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一 one (yī)
This is the first stroke
taught to children.
It means 'one'.

1

INTRODUCTION

The Calligrapher's Daughter
How to Use the Book

How to Use the Book

A quick overview

Each character in this book is introduced in its Chinese form, followed by its English translation and then its pinyin (the approximate sound of the character; see p. 13). Each building block and compound character (these terms are explained below) has a short introduction that teaches you some fun historical and cultural facts as you are learning the language. Also included are unillustrated phrases (e.g. see 'heart' on p. 87) that will help to expand your vocabulary.

At the end of the book there is a handy index that lists every character and phrase taught in Chineasy, and provides you with its traditional and simplified forms (see opposite) and its pinyin.

Chineasy methodology

The Chinese language is traditionally taught through a series of between roughly 180 and 215 radicals. These radicals are then used to form the characters of the Chinese language. Chineasy has broken down this collection of characters into their most basic and recurring forms, allowing students to learn fewer and simpler radicals that we have termed 'building blocks'.

One building block (e.g. the character 火 for 'fire', see p. 28), or a specific compound form of the building block (e.g. ⺣ 'fire', see p. 28), can be combined with one or more other characters to make a compound character (e.g. 炎 'burning hot', see p. 29). Two or more independent characters can be placed next to one another to make phrases (e.g. 炎炎 'blazing', see p. 30). In compounds, a whole new character is created; in phrases, the placement of characters next to one another gives a new meaning to the collection of characters. This principle of building blocks is what makes Chineasy so easy!

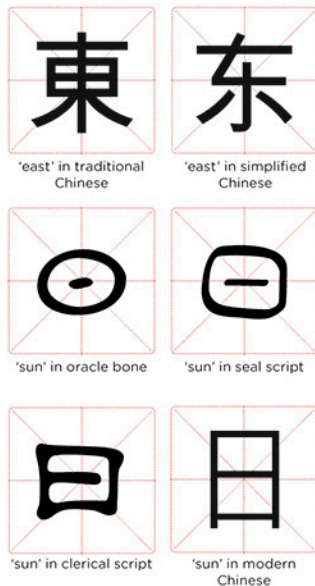|	
火	炎
fire (building block)	burning hot (compound)
炎	炎
burning hot	burning hot

blazing (phrase)
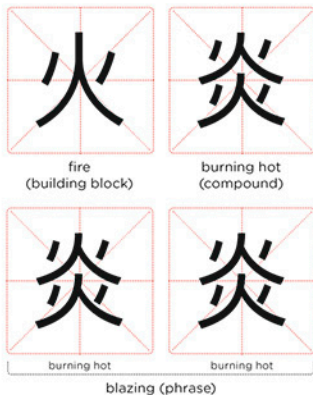
Traditional or simplified?

Chineasy teaches mainly traditional Chinese, which is the written language of Taiwan and Hong Kong. Simplified Chinese was adopted in mainland China in 1949, after the end of the Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Both traditional and simplified forms still share a great number of characters. Chineasy specifies in the character captions when the simplified form is used instead of the traditional form (e.g. 'to follow' and 'crowd' on p. 17). Where no distinction between forms is noted, the traditional and simplified forms of the character are the same.

The evolution of Chinese

As in the case of all languages, Chinese has continuously evolved throughout the course of its existence. Political change, geographic expansion and philosophy have all influenced the stylistic form of Chinese characters. Throughout the book, you will see references to oracle-bone 甲骨文 (c. 1400 BCE), bronze script 金文 (c. 1000 BCE), seal script 篆書 (c. 220 BCE) and clerical script 隸書 (c. 200 BCE) characters. These terms refer to periods in the evolution of Chinese writing from which the modern Chinese language is derived.

The most ancient Chinese characters were developed as logograms, and therefore do not usually indicate how they should be pronounced (see p. 13). However, as the Chinese language became more sophisticated, two or more building blocks were used to form new characters; in this case, one of those building blocks was chosen as the basis for the new character's pronunciation. For example, account/bill 賬 (zhang[4]) on p. 85 comprises the building block for 'shell' (associated with wealth – see p. 130), indicating the meaning of the compound character, and the character for 'length' (chang[2]), which influences the pronunciation. (See also 'at' on p. 115.)

|	
東	东
'east' in traditional Chinese	'east' in simplified Chinese
☉	日
'sun' in oracle bone	'sun' in seal script
日	日
'sun' in clerical script	'sun' in modern Chinese

人 person (ren²)

Hello, people! Our first building block is 'person'. This building block traditionally depicted a human in profile. Today it looks like the profile of a man walking.

亻 person (ren²)

This character is the form of 'person' that is used as a component in certain compounds (see explanation on p. 12). It is known as 單人旁, which translates as 'single person side-radical'. See 'group' on p. 29 for an example of this character.

to follow

(crowd)

big

man
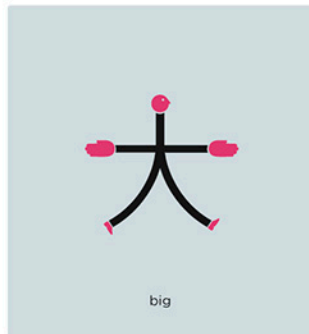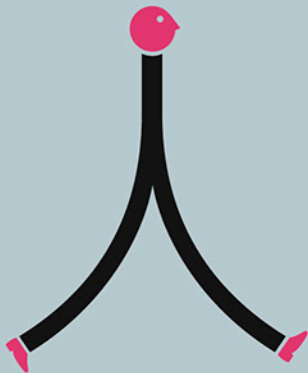
从 to follow (cong²)

This character comprises two building blocks for 'person'. One man leads, the other follows close behind. This is the simplified form; the traditional form of this character is 從.

众 crowd (zhong⁴)

'Two's company, three's a crowd.' Three building blocks for 'person' make a crowd. This is the simplified form; the traditional form of this character is 眾.

大 big (da⁴)

This character depicts a man stretching his arms wide. Imagine that he is saying, 'It was this big.'

夫 man (fu¹)

'Man' is the compound for 'big' with an extra line across the top of the character, like wide shoulders. This line represents the pins in a man's topknot hairstyle.
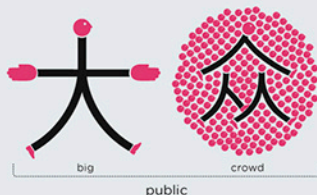
大人 adult
(da⁴ ren²)

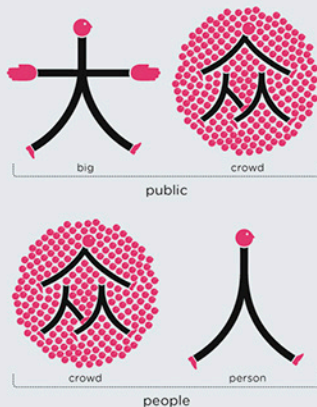Height doesn't always indicate maturity, but, in simple terms, an adult is just a big person. big + person = adult
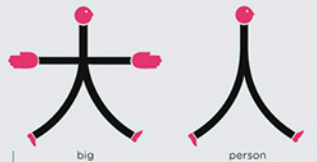
大众 public
(da⁴ zhong⁴)

The public is made up of a large group of people. big + crowd = public

众人 people
(zhong⁴ ren²)

A crowd is made up of many different people. This phrase also means 'everybody'. crowd + person = people

夫人 madam
(fu¹ ren²)

In ancient China, a woman became her husband's property after marriage; she became her husband's person. man + person = madam
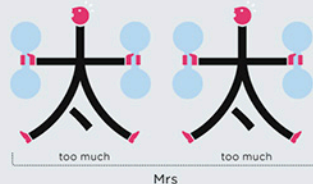

big   person

adult

big   crowd

public

crowd   person

people

man   person

madam
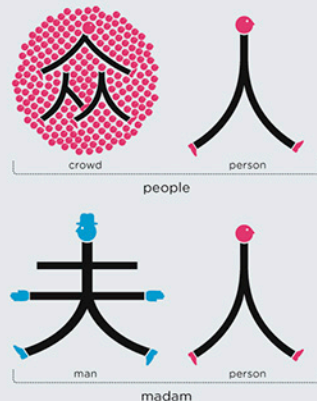
太 too much (tai⁴)

This compound comprises 'big' and a stroke under the character, suggesting something even bigger. It also means 'extremely' or 'excessively'.
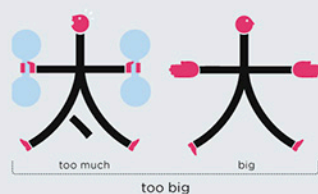
太太 Mrs (tai⁴ tai⁴)

This is a strange phrase. To have double too much means 'Mrs' or 'wife'. Do you think this phrase is accurate? too much + too much = Mrs

太大 too big
(tai⁴ da⁴)

A straightforward phrase: if something is too big, there is too much of it. too much + big = too big

大夫 doctor
(dai⁴ fu)

This phrase has two meanings. When pronounced 'dai⁴ + fu', with a neutral and soft tone, it means 'doctor'. When pronounced 'da⁴ + fu¹', it means 'senior official'. Both are rather archaic. big + man = doctor

too much

too much   too much

Mrs

too much   big

too big

big   man
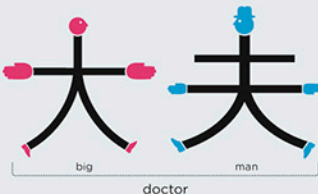
doctor

口 **mouth** (kou³)

Depending on the size of the building block, this character means either 'mouth' (if it is small) or 'to surround' (if it is large).

口 **to surround** (wei²)

Can you tell the difference between these two characters? It is nearly impossible, but the difference is usually made evident by the meaning of the compound. It's useful to remember that 'to surround' never appears alone, so if you see a stand-alone 口, it is the character for 'mouth'.
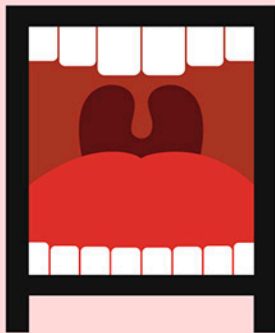
shout

quality

to cause

to return

口口 **shout** (xuan¹)
A mouth emits sound. Two mouths emit even more sound! This is a rare character, so use it to show off to your Chinese friends!

品 **quality** (pin³)
Imagine that each mouth is an opinion. The quality of something is judged by what people say about it. This character also means 'item', 'product' or 'grade'.

因 **to cause** (yin¹)
This character is a combination of 'mouth' and 'big'. It also means 'because of' and 'reason'. I like to remember it by thinking that a big mouth causes problems (although, in this case, 口 means 'to surround').

回 **to return** (hui²)
This character is a combination of a small 'mouth' and 'to surround'. Imagine that it depicts a swirling whirlpool, continuously turning back on itself.

山 **mountain** (shan¹)

The character for 'mountain' represents the peaks of a mountain range.

to get out
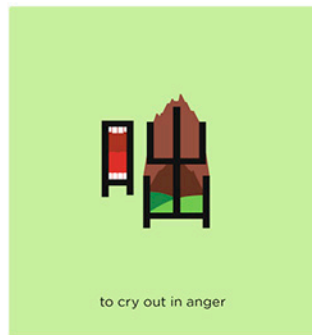

to cry out in anger

immortal
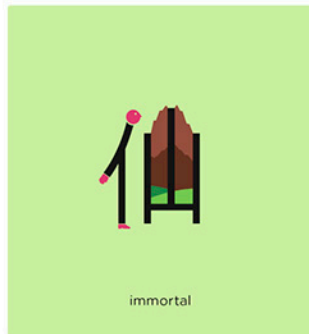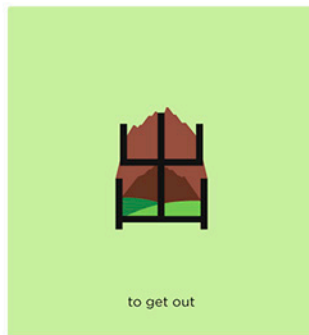
two mountains

出 **to get out** (chu¹)

In the past, the Emperor sent people in exile beyond the mountains. As a result, this character used to mean 'exit'. Today it means 'to get out'.

咄 **to cry out in anger** (duo¹)

This character is a combination of 'mouth' and 'mountain', and can also mean 'noise of rage'.

仙 **immortal** (xian¹)

This character is a combination of 'person' and 'mountain'. Remember that a man who lives as long as a mountain will appear immortal to other men.

屾 **two mountains** (shen¹)

This compound can either be a surname or refer to two mountains. It's another rare character that you can use to show off to your Chinese friends.

出口 exit
(chu¹ kou³)

A mouth that tells you
where to get out is an exit.
to get out + mouth = exit

出來 to come out
(chu¹ lai²)

This is such an easy
phrase. to get out + to
come = to come out

出品 to publish
(chu¹ pin³)

How do you get a
product out to the
people? You publish it,
of course! to get out +
product = to publish

to get out	mouth

exit

to get out	to come

to come out

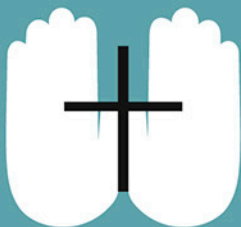| to get out	quality/product

to publish
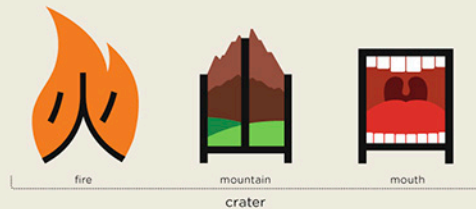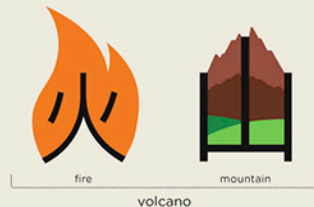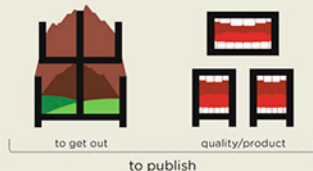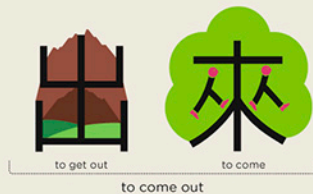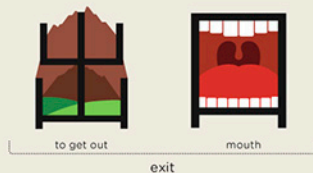
火山 volcano
(huo³ shan¹)

fire + mountain = volcano

火山口 crater
(huo³ shan¹ kou³)

volcano + mouth =
[literally] the mouth
of the volcano = crater

休火山 dormant
volcano
(xiu¹ huo³ shan¹)

rest + volcano = [literally]
at rest volcano = dormant
volcano

fire	mountain

volcano

fire	mountain	mouth

crater

rest	fire	mountain

dormant volcano

一 **one** (yi[1])
This is the first stroke taught to children. It means 'one'.

二 **two** (er[4])
One stroke plus another is two.

三 **three** (san[1])
One plus two is three.

四 **four** (si[4])
The number four is considered unlucky, because it sounds like 'death' 死 (si[3]).

五 **five** (wu[3])
The etymology of this character is disputed, but it can also be used as a surname.

六 **six** (liu[4])
The number six represents wealth in Cantonese, because it sounds like 'good fortune' 祿 (lu[4]).

七 **seven** (qi[1])
The number seven is considered a lucky number by people in relationships.

八 **eight** (ba[1])
The number eight is considered one of the luckiest numbers in Asia, because it sounds similar to the first character in 'prosper' 發財 (fa[1]cai[2]).

九 **nine** (jiu[3])
Nine once resembled the character for 'hand' 手 (see p. 100).

十 **ten** (shi[2])
The character for ten alludes to a complete unit. I like to imagine it as an 'X' marking the end of a unit of ten.
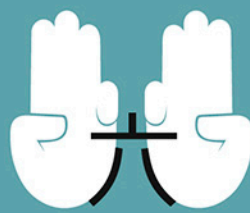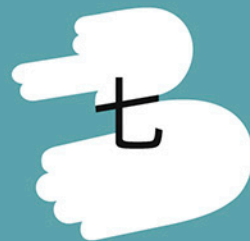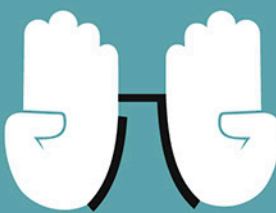
子 son (zi³)

The earliest form of this character, in oracle-bone inscriptions, depicted a baby with a head, two arms and one leg, and meant 'baby' or 'infant'. The character has now been extended to mean 'son' or 'child'.

In addition to the 'son/child' meaning, 子 is often used as a suffix for single-syllable nouns or when referring to small objects. See, for example, the phrase 'day' opposite. In such instances, it is pronounced 'zi'.
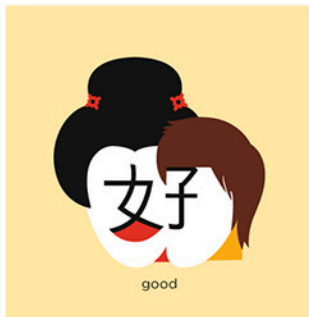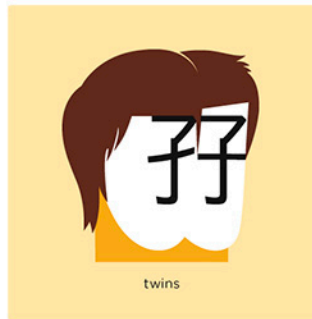

good
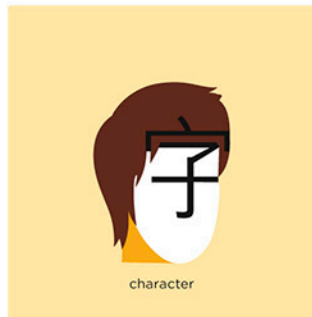
character

plum

twins

好 good (hao³)
This character is a combination of 'woman' and 'son'. In ancient China, the foremost requirement of a good woman was to bear a son in order to continue her husband's line. The character can also mean 'such'.

子女 offspring (zi³ nü³)
son/child + woman

字 character (zi⁴)
This compound is a combination of 'roof' and 'son'. When boys are born under a roof, it means a growth of population, which perpetuates civilization and literature. So this means 'character' (or 'word') in Chinese literature.

王子 prince (wang² zi³)
king + son

李 plum (li³)
This character is a combination of 'tree' and 'son'. Plums were considered a symbol of endurance in ancient China, as their flowers bloomed in winter. This is also a very common surname, translated as Li or Lee.

日子 day (ri⁴ zi)
sun/day + son

孖 twins (zi¹)
This character comprises two 'son' building blocks. Twins were considered a sign of either good luck or bad luck, depending on the region.

好心 good intention (hao³ xin¹)
good + heart

Advanced Sentences

Such a beautiful princess
好美的公主 (pages 97, 41, 137, 141)

Such a long sentence
好長的句子 (pages 97, 85, 137)

Sweat stinks
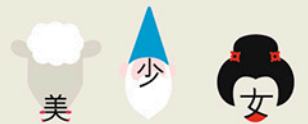好臭的汗 (pages 97, 99, 137, 145)

The instruction from God
神的指示 (pages 143, 137, 151, 142)

Blessed woman from Shandong Province
幸福的山東女人 (pages 145, 143, 137, 54)

Everybody be careful
大家小心 (pages 93, 87)

Beautiful teenage girl
美少女 (pages 41, 133, 46)

The fish is so fresh
魚好鮮 (pages 25, 97, 41)

彼得與狼

The Story of Peter and the Wolf