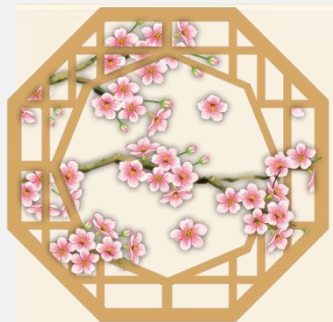




SIHE 4001

An Introduction to Chinese Philology I

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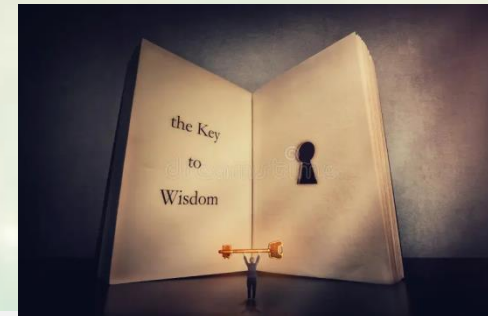




1. General Introduction

Why study Chinese philology?

- To evaluate different annotations to ancient texts
- Chinese characters are carriers of Chinese culture.
- Chinese characters are ideographs containing profound meanings.
- Chinese characters transcend time and space, forging a spiritual connection with ancient people.
- Philology serves as the key to unlock the treasures of culture.
- Philology is a foundational step that should not be skipped.





1. General Introduction

Not only know what it is, but also understand why it is.

**graphical
study**

phonology

exegesis

lexicology

grammar

Chinese characters reflect 3,000 years of cultural evolution.

Each character has a logical composition.

Each character has its own growth story.

- How are Chinese characters constructed?
- Any underlying rationales for their construction?
- What do the components of a character contribute to its meaning?



Enjoy your journey into the wonderland of Chinese philology.





Five Regional Cultural Spheres

**Indian script
cultural sphere**

**Chinese character
cultural sphere**

**Latin script
cultural sphere**

**Cyrillic script
cultural sphere**

**Arabic script
cultural sphere**



The Chinese Character Cultural Sphere:

Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and many ethnic groups within China

Cultural Convergence:

- The transition from the flourishing of a hundred schools (the Warring States period, c.475–221 BCE) to the dominance of Confucianism (the reign of Emperor Wu of Western Han, 156–87 BCE)
- The mergence of the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism

The Shrink of Chinese Character Cultural Sphere:

After World War II, Vietnam abolished Chinese characters in favour of the Roman alphabet, while Japan and Korea reduced their use of Chinese characters.





The boundaries of cultural spheres differ from national borders

- Xīnjiāng falls within the Arabic script cultural sphere.
- Tibet belongs to the Indic script cultural sphere.
- Singapore is part of both the Latin script cultural sphere and the Chinese character cultural sphere.

Writing does not equate to culture, but it serves as a primary carrier of culture.

The evolution of human culture is not merely a process of Westernisation or Easternisation. Rather, it involves transitioning from singular traditions to a fusion of multiple influences.

As the world becomes more interconnected, humanity is shaping an unprecedented, globalised culture.

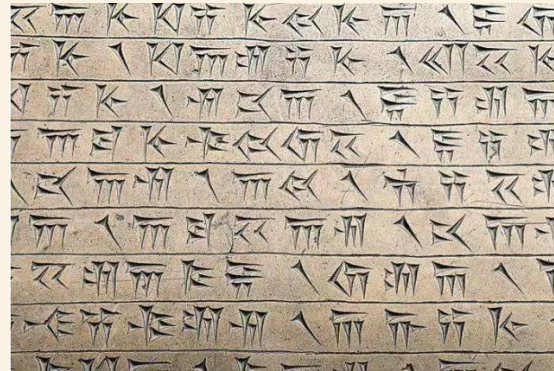




The four great indigenous ancient writing systems of the world



Hieroglyphs



Cuneiform



Maya Glyphs



Oracle Bone Script



2. Introduction of the Chinese Writing System



虫胡

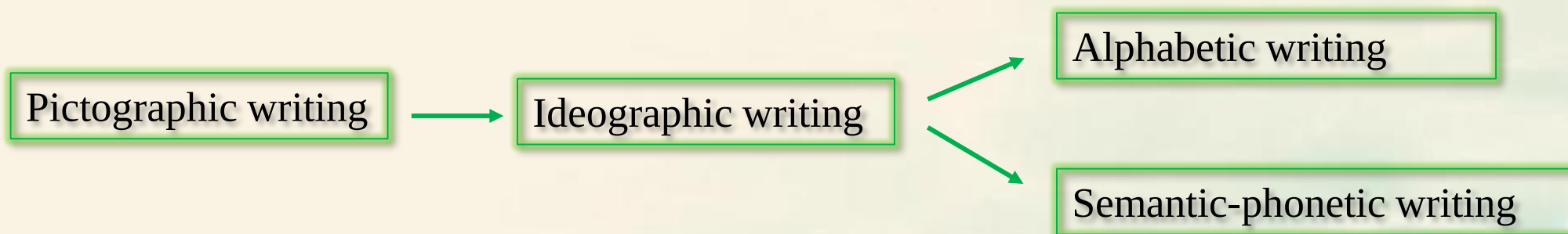


湖



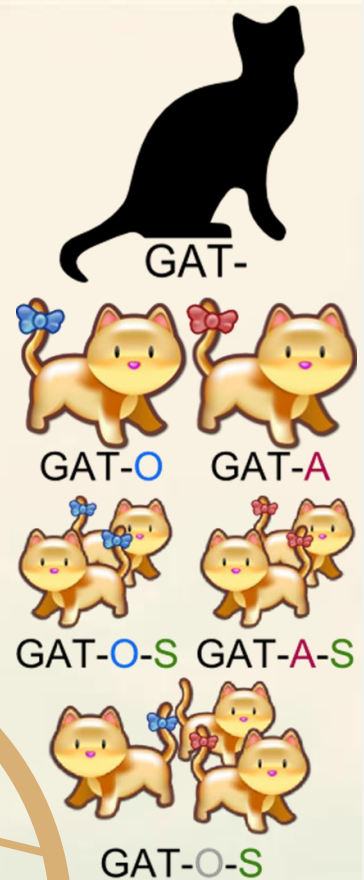
糊

The evolution of world writing systems:



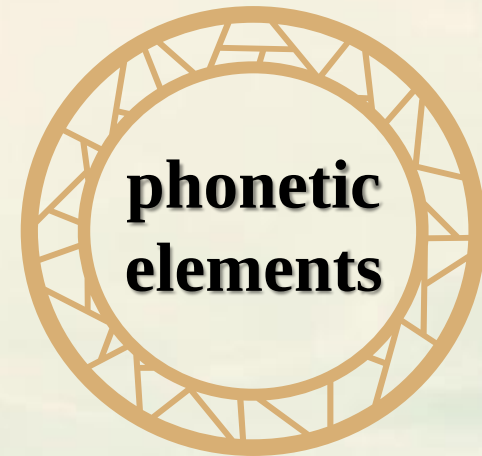
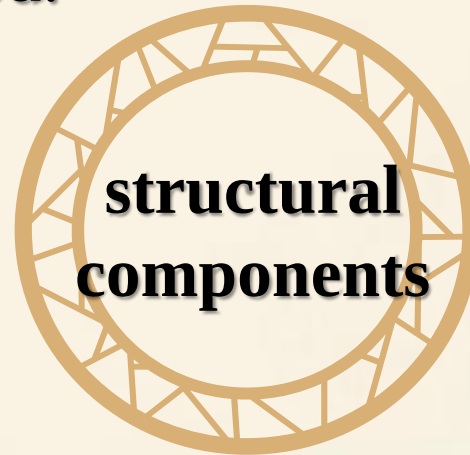
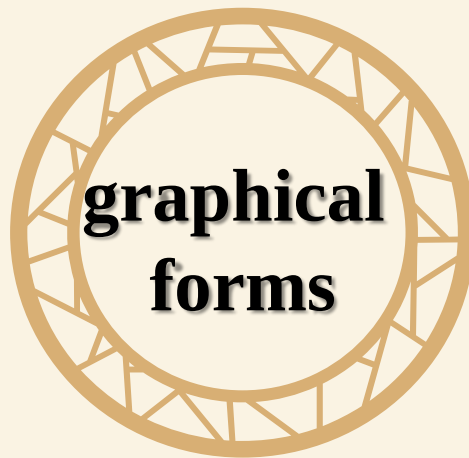


Chinese is an isolating language (analytic language) with no inflection. Chinese words involve very few variations, and thus the graphical forms do not change according to different cases.

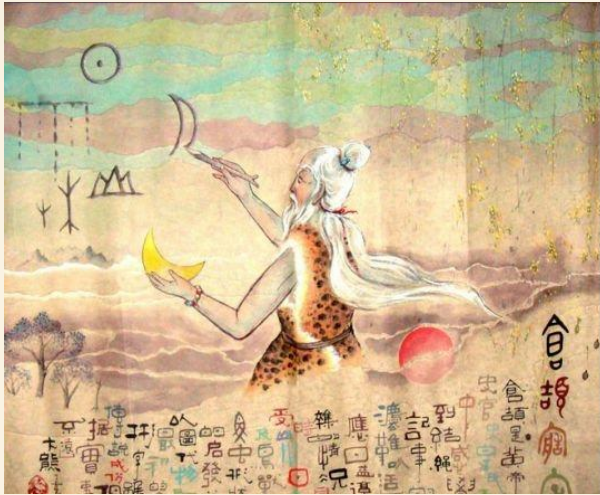




Form (*xíng* 形), sound (*yīn* 音), and meaning (*yì* 義) are the three fundamental components of Chinese characters and are interconnected.



2.1 The Invention of Chinese Characters



Cāng Ji é 倉頡 developed Chinese Characters

biàn 采
(to separate,
distinguish)



shěn 審 (to examine, investigate)
shì 釋 (to interpret, elucidate)
xī 悉 (to comprehend, detailed)

fān 番
(paw)



2.2 Evolution of Chinese Characters



oracle bone
inscription

Shāng dynasty
(1314 – 1000 BCE)



bronze
inscription

Zhōu dynasty
(c.1046 – 256 BCE)



small seal
script

Qín dynasty
(221 BCE – 8 CE)



Shang 商 Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE)

Zhou 周 Dynasty (c. 1046–256 BCE)

Western Zhou 西周 (c. 1046–771 BCE)

Eastern Zhou 東周 (c. 770–256 BCE)

Spring and Autumn Period 春秋
(722–c. 476 BCE)

Warring States Period 戰國
(c. 475–221 BCE)

oracle bone inscription

inscriptions on shells and
bones from the Shāng
dynasty (1314 – 1000 BCE)

Oracle bone inscriptions were
used for divination purposes



bǔ 卜 [*puk]
(to divine, foretell,
predict)



zhào 兆
(omen)



jī 稽
(to examine, detain)

qǐshǒu 稽首 (deep bow)

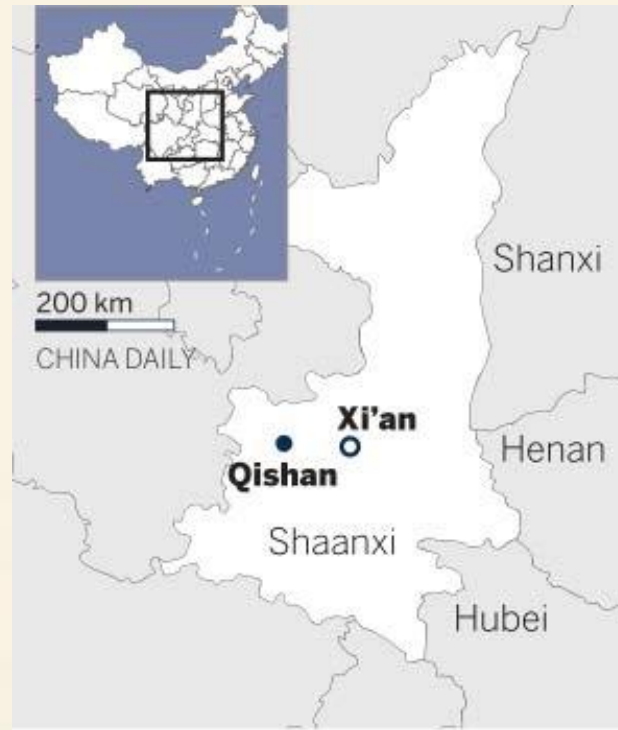
jīkǎo 稽考 (to examine)

jīliú 稽留 (to detain)

ānyáng 安陽 County,
Hénán 河南 Province



qíshān 岐山 County,
Shǎnxī 陝西 Province



Assembling fragmented pieces
of oracle bone inscriptions



Shang 商 Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE)
 Zhou 周 Dynasty (c. 1046–256 BCE)
 Western Zhou 西周 (c. 1046–771 BCE)
 Eastern Zhou 東周 (c. 770–256 BCE)
 Spring and Autumn Period 春秋
 (722–c. 476 BCE)
 Warring States Period 戰國
 (c. 475–221 BCE)

bronze inscription

inscriptions on bronze
 (*jīn* 金) vessels, used in
 the Zhōu dynasty
 (c.1046 – 256 BCE)

	<i>r</i> 日 (sun)		<i>zǐ</i> 子 (child)
bronze inscriptions	← ☉	•	𠂔 𠂔
oracle bone inscriptions	← 𠂔	◻	𠂔 𠂔
		<i>dīng</i> 丁 (nail)	<i>fù</i> 父 (father)

Late Western Zhou

↑

Early Western Zhou

Spring and Autumn period



The bronze objects had been used in connection with sacrificial ceremonies.

Máo Gōng tripod cauldron

毛公鼎



Sǎn Shì bronze basin

散氏盤



Zhou 周 Dynasty (c. 1046–256 BCE)

Western Zhou 西周 (c. 1046–771 BCE)

Eastern Zhou 東周 (c. 770–256 BCE)

Spring and Autumn Period 春秋
(722–c. 476 BCE)

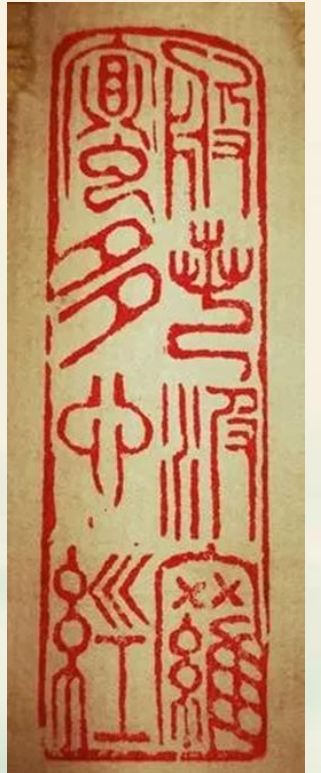
Warring States Period 戰國
(c. 475–221 BCE)

Qin 秦 Dynasty (221–206 BCE)

Han 漢 Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE)

Former (Western) Han 西漢 (202 BCE–8 CE)

Later (Eastern) Han 東漢 (25–220 CE)



The small seal script was commissioned by Qínshǐhuáng, the first emperor of a unified China, after his conquest of the other Warring States.

Zhou 周 Dynasty (c. 1046–256 BCE)

Western Zhou 西周 (c. 1046–771 BCE)

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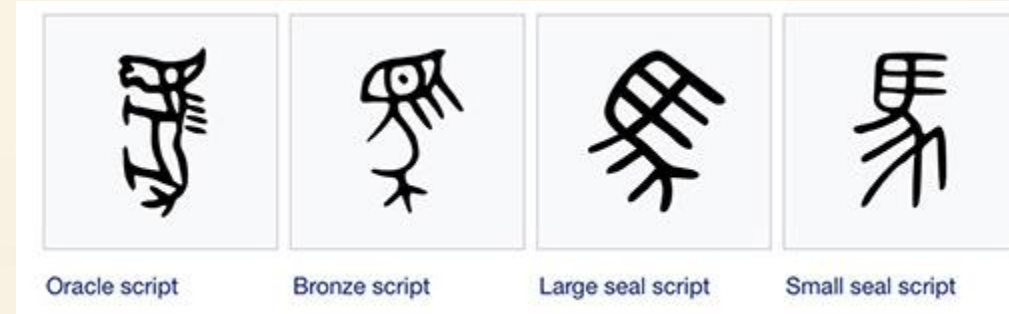
Later (Eastern) Han 東漢 (25–220 CE)



Namo Amitabha

horse

small seal
script



Small seal script
(221 BCE – 8CE) was
developed in the Qín
dynasty and represents the
final stage of ancient forms
of Chinese characters.

Small seal script was a simplified
version based on the large seal
script (also called the Zhòu script),
the characters commonly used in
the Qín state during the Spring and
Autumn period and the Warring
States period.



Qin 秦 Dynasty (221–206 BCE)

Han 漢 Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE)

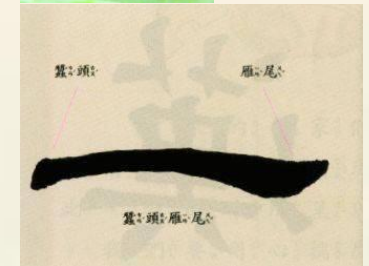
Former (Western) Han 西漢 (202 BCE–8 CE)

Later (Eastern) Han 東漢 (25–220 CE)

Clerical Script

In the H àn dynasty
(202 BCE – 220 CE),
clerical script
became mature.

Modern version of Chinese characters



The transition from small seal script to clerical script was known as *lǐ biàn* 隸變 (clerical change), is regarded as the most important transitional phase between ancient and modern writings.

Modern version of Chinese characters

Regular Script
with few changes
other than the
simplification
of strokes.



**Traditional characters
& Simplified characters**

Much of the meaning
inherent in traditional
characters were during the
simplification process.

ěr 耳 (ear)

tīng 聽

xīn 心
(heart)

kǒu 口 (mouth)

jīn 斤
(a unit of
measurement)

Modern version of Chinese characters



Traditional characters

Simplified characters

a 愛 (love) without the heart (*xīn* 心) → 爱

dǎo 導 (guidance) without the way (*dào* 道) → 导

shèng 聖 (sage) without ears (*ěr* 耳) and mouth (*kǒu* 口) → 圣

kāi 開 (open) the gateless gate (*mén* 門) → 开

mì 麵 (noodles) without wheat (*mài* 麥) → 面 (face; noodles)

xìn 信 (trustworthy)

xiào 孝 (filial piety)

xiǎng 想 (thought)



2.3 The Introduction of the *Shuōwén jiězì* Dictionary (Explaining Simple Graphs and Analysing Compound Characters)

The earliest comprehensive Chinese character dictionary, authored by Xǔ Shèn 許慎 (58–147).

Xǔ Shèn was regarded as ‘the peerless master of the Five Classics’ (*wǔjīng wúshuāng* 五經無雙) by his contemporaries.



Without mastering the principles behind Chinese character formation, it is impossible to fully grasp the profound meanings embedded in ancient texts.

Preface to the *Shuōwén jiězì*: ‘Written characters are the foundation of the classics, the beginning of royal government, the means by which former generations passed on [wisdom and experience] to posterity, and the channel through which later generations can learn from the past. Therefore, it is said: ‘Once the root is established, the Dao will be born. We will know the world’s deepest mysteries and not be confused.’

《說文解字序》：「文字者，經藝之本，王政之始，前人所以垂後，後人所以識古。故曰：本立而道生，知天下之至赜，而不可亂也。」

The *Shuowen* provides a comprehensive analysis of the ancient forms, sounds, and meanings of Chinese characters based on **the Six Principles of Character Formation** (*liùshū* 六書) :

- (1) *xì àngx íng* 象形 (pictograph),
- (2) *zhǐshì* 指事 (ideograph),
- (3) *hu òu yì* 會意 (associative compound),
- (4) *xíngshēng* 形聲 (semantic-phonetic compound),
- (5) *zhuǎnzhù* 轉注 (mutually explanatory characters),
- (6) *jiǎjiè* 假借 (loan characters).



Shuowen collects 9,353 characters which are categorised under 540 radicals.

Emperor Xuánzōng of Táng (685-762) set a precedent for revising ancient texts



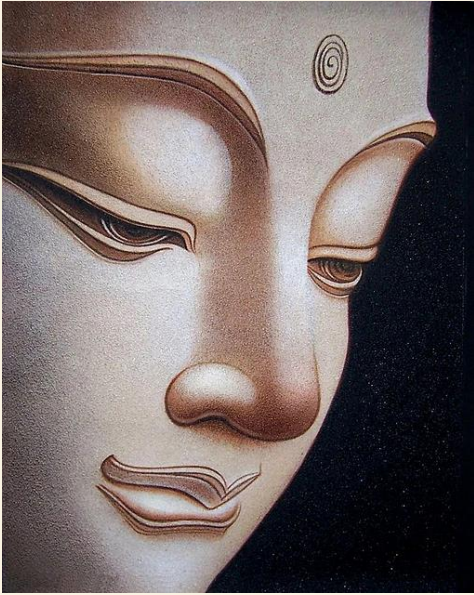
The Táng dynasty calligrapher Li Yángbīng 李陽冰 (fl.766) tampered with the *Shuōwén jiězì*, adding his own interpretations.



Xú Xu àn 徐鉉 (916–991)'s Shuōwén jiězì dàxúběn 說文解字大徐本 (Collated and Finalised Shuowen jiezi) added fǎnqiē readings based on the Tang Dynasty's Rhyme Dictionary and appended graphs not included in the original.



Romano-British period (43–410 CE)	Later (Eastern) Han 東漢 (25–220 CE) Three Kingdoms 三國 (220–265) Western Jin 西晉 Dynasty (265–316) Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty (317–420)
Middle Ages (late 5th c. to 1485)	Sixteen Kingdoms 十六國 (304–439) Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝 (420–589)
• 410-789: Anglo-Saxon period	Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty (317–420)
• 789: Vikings from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden	Tang 唐 Dynasty (618–907) Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960)



Since Buddhism was introduced to China, the translation of Buddhist sutras benefited the development of analytical skills in Chinese phonology.

The alphabetical writing system and precise phonetic analysis of Sanskrit led to the refinement of Chinese phonological techniques. The first consequence was the invention of the *fǎnqiē* 反切 method of spelling.

Fǎnqiē (Sinographic Spelling) was invented in the H àn dynasty and was prevalent in Su í and T áng dynasties. It is a traditional way of indicating the pronunciation of a Chinese character by using two other characters.

The first character in the fǎnqiē provides the initial sound, while the second provides the final and the tone.

character	fǎnqiē spelling	
同 tóng	徒 tú	initial
	紅 hóng	rhyme & tone

Xú Kǎi 徐鍇 (920–974), Xú Xuàn's younger brother, produced an interpretive analysis of each entry, titled *Shuōwén xùzhàn* 說文繫傳 (Filiations of and Commentary on the *Shuōwén jiězì*)



Romano-British period (43–410 CE)	Later (Eastern) Han 東漢 (25–220 CE) Three Kingdoms 三國 (220–265) Western Jin 西晉 Dynasty (265–316) Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty (317–420)
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优酷

文化中国

rì 日 (sun)



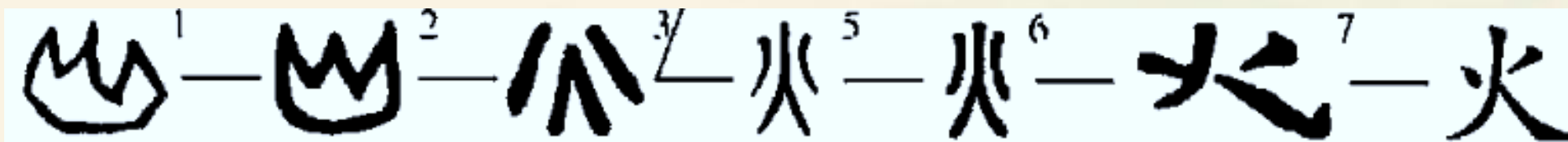
shān 山 (mountain)



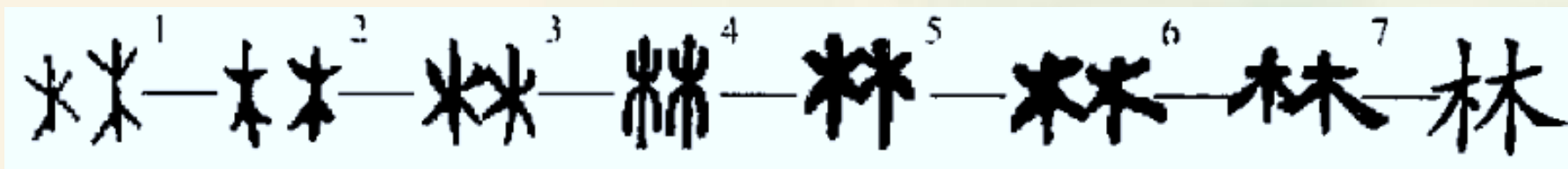
shuǐ 水 (water)



huǒ 火 (fire)



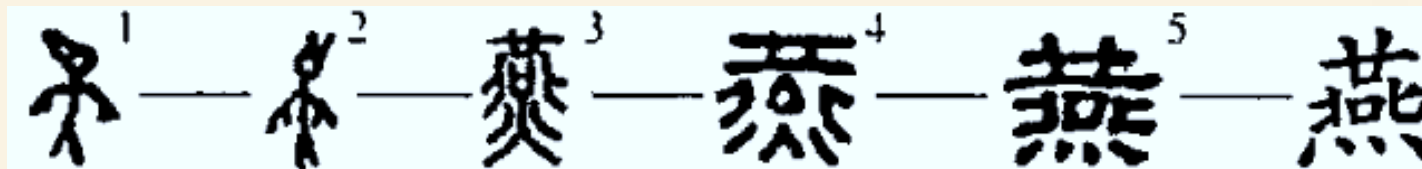
lín 林 (forest)



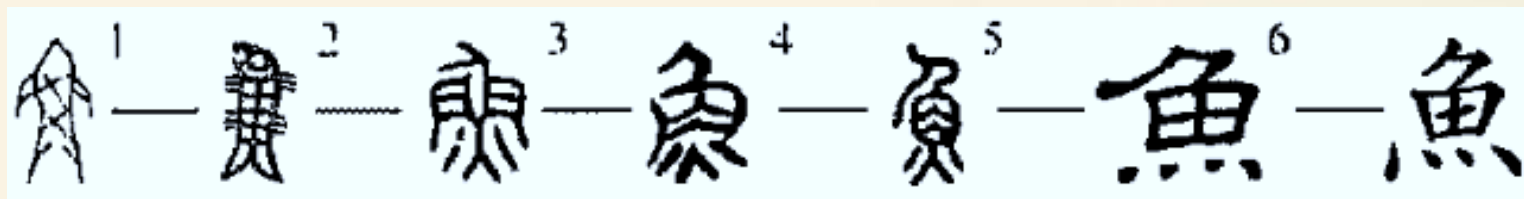
niǎo 鳥 (bird)



yàn 燕 (swallow)



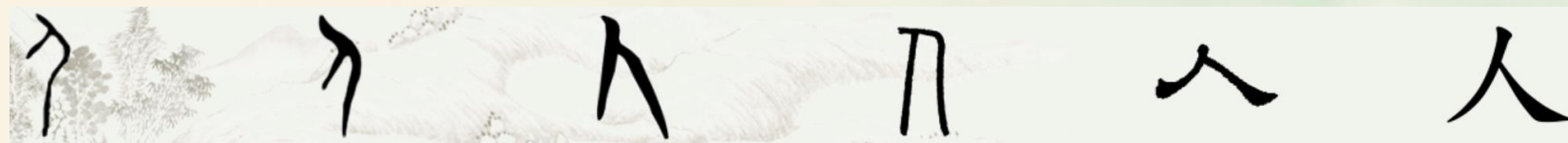
yú 魚 (fish)



mǎ 馬 (horse)



rén 人 (person)



Chinese: Analytic/Isolating language: Grammatical functions are primarily expressed through word order and function words.

wǒ chīguò wǔcān le

我 吃過 午餐了。

I **have had** lunch.

wǒ zài chī wǔcān

我 在吃 午餐。

I'm **having** lunch.

wǒ yàoqù chī wǔcān

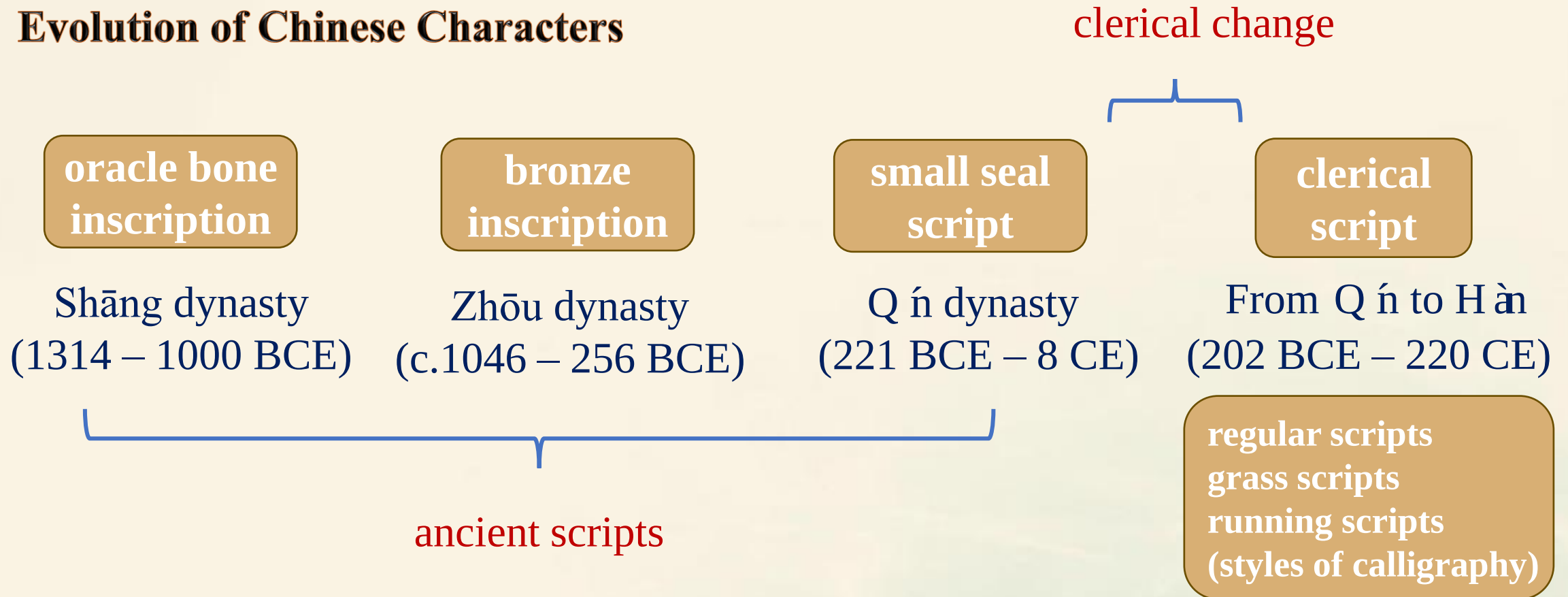
我 要(去) 吃午餐。

I'm **going to** have lunch.

English: Inflectional languages: Grammatical relationships are conveyed through internal changes in the root or the addition of affixes, such as *-ed*, *-ing*, *-tion*, and *-ly*.

Agglutinative languages (Japanese and Korean): Grammatical meanings are primarily expressed through affixes attached to the root.

Evolution of Chinese Characters



Form (*xíng* 形), sound (*yīn* 音), and meaning (*yì* 義) are the three fundamental components of Chinese characters. They are interconnected.

modern scripts

2.4 Duàn Yùcái and his *Annotations to the Shuōwén*

Duàn Yùcái 段玉裁 (1735–1815), one of the foremost philologists during the Qīng dynasty, provided **annotations** to the *Shuōwén* entitled the *Shuōwén jiězì zhù* 說文解字注.

In addition to elucidating Xǔ Shèn's rationale for interpreting a character's original meaning, Duan further teased out the extended and borrowed meanings of characters.

The ***Duànzhù*** (**Duan's annotations**) is viewed as an authoritative text offering a comprehensive elucidation of the *Shuōwén*.



2.4 Duàn Yùcái and his Annotations to the *Shuōwén*

Duàn Yùcái's Anecdotes and Stories:

1. Duan's Family Motto:

Without cultivating the field of the inkstone, there is no joy in life; without iron will, poverty cannot be borne.

(不耕 *yàntián* 硯田無樂事，不撐 *tiěgǔ* 鐵骨莫支貧)

tiěgǔ 鐵骨 (iron bone) refers to someone with a strong will and unyielding character.

yàntián 硯田 (the fields of the ink-slab) refers to writer's way of making a living



Du àn Yùcái's Anecdotes and Stories:

2. Never Forget his Teacher D à Zhèn's 戴震 (1724–1777)
Kindness

3. Never Ceasing to Write and Research

4. Rigorous Attitude toward Research



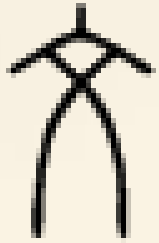
Du àn Yù ài 段玉裁



Xǔ Shèn 許慎



2.5 The Explanations of *wén* 文 and *zì* 字



The character *wén* 文 resembles
intersecting brush strokes

文 is the orthograph of *wén* 紋 (pattern), with the latter having the classifier ‘silk’ (糸) attached.

wénzhāng 文章 (article), *wénxué* 文學 (literature), *wénhuà* 文化 (culture), *wénmíng* 文明 (civilisation)

文 refers to **simple graphs** which are **indivisible**.



In the oracle bone inscriptions, the form 文 depicts a man with tattoos on his chest. 文 also means ‘ornament’.

2.5 The Explanations of *wén* 文 and *zì* 字

The basic meaningful unit in the construction of Chinese characters is called *wén* 文. 文 is indivisible and is thus known as a **simple graph**, also referred to as the ‘**primary script**’.

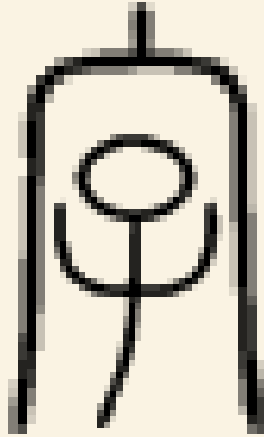


The combination of two or more simple graphs forms *zì* 字, the **compound character**.



mi án 𡩊
(roof)

zǐ 子
(child)



The character z 字 originally meant ‘to propagate, reproduce’.

字 refers to **compound characters** which are combinations and derivations of two or more simple graphs.

2.6 Word Formation

In ancient times, one character corresponded to one word. Today, one character corresponds to one morpheme. This results from the disyllabic tendency in the development of Chinese language. Monosyllabic words dominated ancient Chinese. Over time, disyllabic words gradually replaced many monosyllabic words.

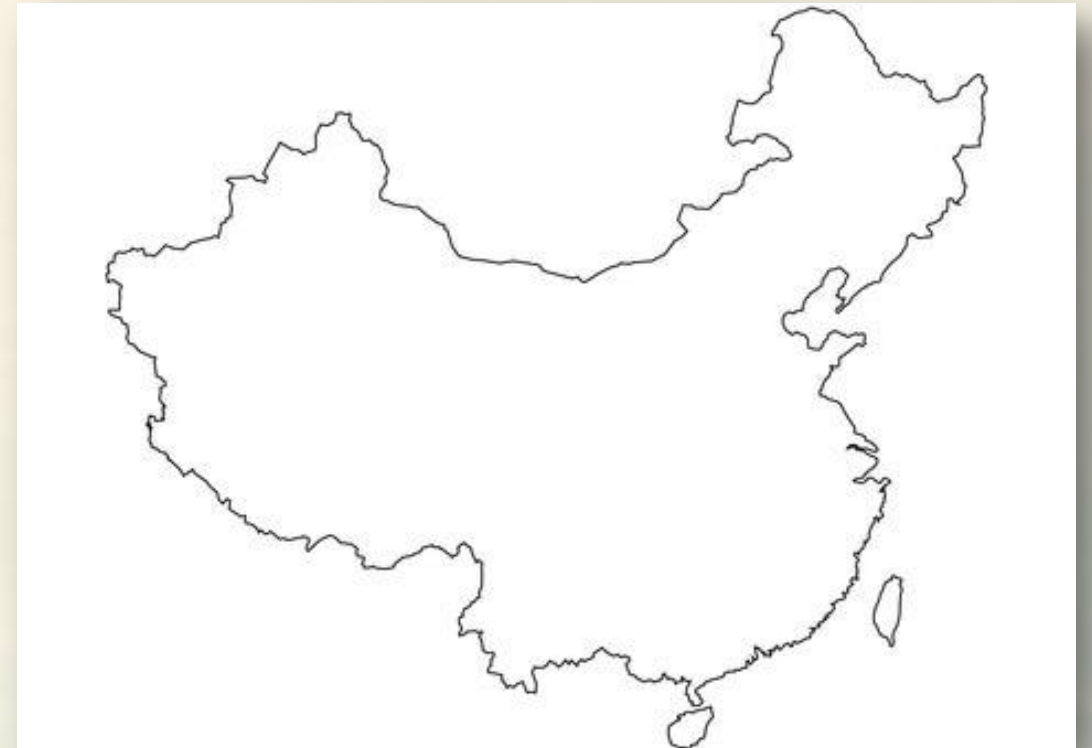
For example, the word tiger was once expressed with the character *hǔ* 虎 (tiger) in ancient Chinese. In modern Chinese, however, 虎 has become part of the disyllabic word *lǎohǔ* 老虎, where *lǎo* 老 serves as a meaningless prefix.



Chinese characters are **visual symbols** that convey **meaning** through their **forms**.

Despite the differences among Chinese dialects,

the written language remains consistent across regions, eliminating communication barriers.

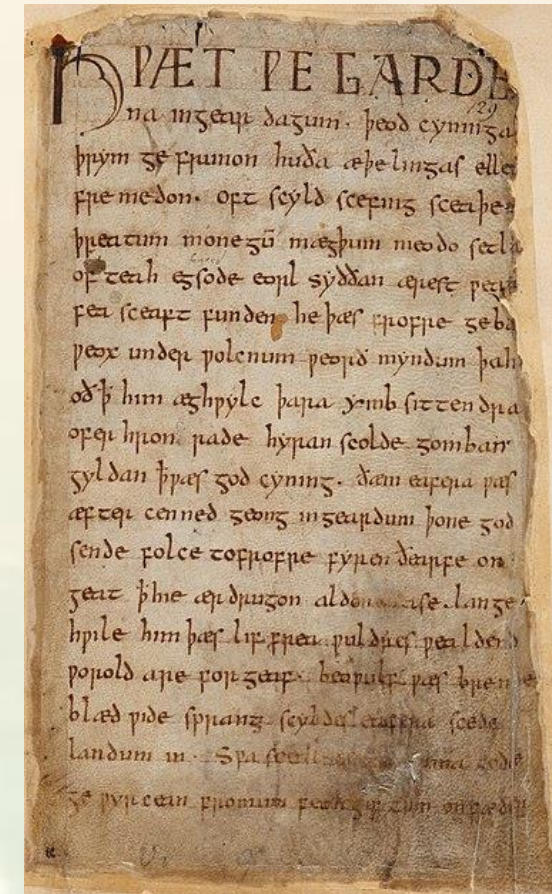


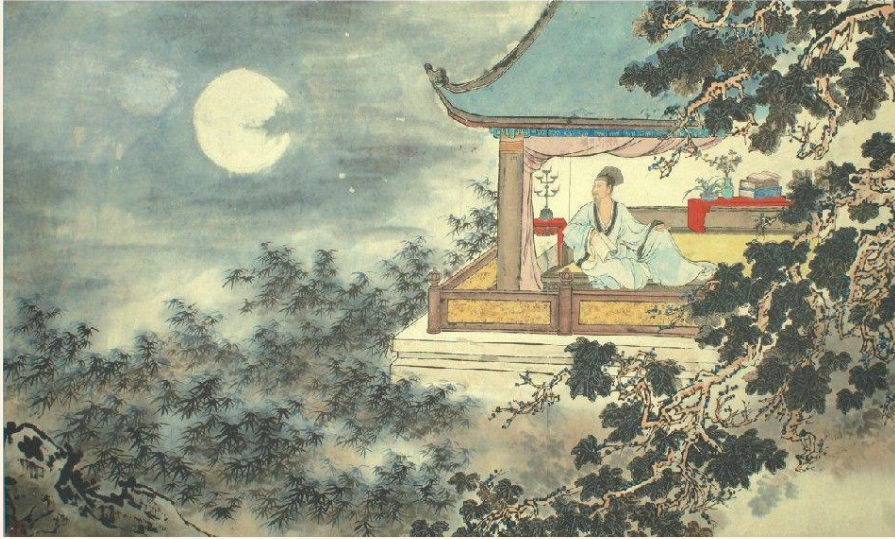
In alphabetical languages, symbols
represent **phonemes**,
and the written form evolves alongside
changes in pronunciation.

*'Wepying and waylyng, care and oother sorwe
I knowe ynogh, on even and a-morwe,
Quod the Marchant, 'and so doon oother mo
That wedded been.*

—Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*
(14th Century, Middle English)

Beowulf (700–1000)
Old English





**A poem written by
the Tang poet Lǐ Bái李白 (701~762)**

静夜思

床前明月光，疑是地上霜，
举头望明月，低头思故乡。

Thoughts on a Tranquil Night

Before my bed, there's a pool of light
— Can it be frost on the ground?
Looking up, I find the moon bright;
Bowing, in homesickness
I'm drowned.

23-25 AD	Western Han Dynasty
25-220 AD	Eastern Han Dynasty
220-265 or 280 AD	Three Kingdoms
265-317 AD	Western Jin Dynasty
317-420 AD	Eastern Jin Dynasty
386 or 420-589 AD	Southern and Northern Dynasties
589-618 AD	Sui Dynasty
618-907 AD	Tang Dynasty
907-960 AD	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms
960-1127 AD	Northern Song Dynasty
1127-1279 AD	Southern Song Dynasty
907 or 916-1125 AD	Liao Dynasty
1115-1234 AD	Jin Dynasty
1038-1227 AD	Western Xia
1271-1368 AD	Yuan Dynasty
1368-1644 or 1662 AD	Ming Dynasty
1636 or 1644-1911 AD	Qing Dynasty
1912-1949 AD	Republic of China
1949 AD-Present	People's Republic of China; Republic of China, Taiwan



3. Examples of Characters

Chinese characters are constructed in a scientific and systematic way. By mastering the principles of character construction, we gain the key to understanding them.







Thanks for your kind attention!

