

# Categorization of meaning in the Chinese ideographic characters

Jungsam YUM

Seoul National University, KOREA

## < Contents >

1. Matteo Ricci 'Table of the Categorization of All Things 物宗類圖'
2. Chinese classification based on Figure: *Xingxiang* 形象
3. History of classification in China: from Confucius
4. Relation between language and ethics
  - Language 言 and letter 文, Ritual 禮 and culture 文
5. Ritual music 禮樂 and Cultured expression 文理: *Xunzi* 荀子
6. Classification by *Xiangxing* 象形: *Jicizhuan* 繫辭傳 in *Book of Changes*
7. Establishment of classification theory in *Shuowenjiezi* 說文解字
8. Examples of classifying in Chinese ideographic characters

1

In *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Matteo Ricci criticized the Chinese scholars for thinking that ‘all things in Heaven and Earth are made from the same energy’. It is true that the Chinese scholars had the conviction as follows: All things in Heaven and Earth share the same energy. Though all things in Heaven and Earth share the same energy, each of them can be classified according to its own shape and figure. The body, taken as an example, is only a shell, as has inner and outer side, which is made from the energy of *yin and yang* in Heaven and Earth. Briefly, the one (same) energy makes all things, but they take various forms (shapes), by which we can make classification and identification. So if only we look at the shape, we can tell which class a thing belongs to. In contrast, the western scholars classify things not by its shape, but by its nature. Ricci said: To distinguish by the difference in their shapes is to classify the things not according to its own nature, but to its shape (figure), because the shape is not the thing’s own nature. So the distinction in the shapes is different from the distinction in the natures. According to Ricci, on the contrary that the Chinese scholars classify the things according to the appearance (shape), the western scholars do it in more detailed way. At last, Ricci made up a ‘table of the all things’ published in the chapter 4 of *The True Meaning*. This table, based on the ‘substantia’ and the ‘accidens’ of Aristotle, shows that the true categorization of the western scholars is made on the basis of the nature, not of the shape.

Through the discussion on the nature and shape, Ricci aims to solve the profound religious problem encountered in missionary efforts in China. He attempted to prove the existence of God as the Creator of all things and to attribute to human being the superior status over all other creatures.

Roughly speaking, the Lord and the human being don't belong to 'all things created'. Ricci tries to prove the existence and superiority on the basis of the Aristotle's logic, as medieval doctors did. For this purpose, it must be introduced to Chinese scholar the western logics based on Aristotle, so that the Aristotle's Category is translated into Chinese by the Jesuits missionaries under the title of *Minglitan* 名理探. As a result, Ricci's criticism led his colleagues and descendants to introduce the western logics to China. So examining the classification is needed to bring light on the introduction of western philosophy.

## 2

Once the western classification and categorization is introduced in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, the Chinese traditional way of classification is neglected by reason that it separates all things only on the grounds of shapes. Generally speaking, however, there are two aspects in classifying things. The one is the epistemology, concerning the recognition of the similarity and difference between things. The other is the linguistics, concerning the way of expression of what one perceives and understands. It is true that these two aspects present various ways of categorization in various cultures. But the Chinese traditional categorization has been overwhelmed by the Western tradition based on the Aristotelian logics and epistemology, since Matteo Ricci's remark (since Matteo Ricci noticed, remarked). And Ricci's understanding has never been put into question. To examine Ricci's understanding, as a preliminary, it is needed to know how the Chinese make their own classifying tools, how much their view of

the world is influenced by the classification, and how the classification is expressed in the Chinese character and language.

### 3

The Chinese traditional classification resulted from the social and political solutions in a certain historical situation. In Age of Spring and Autumns, Confucius says: above all, names must be rectified, in order that the society moves from the chaotic situation where son kills father and subject kills lord, to the stable state where violence is not used unjustly. Since Confucius attribute ethical (moral) importance to names, the Chinese traditional expression and classification is based on the morality. "If names are not rectified, then words are not appropriate. If words are not appropriate, then deeds are not accomplished. If deeds are not accomplished, then the rites and music do not flourish. If rites and music do not flourish, the punishments do not hit the mark. If punishments do not hit the mark, then the people have nowhere to put hand or foot."<sup>1</sup> Following Confucius, among names, words, rites and music, punishments, and people's stability arise close relationships.

Especially Xunzi 荀子 refines the relationship between the names and the rites and music. According to Xunzi's saying, it is the rites and music that makes the people know the reasoning of classifying the names and the way of living harmoniously together. Being asked what the rites and music originate from, Xunzi says; the quarrel will be inevitable, if the people,

---

<sup>1</sup> 《論語·子路》：“子路曰，衛君待子而爲政，子將奚先。子曰，必也正名乎！……名不正則言不順，言不順則事不成，事不成則禮樂不興，禮樂不興則刑罰不中，刑罰不中則民無所措手足。”

who have desires (who desire something), are banned without knowing the limitation and classification. They established the regulations contained within ritual and moral principles in order to apportion things.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between nobility and baseness (貴賤), old and young (長幼), poverty and wealth (貧富), and insignificance and importance (輕重) represent the classification by names according to the ritual and moral principles.

In the late Warring States age, Xunzi's thoughts based on the rites and music becomes the basic theory of classification. All the writings dealing with the category (classification), from *Yueji* (樂記) in *Liji* (禮記), Dongzhongxu (董仲舒)'s *Chunqiuifanlu* (春秋繁露) and *Lishu* (禮書) in *Shiji* (史記), to *Liyuezhi* (禮樂志) in *Hanshu* (漢書), succeed the Xunzi's classification based on the rites and music. And again it gives the basis for *Jicizhuan* (繫辭傳) in *Book of Changes* (易), and, at last, reveals the diverse and concrete classification in the form of ideographic characters in *Shuowenjiezi* (說文解字).

#### 4

In the tradition of categorizing the ideographic character, Confucius is important, because he is the first master who contrast the *Wen* (文) with *Yan* (言) to define the relationship between words and moral. Confucius'

---

<sup>2</sup> 《荀子·禮論》：“禮起於何也？曰，人生而有欲，欲而不得，則不能無求，求而無度量分界，則不能不爭，爭則亂，亂則窮。先王惡其亂也，故制禮義以分之，以養人之欲，給人之求，使欲必不窮於物，物必不屈於欲，兩者相持而長，是禮之所起也。故禮者養也。芻豢稻粱，五味調香，所以養口也。椒蘭芬苾，所以養鼻也。雕琢刻鏤，黼黻文章，所以養目也。鐘鼓管磬，琴瑟竽笙，所以養耳也。疏房櫨貌，越席床第几筵，所以養體也。故禮者養也。君子既得其養，又好其別，曷謂別？曰，貴賤有等，長幼有差，貧富輕重皆有稱者也。”

saying “Clever words upset virtue”<sup>3</sup> means that the eloquence is not a good gift for building excellent character. And in saying that Clever words and a plausible appearance have seldom turned out to be humane, he affirms that the clever words cannot coexist the benevolence (*Ren*, 仁).<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the words, Confucius emphasize on the ‘letters’ (文). He notes the relationship between letters (refinement, culture) and the quality (substance) ; the former means the ability to express one’s thought, the latter means the character (nature) giving the moral personality (morality). Even he says “Only if refinement (letters) and substance (quality) are properly blended, does one become a gentleman.”<sup>5</sup> Particularly, he goes so far as to extend the meaning of ‘letters’ containing the efforts to learn, or learning. So for Confucius’ thoughts, the letters mean the efforts to learn based on the morality. Throughout the pages of *Lunyu* (論語), we can easily find the usage of the word ‘letters’ (Wen 文), which means not only the expression of the morality, but the way of learning and building the morality. For example, Zigong asked why they called Kong Wen Zi ‘cultured’ (Wen 文). The Master said: ‘He was diligent and fond of learning, and he was not ashamed to ask questions of those beneath him. That is why they called him cultured. (Wen 文)’<sup>6</sup>

The conception of letters is transformed into the ethical (moral) attitude and the effort of learning, and even more noticeable is that the conception itself becomes the object to learn. The word ‘letters’ designates the records of the great dominants with morality in ancient times. So Confucius referred frequently to *Wen* ‘文’ as an object to learn. “The gentleman, with his wide-ranging studies in culture restrained by the

---

<sup>3</sup> 《論語·衛靈公》：“巧言亂德”

<sup>4</sup> 《論語·陽貨》：“巧言令色，鮮矣仁。”

<sup>5</sup> 《論語·雍也》：“文質彬彬，然後君子。”

<sup>6</sup> 《論語·公冶長》：“子曰，敏而好學，不恥下問，是以謂之文也。”

requirements of ritual, surely cannot rebel against this, can he?”<sup>7</sup> Through these sayings we understand the relation between ritual (禮) and culture (文).

## 5

The rites and letters of Confucius evolve into the ritual and music and the letters and principle of Xunzi. Xunzi says; it is inevitable that man is born with desires, so the desires must be brought up and trained by the moral principle. In a word, the moral principle means rearing and training. From this definition of the moral principle, Xunzi extends his reasoning to the idea of the ritual and moral principle and the form and reason. He says; “acting in accordance with ritual and moral principles and observing good form and reason are how to nurture his emotions.”<sup>8</sup> And “when form and principle are emphasized and emotions and offerings are treated perfunctorily, there is the greatest elaboration of ritual.”<sup>9</sup> The human desire and emotion will be expressed with no suppression, but with harmony, when the ritual and moral principle (禮義) and the culture and reason (文理) are spread out all over the society and willingly accepted by each man. And it will be successful when all things are sorted and classified in the right places.

Xunzi regards the culture and reason as the criteria for the classification in the right places. In *Lilun* 禮論, he gives the example of the

---

<sup>7</sup> 《論語·雍也》：“子曰，君子博學於文，約之以禮，亦可以不畔矣夫。”

<sup>8</sup> 《荀子·禮論》：“禮者，養也，……孰知夫禮義文理之所以養情也。”

<sup>9</sup> 《荀子·禮論》：“文理繁，情用省，是禮之隆也……文理情用相為內外表裏，並行而襍，是禮之中流也。”

classification and distinction of the things. "Heaven and Earth are conjoined, the sun and moon shine brightly, the four seasons observe their natural precedence, the stars and planets move in ranks, the rivers and streams flow, and the myriad things prosper. Through them, love and hate are tempered, and joy and anger made to fit the occasion."<sup>10</sup> "Root and branch accord with one another, end and beginning are fitting and proper, one to the other."<sup>11</sup> As a consequence of their perfected form there are the various distinctions made by ritual principles, and as a consequence of their perfect discernment there are explanations provided for everything. The Criteria for the distinctions is based on the dualism like Heaven and Earth, or *Yin* and *Yang*, sun and moon, land and sky, love and hate, and joy and anger. But these divided two things are conjoined within the culture and reason. Division or discernment within the culture and reason is the one side of Xunzi's thought on the moral and music. Music is the other side (the counterpart of the culture and reason). Music also tempers and trains the desire and emotion, so as to conform to the moral principle. And eventually, human beings live together in the harmonious society. Therefore he says, "Music embodies harmonies that can never be altered, just as ritual embodies principles of natural order that can never be changed. Music joins together what is common to all, ritual separates what is different".<sup>12</sup> Judging from Xunzi's dualism, that is the moral principle and the music (judging from Xunzi's above phrase, it is supposed that the distinction and harmony was the Chinese traditional classification

---

<sup>10</sup> 《荀子·禮論》：“天地以合，日月以明，四時以序，星辰以行，江河以流，萬物以昌，好惡以節，喜怒以當。”

<sup>11</sup> 《荀子·禮論》：“本末相順，終始相應，至文以有別，至察以有說。”

<sup>12</sup> 《荀子·樂論》：“樂也者，和之不可變者也。禮也者，理之不可易者也。樂合同，禮別異。”

6

For Xunzi, the ritual is related to the distinction and the music to harmony. These notions are reproduced repeatedly by the Chinese scholars. Among those notions, the music is very peculiar because it is expressed in sound and disappeared in the air. So the music gradually have been losing importance. On the contrary, the ritual principles have more strict relations to the culture. These notions in the *Yuelun* of Xunzi is succeeded in the *Yueji* of *Liji*, where the moral principle controlling the human desires and emotion is proposed to be the basis for the moral and music theory.

Xunzi imposed ritual morality on the concept of *Wen* 文. He says, "Ritual principles admire forms"<sup>13</sup> In *Yueji* (樂記) of *Liji* (禮記), ritual morality is emphasized as well.

"The ancient sage kings, in their institution of ceremonies and music, did not seek how fully they could satisfy the desires of the appetite and of the ears and eyes, but they intended to teach the people to regulate their likings and dislikings, and to bring them back to the normal course of humanity."<sup>14</sup>

The pages to define the ritual in *Lishu* of *Shiji* also quotes exactly the phrases in *Lilun* of Xunzi as follows; "Thus, the meaning of ritual is to nurture. When the gentleman has been nurtured by these things, he will also be fond of ritual distinctions. What we call distinctions mean the

---

<sup>13</sup> 《荀子·勸學》：“學惡乎始？惡乎終？曰，其數則始乎誦經，終乎讀禮。其義則始乎爲士，終乎爲聖人。真積力久則入。學至乎沒而後止也。故學數有終，若其義則不可須臾舍也。爲之人也，舍之禽獸也。故書者，政事之紀也，詩者，中聲之所止也，禮者，法之大分，類之綱紀也。故學至乎禮而止矣。夫是之謂道德之極。禮之敬文也，樂之中和也，詩書之博也，春秋之微也，在天地之間者畢矣。”

<sup>14</sup> 《禮記·樂記》：“是故先王之制禮樂也，非以極口腹耳目之欲也，將以教民平好惡，而反人道之正也。”

gradation of rank according to nobility or baseness, disparities between the privileges of old and young, and modes of identification to match these with poverty or wealth, insignificance or importance.”<sup>15</sup>

And other phrases and words coincide with those of *Lilun*, such as the harmony of ritual principles and emotions<sup>16</sup>, Heaven and Earth, Sun and Moon, Four Seasons, Star and planet, rivers and streams etc.<sup>17</sup>

And, at last, the ritual principle establishes more close relationships with classification, being applied to the distinction between heavenly signs and earthly things. All things can be represented by assembling and separating these signs (象) and things (形). And this representation system eventually makes important role to establish the system of Chinese characters. We can find in *Yueji* of *Liji* the first step of these successive extensions of implication. “There are heaven above and earth below, and between them are distributed all the various beings with their different (natures and qualities): in accordance with this proceeded the framing of ceremonies..... (The relation) between ruler and minister was determined from a consideration of heaven (conceived of as) honourable, and earth (conceived of as) mean. The positions of noble and mean were fixed with a reference to the heights and depths displayed by the surface (of the earth). The regularity with which movement and repose follow each other (in the course of nature) led to the consideration of affairs as small and great. The different quarters (of the heavens) are grouped together, and the things (of the earth) are distinguished by their separate characteristics; and this gave rise to (the conception of) natures and their attributes and functions. In

---

<sup>15</sup> 《史記·禮書》：“故禮者養也。君子既得其養，又好其辨也。所謂辨者，貴賤有等，長少有差，貧富輕重，皆有稱也。故天子大路越席，所以養體也。”

<sup>16</sup> 《史記·禮書》：“文貌繁，情欲省，禮之隆也。文貌省，情欲繁，禮之殺也。文貌情欲相為内外表裏，並行而雜，禮之中流也。”

<sup>17</sup> 《史記·禮書》：“...至備，情文俱盡。其次，情文代勝。其下，復情以歸太一。天地以合，日月以明，四時以序，星辰以行，江河以流，萬物以昌，好惡以節，喜怒以當.....”

heaven there are formed its visible signs, and earth produces its (endless variety of) things; and thus it was that ceremonies were framed after the distinctions between heaven and earth.”<sup>18</sup>

7

And it repeats again in *Chunqiu fanlu* (春秋繁露) of Dongzhongxu (董仲舒); “It is by the name that we can discern all things.” And even says “Only when a thing gets its name, it is said to be exist (born). And the sage gives the name on the basis of the figure (?).”<sup>19</sup> And the statements in *Jicizhan* 繫辭傳 show the delicate transformation, or extension, of the meaning from letters (culture) to the figure.

“Heaven is lofty and honourable; earth is low. (Their symbols), Qian and Kun, (with their respective meanings), were determined (in accordance with this). Things low and high appear displayed in a similar relation. The (upper and lower trigrams, and the relative position of individual lines, as) noble and mean, had their places assigned accordingly. Movement and rest are the regular qualities (of their respective subjects). Hence comes the definite distinction (of the several lines) as the strong and the weak. (Affairs) are arranged together according to their tendencies, and things

---

<sup>18</sup> 《禮記·樂記》：“天高地下，萬物散殊，而禮制行矣。……天尊地卑，君臣定矣。卑高已陳，貴賤位矣。動靜有常，小大殊矣。方以類聚，物以羣分，則性命不同矣。在天成象，在地成形。如此則禮者，天地之別也。”

<sup>19</sup> 《春秋繁露·天地陰陽》：“名者，所以別物也。親者重，疏者輕，尊者文，卑者質，近者詳，遠者略，文辭不隱情，明情不遺文，人心從之而不逆，古今通貫而不亂，名之義也。男女猶道也。人生別言禮義，名號之由人事起也。不順天道，謂之不義，察天人之分，觀道命之異，可以知禮之說矣。見善者不能無好，見不善者不能無惡，好惡去就，不能堅守，人道者，人之所由樂而不亂，復而不厭者，萬物載名而生，聖人因其象而命之。然而可易也，皆有義從也，故正名以名義也……”

are divided according to their classes. Hence were produced (the interpretations in the Yi, concerning) what is good [or lucky] and evil [or unlucky]. In the heavens there are the (different) figures there completed, and on the earth there are the (different) bodies there formed. (Corresponding to them) were the changes and transformations exhibited (in the Yi).”<sup>20</sup> “(The sege), in accordance with (the Yi), looking up, contemplates the brilliant phenomena of the heavens, and, looking down, examines the definite arrangements of the earth.”<sup>21</sup> The phrase “Affairs are arranged together according to their tendencies, and things are divided according to their classes.” is the repetition of the same phrase in *Yueji* 樂記.

Let’s try to arrange together and divide the terms used in the above passage. (Using the terms in the above passage, we can give the example of arranging together and dividing. In the above passage, there are many two opposite things such as Heaven and earth, high and low, noble and mean, movement and rest, strong and weak, which represent the division. But we can arrange together in the same class the former words such as Heaven, high, noble, movement etc. and in the other class the latter words such as Earth, low, mean, rest, etc. And furthermore, we can subdivide or arrange together in comparatively restricted classes the similar words, like high-heaven, low- earth, high- noble, low- mean, strong movement, weak rest, etc.

As the above example, the basic distinction lies between the figure in Heaven and the body in Earth, and, next, Dividing or arranging figure and body make new figures and bodies. And, next again, these new figures and bodies subdivided or arranged together again, and then, new figures and

---

<sup>20</sup> 《易·繫辭傳》：“天尊地卑，乾坤定矣。卑高以陳，貴賤位矣。動靜有常，剛柔斷矣。方以類聚，物以羣分，吉凶生矣。在天成象，在地成形，變化見矣。”

<sup>21</sup> 《易·繫辭傳》：“仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理”

bodies are made. These endless processes will make myriads of names, and give them to each thing. So all things are born with their names, which are already classified (divided or arranged together).

In this context, the passage below in *Jicizhan* 繫辭傳 can be understood. “Hence to speak of the emblematic figures: (The sage) was able to survey all the complex phenomena under the sky. He then considered in his mind how they could be figured, and (by means of the diagrams) represented their material forms and their character. Hence those (diagrams) are denominated Semblances.”<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Xushen makes a great step forward in transition from figure to character. Before Xushen, of course, there are also the writings containing the relationship between the figure and the classification. For example, the two passages below show that there is no difference between *Jicizhuan* and Xushen’s view on the figure and the classification.

“Anciently, when Poxi had come to the rule of all under heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He contemplated the ornamental appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things.”<sup>23</sup>

“Anciently, when Poxi had come to the rule of all under heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down

---

<sup>22</sup> 《易·繫辭傳》：“是故夫象，聖人有以見天下之賾，而擬諸其形容，象其物宜，是故謂之象。”

<sup>23</sup> 《易·繫辭傳》：“古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。”

he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He contemplated the ornamental appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things. At this time eight trigrams of Yi were invented in order to bestow right figure 象.”<sup>24</sup>

Xushen intends that the figures, eventually the characters, are originated in the eight trigrams, which, in turn, are originated in the classification based on the ritual (moral) principles and the culture. “Cangjie 倉頡, looking at the footprints of the birds and the beasts, notices that the footprints can be distinguished by the different patterns.”<sup>25</sup> At that time he invents the character classification. Originally he takes the figures according to the classification of the things, and calls them ‘culture (letter)’ (文)<sup>26</sup> In sum, “the letter is the root of the figure.”<sup>27</sup>

After 5-6 centuries from the Confucius, Xushen says “What we call the character (文字) gives the ground for study canons and good politics (王道政治). With the characters, the ascendants hand down the knowledge to the descendants. So we say that only if basic principles are established, the Way (道) can be given.”<sup>28</sup> In *Shuowenjiezi*, Xushen regards the Chinese character as the method to represent all things, based on the classification. His idea of connecting the characters to classification is derived from

---

<sup>24</sup> 《說文解字·敘》“古者庖犧氏之王天下也。仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地。視鳥獸之文與地之宜。近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作易八卦，以垂憲象。”

<sup>25</sup> 《說文解字·敘》“黃帝之史倉頡，見鳥獸蹏迒之迹，知分理之可相別異也。初造書契。”

<sup>26</sup> 《說文解字·敘》“倉頡之初作書，蓋依類象形，故謂之文。”

<sup>27</sup> 《說文解字·敘》“文者，物象之本。”

<sup>28</sup> 《說文解字·敘》：“蓋文字者，經藝之本，王政之始。前人所以垂後，後人所以識古。故曰本立而道生。”

Xunzi's classification based on the ritual principle and music, and the notion of figure in *Yueji* of *Liji* 禮記 and *Jicizhuan* 繫辭傳. For Xushen, the characters contain all things without exception.

## 8

Through the meaning of form (shape/figure) shown in the Book of Changes, Xushen wanted to tell us that divided patterns in things are expressed by ideographic characters. He said in *Shuowenjiezi* as following: "I begin with one (yi) in establishing the radicals. Affairs are arranged together according to their tendencies, and things are divided according to their classes. Same items are joined together, and similar principles are consistently connected. They are mixed together, but never go over the other side. They are linked based on ideographic forms. We can research the source of all things by the detailed explanations on them. I finish with hai, so as that we can understand the changes and realize the profundity."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, all characters in *Shuowenjiezi* fourteen chapters are arranged in good order from the yi to the hai, mainly according to the shape of characters. Ideographic characters and classification of things are combined theoretically in *Shuowenjiezi*, so that they are arranged by the classification of meaning in ideographic characters. These are the examples shown in *Shuowenjiezi*.

Xushen's achievement is that he attempted to show the close relationship among the elements in terms of their shape and meaning. After fixing the shape and meaning of characters that represent the

---

<sup>29</sup> 《說文解字·敘》“其建首也。立一爲端，方以類聚，物以羣分。同條牽屬，共理相貫。襍而不越，據形系聯，引而申之，以究萬原。畢終於亥，知化窮冥。”

semantic elements according to the classification, he created a network of significance that ties into the characters' form. Xushen classified 540 semantic elements (so called radicals) in total, starting with '一' and ending with '亥[hài]', and as he identified the shapes that represent the meaning of semantic elements at large, he analyzed those semantic elements primarily as ideographs. Then, he laid out the 540 semantic elements so as to show the continuity and relationship of shapes and meaning of the elements. The following is a list of the seal script radicals included in Book One of the *Shuowenjiezi*. This sample reveals how the similarities of strokes overlap each other and how they are related in form.

一 二 𠄎 三 王 玉 珏 气 士 丨 𠂔 𠂔 𠂔 𠂔 𠂔

一 is followed by 二 which adds a short stroke above 一. 𠄎 follows 二 and includes three vertical strokes draped under the shape of 二. 三 then consists of three horizontal strokes. 王 is next with a vertical stroke penetrating the center of 三. 玉 comes next in relation to 王. 珏, which comes after 王, repeats 王 twice. 气 is linked to and comes after 三. 士 is followed by 丨. 丨 is the vertical stroke penetrating 三, which it follows. 𠂔 succeeds 丨, and 𠂔 repeats 𠂔 twice. 𠂔 relates to and follows 𠂔, while 𠂔 duplicates 𠂔 above and below.

In addition, if we translate the radicals in the *Shuowenjiezi*, Book One, as listed above, in regular script, they include the words such as 一 (one), 上 (up), 示 (to show), 三 (three), 王 (king), 玉 (jade), 珏 beads), 气 (energy), 士 (scholar), 丨 penetrate), 中 plant), 艸 (grass), 蓐 (straw mat), and 𠂔 (overgrown) these words seem to share a single continuous context in meaning as well. Elaboration of this continuity is as follows.

'一' is the beginning of writing and is a radical that reveals the principle of the universe. This principle starts from the heavens that lie 'up'

(上) above. The heavenly bodies such as the sun, the moon and the stars 'show' (示) the workings of the skies and of the world. These workings are also expressed as the number 'three' (三), which signifies the three critical elements in the world, that is, the heaven, the earth, and the man. The 'king' (王) is one who rules through the three, bearing the 'jade' (玉) as the most important ornament symbolizing his rule. 'Energies' (气) abound in the skies, and the 'scholar' (士) is the person enlightened in the movement of all energies in heaven and earth. This scholar contemplates at the center of the universe that 'penetrates' (丨) through heaven and earth. The energies of heaven and earth are channeled through the ground and into life, and the first character that shows this phenomenon is the character '屮' which symbolizes grass. This character then becomes '艸' which signifies the increase of grass. A place made of grass is called 'straw mat' (蓐), and being surrounded by many plants is described as 'overgrown' (𦰩). Such semantic continuity can be found in not only in Book One but also in the fourteen volumes of the *Shuowenjiezi*, up to the last radical '亥'.

001	一	002	二	003	示	004	三	005	王	006	王	007	王	008	气	009	士
010	丨	011	屮	012	艸	013	蓐	014	𦰩								

Book Two of the *Shuowenjiezi* starts with xiao, which means small. After xiao there comes ba that means division.

015	小	016	丿	017	米	018	半	019	半	020	𦰩	021	𦰩	022	𦰩
023	𦰩	024	𦰩	025	𦰩	026	𦰩	027	𦰩	028	𦰩	029	𦰩	030	𦰩
031	𦰩	032	𦰩	033	𦰩	034	𦰩	035	𦰩	036	𦰩	037	𦰩	038	𦰩

039 𠂔 040 𠂔 041 𠂔 042 𠂔 043 𠂔 044 𠂔

In Book Fourteen of the *Shuowenjiezi* the radicals are arranged as follows:

490 金 491 升 492 弓 493 几 494 且 495 尸 496 考 497 吊  
 498 車 499 𠂔 500 𠂔 501 𠂔 502 𠂔 503 𠂔 504 𠂔 505 𠂔  
 506 亞 507 五 508 𠂔 509 𠂔 510 𠂔 511 𠂔 512 𠂔 513 𠂔  
 514 𠂔 515 丙 516 个 517 𠂔 518 己 519 巳 520 𠂔 521 𠂔  
 522 𠂔 523 王 524 𠂔 525 𠂔 526 𠂔 527 𠂔 528 𠂔 529 𠂔  
 530 𠂔 531 𠂔 532 𠂔 533 𠂔 534 𠂔 535 𠂔 536 𠂔 537 𠂔  
 538 𠂔 539 𠂔 540 𠂔

## Discussion: Categorization of Meaning in the Chinese Ideographic Characters

Olivia MILBURN

Seoul National University, KOREA

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Yum for her fascinating paper. As the translator into Korean of Duan Yucai's 段玉裁 (1735-1815) *Commentary on the Shuowen jiezi* or "Graphs Explained and Characters Elucidated" (*Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注), a text originally compiled by Xu Shen 許慎 in around 100 BCE, Professor Yum is ideally placed to discuss the influence of this crucial early dictionary and its subsequent scholarship in the history of Chinese thought.

There are a number of points that occurred to me particularly when reading this paper. Professor Yum discusses here the important concept in Confucian philosophy of the "Rectification of Names" or *zhengming* 正名, a concept which although now generally regarded as a cornerstone of Confucianism was originally associated with Legalist philosophy, indicative of the assimilative nature of early Chinese thought. This concept remains particularly significant for the modern world. Although traditionally described in terms of using ritual and music versus punishments in order to maintain social order, the idea that the correct names have to be used for

individual situations is an interesting prospect at a time when so many things have been obfuscated by the terminology generated through political correctness.

A key concept discussed in this paper is that of *wen* 文, a word of considerable importance in the history of Chinese thought. The complexity of different meanings attached to this character serve to indicate something of its significance within the context of Chinese culture. Confucius in particular stressed the use of this character to mean “culture” in his comments which demonstrate a considerable distrust of rhetorical skill, which he seems to have regarded as intrinsically deceitful. The meanings of this term when it was employed by Confucius are very different from earlier usage of this character, where (as analyzed in a recent paper by Lothar von Falkenhausen) it seems to have simply an epithet used to refer to deceased ancestors. It is only in the late Spring and Autumn period that this character seems to have acquired other connotations such as “pattern” or indeed the meaning attached to it by Confucius: “culture.”

In pre-imperial times, a number of philosophers seem to have devoted considerable amounts of their time to considering the characteristics of a cultured society, and the ways in which to achieve social harmony. Professor Yum in her paper has particularly focused on the work of *Xunzi* 荀子, who laid unusual stress upon the importance of music, arguing that a harmonious society can be created by the performance of refined and elegant music which does not excite the listener too much. However, as pointed out in this paper, the precepts laid down by *Xunzi* were rarely taken up by later philosophers, who seem to have been deterred by the difficulty of quantifying the influence of music on human behavior. In the circumstances, given the problems of demonstrating any definite instances of social control achieved by aural means, they seem to have turned to

#### Discussion: Categorization of meaning in the Chinese ideographic characters

more readily understandable forms of social contract, such as the Rites (*li* 禮). The terms of the debate introduced by the *Xunzi* raise an interesting question- given that ancient Chinese philosophers seem to have shown great concern over the effect of stimulus to the eyes, ears and indeed mouth, why did they not also express interest in the possibility of improving social harmony through scent?

When Xu Shen came to write his dictionary in around 100 BCE, he was engaged in a unique endeavor and in proceeding to categorize the characters included in his dictionary in a methodical and systematic way, he deserves nothing but praise. Furthermore, in terms of the knowledge of the day concerning the derivation and development of individual characters, the *Shuowen jiezi* is a highly impressive work of scholarship. However, having finished the paper with a discussion of this important early dictionary, I have one further question. How does what Matteo Ricci and the other missionary scholars attempted to do in terms of developing Aristotelian schematization in China relate to Xu Shen's classification?

