• Background - Dr. Chan wondered in his childhood how Chinese writing was constructed. He studied at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, and classmates would ask him about Chinese writing. He didn’t have a lot of information to share because his Chinese teachers hadn’t had a lot of background in it.

• Written Chinese is different from Western writing in that it never used a letter alphabet. Standard Chinese writing today is similar to how it has been since the 3rd century.

• Chinese writing is the longest lasting uninterrupted literary system in the world – 3,300 years old, longer than hieroglyphs or cuneiform.
  o The earliest writing was developed in Iraq along the Euphrates riverbank. Sumerians’ writing, based on pictographs, lasted almost 1,000 years.

• Dr. Chan’s argument: you do not have to have an alphabet of sounds. In alphabet-based languages, the writing is an actual transcription of sound.
  o In 1837: Hegel’s Philosophy of History states that not having an alphabet of letters was an obstacle to modern times
  o In 2007: The last volume of a 12 volume opus by Josef Molheim asks a major question: why does China has inventions like the compass, printing press, etc., but still isn’t up to par with England and Germany in other areas. Molheim reaches the same conclusion: not having an alphabet is an obstacle.
  o The study of geometry helped to change assumptions, showing that we can use graphics instead of sound to convey meaning.
  o Chinese is a “language of the eyes,” and other languages are “languages of the ears.” This does not imply a value judgment – it is neither better nor worse than other languages, just different.

• Cuneiform began as pictograms but became a language of sound - no longer a picture but a group of little lines/wedges only meaning the sound for the word heard.

• China has 205 languages spoken by 56 different minorities, so it is essential to keep their languages.

• Chinese culture is a text based culture. In every city, town, country, village, etc., there is a person whose job it is to be the official historian.

• It is more important to understand the meaning of a character than to know the character’s strokes

• An ideograph is a graphic representation of an idea.
  o Shell – an object; Currency – an application; Value – a generalized idea
  o An ideograph would represent the idea of value

• We must understand Chinese writing to understand the history and culture of China.
  o Sound of “ma” could mean yelling, horse, or mother
  o “See” has 36 different characters and they’re only distinguished by the characters
  o If we don’t understand the characters, we can’t understand the meaning of those sounds