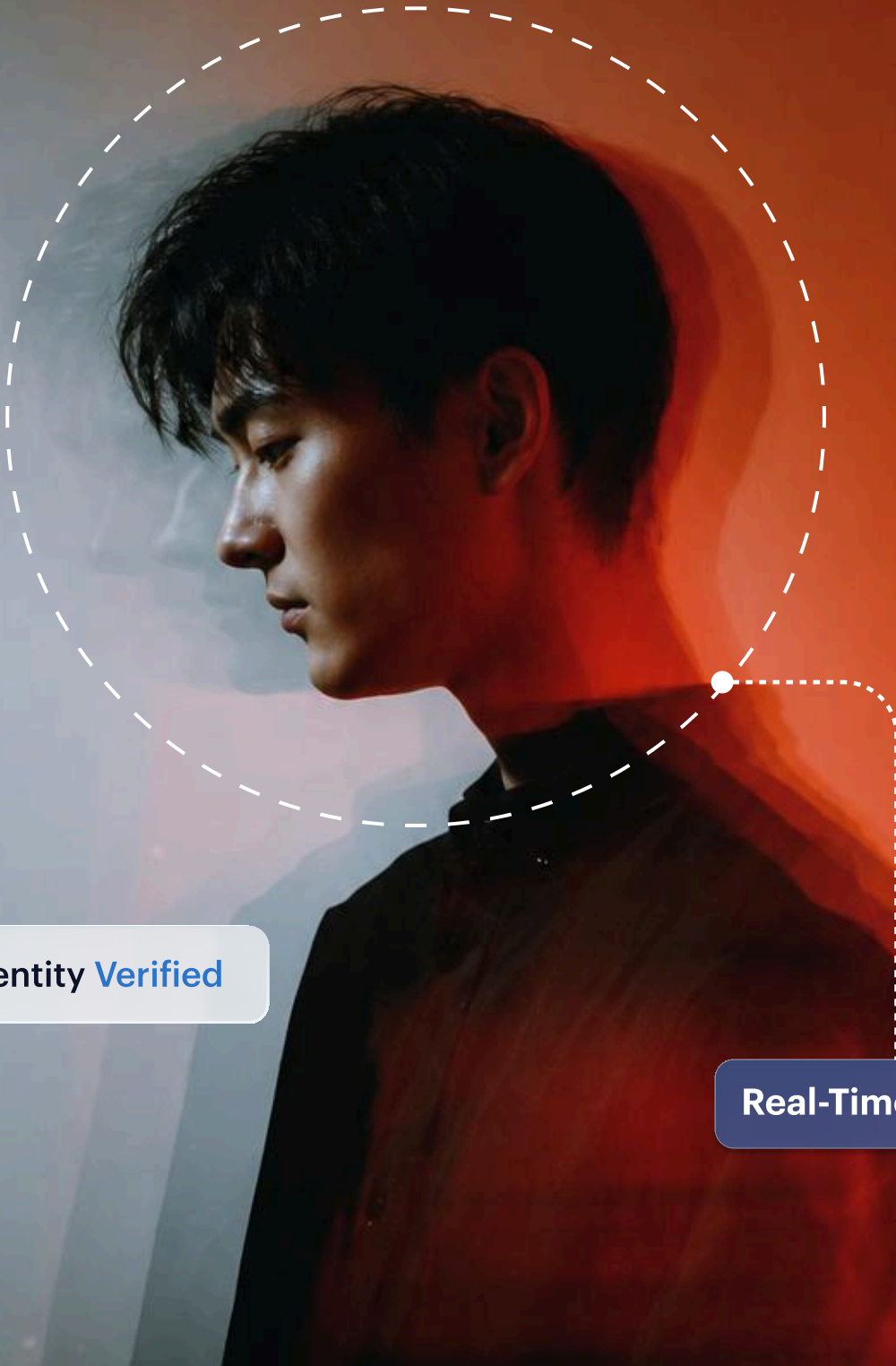


A Merchant's Guide to Identity Verification in JAPAN



Identity **Verified**

Real-Time Checks



VÉRIFICATION
D'ÂGE KJM



PCI DSS



iBeta L3



ISO 27001:2022



CE+



QG GDPR



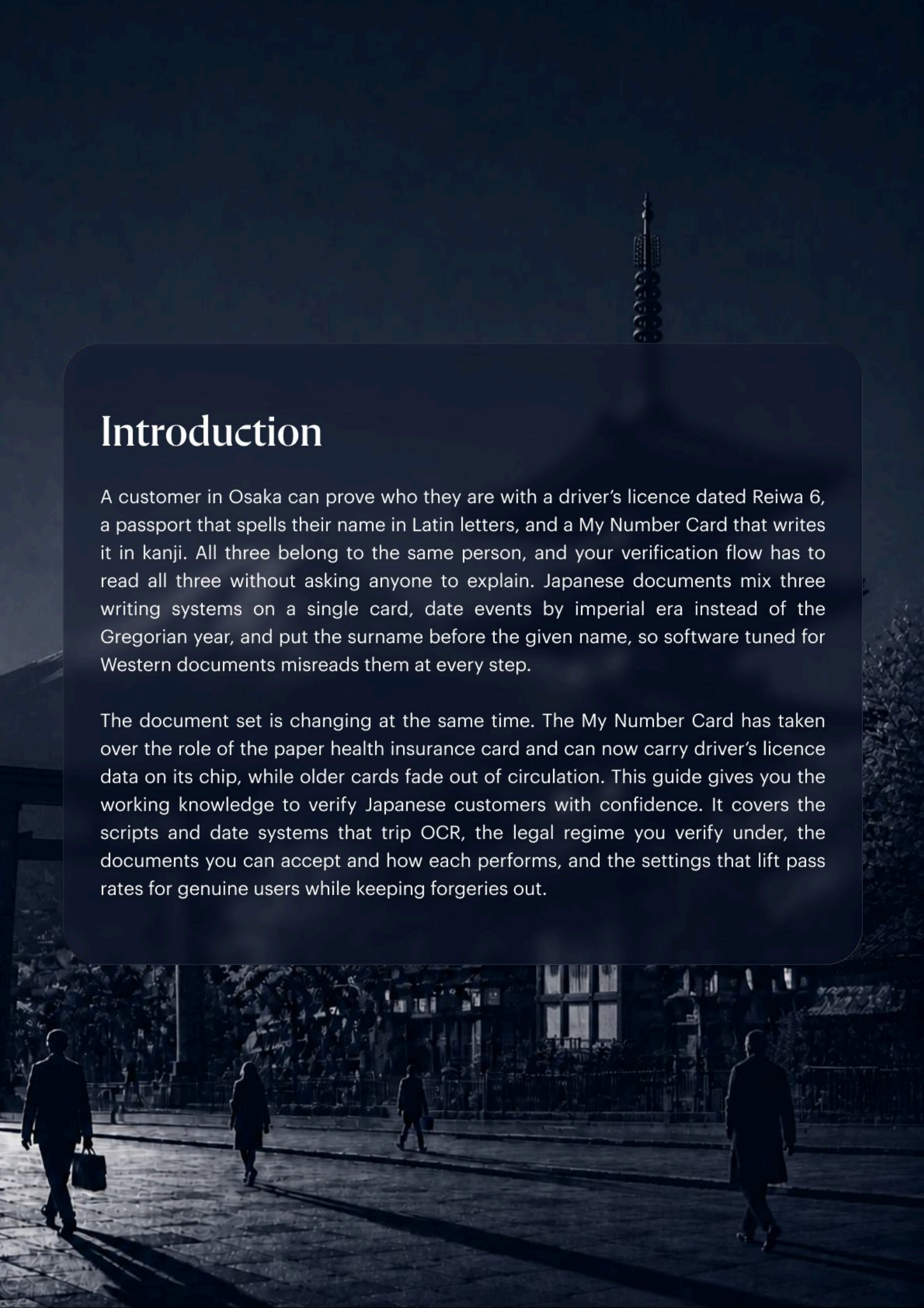
SOC2



GDPR



CCPA



Introduction

A customer in Osaka can prove who they are with a driver's licence dated Reiwa 6, a passport that spells their name in Latin letters, and a My Number Card that writes it in kanji. All three belong to the same person, and your verification flow has to read all three without asking anyone to explain. Japanese documents mix three writing systems on a single card, date events by imperial era instead of the Gregorian year, and put the surname before the given name, so software tuned for Western documents misreads them at every step.

The document set is changing at the same time. The My Number Card has taken over the role of the paper health insurance card and can now carry driver's licence data on its chip, while older cards fade out of circulation. This guide gives you the working knowledge to verify Japanese customers with confidence. It covers the scripts and date systems that trip OCR, the legal regime you verify under, the documents you can accept and how each performs, and the settings that lift pass rates for genuine users while keeping forgeries out.

Understanding the Challenges of Japanese Identity Documents

Six traits of Japanese documents that decide whether your automated checks read them or reject them.

Reliable verification in Japan starts with the documents themselves. Japan's identity documents have turned over almost completely in the past decade — the My Number Card took over from the Jūki card, the Residence Card replaced the old Alien Registration Certificate, and the paper health insurance card is now leaving circulation — yet the writing on them has not changed. Three scripts, era-based dates, and surname-first names still decide whether an automated check reads a Japanese document or rejects it. The six challenges below cause most failed reads and false rejections.

1 | Linguistic Diversity

Japanese writing comprises three scripts — hiragana ひらがな, katakana カタカナ and kanji 漢字 — and a single document mixes all three.

Hiragana (ひらがな). A syllabic script of 46 basic characters used for native Japanese words and grammar. It is often the first script learners meet, and it fills the grammatical connective tissue on documents.

Katakana (カタカナ). Covers the same sounds as hiragana but spells foreign words, technical terms, and foreign names, so it is the script many foreign residents' names appear in. Its angular strokes sit next to the cursive hiragana on the same card.

Kanji (漢字). Logographic characters that came from Chinese, and a Japanese person's legal name is usually written in them. Only about 2,000 of the thousands in use are needed for everyday reading, and a single character can carry more than one reading depending on the words around it, so an automated check has to settle the reading from context.

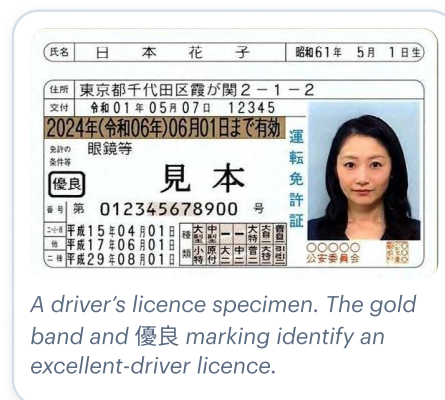
National IDs, passports, and driver's licences incorporate all three scripts, sometimes with a Romanised name alongside, which makes OCR processing particularly challenging — an advanced OCR system has to recognise complex kanji and switch scripts mid-field without losing accuracy.



The Jūki card, a legacy ID whose role passed to the My Number Card.



The former Alien Registration Certificate, replaced by today's Residence Card.



A driver's licence specimen. The gold band and 優良 marking identify an excellent-driver licence.

2 | Complex Diacritic Symbols

Hiragana and katakana carry diacritic marks called dakuten and handakuten that change a syllable's sound, and a dropped mark changes a name. Kanji adds a harder problem: many characters look nearly identical while meaning something entirely different. The kanji for tree 木 and the kanji for book 本 are visually similar — one stroke apart — and only their context within a name or an address tells a verification system which one it is reading.

3 | No Spaces Between Words

Japanese text runs without spaces between words. A name on a document sits as one unbroken string, so the software has to work out where the surname ends and the given name begins. Some documents also print a Romanised version of the name next to the Japanese one, and the two must be matched to each other rather than treated as two different people.

4 | Japanese Era Calendar

Japanese documents date events by imperial era rather than the Gregorian year. **Shōwa** ran from 1926 to 1989, **Heisei** from 1989 to 2019, and **Reiwa** began in 2019 and continues today. A birth date can appear as kanji era text rather than a Western year, and sometimes as a Latin abbreviation such as H3 for Heisei 3. Certain year numbers never appear at all because an era ended before reaching them, so date validation has to understand the era system rather than just parse digits. Your verification flow needs to convert every era date to its Gregorian equivalent accurately.

Typically, Japanese dates are written in the following format: **Era Name – Year – Month – Day**. For example:

平成 25 年 12 月 25 日 (Heisei 25-nen 12-gatsu 25-nichi) = December 25, 2013

A typical Japanese date. Era name first, then year, month, and day.

平成3

Heisei 3, an era-format year.

2020 → 令和^{REIWA} 2年
2018 → 平成^{HEISEI} 30年
1945 → 昭和^{SHOWA} 20年
1915 → 大正^{TAISHO} 4年
1868 → 明治^{MEIJI} 元年



Gregorian years and their era-calendar equivalents, from Meiji to Reiwa.

ERA QUICK REFERENCE

Shōwa 昭和 1926–1989

Heisei 平成 1989–2019

Reiwa 令和 2019–today

A Merchant's Guide to Identity Verification in Japan

The legal regime you verify under, the documents you can accept, and how each one performs.

Identity verification in Japan sits under the Act on the Protection of Personal Information (APPI), which governs how you collect, handle, and store the personal data a verification check touches. The Personal Information Protection Commission (PPC) supervises the law. Anti money laundering duties come from the Act on Prevention of Transfer of Criminal Proceeds, which sets the identity checks regulated businesses must run at onboarding. Mistakes are expensive on two fronts, regulatory exposure on one side and rejected genuine customers on the other.

Compliance and conversion are the same problem in practice. A flow that asks for the wrong documents or stalls at capture loses customers mid-signup, so a compliant check that still passes genuine users first time protects both your regulatory standing and your completion rate.

1 | Verification Modes

Shufti supports two verification modes, and the right choice depends on who collects the proofs.

ONSITE VERIFICATION

The end user completes verification inside your flow through Shufti's iFrame or Verify component. The user submits ID and address proofs directly, gets real-time guidance during capture, and you receive results in the Back Office portal or through the API response. This mode suits consumer signup, where guided capture prevents the blurry photos and cropped documents that sink first-attempt pass rates.

OFFSITE VERIFICATION

You collect the proofs from your customers and submit them to Shufti for verification. Results come back through the same Back Office portal or API response. This mode suits businesses that already hold customer documents or run verification in batches.

2 | Document Types Selection

In Japan, various identity documents serve different purposes and offer varying levels of security and verification capability. Shufti accepts the following Japanese documents for identity verification.

ID Card. Japan's card-format IDs cluster into a few types, and the mix has shifted quickly in recent years:

My Number Card. The My Number Card is Japan's national ID card, issued on application to residents and tied to the twelve-digit Individual Number. It carries a photo, an IC chip, and machine readable elements, and its role keeps growing. It already stands in for the health insurance card, and since March 2025 it can also hold driver's licence data on its chip. For verification it is a strong anchor document.

Residence Card. The Residence Card (在留カード) identifies foreign nationals staying in Japan mid to long term. The Immigration Services Agency issues it with an IC chip, holograms, and a clear bilingual layout in Japanese and English, which makes it one of the most machine-readable documents in the country.

Health Insurance Card. The paper health insurance card spent decades as Japan's everyday fallback ID even though it carries no photo. It is now on its way out. New issuance stopped in December 2024 and its function moved onto the My Number Card, so treat any remaining card as a supporting document rather than primary proof of identity.

Driver's Licence. The driver's licence is Japan's most widely carried photo ID and the default identity document for many adults. It shows the holder's name, address, and birth date in era format alongside the colour-coded validity band, and its security features meet Japan's regulatory standards.

Passports. Japanese passports are high-security documents with biometric data and layered anti-fraud features, and they are the strongest option where you need globally recognised proof. The data page pairs the Japanese name with its Latin transliteration and a machine readable zone.

Credit/Debit Card. Credit and debit cards exist to move money. They prove possession of an account rather than a person's identity, and they carry no photo, no biometric anchor, and no issuing authority attestation of who the holder is. Do not accept them as identity proof.

3 | Document Type Preference and Performance

Different types of Japanese identity documents yield varying success rates in verification. Here is how each performs in practice.



The Residence Card for foreign nationals. Its bilingual layout reads cleanly under OCR.

Resident Card

The Residence Card's clear bilingual layout gives OCR an easy read, and Shufti's extraction handles it with high first-attempt accuracy.

Extraction parameters: name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, address, nationality.



A driver's licence specimen. Era-format dates appear across the card.

Driver's Licence

Japanese driver's licences pack era-format dates, kanji addresses, and regional variation into a small card. Shufti's OCR is tuned for these traits, though complex cases can take extra processing time.

Extraction parameters: name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, address.



The My Number Card, Japan's national ID card. Note the era-format dates.

My Number Card

The My Number Card's standard national format gives Shufti clean, fast reads, and its growing role in administrative and financial tasks keeps it current in customers' wallets.

Extraction parameters: name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, address.



The paper health insurance card. No longer issued, and never a photo ID.

Health Insurance Card

Older paper cards mix printed and handwritten elements and vary by insurer, and Shufti's OCR is trained to read them. Expect these cards to keep fading from circulation now that new issuance has ended.

Extraction parameters: name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, address.



The Japanese passport data page pairs Japanese fields with Latin transliteration.

Passport

The Japanese passport's holograms and microtext trip weaker systems. Shufti's OCR reads through them and cross-checks the machine readable zone against the printed data for fast, reliable processing.

Extraction parameters: name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, nationality, gender, place of issue, MRZ.

4 | Preferred Document for Identity Verification

Shufti recommends the My Number Card, the Residence Card, and the driver's licence as the preferred documents for identity verification in Japan. The My Number Card leads for citizens and long-term residents because of its chip, photo, and standard national format, and the Residence Card plays the same role for foreign nationals. The driver's licence is the strongest alternative when a customer holds neither. Shufti's OCR is tuned to the specific characteristics of all three, so data extraction stays quick and accurate whichever one the customer presents.

Verification Settings

Four configuration choices that decide your pass rate in Japan. The documents are half the picture. These four settings decide how well your Japanese verification flow performs in production.

01

Verification Mode (Onsite vs. Offsite)

Onsite verification is the better default for Japan. Document forgery here is sophisticated, and guided real-time capture with biometric and liveness checks gives you stronger control over authenticity than reviewing files a user gathered elsewhere.

02

Data Extraction

Turn on OCR extraction. Japanese documents mix kanji, hiragana, and katakana with era-format dates, and extraction tuned for these scripts converts era dates to their Gregorian equivalents automatically. Manual keying of mixed-script text at volume introduces errors that automated extraction avoids.

03

Identity Document's Backside Proof

Switch on the backside proof requirement. Japanese documents often carry information on both sides, and the back can hold the document number, an updated address, and QR codes. A front-only check misses data your compliance record needs.

4 | Real-Time Proof Capture vs. Proof Upload

Real-Time Proof Capture. Shufti's auto-capture detects the document and photographs it without user fumbling, which makes it the fastest and most reliable route for physical documents.

Proof Upload. Users can also upload pre-captured images of their identity documents. Upload suits users who already hold clean images of their documents.

Merchants control both routes through the **Allow Online** (real-time proof capture) and **Allow Offline** (proof upload) options in the Verification Settings tab. Offering both keeps completion rates high across Japan's mix of physical cards and chip-based credentials.

Disclaimer: While we endeavour to keep the information up-to-date and/or correct, we make no representations or warranties of any kind, express or implied, or for any purpose about the completeness, accuracy, reliability, suitability, or availability of the contents or information herein. Any reliance on its content is thus entirely at your own risk. Shufti will not be liable for any false, inaccurate, inappropriate, or incomplete information presented herein, and all liabilities with respect to actions taken, or not taken, based on the contents or information herein, or for any loss sustained by you as a consequence are hereby expressly disclaimed by us.



Global reach, local precision

Shufti verifies identities across 240+ countries and territories and reads each market's documents with local accuracy. In **Japan** that means the old paper RG, the blue CPF card, every CNH format, and the new national identity card are all handled correctly, so you onboard real people fast and keep fraud out.

[Book a Customised Demo](#)

[See Supported Countries](#)

Shufti is based in the United Kingdom and operates offices worldwide.



United States

16200 SW Pacific
Hwy, Suite H PMB
1053,
Tigard, OR



Cyprus

Arch. Makarios III
Avenue 229,
Limassol



Dubai

Unit 507, Level 5,
Gate District
Precinct
Building 03, DIFC,
Dubai



Hong Kong

8 Queen's Road
East, Wan Chai,
Hong Kong



Pakistan

322-G3 Main Blvd,
Johar Town, Lahore,
Pakistan



Singapore

68 Circular Road
#02-01, Singapore



United Kingdom

Office 408,
Coppergate
House, 10 Whites
Row, London E1
7NF

shuftipro.com

sales@shuftipro.com