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TOWARDS A TRANSPARENT TRANSCRIPTION*

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Abstract

This article discusses some methodological issues concerning a Transparent Transcription for excavated early Chinese manuscripts, featuring a necessary step-by-step transcribing process. Starting from a reconsideration of the *liding* 隸定 tradition, the present study pays particular attention to problems related to direct transcription. Both the importance of such an approach to transcribing and the reasons why a direct transcription cannot always work are examined. The discussion includes examples of (1) archaic graphs with components that cannot be directly transcribed, (2) archaic graphs with direct transcriptions that are identical to different graphs, (3) classifier variations of archaic graphs, and (4) graphs with cursive stylized strokes. Basically, Transparent Transcription involves four steps of transcription, although not all of them are always needed, i.e., Tracing Transcription (TT), Direct Transcription (DT), *Liding* Transcription (LT), and Interpretive Transcription (IT), in addition to a series of working principles and rules, as well as a database of archaic classifiers with their conventional standard equivalents.

1. Introduction

Today it is hard to overstate the importance of excavated Chinese manuscripts, which have significantly changed our understanding of and expectation for a

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more real early China. With bamboo and silk texts dated from the Warring States to Han periods available, we are able to directly communicate with early Chinese intellectuals through their original writings. Such communication unavoidably relies on deciphering and reading the archaic Chinese writing systems that were no more used after 221 BCE. However, transcribing and interpreting excavated bamboo and silk texts is not at all a new enterprise for us. According to tradition, Kong Anguo 孔安國 (ca.156 – ca.74 BCE) transcribed many of those archaic graphs in the archaic version of the *Shangshu* 尙書 into their corresponding "clerical script" (*lishu* 隸書) forms based on the context and meaning of the excavated pre-Qin classic.[1] This transcribing procedure was consequently called "identifying archaic graphs with their clerical script forms" (*liguding* 隸古定 or *liding* 隸定),[2] a tradition that has been well accepted and developed by Chinese paleographers for over two millennia.

The apparent presumption behind the *liding* tradition is that archaic graphs have their clerical script equivalents. More or less due to this presupposition, traditional Chinese scholars seem to only pay attention to identifying those clerical, or more accurately, "standard script" (*zhengshu* 正書) equivalents of the archaic graphs rather than faithfully depicting the original forms of the archaic graphs, i.e., graphic forms that were exactly written on bamboo and silk. This methodological tendency leads to the ambiguity of the *liding* transcripts. It is not uncommon that the reader gets lost when s/he tries to identify a clear connection between a transcribed form and the original archaic graph being transcribed. With the help of advanced photographing and printing technologies, original forms of archaic graphs currently can be easily accessed by the reader, thus some scholars even believe that further discussions on transparent transcriptions are no more necessary because when the photos of the original archaic graphs are available, everything one needs for research is already in what Chinese paleographers or editors have provided in their *liding* transcriptions. This is evidently unconvincing to me because I do not consider a transcription transparent if readers, in particular those without sufficient paleographical training or knowledge, are unable to tell basic reasons why an archaic graph was transcribed into one particular standard character, or particularly, if they are

1 Kong Yingda B 1: 3 bottom.

2 *Shangshu xu* 尙書序 reads, "Using the text that I learnt from Fu Sheng, I scrutinized the meaning of the writings, identified those that could be known and transcribed those that were in archaic graphs, with their clerical script forms. 以所聞伏生之書, 考論文義, 定其可知者, 爲隸古定." Kong Yingda B 1: 3 bottom.

unable to tell that a transcribed form is actually a pending suggestion of a controversial archaic graph.

Western scholars have paid serious attention to problems in the *liding* tradition. When William G. Boltz proposed his transcription rules, he is critical to the practice of transcribing "what is meant" rather than "what is written", the physical graphic form to be found in the manuscript.[3] Martin Kern's further discussion extends Boltz's principles into the treatment of textual variants.[4] With Matthias Richter's proposal of his three-step transcription, not only the separation of "what is written" from "what is meant" is clearly presented but also the transcribing procedure becomes transparent.[5] Roughly speaking, since Noel Barnard published his work in direct transcription on the Zidanku 子彈庫 Chu manuscript in the early 1970s, the practice of and discussion on direct transcription have never ceased.[6] As a challenge against the ambiguity of *liding* transcription, direct transcription, as well as related arguments and principles, is a question that a Chinese scholar should not and cannot evade or even ignore with or without arrogance.

In this article, I try to respond to the theories and practices of direct transcription in the Western Sinological tradition. While surveying and reconsidering quite a few example graphs in this article, I am still unable to cover all the related examples and cases. Neither do I intend to resolve all the problems that I introduce. This ambitious goal must be achieved by collective endeavors of scholars from both the East and the West in generations. In the following discussion, I will first reexamine the *liding* tradition in China. Secondly, I will reconsider some working principles and problems of direct transcription. Lastly, I will suggest a transcribing procedure including Tracing Transcription, Direct Transcription, *Liding* Transcription, and Interpretive Transcription, towards a transparent transcription.[7]

3 Boltz 2000: 40–41. In the presentation of his paper "Problems in Dealing with an Early Imperial Tomb Library", Michael Friedrich also discussed similar problems at the first Hamburg Tomb Text Workshop, July 2000.

4 Kern 2002: 150–155.

5 Richter 2003: 4–11.

6 Barnard 1972 & 1973; Xing Wen 2003: 118–123.

7 As no questions would be raised for the names of DT and LT, the names of TT and IT could be controversial. By calling TT and IT "transcriptions", I focus on the transcribing aspects of these two steps in the approach in question. In a transparent transcription, a tracing can never be a strict tracing but both tracing and transcribing that lead to further transcriptions. For similar reasons, as the final step of a transparent transcription, an IT is still a transcription that is derived from a LT rather than a simply interpretive reading.

2. Reconsidering *Liding* Tradition

Not as late as most people imagined, the origins of the *liding* tradition actually can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. During the Warring States period, abbreviated and cursive writing forms of some components of Qin 秦 state graphs, which were used before Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 established the Chinese empire, lead to a stylistic transformation of those components in a script that is significantly different from the Warring States archaic graphs but very close to the later clerical script forms. This graphic transformation is called "clerical transformation" (*libian* 隸變).[8] From the following example of the graph 相, it is evident that the clerical transformation technically prepared the ground for the later *liding* tradition, and in this typical case, the clerical transformation form is exactly the later *liding* transcription form.[9]

Table I. A comparison between Warring States period graphic forms and the *liding* form of 相: an illustration of clerical transformation

Names of states	Warring States period forms of 相	The *liding* form of 相
1. Qi 齊	1.1	相
2. Chu 楚	2.1 2.2 	
3. Yan 燕	3.1	
4. Jin 晉	4.1 4.2 	
5. Qin 秦	5.1 5.2  5.3	

In the above table, all those graphs from 1.1 to 5.3 are archaic, being used in the pre-Qin period. It is not difficult to tell the distinctions between them and the *liding* form 相, except graph 5.3. Graph 5.3 is a clerical transformation form of graphs 5.1 and 5.2. It is basically identical with its *liding* form.

The connections among the above graphs can also be observed. All the archaic graphs except graph 3.1 have a "wood" classifier 木, which is written as either  or  . According to later standards, is a form of "archaic script" (*guwen* 古文), and is the "seal script" (*zhuanshu* 篆書) form. Neither form can be considered "clerical" if the strokes of the component are not in clerical

8 For an examination on the origin and definition of the term, see Zhao Ping'an 1993: 1–6.

9 In most cases, clerical transformation only occurs in certain components of a graph. The typical aspect here is that both components of the graph 相 were under "clerical transformation".

strokes or even standard strokes such as that in graph 5.3, 木. Similarly, archaic forms of the component written as  ,  or  , the last of which is actually a seal form, etc., cannot be considered "clerical" either, unless it is in a more "clerical" or "standard" form such as 目. It is self-evident that *liding* is a term coined only after the establishment of clerical script. As a Warring States graph appeared before the formation of clerical script, graph 5.3  , which is in the same form as that in its *liding* transcription, is a typical example of clerical transformation and its connection with the later *liding* tradition.

Needless to say, 相 is not the only example of clerical transformation. In his *Libian yanjiu* 隸變研究, Zhao Ping'an 趙平安 provides a list of *libian* components.[10] Those simplified Warring States Qin graphs or classifiers, i.e., *libian* components, illustrate the possibility and practicality of the later scholars using clerical script components and strokes to transcribe the pre-Qin archaic graphs. Considering the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 accounts of graphical component analyses in the early 6th century BCE,[11] I am convinced that the *liding* tradition has its origins at least in such clerical stylistic transformation of the Warring States Qin archaic graphs in the pre-Qin period.

The *liding* tradition has profound significance in the study of Chinese civilization. *Liding* made it possible to read and transmit early Chinese classics and texts in archaic script in the 2nd century BCE, after Qin Shihuang banned most intellectual writings and burned Confucian texts. *Liding* enabled the development of the "Study of Bronzes and Stones" *jinshi xue* 金石學 in the 11th century Northern Song 宋 China, and this study is considered as the precursor of Chinese archaeology.[12] *Liding* is also the basic methodology for early Chinese scholars in the beginning of the 20th century to decipher and interpret the Yin 殷 oracle bone inscriptions, which ended the long-lasting doubts and debates on the reliability of the textual records of the Shang 商 dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) in China's first official history *Shiji* 史記. It is the *liding* tradition that preserves invaluable material of the pre-Qin paleography which defines the current study of excavated early Chinese bamboo and silk manuscripts. However, like any methodology originating from millennia ago, *liding* unavoidably has its deficiencies and limitations. By transcribing archaic graphs into clerical or standard script forms, *liding* carries the presupposition that all those archaic

10 Zhao Ping'an 1993: 10.

11 In the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, "Xuan 12" has, "In writing, 止 and 戈 compose the graph 武. 夫文, 止戈爲武"; "Xuan 15" has, "Thus in writing, the reverse of 正 is the graph 乏. 故文反正爲乏." Kong Yingda A 23: 180 middle and 24: 186 top.

12 *Zhongguo da baike quanshu kaogu xue bianji weiyuanhui* 1986: 236.

scripts have their clerical script equivalents or, at least, can be identified as stylistic variants of clerical forms. This is where the problems of the tradition lie. In general, those problems involve two types of archaic script graphs: (1) the pre-Qin archaic graphs or components with no corresponding clerical script forms, and (2) the pre-Qin archaic graphs or components with clerical script equivalents which are identical to different graphs in clerical or standard script.

2.1 Archaic Graphs with No Clerical Equivalents

In this category, there are three types of graphs.

2.1.1 Graphs or components that were already no more in use by the end of the pre-Qin period

Not all the archaic graphs were still in use in or after the Qin dynasty. Many archaic graphs died in the pre-Qin age. E.g. many of the characters found in Yin 殷 oracle bone inscriptions had already become obsolete by the end of the Zhou dynasty. The *Jiaguwen bian* 甲骨文編 collects 4,672 characters.[13] Plus those collected in the *Xu jiaguwen bian* 續甲骨文編, the total number is over 5,000.[14] Even though the latest and more accurate statistics suggest a number of around 4,000 characters in the Yin oracle bone inscriptions, the actual number must have exceeded the number that we are able to see today.[15] Guo Moruo 郭沫若 considers that half of the oracle bone inscriptions are undecipherable, such as names of places, people and clans.[16] It is reasonable to accept that quite a substantial portion of the Yin oracle bone inscriptions, in particular proper names, were not used any longer after the Shang dynasty, e.g. the characters  ,  , and , etc.[17]

13 Sun Haibo 1965.

14 Jin Xiangheng 1959.

15 Li Xueqin 2000: 31.

16 Guo Moruo 1973: 250.

17 The bronze inscriptions are a similar case. The *Jinwen bian* 金文編 includes over 12,000 graphs, but the editor only considers 2,000 of them as deciphered. See "Publisher's Introduction" in Rong Geng 1959.

2.1.2 Graphs or components that were still in use in the pre-Qin period but possibly became obsolete in or after the Qin period

Many archaic graphs that were not used any longer in or after the Qin dynasty were still in use in the Warring States period. The manuscripts excavated from Baoshan 包山 contain such examples, for instance  and , etc.

2.1.3 Graphs or components that existed in the Qin and Han periods but have no corresponding clerical script forms

Not all archaic forms had clerical script equivalents in the Qin or Han periods. Some strokes with pictographic features are difficult to be clericalized. For example, in the Mawangdui 馬王堆 silk manuscript *Xingde* 刑德,  is basically pictographic although the ending of the bottom stroke is clearly executed in clerical script style. This is also true for some components only. Some components in clerical script form graphs are still, or to some degree, pictographic; they are not strokes in clerical script form, even though the whole character should be considered as clerical script. The upper component of 柔 in the Mawangdui *Shida* 十大 text is such an example. Examine the original graph  , the top part of which is still somehow pictographic. The transcribed form 矛 actually does not match that of the original. In all of the above cases, a *liding* transcription actually misleads the reader, because the elements of the clerical character chosen for the *liding* transcription do not match the elements of the original character thus transcribed.

2.2 Archaic Graphs with Clerical Equivalents

Similar problems also exist in those pre-Qin archaic graphs, the corresponding clerical script forms of which are identical to other Chinese characters. Such cases can be divided into three groups.

2.2.1 Archaic graphs whose direct clerical script equivalents are not identical to the clerical or standard script character conventionally used for the same word

The archaic graphs of 仁 and 義 are illustrative examples. It is difficult to consider  as 仁 and as 義 according to common knowledge. Direct *liding* transcription forms make no sense to the reader who has no knowledge of paleography. The vertical combination of components 身 and 心 as well as 我 and 心 seem to mean characters other than 仁 and 義. The *liding* transcription

forms only make sense when they are complemented by the characters conventionally standing for the word they are supposed to represent.

2.2.2 Archaic graphs with variants that share the clerical or standard script forms for the same word

Examples of this category include 喪 with the archaic form variants  and  , 氣 with the archaic form variants  ,  , and  , and 好 with the archaic form variants  and  , etc. In this case, conventional clerical script forms cannot match all the original variations. Any standard *liding* transcription of one graphic form is inevitably a misrepresentation of the other variations. Many of those variants actually stood for the same character even in the time when they were written.

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2.2.4 Archaic graphs and their components with direct clerical script transcriptions that equate to different clerical or standard script characters

Such identical forms not only derive from distinct archaic graphs but also have different semantic significance. In other words, the so-called identical graphs are actually only graphically identical or, more accurately, graphically similar to the archaic graphs in question; they are not semantically related to each other at all. Such examples include 言 and 音, and 父 and 夂, etc., which will be discussed below.

In the light of the problems sketched above, alterations to the archaic graphs are unavoidable in the *liding* transcribing process, thus the result of *liding* tran-

scription could be very ambiguous and misleading. This is why a transparent and informed transcribing procedure is necessary.

3. Reconsidering Direct Transcription

Trying to limit the problems of *liding* transcription to a minimum, Western scholars proposed some working principles in order to produce a direct transcription rather than just a single *liding* transcription. In his study of the Guodian 郭店 *Laozi* 老子 manuscripts, William G. Boltz proposed two transcription rules that challenge the prevailing *liding* tradition. The following discussion is actually a continuation of and response to such important methodological considerations.

The two transcribing rules that Boltz suggests are as follows:

> Transcription Rule I: Characters that are wholly visible and legible must be transcribed exactly as written, without either abbreviation or elaboration of their constituent graphic structure. [...]
> Transcription Rule II: The transcription must rigorously distinguish what the manuscript writes from what the editor adds, subtracts, or emends by way of conjecture.[18]

It is clear that the spirit of the rules is that of direct transcription. Similarly, both Martin Kern and Matthias Richter believe that transcriptions should faithfully reflect what is actually written and include all components in their original structure.[19] This is what Noel Barnard tried to do in his study of the Chu manuscript.[20]

Barnard divided his Direct Transcription into two steps: Modern Character Form and Modern Character Parallel.[21] He defines his Direct Transcription as "essentially a means of preserving significant aspects of the original graph in a modern-style calligraphic form".[22] This can be seen from his transcription of graph 2-24  as 徵, which is a faithful direct transcription.[23] His Modern Character Parallel is actually a direct *liding* transcription, but his Modern

18 Boltz 2000: 40–41.
19 Richter 2003: 2–3.
20 Barnard 1973.
21 Barnard 1973: 33.
22 Barnard 1973: 33.
23 Barnard 1973: 82, 85–86.

Character Form also shows a similar treatment, which should have been avoided. For example, Barnard's transcription of graph A 1-4  as 龍, although absolutely accurate and correct, is not necessarily "direct".[24] In the transcription, he transcribed  as 肉 rather than 月. A semantic interpretation, which belongs to his Modern Character Parallel, was already put into this transcription. This transcribing practice may be acceptable for practical reasons, but it confuses the reader with the inconstancy of its working principles; it also violates both Boltz's Transcription Rules.

One of the most impressive parts of Barnard's work lies in his discussion of the calligraphic aspects of the Chu silk manuscript.[25] Due to the use of a Chinese writing brush, some components, or even the whole graph, cannot be transcribed into what Barnard calls the Modern Character Form part of his Direct Transcription, wherefore the original archaic forms also appear in the transcribed forms.[26] Matthias Richter conducted a more advanced examination. In his three-step transcribing procedure, the principle Richter proposes in the first step not only elevates Barnard's discussion to a theoretical level but also makes Boltz's Rule I even more practicable: "Parts of the original characters that cannot be unambiguously related to specific graphic elements of modern Chinese script should be presented in their original shape (e.g. 正 for ) in the DIRECT TRANSCRIPTION, as is common practice in the case of undecipherable characters (待考字)."[27] This suggestion unveils at least one important problem in direct transcription: not all archaic graphs or components are open to be directly transcribed.

Boltz has clearly presented the significance of direct transcription in his studies, for instance, the different transcriptions or readings 支, 卞, 鞭, and 辯 for the same character in the Guodian *Laozi* material.[28] Similar examples are not hard to find, such as – and 牾 in the Guodian manuscripts.[29] In support of Boltz's Transcription Rule I, the following example illustrates that certain implications of the archaic graphs will never show up without direct transcription.

24 Barnard 1973: 69, 71–72.
25 Barnard 1973: 19–53.
26 Barnard 1973: 52, Figure 19.
27 Richter 2003: 4.
28 Boltz 1999: 599.
29 Kern 2002: 152; Xing Wen 2003: 119. As for a systematic discussion on graphic variation, see Boltz 1994: 158–177.

In the Guodian version of the text *Wuxing* 五行, there are two 直 graphs on slip 34. The first one is written as  , the second as  .[30] The editors of *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 transcribed the first as 植 (直) and the second as 悳 (直).[31] The transplantation of the 木 classifier to the left side of the 直 in the first character is a standard *liding* transcription but evidently violates the direct transcription rule. It misleads the reader since 植 has its current conventional meaning, which is different from 直. It also conceals some composing codes of the Warring States Chu graphs.[32] By placing the 木 classifier in its original position under the 直, i.e., , it would be much easier for the reader to figure out the original meaning of the archaic graph since an unnecessary reasoning transaction, i.e. from () to 植 to 直 rather than from () directly to 直, is avoided. Moreover, to retain both the 木 and 心 classifiers in the direct transcription is very important for comprehending the original meaning of the sentences. If the transcription only has the modern equivalent 直 of the two graphs, the semantic part of the first 直, the 木 (tree) classifier, disappears, and the same thing happens to the semantic part of the second 直, the 心 (mind) classifier. Thus the implication of the difference between the two 直, the first of which is related to physical action while the second concerns intention, diminishes and it becomes impossible for us to understand the text more accurately, and we miss the opportunity of enjoying both the semantic and philosophical nuances of the text.

Boltz's Transcription Rule II requires that anything that the transcription editor adds, subtracts or emends must be rigorously distinguished from what was originally written in the manuscript. In fact, in order to better implement this principle, any unnecessary addition to the transcription by means of conjecture must be strictly avoided. The editors should present the readers with the facts and clearly distinguish their own conjectures from what is written in the manuscripts, in order to allow the readers to form their own judgments.

In the transcription of *Yu cong si* 語叢四 in the Guodian texts, the first sentence reads, "言以司(詞)" in the transcription.[33] At first sight, it seems that the editors clearly distinguished the suggested 詞 from the original 司 by the parentheses. However, from the later scholarship, the reader can realize that the

30 *Jingmen shi bowuguan* 1998: 33.

31 *Jingmen shi bowuguan* 1998: 150.

32 The significance of some classifiers in the Warring States graphs is profound. As Wei-ming Tu pointed out, the 心 classifier in some Guodian texts has an enormous intellectual significance. See Wei-ming Tu 1999: 6 and Xing Wen 2000: 9.

33 *Jingmenshi bowuguan* 1998: 217.

original graph  ,[34] which could be transcribed as either 司,[35] 始,[36] 殆,[37] or 怠[38] according to both the graphic form and the context, does not necessarily have to be 詞.[39] Needless to say, how misleading 言以司(詞) could be if it were not the original meaning, since the implied interpretation, "speak with words", is so self-evident and reasonable at first glance.

While emphasizing the importance of direct transcription rules proposed by William Boltz, Martin Kern further discussed the limits of direct transcription in his methodological study on textual variants.[40] He indicated three situations in which a direct transcription would be misleading. First, the structure of components of an archaic script shares the same structure of components with another character in its standard script form, for instance, the word *wei* 唯 is in the Guodian manuscripts written as 售.[41] Second, the archaic graphic idiosyncrasy does not have an exact equivalent in its standard script form. Third, the graphic form of a so-called "vulgar character" has to be interpreted by reference to its standard counterpart.[42] Kern's examples are chosen from the perspective of textual variants. For a reconsideration of working principles of direct transcription, I will in the following examine three sorts of cases in which a direct transcription is apparently difficult.

3.1 Archaic graphs with components that cannot be directly transcribed

3.1.1 Graphs or components of pictographic forms

Pictographic forms usually occur in early writings. For example, the pictographs  for 狩,[43] and  for 集.[44] Such pictographs are impossible to be directly

34 *Jingmenshi bowuguan* 1998: 105, slip 1.
35 *Jingmenshi bowuguan* 1998: 217.
36 Lin Suqing 2000: 390.
37 Chen Wei 2002: 230–231.
38 Chen Weiwu 2003: 200.
39 *Jingmenshi bowuguan* 1998: 217.
40 Kern 2002: 152–153.
41 This example is similar to 植 and  , but it involves more interpretive considerations. Although it is not difficult to identify the intended words from their contexts, it is still problematic to transcribe a character with a form identical to a character conventionally standing for a different word.
42 Kern 2002: 153.
43 Yu Xingwu 1996: 3084.
44 Rong Geng 1959: 208.

transcribed if we do not make any changes.[45] In later bamboo and silk manuscripts, pictographs basically disappear although some remains still show up once in a while. This is the case with graphs representing the word *yin* 因. The origin and semantic implications of these graphs are quite controversial.[46] In the Guodian material, 因 appears as  in *Yu cong yi* 語叢一,[47] and as  in *Zun deyi* 尊德義.[48] I tend to believe that the graphic form imitates the shape of a wrapped corpse.[49] In any case, a direct transcription of this graph seems impracticable or unnecessary, due to its pictographic form in either example.

3.1.2 Graphs or components that are not linearized

Such graphs or components are basically no more considered as pictographs, although certain pictographic features distinguish their strokes from the common appearance of conventional strokes. This is particularly true for those pre-Qin archaic graphs that carry some characteristics of late Shang and early Zhou bronze inscriptions. Graphs with filled-in round or square components are such examples that are hard to be transcribed. Those filled-in parts were difficult even for early Chinese people to write and transmit, thus, as we will see in the following examples, various indicating strokes were used to replace or indicate the filled-in parts. The application of indicating strokes in direct transcription does of course not accord with the basic idea of direct transcription. But it is an essential part of the evolution of the Chinese writing system. The implications of those practices are two-fold. On the one hand, they prove that absolute direct transcription is almost impossible in some cases, unless one writes at least part of the character as a tracing. On the other hand, they provide solutions to a transcription that comes closest to direct transcription. Let us turn to some representative situations and practices in the following cases.

a) Linearizing the filled-in part into one straight stroke
正 is an example. The top stroke of 正 is a filled-in component, as in  , in its archaic forms. Conventional transcription simply linearizes the filled-in part into a straight stroke by transcribing as 正. This is also a practice in early China

45 In the example of 集, a transcription of 隹 is clearly interpretive, rather than direct, to the original graph .

46 Yu Xingwu 1996: 92–103.

47 *Jingmenshi bowuguan* 1998: 79, slip 31.

48 *Jingmenshi bowuguan* 1998: 56, slip 17.

49 See also arguments referring to "Jixi li 既夕禮" of the *Yili* 儀禮 in He Linyi 1998: 1106 top.

since  was also written as  in archaic forms, where the top filled-in component was just a short horizontal stroke.[50] A similar example can be found in  , which is transcribed as 車, where the bottom horizontal stroke represents the filled-in knot in the lower part of the archaic form.

b) Outlining the filled-in components

山 was usually written as  in the archaic form. A transcription of depicts the filled-in component with an empty triangle outline as in  . A similar example is 玉; the graph shows up with a filled-in component as  in the 4th century BCE Baoshan material, and there is a contemporary variant  , in which clearly the filled-in part has been outlined. When  (生) was written as  , this also falls into this category.

c) Outlining the filled-in components with similar rather than exact profile strokes

Sometimes strokes only roughly indicating the profile of the filled-in components are used. Such examples can be seen in the applications of the upper part of 已 and middle part of 瓜. In the Baoshan material, there is a  , which is transcribed as 軎已 . The top part of 已 is an open component that only roughly indicates the filled-in part in  . The component 厶 is used in the same function as in 瓜. The character  in the Baoshan inscriptions has been transcribed as 瓜瓜.[51] Non-filled-in components can also be transcribed in a similar way, e.g., those of the standard and inverted pictographic forms of 子. See Boltz 1994: 111.

Besides the upper part of 已 and the component 厶, other frequent examples of graphic elements in modern standard script with similar functions are the following:

50 As Matthias Richter correctly pointed out, I did not make the distinction between the development of the writing system and the transcription of archaic graphs into modern standard script forms here, in particular in the following example of 生. However, what I want to present is that a later or even contemporary graph, such as  and  , could be actually a transcription of an earlier or contemporary graph, such as  and  , in the development of the script. Such variants or development of characters in history serve as bases of a transparent transcription.

51 Non-filled-in components can also be transcribed in a similar way, e.g., those of the standard and inverted pictographic forms of 子. Cf. Boltz 1994: 111.

口 The component 口 is not only used to outline a square filled-in component, but it can also be used in this way. In a Warring States Chu bamboo text, 風 was written as  . The bottom filled-in part, which looks like a painted ink dot, is written as 口 in modern script. However, the upper right filled-in component, together with its vertical stroke got lost.

凵 In some cases the equivalent of the archaic dot looks like 口 without its upper horizontal stroke, e.g. in 屯 as a transcription of  . The upper filled-in component in the archaic original has simply been omitted in the transcribed form, and the lower filled-in component represented by 凵.

廿 Another typical case is 廿. In the Warring States Chu bamboo slip writings, the top filled-in components of the original  or  , both of which stand for 共, have a dot as their upper component, which is conventionally transcribed as 廿, which depicts the shape of a vessel. 共 is usually considered as the protoform of 供, offering things in a vessel with two hands.[52] Thus the original pictography of the filled-in part, which had been somehow simplified, was sometimes also reconstructed and traced during the outlining process.

Short strokes, including dots, are commonly used indications of filled-in parts inside transcribed outlines. The short vertical stroke in the upper part of 巴 functions in this way. For an example of such an original, see the component in  (肥) in the Baoshan inscriptions. In the graph 卵, the filled-in parts of the original, e.g.  , are represented by both the outlines and two dots inside them.

d) Indicating filled-in components with short strokes

Different from the short strokes inside the profiles, independent strokes, often short, are also used to indicate filled-in components. 土, written as  , is a very common example. The bottom part of the vertical stroke is thicker, just like a filled-in triangle. It could be written by outlining the filled-in triangle with a small circle, as in  . But in a transcription it is definitely better indicated by a short horizontal stroke as in 土. The same is true for 生,  , which could also be written  as we just mentioned above, but it was also written as  with a short horizontal stroke indicating the filled-in component. A similar example is 古, with the horizontal stroke indicating the filled-in component in , and so is 千, .

52 Qiu Xigui 2000: 189.

e) Indicating filled-in components with both short strokes and profile strokes
In early writing, a short stroke seemed not to be a satisfactory equivalent of a filled-in component. Thus in some cases, both indicating short strokes and profile strokes were used at the same time. A typical example is 才, which was written  or in its archaic form. However, its contemporary variants include forms such as and . Extra horizontal strokes were used in addition to the outline strokes.

f) Indicating filled-in components with T-shaped strokes
In bronze age China, 丁 was most commonly written as . An oracle bone inscription wrote it as 口.[53] In the Guodian texts, 丁 appears as , the top part of which is almost a horizontal line. This may explain the rationale why a T-shaped 丁 can transcribe a filled-in ink dot – the overall image of the graph here roughly resembles a T-shape.

Considering all the above examples, it is evident that neither the conventional transcriptions nor in some cases early variants, which were contemporary to the archaic graphs, are suitable direct transcriptions of those filled-in components. Different marks are used to indicate the filled-in components. Imitating the shape of the filled-in components in the manner of a tracing hardly makes much sense, as a transcribing practice should not retain pictographic elements.

3.1.3 Graphs with curvilinear strokes

Curvilinear strokes are not always a problem for transcribing. It is a common practice to simply straighten curved strokes during transcribing procedures. , which actually equals 厶, can be easily transcribed as 台 or 以, and simply as 口. However, in the practice of direct transcription, to simply straighten some curvilinear strokes would make either less sense or no sense or could even be misleading. For example, how can be directly transcribed? A combination of directly straightened strokes, , perhaps hardly makes any sense and does not suggest 民. A similar case would be . What can the reader gather from a transcription like , resulting from simply straightening the strokes? It certainly does not convey the information that the character stands for modern standard 於. Transcribing an archaic Chinese script is to decode its semantic components from its graphic form. If a direct transcription transforms a meaningful graph into a senseless or even misleading character, it will hardly mean anything

53 Yu Xingwu 1996: 2088.

sensible at all. In other words, direct transcription in such cases is impractical if not misleading.

4. Archaic graphs with direct transcriptions that are identical to graphs standing for different words

This category includes confusing cases in which some direct transcriptions turn out to be identical in structure with modern standard characters standing for different words. The semantic implications of such identical graphic forms vary in different types.

4.1 Identical forms

 , standing for the word *wei* 唯, is an example.[54] Its direct transcription is 售 rather than 唯, but 售 is a different character from 唯, and conventionally stands for a different word, although both share the same components.

In the case of 唯 and 售, the reader will not be confused too much because one always can decide based on the context, in particular when 唯 functions as a grammatical particle. We are also able to guess at the actual word 唯 from a transcription 售, in this case based on both semantic analysis and construction rules of archaic graphs. However, such speculations do not always work. A direct transcription of  in the Guodian version of the *Ziyi* 緇衣 should be 甘. It would be almost impossible to suspect the real character 心 simply based on the direct transcription. In this case, a direct transcription is evidently misleading. Similar confusions could also be seen in other Warring States scripts. Direct transcriptions of  ,  , and  are 本, 片 (片), and 音, respectively. Who will be able to imagine that these characters actually stand for the words *er* 爾, *zhai* 宅, and *qi* 其 (期) simply based on their direct transcriptions? And in the case of vague contexts, the misleading effects will be magnified.

4.2 Near-identical forms

As we mentioned in the first part of the present discussion, in the practice of direct transcription some transcribed graphs seem to be identical with graphs standing for other words. Those cases can be referred to as near-identical forms,

54 Kern 2002: 153.

because the identical or similar forms in fact have no semantic relation with each other. For example 言 was written as  in the Chu script. A direct transcription of this is something close to 音, which is clearly a different character. However, 言 and 音 have no semantic connections. The 音 as the direct transcription of and the 音 in standard script are not identical graphs. The component  discussed below is directly transcribed as 乂, which is very similar to 上 but it actually stands for *zhi* 止. Similar examples include  , the direct transcription of which is 开, but it actually represents *er* 而, and  , the direct transcription of which is 辛, but it actually writes the word *bu* 不, etc.

4.3 Stylistic confusions

Direct transcriptions of some stylized cursive graphs are identical to specific different graphs. For example, in the Warring States Chu texts collected in the Shanghai Museum, 下 was written as  , a direct transcription of which should be 卞. As a stylized form of 四,  should also be transcribed as a character somehow close to 开 in a direct transcription.

5. Classifier variations of archaic graphs

Classifier variations can also cause confusion in the direct transcription, due to their various forms and positions, in archaic graphs. They include (1) the same classifiers in archaic graphs transcribed differently, (2) the same classifiers with different positions in the originals but transcribed as with the same positions in the respective transcriptions, and (3) the same classifiers transcribed both with different forms and changing positions. Confusions of such classifier variations are caused by the graphic inconsistency between direct transcriptions and conventional usages of the relevant classifiers.

5.1 Variant classifiers

5.1.1 Identical components transcribed into different classifiers

Identical components in archaic graphs can be transcribed into different classifiers. E.g., 迹 in the Guodian *Laozi B* was written  , the 止 classifier of which character being conventionally transcribed as 辶. 乂 (), i.e. 止, is more commonly transcribed 𠂆, as in 足 (), 是 (), or and 楚 (). The 止

classifier with different transcribed forms will be discussed below in the next category.

The graph from which 辶 is actually derived is 辵, i.e. a combination of 彳 and 止. Examples are available from a wide range of materials, e.g. 遠,  and 迷,  , etc. The graphs 止 and 辵 are distinct classifiers, and they should evidently be transcribed differently in the direct transcription. If a direct transcription does not match the conventional transcribed form, such as 辶, or if a conventional form has to alter a direct transcription, confusions are inevitable.

A similar case is that of the 亻 classifier. Written as  in the Guodian manuscript *Zhong xin zhi dao* 忠信之道, the classifier of 信 was written as 千, and the 千 here has to be transcribed 亻. As we know, 亻 is the form the character 人 takes when used as a classifier, such as 𠂉 in  (位), etc., and 千 is a completely different character. So in the case of this classifier, a direct transcription would also lead to confusion.

5.1.2 Identical classifiers conventionally transcribed with different forms

As mentioned above,  (止) has been transcribed as both 辶 and 𧾷. But the 止 classifier can also be transcribed as 辵. In both Guodian *Laozi A* and *B*, 建 was written as  . The bottom part is the classifier , which is the original archaic form of classifier 辵.

It is reasonable to transcribe (止) as either 辶, 𧾷, or 辵 classifiers because they are all 止 (foot) related. A relevant example is 辵. As we said above, an archaic 辵 classifier original is usually transcribed as 辶. However, 辵 is also transcribed as 彳. 後 in the Guodian *Laozi A* was written  with the classifier 辵. Other examples in the Guodian material include 往 (), etc.

5.2 Classifiers with different placements

Changing the position of a classifier in a graph is a method to avoid repetition in early Chinese writing practice. Both  and  are equivalents of the same character 沈, their water classifiers being placed in different positions.[55] 秋 and its variant 烄 are another example of the same phenomenon, and the variant form has been conventionally accepted by now. In cases like 秋 and 烄, where both forms have become accepted by convention, one can retain the respective original arrangements of components also in the transcription, but in cases like

55 Xu Baogui 2002: 268.

沈, where the variant form has not been accepted as a standard form by tradition, one transcribes both variants as the same standard form.

An amazing aspect of Chinese script is that even slight differences in the positions of character components can lead to different characters, whereas in other cases, as those shown above, a totally different position of the whole classifier makes no difference. A common example in modern Chinese characters is the case of 太 and 犬 although the dot (丶) components in the two characters have no etymological connections. A similar or even more confusing case is that of 文 and 旻 in the Chu bamboo slip text *Shilun* 詩論 in the Shanghai Museum collection. 旻 was written  [56] in this Warring States text, but 文 was written  in the same text. However, the confusion does not end here because in most cases in this text, 文 was written as  [57] and . In other words, in this case, 文 was written as 旻, which is in the same form as that of 文.

5.3 Variant classifiers with different placements

Some classifiers have variant forms that are interchangeable in archaic graphs. In the Chu script,  , , and are all the classifiers for 宀 in standard script. A direct transcription of them does not always cause problems. Such classifier variations sometimes occur in combination with a variation in their position. There are some examples in the *Shilun* text. 改 in the *Shilun* was written as both  and . Here the classifier 攵 in the standard script was first written as 攴 and then as 又, both of which are commonly interchangeable in archaic graphs. As we can see, this classifier variation goes together with a variant classifier position, i.e., whereas 攵 is the right part of the first character, 又 is the bottom part of the second one. From this example we can see the necessity of direct transcription. Without direct transcription, the reader will not be able to tell the difference of the classifier variations and placements in the originals.

However, confusing cases are more worthy of mention in this category. In the combined graph 孔子, the 乚 classifier of 孔 has at least four variants according to the editors of the text, and those classifier variations come together with positional variation. In  , 乚 is placed under 子, and in , 乚 is above 子. Although the form of 乚 was varied, there is no problem with transcription. Even when the 乚 component merges into part of the 子 component as  in the manuscript *Min zhi fumu* 民之父母, the reader is still able to tell 孔 based on both the indicating left-falling stroke ノ and the combination graph mark =.

56 Ma Chengyuan 2001: 20.

57 Ma Chengyuan 2001: 13.

However, confusion does arise in  . As  usually is the classifier 宀 in the Chu script, a direct transcription of  would lead to a reading of 字 rather than 孔 for the principal graph. As for the example of  , its decipherment seems still open for discussion. If it really is 孔子, the result of a direct transcription, 卜子, should have already been misleading.[58]

6. Graphs with cursive stylized strokes

Cursive stylized strokes are very common in brush written manuscripts. In most cases, they do not cause any problem for a transcription in the *liding* tradition. However, when direct transcription rules are applied, transcribing stylized cursive strokes can pose a problem. For example, 止 was, in the Guodian materials, commonly written as  and even  , which can be transcribed as 止 and read as 之. However, in a more stylized script, 之 can be written as  and  . What should a direct transcription be in this case? How does a direct transcription of the curved center vertical stroke look like? Another example is  . It is actually the same character as 正, which could be directly transcribed as 正. The cursive style allows certain strokes that should not cross each other to cross, e.g. when the main part of the character is written not like  but stylized as  , which rather resembles the conventional shape of the archaic form of 五. The remaining question is how one should transcribe the two right angle strokes ㄱ , the top two horizontal strokes in . Traditional *liding* transcription would simply neglect them, but a direct transcription is supposed to faithfully depict them. When direct transcriptions turn out to be misleading or confusing, and conventional transcriptions can best present the originals, is it still necessary for us to stick to a strict direct transcription?

One purpose of direct transcription is to prepare a transcription for a faithful reading of the text in the manuscript through a transparent rather than ambiguous transcribing process. If a strict direct transcription of cursive stylized strokes leads to more confusion, whether or not such stylized strokes should be faithfully recorded in direct transcription is a question worthy of reconsideration. Even the strictest direct transcription cannot produce a one hundred per cent

58 Qiu Xigui tentatively suggested a direct transcription of 卜子 for this graph on the International Conference on Recently Discovered Chinese Manuscripts, Beijing, August 2000, but he abandoned it later when more materials were published. See Qiu Xigui 2002: 139.

accurate transcription, because transcription itself, no matter how direct it is, is to some degree a process of transforming and altering the original graphs. In order to have a faithful as well as interpretable text in the end, transparency of a transcription is more important than the accuracy.

7. Towards A Transparent Transcription

Not intending to provide a complete list of problems with direct transcription, the above discussion simply shows that direct transcription, although very necessary and important, cannot lead to an immediate success in a satisfactory transcription but sometimes rather to confusions. A transcribing methodology that both presents and clarifies the above problems is needed. As an attempt towards such a methodology, I propose the following working rules, which are neither complete nor systematic, as well as a tentative Transparent Transcription procedure.[59]

Transparency is the key of this transcribing approach. From the above discussion, it is apparent that a strict direct transcription cannot work in a number of cases. Two things need to be done before a relatively satisfactory direct transcription can be achieved. One is a transcribing step bridging original archaic graphs and direct transcription, whenever a direct transcription is impossible due to any of the problems mentioned above. The other is the establishment of systematic working principles and rules, including a database of archaic components, in particular classifiers, with their standard transcribed equivalents in accordance with those working rules. The spirit of transparent transcription is aiming to both reveal problems in the transcribing process and enable direct transcription in order to produce a both readable and traceable transcribed text. By proposing some working rules in the following cases, I only want to indicate the direction towards which a series of systematic working principles and rules could be established.

The following archaic graphs are all from slip no. 1 of a Warring States Chu text *Min zhi fumu* 民之父母 in the Shanghai Museum collection.[60] The working rules are discussed according to four possible steps of Transparent

59 This was first presented as "*Suigong xu*: typology, calligraphy, and a transparent transcription" in The X Gong Xu Workshop, March 2003, Dartmouth College. The basic idea can be found in Xing Wen 2003: 118–123.

60 Ma Chengyuan 2002: 17.

Transcription, i.e. Tracing Transcription (TT), Direct Transcription (DT), *Liding* Transcription (LT) and Interpretive Transcription (IT).

TT: With a graph that can be immediately transcribed into a DT, no TT is necessary. TT is only transcribed to bridge an original and a DT when a DT is either difficult or confusing or even impossible due to certain peculiarities of the original graph.

DT: The proposed DT form of this graph is  . In this transcription, I followed two working rules. The first one: a component that is hard to be directly transcribed due to either curvilinear strokes or other confusing features should be transcribed as its standard conventional form, like 日 in the present case. The second one: a component that can be directly transcribed without difficulty should be transcribed in that way no matter what its equivalent is in the standard character for the word it stands for. In the present case, the middle component 人 is transcribed as 人 rather than 亠.

LD: In the present case, the classifier 亠 only appears in LD, i.e.  .

TT: A TT of  here is necessary to explain why the right bottom component is transcribed 耳 in its DT.

DT: Following the previous rule, the 亠 classifier on the top is still transcribed 人 as in  .

TT: A working rule for stylized strokes: whenever possible, purely stylistic features of strokes are only presented in a TT. In this case, the starting hook of the main horizontal stroke of 子 is only transcribed as  in TT. In DT below, the stylistic hook is omitted.

DT: Accordingly, stylistic features should be ignored in DT; only if a stylistic feature has a semantic implication can it be transcribed in a DT. Thus the DT for this graph is  rather than with the hook.

TT: A TT of  could be omitted if it only regards stylistic features of some commonly used components such as 口 and 曰, etc. In this case, a TT makes connections between 音 and 言, as curvy strokes of 音 are simply straightened in DT.

TT: Applying the above rule, a TT of  should be omitted. And the DT should be simply 曰, neglecting the stylistic features.

TT: TT is very important in this case. Since a logic DT form of  (or even) is still not a strict DT and it only invites confusion with another known graph, I would suggest a working rule of using a LT form to transcribe its DT in such cases, or even skipping DT and going directly to LT. Such a

reduced procedure is worthy of consideration, if it helps to avoid confusions. Unless there is a TT in such cases, the transcription procedure is still transparent and traceable. This rule should also apply to the archaic graph of 女,  , with  as its TT.

 **DT**: Extra strokes should not be considered as purely stylistic; therefore they should be transcribed in DT. According to this rule, the DT form of should be rather than 可.

Needless to say, a complete and systematic set of transcribing principles and working rules needs to be developed in further transcribing practice. However, with some basic working rules available, an experimental practice of Transparent Transcription can be conducted in order to test the proposed rules. In the following, I will present a transparent transcription of the first slip of the manuscript *Min zhi fumu*, applying the working rules proposed above (GN: Graph Number; OG: Original Graph). By dividing the procedure into TT, DT, LT and IT, I do not mean that all four steps are needed for each graph. In many cases, as we will see below, TT is omitted, or DT and LT, or LT and IT are identical. The four steps are designed to reveal problems and possible confusions during the transcription process, and the goal is still to produce a readable text, which is given in the IT column in the following table.

Table II. An illustration of Transparent Transcription: Slip No. 1 of the manuscript Min zhi fumu 民之父母

GN	OG	TT	DT	LT	IT	Note
M 1:1		—			夏	
M 1:2					問	In the DT, is the form between DT and LT , which is the current 聞. 聞 and 問 both fall in the 文 category of initials and the 明 rhyme group in archaic Chinese and are thus interchangeable.
M 1:3		—		於	於	

M 1:4			孔	孔	孔	
M 1:5			子	子	子	
M 1:6			詒	詒	詩	
M 1:7		—	曰	曰	曰	A TT 曰 can be filed in a database.
M 1:8			幾/线	幾	凱	
M 1:9		—	俤	俤/俤	悌	
M 1:10			君	君	君	
M 1:11			子	子	子	
M 1:12			民	民	民	
M 1:13			止	之	之	
M 1:14			父	父	父	
M 1:15			母	母	母	
M 1:16			敢	敢	敢	
M 1:17			雚	雚	問	
M 1:18			可	可	何	
M 1:19			女	女	如	
M 1:20			而	而	而	
M 1:21			可	可	可	

M 1:22		—		胃/胃	謂	
M 1:23				民	民	
M 1:24			止	之	之	
M 1:25				父	父	
M 1:26			母	母	母	
M 1:27				孔 子	孔 子	
M 1:28		—			答	A TT can be filed in a database.
M 1:29		—	曰	曰	曰	
M 1:30				民	民	

In the above table, the last column is reserved for paleographic, etymological and phonological notes, as we can see from the examples. Transparent Transcription makes no distinction between Noel Barnard's "Modern Character Parallel", "Modern Character Equivalent" and "Modern Character Replacement".[61] They are basically Interpretive Transcription here, although Barnard's "Modern Character Parallel" is closer to *Liding* Transcription. The weak aspects of Barnard's transcribing procedures are the lack of clear and consistent transcription rules as well as the occasional fusion of direct transcription and *liding* transcription. It is not difficult to understand that the latter problem is a result of the former one, the deficiency of transcription rules. This becomes manifest not only in the transcription of individual graphs, as in the Chu silk manuscript example of  mentioned above, but also in that of the whole text. In his transcription of the *Shu Ze fangding* 叔夨方鼎 inscription, there is actually no

61 Barnard 1973: 33.

distinction between direct transcription and *liding* transcription, due to the absence of necessary transcription principles or rules.[62]

In conclusion, among the four steps, TT is designed to help the production of a DT. By tracing and depicting possible problems and confusions in archaic originals, TT is actually an act of transcribing by means of tracing and imitating rather than a mere tracing in the strict sense. Such imitation only needs to be done when connections between an original and a DT are ambiguous. Otherwise it can be omitted. However, a TT is still a tracing imitation rather than a real transcription; it helps to decipher the DT by making transparent the rationale behind it. In many cases, a DT makes no sense to a lay reader because of the gap between DT forms and their conventional graphic equivalents. This is why it is necessary to further transcribe DT forms into LT forms (which actually conform to standard script in most cases rather than clerical script), although the two are identical in many cases. An IT is necessary for the non-specialist reader, due to particular traditional usages of Chinese characters, including loan characters. Only the IT really presents the manuscript text according to modern orthography.

Transparent Transcription cannot guarantee its transparency if a database of archaic radicals with their equivalents in standard script forms is not established. Without such a database, transcriptions of certain components can be either confusing or ambiguous. In both M 1:1 and M 1:2 in the above table, the 𠂉 component is transcribed as 𠂇. However, in the next graph M 1:3, the 𠂉 component is transcribed as 人. In fact, the component 𠂉 can be transcribed as many different things, including, but not limited to, 人, 𠂇, 冂, and 亠, etc. Similar examples also can be found for the radicals 辶, 辵, 廴, and 彳, etc. The establishment of such a database should form part of the working rules of transcription, or at least be considered as a key attachment to transcription rules. This immediate need requires a separate substantial discussion.

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