

## The Processing of Chinese Simplified and Traditional Scripts: A Psycholinguistic Study

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Mastering reading and writing in Chinese requires learning thousands of complex characters, making it the most difficult to learn of the worlds' writing systems. Mainland China uses simplified script in which approximately 1/3 of the most common characters were simplified. Taiwan, on the other hand, uses traditional script. The existence of two Chinese scripts allows psycholinguists to investigate whether a simpler writing system is the superior system for reading.

Four groups of participants, 29 college students and 25 middle school students in China and 30 college students and 24 middle school students in Taiwan, performed a semantic judgment task, a reading comprehension task, a read aloud task, and a lexical decision task.

The finding that Chinese middle school students outperformed Taiwanese middle school students in the reading comprehension task and the read aloud task suggests that simplified script is easier to learn due to lower average stroke count. The finding that Taiwanese college students outperformed Chinese college students in the semantic judgment task and the reading comprehension task suggests that traditional script benefits advanced readers because of its richer semantic and phonetic information.

The results of the lexical decision task show that although the performance of the readers of simplified script (i.e. the Chinese students) was the same as the performance of the readers of traditional script (i.e. the Taiwanese students), they adopted different strategies in making lexical judgments. The readers of simplified script used a gestalt strategy by which they viewed each character as a whole, whereas the readers of traditional script tried to analyze the internal structure of characters. This implies that different Chinese scripts influence the process of character recognition without impairing recognition accuracy rates.