

# Fanfare

## Character Profile

**Meaning:**  
fan

**Joyo yomi:**  
On: セン  
Kun: おうぎ  
In names: み

**Type of on-yomi:**  
呉音 (ごおん, from Chinese readings of the 5th–6th c.): セン

**Keywords for remembering the yomi:**  
セン: 扇子 (せんす: folding fan)  
おうぎ: 扇 (おうぎ: folding fan)

**Relative importance and difficulty:**  
1814th most-used kanji in newspapers  
JLPT level: N1

**Radical:**  
戸 (とだれ or とかんむり: the “door” radical)  
Note: To learn more about this radical, see [Radical Note 63](#).

**Don't confuse 扇 with these look-alikes:**  
翁 (1037: elderly man), 雇 (1232: to employ), 扉 (1730: door)

**Don't confuse 扇 with these sound-alikes:**  
おうぎ: None

**Strokes: 10**



### Read All About It!

Halpern	1239/1704
Henshall	1492/1599
Kanshudo	<a href="#">Click here</a>
Denshi Jisho	<a href="#">Click here</a>

Let me dispel any misconceptions you might have about 扇, whether or not you realize it!

1. A 扇 primarily represents a handheld fan, though this kanji also appears in terms for the electric kind.
2. You might be picturing a handheld fan as a delicate item held by a delicate woman. Actually, Japanese war commanders used to hold fans!
3. Far from being confined to a genteel world, 扇 plays a role in words about instigating trouble.
4. Handheld fans with accordion pleats can fold. That's the kind of fan in the image below. It's called an 扇 (おうぎ: folding fan) or a 扇子 (せんす: folding fan). Incidentally, these two words showcase the Joyo readings of our star kanji—[おうぎ](#) and [セン](#), respectively.
5. Another type of handheld fan can't fold. Shaped more like a [paddle](#), that kind is known as an 団扇 (うちわ: paddle-shaped nonfolding fan), an [ateji](#) term.
6. Both fan designs pop up in animal and plant names to indicate fan-shaped features. But because an 扇 is triangular and an 団扇 is rounded, one fan-shaped feature could look quite different from another!

If that sweeping overview seemed fast, don't worry. We'll go over it all in a lot more detail.



The great artist [Hokusai](#) (1760–1849) captured the beauty of folding fans in this [work](#), which seems to be called *Five Fans*.

## Etymology Box

The newer edition of Henshall says that 扇 might break down as “gate, door” (戸) + “wings” (羽), signifying “leaves of a gate or door” that open and close much as a bird’s or insect’s wings move up and down. This has extended to “fan.” He points out that 扇 could be an abbreviated form of 翹, which also means “wings.” If so, the same interpretation applies.

By contrast, *Kanjigen* says that 扇 represents “flat objects that people flap to create a breeze.”

The shape of the character certainly hasn’t changed much over time:

© Richard Sears  
Seal-script version.

## When 扇 Is Not What It Seems

On very rare occasions, 扇 means “door,” as in this uncommon word:

門扇 (もんせん: gate; doors of a gate) **door + door**

Our kanji also offers up another surprise. It can carry the extremely uncommon kun-yomi とびら. That reading usually corresponds to 扉, which primarily means “door” or “hinged door.” As [essay 1730 on 扉](#) mentions, 扉 etymologically represents a “door” (戸) with “the spreading wings of a door” (非) per Henshall or a “pair of doors” per *Kanjigen*.

So 扇 and 扉 both contain “door” components and door parts that flap open. The two kanji look similar. It’s no wonder that people have treated them as interchangeable when it comes to the yomi とびら and the meaning “door.”



Hokusai included a fan in at least one more [painting](#). The fan here bears a picture of Mount Fuji, so between the fan, the mountain, and the pine sprig in the porcelain pot, he did a thorough round-up of images symbolizing Japan!

The Wikipedia caption for this artwork is 肉筆画帖. The 肉筆 (にくひつ) means that the artist has painted the piece by hand (unlike with a woodblock print), and 画帖 (がじょう) means “sketchbook.” The 帖 is non-Joyo.

According to a site that is no longer available, this artwork is titled 「福寿草と扇」, which breaks down as follows:

福寿草 (ふくじゅそう: pheasant’s eye, a species of buttercup, *Adonis ramosa* or *Adonis amurensis*), the name of the small [plant](#) in the pot  
扇 (おうぎ: folding fan)

Hokusai was hardly alone in noting the beauty of folding fans. I’ve found that shape as a motif on all of the following:

- kimono fabric
- family crests [here](#) and [there](#)
- teacups

As long as we’re talking about fan artistry, here’s a relevant word:

絵扇 (えおうぎ: folding fan painted with a picture) **picture + folding fan**

Look at all those vowels! It’s still common to paint pictures on fans.



Photo Credits: David Jacobson

In the town of Magome in Gifu Prefecture on Honshu, 扇 appears in the name of the souvenir shop 下扇屋 (しもおおぎや). Though it's technically incorrect to render the yomi of 扇 as おおぎ (given that the Joyo kun-yomi is おうぎ), it's a shop name and the owners can do as they see fit.

I'm sharing this photo with you before we've even seen much of 扇 simply because I want you to compare the shape of 扇 in the left-hand picture with the old-style image in the Etymology Box. Dead ringers, right?! Souvenirs are all about memories (straight from the French verb *se souvenir*, "to remember"), so it's appropriate that this souvenir shop sign contains ancient shapes of the characters!

The photo to the right is of the noren (split shop curtain) from the same place but presents the contemporary versions of the kanji, along with a cute fan symbol at the top. The や in that shape probably refers to 屋 (shop).

In the right-hand column we find these kanji:

郷土民芸品

Items made with regional folk crafts

郷土 (きょうど: region); 民芸品 (mingei-hin:  
items made with folk crafts)

Note that the noren bears a variant of 芸, wherein the "grass" radical on top doesn't have the usual ++ shape.

## Fan-Tossing Game

A traditional Japanese game involves folding fans! It's known as follows:

投扇興 (とうせんきょう:  
fan-tossing game)

to throw + folding fan +  
amusement

Tossing an open fan, the player tries to hit a fan-shaped target atop a wooden box. [Japanese Wikipedia](#) has photos of the equipment, which you can also buy on [Amazon Japan](#). There's a demonstration of the game on [YouTube](#).

## Folding Fans in General

Here again are the most general ways of referring to folding fans:

扇 (おうぎ: folding fan)

扇子 (せんす: folding fan)

folding fan + small object suffix

As you know, each of these common words showcases a Joyo yomi.

On Amazon Japan, in one very pretty display of a fan lying atop calligraphy, the fan is called a 扇子. That's also the keyword in this sentence:

香気の強い白檀の扇子を買いました。

I bought a sandalwood fan that has a strong aroma.

香気 (こうき: fragrance); 強い (つよい: strong);

白檀 (びやくだん: sandalwood, in which 檀 is non-Joyo); 買う (かう: to buy)

Later we'll see ways of characterizing specific types of folding fans.

## Fanning with Two Non-Joyo Kun-Yomi

The reading of the following verb is quite a departure from おうぎ:

扇ぐ (あおぐ: to fan in a literal way)

We're seeing a non-Joyo kun-yomi for 扇. When you write this word with that kanji, this common transitive verb refers to literal fanning, as in this sentence:

少年は帽子で自分を扇いだ。

The boy fanned himself with his hat.

少年 (しょうねん: boy); 帽子 (ぼうし: hat);

自分 (じぶん: himself)

You could also render this verb with the non-Joyo 煽:

扇ぐ or 煽ぐ (あおぐ: to fan in a literal way)

However, it's less common to see the word that way. In fact, the Japanese usually write the whole word in hiragana.

As the "fire" radical 火 in 煽 reflects, this kanji has a strong connection to fire. Originally, 煽 was about fanning a fire to make the flames larger. Now 煽ぐ is about fanning flames, either literally or figuratively.

Because 扇 is Joyo and 煽 is not, the Japanese typically use 扇 in the verbs in which these characters appear. However, people who know the earliest meaning of 煽 prefer that kanji when they want to say something about fanning actual or metaphorical flames.

Pye (my source on *on*-echo matters) indicates that 扇 and 煽 are part of the same *on*-echo series, as both kanji carry the セン yomi and include the 扇 shape.

Their *kun* readings overlap, too. We've seen that with あおぐ. It's also true of this verb:

扇る or 煽る (あおる: (1) to fan flames figuratively, agitate, incite, instigate; (2) fan actual flames)

With あおる, the figurative usage is far more common than the literal usage and therefore appears first here.

Incidentally, 扇る is so rare that when I type あおる, I can't get it to convert to 扇る. My proofreader has the same problem. But *Kanjigen* does include this yomi for our star kanji. Meanwhile, 煽る is quite common.

To see how 扇 and 煽 relate to each other in terms of meaning, let's consider this word for a moment:

扇ぎ立てる (あおぎたてる: (1) to fan incessantly; (2) agitate, incite, instigate)  
**to fan + aux. verb indicating a vigorous or thorough action**

The first definition of this transitive verb is about actual fanning. The following sentence reflects the second meanings:

それは私の好奇心を扇ぎ立てた。  
It stirred up my curiosity.  
私 (わたし: I); 好奇心  
(こうきしん: curiosity)

It's safe for us to pay little attention to this verb because it's uncommon. Given all that 煽 conveys, people are far more likely to use this synonym in the same sentence:

煽り立てる (あおりたてる: (1) to fan incessantly; (2) agitate, incite, instigate)  
**to fan; agitate + aux. verb indicating a vigorous or thorough action**

Notice that these verbs don't have the same reading; the ぎ has changed to り.

### Being Sensational with the On-Yomi セン

In the next term, we again have a choice of fan kanji:

扇情的 or 煽情的 (せんじょうてき: inflammatory, sensational; lascivious) **inciting + feelings + adjective suffix**

Now, though, we've shifted to the on-yomi セン, along with a definition of **sensational!** Should I say that it's simply sensational to see that?! No, I shouldn't because "sensational" in this context is quite a negative word, often associated with provoking people.

Of course, the last definition, "lascivious," is another matter altogether, and that meaning is relevant to the next word:

扇情小説 or 煽情小説 (せんじょうしょうせつ: sultry novel; suggestive story)  
**suggestive (1st 2 kanji) + novel (last 2 kanji)**

I found this term in a surprising book title:

「ルイザ・メイ・オルコットの秘密 煽情小説が好き」  
*Louisa May Alcott's Secret: She Liked Sultry Novels*  
秘密 (ひみつ: secret); 好き (すき: fond)

Seriously?! Prim and proper Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*?! Yes, before she wrote that masterpiece, she wrote other novels, including some steamy ones!

We again find 扇 and 煽 in renderings of this common word:

扇動 or 煽動 (せんだう: inciting, agitating; sedition) **inciting + moving to action**

This noun can function as a する verb, as is true here:

現地の人々を扇動するためにスパイを送り込んだ。  
They sent secret agents to rile up the local people.  
現地 (げんち: local); 人々 (ひとびと: people);  
スパイ (spy, secret agent); 送り込む (おくりこむ: to send in)

The noun form appears in the title of a book about Hitler:

「ヒトラーの大衆扇動術」  
*Hitler's Technique for Riling Up the Masses*  
大衆 (たいしゅう: the masses); -術 (-じゆつ: technique)

In another title with this keyword, 煽 appears instead:

「煽動の研究 歴史を変えた世論操作」  
*Research into Agitation: How Manipulating Public Opinion Changed History*  
研究 (けんきゅう: research); 歴史 (れきし: history); 変える (かえる: to change);  
世論操作 (よろんそうさ: manipulation of public opinion)

The word 扇動 is lodged inside this spinoff:

扇動者 or 煽動者 (せんだうしゃ: agitator) **agitating (1st 2 kanji) + person**

I found this word in titles here and there, both with 煽 in place of 扇. Please check the second link and tell me if you think that guy looks like an agitator in any way!

For all I know, he may be the guy referred to in this sentence:

学生達は扇動者の演説に動かされた。  
The students were stirred up by the agitator's speech.  
学生達 (がくせいたち: students); 演説 (えんぜつ: speech);  
動かす (うごかす: to stir, shown here in the past tense of its passive voice)

This word is practically a synonym:

扇動家 or 煽動家 (せんだうか: agitator) **agitating (1st 2 kanji) + professional**

From the next sentence, you wouldn't know that 扇動者 and 扇動家 were any different:

その扇動家は些細なことを大袈裟に表現する傾向がある。  
The agitator tends to exaggerate trivial matters.  
些細 (ささい: trivial); 大袈裟 (おおげさ: exaggeration);  
表現\* (ひょうげん: expression); 傾向がある (けいこうがある: to tend)

This literally translates as "The agitator tends to express trivial matters in an exaggerated way." By the way, 些, 袈, and 裟 are all non-Joyo.

There is, however, a subtle difference between 煽動者 and 煽動家; the former can be a one-time agitator, whereas the latter sounds like a professional agitator who regularly riles people up.

The Japanese don't see any of this in a very positive light. The word 扇動/煽動 sounds fairly negative, and certain types of agitation are considered to be crimes—hence this word:

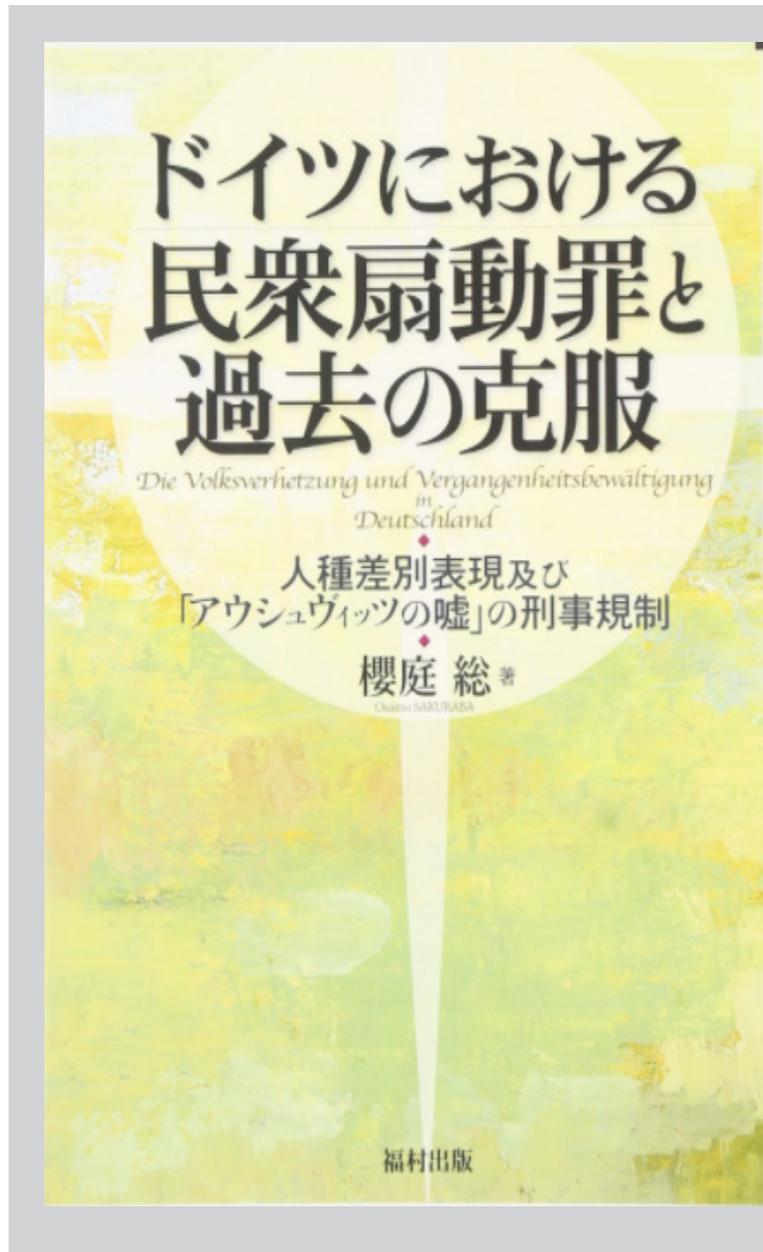
扇動罪 or 煽動罪 (せんだうざい: the crime of agitating)

**agitating (1st 2 kanji) + crime**

The following 扇動 spinoff sounds like nothing but trouble:

教唆扇動 or 教唆煽動 (きょうさせんだう: instigation and agitation)  
**instigation (1st 2 kanji) + agitation (last 2 kanji)**

This instigation and agitation could constitute a crime, depending on what the agitator tells people to do.



The book title to the left contains another 扇動 spinoff:

民衆扇動 or 民衆煽動 (みんしゅうせんだう:  
demagoguery)  
**masses (1st 2 kanji) +  
agitation (last 2 kanji)**

Actually, the keyword in the title has one extra kanji attached, forming this term:

民衆扇動罪 (みんしゅうせんだうざい:  
criminally inciting hatred)  
**masses (1st 2 kanji) + agitation  
(next 2 kanji) + crime**

This word is a direct translation of the German term *Volksverhetzung*, "incitement of the masses." That involves whipping up hatred against segments of the population and calling for violent or arbitrary measures against them or assaulting their dignity. This is now a crime in Germany, which is why the Japanese term ends with 罪 (crime).

Here's the title with its English translation:

「ドイツにおける**民衆扇動罪**と過去の克服」  
*Criminally Inciting Hatred and Conquering  
the Past in Germany*  
における (in); 過去 (かこ: past);  
克服 (こくふく: conquest)

「人種差別表現及び『アウシュヴィッツの嘘』の刑事規制」  
*Controlling the Expression of Racial Discrimination  
and "Lies About Auschwitz" by Treating Them as  
Criminal Offenses*  
人種差別 (じんしゅさべつ: racial discrimination);  
及び (および: and); 嘘 (うそ: lie, a non-Joyo kanji);  
刑事 (けいじ: criminal matter); 規制 (きせい:  
controlling)

## A Cardboard Fan

One cardboard, folding-fan-shaped instrument has nothing to do with cooling oneself:

ハリセン (張り扇: cardboard fan used as a stick for slapping)  
**slapping + fan**

Breen defines this tool as a “slapstick,” which completely confused me, as that’s primarily a type of comedy. But as it turns out, “slapstick” also refers to a type of stick that silly entertainers (such as clowns) use to strike other performers. That was the original definition of “slapstick.”

That’s almost the meaning of 張り扇, which the Japanese typically write as ハリセン. A [video](#) shows how people use these fans to hit each other in silly comedy such as manzai (story-telling by two performers in a funny dialogue). When someone says something silly or makes a foolish mistake, the penalty is a slap on the head with a ハリセン. In the video, people are attempting tongue-twisters, and whoever makes a mistake receives a slap. It doesn’t hurt much but is quite loud, which the audience finds funny.

As to why this term usually appears in katakana, the Japanese probably see ハリセン as slang because it’s used in comedy, a very casual context.

By the way, Noh performers make a slapping sound with another type of fan. It’s also called a 張り扇, read in that case as はりおうぎ. Such fans appear in a 講談 (こうだん), a type of play in which people tell epic stories. You can see that use of a fan at 0:58 of a [video](#).

## The Shape of a Folding Fan

That was all quite heavy! Fortunately, we’ve now arrived at a fun and light aspect of 扇. It involves these words:

扇形 (おうぎがた or せんけい: shape of a folding fan)  
**folding fan + shape**

扇状 (せんじょう: shape of a folding fan)  
**folding fan + shape**

Both are nouns that can become の adjectives, and both are common words.

The possible applications are endless. Here are just some of the many objects the Japanese would describe as having the shape of a folding fan:

- a deck of cards that someone has “fanned” out
- the bristles of a makeup brush or of a calligraphy brush
- a curved sushi “tray” known as a 盛台 (もりだい)
- earrings
- an enormous gossamer cloak that is part of a belly-dancing costume
- an umbrella stand shaped (from a bird’s-eye view) like a quadrant of a circle

The terms 扇形 and 扇状 are synonymous in the usage we’ve seen. Some of the Amazon product titles at the links include 扇形, and some use 扇状. (And some are no longer available, so I’ve removed the links.) However, 扇形 has one definition that 扇状 does not share:

扇形 (おうぎがた or せんけい: circular sector)

This refers to a geometric shape, the portion of a disk enclosed by two radii and an arc. At the link, the shaded part of the diagram is the circular sector. The size of the angle doesn’t matter. Even if the whole circle is shaded, 扇形 still applies! Clearly, that use of the word deviates quite a bit from the image of a folding fan!

Here’s one more word inspired by the shape of a folding fan:

尾扇 (びせん: tail fan) **tail + folding fan**

This refers to the tail of a shrimp, lobster, and so on. Even English speakers recognize the fan shape in this case. Well, I’m saying that based on the term “tail fan.” I don’t think I’ve ever once looked at a shrimp and glimpsed a folding fan!

## Quick Quiz 1

You've seen that both 扇状 and 扇形 refer to the shape of a folding fan. Given that, what could the following terms mean? Match each word with one lettered option:

1. 扇状地 (せんじょうち)      **folding-fan-shaped (1st 2 kanji) + earth**
  2. 扇形庫 (せんけいこ)      **folding-fan-shaped (1st 2 kanji) + storehouse**
- a. triangular plot of land  
b. triangular warehouse  
c. roundhouse  
d. alluvial fan, delta



Because some plants and animals are partly or entirely shaped like folding fans, 扇 is part of their names. For instance, Breen lists many types of beaked whales, and all of their names include the following term:

オウギハクジラ (扇齒鯨: Stejneger's beaked whale, *Mesoplodon stejnegeri*)      **folding fan + tooth + whale**

"Tooth" (齒) is in the Japanese, and "beak" is in the English! The animal's face certainly suggests a beak to me. To understand why 扇 and 齒 are in this term, look at a skeleton of this kind of whale. Its lower jaw contains a fan-shaped tooth.

We also find 扇 in the name of the shell on the left, which belonged to this animal:

ヒオウギガイ (檜扇貝: noble scallop, *Chlamys nobilis*)      **hinoki fan (1st 2 kanji) + shellfish**

The name of the tree on the right similarly begins with our star kanji:

オウギバショウ (扇芭蕉: traveler's tree, traveler's palm, *Ravenala madagascariensis*)  
**folding fan + Japanese fiber banana (last 2 kanji)**

The Japanese tend to use katakana for these words (in which 檜, 芭, and 蕉 are non-Joyo), undermining the 扇 connection.

By the way, as the breakdown of the scallop name indicates, 檜扇 means something in the world of fans:

檜扇 or 桧扇 (ひおうぎ: (1) formal folding fan made of hinoki cypress; (2) blackberry lily, *Belamcanda Chinensis*; leopard lily, leopard flower) **hinoki cypress + folding fan**

In the second rendering, the non-Joyo 桧 also means “hinoki cypress.”

Wikipedia has an image of the type of fan that 檜扇 primarily represents. When designed exclusively for women (and used exclusively by court ladies), such a fan was known as follows:

裯扇 (あこめおうぎ: formal folding fan made of hinoki cypress) **layer of women’s clothing + folding fan**

In this context, the non-Joyo 裯 apparently stands in for “woman,” indicating that this sort of fan was for those who would wear the layer of women’s clothing known as a 裯.

Ordinary folding fans are made of bamboo or wood and paper. By contrast, an 裯扇 was entirely made of hinoki cypress and came with a beautiful picture and tassels.

## Answers to Quick Quiz 1

1.d. 扇状地 (せんじょうち: **fan-shaped (1st 2 kanji) + earth**) means “alluvial fan” or “delta,” which is to say “a fan- or cone-shaped deposit of sediment crossed and built up by streams.” On Wikipedia you can see pictures of this sort of landform, including a vast example in China. To me, the clearest one to grasp is smaller and is in the French Pyrenees. If you want to read Japanese books about alluvial fans, one is about such landforms in Japan, whereas another examines alluvial fans around the world.

2.c. 扇形庫 (せんけいこ: **fan-shaped (1st 2 kanji) + storehouse**) means “roundhouse.” This term refers to a building that railroads use for servicing, repairing, and storing locomotives. Such a structure traditionally surrounds or is adjacent to a turntable. Wikimedia Commons includes photos of roundhouses in Japan.

## Fans for Macho Men

When I took a tour of Kyoto many years ago, the male guide beckoned to our scattered group after each stop and made himself more visible by holding up a folding fan. I thought such a dainty object would be for women’s use only, so I was quite amused by what I took to be gender-bending irony. But it turns out that some fans are for tough men.<sup>1</sup>

Let’s examine such fans, starting with this one:

舞扇 (まいおうぎ: dancer’s fan) **dance + folding fan**

In the West, “dancer” and “fan” are about as far removed from typical images of masculinity as one can get. In Japan, though, dancing with a fan is actually a way to seem menacing!

## Fans and Gender<sup>1</sup>

One [site](#) says that gender determines how one should hold a folding fan:

- A man should hold the fan with the thumb facing others and the other fingers facing himself.
- A woman should hold the fan with the thumb facing herself and the remaining fingers facing others.

In the image under “point 1” at the link, blue is for a man’s grip on a fan, and pink is for a woman’s.

Here are more fan etiquette tips from the same site:

- Open the fan gently without making noise. Got that? No grunting! Actually, this rule refers to the slapping sound a fan can make while opening.
- Fan yourself elegantly with the printed side of the fan facing others.
- Don’t unnecessarily fan others while fanning yourself.
- Fanning yourself in front of older people could be considered bad manners.

Wow!

Images of such a fan appear on [Japanese Wikipedia](#). Another pops up in a [video](#) of a Noh actor as he dances, sings, and waves a 舞扇. If his face looks crazed and his tone sounds frightening, you’re interpreting it right! He’s performing a 幸若舞 (こうわかまい), a style of recitative dance popular during the Muromachi period (1333–1573). This type of dance often has a military theme and menacing undertones. In such contexts, the fan symbolizes a weapon, such as a sword or spear. In yet another [video](#), such fans are used during a 剣舞 (けんぶ: sword dance). At cherry blossom festivals, boys and girls sometimes perform this dance using both fans and swords.

However, a 舞扇 isn’t always meant to scare people. In a traditional Japanese dance, these fans can also express the movements of leaves, flowers, rivers, wind, and a dancer’s emotions.

But we’re back to a militaristic context with the next word:

軍扇 (ぐんせん: commander’s war fan) **military + folding fan**

Using this fan as a baton, a commander would take command of an army, though it’s unclear (at least to my proofreader) exactly how he did so.

Here’s a fan that actually served as a weapon:

鉄扇 (てつせん: iron-ribbed fan) **iron + folding fan**

In the Warring States period (1467–1568), the Japanese made the outer ribs of such fans out of [iron](#), using these weapons in battles or in self-defense.

Despite the 扇 in the word, I’m not sure “fan” is the right term for this instrument. In one [picture](#), a 鉄扇 looks like a blunt piece of iron used to smash windows or heads. I’m told that the term includes 扇 because the hunk of metal resembles a folded-up fan, but that association feels like a stretch. Another [picture](#) of a 鉄扇 looks more fanlike and comes with a sign saying 鉄扇 in tidy characters. It’s also possible to find a 鉄扇 that fans out and is entirely [made of stainless steel](#).

It was probably the all-metal type of 鉄扇 that inspired this martial art:

鉄扇術 (てつせんじゆつ: martial art based on the use of the iron fan) **iron + folding fan + technique**

Here are terms for two other metallic fans:

金扇 (きんせん: gilded folding fan) **gold + folding fan**

銀扇 (ぎんせん: silver-foiled folding fan) **silver + folding fan**

Where are such fans used? What do they signify? My proofreader has no idea, saying that dictionaries don’t explain any of this. All I found was that a [company](#) called 金扇 makes a sweet described on Amazon as “rubbery candy”! Mmm! Oh, wait—maybe ラブリーキャンディ means “lovely candy”! It might be better to use kanji to avoid that misconception!



North of Tokyo, in Saitama Prefecture, the city of Kumagaya features a statue of a samurai on horseback holding a fan! The man is Kumagai Naozane (1141–1207 or 1208) and is famous for having killed one warrior in particular, as a [Wikipedia article](#) mentions in English.

Originally, Kumagaya City was called Kumagai. Some sources say that the samurai's surname came from the place name, but many sources say it happened the other way around.

## Newfangled Fans

Given that the Japanese strongly associate 扇 with folding fans, I'm quite surprised to find that they also use this kanji in terms for modern fans powered by electricity. I would have expected them to use ファン for that, but that word means "fan" in the sense of "baseball fan" or "Beatles fan." (And in English, that kind of "fan" comes from "fanatic.")

Anyway, here's a common term for a newfangled fan:

扇風機 (せんふうき: electric fan)      fan + wind + machine

Note the breakdown; in words for modern fans, 扇 means "fan," not "folding fan." Also notice the very cute yomi, which sounds like what you'd say while tickling someone's tummy.

Here are two ways to use the keyword:

名古屋の夏を涼しく過ごすには扇風機が必須だ。  
In Nagoya in the summer, an electric fan is essential to feel cool.  
名古屋 (なごや: city name); 夏 (なつ: summer);  
涼しい (すずしい: cool); 過ごす (すごす: to lead (a life));  
必須 (ひつす: essential)

暑かったので扇風機をつけた。  
It was hot, so I turned on the fan.  
暑い (あつい: hot); つける (点ける: to turn on)

Such a fan might hang from the ceiling. If so, this is the most accurate (but uncommon) term:

天井扇 (てんじょうせん: ceiling fan)      ceiling (1st 2 kanji) + fan

If an exhaust fan is in the kitchen (over the stove) or bathroom, this is the word you want:

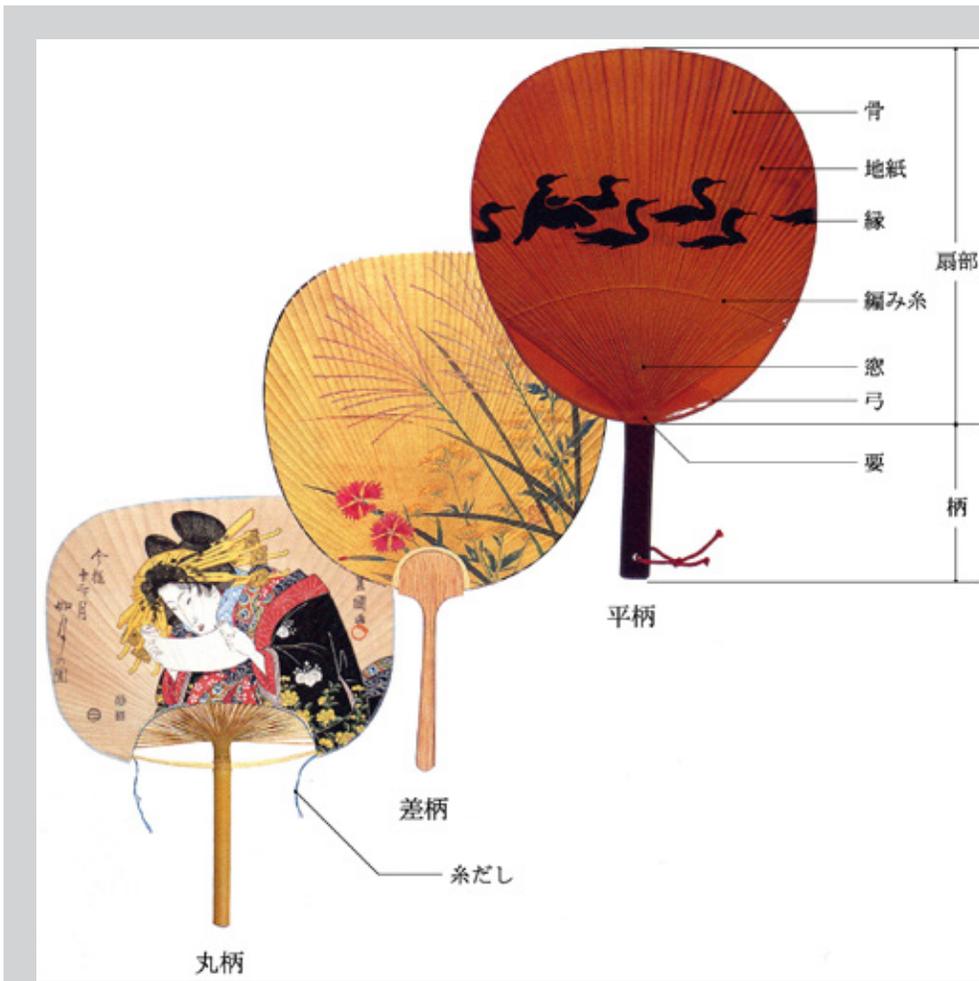
換気扇 (かんきせん: ventilation fan)      ventilation (1st 2 kanji) + fan

This term is common.



We shift now to the paddle-shaped fan known as an 団扇 (うちわ). That's what the woman is holding in this painting by Seiki Kuroda (黒田清輝, くらだ せいぎ), an 1897 work called 「湖畔 (こはん: Lakeshore)」.

I'm intrigued that the painting looks Western and that the woman hardly looks Japanese. One [site](#) confirms that Kuroda was the father of painting in the Western style in Japan and that the woman he depicted here was his future wife, who was indeed Japanese.



A paddle-shaped fan looks simple but has many parts! This [diagram](#) shows the names, which are much clearer at the link. Here are yomi and definitions, with question marks showing my proofreader's uncertainty:

- 扇部 (せんぶ? or おうぎぶ?: the decorated surface)
- 柄 (え: handle)
- 骨 (ほね: rib)
- 地紙 (じがみ: paper in a fan)
- 縁 (ふち?: edge)
- 編み糸 (あみいと: thread binding the ribs)
- 窓 (まど: "window," the part between the thread and the handle)
- 弓 (ゆみ: U-shaped frame that looks like a bow, with the 編み糸 as the bowstring)
- 要 (かなめ: the part between the decorated surface and handle)
- 平柄 (ひらえ: flat handle)
- 差柄 (さしえ: slitted handle into which the decorated surface is inserted)
- 糸だし (いとだし: the part of the 編み糸 that hangs off the decorated surface)
- 丸柄 (まるえ: round handle)

## The Uses of the Uchiwa

As you know, the preceding images feature this kind of fan:

団扇 (うちわ: paddle-shaped nonfolding fan) **group<sup>2</sup> + fan**

### The 団 in 団扇<sup>2</sup>

It's rare but possible to read 団扇 with on-yomi:

団扇 (だんせん: (1) nonfolding fan; (2) military leader's fan)

This term prompted my proofreader to muse that although he can't find anything about the etymology, his gut feeling is that the 団 in 団扇 comes from the fact that a military leader would use a fan to command an army corps (軍団, ぐんだん), which is a group of people (団).

As I mentioned early on, this common word is ateji. Some dictionaries say that うちわ was once rendered as 打ち翳 and then as 打ち羽, later becoming 団扇.

In 打ち翳, the 打ち means "beat," and the non-Joyo 翳 (は) represents another kind of fan. According to [Japanese Wikipedia](#), people used the うちわ (formerly pronounced うちは) to beat and repel insects, such as flies and mosquitoes.

I find it interesting that as 打ち羽 evolved into 団扇, the 羽 (wing) turned into 扇, which contains the wings of a door. By the way, whereas うち is the official way of reading 打ち, わ is a non-Joyo yomi for 羽.

Today, people usually write うちわ rather than 団扇 because the latter rendering feels unfamiliar. However, I'm going to stick with the kanji, as in this sentence:

ちなみに、この部屋には冷房設備なんて物は何も無い。あるのは団扇だけ。  
Incidentally, this room doesn't have anything like an air conditioner.  
All it has is an uchiwa.

ちなみに (incidentally); 部屋 (へや: room);  
冷房設備 (れいぼうせつび: air conditioner); なんて (like);  
物 (もの: thing); 何も無い (なにもない: nothing)

The other reason to acquaint oneself with the kanji rendering 団扇 is that it appears in several spinoffs, such as this one:

軍配団扇 (ぐんぱいうちわ: (1) gourd-shaped war fan; (2) sumo referee's fan; (3) fan-shaped emblem)  
**strategy (1st 2 kanji) + uchiwa (last 2 kanji)**

The first meaning is military, and the breakdown reflects that sense. I've seen examples of a supposedly gourd-shaped war fan [here](#) and [there](#), and the shape usually does not remind me of a gourd, though [sometimes](#) I can see it.

As to the second definition of 軍配団扇, a sumo referee holds this kind of fan and uses it at key moments. In a [video](#) of a sumo match, you can clearly see the fan at 1:13. Then at 2:20, the referee raises his fan toward the winner.<sup>3</sup> The third meaning of 軍配団扇, "fan-shaped emblem," refers to a type of [family crest](#).

### Figurative Spinoffs<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese often abbreviate 軍配団扇 as 軍配 (ぐんぱい). We see that word in these common expressions, which don't include our star kanji:

Aに軍配が上がる (Aにぐんぱいがあがる: the referee's fan is raised toward A, signaling that he has won the match), which is to say "to be declared the winner"

Aに軍配を上げる (Aにぐんぱいをあげる: to raise the referee's fan toward A, signaling that he has won the match), which means "to declare someone the winner"

The decisive motion with which a sumo referee raises his fan toward the winner has inspired these phrases.

People use them primarily for sumo but also far beyond the sumo ring. For example, they come in handy when talking about who won any kind of contest. They're also useful for comparisons. For example, if you are sampling saké and wine and you think the saké is better, you could say this:

日本酒に軍配が上がる。  
The saké is the winner.  
日本酒 (にほんしゅ: saké)

The next 団扇 spinoff is quite intriguing:

羽団扇 (はうちわ: nonfolding fan made of bird feathers)  
**feathers + uchiwa (last 2 kanji)**

We practically have a 羽 sandwich here! And what's this about feathers as a fabrication material?! Actually, that's kind of ingenious, given that feathers are supposed to flap and create a breeze, just as fans are!

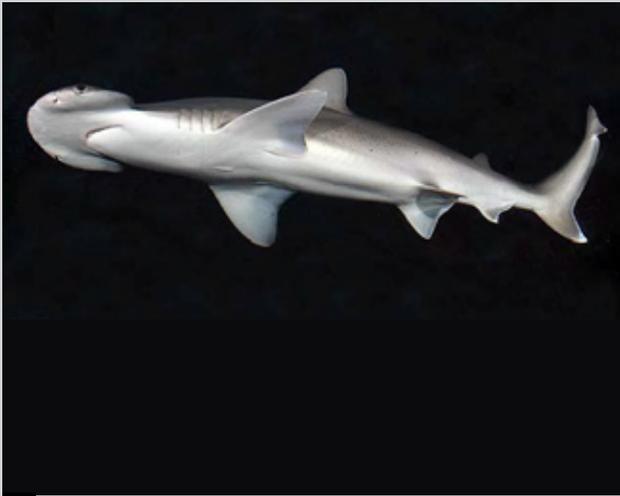
These sorts of fans probably don't exist anymore, but the mythical creature 天狗 (てんぐ, in which 狗 is non-Joyo) is believed to possess one.

### Quick Quiz 2

If 左 means "left," as in "the opposite of right," why do you think 左団扇 means what it does:

左団扇 (ひだりうちわ: ease and comfort)  
**left + handheld fan (last 2 kanji)**

- An emperor had a left-hand man who would fan him on hot days.
- Most people are right-handed. If you fan yourself with your left hand, you'll do it slowly, which suggests leisure.
- Ease and comfort are out of reach for most people, like something too far off to the left.



**a**

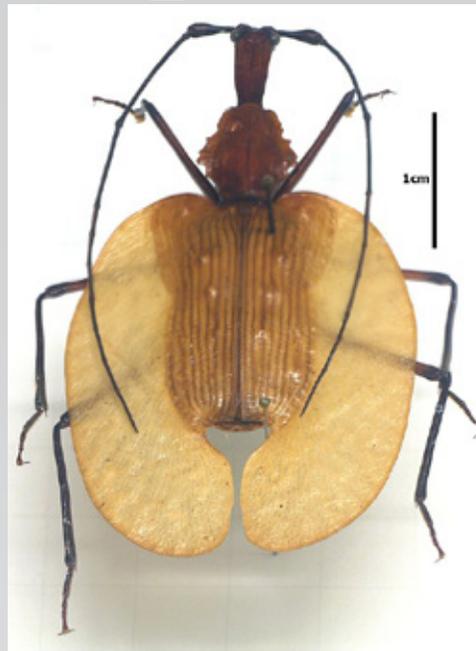


**b**



ウチワエビ  
*Ibacus ciliatus*  
十脚目 ウチワエビ科

**c**



**d**



**e**



**f**

All of these animals and plants have rounded features, so 団扇 is in their names. Of course, the Japanese tend to write the names in katakana, which misses all the fun of the fan connections! Here are the names:

a. ウチワシユモクザメ (団扇撞木鮫: bonnethead, *Sphyrna tiburo*)      **uchiwa (1st 2 kanji) + hammerhead shark (last 3 kanji)**

This is a species of hammerhead shark. What is called a 団扇 in Japanese is considered a “hammer” in English, though the Japanese term also contains a hammer, in that 撞木 means “wooden bell hammer.” The purpose of that rounded protrusion is unknown. Both 撞 and 鮫 are non-Joyo.

b. ウチワゴケ (団扇苔: tiny bristle fern, *Crepidomanes minutum*)      **uchiwa (1st 2 kanji) + lichen, moss**

The last kanji is non-Joyo.

c. ウチワエビ (団扇海老: fan lobster, esp. *Ibacus ciliatus*; sand crayfish) **uchiwa (1st 2 kanji) + lobster (last 2 kanji)**

d. ウチワムシ (団扇虫: violin beetle, ghost walker (beetle), *Mormolyce phyllodes*)      **uchiwa (1st 2 kanji) + insect**

e. ベニウチワ (紅団扇: Anthurium lily, flamingo lily)      **crimson + uchiwa (last 2 kanji)**

f. ハウチワカエデ (羽団扇楓: Japanese maple, *Acer japonicum*)      **nonfolding fan made of bird feathers (1st 3 kanji) + maple**

Oh, my favorite type of tree! And look—we have a recurrence of 羽団扇, the feathered fan! When I initially saw that the kanji for “Japanese maple” included 団扇, it made no sense to me because the leaf is hardly paddle-shaped. But it’s certainly feathery! Everything just fell into place! By the way, I don’t mean to be too anticlimactic, but 楓 is non-Joyo!

## Answer to Quick Quiz 2

b. 左団扇 (ひだりうちわ: **left + handheld fan (last 2 kanji)**) means “ease and comfort” because, according to Gogen, most people are right-handed, so if you use your left hand to fan yourself, you’ll do it slowly. The slowness of the act makes it seem as though one is living a leisurely, financially carefree life. Hence, 左団扇, as well as 左扇 (ひだりおうぎ), came to mean “living with ease and comfort.” Most Japanese people are familiar with this very common term but don’t know the origin. Here’s a sample sentence:

宝くじでも当たれば、**左団扇**で暮らせるのに。

If I win the lottery, for example, I’ll be able to live high on the hog.

宝くじ (たからくじ: lottery); でも (for example); 当たる (あたる: to win);

暮らす (くらす: to live, shown here in its potential form)

The のに at the end of the sentence indicates a fantasy, as well as regret that the fantasy has not come true.

## Where We've Been, What We've Seen

We've seen three common terms for two kinds of fans:

扇 (おうぎ: folding fan)

扇子 (せんす: folding fan)      **folding fan + small object suffix**

団扇 (うちわ: paddle-shaped nonfolding fan)

The first word showcases おうぎ, the Joyo kun-yomi of our star kanji. The second word incorporates the Joyo on-yomi セン. And the last term is ateji.

We can indicate the shape of a folding fan with these words:

扇形 (おうぎがた or せんけい: shape of a folding fan)      **folding fan + shape**

扇状 (せんじょう: shape of a folding fan)      **folding fan + shape**

Several animals and plants have 扇 or 団扇 in their names to indicate a fan-shaped feature. But because the two kinds of fans look so different, that feature could be triangular or rounded!

There are specialized folding fans, some made of metal, some used in war or in dance, all including 扇. Words for electric fans also contain 扇, as in these two examples:

扇風機 (せんふうき: electric fan)      **fan + wind + machine**

換気扇 (かんきせん: ventilation fan)      **ventilation (1st 2 kanji) + fan**

The traditional fan has given rise to this uncommon verb:

扇ぐ or 煽ぐ (あおぐ: to fan in a literal way)

When you render this verb with our star kanji, you're talking about literal fanning. If you instead use the non-Joyo 煽 here, you could be talking either literally or figuratively about fanning flames. With 煽, the figurative usage is far more common than the literal usage.

Some people figuratively fan flames by whipping others into a frenzy. We can express that with this on-yomi term:

扇動 or 煽動 (せんだう: inciting, agitating; sedition)      **inciting + moving to action**

It has several spinoffs, including these:

扇動者 or 煽動者 (せんだうしゃ: agitator)      **agitating (1st 2 kanji) + person**

扇動家 or 煽動家 (せんだうか: agitator)      **agitating (1st 2 kanji) + professional**

扇動罪 or 煽動罪 (せんだうざい: the crime of agitating)      **agitating (1st 2 kanji) + crime**

If you're not feeling too agitated, it's time for your Verbal Logic Quiz!

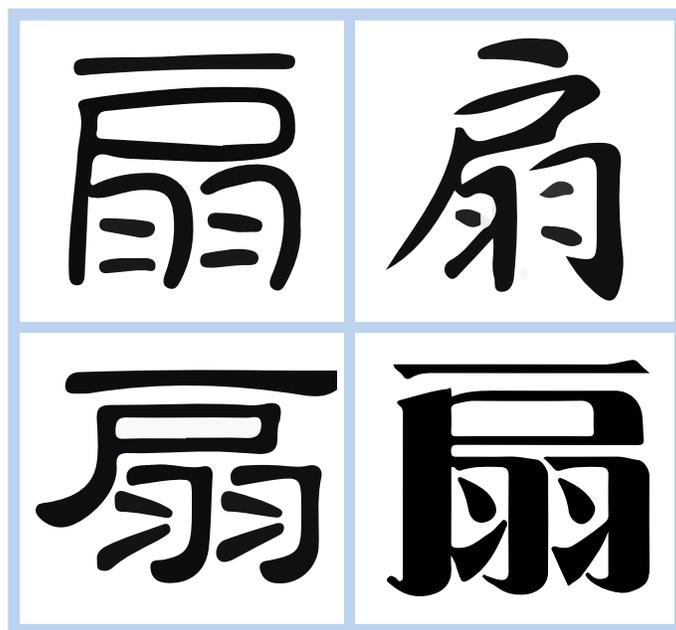
Master the material in this [essay by playing games](#) from our partner Kanshudo!

## Verbal Logic Quiz

The following term literally means “summer fireplaces and winter fans.” What do you suppose that means figuratively:

夏炉冬扇 (かろうせん)      **summer + fireplace + winter + folding fans**

- a. things that make you uncomfortable
- b. useless things
- c. redundancy
- d. things that make a bad situation worse



## Answer to the Verbal Logic Quiz

b. 夏炉冬扇 (かろとうせん: **summer + fireplaces + winter + folding fans**) figuratively means “useless things.”

The Japanese convey much the same idea by referring to autumn fans:

秋扇 (しゅうせん or あきおうぎ: fan in autumn (esp. one that is no longer used); outdated item that has fallen into disuse; woman who has lost a man’s affection or interest) **autumn + folding fan**

People also render this term as 秋の扇 (あきのおうぎ). As you can see, only the kun-kun reading applies then.

There’s yet another way to express this idea:

忘れ扇 (わすれおうぎ: discarded fan (in autumn); forgotten fan) **forgotten + folding fan**

All of these expressions are uncommon.

*Daijisen* and *Daijirin* note that 秋の扇 came from ancient China, where a court lady of the Han dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE) likened herself to an unused fan in autumn. She was referring to her love life because the emperor had lost interest in her. The Japanese later adopted the term.