Abstract

Xu Shen was a famous scholar who lived in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 A.D.). His Shuo-wen Jie-zi was the first Chinese dictionary which combined phonetic, semantic and etymological studies of almost ten thousand Chinese logographs. In the Shuo-wen Jie-zi, there is a postface which discusses the origin, history of development, the construction and the function of Chinese characters.

Both the Shuo-wen Jie-zi and its postface provide us with a mine of information on Chinese paleography. Thus they are very useful for the study of ancient Chinese language, especially written language. However, despite the increased enthusiasm for the study of Shuo-wen Jie-zi, its postface has not been given sufficient attention. It is only used as a supplementary reading for Shuo-wen Jie-zi. For this reason, this Academic Exercise attempts a comprehensive study of this postface.

Though this postface is a very valuable source for the study of Chinese paleography, it must not be regarded as infallible. Some of the information it provided was regarded as unreliable. However, some criticisms to this postface had been very unfair as they were only the scholars' misinterpretation of Xu Shen's writing.

The postface of the Shuo-wen Jie-zi, in spite of its shortcomings, is definitely an indispensable source for the study of Chinese paleography in particular, and for the study of Chinese language in general.