

Witty Wordplays:  
Laughing Out Loud  
with Chinese Characters



“字”得其乐  
——汉字笑话500篇

Written by Ma Changshan

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Translated by Li Guobin and Zhao Jinji

李国斌 赵金基 英译

Illustrated by Liu Hong

刘宏 图

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Changshan Ma

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## 序 言

马长山

大约八九年前的一个下午，我突发奇想：可否以我们中国人每天使用的汉字作为幽默对象，写出一本笑话集？

说干就干。我开始琢磨眼前的常用字，试图利用它们的偏旁部首、组织结构和读音的异同，寻找和制造一些笑料。写了几十段以后，脑袋空了，实在写不动了。这时我在网上搜索到一些“汉字搞笑对话”之类的段子，感到同道不少，于是又硬着头皮写了下去。后来我还邀请了李国斌、赵金基两位英语高手和漫画家刘宏加入到这个阵营中来，想让全世界更多的人——即使他们一个汉字也不认识——了解到汉字不仅是神圣伟大实用之创造，而且是幽默、欢乐、诙谐之源泉。就这样我们互相鼓励，反复切磋，终于创作出了这本世界出版史上第一部以汉字为幽默对象的笑话集——而且还是中英双语版。

但是在联系本书的出版时却很不顺利。整整五年时间，我在中国大陆找了无数家出版社，都没有找到合适的出版单位。好在出版是无国界的。感谢美国南方出版社让此书得以面世。希望本书为全球读者，特别是喜欢汉语的读者带来欢乐！

2023.4.15. 于中国北京

## Preface

Ma Changshan

Approximately eight or nine years ago, on one afternoon, I had a sudden inspiration: Could Chinese characters in everyday use be utilized as objects of humor to create a comprehensive joke book?

Immediately I delved into the exploration, utilizing the radical components, organizational structures, and distinctions in pronunciation of commonplace characters to conjure amusing contents. After crafting several dozen short anecdotes, my well of inspiration temporarily depleted, impeding further progress. Nonetheless, my curiosity persisted, and I discovered some "funny Chinese character dialogues" online, a serene reminder that others shared my interests. Encouraged, I persevered and even invited two proficient English experts, Li Guobin and Zhao Jinji, as well as the skilled cartoonist Liu Hong, to join me in a collaborative effort. I aspired to create a work that would allow more people from all over the world, including those who did not perceive a single Chinese character, to recognize that Chinese characters are not only exceptional and practical creations, but also a source of wit, glee, and satire. We spurred one another on, continuously revising and refining the contents until we ultimately created the world's first collections of jokes with Chinese characters as objects of humor - presented in both Chinese and English.

Nonetheless, publishing the book was a trying endeavor. For an arduous five years, I searched across mainland China for myriad potential publishers with no success. Fortunately, publishing knows no boundaries, and I am grateful to the Dixie W Publishing Corporation in the United States for affording me the opportunity to materialize my vision. Ultimately, it is my sincere aspiration that this literary work shall impart a sense of delight to readers across the globe, particularly those who have developed an affinity towards the Chinese language.

Beijing, China.  
April 15, 2023.

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## 第一章 差点把姐认成牛 Chapter 1 Almost Mistaken for a Cow

### 乱了辈分

出场角色：儿 (ér)；母 (mǔ)；充 (chōng)。

儿去南方读书已经半年多了。母每日苦苦思念着儿。

一天，母的一个远房亲戚充来家里串门。精神有些恍惚的母把充当成了自己的儿，高兴地说：“儿啊，你戴了博士帽啦！”

充皱着眉头说：“嫂子，我是充啊，你连我都认不出来啦？”

### A Relative Mixed Up with Son

Characters: 儿"son"; 母"mother"; 充"full".

Mom misses 儿 terribly who has been away from home for half a year studying in the south.

One day a distant relative 充 comes around. Mom, somewhat in a trance, mistakes him for her son.

"Oh, my boy!" she exclaims with delight. "You're wearing a mortarboard."

"Can't you recognise me?" replies the man with a frown. "I'm 充, not your son."

Note: 充 is composed of 儿 with a component on top representing a mortarboard.

### 差点把姐认成牛

出场角色：午 (wǔ)；干 (gān)。

午在商厦里见到了干。

午对干说：“妹子，我这个纱巾还不错吧？”

干撇着嘴对午说：“姐，我眼神儿不好。你披上这玩意，我差点把你看成一头牛了。”

### Almost Mistaken for a Cow

Characters: 午"horse"; 干"dry".

午 runs into 干 at a mall.

"Hi, sis," says 午 to 干. "The veil looks good on me, doesn't it?"

"Excuse my poor eyesight," replies the other, curling her lips. "But I almost mistake you for a cow."

Note: 午 has a left-falling stroke on the top left resembling a veil; 午 is graphically similar to 牛"cow".

### 出言不逊

出场角色：妻 (qī)；袞 (gǔn)。

妻在商厦里见到了袞，惊讶道：“老公啊，你啥时候买了件衣服啊？”

袞笑道：“妹子，你认错人了。我可不是你老公啊。”

妻问：“那你谁呀？”

袞：“gǔn！”

妻怒道：“我和和气气地问你，你咋让我‘滚’呢？”

注释：袞，古代君王等的礼服。

### Putting Foot in Mouth

Characters: 妻"wife"; 袞"ancient robe".

妻 runs across 袞 at a mall. "Hubby, when did you get the coat?" she asks in surprise.

"Sorry, madam, but you've got the wrong person," smiles the other. "I'm not your husband."

"Who are you, then?" asks the woman.

"袞," comes the reply.

"I've been courteous, but why are you being so rude to me?" says the lady crossly.

Note: 袞 is structured like 公 "husband" in the middle of 衣 "coat"; "袞" is mistaken for its homophone "滚" meaning "Get out!".

### 家的味道

出场角色：口 (kǒu)；囚 (qiú)；家 (jiā)。

口、囚和家在一次聚会上问其他人，他们仨谁的相貌更像一个家。

“你们仨先做个自我评价吧！”众人建议道。

口抢先说：“我最像家了，虽然空空如也，只有四面大墙，可有句成语叫‘家徒四壁’，这说明我最像家啊！”

囚摇了摇头，反驳道：“光有几面墙，一个人没有，那算什么家呀。我是既有房又有人，看来我更像个家。”

家清了清嗓子，最后出场：“口兄确实没有一点家的味道。可是囚兄，你虽然有房有人，可是人在密不透风的四面大墙之内，没有一点自由。这算什么家呀！你俩看看我，虽然没有房，没有墙，只有一

个顶棚加一猪。可是多温馨啊。不信你俩问问大伙谁更像家。”

### The Essence of Home

Characters: 口"mouth"; 囚"prisoner"; 家"family".

At a party, 口, 囚 and 家 ask the other guests to identify who of them best embodies the essence of a home.

"You three start with a self-evaluation!" the others suggest.

"I am the best picture of a home," 口 asserts promptly. "Though I may seem empty, the idiom 'a home with nothing but four bare walls' indicates that I resemble a home perfectly."

"Four walls alone don't make a home," retorts 囚, shaking his head. "With a person within a house, I look more like a home."

Finally, 家 clears his throat and remarks, "Brother 口 certainly fails to evoke any sense of homeliness, and as for brother 囚, a confined space of four tight walls with a person shut in cannot be deemed as a home."

"Look at me. A pig under a roof with no wall or person lives in the real comfort of home," 家 continues. "So you two can seek the opinion of others to determine who is the best image of a home."

Note: 口 is shaped like an enclosure of four walls; 囚 is composed of 人 "person" fully enclosed by 口; 家 is composed of 豕 "pig" with a semantic radical 宀 "roof" on top.

### 没大没小

出场角色: 人 (rén) ; 大 (dà) 。

人问大: “兄弟, 玩上单杠了?”

大怒道: “这么没礼貌。我是大, 你咋跟我称兄道弟呀!”

注释: “大”, 在汉语某些方言中指父亲。

### A Mannerless Son

Characters: 人"man"; 大"dad".

"Hey, bro," 人 says to 大. "Having fun on the high bar?"

"How rude you are to address father as bro!" responds the other angrily.

Note: 大 resembles 人 playing a horizontal bar.

### 不孝之子

出场角色: 克 (kè) ; 古 (gǔ) 。

克问古: “兄弟, 你儿子跑啦? 他这一跑, 你岂不是作古了吗?”

注释: 作古, 指死亡。

### The Black Sheep of the Family

Characters: 克"gram"; 古"ancient".

"Old chap, your son has run away?" 克 asks 古. "Deserted by him, you've become ancient, right?"

Note: 克 is composed of 古 at the top and 儿 "son" at the bottom; the Chinese expression "become ancient" is a euphemism for "die".

## 惨遭毒手

出场角色：羊 (yáng)；羔 (gāo)。

羊望着羔，悲痛欲绝地大哭道：“孩儿啊，谁把你的尾巴切成四截啦？”

### The Victim of a Cruel Hand

Characters: 羊"sheep"; 羔"lamb".

"Oh, kid. Who cut your tail into four pieces?" wails 羊, staring at 羔 with desperation.

Note: The bottom extended part of the vertical line in 羊 resembles a tail while the radical 𠂇 at the bottom of 羔 resembles a tail cut into four segments.

## 爱心无价

出场角色：茧 (jiǎn)；萤 (yíng)。

茧望着天上飞翔的萤，羡慕地问：“朋友，为啥你能在空中漫舞，我只能匍匐在地上呢？”

茧看了看茧，笑道：“因为我比你多一颗爱心啊！”

### A Love Heart

Characters: 茧"cocoon"; 萤"firefly".

"Hey, buddy. Why are you capable of dancing in the air while I can only lie on the ground?" asks 茧 admiringly as he looks up at 萤.

Sizing the other up, 萤 replies with a smile, "Because I've got a love heart that gives me the strength to fly!"

Note: Compared with 茧, 萤 has one more radical 冫, which lies in the middle of the character 爱 "love" representing "a love heart".

## 冷战夫妻

出场角色：比 (bǐ)；北 (běi)。

比见到了北。他反复端详着北，自言自语道：“夫妻一旦陷入冷战，连睡觉也要背靠背了。真爱就是两个人要永远朝着一个方向。”

### The Silent Treatment

Characters: 比"comparison"; 北"north".

比 comes across 北. Looking the other up and down, 比 mutters under his breath, "Once involved in the silent treatment, a couple give each other the cold shoulder even in bed. True love means looking in the same direction now and forever."

Note: 比 is structured left to right with a pair of graphically similar components resembling two persons looking in the same direction while 北 representing a couple facing opposite directions.

## 儿在村里找他大

出场角色：儿 (ér)；天 (tiān)；因 (yīn)。

大出门多半天了，到吃饭时间了还没有回家。娘让儿出去找找。

儿在村里转了好久，也没有遇见他的大。

突然，儿遇见了天。

“大，你咋让人吊天花板上啦？”儿害怕地问。

“我不是你大。我是你天叔啊！”天微笑着摸了摸儿。

儿继续找他的大。又见了因。

儿大哭道：“大，你被关起来啦？娘让你回家吃饭哩！”

因笑道：“傻孩子，别哭啦。我是你因叔，不是你大。”

## Nowhere to Be Found

Characters: 儿"son"; 天"sky"; 因"cause".

Dad is out for long and still not back for meal, so Mum sends 儿 to look for him.

儿 is searching here and there around the village when suddenly he catches sight of 天.

"How come you're hanging from the ceiling, da?" asks the boy in panic.

"Kid," smiles the other, giving the child a reassuring pat, "I'm your uncle 天, not your father."

Then 儿 picks up his search till he comes across 因.

"How come you are locked up, da?" wails the boy. "Ma asks you to come home for dinner."

"Don't cry, dumb bunny," the man laughs. "I'm your uncle 因, not your father."

Note: 天 is composed of 大 "dad" with a horizontal stroke on top resembling a ceiling; 因 is composed of 大 fully enclosed by a radical 口.

## 珠联璧合

出场角色：丰 (fēng)；色 (sè)。

丰是一个单身小伙子。经人介绍，他认识了美女色。

丰为色的美貌所倾倒。一天，丰情不自禁地对色说：“小姐，嫁给我吧，咱俩共铸多彩人生。”

## Side by Side

Characters: 丰"plentiful"; 色"colour".

丰, a single young man, is introduced to 色, who is such a stunning beauty that he is completely swept off his feet.

One day, unable to contain his emotions, 丰 pops the question. "Will you marry me, miss?" he says. "Let us build a colourful life side by side."

Note: 丰 joined by 色 on the right forms the character 艳 "colourful".

## 寡妇的难处

出场角色：禾 (hé)；季 (jì)。

禾对季说：“季姐，你老公去世多年。你也该找个合适的人成家了。”

“我拖个油瓶，没人待见啦。”季无可奈何地说。



## A Widow's Trouble

Characters: 禾"grass"; 季"season".

"Sis, it's been years since you were widowed," says 禾 to 季. "It is time that you got remarried."

"Nobody has a crush on a woman with a son of tender age," replies the other with a heavy sigh.

Note: 季 is structured top to bottom with 禾 and 子 "son".

## 小巫见大巫

出场角色: 句 (jù); 旬 (xún)。

妇产医院门口, 句巧遇了旬。

旬告知自己怀了双胞胎。

句对旬说: “姐姐真厉害, 一下子怀了两个。”

旬笑道: “现在双胞胎不算个啥。人家旬姐才有本事, 一下子就是四胞胎。”

## A Giant in the Presence of a Super-Giant

Characters: 句"sentence"; 旬"ten days".

句 bumps into 旬 at the gate of a maternity hospital.

Learning that the other is pregnant with twins, 句 says, "You are really something, sis, expecting two at a time."

"It's no big deal compared to 旬," 旬 laughs, "who is carrying four babies at once."

Note: 句, 旬 and 旬 are respectively composed of 口, 日 and 田, all enclosed by the same radical 勹 (from upper and right sides); 句 represents a woman pregnant with one baby, 旬 with twins and 旬 with quadruplets.

## 恍然大悟

出场角色: 几 (jǐ); 朵 (duǒ)。

几对朵说: “妹子, 你一上树就显得仪态万方。我知道为什么姐妹们都要攀高枝儿了!”

## Seeing the Light

Characters: 几"small table"; 朵"flower".

"Sis, you appear in all your glory on top of the tree," says 几 to 朵. "Now I see why all girls like climbing high branches."

Note: 朵 is composed of 几 at the top and 木 "tree" at the bottom; the Chinese expression "climb high branches" means marrying someone from a higher economic or social class.

## 顶上开花

出场角色: 开 (kāi); 卉 (huì)。

开对卉说: “姐, 你啥时候长出一根小辫儿啊?”

## A Floret on Top

Characters: 开"open"; 卉"grass".

"Sis, since when have you sprouted that little pigtail?" 开 asks 卉.

Note: The vertical stroke running across the top horizontal line in 卉 resembles a pigtail.

## 少说为佳

出场角色: 口 (kǒu); 田 (tián)。

经人介绍, 口小姐和田先生在星巴克咖啡厅约会了。

楚楚可人的口小姐滔滔不绝地介绍了个人情况, 包括学历、职业、收入、爱好和父母。

衣冠楚楚、气宇轩昂的田先生则一直保持沉默。

口小姐望着田先生说: “你为什么不说话呀? 难道你是哑巴?”

田先生拿出一支笔, 在餐巾纸上默默写了一行字: “我这是第一次跟女孩子约会, 妈怕我言多语失, 给我嘴巴上贴了十字封条。”

## Silence Is Golden

Characters: 口"mouth", 田"field".

Miss 口 and Mr. 田 meet on a blind date at Starbucks.

The charming young lady introduces herself, going into details about her education experiences, job, income, interests and her folks, while the gentleman, who is neatly-dressed and distinguished-looking, simply keeps quiet all the time.

"Why don't you talk?" finally she asks, looking him in the face. "You

aren't a mute, are you?"

Then silently, Mr. 田 takes out a pen and writes down his reply on a napkin, "This is my first time on a date, and Mum seals my mouth for fear that I might put my foot in it."

Note: 田 is composed of 口 with 十 enclosed, resembling a sealed mouth.



## 骗子是怎样诞生的?

出场角色: 马 (mǎ); 扁 (biǎn); 骗 (piàn)。

马先生和扁小姐结婚了。不久, 他们有了一个儿子。

夫妻俩为孩子应该随谁的姓发生了争执。

“孩子随父姓, 自古皆然。”马理直气壮。

“现在男女平等。《婚姻法》没有规定孩子必须姓你的姓。”扁据理力争。

夫妻俩找到了一个解决办法：他们用双方的姓氏组成了一个新姓——骗，并且给儿子起了一个独到的名字：“骗子。”

### How a Swindler Is Born

Characters: 马"horse"; 扁"flat".

"Mr. 马 and Miss 扁 get married, and soon they have a son.

The couple have a dispute over whose surname the child should take.

"The kid should take the father's family name, as it has been like that since ancient times," 马 insists confidently.

"Nowadays, men and women are equal. The Marriage Law does not stipulate that the child must take your last name," 扁 argues.

The couple find a solution: they combine their surnames to create a new one - "骗", and give their son a unique name: "骗子".

Note: 马 joined by 扁 on the right forms the character 骗"swindle"; the Chinese "骗子" means "swindler".

### 从头做起

出场角色：兰 (lán)；三 (sān)。

兰对三说：“妹子，咱们女孩子有没有小辫儿，气质就是不同啊。”

三笑嘻嘻地说：“长了小辫儿的小三儿还是小三儿。”

兰正色道：“妹妹你错了，我现在已经是一个兰质蕙心的淑女了。”