Discussion on the variation of Chinese character forms and the teaching application

Chen Pan[1,a], Gao Song[1,b]

[1]School of International Cultural Exchange, Xinjiang Normal University, Urumqi, Xinjiang, China
[a]papaver621@163.com, [b]1598202613@qq.com

Abstract: The evolution of Chinese character forms is from complexity to simplicity. It is in line with the needs of Chinese language usage. In the process of the development of the Chinese characters, the method of pseudo-borrowing was adopted to write the language. In the national unification of the script, some policies to simplify the Chinese characters were adopted, which is conducive to the use and spread of the Chinese language. However, it also certainly hinders the teaching of the classical Chinese. This thesis combines Mr. Qiu Xigui's Chinese Writing and the actual situation of teaching literary texts in junior high school, and puts forward the "Traceable Character Creation" and "Word Decomposition Teaching Method", which seeks to provide teachers with teaching inspiration and enable students to learn through fun. Contemporary Chinese language teachers need to improve their own cultivation and balance their duties of imparting knowledge and inculcating Chinese culture.

Characters are considered to be written when they have the function of recording language. Prior to that, they are considered to be the initial word pictures and mark words. Until the creation of ideograms and pseudo-characters, it came to the beginning of the formation of characters. Chinese characters are symbols for recording the Chinese language and are one of the oldest characters in the world. They belong to the ideographic script in terms of the glyph, and to the linguistic structure system, they belong to the graphemic-syllabic script. When we use strokes to determine traditional and simple characters, it is necessary to clarify two concepts first: font and glyph. Both of them are the focus of research on the writing of Chinese characters. At present, there are still some controversy in the definition of font and font in this field. For the sake of discussion, the term font refers to the "general style of a group of characters", while the glyph refers to the "characteristics of individual characters within a group of characters".[1] As far as the determination of traditional and simplified characters is concerned, the differences between traditional and simplified characters should be expressed in terms of the external characteristics of individual characters within a Chinese character system or a group of characters.

1. Changes of Chinese Characters in Traditional and Simplified Characters

The evolution of Chinese characters has gone through different stages, such as oracle bone script,

bronze, small seal script, ancient clerical script, Chinese clerical script, semi-cursive script, regular script, etc., and the parallel use of popular forms of characters such as bird-worm inscription, Zhouwen (a style of calligraphy, current in the Zhou Dynasty) and cursive script, etc. Consequently, it can be seen that the morphological structure of Chinese characters is very complex. In terms of symbolic features, characters were divided into three categories: ideograms, phonetic symbols, and marks. The most influential division of Chinese character types belonged to Xu Shen's "Chinese character classification (Six Writings)", i.e., pictographs, self-explanatory characters, ideographs, phono-semantic compounds, derivative cognates, and phonetic loan characters. But later some scholars, based on the limited availability of information at the time of writing, believed that Xu Shen's explanations of the origins of the characters were erroneous and put forward their own opinions. Qiu Xigui put forward the "Three Writings" in the Chinese Writing, i.e., ideographic characters, phonetic characters, and ideogram phonetic characters, but the author himself also explained the limitations of this kind of categorization.

Regarding the classification of Chinese characters, we should understand the viewpoints of various schools, but it is not necessary to have a unified classification. Chinese characters are constantly evolving. In the daily use, they tend to be adjusted in the process of evolution of two kinds of forms, namely, simplified and complicated. In the future, there will be a lot of changes in the forms of characters, and even the emergence of new characters, which will also lead to the introduction of new classification methods. The most suitable naming classification can be adopted as long as it is suitable for the Chinese character forms. When we face different groups of people with different script bases for explanation, we can just adopt the most suitable statement.

In the ancient times, Chinese characters had complicated fonts, complex structures, low legibility, and were not convenient to write. After the evolution, Chinese characters underwent an important transformation of morphology, and the main reason for the simplification of Chinese characters was the convenience and economy. After Cai Lun improved the papermaking method in the middle of the Eastern Han Dynasty, paper became the most important writing material and completely replaced bamboo and wooden slips in the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Therefore, in order to facilitate writing, there was a gradual transition to the form of Chinese characters with beautiful shapes, smooth lines and neat strokes. Contemporary secondary school students' learning of the core qualities of language should be oriented to the improvement of professionalism and cultural literacy. The teaching of "characters" should be scientifically designed so as to not only increase the students' knowledge of Chinese characters and improve their level of using Chinese characters, but also to help the students to build up a solid cultural foundation, so as to boost their awareness of and confidence in Chinese culture.[2]

After the liberation of China's government has done a lot of work to simplify the characters, starting from the implementation of the "Simplification Program of Chinese Characters" in 1956, and then made adjustments to individual characters in 1986. Then the "General Chinese Character List of Modern Chinese" was released in 1988 to include 7,000 characters, and then followed by the promulgation of the "General Standardized Chinese Character List" in 2013, with a total number of simplified characters of 2,546. The main methods of simplification include analogical simplification, homophonic substitution, regularization in cursive script, replacement with simple symbols, retention of features, and formation of new form-sounding or ideographic characters, the most important of which is the phono-semantic compound, which also conforms with the basic glyph characteristics of Chinese characters that belong to the ideographic script. The List of Commonly Used Characters in Modern Chinese contains 3,500 characters, of which 2,500 are commonly used. It can be seen that the simplified Chinese characters had a great impact on the use of Chinese characters in the whole country. As shown in Table 1(1 and 2),after the simplification of the Chinese character "yán1", the simplified character "yán2" has become an ideographic character from the structure of the phono-

semantic compound, so the simplified character is indeed easier to write and learn, but it is not easy to recognize and can only be understood through the hieroglyphic components. If the simplified character is added to the components of the character, it will be far away from the original character. From the point of view of word spreading, if Chinese characters are developed too far away from the sound, it will also be unfavorable for foreigners to learn. On the contrary, the Latin alphabet system has the advantage of phonetics, which can record vowels and consonants. Even if you haven't seen a word before, you can still write the words by listening to the phonetics. However, if Chinese characters are only told the phonetics, you will never be able to write the words. Chinese characters have the advantage of retaining some of the pictographs. Although you don't know the pronunciation, you won't be able to recognize it by adding some parts. Although we don't know the pronunciation, people who don't know Chinese characters may be able to associate the meaning of the character. As the phono-semantic compound is suitable for the development of Chinese, its development is the fastest and the proportion of the Chinese characters is larger.

2. Characteristics of newly created characters

The Chinese character is a system of continuous updating and development. Wang Ning pointed out that "the creation and change of each Chinese character generally passes through three stages: personal use, social passage and authoritative standardization." [3]As shown in Table 1(3), the character "jiǒng" in 2008 began to popularize, and the network use and its wide range prompted it to be included as a single character with independent meaning. In fact, it existed as early as in 543 A.D., in the exegete Gu Yewang made the first regular script dictionary, Words, "Jiǒng, it's bright". However, the use of this character has changed dramatically, from the original radical to the present-day pictograph, as shown in Table 1 (4 and 5), with "bā" thought to resemble eyebrows and eyes, and "kǒu" resembling a mouth. Based on its shape, is used to express "depression and embarrassment". However, Internet buzzwords are like grass in the grassland. After the fashion circle of Internet buzzwords has finished, they are seldom used nowadays. From the perspective of teaching, it is not recommended to use network buzzwords in the process of teaching writing. From the students' point of view, some students will also use them in the text, which will affect the literary value of the article and make the composition more casual and perfunctory. As a result, Chinese language teachers must pay attention to put forward the appropriate requirements and expand their thinking in the teaching of writing, and help the students become inspired and creative.

As the world's science and technology continue to progress and develop, the process of creating characters for new chemical elements will continue. Modern Chinese translators and scientists have adopted the phono-semantic compound method of Chinese character creation to translate the newly discovered chemical elements into Chinese. When creating the characters, the form-sounds are used to reflect the nature of the chemical elements, as shown in Table 1 (6 to 9),such as "jīn", "shí", "shuǐ", "qì", etc., and the sounds are used to be as close as possible to the pronunciation of the international names of the chemical elements. In May 2017, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the State Language Commission, and the National Committee for the Examination and Approval of Scientific and Technical Terms jointly held a press conference in Beijing yesterday to officially release the Chinese names of elements No. 117 and No. 118, as shown in Table 1 (10 and 11),which are sequentially named "shípáng tiān zǐ"and "qìtóu ào zǐ", and are sequentially pronounced "tiān" "ào", which are newly created characters but are not included in the dictionary and are only used in the specialized field of chemistry.

In addition, as shown in Table 1 (12 and 13),"biáo,béng" originated from the Northern China dialect, and were later created as ideographs by means of component synthesis. But we still see very few of them in the formal written language, and they are occasionally used in individual novels,

dramas and other forms of art. Even though we have created some characters, in fact, the commonly used words haven't changed much, and it also conforms to the law of the development of Chinese characters, which makes it easy for the use of Chinese characters in the development of science and technology in China.

3. Inspiration and Application to the Teaching of Chinese Characters

The teaching of Chinese characters includes three aspects: form, sound and meaning of Chinese characters. However, many characters are used in a pseudo way and some Chinese characters are oversimplified. When teaching the meaning of classical Chinese, there will be some obstacles accordingly, especially for the students who have no foundation in literalism. These students will not be able to understand the developmental changes and historical origins of the meanings of some literary characters. Once the traditional characters are given, all the problems have been solved. Yang Bofeng and Nan Xiaomin suggested that in modern language teaching, it is very necessary to study ancient characters to understand the connotation of characters and pass on the culture of characters.[4] In the teaching process, literacy teaching activities can be carried out through simple oracle bones to ensure that students accurately grasp Chinese characters while attracting their attention. For example, the oracle bones of the sun, moon, fish, etc. are relatively graphic and intuitive, so students can accurately understand the meaning of the characters through the form.

In Tao Yuanming's The Peach Blossom Spring, there are two important Chinese characters,as shown in Table 1 (14 and 15),namely "jí1" and "jì1", which students tend to confuse in their learning. In the oracle bone, as shown in Table 1 (16 and 17),"jí1" "jí2" looks like an ancient sat on the ground, and the right side of the character looks like a kneeling figure, indicating that the person is eating, which means "immediately, right away" in the Chinese text; "jì1" "jì2" in the oracle bone script, the vertical "kǒu" at the upper end of the human figure is not toward the food but toward the back, indicating that the food is finished, which means "already" in the Chinese text. The evolution of the character is very conducive to students' learning.

In Liu Zongyuan's The Story of Little Stone Pond, as shown in Table 1 (18),the clause "méng1 luòl yáo zhuìl", which is interpreted as "cover", "entangle", "sway" or "link" and it is very difficult for students to understand. So they can only master it by rote memorization, which is not in line with the original intention of our education. If we look up other etymological works, it is not difficult to understand. As shown in Table 1 (19 to 21),the bone oracle of "méng1" is "méng2", and it's obvious that the head of the hieroglyphic part is the grass; the bone oracle of "luòl" and "zhuìl" are "luò2" "zhuì2" , and the left side of the rope are twisted and tied, and the right side of "zhuìl" are implicated.

As shown in Table 1 (22), another example is "zhī1", a very important and frequent character in the middle school literary language. As shown in Table 1 (23), its oracle bone character is "zhī2", a cross at the bottom of the character represents the place where the person leaves, and the upper part of the character used to be the foot of the person moving forward, indicating that the person goes away from this place. This facilitates students' memorization and exposes them to the knowledge of literalism. Out of students' interest, some of them have begun to write their names in oracle bone script or bronze, and have even taken the initiative to look up the history of the development of the script.

In addition, in the ministry-edited version of secondary school Chinese textbooks, the labeling of some under-class annotations on the pseudo-borrowed words is not clear, especially the interchangeable words, which influences the standard of translation of the classical Chinese. In the teaching process, the fluency and accuracy are both indispensable, but the daily study of the classical Chinese is very difficult because the students' learning time and their ability to memorize are limited. In the study of language cognition, easy learning environment and pleasant mood can effectively

improve the efficiency of students' learning, then how language teachers can make students accept, absorb and use the knowledge of these words easily and pleasantly in the limited time, it becomes the focus and difficulty in the teaching of the Chinese language.

When teaching Chinese characters, teachers can explain the rationale behind the construction of Chinese characters and the reflection of national culture behind the rationale for the relationship between the form and meaning of Chinese characters, which can help students accumulate temporary and specific linguistic meanings through contexts with the help of the inherent, generalized characteristics of the meaning of the words implied by the form of Chinese characters, and enhance the accuracy of language use. Furthermore, by explaining the Chinese characters, they can convey the excellent traditional Chinese culture to students, which is conducive to cultivating students' national pride and cultural self-confidence. The teaching of Chinese characters in both aspects should be based on scientific and systematic explanations of Chinese characters.

4. Summary

In organizing and changing Chinese characters, we should not simplify them as much as possible. What we should do is to recognize and respect the inherent development law of Chinese characters. In the history of the evolution of character forms, it is actually considered a modern trend to move from complexity to simplicity. However, the complexity of forms and the addition of radicals can also make the use of Chinese characters more effective. As characters are the carriers of language and their main function is to serve social communication, we should keep the development of Chinese characters in a balanced way. Although there are many researches in the fields of Chinese philology, rhetoric, grammar and pragmatics, and their history is long, it is worthwhile for us to further delve into how to apply these theoretical knowledge in Chinese teaching. The main task of our current script work is to promote the standardization, normalization and informatization of Chinese characters to meet the needs of the continuous development of society and economy, the growing need for informatization, and the need for Chinese characters and Chinese culture to go global.[5]

References

[1] Sun Jianwei. On fonts and glyphs [J]. Journal of Nanyang Normal College, 2012, 11(04): 57-59.

[2] Yan Yan. Exploring the reform of modern Chinese language program in teacher training colleges under the background of core literacy--Taking the teaching of "characters" as an example [J]. Journal of Jianghan Petroleum University, 2023, 36 (04): 68-70.

[3] Ding Ming. Theory of Traditional and Simplified Chinese Characters [J]. Journal of Anhui University, 2022, 38(06): 88-92.

[4] Yang Bofeng, Nan Xiaomin. Strategies of using ancient characters in high school language teaching [J]. Chinese Journal of Education, 2020, (S2): 74-75.

[5] Yang Xi. Review of Qiu Xigui's "Outline of Characteristics"--Attention to the Evolution of Chinese Character Forms and the Problem of Simplified Characters [J]. Hanzi Culture, 2022, 24: 4-5.

Appendix

Table 1: Table of characters corresponding to pinyin (Chinese romanization).

Column 1	pinyin	Chinese character	Column 2	pinyin	Chinese character
1	yán1	巖	13	béng	甭
2	yán2	岩	14	jí	即
3	jiǒng	囧	15	jì	既

4	bā	八	16	jī2	縊
5	kǒu	口	17	jī2	頸
6	jīn	车	18	méng1 luò1 yáo zhuì1	蒙络摇缀
7	shí	石	19	méng2	蒙
8	shuǐ	氵	20	luò2	络
9	qì	气	21	zhuì2	缀
10	shípáng tián zì	石旁田字	22	zhī1	之
11	qìtóu ào zì	气头奥字	23	zhī2	业
12	biáo	覂			

Comment: The serial numbers in the table are listed in the order in which they appear in the text.