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Sound and Meaning Spring from the Same Source 聲義同源——Taking the Character *Si* 寺 as an Example

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Date: 11 Nov. 2021

Word count: 2213

(Can you see my PowerPoint slides? Ok, I'll start.)

Provost Shengmiao and Miss Deng good afternoon. My name is Ye Yushi, today I'd like to share with you the topic of 'Sound and Meaning Spring from the Same Source 聲義同源——Taking the Character *Si* 寺 as an Example'. The presentation will be divided into four parts. First is the introduction, then a brief exploration of the character *Si*. Thirdly, we will discuss some phonograms 形聲字 with phonetic symbol 聲符 *Si*. The last part is conclusion.

1. Introduction

In the Qing Dynasty of *Guangxu* twenty-five 光緒二十五年 (1899 AC.), Wang Yirong 王懿榮, a director of the Chinese Imperial Academy 國子監祭酒, bought some traditional Chinese medicine for ill. Then he found some symbols inscribed on oracle bones in *Longgu* 龍骨. So the oracle bones inscriptions 甲骨文 of Shang Dynasty 商 had been recognized.¹

¹ Lin Yin 林尹, *Wenzixue gaishuo* 文字學概說(Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 2007), p.48-49.

The time of those oracle bones inscriptions is from the reigns of King Wu Ding 武丁 (1250 BC. – 1192 BC.) to the Spring and Autumn period , lasting more than 3000 years.²From the oracle bones inscriptions to standard script today, the history of Chinese character does not break off, which is also the unique feature of it.

Chinese character is composed by form, sound and meaning. As Dai Dongyuan 戴東原 said, ‘Character’s form, meaning and sound have close connection with each other’. (字學、故訓、音聲未始相離。)³Duan Yucai 段玉裁 also annotated in *Shouwen jiezi* 說文解字, ‘Meaning leads to sound, and sound leads to form, which is the origin of derivation. Besides, if there is form, the sound will appear. If there are form and sound, the meaning will exist. That is the study of classics.’ (有義而後有聲，有聲而後有形，造字之本也。形在而聲在焉，形聲在而義在焉，六藝之學也。)⁴

Duan Yucai thinks sound comes from meaning, and sound exists with meaning, which is actually the basis of sound and meaning spring from the same source 聲義同源。⁵Today I will share a part of sound and meaning spring from the same source and take character *Si* as an example.

2. A Brief Exploration of the Character *Si*

² Li, Xueqin. The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project: Methodology and Results. *Journal of East Asian Archaeology*. 2002, Vol.4 (1), p.321-333.

³ Lin Yin 林尹, *Xunguxue gaiyao* 訓詁學概要(Xinbei: Zhengzhong shuju, 2013), p.122.

⁴ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.434.

⁵ Lin Yin 林尹, *Xunguxue gaiyao* 訓詁學概要(Xinbei: Zhengzhong shuju, 2013), p.122.

2.1 The meaning of character *Si*

Shuowen said, ‘*Si* means an administrative organization. It is where a place has law and rules. The character composed by *Cun* 寸 and the sound of *Zhi* 之.’(廷也。有法度者也。從寸之聲。)⁶According to *Shuowen*, the original meaning of *Si* is the name of an ancient office that belongs to the administrative institution. For example, *Dali si* 大理寺 in ancient China was an office in charge of sentencing, it is the Supreme Court today.

In the eastern Han dynasty 東漢, emperor Ming of Han 漢明帝 invited eminent monks from the Western regions, Mo Teng 摩騰 (Kāśyapa Mātanga) and Zhu Falan 竺法蘭 (Dharmaratna), to China promoting Buddhism. Mo Teng and Zhu Falan resided temporarily on *Honglu si* 鴻臚寺, an organization where the ancient ceremony and reception were held (today's Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

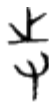
Then emperor Ming of Han built another place for them, named *Baima si* 白馬寺. For commemorating a white horse which carried all the Buddhist sutras to China at that time, naming the place ‘*Baima*’ 白馬 (white horse). Also, to show respect to these guests, the place still named *Si*. Therefore, character *Si* has an extended meaning, a place for monks to live and offer buddhas.

Why does character *Si* have the meaning of a place that has law and rules? Firstly,

let's look the seal script of character *Si*  ⁷. Above it is a character *Zhi* 之.

⁶ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.122.

⁷ All the picture from *Xiaoxue tang zixing yanbian* 小學堂字形演變(2017), <https://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/yanbian>, accessed 6 Nov. 2021.

However, if we look at the bronzes inscriptions 金文  , we will find that above the character is character *Zhi* 止, and below it is a hand. So in ancient script form, characters *Zhi* 之 and *Zhi* 止 are actually the same one.

Besides, character *Zhi* 止 is in the shape of a toe in ancient script form.  (亞 龔 夫止鼎, bronzes inscriptions, Late Shang Period). If a character composed by

two character *Zhi* 止, it means ‘walking’ of character *Bu* 步.  (步 觚, bronzes inscriptions, Late Shang Period) . If only one character *Zhi* 止, it means ‘stop’.

Below *Si* is the character *Cun* 寸  . *Shuowen* said, ‘(*Cun* is a unit of length.) Ten *Fen* 分 is equal to one *Cun*. There is a vital part called *Cunkou* 寸口 which is one *Cun* away from our wrist. The character *Cun* composed by *You* 又 (hand) and *Yi* 一 (one).’ (寸, 十分也。人手卻一寸  動，謂之寸口。从又从一。) ⁸

Today *Cunkou* is where doctors feel the pulse in traditional Chinese medical science.

In China, there is a terms called ‘*Fencun*’ 分寸, which refers to a very small distance. But success or failure often depends on it. *The Great Learning* 大學 said, ‘The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined.’(知止

⁸ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.122.

而後有定。) ⁹ It is very important for us to know how to go in life, where we are supposed to be, and what our duties are.

2.2 The meaning of character *Fa* 法 and *Du* 度

Then we can deep explore the characters *Fa* 法 and *Du* 度. According to *Shuowen*, the origin of character *Fa* 法 is character *Fa* 灋. *Shuowen* said, ‘*Fa* is a law. It means lawsuit settlement should be equal as water, so it composed by water. Animal *Zhi*’s 廌 angle will touch person who do wrong, making them to leave. So the character composed by *Zhi* 廌 and *Qu* 去 (leave)’. (灋, 荆也。平之如水，从水；廌所以觸不直者；去之，从廌去。) ¹⁰ As water always flat, meaning that settling a lawsuit should be equal as water.

Besides, *Zhi* 廌 was an ancient mythical animal, named *Xiezhi* 獬豸. *Zhi* 廌 was fond of living near the river, and it was loyal and steadfast. Because it could distinguish right from wrong. If it saw two people fight or quarrel, it would horn or

bite the wrong one.  (大克鼎, bronzes inscriptions, Late Shang Period)

This is the character *Fa* 法 in bronzes inscriptions, the image of *Zhi* 廌 on the right is vivid.

It is so nice to have *Zhi* helping us to settle the lawsuit. But when we have left the age of myth, there is no such mythical animals, we need law. Law can give people an

⁹ Annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng sishu zhangju jizhu* 新編諸子集成四書章句集註, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p.5.

¹⁰ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.474.

explicit criteria and can let people know when need to stop. So we need an administrative organization to judge right from wrong, that is *Si*.

For the character *Du* 度, *Shouwen* explained it as legal institutions 法制也.¹¹ It means the code of conduct by which we live in society. In ancient China, the system of rites and music 禮樂制度 is the core of social institution based on the system of law. Therefore, *The Great Learning* said,

It would not enact the legal system except the national leader...If someone is in position but he does not have enough virtue, he does not dare to make the system of rites and music. If someone is virtuous but not in position, he does not dare to make the system of rites and music, too. (非天子不制度。……雖有其位，苟無其德，不敢作禮樂焉；雖有其德，苟無其位，亦不敢作禮樂焉。) ¹²

Because only the virtuous and knowledgeable sages could make the suitable and benefit system for the people. So, Confucius also said,

If using government orders to govern people and law to rectify them, they only want to avoid the punishment, but there is no heart of shame. However, if guiding people with morality and assimilating them with rites, they will not only have a sense of shame, but also will be sincerely convinced. (道之以政，齊之以刑，民免而無恥；道之以德，齊之以禮，有恥且格。) ¹³

Therefore, the character *Du* here not only means law, but also refers to our inner criteria and boundaries. *Du* is a principle. When we did immoral things, evens we could not be punished, we might blame ourselves. That is to keep kind and conscience in our hearts. So here *Si* not only means to judge right from wrong, but also means criteria.

¹¹ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.117.

¹² Annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng sishu zhangju jizhu* 新編諸子集成四書章句集註, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p.49.

¹³ Annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng sishu zhangju jizhu* 新編諸子集成四書章句集註, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p.67.

3. The exploration of the phonograms 形聲字 with phonetic symbol 聲符 *Si*

Then we will explore some phonograms with phonetic *Si*, such as *Shi* 時 (time), *Shi* 詩 (poetry), *Shi* 恃 (rely on), *Chi* 持 (hold) and *Dai* 待 (wait). These five characters are alliteration and rhyming 雙聲疊韻 with character *Si* in ancient pronunciation. They have the same alliteration *Ding* 定 and the same rhyme *Zhi* 之.¹⁴ Now let's explore whether they have the connection in meaning with character *Si*.

3.1 The character *Shi* 時 (time) and *Shi* 詩 (poetry)

To begin with, let's look at the seal script of character *Shi* 時 . *Shouwen* said, 'The character *Shi* 時 means four seasons. It composed by character *Ri* 日 (sun) and the sound of character *Si* 寺' (四時也。從日寺聲。)¹⁵ Duan yucai annotated, 'the origin meaning of *Shi* 時 is spring, summer, autumn and winter. Then it extended to the application of year, month, day and time.' (本春夏秋冬之稱，引伸之爲凡歲月日刻之用。)¹⁶

Every year has four seasons, which is the law of nature. For example, sprout in spring, growth in summer, harvest in autumn and hibernation in winter. The ancients

¹⁴ According the system of Chen Xinxiong 陳新雄, Chen Xinxiong 陳新雄, *Shengyun xue* 聲韻學 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2007).

¹⁵ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.305.

¹⁶ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.305.

think that human beings should live according to the laws of nature. In *the Book of Mencius*, ‘The axes for cutting down trees should go into mountains in season, hence the wood will be inexhaustible’. (斧斤以時入山林，材木不可勝用也)¹⁷

Besides, especially in spring, young animals will give birth, hunting in the mountains will be restricted. Then it allows nature to develop sustainably. The heaven and earth go with the law of nature, as human beings we should also live with nature. Such as going to bed on time and not staying up late. Therefore, character *Shi* 時 means the law of nature, which come from the meaning of ‘criteria’ in character *Si*.

For the character *Shi* 詩 (poetry), *shuowen* said, ‘Character *Shi* 詩 means aspirations. It composed by character *Yan* 言 (speech) and the sound of character *Si*.’ (志也。從言寺聲。)¹⁸*Maoshi xu* 毛詩序 said, ‘Poetry is where the aspirations located. Aspiration exists in mind, then expressing in word, which calls “poetry”.’ (詩者，志之所之也。在心爲志。發言爲詩。)¹⁹So we often say that poetry is a mirror of one's emotions. It is the criteria in heart for balancing one's emotion. Because emotion should be in middle way, neither too sad nor too excited.

In addition, we also need to have the rules of *Ping* 平 (even tones) and *Ze* 仄 (uneven tones) when composing poems. Especially for *jinti shi* 近體詩 (Chinese poetry after Tang Dynasty), it has strict rules on the number of sentences and

¹⁷ Annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng sishu zhangju jizhu* 新編諸子集成四書章句集註, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p.208.

¹⁸ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.91.

¹⁹ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.91.

characters, *Ping* and *Ze*, and rhyme. So, poetry also has the meaning of criteria in format. Therefore, character *Shi* 詩 is the criteria of heart and poetry format.

3.2 The character *Shi* 恃 (rely on), *Chi* 持 (hold) and *Dai* 待 (wait)

For the character *Shi* 恃, *shuowen* said, ‘the character *Shi* 恃 means relying on. It composed by character *Xin* 心 (heart) and the sound of *Si*.’ (賴也。從心寺聲。)

²⁰This character related to the meanings of both characters *Fa* and *Du*. When we have somethings to rely on in heart, we will feel at rest. It means we can judge right from wrong, and we have the criteria of justice in mind.

For the character *Chi* 持, *shuowen* said, ‘the character *Chi* 持 means holding. It composed by character *Shou* 手 (hand) and the sound of *Si*.’ (握也。從手寺聲。)

²¹ The origin meaning of it is to hold with hand, which need keep a right force. For example, if we catch a little chick from one cage to another cage. If holding too tight it will be killed, but if holding too loose it will escape. It should have a moderate force, so the character related with criteria.

For the last character *Dai* 待, *shuowen* said, ‘the character *Dai* 待 means waiting. It composed by character *Chi* 彳 (walk) and the sound of *Si*.’ (俟也。從彳寺聲。)

²²The character means waiting, which related with not only the meaning of criteria in character *Si*, but also the meaning of stop in character *Zhi* 止. Because we can realise when to stop and wait with the criteria in mind.

²⁰ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.510.

²¹ By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.602.

²² By Xushen 許慎, Annotation by Duan yucai 段玉裁, *Xintian guyin shuowen jiezi zhu* 新添古音說文解字註 (Taipei: Hongye wenhua chubanshe, 2016), p.77.

There is a story about waiting, at that time Confucius had already left Country Lu 魯國 and led his disciples to travel around other countries. Zi Gong 子貢 asked Confucius, ‘There is a beautiful jade. whether should we store in a wooden box or wait for someone found it and sell to him?’ Confucius said, ‘I will sell it to him, I will sell it to him.’ He repeated the sentence twice. Then Confucius explained that ‘I’m waiting for someone who knows the value of the jade.’ (子貢曰：「有美玉於斯，韞匱而藏諸？求善賈而沽諸？」子曰：「沽之哉！沽之哉！我待賈者也。」)²³

In my opinion, Confucius is a virtuous and knowledgeable sage. What he thinks is only to benefit others and spread sages’ education. Like what he did as *Zhongdu zai* 中都宰 (The governor of *Zhongdu*), making others all follow him after one year.²⁴ Besides, Confucius had a broad mind and no desires for anything. he did not worry for not being know 不患人之不己知’.²⁵ If people did not understand him, he just hide himself to educate students and write books.

Although finally he did not meet the one who really knows the value of jade, his wisdom and spirit have benefit later generations. Therefore, Sima Qian 司馬遷 still saw Confucian students often practice rites in the Confucius Temple in Western Han Dynasty, which moved him a lot and made him linger for a long time.²⁶

²³ Annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng sishu zhangju jizhu* 新編諸子集成四書章句集註, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p.118-119.

²⁴ By Sima qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Ma chiyong 馬持盈, *Shiji jinzhu* 史記今註 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), vol.47, P.1928.

²⁵ Annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng sishu zhangju jizhu* 新編諸子集成四書章句集註, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p.66.

²⁶ By Sima qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Ma chiyong 馬持盈, *Shiji jinzhu* 史記今註 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), vol.47, P.1969.

4. Conclusion

Previous scholars spent their lives learning deeply on philology, phonology, and exegesis. Then they explored the relationship between sound and meaning in character. Most phonograms of same pronunciation have the same meanings, and most phonetic symbols have close meanings. As Duan yucai said, ‘Sound and meaning spring from the same source. So most of the phonetic symbols of phonogram have close meanings.’ (聲與義同原，故諧聲之偏旁多與字義相近。)

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There are lots of phonetic symbols in seventeen ancient sound 古音十七部 of Duan Yucai. Although the example of character *Si* is only one of the examples of it, we can also have a general idea. Therefore, Chinese characters have many phonograms, which not only meets the needs of characters usage, but also plays an important role in giving meaning to character form and sounds.

This is all for my presentation. Any feedback and suggestion would be appreciated. Thank you very much.

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