



**THE ORIGINS**

**OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION**

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**Recent Archaeological Evidence  
Relating to the Origin  
of Chinese Characters**

**CHEUNG KWONG-YUE**  
(Translated by Noel Barnard)

As a result of continuing archaeological activities over the past fifty years ceramic vessels and sherds bearing what are termed marks, symbols, or characters have come to light from many sites representative of pre-historic and early historic cultures. I shall simply call them inscriptions, graphs, or marks, without seeking, in this preliminary survey of the materials, to bring into the picture modern conceptions of what constitutes a pictogram, an ideograph, a glyph, a logograph, a symbol, and other such terms.<sup>1</sup> Where radiocarbon dates are available, I date the materials according to the revised (DFLW) calibrations of carbon-14 assessments. I offer tentative assessments of sites not yet dated by carbon-14 tests with reference to the generally accepted datings of comparable cultures; such chronologies are necessarily relative.

**EARLY POTTERY MARKS: FIELD SURVEYS,  
1928-1977**

1. Pottery inscriptions from Pan-p'o-ts'un, Hsi-an-hsien (Sian), Shensi: Unearthed between 1954-1957 (CKKH and Shen-hsi 1963).

1. It is appreciated that readers would like to see greater precision than this. My view is that the time is not yet ripe to systematize our understanding of the marks until there is a large enough "vocabulary" resulting from further excavations which may help clarify the role of the marks in the development of Chinese characters. Without more examples of two or more graphs in one inscription (we have only the Liang-chu and the few Wu-ch'eng examples to draw upon) scholars can do little more than speculate.

