

CHINESE SCRIPT AND THOUGHT.

COMMUNICATION OF THOUGHT.

IN China the most ancient mode of recording thought was accomplished by *chieh shêng* (結繩) or "knotted cords," which is alluded to by Lao-Tze in his *Tao Teh King*, 道德經,¹ (written in the sixth century before Christ) as the ancient and venerable, though awkward, mode of writing, and also by Confucius in the third appendix to the *Yih King*.²

All detailed knowledge of the use of knotted cords in China has been entirely lost, but we can easily understand that it was a mnemo-technic method of remembering data of various kinds and communicating ideas. The same practice prevailed in ancient Peru as well as among the islanders of Oceania, and seems to have been common all over the globe among the peoples of a primitive civilization.

In South America the knotted cords are called "quippu" and some that are still preserved in ethnological collections were used to indicate the tribute to be paid to the Incas by the several tribes. They consist of woolen threads, the different colors of which represent different kinds of produce: corn, wheat, fruits, furs, etc., while the number of knots register the amount or measure.³

¹ See *Lao-Tze's Tao Teh King*, Chapter 80.

² Section 23. See James Legge's translation in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XVI, p. 385.

³ What can be done with knotted strings is well illustrated by the fact that a string alphabet has been invented for the use of the blind in which the letters are indicated by form or arrangement. The knots are easily made

Herodotus informs us that King Darius when fighting the Scythians gave his orders to the Ionians in the form of a leathern thong with sixty knots in it, thereby indicating the number of days in which they should expect his return. We thus see that the Persians employed the same mnemo-technic means that have been discovered in several South Sea islands as well as in America, and we may assume that the ancient Chinese knotted cords (*chieh shêng*) also were in principle the same.

Knotted cords were replaced by notched bamboo sticks, and the incised characters may in olden times have been as primitive as are mnemotechnic communications of the American Indians, such as prayer-sticks and such other pictorial writings as are still extant.

* * *

The invention of writing in the proper sense of the word is credited to Ts'ang Hieh (蒼頡), also called Shih 'Huang (史皇), the "Record Sovereign" because he is the protector and patron saint of history and archival documents. He is said to have lived in the twenty-eighth century B. C., and having ascended a mountain overlooking the river Loh, he saw a divine tortoise rising from the water. It exhibited on its back mysterious tracings of letters which "lay bare the permutations of nature to devise a system of written records,"^a—a report which imputes that he saw the characters of

It is not impossible that Chinese writing has been introduced from ancient Mesopotamia, a theory vigorously advocated by M. Terrien de Lacouperie, rejected by many, but, after all, sufficiently probable to deserve serious consideration, for we cannot deny that many Chinese symbols exhibit a remarkable similarity to the ideograms of both ancient Babylonia and ancient Egypt, and remembering the fact that Chinese bottles have been discovered in Egyptian tombs and also in Asia minor, we cannot help granting that in prehistoric days there must have been more trade, and more travel, and a greater exchange of thought than is generally assumed.

and sufficiently different to be easily deciphered. The *Standard Dictionary*, II, p. 1780, contains an illustration of the string alphabet.

^a Myers's *Chinese Reader's Manual*, p. 228, I, No. 758.
the five elements on the tortoise's back.

We here reproduce from Garrick Mallery's work on *Picture Writing of the American Indians*,¹ a table of symbols which shows the cuneiform signs in three forms; pictorial, hieratic, and cursive, the Chinese and the Egyptian in parallel columns.

Pictorial	Hieratic	Cursive.	Chinese.	Egyptian	
					Sun.
					Hand.
					Fish.
					Corpse.
					Wood.
					Cave.
					Home.
					Place.
					Bound-ary
					God.
					Ear.
					Water.
					Horn.
					Half.
					Door or Gate.

MALLERY'S TABLE.

A Comparison of the Cuneiform, Chinese, and Egyptian Systems of Writing.

The words omitted in the Chinese column of Mr. Mallery's

¹ *Ann. Rep. of the B. of Ethn.*, 1888-9, p. 675. Mr. Mallery does not state the source from which it is taken. It may be from W. St. Chad, Bos-cawen, or M. T. Lacouperie.

table (God, ear, home) are not less remarkable instances than the others.

The word "God" is more similar than it appears if we were to judge merely from its external shape. In cuneiform writing as well as in Egyptian it is a star, and the Chinese word *shih* (示) shows a horizontal dash and underneath three perpendicular wave lines. This seems very different from the Babylonian and Egyptian conceptions, but the Chinese character is explained to mean "light from the sky" or "celestial manifestation," the dash on top meaning "the heavens," and the three vertical lines depict the emanations in the form of rays.

The character for "ear," in its present form 耳 (*'rh*), might very well have originated from the Babylonian. The same is true of the Chinese character that denotes "field," or "farm land," which may very well be used in the sense of "homestead." The character *t'ien* (田) is in principle the same as the pictorial Babylonian and the hieroglyphic Egyptian.

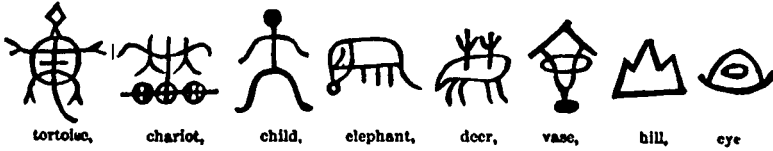
Further, we have to add that the Chinese word meaning "corpse" is explained as "body lying" and thus resembles the Egyptian word for "mummy" which in different senses is represented either as a standing or a lying mummy.

We have to correct a mistake in Mr. Mallery's table; the word "half" in Chinese is not a cross, but either half a tree or the ideogram "cow" combined with the character "division." A cross means "completion" and the complete number of our fingers, viz. "ten."

Whether or not the theory of Lacouperie be tenable, one thing is sure, that all three systems of writing, the Babylonian, the Egyptian, and the Chinese, have begun with pictorial representations of the objects which, according to circumstances, were conventionalised in different ways.

The writing material always influences the character of a script. Thus, after the invention of brush and paper, the method of writing down from top to bottom was naturally retained, but the script acquired that peculiar picturesque character of brush dashes which it still possesses.

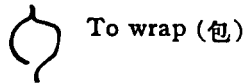
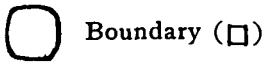
The hair brush is called *mao-pi*, or simply *pi* (bamboo pencil),* and tradition states that General Meng T'ien was the inventor of writing with a brush,—a statement which is not impossible but



PICTORIAL WRITING CONVENTIONALISED.*

strange, for he was the most faithful servant of Shih Hwang Ti, the great hater of ancient literature, who on capital punishment ordered all the ancient books burned. Shih Hwang was a warlike emperor who ruled from 259 until 210 B. C., and for the first time (in 222 B. C.) united the entire Chinese empire under one scepter. He is the same who erected the great wall, so expensive and at the same time so useless, and General Meng T'ien was in command of the laborers. When the Emperor died, General Meng T'ien is said to have committed suicide.⁵


We here reproduce a list of ornamental Chinese characters which are commonly, and without doubt rightly, assumed to represent the most ancient forms of Chinese writing with a brush.




* Reproduced from Williams's *Middle Kingdom*.


* The character 筆 *pi* consists of the radical "bamboo" and the word "brush" or "stylus."

⁵ See Myers, *loc. cit.*, Nos. 597 and 497.


 Water (水)

 River (川)

 Rain


 Rain (later character)


 Earth (土)

 Elephant, Idea (象)


 Bird (鳥)


 Island (州)

 Wings (羽)


 Wheel, Carriage (車)

 Field (田)


 Boundary (畵)


 Grass


 Grass


 Boy, Child (子)

 Constellation (星)

 Star (星)

 Thread


 Thread (another form)

 Wheat (麥)


 Tree (木)


 Wood (林)


 Forest (森)

 One-half (half a tree) (片)


 Fruit (果)



 Muscle (力)


 Sun (日)

 Infant, Feeble (𠂔)


 Moon (月)


 Weak (infant muscle) (幼)


 Bright (Sun and Moon) }
 Bright (Moon shining in window) } 明

 Male (muscle working in field) (男)


 Complete, ten (十)

 Evening (夕)


 Middle (中)

 Many (多)

 Above (上)

 Ear (耳)

 Below (下)


 Heart (心)



 Gate (門)


 Flesh (肉)

 Between (間)

 Mouth (口)

 Divide, (八) Eight

 Teeth }
 Teeth (later form) } 齒

 To cut (分)



Crooked (亞)



Humaneness (仁)

Hatred (Crookedness
of heart) (惡)

Compare

比



Cow (牛)



Compare



Half (Cow divided) (半)



Invert, change (匕)



Horns*



Conversion (化)



Sheep (羊)

Looking backward,
To flee before
enemy (North) (北)

Justice (my sheep) (義)



Many†

Beauty (large
sheep) (美)

Multitude (衆)



Man (人)

Most of the symbols of the list explain themselves. A "boundary" is a simple line of enclosure. "Revolve" is a curve. The meaning of the signs "to wrap," "mountain," "water," "river," "rain," "horns," "grass," "child," "constellation" or "star," "thread," "wheat," "tree," "fruit," "sun," "moon," is obvious enough. The symbols "elephant," "bird," "heart" require more imagination; but

* This character does not exist in modern Chinese.

† Not used in modern Chinese.

the original picture is still recognisable in them. The word "flesh" is meant as a slice of meat. "Mouth," "teeth," "eye," are also intended to depict the objects. The word "muscle" represents the upper arm, and in connection with the word "weak" which originally means also "infant," it denotes "lack of strength." A character consisting of two lines, representing two pieces cut off, means "to divide." Later the character "knife," as the instrument by which the division is to be made, was added. Crooked roads mean "crooked" or "evil," and in combination with the word "heart" we have the word "hatred." In the symbol "cow" the horns form the most prominent part, the body being reduced to a mere cross. The symbol "cow" combined with the symbol "division" means "half." The picture of a sheep shows the symbol "horns" on the top while the rest is scarcely recognisable. The symbol "sheep" in combination with the symbol "mine" represents the character "justice," because the ancient Chinese were shepherds, and their main quarrels in courts of justice were disputes about the ownership of sheep; and their idea of beauty was expressed by "a sheep" that is "great." The symbol "middle" is easily understood and so are the symbols "below" and "above." The character "gate" is a picture of a double doorway, and the character "between" shows a mark between the two posts of the gate. The character "sun" or "moon" and a picture of a "window" means "bright," for if the moon shines into the window it denotes "brightness," and "sun and moon" in their combination mean the same, viz., the best light there is in the world. The ideogram "moon," if written in a special way, is read "evening," and if "moon" is repeated it means "many evenings," or simply "many." The earth is represented by a horizontal line on which a cross stands, implying that the soil of the earth is stable; it is the place on which to take a stand. Two trees mean "wood," three trees "forest." If the tree is cut in two, it originally denotes "one-half," later on it acquired the meaning "part or parcel," and finally "piece."

The outline map of a field means "field" or "farm," and lines limiting two fields mean "frontier" or "boundary."

If the character "man," of which only the legs are left, has the

symbol "two" attached to it, it means the relation which obtains between two or several people, viz., "humanity," "humaneness," or "kindness." One man or two men turned the other way means "to compare." A man upside down means "to invert," "to change." One man in his normal position, and the other upside down acquires the sense of "transformation" or "conversion." One man in a normal position and another man looking the other way means "north," for the Chinese determine directions by looking south; hence, to look backward means "north." The symbol consisting of three men means "many." To this symbol is frequently attached the character "eye," and thereby it acquires the meaning "many as a unit," i. e., "a multitude."

A pretty instance of Chinese word formation is the word *shu* (書), which means "book" or "treatise," and is composed of the characters "brush" and "speak," the idea being that it is a thing in which "the brush speaks."

There are several styles of Chinese script (*shu*), and we here reproduce from Professor Williams's *Middle Kingdom* (Vol. II, p. 594) a table which shows at a glance their similarities and differences. The most old-fashioned style is called "the seal script," or, after the name of the inventor, *Chuen Shu*. The second is the official style, or *Lieh Shu*, used for engrossing documents and commonly considered the most elegant form of writing. The third is called the pattern or normal style (*Kiai Shu*); because it preserves most clearly the essential character of Chinese writing. The fourth is a shorthand and demotic style called cursive script or *Hing*¹⁰ *Shu*, much used in practical life. It is the most difficult for foreigners to read, as many lines are run together, thus obliterating the distinctness of the original character. The fifth style is called the grass script or *Tsao Shu*. It is almost an approach to the easy hand of the Japanese, and its name may be translated "fancy style." Under the Sung dynasty a new style was adopted which is practically the same as the normal style, only showing more regularity, and it is

¹⁰*Hing* means "to walk," "to run"; and as a noun the same character means "element."

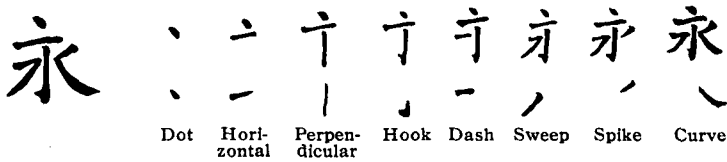
Sung style	Fancy style	Cursive style	Normal style	Official style	Seal style	
6	5	4	3	2	1	
書有六體曰篆曰隸曰楷曰行曰草曰宋	書有六體曰篆曰隸曰楷曰行曰草曰宋	書有六體曰篆曰隸曰楷曰行曰草曰宋	書有六體曰篆曰隸曰楷曰行曰草曰宋	書有六體曰篆曰隸曰楷曰行曰草曰宋	書有六體曰篆曰隸曰楷曰行曰草曰宋	Writing
						has
						six
						styles,
						viz.,
						seal,
						viz.,
						official,
						viz.,
						normal,
						viz.,
						running or cursive,
						viz.,
						grass or fancy,
						viz.,
						Sung.

SIX DIFFERENT STYLES OF CHINESE WRITING.

(Reproduced from Williams's *Middle Kingdom*.)

commonly called *Sung Shu* which has become the pattern of modern Chinese print.

The writing of Chinese requires eight different kinds of dashes, and the word *yung* (永), "eternal," contains all of them. This significant character accordingly has become the typical word with which Chinese scholars start their calligraphic lessons.



THE ELEMENTS OF CHINESE SCRIPT.

The little mark like a fat upward comma is called *dot*. Among the lines we have a *horizontal* and a *perpendicular*. Further there is a *hook*, which latter is added to the perpendicular by joining to its lower end a dot line. A *dash* is a short horizontal line. A tapering line downward is called a *sweep*, upward a *spike*, and a smaller sweep in the shape of a big downward comma, *stroke*. A crooked line is called a *curve*.

STOCK PHRASES AND STAPLE THOUGHTS.

The Chinese are in the habit of propounding their favorite notions and beliefs in enumerations. They are so accustomed to the mathematical conception of Yang and Yin that they would agree with Pythagoras who finds in number the explanation of the world.

The Chinese speak of the *liang i*, i. e., the two primary forms representing the positive and negative principles. Further they speak of the two great luminaries, sun and moon; the two divinities presiding over war and peace, the two emperors of antiquity, the two first dynasties, viz., the Hsia and Yin; and the two venerable men that hailed the advent of the Chow dynasty, etc.

The number "three" plays an important part in Chinese enumerations. There are three systems of religion authorised by the government: Confucianism, or the system of the Literati (儒); Bud-

dhism, or the system of Shakya Muni (釋); Taoism or the system of Lao Tze (道). There are three kinds of heavenly light: of the sun, the moon, and the stars. In Chinese ethics there are three forms of obedience: of a subject toward his sovereign, of the son toward his father, of a wife toward her husband. There are three mental qualities (性) of a student: application (讀), memory (記), understanding (悟). There are the three gems worshipped by Buddhists, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. There are



THE THREE GEMS OF BUDDHISM.

three pure ones or precious ones worshipped in the Taoist temples, probably in imitation of the Buddhist trinity. There are three ceremonial rituals; one in worshipping heavenly spirits, another in worshipping spirits of the earth, and the third one in worshipping the spirits of ancestors. There are three sacrificial animals: the ox, the goat, the pig. There are three holy men: Yao, Shun, and Yü. There are three auspicious constellations: the constellation of happiness, the constellation of emolument, and the constellation of

longevity. There are three kinds of abundance that is desirable: abundance of good fortune, abundance of years, abundance of sons. There are three powers (三才) of nature: heaven (天), earth (地), man (人). There are three regions of existence, the heavens, the earth and the waters. There are three degrees of kinship. Further there are three penal sentences: the death penalty, corporeal punishment, and imprisonment. There are three tribunals of justice: the board of punishments, the court of judicature or appellate court, and the censorate or supreme court. There are three forms of taxation: land taxation, a service of twenty days labor each year, and tithes of the produce. There are three great rivers: the Yellow River, the Loh, and the I. There are three great river defiles: Kwang Tung, the Valley of the Yang Tse Kiang, and the defiles of the Si Ling on the Yellow River. There are three primordial sovereigns: Fuh Hi, Shen Nung, and Hwang Ti. In addition there are innumerable sets of three in the literature of the Confucianists, the Buddhists, the Taoists, and also in history.

The number "four" is not less frequent. We have four quadrants and four divisions of the heavens; the East is the division of the azure dragon, the North of the somber warrior, the South of the vermillion bird, and the West of the white tiger. There are four supernatural creatures considered as endowed with spirituality: *lin* (麟) or unicorn, *feng* (鳳) or phoenix, *kwei* (龜) or tortoise, and *lung* (龍) or dragon. The scholar possesses four treasures (寶): ink (墨), paper (紙), brush (筆), and ink slab (硯).¹¹ There are four figures which originate by combining the two primordial essences in groups of two, the great *yang*, the small *yang*, the great *yin* and the small *yin*. There are four cardinal points and four members of the human frame.

Instances of the number "five" are above all the five blessings (五福): longevity (壽), riches (富), peacefulness (康) and serenity (寧), the love of virtue (攸好德), and a happy consummation of life (考終命). There are five eternal ideals (常): humaneness

¹¹ The Chinese have no ink stand but use a slab upon which they rub their ink, taking it as does a painter from a palette.

(仁), uprightness (義), propriety (禮), insight (智), and faithfulness (信). There are five elements (五行): water, fire, wood, metal, earth. There are five cardinal relations among mankind: between sovereign and subject (君臣), between father and son (父子), between elder brother and younger brother (兄弟), between husband and wife (夫婦), between friend and friend (朋友). There are five genii: of spring, of summer, of mid-year, of autumn, and of winter. There are five beasts used for offerings: the ox, the goat, the pig, the dog, the fowl. There are five colors: black, red, azure, white, yellow. There are five classes of spiritual beings:

仁	五常	攸好德	壽富	五福
義		考終命	康寧	
禮				
智				
信				

THE FIVE IDEALS.

THE FIVE BLESSINGS.

ghosts or disembodied human spirits, spiritual men, immortalised beings living in this world, deified spirits who have departed from the material world and live in the islands of the blest, and the celestial gods who enjoy perpetual life in heaven, There are five planets: Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn. Further the Buddhists enumerate five attributes of existence: form, perception, consciousness, action, and knowledge. There are five degrees of feudal rank, five tastes, five notes of harmony in music, five sacred mountains, five kinds of charioteering, five colors of clouds, five ancient emperors, five imperial courts, five kinds of mourning, etc., etc.

The characters which stand for the five blessings, and also the five eternal ideals, are naturally the most popular symbols all over



五蝠

THE FIVE BATS.

(After a Tibetan picture.)



THE LONGEVITY GARMENT.*

China. They are used for congratulations and are inscribed upon wall pendants as ornaments. Among them the characters "longev-

* Reproduced from Professor De Groot's *Religious Systems of China*, page 60.

ity" and "blessing" are most used of all. They appear upon the decanters of convivial meetings; they are written on the bottom of tea cups; they are wrought into artistic forms of furniture; they



CRANE AND TORTOISE.*

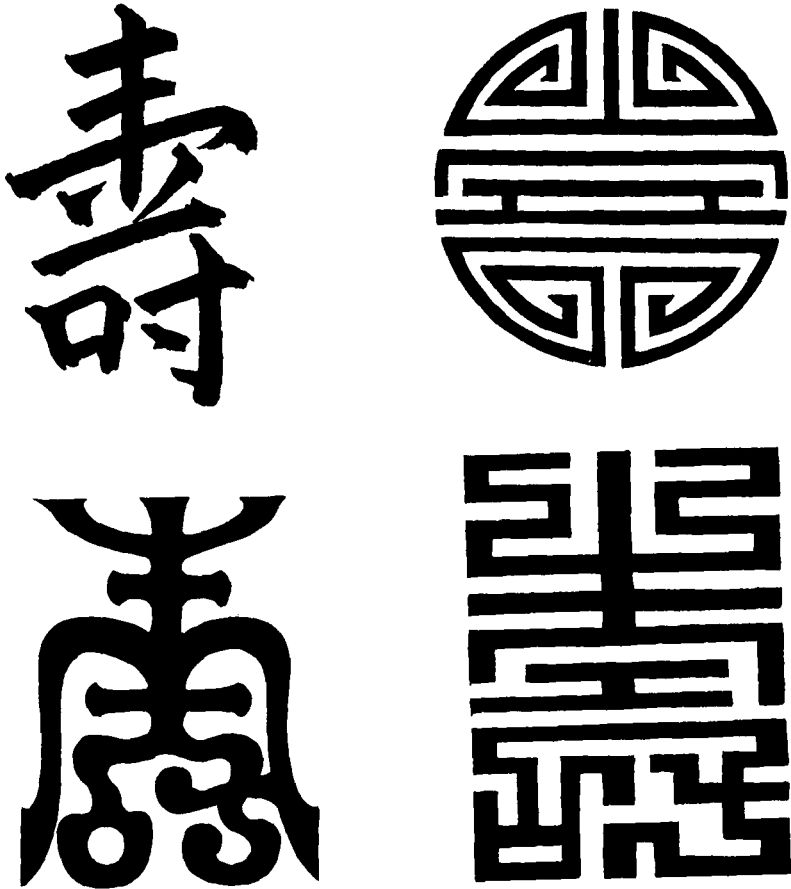
Symbols of long life. (Bronze candlestick.)

are used for buckles, on pins, on dresses, and as ornaments of every description.

* The tortoise drags along the moss that has grown on its back.

Blessing is called *fu* in Chinese, which is an exact homophone of *fu* meaning "bat," and so the five blessings, *wu fu*, are frequently represented by five bats.

The meaning of the symbol "longevity" is not limited to the secular meaning of long life in this world, but is endowed with



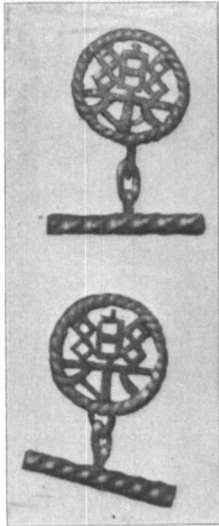
THE LONGEVITY SYMBOL IN DIFFERENT STYLES.

religious signification verging on the idea of immortality among Western peoples.

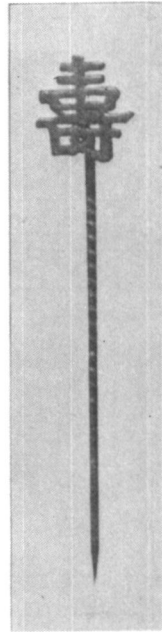
Ancient traditions tell us that Si Wang Mu, the Royal Mother of the West, who lives in the Kwun Lun Mountains, possesses a

peach-tree bearing fruit but once in three thousand years. From the peaches of this tree the elixir of life can be distilled, and this is the reason why the peach symbolises longevity. Other symbols of longevity are the pine-tree, the crane, and the tortoise.*

Of enumerations in sets of six we will only mention the six accomplishments: intelligence, humanity, holiness, sincerity, moderation (keeping the middle path), and benignity; further the six



THE CHARACTER 樂 ON CUFF BUTTON.



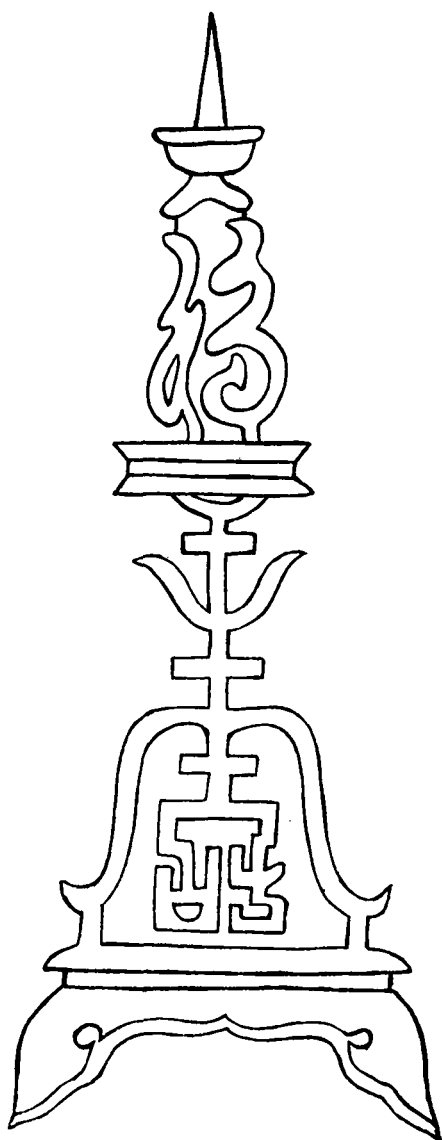
LONGEVITY PIN.

forms of writing: the seal character, the ancient official style, the normal style, the cursive style, the grass style, and the printer's style.

There are fewer enumerations of seven than might be expected. We mention the seven sages in the bamboo grove, the seven precious things (Sapta Ratna) of the Buddhists, the seven primary

* For special reference see De Groot's *Religious Systems of China*, pp. 56-57.

notes of music, the seven stars of Ursa Major commonly called "the dipper," the seven apertures of the head: ears, eyes, nostrils, and



CANDELABRUM WITH "LONGEVITY"
AND "HAPPINESS" SYMBOLS.



"LONGEVITY" DECANTER.



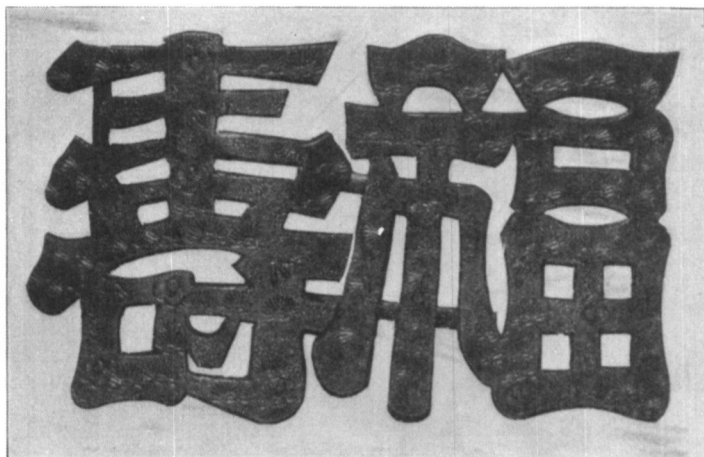
"LONGEVITY"
CHOPSTICK HOLDER.

mouth; the seven luminaries: sun, moon, and the five planets; the seven emotions: joy, anger, grief, fear, love, hatred, desire.

The most important set of eight is the eight *kwa* or trigrams.

The figure "nine" is represented as the nine heavens, situated, one in the center, and the eight remaining ones in the eight divisions of the compass. There are further nine degrees of official rank, and nine divisions of the Great Plan, an ancient Chinese state document.

There are ten canonical books: the Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Book of Odes, the Record of Rites, the Ritual of the Chow Dynasty, the Decorum Ritual, the Annals of Confucius, the Three Commentaries, the Conversations of Confucius (*Lun Yü*),



BUCKLE WITH CHARACTERS "LONGEVITY" AND "BLESSING."

and the Book of Filial Piety. There are ten commandments and ten heinous offences.

Of twelve we have the twelve animals of the duodenary cycle called rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, goat, monkey, cock, dog, and pig. They preside, each one over a special hour of the day and the night and are supposed to exercise an influence peculiar to the character of the several animals. There are further twelve months, corresponding to the twelve divisions of the ecliptic, and the Buddhists speak of the twelve Nidanas or links in the chain of causation.

The figure "twenty-eight" is important as the number of days of a lunar month. Accordingly, the heavens are divided into twenty-eight constellations or stellar mansions, and it is noteworthy that four days in the twenty-eight, corresponding to the Christian Sunday, have been signified as resting-days and are denoted by the character *mi* (密日) which has been traced to the Persian Mithra and proves that, in remote antiquity, Mithraism must have exercised an influence upon Chinese habits.¹²

福

NORMAL STYLE.

福

GRASS STYLE.



A NEW YEAR'S CARD.*

THE CHARACTER "BLESSING."

These enumerations are not accidental and indifferent notions, but form the staple thoughts of Chinese ethics. They have become fundamental principles of Chinese morality and constitute the backbone of the convictions of every half-way educated inhabitant of

¹² See Mr. A. Wylie's article on the subject in the *Chinese Recorder*, Foo Chow, June and July numbers, 1871.

* The deity Wen Ch'ang points upward, indicating that all blessings come from heaven.

China. Whatever their station in life may be, all Chinese people know these ideas, they bear them in mind and allow their lives to be determined by the conception of the five eternal ideals, the five virtues, the five blessings, etc. They recognise in nature the fundamental contrast of Yang and Yin as having originated from the great origin and believe that the moral world of social conditions



CHINESE SAUCER WITH PHOENIX AND DRAGON.

The centre contains the character *fu* "blessing."

is governed by the same law. Their highest ambition is to fulfil all the demands of *hsiao*, i. e., "filial piety." Scholarship is highly respected, and even the lower classes are punctilious in the observance of all rules of propriety.

EDITOR.