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WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT ON THE CHINESE LANGUAGE
— INTERPRETATION AND RECONSTRUCTION*

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Stones from another hill, may be used to polish jade

-- "The Crane Cries", *The Book of Poetry*

它山之石,可以攻玉。 -- 《詩經·小雅·鶴鳴》

ABSTRACT

Acclaimed as the father of general linguistics, Wilhelm von Humboldt's scholarship on the Chinese language was also a remarkable one. For Humboldt, language universals are nothing but some general principles pertaining to the function of language as a major intellectual activity. These principles, however, have to be exemplified by individual languages with all their linguistic particularities. Humboldt considered languages to be like organic entities capable of consistent development over ages. Starting from specific linguistic idiosyncrasies, individual languages tend to follow their own consistent and self-adjusted line of development. In the Chinese language, initial linguistic features such as "phonic poverty", "phonic isolation" (monosyllability) etc. prevented the Chinese from developing a grammatical system on the basis of inflection, as is the case in most Indo-European languages. In regard to grammar, the Chinese language seems to have found a way of its own. Instead of relying on externally precipitated sound forms, Chinese grammar has developed in such a way that the intellectual power tends to take direct control over the sentence. For this to function smoothly, a number of linguistic devices (such as tonality, the use of particles and idioms etc.) were also developed as compensation measures to offset the relative weakness of the Chinese sound system. For the same reason, in

the development of the Chinese script, the graphical elements were allowed to share with the phonic elements the burden of meaning discrimination. With the measure of "analogy of script", as highlighted by Humboldt, the hidden creativity of the Chinese mind is liberated to its greatest extent. Besides being an interpretation of Humboldt's theory, this paper is also an attempt for reconstruction. In so doing, various works of modern scholarship on the Chinese language/script were cited, of which the works of two Chinese linguists, Hu Pu'an and Sun Yongchang were given special attention.

I. HUMBOLDT'S APPROACH TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

I. LEIBNIZIAN, KANTIAN AND HEGELIAN ELEMENTS:

Talking about Wilhelm von Humboldt's scholarship, one should not lose sight of the fact that Humboldt's philosophy falls within the general framework of the German idealistic tradition. To provide a suitable frame of reference for Humboldt, we can broaden our understanding of the term "German Idealism" (commonly referring to the period from Fichte to Hegel) to mean the whole trend of German philosophical development from Leibniz through Kant to Hegel.¹ Against this backdrop, we will argue that Humboldt's philosophical endeavour in general, and his philosophy of language in particular, not only recapitulated the basic themes of Leibniz, Kant and Hegel, but brought about a synthesis of these themes in a very peculiar manner. From Leibniz, Humboldt inherited the overall interest for language, the approach to linguistic comparativism, the idea of life as *conatus*, as *Drang* or as *Kraft*, and the attempt to reconcile universalism and individualism.² From Kant, Humboldt adopted a stringent limitation on every overly metaphysical approaches to philosophy, the methodical juxtaposition of matter and form, and the transcendental reformulation of the problem of subject-object relation.³ Lastly, Humboldt's emphasis on intellectual development has an unmistakable resonance with the Hegelian motives of *Philosophie des Geistes* and *geistige Entwicklung*, although Humboldt does not share the speculative elements and the emphasis on pure thinking characteristic of Hegel.⁴

Since the dawn of modern philosophy, many traditional philosophical issues sharpened to become the philosophy of subjectivity, which nowadays is much criti-

cized for being too metaphysical on the one hand, and for having triggered off the so-called modernity crisis on the other. Instead of directly speculating on subjectivity, Humboldt's reflections on language provided another alternative in handling philosophical questions of old. For Humboldt, the host of traditional philosophical problems, that of the German idealistic tradition in particular, can be transformed into problems of linguistics.⁵ If we accept the expression "linguistic turn" as a catchword for contemporary philosophy, then Humboldt can be considered the most important forerunner, if not the true initiator, of this movement.

2. LINGUISTIC UNIVERSALS VERSUS LINGUISTIC INDIVIDUALITIES:

As regards language universals, one can not help but think of Chomsky's linguistic program for which the search for linguistic universals is the foremost task. But precisely at this point we see the major difference between the linguistics of Chomsky and of Wilhelm von Humboldt, to whom the former has paid much tribute. For Chomsky, the real solution to language universals is the tracing out of a universal grammar (UG) innately adopted by all language speakers and supposedly applicable to all languages. This accounts for the high profile of Chomskyan linguistic research as formalistically authoritative for various national languages. Now when we are to talk about language universals in Humboldt, what we can assert is something very different. In the first place, Humboldt would not have agreed with Chomsky on the so-called UG. Language universals for Humboldt could only mean some principles of the development and use of language common to individual languages. Granted, Humboldt often speaks of "form of language", an expression much quoted by Chomsky in support of his own language universalism. But for Humboldt, "form of language" or even "grammatical form" does not entail "formal" in a Chomskyan sense, but can at best be explained in broad philosophical terms such as *Geist* or "mental development" (*geistige Entwicklung*). Humboldt never came up with the idea that there can be a formalistically all-commanding UG.

For Humboldt, the outlining of the particularities or idiosyncrasies of individual languages is as important a task as the discovery of the universality of language in general. For the universal mental principle to be concretized, the linguist's craft is to look into the details of individual language structures, and observe through what means the general mental principle can be implemented.⁶ This basic attitude in regard to universality and individuality of languages is best evidenced by the title of

Humboldt's *magnum opus* "Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts", and that of Humboldt's letter to a contemporary French sinologist: "Lettre à Abel-Rémusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier".⁸

Another Humboldtian feature not found in the Chomskyan approach to language is the emphasis on the historical cultural tradition as the formative principle of the development of individual languages.⁹ In the second half of this paper, we will find this emphasis particularly relevant when we try to explain why and how the Chinese systems of language and script have evolved so differently from most other languages of the world.

3. COMPARATIVISM AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS PAPER

In regard to the question about the structural perfection of languages, one might expect Humboldt to adopt an exclusively Eurocentric view giving credit only to inflection languages¹⁰. By reading Humboldt more carefully, we know this is not the case. Naturally, Humboldt remarks with great clarity that structurally speaking, the Chinese language deviates greatly from the inflection languages (with Sanskrit as the most perfect example) and can for this reason never assume that kind of linguistic perfection characteristic of the latter. But instead of debasing the Chinese language conclusively as "*unvollkommen* (imperfect)", Humboldt readily argues that the Chinese have taken an utterly different path and have followed through consistently so that eventually a different sort of linguistic perfection was achieved.¹¹

As the chief advocate for *comparativism*, this view of Humboldt on linguistic perfection differs significantly from a Eurocentric view that could have been held by, say, Hegel, who seems to prefer *evolutionism* according to which there is only one pinnacle of perfection.¹²

Inevitably indeed, Humboldt's understanding of the Chinese language has to be made from the vantage point of inflection languages, which exhibit strengths in grammatical form supported by phonetic complexity. While lacking such effective features, Humboldt finds it necessary to think of the Chinese language as possessing some alternative devices which supposedly would compensate for what it "lacks."

This leads to another major concept of linguistic comparativism, the notion of compensation or "replacement" (*Ersetzen*).¹³ It is through this line of thought that Humboldt finds the structure and function of the Chinese language comprehensible.

Before we go on, let us say a few words about the methodology of this paper. As far as textual material is concerned, Humboldt's interest in and his emphasis on the Chinese language are very prominent. In addition to the numerous references made in his monumental *Kawi-Schrift* (1835), Humboldt has left behind at least two pieces of work dedicated to the discussion of the Chinese language, namely, his *Brief an Abel-Rémusat* (1827) as aforementioned, and a lecture on the topic "Über den grammatischen Bau der chinesischen Sprache"¹⁴, delivered in 1826 at the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences. According to the standards of today's Sinologists, we probably cannot assume Humboldt to be substantially proficient in the Chinese language. He very seldom goes into linguistic details. His thoughts on the topic are limited to general, often aphorism-like observations. But given the virtuosity of Humboldt as the father of the new science of general linguistics and given his vision in linguistic comparativism as discussed above, most of the short observations he makes on the Chinese language proved to be extremely incisive and attention deserving.

In the following pages, instead of just reporting on Humboldt's treatment of Chinese, which probably would need much less space, I will be doing something quite different. I believe that the most valuable thing about Humboldt's linguistic philosophy is his readiness and his attempt to shift his standpoint from that of his own cultural circle to that of others. Although his views were incisive, they might not be accurate all the time. Therefore, starting with certain observations made by Humboldt on the Chinese language, which at times can be very brief, I will try on my part to fit in whatever material I think will testify, clarify, rectify or even develop Humboldt's view. Besides the work of other Western scholars, like that of Ferdinand de Saussure, I will be introducing two Chinese scholars, Hu Pu'an and Sun Yongchang, whose views will be proved highly relevant for our study. In other words, I will be performing a reflection on the Chinese language, which is Humboldtian in nature, but instead of being a mere interpretation, it is also a reconstruction of Humboldt's view. I am convinced that this way of looking at the Chinese

se language will bring insights that would not have been readily disclosed to us if done otherwise.

II. HUMBOLDT ON THE FORM AND MATTER OF LANGUAGE

4. FORM AND MATTER:

From Greek antiquity onward, the differentiation between form and matter has been a distinction of great philosophical importance. While Plato prefers form to matter, Aristotle represents a philosophical position trying to do equal justice to both, a position that we can call *hylomorphism*. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, hylomorphic doctrines have been formulated in many different ways, but they all stand on one common ground, namely the conviction that mundane entities have to consist of form as well as matter, and that these two are inseparable from one another. Whereas form and matter are often interpreted very differently, this basic notion behind hylomorphism remains unchanged.

For Aristotle, matter is basically understood as physical *substrata* in which forms "inhere". For Aristotle, all physical, individual objects are nothing but *hylomorphic concreta* (σύνολον). For Kant, the problem of matter and form is a much more complicated one: mundane entities can never acquire the status of separate realities, but must always be considered with reference to human experience. Consequently matter and form in Kant refer always to matter and form *not* of objective entities *but of experience* in the broadest sense. While the matter of experience in the last analysis refers to our sensible manifolds, the form of experience for Kant has to be treated at two distinct levels, namely as *form of intuition* (space and time) and as *form of thought* (categories or pure concepts of the understanding).¹⁵

As with Humboldt, the whole problematic with mundane entities switches to the level of linguistic expression. What for Kant is experience is for Humboldt language. Instead of looking into sensible manifolds in general for the source of "matter", Humboldt pinpoints a single sensible manifold – sound,¹⁶ which he sometimes depicts as *Körper* or as *Stoff* of language.¹⁷ To put it in a simple formula, "sound, in and for itself, would resemble the passive matter which receives form."¹⁸ Humboldt seems to have made the important discovery that sound is not just any one out of the many sensible manifolds available to the human being; sound has certain edges not

only for linguistic expression, but also for the problem of *Geist* (mind/spirit). Humboldt speaks for example of the "aptitude of sound to the operation of the mind".¹⁹

Very much parallel with Kant, Humboldt also treats the problem of form at two levels, which represent nothing but the two levels of intellectual function in general. Just as for Kant our sensible manifolds are subject both to the form of intuition and the form of thought, so for Humboldt the phonic matter is subject to forms of two distinct levels, namely to "sound form" and to "inner linguistic form" respectively.²⁰ In line with the spirit of *hylomorphism* discussed above, Humboldt also declares: "In an absolute sense there can be no formless matter (*keinen ungeformten Stoff*) within language."²¹ Such rich thoughts on the relation between form and matter in Humboldtian linguistics can best be demonstrated through the concept of articulation.

5. THE CONCEPT OF ARTICULATION:

Another important "formal principle" central to Humboldt's thoughts is that of articulation. For today's mainstream linguistics, the term articulation refers normally to the physiological process of sound utterance and its neurological background²², but in classical general linguistics, articulation pertains to phenomena of a much deeper level, namely the intellectual. For Saussure, articulation is the chaining together of structural linguistic elements. For Humboldt, articulation is the "form of thought" in the most pregnant sense. Specifically formulated, it is the working of the intellect itself. As all forms must work on matter, Humboldt's notion of articulation must in the first place be raised as the question of what he called "articulate(d) sound" (*artikulierte Laut*). Articulate sound in Humboldt's original conception has nothing to do with what we today call "articulatory phonetics". Articulate sound is, so to speak, a "hylomorphic concretum". Here, "sound" is the matter, and "articulation" the working of the mind. Or as stated elsewhere, "Articulation rests upon the power of the mind over the vocal organs, to compel them to deal with sound in accordance with the form of its own working."²³ In order to spell out the interconnection between these two roots of the linguistic phenomenon, Humboldt suggests for us a thought experiment: imagine that we subtract the physical material sound from what we hear, we can yield so to speak the naked *Artikulationssinn* itself.²⁴

"Language is the formative organ of thought."²⁵ This much quoted *dictum* of Humboldt, when looked into its details, represents also an idea which has to be con-

cretized through the medium of sound: "Thought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other. But the former is also intrinsically bound to the necessity of entering into a union with the verbal sound; thought cannot otherwise achieve clarity, nor the idea become a concept. The inseparable bonding of thought, vocal apparatus and hearing to language is unalterably rooted in the original constitution of human nature which cannot be further explained."²⁶

Later on, Humboldt speaks of sound as paving for the mind "a new path" (*einen neuen Pfad*) and added, "...if the thought do but breathe a soul into the sound, the latter, from its own nature will return an inspiring principle to thought. The firm combination of the two main linguistic constituents is primarily expressed in the sensuous and imaginative life that thereby blossom(s) in language..."²⁷

Overall speaking, it is in this concept of articulation that the traditional philosophy of mind has found a new way of expression. With its mental "origin", articulation has but to be concretized in and through sound. In Humboldt, the phenomenon of sound is therefore accorded great theoretical significance, since it is sensual and accessible on the one hand, but susceptible to the mind on the other. Sound is so to speak the seismograph of the mind. With the study of sound, a new access to the "inner stirrings of the mind"²⁸ can be found. Through the empirically accessible domain of speech sounds, new indications for the domain and activities of the mind can be uncovered...

6. SOUND FORM: THE THREE WAYS HOW SOUND IS RELATED TO CONCEPTS

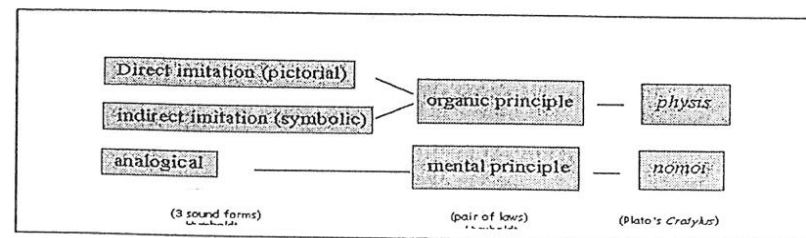
Although the concept of phonology was not proposed until Courtenay and Trubetzkoy, there is one thing about Humboldt's sound theory that allows us to justifiably consider him the most important forerunner, if not the founder, of contemporary phonological theory. As clarified by Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, phonology distinguishes itself from phonetics in the former's vision of the need to treat sound as a social-communicative phenomenon (instead of as a natural-scientific one) and in its attempt to explain how sound can possibly constitute and convey meaning.²⁹ Parallel to the work later carried out by the phonologists, Humboldt proposed the concept of sound form (*Lautform*). The concept sound-form could be very misleading if we suppose it to be derivable from sound alone. For Humboldt, sound

form is only conceivable as the form or the way in which the mind habitually expresses itself with sound. Sound form is "the expression which language creates for thought"³⁰. It is for the mind a self-cultivated "receptacle" (*Gehäuse*)³¹, through which it makes manifest what it "means" through sound. To show concretely how this can happen, Humboldt proposed that "the language then actually possesses a sound-form in three expanding stages". They exemplified, for Humboldt, "three ways of designating concepts" with sound. With the three-fold sound form the sound system of a nation is "enlarged to the greatest extent."³²

The three stages of sound-form proposed by Humboldt are:

- a) the directly imitative or the pictorial,
- b) the indirectly imitative or the symbolic, and
- c) the analogical.

Of these three, the first two can be grouped together under one heading, since they both have to do with sounds directly or indirectly connected to certain physical, physiological or even psychological conditions, or in one word, to *nature*. In Saussurean terms, they deal with sounds that are "motivated". In contrast, the third stage treats sound *sui generis* as arbitrary or unmotivated, claiming no connection between the sounds uttered and the concepts expressed. Certain sounds are habitually used to denote certain concepts simply by convention. This way of sound manipulation is called "analogical" since a particular pattern of sound, once arbitrarily assigned a certain meaning, can then be copied, multiplied according to the need and discretion of the "mind". Parallel and closely related to the above tripartition, Humboldt also speaks of "sound transformation" (*Lautumformungen*) being "subject to a pair of laws": "The one is a purely organic law, arising from the vocal organs [...] following the natural affinity of the sounds. The other is given by the mental principle (*geistiges Gesetz*) of language [...]."³³



If we go back to the dawn of the theory of language, we can immediately note that Humboldt's "pair of laws" is reminiscent of the Greek distinction between *physis* and *nomoi* since the time of the sophists and of Plato (*Cratylus*, Jakobson: *physis/ilthesei*). Ever since the supposed debate between Cratylus and Hermogenes, the two positions have had throughout history their own followers. With the influence of Saussure, the majority of linguists nowadays seem to favour the view that the use of sound is arbitrary and regulated purely by convention (*nomoi*). This standpoint has an obvious edge over the rival *physis*-standpoint since it better accounts for the effective use of sound (especially as exemplified by the analogical sound form), and is more in line with the theory of double articulation which assumes the arbitrariness and meaninglessness of sub-morphemic linguistic elements.³⁴ In spite of this general preference for phono-conventionism, however, modern linguistics witnessed an important rival standpoint, which, while admitting phono-conventionism in principle, argues that in talking about sound and meaning constitution, *reference to nature* is an important factor which should be equally honoured. Such voices have been raised by highly reputed linguists such as Georg von der Gabelentz, Otto Jespersen, Edward Sapir, M. Grammont, Dwight Bolinger, Émile Benveniste, Roman Jakobson,³⁵ Eugenio Coseriu and many more... a position now often known as linguistic iconicity.³⁶ This obviously more balanced view on linguistic sounds has its root in fact in Humboldt. And the "pair of laws" or the three sound forms should be understood precisely from this standpoint.

a) *The directly imitative: the pictorial*

Of the three "ways" of using sound mentioned by Humboldt, the "pictorial" (*malende*) is a direct imitation of the sounds of nature. "Just as a picture presents the way in which the object appears to the eye, so language depicts the way it is apprehended by the ear."³⁷ In a very brief passage introducing this sound form, Humboldt mentioned two points which are theoretically important. Firstly, the sounds being imitated are all "unarticulated sounds", and secondly, uttering such sounds is in conflict with (the sense of) articulation, which, by its very nature as a *conatus* of the mind, seeks chances of relating as many impressions or ideas as possible. In practical terms, this pictorial sound form (often known as *onomatopoeia*) is suitable only for objects that can produce or be made to produce sound in some way. Furthermore, in face of the vast amount of information waiting for us to be depicted, this direct

but primitive sound form is obviously not economical. Being so restricted in use, and so extravagant, this sound form is soon replaced by the "indirectly imitating" sound form.

b) *The indirectly imitative: or the symbolic*

Under "indirect imitation" Humboldt understands imitation that is undertaken "not directly, but by way of a third factor common to both sound and object."³⁸ For Humboldt, the mention of a "third factor" is not a casual one, but one with a profound philosophical implication which is typically Kantian. While burdened by the apparent discrepancy between the categories and appearance, Kant sees the need to find out a "third thing" as a bridge, and this third thing must bestow homogeneity for the categories on the one hand, and for sensible appearance on the other. And Kant discovered in the "transcendental schema" this "third thing".³⁹ Following this same principle, the so-called "symbolic" sound form aims at bridging the object and the sound through "a third factor", which Humboldt explains as follows: "it selects, for the objects to be designated, sounds which [...] produce for the ear an impression similar to that of the object upon the soul."⁴⁰ In modern terminologies, what Humboldt has in mind is what is now called *synesthesia*, and the sound elements involved are now called *phonesthemes*. Compared with the concept of phoneme, which is the core concept of modern phonology, the word phonestheme has a peculiarly philosophical and epistemological implication. While phoneme is just a basic sound unit pure and simple, phonestheme is one which "senses" (*cf.* αἴσθησις). Also unlike onomatopoeic words, which are rigid labels for definite objects, phonesthemes excel in being more vague and indefinite. Phonesthemes allow much freedom for the human imagination and are therefore more flexible and applicable to a wider spectrum of mundane phenomena. Technically speaking, phonesthemes can be *vocalic* (dealing with size-symbolism)⁴¹, they can be *consonantal* (physical state)⁴², or they can be based on *consonant-clusters* (relative movement). Of these kinds of sound symbolism, the "vocalic" is obviously more primitive, while that of "consonant cluster" the most developed. In Indogermanic languages, consonant clusters have proved themselves to be highly productive in phonosemantics. Consequently, classical consonant clusters such as /sl/, /st/, /str/, /fl/ in English or /schl/, /st/, /str/ in German successfully gathered around themselves groups of cognates which are not unimportant for the formation of the respective lexicons.⁴³

c) *The analogical*

It is worthy of note that *analogy* as a theoretical issue is not one invented by Humboldt, but one which is deeply rooted in the Western philosophical as well as theological tradition, traceable back to Aristotle or arguably even earlier.⁴⁴ Since antiquity, analogy has been considered as pertaining to a basic model of thought essential to the human understanding with all its finitude and imperfection. In theology, for example, analogy has often been used to explain how certain mental constructs could come about, as, for instance, man's knowledge of God.⁴⁵ While lacking in stringency, the use of analogy as a means of cognition is generally not favoured. But in the context of language, since we are no longer talking about knowledge and being, but about meaning and intentionality⁴⁶, much room has been left for the discussion of analogy. And Humboldt can be considered the first thinker in modern times who has reiterated the conception of analogy as a linguistic issue.⁴⁷

With his general linguistic orientation, the problem of analogy becomes for Humboldt the problem of the "analogical" sound form, the last of the three sound forms of language. In the *Kawi-Schrift*, Humboldt explains what "analogical" means in the following paragraph:

"[3]. Designation by sound-similarity, according to the relationship of the concepts to be designated.ⁱⁱ Words whose meanings lie close to one another, are likewise accorded similar sounds; but, in contrast to the type of designation just considered, there is no regard here to the character inherent in these sounds themselves.ⁱ For its true emergence, this mode of designation presupposes verbal wholesⁱⁱⁱ of a certain scope in the system of sounds, or at least can be applied more extensively only in such a system^{iv}. It is, however, the most fruitful of all^{vii}, and the one which displays with most clarity and distinctness the whole concatenation of what the intellect has produced in a similar connectedness of language^v. This designation, in which the analogy of concepts and sounds, each in its own domain, is so pursued that each must keep step with the other^{vi}, may be called the analogical."⁴⁸

Despite the laconic nature of this passage, its basic ideas are very clear and can be summarized in the following points:

- i) Unlike the symbolic, the analogical sound form designates concepts without referring to the natural qualities of objects involved.
- ii) Related concepts are given, or assigned similar sounds. There being no reference to nature, this assignment can only be by convention.
- iii) Convention brings about the clusters of words or cognates.
- iv) The whole thing will work only in a system.
- v) What the analogical sound form systematically depicts is nothing but the fruits of our intellectual or mental activities (*intellektuell Erzeugten*) themselves.
- vi) In the analogical, sounds and concepts are by themselves unrelated. Sounds are used differently just to paraphrase the changes in conceptual meaning which come to the mind's attention. Sounds *keep step* with concepts. ἀναλέγειν in Greek means parallel-speaking (*Entsprechen*).⁴⁹
- vii) Analogy provides the most fruitful channel for conceptual development of a nation. As far as the need for an effective, economic, and unrestricted use of sound is concerned, it is sound analogy that represents the pinnacle of phonological development.

Despite the wealth of ideas packed inside the above cited passage, Humboldt left us very little discussion, and regrettably even no examples, to show how the "analogical" can have concrete application in language.⁵⁰ According to the principles as indicated above, we could of course note that sounds used as grammatical morphemes are analogical by nature. But beyond that, what other fruits can analogy bring about? This is a question that Humboldt has left for his posterity to answer.

After Humboldt, the notion of analogy again became an issue of central importance in the linguistic theory of Saussure, who discussed analogy in much more detail. To a certain extent, Saussure's reflection on analogy can be regarded as an important augmentation and further development of Humboldt's theory. If we use the traditional divisions of analogy as measuring rod, we can say that Humboldt's notion of analogy is roughly speaking *analogy of proportion*, but that of Saussure *analogy of proportionality*.⁵¹ Both types of analogy, though different in the pattern of relation, do agree in one respect: they both can generate, according to rules,

clusters of words around some initial vocabularies and are in this regard extremely “productive” in language development.

However, Humboldt’s notion of analogy differs from that of Saussure in another more important respect. For Saussure, analogical use of sound is closely related to the arbitrariness of sound in respect of meaning constitution. As a consequence, analogy is emphasized without due recognition of the motivation of speech sound. By contrast, Humboldt’s basic position is a more balanced one. Overagainst the popular attitude to regard language as totally arbitrary, Humboldt’s “pair of laws” (and the related distinction between the three sound forms) resumes the classical *physis-nomoi* discussion in such a way that justice is given to both the organic and the mental principles.⁵² For Humboldt, the three sound forms not only recapitulate the “three expanding stages”⁵³ of the development of the sound-system, they also reflect the different levels of activities performed by the human mind as such.⁵⁴

7. THE MENTAL PRINCIPLE AND THE INNER LINGUISTIC FORM

Given the versatility of the various sound forms, they alone, without the involvement of the “internal and purely intellectual part of language”, would not bring fruits. This is what Humboldt declared at the outset in the crucial chapter of his *magnum opus* bearing the sub-title “inner linguistic form.”

As we have already noted, the problem of “form” in Kant covers both the form of intuition and the form of thought. In the light of the doctrine of “schematism”, Kant declared that although the form of intuition is essential for the spatial-temporal representation of outer and inner experiences, it alone without the guidance of the form of thought (i.e. the categories) would not be in a position to furnish us with meaningful knowledge which demands unity and connection (*Verbindung*). On the other hand, Kant also maintained that in order to guarantee the legitimate use of the form of thought, the form of intuition (time), mediated through the schemata of the sensibility, “realises the understanding in the very process of restricting it.”⁵⁵

Now the whole Kantian doctrine of knowledge can again be transposed into linguistics. By the same token, Humboldt maintained that, of the *Lautform* and the inner linguistic form, it is the latter that is the enlivening and creative principle of language. Only through it can the unity of thought and speech be guaranteed. But on

the other hand, it is the sound form that is the source of material stimulation for the inner linguistic form so that it has something objective to work on and to start with. The mutual relationship of the sound form and the inner linguistic form is well expressed in the following passages:

“The combination of the sound-form with the inner laws of language constitutes the perfection of languages; [...] if the thought do but breathe a soul into the sound, the latter, from its own nature will return an inspiring principle to thought. The firm combination of the two main linguistic constituents is primarily expressed in the *sensuous* and *imaginative* life that thereby blossom(s) in language...”⁵⁶

This cooperation of sound form with the inner linguistic form can best be reflected, so Humboldt says, by the fact that there are two areas that they have to serve in common, namely, 1) “the designation of concepts” (*Bezeichnung der Begriffe*) and 2) “the laws of syntax” (*Gesetze der Redefügung*). The outer (sound) and inner forms of language differ only in the way they carry out their duty. Expressed in a Kantian way, while sound form provides the receptive framework for the employment of sound, the inner linguistic form spontaneously works on and gives direction to the former.

For Humboldt, the inner linguistic form, being the mental capacity of mankind *in concreto*, “has its existence only in its activity.”⁵⁷ While Humboldt admits that the form of language (inner and outer) preserves uniformity to some extent, he also notes that the individual nations can exercise their sensibility, imagination and feeling differently so that their languages can exhibit “individual shapings”. Furthermore, since Humboldt thinks of the development of a national language as a process of intellectual growth over time, he maintains that in the way of attaining linguistic perfection, a language might, to offset unwanted consequences, look for its own solution. In so doing, it can even “allow one form to take the place of another.”⁵⁸ In other words, Humboldt’s language theory admits of linguistic change as a process of self-regulation, or better formulated, self-compensation undertaken by the collective mind of a nation. This is precisely the line of thought that underlies Humboldt’s reflection on the Chinese language.

III. THE CHINESE LANGUAGE IN THE LIGHT OF LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY

In the following we will discuss some of Humboldt's reflections on the Chinese language. We will embark upon the three main topics of linguistic studies sequentially, namely phonology, grammar and semantics. However, we must note at the outset that for Humboldt these three areas are by no means separate issues, but are closely related to one another for language to work at all. We will also see that "weakness" in one of these areas can very well be compensated by specific strengths in another.

8. PHONOLOGY

a) *Phonic poverty (lautliche Armut):*

Having made clear the fact that sound is the matter of language, it becomes obvious that, depending on the abundance of distinctive sound elements available in a language and the degree of complexity of their combinations, we can speak of the wealth or poverty of individual sound systems. Modern developments in phonology have, with the discovery of the concept of the phoneme, testified to this point. Compared with English, which has 40 phonemes, modern Chinese has a much smaller set of phonemes (23 for Mandarin and 27 for Cantonese).⁵⁹ Judging therefore purely from a quantitative point of view, we already see that the Chinese phonological system is a relatively weak one. In fact, more than a century before the discovery of all these figures, Humboldt has already made the remark that the Chinese language exhibits a certain "phonic poverty" (*lautliche Armut*).⁶⁰ This observation became so prevalent that in the twentieth century the same view was adopted by Bernhard Karlgren (known to the Chinese as 高本漢), a great scholar of Chinese phonology.⁶¹ If we take a closer look at this issue, we discover that Humboldt's remark on the phonic poverty of the Chinese language is not only a quantitative observation, it has also qualitative implications.

b) *Monosyllabicity:*

The question whether Chinese is monosyllabic or polysyllabic has been a much-debated issue. It is important to note at the outset that the focus of the debate lies not in the Chinese characters, which obviously are monosyllabic, but in lan-

guage proper. As far as the Chinese language is concerned, some might (including Humboldt's Sinologist correspondent Abel Rémusat)⁶² maintain the view that, given the abundance of polysyllabic Chinese words, Chinese should be considered a polysyllabic language. However, Humboldt recognized immediately that this view is basically a mistaken one. He observes that the examples raised by Abel-Rémusat are in fact nothing but compound words, and that "a language does not cease to be monosyllabic because it possesses compound words."⁶³

To defend his position, Humboldt first sets out the conditions for the monosyllabicity of Chinese to be disproved, if at all: "A proper counterexample to the monosyllabic character of a language would have to carry proof that *all* the word's sounds are *meaningful* only *collectively* and *together*, not by themselves in isolation."⁶⁴ The counterexample Humboldt is asking for can be exemplified by English words such as *honey*, *every*, *sorrow*, *calendar*, *happen* or German words such as *sauber*, *Leben*, *Jammer*, *Dokument*, *trauig* etc. All these words have one thing in common. They are all polysyllabic morphemes, which are constructions not found in the Chinese language. In Chinese, the so-called compound words (hence by definition polysyllabic) are in fact compounds of multiple morphemes, in which each morpheme taken by itself is still always monosyllabic. So monosyllabicity in Chinese is not a matter of spoken words, but refers to the very morphemic unit as such. To put it in the words of an eminent Chinese scholar Huang Kan (黄侃), "the Chinese language is monosyllabic down to its roots. With the uttering of one sound in Chinese, a certain meaning should have been expressed in its entirety, this being so different from polysyllabic Western languages. Should there occasionally be disyllabic morphemes, they must have been borrowed from foreign idioms, eg. 珊瑚 (*shanhū*, or coral)."⁶⁵

As a compensation for the poverty of sound, the Chinese language developed a series of features to offset any adverse effect that this poverty might bring about. First of all, as is already hinted at, there is in Chinese a consistent tendency from antiquity up to nowadays for compound words (the majority of which are disyllabic) to develop. Compound words used to be relatively rare in ancient texts such as *Shu Jing*. But statistics has shown that such compounds increased from 25.1% in the *Analecst*, to 29% in the *Book of Mencius*, and finally to about 37% in modern Chinese.⁶⁶ Another well-known tactic subsequently adopted by the Chinese is the elabo-

rate and strict use of tonality along with the pronounced expressions, a characteristic also noted by Jakobson.⁶⁷ The growing abundance of compound words in place of original single character expressions and the use of tonality are obviously manoeuvres to achieve greater sound complexity and their goal is obviously disambiguation.

Having explained in what sense the Chinese language is monosyllabic, our next task is to see what monosyllabicity will amount to for the Chinese language at large. In the course of our present treatise, two consequences will be discussed, namely, that monosyllabicity has affected 1) the sound-meaning correlation, and 2) the grammatical structure of the Chinese language.

c) *The "sound form" of Chinese*

Although Humboldt referred to the Chinese language on many occasions, he did not go into detailed discussion of the Chinese sound form in particular. However, his tripartition scheme provides some guidelines for us to rethink how sounds and meanings are related in the Chinese context.

In fact, the study of sound has never been unfamiliar to the Chinese. During the Qing Dynasty, the study of speech sounds even evolved to become a core programme of classical Chinese scholarship. Unlike the study of phonetics prevalent in the West in the nineteenth century, the classical Chinese study of speech sounds is related to semantics from earliest times. Talking about the relation between sounds and meanings, two different approaches must be distinguished: on the one hand we can concentrate on the historical, factual correlation of certain sounds and meanings alone. Attempts can be made to show *what* sounds are correlated to *which* meanings. Sounds with semantic similarities can even be tabulated into groups with the same vowels or finals etc. On the other hand, we can embark upon the question of *why* and *how* certain sounds acquire certain meanings, a program that is central to Humboldt's doctrine of speech sounds. Looking from this angle we can say that the study of speech sounds in the Qing dynasty, despite its remarkable results, followed mainly the first approach, which is basically a historical⁶⁸ rather than a truly structural and functional one.

This situation, however, saw some breakthroughs after the 1911 revolution in China. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Liu Shiwei (劉師培, 1884-1919), while reiterating the basic standpoint of Qing phonological studies that the

meaning of the Chinese characters is closely related to their sounds, further proposed to give this correlation some theoretical justification. He maintained that in order to prevent the sounds of the characters from losing track of their correct pronunciation, the best strategy would be to require the sound to correspond to the object expressed (i.e. to "nature") right from the start.⁶⁹ This worry about the sounds of the characters to "lose track of their correct pronunciation" might seem at first glance to be quite unintelligible for Westerners. Yet if we remind ourselves that sounds of the Chinese language were transmitted since antiquity not through a phonetic alphabet, but through ideograms, the above worry becomes immediately understandable and well justified. The psychological, mnemonic explanation of Liu induced him to work on the origin of the sounds of a series of characters, but his observations seem to be limited to the directly and indirectly imitative sound forms as conceived by Humboldt.

Some two decades later, Hu Pu'an (胡樸安, 1878-1947) followed through this line of thought and produced in my opinion a theory of "sound form" which is independent of, yet even more comprehensive than that of Humboldt. Following in the footsteps of Qing phonological scholarship, Hu again used the character collection of *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字) as starting point, but his aim is to use these characters only as hints to speculate on the genesis of sounds and words before the introduction of the script. Instead of just treating the problem of sound alone, he proposed four sound forms (四音) and four word forms (四語) as listed below:⁷⁰

Four Sound Forms (四音):

natural-emotional sound	自然音
object-imitative sound	效物音
state-referential sound	狀況音
sense-transferring sound	轉移音

Four Word Forms (四語):

single words	單獨語
compound words	聯合語
derivative words	推展語
explanatory words	說明語

- i) The first two sound forms according to Hu correspond to Humboldt's direct imitative sound form. The natural-emotional sounds (自然音) are in fact interjections as a result of physiological and emotional states. Hu spotted 159 such

sounds divided into five sub-groups, most of which are no longer in use today. The five sub-groups cover areas such as 1) laughing and crying; 2) surprise, fear and rage; 3) breath and tone; 4) eating, drinking, singing and reciting; and 5) whooping, groaning, vomiting and spitting etc. The abundance of this kind of sounds in antiquity and the fine differentiation of nearly all nuances imaginable seem to support the observation that the Chinese mind has a strong social awareness for the emotional states of others.

- ii) The object-imitative sound form (效物音) reflects what is known as onomatopoeia in the West. Hu enumerated 106 such sounds divided into eight sub-groups: 1) animals; 2) plants; 3) minerals; 4) artifacts; 5), 6), 7), and 8) being adjectival descriptives derived from the first four. Such a collection of sounds seems again to outnumber similar listings for any Indogermanic language known to the West.
- iii) More noteworthy are the 3rd and 4th sound forms. The so-called state-referential sound form (狀況音) corresponds to Humboldt's symbolic sound form. On the one hand, Hu, who knew no Western language, proposed a theory of indirect imitation comparable to Humboldt's notion of the "symbolic". On the other hand, his deliberation on the *mechanism* of this type of sound employment is fully compatible with the theory of synesthesia in the West. Given these similarities with the theory of sound symbolism, what is to be regretted is that nearly all examples (much fewer in number) cited by Hu are only vocalic in nature (involving mainly "size-symbolism"). Sound symbolism based on consonants (as depicted by Plato and Leibniz) and consonant clusters are not mentioned at all. Today, linguists who believe in sound symbolism would nearly all agree that consonant clusters are of great importance for the semantic content of most Indo-European languages,⁷¹ especially for capturing physical textures of and movements in nature. As with the Chinese language, there have been prolonged debates about whether consonant clusters existed in ancient Chinese or not.⁷² Whatever the answer, one thing for us now is quite clear: consonant clusters do not (or no longer) exist in modern Chinese.⁷³ This bare fact inevitably requires us to note that, as far as phonological resources are concerned, the Chinese language falls short of one of the most powerful tools for meaning constitution. In this regard, the Humboldtian judgment on the "sound poverty" of Chinese again seems to make sense.

- iv) The sense-transferring sound form (轉移音) is in every respect very close to what Humboldt called "analogical". First of all, Hu explains that for this sound form to take place there must be a considerable amount of existing words with assigned meanings already in use. Now if there were the need to create a new word, one possible practice would be to adopt a sound similar to that of another word whose meaning is somehow related to the new word. How this relation should be conceived, is subject only to imagination. To name just a few examples: "門，聞也", "door", while related to "hear", gets the sound *men* similar to that of the latter (*wen*); "判，半也", "judgment", while related to "half", gets the similar sound *pan*. In these examples, we see that the pattern of sound transferring is very similar to the *Geist/Gischt* example proposed by Humboldt, and for this reason, falls under the analogy of proportion as discussed above. As with analogical sound structure as described by Saussure (analogy of proportionality), no trace can be found in the monosyllabic roots of Chinese. The reason for this is simple: While these roots are monosyllabic in nature, no room for "reshuffling" (Saussure) of morphemic structures is left. For sound analogy of the proportionality type to occur, compound words with pluri-morphemic structures must be involved. These leads to Hu's next topic on the four word forms.

d) The "word form" of Chinese

For Hu, the four word forms are not to be understood as linguistic phenomena developed temporally after that of the four sound forms. The difference between sound and word forms lies in the degree of awareness while being used; whereas sounds are more or less spontaneous interjections or utterances, words are used with full awareness of communicative action.

- i) Single words (單獨語) are, for Hu, those monosyllabic words widely used in the remote past. A classical example reported of the case that we can enumerate up to around 30 words, all monosyllabic, which have something to do with "cow/ox", as, for instance, "犛", designating "cows/oxen "with black lips", "撞" (cows without horns), "牟", (cows mooing), "犛" (cows breathing), "犛" (cows weighing thousands of catties), "犛" (cows with thin legs) etc. Noteworthy is that these single words often depict state-of-affairs which involve notions of substantives, adjectives and verbs etc. Instead of differentiating these notions functionally and grammatically, a single word mingles

them all up to produce one sound crowded with a multitude of semantic contents pointing to hair-splitting details. Some examples can be as extreme as “牯” standing for “cows with a hide in both white and black” (白黑雜毛牛), or “駮” standing for “horses seven feet tall” etc. Using sound in this manner is obviously not economical on the one hand, and too bothering for the mind on the other. For if things go on like this, available sounds would be exhausted very quickly. Hu noted that with little exceptions, most of these single words did not manage to survive to nowadays.⁷⁴

- ii) To counteract the shortcomings of single words as described above, compound words (聯合語) come to the rescue. Hu differentiated mainly between two types of compound words, most of which are disyllabic. The first type consists of those words making up of two sounds of different grammatical categories, like adjective+substantive (e.g. 父羊 he-goat, 母羊 she-goat, 小羊 small goat), or noun+verb (e.g. 鳥飛 bird flies, 兔走 rabbit runs) etc. The second type of compound words consists of two sounds of the same grammatical category. Such two sounds, originally having specific but related meanings, are conjoined to denote a more generic concept. For example, 負 (carry on the back) and 擔 (carry on the shoulder) put together can yield 負擔 meaning “to bear a burden”; or 朋 (same teacher) and 友 (same devotion) put together will get 朋友 meaning “friends”. As indicated above, the percentage of compound words in Chinese is increasing steadily over time.
- iii) Derivative words (推展語) are closely related to the sense-transferring sounds described above. These two mechanisms both start with a core element (sound/word). While sense-transferring sounds involves one-to-one transfers of meaning, derivative words, as understood by Hu, refer to meaning transfers that result in *groups* or *clusters* of words sharing similar meanings with the respective core elements. Here we can name two such clusters as examples: From 倫 with its basic meaning of “well-structured”, we witnessed the derivation of words such as 倫 (ethical relationships), 論 (doctrine, i.e. well-structured words), 輪 (fine wood), 漣 (ripple, structured water surface), and 輪 (wheel, structured with spokes) etc. Or from the word 音, with its original meaning of “suppressed/low”, words such as 喑 (cried and became hoarse), 暗 (sun dimmed), 黯 (dark-colored), 閤 (closed doors, house for mourning)

etc. can be derived. This multiple use of one similar sound, though productive in one sense, increased the ambiguity of using that sound and created a problem to be solved. The Chinese sound system, being congenitally weak by nature, is therefore exploited to the greatest possible extent, and the task of disambiguation eventually falls on the shoulder of the Chinese script.

- iv) At last, the development of explanatory words (說明語) can be taken as the reverse process of the unlimited multiplication of single words. This is only possible at a later stage of the development of language, given the progress of knowledge and the ability to perform abstraction and induction from experience. For example, given the multitude of ways of laughing as mentioned in the earlier section on “natural-emotional” sounds, the common word 笑 for “laugh” came finally into use, though at a much later stage.⁷⁵ Explanatory words are not necessarily represented by new words, but can take up old words by assigning new meaning. A typical example is the word 獸 which meant originally one particular breed of dog, but later became the generic term for animal.

Summarizing Hu Pu'an's discussion of the Chinese sound system, we notice that it fits perfectly well into Humboldt's representation of gradual advances in sound forms from the directly imitative, through the symbolic to the analogical. Of the three sound forms, evidence shows that ancient Chinese had a strong tradition of using sound directly to depict details of personal feelings and objective realities, a maneuver which has been proved uneconomical. As with the much more powerful sound-symbolic device, the subsequent absence of consonant clusters puts the Chinese language at a great disadvantage compared with many other languages. As with the analogical use of sound, we see that both the proportion and proportionality modes of analogy are available to the Chinese to some extent, the first mode in the form of sense-transferring sounds and of derivative words, the latter in the form of compound words. But even so, the structure of analogy (which favours polysyllabicity) is not conspicuous enough owing to the monosyllabicity of Chinese. But this restriction is somewhat relaxed in the supra-morphemic level. If we look inside the structure of compound words, we will find elements or morphemes (words by themselves) which can be dissociated, reshuffled, and re-associated very easily, as far as the internal syntax of *Wortbildung* allows it. This kind of structure reminds us

immediately of the Saussurean model of linguistic analogy. Indeed, it was Bernhard Karlgren again, who pointed out that Chinese compound words are in many cases products of analogical derivation.⁷⁶

Overall, Humboldt may be right in saying that the Chinese language suffers from phonic poverty, but the situation might not be as serious as he imagined. Yet, if we are talking about the ideal of optimal and perfect employment of a nation's linguistic power, then even the slightest shortcoming in one aspect of language has to find compensation elsewhere. With this in mind, we will proceed to the discussion of grammar and semantics to see how this has been worked out. On the other hand, we must remind ourselves, that monosyllabicity has an unfavourable effect not only on sound-meaning correlation, but also on grammar. This will add further complications to the issue of compensation.

9. GRAMMAR

If we agree with Humboldt that sound belongs to the matter of language, then the "phonic poverty" resulting from monosyllabicity naturally will affect the form of the Chinese language. Having discussed the sound form of Chinese, we now come to its effect on the grammatical form.

a) *Chinese as an isolating language*

Closely related to monosyllabicity is the very feature of phonic isolation. In fact, it is this feature of isolation that accounts for the usual typological classification of Chinese as an "isolating language". However, we must note that isolation is not a purely phonological issue, but one related also to the problem of grammar. Indeed, it is while talking about the absence of inflection that Humboldt came upon the issue of isolation of Chinese. He talked about "the Chinese practice of dispensing with the signs relating parts of speech."⁷⁷ To account for this, Humboldt added, "The Chinese structure, however we may explain it, is obviously founded on an imperfection in the making of the language, probably a custom, peculiar to that people, of isolating sounds, coinciding with an *insufficient strength* of the inner linguistic sense that calls for their combination and mediation."⁷⁸

At this point we see clearly that the main reason why Humboldt considered Chinese to be phonologically impoverished lies also in his observation that the contribution of the Chinese sound system to grammatical structure is minimal. In modern terminology, inflection based grammatical morphemes⁷⁹ are not developed in Chinese, or to put it in the words of Karl Bühler, the Chinese language has "no phonematically characterized word classes."⁸⁰ With this deliberation, we see how the spirit of comparativism is at work. Here Humboldt's notions of isolation, of the absence of inflection and of imperfection are all raised from the vantage point of the Indo-Germanic inflection language. With all these seemingly pejorative remarks Humboldt is confronted actually with the question: given these "shortcomings", how could the basic linguistic functions and hence the intellectual culture of the Chinese remain not jeopardised? As Humboldt clearly knows, it is counterfactual to speak of the Chinese mind as intellectually undeveloped, so what is left for him to discover is the alternative linguistic structure that should or must have worked for the Chinese throughout history.

b) *Morphology and Syntax*

While the notion of "grammar" nowadays is often being broadened to include phonology and semantics, its basic meaning for Humboldt is rather clear-cut. Totally in line with his understanding of the role played by the inner linguistic form, Humboldt considered grammar to be made up of *morphology* and *syntax*. For Chinese in particular, Humboldt remarks clearly that "while the grammars of other languages have a morphological and a syntactic component, Chinese has only the latter."⁸¹

Basically speaking, morphology is that part of grammar that governs the formation of the word, and syntax that of the sentence. But this way of differentiation could lead to a misunderstanding, as if morphology and word-formation (*Wortbildung*) were the same thing.⁸² Indeed, we all know that Chinese does have rules for compound words to be built up from simpler elements⁸³, but morphology? By morphology, Humboldt understands the whole scheme of inflectional forms that governs the characterization of grammatical categories. In respect of function, morphology deals with conjugation of verbs, declensions of nouns and adjectives; and grammatical changes related to person, sex, number, case, tempus, mood etc. In respect of technique, morphology in the above sense can be effectively realized only

within a polysyllabic sound system, namely, through phonic means such as vocalic change, prefixes, suffixes or infixes, and sound reduplication.

For Humboldt, the grammatical forms of inflection languages are extremely beneficial to the people who speak them. This attitude of Humboldt is best reflected in the following passage: "These grammatical forms, no matter how unnoticeably, provide for us a means to connect sentences with one another according to the need of our thoughts, carrying them aloft on a flight, allowing and compelling us to express our thoughts in the finest nuances and the most subtle correlation."⁸⁴

Now looking back to the Chinese context, we realize immediately that, with its basic features of monosyllabicity and phonic isolation, Chinese obviously is not in possession of such powerful linguistic features related to inflection.

Superficially considered, this absence of morphology in Chinese could therefore very easily be taken as a deficiency, or even as a flaw that Chinese is suffering from. But for Humboldt the comparativist, the situation is not quite so. He emphasized that for the Chinese, morphology in the Western sense is something they don't even want. Humboldt made his point forcefully by saying: "On the contrary, I want to assert that the Chinese language not merely neglects, but rather refuses to designate the grammatical categories. In so doing, it sets out for itself a totally new horizon in regard to the nature of language."⁸⁵ Elsewhere he spoke of the Chinese "rejecting grammatical formation with scornful resignation."⁸⁶ In respect of the perfect functioning of language, Humboldt readily argues that Chinese seems to have chosen a path of its own!

In highly inflective languages such as Sanskrit, or to a lesser degree, in Greek and in Latin, the grammaticality of sentences is governed to a very high extent by morphological forms. Consequently, the importance of syntax tends to be minimal. But for Chinese, the scenario is just the opposite. Because of the "absence" of morphological markers, syntax tends to exhibit a much greater importance, and the concretization of it lies mainly in "word order". The remaining questions are:- Is morphology or grammatical forms really excluded from Chinese? Is word order alone really in a position to bind up the sentence? How is word order regulated? To these questions, the following statement of Humboldt gives us a pregnant but seemingly enigmatic answer: "Chinese relies solely on word order, and on the imprint of gram-

matical form within the mind."⁸⁷ To clarify this, we have to proceed to the next section.

c) *Formprinzip and Geistesprinzip*

As we have indicated above, the absence of morphology (grammatical form) in Chinese is a consequence of the "poverty" of the Chinese sound system. For Humboldt, however, this absence does not imply that the Chinese people have no idea of grammatical categories altogether. In fact, Humboldt's view is that, while denouncing the use of grammatical forms with *externalized* phonic elements⁸⁸, Chinese does *internally* differentiate between the major "grammatical entities or word classes, e.g. nouns, adjectives and verbs".⁸⁹ In other words, despite the absence of externalized morphology, the Chinese language should not be regarded as lacking of grammatical form in the broadest sense of the term, since according to Humboldt, "grammar, more than any other aspect of language, is *invisibly* present to thought patterns of any speaker."⁹⁰ So it turns out that Humboldt's dictum that "Chinese has only syntax but no morphology" is a statement with superficial or external validity only.

To tackle this difficult theoretical issue, let us first take a closer look at syntax, the supposedly only major component of Chinese grammar. As one can imagine, for isolating languages such as Chinese, the construction of sentences relies mostly on word order. Humboldt observes that word order involves two basic principles of construction, namely, "the limitation of the extent of one concept through another; and the application of one concept to another. Those words which qualify and limit others precede them; those words to which others refer, follow them."⁹¹ Applying these principles to concrete sentence structures, Humboldt further remarked: "In our terminology, therefore, the adverb precedes the noun or the verb, the adjective follows the adverb but precedes the substantive, the subject, whatever part of speech it is, precedes the verb, and the verb precedes the word which it governs as its object."⁹² However, if we think that this is already the whole picture of Chinese syntax, then we have over-simplified the situation. For although such simplistic rules hold for most standard sentence constructions, they cannot account for a host of sentential or phrasal structures which are stylistic deviations from the standard form. And frankly speaking, the so-called stylistic "variations" can even be more abundant than standard forms, which tend to be rigid, arid and suited only for grammatical

textbooks. In this respect, Humboldt remarked clearly that in Chinese, word order is “never sufficient on its own”⁹³ to account for the grammaticality of Chinese sentences in real life. Then what else is needed to bind up the Chinese sentences? At this point, we should recapitulate the passage we have quoted earlier. For in that passage Humboldt himself has already made room for an extra need for grammatical bondage of the Chinese sentence: the “imprint of grammatical form within the mind”. What does this really mean?

For Humboldt, precisely while there are no marked grammatical elements to rely on, the mind of Chinese speakers has therefore to make *extra effort* to ensure that the flow of the *sentence* is fully under control, and that the grammatical structure of the utterance is correctly conveyed. In so doing, the mind of the speaker is alerted to a very high degree. On the other side of the same coin, this grammatical structure “that is scarcely indicated by sound at all” will also be “left entirely for the listener... to seek out”.⁹⁴

All these remarks will cease to sound enigmatic if we look back on Humboldt's theory of articulation. We need to remind ourselves that while *articulatio* means literally the chaining up or concatenation of linguistic elements, articulation in the purest sense of the word is for Humboldt not a matter of sound, but one of *Geist*.

Humboldt goes on to explain: “...we ought at first sight to consider Chinese as departing the furthest from the natural demands of language, as being the most imperfect of all. But this attitude evaporates on closer inspection. Chinese, on the contrary, has a high degree of excellence, and exerts a powerful, albeit one-sided, influence on the mental faculties.”⁹⁵ Humboldt calls this inner working of mental faculties “one-sided”, since without the help of inflected morphology, the Chinese mind still has to deal with abstract grammatical entities, although this has to be done in the manner of “*soundless designation of formal relations*”.⁹⁶ But what will this amount to? Humboldt concludes: “However paradoxical it may sound, therefore, I consider it established nonetheless, that the seeming absence of all grammar in Chinese is precisely what enhances, in the national mind, the acuteness of the ability to recognize the formal linkage of speech; whereas, on the contrary, those languages which attempt, without success, to designate grammatical relationships, are liable, rather, to put the mind to sleep, and to cloud the grammatical sense by a mingling of the materially and formally meaningful.”⁹⁷

In this way, so argues Humboldt, Chinese succeeded to turn what at first sight is a deficit (in form) in to a surplus (in intellectual awareness), or as Humboldt himself puts it, “to turn a drawback into a virtue” (*einen Mangel in eine Tugend verkehrt*).⁹⁸ Such insight into the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese grammar led Humboldt to the rethinking of the problem of linguistic typology, which fully expresses his whole deliberation on linguistic comparativism.

Language typology differs from language genealogy in that instead of tracing historical origins and relations, languages are compared rather from a purely structural point of view. It is well-known that since the time of Friedrich Schlegel, languages of the world have been divided roughly into three main types, namely, the isolating (e.g. Chinese), the agglutinating (eg. Turkish), and the inflective (e.g. Indo-Germanic languages). To this three, Humboldt has added a fourth, the polysynthetic (e.g. American-Indian languages).⁹⁹ This scheme of classification, being made from a structural point of view, gives the general impression that it is the inflective that is the most developed type and the remaining three are all imperfect to certain extent. While this classification has remained influential even today, it is relatively unknown that Humboldt has, in regard to typology, proposed another scheme of classification.

This other typology divides languages of the world into three types, with Chinese and Sanskrit representing two “fixed extremes” or “end-points”.¹⁰⁰ They are both perfect in the sense that they are “unequal to each other in their aptness for mental development, but alike in *internal consistency* and complete execution of their systems”.¹⁰¹ And the third type of languages is so described: “Languages which do not belong to either of these two classes strive for grammatical forms and indicate these, but do not achieve a full and adequate denotation of them; in some cases what they have achieved is inadequate, in others it is superfluous and inaccurate.”¹⁰²

In this new, structurally conceived scheme of typology, Chinese and Sanskrit are considered to be the two poles that go into two extremes, both of which being perfect in their own right and in their own way. In Humboldtian terms, this is a contradistinction between *Formprinzip* on the one hand and *Geistesprinzip* on the other. This subtle relation can best be expressed with the words of Zhang Shilu (張

世祿), an eminent Chinese linguist: whereas in the former case grammar is "governed by form" (形攝), in the latter it is "governed by the mind" (神攝).¹⁰³

Besides comparing Chinese with Sanskrit, Humboldt also compared Chinese with other "less perfect" languages in order to highlight the linguistic achievement of Chinese: "Chinese distinguishes itself from these [3rd class] through the *purity*, *regularity* and *consistency* of its grammatical structure. These positive qualities place it among the most highly developed languages..."¹⁰⁴ From today's point of view, this typological statement of Humboldt is of course theoretically contestable,¹⁰⁵ but it again confirms for us the important insight of his understanding of the Chinese language — purity, regularity and consistency of internal grammar. To make good for the "shortage" in externalized grammar, the Chinese mind will call for a series of measures to consistently compensate for what it is lacking.

d) *Replacement for lack of grammatical inflection (morphology)*

We have explained from Humboldt's point of view that Chinese grammar differs in principle from most other languages and that it has, despite its lack of inflection based morphology, developed a way of its own. We have also explained, in the light of Humboldt, that the Chinese grammatical system has required the Chinese mind to become more alert and to take up more responsibility in grammatical binding. In the following we will embark upon a number of technical issues in the hope of explaining how this can actually take place. In Humboldtian terms, these technical issues can be understood as "replacement" measures generated within the Chinese system of language itself¹⁰⁶, the main purpose of which is nothing but the strengthening of the mind so that it can exercise adequate control over the sentences. As we have already seen, it is the lack of morphology (which has its root in phonic poverty according to Humboldt) that has brought about such idiosyncrasies of Chinese grammar. In the following we will see that the replacement measures thus emerged involved nearly the Chinese system of language as a whole. For Chinese grammar to work, compensation has to be found not only in phonology, but even semantics has to be mobilized.

- i) *Tonality*: In order to increase sound complexity, Chinese has developed a system of tones (聲調). Tonality in Chinese is not the same as tones in other languages. In many languages, the so-called intonation is used "post-lexically" just to express moods or emphasis, but tonality in Chinese and

related languages is meaning-discriminative or lexically binding.¹⁰⁷ Modern phonological studies show further that other linguistic features (pitch shapes, tone sandhi, voicing or *qing/chuo* 清濁 in Chinese etc.) derived from tonality can play a significant role in language understanding.¹⁰⁸

- ii) *Minimal morphological features*: Being basically a non-inflective language, Chinese does occasionally use sound change to denote different grammatical entities. Humboldt himself is aware of the following two exceptional measures: a) if a noun is used as a verb, the sound will be changed.¹⁰⁹ b) Some compound words are having the character "子" as suffix, and this shows that the word is a substantive. This second feature mentioned by Humboldt pertains to the use of what we now call "grammatical morphemes" in Chinese (eg. 的, 了, 子, 著, 們).¹¹⁰
- iii) *Compound words*: Chinese started with multitudes of single words, which were steadily replaced by word compounds. The reason behind this trend of development is twofold. On the one hand this increases sound complexity, on the other, this is consistent with the principle of economy of thought (sounds can be recycled and reshuffled). The growing abundance of compound words also provides a channel for "analogy" to take place, and this is very important for the multiplication of the Chinese vocabularies.¹¹¹
- iv) *Extensive use of particles*: Humboldt emphasizes very much the importance of particles for Chinese. He once even named "the particles (grammatical words) and word order" as the "only syntactical auxiliaries" of Chinese.¹¹² In Western linguistics, particles are also known as "grammatical words" or "function words", referring to uninflected words which have purely grammatical functions. But in Chinese linguistics, particles are called 虛詞, or "empty or hollow words" (*hohl oder leer genannten Wörter*) according to Humboldt¹¹³, as opposed to 實詞 (content words). Unlike content words, the grammatical identity of which is more or less fixed, and their meaning more stable, empty words are more fluctuating in meaning and in grammatical function. This is what Humboldt found most impressive: "The purpose of empty words of Chinese lies by no means in the designation of grammatical categories but rather in the indication of the transition of one part of thought to another."¹¹⁴ With the help of a couple of classical particles ("之",

"也", and "而"), Humboldt correctly pointed out that particles can often transfigure from one grammatical identity to another.¹¹⁵ What we can add is that, besides depicting the transition of thoughts, particles in Chinese can also express the nuances of speech modalities including the emotional.¹¹⁶ For a real mastery of the Chinese language, particles are as important as the content words.

- v) *The linguistic tradition of idioms and proverbs*: Without externally precipitated grammatical forms, Chinese speakers and hearers have to rely to a much larger extent on the control of the mind. This is the main point put forward by Humboldt. While this could mean more freedom for the speaker and hearer, their chances of misunderstanding will also increase.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the continual strain imposed upon the mind could also become a problem. To offset or to ease out this kind of pressure, Humboldt agreed with Abel-Rémusat and incisively noted that the Chinese have developed "an immense number of phrasal expressions whose meaning have been fixed by the way they were used"¹¹⁸. Such phrasal expressions, also called by Humboldt "set phrases" (*ausgeprägten Redefügungen*)¹¹⁹, or 成語 in Chinese, constitute a powerful linguistic tradition, carrying idioms which are "sanctified (*geheilig*)"¹²⁰ by their traditional use. As these vast amount of idioms are relatively stable in meaning, their extensive use will have a soothing effect for the otherwise "tense" mind of the Chinese, not to mention that they also carry with them generations of life wisdom.
- vi) *Short sentences*. Humboldt pointed out that a major characteristic of Chinese is to favour short sentences. "Nearly all Chinese sentences are very short, and even those which appear to be long and complicated after translation, they can easily be divided into a multitude of short and simple sentences. This way of grasping the sentence seems to be most suitable for the Chinese mind."¹²¹ Without the support of externalized morphology, the reason why Chinese prefers short sentences is very obvious: long sentences are more difficult for the mind to handle. While this observation is generally true, there are counter-examples which are too abundant to be called "exceptions". For even in classical Chinese, there are many writers whose sentences are longer than usual, but elegantly constructed.¹²² In modern Chinese,

the average length of sentences is even steadily increasing.¹²³ To be fair, therefore, we may put things this way: Chinese favours short sentences, but is not incapable of formulating long ones.

- vii) *Richness in philosophical and emotional expressions*: Humboldt also suggests that the deficit of Chinese in grammatical form has been richly compensated by the concentration of imagination, which in turn stimulates the mind. With more intensive intellectual involvement, but without the distraction due to overly long sentence structures, Chinese is ideal for the cultivation of colourful but pregnant expressions, such as those in philosophy and those describing the passions.¹²⁴
- viii) *Priority of meaning context*: Without inflation related morphological support, the understanding of Chinese sentences has to rely on context and on the semantic content of words used. Humboldt has once observed that in reading an *Indo-Germanic* sentence, what one can do is "pay attention to the grammatical interpretation and the analysis of the sentence construction first, and only then look up in the lexicons for the meaning. For Chinese, this method cannot be applied. For one always has to start with the meaning."¹²⁵ In reading a Chinese sentence, we have to get hold of the meaning first, and see what is being expressed, before we can correctly interpret the structure of the sentence. To take the part of Humboldt, Chinese is a language where the grammaticality of its sentence is not reflected in formal, morphological notations, but "resides in the material meaning alone".¹²⁶ With this consideration, the special importance of semantics for the use of Chinese comes at last to the foreground.

10. SEMANTICS

a) *Language and writing: Phonocentrism and Beyond*

For many linguists since Saussure, language and writing are two phenomena which should be treated separately. Of these two, Saussure obviously laid much more emphasis on the former. Saussure even speaks of writing's purpose of existence as "solely of representing the former"¹²⁷ and holds the view that the use of writing is a "usurpation"¹²⁸ of language. He also suggests that "[...] writing ob-

scures language; it is not a guise for language but a disguise."¹²⁹ This attitude of Saussure has been criticized as phonocentrism.

Jürgen Trabant has noted that for Humboldt, text (or the script) is always an important element of language studies.¹³⁰ Trabant has correctly outlined that in respect of the nature of the script, "Humboldt essentially has emphasized two points: firstly, the script puts meta-linguistic reflection or '*Nachdenken*' on language to work; secondly, the script brings about changes in the language itself in the sense of a 'refinement' (*feineren Bearbeitung*)."¹³¹ For Humboldt, even phonetically oriented script like alphabetic writing is not a mere mechanical reproduction of the articulated sound system, but reinforces our consciousness of the articulation (*zweite Gliederung der Sprache*) rendering the structure of the language more prominent on the one hand, and allowing the expression of the language to be further polished on the other.¹³² To put it in Trabant's words, the script is for Humboldt the *Schlußstein* of linguistics.

If even the supposedly phonetic-based alphabetic script¹³³ should be accorded such importance in the phenomenon of language, how could we possibly overestimate the significance of the Chinese script, which is by nature ideographic?¹³⁴ Indeed if we take into account our earlier assumption that the Chinese sound system is an impoverished one, then would not the Chinese script present us with a new intellectual horizon which can help us (and Humboldt) account for the overall development of the Chinese language?

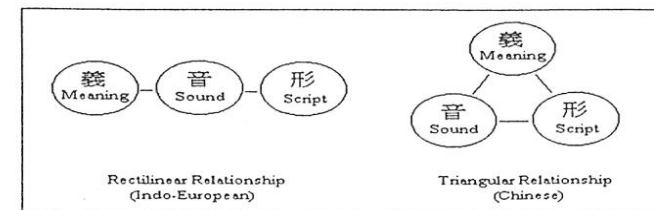
Historically speaking, the phenomenon of the Chinese script has always been an attraction and a fascination for the West. The reason for this fascination lies mainly in Chinese being an obvious deviation from the phonocentric commonplace of the West. Leibniz, for example, even expressed the wish to have a universal writing system with diagrams similar to that of the Chinese introduced for all people. While being obviously reluctant to do away with inflections and particles of the languages he knew, Leibniz even proposed that additional marks (supposedly syntactic by nature) be appended to these diagrams to make up a kind of "pictorial symbolism", so that "it would literally speak to the eyes."¹³⁵ While Leibniz' conjecture lacks linguistic reality, and is overly unrealistic, it clearly documented the Western awareness of the limitation of phonocentrism.

By the same token, Edward O. Wilson goes even further in ascribing to the Chinese script, or to be more precise, to Chinese calligraphy, the important meaning of being the best indicator of the fine nuances of the mind. To make his point, Wilson quotes the following passage by the sinologist Simon Leys, "The silk or paper used for calligraphy has an absorbent quality: the lightest touch of the brush, the slightest drop of ink, registers at once – irretrievably and indelibly. The brush acts like a seismograph of the mind, answering every pressure, every turn of the wrist. Like painting, Chinese calligraphy addresses the eye and is an art of space; like music, it unfolds in time; like dance, it develops a dynamic sequence of movements, pulsating in rhythm."¹³⁶

b) *Relationship between concept, sound and script - "rectilinear" versus "triangular"*

In a letter to Welcker written in 1822, Humboldt pointed out what he thought to be the most important distinction between the phonetic script and the ideographic script like Chinese: He said, while the former is a "script of words" (*Schrift der Worte*), the latter can be called "script of the mind" (*Gedankenschrift*).¹³⁷ This distinction of Humboldt, simplistic and theoretically vulnerable as it might seem¹³⁸, does pertain to the most important theoretical question concerning the structure of Chinese. It concerns the relation between *meaning* (義), *sound* (音) and *script* (形).

If we consider meaning, sound and script to be the three most important aspects of the language phenomenon, then we can immediately point out that the relation between these three headings in Chinese is a very peculiar one. To put things in a laconic manner: Whereas the three headings exhibit, roughly speaking, a *rectilinear* relationship in Indo-European languages, their relation in Chinese is a *triangular* one.¹³⁹ (See the following diagram)



The rectilinear relation as in Indo-European languages is a semantic model widely taken for granted since Greek antiquity. Aristotle puts the matter this way at the beginning of his *On Interpretation*: “Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken.”¹⁴⁰ Regardless of the controversy behind this dictum¹⁴¹, it reflects clearly that in Western languages, the script is understood merely as a mechanical reproduction of the verbal language, and that sound is the direct representation of meaning, and the script only an indirect one. In terms of language learning, this amounts to the fact that acquisition of literacy in phonemic-based Western scripts (what Humboldt called “script of words”) is a relatively easy task, since the correlation between sound and writing is usually mechanical, straightforward and easy to master.

As with the semantic model of Chinese, the triangular relation suggested that meaning is not monopolized by sound alone. For every Chinese character, a *graphical* (visual) and a phonological (audio) element can be found. What the “triangular” relationship actually means, is that the *meaning* of a character may be related to its graphical or its phonological component, or to both. In this regard, Saussure’s observation is indeed very correct: “To a Chinese, an ideogram and a spoken word are both symbols of an idea...”¹⁴² Under certain circumstances, the script could even bypass the sound and be a carrier of meaning. In other words, the usurpation of the script has become a realistic issue.

In learning Chinese, we often come across such situations: When we see a new character, we cannot automatically infer its sound, and being able to use an expression in speech, we do not necessarily know how to write it down on paper. For Chinese children, basic literacy requires much more initial effort than an average child in the West. It is probably one of the main reasons why so far the Chinese population has to reckon with a higher rate of illiteracy.

It is quite clear that the Chinese script by itself is an important source of lexical information. But if one proceeds from this fact to arrive at the conclusion that the Chinese writing system, being ideographic in nature, is totally independent of phonetics, then it would be a total misunderstanding.¹⁴³ In the first place, it is obvious that before the introduction and popularization of the Chinese script, the Chinese sound system must have developed a self-sufficient mechanism to represent mean-

ing. After the introduction of the Chinese script, the meaning discriminating and meaning carrying function of the sound system was no doubt very much challenged, but it did not stop altogether. On the contrary, the sound system has continued to play an important parallel role with the script down to the present.

At the dawn of the introduction of the Chinese script, the sound system is still so strong that characters with the same or similar sounds can often be borrowed or shared.¹⁴⁴ In other words, a lot of Chinese characters were not used according to their graphical “face value”, but borrowed simply as sound tags.¹⁴⁵ Such borrowed use of characters eventually created more and more semantic ambiguities. For the Chinese mind to further develop, semantic disambiguation becomes a matter of top priority. But given the unfavorable nature of the Chinese sound system as a whole, with inborn features such as phonic isolation, monosyllabicity, phonic poverty etc, the task of semantic disambiguation was assigned to the graphical elements of the Chinese scripts. Subsequently, the visual or graphical elements of the Chinese script were bound to annex more and more territory in the world of meaning formerly dominated by the sound system. This will be made clear in the next two sections.

My general observation is: While the sound system is central to the understanding of the original semantic structure of the Chinese language, it gradually surrenders importance to the Chinese script in the course of history. Of course, from a scholarly point of view, historical phonology is and will remain important¹⁴⁶ especially if we are aiming at an accurate access to the wealth of our intellectual past. But as far as the stimulation of the cognitive and imaginative mind for today’s education is concerned, the visual aspect of the scripts should be given due attention. Being a “script of the mind” as depicted by Humboldt, the Chinese script is not a mere rewriting of the sound, but a script containing mental constructs as such.

At this point, Humboldt again has made a remark showing his incisive understanding of Chinese: “Etymology, which allows us to recognize the correlation of concepts in language, exhibits very naturally in Chinese a double character. Etymology of Chinese has its base at the same time in the characters and in the spoken words; but it is obvious (*offenbar*) only in the former.”¹⁴⁷ Later on, Humboldt goes even further to assert that it is the script which has the stronger impact on the language user: while “...the characters are nearly all composite; their parts *jump almost*

straight into the eyes". Humboldt maintains that with the development of the script, the previous attention to sound has been "distracted (*weg gelenkt*)."¹⁴⁸

Concerning this distraction or usurpation of the script Leibniz once made a very amusing remark, suggesting that the Chinese seem to be better off in writing than in speaking, and that when among the Chinese the speech alone is insufficient for communication, they would often start to "sketch out the characters with their fingers in the air".¹⁴⁹ This remark of Leibniz might be an exaggeration, but it shows us where the true problem lies. Here again, Humboldt's observation seems to be extremely inspiring. He says that "among the Chinese, if they happen to know how to speak and to write, then when they speak, or even when they think, they would very often represent the characters to themselves."¹⁵⁰ While this dictum of Humboldt might appear rather high-sounding, it does reveal before us a problem that is totally realistic, namely, the problem of the reverse impact of *literacy* upon the *oral* linguistic behavior.¹⁵¹

Take German as an example: Back in my student years, I once heard my landlady comment on the German of one of her good friends: "Die Frau Hanne spricht eine Art von Schrift-Deutsch." Later on, I realized that *Schrift-Deutsch* (literary German) is the opposite of *Strassen-Deutsch* (street German), both can be spoken! In the case of Chinese, this differentiation can be even more drastic, and the difference can be truly significant. A university student from Peking, even a professional, if not particularly attuned to the intellectual tradition, can speak Chinese very fluently but be noticeably arid. By contrast, a Chinese vernacular like Cantonese, which is often considered a ruder dialect than Pekinese (Mandarin), can be articulated, given the right person, with great poise, elegance, and word power. The difference will depend upon how much substance the speaker brings into his speaking. In this connection, the better-versed one is in the written tradition, the more literary stock he has, the livelier will be his linguistic imagination. So Humboldt may be right when he says, "I indeed have shown that the Chinese script has become an inherent component (*einem inhärenten Bestandteil*) of the Chinese language itself. Since the script provides a convenient means to multiply the signs without increasing the number of sounds, this very script must be able to play an important role in the expression of concepts, both in the present state of Chinese civilization, and since the days when it became widespread."¹⁵²

Contemporary neurolinguistics has shown that successful reading of a text has to be accompanied by speech recoding¹⁵³, a position which at first sight seems to contradict Humboldt's claim. On second thoughts, however, it seems to me that the reading of a Chinese text requires speech-recoding (and thus the sound system) is one thing, but whether the "reading" of a Chinese "text" without visual or graphical support will bring about the same level of intellectual comprehension is quite another.¹⁵⁴ All in all, what Humboldt needs to defend is only the following: although the Chinese script is not a necessary condition for the understanding and use of the Chinese language, it affects and tunes up its performance essentially.

c) *Analogy of Script*

To fully appreciate the impact the Chinese script can have on the intellectual development of the Chinese mind, we have to return to the problem of analogy. Have we not mentioned earlier that for Humboldt, as well as for Saussure, analogy is recognized as the most productive linguistic means of all, both in the flexible and effective use of existing words, and in the generation of new concepts? In the previous sections we have seen that analogy excels as the most developed sound form. We have also shown that this analogical sound form does provide a principle of word formation both in the Indo-European languages as well as in Chinese. But the question is, given the overall weakness of the Chinese sound system, would the productivity of analogy not be kept in check? Or we can ask: with the emergence and development of the Chinese script, will the deficit in sound analogy not be richly compensated by some visual form of it? This is exactly what Humboldt has in mind, although again, this innovative idea is elaborated in no more than one brief but extremely important passage:

"A deficiency of sound-change impedes recognition, from the sounds, of the concepts designated, a difficulty that would be still more palpable in Chinese, if sound-analogy were not very often replaced there, in *deriving* and *compounding*, by analogy from the written character (*Analogie der Schrift*)."

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This laconic paragraph of Humboldt is important in many respects. First of all, it brings to the foreground the important issue of "analogy of script" as a new mode of analogy totally unknown to the West. Secondly, the seemingly casual differentiation "in *deriving* and *compounding*" outlined (unfortunately without further ex-

planation) precisely two basic types of analogy of script, the true meaning of which we will try to unveil and discuss in the following pages one after the other. Thirdly, if we realize that analogy in the Western discussion also pertains to the basic model of human intellect¹⁵⁶, the notion of *Analogie der Schrift* will no doubt provide us with a good opportunity to understand how the Chinese script could contribute to the formation of the Chinese intellect.

While Humboldt was so brief with the idea of analogy of script, a contemporary Chinese linguist Sun Yongchang (孫雍長) has worked out in his book 《轉注論》 (Treatise on *Annotative Derivatives*) a theory of Chinese characters, which, when looked at closely, attests to what Humboldt could have had in mind when he was talking about the Chinese script.¹⁵⁷

Before we can turn to Sun's theory, we have to take a brief look at the traditional classification of Chinese characters known to the Chinese since antiquity as *Liushu* (六書) or the *six ways of character formation*). While there were different formulations of this classification scheme even in ancient China, we will abide by the version adopted by Xu Shen (許慎, 58-147AD) in the postscript to his epoch-making dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* (《說文解字》). For the purpose of discussion, the six types of character or script are tabulated as follows, with translations in English by two eminent Western scholars appended:¹⁵⁸

Six ways of character formation (六書) (with examples)			Pulleyblank ¹⁵⁹	Malmqvist ¹⁶⁰
1. 象形	<i>Xiangxing</i>	日、月	'Imitating shapes', (graphs derived from pictograms)	<i>Pictographs</i> (drawings of objects depicting by the graphs)
2. 指事	<i>Zhishi</i>	上、下	'Pointing to things', (graphs that directly symbolize ideas)	<i>Ideographs</i> (depictions of abstract notions)
3. 會意	<i>Huiyi</i>	武、信	'Combined meanings'	<i>Compound ideographs</i> (combinations of ideographs or pictographs)

4. 形聲	<i>Xingsheng</i>	江、河	'Form and sound', (graphs that combine two simpler graphs, one representing the sound and one referring to the meaning)	<i>Phonetic compounds</i> (combination of a 'classifier', indicating the semantic sphere of the graph, and a 'phonetic', serving to indicate the sound)
5. 假借	<i>Jiajie</i>	令、長	'Borrowing', (where a character is used for another word of the same or similar sound)	<i>Loan characters</i> (characters borrowed to serve for semantically unrelated homophones)
6. 轉注	<i>Zhuanzhu</i>	老、考	'Transferred notation', (an uncommon category, apparently meaning cases where words of different sounds but similar meaning are written with similar graphs) ¹⁶¹	<i>Derivative graphs</i> (graphs which Xu Shen considered semantically related and which exhibit minor graphic variation)

While this scheme of classification has been transmitted for more than two millennia, debate over its correct interpretation seems to be still on-going. Of the six categories, *zhuanzhu* (轉注, or 'transferred notation' according to Pulleyblank) has been the most controversial one. But the extreme diversity in opinion concerning *zhuanzhu* does not mean that the issue has been adequately clarified. The scenario is that, broadly speaking, no particular theory can manage to make good sense of this character type, which so far looks trivial and unimportant.¹⁶² In this regard, the revolutionary theory proposed by a contemporary classicist Sun Yongchang (孫雍長) seems to me to be the most plausible one. In the following passages we will outline Sun's theory of *zhuanzhu*, which I from now on will, according to Sun's new interpretation, translate as "annotative derivatives"¹⁶³.

d) *Analogy of Script -type I: Annotative Derivatives Re-interpreted*

Sun first of all protests against the popular theory of leading scholars of the Qing dynasty (such as Dai Zhen [戴震], Wang Yun [王筠], and Duan Yucai [段玉裁]) that of the six categories only the first four can be considered as principles of script formation (造字之法), while the last two exemplify only principles of use (用字之法), i.e. they are regarded as non-formative. In a series of detailed analysis, Sun successfully argues that all six categories are ways of forming characters ac-

ording to principles. With his reflections on *annotative derivative* in particular, Sun not only has brought about its rehabilitation, he in fact forcefully proves that *annotative derivative* embodied the basic principle for the multiplication of the Chinese script, and is in this respect the most productive of all the six types of character formation. As I have previously hinted at, Sun's treatment is in broad terms compatible with the idea of analogy we have so far discussed. In the following, I will just touch upon a few most important points:

- i) "Annotative derivative" as a counteraction of the overgrowth of "jiajie": As we have noted earlier, the borrowing of characters is a very common practice in ancient Chinese. For Sun, borrowed or loan characters were a necessity, as they came to help where no existing characters were available for certain concepts (usually abstract ones), and that borrowing is usually carried out on a homophonic principle.¹⁶⁴ But the proliferation of borrowing eventually resulted in a lot of semantic ambiguities, with irrelevant and unrelated ideas competing for the use of the same characters. It is for this reason that *annotative derivation* was introduced as a means for disambiguation. But how *in concreto* can this take place?
- ii) "Annotative derivation" as formation mechanism behind "zhuanzhu": Talking about disambiguation, the main idea behind *zhuanzhu* (*annotative derivative*) is to clarify an originally ambiguous character by annotating it with an additional graphical element, or a "group tag", which specifies the nature of the group of entities the intended concept should belong to. With this annotation, a new but more precise character is derived. This in fact is how Xu Shen's succinctly expressed definition for *zhuanzhu*, namely "建類一首，同意相授", should be interpreted. Demonstrated with the classical example of "老" and "考", the whole picture should be as follows: At a certain point in history, the character "丂" must have already been in use to signify various ideas. Among these ideas, the idea of "de-



ceased father" was also in use.¹⁶⁵ To prevent this idea from continuously being jammed by other ideas which have borrowed this same character 丂, the group tag "老" (=old) was attached to the original stem character 丂 to specify that "deceased father" was sort of "old". This yielded an annotatively derived new character as shown in the diagram. In this particular case, the resultant *annotative derivative* character actually existed in the bronze inscriptions, but was later simplified to become "考".¹⁶⁶ With this example, Sun designated the original character "丂" as *zhuanzhu*-root-character (轉注原體字), and the resultant "考" (to be precise, the already extinct character shown) simply as *annotative derivative*, or in Chinese as *zhuanzhu*-character (轉注字). Put into an analogical framework, the former can be called an "*analogon*", and the latter an "*analogate*".¹⁶⁷

- iii) "Annotative derivative" can start with the original meaning of a "Jiajie" character, or can start with the latter's borrowed meaning: If *annotative derivative* is to be compared to analogy, it must show us how productive it is! For a so-called loan character, while it is being loaned, the character itself can be understood as according to its original meaning or to its derived meaning. Now the *annotative derivative* principle could work on either the original or the derived meaning! Examples from the first type is "其" (=basket) being assigned the group tag "竹" (=bamboo) to yield the word "箕" which is used even till today; "莫" (=evening) assigned "日" to yield "暮"; examples for the second type are "隹" (originally meaning "鳥") assigned group tag "口" deriving "唯", "羊" assigned group tag "示" deriving "祥" etc.
- iv) Derivation of a series of *annotative derivatives* from one root with multiple borrowed meanings: If a character has multiple borrowed meanings, then the root can be used as *analogon* and be tagged with different group identity to yield a series of *annotative derivatives*: for example, from "莫" we can yield from the original meaning the new character "暮", and from its derived meanings we can yield "墓" (=grave, tagged with "土" =earth), "慕" (=admire, tagged with "心" = heart), "寞" (=lonely, tagged with "宀" =house) and "幕" (=curtain, tagged with "巾" =cloth) etc. As for the character "莫", since its original meaning of "evening" (sun sunk among bushes of grass) had been represented by "暮" already, it therefore surrendered itself totally to the

borrowed meaning of "no" or "denial", and remained so used up to the present! Noteworthy is that all these characters, while sharing the same or similar sounds, have different meanings, and it is their respective semantic tags that have been the clues to their disambiguation.

- v) *Derivation of semantic cognates from semantically extended usage:* While most loan characters are borrowed on a homophonic principle, there are some loan characters, which are semantic extensions of the original ones (still sharing the same visual forms). Now then if the *annotative derivative* principle is to work on these semantically extended and thus related loan characters, annotative derivatives in the form of semantic cognates will be formed. For example, from "井" (=well), "阱" (=trap, tagged with "阜" =slope) is derived; from "象" yielded "像", from "敖" yielded "遨", and from "北" yielded "背" etc. Notable is that such cognates are also semantically related.
- vi) *Derivation of semantic cognates as spontaneous creation:* Most interestingly, in the course of the development of the script system, the *annotative derivative* principle can be applied on occasions where even no traces of borrowing of any sort can be found. We can find for this no other reason than the drive of the Chinese mind to multiply its repertoire of scripts to satisfy its desire for new expressions. Very often, starting with any *character-stem*, a whole series of semantic cognates can be generated. A classical example is the character-stem "𡗗" (=small, little) yielding a long list of cognates as "淺", "錢", "賤", "殘", "棧", "箋", "蓋" etc., signifying "shallow (little water)", "coin (small money)", "cheap/lowly (small shell)", "cruel (small and wicked)", "path (small wooden way)", "note (small bamboo chip)", "cup (small container)" respectively. Noteworthy is that all the words in the series do have similar sounds and all share the same vague meaning of "small", although this notion of smallness has to be concretized in different directions. But one important thing is that, having the same or similar sound alone won't necessarily constitute another cognate of the same series. The graphs "前" and "纏" are pronounced the same or similar to "錢", but their meanings are not related whatsoever. For the series of cognates to accumulate, a *zhuanzhu*-root-character (in this case "𡗗") must be identified first, which then becomes a crystallization point around which a series of annotative derivatives can be generated. This

resembles the classical analogy of attribution (of proportion) in the most perfect manner.

- vii) *Many characters formerly identified as phonetic compounds (形聲) were in fact constructed according to the principle of annotative derivation:* Traditional Chinese scholarship has mostly been of the opinion that "phonetic compounds" cover the greatest percentage of Chinese characters. One major task of Sun's book is to disprove this. This part of his argument is very lengthy, but his points are clear. In the first place he thinks that, as far as componential structure is concerned, phonetic compounds and *annotative derivative* characters can very easily be mixed up, but as far as the *reasons* for their construction and the path of construction are concerned, they are utterly different.¹⁶⁸ For Sun, phonetic compounds are the result of the attempt to create new characters, but the conditions of construction are too strict for them to become widespread. The reason for this was that a phonetic compound requires both a visual and a phonetic component to be sorted out to exactly suit the intended character. *Annotative derivation*, on the other hand, does not aim at the "creation" of new words, but the "renovation" or "modification" of existing root characters, by assigning tags to them showing their class belongings; such conditions are much looser, vaguer (fuzzier), and therefore more favourable for high productivity application. After such demarcations, Sun maintains that many characters formerly identified as phonetic compounds were in fact constructed according to the principle of *annotative derivation*. This theoretical distinction can be made easier to understand if we formulate it in Saussurian terms: the difference between phonetic compounds and *annotative derivative*-characters can never be disclosed with synchronic analysis alone. Only through diachronic comparison, taking into consideration the *why* and *how* of their genesis, can the one be distinguished from the other. With this new understanding of the true nature of these two "character types", Sun makes the revolutionary remark that it is *annotative derivation* which is the most productive method of formation of Chinese scripts.

When Saussure talked about the "evolutionary" aspect of analogy, he very much emphasized the claim that analogy is a *renovating* as well as a *conservative* force. Indeed, analogy is innovative, creative, and productive, because man has to

confront ever-changing states of affairs. But the point is that starting ever anew with our creation would be a waste of previous intellectual effort. This attitude of Saussure can best be demonstrated with his famous dictum: "Language is a garment covered with patches cut from its own cloth."¹⁶⁹ For Saussure, the basic idea behind analogy is the analyticity, dissociation and reshuffling of morphemic elements. If we look back on our previous discussion of *annotative derivative* as proposed by Sun, we see that this insight of Saussure's is well testified by the development of the system of Chinese script.¹⁷⁰

Sun also maintains that for annotative derivatives (cognates) to be formed, we need to have a number of class concepts, which we can use as group tags for semantic annotation. This is what Xu Shen meant by "establishing a class heading, and give it to those whose meaning fits (建類一首，同意相受)". These class concepts could not have been spontaneously improvised, but "must be already around for us to attend to, to compare, and to reason with. By exemplifying the various manners how the principle of annotative derivation can make use of these class concepts to derive new (or better, renovated) cognates, Sun shows us clearly how the Chinese mind has carried out mundane observation, creative imagination and intellectual reasoning to the greatest extent. To put it in the words of Humboldt, the Chinese script has "in certain manner embraced philosophical work within itself."¹⁷¹

e) *Analogy of Script-type 2: Genealogy of Compound words as visual entities*

Humboldt's most incisive idea about Chinese is that its insufficiently developed analogy of sound is richly compensated by the analogy of script. We also have shown that this analogy of script did take shape in the first place as annotative derivation, which as a basic principle of character formation accounts for the development and multiplication of the Chinese characters.

But now one embarrassing, but important question emerges. If we consider the multiplication of Chinese characters to be the manifestation of productivity, then we must admit that this productivity must have been severely hampered. For the fact is that, the flourishing era for the creation of new characters has long since passed. For many centuries already, creation of new characters has become rare.¹⁷² So where has all the productivity of Chinese gone?

This seemingly challenging question gives us a chance to take a step back and ask: Is it beneficial at all for the Chinese to keep on multiplying the amount of new characters? The answer is of course a negative one, and the reason for this is implicitly there already. In our earlier discussion of the four word forms, we have pointed out that, in the area of language proper (not writing), the initial boom of single words (or lone words) cost too much intellectual energy, and therefore had to be checked and balanced, both by the use of compound words and by the introduction of explanatory words. For this is the true outlet of the mind in attaining an economic employment of its *Kraft*. This is the reason why we have ascribed the notion "analogy of sound" not only to the "sense-transferring sound-form", but also to the compounding word-form (proportionality) and to the derivative word-form (proportion). With the invention and development of script, which is just another semiotic system, this same process of the mind had to be repeated.

Now the answer to the question of the whereabouts of intellectual productivity of Chinese in respect of its system of writing: Instead of keeping on creating new characters, the Chinese mind had long ago re-channeled its productivity to the development of compound words (in their written form of course). At this point, some linguists might question if compound words should not be a matter of language rather than of writing. Indeed, "word" is originally a linguistic concept. But, to speak again with Humboldt, "In China, the script is a real component of her language. If the Chinese have to make judgement about their language in general, the script must be considered as well."¹⁷³ It is also for this reason that Humboldt has named "compounding" the second way to implement what he conceived as "analogy of the written character (script)", as depicted in the important passage cited earlier.

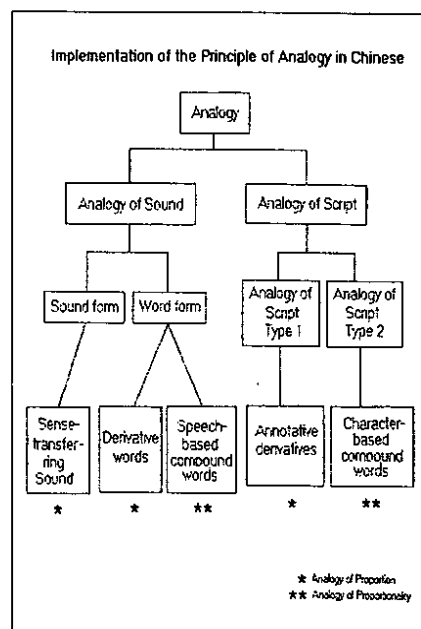
In forming new words, the principle of analogy is again playing a role. Take the example of the character "炎" (=inflammation), modern medicine has shown how this character clustered around itself the whole list of compound words like "腦膜炎", "中耳炎", "蘭尾炎", "腮腺炎", "肩周炎" etc. Or take a more conceptual example, we see that the character "論" (=doctrine) can form compound words such as "進化論", "知識論", "範疇論", "博奕論", "化約論" and the like. In more extreme cases, new word formations such as "後工業社會" (=post-industrial society), "後現代主義" (=post-modernism) etc. can also be constructed

according to the analogical principle. This scenario is nearly exactly the same as what Saussure has described: Characters, each being one morpheme in its own right, can be dissociated and exchanged, reshuffled, and re-associated. Patterns in existent word forms can also be copied, mimicked. Taking these into consideration, we see no reason not to consider the formation of compound words as commensurable with the principle of analogy of script.

To distinguish this type of analogy from the one in the level of character genealogy (type-1), we call this new type of analogy "analogy of script type-2". In order to show how the principle of analogy has worked in the phonological and in the graphical levels of language, and to show how the various types of analogical formation can be related, we can summarize all relevant topics in the following chart:

Although the cumulative sum of Chinese characters amounted to quite an incredible number (above 60,000 in the *Kangxi Zidian* 《康熙字典》), the characters now actively being used are much smaller in number. Statistics has shown that the number of Chinese characters used in a modern Hong Kong Chinese corpus¹⁷⁴ is only 4687. Of these 4687 characters, the most frequently used 3650 characters can account for 99.8% of the whole corpus already. If a reader happens to know just the top 500 characters, he would then be able to cover 75% of the text. In other words, with a relatively small number of Chinese characters, the number of literal expressions that can be formed is practically without limit.

In Indo-European languages, learning the alphabet is easy, but the words have to be learned with extra effort. In learning Chinese scripts, the situation is quite different. While the mastery of the few thousand basic characters is a great chal-



lenge for the children, the learning of words, given the basic literacy required, will be much easier. As for the learning of the first few thousand characters, the difficulty is often much exaggerated. The fact is, there is no need to learn these few thousand characters "one by one" in total separation. Having explained the renovating principle of script genealogy and the idea of radicals, we should be able to see that starting from a much smaller number of basic graphical components, the vast majority of Chinese characters can be "reasoned", although the teacher has to constantly make sure that things are not misunderstood. This strange didactic reflection leads me to a most interesting idea about the Chinese system of writing, with which I will end up this section.

Analogy of script type-1 and analogy of script type-2 (designated as "deriving" and "compounding" by Humboldt) taken separately pertain to the construction of the characters and the compounding of words respectively, but if we put these two types of analogies together, a subtle relation between them emerges. Just as in language we can talk about the so-called double articulation, here with the system of Chinese writing we can, to follow Elmar Hohenstein, also speak of a "double articulation of scripts",¹⁷⁵ and it is this double layered mechanism that allows learners of the Chinese language (+script) to acquire literacy with the greatest possible effectiveness.

One of Humboldt's greatest contributions to the understanding of Chinese is to have pointed out that the Chinese script has, in the actual course of historical development, become an inherent component of the Chinese language itself. With the characterization of the Chinese script as *Gedankenschrift* and the notion of *Analogie der Schrift*, Humboldt allows us to see how the Chinese mind has successfully shifted much of its creativity and productivity from the phonological to the graphical level. With the extreme example of Chinese, Humboldt demonstrated how the linguistic sense of a nation is at work: Stretching from a synchronic to a diachronic plane, melting up sounds and scripts to form a new synchronic system which in turn awaits future diachronic variations. To describe such a scenario, I can find no better description than "dynamic synchrony" as outlined in Jakobson's latest work.¹⁷⁶ And I think it is this dynamic synchrony that best exemplifies Humboldt's original idea that language is not Work but Activity.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Humboldt's understanding of the Chinese language gives us a good opportunity to test his linguistic theory to its extremes. It provides us with material means to look into the unfathomable area of the mind. With his idea of linguistic comparativism, we come to know that strengths and weaknesses of a nation's language are relative. Shortcomings in one area, if correctly handled, might find compensation in another. With the study of Chinese, Humboldt shows us how the intellect of a nation could collectively maintain consistency in purpose over a long period of time. Humboldt's typology might be outdated, but its intention is obvious. By making the Chinese language another candidate for linguistic perfection, Humboldt is among the first intellectuals in modern Western history to guard his people against Eurocentrism. By appraising the value of the Chinese script, Humboldt allows us to see the possible limits of phonocentrism, making it easier for us to appreciate the multidimensionality of intellectual culture. On the other hand, for the Chinese nation, instead of being flattered by Humboldt's compliments, they should rather use his deep reflections as a touchstone for their own linguistic understanding. Given the peculiar triangular relationship of the Chinese semiotic system as described above, the relative abundance of illiterates remains a real problem not to be ignored. But before a drastic maneuver such as the abolishment or full romanization of the Chinese script should be considered (which was once the case)¹⁷⁷, the intrinsic structure and the interdependence of the various factors concerning language, meaning, sound and script etc. should be deliberated upon. For example, the Chinese should seriously consider, if with their relatively weak sound system, they can do away with their script, which has so far taken up many burdens in semantics. Or if, knowing the interrelation of these factors, new didactic measures or language planning policies should be introduced so that the beneficial factors can be maximized. As the epithet that introduces this paper suggests, Humboldt's reflections on the Chinese language could contribute to a better self-understanding both for the West and for the Chinese nation.

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NOTES:

1. Dietrich Mahnke understood German Idealism precisely in such a broad manner. He even explicitly named Leibniz, Kant and Hegel as the "drei größten Systematiker des deutschen Idealismus". See Mahnke (1925), *Leibnizens Synthese von Universalmathematik und Individualmetaphysik*. In: *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, (hrsg.) Edmund Husserl. Halle a.d.S., p.1.
2. For more discussion on the relation of Humboldt to Leibniz, see Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: Mohr, p.416; and Alfons Reckermann, *Sprache und Metaphysik. Zur Kritik der sprachlichen Vernunft bei Herder und Humboldt*. München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1979, p.58 *et seq.*
3. See Ernst Cassirer (1923), "Die Kantische Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie", in: *Festschrift für Paul Hensel*, Greiz i. V., pp. 105-127.
4. See Heymann Steinthal (1948), *Die Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's und die Hegelsche Philosophie*. Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, Neudruck 1971.
5. Richard Kroner has proposed to include, besides Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, a group of German intellectuals around the year 1800 to build up a more comprehensive notion of German Idealism as an intellectual movement. In this connection, Kroner mentioned explicitly the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt as a representative

of "history and philology" of the movement. See Kroner (1948), "The Year 1800 in the Development of German Idealism", in: *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, p.2.

6. For discussion on the tension between universalism and individualism in Humboldt, see Helmut Gipper (1976), "Individuelle und universelle Züge der Sprachen in der Sicht Wilhelm von Humboldts", in: *Universalismus und Wissenschaft im Werk und Wirken der Brüder Humboldt*, hrsg. Von Klaus Hammacher, Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, pp.199-223.

7. Humboldt's (1835) *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* was posthumously published by Humboldt's brother Alexander von Humboldt. In this present paper, the edition being used is the one included in Wilhelm von Humboldt's, *Werke in Fünf Bänden, III. Schriften zur Sprachphilosophie*, hrsg. von Andreas Flitner und Klaus Giel. This work will be cited in this paper as *Kawi-Schrift*, and the page numbers are that of the Flitner-Giel edition. So far there are two English translations of the *Kawi-Schrift*. The one used for citation is the translation by Peter Health (*On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of mankind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For the convenience of non-German readers, pagination of this English edition (E-xxx) is appended after the pagination of the German original. In passing, it can be noted that so far there are two Chinese translation of this *magnum opus* of Humboldt: 1) translated by 錢敏汝 (Qian Minru) (1997): 《語言與人類精神》, Beijing, Peking Normal University Press; and 2) translated by 姚小平 (Yao Xiaoping) (1997): 《論人類語言結構的差異及其對人類精神發展的影響》, Beijing, Commercial Press. Of these two translations, the first translation is one based on a Humboldt-anthology (*Schriften zur Sprache*, edited by Michael Böhler, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1973), which includes a few short but important essays of Humboldt and an abridged version of the main work. The second translation, being a complete translation of the main work, also provides the readership with a full index. Indeed the second translator has also written an elaborated book in Chinese language on Humboldt. See Yao Xiaoping (1995), 《洪堡特—人文研究和語言研究》 (*Humboldt: Humanistic and Linguistic Researches*), Beijing: Foreign Language Education and Research Publisher.

8. Humboldt (1827), *Lettre a M. Abel-Rémusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier* was published in French. Paris: Librairie Orientale de Dondey-Dupré. In 1979, the letter was translated into German by Christoph Harbsmeier as *Brief an M. Abel-Rémusat. Über die Natur grammatischer Formen im allgemeinen und über den Geist der*

chinesischen Sprache im besonderen, which was included in Harbsmeier (1979), *Zur philosophischen Grammatik des Altchinesischen im Anschluß an Humboldts Brief an Abel-Rémusat*. (Stuttgart: Frommann). In this paper, Humboldt's letter is cited as *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*. Page numbers are that of Harbsmeier's. English translations (from German) are mine.

9. This difference has been pointed out in the sixties by Hans-Heinrich Baumann (1965), "Die Generative Grammatik und Wilhelm von Humboldt", in *Poetica. Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, Band 84: Pp. 498-508.

10. Hans Aarsleff, for example, holds such a view, see his introduction to the English translation of the *Kawi-Schrift* translated by Peter Heath.

11. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.676, E-232.

12. The contradistinction between comparativism and evolutionism was made by Wolfgang Schluchter to account for the two major perspectives in understanding social development. See Schluchter (1981), *The Rise of Western Rationalism. Max Weber's Developmental History*, transl. by Guenther Roth. University of California Press, p.1.

13. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.607-8, E-185.

14. The version I was using is *Wilhelm von Humboldts Werke*, ed. By Albert Leitzmann, Band V, (1906), Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, pp. 309-324. Not long ago, an English translation of this lecture came to my attention from which I am citing in this paper. "On the Grammatical Structure of the Chinese Language", in: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Essays on Language*. Edited by T. Harden and D. Farrelly (1997), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp. 95-110. The Letter is cited in this paper as *GSCL*. Page numbers are from the Harden-translation.

15. Kant's famous dictum "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" is a very subtle statement of this kind of experiential hylo-morphism. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. By Norman Kemp Smith, A51/B75.

16. Humboldt speaks, for example, of *Laut-Mannigfaltigkeit*. Cf. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.446, E-69.

17. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.440, E-65.

18. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.650, E-214. "Laut würde an und für sich der passiven, Form empfangenden Materie gleichen."

19. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.428, E-56.
20. Marie-Elisabeth Conte, "Semantische und pragmatische Ansätze in Humboldt", in: *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics*, ed. By Herman Parret (1976), Berlin: de Gruyter, pp.617-8.
21. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.422, E-51.
22. While today's mainstream linguistics generally understands articulatory phonetics as dealing with speech production, rendering articulation thus a mere physio-logical phenomenon, there are voices that have clearly identified articulation as something more fundamental and basically different from *phonation* (Saussure) or from *Verlautbarung* (Heidegger).
23. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.441, E-66.
24. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.440-441, E-65. This again is reminiscent of Kant's method of discovering space and time as forms of intuition through "separation" (*abtrennen*) and "isolation" (*isolieren*). See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A22/B36.
25. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.426, E-54.
26. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.426, E-54-55.
27. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.474, E-88.
28. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.473, E-88.
29. See N. Trubetzkoy (1939), *Grundzüge der Phonologie*. See also Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle (1956), *Fundamentals of Language*, The Hague, Mouton.
30. Humboldt, *Kawi-Schrift*: p.457, E-76.
31. Humboldt, *Kawi-Schrift*: p.457, E-76. The concept of sound form is comparable to the concept of "sound shape" of Jakobson. See Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh (1979), *The Sound Shape of Language*. Harvester Press.
32. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.451, E-72.
33. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.447, E-69.
34. A. Meillet and J. Vendryes were the main supporters of this attitude. O. Ducrot and T. Todorov also pointed out that all linguists who emphasize analogy tend to agree on the arbitrariness of sound and phono-conventionism. See (1979):

Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, , p.131.

35. For Jakobson's anti-Saussurean position, see his "Quest for the Essence of Language (1965)", in: Roman Jakobson (1971), *Selected Writings*, Vol.2. Mouton, pp.345-359.

36. For discussion on this topic refer to *Sound Symbolism*, edited by Leanne Hinten, Johanna Nichols, and John Ohala (1994), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Margaret Magnus has put up a website with all possible information on sound symbolism outlined. Recently, an Internet group by the name of "Linguistic Iconism Association" was set up to promote discussion on sound symbolism. (URL: <http://www.conknet.com/~mmagnus/LIA.html>)

37. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.452, E-73.

38. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.452-453, E-73-74.

39. In the chapter on "Schematism" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, one crucial but most difficult problem Kant has to deal with is to explain why and how the supposedly pure concepts of the understanding (categories) can justifiably be applied to sensible experience, which is basically empirical. In the following passage, we see how Kant managed to put his whole theory of cognition together by introducing the concepts of schema (and transcendental imagination) as the bridging "third thing". "Obviously there must be some third thing, which is homogeneous on the one hand with the category, and on the other hand with the appearance, and which thus makes the application of the former to the latter possible. This mediating representation must be pure, that is, void of all empirical content, and yet at the same time, while it must in one respect be intellectual, it must in another be sensible. Such a representation is the transcendental schema. The concept of understanding contains pure synthetic unity of the manifold in general. Time, as the formal condition of the manifold of inner sense, and therefore of the connection of all representations, contains an *a priori* manifold in pure intuition. Now a transcendental determination of time is so far homogeneous with the category, which constitutes its unity, in that it is universal and rests upon an *a priori* rule. But, on the other hand, it is so far homogeneous with appearance, in that time is contained in every empirical representation of the manifold. Thus an application of the category to appearances becomes possible by means of the transcendental determination of time, which, as the schema of the concepts of understanding, mediates the subsumption of the appearances under the category." (A138-139; B177-178, translation by N. Kemp Smith).

40. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.453, E-73.
41. For size symbolism, see *inter alia* Louis Hjelmslev (1970), *Language. An Introduction*. (Madison, U. of Wisconsin Press), p.43; then also Edward Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics as a Science", in: *Language*. Vol.5 (1929), pp.207-214.
42. The most classical examples can be traced back to Plato's *Cratylus*, where consonants such as /p/, /ɸ/, /s/, /ʃ/, /δ/, /t/, /ʎ/ etc. are all related to certain state of motion or rest (*Cratylus*: 426D-427C, 426A). Subsequently, Leibniz has shown much interest in the same topic. See, Leibniz', *New Essays on Human Understanding*. Further material can be found in his *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache*, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983). Further detail discussion can be found in Sigrid von der Schulenberg (1993), *Leibniz als Sprachforscher*, Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann.
43. Interesting enough, Johann G. Herder is not only aware of but also very proud of the abundance of consonant clusters in German. While Herder is well known for his composition of the *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, his ideas on consonants is recorded in a fragment in his posthumous work. See J. G. Herder, *Sprachphilosophische Schriften*, hrsg. von Erich Heintel (1975), Hamburg: Meiner, p.107 *et seq.*
44. For traces of analogical thinking before Aristotle's coinage of the term analogy, see Eberhard Jüngel (1964), *Zum Ursprung der Analogie bei Parmenides und Heraklit*. Berlin.
45. See Frederick Copleston (1946), *A History of Philosophy. Augustine to Scotus*. Vol. 2, Part 2, pp.75-78.
46. Notable is the fact that both Aquinas and Thomas de Vio opined that analogy could be spoken of either "according to 'to be'" or "according to 'intention'". See Cardinal Cajetan, *The Analogy of Names, and the Concept of Being*. Translated and annotated by Edward Bushinski, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1953), pp. 12, 23, 29 etc.
47. Before Humboldt, Thomas de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan, 1496-1534) made, in my opinion, an important attempt to show that analogy is basically a linguistic issue. The name of his treatise *The Analogy of Names* is the best evidence for this intention. Instead of simply putting analogy overagainst *equivocality* and *univocality*, Cajetan subsumed the dialectical relation between *equivocality* and *univocality* in a very special mode of analogy, which he called *analogy of inequality* (*ibid.*, pp. 9-14). In

so doing, he is making the important move of declaring the equivocal and univocal uses of universal terms to be mere special cases of analogy, which should be considered as pertaining to the ontological structure of the human understanding at large. For the idea of univocity as a special case of analogy, I am indebted to the incisive article "Exploring Analogy" by Glenn M. Miller over the network (URL: <http://www.webcom.com/~ctt/godtalk.html>).

48. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.454, E-74. Underlines and roman numeric superscripts are mine. They are inserted in the citation to refer to the main points discussed in the following paragraph.

49. For the discussion of analogy as "Ent-sprechen", see Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Θ 1-3: Vom Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft, Gesamtausgabe*, Band 33, hrsg. von Heinrich Hüni (1981), Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, pp. 33-42.

50. Heymann Steinthal, a disciple of Humboldt, reported that in the manuscript-A of the *Kawi-Schrift* there was originally an example under the section on the analogical, but Humboldt later deleted the example. In that example, the word "Geist" was said to be derived from the word "Gischt". Here we see that the meaning of *Geist* and the sound /Geist/ can have no direct or indirect physical relationship. *Geist* is so pronounced only through the mediation of or the hint provided by the meaning-sound duplex *Gischt* and /Gischt/. This is so because *Geist* as an intellectual phenomenon is analogous to *Gischt* as a natural phenomenon. From the historical point of view, the notion of analogy implied by the above example turns out to be very similar to the classical example given by Aristotle on the various meanings of "health". But the very fact that Humboldt eventually deleted this example seems to suggest that Humboldt readily thinks that analogy in language should be accorded an even broader scope of application than the one prescribed by this unsuccessful example. See. Heymann Steinthal (ed.) (1984), *Die sprachphilosophischen Werke Wilhelm's von Humboldt*. Berlin: Dümmlers, pp. 315-316.

51. Throughout the Western tradition, analogies have been distinguished in different ways. The divide between analogy of proportion and proportionality is mainly a Thomist distinction. Later on in the 15th century, Thomas de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan) made a more complete account in which different terminologies are used. See his *The Analogy of Names*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1953). For more recent discussion, cf. Gilles Deleuze, "Seminar session on Scholasticism & Spinoza," now available online: <http://www.imaginet.fr/deleuze/TXT/ENG/140174.html>.

52. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.447, E-69. Humboldt, for example, noted clearly that the organic law and the mental principle "often reinforce each other, though in other

cases they also conflict." Humboldt has also emphasized that there can be an integration of the symbolic and the analogical, and that a nation can often choose to "put more objective reality into its language, or more subjective inwardness." See: *Kawi-Schrift*: p.469, E-85.

53. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.451, E-72.

54. This attitude of Humboldt reminds us of the similar position of Kant about the human mind: "Thus all human knowledge begins with intuitions, proceeds from thence to concepts, and ends with ideas." *Critique of Pure Reason*, A702/B730.

55. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B186-187.

56. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.473-474, E-88. I have put the words "sensuous" and "imaginative" in italics as they refer to Humboldt's "pair of laws".

57. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.464, E-81.

58. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.466, E-83.

59. It has to be noted that the number of unique phonemes ascribable to a language might vary depending on the aspects and criteria of demarcation. See Yuen Ren Chao's (趙元任) (1934) linguistic classic "The Non-Uniqueness of Phonemic Solutions of Phonetic Systems", in: *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, 4:4, pp.363-397. Reprinted in Martin Joos (ed.) 1957, *Readings in Linguistics*, Vol.1, pp. 38-54. Washington DC: American Council of Learned Societies. Thanks to Thomas H-T. Lee for pointing this out.

60. Humboldt, *Brief an Abel Rémusat*, p.84. See also *Kawi-Schrift* p.460, E-78.

61. Bernhard Karlgren (1949), *The Chinese Language. An Essay on Its Nature and History*. New York, The Ronald Press Company, p.7-8. Here, Karlgren speaks of the Chinese phonic system in the following manner: "Now when we look at the sounds of the language we find that modern Mandarin Chinese is extraordinarily simple and that it is poor in its resources." Then also: "This meager and poor stock of sounds, however, is enriched by every word's having its so-called musical accent [...]. In Pekinese there are four such tones [...]"

62. Besides Abel-Rémusat, such a view is also held by more recent scholars such as George A. Kennedy and John DeFrancis.

63. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.719, E-262. This incisive statement of Humboldt, rather than being outdated, has found in contemporary Chinese linguistic research new resonance. While talking about the development of disyllabic and polysyllabic

words in Chinese, Göran Malmqvist did make the following remark: "But this development has not reduced the concept of the monosyllabicity of the language to a myth." See Malmqvist (1994), "Chinese Linguistics", *History of Linguistics. The Eastern Traditions of Linguistics*, edited by Giulio Lepschy, London: Longman, p.1.

64. *Kawi-Schrift* p.720, E-262 (Humboldt's own italics). With this statement, Humboldt in fact indirectly defined monosyllabicity with the concept of phonic isolation, which at the same time is the main criterion for the typological classification of Chinese as an "isolating" language.

65. See Huang Kan 黄侃 (1983), 《文字聲韻訓詁筆記》 (*Notes on Etymology, Phonology and Semasiology*), Shanghai, p. 99, also p.56. – Of course, every rule might have exceptions. In respect of monosyllabicity, the query has been raised that besides the rather casual exceptions such as the one raised by Huang Kan and other equally straightforward ones such as 葡萄 (*putao*, or grapes) and 苜蓿 (*musu*, or alfafa), there exist in the Chinese language a whole wealth of disyllabic roots known under the banner of 聯綿字 (*Lianmianzi*). In the Chinese language, such disyllabic roots are of three types, namely a) reduplication of a character (疊字), b) two-character structures with both characters having the same phonic initials (雙聲), and c) two-character structures with both characters having the same finals (疊韻). Taking a closer look, I am of the opinion that even the abundance of all these disyllabic roots would offer no help for the claim that the Chinese language is polysyllabic like European languages. My arguments are as follows: 1) Judging from a purely quantitative point of view, disyllabic is not yet polysyllabic in the fullest sense. 2) From a qualitative point of view, the disyllabic roots in Chinese are restricted to the three basic types listed above and is, in this regard, unlike Western polysyllabicity which exhibits much more freedom and flexibility of combination. 3) Looking closer into the relation between the two characters of some representative disyllabic roots, we see that many of these roots, which supposedly are incapable of further division, can indeed be divided and still be semantically conceivable. (e.g. 倉皇, 籠統). 4) Considering the modality of expression, many disyllabic roots can be expressed in different written forms but having similar sounds (e.g. 逶迤 can also be written as 逶迤, 蜿蜒, 逶夷 etc.). What is of crucial importance here is therefore not the written form but the sound. And indeed the very tactic used by the three types of disyllabic roots turns out to be nothing but emphasis through sound reduplication. What is being reduplicated is the originally monosyllabic sound or one of its parts (initial or final). All these appears to speak for the judgement that instead of disproving monosyllabicity, the presence of the so-called disyllabic roots confirms rather the basic monosyllabic nature of the Chinese language.

66. See 申小龍 (Shen Xiaolong) (1988), 《中國語言的結構與人文精神》 (*The Structure of Chinese Language and its Humanistic Intent*), Beijing: Guangming Ribao Press, p.32.

67. Jakobson spoke of the Chinese language as a “monosyllabischen Sprache mit polytonischer Betonung”. See Roman Jakobson (1962), *Selected Writings I: Phonological Studies*, Mouton, p.126.

68. Lin Yu-tang translated the term *shengyun* (聲韻) precisely as “the historical study of vowels and consonants”, See (1971), 《林語堂當代漢英詞典》 (*Lin Yutang's Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage*), Chinese University of Press, Hong Kong. *Apropos*, the Chinese University Press has commissioned the present author to prepare an online-searchable version of Lin's dictionary. This online version of the dictionary is now available for public access through the following URL: <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/Lindict/>.

69. See Liu Shipai's (劉師培) “On the origin of sounds of characters” (〈原字音篇〉上、下), in: 《劉申叔遺書》 (*Liu Shen Shu I-shu*). The text reads: “古代造字，慮字音展轉失其真讀也，乃以字音象物。” I am indebted to my colleague Lee Kwai-sang (李貴生) for bringing Liu's work to my attention.

70. See Hu Pu'an (胡樸安) (1941), 《從文字學上考見中國古代之聲韻與言語》 (*Examining Ancient Chinese sounds and speech from a philological perspective*), 《學林》 (*Xuelin*). For a detailed analysis of this work of Hu, see Tze-wan Kwan, 〈從洪堡特語言學看漢語和漢字的問題〉 (“Meaning Constitution in the Chinese Language: A Humboldtian Perspective”), in Kwan (1994), 《從哲學的觀點看》 (*From a Philosophical Point of View*), Taipei, Pp. 269-340.

71. See Note on Herder in the earlier section.

72. Bernhard Karlgren (高本漢) was among the first linguists to plead for the existence of consonant clusters in ancient Chinese. For a summary of all major debates about this issue, see Zhao Bingxuan and Zhu Jianing (趙秉璇、竺家寧) edited (1998), 《古漢語複聲母論文集》 (*Collected paper on consonant clusters in ancient Chinese*), Beijing; also Zhu Jianing (1981), 《古漢語複聲母研究》 (*Studies on Consonant Clusters in ancient Chinese*), Taipei.

73. This is one point that Edward Sapir has explicitly taken note of. See Sapir (1921), *Language. An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York, Harcourt, p.54.

74. For those lone words which do survive until this day, their erstwhile hair-splitting meanings are usually replaced by some more generic ones. Examples of these words are 美 (changed its meaning from “sheep big and tasty” to “beautiful”) or 驕 (meaning changed from “horse six feet tall” to “proud”) etc.

75. The word 笑 for example is not included in Xu Shen's *Shuowen Jiezi*. For a similar reason, Heidegger argued that the so-called infinitive form for the Greek verb-to-be εἶναι appeared at a much later stage than the other conjugated forms of the same verb. See Martin Heidegger (1953), “Über die Grammatik und die Etymologie des Wortes ‘sein’”, in: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen: Niemeyer.

76. For Karlgren's reflection on compound words as products of analogy, see his *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, translated by 張世祿 (Zhang Shilu) as (1977), 《中國語與中國文》, Section 18 of the introduction. Taipei, p.23; see also Karlgren's *Word Families in Chinese*, translated by Zhang Shilu again as 《漢語詞類》, Shanghai: Commercial Press,. For supporting discussion (1937), see Zhang Shilu's 〈言語演變的原則〉, in: (1984), 《張世祿語言學論文集》, Shanghai: Xuelin, , p.137.

77. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.639, E-206.

78. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.639, E-206-207, italics are mine.

79. Morpheme denotes the minimal distinctive unit of grammar, or in other words, the smallest functioning unit in the composition of words. In respect of functions, morphemes can be differentiated into grammatical morphemes and lexical morphemes. (Cf. Entry of “morpheme” in David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, Oxford: blackwell, 1985) In the Indo-European languages, which Humboldt has in mind for comparing with Chinese, grammatical morphemes are predominantly actualized through inflection of words. Grammatical morphemes in Chinese (eg. 的, 了, 子, 著, 們 etc.) are never a result of inflection and their uses are not as strictly governed, and their role in grammar not as prominent and powerful as in the inflection languages.

80. Karl Bühler (1934/1990), *Theory of Language*. Translated by Donald Fraser Goodwin. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, p.343.

81. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.18: “Die Grammatiken der anderen Sprachen haben einen morphologischen und einen syntaktischen Teil; das Chinesische kennt nur die Syntax.” In his lecture “Über den grammatischen Bau der chinesischen Sprache”, Humboldt used somewhat different wordings: “Die Grammatik anderer Sprachen

hat zwei abgesonderte Theile, einen etymologischen und einen syntaktischen, in der Chinesischen Grammatik findet sich bloss dieser letztere." (S. 310).

82. Even Humboldt himself has confusingly used the word "etymology" in place of "morphology". See the above note.

83. The most representative work on Chinese word formation is Lu Zhiwei's (陸志韋) (1977), 《漢語的構詞法》 (*Word Formation in Chinese*), revised edition. Hong Kong: Zhonghua Book Company.

84. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.65. "Diese grammatischen Formen, so unscheinbar sie auch ausschen mögen, geben ein Mittel an die hand, um Sätze nach den Bedürfnissen des Gedankens miteinander zu verknüpfen, führen den Gedanken in einen höheren Flug; sie erlauben ihm und veranlassen ihn dazu, den Gedanken bis in die feinsten Nuancen und die subtilsten Verbindungen hinein auszudrücken."

85. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.18. "Ich möchte dagegen aber behaupten, daß die chinesische Sprache es nicht nur unterläßt, sondern geradezu ablehnt (*dédaigne*), die grammatischen Kategorien zu beschreiben, und sich damit von der Natur der Sprache her auf eine ganz andere Ebene begibt."

86. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.617, E-191. "...die grammatische Formung mit verschmähender Resignation zurückstösst."

87. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.715, E-259, "Die Chinesische stützt sich allein auf die Wortstellung und auf das Gepräge der grammatischen Form im Inneren des Geistes."

88. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.68-69. Here Humboldt speaks of "...den grammatischen Modifikationen keine Laute als äußere Zeichen anfügt..."

89. *GSCL*: p. 96.

90. *GSCL*: p. 97. With the above observation made by Humboldt, we can justifiably question the view of those who think that the Chinese people, whose language lacks morphology and strict logical patterns, are incapable of logical thinking. Compare the different views of Chad Hansen (1983), *Language and Logic in Ancient China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, with that of Christoph Harbsmeier (1996), *Language and Logic in Traditional China*, being the first part of the seventh volume of Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization of China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

91. *GSCL*, p.105.

92. *GSCL*, p.105.

93. *GSCL*, p.105

94. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.536, E-133. "...da die Chinesische es ganz dem Hörer überlässt, die kaum irgend durch Laute angedeutete Zusammenfügung aufzusuchen."

95. *Kawi-Schrift*: p. 673, E-230.

96. *Kawi-Schrift*: p. 673, E-230.

97. *Kawi-Schrift*: p. 674, E-231.

98. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 81.

99. See Hans Arens (1969), *Sprachwissenschaft. Der Gang ihrer Entwicklung von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Band 2, Freiburg: Alber, p.496.

100. *Kawi-Schrift*: p. 676, E-232. In Heath's translation, the two words "extremes" and "end-points" are translated from the same German word "Endpunkte".

101. *Kawi-Schrift*: p. 676, E-232.

102. *GSCL*, p.106/321; See also *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.55.

103. This view of Zhang Shilu is reported by one of his students. See 申小龍 (Shen Xiaolong), *op cit.*, p.43f, p.57f.

104. *GSCL*, p.107, italics are mine; see also *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 64.

105. From a theoretical point of view, the question of language typology is inevitably controversial. While the more common version of it is obviously biased with Euro-centrism, the alternative version of it appears to be an attempt to undo this bias, although such an attempt is only partially achieved. For even in this second version, injustice has still been done to most languages of the world, which are grouped under the third class. Contestable as it is, this second attempt made by Humboldt remains to be of great value. Since given more effort and a more liberal perspective, it is not unimaginable for us to find out for all other languages of the world their own ways of showing linguistic perfection.

106. Here we must again note that, paradoxically, the term "replacement" will make sense only from a comparative standpoint.

107. See D. Robert Ladd (1996), *Intonational Phonology*, Cambridge: CUP, pp.148.

108. See William S-Y. Wang's series of essays on tones collected in his (1991) *Explorations in Language*, Seattle/Taipei: Pyramid Press, pp. 169-246.

109. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.53, *GSCL*, p.101. This phenomenon is widely known for readers of classical Chinese. For examples, in the phrases “君子好逑”, “以女妻之”, “如惡惡臭”, “非所以要譽於鄉黨朋友也” etc., the words “好”, “妻”, “惡”, and “要” are all pronounced differently as compared to their normal pronunciation. This is so because in such locutions they all have unusual grammatical usage.
110. Of course, grammatical morphemes in Chinese are a result not of inflection but more of syntax. See also previous note on “morpheme”. For more background of the use of grammatical morphemes in Chinese, see Feng-Sheng Hung (1996), *Prosody and the Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes in Chinese Languages*, Bloomington/Indiana: Indiana University Linguistics Club.
111. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.728f, E-268.
112. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.679, E-234-5; 714, E-258.
113. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 47. *Kawi-Schrift*: p.699, E-248.
114. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 47.
115. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: pp. 44-47; *GSCL*, pp.102-106, German 316-320.
116. According to Zhang Shilu (張世祿), empty words in Chinese can be differentiated into two classes, grammatical words (語法詞) and modal words (語氣詞). See the last two chapters of his (1978), 《古代漢語》 (*Ancient Chinese*), Shanghai, Shanghai Jiaoyu Press.
117. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 52.
118. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 52.
119. *GSCL*: 106, German-320.
120. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 52.
121. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 51.
122. For counter examples we can cite the most representative prose writers during the Tang and Song dynasties, known under the group 唐宋八大家. Browsing through their opus, one will find countless long sentences, many of which are argumentative in nature.
123. See 高更生 (Gao Gengsheng) (1983), 《長句分析》 (*Analysis of Long Sentences*), Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, p.4 *et seq.*

124. See *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: S. 67. It might be of great interest to note that some two centuries before Humboldt, Leibniz complained about the German language. Being rich in vocabularies for worldly objects and in technology (hunting, pasture, mining ore processing, and navigation etc.), so argued Leibniz, the German language at that time was poor in handling intangible objects, of which expressions of the activities of the soul, of morality and of government is one thing, and abstract expressions in epistemology, logic and metaphysics is another. Now Humboldt seems to have found in Chinese what had been wanting for Leibniz, although at his time, the German language must have already been a much enriched one through the activities of Goethe and Schiller on the one hand, and of Kant and Hegel on the other. See G.W. F. Leibniz, *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache*. (Stuttgart, Reclam, 1983), pp. 8-10.

125. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 50.

126. *GSCL*: p.97

127. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p.23.

128. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p.24.

129. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p.30.

130. Jürgen Trabant (1990), *Tradition Humboldts*. Suhrkamp, p.194.

131. Trabant (1990), p.208. “Humboldt stellt im wesentlichen zwei Punkte heraus: erstens, daß die Schrift metasprachliche Reflexion, ‘Nachdenken’ über die Sprache (V, S.109) in Gang setzt und, zweitens, daß sie die Veränderung der Sprache selbst im Sinne einer feineren ‘Bearbeitung’ bewirkt.” Here Trabant is quoting from Humboldt’s “Buchstabenschrift und Sprachbau”, in: Band III of the 5-volume edition, *ibid.*, pp 109-110.

132. From a different angle, Elmar Holenstein speaks of the “strukturelle und funktionale Anisomorphie von Lautsprache und alphabetischer Schrift”, securing thus for the script an area of significance of its own. See Holenstein (1980), “Doppelte Artikulation in der Schrift”, in: *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, pp. 319-333.

133. Trabant goes even further than Humboldt by arguing that the alphabetic script is not only capturing articulated sound, but also capturing the movement of the speaker’s mouth, and is in this regard *kinematographic* instead of *phonographic*. See Trabant (1990), p.211.

134. William G. Boltz (1994), *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*. New Haven: American Oriental Society. In this book Boltz differentiates sharply between the notions of ideograph (ref. to concepts), pictograph (ref. to objects without adequate linguistic awareness), logograph (ref. to words with marked linguistic awareness) and zodiograph (a subset of logograph with a pictographic origin) etc., with the intention of rectifying a number of commonplace misconceptions about the nature of the Chinese script. According to Boltz, Chinese characters should be considered basically as logographs and not as ideographs (p. 3, 6, 126). His main argument is that taking the Chinese characters as ideographs would invoke the commonplace misconception that these characters, while not related to the words, could be separated from the language itself and still be understood or even be used. In so far as this misconception (predominantly a Western one) is concerned, Boltz' warning is grounded. However, in the following, I see the necessity to retain the notion "ideograph" in depicting the nature of the Chinese characters, and my reasons are as follows: 1. The characterization of the Chinese characters as ideographs does not affect their simultaneous status of being logographs, a fact that has never been foreign to the Chinese themselves, and the Qing scholars in particular. 2. It is true that all Chinese characters must be related to a certain sound element in order to be qualified as writing. But for the Chinese script in particular, the relation of the script to its sound is a very different one from the same relation in Western scripts. While the visual presentation of Western script is a direct, automatic and exclusive mapping of the sound system, the visual elements of Chinese characters *do not necessarily* reveal the corresponding sounds. In cases when we are talking about the so-called sound components (聲辟) of characters of the 形聲 type, the phonetic representation is still a very indirect one. What is being *explicitly* revealed in the visual elements of the Chinese characters are indeed predominantly concepts. 3. The emphasis on the logographic nature of the Chinese script, without further qualification, might lead to the over-estimation of the role played by the sound elements or an under-estimation of the role played by the visual (thus conceptual) elements of the Chinese scripts. 4. This over- and under-estimation might render the important topics such as the "usurpation of the script", "phonic poverty of Chinese" or the later development of the Chinese writing system (the *Zhuanzhu* characters as discussed in this paper) etc. unintelligible. 5. While the notion of zodiograph is a possible alternative for ideograph, I have not chosen this term either because not all Chinese characters are pictographic in origin (e.g. 指示). 6. The term ideograph is more in line with Humboldt's conception of the Chinese script as *Gedankenschrift*. As a consequence, it occurs to me that, as

long as Boltz' warning is kept in mind, the term ideograph still seems to be the most appropriate designation for the Chinese characters.

135. See G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp.398-9.

136. See Edward O Wilson (1998), *Consilience*. Simon Leys' interpretation of Chinese calligraphy is presented in his review of "The Chinese Art of Writing", by Jean François Billeter (1990), New York: Skira/Rizzoli, in (1996), *The New York Review of Books*, 43: pp.28-31.

137. Humboldt wrote this letter not long after he learned Chinese (1981). See *Werke in Fünf Bänden*, Band V. *Kleine Schriften, Autobiographisches, Dichtungen, Briefe*. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, pp.251-259.

138. Humboldt's "script of words" might suggest the script to be a direct mapping of speaking (words). But as we have pointed out, Humboldt is not unaware of the added value the script can contribute.

139. The present author has adopted this scheme of understanding for many years, and only long after did he notice that Zhang Shilu has long before him discussed these two models. See 張世祿, 〈漢字的特性及其對社會文化的作用〉 (The characteristics of the Chinese scripts and their influence on society and culture), in: 《張世祿語言學論文集》, *ibid.*, pp. 555-561.

140. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, translated by Harold P. Cook, *Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 16a4-a6.

141. The sentence cited above is followed by the following dictum: "As writing, so also is speech not the same for all races of men. But the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs are the same for the whole of mankind, as are also the objects of which those affections are representations or likenesses, images, copies." (16a7-a9) And the whole passage put together amounts to one of the most debated questions in the philosophy of language, namely, whether languages of the world are merely different ways of expressing some universal mental impressions aroused by one objective world? The positive stance of Aristotle has been met in the last century by linguists and philosophers including Saussure, Sapir/Whorf and Gadamer etc.

142. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p.26.

143. An example of such misunderstanding can be found in Ernst Mach, *Erkenntnis und Irrtum*. (Digital Bibliothek) S. 130.
144. Talking about Chinese characters being borrowed, one has to differentiate between two types of borrowing. On the one hand we can mean that type of borrowing which is counted as one of the six categories of Chinese characters (六書假借). On the other hand we can mean another type of borrowing called "borrowing on homophonic principle" (同音通假). While the first type of borrowing is serving some lexical purpose, the second type of borrowing is just a widespread habit (see the new versions of *Yijing* or *Laozi* unearthed in the past decades for example) which is pervasive yet linguistically totally unnecessary. After the Tang dynasty, the second type of borrowing was gradually disqualified.
145. Statistics has shown that the percentage of borrowed or loan characters in the oracle script is a much higher one compared to the percentage of loan characters in subsequent collections of Chinese characters (such as the *Shuowen Jiezi*). See Li Hsiao-ting (李孝定) (1986), 〈從六書的觀點看甲骨文字〉, in: 《漢字的起源與演變論叢》 (*Essays on the Origin and Development of the Chinese Script*), Taipei: Linking Press.; see also the same author (1977), 《漢字史話》 (*A History of the Chinese Script*), Taipei: Linking Press., p.38 ff.
146. At this point we can even point out that the phonological studies of the Qing dynasty represent precisely a *rediscovery* of the relevance of the sound system for the correct deciphering of the semantic contents of many ancient texts, the meaning of which could have been blurred for centuries or even millennia. Take Xu Shen's (許慎) celebrated *Shuowen Jiezi* (《說文解字》) of the 2nd century AD for example. The work was originally arranged according to visual radicals (部首). After the discovery of oracle and bronze scripts in modern times (which were not available to Xu), we now know that many of the words recorded by Xu were not accurate. Throughout the Qing dynasty, therefore, a host of classical scholars including Dai Zhen (戴震), Duan Yucai (段玉裁), Zhu Junsheng (朱駿聲) et al. made attempts to reconstruct this work according to phonological principles in the hope of recovering the lost threads in ancient semantics. This resulted in a series of lexicons, which are of the greatest importance for the exegeses of ancient Chinese texts.
147. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 80.
148. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 80, italics are mine; German translation of Harbsmeier: "...springen gerade in die Augen".
149. See Leibniz' *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken...*, *op. cit.*, p.27.

150. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: S. 80.

151. The overall importance of the graphical or graphological aspect of the Chinese script suggested by Leibniz and Humboldt is testified by modern neurolinguistic study of the Chinese script. See the next few notes for details.

152. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p. 84. It is no wonder, the modern Prague functionalist typologist Vladimir Skalicka has specified "*written Chinese*" and not Chinese in general when working on his language typology. See Petr Sgall, "Prague School Typology", in: *Approaches to Language Typology*, edited by Masayoshi Shibatani and Theodora Bynon (1995), Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.56.

153. See William S.Y. Wang, Ovid J.L. Tzeng and Daisy L. Hung, "Speech Recoding in Reading Chinese Characters", in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*. 3.6 (1977), pp. 621-630. Reprinted in Wang's *Explorations in Language, op cit.*, pp. 249-262.

154. In a keynote speech to the 1995 *International Workshop on Mind & Language* (Academia Sinica, Taipei), Ovid J.L.Tzeng (曾志朗) cited and discussed many recent neurolinguistic experiments on the Chinese scripts as well as on Japanese Kanzi and has arrived at the conclusion that a special "graphomotoric encoding scheme" must be involved in the reading of Chinese characters. Tzeng even suggested that such a graphomotoric encoding scheme must have precipitated in the left posterior area of the human brain (somewhere in the parietal areas and adjacent to the visual cortex) constituting a functional parallel to the Broca area which is the neurological base for speech articulation. See Ovid J. L. Tzeng and Daisy Hung, "Origin of Cerebral Lateralization of Language: A Neurolinguistic Perspective", in (1999): *Mind and Language: Collected Papers from 1995 International Workshop on Mind & Language*, Taipei: Academia Sinica, pp 1-85, esp. pp. 38-45. For the topic on the application of neurolinguistics in the study of the Chinese language in general, the present author is indebted to the following book by William S. Y. Wang: 王士元 (1983): 《實驗語音學講座》 (*Lectures on Experimental Phonetics*), Beijing: Commercial Press.

155. *Kawi-Schrift*, p. 447, E-69; italics by the present author.

156. John Lyons, for example, besides depicting analogy as a "major factor in the development of languages at all periods", also related analogy directly with "structure" and "pattern" and remarked that analogy constitutes "the dominating principle, without which languages could not be learned or used..." See Lyons (1971), *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge: CUP, p. 31, 38.

157. See Sun Yongchang (孫雍長) (1991), 《轉注論》 (*Treatise on Annotative Derivatives*), 長沙: 岳麓書社. Sun's view was further elaborated in his other book 《管窺蠹測集》 (*Collected Papers: Watching the Sky through a Tube and Measuring the Sea with a Shell*), (長沙: 岳麓書社, 1994).

158. These six categories of Chinese characters were first proposed by Xu Shen (許慎) in his epoch making etymological dictionary of Chinese characters. See *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字) (*Explanations of Graphs and Analysis of Characters*) published at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. While adopting Xu's expressions, I do not follow his sequence, but prefer to put in a way I think logical. Incidentally, this sequence has been the one adopted by Göran Malmqvist.

159. Edwin G. Pulleyblank (1995), *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*. Vancouver, UBC Press, pp.7-8.

160. See Göran Malmqvist (1994), "Chinese Linguistics", in: *History of Linguistics. Vol.1: The Eastern Traditions of Linguistics*. London: Longman, pp.1-24.

161. While Pulleyblank's translation of 轉注 as "transferred notation" is a very close transliteration of the original Chinese term, his verbal explanation of it is basically misconceived. This shows us how tricky the concept annotative derivative is, that a highly deserving scholar such as Pulleyblank could be deceived by it, just as it has deceived scholars of the Qing period. This will become clear in the following discussion.

162. The true meaning of *zhuanzhu* as one of the six categories of Chinese scripts is not only an extremely difficult issue for traditional Chinese scholars, it remains so for modern scholarship in Sinology as well. In his otherwise outstanding book on the *Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*, William Boltz, for example, has left the problem of *zhuanzhu* (*chuan chu* for Boltz) practically untreated. (Boltz, *op. cit.*, pp.146,154). Besides referring to an earlier treatise of Serruys on the topic and repeating the outdated "application/use" theory of the Qing scholars, Boltz has made no attempt to make the phenomenon of *zhuanzhu* more intelligible. Taking such difficulties into consideration, Sun Yongchang's work on *zhuanzhu* turns out to be especially deserving of attention.

163. As for the translation of the much disputed concept of *zhuanzhu* (轉注), Pulleyblank's "transferred notation" sticks very close to the Chinese original (although his explanation of it is not too accurate). Malmqvist's translation "derivative graphs" contains the word "derivative" which I prefer to Pulleyblank's "transfer", but the translation as a whole is too general and regrettably it leaves the

important notion of "annotation" unattended. Therefore I have decided to merge the two translations into a third: "annotative derivative". Here, it is important to note that "annotation" is changed to its adjectival form to indicate that "annotation" is a *means* only and not the *end*, which is the "derivation" of new scripts. The word "derivative" is therefore not an adjective, but a substantive.

164. This corresponds to what Xu Shen has described in his *postscript*: "本無其字，依聲託事". Furthermore, it must be clarified that, the borrowing discussed here involves exclusively the loaned characters which represent one of the six types of character formation (六書通假), and not the kind of borrowing called 同音通假, which is just casual replacement of extant homophonic characters while not actually required (本有其字，同音相代).

165. In the bronze inscriptions (which were unavailable at Xu's time), the original word "𠂔" meaning "deceased father" did exist, as in "皇𠂔" (《齊鐘》) or in "厥𠂔" (《司土司敦》). See Sun Yongchang, *op. cit.*, p.41. Even today, we use expressions such as "考妣" or "顯考" (in epitaphs) with the same meaning.

166. The diagram is excerpted from 容庚 (Yong Geng) (1985), 《金文編》 (*A Collection of Bronze Inscriptions*), 北京:中華書局, p.596. Noteworthy is the fact that out of the 135 samples of this character collected by Yong, 2 samples were inscribed as 𠂔, around 80 samples contain the complete character of 老 as the basic component of the resultant script 考, and more than 50 samples have been, componentially speaking, simplified to a form similar to the modern 考. Also noteworthy is that while the annotatively derived script 考 appeared in such great numbers in the bronze inscriptions, the same character can barely be found in the oracle scripts, although in a few rare instances, some ancient forms of 老 and 耄 were suspected to stand for 考. See Xu Zhongshu (徐中舒) (1998), 《甲骨文字典》 (*A Lexicon of Oracle Scripts*), 成都:四川辭書出版社, p.941; see also Yu Shengwu (于省吾) (1996), 《甲骨文字詁林》 Vol. 1, 北京:中華書局, p.76.

167. *Analogon* and *analogate* were terms used in medieval Europe for the description of the internal conceptual relationship related to analogy. See Thomas de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan), *The Analogy of Names, op.cit.*, Chapter 4, "The distinction of the analogon from the analogates", pp. 30 *et seq.* In my earlier work on Humboldt, I have translated *analogon* as 類比原項, and *analogate* as 類比衍項.

168. As reported by Sun Yongchang himself, in the reappraisal of the relation between annotative derivative and phonetic compounds, he is much indebted to Zheng Zhen (鄭珍, aka. 鄭子尹) and his son Zheng Zhitong (鄭知同), two Qing scholars not widely known by posterity. See Sun's 《轉注論》, *op. cit.*, p. 206f.

169. F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p.172.

170. Now by looking at the roots of the issue, we can even argue that this basic principle of creation through renovation and conservation is applicable not only to annotative derivation, but to character formation in general. Taking a closer look at all the six ways of character formation, we can readily show that with the limited exceptions of extremely primitive constructions, most Chinese characters are the results of remodeling or renovations upon more primitive elements. 1) *Pictographs* (象形): Naturally, a lot of pictographs are new artistic creations in the real sense of the term. But a lot of them were renovations based on more original prototypes. For example, the simple pictographs "鳥", "鳥", "鳥" (three kinds of birds) are obviously modified from the more generic "鳥"; other so-called composite pictographs such as "眉", "衰", "疇" are modified from the simple pictographs "目", "衣" and "田" respectively. [See 段玉裁 (Duan Yucan), 《說文解字注》 (Annotations to the *Shuowen Jiezi*), Book 15. Shanghai, 上海古籍出版社, 1988. p. 755.] 2) *Ideographs* (指事): Ideographs such as "本", "末", "刃" and "甘" are adopted from "木", "刀" and "口" respectively. Since modifications of this kind are usually bound to specific situations, their formation is carried out only case by case and their number is therefore quite limited. 3) *Compound ideographs* (會意): This kind of characters best testify to the imagination of the ancient Chinese people. Basically they are imaginative combinations of simpler pictographs, as exemplified by the two classical examples of "信" (= "人" + "言") and "武" (= "止" + "戈"). The composite nature of compound ideographs shows clearly that they are result of renovation instead of creation. Being quite rich in number, one regrettable thing about compound ideographs is that in many occasions, the source components might not be as conspicuous as the two examples cited above. For example, the compound ideographs "父", "及", "共", "尹", "寸", "友", "爭", "受", "秦", "晉", "書" etc. are all modified from the one character "手" (=hand); and "出", "之", "前", "韋", "步", "陟", "降", "定", "復", "奔" etc. from "止" (=toe/foot). However, after various phases of script reform (that of *Li*-transformation 隸變 in particular), a lot of basic script components (such as those of "手" and "止" in the above cases) have been blurred to the extent that their identity is no longer obvious for the layman. 4) *Phonetic compounds* (形聲) are combinations of visual and phonetic elements in the hope of benefiting from both of them. They are further examples of graphical renovation in the sense that only existing elements are used. If, as mentioned before, many seeming phonetic compounds should be reclassified as annotative derivatives, the actual number of this kind of script would be much less than previously assumed. In fact, Sun is of the opinion that, as a less flexible and less productive means of

construction, phonetic compounds were only an intermediate stage on the way for Chinese to find a better channel of graphical multiplication. 5) *Loan characters* (假借) are in fact nothing but sound tags. Again, as far as this involves the borrowing of existing elements, the renovating principle is again at work. Loan characters were developed much earlier than phonetic compounds. Unluckily, since Chinese scripts were from the beginning not phonetic scripts; phonetic borrowing is bound to create ambiguities, which requires the final process of annotative derivatives to disambiguate them. 6) *Annotative derivatives* (轉注), as argued thoroughly by Sun, are the best exemplification of creation through renovation. For Sun, the hitherto neglected phenomenon of "annotative derivation" is in fact the most significant force underlying the development and multiplication of the Chinese script.

171. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*, p.81. "...weil die dort entwickelte Schreibweise schon in sich in gewisser Weise eine philosophische Arbeit beweist."

172. The only exceptions seem to lie in scientific terms like "氫", "氛", "氣", "燭", "網", "鐮", "砂", "糖", "羶 (originally a kind of goat)" etc. In such cases, analogy of script type-1 is again used.

173. *Brief an Abel-Rémusat*, p. 81.

174. For the following statistics, see 李敏生 (Li Minsheng) (1997), "漢字構詞的獨立性及認識論意義", in: 《漢字哲學初探》 (*A First Attempt at a Philosophy of the Chinese Script*), Beijing: p.188 *et seq.*

175. Elmar Holenstein, "Doppelte Artikulation in der Schrift", in (1980): *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, pp. 319-333. After the presentation of this paper in Zürich, I had the privilege to discuss this issue in detail with Holenstein for a whole week and have solicited his understanding and agreement with my basic views. During our discussion, one main topic has been whether one can justifiably apply the notion of "double articulation of script" in explaining the two layered analogy of writing in Chinese as proposed by Humboldt. Holenstein shared my view that, of course, one might disagree with my thesis by raising the objection that analogy of script type-1 is dealing with elements that already have meaning and not with meaningless signs as required by the so-called second articulation (the "cenematic" for Hjelmslev) in phonological studies. While this objection is valid, there is one thing that we should not forget: In terms of structural analysis, we can justifiably speak of anisomorphism (a notion I borrowed from Holenstein's above quoted paper), which means that, similar or comparable structures might not necessarily need to have exactly the same form. What we can do is to judge from a functional point of view, to see for what purpose a layer of structure is serving. In comparing language and script, we

can use word formation as our point of reference. So considered, we see clearly that, while in language words have to be composed of morphemes, a written Chinese word has to be composed of characters, which are in fact morphemes in their own right. Now, the Chinese writing practice obviously has a much more complicated structure, involving strokes, radicals, characters, words, and sentence. If we have to follow the strict rule of designating meaningless elements to be the dividing line between first and second articulation, then we might have to resort to drawing this boundary at the stroke level (筆畫, for in Chinese writing, only strokes are meaningless, the next higher structure, the radicals, already possess meaning), which then will make the span or spectrum of the first (*plerematic*) articulation too long and cumbersome to be of real use in explaining the everyday grammatological (writing) practice of the Chinese. This idea of double articulation in the Chinese scripts, if correctly understood, will provide guidelines for the didactics of Chinese in the future.

176. See Roman Jakobson (1984), "Dialectics in language", in Roman Jakobson, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Elmar Holenstein, *Das Erbe Hegels II*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.

177. Should we have asked Humboldt for his opinion on such plans, he would have surely answered: "According to my opinion, it is nearly impossible for the Chinese script to be readjusted as an alphabetic script." (*Brief an Abel-Rémusat*: p.81.)

威海姆·冯·洪堡特的汉语理论：解释与重建

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德国近代语言学家威海姆·冯·洪堡特除了是普通语言学的奠基者外，於汉语亦素有研究。对洪堡特来说，语言的共同性不外指语言作为一种心智活动所涉及的一般运作原则。在说明这些运作原则时，洪堡特强调应以各民族语言的个别特性为依据。洪堡特认为语言有如一有机体，在历史的演变过程中，会因其本身已表现的特质而寻求独特的发展方向。就汉语而言，洪堡特首先指出了「语音匮乏」、「语音分离」(单音节)等特点，使汉语不像西方语言一般，能以屈折的「形态学(构词法)」去构成一强势的外在形式语法系统。然而，汉语却另辟蹊径，除了演变成一不重视语音外在形式，却重视精神内在驾驭的语法系统外，更发展出一系列的「补偿机制」，以确保语法的灵活运作。同样地，由於语音匮乏的根本限制，汉字的发展采取了语音和图像兼顾的途径，而且藉著洪堡特所谓「文字类比」原则，使潜伏於人类思维深处的创造力得以充分发挥。本文除了是洪堡特汉语理论的解释外，亦尝试对其理论加以重建。本文除徵引洪堡特的基本著作外，亦采纳了当代中外学者有关汉语和汉字的观点，其中对胡朴安和孙雍长二氏之理论，作了较详细的介绍。