

EALC C561: Topic: Proseminar in Shang and Western Zhou Historical Texts

This class will be designed to teach students to read Shang period oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou, to interpret them in the context of our social and political understandings of those eras, and to become aware of associated issues of state development. Coursework will be aimed at strengthening preparation for research work in ancient Chinese texts and social history, and as training in paleographic methodology.

The inscriptions of the Shang and Western Zhou are the earliest voices we hear from China. They speak to questions of religious thought and practice, social and political structures, and historical change. Unlike received texts, they come to us in the unfamiliar media of bone and bronze, written in archaic script. They are unique documents, untransmitted, and lacking contextualizing and commentarial apparatus - these factors make them challenging to interpret. However, they are also numerous and highly formalized, and these features make it possible to begin to explore them with relatively little preparation.

Regular class meetings will be divided between text reading and discussion of relevant scholarship concerning historical, social, archaeological, and philological issues, in both Chinese and English. Six additional one-hour meetings will be scheduled to devote exclusively to text practice, three early in the term on oracle texts, three in the middle of the term as we transition to bronze inscriptions.

Written requirements will include (1) quiz-like exercises for bone and bronze script, (2) a number of written précis (to be circulated to the class), of books, chapters, and articles, and (3) a research paper, due at the end of the term, which will be introduced to the class as an oral presentation in April.

Prerequisites include reading knowledge of Classical and Modern Chinese, and permission of the instructor.