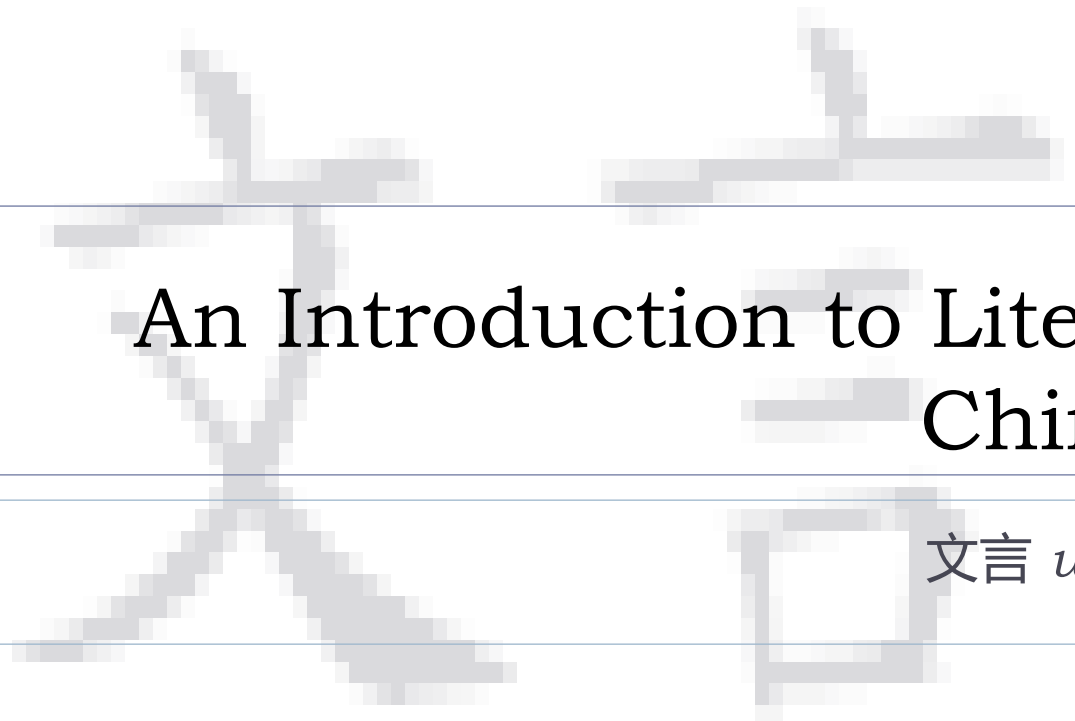



An Introduction to Literary Chinese

文言 *wenyan*



Classical Chinese

- ▶ “Classical” Chinese is the written form of Chinese employed in the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國; BCE 475-221) and Han 漢 (BCE 206 – CE 220) periods
- ▶ used to write the Classics, the histories, poetry, literature, philosophy, and historical documents in traditional China
- ▶ formative influence on other East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean
- ▶ Modern Chinese is shot through with classical expressions or phrases

“Ancient fossil, please do not approach”



“To avoid danger, please do not leap over railing.”



“...from here 100 metres to the south...”



“No tourists beyond this point”



“*Yi wu suo you*” 一無所有
“Nothing to my name”



Classical texts on objects

Pen holder



Perfume bottle



Oracle bone inscription (1300-1050 BC)

Jiaguwen
甲骨文



Bronze inscriptions

Jinwen
金文



Chronology

- ▶ Archaic Chinese: Shang and early Zhou language;
 - ▶ *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*)
 - ▶ *Shujing* 書經 (*Documents*)
 - ▶ *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Songs*)
- ▶ Classical Period: 6th century -221 BCE
- ▶ Imperial Unification: Qin and Han dynasties
- ▶ Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) onwards: Classical language increasingly adopted vernacular, i.e. spoken elements



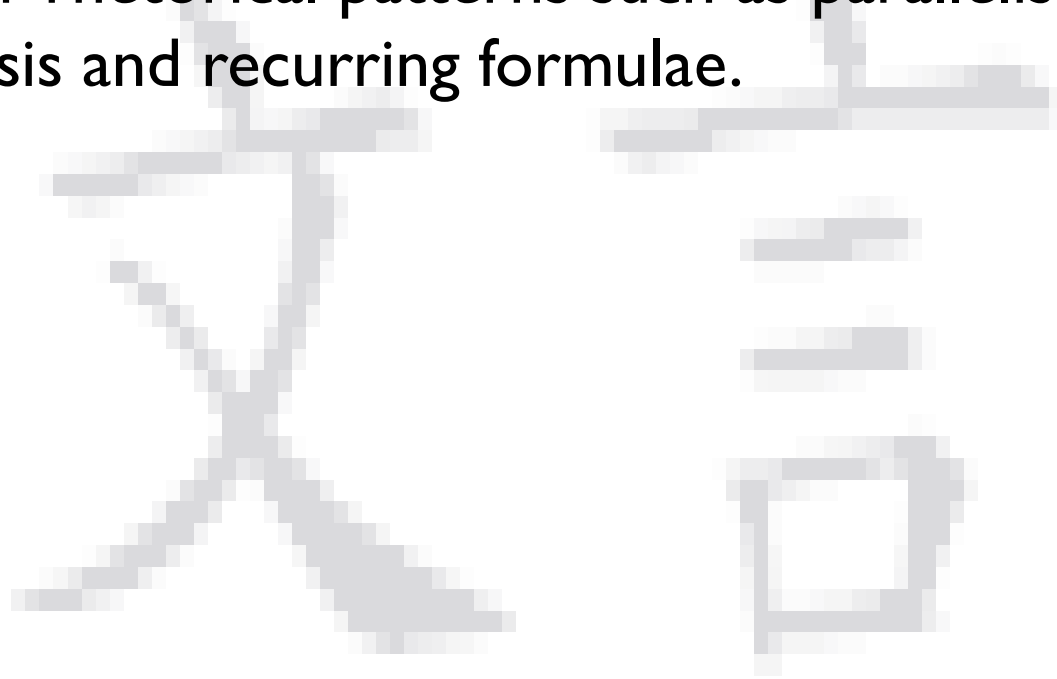
Variants of Classical Chinese

1. An archaic form of the literary language closely resembling the language of the *Shijing* and probably based on a central dialect. This is the language that can be found in historical texts such as the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and the *Guoyu* 國語;
2. A Lu 魯 dialect used in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) of Confucius and the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子).
3. A southern Chu dialect used in the *Li Sao* 離騷 and early *Chuci* 楚辭 poems.
4. A third century dialect found in texts such as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Xunzi* 荀子 and *Han Feizi* 韓非子.



Levels

1. the meanings of the individual characters;
2. the relations of one character to another, i.e., the grammar;
3. broader rhetorical patterns such as parallelism, antithesis and recurring formulae.



Characters

- ▶ The same character can function as
- ▶ noun (*mingci* 名詞)
- ▶ verb (*dongci* 動詞)
- ▶ adverb (*fuci* 副詞) or
- ▶ adjective (*xingrongci* 形容詞)
- ▶ → Word order or syntax determines function of a word in Classical Chinese

bai 白

1. noun: “the white (colour)”
2. adjective: “white”
3. verb (intransitive): “to be/become white” (stative verb)
4. verb (factitive): “to make white, to whiten”
5. verb (putative): “to consider white, regard as white”
6. verb (transitive): “to make clear, to inform, to exonerate”

Two basic rules

- ▶ **Rule One:** the normal word order is SVO: SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT
- ▶ **Rule Two:** Subordinate or modifying elements usually PRECEDE the words they modify: adjuncts precede heads, adverbs precede main verbs, subordinate clauses precede main clauses.
- ▶ Example:
 - ▶ “I love you.” → *Wo ai ni* 我愛你。
 - ▶ “You love me.” → *Ni ai wo* 你愛我。



臣

Chén

Minister

來

lái

to come

The minister is coming.

Who? – Subject. ----- Does what? – Verb.



Grammatical ambiguity

臣來 *chen lai* minister to come

The minister came.	<i>def., sg., past</i>
A minister came.	<i>indef., sg., past.</i>
The ministers came.	<i>def., pl., past.</i>
Ministers came.	<i>indef., pl., past.</i>
The minister is coming.	<i>def., sg., pres.</i>
A minister is coming.	<i>indef., sg., pres.</i>
The ministers are coming.	<i>def., pl., pres.</i>
Ministers are coming.	<i>indef., pl., pres.</i>
The minister will come.	<i>def., sg., fut.</i>
A minister will come.	<i>indef., sg., fut.</i>
The ministers will come.	<i>def., pl., fut.</i>
Ministers will come.	<i>indef., pl., fut.</i>

