Introduction to *kuzushiji* (cursive Japanese calligraphy)

As an example of *Fuji no Hitoana* owned by the Honolulu Museum of Art

National Institute of Japanese Literature

KOIDA Tomoko
1. What is *kuzushiji*?

1-1. The word *kuzushiji* くずし字 refers to a form of abbreviated or cursive Japanese calligraphy. As with all forms of Japanese writing, the art of cursive calligraphy is based on Chinese characters (*kanji* 漢字). Cursive calligraphy was developed through a process of gradually omitting strokes from Chinese characters, thereby forming a highly stylized set of abbreviated characters. These characters were first developed as a means of annotating Sinitic passages found in Japanese old and rare books (*kotenseki* 古典籍) and old documents (*komonjo* 古文書).

1-2. There are those characters which, having been so greatly abbreviated, look very little like the original *kanji* from which they were developed. Furthermore, the particular shape of a given character depends on where it appears within a sentence; the shape of a cursive character changes depending on how it is connected with those characters coming immediately before and after it. This last system is known as cursive script (*sōsho* 草書).
1-3. *Hiragana* 平仮名 is a blanket term referring to all the cursive scripts used throughout Japanese history. For example, the *hiragana* character あ あ is derived from an abbreviated version of the bottom part of the *kanji* 安. This latter character is pronounced *an*, for which reason it was used, by removing the final -n, to refer to the Japanese sound *a*. Those *kanji*, like *an* 安, which form the root of *hiragana* characters, are known collectively as *jibo* 字母, literally, word-mothers.

1-4. As just mentioned, any given cursive character may have a number of variants. In premodern *hiragana* scripts, the syllable *a* was represented not only by abbreviating the character *an* 安, but also by abbreviating other Chinese characters whose Japanese pronunciation approximates this *a* sound. Some example include the Chinese characters 阿 and 愛. These alternative versions of cursive characters are known as *hentai gana* 変体仮名, literally, altered *kana*.
1. What is *kuzushiji*?

1-5. When examining cursive calligraphy, you will no doubt come across the following two symbols: ゝ and く. These are all symbols meaning that the previous character should be repeated, just like the ditto mark in English. These ditto marks are known as *odoriji* 踊り字, literally, dancing characters. The symbol ゝ means that a single character is to be repeated, while a lengthened く means that the two previous characters are to be repeated.
2. Tools to assist in reading cursive calligraphy

*Books*

2-1

*Zōho kaitei kana hentaishū*, by Ijichi Tetsuo (ed), Shintensha, 1975. ¥378

2-2


2-3


2-4

2. Tools to assist in reading cursive calligraphy

Books

2-5
Sōsho kensaku jiten, by Emori Kenji, Sanseidō, 2007. ¥10,260

2-6
Kuzushiji jiten, by Hatano Yukihioko, Tegami No Kai, Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2000. ¥6,480

2-7
Kinsei komonjo kaidoku jiten, by Hayashi Hideo, etc, Kashiwa Shobō, 1972; a newly bound edition in 1996. ¥10,260

2-8
Shinpen komonjo kaidoku jiten, by Hayashi Hideo, etc, Kashiwa Shobō, 1993. ¥3,356
2. Tools to assist in reading cursive calligraphy

**Application and site**

3-1 The Hentaigana App
By UCLA and Waseda University

3-2 Kuzushiji Learning Application
KuLA
By Osaka University

3-3 Classical Kana
By XJIE YANG

100 Classical Kana Words in Motion

変体仮名を読み解くためには、まず单体の字形とその変形を解くから、つづいてステップはかなの連絡である。テクノロジー環境において、切り取った文を入力して、ことわざの関連を簡単に示すことができ手厚いもので、仮名の字形を動画をもって解説することも可能になった。ここに100字合計を100点一覧表に、文字からは離れても、動画観て感じる古典文学の美しさを体験、仮名仮名を肩に Southwestにして書くことに役立てれば幸いです。

To understand classical kana, the first step is to memorize each single character and its origin, then move to multiple kana in a line. The digital technology provides a possibility to connect examples and its original work and to explain the shape of kana through a motion. Here I selected 100 words from 20 titles available at e-Museum, created motion pictures to show the writing process. Please enjoy the beauty of the writing, and approach to classical kana at your own pace.

スタート リスト ゴール
2. Tools to assist in reading cursive calligraphy

※ Application and site

3-5 Kyoto University  https://honkoku.org/

3-4 Denshi Kuzushiji Jiten DB/ Mokkan Jiten
By Historiographical Institute
The University of Tokyo and
Nara National Research Institute
for Cultural Properties.
http://clioapi.hi-u.tokyo.ac.jp/ships/ZClient/W34/

※ TOPPAN PRINTING CO.,LTD. / NIJL-NW project
5. Practice reading cursive calligraphy.

Fuji no Hitoana, Otogi-zōshi お伽草子（popular vernacular fiction）.
No colophon; two illustrated large books 無刊記絵入大本2冊. 中42, Honolulu Museum of Art

This tale, based on an episode found in Mirror of the East 吾妻鏡, is also known simply as Hitoana Cave at Mount Fuji (Fuji no hitoana 富士の人穴) or Nitta Shirō (Nitta shirō 仁田四郎), after the protagonist Nitta Shirō Tadatsune 新田四郎忠常 (1167-1203), who was commanded to explore Hitoana Cave and takes a tour of hell by the guidance of the Great Bodhisattva Sengen 浅間大菩薩.

There are many manuscripts and printed editions. More than 40 manuscripts exist, including one copied late in the Muromachi period, and one in the eighth year of Keichō 庆長 (1603). There are 15 lineages of printed editions, including illustrated large books 絵入り大本 printed with old moveable type 古活字版 between Genna and Kanei 元和・寛永 (1615-43), as well as other illustrated woodblock large books 絵入り整版 printed one in the fourth year of Kan’ei 寛永 (1627), one in the third year of Keian 慶安 (1650), one in the fourth year of Meireki 明暦 (1658), one in the second year of Manji 万治 (1659), and others.
5. Practice reading cursive calligraphy.
5. Practice reading cursive calligraphy.
6. Tools to assist in reading *Otogi-zōshi*

*Otogi-zōshi no sekai*, by Nara Ehon Kokusai Kenkyū Kaigi (ed), Sanseidō, 1982

*Chusei ōchō monogatari otogizōshi jiten*, by Kanda Tatsumi and Nishizawa Masashi. (ed), Benseisha Shuppan, 2002. ¥ 27,000

*Otogizōshi jiten*, by Tokuda Kazui (ed), Tokyōdō Shuppan, 2002. ¥ 7,344
6. Tools to assist in reading *Otogi-zōshi*

National Institute of Japanese Literature Website
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