

III. The Chinese Writing System

A. The Formation of Chinese Characters

Unlike English, which is an alphabetic language, Chinese writing is represented by “characters,” each of which represents a syllable. Characters are traditionally divided into the following six categories:

汉字是表意文字，汉字的造字方法有六种，最常见的是四种。

Chinese characters are ideographic, and there are six methods for creating them, with the most common being four.

1. 象形 xiàngxíng pictographs, pictographic characters

EXAMPLES:

人



rén

person

山



shān

mountain

日



rì

sun

月



yuè

moon

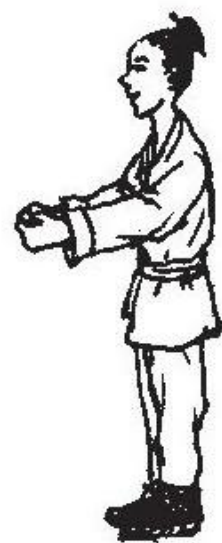
木



mù

tree

人 rén



人
甲骨文

人
金文

人
小篆

人
隶书

人
楷书



○
甲骨文



○
金文



○
小篆



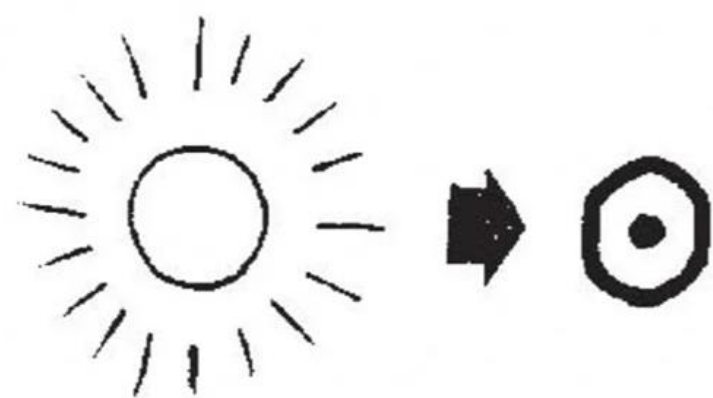
○
隶书



○
楷书

日

rì



sun (日)



月

yuè



月

甲骨文

月

金文

月

小篆

月

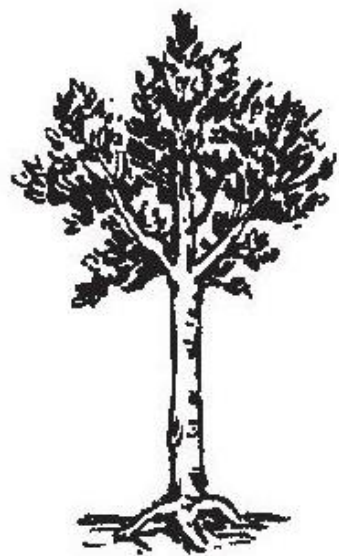
大篆






月

楷书

木

mù



甲骨文	金 文	小 篆	隸 書	楷 書
				

馬



→

𠂔

→

𠂔

→

𠂔

→

馬

刀



→

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→

𩺰

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𩺰

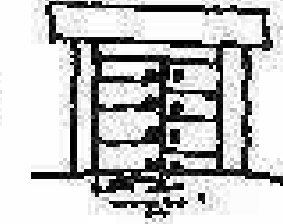
→

魚

→

魚

門



→

𠂔

→

𠂔

→

門

→

門

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Integrated Chinese • Level 1 Part 1 • Textbook

2. 指事 zhǐshì self-explanatory characters

EXAMPLES:

上

一

shàng

above

下

一

xià

below

3. 会意 huiyi associative compounds

EXAMPLES:

明



míng

bright

休

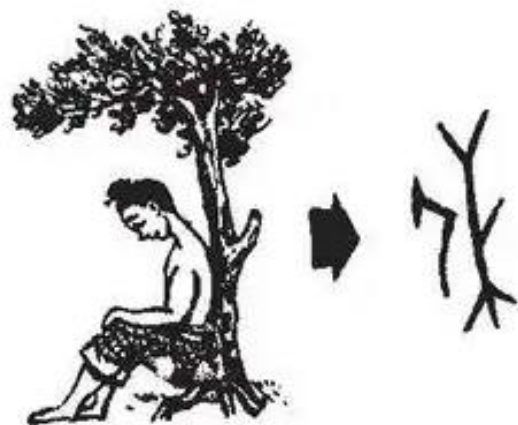


xiū

rest

休

xiū



𠂇

甲骨文

𠂇

金文

𠂇

小篆

休

隶书

休

楷书

甲 骨 文		金 文	篆 文
			
前 5·26	林 2·5·4	杨鼎	说文解字
金 文	篆 文	隶 书	楷 书
			
中山王壺	说文解字	淮源庙碑	牛橛造像

休息，休息

4. 形声 xíngshēng pictophonetic characters (with one element indicating meaning and the other sound)

EXAMPLES: 江，河，饭，姑

形声：

形（样子appearance、形状shape、实体entity） + 声
（pronounce, ）

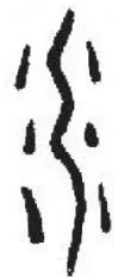
江、河、饭

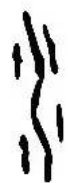




+

工、可、反、古

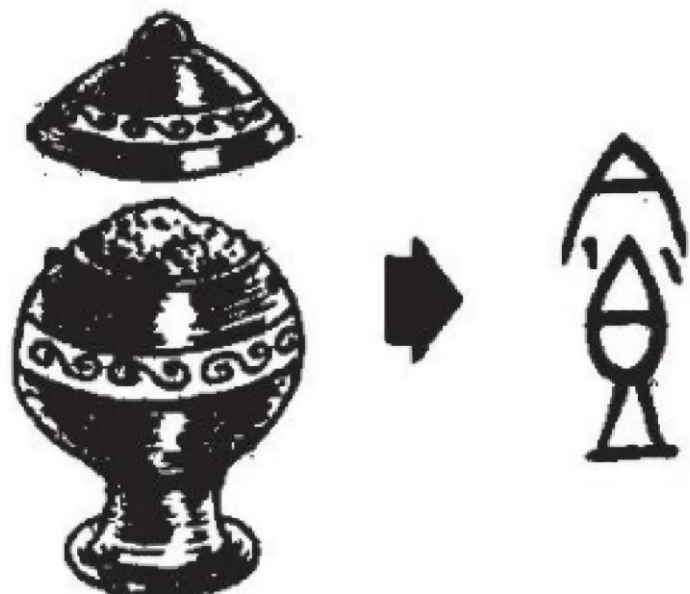
In Chinese, pictophonetic characters are the most numerous, accounting for approximately 90%.

水 shuǐ



甲骨文	金文	小篆	隸書	楷書
				





“食”的本义是食物。甲骨文中的“食”字是一个会意字，字形像一个古代用来盛食物的容器。其中，上面的“人”字头犹如器皿的盖子。



食物是人和其他动物的生存必需品。

食

(shí)



B. Basic Chinese Radicals

Although there are more than fifty thousand Chinese characters in existence, one only needs to know two or three thousand to be considered literate. Mastering two or three thousand characters is, of course, still a rather formidable task. However, the learning process will be more effective and easier if one knows well the basic components of Chinese characters. Traditionally, Chinese characters are grouped together according to their common components known as “radicals” (部首, bùshǒu). The 214 “Kangxi radicals” have been the standard set of radicals since the publication of the great *Kangxi Dictionary* (康熙字典, Kāngxī Zìdiǎn) in 1716, although some contemporary dictionaries, which treat simplified characters as primary forms, have reduced that number to 189. By knowing the radicals and other basic components well, you will find recognizing, remembering and reproducing characters much easier. Knowing the radicals is also a must when using dictionaries that arrange characters according to their radicals. The following is a selection of forty radicals that everybody should know well when starting to learn characters.

Chinese radical	Pinyin	English	Examples
✓ 1. 人 (亻)	rén	person	今, 他
2. 刀 (刂)	dāo	knife	分, 到
3. 力	lì	power	加, 助
4. 又	yòu	right hand; again	友, 取
5. 口	kǒu	mouth	叫, 可
6. 口 **	wéi	enclose	回, 因
7. 土	tǔ	earth	在, 坐
8. 夕	xī	sunset	外, 多
9. 大	dà	big	天, 太
✓ 10. 女	nǚ	woman	婆, 好
11. 子	zǐ	son	字, 孩
12. 寸	cùn	inch	寺, 封
13. 小	xiǎo	small	少, 尖
14. 工	gōng	labor; work	左, 差
15. 幺	yāo	tiny; small	幻, 幼
16. 弓	gōng	bow	引, 弟
17. 心 (忄)	xīn	heart	想, 忙
18. 戈	gē	dagger-axe	我, 或
✓ 19. 手 (扌)	shǒu	hand	拿, 打
20. 日	rì	sun	早, 明
21. 月	yuè	moon	期, 朗
22. 木	mù	wood	李, 杯
✓ 23. 水 (氵)	shuǐ	water	永, 洗
24. 火 (灬)	huǒ	fire	烧, 热

偏旁部首 (radical) Piānpángbùshǒu

25. 田	tián	field	男, 留
26. 目	mù	eye	看, 睡
27. 示 (礻)	shì	show	票, 社
28. 糸 (纟)	mì	fine silk	素, 红
29. 耳	ěr	ear	聾, 聊
30. 衣 (衤)	yī	clothing	袋, 衫
31. 言 (讠)	yán	speech	誓, 说
32. 贝	bèi	cowrie shell	贵, 财
33. 走	zǒu	walk	趣, 起
34. 足	zú	foot	跳, 跑
35. 金 (钅)	jīn	gold	鉴, 钱
36. 门	mén	door	间, 闷
37. 隹	zhuī	short-tailed bird	难, 集
38. 雨	yǔ	rain	零, 雲
✓ 39. 食 (饣)	shí	eat	餐, 饭
40. 马	mǎ	horse	骑, 骂

(** = used as radical only, not as a character by itself)



Two Chinese radical charts.

C. Basic Strokes

The following is a list of basic strokes:

Basic stroke	Chinese	Pinyin	English	Examples
1. “丶”	点	diǎn	dot	小，六
2. “一”	横	héng	horizontal	一，六
3. “丨”	竖	shù	vertical	十，中
4. “丿”	撇	piě	downward left	人，大
5. “㇏”	捺	nà	downward right	八，人
6. “㇀”	提	tí	upward	我，江
7. “㇇”	横钩	hénggōu	horizontal hook	你，字
8. “㇚”	竖钩	shùgōu	vertical hook	小，你
9. “㇚”	斜钩	xiégōu	slanted hook	戈，我
10. “㇄”	横折	héngzhé	horizontal bend	五，口
11. “㇚”	竖折	shùzhé	vertical bend	七，亡

[链接](#)



C. Numerals

Having good control of the Chinese numerals will facilitate your dealing with real life situations such as shopping, asking for time and dates, etc. You can get a head start by memorizing 1 to 10 well now.

1.	yī	one	一
2.	èr	two	二
3.	sān	three	三
4.	sì	four	四
5.	wǔ	five	五
6.	liù	six	六
7.	qī	seven	七
8.	bā	eight	八
9.	jiǔ	nine	九
10.	shí	ten	十

[链接](#)

下面我们开始学习会话课文

Now we will start learning
the Chinese conversation
text.

LESSON 1

第一课

Dì yī kè

Greetings

问好

Wèn hǎo





VOCABULARY

- | | | | |
|--------|---------|-----|---|
| 1. 你 | nǐ | pr | you |
| 2. 好 | hǎo | adj | fine; good; nice; O.K.; it's settled |
| 3. 请 | qǐng | v | please (polite form of request); to treat or to invite (somebody) |
| 4. 问 | wèn | v | to ask (a question) |
| 5. 贵 | guì | adj | honorable; expensive |
| 6. 姓 | xìng | v/n | (one's) surname is...; to be surnamed; surname [See Grammar 1.] |
| 7. 我 | wǒ | pr | I; me |
| 8. 呢 | ne | qp | (question particle) [See Grammar 2.] |
| 9. 小姐 | xiǎojiě | n | Miss; young lady |
| 10. 叫 | jiào | v | to be called; to call [See Grammar 3.] |
| 11. 什么 | shénme | qpr | what |

Dialogue I: Exchanging Greetings



- | | | | |
|--------|-----------|---|-----------------------|
| 12. 名字 | míngzi | n | name |
| 13. 先生 | xiānsheng | n | Mr.; husband; teacher |

Proper Nouns

- | | | |
|--------|-----------|-------------------|
| 14. 李友 | Lǐ Yǒu | (a personal name) |
| 李 | lǐ | (a surname); plum |
| 15. 王朋 | Wáng Péng | (a personal name) |
| 王 | wáng | (a surname); king |



你好^①！



你好！



请问^②，你^③贵姓？



我姓^①李。你呢^②？



我姓王。李小姐^④，
你叫^③什么名字？



我叫李友。王先生，
你叫什么名字？



我叫王朋。



Nǐ hǎo^①！



Nǐ hǎo！



Qǐng wèn^②， nǐ^③ guì xìng?



Wǒ xìng^① Lǐ. Nǐ ne^②?



Wǒ xìng Wáng. Lǐ xiǎojiě^④， nǐ jiào^③ shénme míngzi?



Wǒ jiào Lǐ Yǒu. Wáng xiānsheng, nǐ jiào shénme míngzi?



Wǒ jiào Wáng Péng.



VOCABULARY

- | | | | |
|-------|----------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 1. 是 | shì | v | to be [See Grammar 4.] |
| 2. 老师 | lǎoshī | n | teacher |
| 3. 吗 | ma | qp | (question particle) [See Grammar 5.] |
| 4. 不 | bù | adv | not; no [See Grammar 6.] |
| 5. 学生 | xuésheng | n | student |
| 6. 也 | yě | adv | too; also [See Grammar 7.] |
| 7. 人 | rén | n | people; person |

Proper Nouns

- | | | |
|--------|----------|----------|
| 8. 中国 | Zhōngguó | China |
| 9. 北京 | Běijīng | Beijing |
| 10. 美国 | Měiguó | America |
| 11. 纽约 | Niūyuē | New York |





王先生，你^④是老师^⑤吗^⑤？



我^⑥不^①是老师，我是学生。
李友，你呢？



我^⑦也^⑦是学生。你是
中国人吗？



是，我是北京人。你是
美国人吗？



是，我是纽约人。



Wáng xiānsheng, nǐ shì^④ lǎoshī ma^⑤?



Wǒ bú^⑥ shì lǎoshī, wǒ shì xuésheng. Lǐ Yǒu, nǐ ne?



Wǒ yě^⑦ shì xuésheng. Nǐ shì Zhōngguó rén ma?



Shì, wǒ shì Běijīng rén. Nǐ shì Měiguó rén ma?



Shì, wǒ shì Niūyuē rén.