



汉字 Hànzì

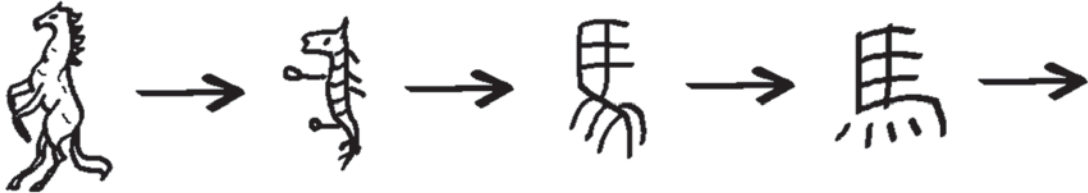
Chinese Characters

LESSON

04

Origin of hanzi

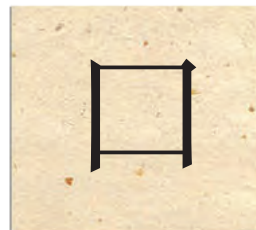
Original character to simplified one



There are six categories of Chinese characters: pictographs, pictophonetic characters, associative compounds, self-explanatory characters, phonetic loan characters and mutually explanatory characters. Here we only introduce the common four categories, because the other two categories are not widely used.

1. Pictographs

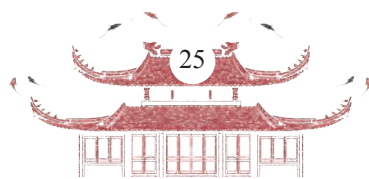
Some Chinese characters were created from pictures of real things, like
“kǒu 口 mouth.”



“mù 木 tree”



“mén 门 door”



“mǎ 马 horse”



2. Picto-phonetic characters

Picto-phonetic characters are made from a radical and another component.

Picto-phonetic characters can be divided into 8 types. The most common type is “left radical right phonetic.” The left part of the Chinese character is a radical; it shows you the possible meaning this Chinese character might be related to, and from the right part, you can guess how to read/pronounce the Chinese character or the sound of the character to a certain extent.

For example: 青 (qīng – green grass), 请 (qǐng – request), 情 (qíng – feeling)

远 (yuǎn – far away), 元 (yuán – currency unit/Chinese yuan), 院 (yuàn – courtyard, compound)

Like “ma 吗 a question word”

The left part is a radical, “kǒu 口 mouth;” you need to ask questions by mouth, so the left part shows you the possible meaning, and the pronunciation of the right part “mǎ 马 horse” is similar with “ma 吗 a question word.”

“mā 妈 mother”

The left side is a radical, “nǚ 女 female” shows the meaning; the right side shows the phonetic, because “mǎ 马 horse” and “mā 妈 mother” have similar pronunciations.

3. Associative compounds

These Chinese characters can be divided into two parts: One part is about figure, the other part is about meaning.

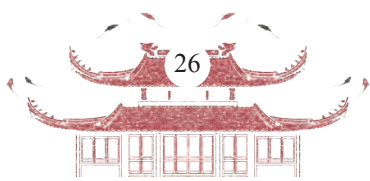
For example: in “xiū 休 rest,” the left part is the radical indicating person, the right part means tree; it’s like a man leaning against a tree.

“dàn 旦 daybreak, dawn,” , the upper part is “rì 日 the sun,” and the lower part is like the horizontal line; when the sun rises from the horizon line it’s daybreak.

“nán 男 male, man, ” the upper part is “tián 田 farm field,” the lower part is “lì 力 strength,” for people who work in the field with strength are men.

4. Self-explanatory characters

These types of Chinese characters are not convenient to be drawn as a concrete



image, so they are shown by a single abstract symbol, line, or a pictograph and an abstract symbol.

For example: “yī 一 one,” “èr 二 two,” “sān 三 three,” one line represents the number “one,” two abstract lines are just the abstract image of two things, and so is three.

“shàng 上, on, up,” the short line shows the position; it’s up the long line “xià 下, down, below,” the short line is below the long line.



Like “xiōng 凶 deadly trap”

U = U (cupped pit) + X (crossed thorn) when people fell into a trap or pit, the scared feeling and the bad situation is just represented by “X”

It is not that every Chinese character can be classified into a certain category, because they have experienced a long-term process of evolution. However, knowing the principles of making Chinese characters can help in memorizing easily and learn it with fun.

Basic Strokes of Chinese Language

Stroke	Direction	Name	In Context
丶	↘	diǎn	你 字
一	→	héng	言 天 甚
丨	↓	shù	到 田 甚
丿	↙	piě	你 禾 字
㇏	↘	nà	天 禾
㇏	↗	tí	我
㇏	↘	hénggōu	字 爱
㇏	↘	shùgōu	小 到 你
㇏	↘	xiégōu	我 戈
㇏	↘	héngzhé	回 要
㇏	↘	shùzhé	忙 甚

Stroke order

Each character is composed of various strokes. There are 11 basic strokes. A character may have one stroke or multiple numbers of strokes. Every character has



fixed number of strokes and for writing the character, a sequence is followed which is called as stroke order. There are certain rules for stroke order which are as follows:

Rule	Example	Meaning
1. First Horizontal, then Vertical	十	shí = ten
2. First Left, then right	人	rén = person
3. From top to bottom	三	sān = three
4. From left to right	儿	ér = child
5. From outside to inside	间	jiān = middle
6. First fill in the inside and then close (seal)	国	guó = country
7. Middle first then left and right	小	xiǎo = small

A Chinese Radical

Every Chinese character has a radical. A Chinese radical (部首- bùshǒu - literally: “section header”) is a graphical component of a Chinese character under which the character is traditionally listed in a Chinese dictionary. A radical has several functions: It allows you to search a character in a dictionary, it may give hint about the meaning of the character and it may even suggest the pronunciation! There are around 214 radicals.

练习 Liànxí :

1. Recognise the following basic Radicals and write meaning in English.

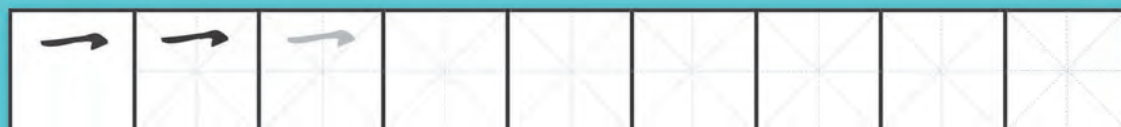
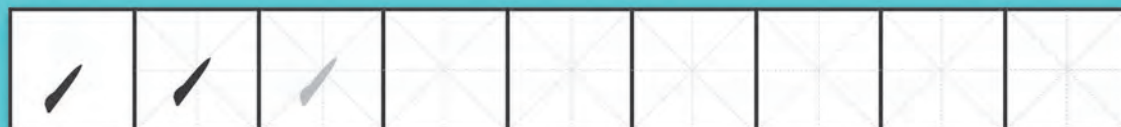
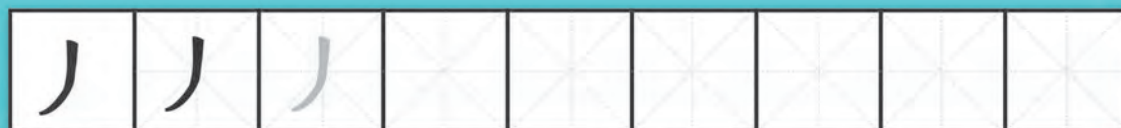
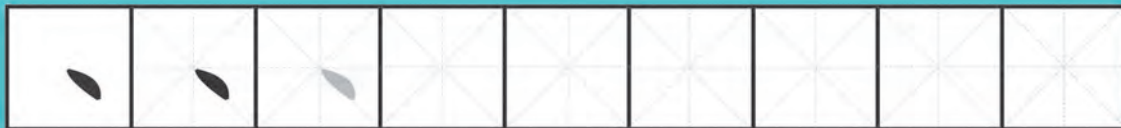
- 人
 儿
 日
 月
 手
 口
 山
 大
 小
 工

2. Write appropriate radical for the following English words:

1. Water
 2. Ice
 3. Grass
 4. Soil
 5. Door



Chines Stroke





Calligraphy

Picasso, the world famous master of art, once expressed that “If I once lived in China, I must had become a calligrapher rather than a painter”. Calligraphy is one of the unique and traditional arts of China. Chinese calligraphy has a long history of about 1000 years. Chinese calligraphy mainly has five categories i.e. seal script, official script, formal script, running script and cursive script.

