

Asian 404



Unit III: Chinese

1: The Early Development of Chinese Writing

Egyptian tags from Abydos tomb U-j



Early Chinese earthenware pot (detail)



Is it writing?



picture or pictogram?

sun or 'sun'?

The invention of writing

Visual representation of
an eye (a picture)



Visual representation of
the word 'eye' (a pictogram)

Limits of pictography

"I am going there soon."

How would you represent the sentence above
using only pictograms?

Of the six morphemes in the sentence, only *go*
seems amenable to pictographic representation.

Early Chinese signs

||| \ 111 7 > X 11
10 || 111 11 11 11
11 11 11 11 11 11
11 11 11 11 11 11



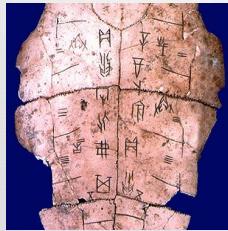
Shang Dynasty (16th to 11th centuries BCE)



Oracle bone inscriptions



Continuity of Chinese writing



晚，当孟泥推开小尚的房门
一张光溜溜的床架，能搬的
“喂”一声，他竟然就搬走了？」
子几百秒。她掏出手机来，打
“该用户并不存在”。她不相
反反复地回荡，一次比一次虚
说：“妹子，他说有一把钥匙
回过神，“你知道他的去向吗？”

Oracle bone fragment



Pictures (archeological) Pictograms (oracle bones)

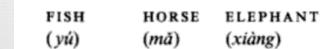
FISH
(yú)



HORSE
(mǎ)



ELEPHANT
(xiàng)



COW
(niú)



Pictographic evolution

	Shang bone script	Zhou bronze script	Warring States script	Seal script	Clerical script (Han)
1. 'child'	子	𡇗	𡇗	𡇗	子
2. 'cloud'	云	𠂔	𠂔	𠂔	雲
3. 'water'	水	水	水	水	水
8. 'fruit'	果	果	果	果	果
9. 'tripod'	鼎	鼎	鼎	鼎	鼎
10. 'deer'	鹿	鹿	鹿	鹿	鹿

Pictographic evolution

TABLE 3.1: The Formation and Evolution of Coneiform Signs

	Ancient Urak ca. 2000	Prae-Sogdian Logos ca. 240	New-Aryanian ca. 700
1. AGA	𠁠	𠁠	𠁠
2. KA	𠁢	𠁢	𠁢
3. GO	𠁤	𠁤	𠁤
4. EML	𠁦	𠁦	𠁦
5. DU	𠁧	𠁧	𠁧
6. UDU	𠁩	𠁩	𠁩
7. AKA	𠁪	𠁪	𠁪
8. GUD	𠁫	𠁫	𠁫
9. GEMLI	𠁬	𠁬	𠁬
10. GI	𠁭	𠁭	𠁭
11. SAR	𠁮	𠁮	𠁮

Phonetic extension

1. 云 {^{*}Gwən > yún 'cloud'} extended to write {^{*}Gwən > yún 'to say'}
2. 网 {^{*}kə > jī 'winnowing basket'} extended to {^{*}gə > qí 'if, perhaps'}
3. 象 {^{*}zang? > xiāng 'elephant'} extended to {^{*}zang? > xiàng 'resemble'}

Semantic extension

1. 月 {^{*}ngwat > yuè 'moon'} extended to write {^{*}s-Gak > xī 'night'}

Semantic determinatives (1)

- Obi forms: 1. 云 2. 云
- Seal script forms: 1. 雲 2. 云
- Modern forms: 1. 雲 2. 云

Semantic determinatives (2)

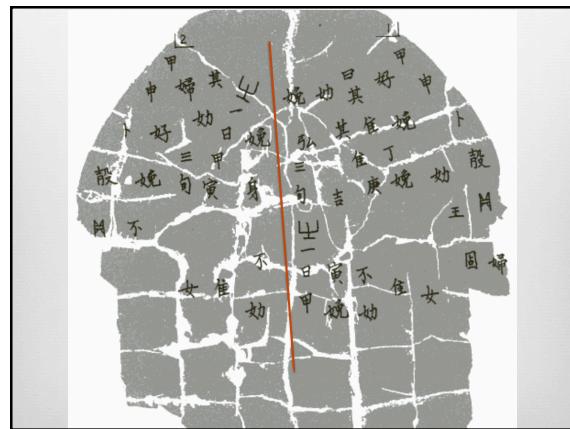
- Obi forms: 1. 网 2. 网
- Seal script forms: 1. 篁 2. 篁
- Modern forms: 1. 篁 2. 其

Semantic determinatives (3)

1. {*zang? > xiàng ‘elephant’}
 2. {*zang? > xiàng ‘resemble’}
- Obi forms: 1. 2.
- Seal script forms: 1. 2.
- Modern forms: 1. 象 2. 像

Graphic differentiation

1. {*ngwat > yuè ‘moon’}
 2. {*s-Gak > xiā ‘night’}
- Obi forms: 1. 2.
- Seal script forms: 1. 2.
- Modern forms: 1. 月 2. 夕



Subsequent developments

1. Ongoing abstraction
 ↗ simplification and conventionalization
2. Proliferation of phonetic-semantic compounds
 ↗ created in one step
3. Variation and standardization
 ↗ two tendencies in conflict

Ongoing abstraction

	Shang bone script	Zhou bronze script	Warring States script	Seal script	Clerical script (Han)
1. ‘child’	子	子	子	子	子
2. ‘cloud’	云	云	云	云	云
3. ‘water’	水	水	水	水	水
8. ‘fruit’	果	果	果	果	果
9. ‘tripod’	鼎	鼎	鼎	鼎	鼎
10. ‘deer’	鹿	鹿	鹿	鹿	鹿

Phonetic-semantic compounds

- ❖ By analogy with compound graphs created through
 1. phonetic extension
 2. differentiation by semantic determinative

new graphs were created as phonetic-semantic compounds in one fell swoop, e.g. *fāng* 芳 ‘fragrant’ from ‘GRASS’ over *fāng* 方 ‘square’ß

Variation

國	纖	蘭	麌	臺	國	國
L38232	L38233	L38234	L38235	L38236	L38237	L38238
國	國	國	國	國	國	國
L38239	L38240	L38241	L38242	L38243	L38244	L38245
𠂇	国	國	國	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
L38246	L38247	L38248	L38249	L27988	L27989	L27990
𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
L27991	L27992	L27993	L27994	L27995	L27996	L27997
𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
L27998	L27999	L28000	L28001	L28002	L28003	L28004
𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
L28005	L28006	L28007	L28008	L28009	L28010	L28011

Chinese character types

- ❖ Unitary graphs
 - ❖ pictograms: *nì* 日 ‘sun’
 - ❖ abstract pictograms: *èr* 二 ‘two’
 - ❖ their phonetic extensions: *qí* 其 ‘if, perhaps’
- ❖ Compound graphs
 - ❖ phonetic-semantic: *yún* 雲 ‘cloud’
 - ❖ semantic-semantic: *hǎo* 好 ‘good’