



Beyond the Panda

熊猫后续



# Lesson 1

## Introduction to Mandarin

*(For pdf version – download separate sound files. There will be a corresponding sound file where you see the sound icon.)*



**SCILT** Scotland's National Centre for Languages







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# What are Chinese characters and Pinyin?

- Chinese doesn't have an alphabet like English. Instead of using letters, Chinese uses the characters to express the meaning.
- A Chinese word can have 1-3 characters. For example, 好  means 'good'; 快乐  means 'happy'; 巧克力  means 'chocolate'.
- In most cases, a character includes a sound part.
- In order to show the pronunciation, Pinyin was invented based on the Roman alphabet. For example, the pinyin of 好  is hǎo. [Accents are used to denote the tone.]

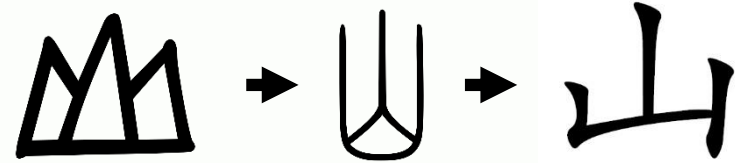
# Chinese Character Classification

Chinese characters represent words using several strategies:

- Pictograms
- Simple ideograms
- Associative idea characters
- Phono-semantic compounds

# Pictograms 象形字

- A few characters, including some of the most common used, came from the drawings of the objects.
- The shapes of characters changed several times in the history so that people can recognize them quicker and use them more conveniently.

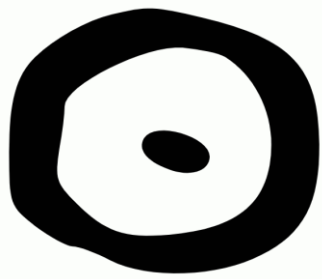


shān

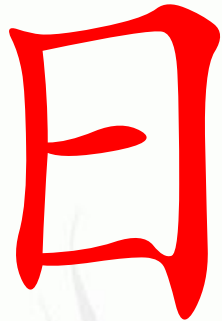


mountain

Notice the modern character keeps the form of the three peaks.



Modern Chinese characters fit into square shaped blocks. The modern script was standardised and does not consist of any circular strokes. Therefore original drawings, taking the form of a circle, will now be rectangular or square.



rì



sun

# Simple ideograms 指事字

In order to express abstract concepts which can't be depicted directly, ideograms were invented.

- Examples include 上 shàng 'up' and 下 xià 'down', originally a short line above and below a longer line.



上

shàng



下

xià






# Associative idea characters 会意字

Two or three characters are put together as one character to express more complex concepts.

- For example, put 日 rì 'sun' and 月 yuè 'moon' together to get 明 míng 'bright'.
- 好 hǎo 'good' is composed of 女 nǚ 'woman' and 子 zǐ 'child'.

# Phono-semantic compounds 形声字

Nowadays most characters are phono-semantic compounds.

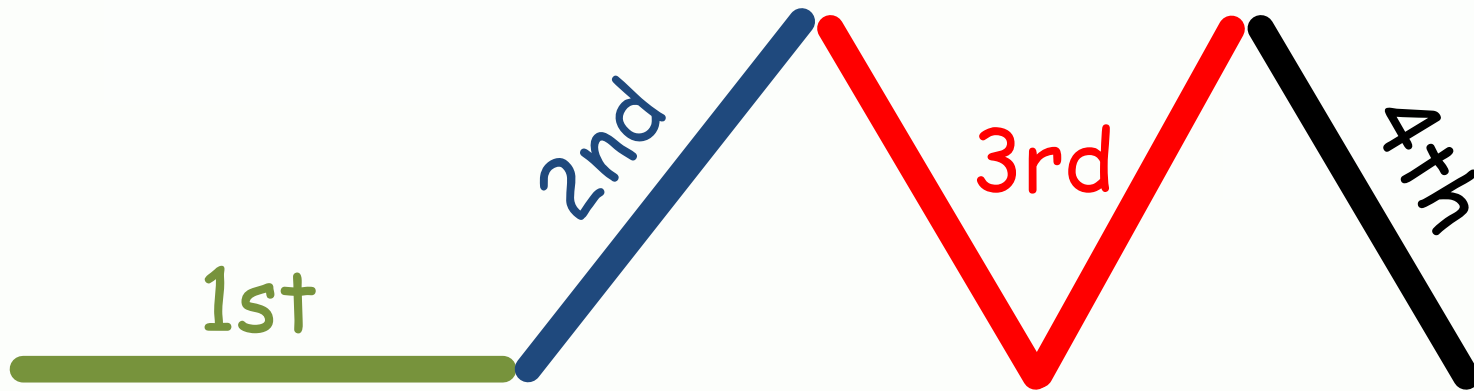
- These characters are often composed of two parts.
- The semantic component suggests the general meaning of the character; the phonetic component suggests the pronunciation of the character.
- Examples include 河  hé - river, 湖  hú - lake, 流  liú - stream. All these characters have the same radical 氵 on the left that means water.  
(The other part of the character is sound related.)



# Four Tones





A big difference between English and Chinese is the use of tones.

- In Chinese, there are four tones. The inflection you use to pronounce a syllable can create a new word entirely.
- For example, 熊 (xióng) means ‘panda’. If you pronounce it incorrectly as 胸 (xiōng), this means ‘chest hair’! The characters are, of course, very different: 熊猫 for panda and 胸毛 for chest hair.



- The first tone is a steady high sound.
- The second tone is a sound that rises from middle to high pitch, like shouting - Mum!
- The third tone descends from mid-low to low, like asking a question - Mum?
- The fourth tone features a sharp fall from high to low, like complaining - Mah-ummm!

# Four Tones

Tone	Example	Meaning of example
1st	妈 mā 	mother
2nd	麻 má 	hemp
3rd	马 mǎ 	horse
4th	骂 mà 	to scold



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Now with a little understanding of how the language works, try some greetings in Lesson 2



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