

Calligraphy for Japanese Official Documents

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Figure 1. Portuguese viceregal charter. (Myoh'hoh'in temple archives.)



Figure 2. Edict expelling Portuguese missionaries. (Matsumura Museum.)

A 16th century Portuguese viceregal charter lies in the archives of Myoh'hoh'in. When placed next to the edict expelling all missionaries from Japan (reposited in the Matsu'ura Shiryoh Haku'butsu'kan), striking differences between these two documents are immediately evident. While the Portuguese document is dominated by an illuminated border which extends around the top and sides of the document, the Japanese document is bereft of any ornamentation. This difference between Japanese and European documents is well known, but there are other striking differences as well.

Western documents are in general rather discursive. This stems in part from the syntax requirements of Indo-European languages, but also derives in part from a deeper aesthetic. In contrast, Japanese official documents are rather telegraphic. This telegraphic approach to official writing may reflect not only the warrior mentality, but also the lingering effects of *kan'bun'kun'doku* (reading classical Chinese texts as classical Japanese texts). Regardless, a Japanese official document usually has a one or two word title possibly followed by a short introduction, but the bulk of a medieval edict consisted of a list of items. Preludes and introductions were frequently omitted and edicts simply began with the list of specifications. This is in stark contrast with the common practice in the Laurel Kingdoms of incorporating a rather lengthy expository section at the beginning of documents.

As noted, Japanese documents typically consist of a list of items. These items are distinguished by beginning a new column and each item begins with the word "ITEM". This corresponds to the word "ICHI" (literally "one") or "hitotsu" (also literally "one") found in the original Japanese manuscripts. Subsections are sometimes found within a single section. In historic documents, these subsections are consecutively numbered beginning with "one" and progressing upward. However, subsections do not begin their own column, but are embedded in the main text of the item to which they belong. A document concludes with attestations of authenticity.

Although a Japanese document consists entirely of text, it is not a solid mass of characters. As with other Japanese graphic art forms, there is an extensive use of blank space to organize the document and to lend understand and beauty to it. The title sits by itself on the far right of the page and is typically written both larger and darker than the rest of the text. While the title sits at the far right it is not written at the top of the page, but somewhat below the top and never higher than the text of the individual items.

The name of the recipient followed by the honorific 殿 *dono* is recorded on the document. While 様 *sama* can be found as a title in at least one 15th century document, it appears to have been applied to a commoner who did not have a true family name. In contrast, *dono* can be found in extensive use as early as the Kama'kura period. Further, *dono* is structurally related holding office or authority while *sama* simply means form or shape and merely substitutes for the person's name or decorates it. As Japanese does not conjugate gender, *dono* is appropriate for both genders. Although *dono* means lord and is strongly related to status, it is not generally used to form office names, rather it is appears to be a true honourific. Minamoto no Yoritomo was referred to as 鎌倉司 *Kamakura no tsukas* or "governor of Kamakura" in early Kamakura *baku'fu* documents.

Classical and medieval Japanese differ from modern Japanese in many other ways. While it is rather difficult to write in correct classical or medieval Japanese, it is possible to incorporate elements of these. One element which can be easily adopted is pronouns commonly found in pre-modern Japanese. Another is pre-modern existential verbs. Finally, the pre-modern forms of endings can be employed.

There is considerable variation in where the name of the recipient or object of the document is written. It is sometimes found at the beginning between the title and the text. It can also be found at the end of the text before the attestation as in a Japanese letter. If the name of the recipient appears at the beginning of a document, then the name is subordinate to the title and begins a new line. And, at the end, is superior to the closing declaration and begins a new line. Thus, it is possible to construct an official Japanese document which roughly parallels the signet standards of the East Kingdom. The overall structure for East Kingdom "scrolls" is:

- 1) the title of the document.
- 2) the name and title of the recipient.
- 3) a brief introduction. (Not normative in historical examples.)
- 4) a list of items.
- 5) an order promulgating the edict.
- 6) attestation of authenticity.

The Award of Arms is the most frequent occasion for producing a scroll in the Laurel Kingdoms and is therefore of particular interest. While medieval Japan did not have an institution which exactly duplicates the award of arms, there was a significant class distinction between the *kuge* (noble class), the *buke* (warrior class) and lower classes. In Japan, a member of the *buke* class had a number of prerogatives. Thus, it is appropriate to list each of these as an item to be conferred.

First, due to the nature of the Japanese feudal system, it is necessary to award a court appointment. This locates the armigeur in the imperial hierarchy and allows him to enter the court. The Japanese imperial government was divided into three departments each of which has a distinctive title for its chief minister:

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1) Sa'dai'jin | Minister of the Left | Arts and Sciences |
| 2) U'dai'jin | Minister of the Right | Military Affairs |
| 3) Nai'dai'jin | Minister of the Middle | Administration |

While all three ministries were directly subordinate to the Tai'sei Dai'jin, they were not equal. The *sa'dai'jin* was actually the highest in precedence and the *nai'dai'jin* the lowest. Subordinate to the three ministers were officers of various ranks. While there

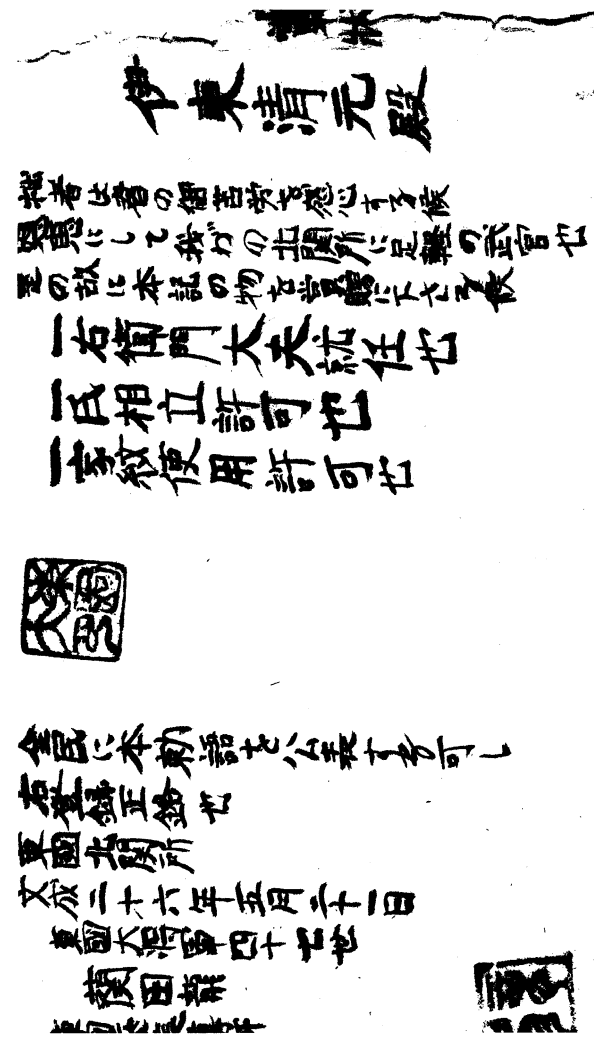


Figure 9. A example of an Award of Arms work sheet.

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Illustrations

The illustrations appearing in this note are based upon illustrations found in the works cited in the bibliography. Specifically, figures 1 and 2 are derived from *Hashiba Hideyoshi*, figure 3 is derived from *Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan*, figure 4 is derived from *Seki'ga'hara no Arasoi*, figure 5 is from *Sengoku Kanto San Koku Shi*, figure 6 is derived from *Kana*, figure number 7 is derived from *Shinsen Gotai Jikan*, figure 8 is derived from *Sengoku Kanto San Koku Shi*, figure 8 is derived from *Santai Senjimon* and figure 9 is a practice piece by the author.

About the Author

Lady Solveig Thronardottir, CoM is a tenth century Norse woman who somehow got lost and found her way to Japan. Barbara Nostrand has a Ph.D. in Mathematics and may some day earn an M.A. in Japanese Language and Literature.

exists a regular system of titles for the ministries of the left and right, the title system for the middle does not directly parallel the other two. Further, it is not appropriate to adopt the system of titles used by provincial governors. Rather, titles used by officers in the *Chuu'mu'shoh* (middle department) appear to be appropriate. Thus, the first ITEM in a Japanese award of arms is actually an appointment to an office. These offices are actually taken from the ranks of the palace guards and not the ranks of the imperial ministries or the imperial territorial government. Not only were these ranks frequently granted to members of the *buke* class, the *baku'fu* and later the military clans themselves assumed the prerogative of granting them. The following titles (or more correctly appointments to office) are recommended:

1) Sa'e'mon'ta'yuu	(Arts and Sciences Deputy of the Fifth Rank.)
2) U'e'mon'ta'yuu	(Military Affairs Deputy of the Fifth Rank.)
3) Dai'shu'rin	(Low ranking Administrative Deputy.)

Since antiquity, the Japanese government has enforced universal family registration in *koseki* which record the members of each family. However, the majority of Japanese did not possess a *myou'ji* (family name) or *na'nori* (official personal name). Rather, they were known by *zoku'myou* (common names) which are linguistically distinct from the more exalted *na'nori*. Following the Meiji restoration, all Japanese were granted *myo'ji go'men* which allowed them to use both *myou'ji* and *na'nori*. Thus, the second ITEM in a Japanese award of arms is granting *myou'ji go'men*. The third and final ITEM in a Japanese award of arms grants permission to the armigeur to use a *ka'mon* (also called a *mon'shou* or *mon'dokoro*). These are household marks which appear on buildings, clothing and other items. During the middle ages, Japanese filial identification was primarily based upon common residence.

The emblazon of the armigeurs device appears between the list of items and the proclamation order. The emblazon is centred in this space and above it is placed the *jitsu'in* (great seal) of the kingdom. The great seal can be placed in either of two places. 1) It can be placed with the top of the seal level with the top of the text. 2) it can be centred across the top of the document so that only one half of the seal appears on the document itself. This latter practice corresponds to the European practice of indenture. The upper half of the seal appears on a corresponding record of the official act. Thus, any document can be authenticated by comparing the document with the official record.



Figure 3. Seal of the chin'ju'fu.

The great seal of the kingdom and the individual *in'kan* used by the royalty are *deko* (positive printing seals) rather than *boko* (negative printing seals) as this corresponds to normative practice. Seals were developed as a substitute for *ka'o* which are ornamental signatures used to authenticate documents during the Hei'an period. Official Japanese seals usually bear characters written in *setsu'bun* style. This style is one of the oldest and most pictographic styles for *kan'ji* (Chinese characters) and were originally designed for being carved into stone. These seals can be simply produced by carving them into the end grain of 1×1

inch wooden blocks. Seal impressions are made with thick red ink which is manufactured in China.

The promulgation decree following the seal of state is a simply worded order to proclaim the act to all mankind. (This is put into effect by the court herald reading the scroll and publication in the official kingdom register.) The remainder of the document

consists of the statement that all that has been written is authentic followed by the place



Figure 4. A document authenticated by hand impressions. This method was often used by monks. (Collection of Tokai Bank)



Figure 5. Ka'o of Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

twelfth.

The authenticating signatures and seals complete the document. The first signature and seal is that of the monarch by right of arms. His title is given as the nth Shoh'gun of the nation. The title 征夷大將軍 *sei'i'tai'shoh'gun* was chosen because it corresponds well to the way in which monarchs are elected in the Laurel Kingdoms and their role as war leaders. Also, the Japanese word which is usually translated as "king" was actually a title attached to the names of cadet members of the imperial family and a variety of Chinese gods. Thus, not only is it not the title of a true sovereign, but it is strongly connected with the emperor cult. Since Japanese feudal society did not have queens as we know them, the title *shikken* (regent) is used. This is based upon the Hojo regency during the Kama'kura period. The Hojo regents held power through hereditary ownership of two important ministerial positions within the *baku'fu*.

Following the king and queen, the principal herald signs an award of arms scroll to authenticate that the arms on the scroll have been registered with the College of Arms. *Shitsu'ji* was chosen as the Japanese title for the principal herald because this was the title used by a protocol officer in the Ashikaga Baku'fu.

Japanese documents were authenticated by a number of means. A golden seal produced in China was introduced to Japan during the clan dominated period of pre-imperial Japanese society. This seal was probably a token of recognition by the Chinese court. For several centuries during the early imperial period, the Japanese court continued to seek recognition by the Chinese court. Regardless of how seals came into use, they eventually came to pervade Japanese society. Seal impressions were most often made with thick red Chinese ink. Whether this choice of colour reflected signing documents in

and time where the act was proclaimed and the signatures and seals of the king, queen and principal herald. While it is generally possible to translate place names into Japanese, often it is only possible to transliterate the primary personal names of the monarchs and principal herald. However, with some ingenuity it is often possible to construct a transliteration of one of their names which will make sense in Japanese.

Japanese dates are not based upon a fixed calendar. Instead, Japan uses a system of era names. The Japanese have also recorded dates in terms of individual reigns, since the mythological establishment of the imperial family and the Chinese sixty year calendar. Of these, the most appropriate is the era name system. Further, Japanese numbers months and does not give them names. Thus, the era name *bun'sei* (making a culture) proceeds the Anno Societatis year number and is followed by the month where May is the first month of the year and April the

Since classical Chinese was written in regular grids, official Japanese should emulate this pattern. Deviations from this pattern occur in order to accommodate changes in letter size for an individual line. The easiest way to produce regular vertically aligned characters is to construct a writing guide and lay it across the manuscript directly to the left of the work area. In this case it is important to allow enough space so that the characters will not run onto or under the writing guide. Regardless, you should be careful to use compatible styles of *kan'ji* for your document and to harmonize the styles which you have selected within it. For example, ancient letter forms were used for seals regardless of the type of *kan'ji* used for the text. Consequently, while you should feel free to use old style *kan'ji* to seal your more recent documents, reversing this usage would be a bit odd.

Learning to write Japanese and to produce Japanese official documents is necessarily a rather long undertaking. The discipline exercised in learning to write beautifully builds strength of character and is believed to be a path for realizing the Buddha nature. As writing employs both physical and spiritual strength as well as courage, it is a fitting exercise for warriors. Regardless, I hope that this short article can aid appreciation of Japanese documentary forms and Japanese calligraphic arts. Further, I hope that others will take brush in hand and begin to learn Japanese calligraphy.

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writing the assigned text. No amount of explanation or study of stroke diagrams will make you into a calligrapher. Rather, you must extend your own spirit into the brush and let it write upon the paper. Without that spirit, you will hold your brush at an odd angle, let it flop about or attempt to write with your wrist or fingers. Your arm should simply lie flat. It should simply be suspended in air above the paper and act as an extension of your heart while writing.

Regardless, there are techniques for forming each of the individual strokes. These techniques are quite natural to the stroke and are intended to arrange the tip of the brush. Aside from arranging the tip of the brush, another secret of Japanese calligraphy is controlling the ink at the tip of the brush. Your ink should never be too dry or too wet. If it is too wet, then you will leave blobs on your paper. If it is too watery, then the water will separate out of the ink, and flow into the paper to form a gray smudge. If the brush is too dry, then the bristles will separate and your writing will have streaks of white in it. Regardless, before beginning to write a single character, load your brush thoroughly with ink. The ink should come about half way up the bristles, but not up to the bamboo shaft that holds the bristles.

Now that I have warned you thoroughly, we will study the *kan'ji* EN which means "long". This *kan'ji* character has been used for teaching calligraphy for over 1800 years. Diagrams similar to the one below have been printed and discussed countless times. This letter is chosen for two reasons. The first is that it is a felicitous letter suggesting long life. When Japanese practice calligraphy, they typically write Zen Buddhist saying of the length desired. The other reason for picking this letter is the diversity of basic stroke types contained within it. Most of the basic techniques used in writing *kan'ji* are employed to write this single letter.

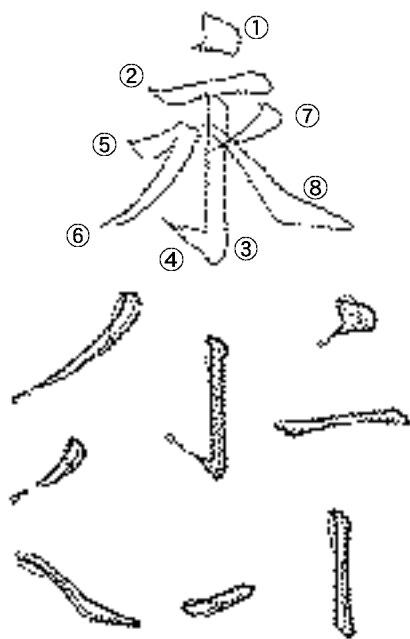


Figure 8. Exploded view of the strokes used to draw the *kan'ji* character EN. Each of the strokes is named. ① soku, ② roku, ③ do, ④ teki, ⑤ saku, ⑥ ryoh ⑦ taku, and ⑧ taku. (While taking the same pronunciation, the two 'taku' are written with different *kan'ji* and have different meanings.) Soku is composed of three fine strokes with sharp curves. Roku is drawn from left to right with even weight. Do is drawn vertically without and curves or bends. Be careful to turn smartly to left to draw the teki final before beginning to lift the brush. The teki final is produced by lifting the brush while pulling to the left. Sake is drawn from left to right. Be careful not to touch the vertical do stroke. When drawing the ryoh stroke, be careful to maintain the same strength that you used to draw the preceding saku stroke. The upper taku is drawn diagonally from right to left pulling the brush upward at the end. Lower the brush slightly while pulling to the right at an angle when drawing the final taku stroke.

blood can not be known. Red is a rather auspicious colour in Japanese society and is produced by a relatively easy to produce pigment. These seals took a number of forms. Official seals of offices and other governmental entities often identified themselves as "seals" just as Western European seals did. Personal seals, however, most often simply represented one or more of the names of their owners. Members of the tea cult often circumscribed their seal impression with an image of a tea kettle and there are also examples of personal seals surmounted by horses or other icons. Finally, the monarch has recourse to affixing his *ka'o* or "flower impression". *Ka'o* are highly stylized signatures which resemble a squashed flower.

Before actually attempting to produce a Japanese scroll it is necessary to acquire the appropriate equipment and to practice the text. Writing brushes (*fude*) are made in a wide variety of widths.

#1 - #3	15.0 mm - 13.0 mm	<i>Han'shi</i> (Hanging Scrolls)
#3 - #6	13.0 mm - 8.5 mm	<i>Shiki'shi</i> (For <i>Hai'ga</i>)
#6 - #8	8.5 mm - 6.7 mm	<i>Tan'zaku</i> (Narrow Poetry Samples)
#8 - #10	6.7 mm - 5.5 mm	Very Fine Writing

Brushes also come with their bristles cut to a variety of shapes from very stubby to very long. In general, for writing official documents, it is best to use a #6 brush with medium length (approximately 33.5 mm) or slightly shorter bristles. Ink is prepared by rubbing an ink stick (*sumi*) on a *suzuri* (ink stone) which has a small amount of water in it. After being washed, brushes should be stored rolled up in a *tsudare* which is a bamboo mat. The scribe should also equip himself with a *bun'chin* (paper weight) to hold down the top of the manuscript paper and a *shita'jiki* (piece of felt placed under the paper to absorb the ink).

Ideally Japanese documents should be produced on handmade Japanese rice paper. The commercially available paper which best approximates that used in Japan for *men'joh* (artistic licenses) is called *hosho* in North America. This paper comes in roughly formed sheets which must be cut to size before use. The resulting sheet is approximately 8 inches tall and 19 inches wide. *Kuro'tani* number five paper (a hand laid paper which includes the inner bark of the mulberry tree) is a close visual approximation to paper used for documentary purposes during the late Muro'machi period. It comes in sheets which can be cut into thirds prior to use. All Japanese calligraphy paper has both a smooth *omote* (front) side and a rougher *ura* (back) side. Unless the paper is manufactured by machine and the *omote* side is very hard, the relatively smooth front side of the paper should be written upon and not the back.

There are only two secrets to Japanese calligraphy. First, the density of the ink must be controlled. It must not be too moist in which case it will bleed into the paper. Neither may it be too dry in which case the bristles of the brush will separate and brush strokes will not be solid. The second secret is to learn to control the tip of the brush. The brush is held midway up its barrel with the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand. All strokes are performed by moving the arm with the brush held vertically.

While the earliest Japanese documents were written in Chinese, later documents were written in Japanese using a mixture of *kan'ji* (Chinese characters) and one of the two *ka'na* (syllabic) alphabets. While either of these two alphabets were used for Japanese official documents, *hira'ga'na* is generally both easier to read and more pleasing in appearance. The internal structure of Chinese characters developed over time, and generally evolved from complicated pictographs suitable for engraving into simplified compound

ideograms suitable for writing with a brush. Thus, prior to writing a document, the scribe should research each of the letters to find an appropriate form. The *kan'ji* reform following the Pacific War makes this a particularly important step in attempting to produce a period document.

Chinese characters evolved from pictographic and ideographic figures carved originally carved in stone or upon other similar surfaces. During this period, books were made of slips of bamboo or wood fastened together with string. The text was incised upon the individual bamboo strips. Later, paper technology was developed and the Chinese began to write with brushes. This caused the form of the characters to evolve. Regardless, the early character forms continue to be used for *jitsu'in* and other similar purposes. Later letter forms were adapted for the brush, and the various strokes find their form by controlling the tip of the brush. It is especially important to draw the tip together at the beginning of each stroke and to draw each stroke resolutely. In this way, the strokes will appear strong and even.

Originally, the Japanese court wrote all of its documents in Classical Chinese. Later, while continuing to write in Classical Chinese, the court began to read the *kan'ji* in which the documents were written as if they were Japanese words simply substituting the appropriate Japanese word for the Chinese word. Thus, *kan'bun'kun'doku* was developed. As an aid to the reader, scribes began to write familiar Chinese words with the appropriate sounds next to the *kan'ji* which actually carried the meaning. These extra letters were called *ka'na* do indicate their character as being an expedient for remembering the "names" or sounds of the letters. These aids to pronunciation were eventually to become what we now call *kata'kana*. At about the same time, women began to keep informal personal



Figure 6. Both of the phonetic writings systems were developed from *kan'ji* characters. *Kata'kana* was originally used for writing phonetic readings next to *kan'ji*. *Hira'gana* was originally developed as an everyday writing system. *Kata'kana* is generally attributed to men, and *hira'gana* is generally attributed to women. Both *hira'gana* and *kata'kana* can be found in medieval documents.

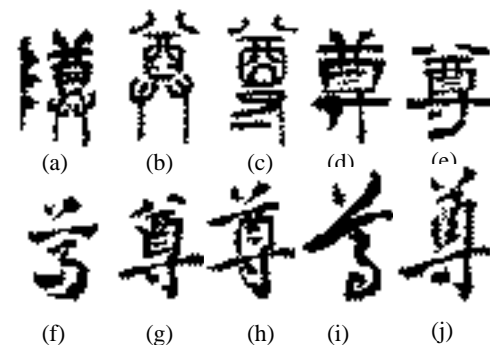


Figure 7. The historical evolution of a single *kan'ji* character: (a) *ko'bun*, (b) *dai'ten*, (c) *sho'ten*, (d) *ko'rei*, (e) *hachibun*, (f) *shoh'shoh*, (g) *kon'rei* (classic script), (h) *gyoh'sho* (moving script), (i) *soh'sho* (grass script), and (j) *ha'tai*. There are two distinct kinds of difference between the *kan'ji* shown above. First is due to the changing form of the underlying character itself. This is expressed in the ideal character. There is also a stylistic difference equivalent to the difference between printing and cursive writing. This is the progression from *rei'sho* through *gyoh'sho* to *soh'sho*,

of the different kinds of brush stroke.

Individual Japanese characters are written from left to right and from top to bottom. Because of this and the loose nature of the bristles of your brush, it is even more difficult to write Japanese and Chinese left handed than it is to write Western alphabets left handed. For this reason, Japanese calligraphy teachers forbid their students to right left handed. Regardless, the strokes may either be distinct or connected depending on the style in which the character is written. Generally, a more disconnected style produces a more formal letter. For many strokes, the bristles of the brush are gathered together at the beginning by inscribing a small hook with the tip of the brush or by placing the tip and then drawing to the side. Strokes terminate in three basic ways. To produce a blunt end, the tip is drawn slightly to either the left or top and the across slightly in the opposite direction. Some strokes terminate in a tapered line which is produced by softly lifting the brush at the end of the stroke. Finally, hooks are commonly produced by drawing the brush to the side at the end of a stroke. Regardless, all strokes are produced slowly and deliberately.

How can you learn the individual strokes and how to write them together in combinations? Ultimately, the answer is practice. In Japan, your *sen'sei* would simply demonstrate writing the characters and then you would attempt to emulate him. Occasionally, he would step behind you and seizing your arm write through you on the paper before you. This always amazed me whenever my own *sen'sei* did this. I would be struggling to write the text assigned to the class, but with *sen'sei* holding my arm, the text would simply flow onto the paper. What he was doing was showing me how it feels to be

diaries borrowing more familiar *kan'ji* to write the sounds of ordinary Classical Japanese. While *kata'kana* preserved the upright appearance of official documents, these personal diaries adopted a more fluid artistic script. Thus, the original *kan'ji* were gradually simplified and became what we now call *hira'gana*.

Finally, let us turn the matter of writing! Each day before beginning to write, the student of calligraphy should practice his basic brush strokes and re-acquaint his body with drawing them evenly. This can be achieved by drawing spirals either moving inward or outward. Be careful to keep the line thickness and line spacing even. The student should also practice drawing grids by first drawing many horizontal lines and then many vertical lines, or perhaps in the opposite order. As with the spirals, observe line width and spacing. After this, practice drawing *kan'ji* that you will need that day paying special attention to each