

## Lecture 01

### Orientations: Land & Language

#### 0. Introduction

Without being too ahistorical, what meaningful general observations can we make about land and language as a way to orient ourselves to the study of Japan in the context of East Asian civilization and culture?

#### 1. Land: Taming water, meaningful mountains, and seasonality as a way of life

- a. Two basic orientations: part of Asian land mass; part of Pacific basin
- b. General terrain
- c. Water
- d. Mountains
- e. Climate and seasons

#### 2. Language

- a. Language of social ranks
- b. Sino–Japanese aspect of language
- c. World's Craziest Writing System
  - Written Japanese is based on Chinese characters, but the two languages have absolutely no natural linguistic relationship.
  - *Kana* are simplified Chinese characters that are used for sound, not meaning and have 2 types:
    - hiragana*: cursive form for J'ese words.
    - katakana*: angular form for Japanized foreign words, onomatopoeia, etc.

Original 9 consonants and 5 vowels form 50 sounds in syllabary (47 today), which are traditionally arranged in “Iroha” according to a Buddhist-inspired poem in which each sound is used once. (see Smits, pp. 84-85):

Iroha nioedo chirinuruwo	Though I smell colorful blossoms, they are doomed to scatter
Wagayo tarezo tsunenaran	Who in the world exists forever?
Ui no okuyama kyô koete	Today I cross over the deep mountains of existence
Asaki yume miji eimo sezu	I shall no longer dream shallow dreams, no longer be drunk.