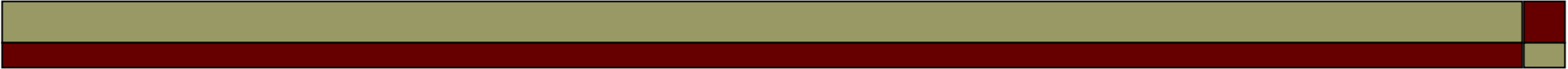




Literacy and Knowledge in Ancient and Medieval China

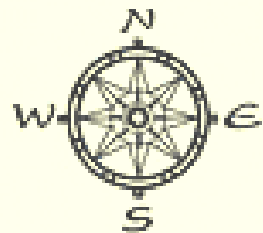
Dr Thomas Jansen



Core questions

- How did writing contribute to the consolidation of the early empires?
- What does literacy mean in the Chinese context? (ability to write?)
- What did literacy contribute to Chinese civilization?

Neolithic Era (About 3500 - 1500 B.C.)



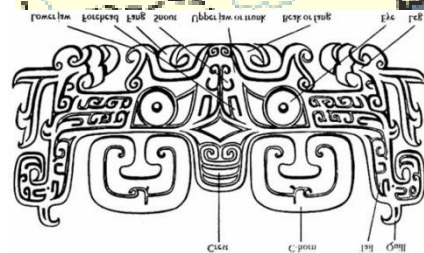
Land occupied
during the
Neolithic Era

--- Current
boundaries of China
and Mongolia

0 1000km



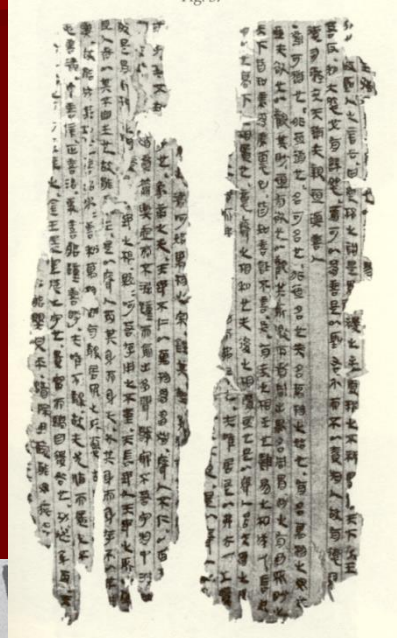
Shang (1523 - 1028 B.C.)



Eastern Chou (771 B.C.-256 B.C.)

周

EASTERN
CHOU



Ch'in (221 B.C.-206 B.C.)

秦

秦 始 皇 帝



Han (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.)

汉/漢

漢高祖像



Six Dynasties (220 - 581)

魏晉南北朝



Sui (581-618)

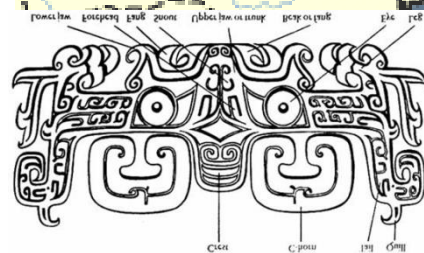
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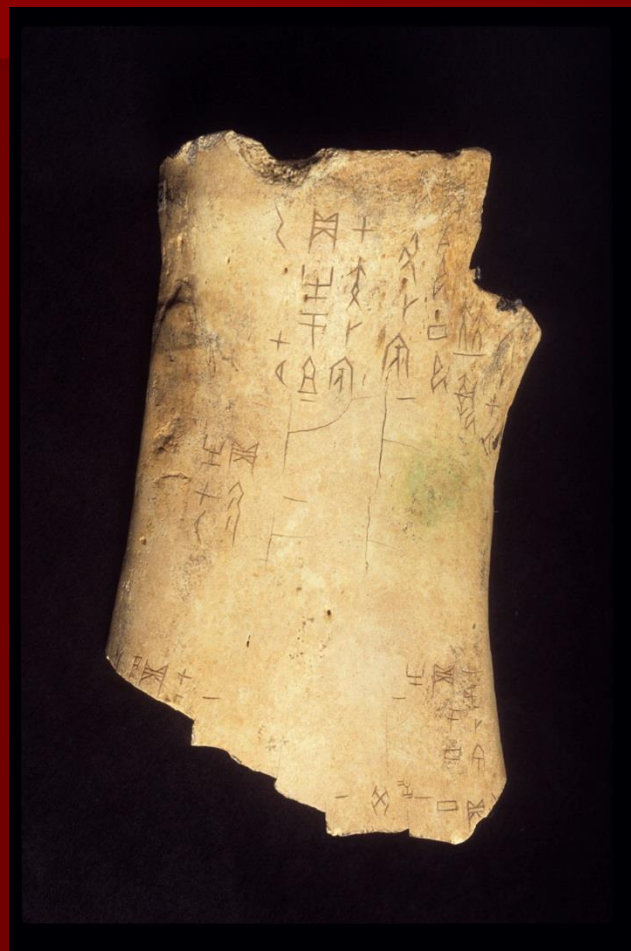
T'ang (618-907)



Shang (1523 - 1028 B.C.)



Chinese Oracle Bones (*jiaguwen* 甲骨文)



Cambridge University Library; CUL 52 recto (left); verso (right)

British Museum Or 7694/1509
1300 BC-1050 BC, Inscribed oracle bone (*jia gu* 甲
骨) from the Couling-Chalfant collection.



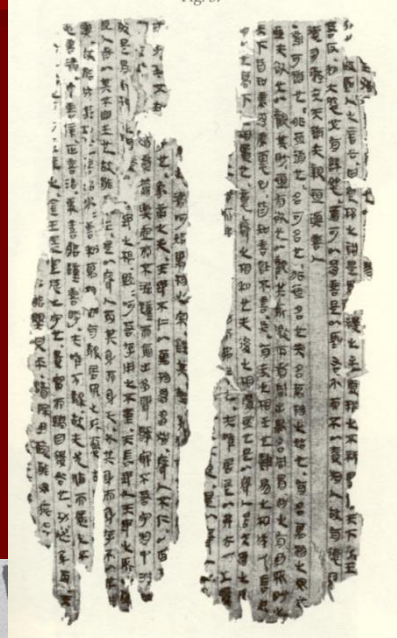
Western Chou (1027 B.C.-771 B.C.)



Eastern Chou (771 B.C.-256 B.C.)

周

EASTERN
CHOU



Shi Qiang bronze vessel (*pan*)



Middle Western Zhou Dynasty (end of tenth century B.C.)
Zhouyuan Administrative Office of Cultural Relics, Fufeng
©2015 National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Bronze inscriptions (*jinwen*)

- ❑ 5,758 distinct inscriptions in *Jinwen yinde* (publ. 2001)
- ❑ Bronze inscriptions complement and challenge transmitted sources
- ❑ Example: ‘Heavenly mandate’ (*tianming*) and ‘Son of Heaven’ (*tianzi*) not well attested in bronze inscriptions → significant only in the late Western Zhou period (857-771 BCE)

Zhou Ancestral sacrifice

- ❑ Space where ancestral spirits and living descendants could mingle
- ❑ Sacrifice constituted and perpetuated identity of the living
- ❑ Zhou king: sacrifice provides basis and legitimation to rule
- ❑ Sacrifice embodied cultural practices of elite life; patterns of life that were handed down by the ancestors
- ❑ Sacrifice was primary means to express, legitimize and enforce social hierarchy as well as solidarity
- ❑ Sacrifice marked sacred space and time
- ❑ Sacrifice to ensure continuation of past into the future (“may sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure and use [this sacrificial vessel]”
- ❑ → M. Kern: “the practice of writing as textual display evolved primarily within the setting of the ancestral sacrifice”

Ch'in (221 B.C.-206 B.C.)

秦

秦 始 皇 帝



Han (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.)

汉/漢

漢高祖像



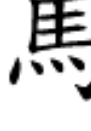
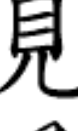
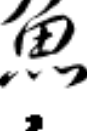
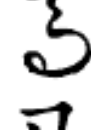
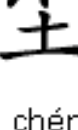
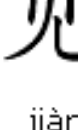
The Rise of the CHINESE EMPIRE

VOLUME 1

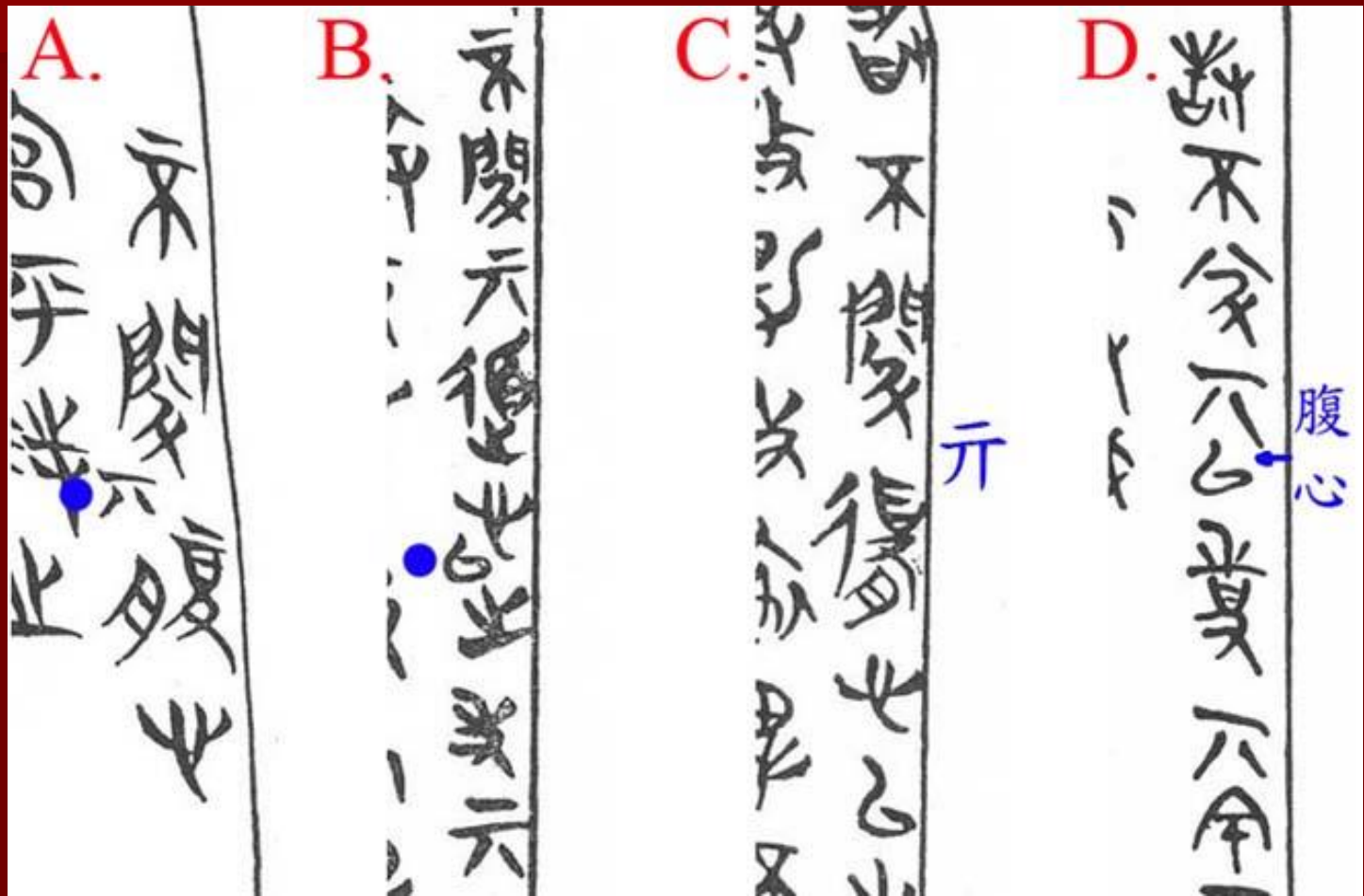
Nation, State, and Imperialism
in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C.–A.D. 8



Chun-shu Chang

	horse	cart	fish	dust	see	
Oracle bone script 甲骨文 (jiǎ gǔ wén)						The Oracle bone script was used during the Shang or Yin Dynasty (c. 1400-1200 BC)
Bronze script 金文 (jīn wén)						The Bronze script was used during the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1100 - 256 BC)
Large Seal script 大篆 (dà zhuàn)						The Large Seal script was used during the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1100 - 256 BC)
Small Seal script 小篆 (xiǎo zhuàn)						The Small Seal script was used during the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC)
Clerical script 隸書 (lì shū)						The Clerical and Standard scripts first appeared during the Han Dynasty (207 BC - 220 AD).
Standard script 楷書 (kǎi shū)						
Running script 行書 (xíng shū)						The Running script has been used for handwritten Chinese since the Han Dynasty.
Draft script 草書 (cǎo shū)						The Grass script is the Chinese equivalent of shorthand and has been used since the Han Dynasty.
Simplified script 简体字 (jiǎntǐzì)						The Simplified script has been used in the P.R.C. since 1949. It is also used in Singapore.
hànyǔ pīnyīn 汉语拼音	mǎ	chē	yú	chén	jiàn	<i>Hanyu pinyin</i> has been used in the P.R.C. since 1958.
zhùyīn fúhào 注音符号	ㄇㄚˇ	ㄔㄜ	ㄩˊ	ㄔㄣˊ	ㄐㄧㄢˋ	<i>Zhuyin fuhao</i> was developed in China in 1913 and is still used in Taiwan.

Houma Covenant Texts, 442-424 B.C.E



Ritual basis of Chinese law

- ❑ Covenants: ritual of covenant had dual function of binding independent groups and expelling unwanted elements from body politic → oath → reinforced by invocation of spirits and blood sacrifice
- ❑ Excavated covenant texts represent “transitional stage” between inter-lineage covenants of Spring-and-Autumn period and law-based polities of Warring States
- ❑ Casting of bronze vessels; medium for public proclamations, e.g. in the *Zuozhuan*
- ❑ Legal texts as burial objects
- ❑ Ritual significance of bestowing names → spell-binding power of naming → ritual based ‘rectification of names’ in Confucius thought

Rituals of control in the courts

- Ceremonial and religious elements of techniques by which ruler controls his ministers
- Source: Baoshan legal texts (ca. 316 BCE); state of Chu; individual cases to be adjudicated by central court
 - Ceremony of appointment
 - Application of ritual nomenclature to administration

Six Dynasties (220 - 581)

魏晉南北朝



Sui (581-618)

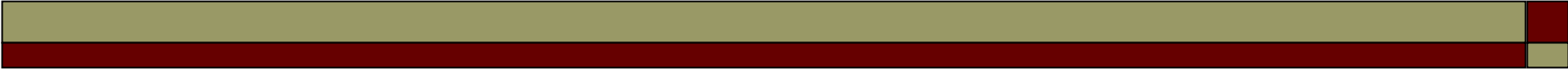
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T'ang (618-907)

唐





Mark Lewis, *Writing and Authority*

“I will argue in this book that the ultimate importance of writing to the Chinese empire and imperial civilization did not derive from its administrative role. Rather the Chinese empire, including its artistic and religious versions, was based on an imaginary realm created within texts. These texts, couched in an artificial language above the local world of spoken dialects, created a model of society against which actual institutions were measured.” (p. 4)

Cangjie 倉頡 – Inventor of characters

- Chinese culture hero
- Depicted with four eyes → sees everything
- Helped order the world
- Gives name to Chinese input method in Windows Word



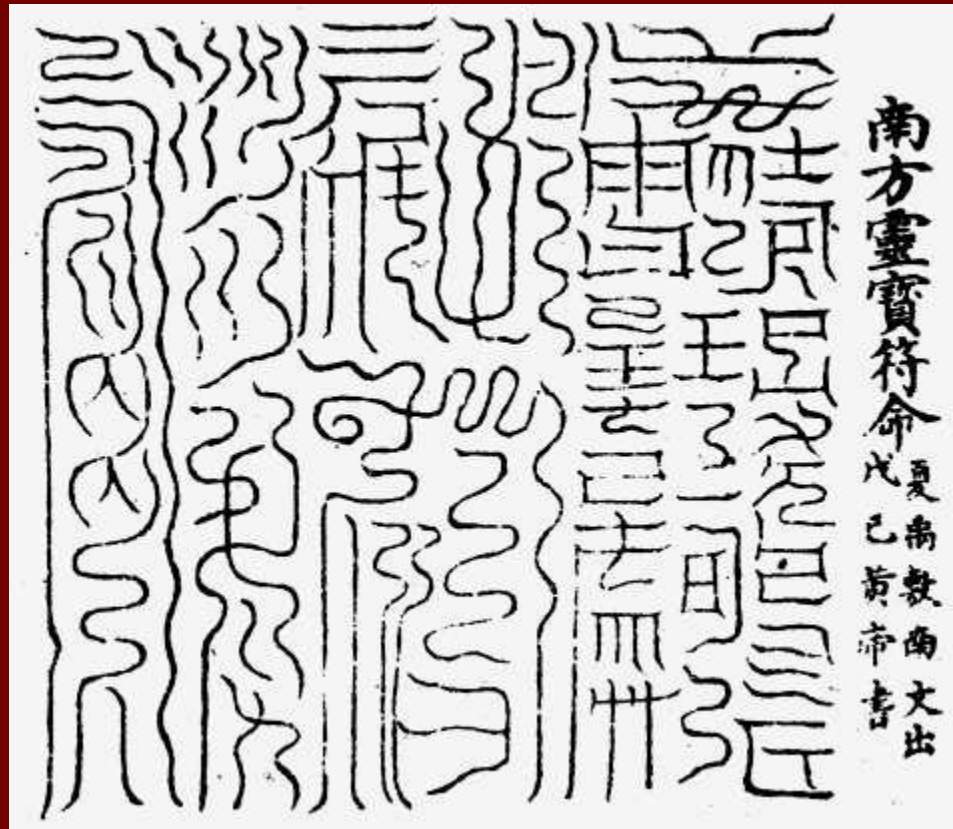
Writing and the natural order

- writing is situated in the natural world
- Cang Jie invents the script →
- “He observed the footprints of birds and beasts, and recognized that meaningful patterns could be distinguished. For the first time he created graphs and tallies. All types of craftsmen were thereby put in order, and all types of products were thereby examined.” (Source: *Shuowen jiezi* (completed ca. 100) by Xu Shen)

Images emblematic of a hidden natural order

“Thus the images in all cases are understood as visual signs *that through their correspondence to the natural and social worlds allow insights into the structure of reality and its inherent tendencies.*” (Lewis, *Authority*, p. 265)

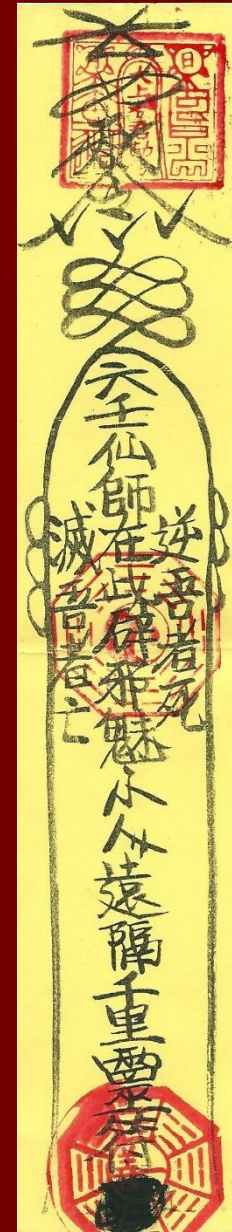
Daoist talisman (fu 符)



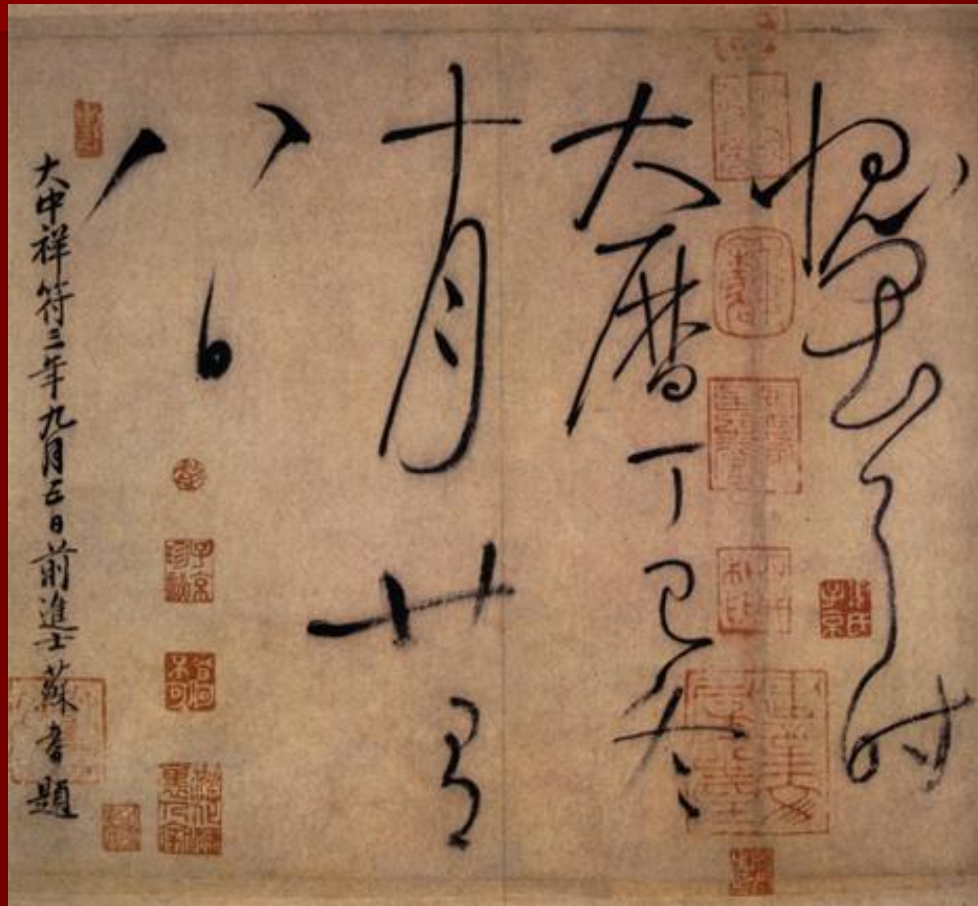
Source: *Lingbao wufu xu* (Prolegomena to the Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure; CT 388), chapter 3.

Protective talisman

Talisman to protect against little people (小人) -- the people who bar your way, cause trouble, and oppose you.



Huaisu (735? – 800? AD), *Autobiographical Essay*



<http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/callig/tcalindv.htm>,

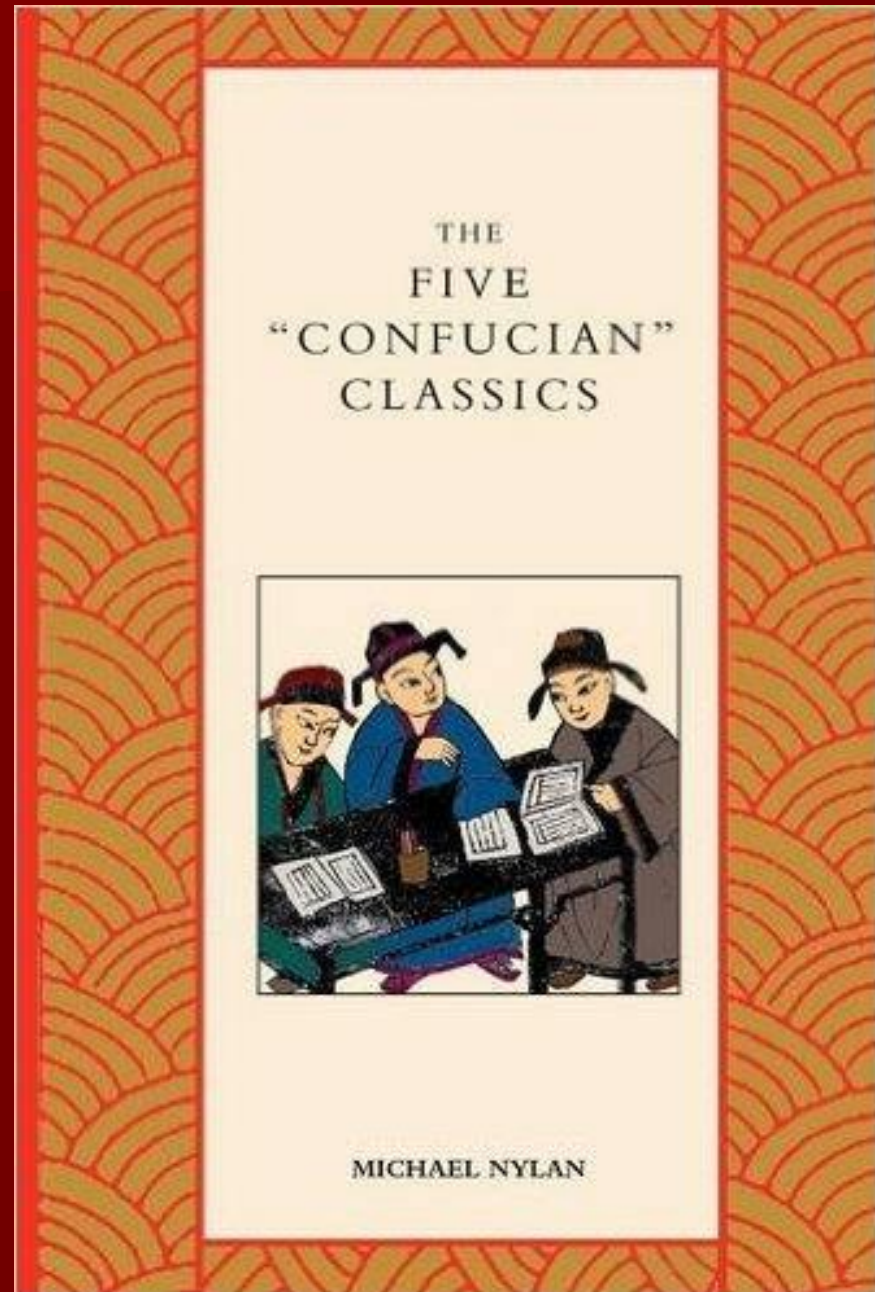
SOURCE: Yang Renkai, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Shufa juanke bian 3: Sui Tang Wudai shufa* (Beijing Renming meishu chubanshe, 1986), pl. 76, p. 167. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

The encyclopedic epoch: Qin and Han

- ❑ State-sponsored compendia
- ❑ Emperor Shundi ordered in 132 A.D. that candidates for official posts who had been nominated solely on their exemplary behaviour as “filial and incorrupt” (xiaolian) had to be tested on their knowledge of the written texts of the Classics and their ability to draft documents.

Five Confucian Classics

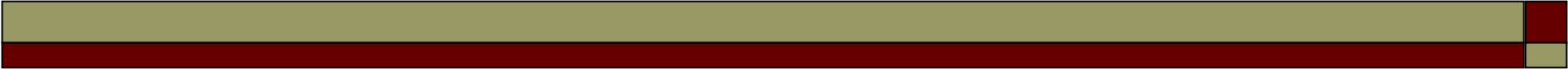
- Han Wudi, in 136 B.C., established chairs for the Five Canonical Scriptures (wu jing 五經)
- 51 B.C.E Emperor Xuan held discussion in Shiqu palace pavilion
- Confucians= Classicists



1st Chinese Dictionary

- Shuowen jiezi
- Comp. Xu Shen (ca. 58-147)
- (completed ca. 100)
- Aim: render the interpretation of the classics doubt free





Sima Qian's universal history

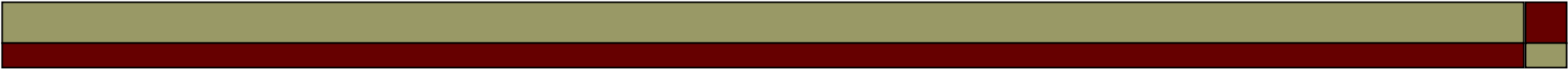
“I have gathered together old traditions abandoned by the world, examined their conduct, and investigated the principles of success and failure or rise and decline. In total there are 130 chapters. I desire thereby to exhaust the interchanges between Heaven and man, completely trace the changes from ancient times to the present, and thus complete the words of a single school/family.” (Lewis, *Writing*, 309)

Sources for Zhou religion

- Early Western Zhou (1045-957); middle (956-858), late (857-771)
- “Eulogies of Zhou” (Zhou song): performed during Western Zhou sacrifices
- Royal speeches in the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu*)
- Bronze inscriptions (*jinwen*)
- Ritual classics: Commentary on earlier sources:
 - Rites and Ceremonies (*Yili*)
 - Rites of Zhou (*Zhouli*)
 - Book of Rites (*Liji*)

Western Zhou sources

- ❑ Commemorative function → “What do we wish to remember?”
- ❑ Eulogistic; tendentious, even propagandistic diction
- ❑ Audience: insiders who participated in the lineage ideology of the Zhou royal house
- ❑ Focus on common origin and identity through common narrative of memory



Core questions

- ❑ How did writing contribute to the consolidation of the early empires?
- ❑ What does literacy mean in the Chinese context? (ability to write?)
- ❑ What did literacy contribute to Chinese civilization?

Changing concepts of *wen* (writing)

1. early Zhou (10th century B.C.) - Spring and Autumn period (770-ca.470): *wen* or *wenzhang* 文章 signified exemplary behaviour worthy of admiration
2. Warring States period (475-221 B.C.): *wen* applied to types of writing in communication between Heaven and Earth.
3. Qin (221-206 B.C.) and early Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 9): *wenzi*, “precise naming” in the context of bureaucratic practices. Speculation into relations between *wen* and cosmic patterns discourage.
4. Western Han (200-100 B.C.): Writing was still considered too liable to loss or abuse by mere government “clerks” - “true Classicists” (*Ru*) did not particularly value “writing” as one sort of *wen*.
5. around 100 A.D.: written texts regarded as more valuable than either the spoken word or exemplary behaviour.