这个夏天，海宝将欢迎来自五湖四海的客人，
让我们来一起探讨“海”这个字的深意吧！

ON THE CHARACTER “海”

This summer, people from the “four seas” and around the world will meet in Shanghai. Discover what the character **海**, or sea, means to lovers, officials, foreigners and even a mascot.

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The evolution of the character 海:


Bronze inscription


Seal script


Clerical script


Regular script

上海世界博览会的吉祥物“海宝”是按照汉字“人”的形体创造出来的，这个活泼可爱的蓝色小海宝，人见人爱。可是有谁知道“海”这个字的身世和它的含义吗？

“海”是形声字。形声字是说一个字是由形旁和声旁两部分组成，形旁表示字的含义，声旁表示字的读音。“海”字左边的“氵”是形旁，它表示“海”字跟水有关系，太平洋的“洋”、洞庭湖的“湖”、长江的“江”、黄河的“河”这些字都有“氵”字旁，它们的含义都和水有关系。在铜器铭文和小篆里，“海”字左边的水就画做流水的形状，后来到了隶书，人们为了书写方便，把流水的形状改成三点的“氵”了。“海”字右边的“每”是声旁，“每”在甲骨文里像一个戴着漂亮头饰的女人，但是这里的“每”不表示任何意思，它只表示“海”字的读音。由于汉字古今读音发生了变化，“海”字现在的读音和“每”字不一样了。

“海”是指靠近大陆的那一大片水域，也就是我们平常所说的大海。因为大海很大，所以人们常常用“海”来比喻聚集在一起很多、很大一片的人或事物，例如：人们把聚集在一起像大海一样的人群叫做“人海”；把一大片燃烧的火叫做“火海”；把连绵起伏看不到边的云叫做“云海”；把漫山遍野盛开的花儿叫做“花海”。

因为大海很大，人们喜欢用“海”来夸张地描述一件事情，例如：人们把没完没了开很多会叫做“会海”，成语有“文山会海”；把非常困苦的生活环境叫做“苦海”，成语有“苦海无边”；把充满竞争和风险的商业领域叫做“商海”，经商的人说他们“在商海中拼搏”；把官吏争夺功名富贵的场所叫做“宦海”，做官的人说他们“在宦海中沉浮”。

由于大海不会干涸，石头不会粉碎，热恋中的男女总喜欢说“海枯石烂不变心”这句话，意思是说：即使海水干涸、岩石粉碎，彼此相爱的心也不会改变。由于大海广阔无边、深不可测，儿女们常常用“恩深似海”来表述父母为自己付出的辛劳和感情。父母过生日时，孩子祝愿父母“福如东海，寿比南山”，就是希望爸爸妈妈的福气像大海那样多，寿命像高山那样长。

古时候人们以为中国四周有大海环绕，所以把国境以内叫做“海内”；把国境以外的地方叫做“海外”。现在我们还沿用这个说法，上海世界博览会欢迎“海内外”的朋友们，就是欢迎中国各地的老百姓和世界各国的朋友。

古人以为东海、南海、西海、北海四海围绕着中国，于是用“四海”指代全国各地，后来也指代全世界各处。成语“漂流四海”是说在世界各地飘泊流浪；“四海为家”是说到处都是自己的家。上海世博会吉祥物取名“海宝”，意思是“四海之宝”，也就是说“海宝”是全世界人民之宝。

The mascot for the Shanghai World Expo is a little fellow shaped like 人 (rén) and named Haibao (海宝), meaning “Sea Treasure.” The character 海 (hǎi) has a long history, and a lot of fun—and even poetic—uses.

海 is made up of two parts. The first part, 氵, is the water radical, and any character with it will be somehow related to water or liquid. Just take a look at these: 洋 (yáng, ocean), 江 (jiāng, river), 湖 (hú, lake). Easy to spot, the radical resembles three drops of water on the left side of each character. In early calligraphy styles, like Bronze Inscription and Seal Script, the left side of 海 looked more fluid and water-like. Official Script changed the flowing shape, simplifying it to just three drops.

The second part of the character is 每 (měi), which was the original sound of the character. Its pronunciation changed over time, and today 海 (hǎi) and 每 (měi) have very different sounds.

海 is used in many common expressions. “A sea of people” can be 人海 (rénhǎi); a “sea of fire” 火海 (huǒhǎi) is a bonfire. A group of clouds blocking out the sky can also be called a “sea of clouds,” 云海 (yúnhǎi).

To describe a long day full of pointless meetings, you might say a “sea of meetings” 会海 (huìhǎi). Take it one step further and say your day was full of “mountains of paperwork and a sea of meetings” 文山会海 (wénshān huìhǎi).

Poor villagers, it might be said, live in a “sea of bitterness” 苦海 (kǔhǎi) or an “endless sea of bitterness” 苦海无边 (kǔhǎi wúbiān). In contrast, the highly competitive business world is a “sea of trade” 商海 (shānghǎi), where business people “fight with all their might” 在商海中拼搏 (zài shānghǎi zhōng pīnbó). Government officials have been known to “drift in a sea of officialdom” 在宦海中沉浮 (zài huànhǎi zhōng chénfú).

Chinese lovers also use the sea as a metaphor to describe their passion for each other. With the first part implied, they say, “[I will love you until] the sea runs dry and the stones rot” 海枯石烂 (hǎikū shílàn)—now that’s a long time!

In ancient times, the Chinese believed they were surrounded by four seas 四海 (sìhǎi), and used the term to describe China. Now, the term has expanded to include the entire world, so the expression “to drift on the four seas” 漂流四海 (piāoliú sìhǎi) means to roam aimlessly around the world. To say that “the four seas are home” 四海为家 (sìhǎi wéi jiā) means one feels they have a home everywhere in the world.

Long ago, to be “outside the sea” 海外 (hǎiwài) meant you were a foreigner—from the other side of the world—and to be from “inside the sea” 海内 (hǎinèi) meant you were a local. And that’s why it’s so important that this year’s Shanghai World Expo “welcomes friends from both inside and outside the sea!” (欢迎海内外的朋友们！Huānyíng hǎinèiwài de péngyoumen!)

Translated by Nicholas Richards (芮尼克)