

4 The Japanese Language

The **origin** of the Japanese language is not known. Most **linguists** believe the first Japanese arrived from Korea during the Yayoi Period. Another **theory** is that the first Japanese came from South Pacific Islands. As Japanese spread they pushed the native Ainu north. When Japanese first encountered Chinese they didn't have a writing system. Japanese then learned words, ideas, and their writing system from China. For example, the word *kanji* is Japanese for the Chinese word *hànzì*, which means, "Han **characters**." There are two types of kanji. "On-yomi" means "sound reading" and is the Chinese way to read the kanji; the Japanese way of reading is called "kun-yomi." Originally, each character was made to **represent** a thing or idea. Thus, the character *sun* was a picture of the sun. Japanese borrowed many words from China during the Heian Period. Today Japanese borrow many words from English.

Check the vocabulary and think about each picture. Challenge words are in red.



bamboo
symbol
characters

drill
memorize
literature



bow
status
honoric language

northeast
distinct
dialect



rote
mnemonic
James Heisig

brush
stylized
calligraphy

