

Word Shadows

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One night, a little girl, who just happened to be very good at Chinese calligraphy, was having trouble falling asleep. She saw the shadows that some tree branches were throwing on the wall, and realized that there were lots of Chinese characters in the shadows. She tried to find as many as she could and started to get sleepy. In half-sleep, she wondered to herself if the shadows were the origin of Chinese characters somehow. And she fell asleep.

In her dream, the trees were sending shadows onto big long scrolls which lined the walls. When she woke up, she went to her mother and told her about seeing the characters and asked if trees were the origins of Chinese characters. The mother and daughter went to the grandparents and asked them her question.

Indeed, the grandmother said that in the ancient days, Chinese people used to worship the trees and the earth and take great care of them, for trees were an important part of the cycle that provided good earth to grow food in. Legend said that an old wise woman also noticed the shadows one winter night, and wondered if the trees were sending messages just like the smoke signals that people used then. As she tried to find meaning in the shadows, she defined many of the characters that people use to this day – house, rain, tree, person. The ancient people wondered if they could communicate with the trees, first using light to cast shadows, and later using calligraphy much in the manner that is still used. Eventually, the calligraphy was used by the people to write not only to the trees, but also to each other.

The girl went right to her calligraphy set and wrote and wrote. At last, she made one more scroll before bed time: Tree – Love - Girl meaning “Girl loves trees and trees love girl.”