

History Philology and Modern Chinese Character Teaching

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Abstract—The study of Chinese characters is consistent with the teaching of Chinese characters. They are all for the purpose of understanding and mastering Chinese characters. In today's Chinese character teaching, more and more scholars analyze the structure of Chinese characters from the perspective of cognitive philology, the main purpose of which is to help people learning Chinese characters to remember the font. These methods are not very helpful to the learners in the understanding of the meaning of Chinese characters and the use of Chinese characters, and even sometimes they will produce some misleading. Based on this phenomenon, this paper attempts to discuss the problem of modern Chinese character teaching from the perspective of historical philology.

Keywords: *history philology, cognitive philology, modern sinology, modern Chinese character teaching*

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese characters bear thousands of years of Chinese culture, but due to the long history of spreading, there are many differences between modern Chinese characters and ancient Chinese characters, especially in the aspect of the Chinese characters' form, the differences between ancient and modern Chinese characters, which make modern Chinese character scholars and historical Chinese character scholars have some differences in the analysis of Chinese characters.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF MODERN CHINESE CHARACTER STUDY AND ITS APPLICATION IN CHINESE CHARACTER TEACHING

A. Research status of modern Chinese characters

As far as Chinese characters is concerned, the purpose of studying the ancient characters of pre Qin Dynasty is to analyze the body structure of ancient characters and explore the original meaning of characters, which can be called "Historical Philology"; the purpose of studying the official script of Han Dynasty is to understand the character structure of official script and memorize characters, which can be called "cognitive Philology".

Chinese characters entered the Ideographic system, after the change of the official script of Han Dynasty. The strokes and structure of Chinese characters have been fixed, and the

glyphs are also obviously symbolic. "木" as a signifier still represents the meaning of "tree" in the combination of words, but it is only because people have agreed that the symbol "木" represents such a meaning, not because the structure of "木" reflects such a meaning. [1]

In his *Summary of Chinese Characters*, Mr. Qiu Xigui pointed out: "the symbols used in writing are called 'characters'... The characters of all kinds of characters can be roughly classified into three categories, namely, ideogram, note and mark. The characters that are related to the meaning of words are ideograms, and the ones that are related to the voice are notes (ideograms or notes are not equivalent to the figure sides or sound sides of semantic-plus-phonetic characters, the latter two are only limited to the scope of phonograms, and their connotation is less than the former two). The ones that are not related to the voice and meaning are marks." [2]

Based on this, modern Chinese character scholars believe that the traditional "six categories of Chinese characters" theory is only applicable to the ancient characters' character formation rules, which is not suitable for the production of modern Chinese characters, and then put forward a new theory of modern Chinese characters' character formation. The word formation method refers to the analysis of the current situation. It does not matter what regulations are followed when the Chinese characters are created, nor how it has changed from ancient times to the present. It only looks for the rules of the word formation from the current situation of the shape, sound and meaning of the characters. Based on the analysis of the structure of modern Chinese characters by means of ideogram, note and mark, seven types of Chinese characters are obtained: single ideographs, ideographic characters, semantic-plus-phonetic characters, semi ideogram semi mark, semi note semi mark, single mark and combined mark.

B. The application of modern Chinese character research in Chinese character teaching

The study of modern Chinese characters based on cognitive philology is mainly used in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. With the internationalization of Chinese characters and the development of Chinese character teaching in various fields, modern Chinese characters, as the

main content of Chinese character teaching, have been paid more and more attention to.

In the teaching of modern Chinese characters, modern Chinese character scholars advocate that the teaching of marks and marked characters should be regarded as the starting point and key point, and the method of "analogy" should be adopted to memorize Chinese characters.

In the early 1980s, Mr. An Zijie, a Hong Kong scholar, felt that it was difficult for English speaking students to learn Chinese characters. He separated the current Chinese characters and integrated the contents of history, ancient and modern culture and logical thinking into it to form an organic system for learning Chinese characters. The book was originally written in English and was abbreviated into Chinese and then called *Solving the Mystery of Chinese Characters*. [3] This is a systematic construction of the practical content of cognitive philology. In the preface of this book, the author shows his purpose of writing:

Three years ago, an English speaking Western friend in Hong Kong asked me this question: "is there a better way to learn Chinese than the traditional way?" Three years later, I told my friend: "if you want to learn Chinese, this book will give you an answer. Although voluminous, but before and after through. When you make progress, you will believe that what I use is a new method different from before. There are many new ideas and good ideas in the book. This method of expressing and introducing Chinese characters is original and convenient for you to remember them more easily. I offer you special inspiration to print Chinese characters in your memory. Although it is not a traditional channel, many interpretations of Chinese characters have been accepted in history." Such as:

扮(Disguise): to do work with "手(hands)" so that people can't "分(distinguish)" clearly, for example, a man "扮(disguises)" a woman in a play. (147 pages of abridged Chinese version of *Solving the Mystery of Chinese Characters*)

妾 Concubine: the word "立(stand)" and "女(female)" are formed, which means that the "female" is "standing", i.e. "servant girl" and "little wife", are not as noble as the hostess. (ID. 147)

温(warm): the word is composed of three parts, i.e. "氵(water)", "日(sun)" and "皿(basin)". When the water is in the basin and the basin is under the sun, what happens? That's Warm. (ID.110)

Mr. An is also very clear about the cognitive nature of similar theories of writing. He said: "Of course, in the book *Solving the Mystery of Chinese Characters*, many of them are repetition of what we have seen before, and many of them are my fabrication. I just want to be able to speak logically, and I will use my interpretation. For the analysis of predecessors, most of the time, I only use those that conform to the idea of modern people." [4]

In the teaching materials of Chinese as a foreign language, Bai LeSang, a modern sinologist, has compiled the

Chinese teaching material *Chinese Language and Character Enlightenment* based on the "character based teaching method", mainly starting from the idea that Chinese characters can express meanings, selecting Chinese characters with high frequency of use, analyzing them from the glyph, ingeniously combining the glyph with the common meaning of the word, so that learners can more easily remember them.

It has always been a common understanding that Chinese characters are difficult to learn for foreigners, but the use of the above methods has achieved good results in the Enlightenment of literacy teaching for foreign students or domestic children.

However, from the perspective of historical philology, it is not difficult to see that the analysis of these glyphs is problematic and incorrect from the perspective of the original meaning of word formation. How to combine the history philology with the modern Chinese character teaching better is a problem to be studied.

III. SOME PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF MODERN CHINESE CHARACTERS

In the study of modern Chinese characters, modern Chinese character scholars pay close attention to the mark character. The definition of modern Chinese characters by modern sinologists is a word composed of marks. The so-called mark is a part that has no connection with the meaning and pronunciation of the whole character. In the study of the construction of modern Chinese characters, the meaning of the whole character refers to the meaning commonly used in modern times rather than the meaning related to the font. The pronunciation of the whole character refers to the meaning of the whole character Modern pronunciation, not ancient pronunciation. It seems that the concept is rigorous, but there are many questionable points.

From the initial creation of Chinese characters to the present, regardless of the shape, the meaning or pronunciation of Chinese characters has undergone very complex changes. In modern society, the meaning and pronunciation of many Chinese characters cannot be simply summarized by "modern meaning" and "modern pronunciation". We can't use a time line to divide the meaning and pronunciation of a word into modern and ancient ones. Of course, we should try to classify modern Chinese characters, but the question is whether this classification must cut off the history of Chinese characters?

For example, "日(sun)", according to the traditional theory of "six categories of Chinese characters", is a typical pictograph, but in modern Chinese characters, it is defined as a single mark character. The reason is that the current glyph is no longer pictographic, that is to say, the glyph of "日(sun)" has no relation with its meaning, but when "日(sun)" is a component of character construction, such as "明(bright)" with "月(moon)", it becomes a signifier that can be expressed, and then combined with the "modern meaning of words" that modern Chinese character scholars say, we can do this It is believed that when "日(sun)" is interpreted as "day", it is a

simple sign word, and when it is interpreted as "sun" and used as a signifier, it becomes "pictograph" again.

We admit that there is no natural connection between the form and content of any symbol, and the combination of the two is completely established on the basis of people's habits, which is not demonstrable. But this doesn't mean that we can continue to "agree" between the form and content of symbols without "convention". Chinese characters such as "日(sun),月(moon),山(mountain) and 水(water)" are no longer so pictographic in terms of modern glyphs, but they have long been accepted as "sun, moon, mountain and water" in our cognition. At this time, is it necessary to define whether they are pictographs from the similarity between glyphs and real objects?

In conclusion, there are several problems in the study of modern Chinese characters that need to be clarified:

A. The definition of "modern meaning" and "modern pronunciation"

The modern meaning and pronunciation of words refer to the new meaning and pronunciation in modern times, or the commonly used meaning and pronunciation in modern times? If it refers to the former, then the range of word meaning and pronunciation it generalizes is too small. If it refers to the latter, in fact, it can't be different from the ancient meaning and pronunciation in many times, because even in modern society, the ancient meaning and pronunciation of many words are often used. Therefore, modern Chinese character scholars use such seemingly rigorous concepts to strictly distinguish the meaning and pronunciation of modern Chinese characters.

B. The difference between ideogram and pictograph

According to modern Chinese character scholars, there is no natural connection between the form and content of any symbol. Therefore, for Chinese characters, what kind of character form to use and what kind of phonetic form to express concept are also conventional, which is the theoretical premise of the existence of single mark and semi mark characters. But one of these marks is pictograph. It needed to think that there should be some inevitable connection between the shape of pictograph and its meaning.

The definition of pictographs is exactly the place where modern philology and historical philology have the biggest difference. Modern philology thinks that the pictographs once became less pictographic in modern Chinese characters than in historical philology, and then became marks, which led to the changes in the classification of self-explanatory characters, ideographic characters and semantic-plus-phonetic characters originally composed of pictographs, which is not a fundamental change. It's just a change in the understanding of glyphs, so such a redefinition is not of great value. It's questionable whether it's necessary to do so.

C. There are inconsistencies in the word construction method which judged by the common meaning

In the analysis of the construction of Chinese characters, modern Sinology often uses the common meaning to judge its construction, which will result in several construction methods of the same character, such as "明". According to the analysis of modern Chinese character scholars, if the meaning of "bright" is expressed, the word is a ideograph with a new meaning synthesized by the ideograph "日(day)" and "月(moon)", and when the meaning of "tomorrow" is expressed, the word should be a semi ideogram semi mark character.

IV. THE COMBINATION OF HISTORICAL PHILOLOGY AND MODERN PHILOLOGY

Because our present Chinese character teaching doesn't combine history with modern perfectly, students have a lot of questions, often students ask, why is the same Chinese character, in the modern Chinese class, the teacher said it is a mark character, but in the ancient Chinese class, the teacher said it is a pictograph character?

With the development of language, many changes have taken place in the form, meaning and sound of Chinese characters. The original meaning of most Chinese characters has become lost. If we explain the structural relationship between such dead meaning and the form to foreigners, it really has no practical significance. But in the process of Chinese character teaching in China, especially in the modern Chinese class in Colleges and universities, when we explain Chinese characters, if it is necessary to separate the modern Chinese characters from the ancient characters, which need to further discuss the origin and history of the Chinese characters regardless.

Cognitive philology and modern Chinese character learning do play a very active role in teaching, but they are isolated from the history of Chinese characters, and they emphasize to cut off the whole development history of Chinese characters and form their own system, among which there will be many problems. The most common one is the difference between modern philology and historical philology in the original meaning and the formation of Chinese characters, which makes the whole Chinese character system break. From its birth to today, Chinese characters have always been a continuous and unbroken system. Although modern Chinese characters form their own system, they can't cut off the relationship with the history of Chinese characters.

When Zhang Meng talks about the culture of Chinese characters in *the Grand View of Chinese Character Culture*, he has the following sentence: "therefore, from the point of view of Chinese characters and Chinese character culture, we should be cautious when it comes to the change of Chinese characters, whether it is innovation or restoration. It's better to be strict than to take risks. It's better to keep the routine than to change. It's better to keep all the things up to now and not abandon the 'ambition' that has been overturned." [5] In fact, when modern Chinese character scholars talk about a

mark character that is no longer pictographic, they will add a sentence in front of it: "this character was originally a pictographic word, like a certain shape, but later it became less pictographic, so it has become today's mark character". Since they have recognized its pictograph, why should they mention today's less pictograph again?

V. CONCLUSION

In the study of modern Chinese characters, we should combine the ancient with the modern. We should not only ensure the continuity of the history of Chinese characters, but also make innovations on this basis. Only in this way can we truly benefit our nation, our future generations and our friends.

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