Radical Beasts

a memory system for learning Chinese

for beginners

Lynne Kelly

Radical Beasts: a memory system for learning Chinese

Version 1.0. This is a work in progress, and probably always will be. The document will be updated continually with the new version number in the link.

Of all the topics readers of *The Memory Cod*e wrote to me about, learning foreign languages was the most common. I used to think that was a bummer because the subject I failed every year at school was languages. I tried Latin, French and German - encouraged by a mother who adored learning languages - and I failed every time.

I joined an adult French class to test out the memory methods and discovered that with the aid of memory tools described in *Memory Craft*, I was able to learn and even enjoy it. So I became ridiculously ambitious and took on Chinese (Mandarin) *Putonghua*. It is a fascinating experiment because these two languages are so different that I have had to approach them differently even though I am using similar techniques.

This booklet outlines the method I devised as I tackled the hardest thing I could imagine to commit to memory: the Chinese language. Of course, there is a great deal more than just memorising vocabulary and characters, but more of that later.

As an English speaker with no Chinese heritage or background, the starting point was the hardest to find. I had no hooks to hang anything on: vocabulary, pronunciation nor those incomprehensible squiggles (also known as characters). Nothing at all.

Languages are usually taught by people who are native speakers. Consequently, they usually teach the language the way they learnt it. This makes total sense if you grow up in an environment where you are hearing the language, even if only spasmodically. When we learnt to read and write English as children, we were hearing the language all day every day.

The problem for people like me, English speakers who are never in a Chinese speaking background, everything is so strange that I couldn't retain anything. So I came up with a method for somebody with no familiarity with the language, and to assist with any Chinese language course.

I have tried a number of courses to test out the method, including self-paced and live classes online. I have tested it with various books and personal tutors, and looking at the way other online courses present their curriculum. The system works with them all.

In my online live weekly classes, we started with 40 people in first semester and had 15 in the second. We were down to three in the third semester. I was the only one without any Chinese background. I was certainly working much harder than the others, putting in many hours between

classes. Looking at research and talking with teachers, it seems that this pattern is typical of Chinese courses in Australian schools, an issue I want to address. I am convinced the lack of memory techniques is a major contributor.

Without hooks we are dependent on mindless, endless repetition. So people like me usually give up.

Radical Beasts

Two structures are required to get started, but neither need be committed to memory. You keep a copy of the Bestiary and the Memory Palace at hand, gradually learning them as you implement them throughout the course.

To set up the system, the following are provided:

- the Bestiary for initials and actions for the finals.

- the Actions for the finals

See the separate file: **Radical-Beasts-pinyin-initals-finals.pdf**

- a Memory Palace for the characters based on the set of radicals. This is used when you want to add the characters as well.

See the separate file: **Radical-Beasts-radical-palace.pdf**

- set of components which appear in characters but are not radicals, with suggested meanings based on what they look like.

(A separate file for these will be available soon. Meanwhile, it isn't hard to make them up. And example is given below in nǐ hǎo.)

This seems like a lot but you use more and more of the system gradually as needed.

Without hooks, you cannot remember new information. Beastly Radicals is really just a structured set of hooks, kept as simple as I could manage.

Part One: PINYIN

The starting point is pinyin. The difference between learning Chinese and other languages is the structure of the syllables. Every syllable, which maps to a single character, has an **initial** and a **final**. So dian has the initial 'd-' and the final '-ian'.

YoYo Chinese Pinyin Table

I use the pinyin chart which is publicly available on YoYo Chinese, the course which I do most:

https://yoyochinese.com/chinese-learning-tools/Mandarin-Chinese-pronunciation-lesson/pinyin-chart-table

For the pinyin, the beauty is that there is a limited number of initials and finals - a joy which isn't offered by French, which I am comparing using the same mnemonics - the application soon differs hugely.

I am using a combination of what is known in memory competition circles as a PA (People-Action) system. In this case is a Beast-Action system. The Bestiary is a cast of animals and human critters which I use for the initials.

Pinyin and vocabulary

You will need the ***Radical-Beasts-pinyin-initals-finals*** list. This contains a Beast for each of the initials and an action list for each of the finals. Every attempt has been made to get as close to the pronunciation as I could manage.

The YoYo Chinese Interactive Pinyin Chart gives pronunciation for all initials and finals.

Some people complain, before they have tried using memory aids, that you are remembering more than you need to if you just remember the word and meaning. Technically this is true. In terms of efficiency, it is really way out. Memory aids do exactly that, they aid memory. You will spend a great deal less time learning vocabulary using a memory aid.

Initials and their beasts

For each of the 23 initials, I assigned a Beast with as close as I could manage to the correct pronunciation. They are illustrated throughout this document.

Animals have more variation than people, so I find them easy to remember than people. I made my

critters as different as I could for the images. Little shrew, big fiery dragon, ancient Chinese nobleman (not a beast, but the best I could find for the situation), panda …

This method is way more fun than rote - the beasts have all become really active characters with individual personalities and it is fun having them all traipse around with me in my imagination, doing all the strange combinations of actions.

Problem initials

c- is a problem - pronounced ts. A year into developing and testing I came across czar which is also written tsar! Very pleased with that one.

x- is a real issue, so I ended up with using xióngmāo, which is panda in Chinese. This ensured the right pronunciation of x- which is a sound we don't have in English.

zh- gave the same problem - it's not used in English. But there is the Chinese Zhōu Dynasty, which is pronounced Joe - so Joe is my character but he's an ancient Chinese imperial guy. So my character looks impressive, is called Joe and gives me the correct pronunciation. Plus I have grown very fond of him.

The finals become the actions

For each of the 33 finals, I assigned an action.

Again, I did my best to match the sounds, but with varying success. I am very proud of liquor for -uo. That took me a year of searching and works really well for the pronunciation - the Beast gets drunk. UN for -un (short for -uen) works well for pronunciation and just adds a blue hat. I gave up on finding a 'un' word with the correct pronunciation.

-a is eating a banana. In Australian pronunciation, all three 'a' vowels in banana are pronounced correctly. In the US, it will only be the last one - but that is the final anyway.

Problem finals

-ao was a real problem with no familiar English words ending in that.
But cacao is a word being used more in general conversation and solved a difficult, yet common final.

-ou is pronounced as in **ov**er. I couldn't find any word in English which pronounced 'ou' as 'oh', so I use over - for the pronunciation and action. The action is **moving** over the location, rather than just high up, as is the indicator for the first tone.

-iu is ee-oo. I have resorted to saying Jiu Jitsu that way. The action is fighting.

-iong - nothing. There is not a single word in English that I could find with 'iong' in it. I use crying as the action because of my failure, which works for me. It sounds pretty much as it looks, fortunately.

-uan. Don Juan. May not be familiar to younger children, but I have struggled to find better.

-uang. An quango is a government organization or agency that is financed by a government but acts independently of it. Best I could do in a few years of searching!

-un is never pronounced in English as u-en. But the UN is! This one actually works a treat. Action, add a blue cap.

-uo was really hard, but I finally found liquor, which has the -uo correctly pronounced. Action: drunk and works really well.

The Special 7 i-finals

The final -i is pronounced in two ways, depending on the initial. For the initials which have a form including h (c-, ch-, s-, sh-, z-, zh-) and the very special r-, the -i is pronounced like the first 'i' in bikini, as long as you don't put any emphasis on that syllable.

For all other situations, it is pronounced as the middle and final 'i' in bikini. The action is wearing a bikini which gives some really weird images - and therefore highly memorable ones. Zhou and the czar object profusely!

Tones

For the tones: the action happens up high at the location for first tone, in an upward direction for second tone, on the ground for third tone and fast down for fourth tone. Neutral, I have less active and in the middle.

The tone rule

To remember which letter takes the tone:

a and e dominate all other vowels and always take the tone mark. There are no Mandarin syllables in Hanyu Pinyin that contain both a and e.

In the combination ou, o takes the mark, keeping the alphabetical order.

In all other cases, the final vowel takes the mark.

Example - diàn

diàn relates to electricity.

d- is a dragon

-ian which is pronounced the same as in magician. The action is performing magic.

So 'dian' is a dragon doing magic.

The tone comes from the direction of the action. Electricity is diàn, 4th tone, downwards and fast.

The memory aid for electricity is dragon magic! And the dragon directs his fiery electric shock rapidly down into the ground.

So in one image, I have the pinyin, the correct pronunciation, the meaning and the tone.

Eventually, of course, you lose the dependence on the story and the images because you know the word and meaning. You will also find words build on other words and are constructed of characters you already know. You don't need the system at all for them.

Once the words are located in a memory palace dictated by the radical of the character, diàn
will reside at the location for the radical tián, field. Whenever I pass the field location, I cannot help but see my gorgeous dragon doing his electrical magic.

Two or more syllable words

If there are two or more syllables, you just add the pinyin for the other syllables to the story. That has beasts interacting, which is fun.

Example - diànshì

diànshì means TV. My dragon is still doing his magic, but now my tiny little shrew, wearing a bikini, is his assistant, and they are on a TV show.

That image will also be somewhere at the location for tián (field) when the memory palace has been activated, as in Part 2 below.

Into a memory palace

I actually place that image in the memory palace at the location for the radical, the key part of the character for diàn, a field. So the same image also gives me a big clue to the character.

I advise getting that memory palace started as soon as possible.

Part Two: CHARACTERS

The beasts serve to act out words according to the pinyin. To add in the characters, more is needed. I wanted to start adding in characters as soon as possible and so set up my memory palace.

It is common to see mention of using pictures for characters, but these really only work for a very few of the thousands you need to know. So those resources will always give the characters for person and for mountain. Then sun, which I don't think looks like a sun.

人 person　　山 mountain　　日 sun
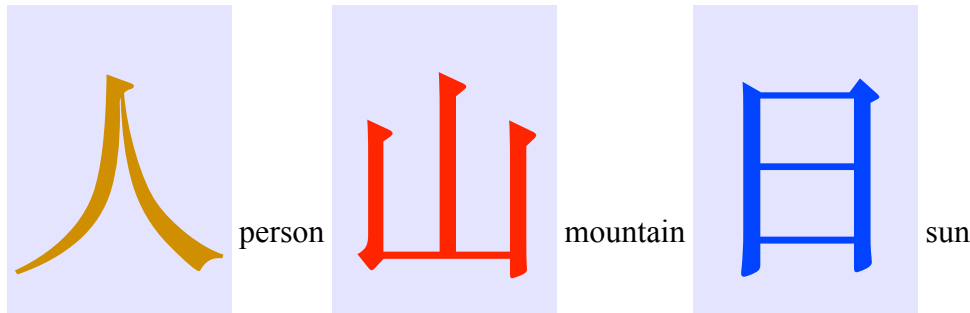
Systems then try to make artificial images out of characters. Looking for a picture occasionally works for me, but I wanted a system that I could apply in every single case - systematically.

I was hugely influenced by this article:

Radicals Reveal the Order of Chinese Characters by Heather Clydesdale

https://asiasociety.org/education/radicals-reveal-order-chinese-characters

> *Mastering Chinese is daunting, in large part because learners must memorize thousands of distinct characters. So it is both a revelation and a relief to learners when they discover radicals.*
>
> *Radicals organize the chaotic swarm of characters into a logical system. Traditional*

9

Chinese groups all characters according to 214 radicals (simplified uses 189), which are organized based on number of strokes into a chart called the bushou. Each radical is itself a freestanding character-word, such as one, woman, child, cliff, field, tree, millet, halberd, leather, and bird.

Once inducted into radicals, students can look up characters in a dictionary without knowing the pronunciation. In addition, they can more deeply appreciate the characters they know, guess the meaning of new ones they encounter, and more efficiently memorize them.

For these reasons, Mingquan Wang, senior lecturer and language coordinator of the Chinese program at Tufts University, insists that radicals should be a part of the curriculum for teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

That started my love affair with radicals. It seems like a lot of effort up front, but I cannot emphasise enough how much this has made the journey to learning Chinese easier. Once I had the memory palace in place, I used it for all new words, giving a physical location to my pinyin stories. This made them much more memorable as well.

The Radical Beasts memory palace

To get started on the characters requires no memory work up front, but the memory palace does need to be established - not memorised, just documented. You will gradually memorise locations as you need them.
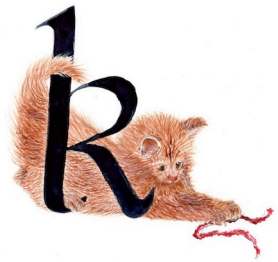
If you look up anything about memorising a memory palace, especially for memory competitions, you will be instructed to know every location from the starting point of the palace. The **big difference** between the Radical Beasts palace is that you never need to be able to travel the palace in order. Your brain will jump to the location it needs as soon as it has that location mentally recorded. Some locations you won't use for years, and some never at all. It is just easier to set it up ready from the start.

The logical order is the traditional list of radicals with the original KangXi radical numbers because this gives you a consistency with so many online sites and resources. The problem with this list is that there are a dozen radicals which are really commonly used but occur very late in the list.

So I put these at the beginning of my palace, which I could then walk to much faster if I was using my physical palace.

The KangXi radical number order, with my extra radicals at the beginning, presents the radicals in approximately the right order for the number of strokes. You certainly will have a good idea whether it's two or maybe three or maybe four strokes when your brain jumps to the right location.

The palace will consist of 236 physical locations (don't panic):

- the 214 KangXi radicals
- 12 extras at the front
- 10 radicals which had two commonly used forms which I split into two locations.

It sounds like a lot, but the palace can be documented quite quickly. And it gives you those essential mental hooks on which to hang the characters.

See the separate file: **Radical-Beasts-radical-palace.pdf**

A really interesting account of using radicals is given on the Hacking Chinese website:

Kickstart your Chinese character learning with the 100 most common radicals:

https://www.hackingchinese.com/kickstart-your-character-learning-with-the-100-most-common-radicals/

Creating a Memory Palace

Memory palaces have been used far back in pre-history and are still used by all memory champions today because no better method has been found for aiding the brain to remember information. I write about this extensively in my books.

In the Radical-Beasts-radical-palace.pdf (also available as a download) is my list of radicals as I encode them. There is no need ever to memorise the KangXi radical number. They are just there for reference.

A good starting point is using the landscape as a set of memory locations – the classical technique known as the method of loci. Walking the path – be it around the house or garden, around the block or through the bush – enables you to fix the locations.

The easiest is to start with a room. I would suggest that five locations in each room. Starting with the doorway and adding four more locations in the room before moving on to the next one. Just keep going out into the garden, around buildings and wherever the path leads you.

I prefer large memory palaces, so I walk my neighbourhood, with each house, shop, road, park … representing one radical. That allows plenty of items at the location as hooks for the radicals and many characters which will be stored there.

Areas around a school will work well - each building segment, corridor, classroom, seating area, sports field … The the whole class can use the same memory palace.

By photographing the locations you can have the palace with you all the time, although you will find you don't need reminders of the locations once you have used them a few times. They become familiar. It really is much easier than it sounds!

You have the palace mapped out, so time to use it.

Move to the first location and stare at it. You will be amazed how much detail there is in any physical space. Every detail is a hook you have available to use.

So 见 / see / jiàn goes at the first location. You imagine the **jester** at the location doing a **magic act**. j- jester, -ian magician act. The magical movement you imagine heads for the floor, and that gives the tone. And he **sees** you. Imagine that look of his thoroughly.

In one image, you have the **character for the radical, the pinyin, the tone and the meaning**. That is what you do for every word you want to be able to remember and write.

Any word for which 见 is the radical of the first syllable, is associated with that location. Find something which helps you remember the shape. A door frame top over a skipping person, maybe? It all depends what is at your location. Relax, and your brain will find something, I promise.

As you add more and more of the words with 见 as the radical, you will notice lots of aspects around the location. You have now started the story of what goes on there, with the magic performance of the jester. Have fun with it!

Next location, maybe a window, is 车 / vehicle / chē. I saw that character referring to the 4 wheels of a car. My great mate, the chimpanzee is driving it with his nose out the window being stretched by the wind. He starts the fun for the second location.

Both of these radicals are words in their own right. So you gain vocabulary with almost every radical name.

And so on for 236 locations. Sounds impossible? It isn't - this is the way your brain works naturally, so you will be surprised how well it works. But you're in no hurry. You have a list of the 236 locations needed and you can gradually add a note on that list about the location as you need them.

I would strongly recommend putting in the first 25 radicals in initially to get used to the system and because you're going to need these radicals often.

You don't need to add information to the sequence of locations in any particular order, because the sequence is grounded in the landscape. You can never run out of space or story to add an infinite amount of information to every single location.

I suggest taking a walk and photographing each house/shop/whatever with your phone until you get to 236. That gives a record which is always available to you. It won't take as long as you think! It will be an hour very well invested.

You then just start with whatever the word is first in your Chinese course. That way, you will get to know the locations and radicals which are most frequent first, and slowly build up the whole palace.

There is no need to learn the whole palace in order. Some locations will rarely be used, if ever. You don't need to learn the location numbers nor the KangXi radical numbers. You will never need them.

Components which aren't radicals

There are also components which aren't radicals. For example, the left bit of 左 (zuǒ, left) or the top bit of 学 (xué, learn)。

I have a list of them and have made up objects to link them to, making sure that does not overlap with existing radicals. For example, the top bit of 每 (měi, every) is a sign post. So every is remembered as a *signpost* pointing to a mother, which is what *every*one needs. Or some such story.

Example - 请 (qǐng, please)

If I want to encode 请 qǐng as please. I check the radical on MDBG:

https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary?page=worddict&wdrst=0&wdqb=please

That slows me down and forces me to focus and not be thinking of something else.

I go (usually physically, but mentally will do) to the 讠 location in the palace.

I need q- and -ing. q- is a queen and -ing is a ring. And the third tone indicates low down.

At the 讠 location, I am very polite because there is a queen there, sitting in a ring of people. I ask 'please may I …?'.

There are three parts to the character, 讠 as well as the radicals for one, earth and month. I don't need to encode the 讠 because I have it from the location. So I ask the queen, bowing low (3rd tone), please may I have the one earth for a month. I figure that in that time I can solve all the wrongs in the world. That gives me the pinyin, the character, the meaning and the tone. And an emotional engagement which always helps memory.

Later, you will find that the 青 bit is actually a radical way down the end of the palace at KangXi number 174: qīng (green). It is a phoenetic component. But I didn't know that when I encountered qǐng early in the course.

Two syllable words

你好 (nǐ hǎo, hello)

At locations 21 and 22 I have the two forms of the radicals for person. I separated them because they are both common and I wanted to make sure which one I was looking for in remembering the character.

I call 亻 little person. rén is a rooster engraving upwards. With a physical location, you now have something for our colourful engraving fowl to engrave on. He is engraving the image of a little person. Something at the location will look like the character engraved on the location as well.

The next location is 人, big person, rén where the rooster is engraving a big image of a big person.

For 你好 (nǐ hǎo, hello) we need location 21. You don't need to remember the location number, nor the KangXi radical number, just that the location for all the words in which the first character has the radical 亻.

For nǐ hǎo, you have the Neanderthal saying hello alongside the hydra eating lots of chocolate. - stuffing it into every one of its many mouths. Both are bowing and touching the ground to give the third tone.

Now you need a story. It is here you really start to need a lot more of the radicals. You can look

them up on your Beastly Radicals radical list. Or you can use the website on which I depend:

https://www.archchinese.com/arch_chinese_radicals.html

Click on any radical image there, and you will find all the characters for which it is the radical.

Along with the other site which I depend on:

https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary

Click on the characters to load a more detailed frame, and the radical for each character will be shown, along with how many further strokes are required.

Click on the three dots, and you will find all sorts of options:
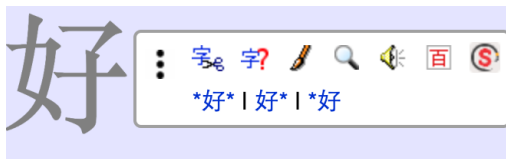
The little symbol with a pair of scissors cutting up a character will separate the character into the components. The brush will show you how to write it in correct stroke order. The speaker will play the pronunciation.

Clicking further breaks down the character into the components. It is those components which give you the story.

Clicking on any component tells you if it is a radical, such as xiǎo below, which has no extra strokes, hence the +0. Another radical learnt!

The sooner you know the major radicals, the easier this becomes. It really is worth putting time into learning the radicals - that effort will pay off incredibly well. I promise that you will thank me if you take that advice.

So to encode 你好 nǐ hǎo, the process is as follows:

Go to the location for 亻 .

Say hello to the Neanderthal saying hello to you as he shows off his bikini. We need a story for the components. There is a little top bit which is not a radical. I have it in the **other-components.pdf** list. I imagine that as a little cap, and it always seems to be on the top of components. You will learn the 'other components' as you use them.

I don't need to include the 亻 in the story, because the location gives me that. So I just need to add that my Neanderthal then puts his cap back on after saying 'hello'. The character means 'you' and the Neanderthal is directing his address to me saying 'you good!' the literal meaning of 你好.

Next to my bikini-wearing, cap donning Neanderthal is the hydra munching on choclate. To add the components of his character, I need to story to tell me of the two radicals used in it: woman and child. This character means 'good', which makes sense.

The hydra has one head which is obviously a female head and it is snuggling what is obviously a child head. All the other heads are looking at these two in adoration because they are so good.

Sounds like a lot? You only do this for new characters which you cannot remember any other way. The more words you learn, the more they become combinations of characters you already know.

New words, you will start to recognise the radicals and that will give a clue to the meaning. It all starts to make perfect sense - and you will get all sorts of unpredictable images and stories on the way.

Notebook for the palace

I have a little notebook with a page for each radical. I take it with me when I walk each day. I will either add in new vocabulary or revise what is there. I don't try the whole palace in one walk, but usually a section of the palace. Some locations now have a lot of words, so I may walk to that location and revise or add new vocabulary.

Some people worry about multiple characters and stories all occurring at the same location. That isn't a problem.

For example, I have at least 40 characters in one location in the Chinese palace (kǒu, mouth) but I would never bother trying to retrieve them all. My brain just retrieves what it wants and the rest are just background noise.

If I want a particular word, my brain will jump to the location it is associated with, and then to the detail within that location that I have used - letterbox, roof, funny thing in the garden ... Once I know it well, then my brain just knows it and doesn't worry about the palace at all.

This jumping to locations is what the brain does naturally. It shocks people how well it works - but they have to try it first!

Part Three - OTHER USEFUL STUFF

A language is far more than just the vocabulary. I have tried a lot of other methods alongside the Radical Beasts system, with varying degrees of success. The struggle is more with time than with

learning Chinese. Motivation is never a problem because I have so much fun with my Beasts by my side.

I will be extending this section in time and incorporating suggestions from others.

Sentences

I have found that translations as close to being literal as possible work better for me than those that try to be natural English. A number of courses refer to Chinglish - speaking English as close as possible to the order of the Chinese sentences. I try to speak in Chinglish as much as I can.

Natural English: Who did you come with today?

今天是跟谁来的?

jīn tiān shì gēn sheí lái de?

Chinglish: Today is with who come de?

I put sentences on cards and dot them around the house or in my pocket, saying the sentences over and over to get the tones right and feel comfortable. I slowly found that I was saying words rather than a series of syllables. It takes time, but repeating sentences is essential.

Children's videos and songs

There are plenty of videos designed for children online. They work for grown up children too. I play these when I am getting dressed. I will be adding more sites to the section below, YouTube videos.

I found that learning children's short songs from online sites was really valuable, especially in the early stages when everything was so unfamiliar. A song would get stuck in my head and I would sing the words while I was doing house work or in the shower on a walk. Even if I gained one word, I was happy. I was astounded at how much of the vocabulary and grammar got into my head that way.

Eventually I wrote them out and would sing from the characters. Beware: the tones often get lost in songs.

Children's books

I started to collect books in Chinese. Children's books still have advanced vocabulary, but there are books with a limited vocabulary and number of characters, such as the Mandarin Companion series.

The Mandarin Companion series of booklets have the CHinese characters on the bulk of the page, with pinyin and English vocabulalry in the footnotes and further assistance on the website. The key feature of the booklets is that you will get meaningful stories with a limited number of characters. The same characters appear in different, mostly related, words.

https://mandarincompanion.com

Books, pamphlets and anything in Chinese

I collected pamphlets and had friends bring them back from China for me. The more I collected, the more I wanted to read them, especially when some of my own books were translated into Chinese. With no pinyin nor English, just translating a single sentence took time, but it was such fun to guess the radical, then use Archchinese to find the character.

https://www.archchinese.com/arch_chinese_radicals.html

Clicking on the radical brings up all the possible characters. It is a game to see how quickly I can find an unknown character.

Spaced Repetition Systems (SRS)

Some people swear by apps which give vocabulary using SRS. Basically, the better you get at a particular answer, the longer before you will be asked it again. There is lots of repetition.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spaced_repetition

I don't want to learn from a screen all the time - just my personal preference. There are systems which create flashcards - but it is essential for me to know the radical.

I make my own flash cards. Writing them out, finding the radical, learning the stroke order, being made to focus on the tone … it works better for me than using an electronic source.

I use colours on my cards - green for the key radical, purple for other components which are also radicals, red for components which are not radicals.

I then take a few cards in my pocket when I walk. I also run a Leitner Box for my flashcards.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leitner_system

I use high quality card stock because I like the nice feel of them. The choice of SRS system, should you want to use one, is a personal preference.

Using Radical Beasts in a school setting

I have taught in schools for decades - but obviously not Chinese! These are a few thoughts on why the Radical Beasts will work in schools better than some other systems which also use memory methods for Chinese.

The teacher can define the palace in advance, using the school buildings and grounds. In fact, all the teachers in a school can use the same memory palace, even for different topics. The map can be a school-wide resource, online or printed as required. This also means that changes in teachers as students progress through the school or as teachers leave, does not impact the system.

A set of photos of the locations could be provided or students could take their own. That means that even if they leave the school or want to work from home, they can still use the palace.

If the teacher has already set up the memory palace and has the Beasts and Radical Palace lists ready to hand out, then students need do nothing before they start their first word. They will use the Beasts and Actions for pinyin, only adding in the Chinese characters as the course dictates. All students are using the same Beasts and the same Radical palace. This has two significant advantages over systems which have the students create their own characters or memory palace.

1. For the teacher, this system works alongside the teacher's own curriculum. Teachers often want to do introducing yourself or greetings or animals or weather or ... The method must leave teachers to use their own syllabus and just add memory methods as a tool.

2. For the students, they can make up stories together which usually leads to a lot of laughter and fun. It is not cheating to use someone else's good idea. If another student tells a really good image and story, then using it is a complement to that student. Lots of sharing and learning.

I would strongly suggest that students physically move to locations whenever possible to look around for a connection when encoding new words.

Adding mnemonic forces students to slow down, engage with word or character or both. This is because you need to use a mode shift - changing the mode of the item being remembered from a word to an image. You cannot do this when thinking of something else. It forces focus. In the very early days of doing this, I found making a quick sketch really helped, but I soon became used to the system and just used my imagination.

Marilyn System and Alex Mullen

I was hugely influenced by memory champion Alex Mullen's ideas based on the Marilyn System:

http://countryoftheblind.blogspot.com/2012/01/mnemonics-for-pronouncing-chinese.html
https://mullenmemory.com/memory-palace/chinese-system-part-1
https://mullenmemory.com/memory-palace/chinese-system-part-2

In the Marilyn Method, students are required to come up with 56 people for the initials. This is not something most people find easy and would be a real problem for a classroom. But, this approach was not intended for school children, while mine has that context firmly in sight.

If students come up with their own set of people, as suggested, they will all be different. The teacher won't have heard of most of the chosen folks - family members, pop stars, TV characters, toys. Some students will have their set ready when the teacher wants to use them, others will struggle, or not come up with a set in time … and people all look similar. So my Beasts will work better in a classroom setting.

There is a huge advantage in all using the same Beasts - the teacher can use them as examples when teaching. Students can share stories.

I also found the tones too difficult using Mullen's method. But I have no visual imagery because I have a condition known as aphantasia. As about 4% of the population lack visual imagery, this will also be the case for many learners. Mullen's method may well work better for other people than it did for me.

Because of the way the memory palace works, as Alex Mullen admits, it becomes a problem with two or three syllable words. You have to jump between locations in the memory palace for each syllable. My method has no problem with that - the story just adds in as many characters as needed to the story, but all aspects of a word will reside in one location.

Mandarin Blueprint

This online course uses memory methods in a way that none of the courses I have tried do. I have talked to a student doing Mandarin Blueprint who is very happy with it:

https://www.mandarinblueprint.com
https://www.mandarinblueprint.com/chinese-mnemonics/
https://www.mandarinblueprint.com/chinese-memory-palace-sets-for-pinyin-finals/)

Their 'movie method' is very much like my stories. Their memory palaces relate closely to what Alex Mullen talked about on his site, which they acknowledge.

Heisig: Remembering Simplified Hanzi

Remembering Simplified Hanzi: how not to forget the meaning and writing of Chinese characters by James W. Heisig

This book was recommended to me often, and I really like the story method. I was both reassured and influenced by this approach.

The problem that I found with it was that I wanted a system which would run parallel to any Chinese language course and not dictate the order in which vocabulary was introduced. Using Radical Beasts, the teacher can introduce the characters and stories in the order which suits their chosen curriculum.

My stories are similar to those in Heisig. It is all about making up stories from the components and linking them to the meaning.

YouTube videos

There is so much on YouTube for Chinese learners. This is only a starting point - I have a lot more to add.

Children's videos

Little Fox Mandarin

There is a huge amount of material on Little Fox Mandarin. You need to subscribe to get access to some of it, but it is free and I haven't had any spam as a result.

https://chinese.littlefox.com/en

The series I started with was Mrs Kelly's Class Songs (not because of the name!)

https://chinese.littlefox.com/en/song/contents_list/DP000785

In that very first few months of struggle, playing these over and over was really useful - and they are so cheerful. But there is a great deal more on the site than just Mrs Kelly's class songs, and then the stories associated with them.

Accessible Grown-up songs

Transition music group

Transition 前進樂團 Dui Bu Qi 對不起我的中文不好

> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XTBwvi0h2E

> Love this song!!

And so much more on their website: https://transition.tk/

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A lot more to come!

In Conclusion

This booklet is very much a work in progress. I will be updating as I get time and deeper understanding and new ideas - my own and those from readers.

Each update will have a new version number.