Writing in Japan was imported from China. The Japanese started to write when they imported from the continent Chinese culture, considered superior and which included among other items, Buddhism and written texts. Therefore, the Japanese learned the existence of writing and its function only around the fifth or sixth century AD when intensive exchanges across the channel that divides China from Japan started.

In the beginning, the Japanese introduced written texts to their own country, most of which were Confucian or Buddhist in content. They tried to understand them asking the help of Korean or Chinese immigrants who worked as teachers and translators. In this way, they discovered the function and advantages of writing and they, subsequently, started to write. The Japanese originally imitated Chinese texts and wrote in Chinese, but little by little they started to use Chinese characters—called kanji 漢字—also to represent their autochthonous language, that is Japanese, often producing a hybrid language, not completely Chinese, nor completely Japanese. We have many texts dating to around the seventh and eighth centuries AD where kanji are employed to write Chinese, or Japanese, or even such a hybrid language. It was difficult to write an agglutinative language as Japanese with suffixes, inflections and functional words by means of characters born in an isolating linguistic environment. Many different strategies were devised for that purpose before reaching the logophonographic writing system that is used up to the present day. At the beginning of the tenth century, the two parallel and complete phonetic syllabaries called hiragana and katakana that had been devised from kanji, started to be used largely in prose and poetry. They were used both to write the entire pure Japanese autochthonous language and to represent the functional parts of a more sinicized language. In that period, the Japanese used to write using different styles called buntai文体, which ranged from pure Japanese to pure Chinese, including also mixed strategies which can be called sino-japanese, and they were widespread. In principle, pure Japanese was written entirely (or mostly) phonographically with kana (generally hiragana), while pure Chinese was written only in kanji. The hybrid
forms of the written language used both kinds of characters, normally entrusting the semantic part to *kanji* and the functional parts to *kana*, which, being phonographic, could better express inflections and particles. Therefore, from around the tenth century onwards, we have texts written entirely in *kanji*, others written entirely in *hiragana*, or with a mixed form of writing that is *kanji* and *kana* called *kanji kana majiri* or *kanji* mixed with *kana*, that is the forerunner of the present day form of writing the Japanese language. In this way, *kana* greatly helped to make the writing of Japanese easier and more widespread.

It is clear that Japanese writing from the beginning up to this day has always maintained a strong influence of Chinese writing and language. It is then interesting to investigate the symmetries and asymmetries that developed between the Chinese writing system and the Japanese one, which derived from the former. In fact, this is one of the few cases in which a so-called "logographic writing" (Chinese) developed into a mixed logophonographic one, maintaining many logographic traits, but integrating it with the necessary phonographic elements. The whole history of Japanese writing is closely connected to Chinese characters and also to the Chinese language, in a sort of unavoidable fate that accompanied its birth and development.

In principle, the adaptation of Chinese characters in Japan used the following strategies, notwithstanding certain exceptions:

1. Chinese character/words imported as such and read with sino-japanese pronunciation, called *on* (音). In this case, the use of characters is logographic. Same character and same meaning as Chinese, and approximate Chinese reading.
2. Chinese character/words were given Japanese values, that is, the Japanese translated the Chinese character/words into their own language (this is called the *wakun* 和訓 strategy). In this case also, the use of characters is logographic. Same character and same meaning as Chinese, but use of a Japanese word, called *kun* (訓).
3. Chinese characters used only for their phonetic value to represent syllables of the Japanese language. In this case, the use of characters is phonographic. This case is doublefold: the reading of the character could be derived from the sino-japanese or the autochthonous reading,

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1 Generally speaking, the sino-japanese pronunciation is the adaptation of the Chinese reading of characters to the Japanese phonological system (which was much simpler and regular compared to the Chinese one). It is an approximate Chinese reading.