Classical Chinese for Everyone

登諸子之堂 辭白丁之黨

A Guide for Absolute Beginners

Bryan W. Van Norden

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Contents

Preface

This book is designed to introduce Classical Chinese to students with no previous exposure to Modern Chinese. This differs from the approach used in most textbooks, which assumes you already have studied Chinese for at least a couple of years. (Some of these books also seem to assume that you plan on being a Sinologist and already have a master's degree in linguistics!)

I started studying Classical Chinese as an undergraduate (with Nathan Sivin at the University of Pennsylvania), after completing three years of Modern Chinese (studying under Victor Mair and the late A. Ronald Walton, among others). I continued my study as a graduate student in philosophy at Stanford, and translation has been an important part of my research and publications ever since. However, I learned from my teacher, the late David S. Nivison, that it is possible to teach Classical Chinese to students with no previous exposure to the language; he routinely included language instruction as part of his introductory course on ancient Chinese philosophy. Later, I was one of the founders of the Department of Chinese and Japanese at Vassar College, and I offered our first course in Classical Chinese. In the first years of the program, we simply did not have enough students to make two years of Modern Chinese a requirement for Classical Chinese. Consequently, I wrote the first draft of this textbook for our students. The Department of Chinese and Japanese at Vassar has flourished, and I now use Paul Rouzer's *A New Practical Primer of Literary Chinese* to teach students who have already learned Modern Chinese.

I still got some use out of my old textbook, though, sending PDFs to Western-trained philosophers and interested amateurs when they asked for a recommendation for a text to help them learn at least a little of the language of the classics of Confucianism and Daoism. On a whim, I

submitted the manuscript to my editor at Hackett Publishing Company, Rick Todhunter, and he reported that there is a real hunger for a book like this.

So I owe a debt to my own teachers, to my students, and to my colleagues at Vassar, all of whom were essential for the eventual completion of this book. I am also grateful to my colleagues at Yale-NUS College, Scott Cook and Jing Hu, for assistance on some technical issues. Justin Tiwald and four anonymous referees also provided invaluable feedback and corrections to earlier drafts. Rick Todhunter has been very encouraging of this project from the beginning. In addition, Hackett's production director, Liz Wilson, and this book's copyeditor, Shannon Cunningham, and its proofreader, Leslie Connor, have made me sound much more articulate than I am. None of these people is responsible for my mistakes, of course.

Introduction

Classical Chinese is the form of Chinese that was written in the period between roughly 500 BCE and 220 CE. It is the language of classical Confucianism and Daoism. This book is designed to introduce you to the fundamentals of Classical Chinese grammar, some basic vocabulary, and fundamental skills in using a dictionary and classical commentaries. After reading this book, you will still have a lot to learn. However, you should be ready to continue learning from a more conventional textbook. In addition, with perseverance and the help of a good grammar and dictionary, you will be able to work your way through a few elementary Chinese texts on your own.

Two aspects of this book are distinctive. First, most other textbooks of Classical Chinese assume that you have already completed at least two years of Modern Chinese or Japanese. However, this textbook assumes no previous familiarity with the Chinese or Japanese spoken or written languages. Second, from the very first lesson, this book teaches you using selections from actual Chinese philosophical texts. These include readings from the sayings of Confucius, Laozi (the legendary founder of Daoism), and some Tang dynasty poetry. In three lessons I edited the text slightly, but all of the other readings are complete, and none of the readings are artificial or dumbed down.

Classical Chinese is a style of Literary Chinese, the written language used by the educated in China for approximately 2,500 years.[1] It was also adopted as the literary language of premodern Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. In a way, Literary Chinese played a role in East Asia similar to Latin in the West. Latin and Literary Chinese were originally the written form

1. There is also an earlier pre-Classical language (called Old Chinese or Archaic Chinese) that we know from inscriptions on artifacts and the older portions of works like the *Classic of Odes* (詩經 Shījīng) and the *Classic of Documents* (書經 Shūjīng), which were already ancient by the time of Confucius.

of the language spoken natively by a particular group of people. However, the ordinary vernacular language evolved into various spoken dialects, and Latin and Literary Chinese became the common written languages of the educated elites. In the West, books were first printed using vernacular English, German, etc. during the Protestant Reformation (beginning in the sixteenth century), but educated people were expected to know Latin until the beginning of the twentieth century. In China, almost all texts were printed in Literary Chinese until the New Culture movement of the early twentieth century.

1. The Five Types of Chinese Characters

Everyone knows that there is something distinctive about the Chinese writing system, but there is considerable ignorance and confusion about how that writing system works.[2] Almost two thousand years ago, the Chinese lexicographer 許慎 Xǔ Shèn noted that there are five kinds of Chinese characters: pictograms, simple ideograms, compound ideograms, loan characters, and semantic-phonetic compounds.[3] We can illustrate four of these five types using symbols that are familiar to contemporary English readers.

2. Sections 1–3 of this Introduction are reprinted, with modifications, from Bryan W. Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011), Appendix B, 235–47.

3. Nerd note: In Chinese, these are known as 象形字 xiàngxíngzì (pictograms), 指事字 zhǐshìzì (simple ideograms), 會意字 huìyìzì (compound ideograms), 形聲字 xíngshēngzì (semantic-phonetic compounds, which are also referred to as 諧聲字 xiéshēngzì), and 假借字 jiǎjièzì (phonetic loans). Xǔ Shèn explained his system in his 說文解字 Shuōwén jiězì, *Explanation of Simple Characters and Analysis of Complex Characters*, from about 100 CE. Xǔ Shèn also identified a sixth type of character, but there is no consensus about what he thought the defining feature of this type is, so people generally ignore it.

Pictograms were originally drawings of something:



As these examples illustrate, the pictures are usually stylized, sometimes to the point of being purely conventional. The image on the far right looks nothing like a real human heart, but children are taught in kindergarten that it is a "picture" of a heart. In addition, the relationship between the picture's meaning and what it depicts has a large element of conventionality. The middle symbol means "smoking permitted here," but our culture could equally well have decided that it means "tobacco sold here" or "warning, flammable materials present." So pictograms are pictures of something, but their meaning is still determined to a great extent by social convention.

Simple ideograms are characters whose structure suggests their meaning, but which were not pictures of anything concrete:



The simple ideogram on the far left means "five," but it is not a picture, because the number five is an abstract entity, so there could not be a picture of it. As with pictograms, there is an element of conventionality in the meanings of simple ideograms. The middle symbol is posted on roads and means "U-turn allowed," but we as a society could have decided that it means "watch out for falling balls" and posted it on golf courses or baseball parks.

Compound ideograms are characters with two or more meaningful components that in conjunction suggest the meaning of the composite symbol:



Notice that the components of the compound ideogram on the left are themselves ideograms. However, the compound ideogram in the middle has one component that is a pictogram and one that is an ideogram. The compound ideogram on the far right has two components that are pictograms. In general, the components of a compound ideogram do not have to be ideograms themselves. All that is necessary is that the conjunction of meaningful symbols suggests the meaning of the whole.

The previous three types of characters categorize them according to the way in which they are *created*. The next category, phonetic loans, includes characters that already exist but that are *recycled* to represent a new meaning. Simply put, a phonetic loan is a rebus. If you are not familiar with that term, consider the following "sentence":



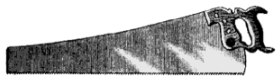
It means, "I love you." But how does it get this meaning? Left to right, the symbols are a pictogram of an eye (from the seal on the back of the US dollar bill), a pictogram of a human heart, and a pictogram of a hand pointing at the reader. The eye pictogram does not stand for a human eye here, of course. Instead, it stands for a word that sounds the same as "eye" in English: "I." This is how phonetic loans work: they borrow pre-existing symbols that already have a word associated with them and use them to represent *different* words that *sound* the same.

Most people, if they have any preconceptions about Chinese characters, seem to think that they all work like pictograms or ideograms. In fact, only a small percentage of Chinese characters are either pictograms or ideograms. Almost all Chinese characters (97 percent) belong to the fifth group of characters: semantic-phonetic compounds. As we have seen, there are examples of pictograms, ideograms, and even phonetic loans that will be familiar to English readers. However, semantic-phonetic compounds are a little harder to illustrate. Consider the following sentence:

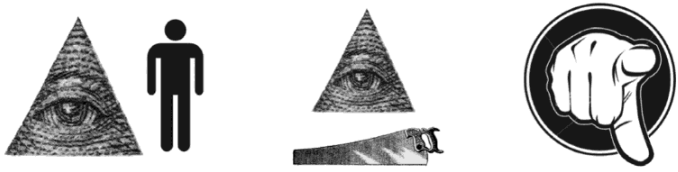
The first symbol in the above sentence is a pictogram of an eye, being used as a phonetic loan for "I." The third symbol is still a pictogram for "you." But what is the eye pictogram doing in its second occurrence? It means "see." So the sentence means "I see you." Perhaps you guessed this immediately, but if there were lots of pictograms in common use and they had different meanings, sometimes used as phonetic loans and other times pictograms proper, you could easily get confused. So we might start to distinguish one use of a symbol from another by providing an additional hint:

The first symbol is now a semantic-phonetic compound. The eye pictogram in the first symbol is the phonetic component: it tells us what the pronunciation of the character is. The man pictogram in the first symbol is the semantic component: it gives you a hint about what the meaning

of the symbol is. If we were properly trained in reading this written language, we would immediately read the above sentence as "I see you." Now consider the following pictogram of a handsaw:



Suppose we combine this symbol with the eye symbol, producing the semantic-phonetic compound in the middle of the sentence below:



This sentence would mean "I saw you." The first two symbols in this sentence are both semantic-phonetic compounds, in which one part gives you a hint about the pronunciation of the symbol and one part gives you a hint about the meaning. Chinese semantic-phonetic compounds work the same way.

Now that we understand the five types of Chinese characters, let's look at some actual examples. Pictograms, once again, are stylized pictures that have a meaning that is conventionally connected to what they depict:

日　月　女　子

Try to guess what these four characters are pictures of, and then look at the footnote for the answer.[4] If you guessed even one of them correctly, you have done as well as any student has ever done in the thirty years that I have been using this example. In all likelihood, you couldn't guess any of them. As I stressed before, pictograms are highly stylized symbols whose meaning is not transparent.

4. Believe it or not, these are (from left to right) pictograms of the sun, the moon, a woman, and a child.

Simple ideograms, you will recall, are characters whose structure suggests their meaning but which are not pictures of anything. Simple ideograms are quite rare in Chinese, but here are some examples:

一　二　三　上　下

You might be able to guess the meanings of the first three symbols, especially when you see them written side by side like this. The fourth and the fifth characters are less transparent, though.[5]

Compound ideograms are characters with two parts, each of which has a meaning on its own, which suggests the meaning of the whole character when they are brought into conjunction:

明　好

You now know the meanings of the components of each of these two compound ideograms. (Look back under the examples of pictograms if you have forgotten.) Based on the components, try to guess the meaning of each of these compound ideograms before looking at the footnote.[6]

Semantic-phonetic compounds have one part that hints at the meaning of the character (the semantic component) and one part that hints at the pronunciation (the phonetic component). For example, the pictogram 門 depicts a gate and is pronounced mén, but it occurs as the phonetic component in the following semantic-phonetic compounds:

---

5. From left to right, these are the simple ideograms for the numbers one, two, three, above, and below. (And, no, the character for "four" is not what you would guess.)

6. The compound ideogram on the left means "bright" (suggested by the combined brightness of the sun, 日, and the moon, 月), while the one on the right means (in Classical Chinese) "to be fond of" (suggested by a woman, 女, holding her child, 子). The original form of 明 may have shown a window and the moon, which would also be a compound ideogram, but with different components.

問 wèn, "to ask" (the semantic component is 口, "mouth")
聞 wén, "to hear" (the semantic component is 耳, "ear")
們 men (pluralizing suffix in Modern Chinese; the semantic component is 亻, "person")
悶 mèn, "to be sad" (the semantic component is 忄, "heart")

Not all phonetic components are as useful as these. The pronunciations of Chinese characters have changed greatly over time, so a phonetic element that was helpful when the character was first created two thousand years or more ago may be almost useless today. However, it is good to get into the habit of recognizing phonetic elements in characters, because they do often aid in memorization.

Phonetic loan characters are originally created in one of the four previous ways: pictograms, simple ideograms, compound ideograms, or semantic-phonetic compounds. But they are recycled to represent different words that sound the same as (or similar to) the words that they originally represented. For example, the character 來 was originally a pictogram of wheat. It was borrowed to represent the homophone meaning "to come." Similarly, the character 其 was originally a pictogram of a basket, but it was borrowed to represent the meanings "his," "her," "its," or "their." The phonetic loan principle is very important in explaining the origin of many characters. In addition, we have learned from ancient manuscripts discovered in excavated tombs that it was once extremely common for scribes to substitute homophonous characters for one another.

In summary, almost all Chinese characters (again, about 97 percent) are semantic-phonetic compounds, in which part of the character gives a hint about the meaning and part gives a hint about the pronunciation. In addition, a handful of characters are created as pictograms, simple ideograms, or complex ideograms—in which there is a conventional connection between the structure of the character and its meaning. Finally,

some characters that are created in one of the preceding ways are used to represent homophones in the spoken language.

I have been stressing two things: the conventionality of the meaning of Chinese characters and their strong connection with the spoken language. I have been doing this in order to inoculate you against what is sometimes called "the ideographic myth," the mistaken belief that Chinese characters somehow directly represent ideas or meanings, without conventions or connections to the spoken language. One extreme illustration of the ideographic myth is provided by the 1960 science fiction film *12 to the Moon*. In this film, an international crew of astronauts receives a video transmission from space aliens that is written in what the astronauts describe as "hieroglyphs." The Japanese crewmember helps out by sight-translating the alien script.[7] The "logic" here is apparently that *kanji* (the Chinese characters used in written Japanese) are hieroglyphs, and both are pictures, and as such they have intrinsic meaning that can be understood by anyone familiar with any picture-language. I hope that, even before reading this book, you would roll your eyes at this scene, but you are guilty of a similar misconception if you think that Chinese characters are all pictures, or have no connection with spoken words. So remember: characters usually provide some phonetic information, and even if you know exactly what the structure of a Chinese character is, you will not necessarily know what it means. Like a word in any language, written or spoken, to know the meaning of a character you must know how it is used.

How many characters are there? This question is not as easy to answer as it might seem, because the answer depends on whether we count variant forms of the same character (some of them extremely obscure) and whether we count characters that are now completely obsolete. (Is the British "civilisation" a different word from the American "civilization"?

7. Nerd note: Part of this scene is shown in the trailer for the film, which can be found on YouTube. If you find the complete film, the relevant scene starts around 45 minutes in. By the way, Egyptian hieroglyphs are not all pictograms either. Many of them are phonetic loans.

Is Shakespeare's "fardels" still an English word?) The larger Chinese dictionaries that aim at being comprehensive have sixty thousand characters or more. But don't despair: the three thousand most common characters include 99 percent of all characters in use in contemporary Chinese documents. In addition, the eight thousand characters in Kroll's *Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* include almost every character you are likely to run across in the most commonly read premodern documents.

There have been various proposals for reforming or simplifying the Chinese written language. In the 1950s, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) introduced a set of simplified characters. These characters are often based on the handwritten cursive style of characters that have been used for centuries when writing informally. So, for example, 習, "to practice," was simplified to 习, and 門, "gate," was simplified to 门. Not all characters have a simplified form; in those cases, people still use the "long" or "traditional" form.[8] Most contemporary Chinese language programs in the United States teach the simplified forms. However, the traditional forms are often used by Chinese outside the PRC, including the Republic of China (ROC on Taiwan). In addition, well-educated people in the PRC also recognize the long-form characters.

People sometimes have very passionate views about the choice to use simplified or long forms. (I once got yelled at by someone at a conference in mainland China for including some traditional characters in the printed version of my talk.) In any case, in this book we will use primarily the long forms of the characters, although I will supply the simplified form of a character in parentheses (when there is one) in the vocabulary list for each lesson.

8. Nerd note: In Chinese, "simplified character" is jiǎntǐzì and is written (with the simplified form in parentheses) 簡體字 (简体字). "Long form" or "traditional" characters are called 繁體字 (繁体字) fántǐzì.

2. Spoken Chinese

The sounds of Chinese words and characters can be written with a romanization system, which is a method of writing a spoken language using the letters of the Roman alphabet. The standard phonetic system for Mandarin Chinese today is Pinyin, which is the one used by the PRC, the United Nations, US news organizations, and almost all contemporary Chinese language textbooks. Prior to the development of Pinyin, Wade-Giles was the standard romanization system. Many older books, articles, and reference works use Wade-Giles, so it is convenient to know if you are really serious about Sinological research. You can recognize a Wade-Giles romanization by the frequent use of apostrophes and hyphens. For example, "Kongzi" (Confucius) in Pinyin is "K'ung-tzu" in Wade-Giles. Pinyin is also distinctive because it begins words with letter combinations that do not occur in English. For example, "qian" and "zhou" are Pinyin romanizations, corresponding to "ch'ien" and "chou" in Wade-Giles.

Two aspects of spoken Chinese make it especially challenging: dialects and tones. The dialects of Chinese are as different from one another as are French, Spanish, and Italian. Fortunately, everyone in China who has graduated from high school can speak what we call the Mandarin dialect, even though they may have been raised speaking another dialect and use that in their home village.[9] We do not know exactly how spoken Chinese sounded in the time of Confucius, so it is standard to pronounce the classical texts in whatever contemporary dialect you speak.

In Modern Chinese, the same set of phonemes (basic sounds) will be a different word depending on the tone with which they are pronounced. Mandarin has four tones (or five, if you count the absence of a tone as a

9. Nerd note: Mandarin is called 普通話 (普通话) pǔtōnghuà, "common speech," in the PRC and 國語 (国语) guóyǔ, the "national language," in the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan. You can also just say 中國話 (中国话) zhōngguóhuà, "Chinese speech," and people will assume you mean the Mandarin dialect.

tone). Nowadays, tones are usually represented with accent marks over the vowels. So (to use the example found in almost every textbook), *ma* can have five different meanings:

> mā 媽, n., "mom" (semantic-phonetic compound; semantic element is 女, "woman")
> má 麻, n., "hemp" (pictogram of plants drying in a shed)
> mǎ 馬, n., "horse" (pictogram of a horse)
> mà 罵, t.v., "to scold" (semantic-phonetic compound; semantic element is a double 口, "mouth")
> ma 嗎, g.p. (sentence-final particle marking a question) (semantic-phonetic compound; semantic element is 口, "mouth")

Notice that 馬, the pictogram of a horse, occurs as the phonetic element in three of the other characters. The following is a rough approximation of the tones. The first tone is high and level, similar to the way you would say, "g" if a music teacher said, "Give me a 'g.'" The second tone rises up, as if you were saying, "Huh?" The third tone dips down slightly, then rises up, like an old teacher answering a knock on the door by saying, "Yeeeeeeeees?" The fourth tone goes down, like disciplining a naughty dog: "No!"

I am not going to try to teach you how to pronounce Chinese in this textbook, because the best way to learn is by hearing and copying someone who is a native speaker. However, here are some free resources that give you paradigms of how to pronounce the syllables of Modern Mandarin:

- "Mandarin Chinese Pinyin Chart with Audio,' *Yabla*, https://chinese.yabla.com/chinese-pinyin-chart.php (accessed February 6, 2019). This chart displays all the syllables in Mandarin Chinese. When you click on a syllable, you get a menu that lets you select the tone in which to hear it pronounced.
- "Mandarin Chinese Pinyin Chart," *DigMandarin*, https://www.digmandarin.com/chinese-pinyin-chart (accessed February 6, 2019). Similar to the preceding but with the syllables drawn out

more (which makes them easier to hear, but is less faithful to actual speech).

- "Say It Right," *Chinesepod*, https://chinesepod.com/tools/pronunciation (accessed February 6, 2019). This is a series of lessons explaining in detail Pinyin pronunciation. If you have the patience, this is actually a good way to learn pronunciation.
- Pleco Software, *Pleco Chinese Dictionary*, https://www.pleco.com/ (accessed February 6, 2019). The basic version of this app is available for both iOS and Android free of charge. It includes pronunciations (read in either a male or female voice) for each character and provides a variety of ways to look up characters, including by Pinyin romanization or by the "radical" (explained in the next section). Best of all, you can just write a character with your finger on the screen to look it up. You can pay for various add-ons, including Kroll's *Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (discussed below).

3. Dictionaries and Radicals

By this point you might be wondering how to look up a character in a Chinese dictionary. Some contemporary dictionaries are organized phonetically and alphabetized according to Pinyin romanization. But what if you don't already know how to pronounce a character? Most Chinese dictionaries have a finding list that follows the famous *Kang Xi Dictionary* (康熙字典 Kāng Xī Zìdiǎn, published 1716 CE) in organizing characters according to 214 radicals (部首 bù shǒu). In principle, every Chinese character has at least one radical in it, or the character is itself a radical. So if you encounter a character that you do not recognize, you first take a guess about what its radical is. Usually the radical is fairly easy to spot, but sometimes there is more than one radical, and other times the radical may be obscure. Next, count the number of "strokes" in the character in addition to the radical, where a stroke is defined by when you would lift up the brush or pen in order to draw the next line. With this information, go to the part of the dictionary that lists all the characters with that radical plus that many additional strokes. There will typically be a number of

characters fitting this description, so you go down the list until you find the character you are looking for.

A traditional dictionary whose main entries are organized by radicals will usually also have an index that allows you to find a character by its pronunciation, and another index organized by the total number of strokes in the character. This last system works well for short lists of characters (like in the glossary of this book), but finding a character by its strokes in a full dictionary is a last resort, as there are (for example) about two hundred characters with six strokes in even a basic dictionary.

See the end of section 6 in this Introduction for recommendations for dictionaries of Classical Chinese.

4. A Note on Japanese

Someone once said to me: "I hear you're an expert on China. I'm going to Tokyo next week. Any advice?" I explained, as gently as I could, that China and Japan are not the same country. Perhaps you wouldn't make the same mistake, but people often fail to realize just how different the Chinese and Japanese languages are. In fact, spoken Chinese and Japanese are not merely distinct languages: they are in completely different language families. This means that spoken English is more closely related historically and structurally to Hindi than Japanese is to Chinese. For example, Japanese is a highly inflected language, where endings on verbs and nouns change to reflect tense, politeness level, etc. Chinese is uninflected; it does by context or grammatical particles what languages like Japanese and English do with inflections. This is why it is so utterly amazing that, more than a thousand years ago, the Japanese adopted the Chinese writing system.

Consider this example of how one verb functions differently in English, Japanese, and Chinese:

English	*Japanese*	*Chinese*
to drink	nomu	yǐn
drink	nomimasu	yǐn
drank	nomimashita	yǐn
not drink	nomimasen	bù yǐn
can drink	nomeru	huì yǐn
Drink!	Nominasai!	Yǐn ba!

As this example suggests, the same character can easily represent one verb in Chinese because the ending on the verb does not change, and grammatical function words can be represented by separate characters. However, characters do not work well for representing Japanese verbs, because they do not give you a way to express the changing inflections.

Traditional Japanese writers solved this problem by developing a two-track writing system. For centuries, high literature and official documents in Japanese were written in Chinese characters with Chinese grammar. Anyone who can read Literary Chinese can read these works written by Japanese authors. The same thing happened in Korea and Vietnam, which also have a rich, native literatures written in Literary Chinese.[10] In addition to writing in Chinese, Japanese authors also developed multiple phonetic scripts, derived from stylized forms of characters but used to represent syllables in Japanese. These latter scripts were used to transcribe diaries, novels, or other works using Japanese words and syntax. Eventually, a hybrid script developed that combined Chinese characters (called *kanji* in Japanese) to represent some common nouns and the stems of verbs along with two phonetic scripts (called *kana*) to represent verb endings, distinctive Japanese grammatical particles, and loanwords from Western languages.

10. Nerd note: I hate to admit it, but the Wikipedia page on "Kanbun" (漢文, the Japanese name for Chinese text) is actually the best introductory-level reading I know on Sino-Japanese, its various forms, and its writing conventions. See Wikipedia Contributors, "Kanbun," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanbun (accessed February 6, 2019).

Here are the same examples from above, but with *kanji* and *kana*:

English	*Japanese*	*Chinese*
to drink	飲む	飲
drink	飲みます	飲
drank	飲みました	飲
not drink	飲みません	不飲
can drink	飲める	會飲
Drink!	飲みなさい!	飲吧!

Let's now look at how a simple sentence would be written differently in idiomatic Modern Chinese and Japanese:

I put the book on the table.
我把書放在桌子上。
私はテーブルの上に本を置きます。

In the Japanese sentence, テーブル are *katakana*, a syllabic script used to represent foreign names and loanwords, like "table" (*tēburu*). The following symbols are *hiragana* used to represent Japanese grammatical particles: は, の, に, を. The other *hiragana* represent the inflection of the verb: きます. Notice also that the characters 我 wǒ "I," 書 shū "book," and 放 fàng "to put" in the Chinese sentence are replaced respectively by the *kanji* 私 (*watakushi*), 本 (*hon*), and 置 (*oku*) in Japanese. (In Chinese, these characters mean "selfish" [read *sī*], "root" [*běn*], and "to install, to set up" [*zhì*].) The only character the two sentences have in common is 上, "top" (read *ue* in Japanese and shàng in Chinese).

In this book, I will sometimes note similarities between Chinese and Japanese, but keep in mind that these are often coincidental.

5. Writing Chinese Characters

When you learned to write the letters of the alphabet, your teachers didn't just show you what the letters look like and say, "Make something that looks like *that,* any way you can." Instead, they showed you *how* to write

each letter, following a specific pattern. For example, in writing the letter "*a*," you (probably) learned to start writing it at the top, move your hand to the left and down until you finish the curve, then lift the pen up to go back to the top, before finishing the back of the letter with a straight line. You practiced this again and again, until it became so automatic that now you don't even think about doing it. In addition, you learned that the printed form of the letter, "a," is different from the handwritten form, "*a*," that there is a cursive form for writing quickly, a Gothic form that was used in some old documents and sometimes for stylistic reasons today, etc. Each of these styles of writing the letters of our alphabet has analogous styles in writing Chinese characters. The guides to writing characters that you will find in almost every book and website on the topic use "regular script," which is where you should start. But keep in mind that you will see in print and in Chinese calligraphy different forms of these characters.[11]

At the beginning, the most important thing to learn is how to write the "strokes," the lines and curves, that make up a Chinese character, and what order to write them in. In the Character List for each lesson, I give you the Pinyin romanization of each character. You can use that to look up the character in any of a number of guides to the proper stroke order for characters. For example, the ROC Ministry of Education has a website where you can look up an animation of the stroke order for the most common characters: http://stroke-order.learningweb.moe.edu.tw/pinyin.do (accessed February 6, 2019). There are also apps for this purpose, including a paid add-on for the *Pleco Chinese Dictionary* (discussed above). I'm old fashioned and prefer actual books. See the end of section 6 of this Introduction for recommendations.

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11. Nerd note: The main styles of Chinese writing are regular script (楷書 kǎishū), semi-cursive script (行書 xíngshū, also called "running style"), cursive script (草書 cǎoshū, also called "grass style"), seal script (篆書 zhuànshū), and clerical script (隸書 lìshū). The first two are what you would guess they are like from their names. The third style, fully cursive script, is used primarily for artistic purposes and is often illegible to even native readers of Chinese. Seal script and clerical script are analogues to Carolingian and Gothic scripts (roughly).

The great Chinese calligrapher 王羲之 Wáng Xīzhī (303–361 CE) said that there are eight different kinds of strokes that make up all Chinese characters.[12] However, different teachers and texts give different lists. The following rules will guide you to draw the strokes in the correct way most of the time:

> Horizontal strokes go from left to right.
> Vertical strokes go from top to bottom.
> Curved or angled strokes go downhill (usually).
> Dots are small downward strokes.

By "curved," I mean any stroke that is not approximately straight; by "angled," I mean lines that are neither flat horizontal nor straight vertical. The main exception to these rules is a kind of angled stroke found in some characters that runs from lower left to upper right.

The order of strokes is usually

> First left-hand part of the character, then the right-hand part.
> First the top part, then the bottom part.
> First the outer part, then the inner part.
> When two strokes cross, first the horizontal stroke, then the vertical stroke.
> First the down and to the left stroke, then the down and to the right stroke.

I recommend that you get some paper intended for character practice that has columns with regular boxes. You can find this online and print it out, buy it in places where Chinese parents shop for their kids, or make your own. Write each new character at least fifty times. Learn to write a

12. Nerd note: These are the 横 héng (horizontal stroke), 竖 shù (vertical stroke), 撇 piě (down and to the left), 捺 nà (down and to the right), 鉤 gōu (hook-shaped), 折 zhé (corner), 點 diǎn (dot), and 挑 tiǎo (lower left to upper right).

character using the correct stroke order, and with the strokes written in the right directions. Characters written correctly will look better, and it is hard to unlearn habits once you have ingrained them.

6. Introducing the Lessons

Each lesson in this textbook has four parts: (1) the readings, (2) the vocabulary, (3) the grammar notes, and (4) supplemental discussions.

(1) The readings are written in a traditional Chinese style: start in the upper right-hand corner of the page and read down the column; when you get to the bottom of the column, go to the next column to the left and read down again. The punctuation is also traditional, consisting only of a dot, 。, which sometimes functions like a comma, sometimes like a period, and sometimes like some other mark of Western punctuation. (Most texts printed prior to the Qing dynasty, 1644–1911 CE, were not punctuated at all.)

(2) The vocabulary list gives the new characters introduced in each reading, as well as any old characters that are being used with new meanings. If the simplified form is significantly different from the long form, the simplified form is supplied in parentheses. After the character is its pronunciation in Pinyin romanization. (A handful of characters have more than one pronunciation, but usually only the pronunciation relevant to the reading is given.) Following the romanization is an abbreviation indicating the grammatical class of the word. (There is a complete list explaining these abbreviations at the end of this Introduction.) Then I give the meaning of the character as used in this lesson along with meanings introduced in earlier lessons. (Sometimes more than one meaning is given if the character is ambiguous, or if it helps to understand some related meanings of the word.) You should learn to recognize and write the long forms of these characters, pronounce them, and give any meanings you have learned for them.

(3) The grammar notes for a reading introduce the text from which the reading is taken (the first time it is used). They then explain the new grammatical constructions that are found in this reading. In every lesson,

I shall give you greatly simplified accounts of Chinese grammar. I will tell you what you need to know to understand the reading for the upcoming lesson (and maybe a *little* bit more). I do this because if I gave you a completely nuanced account of the use of every grammatical construction or particle at the moment I introduced it, you would almost certainly get lost in the details. (My "Nerd Notes" supply additional details and qualifications, and references to other works with more information.)

(4) The supplemental discussions after a lesson contain information about how Classical Chinese differs from Modern Chinese, or about historical and philosophical aspects of the text. There is also a glossary at the end of this book that includes every character and expression introduced in the lessons, organized by the number of strokes in the character (or in the first character in the expression).

My recommendation is that, for each lesson, you start with the vocabulary list and learn to recognize and pronounce the characters. Next, glance over the grammar notes (ignoring the "Nerd Notes" at first and just trying to get the gist of the grammar). Then try to understand the reading, without having the vocabulary list or the grammar notes in front of you. After you think you have understood the reading (or if you become hopelessly confused while trying to do the reading), review the vocabulary list and the grammar notes, to make sure you haven't missed anything.[13] You cannot reread or review too many times! In traditional China, kids (usually only upper-class boys, but some women were also very literate) would start reading Classical Chinese at age five, and repeat every sentence from the classics out loud at least fifty times to *begin with*, so you have a lot of catching up to do.

There are several other works that you will find extremely useful in your quest to learn Classical Chinese.

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13. You can find translations of all of the philosophical texts in this book in Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005). But don't use pre-existing translations as a substitute for trying to understand the text on your own. After all, translations frequently disagree.

Fuller, Michael A. *An Introduction to Literary Chinese*. Rev. ed. Harvard University Press, 2004. I have a slight preference for Rouzer's textbook (see below), but this is also a good textbook for students who already know Modern Chinese, or for you to continue with after you have finished the book you are reading now.

Hackett Publishing, support page for *Classical Chinese for Everyone*, https://www.hackettpublishing.com/chinese-for-everyone-support. The support page for this textbook will provide up-to-date links for relevant web resources, along with supplemental learning and teaching materials.

Harbaugh, Rick. *Chinese Characters: A Genealogy and Dictionary.* Yale University Press, 1999. This work gives you traditional etymologies of the characters, which are very helpful for memorizing the characters and for making small talk with people at parties. It is also available online at http://zhongwen.com/ (accessed February 6, 2019).[14]

Kroll, Paul W. *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*. Rev. ed. Brill, 2017. This is, by far, the best Chinese-English dictionary for Classical Chinese. If you read it carefully, you will also find some wonderfully snarky comments about other dictionaries. This is available as a paid add-on to the *Pleco Chinese Dictionary* (discussed above).

McNaughton, William, and Jiageng Fang, *Reading and Writing Chinese*. 3rd ed. Tuttle Publishing, 2013. This and Teng, *Far East 3000* (see below), are two books that show you the proper stroke order to write the most common characters in Modern Chinese. Some of the characters in my lessons are not in these books, but those characters are composed of components that are in these books. You only need one of these two books.

Pulleyblank, Edwin G. *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar.* UBC Press, 1996. This book is detailed and clear with lots of examples drawn from classical texts, and I will often cross-reference it in the "Nerd Notes" so you can look up more detailed explanations.

Rouzer, Paul. *A New Practical Primer of Literary Chinese.* Harvard University Asia Center, 2007. This is my favorite textbook for teaching

14. Nerd note: Harbaugh's etymologies are generally based on the dictionary of Xǔ Shèn, which we discussed above. This dictionary is very important historically. However, we are learning more about the history of Chinese characters all the time, so the traditional etymologies given by Xǔ Shèn (or Harbaugh) are often inaccurate.

students who already know Modern Chinese, or for you to continue with after you have finished the book you are reading now.

Sturgeon, Donald, ed. *Chinese Text Project*, https://ctext.org (accessed February 6, 2019). This is a wonderful resource that provides a searchable online database of some of the major works of Chinese philosophy, history, literature, and canonical classics. Every philosophical work found in this book is also available in full on the *Chinese Text Project.*

Teng Shou-hsin, ed. *The Far East 3000 Chinese Character Dictionary (Traditional Character Version).* Far East Book Company, 2003. You can use this book or McNaughton and Fang (see above) to learn the proper stroke order for characters.

Van Norden, Bryan W. *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy.* Hackett Publishing, 2011. This book will give you useful historical background along with readable summaries of the overall philosophies of the thinkers whom you will be reading below.

7. Abbreviations for Grammatical Classes

adv. = adverb (word that modifies a verb or adjective: "quickly," "slowly," "mutually," "in response")

conj. = conjunction (word that joins two phrases: "and," "or")

exp. = multiword expression or phrase

g.p. = grammatical particle (words that mark or transform the grammatical class of another word; inflections, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs do similar functions in English)

n. = noun (a word that refers to a thing; "mother," "son," "duke," "table," "righteousness")

prep. = preposition (a word that indicates a relationship between two nouns, or between a noun and a verb: "by," "with," "from," "of")

s.v. = stative verb (a verb that characterizes the quality of something: "are close," "is far," "will be tired")

t.v. = transitive verb (a verb that requires a noun to complete its sense: "hit [the ball]," "read [the book]")

v. = verb (special use verb not easy to classify as stative or transitive)

Lesson 1

1.1. Reading: *Analects* 17.2

子曰。性相近也。
習相遠也。

1.2. Vocabulary

(Eight new characters)

子 zǐ n., Master (here refers to 孔子 Kǒngzǐ, who is better known in the West by the Latinization of his name, "Confucius")
曰 yuē v., to say (used to introduce a direct quotation)[1]
性 xìng n., nature (as in "human nature" or "the natures of humans")
相 xiāng adv., to each other
近 jìn s.v., to be close
也 yě g.p. (comes at end of sentences to mark nominal sentences; often indicates a generalization)
習 (习) xí n., practices
遠 or 遠 (远) yuǎn s.v., to be far

1.3. Grammar Notes

Stative Verbs, Adverbs, and Nominal Sentences

This reading is the complete text of *Analects* 17.2.[2] The *Analects* (known in Chinese as the 論語 (论语) Lúnyǔ, which probably means "Categorized

1. Nerd note: In a later lesson we'll meet a different character 日 rì, which is narrower than 曰 yuē and means "Sun." For this lesson you are only responsible for learning 曰 yuē.

2. For an English translation of this passage, see Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy,* Second Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), p. 48. In each lesson, I will provide a reference to an English translation of the relevant text, but I have two strong recommendations. First, do not look at any English translations until after you have completed the lesson. Second, it is a good idea to compare multiple translations of a single text and think carefully about the differences among them. Sometimes, differences are because translators make mistakes. However, differences can also be because of choices translators make about how to balance values like readability and fidelity to the original. For more on these issues, see sections 6.4.2–3 and 7.4.2, below.