Evolusion and Gender Bias Reflected in Chinese Characters

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ABSTRACT

Evolution of Chinese characters besides the form of its streaks, also occur in change and meaning of vocabulary. Vocabulary containing radical women which is expressed with the pictograph "女 nǔ" contained a lot of negative meanings, so it is very interesting to study the gender bias. To analyze the evolution of the character content and gender bias in Chinese characters, an analytical literature method was used. Results of the analysis found that Chinese characters contain a high philosophy. By seeing the form of the characters we are already aware of the culture reflected in the nation. Besides that many Chinese characters used 'woman' radical with a derogative meaning, showing that the time these characters were created, the woman position of women were regarded lower than men. In simplification of the character streaks it was found that some negative meaning characters no longer contain the 'woman radical', marking a change in the view about women, but the percentage is still small.

Key words: Chinese character, Evolution, Woman "女 nǔ" radical, Gender bias

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the phenomenon of gender bias that attracted a broad community, and now widely discussed by academic researchers and the general public, this article analyzes the evolution and developments regarding gender which are reflected in Chinese characters. Formation of the Chinese language has a very close relationship with philosophy concepts, moral concepts, and the traditional values concept of the China state. These characters depict a state of mind of the Chinese community at the time these characters were created (Guō, Jǐnfú, 2010, p.6). Innitially the Chinese community upheld the dignity of women, then transformed into degrading them; so it is interesting to examine these characters change in connection to views about women.

The entire human culture can be noted with the letters of written language. Therefore, language is a sign of culture for understanding a nation through language of the country. According to Ji, Xiūshēng (2004) vocabulary is a storehouse of all kinds of traditional culture (p.36). This is consistent with the statement of Xíng, Fúyì and Wàng, Guóshèng (2009) who pointed out that Chinese characters are one of the world alphabets with a very long history, and the present characters were developed from classical Chinese characters (p.25).

The development of Chinese characters besides in the form of its streaks also changes in vocabulary meanings. Lǔ, Bǎoyuán (1999) have pointed out that

the Chinese state was the first a matriarch society that upholds the dignity of women, and afterwards turned into a patriarch society (P.31). Since the transition of society in ancient matriarch into the patriarchal society which professing a slavery system, the women occupy a low position. Discrimination against women was a strong phenomena, reflected in daily language of life, such as Chinese characters containing the radical women indicated by the pictograph "女 nǔ", lots contains a negative meaning. To analyze the evolution of Chinese characters and its content of gender bias, a analytical method was used in library studies.

Literature method used is by reading books / journals written in Chinese as a reference data. After all vocabulary data containing the radical women or "女 nǔ" with a negative meaning are collected, then the evolution of these Chinese characters were collected and analyzed. A method to analyze this is in accordance with the literature study methods expressed by Nasir, Moh. (2005) which directed in obtaining the necessary information during conducting literature research using data text books, journals, or newspapers (p.103).

2. HISTORY OF STREAK FORMS IN CHINESE CHARACTERS

The Chinese Lettering *jiǎgǔwén* 甲骨文 was first discovered by Wáng Yìróng 王懿荣 a *Qīng* 清 dynasty epigraph expert in 1899 in *Hénán* province *ānyáng* 河南 安阳 (formerly the capital at the end of the the *Shāng* Dynasty 商) . One day accidently because his illness he bought Chinese medicine consisting of animal fossils. The fossils were engraved with Chinese characters (Jīn, Níng, 2003, P. 24). These characters then change in the brush streaks and materials used for writing Chinese characters, into a formation so-called *jīnwén* 金文 carved on copper at the time of the Western *Zhōu* dynasty 西周 (11th century BC-771M), 春秋 *Chūn Qiū* era, *Shāng* Dynasty 商 , *Zhōu* 周 `, and the Six Nations era (475 BC - 221 BC) (Gāo, Gèngshēng, 2002, p.14). *jīnwén* 金文 character forms anticipated at the time of the *Shāng* and *Zhōu* era, were all written with a brush then printed on a copper sheet , so it looks a bit rough and fatter but more neat than *jiǎgǔwén* 甲骨文 characters.

Subsequent development process, ie at the time of the *Qín* dynasty, were the character shape "*dàzhuàn* 大篆" and "*xiaozhuàn* 小篆". According Chéng, Yùzhēn (2000), the *dàzhuàn* 大篆 characters were engraved on tambourine shaped stone tablets, and regarded as treasure properties of the Chinese state (p.64). *Dàzhuàn* 大篆 characters appeared neater than *jīnwén* 金文 characters , the streaks are similar to the *xiaozhuàn* 小篆 characters, which appeared after Emperor *Qín* 秦 united the six nations in 221 BC, The shapes were implemented through harsh standardization, with more rounded brush streaks and not square.

The next stage of the development of Chinese characters was the *Lìshū* 隶书 formation, distinguished into two kinds *Qínlì* 秦 隶 and *Hànlì* 汉隶. *Qínlì* 秦 隶 characters were the *Lìshū* 隶书 characters of the *Qín* dynasty, the arc-shaped brush streaks disappear and transformed into a square shapes and broken, thus eliminating the unique characteristics of Chinese classical form. While the shape

of the *Hànlì* 汉隶 characters a change of *Qínlì* 秦 隶 form, already has a kind of modern-day streak font called *piě* 撇（丿）, *nà* 捺, thus has not left a trail of *zhuànshū* 篆书 character form. Subsequent development emerged in the form of.

  Kǎishū 楷书 in the late Han dynasty 汉 (220 M), and peaked at *Wèi Jìn* 魏晋 Dynasty (220 AD - 420 AD). *Kǎishū* characters are used until now, with a rectangle shape and beautiful and interesting brush streaks (Huáng, Bóróng and Liào, Xùdōng, 2005, p.167). After China's state independence, in order to overcome the streak complexity of Chinese characters which is difficult to remember, prompted the government to make "Simplification Draft Letter". Thus the Chinese characters once again experienced a complete overhaul in character shape where complicated *fántǐzì* 繁体字 streaks became simpler *jiǎntǐzì* 简体字 streaks. For example the word "*chuāng* 創 "means 'wound' in complex streaks into "*chuāng* 创" its simple form. Following is an example of the evolution form of Chinese characters.

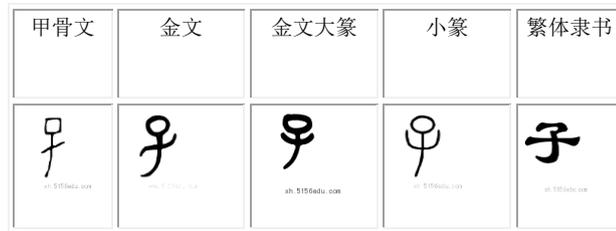| 甲骨文	金文	金文大篆	小篆	繁体隶书

Fig 1 Several evolution forms of the Chinese character 子
(Bbs.tiexie.net/post_3737317_1.html)

Fig 2 The *jiǎgǔwén* 甲骨文 characters written on turtle shell
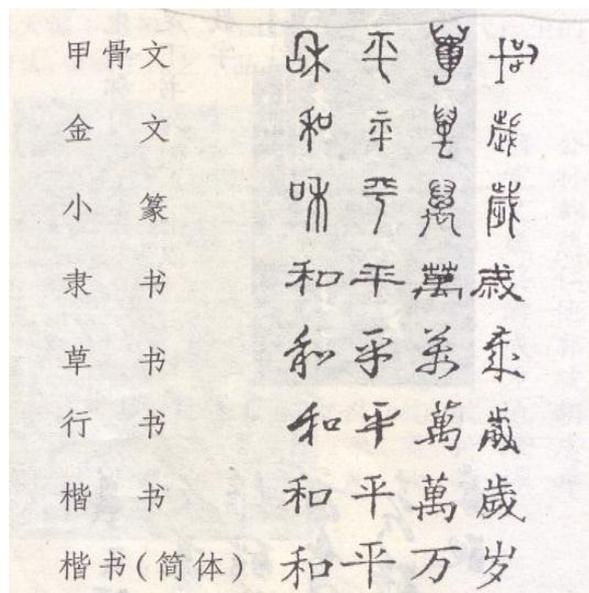(baike.baidu.com/picview/8170/)

Fig 3 Various Chinese characters from top to bottom
Beginning with *jiǎgǔwén* 甲骨文 characters until *kǎishū* 楷书
(Huáng and Liào, 2005, p.176.)

3. UNIQUENESS OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Universal language characters can be divided into two types, characters stating the sound and characters stating the meaning. Characters stating the sound used the alphabet for writing. Characters written with alphabet according to Qìng, Wénzhōng (1986) were differentiated into morpheme character such as English, Russian, Arabic, and syllabic character like the Japanese alphabet (p.245). Characters stating the meaning are characters using a specific symbolic form to indicate a word or a morpheme, which include Chinese characters, Ancient Egypt, Ancient America (Xíng, and Wàng, 2009, p.25). Characters of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Maya all extinct in daily use, leaving the Chinese characters which still endure and even become more popular around the world.

The uniqueness of Chinese characters can be mentioned in several aspects. Chinese characters as letters stating meaning, have a very close relationship between appearance and meaning. In the classical period, the formation of Chinese characters were distinguish into four kinds, namely (1) xiàngxíng 象形; (2) zhǐshì 指事, (3) Huiyi 会意; (4) xíngshēng 形声 (Zhang, Dàinián & Fāng Kèlì, 2010, p.116).
(1) Xiàngxíng 象形, is based on the way formation of Chinese characters representing things or animals. This method distinguishes two kinds. First based on the original form of the object, for example the letter "ri 日" which means 'days / points today'; another way to add a form that is related to these objects, for example the letter "雨 yu" which means 'rain' (Gāo, 2002. p.26).
(2) Zhǐshì 指事, is a way of constructing Chinese characters using an abstract symbol form of points and lines to convey meaning or object position. The

character "*běn* 本" means "again" comes from the character "*mù* 木" meaning 'wood' and added a centre bottom line to indicate a root to become character " *běn běn* 本".

(3) Huiyi 会意 is a way of formation of Chinese characters by combining two or more symbols to indicate new meaning characters, for example "*xiū* 休" meaning 'rest' combines "*rén* 人（亻）" leaning" on "wood" or "*mù* 木".

(4) Xíngshēng 形 声 is a way of forming Chinese characters by combining the radical stating the meaning with component characters stating sound intonation to become a new meaning character , for example the word "*hé* 河" means "river" using the radical *shuǐ* 氵 meaing 'water' and the rhyming character *kě* 可 as a vocal sound meaning 'can'.

The first, second, and third states do not express sound intonation, except the fourth. Chinese characters are morphenes, meaning characters registered one syllable, and a syllable often represent a morpheme. For example the word "一 *yī*" meaning 'one' record one syllable that express the meaning of 'one'.

4. COMPLICATED AND SIMPLE CHINESE CHARACTER STREAKS

The Chinese state is very good at looking at the situation globally, the country knows that if you want Chinese language known and popular throughout the world, the intricate character streaks must be simplified. Since 1959 the jiǎntǐzì 简 体 字 simplified version   were officially used. (Wáng, Lǐjiā. Lù, Jiānmíng. Fú, Huáiqīng, 2000, P.166). Simplification of streaks in classical times occur naturally, but at the Chinese independence era,   simplification was done systematically. In January 1956 the State Council of China officially announced the "Simplification Design of Chinese Characters ", and appealed for using jiǎntǐzì 简体字 anywhere .

After Chinese streaks were simplified, some problems arose, namely several characters have been similar simplified, like "*shè* 设 ' plan ' to" 没 *méi* 'do not have'. While with complicated streaks are clearly distinct as "*shè* 設" "*méi* 没".   In addition, there are issues about the difficulty of explaining the radical parts that make up the characters after being simplified; for example, "*nóng* 农" can not be analyzed consisting of any component.This word before simplification was written 辰 曲 and easy to explain   the radical 曲 and component 辰. Another constraint caused by streak simplification is occuring similar sounds with a different meaning, for example the word "*gān* 干" which replaces the complicated streak character letter word "*gān* 乾" , sounds "*gānhuó* 干活" 'work' and "*gānzào* 干燥" 'dry '.

5. GENDER EVOLUTION REFLECTED IN CHINESE CHARACTERS

According to Guō (2010), the formation of Chinese clans were initially closely linked to a matriach community. Clans of the emperor in classical times

contained the radical "女 *nǚ*" 'women', like the *yántì* 炎帝 emperor had a surname *jiāng* 姜; the *huángì* 黄帝 emperor had a surname Huang *jì* 姬; other person's surnames in classical times were *sì* 姒, *yáo* 姚. This indicates that clans drew from the lineage of women, meaning it has a close relationship with a matriach tribal community where a surname often acted as a tribal symbol. In subsequent development the matriach society transformed into a patriarch society, and clan ancestry were drawn from the father, and no longer contained the 'woman' radical "女 *nǚ*",for example the *qí* 祁 clan, *téng* 滕 or *rèn* 任 (p.317-318).

It is known that China experienced a very long feudal society. At this feudal era discrimination against women happened. Automatically discriminating phenomenon is also reflected in the language of life. Viewing the meaning of Chinese characters containing the radical 'woman' "女 *nǚ*" the society underestimate women. Discrimination against women is clearly reflected for example, the word "奴 *nǔ*" means 'slave', which noted that in feudal times women were treated as slaves, they lose their freedom, and were always arranged by men (Lǔ, 1999, P.31). In real life, slaves were not only made up by women, but also men, but why are slave only written with a woman radical? .

There are letters that since classical times already reflect discrimination against women, because of the radical women's appearance combined with other components of which, when traced from its meaning can be found at the society's view of the position of women. Guō (2010) explains that the origin of the letter from "女 *nǚ*" itself reflected the low status of women, because it is derived from the image of a person kneeling. This suggests women should kneel, while men need not, so a discrimination view against women. Of the letters "*fù* 妇" 'an adult woman', it can be seen that the main task of women is sweeping the house, or as blue-collar workers. In other words can also be analyzed from the similarity of the sound the word "*fù* 妇" with the word "*fù* 负" meaning 'in charge', so a relationship that women are responsible for the work force. This proves that women in those days were regarded as slaves of men (p.30).

Similarly, regarding the letter "奸 *jiān*" meaning 'traitor / evil'. Actually evil is not a women monopoly, because many men also do . When searching more detailed, precisely many evil officials are men, but the character bears the radical women, so it reflects injustice. Other negative meaning characters bearing the radical 'woman' are like "妒嫉 *dùjì*" 'envy'; "贪婪 *tānlán*" 'greedy '(Lǔ, 1999: 31).

There are several characters containing radical 'woman' "女 *nǚ*" which initially had no negative meaning, such as the character "*yāo* 妖". The basic meaning is 'pretty faced woman', but because men in feudal times, especially kingdom officials were attracted by the beautiful women, they ignored their duty governing the country well. Men do not interospect themself, instead negligence of responsibility to govern the country properly were delegated to women. This then led "beauty" into a catastrophe, so that the character "妖" changed its meaning into 'demon'. Likewise, words with the character "*mèi* 媚", initially had a positive meaning of 'gentle'. Women are gentle towards men should be significantly positive, but because there are men who do not act well and do not

try to go forward,even fell deep in the softness of a women, so the development of the negative meaning 'boot-licker' (Lǔ, 1999, p.31).

The following table analyzes the negative meaning of characters containing the radical 'women' according *Xiàndài hànyǔ cídiǎn* dictionary published by Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn yǔyán yánjiūwsuǒ (2005). Analyzes was done after observing the meaning of other components combined to the radical 'woman' "女 *nǔ*" . Selected were 19 examples of characters that have a negative meaning in this dictionary.

Table 1 Analysis of character meaning containing the radical "woman 女 *nǔ*" combined with other components

No.	Words with woman radical	Word meaning (*Derog*)	Component added and word meaning	Gender bias and discrimination reflected after combining the radical with other component
1	妄 *wàng*	Unreasonable	亡 *wáng* = Run / loose	Women loose reasoning
2	奸 *jiān*	*Traitor*	干 *gàn* = Perform	Women betray
3	姹 *chà*	Beautiful	宅 *zhái* = Home	Home is for beautiful women only
4	妃 *fēi*	*Mistress, Concubine*	己 *jì* = One self	Exclusive for women, never assumed to a second husband
5	妓 *jì*	*Prostitute*	支 *zhī* = Support	Prostitutes are women able to support the family
6	妨 *fáng*	Hinder	方 *fāng* = Direction	Women prevent anything happen
7	嬲 *jī*	*Male sexual relationship*	田 *tián* = Rice field	Women in the rice-field are sex objects
8	姗 *shān*	Slow	册 *cè* = Book	Women learn slow.
9	妾 *qiè*	*Mistress*	立 *lì* = Stand	By being a mistresses can women survive
10	耍 *shuá*	Play	而 *ér* = Conjunction for same word	Women as a playing tool
11	娄 *lóu*	Unhealthy body	米 *mǐ* = Rice	Rice is grown by unhealthy women
12	婚 *hūn*	Mariage	昏 *hūn* = Vague, blurred	Mariage for woman are uncertain
13	婧 *duò*	*Lazy*	Consisting the component 左 *zuo* 'left' and 月 *yue* 'moon'	Women are regarded lazy, even there are no connection with "left" and "moon"
14	婬 *yín* become 淫	*Dishonest in mariage*	Consisting the component *zhuā* 爪 'claw' and *rén* 壬'earth'	Basically women are dishonest in mariage
15	婼 *chuò*	Not smooth	若 *Ruò* = Like	Women actions are not smooth
16	嫌 *xián*	*Suspicious*	兼 *jiān* = Duplicate / Two fold	Women are too suspicious compared to men
17	嫖 *piáo*	*Prostitute*	票 *piào*= Ticket	Women can be bought with tickets or money.
18	嬾 *lán* become 懒	*Lazy*	赖 *lài* = Hanging	Women are not autonomious
19	娼 *chàng*	*Prostitute*	昌 *chāng* = Prosperous, wealthy	Wealthy women came from prostitutes

After analyzing the Chinese characters containing the radical 'woman' apparently findings are two characters with initial significant derogative meaning , turned into words not containig the 'woman' radical anymore. The 14th row "*yín*` 淫" now in the modern Chinese language dictionary used the "water 氵" radical to form "淫". Similarly, in row 18 the word "嬾 *lán*" now used the radical " heart 忄" forming the word into "懶".

6. CONCLUSION

Chinese characters contain a high philosophy, because from   the characters we can gues the culture reflected in the nation. Also that many Chinese characters used a derogative meaning with 'woman' radicals , shows that the Chinese people while creating these characters look the position of women is lower than men. At the times when   intricate streaks where replaced with simple streaks, it found that two derogative words do not contain the 'woman' radical anymore, indicating a change in the view of women, but the percentage is still very small.

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