

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Chinese Language - Uniting Factor 汉语

Oracle Bone Inscriptions and the Bronze Inscriptions

The earliest examples of Chinese writing date to the late Shang period (1200 BC). These are the so-called Oracle Bone Inscriptions (甲骨文). The Oracle Bone Inscriptions are the earliest Chinese writing scripts discovered by far. They were found in Anyang, Henan province at the end of 19th century. The second stage of the development of written Chinese is the bronze inscriptions. The Bronze Inscriptions were cast or engraved on bronze vessels. Starting from about the fifth century BC, Chinese people wrote the characters on bamboo strips, which were tied together with strings to form a roll. Besides bamboo strips, texts were also written on wooden tablets and silk cloth.

Questions

1. What are the main contents of oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions?
2. When and how were the oracle bone inscriptions found?

The Written Language as a Uniting Factor

There are seven major dialects in Chinese spoken language. Mandarin or Standard Chinese is the official language of China. Beijing dialect forms the basis of Standard Chinese, which is also referred to as Pǔtōnghuà(普通话) literally "common speech". Despite the existence of many dialects of Chinese spoken languages, the written form, including grammar and vocabulary are almost identical. In fact, as early as the 3rd century BC, Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China, united the writing forms that existed in China at the time.

Questions

1. Why is the Chinese written language regarded as one factor in Han ethnic unity?
2. In China Cantonese is considered a dialect of Chinese language, but some people think it is another language in China. What is your opinion? Please give reasons.

Chinese Calligraphy

Chinese language is called Hanyu. Similarly, Chinese characters, used to write the language, are called Hanzi or "Han characters. Character writing with writing brush (Chinese Calligraphy) has been long considered a cornerstone of Chinese culture and one of the imperial courts' standards for selecting officials. It has been consistently practiced as a major aesthetic expression from the 5th cent. B.C. Shu (calligraphy), Hua (painting), Qin (a string musical instrument), and Qi (a strategic board game) are the four basic skills and disciplines of the Chinese literati.

Questions

1. Chinese Characters is poetic symbols and symbols of sentiment. How were characters reshaped into graceful Olympic Symbols of the Olympic Games of 2008?
2. Practicing calligraphy is said to be helpful in promoting one's longevity. Why?
3. What are the rhythms of calligraphy displayed in Wang Xizhi's masterpiece "Preface to Langting pavilion"?

Reading

Dingmin Wu, A Panoramic View of Chinese Culture, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2010

Lang Ye & Zhu Liangzhi, *Insights into Chinese Culture, Foreign Language Teaching and Research press, Beijing, 2008*

Ebrey Patricia Buckley, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook, 2nd Ed, 1993*