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Chinese Characters

师姣 ◎ 编著



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师 奴 编著

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在2008年北京奥运会开幕式上，中国向世界展示了历史悠久、博大精深、丰富多彩的中华文明。897位开幕式表演者操作着897块活字印刷字块变换出不同字体的“和”字，向世界传达了中国“和为贵”的思想，同时形象地展现了中国汉字的历史发展进程。

中国的汉字与苏美尔的楔形文字、埃及的象形文字同为世界上最为



At the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, China presents to the world a palace of civilization, long-standing, profound and colorful. There, 897 moveable-type blocks powered by 897 performers bounced up and down, spelling out the character “harmony” in different fonts, which conveys the Chinese value of peacefulness to the whole world, and meanwhile vividly demonstrates the historical evolution of Chinese characters.

The Chinese character, Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics are the world's most ancient writing systems. But among all the three, only Chinese is still in use, carrying on the Chinese civilization of five thousand years' history. Different from any other writings in the world, Chinese character as a mature ideogram system has its own features. First, it is squarely shaped and hence also known as square-block character. Second,

古老的文字。而汉字是其中唯一至今仍在使用的文字，承载着中华文明五千年的悠久历史。作为一套具有成熟体系的表意文字系统，汉字不同于世界上任何一种文字，具有独特的性质：拥有方方正正的方块式结构，因此又被称为“方块字”；使用汉语拼音的方式注音；书写时讲究笔画顺序，遵循一定的规则；有六种造字原理，即象形、指事、会意、形声、转注、假借；在漫长的历史发展中，演变出了多种字体，包括小篆、隶书、草书、楷书、行书等。中国书法、篆刻、诗歌、对联等传统艺术形式则展现了汉字富于变化的形体和极富韵律的节奏。在世界文明中，汉字散发着独一无二的璀璨光芒。

本书通过对汉字的历史、汉字的特点，以及书法、篆刻、诗歌、对联等中国传统文化的相关介绍，向读者展现中国文字的精髓。

phonetic notation takes the form of *Pinyin* (Chinese Romanization). Third, there are rules for stroke order in writing. Fourth, the formation of Chinese character can be varied from pictogram, ideogram, ideogrammic compound, phono-semantic compound, transformed cognate and rebus. Fifth, in the long evolution history, a variety of styles come into being, such as small seal script, clerical script, cursive script, regular script, running script, etc. Besides, Chinese calligraphy, seal carving, poetry, couplet and other traditional art forms all manifest the varied structure of Chinese character and its beauty in rhythm. Even in the world civilization, Chinese character emits unique brilliance.

This book mainly introduces the history and features of Chinese character. It also refers to calligraphy, seal carving, poetry, couplet and other related traditional Chinese culture, in order to reveal the very essence of Chinese characters.

目录 Contents



悠久的历史

The Long History of Chinese Character..... 001

汉字的起源

The Origin of Chinese Character 002

汉字的发展

The Evolution of Chinese Character 007

神奇的汉字

The Magical Chinese Character..... 021

汉字的注音

The Phonetic System of Chinese Character 022

汉字的构形

The Structure of Chinese Character 027

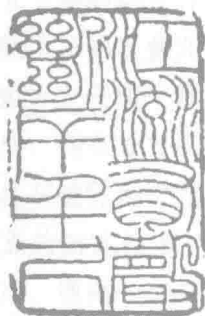
汉字的字义

The Semantic Meaning of Chinese Character . 035

汉字造字法

The Formation of Chinese Character 042





优美的汉字

The Graceful Chinese Character..... 057

汉字与书法

Chinese Character and Calligraphy..... 058

汉字与篆刻

Chinese Character and Seal Carving..... 089

汉字与诗歌

Chinese Character and Poetry..... 111

汉字与对联

Chinese Character and Chinese Couplet..... 121

附录

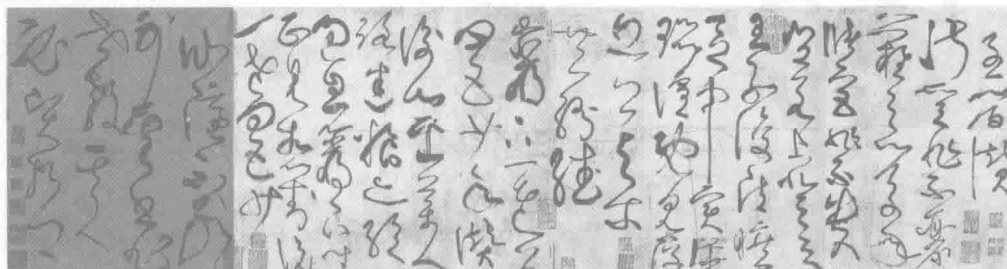
Appendix..... 129

汉字书写工具

Writing Tools of Chinese Character..... 130

如何写汉字

How to Write Chinese Character..... 139



悠久的汉字

The Long History of Chinese Character

汉字，亦称“中国字”、“中文字”、“方块字”，是记录汉族语言的一种文字，属于表意文字的词素音节文字，得名于汉族和汉朝，是中华文明的重要标志之一。汉字是世界上使用人口最多、使用范围最广、使用时间最长的文字，其与古埃及象形文字圣书字、两河流域苏美尔人的楔形文字一样属于世界上最古老的文字，也是至今唯一仍被使用的文字体系。

Chinese character (*Hanzi*), also known as Chinese word, Chinese script or square-block character, is a writing system of the Han people and also gets its name therefrom in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). It is ideographic and morpheme-syllabic, serving as one of the important symbols of Chinese civilization. Moreover, Chinese character is the most populous, most widely and longest used writing system in the world. Besides, unlike the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics written on the holy books, and the Sumerian cuneiform born at Mesopotamia, Chinese character is not only most ancient, but still in current use.



> 汉字的起源

考古学家在新石器时代后期的山东大汶口文化遗址（约前4500—前2500）发现了刻有符号的陶尊和残器片，这些符号被专家们普遍认为具备简单文字的特征，是中国的原始文字。在仰韶文化（约前5000—前3000）早期的陕西半坡遗址中，出土了大量彩陶，上面绘有人面、鱼、鹿、植物枝叶及几何形等纹样，其中鱼形纹被证实与早期象形字有很大关系。



> The Origin of Chinese Character

At Dawenkou Cultural sites of the late Neolithic Age (ca.4500 B.C.-2500 B.C.) archaeologists have found fragments of pottery vessels engraved with symbols. As the symbols reveal features of simple script, experts generally regard them as ancient Chinese characters. Later at the Banpo Sites of Shaanxi Province were unearthed many painted potteries made in the early period of Yangshao Culture (ca.5000 B.C.-3000 B.C.). There we can see decorated patterns of human face, fish, deer, branch and leaf of plant, and geometric forms, among which the fish

• 人面鱼纹盆（仰韶文化）

Basin with Human Face and Fish Design
(Yangshao Culture, ca.5000 B.C.-3000 B.C.)

新石器时代

新石器时代是考古学上石器时代的最后一个阶段，与旧石器时代相对应。这一时期，人类开始使用磨制石器，并创造了彩陶，是人类社会物质文明发展的一个重要阶段。中国的新石器时代距今约1万年，最早出现在黄河流域和长江流域。仰韶文化、龙山文化是新石器时代的历史代表。

Neolithic Age

In archeological chronology, the Neolithic Age (ca.10,000-4000 years ago), corresponding to the Paleolithic Period (ca.1,700,000-10,000 years ago), is the last phase of the Stone Age. During this period, human beings began to use polished stone implement and also created painted pottery. It is an important stage in the development of material civilization. The Chinese Neolithic Age appeared circa 10,000 years ago at the Yellow and Yantze rivers. Yangshao Culture and Longshan Culture are representative of this historical period.

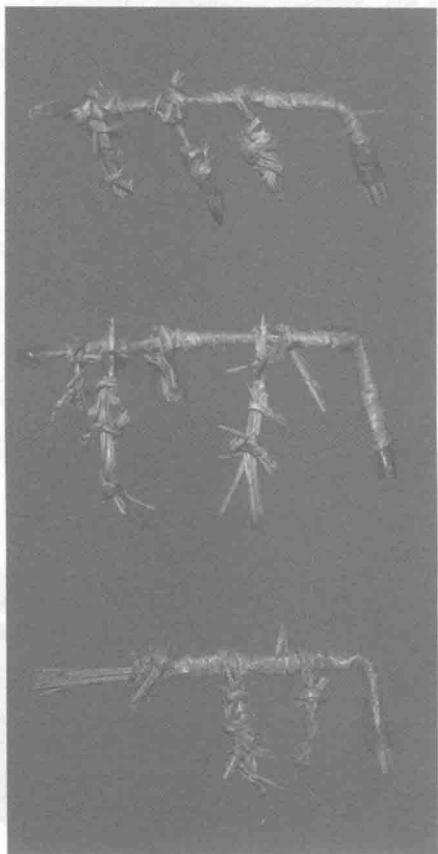


- 龙山文化黑陶高柄杯
Black Pottery Cup with High Stem in Longshan Culture (ca.2800 B.C.-2300 B.C.)

- 仰韶文化船形网纹彩陶壶
Boat-shaped Painted Pot with Net Pattern in Yangshao Culture (ca.5000 B.C.-3000 B.C.)



汉字产生之前，古人用结绳记事来记录日常生活，结绳即是将绳子打结，通过绳结的大小、数量来记录所发生的事情。刻木记事，也是原始记事方法之一。古人在竹子、木头上刻上不同大小、不同样式的符号来记录日常生活。但是，这种原始的记事方法，只能满足人



pattern is proved to be strongly related with the early pictographs.

Before the generation of Chinese characters, the ancients would tie knots into different sizes and numbers to keep daily records, or by wood notching which is another way to set down everyday life. Usually they would notch symbols of different sizes and styles on bamboos or woods, but for all practical purposes, such ancient methods can only help to record simple events. As the need arose for more communication, ancient people began to explore a better channel to exchange information. Thus since the demand of social development went beyond the range of knot-tying and wood-notching, some pictographs and symbols gradually emerged to meet the needs; they are the early forms of

• 结绳记事

原始先民以绳结形式反映客观经济活动及其数量关系的记录方式，是在文字产生之前古人广泛使用的记录方式之一。

Keep Records by Tying Knots

In ancient China, people usually tied knots to record economic activities and denote quantitative relations. This method is widely used before the generation of characters.



们记录简单事件的要求，不能满足人们沟通、交流更多信息的需要，于是先民们开始探索另外一种交流信息的工具。随着人类社会的发展，结绳、刻木因为不能适应范围大、数量多的记事要求而遭到淘汰，渐渐地产生了图画文字、符号文字等原始汉字的雏形。图画文字是由直观、形象、写实的图画演化而来，通过多次的使用产生相应的联系，具有某种约定性，从而在使用过程中达到消息互通的效果。由图画文字发展变化来的符号文字产生于公元前1万年左右，可以说是中国远古时代最初的文字。

Chinese character. Pictographs are evolved from visual and realistic images. Their inter-connection is established through repeated use which in turn helps to facilitate communication in practice. The symbols, born around 10,000 B.C., are developed from pictographic writings. They are the prototype of Chinese characters in ancient times.

仓颉造字

关于汉字的产生，不得不提到“仓颉造字”的传说，这一传说最早出现在战国时代的文献《吕氏春秋》中。传说仓颉是约公元前2500年轩辕黄帝时期的史官。他从辨析鸟兽足迹中得到了用图画法创立文字的启发，又因为其从事史官的工作，需要集中使用文字对历史进行记录，因此对流传于先民中的字符加以搜集、整理和使用。所谓“仓颉造字”的历史传说曲折地折射出先民造字的历史过程。仓颉被中国人尊奉为“造字圣人”。

Cangjie, the Inventor of Chinese Characters

Based on the legend, Cangjie played a crucial role in the generation of Chinese characters. This legend first appeared in *Mister Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals (Lüshi Chunqiu)*, a literary

document of the Warring States Period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.). There Cangjie is claimed to be an official historian of the Yellow Emperor about 2500 B.C. and later revered as the Great Inventor of Chinese Characters. From the footprint of birds and animals, he found inspiration for pictographs and hieroglyphics. Moreover, as his work needed words to record history, Cangjie began to collect and collate characters spread among the ancients and put them into use, just as the legend goes. In brief, Cangjie has made a significant contribution to the development of Chinese characters.



• 仓颉造字

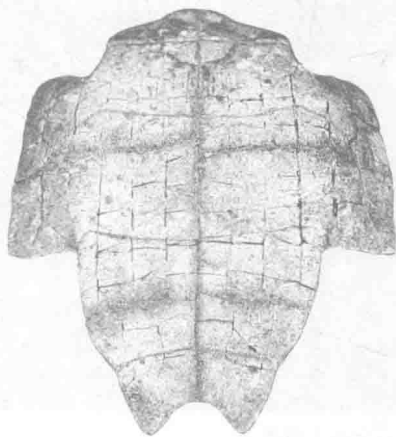
Cangjie, the Inventor of Chinese Characters



> 汉字的发展

公元前2000年，汉字开始进入字符积累阶段。汉字的发展演变过程，大致可分为甲骨文、金文、篆书、隶书、楷书等五个阶段。

现存最早的汉字是殷商时期（前1600—前1046）的甲骨文，它是一套具有比较严密系统的文字



• 刻有甲骨文的龟背

Oracle Bone Scripts Incised on Turtle Shell

> The Evolution of Chinese Character

In around 2000 B.C., Chinese characters began to enter the stage of accumulation. Its evolution can be broadly divided into five stages, oracle bone script, bronze script, seal script, clerical script and regular script.

The oracle bone script of the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C.-1046 B.C.) is the earliest Chinese characters existent. The rigorous writing system, dating back over 3000 years, is developed from the early ideographic symbols. Oracle bone script, as the name suggests, is characters incised on animal bones or turtle shells, used in the palace of the late Shang Dynasty for divination or recording. It was only discovered by the end of the 19th century. Since oracle bone script is hieroglyphics evolved from pictographic writing, in the early Shang Dynasty it more resembles pictographs. Only towards the late Shang

体系，距今约有3000多年的历史，是由早期的表意符号发展演变而来的。“甲骨文”的名称来源于商朝后期宫廷内进行占卜记事的龟甲、兽骨上的记文。在19世纪末，这些刻在龟甲、兽骨上的文字才被人们发现。由于甲骨文是从图画文字演变而成的象形文字，商代早期的甲骨文象形成分较多，直到商代晚期形声字的比例才逐渐增加。现在，发现的甲骨文有5000多字，其中1000多字已经能够被确切地辨认。甲骨文的发现对于研究汉字的产生有重要意义。

在甲骨文之后，金文逐渐产

Dynasty, does the proportion of phono-semantic compounds gradually increase. Now, more than 5000 oracle bone scripts have been unearthed, among which 1000 characters can be clearly identified. In all, the discovery of oracle bone script has great significance for our study of the generation of Chinese characters.

Following the steps of oracle bone script, the bronze script gradually emerged. During the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (1600 B.C.-256 B.C.), bronze ware came into fashion. Instruments like bell and ritual articles like tripod were often inscribed with characters; hence bronze script is also known as Script on Bell and Tripod. Chronologically, the



• 殷商时期的甲骨文

Oracle Bone Scripts of the Shang Dynasty
(1600 B.C.-1046 B.C.)



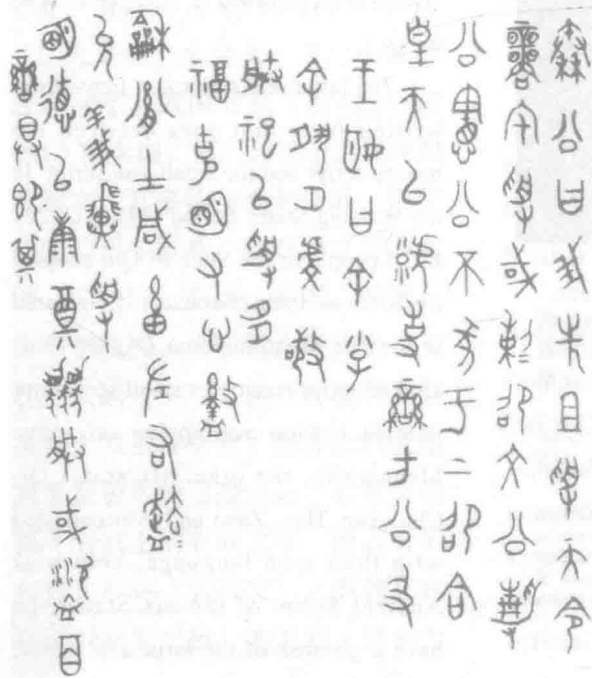
• 毛公鼎（西周）

Maogong Tripod (Western Zhou Dynasty,
1046 B.C.-771 B.C.)



生。“金文”得名于后人是从青铜器上发现这一类型的文字的。商周时期盛行青铜器，以钟为代表的乐器和以鼎为代表的礼器的青铜器上常刻铸有文字，因此金文亦称“钟鼎文”。按照时间顺序，金文分为殷商金文、西周（前1046—前771）金文、东周（前770—前256）金文和秦汉（前221—公元220）金文。最有代表性的是西周时期的青铜器铭文，载字499个的毛公鼎是其中最

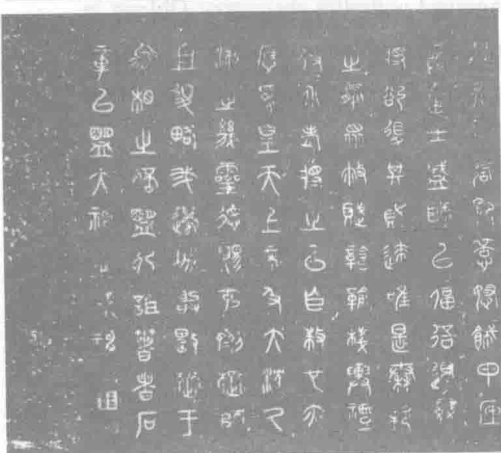
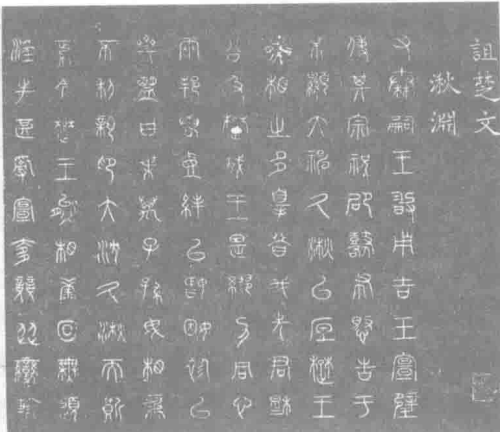
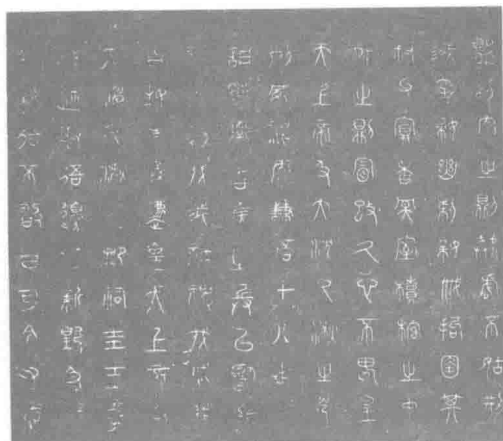
development of bronze script can be divided into four periods, bronze script of the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C.-1046 B.C.), Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C.-771 B.C.), Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 B.C.-256 B.C.), Qin and Han Dynasties (221 B.C.-220 A.D.). Among others, bronze script of the Western Zhou Dynasty is most representative. One masterpiece is the Maogong Tripod engraved with 499 characters. Oblong in structure, the bronze inscriptions outshine in style, pouring forth unaffected vigor



• 秦公钟金文（春秋 秦）

（图片提供：FOTOE）

Qin Gong Zhong Bronze Script (Spring and Autumn Period Qin, 770 B.C.-476 B.C.)



• 石刻文字“诅楚文”（战国 秦）

秦楚两国在战国后期争夺霸权，这篇文章的内容是秦王祈求上天保佑秦国获胜，诅咒楚国败亡。石鼓文比金文规范、严正，但仍一定程度上保留了金文的特征。

Stone Inscription "Curse on the State of Chu"
(State of Qin in Warring States Period, 475 B.C.-221 B.C.)

In the late Warring States Period, the State of Qin and State of Chu battled for hegemony. This article is written to pray for the triumph of Qin and defeat of Chu. Stone drum script retains certain feature of the bronze script, but appears more standard and principled in form.

and integrity. Hence seal script of the Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C.-256 B.C.) has always been regarded as lineal descent of it.

The large seal script is a transitional writing form that goes between the bronze script and the small seal script. In the Warring States Period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.) people in the State of Qin adopted *Zhouwen* as their characters. Originated in the late Western Zhou Dynasty, this kind of script resembles small seal script in style, but has overlapping structures. Meanwhile, the other six states Qi, Chu, Yan, Han, Zhao and Wei persisted with their own language, known as Ancient Script of the Six States. To have a glimpse of the large seal script,