

Reporting for this advertisement page by students of Kyoto University of Foreign Studies



This issue's editor
Yurina Yonemushi

DEEP in CHARACTER

exploring the kanji of Kyoto

Even though you may not be able to read or understand them, you have probably seen Japanese kanji characters somewhere in your lifetime. They are popular as artistic motifs in fashion, interiors and even tattoos in cultures all over the world. But how much do you really know about the culture, history and meaning of kanji?

Kanji are the elaborate characters that are used in written languages of Japan, China and other Asian countries. The number, shape and meaning of kanji vary from language to language, but for Japanese it is said that the total number exceeds 50,000, though only around 2,000 are used in daily communication.

It was about two millennia ago that kanji were brought from China to Japan. As Japanese adapted the pronunciation and meaning of Chinese characters to the Japanese language, an original kanji culture was born and continues to this day.

An extremely interesting feature of kanji, one not found in the English alphabet, is that each character carries meaning. Moreover, a single kanji character has multiple pronunciations. Most have two, - a Japanese *kun-yomi* reading and the original Chinese reading known as *on-yomi* -, though there are also kanji with more than 10 pronunciations.

Kyoto, which was the capital of Japan for over a thousand years, was a place where historical documents and scriptures entered Japan from China, and was also the place where full-fledged Japanese literature was born. That's why, here in Kyoto, there are several "kanji spots" that you can experience and learn about kanji culture. To know a little about kanji is to know a little more about the spirit of Japanese people. Why not experience the history and philosophy of Japan through the window of its written language?

Japan's one and only kanji museum

Kanji Museum | www.kanjimuseum.kyoto

Close to the famous Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto's historical Gion district, there is a museum devoted entirely to kanji. In this experience-based facility, visitors can learn all about the history and culture of Japan's written characters.



In this museum, there are some key features designed to appeal to kanji-literate visitors and novices alike. The huge picture stroll charts the history of kanji beginning from ancient China, while in another exhibition shows the Kanji of the Year, a single character which is announced at Kiyomizu-dera temple on December 12th every year to best represent the state and feeling of Japan over the past year. Another spectacle is the "fifty thousand-character tower," a indoor structure decorated all over with an incredible variety of kanji.



In addition, visitors can enjoy learning about the history usage, and structure of kanji through hands-on digital games, graphics and images. The Museum's explanatory texts are written in Japanese only, though foreign visitors can enjoy the Museum through audio guides in English, Chinese and Korean are available for rental at ¥500 per guide.

Through the experience here you will understand more about the unique features of kanji, and marvel at how much meaning and information can be communicated in a single character. While here in the kanji society of Japan, please take the time to experience and learn a little about the kanji that you see all around you. Who knows? You may not need a translated train map one day!



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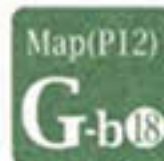
Yumi Nakai



Yui Sato



Yuka Ko



Try your hand at kanji

WAK JAPAN | wakjapan.jp

Wak Japan is a cultural center providing the opportunity for visitors to experience, in English, Japanese cultural forms such as calligraphy, flower arrangement and tea ceremony. The center is housed in a renovated townhouse known as a *machiya*, where visitors can learn about this culture in a traditional environment that features tatami floors, a *tsuboniwa* courtyard garden and folding screens. In the Shodo Experience, the center introduces visitors to calligraphy history, tools and a basic knowledge of kanji in quiz format, so that even kanji beginners can enjoy it.

Instructor Mineko Jinbo says, "I want to pass on my love of calligraphy through teaching its rhythms and variations to foreign visitors." After taking in the class, French student Thomas commented, "The explanations were easy to understand, and the class itself was a wonderful performance."



Once they have learnt about kanji and calligraphy, participants can write a kanji of their choice in ink to take home, so it might be a good idea to choose one beforehand. If you don't have a favorite, the instructor can help you find one. Even with only a passing interest in Japanese script, it's an hour well spent.



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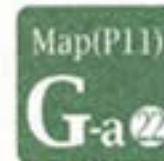
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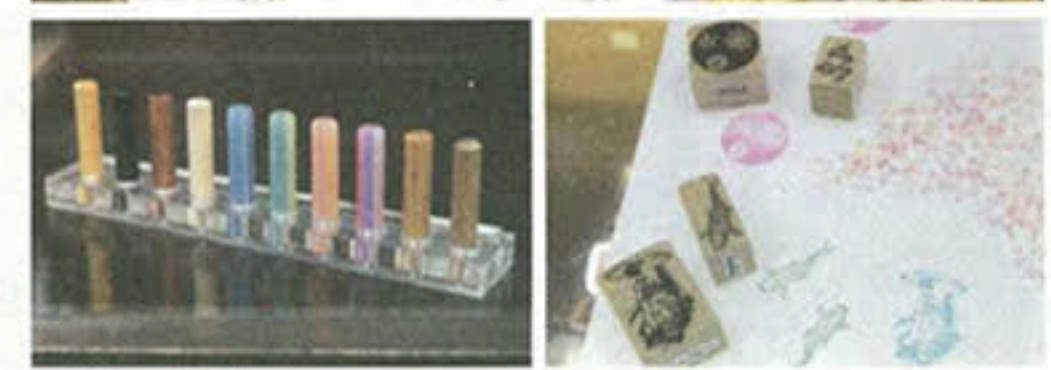
Stamp your name

Tamaru Inbou | tamaru-inbou.com

The *inkan* - a personal name stamp or seal - is a symbol of kanji culture. They are especially important to Japan, where each person uses one to approve documents instead of a signature. Tamaru Inbou is a popular *inkan* store where foreign people can make a seal to represent their name in kanji, regardless of the language. For example, the name Tom can be expressed in kanji as 都夢. This kanji is made up of two characters, the first, read as to, has the meaning of "city". The second kanji 夢, *mu* has the meaning of "dream." In this way, they make use of the meaning in each kanji and, people who are "given" a kanji name are happy to find out its meaning. In the case of many common names such as Tom and Maria, the store has many pre-made seals,



so why not browse the racks and see if your name is there? If not, tell the staff your name, and they'll choose a kanji for you and carve your seal in about thirty minutes. These seals make wonderful souvenirs for family and friends, or personal mementos of your time in Japan. It's also a good idea to buy a inkpad and *inkan* case to complete your set.



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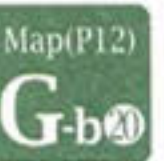
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