More Web-Based Resources for Learning and Reading Chinese

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In two earlier posts (from last May and August 2008), we offered some of our top picks among language and literature websites for students of Chinese. Here are five more recommendations for anyone who is learning the language or who struggles occasionally (!) with reading Chinese texts. All these resources are free unless otherwise noted.

1. Based on a popular tool for reading Japanese websites, Chinese Perapera-kun is an easy-to-use pop-up translator that can be installed as an add-on to the Firefox web browser. Once the tool is enabled, positioning the mouse cursor over any Chinese character on a website displays the pinyin and definition of the character and the compound, if any, in which it is used.

2. Funded by the US Department of Education, the Read Chinese website provides an unusually rich and comprehensive set of lesson-based learning materials at the novice and intermediate levels. Each of the 100 lessons includes full text, audio, glossary, a variety of exercises, and learning strategies.

3. If you’re interested in keeping up with news from China but could use some help with the language, check out the News in Chinese tool offered by PopupChinese.com. You can scan recent headlines from the Xinhua news agency and access the full text of any article you want to read. Mouse over any unfamiliar word to display its pinyin and definition. The site also provides a bilingual dictionary and graded podcasts on a variety of topics. (Accompanying lesson materials require a paid subscription.)

4. The best handwritten character search tool we’ve seen on the web is on the nciku site—this is very useful for looking up an unfamiliar character from a printed document. The site’s unusually good dictionary also allows you to search using English, pinyin, radical, or characters, and to view usage examples as well as multiple definitions of Chinese words. Site members share notes, sample dialogs, and vocabulary lists on well-frequented message boards.

5. Looking for reading materials that will enhance your (Chinese) cultural capital? The Chinese Text Sampler website, created by China Beat contributor David Porter, offers 100 often well-known texts divided into six categories: Modern Literature; Classical Literature; Film Scripts and Song Lyrics; Fables, Parables, and Children’s Stories; History, Ethics, and Politics; and Daily Life. A brief description in English is provided for each selection, along with a grade indicating its relative difficulty.

Tags: Chinese language learning