

CHINESE CHARACTERS

THEIR ORIGIN, ETYMOLOGY, HISTORY,
CLASSIFICATION AND SIGNIFICATION. A
THOROUGH STUDY FROM CHINESE
DOCUMENTS

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CHINESE CHARACTERS.

INTRODUCTORY.

I. HISTORICAL SKETCH.

Tradition ascribes the idea of the characters to 伏羲 Fu-hsi, and their first drawing to 倉頡 Ts'ang-hsieh, two worthies of the prehistoric age. The systematisation of the Chinese writing, is attributed to 黃帝 Huang-ti, the founder of the Chinese empire, 25th century B.C. Some texts of the *Annals*, may have been written earlier than the 22th century B.C. — In the beginning, writing was used only for matters of government and administration. By its means, the Emperor was given information, and his orders were transmitted to the mandarins and to the people. The 史 shih, recorders, registrars, scribes, were trained up in official schools, under the direction of a 太史 t'ai-shih grand-recorder.

The oldest 古文 ku-wên graphies that have come down to us in their original form, are traced back to the 18th century B.C. Their study reveals the fact, that while their making was well defined, their form varied much. Towards the year B.C. 800, the grand-recorder 籀 Chou drew up, for the use of the official scribes, a catalogue of the then existing characters, and fixed their standard shape. Those ku-wên are called by Chinese philologists 籀文 chou-wên, or 大篆 ta-chuan greater seal characters, or 蝌蚪字 k'o-tou-tzū tadpoles. The origin of the latter appellation is thus recorded, in the 2d century B.C., when the house in which

3. *By sounds.* Being given a system of figuration, the characters were classified according to the European alphabetical order. The big English dictionaries of *Williams and Giles*, and the big «*Dictionnaire chinois-français du P.S. Couvreur S.J., Ho-chien-fu, 1890*», are made after this method.

Use of the dictionaries. — To find a character the sound and meaning of which are unknown, one must refer to a dictionary by radicals, which supposes the knowledge of the 214 keys of *K'ang-hsi*. — If the sound is known, with the help of a Chinese master, or otherwise, then the shorter method is to use a dictionary by sounds, supposing that one is well acquainted with its figuration. — The phonetic series are the most useful for study, but they are not very useful as a dictionary, unless one is already far advanced in the study of Chinese.



ETYMOLOGICAL LESSONS.

LIST OF THE 224 PRIMITIVES.

Modern form. The ancient form may be found at the number given.

1	ノ	P'ieh ¹ .	4	Chiu ¹ .	八	Ju ⁴ .	ト	Po ³ .
		7.		54.		15.		56.
フ	乞	Ya ² .	口	Chiung ³ .	口	K'an ³ .	十	Shih ² .
11.		9.		34.		38.		24.
フ	し	Yin ³ .	ム	Ch'ü ¹ .	ム	Kung ¹ .	九	Shu ² .
4.		10.		38.		38.		22.
ク			人	Ch'uei ² .	カ	Li ⁴ .	ム	Ssu ¹ .
12.				13.	カ	53.	刀	89.
フ	2		仁	Fang ⁴ .	一	Mi ² .	丁	Tao ¹ .
6.				51.	乃	34.		52.
一	几	Chi ¹ .	弓	Han ³ .	乃	Nai ³ .	丁	Ting ⁴ .
1.		20.	厂	55.	八	19.		57.
フ	七	Ch'i ¹ .	厶	Han ⁴ .	八	Pa ¹ .	又	Wu ³ .
8.		33.	又	59.	ヒ	18.		39.
乙	万	Ch'iao ³ .	人	I ¹ .		Pi ³ .		Yu ⁴ .
9.		58.		39.		26.		43.
一	九	Chia ³ .		Jên ² .		Ping ¹ .		
6.		23.		25.		17.		