

CHINESE

汪 春 郑重庆 编著

Characters in Pictures



(1)



外语教学出版社
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Preface

The American poet Ezra Pound once said, "The easiest language in the world for writing poetry is Chinese." And in the words of E. E. Cummings, another American poet, "Chinese poets are painters." This book, *Chinese Characters in Pictures* is one which uses words to explain and pictures to illustrate the form and structure of Chinese characters. Therefore, it is both a collection of poetry and a picture album, so to speak.

Each Chinese character has a form of its own, representing a particular sound and a particular meaning, one at least. In other words, each character is a unity of form, sound and meaning. The student of Chinese must call on every one of the individuals if he or she is to really know the personality of each.

Learning Chinese is quite different from learning any other language. The way of learning is different. In learning a Western language, for instance, you swallow a whole series of sounds, lock, stock and barrel. If you were to take a word apart, separating it into so many phonetic syllables, it would lose its meaning altogether. In learning Chinese, however, what you have to do is exactly that, not into so many syllables, but into so many characters. You learn first the characters, then the word. Take, for instance, the Chinese word 大学 (dà xué) which means "university". You first learn the words 大 and 学 separately since 大学 is formed by combining the two characters (you might call them elements of language). In meaning, 大学 has to do with both 大 and 学, and yet 大学 is not a simple case of 大 plus 学. 大学 is the Chinese equivalent of the English word "university". But if you were to take the English word "university" and try to figure out its meaning based on the meanings of the five syllabic components u/ni/ver/si/ty, you would definitely get nowhere, because separately,

these components have no meaning at all and certainly have nothing to do with what the word “university” means. So, the character forms the basis in learning Chinese, whereas the word or sentence forms the basis for learning a Western language. It is no wonder then that there should have been so many textbooks written since ancient times on learning Chinese characters, e.g. *Qian Zi Wen* (Learn A Thousand Characters) and *Bai Jia Xing* (One Hundred Family Names).

The pictures as represented in the Chinese characters vary in complexity. Take the characters contained in this book. Some are as simple as 人, 口, 牛, 羊; others as complicated as 双, 养, 喜, 声. Whether simple or complicated, they are each a picture and a poem. Of course, one cannot expect everyone to agree in their analyses of each and every character, just as people couldn't totally agree, in fact they might totally disagree, in their understanding and interpretation of a painting or a poem. Regardless of whether the poet or painter agrees or disagrees, the reader or viewer would have his own appreciation of the work on the basis of his or her own understanding. The same holds true, more or less, for the written script. It is your right to create the written character, it is my right to interpret it.

Chinese Characters in Pictures is written for those non-Chinese who intend to explore the secrets of the civilization. It is somewhat like a guidebook, listing nearly two hundred cultural sites. Like the looking glass in *Alice in Wonderland*, the characters depicted in this book will take the tourist into the kaleidoscopic world that is Chinese culture.

by Cheng Xianghui
Dean of College of Chinese Language
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前言

美国诗人埃兹拉·庞德曾经说过：“世界上最适合写诗的语言是汉语。”美国另一位诗人E. E.卡明斯说：“中国诗人都是画家。”《画说汉字》用语言诠释、用图画演示汉字的结构和字形，因此可以说：这本书既是诗集又是画册。

每个汉字都有其独特的字形、特别的发音和至少一个字义。换句话说，每个汉字都是字形、声音和意义的统一体。学习汉语的学生必须接触每一个汉字才能真正了解它们的个性。

学习汉语的方法不同于学习其他语言。例如在西方语言中，若干个毫无意义的音节构成一个词，如果你把一个词拆分成音节，它的意义就不复存在。但是学习汉语则不同，你要做的恰恰是把一个词拆分成独立的字，在学习词之前先要学习字。以汉语“大学”（university）为例，你先要分别学习“大”和“学”这两个字，因为“大学”这个词是由这两个字组成的（你可以称它们为“语素”）。从词义上看，“大学”和“大”和“学”有关系，但并不等于“大”和“学”这两个字义的简单相加。和“大学”对应的英文是university，如果你试图通过这个英文单词的五个音节u/ni/ver/si/ty推断出它的意思，那将是白费力气，因为这些音节没有意义，和词义毫无关联。词或句子是西方语言的基本元素，而汉语的基本元素是汉字。正是因为如此，从古至今，学习汉字的书层出不穷，如：《千字文》，《百家姓》等。

用以表示汉字的图形繁简不一。拿这本书中涉及的字来说，有些非常简单，象“人”、“口”、“牛”、“羊”，有些却非常复杂，象“双”、“养”、“喜”、“声”。不论简单还是复杂，每一个字都象是一幅画、一首诗。也许并非所有人都赞同本书中对每个汉字的诠释，就象每个人对诗歌或绘画都有不同的理解一样，不论原创者有着怎样的寓意，读者或观者总是会在欣赏时加入自己的理解，对汉字的理解也或多或少地符合这一规则。

《**画**说汉字》是为那些希望探究中国文明史的外国朋友编写的，它就象一本旅游手册，带领读者徜徉于近200个“文化名胜”；书中的汉字就象《爱丽斯漫游奇境》中的魔镜，引导旅游者进入中国文化的万花筒。

程祥徽

澳门大学汉语学院院长

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安

ān

(peaceful; quiet; calm)

丶 亻 宀 宀 安 安

“安”（安）字的外面（宀）是一间屋子，屋里有一个弯着腰的女子（亻）。以前，人们认为女人留在家中料理一切事务，就会有安定的生活。

This character is comprised of two parts: the outer portion is a house (宀). Inside the house there is a bowing woman (亻) facing towards the left. “A woman stays inside the house” has long been considered the condition of peace, the earliest known meaning of this particular pictograph.

【部首】 Radical 宀 (roof)

【同部首字】 Characters under the radical

宋(a surname), 宜(suitable), 宝(treasure)

【词语】 Words and phrases

安定	āndìng	stable; settled
安分	ānfèn	be law-abiding
安好	ānhǎo	safe and sound; well
安静	ānjìng	quiet; peaceful
安全	ānquán	safe; secure
安慰	ānwèi	to comfort



安分守己

ān fèn shǒu jǐ

keep one's duty and be self-restrained

i.e., act properly according to one's status

安居乐业

ān jū lè yè

live and work in peace and contentment

安然无恙

ān rán wú yàng

safe and sound

i.e., (escape)unscathed

安如泰山

ān rú tài shān

as secure as Mount Taishan

安不忘危

ān bú wàng wēi

mindful of possible danger in time of peace

【例句】 Example

祝你一路平安!

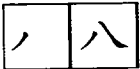
zhù nǐ yí lù píng ān

Have a good trip!



bā

(eight)



“八”字笔划较少，以前用它表示把东西分为两份，所以有“分开”或“分别”的意思。后来“分开”这个意思被用作数字的“八”取代了，这个数字便一直沿用至今。“八”也可做部首，以“八”为部首的字多数包含“分开”的意思。

The character 八 seems very simple. Yet, it is a combined representation which shows one thing being divided or parted into two halves. So originally 八 meant “divide” or “part”. But later the meaning of “divide” was completely lost. 八 came to mean the number “eight”, which has nothing to do with the original meaning. 八 is also a radical. Most Chinese characters formed with 八 have something to do with the meaning of “divide”.

【部首】 Radical 八(eight)

【同部首字】 Characters under the radical

兵(soldier), 典(standard)

【词语】 Words and phrases

八成	bāchéng	eighty percent
八度	bādù	octave
八方	bāfāng	the eight points of the compass; all directions
八卦	bāguà	the “Eight Diagrams” (eight combinations of three whole or broken lines formerly used in divination)



白

bái

(white)

' 亻 白 白 白

在象形字里，(白)看上去有一个光环正围绕着一团熊熊烈火，给人光亮的感觉，后来它还带有“清澈”、“清晰”、“清楚”的意义。

The original meaning of 白 is brightness. In the oracle bones, it is a picture of a fire burning with a bright ring surrounding it. Later it evolved to mean “clarity” or “clearness”.

【部首】 Radical 白(white)

【同部首字】 Characters under the radical

皇(imperial), 的(a particle), 皎(clear and bright)

【词语】 Words and phrases

白菜	báicài	Chinese cabbage
白痴	báichī	idiocy
白饭	báifàn	plain cooked rice
白费	báifèi	waste
白宫	báigōng	the White House
白色	báisè	white (colour)
白天	báitiān	daytime; day
白银	báiyín	silver



白璧无瑕

bái bì wú xiá

flawless white jade

i.e., impeccable moral integrity

白费心思

bái fèi xīn sī

to rack one's brains in vain

白驹过隙

bái jū guò xì

like glimpsing white colt flashing past a chink in the wall

i.e., time flies

白日做梦

bái rì zuò mèng

daydream

白头偕老

bái tóu xié lǎo

remain a devoted couple to the end of their lives

白日不做亏心事，夜半敲门心不惊

bái rì bú zuò kuī xīn shì, yè bàn qiāo mén xīn bù jīng

A clear conscience laughs at false accusations.

【例句】 Example

她听到这个消息顿时脸色苍白。

tā tīng dào zhè gè xiāo xī dùn shí liǎn sè cāng bái

She went as white as sheet when she heard the news.



本

běn

(the root of a plant; foundation)

一 十 才 木 本

汉字的确很神奇，在“木”（木）字底部加上一画后，就变成了“本”字。“本”是指树木的根部，后来慢慢发展为“所有事物的根本”，同时也有“自己”的意思。

An additional short stroke is put near the base of the character 木(木), originally meaning “tree”, it is to emphasize where the roots of the tree are. So, “root” is the original meaning of 本. It extends to mean the foundation for all the things. From the meaning of “foundation”, it also extends to mean “one’s own”.

【部首】 Radical 木(tree)

【同部首字】 Characters under the radical
材(material), 村(village), 杜(a surname)

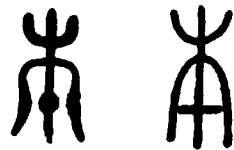
【词语】 Words and phrases

本国	běnguó	one's own country
本能	běnnéng	instinct
本钱	běnqián	capital
本人	běnrén	me; myself; oneself
本土	běntǔ	one's native country
本性	běnxìng	natural instincts
本意	běnyì	original meaning

本源

běnyuán

origin; source



本固枝荣

běn gù zhī róng

When the root is firm, the branches flourish.

本末倒置

běn mò dào zhì

take the branch for the root

i.e., put the cart before the horse

本地姜不辣

běn dì jiāng bú là

Local ginger is not peppery.

i.e., Familiarity diminishes appreciation.

本来面目

běn lái miàn mù

true colour

i.e., true features

本乡本土

běn xiāng běn tǔ

one's native land

i.e., one's hometown

【例句】 Example

助人是快乐之本。

zhù rén shì kuài lè zhī běn

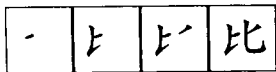
Helping people is the foundation of happiness.



比

bǐ

(compare; close to)



你能看出这个字 (比) 里有两个人站得很近吗? 它所指的意义很多, 原先是“亲近”、“亲密”的意思, 后来两个人站着比高低, 就有“比较”、“对照”等意思了。你听过一句世代相传的诗文: “海内存知己, 天涯若比邻”吗? 它是说人们无论走到哪里都要记着友情的可贵, 到了天涯海角, 彼此的心都靠得很近。

This character originally shows two people standing together facing towards the right (比), very close to each other, giving us the original meaning of “close”, as we can see from the well-known verse: 海内存知己, 天涯若比邻 (Keeping good friends in mind wherever they roam, even to the ends of the earth, you would feel them as close as next door.). Over time it has evolved and acquired the additional meanings of “compare” as in 比较 and 对比, as well as 比喻.

【部首】 Radical 比(compare)

【同部首字】 Characters under the radical

毗(adjoin), 毕(finish), 皆(all)

【词语】 Words and phrases

比较	bǐjiào	comparison; contrast; relatively
比邻	bǐlín	next-door neighbour
比率	bǐlǜ	rate; ratio