the shift of focus from the immediacy of appearance to an abstract objectivity in the historical development of thought, and respectively from the images of the heavens to the world of human beings outlined above, is immediately reflected in the development of the medium through which our knowledge of Chinese antiquity has primarily come down to us, namely the Chinese written language; for in China, writing did not originate as a means of recording human discourse for other humans, but rather for communication between the deities or ancestral spirits of heaven and the humans on the earth, i.e., as a mediation between heaven and earth.

This is to say, that the act of writing itself was thought of as a direct expression of the enduring cosmic act of creation, by which the pattern of heaven was cast down into the regulations of earth. Cangjie, the mythical founder of the art of writing, was therefore represented as having two pairs of eyes, one above and one below, so that he could see the heaven and the earth simultaneously. The tracks of birds (which signify the messengers of heaven) on the ground are said to have inspired him to devise writing. And moreover it is reported that with the invention of writing, the demons began to weep in the night, for “the script which decodes the world, the fruit of the union between heaven and earth, above and below, heralded the power of human beings over them.”

The associative joining of heaven and earth was, however, not only the principle of the creation of writing, which indeed, in the course of the first two to three centuries of the Zhou Dynasty led to the developed form of a
regular written language, but moreover to the production of symbols in general. It was the principle of a mythical way of thinking, that primarily represented mythos in the synesthetic medium of ritual. The rituals originated out of the ecstatic techniques of the shamanic priests, through which they entered into intuitive contact with the celestial powers. One such ecstatic technique was obviously the legendary Dance of Yu. Hence, in their later codified forms, the rituals possessed the structure of a symbolic imitation of celestial phenomena in order to immediately correspond to the mandate of heaven.

How one must conceive of the origin of writing in the context of early ritual has been convincingly reconstructed by Leon Vandermeersch on the grounds of investigation of the archaic forms of relevant Chinese characters. Thus the character yue 曰 (in its archaic form) that introduces a written quote, signifies the image of a "script tray" that is a flat vessel filled with a layer of sand in which the inscribed tablet of wood or bamboo would be placed, as it is practiced with incense sticks in Chinese temples today. On these tablets was written the message or the question to the heavens that the ritual was intended to express. The character for 'scribe' (shi 史) originally represented a hand which holds aloft a script holder fastened to a stick, in order to offer the message contained within it to the heavens. The scribe ritually answers the gesture with which, in the reverse direction, the heaven itself lets its 'signs' (wen 文) or 'images' (xiang 象) 'hang down', as it is referred to in the old texts.

The messages on the tablets were graphic magic formulae, which "proceeding from the development of writing, may not yet be regarded as talismans, that is as compositions of layered or juxtaposed graphic forms without any of the pronouncability of characters which could be spoken aloud". They were magical keys or templates (fu) for the contact with the heavens and the world of the ancestral spirits, in that they represented the present situation in an associative unity with the celestial phenomena as the cosmic moment's holographic trail of information. The shamans put themselves into a place where they could experience this dimension in their ecstatic view and to articulate it graphically. Clearly, psychedelic plant drugs played a large role in this, which are documented in the early sources with reference to the extraordinary ritual importance and the later battle against 'wine'.

Such magical script-images from the early Chinese epoch have not been passed down to modern times. Nevertheless, we can clearly imagine them, since in Taoism the tradition of their spontaneous creation from the ecstatic vision has been preserved. The collection of Daoist texts containing more than 1,000 works is full of graphic compositions of this type, by means of which a consciousness-broadening or psychotherapeutically effective view into the essence of being is imparted, that is, a blueprint of the inner context of things with the world of spirits and the deities of the heavens.

In many ways, these images exhibit a high level of artistry. In that they depict no objects but rather incorporeal phenomenal structures hence pure mental essences, the characteristic elements of the abstract art of our century are, in a way, anticipated.

Many of these images possess the explicit characteristics of script, they are 'spirit script' of fantastic, freely formed characters - from the Confucian view a sacrilege against the sacred form of script established in the classics. This style of writing was called by the Taoists 'true writing' (zhenwen 真文) in which the 'celestial script' (tianwen 天文) is manifested. The shamanistic tradition of primordially creating symbolic scripts was thereby effectively continued by the Taoists. In a philosophy of creative spontaneity, they challenged the later compulsory fixed
writing of characters as a universally valid linguistic codex and symbolically determined frame of reality. For them the way of heaven constantly manifested itself in new ways in the immediate experience. Every situation required its own expression, won from the spontaneous intuition - for, as Laozi said: “The Way (dao) which can be followed (i.e., the real way), is no constant way. The names that can name (i.e. the real names) are not constant names.” This is also the linguistic background of the Taoist doctrine of *wuwei*, that most translate as ‘not (goal oriented) acting’. The word *wei* normally expresses the predicative ‘is’ of a written sentence, i.e., it takes on the function of the ‘copula’ by means of which one term is defined by another. The original, namely linguistic meaning of *wuwei* is therefore ‘not to define’.

However the graphic formulae of the scribe-shamans of early times actually appeared, they were in any case an element of rituals, arranged to be a communication with the ancestral deities in heaven. We can also regard the great bronze vessels which began to appear around 1450 B.C.E. as an expression of ritual function. On the vessels, one finds short inscriptions that, as Vandermeersch believes, “as writing to the spirits played the same role as the magical formulae placed in the script trays of the previous stage of development. This in fact corresponds to the symbolism of the form of the bronzes themselves. These are to be understood as mythical world models, which with the form of the vessel represent the dark inner or night side and the bright outer or day side of the world as a symbolic incorporation of the bipolar heavenly order. With the discovery of such bronzes in later centuries it was actually believed they had fallen from heaven. As Carl Hentze pointed out, in the rich symbolism of their decor, the relationship between the empire of the dead in the underworld and to the upper world of the living was repeatedly formulated, which again was thought about as the changing relationship between the sky of night and that of day. The ritual mediation between heaven and the world of human beings obviously held the purpose of upholding the natural cycle of death and rebirth.

The inscriptions on the Shang vessels consist of a few, mostly single, difficult to decipher symbols, which are interpreted as a the posthumous name or clan symbol of the deceased, to whom the vessels were often dedicated as funeral accompaniment. They formulated as it were the ‘address’ of the ancestral spirit to which the ritual involving the vessel was directed.

From an actual written language in which the articulation of sentences was possible, one cannot yet speak of at the level of development found in the Shang period bronzes. The cultural vehicle for the development of such a script was much more another form of ritual performance, namely the oracle.

In the earliest forms, the oracle, having evolved out of the sacrifice of animals, was carried out with the help of cattle bones or tortoise shells. By heating these shells and bones over a fire, cracks were produced, the forms of which were interpreted as information from the heavenly deities. It was, so to speak, an experimental method to determine the current influence of the heavens (of the solar fire) on the terrestrial material (the cattle bones), in order to be able to predict the course of events. On these bones and turtle shells that have been excavated in great numbers, one now finds more detailed though still very terse inscriptions by which the fissures are explained, the so called jiaguwen (‘shell’ and bone script). These were, as Vandermeersch writes, created “as it were as subtitles of the oracle diagrams”. In them “the ideographic formulae begin to take a linguistically articulated direction”. Vandermeersch comes
to the conclusion: Apparently it was in this that the manner of juxtaposition of the diagrammatic and ideographic forms of expression of one and the same oracular mandate that during the Yin (later part of the Shang dynasty; ca. 1300-1050 B.C.E.) through their reciprocal influence, led to the very large and very rapid advancement of the analysis of the bone oracle on the one hand and the ideographic algorithm on the other. In fact, there is no doubt that the methodical systemization of the creation of writing was derived from the theory of the oracle. This systemization reached its highest level of development, however, not in the shell-and-bone scripts, but rather in the oracular system of the Yijing. The Book of Changes provides a highly systematic formulation of the relationship between the binary pattern of appearances in the sky and its graphic, that is proto-literary manifestations on the earth, which in return served as the ordering scheme for textualization with the actual oracular verdicts.

With the developing systemization of the written language’s repertoire of forms progressing in this way, the separation from the regulatory framework of the oracle and the free formulation of texts became possible. At the time of the Western Zhou Dynasty, we find the first somewhat longer inscriptions on bronze vessels. In these, events such as the granting of titles by the king are communicated, which the vessel is intended to document. A literature of written documents arose, which have been partially transmitted in the Shangshu (Book of Documents) as well as a literature of lyrical poetry, selected instances of which have come down to us in the collection of poetry compiled by Confucius, the Shijing (Book of Songs).

That the poems are rhymed already indicates that here there is an intentional correlation between the written symbols and the words of the spoken language. Both the documents and the poems are, however, still mytho-logically constructed in the shamanistic tradition, namely as the “joining of the Above and the Below to signifiers”.

Under the documents of the Shangshu, one also finds the command of the heavenly emperor, with which he decreed the parting of heaven and earth. This formulates the cosmological momentum toward the process of demythologization with which the network of symbolic meanings were deducted from the celestial scenario and transferred to a predicative system of terminology for the practical affairs of the human world. The dimension of myth, i.e., the pictographic mode of formation of the character system, is eclipsed by the dimension of logos, its mode of utilization. The cosmic foundation of myth was superimposed with a predicative system of definitions, in which it did not disappear entirely, but was only determined as the formal order of analogous correlations between terms. The mythical categories of the phenomenal cosmos were thereby projected into the immanence of a spatial and material conception of the world. Thus it was that the cosmic pattern of organization found in the ‘Five Wanderers’ (Wuxing) were defined through the five elements of Water, Metal, Fire, Wood, and Earth and devoted to the analogical organization of the most disparate domains: There were five colors, the five inner organs, the five social relationships, etc.. The cosmic origin of this fivedom, the five ‘wandering’ stars or planets visible with the naked eye, designated ‘Waterstar’ (Mercury), ‘Metalstar’ (Venus), ‘Firestar’ (Mars), ‘Woodstar’ (Jupiter), and ‘Earthstar’ (Saturn), appeared as merely one of the many dimensions in which the analogical pattern of the fivedom manifested itself.

To this corresponded the fundamental idea of ‘correlative anthropo-cosmology’ characteristic of traditional Chinese cosmology. The predicative logic thereby practically remained under the dominance of analogy, while the logos continued as an objectifying
and analyzing disguise of mythos. Analogical parallelism is a structure which in the classical Chinese written language, unlike all other modern languages, essentially belongs to grammatical.

Before the backdrop of these ominous culturo-historical developments, in the course of centuries there evolved a philosophy of human existence that, in the Confucian tradition led to a highly developed political and social structure, and in Taoism to the systems science of the psychobiological organism. Some of the basic elements of these cultural traditions we will become familiar with in the course of this book.

This introductory discourse has remained very abstract. The fascinating thing about the Chinese way of thinking is precisely how stunningly concrete their categories are derived from the natural phenomenal order of the cosmos. In the course of the following pages, we will have the opportunity to observe this feature in detail with relation to various characteristic manifestations of Chinese culture.

This is the translated chapter, "Image and Script," from Prof. Frank Fiedeler's book *Yin und Yang* (Yin and Yang), Köln: Dumont, 1993.

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Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D. & Gabriel Weiss