

## English Equivalents for the Traditional Radicals

Radicals are elements that hint at the meaning of a given character. (In phonetic compounds, another element hints at the sound.) For example, the radical 水 water, often written on the left-side as 氵, nearly always indicates that the character has something to do with water or other fluids, while the presence of the radical 木 tree/wood will suggest something to do with trees or products made of wood.

The first important dictionary of Chinese characters, 說文解字 (Shuowen Jiezi), compiled in 100 C.E. by the lexicographer 許慎 (Xu Shen), was organized according to 540 radicals. The 1716 dictionary 康熙字典 (KangXi Zidian) reduced the number of radicals to 214, and this has been the typical arrangement for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean dictionaries of the Chinese characters ever since.

The traditional radicals are of the following types: 1) Pictographs of humans or of human body elements; 2) Pictographs of animals or of animal body elements; 3) Natural features; 4) Tools/weapons; 5) Miscellaneous objects; 6) Ideographs, or pictographs of abstractions or imaginary objects; 7) Compound characters. Some 80 of these radicals account for the great majority of the characters in common use in Japan today; these are listed below in Section I. Sections II and III contain characters that appear less often as radicals.

Note that when used as radicals these characters can convey meanings quite different from their customary ones, 八, 十, 欠, 豆, 貝, and 頁 being good examples.

### Section I Radicals in Common Use

#### Radical Basic Meaning(s)

人	person (usually appears on the left in the form seen in 仕 or 休, but can also be on the top in the form seen in 介 or 令)
儿	human figure (NOTE: pictograph of human legs)
八	divide right and left
冫	ice (abbreviation of 冰)
刀	sword/knife (often appears on the right in the form seen in 割 or 判)
力	power/energy
十	gather; assemble
又	hand/action indicator
口	mouth

口	enclosure (NOTE: the same shape as “mouth,” but written larger)
土	earth
夕	(crescent) moon
大	person standing outstretched
女	woman
子	child
宀	roof/building (NOTE: from a pictograph of a roofed house)
寸	hand/action indicator
尸	buttocks; body; shape indicator (NOTE: from a pictograph of a person lying in a rigid position, the buttocks thrust out. When used as a shape indicator, 尸 typically suggests a hanging object such as a curtain, banner or roof.)
山	mountain
巾	cloth (NOTE: pictograph of a drooping piece of cloth)
广	building (NOTE: from a pictograph of the roof of a building)
弓	bow
彳	movement (abbreviation of 行)
忄	heart/emotions (See 心)
扌	hand/action indicator (See 手)
氵	water (See 水)
犴	dog/beast (See 犬)
辶	movement (abbreviation of 辵, which is never used independently. The modern form of 辶 eliminates the stroke at top)
阝	village/settlement (used on the right side of a character; abbreviation of 邑)
阝	piled earth (used on the left side of a character; abbreviation of 阜)
心	heart/emotions
戈	spear/halberd
户	door
手	hand/action indicator
攴	action indicator (NOTE: from a depiction of a hand pounding an object with a stick)
日	sun/day
月	moon; flesh (“flesh” is as an abbreviation of 肉)
木	tree/wood
欠	bent, open-mouthed figure
止	leg/foot; stop
歹	severed bone; death (NOTE: from a pictograph of a severed bone)

扌	action indicator (NOTE: from a pictograph of a hand standing an object in place)
水	water
火	fire (also written 灬, as in 点)
牛	cow
犬	dog/beast
礻	altar/the supernatural (See 示)
玉	jewel (often appears on the left in the form 王; no connection with “king”)
田	field
疒	illness (NOTE: originally, a depiction of a person on a sleeping pallet, suggesting illness)
皿	dish; plate; bowl
目	eye
矢	arrow
石	stone
示	altar/the supernatural
禾	grain/rice (NOTE: from a pictograph of a pendent ear of round foxtail millet)
穴	hole
立	stand
衤	clothing (See 衣)
竹	bamboo
米	rice
糸	thread
羊	sheep
羽	wing/feather
耳	ear
肉	flesh (usually appears on the left, in the form 月)
舟	boat
艸	grass/plant (always in the form as seen at the top of 草, though in previous forms the three strokes are written as four)
虫	insect; (small) creature
衣	clothing
見	see
言	words
貝	commodities
走	run

足	leg/foot
車	vehicle
酉	alcohol container
金	metal
門	gate
隹	(short, squat) bird
雨	rain/natural phenomena
食	food/eating
頁	head
馬	horse
鬼	(round-headed) ghost/demon
魚	fish
鳥	bird

Section II      Other radicals that are themselves everyday use characters.  
Meanings in brackets are the conceptual ideas attached to the radicals, which in some cases differ from the meanings when the characters stand in isolation.

一	one
乙	[shape indicator; block]; second in a series
二	two
入	enter; go in
士	[erect]; man
小	small
川	river (NOTE: sometimes appears in the form 巛)
工	work
己	self; sixth in a series
干	forked stick; thick bar; thrust; dry
支	branch; support
文	pattern; writing; letter(s)
斗	ladle; dipper; measuring cup; unit of liquid measure
斤	ax; unit of weight
方	[spread right and left; spread in all directions]; side; method; person
比	line up; compare
毛	(fine strands of) hair

氏	thin, flat spoon; clan; lineage; birth; family name
父	father
片	thin and flat (piece); part; one (of a pair/set); one side
玄	slender (thread); darkness; mysterious
甘	[contain (in the mouth)]; sweet; tasty
生	birth; life; fresh
用	use; action; business
白	white
皮	[cover; slant]; skin; hide; pelt; (tree) bark; rind
矛	halberd
缶	round container; can
老	elderly person with a bent back
臣	downcast eye; subject; retainer
自	[nose]; self
至	proceed; reach; arrive
舌	tongue; speaking
色	color; appearance; sex
血	blood
行	crossroads; movement (See 彳 in Section I)
角	horn
谷	sunken fountainhead; valley; ravine
豆	pedestal; foodstand; bean
赤	red
身	body
辛	needle; cutting tool; sharp
里	village; unit of length
麥	barley (or other grains)
長	long
青	[clean; pure]; green; blue; youth
非	[divide right and left]; not; non-; object; refuse; wrong
齊	[align neatly]; medicine; drug
面	face; surface; aspect; side; direction
革	leather
音	sound
風	wind
飛	fly

首	run through; neck; head
香	fragrance; scent
骨	bone
高	tall; high
麻	[rub and shred]; hemp; flax
黄	yellow
黑	black; dark
齒	tooth; teeth
鼓	drum
鼻	nose
龍	dragon (Now in the form 竜)

Section III      The radicals presented in Sections I and II account for well over 90% of the compound characters ever devised. For the record, Section III presents the remaining radicals from the traditional list. Only a handful ever appear as independent characters.

丨	pierce
丶	lamplight
丿	extension; division; separation
丨	hook
宀	top; cover
冂	boundary
冃	cover; conceal
几	desk; pedestal
凵	open; empty
勹	wrap
匕	spoon; ladle
匚	enclosure
匚	conceal
卜	divination
卩	bend; kneel
厂	cliff; piled earth
厶	plow; oneself; elbow
夂	leg/foot (pointed downward)
夂	dragging leg/foot

尢	lame; hunchbacked (NOTE: sometimes appears in the form 尢)
屮	grass shoot
么	slender thread; slight
廴	extension
廾	pair of hands; raise; support; offer
弋	stake; tool; weapon
厶	head of an animal (NOTE: sometimes appears in the form 厶)
彡	pattern
攴	action indicator (NOTE: variant of 攴 in Section I)
无	nonbeing (NOTE: sometimes appears in the form 无, but this is a separate character suggesting engorgement)
曰	say; speech indicator; reason
毋	not; un-
气	rising breath/vapors
爪	hand; claw (NOTE: sometimes appears in the form 爪)
爻	cross; mix
爿	long, wooden sleeping pallet
牙	fang; tusk
瓜	melon; oval
瓦	tile(s)
疋	leg; one of a pair
夨	spread open
内	trample; tread
水	water (NOTE: variant of 水 in Section I)
囧	net (NOTE: sometimes appears in the form 囧)
而	soft, drooping beard
耒	plow
聿	hand holding a writing brush
臼	mortar
舛	crossing legs; cross; alternate
艮	fixity
虍	tiger
西	cover
豕	pig; boar
豸	animal that ambles along the ground
辰	bivalve (with soft, twitching flesh)

采	hand scattering seeds; scatter
隶	seize
韋	circumambulate; leather
韭	leek
髟	(long) hair
鬥	fight; battle
艸	herb
鬲	tripod cooking vessel
鹵	salt/alkali
鹿	deer
麥	(NOTE: see 麦 in Section II)
黍	millet
黑	(NOTE: see 黑 in Section II)
黼	embroidery
黽	frog
鼎	tripod kettle
鼠	rat; mouse
齊	(NOTE: see 齐 in Section II)
齒	(NOTE: see 齿 in Section II)
龜	turtle
龠	flute