

か こと ば ゆ ら い
書き言葉の由来 Origins of the written language



やま と こと ば
 大和言葉, the ancient Japanese language, developed without a form of written expression; it was first written down in ^{かんじ}漢字, characters which had been introduced from China. By the 8th century a system of writing, ^{まんようがな}万葉仮名, had emerged which transcribed ^{やま と こと ば}大和言葉 into characters largely according to their phonetic value. During the Heian Period (794-1185) while court nobles favoured ^{かんぶん}漢文 (classical Chinese) as the literary language, court women, denied access to its study, developed simplified versions of ^{まんようがな}万葉仮名 written in a free-flowing style called ^{おんなで}女手 (literally 'women's hands'). These became the first ^{ひらがな}平仮名, while ^{かたかな}片仮名, (literally 'incomplete kana') were formed by using one part of the character used in ^{まんようがな}万葉仮名. Over time a hybrid written language developed incorporating ^{かんじ}漢字 used semantically and ^{かな}仮名 used phonetically, and the rest, as they say, is history!

Here are some works which mark the history of the Japanese language:

<p>こ じ き 「古事記」</p>	<p>712 'Record of Ancient Matters' - the oldest chronicle of myth and history (written in a form of ^{かんぶん}漢文)</p>
<p>まんようしゅう 「万葉集」</p>	<p>circa 760 'Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves' or 'Collection for Ten Thousand Generations' - earliest collection of poetry and prose spanning 400 years (written in ^{まんようがな}万葉仮名)</p>
<p>げん じ ものがたり 「源氏物語」</p>	<p>11th century 'Tale of Genji' - masterpiece of Japanese literature, it has been called the first great novel, written by a lady of the court ^{むらさきしきぶ}紫式部 (written in ^{おんなで}女手)</p>