Liu-shu, the six principles of constructing the Chinese characters, consists of Xiang Xing (pictographs), Zhi Shi, Hui Yi (ideographs), Jia Jie (phonographs), Xing Shen and Zhuan Zhu.

Liu-shu has similarities when compared to ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia characters. But only Liu-shu has the characteristics of mono-structure.

In Eastern Han dynasty, Xu Shen was the first person to give the definitions of the six principles. As the definitions were too simple and un-specific, traditional scholars disagreed with the definitions and exact membership of these types of characters. This academic exercise is written in an attempt to settle these problems.

The study is divided into seven chapters. The first introductory chapter traces the emergence of Liu-shu and states the purpose of studying Liu-shu. The second chapter explores the name and sequence of Liu-shu. The third chapter draws a clear line between Xiang Xing, Zhi Shi and Hui Yi. Chapters four to six examine the definitions of Jia Jie, Xing Shen and Zhuan Zhu.

Based on the findings, the importance of Liu-shu when constructing new characters and also in studying the initial meaning of Chinese characters is emphasised.