

XIX. *EUGRAPHIA SINENSIS; OR, THE ART OF WRITING THE CHINESE CHARACTER WITH CORRECTNESS: contained in Ninety-two Rules and Examples. To which are prefixed, SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CHINESE WRITING. By JOHN FRANCIS DAVIS, Esq., M.R.A.S., F.R.S., &c.*

Read June 18, 1825.

ON THE CHINESE WRITING.

THE graphic beauty of a written language, which approaches so near to the hieroglyphic as the Chinese, where many of the characters are intended as pictures of the idea to be conveyed, where the variety of the lines, or strokes, is so great, and their combinations are so numerous, must be allowed at once to exceed, and to be more difficult of attainment than, that of the alphabetic writing of Europe. The number of the simple characters, or elements, of which all the compounds of the language are formed, greatly exceeds that of any one alphabet; but, when compounded, their relative juxta-position and arrangement, the shortening of some strokes and the lengthening of others, is of course subject to some general rules; which, from the very nature of the subject, must be more numerous and complicated, than the mere joining together of our European letters. The advantage of simplicity (and a very great advantage it is) constitutes the chief merit of alphabetic writing; that of variety and graphic beauty may fairly be claimed by the Chinese.

It must be observed, however, that there are two forms, under which the character generally appears: of these, the *Sung pan*,* in which books are commonly printed, being stiff and inelegant, lays claim only to correctness; the other, *viz.* the *Keae shoo*,† in which all papers of consequence are written, and which occasionally is also used in print, combines both correctness and beauty;‡ it is at once the most elegant, the most useful, and

* See Plate IV, No. I.

† See Plate IV, No. II.

‡ There are several other forms, and among the rest the seal character, which is somewhat analogous to our black letter; and which being hardly ever used, does not deserve much attention from Europeans.

the most studied form of the Chinese character. To attain skill in writing it, is more or less the aim of every educated Chinese; and to impart that skill, is the object of the work, whose rules I have translated, and given its examples, in the following pages.

Of the two points, correctness and elegance, the first only is absolutely required of students, at their public examination;* though, of course, if the latter exist, it is held to be an additional recommendation. If graphic skill be ever held cheap in China,† it is only in the possession of him who can lay no claim to the higher attainments of solid erudition. It will always procure as much consideration as it is worth; and that it is worth a great deal, when combined with learning and critical accuracy, is proved by the care with which it is studied.

Having derived some advantage, in writing the character correctly, from an observance of the rules that follow, I concluded that they might prove equally useful to such Englishmen, or others, as studied the language, of which the written character must be allowed to form an important department. It is well known, that the Chinese themselves write with a hair pencil, but partly with a view to make it more difficult for them to forge such papers, and partly because it is a readier method. The British Factory at Canton, in their correspondence with the local government, are accustomed to have their letters, &c. in the native language, written with a pen, on English paper; though it certainly is not possible with our pens exactly to imitate the pencil strokes of the Chinese; yet by dint of practice much may be done with it, even in point of neatness and beauty: the form of the character, and its proportions, may be most accurately preserved; and there is no reason whatever why, in point of correctness, the writing of the pen should not be fully equal to that of the pencil.

The rules and examples that follow include every possible class of written character; and indeed, some few of them are little more than mere repetitions of the same general directions, though, as they were made for the instruction of the Chinese themselves, I have thought it right to omit none,

* To prove how much stress is laid on this, the Chinese have a common story of some candidate, who having written the character for a horse, with a horizontal line at the bottom, instead of with four points, was rejected altogether, being told "it was impossible for a horse to walk, without its legs."

† See Chinese Moral Maxims, page 175.

in my translation. It may be as well to notice, in this place, two or three leading precepts, which, as they apply to the writing of every character in the language, are more especially to be kept in mind.

First, it is a rule both in printing and writing, that each character should occupy about the same space in the page, or be nearly of the same size as the rest, whether it consist of only one or two strokes, or of a great number.

Secondly, it follows from the above, that where the strokes are few, they must be thickened and enlarged in proportion; and that where they are many, they must be proportionably diminished, and written close to one another.

Thirdly, in forming a character, it is proper to commence at the top, towards the left hand; thus, in writing *Lin*,* it is right to begin with the horizontal stroke in the left portion, then to bring down the perpendicular across it, next the left oblique stroke, and lastly the right: this being done, the right hand portion of the character is completed in the same manner. The remembrance of a few such rules greatly simplifies the subject, and, joined to regular practice, renders the acquisition of a sufficient portion of skill, for every useful purpose, by no means a difficult undertaking.

But it is not alone for the purpose of learning to write, that Chinese writing is to be studied; without some practice in this way, it is impossible to fix many characters in the memory, and no man can properly be considered to learn the language, who does not devote a portion of his time to this important branch of the subject.

No reasonable person, at the present day, will deny the necessity that there is, for some few, at least, of our countrymen being possessed of a competent and practical knowledge of the Chinese language. He who ever carries his thoughts back to the past, will allow how ill we should have fared without it, on many critical discussions with a people, of all others the most extravagant in their assumptions, and the most difficult to manage; and he who can look beyond the present day to the future, may not only foresee (as long as our government neglects to make some sort of provision against such contingencies) the possibility of discussions still more embarrassing, and more difficult, than have ever yet occurred at Canton; but

* See Plate IV, No. III.

when he takes into consideration the extension of our Indian frontier to the northward and eastward, may easily anticipate the chance of our being, some day, unavoidably placed, with respect to the Chinese empire, in relations of a far more weighty and important nature, than such as are simply commercial.

The Chinese, themselves, are cunning enough to know, that "knowledge is power;" and, though they have, of late years, gradually relaxed in their vigilance, and may at length be considered to have relinquished the point, the jealousy with which they, not very long ago, regarded the attainment of their language by Europeans, sufficiently shewed the importance that they attached to it, and the consequences that they foreboded, from such knowledge, to their selfish interests.

Every step that renders us independent on native aid, in acquiring and making use of the language, may be considered as something gained: not to mention, that such aid is hardly procurable by the student in Europe. The Chinese might, at a future period, revise and greatly increase the penalties against such of their people, as give instruction to Europeans, at Canton; and the very occasions, on which the use of the language was most required, would be those on which the assistance of natives was most likely to be cut off. Besides, as experience has shewn that the local government, notwithstanding its pretended pride and indifference, has condescended to employ spies upon our actions and intentions, these persons, being necessarily acquainted, in some measure, with our counsels, would be the most convenient that it could select for the purpose.

The assiduous labours of our countrymen, during the last ten or twenty years (I, of course, especially allude to the valuable dictionaries of Dr. Morrison), have done nearly all that was required towards this desirable independence on native aid. Something, however, seemed still wanting, which might make us acquainted with the general rules by which the Chinese are guided, in writing the great variety of their characters: and the object of the present compilation, imperfect as it is, has been to supply, in some measure, the defect.

Macao, 5th July, 1824.

* It was insisted upon by the British Factory, in the discussions of 1814, and at length yielded to them.

All characters are composed of the six following kinds of strokes, or lines,* *viz.* :—

<i>Hung</i>	.....	Horizontal.
<i>Shoo</i>	.....	Perpendicular.
<i>Peë</i>	.....	Left oblique.
<i>Nă</i>	.....	Right oblique.
<i>Kow</i>	.....	Hooked, or bent.
<i>Teën</i>	.....	A point, or dot.

THE NINETY-TWO RULES FOR WRITING THE CHINESE CHARACTERS WITH
CORRECTNESS.†

1. The upper part should cover in what is below.
2. The horizontal stroke below should be rather extended, as a foundation for what is above.
3. In these, the left-hand portion should be elevated, and the right depressed.
4. In these, the left-hand portion should be small, the right full and extended.
5. In these, which are compared with something carried on a pole, the horizontal stroke in the middle should be long.
6. Let the perpendicular, in these, be drawn down perfectly straight through the middle.
7. The 20th of the 214 Chinese keys, or radicals, should not be much deflected nor short, in these.
8. Let the 20th radical in these be neither too upright nor too long.
9. The horizontal line in these must be short, the oblique long.
10. The horizontal lines must be long, the oblique short.
11. The horizontal strokes short, the perpendicular long, and the oblique at full length.
12. The horizontal lines in the 75th radical, at the lower part of these characters, must be long, the perpendicular short, and the two oblique contracted into points.

* See Plate IV, No. IV.

† For the Chinese examples, see Plate IV. to XI, No. 1 to 92.

13. The transverse stroke long, the upright short.

14. The transverse short, the upright long.

15. When there is an horizontal stroke at the top and bottom, the upper one should be short, and the lower one long.

16. When there are perpendicular lines at the left and right, the left should be short, and the right full and extended.

17. When there is an oblique stroke to the left, and a perpendicular to the right, the former should be contracted, and the latter brought down.

18. When there are perpendicular strokes to the left, and oblique ones to the right, the former should be short, and the latter free and extended.

19. When there are several dots, their relative size and position should be varied, to prevent uniformity.

20. Where horizontal strokes are repeated, they must be of different lengths, like scales, or feathers, to prevent stiffness of appearance.

21. Both sides being nearly equal, they must be even at the top and bottom.

22. Where a character is compounded of three simple parts, placed sideways, the middle one should be narrow and upright.

Note.—As every character ought to approach, more or less, to a squarish form, it follows, that where the component parts are placed sideways, each should be narrow and long, as in this example; but, where they are placed one above the other, each should be broad and short, as in the next example.

23. The two separate parts must be broad and flat, that the whole may approach to a squarish form.

24. Where a character is composed of three, placed one above the other, let some of the horizontal strokes be short, and some moderately long.

25. Where the left-hand portion is small, it should be even with the top of the character.

26. Where the right-hand portion is small, it should be even with the bottom of the character.

27. Where four characters are repeated on the outside of another, the whole should have a square form.

28. Where four characters are repeated on the inside of another, they must be written very close together.

29. Here the long strokes should not be horizontal, but written with an inclination.

30. The long lines should be horizontal, and the perpendicular without any inclination.

31. The oblique stroke should not be too much elongated.

32. The long oblique in these should be nearly straight, with a certain appearance of strength; that is, as if drawn with a firm steady hand.

33. Let the hooked stroke below be sufficiently bent.

34. Here the bent stroke should include, and, as it were, embrace the character at the side.

35. The lower strokes must be placed centrally under those above.

36. The hooked strokes in the left-hand portion must be contracted.

37. The point of the hooked stroke should be directed towards the middle of the four dots.

38. These should be even at the top.

39. These should be even at the bottom.

40. Where there are many right oblique strokes, some must be at full length, and some contracted.

41. Some of the hooks in the component parts must be suppressed, and some indicated.

42. The hook in the upper portion should be slightly, and in the lower, more strongly indicated.

43. The hooked stroke at the top should be contracted, and the one below extended.

44. The upper part of these characters should be broader than the under.

45. The under part in these should be broader than the upper.

46. Let the left-hand portion yield in size to the right.

47. Let the right-hand portion yield in size to the left.

48. Let the two sides be large, and the middle small.

49. In these the middle portion should be fully written.

50. The middle portion in these should be small.

51. The hooked stroke in these must be bent, and with an appearance of strength, as if drawn with a firm hand.

52. The bent stroke must be round and flowing.

53. The oblique stroke to the left must not be too thin and elongated.

54. The two left oblique strokes must not be parallel to each other.

55. When there are three oblique strokes together, let the top of each proceed from the middle of the one immediately above it.

56. In writing the contracted form of the 85th radical, the lowest dot should be drawn up in a point towards the highest.

57. The 25th radical in these characters must be upright, and placed immediately under what is above.

58. The 32d radical in these must be erect, and the perpendicular stroke in a line with the perpendicular stroke below.

59. Where characters consist of a great number of small uneven parts, care must be taken lest they become confused.

60. Where the strokes are thickly placed, more care is required in writing them.

61. The descending stroke must be thick at top, and diminish towards the bottom.

62. The descending stroke should be of nearly equal thickness throughout.

63. Though the lines of these be inclined, "the heart of each character must be central."

64. The lines should all be straight and strong.

65. The body of these characters should be of a long shape, and the strokes rather slender.

66. These should be of a dwarfish shape, and the strokes rather thick, partly because there are few of them.

67. The oblique strokes which cover in what is below must balance each other.

68. The foregoing rule also applies when they are in the middle of the character.

69. Though the lines in these should be thick, let them not be clumsy.

70. Though in these the strokes should be rather long, let them not be meagre.

71. Where there are but few of them, the lines should be thick.

72. Where there are many strokes, let them be small, and equally blended.

73. Where the same character is thrice repeated in a compound, each must be nearly of a size with the rest.

74. Where the strokes, from their number and form, are involved, care must be taken lest they become confused.

75. The horizontal line below must meet, and be carried a little beyond, the descending stroke to the right.

76. Let the hook below be strongly indicated.

77. When a character is compounded with the 162d radical, the upper part of it should be written larger than the lower.

78. Where the oblique strokes are short, and the horizontal long, the oblique stroke on the right must be contracted.

79. In these, let the upright lines to the left be short, those to the right long.

80. Let the perpendicular stroke to the left of these be extended a little beyond the others.

81. The hook in the upper part of these should be turned inwards.

82. These characters require skill and care in writing them.

83. Examples for writing such characters as are compounded of the 26th radical.

84. Examples of such as have the 163d radical on the right.

85. Examples of such as have the 170th radical on the left.

86 to 92. Examples of characters compounded with various radicals, &c.

7. 葡萄蜀葛

8. 句勺勻勿

5. 喜吾婁安

6. 甲平千午

3. 勅部幼即

4. 讀竦議績

1. 宇宙定寧

2. 至聖孟孟蓋

II. 楷書

I. 宋板

III. 林

IV. 橫 豎 撇 捺 勾 點

一 丨 ノ 丶 乚 乙 丶

19. 亦 赤 然 無

17. 川 升 邗 邦

15. 丕 正 亞 並

13. 十 上 下 士

11. 木 本 朱 東

9. 左 在 尤 尮

20. 三 冊 冉 聿

18. 伊 侈 僂 修

16. 目 自 因 固

14. 才 斗 丰 井

12. 樂 棊 築 彙

10. 右 有 左 灰

21

雖 顛 顧 體

23

鑿 響 需 留

25

吸 呼 峰 峻

27

噐 噐 噐 噐

29

此 七 也 也

31

丈 尺 史 又

22

御 謝 樹 術

24

章 意 素 累

26

和 知 鈿 細

28

齒 爾 爽 齏

30

云 去 且 旦

32

武 成 或 幾

33

息
息
必
志

35

天
父
外
文

37

鳥
馬
馬
為

39

朝
故
辰
後

41

禁
林
森
懋

43

冠
冕
寇
宅

34

勉
旭
魁
拋

36

鷓
鳩
輝
頰

38

師
明
既
野

40

癩
談
茶
黍

42

束
戈
哥
柔

44

雲
普
比
齊

45
參修須形

47
庭居尹底

49
風鳳飛氣

51
蕃筆衝擲

53
敬獻斂劉

55
眾表萬禹

46
治洪流海

48
友及反皮

50
先見元毛

52
鸞鶯驚鷲

54
弼辨衍仰

56
施騰讓靖

57

是足走走

59

馨聲繁繫

61

車申中巾

63

易乃毋力

65

身目耳貝

67

會合金命

58

者者老考

60

繼纒纏縶

62

卓煢單畢

64

正主本王

66

白工曰四

68

琴吝各谷

79 作仰冲行

77 遠邊還逮

75 口曰田由

73 晶磊轟森

71 上下千小

69 土止山公

80 臣巨於佳

78 莫矣矢契

76 丁苜寧亭

74 爨鬱靈糜

72 言臚齋龜鼉

70 了寸卜才

81

官空宥宰

83

印印叩卹

85

階隄陔阪

87

祭蔡察登

89

家象豪象

91

從徐循後

82

鷓赫鬪鬻

84

邛郊鄭鄰

86

登登發發

88

采泉衆聚

90

仁儀俯休

92

乳亂色色