

Six New Symbols from Chinese Folk Religion (revision 1)

To: UTC
 Date: 30 October 2014
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 Live Doc: <http://goo.gl/1EcMVk>

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Background

Chinese folk religion is the collection of ethnic religious traditions of China which consists of the worship of the *shen*¹ which can be patron deities (of nature, cities, or other human agglomerations), national deities, cultural heroes and demigods, ancestors and progenitors, and deities of the kinship². According to statistics, 22% of Chinese population (6% of global population) are practicing Chinese folk religion³.

Over the ages, this belief system, like many others, incorporated a fair amount of symbolism specifically for good fortune and auspicious thought. The first appearances of such symbols were found on vessels and utensils from Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Use of these symbols later spread to other forms of decorative arts⁴.

This document proposes six of the most prominent of such symbols. The symbols proposed here were first considered for addition to complement the set of existing emoji and symbols for religions and religious structure to cover major belief systems worldwide⁵, but due to the opportunity to receive wider feedback, the authors decided to develop a separate proposal

¹ “神” = “expressions” (literal), “spirit”, “god”.

² Wikipedia contributors. “Chinese folk religion”.

³ Pew Research Center. “The Global Religious Landscape”.

⁴ Sung. “Five-Fold Happiness: Chinese Concepts of Luck, Prosperity, Longevity, Happiness, and Wealth”, pp. 11-12.

⁵ Afshar, and Pournader. “Emoji and Symbol Additions - Religious Symbols and Structures”.

document for the consideration of the UTC.

Cultural Context and Significance

Five most common of these felicitous symbols are referred to as “Five-fold Happiness”⁶ and are Luck (福, *fú*), Prosperity (禄, *lù*), Longevity (寿, *shòu*), Happiness (喜, *xǐ*) and Wealth (财, *cái*). A sixth symbol, Double-Happiness (囍, *shuāngxǐ*) which is a variation of 喜, is used as a symbol of love and marriage. Each of these symbols also have their respective deity. Traditionally, the deities for *fú*, *lù*, and *shòu* form a group of three revered stellar gods⁷.



These symbols and their underlying ideographs are usually represented in numerous calligraphic variations and sometimes repeated a hundred times on a single canvas to create talismanic and decorative artifacts.



Variations of *fú*⁸



100 *fú* (*bǎi fú*)⁹



100 *shòu* (*bǎi shòu*)¹⁰

⁶ Sung. Ibid.

⁷ Sung. p. 28.







⁸ <http://www.nipic.com/show/9175922.html>

⁹ Welch. “Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery”.

¹⁰ Guenot. “100 talismanic forms of the character Shou, representing long life”.







In spite of existing calligraphic and decorative variations, there are common and widespread visual representation for these symbols which are collected and annotated in the next section.

Symbols

| Pinyin | Han | Symbol for | Symbol | Notes ¹¹ |
|-----------------|-----|------------------|---|---|
| <i>fú</i> | 福 | Luck |  | Representing good fortune, blessings, and luck. Used in doorways (particularly during New Year) since Ming Dynasty. |
| <i>lù</i> | 祿/禄 | Prosperity |  | Representing status, honor, advancement to high office, and rank. Literally means “official salary”. Differs from <i>cái</i> which is wealth gained through doing business. |
| <i>shòu</i> | 寿/壽 | Longevity |  | Representing longevity, long life, and respect for elders. One of the most central values of life in ancient China was to live long and die of natural causes. |
| <i>xǐ</i> | 喜 | Happiness |  | Representing joy. Also see <i>shuāngxǐ</i> . |
| <i>cái</i> | 財/财 | Wealth |  | Representing material wealth, flourishing business or trade, and good harvest. |
| <i>shuāngxǐ</i> | 囍 | Double-Happiness |  | Representing love, marriage and marital bliss, and fertility. Appears on wedding decorations. |

¹¹ Sung. Ibid.

Symbols Proposed for Encoding

| | Symbol | Proposed name |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1F260 |  | ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR FU |
| 1F261 |  | ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR LU |
| 1F262 |  | ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR SHOU |
| 1F263 |  | ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR XI |
| 1F264 |  | ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR SHUANGXI |
| 1F265 |  | ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR CAI |

Discussion

Although the proposed symbols can be classified as non-notational and non-compatibility, but considering the Unicode Consortium criteria and guidelines for proposing new symbols^{12 13}, the authors find these characters to have a compelling case to be incorporated into the Unicode

¹² Unicode Consortium. "Submitting Character Proposals".

¹³ Freytag. "Towards criteria for encoding symbols".

Standard:

- The proposed symbols are a limited set of letterlike symbols with a very widespread and common usage by a large community;
- Although mostly considered decorative, these symbols complement a set of existing religious symbols;
- These symbols have well-defined semantics which is non-ignorable in processing including searching and indexing.

Character Properties

```
1F260;ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR FU;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;;
1F261;ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR LU;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;;
1F262;ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR SHOU;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;;
1F263;ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR XI;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;;
1F264;ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR SHUANGXI;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;;
1F265;ROUNDED SYMBOL FOR CAI;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;;
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