

ROMANIZATION OF JAPANESE KANA

Modified Hepburn System BGN/PCGN 1976 Agreement¹

The modified Hepburn system for the romanization of Japanese has been in use by the BGN and the PCGN since the 1930's and has been used extensively in the romanization of Japanese geographic names. This system is well adapted to the general needs of speakers of English and is the most widely used system for romanization of Japanese. In 2007, the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI) issued "Toponymic Guidelines for Map Editors and other Editors, Japan (Third Edition)²," and the BGN and the PCGN have adopted several of the guidelines dealing with romanization.³

The Japanese language is written in two forms: *kanji*, which are Sino-Japanese characters, and *kana*, which are syllabic symbols. There are two styles of *kana*, namely *katakana*, the squared form, and *hiragana*, the cursive form. *Katakana* symbols were originally derived from parts of *kanji* characters and today are used primarily for the phonetic transcription of foreign words and as the equivalent of italics. *Hiragana* symbols, on the other hand, were originally created by simplifying the strokes of whole *kanji* characters and are mainly used to represent grammatical particles and suffixes. Each *kana* character represents a syllable, which may be composed of a vowel, consonant-vowel combination, or syllabic nasal.

Running text is usually written in *kanji* with *kana* interspersed. Geographic names, personal names, and words written in isolation are usually written in *kanji*, with or without the addition of small-script *kana* equivalents, which, when used for that purpose, are referred to as *furigana*.

Kanji may be romanized by determining the *furigana* of the *kanji* characters using a Japanese dictionary (e.g., *Kokugo Jiten* or *Kanji Jiten*), then romanizing the *furigana* using the modified Hepburn system. A familiarity with the grammatical structure and writing system of the Japanese language is essential for the correct romanization of *kanji*.

¹ Introductory text expanded, tables modified, and explanatory notes added in 2015

² http://www.gsi.go.jp/ENGLISH/page_e30064.html

³ See 'Notes' for the modified rules for the romanization of Japanese (pages 6&7)

Table 1: Standard Characters
[Hiragana/Katakana/Romanization]

This table summarizes the *kana* symbols (*hiragana* and *katakana*). Each symbol represents a syllable. When reading Japanese *kana*, it is important to recognize whether the following syllable/vowel letter is within the same Kanji character.

	a	i	u	e	o
-	あ/ア/a	い/イ/i	う/ウ/u	え/エ/e	お/オ/o
k ⁴	か/カ/ka が/ガ/ga	き/キ/ki ぎ/ギ/gi	く/ク/ku ぐ/グ/gu	け/ケ/ke げ/ゲ/ge	こ/コ/ko ご/ゴ/go
s	さ/サ/sa ざ/ザ/za	し/シ/shi じ/ジ/ji	す/ス/su ず/ズ/zu	せ/セ/se ぜ/ゼ/ze	そ/ソ/so ぞ/ゾ/zo
t	た/タ/ta だ/ダ/da	ち/チ/chi ぢ/ヂ/ji	つ/ツ/tsu づ/ヅ/zu	て/テ/te で/デ/de	と/ト/to ど/ド/do
n	な/ナ/na	に/ニ/ni	ぬ/ヌ/nu	ね/ネ/ne	の/ノ/no
h	は/ハ/ha ば/バ/ba ぱ/パ/pa	ひ/ヒ/hi び/ビ/bi ぴ/ピ/pi	ふ/フ/fu ぶ/ブ/bu ぷ/プ/pu	へ/ヘ/he べ/ベ/be ぺ/ペ/pe	ほ/ホ/ho ぼ/ボ/bo ぽ/ポ/po
m	ま/マ/ma	み/ミ/mi	む/ム/mu	め/メ/me	も/モ/mo
y	や/ヤ/ya		ゆ/ユ/yu		よ/ヨ/yo
r	ら/ラ/ra	り/リ/ri	る/ル/ru	れ/レ/re	ろ/ロ/ro
w	わ/ワ/wa				を/ヲ/o
-n	ん/ン/n				

⁴ Row headings refer to classes of sounds. The sounds may be spelled differently based upon surrounding sounds.

Table 2: Standard Characters with Contractions
[Hiragana/Katakana/Romanization]

Character combinations used for contractions consist of a full-sized kana plus a miniature kana representing a single vowel or diphthong. For example, き ki combined with や (a miniature version of や ya) becomes きゃ kya. When the small vowel letters and diphthongs follow consonant/diphthong letters, table 2 rules supersede the rules in table 1.

	ya	i	yu	ye	yo
k	きゃ/キヤ/kya ぎゃ/ギヤ/gya くぁ/クァ/kwa ぐぁ/グァ/gwa	くゐ/クヱ/kwi ぐゐ/グヱ/gwi	きゅ/キュ/kyu ぎゅ/ギュ/gyu	きえ/キエ/kye ぎえ/ギエ/gye くゑ/クヱ/kwe ぐゑ/グヱ/gwe	きょ/キョ/kyo ぎょ/ギョ/gyo くお/クオ/kwo ぐお/グオ/gwo
sh	しゃ/シャ/sha じゃ/ジャ/ja		しゅ/シュ/shu じゅ/ジュ/ju	しゑ/シエ/she じゑ/ジエ/je	しよ/シヨ/sho じよ/ジヨ/jo
t	ちゃ/チャ/cha ぢゃ/ヂャ/ja つぁ/ツァ/tsa	つゐ/ツイ/tsi てゐ/テイ/ti でゐ/デイ/di	ちゅ/チュ/chu ぢゅ/ヂュ/ju テュ/tyu デュ/dyu トゥ/tu ドゥ/du	ちゑ/チエ/che ぢゑ/ヂエ/je つゑ/ツエ/tse	ちよ/チヨ/cho ぢよ/ヂヨ/jo つお/ツオ/tso
n	にゃ/ニヤ/nya		にゅ/ニユ/nyu	にゑ/ニエ/nye	にょ/ニョ/nyo
h	ひゃ/ヒヤ/hya びゃ/ビヤ/bya ぴゃ/ピヤ/pya ふぁ/ファ/fa	ふゐ/フヱ/fi	ひゅ/ヒュ/hyu びゅ/ビュ/byu ぴゅ/ピュ/pyu	ひゑ/ヒエ/hye びゑ/ビエ/bye ぴゑ/ピエ/pye ふゑ/フエ/fe	ひよ/ヒヨ/hyo びよ/ビヨ/byo ぴよ/ピヨ/pyo ふお/フオ/fo
m	みゃ/ミヤ/mya		みゅ/ミユ/myu	みゑ/ミエ/mye	みよ/ミヨ/myo
y				いゑ/イエ/ye	
r	りゃ/リヤ/rya		りゅ/リュ/ryu	りゑ/リエ/rye	りよ/リヨ/ryo
w	ヴァ/va	ウゐ/wi ヴゐ/vi	ヴ/v	ウゑ/we ヴェ/ve	ウお/wo ヴお/vo

Table 3: Standard Characters with Long Vowels⁵
[Hiragana/Katakana/Romanization]

Japanese distinguishes between short and long vowels. With some exceptions, long vowels are usually romanized with a vowel letter bearing a macron (e.g., ā). The Japanese long vowel marker (ー) indicates a lengthening of the short vowel symbol it follows, causing it to be romanized as a long vowel.

	ā	ī	ū	ē	ō
-	ああ/アア/ā (ああ/アー/ā)	いい/イイ/ī (いい/イー/ī)	うう/ウウ/ū (うう/ウー/ū)	ええ/エエ/ē (ええ/エー/ē)	おう/オウ/ō (おう/オー/ō) (おお/オオ/ō) (おお/オー/ō)
k	かあ/カア/kā があ/ガア/gā	きい/キイ/kī ぎい/ギイ/gī	くう/クウ/kū ぐう/グウ/gū	けえ/ケエ/kē げえ/ゲエ/gē	こう/コウ/kō (こお/コオ/kō) ごう/ゴウ/gō (ごお/ゴオ/gō)
s	さあ/サア/sā ざあ/ザア/zā	しい/シイ/shī じい/ジイ/jī	すう/スウ/sū ずう/ズウ/zū	せえ/セエ/sē ぜえ/ゼエ/zē	そう/ソウ/sō (そお/ソオ/sō) ぞう/ゾウ/zō (ぞお/ゾオ/zō)
t	たあ/タア/tā だあ/ダア/dā	ちい/チイ/chī ぢい/ヂイ/jī	つう/ツウ/tsū づう/ヅウ/zū	てえ/テエ/tē でえ/デエ/dē	とう/トウ/tō (とお/トオ/tō) どう/ドウ/dō (どお/ドオ/dō)
n	なあ/ナア/nā	にい/ニイ/nī	ぬう/ヌウ/nū	ねえ/ネエ/nē	のう/ノウ/nō (のお/ノオ/nō)
h	はあ/ハア/hā ばあ/バア/bā ぱあ/パア/pā	ひい/ヒイ/hī びい/ビイ/bī ぴい/ピイ/pī	ふう/フウ/fū ぶう/ブウ/bū ぷう/プウ/pū	へえ/ヘエ/hē べえ/ベエ/bē ぺえ/ペエ/pē	ほう/ホウ/hō (ほお/ホオ/hō) ぼう/ボウ/bō (ぼお/ボオ/bō) ぽう/ポウ/pō (ぽお/ポオ/pō)
m	まあ/マア/mā	みい/ミイ/mī	むう/ムウ/mū	めえ/メエ/mē	もう/モウ/mō (もお/モオ/mō)
y	やあ/ヤア/yā		ゆう/ユウ/yū		よう/ヨウ/yō (よお/ヨオ/yō)
r	らあ/ラア/rā	りい/リイ/rī	るう/ルウ/rū	れえ/レエ/rē	ろう/ロウ/yō (ろお/ロオ/rō)
w	わあ/ワア/wā				

⁵ See Notes section 5 for general rules regarding long vowels.

**Table 4: Standard Characters with Long Vowels and Contractions
[Hiragana/Katakana/Romanization]**

Character combinations for contractions involving long vowels are composed of a short contraction (see Table 2) combined with a full-sized *kana*. Sometimes the long vowel marker (ー) is used instead of the final *kana* in words of foreign origin. The vowels in these combinations are romanized with macrons. For example, き *ki* combined with や (a miniature version of や *ya*) and あ *a* becomes きゃあ *kyā*.

	(y)ā	ī	(y)ū	(y)ē	(y)ō
k	きゃあ/キヤア/kyā ぎゃあ/ギヤア/gyā		きゅう/キユウ/kyū ぎゅう/ギユウ/gyū	キエー/kyē ギエー/gyē	きょう/キョウ/kyō (きよお/キョオ/kyō) ぎょう/ギョウ/gyō (ぎよお/ギョオ/gyō)
sh	しゃあ/シャア/shā じゃあ/ジャア/jā		しゅう/シュウ/shū じゅう/ジュウ/jū	シェー/shē ジェー/jē	しょう/ショウ/shō (しよお/ショオ/shō) じょう/ジョウ/jō (じよお/ジョオ/jō)
t	ちゃあ/チャア/chā ぢゃあ/ヂャア/jā ツァー/tsā	ティー/tī ディー/dī	ちゅう/チュウ/chū ぢゅう/ヂュウ/jū テュー/tyū デュー/dyū トゥー/tū ドゥー/dū	チエー/chē ヂエー/jē ツエー/tsē	ちょう/チョウ/chō (ちよお/チョオ/chō) ぢょう/ヂョウ/jō (ぢよお/ヂョオ/jō) ツォー/tsō
n	にゃあ/ニャア/nyā		にゅう/ニユウ/nyū	ニエー/nyē	にょう/ニョウ/nyō (によお/ニョオ/nyō)
h	ひゃあ/ヒャア/hyā びゃあ/ビャア/byā ぴゃあ/ピャア/pyā ファー/fā	フィー/fī	ひゅう/ヒユウ/hyū びゅう/ビユウ/byū ぴゅう/ピユウ/pyū フュー/fyū	フェー/fē	ひょう/ヒョウ/hyō (ひよお/ヒョオ/hyō) びょう/ビョウ/byō (びよお/ビョオ/byō) ぴょう/ピョウ/pyō (ぴよお/ピョオ/pyō) フォー/fō
m	みゃあ/ミャア/myā		みゅう/ミユウ/myū		みょう/ミョウ/myō (みよお/ミョオ/myō)
y				イエー/yē	
r	りゃあ/リャア/ryā		りゅう/リュウ/ryū		りょう/リョウ/ryō (りよお/リョオ/ryō)
w	ヴァー/vā	ウィー/wī ヴィー/vī		ウェー/wē ヴェー/vē	ウォ/wō ヴォ/vō

Notes

1. When *hiragana* は (**ha**) or へ (**he**) are used as grammatical particles, they are always romanized as **wa** (は) and **e** (へ) respectively.
2. The *hatsuon* ん shall always be romanized as **n**.

Kanji	Hiragana	Romanization
山武町	さんぶまち	Sanbumachi (PPL) ⁶
神明崎	しんめいさき	Shinmei Saki (PT)
南気仙沼駅	みなみけせんぬまえき	Minamikesenuma Eki (RSTN)
難波駅	なんばえき	Nanba Eki (RSTN)
秋田少年鑑別所	あきたしょうねんかんべつし よ	Akita Shōnen Kanbetsusho (PRNJ)
天白区	てんぱくく	Tenpaku Ku (ADM3)

3. When *hatsuon* ん(**n**) is followed by **a**, **i**, **u**, **e**, **o** or **y** (including when appearing with a macron), an apostrophe shall be placed after **n**.

Kanji	Hiragana	Romanization
新大久保	しんおおくぼ	Shin'ōkubo (PPL)
大番屋	おおばんや	Ōban'ya (PPL)
南陽市	なんようし	Nan'yō Shi (ADM2)

4. Doubled consonants are marked with the *sokuon* symbol (a miniature つ **tsu**), which indicates a doubling of the consonant sound it immediately precedes. A single consonant that follows the *sokuon* shall be doubled (e.g., **k** becomes **kk**). For digraph consonants (**sh**, **ts**, **ch**), only the first consonant shall be doubled (e.g., **sh** becomes **ssh**), except for digraph **ch**, which becomes **tch**.

Kanji	Hiragana	Romanization
刈田崎	かったさき	Katta Saki (PT)
八丁堀	はっちょうぼり	Hatchōbori (PPL)
北海道	ほっかいどう	Hokkai Dō (ADM1)
札幌市	さっぽろし	Sapporo Shi (ADM2)
八崎	やっつあき	Ya Ttsaki (PT)

⁶ Feature designation codes from the Geographic Names Database are shown parenthetically to indicate feature type.

5. When vowels **a**, **u**, or **o** repeat in the same *kanji*, they are romanized with a vowel bearing a macron (e.g., **ā**). When the vowel **i** repeats in the same *kanji*, it is romanized as **ii**. However, when identical repeating vowels belong to different *kanji* characters, they shall be romanized individually and an apostrophe (') shall be placed between the vowels. Although it is not pronounced as a true diphthong, the combination of **ei** in the same word is always spelled **ei**.

Kanji	Hiragana	Romanization
宝来町	ほうらいちょう	Hōraichō (PPL)
龍ヶ崎市	りゅうがさきし	Ryūgasaki Shi (ADM2)
細尾	ほそお	Hoso'ō (PPL)
大阪市	おおさかし	Ōsaka Shi (ADM2)
新潟県	にいがたけん	Niigata Ken (ADM1)
航空自衛隊松島基地	こうくうじえいたいまつしま きち	Kōkū Jieitai Matsushima Kichi (INSM)

6. An inventory of letter-diacritic combinations, with their Unicode encoding, in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script is:

Ā (U+0100)	ā (U+0101)
Ī (U+012A)	ī (U+012B)
Ū (U+016A)	ū (U+016B)
Ē (U+0112)	ē (U+0113)
Ō (U+014C)	ō (U+014D)

7. The Romanization column shows only lowercase forms but, when romanizing, uppercase and lowercase Roman letters as appropriate should be used.