that we ^{外人}gaijin, except for those few blessed with photographic memories, find it hard to memorize kanji simply by following the advice of one of my earliest teachers: "Just write it ten times, and you'll never forget it." *Reading Japanese* by Eleanor Jorden and Hamako Chaplin is excellent at providing tons of sample sentences and exercises, but it is so closely keyed to the old *Beginning Japanese* spoken textbook by the same authors that it is very difficult for a person learning from any other textbook to use, and some of the usages presented in it are obsolete. Even if you do master the 450 kanji presented in *Reading Japanese*, that still leaves 1,495 to go before you complete the full set of kanji taught in Japanese schools.

So what's a *gaijin* to do? Most non-Japanese who have become proficient at reading and writing kanji seem to have done so by a combination of self-disciplined memorization and a regular, determined effort to work through carefully selected material. Two books that have helped countless learners along the way are *A Guide to Reading and Writing Japanese*, edited by Florence Sakade, and *Kanji and Kana: A Handbook and Dictionary of the Japanese Writing System*, by Wolfgang Hadamitzky and Mark Spahn. (People often refer to these two books simply as "Sakade" and "Hadamitzky and Spahn".)

The Sakade-Book is about twenty years older than *Kanji and Kana*, and thus it reflects the officially sanctioned Japanese writing system as it was in the early 1960's. After an eight-page introduction on the structure of the system, it introduces the 881 *kyôiku kanji* or "education kanji," the ones taught to Japanese elementary school pupils until the revision of the official lists in the late 1970's. Each *kyôiku kanji* is accompanied by a set of diagrams showing how to write it stroke by stroke, its accepted readings, the general meaning of the character, and three compounds in which the character is used. The next section is a listing by stroke order of the 881 *kyôiku kanji* along with the 979 others which together made up the so-called *tôyô kanji*. This listing does not repeat the information on the *kyôiku kanji* but merely refers the reader to that particular character's number on the *kyôiku kanji* list and to the page on which it is found. The other 979 are listed with their official readings and approximate meanings but without examples of compounds or instructions for the proper stroke order. This is one of the greatest deficiencies of the book, because it is much easier to memorize a kanji as part of a meaningful word than as simply a reading and a sometimes rather vague meaning.

The Hadamitzky and Spahn book is much more complete, not to mention being more up-to-date. It begins with a fifty-page introduction to the entire Japanese writing system, covering such topics as calligraphic styles, different systems of romanization, the origin of hiragana and katakana, rules for arranging words in kana order, proper stroke order for both hiragana and katakana, rules for when to use each type of kana, punctuation, a brief history of the use of kanji in Japan, a description of how the kanji are structured, the distinction between *on* and *kun* readings and when each one should be used, the overall principles of stroke order for kanji, and the steps involved in using a kanji dictionary.

At first glance the listing of kanji in the main portion of the book looks like the one in Sakade, since the reader is presented with an entry showing each kanji, its official readings, the meanings of these readings, and a few sample words, but there are actually significant differences. The first is that every one of the 1,945 official characters receives the same treatment, so there are sample words for all the kanji. Looking closely at the sample words, we also find that Hadamitzky and Spahn have made a special effort to limit their examples to combinations of kanji already introduced. Thus, while Sakade gives *ichigatsu*, *ichiban*, and *issatsu* as the examples for *ICHI/hito(tsu)*, Hadamitzky and Spahn give *ichipêji*, *hitotsu-hitotsu* and *hitori*, since *JIN,NIN/hito* is the only kanji they have introduced previously. This practice not only saves the beginner from being distracted by unfamiliar and often difficult kanji, but also provides a limited amount of review of previously learned items. Following each example word or phrase, in fact, are the numbers of the other kanji used in the sample word or phrase, so that learners can refer back to the original introduction of the kanji.

The kanji themselves are presented in their brush-written forms with little numbers alongside and at the beginning point of each stroke so that the learner can see the stroke order. This method saves space, but it is not as easy to follow as the detailed, step-by-step charts found in Sakade. The brush-written characters are attractive, but even Japanese people rarely write with a brush these days, so the chart also includes the pen-written form. Two additional pieces of information are packed into the chart for each kanji: its radical number and its number in Andrew Nelson's *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*. according to the 214 radical system, as the 79 radical system was first published in "Japanese Character Dictionary" in 1989

Each character is indexed three times. The first index is an index by radicals, and this is an extremely valuable portion of the book. The huge Nelson dictionary and almost all Japanese and Chinese character dictionaries designed for native speakers index the characters by radicals, and it is useful for the student to be able to practice this system of looking up kanji in a controlled, non-intimidating framework. The second index lists the kanji by number of strokes, and the third lists them by both *on* and *kun* readings.

All in all, Hadamitzky and Spahn is far more up-to-date and comprehensive than Sakade. The introductory material is excellent, there are stroke-order numbers and examples for 1,945 kanji, and the book can serve as a beginner's character dictionary. The main advantage of Sakade is that the first 881 characters are written out stroke by stroke, and real beginners may find this approach less confusing. Eventually, however, the student would be wise to "graduate" to Hadamitzky and Spahn for a more sophisticated and complete view of the Japanese writing system.

Sample entries from *A Guide to Reading and Writing Japanese*
(shown actual size)

<div>良</div> <div>530</div> <div>7 strokes</div>	丶	㇀	㇁	RYŌ; <i>yo(i)</i> , good, well, fine, right, satisfactory 改良 <i>kairyō</i> , improvement 良心 <i>ryōshin</i> , conscience 最良 <i>sairyō</i> , the best, the ideal
	㇂	良	良	
<div>料</div> <div>531</div> <div>10 strokes</div>	丶	㇂	㇂	RYŌ (charge, materials) 原料 <i>genryō</i> , raw material 料理 <i>ryōri</i> , cooking 料金 <i>ryōkin</i> , charge
	㇂	料	料	

Sample entries from *Kanji and Kana*
(shown actual size)

<div>料</div> <div>radical</div> <div>119: 米</div> <div>115: 禾</div> <div>138: 良</div>	319	RYŌ, materials; fee	
	119	料理	<i>ryōri</i> cooking, cuisine; dish, food 143
	3468	原料	<i>genryō</i> raw materials 136
		料金	<i>ryōkin</i> fee, charge, fare 23
<div>科</div>		手数料	<i>tesūryō</i> fee; commission 57, 225
		有/無料	<i>yū/muryō</i> pay, toll, charging a fee/free 265, 93
	320	KA, academic course, department, faculty	
	115	科学	<i>kagaku</i> science 109
<div>科</div>	3272	理科	<i>rika</i> natural sciences (department) 143
		外科	<i>geka</i> surgery 93
		産婦人科医	<i>sanfujinkai</i> gynecologist 278, 316, 1, 220
		教科書	<i>kyōkasho</i> textbook, schoolbook 245, 131
<div>良</div>	321	RYŌ, <i>yo(i)</i> , good	
	138	良好	<i>ryōkō</i> good, favorable, satisfactory 104
	3885	良質	<i>ryōshitsu</i> good quality 176
		最良	<i>sairyō</i> best 263
<div>良</div>		不良	<i>furyō</i> bad, unsatisfactory; delinquency 94
		良心	<i>ryōshin</i> conscience 97

number in "old" Nelson

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