

Teaching the Non-Chinese Speaking Students Origami to Improve Their Interest and Concentration in Learning Chinese Language

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The difficulties in learning Chinese faced by non-Chinese students are the subjects of concern in the education sector, especially in writing Chinese characters. We write the characters with strokes and dots, more or less strokes or dots will represent different words and different meanings. Students found these very complicated and confused, thus it leads them to lose their motivation and interest in learning Chinese language. From the beginning of the 1990s, I began using origami as one of the activities to promote the teaching of Chinese in the state school in Melbourne Australia with remarkable results. Program got widely reported by Medias. In 1995, I got the “National Excellence in Teaching Awards”. After I took up the position as the curriculum development officer in University of Hong Kong in 2007, I worked closely with the teachers and students using origami as the theme base learning in Chinese. It helps to increase their understanding of the radicals and parts, so as to improve their confidence in writing Chinese characters.

Keywords: non-Chinese students writing, Chinese characters, strokes and dots, origami, confidence

Preface

In recent years, with the development of China’s economy and the continuous improvement of openness, more and more foreigners learn Chinese as their second language. On December 10, 2016, the 11th Confucius Institute Conference on “Innovation, Cooperation, Inclusion, and Sharing” was held. One hundred and forty countries have established 511 Confucius Institutes and 1,073 Confucius Classrooms. At present, nearly 300 institutions have been formally submitted to apply for the Confucius Institute and Confucius Classroom, and nearly 70 countries have included Chinese teaching in the national education system.

Students’ learning outcomes in Chinese are directly related to teachers’ classroom teaching strategies. Therefore, teachers in the classroom teaching process to stimulate students’ interest in learning, improve learning motivation and effectiveness, it is worthy of academic attention to the subject.

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The Difficulties for the Chinese as Second Language Learners

For the second language learners, learning to write in Chinese character seems to learn the language of the “Alien”. Many Chinese characters are very similar for the first glance. Such as the length or one stroke more; the position of a dot; the tilt of the different, students find it difficult to distinguish the difference accurately. See Table 1:

Table 1

Subtle Difference in Strokes Makes Great Difference in Meanings

晴Qíng sunny	睛Jīng eye	人Rén person	入Rù in
囚Qiú prison	因Yīn reason	王Wáng king	玉Yù jade
折Zhé fold	拆Chāi Demolition	失Shī lose	夫Fū husband
刁Diāo Unruly	刀Dāo knife	大Dà big	犬Quǎn dog
土Tǔ earth	士Shì people	同Tóng same	司Sī

Why Choosing Origami as the Teaching Tool

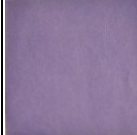


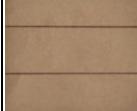
To ensure the success in an origami project, the student must listen carefully to the instructions and pay very close attention to the teacher. Origami requires precision and neatness which require the student to concentrate. Also listening to the teacher’s explanation helps them to increase their understanding of Chinese characters, and effectively improve their participation in the Chinese classroom learning.

Compare the Visual Structure of Chinese Characters and Origami




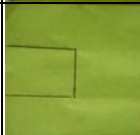
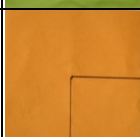



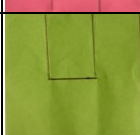
As with Chinese characters, a radical or component, when replaced with different parts or radicals, can be combined into a new Chinese character, see Table 2:

Table 2

Compare the Visual Structure of Chinese Character and Origami

漢字結構方式 The Visual Structure of Chinese Characters	字例 Example	Origami
獨體結構 Single structure 口	口 Kǒu Mouth	
品字形結構品 structure 品	森 sēn Forest	
上下結構 Top Down structure 思	思 sī Think	
上中下結構 Top-middle-bottom structure 意	意 yì Meaning	

(table 2 continued)

漢字結構方式 The Visual Structure of Chinese Characters	字例 Example	Origami
左右結構 Left-right Structure 𠂇	村 cūn Village	
左中右結構 Left-middle-right structure 𠂇	街 jiē Street	
全包围結構 Fully Surrounded 囗	國 guó Country	
左包围結構 Left surround right 匚	醫 yī Treatment	
左上包围下 Left-up surround right-down 冫	慶 qìng Celebrate	
右上包围下 Right-up surround left-down 勹	句 jù Sentence	
左下包围上 Left-down surround right-up 阝	建 jiàn Build	
上包下 Up part surround down part 冫	聞 wén Smell	
下包上 Down part surround up part 冫	函 hán Letter	

Note. Retrieved from <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/88249199.html>; <http://www.thn21.com/base/zi/4414.html>;
<https://www.slideshare.net/legoomandarin/the-visual-structure-of-chinese-characters-calligraphy>.

Compare the Base Folds of the Origami With the Basic Radicals of the Chinese Characters

Origami has a lot of research on the understanding of mathematical geometry, and in recent years the use of origami activities in Chinese teaching has also been carried out in research.

A series of basic fold can create different graphics then finish different beautiful origami product (see Figure 1).

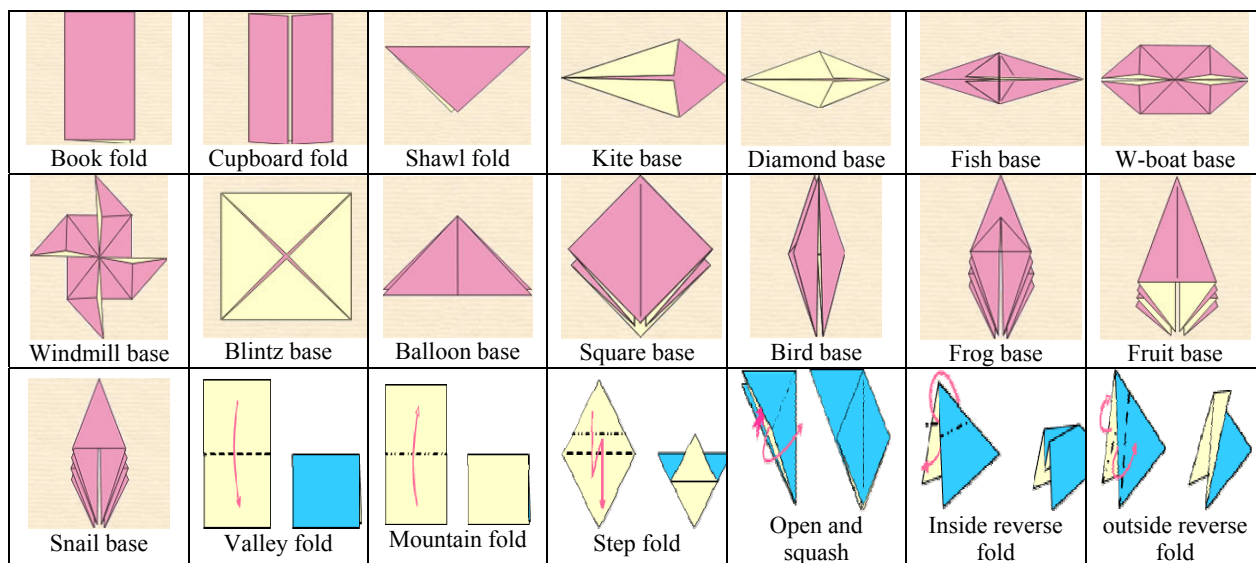


Figure 1. Origami base folds. Source: Adapted from <http://www.oriland.com/oriversity/basefolds/main.php>;
<http://www.oriland.com/oriversity/symbols/main.php>.

The following are the most common radicals of the Chinese character (see Table 3):

Table 3

The Most Common Radicals of the Chinese Characters

人 person	刀 knife	力 power	又 again	口 mouth
口 enclosure	门 door	土 earth	夕 sunset	大 big,
女 female,	子 son	寸 inch	小 little	工 work
鸟 bird	弓 bow	马 horse	心 heart	戈 dagger
手 hand	日 sun, day	月 moon, month	贝 shell	木 wood
水 water	火 fire	田 field	目 eye	示 to show
糸 fine silk	耳 ear	衣 clothing	言 speech	走 to walk
足 foot	雨 rain	金 metal, gold	米 rice	食 to eat
車 vehicle	虫 insect	疒 sickness	冫 ice	舟 boat
石 stone	艹 grass	禾 grain	竹 bamboo	羊 sheep

The following are the Comparison of folding an origami car with the writing of the Chinese character “car” (see Figure 2 and Figure 3):

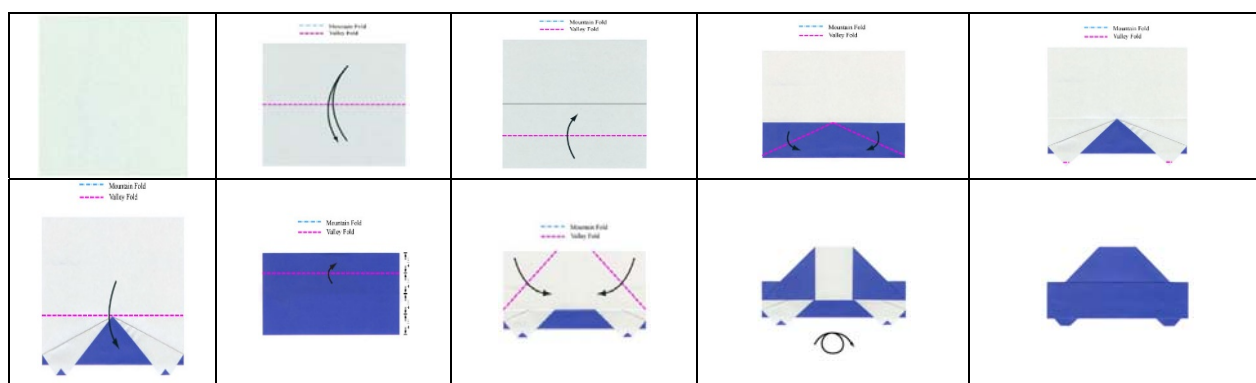


Figure 2. The folding prose of the car. Source: Adapted from <http://www.origami-make.com/easy-origami-car.php>.

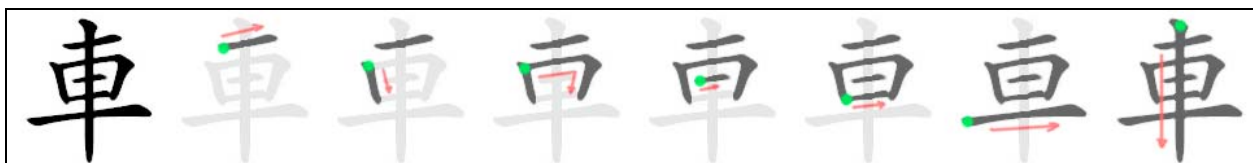


Figure 3. The stroke order of the Chinese character “car”. Source: Adapted from <http://www.handedict.de/jt/zi/%E8%BB%8A>.

Is Origami Just an Interest?

Many people think that origami is simply as an activity. We found that students through the interpretation of the origami basic folds and bases, help students understand the structure of the radicals and parts of the characters, students can clearly understand the writing of Chinese stroke orders. It helps reduce the typos of Chinese characters. See Table 4.

Table 4

The Inference of Writing Chinese Characters and Origami

Chinese character structure:	Origami folding:
1. An image of the square	1. Mostly use square paper
2. Combination of dots and lines	2. Combination of mountain and valley fold
3. Writing in stroke order	3. In a certain logical order
4. Each word has a specific radicals and parts	4. Origami usually starts with a base and folds
5. When writing each character, there are different image changes	5. When folding, it appears graphics changes, like square, triangle, diamond, trapezoid, polygon and others

Origami in the Chinese Classroom

Origami can bring out a lot of interesting classroom activities to attract students in participating in classroom teaching, improve classroom order; by participating in origami activities, in addition to students can cause interest and motivation, the teacher asked them to describe the folded works to learn a large number of Chinese vocabularies. It can enhance their oral and listening skills.

Through learning origami, students simply use the appropriate steps and order to be successful, which with the Chinese characters of the radicals and strokes have a lot of similar points.

After years of practice origami with the theme teaching, students interested in writing words also increased, students can simultaneously learn and develop their listening, reading and writing skills (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Using origami in the classrom.

Conclusion

It has long been known that origami has many benefits like developing eye hand co-ordination, sequencing skills, attention skills, patience, temporal spatial skills, math reasoning etc. but according to the latest research on the brain and the work of Doctor Katrin Shumakov and Yuri Shumakov, when both hands are engaged, impellent motor impulses activate the language portion of the brain.

Non-Chinese students who learn Chinese as a second language, will encounter many difficulties and problems; regardless of their problems belonging to that type, the most important thing is to improve their motivation and interest. It helps to increase their understanding of the radicals and parts, so as to improve their confidence in writing Chinese characters.

Only when the students are willing to learn, want to learn, teaching and learning effect will be obvious and fruitful.

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