



Investigation of the Word *laoshu* 老鼠

Module code : SICH6018

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laoshu 老鼠

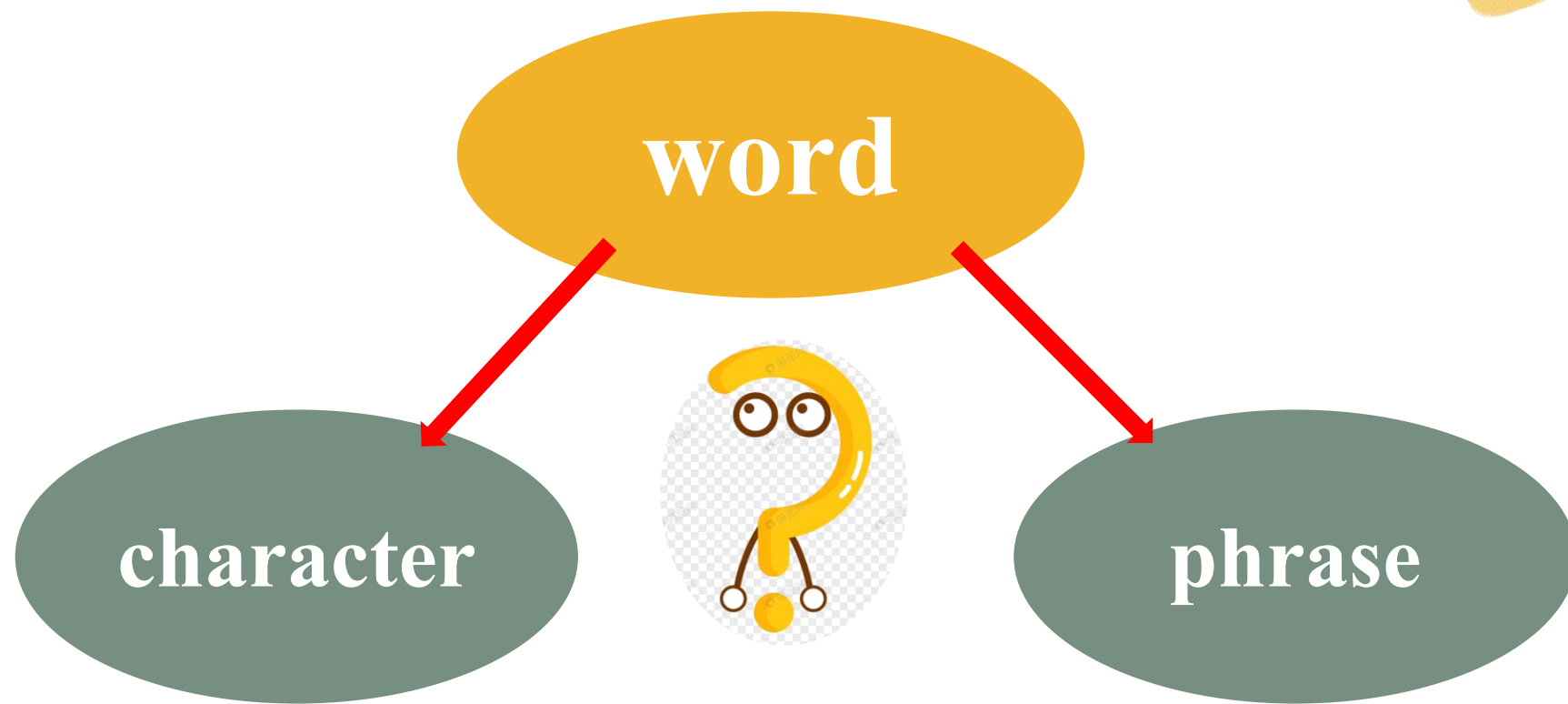


habits, species, or traits



origin and development







character

monosyllabic

bai 白



word

compound syllable

baicai 白菜



phrase

combinations of
several different
concepts



honghua 紅花
red + flower

word

one word
representing a single
concept

baicai 白菜
cabbage ✓
white + vegetable ✗





Xu Shen 許慎 (58CE-147CE) ——

Shuowen jiezi 說文解字:

‘老, 考也.’

lao 老 means old

shu 鼠 refers to a rodent—rats

laoshu 老鼠 seems —— old + rats —— phrase





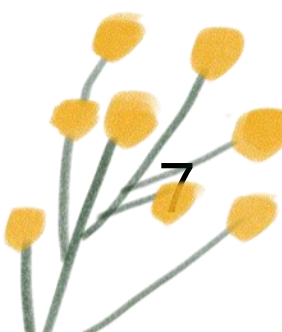
——In the Later Han dynasty

laoshu 老鼠 —long life span

——Today

we refer to all rats as *laoshu* 老鼠,
regardless of old or young, big or small

laoshu 老鼠 — has **not** a practical meaning



When did the word *laoshu* 老鼠
change from a phrase to a word?
How has this word historically
evolved?

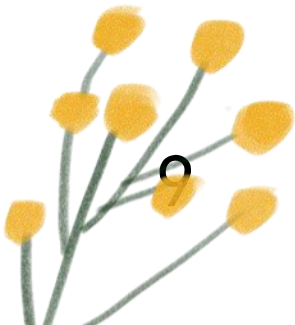


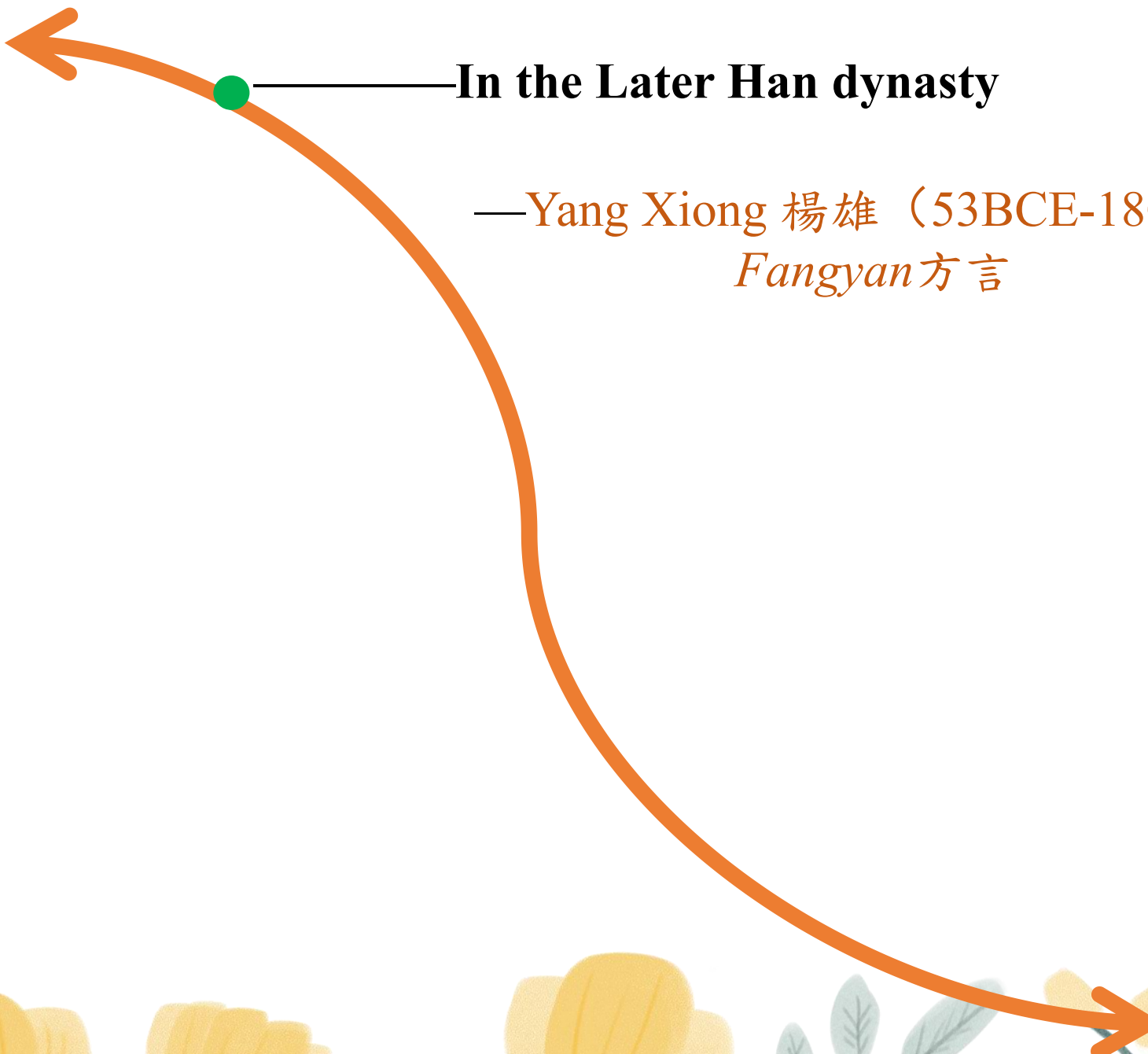


Historical Order



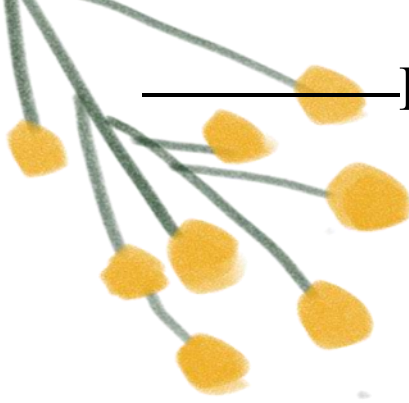
In these papers, the word
laoshu 老鼠 is mentioned only
as an example for scholars
studying prefixes.





In the Later Han dynasty

—Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53BCE-18CE) :
Fangyan 方言



In the Later Han Dynasty

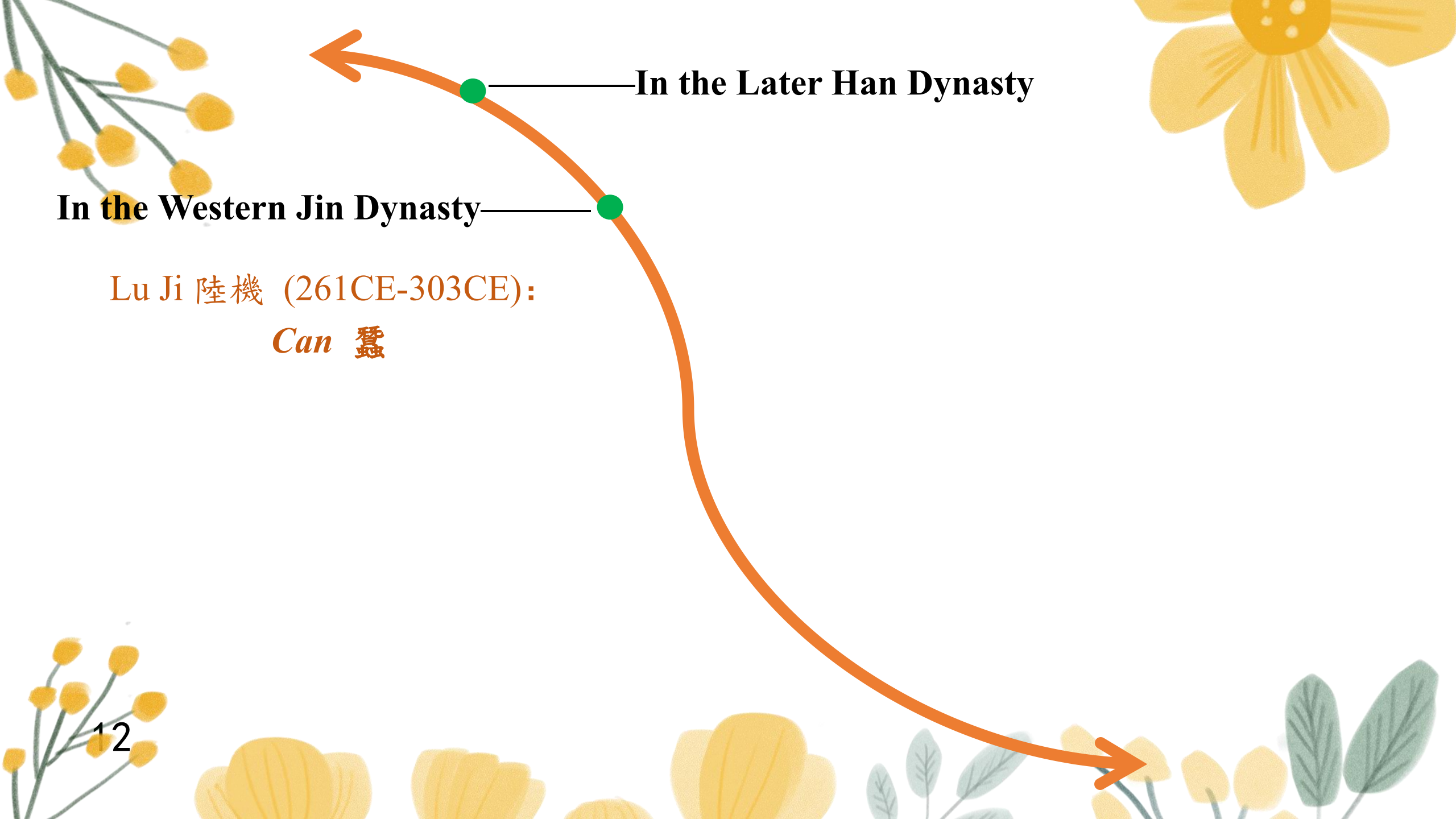
—Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53BCE-18CE) :
Fangyan 方言

➤ Bats are also called *laoshu* 老鼠, or *xainshu* 仙鼠.

—Liu Xi 劉熙 (? -216CE) :
Shiming 釋名 :

***xian* 仙 = long life = *lao* 老**

➤ To live a very long life without dying is called *xian* 仙.

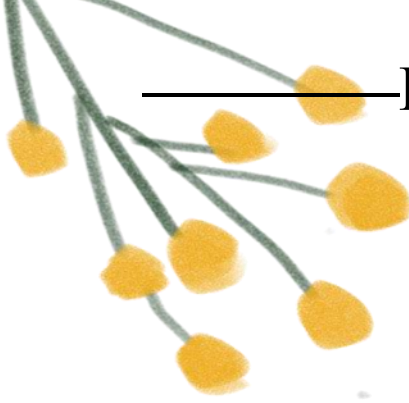


In the Later Han Dynasty

In the Western Jin Dynasty

Lu Ji 陸機 (261CE-303CE):

Can 蠶



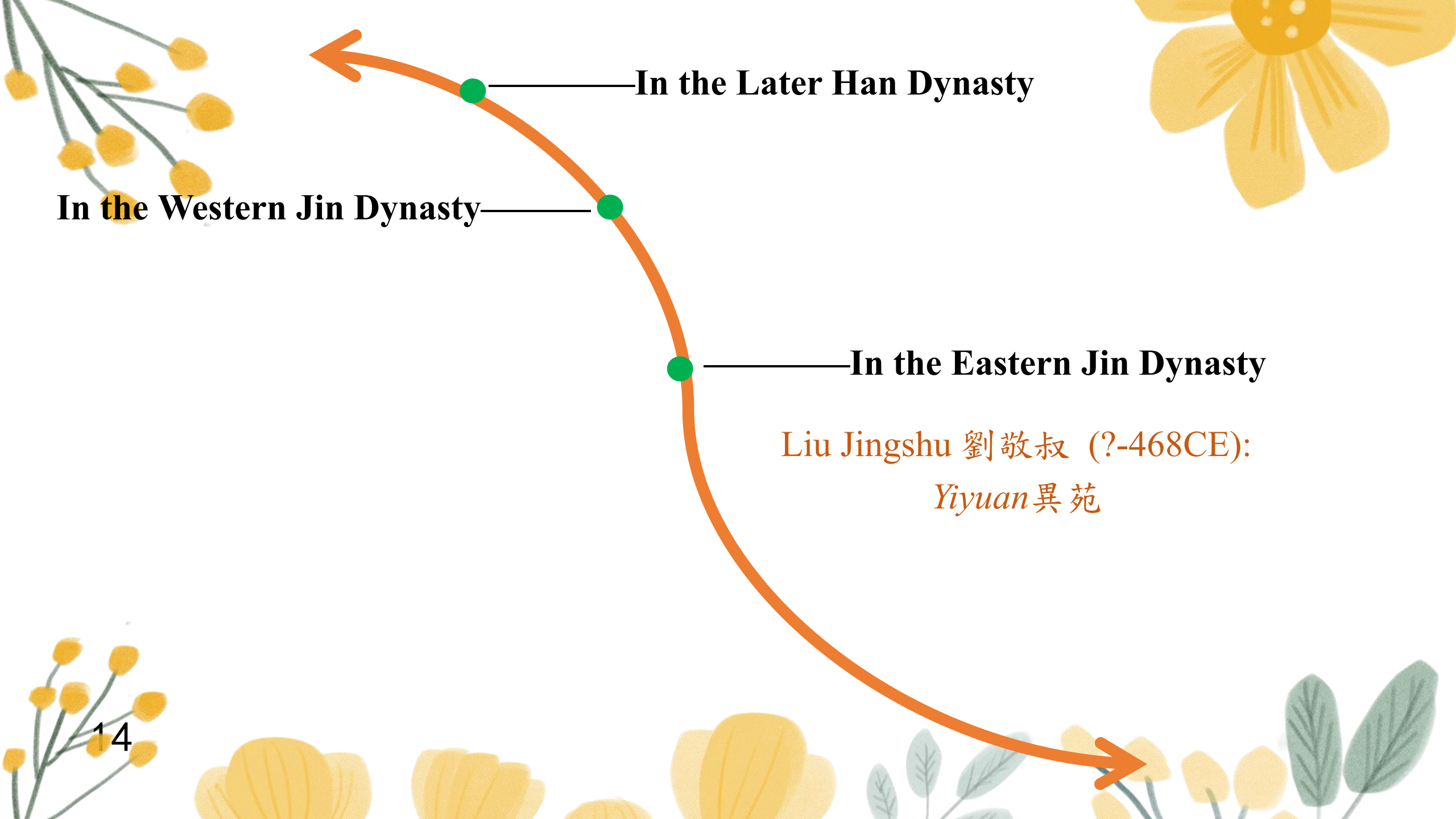
—In the Western Jin Dynasty

Lu Ji 陸機 (261CE-303CE):

Can 蠶

Silkworms have difficulty in spitting out silk when they grow old, and it is a shame for women to marry when they grow old, but **rats *laoshu* 老鼠** can turn into bats and fly freely when they grow **old**.

laoshu 老鼠——usual rodent species---means old



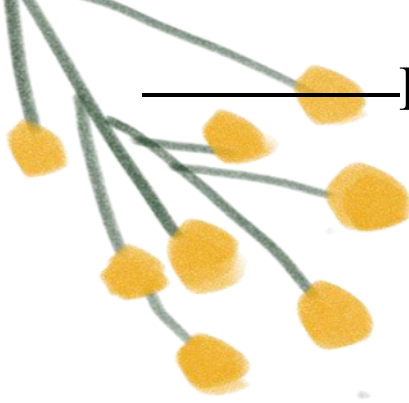
In the Later Han Dynasty

In the Western Jin Dynasty

In the Eastern Jin Dynasty

Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (?-468CE):

Yiyuan 異苑

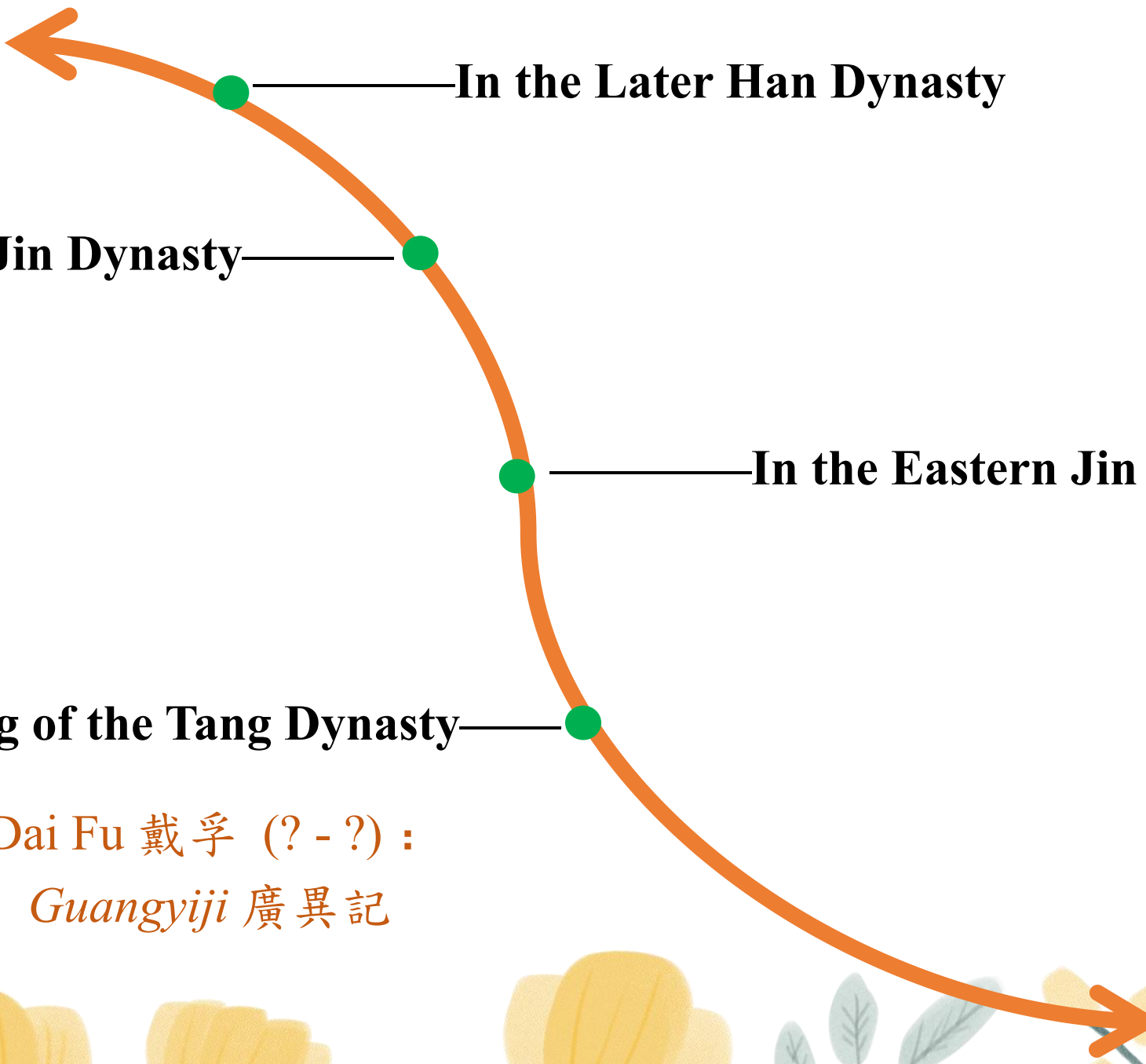


In the Eastern Jin Dynasty

Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (?-468CE): *Yiyuan* 異苑

There was a ghost called *linghou* 靈候, which could attach itself to a person to divine things, and the people said that this ghost was transformed from rats - *laoshu* 老鼠.

live a long life and then turn into ghost



In the Later Han Dynasty

In the Western Jin Dynasty

In the Eastern Jin Dynasty

At the Beginning of the Tang Dynasty

Dai Fu 戴孚 (? - ?) :
Guangyiji 廣異記



—At the Beginning of the Tang Dynasty

Dai Fu 戴孚 (? - ?) :
Guangyiji 廣異記

Someone had caught a ghost and asked who the ghost was. Then the ghost replied that it was *laoshu* 老鼠 — a rat that had lived for more than a thousand years.

lao 老 — long life



In the Western Jin Dynasty

In the Later Han Dynasty

In the Eastern Jin Dynasty

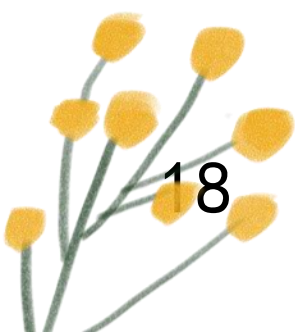
At the Beginning of the Tang Dynasty

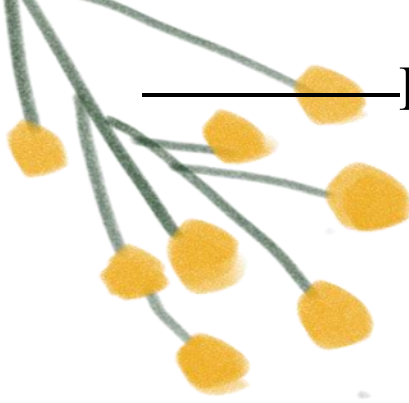
Pei Xu 裴諝 (719CE-793CE):

Youpan zhengmaoer zhuang

又判爭貓兒狀

In the Middle of the Tang Dynasty





—In the Middle of the Tang Dynasty

Pei Xu 裴諝 (719CE-793CE):

Youpan zhengmaoer zhuang

又判爭貓兒狀

Mao 貓--a cat doesn't know its owner, but helps to catch *laoshu* 老鼠-rats
for others.

lao 老 in it has no practical meaning, it does
not mean old anymore.

Conclusion

In the middle of the Tang Dynasty, the word *laoshu* 老鼠 was eventually transformed from a **phrase to a word** which representing a **single concept**. The practical meaning of the character *lao* 老 in the word *laoshu* 老鼠 has been **reduced to a meaningless prefix** and added **in front of the character *shu*** 鼠 to denote an animal.



Thank you for listening!