

Introduction to Chinese Characters 1: An Overview



Chinese characters are logograms used in the writing of Chinese and some other Asian languages. In Standard Chinese, and sometimes also in English, they are called hàn zì (simplified Chinese: 汉字; traditional Chinese: 漢字). They have been adapted to write a number of other languages including: Japanese, where they are known as kanji, Korean, where they are known as hanja, and Vietnamese in a system known as chữ Nôm. Chinese characters constitute the oldest continuously used system of writing in the world. By virtue of their widespread current use in East Asia, and historic use throughout the Sinosphere, Chinese characters are among the most widely adopted writing systems in the world.

Chinese characters number in the tens of thousands, though most of them are minor graphic variants encountered only in historical texts. Studies in China have shown that functional literacy in written Chinese requires a knowledge of **between**

three and four thousand characters. In Japan, 2,136 are taught through secondary school (the Jōyō kanji); hundreds more are in everyday use (note that the characters used in Japan are distinct from those used in China in many respects). There are various national standard lists of characters, forms, and pronunciations. **Simplified** forms of certain **characters** are used in mainland China, Singapore, and Malaysia; the corresponding **traditional characters** are used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and to a limited extent in South Korea.

(Adapted from threads on www.wikipedia.org)