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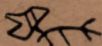
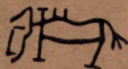
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THE
EVOLUTION
OF
CHINESE
WRITING

BY
PROF. G. OWEN
KING'S COLLEGE
LONDON



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THE
EVOLUTION
OF
CHINESE WRITING

THE INAUGURAL LECTURE OF THE
MICHAELMAS TERM OF THE SCHOOL OF CHINESE

OCTOBER 4TH, 1910

BY
PROFESSOR G. OWEN
KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON

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THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE WRITING

MYSTERY hangs over the beginning of Chinese writing as it hangs over all beginnings. Long ago, when time was young, when earth was nearer to heaven than it is now, when men saw visions and dreamed dreams, a dragon horse bearing on its back a mystic map came up out of the Yellow River and appeared to Fu Hsi, the reputed founder of Chinese civilization. Out of the River Lo crept forth the half-divine tortoise having on its back a mysterious writing and appeared to Fu Hsi, or to Huang Ti or to Ta Yü.¹ These appearances were epoch-making. From the one sprang the diagrams of Fu Hsi having the key to the mysteries of life, science, and philosophy, and from the other was evolved that enduring marvel the written language of China.

But these are legends. The real story, however, is not without its poetry. When men multiplied on the earth and families grew into communities, their affairs became complicated, and some method of recording things and events was felt to be a necessity.

With the need came the man. Some genius hit upon the expedient of tying knots upon cords. Who he was is not known. The honour is given to the fabulous Sui Jen, the fire-maker, to Fu Hsi (2900 B.C.) who has so many honours, to his successor Shen Nung, the divine husband-

¹ 河出圖, 洛出書. III Appendix to the *Book of Changes*.

man (2800 B.C.), and to that greatest of all Chinese inventors, Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor (2700 B.C.).

But knotted cords in course of time failed to meet the needs of a rapidly growing community. Then an inspiration came to some one. An idea very akin to writing struck him, and he made notches on bamboo sticks and on slips of wood to serve as records of events and as tallies of agreements among men. Traces of these notches survive to the present in such words as 契 *ch'i*, 契 *ch'i*, a notch, a bond. The invention is attributed to Fu Hsi, who saw the need of something better than knotted cords, and had the genius to supply it.

But notches in turn became inadequate to the needs of men, and then at last, true writing, though in its pictorial form, was born. This great invention is generally attributed to Ts'ang Chieh 倉頡. Every Chinese schoolboy knows the couplet 'Ts'ang Chieh made characters and Ts'ai Lün made paper'. He and his coadjutor 沮誦 Chü Sung were long afterwards deified as the Gods of Letters 字神. The personality of this Ts'ang Chieh, however, is a very uncertain quantity. He is said to be identical with mythical ruler 史皇氏 Shih Huang Shih, who preceded Fu Hsi. He is also said to have been a minister of Fu Hsi, and to have had four eyes. But the general statement is that he was a minister of the Yellow Emperor. Observing the shapes of things in the heavens and the forms of things on the earth with the footprints of birds and beasts on the sand and mud, the idea of pictographic writing flashed across his brain and the long-sought art of writing was found.

The Hebrew poet tells us that when this globe of ours took its place among the planets a finished orb, 'the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy,' and the Chinese historian tells us that when Ts'ang Chieh

had written his 540 primary characters all nature was moved, the heavens rained down millet upon the glad earth, demons wailed in the night and dragons hid themselves in the depths.

This great commotion, the enthusiastic narrator says, was not simply over those 540 pictograms, but over the great evolution that was to follow. They contained the embryo of the Thirteen Classics, the Twenty-four Dynastic Histories, and the writings of the Ten Philosophers.¹ They completed the diagrams of Fu Hsi, and began that great literary movement which was to culminate in the vast literature of China. They were the springs of a mighty river, the first seedlings of a great forest.

What Ts'ang Chieh really invented is not quite certain. The author of the archaic dictionary, the 六書通 *Liu Shu Tung*, assumes that he invented the 540 old classifiers or radicals. Others less precise content themselves with the general statement that he invented written symbols which they call 文 *wen*, that is delineations, or pictograms, which appealed to the eye, not to the ear; forms, not sounds.

According to the common chronology Ts'ang Chieh made his great invention about 2700 B. C., and strange to say we hear nothing more about the evolution of writing till nearly the middle of the Chou dynasty, or 800 B. C. There is a silence of nearly 2,000 years, a silence as long as the whole of our Christian era. How is this vast blank to be filled up?

The author of the well-known etymological dictionary, the 六書故 *Liu Shu Ku*, in common with most Chinese writers, assumes that during that long period changes went forward in a natural, orderly way. Just as knotted cords

¹ Preface to the 六書通.

象	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
虎	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
鹿	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
馬	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
牛	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼	𠩺
羊	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼	𠩺
犬	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
魚	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
蛇	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
龜	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
鳥	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
雀	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺
燕	𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀	𠩺

I. Old forms of writing.

and notched sticks proved insufficient for the needs of the ever-growing Chinese communities, so in turn the pictograms of Ts'ang Chieh, the invention of which had sent a thrill through heaven and earth, proved wanting.

But his invention had a quality in it which those inventions lacked: it was capable of change, and through change was preserved.¹ It is noteworthy that amid all the changes which Chinese writing has undergone since Ts'ang Chieh first traced his 'resemblances', the pictographic element has remained its characteristic feature. It is fundamentally a pictographic script much disguised.

The first step in the change was the blending of the pictograms to make new words by way of suggestion. The old pictures could not express the invisible or the abstract, but by combining them a considerable number of suggestive words, that is ideograms, could be formed and the needs of the community temporarily met. For example, by combining the pictures for sun 日 and moon 月 the word for bright, brightness, 明 ming, was produced. By putting together the pictures for girl 女 and boy 子 the word well, good, 好 hao, was made. By repeating the picture for tree 木, the word for forest, 林 lin, was formed. By repeating it three times the word for shady, dense, 森, stands before us with graphic vividness.

Manifestly this process of word-making is only limited by the number of pictures available. But so far as is known the number of pictograms was never very large, probably only a few hundreds, and thus the number of possible ideograms was necessarily limited. They form, however, a very interesting group of characters, and give us glimpses into the hearts of the men who made them—

¹ 存乎變: Preface to 六書通.

hearts which have long ceased to beat, yet were wonderfully like our own. This was the second stage in the evolution of Chinese writing—ideograms were added to pictograms.

The third stage in that evolution was a momentous one, for it enabled the Chinese to coin words by the thousand. It was the plan of making new words by reproducing spoken sounds. The word-makers consciously or unconsciously stumbled upon the great principle that writing is only visible speech, which is the conception underlying all alphabetic languages, and thus the Chinese came near to having a phonetic script. But, for good or evil, the new method did not take an alphabetic form, but was simply applied to the development of existing characters. Some of these were used as classifiers or radicals to indicate the meaning and others as phonetics to indicate the sound. For the most part the old picture words of Ts'ang Chieh were used for classifiers, and the newer words for phonetics. How many of these classifiers and phonetics were used at first there are no means of knowing, but in the oldest extant dictionary, the 說文解字 *Shao Wen Chieh Tsz*, which was published A.D. 121, the classifiers are 540, the phonetics 883. Since then the classifiers or radicals have been reduced to 214 and the phonetics increased to over 4,000. K'ang Hsi's dictionary has 4,081.

The old pictograms and ideograms had the fatal defect of having no visible phonetic relationship to the spoken language. They were pictures without words; symbols, not sounds. We might guess their meaning, but their pronunciation never, for that was wholly conventional. They had the further defect of being able to express the generic only: detail was impossible. The application of the phonetic principle remedied both these defects.

For example, by combining the pictogram hand 手, 扌

with a phonetic 主 *chu*, we get the common word 拄 *chu*, *to lean upon*. By uniting the pictogram man 人, 亻 with the same phonetic, we get the common word 住 *chu*, *to dwell*. By placing the pictogram tree 木 alongside of the same phonetic, we get the common word 柱 *chu*, *a pillar*. By combining the pictogram 言 with the same phonetic, the common word 註 *chu*, *to comment, to make notes on*, is formed.

In these examples the right-hand half of the characters, which is the same in each, indicates the sound, while the left-hand half, which differs in each, indicates the meaning. Thus for the first time in Chinese writing the written word was a reproduction of the spoken word—writing was an echo of speech, and so far Chinese became a phonetic language.

The other defect was remedied in the same way. The old pictogram for tree 木 could only convey the generic idea, it could not convey the idea of any particular tree such as pine, or cypress, or poplar. But in daily speech the pine-tree was called *sung*, the cypress, *pai*, and the poplar, *yang*, so the word-makers added characters having those sounds to the pictogram tree, thus 松 栢 楊, *sung, pai, yang*, and thus produced written words corresponding with the common speech.

Or to take another stock example. The old pictogram 水, 氵 *shui* could convey the general idea of water, but could not convey the idea of river, lake, or ocean. The people at that time called a great navigable river like the Yangtse *kong* (now pronounced *chiang*), so they placed the character 工 which then had that sound alongside of water 江 and there was the word for the Yangtse *Chiang*. They called an unnavigable river like the Yellow River *ho*, so they placed the character 可 which then had that sound

alongside of water 河 and there was the word for the Huang Ho. They called a lake *hu*, so they put a character 湖 having that sound beside the old pictogram water 水, and there was the word lake. They called the ocean *yang*, so they put a word pronounced *yang* alongside of water 水, and there was the word for ocean in the speech of the people. In each case the pictogram or classifier on the left gave a clue to the meaning, and the phonetic or primitive on the right gave a clue to the sound.

Generally speaking the phonetics in such combinations entirely lose their meaning and become simple sounds. This, however, is not always the case, for the phonetics were often chosen to help the meaning as well as to indicate the sound as may be seen in such words as 懼 *chü*, to *fear*—a little scared bird looking both ways; 娶 *ch'ü*, to *take a wife*—taking a woman by the ear; 掃 *sao*, to *sweep*—the hand holding a broom; 恊 *hsieh*, *union*—the strength of three with the heart of one; 顯 *hsien*, to *display, to manifest*—the sun shining on floss; 淋 *lin*, to *drip*—water falling from trees.

The Chinese from the Chou dynasty downwards have divided their characters into six classes called the 六書 *Liu Shu*, or Six Scripts. The order in which these are given differs much at different periods, and in different writers, but the general order is—

- | | | | |
|----|----|---------------|----------------------|
| 1. | 象形 | Hsiang Hsing. | Pictograms. |
| 2. | 指事 | Chih Shih. | Indicators. |
| 3. | 會意 | Hui I. | Ideograms. |
| 4. | 諧聲 | Hsieh Sheng. | Phonograms. |
| 5. | 轉注 | Chuan Chu. | Deflectives. |
| 6. | 假借 | Chia Chieh. | Borrowed characters. |

But the second, fifth, and sixth in this category are manifestly subordinate groups, and may well be included in the first, third, and fourth.

We thus reach the conclusion that in the formation of Chinese characters there were three great epochs, or what geologists would call a primary, secondary, and tertiary period.

Fully eight-tenths of existing Chinese characters are phonograms; for while the old pictograms have remained stationary, the phonograms, ever since their invention, have gone on increasing century by century.

It was the invention of the phonetic system which made the Chinese script a language, and made the writing of history, poetry, and philosophy possible. The old pictograms were too few in number and too generic in character to allow of more than the baldest chronicle or category.

It is therefore very important to know when the phonetic system was first employed in Chinese writing, for the Chinese written language as an effective instrument cannot be older than that system.

Yet it was heralded by no fall of heavenly millet or wail of nocturnal spirits. The inventor's name, if there was an inventor, is unknown, and his brow ungarlanded. Indeed, Chinese writers do not seem to appreciate the supreme value of phonetics in the development of their language, and have therefore not been to the trouble of assigning them an inventor.

But the spirit of the unknown genius in the glad Elysian Fields may comfort himself with the reflection that while the old pictograms never numbered more than one or two thousand, if as many, his phonograms run up to forty or fifty thousand. He may also comfort himself with the reflection that while 文 wen, the old word for pictogram, stands for literature to-day, 字 tsz, the *alias* for phonogram, stands for characters or written words.

This word, 字 *tsz*, seems to have come into use as the name for characters about the beginning of the Ch'in dynasty, or 220 B.C. It means begetter, and is applied to phonetics because of their power of combining with pictograms to produce new words.

I could wish that the spirit of one of the old word-makers would play the part of Mr. Stead's Julia, and tell us when his begetters began begetting. The knowledge would solve some important problems regarding the language, literature, and history of China. There are several good reasons for believing that it was not earlier than the beginning of the Chou dynasty, or 1100 B.C.

If we except acknowledged forgeries, there are very few things in Chinese literature which serious critics claim to be older than the Chou dynasty. The earlier portions of the Shu Ching, or Book of History, contain the records of the reigns of Yao and Shun (2356-2206 B.C.), and of the first two dynasties, Hsia and Shang (2205-1123 B.C.); and five of the Praise-Songs in the Shih Ching, or Book of Odes, are said to belong to the early part of the Shang dynasty, or 1720 B.C. Popularly these are supposed to be contemporaneous records; but scholars only claim that they are based upon such records.

The script in which these old portions of the classics are now written abounds with phonograms, and in that regard do not differ from the script of to-day. It would seem, therefore, that we must hold these old portions of the classical books to be forgeries or admit that the phonetic system of writing in China began more than 2,000 years B.C.

There is, however, a very simple and satisfactory way out of this apparent dilemma. We know that the remnants of the Confucian Classics which were rescued from the fires of Ch'in Shih Huang-Ti during the two centuries preceding the Christian era were rewritten in the current *li* script.

They are said to have been again rewritten during the T'ang dynasty in the modern k'ai script. Therefore the characters in which any portion of the classical books is now written afford no evidence whatever of the original script. Whatever books may have once existed in the 古文 *ku wen*, or ancient pictorial script, they exist in that script no longer, having been changed fully two thousand years ago.

In order to discover what was the form of writing previous to the Chou dynasty we are thrown back on the inscriptions found upon urns, bells, cups, and other bronze vessels, and upon stone slabs which have come down to us from those far-off times.

The oldest of all old Chinese inscriptions or supposed inscriptions is the Tablet of Yü 禹碑. There was for long in China a tradition founded on the tale of a Taoist priest, that the great Yü had erected a tablet on Kou Lou 峒嶼, the loftiest peak of the Heng mountains in the province of Hunan. But though many searched for it, none found it till the thirteenth century A.D., when a man named 何致 *Ho Chih*, is supposed to have discovered it and copied the inscription upon it. But no one has been able to find a trace of it since, and there can be no reasonable doubt that the discovery was a fraud.

The inscription on this mythical tablet was said to be in the so-called tadpole character 蝌蚪字 *K'ê tou tsz*. The forger no doubt said this because there was a tradition that in the second century B.C. several of the Confucian Classics, said to have been written in that character, were found hidden in the walls of Confucius's old house. But whatever books may have been found in that house, it is hard to believe that they were written in other than the seal character which had been the common script for 600 years,

𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	永
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	帝
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	曰
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	咨
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	異
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	輔
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	佐
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	卿
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	洲
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	渚
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	與
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	登
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	鳥
𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	𠄎	獸

11. The supposed Tablet of Yü.

and was the common script when most, if not all, those books were written.

But however that may be, the characters on this supposed tablet of Yü are only fantastic distortions of the old seal characters, as even a cursory examination will show.

Chinese are very clever at and very fond of making these fanciful adaptations and distortions, as may be seen by the manifold way in which the characters 福 *fu*, *happiness*, and 壽 *shou*, *longevity*, have been written, as shown on Plate III.

Chinese greatly indulged this fancy during the Ch'in and early Han periods. In the time of the First Emperor there were eight different styles of writing called the 八體 *pa ti*, some bearing such fanciful names as the tally, the grub, and the spear styles. In the Han dynasty the author of the old etymological dictionary, the 說文 *Shuo Wen*, complains bitterly of the reckless way in which old characters were varied, and new ones invented, till even scholars did not know what the old forms really were.

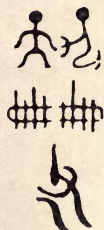
But setting aside the Tablet of Yü there is no monument, inscription, or other writing of the Hsia dynasty (2205-1767 B.C.) or of any previous time. So far as any writing or inscription is concerned the years before 1700 B.C. are a blank.

Happily, however, Chinese scholars assure us that of the succeeding or Shang dynasty there are many relics such as urns, bells, cups, and other bronze utensils preserved in the Imperial Palace and in private collections. Unfortunately there are no public museums in China where these precious relics of a long-vanished past may be viewed and examined.

The late well-known viceroy and scholar Juan Yüan, in his antiquarian work the *Chi Ku Chai* (積古齋鐘鼎彝器款識), gives the inscriptions from 165

bronzes of the Shang dynasty (1766-1123 B.C.) of which 3 are bells, 24 urns, and 17 cups.

All these inscriptions are pictographic, some of them



子册
孫册
父乙

商鼎
册册父乙鼎



鹿象形

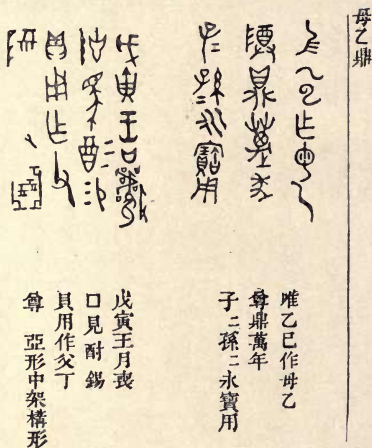
鹿鐘

IV. Two inscriptions from bronzes of the Shang dynasty.

crudely so, and so far as I can discover, there is not a trace of the phonetic in any of them.

But this is largely true of the inscriptions of the Chou and even of later dynasties long after the introduction of

the phonetic system. It is not safe, therefore, to infer from the presence of pictograms, even crude pictograms, or from the entire absence of phonograms in an inscription that it belongs to pre-phonetic times; for the sculptor and the founder always prefer the archaic to the modern script. It is more picturesque.



V. Two inscriptions from bronzes of the Shang dynasty.

On Plate IV there are two inscriptions from the bronzes of the Shang dynasty, taken from Juan Yüan's work the *Chi Ku Chai*. You will notice how crude and cumbrous they are, and what a difficult task writing with them must have been and how unsatisfactory.

On Plate V there are two more inscriptions of the Shang dynasty. They are not quite so crude as those on Plate IV, but are wholly pictographic. But these and such as these

are the only relics of those early times, and so far as their evidence goes, they prove that the old pictographic writing held sway from the time of its invention, whenever that was, down to the early part of the Chou dynasty.

以	柳	沽	竟	用	大	散	邑	迺	即	散	用	田
西	復	一	自	大	散	邑	迺	即	散	用	田	
表	洮	表	瀛	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
于	灋	以	洮	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
皃	灋	降	以	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
城	灋	二	南	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
杜	灋	表	至	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
木	灋	于	于	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
表	灋	邊	大	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋
于	灋			灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋	灋


VI. An inscription from tripod of Chou dynasty.

Juan Yüan in his *Antiquities* of the Chou dynasty gives 266 inscriptions from bronzes of that period.

Plate VI is part of an inscription on a brass tripod sup-

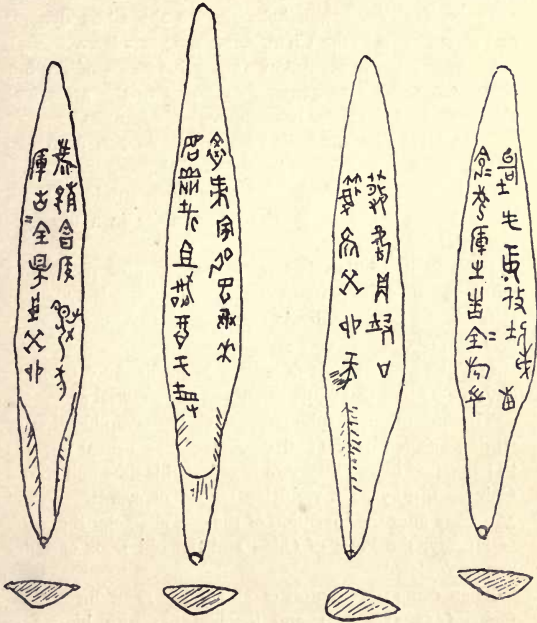
posed to have been cast during the reign of Wu Wang, the founder of that dynasty (1122 B.C.). While this writing is still mainly pictographic, the phonetic element is clearly present in several of the characters, and if the tripod was really made in the reign of Wu Wang, it would prove that phonetic writing is at least as old as the beginning of the Chou dynasty. There is need, however, of a more thorough investigation of these old bronzes before we can safely draw conclusions from them; for some of the inscriptions said to be of the Chou dynasty are as crudely pictorial as those of the Shang, while others are clearly phonetic.

In 1899 some three thousand bone and tortoise-shell fragments inscribed with old characters were said to have been dug up in the Honan province on the site of the ancient city of Chao Ko Ch'eng. Several of these fragments are figured in the Rev. Frank H. Chalfant's work *Early Chinese Writing*. Some hundreds of the symbols have been identified, but most of them are still undeciphered. The inscriptions on these bone fragments are supposed to be divination responses, and are believed to belong to the early Chou period or even earlier. Many of the symbols are crudely pictorial and might be as old as Ts'ang Chieh himself, others are in the seal character, and a few are as modern as if made yesterday. This is suspicious; and we should like to know more regarding the circumstances of the find and of the finders before basing any conclusions upon these fragments.

We now come to surer ground. In the 8th century B.C. a revolution in Chinese writing occurred; a new script appeared. An historiographer named Chou  wrote a book in fifteen sections in what is sometimes called the Great Seal character and sometimes called, after the reputed inventor, the Chou character.

Unfortunately no undoubted examples of the Chou-Seal

character have come down to us from those early times. Six sections of his work were lost by the time of the Han dynasty, and the remaining sections subsequently disappeared.



VII. Recently discovered bone fragments.

There are, however, ten stone drums in the Confucian Temple in Peking inscribed with what are held to be old seal characters. The inscriptions on these drums are

generally believed to be a poetical record of a royal hunt in the time of King Hsüan, who began his reign in 827 B.C. But at least two great scholars 鄭樵 Cheng Ch'iao (A.D. 1108-1162) and 歐陽修 Ou Yang Hsiu (A.D. 1017-1072) dispute their belonging to the Chou dynasty and assign them to the Ch'in, some 600 years later.

But accepting those drums as genuine relics of the 8th century B.C., and as genuine examples of the great seal character, that character has some notable features.

Plate VIII is a facsimile of a rubbing taken from one of those drums, and it will be observed that—

(1) The pictorial element though much subdued is still marked in a good many characters, while in a few it is nearly, if not quite lost.

(2) The inscription is largely composed of pictograms and ideograms, the phonograms being comparatively few.

(3) There is a considerable number of archaic characters now rare or obsolete.

(4) The general style of writing is much more compact and much more like writing than the old pictorial style.

The invention of phonetics, and the simplification of writing effected by the seal character, gave a great impetus to letters. Chinese literature began at this time and so did Chinese history as a verifiable record of events. Within 300 years after the invention of the seal character the Book of History, the Book of Odes, and the old Book of Rites were completed.

Then came the greatest of all China's great men, Confucius (551-478 B.C.), and touched her with his magic wand. The thrill of that touch has been felt through all the centuries since in the literature, in the politics, and in the social life of the nation.

A hundred years later came Mencius, and the immense



VIII. The Great Seal character from the 'Stone Drums'.

progress which the written language had made since the beginning of the Chou dynasty may be seen by comparing his luminous pages with the skeleton-like language of the old text of the Book of Changes written by Wen Wang and Chou Kung seven centuries earlier.

The old seal character continued to be the current script for 600 years, then a further simplification took place. At the beginning of the Ch'in dynasty, Li Sz, the prime minister of the First Emperor, imposed the use of the small seal character upon all. This character is variously said to have been invented by Li Sz himself or by an official called Ch'eng Miao;¹ it is also said to have been the character already in use in the State of Ch'in.

It is a simplified form of the old seal character, and has continued in use down to the present time on official seals, stamps, inscriptions, and other ornamental writing. The oldest dictionary in the Chinese language, the famous 說文解字 *Shuo Wen Chieh Tsz*, which was first published in A. D. 121, was in the small seal character, the explanations being in the 隸 *li* or official character. Plate IX is a photographed page of that old work as it is now printed.

But change was in the air, and a far greater revolution in writing soon followed. The times were troublous, the Emperor was a tyrant, and the prisons were crowded. The business in the law courts was immense, and the records of cases were voluminous. Some shorter method of writing than the seal character was imperative, and out of this necessity grew the famous 隸 *li*, or official character. Some say that this character was invented by a small official named Ch'eng Miao already mentioned, but more probably it grew out of necessity, that fertile mother of many inven-

¹ Preface to the *Shuo Wen*.

熾

部三百
八十六

熾

部三百
八十七

熾

部三百
八十八

熾

部三百
八十九

火

部三百
八十二

炎

部三百
八十三

熾

部三百
八十四

𤇀

部三百
八十五

然

部三百
七十八

𤇀

部三百
七十九

𤇀

部三百
八十

𤇀

部三百
八十一

兔

部三百
七十四

兔

部三百
七十五

𤇀

部三百
七十六

𤇀

部三百
七十七

𤇀

部三百
七十

𤇀

部三百
七十一

𤇀

部三百
七十二

𤇀

部三百
七十三

IX. The Small Seal character.

tions. The author of the *Shuo Wen* dictionary just referred to says it was so, and there is no better authority.

Plate X is a specimen page of that writing. This Official Script, so far as form is concerned, is almost a new character in which the pictorial has largely disappeared. Curves and circles become squares and straight lines. These changes were aided if not necessitated by the introduction during the reign of the First Emperor of the hair brush. Hitherto a knife-pen 刀筆 had been used.¹

This style of writing was a great improvement upon all previous styles and at once became popular. Everybody adopted it, and all books, the Confucian Classics among them, were rewritten in this script. So entirely did it occupy the field that, according to the author of the 說文 *Shuo Wen* dictionary, 300 years after its introduction all others were forgotten, and even scholars regarded it as the original script of China in which all the great classical books had been written, and as the invention of Ts'ang Chieh himself! With slight modifications this li or official hand has continued to be the script of China down to the present time. The Grass hand, or 草書 Ts'ao shu, the Pattern hand, or 楷書 K'ai shu, the Running hand, or 行書 Hsing shu, are only adaptations of that style.

According to the author of the *Shuo Wen*, the grass hand, like the official hand, was the daughter of necessity, and sprang up among the clerks in the law courts of Ch'in, though others say that it was invented later by one Chang Ping. It is a sort of shorthand used in taking notes and making drafts. It is convenient for the scholar who is writing in a hurry, and for the poor ignoramus who does not know whether the next stroke should be a p'ieh, a fu, a t'i, or

¹ 六書故.

序

李子以故乳母周艾氏餘賞若干石印玉璽
 至寶鈔二千部施逆逆遺志也書既成客語
 李子曰子素不信鬼神陰陽之說今是編所
 載如十殿閻羅諸名寒冰烈火刀山血池等
 獄虛無荒誕真可稽候搢紳先生難言之而

a na, in other words, an l or a b, an a or an o, an e or an i, for in the grass hand these distinctions are all obliterated. Many a poor Chinaman has been grateful for the grass hand.

The next change in writing was inaugurated or popularized some five hundred years later, i. e. in the fourth century A. D., by the famous penman, Wang Hsi Chih. It is called the **楷** K'ai, or Pattern hand, and is simply the official hand improved and adapted to the hair brush.

It is the hand in which all official dispatches and other important documents are written. The penmanship of this famous calligrapher was greatly admired, and many grew grey imitating him. One ardent student took the mania badly, bought a cartload of paper, pens, and ink, and retired to a lonely cottage in the mountains to practise writing. Week after week and month after month he toiled at his writing-table. At last the hope grew up within him that he had equalled the great master; so taking a few of his best specimens he called upon him. The famous penman in the largeness of his heart praised the writing and, drawing one of the sheets towards him, gave one of the characters a touch or two with his magic pen and handed the sheet back to the delighted student. Flattered by his reception, he called upon another famous penman and begged to know if any of his characters would compare with the great calligraphist's. After glancing over the sheets he said 'Yes, yes, here is one that may compare with the master's own'. 'Which, which?' asked the delighted student. 'This one,' was the reply. Alas! it was the one the master himself had touched with that magic brush of his.

The Pattern style was followed by the Running hand or Hsing shu, which is merely an easy form used in correspondence and in ordinary writing.

On Plate XI there are specimens of the pattern, running,

and grass hands, as well as of the style next to be mentioned.

The art of printing from blocks may have been known in China as early as the sixth century of our era; but it did not come into general use till the early part of the tenth century. In 923 a complete edition of the Confucian Classics was printed from wooden blocks.

日	日	日	日
月	月	月	月
山	山	山	山
水	水	水	水
鹿	鹿	鹿	鹿
馬	馬	馬	馬
魚	魚	魚	魚
鳥	鳥	鳥	鳥

XI. The Pattern, Running, Grass, and Printing styles.

With the introduction of printing came a slight change of character. The pattern hand suited the brush of the writer, but not the knife of the block-cutter, so the latter introduced the square character commonly called the **宋板** Sung pan, or **宋體** Sung t'i, which has been used ever since in the printing of books, and is the latest, though

it may not be the last stage in the development of Chinese writing.

The story of that development began with the pathetic figure of primitive man devising a system of knotted cords and ends with the all-powerful modern printer throwing off from his blocks volumes of classical literature.

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