

# Historical Analysis of Japanese Writing Systems Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji

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## Keywords

*Hiragana, Katakana, Kanji, History.*

## ABSTRACT

This study discusses the historical analysis of the Japanese writing system hiragana, katakana, and kanji. In Japanese writing, there are three types of characters: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Kanji, which are derived from Chinese characters, are used for words with specific meanings. Hiragana and katakana, are also used as grammatical particles, words without kanji equivalents, and foreign words. Hiragana is used for native Japanese words, while katakana is used for foreign words and emphasis. This study aims to determine the history of the development of the use of writing systems in Japan. The problem of this study is how the relationship between hiragana, katakana, and kanji in the Japanese writing system. The method used in this study is descriptive analysis. This research was obtained through literature studies sourced from history books, journals, articles, and research results from the formation of kanji itself. The results of this study show that historically, there is a relationship between katakana, hiragana, and kanji that complement each other and are important for the Japanese writing system.

## INTRODUCTION

The Japanese writing system has undergone an interesting evolution, with Kanji playing an important role in its development (Kubota, 2017; Yoshioka et al., 2015). The Chinese writing system was introduced to Japan in the 5th century through the Korean peninsula. Originally, it was used with the Japanese term, represented by characters describing meanings rather than sounds. The evolution of Kanji was driven by a desire to be faster and more accurate when writing. Kanji flourished between the 6th and 10th centuries AD, and the Japanese began using it to write Japanese as a syllabic script after the 7th century (Heinrich, 2015; Joyce et al., 2014; Ogino et al., 2017; Yagyu et al., 2021).

Kanji has been considered an orthodox form of writing in Japan since ancient times. Kamo no Mabuchi, a scholar from the Edo period, valued the small number of characters in kana characters and argued for the restriction of kanji. However, Kanji Key has become a reference guide for Kanji learners based on etymological research and provides complete pictorial entries for each kanji (Hermalin, 2015; Paxton & Svetanant, 2014; Seely & Henshall, 2016).

The unusual breadth and depth of information provided by this guide meet the needs of students and teachers in a variety of educational programs as well as independently studying adult learners (Librenjak et al., 2012; Setiawati, 2018; Setiawati et al., 2021). Hiragana and Katakana are two syllable-based characters for grammatical suffixes and words without corresponding Kanji. While Kanji has historical significance in the Japanese writing system, unlike Chinese, Japanese characters cannot be

written entirely in Kanji (Ayu, 2013; Bossard, 2015; Liyuan, 2023; Shibatani & Kageyama, 2015; Tamaoka & Makioka, 2004).

The evolution of kanji was driven by the need to write faster and more accurately, which led to its development during the 6th to 10th centuries AD in China. In Japan, kanji is considered an orthodox form of writing since ancient times. Katakana is a voice-based writing that can be used to write foreign loan words, developed by Buddhist monks and more like a shortened version of Kanji.

Meanwhile, hiragana is a simplified version of Kanji created by the Imperial Court of Japan and used by most people who speak Japanese. Nouns often consist of compound characters two or more kanji written together. Japanese affixes for verb forms, prepositions, and other grammatical markers, which do not exist in Chinese, are then indicated by kana (usually hiragana). Therefore, the historical development of the Japanese writing system can be traced through the origin and evolution of kanji, which played an important role in shaping Japanese culture, language, literature, history, and records (Robbeets, 2017; Tamaoka et al., 2002; Vovin, 2017). So, this study aims to discover the history of developing the use of writing systems in Japan. This study's problem is the relationship between hiragana, katakana, and kanji in the Japanese writing system.

## METHODS

The research method employed in this study adopts a descriptive analysis approach, utilizing a diverse array of literature to investigate and document historical aspects (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017; Xiao & Watson, 2019). To enhance the research methodology, specific steps taken during data collection and analysis should be detailed for transparency and replicability. The inclusion of literature in Japanese, English, and Indonesian must be clearly justified, emphasizing the relevance and authority of chosen sources to strengthen the research's credibility. Acknowledging potential bias in relying solely on history books and addressing this concern by incorporating diverse perspectives or alternative sources will contribute to a more balanced study. Validation procedures for the findings should be explicitly outlined to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. The scope of the study, particularly concerning hiragana, katakana, and kanji, should be clearly defined to provide readers with a better understanding of the research's boundaries. The process of refining ideas needs more detailed explanation, shedding light on how researchers iteratively refined their research questions or hypotheses. Additionally, the conclusion of research problems should be clarified by providing insights into the criteria used to evaluate the research's success and discussing the implications of the findings, thereby strengthening the overall rigor and transparency of the study.

## RESULTS

The Japanese writing system has a rich history that evolved over time. The earliest evidence of a Japanese writing system dates to the 1st century AD, during the late Yayoi period when the Japanese first met Chinese writing. The Japanese writing system combines three writing systems: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Kanji is based on Chinese characters and was the first writing system used in Japan. Hiragana and katakana are syllabic characters developed in Japan.

The Japanese writing system has undergone significant changes throughout its long history. One of the most significant changes was the simplification of kanji characters after World War II. This simplification aims to make the writing system easier to learn and use.

Kanji is a logographic writing system that originated in China and was introduced to Japan in the 5th century. The kanji means "Chinese character" (*kan*, 漢, and *ji*, 字). In Mandarin Chinese, the word "*kanji*" is pronounced "*hànzì* 汉字". Like Han characters, the origin of kanji is pictographs or images that resemble writing to represent objects, such as the sun, moon, and trees. Over time, kanji evolved to represent more abstract concepts, such as ideas and emotions.




























Picture	→	Kanji	'KUN'	'ON'	Meaning				
	→		→		→	火	ひ	[KA]	fire
	→		→		→	水	みず	[SUI]	water
	→		→		→	金	かね	[KIN]	gold money metal
	→		→		→	土	つち	[DO]	ground earth soil
	→		→		→	子	こ	[SHI]	child
	→		→		→	女	おんな	[JO]	woman female
	→		→		→	学	(まな-ぶ)	[GAKU]	study
	→		→		→	生	い-きる う-まれる	[SEI]	live birth
	→		→		→	先	さき	[SEN]	foregoing previous

Figure 1. Kanji Evolution

The use of kanji in Japan has a long and complex history. During the Heian period (794-1185), the aristocracy used kanji to write poetry and literature. However, most people in Japan are illiterate and cannot read or write kanji. In the 9th century, two syllables, hiragana, and katakana, were developed to represent the sounds of the Japanese language. These syllables make it easier for people to read and write in Japanese.

The Japanese government significantly changed the writing system during the Meiji period (1868-1912). They simplified many kanji characters and introduced new characters that were easier to read and write. These changes made the writing system more accessible to the general public and helped increase the literacy rate in Japan.

Hiragana is a syllabic script used in the Japanese writing system. It was developed in Japan during the 9th century. Hiragana is cursive writing derived from Chinese characters, specifically the cursive form of Chinese character writing known as Grass Writing. Women originally used hiragana to write literature and personal letters because they were not allowed to use the more formal kanji script

reserved for men. Over time, hiragana became more widely used and was eventually adopted as an official script in Japan. One of the most important events in hiragana's history was the kana system's development. The kana system is a set of syllabic writings that includes hiragana and katakana. It was developed during the Heian period (794-1185) to represent the sounds of the Japanese language.

Today, hiragana is an important part of the Japanese writing system. It is used to write articles, inflections, and auxiliary verbs. It is also used to write words that do not have corresponding kanji characters. Hiragana is taught to Japanese children in elementary school, and it is an essential tool for anyone learning to read and write in Japanese.

Katakana is a syllabic script used in the Japanese writing system. It was developed in Japan during the 9th century. Katakana is derived from Chinese characters, specifically the cursive form of the Chinese character script known as Grass Script. Originally, katakana was used by Buddhist monks to annotate Chinese texts. Over time, katakana evolved into writing specifically used to write foreign words, loan words, onomatopoeic expressions, and specialized terminology.

The Japanese government significantly changed the writing system during the Meiji period (1868-1912). They simplified many katakana characters and introduced new characters that were easier to read and write. These changes made the writing system more accessible to the general public and helped increase the literacy rate in Japan. Today, katakana is an important part of the Japanese writing system. It is used to write foreign words, scientific and technical terms, and onomatopoeic expressions. Katakana is taught to Japanese children in elementary school, and it is an essential tool for anyone learning to read and write in Japanese.

## RESULTS

The Japanese writing system is a unique combination of three writing systems that evolved. Its history is rich and complex, and it continues to evolve. Kanji has a rich history that spans centuries. It has evolved to become an integral part of the Japanese writing system and is an important aspect of Japanese culture and identity. Hiragana also has a long and rich history that spans centuries. It has evolved to become an integral part of the Japanese writing system and is an important aspect of Japanese culture and identity. Similarly, katakana has a rich history that spans centuries. It has evolved to become an integral part of the Japanese writing system and is an important aspect of Japanese culture and identity.

The connection between hiragana, katakana, and kanji in the Japanese writing system is that in the Japanese writing system, there are three types of characters: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. Hiragana and katakana are phonetic characters used to represent Japanese words and grammatical particles, while kanji are ideographic characters borrowed from Chinese that represent words and concepts. Hiragana and katakana are often used together in sentences to form words, while kanji are used to give words meaning. Combining these three types of characters is very important in Japanese writing, and they are used together to form complete sentences.

For example, in sentences like "私 は りんご を 食べました" (*watashi wa ringo tabemashita*), "watashi" is written in hiragana, "ringo" is written in katakana, and "tabemashita" is written using kanji. Hiragana and katakana are used for grammatical particles and to represent the sounds of words, while kanji are used to indicate the meaning of words.

Another example of the relationship between hiragana, katakana, and kanji can be seen in a Japanese sentence. For example, the phrase "私 は 日本語 が 好き です" (*watashi wa nihongo ga suki desu*)

means "I like Japanese". In that sentence, "*watashi*" is written with hiragana letters, "*nihongo*" is written with kanji, and "*suki desu*" is written with a mixture of hiragana and kanji characters.

Hiragana is used to write words that do not have kanji characters, such as particles and pronouns. Katakana is used to write loanwords from foreign languages, such as the names of objects and food. In contrast, kanji is used to write words that have a certain meaning and come from Chinese.

The 3rd example is 「今日は天気が良いですね」 (*Kyou wa tenki ga ii desu ne*), which means, "Today's weather is good, isn't it?" In this sentence, "*kyou*" is written in kanji, "*tenki*" is written in kanji, "*ii*" is written in hiragana, and "*desu*" and "*ne*" are written in hiragana. Kanji are used to write words that have specific meanings, such as "*kyou*" (today) and "*tenki*" (weather). Hiragana is used for grammatical particles, such as "*desu*" (is) and "*ne*" (not), and for writing words that have no kanji equivalent, such as "*ii*" (good).

For example, Katakana can also be used in this sentence if you want to emphasize a foreign word. For example, instead of writing "coffee" in kanji, you can write it in katakana as "コーヒー" (*koohii*) to emphasize that it is a foreign word.

Therefore, it can be inferred that hiragana, katakana, and kanji are interconnected and important in Japanese writing. Hiragana and katakana are used to represent the sounds of words, while kanji are used to indicate the meaning of words. Together, they form a complete sentence. Hence hiragana, katakana, and kanji are used together in Japanese writing to convey meaning and to express grammatical structures. Kanji is used for words with specific meanings, hiragana is used for grammatical particles and words without kanji equivalents, and katakana is used for foreign words.

## CONCLUSION

The Japanese writing system comprises three characters: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Kanji, originating from Chinese characters, was introduced in the 5th century for words with specific meanings. Hiragana and katakana, native to Japan, emerged in the 9th century for words without kanji, articles, and pronouns. Initially exclusive to nobles and priests, the kana system (hiragana and katakana) became widespread in the 10th century. In the 20th century, Japan incorporated the Latin alphabet for foreign words. In Japanese writing, kanji denotes specific meanings, hiragana handles grammatical elements, while katakana deals with foreign words and emphasis. The interplay of these characters is crucial for conveying meaning and expressing grammatical structures in the Japanese writing system.

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