



An Introduction to Chinese Philology II

Oct 2025





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



The connections between sounds and meanings of Chinese words manifest primarily in two stages:

(1) Since the creation of language, sounds have been associated with meanings. Before the advent of characters, language (sounds) initially appeared to convey ideas (meanings).

Although the combinations of sounds and meanings might seem random in the origin of language, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that certain sounds were used to depict specific meanings.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



For example, many words for large things are pronounced as *hong*, such as *hóng* 閤 (big gate), *hóng* 宏 (big house), *hóng* 洪 (flood), *hóng* 鴻 (wild swan) and *hóng* 弘 (big bow).

Words with the initial consonant [m-] are often related the sense of blurring and confusion. This can be seen in words such as *miǎo* 渺 (vague), *máng* 茫 (boundless), *miǎo* 邈 (remote), *mèng* 夢 (dream), and *mèi* 寐 (sleep).





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



As language evolved, the combinations of sounds and meanings gradually became fixed and accepted through common usage. As communication became more complex, words began to diversify from their root meanings.

The derived words are often cognates, resembling descendants originating from the same ancestor. Their shared features, reflected in both sounds and meanings, serve as the bond that connects them to each other.

Phonetic compounds with the same phonetic element are often pronounced similarly, they frequently share a common meaning. The words they represent are typically cognates derived from the same root.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.1 The Relationship between the Phonetic Element and the Phonetic Compound

During the process of word differentiation, many characters were derived by adding classifiers to the phonetic element. This method proved to be an effective way of creating new characters.

Many phonetic elements are proto-forms, preserving the sources of the meanings of their derived phonetic compounds.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example:

Qǐ 𠂔 is composed of *hù* 户 (a single-panel door) and *yòu* 又 (hand). It is the original script for the concept of ‘opening’.

Qǐ 𠂔, with *kǒu* 口 (mouth) added, means ‘to instruct or to open’.

Qǐ 𠂔, with *rì* 日 (sun) added, means ‘rain ceasing’.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example:

Zhǐ 止  means ‘foot, toe, stopping, resting, foundation’.



Zhǐ 趾, with the classifier *zú* 足 (foot) added, means ‘toe’.

Zhǐ 址, with the classifier *fù* 阜 (mound) added, means ‘foundation’.

Zhǐ 址, with the classifier *tǔ* 土 (earth) added, means ‘dwelling place’.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Examples:

Tā 它 𧈧 originally denoted ‘serpent’. Since 它 was borrowed to signify the third-person pronoun, the phonetic compound 蛇, with the classifier *huǐ* 虫 (snake) attached on the left side, was created to convey the meaning of ‘snake’.

Zhōu 州 州 originally denoted ‘a land surrounded by water’. Since 州 was later extended to signify *jiǔzhōu* 九州 (the Nine Provinces of China), 洲, with the classifier *shuǐ* 水 (water) added, specifically denotes ‘a place which is habitable in the midst of water’.





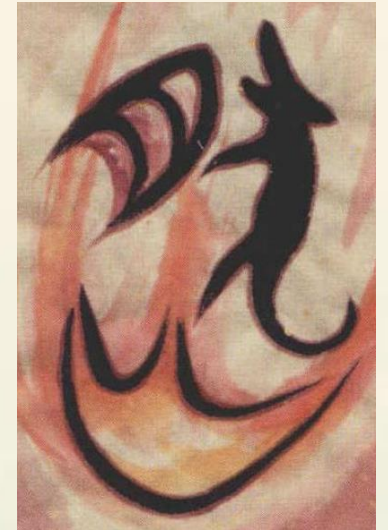
4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Examples:

Rán 然  originally denoted 'to burn'. Since it was later borrowed as a function word, the phonetic compound 燃, with the addition of the classifier *huǒ* 火 (fire), was created to denote the original meaning of 'burning'.

Mò 莫  originally meant 'evening'. Later, it was borrowed to mean 'do not', *mù* 暮, with the classifier *rì* 日 (sun) added, was formed to specifically signify 'evening'.





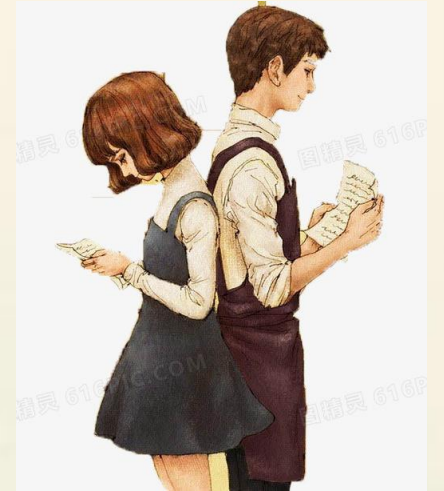
4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Examples:

Běi 北  originally meant ‘back, to reverse’. Since it was later borrowed to represent ‘the north direction’, the phonetic compound *běi* 背, with the classifier *ròu* 肉 (meat) attached, was subsequently formed to signify ‘back, rebelling against’.

Jiě 解  originally denoted ‘to divide’. It is comprised of *dāo* 刀 (knife), *niú* 牛 (ox), and *jiǎo* 角 (horn), denoting ‘to split a horn by a knife’. Its extended meaning is ‘to loosen or to be relaxed’. Later, with the addition of the classifier *xīn* 心 (heart-mind), *xiè* 懈 was formed to convey the extended meaning of ‘being relaxed, loose, idle’.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.2 Some Phonetic Compounds Are Concurrently Associative Compounds

The phonetic elements of some phonetic compounds also convey meaning.

For example: *gān* 甘 (liquorice)

semantic classifier: *cǎo* 艸 (grass);

phonetic element: *gān* 甘 (sweet)



甘 not only denotes the pronunciation but also conveys the meaning of sweetness.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: *ji à* 駕 (to drive a horse)

semantic classifier: *mǎ* 馬 (horse);

phonetic element: *jiā* 加 (to add, attach)



加 not only denotes the sound but also contributes to the meaning of 駕.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: *zhèng* 政 (to govern, politics)

semantic classifier: *pū* 支 (to tap);

phonetic element: *zhèng* 正 (proper, upright)

正 represents both sound and meaning.



Analects: ‘He who stands rightly himself will inspire an action even before he gives the order; he who does not stand rightly himself will not have an order obeyed even when he gives one.’

(《論語·子路》：「其身正，不令而行；其身不正，雖令不從。」)

The Great Learning: ‘To govern a country, one must first regulate the family; to regulate the family, one must first cultivate oneself; to cultivate oneself, one must first rectify the heart.’ (《大學》：「欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先修其身；欲修其身者，先正其心。」)



4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: *cài* 菜 (the edible plants)

semantic classifier: *cǎo* 艸 (grass);

phonetic element: *cǎi* 采 (to pluck)



采 concurrently serves a semantic function in addition to denoting sound.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: *zhu ó* 茁 (sprouts appearing above the ground)

semantic classifier: *cǎo* 艸 (grass);

phonetic element: *chū* 出 (to go out)

Both the sound and meaning of 茁 derive from 出.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: *gǔ* 詁 (to explicate the old words)

semantic classifier: *yán* 言 (speech);

phonetic element: *gǔ* 古 (old, ancient)



The component 古 serves as the phonetic element of 詁. It also fulfils a semantic function.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: *dùn* 遁 (to flee and hide)

semantic classifier: *chū* 走 (to walk);

phonetic element: *dùn* 盾 (shield)

The component 盾 represents both sound and meaning.



The story of ‘the Spear and the Shield’
(*zìxiāng máo dùn* 自相矛盾)





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds

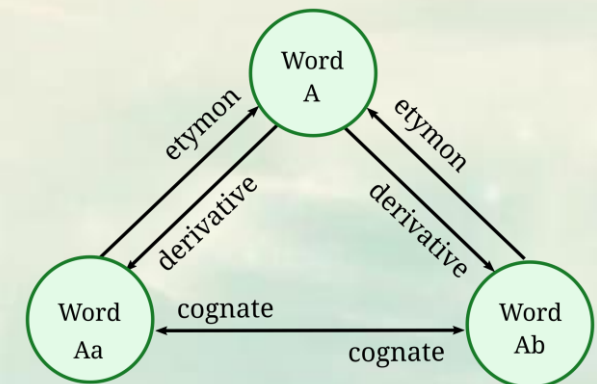


4.3 Characters Sharing a Given Phonetic Element Often Share a Given Meaning

Many characters with the same phonetic element are interconnected in meaning.

We can represent these relationships using ax , bx , cx , and dx , where x represents the shared semanteme—the phonetic element.

X serves as the common gloss or core meaning for this series of phonetic compounds.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



Example: phonetic compounds with the phonetic element 戔.

Form: *jiān* 戔 is composed of two ‘*gē* 戈’ (dagger-axe), indicating that combat between two dagger-axes result in mutual diminishment or injury. Consequently, 戔 represents the concept of diminishing each other, which implies ‘smallness’.



Sound: the sound *jian*, featuring a dental sibilant, reinforcing the association with ‘smallness’.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element

jiān 笺
smallness

qiǎn 浅: shallow

jì àn 贱: cheap

zhàn 栈: shed

jiān 笺: pad





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element

bāo 包
wrapping

pào 泡: bubble



bāo 苞: bud



bāo 胞: foetal membrane



bào 抱: to embrace



páo 袍: gown



báo 雹: hail





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



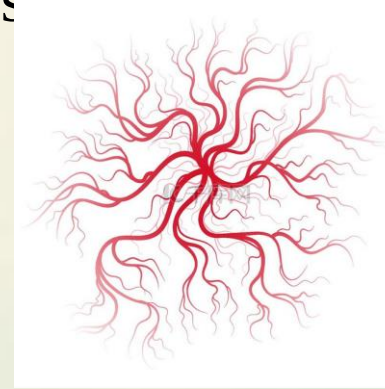
phonetic element

p ài 派
branched

p ài 派: branched water



m ài 脈: branched blood vessels



p ài 紕: separated silk





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element
chuān 川
smoothly flowing

xùn 訓 : to instruct

xùn 馴 : tamed

shùn 順 : to go along with



yīfān fēngshùn 一帆風順 (smooth sailing)
yīqiè shùn lì 一切順利 (everything goes smoothly)





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element
jīng 莖
(straight and long)

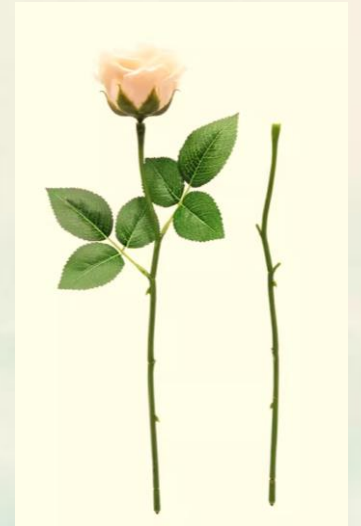
x ñg 陁: mountain gorge

jǐng 頸: neck

j ñg 莖: the stem of plants

j ñg 徑: small path, diameter

jīng 經: warp, to pass through





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



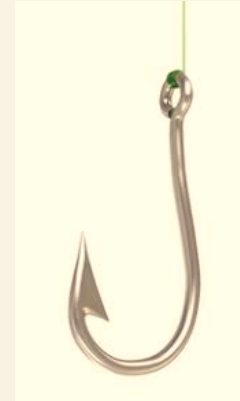
phonetic element

gōu 句
curved

gōu 鉤: hook

gǒu 筍: bent bamboo basket

gōu 佝: hunchback





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element

qīng 青
green

qīng 清: pure



jīng 精: polished rice, fine



qīng 倩: beautiful



qīng 青: red silk

The phonetic element 青 contains the sense of ‘nice or wonderful’





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



The meaning conveyed by the phonetic element is not necessarily related to the character's graphic form but is determined by its sound.

For example, *àn* 暗 (dark, dim, unclear), *àn* 闇 (dark, muddled), and *àn* 黯 (dark, black, gloomy) all of these characters carry the meaning of 'dim or dark', but their shared phonetic component, *yīn* 音 (sound), is not semantically related to 'dim'.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element
chén 辰 (early morning)

shēn 娠: feotal movement

zhèn 震: thunder

zhèn 振: to shake



The phonetic element 辰 contains the sense of ‘movement’





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element
nóng 農 (farming)

nóng 濃: thick dew

nóng 釀: heavy-flavoured wine

nóng 襪: thick clothes

nóng 膿: pus

nóng 穠: thick growth



The phonetic element 農 contains the sense of ‘**thick, dense**’





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element
piāo 票
(blazing fire)

biāo 鏢: point of a knife
biāo 標: tip of a branch
biāo 葉: tip of a blade of grass



The phonetic element 票 contains
the sense of ‘tip or ending’





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



phonetic element

piāo 票
(blazing fire)

piāo 漂: to float, drift

piāo 飄: whirlwind

biāo 標: flying flame

pī ào 慆: rash, frivolous



phonetic element 票 contains
the sense of 'lightness'





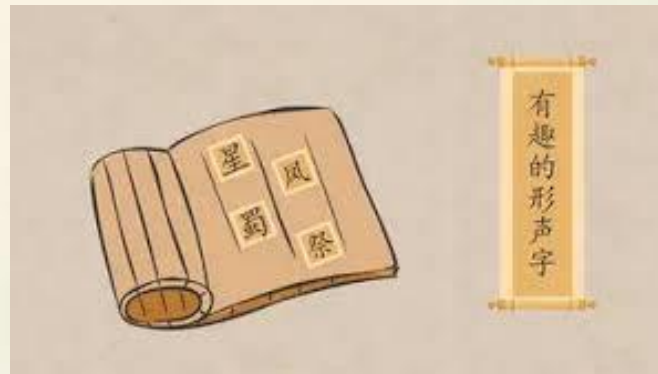
4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



What kinds of phonetic components have semantic functions?

To clarify this issue, one must first trace the origins of such characters and investigate their derivation. This requires uncovering the causes behind the creation of phonetic compounds and examining the development of these characters.

There are three conditions in which phonetic elements convey meanings:





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



(1) Words derive extended meanings from their original meanings. As a result, a single character can have multiple meanings. To distinguish these meanings, additional semantic classifiers are added.

For example, the original meaning of the character *zhǐ* 止 is ‘foot’. Later, it extended to include the meanings of ‘to reside, stop, and prohibit’. As a result, *zhǐ* 趾 came to represent the original meaning of ‘foot’, while 止 was used to mean ‘to stop or prohibit’.

Since the foot is at the lowest part of the body, the bases of walls, the foot of mountains, and foundations were also written as 趾. To differentiate these meanings, semantic classifiers were altered, giving rise to characters like *zhǐ* 址 (foundation) and *zhǐ* 址 (site or location).



4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



(2) In language, some words originally had no corresponding characters. Characters with similar sounds were used as substitutes, a practice known as phonetic borrowing. As a result, a single character have multiple meanings. To clarify their functions, semantic classifiers were added to differentiate meanings.

For example, the original meaning of *mò* 莫  was 'evening'. Later, 莫 was borrowed to serve as a negation word, so the component *rì* 日 (sun) was added to create *mù* 暮 (evening).





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



(3) Due to the evolution of character forms, the meanings expressed by their shapes became ambiguous. To make the character forms more clearly express their meanings, semantic classifiers were added to enhance clarity.

For example,

dài 逮  —— *dài* 逮 (to catch): To grasp the tail with a hand, implying ‘to chase closely’.

gòu 構  —— *gòu* 構 (to build): Represents the appearance of overlapping timber, implying ‘to construct’, or two fish meeting, symbolising ‘connection’.

pài 派  —— *pài* 派 (to distribute): Represents a river branching into tributaries, implying ‘to distribute’.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



These phonetic compounds, which add semantic classifiers to clarify or distinguish meanings, generally retain the original pronunciation of the character. In fact, the original character, often serves as the phonetic component, while the newly added element provides semantic distinction. From the perspective of character evolution, most early phonetic compounds were derived in this way.





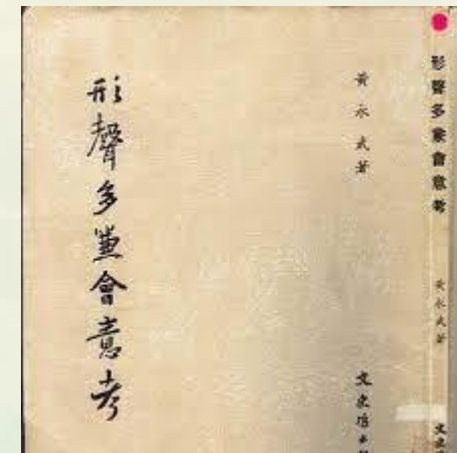
4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4 Exceptions in Which Phonetic Elements Are Not Semantic

The principle that ‘many phonetic compounds are concurrently associative compounds’ suggests that phonetic elements often contribute to the meaning of phonetic compounds. The semantic function of phonetic elements can help address many issues related to word glosses.

However, it is important to note that there are exceptions where phonetic elements are not, or not directly, semantic. The following are examples.





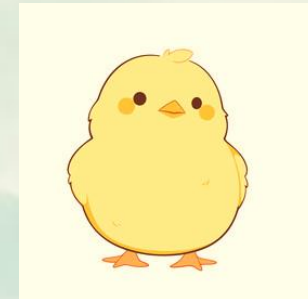
4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.1 Onomatopoeia Words Representing Animal Sounds

For instance, the phonetic compound **é鵞[*ngar]** (goose) is comprised of *niǎo* 鳥 (bird) with *wǒ* 我 (I) as the phonetic. The component **我[*ngarx]** has no semantic function but serves purely as a phonetic element, mimicking the sound of a goose.

The same applies to the phonetic compounds like **jī** 雞 (chicken), **yā** 鴨 (duck), and **jiā** 鴛 (a kind of wild goose), whose phonetic elements do not convey meaning but instead imitate the calls of birds. This type of phonetic compound often denotes bird names and includes *niǎo* 鳥 (bird) as its classifier.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.1 Onomatopoeia Words Representing Animal Sounds

Another category of phonetic compounds also mimics animal sounds. Most of these are used as adverbs and feature *kǒu* 口 (mouth) as their classifier. Their phonetic elements do not convey meaning either.

For instance, the phonetic compound *miāo* 喵 (mewing) is comprised of 口 (mouth) with *miáo* 苗[*mjagw] (sprouts) as the phonetic element, which imitates the sound of a cat mewing. Similarly, phonetic compounds such as *guā* 呱 (croaking) and *yīng* 婴 (twittering) have phonetic elements *guā* 瓜[*kwrag] and *yīng* 婴[*·jing], which imitate the croaking of frogs and the chirping of birds, respectively.





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.2 The Phonetic Compounds Created by Transliteration

Before Buddhism was introduced to China, there were no Chinese words for ‘buddha’ or ‘monk.’ Since the character *fú* 弗 [pjuət] (not) had a pronunciation similar to the Sanskrit word buddha, it was used as the phonetic component in *fó* 佛 [bjuət] (buddha), which was created through transliteration.

The same principle applies to the phonetic compound *sēng* 僧 [səng] (monk), whose phonetic element *céng* 曾 [tsəng] (a sign of the past) has a similar pronunciation to the Sanskrit word sangha (monk). 曾 was used solely to represent the sound of 僧, meaning there is no semantic link between 曾 and 僧.





4.4.2 The Phonetic Compounds Created by Transliteration

In addition, the phonetic compounds for certain chemical elements, such as *lǐ* 鋰, *jiǎ* 鉀, *nà* 鈉, and *měng* 錳, were transliterated from the Latin words lithium, kalium, natrium, and manganese, respectively. The phonetic elements *lǐ* 里, *jiǎ* 甲, *nè* 內, and *mèng* 孟 serve only as phonetic markers.

1 H																	2 He
3 Li	4 Be											5 B	6 C	7 N	8 O	9 F	10 Ne
11 Na	12 Mg											13 Al	14 Si	15 P	16 S	17 Cl	18 Ar
19 K	20 Ca	21 Sc	22 Ti	23 V	24 Cr	25 Mn	26 Fe	27 Co	28 Ni	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br	36 Kr
37 Rb	38 Sr	39 Y	40 Zr	41 Nb	42 Mo	43 Tc	44 Ru	45 Rh	46 Pd	47 Ag	48 Cd	49 In	50 Sn	51 Sb	52 Te	53 I	54 Xe
55 Cs	56 Ba	-71	72 Hf	73 Ta	74 W	75 Re	76 Os	77 Ir	78 Pt	79 Au	80 Hg	81 Tl	82 Pb	83 Bi	84 Po	85 At	86 Rn
87 Fr	88 Ra	-103	89 Rf	90 Db	91 Sg	92 Bh	93 Hs	94 Mt	95 Ds	96 Db	97 Nh	98 Fl	99 Mc	100 Lv	101 Ts	102 Og	

57 La	58 Ce	59 Pr	60 Nd	61 Pm	62 Sm	63 Eu	64 Gd	65 Tb	66 Dy	67 Ho	68 Er	69 Tm	70 Yb	71 Lu
89 Ac	90 Th	91 Pa	92 U	93 Np	94 Pu	95 Am	96 Cm	97 Bk	98 Cf	99 Es	100 Fm	101 Md	102 No	103 Lr

■ Known in antiquity
■ also known when (akw) Lavoisier published his list of elements (1789)
■ akw Mendeleev published his periodic table (1869)
■ akw Deming published his periodic table (1923)
■ akw Seaborg published his periodic table (1945)
■ also known (ak) up to 2000
■ ak to 2012





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.3 Phonetic Borrowing of Phonetic Elements

The phonetic compound *lù* 祿 (good fortune) has no semantic relation with its phonetic element 录 (to carve wood). It could be suggested that *lù* 录 [*luk] is borrowed for *lù* 鹿 [*luk] (deer). In ancient times, deer were often reared as livestock and regarded as human property because they are tame and harmless. Thus, deer symbolised good fortune (祿).



The same applies to the phonetic compound *hù* 禍 (misfortune, disaster), which bears no relation to its phonetic element 𪔐 (jaw). 𪔐 [*khar] is borrowed for *hǔ* 虎 [*hag] (tiger), which was considered dangerous and harmful to both people and livestock. Therefore, 禍 means misfortune and disaster.



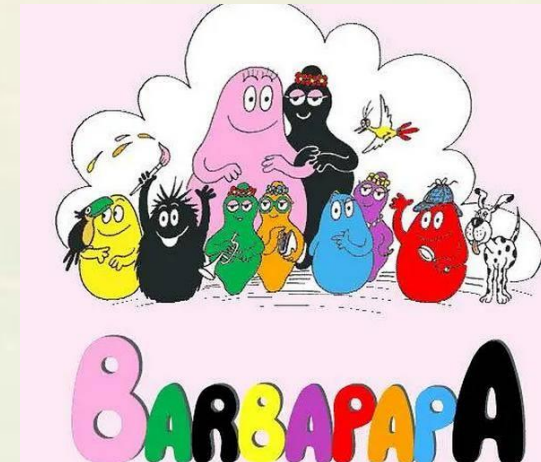


4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.4 Altering One Part of a Graphic Form into the Phonetic Element

During the evolution from ancient scripts to small seal script, some associative compounds were converted into phonetic compounds by altering one part of its graphic form into a phonetic element. In this case, the phonetic element bears no semantic relationship to the phonetic compound.

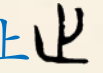




4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.4 Altering One Part of a Graphic Form into the Phonetic Element

For example, the ancient script of the character *bēn* 奔 (running fast) was written as , which originally combined the intentions of *zǒu* 走  (to run, to walk) and *three zhǐ* 止  (foot).

Later, in the small seal script of 奔, the ‘three feet’ indicating ‘running fast’ was altered to ‘*three ch è* 屮  (sprouting)’, which is similar to ‘three feet’ in graphic form.

According to the *Shuowen*, 奔 is comprised of *yāo* 夭 (to bend) with *b* 𠂔 (decoration) as the abbreviated phonetic element. However, the phonetic element 𠂔 bears no semantic relation to the phonetic compound 奔 (running fast).





4. Sound-meaning Relations in Phonetic Compounds



4.4.5 The Phonetic Element Is Later Added

Some phonetic compounds were created by adding a phonetic element to a proto-form. The phonetic element only denotes pronunciation and bears no meaning.

For instance, the oracle bone inscriptions of *fèng* 鳳[*bjəm] (phoenix) and *jī* 雞[*kig] (chicken) are pictographs that resemble each other closely. Their phonetic elements *fán* 凡[*bjam] and *xī* 奚[*gig] were later added to differentiate them.

All the above examples represent cases in the section 4.4 where the phonetic element has no semantic link with the phonetic compound. These cases should be distinguished from the phonetic compounds whose phonetic elements do convey meaning.





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters

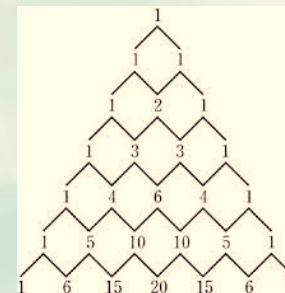


5.1 A Hierarchical Structure of Simplifying Complexity

Chinese characters are structured in layers, with simplicity governing complexity. The vast majority of Chinese characters have a ‘compound structure’, meaning they are formed by combining two or more components.

When broken down into their smallest meaningful writing units, known as ‘single graphs’, there are only about 300 of them.

From these 300 base characters, we can arrange and combine them to create 4,000~5,000 compound characters. These compound characters can then be further combined to form over one hundred thousand polysyllabic words and phrases.





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



di àn

電

lightening

雷

nǎo

腦

brain

腦

di àn nǎo

電

腦

computer





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



lún 侖 𠂔

an associative compound made up of *j* 亼 (gathering)
and *c* 冊 (book)

c 冊 𠂔

an ancient book made of bamboo slips



Since books made of bamboo slips followed the order of
the texts, the character 侖 was extended to denote ‘order’.





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



lún 倫:

the order that people should follow when interacting with one another



lùn: proper and logical words

lúnyǔ 論語 (*Analects*); *tǎolùn* 討論 (to discuss)



5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



The liquid consonant ‘**l**’ requires the rolling of our tongue. Thus, phonetic compounds with 侖 as the phonetic element are also related to ‘**round and circular**’.

lún 輪: wheel;

nián lún 年輪: the concentric rings of trees



lún 淪: ripple





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



lún/ lùn 論

(proper and logical words)

The classifier *yán* 言 (speech) :

tán 談 (to talk)

huà 話 (words)

dú 讀 (to read)

tánlùn 談論 (to talk about)

shuōhuà 說話 (to speak)

dúshū 讀書 (to read books)

tántǔ 談吐 (speech manner)

huà yǔ 話語 (words)

dúshù 讀誦 (to recite)

tántiān 談天 (to chat)

bái huà 白話 (vernacular)

yúèdú 閱讀 (to read)

The phonetic element *lún* 倫 (order, round) :

lún 輪 (wheel), *lún* 淪 (ripple), *lún* 倫 (human relationships), *lùn* 論 (to discuss)

chēlún 車輪 (wheel)

lúnlǐ 倫理 (ethics)

lùnzhèng 論證 (to demonstrate)

lúntāi 輪胎 (tire)

lúncháng 倫常 (moral principles)

lǐlùn 理論 (theory)

niánlún 年輪 (tree rings)

tiānlún 天倫 (familial bonds)

tǎolùn 討論 (to discuss)





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



5.2 Transcending Time and Space

Chinese characters, as a visual symbol system, exhibit a significant degree of independence from time. Regardless of how spoken language evolves over centuries or millennia, the written form of Chinese characters remains relatively stable.

In terms of spatial factors, Chinese characters are also less constrained by geography. Despite the numerous dialects spoken across China, each with varying pronunciations, people can communicate seamlessly through the same written characters.

*'Wepyng and waylyng, care and oother sorwe
I knowe ynogh, on even and a-morwe,'
Quod the Marchant, 'and so doon oother mo
That wedded been.*

—Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*
(14th Century, Middle English)





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



5.3 Easy to Recognise, High Information Density

Chinese characters are highly recognisable due to their intricate and complex strokes. From the perspective of visual recognition, the more complex a character, the easier it is to distinguish.

Additionally, Chinese characters are a form of planar writing that conveys a substantial amount of information. Each monosyllabic character is a compact block containing three integral elements: form, sound, and meaning. This creates a multidimensional ‘plane’ of information within a single character.





5. The Characteristics of Chinese Characters



5.4 A Dual Pathway of Visual and Auditory Recognition

Swedish sinologist Bernhard Karlgren pointed out that Chinese characters are a symbol system that combines visual and auditory recognition. Unlike phonetic scripts, which rely solely on auditory recognition, Chinese characters enable dual-channel cognition.

Approximately 90% of Chinese characters are phonetic compounds, where the semantic component provides visual recognition of the meaning category, while the phonetic component offers auditory recognition of the sound. Therefore, we can grasp the information contained in a character through both pathways simultaneously.





6. Conclusion



Chinese characters are symbols of people's thoughts, behaviours, and communication, evolving alongside cultural changes.

As society advances, civilisation progresses and culture diversifies, all of these are reflected in Chinese characters.





6. Conclusion



Chinese characters carry five thousand years of Chinese culture, transcending the limits of time and space. They enable us to draw wisdom from the classics left by ancient sages for self-cultivation and governance.

Chinese characters are not only carriers of culture; each character is a symbol of wisdom. The philosophies embedded in each character can enhance our self-cultivation, refine our character, illuminate our wisdom, and elevate our spirituality.





7. Topics of Essay



- Chinese characters with a roof component;
- Chinese characters related to plants/sky/clothes;
- Chinese characters related to virtues
- The sound and meaning relations of Chinese characters
- The derivation of Chinese characters





Thanks for your kind attention!

