

**A GRAMMAR OF THE
JAPANESE WRITTEN
LANGUAGE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649040353

A Grammar of the Japanese Written Language by W. G. Aston

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Cover @ 2017

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BY
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THIRD EDITION, Revised and Corrected.

London:
LUZAC & CO.

Yokohama:
LANE, CRAWFORD & CO.

1904

Denison
Orientalist
2-1-39
37935

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A GRAMMAR OF THE JAPANESE SPOKEN LANGUAGE.

THE NIHONGI; or, Chronicles of Japan from the
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A HISTORY OF JAPANESE LITERATURE.

SHINTO. *In preparation.*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

IN its structure, the Japanese language possesses all the characteristics of the Turanian family. It is in the main an agglutinative language, that is to say, the roots of words suffer no change,* and the results which are obtained in European languages by inflection are arrived at in Japanese by the use of separate particles suffixed to the root. Like the other languages of this family, Japanese has no formative prefixes such as the German *GE*, or the reduplication of the perfect in Latin and Greek verbs. Its poverty in conjunctions and copious use of participles instead is another point of resemblance. The Japanese language is further an example of the rule common to all languages of this family, that every word which serves to define another word invariably precedes it. Thus the adjective precedes the noun, the adverb the verb, the genitive the word which governs it, the objective case the verb, and the word governed by a preposition the preposition.

The number of vocables common to Japanese with its kindred tongues is much smaller than might have been expected. The only language which contains any con-

* It may be a question whether the addition of the vowels *a*, *i*, *u* and *e* to the roots of verbs (see Chap. IV.) is agglutination or inflection. To the Japanese mind they are not distinct from the root, and a Japanese knows nothing of such forms as *mat* (wait), *tab* (eat). These vowels have no meaning in themselves. They only serve to modify the meaning of the root, and therefore the term inflection appears more appropriate. It has accordingly been used in this treatise to distinguish these changes from agglutination proper, or the addition of particles which have a distinct meaning of their own, and are recognized by those who use the language as separate from the root.

siderable proportion of words which are also found in Japanese is that spoken in the Loo-choo Islands. Loochooan is very closely related to Japanese, but Mr. B. H. Chamberlain's researches show clearly that its grammar differs so much that it cannot be regarded as a mere dialect.

The Korean language has also an affinity with Japanese. The number of common roots is apparently not considerable, but the resemblance in grammatical structure is very close.

The vocabulary of the Japanese language, as it appears in its oldest monuments, is, in so far as it is possible to judge, homogeneous. It contains only a very few of the Chinese vocables which are so plentiful in its later forms.

According to Japanese accounts, the study of Chinese was first introduced into Japan in the third century of the Christian era, when Chinese books and teachers were brought over from Korea;* but even if these accounts can be depended upon, the influence of these teachers was probably confined to the Court, and had little permanent effect. A succession of other teachers afterwards arrived from Korea, but it was not till the sixth century, when Buddhism was first introduced into Japan, that the study of Chinese became general. From this time it spread rapidly. The profane literature of China was also studied, and Chinese words began to find their way into the Japanese language. This process has gone on uninterruptedly up to the present day, and now

* The old Japanese histories inform us that a teacher of Chinese called *Ajiki* came over to Japan from Korea A.D. 284, for which the correct date is 404. In the following year a second, named *Wani*, was sent for. *Wani* is said to have brought with him the *Ron-go*, or Confucian Analects, and *Sen-ji-mon*, or thousand character classic, but there must be a mistake about the last-named work, as it was not written till more than two hundred years later. These two scholars were subsequently made instructors to the Imperial Prince. There is, however, evidence that Chinese books were brought to Japan in the preceding reign.

the Chinese words in the language far outnumber those of native origin.

The Chinese pronunciation first adopted by the Japanese was that of the province of *Go* (*Woo* or *U* in Chinese). This province contained Nankin, the capital of China under the eastern Tsin dynasty, which began A.D. 317, and it also contained the capital of the southern of the two empires into which China was divided during the dynasties which succeeded from A.D. 420 to A.D. 589. It was the *Go* pronunciation that the Buddhist priests used (and continue to use) in their litanies, and the greater number of the Chinese words which found their way into Japanese in the early period of Chinese learning have come down to us with the *Go* pronunciation. Most of the *kana* are Chinese characters pronounced according to the *Go-on*, or with slight modifications of it. The reason for choosing this dialect was no doubt simply because the province where it was spoken lies nearest to Japan, and was at that time the most flourishing part of the Chinese Empire. The intercourse between Japan and this part of China was considerable, and was not confined to matters of religion and learning only. Many Chinese customs and much of their civilization were adopted at the same time. To this day a draper's shop is called in Japan a *Go-fuku-ya*, or "Go-clothing-house," showing that what we are accustomed to consider the Japanese national costume was at first an imitation of the dress of *Go*. Japanese grammarians give as an additional reason for preferring the *Go* pronunciation, or *Go-on* as it is called, that it approached more closely to the sound of the Japanese language, and was therefore more easy of pronunciation. It is not to be supposed, however, that any Japanese, except perhaps a few scholars who visited China, ever acquired the true Chinese pronunciation. It is impossible to represent any Chinese dialect accurately by the

Japanese syllabary. English written in this way becomes almost unrecognizable, and the metamorphosis undergone by Chinese when subjected to the same process is much greater.

A second mode of pronouncing Chinese was introduced into Japan not long after the *Go-on*. This is what is known as the *Kan-on*. *Kan* (in Chinese *Han*) is the name of the celebrated dynasty which ruled in China during the period from B.C. 206 till A.D. 265. Under it flourished the greatest literary men that China has produced, and even at the present day the Chinese are proud to call themselves "sons of *Han*."

In a number of expressions *Kan* is used by the Japanese as equivalent to "Chinese." Thus, *Kan-seki* are Chinese books; *Kan-bun*, Chinese composition; *Kan-go*, a Chinese word; *Kan-gaku*, Chinese learning, &c. In the term *Kan-on* however, the word *Kan* has a narrower signification. The *Kan-on* was the dialect which continued to be spoken in the province of Honan which had contained the seat of the government of the Han dynasty. It was the most refined and cultivated language of China at this period, and occupied a position similar to that now held by the so-called Mandarin dialect. It was recognized as the standard pronunciation by the Chinese teachers from *Go*, although they spoke and taught their own dialect; and even the Buddhist divines, who did more than any other class of scholars to establish the *Go-on*, did not altogether neglect the study of the *Kan-on*. The *Go-on* had become widely adopted before much attention was paid to the *Kan-on*. The latter was, however, recognized as the standard, and succeeded gradually in establishing itself as the more usual pronunciation of Chinese words. It is now, except in rare cases, the only one given in Japanese dictionaries of the Chinese character, but a multitude of words is still pronounced according to the *Go-on*. The *Kan-on* often coincides with the *Go-on*, but it is as frequently widely