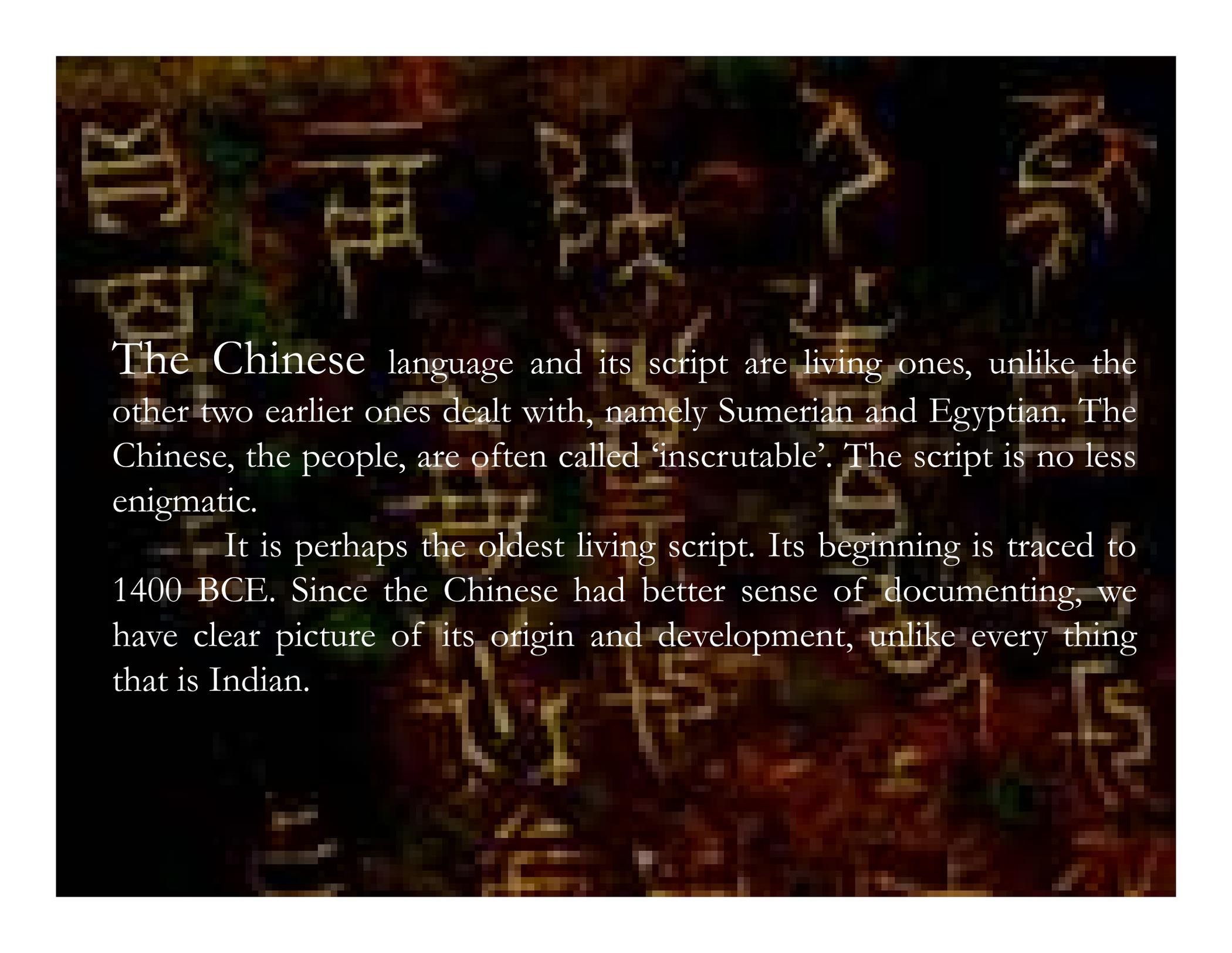
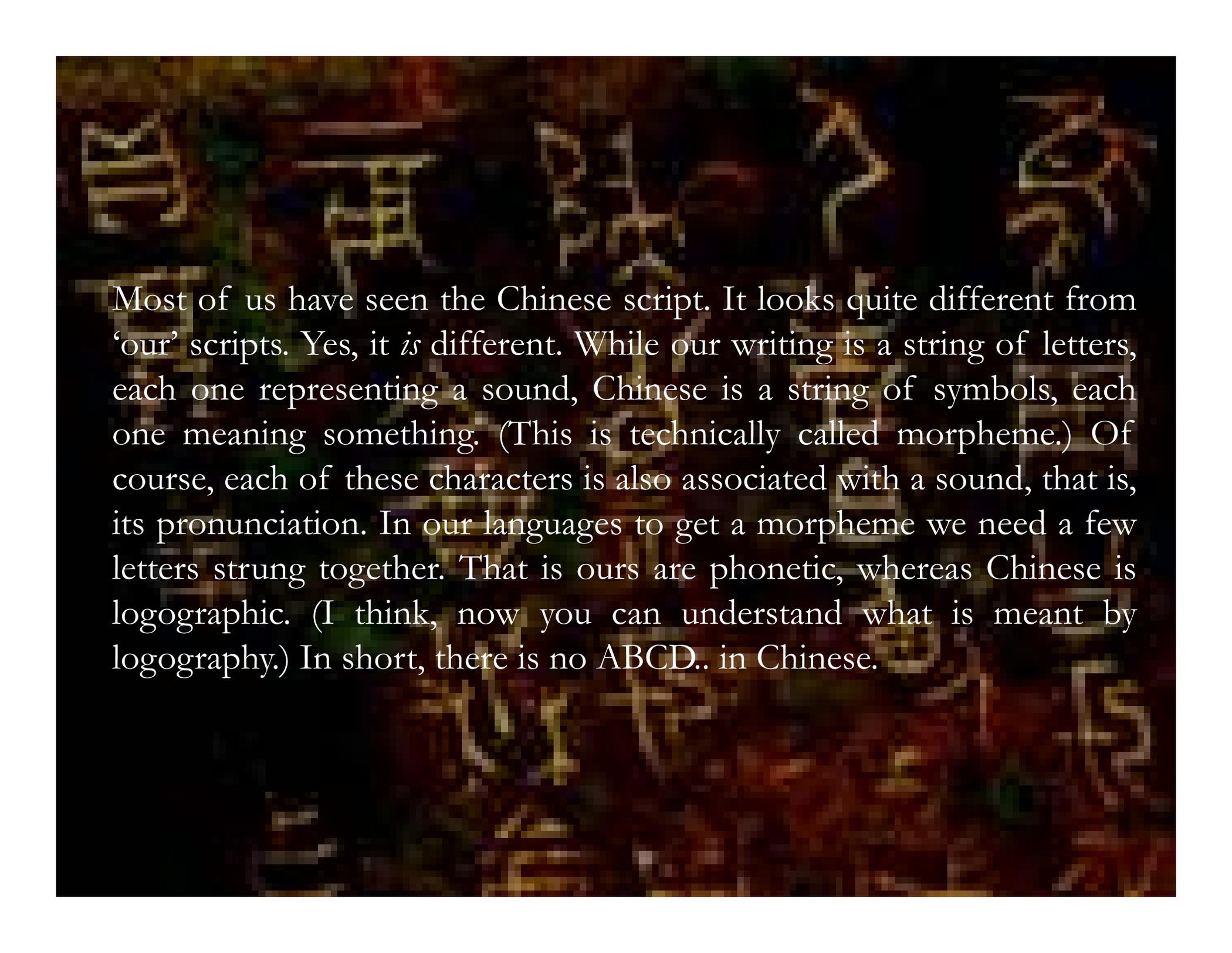


*A glimpse of
the Chinese Writing*

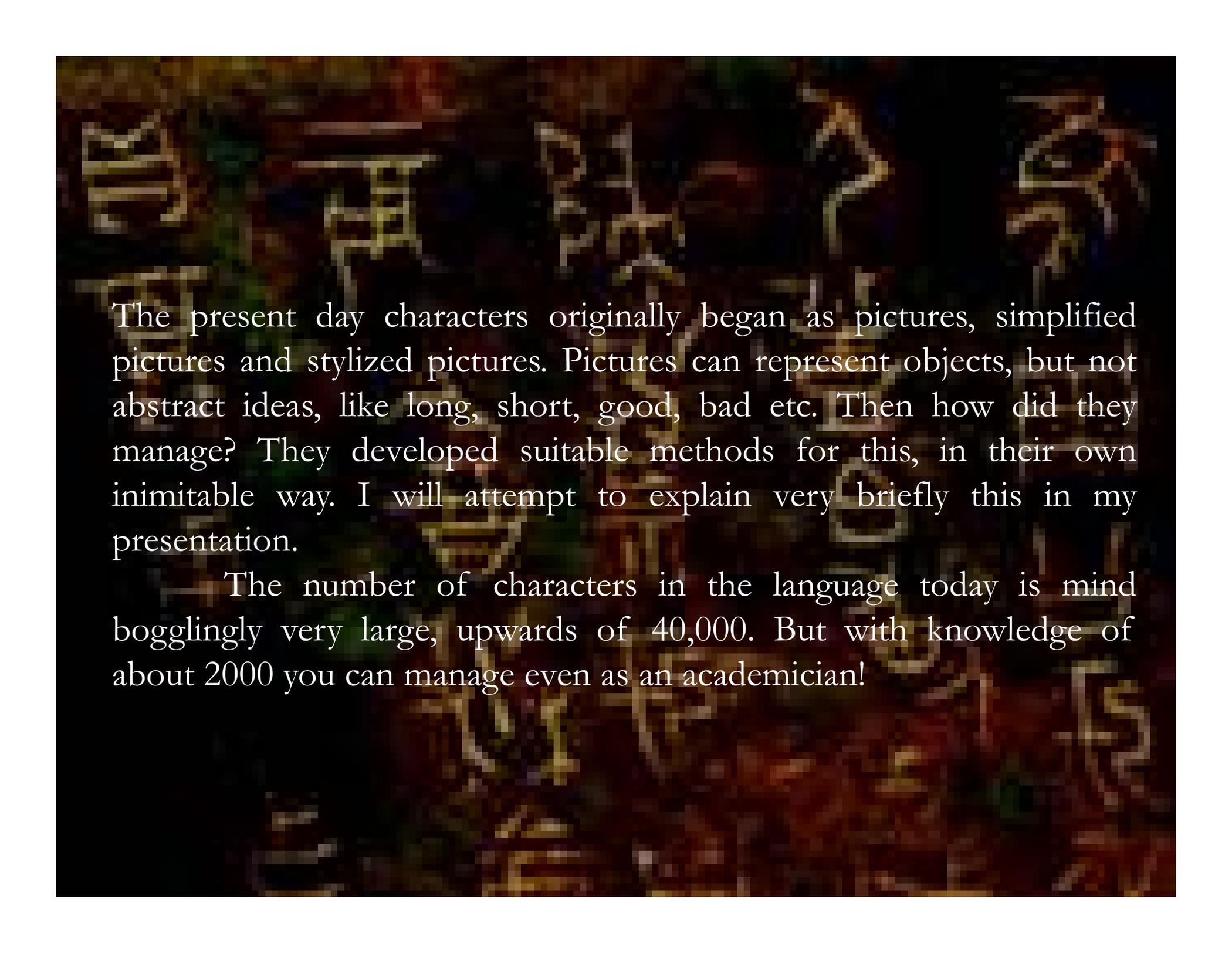


The Chinese language and its script are living ones, unlike the other two earlier ones dealt with, namely Sumerian and Egyptian. The Chinese, the people, are often called 'inscrutable'. The script is no less enigmatic.

It is perhaps the oldest living script. Its beginning is traced to 1400 BCE. Since the Chinese had better sense of documenting, we have clear picture of its origin and development, unlike every thing that is Indian.

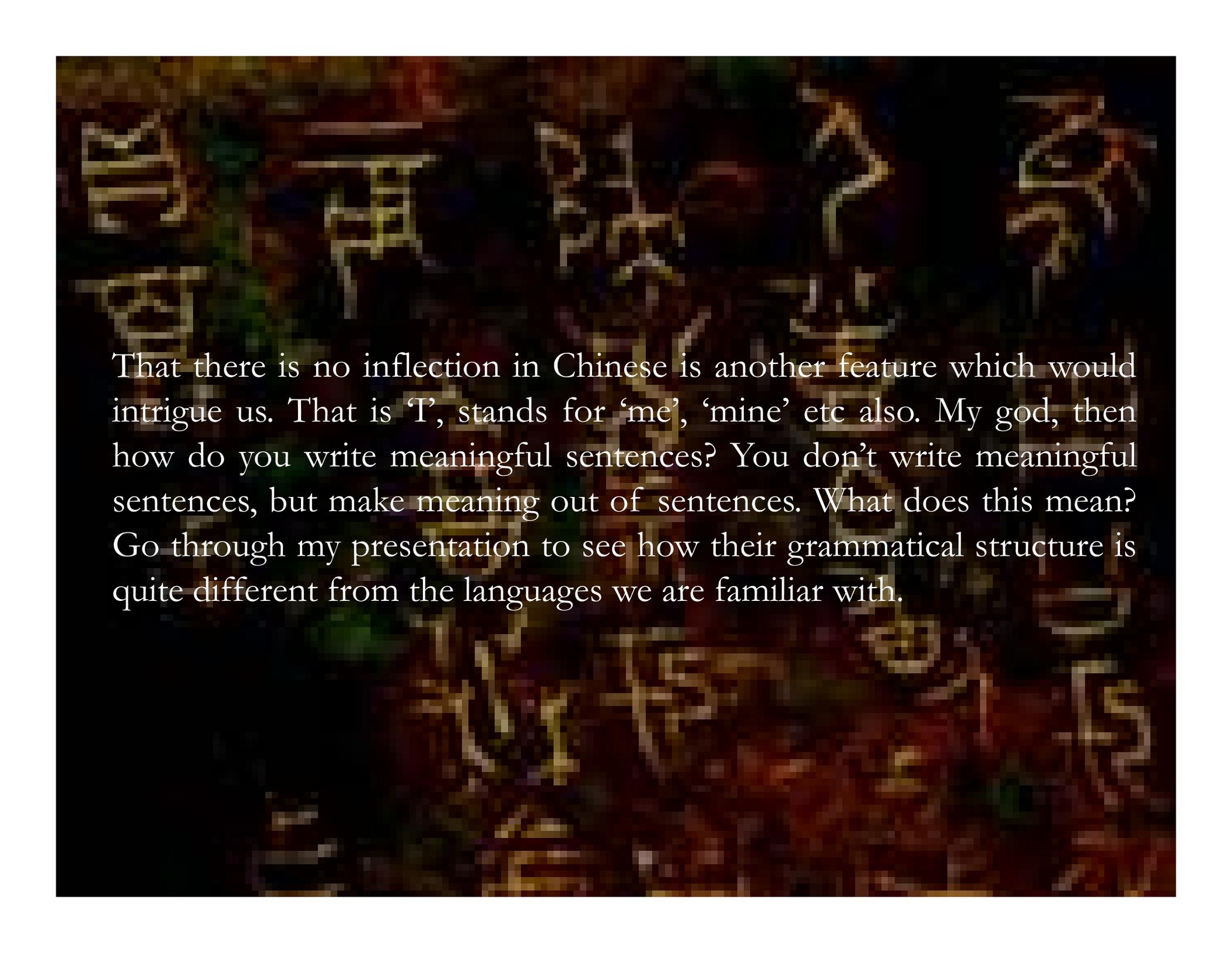
The background of the slide is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric, with a mottled pattern of brown, black, and green. Faint, glowing Chinese characters are visible in the background, appearing to be part of a larger inscription or calligraphy. The characters are not clearly legible but add a traditional aesthetic to the slide.

Most of us have seen the Chinese script. It looks quite different from 'our' scripts. Yes, it *is* different. While our writing is a string of letters, each one representing a sound, Chinese is a string of symbols, each one meaning something. (This is technically called morpheme.) Of course, each of these characters is also associated with a sound, that is, its pronunciation. In our languages to get a morpheme we need a few letters strung together. That is ours are phonetic, whereas Chinese is logographic. (I think, now you can understand what is meant by logography.) In short, there is no ABCD.. in Chinese.

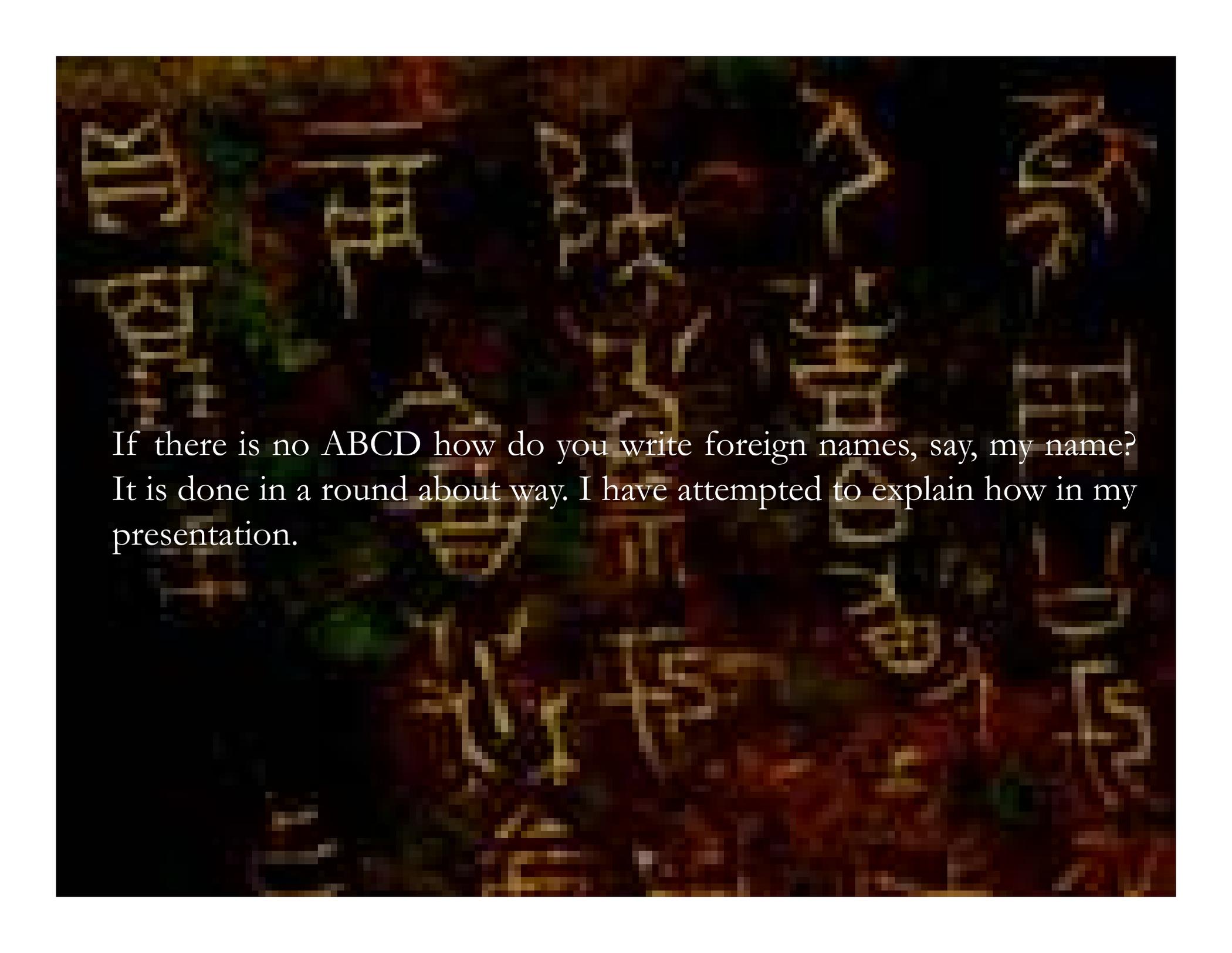


The present day characters originally began as pictures, simplified pictures and stylized pictures. Pictures can represent objects, but not abstract ideas, like long, short, good, bad etc. Then how did they manage? They developed suitable methods for this, in their own inimitable way. I will attempt to explain very briefly this in my presentation.

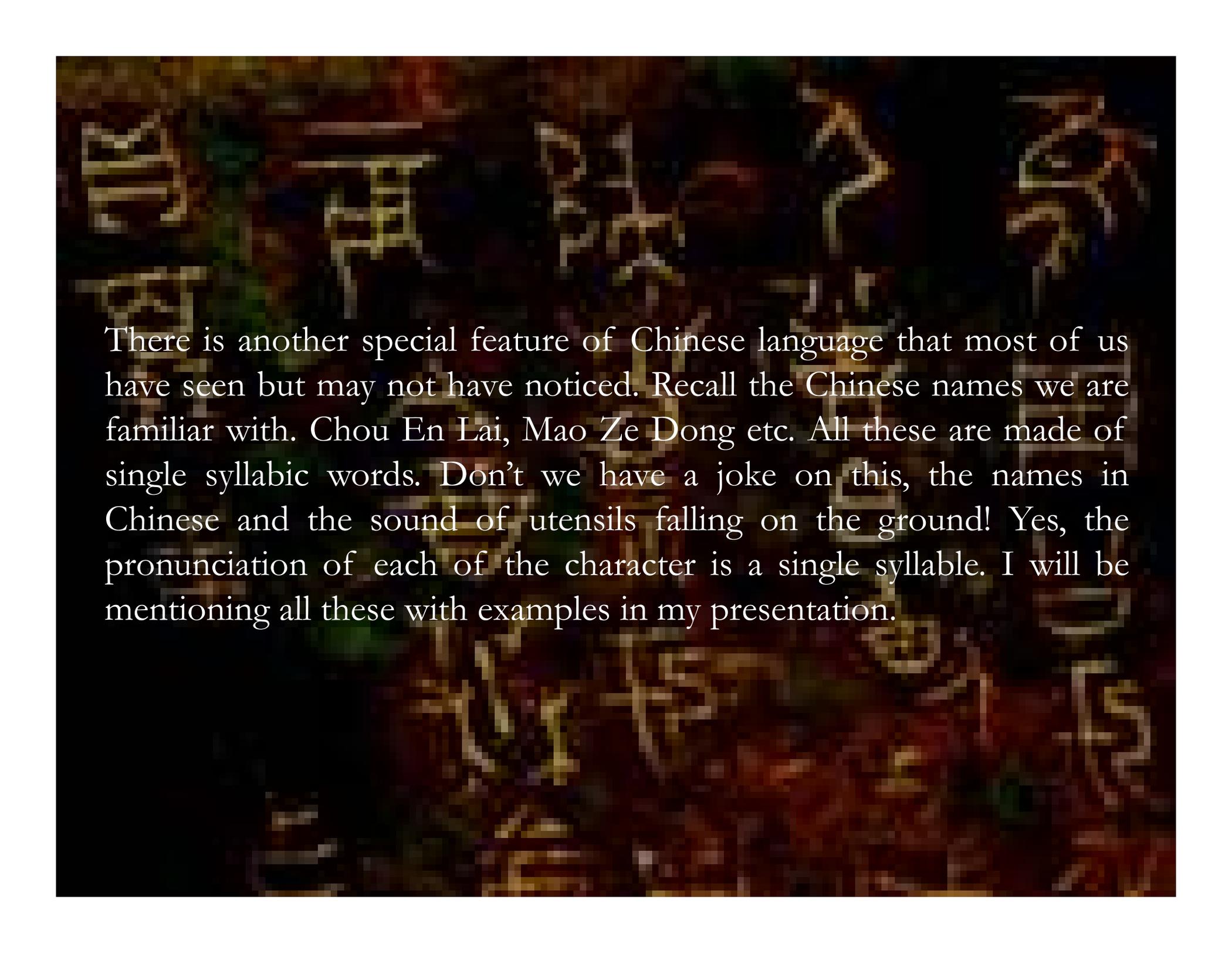
The number of characters in the language today is mind bogglingly very large, upwards of 40,000. But with knowledge of about 2000 you can manage even as an academician!



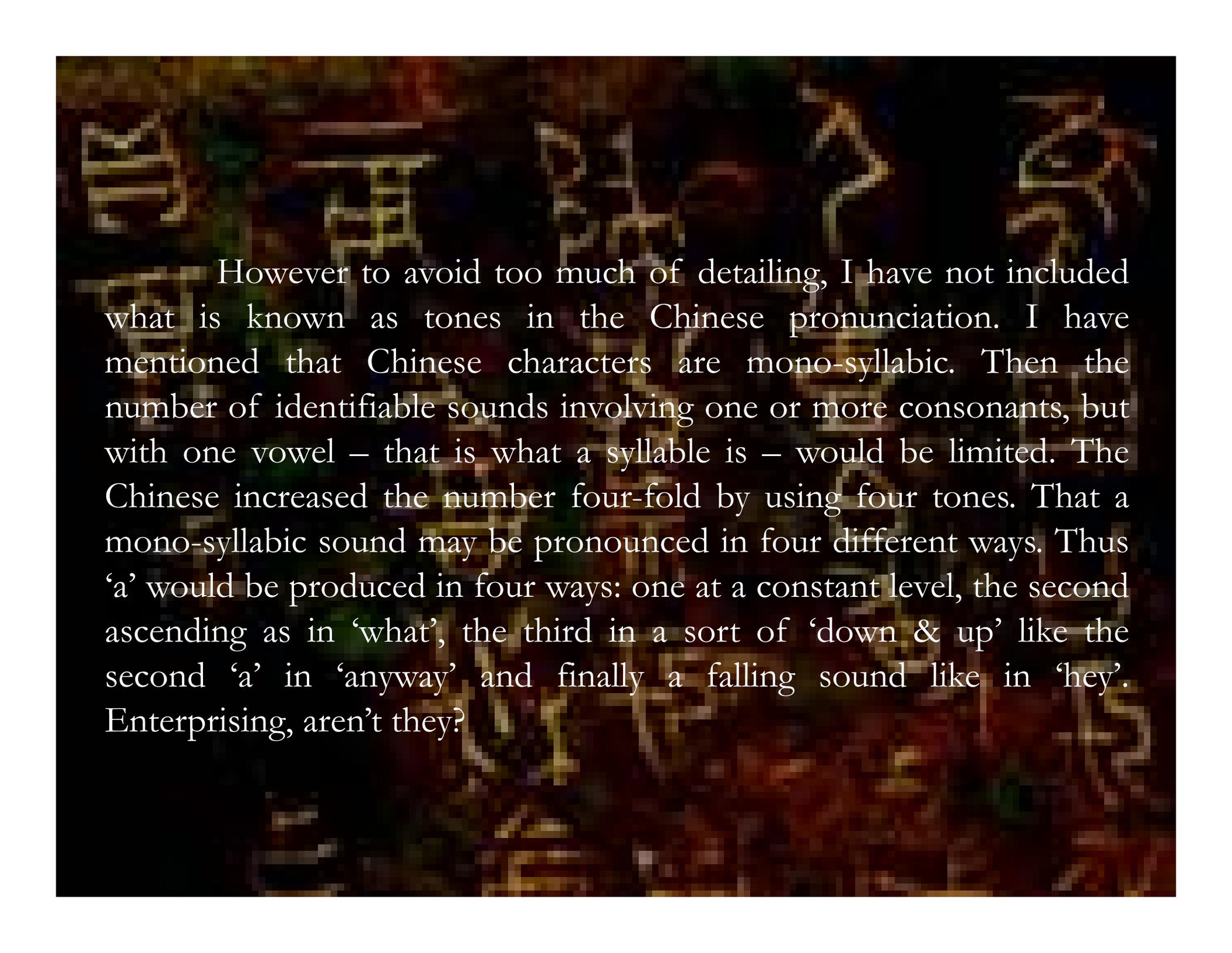
That there is no inflection in Chinese is another feature which would intrigue us. That is 'I', stands for 'me', 'mine' etc also. My god, then how do you write meaningful sentences? You don't write meaningful sentences, but make meaning out of sentences. What does this mean? Go through my presentation to see how their grammatical structure is quite different from the languages we are familiar with.



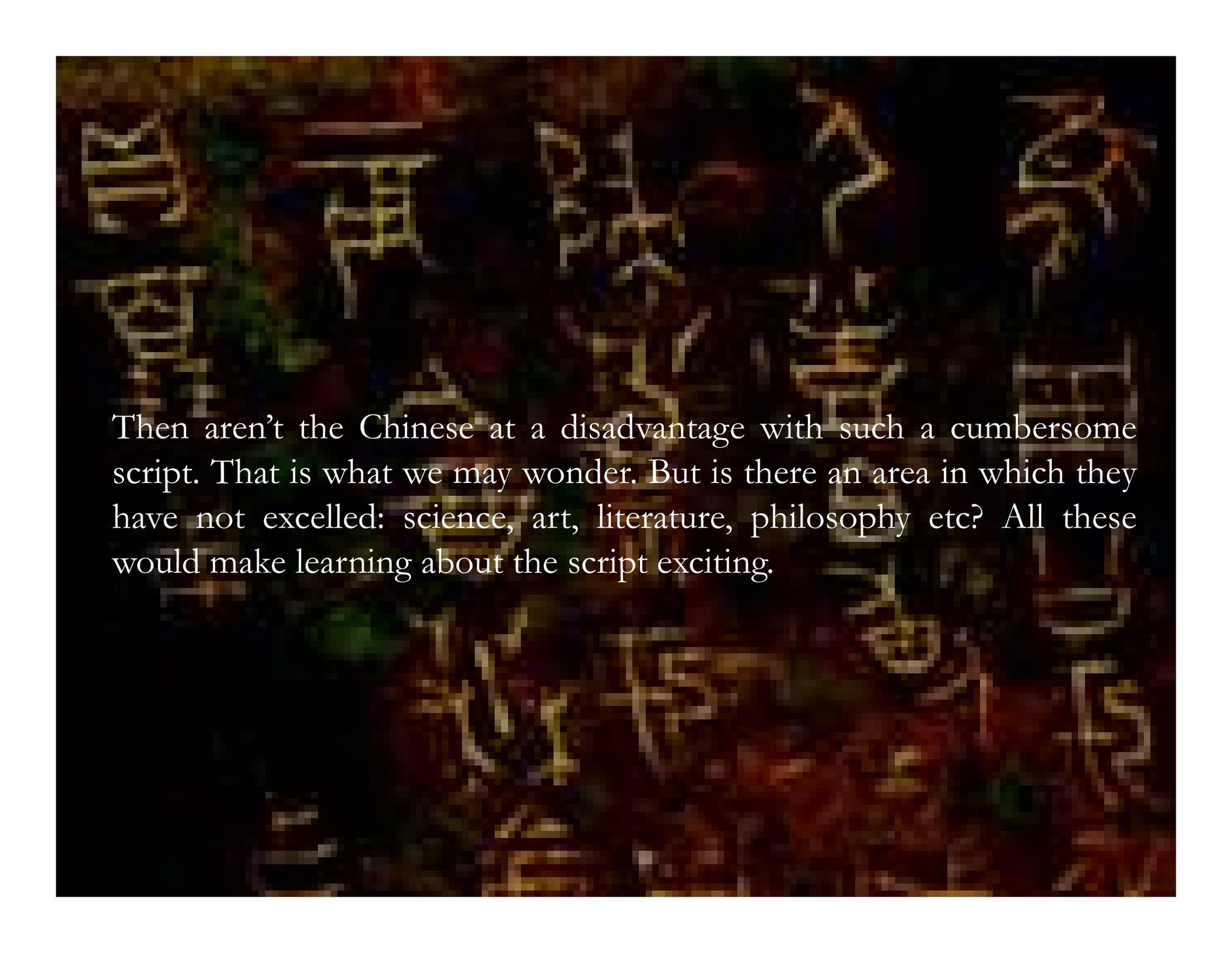
If there is no ABCD how do you write foreign names, say, my name?
It is done in a round about way. I have attempted to explain how in my
presentation.



There is another special feature of Chinese language that most of us have seen but may not have noticed. Recall the Chinese names we are familiar with. Chou En Lai, Mao Ze Dong etc. All these are made of single syllabic words. Don't we have a joke on this, the names in Chinese and the sound of utensils falling on the ground! Yes, the pronunciation of each of the character is a single syllable. I will be mentioning all these with examples in my presentation.

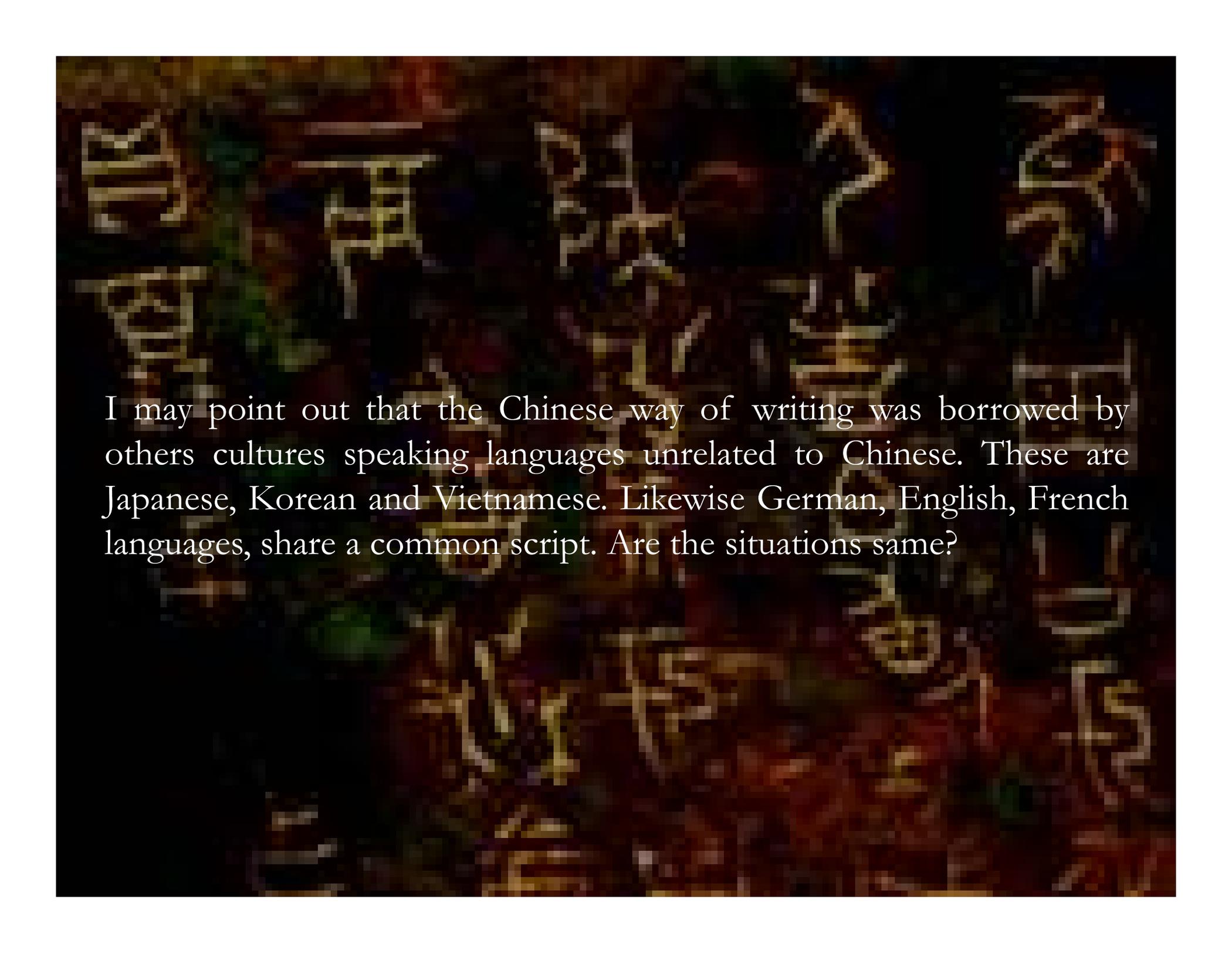


However to avoid too much of detailing, I have not included what is known as tones in the Chinese pronunciation. I have mentioned that Chinese characters are mono-syllabic. Then the number of identifiable sounds involving one or more consonants, but with one vowel – that is what a syllable is – would be limited. The Chinese increased the number four-fold by using four tones. That a mono-syllabic sound may be pronounced in four different ways. Thus ‘a’ would be produced in four ways: one at a constant level, the second ascending as in ‘what’, the third in a sort of ‘down & up’ like the second ‘a’ in ‘anyway’ and finally a falling sound like in ‘hey’. Enterprising, aren’t they?

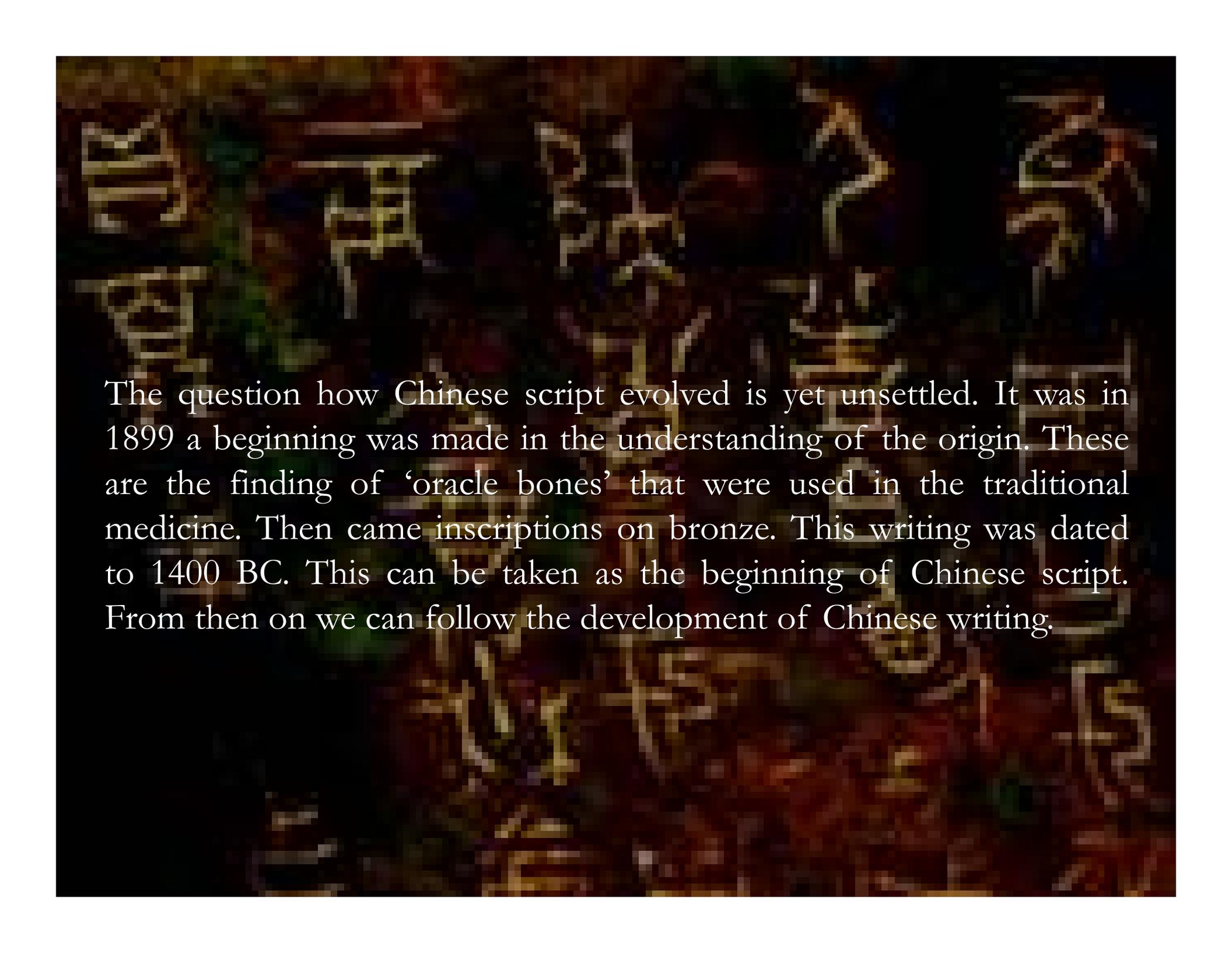


Then aren't the Chinese at a disadvantage with such a cumbersome script. That is what we may wonder. But is there an area in which they have not excelled: science, art, literature, philosophy etc? All these would make learning about the script exciting.

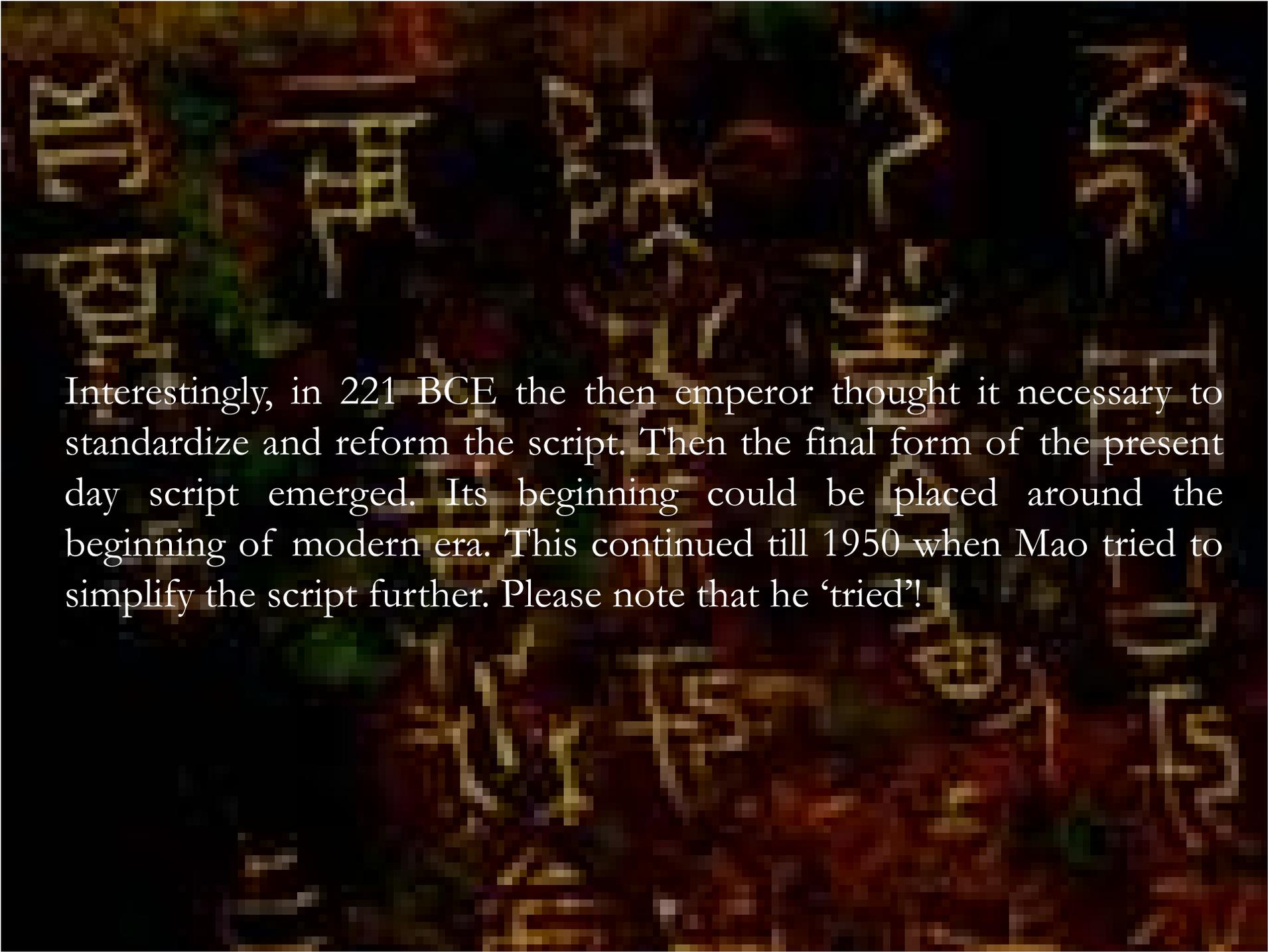
In the 17th century there was an attempt to create a universal philosophical written language, a script-language that can make the idea directly without letters and words, that is, without any arbitrary grammar of natural languages. Is this possible? Perhaps, yes. For example, the sign for NO-HORN is simply a figure of horn that is crossed out. Such symbols are used in places like international airports etc. These can be called ideogram. What it signifies is evident, provided you are aware that the figure refers to a contraption that produces noise in automobiles and a cross is meant to convey the message 'don't do'. The proponents looked to Chinese for inspiration. Actually they were mistaken. Chinese characters are words and not things or ideas. In technical language, the Chinese characters are logograms and not ideograms. (But you will notice that still I have used the term ideogram in my presentation.)



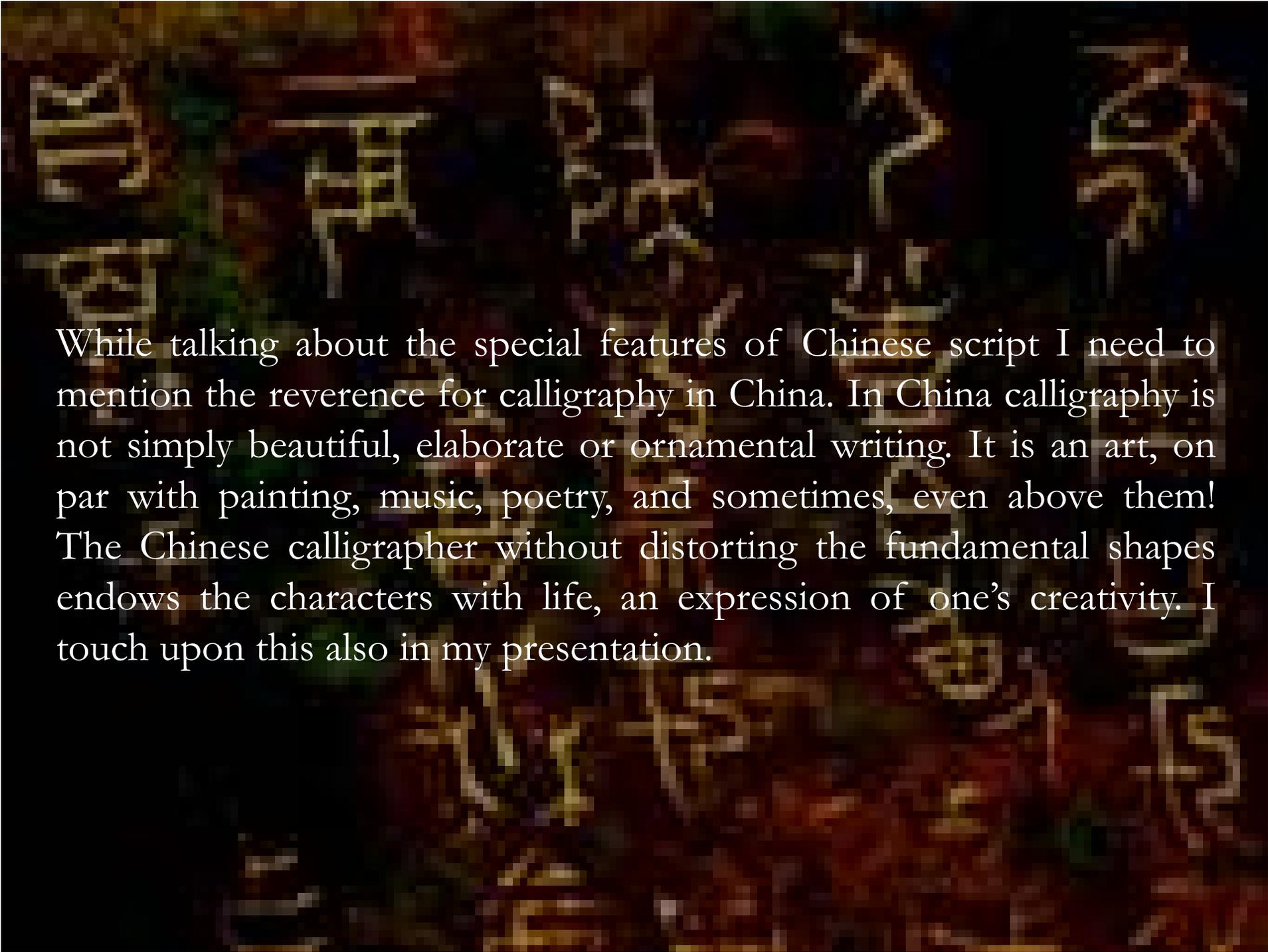
I may point out that the Chinese way of writing was borrowed by others cultures speaking languages unrelated to Chinese. These are Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. Likewise German, English, French languages, share a common script. Are the situations same?



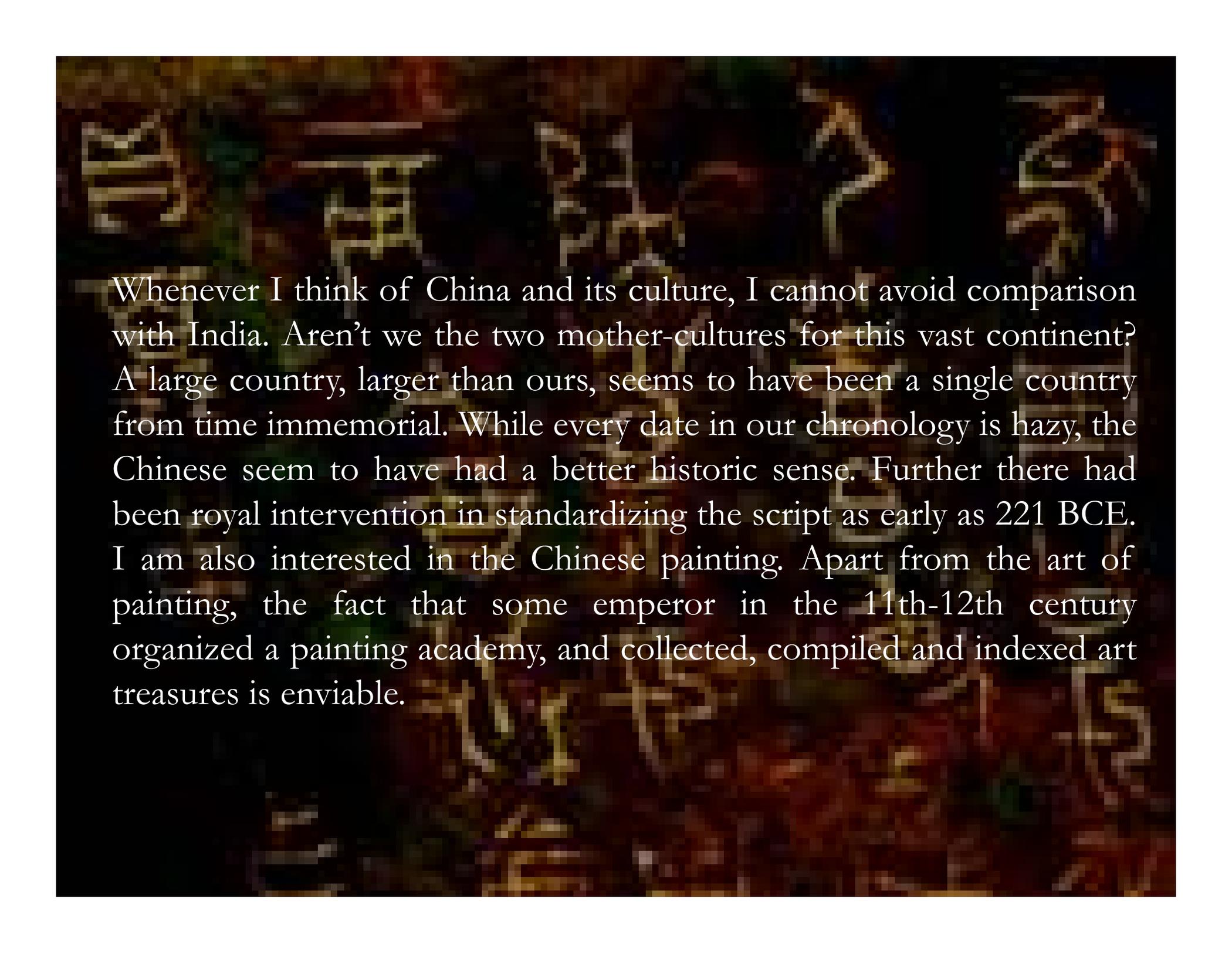
The question how Chinese script evolved is yet unsettled. It was in 1899 a beginning was made in the understanding of the origin. These are the finding of 'oracle bones' that were used in the traditional medicine. Then came inscriptions on bronze. This writing was dated to 1400 BC. This can be taken as the beginning of Chinese script. From then on we can follow the development of Chinese writing.



Interestingly, in 221 BCE the then emperor thought it necessary to standardize and reform the script. Then the final form of the present day script emerged. Its beginning could be placed around the beginning of modern era. This continued till 1950 when Mao tried to simplify the script further. Please note that he ‘tried’!



While talking about the special features of Chinese script I need to mention the reverence for calligraphy in China. In China calligraphy is not simply beautiful, elaborate or ornamental writing. It is an art, on par with painting, music, poetry, and sometimes, even above them! The Chinese calligrapher without distorting the fundamental shapes endows the characters with life, an expression of one's creativity. I touch upon this also in my presentation.



Whenever I think of China and its culture, I cannot avoid comparison with India. Aren't we the two mother-cultures for this vast continent? A large country, larger than ours, seems to have been a single country from time immemorial. While every date in our chronology is hazy, the Chinese seem to have had a better historic sense. Further there had been royal intervention in standardizing the script as early as 221 BCE. I am also interested in the Chinese painting. Apart from the art of painting, the fact that some emperor in the 11th-12th century organized a painting academy, and collected, compiled and indexed art treasures is enviable.

The Chinese Civilization



Among the glorious accomplishments of the Chinese civilization are its unique language and its script, representing the inimitable attitude to life and culture of the Chinese.

The Chinese Civilization



A vast country, a multitude of dialects,
but all under one cultural tradition,
developed a distinctive idiom.

The Chinese of different regions speak
different dialects,
but the script is common.

The beginning



The earliest writing was inscribed on turtle shells and animal bones, dating from 1500 BCE.

The modern script appeared around 500 BCE, a fast and efficient script, adaptable to brush and pen.

Oracle Bones Period – 1500 BC

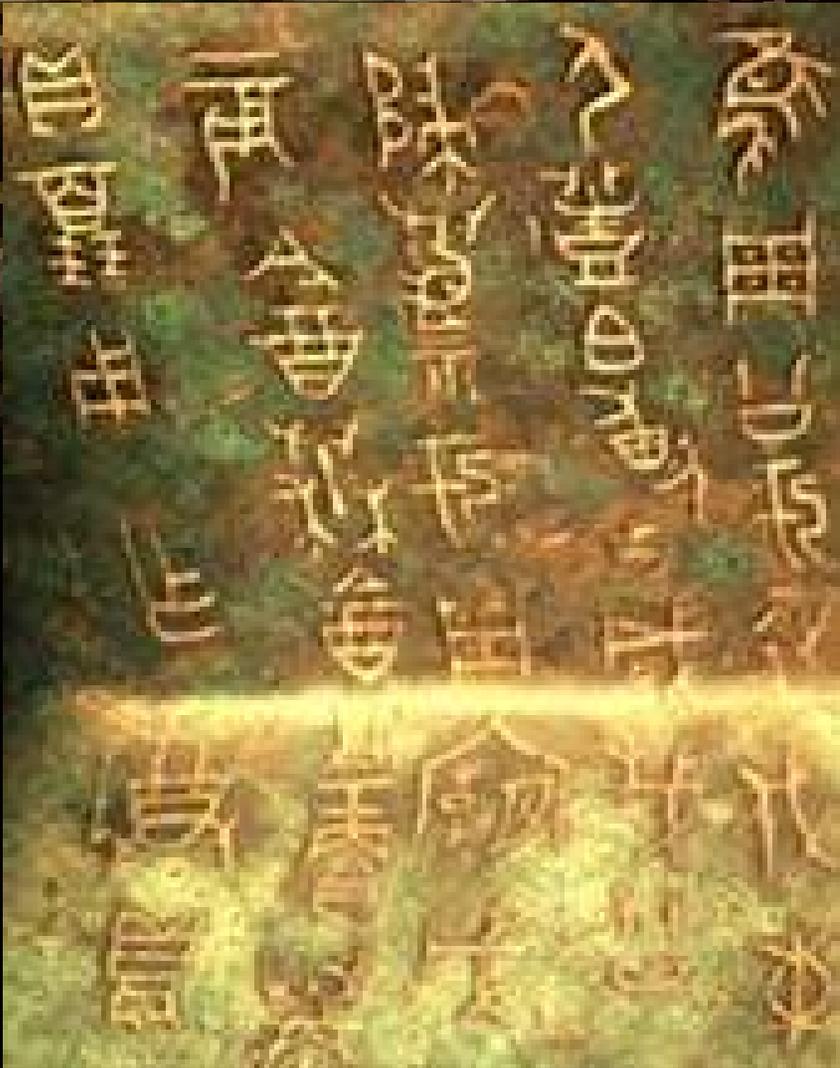
The earliest writing was inscribed on turtle shells and animal bones, dating from 1500 BCE.

Called oracle bone writing, this was used for divination.



Greater Seal Period 1100 - 700 BC

In the next stage,
from 1100 BCE to 700 BCE,
known as Greater Seal,
the writing was
mainly on cast bronze.



Lesser Seal Period *From 220 BCE*

The parent of the modern script,
Lesser Seal, is the one we may still see
in calligraphy and landscape paintings.



Drinking Tea - A Chinese painting by Tang Yin (1470-1523)



龍

Modern Period

The modern script appeared around 500 BCE,
a fast and efficient script,
adaptable to brush and pen.

Evolution – From Picture



The characters were originally pictures of people, animals or other objects, but later stylised with little resemblance to their origin.

Following the metamorphosis of this unique script would be instructive.



Chinese Character

The Chinese letter is called a character.

Each character, irrespective of its complexity,
is of the same size.

The elements forming a character are three:
form, meaning and sound.



Chinese Character

Each character, thus, is simultaneously

- a form, mostly originating from a picture which provides
- the meaning directly, or by association, and
- usually a mono-syllabic unit of spoken Chinese.

Chinese character



For us, the non-Chinese,
the Chinese characters may appear
a meaningless jumble of lines,
a product of the native's fancy.

Tracing the development of the script
over the centuries would help us
appreciate the script.

I shall attempt this through some examples.

Effect of writing tools



The Chinese in the early stages
engraved on shells and bones, and
later used cast bronze, but
finally, settled down to brush on paper.

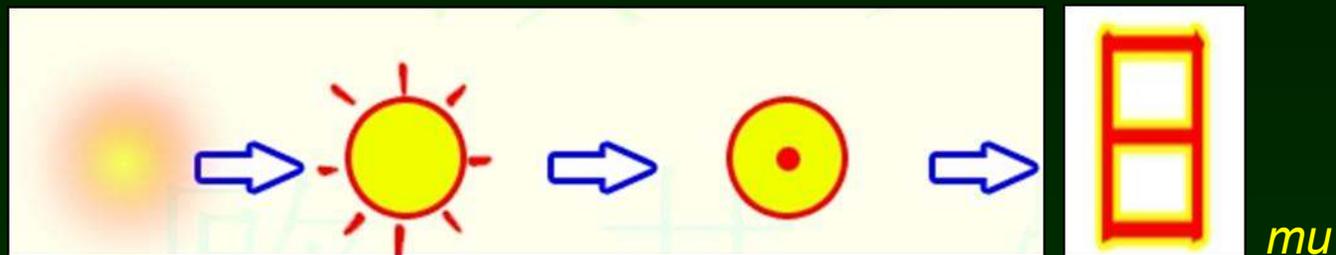
Brush restricted movement to one direction only.

Thus, all the strokes are from left-to-right or
top-to-bottom, and never the other way.

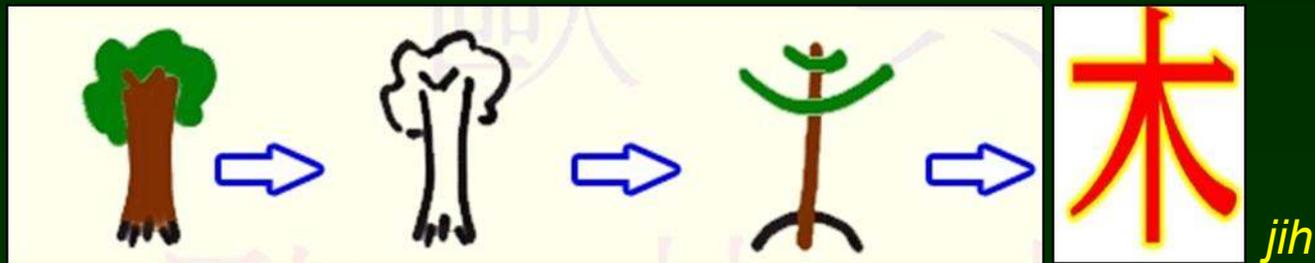
This needed converting circles into rectangles.

From pictures to pictograms

Characters are formed by simplifying pictures:



Picture of 'SUN' simplified



Picture of a 'TREE' simplified

Coining new words

New words were formed in a number of ways,



mu

The SUN,



jih

rising behind
a TREE



dong

became
EAST

Coining new words



mu

A TREE



with ROOTS added
and simplified



pen

became
ROOT



mu

TREE



lin

GARDEN



sen

FOREST

Coining new words



Woman

+

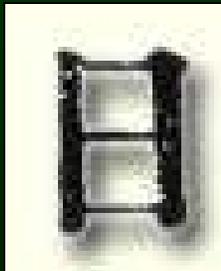


Child

=



Good



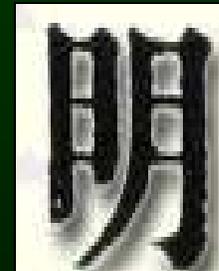
Sun

+



Moon

=



Bright

Styles of writing



The earliest script engraved on bone,
cast in bronze or stamped in clay.
The symbol resembled the object.



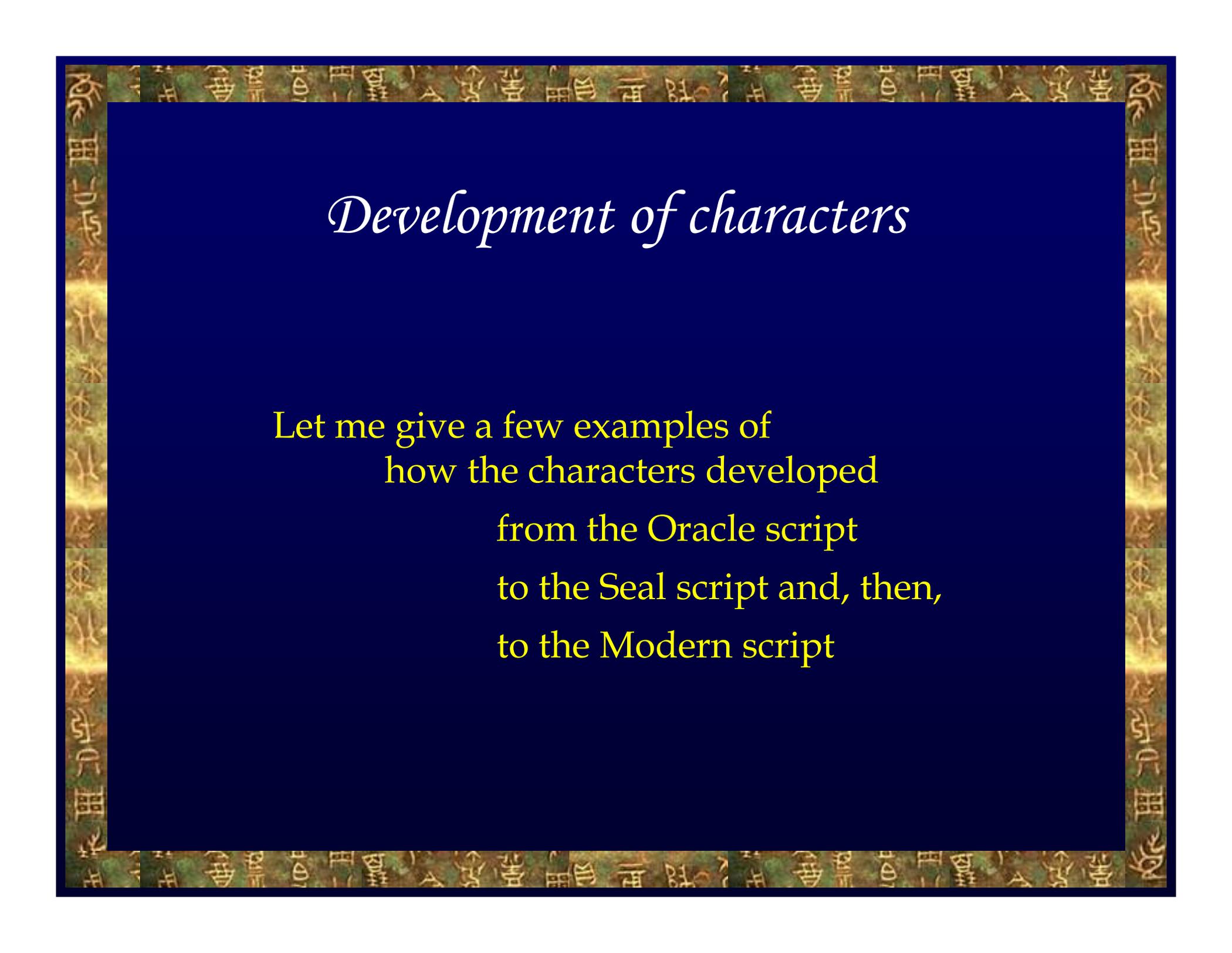
Written with a brush, loses resemblance.
Brush is being used from the 4th century CE.



Cursive style with brush, for faster writing
and lost resemblance to the object.



Shorthand form, called Grass Script,
for personal expression.

The slide features a decorative border with a repeating pattern of ancient Chinese characters in a gold and green color scheme. The main content is on a dark blue background.

Development of characters

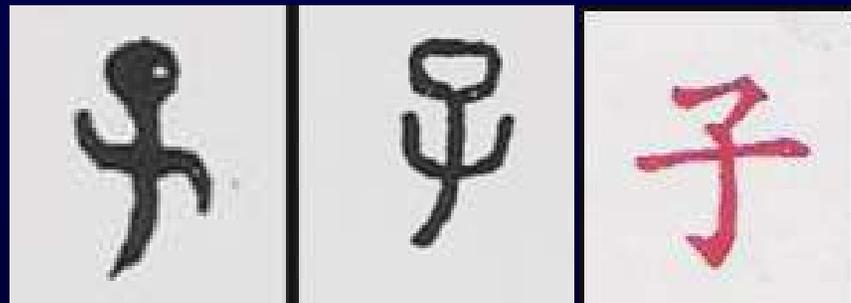
Let me give a few examples of
how the characters developed
from the Oracle script
to the Seal script and, then,
to the Modern script



Woman



Man



Child

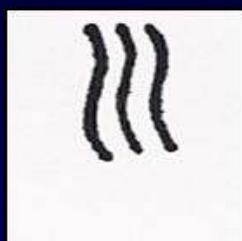
Oracle > Seal > Modern



Mountain



Rain



River

Oracle > Seal > Modern



Form and sound of characters

Such a simplified image would indicate the meaning, and is called a radical.

But, the pronunciation is provided by the phonetic element.

Let us take a few examples.

Table of Radicals

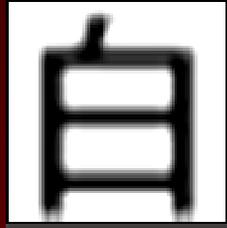
Just for record,
here is a table of
such radicals

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210,

0,	儿	勺	口	宀	巾	彳	方	母	月	生	矛	糸	肉	艸	谷	辛	阜	音	髟	麻	齊	
①												糸	月	艸						⑫	⑬	
1,	一	入	匕	口	寸	干	心	无	比	片	用	矢	缶	臣	虎	豆	辰	隶	頁	鬥	黃	齒
							卜	死														⑭
2,	丨	八	冂	土	小	幺	戈	日	毛	牙	田	石	网	自	虫	豕	彳	隹	風	鬯	黍	龍
													元	四			之					
3,	丶	冂	冂	士	九	广	戶	日	氏	牛	疋	示	羊	至	血	豸	邑	雨	飛	鬲	黑	龜
					允							示					下	單				⑮
4,	丿	一	十	夕	尸	乚	手	月	气	犬	疒	肉	羽	白	行	貝	酉	青	食	鬼	齋	龠
							扌			⑯	牙									⑰	⑱	
5,	乙	丿	卜	攴	巾	廿	支	木	水	玄	火	禾	老	舌	衣	赤	米	非	首	魚	隹	
									冫	水					衤		⑲					
6,	丨	几	冂	夕	山	弋	支	欠	火	玉	白	穴	而	舛	西	走	里	面	香	鳥	鼎	
	⑲		冂			攴		欠	灬	王					⑳		ㄩ	⑳	ㄩ			
7,	二	口	广	大	川	弓	文	止	爪	瓜	皮	立	耒	舟	見	足	金	革	馬	鹵	鼓	
					川				爪			⑳										
8,	一	刀	厶	女	工	斗	歹	父	瓦	皿	竹	耳	艮	角	身	長	韋	骨	鹿	鼠		
		刀			工	斗	歹	父								長				⑳		
9,	人	力	又	子	巳	彡	斤	殳	爻	甘	目	米	聿	色	言	車	門	韭	高	麥	鼻	
	亻										目											

9, 19, 29, 39, 49, 59, 69, 79, 89, 99, 109, 119, 129, 139, 149, 159, 169, 179, 189, 199, 209,

Phonetic Element



This character, meaning 'white'
when added to a radical the character is
pronounced as 'bo' or 'bai'

Here this combines with various 'radicals'

person		+		=		Meaning: uncle Pron: 'bai'
boat		+		=		Meaning: ship Pron: 'bo'
hands		+		=		Meaning: clap Pron: 'pai'

Writing foreign names

Then, how do you write foreign names?

You select the nearest sounding syllables
and string a word.

For example, (Mike) Tyson may be written as
Tai-Sen,



meaning, 'peaceful-forest', a humour unintended!

Writing foreign names



可口可樂

ke-kou-ke-le for Coca Cola
would swell the manufacturer's pride
for it means
'palatable and fun',
again unintended,
but most welcome, this time!

Forming sentences



Chinese sentences would appear to us telegraphic
for there are no inflections.

For example,

to mean *Tigers do not breed dogs*

the Chinese may go somewhat like this:

tiger-father-no-dog-son

And, for *Calamities do not occur singly*

may be written as

calamity-no-single-act

Writing Chinese characters

A large, white, stylized Chinese character '龍' (Dragon) is displayed on a dark, textured background. The character is composed of several distinct strokes, including a curved top, a vertical stem, and a long, sweeping tail.

Strokes play an very important role in writing Chinese.

While writing character a sequence is followed strictly, and the number of strokes forming a character is important.

Writing Chinese characters

Strokes

These are the twelve fundamental strokes



For the character



this is the sequence of strokes



Let me take a specific example, a four-line sentence
and attempt to understand it.



Given below are the characters line-by-line
with pronunciation and meaning.



	Pron.	Meaning
吾	wu	I
不	bu	NOT
知	zhi	KNOW
其	qi	ITS
名	ming	NAME
強	qiang	MUST
字	zi	WORD
之	zhi	IT
曰	yue	CALL
道	tao	DAO

Let us try to understand the meaning



I (do) not know its name.

(If I) must (assign a) word (to) it (I) call (it) Dao.

Writing Chinese characters

A large, white, stylized Chinese character '龍' (Dragon) is centered on the left side of the slide. The character is composed of several distinct strokes, including a long horizontal base, a vertical stem, and a complex, curved top section that resembles a dragon's head and horns. The background is dark with a subtle pattern of repeating Chinese characters in a lighter color.

There are quite a few aspects of Chinese that would be puzzling us.

For example, without alphabet, how would the dictionary be made?

Interestingly, they are listed according to the number of strokes of the characters!

Listing in Chinese dictionary

This is how the characters are listed in a dictionary

One-stroke

一	i	sky
丨	kun	vertical
丿	p'ieh	diminish
乙	i	one

7-stroke

卸	hsieh	to unload
批	pi	to criticize
吞	tun	to swallow
佔	chan	to seize

2-stroke

二	erh	two
十	shih	ten
厂	han	cliff
ナ	yi	right hand

15-stroke

嘗	ch'ang	to taste
齋	chi	to trim
頤	chieh	to levelhead

Chinese Script

The Chinese script may look cumbersome
for the non-Chinese.

But the Chinese achievement in all walks of life,
science, technology, arts, literature etc,
has been spectacular.

The script has been adapted for such
unconnected languages,
as Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese.

The image features a traditional Chinese landscape painting in the background, rendered in a dark, monochromatic style with shades of brown and black. The scene depicts a rugged, mountainous terrain with a winding path or stream. In the foreground, a pack of animals, possibly horses or mules, is visible, suggesting a caravan or a journey. The painting is framed by a decorative border consisting of repeating Chinese characters in a stylized font. Two red square seals are visible on the right side of the painting, adding to its authenticity and historical context.

*The script has contributed
certain unique dimensions
to Chinese culture.*

The unique contributions of Chinese Script



Aesthetics of writing,
form, shape and balance,
have been developed
to an unprecedented level
in China



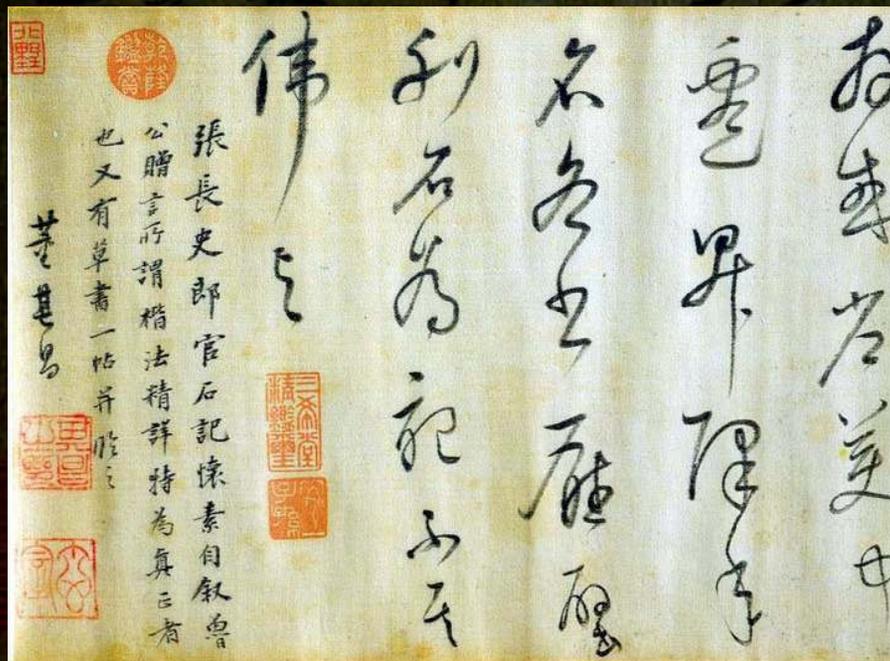
The unique contributions of Chinese Script

Calligraphy has come to be respected at par with painting

Painting compositions were
integrated with calligraphic legends



The unique contributions of Chinese Script



Poets were expected
to be gifted calligraphers too.

Finally, my name could be written like this

思 万 觅 纳 善

Si wan mi na shan

And interestingly,
there can be many more versions,
and this name 'means' something!

Every character sounds closely
the syllables that form the name
and each of the character has a meaning

思
万
觅
纳
善

Si ('to think')

wan ('ten thousand, meaning "a lot"')

mi ('to search, to look for')

na ('to accept')

shan ('kindness')

When put these characters together, it can be taken to mean:
"you are a thinker and you always seek kindness."

*This presentation is just a curtain raiser;
an entry point towards appreciation of
Chinese sensibility*