Decoding Asian Genealogy 101

Navigating through Asian language genealogical resources is a challenge unlike that of any European resources. Does researching Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language records require a mastery of the language? Absolutely yes, however, with some basics a non-speaker can sift through, decode, and extract useful information without being a master of languages. This paper will familiarize you with:

- The basics of Chinese characters and their use in Korea and Japan
- How to look up characters
- Basics of Asian language input methods on computers
- Common genealogical terms and vocabulary
- Cultural challenges, such as differing calendars and methods for rendering dates

The author is proficient in Chinese, has a general knowledge of Korean, and has only a cursory knowledge of Japanese. The author has studied Chinese for many years and is familiar with some Korean records, so while the author's genealogical research experience in native-language records from across Asia is limited, there are some commonalities which this paper relates.

First and foremost, written Chinese is essentially the Latin of Asia, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Governments adopted Chinese writing early on—before they developed their own writing systems—for important governmental records and religious text, and even while some governments may be moving away from Chinese characters, the bulk of their existing historical records are written in characters.

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Family Registry (族譜) Introduction

The family registry (or "clan genealogy") is used in China, Korea, and likely Japan. It traces direct patrilineal ancestry to an early, notable progenitor back as far as a thousand years or more. The main purpose of the family registry is not necessarily genealogical as we think of it today; rather it is a running census, so to speak. As new family members are born and elders die, they are recorded in the family registry. When women marry they are removed from their father's registry and added to the husband's registry. In this manner, the population count retains its degree of accuracy.

Another darker, past use of the family registry was punishment. If a notable high-ranking family member committed treason then a large portion of the family could be exterminated, thus underpinning a societal foundation wherein families are responsible for the actions of individual family members. But we won't dwell on this.

For the family, the registry is used so that rites can be carried out correctly on days commemorating family ancestors. In the example of my wife's Korean family registry, at the Lunar New Year her grandparents and great grandparents names are carefully written on white cards and placed on a table along with her father's portrait, bowls of rice, foods, fruits, and candles, to honor her ancestors.

As recorded for centuries, family registries seemingly are complete, gift-wrapped genealogies, but as researchers we must corroborate and verify. As noted above, these patrilineal records trace back to a notable progenitor, which basically means that everybody descends from noble or famed roots. Not likely. They also give the appearance that the record began with the progenitor. Not so. Many were back dated centuries later. Even family surnames of famous Chinese figures have been applied retroactively and centuries posthumously, yet are presented as fact in family registries.

I have also found in my wife's Yi family registry that it claims the clan originated with the founding of the Silla Dynasty in the First Century CE but three generations later highlights a man who married a woman from the Koryo court--900 years later! The science of history we know today is a relatively recent evolution.

Furthermore, definitions of family relationships may have changed over time as well and may not be explicitly accounted for in family registries. Even today, it is not unheard of for a son-less family in Japan to adopt a son-in-law and add him as a blood-son to the family registry and carry on the family name.

See [Family Registry](#) for more details.

What is a Chinese Character?

Chinese characters trace back to symbols carved on tortoise shells and bones, which were then heated and cracked. The cracks and their relation to the symbols were interpreted to divine the future and to advise leaders on what courses of action would have the most desirable outcomes. This dates back 3,300 years to about the 13th Century BCE during the Shang Dynasty.

Pictographs

In their simplest form, characters are ideographs—they represent concepts rather than sounds. Concrete examples include sun (日), moon (月), and man (人). Although stylized over time, the three symbols are simply pictographs of a sun, with a sunspot; a crescent moon, with two craters; and a walking man. As writing evolved beyond divination symbols, more complex and abstract terms were added, such as thought (思) and love (愛). In each of these two examples you will find that heart (心) is a component. In all cases, in Chinese and Korean (but not Japanese), the word that each of these symbols represent is pronounced with only one syllable. In the six examples above, the symbols are pronounced in Chinese Mandarin as '*rì*', '*yue*', '*ren*', '*sī*', '*ai*', and '*xin*'; and in Korean as '*il*', '*wol*', '*in*', '==*sa*==', '*ae*', and '*shim*'. This is why Chinese is often called a "monosyllabic" language (which is not entirely accurate in its actual use, but in comparison to European languages is close enough).

One advantage of ideographs is that these symbols largely retained their original meaning over the millennia and across dialects. '日,' regardless of how it is pronounced today in Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, or Tokyo, has the basic meaning of 'sun.'

Phonetic Components and Radicals

Later, as concepts grew beyond the limitations of what mere mortals could possibly memorize with unique pictographs, the Chinese began "recycling" characters based on their phonetic sound. They took rudimentary pictographs like horse (馬/*ma*), established that as a phonetic component for numerous homophones, and then added "radicals" to distinguish which particular homophone was meant. Thus woman (女) was added to '*ma*' to represent mother (媽); one mouth was added to create a question particle (嗎); two mouths were added to represent scold (罵); and jade (玉) was added to denote agate (瑪). All are pronounced '*ma*' in standard Mandarin. Of course, this example just happens to work nicely in Mandarin, but because Mandarin is a more recent dialect, it was not around when these phonetic components were first devised during the Shang Dynasty. For that we have to go all the way back 3,330 years to Proto-Chinese. What rhymed then does not always rhyme today, like '甫' ('*pu*'), '浦' ('*bu*'), and '補' ('*fu*'). So, as far as a phonetic components go, they only get you into the ball park in Mandarin.

In this manner, the number of characters rapidly expanded to represent the myriad concepts needed to communicate, however, a downside (from the Western point of view) is that the number of phonetics sounds did not expand. In Mandarin (which admittedly is not the most representative Chinese dialect) there are only around 420 syllables, yet in total, there are over 106,000 characters in existence. This high ratio of characters to syllables is somewhat mitigated by the fact that most syllables are modified by tones (four in Mandarin, eight in Cantonese), but still you will have to deal with many, many more homophones in Asian languages than you will

in European languages. In fact, as a case in point, there are tongue-twister poems written entirely using characters that are pronounced "*shi*" in Mandarin and can only be understood when read. They are completely unintelligible when read aloud.

> 石室诗士施氏，嗜狮，誓食十狮。施氏时时适市视狮。十时，适十狮适市。是时，适施氏适市。氏视是十狮，恃矢势，使是十狮逝世。氏拾是十狮尸，适石室。石室湿，氏使侍拭石室。石室拭，氏始试食是十狮尸。食时，始识是十狮尸，实十石狮尸。试释是事。

Every stroke counts. The placement of a single dot can dramatically alter the meaning of a character. For instance, 犬 and 太. Do you see the difference? The former means dog, the latter is doubled to form the word 'wife' (太太). Either way you make this mistake you're bound to get bit. (*I'll have to show you my scar sometime.*)

While there are over 106,000 characters in existence (with many collecting dust in libraries), Korean and Japanese both recognize over 50,000 of these. General literacy requires mastery of *only* 3,000 to 4,000.

Korean and Japanese Usage

As noted before, Chinese is essentially the Latin of Asia. Each character has more or less maintained the same meaning for all for over 1,500 years, but the pronunciations have changed over time.

Korea later adopted Chinese writing (漢字/한자) and after that Japan did as well around 478 AD.

In Korean, the meaning and pronunciation of Chinese characters were codified and have largely remained standard, with a few exceptions. One exception is the character 金, which as 'gold' is pronounced 금 ('*geum*') but as a surname it is pronounced 김 (*Kim*).

Having used Chinese writing for over a thousand years, King Sejong commissioned the formation of a Korean phonetic alphabet (한글/*hangul*) in 1446, but it did not become a mainstream form of writing until after World War II.

Japanese adoption was a bit more complex. Each character has at least two pronunciations, one that reflects the original Chinese dialect from which it was borrowed (*on*) and a Japanese pronunciation (*kun*) for the original Japanese word that was matched to the borrowed character. For example, the Japanese word for island '*shima*' was paired with the Chinese character for island (島/*dao*), which the Japanese recorded as '*to*'. So '島' can be pronounced as '*shima*' to reflect the original Japanese concept or as '*to*'. And to add a little more complexity, Japanese words can undergo sound changes when combined with other words, so that when '島' appears in the island *Iwo Jima* (硫黄島) it can be pronounced in its borrowed Chinese form as '*lō-tō*' (the official form), as '*Iwo Shima*', or as '*Iwo Jima*' (how we know it from World War II) but the characters are the same.

In addition to Japanese use of Chinese characters (漢字/*kanji*), the Japanese also have two phonetic writing systems—*hiragana* and *katakana*. *Hiragana* is used to phonetically represent Japanese words for which there is no associated Chinese character (*kanji*) and grammatical particles. *Katakana* is primarily used to phonetically represent foreign words. For the most part,

an historical Japanese document will be written predominately in *kanji* and interspersed with *hiragana*. *Katakana* will likely not be used.

Simplified Chinese Characters

Beginning in the early 1900s, scholars began looking at ways to simplify complex characters to help increase literacy in the modern age. Some shortcuts were already in existence and many of these derived from cursive "grass style" characters. Communist China officially adopted simplified characters (简化字/简体字) in the 1950, so since most of the records that will be of interest to you pre-date the 1950s we won't dwell on these. Some examples of simplifications are:

門/门, gate/door	國/国, nation	萬/万, 10,000	頭/头, head	體/体, body
馬/马, horse	會/会, meeting	東/东, east	廠/厂, factory	廣/广, broad

As you can see, some simplifications are relatively minor while some appear quite drastic in printed form.

Romanization

Romanization is another challenge. In the 16th Century, Jesuit missionaries (such as Matteo Ricci) traveled to the East, learned the languages and local dialects, and set about translating the Bible into those languages. In the process they developed Romanization systems to teach other missionaries the local languages. In the mid-19th Century, at the height of British semi-colonialism in China, the Wade-Giles system was formed to phonetically represent Chinese sounds using English letters for British students of Chinese. Later Yale University introduced systems for Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Japanese. At roughly the same time, the Communist Chinese government devised an alternative "*Hanyu pinyin*" (漢語拼音) system in the 1950s to help popularize Mandarin as the national dialect, standardize pronunciation, and boost literacy rates. Thus, over time Chairman Mao's name (毛澤東) was written in the West as "Mao Tse-tung" (Wade-Giles), "Mau Dzedung" (Yale), and later as "Mao Zedong" (*Hanyu pinyin*). All represent the exact same sounds but are written differently in the West. Similarly, the phonetic spelling of the Chinese capital '北京' transitioned from 'Peking' (Wade-Giles) to 'Beijing' (Yale and *Hanyu pinyin*) while the actual native pronunciation did not change.

Korean Romanization systems also evolved from the McCune-Reischauer (MR) system of 1934, through Yale and others, to today's Revised Romanization (RR), which is also known as "MC" for the Korean Ministry of Culture.

The evolution of Japanese Romanization systems is similar. In all cases, the thing to keep in mind is that as you study the history of your ancestral homeland in Western texts you will find spellings will vary over time. At each step you will need to take note of the Chinese characters/*hanja/kanji* to be sure that the names are in fact the same.

Using Characters

Fortunately in the digital age, you can get pretty far with copying and pasting groups of characters into search engines. I recommend that from the very start you start a document of

pertinent genealogical vocabulary—surnames, given names, place names, and such—so that you can readily copy and paste them into search engines without having to use language input methods. You will eventually want to learn how to use language input methods, but let's start by developing a cheat sheet. (See "Common Vocabulary" for a start.)

Dictionaries

Not everything you need will be digitized so you will have to break out a dictionary and look up characters to figure out their meaning and sound. But how does one organize a dictionary for non-phonetic symbols?

Rhyme tables have been employed since before the Song Dynasty (960-1279), but the earliest surviving date back to 1161. These however were primarily designed for poets and only served to group like homophones. There was no attempt to devise a phonetic spelling system around them.

Radicals and Phonetic Components

Qing Emperor Kangxi (K'ang-hsi), reigned 1661-1722, ordered the compilation of the first modern dictionary of Chinese, which organized 47,035 characters by 214 "radicals." As previously noted in "What is a Chinese Character," symbols like the horse (馬) are reused as phonetic components ('*ma*': '馬' (horse)，'媽' (mother)，'罵' (to scold)，'瑪' (agate)) and meaning components (radicals) are appended to differentiate the meaning. But '馬' can also be used as a radical, rather than as a phonetic, in words like '駕' ('to drive'), '駛' ('to drive'), and '騎' ('to ride'), none of which sound like '*ma*'. In each the 'horse' radical is related to concepts of driving a horse-drawn wagon or riding a horse, and in each it is paired up with a phonetic component ('*jia*,' '*shi*,' and '*qi*,' respectively). So let's review these seven examples together:
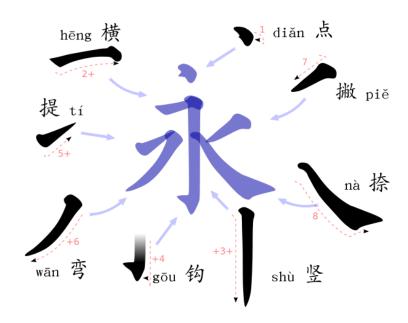
馬　　媽　　駛　　騎　　瑪　　　　罵　　駕

The first is the basic pictograph for 'horse' ('*ma*'). It is used in the other six characters as either the phonetic component or the meaning component (radical). In the left-right pairings, the radical is on the left and the phonetic is on the right. This is not always the case, but the odds are generally on your side. In the top-bottom pairings (last two) we see the meaning on top (two mouths) and phonetic '*ma*' on bottom in '罵', but it is the opposite in '駕', where the phonetic ('*jia*') is on top and the meaning (horse for 'to drive') is on the bottom. Such inconsistencies are always expected in linguistics.

Strokes

So now that we have the most basic understanding of radicals and phonetic components, it's time to compose the radical chart for a dictionary. But how does one organize a radical chart non-phonetically? The next most basic breakdown of characters is the individual strokes. In calligraphy, there are nine main brush strokes, eight of which can be illustrated in the single character '永' ('*yong*', 'eternal'):

1. dot ('*dian*')
2. horizontal line ('*heng*')
3. vertical line ('*shu*')
4. a hook ('*gou*')
5. up-stroke ('*ti*')
6. left-curve ('*wan*')
7. left-falling ('*pie*')
8. right-falling ('*na*')

- Another stroke, not represented by '永' is the right hook (乙).

hēng 横　diǎn 点　撇 piě　提 tí　nà 捺　wān 弯　gōu 钩　shù 竖

Stroke Order

Note too the order in which they are written (1-8). Generally you compose a character from top-to-bottom and left-to-right, as is noted here. The dot at the top comes first, followed by the central horizontal-vertical-hook (which is written as one stroke, but for illustrative purposes in calligraphy is broken into a horizontal, a vertical, and then a hook at the bottom of the vertical), then the left two strokes, and finally the right two strokes. These rules all came about by the characteristics of writing with brush and ink. Other rules are:

- Strokes may start from a prior stroke but will not end at or on a prior stroke. For example, in '工' it might make sense to draw the two horizontals first and then the vertical, but in calligraphy that would result in an unattractive situation where the vertical has to end precisely and neatly on the bottom horizontal. Rather, the top horizontal is written, then the vertical, and finally the bottom horizontal is drawn so that neatly overwrites where the vertical brush stroke trailed off.
- Verticals sometimes are written last when they pierce other components, like '中' and '筆'.
- In boxed characters, such as '国' and '囚', the left vertical is written first, the top and right are written next in one hooked stroke, then the inside is written, and finally the bottom stroke of the box is written to close it off.

Stroke Count

Next comes stroke count. Given the principles of drawing a character you should be able to count the discrete strokes. This takes lots of practice and trial an error.

Let's take a look at the Kangxi radical chart. Note that the first six characters, left-to-right, are simply six of the basic calligraphy strokes above (horizontal, vertical, dot, left curve, right hook, and vertical hook). Then, keeping in mind this established order of precedence, you have the next batch of two-stroke characters: two horizontals ('二', the number 2), a dot and horizontal (the "lid" radical), a left curve and right-falling ('人', a person), and so forth, adding more strokes as you go:

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一 丨 丶 丿 乙 亅 二 亠 人 儿 入 八 冂 冖 冫 几
凵 刀 力 勹 匕 匚 匸 十 卜 卩 厂 厶 又 口 囗 土
士 夂 夊 夕 大 女 子 宀 寸 小 尢 尸 屮 山 巛 工
己 巾 干 幺 广 廴 廾 弋 弓 彐 彡 彳 心 戈 戶 手
支 攴 文 斗 斤 方 无 日 曰 月 木 欠 止 歹 殳 毋
比 毛 氏 气 水 火 爪 父 爻 爿 片 牙 牛 犬 玄 玉
瓜 瓦 甘 生 用 田 疋 疒 癶 白 皮 皿 目 矛 矢 石
示 内 禾 穴 立 竹 米 糸 缶 网 羊 羽 老 而 耒 耳
禸 禾 臣 自 至 臼 舌 舛 舟 艮 色 艸 虍 虫 血 行
辰 辵 邑 酉 釆 里 豆 豕 豸 貝 赤 走 足 身 車 辛
革 韋 金 長 門 阜 隶 隹 雨 青 非 面
韋 鬼 門 鳥 阜 隹 雨 青 非 韭
鼎 齊 齒 龍 龜 龜 鹿 麥 麻 黃 黍 黑 黹 黽 鼓 鼠
鼻 鼻 齊 齒 龍 龜 龜 鹵 麻 黃 黍 黑 黹 鼎 鼓 齊 鼠

List of Unicode 'radicals' (AR PL UKai TW)

The radical chart in your dictionary will likely vary, but that should not matter. Get used to yours and be aware of that others exist.

So now you've identified the radical and located it on the radical chart—*you're half way there*. Next your dictionary will give you an index number for that radical. Turn to the page with that index number and radical, and then, following the same rules of stoke order and stroke count, browse down the list of characters until you find the one you're looking for. Note that some dictionaries use total stroke-count and other use remaining stroke-count. That is, the former includes the strokes of the radical while the latter excludes the strokes of the radical and only counts the remaining strokes.

At this point you will be given a page number or perhaps, if your dictionary is arranged phonetically, the sound (or sounds) of the character. Non-Western dictionaries, such as Chinese-Korean or Chinese-Japanese dictionaries may not be phonetically organized so the radical index will direct you to the first page of characters that have that radical and you will have to page through, in stroke-count order until you find your character. These non-Western dictionaries often have separate phonetic indexes of characters such as:

한：寒 漢 閑 韓

This will help you find a character for which you already know the sound, but will not help you locate an unfamiliar character.

Punctuation

We'll make this quick. There pretty much wasn't any until the 20th Century, and they still haven't invented the space between words. So if you refer to the poem of characters that all sound like "*shi*" and remove all the punctuation you'll get the picture. Even with modern punctuation, the lack of spaces between words still poses a daunting challenge to translation tools such as Google Translate.

Asian Language Input Methods

Your computer will need language fonts and input methods installed. Refer to your installation disks.

Common Vocabulary

As suggested before, start building a cheat sheet of terms, such as surnames, given names, and key place names. This will help you decode your native language documents and help you copy and paste key terms into search engines.

Characters (variants)	Pronunciations CM/KO/JP	Meaning
Vital Records		
生, 出生	Sheng, chusheng (CM)	Birth
年	Nian (CM)	Year
月	Yue (CM) Wol (KO)	Month (a pictograph of a crescent moon)
日	Ri (CM) Il (KO)	Day (a pictograph of the Sun)
初	Chu (CM)	"First," followed by a number, referring to the first ten days of a month
卒享年	Zu xiang nian (CM)	"Enjoyed X years" (age)
族譜 (族谱)	Zupu (CM), Jok-bo (KO)	Family Registry or Clan Genealogy
祖譜	Zupu (CM)	Family Registry
家譜	Jiapu (CM)	Family Registry
氏系譜	Shixipu (CM)	Clan Registry
家系譜	Jiaxipu (CM) Kakei…(JP)	Family Registry
戶籍	Huji (CM)	Family Registry
書	Shu (CM)	Book
冊	Ce (CM)	Volume
卷	Juan (CM)	Roll, leaf (off a document)
頁	Ye (CM)	Page
原	Yuan (CM)	Originally, formerly
自…至…	Zi…Zhi… (CM)	From…to…
Numbers		
一 (壹)	Yi (CM) Il (KO) Yichi (JP)	One
二 （貳）	Er (CM) Yi (KO) Ni (JP)	Two
三 （參）	San (CM, JP) Sam (KO)	Three
四 （肆）	Si (CM) Sa (KO) Yon (JP)	Four
五 （伍）	Wu (CM) O (KO) Go (JP)	Five
六 （陸）	Liu (CM) Yuk (KO)	Six

	Roku (JP)	
七（柒）	Qi (CM) Ch'il (KO) Nana (JP)	Seven
八（捌）	Ba (CM) Pal (KO) Hachi (JP)	Eight
九（玖）	Jiu (CM) Ku (KO) Kyu (JP)	Nine
十（仕）	Shi (CM) Ship (KO) Ju (JP	Ten
百	Bai (CM) Baek (KO) Hyaku (JP)	Hundred
千	Qian (CM) Ch'oen (KO) Sen (JP)	Thousand
萬（万）	Wan (CM) Man (KO, JP)	10,000
Place Names		
祖籍	Zuji (CM)	Ancestral place of origin
籍貫	Jiguan (CM)	Permanent residence (other than ancestral place of origin)
中國	Zhongguo (CM) Chungguk (KO)	China
中華民國	Zhonghua Minguo (CM)	Republic of China (ROC) (Nationalist)
中华人民共和国	Zhonghua Remin Gongheguo (CM) Chunghua Inmin Gonghuaguk (KO)	People's Republic of China (PRC) (Communist Mainland)
臺灣 (台湾)	Taiwan (CM) T'aeman (KO)	Taiwan (Island or province, not as a nation)
韓國	Hanguk (KO) Hanguo (CM)	Korea
大韓民國	Daehan Minguk (KO) Dahan Minguo (CM)	Republic of Korea (ROK) (South Korea)
朝鮮	Chosun (KO) Chaoxian (CM)	Korea (Chosun, an historic name for Korea but today mostly refers to North Korea)
朝鮮民主主義人民共和國	Chosun Minju Juyi Inmin Gonghuaguk (KO) Chaoxian Minzhu Zhuyi Renmin Gongheguo (CM)	Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK)
日本	Nippon (JP) Riben (CM) Ilbun (KO)	Japan
美國 (美国)	Meiguo (CM) Miguk (KO)	America (CH/KO)

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米國 (米国)	Miguo (CM)	America (JP)
北	Bei (CM) Buk (KO)	North
南	Nan (CM) Nam (KO)	South
東 (东)	Dong (CM/KO)	East
西	Xi (CM) Sa (KO)	West
省	Sheng (CM)	Province
州	Zhou (CM)	Prefecture (CH) Province (JP)
縣 （县）	Xian (CM) Soen (KO) Ken (JP)	County (CH) Prefecture (JP)
市	Shi (CM)	Major City, Municipality
城	Cheng (CM)	City
君	Jun (CM) Gun (KO)	
區 (区)	Qu (CM) Ku (KO)	District
里	Li (CM) Ni (KO)	Neighborhood
村	Cun (CM)	Village
山	Shan (CM) San (KO)	Mountain
田	Tian (CM) Cheon (KO)	Field
島	Dao (CM) Do (KO)	Island
Family		
家	Jia (CM) Ka (KO)	Family
氏	Shi (CM)	Family, clan
姓	Xing (CM)	Surname
父	Fu (CM) Bu (KO)	Father
母	Mu (CM) Mo (KO)	Mother
子	Zi (CM) Ja (KO)	Child (often referring to a son)
兒 (儿)	Er (CM)	Son
女	Nyu (CM)	Female, daughter
后	Hou (CM)	Wife
外祖	Waizu	Maternal grandfather
后外祖	Hou waizu (CM)	Wife's maternal grandfather

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伯	Bo (CM)	First son
仲	Zhong (CM)	Second son
男	Nan (CM) Nam (KO)	Male
女	Nü (CM) Yo (KO)	Female
世	Shi (CM)	Generation
代	Dai (CM) Dae (KO)	Generation
配	Pei (CM)	Married (arranged?)
室	Shi (CM)	Married
繼室	Jishi (CM)	Subsequent wife
Surnames (Chinese, also used in Korea*; alphabetized by *Hanyu pinyin*)		
白	Bai (CM)	
陳 (陈)	Chen, Ch'en (CM); Can (CC); Jin (KO); Chin (JP)	
高	Gao, Kao (CM); Gou (CC); Go (KO); Ko (JP)	
郭	Guo, Kuo (CM); Gwok (CC); Gwak (KO); Kaku (JP)	
何	He (CM); Ho (CC); Ha (KO); Ka (JP)	
胡	Hu (CM); Wu (CC); Ho (KO); Ko (JP)	
黃	Huang (CM); Wong (CC); Hwang (KO); Ko (JP)	
李	Li (CM); Lei (CC); Yi, Ri, Ree, Rhee (KO); Ri (JP)	
梁	Liang (CM); Loeng (CC); Yang, Ryang (KO); Ryo (JP)	
林	Lin (CM); Lam (CC); Im, Rim (KO); Rin, Hayashi (JP)	
劉 (刘)	Liu (CM); Lau (CC); Yu, Ryu (KO/JP)	
羅 (罗)	Luo, Lo (CM); Lo (CC); Na, Ra (KO); Ra (JP)	
馬 (马)	Ma (CM); Maa (CC); Ma (KO); Ba (JP)	
孫 (孙)	Sun (CM); Syun (CC); Son (KO/JP)	
王	Wang (CM); Wong (CC); Wang (KO); O (JP)	
吳	Wu (CM); Ng (CC); Oh (KO); Kure, Go (JP)	
徐	Xu, Hsu (CM); Ceoi (CC); Seo (KO); Jo (JP)	
楊 (杨)	Yang (CM); Joeng (CC); Yang (KO); Yo (JP)	
袁	Yuan (CM); Jyun (CC); Won (KO); En (JP); Nguyen, Vien (VN)	
張 (张)	Zhang, Chang (CM); Zoeng (CC); Jang (KO); Cho (JP)	
趙 (赵)	Zhao, Chao (CM); Ziu (CC); Jo (KO); Cho (JP)	

鄭 (郑)	Zheng, Cheng (CM); Zeng (CC); Jeong (KO); Tei (JP)
周	Zhou (CM); Zau (CC); Ju (KO); Shu (JP)
朱	Zhu, Chu (CM); Zyu (CC); Ju (KO); Shu (JP)
Surnames (Korean, also used in China*; alphabetized by Korean MR)	
曺 (曹)	Cho (KO); Cao (CM)
崔	Ch'oi (KO); Cui (CM)
高	Go, Ko (KO); Gao, Kao (CM); Gou (CC); Ko (JP)
趙 (赵)	Jo (KO); Zhao (CM); Ziu (CC); Cho (JP)
金	Kim, Gim (KO); Jin (CM)
朴	Pak, Bak (KO); Piao (CM)
吳	O (KO); Wu (CM), Ng (CC); Kure, Go (JP)
李	Yi, Ri (KO); Li (CM)
Surnames (Japanese)	
伊藤	Ito
加藤	Kato
小林	Kobayashi
松本	Matsumoto
中村	Nakamura
佐々木	Sasaki
佐藤	Sato
鈴木	Suzuki
高橋	Takahashi
田中	Tanaka
渡辺	Watanabe
山田	Yamada
山口	Yamaguchi
山本	Yamamoto
吉田	Yoshida

Dates

As if decoding characters wasn't tough enough, other differences in how Asia recorded history further complicate Western study. The East only adopted the Western calendar in the last century, so you will have to navigate both reign years and the lunar calendar to find out when it was that great-grandpa was born.

Reign Years

Even in the West, before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, gradually from 1582 to 1752 (Great Britain) and finally as recently as 1923 (Greece), reign years were common. That is, years were counted from the year of each king's coronation. So for the year 1895, you will have to know that it was the **20th** year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu (光緒) in China; the **28th** year of the reign of Emperor Meiji (明治天皇) in Japan; and the **31st** year of the reign of King Gojong (高宗光武帝/고종 광무제) in Korea.

Next you'll have to contend with the many ways that emperors and kings were referred to. First, during their reign they took on a name that was not at all related to the name they grew up with. The Japanese emperor we know today as "Meiji" was named Mutsuhito (睦仁) before he became emperor. Next, upon coronation they picked a reign or era name, separate and distinct from their own name, to set the tone for their reign. The young emperor picked "Meiji" (明治), "Enlightened Rule" as the era name—not his own name—in the ninth month of his reign. To further muddy the waters, emperors sometimes changed era names in the middle of the reign to denote a strategic change of direction for their rule.

Finally, after an emperor or king died, his successors chose a posthumous name to memorialize the sovereign's reign. In the case of Meiji, his era name was chosen as his posthumous name and all accounts of his reign thereafter refer to him by that name, even though it was his reign, not the emperor himself, who held that name during his lifetime.

In a modern adaptation of the reign year, Taiwan, as the Republic of China, still counts years from the founding of the Republic in 1912. So while they still celebrated 2014 along with the rest of the world, on official documents the year 2014 is designated as the year 102 of the Republic.

Sexagenary Cycle

Confused yet? There's more. In addition to reign years, the Chinese adopted a continuous system of numbering years that span reigns, but they don't use numbers. Rather, a system of 10 heavenly stems and 12 earthly branches are combined to form perpetual cycles of 60 years. So the year 1895 was known in Chinese histories as the year '甲午' (*jia-wu*), the first heavenly stem plus the seventh earthly branch, which works out to be the 31st year of the cycle. Think of it as if the 10 heavenly stems were the numbers 1 through 0 (representing 10) and the 12 earthly branches as the letters A through L. So beginning at '甲子' (1A=1) we proceed to '乙丑' (2B=2) and so on and so forth to '癸亥' (0L=60).

Accordingly, the Sino-Japanese War of that year is known to the Chinese as the '甲午戰爭' ("*Jia-Wu* War," or as we would call it, "the War of 1895").

Decoding Asian Genealogy 101

The 10 heavenly stems originally were the names of the 10 days of the week back during the Shang Dynasty and date back to around 1250 BCE.

甲	乙	丙	丁	戊	己	庚	辛	壬	癸

The 12 earthly branches also align with the 12 Chinese zodiac figures so that, for example, the seventh branch '午' always correlates to the Year of the Horse, the seventh figure of the Chinese zodiac.

子	丑	寅	卯	辰	巳	午	未	申	酉	戌	亥
(Rat)	(Ox)	(Tiger)	(Rabbit)	(Dragon)	(Snake)	(Horse)	(Goat)	(Monkey)	(Rooster)	(Dog)	(Pig)

Stem-Branch Sexagenary Cycle

甲子 1A = 1	乙丑 2B = 2	丙寅 3C = 3	丁卯 4D = 4	戊辰 5E = 5	己巳 6F = 6	庚午 7G = 7	辛未 8H = 8	壬申 9I = 9	癸酉 0J = 10
甲戌 1K = 11	乙亥 2L =12	丙子 3A = 13	丁丑 4B = 14	戊寅 5C = 15	己卯 6D = 16	庚辰 7E = 17	辛巳 8F = 18	壬午 9G = 19	癸未 0H = 20
甲申 1I = 21	乙酉 2J = 22	丙戌 3K = 23	丁亥 4L = 24	戊子 5A = 25	己丑 6B = 26	庚寅 7C = 27	辛卯 8D = 28	壬辰 9E = 29	癸巳 0F = 30
甲午 1G = 31	乙未 2H = 32	丙申 3I = 33	丁酉 4J = 34	戊戌 5K = 35	己亥 6L = 36	庚子 7A = 37	辛丑 8B = 38	壬寅 9C = 39	癸卯 0D = 40
甲辰 1E = 41	乙巳 2F = 42	丙午 3G = 43	丁未 4H = 44	戊申 5I = 45	己酉 6J = 46	庚戌 7K = 47	辛亥 8L = 48	壬子 9A = 49	癸丑 0B = 50
甲寅 1C = 51	乙卯 2D = 52	丙辰 3E = 53	丁巳 4F = 54	戊午 5G = 55	己未 6H = 56	庚申 7I = 57	辛酉 8J = 58	壬戌 9K = 59	癸亥 0L = 60

So, if 1895 = 甲午 (31) and 1912 = 辛亥 (48), then…

甲子 = 1624, 1684, 1744, 1804, 1864, 1924, 1984, 2044,…

Months and Days (Lunar)

So now that we can decipher years, next we have the lunar calendar to contend with. Lunar calendars were the first to evolve because the moon offers an easily comprehensible pattern for farmers to track. The chief problem, however, is the lunar cycle does not naturally synchronize with the solar solstices and equinoxes that mark the seasons. The lunar new year begins on the new moon prior the spring equinox and as such will vary between January 21 and February 21.

The East only began using solar calendar birthdates as recently as around the 1970s so the months you see in family registries will certainly be lunar months. Make sure you record "the 9th month" (九月) as "the 9th month" and not "September" or you will be somewhere between 3 to 7 weeks too early.

Eastern dates also take the form of largest to smallest, so year comes first, followed by month and day. One LDS date convention uses "29D 8M 1900" to represent 清光绪廿六年八月二十九日 (Ch'ing/Qing [Dynasty], Kwang-hsu/Guangxu [Emperor], 26th year, 8th month, 29th day). Even if you convert this date to the Western solar calendar (September 22, 1900), be sure to retain the original lunar date.

Family Registry (族譜)

The LDS Church Family History Library in Salt Lake City has microfilms of "clan genealogies" dating back to the 17th Century, which correspond to the beginning of the Qing/Ch'ing Dynasty (1644-1912) in China, the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868) in Japan, and the latter half of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910) in Korea. These are organized by the clan name and province or county/prefecture. These, both the clan name and location, will be in older Romanization systems, so be sure to take note of the characters and remain aware that all Li's and Lee's are not necessarily the same (李，黎).

Ex. 慶州李氏族譜   Kyungju (now spelled "Gyeongju" (경주)), Yi (이, which includes spellings

of "Lee," "Ri," "Ree" and "Rhee") Family Registry

Naming Conventions

- First character (or a character with the same radical) the same for all sons of a given generation
- Second character represents birth order (伯, 仲,...)