FUN PUZZLES WITH THE CHINESE CHARACTER
OR GETTING TO KNOW THE MIND OF THE CHINESE
& WHY THE CHARACTERS MEAN WHAT THEY DO
(First edition)
(Students edition)

漢字樂謎

by
Dennis N. McDonald

A book for the student, the puzzler and those who want to make learning the Chinese character easy and fun!
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FOREWORD

I have puzzled over the Chinese character for nearly fifty years when, as a missionary, I was introduced to my first Oriental language, Japanese. The Japanese language “borrowed” the Chinese characters and called them KAN-JI (literally: Chinese character). From the start I was captivated by this unusual way (at least for westerners) of expressing ideas in writing. The general idea held by many in those days was: “Westerners will never learn to read the Chinese character”. Perhaps through having a different bent of mind I was determined to learn the characters and use them in writing the Japanese language which I was speaking every day. I found that the best place to learn the Chinese character was not from the study of books, but by looking at them in the streets, in the shops, on advertisements that were surrounding me all of the time. I soon found that by this ‘looking and observing’ some characters quickly became familiar to me and a question to anyone standing nearby would inform me of the pronunciation. After that, consulting a dictionary was all that was needed to find the meaning too. And, as one tends to notice the characters that turn up more often, I learned the commoner simpler ones first. This put me on the right track and I soon found that I could reasonably read some of the things that were going on all around me, and what is more it was fun! I am sure that if you really want to look into the seeming mystery of those Chinese characters this book will help to do it. The children in the orient spend a large portion of their school time learning to read and write the thousands of characters but for them it is not fun, just a chore. Even in later years, although they can read and use the characters they learned at school the many do not know why they mean what they do. This book will not only make it enjoyable to learn the characters, it will help you to see why they mean what they do. So, go on, have fun with the Chinese characters.
THE INTRODUCTION

Read this first

This book is not written especially for the student of Oriental languages, although he or she will, I am sure, appreciate a great deal more about the characters and their structure, besides learning many new ones and also the importance of the radicals.

No, I am writing for the puzzler. So if you are a student studying a language you will benefit in two ways: learning and having fun too! It is too, I hope, something brand new. It is a new kind of ‘puzzle’, rewarding when solved, not just from the amusement or even the accomplishment angle, but from a truly beneficial angle: learning a new written language which about a billion people know and yet who strangely, speak many, many different languages or dialects.

How many of us have not done a crossword puzzle at some time. Skeletons, Acrostics, Cryptics and such, we enjoy them especially when we work them out and find they are even right! But what really have we leaned and benefited, apart from adding a few new, perhaps very unusual words to our vocabulary? Why do we do puzzles like this? Well, is it not meeting the challenge and winning? After all we all like to win - sometimes! This book “FUN PUZZLES WITH THE CHINESE CHARACTER” is best viewed as a continuous puzzle to find out why did the Chinese invent the 10,000 or so characters that have become the means of communication for about a quarter of the world’s population even in our day! Is there any sense behind those stroke filled characters? In fact why do those characters mean what they do? How can we get to understand them?

Well let me tell you something about the character for ‘understand’ now. It is made up of two parts: number ‘eight’ and a ‘knife’. Is it not true if you want to understand something difficult you break it up into smaller parts - the Chinese drew ‘eight parts’ into that character - still true today! So that is what I do in this book: break the characters down into bits anyone can grasp. But here we have a strange phenomenon: Those who use them the most, especially the Chinese and Japanese seem to know the least about why they mean what they do! Learning the
characters from their first days at school through most of their educational years they learned them by rote. And as they will tell you not a very pleasant one! It is often the foreigner to the Chinese character that some how has investigated the matter of why the characters mean what they do, who has discovered the wisdom, the insight into human nature that is locked away in those characters for the last 4,000 years or more. In this book I want to show you what I have found out about them. Doing this is not only immensely rewarding and a grand adventure into the unknown, it is real fun all the way. It can be a field of discovery.

For those who use the Chinese character, or are students of oriental languages this book “FUN PUZZLES WITH THE CHINESE CHARACTER” will be of great utility not only helping you learn the characters but too, to understand why they mean what they do, and aid in remembering how to write the ones you know already as well as learning many, many others.

The main feature of every chapter is: The Puzzle. Simple comments will show you how the puzzles are worked out. For the student the Puzzle(s) can be viewed as exercises or a test of things learned. The characters have been specially selected to make the puzzles amusing as well as instructive as also those most commonly seen. At the end of the book there is a large appendix which provides valuable charts, tables and lists for those wanting to delve deeper and do further research into the structure of the Chinese character. References are made to these continuously when their help is essential. Some of the information that will be constantly used is on a handy reference card that will save you continually going backward and forward in the book. Do not lose it, in fact make a photocopy of it and keep the originals ‘just in case’.

A word about “radicals” you will notice this expression used continuously. It has reference to simple, commonly used characters from which all other character are built. There are 214 of them - not many compared to the 10,000 characters that exist. This book concentrates on helping you learn the important ones of these first. After that recognising more complex characters comes easy, and it is fun trying to interpret these as you come across them. Here is hoping you will have as much fun doing all the puzzles and quickly using the characters as I have had in writing this book.

Dennis N. McDonald
Billerica
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How to use this book

This book has many uses. It is primarily to have fun with. If you have fun with the reading and the puzzles you will learn enjoyably and I think quickly. It is not of course teaching any particular language. It is to open the world of the Chinese character to Westerners, easily, enjoyably.

In this age we travel just about anywhere, quickly efficiently. When you first get to the orient, particularly main land China, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan, besides other countries you are suddenly confronted with a writing system that is different, very different, even intimidating, incomprehensible. But it need not be. The writing system was invented and developed for everyone and truly is international, bridging all languages and cultures. View it as a help not a hindrance - it is not.

Are you going to the Orient for the first time? Have you had no experience with the writing systems of the Orient before? This book can help you. Naturally, most people would be able to do some preparation before travelling to the Far East so if you can try and become familiar with the fifty most common radicals. They are found in the Appendix and in chapters that deal with them in detail. The puzzles in the body of the book concentrate on these fifty signs and doing the puzzles will at least get you to recognise them when you see them. At best you will be well on the way to feeling at home with more complicated characters and begin to analyse them for yourself.

Are you going to the Orient for the first time...become familiar with the fifty most common radicals. They are found in the Appendix.

Possibly you are not travelling anywhere just now or are contemplating a visit to China or there-abouts next year. Then you have some of that precious commodity called time. Start at the first chapter and work you way through the puzzles. Do not worry if you do not get them all right the first time. Keep moving on, you are learning to recognise the characters as pictures, just like you would any new scene put before you. At first rather inaccurately, you may confuse two characters that are somewhat similar, but keep on. Look at the details in the characters, think about the
parts, particularly *the radicals* which are the basic pieces from which all characters are built. A complete list of these is found in the Appendix together with their meaning. *Get used to consulting it all of the time.* Use the card list to identify characters by number, then check the meaning in the appendix. When doing the puzzles and stuck for a solution, search through it to find the meaning you want. This is by no a waste of time. It is fun when you suddenly realise that you are getting sense from these ancient signs, that your mind has gone back perhaps more than four thousand years, and you are comprehending something that was written down so long ago. Remember you will learn the characters by looking at them, diligently, carefully, enjoyably. If you not having fun, put the book down for a while and come back to it later as the challenge will certainly make you do so.

While the book is designed for progressive use from chapter one on, all of the chapters and books Two and Three have a particular study interest of their own. If you have a specialised interest in any of the subjects dealt with, go to that chapter and work your way through the puzzles there. You will notice that I have left very generous margins. This is to give you plenty of room for making notes of your own as you progress or even trying your hand at copying characters. If you intend to do that check with the material on how to write the characters first, then you will be able to write in an acceptable way. There is plenty of room at the bottom of the pages too. This is space to note down your solutions to the puzzles and I suggest that you do this in pencil so that it can be erased and will not be a hindrance to future use.

**Start from the first chapter and work your way through the puzzles. Do not worry if you do not get them all right the first time.**

**Look at the detail in the characters,... particularly *the radicals* which are the basic pieces from which all characters are built. A complete list of these is found in the Appendix.**

If you are using this book to assist you in getting to know and understand the meaning of characters in connection with the study of a language, such as Japanese, Cantonese or Mandarin then I suggest to start at the beginning and work you way right through. You may, on the other hand, want to get *writing* the characters as you go. This will certainly assist you to imprint the characters on your mind. Turning to Chapter Four “Fun writing the first strokes” will prove useful in getting off to a good start in writing correctly. Be sure and refer to it from time to time as also the section in the Appendix on the *basic strokes and stroke order.* It is important to start writing the characters correctly from the outset and develop good habits. Some of the ‘fun puzzles’ will help you do just that.
It may be that you know many of the characters dealt with in this book but like so many are at a loss to say why the characters mean what they do! The book will help you to get to grips with “why the characters mean what they do”. The whole book is dealing with this matter but if you get stuck with a solution to a puzzle go to the Appendix section “The 214 Radicals and their meaning” especially considering “the 50 most common radical” list and chapters such as Two: “Getting to know the mind of the ancients”, “Deep thoughts from simple signs” and “Think like the Ancient Chinese”. Also keep the card containing the list of the radicals by you when reading - it will save you time in identifying characters and the numbers will enable you to check the meaning against the list in the reference section quickly.

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This book is not very long. I did not intend for it to be daunting like so many grammar books are. You probably will not get all of the puzzles right the first time. Go back and go over them again at a later date. You will ingest many ideas as you go along and later on you will not only recognise many of the characters more readily, but you will get used to the idea of getting thoughts, not from sounds of a language, like western languages (how many of us at some time only recognise a new word when we try to pronounce it?) but from seeing the depth of meaning in the various characters and know “Why they just mean what they do!” Finally, do you want to have more fun? The look out for a proposed future book “MORE - FUN PUZZLES WITH THE CHINESE CHARACTER”