

## Chapter 2

### Character morphology

[Myers, J. \(May 2019\). \*The grammar of Chinese characters: Productive knowledge of formal patterns in an orthographic system\*. London: Routledge.](#)

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#### Abstract

This chapter focuses on Chinese character morphology: regularities relating to potentially interpretable constituents like semantic radicals and phonetic components. While not all complex characters can be fully decomposed into interpretable constituents, neither can all complex spoken or signed words. Character formation operations are similar to those in spoken or signed languages as well. Semantic radicals in semantic-phonetic characters are affix-like in being closed class, bound, semantically bleached, favoring certain positions, and tending towards formal reduction, both via lexically idiosyncratic alternations and via regular processes. The root-like constituents of semantic compounds differ in most of these properties, though lexical frequency effects suggest that semantic-phonetic character formation may have been frozen on its way towards full grammaticalization. In reduplication, the copying itself is meaningful, with the interpretations restricted just as they are in spoken and signed languages; also restricted are the formal reduplicative structures, suggesting templates, to be analyzed in the next chapter. Further evidence that affixation, compounding, and reduplication are distinct from each other, as well as that character morphology is distinct from character phonology, is that idiosyncratic alternations are generally blocked in reduplication, while regular reduction is permitted.