

CRACKING the CHINESE PUZZLES

By **T.K. ANN**

ANN'S INTEGRATED METHOD

of Learning the Chinese Language
by Conceptualizing and Philosophizing Approach

Volume -1 Character No. 0001 - 1898



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To my wife

Louise

for her great patience,
tolerance and forbearance



Perhaps a lingering subconscious resentment of the author against the way the majority of Western artists adulterate Chinese calligraphy in their China street-scene paintings, has prompted the idea of writing this book.



Chinese as a Second Language

For an adult foreign student of the Chinese language, there are three *entry* points:

First — as Chinese children do, he starts with the simple characters, one by one, and in an arbitrary sequence — a **long journey**;

Second — thinking he should be *satisfied* with some ability in making conversation, he is always handicapped by not knowing well and enough the Characters and feels that it is too difficult — a **bushy path leading to nowhere**;

Third — through these volumes, he is following a *cheaper-by-the-dozen* method — an integrated system and he will have an insight into the classics as well as vernacular Chinese, simplified characters and variants included — a **rational short-cut**.

How is the term **WORLD** arrived at in Chinese?

This Morning 2:21 Hour
Space Shuttle Safely Returned to the Earth
After Completing its Historical Maiden Voyage



世 shì originated from 卅 sā 'thirty' (years). By connecting the bottoms, it means 'a generation'. By extension, it becomes to mean 'this period of existence'.

界 jiè composed of 田 tián 'farms' and 介 jiè (two men) 'in between'. 'In between farms' means 'boundary'. By extension, it means 'sphere'.

'Sphere of this period of existence' = **WORLD** which is the modern meaning of the bisyllabic expression: 世界 shìjiè.

Volume - 1

PRIMER AND SINGLETONS

Character No. 0001 — 1898

1,898 Notion Characters

32% of a total of 5,888 Characters to be learned

68.4% of a total of about 1.4 million Characters surveyed

*36.7% of a total of 3,650 Frequently Used Characters determined
by the Survey*

Volume - 2 DIFFERENTIATION

Earliest Chinese Written Language — Jiaguwen

Reminder

Distribution of 3,650 Frequently Used Characters in Volume 2 (849)

Chapter Twenty	The Importance of a Dot
Chapter Twenty-one	An Additional Left or Right Sliding Stroke makes all the difference
Chapter Twenty-two	Variation through the Additional Horizontal Stroke.
Chapter Twenty-three	Short by One Vertical Stroke
Chapter Twenty-four	They are anatomically different 0001 — 1999
Chapter Twenty-five	They are anatomically different 2000 — 2999
Chapter Twenty-six	They are anatomically different 3000 — 5999
Chapter Twenty-seven	They are anatomically different 6000 — 9999

Volume - 3 YOU CAN DECIPHER CHINESE PUZZLES TOO

An Important Book Printed in A. D. 1720 — Liushutong

Reminder

Significance of 170 Bushous

Distribution of 3,650 Frequently Used Characters in Volume 3 (837)

Chapter Twenty-eight	Guestimables in Index Group 0001 — 0999
Chapter Twenty-nine	Guestimables in Index Group 1000 — 1999

Chapter Thirty	Guestimables in Index Group 2000 – 2999
Chapter Thirty-one	Guestimables in Index Group 3000 – 3999
Chapter Thirty-two	Guestimables in Index Group 4000 – 4999
Chapter Thirty-three	Guestimables in Index Group 5000 – 6999
Chapter Thirty-four	Guestimables in Index Group 7000 – 9999

Volume - 4 ANTONYMS AND SOME OBVIOUS PATTERNS

Specimen of Various Scripts

Reminder

Distribution of 3,650 Frequently Used Characters in Volume 4 (623)

Chapter Thirty-five	Antonyms – I
Chapter Thirty-six	Antonyms – II
Chapter Thirty-seven	Antonyms – III
Chapter Thirty-eight	Antonyms – IV
Chapter Thirty-nine	Animals to represent a Quality
Chapter Forty	More about Hands
Chapter Forty-one	572 Modern Chinese Characters involve 'Water'
Chapter Forty-two	The Infinite Sign – Man and the Cover over his Head
Chapter Forty-three	Bushou as Co-components and Bi-bushou Characters
Chapter Forty-four	Symmetrics
Chapter Forty-five	Doublets, Triplets and Quadruplets
Epilogue	

Volume - 5 APPENDICES

Calligraphy

- I Four-corner Indexing Method
- II Rules to be followed in locating a Character in Ordinary Printed Style
- III Guiding Principles of the Compilation of ANN's Word Lists
- IV ANN's Word List A
- V ANN's Word List B
- VI ANN's List of 3,650 Frequently Used Characters
- VII ANN's Morpheme Table A — reclassified
 - Part I — Non-Rigid*
 - Part II — Rigid*
- VIII The Gamut of Pinyin Sound of the Modern Chinese Characters
- IX Complete List of Modern Pinyin Sound Disregarding Intonation
- X Simplified Characters Not Yet officially adopted in Printing
- XI Differentiation of Chinese Characters and Japanese Kanji
- XII List of Characters Indigenous to Hong Kong
- XIII Significance of Bagua Characters

Reference Books

Foreword

An English-speaking Western friend in Hong Kong put this question to me three years ago:

“Is there a better approach to learning the Chinese language than the conventional method?”

He continued:

“I am extremely interested in ancient Chinese culture as well as current Chinese events, and I wish I could read Chinese. I think there are many who, like me, would like to be able to read Chinese language newspapers.

“I know it’s a difficult language. I am told by other Chinese friends that unlike Western languages which can be mastered easily just by learning the spelling and meaning of words, Chinese characters have to be learned in great numbers and though each forms a perfect square block, each has an irregular number of strokes. Apart from pattern recognition, there is the pronunciation and meaning to grasp.

“It is really frightening that in modern Chinese, as they say, many thousands of characters are used. Some of them are so similar yet have entirely different meanings.

“Although in modern Chinese one does use punctuation, it is hard to know where the unit of ideas begins and ends. Even consulting a dictionary is a difficult matter.

“As far as I understand, you have so many dialects in which the speaker pronounces the same character differently, and even when there is uniformity in pronunciation, the tone can differ. In the Peking dialect, there are five tones; in the Swatow, Amoy and Cantonese dialects there are eight. Your Shanghai people practically ignore intonation altogether.

“I have no ambition to write Chinese letters or essays. What I really want is to understand the printed word, and be able to read Chinese language newspapers.”

My reply was:

“First, one must realize the importance of a dictionary. In learning a foreign language, one must rely on dictionaries, especially after one has built up a certain basic knowledge, but has not yet fully grasped the historical

background. In a Chinese article, there are often scattered phrases which are connected with China's historical events from which the meaning has derived. Through the ordinary meaning of these characters alone, the exact meaning or nuance of such phrases* cannot be grasped. You need a dictionary.

"After all, language is part of the history of a civilization. Each civilization has its own characteristics which are accepted by its people as natural as mother's milk, but sometimes these can hardly be understood or appreciated by a foreigner, even a well-educated one.

"Yes, there are dialects as in any country. Like Japan which made Tokyo dialect the standard language, China has adopted the Peking dialect as its national language called 漢語 † hànyǔ. Save for some slants in pronunciation, it has been dominant in most of China's provinces as a spoken language for the last few hundred years. The following are the exceptions: Guangdong, half of Guangxi, Fujian, Zhejiang and a quarter of Jiangsu Province. In all these places, the pronunciation can be entirely different and there are certain words which cannot be put into writing, mostly due to the retention of ancient sounds and twists or distortions inherent in history.

"As to the Peking dialect, you will always find the exact pronunciation of each character from the dictionary. Every spoken word can be expressed by a character. The pinyin romanization has been adopted thus eliminating much confusion, but one must memorize the peculiar way of pronouncing the following letters, viz: b, c, ch, d, g, j, q, sh, x, z, zh and the intonation. However, this should present no more difficulty than the learning of other Western languages.

"When you cannot understand the exact meaning of a certain term, you must of course consult a comprehensive dictionary where all expressions are listed under the first character of a word formation of two characters, or three or even four characters. Five and six in a row can really be broken up into two or three units.

"However, it is, first of all, very important for a foreigner to understand the meaning of a character which on the one hand could be very exact and on the other, widely embracing. History has extended the significance or meaning of certain characters, sometimes to an unrecognizable extent.

* For example: one may recognize and know the meaning of every character of the four-character phrase "九牛一毛 jiǔniú yīmáo 'nine cows one hair' whose real meaning is 'a drop in the ocean'".

† It is also called 華語 huáyǔ in Singapore, 國語 guóyǔ in Taiwan and 唐話 dongwa among older generations of American Chinese.

"In modern Chinese, the present printed type or its written version called 'Regular Script' 楷書 pronounced *kǎishū* is one of six types. You can forget about the other five. They are obsolete and visible only in handwriting or in cases where it is deliberately used to draw the attention, such as in advertisements or posters, or in private letters from calligraphists.

"When you pay particular attention to the sequence of the character arrangement in modern Chinese, you will find that one character is always qualified or emphasized by another below or above it (with the exception of those commonly used prepositional or adverbial characters which may turn up singly). In practice, therefore, it can be said that the Chinese language, especially modern Chinese, is a bisyllabic language. Once you have acquired this notion with respect to the modern Chinese language, you have the key to mastering it from the very beginning. Still you have to work hard.

"Good dictionaries will include over 10,000 characters (the commonly used simplified characters adopted by the Chinese Government in 1955 included) and over 50,000 expressions.

"If we disregard those less commonly used characters and those so-called complex styles which are being substituted by simplified forms, there are about 6,000 left.

"However, many of them may be learned in pairs because quite often at least one of them never comes alone but is always used in conjunction with another character. This brings the number down to around 5,500 characters.

"Don't worry too much about intonation. Having made a study, I found that without taking tones into consideration, there are 413 sounds in Chinese. In English there are 462, Japanese 420, French 468, German 437, Spanish 483 and Russian 493.* So you see learning Chinese is not such a gargantuan task.

"To use two sounds to express one idea unit is indeed very economic. By means of juggling characters or their respective monosyllabic pronunciation in combinations of two or sets of two, you will be able to communicate with one billion people who speak this language!

"Chinese grammar is simple in the Western sense. There are no genders, plurals, tenses, cases or conjugations. Only the numerary descriptives may be a little annoying to Westerners but they are very limited in number.

* The formula used in the count was: consonants multiplied by vowels with or without nasal sound, long vowels included.

“Chinese people usually understand by logic and *not* by sounds only, though a certain sector of the people may be very particular about intonation. But intonation is generally not paid much attention to by the majority of Chinese and ‘Putonghua’ (普通話 ‘common language’, i.e. Peking dialect tinted by provincial or dialectal intonation) has become the *lingua franca* and the *de facto* national language.

“When you are speaking to a Chinese who cannot catch the meaning represented by two sounds, he will search for clues from what you have said previously and listen carefully to how you continue. In other words, he will try to understand from the context of your sentence and, quite often from the surroundings which may have a bearing on what one is saying. A process which is in fact completed in a fraction of a second! In the case of three characters the speaker often prolongs by half a note the pronunciation of the singly outstanding word for the sake of achieving clarity.

“In China, Putonghua can be compared to the way modern English is spoken universally. If you are careful in listening and have acquired the experience, you will distinctly find that there are many kinds of spoken English, such as Queen’s English, American English, Australian English, African English, the English spoken by the French, the Germans, the Spaniards, Japanese, Malaysians, Indians, etc. They are also somehow different. But it is basically the same language that is used and understood by any English-speaking person.

“No language which has such a background of meritorious civilization like the Chinese, could be said to contain too voluminous or too large a vocabulary.”

Three years later, I told my friend:

“If you want to learn Chinese, this Book is your answer though voluminous, it is almost complete. As you progress, you will find that I used a different and new approach and that I have many pigeons to draw out of my hat! The presentation and ways of introducing the characters are my own creation for the sake of convenience, and to make these characters easier for you to memorize. I provide you with extra ideas to anchor them to your memory, which are partly heterodox and partly historically accepted.

“Thus, I call this Book ‘Cracking the Chinese Puzzles.’”

Introduction

If you want to comprehend a foreign language just by listening, the coverage is normally the distance of a hall or room (unless you are on the telephone or listening to the radio or TV). If you can also read and understand the written language, your coverage has no boundaries and is timeless in that you can go back to the writings and ideas of those who wrote them but have long passed away. Even if the writer is a contemporary, he may be a thousand miles away from where you are.

Your ears must grasp the sound and meaning of the spoken word simultaneously or you will fail to understand. The eye, on the other hand, can absorb and linger over the written word and there is no limit to the time taken in assimilating the information.

The idea of writing this book first came to me following an episode that occurred in 1976 when, for the first time, I visited the country of one of the world's oldest civilizations — Greece. There I met a university student who had never met a Chinese before and knew nothing about the Chinese civilization. In our conversation I seemed to spark an interest in her of Chinese things and Chinese characters and their formation were discussed at length. Until that time anything Chinese had, so to speak, been 'all Greek to her'!

At first, I wrote down two characters as follows:

雞 pronounced jī 'chicken' and 馬 pronounced mǎ 'horse' and asked her to guess which was the chicken and which the horse. She made the right guess and when I further wrote two characters: 狗 pronounced gǒu 'dog' and 鳥 niǎo 'bird' she intuitively again made the right choice. The shape of the characters had provided some clue.

Chinese is the oldest living language. In order to master it more effectively, one must have some idea of its origins. In order to learn its characters more easily, one must first have a mental picture of a semi-primitive society at the dawn of civilization — a society of primitive men who had already learned the art of cultivation.

Except for the stars and the brightness of the moon only at certain time of the month, there was no light at night. Day and night, he had to struggle against the forces of nature. He had to defend himself and his kin against all kinds of adversaries and natural enemies. From very early on in life he had to obey his elders, and was subject to the commands of his chief.

It was the mouths he had to feed that worried him most of the time. He had limited powers of recollection and could not make himself completely understood by others, but he had desires, pride and hopes just as any modern man. So he started to 'write' pictographically.

Over the centuries this developed until, by symbols, his descendants were able to convey abstract thoughts and ideas. Such a society, of course, would have a mistaken and biased view of many things, which can hardly be judged fairly against the knowledge of modern man. He had a prejudice against the female sex and he wrongly assumed that the heart was the centre of the human thinking process.

We do not know exactly how old the Chinese language is, but from specimens found which date back to 1500 B.C. we know it is at least over 3,500 years old. The earliest writings found were on shoulder-blades of oxen and on tortoise shell. This was from the Shang 商 Dynasty (1766 — 1123 B.C.) over 3,700 years ago. By that time they were already quite well developed and no longer primitive. Altogether 4,672 characters have thusfar been found, but only about 900 can be identified or recognized. They are called 'Jiaguwen' 甲骨文 or Bone-shell language, mostly written in straight lines.

In 1972 Chinese archaeologists found pottery unearthed in Dawenkow bearing writings which also appeared on archaeological finds unearthed elsewhere. All these date back to 2597 B.C. or 46 centuries ago, and the experts then surmised that the writing had a history of 6,000 years. In fact, relics 7,000 years old have now been found.

'Shang' means merchantry and the most powerful tribesmen were merchants. According to some experts, people at that time had already discovered the advantage of exchange of goods to satisfy their immediate needs, or for better value. Handicrafts developed. Amazingly beautiful bronze vessels left behind from that era bore inscriptions now known as 'Jinwen' 金文 * or Metal language. The first inscriptions thusfar found on such bronzeware date back to 1373 B.C.

It was not until the turn of the century that specimens of earlier types of Chinese writing called 'Jiaguwen' were unearthed, whereas 'Jinwen' bearing resemblance to and being the successors of the bone-shell language, had on the contrary been known to the Chinese people for thousands of years.

* Or called 'Zhongdingwen' 鐘鼎文 which means 'bell/tripod cauldron' script.