Cultural Perspectives on Chinese Language (Chinese Characters)
汉语文字的文化透视

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Abstract
Language is not a mere expression developed out of the need for communication. It is an oral or written production which is culturally learned focusing on the traits, beliefs, behaviour and values of a given cultural milieu. The elements of language instruction in Chinese language have given a teaching tone to understanding the place of culture in language learning. This study hinges on the dialogic interpretation between Chinese language and Chinese cultural tradition. A divorce of the above notion amounts to generic incompleteness. This discourse draws its logic from China's patterns of life (philosophy) as represented in the spoken Mandarin 汉语 (Hànyǔ), Calligraphy 书法(shūfǎ), ideogram 表意字 (biǎoyìzì) and characters 汉字 (Hànzì), a common writing system with historical relevance. This study therefore investigates Chinese language's reliance on Chinese writing culture as a unifying attempt to create national standards laced with Chinese characteristics.
Keywords: Mandarin, Ideogram, Character, Calligraphy

Introduction
Language is currently absorbing massive attention in global communication today. Significantly, communication adopts a cultural model and behaviour in both specific and implied reasons (Sapir, 104). By the same token we can expressly affirm that "language permeates our lives from birth to death" (Okolo & Ezikeojiaku, 1). "Language also serves as an essential tool for conducting the most mundane transactions of our daily lives" (Ibid). The truth of this dialogical view is that language exploits all the rich resources of culture in an authentic form by molding feelings, worldviews and ideas. For this reason, one can boldly say that language originates from the basic impulses of culture in order to record social-historical activities. Hence, language becomes a mode for "cultural authenticity and cultural identity" (Akporobaro, 37).

Language and culture are two inseparable elements that cannot be divorced from mankind. In the face of consistent change, language illuminates culture with a sense of security and the pleasure of patriotism. No doubt, Language as a unique channel of human communication enables people to express themselves in a conventional manner with words (spoken or written) for specific purposes. This spontaneous attribute of language maintains and gives a sense of permanence to culture. Commenting on the phenomenon of language in relation to culture, the Chinese language introduces cultural transmissions with recognizable motifs.

The historicity of China's cultural influence is very significant in determining her people's commitment to expression (oral and written), both in creativity and imagination. Writing about the impact of culture on society, "China's culture is one of the oldest of the world" (Law, 10). The quest for cultural continuity and the universal desire to transcend common experiences that have become aspects of cultural heritage raise the need for a unifying language. Interesting for comprehending an interaction between Chinese language and Chinese culture, Lihua Zhang   acknowledges that "language competence cannot develop without cultural competence" (202). The above expression gives a certain type of reality that is not farfetched—studying a language is beyond understanding the fundamental grammar rules and internalizing the numerous morphemes that constitute daily expressions. The emphasis is on the elucidation of culture as a natural context that avails individuals the opportunity of understanding the meaning of words within and outside one's environment. Like other contemporary languages—French, Spanish, Italian etc, we learn and speak Chinese language (Mandarin 汉语(Hànyǔ) with an inclination that there is only one Chinese language. In actual sense, the preliterate ethnic groups in China according to Boye Lafayette De Mente have at least "seven Chinese languages including Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese, Hokkien, and Hunanese, along with dozens of Chinese dialects and minority-group languages" (Preface, v). There is a significant difference in these languages—their mutual unintelligibility. The fact that these languages have a common traditional writing forms or formats (ideograms or characters) with diverse pronunciations raises a major concern for national unity in language. The significance of this unity is an important contribution to cultural impact and expression. To find a unifying curve in language, CCP (Chinese Communist Party) in 1956 simplified and standardized Mandarin also known as Putonghua—a common language spoken in northern China (Beijing and others) as a national language (De Mente, iv). This language reform has yielded to the possibilities of simplifying the characters employed in the writing systems of China's languages with a special interest in Mandarin. Although many might think that other local dialects have become history but the contemporary generation speaks both Mandarin and other languages. Efforts at projecting a unifying language has redefined Mandarin Chinese as not just an Asian language but one of the world's most sought-after languages that suits the contemporary context. Although, Chinese "Mandarin (汉语 Hànyǔ) is a Sino-Tibetan language family originally spoken by the *Han*; it is now spoken by the Hui, Manchu, other ethnic groups that constitute 94% of the population of China and other speakers from other continents" (Liu Xun et al, 13).

No doubt, Mandarin, a northern based language is spoken by the Chinese and many people of diverse origins, slowly circling the earth with subtlety of economic relevance that launches China into the world's limelight. With many countries yielding to the driving wave of Chinese Mandarin-fever, imbibing it with positive implication; there is need for intellectual discourse that calls attention to understanding Chinese language with cultural expectation. The prospect of the future with Mandarin and non Chinese natives remains weak-kneed without multifaceted inclination that hinges on cultural elements tightly knitted with Chinese language.

Cultural Elements in Chinese Language
This is an attempt at exploring the relationships between Chinese language and Chinese writing culture. The views here adopt eclectic approach and the negotiation of meaning in language expression and philosophical thoughts. No doubt, the Chinese sociocultural

milieu reconstructs historical and cultural moments in writing as represented in the conservative elements below:

- **Ideogram (表意字 biǎoyìzì) and Character 汉字 (Hànzì)**
- **Calligraphy (书法 shūfǎ)**

Ideogram (表意字 Biǎoyìzì) and Character 汉字 (Hànzì)

Mandarin Chinese is our primary concern in this discussion, purely and exclusively used to communicate how its language elements (ideogram/character) connect to Chinese culture. From ancient periods, China has been very famous in displaying her highly cultural and stylized method of documenting experiences and historical events. In comparison with other writing systems of antiquity like the "Babylonian and Egyptian characters with over 5,000 years of civilization" (Law, 34), Chinese characters with their ancient dynamic forms have outlived others. Chinese language specifically, is a body of "Square characters" (Zhu et al. 2004, 34), neatly marked strokes mapped out for written communication and "Mandarin" 普通话 (pǔtōnghuà) a common language collectively adopted for spoken or oral communication. Notably, "the ancient Chinese characters are square-shaped, while the contemporary ones that have evolved from ancient symbols (ideograms) are written by merging strokes— both basic and combined strokes (Liu Xun et al, 10).

In form and technique, Chinese characters are culturally categorized as "Chinese Arts" (Zhu et al. 2004, 30- 34) deeply steeped in philosophy. No wonder, Ezra Pound, the American poet has remarkably viewed Chinese language as "the easiest language for writing poetry in the world" (Wang et al, Preface) due to its stylized logographic form and brief nature artistically arranged in vertical/ horizontal lines. Ezra's opinion stems from the intrinsic element of the traditional aesthetics of painting thoughts with beautifully marked strokes. One of the notable committed systems of communication in ancient China is the use of simple pictographs (traditional form) to document daily experiences and historical facts before the invention of contemporary characters. Liu Xun et al affirm that Chinese characters "originated from pictures historically traced to remote antiquity" (10). It is interesting to note that these pictures are adequate representation of the Chinese way of life and worldview. To the Chinese, the pictures are mainly a mirror-map held up for direction and communication.

Gradually, the pictographs were reinvented in simplified forms. This shows that the traditional form of characters as used in the ancient times contain more drawings and marked strokes that needed to be reduced in complexity. It has been observed that the simplified characters contain strokes with basic line markings like sketchs or patterns as elements of a work of art or well mapped architecture. The liberty of simplified forms has imbibed meanings that encouraged the legacy of pictographic characters. The 14th century system of characters called 甲骨文 (jiǎgǔwén) delineates mature examples of these pictographic characters. These characters are connected to the cultural worldview of the Chinese in relation to animal mythical essence. According to Law, "about 6,000 characters have been found inscribed on bones and tortoise shells, recording in detail the activities of sacrificial ceremonies and divinations" (34). Other culturally accepted materials such as animal bones (Oracle-bone) used in the Shang Dynasty (1711-1066) and bronze materials widely used in Zhou Dynasty (1066-256BC) have historical relevance in the development of characters. The use of culturally accepted materials such as silk and bamboo in the Qing Dynasty (221-206BC) as a seal script also marked a sharp development. This seal script

has undergone modifications in the Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD) until it is accepted as the official script (Feng Lingyu & Shi Weimin, 41-42).

The most significant of the simple pictographic characters is the emergence of ideographs and phonographs for the representation of ideas of something without giving a clue to the sequence of sounds adopted in pronunciation. In fact, there was a massive advancement that culminated into enhancing ideas using ideographic and phonographic characters that have foundation on 甲骨文 jiǎgǔwén, a very ancient 汉字 forms with inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells. It is indeed the oldest surviving Chinese script. Closely x-rayed, the gradual standardization of Chinese characters stems from the cultural significance of acknowledging artistic design of totemic representation. Symbolically, this cultural way of documentation has witnessed great transformation starting from the first emperor of China, Qin Shihuang whose idea on the unification of China and the establishment of writing styles became a reality. This fundamental rethinking of unifying China and different writing styles contributed to the emergence of 小篆 (xiǎozhuàn, script style standardized in the Qin dynasty) a designed and less complex characters commonly used across the empire. For easy expression and usage, (小篆 xiǎozhuàn) was further simplified into 隶书[隸書] Lìshū as characters approved by authority, the official strategy guide containing a smaller number of strokes and writings in simplified forms. There was a significant change noticed in the strokes—curved ones turned into straight strokes. No doubt, this gradual transformation changed the face of Chinese characters. This mutually beneficial transformation based on 隶书[隸書] (Lìshū) thrived in the 4th, 5th and 6th centurys. Worthy of note, is the popularization of an official script termed 楷书(書) kǎishū, a regular script (standard calligraphy) in the 6th century. This script has minor recognized changes in characters. One interesting thing is that 楷书(書) kǎishū reflects the Chinese characters (汉字 Hànzì) commonly used in contemporary China (Law, 34). By and large, one would understand that the modification of primordial quality or significant changes that Chinese characters have undergone could be traced to their cultural roots with identified examples associated with their transformation.

The Cultural Root of Some Selected Chinese Characters (汉字 Hànzì)

Basically, culture (文化 wénhuà) forms the basis in understanding the Chinese people while "characters (汉字 Hànzì) majorly form the basis in learning Chinese as a language" (Wang et al, Preface). Chinese characters are not formed by letters to represent sounds. They are mainly strokes combined together to reflect meanings. These characters mediate between people and inherited communication traits visible in Chinese cultural milieu. The significance of these forms of communication goes beyond a mere matter of language acquisition for the nature of communication is cultural in itself as a distinctive marker of a particular group. Notably, the impact of expression is heavily accepted within a cultural community with artistic enjoyable patterns intimately bound in social occasions to recapture and convey adequately the emotional condition of a given atmosphere for clarity. Traditionally, Chinese character has its origin as compiled in one of the earliest dictionaries, 说文解字 Shuōwén Jiězì, the first Chinese dictionary, documented by Xu Shen, 121 A.D. The above dictionary has laid the foundation for classifying characters. "The Traditional Chinese lexicology has classified these characters into six groups known as 六书 liùshū (six writings) which is categorically based on the structure and representation of meaning" (Odinye, 33). The classification reflects six categories such as pictogram, ideograph, logical aggregates, picto-phonetic compounds, borrowing and associative transformation (Ibid).

For clarity in meaning, this study has adapted the above traditional classification into stages of cultural transformation that capture situations. More significantly, this study exposes readers to the cultural stages which do not disconnect from the original meanings of the traditional classification. The stimulation of capturing situations in Chinese society in this study has different stages namely: pictographic stage, suggestive stage, associative stage, picto-phonetic stage, explanative stage and borrowed phonetic stage etc. The categorizations above reflect the cultural stages of Chinese character creation.

The **pictographic stage** is the first attempt of enhancing communication through drawn pictures that depict culturally accepted mode of relationship in ancient China. Natural objects in the environment and parts of the human body represented in drawings are used in explaining actions or experiences. The use of the picture forms not only recreates, but mediates between lived experiences and verbal memory which sharply manipulates the imagination of individuals to communicate reality and values. This stage is of no doubt limited in the communication of abstract ideas that are not expressible using pictures. The lacuna quickens the arousal of the **suggestive stage,** a representation done by inserting a culturally accepted symbol to a drawing to define an idea. More important features of inherited meanings perceived by merging pictographs to communicate reality and values produces the **associative stage**. The inability of capturing adequate drawn communication in the associative stage encouraged the acceptance of **picto-phonetic stage.** The picto-phonetic stage employs different pictographs placed as different parts as carriers of meanings. More significantly, when the representation in the picto-phonetic stage could not adequately capture ideas or meanings, pictographic element was inserted to further highlight and differentiate meanings clearly from the whole character and the newly added one. This attempt ushered in the **explanative stage**. Although the explanative stage is seriously considered effective in communicating meanings, there are important contexts that it lacks expert meanings in expression especially in borrowing a character that has similar way of pronunciation to communicate a new idea that has no character ascribed to it. This leads to the emergence of another stage called **borrowed phonetic stage**. This stage practically imposes a sense of correctness to the Chinese users for formal or imaginative self-expression. The above rudimentary narrative sequence of reducing the complexity of Chinese traditional pictographs to modern Chinese characters ratifies its cultural attachment to change as a natural phenomenon.

In the social life of Chinese people, expression constitutes a powerful device for raising consciousness and beliefs. A major aesthetic quality of the language is traced from its culturally induced pictographic forms to its ideographic/ phonographic forms. A collection of the historical origin of the Chinese writing development is indeed an insight into its rich and dynamic culture of writing from the oracle bone to standard script. The examples below describe the imitation of culturally induced system of writing through spectacular and realistic events. Note, some of the examples given below may not fully describe the six categories of Chinese characters in a more detailed manner since this study aims to explore the traditional system of written documentation that has influenced Chinese Language (汉字 Hànzì).

> 人 **[rén] Person/Human Being**
In Chinese cultural life, "human beings are the center of the world" (Lui Yan Mei, 9-10)**.** Indeed, both cosmic and cultural activities revolve around them. In essence, "everything starts from 人 [rén] person" (Ibid). The earliest pictograph of this crucial character is

anthropoidal in nature. It reflects the picture of an individual with head, hands and legs. The modification of the pictographic human form has stylistically transformed resembling an individual standing on his or her feet. The modern form 人 [rén] combines two strokes that look like human legs spread apart. The cultural significance of this pictograph exposes us to the unfolding of human changes in shape, bodily stature and mentality. It is indeed, a depiction of prehistoric view about human evolution. Currently, this character is a radical and a component of many Chinese characters. Worthy of note is an amazing concrete cultural symbol and its ideational modern character form. For the teaching of modern Chinese language and character, cultural providence has become interwoven in this lineal transmission of linguistic elements.

Modern Chinese character of [rén] projects two legs, with other parts of the body hidden from public view. 人 is a character of two strokes. This is in contrast with the pictographic forms which display the body, with one arm and one leg. At the picto-phonetic stage, the character 人 tilts to one side when attached to other characters to adequately capture a given idea. As a component, rén is often written 亻 on the left side of characters, as seen in 他, 们, 你, 仁 etc.

Note, the **oracle bone** captures the 'man' pictograph in an image-like form or drawing form of an object. The standard script now captures it as 人.

rén
(human being; person, people
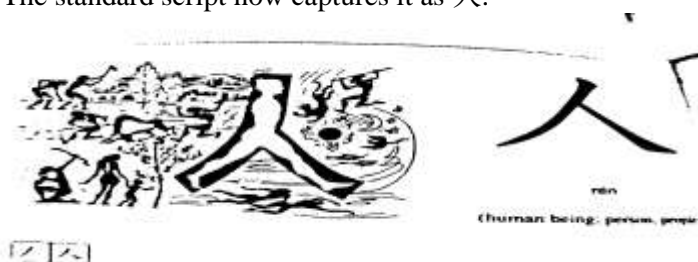
Below is the list of characters containing 人 as a component
大 [dà] big; 大家 dàjiā everybody [dài] 大夫 dàifu doctor
个(F 個) [gè] [ge] (measure word); 个人 personal [gě] 自个
会(F 會) [huì] meet; can, able   [kuài] 会计 kuàijì accounting [huǐ] 会儿 moment
會(S 会) [huì] meet; can, able   [kuài] 會計 kuàijì accounting
以 [yǐ] using; so as to; as well as; 可以 kěyǐ may; 所以 suǒyǐ so
从(F 從) [cóng] from, since   [cōng] 黑从从

> ➤ 木 [mù] Tree/Wood

Chinese characters are studied under different cultural aspects. The study has been the pursuit of other non-natives who are interested in the cultural/linguistic ideas of the various characters. The connection of the pictographic form is indeed very fascinating. The similarity of ideas expressed and its formal modern expression clearly connects to its common origin. The pictographic character 木 [mù] has its root from the picture or symbol of a tree with branches and roots. The upper part has the branches which are variously spread out in the air and the lower part features the root which is attached to the soil. It should be noticed that every society has tree as one of the natural/environmental elements that adds to the survival of the human race. These facts are of great importance because; the tree fits into the surroundings to influence man's daily native habits. To emphasize the origin/ foundation of a thing as represented in the roots of a tree, the radical character of a

tree with an added flat stroke is placed on the lower part of the horizontal line in 木 [mù]. This additional stroke results to the formation of a new idea termed 本 [běn] (basis, origin) which means "root". Note, root is the original meaning of 本 [běn] which later extends to the foundation of things. Invariably, everything within a given cultural milieu has a root or origin. Characters under this radical are connected to the tree. At this point, there is the need to remember the cultural connection of words in relation to the pictographic form. The pictographic form gave birth to the modern form of 木 which is represented using (4 strokes).

Below is the list of characters containing 木 as a component.

树木[樹-] ¹shùmù n. trees (木头 mùtou) wood

树木[樹-] ¹shùmù n. trees

木头[-頭] mùtou n. ①wood; log; timber

灌木 guànmù n. bush; shrub

木材 mùcái n. wood; timber; lumber

木匠 mùjiang n. carpenter

木炭 mùtàn n. charcoal

伐木 fámù v.o. fell trees n. lumbering; cutting

麻木 mámù s.v. numb

来(F 來) [lái] come; 起来 get up; 原来 it turns out

 來(S 来) [lái] come; 起來 get up; 原來 it turns out

本 [běn] basis, origin; volume (book); 日本 Japan

机(F 機) [jī] (机器 jīqi) machine; 收音机 shōuyīnjī radio

 機(S 机) [jī] (機器 jīqi) machine; 收音機 radio

 相 [xiāng] each other, mutual

> ➢ 门(門) [Mén] Door,Gate

Every pictographic character preserves events of the past in the present with a psychological sense that aids linguistic communication. A substantial corpus of cultural significance is the unique insight or values of having doors placed at every house for safety and artistic purposes. The Chinese pictograph reflecting a pair of double doors (門) placed in-between barricaded walls is a good example. The modification of the symbols of the doors culminates into a modern day radical 门. It is a character of three strokes. The cultural connection between the ancient form and the contemporary character is so vivid that the characters with this radical are related to the meaning of the door/gate.
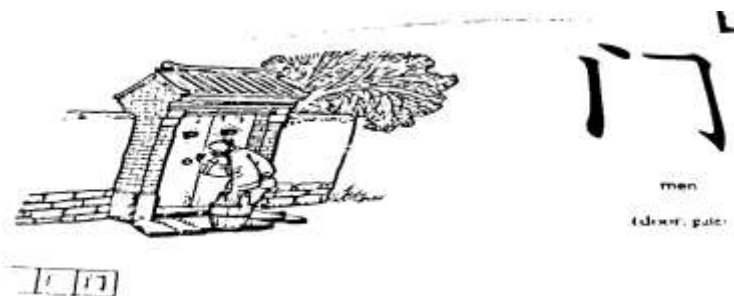
Examples of characters with the radical connected to the door

门(F 門) [mén] door; 门口 doorway; 部门 department; 门铃 doorbell

们(F 們) [men] (pluralizing suffix:) 我们 wǒmen. we; 人们 people

 问(F 問) [wèn] ask; 问题 question, problem; 访问 visit

 间(F 間) [jiān] room; between [jiàn] gap, interval [gān]

> ➢ 高 **[gāo] High, Tall**

Most of the characters originate from artistic creation or social realities of the Chinese people. To help preserve this reality, essential traditional forms are used for emphasis. The character 高 [gāo] which serves as an adjective is represented in the Chinese ancient times with artistically built high fixtures that look like a pinnacle. The fixtures are used in capturing the idea of "a tall or high object, animate and inanimate. It can also express the idea of someone who is above average. 高 is a character of ten (10) strokes. Note that 高 [gāo] can function as a radical in expressing abstract ideas.
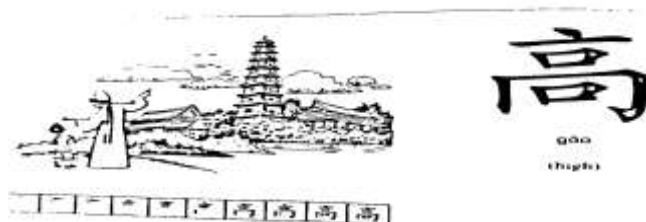
Currently, characters that have the radical are associated with the concept of "high".

提高 tígāo improve; 高兴 gāoxìng happy

高 ¹gāo* s.v. ①tall; high ②above average

毫 [háo] long fine hair; milli-; 毫不 not at all

 稿 [gǎo] stalk of grain; draft, sketch; manuscript

 豪 [háo] not at all

 敲 [qiāo] knock; strike; 敲门 (door); 敲锣 (gong)

 亭 [tíng] (亭子 tíngzi) pavilion

> ➢ 月亮 **(yuèliang), 月球(yuèqiú) Moon**

In the social life of Chinese people, the moon is one of the cultural elements for counting seasons and celebrating lunar festivals like the Spring Festival. In essence, the moon plays a significant role in Chinese folk religion 中国民间信仰 which is replete with ancestral, deity, spirit and nature worship forms. The moon has continued to function as a cosmic controller for Chinese yearly cultural occasions and a means of guaranteeing a peaceful and rich life. The cultural imagination of man capturing the moon in its waxing and waning moments depicts the pictographic form of a new emerging moon smiling in the sky. The oracle bone form (ancient form) of the moon captures a drawing or picture in the "moon"

form. This picture form has undergone transformation until its current form in the standard script 月. The vertical line added in the drawing of the moon reflects the shadow of the bay tree as man views the moon.. When you see a character which contains the component 月, it might be from 月 yuè 'moon' or other related characters. 月 is a character of four (4) strokes.

Below are the characters containing 月 as a component.

有 [yǒu] have; there is; 没有 haven't; 有的 some [yòu] (=又)

能 [néng] can, be able; 能够 be capable of; 可能 maybe

前 [qián] before, front

明 [míng] bright; 明白 míngbai clear, understand; 明天 tomorrow

期 [qī] (时期) time period; 星期 week; 长期 long term [jī]

望 [wàng] look; full moon; 希望 xīwàng hope

服 [fú] (服务) serve; (衣服) clothes   [fù] dose

No doubt, Pictographs are traditional forms of artistic-aesthetic creations that communicate ideas in a memorable way with imaginative power replete with vivid cultural picture forms. The origin of Chinese writing system stems from the drawing of culturally accepted objects or symbols for communication. In essence, these cultural pictures illustrate the structures or components of Chinese characters. The picture forms emerged into inscribed pictographs on the oracle bone, bamboo and silk leading to the emergence of small seal characters, official characters, complex character in regular scripts and simplified characters in regular scripts. The above view is a unique insight into the Chinese worldview. These artistic forms are now indicated in strokes retaining some of its cultural primeval forms when examined carefully. From the examples and explanation given, one thing is clear, a traditional Chinese man cannot divorce the role of culture from the issue of language. In a common sense, language is deeply influenced by human ideas shaped by cultural traits.

Calligraphy 书法 (Shūfǎ)

Chinese calligraphy is an artistic cultural practice of writing characters imbedded in strokes in a decorative way. A study of calligraphy shows that it is the "traditional art of writing Chinese character from the ancient times. In Feng Lingyu and Shi Weimin's view, "the way characters are written has been perceived as the revelation of the inner world of the calligrapher, his self-cultivation, emotions and way of life" (49). Culturally speaking "children start learning calligraphy the day they start learning the characters" (Ibid). After centuries of creation and evolution, it has become a unique form of Art" (The Office of Chinese Language Council International, 121).

Calligraphy has been as old as the Chinese culture and the road map to Chinese artistic writing. The genuineness of feelings in calligraphy is indeed the soul of Chinese culture in learning the correct format of writing Chinese characters. Notably, the notion of the

Chinese calligraphy communicates traditional performances that merge visual arts and interpretative idea of the written artistic character. In the Chinese context, it is strongly linked to the Chinese literary/aesthetic circles commonly referred to as the "Chinese Arts". In Law's view, "calligraphy has seen many artistic and talented giants who have infused characters with a rich artistic meaning beyond the meaning of the characters itself" (34). Using a common parlance, calligraphy is one of the popular cultural expressions of writing in Chinese society with traditionally invented technique and tools of historical artistry. The use of cosmic energy of rhythmic emotion on traditionally produced materials or tools like ink, stick, ink stone, brush, silk or papers in writing produces aesthetic satisfaction which stems out of the need for soul meditation and search for tranquility. Culturally, Chinese scripts are categorized into five (5): seal script (zhuan), official script (li), regular script (kai), cursive hand (cao) and the running hand(xing). The seal script was widely used in the Qin Dynasty (221 BC-206 BC). The official script became famous in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). The regular script emerged as a result of the official script. The cursive hand then indicates a swift way of scribbling the regular and official scripts. The running hand is quite easy and a common form of writing expressly and artistically. It represents a continuous pattern that captures the style between the regular and cursive scripts. Great calligraphers like Zhao Mengfu, Wang Xizhi, Ouyang Xun, Yan Zhenqing etc have unique calligraphic styles with many years of intense dedication to writing (The Office of Chinese Language Council International, 121). The images below culled up from Khan Academy (khanacademy.org/ education.asaianart.org) represent the cultural stages of evolution of Chinese character of the word "dragon 龙[龍] lóng" using the five basic Chinese scripts.

From the images above, one deduces a significant perception that calligraphy is a socio-cultural ritual in writing characters. In terms of the effects on the audience or calligraphers, tracing of characters in a unique manner produces an act of purgation with intrinsic aesthetic value that pleases the soul. In essence, cultural creativity is effective in arousing intellectual ideas and creative feelings. The use of this art is traced to the Confucian scholars and other intellectually endowed individuals in different dynasties (Zhou dynasty 1046-256 BC to Han dynasty 206 BC-220 AD) in the form of Chinese culture, literature and philosophy. Just like the transformation of Chinese characters from the ancient pictographic form to the modern form, Chinese calligraphy has also encountered some historical changes from the classical to the modern; from the oracle-bone to the semi-oracle bone; from the cursive to the semi-cursive. All these changes reflect the major scripts of the Chinese as necessitated by time of occurrence in the narrative effects on the seal script, clerical script, cursive script and standard script. One thing is clear— all these calligraphic scripts are visually developed vocabulary borne out of the calligrapher's cultural acceptance, emotional discernment and context of occasion. Undoubtedly, the "four basic valuable instruments of calligraphy are: brush, ink stick and paper". Currently, to enjoy the cultural practice of painting and mastering of individual characters, a beginner must use the official script in a more regular form.

Conclusion

A significant feature of writing characters as linguistic signs is the need for communication. This form of writing communication has evolved into a sociocultural and traditional art form referred to as calligraphy, 书法 (Shūfǎ). Calligraphy has redefined the Chinese cultural realities by connecting language learning to self-retrieval of primordial Chinese writing skills engrossed in deep emotion. No doubt, understanding Chinese characters goes beyond time and space. This is traceable to the cultural duplication of basic structures and meanings of characters which connect the contemporary written Chinese to the ancient forms. Amidst a growing interest in learning Chinese language, this study has brought to limelight some perspectives of writing characters which are both cultural and historical.

Regarding Chinese calligraphy as a cultural form; pictographic forms and the brush made with ordinary stick or bamboo and animal hair have perfected the spirit of imbibing writing skills. Following the footsteps of Chinese writing culture, Pictographs (象形 xiàngxíng), is the oldest character drawn out of the pictures or drawings of real objects. The myriad of Chinese nomenclatures in representing abstract meanings or ideas enhances a pictographic symbolic sign which is more indicative. This indicative form is called 指事 zhǐshì (Ideographs). Furthermore, there is recognition of difficulty in extracting meanings from ideas using symbols or indicative signs as such, 会意 huìyì (Combined Ideographs) are used as integral aspects to suggest the meaning of an idea to be represented. The cultural zeal to capture meanings in written forms has witnessed a prominent combination of the pictographic part and phonetic part called 形声(聲) xíngshēng (picto-phonetic character), one part explains the form of an object, the other part exposing how the name is pronounced. As long as the study of Chinese character is concerned, the "picto-phonetic character" is difficult and constantly thwarted in pronunciation due to various changes that have occurred in history. The history of Chinese character is inevitably told against the background of cultural preoccupation which has remained under the control of pictographic and ideographic forms, in relations to the meanings attached to them. The deployment of "六书 Liùshū Theory" (six writings theory) as complied in 说文解字 *Shuōwén Jiězì* has revealed the enthralling cultural narratives that captures the capacity for vivid imaging amid complexities of meanings by relating the classical to the contemporary form of writing.

In terms of focus, transformation of the pictographic forms into different complex scripts and later to standard scripts with fewer strokes exhibits a cultural transformation in Chinese writing characteristics. The promotion of the standardized written Chinese characters is traceable to Chinese everyday life patterns drawn from objects to fulfill the linguistic requirement of representing norms in society. This conscious effort has played a specific part in projecting the cultural root and structures of individual Chinese characters. In essence, the pictographic forms have played major roles as the basic structures for constructing social reality in the rhetorical, ideological and historical written language journey of the Chinese cultural milieu.

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