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The Current State of Kanji Learning in the Japanese Foreign Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Kanji has long been thought of as the most difficult thing to learn within the Japanese language. Scholars such as Heath Rose and Yoshiko Mori have dedicated extensive amounts of time to figure out what is behind the difficulties of kanji learning and give possible answers as to how teachers can make it easier for students. However, by focusing on which kanji teaching methods are the best and worst, these scholars have overlooked the most important part of finding a solution to the problem. Who is having the hardest time? The answers provided in most of the scholarly work thus far assume students to have the greatest number of difficulties and attempt to pinpoint the root of these difficulties in either the actions of the students or teachers. Rather than trying to provide an answer that fixes any problem faced while teaching kanji, this thesis instead attempts to reevaluate the problem itself. By looking at how kanji is treated in the Japanese language, viewed by Japanese people, and taught in the Japanese foreign language classroom, every part of kanji acquisition is acknowledged. Contrary to what most research has found, though, it appears that kanji acquisition is primarily a problem for teachers, not students. The lack of time given to teachers to focus on kanji has allowed dissatisfaction to arise in teachers, with many stating that there is not enough time in a semester to teach everything expected of them.

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The last people I would like to thank are the teachers who helped in distributing my survey to people at their school and within their contacts: Iwami Haruko at Penn State University, Yumiko Kawanishi at UCLA, Junko Mori at University of Wisconsin-Madison, Yoshiko Matsumoto at Stanford, and Amy Ohta at the University of Washington. With the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how kanji is treated in the Japanese foreign language classroom today, and these professors helped me in keeping my findings up to date while also giving me new material to analyze. Their help, as well as the many other students and professors that responded to my survey, is invaluable, and I hope that this thesis is able to help them in the future as they decide how kanji should be pursued in the classroom.

Introduction

With kanji being used everyday by Japanese people, through both the things they are writing and the signs they are reading, knowing kanji is an absolute necessity if someone wants to comfortably travel or live in Japan. However, unlike when someone studies English and its obvious that they must study the English alphabet, or when someone studies Arabic and must study the Arabic alphabet, the complicated nature of the Japanese language makes it not as apparent to foreign language learners that kanji is required.

The Japanese written language has three different scripts, with two being phonetic (hiragana and katakana) and one being sinographic (kanji). Because many foreign language students around the world have a background with phonetic scripts, it is commonly believed that the phonetic scripts in Japanese are easier to learn, whereas kanji has many barriers that stop students from even wanting to pursue it.[1] This has led to a common practice in Japanese language classrooms where the phonetic scripts are taught first,[2] new vocabulary is introduced using these phonetic scripts, and as students slowly get further into their studies, only then are they given the kanji that is actually used to write these words.[3]

This method is not necessarily a bad one, as it makes sure students do not become too overwhelmed too quickly with all of the new things they must learn. However, many educational policies surrounding second language acquisition do not consult relevant research when deciding how classes will be taught,[4] and the ways in which kanji is taught in the classroom shows this.

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[1] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[2] Steinberg, D. D., & Yamada, J. (1978). Are whole word kanji easier to learn than syllable kana? *Reading Research Quarterly, 14*(1), 88. doi:10.2307/747295

[3] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[4] Dixon, L. Q., Zhao, J., Shin, J., Wu, S., Su, J., Burgess-Brigham, R., . . . Snow, C. (2012). What we know about second language acquisition. *Review of Educational Research, 82*(1), 5-60. doi:10.3102/0034654311433587

Many studies have found that the most effective way to learn kanji is through a wide variety of strategies, and it is important that Japanese language professors teach these strategies so a student can decide later on which is most useful for their specific situation.[5] Yet, early language classes, especially, tend to only focus on teaching rote memorization strategies.[6] This has led to many misconceptions by students where they believe things like, "Rote memorization is the only way to learn kanji;"[7] when, in reality, rote learning is considered one of the worst methods of memorization by neurologists.[8] Metacognitive strategies (e.g. mnemonics, kanji breakdown), on the other hand, have been shown to lead to longer retention rates,[9] and students that use these strategies have also been found to memorize kanji more strategically.[10] That is not to say, however, that moving from a rote teaching method to a metacognitive teaching method will fix all difficulties students face with learning kanji.

While this thesis aims to provide new perspectives to language professors on how they can teach their classes, the core purpose of this paper is to recognize whether there is something that needs to be changed in the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language. Japanese language programs typically have higher attrition rates than other language programs, and this has long been attributed to the difficult of the language.[11] Yet, many classes are still expected to show the same results of progression as other language programs, even though it has been proven that Japanese language students progress slower.[12] By looking at how kanji, which is considered to be the most difficult part of the Japanese language, is treated in the

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[5] Bourke, B. (1996). *Maximising efficiency in the Kanji learning task* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996). St. Lucia, Qld.

[6] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[7] Yoshiko, M. (2012). Five Myths about Kanji and Kanji Learning. *Japanese Language and Literature, 46*(1), 143-169.

[8] Rose, H. (2017). *The Japanese writing system: Challenges, strategies and self-regulation for learning Kanji*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

[9] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[10] Mori, Y., Sato, K., & Shimizu, H. (2007). Japanese Language Students' Perceptions on Kanji Learning and Their Relationship to Novel Kanji Word Learning Ability. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 57-85.

[11] Kato, F. (2002). Efficacy of intervention strategies in learning success rates. Foreign Language Annals, 35, 61–72.

[12] Dwyer, E. S. (1997). Getting started the right way: An investigation into the introduction of kanji study to neophyte Japanese learners (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Texas, Austin, TX.

classroom, I hope to provide answers on why students have so much harder of a time learning Japanese and if there are any possible ways to make Japanese language learning any easier, especially in the context of kanji acquisiiton.

An Introduction to the Japanese Language

The Japanese written language consists of three different scripts: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. Both hiragana and katakana are syllabaries, with almost every letter consisting of one consonant and one vowel sound. In comparison, kanji is a logographic system borrowed from China, with each symbol representing an idea as well as various different sounds. All three of these scripts are necessary to understand when reading Japanese, as each of them hold their own purpose and meaning within the context of a sentence. In the following section, I will explain the basic structure of the different scripts as well as how they are used within the language.

The first two scripts I mentioned, hiragana and katakana, have a lot of overlap in their makeup. As seen in Figure 1, for all 46 characters in hiragana, there is a character in katakana that holds the same sound.

Hiragana	Katakana
あ	ア
a	

Romanization

あ	ア	い	イ	う	ウ	え	エ	お	オ
a		*i*		*u*		*e*		*o*	
か	カ	き	キ	く	ク	け	ケ	こ	コ
ka		*ki*		*ku*		*ke*		*ko*	
さ	サ	し	シ	す	ス	せ	セ	そ	ソ
sa		*shi*		*su*		*se*		*so*	
た	タ	ち	チ	つ	ツ	て	テ	と	ト
ta		*chi*		*tsu*		*te*		*to*	
な	ナ	に	ニ	ぬ	ヌ	ね	ネ	の	ノ
na		*ni*		*nu*		*ne*		*no*	
は	ハ	ひ	ヒ	ふ	フ	へ	ヘ	ほ	ホ
ha		*hi*		*hu*		*he*		*ho*	
ま	マ	み	ミ	む	ム	め	メ	も	モ
ma		*mi*		*mu*		*me*		*mo*	
や	ヤ	—		ゆ	ユ	—		よ	ヨ
ya				*yu*				*yo*	
ら	ラ	り	リ	る	ル	れ	レ	ろ	ロ
ra		*ri*		*ru*		*re*		*ro*	
わ	ワ	—		—		—		を	ヲ
wa								*o (wo)*	
ん	ン	—		—		—		—	
n									

Figure 1 Hiragana and Katakana Symbols and Romanization[13]

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[13] Hiragana katakana tables. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.coscom.co.jp/hiragana-katakana/kanatable.html

The first characters, or kana, within the scripts are the basic vowels: [*a*], [*i*], [*u*], [*e*], and [*o*]. Excluding

[*n*], the rest of the characters are a combination of a consonant and one of these vowels.

There are many ways to alter these kana to allow for a wider variety of sounds. For instance,

both the hiragana and katakana that start with the sounds [*k*], [*s*], and [*t*] can be changed into their voiced

form by adding the diacritic " to the character (e.g. か [*ka*] → が [*ga*], さ [*sa*] → ざ [*za*], た [*ta*] → だ

[da]). Characters starting with the [*h*] sound can also be altered into the voiced and unvoiced version of a

bilabial stop by adding either the diacritic "for a voiced stop [*b*] or the symbol ° for a voiceless stop [*p*]

(e.g. は [*ha*] → ば [*ba*] → ぱ [*pa*]). And, if a word needs a consonant sound along with a y sound, then

one can add a small version of や [*ya*], ゆ [*yu*], or よ [*yo*] to any of the consonant-vowel combination

ending in an [*i*] sound (e.g. き [*ki*] → きゃ [*kya*], ぴ [*pi*] → ぴょ [*pyo*]).

Even though these two scripts are nearly identical in their composition, their actual uses in the

Japanese language are very different. Hiragana is primarily used as a supplement for kanji.[14] If a word

does not fall into the category of noun, verb, or adjective and it is a native Japanese or Chinese loan word,

then it will most likely be written in hiragana.[15] In some special cases, such as if a kanji has become

obsolete or too complicated to remember, hiragana will also be used to write out entire nouns, adjectives

or verbs, or the single obsolete kanji in a word will be replaced with hiragana while the rest stays kanji,

creating what is known as a *mazegaki* (交ぜ書き, 'mixed characters') (e.g. 危惧 [*kigu*] → 危ぐ

[*kigu*]).[16] The most common thing hiragana is used for, however, is to support sentence structure.

Japanese uses a subject-object-verb format with little regulation for where extra information may go in a

sentence. Because of this, subject, object, and locative case-marking particles can be used to signify what

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[14] Liu, X. (2009). Japanese Simplification of Chinese Characters in Perspective. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 31*, 160-174.
[15] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system.* Tokyo: Tuttle Pub.
[16] Ibid.

the subject and the object of a sentence is, as well as extra information to describe the setting of what is being described (e.g. 家で水を飲みます ['I drink water [obj] at [locative] home]; で shows where it is happening, while を shows what is being consumed.) Additionally, hiragana is used to show inflections of verbs and adjectives (e.g.水を飲みます ['I drink water'], 水を飲みました [' I drank water']). The use of hiragana as sentence support has helped make it an integral part of the Japanese written language.

In comparison to hiragana, katakana appears much less frequently, but is used in a much larger variety of ways. In Hadamitzky and Spahn's *Japanese Kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*, they state that there are seven instances in which katakana is used: foreign-derived words (e.g. ビール [*bīru*]; 'beer'), foreign proper names(e.g. アメリカ [*amerika*]; 'America'), scientific names of plants and animals (e.g. ネズミ [*nezumi*]; 'mouse, rat'), some female names (e.g. エミ [*emi*]), onomatopoetic words (e.g. ニャー [nyā]; 'meow'), slang (e.g.デカ [deka]; 'police detective'), and emphasized words or proper names (e.g.トヨタ [*Toyota*]; this is put in katakana because it is a famous company name).[17] To put it simply, katakana is primarily used when a writer wants to emphasize what is being said or to indicate that the word was taken from another language. There are times in which people use katakana outside of this framework, but those are the contexts in which one would see it most often.

The last script I will introduce is kanji, which is the main topic of this thesis. Kanji is a logographic script where each character denotes a single idea rather than a single sound. Japan borrowed kanji from China when it had no other writing system and for over a millennium afterwards, kanji was the main script used when writing. In the 20th century, however, the Japanese government attempted to make writing more accessible to the general public and decided that if they wanted this, the number of everyday

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[17] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub.

kanji needed to be limited. [18] The regulations put on kanji usage is what led to the rise in importance for hiragana and katakana, and why some words that used to be completely made up of kanji are now mixed with multiple scripts or completely vacant of any kanji (as mentioned above when talking about hiragana's place in the language). Even though kanji has diminished in importance when it comes to the structure of a sentence, kanji is still extremely vital to learn and understand since it can be found in almost every common noun, verb, and adjective.

Structure of Kanji

Depending on which study guide you follow, there are many ways kanji is categorized, but for the sake of this paper I will be using the three categories mentioned in Hadamitzky and Spahn's *Japanese Kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*.[19] In this guide, kanji is broken down into pictographs, ideographs, and composed characters.[20]

Pictographs are quite simple in the fact that they are just kanji that look like the noun they are describing. Some of the most common pictographic kanji include tree (木 [*ki*]), mountain (山 [*yama*]), and river (川 [*kawa*]). These three kanji, while not obvious at first glance, tend to make sense after being given the definition. Sometimes, however, pictographic kanji are not obvious even after being given the meaning behind it. Two examples of this are the kanji for sun (日 [*hi*]) and moon (月 [*tsuki*]). The pictographs of sun and moon come from some of the earliest Chinese scripts, believed to have been made at least 4000 years ago. [21] Because so much time has passed since their original creation, it has allowed

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[18] Liu, X. (2009). Japanese Simplification of Chinese Characters in Perspective. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 31*, 160-174

[19] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub

[20]Ibid.

[21] Olson, D. R. (2014, March 14). Chinese writing. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-writing

for a lot of script change and standardization to occur. Below is a picture of the early forms of Chinese

characters next to their present-day kanji.

Early Forms	Modern Character	Meaning
木 → 木	木	tree, wood
木+木 → 林	林	woods
木+木+木 → 森	森	forest
木 → 木	本	root, origin
☉ → 日	日	sun
月 → 月	月	moon
☉+月 → 明	明	bright
山 → 山	山	mountain
鳥 → 鳥	鳥	bird
島 → 島	島	island

Figure 2 Origins of Kanji Pictographs[22]

The left side of "early forms" shows examples of the earliest Chinese scripts that has been found by

archeologists: oracle bone script and bronze inscriptions. These were prominent in the Shang Dynasty

from 1600 to 1046 B.C.[23] It is believed modern pictographic Chinese characters evolved from these two

scripts, as there are many similarities between the oracle bone and bronze forms with the scripts that came

afterwards, as seen with the right side of "early forms." The right side is primarily showing examples

from small seal script, which was prominent during the Qin Dynasty in 221 to 207 B.C.[24] By looking at

the early forms, it can help to understand why some kanji look the way they do. However, only about 4%

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[22] Halpern, J. (2001, July 20). The Origin of Chinese Characters. Retrieved from
http://www.kanji.org/kanji/japanese/writing/outline.htm
[23] Wang, Y. (n.d.). Introduction to Chinese Characters. Retrieved from
https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/international-affairs/year-of-china/language-and-cultural-resources/introduction-chinese-characters/introduction-chinese-characters
[24] Ibid.

of the total Chinese characters in use today are pictographic,[25] the majority are either ideographs or composed characters.

Unlike pictographs, which focus on how the object of focus looks, ideographs explain abstract ideas, such as 'one' (一 [*ichi*]) or 'above' (上 [*ue*]). On the surface level, many ideographs that represent time and space are similar to pictographs in how they describe the place of the thing they represent. But, because these cannot directly show their meaning in picture form, it also allows for multiple different interpretations to come about. Sometimes these interpretations can even hold great philosophical meaning. For instance, 一 has always been used to mean "one," but in 100 A.D. a Chinese scholar wrote that it was also defined as "the 'sole principle' from which heaven, earth and living things originated from."[26] This complex meaning is not something that can be shown in a single picture, which is why it had to be symbolized instead.

While 一 is a good example of how scholars were able to find deeper meaning in basic characters, the majority of Chinese characters with complicated and abstract meanings were actually made from combining the ideographs and pictographs already made. An example of this is 天 [*ten*], which is a Chinese character that was made directly from the philosophical definition of 一. By taking the pictographic Chinese character for 'a big man' (originally 夨 , now 大 [*dai*]) and adding 一, the Chinese character 天 was formed. This character directly translates to "higher than the highest person"[27] but is now used to refer to 'heaven' and/or 'the sky.'

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[25] Wang, Y. (n.d.). Introduction to Chinese Characters. Retrieved from https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/international-affairs/year-of-china/language-and-cultural-resources/introduction-chinese-characters/introduction-chinese-characters

[26] Lee, K. (2018). *The origin of Chinese characters: An illustrated history and word guide*. New York, NY: Algora Publishing.

[27] Ibid.

A character that is made through combining multiple basic characters is called a composed/complex kanji.[28] Most composed characters are similar to ideographs in the way that they are trying to describe a concept. Other than 天, this can also be seen with the kanji for bright (明 [*akari*]), which combines the two pictographic kanji, sun (日) and moon (月). Not all complex kanji are like this, however. In figure two, there are a few kanji that combine pictographs to form a bigger picture, two of which are 林 [*hayashi*] and 森 [*mori*]. 林 is the kanji for woods and 森 is the kanji for forest. By multiplying the pictographic kanji for tree (木 [*ki*]) twice, 林 is able to represent a few trees together, which can also be interpreted as woods. By multiplying the pictographic kanji for tree (木) three times, 森 represents many trees together, which can be seen as a forest.

The basic characters used to help build other characters, such as 一 and 大 in 天 or 木 in 林, are called radicals. Some radicals are completely dependent and cannot stand as a character by themselves, such as 亠 (found in 京) and 彳 (found in 行). Other radicals, as shown with 一 and 大 in 天, derive from original pictographs and ideographs. A large amount of radicals, however, are variations of pictographs and ideographs that are dependent on being in a kanji but are simpler to write or fit better in the character (e.g. 亻 and 𠆢 are variations of 人 [*hito*], which is the kanji for person, and are used in words such as 仕 and 今 where 人 would not fit).

As there are multiple ways to categorize kanji, there are also multiple ways to categorize radicals. One of the most common ways is where the radical typically sits in a kanji. Most study guides, including

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[28] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub

Kanji Alive, *Tofugo, Tobira*, and Henshall's *A Guide to Remembering Japanese Characters* agree that

there are seven basic categories that radicals fall under to describe their position within a complex kanji:

Category	Description	Image	Example
偏 (*hen*)	Left Side		言 in 記
旁 (*tsukuri*)	Right Side		力 in 助
冠 (*kanmuri*)	Top		⻌ in 花
脚 (*ashi*)	Bottom		⺌ in 点
垂 (*tare*)	Top Left		广 in 店
繞 (*nyō*)	Bottom Left		辶 in 近
構 (*kamae*)	Surrounding		囗 in 国

Figure 3 Kanji Radical position[29]

Outside of these seven categories, there is little debate. The only thing people occasionally disagree on, is

how *kamae* (surrounding) is categorized. For some scholars, they like to include another category that is

"top & right" (▗)[30], since there are already two others to describe the top left and bottom left.

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[29] University of Chicago. (2005). The 214 Traditional Kanji radicals and their meanings. Retrieved January 18, 2021, from https://kanjialive.com/214-traditional-kanji-radicals/

[30] Akizawa, T., Aoki, S., Kono, T., Kushida, K., Matsumoto, T., Ohashi, M., . . . Sato, T. (2013). *Kanji In Context [Revised Edition]* (1st ed.). Tokyo: The Japan Times.

Additionally, some study guides will also include a category for "Solid" [31] or "Other. [32] This is typically

in reference to radicals that are also their own kanji (e.g. 一 in 一).

Since each radical tends to have a pre-designated place in the kanji, the Japanese government

decided a good way to standardize script was through giving each kanji a stroke order, but because of the

many specialized stroke orders for certain radicals, the rules can be quite situational (e.g. "Center usually

precedes right and left where latter do not exceed two stokes each.")[33] The most typical stroke order

follows the form of top to bottom and left to right. In nearly all of the major study guides where kanji is

taught, including *Genki*, *Tobira*, *Kanji in Context*, and Heisig's *Remembering the Kanji*, the stroke order

is always included.

Figure 4 Example of Kanji Stroke Order Found in *Genki I*[34]

By starting with the radical in the top left and finishing in the bottom right, one can not only have a better

understanding on what the word means but also get insight into how it sounds. Within a complex kanji,

there is normally a radical that stands for the entire sound put out by the kanji. This is not reliable all the

time because many kanji have multiple pronunciations depending on the word it is in, but it can

sometimes help if one needs to try and figure out which word they are reading.

Thus far, I have been noting a pronunciation of each kanji introduced to make is easier to

understand and read aloud. However, these pronunciations are not the only pronunciation for the kanji. As

seen in the example above taken from the *Genki I* textbook, there are two sounds designated to the kanji

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[31] Akizawa, T., Aoki, S., Kono, T., Kushida, K., Matsumoto, T., Ohashi, M., . . . Sato, T. (2013). *Kanji In Context [Revised Edition]* (1st ed.). Tokyo: The Japan Times.

[32] Halpern, J. (2013). *The Kodansha Kanji Learner's Dictionary: Revised and Expanded* (2nd ed.). New York: Kodansha USA.

[33] Henshall, K. G. (2008). *A guide to remembering Japanese characters*. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing.

[34] Banno, E., Ikeda, Y., Ohno, Y., Shinagawa, C., & Tokashiki, K. (2011). *An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese: Genki I* (2nd ed.). Tokyo: The Japan Times. (p. 298)

of five: *go* (ご) and *itsu* (いつ). The black arrow next to *go* means that that is the *on-yomi* (音読み), or

the Chinese loan pronunciation. The white arrow indicates *kun-yomi* (訓読み), the native Japanese

pronunciation. Many Japanese words describing technology or ideas are often Chinese loan words, so,

these words will typically use the *on-yomi* of a kanji (e.g. 電 [*den*]; 'electricity'). On the contrary, most

basic words like mountain (山 [*yama*]) or river (川 [*kawa*]) will use the *kun-yomi*. Of course, this is not

always true, as many of the Chinese loan words have become completely integrated into Japanese society,

making *on-yomi* as much Japanese as *kun-yomi*. This is why, even with words like mountain (山), there

are instances where instead of saying *yama*, Japanese people will actually use the *on-yomi* of *san*, such as

in proper names like Mount Fuji (富士山 [*fujisan*]).

A Brief History

Since kanji was originally borrowed from China, many people have written it off as nothing more

than Japan using Chinese script. [35] This thought, however, is extremely incorrect. When Chinese script

was first introduced to Japan around the 6th century, there was no written language of Japanese. Due to

this, many Japanese scholars began to study the characters, and in their studies they came up with

different interpretations on how to use it with the Japanese language and built on that.

During the early stages of adapting the character, each character was used to signify a sound,

completely ignoring any prior meaning found in the Chinese language.[36] Using Chinese characters

phonologically proved very inefficient, however, so scholars and elites quickly changed directions and

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[35] Liu, X. (2009). Japanese Simplification of Chinese Characters in Perspective. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 31*, 160-174.

[36] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub.

began using characters ideographically; no longer paying attention to Chinese pronunciation (音読み [*on-yomi*]), unless it was in Chinese loan words. Rather, they gave new sounds to the characters that fit the Japanese spoken language (訓読み[*kun-yomi*]).[37] As scholars studied these characters, they also began making changes to the characters themselves. These changes evolved through the creation of new kanji, changing meanings of old kanji, and forming original combinations of kanji to support evolving ideas.[38]

Even though the majority of scholars used kanji logographically, there were still some that used it for its phonetic purposes. This was called *man'yōgana* (万葉仮名) and was primarily used when recording poetry, as seen in the *man'yōshū* (万葉集), which was compiled sometime in the 8th century. Hiragana and katakana are two derivations of *man'yōgana* that have persisted until today. Hiragana derives from a cursive style of Chinese calligraphy and was primarily popular among women who were not able to get a proper education and learn kanji.[39] Comparatively, katakana was first created by Buddhist monks in the 9th century to write shorthand and was later almost entirely used by men for official documentation.[40] Because the educated upper class studied kanji and saw it as a more elite form of writing, *man'yōgana* never became anything more than supplementary to kanji, leading to a standardization of kana usage. Kanji, on the other hand, did not see any sort of standardization until government intervention occurred.

Up until the 20th century, there were thousands of kanji being used and no regulations to make sure everyone could understand what was being read. The *Dai Kan-Wa Jiten* (大漢和辞典), or the Chinese-Japanese character dictionary that was released from 1955 to 1960, over the span of 13 volumes,

[37] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub.

[38] Liu, X. (2009). Japanese Simplification of Chinese Characters in Perspective. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 31*, 160-174

[39] Bowring, R., & Laurie, H. U. (2004). An introduction to modern Japanese. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[40] Hawisher, G. E., & Selfe, C. L. (2000). *Global literacies and the World-Wide Web*. London: Routledge.

held around 50,000 kanji and 500,000 compounds. For the most part, many of these characters were no longer used in Japan or were only used in China. Even still, the massive number of kanji that was being used made it difficult for regular people to learn the written language and understand everything being published by newspapers and the government. As a way to remedy the low levels of literacy, the Japanese government decided the Japanese written language needed to be reformed. In 1946 the Japanese government began looking at how to simplify and standardize Chinese characters. While working on the reformation, they also started making a list of all the characters and pronunciations considered necessary.[41] In 1948, the first reform was put in place, minimizing the number of kanji in official publications to 1,850 *Tōyō Kanji* (当用漢字; 'kanji for general use') with a possibility of only 3,500 *on-yomi* and *kun-yomi.*[42] Schools were also given a list of 881 *Kyōiku Kanji* (教育漢字; 'education kanji') that were expected to be taught in the first six years of school.[43]

Following the first language reform, the government continued to keep tabs on any how the language was evolving to decide if the list needed to be revised, which led to two more reforms occurring in 1981 and 2010. In 1981, the 1,850 *Tōyō Kanji* was expanded to 1,945 *Jōyō Kanji* (常用漢字; 'regular-use kanji') and the original 3,500 *on-yomi* and *kun-yomi* designated to the *Tōyō Kanji* increased to over 4,000 for the *Jōyō Kanji*. In 2010 when the list of *Jōyō Kanji* was increased to 2,136 and the number of *on-yomi* and *kun-yomi* went up to 4,394. As stated in the earlier section, kanji is almost entirely used to represent the core meanings of verbs, adjectives, and nouns, so these expansions of the list primarily came after news outlets and politicians complained about common words that had to regularly be written in

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[41] Liu, X. (2009). Japanese Simplification of Chinese Characters in Perspective. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 31*, 160-174

[42] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub.

[43] Ibid.

hiragana or katakana (e.g. 猿 [*saru*]; 'monkey'; added to list of *Tōyō Kanji* in 1981).[44] As well as adding

words, the reforms also took away words and readings that were no longer used often (e.g. *iwa* [錘];

'weight of a fishing net'; removed from the list of *Jōyō Kanji* in 2010). The last thing these reforms did

was simplify kanji that were considered too complex (i.e. 燈 [*tō*]; 'light, lamp'; turned into 灯 in 1981).

Even though policy makers made the original list with only the most necessary kanji in mind, the

Japanese government recognizes that as times changes, so does language, which is why two reforms have

already happened in the last 80 years and there will probably be many more as time goes on.

Another kanji list that is constantly be changed and updated by the Japanese government is the

Kyōiku Kanji list. As mentioned earlier, the *Kyōiku Kanji* list first made its appearance in the 1948

reform, where schools were assigned 881 kanji to be taught.[45] Today, this list contains 1,026 kanji. From

grade one to six, students are expected to learn anywhere from 80 to 200 kanji in the year to support their

understanding of new material.[46] The list itself is in order of commonality, with the most common kanji

being taught in first grade and the less common being taught in sixth. It is updated much more frequently

than the *Jōyō Kanji list,* with the most recent change occurring in 2020 when 20 characters that are used

in prefecture names were added.[47] This is because the Ministry of Education wants to make sure that

anyone who does not stay in school past the mandatory time (9th grade) can still function in society.

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[44] Kanji list just got bigger. (2010, December 2). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2010/12/02/editorials/kanji-list-just-got-bigger/

[45] Hadamitzky, W., & Spahn, M. (2012). *Japanese kanji and Kana: A complete guide to the Japanese writing system*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub.

[46] MEXT. (n.d.). 学習指導要領「生きる力」. Retrieved from https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/syo/koku/001.htm

[47] 小学校の必修漢字に都道府県名２０字追加 ２０年度にも：朝日新聞デジタル. (2016, May 18). Retrieved from https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASJ5K4VGYJ5KUTIL02Q.html

Views Towards Kanji

The prominence of kanji in Japan's written language means that kanji is a necessity if one would like to read or write anything in Japanese. Even with this, however, the question arises: Does one need to know kanji in order to understand and assimilate with Japanese people? In *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* by Fred Jandt, it is put forth that culture and communication are entwined, and if one wants to understand either of them, they have to study them both.[48]

Quite a few scholars have stated that they believe kanji is important to Japanese people due to the nationalistic connotations surrounding it. The word nationalism is used because it describes both the instances in which kanji is used to separate outsiders,[49] as well as maintain pride toward the nation. [50] Since these two arguments are personal in nature, there is no way to prove them to be completely true, yet many Japanese scholars still hold them to have some form of validity due to the convincing arguments surrounding them. When it comes to blocking foreigners with kanji, a common supporting argument is the fact that even though there are already two other easier-to-learn scripts in Japan, Japan continues to maintain and promote the more complicated writing system.[51] On the other hand, for the promotion of nationalistic pride, it has been said that because of the complicatedness of kanji, it shows that every person in Japan has the skill to understand difficult concepts.[52]

Of course, not everyone believes nationalism is part of the reason why kanji is so important. Since kanji has been a part of Japanese culture for over a millennium, some scholars believe it has nothing to do with nationalism, but rather is just "the continuation of an existing infrastructure."[53] This is

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[48] Jandt, F. E. (2020). *An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community* (10th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

[49] Manabe, K., & Befu, H. (1993). Japanese Cultural Identity: An Empirical Investigation of Nihonjinron. *Japanstudien, 4*(1), 89-102. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/09386491.1993.11827036

[50] Gao, F. (2005). Japanese: A Heavily Culture-Laden Language (1183425014 885813647 J. Allwood, Ed.). *Journal of Intercultural Communication,* (10). Retrieved February 7, 2021, from fengping-gao.htm

[51] Manabe, K., & Befu, H. (1993). Japanese Cultural Identity: An Empirical Investigation of Nihonjinron. *Japanstudien, 4*(1), 89-102. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/09386491.1993.11827036

[52] Gottlieb, N. (1999). Language nationalism? Kanji on the Internet. *South Pacific Journal of Psychology, 10*(1), 39-46. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/S0257543400000985

[53] Ibid.

very likely true, at least in terms of the fact that kanji has become such a significant part of the Japanese language that it would be extremely difficult to just take it away. It is well known, however, that in the early 20th century, the Japanese government put in place many different infrastructures to try and promote the idea of nationalism, especially in the context of history.[54] With kanji having over a millennium of history in Japan and being one of the few experiences that everybody has in common, it is very easy to see how it can be turned into nationalistic propaganda.

No matter what the reason for kanji's prominence, however, it is accepted by most Japanese people and scholars that kanji is significant to not only the Japanese language but also Japanese culture. The remainder of this chapter will examine how Japanese citizens view kanji by examining Japanese language and kanji proficiency tests as well as understanding how perspectives on kanji in the Japanese foreign language classroom deviate from perspectives found in Japan.

Kanji Testing in Japan

Starting in elementary school, Japanese citizens are tested on kanji every year to show that they are following along with the *Kyōiku Kanji* (教育漢字; 'education kanji') list. The main test used to measure this is the *Kanji Kentei* (漢字検定).[55] There are 12 levels of the *Kanji Kentei*, ranging from 1 to 10 and including a pre-1 and pre-2 (see Appendix A for more information on test contents). Level 10 is the easiest of all the levels and includes only the 80 kanji that are expected to be taught in the first grade of elementary school. Each level up increases the number of kanji one is expected to know as well as how much one needs to understand about the kanji. When moving from level 9 to 8, one has to not only know the stroke order and basic readings of the kanji, but also start learning the difference between the *on-yomi*

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54 Saaler, S. (2016). Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan. *The Asia-Pacific Journal, 14*(20). doi:https://apjjf.org/2016/20/Saaler.html

55 日本漢字能力検定. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/

(Chinese reading of the character) and *kun-yomi* (Japanese reading of the character), the main radicals found in the kanji, and how the kanji interact with one another.[56] The last level of the *Kanji Kentei* that contains characters from the *Kyōiku Kanji* list is level 5. After level 5, test-takers are expected to be studying from the government's *Jōyō Kanji* ('regular use Chinese character') list. The most popular test is level 3,[57] which contains 1623 characters that are expected to be learned by the end of junior high school (the last mandatory year of school in Japan.)[58]

Level 2 is the third highest level of the *Kanji Kentei,* and even though it only includes kanji from the *Jōyō Kanji* list, it had a passing rate of 21.2% in 2016;[59] which can be explained by the fact that test takers need to understand kanji on a much deeper level, including knowing *ateji* (宛字; kanji used phonetically, similar to *man'yōgana* [万葉仮名]), as well as four character idioms, which are classic sayings that derive from four Chinese characters (e.g. 一所懸命 [*isshokenmei*]; 'With utmost effort'). In comparison to this, level 1 includes everything that makes level 2 difficult, but with an additional 3000 characters. The exam is also expanded to test individuals on their ability to understand historical kanji compounds that were used as country names and within ancient literature.[60] In 2016, only 3,542 people attempted level 1, and 368 passed (10.4%).[61] Most people that attempt level 1 are seen as Japanese

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[56] 各級の出題内容と審査基準: 漢検の概要: 日本漢字能力検定. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/outline/degree.html

[57] 平成 28 年度 受検データ: 調査・データ: 日本漢字能力検定. (2017, April 10). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/investigation/result/28.html

[58] 各級の出題内容と審査基準: 漢検の概要: 日本漢字能力検定. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/outline/degree.html

[59] 平成 28 年度 受検データ: 調査・データ: 日本漢字能力検定. (2017, April 10). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/investigation/result/28.html

[60] 各級の出題内容と審査基準: 漢検の概要: 日本漢字能力検定. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/outline/degree.html

[61] 平成 28 年度 受検データ: 調査・データ: 日本漢字能力検定. (2017, April 10). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/investigation/result/28.html

language lovers or professional scholars.[62] The difficulty in passing lower levels of this test makes it a very prestigious achievement for both foreigners and Japanese citizens, alike.

While it is obvious that someone who has lived in Japan their whole life is expected to learn and know kanji, if a foreigner shows interest in working or studying in Japan, they are equally expected to know a large number of characters. The most popular proficiency test for nonnative Japanese speakers is the Japanese Language Proficient Test (JLPT; 日本語能力試験). The JLPT is administered by the Japan Foundation and the Japan Educational Exchange Services and is often used as a reference for companies and universities to determine whether a foreigner has enough Japanese language skills to live in Japan comfortably. The test itself is broken into five sections: N1, N2, N3, N4, and N5, with the N5 being the lowest proficiency and N1 being the highest.[63] For many universities, one must have passed at least the N2 to enter a program taught in Japanese. Unlike the *Kanji Kentei,* The JPLT has stated that they do not want to limit understanding of the Japanese language to a list that needs to be memorized:

> "We believe that the ultimate goal of studying Japanese is to use the language to communicate rather than simply memorizing vocabulary, kanji and grammar items… Therefore, we decided that publishing 'Test Content Specifications' containing a list of vocabulary, kanji and grammar items was not necessarily appropriate."[64]

The "Test Content Specifications," or "Composition of test items" can be found in Figure 5, below, and while the document does not give exact kanji that needs to be memorized, it still acknowledges the importance of knowing it.

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[62] [Zingera]. (2013, July 29). The Kanken 1 exam... [Online Forum Post] Retrieved March 13, 2021 from https://www.reddit.com/r/LearnJapanese/comments/1jadwc/the_kanken_1_exam/

[63] Composition of Test Sections and Items: JLPT Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.jlpt.jp/e/guideline/testsections.html#anchor01

[64] FAQ: JLPT Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.jlpt.jp/e/faq/index.html

Test Section		Type of Test Items	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5
Language Knowledge · Reading	Vocabulary	*Kanji* reading	○	○	○	○	○
		Orthography	—	○	○	○	○
		Word Formation	—	○	—	—	—
		Contextually-defined expressions	○	○	○	○	○
		Paraphrases	○	○	○	○	○
		Usage	○	○	○	○	—
	Grammar	Sentential grammar 1 (Selecting grammar form)	○	○	○	○	○
		Sentential grammar 2 (Sentence composition)	○	○	○	○	○
		Text grammar	○	○	○	○	○
	Reading	Comprehension (Short passages)	○	○	○	○	○
		Comprehension (Mid-size passages)	○	○	○	○	○
		Comprehension (Long Passages)	○	—	○	—	—
		Integrated comprehension	○	○	—	—	—
		Thematic comprehension (Long-Passages)	○	○	—	—	—
		Information retrieval	○	○	○	○	○
Listening		Task-based comprehension	○	○	○	○	○
		Comprehension of key points	○	○	○	○	○
		Comprehension of general outline	○	○	○	—	—
		Verbal expressions	—	—	○	○	○
		Quick response	○	○	○	○	○
		Integrated comprehension	○	○	—	—	—

Figure 5 "Composition of test items" taken from the JLPT website[65]

Kanji reading is the first entry listed under types of test items. With a great deal of the test including

reading, many study guides have entire sections designated solely for teaching kanji.[66] In the study guide

Japanese Language Proficiency Test, Thorough Guidebook for N1, Lessons and Practice Tests, published

by the Intercultural Institute of Japan, there is even a disclaimer about the importance of kanji:

"The Japanese Proficiency Test requires reading and writing of kanji, and knowledge about

compounds in the questions in the "moji, goi (Words and Vocabulary)" section. The Japanese

language has a large vocabulary. It is said that about 10,000 words are required to read ordinary

[65] Composition of Test Sections and Items: JLPT Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.jlpt.jp/e/guideline/testsections.html#anchor01

[66] Intercultural Institute of Japan. (2011). *日本語能力試験[完全攻略]N1 テキストと実践問題集.*

sentences. It is assumed that N1 requires knowledge of those 10,000 words. You also need to memorize about 2,000 kanji characters. However, only their reading will appear."[67]

On top of recognizing the importance of kanji within the language, this disclaimer also acknowledges another point of interest that is becoming more apparent to Japanese scholars and professionals: writing Chinese character is becoming less important and more attention should be given to the process of recognizing characters. This has become especially true in recent years as technology has advanced, with autofill bringing many outdated kanji back into use. Because of this, some scholars have gone so far as to say that learning how to write Chinese characters is no longer needed at all, instead students should focus solely on learning to identify as many characters as they can.[68] Since the JLPT is about overall Japanese proficiency, it makes sense that there is not as much emphasis on knowing every small detail about kanji, instead focusing on recognition and comprehension within texts provided.

The reason tests like the *Kanji Kentei* and JLPT are so important to foreigners and Japanese citizens is because they signify a certain level of knowledge and ambition. For the *Kanji Kentei,* each level helps to show one's academic progression, and when test takers reach the highest level, it shows a true dedication and interest towards the Japanese language. In the case of the JLPT, it shows that the test takers studied all parts of Japanese, including kanji, for a long enough time that they can comfortably communicate with anyone they meet, whether that be a coworker or boss at work, or a friend or professor at school. In Japan, kanji as seen as not only seen as something necessary to communicate with but also something that can give someone reputation.

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[67] Intercultural Institute of Japan. (2011). *日本語能力試験[完全攻略]N1 テキストと実践問題集.*

[68] Allen, J. R. (2008). Why learning to write Chinese is a waste of time: A modest proposal. *Foreign Language Annals, 41*(2), 237-251. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.2008.tb03291.x

Kanji in the Japanese Foreign Language Classroom

While a great majority of Japanese teachers recognize the importance of Kanji in the Japanese language, the way in which foreign language classes are taught often put kanji on the backburner.[69] This may be attributed to both the feelings of teachers and students. With many Japanese foreign language (JFL) students living in non-Japanese language dominant environments, teachers believe the lack of exposure causes low motivation towards learning kanji and little possibility to practice their kanji reading and writing skills.[70] Compared to Japanese citizens, who grow up with constant exposure to kanji, making it obvious to them that it is important, JFL students, especially those from backgrounds where a phonetic alphabet are used, tend to have a harder time understanding the importance of kanji and how to learn it.[71]

In a piece published by Yoshiko Mori in 2012, five common myths about Kanji within the JFL classroom are acknowledged and answered. The majority of these myths are things students tell themselves that lowers motivation or limits their learning capabilities:

1. "There are too many *kanji* characters to learn.

2. *Kanji* makes Japanese reading difficult.

3. It is easy to guess the exact meaning of an unfamiliar *kanji* word because its elements provide sufficient information about the word's meaning.

4. Because the primary function of *kanji* is to represent meaning, sound plays an unimportant role in kanji recognition.

5. Rote memorization is the only way to learn *kanji*."[72]

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[69] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[70] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[71] Bourke, B. (1996). *Maximising efficiency in the Kanji learning task* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996). St. Lucia, Qld.

[72] Mori, Y. (2012). Five Myths about Kanji and Kanji Learning. *Japanese Language and Literature, 46*(1), 143-169.

Many of the myths surrounding kanji and kanji learning emerge from a lack of understanding towards the symbols, themselves. How a student learns kanji is often both a reflection of the student and the teacher.

The idea that kanji is too difficult to learn, whether that be because of the complexity or number of characters is typically correlated to a lack of confidence on the students part.[73] The reason that confidence is lowered in the first place, however, can be traced back to the other myths, including "it is easy to guess the exact meaning of an unfamiliar kanji" and "sound plays an unimportant role in kanji recognition."[74] When students do not understand the cultural or historical depth of kanji, it can lead to an oversimplification that makes it seem like every kanji is just a symbol that needs to be memorized, or a series of symbols that needs to be memorized.[75] This is especially true in cases where students believe rote memorization is the only way to learn kanji. Rote memorization is the most popular learning strategy used in Japanese foreign language classrooms,[76] and is sometimes the only strategy acknowledged/taught by teachers,[77] but it has been found to be one of the least effective methods of remembering kanji.[78] In addition to being ineffective for long-term memory, rote memorization also ignores the many other aspects of kanji that need to be learned, including "meaning(s), sound(s), orthographic features, compositional structures, stroke order, semantic and/or phonetic congruence within context, grammatical function, and prototypical and/or non-prototypical usage."[79]

It would be irrational to think all of these different aspects of a kanji could be taught and remembered alongside the first introduction of a character, so it makes sense why rote memorization is

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[73] Mori, Y. (2012). Five Myths about Kanji and Kanji Learning. *Japanese Language and Literature, 46*(1), 143-169.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[76] Ibid.

[77] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[78] Rose, H. (2017). *The Japanese writing system: Challenges, strategies and self-regulation for learning Kanji*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

[79] Yoshiko, M. (2012). Five Myths about Kanji and Kanji Learning. *Japanese Language and Literature, 46*(1), 143-169.

often used for initial learning of a kanji.[80] However, the lack of introduction to other learning methods is a major setback for students. Most linguistics scholars agree that the students who achieve the most in kanji learning are the ones that use a large variety of strategies and are using them "more 'consciously, purposefully, appropriately and frequently than… less able students'."[81] Depending on the level of a student and the complexity of a kanji, the best strategy to use may be different, which is why it is important to teach students various different ways to study kanji.[82]

Teachers play a large role in how students learn and perceive kanji. A great deal of how a student perceives the difficulty or enjoyment of learning kanji is tied to the teacher's feelings.[83] Whether a teacher decides to teach a student about the cultural significance of kanji or just acknowledges it as something needed to understanding Japanese, they will end up influencing both the methods in which a student studies kanji and their overall perception of its place in Japanese.[84] The fact that many JFL students do not have exposure to Japanese outside of the classroom means that the way kanji is promoted in the classroom will leave lasting impacts on a students' perceptions during their Japanese language learning process.[85]

For the most part, kanji is seen as a supporting element of learning Japanese. Many teachers follow a plan where students will learn hiragana and katakana, vocabulary, and grammar, before they are then exposed to kanji.[86] By pushing kanji learning off, though, many misconceptions, or "myths" as mentioned earlier, come about and make kanji even more difficult to learn in the eyes of students.[87]

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[80] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[81] Bourke, B. (1996). *Maximising efficiency in the Kanji learning task* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996). St. Lucia, Qld.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[84] Mori, Y., Sato, K., & Shimizu, H. (2007). Japanese Language Students' Perceptions on Kanji Learning and Their Relationship to Novel Kanji Word Learning Ability. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 57-85.

[85] Bourke, B. (1996). *Maximising efficiency in the Kanji learning task* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996). St. Lucia, Qld.

[86] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[87] Yoshiko, M. (2012). Five Myths about Kanji and Kanji Learning. *Japanese Language and Literature, 46*(1), 143-169.

Kanji as a Language Learning Process

The way in which Japanese is taught plays a very large role in how a student perceives the Japanese language. However, the ways in which one perceives their studies goes beyond just the small branch of academia being acknowledged in their class. For this reason, I believe it is equally important to acknowledge work done in fields outside of and bigger than just Japanese foreign language acquisition, such as the overarching discipline of linguistics, and the subfields of neurolinguistics, and sociolinguistics. In the context of second and foreign language acquisition, the fields under applied linguistics especially tend to focus on three different ideas: complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF).[88] In a piece by Housen, Kuiken, and Vedder (2012), CAF is defined as follows:

> "Complexity is commonly characterized as the ability to use a wide and varied range of sophisticated structures and vocabulary in the L2, accuracy as the ability to produce target-like and error-free language, and fluency as the ability to produce the L2 with native-like rapidity, pausing, hesitations, or reformulation."[89]

These three topics became especially prominent following the mid-1990s as more scholars in second language acquisition became interested in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics.[90] However, because of the multitude of different backgrounds that linguistics researchers come from, including foreign language acquisition, first language acquisition, psycholinguistics, as well as sociocultural studies, the direction in which these topics have been studied and interpreted vary greatly.[91]

Beyond CAF having many different interpretations, there is much debate on how important and valid the topics are within language acquisition. For instance, even though accuracy is the skill that is the

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[88] Housen, A., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(4), 461-473. doi:10.1093/applin/amp048

[89] Housen, A., Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2012). Complexity, accuracy and fluency in SLA. *Dimensions of L2 Performance and Proficiency,* 1-20. doi:10.1075/lllt.32.01hou

[90] Housen, A., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(4), 461-473. doi:10.1093/applin/amp048

[91] Dixon, L. Q., Zhao, J., Shin, J., Wu, S., Su, J., Burgess-Brigham, R., . . . Snow, C. (2012). What we know about second language acquisition. *Review of Educational Research, 82*(1), 5-60. doi:10.3102/0034654311433587

most easily defined and acknowledged by scholars, there are many times in which non-standard ways of speaking are accepted under special circumstances (e.g. within a certain community), which makes it much more difficult to ascertain if someone is speaking "accurately".[92] Similarly, fluency has long been established as "perceptions of ease, eloquence, and 'smoothness of speech or writing,"[93] but today we recognize that there are various different subdimensions in which one can be considered fluent; including "speed fluency (rate and density of delivery), breakdown fluency (number, length, and distribution of pauses in speech), and repair fluency (number of false starts and repetitions)."[94] With so many subdimensions underlying fluency, it becomes difficult to determine if someone is truly fluent in a language unless they have mastered all of the different aspects of it.

The final term, complexity, is the most complicated term of all three and has the most debate around it.[95] The two largest ways complexity is thought of is as cognitive complexity and linguistic complexity.[96] While both of these refer to the many intricacies found inside a language, cognitive complexity is typically in reference to how the learner views the language, whilst linguistic complexity is in reference to the overall features and systems of the language.[97] Within these two areas, complexity can be broken down even further depending on the interest of the researcher and the discipline they fall under (e.g. linguistic complexity will look very different for a neurolinguist compared to a linguistic historian). In the end, however, the many different ways in which linguistics is studied has provided a rich environment full of checks and balances to try and make sure there is no suppression of ideas.[98]

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[92] Housen, A., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(4), 461-473. doi:10.1093/applin/amp048

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Mitchell, R., Myles, F., & Marsden, E. (2019). *Second language learning theories* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

[96] Housen, A., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(4), 461-473. doi:10.1093/applin/amp048

[97] Ibid.

[98] Larson-Freeman, D. (2007). Reflecting on the cognitive-social debate in second language acquisition. *The Modern Language Journal, 91*, 773-787. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00668.x

In the following chapter, I will be reviewing the neurolinguistic and applied linguistic research that has been done on kanji, specifically, to elucidate some of the unnoticed aspects of foreign language acquisition that impact the overall learning and understanding of the characters.

Neurological Factors of Learning Kanji

When it comes to the neurological studies that have been done on Japanese, the comparison of kanji and kana processing is a prominent topic. This has been a common topic ever since the 1970s when researchers started looking at what part of the brain processes different forms of language. In the 1977 piece by Sasanuma, Itoh, Mori, and Kobayashi, it was put forth that many patients with aphasia (the loss of ability to understand or express speech) who have a hard time understanding kana were perfectly fine with kanji, and vice versa.[99] Their hypothesis, based on this observation, was that kana and kanji call for different types of cognitive functions, with kana having a phonological processing and kanji having more of a visual processing. To test this, they attempted to measure which areas of the brain analyzed the different characters and how much of that area was needed in the process. For kana, the left hemisphere was the most prominent area of analysis, which was a similar result to studies done on the English alphabet in earlier years.[100] This finding ended up supporting the idea that the left hemisphere is the more prominent area used when processing linguistic/phonetic materials. However, kanji was found to use quite a bit more of the right hemisphere during the period of processing.[101] Since some kanji are more phonetic than logographic, there was a variation in just how much the different sides of the brain were used but there was still an overall increase in right hemisphere activity. This means that while kanji is analyzed linguistically (in the left hemisphere), like most phonetic written forms, it also has a much heavier emphasis on visual analysis (in the right hemisphere). In the same year, Hatta published a piece

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[99] Sasanuma, S., Itoh, M., Mori, K., & Kobayashi, Y. (1977). Tachistoscopic recognition of kana and kanji words. *Neuropsychologia, 15*(4-5), 547-553. doi:10.1016/0028-3932(77)90058-6
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

that supported this idea even further and found that both concrete and abstract kanji were primarily viewed with the left visual field, which is tied to the right hemisphere, where images are typically analyzed.[102]

The emphasis on visual analysis for kanji can be explained by another study that was performed in 1993 by Flores d'Arcais and Saito. In this study, Flores d'Arcais and Saito had Japanese people read and give the definition of various different pairs of kanji. Figure 5 shows five examples of these pairs that can be broken down into four different categories: part-whole relation, component semantic relation, total semantic relation, and unrelated pair. [103] The figure shown in (b), stone and mouth, was the example used to show part-whole relation, where one kanji is a radical in the other. The figure shown in (a), stone and eye, was used to show component semantic relations, which was an attempt to see if people pay more attention to the radical or whole kanji meaning, so for stone, which has the radical of mouth, they paired it with eye, a kanji that is often associated with mouth. The figure shown in (c), stone and soil, represented total semantic relation since the meaning behind both of these kanji are typically correlated. And the figure in (d), stone and house, was used for the last category, unrelated pair, since stone and house have no correlation in either meaning or kanji composition (in Japan, houses are typically made out of wood, so there would be no accidental association there). By looking at how long it took for a participant to give the definition of these kanji and how many errors they made based on

Figure 6 Example from Flores d'Arcais-Saito Study

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[102] Hatta, T. (1977). Lateral recognition of abstract and Concrete kanji in Japanese. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 45*(3), 731-734. doi:10.2466/pms.1977.45.3.731

[103] Flores d'Arcais, G. B., & Saito, H. (1993). Lexical decomposition of complex kanji characters in Japanese readers. *Psychological Research, 55*(1), 52-63. doi:10.1007/bf00419893

the pair category, the researchers were able to find out just which parts of the kanji people were looking at to understand it, and, in the end they were able to conclude that radicals were actually one of the most important tools Japanese people used to understand and read complex characters.[104] Since radicals are one of the first things analyzed to understand a kanji, it can be inferred that kanjis are more likely read as a picture instead of a phonetic word, explaining why the right hemisphere of the brain is used more for kanji.

In H. Rose's book *The Japanese writing system: Challenges, strategies and self-regulation for learning Kanji*, the neurological importance of radicals is brought about when Rose mentions the various different levels of processing and how our minds encode information. Repetition/rote memorization, a very common method of learning kanji, is said to encode information at a very shallow level in the brain, since most neural connections occur in a small area. Whereas, when kanji is associated with images, experiences, and/or stories, connections are made at multiple different locations in the brain, creating a deep level of encoding and causing kanji to be remembered for a longer period of time.[105] At an advanced level, reading, writing, and semantic comprehension are known to be correlated and the more one studies any of these areas, the more they will understand of the other areas.[106] But, if radicals are not taught early on, it may lead to slower language progress since there is less opportunity to make a wider variety of connections.[107]

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[104] Flores d'Arcais, G. B., & Saito, H. (1993). Lexical decomposition of complex kanji characters in Japanese readers. *Psychological Research, 55*(1), 52-63. doi:10.1007/bf00419893

[105] Rose, H. (2017). *The Japanese writing system: Challenges, strategies and self-regulation for learning Kanji*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

[106] Otsuka, S., & Murai, T. (2020). The multidimensionality of Japanese kanji abilities. *Scientific Reports, 10*(1). doi:10.1038/s41598-020-59852-0

[107] Hagiwara, A. (2016). The role of phonology and phonetics in l2 kanji learning. *The Modern Language Journal, 100*(4), 880-897. doi:10.1111/modl.12350

Socio-Cultural Factors of Learning Kanji

While looking at the brain can help explain why students react differently to certain modes of instruction and components of language, it is vital to also look at the behaviors of students and teachers to see how worldviews can impact the learning of a language. A few factors were already briefly mentioned in the section, "Kanji in the Japanese Foreign Language Classroom," such as motivation, learning strategy, and perception of the language. These points were primarily used to show how JFL students and teachers view kanji today. These views, however, play a significant role when it comes to academic progress and the extent to which a student pursues their studies. Motivation, the strategies used to teach and learn a language, and how a student perceives a language are all tied together, and they have all been shown to impact academic performance and self-image.

Motivation can be broken down into three major categories: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.[108] In the section on Kanji in the JFL classroom, it was stated that many teachers believe students to have amotivation (a lack of motivation) towards learning kanji,[109] but a study performed by Mori Tanaka in 2013 found almost all students to have some form of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, with some types of motivations pushing them to pursue kanji learning further and others having a direct correlation to lower Japanese proficiency.[110]

Extrinsic motivation, or motivation from external factors, can be further broken down into four subcategories: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrative regulation.[111] External regulation is in reference to motivation by rewards and punishments, which is also seen as "motivation regulated entirely by external factors."[112] Introjected regulation motivation is based

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[108] Ryan, R.M., Deci, E.L., 2000. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. Am. Psychol. 55, 68-78.

[109] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[110] Tanaka, M. (2013). Examining kanji learning motivation using self-determination theory. *System, 41*(3), 804-816. doi:10.1016/j.system.2013.08.004

[111] Ryan, R.M., Deci, E.L., 2000. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. Am. Psychol. 55, 68-78.

[112] Ibid.

out of pressure from a third party, which is further broken down into introjected avoidance (avoiding the shame and guilt from failing) and introjected approach (pursuing the pride and social approval from succeeding). Identified regulation motivation comes from the importance an individual puts on a task to upkeep their goals and/or identity. The last type of extrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, is completed based on theory and is the idea that the thing being learned is directly tied to one's identity, making the thing being taught invaluable and a necessity.

Intrinsic motivation is seen as one of the best types of motivation a student can have and has been positively correlated with motivational intensity, learning persistence, L2 achievement, perceived confidence, and overall lower anxiety in the classroom.[113] This type of motivation refers to a student's desire to learn, based on an interest towards and enjoyment of the topic. While intrinsic motivation is great for the overall the early stages of learning, some scholars believe that identified regulation is a more reliable and better form of motivation regulation. In the case of intrinsic motivation, if someone loses interest in the topic, they will no longer have reason to pursue learning it. In comparison, identified regulation is more strongly associated with the amount of time spent studying, achievement of long-term goals, and the persistence of learning.[114] For this reason, intrinsic motivation is said to be very important in the early stages of learning kanji, but to maintain long-term interest teachers are encouraged to feed student interest in Japan as well as provide opportunity to build extrinsic motivation, specifically in the form of identified regulation.[115]

An important factor in the type of motivation that drives a student is the way in which they perceive Japan, Japanese people, and/or the Japanese language. For students studying Japanese as a second language (in Japan), they will most likely build up their own ideas and perceptions of Japan and Japanese citizens. In the case of students studying Japanese as a foreign language (outside of Japan),

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[113] Noels, K.A., Pelletier, L., Cle´ment, R., Vallerand, R., 2000. Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. Lang. Learn. 50, 57-85.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Tanaka, M. (2013). Examining kanji learning motivation using self-determination theory. *System, 41*(3), 804-816. doi:10.1016/j.system.2013.08.004

however, their main interactions with the language and culture come from pop culture or their interactions

in Japanese class. The worst thing that can happen for a student is to form a negative opinion of Japanese

people, as that has been shown to have a direct correlation with amotivation.[116] Amotivation has been

found to also be connected with high anxiety, low motivational intensity, low learning persistence, and

low confidence, making it very difficult to change how a student feels towards language learning after

they have amotivation.[117]

Student Background in Understanding Kanji

Another sociocultural factor that is important when looking at how a student learns a language is

their background. Student background, including age,[118] location,[119] and first language,[120] are all things

that impact how a new language is learned. For instance, it has been found in Australia, that students with

an English background have higher attrition rates in Japanese language programs compared to all other

language programs.[121] This could be attributed to the fact that these students tend to learn Japanese at a

much slower rate than other languages, leading to a decline in confidence and an elevated sense of

difficulty.[122]

Students that come from a phonetic alphabet-based background are known to have a much more

difficult time in their Japanese language pursuits than those that come from character-based backgrounds

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[116] Tanaka, M. (2013). Examining kanji learning motivation using self-determination theory. *System, 41*(3), 804-816. doi:10.1016/j.system.2013.08.004

[117] Hiromori, T. (2003) What enhances language learners' motivation? High school English learners' motivation from the perspective of self-determination theory. JALT J. 25, 173e186.

[118] Otsuka, S., & Murai, T. (2020). The multidimensionality of Japanese kanji abilities. *Scientific Reports, 10*(1). doi:10.1038/s41598-020-59852-0

[119] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[120] Mori, Y. (1998). Effects of first language and phonological accessibility on kanji recognition. *The Modern Language Journal, 82*(1), 69-82. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb02595.x

[121] Kato, F. (2002). Efficacy of intervention strategies in learning success rates. Foreign Language Annals, 35, 61–72.

[122] Dwyer, E. S. (1997). Getting started the right way: An investigation into the introduction of kanji study to neophyte Japanese learners (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Texas, Austin, TX.

(i.e. China and Korea).[123] For non-character based students, Japanese is riddled with barriers in the written language, making many teaching methods used for other languages unavailable in Japanese (e.g. reading to increase vocabulary)[124], and the time in which it takes to learn writing is extended.[125] Many scholars have done studies to find how a history with Chinese characters influences student progress and mentality towards the Japanese language. Most conclusions show a strong correlation between phonetic based backgrounds, higher levels of perceived difficulty, [126] and greater amounts of anxiety.[127]

The way in which a student perceives Japanese based on their background has also been proven to influence the methods they use to study Japanese, which, in turn, influences their speed of progression.[128] In a study designed to show how students from character based backgrounds and non-character based backgrounds react to the absence of phonological radicals in a kanji, students from character based backgrounds were still able to denote the sound associated with the kanji while non-character based students were more likely to give incorrect pronunciations.[129] The researcher behind this study believed this to be because students from character based backgrounds analyze kanji with different strategies than students from phonetic background. In 2013, this idea was further supported by two articles that stated students from these different backgrounds tended to pay more attention to different areas during their studies; students from character-based backgrounds focus more on learning the

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[123] Machida, S. (2013). Kanji learning by fl students from character and non-character based language backgrounds – report from a foreign language class. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(2). doi:10.4304/jltr.4.2.220-228

[124] Kondo-Brown, K. (2006). How do English L1 learners of advanced Japanese Infer Unknown Kanji Words in Authentic Texts? *Language Learning, 56*(1), 109-153. doi:10.1111/j.0023-8333.2006.00343.x

[125] Machida, S. (2013). Kanji learning by fl students from character and non-character based language backgrounds – report from a foreign language class. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(2). doi:10.4304/jltr.4.2.220-228

[126] Kondo-Brown, K. (2006). How do English L1 learners of advanced Japanese Infer Unknown Kanji Words in Authentic Texts? *Language Learning, 56*(1), 109-153. doi:10.1111/j.0023-8333.2006.00343.x

[127] Machida, S. (2013). Kanji learning by fl students from character and non-character based language backgrounds – report from a foreign language class. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(2). doi:10.4304/jltr.4.2.220-228

[128] Machida, S. (2013). Kanji learning by fl students from character and non-character based language backgrounds – report from a foreign language class. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(2). doi:10.4304/jltr.4.2.220-228

[129] Mori, Y. (1998). Effects of first language and phonological accessibility on kanji recognition. *The Modern Language Journal, 82*(1), 69-82. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb02595.x

pronunciations of kanji,[130] while students from phonetic alphabet-based backgrounds put more time

toward learning the shape and makeup of a kanji, with pronunciation typically being an afterthought.[131]

It is important for teachers to recognize the different backgrounds of their students since

backgrounds can often be closely tied to a student's initial views of the language and the difficulties they

may face while studying it. Students from non-character-based backgrounds will most likely need more

support and attention when it comes to learning kanji makeup and its place in the language.[132] This does

not mean, however, that students with a history in Chinese characters have an easy time learning and

differentiating all of the various parts of kanji.[133] Every student needs guidance to know which characters

are more important and how each character interacts differently with the language. Nevertheless, if a

student has already had the opportunity to learn kanji memorization strategies from their other

experiences, they will not need as much help as those students who have only had experience with

phonetic alphabets.

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[130] Tanaka, M. (2013). Examining kanji learning motivation using self-determination theory. *System, 41*(3), 804-816. doi:10.1016/j.system.2013.08.004

[131] Machida, S. (2013). Kanji learning by fl students from character and non-character based language backgrounds – report from a foreign language class. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(2). doi:10.4304/jltr.4.2.220-228

[132] Ibid.

[133] Tanaka, M. (2013). Examining kanji learning motivation using self-determination theory. *System, 41*(3), 804-816. doi:10.1016/j.system.2013.08.004

Kanji Learning Methods

So far, I have mentioned a few learning methods prominent in the field of Japanese as a foreign language, including rote memorization and mnemonics. While most Japanese teachers will tell students which kanji they need to learn to pass the upcoming quiz and/or understand the material, it is primarily up to the students on which method they feel will get them the farthest. In an article published by the founder of Tofugo, kanji learning methods are broken down into 7 categories:

1. "The 'Repetition is King' Camp"

2. "The 'Kanji Flashcards' Camp"

3. "The 'Vocabulary and Experience' Camp"

4. "The 'Reading Reading Reading' Camp"

5. "Mnemonics Camp #1: Heisig's"

6. "Mnemonics Camp #2: 'Kanji Meanings and Readings'"

7. "Mnemonics Camp #3: 'Kanji Meanings, Readings, and Vocab'"[134]

"Repetition is King" and "Kanji Flashcards" are the two most popular forms of rote memorization when it comes to kanji. The first method is in reference to writing the kanji over and over again until they have it memorized. This is most commonly found in workbooks that have the kanji written in a lighter grey for students to trace over until they are confident enough to write it by themselves, as seen in figure 7 below.
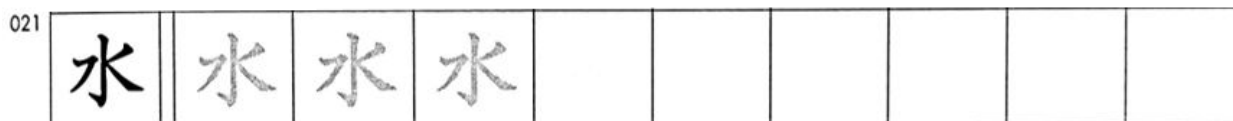
Figure 7 Example of "Repetition is King"[135]

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[134] Koichi. (2014, February 14). The 7 different ways to learn kanji (as i see it). Retrieved March 14, 2021, from https://www.tofugu.com/japanese/kanji-study-methods/

[135] Banno, E., Ikeda, Y., Ohno, Y., Shinagawa, C., & Tokashiki, K. (2011). *Genki Workbook* (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Tokyo, JP: The Japan Times.

In comparison, "Kanji Flashcards" is when students use hand-made, store-bought, or online flashcards to help with their recognition of the characters. Depending on how the flashcards are set up, the flashcards can help with the memorization of associated sounds, meanings, or words. Some online flashcards also have a function where students can practice their writing/spelling by typing or drawing out what they believe is the correct answer to the flashcard.[136] Anki is most popular applications for students of Japanese that use flashcards (暗記 [*anki*] is the Japanese word for 'memorization'), and while the most

popular kanji decks in Anki do not provide opportunity to practice writing, they do provide other forms of information that can be important to the student; such as the *on-yomi* and *kun-yomi*, example words that use the kanji, kanji level (e.g. JLPT level, *Jōyō* level, frequency), correlated mnemonics, radicals, and other websites that can give even more information.[137] Depending on the student's preference, kanji flashcards can take many different forms, with some having so much information that it could be considered overwhelming, and others just having the bare minimum needed to pass a classes.[138]

"Vocabulary and Experience" and "Reading Reading Reading" both are centered on the idea that the best way to learn kanji is through exposure. Rather than studying kanji by themselves, people that believe in the "Vocabulary and Experience" method instead try to learn as much vocabulary as they can and learn the kanji as they appear. "Vocabulary and Experience" is an especially important method to low-level Japanese language learners, as a lack of vocabulary tends to make it difficult to identify which kanji are common and necessary to remember.[139] In contrast, "Reading Reading Reading" is typically only possible for upper level Japanese learners who already have some experience with kanji.[140]

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[136] Studying with write mode. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from https://help.quizlet.com/hc/en-us/articles/360030990531

[137] All in one Kanji Deck. (2017, April 04). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from https://ankiweb.net/shared/info/798002504

[138] [Icohgnito]. (2018, June 26). Best Kanji Deck [Online Forum Post] Retrieved March 16, 2021 from https://www.reddit.com/r/Anki/comments/8u2dvx/best_kanji_deck/?ref=share&ref_source=link

[139] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

[140] Kondo-Brown, K. (2006). How do English L1 learners of advanced Japanese Infer Unknown Kanji Words in Authentic Texts? *Language Learning, 56*(1), 109-153. doi:10.1111/j.0023-8333.2006.00343.x

However, many lower level Japanese learners also believe in this method since it is as close as a foreigner

can get to replicating the exposure native Japanese people grow up with (these lower level people usually

purchase many children's books and try to work their way up to more advanced material).[141] For students

that prefer this method, though, some teachers advise against getting books with *furigana* (reading aids

where hiragana is written in a small font above the kanji; e.g. 振り仮名 [*furigana*]), as students will

often only read the *furigana* and ignore the kanji.[142]

The last three methods commonly found among Japanese language learning students are different

forms of mnemonic memorization. Using mnemonics as one learns kanji was originally made popular by

a philosopher named James W. Heisig.[143] According to Heisig, when he first wanted to learn Japanese, he

wasn't able to take language classes so he instead he focused on kanji. Without any concept of what the

kanji sounded like, nor any past knowledge of vocabulary, Heisig ended up memorizing around 1,900

characters in the span of a month. He did this by creating a story based on the radicals found in every

kanji, an example of which can be found below in figure 8.
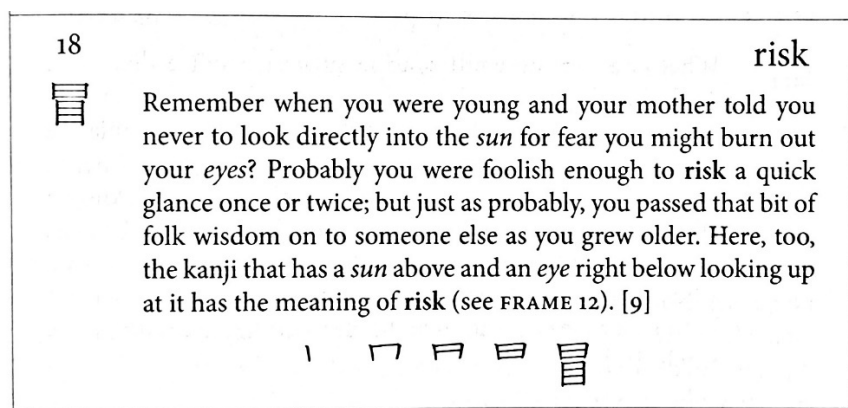
Figure 8 Example of Mnemonics from Heisig's *Remembering the Kanji 1*[144]

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[141] Euodias (2017, November 10). *5 STEPS TO FLUENT JAPANESE | How I Learnt Japanese in 6 Months* [Video]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-12bzTZD1eY

[142] Scott, L. [KemushiChan ロレッタ] (2018, May 23). *How Japanese People Learn Japanese // KANJI Edition!* [Video]. https://youtu.be/kOjmzMdqizw

[143] Heisig, J. W. (2011). Remembering the Kanji (6th ed., Vol. 1). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

[144] Ibid.

What sets Heisig's method of learning kanji apart from the two other mnemonics camps is just how much information is learned through the mnemonics. Since Heisig only is focused on the meaning behind a kanji, "Mnemonics Camp #2: 'Kanji Meanings and Readings'" and "Mnemonics Camp #3: 'Kanji Meanings, Readings, and Vocab'" add on the two other elements that are special to a kanji, the reading and associated vocabulary. While there are not many study guides that use the second version of mnemonics, mnemonics that use a combination of meaning and readings can commonly be found on applications where students can create and memorize their own mnemonic phrases. Figure 9 is an example of a mnemonic that incorporates both meaning and reading, taken from Kanji Koohii. The word being memorized is 'day', which has the kanji of 日 and can be pronounced as [*hi*], [*jitsu*], [*nichi*], and [*bi*].

12   day

日 Look out the window! What a beautiful, sunny **day!** He (HI) just (JI-TSU) needs she (NI-CHI) to be (BI) the perfect date.
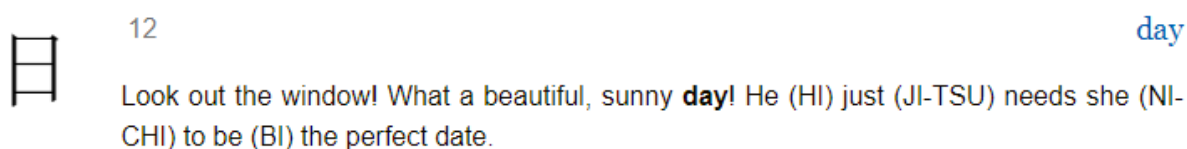
Figure 9 Example of "Mnemonics Camp #2: Kanji Meanings and Readings" [145]

In comparison to mnemonics camp 2, it is much more difficult to include meaning, sound, and new Japanese vocabulary in a single memorable sentence. For this reason, the third type of mnemonics typically does not incorporate new Japanese vocabulary into the mnemonic itself, but rather is made available alongside the mnemonic. This can be found in study guides such as *A Guide to Remembering Japanese Characters* by Henshall (as seen below with figure 10) and also some flashcard decks (as mentioned above with Anki).

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[145] [vperezjapanese]. (2021, February 22). 12 day [Online Flash Cards] Retrieved March 18, 2021 from https://kanji.koohii.com/profile/vperezjapanese

Depending on the preference of a student and/or the culture of their class, a person learning Japanese may use one of these methods or all of these methods throughout their Japanese language learning life. It is important to recognize, however, that almost every study done on the effects of different kanji learning methods has shown that students who can utilize many different methods tend to succeed more often in kanji recall tasks.[147] In both instances of students that only focus on rote memorization and students only focusing on mnemonics, they end up hitting a wall that is caused by the limitations of these methods. For students who use rote memorization, it has typically been found that they do not remember the kanji after a long period of time.[148] For students who only use mnemonics, they can easily become overwhelmed by the sheer number of things they must remember, which also causes problems with learner recall.[149]

Methods in the Japanese Foreign Language Classroom

To understand how and why students are influenced into having a preference towards certain methods, it is important to look at which methods are most often used in different areas of study. As

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[146] Henshall, K. G. (2008). A guide to remembering Japanese characters. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing.

[147] Bourke, B. (1996). *Maximising efficiency in the Kanji learning task* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996). St. Lucia, Qld.

[148] Rose, H. (2017). *The Japanese writing system: Challenges, strategies and self-regulation for learning Kanji*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

[149] Rose, H. (2013). L2 learners' attitudes toward, and use of, mnemonic strategies when learning Japanese kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 97*(4), 981-992. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12040.x

stated in earlier sections, the most common method of kanji learning promoted in the foreign language classroom is rote memorization.[150] It is a common belief that teachers will teach in the same way they were taught,[151] and with rote memorization being one of the most common ways kanji is taught in Japan, [152] it can easily be seen why Japanese teachers in America will also use this method. However, even if a teacher does not believe in rote memorization practices, the textbooks and workbooks that students are expected to use still tend to make learners fall into habits of rote memorization.

The most popular textbooks for beginner Japanese classes in America are the *Genki* I and II books. Figure 7, an example of "Repetition is King," is taken from the Genki I workbook. While this workbook provides a page for students to write out kanji in the new vocabulary learned during the chapter lesson, it also has an entire page in every chapter dedicated to writing out the new kanji over and over again. In comparison, the textbook provides a bit more information for students, including all of the different *on-yomi* and *kun-yomi*, and there is also a section for students to practice reading the kanji in text, but there is no breakdown of radicals, nor any indication of other metacognitive strategies students might be able to memorize these characters. Even though many studies have shown a positive correlation between metacognitive strategies and kanji retention rate,[153] due to the little attention mnemonics and radical break down methods are given in class, it was found that students tended to believe rote learning strategies were more effective and they had little interest or faith in metacognitive strategies.[154]

From this information, it can be said that Japanese foreign language textbooks typically follow methods similar to the "Repetition is King" Camp and "Vocabulary and Experience" Camp. However,

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[150] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[151] Oleson, A., & Hora, M. T. (2013). Teaching the way they were taught? Revisiting the sources of teaching knowledge and the role of prior experience in shaping faculty teaching practices. *Higher Education, 68*(1), 29-45. doi:10.1007/s10734-013-9678-9

[152] Scott, L. [KemushiChan ロレッタ] (2018, May 23). *How Japanese People Learn Japanese // KANJI Edition!* [Video]. https://youtu.be/kOjmzMdqizw

[153] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[154] Mori, Y., Sato, K., & Shimizu, H. (2007). Japanese Language Students' Perceptions on Kanji Learning and Their Relationship to Novel Kanji Word Learning Ability. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 57-85.

that is only for early level Japanese classes. Following the completion of the *Genki* textbooks, many

Japanese language programs will then use the *Tobira: Gateway to Advanced Japanese* books. Unlike

Genki, which has a workbook that works alongside the textbook, *Tobira* instead has a core textbook,[155]

one workbook,[156] and a special supplementary[157] book that students can use to work on kanji if they need

it. With the kanji textbook often being supplementary and not a required book for the class, students are

expected to study the new kanji as they appear with the vocabulary.

The lack of emphasis on kanji in the classroom has allowed for self-study methods to thrive. As

mentioned previously in this chapter, there are many books and applications already in the market that

help students learn different methods of learning kanji. However, with it being up to the teacher on which

kanji learning methods are exposed to the students, students that do not know where to look for these self-

study supports or do not have the motivation to expand on their academics outside of the classroom are

put at a major disadvantage. There is a very obvious correlation between teacher behavior and student

perception of kanji, with some scholars going so far as to say that "students are willing to learn kanji and

that they will find learning kanji fun if their teachers believe kanji is not difficult to learn and if they want

to interest students in kanji."[158] Since so many teachers believing kanji to be extremely difficult, even for

native Japanese children,[159] it changes how they interact with and present it to students in foreign

language classrooms,[160] which ends up limiting the students in their overall Japanese language learning.

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[155] Oka, M., & Tsutsui, M. (2009). *Tobira: Gateway to Advanced Japanese Learning through Content and Multimedia* (1st ed.) (J. Kondo, S. Emori, Y. Hanai, & S. Ishikawa, Eds.). Tokyo, JP: Kurosio.

[156] Oka, M., & Emori, S., Hanai, Y., & Ishikawa, S. (2012). *Tobira: Grammar Power: Exercises for Mastery* (1st ed.) (J. Kondo, & M. Kondo, Eds.). Tokyo, JP: Kurosio.

[157] Oka, M., Tsutsui, M., & Ishikawa, S. (2010). *Tobira: Power up Your Kanji - 800 Basic Kanji as a Gateway to Advanced Japanese* (1st ed.) (J. Kondo, S. Emori, & Y. Hanai, Eds.). Tokyo, JP: Kurosio.

[158] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

[159] Steinberg, D. D., & Yamada, J. (1978). Are whole word kanji easier to learn than syllable kana? *Reading Research Quarterly, 14*(1), 88. doi:10.2307/747295

[160] Yamaguchi, Y. (2008). *Kanji Instruction at a Japanese Supplementary School in the U.S.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i.

Views towards Current Methods

Even if the research shows certain teaching methods to be better than others, the best methods do not accomplish anything unless there is also a sense of discontent within either the teachers or students. Most studies where feelings about teaching methods are acknowledged only focus on how those feelings affect language acquisition. Rather than trying to find out how to fix the problems in the Japanese foreign language classrooms, this thesis instead hopes to identify who is having the biggest problems. As a way to answer this, I conducted a survey querying 100 participants, including Japanese foreign language students, teachers, and native speakers about their experience learning kanji and their overall feelings towards the different methods being used (see Appendix B for survey contents). By doing this, I was not only able to discover the general feelings towards the current state of kanji in the Japanese classroom, but also how much certain backgrounds impacted these feelings (e.g. where students learned Japanese, if they had ever been to Japan; if teachers were native Japanese speakers, how long they had been teaching; where the native Japanese speakers studied kanji and the methods used in those places to teach it).

n=100	*Native Japanese Speaker*	*Japanese Language Teacher*	*Japanese Language Student*
Participants	9	13	78

Table 1 Survey Participants

Native Japanese Speakers

The reason native Japanese speakers were included in this survey is due to the idea mentioned in the previous chapter, that teachers teach using the method they were taught.[161] By understanding the feelings of a regular Japanese person (specifically not a teacher), one can see the mentality that many Japanese professors have before they start teaching. Since the native Japanese speakers were not the main target for this survey, however, the total number of native Japanese speaker responses was nine. Of these

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[161] Oleson, A., & Hora, M. T. (2013). Teaching the way they were taught? Revisiting the sources of teaching knowledge and the role of prior experience in shaping faculty teaching practices. *Higher Education, 68*(1), 29-45. doi:10.1007/s10734-013-9678-9

nine participants, all of them lived and studied in Japan at some point in their life, but their levels of proficiency ranged anywhere from intermediate to fluent. Table 2, below, shows the responses from the 9 participants on how they learned kanji and what they think are the best and worst methods.

n=9	Rote Memorization	Mnemonics	Exposure	Combination
How Kanji was Taught	7 (78%)	2 (22%)	5 (56%)	4 (44%)
Best way to learn Kanji	5 (56%)	0	2 (22%)	2 (22%)
Worst way to learn Kanji	1 (11%)	7 (78%)	1 (11%)	0

Table 2 Native Japanese Speakers' History and Feelings towards Kanji Teaching Methods

As for how the native Japanese speakers learned kanji, 78% stated that they learned through rote memorization, 56% included exposure, and 22% said they learned through mnemonics. Of the two people that used mnemonics, they specifically said they also self-studied to learn kanji. As for which methods the speakers felt were the best and worst, the results were very similar to a study done by Mori and Shimizu for foreign language students, "that metacognitive strategies would be least effective among the identified strategies and that rote learning strategies would be most effective."[162] 56% of native Japanese speakers said rote memorization was the best way to learn. In comparison, only 22% stated a combination of multiple methods (both having rote memorization as the second best), and 22% put down exposure as their preferred method. In contrast, 78% said that mnemonics was the worst method for learning kanji, while only 11% stated rote memorization, and 11% exposure. Even though seven of the nine participants agree to some extent that "Japanese language learning students need different learning methods when compared with native Japanese students," they still felt that the ways they were taught were the best ways to teach.

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[162] Mori, Y., Sato, K., & Shimizu, H. (2007). Japanese Language Students' Perceptions on Kanji Learning and Their Relationship to Novel Kanji Word Learning Ability. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 57-85.

Japanese Foreign Language Teachers

While the native Japanese speakers were taken as a reference to look at how Japanese foreign language teachers viewed teaching the language before they entered the classroom, not every teacher was a Japanese native speaker (only 77% wrote down that Japanese was their first language), and a great deal of them had been teaching for such a long time that their feelings before entering the workforce are not as relevant (69% had been teaching for longer than 10 years). Below is a table similar to the one for native Japanese speakers, showing how the teachers learned kanji as well as their feelings about which method is the best and worst method to teach kanji.

n=13	*Rote Memorization*	*Mnemonics*	*Exposure*	*Combination*	*Other*
How Kanji was Taught	12 (92%)	6 (46%)	11 (85%)	10 (77%)	3 (23%)
How they Teach Kanji	10 (77%)	8 (62%)	8 (62%)	9 (69%)	4 (31%)
Best way to learn Kanji	0	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	10 (77%)	0
Worst way to learn Kanji	1 (8%)	7 (54%)	5 (38%)	0	0

Table 3 JFL Teachers' History and Feelings towards Kanji Teaching Methods

Reflecting the result of the native Japanese speaker survey, 92% of teachers said that they learned kanji through rote memorization, 85% included exposure as part of their history, 46% mentioned mnemonics, and 23% included some other form of teaching. Unlike the Japanese speakers, however, 77% of teachers believed the best method of kanji teaching was a combination of multiple methods (40% of which had exposure as the second best, 30% rote memorization, 20% mnemonics, and 10% other), while only 15% said mnemonics was the best, 8% said exposure, with rote memorization going unrecognized. Even though more teachers had positive feelings towards a multi-method approach, mnemonics still was rated the lowest for 54% of teachers. In comparison, 38% had exposure as the least effective method and 8% said rote memorization.

Unlike with questions on a teacher backgrounds and preferences where the answer is quite straightforward, teachers were given a 5-point scale to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with

certain statements as a way to understand their feelings about the Japanese classroom. The answer to these statements is seen below in table 4.

n=13	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	No Opinion
"Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to be good at Japanese"	0	0	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	10 (77%)	1 (8%)
"Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to live in Japan"	0	0	2 (15%)	2 (15%)	9 (69%)	0
"Teaching Kanji is the job of a Japanese teacher"	0	0	1 (8%)	4 (31%)	7 (54%)	1 (8%)
"Learning Kanji should be a larger focus in self-studying than in the classroom"	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	3 (23%)	6 (46%)	0
"Teachers should give students the methods to learn Kanji then leave it to them if they want to self-study"	1 (8%)	0	5 (38%)	3 (23%)	4 (31%)	0
"The amount of time given in a semester is not enough for all of the material Japanese teachers are expected to teach"	0	0	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	10 (77%)	1 (8%)
"I am satisfied with how Kanji is/was taught in my classes"	3 (23%)	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	3 (23%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)

Table 4 JFL Teachers' Feelings towards the Current State of the JFL Classroom

The overall sentiment towards kanji by these teachers was that kanji was important for students to know if they wanted to be good at Japanese and possibly live in Japan someday. And, while 92% of the participants agreed that "teaching kanji was the job of a Japanese teacher," 62% agreed to some extent that "learning kanji should be a larger focus in self-studying than in the classroom." When taking this into account, alongside the fact that 85% of teachers strongly agreed "the amount of time given in a semester is not enough for all of the material Japanese teachers are expected to teach" and 62% either chose to be neutral or disagree with the statement "I am satisfied with how Kanji is/was taught in my classes," it can

be inferred that teachers recognize more emphasis needs to be given to kanji but there is not enough opportunity to do so.

Japanese Foreign Language Students

In comparison to the small number of teachers and native Japanese speakers, a total of 78 Japanese language learning students responded to the questionnaire. The background of these students varied greatly, with some only having taken a single semester of university classes while others grew up in Japan and decided to study Japanese again after a decade of not practicing it. Table 5 shows the places mentioned by students, while Table 6 shows their history with other languages.

n=78	Visited Japan	Studied Abroad in Japan	American K-12	American University	Language Academy	Self-Study
	7 (9%)	14 (18%)	19 (24%)	70 (90%)	6 (8%)	18 (23%)

Table 5 Where Student Participants Learned Japanese

The various methods and locations that were mentioned in the background of these students included American universities (90%), American high schools and middle schools (24%), study abroads in Japan (18%), non-academic visits to Japan (9%), Japanese language academies (8%), and self-study (23%). While only 62% of students had been to Japan, 95% agreed to some extent that kanji was a necessity if one wanted to be good at Japanese and 92% felt it was needed if one wanted to live in Japan.

With many students coming from American University, much of their feelings towards the best and worst way to learn kanji and how they were taught is based off their experience in their college classrooms.

n=78	Rote Memorization	Mnemonics	Exposure	Combination
How Kanji was Taught	61 (78%)	33 (42%)	33 (43%)	42 (54%)
Best way to learn Kanji	17 (22%)	15 (19%)	11 (14%)	34 (44%)
Worst way to learn Kanji	37 (47%)	26 (33%)	15 (19%)	0

Table 6 Students' History and Feelings towards Kanji Teaching Methods

As already found in many other studies done thus far, rote memorization still stands as the most popular method used in the Japanese foreign language classroom, with 78% of students indicating that rote memorization was one of the methods used to teach kanji in their class. However, 42% of students also said that their class included material surrounding mnemonics or exposure. In total, 54% of student said that their classes used multiple methods to teach kanji, which goes against ideas put forth so far where rote memorization is the only method used in classrooms. Similarly, 44% of students stated that a combination of multiple methods was the best way to learn kanji (with 29% of those students having mnemonics as second best, 18% rote memorization, and 53% exposure). This is very different from the strong support that rote memorization has from native Japanese speakers and past studies that state Japanese language students tend to prefer rote memorization.[163] In this study, only 22% of students thought rote memorization was the best method to learn kanji, while 47% of students actually said rote memorization was the worst method.

In the same way that teachers were asked to rate certain statements according to how much they agree or disagree, this was also asked of students to measure if they are satisfied or dissatisfied with how classes are being taught.

n=78	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	No Opinion
"Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to be good at Japanese"	0	0	3 (4%)	12 (15%)	62 (79%)	1 (1%)
"Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to live in Japan"	0	1 (1%)	4 (5%)	2 (3%)	70 (90%)	1 (1%)
"Teaching Kanji is the job of a Japanese teacher"	0	4 (5%)	14 (18%)	17 (22%)	42 (54%)	1 (1%)
"Learning Kanji should be a larger focus in self-studying than in the classroom"	4 (5%)	13 (17%)	18 (23%)	23 (29%)	14 (18%)	6 (8%)

[163] Mori, Y., Sato, K., & Shimizu, H. (2007). Japanese Language Students' Perceptions on Kanji Learning and Their Relationship to Novel Kanji Word Learning Ability. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 57-85.

"Teachers should give students the methods to learn Kanji then leave it to them if they want to self-study"	8 (10%)	10 (13%)	18 (23%)	20 (26%)	21 (27%)	1 (1%)
"The amount of time given in a semester is not enough for all of the material Japanese teachers are expected to teach"	6 (8%)	11 (14%)	22 (28%)	16 (21%)	18 (23%)	5 (6%)
"I am satisfied with how Kanji is/was taught in my classes"	8 (10%)	7 (9%)	23 (29%)	17 (22%)	23 (29%)	0
"I wish my Japanese teacher spent more time teaching Kanji"	10 (13%)	12 (15%)	23 (29%)	14 (18%)	13 (17%)	6 (8%)
"I wish my Japanese teacher spent less time teaching Kanji"	31 (40%)	19 (24%)	19 (24%)	3 (4%)	2 (3%)	4 (5%)
"If I could, I would take a class specifically meant for teaching Kanji and Kanji-memorization methods"	16 (21%)	10 (13%)	11 (14%)	16 (21%)	25 (32%)	0

Table 7 Students' Feelings towards the Current State of the JFL Classroom

Even though many students are being taught kanji in a way they consider ineffective, 51% of students still said that they satisfied with how kanji was taught in their classes. While a few said that they wish more time was spent on teaching kanji (35%), most stated that the teacher neither spent too time much nor too little (60%). This may be due to the fact that many students thought kanji was more important for self-studying (47%), some going so far as to agree that "teachers should give students the methods to learn kanji then leave it to them if they want to self-study" (53%). Even though only 44% of students felt there was not enough time in a semester for everything a Japanese teacher is expected to teach, 53% said that they would be willing to take a specially made class that solely focuses on teaching kanji and kanji learning methods.

As seen with Table 8, by looking at the correlation coefficient between the different backgrounds of students and their want for more or less time with kanji, and/or their willingness to take an extra class for kanji, one can deduce which students need more kanji help in the Japanese foreign language

classroom (the results of the questionnaire were ran through a program that produced a coefficient ranging from -1 to 1; -1 means there is a high negative correlation while 1 means there is a high positive correlation; if it is close to 0 then there is little correlation/the background had little impact on the final results).

History Learning Japanese	Less Time on Kanji	More Time on Kanji	Willing to Take a Kanji Class
Visited Japan (7)	0.255	-0.168	-0.171
Studied in Japan (14)	0.337	-0.318	0.157
Self-Studied (18)	-0.143	0.087	-0.522
Language Academy (6)	-0.596	-0.071	0.179

Table 8 History of Learning Japanese and Kanji Satisfaction

The high negative correlation between students that self-study and their willingness to take a special class on Kanji can help one see that if a student is already willing to practice Japanese when they have no class, then a special extra class would not be as beneficial for them. This is in contrast to students that only pursue the Japanese language when they are under some form of pressure put forth in a classroom setting.

Another conclusion that can be taken away from Table 8 is that if a student participated in a Japanese study abroad program, they were more likely to say that teachers should spend less time teaching kanji. This is similar to a finding from Table 9, where students from character-based backgrounds also wanted teachers to spend less time on kanji.

History Learning Japanese	Less Time on Kanji	More Time on Kanji	Willing to Take a Kanji Class
English Background (50)	-0.073	0.036	-0.126
Bilingual (47)	-0.248	0.203	0.260
Character-Based Background (19)	0.445	-0.415	-0.882
Studied a Character-Based Language (4)	-0.114	-0.315	0.222

Table 9 Language Background and Kanji Satisfaction

This may be attributed to the fact that students who go to Japan and students that grew up learning Chinese or Korean both were exposed to a great deal of kanji and do not feel as strong of a need for it to appear in the classroom. However, while students that went to Japan do have some willingness towards taking a kanji-based class, there was a very strong negative correlation between students from a character-

based background and wanting to take a kanji class. For these students, it is likely that they feel learning about the different ways to memorize kanji would be useless, as they have already built up their own methods throughout their life. In comparison, the students that studied in Japan feel they do not need as much help with kanji but still recognize they are not masters of it.

The biggest correlation found when looking at kanji satisfaction rates, however, was the perceived proficiency of students, as seen in Table 10.

History Learning Japanese	Less Time on Kanji	More Time on Kanji	Willing to Take a Kanji Class
Beginner (27)	-0.250	0.092	0.332
Intermediate (34)	-0.238	0.325	0.378
Advanced (4)	-0.368	0.437	-0.323
Fluent (6)	-0.357	0.857	0.411

Table 10 Perceived Proficiency and Kanji Satisfaction

Contrary to what one might originally believe, lower level students were less likely to care about how much time was spent on kanji in the classroom. As one's perceived proficiency rises, however, there they are more likely to say that they want more time spent on kanji. This may be due to how kanji is approached in earlier classes versus later classes. As mentioned in the last chapter, early level Japanese classes use a book where kanji is taught alongside every lesson. Advanced classes, though, tend to leave kanji entirely up to self-study.

Discussion

With so many students recognizing themselves as either beginner (35%) or intermediate (44%) level learners of Japanese, the results from their questionnaire will most likely be the greatest help to lower-level Japanese professors. However, the most important information from this is actually found in the results from teachers. Most Japanese language professors are given a list of things that students must know by the end of a semester, and a good deal of students felt satisfied with the amount they had learned

in a semester (51%), almost every professor said that they did not have enough time to teach everything expected of them.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the main reason for this survey was to evaluate whether there was reason to try and find different ways to teach kanji in the Japanese foreign language classroom. Because of the overall discontent that Japanese language professors have towards the expectations put on them, as well as the dissatisfaction they show towards the methods used to teach kanji, I believe the answer to "is there a problem that needs to be fixed?" is "yes." However, as this study was quite limited and was only able to deduce if there was an issue that should be fixed, a good topic for further research would be a conclusive answer on what is causing the problem and how that problem may be solved.

Conclusion

It has long been acknowledged that students of Japanese have a harder time learning the language[164] and staying motivated in their studies compared to students of other foreign languages.[165] This has primarily been attributed to the complicated Japanese written language as well as the uncommon grammar style. However, the structure of the Japanese language is not so different from other languages that it can be used as an excuse for people having a hard time learning it. Similarly, students studying Chinese also have to learn characters that look almost identical to kanji. The issue with believing Japanese is especially difficult for students it that the student remains the center of kanji struggles. Whether it is a linguist focusing on neurology or sociology, by only looking to the student and their relationship with kanji, important factors of language learning can be missed. For this reason, this thesis attempted to approach the problem of kanji acquisition in a different way than most research that has been published thus far. While most of the scholarly work is trying to find an answer on how teachers can help students, I have attempted to instead resituate the problem at hand, in hopes other scholars could build on the newly found problem.

In a survey conducted from December of 2020 to February of 2021, 100 people, including Japanese native speakers, teachers, and foreign language students, answered questions regarding the most popular methods of teaching kanji and how they felt about those methods. In the past, rote memorization has typically been found to be most well-liked among Japanese students and teachers[166] as well as most frequently used in Japanese classrooms.[167] While it is true that rote learning strategies are still the most regularly used teaching method for kanji in the Japanese foreign language classroom, views of rote

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[164] Dwyer, E. S. (1997). Getting started the right way: An investigation into the introduction of kanji study to neophyte Japanese learners (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Texas, Austin, TX.

[165] Kato, F. (2002). Efficacy of intervention strategies in learning success rates. Foreign Language Annals, 35, 61–72.

[166] Mori, Y., Sato, K., & Shimizu, H. (2007). Japanese Language Students' Perceptions on Kanji Learning and Their Relationship to Novel Kanji Word Learning Ability. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 57-85.

[167] Shimizu, H., & Green, K. E. (2002). Japanese language Educators' strategies for and attitudes toward teaching kanji. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(2), 227-241. doi:10.1111/1540-4781.00146

memorization have changed significantly over the past few decades as more research on the negative

impacts of rote learning continue to be published . Today, most teachers prefer a multi-method approach

to teaching Japanese, which is very beneficial for students since research has increasingly been finding

that students who use many kanji learning methods tend to achieve more in their Japanese language

learning pursuits.[168] Similarly, while students in the past thought rote memorization to be the best way to

learn kanji (and sometimes the only way to learn)[169] more students are becoming more aware of other

learning strategies and actually preferring multi-method approaches.

Even though it seems that Japanese foreign language classes are moving in a more positive

direction for students, the survey also found another problem not often mentioned by past studies.

Teachers are not being given the opportunity to teach students kanji in the way they want to. For much of

the research that has been published on kanji acquisition, the authors are attempting to find fault with the

methods being used or promote another method into use. They do not, however, acknowledge how

possible it is for teachers to implement a different method. The study done for this thesis found that many

teachers were unsatisfied with how kanji was taught in their classrooms and stated that they did not have

enough time to teach everything expected of them. For this reason, I believe that before scholars pursue

the best method of learning kanji, they should first recognize the restrictions on teaching those methods.

Because the feelings of the teacher heavily influence how a student views a language, it is

important that teachers are given enough time to show the true important of kanji and teach students the

methods they can use to learn kanji. While this may take away from time spent on grammar and

vocabulary during the early stages of a student's language learning, it can also help them greatly in their

later classes when kanji is expected to be learned outside of the classroom.

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[168] Bourke, B. (1996). *Maximising efficiency in the Kanji learning task* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996). St. Lucia, Qld.

[169] Mori, Y. (2012). Five Myths about Kanji and Kanji Learning. *Japanese Language and Literature, 46*(1), 143-169.

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https://www.reddit.com/r/LearnJapanese/comments/1jadwc/the_kanken_1_exam/

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Appendix A. *Kanji Kentei* Contents[170]

Level	# of Kanji	Test Content
1	~6000 kanji	[Reading and writing] Get used to reading and writing about 6000 kanji, including the sounds and kuns of common kanji, and use them appropriately in sentences. • Understand jukujikun and Ateji • Understand antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homonyms • Understand national characters (怺える, 毟る, etc.) • Knowing kanji notation (a type of Ateji) such as place names and country names • Understanding multiple kanji notations (salt [鹽]-salt [塩], typhoon[颱風]-typhoon[台風], etc.) [Four-character idioms / chengyu / proverbs] Correctly understand the authoritative four-character idioms, chengyu / proverbs. [Classical sentences] Understand the kanji and Chinese words in classical sentences.
Pre-1	~3000 kanji	[Reading and writing] Get used to reading and writing about 3000 kanji, including the sounds and kuns of common kanji, and use them appropriately in sentences. • Understand jukujikun and Ateji • Understand antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homonyms • Understanding national characters (峠, 凧, 畠, etc.) • Understanding multiple kanji notations (country[國]-country[国], crossing[交叉]-crossing[交差], etc.) [Four-character idioms / chengyu / proverbs] Correctly understand the authoritative four-character idioms, chengyu / proverbs. [Classical sentences] Understand the kanji and Chinese words in classical sentences

[170] 各級の出題内容と審査基準: 漢検の概要: 日本漢字能力検定. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.kanken.or.jp/kanken/outline/degree.html

2	2136 kanji	[Reading and writing] Be proficient in reading and writing all common kanji and use them properly in sentences. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Being able to write correctly, paying attention to okurigana and kana usage • Correct understanding of the composition of idioms • Understand jukujikun and Ateji (海女／あま, 玄人／くろうとなど, etc.) • Correct understanding of antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homonyms [Four-character idiom] Understand the authoritative four-character idiom (鶏口牛後, 呉越同舟, etc.). [Radical] Identify radicals and understand the composition and meaning of Chinese characters.
Pre-2	1951 kanji	[Reading and writing] Learn to read and write 1951 kanji and use them properly in sentences. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Being able to write correctly, paying attention to okurigana and kana usage • Correct understanding of the composition of idioms • Understand jukujikun and Ateji (硫黄／いおう, 相撲／すもう, etc.) • Correct understanding of antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homonyms [Four-character idioms] Understand the authoritative four-character idioms (驚天動地, 孤立無援, etc.). [Radical] Identify radicals and understand the composition and meaning of Chinese characters.
3	1623 kanji	[Reading and Writing] Learn to read and write all the kanji in the Kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school and about 600 other common kanji and use them appropriately in sentences. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Being able to write correctly, paying attention to okurigana and kana usage • Correct understanding of the composition of idioms • Understand jukujikun and Ateji (乙女／おとめ, 風邪／かぜ, etc.) • Correct understanding of antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homonyms

		[Four-character idiom] Understand four-character idioms. [Radical] Identify radicals and understand the composition and meaning of Chinese characters.
4	1339 kanji	[Reading and Writing] Learn to read and write all the kanji in the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school and about 300 other common kanji and use them appropriately in sentences. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Being able to write correctly, paying attention to okurigana and kana usage • Correct understanding of the composition of idioms • Understand jukujikun and Ateji (小豆／あずき, 土産／みやげ, etc.) • Correct understanding of antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homonyms [Four-character idiom] I understand four-character idioms. [Radical] Identify radicals and understand the composition and meaning of Chinese characters.
5	1026 kanji	[Reading and writing] You can read and write the kanji you learned up to the 6th grade of the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Being able to write correctly, paying attention to okurigana and kana usage • Knowing the composition of idioms • Correct understanding of antonyms and synonyms • Correct understanding of homophones and homophones [Four-character idiom] Understand four-character idioms correctly (有名無実, 郷土芸能, etc.). [Stroke order] Understand the stroke order and the total number of strokes correctly. [Radical] Understand and identify radicals.

6	835 kanji	[Reading and writing] You can read and write the kanji you learned up to the 5th grade of the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Be careful to write okurigana and kana usage correctly (求める, 失う, etc.) • Knowing the composition of idioms (上下, 絵画, 大木, 読書, 不明, etc.) • Understand most of the antonyms and synonyms (禁止－許可, 平等－均等, etc.) • Correct understanding of homophones and homophones [Stroke order] I understand the stroke order and the total number of strokes correctly. [Radical] I understand radicals.
7	642 kanji	[Reading and writing] You can read and write the kanji you learned up to the 4th grade of the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school. • Correct understanding of on-yomi and kun-yomi • Be careful about okurigana and write correctly (等しい, 短い, 流れる, etc.) • Knowing the composition of idioms • Understand most of the antonyms (入学－卒業, 成功－失敗, etc.) • Understanding homophones (健康, 高校, 公共 ,外交, etc.) [Stroke order] I understand the stroke order and the total number of strokes correctly. [Radical] I understand radicals.
8	440 kanji	[Reading and writing] You can read and write the kanji you learned up to the 3rd grade of the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school. • Understanding on-yomi and kun-yomi • Be careful about okurigana and write correctly (食べる, 楽しい, 後ろ, etc.) • Understand most of the antonyms (勝つ－負ける, 重い－軽い, etc.) • Understanding homophones (反対, 体育, 期待, 太陽, etc.)

		[Stroke order] I understand the stroke order and the total number of strokes correctly. [Radical] Understand the main radicals.
9	240 kanji	[Reading and writing] You can read and write the kanji you learned up to the second grade of the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school. [Stroke order] Understand the length of strokes, how to touch and intersect, stroke order and total number of strokes.
10	80 kanji	[Reading and writing] You can read and write the learning kanji for the first grade of the kanji distribution table for each grade of elementary school. [Stroke order] Understand the length of strokes, how to touch and intersect, stroke order and total number of strokes.

Appendix B. Questionnaire Contents

* Required

1. Which of these best describes you?*

    ○   Japanese language learning student

    ○   Native Japanese speaker (non-teacher)

    ○   Japanese language teacher

Questionnaire for the Japanese Language Learning Student

2. Have you ever been to Japan?

    ○   Yes

    ○   No

3. Please write down your history of Japanese language learning. *
   Ex. "Lived in Japan (3 Years), studied at Penn State University (3 semesters), Self-study (8 months)

4. Please list all of the languages you speak and your proficiency. *
   Ex. "Chinese (native), English (fluent), Spanish (beginner), Japanese (intermediate)

5. What is your main purpose for learning Japanese? *

    □   To watch and listen to their entertainment

    □   I have Japanese friends or family

    □   To travel abroad

    □   To move/work abroad

□   No Specific Reason

□   [   ]

Other

6. When was the last time you took a Japanese class? *

O   Less than 6 months ago

O   6 months to 1 year ago

O   1 to 2 years ago

O   Over 2 years ago

7. How was kanji primarily taught in your classes? *
Rote Memorization is learning through repetition while mnemonics is learning by breaking down the kanji (ex. 町 means town which can be inferred from 田 (rice paddy) and 丁 (street))

□   Rote memorization

□   Mnemonics

□   Exposure (through books, movies, etc.)

□   [   ]

Other

8. Please rank the different kanji teaching methods. *

Rote memorization
Mnemonics
Exposure
Combination of multiple methods
Other

9. If you answered "other as your top choice, please explain what you mean.

[   ]

10. Please click the answer that shows how much you agree with each statement*

	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	No Opinion
Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to be good at Japanese	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to live in Japan	○	○	○	○	○	○
Teaching Kanji is the job of a Japanese teacher	○	○	○	○	○	○
Learning Kanji should be a larger focus in self-studying than in the classroom	○	○	○	○	○	○
Teachers should give students the methods to learn Kanji then leave it to them if they want to self-study	○	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of time given in a semester is not enough for all of the material Japanese teachers are expected to teach	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am satisfied with how Kanji is/was taught in my Japanese class	○	○	○	○	○	○
I wish my Japanese teacher spent more time teaching Kanji	○	○	○	○	○	○

| I wish my Japanese teacher spent less time teaching Kanji | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| If I could, I would take a class specifically meant for teaching Kanji and Kanji-memorization methods | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

11. Have you ever bought/used supplementary material to learn Kanji?
If yes, please write down what resources you have used (Ex. I used "A Guide to Remembering Japanese Characters" by Henshall and I have an app on my phone called "Japanese Kanji Tree")

12. What do you find most difficult about learning Kanji?
Ex. "Writing them," "Differentiating On-Yomi and Kun-Yomi"

13. Has there been anything that especially helped you while learning Kanji?

Questionnaire for the Japanese Native Speaker (Non-Teacher)

2. Have you ever lived in Japan? *

○ Yes

○ No

3. If yes, how many years did you live in Japan?

4. Please list all of the languages you speak and your proficiency. *

Ex. "Chinese (native), English (fluent), Spanish (beginner), Japanese (intermediate)

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│                                                         │
│                                                         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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5. How did you primarily learn Kanji? *? *

Please choose all that apply

- □ School

- □ Self-study (memorization)

- □ Reading books, newspapers, etc.

- □ Reading subtitles

- □ Unintentional exposure

- □ ┌──────────────────────────────┐
     │   │
     └──────────────────────────────┘
     Other

6. How was kanji primarily taught in your classes? *

Rote Memorization is learning through repetition while mnemonics is learning by breaking down the kanji (ex. 町 means town which can be inferred from 田 (rice paddy) and 丁 (street))

- □ Rote memorization

- □ Mnemonics

- □ Exposure (through books, movies, etc.)

- □ ┌──────────────────────────────┐
     │   │
     └──────────────────────────────┘
     Other

7. Please rank the different kanji teaching methods. *

Rote memorization
Mnemonics
Exposure

Combination of multiple methods
Other

8. How would you describe your kanji learning experience? *

Ex. "I was given a list of kanji to know and I was expected to memorize it by the end of the week"

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9. Please click the answer that shows how much you agree with each statement*

	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	No Opinion
Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to be good at Japanese	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to live in Japan	○	○	○	○	○	○
Japanese language learning students have a disadvantage when learning Kanji	○	○	○	○	○	○
Japanese language learning students need different methods when compared with native Japanese students	○	○	○	○	○	○
The way I was taught Kanji in school would not work for someone learning Japanese as a second language	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. What do you think is the most difficult part of learning Kanji (for native Japanese speakers)?
Ex. "Memorizing is hard," "The different On-Yomi and Kun-Yomi are difficult to remember"

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11. What do you think is the most difficult part of learning Kanji (for Japanese language students)?

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12. Are there any tips you would give to a Japanese language student for learning Kanji?

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Questionnaire for the Japanese Language Teacher

2. Is Japanese your first language? *

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

3. How many years have you been a Japanese teacher? *

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4. What is your main method of teaching Kanji? *
Rote Memorization is learning through repetition while mnemonics is learning by breaking down the kanji (ex. 町 means town which can be inferred from 田 (rice paddy) and 丁 (street))

   □ Rote memorization

   □ Mnemonics

   □ Exposure (through books, movies, etc.)

   □ [   ]

      Other

5. How would you describe your experience learning Kanji? *

   □   Rote memorization

   □   Mnemonics

   □   Exposure (through books, movies, etc.)

   □

      Other

6. Please rank the different kanji teaching methods. *

Rote memorization
Mnemonics
Exposure
Combination of multiple methods
Other

7. Please click the answer that shows how much you agree with each statement*

	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	No Opinion
Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to be good at Japanese	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understanding Kanji is necessary if someone wants to live in Japan	○	○	○	○	○	○
Teaching Kanji is the job of a Japanese teacher	○	○	○	○	○	○
Learning Kanji should be a larger focus in	○	○	○	○	○	○

self-studying than in
the classroom

Teachers should give students the methods to learn Kanji then leave it to them if they want to self-study	○	○	○	○	○	○
Different students need different methods for learning Kanji	○	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of time given in a semester is not enough for all of the material Japanese teachers are expected to teach	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am satisfied with how Kanji is/was taught in my Japanese classes	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. What do you think is the hardest thing for students when learning kanji? *
Ex. "Memorizing is hard," "The different On-Yomi and Kun-Yomi are difficult to remember"

ALEXANDRA ELKINS

Through my past work in various fields and studying numerous different cultures, I hope to bring a new and creative perspective to the company I join.

Education

Master of International Affairs Aug 2020 – May 2021
The Pennsylvania State University | State College, PA
- Concentration: International Education
- Coursework Includes: International Cultures, International Economics, Econometrics, Comparative and International Education

Bachelor of Arts: Asian Studies Aug 2018 – May 2021
The Pennsylvania State University | State College, PA
- Minor in Korean, Japanese, & Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
- Coursework Includes: East Asian History, Korean Language, Japanese Language, Teaching English as a Second Language

South Korea Study Abroad June – Aug 2019
Yonsei International Summer School | Seoul, South Korea
- 7-week program
- Coursework on Korean history, language, and culture

Bachelor: General Studies Sep 2016 – June 2018
Eastern Washington University | Cheney, WA
- Transfer to the Pennsylvania State University August 2018
- Coursework Includes: Programming 101(Python), Japanese Language, Calculus I-IV

Experience

Creative Content Intern June 2020 – July 2020
Globaleur | Seoul, South Korea
- Collected information on locations all across Asia and categorized them according to who would be attracted to it
- Worked alongside other employees around the world to promote the website
- Translated information from Thai, Mandarin, and Korean

Global Programs Assistant Mar 2020 – July 2020
The Pennsylvania State University | State College, PA
- Worked in depth with InfoReady to create and archive funding opportunities
- Used Excel to plan events for incoming Fulbright faculty

Additional Activities

Student Advisory Board Member Jan 2019 – Present
Paterno Fellows | Penn State Liberal Arts Honors Program
- Planned meetings, events, and scholarships within the program
- Interviewed candidates for the new Paterno Fellows director

Social Media Chair May 2019 – May 2020
Korean International Club | Penn State University
- Recruited new members at events around campus
- Planned events every week that taught members about Korean culture
- Ran the Instagram, Facebook, and group chats

Skills	**Computer**: Word, PowerPoint, Excel, QuickBooks, Adobe Illustrator, Oxmetrics, social media (esp. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), Programming (Python), **Language**: English (Fluent), Korean (Lower Intermediate), Japanese (Basic Knowledge)

Honors and Awards	• Eastern Washington University Dean's List, Fall 2016 – Spring 2018 • Penn State Dean's List, Spring 2019 – Spring 2020 • Penn State Schreyer Honors College • Penn State Paterno Fellow • Outstanding Achievement in Korean Studies Fall 2019 – Spring 2020 • FLAS Fellowship Recipient, Spring 2019 • BTAA Korean Studies Summer Study Abroad Scholarship, Summer 2019 • Haskell Honors Scholarship, Fall 2018 – Spring 2019 • Penn State Provost Award, Fall 2018 – Spring 2021 • Mead High School Valedictorian • Honor's Society Member