

Formation of Chinese characters

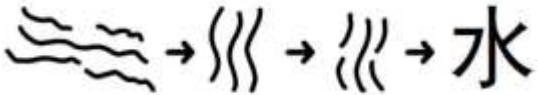
Types of Chinese characters based on formation

- Pictograms
- Simple ideograms
- Ideogrammic compounds
- Pictophonetic characters

xiàng xíng

Pictograms (象 形 - form imitation)

- Words formed from things which can be drawn (such as animals, a person, or objects, etc.)
- Roughly 600 Chinese characters are pictograms

Changes of Pictograms	Pronunciation	Meaning
	<u>日</u> (rì)	Sun
	<u>月</u> (yuè)	Moon
	<u>目</u> (mù)	Eye
	<u>木</u> (mù)	Tree
	<u>山</u> (shān)	Mountain
	<u>水</u> (shuǐ)	water

What's the difference between the pictographic characters and their modern version?

- -- The characters are no longer imitations of things they refer to, but in **square forms**;
- -- The second is the **soft lines** have turned **solid strokes**.

zhǐ shì

- Simple ideograms (指 事 - indication)
- Simple ideograms express meaning by **simple symbols**.
- Characters of this sort either **add indicators to pictographs** to make new meanings, or **illustrate abstract concepts directly**.



1



2



3



shàng
上

Up



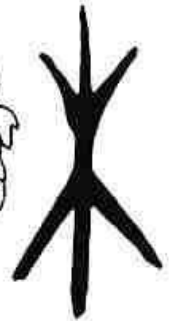
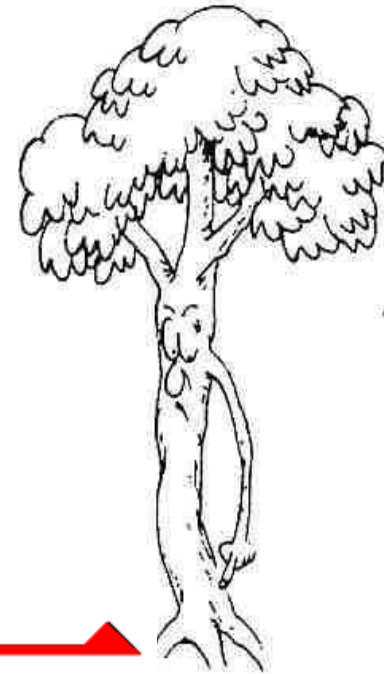
xià
下

Down

- 本(běn) ("root")
- a tree (木 mù) with the base indicated by an extra stroke.



- 末(mò) ("apex")
- the reverse of 本 (bēn), a tree with the top highlighted by an extra stroke.



huì yì

- Ideogrammic compounds (会意 - "joined meaning")
- In ideogrammic compounds, two or more pictographic or ideographic characters are combined to suggest a third meaning.

First part		Second part		Character
亻 (person)	+	木(tree)	→	休(rest)
木(wood)	+	木(wood)	→	林(woods)
日(sun)	+	月(moon)	→	明(bright)
人(person)	+	人(person)	→	从(follow)
艹(grass)	+	田(field)	→	苗(seedling)
禾 (grain)	+	火 (fire)	→	秋 (autumn)
爪 (hand)		木 (wood, bush)		采 (harvest)

First part		Second part		Third part		Character
木(wood)	+	木(wood)	+	木(wood)	→	森 (forest)
木(wood)	+	木(wood)	+	火 (fire)	→	焚 (burn)

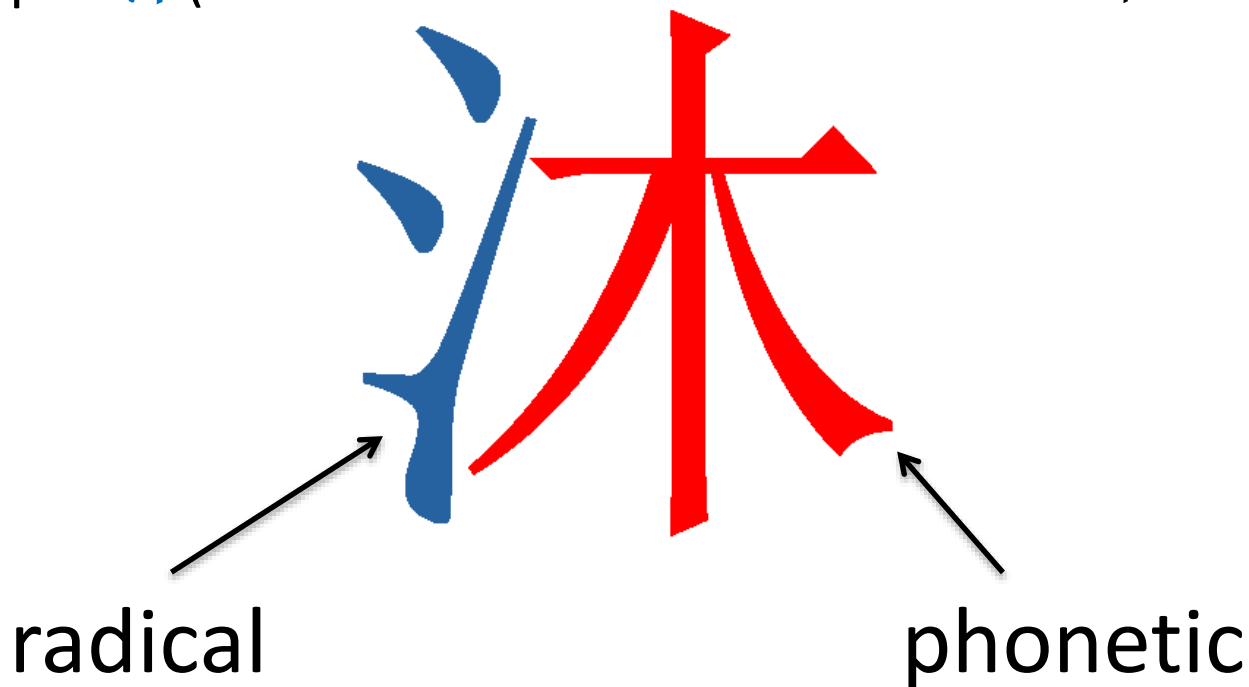
xíng shēng

- **Pictophonetic characters** (形 声- "form and sound")
- Pictophonetic characters are made up by two parts: **radical** (semantic element) and **phonetic element**
- **90%** of Chinese characters are pictophonetic characters.

- Most often, **the radical** is on one side (often the **left**), while **the phonetic** is on the other side (often the **right**),

mù

- Example: 沐 (to wash one's hair) = 氵 "water" + 木 "mù".

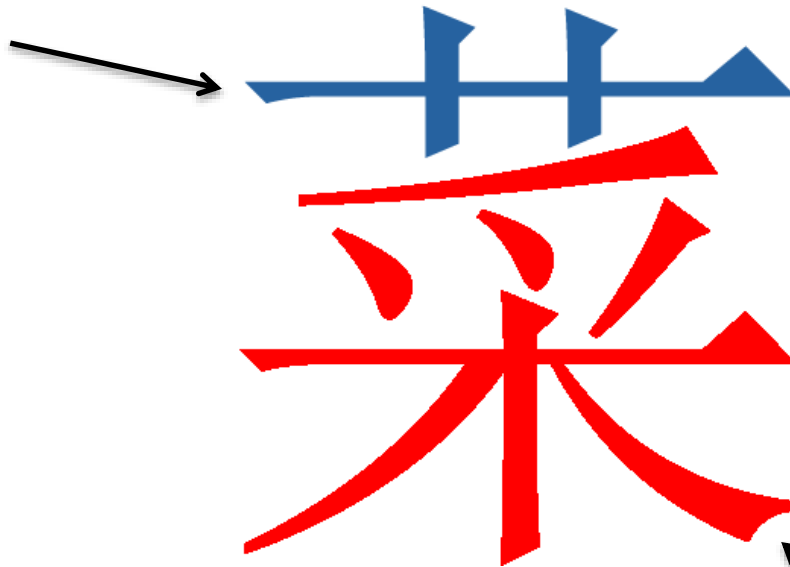


- Also common is for the semantic and phonetic elements to be stacked **on top of each other**

cài

- 菜 (vegetable, food) = 艹 "plant" + 采 "cǎi".

radical



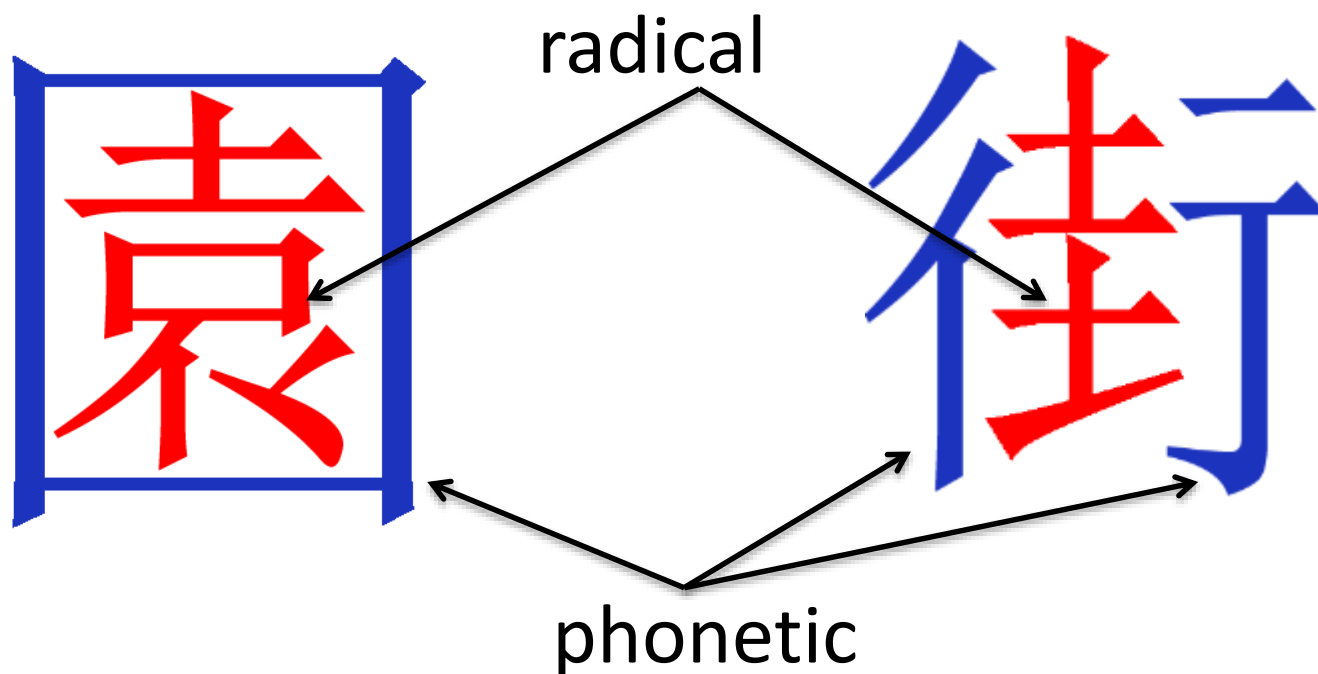
phonetic

- More rarely, the phonetic may be placed inside the semantic,

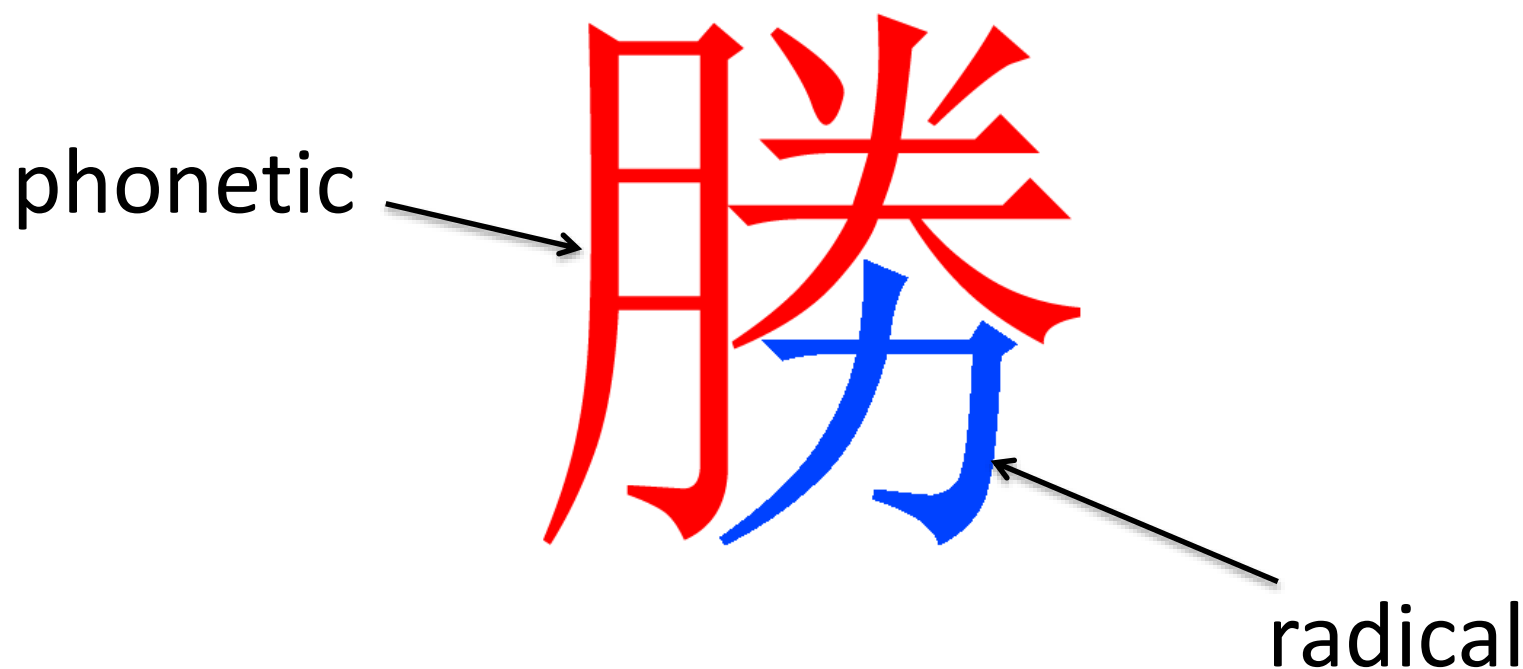
yuán

jiē

as in 園 (garden) = 囗 "enclosure" + 袁, or 街 = 行 "go, movement" + 圭.



- More **complicated combinations** also exist,
shèng
such as 勝 (win)= 力 "strength" + 朕 (**zhèn**), where the semantic is in the lower-right quadrant, and the phonetic is the other three quadrants.



radical			phonetic			character		
Char.	Meaning		Char.	Pron.		Char.	Pron.	Meaning
氵	water	+	淋	lín	=	淋	lín	to pour
艹	grass	+	采	cǎi	=	菜	cài	vegetable
艹	grass	+	牙	yá	=	芽	yá	bud
木	wood	+	乔	qiáo	=	桥	qiáo	bridge
日	sun	+	青	qīng	=	晴	qíng	sunny
女	woman	+	马	mǎ	=	妈	mā	mother