The Study of Chinese Philosophy and Metaphysical Beliefs through Oracle Bone Inscription

Chienyn Chi
• The Origin of Chinese Writing.
• A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy.
• The Evolution of Chinese Writing
• The idea and the word 巫 shaman.
• Oracle Bone Inscription and Shamanism
The Origin of Chinese Writing

• Since Oracle Bone Inscription is a mature writing system, there must be an earlier writing system. The book of Changes states 周易：” Ancient Times people used ropes and knots to calculate the time (or govern), and afterwards people started to write. However, knots and ropes can only function as symbols to help people keep track of daily things, it is not writing.

• It is possible that the heaven earth calendar system originated from the ropes and knots system. Some can argue that the heaven earth calendar system led to the invention of writing. However, according to some scholars writing came from Pictures. They would say drawings became the simpler with less detail and turned into writing. In the end, people found this concept inconsistent to compare different writing systems.

• Therefore, the more accepted theory is: when spoken language and pictographic symbols are combined, writing is produced.
• For example, 大鹿 means big deer rather than a person chasing a deer or feeding a deer. Despite the fact that the first word 大 resembles a person it has come to mean big an adjective. This is when the word 大 is has transformed itself from a picture to writing. This process is quite long and complex.

**Legendary origins**

• According to legend, Chinese characters were invented by Cangjie (c. 2650 BC), a bureaucrat under the legendary emperor, Huangdi. The legend tells that Cangjie was hunting on Mount Yangxu (today Shanxi) when he saw a tortoise whose veins caught his curiosity. Inspired by the possibility of a logical relation of those veins, he studied the animals of the world, the landscape of the earth, and the stars in the sky, and invented a symbolic system called zi—Chinese characters. It was said that on the day the characters were born, Chinese heard the devil mourning, and saw crops falling like rain, as it marked the beginning of the world.
A Brief description of Chinese Philosophy

Early beliefs

• Early Shang Dynasty thought was based upon cycles. This notion stems from what the people of the Shang Dynasty could observe around them: day and night cycled, the seasons progressed again and again. During the Shang, fate could be manipulated by great deities, commonly translated as Gods. Shamanism was prevalent and ancestor worship was universally recognized. There was also human and animal sacrifice.

• When the Shang were overthrown by the Zhou, a new political, religious and philosophical concept was introduced called the "Mandate of Heaven". This mandate was said to be taken when rulers became unworthy of their position and provided a shrewd justification for Zhou rule. During this period, archaeological evidence points to an increase in literacy and a partial shift away from the faith placed in the Supreme Being, with ancestor worship becoming commonplace and a more worldly orientation coming to the fore. Book of Changes.
Hundred Schools of Thought

- In around 500 BCE, after the Zhou state weakened and China moved into the Spring and Autumn Period, the classic period of Chinese philosophy began (it is an interesting fact that this date nearly coincides with the emergence of the first Greek philosophers).

- This is known as the Hundred Schools of Thought (諸子百家; zhūzǐ bǎijìā; "various philosophers hundred schools"). This period is considered the golden age of Chinese philosophy. Of the many schools founded at this time and during the subsequent Warring States Period, the four most influential ones were Confucianism, Daoism (often spelled "Taoism"), Mohism and Legalism.

Qin and Han Dynasty

- The short founder Qin Dynasty, where Legalism was the official philosophy, quashed Mohist and Confucianist schools. Legalism remained influential until the emperors of the Han Dynasty adopted Daoism and later Confucianism as official doctrine. These latter two became the determining forces of Chinese thought until the introduction of Buddhism.
Confucianism was particularly strong during the Han Dynasty, whose greatest thinker was Dong Zhongshu, who integrated Confucianism with the thoughts of the Zhongshu School and the theory of the Five Elements. He also was a promoter of the New Text school, which considered Confucius as a divine figure and a spiritual ruler of China, who foresaw and started the evolution of the world towards the Universal Peace. In contrast, there was an Old Text school that advocated the use of Confucian works written in ancient language (from this comes the denomination Old Text) that were so much more reliable. In particular, they refuted the assumption of Confucius as a godlike figure and considered him as the greatest sage, but simply a human and mortal.

**Xuanxue and Buddhism**

The III and IV centuries saw the rise of the *Xuanxue* (mysterious learning), also called *Neo-Taoism*. The most important philosophers of this movement were Wang Bi, Xiang Xiu and Guo Xiang. The main question of this school was whether Being came before Not-Being (in Chinese, *ming* and *wuming*). A peculiar feature of these Taoist thinkers, like the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, was the concept of *feng liu* (lit. wind and flow), a sort of romantic spirit which encouraged following the natural and instinctive impulse.
Buddhism arrived in China around the 1st century AD, but it was not until the Northern and Southern, Sui and Tang Dynasties that it gained considerable influence and acknowledgement. At the beginning, it was considered a sort of Taoist sect, and there was even a theory about Laozi, founder of Taoism, who went to India and taught his philosophy to Buddha. Mahayana Buddhism was far more successful in China than its rival Hinayana, and both Indian schools and local Chinese sects arose from the 5th century. Two chiefly important monk philosophers were Sengzhao and Daosheng. But probably the most influential and original of these schools was the Chan sect, which had an even stronger impact in Japan as the Zen sect.

In the mid-Tang Buddhism reached its peak, and reportedly there were 4,600 monasteries, 40,000 hermitages and 260,500 monks and nuns. The power of the Buddhist clergy was so great and the wealth of the monasteries so impressive, that it instigated criticism from Confucian scholars, who considered Buddhism as a foreign religion. In 845 Emperor Wuzong ordered the Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution, confiscating the riches and returning monks and nuns to lay life. From then on, Buddhism lost much of its influence.
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From Neo-Confucianism to late Imperial Era

- Neo-Confucianism was a revived version of old Confucian principles that appeared around the Song Dynasty, with Buddhist, Taoist, and Legalist features. The first philosophers, such as Shao Yong, Zhou Dunyi and Chang Zai, were cosmologists and worked on the Yi Jing. The Cheng brothers, Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, are considered the founders of the two main schools of thought of Neo-Confucianism: the School of Principle the first, the School of Mind the latter. The School of Principle gained supremacy during the Song Dynasty with the philosophical system elaborated by Zhu Xi, which became mainstream and officially adopted by the government for the Imperial examinations under the Yuan Dynasty. The School of Mind was developed by Lu Jiuyuan, Zhu Xi's main rival, but was soon forgotten. Only during the Ming Dynasty was the School of Mind revived by Wang Shouren, whose influence is equal to that of Zhu Xi. This school was particularly important in Japan.

- During the Qing Dynasty many philosophers objected against Neo-Confucianism and there was a return to the Han Dynasty Confucianism, and also the reprise of the controversy between Old Text and New Text. In this period also started the penetration of Western culture.
The Evolution of Chinese Writing

The traditional picture of an orderly series of scripts, each one invented suddenly and then completely displacing the previous one as implied by neat series of graphs in popular books on the subject, has been conclusively demonstrated to be fiction by the archaeological finds and scholarly research of the last half century. Gradual evolution and the coexistence of two or more scripts was more often the case.
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The Evolution of Chinese Writing

- Oracle bone script
- Bronze inscription
- Proto-clerical
- Clerical
- Neo-clerical
- Semi-cursive
- Regular Script
- Modern Cursive
Proto-Clerical
Evolution of seal script

- There were several different variants of seal script which developed in each kingdom independently during the warring state period and spring and autumn. The 'birds and worms script', was used in the Kingdoms of Wu, Chu, and Yue. It was found on several artifacts including the Spear of Fuchai, and Sword of Goujian.

- Bronze sword of King Gōujiàn of Yuè (late Spring & Autumn), with bird script; detail--part of inscription: "越王自作" Yuè Wáng zì zuò, “Made by the King of Yuè”. Húběi Provincial Museum

- On one side of the blade, two columns of text were visible. In total there are eight characters written in an ancient script. The script was found to be the one called "鳥蟲文" (literally "'birds and worms'-characters" owing to the intricate decorations to the defining strokes), a variant of zhuan that is very difficult to read. Initial analysis of the text deciphered six of the characters, "越王" (King of Yue) and "自作用劍" ("made this sword for (his) personal use"). As a southern state, Chu was close to the Wu-Yue influences. Chu produced broad bronze swords that were similar to Wuyue swords, but not as intricate. Chu also used the difficult to read script called "Birds and Worms (鳥蟲文)" style, which was borrowed by the Wu and Yue states.
Unified small seal script

- Small seal script epigraph on the standard weight prototype of Qin Dynasty. Made from iron, this prototype was unearthed in 1973 at Wendeng City (文登市), Weihai, Shandong Province.
- The script of the Qin system (the writing as exemplified in bronze inscriptions in the state of Qin before unification) had evolved organically from the Zhou script starting in the Spring and Autumn period. Beginning around the Warring States period, it became vertically elongated with a regular appearance. This was the period of maturation of Small Seal script, also called simply seal script. It was systematized by Li Si 李斯 during the reign of the First Emperor of China Qin Shi Huang through elimination of most variant structures, and was imposed as the nationwide standard (thus banning other regional scripts), but small seal script was clearly not invented at that time.
Hàn Dynasty
Proto-clerical evolving to clerical

• Despite the Qín script standardization, more than one script remained in use at the time. For example, a little-known, rectilinear and roughly executed kind of *common writing* had for centuries coexisted with the more formal seal script in the Qín state, and the popularity of this common writing grew as the use of writing itself became more widespread.

• Proto-clerical, which had emerged by the Warring States period from common Qín writing, matured gradually, and by the early Western Hàn, was little different from that of the Qín. Recently discovered bamboo slips show the script becoming mature clerical script by the middle to late reign of Emperor Wǔ of the W. Hàn, who ruled 141 BCE to 87 BCE.
闻道长安似弈棋，百事皆新。不徒湘累悲生文，武衣冠。异时直北开山金鼓振，征西车马羽书驰。鱼龙寂寞秋江冷，故国平居有所思。
Clerical & clerical cursive

- Contrary to popular belief of one script per period, there were in fact multiple scripts in use during the Hán. Although mature clerical script, also called 八分 bāfēn script, was dominant at that time, an early type of cursive script was also in use in the Hán by at least as early as 24 BCE (very late W. Hán), incorporating cursory (sic) forms popular at that period as well as many from the vulgar writing of the Warring State of Qín. By around the Eastern Jin dynasty this Hán cursive became known as 章草 zhāngcǎo (also known as 隶草 lìcǎo today), or in English sometimes clerical cursive, ancient cursive, or draft cursive. Some believe that the name, based on 章 zhāng meaning "orderly", is because this was a more orderly form of cursive than the modern form of cursive emerging around the E. Jin and still in use today, called 今草 jīncǎo or "modern cursive".
Neo-clerical

- Around the mid *Eastern Hán*, a simplified and easier to write form of clerical appeared, which Qiú (2000, p. 113 & 139) terms "neo-clerical" (新隸體 / 新隸體 xīnlìtǐ) and by the late E. Hán it had become the dominant daily script, although the formal, mature *bāfēn* (八分) clerical script remained in use for formal situations such as engraved stelae. Some have described this neo-clerical script as a transition between clerical and regular script, and it remained in use through the Cáo Wèi and Jìn dynasties.

Semi-cursive

- By the late E. Hán, an early form of semi-cursive script appeared,[32] developing out of a somewhat cursively written kind of neo-clerical script[33] and cursive. It was traditionally attributed to Liú Déshēng ca. 147–188 CE, although such attributions refer to early masters of a script rather than to their actual inventors, since the scripts generally evolved into being over time. Qiú 2000, p. 140 gives examples of early semi-cursive showing that it had popular origins rather than being only Liú’s invention.
• The Cursive Script (草书 / 草書 cǎoshū, literally "grass script") is not in general use, and is a purely artistic calligraphic style.
• The basic character shapes are suggested, rather than explicitly realized, and the abbreviations are extreme. Despite being cursive to the point where individual strokes are no longer differentiable and the characters often illegible to the untrained eye, this script (also known as draft) is highly revered for the beauty and freedom that it embodies. Some of the Simplified Chinese characters adopted by the People's Republic of China, and some of the simplified characters used in Japan, are derived from the Cursive Script. The Japanese hiragana script is also derived from this script.
Regular script

- Regular script has been attributed to Zhōng Yáo, of the E. Hàn to Cáo Wèi period (ca 151–230 CE), who has been called the “father of regular script”. However, some scholars think that one person alone cannot develop a new script which is universally adopted, but only be a contributor to its gradual formation. The earliest surviving pieces written in regular script are copies of his works, including at least one copied by Wáng Xīzhī. This new script, which is the dominant modern Chinese script, developed out of a neatly written form of early semi-cursive, with addition of the pause (頓 / 頓 dùn) technique to end horizontal strokes, plus heavy tails on strokes which are written to downward right diagonal. Thus, early regular script emerged from a neat, formal form of semi-cursive which had emerged from neo-clerical (a simplified, convenient form of clerical).
It then matured further in the Eastern Jin dynasty in the hands of the "Sage of Calligraphy" 王羲之 and his son 王獻之. It was not, however, in widespread use at that time, and most continued using neo-clerical or a somewhat semi-cursive form of it for daily writing, while the conservative bāfēn clerical script remained in use on some stelae, alongside some semi-cursive, but primarily neo-clerical.

Modern cursive

Meanwhile, modern cursive script slowly emerged out of the clerical cursive (zhāngcǎo) script during the Cáo Wèi to Jin period, under the influence of both semi-cursive and the newly emerged regular script. Cursive was formalized in the hands of a few master calligraphers, the most famous and influential of which was 王羲之. However, because modern cursive is so cursive, it is hard to read, and never gained widespread use outside of literati circles.
Dominance and maturation of regular script

- It was not until the Southern and Northern Dynasties that regular script rose to dominant status. During that period, regular script continued evolving stylistically, reaching full maturity in the early Táng dynasty. Some call the writing of the early Táng calligrapher Ōuyáng Xún (557–641) the first mature regular script. After this point, although developments in the art of calligraphy and in character simplification still lay ahead, there were no more major stages of evolution for the mainstream script.
图五 金文中的巫字和巨字
（采自高明《古文字类编》，中华，1980）
也，象人有规矩也，与巫同意”。又员认云：“规巨也，持之”。许慎似是知道巫字本义的，所以工巫互解，而矩是木匠用来画方画圆的工具。为什么古代的巫以矩为
The idea and the Word Wu Shaman

• The word Wu巫 can be interpreted by some scholars two jades put together, (since Shamans believe in magical and spiritual powers of jades).

• Another interpretation is the word 工 meaning “tool” representing a connection between heaven and earth through human efforts.
Oracle Bone Inscription and Shamanism

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• Another interpretation is the word 工 meaning “tool” representing a connection between heaven and earth through human efforts.

• Scholars has speculated the when Shamanism originated. Through Archaeological finds, we know that it can be dated around 3000 BCE (Which was before Shang). During Chong li era, Shamanism was a common religion, and Oracles or Shamans started appearing. Religion went through significant stages. First of all, religion and military power were of the same category. Second of all, there was the privatization of Shaman powers. Common people could not practice what the Shaman did.
The reign of Chong, Li 重、黎的時代 is the first appearance of Shamans. Moreover, it was the reign of Shaman kings. At this time, people’s focus moved away from mass superstition but to practical documentation.

Moreover, it gave the emperor the right of religion and marginalized peasantry belief out of the system to be viewed as superstition. This can be the starting point of a hierarchy system that draws a line between the government and the people. This could also have led to the Chinese concept of a unified philosophy as opposed to a scattered philosophy during a dynasty, such as Confucianism in the Han period. The distinction between peasantry and the government can be seen throughout Chinese history. The debate about the Old text, and New Text in Han dynasty is an example.

During Shang, Shamanism moves beyond the Chong Li era by institutionalizing Shamanism. The art of a Shaman became a profession and complicated bureaucratic system. Thus, there were no longer Shaman Kings, but Shaman officials.
Bibliography
