

# An Introduction to The Chinese Writing System for ESL Professionals

by

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# Overview

- Importance of Chinese
- Chinese Language (Mandarin)
- Structure of Chinese Characters
- Morphemes and Syllables
- Words
- Sentences

# Importance of Chinese

- Number of Chinese speakers
- Number of ESL learners with Chinese as L1

# Mandarin tones

- First tone (high level) (mā) (mother)
- Second tone (high rising) (má ) (hemp)
- Third tone (low falling) (mǎ) (horse)
- Fourth tone (high falling) (mà) (to scold)
  
- Neutral tone (ma) (question particle)

# Mandarin tones

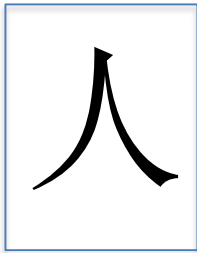
- [chinesepod.com/tools/pronunciation/section/17](http://chinesepod.com/tools/pronunciation/section/17)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Calligraphy–Imaginary Square
- Strokes– Stroke Order and Direction
- Components
- Spatial Arrangement
- Character Types
  - Pictographs, Ideographs,
  - Compound Ideographs, Phonetic Compounds
- Radicals/Significs
- Phonetics

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Calligraphy–Imaginary Square





# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Strokes
- 17 basic strokes

[www.clearchinese.com/chi#4194B0](http://www.clearchinese.com/chi#4194B0)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Strokes--Stroke Order and Direction

[www.archchinese.com.webloc](http://www.archchinese.com.webloc)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Components
- Spatial Arrangement

[www.yellowbridge.com/.webloc](http://www.yellowbridge.com/.webloc)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Basic character types**
- Pictographs
- 日 (rì) (sun)
- 月 (yuè) (moon)
- 口 (kǒu) (mouth)
- 手 (shǒu) (hand)
- 水 (shuǐ) (water)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Basic character types**
- Ideographs
- 一 (yī) (one)
- 二 (èr) (two)
- 三 (sān) (three)
- 上 (shàng) (above)
- 下 (xià) (below)
- 中 (zhōng) (middle)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Basic character types**
- Compound Ideographs
- 好 = 女 + 子
- “good” = “woman” + “child”
- 明 = 日 + 月
- “bright” = “sun” + “moon”

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Basic character types**
- Phonetic Compounds

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Phonetic Compounds (Significs + Phonetics)**
- Most Chinese characters (about 90%) consist of one signific element that indicates meaning, and one phonetic element that indicates sound.
- These types of characters are called “phonetic compounds.”



# Phonetic Compound Characters

- A “significant” part, which indicates meaning
- plus
- A “phonetic” part which indicates sound
- 妈 [mā (mother) = 女 (female) + 马 [mǎ]

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Phonetic Compounds (Significs + Phonetics)**
- 马 (mǎ ) (horse)
- 妈 (mā) (mother)
- 吗 (ma) (question particle)
- 骂 (mà) (to scold)

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- **Phonetic Compounds (Significs + Phonetics)**

- 马 (mǎ) (horse)

- 妈 (mā) (mother)

- 吗 (ma) (question particle)

- 骂 (mà) (to scold)

- The character 马 (mǎ) (horse) is a phonetic element in other compound characters, i.e., it lends its pronunciation to the other characters.

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Radicals
- There are 214 radicals, or keys, used to organize characters in a traditional Chinese dictionary, such as the famous Kangxi dictionary of 1716.
- Many radicals are also significs, and impart some degree of semantic information to a character.

# Structure of Chinese Characters

## Radicals

- In the phonetic compound character  
妈 [mā (mother) = 女 (female) + 马 [mǎ] ,  
女 (female) is also a radical.

# Structure of Chinese Characters

- Phonetics
- There are approximately 900 to 1200 phonetic elements that comprise most Chinese characters.

# The Mandarin Syllable

- A syllable in Modern Standard Mandarin
- Consists of:
- An initial
- A final
- A tone

# The Mandarin Initial

- The Mandarin initial consists of the initial consonant in a syllable.



# The Mandarin Final

- The Mandarin final consists of all of the vowels and consonants that occur after the initial consonant, i.e., the rest of the syllable after the initial (initial consonant).

# Types of Phonetic Series Based on Phonemic Congruence (Kraemer 1980, 1991)

Seven Categories:

- Totally Perfect
- Segment Perfect
- Initial Perfect
- Final Perfect
- Tone Perfect
- Initial – Tone Perfect
- Final – Tone Perfect

# Totally Perfect

- 成 [tʂ'əŋ2] (chéng-become)
- is a phonetic in  
城 [tʂ'əŋ2] (chéng-city)

# Totally Perfect

- 丈 [tʂɑŋ4] (zhàng-measure (land))
- is a phonetic in
  - 仗 [tʂɑŋ4] (zhàng-weapons)
  - 杖 [tʂɑŋ4] (zhàng-cane;stick)

# Segment Perfect

长 [tʂɑŋ3] (zhǎng-grow) is a phonetic in  
张 [tʂɑŋ1] (zhāng-surname, measure  
word)

# Segment Perfect

马 [ma3](mǎ-horse) is a phonetic in

吗 [ma0] (ma-question word)

骂 [ma4] (mà-scold)

妈 [ma1] (mā-mother)

# Segment Perfect

门 [mən2] (mén-door) is a phonetic in

们 [mən0] (men-plural)

# Segment Perfect

方 [faŋ1] (fāng-place) is a phonetic in

房 [faŋ2] (fáng-house)

防 [faŋ2] (fáng-guard against)

访 [faŋ3] (fǎng-visit)

放 [faŋ4] (fàng-let go)



# Initial Perfect

- 先 [ɕiɛn1] (xīan-first) is a phonetic in
- 洗 [ɕi3] (xǐ-wash)
  
- 你 [ni3] (nǐ-you) is a phonetic in
- 您 [nin2] (nín-you-polite)

# Initial Consonant + Vowel (CV)

## Perfect

- 先 [ɕiɛn1] (xīan-first) is a phonetic in
  - 洗 [ɕi3] (xǐ-wash)
  - both share [ɕi-] xi-
- 
- 你 [ni3] (nǐ-you) is a phonetic in
  - 您 [nin2] (nín-you-polite)
  - both share [ni-] ni-

# Final Perfect

长 [tʂ'ɑŋ2] (cháng) 张 [tʂɑŋ1] (zhāng).  
They share the final [ɑŋ] -ang .

方 [fɑŋ1] (fāng) 旁 [p'ɑŋ2] (páng) . They  
share the final [ɑŋ] -ang .

艮 [kən3,4] (gěn, gèn) 根 [kən1] (gēn) 很  
[xən3] (hěn). They share the final [ən] -  
en .

# Rime Perfect (NE Perfect)

- In a rime perfect phonetic series, the characters share this same main vowel or nucleus (N) followed by the same final vowel or consonant ending (E).

# Rime Perfect

- 门 [mən2] (mén-door) is a phonetic in
- 问 [wən4] (wèn-ask).
- They share the rime [ən] (-en) .

# Rime Perfect: Underlying Forms

- 山 [ʃan1] (shān-mountain) is a phonetic in
- 仙 [ɕiɛn1] (xiān-immortal).
- They have the two rimes [an] and [ɛn]
- But they share the same *underlying form* of the rime (-an ) (See Cheng 1973).

# Rime Perfect: Underlying Forms

- 占 [tʂan1,4] (zhān-to divine; zhàn-to occupy) is a phonetic in
  - 点 [tiɛn3] (diǎn- a point) and
  - 店 [tiɛn4] (diàn-shop).
- 
- They have the two rimes [an] and [ɛn.]
  - But they share the same *underlying form* of the rime (-an ) (See Cheng 1973).

# Similar Vowel Features

- 是 [ʂɿ4] (shì-to be) is a phonetic in
- 題 [t'i2] (tí-topic) and
- 提 [t'i2] (tí-lift from above).
- C1 V / C2 V (V = i) (phonemic) same final V phonemically)
- [ʂɿ4] / [t'i2]
- (shi) / (ti)



# Chinese Characters-Morphemes

- **Characters are morphemic**
- Usually one character = 1 morpheme
  
- 我 (wǒ ) (I, me)
- 你 (nǐ) (you)
- 他 (tā ) (he)
- 她 (tā) (she)
- 图书馆 (túshūguǎn)(library) (charts + books + place )
- 美国(Měiguó)( beautiful + country)
- 中国(Zhōngguó) (central + country) (middle + kingdom)

# Chinese Characters-Syllables

- **Characters are syllabic**
- Usually one character = 1 syllable
  
- 我 (wǒ ) (I, me)
- 你 (nǐ) (you)
- 他 (tā ) (he)
- 她 (tā) (she)
- 图书馆 (túshūguǎn)(library) (charts + books + place )
- 美国(Měiguó)( beautiful + country)
- 中国(Zhōngguó) (central + country) (middle + kingdom)

# Chinese Writing System

- The Chinese writing system can be thought of as morpheme–syllabic (DeFrancis).

# Morphemes Versus Words

- The single Chinese character is a morpheme.
- Most words in Chinese (Mandarin) are 2 or more syllables (disyllabic or multisyllabic).
- 我 (wǒ) (I, me)
- 的 (de) (Possessive)
- 我的 (wǒde) (my) (I + possessive)
- 图书馆 (túshūguǎn) (library) (charts + books + place)
- 本子 (běnzi) (notebook)
- 学习 (xuéxi) (study)

# Sentences

- 你好吗？ (Nǐ hǎo ma?) (how are you?)
- 我很好。 (Wǒ hén hǎo.) (I am very well.)
- 谢谢。 (Xièxie.) ( Thank you.)

# Sentences

- 你到那儿去？
- (Nǐ dào nǎr qu?)
- ( Where are you going?)
- 我到图书馆去。
- (Wǒ dào túshūguǎn qu.)
- ( I am going to the library.)

# Sentences

- 你有几本书？ (Ní yǒu jǐ běn shū?)
- (How many books do you have?)
- 我有三本书。 (Wó yǒu sān běn shū.)
- ( I have 3 books.)

# Sentences

- Modern Chinese sentences in the PRC are written from left to right.
- Sentences in Chinese are written with equal spacing between characters.



# Traditional versus simplified characters

- Traditional characters can be found in Taiwan and certain overseas Chinese publications.
- Simplified characters are the officially simplified forms used in the People's Republic of China.



# 谢谢

- Xièxie (Thank you.)

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