JAPANESE TYPOGRAPHY ESSENTIALS: LEARNING FRAMEWORK OF TYPOGRAPHY IN JAPAN
(Japanese Typography as a Visual Form of Japanese Writing)

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Abstract

This research discusses the comparison of designs that use typography or not. With three types of Japanese fonts representing the gothic, Mincho, and calligraphy categories, namely DFMincho-SU, Yu Mincho, and BIZ UDGothic. The purpose of this study is to look at the differences in typographic characteristics of each font and their influence on Japanese writing. The methods used included font sampling and a comparative study in which each font was typed on two different sheets: one without typographic manipulation and one with typography applied at the same size. Japanese writing is closely tied to typography because of the emotional value in characters. Calligraphic Japanese fonts are expressive and aesthetically pleasing. Japanese typography enhances visual design within writing rules. The development of Japanese language learning, especially in writing, can benefit from Japanese typography as a visual tool.

Keywords: *Graphic Design, Typography, Japanese Characters*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's era of technology and digital advancements, the utilization of various fonts to communicate visual messages and create a specific atmosphere is on the rise. This trend is becoming more prominent as people seek innovative ways to engage with audiences and captivate their attention through diverse typographical choices. The evolution of typography in the digital landscape has opened up new possibilities for designers and content creators to experiment with different font styles and sizes (Valentino, 2019). An example of this can be seen in advertisements created by Hoshiba Kunikazu for tourism in the Wakayama Prefecture region, which is home to Mount Kōya and was established as a center of the esoteric Shingon Buddhism sect in 816 through an imperial edict by Kōbō Daishi (774-835). Suzuki Hachirō explains that writing style is derived from lifestyle (Harun & Biduri, 2024).

When we want to convey something clearly to the target audience, Gothic fonts can be used (fonts that are finless and easy to read), but when we want to give emotion to the text, for example in the words こんにちは*konichiwa* or いっらしゃい*irasshai* (hello or welcome), we use handwriting. If there is no one to write it, the closest calligraphy we would use is sosho (Lin & Cob, 2024). The font is chosen that is closest to the emotion to be conveyed. The product being advertised should be able to exemplify the right expression (Bartal, 2013).
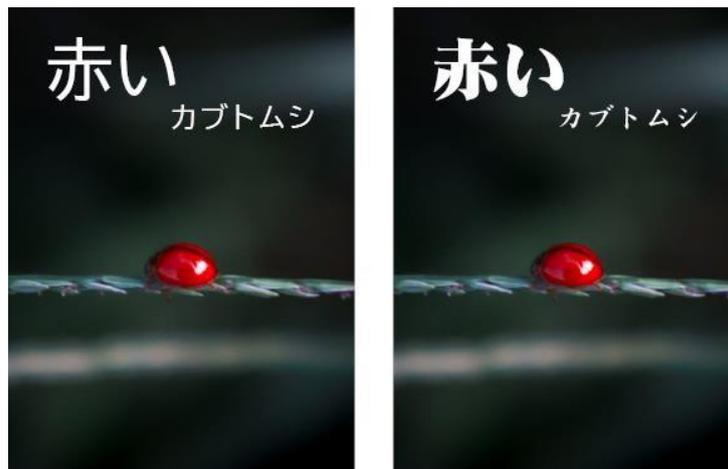
Figure 1. Use of Typography to Display Emotional Value in Design

Typography is used in packaging design so that the characters have high readability by consumers and give a positive impression of a package (Mukai, 2014). The same findings were also stated by Mukai & Miyazaki (2016) where the readability of good letter characters can improve the overall aesthetic impression of the packaging (Shockey, 2012).

Figure 2. Differences in Font Selection Affect the Emotion Generated

Japanese characters as the basis of writing, and typography as a visual value create a harmony of Japanese characters that are comfortable to see, easy to read and interesting to look at (Singh et al., 2022). With the knowledge of typography, Japanese language learning and Japanese writing rules are more varied and interesting. How is the relationship between Japanese characters and typography.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. History of Japanese Writing System
Japan did not originally have its own writing system. In the first or second century AD, Chinese characters were introduced to Japan. Although the Japanese initially tried to write in Chinese, the differences between Chinese and Japanese led to the need for

customization. From this, the kanji-hiragana and katakana systems were born, as a simplified form of Chinese characters. Kanji is also used to represent sounds in Japanese.

Chinese characters, known as Hanzi in Chinese and Kanji in Japanese, are logograms used not only in China, but also in several other Asian countries. These characters, called CJK (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) characters, have also undergone simplification and are used in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

"*Manyogana*" is a Chinese character used in the early days of script writing. Eventually, the set of signs was reduced in its entirety and simplified to hiragana (Al Jahan, 2017; Aravinda, 2021).

2.2. Hentaigana

Hentaigana (変体仮名, variant kana) are obsolete or non-standard hiragana. They include both stylistic variants of the current hiragana as well as different alternative hiragana characters (Marks, 2015). There are several hiraganas that are more or less interchangeable for each mora in Japanese. The 1900 script reform stipulated that only one specific character is used for each mora, while all others are considered hentaigana. Although not usually used in publications, hentaigana is still used on store signs and trademarks to create a traditional or old-fashioned atmosphere (Al Jahan, 2017).

2.3. Previous Research

Previous research has shown significant differences between Japanese and Latin characters. From 5 different fonts, it was found that Japanese characters do not have a baseline, but have a Center of Gravity, where the center axis point of Japanese characters is in the middle of each letter.
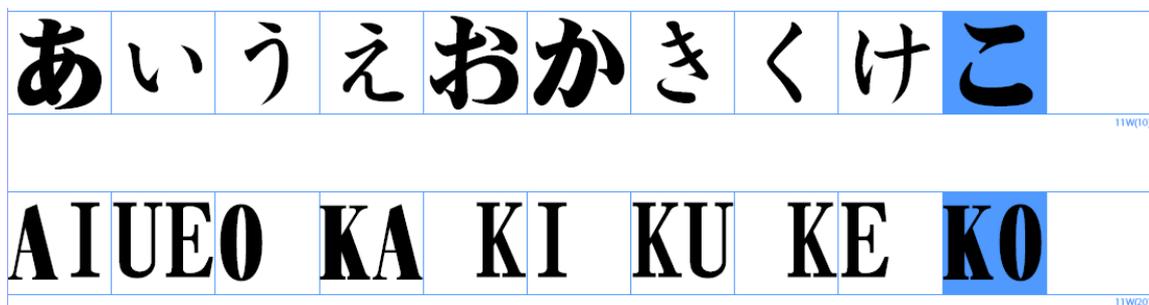

Figure 3. Overview of Previous Research

The fundamental difference between Japanese and Indonesian typography is due to the different ways of writing characters and typesetting. Where Japanese characters use Kana (Hiragana, Katakana) and Kanji while Latin characters use the alphabet.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted by conducting a literature study, followed by a comparative study on tea packaging design related to the use of Japanese typography and not involving typography. Comparisons were made on Adobe InDesign, Adobe InDesign itself is a graphic software that develops layouts.

3.1. Font Sampling

Researchers took 3 types of font samples representing gothic, Mincho and calligraphy for comparison. The fonts consist of DFMincho-SU, Yu Mincho, and BIZ UDGothic.

3.2. Comparative Study

The collected fonts were typed on two different sheets. Where on the first sheet no typography is used, only Japanese writing, while on the second sheet typography is played at the same size.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the comparison results, although with the same layout and the same size, the difference in fonts results in a difference in the implied meaning. In this case the writing above uses Hiragana "O", Kanji "Cha" and below it uses Hiragana characters.
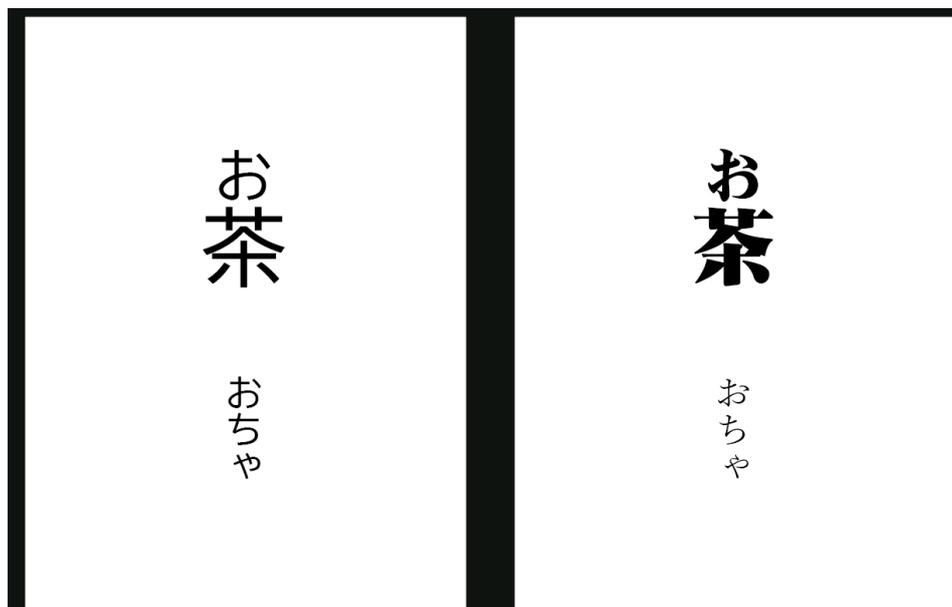

Figure 4. Differences in Font Selection on Ocha Tea Packaging

Paper designed with calligraphy tends to be more emotionally charged and has a high judgment on aesthetics. However, in terms of reader comfort, the first paper with characters whose lines are still clear and do not merge into other lines, makes the writing more comfortable to read. However, on the first paper, writing without typographic editing tends to be stiff and boring (not creative) (Mukai, Hibino, & Koyama, 2017).

Figure 5. Selected Font Type Gives a Different Impression with Other Fonts

Letter Character as the basis of writing, Typography as a Complement to Visual Forms

5. CONCLUSION

Japanese writing cannot be separated from typography, this is because Japanese characters do not escape the emotional value contained in them, where Japanese fonts that use calligraphy are more expressive, and have a value on beauty. Calligraphic fonts themselves have no comfort value in them. Japanese typography leads to visual design on top of Japanese writing rules. Based on this research, the development of Japanese language learning, especially in writing, is expected to be complemented by Japanese typography which is a visual shaper.

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