

“(生)進也。象艸木生出土上。下象土。上象出。此與? 出_艸以類相從。所庚切。十一部。凡生之屬皆从生。”

生 means developing. The character resembles grass and trees growing from the earth. The lower part of the character resembles the word for earth (土) and the upper part of the character resembles the word for “go forth” (出). Why is this so? Perhaps it is because they are similar in that they sprout forth. The pronunciation is comprised of *suo* (所) and *geng* (庚). It is under the eleventh radical. All characters pertaining to living have the life radical (生).

“(始)女之初也。釋詁曰。初、始也。此與爲互訓。初、裁皆衣之始也。基者、牆之始也。凡言之者皆分別之_彙。有段殆爲始者。七月毛傳云殆始也是也。从女。台聲。詩止切。一部。按凡始事有急緩之殊。不得云有二義。今人乃爲之二音。緩者讀去聲。月令紀節物用始字十餘。而蟬始鳴獨市反。其亦庸人自擾也矣。”

始 means beginning from a woman. The *Shigu* (釋詁) says: *chu* (初) [“start”] means *shi* (始) [“beginning”]. Thus, these two are synonyms. *Chu* means start in the sense of how cutting cloth is the beginning of making clothes and how foundations are the beginnings of walls. In speech, we distinguish this in terms of “_彙”. Some usages of *dai* (殆) are loan graphs for *shi* (始). An example where it reads *dai* (殆) for *shi* (始) in the *Qiyue Mao Zhuan* (七月毛傳). The character has the female (女) radical and “台” is a phonetic component. The pronunciation is comprised on *shi* (詩) and *zhi* (止). It is under the *yi* (一) radical.¹ All matters pertaining to *shi* (始) [“beginning” or “being born”] have an element of urgency, but we should not say that the character has two completely different meanings. People nowadays read it with two different tones. When it has the sense of releasing tension (*huan* 緩), they read it with the falling tone (*qu sheng* 去聲). The *Yueling* (月令) records use the character *shi* (始) dozens of times. When *shi* (始) is used in the sense of cicadas beginning their call, the pronunciation is comprised of *du* (獨) and *shi* (市). I think this [whole issue of the different pronunciations of *shi*] is just a matter of people creating worries for themselves!

¹ [This could also mean “is listed under the first radical”. See below where the text reads “十一部” which more likely means “is listed under the eleventh radical”.

“(母) 牧也。以𠂔韻爲訓。牧者、養牛人也。以譬人之乳子。引伸之、凡能生之以啓後者皆曰母。从女。象褰子形。褰、裒也。象兩手褰子也。一曰象乳子也。廣韻引倉頡篇云。其中有兩點者、象人乳形。豎通者即音無。按此就隸書釋之也。莫后切。古音在一部”

母 means to tend young. By means of 𠂔 it rhymes with *xun* (訓) [“to teach by drilling”]. A tender is one who raises oxen. It also refers to how humans suckle our infants. By extension, all living beings that can give birth to progeny are called “*mu*” (母) [“mothers”] once they have done so. The character has the female (女) radical. It resembles the shape of a woman carrying (褰 *huai*) a child. “褰” (*huai*) means to carry in an embrace. The character [母] resembles carrying a child in two hands. Some say that it resembles suckling a child. The *Guangyun* (廣韻) [“Broad Rhyming Dictionary] cites this in the *Cangjie* (倉頡) chapter. There are two points I take from it: the character resembles a human suckling; and as it stands erect, the pronunciation resembles that of *wu* (無). Thus, the character is explained when written in Clerical Script (*Lishu* 隸書). The pronunciation is comprised of *mo* (莫) and *hou* (后). The ancient pronunciation had it listed under the *yi* (一) radical.

“(無) 豐也。从林；爽。或說規模字。从大、卅，數之積也；林者，木之多也。卅與庶同意。

《商書》曰：“庶草繁無。”文甫切【注】徐鍇曰：“或說大卅爲規模之模，諸部者，不審信也。”

無 means abundant. It has the forest (林) radical; and 爽. Some say that it contains the components for the characters *guimo* (規模) [“scope”]. It has the big (大) radical and 卅, which means, much that is accumulated. Forest (林) means many trees. 卅 has the same meaning as 庶 (numerous). In the *Shang Shu* (商書), it says: “Numerous grasses propagate into *wu* (無)”. The pronunciation is made up of *wen* (文) and *fu* (甫). Note: Xu Kai (徐鍇) comments: “Some say that the 大卅 means *mo* (模) [“model”] as in *guimo* (規模) [“scope”]. However, I do not believe that these components have that meaning.”

“(雌) 鳥母也。从隹此聲。”

雌 means female bird. It has the bird (隹) radical and 此 gives the pronunciation.

“(牝) 畜母也。从牛匕聲。”

牝 means female livestock. It has the ox (牛) radical and 匕 gives the pronunciation.

“(雄) 鳥父也。从隹厶聲。”

雄 means male bird. It has the bird (隹) radical and 厶 gives the pronunciation.

“(牡) 畜父也。从牛土聲。”

牡 means male livestock. It has the ox (牛) radical and 土 gives the pronunciation.

“(弱) 橈也。橈者曲木也。”

弱 means bent and twisted (橈). 橈 means twisted wood.

“(柔) 木曲直也。从木矛聲。”

柔 means when wood is curved and then goes straight. It has the wood (木) radical and 矛 gives the pronunciation.

“(陰) 闇也。水之南、山之北也。从阜隤聲。”

陰 means dark as in south of water and north of mountains. It has the mound (阜) radical and 隤 gives the pronunciation.

“(陽) 高、明也。从阜易聲。”

陽 means high and bright. It has the mound (阜) radical and 易 gives the pronunciation.

“(為) 母猴也。其為禽好爪。爪，母猴象也。下腹為母猴形。”

為 refers to the female monkey, which is fond prey for birds. 爪 resembles the female monkey. The lower abdomen [of the character] resembles that of the female monkey.

“(川) 貫穿通流水也。”

川 means a place through which streams flow.

“(江) 水。出蜀湔氐徼外嶓山，入海。从水工聲。”

江 refers to waters. These waters originate from Shu, wash through the Di frontiers, beyond the Min Mountains, and then out to sea. It has the water (水) radical and 工 gives the pronunciation.

“(海) 天池也。以納百川者。从水每聲。”

海 means the heavenly pond. It is that into which all rivers flow. It has the water (水) radical and 每 gives the pronunciation.

“(自) 鼻也。象鼻形。凡自之屬皆从自。”

自 means nose. The character resembles a nose in shape. All characters that refer to nose have the nose (自) radical.²

“(然) 燒也。从火狀聲。”

然 means to burn. It has the fire (火) radical and 狀 (*ran*) gives the pronunciation.

“(言) 直言曰言，論難曰語。从口辛聲。凡言之屬皆从言。”

Speaking directly is called talking (言) whereas discoursing on difficult subjects is called discussing (語).

It has the mouth (口) radical and 辛 (*qian*) gives the pronunciation. All characters that refer to speech have the talking (言) radical.

² [This may help explain why in Chinese culture people point to their nose when referring to themselves. The modern usage of “自” often means “oneself”, or “me”.