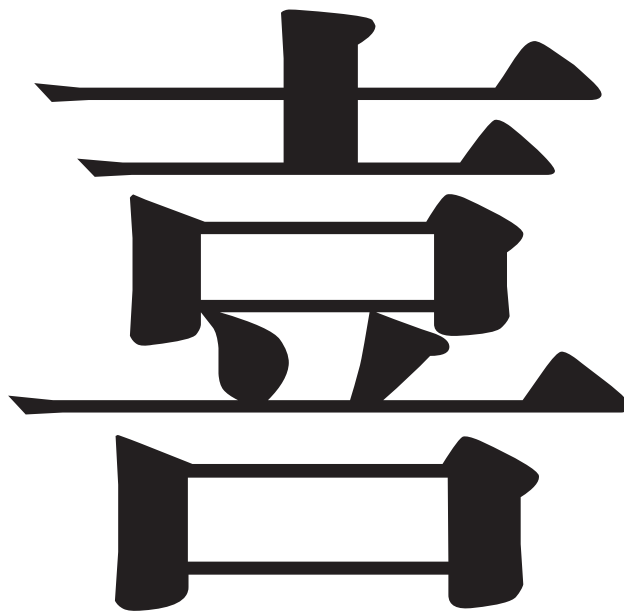


With a movie debuting at the box office every week and our phones and tablets bombarded with online memes by the minute, one might be forgiven for imagining that ancient people would have been a bit starved for entertainment, what with not having pictures of cats “can hasing cheezburgers” beamed into their palms. However, the ancient Chinese were a righteously funny bunch, able to have a laugh and a good time with something as simple as a drum. As the ultimate symbol for happiness and joy in Chinese, 喜 (xǐ) captures a delightful time in ancient human history when people were happy to be entertained by the simplest things. On top is 吉, an evolved pictographic depiction of a drum on a rack. On the bottom is 口, mouth, which indicates that the drummer’s audience would sing or laugh. Either way, *xǐ* was used to describe drumbeat-induced delight.

Besides music, romantic love brings joy to the world as well. Three thousand years ago, a maiden in love described her feelings with the lines: “既见君子，我心则喜” (jì jiàn jūnzǐ, wǒ xīn zé xǐ), meaning: “Having seen my Prince Charming, my heart is delighted.” Another example appears a few hundred years later than the *Classic of Poetry* during the time of the philosopher Mencius (孟子, 372 B.C.- 289 B.C.). He once praised the quality of one of his disciples by saying: “子路，人告之以有过，则喜。” (zǐlù, rén



*From rain to morning sickness, a character to brighten your day*

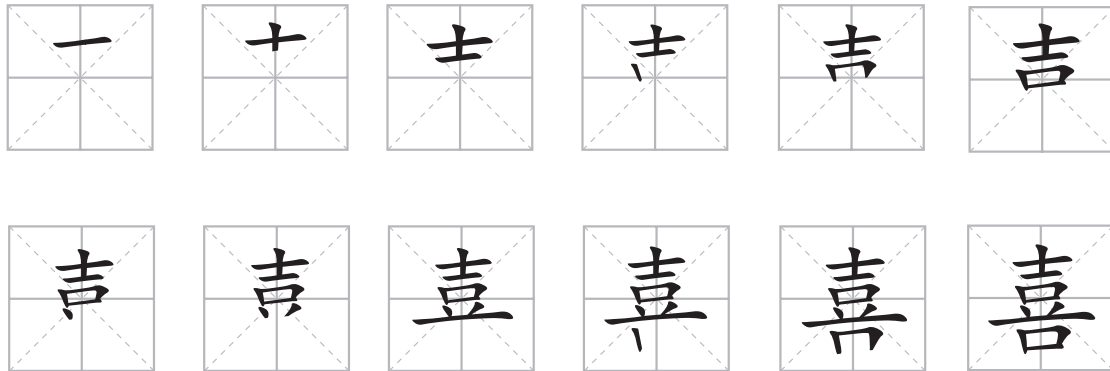
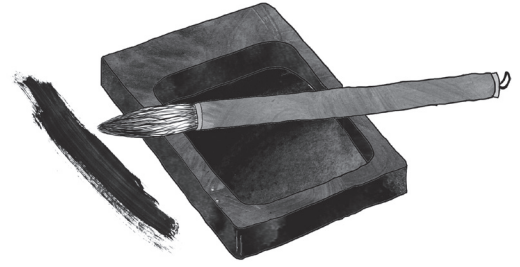
在这个娱乐爆炸的时代，你能想象出古人听到鼓声便欣喜若狂的样子吗？

gào zhī yǐ yǒu guò, zé xǐ.), meaning: “Zi Lu (a disciple) is pleased that people point out his mistakes.”

Whether it’s a love poem from the *Classic of Poetry* (《诗经》), the earliest anthology of Chinese poems and songs, or a Weibo post by a young woman dreamily rambling about her boyfriend, it seems time has not changed the essence of *xǐ*. Quite a few idioms today use *xǐ* to describe the status of being overjoyed: 大喜过望 (dà xǐ guò wàng) means “be pleased beyond expectation” while 喜不自胜 (xǐ bù zì shèng) means “be transported with joy”. When your heart is filled with joy, it’s hard to

not to show it, hence the term 喜形于色 (xǐ xíng yú sè) meaning “light up with pleasure”. You can use 喜怒无常 (xǐ nù wú cháng) to describe high and low mood swings, and the next time you’re asked the question, “Do you want the good news or the bad news?” you’ll most likely have a 悲喜交加 (bēi xǐ jiāo jiā) moment, meaning “mixed emotions”.

*Xǐ* is a harbinger of good news, and naturally, good news is called 喜讯 (xǐ xùn) or “pleasing message”. What about films or performances that get you giggling? For this, *xǐ* comes in the form of 喜剧 (xǐ jù), meaning comedy. Stick *xǐ* in front of anything, and it will instantly turn



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into something joyful, even in the case of rain—喜雨 (xǐyǔ) means “pleasing rain”, which normally occurs in spring. What about air that’s pleasing? You guessed it, it’s called 喜气 (xǐqì), meaning the happy expression on people’s faces or just the general atmosphere.

You might be surprised that spiders can be pleasing in Chinese culture. 喜蛛 (xǐzhū), for instance, is a kind of long-bodied, long-legged spider you might be happy to see dangling in your room, as it represents 喜从天降 (xǐ cóng tiān jiàng) heaven-sent fortune.

One folk story says the North Song Dynasty (960-1279) prime minister and litterateur Wang Anshi (王安

石) invented the double xi (囍) to describe a situation where two happy events occur around the same time. Wang, himself, passed a government exam and got married. Later, 囍 became exclusively associated with weddings as a decorative symbol. On the couple’s big day, you’ll find the character everywhere, from doors and windows to invitations and red envelopes stuffed with money. In marriage, xi is the name of the game: the wedding banquet is called 喜宴 (xǐyàn), wine served is 喜酒 (xǐjiǔ) and sweets are 喜糖 (xǐtáng). Traditionally, Chinese weddings are regarded as extremely auspicious and can supposedly bring good fortune

and drive away evil spirits. So, if an elderly relative is ill, young couples move up the date in the belief that it might help their recovery—a practice called 冲喜 (chōng xǐ).

Another special meaning for xi is “pregnancy”, which is commonly referred to as 有喜 (yǒu xǐ), literally meaning “to have xi”. Even morning sickness is called 害喜 (hài xǐ), “to suffer from xi”.

No one turns away that type of good fortune, so xi also just means “like” in the form of 喜欢 (xǐ huan). If you enjoyed what you learned today, don’t forget to 喜欢 our magazine on Facebook! - LAO HUANG AND XIAO CHU, TRANSLATED BY LIU JUE (刘珺)