

THE HANZI MOVIE METHOD

**HOW TO READ, WRITE,
AND PRONOUNCE ANY
CHINESE CHARACTER
IN LESS THAN ONE MINUTE**

Luke Neale & Phil Crimmins



MANDARIN
BLUEPRINT

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Luke Neale

Luke has maintained a love for Chinese culture since the age of 13 when he became interested in martial arts. He came to China for the first time in 2007 with very basic Chinese skills and was amazed by the warmth and depth of Chinese people.

Luke's strength is his native-like pronunciation; having placed a strong focus on it early on.



Phil Crimmins

In Spring 2017, Phil graduated from Sichuan University with a bachelor's degree in the Chinese language, and he was also awarded an "Outstanding Thesis Award" for his dissertation titled "Chinese Acquisition Methods from the Perspective of a Mandarin Learner."

Phil's strength in Mandarin is reading and writing; having started his study with a heavy focus on Chinese characters.



COMPLEMENTARY CURRICULUM COLLABORATORS

We met back in 2013 and quickly discovered that we were both equally passionate about learning Chinese. As well as becoming great friends, we started sharing the various memory techniques and learning tools we found helpful for language acquisition. As a result, we found ourselves improving many times faster than others in our peer group, all while investing less time and seemingly having a lot more fun along the way.

After both passing the HSK 6 in a quarter of the allotted time, we knew we were onto something big. We decided to join forces and create a crash course on how to learn Chinese, sharing our knowledge with the local community of Chengdu. It became so popular that we began teaching online and creating awesome video courses. We now have a total of 16 years of experience both learning and teaching Chinese, and in that time we have become acutely aware of the problems Chinese learners continue to face, and how to solve them.

In late 2018, we were both given inventor status for the US patent application titled "Method of Teaching Chinese Characters, Vocabulary, and Grammar as a Second Language to Non-native Speakers" (pat # PCT/US18/57921). This became the basis for our ground-breaking video curriculum that we call "The Mandarin Blueprint Method".

Learning Chinese changed our lives forever. We discovered that those who embark upon this learning journey are rewarded with knowledge & wisdom that comes not just from the language itself, but more importantly from the hearts and minds of Chinese people. It is as enlightening an experience as we could have ever hoped for, and now it is your turn.

Let's get to it!

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INTRODUCTION

In this ebook, we will explain exactly what The Hanzi Movie Method is, how it works and why it is going to save you years of time and frustration.

You can take what you learn here and apply it to your own list of Chinese characters if you wish. If you do this, we also suggest that you create flashcards and review them for each character you learn.

If you'd rather have us guide you step-by-step to fluency and literacy in Mandarin, you can sign up for a free trial of [The Mandarin Blueprint Method](#). This video curriculum will not only teach you Chinese characters, but also vocabulary and grammar with the help of 300 high-quality videos, 2,000 lessons and a ton of supporting and bonus resources, including over 7,000 customizable digital flashcards!

Any subscription of The Mandarin Blueprint Method comes with a [30-day money back](#) guarantee.

In this first chapter, we're going to introduce you to the fundamentals of visual mnemonics as if you are a complete beginner, starting with the concepts of mnemonics and memory palaces, and give you a basic outline of the Hanzi Movie Method.

What is the Hanzi Movie Method?

The Hanzi Movie Method is the product of several learning resources adapted and developed further by us over several years of live teaching and extensive research.

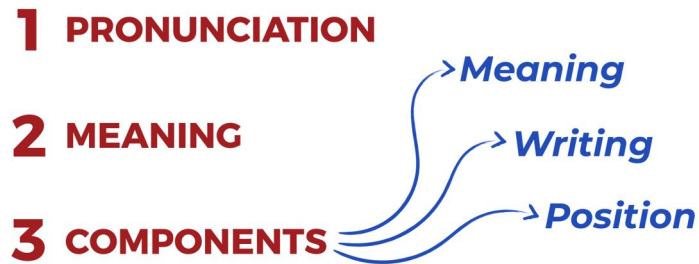
Here they are:

1. The original system (known as “The Marilyn Method”) was [a post](#) by Serge Gorodish on his blog Country of The Blind. Since using his system, we have systemized it further and added several of our own elements along the way.
2. The order of the characters is inspired by [“Remembering the simplified Hanzi”](#) by Heisig and Richardson. We have made a lot of improvements here too, specifically by focusing on a smaller number of more frequent characters first, and adding a huge amount of personalization in the way components and characters are learned.
3. Mnemonic & Visualisation techniques currently being used and perfected by the world’s greatest memory athletes. Sources are numerous, but a special shout out to [Dominic O’Brien](#) and his fascinating books on memory techniques, several extracts from which you’ll find in this ebook.

Before we start teaching you this incredible method for learning Chinese characters, we should first take a moment to establish exactly what do we mean when we say that you will **“learn”** or **“know”** a character. This is very important, largely because the vast majority of character learning methods, even the more widely known, can leave learners with a very shallow knowledge when compared with a native Chinese learner.

What does "knowing" a character really mean?

When learning characters, we need to know...



We hold our clients by the same standards as a Chinese person. Here's what you need to know about a character to honestly say you "know" it by Mandarin Blueprint standards:

1. **The pronunciation**, which includes: The pinyin consonant ("Initial"), The pinyin vowel ("Final"), and the tone.
2. **The meaning** (of course).
3. **The character components**, their meanings (if applicable), and their exact position within the character.

By the time you finish this ebook, you will be equipped to learn all of these aspects of a Chinese character **in a matter of seconds**. You will also be able to write the characters with ease and with a **90-95% retention rate**. All it takes is an open mind, a willingness to follow our instructions, and a little practice.

The techniques that this system employs are based on an elaborate system of **mnemonics** very similar to those used by memory athletes around the world. Let's explore these a little deeper...

What's a Mnemonic?

Derived from the name Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, a mnemonic is any device that helps us to memorize a piece of information more efficiently, from shopping lists to languages. They have been around for thousands of years, and there are several widely used systems of mnemonics today. The oldest and most famous of these is the "Method of Loci".

The Method of Loci & Chinese Mnemonics

The method of loci (or memory palace technique) was the first implemented by the ancient Greeks. They used memory palaces (or "mind palaces"), aka locations in your mind where you can store mnemonic images. Before the days of paper (or smartphones!), these were essential for recording information accurately, but have since fallen by the wayside. They are now a key technique used by memory athletes for remembering vast amounts of information, often in a specific order.

What are “Loci”?

“Loci” are specific locations within your memory palace (e.g., on the sofa, in the corners, on the coffee table, etc.) where you place imaginary objects or people that represent what you need to remember. Using the method of loci, or “**journey method**”, you can plan a fixed route through your memory palace and visit your loci in a specific order, e.g., From the bedroom to the front door. On the way through this route, you interact with imaginary objects or people at each locus that represents the information you want to remember. This technique can be used to remember things like shopping lists or speeches.

To be more memorable, the people or objects in a given locus are often unusual or outrageous. For example, to remember to buy washing up liquid, you might imagine a big bottle of it on your sofa shooting bright blue detergent all over the living room.

Proven to work

Over the years, memory athletes have developed many different variations of these mnemonic systems that have been adapted to memorize certain kinds of information better. Most of these methods tend to have 4 key elements in common: **locations**, **people**, **objects**, and **actions**. These are things that (almost) all of us can imagine very easily.

Memory athletes link different sets of information to these key elements and then create a series of scenarios involving them to remember certain playing cards, numbers or pi, or even lines from poems. For example, Marilyn Monroe in a diamond dress represents the queen of diamonds, Mohammed Ali wearing boxing gloves represents the king of clubs, etc.

Here are a few feats of memory that have been performed using techniques like these over the years:

- [In 2002, Dominic O'Brien](#) memorized a random sequence of 2808 playing cards (54 packs). After looking at each card only once. He was able to correctly recite their order, making just eight errors, four of which he immediately corrected when told he was wrong.
- [In 2016, Alexander Mullen \(USA\)](#) memorized a deck of cards in under 20 seconds. He was only allowed to look at each card once.
- [In 2015, Marwin Wallonius \(Sweden\)](#) memorized 5,040 random binary numbers in 30 minutes.

[fMRI scans](#) and various brain experiments have proven that these kind of feats are not due to intelligence or unique brain structure. On the contrary, it all comes down to variations on several mnemonic techniques. In the Hanzi Movie Method, we apply the same principles as these athletes, just with different associations:

- The **locations** will be your **"sets"**, which represent the **pinyin vowels**.
- The **people** will be your **"actors"**, which represent the **pinyin consonants**.
- The **objects** will be your **"props"**, which represent the **character components**.

- Finally, **actions** (i.e., how these elements all interact) will be your “**movie scenes**” or “**scripts**”, which represent the **meaning** of the character.

As an added bonus, we will also gradually introduce many different “**special effects**”, which are little tricks passed down by the experts that make your “movie scenes” extra memorable.

We’ll be devoting a whole chapter of this ebook to each of these key elements.

A Truly Worthwhile Endeavour

Using The Hanzi Movie Method for the first time is like becoming fluent in a new mini-language. At first, it takes a bit of time to get familiar with the elements of the method (Sets, Actors, Props, Scripts & Special Effects). Consequently, you may find yourself thinking: “Hey, I just want to learn Chinese characters and I’m spending time learning all this extra stuff”. Perhaps you start to think it might be quicker learning the old-fashioned way. **Please don’t let yourself believe that.**

It takes from between 10 and 50 characters before you hit your stride with this technique. After this, **you’ll be unstoppable**. If you ever feel doubt creeping in, remember these points:

1. It’s Comprehensive

The Hanzi Movie Method allows you to learn **ALL** aspects of a character (reading, writing, and pronunciation) at the same time. There are other methods out there

You'll use the **Hanzi Movie Method** to learn...



that will teach you one or maybe even two of these aspects, but you'll have to spend more time learning the other parts separately.

2. It's Fast

Once you get good at The Hanzi Movie Method, you'll be able to memorize **30-60 characters an hour**, easily.

3. It's Easy & Fun

The character order is designed to be intuitive. Much of the inspiration to use character components as a guide for building the 汉字 sequence came from James Heisig's book [Remembering the Simplified Hanzi](#), but with a few crucial differences. You will learn the more straightforward and frequent characters first and gradually build up to more complex ones. It's critical for your self-confidence to [win games](#). You start winning small day-to-day games and move on to win the meta-game of mastering the technique.

4. We've Got Your Back

Aside from this series of articles, we have created a ton of support materials to make The Hanzi Movie Method even more straightforward. This includes our intuitive character order, sample scenes (which we call "Scripts"), Anki decks, and

our living google docs on the latest visualization techniques (aka “Special Effects”). These are accessible by [subscribing to the course](#).

5. It Builds a Solid Foundation

Once you’ve finished the 592 characters currently on our list, you’ll know over **250 common components** (which we call “Props”), which amounts to the vast majority used in all Chinese characters. This means that you’ll have the building blocks necessary to memorize many more common characters which also share these components.

6. It Doesn’t Only Teach You Chinese

Using this technique will have a sweet side-effect. You’ll unlock powers of association and creativity that you can apply to Chinese [vocabulary acquisition](#), and anything else you need to remember in your life. The learning process itself will exercise your brain, improve your levels of concentration and sharpen your memory. **We can attest to the incredible effects using this method has had on our creative thinking abilities.**

Chinese is the Script. You are the Director. Life is the Inspiration.

The greatest 惊喜 (jīngxǐ – surprise) for us making this curriculum is the following realization: **The Hanzi Movie Method is fundamentally human.** We designed it with the express intent to conform to your individuality. The two of us don’t merely hope you use this method to learn Chinese & master mnemonic visualization. We

want you to learn about yourself, grow as a person, and realize you are way more powerful than you think.

Here's what some of our clients have to say about the Hanzi movie method:



"The Hanzi Movie Method of character learning is near magic."

David



"I never would've thought that I could learn over 600 characters in less than a month, let alone that it would feel so painless, even enjoyable! I can only recommend this course."

Jo



"I can't stress enough how thrilling that discovery has been."

Jordan

[See More Testimonials](#)

USING “PROPS” TO LEARN CHINESE COMPONENTS

SEMANTIC	油	PHONETIC
 “3 Dots Water”	 <i>yóu</i> “Oil”	 <i>yóu</i> “From”

It is essential to remember that Chinese characters themselves aren't the only elements of the written language that contain meaning; each character component (sometimes referred to as “[radicals](#)”) also contains meaning.

Core Object Recognition and Chinese Components



Have you ever stopped to consider how it is that humans are so good at rapidly recognizing objects despite the substantial variation across all the different things

we see day to day? The following excerpt from a [scientific publication](#) on the subject beautifully sums up what a magnificent feat this is:

*“Recognizing the words on this page, a coffee cup on your desk, or the person who just entered the room all seem so easy. The apparent ease of our visual recognition abilities belies the computational magnitude of this feat: **We effortlessly detect and classify objects from among tens of thousands of possibilities** (Biederman, 1987) **and we do so within a fraction of a second** (Potter, 1976; Thorpe et al., 1996), **despite the tremendous variation in appearance that each object produces on our eyes** (reviewed by Logothetis and Sheinberg, 1996). From an evolutionary perspective, our recognition abilities are not surprising -- **our daily activities** (e.g. finding food, social interaction, selecting tools, reading, etc.), **and thus our survival, depends on our accurate and rapid extraction of object identity from the patterns of photons on our retinae.**”*

No wonder we are such natural experts at recognizing objects! In order to leverage this natural ability to help us learn Chinese character components, all we have to do is link **real-life 3D objects** with them.

How to Choose Great Props

When choosing a ‘prop’ to represent each character component, it is helpful to ask: **What is the original meaning of the component?** If your prop representation of the component relates to the meaning, you create yet another strong connection with the 汉字. In other words, you don’t want to assign objects randomly; there should be a logic behind it (more on how below).

Throughout the levels of The Mandarin Blueprint Method, we provide suggestions (often two) for each prop. All your props can also be found in your flashcards.

Most of the props we provide you’ll want to use. However, if you’re even the slightest bit apprehensive about our choices, or if another image pops into your mind, then **go with your instincts**. When you do, you should do so based on one of these three things:

1. The Component’s Appearance



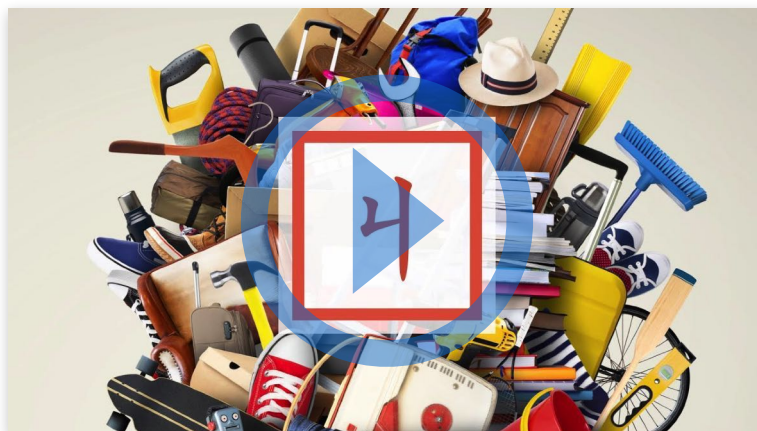
“ㄣ” looks like a banana, so that can represent this component in your “movie scenes”. If it looks like something else to you, go with that instead. Simple!

2. The Component's Meaning



中 means middle, so we chose a dartboard or Malcolm from the TV show Malcolm in the Middle.

3. A Combination of Both



中 looks like a 4, so we could make it's prop something connected with four's meaning or pronunciation. We chose a golf club because of it's relation to shouting "Fore!".

Choose Your Props Efficiently

Unlike Actors & Sets, Props link more tightly to elements that are uniquely Chinese. Pinyin initials & finals (actors & sets) are made up of roman letters that you've been familiar with for years. Character components, on the other hand, are new to you. It's for this reason that we advise taking the majority of our suggestions. Choosing your own props is excellent, and does indeed have the potential to be more memorable, but in the early stages, you risk making too tenuous a connection with the component if you don't follow our lead.

USING “SETS” TO LEARN PINYIN FINALS

We are not the first people to advise using mnemonic visualization to memorize 汉字, but almost all of it focuses exclusively on the meaning and character components. How an individual Chinese character is pronounced is often left by the wayside, and this is a significant problem. It's not a phonetic language, so without memory techniques, you are forced to once again fall back on rote learning. [That sucks.](#)

As we already mentioned in part one of this series, to memorize the various elements we need to know about a character, we simply need to connect real-life concepts to them.

Aside from a handful of exceptions, every one of the roughly **400** Chinese syllables are made up of three elements: **Initial**, **Final** and **Tone**. We link these to **people**, **places** (buildings) and **rooms** within a place respectively.

You will notice some differences between the initials and finals of the Hanzi Movie Method and the actual pinyin chart, but you don't need to know the how and why behind that to rapidly learn Chinese characters! For those of you who are curious, we wrote a detailed post about it [here](#).

What makes The Hanzi Movie Method even more unique is its commitment to flexibility. While other modes of Mandarin syllable mnemonics are rigid, the MBM approach follows the advice of the [World Memory Champions](#) by encouraging you to pick actors and sets relevant to your personal lived experience.

The neural networks in your brain that represent the people and places who left the most significant impression upon you are, by definition, the most solid. Consequently, people and places you know well or know a lot about are much more memorable.

The Chinese Memory Palace – How Does it Work?

Sets represent Pinyin Finals. As mentioned above, we re-defined which sounds fall into the category of “Finals” and “Initials”. We’ll talk about this in detail in the final

chapter of this ebook, but it is not necessary to understand the mechanism behind it to follow the method. All you have to do is assign a “set” to the next 13 finals:

-a, -o, -e, -ai, -ei, -ao, -ou, -an, -ang, -(e)n, -(e)ng & Ø Null

Below each “Set the Scene” video is a detailed description of how to choose the Set that relates to the individual Pinyin Finals, however here are some types of places you can consider:

Places you've lived

Hotels

Schools

Gyms or Stadiums

Friend's Houses

Auditoriums or Performance

Restaurants or Shops

Venues

Workplaces

*Any other place you can
distinctly remember*

The Room Within the Set Represents the Tone

Each set should have clearly defined rooms or areas. While it is acceptable to choose an entirely outdoor set, you must be sure that there are at least four clearly defined boundaries between the different sections of the outdoor environment. The four areas will represent the four Mandarin tones. Fifth tone does occasionally come up rarely, and it has its own special area, which we'll tell you about below.

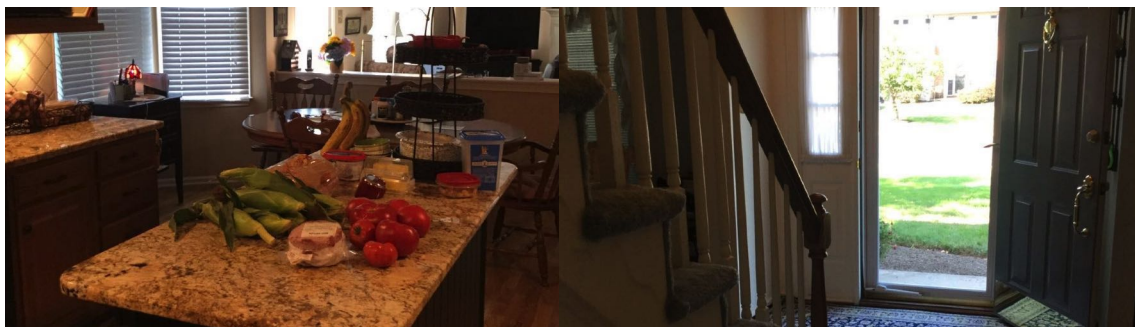
Technically speaking, you could randomly assign any four rooms to any of the four tones. However, we recommend applying as much consistency as possible across your 13 Sets to mitigate confusion. Here are our recommendations (pictures from Phil's childhood home):

1st Tone – Outside the Entrance



Regardless of which type of Set you select (school, home, workplace, etc.), they all have entrances, so imagine yourself outside the entrance, and you'll know that your scene is representative of 1st tone.

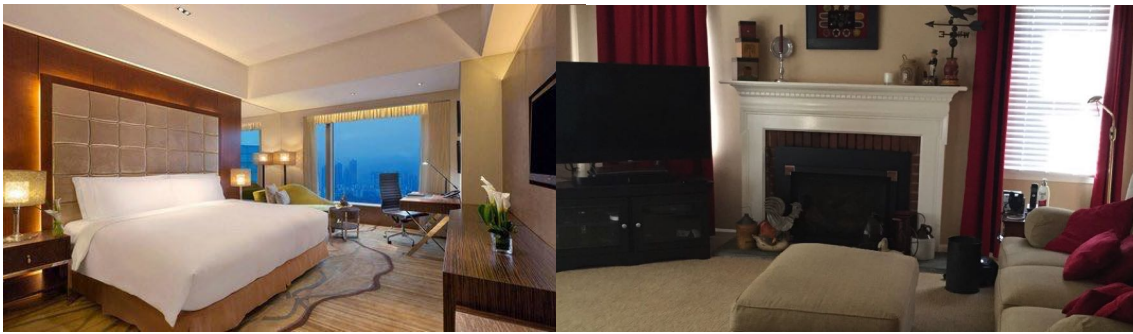
2nd Tone – Kitchen or Inside the Entrance



The kitchen is an ideal choice for 2nd Tone because a kitchen has many instantly recognizable characteristics. If you see a stove, sink, refrigerator, etc., you immediately know that the scene is representative of a 2nd Tone 汉字. However,

certain types of sets do not have a kitchen, in which case we recommend visualizing your scenes taking place just inside the entrance of the Set.

3rd Tone- Bedroom, Living Room or Any Alternative Room



In the same way that the characteristics of a kitchen are instantly recognizable, so are the components of a bedroom. There's a bed there for heck's sake! In some Sets you may have more memories in the Living Room, so that is acceptable as well. Of course, certain types of Sets contain neither a bedroom or a living room. In this scenario, you can assign 3rd Tone to any room that does not conflict with the other tones.

4th Tone – Bathroom or Backyard



Bathrooms have toilets, sinks & showers, and so they are also easy to visualize and directly associate with 4th Tone. The backyard is another option if your emotional memory of a particular back garden is quite strong.

5th Tone – On the Roof

There are very few characters that are only a 5th Tone, but in the rare instances that this does take place, shoot your scene **on the roof**.

Remembering the “Epoch” of the Set

Skilled memory athletes encourage taking the time to analyze the “epochs” of your personal history to more easily bring to mind fodder for your mnemonics. So what’s an “epoch?” One of the definitions of the word epoch is “a particular period of time marked by distinctive features, events, etc.” If your life were a book, an epoch would be a chapter. It’s also known as “episodic memory”.

Your Sets are one of the best triggers to the epochs of your life. Imagining yourself standing in your college dorm room, middle school or most hated workplace has the potential to transport you back to that chapter of your life instantly. It doesn’t just have to be about memories in that particular location either; it could just as easily be a reminder of other life events going on during that period. Taking a few moments to let that emotional memory wash over you will naturally give you more fodder for your movies scenes.

Here are Phil’s Sets you can use to get a clearer idea of how this works:

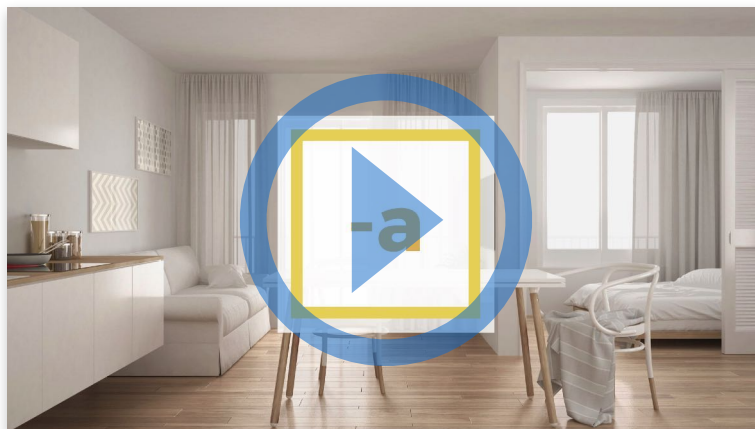
1. Ø NULL – Childhood Home

Many syllables in The Hanzi Movie Method have no final (Ø Null), but it is still necessary to shoot a scene in a memorable location to take advantage of our



brain's 3D spatial imaging capacity. **We highly recommend selecting your Childhood Home to represent the 'Ø Null' Final.** This final will appear the most, and your childhood home is an ideal choice because of the emotional memory residing there. To be clear, this is not a requirement, but we still think it is the best choice.

2. Pinyin Final: -a

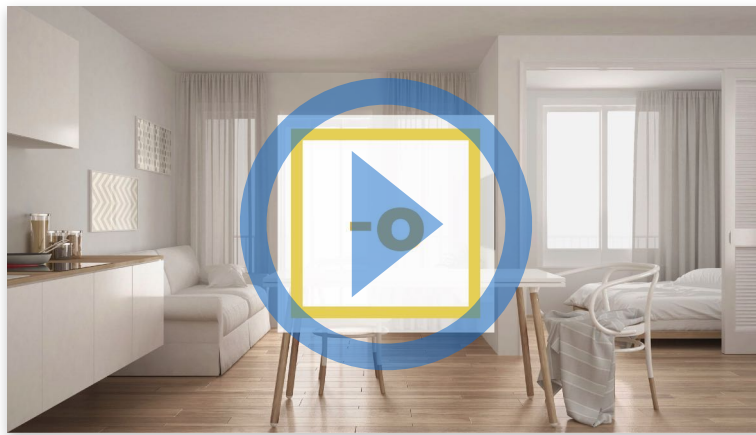


Set: Fairmount Ave Apartment in Philadelphia – Phil's first ever apartment after moving out of his parents' house.

Link to Chinese: The connection to "-a" is that his roommate was a friend named "Alex."

Phil's Epoch: The first apartment after moving out of one's parents' house often has memories of excitement and individuation. That year Phil was studying accounting at Temple University, which was a real slog, but on the other hand, he had a great time with his roommate and fellow drummer Alex. Phil's memory of that epoch was that of a freedom & potential like he'd never seen before, and that excited energy provided excellent fodder for Hanzi Movie Method scenes.

3. Pinyin Final: -o



Set: Dorm room at Temple University

Link to Chinese: Phil's roommate was a real "bro" (rhymes with "o")

Phil's Epoch: Memories of dorm life tend to leave a lasting emotional impact, and Phil's experience was no different. Thinking about that time easily brings back memories of a deep excitement associated with not only being independent of one's family but also being surrounded by a whole group of peers in the same situation.

4. Pinyin Final: -e

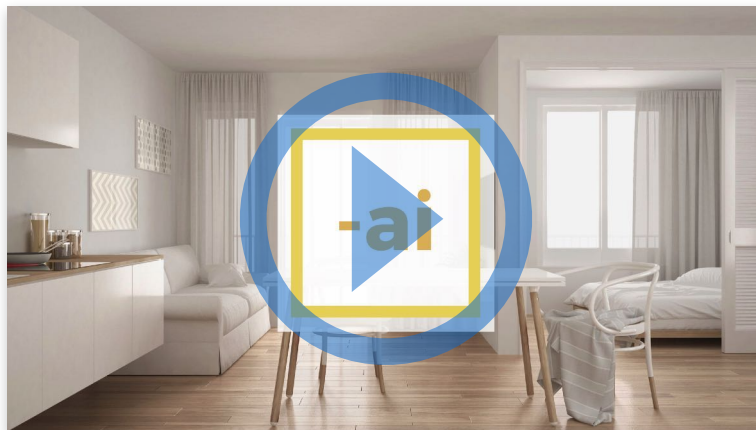
Set: Hatfield Elementary School



Link to Chinese: Elementary starts with “e.”

Phil's Epoch: All throughout elementary school Phil had extraordinarily good luck in his assigned teachers. All seven of them (Kindergarten – 6th Grade) were admirable people who seemed genuinely passionate about educating young people. As a result, whenever he shot a 汉字 movie scene in Hatfield Elementary School, there was nearly endless fodder for the “scripts.”

5. Pinyin Final: -ai



Set: Kempinski Hotel in Chongqing

Link to Chinese: The band Phil played in at the Kempinski Chongqing had a guitar player named Marty Vai, which also reminds him of Marty McFly from Back to the Future (the vowel sound in “fly” sounds like “-ai.”)

Phil’s Epoch: A brand new experience defined this period for Phil. He was playing drums nightly in the Paulaner Brauhaus restaurant attached to the lobby of the Kempinski Hotel Chongqing. He was also living in the hotel, getting food from the hotel restaurant, and swimming in the hotel pool. This time taught Phil a valuable life lesson because despite being surrounded by luxury, there was often a sense of loneliness as a result of not knowing anyone in Chongqing.

6. Pinyin Final: -ei



Set: Kempinski Hotel in Chengdu

Link to Chinese: Phil’s bandmates were from Trinidad & Tobago. The vowel sound in “Tobago” is almost identical to the sound of “-ei.”

Phil’s Epoch: Two opposite emotional states for Phil defined this epoch. On the one hand, it was during this time that he fell in love with Chengdu and decided to study Chinese in earnest. On the flip side, he had a very consistent and ultimately unresolvable conflict with one of his bandmates that caused a lot of stress.

Remember, the most memorable moments in our lives are not all positive. On the contrary, when something is unpleasant or causes emotional pain, we're much more likely to remember it so that we can more easily avoid a similar circumstance in the future.

7. Pinyin Final: -ao



Set: John & Katy's Apartment

Phil's Epoch: After playing drums in Beijing for about a year, Phil met a guitar & bass player named John who would become a great friend. During this time, Phil spent a lot of time in John's apartment practicing original music. John's wife Katy often made came home at the end of the rehearsal with food or cooked a meal. It was such a warm and welcoming experience for Phil that he never forgot and still keeps in touch with John & Katy to this day. The advantage of this type of set is that it makes you excited to learn a 汉字 that happens to have this Pinyin Final, after all, you get to revisit a place of kindness & love.

8. Pinyin Final: -ou

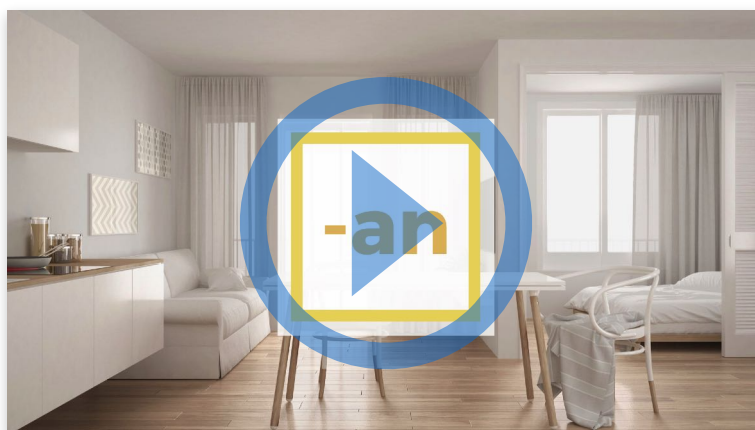
Set: Beijing Dongzhimen Apartment



Link to Chinese: The link is in the epoch, as this was a time of great “growth” for Phil. The vowel sound in “grow” or “growth” sounds just like “-ou” in Mandarin.

Phil’s Epoch: This is the first place Phil lived after moving to China. He had never lived abroad before, and it felt as though every day was an adventure. Just outside his door were the famous “Ghost Street” (簋街) and a maze of Beijing’s famous hutongs (胡同). As a result of facing the challenge of getting by in a foreign land without knowing the language (yet), he was forced to grow as a person to rise to the occasion.

9. Pinyin Final: -an

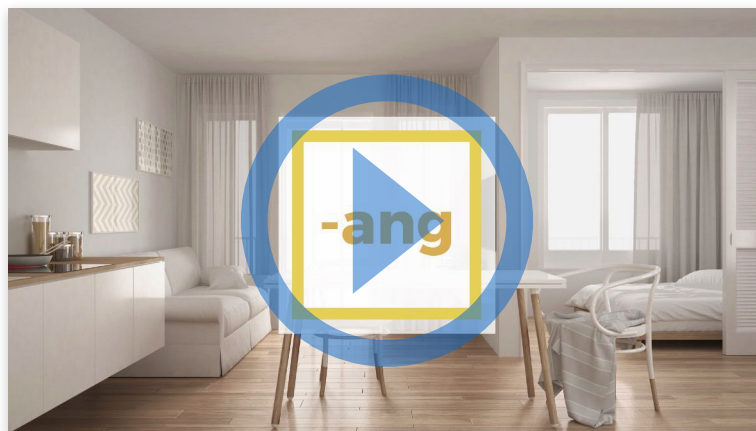


Set: Sam Ash Music, King of Prussia, PA

Link to Chinese: Manager's name was "Sandu."

Phil's Epoch: Sam Ash Music is a big box musical instrument retailer. Phil worked in the drum department selling percussion equipment, and the store was massive. All the employees were in some way connected to music but working at Sam Ash to pay the bills. This made for quite a motley crew of personalities that certainly didn't fit the mold of corporate employees. The greatest lesson of this epoch for Phil was how to be a great boss. The general manager named Sandu simultaneously expected the best from the staff while also inspiring loyalty like no one Phil has met since. Every time Phil had a scene taking place in the "-an" set, it was always a piece of cake to come up with ideas.

10. Pinyin Final: -ang



Set: 19th & Angley St. Apartment

Link to Chinese: "Angley" St. & "-ang."

Phil's Epoch: Phil lived in this apartment with three different sets of roommates, all of whom he loved dearly and are still friends to this day. Naturally, many fond memories in that apartment can be applied to mnemonic scenes.

11. Pinyin Final: -(e)n



Set: Pennfield Middle School

Link to Chinese: The “en” in Pennfield maps to “-(e)n.”

Phil’s Epoch: Unlike elementary school, middle school was defined by puberty & awkwardness for Phil. The students from five different elementary schools all funneled into the middle school, and like many children of that age (12-15), it was challenging to handle socially. Despite the memories of social stress, this was also the time that Phil started to establish himself as a skilled drummer for his age, and so he chose to make 3rd Tone scenes take place in the Band Room or Auditorium.

12. Pinyin Final: -(e)ng



Set: Kindergarten in Beijing

Link to Chinese: This is where Phil taught English (English->eng) upon arriving in China.

Phil's Epoch: Like many who come to China, Phil's first occupation was teaching English. This place reminds Phil of alternating between joy and frustration by the children (ages 4-6). Phil discovered that he admires children's curiosity, but also felt stressed that he didn't know how to handle emotional outbursts or conflicts between students very well. These emotions served as great fodder for Phil's scenes.

A Special Case in the Chinese Memory Palace: -(e)n & (e)ng

You'll notice that the finals -(e)n & -(e)ng have a floating "e". This has a direct relationship with the actors that represent the pinyin initials, which we'll talk about in detail in the next chapter. When a female, fictional or world leader actor combines with one of these sets, the "e" drops in the Pinyin spelling. For the male actors, it does not. Examples:

L – Male Actor + -(e)ng Set = leng ("e" doesn't drop)

Li – Female Actor + -(e)ng Set = ling ("e" drops)

Lu – Fictional Actor + -(e)n Set = lun ("e" drops. Fictional actors never combine with "-(e)ng")

Qu – World Leader + -(e)n Set = qun ("e" drops. World Leaders never combine with "(e)ng")

13. Pinyin Final: -ong



Set: Sing Song Music Store

Link to Chinese: Song has “-ong” in it.

Phil's Epoch: Phil is a drummer and took drum lessons at a store hilariously named “Sing Song Music.” Drumming was great for Phil emotionally during the awkward teenage years of this epoch. It gave him confidence that he could excel at something so long as he practiced every day, and once again he was fortunate to have an excellent teacher.

Choose Your Sets Wisely

There are only 13 sets to choose, but as illustrated above they can be the gateway to a whole series of emotionally resonant chapters of your life. With that in mind, you'll likely understand what we mean when we say that The Mandarin Blueprint Method uses the **memoir** of your life to teach you Chinese. It still takes mental effort to bring to mind your past, but the alternative of rote learning pales in

comparison to “a trip down memory lane” when it comes to fun, and hey, you might just learn a bit about yourself in the process!

USING “ACTORS” AND FACIAL MNEMONICS TO LEARN PINYIN INITIALS

		F I N A L S																																			
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		a	ai	ao	an	ang	e	ei	(e)n	(e)ng	Ø	o	ong	ou	Ø	a	ao	e	ou	an	ang	(e)n	(e)ng	ong	Ø	a	o	(ei)	ai	an	(e)n	ang	(e)ng	Ø	e	an	(e)n
Ø		a	ai	ao	an	ang	e		en	eng	er	o		ou	yi	ya	yao	ye	you	yan	yang	yin	ying	yong	wu	wa	wo	wei	wai	wan	wen	wang	weng	yu	yue	yuan	yun
b		ba	bai	bao	ban	bang		bei	ben	beng		bo			bi		biao	bie		bian		bin	bing		bu												
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n		na	nai	nao	nan	nang	ne	nei	nen	neng			nong	nou	ni		niao	nie	niu	nian	niang	nin	ning	nu		nuo			nuan					nü	nüe		
l		la	lai	lao	lan	lang	le	lei		leng		lo	long	lou	li	lia	liao	lie	liu	lian	liang	lin	ling	lu		luo			luan	lun			lǚ	lüe			
z		za	zai	zao	zan	zang	ze	zei	zen	zeng					zi									zu		zuo	zui			zuan	zun						
c		ca	cai	cao	can	cang	ce		cen	ceng			cong	cou	ci									cü		cuo	cui			cuan	cun						
s		sa	sai	sao	san	sang	se		sen	seng			song	sou	si									sü		suo	sui			suan	sun						
zh		zha	zhai	zhao	zhan	zhang	zhe	zhei	zhen	zheng			zhong	zhou	zhi									zhu	zhua	zhua	zhui	zhuai	zhuan	zhun	zhuang						
ch		cha	chai	chao	chan	chang	che		chen	cheng			chong	chou	chi									chu	chua	chuo	chui	chuai	chuan	chun	chuang						
sh		sha	shai	shao	shan	shang	she	shei	shen	sheng				shou	shi									shu	shua	shuo	shui	shuai	shuan	shun	shuang						
r				rao	ran	rang	re		ren	reng			rong	rou	ri									ru	rua	ruo	rui		ruan	run							
j																ji	jia	jiao	jie	jiu	jian	jiang	jin	jing	jiong									ju	jue	juan	jun
q																qi	qia	qiao	qie	qiu	qian	qiang	qin	qing	qiong									qu	que	quan	qun
x																xi	xia	xiao	xie	xiu	xian	xiang	xin	xing	xiong									xu	xue	xuan	xun
g		ga	gai	gao	gan	gang	ge	gei	gen	geng			gong	gou										gu	gua	guo	gui	guai	guan	gun	guang						
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h		ha	hai	hao	han	hang	he	hei	hen	heng			hong	hou										hu	hua	huo	hui	huai	huan	hun	huang						
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Just as “Sets” (locations from your life) represent the pinyin vowels (also known as “finals”), “Actors” (People you know or know about) represent pinyin consonants (also known as “initials”).

In the Hanzi Movie Method, there are 55 “actors” in total, which we split up into four distinct categories. Here they are:

The actors within the **blue** category of initials on the left are represented by **males**.

The actors within the **pink** category of initials are represented by **females**.

The actors within the **green** category of initials are represented by **fictional characters**.

The actors within the **purple** category of initials are represented by either **Gods** or **world leaders**.

Let's look at why we have done this in a bit more detail.

Male Actors



Male Actors Represent:

b-, p-, m-, f-, d-, t-, n-, l-, g-, k-, h-, zh-, ch-, sh-, r-, z-, c-, s-

The actor you choose should give a clue to the pronunciation. For example b = Bill (Murray) or p = Paul (McCartney)

We base most of the examples on first names, but feel free to link a Pinyin initial to a surname or nickname as well.

The 'Ø Null' Situation



Some syllables do not contain an initial (e.g., ao, an, en, etc.) However, we MUST have an actor in every scene. We categorize these syllables as having a 'Ø Null' initial, and the actor is always Jackie Chan. We chose him because he's so well known, but go ahead and choose somebody else if you like.

Dealing With "ER"

The Pinyin syllable "er" is unique. It doesn't follow the same system of initials and finals as the rest of the chart. What to do? We solve this by calling "er" a 'Double Ø Null.' Ø Initial + Ø Final = Jackie Chan in your childhood home.

Female Actors (Yi/i)



Females Actors Represent:

y-, bi, pi, mi-, di-, ti-, ni-, li-, ji-, qi-, xi-

REMINDER: Standard Pinyin changes any “i” with no preceding consonant to “y.”

Wait, Isn't “-i” Considered a Final?

According to [standard Pinyin](#), “i” (“ee”) is categorized as a “final” along with “-ian, -iang, -ia, -iao, -iou, -ie, -in, -ing & -iong.” However, if we treat this set of pronunciations as finals, we end up with too many finals (sets) and too few initials (actors).

To solve this problem, all you have to do is re-categorize what is considered an “initial” by taking the “i” and tacking it on to the consonants listed above (b, p, m, d, t, n, l, j, q, x). These combinations of “consonant + i” are represented by Female Actors.

The actor you choose should give a clue to the pronunciation. For example bi = Britney (Spears) or ti = (Mother) Theresa

J, Q & X Are Special



The initials “j-, q- and x-” never appear except before -i- or -ü-. Hence why Male Actors never represent “j, q or x.”

Combining with the Final “-ou”

REMINDER: When combining initials that have a “consonant+i” structure (i.e., di, ji, li) with the final “-ou,” standard Pinyin drops the “o” as such:

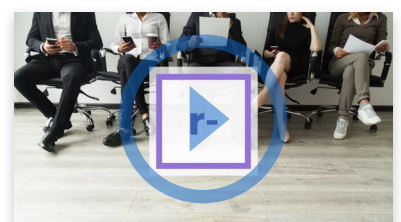
di- + -ou= diu (not “diou”)

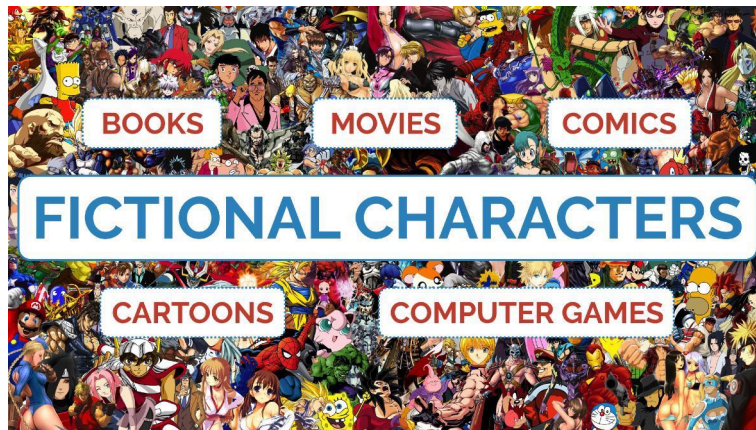
ji- + -ou= jiu (not “jiou”)

li- + -ou= liu (not “liou”)

So remember all combinations of this type (diu, jiu, liu, etc.) take place in your “-ou” ‘Set’ with a female ‘Actor.’

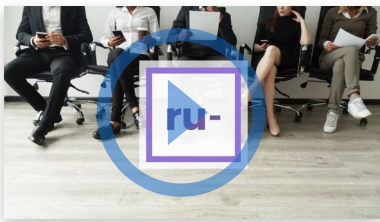
Zhi, Chi, Shi, Ri, Zi, Ci and Si are male!





Fictional Actors Represent:

w-, bu-, pu, mu-, fu-, du-, tu-, nu-, lu-, gu-, ku-, hu-, zhu-, chu-, shu-, ru-, zu-, cu-,
su-



REMINDER: Standard Pinyin changes any “u” with no preceding consonant to “w.”

Combining with the Final “-ei”

REMINDER: When combining initials that have a “consonant+u” structure (i.e., du, gu, hu) with the final “-ei,” standard Pinyin drops the “e” as such:

du- + -ei= dui (not “duei”)

gu- + -ei= gui (not “guei”)

hu- + -ei= hui (not “huei”)

So remember all scenes with this set of syllables (dui, gui, hui, etc.) are shot in your “-ei” Set with a Fictional Actor.

Combining with the Final “-en”

“U+en” is the same pinyin vowel occlusion as “u+ei” directly above. The “-en” sound is still pronounced, but the “e” spelling drops out.

du- + -en= dun (not “duen”)

gu- + -en= gun (not “guen”)

hu- + -en= hun (not “huen”)

So remember all scenes with this set of syllables (dun, gun, hun, etc.) are shot in your “-en” Set with a Fictional Actor.

World Leaders or Gods (Yu/ü)



World Leaders or Gods Represent:

yu-, nü-, lü-, ju-, qu-, xu-

NOTE: There are only six representatives of this category. If you can think of an alternative six 'Actors' who fit into a clear & distinguishable category, go for it. We once had a student who chose six communist dictators to represent the six "Ü" initials. To each their own, however, it is essential to be sure that whatever category you pick is visually self-explanatory so that you don't confuse it with the male, female and fictional actors.

REMINDER: Even though they don't all have the umlaut ("ü") they are all pronounced the same way.

Some Inspiration for Choosing Gods

A good source for choosing gods can be the Ancient Greek & Roman gods, but you can also consider gods from any other religion, or even movies (i.e., Thor & Loki from The Avengers)

Some Inspiration for Choosing World Leaders

There are a ton of world leaders to choose from that you can connect to the six pronunciations within this category, and for each lesson where this becomes relevant, we give you a trigger list.

You can also create your own entire group! We've had people use communist leaders, rock bands, and many more.

Choose Your Actors Well

You'll be shooting scenes with the 55 actors you choose for a long time to come, and so having a variety of personalities is crucial in preventing boredom with the method. Luckily, there are extraordinarily few things in this world that vary more than the personality traits of individual people. Use this fact to help make your scenes richer & distinguishable from one another. Darth Vader is not going to react the same way to having a banana thrown at him as your cowardly friend from middle school, and that's half the fun. Oh, and about that, don't forget to HAVE FUN!

USING MOVIE SCENES TO LEARN CHINESE CHARACTERS

We now have all the elements necessary to visually represent the pinyin (Actors & Sets), tone (Room) and character components (Props) for any individual character you want to learn.

Now it's time to figure out how to visually express the character's meaning.

We give every Character an English "Keyword" that represents one of the general meaning of the character. Characters often have several meanings, but we try to choose the most common one.

Throughout this post, we'll be quoting 8-time memory champion Dominic O'Brien several times from his book "[You Can Have an Amazing Memory](#)", shown by *blue italics*.

Before You Start Creating: Some Things to Keep in Mind

#1 Catch the right brain waves



Research has shown that the brain produces several types of waves depending on your physical and emotional state.

Beta waves (13 to 40 Hertz): These are vital for taking action, decision making and concentration. With such a broad frequency spectrum, beta waves are often subdivided into high beta and low beta. High beta waves (24 to 40 Hertz) can be associated with stress. In short bursts, frantic brain activity is good for quick thinking and instant reaction, but prolonged high-beta activity is draining and can lead to burn-out.

Alpha waves (9 to 12 Hertz): The “chill-out” waves that are produced when you are relaxed. These are the best waves for creative visualization.

Theta waves (5 to 8 Hertz): Associated with dreaming and REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, when many researchers believe our memories are consolidated. During wakefulness, our theta waves promote creative thinking and logical thinking, both of which are important for improving memory.

For the Hanzi Movie Method, you'll want to be as Alpha and Theta as you can. Be relaxed, and you'll be able to access surprising new levels of creativity.

#2 Close your eyes

This usually helps a lot, as any visual cues or distractions from your environment could affect the quality of your scene.

#3 Choose a quiet environment

For best results, you'll need to access those "chill out waves", so a calm, quiet environment would be ideal. However, once you get used to doing this, you'll be able to use these scenes to memorize characters in a taxi, in a bar, or anywhere pretty much instantly, after which you can put them into Anki for review when you get the chance.

#4 Be "present" in every scene

You are the observer, and these are your places, actors and props, and you are in every single one of these scenes looking on. This is not only really effective but also really easy because you know exactly how you would respond to any given action or situation. Think about how you feel towards everything that is going on, as well as thinking about how your actors are feeling. Is somebody menacing? Be intimidated. Somebody exploding? Be surprised. **You can also add yourself in as a third person actor whenever you like.**

"The circuitry of your brain – that is, the individual neurons and networks of neurons it contains – can't tell the difference between what's real and what you've imagined. Only "you" as a whole conscious being know the truth – that's why tricking your brain is relatively easy. Once you bring your humanity, vulnerability and "realness" to your story, your brain can believe it as true – and that makes it even more memorable."

How to Make Killer Associations



The creative visualization involved in the Hanzi Movie Method brings both hemispheres of your brain and your senses into play, working in harmony together to create incredibly memorable "scenes" for each character.

Your left brain gives you the logical functions of the various props (e.g. a razor blade is used for shaving) and actions of your actors, i.e. How they would respond to certain stimuli.

Your right brain gives you imagination, color, spatial awareness and size and shape of objects. On top of that, your five senses give you sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch.

It's these three significant components combined that will trick your brain into thinking the scene is real, making it just as unforgettable as your various memories from different chapters of your life.

Below are some overarching principles you should apply to every scene you create.

Follow this advice, and you'll be making unforgettable memories instantly.

#1 Bring your emotions into play

This is the top rule because it is the factor that will make a scene genuinely come alive because our judgment of any experience comes straight from how it makes us feel.

Our brains are powerful machines when it comes to association and memory, and they respond exceptionally well to emotions.

"Emotions are powerful, instant knee-jerk reactions to what we experience and are the primary link we have to memories from our past. Think about your first day at school, your first kiss, or your first injury. Regardless of the sensory information, you can recall, the overarching details are those related to how you felt. When recalling, just as when you recall a dream, things will seem fuzzy or distorted, but it's the "emotional footprint" that the scene leaves behind that will trigger your memory, just as with real-life events from your past."

Make things surreal and fantastical if you like, but never forget to put emotional content in there, both from your actors and (more importantly) yourself. Also, make sure you not only set in emotional reactions to what's going on from your various actors within the scenes you create but also feel them yourself.

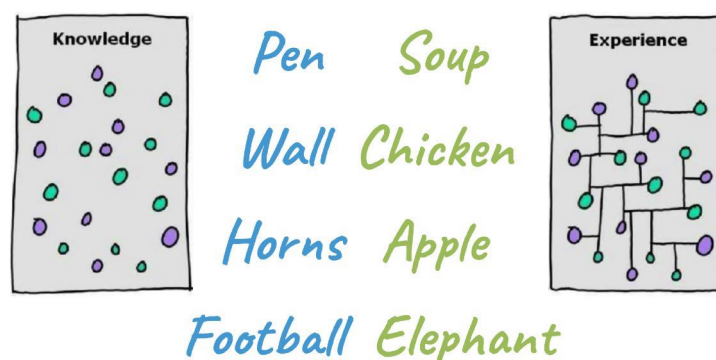
#2 Bring your senses into play

"If you can hone your natural ability to make connections and bring alive episodes from your past by using your emotions and senses, as well as logic and creativity, you make it easier for your brain to memorize new information in an instantly vivid, memorable way."

Every time you interact with your actors, the environment (i.e., your sets) or various objects (i.e., your props), focus on applying your senses to them. Don't just think about how things look, but also how they feel, what sounds they make, their aromas and even how they taste!

On top of that, don't forget other, more subtle senses such as weight, temperature, pain, the momentum of movement, pressure, muscle tension and even itchiness! The more of these you apply, the more your brain thinks that what is happening is real, and therefore more memorable.

#3 Draw from your knowledge and experience



You can apply your knowledge and experience to props, actors, and sets so the actions that occur happen with very little strain. This excerpt from O'Brien's book explains this concept perfectly

Wall: "Makes me think of the Pink Floyd album, a wall I climbed as a child, the wall I used to jump over on my way out of school and so on. As the associations come thick and fast, I come across the most obvious link: the traditional nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall." Eureka!"

Pen and soup: "Using free association and my imagination, I come up with the following possibilities: use the pen to stir the soup (perhaps the soup changes color as the ink from the pen mixes in); use the pen to make a pattern or perhaps write a word in the thick soup; fill the pen with soup as though it was ink to write a letter; use the pen as a straw for the soup; and so on."

Although the connections to my past aren't evident in this example, all the associations draw upon my experience and understanding of both a pen and a bowl of soup. Memory and association are inseparable. The goal is to allow your brain to arrive at whatever common denominator it wants to find without prejudice or preconceptions getting in the way."

#4 Start from the keyword

You are the director, scriptwriter, and cameraman. Do you think anyone in any of those professions starts filming a scene before knowing the message they are trying to send with it? Of course not. **Before you begin creating your scene, think**

about an object or specific action or series of actions that best represents the keyword to you. Look at each keyword and see what flashes from the past they bring up for you. This doesn't have to be anything particularly significant; it could be a film you watched, a game you played, a person you knew, etc. Then let the images, thoughts, emotions, and senses resurface in as much detail as possible. Doing this may take a second, or it may take several minutes. This process is called the "Linking Method," and getting good at this will be very useful for learning words later on in the course.

#5 Make the intangible tangible

Scenes for characters with keywords like "car", "river", and "brain" are easy to create, but words like "individual" (个 – gè), "what" (什 – shén), and "need" (需 – xū) are tougher for beginners because they are abstract. **All you have to do is connect to something tangible.** The connection can be tenuous, and can even have a few degrees of separation.



#6 Involve the environment

Remembering where the scene takes place is essential for remembering the pronunciations correctly. Focus on a specific part of the room you're in (referred to

above as “loci”) and find ways to interact in some way with the walls, ceiling, floor, or furniture. Doing this will not only make the scene more realistic (as mentioned in the section above) but will also clearly imprint the set you are in at the same time.

#7 Make it logical to some degree

All we’re doing here is essentially creating “fake” memories, and your brain can’t tell the difference between real and imagined memories very well, even if they’re a little surreal or fantastical. However, there are limits. There has to be some plausibility or possibility of the actions taking place for it to be memorable, i.e. some bearing on reality. Use your understanding of the properties of the objects in play and apply them to the scene. Your scenes might be a bit bizarre or unconventional but they should also be reasonably plausible or possible. Just keep it (at least mostly) real.

“Don’t try to make the connection any more weird or fantastical than it needs to be – there’s no need to do your creative work overtime. The more natural and logical the imagined scenario is to you, the more likely it is that the two halves of your brain are working in harmony and your brain will accept and remember the associations you come up with.”

#8 As With Everything Else You Learn, Reviewing Is Key

If you are taking our course then we will provide you with [expertly crafted flashcards](#) powered by our favorite spaced repetition software Anki. Even if you decide to go it alone, we still highly suggest using this app or a similar one to make sure you remember every character you learn. Make sure to finish reviewing your

flashcards before looking at new cards. Otherwise, you'll be wasting your energy as you will eventually forget the scenes you create.

Make daily, weekly and even monthly goals on how many characters you want to learn. Adjust and review these goals as you become better at the method. Also, make sure to use a pen and paper to write out the characters once or twice when learning and reviewing. This develops muscle memory that is great for recall.

Common Mistakes

In the early days, some can struggle with this method, and that's understandable. We adults very rarely use our brains like this and, like any muscle, it has to develop with practice. We can also get a lot of “**Interference**” when starting out. Dominic O'Brien uses this term for internal goings-on that makes this process of free association and visualization harder than it needs to be.

Here are the main cause of “interference”, and lead to unnecessarily struggling with this method.

#1 Over-creativity

When you're first starting, a common mistake is trying way too hard to think of unnecessarily complicated images and actions to combine props to show the meaning of the characters or “keywords”. Working hard is what brings your Beta waves into play, which are very draining on your energy levels.

Rather than trying to craft every minute detail of your props and actors' various actions, get a rough idea and focus on the emotions of the actors involved and yourself.

"It's quicker and more effective to imagine a scene and monitor my emotional response to it, and then afterward to recapture that emotional response as my memory trigger, than to fill in every last detail of how the image might look in reality. Set your imagination free and don't try to make the connection any more weird or fantastical than it needs to be."

#2 Being picky with your associations

Shall I make Gandalf throw the razor blade at the syringe? How push the syringe onto the razor blade from below then pull the razor blade up? How about I start with the desert and then turn it into a grass field? Maybe the opposite way around? No, I prefer cacti to have two arms, not three. What if I get confused and think the character means "cactus" not "dry"?.....and so it goes on.

"Go with whatever association comes naturally. The goal is to allow your brain to arrive at whatever common denominator it wants to find without prejudice or preconceptions getting in the way. Don't try to make sense of how the associations are connected. Just trust that they are connected and let the pure power of association "happen"

Remember: Relax and go with your first association. Don't analyze and perfect until you review it. The recall stage is when you find weaknesses in your scenes. Forgot a certain component? That needs to play a more specific part in the scene.

Got the right components but messed up their positions? Go for a clearer focus on where the props are in the scene, etc.

Troubleshooting

Having some issues? Getting frustrated? Here are some easy fixes for you that we've picked up during our hundreds of hour teaching this method.

#1 Ask questions

If you're having trouble making the actor or props interact to create the keyword, ask yourself questions about the actors and props with the scene:

Why is this here?

How could that get there?

What properties does this object have?

How could it interact with the other people and objects around?

Are there any traits about this actor that I can incorporate into this scene?

Your brain will apply your intuitive knowledge of the physical world and combine with your experiences to create the associations necessary.

#2 Relax and go with your first association

Don't analyze and perfect until you review it in Anki. The recall stage is when you find weaknesses in your scenes. Forgot a certain component? That needs to play a

more specific part in the scene. Got the right components but messed up their positions? Go for a clearer focus on where the props are in the scene, etc.

#3 Take breaks

If you've tried all these things above and still feel like you aren't getting anywhere, that's probably a sign that you need a break. These various mental gymnastics require a lot of energy to fire neurons and create connections between them. Be sure to take short breaks after every few minutes. Indeed, don't do it for any longer than 25 minutes at a time! [Timeboxing](#) is a fantastic technique to regulate this.

#4 Draw from personal experience

Your own lived experiences each hold a possible key that will unlock a connection to Chinese. Any time you have a personal experience that is related to your actor, props, or most importantly the keyword, find a way to fit it into your scene. For example, when learning the character that means "friend" or "companionship," think of a time in your life when you had a great time with your friends. Whatever your brain came up with without you having to think about it is likely good enough. The fact that it came to mind so quickly is sufficient evidence that the association is strong.

We like to call this "Neuron Welding." When you bring to mind a lived experience, there is electricity passing between previously constructed neural networks that connect to that memory. If you then introduce a visual element that represents Mandarin Chinese, you allow neural pathways to weld a new connection from your solidly built lived experience network of neurons to the new Chinese concept. The alternative would be to create a neural network from scratch, but that's an

absolute waste of time. We're in the meaning business over here, and meaning is NOT unique to any one language.

#5 Incorporate movement

Speaking of inspiration, sometimes you will prepare to “make a movie” for a character by setting the scene & bringing in your actors and props and then feel stuck. One of the simplest ways to get unstuck is to imagine your props and actor moving around. The movement triggers you to naturally consider how a prop or actor might be used logically to express the keyword. The ideas that come to mind when watching a razor blade flying around the room will be different from a giant teddy bear running sprints. Consider making the movements sharp or extreme to help strengthen the connection to the props & actor.

#6 Use cultural tropes

We live in a world gloriously filled with the works of people who've already taken the time to express meaning artistically. So what? Well, this implies that for many (if not most of) your scenes, you don't need to find creative inspiration on your own. Just borrow from media, internet memes, historical events, or other tropes that have permeated the culture.

Remember, in the early stages of Mandarin acquisition the keywords you learn are simple. All of these character meanings have a connection somewhere in the media, and in many cases, a great deal of effort was applied to expressing that meaning visually. The legwork is already done, all you have to do is piggy-back off of it.

#7 Considering the reactions to what is happening



Imagining your actor, yourself, or a living prop reacting to the events of your scene is pivotal to this method. Consider the following story to show just how memorable a simple reaction shot can be:

When Phil was in middle school, his friend Bob was a big fan of the Anime show “Dragonball Z.” Phil never got into it, but one day he watched an episode with Bob. To this day Phil still clearly remembers a moment where one of the characters mentions offhandedly to two other characters that he has a son.

The two characters reacted with “YOU HAVE A SON?!?!?” in a way that can only be described as Anime gold. Both of their eyes became tiny dots while their mouths took up about 75% of their faces. Their whole bodies were vibrating, and the sky behind them was a cacophony of white energy lines speeding across a red sky.

Oh. I guess they didn’t know he had a son.

The fact that Phil still remembers a random moment (not even a full scene) from a show he watched only once nearly 20 years ago is a testament to just how tuned in we are to reactions. This example also illustrates how exaggerating the reactions can solidify them in your memory. As a side note, remember that the response

doesn't always have to be realistic. Assigning your actor the opposite reaction they would have in real life can be hilarious.

#8 Incorporate contrast

In what ways can you get your Scene to express the meaning through contrast?

Examples:

Do you want to show that something is dry? Make sure it started very wet.

Want to emphasize that something is alive? Have it start dead.

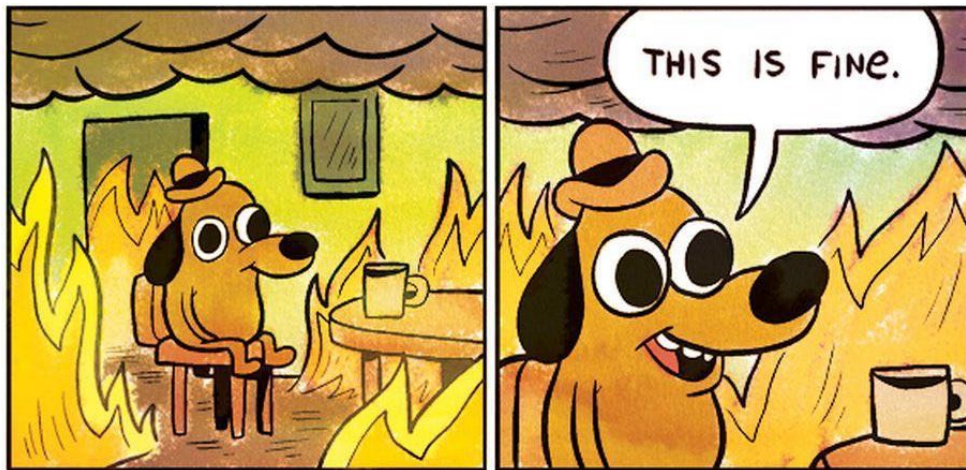
If you want to get across that someone is reckless, first show the actor being very careful.

After three years of teaching this course, we've concluded that thinking about how to apply contrast is the easiest way to get "unstuck" when struggling for inspiration. It doesn't work 100% of the time, but so often it does.

#9 Make it funny!

The Hanzi Movie Method continually provides opportunities for laughter because many of the scenes can be surrealistically absurd. "Shaquille O'Neal, what are you doing in my high school with a spatula and a ferret?!"

While it is undoubtedly true that senses of humor vary between individuals, there are some aspects to comedy that are virtually universal. Often when scenes contain a surprise or a misdirection, you'll end up laughing at the absurdity of it all. We just mentioned contrast & reactions, well consider this popular meme:



What makes this funny is the misdirection around how most creatures react to, you know, BURNING FIRE ALL AROUND THEM. Allow for this loose and silly feeling to permeate your scenes & the next thing you know you'll be laughing your way to fluency.

#10 Use Anthropomorphization

Sometimes when you are struggling to come up with an idea for a scene, you can give what was previously an inanimate object human traits. Seem strange? Have you ever seen "The Brave Little Toaster?"

Besides creating the potential for some adorable scenes, this technique inevitably will give you a more significant opportunity for humor.

#11 Think about the positioning of the props

Imagine the Props either appearing in the order written, or positioned in the same way they are in the character. For example, if the character is 唯, imagine the mouth (口) to the left of the turkey (隹).

This is particularly relevant for some characters that have the same Props but just in different positions:

售 shòu (to sell) – 唯 wéi (solely, only)

加 jiā (to add) – 另 lìng (another)

#12 Use strong imagery

For the sake of keeping this family friendly, we won't go into too much detail here. However, remember that evolutionarily speaking, we are hardwired to have strong associations with sex, violence and gross experiences, so it can be a useful tool. Just remember though, you can be 100% awesome at this system whilst keeping your mind pure!

#13 Bring in “extras” or “copies”

Sometimes you just need an extra pair of hands to help out, but you don't want to use anyone that will affect your recall of the pronunciation. Easy! Just bring in a person or people directly related to either the actors or the set. We call these “extras”, and they can really help. Here are some examples:

John Watson shows up in a scene with Sherlock Holmes

Captain America shows up in a scene with Iron Man

Stan, Kyle & Kenny join Cartman for a scene.

Your Auntie comes into the scene because her house is the set you're using.

Remember: Only use “Extras” if there is no conflict between the extra and your other chosen actors. If you can't think of an extra to use in a scene, just make a copy (or copies) of your actor!

#14 Emphasize Details

Emphasizing details is a technique you can use when you realize you've forgotten something about your scene. For example, you remember the props, actor & keyword, but you're struggling to remember the set. You could do any or all of the following to help solidify the set in your memory:

In every room (for example, your childhood home living room), mentally walk through and take note of as many details as possible.

What furniture is present?

What is on the walls?

Are there decorations?

How is the lighting?

Is sunlight coming in from the window?

Are there miscellaneous objects around the room?

What is the carpeting like?

Is there a smell to the room?

You could run through a similar process if the element you forgot was instead the actor, a prop or the keyword.

#15 Google it!

When all else fails, you can utilize Google image search to trigger yourself towards a new idea. After all, the internet is full of pictures that represent simple objects, meanings, people & places. We recommend only using this as a last resort because connections that arise from within your brain are more potent than those derived from others. Nonetheless, Google is there for you if you need it.

Special Effects

Did you know that memory competitions are a thing? Check out [this video](#) (2 minutes) of 8-time World Memory Champion Dominic O'Brien explaining how the contest works.

The Mandarin Blueprint Method utilizes the very same techniques, and we've even invented some of our own over the years. Each step covered in the previous few videos is a foundational memory technique. To review, they are:

Core Object Recognition (Props)

3D Spatial Imaging (Sets)

Facial Recognition (Actors)

Actions & Interaction (Scripts)

That said, if you want to get really proficient at this method, learning more “advanced” techniques is in order. We put “advanced” in scare quotes because they only seem advanced when you are seeing all of them utilized at once. However, each individual technique is pretty darn easy. To stick with the movie metaphor, we call these techniques Special Effects. Here are what we consider to be the most useful:

#1 Bullet Time (Slow Motion)

First, imagine the scene at average speed, and then make it like the scene from The Matrix where Neo is dodging the bullets. This type of slow motion accomplishes a few things. First of all, it can automatically apply surreality, humor or drama without you even intending that to be the result in the first place. Secondly, you see all

elements of the scene more distinctly. This use of slow motion is particularly useful for scenes that have three props instead of two. It gives you a chance to slow things down, so you see the connection between all three of the props.

#2 Different Angles

Using different “camera angles” can serve two purposes. First of all, different angles can allow you to solidify the memory of a scene you’ve already finished. Imagining the same scene taking place from different vantage points signals to your brain that what you’ve just pictured is essential and shouldn’t be filtered out. After all, why would you spend time looking from all angles if it wasn’t something you wanted to retain?

Secondly, you can use different angles to add drama or humor to a scene. Imagine that you are observing a scene from a 1st person vantage point. In the scene, you are having a nice chat with your actor, but the wall obstructs their left hand. You change the angle to see the actor’s side, and it turns out they are holding a gun. Suddenly the two perspectives contain a considerable change in what you expect to happen next. Here are some “camera angle” options:

Above & Below

From the perspective of your mnemonic character

From the perspective of yourself

From outside the window of the scene

Michael Bay Style Moving Helicopter Angle

Any other angle you can think of!

NOTE: You should still end your story at the angle that sees the props in the correct position.

#3 Bright & Shining

This special effect is particularly useful for nouns. For example, if your Keyword is “Leaf” (叶), we would highly recommend that you make the leaf bright, shining and beautiful. Make the leaf the absolute centerpiece of the scene. Now your brain can more easily remember that the Leaf is the Keyword and not just another prop.

#4 Sound Effects

What does it sound like when a bunch of objects topple on the ground? When a person is injecting themselves with a needle? When a person gets punched?

#5 Theme Music

Have you ever considered that you never question music in a movie? Even in documentaries or works of non-fiction, if there is music playing in the background of a movie scene you never think “This movie is unrealistic! Music isn’t playing in real life! This is supposed to be a true story!” You just accept it.

The fact that we never question music’s presence in a film is because it integrates deeply with our emotional world. You know instantly if the music is meant to elicit sadness, excitement, fear, triumph or a whole other host of human experience. Whenever you want to add emotional context to a scene, you’d be surprised how instantly your brain will provide the appropriate background music, give it a shot!

[Here’s a great video](#) by The Nerdwriter about how music impacts The Lord of the Rings Trilogy. Theme music is particularly useful if you associate the Actor or Keyword with music. For example, utilizing “The Imperial March” when shooting a

scene that includes Darth Vader solidifies his presence in the script. When you 'Make a Movie' for “单 dān – Single,” you could have the song “Single Ladies” by Beyoncé playing in the background.

#6 Explosions

Explosions elicit a powerful memory response because of their fear-inducing destructive qualities. Apart from the fear response explosions create, they also create a sense that something about the scene will be different afterward. After the dust settles, suddenly your keyword connection is in view.

CONCLUSION & YOUR FREE GIFT

That just about rounds up our breakdown of The Hanzi Movie Method. We've written this ebook so that anyone can use the method on their own, although following our step-by-step video curriculum will be by far the easiest and most enjoyable way of doing it. [Learn more about the course below:](#)

LEARN MORE

OR If you'd rather jump into the full course, you'll be learning FAR more than just characters. You'll learn how to read, understand, speak and even write the language. [All you have to do is click play and follow our instructions.](#)

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