

汉字 [Hànzi] (Chinese characters)

Even before thinking about doing some grammar or learning some basic vocabulary, it is essential to spend some time on the writing and understanding of Chinese characters. Those can be found under 2 aspects: **Traditional characters** and **Simplified characters**; depending on where you are going, one or the other will be used. In China, it is simplified characters that you will find, and it is also those that we are going to focus on in the following lessons. In Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, the people use traditional characters, even though, they will still be able to read simplified ones as well, as they are- by definition- more simple.

The Chinese language is very complex, and in the Mainland, depending on the region, it is not the same language that is spoken. Lots of dialects exist such as Mandarin, Min Nam, Hakka, and Cantonese for the most popular. Mandarin is however the only official language of the country. So, there is a great chance that the Chinese people may not understand each other when they speak, however, they will have no problem in the written form, because even though the characters are pronounced differently, the meaning and the writing are still the same. That's the reason why on TV, every single program has subtitles- so that everybody can follow.

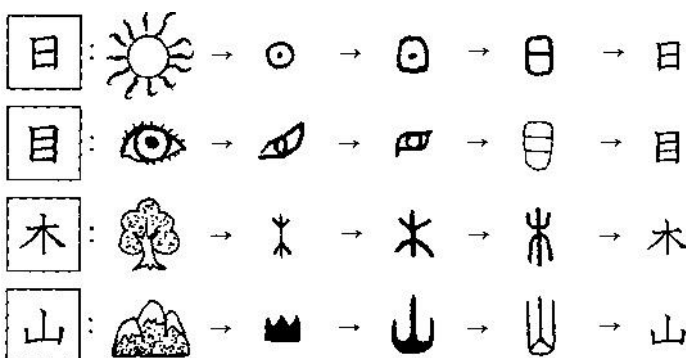
1) Elements and principles of the Chinese characters

There are 3 elements in a Chinese character:

- the image/form
- the sound
- the meaning

There are 6 principles that define and explain the making of characters:

📌 Pictograms (象形字) [xiàngxíngzì]



There are about 600 pictograms in the Chinese language. Pictograms are stylised drawings of the objects they represent. They are generally part of the oldest characters.

Simple indicatives/ideograms (指事字) [zhǐshìzì]

一 one
二 two
三 three
下 below
上 above

Ideograms express an abstract idea through an iconic form including an iconic modification of the pictographic characters.

Compound indicatives/ideographs (会意字) [huìyìzì]

好 good (woman + child)
安 peaceful (woman under a roof)
明 bright (sun + moon)
家 home/family (pig under a roof)
思 thought (heart + field)
牢 prison (cow under a roof)
雷 thunder (rain cloud over a field)
男 man/male (field + strength)



女 + 子 = 好
woman child good

Compound ideographs are a combination of two or more ideographic or pictographic characters, suggesting the meaning of the word to be represented.

Phono-semantic compound characters (形声字) [xíngshēngzì]

semantic part			phonetic part			Pictophonetic character		
Char.	Meaning		Char.	Pron.		Char.	Pron.	Meaning
讠	speech	+	井	jǐng	=	讲	jiǎng	to talk, to speak
火	fire	+	因	yīn	=	烟	yān	smoke

Phono-semantic characters represent 90% of the Chinese characters. The characters are composed of 2 parts:
The **left** contains the **sound**
The **right** contains the **meaning**

Derived character (转注字) [zhuǎnzhùzì]

考 kǎo "to verify"

老 lǎo "old"

were once the same character, meaning "elderly person"

This category is the smallest one and also the least understood. Those mutual explanatory characters are a pair or group of characters that share the same radical and have a similar meaning

Borrowed characters (假借字) [jiǎjièzì]

亚细亚 → 亚洲 [Asia]

(yàxìyà) (yàzhōu)

佛蘭西 → 法国 [France]

(fólánxī) (fǎguó)

印度 [India]

(yìndù)

Rebus characters are phonetic loan characters that are borrowed for words that did not originally have characters. They can be borrowed from foreign languages.

