Remembering the Kanji 2: A Systematic Guide to Reading Japanese Characters

By James W. Heisig

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Following the first volume of *Remembering the Kanji,* the present work provides students with helpful tools for learning the pronunciation of the kanji. Behind the notorious inconsistencies in the way the Japanese language has come to pronounce the characters it received from China lie several coherent patterns. Identifying these patterns and arranging them in logical order can reduce dramatically the amount of time spent in the brute memorization of sounds unrelated to written forms.

Many of the "primitive elements," or building blocks, used in the drawing of the characters also serve to indicate the "Chinese reading" that particular kanji use, chiefly in compound terms. By learning one of the kanji that uses such a "signal primitive," one can learn the entire group at the same time. In this way, *Remembering the Kanji 2* lays out the varieties of phonetic pattern and offers helpful hints for learning readings, that might otherwise appear completely random, in an efficient and rational way. Individual frames cross-reference the kanji to alternate readings and to the frame in volume 1 in which the meaning and writing of the kanji was first introduced.

A parallel system of pronouncing the kanji, their "Japanese readings," uses native Japanese words assigned to particular Chinese characters. Although these are more easily learned because of the association of the meaning to a single word, the author creates a kind of phonetic alphabet of single syllable words, each connected to a simple Japanese word, and shows how they can be combined to help memorize particularly troublesome vocabulary.

The 4th edition has been updated to include the 196 new kanji approved by the government in 2010 as "general-use" kanji.

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About the Author
James W. Heisig is a permanent research fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya, Japan.

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