

# Culture and Knowledge

Edited by Friedrich G. Wallner

Vol. 22

Fengli Lan

## Culture, Philosophy, and Chinese Medicine

Viennese Lectures



PETER LANG

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Fengli Lan

# Culture, Philosophy, and Chinese Medicine

Viennese Lectures

文化哲学与中医学  
李凤利著  
维也纳大学讲稿  
李鼎题



PETER LANG

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## Author's Foreword

This is a stern reality: Information in English accounted for over 80% of the total information stored in the computers of the world; databases owned by the U.S.A. made up over 70% of the globe;<sup>1</sup> the statistics of the United Nations showed that 80% of all the original documents were in English and less than 1% in Chinese; there existed great deficit in the cultural exchange: the works translated from Western languages into Chinese were about 50 to 100 times of the works translated from Chinese into Western languages.<sup>2</sup>

Influences of Chinese culture on the Western culture have still remained very limited although Confucius Institutes have been established internationally and widely by the P.R. China across the world, which aims at promoting dissemination of Chinese language and culture worldwide and in real fact promotes teaching and learning of Chinese language among foreigners.

Does globalization mean westernization, easternization or similarization or even uniformation? No, globalization should be pluralization. Almost everybody has traveling experience. As a traveler, everyone would like to see something, some place, and some people with distinctive, specialized and local features. If everywhere were the same someday in the future, the world would be very boring. This is the same with the culture, philosophy and science of the globe, which should be manifold not unified. The world is manifold, which needs approaches from different cultures to enrich human understanding of the world from as many as possible perspectives.

The research team of a key research project of National Social Science Fund of China - "Strategic Studies on Developing Soft Power of Chinese Culture" (07&ZD037) announced its periodic achievement of "A Survey of Symbols for Chinese Culture" recently. This survey lasted half a year and involved teachers and students from colleges and universities in the country. The survey shows that, among the 270 candidate symbols for Chinese culture, the first ten most representative ones are as follows: 1 Chinese language (Chinese characters), 2 Confucius, 3 Chinese calligraphy, 4 the Great Wall, 5 the Five-Starred Red Flag (the national flag of the People's Republic of China), 6 Chinese medicine, 7 Mao Zedong (the founder of the P. R. China), 8 the Imperial Palace (also known as the Forbidden City, the world's largest royal palace), 9 Deng Xiaoping (the general designer of China's reform and opening-up policy), and 10 Terracotta Warriors and Horses unearthed at the Qin Shi Huang's Imperial Mausoleum in Shaanxi province. Among the 10 most representative cultural symbols, 70% are traditional ones. I think that Chinese characters, Confucius (Confucianism), and Chinese medicine are rich most in cultural connotations, and have general and specific cultural identification feeling among all the Chinese people.

---

1 Yu Keping. Globalization: Westernization or Chinesization [M]. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2002: 4-256.

2 Wang Yuechuan. Discovering the East [M]. Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 2003: 29.

Along with the formation of a worldwide aging society and the significant variations in disease spectrum, it has become thus clear that Chinese medicine is a real gem worth to cherish and to carry on in the unending quest for human health and a long life. Chinese medicine is a culture dependent art of healing originating from China, and is deeply rooted into Chinese culture and philosophy. I feel greatly honored to have got this chance to stand on the platform of Vienna University and to reveal the essentials of philosophy of Chinese language, classical Chinese philosophy and Chinese medicine to my students from different cultural backgrounds.

In publishing this book, I welcome the opportunity of expressing my thanks to Prof. Dr. Friedrich Wallner of Faculty of Philosophy, Vienna University, who made it possible for me to come from Shanghai to Vienna as Visiting Professor in the Winter semester of 2010-2011, which resulted in the writing of this book. I am also grateful to my students of Vienna University for their interests, cooperation and encouragement. Also I wish to thank Dr. Norbert Willenpart of Peter Lang for his help in making arrangement for the publication of the book. Besides, I also thank Lu Bin of Shanghai University of TCM for his professional technical assistance in type-setting and making the manuscript ready for publication.

The book is based on my teaching PPT slides and lecture notes, which are composed of three parts with the same titles as the three topics of my lectures and seminars: Overview of Chinese Culture through Chinese Characters (180364), Fundamental Concepts of Classical Chinese Philosophy (180367), and The Importance of Metaphors in Chinese Medicine (180368). They were classified as courses in the fields of linguistic philosophy and intercultural philosophy. It is worth to note that, what present in this book is my specific research outcome from my own work in the last years, esp. from the part of cooperation with Prof. Dr. Friedrich G. Wallner.

In fact, the book is a starting point where I meet myself and the needs of transmitting Chinese culture to the West. I do hope this booklet can bring you a unique experience into culture, philosophy, and Chinese medicine, and help you understand China and Chinese culture much better than before.



# **I Overview of Chinese Culture through Chinese Characters**

“Language is the outcome of a culture. Language of a nation is the general reflection of the culture of the nation; but we can also say that language is a part of the culture ... and that culture and language have developed together for thousands of years.”

- Claude Levi Strauss<sup>3</sup>

“The role of language within a culture and the influence of the culture on the meanings of words and idioms are so pervasive that scarcely any text can be adequately understood without careful consideration of its cultural background.”

- Eugene A. Nida<sup>4</sup>

## Introduction

As regards to the historical development, generally speaking, the remoter the antiquity and the slower the development. The mankind underwent a very long period of uncivilized state, and gradually has entered an age of civilization. Civilization refers to “an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached”<sup>5</sup>. One of the most important marks for a civilization is the emergence and application of a written language.

Ancient civilizations all appeared along rivers for water provides essential living conditions for other living creatures such as plants and animals, and thus ensures the survival of human beings. Chinese civilization was born in the Yellow River valley, and has been developing independently for thousands of years. Chinese characters or sinograms<sup>6</sup>, the writing forms of Chinese language and one of the most important marks of Chinese civilization, emerged<sup>7</sup> independently around 6,000 years ago, which is identified by the history of Banpo Ruins of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province<sup>8</sup>. The sinogram 家 Jia, which is interpreted as

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3 Translated from Chinese translation. Quoted from a secondary source: See He Yumin. 1990: 149.

4 Nida, Eugene A. 1993: 1.

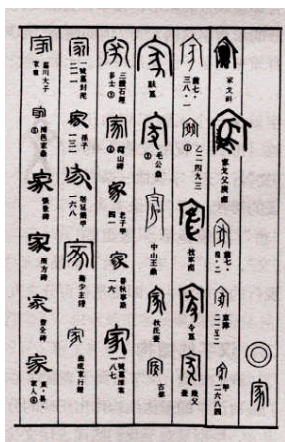
5 Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (New Revised Edition) [Z]. 199 : 270.

6 For translation of Chinese 汉字 I prefer “sinogram” instead of “Chinese character”, which was originally proposed by Prof. Pan Wenguo (1944- ) in his monograph entitled “Sinogram as the Basic Unit and Chinese Language Study” published in 2002. The author advanced that Chinese language study should take Zi or sinogram instead of Ci or word as the basic unit for Chinese language study.

7 Cang Jie 仓颉 (?-?) was said to be the creator of Chinese characters in Chinese legendary. He was said to be an official historian of the Huang Di's (Yellow Emperor) reign, or a king of the remote antiquity. It is said that he had four eyes on his head, could communicate with gods, and created sinograms by integrating beauties he collected widely from myriad of things. Modern scholars hold that a writing form is a collective creation of human society, that Chinese characters were also a collective creation, which were conceived, created, chosen, refined, and developed by the Chinese people, and that Cang Jie was possibly the earliest most famous figure who did so in the remote antiquity.

8 In 1972, Archaeological Institute of China Academy of Science identified the history of Banpo Ruin as around 6,000 years by C14 determination in its labs.

“residence” in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* or *The Origin of Chinese Characters*<sup>9</sup> 说文解字 and now is Chinese equivalent for English word “home”, is composed of two parts 宀 (the image of “the roof of a house” in ancient China for house) and 豕 Shi (the image for swine, pig). Residence or Home should be a living place for human beings, but why there was a pig in the house? Could it be said that “residence or home” was also supposed to keep a pig? You will come to understand this sinogram suddenly if you visit the Banpo Ruin. In the matriarchal clan society, the pig had already been raised and kept in human’s residence. It can be seen that the sinogram 家 had been conceived 6,000 years ago; and developed into 家 of the oracle script and bronze script 2,000 years later. See Illus. 1.<sup>10</sup>



**Illus.1 "Jia 家 (Residence, Home) "in *The Great Dictionary of Oracle, Bronze, Seal, and Official Scripts***

Chinese characters, Egyptian hieroglyphics, Sumerian cuneiforms, primitive scripts of ancient Elam, and scripts of Crete, etc. are the oldest writing forms in the world. Chinese characters, like the other oldest writing forms, underwent the

9 *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 说文解字 literally means “explaining pictographs and analyzing composite sinograms”. I prefer to translate the title into *The Origin of Chinese Characters*. It is the first comprehensive systematic dictionary of sinograms arranged by sections with shared components, called radicals (*bùshǒu* 部首, lit. “section headers”) and finished in 100 A.D. by Xu Shen 许慎 (A.D.58? – 147?) of the Eastern Han Dynasty. It is also the first dictionary which interprets the original meaning of a sinogram by analyzing its structure and gives the rationale behind it, sometimes the etymology of the sinogram as well. Actually, it is far beyond a dictionary, and moreover it can be interpreted from cultural and philosophical perspectives. It is indeed the case that no monograph on philosophy of Chinese language has ever been available up till today except this book.

10 Zuo Min’an, 2005:7.

period of evolution from pure pictographs to ideographs; but all of the others lost their vitality and were stopped being used during the evolution, some became phonetic writings, some were not recognizable and therefore were replaced by a foreign writing system; Chinese writing form is the only exceptional case, which has been used up till today and becomes the only logographic writing<sup>11</sup> as opposed to phonetic writing. The sinograms contain rich Chinese culture, and reflect Chinese way of understanding the world.

---

11 Logographic writing or *Xiang Xing* 象形, also known as ideographic or pictographic writing in English. Here logographic writing is a better translation for here it refers to the general writing form of the Chinese characters as a whole as opposed to phonetic writing. *Xiang Xing* 象形 as one of the 6 categories of Chinese characters classified in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* (Shuo Wen Jie Zi, 说文解字) are pictographs. *The Origin of Chinese Characters* classifies all of the Chinese characters into 6 categories (Liu Shu, 六书), i.e. *Xiang Xing* 象形(pictographs), *Zhi Shi* 指事[ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms)], *Hui Yi* 会意(associative compounds), *Xing Sheng* 形声[pictophonetic (or signific-phonetic) ], *Zhuan Zhu* 转注 (mutually interpretive), and *Jia Jie* 假借(loan sinograms).

The world is too new, and many things have still not got their names. We had to stretch out our fingers to point them out.<sup>12</sup>

- Gabriel García Márquez

## 1 Etymology: Six Categories of Chinese Graphs

“Chinese etymology is far from a science. Sinologists could debate for decades over the origins of certain characters and never come to a final resolution”.<sup>13</sup> But it is well known that Chinese characters are a kind of ideographic writing, where the shape of a Chinese character is directly related to its meaning. Correct analysis of structures of sinograms will be of great help for us to understand their original meanings and extended meanings, and to understand Chinese culture as well.

*Liu Shu* 六书 or Six Categories of Chinese Graphs are always used to illustrate the structures and creating methods of sinograms. This term first appeared in the section of *Di Guan. Bao Shi*<sup>14</sup> 地官•保氏 of *Zhou Li* 周礼 or *The Rites of Zhou [Dynasty]*; its detailed categories first appeared in *Qi Lue* 七略 by Liu Qin 刘歆(50?B.C.-23A.D.)<sup>15</sup>.

There are different versions on *Liu Shu* 六书 or Six Categories of Chinese Graphs in the history. Hereafter are 3 main figures of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 A.D.), who gave their explanations of *Liu Shu*.

The first is Ban Gu 班固 (32-92)<sup>16</sup>. In the *Treatise on Literature of History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Han Shu. Yi Wen Zhi, 汉书•艺文志), it states that “In ancient times children started school at the age of eight. Mr. Bao, an official of Zhou dynasty, was in charge of teaching children of the country. He taught them *Liu Shu* 六书, namely *Xiang Xing* 象形 (pictographs, literally “resembling shapes”), *Xiang Shi* 象事 (ideographs or indicators, literally “resembling things”), *Xiang Yi* 象意 (associative compounds, literally “resembling meanings”), *Xiang Sheng* 象声 (pictophonetics, literally “resembling

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12 Translated from Chinese translation. The original reference is the CIEN ANOS DE SOLEDA.D., known as “One Hundred Years of Solitude” in English, originally by Gabriel García Márquez (1927- ).

13 Wiseman, Nigel & Zhang Yuhuan. 2003: 16.

14 Bao Shi 保氏, an official to be in charge of teaching in an elementary school (opposed to “Great Learning”) and remonstrating with King, as well as teaching children of high officials of Zhou Dynasty (11th C. -256 B.C.).

15 *Qi Lue* 七略, the first official library catalogue compiled by Liu Qin 刘歆(50?B.C.-23A.D.) in 6-5 B.C based on his father Liu Xiang’s 刘向 (77?-6B.C.) work *Bie Lu* 别录, which records the authors, contents, academic values, etc. of the books collected and systematized at that time.

16 Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), had been the national imperial librarian during Ming Emperor’s reign 汉明帝 (57-75A.D.), and accomplished the first historical records *Han Shu* 汉书 or *History of the Former Han Dynasty* presented in a series of biographies divided into periods in between 206 B.C. and 23 A.D. His *Han Shu. Yi Wen Zhi* 汉书•艺文志 or *Treatise on Literature of History of the Former Han Dynasty*, the first systematic book catalogue extant in China, was compiled on the basis of *Qi Lue* 七略.

pronunciations”), *Zhuang Zhu* 转注 (mutually interpretive), and *Jia Jie* 假借 (loan sinograms), which are the foundation of creating sinograms<sup>17</sup>.”

The second is Zheng Zhong 郑众 (?-83)<sup>18</sup>. His annotation on the section of *Di Guan. Bao Shi* of *The Rites of Zhou [Dynasty]* reads that “*Liu Shu* 六书 refers to *Xiang Xing* 象形 (pictographs), *Hui Yi* 会意 (associative compounds), *Zhuan Zhu* 转注 (mutually interpretive), *Chu Shi* 处事 [ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms)], *Jia Jie* 假借 (loan sinograms), and *Xie Sheng* 谐声 [pictophonetics (or signific-phonetics)]”.

The third is Xu Shen 许慎 (58?-147?)<sup>19</sup>. In the preface of *The Origin of Chinese Characters* it states that “the first is *Zhi Shi* 指事 [ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms)], the second is *Xiang Xing* 象形 (pictographs), the third is *Xing Sheng* 形声 [pictophonetics (or signific-phonetics)], the fourth is *Hui Yi* 会意 (associative compounds), the fifth is *Zhuan Zhu* 转注 (mutually interpretive), and the sixth is *Jia Jie* 假借 (loan sinograms)”.

As regards to the names of the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs, most of the scholars adopt the names given by Xu Shen not only because he gave detailed interpretation for the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs but also because he composed the first monograph on studying and analyzing Chinese characters. As regards to the order of the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs, most of the scholars adopt Ban Gu’s version because Chinese characters originated from pictures, which is closely related to *Xiang Xing* 象形 (pictographs), *Zhi Shi* 指事 [ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms)], and *Hui Yi* 会意 (associative compounds); *Xing Sheng* 形声 [pictophonetics (or signific-phonetics)] have been developed on the basis of pictographs, which also accords with the developing rule of a written language – from pictographic to ideographic, then to phonetic

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17 It is worth to note that the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs are the concluded rules on structures of Chinese characters according to their characteristics summarized by ancient scholars. We should not believe that ancient Chinese people created sinograms according to the six rules. Actually, *Xiang Xing* 象形 (pictographs), *Zhi Shi* 指事 [ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms)], *Hui Yi* 会意 (associative compounds), and *Xing Sheng* 形声 [pictophonetics (or signific-phonetics)] are ways of creating and developing sinograms, while *Zhuan Zhu* 转注 (mutually interpretive) and *Jia Jie* 假借 (loan sinograms) have nothing to do with structures of sinograms, and are ways of using sinograms.

18 Zheng Zhong 郑众 (?-83), an expert in Confucian classics of Eastern Han Dynasty. His works had been lost. Ma Guohan 马国翰 (1794-1857) collected “Zheng Zhong’s Annotations of *The Rites of Zhou [Dynasty]*” (6 volumes) 周礼郑司农(众)解诂 and “Zheng Zhong’s Syntactic and Semantic Analysis of Examples of *The Spring and Autumn Annals*” (1 volume) 郑众春秋牒例章句.

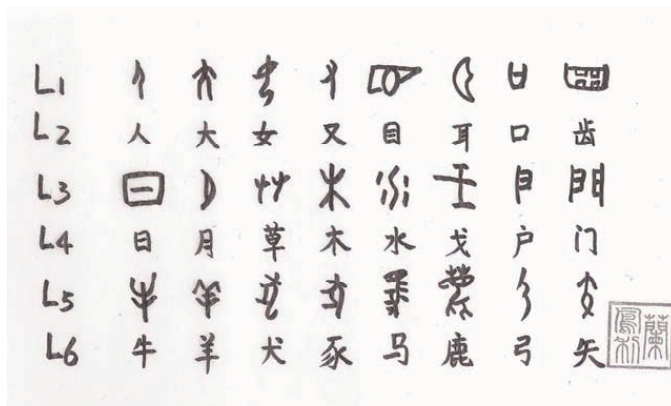
19 Xu Shen 许慎 (58?-147?), a distinguished expert in Confucian classics, philologist, linguist, and the pioneer of the study of Chinese characters of the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was perfect in critical interpretation of ancient sinograms, and accomplished the writing of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 说文解字 or *The Origin of Chinese Characters* (15 volumes) after fifteen years of hard work, which collects 9,353 sinograms arranged according to significs or radicals. It is the first monograph on exploring etymology of sinograms and interpreting original meanings of sinograms by analyzing their original structures, and it is known as the first systematic dictionary with complete collection of sinograms, comprehensive analysis of the shape, pronunciation and meanings as well as scientific arrangement.

writings; *Jia Jie* 假借 (loan sinograms) mainly show the relations between pronunciations, which have nothing to do with the meanings of sinograms. Therefore, the generally recognized names and order of the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs are formed after a comparison of the three versions mentioned above: *Xiang Xing* 象形 (pictographs), *Zhi Shi* 指事 [ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms)], *Hui Yi* 会意 (associative compounds), *Xing Sheng* 形声 [pictophonetics (or signific-phonetics)], *Zhuan Zhu* 转注 (mutually interpretive), and *Jia Jie* 假借 (loan sinograms). Hereafter is a detailed interpretation of the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs.

### 1.1 Pictographs: *Xiang Xing* 象形

*Xiang Xing* 象形 or Pictographs, just as its name implies, means sinograms resembling shapes of concrete things, and depicting shapes of objects. *The Origin of Chinese Characters* defines *Xiang Xing* 象形 or pictographs as sinograms created by “drawing objects with curves by following their natural shapes, like 日 sun and 月 moon”.


It is well known that the Chinese writing system was originally pictographic. In their original forms, graphs representing animals and objects were self-explanatory. See Illus. 2.



**Illus.2 Original Forms of Some Sinograms: Pictographic and Self-Explanatory**

In this Illustration, the lines 1, 3, 5 show some pictographs in oracle script, and the sinograms of the lines 2, 4, 6 bear the same meaning as those of the lines 1, 3, 5 respectively but in their regular script. The objects or animals of the sinograms of the line 1 denote (from left to right): human, big (man), female (resembling the side image of a pregnant woman), right (hand), eye, ear, mouth,

and teeth; those of the line 3 denote (from left to right): sun, moon (the image of crescent or new moon), grass, wood (tree), water, dagger-axe (a weapon used in ancient China), one-paneled door, two-paneled door; those of the line 5 denote (from left to right): ox, goat, dog, pig, horse, deer, bow, arrow.

The way of being pictographic is still alive. An interesting example is 囧 Jiǒng, which was written as  in oracle script, resembling the image of a window with light in, and so its original meaning is "bright". But in the recent years, it has been given a new meaning, which is much popular than its original meaning now, by Internet users in China by relating the image of the sinogram with a mournful face - 八 for two eyebrows, 口 for a mouth. Then you can imagine the meaning if a person's face looks like this: depressive, sad, helpless, wordless, etc.







As pictographs are created by “drawing objects with curves by following their natural shapes”, this way of creating sinograms bears big limitations for writing pictographs was very troublesome and for the same object writings of different persons could be very different. Therefore, compared to the other three ways of creating and developing Chinese characters, this way of *Xiang Xing* 象形 or “drawing objects with curves by following their natural shapes” has been becoming less and less important in the developing course of Chinese characters.

Not all elements of the language could be represented in pictorial form. Other devices had to be used.

## 1.2 Ideographs: *Zhi Shi* 指事

*The Origin of Chinese Characters* defines *Zhi Shi* 指事 or Ideographs as sinograms “being recognizable by the first sight and being understandable by careful observation, like 上 up and 下 down”. This definition is quite confusing, as Wang Jun 王筠 (1784-1854), a famous philologist of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), said in his work “Interpretations of Examples from *The Origin of Chinese Characters*” (Shuo Wen Shi Li, 说文释例) that “being recognizable by the first sight is close to *Xiang Xing* 象形 or Pictographs, while being understandable by careful observation is close to *Hui Yi* 会意 or Associative compounds”. But generally speaking, most of the scholars identify *Zhi Shi* 指事 or Ideograph as a sinogram with a pictograph as its basic form and an indicating mark to denote its meaning. Some notions could be represented in this vivid fashion. See Table 1, which shows some examples to illustrate this way of creating and developing Chinese characters.



Oracle Script	Regular Script	Denotation	Explanatory Notes
	上 Shang	Up	Both with the horizontal as their first stroke, one dot above the horizontal indicates Up, while one dot below the horizontal indicates Down.
	下 Xia	Down	
	末 Mo	Tip of a Tree	Both with 木 (tree) as their basis, one dot at the top indicates the tip of a tree, while one dot at the foot indicates the root of a tree. A Chinese idiom 本末倒置, which literally means “take the tip for root or take the root for tip”, is based on the two sinograms to mean “have the order reversed” or “set the cart before the horse”.
	本 Ben	Root of a Tree	
	甘 Gan	Sweet	The outer represents a tongue, the stroke in the center stands for the place for feeling tastes, something which can be kept at the middle of the tongue must be sweet.
	刃 Ren	Edge of a Knife	The stroke on the left indicates the edge of a knife (the part on the right).

**Table 1 Examples: Ideographs**

### 1.3 Associative Compounds: *Hui Yi* 会意





*The Origin of Chinese Characters* defines *Hui Yi* 会意 or Associative Compounds as sinograms formed by “combining pictographs to get a new denotation, like 武 and 信”. 武, written as 𠂔 in oracle script, an associative compound, showing the image of fingers holding a dagger-axe, a weapon of ancient times, means “is going to start a fight, use force”, so its original meaning is “valiant”. 信, an associative compound, follows 人 (man) and 言 (words), means “honest, sincere” for all of man's words were honest and sincere in ancient times of China.

Another example is 步. In ancient China, raising one foot names 跬 (kui, half step), and then raising the other foot names 步 (one step). *Xun Tzu*<sup>20</sup> states

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<sup>20</sup> *Xun Tzu* is the representative work by Xun Tzu 荀子 (300?-230?B.C.). Xun Tzu was a Chinese Confucian philosopher, thinker, and educator who lived during the Warring States Period and contributed to one of the Hundred Schools of Thought. Xun Tzu believed that man's inborn tendencies need to be curbed through education and ritual, counter to Mencius's view that man is innately good. He believed that ethical norms had been invented to rectify mankind. Xun Tzu was one of the most sophisticated thinkers of his time, and was the teacher of Li Si 李斯 (280?-208 B.C.), a famous politician, writer and calligrapher of Qin Dynasty and Han Fei 韩非 (281-233B.C.), a famous philosopher, thinker, essayist, and political commentator as well as the synthesizer and the representative figure of the Legalist School.

in the chapter of "Encouraging Learning" that "You will never reach a place of one thousand miles away if you do not start from one step of walking".

Oracle Script	Regular Script	Categories	Meaning	Explanatory Notes
	步 Bu	Pictograph	To walk, go on foot; pace, step	Resembling the image of walking with two feet, one front one back.
	涉 She	Associative compound	To walk through a water, wade or ford a water	Showing the image of walking through a stream; in the middle of the two feet is the image of water.
	陟 Zhi	Associative compound	To climb, walk up a hill	The left part indicating a hillside, the right part indicating walking with toes upward.
	降 Jiang	Associative compound	To walk down from a hill	The left part indicating a hillside, the right part indicating walking with toes downward.

**Table 2 Examples: 步 and 涉 陟 降**

Generally speaking, associative compounds can be classified into 3 main subcategories:

① The first is composed by combining different pictographs, which makes up the major part of the associative compounds. For example,

The combination of the 日 Sun and the 月 Moon is 明, meaning “bright or brightness”.

The combination of the 日 Sun, the 月 Moon, and the 空 sky makes 曌, which means “The sun and the moon shine together up in the sky”. Wu Zetian 武则天 (625 – 705), the only female emperor in the history of China, created this sinogram to name herself.

The combination of the 田 Farmland and the 力 Labor gives birth to 男 Male, for males usually labored in the farmland in ancient times.

The combination of the 人 human and the 木 tree produces 休, indicating human is resting against a tree.


The combination of the 女 female and the 子 girl results in 好, its original meaning is beautiful and now its common meaning is good.

② The second is composed by combining the same pictographs. For example,

从, being composed of two 人 (human), one front one behind, means “to follow”.

众, being composed of three 人 (human), means “many people”.

林, being composed of two 木 (tree), means “forest, woods”.

森, its oracle script written as , being composed of three 木 (tree), means “full of trees”; “multitudinous, in multitudes”, e.g. in 森罗万象 which means myriads of things, everything under the sun; “dark, gloomy, grim”, e.g. 阴森.

淼, being composed of three 水 (water), means “wide expanse of water being vast”.



③ The third is composed of different non-pictographs by the way of being pictographic. For example,

Being unable to go “up 上” nor go “down 下” is “卡 block”.

The upper “small 小” and the lower “big 大” is “尖 pointed or tapering”.

A “mountain 山” being “high 高” is 嵩 to describe mountains of being high and lofty.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.4 Signific-Phonetics: *Xing Sheng* 形声

*The Origin of Chinese Characters* defines *Xing Sheng* 形声 or Signific-Phonetics as sinograms formed by “combining one part of meaning and the other part of pronunciation, like 江 and 河”. 江, written as  in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* (lesser seal script), is composed of 水 water (signific) and 工 (phonetic), originally refers to the Changjiang River or Yangtze River; 河, written as  in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* (lesser seal script), is composed of 水 water (signific) and 可 (phonetic), originally refers to the Huanghe River or the Yellow River. The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia, while the Yellow River is the second longest river in China (after the Yangtze River), and is honored as “the cradle of Chinese civilization” as its basin is the birthplace of the northern Chinese civilizations and was the most prosperous region in early Chinese history.

As we know that the ways of creating pictographs, ideographs and associative compounds bear certain limitations in creating and developing sinograms for many things, phenomena and abstract concepts can not be expressed in such ways. Take fish as an example. “鱼 Fish”, a pictograph, is a collective term for all different kinds of fish, but different species of fish bear

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21 Zuo Min'an, 2005:12.

nearly the same shape or image. How is it possible to create different sinograms to denote thousands of different species of fish by mirroring their shapes? It would be very difficult to identify and distinguish them even if you could create thousands of sinograms by so doing. Therefore, in Chinese there is a pictograph “鱼 fish” as a collective term for all different species of fish; and then different signific-phonetics are created by combining the pictograph “鱼 fish” as the signific part to show its general meaning and different pronunciation parts to denote specific kinds of fish, such as 鳕 Cod, 鲨 Shark, 鲈 Perch, 鳗 Eel, 鲷 Pomfret, 鲱 Herring, 鲑 Salmon, 鲔 Tuna, 鲚 Dace.

The need for creating new signific-phonetics results from either distinguishing the meanings of one sinogram or conveying new concepts. For example, the sinograms “藏府 Zang Fu” bear at least two major meanings: One is “depots and palaces for storing precious things and goods respectively”, and the other is “the yin and the yang internal organs respectively of the human body”. Later on, in order to distinguish the two meanings from each other, the sinograms “臟腑 Zang Fu” were created by adding “the flesh moon part 月”<sup>22</sup> on the left of “藏府” respectively to denote specifically the internal organs of the human body. Now the simplified writing forms of the two sinograms are 脏腑. As regards to creating new signific-phonetics to convey new concepts, I would like take Chinese translation of chemical elements as an example.

In 1871, John Fryer 傅兰雅 (1839–1928)<sup>23</sup> and his Chinese colleague Xu Shou 徐寿 (1818–1884)<sup>24</sup>, both of them working for the translation office of the Jiangnan Arsenal, created a principle for the translation of chemical elements according to the way of creating signific-phonetics, where a root signific classifies the element as of the “metal”, “air”, “stone (metalloid)”, or “water” groups, and a single descriptive word or an imitation of the sound of one syllable in the English name of the element gives the pronunciation. See Table 3.

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22 Sinograms denoting parts of human body usually carry this flesh moon part.

23 John Fryer 傅兰雅 (1839–1928), English, had long been working for the translation office of the Jiangnan Arsenal. His ideal was clearly written down in *Biographical Sketch of Translating Western Works at Jiangnan Arsenal* 江南製造總局翻譯西書事略 that “All I hope is that China spreads out knowledge of science so as to make the East similar developed to the West. Therefore I will do nothing but devote my whole life time to translating Western scientific works into Chinese”. It is indeed the case that he translated numerous books on science, technology and some on social sciences into Chinese, and thus did a very important contribution to the transmission and development of Western science in modern China.

24 Xu Shou 徐寿 (1818–1884), a scientist of the late Qing Dynasty, initiated and introduced chemistry to modern China.

Root Classifiers (Significs)	Combinations of Significs and Phonetics			
金 Metal	鈣 Calcium	鋰 Lithium	鎳 Nickel	鈹 Palladium
气 Air (Gas)	氧 Oxygen	氫 Hydrogen	氮 Nitrogen	氟 Fluorine
石 Stone (Metalloid)	砷 Arsenic	硼 Boron	碘 Iodine	硅 Silicon
水 Water	汞 Mercury			

**Table 3 Creating Signific-Phonetics to Translate Chemical Elements**

The impact of their translations on the fields of chemistry and chemical engineering proved to be enormous.

In the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs stated in *The Origin of Chinese Characters*, the pictographs, ideographs (or indicators, self-explanatory sinograms), associative compounds, and signific-phonetics explain sinograms in terms of their formation. Chinese etymologists speak of two other categories that are based on how the sinograms are used, i.e. “mutually interpretive” and “loan sinograms”.

### 1.5 Mutually Interpretive: *Zhuang Zhu* 转注

The definition of *Zhuang Zhu* 转注 or Mutually Interpretive in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* has been explained in several different ways. The most common interpretation is that “synonymous sinograms with the same radical (signific) being mutually interpretive, like 考 and 老”. “老 old age” and “考 originally meant ‘long life’ or ‘aged’, later has come to mean ‘test’”, both share the same radical (signific) “老 old age”, and is the only pair of example for *Zhuang Zhu* 转注 or Mutually Interpretive from *The Origin of Chinese Characters*. See Illus. 3.



**Illus. 3 The Sinograms 考 and 老 from Oracle, Bronze, Lesser-Seal to Regular Script**

### 1.6 Loan Sinograms: *Jia Jie* 假借

The definition of *Jia Jie* 假借 or Loan Sinograms in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* indicates that a colloquial form first appears in spoken language but no written form for something new, and then a sinogram with the same pronunciation as that of the colloquial of the new thing is borrowed to denote this new thing. We can understand *Jia Jie* 假借 or Loan Sinograms as sinograms that


are taken from one context and used, mostly for their pronunciations, in an entirely different context. For example,


來: originally a pictograph of “wheat”, was later borrowed to denote “come”;

午: originally a pictograph of “pestle”, was later borrowed to denote the seventh of the 12 Earthly Branches<sup>25</sup> - *Wu*;

我: originally following “戈”, a kind of weapon, was later borrowed to denote “I or me”;

難: following “隹”, originally a collective term for short-tailed birds, was later borrowed to denote “difficult or difficulty”;

亦 and 腋: 亦, its oracle script written as , originally ideographic with one dot under each arm of a man, who is standing with both arms spreading out, denotes “axilla, armpit”. But later on, it has been borrowed as an adverbial word to mean “also, too”. Therefore, a new sinogram of signific-phonetic was created to replace the original meaning of 亦 to denote “axilla, armpit”, i.e. 腋;

自 and 鼻: 自, its oracle script written as , originally pictographic, denotes nose. Later on it has been borrowed to mean “oneself”. Therefore, a new sinogram of signific-phonetic was created to replace the original meaning of 自 to denote “nose”.

Here is worth to note that frequent use of loan sinograms in ancient times somehow results from not enough sinograms in its initial period of the development. Many inscriptions on bones, shells, and ancient bronze objects are loan sinograms, which makes understanding the texts very difficult. Nowadays, it is not advisable to use sinograms in the way of loan sinograms, which in most cases will be identified as wrong written sinograms instead of “loan sinograms”.

According to the above analysis of the *Liu Shu* 六书 or the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs, it is thus clear that the Six Categories of Chinese Graphs are the concluded rules on Chinese characters according to their characteristics summarized by ancient scholars. We should not believe that ancient Chinese people created sinograms according to the six rules.

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25 The Twelve Earthly Branches used in combination with the Ten Heavenly Stems to designate years, months, days and hours.

[Chinese] calligraphy originated from the nature. 书肇于自然。

- Cai Yong<sup>26</sup>

## 2 Evolutions of the Scripts: From Oracle-Bone Inscription to Regular Script

The scripts of Chinese characters appear as a fully developed writing system in the late Shang Dynasty (1600-1100B.C.), and have gone through such an evolution process from *Jia Gu Wen* (Oracle-Bone Inscription, 甲骨文) to *Jin Wen* (Bronze Inscription, 金文) to *Da Zhuan* [Larger Seal Script of Zhou Dynasty (11<sup>th</sup> Century – 256 B.C.), 大篆] to *Xiao Zhuan* (Lesser Seal Script adopted in 213 B.C. during the Qin Dynasty for the purpose of standardizing the script, 小篆) to *Li Shu* [Simplified from Lesser Seal Script, official script in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.– 220 A.D.), 隶书] to Cao Shu (Cursive Script, 草书), *Kai Shu* (Regular Script since the end of Han Dynasty, 楷书), and then *Xing Shu* (Running Hand, 行书).

### 2.1 Oracle-Bone Inscription: *Jia Gu Wen* 甲骨文

*Jia Gu Wen* 甲骨文 or Oracle-Bone Inscription, also known as bone and shell script, oracle script, is the oldest writing form extant in China. In the Shang Dynasty, tortoise shells and animal bones were used in divining activities. After divination the time, purpose and result of the divining activity would be carved by knife on tortoise shells. This kind of writing is named *Jia Gu Wen* 甲骨文 or Oracle-Bone Inscription.



In 1899 of the late Qing Dynasty, bones and shells with inscriptions were first found in Xiaotun village, 2 kilometers away from Anyang County, Henan Province, where has been proved to be the capital of the late Shang Dynasty since the 20<sup>th</sup> king of the Shang Dynasty named Pan Geng 盘庚 according to archaeological studies. The writing was identified by Wang Yirong 王懿荣 (1845-1900)<sup>27</sup> as the writing of Shang Dynasty. Over 100,000 pieces of bones and shells with inscriptions have been unearthed up till now. *Qi Wen Ju Li* 契文举例 or *Examples of Oracle-Bone Inscriptions* (1904) by Sun Yirang 孙詒让 (1848-1908) is the first work on philological studies on Oracle-Bone Inscriptions. In the following over 100 years, about 1/3 of around 4,000 Oracle-Bone Inscriptions have been identified. The vocabulary, grammar, and structures of Chinese characters of the later times are consistent with and identical to those of

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26 Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192), a famous literati and calligrapher of the Eastern Han Dynasty. His daughter Cai Yan 蔡琰 (177?- ?), also known as Cai Wenji 蔡文姬, was a famous talented writer of that time.

27 Wang Yirong 王懿荣 (1845-1900) was an expert in the study of inscriptions on ancient bronzes and stone tablets and the discoverer of oracle-bone inscriptions. He died in the fight for defending Beijing against invasion by the Eight-Power Allied Forces, i.e. the aggressive troops sent by Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Tsarist Russia, Japan, Italy, and Austria, in 1900.

Oracle-Bone Inscriptions, which shows Oracle-Bone Inscriptions are a mature writing system.<sup>28</sup>

Besides of Oracle-Bone Inscriptions, there must be writings on bamboo slips because of the existence of 册 and 典 in Oracle-Bone Inscriptions. 册, written as  in oracle script, resembles the image of bamboo slips threaded together with oxhide ropes; 典, written as  in oracle script, resembles the image of a pair of hands holding 册. That's why important works are named as *Jing Dian* 经典 or classic by later generations. But no writings on bamboo slips of the Shang Dynasty have been found up till now maybe because the time is too long to preserve them for over 3,000 years underneath the earth.

## 2.2 Bronze Inscription: *Jin Wen* 金文

*Jin Wen* 金文 or Bronze Inscription or Bronze Script refers to the inscriptions on ancient bronze objects, esp. bells and tripods, from the Shang-Zhou Dynasties to Spring-Autumn and Warring States Periods (ca.1600-221B.C.). Its writing style transformed from square-shaped strokes in the Shang Dynasty (ca.1600 - ca.1100 B.C.) and the early stage of the Western Zhou Dynasty (C.1100-771B.C.), which is close to that of the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions, to round-shaped strokes from the middle stage of the Western Zhou Dynasty until the early stage of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256B.C.), to thin-strong strokes until Spring-Autumn Period (770-476B.C.), and then was thrown into confusion because of wars.

*Zhuan Shu* 篆书 or Seal Script came out to replace *Jin Wen* 金文 or Bronze Inscription. What is it meant by “Zhuan 篆”? Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978)<sup>29</sup> interpreted it as “official”. In this sense *Zhuan Shu* 篆书 should be “official script”, which can be classified into *Da Zhuan* 大篆 or Larger Seal Script and *Xiao Zhuan* 小篆 or Lesser Seal Script.

## 2.3 Larger Seal Script: *Da Zhuan* 大篆

In the preface of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* or *The Origin of Chinese Characters* it states that “Zhou, an official historian of the King Xuan of the Zhou Dynasty (Zhou Xuan Wang), wrote 15 pieces of *Da Zhuan* 大篆 or Larger Seal Script, which is somehow different from ancient writing forms”. The King Xuan of Zhou Dynasty revived Zhou Dynasty during his 46 years of reign, which provided a good condition for systematizing and unifying Chinese characters.

Its existing form is *Shi Gu Wen* 石鼓文, inscriptions on drum-shaped stone blocks of the Warring States Period (475-221B.C.). *The Origin of Chinese Characters* includes 233 *Da Zhuan* 大篆 or Larger Seal Scripts, which are very important materials to study *Da Zhuan*.

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28 Britannica Concise Encyclopedia (Chinese Version), 2010.

29 Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978), was a famous Chinese author, poet, historian, archaeologist, and government official from Sichuan, China.



## 2.4 Lesser Seal Script: *Xiao Zhuan* 小篆

According to records of the preface of *The Origin of Chinese Characters*, Qin Shi Huang(259-210B.C.), the First Emperor of Qin Dynasty, uniformed written sinograms after he unified the country by adopting Li Si 李斯 (280?-208 B.C.) advice: simplifying *Da Zhuan* 大篆 or Larger Seal Script to *Xiao Zhuan* 小篆 or Lesser Seal Script. The main body of *The Origin of Chinese Characters* is mainly written in the typical *Xiao Zhuan* 小篆 or Lesser Seal Script, which is beautiful and composed of regular and neat lines.

## 2.5 Simplified Lesser Seal Script: *Li Shu* 隶书, Official Script in the Han Dynasty

*Li Shu* 隶书 was simplified from *Xiao Zhuan* 小篆 or Lesser Seal Script, by Cheng Miao 程邈 (?-?) of Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.) according to legendary. But actually this style of writing already appeared on some cultural relics of the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). Therefore, Cheng Miao (?-?) 程邈 can be considered as one of the earliest scholars who collected, systematized, and standardized sinograms in this style of writing. *Li Shu* resulted in the formation of *Kai Shu* or regular script, thus promoting the appearance of *Cao Shu* or cursive script and *Xing Shu* or running hand.

The evolution from Lesser Seal Script to *Li Shu* shows the transformation process from round to square in the shapes, from arc to straight lines in the strokes, and from complicated to simplified by cutting out the superfluous as a whole. By so doing, Chinese characters have lost their features as pictures and become more signific. Therefore, *Li Shu* is critical to the evolution of the writing forms of Chinese characters.

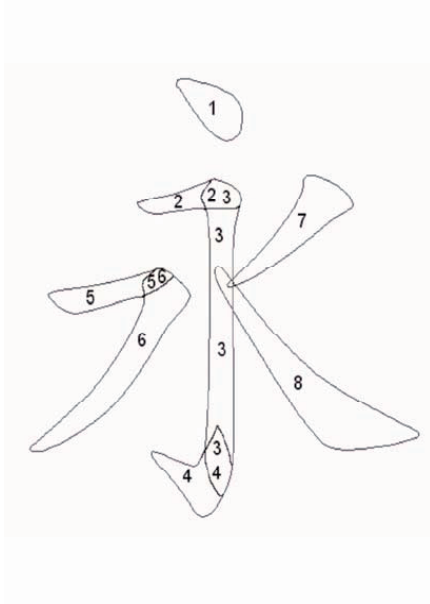
## 2.6 Cursive Script: *Cao Shu* 草书

The preface of *The Origin of Chinese Characters* reads that "*Cao Shu* 草书 started since Han Dynasty (206B.C.-220A.D.) ". This is indeed the case: *Cao Shu* is a kind of writing style parallel to *Li Shu*. This style of writing is usually written in a very fast continuous way, thus, the sinograms in this style of writing usually just bear their rough sketches. But later on some handwritings in *Cao Shu* are not recognizable except their calligraphers for they are written too freely just like dragon flying and phoenix dancing, so such *Cao Shu* is known as the wild scribble or *Kuang Cao* 狂草, an excessively free cursive style in Chinese calligraphy.

## 2.7 Regular Script: *Kai Shu* 楷书

*Kai Shu* 楷书 or Regular Script has replaced *Li Shu* or Simplified Lesser Seal Script for over 1,800 years up till today since the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220A.D.), which evolved from *Li Shu*. Handwritings of *Kai Shu* are straight in strokes, square-shaped in structures, and are easy to write. The shape of *Kai Shu* can be basically displayed by the eight principles of 永 yǒng (means "forever" or

"permanence"), which was put forward by Zhang Huaijin 张怀瓘 (?-?), a famous calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). And thus the eight principles of 永 yǒng has become the foundation of *Kai Shu* and Chinese calligraphy as well. We could say that the writing strokes of all the Chinese characters are no more than these eight principles. See the Illus. 4 and Table 4<sup>30</sup>.











**Illus. 4 "永" Illustrates Eight Writing Principles in Chinese Calligraphy**

Notes: 1) ㇏ — *Xié* 斜 is sometimes added to the 永's strokes. It's a concave *Shù* falling right, always ended by a *Gōu*, visible on this image;  
 2) In addition to these eight common strokes in 永, there are at least two dozen strokes of combinations which enter in the composition of CJK<sup>31</sup> strokes and by including the CJK sinograms themselves, all sinograms which consist of ideograms, in contrast to Western phonetic alphabets and characters.

30 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight\\_Principles\\_of\\_Yong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight_Principles_of_Yong)

31 CJK Unified Ideographs refer to unified ideographs from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.

**List of Yǒng Principles (by Stroke Order)**

Stroke	Name (Pinyin, Chinese, Translation)	CJK Stroke name	Lǐ's name	Additional description
1	 Cè 側/側 "Sideway"	Diǎn 點/点 "Dot"	Guài Shí 怪石 "Strange stone"	Tiny dash, speck.
2	 Lè 勒 "Bridle"	Héng 橫 "Horizontal"	Yù Ān 玉案 "Jade table"	Rightward stroke.
3	 Nǚ 弩 "Crossbow"; Nǚ 努 "Strive"	Shù 豎 "Erect"; Tiěchǔ 鐵杵/铁杵 "Iron staff"	Tiězhù 鐵柱/铁柱 "Iron pillar"	Downward stroke.
4	 Tí 趯 "Jump"	Gōu 鉤 "Hook"	Xièzhuǎ, (蟹爪) "Pincer of a crab"	Appended to other strokes, suddenly going down or going left only.
5	 Cè 策 "Horsewhip"	Tí 提 "Raise"; Tiāo 挑 "Lifting off"	Hǔyá 虎牙 "Tiger's tooth"	Flick up and rightwards.
6	 Liè 掠 "Passing lightly"	Wān 彎/弯 "Bend, curve"	Xījiǎo 犀角 "Horn of rhinoceros"	A tapering thinning curve, usually concave left (convex outward right) and with fast speed as if skimming.
7	 Zhuó 啄 "Pecking"	Piě 撇 "Throw away, slant"; Duǎn Piě 短撇 "Short slant"	Niǎo Zhuó 鳥啄 /鸟啄 "Bird pecking"	Falling leftwards (with slight curve).
8	 Zhé 磔 "Dismemberment"	Nà 捺 "Pressing forcefully"; Bō 波 "Wave"	Jīndāo 金刀 "Golden knife"	Falling rightwards (fattening at the bottom), where the end point is "as sharp as a knife" (hence the name "Dismemberment").

**Table 4 Naming Usages of The Eight Principles of “永 Yong”**

## 2.8 Running Hand: *Xing Shu* 行书

*Xing Shu* 行书 or Running Hand is the flowing or running *Kai Shu*, formed in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220A.D.) for *Cao Shu* is too free while *Kai Shu* is too restricted, and *Xing Shu* is just in between two of them. Therefore handwritings of *Xing Shu* are somehow continuous in strokes, separate and independent from each other, are faster in writing than that of *Kai Shu*, and are easily recognizable as well.

The Illus. 5 on the next page shows such an evolution process. You can see that the Chinese script has changed greatly from its beginning in oracle-bone

inscriptions 甲骨文 through the regular scripts 楷书 of today. But “Despite the great changes in the language, the Chinese script provides access to the literature of the past in a way no other language does. In English, we can barely read the 14<sup>th</sup> century Middle English of Chaucer<sup>32</sup> without a translation, let alone the 8<sup>th</sup> century Old English of *Beowulf*<sup>33</sup>; yet knowledge of written Chinese gives us access to the literature of two thousand years ago or earlier. ... The great stability of the written language means that the modern student of Chinese medicine has relatively easy access to the literature of the past”.<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Wiseman encourages students to study etymology of Chinese characters for a better and deeper understanding of Chinese medicine. He said, “Students learning Chinese for the purpose of understanding Chinese medicine could mistakenly think of etymology as a specialty field of little professional interest to themselves, but investing some time in the study of the roots of characters not only facilitates memorization of those characters, it also helps the student develop a deeper understanding of the patterns of thought and expression that are implicit in the language and therefore the literature of Chinese medicine”.<sup>35</sup> Besides of this, etymology investigation of sinograms is a vital approach to reveal classical Chinese thinking ways and presuppositions of Chinese culture.

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32 Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) was an English author, poet, philosopher, bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. He is best remembered for his unfinished frame narrative *The Canterbury Tales*, written in London dialect and reflecting his humanism through narrating living conditions of different walks of life of the 14th century. Sometimes called the father of English literature, Chaucer is credited by some scholars as the first author to demonstrate the artistic legitimacy of the vernacular Middle English, rather than French or Latin.

33 *Beowulf* is the conventional title of an Old English heroic epic poem, commonly cited as one of the most important works of Anglo-Saxon literature. Its composition by an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet is dated between the 8th and the early 11th century. In the poem, Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, battles three antagonists: Grendel, who has been attacking the resident warriors of the mead hall of Hroðgar (the king of the Danes), Grendel's mother, and an unnamed dragon. After the first two victories, Beowulf goes home to Geatland in Sweden and becomes king of the Geats. The last fight takes place fifty years later. In this final battle, Beowulf is fatally wounded. After his death, his servants bury him in a tumulus in Geatland.

34 Wiseman, Nigel and Zhang Yuhuan. 2003: 6.

35 Wiseman, Nigel and Zhang Yuhuan. 2003: 16.



5-1. Jia Gu Wen 甲骨文



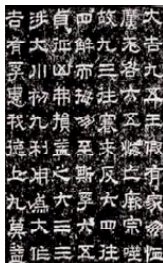
5-2. Jin Wen 金文



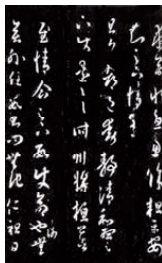
5-3. Da Zuan 大篆<sup>36</sup>



5-4. Xiao Zuan 小篆<sup>37</sup>



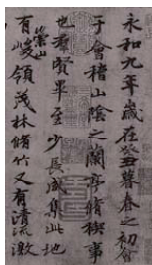
5-5. Li Shu 隶书<sup>38</sup>



5-6. Cao Shu 草书<sup>39</sup>



5-7. Kai Shu 楷书<sup>40</sup>



5-8. Xing Shu 行书<sup>41</sup>

## Illus.5 Evolution of Chinese Writing Forms From Oracle Inscription to Running Hand

36 Shi Gu Wen 石鼓文, inscriptions on drum-shaped stone blocks of the Warring States Period (475-221B.C.).

37 Tai Shan Shi Ke 泰山石刻, inscriptions on a stone of Mount Tai-Shan.

38 Xi Ping Shi Jing 熹平石经, inscriptions of the first Official-Issued Confucian Classics on stone tablets in the 4th year of Emperor Xiping's reign (175 A.D.) of the Han Dynasty.

39 Shi Qi Tie 十七帖, a representative work of cursive script by a famous calligrapher, Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361).

40 Luo Shen Fu 洛神赋, by Wang Xianzhi 王献之 (344-386), calligrapher, the 7th son of Wang Xizhi.

41 Lan Ting Xu 兰亭序, a representative work of running hand by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361).



The writing form keeps the old [thinking] ways. 斯文存古道。

### 3 Classical Chinese Thinking Ways Residing in Chinese Characters

Chinese characters reflect classical Chinese thinking ways and the way of Chinese people understanding the world.

#### 3.1 Universe and Man Uniting and Resembling Each Other: *Tian Ren He Yi*

Classical Chinese thinking is empirical and synthetical, tends to seize the holistic feature of things based on experiences. Man is vivid and complicated, while universe is vast and boundless. How did the ancient Chinese people understand the complicated man and the vast universe? The answer is to relate man and universe to each other, guided by the idea of *Tian Ren He Yi* or Universe and Man Uniting and Resembling Each Other. Such ideas actually imply in Chinese characters.

Man is a small universe, and universe is a big man. On one hand, sinograms referring to human body's parts, behaviors and characteristics can also denote things in the nature, i.e. one relates to man, while the other relates to the nature. For example, *Shou* 首 originally means head, but also refers to the thing at the top of the handle of a weapon; *Er* 耳 originally means ear, but also refers to any ear-like thing, e.g. the ears of a tripod (鼎); *Xing* 性 originally means Man's nature, but also refers to nature, characteristics of things; *Tian* 天 originally means Man's vertex, but also refers to the sky, the heaven, the God, which reflects a subject-centered universe.

On the other hand, sinograms referring to things in the nature can also denote parts, behaviours and characteristics of man, i.e. one relates to the nature, while the other relates to man. For example, *Qi* 气 originally refers to thin, floating clouds in the nature, but later refers to the invisible basic material constituting man which can be transformed into blood, essence, and body fluid, etc., and the normal functional activities of life which is governed by "qi" is known as *Shen* or spirit; *Shen* 神 originally refers to lightening in the nature, but later on refers to the spirit or mind of man; *Jing* 经 originally denotes the longitudinal lines of the textiles, but later on refers to the running routes of the main stems of the meridian system of man; etc.<sup>42</sup>

*Tian Ren He Yi* leads to frequent introspection, self-examination and observation of the universe, therefore it is a kind of circular reasoning: from man to universe and from universe to man, based on the subject, reflecting the direct communication between and unification of the subject and the object. The subject is the center of the universe, is the one to understand himself and the world

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42 See the related chapters for detailed interpretation.

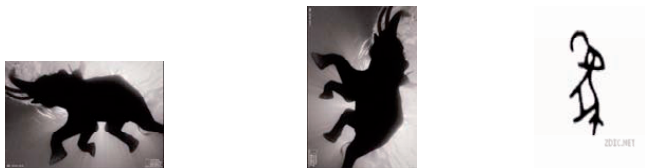
outside him, and so is the norm to understand the myriad of beings. Well-understanding of the subject and the nature means knowing the ways, principles of all the things in the universe.

*The Origin of Chinese Characters* interprets man as "the most valuable being in between the heaven and the earth". *The Book of Changes* reads that "In the remote antiquity when Fu Xi 伏羲 ruled the country, he raised his head to observe images on the heaven, bowed his head to observe phenomena on the earth, observed images of birds and beasts and those of the earth, took near images from man and far images of other things from the universe, on the basis of which he then started to make the Eight Trigrams to illustrate the phenomena".

### 3.2 Imaging Thinking: *Xiang* 象

Chinese character is a unity of the shape and the meaning. The shape of a Chinese character is directly related to its meaning, and both integrate into a unity. The formation of a Chinese character, an organic whole of the shape and the meaning, is one-step made following the rule of the nature, reflecting the direct communication between and integration of the subject and the object. The formation also implies a vital thinking way of Chinese culture, i.e. *Xiang* 象 or Imaging thinking.

*The Origin of Chinese Characters* states that “*Xiang* 象, with long nose and teeth, a big mammal in the Southern Yue area, will be pregnant every three years”, so you can see that the original meaning of “*xiang*” is elephant. In remote antiquity, the elephant had lived in the Central Plains of China. Later on, the elephant had to migrate south because of the changes in climate, so the people in the Central Plains had few opportunities to see live elephants again. Han Fei, a famous philosopher and the representative of the Legalist School of the late Warring States Period (475-221B.C.), said in the chapter of *Jie Lao Pian* of *Han Fei Tzu* 韩非子·解老篇 that “people seldom see the live elephant, but has gained the skeleton of a dead one, so they can imagine what it is like after investigating the picture or image of its skeleton. Therefore, all in people’s imagination is known as ‘*xiang*’”. This quotation also reveals the mystery of the origin of the Chinese compound “*xiang xiang*” 想象 which literally means “thinking or imagining elephant”, and now means imaging or imagination, setting off “*xiang* 象”’s “imagining” cultural connotations. The Illus.6 shows how the sinogram 象 was conceived in the way of resembling the real image of an elephant.



**Illus. 6 A Swimming Elephant (Horizontal & Vertical) and 象 in Oracle Script<sup>43</sup>**

43 Here is worth to note that I cannot find a skeleton of a dead elephant in a lying position. The former two photos in the Illus. 5 are just used to illustrate the conceiving process of this character 象.



The Illus. 7 shows the evolution process of the sinogram *Xiang* 象 from oracle to regular script. In the meanwhile, we can see that “*xiang*” originally evolved from “seeking similarities” between things from the angle of genetics, as stated in *The Book of Changes* “*Xiang* refers to something being like or resembling this thing”. It is well known that Chinese characters are a kind of *Xiang Xing* 象形 writing, literally “resembling shape”, or pictographic, ideographic, logographic writing in English. That is to say, sinograms are pictures, images, and surely suggest the imaging thinking of Chinese culture.



Illus. 7 “*Xiang* 象” from Oracle, Bronze, Lesser-Seal to Regular Script

Actually, it is not easy to completely and exactly express the thinking only with spoken language. *The Book of Changes* reads that “Setting up image to display its connotations to the full... interpreting words for trigram to explain its implications to the full.” Wang Bi<sup>44</sup>’s Annotation of *The Book of Changes* states that “Getting connotations lies in forgetting the image; getting the image lies in forgetting the words”.

Integration of the subject and the object is a thread running through the classical Chinese culture and science, on the basis of which *Tian Ren He Yi* constitutes the foundation of them. The imaging thinking is a classical thinking way of the Chinese culture, and whose process, methods, and rules make up *Qu Xiang Bi Lei* 取象比类 or Taking Image and Analogizing, the framework of the classical Chinese culture and science.<sup>45</sup>

Chinese characters are the only logographic writing which has been preserved for over 6,000 years. An oracle script still shows the image a sinogram implies. I just give you two examples: 朝 zhao, written as 𠄎 in oracle script, an associative compound, depicts the image of the sun being in the grass but the moon is still visible, means sunrise, dawn, morning, daybreak; 暮 mu, written as 𡵓 in oracle script, an associative compound, depicts the image of the sun setting into the grass, means sunset, dusk, evening.

Go drive in the early morning and the late afternoon in your countryside, think of the two images the two sinograms embody, and understand the imaging thinking!

44 Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) discarded the traditional way of interpreting *The Book of Changes* such as annotating the *Xiang Shu* 象数 or Image & Numbers, but interpreted it with ideas of Lao Tzu, and expounded his philosophical thoughts, and thus became the founder of the metaphysical school of Wei-Jin Periods (221-420).

45 See related chapters for detailed information about *Qu Xiang Bi Lei*.