



# The Structure of the Chinese Characters: the Current Characters (IV)

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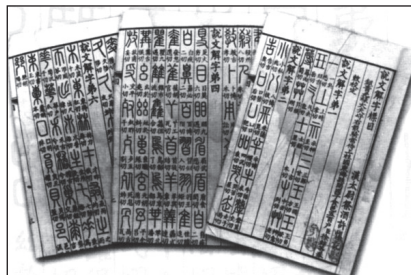
*The Structure of the Chinese Characters: the Current Characters (IV)*

This specific article intends, with a hopeful thought, that one will recollect the article The Structure of the Chinese Characters (III), as the content is determined to be a continuation of my former explanation of the Ancient Characters. The desired purpose is to reveal some useful information on the structure of the Current Characters, therefore bringing certain clarity about this topic as a whole.

Keywords: Current Characters, Phonogram



Learning Chinese Characters is a truly long process, moreover a major obstacle along the path is represented by the retaining in the memory of each stroke of the Chinese Character, consequently one will have to take into account the necessity to comprehend the structure of the Chinese Characters. “The Six Methods”, or as it is known in Chinese “六书”, was the foundation method of creation which was developed by Xu Shen 许慎, thus making important contribution to a better understanding of the Chinese Characters. This particular method had a positive benefit to gain knowledge about the Ancient Characters, but what about the Current Characters?

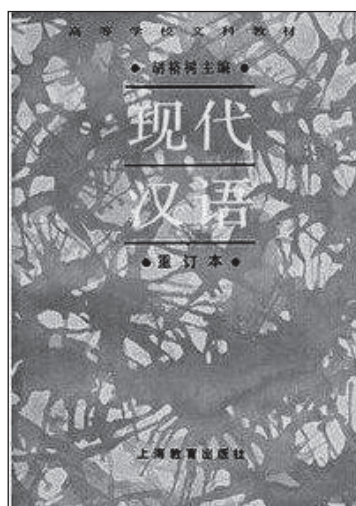


(许慎《说文解字》)

What are the Current Characters? The linguist Xing Fu Yi 邢福义 in the book „The Chinese Characters of Modern Times” 《现代汉字》 provides his personal definition on the meaning of Current Characters “The Current Characters refer to the Chinese Characters that are used nowadays, mainly used with the purpose of writing a modern Chinese symbol system.”

Nevertheless, what seems to be the relation between the Ancient Characters and the Current Characters? In „Modern Chinese” 《现代汉语》 Hu Yu Shu 胡裕树 believes in the fact that a considerably big amount of the Current Characters have developed from the Ancient Characters, though it contains also some new-formed characters. This be said, a remarkable amount of Current Characters as well as the Ancient Characters point out the existence of a continuity, the price not including the scarification of the Ancient Characters. The very difference between them mainly embodies the method of creation.

According to Hu Yu Shu, the most visibly used method of creation for the Current Characters is the Phonogram 形声 -Chinese character that combines the sound and the meaning-, with approximately 90% or



(胡裕树 《现代汉语》)

more of the Current Characters being Phonograms, for this reason the Pictogram 象形 and the Ideogram 指事 methods are no more used. The fourth method, the Combined Ideogram or the 会意法, although is still in use, but is neither as widespread as the Phonogram, nor is does not have created as many Current Characters as the former method.

Hu Yu Shu further explains "The difference between both Ancient and Current Characters lays in the fact that the Ancient Characters use the Pictogram type to combine, whereas the Current Characters use the Regular Script for the combination." "和古文字不同的是，古文字是用象形的字形来会意，现代汉字则用楷书字形来会意。" Obviously, the most adequate example for this theory will be "聾" (pronunciation: dā; meaning: 大耳朵), "余" (pronunciation: dí; meaning: buy up grain). To a better understanding of the method of creation of the Current Characters, Hu Yu Shu makes use of his own imagination, so the definition he came up with is the following: "合形合音合义字". Let us take as an example the character "毓" (pronunciation: qiú; meaning: hydrosulfuryl). In this exceptional situation the foundation of the pronunciation is the product of combining the pronunciation of the following two characters "氢" (pronunciation: qīng; meaning: hydrogen) and "硫" (pronunciation: liú; meaning: sulfur), at the same time what fantastically dumbs us with surprise is the final meaning of the character.



Having "The Six Methods" or in Chinese "六书" as the basis of his theory, Gao Geng Sheng in

his book entitled „Standard Problems in the Current Characters” 《现行汉字规范问题》 originally classified the Current Character creation method into three main categories: The Marked Characters 记号字, The Semi-marked Characters 半记号字 and The Non-marked Characters 非记号字.



(高更生 《现行汉字规范问题》)

In his view, The Marked Characters 记号字 are Chinese Characters which can not be analyzed by the form and structure of the Current Character, nor by the strokes or radicals. According to their inner components, The Marked Characters 记号字 can be divided into two types: Single Marked Characters 独体记号字 and Composed Marked Characters 合体记号字. Between this two types of characters occurs some differences too. The Single Marked Character or the 独体记号字 is composed out of strokes and is divided into four types:

1、From the Ancient Pictogram 从古代象形字变来的，例如：“月” (pronunciation: yuè; meaning: month, moon)

2、From the Ancient Ideogram 从古代指事字变来的，例如：“本” (pronunciation: běn; meaning: this, source, origin)

3、From the Ancient Combined Ideogram 从古代会意字变来的，例如：“及” (pronunciation: jí; meaning: and)

4、From the Ancient Phonogram 从古代形声字变来的，例如：“更” (pronunciation: gèng, gēng; meaning: to change, more, still)

As far as the Combined Marked Characters 合体记号字 regards, it consists out of radicals and is also divided into four types:

1、From the Ancient Pictogram 从古代象形字变来的，例如：“壶” (pronunciation: hú; meaning: pot)

2、From the Ancient Ideogram 从古代指事字变来的，例如：“交” (pronunciation: jiāo; meaning: to



deliver)

3、From the Ancient Combined Ideogram从古代会意字变来的，例如：“兵” (pronunciation: bīng; meaning: military)

From the Ancient Phonogram从古代形声字变来的，例如：“奉” (pronunciation: fèng; meaning: to receive)

The so-called Semi-marked Characters 半记号字 are defined by Gao Geng Sheng as “The Semi-Marked Characters indicate the creation method from which the type and the structure of the Current Characters can be analyzed by the structure of the Chinese Character. On the other hand, if there is no possibility to be analyzed by the structure, then the Chinese character can only be seen as a marked Chinese Character.” In addition, the Semi-marked Characters 半记号字 are Composed Characters 合体字 and are divided into two categories, the Semi-marked Combined Ideogram 会意半记号字 and the Semi-marked Phonogram 形声半记号字. The example Gao Geng Sheng provided is the Chinese Character „暴” (pronunciation: bào, pù; meaning: sudden, violent, cruel ). Having a thorough look over this character, one can observe that the upper part of the character’s structure is “日” (pronunciation: rì; meaning: day, sun), therefore the character is considered to be a 会意半记号字, as for the 形声半记号字 the “布” (pronunciation: bù; meaning: cloth) or “耻” (pronunciation: chǐ; meaning: shame, disgrace) are the best example.



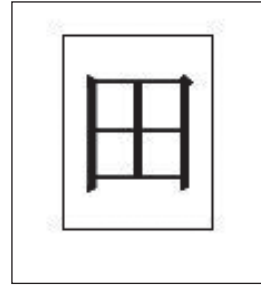
The Non-marked Characters 非记号字 illustrate the Chinese Characters which can be analyzed by the creation method, therefore they are divided into Single-Component Non-marked Characters 独体非记号字 and Composed Non-marked Characters 合体非记号字. The Single-Component Non-marked Characters 独体非记号字 is formed out of strokes, either Phonograms such as „田” (pronunciation: tián; meaning: field) or Ideograms as for instance „一、二、三” (pronunciation: yī, èr, sān; meaning: one, two, three). The Composed Non-marked Characters 合体非记号字 is formed out of radicals and is divided into three categories:

1、会意字，例如：“从” (pronunciation: cōng; meaning: from)

2、形声字，例如：“金” (pronunciation: jīn; meaning: money, metal, gold)

3、合音合义字，例如：“甬” (pronunciation:

béng; meaning: need not)



The distinctiveness in opinion and definition stated by the three presented authors, 邢福义 Xing Fu Yi, 胡裕树 Hu Yu Shu and 高更生 Gao Geng Sheng, serve as the foundation of the present article. Hu Yu Shu and Gao Geng Sheng are of different persuasions, one expressing his strong belief in the influence of “六书” in the Current Characters, additionally classifies the characters according to Single-component and Composed Characters, while the other’s voice reflects a negation towards the former statement, discussing only one method of creation.

Having a brief introduction in the world where the Chinese Characters were created, one should not regard it as a whole new ballgame, neither as a yawning gap between the knowledge had before and after receiving the information, but as a challenge one is invited to compete in.

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