<u>Man'yôgana</u>—How Japanese wrote their language before inventing a native syllabary (pre mid-9th c.)

There were **two main script strategies** used to record the *Japanese* poems that were recorded in the *Man'yôshû*. Both borrowed Chinese characters.[1]

1. One type of script use is called "**correct reading**." Japanese (Yamato) pronunciation follows the original meaning of the Chinese character. For example, the Chinese character 山 means "mountain" and under this system it is read aloud as "*yama*" (the Yamato language word for "mountain"). Similarly, the character 風 means "wind" and is pronounced "*kaze*."

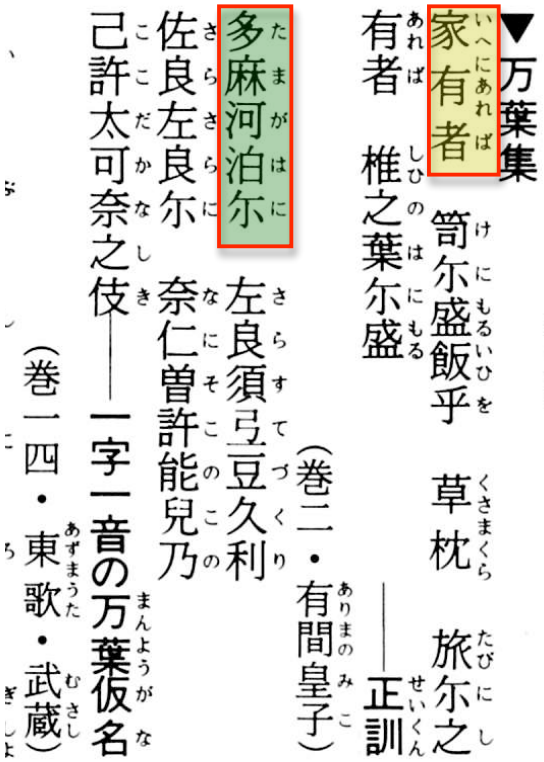
2. The other main type of script in the *Man'yôshû*, called "**one character, one sound**," is where each Chinese character is pronounced in a way similar to its original Chinese sound; the original meaning of the character may or may not be ignored but either way the most important function is to represent a sound thus constructing a type of complicated phonetic syllabary using Chinese characters.

Type 2

Like the rustling ("sarasara") of the homespun cloth set out to bleach ("sarasu") in the Tama River, why do I think so tenderly of that darling girl more and yet more ("sarasara ni")
(http://home.earthlink.net/~khaitani1/mysx7.htm#14-3373)

Type 1

When I am at home, I eat my rice served in a bowl. Now that I am on a journey, grass for pillow, I heap it on a leaf of *shii*.
(http://home.earthlink.net/~khaitani1/mysx2.htm#2-142)



from 『国語国文学手帳』小学館、1990.

[1] This is different, of course, from using Chinese characters simply to write the Chinese language—also a common practice at the time. Also, while similar systems were used to record other literary works such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the are particulars for each text and there are a number of systems used. According to Konishi Jin'ichi, quoting Ono Susumu, these practices both first developed in Korea for the Korean script and then the techniques were imported to Japan. (*A History of Japanese Literature: Volume I*, Princeton UP, 1984, pp. 334–335.)

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