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Ancient Wisdom for the Modern Negotiator: What Chinese Characters Have to Offer Negotiation Pedagogy

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Editors' Note: In a project that from its inception has been devoted to second generation updates, it is instructive nonetheless to realize how much we have to learn from the past. We believe Lee's chapter on Chinese characters and their implications for negotiation is groundbreaking. With luck, it will prove to be a harbinger of a whole variety of new ways of looking at our field that will emerge from our next round of discussion.

Introduction

To the non-Chinese speaker, Chinese characters can look like a chaotic mess of dots, lines and circles. It is said that Chinese is the most difficult language in the world to learn, and since there is no alphabet, the struggling student has no choice but to learn every single Chinese character by sheer force of memory – and there are tens of thousands!

I suggest a different perspective. While Chinese is perhaps not the easiest language to learn, there is a very definite logic and system to the formation of Chinese characters. Some of these characters date back almost eight thousand years – and embedded in their make-up is an extraordinary amount of cultural history and wisdom.

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This chapter looks at nine Chinese characters that are related to negotiation and analyzes how they are written and why they are written that way. It proposes that a deeper understanding of the formation of Chinese characters can enrich the field of negotiation pedagogy. This article has three parts: Part A introduces some background knowledge of Chinese characters. How long ago did they evolve? How are they formed? And how have they changed and become simplified over the years? Part B looks at nine Chinese characters related to the field of negotiation: "negotiation," "co-operation," "conflict," "dispute," "compromise," "relationship," "forgive," "mediation," and "crisis." Why are these characters written in the way they are, and what does that mean? Part C considers four avenues through which understanding these characters might enrich the field of negotiation pedagogy.

Part A: Background Knowledge About Chinese Characters

Historical Evolution of Chinese Characters (6000 Years in the Blink of an Eye)

A comprehensive history of the evolution of Chinese characters is beyond the scope of this article – especially given that some historians trace Chinese characters back to before 6000 BC. However, it is illuminating to have a basic understanding of the history and amount of time that has gone into developing the Chinese character language form.

The earliest *generally accepted* set of characters was found in He'nan province, in the center east of China (Rincon 2003). Strategically located around the Yellow River, He'nan (whose name itself translates to "south of the Yellow River") is referred to as the cradle of Chinese civilization and the tortoise shell carvings found in this region date to around 6600 BC (Longwen 2009).

Chinese history texts refer to a golden age of cultural development during the Xia dynasty of around 2100 BC, during which great poetry and music were composed and literary masterpieces were written.[1] However, since no documents have survived from this period, claims are difficult to verify (Allan 1991).

The earliest *undisputed* set of characters is the set known as the "Oracle Bones" (甲骨文) of 1250 BC, which were once used by the Shang dynasty royalty to divine the future (in a broadly similar way

to the "Tarot cards" of the West) (Boltz 1986: 436). Popular history tells of a government official who, in 1899, discovered strange inscriptions on animal bones used in the Chinese medicine being used to treat his cold (Xianghong 2009: 55). A scholar of ancient texts, he recognized that these inscriptions were ancient Chinese characters, and he mounted a campaign to oppose the use of these bones by doctors and instead preserve these bones for study. Today, over 100,000 bone fragments have been found and approximately 1,400 distinct ancient Chinese characters identified.

Between 1250 BC and 220 BC, different social groups began to emerge throughout different parts of China, each with its own "script" or writing style (Xianghong 2009: 60). Similar but not identical, each script was said to have its own unique cultural and geographic characteristics, e.g., the characters of the Chu were considered "vivid and flamboyant" whereas the characters of the Qin were "tidy and organized" and easily carved into a seal (earning it the title of the "seal script") (Xianghong 2009: 60).

In 221 BC, one social group, the Qin, succeeded in conquering all the others and uniting China – forming the Qin Dynasty. As part of its rulership, the Qin prescribed one unified writing style to be used throughout the whole country. From this point forward, historians generally accept that there was a formal set of "Chinese characters" (Xianghong 2009: 60).

How are Chinese Characters Formed?

Chinese characters are formed by assembling smaller elements known as "radicals." There are 214 generally accepted radicals. Some radicals are as basic as one vertical stroke or two horizontal lines. Many radicals however are more advanced and hold greater meaning.

One set of radicals, the "pictograms," are graphical representations of a "thing," e.g., the radicals for "sun," "moon" and "mountain" all are based on (quite stylized) pictures of a sun 日, a moon 月 and a mountain 山. Pictograms are radicals that often represent the most simple and basic of nouns.

Another set of radicals, the "Ideograms," are graphical representations of a "concept" e.g., the character for "up" is an arrow pointing up 上 and the character for "down" is the opposite 下. The character for "big" is a man with his arms and legs spread wide 大. The character for "small" is a man with his arms and legs held close to his body 小.

By combining radicals together, a character is given form and meaning. For example, the "water" radical of three dots arranged in a vertical line is used in the characters for lake 湖, river 河 and tears 泪. The radical for "mouth," which is similar to a square, is used in the characters for eat 吃, sing 唱 and drink 喝. The radical for "female," a stylized symbol of a pregnant woman nursing a child, is used in the characters for mother 妈, sister 姐 and peace 安 (the character for peace is made up of the radical for "ceiling" over the radical for "female" – suggesting that a female under the ceiling and in the room brings peace).

The original assembly of characters was often done with extraordinary thought and poetic consideration. For example, the character "flight" 飛 was made up of the radical for a mother bird leading a baby bird, above a bridge which crosses a river. The character "love" 愛 came from the radical for "placement" combined with "heart" over "friendship." The character "rest" 休 comes from "man" adjacent to "tree."

The Process of Simplification

While it is tempting to marvel at the deep thought behind these characters, one challenge was that many of these characters were created at a time when literacy was for the elite and often involved numerous and complicated brushstrokes: some characters could have over forty strokes. It might have been lyrical to compose poetry with such characters, but the ordinary person on the street was more likely to be interested in practicality than in poetry.

In 1956, the modern Chinese government enacted a national policy to promote literacy. Part of this policy involved adopting a new "simplified" version of Chinese characters, greatly reducing the number of strokes required to write the "correct" form of a character. Today, the "pre-1956" characters are now referred to as "traditional characters" or 繁体字 (literally translated to "numerous stroke characters"). The "post-1956" characters are now referred to as "simplified characters" or 简体字 (literally translated to "simple stroke characters"). This process has continued with further rounds of refinement and simplification occurring in 1964, 1977 and 1986. Some examples of the difference between traditional and simplified characters:

English word	Pronunciation	Traditional Chinese	Simplified Chinese
Fly (verb)	Fēi	飛	飞
Love	Aì	愛	爱
Horse	Mǎ	馬	马
Nation/ Kingdom	Gúo	國	国
Dragon	lóng	龍	龙
Book	Shū	書	书
Magnificent[2]	Weǐ	偉	伟

There remains considerable controversy as to whether simplification has been a good thing for China. Proponents of simplified characters point to the increase in literacy and the ease of use in modern day life (scribbling a note on the fridge about going to the store to buy some milk using simplified characters is much quicker than doing so using traditional characters) and suggest that concrete issues of practicality, education and literacy should trump whimsical and elitist notions of "linguistic beauty" (Gunde 2002). They also point to the long tradition of simplification over thousands of years, meaning recent simplifications are just another step in the natural evolution of the language (Norman 1988).

Proponents of traditional characters argue that the process of simplification diminishes Chinese culture by removing some of the most significant elements of the language, and contributes towards dumbing down the populace. It is argued that traditional characters are more aesthetically pleasing and are more meaningful. Using the "flight" example, the traditional character of two birds, the river and the bridge has been simplified to a squiggle with wings – from 飛 to 飞. The character for "love" has been simplified by removing the centrally placed radical for heart – from 愛 to爱. There is also the argument that literacy in "traditional character" regions such as Taiwan and Hong Kong is better than that of "simplified character" regions such as Mainland China – so "the literacy argument" is not valid as a reason to promote simplification.[3]

In 2009, there has been much public discourse and debate in Mainland China about the next stage in Chinese character script development: Should we further simplify the language, and if so how? How should new terms such as "internet speak" be incorporated into the language, and should we perhaps consider a return of

some characters back to their more "complicated but meaningful" state?[4]

In 2010, living in Beijing, I notice a blending of traditional and simplified characters in ordinary life. Newspapers, university text books and television subtitles (for the deaf) are all in simplified characters. Much "modern" pop-culture, such as comic books produced in Hong Kong, online computer games produced in Taiwan and pop tune lyrics displayed on the MTV channel regularly use traditional characters.

Finally, it should be noted that the most "everyday" characters used today to write legal documents, to send emails and to read a newspaper, are remarkably similar to the characters of the Qin dynasty dating back to 221 BC. A young primary school student with a basic command of simplified Chinese characters can make some sense of texts dating back 2000 years – something that might be difficult with other languages. (For comparison, consider how much English has changed just since Chaucer's time.) Some characters can even be recognizable against their 6600 BC counterparts – the characters for "sun" and "mountain" have changed very little over this time.

With this as background, I will turn to nine characters that are related to the field of negotiation pedagogy and trace these characters back to their ancient roots, explaining the thinking and consideration behind the original formation of these characters. I use the simplified form of Chinese characters since I am most familiar with this form.

Part B: Nine Chinese Characters Related to Negotiation[5]

Negotiation 谈判 (tán pàn)

谈(tán): This character has a "left" and a "right" part. On the left, there is the radical for "speech." On the right, there is the pictogram for "fire," repeated twice. This character came from the idea of a group of village elders "talking around a fire."

判(pàn): This character has a "left" and a "right" part. On the left there is an ideogram of an item, perhaps a goat, being carved in two (the vertical stroke being the "slash" of the knife). On the right, there is a pictogram of a blade. This character symbolizes a blade cutting something in two.

Hence, the characters for *negotiation* come from "talking around a fire" so that we can "split something into two pieces."

Co-operation 合作 *(hé zùo)*

合(hé): This is a pictogram of a box with a neatly fitting lid.

作(zùo): This character is a heavily simplified pictogram of two sticks of wood being rubbed together rapidly to make fire.

Hence, the characters for *co-operation* come from the concept of being "neatly fitting" with each other so that we can achieve something important (like making a fire).

Conflict 冲突 *(chōng tu)*

冲(chōng): This character has a "left" and a "right" part. On the left is a representation of two rivers. On the right is the character for "middle." The character therefore represents the point at which two rivers crash together.

突 (tu): This character originally came from the pictogram of an angry dog bursting out of a cage. It has been simplified almost beyond recognition now.

Hence, the characters for *conflict* come from the idea of being in a state of great agitation – like being trapped between two raging rivers or like an angry dog escaping from a cage.

Dispute 争议 *(zhēn yì)*

争(zhēn): a highly simplified and stylized picture of two hands, owned by different people, pulling a cow's head in two different directions.

议(yì): another very highly simplified character that used to have three separate parts, which are no longer identifiable in the modern simplified version. The first part was the symbol for "speech" (which is still observable as the radical on the left hand side of the modern character). The second part was the symbol for "me." The third part was the symbol for "goat." The overall character represented the act of "talking to convince you to give me the goat."

Hence the modern characters for *dispute* can be traced back to the idea of two herders arguing over the ownership of livestock.

Compromise 妥协 *(tǔo xíe)*

妥(tǔo): This character has an "upper" and a "lower" part. The upper part represents a hand and is an ideogram for "placing" or "sending." The lower part is the radical for female, derived from the pictogram of a woman nursing a child. The thinking behind this

character is the act of "sending one's daughter away to a rival in order to forge a bond." In ancient times, the daughter of one "tribe" would often be married to the son of another tribe, thus linking the two tribes as one.

协(xíe): This character is a heavily simplified pictogram of two dogs using a lot of strength to do something together.

Hence, the characters for *compromise* come from the idea of giving up something highly treasured, to help you and me to work strongly in the same direction.

Relationship 关系 *(guān xi)*

关(guān): This character is a pictogram of the vertical latch that formed the lock of old wooden doors.

系(xi): This character is an ideogram of someone tying two pieces of silken rope together.

Hence, the characters for *relationship* come from the concept of connecting and locking two people together – much in the way that a door can be locked or two pieces of rope can be attached to each other.

Forgive 谅解 *(liàng jíe)*

谅 (liàng): This character represents the concept of "cooling down" or "reducing temperature."

解 (jíe): This character has three parts. The left hand side represents the idea of "using." The right upper side is the radical for "knife." The right lower side is the pictogram for a horned bull. Assembled together, this character is the concept of using a knife to cut the horns off a bull.

Hence, the characters for *forgive* come from the concept of hot heads cooling down, so that we can cut away the "bad and dangerous parts" of something important.

Mediation 调解 （tíao jíe）

调 (tíao): This character is made up of two parts. The left-hand side is the radical for "speech." The right-hand side is the character for "round" or "circular." (It was originally a picture of a granary, which traditionally was built in a round shape.) Together, these two radicals combine to form the idea of "sitting in a round shape to arrange the doing of things."

解 (jíe): This is the same character used in "forgive" – the concept of using a knife to cut the horns off a bull. Hence, the characters for *mediation* come from the concept of sitting around in a circle to arrange the "cutting away" of bad and dangerous things from our relationship.

Interestingly, one can observe that there is only one character's difference between "forgive" and "mediation."

Crisis 危机 (weī jī)

危 (weī): This is the character for "danger." Originally, it involved a man standing too close to a cliff face and falling off. It has been heavily simplified.

机 (jī): This is the character for "opportunity." On the left hand side is the radical for "wood." On the right hand side is the radical for "tool." The original non-simplified version involved the picture of a wooden trap that was used to hunt wild animals for food.

This oft-quoted character therefore indicates that to the ancient Chinese, a "crisis" was the conjunction of danger and opportunity.

Part C: What Does This Mean for Negotiation Pedagogy?

How can understanding the construction of Chinese characters enrich the field of negotiation pedagogy? I propose the following four avenues for further research and sharing.

1) Richer and Alternate Perspectives

Understanding the history behind these characters can offer different perspectives and illuminating insights into "accepted" ideas and concepts in the field. Consider the word "compromise" as not only "giving up something important" but doing so as a means to ensure that "you and I can work together in the same direction." Interpret the word "forgiveness" through the metaphor of cutting the "sharp dangerous parts" off an angry bull such that we can focus on the more important positive things. Look at a "relationship" as a way in which two people can be connected to each other as if tied by silk rope or latched by a wooden door-bolt.

The field of modern negotiation pedagogy has been created by extraordinarily brilliant people and we have words and concepts like "creating value," "mutual gains" and "developing options" – all of which are important to teaching negotiation. I wonder, however, whether some words and concepts have become so well taught and so entrenched that entertaining other perspectives can be challeng-

ing For example, a "compromise" is generally interpreted as a bad thing. Perhaps greater knowledge and understanding of Chinese characters, developed from a cultural and philosophical background different from that of modern Western thinking, may encourage creative thought and interesting alternative perspectives.

2) A Richer Cross-Cultural Understanding

With the world becoming increasingly smaller and interest in cross-cultural negotiation also increasing, a deeper appreciation of Chinese characters and their embedded cultural history may offer insights into traditional cultural norms and values.

There is already, I believe, much interest in Chinese culture and philosophy. I note that the Chinese character for "crisis" as a combination of "danger and opportunity" appears frequently in Western commentary. Confucius is often cited in the West. And I have more than once seen the mysterious nature of ancient Chinese culture being illustrated by the supposedly ancient curse, "May you live in interesting times."

I hope that this interest in Chinese culture might evolve into a richer understanding of China – and that this in turn may translate into more effective, and deeper, cross-cultural negotiation research. There are of course many illustrations of interesting philosophy beyond the word "crisis" and many more scholars than Confucius whose knowledge could be added to the field. There is also no such Chinese curse as, "May you live in interesting times."

Additionally, a deeper understanding of Chinese characters is not just something that should be promoted among Western scholars. In China, we are reading newspapers, checking the internet and sending off emails every day – but how much do we really consider the wisdom and history behind the characters we use, read, type and write? Chinese people, eager to learn about other cultures, could enhance our cross-cultural awareness by learning more about our own culture.

I believe that an appreciation of the Chinese language and of the make-up of our characters is a fundamental part of better cross-cultural negotiation. Studying these characters, of which there are over 50,000, is a largely untapped goldmine for research in the negotiation pedagogy field, especially as it relates to cross-cultural negotiations.

3) Understanding the Reason for and Impact of "Simplification"

Above, I have referenced the deep controversy behind the simplification of Chinese characters and outlined some of the major arguments for and against the simplification process. While debating the merits of simplification is important, I believe that for the negotiation pedagogy field, the question is not so much whether the simplification process is good or bad, but rather how and why it is happening.

How did a character of thirty strokes become a character of five? When we simplify, what do we keep and what do we throw out – and why? What was the thinking behind removing the radical for "heart" from the character "love?" It may be that one of the original justifications for simplification was to ease writing – but in today's China where we type emails and rarely lift a pen, why do we continue to simplify? [6]

I suspect that a better understanding of the simplification process may provide insights into modern Chinese social thinking, which in turn may reveal wisdom about Chinese negotiation practices.

4) Exploring Other Regions That Use Chinese Characters

Mainland China is the birthplace of Chinese characters and also the founder of "simplified characters." However, it is not the only region to use Chinese characters for writing. Of the regions that started using Chinese characters, some but not all have followed Mainland China along the simplification process. It is interesting to consider what other regions use Chinese characters and the similarities and differences between those regions and China.

In Singapore, Chinese is one of the nation's three national languages. Singapore has completely embraced simplified characters, to the point of exclusion of traditional characters.

In Malaysia, Chinese is spoken, read and written by the large Chinese community, in addition to Malaysia's primary language, Bahasa Malaysia. Malaysia uses a combination of both simplified and traditional characters.

Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau only use traditional characters and explicitly reject the use of simplified characters. Hong Kong and Macau have retained the use of traditional characters beyond their handovers from British and Portuguese to Mainland Chinese administration.

Korea used traditional Chinese characters prior to adopting their own script in the fifteenth century. [7] Korean characters ("hangul"),

as opposed to traditional Chinese characters ("hanja") became formally adopted in official documents in 1894, and today Hangul is by far the most prevalent language of both North and South Korea.[8] My understanding is that today, North Korea has phased out Chinese characters altogether and South Korea retains only a minimal use of traditional Chinese characters, and does not use simplified characters at all. To illustrate the differences between traditional, simplified and Korean Hangul characters, consider the words "Republic of Korea":

- Traditional Chinese: 大韓民國 (pronounced as dà hán mín gúo)
- Simplified Chinese: 大韩民国 (pronounced unchanged as dà hán mín gúo)
- Korean Hangul: 대한민국 (pronounced as daehan-minguk)

Japan has three completely separate scripts that are combined to form the Japanese written language. One of these scripts ("kanji") is based on the Chinese traditional characters. Japan has had its own process of simplification, similar but not always identical to that used in Mainland China. One illustration of differences between simplification is the character for "dragon":

- Traditional Chinese: 龍 (pronounced lóng)
- Simplified Chinese: 龙 (pronounced unchanged as lóng)
- Modern (simplified) Kanji Japanese: 竜 (pronounced as ryu)

Finally, simplified Chinese is one of the five official languages of the United Nations. The United Nations does not recognize traditional characters.

Interestingly, although spoken Chinese, Korean, Japanese and the dialects used in Taiwan (Taiwanese) and Hong Kong and Macau (Cantonese) are completely unintelligible to each other, the common use of Chinese characters means we are usually able to communicate in writing.

There is already considerable research on the difference between "Western" and "Asian" styles of negotiation. Just as there are differences within Western styles (I suggest a traditional "American" style is somewhat different to a traditional "German" style), I believe there are many differences between and within "Asian" styles (see generally Barnes 2006). An analysis of Chinese characters, how and whether those characters have changed over time, may give greater insight into the negotiation traits of each culture.

A Personal Note

My introduction to the world of negotiation pedagogy was through the Program on Negotiation (PON) at Harvard Law School. There, I was exposed for the first time in my life to the teaching of negotiation, to learning through role-play, to writing journals, to decision trees and concepts of "mutual gains," the "7 elements" and "Getting to Yes." I remain incredibly grateful to the PON for nurturing me and inspiring me and starting me on this journey.

When I came to teach negotiation in China, my first class was basically "what I learned from the PON, but delivered in Mandarin." It was *Sally Soprano*, the *Oil Pricing Game* and *Win As Much As You Can* – taught in Chinese. Fast forward six years, and the negotiation syllabus at Peking University has changed greatly. One of the major additions to the course has been sharing with my own Chinese-speaking students the historical development of our own characters. This article has come out of the teachings in my own class.

There is much we in China have to learn from the field of negotiation pedagogy. In the United States and some other countries, law schools, business schools, public policy and planning schools all have long-established negotiation classes, tenured faculty, journals and text-books, while we do not.

But we do have a culture and a history that is longer than any current civilization on the planet. We have been negotiating for a very long time. I deeply believe that in addition to having much to learn, we also have much to offer. Chinese people should look back on and learn from our own linguistic history. Our friends in Japan, Korea and other "Chinese character using cultures" may have their own insights and perspectives to offer. Once we better appreciate our own language, we may be able to share this knowledge more efficiently with our friends from other cultures.

I hope that through sharing this understanding of the history behind Chinese characters, we might be able to make a contribution to the exciting field of negotiation pedagogy.

Notes

[1] One of the most well known and cited texts is the 史记 or *Records of the Grand Historian* by Si Ma Qian. Considered the first authoritative history of China dating from 2600 BC onwards, it lists the Xia dynasty as the first dynasty of Ancient China. An electronic version of 史记 is available at http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/shiji/sjml.htm

[2] The inclusion of the character for "magnificent" in this list is due to that fact that this character is part of my own name. The simplification process is not some abstract practice that only affects technical words – many of our own names have been changed.

[3] There is an English language summary of some of the other contentious points of view on the topic of Chinese language simplification at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debate_on_traditional_and_simplified_Chinese _characters#cite_note-Gunde.2C_Richard_2002-6.

[4] Some preliminary reports about this process are available at 汉字，该繁还是简？ - XINHUA NEWS, April 9, 2009 http://news.xinhuanet.com/focus/2009-04/09/content_11154357.htm; *China to Regulate use of Simplified Characters.* CHINAVIEW August 12, 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/12/content_11871748.htm

[5] See generally, "*说文解字*" *(An Analysis and Explanation of Chara*cters) written by Xu Shen in the Han Dynasty, in approximately 100 AD. There are many versions and printings of this text – the one I favor is the version edited by Xu Xuan of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and published in Beijing by Zhong Hua Book Company, first printed in 1963 and reprinted in 2008.

[6] In Mainland China, we use standard western "QWERTY" keyboards to type. We follow the "Hanyu Pinyin" system which converts Chinese pronunciations into Romanized characters. If we want to write the character "wo," we type "w" then "o" and the computer automatically brings up the character 我 on our screens. If there is more than one character pronounced "wo," then the computer will generate a list of all similar-sounding characters and we select the desired character. In this way, a person typing Chinese need only be able to recognize a character, she or he need not remember how to write it. The argument against simplification is that recognizing a character with fourteen strokes is just as easy as recognizing a character with four (for example, an octagon is just as easy to recognize as a triangle even though an octagon has many more strokes). Hence, the argument goes, simplification of characters is unnecessary.

[7] See, Background of the Invention of Hangeul (2010).

[8] See, Providing Process of Hangeul (2010).

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