Handout III.1

Outline for Unit III: CHINESE

I. Overview of key concepts for understanding independently invented early writing systems

    A. Pictography: picture or grapheme?
        1. Limitations of pictography

    B. Repurposing (or extension) of graphs to achieve a full writing system
        1. Homophonic (= phonetic) extension (the rebus principle)
            a. logogram > logogram
            b. logogram > phonogram (phoneticization = desemanticization)
            c. How can you distinguish (a) from (b)?
        2. Semantic extension (requires iconicity?)
            a. logogram > logogram
        3. Multi-step extension (via conventionalized associations)

    C. Ambiguity of representation (polyvalency = multivalency)

    D. Methods of disambiguation/differentiation
        1. Context
        2. Semantic determinatives (= complements), typically "generic" classifier
        3. Phonetic complements (partial or complete)

    E. a) Motivation for graphemic form ≠ b) method of learning ≠ c) process of reading
        knight vs. *night* ; position of ⊙ 'sun' classifier in 𝄞 *hd*-ḏ 'bright' (handout II.3)

II. Chinese writing: origins and development

    A. Unknowns and unknowables

    B. Oracle-bone inscriptions (dating to about 1250 BCE, Shang dynasty)
        1. Historical context
        2. Status of decipherment

    C. The pictographic (partial) myth of Chinese writing development

    D. Examples of graphic extensions in early Chinese writing
        1. Homophonic extension (rebus principle) (very common)
        2. Semantic extension (there are only a few clear examples)

E. Examples of differentiation in early Chinese writing
      1. Semantic determinatives (= classifiers, complements, taxograms, "radicals" ☹)
      2. Phonetic complements (rare and/or difficult to uncover today)
      3. Graphic modification

F. Reading an oracle-bone inscription

G. Subsequent developments of the script
      1. Abstraction (along with simplification and conventionalization)
      2. Creation of phonetic-semantic compound characters (also recursively)
      3. Standardization vs. variation
      4. Character types (unitary vs. compound; subtypes of each)

H. General characteristics of the script and the language
      1. Unknowns about language and script
      2. Monosyllabicity of spoken morphemes
      3. Morphographic feature of most Chinese characters
      4. Logographic? Morphographic? Morphosyllabographic?
      5. Prevalence of phonetic-semantic structure and phonetic series

III. Chinese writing: modern features and usage

A. How many Chinese characters are there?

B. "Simplified" and "Traditional" scripts

C. Open-ended nature of a logographic script
      1. Creation of new characters
      2. Impact of computerization (especially Unicode)
      3. "Dialect" writing

D. Conservative nature of the script (since about 300 CE)
      1. Sound change and the effect on phonetic components
      2. Meaning change and the "bleaching" of classifiers

E. Multivalency (one graph represents two or more morphemes and/or syllables)

F. Examples of texts

IV. Comparison of Egyptian and Chinese writing systems