



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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English Oral Presentation

Good afternoon professor!

What I want to share today is to briefly understand the development and changes of some Chinese characters by understanding the structure of pictographs related to eyes.

First of all, from the beginning of the creation of characters, the ancients often drew their fonts according to the shape of a certain type of object, and then imitated their characteristics. For example, for the hand, the ancients would draw the shape of the hand, or the nose, then they would draw a nose, and if they wanted to refer to a certain animal, they would draw the characteristics of that animal. What I'm going to talk about today is mainly focused on the glyph structure related to the eyes. Firstly, we can understand that human eyes are composed of orbits and eyeballs. Since Chinese characters are created on a principle that their characteristics are taken and recorded in abstract expressions, the eye can be drawn into a very simple pattern. This is how the eye is written in inscription on bones or tortoise shells.

In addition, in the evolution of Chinese characters, we will find a very interesting phenomenon. In oracle bone inscriptions, there is not only one way of expressing eyes, for example, there are other types of horizontal and vertical drawings. Then these two ways express different meanings respectively. An expression only refers to the human eyes, and the vertical painting represents the vertical appearance of the human eyes or the potential meaning of submission.

First, let's look at the method of eye expression. In the dictionary, we can see that this word, 目, starts with a simple drawing, and then the lines are more regular. Even from horizontal writing to vertical writing an evolutionary process. We can learn that when the ancients wanted to express the content of the eye, they drew an eye. But with the growth of time, people want to express more and more meanings about eyes. A single word cannot fully express what people want to express, so other words appear.

For example, if the ancients wanted to express seeing something, they would write the word in an abstract and concise way. Below this word is the way a person sits on his knees, and above it is a big eye to highlight his state of looking. As for the other, on the top of the eyes, there is a hairy pattern. We can easily understand that what the ancients wanted to express was the meaning of eyebrows. The evolution of this word in the later period has also become an eyebrow, so we can see a word, when it cannot fully analyse all the meaning of the question from the beginning, this word will derive more and more different types of words to express its more detailed content.

Then let's go back and look at its most primitive eye pattern. From the very beginning, there have been two ways of drawing eyes with the expression of inscriptions on oracle bones. One is horizontal and the other is vertical. We have just described a horizontal word, its expression, and its subsequent evolution. Then let's look at this vertically drawn word again, and understand what changes it has in its later evolution.

This word, 臣, in the ancient dictionary "*Shuo Wen Jie Zi*", was called by Xu Shen as a shape like yielding¹. It is also mentioned in another

¹ Xu Shen 許慎, *Dictionary of Chinese Characters* 《說文解字》 (beijing : Zhong Hua Book Company, 2013) , p.60.

dictionary, "*Zi Yuan*"², that this is an erect eye, which was originally intended to describe prisoners of war, slaves, and then extended its underlying meaning to express respect and obedience. It can be written either to the left or the other way around, all with the same meaning. With the evolution of the character, the pictogram weakened and the line drawing strengthened, and the character gradually became a square glyph.

With the evolution of time, there have been many derivative fonts related to the word "臣". For example, "𡇗". The character "臣" on the left side of the word is originally the shape of an erect eye, which also means a servant. The word "又" on the right side of the word represents the meaning of hand, which symbolizes the hand pierce the servant's eye, which alludes to traction means. Then, on the basis of the creation of the character "𡇗", there is another character "𡇘". As for the word "𡇘", its original meaning still means servant, the lower part of the word, "豆", is only a symbol used to express sound, and has no practical significance.

In addition, on the other hand, the word "臣" does not simply express the meaning of servants. Due to the particularity of the vertical drawing method, other words with different meanings were created during the evolution of the characters. For example, the word "𡇙" symbolizes a person's eyes drooping, which means rest³. In addition, pictographically similar words for "𡇙" include "臨" and "監". These two words in the pictogram mean looking down at things from top to bottom, but the first word "臨" is to look at many objects from top to bottom, purely expressing from above to Looking down means. However, the second character "監" expresses looking at a vessel full of water and looking at one's own reflection in it, so the word "監" was gradually understood as monitoring in the later period.

² Li Xueqin and others 李學勤等, *Zi Yuan* 《字源》 (Tianjin: Guji Publishing House, 2012), p.235.

³ Xu Zhongshu and others 徐中舒等: *The Grand Dictionary of Chinese Characters* 《漢語大字典》 (Sichuan: Changjiang Cishu Publishing House, 2010), p.2993.

Through the research on the structure of pictographs related to the eyes, I found that the creation of Chinese characters is not just a simple picture, but an abstract drawing method, which retains the main characteristics of the message it wants to express. In addition, in the process of the development of Chinese characters, although the characters "目" and "臣" were drawn in imitation of human eyes, due to the different emphases of character expression, in the later evolution and derivation process of characters, the shape of characters and meaning are clearly different. For example, some words related to the word "目" will be related to the more detailed expression of the eye. Whether it is to express the action, demeanor of eye, or more detailed organs of the eye, it will be composed of the word "目". On the other hand, since the word "臣" has already had an abstract meaning from the very beginning when it was created and invented, it means surrender, so when the word evolves in the later stage, the ability to retain abstract information will become more and more strong, and the direction of development will be more and more, often related to the meaning of slavery, lookout or supervision. Although both, "目" and "臣", are drawn from the eyes, in the later evolution, the former is more inclined to figurative expression, while the latter is more inclined to abstract expression. The groups of these two words fully express and interpret human thoughts in the process of derivation, and have good complementarity. This fact indirectly confirms that Chinese characters are a system of gradual improvement and development.

That is all for my presentation today. Any feedback and suggestions will be appreciated. Thank you for your listening.

Bibliography

1. Li Xueqin and others 李學勤等: *Zi Yuan* 《字源》 (Tianjin: Guji Publishing House, 2012) .
2. Xu Shen 許慎: *Dictionary of Chinese Characters* 《說文解字》 (beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 2013) .
3. Xu Zhongshu and others 徐中舒等: *The Grand Dictionary of Chinese Characters* 《漢語大字典》 (Sichuan: Changjiang Cishu Publishing House, 2010) .