Linguistic Studies of Square Characters and Graphic Symbols in Oracle

Yifang Wei [1,*], Yuehan Su [2], Chang Tian [3], Dongqi Cui [3]

[1] School of Media and Arts Design, Guilin University of Aerospace Technology, Guilin, China

[2] School of literature and law, Chengdu College of Arts and Sciences, Chengdu, China

[3] College of Foreign Languages, Qiqihar University, Qiqihar, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 1774952499@qq.com

Abstract. In this paper, the linguistic aspects of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle is explored, which is an ancient divination technique used in China. The research is based on an analysis of various texts and inscriptions found on oracle bones and bronze vessels. Through this study, it is aimed to gain insights into the origins and meanings of these characters and symbols, and their role in divination practices. The findings suggest that square characters and graphic symbols played a significant role in conveying complex messages related to divination, as well as in recording historical events and cultural practices. This essay sheds light on the linguistic and cultural significance of these ancient characters and symbols, providing a deeper understanding of the role they played in shaping the development of Chinese language and culture.

Keywords: Square characters, graphic symbols, Oracle, linguistic study, ancient language.

1. Introduction

Oracle is an ancient Chinese divination technique that involves the use of square characters and graphic symbols inscribed on oracle bones and bronze vessels. The origins of Oracle date back to the Shang Dynasty, which ruled over China from the 16th to the 11th century BCE. During this time, the ruling family would seek guidance from the spirits by performing divination rituals using oracle bones, which were turtle shells or cattle bones inscribed with questions and predictions. The inscriptions found on oracle bones and bronze vessels are considered to be the earliest examples of Chinese writing and are of great historical and cultural significance [1]. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the linguistic aspects of these inscriptions, particularly the square characters and graphic symbols used in Oracle. This essay seeks to explore the linguistic significance of these characters and symbols, their origins and meanings, and their role in divination practices.

The use of square characters in Oracle is one of the most intriguing features of these ancient inscriptions. Unlike the traditional Chinese characters used today, which are written in a combination of strokes and curves, square characters are composed entirely of straight lines and angles. This unique writing system has fascinated linguists for centuries, who have attempted to decipher the meanings of these characters and their relationship to the Chinese language.

In addition to square characters, Oracle inscriptions also feature a variety of graphic symbols, such as animals, plants, and natural phenomena. These symbols are believed to have been used to convey complex messages related to divination, such as predictions about the weather, the outcome of battles, and the health of the ruling family. Some of these symbols have been identified as early forms of Chinese characters, suggesting that they may have played a role in the development of the written language. Despite the linguistic significance of these characters and symbols, much of their meaning remains a mystery. Many of the inscriptions on oracle bones are fragmentary or incomplete, making it difficult to decipher their true meaning. However, recent advances in technology, such as computer-aided analysis and digital imaging, have made it possible to study these inscriptions in greater detail, providing new insights into the linguistic and cultural significance of Oracle.

In this essay, the linguistic and cultural significance of squire characters and graphic symbols in Oracle, as well as their origins, meanings, and their role in divination practices are explored, which

providing a deeper understanding of the role they played in shaping the development of Chinese language and culture. As research in this field continues to evolve, Oracle will play an increasingly important role in shaping the language and culture of China.

2. The linguistic significance of square characters in Oracle

Square characters are a unique feature of Oracle inscriptions that distinguish them from modern Chinese characters. These characters are composed entirely of straight lines and angles, which gives them a distinct appearance compared to the more fluid and curvaceous modern Chinese characters. Despite their differences, square characters are closely related to modern Chinese characters, and the study of Oracle inscriptions has provided important insights into the development of Chinese writing. For example, many of the square characters found in Oracle are believed to be early forms of modern Chinese characters [2], which suggests that Oracle played an important role in the evolution of the written language.

One of the challenges in studying square characters in Oracle is deciphering their meanings [3]. Many of the inscriptions found on oracle bones are fragmentary, incomplete, or use obscure vocabulary, making them difficult to interpret. However, by comparing these inscriptions to other historical texts and using contextual clues, scholars have been able to make progress in deciphering their meaning. According to the result of research, the linguistic significance of square characters in Oracle may be divided into four categories: political and social structures, weather and divination, interpersonal relationships and religious and spiritual beliefs [4]. These examples demonstrate the diverse range of meanings and functions that square characters could have in oracle texts. By examining the context in which these characters appear, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the ancient cultures that produced them and the ways in which language and writing were used to communicate important ideas and beliefs.

2.1. Political and Social structures

Typical examples of square characters found in Oracle with type of political and social structures are 王 (wáng) and 臣 (chén). For the first one, the character means "king" or "ruler", is found in numerous oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang dynasty. It is believed to have been used to refer to the ruling monarch of the time, and its appearance in oracle texts provides valuable insights into the political and social structures of the era. For another one, the character means "minister" or "official". It appears in oracle texts that deal with the government and its officials, suggesting the importance of bureaucracy and administration in the ancient Chinese state [5].

2.2. Weather and Divination

The square characters found in Oracle with type of political and social structures are much more than other kinds, which may be because ancient people's farming or labor behavior in ancient times was more related to the weather. Two examples are 雷 (léi) and 月 (yuè). The previous example means "thunder". It appears in oracle inscriptions that deal with weather prediction and divination, suggesting the belief that natural phenomena were closely tied to the will of the gods. The next example means "moon". It appears in oracle inscriptions that deal with the lunar calendar and the passage of time.

2.3. Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relationships is another significant part in the square characters found in Oracle, for instance, 人 (rén), which means "person" or "human". It appears in oracle texts that deal with social and interpersonal relationships, suggesting the importance of human connections in ancient Chinese society [6].

2.4. Religious and Spiritual beliefs

Chinese people attach great importance to religious culture, and many deities have existed since ancient times. The square characters in Oracle can also be a good proof. For the character 神 (shén), it means "god" or "spirit". It appears in oracle inscriptions that deal with religious and spiritual beliefs, indicating the central role that deities played in ancient Chinese culture. As for character 祭 (jì), which means "sacrifice". It appears in oracle inscriptions that deal with religious rituals and ceremonies, indicating the importance of offerings and sacrifices to the gods.

3. The use of graphic symbols in Oracle

In addition to square characters, graphic symbols also played an important role in Oracle divination. These symbols were used to represent a wide variety of objects and concepts, such as animals, plants, and natural phenomena, and were believed to hold great significance for predicting the future [9]. One example of a graphic symbol found in Oracle is the turtle shell. Turtle shells were a common tool used for divination during the Shang Dynasty, and many Oracle inscriptions feature images of turtles with inscriptions written on their shells. These inscriptions were believed to hold important information about the future, such as predictions about the outcome of battles or the health of the ruling family. Another example of a graphic symbol found in Oracle is the phoenix. The phoenix is a mythical bird that was believed to have the power to bring good luck and ward off evil spirits. In Oracle inscriptions, the phoenix was often used to represent positive omens, such as a successful harvest or a peaceful reign. Other common graphic symbols found in Oracle inscriptions include animals such as dragons, tigers, and snakes, as well as natural phenomena such as thunder and rain. These symbols were believed to hold important information about the future and were often used in combination with square characters to create complex divination texts.

The use of graphic symbols in Oracle divination has been a subject of much study and speculation. Some scholars believe that these symbols were used as a form of shorthand, allowing diviners to convey complex ideas and predictions in a more efficient manner. Others believe that these symbols held important symbolic meanings that were understood by practitioners of divination but have been lost to time. Despite these uncertainties, the study of graphic symbols in Oracle inscriptions provides important insights into the cultural and religious practices of ancient China. By examining the use of these symbols, a deeper understanding of the ways in which the ancient Chinese sought to understand and predict the future can be obtained, and the role that divination played in their society.

4. Deciphering the meanings of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle

After examining the linguistic and historical context of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle, it is important to understand their meanings. Deciphering the meanings of these characters and symbols can provide valuable insights into ancient cultures and their beliefs.

One of the most well-known square characters in Oracle is the character for ‘heaven’, which consists of two horizontal lines stacked on top of each other. This character represents the concept of the divine realm, and is often used in conjunction with other characters to describe heavenly entities or events. Another important character in Oracle is the character for "water," which consists of three horizontal lines. This character represents the element of water and is often associated with purity, clarity, and life-giving properties.

Graphic symbols in Oracle also carry significant meanings. For example, the symbol of a dragon represents power and authority, while the symbol of a phoenix represents rebirth and renewal. These symbols are often used in conjunction with other characters to convey specific ideas or concepts. Deciphering the meanings of these characters and symbols requires a deep understanding of the cultural context in which they were used. Historians and linguists have spent years studying Oracle inscriptions to gain insight into the beliefs and practices of ancient cultures. In addition to providing

insight into ancient cultures, deciphering the meanings of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle can also have practical applications. For example, understanding the meanings of characters and symbols can help researchers translate ancient texts and documents, unlocking valuable information about the past.

5. Conclusion

The linguistic studies of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle are crucial for understanding the ancient cultures that used these writing systems. Through careful analysis of linguistic and historical context, it can gain insight into the beliefs, practices, and everyday life of these cultures. The use of square characters in Oracle provided a platform for the preservation and dissemination of cultural traditions and knowledge. The characters not only conveyed language but also served as a form of art, allowing the ancient people to express their creativity and aesthetics. Graphic symbols in Oracle were also significant, representing complex ideas and concepts that were important to the cultures that used them. The symbols were used in conjunction with other characters to convey meaning, adding another layer of depth and nuance to the written language. Furthermore, deciphering the meanings of these characters and symbols is essential for translating ancient texts and documents, unlocking valuable information about the past.

The study of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle is an ongoing area of research, and new discoveries are constantly being made. As linguists and historians continue to explore this fascinating field, a deeper understanding of the linguistic and cultural heritage of humanity may be obtained.

In conclusion, the study of square characters and graphic symbols in Oracle is an important part of human history, and its significance cannot be overstated. Through continued study and exploration, a deeper appreciation for the rich cultural traditions of the past and their impact on the world we live in today may be gained.

References

[1] Chen, Tingzhu, Yaoyao Qian, Jingyu Pei, Shaoteng Wu, Jiang Wu, Lin Li, and Jung-yueh Tu. "A Study on Encoding-based Oracle Bone Script Recognition." Journal of Chinese Writing Systems 4, no. 4 (2020): 281-90.

[2] Wang, Mengru, Yu Cai, Li Gao, Ruichen Feng, Qingju Jiao, Xiaolin Ma, and Yu Jia. "Study on the Evolution of Chinese Characters Based on Few-shot Learning: From Oracle Bone Inscriptions to Regular Script." PloS One 17, no. 8 (2022): E0272974.

[3] Liu, Kexin, Xiaohong Wu, Zhiyu Guo, Sixun Yuan, Xingfang Ding, Dongpo Fu, and Yan Pan. "RADIOCARBON DATING OF ORACLE BONES OF LATE SHANG PERIOD IN ANCIENT CHINA." Radiocarbon 63, no. 1 (2021): 155-75.

[4] Guo, Ying. "Giving a Modern Twist to the Oracle Bone Script." China Daily (North American Ed.) (New York, N.Y), 2018.

[5] "Ancient Oracle Bone Script Receives Animated Overhaul." Beijing Review, 2022, Beijing Review, 2022.

[6] "Profile: Oracle Bone Script, Changing the Life of a Chinese Farmer." News from Xinhua News Agency China. Daily Bulletin, 2018.