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AP world culture project

文字的演变

The evolution of Chinese characters

Chinese character classification

《六书》

Traditionally, there are 6 methods
of formation and usage of
Chinese characters.

Pictograph:

"form imitation"
They are used as
radicals or
components to form
many other characters.

象形

phono-semantic
compound:
"form and sound"

形声

指事

Simple Ideograph:
"indication"
convey abstract
meanings by means of
indicators or abstract
symbols.

转注

Derivative Cognate:
"reciprocal meaning"
they have the
same etymology, radical
and/or similar
pronunciations.

Compound Ideographs:

"joined meaning"
express associative
meanings through 2
or more semantic
parts.

会意

phonetic loan:
"borrowing,
making use of"

假借

Oracle bone script

②

甲骨文

is the oldest attested form of written Chinese, dating to the late 2nd millennium BC. Inscriptions were made by carving characters into oracle bones (bones of oxen/the plastrons of turtles)

𩚑 = drink 𩚑 = fish

𦘔 = clothes 𦘔 = autumn

Chinese bronze inscriptions 金文

③

are writing in a variety of Chinese scripts on ritual bronzes such as zhōng bell (钟) and dǒng tripod (鼎) cauldrons from the Shang dynasty to the Zhou dynasty.

果 = fruit

𦵏 = flower

𡩺 = house

𠂔 = old

小篆 small seal script

It was promulgated across China in order to replace script varieties used in other ancient Chinese states.

湖 = lake

窗 = window

隶书 clerical script

④

It evolved from the late Warring States period to the Qin dynasty.
It matured and became dominant in the Han dynasty.

禮 礼 = present 買 买 = buy

楷书 Regular script

The regular script is the newest of the major Chinese scripts styles, emerging during the Three Kingdoms period c. 230CE. It is the most common style used in modern text.

朝 = morning 彩 = colorful

住 = live 贏 = win

草书 cursive script

风 风 = wind

兵 兵 = soldiers

保 保 = protect

地 地 = ground

行书 ⑤

semi-cursive script

the style is used to write Chinese characters and is abbreviated slightly where a character's strokes are permitted to be visibly connected as the writer writes, but not to the extent of the cursive style.

肉 肉 = meat

六 六 = six

The cursive script functions primarily as a kind of shorthand script or calligraphic style and is faster to write than other styles, but a little bit hard to read.