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One of the first challenges you will face when learning Mandarin is understanding the vast quantity of Chinese characters and their meanings. With hundreds of distinct ideograms to look at, it might be tough to know where to start. However, by focusing on the most common Chinese characters, you may build a strong foundation and gradually enhance your linguistic skills. Wukong will provide you with a comprehensive list of basic Chinese characters, including pinyin, English translations, and often used word combinations. Whether you are an American-born Chinese student or simply curious about the written forms of this ancient script, this resource will equip you with the knowledge and abilities you need to bravely explore the world of Chinese characters. Chinese characters, commonly known as hanzi or kanji, are the primary written components of the Chinese language. These ideographic symbols express thoughts, ideas, and objects rather than particular sounds or phonemes. Unlike the alphabetic scripts employed in many Western languages, mandarin characters are complex visual representations that transmit meaning through their distinctive forms and structures. Specially tailored for kids aged 3-18 around the world! Get started free! Chinese characters have a long history, with the earliest known instances reaching back to the Shang period (c. 1600-1046 BCE). These characters have developed over time, with new symbols introduced and existing ones reduced or altered to match the evolving needs of the language and its users. One of the most striking features of Chinese characters is their adaptability and universality. While precise pronunciations and usages may differ between Chinese dialects, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, the core characters remain mostly consistent, allowing for a shared written language that crosses geographical boundaries. So, how many Chinese characters are there overall? The solution is complicated by the huge number of characters in the Chinese writing system, which is constantly developing. Estimates range from roughly 50,000 to more than 100,000 characters, with the majority of them being rare or specialized symbols utilized in specific situations. However, the foundation of the language is made up of a relatively small number of regularly used characters known as the “basic” or “common” Chinese characters. To help you get started on your quest to understanding the Chinese language, we’ve produced a list of over 200 of the most common and fundamental Chinese characters. These symbols symbolize the Mandarin language’s basic pieces, and learning them will help you understand and communicate successfully in Chinese. The table below includes the character, its Pinyin (Romanized spelling), the English translation, the radicals (the essential components that make up the character), and examples of typical bigrams (two-character sentences or phrases) that use the symbol. No.CharacterPinyinEnglish TranslationCommon Bigrams (with English meaning)1一yīoneone/a (一个), together (一起)2二èrtwotwenty (二十), two people (二人)3三sānthreethree (个), three days (三天)4四sìfourfour (个), four seasons (四季)5五wǔfivefive (个), colorful (五颜六色)6六liùsixsix (个), June (六月)7七qīsevenseven (个), Double Seventh (七夕)8八bāeighteight (个), August (八月)9九jiǔninenine (个), September (九月)10十shítenten (个), very (十分)11人rénpersonpeople (们), life (生)12大dàbigadult (人), family (家)13小xiǎosmallchild (孩), Ming (明)14中zhōngmiddleChina (国), noon (午)15心xīnheartmood (情), psychology (理)16手shǒuhandphone (机), watch (表)17口kǒumouthspoken (语), taste (味)18山shānmountainlandscape (水), Shandong (东)19水shuǐwaterfruit (果), level (平)20火huǒfiretrain (车), rocket (箭)21木mùwoodwood (头), materials (材)22金jīngoldmoney (钱), metal (属)23土tǔearthland (地), soil (壤)24的deof, ‘s, ‘s的人 (a person)25是shìto be, is是不 (is not)26不bùnot不了 (cannot)27了le(aspect marker)了解 (to understand)28在zàiat, in, on在这 (at this)29有yǒuto have, there is有什么 (have what)30我wǒI, me我们 (we)31他tāhe, him他们 (they)32这zhèthis这个 (this)33个gè(measure word)一个 (one)34为wéito do, for为什么 (why)35们men(plural suffix)我们 (we)36来láito come来到 (to come)37上shàngup, on, above上面 (above)38以yǐto, in order to以及 (and)39国guócountry, nation中国 (China)40和héand, with和平 (peace)41到dàoto, until到了 (have arrived)42地de(adverbial marker)这里 (here)43之zhī(possessive)之中 (among)44说shuōto say, speak说明 (to explain)45时shítime, when时候 (time)46要yàoto want, will要求 (to demand)47出chūto go out, appear出去 (to go out)48也yěalso, too也是 (is also)49就jiùthen, just就是 (that is)50可kěcan, may可以 (can)51会huìcan, will会说 (can speak)52而érand, but而且 (and, furthermore)53于yúin, at在于 (lies in)54对duìcorrect, right对于 (regarding)55年niányear每年 (every year)56能néngcan, be able to能够 (be able to)57得de(structural particle)应该 (should)58你nǐyou你们 (you all)59下xiàdown, under下面 (below)60自zìself自己 (oneself)61道dàoway, road说道 (said)62那nàthat那些 (those)63后hòuafter, behind以后 (afterwards)64行xíngto go, conduct行动 (action)65着zhe(progressive aspect)看着 (look at)66发fāto issue, emit发生 (happen)67过guò(perfective aspect)经过 (to pass through)68么me(interrogative particle)什么 (what)69些xiēsome, few一些 (some)70从cóngfrom, by从而 (thereby)71里lǐinside, within里面 (inside)72多duōmany, much很多 (a lot of)73当dāngto act as, during当时 (at the time)74只zhǐonly, merely只有 (only)75以yǐto use, by以及 (and)76于yúin, at在于 (lies in)77开kāito open, start开始 (begin)78这zhèthis这样 (this way)79有yǒuto have, exist有的 (some)80间jiānbetween, among之间 (between)81法fǎmethod, way方法 (method)82们men(plural suffix)我们 (we)83两liǎngtwo两个 (two)84上shàngon, above上面 (above)85来láito come来到 (arrive)86为wèifor, as为了 (in order to)87能néngcan, be able to能够 (be able to)88又yòuand, also又一 (another)89现xiànto appear, present现在 (now)90很hěnvery, quite很多 (a lot of)91种zhǒngkind, type这种 (this kind of)92前qiánfront, before以前 (before)93些xiēsome, few一些 (some)94面miànside, surface面前 (in front of)95事shìmatter, affair事情 (matter)96把bǎ(ba-construction)把握 (grasp)97到dàoto arrive, reach到了 (have arrived)98已yǐalready, by now已经 (already)99就jiùthen, just就是 (that is)100时shítime这时 (at this time)101说shuōto say, speak说道 (said)102好hǎogood, well很好 (very good)103也yěalso, too也是 (also is)104要yàoto want, need要是 (if)105还háistill, yet还是 (still)106去qùto go去了 (went)107看kànto see, look at看到 (see)108可kěcan, may可以 (can)109么ma(interrogative particle)什么 (what)110然ránthen, however但是 (but)111生shēngto be born, life生活 (life)112同tóngsame, together同样 (likewise)113都dōuall, both都是 (all are)114后hòuafter, behind以后 (after)115对duìtowards, correct对于 (towards)116自zìself自己 (oneself)117那nàthat那个 (that)118下xiàbelow, under下面 (below)119因yīncause, reason因为 (because)120行hángprofession, field可以 (can)121些xiēsome, few一些 (some)122给gěito give给他 (give him)123被bèi(passive marker)被人 (by people)124其qíhis, her, its其他 (other)125白báiwhitecolor (色), daytime (天)126黑hēiblackcolor (色), dark (暗)127田tiánfieldfarm (园), paddy (地)128电diànelectricityelectric (气), telephone (话)129日rìsunday (天), date (期)130月yuèmoonmonth (份), bright (亮)131女nǚwomangirl (孩), wife (婿)132子zǐchildson (女), seed (粒)133生shēnglifegrow (长), raw (食)134东dōngeastChina (北), winter (风)135西xīwestEurope (洲), summer (天)136南nánsouthChina (方), summer (风)137北běinorthChina (京), winter (风)138树shùtreewood (林), leaves (叶)139花huāflowerblossom (开), smell (香)140草cǎograssherb (药), lawn (坪)141鸟niǎobirdchicken (禽), sparrow (雀)142虫chónginsectant (蚁), worm (虫)143鱼yúfishcarp (鲤), salmon (鲑)144肉ròumeatpork (猪), beef (牛)145酒jiǔwinealcohol (精), liquor (店)146饭fànmealrice (米), eat (吃)147车chēvehicleautomobile (汽), bicycle (自)148马mǎhorsestallion (驹), camel (驼)149武wǔmilitarymartial arts (术), weapon (器)150言yánspeechtalk (语), say (说)151学xuéstudyschool (校), knowledge (识)152书shūbookliterature (籍), write (写)153报bàonewspapernews (纸), announce (告)154纸zhǐpapertissue (巾), note (条)155钱qiánmoneywealth (财), currency (币)156银yínsilversilver (元), bank (行)157金jīngoldgold (元), jewelry (饰)158石shístonerock (头), jade (玉)159工gōngworklabor (人), industry (厂)160力lìstrengthability (能), force (量)161门méndoorentrance (户), gate (楼)162窗chuāngwindowglass (户), curtain (帘)163屋wūhouseroom (内), building (宇)164床chuángbedsleep (眠), pillow (头)165桌zhuōtabledesk (子), furniture (具)166椅yǐchairseat (子), furniture (具)167衣yīclothesgarment (服), dress (裙)168裤kùpantstrousers (子), shorts (裳)169鞋xiéshoepair (双), sandal (履)170帽màohatcap (子), helmet (盔)171伞sǎnumbrellaparasol (花), raincoat (衣)172旗qíflagbanner (帜), pennant (号)173歌gēsongsing (唱), melody (曲)174画huàpaintingdrawing (图), sketch (本)175钟zhōngclocktime (表), bell (声)176医yīmedicaldoctor (生), hospital (院)177药yàomedicinepill (片), prescription (方)178病bìngillnesssick (患), pain (苦)179死sǐdeathkill (害), funeral (葬)180爱àiloveaffection (情), beloved (人)181梦mèngdreamvision (幻), sleep (眠)182鸟niǎobirdsparrow (雀), swan (鹅)183鱼yúfishcarp (鲤), salmon (鲑)184花huāflowerrose (芳), blossom (开)185树shùtreepine (松), oak (橡)186草cǎograssweed (丛), hay (原)187山shānmountainpeak (顶), ridge (脊)188水shuǐwaterriver (流), sea (洋)189火huǒfireblaze (焰), spark (星)190风fēngwindbreeze (柔), gale (疾)191雨yǔraindrizzle (滴), shower (洒)192云yúncloudmist (霭), fog (霾)193月yuèmoonlunar (缺), eclipse (蚀)194星xīngstarconstellation (座), comet (流)195家jiāfamilyhome (庭), household (人)196学xuéstudyschool (校), education (育)197光guānglight阳光 (sunlight), 光明 (brightness)198春chūnspring春天 (springtime), 春节 (Spring Festival)199夏xiàsummer夏天 (summertime), 夏季 (summer)200秋qiūautumn秋天 (autumn), 秋收 (autumn harvest)201冬dōngwinter冬天 (wintertime), 冬季 (winter) To help you with your Chinese character learning journey, we’ve produced a detailed PDF chart containing all 200+ characters from the list above. This free resource is intended to be a handy reference tool, allowing you to go over the characters, their pronunciations, translations, and common usages at your own leisure. In addition, Wukong Chinese offers a variety of free and engaging Chinese character practice worksheets. Parents who are interested can download and print them online for their children’s practice. If you want your children to master Chinese characters systematically and firmly, as well as set a solid foundation for future Chinese learning, you can enroll in a free online 1-on-1 Chinese trial class and create a Chinese character study plan for them. While the list of 200+ core Chinese characters provides a solid foundation, it is critical to go deeper and understand the language’s most often used symbols. These common characters not only appear often in everyday interactions and written documents, but they also serve as the foundation for more complex words and phrases. Let’s look at 15 of the most common Chinese characters, including their meanings, pronunciations, and insights into the greater Chinese language and cultural landscape. 1.人 (rén) – Person, human being PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 人 is composed of the radical ‘人’, which represents the concept of a person or human being.Common Bigrams– 人口 (rénkǒu) – Population

- This compound word combines the character for person (人) with the character for mouth (口), referring to the people or inhabitants of a place.
- 人民 (rénmín) – The people
- This compound word combines the character for person (人) with the character for people (民), referring to the general population or citizenry.Example Sentence– 这个人很高。(Zhège rén hěn gāo.)
- This sentence translates to “This person is very tall.”
- It demonstrates the use of the person (人) character in a simple, descriptive context.Significance in Chinese Culture– The character 人 is one of the most fundamental and common characters in the Chinese language.
- It represents the central importance of the human being in traditional Chinese philosophy and society.
- The concept of the individual and their relationships within the larger social fabric are crucial in Chinese culture.Importance in Language and Writing– As a basic and essential character, 人 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The simplicity and recognizability of the character make it one of the first characters that students of Chinese learn. 2.大 (dà) – Big, large PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 大 is composed of the radical ‘大’, which represents the concept of something that is big or large in size.Common Bigrams– 大学 (dàxué) – University
- This compound word combines the character for big (大) with the character for school (学), referring to a higher institution of learning.
- 大家 (dàjiā) – Everyone, everybody
- This compound word combines the character for big (大) with the character for family (家), representing the collective group of people.Example Sentence– 这个房间很大。(Zhège fángjiān hěn dà.)
- This sentence translates to “This room is very big.”
- It demonstrates the use of the big (大) character in a simple, descriptive context.Significance in Chinese Culture– The concept of size and scale is important in traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics.
- The character 大 is often associated with ideas of power, authority, and importance in Chinese cultural contexts.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 大 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The straightforward form of the character makes it one of the first characters that students of Chinese learn. 3.小 (xiǎo) – Small, little PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 小 is composed of the radical ‘小’, which represents the concept of something that is small or little in size.Common Bigrams– 小孩 (xiǎohái) – Child
- This compound word combines the character for small (小) with the character for child (孩), referring to a young person.
- 小型 (xiǎoxíng) – Small-scale, miniature
- This compound word combines the character for small (小) with the character for type or form (型), describing something that is of a small size or scale.Example Sentence– 这个苹果很小。(Zhège píngguǒ hěn xiǎo.)
- This sentence translates to “This apple is very small.”
- It demonstrates the use of the small (小) character in a simple, descriptive context.Significance in Chinese Culture– The concept of scale and proportion is important in traditional Chinese aesthetics and design.
- The character 小 is often associated with ideas of delicacy, modesty, and intimacy in Chinese cultural contexts.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 小 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The concise form of the character makes it one of the first characters that students of Chinese learn. 4.中 (zhōng) – Middle, center PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 中 is composed of the radical ‘丨’, which represents the concept of something being in the middle or center.Common Bigrams– 中国 (Zhōngguó) – China
- This compound word combines the character for middle (中) with the character for country (国), referring to the central or “middle kingdom” of China.
- 中午 (zhōngwǔ) – Noon, midday
- This compound word combines the character for middle (中) with the character for day (午), representing the middle of the day.Example Sentence– 这个城市位于国家的中心。(Zhège chéngshì wèizài guójiā de zhōngxīn.)
- This sentence translates to “This city is located at the center of the country.”
- It demonstrates the use of the middle (中) character in a spatial context.Significance in Chinese Culture– The concept of balance and harmony, with things in their proper middle or central position, is central to traditional Chinese philosophy and worldview.
- The character 中 is often associated with ideas of moderation, equilibrium, and the mean between extremes.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 中 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The compact form of the character makes it one of the earliest characters that students of Chinese learn. 5.心 (xīn) – Heart, mind PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 心 is composed of the radical ‘心’, which represents the concept of the heart, mind, or inner being.Common Bigrams– 心情 (xīnqíng) – Mood, state of mind
- This compound word combines the character for heart/mind (心) with the character for emotion or feeling (情), referring to one’s inner emotional state.
- 用心 (yòngxīn) – Careful, attentive
- This compound phrase uses the character for heart/mind (心) to mean to do something with care and focus.Example Sentence– 他的心里很难过。(Tā de xīnlǐ hěn nánguò.)
- This sentence translates to “He is very sad in his heart/mind.”
- It demonstrates the use of the heart/mind (心) character to refer to one’s inner emotional state.Significance in Chinese Culture– The concept of the heart and mind as the seat of emotions, thoughts, and moral cultivation is central to traditional Chinese philosophy and psychology.
- The character 心 is deeply associated with ideas of self-awareness, introspection, and the unity of cognition and emotion.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 心 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The distinctive shape of the character makes it one of the most recognizable and frequently used characters in the Chinese writing system. 6.手 (shǒu) – Hand PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 手 is composed of the radical ‘手’, which represents the concept of the human hand.Common Bigrams– 手机 (shǒujī) – Cellphone, mobile phone
- This compound word combines the character for hand (手) with the character for machine (机), referring to a portable electronic device held in the hand.
- 手艺 (shǒuyì) – Craftsmanship, skill
- This compound word combines the character for hand (手) with the character for art or skill (艺), indicating the importance of manual dexterity and handiwork.Example Sentence– 他用手拿起了那个杯子。(Tā yòng shǒu ná qǐle nà gè bēizi.)
- This sentence translates to “He used his hand to pick up that cup.”
- It demonstrates the use of the hand (手) character in a concrete, physical context.Significance in Chinese Culture– The hand is seen as an essential tool for physical work, artistic creation, and gestural expression in traditional Chinese culture.
- The character 手 is often associated with ideas of skill, craftsmanship, and the ability to manipulate the physical world.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 手 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The iconic shape of the character, resembling an outstretched hand, makes it easily recognizable in the Chinese writing system. 7.口 (kǒu) – Mouth PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 口 is composed of the radical ‘口’, which represents the concept of the human mouth.Common Bigrams– 说话 (shuōhuà) – To speak, to talk
- This compound word combines the character for mouth (口) with the character for speech (话), referring to the act of speaking with the mouth.
- 吃饭 (chīfàn) – To eat a meal
- This compound word combines the character for mouth (口) with the character for food (饭), describing the action of putting food into the mouth.Example Sentence– 他张开嘴巴说话。(Tā zhāngkāi zuǐbā shuōhuà.)
- This sentence translates to “He opened his mouth and spoke.”
- It demonstrates the use of the mouth (口) character in the context of speech and vocalization.Significance in Chinese Culture– The mouth is seen as the primary organ for speech, taste, and oral expression in traditional Chinese culture.
- The character 口 is often associated with ideas of communication, sustenance, and the exchange of information.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 口 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The simple, iconic shape of the character makes it one of the most recognizable and frequently encountered characters in the Chinese writing system. 8.山 (shān) – Mountain PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 山 is composed of the radical ‘山’, which represents the concept of a mountain or mountainous terrain.Common Bigrams– 山水 (shānshuǐ) – Landscape, scenic views
- This compound word combines the character for mountain (山) with the character for water (水), referring to the natural scenery of mountains and rivers.
- 登山 (dēngshān) – To climb a mountain
- This compound word combines the character for mountain (山) with the character for ascend (登), describing the action of climbing up a mountain.Example Sentence– 我们在山上搭帐篷过夜。(Wǒmen zài shānshàng dā zhàngpeng guò yè.)
- This sentence translates to “We set up a tent and stayed overnight on the mountain.”
- It demonstrates the use of the mountain (山) character in a spatial context.Significance in Chinese Culture– Mountains have long been revered in Chinese culture as symbols of grandeur, stability, and spiritual significance.
- The character 山 is often associated with ideas of natural beauty, challenge, and the pursuit of enlightenment.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 山 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The distinctive shape of the character, resembling three peaks, makes it easily recognizable in the Chinese writing system. 9.水 (shuǐ) – Water PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 水 is composed of the radical ‘水’, which represents the concept of water.Common Bigrams– 水果 (shuǐguǒ) – FruitThis compound word combines the character for water (水) with the character for fruit (果), referring to watery or juicy fruits.– 水平 (shuǐpíng) – LevelThis compound word combines the character for water (水) with the character for level (平), representing a flat, even surface like a body of water.Example Sentence– 他喝了一杯水。(Tā hē le yī bēi shuǐ.)
- This sentence translates to “He drank a cup of water.”
- It demonstrates the use of the water (水) character in a simple, everyday context.Significance of Water in Chinese Culture– Water (水) is a fundamental element in traditional Chinese philosophy and cosmology.– It is often associated with the yin energy, representing fluidity, adaptability, and the cycle of life.– Water is also crucial for agriculture, transportation, and daily life in Chinese society, making it a highly significant character. 10.火 (huǒ) – Fire PointDescriptionRadicalsThe character 火 is composed of the radical ‘火’, which represents the concept of fire or flame.Common Bigrams– 火车 (huǒchē) – Train
- This compound word combines the character for fire (火) with the character for vehicle (车), referring to a locomotive powered by fire/steam.
- 着火 (zháohuǒ) – To catch fire, to ignite
- This compound word combines the character for fire (火) with the verb ‘to ignite’ (着), describing the action of something catching on fire.Example Sentence– 篝火熊熊燃烧着照亮了夜空。(Gōuhuǒ xióngxióng ránshāo zhe zhàoliàng le yèkōng.)
- This sentence translates to “The bonfire was burning brightly, illuminating the night sky.”
- It demonstrates the use of the fire (火) character in the context of an actual flame or source of heat.Significance in Chinese Culture– Fire has long been seen in Chinese culture as a transformative and life-sustaining force, with important ritual and symbolic associations.
- The character 火 is often linked to ideas of warmth, energy, and the power to change physical and spiritual realms.Importance in Language and Writing– As a fundamental and common character, 火 appears in numerous other Chinese words and compounds.
- The distinctive shape of the character, resembling a flickering flame, makes it easily recognizable in the Chinese writing system. 11.的 (de) – of PointDescriptionGrammatical Function– Possessive marker
- Descriptive marker
- Nominalization markerUsage Patterns– Placed after the noun, adjective, or verb it modifies
- In possessive constructions, 的 goes after the possessor
- In descriptive constructions, 的 goes after the adjective
- In nominalization, 的 goes after the verb, adjective, or phrase being nominalizedFrequency and Importance– One of the most commonly used characters in Chinese
- Mastering the correct usage of 的 is essential for fluent and grammatically accurate ChineseExample Sentences– 这是我的书。(Zhè shì wǒ de shū.) – This is my book.
- 那朵花很漂亮的。(Nà duǒ huā hěn piàoliang de.) – That flower is very beautiful.
- 学习的好处是什么? (Xuéxí de hǎochù shì shénme?) – What are the benefits of learning?Regional Variations– In some regional dialects, the pronunciation of 的 may vary slightly (e.g., de, di, or deh) 12.是 (shi) – is/am/are/yes PointDescriptionGrammatical Function– The character 是 is primarily used as a copula verb, equivalent to the English verb “to be”Usage– 是 is used to indicate identity, state of being, or equate two noun phrases
- It can be used with various subjects to mean “is”, “am”, “are”, “yes”, etc.Example Sentences– 这个人是我的朋友。(Zhège rén shì wǒ de péngyou.) – This person is my friend.
- 你是学生吗? (Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?) – Are you a student?
- 是的,我是学生。(Shì de, wǒ shì xuésheng.) – Yes, I am a student.Significance in Chinese Grammar– 是 is a fundamental and indispensable grammatical element in Chinese
- Its usage is crucial for forming basic sentences and expressing identity, state, and equationsFrequency and Importance– 是 is one of the most commonly used characters in the Chinese language
- Mastering the correct usage of 是 is essential for communicating effectively in ChineseWriting Conventions– 是 is written as a standalone character and is not combined with other characters
- The placement of 是 in a sentence follows specific grammatical patternsCultural Associations– 是 is associated with affirmation, agreement, and confirmation in Chinese culture
- The simple and direct nature of 是 reflects the pragmatic and concise communication style in Chinese 13.在(zai) – at/in PointDescriptionGrammatical Function– 在 is a preposition that indicates location or positionUsage– 在 is used to express the location or position of something or someone
- It can be translated as “at”, “in”, “on”, “by”, or “during” depending on the contextExample Sentences– 他在图书馆里学习。(Tā zài túshūguǎn lǐ xuéxí.) – He is studying in the library.
- 这件衣服在衣柜里。(Zhè jiàn yīfu zài yīguì lǐ.) – This piece of clothing is in the wardrobe.
- 我们在周三见面。(Wǒmen zài zhōu sān jiàn miàn.) – We will meet on Wednesday.Significance in Chinese Grammar– 在 is a crucial preposition for expressing location and position in Chinese sentences
- Its usage is essential for describing where actions or events take placeFrequency and Importance– 在 is one of the most commonly used Chinese characters
- Mastering the correct usage of 在 is essential for communicating effectively in ChineseWriting Conventions– 在 is written as a standalone character and is not combined with other characters
- The placement of 在 in a sentence follows specific grammatical patternsCultural Associations– 在 is associated with a sense of presence, immersion, and involvement in Chinese culture
- The use of 在 reflects the importance of spatial awareness and context in Chinese communication 14.我 (wǒ) – I/me PointDescriptionGrammatical Function– 我 is a personal pronoun that means “I”, “me”, or “myself”Usage– 我 is used to refer to the speaker or the person who is the subject of the sentence
- It can be used as the subject, object, or possessive form of the first-person singular pronounExample Sentences– 我是学生。(Wǒ shì xuésheng.) – I am a student.
- 这是我的书。(Zhè shì wǒ de shū.) – This is my book.
- 老师叫了我。(Lǎoshī jiào le wǒ.) – The teacher called me.Significance in Chinese Grammar– 我 is a fundamental pronoun in Chinese grammar and is essential for self-reference and first-person expressionFrequency and Importance– 我 is one of the most commonly used characters in the Chinese language
- Mastering the correct usage of 我 is crucial for effective communication in ChineseWriting Conventions– 我 is written as a standalone character and is not combined with other characters
- The placement of 我 in a sentence follows specific grammatical patternsCultural Associations– 我 reflects the individual’s sense of self and self-awareness in Chinese culture
- The use of 我 also suggests a degree of social hierarchy and interpersonal dynamics 15.个 (gè) – individual PointDescriptionGrammatical Function– 个 is a measure word or classifier used to count or quantify nouns in ChineseUsage– 个 is used to count or quantify individual objects, people, or abstract concepts
- It is placed between a number and the noun it modifies to indicate the unit or quantityExample Sentences– 我有三个苹果。(Wǒ yǒu sān gè píngguǒ.) – I have three apples.
- 这里有五个学生。(Zhèlǐ yǒu wǔ gè xuésheng.) – There are five students here.
- 我想买一个新书包。(Wǒ xiǎng mǎi yī gè xīn shūbāo.) – I want to buy a new backpack.Significance in Chinese Grammar– 个 is a crucial grammatical element in Chinese for quantifying nouns and expressing precise amounts
- Proper use of 个 is essential for clear and accurate communication in ChineseFrequency and Importance– 个 is one of the most frequently used characters in the Chinese language
- Mastering the correct usage of 个 is crucial for achieving fluency in ChineseWriting Conventions– 个 is written as a standalone character and is not combined with other characters
- The placement of 个 in a sentence follows specific grammatical patternsCultural Associations– 个 reflects the Chinese emphasis on categorization, quantification, and attention to detail
- The use of 个 suggests a systematic and analytical approach to conceptualizing the world You can use this character list as a reference to gain a better grasp of the chosen characters. Study the material presented, practice using the characters in sentences, and investigate how they fit into the larger framework of Chinese grammar and communication. In the Chinese language, there is a distinction between characters and words: Characters (汉字 hànzì): The basic building blocks of the written Chinese language. Each character represents a single concept, object, or idea. Characters can be used independently as single-character words or combined to form multi-character words. Words (词 cí): Consist of one or more characters. Represent a complete meaning or unit of language. Can be single-character words or multi-character words. For example, the character 水 (shuǐ) means “water” and can be used as a single-character word. However, it can also be combined with other characters to form multi-character words, such as 泳水 (yǒngshuǐ, swimming) or 喝水 (hēshuǐ, to drink water). The relationship between characters and words in Chinese is complex, as a single character can stand alone as a word or be combined with other characters to form new, more complex words. Understanding this distinction is crucial for effectively learning and using the Chinese language. The Chinese character list we’ve covered in this comprehensive tutorial is an invaluable resource for anyone wishing to learn the fundamentals of written Mandarin. By being acquainted with the most common Chinese characters, their meanings, and how they are employed in everyday words and phrases, you will be well on your way to mastering this ancient and intriguing script. Download the free PDF chart to keep this vital information at your fingertips as you continue your journey to discover China’s rich culture and language. You can explore best website to learn Chinese characters here. Specially tailored for kids aged 3-18 around the world! Get started free! Master’s degree in Chinese language and philology. She has 8 years of international Chinese education experience, 6 years of international Chinese first-line teaching experience, and 2 years of international Chinese teaching and research experience, including Chinese pinyin teaching, Chinese character teaching, and Chinese entrance exam teaching. She is also responsible for the development of Wukong’s original content and curriculum design and development. 0 ratings0% found this document useful (0 votes)646 viewsThis document provides a list of the 140 most common Chinese characters to help with character recognition, not exhaustive translations. It introduces the first 30 characters, including part...AI-enhanced title and descriptionSaveSave 140 most common Chinese characters For Later0%0% found this document useful, undefined If you are new to Chinese characters and want a place to start, you’re at the right place. Our 150 most common Chinese characters list will help you get started on your journey. MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) created an algorithm that calculated the most often seen Chinese characters in written Chinese in order of how frequently they are used.Jump to the list now.This post may include affiliate links. That means if you click a product link below and then purchase a product, Written Chinese will take a small commission to keep the site and dictionary running. (Don’t worry, it’s at no extra cost to you!)There are tens of thousands of Chinese characters, but since the symbols that make up written Chinese has developed over thousands of year, the exact number is unknown. In 2004, the 异体字字典 (yì tǐ zì zì diǎn) Chinese Dictionary included a record 106,230 Chinese characters, but only a small amount of those are used today.In modern-day schools, children are expected to learn 3500 characters, but many know more than 5000 by the time they graduate. In mainland China, students learn simplified characters, while traditional Chinese characters are used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao.Difference Between Characters and WordsOne character doesn’t make one Chinese word. A word is usually made up of 2 or more characters, so learning these 150 characters means you actually know many more words.For example, in #11 in this Chinese character list, 这 can be combined with several other characters in the list to make words. For example, 这个, 这里, 这样, 这么, and 这些. If you’ve looked at the new HSK 2021 system, over 9 levels, you’ll study 3000 characters which equate to 11092 words.You can download our Chinese character list as a PDF and excel spreadsheet so you can study later and record your learning. We’ll also send you some tips and instructions on how to start learning. No.Simplified CharacterPinyinEnglish 1的deof 2一yīone 3是shìto be 4不bùnot 5了lecompleted 6在zàiat / in 7人rénperson 8有yǒuto have 9我wǒI / me 10他tāhe / him 11这zhèthis 12个gèindividual 13中zhōngmiddle 14为wèifor 15大dàbig 16们menplural 17来láicome 18上shàngabove / up 19以yǐso as to 20国guócountry 21和héand / with 22到dàoto arrive 23地dìearth 24之zhīof / it 25说shuōto say 26时shítime 27要yàowant 28出chūout 29也yěalso 30就jiùjust 31可kěcan 32会huìable to 33而éryet / but 34于yúin / at / than 35子zǐchild 36生shēnglife 37对duìcorrect 38年niányear 39能néngcan 40得déto get 41你nǐyou 42下xiàdown 43自zìself 44道dàoway 45那nàthat 46后hòuafter 47行xíngto go/OK 48着zhe~ing 49发fāto send out 50过guòto pass 51所suǒactually 52用yòngto use 53作zuòto do 54事shìmatter/thing 55家jiāhome 56里lǐin/inside 57成chéngto become 58方fāngsquare 59其qíits 60然ránso 61种zhǒngtype of 62去qùgo 63如rúlike/as 64多duōmany/much 65经jīngto pass 66法fǎlaw/method 67学xuéto study 68同tóngsame 69天tiānsky/day 70都dōuall 71分fēnto divide 72当dāngregard as 73定dìngto set 74者zhěone who (is) 75进jìnto enter 76么mesuffix 77十shíten 78主zhǔmain 79日rìsun/day 80动dòngto move 81部bùpart 82现xiànnow 83面miànface 84起qǐto rise 85小xiǎosmall 86理lǐto manage 87还háistill 88军jūnarmy 89与yǔand 90看kànto see 91本běnorigin 92好hǎogood 93无wúwithout 94前qiánin front/ago 95些xiēsome 96没méihaven't 97心xīnheart 98因yīncause 99从cóngfrom 100三sānthree 101只zhǐonly 102实shíreal 103样yàngappearance 104开kāito open 105此cǐthis 106公gōngpublic 107使shǐto use 108将jiāngshall 109但dànbut 110意yìidea 111力lìenergy 112民mínpeople 113二èrtwo 114长chánglong 115想xiǎngthink 116它tāit 117机jīmachine 118知zhīknow 119又yòuagain 120第dì(number)~th 121明míngbright 122把bǎto hold 123已yǐalready 124工gōngwork 125正zhèngright 126见jiànto meet 127性xìnggender 128她tāshe/her 129外wàioutside 130业yèindustry 131关guānto close 132高gāohigh 133相xiāngeach other 134两liǎngtwo 135情qíngfeeling 136全quánwhole 137文wénlanguage 138问wènto ask 139等děngto wait 140由yóudue to 141并bìngfurthermore 142月yuèmonth 143应yīngshould 144间jiānbetween 145重zhòngserious 146物wùthing 147政zhèngpolitics 148点diǎndot 149体tǐbody 150战zhànwar Track your studies with this free common Chinese characters list in a printable PDF and excel!Here are the first 20 most common Chinese characters from the list to get you started. I’ve provided definitions for each character, as well as radical breakdowns, example sentences, and common bigrams. The first character to learn is 的 (de), often used as a possessive particle with a neutral tone. It might seem quite an odd character to begin with, but you will use this one so often, better learn it now.白 (bái) white 勺 (bāo) wrap丶 (diǎn) dot你的 / 您的 (nǐ de)/ (nín de) yours我的 (wǒ de) my / mine别的 (bié de) else / other 我们的书包是一样的。 (wǒ men de shū bāo shì yī yàng de) Our bags are the same.我的鞋子是蓝色的。 (wǒ de xié zi shì lán sè de) My shoes are blue.You can learn more about the 的 (de) character in our article How to use the ‘de’ particles 的, 得, and 地 in Chinese. 一 (yī) is an ideograph character, meaning that it is an abstract idea of the number 1.一个 (yī gè) a /an一些 (yī xiē) some / a few一种 (yī zhǒng) a kind of 我有一个孩子。(wǒ yǒu yī gè hái zi) I have one child.她有一点不高兴。(tā yǒu yī diǎn bù gāo xìng) She is a little unhappy.You can learn more about the 的 (de) character in our article How to use the ‘de’ particles 的, 得, and 地 in Chinese. 是 (shì) is commonly found to mean ‘is’ or ‘are’ in a Chinese sentence. It can also be used as ‘yes’.日 (rì) sun一 (yī) one走 (zǒu) to walkOne of the original characters for 是 (shì) was 是 (shì). The sun 日 (rì) is found over the modified character for ‘right or ‘correct’ 正 (zhèng). The sun is the standard of ‘correctness’, creating the meaning of ‘yes’ or ‘is’.不是 (bú shì) no但是 (dàn shì) but / however还是 (hái shì) or 他是老师吗？(tā shì lǎo shī ma) Is he a teacher?今天是星期一。(jīn tiān shì xīng qī yī) Today is Monday.You can learn more about using the character 是 (shì) in our article about saying yes. Although 了 (le) can be used in a few different ways, it is most commonly used as a particle to indicate that something is completed.到了 (dào le) to arrive为了 (wèi le) in order to 别忘了你的东西。(bié wàng le nǐ de dōng xi) Don’t forget your stuff我马上到了！(wǒ mǎ shàng dào le) I’ll arrive soon!To learn more about how to use 了 (le), take a look at our article The Complete Guide to Chinese Modal Particles, where you’ll find a whole section just on 了 (le) and its uses. (zuǒ) left-hand丨 (gǔn) line土 (tǔ) earthThe second is based on an older version of the character:土 (tǔ) earth才 (cái) just now In the development of 在 (zài), 才 (cái) represented a pillar and beam of a house. When 才 (cái) ‘house’ was together with 土 (tǔ) ‘the earth,’ this stood for survival or to ‘exist’.Alternatively, 才 (cái), which means ‘just now’ or ‘a moment ago’, predominantly makes the pronunciation of the character (cái – zài) but also provides some meaning. I am AT (土) at a place JUST NOW (才).现在 (xiàn zài) now正在 (zhèng zài) in the process of放在 (fàng zài) place in / on我正在回办公室。(wǒ zhèng zài huí bàn gōng shì) I’m coming back to the office.他不在家。(tā bú zài jiā) He’s not home.Learn more about using the character 在 in our article, The Different Uses of 在 zai in Chinese. 人 / 亻 (rén)When used as a radical, 人 (rén) is also found on the side in the form of 亻, such as in 们 (men), 任 (rèn) and 化 (huà).人 (rén) is a pictograph of a man’s legs, although the original character showed a man picking wheat from the fields. 女人 (nǚ rén) woman男人 (nán rén) man老人 (lǎo rén) old man这女人很漂亮。(zhè nǚ rén hěn piào liang) The women is very beautiful.你是哪里人？(nǐ shì nǎ lǐ rén) Where are you from? 月 (yuè) moon (zuǒ) left handEarly depictions of 有 (yǒu) show a hand holding a piece of meat. The image of meat was similar to that of the moon 月 (yuè) and as ‘man’ began to focus on ‘reaching the moon’, the image became the hand holding the moon.没有 (méi yǒu) don’t have还有 (hái yǒu) still只有 (zhǐ yǒu) only 这里有家超市。(zhè lǐ yǒu jiā chāo shì) Here is the supermarket.我只有一张电影票。(wǒ zhǐ yǒu yī zhāng diàn yǐng piào) I only have one movie ticket. The earliest form of 我 (wǒ) showed 2 spears but now shows a hand 手 (shǒu) grasping a spear 戈 (gē). The suggestion is that a man holding a spear is a metaphor for his own ego, or ‘I’.我们 (wǒ men) us我的 (wǒ de) my / mine 我来试一下。(wǒ lái shì yī xià) Let me try.我是 Hollie。(wǒ shì...) I’m Hollie.Learn how to use pronouns in our article, You & Me. This & That: Pronouns in Chinese. 人 / 亻 (rén) man / person也 (yě) too他 (tā) is a combination of 亻 (rén) and 也 (yě) meaning ‘also’. The idea is that 他 (tā) means ‘that person also’ referring to another person, he or she.他们 (tā men) they / them其他 (qí tā) other他的 (tā de) his 他是我的男朋友。 (tā shì wǒ de nán péng you) He’s my boyfriend.他是学生吗？ (tā shì xué sheng ma) Is he a student?Learn how to use pronouns in our article, You & Me. This & That: Pronouns in Chinese. Practice writing, watch courses and study flashcards from your favorite text books. 文 (wén) literature辶 (chuò) walkTo understand the character 这 (zhè), we need to look at the traditional character 這 (zhè) that breaks down into ‘walk’ 辶 (chuò) and ‘speak’ 言 (yán). Its original meaning was to ‘meet’.这个 (zhè ge) this one这样 (zhè yàng) this kind of这些 (zhè xiē) these这么 (zhè me) so much 这是你的书。(zhè shì nǐ de shū) This is your book.这种菜很好吃。(zhè zhǒng cài hěn hǎo chī) This kind of food is delicious. 人 (rén) person| (gǔn) single line一个 (yī gè) a / an个人 (gè rén) individual/personal那个 (nà ge) that one 小女孩不要这个玩具了。(xiǎo nǚ hái bù yào zhè ge wán jù le) The little girl doesn’t want the toy.半个小时。(bàn ge xiǎo shí) Half an hour.Learn more about measure words in the article, Weighing Up Chinese Measure Words. The line down the ‘middle’ of 中 (zhōng) suggests symmetry and something ‘central’. Additionally, the origins of this character is a square target 口 (wéi) hit in the center with an arrow, now simplified with the single line | (gǔn). 中国 (zhōng guó) China其中 (qí zhōng) among中心 (zhōng xīn) center 他回到了中国大陆。(tā huí dào le zhōng guó dà lù) He came back to mainland China.她的中文说得非常好。(tā de zhōng wén shuō de fēi cháng hǎo) She speaks Chinese extremely well. 為 (wèi) the traditional character of 为 (wèi) was originally the image of a female monkey. It was ‘borrowed’ for the character ‘because’ and then modified to two claws’.因为 (yīn wèi) because为了 (wèi le) in order to为此 (wèi cǐ) for this reason 他这么认为么？(tā zhè me rèn wéi me) Does he think so?他说这么做是为

了我好。(tā shuō zhè me zuò shì wèi le wǒ hǎo) He said he did it for my benefit. 大 (dà) is an ideographic representing a person with their arms and legs stretched out conveying the idea of 'big'. 大学 (dà xué) university大陆 (dà lù) mainland China大家 (dà jiā) everyone 他多大了？(tā duō dà le) How old is he?大家都很喜欢这次活动。 (dà jiā dōu hěn xǐ huan zhè cì huó dòng) Everyone enjoys this activity. The 来 (lái) character depicts a pictograph of wheat. Additionally, the traditional character 來 (lái) combines 木 (mù) the tree radical with the 从 (cóng) particle, meaning 'from'.出来 (chū lái) to come out过来 (guò lái) to come over后来 (hòu lái) afterwards 晚上你过来吃晚饭吗？(wǎn shang nǐ guò lái chī wǎn fàn ma?) Will you come and have dinner tonight?他从来没有任何怨言。(tā cóng lái méi yǒu rèn hé yuàn yán) He never has any complaints. 上 (shàng) is an ideograph of the horizon 一 with additional lines indicating 'up' from the ground.上海 (shàng hǎi) Shanghai身上 (shēn shàng) on the body上去 (shàng qù) to go up 上海是个发达的城市。(shàng hǎi shì gè fā dá de chéng shì) Shanghai is a developed city.书在桌子上。(shū zài zhuō zi shàng) The book is on top of the table.Learn more about 上 (shàng) in our article, Let's Get Abstract With Chinese Ideograms. Although 以 (yǐ) is its own radical, it can be broken down further to explain its origins. The right-hand side of the character is 人 (rén) meaning 'person' or in this case mother. The origins of this character stem from a mother and baby connecting by an umbilical cord.可以 (kě yǐ) can所以 (suǒ yǐ) therefore / so / as a result of以后 (yǐ hòu) after 你以前去过那里吗？(nǐ yǐ qián qù guò nà li ma) Have you been there before?可以给我一杯水吗？(kě yǐ gěi wǒ yī bēi shuǐ ma) Can you give me a glass of water, please? 玉 (yù) jade囗 (wéi) boundaryThe traditional character, 國 (guó) is composed of a boundary 囗 (wéi), land 一, mouth 口 (kǒu), and a spear 戈 (gē), all components that a country has. The simplified version 国 (guó) shows jade 玉 (yù), which represents the 'king' within a boundary 囗 (wéi), which is a more modern version of a country.可以 (kě yǐ) can所以 (suǒ yǐ) therefore / so / as a result of以后 (yǐ hòu) after 我喜欢中国。(wǒ xǐ huan zhōng guó) I like China.北京在中国的北部。(běi jīng zài zhōng guó de běi bù) Beijing is in the north of China. Reading and writing Chinese characters is often considered the most ambitious challenge that language students face in order to achieve fluency. Indeed, the intricacies which have shaped this character system over thousands of years are both complex and vast. While they may appear bewildering at first, Chinese characters are actually composed of distinct building blocks that form a straightforward and logical structure. Once you grasp a basic understanding of Chinese character anatomy, you will be reading and writing your way across the Middle Kingdom in no time. Explore below and continue along your journey to learn Chinese characters. Images courtesy of confuciusmag.com Unlike the Roman alphabet, Chinese characters are used to illustrate meaning rather than sound. In fact, most characters were originally intended as visual representations of physical elements like trees, houses or humans. Evolving since their earliest forms, simplified versions of these symbols, known as character radicals, serve as the foundation for contemporary written Mandarin. Making up approximately 80% of the language, radicals—in addition to Chinese pinyin—are an essential starting point for anyone who wants to read or write fluently in Mandarin. Jump to the list of the 40 most used Chinese radicals and continue learning Chinese characters. The evolution of the characters 人, 从, and 众. 人=rén=person 从=cóng=from/follow 众=zhòng=crowd. When two or more radicals are combined, they work together to create a single character; the radical on the left indicates the character's category or meaning, while the radical on the right might indicate its pronunciation. The majority of the written Chinese language is comprised of character compounds, in which several characters are combined to make one word. Most Chinese dictionaries include about 20,000 characters, though linguists estimate literate speakers know between 5,000 and 8,000. For language learners, being familiar with just 2,000 to 3,000 characters will give you the tools to read most newspapers and magazines. An important rule to note is that characters are written according to a standardized stroke order, which typically moves from left to right, top to bottom and outside to inside. Skritter is an excellent APP to help you learn stroke order. Although Chinese characters may seem daunting at first, patterns will quickly emerge once you develop a basic foundation. So, review your radicals, familiarize yourself with the most commonly used Chinese characters, and watch as your Mandarin skills grow exponentially! Chinese Character Basics Having a deeper understanding of Chinese characters is important for any student of Chinese. Learning characters will help reveal the language's logical structure as well as China's history and culture. Watch the following video to delve deeper into the pictographic and ideographic nature of Chinese characters. You'll learn the difference between the phonetic alphabet and the Chinese character system. How to Learn Chinese Characters Contrary to what many new students expect, learning the characters is not a particularly hard part of learning Chinese. In fact, many advanced students of Chinese say that remembering and achieving good oral comprehension of the vocal tones associated with Chinese characters and words is actually the hardest aspect of learning Chinese. There are a few different techniques for learning characters and which one is best really depends on which one works for you. The method used by Chinese school children is the repetition method. Characters are studied and written down again and again until they are remembered. Many non-native learners of the language criticize this method as outdated and inefficient. However, this is the method used by the Chinese people, almost all of whom learn more characters than the vast majority of non-native speakers of Chinese ever manage to learn, which is a statistic that makes it hard to criticize the method. Another method—one that is quite popular with Western students of Chinese—involves attaching a story to each character. The story may be based on the appearance of the character or how the character is constructed from different radicals. The theory is that a story is easier to remember than an arbitrary shape. Take the character 吗 (ma) shown below as an example. This Chinese character has the same meaning and use as the question mark does in English, except that in Chinese, the question mark is not silent, but is spoken at the end of the sentence. It is pronounced "ma." If you look at the character's two component radicals in the figure on the right, you will see that the radical on the left half is shaped like a box. This is the Chinese character 口 (kǒu), which is an old character for mouth and still carries the meaning of mouth or opening. The radical on the right is the Chinese character 马 (mǎ), which means horse. If you had already learned the two characters that are the radicals for this new character, then the story you use to remember the character might go something like this: "In ancient times, horses were very expensive. So before buying a horse you would use your mouth to ask lots of questions about the horse's pedigree." Remembering this little story can help to remind you that the character 吗 (ma), with the meaning of a question mark, is drawn by placing the "mouth" character before the "horse" character. The method of repetition requires continuous dedication until the characters become so familiar that they will not be forgotten, and this can take many years. For students who might not be able to study the language continuously for such a long time, the story method might be better. No matter which method you choose, setting targets and goals is a good idea. Studying the most common characters first makes progress quicker and ensures the fastest route to achieving one's goal. A good starting point is the 100 most common Chinese characters. If your plan is to eventually learn a large number of characters in order to pass an exam such as HSK 4， 5 or 6, then it would be a good idea to start by learning the most common radicals (see below). The 40 Most Common Radicals: There are over 200 radicals that make up Chinese characters, though only a portion of them are regularly used in simplified Mandarin today. Check out the list below to find out the 40 most common character radicals—you might find that you've encountered most of them before! Remember, because they serve as the building blocks of the written character system, radicals are absolutely crucial in helping language learners become literate in Mandarin. No.RadicalpīnyīnEnglish 1人rénperson 2刀dāoknife 3力lìpower 4又yòuright hand; again 5口kǒumouth 6囗wéienclose 7土tǔearth 8夕xīsunset 9大dàbig 10女nǚwoman 11子zǐchild 12寸cùninch 13小xiǎosmall 14工gōnglabor ; work 15幺yāotiny; small 16弓gōngbow 17心xīnheart box 18戈gēdagger;axe 19手shǒuhand 20日rìsun 21月yuèmoon 22木mùwood 23水shuǐwater 24火huǒfire 25田tiánfield 26目mùeye 27示shìshow 28糸mìfine silk 29耳ěrear 30衣yīclothing 31言yánspeech 32贝bèicowrie; shell 33走zǒuwalk 34zúfoot 35金jīngold 36门méndoor 37隹zhuīshort-tailed bird 38雨yǔrain 39食shíeat 40马mǎhorse Additional Chinese Learning Resources: The CLI team is comprised of China experts with advanced degrees in China studies, teaching Chinese as a foreign language, education, and other related disciplines. Founded in 2009, CLI is a center for Chinese language and cultural studies based in scenic Guilin, China. 0 ratings0% found this document useful (0 votes)164 viewsThis document provides a list of over 81,000 Chinese characters along with definitions, stroke counts, radicals, and other useful data. It notes that many of the characters are ancient or ra...SaveSave List of Chinese Characters For Later0%0% found this document useful, undefined0 ratings0% found this document useful (0 votes)164 viewsThis document provides a list of over 81,000 Chinese characters along with definitions, stroke counts, radicals, and other useful data. It notes that many of the characters are ancient or ra... Chinese characters, with their intricate strokes and rich history, form the foundation of written communication in the Chinese language. Learning these characters is an essential step towards understanding and mastering Mandarin Chinese. In this article, we present a curated list of the 100 most common Chinese characters, complete with their traditional Chinese characters, Bopomofo and Pinyin pronunciation, and English meaning. Let's embark on this fascinating journey of linguistic exploration. No.CharacterBopomofoPinyinMeaning1的ㄉㄜ˙de(possessive particle), of / truly and really / aim, clear2一ㄧ /ㄧˋ /ㄧˊyī / yí / yìone / single / a(n)3是ㄕˋshìis, are, am, affirmative to be4不ㄅㄨˋbù(negative prefix) no, not5了ㄌㄜ˙ /ㄌㄧㄠˇle / liǎo(modal particle intensifying preceding clause), (past tense marker) / to know, to understand6人ㄖㄣˊrénperson, individual, people7我ㄨㄛˇwǒI, me, myself8在ㄗㄞˋzàiat, in, exist9有ㄧㄡˇyǒuto have, there is, there are, exist, be10他ㄊㄚtāhe, him11這ㄓㄜˋzhèthis, these12為ㄨㄟˊ/ㄨㄟˋwéi / wèiact as, take...to be, be, do, serve as, become / because of, for, to13之ㄓzhīmarks preceding phrases as modifier of following phrase14大ㄉㄚˋdàbig, huge, large, major, great, wide, deep, oldest, eldest / doctor15來ㄌㄞˊláito come16以ㄧˇyǐto use, take, according to, because of, in order to17個ㄍㄜˋgè(a measure word), individual18中ㄓㄨㄥzhōngwithin, among, in, middle, center, while (doing something), during19上ㄕㄤˋshàngabove, on, over, top, go up, last, previous20們ㄇㄣ˙men(plural marker for pronouns and animate nouns) No.CharacterBopomofoPinyinMeaning21到ㄉㄠˋdàoto reach, until, up to, to go, to arrive22說ㄕㄨㄛshuōto express, to communicate23國ㄍㄨㄛˊguócountry, state, nation24和ㄏㄜˊ/ㄏㄨㄛˋhé / huòand, together, with, peace, harmony25地ㄉㄧˋde / dì-ly, earth, ground, field, place, land26也ㄧㄝˇyěalso, too, as well27子ㄗˇzǐchild, son28時ㄕˊshítime, when, hour, period, season29道ㄉㄠˋdàoway, path, method, road, principle, truth, reason, skill, Tao (of Taoism), to say, to speak, to talk30出ㄔㄨchūto go out, to come out, to emerge, to appear, to happen31而ㄦˊérand, as well as, but (not), yet (not), shows causal relation, shows change of state, shows contrast32要ㄧㄠˋ/ㄧㄠyào / yāoimportant, to want, to be going to, must, demand, ask, request33於ㄩˊyúat, in, regarding34就ㄐㄧㄡˋjiùjust, then, only, right away35下ㄒㄧㄚˋxiàbelow, under, down, next36得ㄉㄜˊdé / de / děito obtain, to get, to need to, must, have to37可ㄎㄜˇkěcan, may, able to, certain, particle used for emphasis38你ㄋㄧˇnǐyou39年ㄋㄧㄢˊniányear40生ㄕㄥshēngto be born, to give birth, life, to grow No.CharacterBopomofoPinyinMeaning41自ㄗˋzìself, oneself, from, since42會ㄏㄨㄟˋhuìable, capable, to meet, meeting, society, union, party43那ㄋㄚˋnàthat, those44後ㄏㄡˋhòulater, afterwards, after, back, behind45能ㄋㄥˊnéngcan, may, capable, able, energy46對ㄉㄨㄟˋduìtowards, facing, to oppose, to answer, to direct, couple, pair, correct, right47著ㄓㄜˊ/ㄓㄨㄛˊ/ㄓㄠ /ㄓㄠˊzhe / zhuó / zhāo / zháoindicating ongoing action/state48事ㄕˋshìmatter, thing, item, work, affair49其ㄑㄧˊqíits, their, his, her, that, such, referring to preceding subject50裡ㄌㄧˇlǐwithin, inside51所ㄙㄨㄛˇsuǒactually, place52去ㄑㄩˋqùto go, to leave, to depart53行ㄒㄧㄥˊháng / xínga row, profession, professional / all right, capable, competent, okay, to do, to travel, to walk, behavior, conduct54過ㄍㄨㄛˋguò(past tense marker), to cross, to pass, to live, to experience55家ㄐㄧㄚjiāhome, family, person engaged in a certain art or profession56十ㄕˊshíten57用ㄩㄥˋyòngto use58發ㄈㄚfāto send out, to express (one's feelings), to issue, to develop59天ㄊㄧㄢtiānday, sky, heaven60如ㄖㄨˊrúas (if), such as No.CharacterBopomofoPinyinMeaning61然ㄖㄢˊránindeed, right, so, thus, like this, -ly62作ㄗㄨㄛˋzuòto consider, to take (someone) as, to do, to create63方ㄈㄤfāngsquare, quadrilateral, direction, just64成ㄔㄥˊchéngaccomplish, achieve, complete, become, transform, win, succeed65者ㄓㄜˇzhě-ist, -er (person), person (who does something)66多ㄉㄨㄛduōmany, much, numerous, a lot of, multiple67日ㄖˋrìday, sun, date, day of the month68都ㄉㄡdōuall, both (if two things are involved), entirely, every, even, already69三ㄙㄢsānthree70小ㄒㄧㄠˇxiǎosmall, tiny, few, young71軍ㄐㄩㄣjūnarmy, military, armed forces72二ㄦˋèrtwo73無ㄨˊwúwithout, not to have, no, none, not, lack of, un-74同ㄊㄨㄥˊtónglike, same, similar, together, in unison75麼ㄇㄜ˙me(interrogative suffix)76經ㄐㄧㄥjīngclassics, scripture, pass through, experience, undergo77法ㄈㄚˇfǎlaw, method, way, principle, doctrine78當ㄉㄤ /ㄉㄤˋdāng / dàngto be, to act as, manage, withstand, when, during, ought to, should, equal, right at, on the spot, just at / at or in the very same..., to handle, to replace79起ㄑㄧˇqǐqǐ: to rise, to get up, to start, to initiate80與ㄩˊ/ㄩˇ/ㄩˋyú / yǔ / yù(interrogative particle) / and, with, to give, together with / participate in No.CharacterBopomofoPinyinMeaning81好ㄏㄠˇ/ㄏㄠˋhǎo / hàoexcellent, fine, great / to like, to be fond of82看ㄎㄢ/ㄎㄢˋkān / kànto take care of, to attend to, to observe, to gaze / it depends, to consider, to perceive, to watch83學ㄒㄩㄝˊxuéto acquire knowledge, to learn, academic, learning84進ㄐㄧㄣˋjìnto advance, to enter, to move forward85種ㄓㄨㄥˇ/ㄓㄨㄥˋzhǒng / zhòngkind, species, variety / to cultivate, to grow, to plant86將ㄐㄧㄤ/ㄐㄧㄤˋjiāng / jiàng(will, shall, future tense), to be about to, to handle, to lead / a military general87還ㄏㄞˊ/ㄏㄨㄢˊhái / huánalso, furthermore, moreover, still, yet, additionally / (surname), to repay, to return88分ㄈㄣ/ㄈㄣˋfēn / fènto divide, to separate, minute, (a measure word), (a unit of length = 0.33 centimeter) / part, portion89此ㄘˇcǐthis, these, this (referring to something nearby)90心ㄒㄧㄣxīnheart, mind, innermost feelings91前ㄑㄧㄢˊqiánbefore, in front, ahead, previous, former, frontward92面ㄇㄧㄢˋmiànface, surface, aspect, side, appearance93又ㄧㄡˋyòu(once) again, also, moreover, furthermore94定ㄉㄧㄥˋdìngto determine, to fix, to set, to establish, definite95見ㄐㄧㄢˋ/ㄒㄧㄢˋjiàn / xiànto see, to meet, to perceive, to appear / to appear, to manifest96只ㄓˇzhǐonly, merely, just, but97主ㄓㄨˇzhǔto own, to host, master, principal, main98沒ㄇㄟˊ/ㄇㄛˋméi / mò(negative prefix for verbs), not have, not, haven't / to sink, to disappear99公ㄍㄨㄥgōngfair, just, public, common, honorable100從ㄘㄨㄥˊcóngfrom, since, to follow, to obey, to undertake, to pursue Join our Substack "Mandarin Zest", where we regularly share intermediate to advanced Chinese learning content. Make sure to subscribe! Subscribe to Mandarin Zest Most Chinese characters look complicated to the outside observer, but not all characters are created equal. There are two main Chinese writing systems, traditional and simplified. Traditional characters are based on historical Chinese writing systems with roots tracing back millennia, whereas simplified characters are those same traditional characters, but with many simplified so that they are easier to read and write. Learn Chinese in Beautiful Guilin, China Flexible Scheduling, Affordable Pricing ✈ 🏠 Enroll in our Chinese language school in Guilin, China and learn Chinese through guided conversation and daily practice. Progress with your dedicated team of Chinese teachers online or in person. Learn Chinese with CLI CLI is a center for Chinese language and cultural studies in Guilin, China. The character 汉 hàn written in four different styles, with its iteration at the bottom right. Where are simplified characters used? Simplified characters are the official Chinese written script of mainland China. Yet despite being invented in China, simplified characters are also used elsewhere. Children studying in Malaysia and Singapore all learn simplified Chinese characters. It also wouldn't be surprising to see simplified characters being used in Hong Kong or Taiwan, and even some Japanese Kanji resemble simplified Chinese. While traditional characters were once the only choice for books and texts, nowadays the majority of the contemporary Chinese text is simplified. Another comparison of simplified version (above) and traditional one (below) of 广西 guǎng xī - Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Does Mandarin use simplified or traditional characters? People often say they want to study "simplified Mandarin," and others often ask whether Mandarin Chinese is traditional or simplified. Unfortunately, there isn't a simple answer. It is important to remember that in Chinese, the writing system and the spoken language aren't as interlinked as they are in a language like English. The clear separation between the written and the spoken language means that "simplified Mandarin" is a misnomer. It is better to refer to Mandarin, which is the standard Chinese dialect spoken in mainland China, and simplified Chinese characters, which are used to write Chinese and which, because Chinese is not phonetic, can be used to write both Mandarin and other dialects. In mainland China, the dialect of Chinese known as Mandarin is studied using simplified Chinese characters, and in Taiwan, Mandarin is studied using traditional Chinese characters. Simplified characters are not officially used to write down any language other than Mandarin, whereas traditional characters are still often used to write the southern dialect known as Cantonese, and historically have been used to write both Korean and Vietnamese. Another common point of confusion revolves around the question of whether all characters in simplified Chinese are different from their traditional Chinese counterparts. While the simplifications changed many of the most commonly used Chinese characters, many characters were left unchanged. Characters like 字 zì were already quite simple and weren't adjusted, while others like 弊 bì were uncommon enough that they were also left untouched. Why Don't We Just Use Traditional Characters? Simplifications to Chinese characters have been in use for almost as long as written Chinese has been around. A common early example of simplification is cursive handwritten Chinese, which has incorporated simplifications since the Qin dynasty (221 - 206 BC). However, until the 20th century, such simplifications were limited to handwritten notes and rarely made it into official documents. A countryside market in China during Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) It may surprise you, but many of the early arguments for the simplification of Chinese characters were economic in nature. In the early 1900s, China under the Qing dynasty was seen as falling behind the rest of the world, and many believed that the complexity of the Chinese language was partly to blame. Famous Chinese author Lu Xun (鲁迅, Lǔ Xùn) said: 汉字不灭，中国必亡 Hànzì bù miè, Zhōngguó bì wáng, which can be roughly translated as, "If Chinese characters aren't destroyed, China will die." Lu Xun (鲁迅 Lǔxùn) was the pen name of Zhou Shuren (Zhōushùrén 周树人, 1881-1936), a Chinese writer, essayist, poet, and literary critic At the time that Lu Xun was writing, simplified characters didn't exist yet. When he refers to Chinese characters, he was referring to the notoriously complex traditional Chinese characters. Lu Xun believed that the complexity and difficulty of the character system was acting as a barrier to literacy and holding back China's development. It is important to realize that, as late as 1950, the literacy rate in China was only 20 percent. This was partly due to the poor state of the education system, but was also thought to be partially due to the complexity of the characters students had to learn. A comic by Feng Zikai featuring the simplified character is getting popular in mainland China Low literacy, in turn, hurt economic development across China, as there is a very strong link between literacy and economic growth. Being able to read and write allows citizens to pick up knowledge and skills, which in turn enables individuals to contribute more to the economy. Simplified characters were introduced in part to try to boost economic development. The History of Simplified Chinese Characters At the turn of the 20th century, the classical literary method of writing Chinese, known as 文言文 wényánwén, fell out of favor. Instead of having a different set of grammatical rules for written and spoken Chinese, people began to write Chinese as it was spoken. This vernacular form of Chinese is known as 白话文 Báihuà Wén. While this change greatly simplified reading and writing, allowing virtually any well-educated person to produce and consume literature, it did not bring literacy to the vast majority of Chinese people. In the 1950s, shortly after coming to power, the Communist Party of China undertook huge educational reforms, aiming to foster economic growth by improving literacy. As part of these reforms, the Chinese government introduced the first round of Chinese character simplifications in 1956. A page published in 1955 in the Beijing Daily announcing the newspaper will begin using simplified, rather than traditional, characters. In the 1970s and 80s, both Singapore and Malaysia also adopted the simplifications made by China into their own Mandarin curriculums. While Classical Chinese is still taught to Chinese children today during Chinese literature classes in mainland China, most documents are no longer written in Classical Chinese. It is difficult to tell precisely what effect the character simplification had, as it was just one measure out of many included in the Chinese government's overall program of education reform. However we do know that the reforms as a whole had the effect of increasing the literacy rate to 65 percent by 1982, and to over 97 percent today. How Were Chinese Characters Simplified? Three main methods were used to make Chinese characters easier to read and write. The focus was on simplifying more common characters, as that is where it was believed that simplification could have the greatest impact. 1. Simplify the structure of characters These simplifications involved elements being removed and changed. There are lots of ways this was done, but the general idea was the same. For example, 齒 chǐ became 齿 chǐ, with all but one of the elements in the box at the bottom removed. This process of simplification made the character less complex by 7 strokes, making it both easier and faster to write. Another example is the character 貝 bèi, which became 贝 bèi. In this example, the entire character was simplified, and the strokes required reduced from 7 to 4. There are 482 characters that were simplified this way. 2. Derive new characters from simplified and traditional characters Of the 482 characters simplified using the method mentioned above, 132 can be used to simplify other characters further. 齿 chǐ is one of the 350 characters that is not used in any other character. 贝 bèi, on the other hand, is used in lots of different characters, which allows the characters that originally used the complicated form of this radical to be simplified in a similar fashion by changing every instance of 貝 to 贝. For example, using this method, the character 貞 zhēn became 贞 zhēn and 贈 zèng became 赠 zèng. Multiple characters from the 132 that were simplified according to this method can be used together. For example, 贝 bèi can be combined with 尽 jǐn (simplified from both 盡 jǐn and 儘 jǐn), allowing 贐 jìn to be simplified to 赆 jìn. This reduces the number of required strokes from 21 to 10. 3. Eliminate variants of the same character The first two methods involved changing characters. However, many traditional characters have the same pronunciation and even the same meaning. For such characters, a single variant was chosen from the many in existence, for example, 呼 hū was chosen to exclusively represent 虖, 嘑, 謼, and 呼 in simplified Chinese. Most of the time, the simplest character was chosen, but sometimes a different variant was chosen for aesthetic or historical reasons. For example, 榨 zhà was chosen from 搾 and 榨, as 榨 is significantly older. This is despite 榨 requiring 14 strokes and 搾 only requiring 13. How Many Simplified Chinese Characters Exist? People often want to know how many simplified characters there are. Fortunately, there is an easy answer. In 2013, the Chinese government published 通用规范汉字表 Tōngyòng Guīfàn Hànzì Biǎo or The Table of General Standard Chinese Characters, which contains 8,105 characters. However, it's important to remember that some of them overlap with their traditional counterparts. For example, the numbers 一 yī, 二 èr, and 三 sān are the same in both simplified and traditional characters. Also, estimates for the number of traditional characters can exceed 100,000. By using the second simplification method discussed above, many characters that do not appear in the official list can be simplified. So the answer is actually much more complicated, just as the simplification process was. Could Chinese Characters Be Even Simpler? Not fully satisfied with the first set of simplifications in 1975, the Chinese government introduced a second list of simplified characters, with the ultimate goal being to reduce the number of strokes per character to under 10. These simplifications made use of the same methods we've already mentioned. However, there were some key differences. While almost 90% of the characters simplified in the first simplification already existed unofficially (in cursive, for example), most of the changes in the second list were entirely new characters. Another issue was that while the first scheme focused on the most commonly used characters, the second scheme focused on characters with more than 10 strokes, often simplifying characters that were rarely used. These two factors combined to make the second simplification very unpopular, and it was officially withdrawn in 1986. Another avenue for simplification came from 汉语拼音 Hànyǔ Pīnyīn, or pinyin, the official romanization of Chinese. Since its initial introduction in 1958, there have been some who have advocated for pinyin to replace Chinese characters completely. However, this idea has never gained much support. Although they can be challenging to learn, a majority of the reformers recognized that Chinese characters are an important part of the Chinese language. After the retraction of the second round of simplification, the Chinese government made it clear that they don't intend on making any more dramatic changes to the Chinese writing system. Had this idea gained traction, however, written and spoken Mandarin could have become closely linked, making "simplified Mandarin" less of a misnomer and more of a reality. Should I Learn Simplified or Traditional Chinese? The vast majority of Chinese speakers worldwide use simplified characters, so, for many people, it makes sense to learn them, especially because they are easier to write. However, there are good reasons to learn traditional characters too. For example, you might have family in Hong Kong, you might be really interested in Chinese literature, or you might just think they look nicer. It is also not uncommon to learn simplified characters first and then delve into traditional later. The most important point is that it is up to you. You can even decide to learn Chinese without studying Chinese characters at all, although learning characters is highly recommended. No matter which method you chose, now you know the difference between the two, and why and how simplified characters came about. The Most Common Simplified Characters and Their Traditional Equivalents Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. 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Our original video podcast covers it all—now on demand.Watch Now 5000 Chinese characters [PDF] is an invaluable resource tailored for learners and enthusiasts of the Chinese language, offering a comprehensive compilation of 5000 Chinese characters that range from the most commonly used to more specialized and rare terms. This document provides a structured list featuring Pinyin romanization and English definitions for each character, making it an essential tool for mastering the depth and richness of Chinese vocabulary. Unlike simpler vocabulary lists such as the "1000 Most Common Words in Chinese," this collection of 5000 Chinese characters spans a wide spectrum of usage. It includes everyday characters like "下" (xià – under, below) and "知" (zhī – know, comprehend), as well as less frequent but culturally significant ones like "黴" (méi – mold) and "巉" (chán – steep, rugged). The document captures a broad range of meanings, from practical terms related to daily life (e.g., "天" tiān – sky, heaven; "國" guó – country) to abstract concepts (e.g., "意" yì – thought, idea) and even obscure references (e.g., "黿" yuán – large turtle; "鼷" xī – small rat). This diversity reflects the complexity and versatility of the Chinese language, offering learners a window into its linguistic and cultural intricacies. Whether you're a beginner building a foundational vocabulary or an advanced learner seeking to expand your repertoire, this PDF provides a systematic and thorough approach to conquering 5000 Chinese characters. It's a must-have companion for anyone committed to unlocking the full potential of Chinese language proficiency. Download 5000 Chinese characters PDF Download here Nestled along the banks of the Li River, speckled with tens of thousands of karst peaks, and bustling with the arts, customs, and songs of southern China's thriving ethnic minority groups, Guilin is a destination like no other.The people, serene landscape, ease of transportation — the list goes on. Yet at CLI, we tend to view Guilin through the lens of language learning. This is where Guilin really shines: as a place to learn Chinese in China. Mastering Chinese characters is often the most challenging part for learners. Their formation and memorization methods differ from other languages. However, don't be discouraged! Chinese characters have a logical structure. Understanding this structure makes them easier to learn. A practical approach is to analyze each character like a Lego game. Radicals, key components of Chinese characters, provide meanings and help with memorization. Here is a list of commonly used Chinese characters, categorized by frequently used radicals. You can also download both simplified and traditional Chinese characters list PDF versions. Click here to read more detailed illustrations about this radical. No. Characters Pinyin Definition 1 口 kǒu mouth 2 回 huí to whirl 3 品 pǐn product 4 唱 chàng to sing 5 吗 ma yes or no question particle 6 哈 ha breath out 7 吧 ba let us (do something.) 8 呢 ne what about? 9 叫 jiào to call 10 告 gào to tell 11 吃 chī to eat 12 吹 chuī to blow "Speech" Radical（言字旁）：讠 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 13 认 rèn to recognize 14 识 shí to be aware 15 课 kè lesson 16 讨 tǎo to denounce 17 论 lùn to discuss 18 讲 jiǎng to talk 19 说 shuō to speak 20 谈 tán to talk 21 让 ràng to let 22 试 shì to try 23 词 cí word 24 诗 shī poem 25 误 wù to miss; misunderstand "Walk" Radical（走之底）：辶 Click here to read more detailed illustrations about this radical. No. Characters Pinyin Definition 26 达 dá to reach 27 进 jìn to enter 28 还 hái / huán still / to return 29 远 yuǎn far 30 迷 mí to get lost 31 迫 pò to approach 32 退 tuì to move back 33 迟 chí to walk slowly 34 迅 xùn fast 35 返 fǎn to go back 36 连 lián to link 37 这 zhè this 38 边 biān side 39 运 yùn Transport 40 送 sòng give away 41 选 xuǎn select 42 逃 táo escape 43 通 tōng through 44 遥 yáo remote "Ice" Radical（两点水）：冫 Click here to read more detailed illustrations about this radical. No. Characters Pinyin Definition 45 冰 bīng ice 46 冷 lěng cold 47 冬 dōng winter 48 凉 liáng cool 49 冻 dòng to freeze 50 冽 liè very cold 51 减 jiǎn to decrease 52 准 zhǔn level, standard 53 决 jué to decide 54 净 jìng clean 55 况 kuàng condition, situation "Water" Radical（三点水）：氵 Click here to read more detailed illustrations about this radical. No. Characters Pinyin Definition 56 汉 hàn Han nationality 57 汗 hàn sweat 58 泪 lèi tears 59 海 hǎi sea 60 江 jiāng River 61 河 hé River 62 湖 hú lake 63 洗 xǐ to wash 64 溪 xī Creek 65 汤 tāng soup 66 清 qīng clear 67 法 fǎ law 68 沙 shā sand 69 沉 chén to sink 70 汽 qì vapor 71 泡 pào bubble 72 活 huó to live 73 浓 nóng concentrated 74 淡 dàn light 75 浇 jiāo Pouring 76 浪 làng wave 77 浴 yù bath 78 深 shēn deep 79 浅 qiǎn shallow 80 渐 jiàn gradually 81 温 wēn temperature 82 游 yóu tour 83 满 mǎn full 84 演 yǎn to play, to act 85 激 jī excite 86 瀑 bào / pù rainstorm / waterfall "Water" Radical（四点底）：灬 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 87 点 diǎn point 88 热 rè heat 89 烈 liè strong 90 然 rán Of course 91 煎 jiān Fry 92 熊 xióng Bear 93 熟 shú / shóu familiar/ cooked 94 燕 yàn Swallow 95 煮 zhǔ to boil 96 熬 áo boil 97 焦 jiāo focal "Wood" Radical（木字旁）：木 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 98 本 běn basis, origin 99 未 wèi not yet 100 末 mò end 101 术 shù Technique 102 机 jī machine 103 杀 shā kill 104 权 quán right 105 杂 zá miscellaneous 106 朵 duǒ (measure word for flower) 107 来 lái Come 108 李 lǐ Lee, plum 109 村 cūn village 110 材 cái material 111 果 guǒ fruit 112 林 lín forest 113 森 sēn forest 114 松 sōng loose 115 板 bǎn board 116 枪 qiāng gun 117 枝 zhī branch 118 枫 fēng maple 119 柳 liǔ willow 120 枯 kū Withered 121 根 gēn root 122 格 gé grid 123 桥 qiáo bridge 124 桃 táo Peach 125 柴 chái firewood 126 桶 tǒng barrel 127 棵 kē (measure word for tree) 128 楼 lóu floor, building "Hand" Radical（提手旁）：扌 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 129 打 dǎ hit 130 扔 rēng throw 131 扒 bā pull down, cling to 132 拖 tuō drag 133 托 tuō Care 134 扫 sǎo sweep 135 扣 kòu buckle 136 抗 kàng anti- 137 扛 káng Carry 138 把 bǎ（grammar particle）139 抱 bào hold, hug 140 报 bào Report 141 找 zhǎo Find 142 挤 jǐ squeeze 143 技 jì Skill 144 护 hù Protect 145 投 tóu cast 146 抓 zhuā Grab 147 抢 qiǎng rob 148 拉 lā Pull 149 拦 lán bar, block, hinder 150 指 zhǐ indicate 151 换 huàn change 152 接 jiē Pick up 153 描 miáo Trace 154 提 tí mention 155 摇 yáo shake 156 擦 cā rub "Grass" Radical（草字头）：艹 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 157 艺 yì art 158 节 jié Section 159 芒 máng mango 160 花 huā flower, to spend 161 草 cǎo grass 162 芽 yá bud 163 苦 kǔ bitter 164 萍 píng（kind of grass) 165 药 yào medicine 166 茶 chá tea 167 荡 dàng swing 168 菜 cài dish 169 落 luò drop 170 薄 báo / bó thin / slight "Person" Radical（单人旁）：亻 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 171 什 shén What 172 化 huà Turn into 173 仍 réng still 174 仅 jǐn only 175 仇 chóu hatred 176 他 tā he 177 们 men plural form 178 代 dài generation 179 仙 xiān Immortal 180 件 jiàn Pieces 181 价 jià price 182 优 yōu excellent 183 你 nǐ you 184 但 dàn but 185 住 zhù live 186 位 wèi (measure word for person) 187 低 dī low 188 伴 bàn Companion 189 使 shǐ to make, to let 190 信 xìn letter 191 便 biàn / pián so that, cheap 192 保 bǎo Guarantee 193 修 xiū repair 194 俩 liǎ two, both 195 倒 dǎo / dào fall/ pour 196 借 jiè borrow 197 做 zuò do 198 假 jiǎ / jià fake/ vacation 199 停 tíng stop 200 偷 tōu steal 201 偏 piān Partial, have had 202 像 xiàng image 203 僧 sēng monk "Double person" Radical（双人旁）：彳 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 204 行 háng / xíng Row/ walk, conduct 205 彻 chè thorough 206 往 wǎng to 207 很 hěn very 208 得 de（grammar particle）209 德 dé German, morals "Female" Radical（女字旁）：女 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 210 妈 mā mom 211 奶 nǎi milk；grandma 212 她 tā she was 213 好 hǎo / hào good/ like 214 如 rú Such as 215 妇 fù woman 216 妖 yāo Demon 217 姐 jiě elder sister 218 妹 mèi younger sister 219 始 shǐ beginning 220 姓 xìng surname 221 娃 wá baby 222 娘 niáng mother 223 婚 hūn marriage 224 婆 pó grandma 225 娶 qǔ Marry (man) 226 婴 yīng infant 227 嫁 jià marry (woman) "Insect" Radical（虫字旁）：虫 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 228 虹 hóng rainbow 229 蚁 yǐ ant 230 虾 xiā shrimp 231 蛇 shé snake 232 蝶 dié butterfly 233 蟹 xiè crab 234 蜂 fēng bee "Earth" Radical（提土旁）：土 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 235 地 dì / de Ground/ grammar partical 236 场 cháng / chǎng market, site, spot 237 块 kuài Piece 238 坚 jiān Firm 239 坏 huài Bad 240 址 zhǐ site 241 城 chéng city 242 塔 tǎ tower 243 堆 duī stack 244 墙 qiáng wall 245 境 jìng territory 246 增 zēng increase "Fire" Radical（火字旁）：火 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 247 灯 dēng light 248 灰 huī gray 249 灾 zāi disaster 250 灿 càn brilliant 251 烂 làn rotten 252 炉 lú furnace 253 炎 yán inflammation 254 炊 chuī Cooking 255 炸 zhá Fried 256 烟 yān smoke 257 烦 fán bother 258 烧 shāo burn 259 烤 kǎo grilled 260 烛 zhú candle 261 爆 bào burst "Heart" Radical（竖心旁）：忄 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 262 忆 yì Recall 263 忙 máng busy 264 快 kuài fast 265 慢 màn slow 266 怀 huái Pregnant, miss 267 性 xìng character, nature 268 怕 pà afraid 269 怪 guài strange 270 怜 lián pity 271 恨 hèn hate 272 悄 qiāo quiet 273 悔 huǐ regret 274 悦 yuè Pleased 275 情 qíng mood 276 惊 jīng shock 277 惜 xī Pity 278 惯 guàn used 279 惨 cǎn awful 280 慌 huāng Panic 281 愉 yú Enjoy 282 懒 lǎn lazy 283 懂 dǒng understand No. Characters Pinyin Definition 284 忍 rěn endure 285 忘 wàng forget 286 念 niàn Read 287 忽 hū suddenly 288 忠 zhōng Loyal 289 怎 zěn How 290 总 zǒng total 291 思 sī think 292 急 jí anxious 293 怒 nù angry 294 息 xī rest 295 恶 è evil 296 恐 kǒng fear 297 恩 ēn favor 298 恋 liàn love 299 您 nín you (polite way) 300 患 huàn Suffer 301 悲 bēi sad 302 想 xiǎng miss, think 303 意 yì meaning 304 感 gǎn sense 305 愿 yuàn willing "Bamboo" Radical（竹字头）：No. Characters Pinyin Definition 306 笑 xiào laugh 307 第 dì prefix before a number 308 笨 bèn stupid 309 笛 dí flute 310 等 děng Wait 311 答 dá answer 312 简 jiǎn simple 313 算 suàn Count "Sun" Radical（日字旁）：日 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 314 旧 jiù old 315 旦 dàn Once 316 早 zǎo early 317 时 shí Time 318 明 míng Bright 319 易 yì easy 320 是 shì Yes 321 显 xiǎn display 322 星 xīng star 323 春 chūn spring 324 昨 zuó Yesterday 325 映 yìng Reflect 326 晒 shài bask 327 晚 wǎn late 328 晨 chén morning 329 景 jǐng view 330 智 zhì wisdom 331 晶 jīng crystal 332 晚 wǎn late 333 暗 àn dark 334 暖 nuǎn warm "Eye" Radical（目字旁）：目 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 335 盲 máng blind 336 看 kān / kàn look after/ look, see 337 相 xiāng / xiàng mutually, phase/ appearance 338 省 shěng province 339 眉 méi eyebrow 340 盼 pàn Hope 341 眨 zhǎ blink 342 眼 yǎn eye 343 睡 shuì sleep 344 瞎 xiā blind "Meat" Radical（月字旁）：月 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 345 有 yǒu Have 346 肌 jī muscle 347 肚 dù belly 348 朋 péng Friend 349 肩 jiān shoulder 350 肥 féi fat 351 肤 fū skin 352 肿 zhǒng swollen 353 肺 fèi lung 354 肾 shèn kidney 355 背 bēi / bèi carry on the back/ body's back, unlucky 356 胜 shèng Win 357 胆 dǎn Gall 358 胖 pàng fat 359 胃 wèi stomach 360 脑 nǎo brain 361 胸 xiōng chest 362 脏 zāng dirty 363 朗 lǎng bright 364 脂 zhī fat 365 脚 jiǎo foot 366 脸 liǎn face 367 脱 tuō Take off 368 脖 bó neck 369 朝 cháo / zhāo towards/ early morning 370 腰 yāo waist 371 腿 tuǐ leg 372 腹 fù belly 373 臂 bì arm "Mountain" Radical（山字旁）：山 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 374 岁 suì year old 375 岛 dǎo island 376 岸 àn shore 377 岩 yán rock 378 峡 xiá gorge 379 峰 fēng peak "Ear" Radical（包耳旁）：阝 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 380 队 duì team 381 那 nà that 382 阳 yáng Yang 383 阵 zhèn Array 384 阴 yīn Overcast 385 院 yuàn hospital 386 除 chú except 387 险 xiǎn risk 388 都 dōu / dū All/ city 389 部 bù unit 390 陪 péi accompany 391 随 suí Follow 392 隔 gé Every "Iron" Radical（金字旁）：钅 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 393 针 zhēn needle 394 钓 diào to fish 395 钟 zhōng bell 396 钢 gāng steel 397 钱 qián money 398 铁 tiě iron 399 钻 zuān / zuàn Drill/ diamond, auger 400 银 yín silver 401 铜 tóng copper 402 锅 guō pot 403 锐 ruì sharp 404 锁 suǒ lock 405 锈 xiù rust 406 错 cuò wrong 407 键 jiàn key "Animal" Radical（反犬旁）：犭 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 408 犯 fàn Commit 409 狂 kuáng mad 410 狗 gǒu dog 411 狐 hú fox 412 独 dú alone 413 狠 hěn ruthless 414 狮 shī lion 415 狼 láng Wolf 416 猴 hóu monkey 417 猫 māo Cat "Top" Radical（穴字头）：穴 No. Characters Pinyin Definition 418 穷 qióng poor 419 空 kōng / kòng air, empty, blank/ free time 420 突 tū Sudden 421 穿 chuān wear 422 窃 qiè steal 423 窄 zhǎi narrow 424 窗 chuāng window "Bow" Radical（弓字旁）：弓 Click here to read more detailed illustrations about this radical. No. Characters Pinyin Definition 425 弓 gōng bow 426 引 yǐn to stretch 427 弘 hóng great, vast 428 弱 jiàng stiff, strong 429 弱 ruò weak 430 弦 xián bowstring 431 弢 tāo bow case 432 弩 nǔ crossbow 433 张 zhāng to expand 434 第 dì a prefic for ordinal numbers 435 弟 dì younger brother 436 递 dì to hand over It's always a big shock for the learners who know that there are more than 85,568 Chinese characters in the world for the first time. Don't give up immediately. According to the official research of the China Education Committee, there are only 3500 commonly used modern Chinese characters, which cover about 99.48% of words and characters that you could read in daily life. And you can read around 97.97% of modern everyday Chinese if you know about 2500 characters out of the 3500 characters. To make your study more convenient, we provide you with the 3500 commonly used Chinese characters listed as follows. Identifying the exact number of Chinese characters in existence is an elusive task, but reliable estimates for both ancient Chinese (古代汉语 gǔdài hànyǔ) and modern Chinese (现代汉语 xiàndài hànyǔ) exist. Learn Chinese in Beautiful Guilin, China Flexible Scheduling, Affordable Pricing ✈ 🏠 Enroll in our Chinese language school in Guilin, China and learn Chinese through guided conversation and daily practice. Progress with your dedicated team of Chinese teachers online or in person. Learn Chinese with CLI CLI is a center for Chinese language and cultural studies in Guilin, China. The Number of Characters in Chinese, Past and Present The number of unique Chinese characters used through the ages, though the exact figure is unknown, is safely in excess of 100,000. The largest number ever recorded in a Chinese dictionary—the Taiwan Ministry of Education's 2004 Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants (異體字字典, Yìtǐzì zìdiǎn)—was 106,230. Only a subset of these characters are still in regular use today. In 2013, the Chinese government published a list of the 3,500 most essential characters used in modern Chinese. Chinese schoolchildren are expected to learn all 3,500 at a minimum, though many graduate knowing 5,000, 6,000 or more. In order to pass the highest level on China's official Chinese proficiency exam for non-native speakers, the HSK (汉语水平考试 hànyǔ shuǐpíng kǎoshì), you will need to know 2,663 individual Chinese characters. If you're learning Chinese, figuring out how many Chinese characters you actually need to know is worth considering. From writing on bone fragments thousands of years ago to typing on smartphones today, the quantity and logographic form of Chinese characters has evolved—and continues to evolve—over time. The largest number of Chinese characters ever recorded in a Chinese dictionary—the Taiwan Ministry of Education's 2004 Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants (異體字字典, Yìtǐzì zìdiǎn)—was 106,230. Oracle bones and Chinese character origins The Chinese system of writing has a long and complex history spanning 3,000 years. The oldest surviving examples of Chinese writing appear on oracle bones unearthed in Henan by farmers and archeologists. These inscriptions of Chinese characters were made around 3,200 years ago during the Shang Dynasty. Far fewer characters existed when these early writers etched messages into ox and turtle bones. The following video offers a 10-minute overview of the evolution of Chinese characters from oracle bone script to modern-day Chinese. The origins of Chinese characters can be traced back to ancient oracle bone script. How the number of Chinese characters evolves over time It is clear that many of the characters in use today developed from their pictographic ancestors over two thousand years ago. In some cases, characters developed so much over the millennia that their modern form is completely different. Yet is other cases, like below, characters can be quite similar to their ancient forms. The Chinese language contains six distinct types of Chinese characters. The introduction of simplified characters One of the most recent and major developments to the character system was the introduction of simplified characters around the middle of the 20th century. 2,135 of the commonly used but relatively complex traditional Chinese characters were redesigned into simpler logograms that could be remembered more easily and written more quickly. This was done in order to increase literacy rates in China. While traditional characters are still used in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and several overseas Chinese communities, simplified characters are now standard in Mainland China even though many people can still read the traditional characters. There's nothing quite like the luminous and Chinese character-filled streets of Hong Kong. Number of officially-recognized Chinese characters over time See how the number of officially-recognized Chinese characters has developed over the last two millennia: So why does the character count increase throughout the ages to reach over 100,000 in the 2004 dictionary, then plummet to 12,500 in Modern Chinese Language Dictionary (现代汉语词典, xiàndài hànyǔ cídiǎn) published in 2016? Well, a clue can be found in the name of the 2016 dictionary, which calls itself "Modern." As the name suggests, it is a modern dictionary that covers both Chinese characters and words, but which only focuses on those that are still in fairly common use today in China. Highly specialized subjects discussed by modern scholars today will sometimes use characters that are not included in Modern Chinese Language Dictionary. For those specialized topics, a larger dictionary is required. The first six dictionaries in the above table all contain characters only, not characters and words like Modern Chinese Language Dictionary does. However, most of them also include many old characters that are not used anymore and can only be found on ancient scrolls or stone carvings from past dynasties. The larger dictionaries also contain many variants of the same character, but in different character styles or systems that have been used at various times throughout China's history. The evolution of characters like 臣 can be traced back thousands of years. What counts as a Chinese character? With over 100,000 Chinese characters in existence, linguists and dictionary authors offering varying answers to this question. The Chinese language is very different from Romance languages like French and Spanish, which are phonetic languages with an alphabet made up of a fixed number of letters. Instead, Chinese is comprised of thousands of individual characters, each with at least one, and often many, meanings associated with it. This is the key difference between Chinese characters and letters in Western languages, which carry no meaning on their own, only a phonetic sound. Some characters, like 你 (nǐ), can exist as a standalone word. Others, like 们 (men), must be paired with an additional character to create a word. Consider the following: HànzìPīnyīnExplanation 我wǒThis character means "me" or "I" and is a word on its own. 们menThis character carries the meaning of plural but is not a word that means anything on its own. It does not translate to the English word "plural," and cannot be used as such. 我们wǒmenThese two characters together form the word "we" by combining the meanings of the characters 我 and 们. Thus "I" or "me" becomes plural, meaning "we." 的deThis character typically indicate possessions, like the "'s" in "John's bike" 我们的wǒmen deWe have now combined 我, 们, and 的 to form the single word "our" 你nǐyou 你的nǐ deyour, as in "your bike" 你们nǐmenyou [plural]; you all 你们的nǐmen deyour [plural] Not every Chinese character can function on its own as a stand-alone word. So if there are no letters in Chinese, is there an alphabet with which to classify or categorize Chinese characters? Not in the conventional sense. Most languages originating in Europe and the Middle East are phonetic and have an alphabet of letters, but as Chinese does not have letters, it also does not have an alphabet. However, Chinese does have some components which could be considered to serve a similar purpose to that of the alphabet in other languages. Since Chinese has no alphabet, strokes and radicals are used to classify Chinese characters. Classifying characters using strokes Each modern Chinese character is constructed from a number of strokes of the pen or, traditionally, the brush. Different characters are made up of different numbers of strokes and can be classified by the number of strokes that they contain, but the strokes themselves come from a small pool of clearly defined strokes. There are several different systems for classifying these strokes but most systems recognize approximately 10 basic strokes and another roughly 25 complex strokes. You could think of strokes as letters and the pool of strokes from which the characters are drawn as the alphabet of strokes. However, unlike letters in the alphabets used in English and the Romance languages, there are no specific sounds tied to each stroke. Classifying characters using radicals Chinese characters can also be classified by the Chinese radical upon which the character is based. A radical is part of a character's logogram. The radical is simpler and smaller than the whole character but looks like a small character in itself. Some radicals are standalone characters when written on their own, and others are not. Take the character below as an example. On the left you can see the character 漁 (yú) which means "fishery" or "fishing." On the right it is split into its two radicals. The radical on the left means "water" but is not a character on its own. The radical on the right is the noun for "fish" and is a character when drawn on its own. It is also pronounced "yú." So when you add the radical for water to the character for fish, you get a character that means fishing or fishery. There are several different systems of radicals, but the most commonly used system is Kangxi radicals, which is employed in many Chinese dictionaries used by native speakers. It contains 214 different radicals and each one is used in the construction of many different characters. Some characters, like the one in the example above, contain more than one radical. In this case, the main classifying radical for the character often provides a hint about the meaning of the character. The other radicals making up the character sometimes give hints about its pronunciation, as is the case above. Learning the most common Chinese radicals can provide clues about both pronunciation and meaning. Is Chinese phonetic? The fact that certain radicals indicate a specific pronunciation means that, contrary to popular belief, Chinese is not entirely a pictographic language. Rather, it also has some phonetic elements, although it is certainly not a phonetic language in the same way as English or the Romance languages are. For example, note the phonetic similarities between the following Chinese characters, each of which contain the radical 羊 yáng. HànzìPīnyīnEnglish 羊yáng1. sheep; goat; ram; ewe 2. (Yáng) a surname 样yàng1. appearance; shape; look; form 2. sample; model; pattern 洋yáng1. ocean 2. foreign (esp. Western) 痒yǎngitch; tickle 氧yǎngoxygen (chemistry) 佯yángpretend; feign; sham 蛘yáng(dialect) certain insects (esp. rice weevils) 徉yángto walk back and forth 烊yángmelt; go soft Note that the radical 羊 yáng appears in each of the above characters, and really has no bearing on the character's meaning. It does, though, clearly indicate the character's phonetic pronunciation. Since Chinese characters are made up of individual radicals, whether they are "meaning radicals" or "sound radicals," these radicals can also be seen as a kind of alphabet which is used to construct the written and spoken language. For more information on how characters are constructed and classified, take a look at the anatomy of Chinese characters. You Can Learn Chinese You should now have a better understanding of how many Chinese characters exist—over 100,000! We also hope you gained insight into how the Chinese writing system originated and how it has developed over time to meet the changing needs of the Chinese people. For those interested in learning the language, hopefully you are encouraged to find out that you only need to know about 3,000 characters to be fluent—and much less than that to be able to read most of what you come across on a daily basis. Although learning Chinese might seem daunting at first, it's nowhere near as hard as it seems. Follow the links in the article above if you want to learn more about characters or start learning them yourself. We welcome you to learn Chinese with us in China. Vocabulary: How Many Characters are There in Chinese? HànzìpīnyīnEnglish 语言yǔyánlanguage 汉语HànyǔChinese language (describes the spoken form only) 中文ZhōngwénChinese language (describes the written and spoken form) 字zìCharacter (in terms of writing) 汉字hànzìChinese characters 甲骨文jiǎgǔwénOracle bone script 河南HénánHenan (a province in China) 商代ShāngdàiShang Dynasty (1600 - 1046 BC) 词典cídiǎndictionary (contains both word and character definitions) 字典zìdiǎnCharacter dictionary 拼音pīnyīnpinyin system 打字dǎzìtyping 字母表zìmǔbiǎoalphabet 画huàstroke (in a Chinese character) 偏旁piānpángradical (in a Chinese character) 汉语水平考试Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng KǎoshìHSK Chinese proficency test 声调shēngdiàotone (in linguistics) 流畅liúchàngfluent The CLI team is comprised of China experts with advanced degrees in China studies, teaching Chinese as a foreign language, education, and other related disciplines. Founded in 2009, CLI is a center for Chinese language and cultural studies based in scenic Guilin, China.