

日

sun, day

月

moon

明

brilliant, bright,
enlightened

Combining the light from both solar and lunar orbs results in a word that expresses a luminous totality; ‘ming’ conveys a brilliance whose qualities are both diurnal and nocturnal, conscious and unconscious. It is an ideogram that combines two polar opposites into a union whose new symbolic power transcends the sum of its parts.

Jung might call this word a manifestation of the Coniunctio, an alchemical term referring to chemical combinations (also represented by ‘Sol’ and ‘Luna’”) and psychologically pointing to the union of opposites whose coming together produces new possibilities for the individual.

白

clear, white, plain

明白

to understand

‘Ming’ followed by ‘bai,’ the word for clear and white means to understand. To what extent do the Chinese reader and speaker experience the archetypal underpinnings of these symbols? To what extent have their significance been absorbed or sublimated by the Chinese collective psyche? To what extent are these symbols direct products of this very same collective psyche?

空中小姐

empty/sky middle little elder sister (middle of the empty/sky little sister)

A personal favorite of mine, these four characters combine to form the one word used to mean ‘flight attendant.’ Of course, there was not much need for this word pre-1929 or so. Nevertheless, the symbolic rendering of this occupation suggests some of the mytho-poetic richness that awaits the student of Chinese.

奴

slave (woman/again) heart

心

怒

anger (slave of the heart)

怕

fear (white heart)

女

woman

子

boy, son

好

good

One of the most often spoken words, 'hao' or 'good,' is part of a standard daily greeting. In Cantonese speaking China, 'you good' means 'hi,' and 'you good?' means 'how are you?' After learning the character/word for woman, I was at first surprised to learn that the word 'good' is an ideogram comprising a woman and her son. Mother and child are good. Much like Fenollosa says, the etymology of a word in Chinese is always visible. The socio-political implications, in addition to those archetypal and cultural, are nearby. The most basic of family units, the mother and child, symbolizes growth and balance (both idealized by the Chinese) as well as the closest humans come to achieving immortality of body.

安

peace, contentment (woman under roof)

字

written character (boy, son under roof)

Here is woman, again, this time she is under a roof. This character means tranquility, serenity and peacefulness. When a boy is under the roof, we have the character for the written word. Something privileged young Chinese boys have had to do for more than twenty-five hundred years (stay home and study writing). One could say that woman, privileged or not, have also been associated with the household in China for much longer.

田

rice field

力

force

男

man, male

The character for a rice field is an excellent example of a pictogram, if one thinks of this aerial view as an accurate layout for Chinese farming that continues to this day. Combining power or force by placing it under the field creates the ideogram for man and male. Rice, of course, is the major staple grain for the entire south of China. The connection between rice and the sustenance of life is a clear one. That sweat and hard work are needed to harvest this reward seems to be implied by this ideogram for man.

豕
pig

家
house, family
(pig under roof)

嫁
to marry (woman as subject)
(woman next to family, patrilineal)

耳
ear

又
hand

娶
to marry (man as subject)
to obtain a woman,
take her by the ear

妻
wife (woman under broom)

人
person

大
great, big

太
too much

天
heaven

夫
husband

太太
madam, wife (Mrs.)

目
eye

見
see (eye on legs)

夢
dream

白日夢
daydream (sun/day, bright, dream)

火
fire

禾
grain

秋
autumn

中
middle

心
heart

忠
loyalty

開
open

心
heart

開心
happiness

心理學
psychology

原型
archetype