The Development of Chinese Literacy Culture

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Introduction

- Writing in China dates back to the hieroglyphs that were used in the Shang Dynasty of 1700 – 1050 BC. Chinese literature is a vast subject that spans thousands of years. This large breadth of time with so many writers living in the various eras and countries makes Chinese literature complex. Chinese literary works include fiction, philosophical and religious works, poetry, and scientific writings. The dynastic eras frame the history of Chinese literature and are examined one by one.

- Classical Chinese.
The first dynasty for which there is historical record and archaeological evidence is the Shang Dynasty. It was a small empire in northern central China. No documents from that country survive, but there are archaeological finds of hieroglyphic writing on bronze wares and oracle bones. The hieroglyphic writing system later evolved into ideographic and partly-phonetic Chinese characters.
Oracle bone script (1400–1100 BC)
writing on the bronze wares (1300–1000 BC)

Source: lindongfromeasttowest.wordpress.com
Zhou Dynasty (1045–255 BC)
Basic Philosophical and Religious Literature

• The Zhou Dynasty was contemporaneous with the Shang Dynasty, and then they conquered the Shang Dynasty. Their dynasty lasted for about 800 years, but for most of the time, their original territory was broken up into dozens of competing kingdoms, and these finally coalesced into several big and warring kingdoms by the end of the Zhou era.

• the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476)
• the Warring States Period (475–221).

Taoism, Confucian literature, and other prominent religious and philosophical schools all emerged during these two periods.
Chinese plain in the late Spring and Autumn period (5th century BC)

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spring_and_Autumn_period
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Warring_States
The Chinese call this simultaneous emergence of religions and philosophies the “One Hundred Schools of Thought” (诸子百家).” Perhaps so many philosophers could write simultaneously because they lived in small kingdoms that supported them. In Chinese history, the dominant rulers generally squelch or discourage philosophical expression that contradict their own, so when there were several small powers, different schools of thought could survive in the land at the same time.

The early (pre–Qin dynasty) Classical Chinese poetry is mainly known through the two anthologies, the *Chu Ci* and the
Shijing

• Chinese literature begins with ShiJing (Book of Odes), an anthology of songs, poems, and hymns. It consists of 311 poems (6 without text) dating from the Zhou Dynasty (1027-771 BC) to the Spring & Autumn Period (770-476 BC).

The first song of the Classic of Poetry, handwritten by the Qianlong Emperor, with accompanying painting.
The collection is divided into four main sections:

- **GuoFeng** (Lessons from the States): poems or folk songs from ordinary people.
- **XiaoYa** (Minor Odes of the Kingdom): poems or songs concerning life of the nobility.
- **DaYa** (Greater Odes of the Kingdom): poems or songs of praise of the rulers and their life.
- **Song** (Odes of the Temple and the Altar): hymns written for religious ceremonies of the court.
關雎

關關雎鳩，在河之洲。
窈窕淑女，君子好逑。

參差荇菜，左右流之。
窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。
求之不得，寤寐思服。
悠哉悠哉，輾轉反側。

參差荇菜，左右采之。
窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之。
參差荇菜，左右芼之。
窈窕淑女，錚鼓樂之。
• *Chu Ci* (traditional Chinese: 楚辭) is an anthology of *Chinese poetry* traditionally attributed mainly to *Qu Yuan* and *Song Yu* from the *Warring States period* (ended 221 BC), though about half of the poems seem to have been composed several centuries later, during the *Han dynasty*.

• The *Chu Ci*, originates from South China. Much of the earlier works in it, such as “*Lisao,*” are credited to Qu Yuan (340 –278 B.C.), an under-appreciated official during the Warring States period kingdom of Chu. There is a religious theme in many of the poems of the Chuci, with shamanism as a prevailing theme, particularly in the “*Jiuge*” (Nine Songs).
Qu Yuan, one of the greatest poets in China, was a minister of Kingdom Chu in the Warring States period.
Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC)

Literary Disaster and Legalism

- At the end of the Zhou Dynasty era that is called the Warring States Period, of the surviving few big states in the land, the Qin Dynasty became the most powerful. The Qin Dynasty had big armies and conquered the others. Once the Qin emperor had control, he wanted to keep it, and they squelched any opposition to his authority.

- The emperor ordered the destruction of most books all over the empire. He even killed many Confucian philosophers and teachers. He allowed books on scientific subjects like medicine or agriculture to survive. So the “Book Burning and Burial of Scholars” was a literary disaster.
A former peasant leader overthrew the Qin Empire. The Han Dynasty era lasted for 400 years. At the beginning of the era, Confucianism was revived. Confucian texts were rewritten and republished. The era’s major contributions were historical texts and scientific works.
Sima Qian & Historical Records

• *Sima Qian* wrote *Historical Records* that is a major history concerning the overall history of China from before the Shang Dynasty until the Han Dynasty. The book’s prose was considered a model for writers in succeeding dynastic eras.
Poetry and prose-poetry

• Poetry developed to a regular, five and seven syllable poem style later called "old poem" (gushi 古詩). During the reign of Wudi, a shortlived Office of Music (Yuefu 樂府) was established that collected popular and exotic poems throughout the country. A very common verse style from Han to Tang was the rhapsody or prose-poetry fu 賦, mastered by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如, Yang Xiong 楊雄 and Ban Gu 班固.
Fu (Chinese: 賦), variously translated as rhapsody or poetic exposition, is a form of Chinese rhymed prose that was the dominant literary form during the Han dynasty. Fu are poetic pieces in which an object, feeling, or subject is described and rhapsodized in exhaustive detail and from as many angles as possible.

Classical fu composers attempted to use as wide a vocabulary as they could, and often included great numbers of rare and archaic terms in their compositions. Fu poems employ alternating rhyme and prose, varying line length, close alliteration, onomatopoeia, loose parallelism, and extensive cataloging of their topics.
“于是郑女曼姬，被阿緹，揄紵缟，杂纤罗，垂雾縠。襞积褰绉，郁桡溪谷。紟紟衯衯，扬袘戌削，蜚纤垂髾。殖与猗靡，喫呷萃蔡。下摩兰蕙，上拂羽盖。错翡翠之威蕤，缪绕玉绥。眇眇忽忽，若神仙之仿佛。

“于是乃相与獠于蕙圃，媻珊郣窣，上乎⾦金堤。揜翡翠，射鵕鸃。微矰出，孅缴施。⼷弋⽩白鹄，连鴐鹅。双鸧下，⽞玄鹤加。怠⽽而后发，游于清池。浮⽪鹢，扬旌栧。张翠帷，建⽻羽盖。罔瑇瑁，钩紫⽟⽟。摐⾦金⿎，吹鸣籁。榜⼈人歌，声流喝。⽔水⾍虫骇，波鸿沸。涌泉起，奔扬会。礧⽯石相击，硠硠礚礚，若雷霆之声，闻乎数百⾥里之外。将息獠者，击灵⿎鼓，起烽燧。⾊车按行，骑就队。纚乎淫淫，般乎裔裔。”

——《子虚赋》司马相如

Zixu Fu by Sima
The orthodox Confucianism of the Han Dynasty that was only able to comment the old canonical books and to produce a sterile officialdom, was thoroughly discredited by the end of Later Han. Retiring from governmental offices became the normal way of life for the literati and the scholarship.

The most famous representatives of this attitude were the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" (Zhulin Qixian 竹林七賢) that engaged in highly sophisticated discussions ("pure discussions" qingtan 清談).
the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove"

(Zhulin Qixian 竹林七賢: Ruan Ji 阮籍, Ji Kang 嵇康, Shan Tao 山濤, Xiang Xiu 向秀, Liu Ling 劉伶, Wang Rong 王戎, and Ruan Xian 阮咸)
The literary culture of the literate officials: poetry and rhyming prose

- The literati that retired from governmental offices engaged in contests of painting, calligraphy and writing poems. It was the first great time of producing a new kind of bucolic poetry 田园诗, describing the way of natural life. The most famous poets of this period were Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (Tao Qian 陶潛), Xie Lingyun 謝靈運, etc. Poetic style became so trendy that even prosaic writings used rhythm and parallelism (pianwen 駢文), making prosaic literature very overloaded and unreadable.
The Han Empire disintegrated into warring kingdoms similar to what happened during the Warring States Period before the Qin Dynasty. For several hundred years, dynasties and kingdoms rose and fell in various places, and the next big and long-lasting dynastic empire is called the **Tang Dynasty**.
Tang Dynasty 唐 618AD–c.850AD

Song Dynasty 宋 960AD–1279AD

Tang Poetry Shi Poetry

Song Poetry Ci Poetry
Basic Background of Tang Dynasty

The Silk Road
Basic Background of Tang Dynasty

Famous Monk Xuanzang 玄奘
Basic Background of Tang Dynasty

- Economic prosperity
- Liberal political policies
- National integration
- Emperors' attention to culture

Boom of Shi Poetry
Shi (Tang) Poetry

Lüshi 律诗

Jueju 绝句
Lüshi 律诗 (Classical form)

Eight-line regulated verse
Jueju 绝句 (modern form)

each line consists of five or seven syllables

five-syllable 五绝 Wǔjué
seven-syllable 七绝 Qījué

Quatrains (四行诗)
Night Thoughts

I wake, and moonbeams play around my bed,
Glittering like hoar-frost to my wandering eyes;
Up towards the glorious moon I raise my head,
Then lay me down—and thoughts of home arise.
Tonal Meter (平仄) in Jueju

Four tones in Chinese Pinyin

The first tone
The second tone
The third tone
The fourth tone
Shi (Tang) Poetry

- Characteristic
  - contemporary spoken Chinese
  - written in Chinese characters
  - certain typical poetic forms
  - various common themes

- Buddhism in relationship to Tang Poetry
  - religious ferment (动乱)
  - poets were religiously devout

Gender Studies and Tang Poetry
Transition

Shi (Tang) Poetry

Tang Ci

Ci (Song) Poetry

Li Yu (937AD – 975AD)
Background of Song Dynasty

Land Area
Background of Song Dynasty
Movable type printing 活字印刷

Woodblock Printing 雕版印刷

Mobable type printing 活字印刷
Ci (Song) Poetry

• Classification
  - Tempo
    • xiǎolìng 小令
    • màncí 慢词
  - The number of characters
    • xiǎolìng 小令
    • zhōngdiào 中调
    • chángdiào 長调
  - In terms of style
    • wǎnyuē 婉約 Graceful
    • háofàng 豪放 Bold
Each song title therefore came to specify particular fixed pattern of tone, rhythm, number of syllables or (characters) per line and the number of lines. Therefore, it is common for several Ci poems to share the same title, which often has little or nothing to do with the topics of those poems, but rather to the pattern which the lyrics follow.
An Example of Ci Poetry

- To the Tune of Riverside City – For ten years here I wander and there you lie.
- For ten years here I wander and there you lie. I don't think about you often, yet how can I forget you! With your grave a thousand miles away, where can I confide my loneliness? Even if we met, could you recognize me, with dust all over my face and hair like frost? Last night I had a dream in which I returned home. By the window, you were combing your hair. We looked at each other silently, with tears streaming down our cheeks. There's a place which every year will be my misery: the moonlit night, the hill of short pines.

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[Translation]

Su Shi, 《江城⼦子·⼗十年⽣生死兩茫茫》, 蘇軾
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Ci (Song) Poetry

- Chinese literature started to become **approachable** instead of **elegant**.
- 雅到俗
The Transition of Writing Chinese

- Classical Chinese (古文, gǔwén, "ancient text")
- Literary Chinese (文言文 wényán wén, "written text")
- Vernacular Chinese (白话文)

With the development of the citizen class
Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368AD): Drama

- The nomadic Mongols established Yuan Dynasty.
- They loved to watch shadow puppet plays in their camps.
Yuan Dynasty : Drama

- Shadow puppet plays
  → Zaju operas
Yuan Dynasty: Drama

• Guan Hanqing is regarded as one of the most popular playwrights of the times.

• His work, *Midsummer Snow* (窦娥冤), is a tragedy about an unjustly accused woman who received justice after her death.
Yuan Dynasty: Drama

- The Romance of the Western Chamber (西厢记) was written by Wang Shifu. It is considered one of the best romantic dramas ever written in China.
Yuan Dynasty: Great Fictional Novels

- The *Water Margin* (水浒传) was written in vernacular language by Shi Nai An.
- It is about the lives and ideals of a group of characters who fought against the corrupt Northern Song Dynasty.

A famous plot: Wu Song kills tiger
Yuan Dynasty: Great Fictional Novels

- The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was written in vernacular language by Luo Guan Zhong.

- It is historical fiction about the end of the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms Period.

- 800,000 words.
Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Novels

• Journey to the West is based on the historical journey of a Buddhist to India during the Tang era to learn Buddhist teachings and bring back scriptures and information.

• The characters in the book are well known to Chinese children, and they often appear in martial arts movies and cartoons.
Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Novels

- The routes of Xuanzang.
Qing Dynasty (1644–1911): Novels

- The *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin, also called the *Story of the Stone*.
- A big clan's fall and the sad love story between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu.
R.O.C (Republic Of China) (1912–1949)

• Lu Xun (September 25, 1881 – October 19, 1936), a leading figure of modern Chinese literature.

• Some of his famous stories from 《呐喊》 Call to Arms (1922)
  • 狂人日记 "A Madman's Diary" (1918)
  • 孔乙己 "Kong Yiji" (1919)
  • 药 "Medicine" (1919)
Conclusion

• **Pre–Qin Era:**
  - Poetry such as Shijing, Chu Ci etc
  - Historical Prose such as Zhan Guo Ce, Zuo Zhuan
  - Prose by Hundred of Schools such as Analects of Confucius, Meng Tzu etc.

• **Han Dynasty**
  - Han Rhapsody and Poetry form such as "Han Yuefu 汉乐府" and "Han Fu 汉赋"

• **3 kingdoms and Age of Fragmentation**
  - Poetry

• **Tang dynasty**
  - Tang poetry – "Tang Shi 唐诗"

• **Song dynasty**
  - Song lyric – "Song Ci 宋词"

• **Yuan dynasty**
  - Yuan Melody/Opera – "Yuan Qu 元曲"

• **Ming and Qing dynasty**
  - Classical Novels

• **Modern period**
  - Modern Novels, poetry
Thank you