

Some Comments on Oral vs. Literary Cultures

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With references to Jack Goody & Ian Watt 1963,
"The Consequences of Literacy". *Comparative
Studies in Society and History* 5.3: 304-345.

Goody & Watt 305-306:

Oral cultures pass on their traditional materials and conventionalized ways of acting/behaving and construing the world in face to face interactions, with and without linguistic behaviour: "The transmission of the verbal elements of culture by oral means can be visualised as a long chain of interlocking conversations between members of the group. Thus all beliefs and values, all forms of knowledge, are communicated between individuals in face-to-face contact; and, as distinct from the material content of the cultural tradition, whether it be cave-paintings or hand-axes, they are stored only in human memory."

"The intrinsic nature of oral communication has a considerable effect upon both the content and the transmission of the cultural repertoire. In the first place it makes for a directness of relationship between symbol and referent. There can be no reference to "dictionary definitions", nor can words accumulate the successive layers of historically validated meanings which they acquire in a literate culture. Instead the meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations, accompanied by vocal inflexions and physical gestures, all of which combine to particularize both its specified denotation and its accepted connotative usage" (p. 306).

What is important is remembered, what isn't is forgotten, so what is known is continually relevant to the present. As Goody & Watt mention, citing Franz Boas, "for the Eskimo the world has always been as it is now" (p. 311). In oral societies, "Myth and history merge into one: the elements in the cultural heritage which cease to have a contemporary relevance tend to be soon forgotten or transformed; and as the individuals of each generation acquire their vocabulary, their genealogies, and their myths, they are unaware that various words, proper-names and stories have dropped out, or that others have changed their meanings or been replaced". (p. 311)

In a literate society there is no forgetting; there is accumulation, and so unlike in the oral society, there is a clear distinction between what was and what is now.

This then allows the text to be treated as a thing, and judged as true or false, and so began the *historia* of the Greeks, investigations into the truth of the stories that had been written down. It also leads to abstraction, as "writing establishes a different kind of relationship between the word and its referent, a relationship that is more general and more abstract, and less closely connected with the particularities of person, place and time, than obtains in oral communication" (p. 321). This then led to the development of logic and science as we know it.

Goody & Watt (p. 328) talk about "the inherent advantages which living speech is given over the written word by virtue of its more immediate connection with the act of communication itself. The first advantage is that possible confusions or misunderstandings can always be cleared up by question and answer; whereas 'written words,' as Socrates tells Phaedrus, 'seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing for ever.' The second intrinsic advantage is that the speaker can vary his 'type of speech' so that it is 'appropriate to each nature ... addressing a variegated soul in a variegated style ... and a simple soul in a simple style.' And so, in the Phaedrus, Socrates concludes that 'anyone who leaves behind him a written manual, and likewise anyone who takes it over from him, on the supposition that such writing will provide something reliable and permanent, must be exceedingly simple-minded.'"

Compare in this regard Michael Reddy's arguments against the "Conduit Metaphor", the assumption that words have meanings and we just need to send the words to someone and they will be able to simply unpack the meaning.

(Reddy, Michael J. 1979. The conduit metaphor—a case of frame conflict in our language about language. *Metaphor and thought*, ed. by A. Ortony, 284-324. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

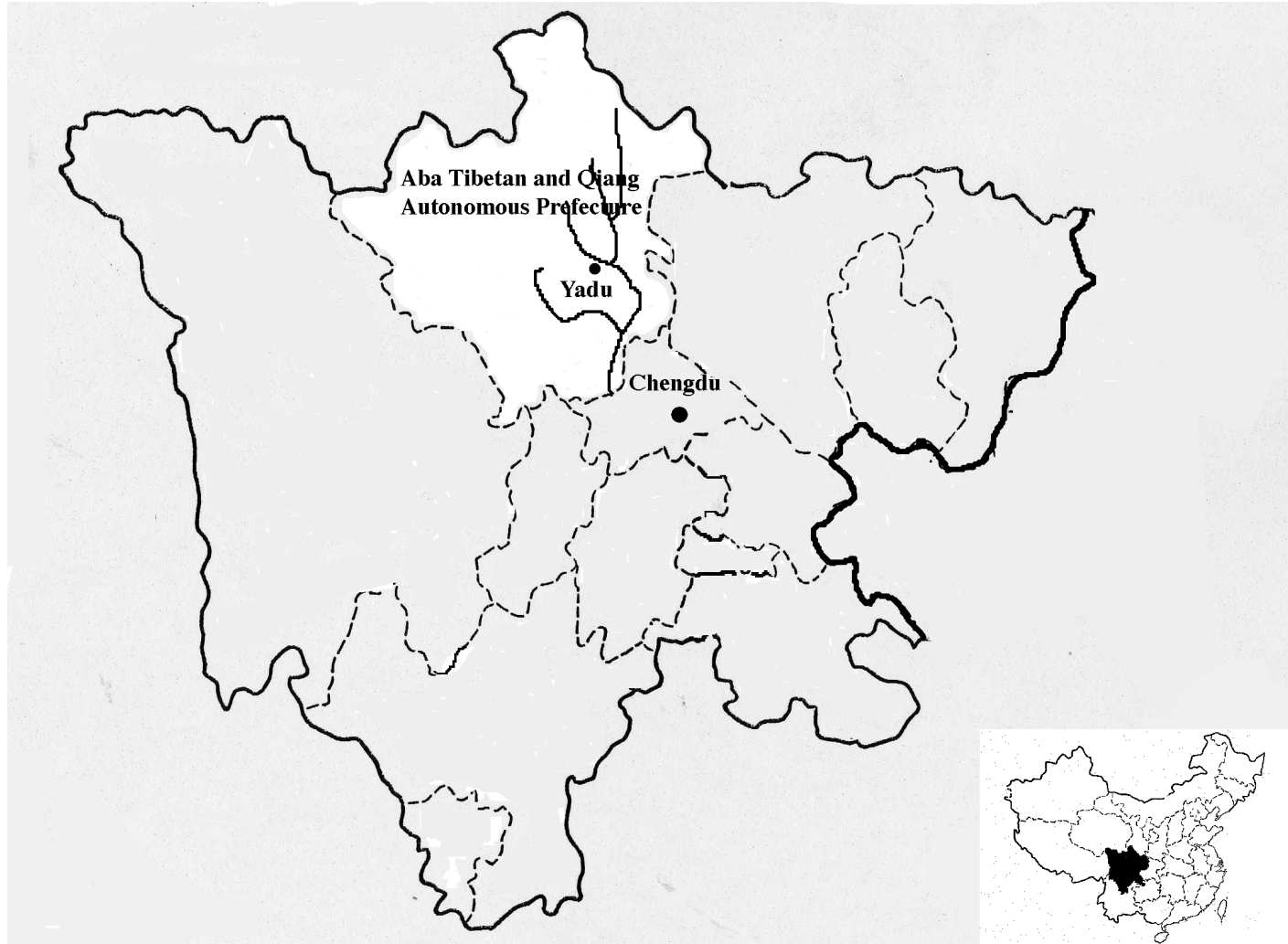
"The writing down of some of the main elements in the cultural tradition in Greece, we say, brought about an awareness of two things: of the past as different from the present; and of the inherent inconsistencies in the picture of life as it was inherited by the individual from the cultural tradition in its recorded form." (p. 333)

In the literate society, the cultural repertoire accumulates and grows at an ever-increasing pace, including the number of words said to be in the language, "more words than anybody knows the meaning of". "This unlimited proliferation also characterises the written tradition in general: the mere size of the literate repertoire means that the proportion of the whole which any one individual knows must be infinitesimal in comparison with what obtains in oral culture. Literate society, merely by having no system of elimination, no "structural amnesia", prevents the individual from participating fully in the total cultural tradition to anything like the extent possible in non-literate society" (p. 334)

"... in contrast to the homeostatic transmission of the cultural tradition among non-literate peoples, literate society leaves more to its members; less homogeneous in its cultural tradition, it gives more free play to the individual, and particularly to the intellectual, the literate specialist himself; it does so by sacrificing a single, ready-made orientation to life. And, insofar as an individual participates in the literate, as distinct from the oral, culture, such coherence as a person achieves is very largely the result of his personal selection, adjustment and elimination of items from a highly differentiated cultural repertoire; he is, of course, influenced by all the various social pressures, but they are so numerous that the pattern finally comes out as an individual one." (p. 340)

An Oral Culture: The Qiang / 羌族 (羌族)

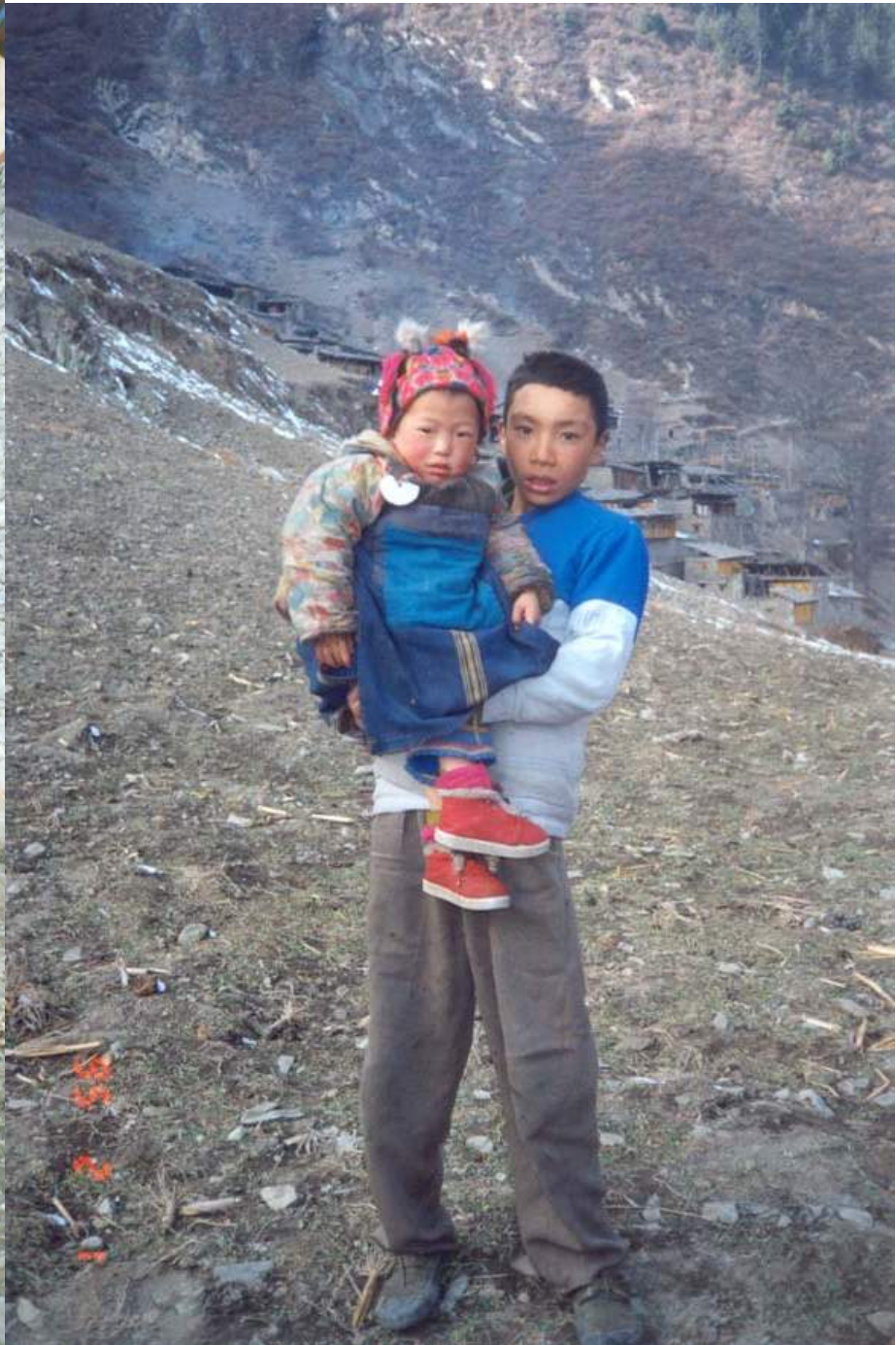
<http://tibeto-burman.net/qiang/> Ronghong Village (荣红寨)















Opening a Cask (開罈子)

<http://tibeto-burman.net/qiang/videos/kaitanzi.mov>

Work with Mr. Chen

Trained storyteller, but not literate. No ability to see language as an abstract object one can talk about divorced from the real world. (Cf. Goody & Watt, p. 338)

Trained me in the stories, but it isn't word by word memorization, but remembering key words.

Qugu texts
How Mao County Was Built

Qugu texts.001

qə¹ z̥mətɕi ɛ ŋuɲi tɕi ɔ ɲa tsi ɔ qa¹qɛ.

qə¹ z̥mə - tɕi ɑ- ŋuəɲi tɕi ɔ ɲa tsi ɔ qa¹qɛ

before the.people - male one- TOP son CL COM daughter CL have

adv n - n num- post n num conj n num v

以前 群众 - 房子 一- （主题） 儿子 一 跟 女 一 有

从前有一位大官，他有两个孩子，一男，一女。

Years ago, there was a high official who had two children, one boy and one girl.

Qugu texts.002

tɕide		ɲuɲi	zimi	lɛwɛ	mɛdʒɛ,		tside	
tɕi	- da	ɲuɲi	zimi	lɛwɛ	mə	- dʒɛ	tsi	- da
son	- DEF	TOP	words	very	NEG	- speak	daughter	- DEF
n	- det	post	n	adv	adv	- v	n	- det
儿子	- (定)	(主题)	话	很	(否)	- 讲	女	- (定)

ɲuɲi	χsa	qɔlɛ.
ɲuɲi	χsa	qɔlɛ
TOP	smart	many
post	adj	adv
(主题)	聪明	很多

男的沉默寡言，女的很聪明。

The boy was very quiet; the girl was very smart.

Qugu texts.003

εptε		ɣuəɲi	tsileta				“qa	tsi,
εp	- da	ɣuəɲi	tsi	- lε	=ta		qa	tsi
father	- DEF	TOP	daughter	- DEF	-LOC	1sg		daughter
kin	- det	post	n	- det	-clitic	pro		n
父亲	- (定)	(主题)	女	- (定)	- (处)	1单		女

zəptaɤa			tɕi	zɛ	tɕi	zɛ	ɲigu	ɲua?”
zəp	- da	=ɤa	tɕi	zɛ	tɕi	zɛ	ɲigu	ɲuə
place	- DEF	-LOC	most	delicious	most	delicious	what	COP
n	- det	-clitic	adv	adj	adv	adj	pro	v
地方	- (定)	- (处)	最	好吃	最	好吃	什么	是

(有一天), 大官问女儿, 「女儿, 最好吃的是什么? 」

The father asked the daughter, "My daughter, what is the most delicious thing in this place?"

Qugu texts.004

“tɕi	zɛ	tɕi	zɛ	buju	ɲuə.”
tɕi	zɛ	tɕi	zɛ	buju	ɲuə
most	delicious	most	delicious	honey	COP
adv	adj	adv	adj	n	v
最	好吃	最	好吃	蜂蜜	是

(女儿回答说), 「最好吃的是蜂蜜。」

(The daughter answered) "The most delicious thing is honey."

Qugu texts.005

“tɕi də tɕi də ɲigu ɲuə?”

tɕi də tɕi də ɲigu ɲuə

most hot most hot what COP

adv adj adv adj pro v

最 热 最 热 什么 是

(父亲又问), 「最热的是什么? 」

(The father then asked) "What is the hottest thing?"

Qugu texts.006

“tɕi də pɰipo ɲuə.”

tɕi də pɰipo ɲuə

most hot leather.coat COP

adv adj n v

最 热 皮衣 是

(女儿回答说), 「最热的是皮衣。」

(The daughter answered) "The hottest thing is a leather coat."

Qugu texts.007

“qa tɕi, tɕi zɛ tɕi zɛ ɲigu ɲuə?”

qa tɕi tɕi zɛ tɕi zɛ ɲigu ɲuə

1sg son most delicious most delicious what COP

pro n adv adj adv adj pro v

1单 儿子 最 好吃 最 好吃 什么 是

（大官也问儿子），「我儿，最好吃的是什么？」

(The official then asked his son) "My son, what is the most delicious thing?"

Qugu texts.008

tɕi zɛ tɕi zɛ tshə ɲuə,

tɕi zɛ tɕi zɛ tshə ɲuə

most delicious most delicious salt COP

adv adj adv adj n v

最 好吃 最 好吃 盐巴 是

（儿子说），「最好吃的是盐巴，

(The son answered) "The most delicious thing is salt,

Qugu texts.009

kutɕka		nike	ze	tshə	mɛɛ			mɛze."
kutɕ	= ka	nike	ze	tshə	mə	- lɛ	mə	- ze
dish(of.food)	-LOC	what.kind	delicious	salt	NEG	- EXIST	NEG	- delicious
n	-clitic	pro	adj	n	adv	- v	adv	- adj
菜	- (处)	何样	好吃	盐巴	(否)	- 有	(否)	- 好吃

菜再好吃没有盐巴也不好吃。」
any dish, no matter how good it is, will not taste good without salt."

Qugu texts.010

“tɕi də tɕi də nigu ŋua?”
tɕi də tɕi də nigu ŋuə
most hot most hot what COP
adv adj adv adj pro v
最 热 最 热 什么 是
(父亲又问)，「最热的是什么？」
(The father then asked), "What is the hottest thing?"

Qugu texts.011

“tɕi də tɕi də mujaq dɛ ɣua.
tɕi də tɕi də mujaq da ɣuə
most hot most hot sun DEF COP
adv adj adv adj n det v
最 热 最 热 太阳 （定） 是
（儿子说），「最热的是太阳，
(The son answered), "The hottest thing is the sun,

Qugu texts.012

mujaq dɛ təχɿni
mujaq da tə- χɿ =ni
sun DEF DIR- appear -ADV
n det pref- v -clitic
太阳 （定） （方） - 出现 - （副）
太阳一出来
when the sun comes out,

Qugu texts.013

zəptaɤa			buʂmaha¹	mu	qɔlele		dadə̌		dzə,
zəp	- da	=ɤa	buʂmaha¹	mu	qɔle	- le	də-	də	dzə
place	- DEF	-LOC	bug	many	many	- EXIST	DIR-	hot	can
n	- det	-clitic	n	adj	adv	- v	pref-	adj	aux
地方	- (定)	- (处)	虫	许多	很多	- 有	(方) -	热	能
所有的天地万物都觉得暖和，									
things everywhere can become hot,									

Qugu texts.014

phiphə	də	gum		də	maŋuətɕi			dadə	
phipo	da	guə	- m	da	mə	- ŋuə	= tɕi	də-	də
leather.coat	DEF	wear	- NOM	DEF	NEG	- COP	-EXCL	DIR-	hot
n	det	vt	- suf	det	adv	- v	-clitic	pref-	adj
皮衣	(定)	穿	- 名物化	(定)	(否)	- 是	-以外	(方) -	热

ma¹dzə̌.”

mə	- dzə
NEG	- can
adv	- aux
(否)	- 能

皮衣的话，只有穿着的人觉得暖和。」

With a leather coat, only the wearer will be warm."

Qugu texts.015

εptε ηuəɲi “ηuə, ηuə, ηuə.”

εp - da ηuəɲi ηuə ηuə ηuə

father - DEF TOP COP COP COP

kin - det post v v v

父亲 - （定） （主题） 是 是 是

父亲听了说，「是！是！是！」

The father then said "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Qugu texts.016

tsi leta ɲi

tsi lε =ta ηuəɲi

daughter DEF -LOC TOP

n det -clitic post

女 （定） - （处） （主题）

（后来，大官就）对女儿（说），

(Later the father said) to the daughter,

Qugu texts.017

“qa	tsi	κɔq	daκəntɕhi				dɔŋru
qa	tsi	κɔq	də-	kə	-n	= tɕhi	dɔŋru
1sg	daughter	mountain	DIR-	go	-2sg	-ADV	name.of.mountain
pro	n	n	pref-	v	-suf	-clitic	pn
1单	女	山	(方) -	去	- (2单)	- (副)	山名

daχlənba

də	χlən	n	= ba
DIR	cross.over	2sg	SUGGESTIVE
pref	v	suf	clitic
(方)	翻过去	(2单)	(叮嘱)

「女儿，你往「东如」山上走，

"My daughter, you go in the direction of Dongru Mountain,

Qugu texts.018

tɕiaotsə	kɔɕtɕy,	natɕ		ju'ər	təbələmba."		
tɕiaotsə	kɔɕtɕy	na	= tɕhi	ju'ər	tə-	bəl -n	= ba
pallaquin	carry.over	good	-ADV	road	DIR-	do -2sg	-SUGGESTIVE
n	vt	adj	-clitic	n	pref-	vt -suf	-clitic
轿子	抬过去	好	- (副)	路	(方) -	作 - (2单)	-(叮嘱)

修一条（四个人抬的）轿子抬得过去的路。」

and build a road wide enough for a four-man pallaquin.

Qugu texts.019

“qa tɕi, ufiɲi xupa daɤəntɕhi,
 qa tɕi ufi - ŋuəɲi xupa də- kə -n = tɕhi
 1sg son 2sg - TOP river.edge DIR- go -2sg -ADV
 pro n pro - post n pref- v -suf -clitic
 1单 儿子 2单 - （主题） 河坝 （方） - 去 -（2单） -（副）
 （然后对儿子说），「我儿子，你沿着河边走，
 (The father then said to the son), "My son, you go along the river's edge and

Qugu texts.020

xuagə¹ kəʂtɕy, natɕi ju'ər təbələnba.
 xuagə¹ kəʂtɕy na = tɕhi ju'ər tə- bəl -n = ba
 palanquin carry.over good -ADV road DIR- do -2sg -SUGGESTIVE
 n vt adj -clitic n pref- vt -suf -clitic
 滑竿 抬过去 好 -（副） 路 （方） - 作 -（2单） -(叮嘱)
 修一条（两个人抬的）轿子抬得过去的路。
 build a road wide enough for a two-man palanquin.

Qugu texts.021

ʃquɲi	ipik			dzə	ɲuəɲi,	ɤua
ʃquɲi	ə-	pi	kə	dzə	ɲuəɲi	ɤua
Maoxian	DIR-	arrive	go	affair(s)	TOP	city.wall
pn	pref-	vi	v	n	post	n
茂县	(方) -	走到	去	事情	(主题)	城墙

ɑ:zəmbɑ,

ə-	zə	-n	=ba
DIR-	construct	-2sg	-SUGGESTIVE
pref-	vt	-suf	-clitic
(方) -	修建	- (2单)	-(叮嘱)

到了茂县以后，就要修建城墙，

When (you) reach Maoxian, build a city wall,

Qugu texts.022

tshaitse iɸimba.

tshaitse	ə-	phi	-n	=ba
rape.plant	DIR-	plant	-2sg	-SUGGESTIVE
n	pref-	vt	-suf	-clitic
油菜	(方) -	种	- (2单)	-(叮嘱)

lapa dapazəmba,

lapa	də-	pa	-	zə	-n	=ba
flower(s)	DIR-	bloom	-	CAUS	-2sg	-SUGGESTIVE
n	pref-	vi	-	suf	-suf	-clitic
花	(方) -	开	-	使	- (2单)	-(叮嘱)

种油菜。油菜开花了，

(and) plant rape seed plants. When you have gotten the flowers to bloom,

Qugu texts.023

ʂqʊpi zəpka ɣzə ɸazunba.”

ʂqʊpi	zəp	=ka	ɣzə	ɸə-	zu	-n	=ba
Maoxian	place	-LOC	offical	DIR-	sit	-2sg	-SUGGESTIVE
pn	n	-clitic	n	pref-	vi	-suf	-clitic
茂县	地方	- (处)	官	(方) -	坐	- (2单)	-(叮嘱)

你就当茂县的官。」

then you will be the offical of Maoxian.

Qugu texts.024

tsi	tu	daqqni,		donru		zəχtə,
tsi	atu	də-	qa =ji	donru		zə- χtə
daughter	after	DIR-	go -ADV	name.of.mountain	DIR-	cross.over
n	dempro	pref-	v -clitic	pn	pref-	v
女	后来	(方) -	去 - (副)	山名	(方) -	翻过去

女儿修完了路，翻过「东如」山，
The daughter (finished making the road), crossed Dongru Mountain,

Qugu texts.025

şqupi	utçu,		tshait sə	lapa	dapa,		tçhist
şqupi	ə-	tçu	tshait sə	lapa	də-	pa	tçhist
Maoxian	DIR-	see	rape.plant	flower(s)	DIR-	bloom	anger.to.death
pn	pref-	v	n	n	pref-	vi	n
茂县	(方) -	看 (到)	油菜	花	(方) -	开	气死

təpni			içi.	
tə-	pə	=ni	ə	çi
DIR-	do	-ADV	DIR	die
pref-	vt	-clitic	pref	vi
(方) -	作	- (副)	(方)	死

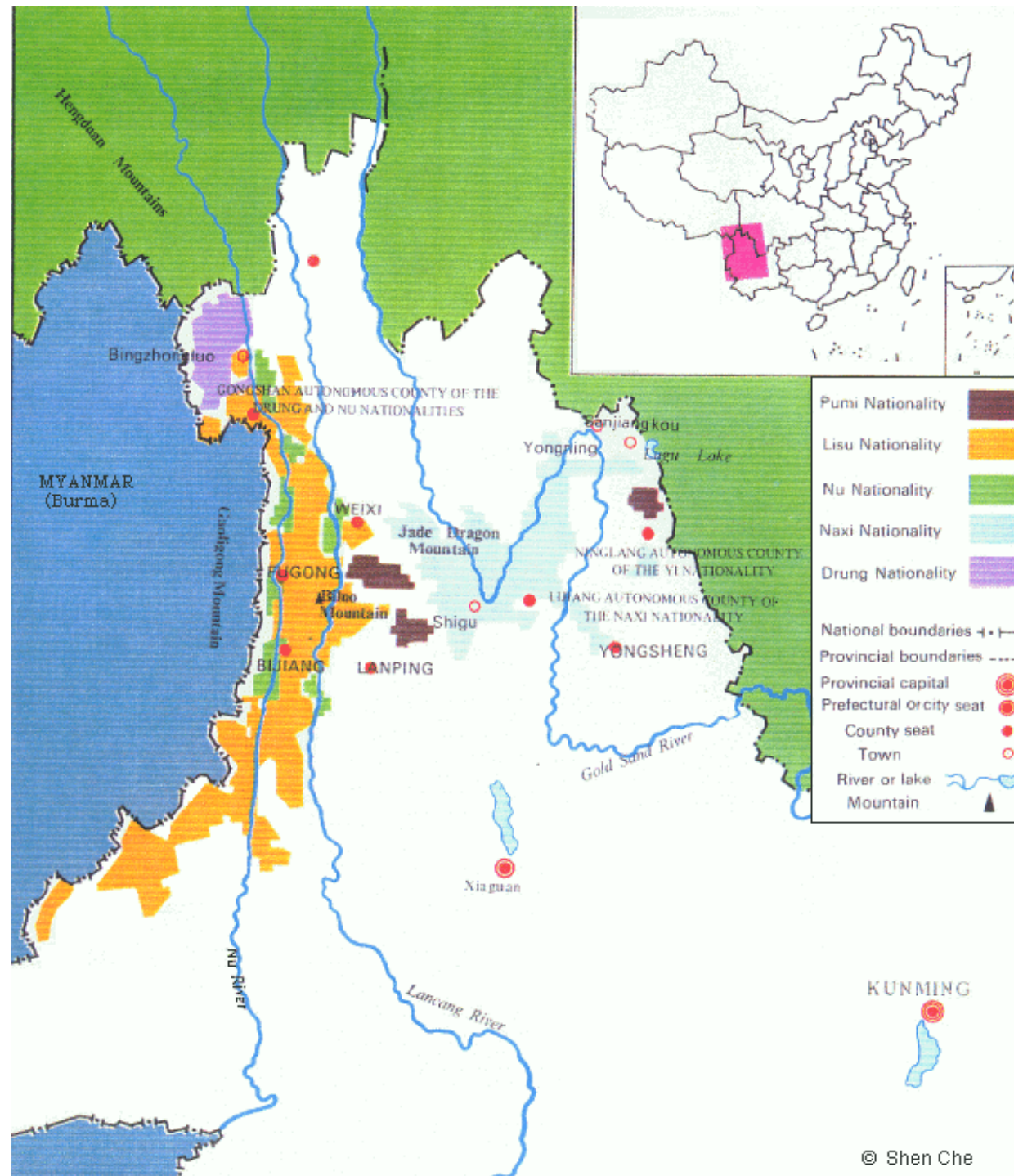
一看，（城墙修完了），油菜开了花，她就气死了死了。

and saw that the flowers had already bloomed in Maoxian, (she got) very angry, and died.

The Dulong (獨龍族; Yunnan China) vs.
Rawang (Kachin State, Myanmar):

Same language, but one literate and one not.





Why monkeys steal human food

told by Li Yaohua (nəwāŋzàr bɿāzì)

tɕā pāɿ ǎtsən̄ nāgoʔ ɕōlaʔ blakpaì tǎ ̀: tɕìwǎ.
long.ago time human baby caregiver monkey AGT do/make HS
Long ago monkeys took care of babies for people.

ǎk-pè ǎk-mè nǎmjàn̄-nǎmjàn̄,
3-father 3-mother daytime-REDUP
During the day, the child's parents

nit-būm mǎ-gōl gū ǎmɿ wà lē jì tɕìwǎ.
mind-many NEG-need ADV field work DAT go HS
could go to work the field without having to worry (about the child).

ǎŋzā kuʔ tòi gəm wǎ,

food also very(big) good HS

The crop grew very well,

blakpaì tǎ nāgɔʔ nənɗǎgəm ɔ: wa.

monkey AGT baby well(adv.) work HS

the monkey took good care of the baby.

"ǎ-pè ǎ-mè" guʔ sō xrɛʔ ɔ: tɕìwǎ.

1-father 1-mother say know.how until do HS

It did this up to the time (the baby) could say "Mommy and Daddy".

nāgɔʔ tòi mǎnēŋ, blakpaì sǎ-loʔ tsot cà mǎnēŋ,

baby big follow monkey CAUS-return time become follow

When the child was big, when it was time to send the monkey back,

çɔ̃la? kũɪtā ǎtsəŋ tǎ tǎɪl sǎkōm cē mē
caregiver fee human AGT quiver(arrow.case) lid one CL
The person only gave a quiver lid full of payment (not money).

tçē zī tçhìwǎ. ǎjà mǎnəŋ blakpəi sǎnā səi wà.
only give HS that follow monkey nose spicy HS
Because of this, the monkey became very angry.

ǎjà tǎɪl sǎkōm nǎkre? dǎ pɛ?-pɛ? nɛ? sǎlo? zīn,
that quiver lid buttock LOC stick(v.)-REDUP eye stare LNK
The monkey stuck the lid to his rear end,

cē kɪōm cē kɪōm ǎtçat zīn lo? jì tçìwà.
one jump one jump(jump.and.skip) jump LNK return go HS
and staring (at them) jumped back (home).

blakpaì nǎkre? ǎjà mǎnēŋ nū ǎŋmūl mǎ-ko? ē tɕìwǎ.
monkey buttock that follow TOP fur/hair NEG-grow be HS
Therefore, the monkey's rear end doesn't grow hair.

blakpəì ē-wā sǎnā səì mǎnēŋ,
monkey DEM-ADV nose spicy(angry) follow
When the monkey got angry,

ǎtsəŋ pǎɕīn dō mǎ-gəm wā cà tɕìwǎ.
human heart/liver LOC NEG-good COMP become(suffer) HS
the person felt bad.

ǎjà mǎnēŋ blakpəì lě ē-wā ɣiū:ŋ wǎ,
that follow monkey DAT DEM-ADV say HS
So the man said to the monkey,

"dēlā buktɕit būŋɔ̃m pē pā-sǎŋām ɔ̃a" gɔ̃u:ŋ wǎ.

later edge.of.the.fieldABL IMP-see come say HS

"Later you can come to the edge of the field and see (eat a bit)."

ǎjà tūm,

that after

After that,

blakpə̀i ejà mǎnəŋ nū ǎtsəŋ tābɔ̃ŋ kū gē wǎ.

monkey that follow TOP human grain steal NOM+be HS

monkeys steal grain from humans.

Naxi Dongba writing (納西族東巴文)

Naxi writing was pictographic, and there was no one sound/symbol to one meaning correspondence; the forms were used simply as mnemonics to help the Dongba (shaman) to remember the rituals and stories.















Later there were attempts to reduce the number of symbols and directly relate them to individual concepts and syllables, due to the influence of Chinese.



Chinese

Essentially what Goody & Watt call "protoliterate" or "olioliterate" up until the mid 20th century, as only about 5% of the people could read and write.

Until the 20th century, writing was read aloud (讀、念、誦、籀), and texts were memorized, so writing was to a large extent just a memory aid. (Cf. Goody & Watt, p. 316-17, 319)

Texts were often not even explained, just memorized, and a student didn't start writing (開筆) until after many years of memorizing texts.

Earliest writing: Oracle bone inscriptions (甲骨文)

Dried plastrons (turtle shells) or ox shoulder bones were dried and then cracked with a hot rod after the shaman asked a question, often in pairs, e.g. "The King should hunt today" / "The King shouldn't hunt today". The questions and results were then carved onto the shell or bone. Sometimes later the outcome was also recorded. The earliest ones were found in the ruins of last 273 years of the Shang Dynasty, 1319-1046 BCE, known as the Yin period because the capitol was at Yin (Anyang, Henan 殷墟).







甲骨文十二生肖图

The Twelve Animals Used to Symbolize the Years in which People Are Born



Moise



Ox



Tiger



Hare



Dragon



Snake



Horse



Sheep



Monkey



Chicken



Dog



Pig

孫

孙

周

周

吳

吴

鄭

郑

王

王

衛

卫

沈

沈

朱

朱

秦

秦

尤

尤

何

何

呂

吕

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The Book of Songs/Odes/Poetry (詩經) (11th to 7th centuries BPE), supposedly by Yin Jifu (尹吉甫) and edited by Confucious (孔子／孔丘／孔仲尼). Some say the songs are too concrete and specific to be simply general folk songs that were collected, and instead were actually written by Ying Jifu.

鳴鳶鳴金
 擊鼓辭我
 舞雩會鼓
 齊先笙和
 笙鼓黃鳥
 篪是猶入
 笙鼓其不
 我聞於

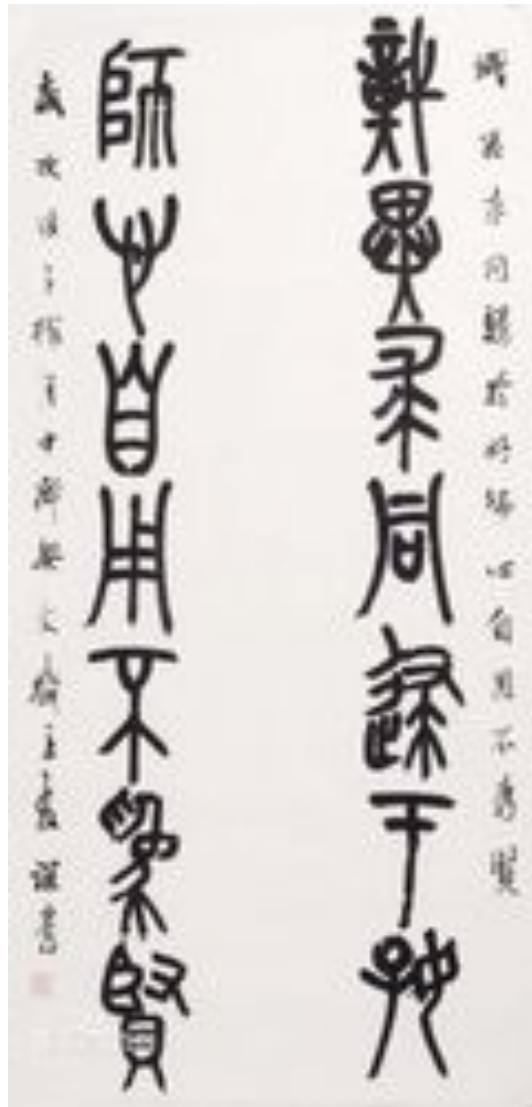
詩經小雅鹿鳴句
 辛卯年
 篆書
 於京華
 趙世

人吹我叻
之笙有叻
好鼓嘉鹿
我簫賓鳴

， ， ， ，

示承鼓食
我筐瑟野
周是吹之
行將笙蘋

○ ○ ○ ○



師	...	識
心	...	異
自	...	求
用	...	同
不	...	歸
為	...	于
賢	...	好

Big Seal Script (大篆／籀文); regularization of older script
 Name based on earliest textbook (《史籀篇》)

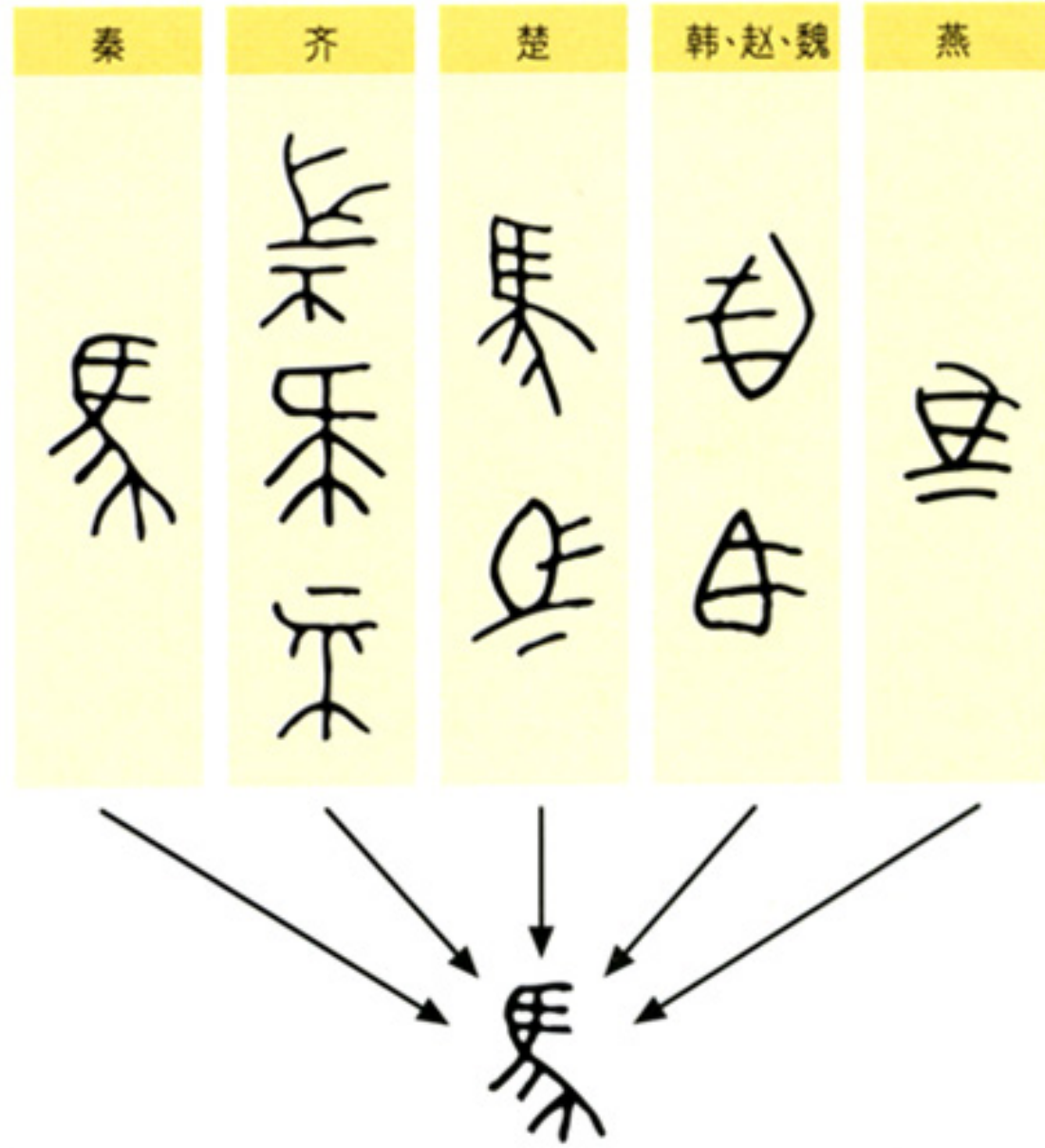
Characters from the difference countries (六國文字) and the First Emperor's standardization (220-210 BCE)

In oral cultures there is no issue of standardization because all learning is face to face and speakers can accommodate each other, but their varieties may change relative to other speaker communities' varieties. That is how we get linguistic diversity, as language learning is always face to face.

In literate cultures spread over a large area, particularly when there is a desire to create a unified nation-state, then the issue of standardization comes up. The First Emperor ordered his Chief Minister Li Si (李斯) to standardize, simplify, and expand the writing system, then called Small Seal Script (小篆／秦篆).

	秦	齊	楚	燕	韓	趙	魏
馬							
安							
市							
者							
陽							

Characters from the different countries



秦统一各国文字为小篆

Once there is writing and standardization, then things like dictionaries are necessary, so that people can know what someone possibly meant when they used a certain character and also how it is to be pronounced. So in 100 CE Xu Shen (許慎) created the first dictionary of Chinese that analyzed the structure of the characters, the Shuowen Jiezi (說文解字) [explain graphs and take apart combined graphs], with almost 1000 characters. This was followed by various rhyming dictionaries and in the Qing Dynasty by the Kangxi Dictionary (康熙字典) [Dictionary of Emperor Kangxi] (finished 1716), with 47,035 characters. Separate rhyming dictionaries were also created, so that writers knew which words could rhyme with other words.

