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FLARR Pages #6: The Word in Chinese

Jenny Lin

Minnesota State University Moorhead

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FLARR PAGES #6

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File under:

- Chinese
- Characters (Chinese)
- Complex Meanings
- Compound Meanings

"The Word in Chinese"

-Jenny Lin, Moorhead State University

天

tiān

heaven; sky; day

This character shows a man standing on his feet (人) and extending his arms egotistically (大). But high above man (人), be he ever so great (大), stretches the heavenly firmament (一), filling the empty space above his shoulders and directing his footsteps. Hence: 天 means "heaven" or "sky". Since the growing light of the sky ushers in the dawn of day, 天 came to mean also "day".

门 (門)

mén

door; gate

The traditional writing for "door" or "gate" is 門, which represents a door with two leaves. The simplified version now has only an open doorway: 门.

*** The combination of the three words above, 天安门, refers to the "Heavenly Peace Gate" -- the Tian'anmen Gate in Beijing.

安

ān

peace; contentment

The character for peace and contentment is made up of woman (女) and roof (宀). Man conceived the idea that to attain peace he should have only one woman under the roof or confine her within the house.

忘

wàng

to forget

This character consists of two words. The upper word, 亡, means "dead" and the lower word, 心, means "heart". When your heart is dead, of course, you won't be able to remember things.

中

zhōng

middle; center; neutral

By shooting an arrow right into the center of a rectangular target, man scored a bull's eye and secured a mark for "center": 中. The symbol also means standing in the middle or being neutral.

国 (國)

guó

kingdom; country; nation

The traditional writing 國 is composed of 口 (boundary), 一 (land), 口 mouth, and 戈 (spear). 國 therefore means land, people, and weapons within a boundary -- a country. The simplified form (国) puts only 玉 (jade, representing the king) within 口 (the boundary) to produce 国 (nation).

*** Thus, the two words above, 中国 (or 中國), mean "China" -- "the Middle Kingdom".

炎

yán

blaze; flame; infection

The character for flame or infection (炎) was formed from two fires (火), one atop the other. Because of its inflammatory nature, it may well spread like wildfire, just like germs spreading inside the body.

好

hǎo

good; well; excellent

Men combined 女 (woman; girl) and 子 (child or son) to form a character for goodness and excellence.

吐

tù

to spit out; to vomit

The ideograph 吐, literally from mouth (口) to earth (土), means to spit or vomit. Figuratively, it can mean to disclose or reveal the truth.

明

míng

bright; brilliant; enlightened

The left-side word (日) means "the sun" and the right side word (月) means "the moon". The sun and the moon were combined to produce an ideograph for bright; brilliant or enlightened. By the way, the Chinese expression for "tomorrow" is míng tiān (明天), which literally means "a bright day".

忍

rěn

to tolerate; to endure; to bear; to put up with

This character consists of two words. The bottom word is 心 (heart), the seat of feelings. The upper word 刃 means "blade" or "the edge of a knife, sword, etc.". It takes a tremendous amount of tolerance to bear pains, insults, humiliation, hardships, extreme hunger, cruel punishments, etc. as if a knife or a sword were cutting your heart.

男

nán

male; man/men; masculine

This character consists of two words. The top word, 田, means "rice field" and the bottom word, 力, means "strength". A field where strength is exerted is the symbol for "man". In traditional China, men's place was outside the house (working in the fields), whereas women's place was inside the house.