

# JAPANESE

**COUNTRY:** Japan

**POST:** Tokyo

It is often erroneously thought that Japanese and Chinese are similar. This misconception exists on account of the writing, which for the most part was borrowed from classical Chinese. In reality the two languages do not have any fundamental points in common, from the viewpoint of either pronunciation or especially syntax.

The origins of Japanese are rather obscure. Many specialists have attempted to find evidence of a link between it and other languages, either with the Malay-Polynesian languages, with Mongol, with Manchu or even with Turkish. However, only Korean can be said with certainty to belong to the same language family.

Japanese is very easy to pronounce, especially for Francophones, who are used to "open" syllables ending in vowels. There are 5 vowels, A, I, U, E and O, according to the Japanese order. The Japanese system of writing is one of unparalleled complexity. Two series of specific signs that are phonetic in nature and are called Kana (Katakana and Hiragana) coexist with the 1,850 characters borrowed from classical Chinese (Kanji). These different signs are used in the following way:

The Katakana are used mainly for the transcription of foreign words.

The Hiragana represent the indigenous elements, in particular all the elements of a grammatical nature.

The Kanji are used to represent words of Chinese origin and to transcribe some of the purely Japanese words.

Since the modernization of Japan, the vocabulary of its language