第一课 Dì-yī kè

Lesson 1

名不正则言不顺，言不顺 则事不成

Míng bú zhèng zé yán bú shùn, yán bú shùn zé shì bù chéng.

Name not proper then words not effective, words not effective then things won't succeed.

On the 'rectification of names'.

Confucius, *Analects*. *Classical Chinese*.

1.1 General features of Chinese texts

1.1.1 Size   Regardless of complexity, characters are matched in overall size, fitting into an imaginary rectangle along the lines indicated in the following example (in simplified characters). For this reason, characters are also called <u>fāngkuàizì</u> 'squared writing'.

上 海 天 气 很 热 。   Shànghǎi tiānqì hěn rè.

1.1.2 Spacing   Characters are evenly spaced regardless of whether they represent whole words or components of words. Compare the character version of the sentence above and the pinyin version. Though the convention is not always consistently followed, pinyin places spaces between words rather than syllables. Characters are evenly spaced ， regardless of word boundaries.

1.1.3 Punctu-ation   Modern Chinese written material makes use of punctuation conventions that are similar in form to those of English, though not always identical in function:

Periods, full stops:	traditionally ' 。 ', but nowadays also '**.**'
Commas:	' ， ' and ' 、 ', the latter for lists (enumeration)
Quotes:	traditionally 「 – 」 or 《 》, but nowadays also ' ' and " "
Proper names:	usually unmarked, though in a few texts, indicated by wavy underline. There is nothing comparable to a capital letter in Chinese.

Other punctuation will be noted as encountered.

1.1.4 Direct-ion   Traditionally, Chinese has been written downwards, from right column to left. Major writing reforms instituted in the 1950s in the PRC not only formalized a set of simplified characters (see next item) but required them to be written horizontally, from left to right, like modern European languages. As a result, Chinese texts now come in two basic formats. Material originating in Taiwan and traditional overseas communities, or

on the Mainland prior to the reforms, is written with traditional characters that are – with a few exceptions such as in headlines and on forms – arranged vertically (top to bottom and right to left). Material originating in the Mainland, in Singapore (again, with some exceptions for religious or special genres) and in some overseas communities，after the reforms of the 1950s，is written with simplified characters arranged horizontally, left to right.

(Chinese has provided the model for most of the scripts that write vertically – at least in East Asia. Vertical writing is still the norm in Japan, coexisting with horizontal writing. Other scripts of the region, such as Mongolian, whose writing system derives ultimately from an Indian prototype, have also followed the traditional Chinese format.)

1.2 The form of characters

Characters are the primary unit for writing Chinese. Just as English letters may have several forms (eg g /g, a/a) and styles (eg *italic*), so Chinese characters also have various realizations. Some styles that developed in early historical periods survive to this day in special functions. Seals, for example, are still often inscribed in the 'seal script', first developed during the Qin dynasty (3rd C. BCE). Other impressionistic, running scripts, developed by calligraphers, are still used in handwriting and art. Advertisements and shop signs may stretch or contort graphs for their own design purposes. *Manga* style comics animate onomatopoeic characters – characters that represent sound – in idiosyncratic ways. Putting such variants aside, it is estimated that the number of characters appearing in modern texts is about 6-7000 (cf. Hannas 1997, pp 130-33, and particularly table 3). Though it is far fewer than the number cited in the largest historical dictionaries, which include characters from all historical periods, it is still a disturbingly large number.

1.2.1 Radicals and phonetics

There are ameliorating factors that make the Chinese writing system more learnable than it might otherwise be. One of the most significant is the fact that characters have elements in common; not just a selection of strokes, but also larger constituents. Between 2/3 and ¾ of common characters (cf. DeFrancis 1984, p. 110 and passim) consist of two elements, both of which can also stand alone as characters in their own right. Historically, these elements are either roots, in which case they are called 'phonetics', or classifiers, in which case they are called (paradoxically) 'radicals'. Thus, 忘 wàng 'forget' contains 亡 as phonetic and 心 as classifier; 語 yǔ 'language' has 吾 and 言. The significance of the terms phonetic and classifier will be discussed in a later unit. For now, it is enough to know that the basic graphs are components of a large number of compound graphs: 亡 appears in 忙 and 氓, for example; 心 in 志 and 忠; 言 in 謝 and 説; 吾 in 悟 and 晤. Even this set of component graphs numbers in the high hundreds, but familiarity with them allows many characters to be learned as a pairing of higher order constituents rather than a composite of strokes.

1.2.2 Simplified characters

Chinese policy makers have also tried to make the writing system more learnable by introducing the Chinese equivalent of spelling reform, which takes the form of reducing the number of strokes in complicated characters: 國 becomes 国; 邊 becomes 边. The two sets are usually called 'traditional' and 'simplified' in English, *fántǐzì* ('complicated-body-characters') and *jiǎntǐzì* ('simple-body-characters') in Chinese.

For almost 2000 years in China, serious genres of writing were written in the *kǎishū* script ('model writing') that first appeared in the early centuries of the first millennium. In the 1950s, the Mainland government, seeking to increase literacy, formalized a set of simplified characters to replace many of the more complicated of the traditional forms. Many of these simplified characters were based on calligraphic and other styles in earlier use; but others were novel graphs that followed traditional patterns of character creation.

For the learner, this simplification is a mixed blessing – and possibly no blessing at all. For while it ostensibly makes writing characters simpler, it also made them less redundant for reading: 樂 land 東 (used to write the words for 'music' and 'east', respectively) are quite distinct in the traditional set; but their simplified versions, 乐 and 东, are easy to confuse. Moreover, Chinese communities did not all agree on the new reforms. The simplified set, along with horizontal writing, was officially adopted by the PRC in the late 1950s and (for most purposes) by Singapore in the 1960s. But Taiwan, most overseas Chinese communities and, until its return to the PRC, Hong Kong, retained the traditional set of characters as their standard, along with vertical writing.

Jiǎntǐzì and *fántǐzì* should not be thought of as two writing systems, for not only are there many characters with only one form (也 yě, 很 hěn, 好 hǎo, etc), but of those that have two forms, the vast majority exhibit only minor, regular differences, eg: 说/説, 饭/飯. What remain are perhaps 3 dozen relatively common characters with distinctively divergent forms, such as: 这/這, 买/買. Careful inspection reveals that even they often have elements in common. For native Chinese readers, the two systems represent only a minor inconvenience, rather like the difference between capital and small letters in the Roman alphabet, though on a larger scale. Learners generally focus on one system for writing, but soon get used to reading in both.

1.3 Function

As noted earlier, characters represent not just syllables, but syllables of particular words (whole words or parts of words). In other words, characters generally function as logograms – signs for words. Though they can be adapted to the task of representing syllables (irrespective of meaning), as when they are used to transliterate foreign personal and place names, when they serve this function they are seen as characters with their meanings suppressed (or at least, dimmed), eg: 意大利 Yìdàlì 'Italy', with the meanings 'intention-big-gain' suppressed.

In practice, different words with identical sound (homophones) will usually be written with different characters.

sound   jīn

meaning   today   metal

character   今   金
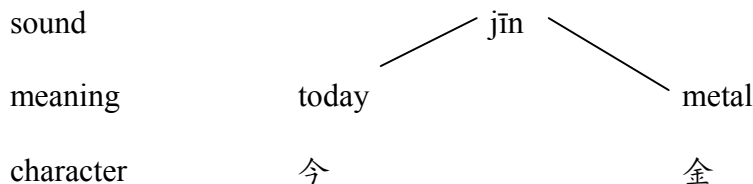
Such homophony is common in Chinese at the syllable level (as the *shi*-story, described in the preliminary chapter, illustrated). Here, for example, are some common words or word parts all pronounced <u>shì</u> (on falling tone):

shì

是 'be'   事 'thing'   室 'room'   试 'test'

.
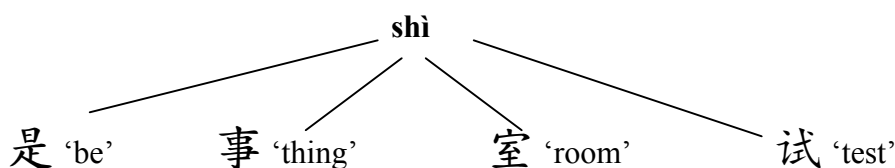
But except for high-frequency words (such as 是 <u>shì</u> 'be'), *words* in Mandarin are usually *compound*, consisting of several syllables: 事情 <u>shìqing</u> 'things'; 教室 <u>jiàoshì</u> 'classroom'; 考试 <u>kǎoshì</u> 'examination'. At the level of the word, homophony is far rarer. In Chinese language word-processing where the input is in *pinyin*, typing <u>shiqing</u> and <u>kaoshi</u> (most input systems do not require tones) will elicit at most only two or three options, and since most word processors organize options by frequency, in practice, this means that the characters for <u>shiqing</u> and <u>kaoshi</u> will often be produced on the first try.

shì

shìqing   kǎoshì
'thing'   jiàoshì   'test'
事情   'classroom'   考试
            教室
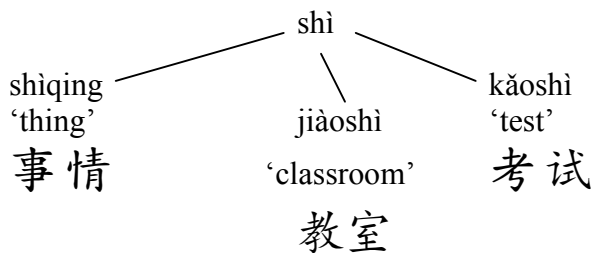
1.4 Writing

1.4.1 Writing in the age of word processors

Just as in English it is possible to read well without being able to spell every word from memory, so in Chinese it is possible to read without being able to write every character from memory. And in fact, with the advent of Chinese word processing, it is even possible to write without being able to produce every character from memory, too; for in a typical word processing program, the two steps in composing a character text are, first, to input *pinyin* and, second, to confirm – by reading – the output character, or if necessary, to select a correct one from a set of homonyms (ordered by frequency).

There is, nevertheless, still a strong case to be made for the beginning student learning to write characters by hand. First of all, there is the aesthetic experience. In the Chinese world, calligraphy – beautiful writing, writing beautifully – is valued not only as art, but also as moral training. Even if your handwriting never reaches gallery quality, the tactile experience and discipline of using a writing implement on paper (or even on a tablet computer) is valuable. Writing also serves a pedagogical function: it forces you to pay attention to details. Characters are often distinguished by no more than a single stroke:

4 strokes	天	夭	夫	犬	太
	tiān	yāo	fū	quǎn	tài
	sky	goblin	person	dog	grand

5 strokes	白	申	田	甲	由
	bái	shēn	tián	jiǎ	yóu
	white	explain	field	'A'	from

Learning to write characters does not mean learning to write all characters encountered from memory, for the immense amount of time it takes to internalize the graphs inevitably takes away from the learning of vocabulary, usage and grammatical structure. This course adopts the practice of introducing material in pinyin rather exuberantly, then dosing out a subset to be read in characters. The balance of writing to reading is something to be decided by a teacher. In my view, at least in the early lessons, students should not only be able to read character material with confidence, but they should be able to write most of it if not from memory, then with no more than an occasional glance at a model. The goal is to learn the principles of writing so that any character can be reproduced by copying; and to internalize a smaller set that can be written from memory (though not necessarily in the context of an examination). These will provide a core of representative graphs and frequently encountered characters for future calligraphic endeavors.

1.4.2 Principles of drawing characters
Strokes are called <u>bǐhuà(r)</u> in Chinese. Stroke order (<u>bǐshùn</u>) is important for aesthetic reasons – characters often do not look right if the stroke order is not followed. Following correct stroke order also helps learning, for in addition to visual memory for characters, people develop a useful tactile memory for them by following a consistent stroke order.

a) Form
There are usually said to be eight basic strokes plus a number of composites. They are shown below, with names for each stroke and examples of characters that contain them.

<u>héng</u> 'horizontal' 一	<u>shù</u> 'vertical' 十
<u>piě</u> 'cast aside' ie 人 leftwards slanting	<u>nà</u> 'pressing down' 入 ie rightwards slanting

<u>tiǎo</u> 'poking up' ie rightward rising	冷 把	<u>diǎn</u> 'dot'	小 熱
<u>gōu</u> 'hook' [four variants, shown]	小 心 弋 买	<u>zhé</u> 'bend' [many variants]	马 凸

Composite strokes can be analyzed in terms of these eight, eg 'horizontal plus leftwards slant'.

b) Direction
In most cases, strokes are falling (or horizontal); only one of the eight primary strokes rises – the one called <u>tiǎo</u>.

c) Order
The general rules for the ordering of strokes are given below. These rules are not detailed enough to generate word order for you, but they will help you to make sense of the order, and to recall it more easily once you have encountered it. Begin here by drawing the characters shown below as you contemplate each of the rules, and recite the names of the strokes:

i) Horizontal (<u>héng</u>) before vertical (<u>shù</u>):	shí	10	十
ii) Except a closing <u>héng</u> is often post- poned till last:	wáng tǔ	king; *surname* soil	王 土
iii) Left stroke before right: (eg <u>piě</u> before <u>nà</u>)	bā rén mù	8 person wood	八 人 木
iv) Top before bottom:	sān yán	3 speech	三 言
v) Left constituent before right: (eg 土 before 也)	dì	place	地
vi) Boxes are drawn in 3 strokes: the left vertical, then top and right, ending with bottom (left to right):	kǒu	mouth	口

vii) Frame before innards:	yuè	moon; month	月
	guó	country	国
viii) Frames are closed last, after innards:	sì	4	四
	rì	sun; day	日
	tián	field	田
ix) For symmetrical parts, dominant precedes minor:	xiǎo	small	小

d) Two illustrative characters

Because of the symmetry of its form as well as the gravity of its meaning, the character that represents the root yǒng, whose basic meaning is 'everlasting', is often used as an illustration of the 8 basic strokes. Actually, yǒng is composed of only 5 strokes, but some of the 5 can illustrate several stokes simultaneously. Also cited, on the right, is the more common character for shuǐ, 'water', which is similar in form.

yǒng
eternal

shuǐ
water

Find out the way these characters are written from a teacher (or from your flashCube links), then see if you can follow the analysis of yǒng into the 8 basic strokes by overlaying each stroke in the following set in red ink:

diǎn	héng	zhé	gōu	tiǎo	piě	piě	nà
永	永	永	永	永	永	永	永

dot	horiz'l	bend	hook	rise	fall left		fall right
		top mid		top left	bottom left, top right		bottom right

1.5   Presentation of characters

a) Each character is introduced in large format, with number of strokes, pronunciation and a general meaning indicated below it. Since most words are compound in Mandarin, characters generally represent parts of compounds rather than words as such. Sometimes combinational or historical information can suggest a general meaning for a particular character/syllable: 明天 'bright + day' for <u>míngtiān</u> 'tomorrow'. But in cases where a particular character/syllable has no independent form, it may not be possible to give a reliable meaning: 昨天 '? + day' for <u>zuótiān</u> 'yesterday' (cf. 'yester+day' in English). In such cases, if a general meaning can be inferred from other combinations, it is given in parentheses.

b) For characters with two forms, a simplified and a traditional, both forms are given, with the traditional form above and the simplified form below.

c) Because of the difficulty of indicating the order of strokes without providing hand-drawn characters, students are asked to seek information on stroke-order from teachers or from internet links.

Some indication of the constituency of characters, as well as the number of strokes needed to draw them, is provided by the two numbers underneath each large format character. The first number is the number of strokes of the radical assigned to the character. The second number gives the strokes that remain in addition to the radical. The sum of the two numbers is the total number of strokes. Where the second number is 0 (eg 长 4+0 / 長 8+0), the character is itself a radical. In some cases, characters that have only one form have been assigned a different radical in the simplified set from that of the traditional; 弟 <u>dì</u> 'younger brother', for example, is assigned the radical 弓 in the traditional set (ie 3+4), but 八 (the first two strokes) in the simplified (ie 2+5). In such cases, both numbers are given, with the traditional radical assignment first.

d) Separate reading materials are provided for both traditional and simplified characters. The former would normally be written vertically, but for reasons of practicality, they too are presented in horizontal format.

e) Occasionally, new characters which have not been formally introduced in the character lessons are included in texts on the assumption that they can be identified from the context. Such material is underlined.

f) Writing exercises may be done by hand, or on a word-processor. Teachers may differ on policy about whether to write simplified, traditional or both. One position is to allow learners to choose one or the other, but to require consistency – no switching within a text just to avoid complicated characters! Regardless of writing choice, learners should learn to read both types.

g) Because written language serves different functions from spoken, it is not surprising to find some material specialized for written functions. In Chinese, this includes particular words, grammatical patterns, and most frequently, the use of truncated compounds (eg 己

alone, rather than the full compound, 已經 yǐjing 'already'). Such forms will be noted as encountered.

Approach
In studying the characters, the following approach is recommended:

Scan the ***large format*** characters and the analysis and ***notes*** that follow them to prime yourself for the type of material that will follow;

then remind yourself of the words and phrases that contain the new characters by trying to read the section entitled ***phrases***, checking your pronunciation against the pinyin that is shown below;

making use of context, do the ***readings*** until fluent;

finally, do the ***exercises***, and practice writing the characters until familiar.

1.6 Numbers

一	二	三	四	五
1+0	2+0	1+2	3+2	1+3
yī	èr	sān	sì	wǔ

六	七	八	九	十
2+2	1+1	2+0	1+1	2+0
liù	qī	bā	jiǔ	shí

Notes

The graphs for 1 –3 are obviously representational. The near left-right symmetry of the graphs for 4, 6, 8, and 10 is not entirely coincident. 四 seems to have represented a whole easily divided into two parts; 六's earlier form looked very like that of 四 (with 六's two legs matching the two inner strokes of 四). 八 (to be distinguished from 人 rén 'person' and 入 rù 'enter') is also said to have represented the notion of division (into two fours), and 十 represented a unity of the four directions and the center. Lower multiples of 10 are sometimes represented as unit characters：廿 '20' and 卅 '30'. However, they are still read as if written 二十 and 三十.

Exercise 1.
a) 九九乘法表 <u>jiǔjiǔ</u> <u>chéngfǎbiǎo</u> '9 [x] 9 multiplication-table'
Read the following multiplications tables aloud. [When the product is only a single digit, the rhythm is preserved by adding 得 <u>dé</u> 'gets'; for similar reasons, the teens are recited as <u>yīshí'èr</u>, etc. rather than just <u>shí'èr</u>.]

一三得三	一五得五	一九得九
二三得六	二五得十	二九一十八
三三得九	三五一十五	三九二十七
四三一十二	四五二十	四九三十六
五三一十五	五五二十五	五九四十五
六三一十八	六五三十	六九五十四
七三二十一	七五三十五	七九六十三
八三二十四	八五四十	八九七十二
九三二十七	九五四十五	九九八十一

b) Telephone numbers:
Although on business cards, telephone numbers are often written out in Arabic numerals, in other contexts they appear as characters, with the exception of <u>líng</u> 'zero', which is more often written '0'. Practice reading the following until you can do so fluently, with a good rhythm. Recall that in the Mainland, 'one' in telephone numbers (as well as other kinds of listings) is usually pronounced <u>yāo</u> rather than <u>yī</u>.

<u>电话 / 電話</u>   diànhuà 'telephone'   <u>手机 / 手機</u>   shǒujī 'mobile'

	电话 / 電話	手机 / 手機
1.	六五九六　二九一八	一三五　0一七五　一四四三
2	四二七九　九四一五	一三九　三六二九　六九六四
3	五四二七　九四一五	一三九　二0三八　五八八二
4	五一六八　七二一九	一三0　二四六七　九九八五
5	八二二0　七四二六	一三五　一四四三　六四八八
6	二三八七　二七六二	0二九　二六六三　四一0九

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