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SCILT
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Institute
for Languages

dragon

lóng

龙

China



Character information

The character for dragon has changed over time from a simple picture.

𪛗 龍 𪛗 龍 龙

Stamp information

Issued: 1987

Value: 8分 fēn

Description: from a set of 4 stamps showing different kites.



Suggested activities:

- Learn a dragon dance.
- Make a dragon mask.



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kite

fēng zheng

风筝

China



Character information

The word for kite is made up from two characters. The first means wind and the second means a stringed instrument. The character for wind has changed over time from a simple drawing.

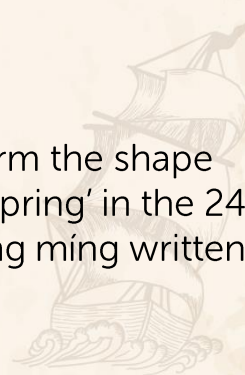


Stamp information

Issued: 2015

Value: 1.20元 yuán

Description: from a set of 6 stamps which together form the shape of a fan and celebrate the 'Beginning of Spring' in the 24 seasonal periods. This stamp has 清明 qīng míng written on it which means clear and bright.



Suggested activities:

- Find out about the 24 seasonal periods.
- Make a kite.
- Fly a kite.



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Chinese flag

zhōng guó guó qí

中国国旗



Character information

中

middle

国

kingdom or country

中国

middle kingdom which means China

国旗

country flag

Stamp information

Issued: 1950

Value: 800\$ (Chinese dollars)

Description: from a set of 5 stamps all showing the same picture but with different values celebrating the 1st anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

Suggested activities:

- Draw the Chinese flag.
- Find out about the history of the flag.



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The Summer Palace

yí hé yuán

颐和园

China



Character information

Although translated as 'The Summer Palace', the Chinese meaning is the 'Garden of Preserving Harmony'. The character for garden is a phonogram. Phonogram characters have one part which links to the meaning and one part which links to the sound.

元

yuan – the sound part

(元 yuán means unit of currency/first/original)

口

enclosure – the meaning part

园

together the character for garden

Stamp information

Issued: 2008

Value: 6元 yuán

Description: 'The Summer Palace' on a stamp in a miniature sheet.



Suggested activities:

- Find out about the history of 'The Summer Palace'.
- Compare the photo of the palace with the image on the stamp.



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golden pheasant

hóng fù jǐn jī

红腹锦鸡



Character information

The literal translation for this bird describes it.

红
腹
锦
鸡

red

belly

bright

chicken

Stamp information

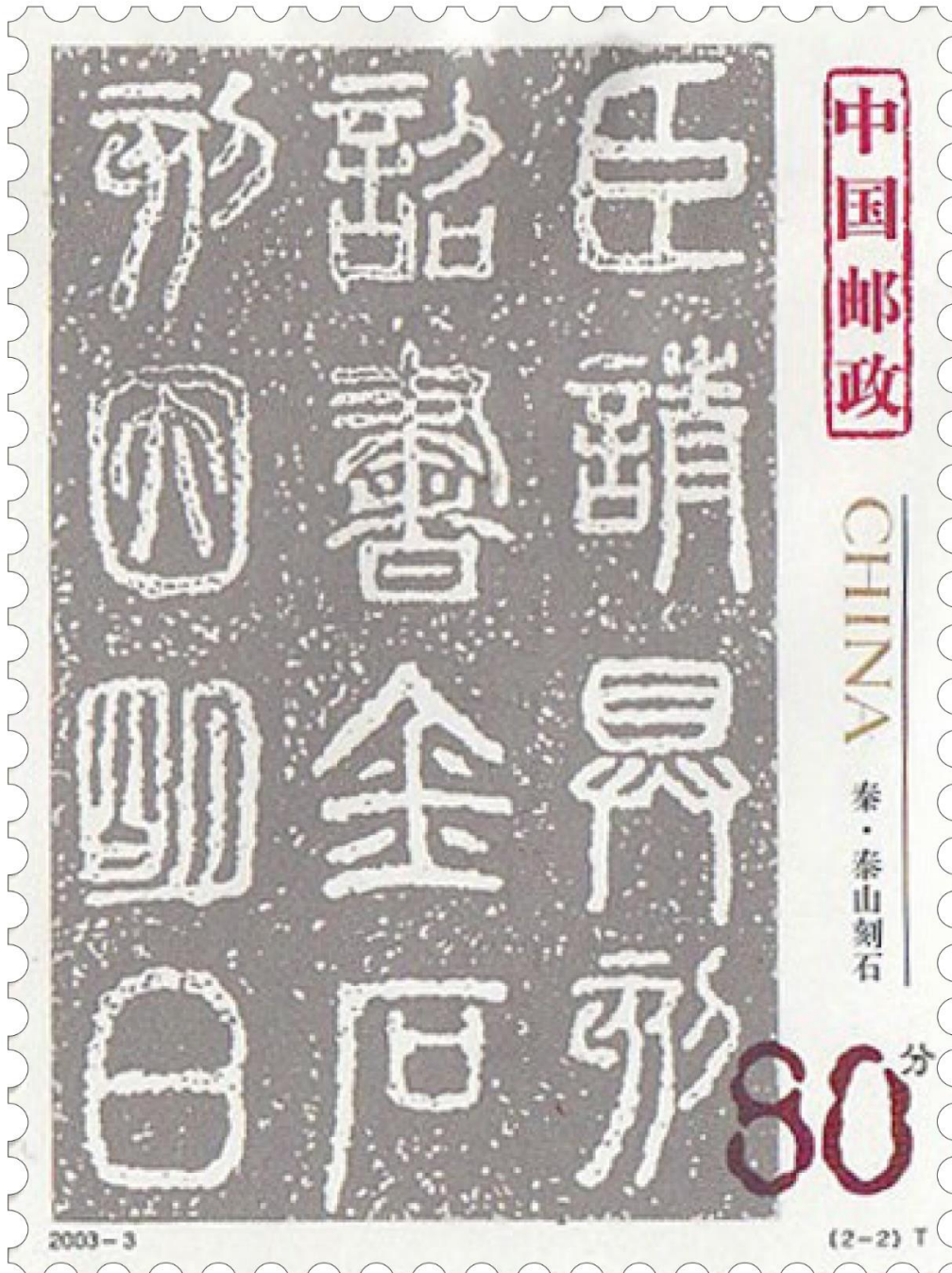
Issued: 2008

Value: 1.20元 yuán

Description: from a set of 6 stamps showing different Chinese birds.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the golden pheasant – their range, habitat and diet.
- Find out the Chinese characters for the other colours on the golden pheasant.



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large seal characters

dà zhuàn

大篆



Character information

The large seal characters are early pictograms and ideograms.

大

big

篆

seal

There are many examples of the seal characters in these activity cards. There are also other ancient characters from different times, for example: oracle bone script; bronze script; small seal characters etc.

Stamp information

Issued: 2003

Value: 80分 fēn

Description: from a set of 2 stamps showing different ancient characters.

Suggested activities:

- Try writing these ancient characters:

见

see 见

火

fire 火

休

rest 休

鱼

fish 鱼

好

good 好



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phoenix

fèng huáng

凤凰

China



Character information

Note that you have to look very closely at some Chinese characters because some of them look very similar. The first character looks very like the character for wind but it is different.

凤

fèng phoenix

风

fēng wind

Stamp information

Issued: 1987

Value: 30分 fēn

Description: from a set of 4 stamps showing different kites.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the legend of the phoenix.
- Make your own imaginary animal.



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brush painting

máo bǐ huà

毛笔画

China



Character information

Brushes are made from hair with bamboo handles. The character for brush is made up from the characters for bamboo and hair. The character 画 huà means painting.

竹

bamboo - written like this

𪔐

毛

hair

笔

brush (also means pen and pencil)

Stamp information

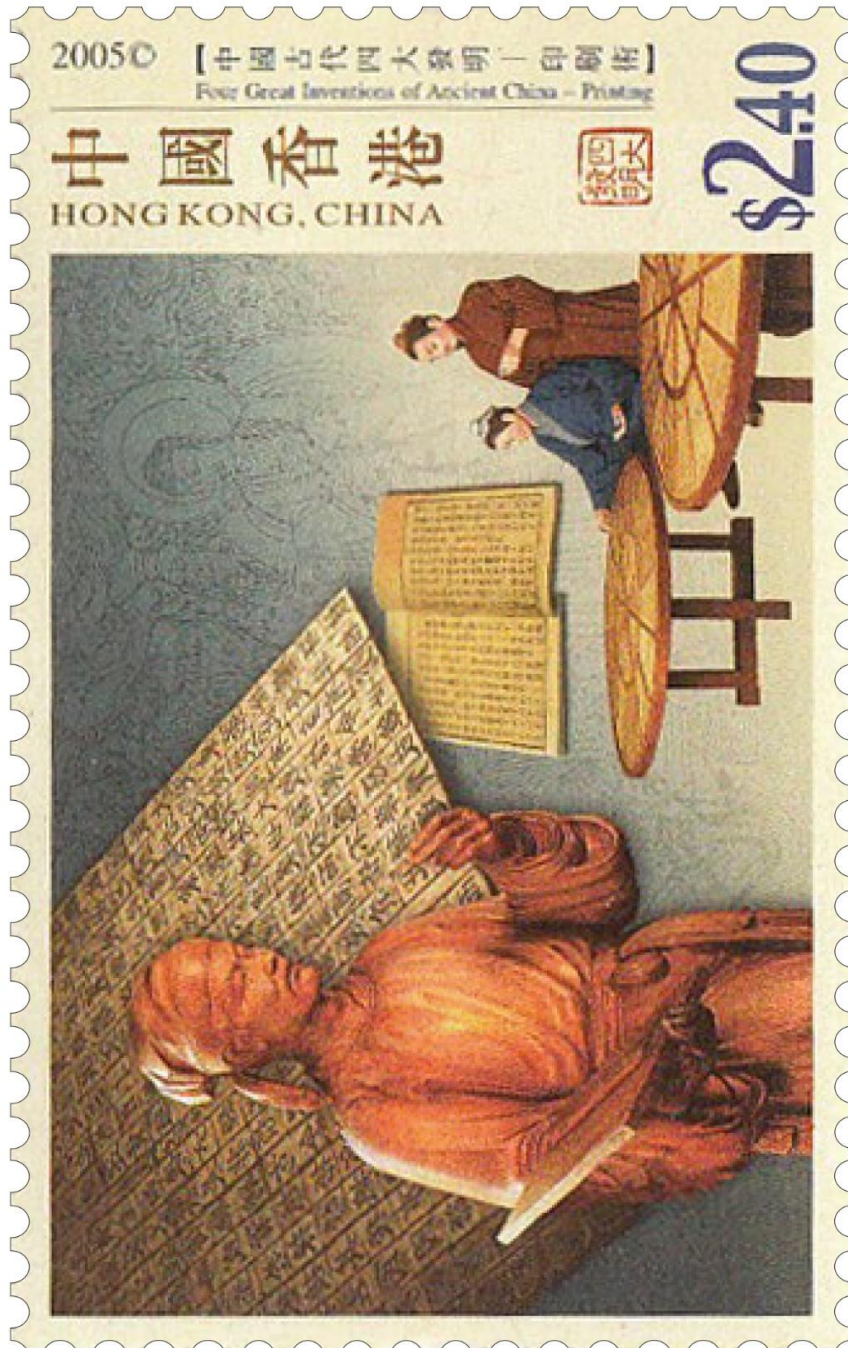
Issued: 1997

Value: 50分 fēn

Description: from a set of 6 stamps celebrating the centenary of the birth of Pan Tianshou a famous Chinese artist.

Suggested activities:

- Look at and compare different brush paintings.
- Create a picture in brush painting style.



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printing

yìn shuā

印刷



Character information

The word for printing is made up from two characters. The first means to print and the second means to brush or to paint. The character for 'to print' has not changed very much over time.

印

Stamp information

Issued: 2005
Value: 2.40\$ Hong Kong dollars
Description: from a set of 4 stamps on Chinese inventions. The other stamps show paper making, gunpowder and an early compass.

Suggested activities:

- Make your own paper.
- Using rubber stamps or block printing create a bookmark or card.



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plane

fēi jī

飞机



Character information

The word for plane is made up from two characters. The first means fly and the second means a machine.

飞

fly

机

machine

The original character for fly is a simple picture of a crane flying with its feathers spread out.

飛 飛 飞

Stamp information

Issued: 1996

Value: 60分 fēn

Description: from a set of 4 stamps celebrating economic growth in Hong Kong.

Suggested activities:

- Find out how long it takes to fly to Beijing.
- Find out the time difference between UK and China.



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compass

zhǐ nán zhēn

指南针



Character information

The word for compass is made up from three characters. The first means finger and also to point at, the second means south and the third means needle. The literal translation of compass is 'to point at the south with a needle'.

指

finger - also means 'to point at'

南

south

针

needle

Stamp information

Issued: 2005

Value: 1.40\$ Hong Kong dollars

Description: from a set of 4 stamps on Chinese inventions. The other stamps show printing, paper making and gunpowder.

Suggested activities:

- Find out how to use a compass and map to navigate.



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giant panda

dà xióng māo

大熊猫

China



Character information

The literal translation is big bear cat.

大

big – a man 人 standing with outstretched arms

熊

bear – the original character may have been a drawing of a bear but the modern character includes characters meaning 'a body with dagger like claws' along with the fire character 灬 which links to the sound.

猫

cat – a phonogram character. Phonogram characters have one part which links to the meaning and one part which links to the sound: animal 犛 and miáo 苗

Stamp information

Issued: 1963

Value: 8分 fēn

Description: from a set of 3 stamps which are believed to be the first stamps with giant pandas on them.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the giant panda – their range, habitat, diet and young.



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terracotta army

bīng mǎ yǒng

兵马俑

China



Character information

The literal translation for the terracotta army is 'soldier and horse figures buried with the dead'. The character for horse has changed over time from a simple picture of a horse.

兵马俑



Stamp information

Issued: 1990

Value: 8分 fēn

Description: from a set of 2 stamps celebrating the 10th anniversary of the discovery of bronze chariots in Emperor Qin Shi Huang's tomb.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the Emperor Qin and the terracotta army.



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Mount Gongga

gòng gā shān

贡嘎山



Character information

The character for mountain has changed over time from a simple picture of a mountain.



Stamp information

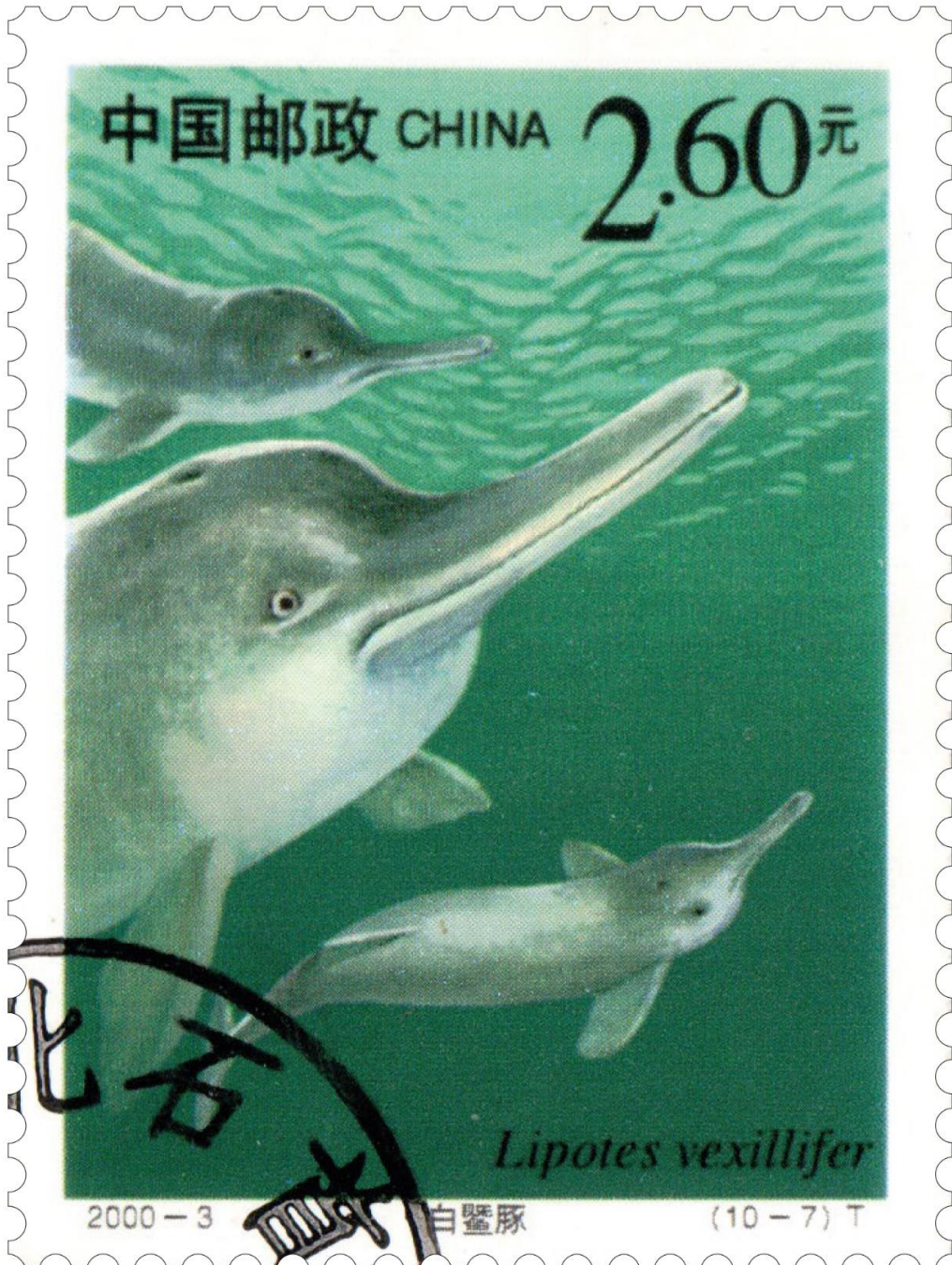
Issued: 1965

Value: 8分 fēn

Description: from a set of 5 stamps celebrating Chinese mountaineering achievements. Mount Gongga is the highest mountain in the Sichuan province, China.

Suggested activities:

- Find out the height of Mount Gongga.
- Compare Mount Gongga to the highest mountain in the world - Mount Everest.



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white river dolphin

bái jì tún

白暨豚



Character information

River dolphin is also jiāng tún 江豚 which is literally river dolphin but this species of white river dolphin is known as bái jì tún.

The character for white is similar to the character for sun but with a small mark showing the sun is just rising and the light is white.

日

sun



日

日

白

white



白

白

Stamp information

Issued: 2000

Value: 2.60元 yuán

Description: from a set of 10 stamps on Chinese wildlife.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the white river dolphin including how endangered it is.
- Find out the Chinese character for the colour black.



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zodiac

shēng xiào

生肖

China



Character information

The literal translation for zodiac is to resemble (be similar to) life.

生
肖

life

resemble (be similar to)

Stamp information

Issued: 2005
Value: 80分 fēn
Description: Chinese zodiac animals.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the legend of the Chinese zodiac.
- Name all the Chinese zodiac animals.
- Find out which animal you resemble.



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water pollution

shuǐ wū rǎn

水污染



Character information

The word for pollution is made up from two characters. The first means dirty and the second means contamination. The other character means water and has changed over time from a simple picture.

汚 水 水

Stamp information

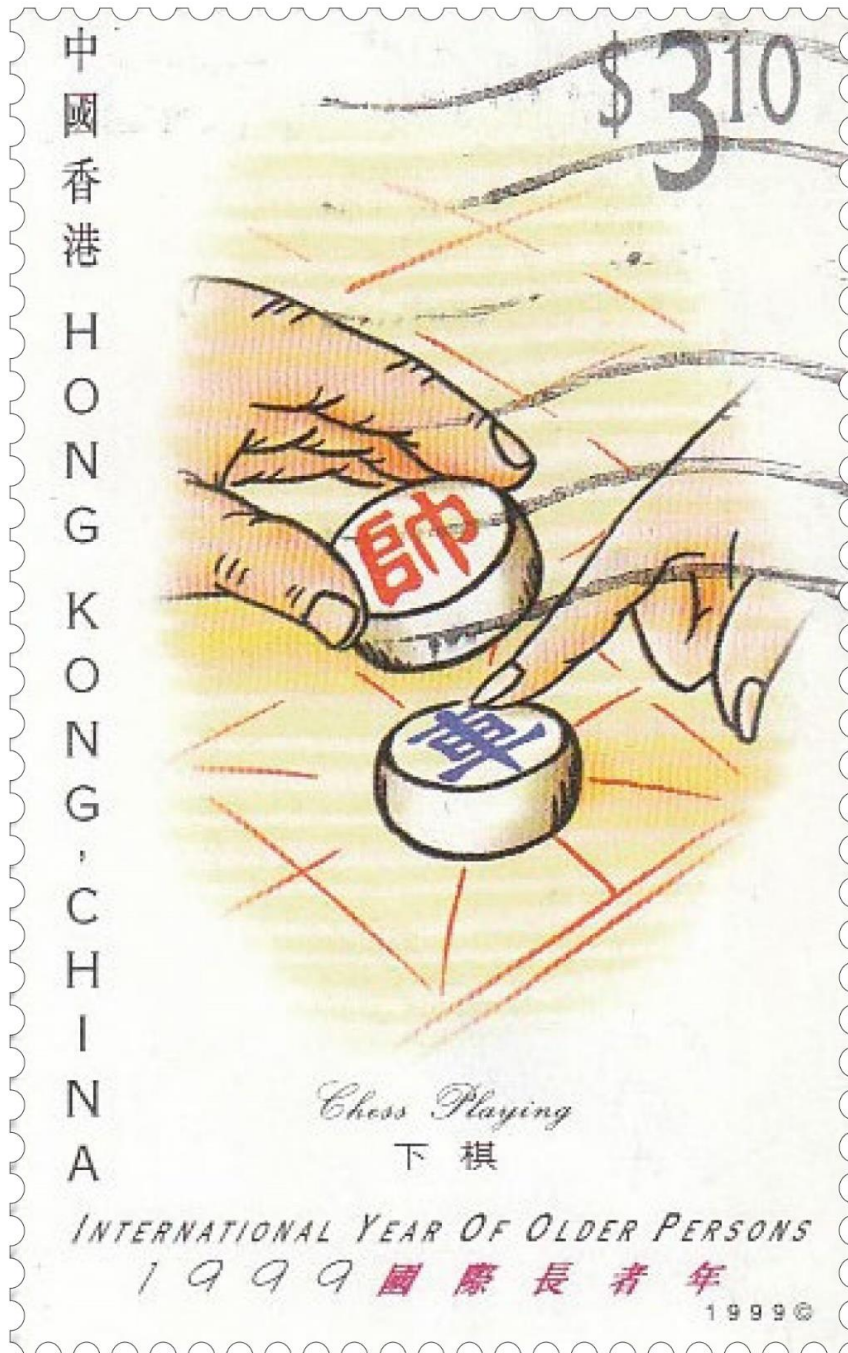
Issued: 2002

Value: 1.50元 yuán

Description: from a set of 8 stamps about environmental protection. The other stamps include images for forest protection, mineral resources protection, biodiversity protection and air pollution.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about how water pollution is affecting the environment.
- Find out what you can do to help.



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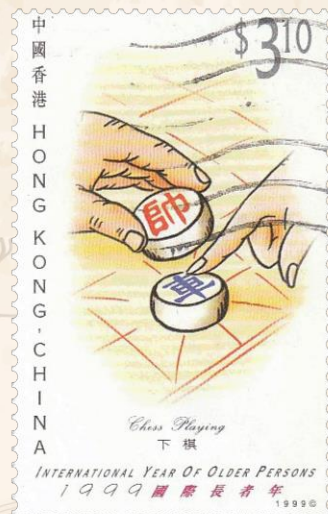


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Chinese chess

xiàng qí

象棋



Character information

The literal translation for xiàngqí is elephant chess. There are various theories as to why it is called elephant chess:

- ancient pieces were made of ivory;
- the game is a battle between two armies and elephants were used in ancient wars;
- the word for a government minister and elephant in Chinese sound the same and it was a minister who first wrote about the game.

象 xiàng elephant

相 xiàng government minister

The character for elephant has changed over time from a simple picture.

象 象 象

Stamp information

Issued: 1999

Value: 3.10\$ Hong Kong dollars

Description: from a set of 4 stamps to celebrate the International Year of the Elderly. This stamp shows an older person teaching someone how to play Chinese chess.

Suggested activities:

- Find out how to play Chinese chess.
- Play a game of Chinese chess.



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Confucius

Kǒng zǐ

孔子

China



Character information

Kǒngzǐ is the Chinese name given to the famous philosopher Confucius. The character zǐ 子 is a very common character and appears in many other characters and words. It has the meaning child but is not the modern Chinese word for child. The same character 子 but with the neutral tone (no tone) zi is often placed after some nouns (naming words) to complete the word.

子

zǐ

has original meaning of child

子

zi

placed after some nouns

孩子

hái zi

child

Note: 孩: 亥 – the sound part (hai) ; 子 – the meaning part; final 子 placed after noun.

Stamp information

Issued: 2010

Value: 3元 yuán

Description: from a set of 3 stamps showing the temple, mansion and cemetery of the Chinese philosopher Confucius.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the Chinese philosopher Confucius.
- Look up some famous Confucius quotes.



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orchid

lán huā

兰花



Character information

The word for orchid is made up from two characters. The first means orchid and the second means flower. The character for flower is a phonogram. Phonogram characters have one part which links to the meaning and one part which links to the sound.

化

hua – the sound part

(化 huà means change)

艹

grass or plant - the meaning part

花

together the character for flower - huā

Stamp information

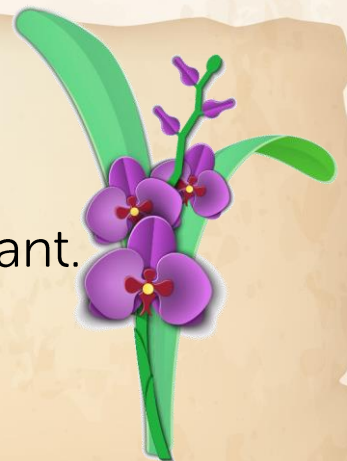
Issued: 1988

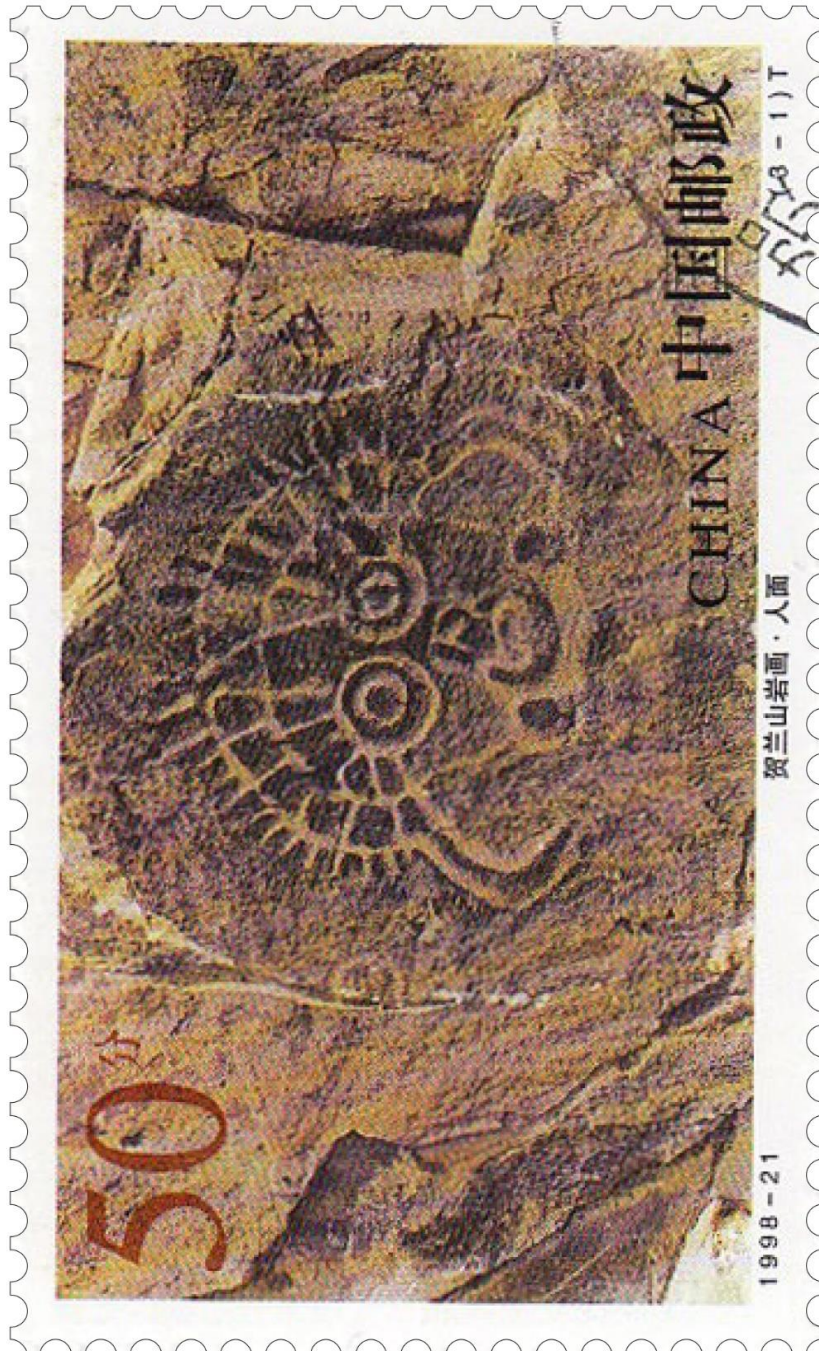
Value: 20分 fēn

Description: from a set of 4 stamps showing different species of orchids.

Suggested activities:

- Find out how to care for an orchid plant.
- Make a paper orchid flower.





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rock paintings

yán huà

岩画



Character information

The literal translation is cliff paintings. The first character means cliff and is made up from the two characters meaning mountain and rock. The character 画 means painting.

山

mountain

石

rock

Stamp information

Issued: 1998

Value: 50分 fēn

Description: from a set of 3 stamps showing rock paintings discovered at Helan Mountains.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the Helan Mountains.
- Find out how old the rock paintings are.



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Confucius Institute

Kǒng zǐ xué yuàn

孔子学院



Character information

Kǒngzǐ is the Chinese name given to the famous philosopher Confucius. The last two characters mean an education institute. 学 xué means to learn. The following is a fun way to remember this character:

子

child

小

small

一

roof

A child under a small roof is learning.

A school student or pupil is xuésheng 学生. Primary school is xiǎo xué 小学 and secondary school is zhōng xué 中学.

Stamp information

Issued: 2012

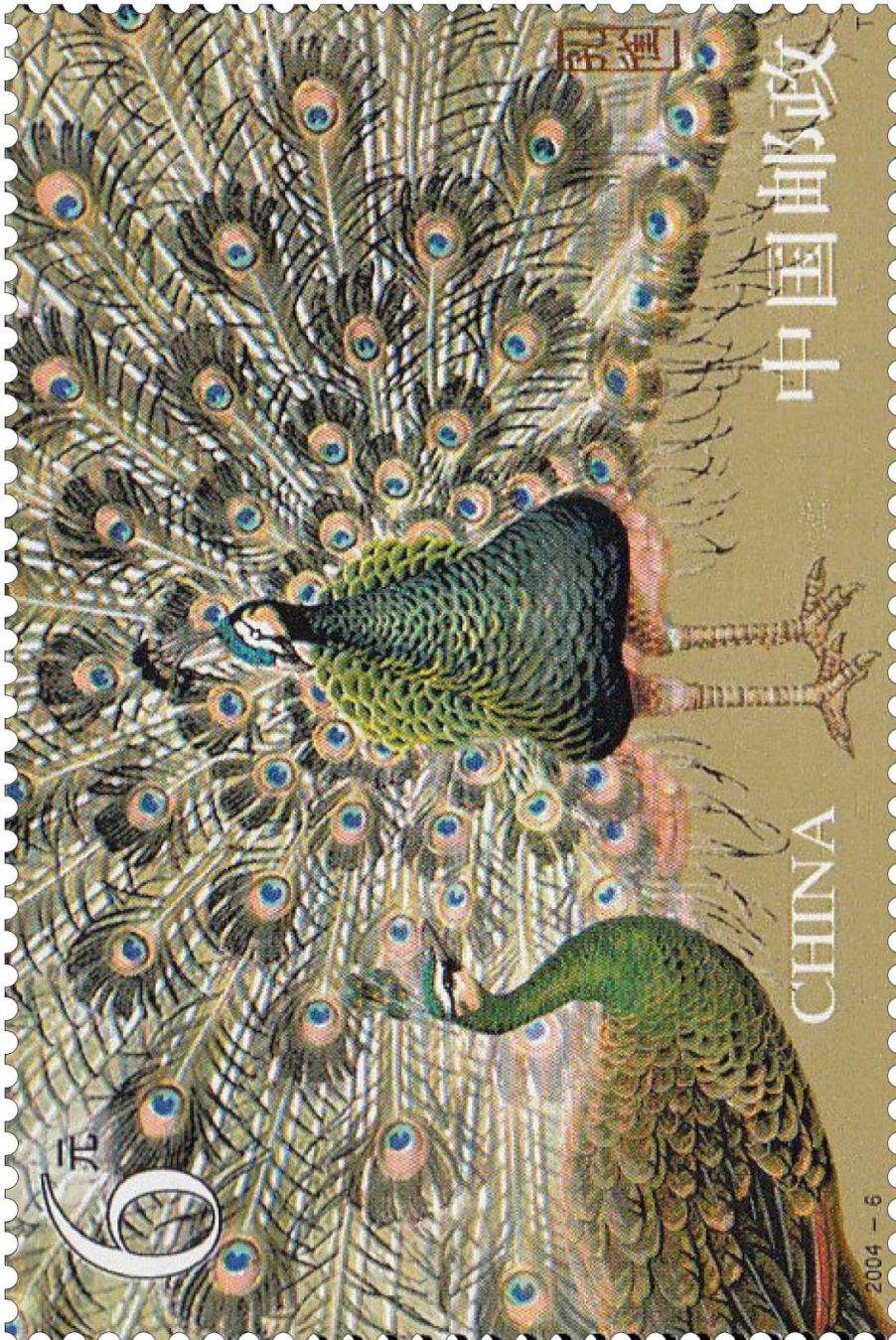
Value: 3元 yuán

Description: from a set of 2 stamps about the Confucius Institute. Confucius Institutes are all around the world to promote the Chinese language and culture.

Suggested activities:

- Find your nearest Confucius Institute.
- Find your nearest Confucius Classroom.

[Confucius Classrooms are linked to a Confucius Institute. They are usually based in schools but in 2018 the first specialist Confucius Classrooms were launched. The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland manages the first science specialist Confucius Classroom in the world as part of the Beyond the Panda education programme. The programme is supported by the Confucius Institute for Scotland and the Confucius Institute for Scotland's Schools.]



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green peafowl

lǜ kǒng què

绿孔雀



Character information

The word for peafowl is made up from two characters 孔雀. The first means opening* and the second means a small bird so the full translation is 'a small bird's tail that opens up'. The other character 绿 lǜ means green. There are two characters for bird in Chinese: 鸟 niǎo – meaning a bird with long tail feathers and 隹 zhuī – meaning a bird with a short tail. 隹 zhuī is combined with the character for small to form the character 雀 què meaning small bird.

小

small

隹

bird with a short tail

雀

small bird

*Also a surname and the name of the Chinese philosopher Confucius.

Stamp information

Issued: 2004

Value: 6元 yuán

Description: peacock and peahen on a stamp in a miniature sheet.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the green peafowl – their range, habitat and diet.
- Make a colourful peacock tail.



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bamboo

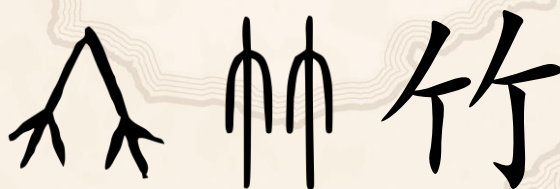
zhú zǐ

竹子



Character information

The character for bamboo has changed over time from a simple picture.



Stamp information

Issued: 1993

Value: 5元 yuán

Description: bamboo stamp in a miniature sheet.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the bamboo plant – how it grows and parts of the plant.
- Find out how much bamboo a giant panda eats in one day.



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tiger

lǎo

hǔ

老虎

China



Character information

The word for tiger is made up from two characters. The first means old and the second means tiger. The character for tiger has changed over time from a simple drawing.

𧈧 𧈨 𧈩 虎

Stamp information

Issued: 2004

Value: 80分 fēn

Description: from a set of 2 stamps on the south China tiger.

Suggested activities:

- Find out how many species of tiger live in China.
- Find out about tigers – their range, habitat, diet and young.



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Shanghai

shàng hǎi

上海



Character information

Shanghai is the largest city in China. It is on the east coast. Shanghai means on the sea.

上
海

on

sea

氵 this part means water

每 this part means every

The character for sea has changed over time from a simple picture.

海

Stamp information

Issued: 1996

Value: 100分 fēn

Description: from a set of 6 stamps showing different pictures of Shanghai.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the city of Shanghai.
- Find out the name of the capital city of China.



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cowrie

bèi

贝

China



Character information

The character for the cowrie shell has changed over time from a simple picture.

𧇖 貝 貝 贝

From about 3000 years ago, cowrie shells and copies of the shells were used as money. The character has the meaning cowrie, shellfish and currency and appears in many other characters. The traditional characters for buying and selling include the cowrie shell.

買

traditional character for buy

买

simplified character for buy

賣

traditional character for sell

卖

simplified character for sell

Stamp information

Issued: 1981

Value: 4分 fēn

Description: from a set of 8 stamps on ancient Chinese coins.

Suggested activities:

- Find out the exchange rate for Chinese yuan to the British pound.
- Play a game of buying and selling with some shells.



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calligraphy

shū fǎ

书法



Character information

The literal translation for calligraphy is book law or method.

书

book

法

law or method

The characters on the stamp are 中國書法 and mean Chinese calligraphy. They are written in traditional characters. In simplified characters it would read 中国书法.

Stamp information

Issued: 2000

Value: 8 Macau Pataca (currency of Macau, China)

Description: Chinese calligraphy on a stamp in a miniature sheet.

Suggested activities:

- Find out how to correctly hold a calligraphy brush and learn about stroke order.
- Write some Chinese characters with a brush and ink following the correct stroke order.



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football

zú qiú

足球



Character information

The two characters that make up the word for football are foot and ball. The character for foot sort of looks like a man with a large foot. The original character for the foot may have been a drawing of the lower leg with a foot but it hasn't changed much from the ancient seal script.

足 球

Stamp information

Issued: 1959
Value: 8分 fēn
Description: from a set of 16 stamps celebrating the 1st National Games.

Suggested activities:

- Find out Chinese words for some other sports:

basketball

tennis

table tennis

badminton

rugby

volleyball



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tea

chá

茶

China



Character information

A fun way to remember the character for tea is to break it up into its three different parts:

艹

grass or plant

亼

to gather or collect

小

small

Gather the tea plant for a small cup of tea.

Stamp information

Issued: 1994

Value: 50分 fēn

Description: from a set of 4 stamps showing Yixing unglazed teapots.

Suggested activities:

- Try some different Chinese teas.
- Look for different styles of Chinese teapots.



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Zheng He

zhèng hé

郑和

China



Character information

Zhèng Hé 郑和 was born as Mǎ Hé 马和. He was captured as a slave but he worked hard and served the prince. He became a general and then an admiral with a large navy. He explored many countries. He served under three emperors and achieved many great things.

和 hé also means 'and' or 'together with'. Historically it also means 'harmony' which helps explain the character. The character is made up from two characters – mouth and grain. If the mouths are filled with grain then everything is in harmony.

禾

grain

口

mouth

Stamp information

Issued: 1985

Value: 20分 fēn

Description: from a set of 4 stamps celebrating the 580th anniversary of Zhèng Hé's first voyage to western seas.

Suggested activities:

- Find out about the famous admiral and explorer Zhèng Hé.



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willow tree porcelain

liǔ shù cí qì

柳树瓷器



Character information

The willow pattern porcelain became really popular in the UK in the 18th century. The designs copied early Chinese paintings.

The last two characters mean porcelain. The first means willow and the second character means tree. The character for tree is a phonogram. Phonogram characters have one part which links to the meaning and one part which links to the sound. The traditional character for tree is 樹 which contains the sound part. However the character in simplified form is 树.

木

wood/tree – the meaning part

𣎵 𣏟 木

尗

shu – the sound part

樹

(traditional)

character for tree

树

(simplified)

Stamp information

Issued: 2000

Value: 8 Macau Pataca (currency of Macau, China)

Description: a circular stamp in a miniature sheet on ceramics.

Suggested activities:

- Decorate a paper plate with a willow tree pattern.
- Find out about the story behind the willow tree porcelain.



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Chinese knot

zhōng guó jié

中国结



Character information

The Chinese knot is a good luck charm and the character is made up from the two characters meaning silk and lucky.

丝

silk

吉

lucky

Stamp information

Issued: 2003

Value: 80分 fēn

Description: a greeting stamp featuring the decorative Chinese knot..



Suggested activities:

- Learn how to make a simple Chinese knot.
- Find out about the history of the Chinese knot.