

CHAPTER

3

The Japanese Language

On first sight the Japanese writing system is rather messy. Technically it consists mainly of three different scripts:

礼

漢字, a logographic script of Chinese characters

れ

平仮名, a syllabary based on cursive style simplifications of 漢字

レ

片仮名, a syllabary based on stylized simplifications of 漢字

Note that the syllabaries, 平仮名 and 片仮名, although based on Chinese characters, were developed in Japan and are used only in Japanese (and very closely related languages like Okinawan).

Apart from these,

R

ローマ字, letters from the Latin alphabet, literally “Roman letters”

9

アラビア数字, Arabic numerals

禮

non-standard (traditional) Chinese characters

also find their way into Japanese writing.

It should be noted, though, that every word is assigned a “reading” in 平仮名 (or 片仮名) and is written above or besides unfamiliar words or characters. These are then called “sprinkled” 仮名, and occur often in children’s newspapers and other educational

► In order to get off on the right foot with the Japanese language, you should really learn the 平仮名 script first, which clears my conscience of teaching you pseudo-Japanese, written using the Latin alphabet and really setting you up for a bad time. All you will need to know (and more) is provided in Appendix 1. And while you’re at it, have a look over the 片仮名 script as well, ◀

	カン
<p>かんじ 漢字 Chinese character かんじだい 漢時代 Han dynasty</p>	

	ジ	あざ あざな ～な
<p>じ character ローマ字 letter of the alphabet すうじ 数字 numeral</p>		