

Japanese romanization policy

The Japanese government has adopted (either *de facto* or *de jure*) various romanization systems at various times:

Hepburn-shiki (1867, 1886, 1908, 1945, 1974)

Nihon-shiki (1885)

Kunrei-shiki (1937, 1954, 1974)

The Kunrei-shiki and Nihon-shiki systems have become international standards:

ISO 3602:1989(en) — Romanization of Japanese (kana script)

ISO 3602 strict

However, a “modified Hepburn” system used by some Japanese publishers is a *de facto* standard of the US (adopted by the Library of Congress in 1989; cf. 1954 Kenkyusha New Japanese-English Dictionary) and other English-speaking countries.

In Japan, we can see romanization inconsistency from sign to sign, e.g.:

北青木

✓ キタオオギ

✓ キタオウギ

✓ Kita Ogi

✓ Kita Ohgi

✓ Kita Oogi

✓ Kita Ōgi

✓ Kita Ougi

? Kita Ôgi [✓ Ôgi]

? Kita Ougi [✓ Ougi]

Also, there is romanization inconsistency even within the same sign. Here, “KOKUHU” and “GEMBUDŌ” are written according to different policies.



We also see vocabulary and grammar variation on signs:

禁煙

[kin'en]

喫煙禁止

[kitsuen kinshi]

煙禁

[kemuri kin]

喫煙してはいけない

[kitsuen shite wa ikenai]

たばこを吸ってはいけません

[tabako wo sutte wa ikemasen]

煙草は禁止されています

[tabako wa kinshi sarete imasu]

lingua academica policy

Under current MEXT policy, there are only two types of language classes that can be taught in the Japanese public school curriculum:

国語

外国語

The words 国語 and 外国語 are a kind of MEXT code that means:

Japanese 日本語

English 英語

In other words, 外国語 does not really mean “foreign language(s)”.

It is practically impossible to teach any languages other than Japanese and English in grades 1 to 9 of a Japanese school.

Even in a Japanese high school, it is extremely difficult to teach any foreign language other than English.

This tends to “imprison” Japanese in Japan by making it more difficult for them to travel and interact with other people as global citizens.

What kind of policy should Japan have for teaching languages in schools?

immigrants: little language support; discrimination

農村花嫁 *nōson hanayome* “farming brides” and other new immigrants, e.g., nurses and healthcare worker, especially since 2013 (cf. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/23/japan-immigration-policy-xenophobia-migration/>)

governmental support programs for children of non-Japanese speakers:

- ◆ supplemental Japanese language classes
- ◆ instructional support in the children’s mother tongue

A multimedia learning site with translations into Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, English, Vietnamese and Cambodian has been sponsored by MEXT to help children learn not only the Japanese language, but also common rules and conventions in primary schools (cf. *Nihongo shidō kyōzai kenkyūkai*).

浜松宣言 *Hamamatsu sengen* “The Hamamatsu Declaration” called for the “coexistence” of Japanese and foreign residents, and outlines the problems related to the education of immigrant children and social welfare for immigrants.

多文化共生社会づくり推進共同宣言 *Tabunka kyōsei shakai zukuri suishin kyōdō sengen* “The Common Declaration for the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence and Society Building”, adopted by Aichi Prefecture, Gifu Prefecture, Mie Prefecture, and Nagoya City, called for mutual understanding and respect of Japanese and foreign residents, for active involvement of foreign residents in local life, for building a society of coexistence through the cooperation of residents, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and local governments.

日本語教育小委員会 *Nihongo kyōiku shōiinkai* “the Japanese Language Education Subcommittee” (2007) established at the Agency for Cultural Affairs, highlighted the need for Japanese language competence for long-term foreign residents.

初等中等教育における外国人児童生徒教育の充実のための検討会 *Shotō chūtō kyōiku ni okeru gaikokujin jidō seito kyōiku no jūjitsu no tame no kentōkai* “the Commission for the Enhancement of Primary Education for Pupils of Foreign Nationality” (2008), of the Ministry of Education, includes guidelines for the education of teachers of Japanese as a second language and teacher-counsellors, including the description of courses on Japanese language education and education for international understanding to be taken by university students in teacher training courses.

At the local level, diverse efforts are being carried out by volunteer organizations:

- ◆ Japanese language teaching support;
- ◆ livelihood support, learning support, career counseling;
- ◆ support in immigrants’ mother tongue;
- ◆ support for the creation of local networks of foreign residents;
- ◆ building of mutual understanding between the majority (Japanese residents) and the minority (foreign residents).

Language teaching offered in official government programs is not sufficient, since it only reaches pupils regularly enrolled in schools, and is therefore being supplemented with learning activities organized by volunteer organizations.

some other culture policy issues

Kobe's public statuary is well known (cf. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g298562-Activities-c47-t26-Kobe_Hyogo_Prefecture_Kinki.html).

How much money should Kobe spend on buying and maintaining public artwork?
Who should decide which statues to erect and which statues to remove?

Gagaku 雅楽 is not the most popular kind of music in Japan. Should the government spend money to maintain this type of music? If so, how much should the government spend? Should government support be spent on:

- live public concerts?
 - TV concerts?
 - scholarships for music students studying gagaku?
 - a music school dedicated to gagaku?
 - something else?
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The Japanese Self-Defense Forces are well trained and well funded. How should these units be used? Should they interact more with regular Japanese people? Should they be deployed overseas more often? Should they invite regular people to attend their military college courses, so that more people can know military history, strategy, and tactics?

What do you think about Japan's designation of Cultural Properties (国指定文化財, 都道府県指定文化財, 市町村指定文化財)? Is this a good idea? Is Japan's policy better or worse than similar policies in other nations?

Following her study of Shizuoka, Mari Kobayashi has described culture policy development this way (<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137327772>):

- Stage One: Potential Power
 - There are rich cultural resources in Shizuoka Prefecture, but people do not recognize their value.
- Stage Two: Recognition
 - Residents recognize the existence and the value of regional cultural resources.
- Stage Three: Utilization
 - Through the utilization of cultural resources, residents and visitors will take notice of the region.
- Stage Four: Adding Value
 - Residents will take pride in their region and cultural resources, increasing efforts to add value to those resources.
- Stage five: Branding and Development of New Links
 - The region attracts people, is able to brand itself, and establishes links to new industries.
- Goal
 - Diverse and interesting culture develops in the region, and the region becomes an attractive place for both residents and visitors.