

Fig. 1: "Shell-and-bone" script, late 2nd millennium B.C.

Fig. 2: Inscription on ceremonial bronze ax, late 2nd millennium B.C.

Fig. 3: Inscription from a bronze "knife coin" from the State of Ch'i, 1st millennium B.C.

Fig. 4 (above): "Seal style" inscription on a roof tile, late 1st millennium B.C.

Fig. 5: Reign name in "clerical style," from tomb brick, dated A.D. 96.

Fig. 6: Portion of inscription in "clerical style" on a rare rubbing of a memorial stone erected to K'ung Chou, lineal descendant of Confucius, dated A.D. 164.

# CAT DOG BOY GIRL

上大人

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MANY American children learn to recite their ABC's by means of the following familiar jingle:

ABCD, EFG	Now I know
HIJK, LMNOP	My ABC's,
QRS, TUV	Tell me what
W, and XYZ	You think of me.

Having mastered the recitation of the alphabet, the youngsters then learn to write the letters, upper case and lower, first in block form and then in cursive form. Next, the individual letters are put together to form simple words such as *cat* and *dog*, and, finally, the words are strung together to make sentences. Through the years the student gradually learns longer and more difficult words such as *pneumonia*, *chalcedony* and *antidisestablishmentarianism* and with these expresses more complex ideas. In this continuing educational process both science and memory play their part: there are principles for forming the letters and for combining them into words. Thus, *c-a-t* becomes *cat* and in this particular sequence symbolizes a feline animal, while *d-o-g* becomes *dog* and calls to mind a different image. Memory, too, is of no small importance, as will be allowed by those of us who still rely on "i before e, except after c."

## Chinese and English

Chinese children, too, must rely upon both science and memory in learning to write, but in both the actual writing

and in the building of vocabulary memory plays a more important role in learning Chinese than it does in learning to write English. This situation in large measure arises from the fact that the principles on which the writing of the two languages is based are very different.

English and Chinese belong to two completely unrelated language families, and, more importantly for present purposes, the writing of the two languages is founded upon totally different concepts. The writing of English, and of Western languages generally, is based upon an alphabet composed of letters, twenty-six in the case of English, that represent the corpus of sounds occurring in the spoken language.<sup>1</sup>

Written Chinese, however, is non-alphabetic and so has no letters that can represent the sounds of the spoken language and spell "words" as we know them. Instead, Chinese is based upon the representation of things and ideas by means of "characters"—pictograms, ideograms, and phonograms whose traceable origins in China go back at least to the middle of the second millennium B.C.


(Continued on next page)

<sup>1</sup> This representation more often than not is both clumsy and inaccurate, thus contributing to problems in spelling. In English, there have been efforts to ameliorate this situation by modifying the alphabet so as to make it conform more closely to the corpus of sounds in the spoken language. The 44-letter Initial Alphabet of Sir James Pitman, which has gained increasing acceptance in England, is an example of such an effort.



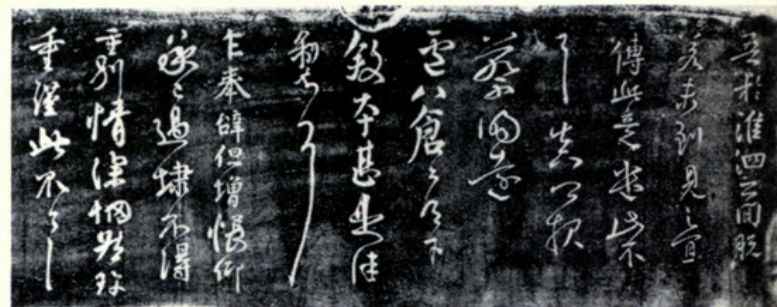
Simply described, without reference to origins and evolution, pictograms represent things, as 日 (*jih*) for *sun* or 月 (*yüeh*) for *moon*; and ideograms represent ideas, as 明 (*ming*), in which *sun* and *moon* are combined to express the idea *bright*. Phonograms, which compose the great majority of Chinese characters, are compound forms, made up of two parts, a meaningful element and a phonetic, or sound-indicating element. Exemplary of phonograms are the following characters, in which the meaningful element differs, but in which the phonetic element is the same. Thus, save for tone

## Form and esthetics

Although the experience lies on the limen of remembrance, most of us either recall learning to write or have relived the learning situation through our children. Most simply described, the process includes mastering the *forms* of letters and their combination in words, and the *esthetics* of writing them. This latter need is more or less happily satisfied by learning to sit and hold the pen properly, by scribing yards of circles  on lined paper to gain control and fluidity, and by imitating perfectly written,

此明拓本也是碑舊本極不易觀數十年間從  
未一見而此間同好中有藏者此本光緒四年四  
清朗特甚即不必有張卯君書籤而可識為數  
年外拓本張君本標數漢夏承碑與鄭谷口筆  
法必出一脈其所藏碑本年代之遠可知矣  
便易尚書見不喜為識之時




右南宋游景仁所藏蘭亭景仁自跋  
云己之二趙侍郎不承以其祖歧簡  
獻王所藏本刻之石今在會稽郡齋  
按宋史宗室世系表太宗派下六世  
不流追封中國公歧簡獻王仲忽孫  
也游侶字景仁南苑人淳祐中為右  
丞相家藏蘭亭凡百種今存於世



Far left: Colophon inscription in "rapid style" by Wang Kuan, dated A.D. 1907.

Left: Portion of a colophon inscription in the "regular style" by Weng Fang-kang, dated A.D. 1791.

Above: Calligraphic model (*fa-t'ieh*) of the "grass style" of Yen Chen-ch'ing (T'ang period, A.D. 618-907).

(i.e., the pitch associated with spoken Chinese words) the following characters all are pronounced *tsu*: 俎 (dish for meat), 徂 (go), 殂 (die), 祖 (ancestor), 租 (rent), 組 (group, organize), 詛 (curse), 阻 (hinder), 齧 (gnaw), 菹 (pickles). This combination of meaningful and phonetic elements very roughly may be compared to an English-language situation in which the several different meanings of *hot* would be written in the following manner:  *hot* (fire-hot),  *hot* (pepper-hot),  *hot* (jazz-hot).

In Chinese, as in English, both science and memory serve as teachers. Science is to be found in the definite principles governing the way in which characters are *built*, by combining meaningful and phonetic elements, and *written*, by using the proper number and order of strokes. Memory also plays its part in these areas and, more particularly, in enlarging the stock of characters necessary for sophisticated communication.

though characterless, models penned in a handwriting manual.

Despite the differences between English and Chinese, much the same teaching pattern has been followed in China. Forms must be learned, largely by rote at the beginning, and esthetics must be satisfied. As in our own system, this process begins in what is called "small school," comparable to our grade school, and continues into "middle school," comparable to our junior and senior high schools. Tots are given what are known as *hung tzu pu*, or "red character models"—sheets of paper on which simple characters are printed in red. Transparent paper is laid atop these models, and the student then traces the underlying characters with Chinese brush-pen and ink. Later, the student dispenses with the *hung tzu pu* and strikes out on his own, imitating calligraphic models set before him. In these initial stages, as in writing English, the teacher at first guides the learner's hand and then, as the student gains confidence and control, allows him to write by himself.

The student begins with characters that are simple in



both form and meaning. As *cat* and *dog* are used in English, similarly certain characters in Chinese traditionally are used for the beginning writer. Some of these are presented singly, as the character 永 (*yung*, "eternal"), which includes the basic types of brush strokes 丶 丿 ㇏ ㇚ ㇛ . Often, a number of simple characters are grouped mnemonically, as shown below, where there are two such sets, the second a longer variant of the first.

上	大	人	上	古	大	人
孔	夫	子	孔	氏	乙	巳
化	三	千	化	及	三	千
七	十	士	七	十	二	士

Broadly translated, these two sets explain that the great man Confucius taught 3,000 (students), among whom there were some seventy scholars. Such a simple set serves two purposes: one, to teach the writing of elementary characters and, two, to inculcate a socially valued concept, in this case the Confucian ethic traditionally followed by the Chinese for more than two thousand years.

Other sets, as the following one, include more complex characters, also arranged mnemonically:

一	去	二	三	里
前	村	四	五	家
高	樓	六	七	座
八	九	十	枝	花

"One (person) went two or three miles;  
Ahead was a village of four or five houses,  
A high building of six or seven stories,  
And eight, nine, or ten branches of blossoms."

Once the initial learning process is over in the early grades, the rest, as with learning any language, is a matter of increasing the vocabulary and improving the esthetic quality of the brushmanship. Here exists one of the major differences between written Chinese and written English: written Chinese still is considered an art, as well as merely a means of communication. In old China, calligraphy was both a medium of communication and a fine art, equal or superior to painting. Scholars devoted years of practice, sometimes many hours a day, to the writing of the character in one or another of the styles that marked Chinese writing in the course of its development.

Organized in two groups, archaic and modern, the major styles are illustrated in Figs. 1-6, and in the exhibit on calligraphy in the Museum's new Chinese gallery. Among the

archaic styles there are (1) the so-called "shell-and-bone script," the earliest known form of Chinese writing, current during the latter part of the second millennium B.C.; and similar forms found on other materials, notably ancient bronzes; (2) the several forms of the "seal style" used in the course of the first millennium B.C.; and (3) the strong "clerical style" characteristic of the Ch'in and Han periods, roughly contemporaneous with the Roman Empire. To these are added the three major styles in common use since the 4th century A.D.: (4) the "rapid style," (5) the "regular style" and (6) the "grass style." It was these major styles, as well as an infinite variety of intermediate and eccentric variants, that were copied and elaborated upon for many hundreds of years, with the variations subject only to the limitations of the creative powers and technical skills of the scholars and artists who conceived them.

In striving for artistry in the writing of their language Chinese students imitated the brushmanship of famous calligraphers of former times. By reason of the long centuries of interest in calligraphy in their civilization, Chinese students could draw upon a wide, wide range of styles represented in models of the hand of one or another of hundreds of eminent calligraphers. Such calligraphic models, or *fa-t'ieh*, still are very common and can be purchased in Chinese stationery shops. The Museum has an extensive collection of *fa-t'ieh*, one of which is represented here by the "grass writing" of Yen Chen-ching. In recent decades two variants of the "regular style," the most common form used today, have been commonly imitated by students: a "thin" variant in the hand of Liu Kung-ch'üan and a "fat" variant in the hand of Yen Chen-ch'ing, both calligraphers of the T'ang period (A.D. 618-907). As has been described, however, the more serious or gifted students might choose one or another of many other styles more pleasing to their esthetic sense or personality.

### The end of old ways

In the West the necessity for learning form continues, but the interest in good penmanship has declined steadily, until now it is all but nonexistent. Once, when the typewriter was new, one apologized for typing rather than writing by hand; now, one apologizes for not using the typewriter. In our society the last refuge of handwriting is its continued use in the writing of social letters—invitations, bread-and-butter notes, and the like—and even in this area penmanship is losing ground. In China, too, a similar trend is apparent. There is a general decline of interest in calligraphy, a decrease in time devoted to the practice of calligraphy in school, a less frequent use of the writing-brush, and a correspondingly greater use of fountain pen and ball-point. Underlying all these changes, the speed of modern life has taken its toll of Chinese calligraphy, with the result that fewer and fewer Chinese either produce or appreciate the fine writing that for so many hundreds of years in China was the mark of the learned and cultivated man. ■





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