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說文解字敘英譯

Postface of the Shuo-wen Chieh-tzu

The First Comprehensive Chinese Dictionary

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ABOUT THE COVER — On the right, a rubbing from a brick dated the 11th year of Yung-yüan (99 A.D.), just one year before the date of the postface of the *Shuo-wen Chieh-tzu*. The rubbing was printed in *Ch'ien-pi-t'ing ku chuan t'u shih* by Lu Hsin-yüan. The other two rubbings are from the Wu-ying Palace collection. The seal script inscription, on the top-left, dates from the Former Han period. It appeared on a family *chung* belonging to the Marquis of Nan-p'i. The other rubbing is from a Chou dynasty tripod.



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2.0 POSTFACE OF THE SHUO-WEN CHIEH-TZU

2.10 The Origin and Early Development of Writing

"In ancient times, P'ao Hsi² 庖犧 came to rule the world. Looking up, he contemplated the phenomena in the sky, and looking down, the patterns on the earth. He observed³ the markings on birds and animals and their adaptations to the earth. From nearby, he took some hint from his own body, and elsewhere from other things. Then he began to make the eight trigrams⁴ of the Changes, to pass on to others the regular patterns in the world.

Later, when Shen Nung⁵ 神農 made knots in rope to direct and regularize activities, all kinds of trades and professions were multiplied, and then artificial and refined things sprouted and grew.

Ts'ang Chieh 倉頡, scribe for the Yellow Emperor, on looking at the tracks of the feet of birds and animals, realizing that the patterns and

²Alternate name: Fu hsi 伏羲, the legendary emperor whose accession was traditionally attributed to 2852 B.C.

³Certain works in which this quotation occurs have slightly different wording. E.g.: the T'ang shih ching 湯石經 has 觀 instead of 視. Cf. also, for this passage in I 易, James Legge, tr., The Sacred Books of China, the I Ching, Vol XVI of The Sacred Books of the East, ed. F. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p. 382. Also cf. Richard Wilhelm, tr., The I Ching or Book of Changes, trans. Cary F. Baynes (New York: Pantheon Book Inc., 1950. Reprints 1952, 1955, 1961), p. 353.

⁴This passage also occurs in the I. Cf. Legge, p. 382 and Wilhelm, p. 353.

⁵The legendary emperor, 2737 B.C., inventor of agriculture.

forms were distinguishable, started to create graphs,⁶ so that all kinds of professions could be regulated, and all people could be kept under scrutiny. This he probably took from the hexagram kwai (夬).⁷ "Kwai: exhibit in the royal court"⁸ - means the patterns show education and enlightenment to the king's court. "Thus the ideal man bestows benefits on his subordinates. If one is virtuous, one is cautious."⁹

When Ts'ang Chieh first created writing (shu 書), he probably imitated the forms according to their categories; so the figures were called "designs" (wen 文).¹⁰ Later, when the writings were increased by combining the forms and phonetics, the results were called "compound graphs" (tzu 字). "Compound graph" means reproduction and gradual increase. When they are written on bamboo and silk they are called "records" (shu 書). "Records" means likeness.

During the time of the Five Emperors and Three Kings, the writing changed into various styles.¹¹ Of the seventy-two eras in which altars were made on Mount T'ai 泰, all used different styles.

⁶This could be interpreted as "graphs" or "carving of graphs."

⁷Quotation, with minor differences, from the I. Cf. Legge, p. 385 and Wilhelm, p. 360.

⁸Quotation from the I. Cf. Legge, p. 151 and Wilhelm, p. 177.

⁹Quotation from the I. Cf. Legge, p. 320 and Wilhelm, p. 178.

¹⁰Or "pictograms". For a good discussion of wen 文 see A. Waley, The Analects of Confucius (New York: Random House 1962), pp. 39-41.

¹¹The five emperors (of the legendary age) were: 1. 黃帝 (軒轅); 2. 顓頊 (高陽); 3. 帝嚳 (高辛); 4. 帝堯 (陶唐); 5. 帝舜 (有虞). The three kings were: 1. Yü 禹 of the Hsia 夏; 2. T'ang 湯 of the Shang 商; 3. Wen 文 or Wu 武 of the Chou 周.

2.20 Principles of Graph Construction

In the Chou-li (The Rites of Chou) it says:¹² "When children reached the age of eight sui¹³ they began the study of the language arts under the Protector, who started teaching the children of the nobles the six types of graphs."

The first is called "indicate-things". (chih-shih 指事). When one sees a graph of this type it may be understood on seeing it; by inspection one sees the meaning.¹⁴ The graph "up" (shang 上) and "down" (hsia 下) are of this sort.

The second is called "imitate-form" (hsiang-hsing 象形). For this type one draws a picture of an object; thus the lines follow the natural shape. "Sun" (jih 日) and "moon" (yüeh 月) are of this sort.

The third is called "form-and-sound" (hsing-sheng 形聲). For this type, a name is made after considering (a relation of) things, i.e., a comparison is made by combination (of phonetic and classifier). "Stream" (chiang 江) and "river" (ho 河) are of this sort.

The fourth is called "grasp-meaning" (hui-i 會意). For this type, suitable figures are compared and meanings joined, whereby appears what is indicated. Warrior (wu 武) and trust (hsin 信) are of this sort.

¹²There is no such statement in the Chou-li as the text now exists, although it mentions the six types of graphs taught by the Protector.

¹³I.e., after having passed the seventh lunar new year after birth.

¹⁴These characterizations of the six types of graphs are all in the form of two rimed lines of four syllables each, as though a mnemonic device. The meanings are subject to speculation.

The fifth is called "interchangeable notation" (chuan-chu 轉注). For this type, one establishes a category, then puts other graphs with similar meanings under that category. /The two graphs for/ aged (k'ao 考 and lao 老) are of this sort.¹⁵

The sixth is called "loan-borrowing" (chia-chieh 假借). These are for words which originally had no graph of their own, and depend on the sounds to stand for something else. "Command" and "honorable" (ling 令) and "grow" or "long" (chǎng and ch'áng 長) are of this sort.

2.30 Evolution of Writing from the Chou to the Western Han

At the time of King Hsüan,¹⁶ his grand scribe Chou wrote /a book of/ fifteen treatises (p'ien 篇) listing the large seal graphs, which are in some cases different from the ancient writing (ku-wen 古文),¹⁷ when Confucius recorded the Six Classics and Tso Ch'iu-ming transcribed the commentaries on the Ch'un-ch'iu, in all cases they used ku-wen, and they are intelligible.

Later, the feudal lords set up governments not controlled by the king /of Chou/. They disliked the adverse effect of the rites and music on their rules, and all of them discarded the canons. China

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of chuan-chu, see Paul L-M. Serruys, "The Study of the chuan-chu in Shuo-wen," Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology (Academia Sinica) 29, Part I (Taiwan, 1957), 131-195.

¹⁶ Of the Chou dynasty. Rules 827-782 B.C.

¹⁷ Ku-wen here is an indefinite term probably meaning "ancient writing of the Chou dynasty and before." For the various meanings of ku-wen see below, and Wang Kuo-wei 王國維, "Shuo-wen so-wei ku-wen shuo" 說文所謂古文說 (Discussion of the Term ku-wen in the Shuo-wen), Kuan-t'ang chi-lin 觀堂集林 (Collected Articles and Poems of Wang Kuo-wei) (1923)

was then split into seven states. Fields were divided in various ways; cart roads had various track widths; different legal systems came to be used; clothing styles varied; words were pronounced differently; graphs had various forms.

After Ch'in Shih Huang-ti first united the country, his prime minister, Li Ssu,¹⁸ in a memorial to the throne, urged that he unify the written language by doing away with graphs which did not conform to those used in Ch'in.¹⁹ Li Ssu also wrote the Ts'ang Chieh Treatise. The imperial supervisor of the emperor's travel arrangements, Chao Kao, wrote the Yüan Li Treatise. The Grand Astrologer Hu-wu Ching wrote the Po Hsüeh Treatise. These three treatises were all written in graphs derived from the large seal style of Chou (grand scribe of King Hsüan).²⁰ Some of them are simplified somewhat--they are the so-called small seal graphs.

At this time Ch'in burned the classics and abolished the old institutions and laws. They built up a great force of civil and military officials, recruited a border army and corvée laborers, which increased duties connected with official and legal matters. Thus began the cler-

¹⁸See D. Bodde, China's First Unifier; A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as seen in the Life of Li Szu (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958).

¹⁹In 221 B.C.

²⁰These three treatises are included in one book and called Ts'ang Chieh by the Han historian Pan Ku in I wen chih 藝文志. See Tuan Yu-ts'ai 段五裁, Shuo-wen chieh-tzu chu 說文解字注 Chapter 15, Part 1, p. 10a.

ical style of writing,²¹ which tended toward simplification, and ku-wen since then has disappeared from use.

There were eight styles of writing in use during Ch'in times. The first is called large seal, the second small seal, the third tally style, the fourth worm style,²² the fifth seal stamp, the sixth title style, the seventh weapon style,²³ the eighth clerical style.

During the rise of the Han dynasty, the rough draft style of writing came into use. The civil police laws /of the Han/ said: "When male students of seventeen sui and older are tested for the first time, they must recite and write 9000 words before they can be appointed officials. They must also be tested on the eight styles. The prefects then send /the boys/ to the Grand Astrologer, who also tests them. The best are made Scribes to the Imperial Secretary. If /at any time anyone makes/ mistakes, he is to be promptly reported /to the emperor/ and recommended for punishment.²⁴ At present, although there are still civil police laws, these tests are not used, and the language arts are not practiced. For a long time now, we have not understood the principles /of the language arts/.

At the time of the Emperor Hsiao Hsüan, people were summoned who could read and understand the Ts'ang Chieh /Treatise/. Chang Ch'ang learned from them how to read it. Tu Yeh, prefect of Liang, Yüan Li

²¹Also translated as square style.

²²Used on banners. See Tuan, p. 11a.

²³Used on weapons, See Tuan, p. 112b.

²⁴These laws are more fully explained in A.F.P. Hulswé, "The Shuo-wen Dictionary as a source for Ancient Chinese Law," Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren Dedicata (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959) p. 239 ff.

of P'ei, and the Imperial Scholar Ch'in Chin also could read it. At the time of Emperor Hsiao P'ing, Li and others--over 100 people--were summoned and ordered to explain the graphs /in the Ts'ang Chieh at Wei-yang palace. Li was made Leading Scholar. Yang Hsiung, Assistant Secretary in the palace, collected (the explanations) and compiled the Hsün Tsuan Treatise (Annotations on the Ts'ang Chieh). Since Ts'ang Chieh, there have been altogether fourteen treatises, comprising a total of 5,340 different graphs.²⁵ Almost all the graphs in all books now in existence are preserved in these treatises.

2.40 Evolution of Writing from the Hsin Dynasty to the Time of Hsü Shen

When the now overthrown house of Hsin usurped the throne, Chen Feng, Chief Minister of Economic and Cultural Affairs, and others, were ordered to collate the works in the various categories of language and literature. They considered it necessary to institutionalize /rites and music, and they amended and revised the ku-wen somewhat.²⁶

At that time there were six styles of writing. The first is ku-wen, occurring in the books found in the wall of Confucius' house. The second is odd graphs, i.e. variations on the ku-wen. The third is seal writing, i.e. small seal, which is the style established by Ch'eng Mo (or Miao) of Hsia Tu by the order of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti. The fourth is administrative style, i.e. Ch'in clerical style. The fifth is sinuous seal style, used on seal stamps. The sixth is bird and worm style, used for writing on banners and tallies (hsin 信).

²⁵This figure of fourteen treatises includes the Ts'ang Chieh itself.

²⁶Here ku-wen seems to mean both "the old texts" and "the old style of writing."

Now as for the wall books: Prince Kung of Lu broke open Confucius' house and found the Li, the Shu, the Ch'un-ch'iu, the Lun-yü, and the Hsiao-ching. The Earl of Northern Peace, Chang Ts'ang, presented the Tso-chuan /to the throne/. In the mountains and rivers in the prefectures and fiefs are often found tripod vessels and vases. The inscriptions on them are ku-wen of earlier times, and all bear resemblances to each other. Although it is not possible to construct their remote development, the details can be explained in broad outline.

2.50 Erroneous Interpretations of Graphs

Many people, however, reject /the above discoveries and those people's ideas/. They consider them curiosity-hunters, who have intentionally and cunningly altered normal forms, and cut windows in the walls /in Confucius' house/ to fake unintelligible books.²⁷ They distort well-known things so they can boast to the world. Various scholars enthusiastically flocked to explain graphs and interpret the meaning of the classics. They labelled the Ch'in clerical style the writing of Ts'ang Chieh's time. They said /the graphs/ had been passed on from father to son, so how could they change? Thus it is erroneously stated that "the graph for man (jen 人) added with the head of the graph for horse (ma 馬) makes the graph for leader (chang 長); the graph for man (jen 人) holding ten (shih 十) is the graph for peck (tou 斗); the graph for worm (ch'ung 虫) is the bent form of the graph for middle (chung 中).²⁸

²⁷ In the Li, "Ming-t'ang wei" 明堂位, occurs the statement: 刮楹達鄉 (cut a window reaching to the hsiang 鄉). Later commentators said: 鄉, 牖屬, 夾戶窗也 (A hsiang is a kind of window, a window between doors).

²⁸ A peck is ten pints (sheng 升). These ideas are readily understandable on seeing the ancient forms of the graphs in question.

The Court Civil Police Magistrates even interpreted laws and decided legal cases according to the graphs. For example "Reprimand a person who receives bribes,"--the graph for "reprimand" consists of "thwart (chih 止)" and "seize (kou 勾)".²⁹ Explanations like this are very numerous, and none are compatible with the forms of the ku-wen (found in the walls of Confucius' house). Neither are they correct according to the treatises of the grand scribe Chou i.e., the large seal graphs. Mediocre scholars and crude people, biased by what they know and blinded by what they vaguely learn, and, not seeing reasonable scholarship nor ever having seen the principles of the rules of graphs, find the old teachings strange but prefer crude opinions. They regard their knowledge as their own secret ingenuity, and think they thoroughly understand the sages' ideas. Moreover, when they read the sentence, "the younger son received the imperial mandate" in the Ts'ang Chieh Treatise, they say this is proof that the treatise was written by an ancient emperor, and therefore its expressions possess the magic powers of god and immortals. These people are ignorant of their confusion. Certainly this is erroneous!

2.60 Hsü's Principles of the Dictionary

The Shu says: "I wish to contemplate the designs (writing, picture, etc.) of the ancients."³⁰ This means one must follow the old writings,

²⁹Because of its resemblance to kou 勾, 勾 was sometimes used in the sense of "arrest."

³⁰Quoted from the Shu, "Yi chi" 並稷. See Legge, Classics, Book III, p. 80.

and not distort everything. Confucius said: "I can remember when a scribe left a blank in his text. Now this is no longer done, alas."³¹ It is not because men do not know and do not ask, but because if they all used their own private judgement, right and wrong would have had no standard, and clever opinions and heterodox pronouncements would have caused confusion among scholars.

Now the written language is the foundation of classical learning, the source of kingly government. It is what the former generations relied on to transmit culture to later ages. Men of later times will rely on it to understand antiquity. Therefore it is said: "When the foundation is established, the Way grows;"³² and "When you know the extremely obscure, you cannot be confused."³³

Now I have arranged the small seal graphs together with ancient Chou graphs.³⁴ I have adopted from those who understand the small and the great, from those who are believable and have proof, and I preserve and explain their opinions.

³¹Quoted from the Analects. See Waley, p. 198.

³²Quoted from the Analects. Cf Waley, p. 83.

³³A similar line is in the I. Cf. Legge, I Ching, p. 361 and Wilhelm, p. 327.

³⁴On Hsü's arrangements of the graphs in the dictionary, see Wang Kuo-wei, "Shuo-wen chin-hsü chuan-wen ho-i ku-chou shuo" 說文今敍篆文合以古籀說 Kuan-t'ang chi-lin 觀堂集林 (1923), Vol. 7, pp. 8a-9b.

In order to classify all kinds of things and correct mistakes, and to state clearly to wise scholars the subtle meanings, I have divided the graphs into groups, so as not to confuse them with each other. Everything can be found here, and nothing was omitted. If some meanings are not clear, then I explain with examples.

I follow the interpretations in the text of the I preserved by Meng /Hsi/ 孟 /喜/, the Shu by K'ung /An-kuo/ 孔 /安國/, and the Shih by Mao /Kung/ 毛 /公/. As to texts on ritual, I have used the Chou-li, and I took Tso's commentary on the Ch'un-ch'iu. I also used the Lun-yü and the Hsiao-ching. In each case I used the ancient text.³⁵ That with which I am not familiar I omitted.

³⁵However, in the dictionary Hsü actually cites texts from both ancient and modern texts. At least one scholar claims this is no contradiction, if we understand Hsü to mean here that he followed in principle the ancient text school, although he quoted from both in making the dictionary. See Ma Tsung-huo 馬宗霍, Shuo-wen chieh-tzu yin-ching k'ao 說文解字引經考 (Peking: Pei-ching K'o-hsüeh Ch'u-pan She 北京科學出版社 1958), p. 2b.