



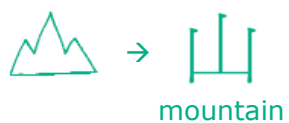
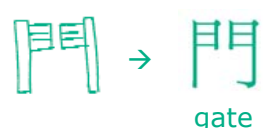
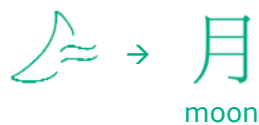
Symbols as words: Chinese characters

What if, instead of using letters, words were made up of pictures and symbols? This would make it possible for two people who spoke different languages to understand each other's writing.

Does such a language exist? Yes, it does - in fact, it is the most commonly spoken language in the world! Welcome to Chinese, which is written using thousands of characters called 'ideographs'. The same characters are also used in Japanese, the ninth most common language in the world. This means that a Japanese person can understand some of the words in a Chinese newspaper - even though the two languages are completely different.

Chinese characters made from pictures

Some Chinese characters are based on simplified pictures of the things around us.



Jade Dragon Snow Mountain

The Forbidden City



The Great Wall

Adding characters together to make new words

When Chinese characters are added together, the new character is the same square shape and size.

日 + 月 → 明
sun moon bright

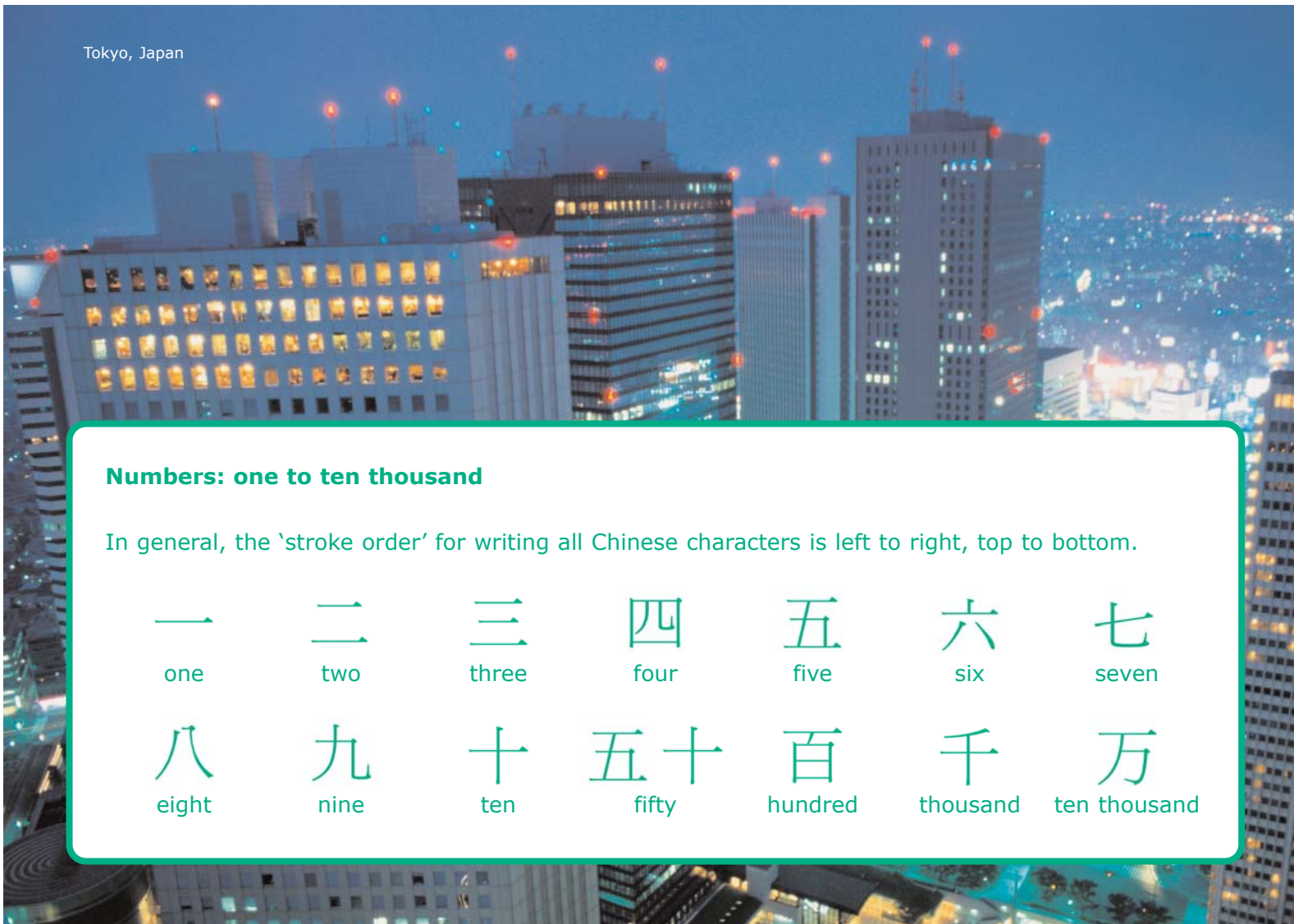
木 + 木 → 林
tree tree wood

木 + 木 + 木 → 森
tree tree tree forest

門 + 日 → 間
gate sun between

人 + 木 → 休
man tree rest

Tokyo, Japan



Numbers: one to ten thousand

In general, the 'stroke order' for writing all Chinese characters is left to right, top to bottom.

一	二	三	四	五	六	七
one	two	three	four	five	six	seven

八	九	十	五十	百	千	万
eight	nine	ten	fifty	hundred	thousand	ten thousand