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# The letter d in chinese

Variations of the post below were first published at Medium.com and on Quora by the same author. It may be obvious to some, less to others, but the Chinese writing system is not based on an alphabet. An alphabet consists of a small number of letters. Letters represent sounds. They spell out how words should be pronounced. Letters don't have any meaning by themselves. A Chinese character on the other hand is a more complex unit. It contains an indication of pronunciation as well as an indication of meaning. There are more than 100,000 different Chinese characters. It is actually impossible to count them all precisely. The number of useful characters, for a literate person however, is "only" between 3,000 and 6,000. That is still a huge number compared to the 26 letters of our alphabet. Related: Why There Is No Chinese Alphabet What exactly is a Chinese character? Here is one way to look at it: take the English word "unexpected" for example. Let's split it into smaller units of meaning: [UN]-[EXPECT]-[ED]. Chinese characters are like those 3 parts. In Chinese, UN would be a character, EXPECT would be another, and ED would be yet another. The word "unexpected" would then be a 3-character word. Let's take an actual Chinese word as example and see how this works: 昨天 (zuó tiān) => yesterday We have 2 characters here: 昨 (zuó) + 天 (tiān). Let's imagine we can split it in English the same way: [YESTER] + [DAY]. As in English, the second character 天 (tiān), means day, and as in English, the first one is not a word if taken alone. But it is sufficiently unique to give the whole word its meaning. Now, let's invent a word in English and Chinese at the same time: 昨月 (zuó yuè) => yestermoth You can guess what I mean with this word, and a Chinese person would probably guess what I mean too, even if those words don't actually exist. This is to show that yester and 昨 (zuó) carry a meaning of their own, even if they are not words. I hope this gives you a sense of what Chinese characters are and how they differ from words and letters. Now there are a few differences between Chinese characters and English morphemes (a morpheme is what those parts like yester, day, un, expect, ed would be called by a linguist). When I see 天 (tiān), I see a small icon which represents a person extending his arms under the sky. I see it this way, because that's how it has been explained to me, and with a bit of imagination, it makes sense. The first meaning of 天 (tiān) is "sky" and by extension "day". So, Chinese characters are in a way, like small abstract pictures. And that's an important difference with English morphemes. Another difference is that English morphemes change to fit the words they contribute to. The word "morpheme" is an indication of this phenomenon. For example "day" becomes "dat" in the word "daily". There are many words in English for which it is hard to find the morphemes, because they blend together. In addition, there are grammar rules like conjugation that further transform words so that their morphemes are not quite visible. In Chinese, there is no conjugation, and the morphemes never blend in with their surrounding. Instead, words are made by composing characters like you would compose Lego bricks. Here is a word I found interesting when I studied Chinese: 共产主义 (gōng chǎn zhǔ yì) => communism It's interesting because you can analyze it at multiple levels. You can take it as a whole word, which means "communism". You can split it in 2: 共产 (gōng chǎn) + 主义 (zhǔ yì): communist + ideology. You can split it in 4: 共 (gòng) + 产 (chǎn) + 主 (zhǔ) + 义 (yì): shared + production + main + meaning. The last part I interpret as something like: "the mainstream idea of shared production", in other words, communism. I find this quite interesting. The meaning of words seems more transparent than in English. Like Lego bricks, you can de-construct words and re-assemble them more flexibly. So far we have looked at Chinese characters from the outside. Let's take a look at what is inside a character. The Make-up of Chinese Characters Characters are drawn inside an invisible square that marks its borders. So they all have roughly the same size, and they can really be assembled like bricks. A Chinese text is like a grid of characters. Chinese kids, when they practice writing, use grid paper. They are instructed to pay careful attention to the proportions and position of the characters inside the virtual square. A character is not a random drawing. It is made of strokes. There are 6 basic strokes. Some of them have several variants, and strokes can be combined to create more strokes. But the basic idea is that most characters are made from a small number of strokes. Strokes have names. By only naming the strokes, I can describe any character. In a way, strokes are closer to the concept of letters than characters are. They are the smallest unit of Chinese writing. Stroke order is important. Kids learn which stroke goes before which at school. It is important because of how muscle memory works. Our brain is able to automatically remember a complex sequence of movement. If strokes were written in a random order, they would be much harder to remember. There are only a few rules for stroke ordering. Characters that look very complex at first, are in fact just a familiar sequence of strokes. Related: 7 Basic Rules On Chinese Stroke Order Complex characters can be broken down at a higher level than strokes. The character above: 国 (guó), can be broken down into 2 components: 口 (wéi) and 玉 (yù). The vast majority of characters in Chinese are compound characters. They can be broken down into 2 or more components, and these components in turn can be broken down. There are several ways in which characters can be broken down into components. The important thing to remember is that a component in a character can take on one of those functions: Meaning component (adds to the character's meaning) Sound component (gives an indication of pronunciation for the character) Empty component (is only there to make the character distinct from other characters) A great many Chinese characters have 2 components, one to indicate the pronunciation, and one to indicate the meaning. Even the most complex Chinese character, with its 56 strokes, can be broken down into familiar components. (biáng) Components and strokes are the basis on which all Chinese characters are built. Once you master these building blocks, you can analyze and learn any character efficiently. Want To Learn Chinese? Join TutorMing to learn more! What is the main purpose of your visit to China and which is the most appropriate visa category for your application? Categories Description of Visa C Issued to foreign crew members of means of international transportation, including aircraft, trains and ships, or motor vehicle drivers engaged in cross-border transport activities, or to the accompanying family members of the crew members of the above-mentioned ships. D Issued to those who intend to reside in China permanently. F Issued to those who intend to go to China for exchanges, visits, study tours and other activities. G Issued to those who intend to transit through China. J1 Issued to resident foreign journalists of foreign news organizations stationed in China. The intended duration of stay in China exceeds 180 days. J2 Issued to foreign journalists who intend to go to China for short-term news coverage. The intended duration of stay in China is no more than 180 days. L Issued to those who intend to go to China as a tourist. M Issued to those who intend to go to China for commercial and trade activities. Q1 Issued to those who are family members of Chinese citizens or of foreigners with Chinese permanent residence and intend to go to China for family reunion, or to those who intend to go to China for the purpose of foster care. The intended duration of stay in China exceeds 180 days. "Family members" refers to spouses, parents, sons, daughters, spouses of sons or daughters, brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandsons, granddaughters and parents-in-law. Q2 Issued to those who intend to visit their relatives who are Chinese citizens residing in China or foreigners with permanent residence in China. The intended duration of stay in China is no more than 180 days. R Issued to those who are high-level talents or whose skills are urgently needed in China. S1 Issued to those who intend to go to China to visit the foreigners working or studying in China, or to those who intend to go to China for other private matters. The intended duration of stay in China is no more than 180 days. "Family members" refers to spouses, parents, sons, daughters, spouses of sons or daughters, brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandsons, granddaughters and parents-in-law. X1 Issued to those who intend to study in China for a period of more than 180 days. X2 Issued to those who intend to study in China for a period of no more than 180 days. Z Issued to those who intend to work in China. Here are the documents you shall prepare before submission of visa application: 1. Basic Documents (1) Passport Original passport with at least six months of remaining validity and blank visa pages, and a photocopy of the passport's data page and the photo page if it is separate. (2) Visa Application Form and Photo One completed Visa Application Form with a recently-taken color passport photo (bare-head, full face) against a light background attached (3) Proof of legal stay or residence status (applicable to those not applying for the visa in their country of citizenship) If you are not applying for the visa in the country of your citizenship, you must provide the original and photocopy of your valid certificates or visa of stay, residence, employment or student status, or other valid certificates of legal staying provided by the relevant authorities of the country where you are currently staying. (4) Photocopy of previous Chinese passports or previous Chinese visas (applicable to foreign citizenship those who were Chinese citizens and have obtained foreign citizenship) If you are applying for a Chinese visa for the first time, you should provide your previous Chinese passport held and a photocopy of its data page. If you have obtained Chinese visas before and want to apply for a Chinese visa with a renewed foreign passport that does not contain any Chinese visa, you should present the photocopy of the previous passport's data page and the photo page if it is separate, as well as the previous Chinese visa page. (If your name on the current passport differs from that on the previous one, you must provide an official document of name change.) 2 Supporting Documents C-Visa A letter of guarantee issued by a foreign transport company or an invitation letter issued by a relevant entity in China. D-Visa The original and photocopy of the Confirmation Form for Foreigners' Permanent Residence Status issued by the Ministry of Public Security of China. We kindly remind you that: Holders of D Visa shall, within 30 days from the date of their entry, apply to the exit/entry administrations of public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level in the proposed places of residence for foreigners' residence permits. F-Visa An invitation letter issued by a relevant entity or individual in China. The invitation should contain: (1) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) (2) Information on the planned visit (purpose of visit, arrival and departure dates, place(s) to be visited, relations between the applicant and the inviting entity or individual, financial source for expenditures) (3) Information on the inviting entity or individual (name, contact telephone number, address, official stamp, signature of the legal representative or the inviting individual) G-Visa An onward air (train or ship) ticket with confirmed date and seat to the destination country or region. J1-Visa Visa Notification Letter issued by the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and an official letter issued by the media organization for which the journalist works. Applicants should contact the press section of the Chinese Embassy/Consulate General in advance and complete relevant formalities. We kindly remind you that: Holders of J1 Visa shall, within 30 days from the date of their entry, apply to the exit/entry administrations of public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level in the proposed places of residence for foreigners' residence permits. J2-Visa Visa Notification Letter issued by the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China or other authorized units in China and an official letter issued by the media organization for which the journalist works. Applicants should contact the press section of the Chinese Embassy/Consulate General in advance and complete the required formalities. L-Visa Documents showing the itinerary including air ticket booking record (round trip) and proof of a hotel reservation, etc. or an invitation letter issued by a relevant entity or individual in China. The invitation letter should contain: (1) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) (2) Information on the planned visit (arrival and departure dates, place(s) to be visited, etc.) (3) Information on the inviting entity or individual (name, contact telephone number, address, official stamp, signature of the legal representative or the inviting individual) M-Visa (1) Documents on the commercial activity issued by a trade partner in China, or trade fair invitation or other invitation letters issued by relevant entity or individual. The invitation letter should contain: a) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) b) Information on the planned visit (purpose of visit, arrival and departure dates, place(s) to be visited, relations between the applicant and the inviting entity or individual, financial source for expenditures) c) Information on the inviting individual (name, contact telephone number, address, official stamp, signature of the legal representative or the inviting individual) Q1-Visa For family reunion, the following documents are required: (1) An invitation letter issued by a Chinese citizen or a foreign citizen with a Chinese permanent residence permit who lives in China. The invitation letter should contain: a) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) b) Information on the visit (purpose of visit, intended arrival date, place(s) of intended residence, intended duration of residence, arrival and departure dates, relations between the applicant and the inviting entity or individual, financial source for expenditures) c) Information on the inviting individual (name, contact telephone number, address, official stamp, signature of legal representative or the inviting individual, etc.) (2) Photocopy of Chinese ID or foreign passport and permanent residence permit (3) Original and photocopy of certification (marriage certificate, birth certificate, certification of kinship issued by Public Security Bureau or notarized certification of kinship) showing the relationship of family members between applicant and inviting individual. "Family members" refers to spouses, parents, sons, daughters, spouses of sons or daughters, brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandsons, granddaughters and parents-in-law. For foster care, the following documents are required: (1) Foster entrustment notarization issued by Chinese Embassies/Consulates General in foreign countries or Foster Care Power of Attorney notarized and authenticated in the country of residence or in China. (2) Original and photocopy of the consignor's passport(s), as well as the original and photocopy of certification (marriage certificate, birth certificate, certification of kinship issued by Public Security Bureau or notarized certification of kinship) notarized and authenticated certification showing the relationship between parents or guardians and children. (3) A letter of consent on foster care issued by the trustee living in China who has agreed to provide foster care services and a photocopy of the ID of the trustee. (4) A photocopy of the certificate indicating the permanent residence status abroad of the parent(s) when the child was born, provided that either or both parents of the child are Chinese citizens. We kindly remind you that: Holders of Q1 Visa shall, within 30 days from the date of their entry, apply to the exit/entry administrations of public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level in the proposed places of residence for foreigners' residence permits. Q2-Visa (1) An invitation letter issued by a Chinese citizen or a foreign citizen with a Chinese permanent residence permit who lives in China. The invitation letter should contain: a) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) b) Information on the visit (purpose of visit, arrival and departure dates, place(s) to be visited, relations between the applicant and the inviting individual, financial source for expenditures) c) Information on the inviting individual (name, contact number, address, signature etc.) (2) Photocopy of Chinese ID or foreign passport and permanent residence permit of the inviting individual. R-Visa The applicant should submit relevant certification in accordance with relevant regulations, and meet the relevant requirements of the competent authorities of the Chinese government on high-level talents and individualized with special skills urgently needed by China. S1-Visa (1) An invitation letter from the inviting individual (a foreigner who stays or resides in China for work or studies) which contains: a) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) b) Information on the visit (purpose of visit, arrival and departure dates, place of intended residence, relations between the applicant and the inviting individual, financial source for expenditures, etc.) c) Information on the inviting individual (name, contact telephone number, address, signature, etc.) (2) A photocopy of the inviting individual's passport and residence permit (3) Original and photocopy of certification (marriage certificate, birth certificate, certification of kinship issued by Public Security Bureau or notarized certification of kinship) showing the relationship of immediate family members between applicants and inviting individual. "immediate family members" refers to spouses, parents, sons or daughters under the age of 18, parents-in-law. We kindly remind you that: Holders of S1 Visa shall, within 30 days from the date of their entry, apply to the exit/entry administrations of public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level in the proposed places of residence for foreigners' residence permits. S2-Visa For visiting family members for a short period, the following documents are required: (1) An invitation letter issued by the inviting individual (a foreigner who stays or resides in China for work or studies) which contains: a) Information on the applicant (full name, gender, date of birth, etc.) b) Information on the visit (purpose of visit, arrival and departure dates, place(s) to be visited, relations between the applicant and the inviting individual, financial source for expenditures, etc.) c) Information on the inviting individual (name, contact telephone number, address, signature, etc.) (2) A photocopy of the inviting individual's (a foreigner who stays or lives in China for work or studies) passport and residence permit (3) Photocopy of certification (marriage certificate, birth certificate or notarized certification of kinship) showing the relationship of family members between the applicant and the inviting individual. "Family members" refers to spouses, parents, sons, daughters, spouses of sons or daughters, brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandsons, granddaughters and parents-in-law. For private affairs, documentation identifying the nature of the private affairs should be provided as required by the consular officer. X1-Visa (1) Original and photocopy of the Admission Letter issued by a school or other entities in China. (2) Original and photocopy of "Visa Application for Study in China" (Form JW201 or Form JW202). We kindly remind you that: Holders of X1 Visa shall, within 30 days from the date of their entry, apply to the exit/entry administrations of public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level in the proposed places of residence for foreigners' residence permits. X2-Visa Original and photocopy of Admission Notice issued by a school or other entities in China. Z-Visa One of the following documents: (1) Foreigners Employment Permit of the People's Republic of China issued by Chinese government authorities for Human Resources and Social Security, as well as Invitation Letter of Duly Authorized Entity or Confirmation Letter of Invitation issued by relevant Chinese entities. (2) Permit for Foreign Experts Working in China or Notification Letter of Foreigners Work Permit in China issued by the State Bureau of Foreign Experts as well as Invitation Letter of Duly Authorized Entity or Confirmation Letter of Invitation issued by relevant Chinese entities. (3) Registration Certificate of Resident Representative Offices of enterprises of foreign countries(regions) issued by Chinese authorities of industrial and commercial administration, as well as Invitation Letter of Duly Authorized Entity or Confirmation Letter of Invitation issued by relevant Chinese entities as well as Invitation Letter of Duly Authorized Entity or Confirmation Letter of Invitation issued by relevant Chinese entities. (4) An approval document for commercial performances issued by the Chinese government authorities for cultural affairs or Invitation Letter of Duly Authorized Entity or Confirmation Letter of Invitation issued by relevant Foreign Affairs Office of provincial governments of China. (5) Letter of Invitation to Foreigners for Offshore Petroleum Operations in China issued by China National Offshore Oil Corporation. We kindly remind you that: Holders of Z Visa shall, within 30 days from the date of their entry, apply to the exit/entry administrations of public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level in the proposed places of residence for foreigners' residence permits. 3. Special Reminder (1) The invitation letter may be in the form of fax, photocopy or computer printout, but the consular officer may require the applicant to submit the original of the invitation letter. (2) If necessary, the consular officer may require the applicant to provide other proof documents or supplementary materials, or require an interview with the applicant. (3) The consular officer will decide on whether or not to issue the visa and on its validity, duration of stay and number of entries in light of specific conditions of the applicant. (4) For further details, please visit the web-site of the relevant Chinese Embassy or Consulate General.

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