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Françoise Bottéro Workshop East Asian writing systems
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Indian scripts' influence on graphic analysis in China

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It is a too well-known fact that Chinese had a profound influence on its neighbors in terms of script, but what about China? Could it completely escape its surrounding's linguistic systems? I shall show that it was not the case.

The Chinese traditional graphic analysis distinguishes 2 types of characters according to the complexity of their structure: “simple characters” *wén* 文 and “compound characters” *zì* 字. This distinction is commonly attributed to Xǔ Shèn 許慎 the author of the first Chinese characters dictionary *Shuōwén jiězì* 說文解字 composed in the year 100 (who happened to be the inventor of the so-called radicals classification system *bùshǒu* 部首). If, as shown by Bottéro 2004, Xǔ Shèn did not make any such structural distinction between *wén* and *zì* in his whole work, then where does this ‘simple versus compound characters’ analysis’ come from?

It goes without saying that non-compound and compound characters have always existed in the Chinese writing system since early stages. But no one ever attributed them a terminological distinction until Zhèng Qiáo 鄭樵 (1104-1162). Zhèng Qiáo is the first author theorizing on non-compound and compound characters under the terms *wén* 文 and *zì* 字.

I will show that he could develop such a new analysis of the Chinese script under the influence of the Indian scripts available during his time and before.

Bottéro, Françoise, 2004, « Revisiting the wen and the zi: The Great Chinese Characters Hoax », *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74 (2002), p. 14-33.

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