

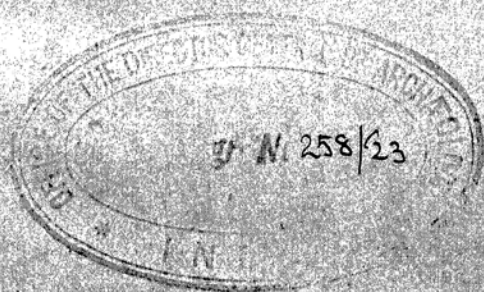
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# Sound & Symbol in Chinese

by

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## NOTES ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF CHINESE

The vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *ü* are pronounced as in German.

*ê* is the 'neutral vowel' of English *about*, German *Knabe*.

*î* is a vowel the value of which may be approximated to by attempting to pronounce *i* (as in *bit*) with the teeth shut close.

The apostrophe, as in *k'u*, marks a strong aspiration, *k-h-u*.

*k'* and *ts'* are both pronounced as *ch* before *i* and *ü*.

*h* and *s* represent the German 'ich-laut' before *i* and *ü*.

*h* before all other vowels the German 'ach-laut'.

*j* is the sonant sibilant of French *jamais*, English *pleasure*.

## CHAPTER I

THE scholar who examines the structure and evolution of human speech finds material of the highest value in every one of the several thousand languages of the world. The phonetic laws and inflexions of a South Sea language or a Negro language may be just as instructive, in the comparative study of linguistic, as the corresponding phenomena in Latin or German. The non-specialist public, on the contrary, attaches a widely varying value to the different languages. On the one hand, a language is considered of more practical importance the larger extension it has, i. e. the greater the number of people who speak it; on the other, a language is appreciated in proportion as it possesses a rich and valuable literature and thus plays a great part in civilization. It is remarkable that Europeans have until recent times paid but scant attention to a language which in both these respects must be said to occupy a very prominent place among the languages of the world, namely, Chinese. Spoken by a larger number of people than any other language, it is at the same time a language having a venerable and extensive literature, a language which has played in eastern Asia a part comparable to that of Latin and Greek in Europe.

An exact figure of the number of people who speak Chinese as their mother tongue cannot be given; the census in China is far less reliable than in Western countries, and the rough estimates of recent years have given very different results. We can therefore only state, in the way of approximation, that Chinese is spoken over an area in

eastern and central Asia that is larger than Europe, and by a population of something between 300 and 400 millions. There are, moreover, considerable Chinese colonies in other parts of the world, especially in the Straits Settlements and in the west of North America. And to this it must be added that it serves as the literary language of Japan, Korea, and Annam.

Not only does Chinese exceed in extent the most widely spoken European languages, such as English, German, French, Russian, Spanish, but it may make good its claim to a position equal with theirs as a civilizing influence. While it is only during the last few hundred years that the Western languages have become the media of an advanced culture, China can produce a literature four thousand years old, a literature which, some centuries before Christ, had reached full maturity, and comprised works of philosophy and of historical research as well as works of a purely literary or aesthetic character.

✓ In putting the age of Chinese literature at four thousand years we are giving an approximate figure only. And here we are brought face to face with the first great problem that has to be considered in the study of the linguistic conditions of China. How far back can we trace the Chinese language? What can be ascertained about its origin and early history? In endeavouring to find an answer to these questions scholars have tried two different methods.

The first of these methods was adopted by certain European scholars in the nineteenth century, who, following the trend of current opinion, supposed that a civilization in most cases is not produced spontaneously, and that it is seldom autochthonous, but is the cumulative result of migrations. They attempted to relate Chinese with certain languages of western Asia, and postulated a migration in the third millennium B. C. through central Asia to the northern

China of to-day. F. von Richthofen, an eminent geographer but no sinologist, speculated upon the routes of the proto-Chinese wanderers, and another scholar, Terrien de Lacouperie, endeavoured to demonstrate that the Chinese originally resided near Babylonia, and that they learned there some variety of cuneiform writing from which Chinese script was ultimately developed.

Now these theories suffer from the disadvantage that they have not been substantiated by valid evidence. None of the attempts to connect Chinese with West-Asiatic languages has as yet been successful. Concerning the affinities of Chinese one fact only has been established, that it forms, together with Siamese and some other languages in Farther India, one branch, the Siamo-Chinese branch, of a great family of languages, the Indo-Chinese family, the other branch of which is the Tibeto-Burman group. But the affinity of even these languages with Chinese is somewhat remote, and hitherto it has been impossible to undertake a serious scientific investigation of the question whether the Indo-Chinese family of languages has any connexion with other families, such as the Altaic (which comprises the Turkish languages and with which are usually coupled Korean and Japanese), the Semitic (Hebrew, Arabic, &c.), the Finno-Ugrian (Finnish, Lappish, Hungarian), or the Indo-European family (which embraces Sanskrit, Greek, the Latin languages, the Slavonic, and the Teutonic languages). Thus the attempts to solve by theories of migration the question of the earliest history of the Chinese language have so far entirely failed.

A more reliable method of approaching the problem is to try to unravel by the light of the literary traditions of China the fortunes of the people and their language in the remote ages of antiquity. That Chinese civilization is of a high antiquity is well known. There is even among



Western peoples a much exaggerated idea of this antiquity, and it is not uncommon to hear it asserted that a highly developed Chinese civilization existed 5,000 or 6,000 years B. C. The Chinese themselves do not put their claims so high. They, like other ancient races, recognize a legendary age of ample dimensions; they date the beginnings of authentic history from the three great emperors Fu-hi<sup>1</sup> (whom they place in the twenty-ninth century B. C.), Shên-nung ('the heavenly husbandman', twenty-eighth century), and Huang-ti ('the yellow emperor', twenty-seventh century). With their names they associate the rise of various cultural elements, such as the art of writing and religious worship. The golden age proper they place still later, under the three great emperors Yao (twenty-fourth century), Shun (twenty-third century), and Yü (about 2,200 B. C.). It is mainly to these that they attribute the creation and development of the Chinese social organization. Thus, according to the tradition of the Chinese themselves, their civilization does not reach back nearly as far as the Egyptian—though it may well equal it in total duration, for Egyptian civilization has been long extinct, while the Chinese of to-day are the true successors and heirs of Yao, Shun, and Yü.

Thus far Chinese tradition. What does modern criticism say to it? Does it confirm or refute the chronology of Chinese authorities?

There are two kinds of materials to which the investigator resorts in order to answer this question, antiquities and literature; but in regard to both of these very grave difficulties confront him.

Most of the highly civilized peoples of the ancient world, such as the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Greeks, have handed down great treasures of antiquities and manuscripts which make it possible for modern scholars to penetrate

<sup>1</sup> For the pronunciation of the Chinese words see p. 4.

deeply into their history. In China, where the people can boast of an incomparable reverence for their ancient history, we have good reason to expect abundant remains of this kind. The greater is our disappointment to find that the material is extremely scanty. This deplorable fact is due to two circumstances.

In the first place, the later epochs of the history of China have been anything but quiet and peaceful. In the long course of centuries dynasty has followed dynasty in motley succession; the struggle for power has been unceasingly bitter, and destruction has followed in its wake. From time to time the country has been overrun by wild nomadic hordes such as Huns, Mongols, and Manchus—these latter as recently as the seventeenth century—all characterized by violent vandalism. During these troublous times ancient works of art in metal have been melted down, libraries have been devastated, and what is left of antiquity is a mere remnant. But it must be remembered that the Chinese have a religious reverence for the grave, which prevents archaeological excavations. The rich treasures that are certainly hidden in the historic soil of old China are consequently still beyond the reach of the explorer.

Among the rare antique objects that have been spared there are not many which give us direct help in fixing more exactly the age of Chinese civilization. A number of bronzes are preserved, but their inscriptions—where these exist—are meagre and unilluminating.

The case was otherwise with the interesting discoveries made some twenty years ago in the province of Honan, a centre of the oldest Chinese civilization. Here were found a great number of bones and tortoise-shells—several thousand pieces, it is said—with ancient inscriptions carved with some sharp instrument. In certain quarters these precious finds were viewed with suspicion. The Chinese

are eager collectors and skilled forgers of antiquities, and it was but natural to expect fraud for commercial ends; and a careful examination showed that the suspicions were not entirely unjustified; a large percentage of the inscriptions were forgeries. It was easily proved that the bones were in fact all ancient, but, while some pieces had characters with sharp clear lines, there were others with little flaws in the edge of the line; it was evident that some enterprising people had found inscribed pieces and had imitated the inscriptions on others, and that the decayed bone had not allowed of carving without giving a broken and blurred line. But genuine specimens were numerous, and there was no difficulty in distinguishing them. Moreover, a mineralogist detected in the grooves of the genuine inscriptions certain crystallizations proving that the pieces had been buried in the soil for a very long time.

Unfortunately, these precious relics were scattered by sale in all directions. But a considerable number found their way into Western collections, and Chinese archaeologists have published facsimiles of a number of others. It appears that these shells and bones were used for purposes of divination in ancient China; they were touched with some red-hot instrument, and the cracks that were thus caused were interpreted according to their resemblance to various characters; on the back of the fragments were inscribed the subject and the date of the inquiry, and the inscriptions that have survived are of this kind.

Sinologues do not agree upon the age of these inscriptions. While some scholars do not consider them to be older than the tenth century B. C., others attribute them to the Shang-Yin dynasty, 1766-1122 B. C. (according to Chinese tradition). The latter view has much in its favour. As we shall see later, the Chinese had an extensive writing practice as early as the beginning of the Chou dynasty (1122-

249 B. C.), and the inscriptions on the Honan finds are of a comparatively primitive kind. It is therefore tolerably certain that—apart from some bronze inscriptions that may possibly be still more ancient—we have in these fragments of bone and tortoise-shell the oldest specimens of Chinese writing now available, probably dating from the second millennium B. C.

While antiquities of the primaeval eras are rare, authentic manuscripts older than the third century B. C. do not exist. This complete annihilation is not due only to revolutions and disturbances in more recent times. The stock of manuscripts was definitively reduced in a particular year of the country's history (213 B. C.), so that old manuscripts from that very date became a rarity. The blow was dealt by one of China's greatest rulers, the emperor Ts'in Shih-huang-ti. Chief of one of the many almost independent fiefs which fought for the hegemony of China in the third century B. C., he succeeded in crushing one rival after another, united the whole country in his strong hand, and put an end for ever to feudalism in China. From the conservative literary class, however, he met with a stubborn resistance, and in their opposition the scholars always brought forward the ancient Chinese method of government as embodied in the classical books of the past. A man of radical measures, the emperor soon found a remedy for this recalcitrancy. He issued an edict ordering a general *burning of books*, which was resolutely carried out. Few were the specimens of the earlier literature that scholars succeeded in hiding, and the stock of old manuscripts was nearly wiped out of existence.

With only a limited number of relics bearing inscriptions and no ancient manuscripts the historian might seem to be seriously handicapped. The position, however, is by no means so hopeless as it appears. The fact is that the book-burning had not the annihilating effect expected by the

despot. Only a few years later he lay in his grave, his dynasty was overturned, and the house which now came into power, the Han dynasty (206 B. C.—220 A. D.), distinguished itself by eager efforts to repair the damage. The little that had escaped the fire was searched out, edited, and annotated, and the scholars, who knew the classical books by heart—a thing quite common down to our day—wrote them down from memory. The old literature acquired a glory of martyrdom which made it extraordinarily popular. Moreover, a rational and thorough philological science grew up in connexion with the work of editing and commenting, with the result that the intellectual life of China received a great impulse from the burning of the books.

The scholars who occupied themselves with the publication of the classical books became inevitably skilled archaeologists and epigraphists; so that we possess from very early times a considerable number of learned works reproducing ancient works of art and the inscriptions which some of them bore. The originals have disappeared in the course of twenty centuries, but Chinese literary tradition has preserved them to this day in faithful copies.

But the question naturally arises, Can modern research trust this second-hand material? Are the texts, that are asserted to be the old classical books, genuine, or are they forgeries of the scholars of the second century B. C.? Are the copies of old bronzes, &c., with quaint archaic inscriptions, faithfully executed, or are they products of the fancy? To this question one can safely give an answer which is very flattering to Chinese scholarship. The old Chinese philologists generally went to work with an accuracy and a scientific method almost equal to that of our modern Western research. In the lively discussions between various schools of interpreters we can discern the reverence and scholarly severity with which they treated the old texts, and generally speaking

—there are, of course, exceptions—we can accept their texts with absolute confidence. The relics of antiquity which are now and then brought to light confirm the reliability of Chinese archaeologists. Thus, for instance, the finds in Honan already mentioned show exactly the same kind of archaic characters which are otherwise known mainly from the copies made by Chinese scholars.

It is now evident that, in order to discover the age of China's civilization and literature, we have to go to the literature preserved by the scholars of the Han epoch. It consists chiefly of the Confucian classics. Confucius—the words K'ung fu-tsi, 'the master K'ung', were latinized in this form by the early Jesuit missionaries—was a statesman and philosopher who flourished about 500 B. C. Appearing in an age of political and social barbarism resulting from the unfettered sway of feudalism, he became ultimately the saviour of Chinese civilization. He collected, sifted, and preserved for posterity the works which embodied the Chinese ethos, works which through his labours have come to be the bible of the Chinese, the *liber librorum* of Chinadom. They include Shī King, the Canon of Odes, a collection of Chinese poetry from the eighteenth century B. C. down to the time of Confucius; Shu King, the Canon of Documents, historical records consisting to a large extent of solemn speeches and moral maxims of ancient emperors; I King, the Canon of Changes, a book of symbolism and mysticism, used for necromancy and regarded as a deposit of the profoundest speculations of philosophy; Li Ki, the Memorial of Rites, the standard of decorum in every department of life; and Ch'un Ts'iu, Spring and Autumn, an extract, revised by Confucius, from the annals of his native state Lu from 722 to 484 B. C. These and other works made up a body of classical literature which has moulded Chinese thought throughout the ages, has become the

theme of, and has coloured most of, the literature of later times, and to this day may be said to be the best exponent of the Chinese mind.

Among the Confucian classics it is to Shu King that we must turn for an answer to the questions about the age of Chinese civilization. It opens with some documents referring to the emperors of the golden age, Yao, Shun, and Yü, placed by the Chinese, as has been stated above, in the twenty-fourth and twenty-third centuries B.C. There is nothing intrinsically impossible in the supposition that these documents are as old as the Chinese assume. We have seen that the bone and tortoise-shell fragments found in Honan show a script which very likely dates from the second millennium B.C. This script is rather primitive, it is true, but it is executed with great elegance and technical skill. There is much in favour of the supposition that there were centuries of more or less elementary writing anterior to these inscriptions, and it is by no means unreasonable to suppose that the oldest Shu King texts were composed many centuries earlier.

A fortunate circumstance, however, enables us to go much farther than this theory of probability. There is an episode in the first of the oldest texts, called 'Yao's calendar', which makes it possible to calculate approximately the age of the text. The passage relates how the emperor ordered certain astronomers to proceed to various stations of observation in the country and to 'observe the heavens, calculate and delineate the movements of the sun, the moon, the stars and the zodiacal spaces; and so respectfully deliver the seasons to the people'. Here follow various astronomical observations concerning the position of certain groups of stars at the solstices and equinoxes, and this information turns out to be of paramount value. There is no difficulty in identifying the constellations in question, and a French astronomer,

L. de Saussure, has established that scientific solstitial astronomy in China and the astronomical text of Yao's calendar originated in the twenty-fourth century B. C., and that three distinct earlier phases of more primitive astronomy can be traced.

Thus, though Chinese traditions give no hint whatever of an immigration from any foreign country, and though there consequently is no external chronological *point d'appui*, we are none the less able to state, from internal evidence, that the Chinese tradition which places the reign of the emperor Yao in the twenty-fourth century B. C. is correct; that the Chinese even in those remote times were skilled astronomers; that they put down in writing and in the Chinese language records of memorable events, and in all probability wrote their accounts soon after the events; in short, that a well-developed Chinese civilization—resting undoubtedly on foundations many centuries old—together with the Chinese language, existed on Chinese soil two thousand years before Christ. We shall therefore have to make a survey, as brief and accurate as possible, of the evolution of the Chinese language extending over a period of some four thousand years.

## CHAPTER II

IF, in order to find our way in the vast domain of the Chinese language, we start with an investigation of the ancient language preserved in the inscriptions and the classical books, we at once realize a fact that must strike everybody who studies Chinese civilization, that in China things are very often diametrically opposite to all that we are accustomed to in the West. The scholar who examines,



for instance, the oldest monuments of Scandinavian language, the runic stones, proceeds first of all to determine the sounds, the phonetic values, of the separate runes; when he has done this, he spells out the words of the inscriptions, and then only is he able, on the basis of phonetic correspondence (based upon certain laws), to identify these words with mediaeval Scandinavian words. It is only in this way, through the old pronunciation, that he arrives at the sense of the words.

✓ In Chinese the procedure is exactly the reverse. There are old characters identifiable with those still used in China. In the course of many centuries their *form* has been considerably changed, it is true, but the *idea* represented is the same. Every one of these stands for a whole word. There is, e.g., the character 日, identical with the modern 日, having the sense of 'sun'; 月 or 𠂇 (old variations of the same character) is the same as the 月 of to-day and means 'moon'. Both are simple pictures of the objects they denote. Through the characters we arrive directly at the *sense* of the word; but, as they do not constitute a phonetic but an ideographic script, they give no hint whatever of the *sounds* that formed the words in ancient Chinese. The knowledge that now, in modern Mandarin, the two words are pronounced, the first *jī*, the second *yü*, is of little avail, for in the lapse of many centuries the pronunciation of the words has changed past recognition. The consequence is that one is able to read off the meaning of the ancient classics, but not their ancient pronunciation. The Chinese of to-day read aloud their ancient literature, giving the words the pronunciation of to-day—a Peking man will read *jī*, *yü* while a Canton man reads *yat*, *üt*—without giving a thought to the old pronunciation, for the most part even without realizing that there ever was any considerable difference in this respect between ancient and modern times.

In the study of other languages the primary task consists in fixing the phonetic value of the ancient characters ; once this is done, the pronunciation can be determined. In Chinese, on the contrary, we have to deal exclusively with characters which are symbols for whole words—symbols the old pronunciation of which is unknown, and which cannot therefore be transcribed as they were read at the time. Consequently in the study of ancient Chinese the study of the script occupies a prominent place. We shall return later to the interesting subject of the constitution of the Chinese script and its history.

The nature of the ideographic writing enables the student to unravel the original signification of the ancient letters. But for the philologist it has the serious disadvantage that it gives no clear indication of the living conditions of the ancient language. Are we then entirely unable to reconstitute this language as it was spoken centuries ago ?

The problem which the philologist has to face here is not without parallel. Western philological science has succeeded in reconstructing, on the basis of a series of cognate languages, the original from which they have all been developed. One of the greatest triumphs of philology is the reconstruction in its essential features of the *primaeval Indo-European* language from which such different languages as Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, and Russian have all taken their rise, and the discovery of the way in which the ramification took place. Since there now exists in China a large number of dialects as divergent as, for example, the North-German and South-German dialects, the philologist's task is here very similar, and it is therefore by no means impossible to draw conclusions from a comparative study of the dialects concerning the Chinese of ancient times.

The evidence of the dialects themselves can be corroborated by evidence of another kind. When the Buddhist

religion was propagated in China in the early centuries of our era, a number of Indian missionaries came to China. The Indians were of old highly skilled philologists, and they taught the Chinese to study their language grammatically. Thus it came about that Chinese scholars began to arrange the phonetic stock of their language: in their dictionaries they brought together words beginning with the same sound and words that rhymed, and they drew up synoptic tables of specimen words, in which groups were formed of phonetically related words (one group containing, e. g., words in *t*-, *t'*-, *d*'-, *n*-, another group words in *p*-, *p'*-, *b'*-, *m*-, &c.). These linguistic works of the old Chinese scholars are of very great value to the modern scholar.

Furthermore, during the last two centuries B. C. and throughout the first thousand years of the Christian era, the Chinese had more or less close relations with various peoples in Central and Western Asia, and our researches are greatly helped by the records of these foreigners concerning China and the Chinese literature with which they came in contact. These aliens transcribed alphabetically to the best of their ability the Chinese words that they heard, and, on the other hand, the Chinese rendered the foreign names—names of peoples, persons, gods, and countries—in their own written characters. These transcriptions give an approximate idea of the old pronunciation of many Chinese characters. Thus, for instance, the name of Buddha was rendered by a character now read *fó* in Mandarin. By comparative dialect study we arrive at the conclusion that this word in ancient Chinese was pronounced *b'juét* (in certain ancient dialects, *b'juéd*), which agrees well enough with the original *Buddha*.

If Chinese intercourse with peoples of alien civilization affords valuable clues to the philologist, the information obtained through the channel of peoples civilized by the

Chinese is still more rich and precious. During the first millennium of our era there was a general introduction of Chinese culture into Korea and Japan, countries which had until then possessed only a primitive civilization. Somewhat later the same thing took place in Annam. With this borrowing of Chinese culture there went a transference on an enormous scale of Chinese words and phrases, and this stock of Chinese loan-words in Korean, Japanese, and Annamese provides invaluable philological data. These loan-words have of course developed on the foreign soil according to the phonetic laws of the alien languages, but these laws can be ascertained, and in many instances a conservative spelling reveals the line of evolution. We have, for instance, reason to believe (from dialect comparison and from ancient Chinese sources) that Mandarin *kie*, Cantonese *kīp*, &c., 'to rob', was anciently *kīäp*, and this is borne out by Sino-Japanese. There the form is *kiō*, but it is spelled in an archaizing fashion *kefu*, and this *kefu* was pronounced, as we can prove, *kepu* (-*u* being a parasitic vowel) at the time of its introduction fifteen hundred years ago. The Japanese evolution was *kepu* > *kefu* > *ke(w)u* > *keu* > *kiō*, and we have in the original Japanese form strong corroboration of our reconstruction of the word.

By such methods European science has been able—although it is only recently that these problems have been seriously tackled—to form a fairly accurate picture of the Chinese language of the sixth century A. D. Concerning older stages, such as the language of the Confucian classics, older by 1000 or 2000 years, little has been so far established for certain. We can have at present only a very vague idea of the sound-system of the oldest Chinese.

We have now to come to close quarters with the language and to discover the characteristics which give it its peculiar constitution. Our attention immediately fixes upon certain

peculiarities common to all the stages of the language with which we are acquainted. These have been summed up under two heads. On the one hand, Chinese is *monosyllabic*, on the other hand, it is *isolating*, i. e. it treats the words as if they were isolated unities, without modifying them according to their function in the sentence. So the German scholar F. N. Finck, in his little book *Die Haupttypen des Sprachbaus* (Leipzig, 1910), in which he gives a concise description of the character of eight languages belonging to different linguistic families, characterizes Chinese thus: 'There are two peculiarities the coexistence of which gives the structure of this language a very curious character. On the one hand, the Chinese words consist, not absolutely always but in the majority of cases, of a single syllable; on the other hand, the relation of these monosyllabic words to the whole sentence is not expressed by any marks in the words themselves, but in the first place by a fixed word-order, and secondly—and in a less important degree—by the addition of words the original concrete sense of which is so far faded that they can be used for formal purposes somewhat like our so-called auxiliaries.'

Let us start by examining this last feature. It is a well-known fact that the Indo-European languages express variations in the meaning of one and the same word by means of various inflexional affixes. If we compare the forms *puella*, *puellae*, *puellam*, *puellā*, *puellas*, *puellarum*, *puellis*, we find that they all possess an element *puell-*, bearing a sense common to them all, but that they differ in having affixes of various forms. Such an affix has, taken by itself, no meaning whatever, but in combination it becomes significant because it indicates the category to which the *puell-* in question belongs. Thus in the form *puellarum* there are no less than three determinations of category: firstly, the *-a-* indicates the category 'feminine gender' (in opposition to *-o-*

in *puerorum*); secondly, the *-rum* indicates the category 'plural number'; and thirdly, this same affix *-arum* conveys the idea of ownership, thus marking the 'possessive case'. In the same way the German form *betest* expresses the categories 'singular number', 'second person', and 'present tense'.

While the Indo-European languages and many other tongues, to a large extent and with great lucidity as a result, make use of such inflexional affixes, Chinese on the whole does without these devices, and thus employs words without modification in the most diverse functions and connexions. The word *jên* means equally 'man', 'man's', 'men', 'men's', and 'the man', 'the man's', 'the men', 'the men's'; the sentence *yu jên tsai mên wai*, lit. 'have man gate outside', may mean 'there is (il y a) a man outside the gate', but it may equally well mean 'there are people outside the gate'. The phrase *jên sin*, 'man heart', corresponds to 'the heart of the man', but also to 'the heart of man' or 'the hearts of (the) men'. There is no sign in the phrase to indicate number (man or men), case (man or man's), the definite or indefinite form (man, a man, or the man). In the same way *lai* is equivalent to the infinitive 'to come' as well as to various forms of that verb, which, in German for example, are inflected: *komme, kommst, kommt, kommen, kommet*. In the sentence *t'a niang tso t'ien ta t'a*, 'he mother yesterday thrash he', i.e. 'his mother thrashed him yesterday', we can see that Chinese has no equivalent of our *-ed* (past tense ending) in the verb any more than it distinguishes the possessive category of 'his' from the objective category of 'him'.

Now, with regard to the other characteristic, monosyllabism, the statement that Chinese words, if not without exception, yet for the most part, consist of one single syllable, must not be misunderstood. In Chinese, as in other languages, we must of course distinguish between

compound words (*composita*) and simple words (*simplicia*). By compounds we mean words consisting of two or more parts each of which can appear by itself (unchanged or with some slight modification) as an independent word. Chinese is very rich in compound words, and these of course may consist of two or more syllables, e. g. *kin-piao*, 'gold-watch', *hi-t'ie-shi* (pull-iron-stone), 'magnet'. But every simple word consists as a rule—there are some exceptions, but of slight importance—of a single syllable. So while English, for example, uses simple words of one, two, or more syllables, e. g. *go*, *club*, *kitchen*, *window*, *anchor*, *writer*, *flogging*, *leanness*, *unbearable*, Chinese does all its work with monosyllabic materials.

Among the English words just cited there are some—*go*, *club*, *kitchen*, *window*, *anchor*—which cannot be analysed into smaller constituent parts. (This statement must be taken from the point of view of modern English: etymologically they can be further analysed, e. g. *kitchen* < Old English *cycene* < Latin *coquina*; *window* < Scandinavian *vind-auga* 'wind-eye'.) These may be called stem-words. The rest can be dissected into various parts, as: *writ-er*, *flog(g)-ing*, *lean-ness*, *un-bear-able*, but they are none the less simple words, not compounds, because parts like *-er*, *-ing*, *-ness*, *un-*, *-able* cannot be used as independent words. Words of this type are derivatives formed by means of the affixes just mentioned, and by cutting them off we may usually arrive at the stem-words (*write*, *flog*, *lean*, *bear*) from which they are derived.

In comparison with the English language, therefore, the monosyllabism of Chinese involves two things. Firstly, all Chinese simple words are stem-words, i. e. Chinese refuses to form new words by means of derivative affixes. Thus, while in English from the verb *shoot* we have a verbal noun *shooting*, the two notions implied are rendered alike by *shē*;

similarly, *transgress* and *transgression* are both *kuo*. Now this in fact is logically much the same phenomenon as the 'isolating' system of Chinese, i. e. its aversion for inflexional affixes (*puellarum*, &c.); for inflexional and derivative affixes from a semasiological point of view serve analogous purposes. The inflexional affixes indicate, as we have seen, various categories (case, number, person, tense). And the derivative affixes have similar functions: *-er*, for instance, indicates the category 'nouns denoting agent' (*nomina agentis*), *writer*, *swindler*, *brewer*, *baker*; *-ness* marks the category 'nouns denoting quality', *leanness*, *ugliness*, *sharpness*, *swiftness*, &c. That all Chinese simple words are stem-words is due to the same tendency which we have considered above when speaking of the isolating nature of the language: Chinese in general does not express categories by means of affixes.

In the second place, Chinese has not, as other languages have, stem-words of more than one syllable. It is true that we in English, after cutting off the various affixes of derivatives, often arrive at monosyllabic stem-words (*flog(g)-ing*, *lean-ness* &c.), but quite as often the stems are disyllabic or polysyllabic. The old Indo-European mother language possessed disyllabic as well as monosyllabic stem-words, and the Finno-Ugrian languages have as a rule disyllabic stem-words. Compared with these two great families of languages Chinese stands in sharp contrast with its system of one-syllable stem-words.

The definition of Chinese as on the one hand isolating, and on the other hand monosyllabic, is based mainly on a comparison with other languages; but, at the same time, its definition as monosyllabic necessitates the consideration of Chinese by itself. There is in this a slight inconsistency in regard to the point of departure, but we shall find, if we keep apart the relative and the absolute description, that



the various characteristics of the relative description may be reduced to a single absolute quality. Thus, from the relative point of view, seen against the background of our European languages, Chinese has three *negative* characteristics.

1. It has not, as certain other languages, disyllabic or polysyllabic stem-words (*kitchen, anchor*).

2. It has no simple words formed with derivative affixes (*writ-er, lean-ness*).

3. It has no words varied by inflexional affixes (*puell-arum*).

These three negative characterizations, the first and second of which, taken together, imply that Chinese has no simple words of more than one syllable, and the second and third of which, taken together, imply that Chinese does not employ affixes to indicate grammatical categories, are in reality equivalent to the following single positive characterization:

From the absolute point of view, considered by itself, Chinese has this special character, that, when we analyse its sentences into the simple words of which they consist (either as independent words or as members of compounds), these words are found to be fixed monosyllables.

Like a set of building-blocks of the same size and pattern, Chinese words are assembled into the structure called a sentence.

This *uniformity*, though it is the most important characteristic of the phases of the language with which we are most familiar, has not always existed. Traces remain of disyllabic stem-words, certain peculiarities in the 'tone' (see chapter III) are vestiges of derivative affixes, and the prose of the latter part of the Chou dynasty (1122-249 B.C.) has been shown to possess case-inflexion in personal pronouns.<sup>1</sup> Just as English has nowadays no inflexional

<sup>1</sup> See article by the author in *Journal asiatique*, 1920.

distinction in nouns between nominative 'the man' and accusative 'the man', but still preserves a trace of an older stage in the pronouns *I*, *me*, *thou*, *thee*, in the same way Chinese had formerly nominative *nguó* 'I', accusative *nga* 'me', nominative *ni<sup>wo</sup>* 'thou', accusative *ni<sup>a</sup>* 'thee'. The old theory which classified Chinese as a 'primitive' language, not yet raised to the inflexional status, is the opposite of the truth. Chinese, in fact, has followed exactly the same line of evolution as the Indo-European languages in the gradual loss of synthetic terminations, with all the stronger appeal to the listener's (or reader's) faculty of purely logical analysis. English is perhaps in this respect the most highly developed Indo-European language; but Chinese has progressed much further.

### CHAPTER III

IF we now proceed to examine how Chinese words, and primarily the simple words, are constituted, we shall find that monosyllabism has produced some very remarkable results. The number of pronounceable syllables is not unlimited. The more words the language created—and it must be remembered that we are dealing with a civilized language which had at an early date a rich vocabulary—the more difficult it became to prevent two or more words from becoming similar, if not absolutely identical, in pronunciation. And this homophony was considerably increased by the fact that Chinese, in the course of its evolution, as far back as it can be traced; has always tended to sound-simplification. To what extent the complication had set in in the earliest stages of Chinese is a question which cannot at present be solved; but as early as A.D. 500 the

language tolerated no more than *one* consonant at the beginning of the word (with the single exception of certain 'affricates': ts, dz, ch, dj—phonemes that can be regarded as *simple* sounds). Thus, words like *pi*, *p'i*, *b'i*, *mi*, *ti*, *t'i*, *d'i*, *tsi*, *ts'i*, *li*, *ngi* (*ng* as in *song*) were possible, but consonant-combinations, as in the English *strong*, *break*, *try*, *flush*, *plan*, did not exist. In the final sounds of the syllables there was a still greater monotony. Just as ancient Greek did not allow other final sounds than a vowel, *n*, *r*, or *s* (with *x*), so every Chinese word (at that period) had to end either in a vowel or in *p*, *t*, *k*, *m*, *n*, or *ng*. Thus, the genius of the language admitted syllables like *ka*, *kat*, *kap*, *kak*, *kan*, *kam*, *kang*, but not syllables like the English *tub*, *if*, *hug*, *sail*, *far*, *as*, *sharp*, *dust*, *short*, *lump*, &c. The extent of the limitation thus imposed is obvious. At this stage, therefore, the language had already reached a state in which many words that had no connexion whatever in meaning or origin had become identical in pronunciation. So, for example, *kau* meant 'high', 'fat', 'cake', and 'lamb', four etymologically different words.

It is true that we find examples of this in other languages as well. In French the two words *vin* and *vain*, which formerly were pronounced differently (and in consequence still differ in spelling), have coincided in the modern pronunciation *vän*. In English *read* and *reed* are now pronounced in the same way, though the spelling points to an earlier difference. Another example is *bear* (noun), *bear* (verb), and *bare*; and in Swedish the syllable *led* represents no less than thirteen historically different words. In European languages instances of this kind are rarely so numerous or so serious as to lead to ambiguity. But in the period of which we are speaking, the number of homophones in Chinese must have become detrimental to the intelligibility of the spoken language.

And it was to become still more so. Since that time the Chinese language has advanced still further along the road of sound-simplification, and the case has been still further complicated by the fact that this simplification has not taken place in the same way in all parts of China. In certain regions the final *-p*, *-t*, *-k* have dropped off, in other regions they are still preserved; some parts have retained the old sonant initials *b'*-, *d'*-, *g'*-; while others have changed them into *p*-, *t*-, *k*- or *p'*-, *t'*-, *k'*-, &c. Thus Chinese has split up into a great number of dialects.

How many different dialects exist in China to-day is still uncertain. So far we possess only some dozens of samples of the language from various parts of this huge country. From these it appears that, while the language in certain regions is fairly homogeneous over large areas, there are other regions where it varies so much that a traveller encounters an almost new language at every two or three miles, and the inhabitants of neighbouring villages are often quite incapable of understanding each other. It is especially along the south coast of China, from the frontier of Indo-China to the mouth of the Yang-tsi river, that this confusion of Babel prevails. In these regions are congregated a large number of the most archaic and most divergent dialects, and the Chinese merchant in South China who cannot master this series of dialects prefers to learn a number of English vocables, which he combines to form sentences after a purely Chinese model. Thus, in the extensive trading districts of the South there has come into existence an Anglo-Chinese lingua franca, known as 'pidgin-English'.

In the large part of China north of the Yang-tsi-kiang and in certain regions immediately to the south of this river the language is much more homogeneous. There certainly are considerable variations, but these are not so serious as to prevent the inhabitants of the various northern

provinces from understanding each other at least after a short term of experience. The language of North China is generally called by Europeans the Mandarin language, or simply Mandarin, an equivalent of the Chinese term *kuan-hua*, 'official language'. The most fashionable variety of Mandarin is that of the capital, Peking, and Europeans generally base their dictionaries upon the dialect of Peking as a kind of 'High Chinese'.<sup>1</sup>

If we now compare modern Mandarin with the language of A. D. 500, we find that the above-mentioned simplification of sounds has left very striking traces. Just as French has dropped most final consonants (though they are still written and occasionally, in combination, pronounced), e. g. *lu* ('loup'), *pa* ('pas'), *pye* ('pied') *yö* ('yeux'), *do<sup>n</sup>* ('dont')—which often involves the confusion of originally different words, e. g. *ku* ('cou', 'coup', and 'cous')—in the same way Mandarin has lost its original *p*, *t*, and *k* at the end of words, and many words have thus become homophonous. The language of the sixth century still distinguished between *ka* 'song', *kap* 'frog', *kat* 'cut', and *kak* 'each', but by the loss of the finals all these words first became *ka*, and then, through the change of *a* into *o*, *ko*, so that *ko* means 'song' as well as 'frog', 'cut', and 'each'. Final *m* was changed into *n*, and thus the ancient *nam* 'south' and *nan* 'difficult' are both *nan*. Further, in the North of China all the old initial voiced stops, *b'*-, *d'*-, *g'*-, &c., have become voiceless, so that the old *tau* 'arrive' and *d'au* 'robber' are levelled in Mandarin *tau*. The vowel elements also have been considerably simplified. The words *li* 'fox', *lie* 'leave', and *liei* 'ceremony' of ancient Chinese are now all pronounced

<sup>1</sup> It may seem improper to regard such different idioms as those of Northern and Southern China as mere dialects and not as different languages. But it is mainly in the evolution of *sounds* that they have diverged so widely; in other grammatical respects they agree so closely that they cannot be called different languages.

*li*, and the ancient *kí<sup>w</sup>o* 'dwell' and *kíu* 'seize' have both given *kii*.

If the Chinese language some five centuries after Christ possessed already an inconvenient number of homophones, it is evident that this further simplification of sounds, radical as it has been shown to be, aggravated the difficulty still more. The modern dialects all have a very meagre stock of vocables, with great numbers of homophones. The Mandarin dialect of Peking is one of the poorest, and, indeed, does not possess more than about 420 different syllables, and, even so, many of these are puzzlingly like one another. We find, e. g., the following nineteen syllables: *chéng*, *ch'êng*, *fêng*, *hêng*, *jêng*, *kêng*, *k'êng*, *lêng*, *mêng*, *nêng*, *pêng*, *p'êng*, *sêng*, *shêng*, *têng*, *t'êng*, *tsêng*, *ts'êng*, *wêng*. It is not surprising, therefore, that a foreigner listening to the talk of a Pekinese gets the impression that he has a vocabulary of a few dozen words which he is continually repeating.

The case is, then, that all the simple words of this highly developed language have to be distributed among these 420 syllables. A small dictionary, including only the very commonest words of the language, gives about 4,200 simple words, which gives an average of *ten* different words for each syllable. But it is not to be expected that the words should be evenly distributed among the syllables; the number of homophones in a series is therefore sometimes smaller, sometimes larger. Of the common 4,200 words there are only two that are pronounced *jün*, but 69 that have the pronunciation *i*, 59 *shǐ*, 29 *ku*, and so forth. But there is a gleam of light in this seeming chaos. The inconvenience of the homophones is considerably alleviated by certain phonetic elements which we have now to consider; these are the musical accents or 'tones'. Musical accent is a phenomenon that existed in the prehistoric Indo-European language, but it has not survived in the majority of

the daughter languages; it is preserved only in Swedish, Norwegian, Serbo-Croatian, and Lithuanian. In Chinese this phenomenon is of great importance. In every Chinese word there is inherent a certain melody, and words otherwise phonetically identical can be distinguished by their different melodies. Just as a Swede at once distinguishes by the melody *giftet* (the marriage) from *giftet* (the poison), the Chinese distinguishes his words by their tones. The Chinese of the sixth century had an even, a rising, a falling, and an abrupt tone, and, as each of these could be pronounced in a high or a low pitch, there were in all eight different melodies. The tone system, like the phonetic system in general, has undergone considerable changes in the course of time, and the modern dialects have a varying number of tones. In Canton, for example, there are no less than nine tones, in the Mandarin of Peking only four:

the even tone, as in an ordinary *yes* of unemotional statement;

the quickly and directly *rising* tone, as in the inquiring *yes* = what do you want?

the slowly and brokenly *rising* tone<sup>∨</sup>, as in a doubtful, hesitating *yes*;

the *falling* tone, as in a triumphant *yes* !! = there you are!

If a Pekinese says *chu*<sup>-</sup>, it means 'pig'; if he says *chu*<sup>!</sup>, it means 'bamboo'; *chu*<sup>∨</sup> is 'master, God', and *chu*<sup>`</sup> is 'to dwell'. It would be clearly disastrous for a foreign missionary to confuse *chu*<sup>-</sup> 'pig' and *chu*<sup>∨</sup> 'God'. Again, *kuei*<sup>`</sup> means 'precious, honourable', and enters frequently into the formulae of polite address; on the other hand *kuei*<sup>∨</sup> means 'devil'. It is obviously of importance to avoid saying *kuei*<sup>∨</sup> *kuo* 'your diabolical country' instead of *kuei*<sup>`</sup> *kuo* 'your honourable country'. Though the existence of these various tones reduces very considerably the number of exact homophones, yet it is evident that they do not

form a perfect remedy. We have mentioned that out of 4,200 words there are 69 having the form *i*. Now, dividing this number by 4, we shall still have about 17 *i*'s to each tone, a number rather too large to be convenient. The words are not, of course, evenly distributed among the four tones; out of the 69 *i*'s Pekinese has 7 in the first tone, 17 in the second, 7 in the third, and no less than 38 in the fourth. Thus *i*<sup>-</sup> in the first tone means 'one', but also 'dress', 'rely on', 'cure'; *i*<sup>'</sup> in the second tone means 'barbarian' as well as 'soap', 'ought', 'intimate', 'doubt', 'move'; *i*<sup>v</sup> in the third tone means 'take', but also 'chair', 'decide', 'ant', 'already'; and *i*<sup>`</sup> in the fourth tone is 'meaning', 'a hundred thousand', 'contemplate', 'bosom', 'different', 'wing', 'city', 'translate', 'post', 'righteousness', 'discuss', 'surplus', 'hang', &c. It is obvious, therefore, that cases like the English *dear* : *deer* and *bear* : *bare*, in which the same phoneme covers several distinct words, are in Chinese, not, as in Western languages, the exception, but the rule.

The question must present itself to the Western mind: How is it in practice possible to use a language having so many homophones? In hearing an *i*<sup>-</sup> pronounced, how can one know whether the speaker means 'dress', 'rely upon', or 'cure'? There is only one answer to such questions: it is absolutely impossible unless the speaker resorts to some special elucidative means. And here we enter upon an extremely important chapter in the history of the Chinese language.

As long as the Chinese still had simple words sufficiently complicated in sound to be distinguished one from another, he could frame his sentences with these simple words and yet make himself understood. But, in proportion as the number of homophones increased, he had to make elucidative additions to the simple words and thus radically reshape



the materials of his language. In this way the spoken language came to be thoroughly changed some centuries after the beginning of the Christian era.

The additions were of various kinds, the commonest and by far the most important of which was the formation of what may be called synonym-compounds. This consists in coupling together two simple words with the same or at least analogous meaning, words that formerly had been used alone. We have already seen that there are no less than 38 common words all pronounced *i̇*. One of these means 'meaning, thought'. Now the hearer, in hearing a single *i̇*, evidently cannot possibly tell whether the speaker intends the word *i̇* = 'meaning' or any of the other 37 words of the series. But there is another syllable *si̇* which means 'meaning, thought' as well as 'this', 'servant', 'private', 'rend', 'control', &c. A single *si̇* therefore is quite as indistinct as a single *i̇*. But now the Chinese puts the two together and says *i̇-si̇*, and indicates thereby that he intends a combination of *i̇* = 'meaning' and *si̇* = 'meaning', and obtains in this way a distinct expression for the idea 'meaning'. Where ancient Chinese managed with a single word, the oldest pronunciation of which we cannot know, but which has become *i̇* in modern Mandarin, the Pekinese of to-day employs the synonym-compound *i̇-si̇*. In the same way *k'an* means not only 'see' but also 'investigate', and *kien* means 'see', 'build', 'strong', 'remonstrate', &c. The combination *k'an-kien* gives a clear expression for the meaning 'see'. This method of elucidative composition is very largely resorted to; thousands of compounds of this type are met with in the modern colloquial, and this device has been introduced even into the Anglo-Chinese pidgin-English: thus 'to see' is 'look-see' in pidgin-English. Undoubtedly these expressions will gradually cease to be felt as compounds; they will be felt as simple words,

and thus the monosyllabic Chinese will develop into a polysyllabic language.

Another category of elucidative compounds is formed by the numerous verbs in which to the simple original verb is added the object logically inherent in it. While the English say I eat, I read, I write, I ride, I walk, I speak, the Chinese say I eat food, I read book, I write characters, I ride horse, I walk path, I speak words, and thus gain a higher degree of lucidity.

While in the above-mentioned kinds of compounds the meaning of the various members is still quite clearly felt by the Chinese, there are other compounds in which the meaning of the second member has lost its colour. There is, for instance, a Mandarin word *t'ou* 'head', which has come to be attached to other words indicating objects having a projecting part, a 'head'. Later on this use has been generalized, *t'ou* becoming a constant suffix to words denoting objects of this kind: *ch'ü-t'ou* (finger-head =) finger, *ku-t'ou* (bone-head =) bone, *man-t'ou* (bread-head =) loaf, &c.

In these compounds the sense of 'head' in *-t'ou* has gradually faded; the syllable has become quite unaccented and is little more than a suffix indicating the category 'object with projecting part'. In the same way the words *êr* and *tsü*, which both mean 'son, child', have been added to other words in order to indicate a 'little one', or 'small specimen' of the thing in question. From *fêng* 'wind' is formed *fêng'r*, or even (contracted) *fêr*, 'light breeze'. Thus *tsü* and *êr* ultimately have become diminutive suffixes. But even this sense has disappeared, and they are nowadays added to words to indicate substantial existence: they are as a rule simply *noun-suffixes*. Instead of *cho* 'table', Mandarin has generally *cho-tsü*.

It is a curious fact that Chinese, which in earlier times, as far as we can ascertain, had no derivative suffixes, has in more

recent times created such suffixes as *t'ou* and *tsi*. And it is interesting to observe that similar suffixes in Western languages have often had an exactly analogous origin. So, for instance, the ancient and mediaeval German had an independent word *heit* 'nature, quality', which became the second member in a compound like *Schönheit* 'beautiful nature'. The independent word then became obsolete, and *-heit* is nowadays a mere suffix in words like *Schönheit*, *Einzelheit*, *Verschiedenheit*, &c. The suffixes formed in modern Chinese are certainly few, and do not as yet invalidate the general statement that Chinese is a suffixless language. But they are of a high symptomatic interest; they show how the sound-simplification discussed above is gradually forcing the language into entirely new lines of evolution, thus bringing it more into accord with the system of our Western languages.

Another kind of elucidative addition of great importance and interest is the so-called 'classifier'. The classifiers precede most nouns when these are determined by numerals or by demonstrative and interrogative pronouns. The syllable *shan*<sup>-</sup> means firstly 'mountain', secondly 'shirt'. In a combination like *i*<sup>-</sup> *shan*<sup>-</sup> (*i*<sup>-</sup> means 'one') it is impossible to know whether one has to translate 'a mountain' or 'a shirt'. There exists, however, a word *tso* that means 'site' and another word *kien* which means 'article of dress', and by means of these the Chinese surmount the difficulty. 'A mountain' they express by *i tso shan* 'one site mountain'; and for 'a shirt' they say *i kien shan* 'one article shirt'. In the same way we have *san tso shan* 'three (sites) mountains', *che tso shan* 'this (site) mountain', *na*<sup>v</sup> *so shan* 'which (site) mountain', and *san kien shan* 'three (articles) shirts', *che kien shan* 'this (article) shirt', *na*<sup>v</sup> *kien shan* 'which (article) shirt'. As is shown by these examples, the function of the classifier is to give the hearer a clue to the

nature of the following word, to inform him in advance of the category to which it belongs, so that he shall be able the more readily to distinguish it from its homophones.

In the choice of such classifiers the Chinese are ingeniously inventive. The word *k'ou* 'mouth' serves for objects with a mouth or a round opening, for instance, 'one mouth well, one mouth pot, one mouth pig, one mouth man'. *T'iao* 'branch' is the classifier for long objects: 'one branch street, one branch rope, one branch leg, one branch snake, one branch dog (sic!), one branch bench.' *Tso* 'site' is used not only for mountains but, for instance, in 'one site city, one site temple, one site hotel, one site pawnshop', &c. There are, moreover, *chan* 'cup', in 'one cup lamp, one cup goblet'; *wei* 'throne', in 'one throne gentleman, one throne mandarin, one throne excellency'; *kuan* 'tube', in 'one tube pencil, one tube flute'. Finally, we may mention *kua* 'suspend, hanging-thing', for instance, in 'one hanging-thing coin (in China the brass coins are put on strings), one hanging-thing curtain, one hanging-thing necklace, one hanging-thing beard'; and *ting* 'top', as in 'one top mountain, one top hat, one top sedan chair' (these latter are in China adorned with a knob). And if no other classifier offers itself, there is always available the word *ko* 'piece', which certainly is not very significant, but which at any rate can suggest that the following word denotes a concrete object: *i ko jen* (pidgin-English *one piece man*), 'one person, a man'.

In the state of things that arose when the word-stock of spoken language, because of the sound-simplification and its result, the multiplication of homophones, was radically changed, the peculiar nature of the Chinese script—a symbolic and not phonetic writing—brought about a remarkable situation. If the Chinese had possessed an alphabetic script like ourselves, all these simple words, all the *is* and *chi's* and *kus*, &c., would have been quite as

indistinguishable in writing as in speech. But the script distinguished to the eye what was homophonous to the ear. Out of the 38 words  $\hat{i}$  (in the falling tone) there is not a single one that cannot be perfectly distinguished from all the rest, because every single  $\hat{i}$  has its own character indicating the meaning of the word without reference in any way to the pronunciation (or the subsequent changes in the pronunciation) of the word. While in speech the simple  $\hat{i}$  for 'meaning' came to be inadequate and was necessarily amplified into  $\hat{i}$  - $\hat{s}\hat{i}$ -, as has been shown above, it was sufficient in writing to give the character for  $\hat{i}$  alone, as this was a satisfactory and distinct symbol for the idea 'meaning'. Thus, while the spoken language had to reshape its word-material, the written language did not need to modify the old stock of simple words. And as this conservatism entailed no loss of lucidity but rather a gain in brevity and distinctness, it was natural that the Chinese should not adopt in writing the new colloquial style;—the more so as all the old literature, from the Confucian classics down to the flourishing learned literature of the Han dynasty, was written entirely in the old, short, and concise style, and so had a venerable tradition in its favour. As a matter of course he considered the old austere language written by the great ancients, and still quite efficient and clear to him when *written*, as *elegant* and *literary* in contrast to the colloquial, a *vulgar* language unworthy of being written down. So, whenever he expressed himself in writing, he continued to employ the former, and in this way there arose in China a distinction between a *literary* and a *colloquial* language.

It is difficult to state exactly the epoch when this distinction began to show itself. The divergence has, of course, been gradual, but not many centuries after Christ the difference was no doubt established. Towards the end of the first

thousand years A.D. there arose a dramatic literature, in which we find a language which is closely akin to the modern colloquial. Later a novel literature grew up in an idiom of a 'Mandarin' type. It is characteristic of the Chinese disdain for the colloquial language that the Chinese scholar in his works on literature and bibliography passes over in silence all dramatic and novelistic literature. Novels are called *siao shuo* 'small narratives'. Even to-day a learned Chinese is very reluctant to use the colloquial language in writing. The most casual letters and jottings are all written in the literary style. Some modern newspapers have tried to introduce *pai hua* 'white language', i. e. vulgar style, colloquial, at least in one or two columns, but with no great success; many subscribers would be offended by the insinuation that they cannot understand the literary columns!

The consequences of this cleavage are very singular. While there is any number of different colloquial idioms in China, the whole population possesses in its old literary style a common book language, a written esperanto, a knowledge of which has great practical value. Not only are the Chinese able, thanks to this excellent medium, to keep in contact with each other in spite of all the various dialects—so that, for instance, a paper printed in Peking is just as easily read in Canton—they are also capable of communicating intimately with the Chinese of past ages in a way that we can hardly realize. The literary language has been an artificial thing for a thousand years and more, and for all its stylistic variations it has been essentially the same throughout the ages. Once a Chinese has succeeded in mastering it, it is the same to him, from the point of view of the language, whether the poem he is reading was written at the time of Christ, a thousand years later, or yesterday; it is just as comprehensible and enjoyable in either case. In other countries, where the written language follows the evolution

of the spoken, a practically new literary language has been evolved in the course of a few hundred years. An ordinary Englishman of to-day can hardly go farther back than three or four centuries in his own literature; the earliest periods he can only appreciate after special philological study. To the Chinese the literature of millenniums is open; his unrivalled love for and knowledge of the ancient culture of his country is largely due to the peculiar nature of his literary language.

The literary language of China is, as we have stated, an esperanto, but, be it observed, exclusively a *written* one, and in this respect it is surely unique. The reason for this we have exhibited several times: the characters do not indicate the pronunciation of the words, and the Chinese of to-day have not the faintest idea how they were pronounced in ancient times. The consequence is that every Chinese reads the words of a literary text just as he pronounces them in his own modern dialect. The above-mentioned character for the word 'moon' (originally a picture, p. 16), which some five centuries after Christ was pronounced *ng<sup>h</sup>wt*—a fact of which the Western comparative philologist to-day is aware, but not the Chinese themselves—is read *yīe* by a Pekinese, *it* by a Cantonese, *ng<sup>w</sup>ok* by a man from Foochow, and *yō* by a Shanghai man. Thus an edict issued in Peking can be read and understood everywhere in this vast country, but the Cantonese read it aloud in a way that sounds utter nonsense to the Pekinese.

And this is not all. Though a Pekinese reads off the edict and pronounces every single word just as it is pronounced in his dialect, another Pekinese, who is listening but not looking at the characters, cannot understand a single sentence if the reader follows the text word by word. The reason for this is evident. The literary language lacks, as we have already said, all those elucidative means created by

the colloquial idiom for distinguishing the homophones. There are, of course, in the edict any number of those short words which are entirely unsuggestive to the ear because they sound exactly like dozens of others. So long as one follows the text with the eye, one can easily distinguish by means of the different characters all the *is*, *sīs*, *chīs*, &c., but as soon as one takes the eye from the paper, and relies solely upon the ear, the sentences teem with homophones, and the result is complete incomprehensibility.

For this same reason a Chinese can read the ancient literature himself, but he cannot understand it when it is read aloud: the reader, not knowing how the words were read at the time when the text was composed and when they were still clearly distinguishable by the ear, has necessarily to read them in their modern phonetic version, and the resulting homophones form an insuperable obstacle to the hearer. The professional story-tellers of China therefore cannot read aloud their old tales verbatim, but have to paraphrase the literary text they are reading into the colloquial in order to make it intelligible to their audiences.

In the peculiar relation between the spoken and the written language in China, and above all in the nature of the latter as being a language that can be understood by the eye but not by the ear alone, we have the explanation of the strange fact that the peculiar Chinese script is *indispensable*. It must often have occurred to Europeans to ask the question: Why do not the Chinese abandon their monstrous antediluvian script in favour of our simple and practical alphabetic writing? And with a shrug they will have answered themselves: They must be incredibly unpractical and conservative, if they refuse to raise themselves to our position of superiority in this respect.

One could hardly imagine a more striking example of the danger of passing judgement upon a question with which one



is not familiar. What would the Chinese gain, and what would they lose by such a change?

The gain may be summed up thus: the schoolboys of China would be spared the toil of a year or two. The number of common words and consequently of common characters is, as we have stated, little more than 4,000. It is true that the most complete Chinese dictionary gives more than ten times as many characters, but of these the great majority are uncommon variations of other letters, or characters that occur but rarely in the old literature, and which therefore can be looked up when met with. Even very learned Chinese do not encumber their memory with more than about 6,000 characters. 4,000 is, as we have said, a tolerably high figure, and even with 3,000 some progress can be made. For a receptive child this is a modest task, and an adult foreigner in the course of a year's study masters without difficulty from two to three thousand characters.

What now would be the price to be paid for the saving of this labour? In the first place, by the introduction of alphabetic writing the Chinese would be compelled to discard his literature of some 4,000 years and with this the backbone of his entire civilization. And this for the reason that the Chinese literature transcribed in phonetic script would become absolutely unintelligible; as we know, there would be in every text dozens of short, simple homophones, *i*, *li*, *shih*, *si*, *ku*, &c. And who will seriously propose that the Chinese should undertake to translate into colloquial (and which colloquial?)—a translation, moreover, that would be entirely impracticable—his literature, which is one of the most voluminous in the world?

Secondly, this marvellous tie between all the parts of the great country which is formed by its literary language, its written esperanto, would have to be broken. A document written by a Pekinese in a phonetic script based on his

dialect would be incomprehensible, for instance, to a Cantonese, and perhaps to a third of all the inhabitants of China. As it is now, the Chinese possess a medium that carries them through all local limitations, a medium so ingenious, so supple, that the preservation of the political unity of China through the ages can be ascribed to a large extent to its unifying force.

If China does not abandon its peculiar script in favour of our alphabetic writing, this is not due to any stupid or obdurate conservatism. The Chinese script is so wonderfully well adapted to the linguistic conditions of China that it is indispensable; the day the Chinese discard it they will surrender the very foundation of their culture.

## CHAPTER IV

THE origin and early history of Chinese script, like those of the people and the language, are enveloped in the mist of legend.

Long, long ago, in the golden age, there was a dragon horse which came up out of the Yellow River with curious symbols traced upon its back, and revealed them to Fu-hi (the first of China's *primaeval* emperors, twenty-ninth century B.C.). This potentate copied them and thus acquired the mystical characters which later became the skeleton of I King, the Canon of Changes, one of the Five Canons. And under the third *primaeval* emperor, Huang-ti (twenty-seventh century B.C.), the minister Ts'ang Kie proceeded further along the path of invention and fashioned the first primitive characters.

If we strip this legend of its fanciful garb, we arrive at

the bare fact that Chinese tradition places the genesis of the script in the middle of the third millennium B.C.; and there is not the slightest hint of foreign origin. Sinological science has no difficulty in accepting the Chinese tradition on both these points. We have seen that the oldest extant texts were composed more than two thousand years B.C. and that the Honan finds of the second millennium bear witness to a tolerably advanced writing technique. The Chinese dating in the middle of the third millennium seems therefore very reasonable; and since nineteenth century theories of the foreign origin of the script have hitherto not been confirmed, the Chinese opinion that it was an autochthonous invention appears to be the most plausible.

The Chinese script is a very complicated product. In the first place, the Chinese characters are by no means all formed according to the same principles; during the lapse of many centuries of its early life, the script underwent an evolution resulting in no less than three main kinds of characters differing in their *method* of formation. Secondly, the writing has, as a matter of course, changed technically; for, just as we do not make our letters in quite the same way as the Romans or the monks of the Middle Ages, so also the Chinese have, in the course of time, radically changed the *shape* of their characters, and this formal evolution was completed only about the beginning of our era.

Let us begin by examining the various principles according to which the characters were composed.

The earliest form of Chinese writing consisted in the drawing of objects. A great number of the most common characters, used at this moment by millions of people, are pictures of this kind, called by the Chinese 'images', three or four thousand years old. These pictures are often, even in their modern form, quite expressive. In other cases they

are distorted past recognition, and a number of characters are, even in the oldest form known to us, very meagre and unilluminating. In their primitive stages they must necessarily have presented much more full and detailed pictures, which have been reduced for convenience sake to a few scanty lines.

A great number of picture characters of course refer to phenomena of nature. *Yi* 日 'sun' and *yü* 月 'moon' have already been mentioned. *Huo* 'fire' is depicted by flames going upwards 火 (now in modern writing 火, abbreviated 灬), and *shuei* 'water' is drawn as flowing 水 (now 水, abbreviated as three drops of water 氵). Somewhat similar is the picture *ch'uan* 川 (now 川) 'stream, river'. *Yü* 'rain' is expressed by drops of rain falling from heaven 雨 (雨). *T'u* 'earth' is held to represent two layers of earth with a sprouting plant: 土. *Shi* 'stone' shows a cliff with a rock: 石 (石). In *kin* 金 (金) 'gold, metal' we have again the 'earth' with gold nuggets in it. *Shan* 'mountain' is a simple and clear picture 山 (山), and the same may be said of *ku* 'valley' 谷 (谷), an image of the dell widening towards its mouth. There are many characters denoting plants and vegetable products: *mu* 木 (木) 'tree', *kuo* 果 (果) 'fruit', *ts'* 束 (束) 'thorn', *chü* 竹 (竹) 'bamboo', and *mi* 米 'rice'. The animal kingdom also is amply represented. The ancient Chinese distinguished between *niao* 鳥 (鳥) 'longtailed bird' and *chuei* 隹 (隹) 'short-tailed bird'. Further we have *yü* 魚 (魚) 'fish' and *ch'ung* 蟲 (虫) 'reptile'; and various quadrupeds such as *ma* 馬 (馬) 'horse', *yang* 羊 (羊) 'ram, sheep', and *nü* 牛 (牛) 'bull, cow', these latter distinguished by their different horns; and finally the much simplified pictures *k'üan* 犬 (犬, abbrev. 犾) 'dog' and *shü* 豕 (豕) 'hog, swine'.

Relating to man and his attributes we have many characters. *Jên* 'man' is represented by a simple and artless picture 人 (人) reminding us of Shakespeare's 'forked radish'. Another portrait—which came to be used for the word *ta* 'great'—is 大 (大). For *nü* 'woman' there were originally several pictures. Here 𡚦 we have her full face, and here 𡚧 seen in profile. The latter picture is already reduced, and in its modern form 女 it does not give a flattering idea of its fair original. 'Child', for which there were two different words, was drawn in two distinct ways. The letter for the word *tsi* is 子 (子, with legs swathed?); for the word *ér* we have the image 兒 (兒), in which, according to the learned commentators, there is visible the open fontanelle of a young baby. *Shên* 'human body' 身 (身) is conspicuous for its imposing abdomen, and the various parts of the body are often cleverly indicated. There are, e.g. *mu* 'eye' 目 (目), *mei* 'eyebrow' 眉 (眉), *ér* 'ear' 耳 (耳), and *k'ou* 'mouth' 口 (口). The sign for the particular product of the mouth, *yen* 'speech, talk' 言 is curious. We have, moreover, *sin* 'heart' 心 (心), and 'hand' in various forms, *shou* 手 (手, abbrev. 扌) and *yu* 又 (又), from which then *kung* 𢇛 (𢇛) 'joined hands' and *ts'un* 'thumb' 𢇛 (寸). Finally we may mention *li* 'sinew' 力 (力), used in the sense of 'strength'.

There are many sidelights on the growth of civilization in ancient China. Thus the Chinese, an industrious farmer at least since the middle of the third millennium B.C., shows us a simple but adequate drawing of his *t'ien* 'field' 田, as well as of his *kiang* 'boundary-marks' 畵. An interesting conception of the village community in ancient times is given by the sign 井, now denoting *tsing* 'a well'; in its old form

其 it shows how *eight* families formed a village and cultivated in common, for purposes of taxation, the middle square where the well was situated. There are also the parts of a house. In *mien* 冂 (冂) and *yen* 广 (广) we see two different types of roofs. Judging from the character for *mên* 'door' 門, the ancient Chinese had folding doors and the door was secured by a *shuan* 'bar' 闩. A more pretentious house, *kung* 'palace', had several rooms beneath the roof 宮 (宮). That tower-buildings existed is indicated by the sign *king* 京 (京), which later got the sense of 'capital' (cf. *Pe-king* 'the northern capital'). As a protection against warlike neighbours the Chinese knew how to fortify their cities, as appears from the character *kuo* 'city-wall' 郭 (now badly disfigured and enlarged by a new element to the right, 郭), in which we see the city-wall with turreted gates opposite each other, a plan surviving to this day in the typical form of a Chinese town or village, though the wall is no longer round but square.

Among the numerous pictures of ancient implements there are many having to do with warfare, *kung* 'bow' 弓 (弓) and *shi* 'arrow' 矢 (矢), while others represent peaceful occupations, as *tao* 'knife' 刀 (刀), *kung* 'carpenter's square' 工, used in the sense of 'work', and *ch'ê* 'cart' 車 (車). Here we may also mention *wang* 'net' 网 (abbr. 网), *liang* 兩 (兩) a balance with two weights, a character used both in the sense of 'ounce' and in that of 'two'; and *pei* 貝 (貝) 'shell, valuables, money', shells having been formerly used as currency.

We have already given the picture *mu* 'tree' 木; if it is cut in two vertically, there will be on the one side *ts'iang* 'board, bed' 牀 (牀), on the other *p'ien* 'tablet' 片 (片). In *chou* 'broom' 帚 (帚) we see a hand wielding that useful

instrument. Somewhat similar is the picture *kin* 'cloth, kerchief' 巾 (巾), and the more elaborate picture *tai* 'girdle, carry' 帶 (帶), where we see skirts hanging down from the girdle, the place for carrying small articles. 'Garment', *i*, is drawn 衣 (衣) so as to show sleeves and skirts. That the finest material was obtainable for the making of clothes is shown by the character *mi* 'silk' 糸 (糸), which depicts silk cocoons and threads; tradition assigns the invention of sericulture to the consort of Huang-ti, the third primæval emperor.

Many characters depict food and drinking utensils of various types, e.g. *ming* 'bowl' 皿 (皿), with a foot and two handles (later 'dish'), and *hu* 'pot' 壺 (壺). From the classical texts we learn that the ancient Chinese had a variety of meat and fish dishes, fresh or salted, with spices and pickles. An interesting character, showing that dried meat was also in use, is the character *jou* 肉 (now 肉, abbreviated 肉, 月, unfortunately coinciding in its modern form with 月 *yue* 'moon') which now means 'flesh, meat' generally: here we see the slices of meat tied together by a string. In ancient China students paid their teacher with such bundles of dried meat, and as a reminiscence of this there is still in modern Chinese an expression 'tied meat' meaning 'teacher's fee'. The art of producing fermented drinks is extremely old in China; the old sign *yu* 酉 (酉) means 'spirits' and shows a vessel made for such drinks.

So much for symbols of house and home, clothing and food. There are also illustrations of higher cultural elements. In *yü* 聿 (聿) we have a picture of the oldest writing instrument, a stylus with which symbols were incised in bone, tortoise-shell, and wood. Wood gradually became the normal material, and the writer used thin, narrow slips of bamboo, starting at the top and writing

downwards. Afterwards connected slips were tied together, thus forming a book, as is shown by the old character *t'sê* 'document' 冊 (册). The Chinese book of to-day bears traces of this arrangement. The reader starts at the top of the right-hand line of the page and reads vertically to the bottom of the page, then goes over to the top of the line next to the left (the last page according to our reckoning being the first in a Chinese book).

Among other products of civilization we find musical instruments. 樂 (樂) is a drum and bells on a stand; the character serves as well for *yo* 'music' as for *lo* 'joy'. Many symbols belong to the sphere of religion. *Pu* 'divination' 卜 and *chao* 'omen' 兆 both illustrate the apparatus of the diviner; they show the fissures in bone and tortoise-shell (mentioned above in connexion with the Honan finds), which were interpreted by their resemblance to various characters. We have a curious letter in *kuei* 鬼 'spirit', later 'devil': the head is of a rather odd type. Some varieties of this character show a small curlicue 鬼 (鬼), by certain commentators interpreted as the whirl made in the air where the spirit sweeps along, by others explained more naturally as a tail.

Picture-characters were admirably adapted to the representation of concrete objects, and several hundreds of such characters became current. But how were abstract ideas to be rendered? It is true that a limited number even of these could be symbolized by drawings. The Chinese script possesses more than a hundred of such *ch'i shi* 'indicators', as they are called by native philologists. Thus we have *i* — 'one', *er* 二 'two', and *san* 三 'three'; and *shang* 上 (now 上) 'up, above' in contrast to *hia* 下 (now 下) 'down, below'. The idea 'cleave, divide' is appropriately symbolized by the sign )(, now 八, *pa*, used



at a very early date in the sense of 'eight', the much-divisible number. That *chung* 中 represents 'the middle, centre' is easy to realize. *Huei* 回, now 回, expresses 'a turn, come back to the starting-point, return'. Several characters for numbers are grouped round these symbols by the commentators, whose explanations, though often impossible, are quite interesting and quaint; the real origin of these very ancient characters has passed out of our ken. Thus, e.g., there is a sign anciently figured thus, 五, meaning 'five'. The number is important in Chinese symbolism just as the numbers 3 and 7 are in the West: there are five elements, five natural relations, five cardinal virtues, and five cardinal vices, &c. The character is said to represent the five cardinal points, north, south, east, west, and centrum. And this would explain why the character was later on framed in two more strokes, thus 十 (now 五), symbolizing the two great cosmogonic forces which created the five quarters, i.e. the universe, *yang*, the heavenly, bright, good, productive, positive, male principle, and *yin*, the earthly, dark, bad, receptive, negative, female principle. A similar basis is assigned to *shí* 十 'ten', which would symbolize all the cardinal points, the whole universe; it is the *complete* number, the highest of the simple numbers.

It is evident, however, that relatively few abstract notions could be satisfactorily rendered by such 'indicators'. Other expedients were, therefore, resorted to.

A common method was to allow the picture of a concrete object to symbolize an abstract idea intimately connected with or effectively suggested by the object in question. The notion 'to cross, entangle, connexion' *kiao* was written 交 (交), a man with crossed legs. *Kao* 'high' was represented by 高 (高), a tower. *Hing* 'to walk' was symbolized by the ordinary product of walking: 行 (行) foot-prints.

For *pei* 'north' we have 𠂔 (北) the picture of two men standing back to back; hence, properly, 'turn the back on, that towards which one turns the back'—in China north having been always regarded as the back and south as the front; thus, the house gate, the emperor's throne, &c., face south.

Another method was to borrow the character of a homophonous concrete word. A word for 'wheat' and the ordinary word for 'come' are now both sounded *lai* in Pekinese. They were evidently homophonous in ancient Chinese, for we find that 'come', a word difficult to depict, has from very remote times been written with the easily-drawn character for 'wheat' 來 (來, a plant with awns). In the same way *wan* 'scorpion' 萬 (萬) serves for the more intricate *wan* 'ten thousand'. This method, by reason of its carelessness and capriciousness, was very risky, for if it had come, or could have come into more general use, the script would have become ambiguous; probably, however, its use on a larger scale was rendered impossible by the absence in the ancient language of any great number of homophones.

These various methods, with whatever ingenuity they might be employed, did not and could not suffice, when characters had to be devised for the great mass of abstract notions. Not only this, but scores of concrete words were incapable of illustration by means of simple pictures. Further invention was, therefore, necessary, and this took the decisive form of the creation of *compound characters* from already existing simple picture characters.

This was done in the first instance by the invention of the important category of characters called *hwei-i*, i.e. 'combined sense', hence, logical compound. Two or more simple pictures were combined so as to bring their meanings into logical relation, and the resulting compound served

as the symbol of a new idea. This convenient method was extensively used, and more than a thousand of the ordinary characters are formed in this way. These combinations involve logical relationships of different kinds, of which we will proceed to give some examples.

One obvious form of combination is that of two objects both conspicuous for the quality or condition to be expressed, or at least possessing it in common. Thus we have *ming* 明 'bright', denoted by sun + moon; *sien* 鮮 'fresh' by fish + sheep (evidently fish and mutton were preferably eaten fresh); *kien* 件 'individual, piece, article' by 人 man + 牛 ox, two typical examples of individual things.

Another combination is that of two objects the co-existence of which would suggest the idea. An instance of this kind is *hao* 好 'good, happy' formed of 女 woman (wife) and 子 son (child), implying that in possessing those one is happy. Less flattering to the fair sex is *kien* 姦 'falsehood, dishonesty, lewdness', which consists of three (meaning several) women together. Other examples are *ning* 寧 'peace, rest' (宀 house, 心 heart, and 皿 cup); *yu* 友, now 友 'friendship, friend' (two hands together); similarly *kung* 共, now 共 'common, all' (four hands joined). Specially interesting combinations are *si* 思, now 思 'think, opinion' (brain and heart, the co-operation of which produces thought); *chao* 召 'bring to justice, condemn' consisting of 口 'mouth' (pronounce a sentence) and 刀 'sword, knife' (amputation of various degrees was an ordinary punishment in ancient China); *she* 設 'establish, arrange' composed of 言 speak (command) and 攴 beat (a hand beating); and *hei* 黑, now 黑 'black', from flames and an aperture (the vent-hole for the smoke), hence soot.

But by far the most common form of logical compounds

consisted in the representation of two objects, one of which was an attribute of the other. Among the characters for abstract words thus created there are numerous verb-characters. Actions not susceptible of expression by a single figure may be readily suggested by a combination. We thus have man playing various parts: *tso* 坐 'to sit' = two 人 men on the 土 ground; *shan* 閃 'get out of the way' = a man running out through 門 the gate; *kien* 見 'to see' = a man (two legs) and 目 an eye; *hin* 休 'to rest' = 人 a man in the shade of 木 a tree; *fu* 伏 'fall, lie prostrate' = 人 a man acting 犬 a dog. The hand appears in numerous characters, e.g. *k'ai* 開 'to open' = 升 two hands removing 闕 the bar of a door; *suan* 算 'calculate' = 升 two hands manipulating 目 an abacus made of 竹 bamboo, *k'an* 看 'look, regard' = 手 a hand shading 目 the eye; *ts'ü* 取 'seize' = 又 a hand gripping 耳 an ear. 言 'speech, talk' occurs, e.g. in *ki* 計 'count, calculate' = 言 to speak up to 十 ten (the highest of the simple numbers of which all the rest are compounds); *king* 詬 'quarrel, argue' = two speeches against each other; *yü* 獄 'litigate' (and then also 'prison', the ordinary consequence of litigation) = 言 to speak against each other like 犬 two dogs—a pleasing little word-picture. The mouth appears in the characters *kan* 告 'accuse, announce' = 牛 to butt, i.e. attack with 口 the mouth; *k'u* 哭 'to cry' = 犬 a dog and several 口 mouths; and *chan* 占 'to divine' = 口 a mouth reading off 卜 divination fissures (on bones or tortoise-shell). Among miscellaneous characters may be mentioned *tsiao* 焦 'to roast' = fire beneath 隹 a bird, and *i* 盪 (益) 'abound' = water at the rim of 皿 a cup;

*kü* 瞿 'to fear' = 目 the eyes of 隹 a bird; and *fén* 分 'to divide' = 刀 a knife 八 cleaving.

Among the logical compounds for abstract words there are many characters denoting quality. A typical one is *mei* 美 'beautiful' = 大 big 羊 sheep. In *tso* 左 (左) 'left' = the hand that 工 works, and *yu* 右 (右) 'right' = the hand that has to do with (carries the food to?) 口 the mouth, we have two characters which seem to reveal peculiar habits of the ancient Chinese. Rather far-fetched is *ku* 古 'ancient' = 十 ten 口 mouths, i.e. what has been handed down as the tradition of ten generations. Highly graphic are:—*ts'ung* 惴 (惴) 'anxious': the heart in the window, and *wei* 危 (危) 'dangerous': a 人 man with one leg over a 厂 precipice. The word *pai* 白 (白) 'white' shows the sun pointing upwards, rising, and *tung* 東 'east, eastern', the 日 sun rising behind the 木 trees on the horizon. In *ch'ü* 隻 'single' is seen one 隹 bird in the 又 hand, this in contrast to *shuang* 雙 'double': two birds in the hand. *Sì* 𩚑 (昔) 'old, ancient' is a picture of slices of meat dried in the sun, thus originally 'old, stale' in opposition to 'fresh'. *K'iang* 疆 'strong' is happily represented by 弓 a bow shooting over several 畛 ploughlands. The character *nan* 男 'male' = 力 strength (orig. 'sinew') on the 田 field, refers to the proper work of the men as opposed to that of the women in the house. The word 分 'to divide' combined with 貝 'money' (shell) gives the character 貧 *p'in* 'poor'—poverty being the result of the division of the capital.

Not only abstract notions but concrete objects can be denoted by combinations of this kind. Thus by *sin* 囚, 人 a man in an enclosure, it is not difficult to understand 'a captive, a prisoner'. The character *i* 夷 'barbarian'

is a 大 man with a 弓 bow. Other interesting examples are *fu* 婦 'wife' = the 女 woman holding the 帚 broom; *nu* 奴 '(female) slave' = a 又 hand 女 maid; *sien* 仙 'a hermit, an "immortal"' = the 人 man living retired in 山 the mountains. Terse and eloquent are *fu* 父 (父) 'father' = the hand holding a stick, a whip; *ku* 股 'loin, thigh' = the 月 flesh that is 爻 whipped; *k'z* 器 'vessel' = the utensil used by four, i.e. many 口 mouths and by 犬 the dogs; *kia* 家 'house, home' = 宀 roof beneath which you have 豕 the swine; *li* 李 'plum tree' = 木 the tree of 子 the children. Very clear and expressive are the characters *sang* 桑 'mulberry tree' = the 木 tree where many 又 hands are picking; *ts'üan* 泉 'a spring' = 白 white 水 water; *k'u* 庫 'store-house' = a 車 coach- 广 shed; *chang* 丈 (丈) 'a fathom': 十 ten 又 hands; *hwei* 灰 (灰) 'ashes' = that, out of the 火 fire, which you can take with 又 the hand; *tsao* 蚤 (蚤) 'louse' = the 虫 insect that 又 scratches (claw); and finally *ti* 狄 'barbarian' = 火 fire- 犴 dog.

All these logical compounds of various types, though admirably adapted for representing words that could not be expressed by a simple picture, had one disadvantage, in that they involved the exercise of too much ingenuity of invention. When it became necessary to create characters for thousands of words, this method broke down by reason of its difficulty. The Chinese therefore had recourse to an entirely new method by means of which new characters could be invented in unlimited numbers.

This new method was a kind of phonetic writing. This must not be taken to imply that an alphabetic script was adopted. The principle of alphabetic writing in which the

object is to represent the sounds of the word, without reference to its meaning, by analysing the word into its constituent phonetic parts, e.g. *c-u-t*, seems to us very simple and natural, and yet it is one of the most epoch-making inventions of mankind. It was entirely alien to Chinese modes of thought. On the one hand he was used to the character indicating the meaning of the word and was by no means disposed to give up this principle entirely. On the other hand he possessed already, as mentioned above, some few cases of a very primitive phonetic writing: the phonetic *loans*, where the character for one word, e.g. 萬 'scorpion', Mand. *wan*, was used for a homophonous word '10,000', Mand. *wan* (see p. 49 above). But now, perfecting this latter clumsy method by aid of the other principle, he was able to raise it to an ingenious and highly efficient method. As 𠂇 (𠂇) 'thumb' (a hand with the thumb marked by a dot) Mand. *ts'un* could not serve without modification for the word 'village' Mand. *ts'un*, because that might lead to misunderstanding, he added the picture for 'tree, wood' 木 (evidently the building material) and obtained a character 村 where the right part indicated a pronunciation identical with that of 𠂇 'thumb'—he did not go so far as to analyse the word phonetically, but took the whole complex as a unity—while the left part, a kind of determinative, showed that it was *not* the word for 'thumb' that was concerned, but the homophonous word which has to do with *wood*, i.e. 'village'. And this method was the more practical as it was not necessary that the words should be *absolutely* homophonous; a close resemblance in sound was held sufficient.

The new character had to consist of one *phonetic* part indicating or at least suggesting the pronunciation of the word, and one *significant* part (by Europeans generally

called the 'radical', a misleading term, as it wrongly conveys the idea of etymological root), indicating or at least suggesting the sense of the word or giving the category to which it belongs.

A few examples will show how this new method worked. If we compare the words

坊	紡	訪	紡	枋
<i>'fang'</i>	<i>fang</i>	<i>fang</i>	<i>fang</i>	<i>fang</i>
district	spin	ask	kettle	board

we find that they have all the same modern Mandarin pronunciation *fang*. As this is identical with that of the word 方 *fang* 'square' (an old picture symbol) and as this element 方 *fang* 'square' forms a part of them all, it is obvious that in ancient Chinese they must have all been identical with or similar in sound to 方 'square', and that consequently the latter was inserted into the five characters only to convey that they were pronounced more or less like the word for 'square'. This then is the *phonetic* of the compound characters. In sense the words are wide apart, and their meanings are precisely discriminated by the symbols. In *fang* 'district' the sense is marked by the addition of 土 'earth', this being the significant part, the 'radical'; in *fang* 'to spin' it is the radical 糸 'silk' that suggests the meaning, in *fang* 'ask' it is 言 'talk', in *fang* 'kettle' it is 金 'metal', and in *fang* 'board' it is 木 'wood'.

A very common phonetic is 工 *kung* 'work' (picture of a carpenter's square), occurring in 功 *kung* 'merit' (radical 力 'sinew, strength'), 詎 *hung* 'dispute' (rad. 'talk'), 烹 *hung* 'to fry' (rad. 'fire'), 紅 *hung* 'red' (rad. 'silk'), 扛 *kang* 'to carry' (rad. 'hand'), 杠 *kang* 'bench' (rad. 'wood'), 江 *kiang* 'river' (rad. 'water'), and 貢 *kung*



'tribute' (rad. 'shell, money'). We have to observe that the words are not always homophonous in modern Chinese, but they have a strong resemblance, and they must have been similar also in the old language.

The phonetic is not necessarily a simple picture character. There are numerous cases where characters, in themselves composed of two or more constituents, serve as phonetics in new compounds. Thus we have 分 *fên* 'to divide' (八 cleave with a 刀 knife) as phonetic in 紛 *fên* 'confuse' (rad. 'silk'), 粉 *fên* 'flour' (rad. 'rice'), 忿 *fên* 'anger' (rad. 'heart'), 吩 *fên* 'to command' (rad. 'mouth'), 枌 *fên* 'elm' (rad. 'tree'), 盆 *p'ên* 'bowl' (rad. 'dish'), 盼 *p'an* 'look for' (rad. 'eye'), &c. In the same way there is 古 *ku* 'ancient' (mouths of ten generations) as phonetic in 姑 *ku* 'aunt, lady' (rad. 'woman'), 詁 *ku* 'expound' (rad. 'talk'), 枯 *k'u* 'withered' (rad. 'tree'), and 固 *ku* 'solid, firm' (rad. 'enclosure'). Moreover, there is nothing to prevent a character thus composed of a radical and a phonetic being regarded as a unity and serving as phonetic in a new word. Thus, for instance, the 固 *ku* 'firm', just mentioned, forms together with the radical 人 'man' the new character 個 *ko* 'individual, piece'. In analysing this latter sign you consequently have to go through this long process: 個 *ko* 'individual' divides up into the rad. 人 'man' and the phonetic 固 *ku* 'firm'; this latter is composed of the rad. 口 'enclosure' and the phonetic 古 *ku* 'ancient', which again splits up into the elements 十 'ten' and 口 'mouth'.

In this method of composing new characters, by means of one indicator of sense, the radical, and one indicator of sound, the phonetic, the Chinese discovered a simple, convenient means of creating new characters *ad libitum*.

By far the majority—about nine-tenths—of the Chinese characters are composed in this way.

Now, it would not be surprising if the reader should object that Chinese in this last category of compounds possesses a sort of phonetic script, and should consequently object to our previous statement that the Chinese characters indicate only the sense of the words and not their sounds. This objection, however, is not valid. It is true that at a certain epoch in its history Chinese writing was to some extent a phonetic script; but it is no longer so. In languages which have an alphabetic script the writing follows more or less closely in the wake of the changing pronunciation. When, for example, the Early English adverb *faste* lost its final syllable in pronunciation, the *e* was also dropped in writing. Now English is notoriously conservative in this respect, while German, for instance, has fairly faithfully changed its spelling with the change of the pronunciation. In Chinese there has been no modification whatever. The composition of the character was fixed once and for all thousands of years ago, and there is no modification of the script corresponding to the extensive change of sound which most words have undergone. It is only in rare instances that a phonetic retains its original function after a sound-evolution of many centuries. That 方 *fang* 'square' can effectively indicate the pronunciation of 坊 *fang* 'district' and 訪 *fang* 'ask', &c., is due to the fortuitous fact that these words, which were originally sufficiently similar in sound to allow 方 to play the part of phonetic in the compound characters, have developed in such a way as to become homophonous—all *fang* in the Mandarin of to-day. But in other cases it is not so. Thus 工 *kung* 'work' is now but a vague indicator of the sound in 扛 *kang* 'carry' and 江 *kiang* 'river'. And in numerous

cases the phonetic evolution has made the words diverge so far that there is hardly any similarity at all between the sound of the phonetic and that of the compound character. The words 占 *chan* 'to divine' and 帖 *t'ie* 'card' are now so differently pronounced that it would be impossible to believe that *chan* is phonetic in *t'ie*, if we were not able to prove that in the sixth century A. D. the words were still much more alike than they are to-day: *chan* was then *tšäm* and *t'ie* was *t'iep*, with cognate initials and cognate finals, and very similar vocalism.

Hence, if the 'phonetic script' was very primitive even in ancient times,—the phonetic and the derivate seldom being exact homophones, and so affording no certain guidance to the sound of the latter,—it has become all the more unreliable through the subsequent change of sounds in the last two or three thousand years.

✓ The peculiar characteristics of Chinese script will necessarily make the practical problem of arranging a Chinese dictionary a very difficult one. Various methods of arrangement are adopted. There are, for instance, dictionaries arranged, like our own, according to sounds. But the Chinese classifies his words, not as we do according to the initials, but first according to tone, into four great groups, and then, within these groups, according to finals. He brings together words that rhyme, and within each rhyme group the words are arranged according to initial consonants. Now it is evident that in a phonetic dictionary of this kind you can only find a word the pronunciation of which you know already, since, as we have seen, the character does not indicate the sounds; such a dictionary can serve only for ascertaining the meaning of compound words and phrases of which the first member is of known meaning. In order to find characters the pronunciation of which you do not

know, you have to consult another kind of dictionary, the radical dictionary (or a radical index on the same principles, generally appended to the phonetic dictionaries just described). We have stated that nine-tenths of all Chinese characters are composed of a radical and a phonetic. There is, however, only a limited number of pictures that are really current as radicals, in fact, little more than two hundred, and these same radicals turn up again and again in a multitude of compounds. Out of the 4,000 most common words no less than 175 have 口 'mouth' as their radical, 120 have 糸 'silk', &c. The Chinese have, however, drawn up a list of 214 radicals which are the framework of the dictionary. The list is arranged according to the number of strokes of the various radicals: first come radicals written with one stroke, then radicals written with two strokes, and so on up to seventeen strokes. Under the headings of these radicals all other characters are placed, and they are further arranged with reference to the number of strokes they contain besides the radical. This will be clearer from a few examples. Suppose, for instance, we look for the character 女. It is a common picture, a simple character, and may be expected to be found among the 214 radicals. We look for it among the radicals with three strokes, and we find it to be number 38, where it is given with the pronunciation *nü* and the meaning 'woman'. We now search for another character, 好. It contains two common pictures, both contained in the radical list. Both have three strokes, and among the radicals with three strokes you find the left element as number 38, the right as number 39. Under which of these two radicals is the compound then to be looked for? There is indeed no means of deciding this immediately; we must try first one and then the other. We start with the left-hand radical, number 38 'woman', and subtracting this we count three strokes in the right
















element. We open the dictionary at radical 38; looking for characters with three strokes (apart from the radical), we find our word: it turns out to be read *hao*, meaning 'good'. Again, if we look for a character 姑, we recognize immediately radical 38 on the left. On the right hand we count five strokes. Under radical 38, five strokes, it is easy to find our character, which is read *ku* and means 'aunt'—the right-hand part is a phonetic (*ku* 'ancient').

It may appear somewhat unreasonable to count three strokes in 女 and five strokes in 古. To ordinary eyes they appear to consist of four and six strokes. The difficulty is explained by the fact that the Chinaman counts the strokes according as he draws his characters, and for this there are very strict rules; the strokes are made in certain tempos and in fixed order. A square 口 ('mouth') must be written in three tempos and in this order:  $| + \neg + - = \square$ ; 女 in three tempos and thus:  $- + \text{人} + \neg = \text{女}$ . It is therefore necessary to know how the Chinese characters are written in order to be able to find them in a dictionary.

The Chinese script is thus very complicated in its structure. To arrive at this stage of complexity has required not only the lapse of many centuries but the exercise of the ingenuity of many brains. The course of evolution has been as follows. The earliest stage was that of picture-writing, which continued for a long time; then the stock of characters was enlarged, first of all by logical compounds, and later by phonetic compounds. This sequence of development is borne out by the ancient inscriptions. In the inscriptions of the Shang-Yin dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.) there are hardly any phonetic compounds at all, but a considerable number of logical compounds, though not nearly so many as of simple pictures. Most of

the phonetic compounds, which make up by far the largest group, were evidently composed during the classical Chou dynasty (1122-249 B.C.), especially in its latter centuries, or even later. The same is true of many logical compounds, the studied and imaginative nature of which betray, not primitive scribes, but fairly advanced scholars. Therefore, if we look for really *primaeva* characters we must go back to the simple pictures.

Chinese script had completed its structural evolution long before the beginning of our era, but an evolution of quite another kind, a formal evolution, went on to a later date.

What the technical evolution was down to the first millennium B.C., it is difficult to discover because of the scantiness of the material. It can only be asserted that the formal variations of a character were many and divergent. For instance we may cite 'horse' which occurs with the following variants among others: , ,  (now 馬), and 'fish', which could be written , , , , &c. (now 魚). Of 'dog' there were the forms , ,  (now 犬), of 'ear' the variants , ,  (now 耳), and of 'mountain' ,  (now 山). About 800 B.C., according to Chinese tradition, a more uniform type was fixed by the issue of an official catalogue, giving the so-called *ta chuan* 'large seal' characters; but, as this was still too old-fashioned and laborious to remember and write, and scribes were very careless, each of them shaped his characters as he found convenient, and a considerable decadence of Chinese script was the result. The great Confucius gives us a hint of these conditions; about 500 B.C. he writes dolefully: 'I have known scribes who left an empty space for characters [they did not know]; now there are no more such.' Reform became finally a necessity. By the irony of fate the very

minister Li Sī, who incited the emperor, Ts'in Shi-huang-ti, to the great burning of the books in 213 B.C., deserved well of Chinese letters by publishing a new official catalogue of characters for the guidance of the scribes. He did his best to preserve the ancient characters, but he simplified them and often replaced an elaborate old drawing by a few summary lines. The characters given above in their oldest variant shapes have the following form in this new style: 馬 'horse', 魚 'fish', 犬 'dog', 耳 'ear', and 山 'mountain'. The characters as they were fixed by Li Sī are called *siao chuan* 'the small seal'. Owing to the burning of the books, we know the bulk of the Chinese characters only in this small seal, and the examples of old picture characters furnished above are given in this style for the sake of simplicity. A comparison with the older characters that happen to have been preserved in inscribed bronzes, &c., shows, however, that Li Sī had often misunderstood the old symbols and that he had sometimes deliberately substituted new characters for them. There was, e.g. an old character 𠂔 for a word meaning 'extend, pull out, notify', &c. Not understanding this, he put in its place a somewhat similar character—perhaps a variant invented by some careless scribe—𠂔 two hands stretching something long (modern 申). Thus the small seal of Li Sī is in many cases an entirely new script.

The small seal, however, was far from being the last stage in the formal evolution of the script. Only a few years after its adoption it entered upon a new phase. This was due to a change in writing materials. Hitherto the characters had been scratched upon slips of bamboo or ordinary wood with a scribing-iron or stylus; but now a kind of ink was invented, and somebody—tradition says

the general Meng T'ien—hit upon the idea of constructing a camel's-hair brush. The wood surface was replaced first by silk stuff and soon afterwards by paper, the invention of which in China is dated at A.D. 105, from which time writing materials in China have not changed. The Chinaman of to-day writes with a fine-pointed brush dipped in Chinese ink.

With the old stylus it was possible to trace at pleasure any quirks and curved lines; with the brush it became more intricate. A brush will spurt if worked against the hairs, and some strokes will become blots. The introduction of the new writing materials thus radically changed the form of the characters. The small seal in the form modified by the use of the brush now became a new style, called *k'ie tsü* 'normal script'. To this day this is the official script used in copy-book writing, specimens of calligraphy, and documents, and forms the basis of the printed characters; it is these normal script characters that are added in brackets in the examples above.

With the brush one could write rapidly, but it encouraged the temptation to be careless and to sacrifice the form of the characters to rapidity of execution. Hence arose, firstly, a slight modification called *hing shu* 'running hand', and secondly, a shorthand which received the picturesque name *ts'ao shu* or *ts'ao tsü* 'grass characters'. This shorthand is not a rigidly consistent system like our Western stenography, but a very elastic style allowing of considerable individual or other variations, and the abbreviation may vary in its radical; there is *shiao ts'ao* 'small grass', which is still tolerably methodical, but there is also *ta ts'ao* 'great grass', which presents almost insuperable difficulties. The following table shows to what an extent the brush has debased Chinese script:



	Small seal	Normal script	Running hand	Grass character	
'horse'	馬	馬	馬	𠂔	𠂔
'bird'	鳥	隹	隹	𠂔	𠂔
'anxious'	𠂔	𠂔	𠂔	𠂔	𠂔
'seize'	𠂔	取	取	𠂔	𠂔
'door'	門	門	門	𠂔	𠂔

The running hand and shorthand variants offer, as we see, very little likeness to the original pictures of the small seal; even the normal script deviates so far from the seal that it is only occasionally—as in the word for 'door'—we recognize the lines of the original picture. It is curious to observe how the transition from the effective picture to its distorted successor is technically sometimes slight. In the characters for 'horse' and 'bird' the small seal forms are still recognizable pictures, but the normal script forms, though in fact very little changed, have not the slightest resemblance to a horse or a bird.

It sometimes happens that the transformation from small seal to normal character deceives us as to the etymology of the character. There is, for example, a character for the word 'spring, well', which in a *primaeval* form and even in the small seal 泉 was an unmistakable picture of a well or spring: a basin from which water flows. The corresponding normal character 泉, however, looks as if it were composed of 白 'white, pure' and 水 'water'; and as this is a good definition of the notion 'spring', it is evident that some speculative scribe in transforming the small seal into a normal character has introduced an element of popular etymology.

From what has been said it is clear that the normal script which has been in use during the whole of our era

seldom gives a clue to the original structure of a character. On the one hand the pictures are often so mutilated and distorted as to become unrecognizable; on the other hand there are various possibilities of error: the author of the normal character may have misinterpreted the small seal, and again, the author of the small seal, Li Sī, may have misunderstood the older character. Thus, when a native of China or a European learns the Chinese script for practical purposes—first the normal script and then the cursive character—it is a series of purely conventional symbols that he has to commit to memory. Sometimes, e.g. in 明 ‘bright’ (= ‘sun’ + ‘moon’) the etymological formation of the character is still, after thousands of years, perfectly clear and consequently assists the memory. But for the most part he has no help at all of this kind, but has to hammer in, quite mechanically, the appearance of the character, its meaning, and pronunciation in a particular dialect.

The question of the historical origin of the various Chinese characters becomes therefore principally a problem of scientific investigation, a branch of research, however, which is of ancient standing, seeing that Chinese scholars have devoted themselves to it for many centuries.

The formal evolution which created the normal script and the grass characters was concluded before the Christian era, and carelessness and licence in regard to the script had already reached such dimensions that it threatened the very existence of the script. A scholar almost considered himself disgraced if he wrote a readable hand like a common scribe. Thus in jeopardy the script was saved by the initiative of one man, Hū Shên, who by means of his dictionary *Shuo-wên kie-tsi* ‘Discussion of picture characters and explanation of compound characters’, published 100 A.D., aroused the interest of scholars in the etymology and orthography

of the script. In his work he made a critical examination of the current characters, put a critical edition of the character-index of Li Si in the hands of all his learned friends, and in this way succeeded in checking the impending decadence. His work called forth universal admiration, and to this day 'Shuo-wên is revered as a canonical book', says the commentary. From that time forward the normal script came into general use in all important books and documents, and the more individual running hand and shorthand was restricted to private use. Hŭ Shên's work *Shuo-wên* had this further important result that it gave the impulse to research upon the history of the script. Since its appearance Chinese scholars have devoted themselves to the task of searching for old variants of the seal characters preserved in the scanty relics of ancient China which were from time to time brought to the light. The results of these researches were published, *more Sinico*, in the form of notes to the numerous new and enlarged editions of *Shuo-wên*, and they are of paramount value because the greater part of the objects copied disappeared long ago, and by means of them many dark places in the history of the script have been illuminated.

Still it must be confessed that scientific research on the most ancient form of Chinese script is still far from the end of the task. His zeal and ingenuity notwithstanding, the Chinese philologist has often contented himself with results which cannot satisfy the requirements of critical science. In many cases he offers far-fetched explanations which are merely ludicrous. For the character 王 *wang* 'king', for instance, he has found no better interpretation than that it is 𠂇 he who is the mediator between 三 (three), the three powers, heaven, earth, and man! And the explanations of the characters 五 (5) and 十 (10) quoted above, savour of scholastic speculation. Thus, though the etymology of

a very large number of characters is already indisputably established, much remains to be done; and it will be an important task for the sinology of the future, when Chinese soil gives up its precious archaeological material, to take up again the history of Chinese script and make it the object of more profound research.

Chinese script, a genuine product of the creative power of the Chinese mind and not, like our writing, a loan from unrelated peoples, distant in time and space, is cherished and revered in China to a degree that we can hardly understand. And this regard is the greater because its picturesque and varying form appeals to the imagination infinitely more than our jejune and matter-of-fact script. The former is a fair and beloved lady, the latter a useful but unbeautiful menial. The Chinese script has always been extensively drawn upon for artistic purposes. Calligraphy is the mother of Chinese pictorial art and always its intimate ally, and an expert calligrapher has always been just as much esteemed in China as a painter of the first rank. As we decorate our rooms with pictures, so the Chinese adorn theirs with maxims of the wise written in large black characters by a good calligrapher on long, white sheets, hung vertically. A Chinaman can be made enthusiastic by the skilful handling of the brush in a written character as much as in a picture. From this close connexion between script and painting it follows that the Chinese artist, who often is both calligrapher and painter, loves to insert in his picture some lines of writing, which he employs with decorative effect in a masterly way. This writing is often a short extract from some ancient poem, and the literary epicure (who, of course, knows the whole poem by heart) finds in it a delightful addition to the picture. Literature and graphic art are thus more intimately connected in China than a westerner can realize. His signature the artist usually

places after the inscription, often with an elegant flourish of the brush, and he adds his name also in a red seal. These inscriptions on pictures are occasionally, but not often, written in normal script. The artist as a rule prefers either the archaic small seal characters (especially in his red-seal name) or the running hand or grass characters; and as artists, in China as in Europe, are an eccentric race, the 'grass' hand may be very individual and intricate. It is a characteristic that there can be purchased in China tables of many dozens of variants of the characters for *fu* 'happiness' and *shou* 'long life', two votive characters frequently used for decorative purposes. In fact the Chinese decorative script is a special branch of study requiring long and severe training, and as sinologists rarely wish to sacrifice their time on this scientifically unimportant speciality, they often collaborate, for instance, in museum work, with some Chinese expert who has been familiar from childhood with all the mazes of Chinese script.

The study of this special branch is excessively laborious. But the learning for ordinary purposes of some three or four thousand characters of the normal script is not an overwhelming task. Having mastered some hundreds of the most common simple characters (pictures), one is possessed of elements which turn up in various combinations (logical compounds and phonetic compounds); and then for the new characters one has only to learn of which of these elements they consist, or, to put it in Western language, how they are spelt.

## CHAPTER V

IF in the foregoing chapters we have given some account of the material of the Chinese language, the simple words and their representation in script, we have not yet dealt with

it as a medium for the expression of thought. The word is a unity arrived at by an analytical process, and the unit of speech is not the word but the sentence, though some sentences may consist of a single word, as 'Yes' or 'Jones' (in answer to such a question as: 'Who is there?').

Our next inquiry therefore will be: How does Chinese construct its sentences? How are the words combined to express thought?

The fixed monosyllabic character of the language must have a paramount influence in determining the structure of the sentence. In the Indo-European languages the variation in the form of a word, that is, its inflexion, serves the purpose of marking the part played by the word in the sentence in which it occurs. By the guidance of the inflexional endings the hearer or reader finds his way at once in a normal sentence. In the sentence 'Albert's mother gives him cakes', we perceive immediately that 'gives', having a finite form, is the verb of the predicate; that the word 'Albert's' cannot be the subject because it is clearly marked as an attribute (possessive) to another word; that 'him' is equally impossible as subject, since it is in an oblique case; that of the two words having a form not inconsistent with their being subjects—'mother' and 'cakes'—the former must be the subject, as the verb 'gives' (in the singular) agrees with 'mother' but not with 'cakes'. Even in English, in which inflexion is much decayed, it is possible to allot the functions of the words in a sentence by means of their inflexions; and in certain other Indo-European languages, e. g. Latin, Russian, German, the syntactical relations can be indicated with much greater precision. The difference between the subject and the object functions in the Latin sentence 'pater amat filium' are clearly marked by the inflexion, while in the corresponding sentence in English, 'the father loves his son', the hearer perceives from

the word-order alone which is which. And it is a fact that, though inflexional endings may seem too precious a possession for any language to get rid of them, the evolution of the European languages is steadily making for their entire abolition. What was formerly conveyed to the hearer by means of inflexions is coming more and more to be expressed in other ways. And in this the European languages are becoming more and more like Chinese, which has gone further in this respect than any of our Western languages, for it has almost reached the affixless stage.

The wide divergence of this state of things from what we are accustomed to in the West becomes obvious when we point out one inevitable consequence of the lack of inflexions, namely, that, speaking generally, Chinese has no formal 'parts of speech'.

An object, a 'thing', concrete or abstract, such as 'man' or 'delight', is such that it can be the subject of a predicate, or the object of an action, or it can appear as possessor, or can manifest itself in various individuals, &c. The Indo-European languages denote these functions by means of various affixes, and the different forms so used make up what are termed *paradigms*, e. g. the Latin paradigm *homo, hominem, hominis, homines, hominum*, &c., constituting the grammatical category 'noun'. Latin thus has a formal word-class 'noun' corresponding more or less strictly to the psychological category 'thing'. Similarly a formal category 'verb' is created, answering essentially to the psychological category 'action, process', in paradigms such as the English *call, calls, called*, where the endings *-s* and *-ed* indicate certain typical aspects of the process. The Chinese have of course the same psychological categories as we have, but they have no 'parts of speech' corresponding to them. Let us consider one of the results of this. A certain phenomenon, e. g. a jerking movement, may be considered as taking place

without reference to an agent, thus: 'The jerk was very violent,' or it may be conceived as produced by a person, as in: 'He jerked his arm.' In the first sentence, it must be expressed in English by a form taken from a noun paradigm (nom. *jerk*, gen. *jerk's*, plur. *jerks*), in the second by a form taken from a verb paradigm (*jerk*, *jerks*, *jerked*). But in Chinese there is no such difference. The Chinese would put these sentences in the form 'jerk very strong', 'he jerk arm'; the word 'jerk' is exactly the same in both cases, and it is certainly conceived by the Chinese as exactly the same word, though from a psychological point of view it functions differently in the two sentences.

To take other instances. The word *chang* corresponds functionally to an English verb in *tsi chang* 'the son grows up', to an adjective in *chang tsi* 'the eldest son', to a verb in the first place and a noun in the second in the phrase *chang wo chang* 'treat-as-old our old-people'. The word *fu* means 'father' and has normally this concrete signification; e. g. *fu lai* 'the father comes', *fu hiung* 'the father's brother'. But *fu fu* does not mean, as one might suppose, 'the father's father (grandfather)', which would be grammatically possible, but 'to father the father', i. e. 'to treat the father as a father' (=with filial piety), and this no more does violence to Chinese grammar than the other. A word which can correspond to most of the English parts of speech is *shang*, which has the fundamental sense of 'be(ing) above'. *Shang* can mean 'the above one', i. e. the emperor, and then corresponds to a noun; in *shang pien* 'the above side' it corresponds to an adjective; in *shang ma* 'to above a horse', i. e. to mount a horse, it corresponds to a verb; in *ma shang* 'horse above', i. e. on the horse, it corresponds to a preposition; in *shang yu t'ien* 'above have (=there is) heaven' it corresponds to an adverb.

The lack of formal word-classes holds good only in



a general way. Like most grammatical rules, it is not without exception, as the following points will show.

The use of affixes is not the only means of indicating inflexional categories. There are two other expedients. We may mark them by vowel-change, sometimes called internal inflexion; e.g. *man*, *men*; *bind*, *bound*. On the other hand we may avail ourselves of auxiliary words which—in contrast to the pure affixes which taken by themselves have no meaning at all—exist in the language otherwise as independent words, but which, when used for inflexional purposes, have a weakened meaning. Such an auxiliary is *have* in the sentence 'I have been in London' (cf. the full meaning in 'I have five shillings').

Chinese offers parallels to both these kinds of inflexion.

Internal inflexion is produced by variation, not in the vowel of the syllable but in its *tone*. The correspondence is not exact, but the parallel is close. The word *hao*<sup>v</sup> means 'good' (adjective), but *hao*<sup>`</sup> means 'to love' (verb). Here Chinese possesses a formal distinction answering to the psychological difference of category; which means that here we have a phenomenon answering to the distinction 'part-of-speech'. But examples of this kind are relatively rare and do not disestablish the general rule that there are no formal word-classes.

Much more important are the cases of inflexion by means of auxiliaries, which exist both in colloquial and in literary Chinese. A plain example from the colloquial is the auxiliary of the future tense, *yao*. *Yao* as an independent word means 'to wish, to want', and *t'a yao lai* means 'he will come'. The parallel with the English 'will' is complete, and may be further illustrated in a sentence such as *p'a yao sī* '(I am) afraid (he) will die', in which there is clearly nothing left of the full force of *yao* 'wish'. Another very common colloquial auxiliary is *liao*, which as an inde-

pendent word means 'to complete'. As a help-word it marks that the action expressed by the principal verb is completed: *t'a k'ü liao* 'he go-complete' = 'he went', 'he has gone'. To take an example from the literary language, we have a verb *i* 'take, use, employ', which serves extensively as an auxiliary word to express an instrumental sense, e. g. *i shou fu ch'ü* 'use hand support he' = 'to support him (using = ) with the hand'. Thus a verb, of which the full meaning is 'use', has become a prepositional particle.

Now it sometimes happens that such an auxiliary becomes a mere affix. All sense of its status as an independent word has disappeared, and it has dwindled to the equivalent of an English inflexional affix. In modern French, for instance, the 'definite article', as in '*le*-garçon', '*l'*homme', is merely an affix—*le*, *la*, *l'* not occurring independently, and having no sense taken by itself; its descent from an independent word, the demonstrative pronoun 'ille', has long been obscured. And similar things have taken place in Chinese. There is in Mandarin, for example, a syllable *ti* which is placed after a word or a word-group in order to mark it as an attribute of a following word. By doing some violence to the English language its force may be rendered by using the ending *-y* (= German *-ig*): *Chang-San-ti niang* 'Chang-San-y mother' ('die Chang-San-ige Mutter') = Chang-San's mother; *hao-ti jên* 'good-y man' = a good man; *shuo-hua-ti yang-tsi* 'speak-word-y manner' = manner of speaking; *cho-tsi-shang-ti t'u* 'table-upon-y dust' = the dust upon the table; *tso-tien lai-ti jên* 'yesterday come-y man' = the man who came yesterday, &c. There exists no independent *ti* with a cognate pregnant meaning in the colloquial, and so we must say that this *ti*, from the standpoint of modern Mandarin, is a purely inflexional affix, a sign of an attribute.

But that *ti* has none the less arisen from an auxiliary, is clear from a comparison with literary Chinese, in which we find a syllable *chī* corresponding exactly to the *ti* of the colloquial as an attributive sign: e.g. *fu-chī sin* 'father-y heart' = the father's heart; and there can be little doubt that an etymological connexion exists between the *chī* of literary Chinese and the *ti* of the colloquial. Now it appears that in the very oldest phases of the literary language this syllable *chī*, besides its function as attribute mark, had a meaning as an independent word, viz. 'this, these'; e.g. *chī tsī* 'this young person'. As a sign of the attribute it is therefore only a weakening of a demonstrative; 'the father's heart' was expressed by 'father this heart'.

The literary language also possesses a few inflexional elements which are not employed with full meaning as independent words, and which may therefore be classed as mere affixes. There is, for instance, the noun-forming *ché*. Joined, e.g., with the verb *sī* 'to die', it forms two kinds of verbal nouns: *sī-ché* 'death, the action of dying, to die'; and *sī-ché* 'the dying, the dead (man)'. But, though this *ché* does not appear as an independent word, it has possibly an etymological connexion with the *chī* mentioned above, and in all probability a pronominal origin.

With these fresh facts before us, two objections against what has been hitherto maintained may occur to the mind of the reader. Firstly, since both the colloquial and the literary language possess inflexional elements, such as these *ti* and *ché*, which do not have an independent existence as words, Chinese must after all be a language with affixes and inflexions. Yes, undoubtedly, but one swallow does not make a summer. The incontestable affixes are very few. And when we furthermore are able, as we have seen above, to trace their evolution from auxiliary words which in their turn come from independent words (*ti*, *chī*, and *ché* having

a pronominal origin), the most we can do is to assert the existence of a certain tendency towards inflexional affixes—just as we have witnessed above (p. 33) the first steps towards creating derivative affixes—tendencies which are certainly too slight to invalidate the general description of Chinese as a language without inflexional affixes.

Secondly, it might be said that, since Chinese makes use of auxiliaries, it must necessarily possess parts of speech. Words inflected by means of the auxiliary *yao* (future tense) are *ipso facto* labelled as verbs. Our answer is that if, in spite of the use of auxiliaries, we refuse to recognize the existence of nouns, verbs, &c., in Chinese, it is because the use of auxiliaries for inflexional purposes plays a much more subordinate part in Chinese than in English and other languages, in which it is a regular grammatical instrument, not only because the existing auxiliaries are few, but they are not obligatory. In English a sentence such as ‘*His mother whacked him yesterday*’ is susceptible of being expressed only in this way. Chinese, however, has a choice of forms; it may use a form corresponding to the English, or it may use a form which, if it could be used in English, would be ‘*He mother whack he yesterday*’. Thus:

*t'a-ti niang tso-t'ien ta-liao t'a*

‘he-y mother yester-day thrash-complete he’, or:

*t'a niang tso-t'ien ta t'a*

‘he mother yester-day thrash he’.

The auxiliaries in fact are indispensable only where they are needed for the sake of lucidity. Otherwise their use is optional, and their presence is often due to rhythmical or euphonic reasons. Even conjunctions, which seem so indispensable to us, can be readily dispensed with:

*t'a pu kei ni ts'ien wo tsiu kei ni*

he not give you money I then give you

‘if he does not give you money, I will give you

*t'a lai-liao ts'ing kau-su wo*  
 he come-complete please tell-tell me  
 'when he has come, please tell me.'

There are, indeed, fewer auxiliaries in modern Mandarin than in the language of the Confucian classics of more than two thousand years ago, and to a very large extent it is possible to do without inflexional affixes and auxiliaries. Our general description of Chinese as a non-inflecting language thus holds good.

What we have said about the structure of Chinese has so far been mainly of a negative kind: the general lack in the language of inflexional affixes and the limited use of auxiliaries. What then are the positive means employed for the construction of lucid sentences? The answer is, the chief resource is the use of an unambiguous word-order. Just as in the English sentence, 'the father loves the son', the mere sequence of the words indicates which of the nouns is subject and which is object, the Chinaman expresses the same thing in the same way: *fu ai tsü* 'the father loves the son', but *tsü ai fu* 'the son loves the father'. The word-sequence adopted in Chinese is generally the one that is natural also to the Englishman. From the sentence quoted we infer the sequence: subject + verb + object. The epithet is always placed before its head-word, e. g. *yen fu* 'the stern father' (but *fu yen* 'the father is stern'); in this respect then there is more accordance between English and Chinese than between English and French, which often has the epithet after the noun ('cet homme excellent'). Only the adverbial phrase has a variable place. These rules are not without their exceptions, but on the whole they are followed with precision, and they form the normal basis in the analysis of the Chinese sentence.

The fixed sequence in the Chinese sentence entails, however, several radical divergences from English usage. Two

interesting phenomena deserve to be pointed out in this connexion.

The English language employs an inverted order of words to express the category *interrogation*. We have two kinds of interrogative sentences, viz. questions for decision and the questions for information. The question for decision (answerable by 'yes' or 'no', the question being whether a known predicate can be applied to a known subject) has no other formal than inversion of the word-order (accompanied by an interrogative intonation), as 'Will he come?', as opposed to 'He will come'. Chinese does not resort to this expedient, since it would bring confusion into the strict word-sequence. It retains the normal word-order and marks the category 'question for decision' in either of two ways.

*t'a lai mo* (or *ma*)

he come? ?

*mo* or *ma* being a final particle of interrogation (cf. Latin *ne, num, nonne*). Answer: 'yes' or 'no'. Or:

*t'a lai pu lai*

he come not come.

The first construction needs no explanation. The second is not difficult. The speaker posits the two possible alternatives—*he comes; he comes not*—of which the hearer will choose one: *lai* '(he will) come', or *pu lai* '(he will) not come'.

The questions for information (where some member in the sentence is an unknown quantity, to be solved out by the answer  $a = x$ ) always contain an interrogative pronoun or adverb, e. g. 'Who is he?' 'What is he?' 'Where is he?' 'When will he come?' From this interrogative word alone the hearer perceives that there is a question put, and it is therefore really superfluous to invert the order of words, as English does by analogy with the questions for decision.

A non-inverted order would be quite as clear: 'He is who?' 'He is what?' &c.; with very logical consistency the Chinese word-order is *t'a shū shuei* 'he is who?' But if it is desired to make the interrogative nature of the sentence still clearer, a final interrogative particle *ní* may be added (not the *ma* or *mo* of the first category): *t'a shū shuei ní*.

While an inversion of the order of subject + predicate has no parallel in Chinese, yet there is in modern Mandarin another kind of grammatical category expressible by mere variation of word-order. As has been said, the place of the adverbial phrase varies according to certain laws which we cannot enter into here. Taking the negation of the verb 'not' as an adverbial phrase, let us see how the mobility of the adverbial phrase is exploited in an interesting way as category mark. When the word has to be simply negated, the negation is placed before it, e.g. *t'a pu lai* 'he not come' = he does not come. Now there is in Mandarin a large number of compound verbs composed of one head verb and one or more auxiliary verbs, corresponding to English compounds of verb + preposition or verb + adverb, e.g. *na-k'ii* 'take-go' = take away, *ta-k'ai* 'hew-open' = hew apart, *shuo-wan* 'speak-finish' = speak to an end, *ta-tao* 'beat-tilt' = throw over, &c. If the negative, instead of being placed before these verbs, is inserted between the members of the compound verb, it serves to mark the category *capability* (or rather, non-capability, since the sentences are always negative):

*t'a na-k'ii*

he take-go = he takes away;

*t'a pu na-k'ii*

he not take-go = he does not take away; but

*t'a na-pu-k'ii*

he take not go = he cannot take away.

This is a phenomenon which is extremely common in

Mandarin and exemplify in a remarkable way the use of word-order as a category mark.

How Chinese sentence structure works out in practice can best be shown by specimens of continuous prose. The first specimen here given is an example of the Peking variety of the Mandarin dialect.

*Yu i ko nien k'ing ti jên shi*  
Have one piece year-light-y man be  
*ko sha ts'i t'a ti*  
piece simpleton (noun suffix). He-y  
*tie niang hien t'a sha kei*  
father mother grudge he stupid, give  
*t'a yin ts'i kiao t'a ch'u k'ü*  
he silver (suffix), cry he go-out go  
*hüe ts'iao ti t'a tsiu tsoü liao*  
learn manner-y. He then go complete.  
*tao liao wai pien lai*  
Arrive-complete exterior side come  
*tao i k'o shu ti hia*  
arrive one stem tree bottom underside.  
*na shu shang yu i ta sie*  
That tree topside have a large number  
*ko kia ts'iao cha cha cha cha ti*  
piece house bird, cha-cha-cha-cha-y  
*luan kiao Hu jan lai*  
pell-mell cry. Sudden thus come  
*liao i ko yao ts'i wang*  
complete one piece hawk (suffix) go  
*shu shang i lo Hia t'e*  
tree topside one sink. Scare-effect  
*na kia ts'iao tu pu kan kiao*  
that house bird all not dare cry  
*liao k'o k'iao yu i*  
complete. But by-chance have one  
*ko nien shu ti jên ye tsai shu*  
piece read-book-y man also exist tree  
*ti hia tso cho ni*  
bottom underside sit-continue (euphon.

There was (il y avait) a young man who was a simpleton. His father and mother were sorry that he was stupid, gave him money, and told him to leave home (learn-y = learning = ) in order to learn manners.

He then set out. When he came out in the wood, he came beneath a tree. Up in the tree there was a great number of sparrows which all at the same time chirped: 'cha-cha-cha-cha'. Suddenly there came a hawk, which made a swoop towards the tree. He scared the sparrows so that they dared not chirp. By a chance there was a (book-reading man) scholar who also was sitting under the tree. He then



*tsiu shuo i niao ju*  
 part.). Then say: one bird enter  
*lin pai niao ya yin*  
 wood hundred bird subdue sound  
*a Na ko sha*  
 (euphon.-part.). That piece simpleton  
*tsi tsiu wen sien shêng ni*  
 (suffix) then ask: previous bear you  
*shuo shên-mo Na ko jên pu*  
 say what? That piece man not  
*yüan i ta li t'a shuo*  
 want-mean answer-reason he, say:  
*wo ai shuo shên-mo shuo shên-mo Pu*  
 I love say what, say what. Not  
*yung ni kuan wo t'a shuo sien*  
 need you mind I. He say: previous  
*shêng kiao kei wo wo kei ni yin*  
 bear teach give I, I give you silver  
*tsi na ko jên shuo na*  
 (suffix). That piece man say: that  
*ye hing liao yao liao*  
 also go complete. Want-complete  
*t'a ti yin tsi kiao kei t'a*  
 he-y silver (suffix), teach give he  
*shuo i niao ju lin pai*  
 say: one bird enter wood, hundred  
*niao ya yin kan hûe*  
 bird subdue sound. Reach learn-  
*hwei liao na ko sha*  
 know-complete, that piece simpleton  
*tsi yu wang pie ch'ü k'ü*  
 (suffix) further go another place go-  
*liao tsou tao liao i*  
 complete. Go arrive-complete one  
*ko tsing tung t'ien na t'iao*  
 piece well. Winter heaven that carry-  
*shuei ti sa ti shuei tsing t'ai shang*  
 water-y spill-y water well-curb topside  
*tung ch'êng ping ling liao Yu*  
 freeze form ice-ice complete. Have

said: When one bird enters the wood, (hundred birds =) all the other birds become silent. [In Chinese a sentence in verse.] The simpleton then asked: (previously born = senior =) Master, what did you say? The man did not want to explain it to him, but said: What I like to say, I say; you need not mind me. He (the boy) said: If the master will teach me [to say] it, I will give you money. The man said: All right ('complete' is confirming)! He demanded his money, and taught him to say: When one bird enters the wood, all the others become silent. When he had learnt it so he knew it, the simpleton went on to another place. He went and came to a well. The water spilled by the water-carriers [because of the] winter time had frozen into ice.

There was an old man

*i ko lao t'ou tsi k'ien*  
 one piece old head (suffix) lead-  
*cho i p'i lao lü*  
 continue one single-animal old donkey  
*lai yin lai liao chê*  
 come let-drink come complete. This  
*lû wang tsing t'ai shang i*  
 donkey go well-curb topside one  
*shang tsiu t'a tao liao*  
 mount then stumble turn-over complete.  
*na lao t'ou tsi chao*  
 That old head (suffix) become-  
*liao chi tsiu han kiao shuo*  
 complete nervous then shout-cry say:  
*Kei wo ch'ou lü lai pa kei wo*  
 Give I pull donkey come! Give I  
*ch'ou lü lai pa na ko sha*  
 pull donkey come! That piece simple-  
*tsi tsiu wen ni shuo*  
 ton (suffix) then ask: You say  
*shên-mo na lao t'ou ki tê*  
 what? That old-head be-angry effect  
*han cho shuo kei wo ch'ou lü*  
 shout-ing say: Give I pull donkey  
*lai wo mei yu shuo pie ti t'a*  
 come, I not have say other-y. He  
*shuo ni kiao kei wo wo kei ni*  
 say: You teach give I, I give you  
*yin tsi na lao t'ou shuo*  
 silver (suffix). That old-head say:  
*hing liao tsiu kiao kei t'a*  
 go complete. Then teach give he  
*shuo kei wo ch'ou lü lai pa Na*  
 say: give I pull donkey come! That  
*sha tsi kei liao t'a*  
 simpleton (suffix) give-complete he  
*yin tsi tsiu hui liao*  
 silver (suffix) then return-complete  
*kia liao t'a tie niang*  
 home complete. He father mother

who came (lead-ing; *cho*,  
 'continue', marks the action  
 as durative) leading an old  
 donkey in order to water it.  
 (One = once =) as soon as  
 the donkey mounted the well  
 curb, he tumbled down. The  
 old man became alarmed,  
 and he cried and said: Come  
 and pull up the donkey for  
 me, come and pull up the  
 donkey for me! The sim-  
 pleton then asked: What  
 did you say? The old man  
 got angry so that he shouted  
 and said: Come and pull up  
 the donkey for me, I have  
 not said anything else. He  
 (the boy) said: If you teach  
 me [to say] it, I will give you  
 money. The old man said:  
 That will do. And so he  
 taught him to say: Come  
 and pull up the donkey for  
 me! The simpleton gave  
 him money, and then he re-  
 turned home. [The second  
 'complete' is pleonastic.]  
 When his father and mother

*k'an kien t'a hwei lai liao*  
 look-see he return-come-complete,  
*tsiu hên huan-hi-ti kie fang*  
 then very happy-glad-y. Street-district  
*lin shê ti ye tu lai k'an t'a*  
 neighbour-hut-y also all come see he  
*lai liao chêng tsai shuo hua*  
 come-complete. Just exist speak-word-  
*ti shi hou chung jên luan*  
 y time-time, multitude man pell-mell  
*jang na sha tsî*  
 make-noise, that simpleton-(suffix)-  
*ti niang lai liao tsin*  
 y mother come-complete. Enter-  
*liao mên chung jên tu*  
 complete door, multitude man all  
*li k'i lai pu nien i shêng*  
 stand-rise-come, not recite one sound.  
*na sha tsî tsiu shuo i*  
 That simpleton (suffix) then say: One  
*niao ju lin pai niao ya*  
 bird enter wood, hundred bird subdue  
*yin t'a tie t'ing kien t'a*  
 sound. He father hear-perceive he  
*shuo ti chê hua tsiu huan hi ti*  
 say-y this word then happy-glad-y  
*ha ha ta siao siao cho*  
 ha-ha great laugh. Laugh-continue,  
*siao cho i hia tsî*  
 laugh-continue one down (suffix)  
*tie liao ko kiao tsin*  
 stumble-complete piece stumble then  
*tie tao liao na*  
 stumble-turn-over-complete. That  
*sha tsî tsiu han kiao shuo*  
 simpleton (suffix) then shout-cry say:  
*kei wo ch'ou lü lai kei wo*  
 give I pull donkey come, give I  
*ch'ou lü lai*  
 pull donkey come!

saw that he had returned,  
 they were very glad. (Neigh-  
 bourhood = neighbour;  
 neighbour - hut's - [man] =  
 neighbour.) All the neigh-  
 bours also came to see him.  
 Just (in speaking time =)  
 while they were chatting and  
 all at the same time were  
 making a noise, the mother  
 of the simpleton arrived.  
 As she entered the door, all  
 rose and did not say a single  
 word. Then the simpleton  
 said: When one bird enters  
 the wood, all the others be-  
 come silent. When his father  
 heard these (he-uttered =)  
 words of his, he guffawed  
 delighted: Ha - ha! He  
 laughed and laughed and  
 (one downstroke =) a mo-  
 ment he stumbled (a stum-  
 bling), and fell. Then the  
 simpleton shouted and said:  
 Come and pull up the don-  
 key for me, come and pull  
 up the donkey for me!

This is an example of modern colloquial. With this let us compare the following specimen of literary style:

*T'ien Kiao shi Lu Ai kung ér*

T'ien Kiao serve Lu Ai duke, but  
*pu kien ch'a wei Ai kung yüe*  
not see consult, address Ai duke say :

*Kün tu pu kien fu ki hu*  
Duke alone not see such-as cock?

*shou tai kuan chē wén*  
Head carry cap (noun suffix) : civil

*ye tsu fu*  
(confirming particle). Foot attach

*kü chē wu ye ti*  
spur (suffix) : military (part.). Enemy

*tsai ts'ien kan tou chē yung*  
exist front dare fight (suffix) : valour

*ye tê shī siang kao*  
(part.). Obtain food mutually announce:

*jên ye shou ye pu*  
benevolence (part.). Watch night not

*shī shī sin ye ki*  
miss time : reliability (part.). Cock

*chē ts'í wu tê kün yu jī*  
(suffix) this five virtue, duke still day

*yo ér shī chī chē ho ye*  
boil and eat he (suffix), what (part.)?

*tsé i k'í so ts'ung lai chē*  
Then take his what from come (suffix)

*kin ye fu huang ku i*  
near (part.) Such-as yellow goose one

*kü ts'ien lí chī kün ch'í yu*  
lift thousand *li*, stop duke pond, park,

*ch'í kün yü pie cho kün shu*  
eat duke fish, turtle, pick duke rice,

*liang wu ts'í wu chē kün*  
millet, lack these five (suffix), duke

When T'ien Kiao served duke Ai of Lu, and (not saw himself consulted=) was not consulted, he said to duke Ai: Has the duke alone no eyes for such a one as the cock? His head's (*tai-chē* [noun] the carrying) carrying [mandarin] cap: [that is] civil ability. His foot's having a spur: [that means] military ability. His daring to fight when he faces an enemy: [that is] valour. When he gets food he tells the hens: [that is] benevolence. He keeps guard in the night and does not miss the time: [that is] reliability. While the cock has these five virtues—the duke's daily boiling and eating him (is what =) what does it mean? [If you ask that] then [it is] (taking =) because (that from which he comes is near =) he comes from close by.

Such a one as the wild goose flies thousand *li* in one lift; it halts in the duke's ponds and parks, it eats the duke's fish and turtles and picks the duke's rice and millet. It lacks these (five-things =) five virtues, but the duke still (considers-as-dear =) appreciates it: [that is], I dare say, (taking =) because (that from which it

*yu kuei ch'ì i k'ì so ts'ung lai*  
 still dear it: take it's what from come  
*chê yüan i ch'ên tsiang*  
 (suffix) far I-dare-say. Servant take  
*k'ü kün huang ku k'ü i*  
 go duke; yellow goose lift I-dare-say.

comes is far) it comes from  
 far. Your servant (I) (un-  
 dertake =) shall leave the  
 duke; [as a] yellow goose  
 [I] will be (lifted, promoted  
 =) esteemed, I dare say.

In interpreting such a Chinese text we encounter three main difficulties, which we will proceed to illustrate here.

One of these consists in the remarkably large variety in meaning of the individual words. In different connexions a word can appear with such divergency of sense that it is hardly recognizable as the same word. In this phenomenon there is nothing in itself exceptional. Parallels can be found in all languages. To give one English example, the word 'spirit' has an extensive variety of meanings: genius, soul; ghost, spectre; vitality; animation, enthusiasm, vigour; courage; temper, mood; spiritual meaning (sense); alcohol, &c. But in Chinese this is carried to astounding lengths. The reason is that Chinese has been a literary language for thousands of years, and multitudes of words have in the course of time split up into a great number of sense varieties. Hundreds of the commonest words are so ambiguous that it is only with the help of the context that one can guess which of its many shades of meaning is intended; and instead of providing reliable points of support in the unravelling of a sentence these common words cause an embarrassing state of uncertainty. It is therefore not so easy as one might think to learn how a particular word is to be written and pronounced and what it means; to discover its meaning may mean the investigation of one or several pages in a dictionary.

Many of these vague words vary widely in sense already when used by themselves; others are troublesome chiefly in combination with others (in compound words or in set phrases). As an example of the former class let us con-

sider the word *king*, the original sense of which was concrete and technical, 'the warp in a loom', it being consequently written with a character for 'silk' as a significant part. From this arise various secondary meanings: the larger vessels of an organic body, arteries, veins, nerves; (the geographical 'warp') the meridians of longitude; to trace the fundamental lines, to plan, to regulate, to arrange, to rule (a state), to fix, fixed (stars); a constant rule, a principle, a canonical book; a Buddhistic sūtra, prayer; to follow a principle, to practise, to experience, to prove sufferings, to suffer; to pass through, to pass, past, earlier, already. Acquaintance with the character and some of its meanings, it is obvious, will not carry one far in a sentence; the context alone will guide. As another example take the word *tsie*, the fundamental sense of which is 'joint on bamboo' and which is written with 'bamboo' as radical. It comes to mean generally 'link, member', and develops the following series: section, article, paragraph; season, festival (the 'joints' of the year, where a new season is entered upon); juncture (observe that this Latin word has a similar history), state of affairs, circumstances; bamboo tablet given by the emperor to a feudatory, seal mandate; (jointed, symmetrical as the joints of bamboo) order, rule, duty, to observe the rules, decorum, rite, ceremony, modesty, loyalty, continence, chastity, remain unmarried (said of widows), to regulate, to moderate, to correct, to reproach, to upbraid. Again, *ku*, which means 'cause, motive, therefore, because; (have a cause why) intention, will; (the counterpart of the cause) consequence, effect, action, phenomenon; (cause for displeasure) discord, misfortune, sorrow, esp. sorrow for a dead, deceased, late, previous, old ("not new", e.g. *ku hiang* "old country", native country), intimate (old, i.e. intimate friend), of the olden age (e.g. *ku shi* historical anecdote). *Shêng* is a word meaning 'live, bear, be born, produce, new born, raw (in contrast to cooked),

unfamiliar (e. g. *shéng tsī*, a character unknown to me), &c.; *shéng jên*, 'bear man', therefore can mean 'to give birth to a person', but also 'a person unfamiliar to me, whom I don't know'. The word *t'ien* 'heaven' has the secondary meanings: 'day, season, weather, (given by heaven) natural, innate, (belonging to the representative of heaven) imperial'. *Ming* means first 'to command', but also 'the command of heaven, the will of heaven', hence 'fate, term of life, life'. The word *pên* means 'root' of a tree, and in the second place 'ground, base, principle, original, main point, main, proper, my, native (in opposition to strange), primitive, natural, true, real'.

If there are very many words of which the independent meaning is not obvious, it is difficult and sometimes impossible unaided to arrive at the meaning of phrasal combinations. There are naturally a large number of obvious cases, like *kin-piao* 'a gold-watch', but the more complicated ones are very numerous. Intelligible, though by no means obvious, are cases like the following: *k'an* means 'to see, to consider', and *chung* 'centre, hit the mark, suitable', &c.; *k'an-chung* 'consider as suitable', i. e. 'to prefer'. *Wai* means 'outside, exterior, surplus', and *hao* 'to shout, to call'; *wai hao* 'surplus appellation', i. e. 'nickname'. *Hi* is 'loose (stuff), sparse, rare', and *t'u* 'map, plan, to plan'; *hi-t'u* 'to consider as rare and to plan', i. e. 'to aspire to, to seek'. *Kuang* means 'light', and *yin* 'darkness'; *kuang-yin* 'light and darkness, succession of light and darkness, the course of time', i. e. 'time'. *T'u* means 'earth, locality', and *yin* 'sound'; *t'u-yin* 'local pronunciation, dialect'. *Yao* means 'wish, want, demand', and *ming* 'command, will of Heaven, fate, term of life'; *yao-ming* 'seeking one's life', i. e. 'awful'. Sometimes the comparison with Western forms of expression is helpful: *shou* means 'hand' and *hia* 'underside, beneath'; *shou-hia* 'under the hand', i. e. 'immediately', cf. French 'main-tenant'.

Next we have compounds in which the idea is so far-fetched that one can hardly hit upon it without assistance, and secondly compounds in which one or both members are simple words with such a wide range of meaning that it is far from obvious which application is appropriate. An instance of the first kind is the compound (occurring in the Mandarin specimen above) *sien-shêng* 'previous-bear', i. e. the previously born, 'senior, master, teacher, sir'. Other typical examples are *tung-si* 'east-west' (east or west, I don't know which) an indefinite object, 'a thing'; and *hien-t'ai* 'law-terrace', i. e. (tower of the law), 'mandarin, dignitary'. The second kind of difficulty appears in such cases as the following: *t'ien* means 'heaven, day, season, weather, natural, innate, imperial', &c., and *fên* means 'part, share, lot', *t'ien-fên* 'innate share', i. e. 'endowments'. *Ku* is 'to turn the head, regard, examine, reflect, supervise, manage, see to in good time, prearrange, provident', and *ming* is 'command, heavens command, term of life, life', *ku-ming* 'prearranging order', i. e. 'last will, testament'. *Tung* means 'east, eastern, belonging to the eastern (finest) part of the house, the house-fathers', the host's', and *tao* is 'way, pass, method, principle, virtue, resource, explain, speak', &c., *tung-tao* 'the host's way, host's principle', i. e. 'host's courtesy, hospitality'.

Compounds, unintelligible at the first view and necessarily requiring explanation, are of two kinds: *technical terms*, which require a knowledge of the 'realia' concerned, and analogical formations.

Technical terms may be exemplified in *sin-ts'ai* 'flourishing talent', *kü-jên* 'lifted man', and *tsin-shü* 'advanced scholar', which are the special terms for the three academical degrees in China, something like our 'bachelor', 'master', and 'doctor'. *Jü-pên* 'sun-root', 'the root, origin, of the sun' is the name of Japan (the word 'Nippon' is just an old loan-word from China, this same *jü-pên* in its



Sino-Japanese form); *sün-fu* 'inspect-soothe' means 'provincial governor'; *shou-t'an* 'hand-chat', 'chat with the fingers' means 'a game of chess'; *ku-jén* 'leg-man' is the technical term for a 'shareholder' (cf. our word 'member').

Many compounds are formed by analogy. We have just seen that *sien-shêng* 'previous-bear' means 'master, teacher'. To this there is first formed the correlative *hiie-shêng* 'learn-bear', i. e. 'pupil'; and then, by analogy with these, terms for various kinds of students, as *i-shêng* 'cure-bear', i. e. 'a student of medicine, physician', &c.

Over and above this multiplicity of meaning of a considerable part of the Chinese vocabulary, there is a further source of difficulty, in that what are apparently simple words may stand by a kind of ellipsis for compounds of which they form the first elements. There are many instances of this kind of thing in English itself. Thus 'stage-coach' is reduced to its first element 'stage', and this may then enter into combination in the ordinary way, as 'stage-driver', which means the driver of a stage-coach. This process is extremely common in Chinese. The *ku-* (leg-) of the word *ku-jén* (leg-man, shareholder) is combined with the word *p'iao* 'ticket', forming *ku-p'iao* 'leg-ticket (leg-man-ticket, shareholder's ticket)', i. e. 'bond'; then the word *ku* comes to be used alone for 'bond'. Similarly the first part of *tung-si* (east-west) 'thing, object', *tung* may stand alone with the force of compound, and may enter into combination, as in *ku-tung* 'ancient-east' (ancient-east-west), i. e. 'curio, antique'.

We have considered the cases in which these elliptical forms are used in the creation of compounds, but there is great freedom allowed in the use of such truncated forms by themselves. In English this kind of truncation is illustrated in such words as *taxi* for *taximeter* or *taxicab*, *tops* for *top-boots*, *clay* for *claypipe*, but these are all fixed and recognized ellipses, and to go outside the number of the abbreviations

conventionally accepted is to endanger one's intelligibility. In literary Chinese, however, there is far greater latitude in this respect. A writer is at liberty to mutilate almost any compound if it is required by the rhythm or the terseness of expression which is so much cultivated. We have seen that *jī-pén* 'sun-root' means Japan. But if a journalist is talking of Japanese soldiers he will not hesitate to write *jī-ping*, literally 'sun-soldier', instead of *jī-pén-ping* 'sun-root-soldier', leaving his reader to supply the missing element. Similarly it is permissible to say *chung-shêng* 'all-bear' instead of *chung-hiie-shêng* 'all-learn-bear', i. e. 'all the students'. Likewise you are expected to know, when you come across an expression like *liang yüan* 'two courts', that it means 'the two governors' (governor-general and governor) of a province. To explain this a long commentary is required. The word *sün-fu* 'inspect-soothe', we have said, means 'governor'. On this is formed an elliptical *fu-yüan* 'soothe-court', i. e. 'governor's residence', and this has subsequently come to mean 'the governor' himself (cf. 'the Sublime Porte'). There is, moreover, a word *pu-yüan* 'board-court', i. e. 'governor-general's residence', which is used for 'governor-general'. So when you say *liang-yüan* 'the two courts', i. e. 'the two governors', the second member *yüan* 'court' is the result of a double ellipse, being the truncation both of *fu-yüan* and *pu-yüan*.

The difficulty of Chinese the various aspects of which we have here exemplified at length: the excessive latitude of meaning of the majority of Chinese words, is, according to the opinion of the author of this book, one of the most serious if not indeed the greatest stumbling-block for the student who has to master this queer language. But the analysis of the Chinese sentence runs up against two more very considerable obstacles.

One of these is only a consequence of a phenomenon

which we have already touched upon several times. We have pointed out that the evolution in the European languages constantly tends towards formal simplification: the abolition of the elucidative inflexional elements, the great demands upon the hearer's power of conjecture, and his ability to find his way without such grammatical signposts and to sort the words, without such helps, into the categories which the speaker or writer has in mind. Languages such as Latin and Greek had comparatively little tendency in this direction; but the most modern, the most 'practical' of all the Indo-European stock, English, has advanced very far upon the road. Chinese, as has been said, is in this respect still further ahead, having almost attained to a complete lack of inflexions. It consequently makes exceptionally strong claims upon the interpreter's 'guessing' faculty, and the chief syntactical expedient of Chinese, word-order, only to a certain extent compensates for the lack of formal marks of the relations of the words within the sentence. Not only, however, do the Chinese suffer no inconvenience from this uncertainty, but they rather foster it, and take the extreme course of disdaining to produce even the measure of lucidity attainable by the observance of word-order. The Chinese sentence, compared with the European, is highly *brachylogi-cal*. It reminds us most of the language used in telegrams, in which we have to express ourselves in as few words as possible, e.g. 'going New York important business tell Jones forward trunk Liverpool Monday'. While we do not as a rule leave out any of the two fundamental elements of the sentence, subject and predicate, the Chinese find it beneath their dignity to express them both if one of them can possibly be understood from the context. An Englishman refusing to buy a certain thing, will say: 'I won't buy it,' thus carefully expressing both subject and object ('I' and 'it'). The Chinese will reject both of these as superfluous, and say simply *pu mai* 'not buy'.

This *sketchy* nature of Chinese, its want of clear and adequate guiding details, its apparently formless sentence-structure, put serious difficulties in the way of learning it. There is nothing for it but to translate word for word—in case of ambiguous words, trying one sense after the other—and thus endeavour to draw conclusions from the context as to the purport of the sentence. The case is therefore not analogous with that of Latin, for example. There a capable schoolboy, who has the ordinary grammar at his fingers' ends, can always with help of a dictionary and relying upon formal analysis tackle any sentence (provided that its subject-matter is sufficiently familiar to him). But it is possible for an expert sinologist to be nonplussed before a Chinese sentence, uncertain how it has to be interpreted. It may chance that a word-for-word translation gives immediately a clear and obvious meaning. But just as often we have to encounter a sequence of words that it requires all our ingenuity to make any sort of sense out of. And it very frequently occurs that the sentence admits of more than one interpretation, all of them grammatically correct. Then you must have a keen scent, you must be sufficiently 'sinicized' to *feel* which of them is the correct one—this applies more especially to the terse literary language than the modern colloquial. And this 'flair' can be developed only by extensive reading. Let us consider some typical literary examples.

The following is an easy passage from the Li Ki, Memorial of Rites, expounding the *san ts'ung*, literally 'three follow', i. e. 'three obedience duties' of woman:

*wu chuan ch'ü ch'ü i yu san ts'ung ch'ü tao*  
 Lack alone govern-y right, have three follow-y way;  
*tsai kia ts'ung fu sh'ü jên ts'ung fu fu*  
 at home follow father, meet man follow husband, husband  
*s'ü ts'ung ts'ü*  
 die follow son.

[She] lacks the right of self-determination (free action); [she] has three duties of obedience; in her [parental] home [she] obeys the father, [when she] marries she obeys the husband, [when] the husband dies [she] obeys [her] son.

Fairly straightforward also is the following piece from the annals of the Tsin dynasty. An official was summoned before a powerful minister, well knowing that he was to be executed. He declared, however, undaunted:

*wên t'ien hia yu tao shou tsai sī i*  
Hear heaven under have way, guard at four border,  
*ming kung ho sū pi hou chī jên*  
bright sir why need wall behind place man.

[I] have heard that [when] (what is under heaven =) the empire has (ways = principles =) a good government, [one is] (guarded =) safe [even] at the four borders [of it]; enlightened Sir, why do you need to place [armed] men behind the wall?

Not quite so easy perhaps is this verdict of a learned man concerning another:

*ming hia ting wu hī shī*  
Name under fix not-have empty scholar.

[He is] a scholar in [whose] (name =) fame (fixed =) certainly (not-have =) there-is-not anything-empty, i. e. He is a scholar who has well deserved his fame.

More difficult still is this line of Chu Hi (12th cent. A. D.):

*Yen shêng kung sī wu Tsêng tsī jī san*  
Yen bear body four don't, Tsêng master day three  
*sing*  
examine.

The scholar (*shêng*, see p. 87) Yen (embodied =) personally observed the four (don't =) prohibitions, the master Tsêng examined [himself] thrice daily. The four 'don'ts' were:—do not behold, do not listen to, do not say, and do not do what is contrary to propriety.

The interpretation of the following passage from the Memorial of Rites is, to say the least, not obvious. During a great famine an almost dying man begged food of the philanthropist Kien Ao, who readily but brusquely gave him rice. The hungry man preferred to die, and refused the gift with the following words:

*pu shǐ                      kīie lai chǐ shǐ*

not eat (or food) cry come-y eat (food).

[I do] not eat a come!-crying's food, i. e. food given by one who cries 'come!' (who gives in an unpolite fashion).

Of similar difficulty is a passage out of another classical collection of rites, the I Li. Tsêng Ts'an was the model of filial piety. He gave a striking proof of this when he repudiated his wife because she served her mother-in-law some badly-cooked pears. Somebody remonstrated with the words:—

*fei ts'i ch'u ye.*

not seven go-out (confirming particle).

*Ch'u* 'go-out' may sometimes have a causative sense: 'cause somebody to go out, reject', and the meaning of the sentence is: [this is] not [one of the] seven [legitimate causes of] repudiation. Tsêng Ts'an, however, maintained that it was a case of the third of the legal causes of divorce, which are:—sterility, levity, negligence towards parents-in-law, an evil tongue, thievishness, jealousy, and contagious disease.

The examples quoted above are difficult, but, at least, they are susceptible of only one interpretation. But in any classical text we shall find scores of ambiguous passages. As an instance take the following laconically worded judge's rule, which is as amusing as ambiguous:

*shǐ jū pu jū shǐ ch'u*

miss enter not like miss go-out.

Let us first notice that 'not be like' is a common expression meaning 'to be unequal or inferior to, be worse than', and

that both *ju* and *ch'u* have to be taken causatively and mean 'cause to enter', i. e. 'imprison', and 'cause to go out', i. e. 'release'. The natural straightforward interpretation would seem to be 'To neglect to imprison is worse than to neglect to release'. This is happily not the meaning. The Chinese, whatever their practice, have always been very humane in theory, and the correct rendering is this: 'To err in case of imprisoning is worse than to err in case of releasing,' i. e. 'It is worse to imprison an innocent man than to release a culprit.'

When we read in an ancient description of a campaign that *sī chē shī kiu* 'the dead ones [were] ten-nine', we must be careful not to translate it 'Those who were killed were nineteen'. It is true that this would be grammatically correct; in normal cases *shī-kiu* 'ten-nine', just like the French 'dix-neuf', means 'nineteen'. Here, however, it stands to reason that this cannot be the sense; the real meaning is: Those who were killed were (of ten—nine=) nine out of ten; *shī* 'ten' is therefore syntactically a partitive genitive.

In the old Shu King, the Canon of Documents, there is the expression: *T'ai K'ang shī wei* 'T'ai K'ang—corpse—throne, place'. This does not mean, as one might be disposed to think, 'the (corpse-place=) grave of [the emperor] T'ai K'ang' but '[the emperor] T'ai K'ang (corpse-d=) sat like a corpse upon the throne', i. e. was lazy and uninterested in the government.

A phrase common in petitions to the judge is:

*pī shu tan ér shuang su*

Brush spread cinnabar and frost stern.

The phrase alludes to the fact that the judge signs the verdict in red script. A grammatically allowable translation would be: [your] brush spreads cinnabar and the frost is stern (the result is hard), but this is not the sense. The whole is a highly respectful compliment, and has to be

interpreted : [your] brush spreads cinnabar and [you are] (frost-stern=) stern like the frost.

One more example :

*sin chi yu wei jo tao hu wei chē yü*  
Heart-'s fear risk(y) like tread tiger tail walk on  
*ch'un ping*  
spring ice.

A grammatically good translation would be: 'The fear in the heart is risky like the treading on a tiger's tail, or the walking on ice in spring'; and yet that is not correct. The true interpretation is not quite so patent: '[my] heart's (fear risk=) fear of the danger is like [its fear of] treading on a tiger's tail or walking on ice in the spring.'

The third chief difficulty in the analysis of a Chinese passage is of a graphical nature, and therefore is met with only in the literary language. In our Western languages we nowadays employ certain artifices to indicate the parts or elements of a sentence; their absence in Chinese is a serious drawback. These expedients are of two kinds.

On the one hand we indicate how parts of the discourse are connected; sentences and clauses are separated by full stop, colon, comma, &c.; the hyphen is used for compound words which there is some reason for not writing continuously as one word; and so forth. There are it is true no hard and fast laws governing their use; punctuation varies with the different languages and even with different authors in the same language; and the writing of compounds as one or several words is not very consistent ('gold-beater' but 'goldsmith', Fr. 'tandis que' but 'puisque'); but, generally speaking, the European can be said to indicate the logical connexion in a satisfactory way. Not so the Chinese. In more recent times, indeed, punctuation has begun to be introduced, especially in newspapers and school-books, but this is still regarded by many as a bolstering up of ignorance, and in editions of the most important



Chinese books, words, clauses, and sentences follow each other in an interminable flow without being separated in any way whatever. And the Chinese script never—whether in ancient literature or in modern school-books—distinguishes compound words, but always represents them as if their members were independent words. The lack of guidance on this point adds appreciably to the difficulty of analysing sentences. In fact, erroneous translations from Chinese are to a very large extent directly due to mistakes arising from misdivision of sentences. What divergent results can be arrived at may be shown by an experiment with a passage from *Shi Ki*, the Historical Memoirs of *Si-ma Ts'ien* (1st cent. B. C.):

*Ti Kung wei t'ing wei pin k'o ying mên ki*  
 Ti Kung make hall guard guest visitor fill door when  
*fei mên wai k'o shê ts'iao lo*  
 throw door outside can establish bird net.

Now, if we punctuated thus, 'Ti Kung make hall, guard guest visitor, fill door, when throw door outside, can establish bird net', we might produce a translation as follows: 'Ti Kung made a hall; he kept watch for guests and visitors, and blocked the door; when he had thrown [them] outside the door, [he] could put up a bird-net [without its being disturbed]'. This is not contrary to Chinese grammar, but the correct interpretation is entirely different. We have to punctuate thus: 'Ti Kung make hall guard, guest visitor fill door; when throw, door outside can establish bird net', and translate: '[when] Ti Kung (made=acted=) was (hall-guard=) minister, guests and visitors filled his door; when [he was] (thrown=) cashiered, [he] could put up a bird-net outside [his] door [without its being disturbed]' (=nobody came to see him).

On the other hand the European marks proper names by means of capital letters. Names like Mark, Hill, Brown, Lee, Turner, Meadows cannot give rise to ambiguity. But

in Chinese no graphic distinction is generally made ; consequently the proper names occurring in a text sometimes may be pitfalls for the unwary. It is true that in many cases the words in question if translated literally would give a sense impossible in the context and thus reveal themselves to be proper names. But this is by no means always the case. It often happens that the unsuspecting translator, giving the ordinary literal sense to the words that form the name, produces what appears to be good sense. Take, for instance, the following :

*Huan kung shū kuan chung k'in ning ts'i*  
 Martial prince send manage younger seek peace(able) relative.  
 That (manage-younger) Kuan-Chung is a name is obvious, and one naturally translates the passage: 'The martial prince sent Kuan-chung to see a peaceable relative', but, in fact, the correct interpretation is: 'Prince Huan sent Kuan Chung to see Ning Ts'i.'

Again, in a passage concerning the court of the emperor Kao Tsu of the Han dynasty, we read:—

*shu sun t'ung ch'i li ch'ao i*  
 uncle grandson throughout determine arrange court etiquette.  
 and unsuspectingly translate thus: '[the emperor's] uncle and grandson (or uncle's grandson) determined and arranged throughout the court etiquette,'—and then Shu-sun T'ung turns out to be the name of a minister!

The risk is just as great in the following sentence, which complains that a gifted man did not attain to the high position to which he was entitled:

*ts'ien li ch'i ki pu feng po lo*  
 Thousand li-y thoroughbred not meet prince delight  
*fu li ér pei*  
 press-down shaft thus suffer.

The most natural translation would seem to be: 'a thorough-

bred [running at a stretch the distance] of thousand *li*, which does not meet with the (delight=) appreciation of a prince, has to suffer under the weight of the [carriage] shaft.' This, however, is wrong, for *Po lo* was the name of a well-known connoisseur of horses, and the sentence means: 'a thoroughbred [running at a stretch the distance] of thousand *li*, which does not meet with a *Po lo* (i.e. one who appreciates its good qualities) has to suffer under the weight of the [carriage] shaft'.

The difficulty of recognizing proper names is considerably increased by the prodigality of the Chinese in regard to personal names. Every man of any importance has a series of personal names. The new-born baby gets a 'milk-name' from his mother, supplanted by a 'book-name' given by the teacher when he enters school. These names are of little account and are seldom recorded in literature. As an adult he receives his ordinary name, the 'official name'. Besides this he adopts a 'literary name', and he may further choose for himself or receive from friends one or more 'fancy names'. Finally, if he is a prominent man, he is given a post-humous 'memorial name'. In literature he may appear under any of these names. Thus, for instance, a prominent scholar of the 11th cent. A. D. was *Sí-ma Kuang*. *Kuang* was his ordinary name and means 'Brightness'. His literary name was *Kün-shí* 'Real Gentleman', and he is canonized as *Wên-chêng* 'Literary and Just'. Under such circumstances it is necessary to be well versed in Chinese history in order to recognize in texts even the names of the more remarkable men, not to mention the lesser stars of the firmament.

This ambiguity due to the lack of graphic distinctions obviously increases the element of uncertainty to which the features treated above contribute the main cause.

## CHAPTER VI

IN giving an account of the simple words, their representation in script, and the mode of their combination in compounds, phrases, and sentences, we have outlined the general structure of the Chinese language. But one important point remains, its artistic embellishment. No language is appropriately characterized unless due attention is paid to style, and in Chinese this is of particular importance because certain stylistic peculiarities play a predominant part in its use; and these peculiarities are indirectly an outcome of the phenomena discussed in the preceding chapter.

It is evident that the great latitude in the meaning of words, the vagueness of construction, and the lack of graphic helps are characteristics which involve the acquisition and mastery of the literary language not by the study of grammatical rules but by experience in reading. Nothing will serve but reading incessantly text after text, under the guidance of a skilled teacher or checking one's interpretation with a reliable translation. After years of practice we may acquire a kind of sixth sense, a linguistic sensibility which reveals almost instinctively the real meaning of the sentence. The beginner will constantly come across sentences which he can construe grammatically in different ways, but the trained translator will immediately feel which is the correct interpretation. And this is as true of the native himself as of the foreigner. The Chinese have to approach their literature in the same way as Europeans. The method that obtained in Chinese schools from ancient times down to the beginning of the present century illustrate this. The boys in elementary schools started by learning by heart volume after volume of literary texts, while at the same time they became familiar with the characters; and it was only at a more advanced stage that the teacher conveyed to them some idea of the meaning of these texts. This exacting method

had one great advantage, that the children stored up in their memories, in their most receptive years, extensive model texts in the literary language, which, once understood, served as key texts to many other works of literature. Even for the lower academical degrees the Chinese student had to know by heart certain large parts of the classics and to commit to memory hundreds of essays and poems written at various epochs by China's most distinguished authors. This curriculum of studies, which has been followed for two thousand years, has brought about an extraordinary familiarity with ancient literature, and in consequence an unequalled love and reverence for the history and literature of past ages, which is one of the most striking features of the Chinese. And the immense capital thus accumulated is at the immediate disposal of a Chinese author for the purpose of effective embellishment of his writing.

This may be done in several ways, which may be briefly exemplified. The means nearest to hand is of course the *quotation*. As soon as an occasion arises in which an adequate expression can be obtained by a direct loan from some classical work, the Chinese is ready at once with a quotation. There are actors in our own countries who are so well furnished with their parts that they have 'gag' ready for almost any occasion, and there are people who are prodigal of literary quotations; but this is considered rather bad taste. In China on the contrary this is the height of culture, and it is the mark of good breeding. A person apologizing for some blunder he may have committed can do so by asking me to *i té pao yüan* 'repay a wrong by good', an expression borrowed from Confucius, or he can cite a sentence *chī kin shī ér tso fei* 'I realize that I am right to-day but was wrong the other day', which is taken from a famous essay of T'ao Yüan-ming.

Such quotations are especially sought after if they contain some stylistic artifice or rhetorical figure. It is a

well-known fact that we in all languages express ourselves to a very large extent by metaphor and figure. It is only a limited number of phenomena that are expressed in direct unmetaphorical language; as 'the sun shines', or 'the dog bit the beggar in the leg'. Innumerable are the figurative phrases which are still felt as such, e.g. 'she is a rising star'; but still more numerous are the expressions of the figurative nature of which we have lost all sense, e.g. 'the sphere of thought', 'the body of the work'. There is much truth in the aphorism 'Language is a gallery of faded metaphors.'

Chinese is no exception to this rule. You find in it an unlimited number of metaphors, living, i. e. conscious, as well as dead, i. e. faded ones. Several expressions discussed in earlier chapters are good specimens of the latter kind, e.g. *shou hia* 'under the hand' = 'at once', where the Chinaman has certainly just as little feeling of the highly figurative nature of the phrase as the Frenchman has when he says 'maintenant'. But the language is very rich indeed in full-bodied living metaphors. There is, for example, the expression *tso tsing kuan t'ien* 'to sit in a well and look at heaven' = 'to be narrow-minded'.

Now, as we have said, the Chinaman is particularly pleased if his quotation contains such a metaphor, in other words, if he can employ a metaphor with a history.

Many such figurative phrases borrowed from literature are sufficiently complete and clear to be effective illustrations of the actual occasion even to those who do not know their origin. But to the scholar who is well acquainted with their antecedents they acquire, beyond this practical value, a high affection value. The metaphor 'dear as the winter sun' is excellent in itself, but its value is greatly enhanced by the fact that it comes from one of the foremost classical works, the famous commentary Tso-chuan on the Ch'un Ts'iu (annals) of Confucius; it is used there about

a very popular minister Chao Ts'uei. In the same way the phrase 'to open the door and salute the thief' is a picturesque expression for 'to be unsuspecting, careless', but it gets its proper value only when seen in the light of an episode in China's history. The prominent dynasty founder, Sun K'üan (third cent. A. D.), at his brother's death devoted all his attention, *more sinico*, to the mourning rites, and neglected his state duties. Chang Chao reproached him in the following words: 'Now when rebels and traitors attack us and wolves fill the roads, to observe the mourning rites is tantamount to opening the door and saluting the thief.' A third example is the phrase: 'when the lips are destroyed the teeth are cold,' which in a negative way expresses the same as our 'union is strength'. This metaphor also is taken out of the commentary Tso-chuan, and is the utterance of a certain statesman.

In scores of cases, however, the nature of the metaphor as a literary loan is unmistakably indicated by the fact that it is in itself unintelligible, that it claims imperatively, in order to be understood, a knowledge, on the part of the reader (or listener), of its literary source. This incomprehensibility may have various causes.

The quotation which contains the metaphor can be mutilated so that the reader, in order to seize the meaning, must know the whole passage from which it has been excised. Such mutilation is frequent. For instance the phrase 'to have the shadow for third man' is equivalent to 'being happy in solitude', and is derived from the following little poem by China's greatest poet, Li T'ai-po (eighth cent. A. D.):

*hua kien i hu tsiu*  
Flower middle one kettle wine

*tu cho wu siang-ts'in*  
alone pour-out not-have comrade.

*kü pei yao ming yüe*  
 lift cup invite bright moon,  
*tuei ying ch'eng san jên*  
 corresponding shadow form third man.

(*ts'in* and *jên* were anciently riming words: *ts'ien* : *njiên*)  
 'Among flowers, with a kettle of wine, I fill my cup in solitude and have no companion. I lift the cup and invite the bright moon, my shadow becomes the third man of the company.'

A poem, again, is the source of the expression 'to cut a handle', which means 'to procure a go-between for arranging a marriage'. The poem, contained in *Shi King*, the Canon of Odes, alludes to the primaeval and still practised custom of proposing marriage through a go-between:

*Fa k'o ju-ho fei fu pu k'e*  
 Cut handle how? Without axe not can.  
*ts'ü ts'i ju-ho fei mei pu té.*  
 take wife how? Without go-between not obtain.

'How do you cut a handle? Without an axe it is impossible. How do you marry a wife? Without a go-between you cannot obtain her.'

Another verse furnishes the phrase 'At the table there is a guest from the South', which means 'Keep your tongue under a bridle, don't say anything indelicate'. The verse runs as follows:

*tso shang jo yu Kiang nan k'o*  
 Seat upon if have Kiang-nan guest,  
*mo hiang ch'un fêng ch'ang ch'ê-ku*  
 not at spring wind sing partridge.

'If there is a guest from Kiang-nan (the south) at the table, do not, when the spring wind blows, sing the praise of the partridge.' The partridge, which according to the Chinese loves only to fly southwards, is the accepted type of homesickness.



The brief description *wu yün* 'five clouds', which is often used for 'signature', took its rise from the fact that a certain Mr. Wei Chê, writing his name in the elegant flourish of the grass character, used to say, 'My name Chê resembles a fivefold cloud'.

The metaphor quotation, however, need not be mutilated to be unintelligible. It often happens that even in its original setting in literature the metaphor is so bold or strained that it can only be understood by close reference to the context. Now, when the Chinese of later ages delight in parading such metaphors, the result will naturally be very insidious. It is recorded, for instance, in the annals of the Sui dynasty that the learned Li O, in a memorial to the emperor, likened literature to *yü lu fêng yün* 'moon-dew wind-clouds', 'dew in the moonlight and airy clouds', and since that time every author has the right to use the phrase 'moon-dew wind-clouds' in the sense of 'literature'. And since once, through a bold figure of speech, a mirror was called *shou kuang hou* 'the prince of eternal brightness', this has become a conventional expression for 'mirror'.

In this way has gradually accumulated a treasury of technical terms quite unintelligible in and by themselves. They are to some extent comparable with the 'kenning' of Old Icelandic poetry, such as 'the dragon's bed' for 'gold'. Forcible examples of the lengths to which this literary play can go are the expressions *p'ing-yüan tu-yü* 'postmaster of P'ing-yüan', = 'an inferior kind of wine', and the corresponding *Ts'ing-chou ts'ung-shü* 'administrator of Ts'ing-chou' = 'a good wine'. A Chinaman says a good wine goes right down to the *navel*, in Chinese *ts'i*, while a bad wine does not go farther than to the diaphragm, *ko*. Now the character for *ts'i* 'navel' happens to be very similar to another letter also read *ts'i* and forming the name of a district within the prefecture of Ts'ing-chou; hence the good wine is called 'the administrator of Ts'ing-chou'. On

the other hand the character for *ko* 'diaphragm' resembles another character also read *ko*, which in its turn is the name of a district in the prefecture of P'ing-yüan; and as the bad wine stops at *ko*, it is called the '(chief of relay = ) post-master of P'ing-yüan'. A connoisseur of wine, secretary of the minister Huan Wen (fourth cent. A. D.), is responsible for this literary *jeu d'esprit*, which for the Chinese is an example of the choicest wit.

Now there is a particular field in which these far-fetched allusions are most appreciated, namely, the polite forms of address. It is a common feature of the whole of the Orient that you honour the person addressed by exalting him and all his, while you disparage yourself and all yours. We have, therefore, in epistolary style, an extensive sphere for the use of extravagant figures of speech. You call yourself an 'unworthy slave', your house 'the low hut', your wife 'the holder of linen and comb', your son 'the young dog', and so forth, while the house of the person addressed is his 'palace', his letter a 'jade tablet', his father 'the stern prince'; you beseech him to allow you to 'trouble his chariot' and to 'let the splendour descend upon your hut', i. e. to honour you by a visit. In epistolary style opportunity is found to use the most delicate hyperboles of ancient lineage. Asking a person, for instance, for a helping hand or a recommendation, you may say, 'Don't be sparing of the fragrance from your mouth', or 'Allow me to share with you the shade of the willow'.

Another stylistic device, no less favoured than the quotation, is the *historical allusion*. This kind of rhetorical figure is no new thing to us. In our Western languages there are in vogue scores of allusions to events of history or of legend, e. g. 'to go to Canossa', 'to meet one's Waterloo', 'to recognize one's Pappenheimers', 'to fight windmills', 'this then was the poodle's purport', &c. But in Chinese the allusion has become a mania. The four thousand years of

Chinese history offer a rich field for the collector—and it is by no means always the greatest and most remarkable events that are chosen to furnish the matter; the ingenious author often makes allusion to trifling events and anecdotes known only to the profound scholar.

Take, for instance, the expression *tao si* 'slippers turned the wrong way', which came to mean 'a courteous reception', because the famous scholar Ts'ai Yung, when Wang Ts'an paid him a visit, was in such a hurry to run out and welcome him that he put on his slippers the wrong way. *Tung ch'uang* 'the eastern bed' is equivalent to 'a nice son-in-law', and for the following reason. K'i Kien, tutor of an imperial prince, wished to marry his daughter to one of the sons of the minister Wang Tao, and wrote him a letter to that effect. Wang Tao invited the bearer of the message to come and choose himself the most suitable of his sons. While all the others presented a well-bred behaviour, there was one youngster who *t'an fu tung ch'uang* 'bare belly eastern bed', i. e. 'was lying with naked belly on the eastern (i. e. finest) bed', munching a cake and laughing sneeringly at his virtuous brothers. Upon learning this K'i Kien at once decided that this independent young man was the *kia sii* 'excellent son-in-law' he wanted.

*Shi ma se weng* 'lose horse wall old-man', i. e. 'the old man at the wall who lost his horse' is a synonym for 'a deliberate man'. The philosopher Huai-nan-ts'i narrates the following anecdote. Once upon a time an old man, who lived close by the Great Wall, had a horse that strayed. The neighbours pitied him, but the old man told them to wait and see if this could not lead to something good. And, indeed, one day the horse returned accompanied by a beautiful Mongol horse. The neighbours congratulated him. 'Don't be rash,' said the old man, 'this may bring misfortune.' Shortly afterwards his son was thrown off the new horse and became a cripple. When the neighbours

condoled with him, the old man answered: 'Who knows if this will not turn out happily?' There soon followed a great invasion of the Huns, and all the young men of the district were called up, and nine out of ten were killed. The cripple, of course, stayed at home, and so the old man until death had a son to support him.

Another philosopher, Chuang-tsi, is the hero of a story which is the source of the metaphor *ku p'ên ch'ī ko* 'drum bowl-y song', i. e. 'a song accompanied by drumming on a bowl', which means 'mourning for a dead consort'. Upon the death of Chuang-tsi's wife, Huei-tsi paid a visit of condolence. Chuang-tsi was sitting in a careless posture singing and accompanying himself by drumming on a bowl. 'It is enough', said Huei-tsi, 'that you do not lament; but that you should make merry in this way is really too much.' 'The dead one', Chuang-tsi answered, 'rests in peace in the great abode.' If I mourned and wept over her that would be not to understand the will of heaven; therefore I have ceased to do so.' *Kua shên wu ch'ī kuan* 'to hang up the shên-wu cap' is equivalent to 'to retire from office'. The expression is due to the fact that when T'ao Hung-king (A. D. 493) left his post he hung up his ceremonial cap at the Shen-wu gate in Nanking. *Tung shan ch'ī fei* 'the expenses of the eastern mountain' means 'generosity towards relatives'. It is recorded that Sie An-shi (fourth cent. A. D.), when retiring from official life, built a villa on the 'eastern mountain' and magnificently entertained his nephews there. As a last example may be mentioned *ping jên* 'ice-man', which means 'a matrimonial go-between'. A certain Ling-hu Ts'è dreamt that he stood on the ice and conversed with an unknown man who was below the ice. He asked a soothsayer about the meaning of the dream and this gentleman said, 'Above the ice, that is the male principle (*yang*); below the ice, that is the female principle (*yin*). When the ice melts there will be a marriage at which you

will act as a go-between', and the prophecy turned out to be true.

A Chinese author does not write for the *profanum vulgus* but for scholars as well stocked with learning as himself, and the various kinds of allusions are so recondite that the Chinese have found it necessary to compile large dictionaries of quotations and allusions for the help of the student.

But, though this learned matter is chiefly intended for literary purposes, its use is not limited to books. It plays an important part also in the intercourse of everyday life. A glance even at the signboards in a Chinese city will help us to understand this. A European physician contents himself with an unpoetical but effective John Smith, M.D., but you will find at a Chinese doctor's gate some such inscription as :

*kü tsing*

*hing lin*

'orange-well apricot-grove'. And the interpretation is as follows. In the first place, when a certain Su Tan was on the point of departing this life, he said to his mother, 'Next year an epidemic will ravage the country; but those who eat a leaf of the orange tree outside our gate and drink the water in the well of our yard, will at once recover their health'. So saying, he disappeared, carried away in a cloud through the air. His prophecy was fulfilled, and thousands were saved by his instruction. In the second place Tung Fêng was an eminent magician and doctor. His eccentricity was to ask no fee for his cures but apricot plants. In a serious case he claimed five, in an easy case one. He was soon the possessor of a large apricot grove which he set tigers to guard.

The same ornamental diction enters largely into the conversational language of the educated. The observant foreigner will soon find that even when he has mastered the language of the common people, the conversation of the upper class remains a mystery to him. It has often happened

to the author of this little book that he has perfectly understood what his amiable interlocutors said to him, while he has hardly grasped a word of what they said to each other. The Chinese passion for displaying literary knowledge and wide reading in conversation makes it almost impossible for a foreigner who has not accumulated masses of learning from his childhood to attain to any great skill in intellectual conversation. One illustration will suffice. I ask a Chinese gentleman about his age, and may get the answer *ér li*. These two words mean literally 'then stand', which tell me very little. But if I know my Confucius by heart, as does every educated Chinaman, I am aware that in the Lun Yü (Confucian discourses), first book, second chapter, and fourth paragraph, there occurs the following passage: 'At fifteen [years] I was intent upon learning; *san shí ér li* (lit. thirty then stand =) at thirty I was stable; at forty I had no doubts,' &c. So, when my interlocutor answers my question about his age by *ér li* 'then stand', he means to say that he is 'thirty years of age'.

There is one particular kind of stylistic embellishment which all classes of people, educated and uneducated, have at their command, the hyperbolical expressions (already mentioned) of polite address. The hyperboles are not confined to one side, they are complementary; all things belonging to the person addressed are marked with epithets like *kuei* 'expensive, honourable', *pao* 'precious', *t'ai* 'high', *ta* 'great', *ling* 'authoritative', while everything connected with the speaker is characterized as *tsien* 'cheap, insignificant', *hia* 'low', *siao* 'little', &c.

A gentleman whom I meet for the first time is sure to ask: *kuei sing* 'the honourable family name?' and I answer *tsien sing Kao* 'my cheap name is Karlgren'. The next question will be 'the honourable country', to which I reply 'the unworthy country is Sweden'. Since inquiries about one's family is a mark of the greatest

politeness, I now have to take my turn in asking about his 'stern prince', i. e. father; his 'honourable hall', i. e. wife, his 'honourable gentlemen', i. e. sons, and his 'honourable love' or 'honourable flower of the zenana' or 'thousand ounces of gold', i. e. daughter; and he will reply, perhaps, that the 'younger brother'—he regards me as an elder brother—has five 'pups', i. e. sons, that 'the one who costs money', i. e. his daughter, is soon 'going out through the door', i. e. is to be married, and that his 'cheap interior' or his 'stupid thorn' or (if he is a man of the people) his 'stinking woman', i. e. his wife, is not worth mentioning.

The well-known author of some excellent though somewhat severe books on Chinese sociology, Arthur Smith, narrates the following anecdote:

A visitor called, clad in his best robes, and awaited the arrival of his host seated in the reception room. A rat, which had been disporting itself upon the beams above, insinuating its nose into a jar of oil which was put there for safe keeping, frightened at the sudden intrusion of the caller, ran away, and in so doing upset the oil-jar, which fell directly on the caller, striking him a severe blow, and ruining his elegant garments with the saturation of the oil. Just as the face of the guest was purple with rage at this disaster, the host entered, when the proper salutations were performed, after which the guest proceeded to explain the situation. 'As I entered your honourable apartment and seated myself under your honourable beam, I inadvertently terrified your honourable rat, which fled and upset your honourable oil-jar upon my mean and insignificant clothing, which is the reason of my contemptible appearance in your honourable presence.'

This instructive story may fittingly close our brief sketch of the linguistic conditions of the Middle Kingdom.

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