

Japanese units of measurement wikipedia

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The ken (間) is a traditional Japanese unit of length, equal to six Japanese feet (shaku). The exact value has varied over time and location but has generally been a little shorter than 2 meters (6 ft 7 in).[1][2] It is now standardized as 1.82 m.[3]

Although mostly supplanted by the metric system, this unit is a common measurement in Japanese architecture, where it is used as a proportion for the intervals between the pillars of traditional-style buildings. In this context, it is commonly translated as "bay". The length also appears in other contexts, such as the standard length of the b? staff in Japanese martial arts and the standard dimensions of the tatami mats. As these are used to cover the floors of most Japanese houses, floor surfaces are still commonly measured not in square meters but in "tatami" which are equivalent to half of a square ken.

This kanji graphically combines "door" and "sun". The earlier variant character was written with "moon" rather than "sun", depicting "A door through the crevice of which the moonshine peeps in".[4]

The diverse Japanese pronunciations of include on'yomi Sino-Chinese readings (from jian or "room; between; gap; interval") of kan "interval; space; between; among; discord; favorable opportunity" or ken "six feet"; and kun'yomi native Japanese readings of ai "interval; between; medium; crossbred", aida or awai "space; interval; gap; between; among; midway; on the way; distance; time; period; relationship", or ma "space; room; interval; pause; rest (in music); time; a while; leisure; luck; timing; harmony".[5]

The ken is based on the Chinese jian. It uses the same Chinese character as the Korean kan.

The value of a ken could change from building to building, but was usually kept constant within the same structure. There can however be exceptions. Kasuga Taisha's tiny honden's dimensions, for example, are 1x1 in ken, but 1.9x2.6 in meters.[1] In the case of Izumo Taisha's honden, a ken is 6.32 m (20.7 ft), well above its standard value.[7]

The distance between pillars was standardized very early and started being used as a unit of measurement. Land area in particular was measured using the ken as a basis. The unit was born out of the necessity to measure land surface to calculate taxes. At the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (16th century), the ken was about 1.97 m (6.5 ft), but around 1650 the Tokugawa shogunate reduced it to 1.818 m (5.96 ft) specifically to increase taxes. After the Edo period, the ken started to be called ky?ma (間).[1][2]

Shaku (Japanese: 尺) or Japanese foot is a Japanese unit of length derived (but varying) from the Chinese chi, originally based upon the distance measured by a human hand from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger (compare span). Traditionally, the length varied by location or use, but it is now standardized as $\frac{10}{33}$ m, or approximately 30.3 centimeters (11.9 in).

Shaku entered English in the early 18th century; a romanization of the Japanese Go-on reading of the character for Japanese foot (尺, shaku).

In Japanese media parlance, shaku refers to screen time: the amount of time someone or something is shown on screen (similar to the English "footage").

Traditionally, the actual length of the shaku varied over time, location, and use. By the early 19th century, the shaku was largely within the range of 0.30175 to 0.303 meters (11.880 in to 11.929 in), but a longer value of the shaku (also known as the kōrai-shaku) was also known, and was 1.17 times longer than the present value (35.5 centimeters or 14.0 inches).

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