

# Nomination form

## International Memory of the World Register

*Memory of the World—Chinese Oracle-Bone Inscriptions*

ID Code [2016-79]

### 1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

*Give a brief description of the documentary heritage being nominated and the reasons for proposing it.*

*This is the “shop window” of your nomination and is best written **last!** It should contain all the essential points you want to make, so that anyone reading it can understand your case even if they do not read the rest of your nomination.*

Oracle-bone inscriptions were excavated from Yin Ruins in Anyang City, Henan Province, China. They were records of making divination and praying to gods by late Shang people from 1400 B.C.-1100 B.C.. The materials used for divination were mainly cattle scapulas and tortoise shells, as well as other animal bones. Omens were deciphered from the cracks made by burning bones. The divination involves all aspects of Shang dynasty, such as sacrifices, praying, king's affairs, weather, harvest, military affairs, coming and going, etc.. Oracle bone inscriptions can be divided into several periods according to their forms and contents, based on which we could reconstruct the real royal genealogy of Shang dynasty, and make research on the important events of royal families and how people lived in Shang time. Oracle bone inscriptions are also the important materials to study the original configuration of Chinese characters and the earliest state of Chinese language grammar. This declaration for Memory of the World is to strengthen the protection and inheritance of these earliest relics of Chinese historical documents.

### 2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Research Center of Oracle-Bone Inscriptions and Yin-Shang culture, CASS, Beijing, China

### 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Storekeeper and researcher of oracle bone inscriptions

### 2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Song Zhenhao(宋镇豪)

### 2.4 Contact details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>	
Song Zhenhao	5, Jianguomen Neidajie, 100732, Beijing, China Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Science	
<i>Telephone</i>	<i>Facsimile</i>	<i>Emai</i>
8610-85195827	8610-65276131	zhhsonga@163.com

### 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

#### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

*In this part of the form you must describe the document or collection in sufficient detail to make clear precisely what you are nominating. Any collection must be finite (with beginning and end dates) and closed.*

Since 1899, about 150,000 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions have been found from Yin Ruins in Anyang, but unfortunately they are scattering in more than 100 institutes all over the world. There are 11 collections of oracle bone inscriptions nominated this time. These 11 collections are separately kept by Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (6555 pieces); Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2024 pieces); China National Library (34783 pieces); Beijing Palace Museum (22463 pieces); Peking University Library (2980 pieces); Tsinghua University Library (1755 pieces); Shanghai Museum (4905 pieces); Nanjing Museum (2870 pieces); Shandong Provincial Museum (10518 pieces); Lvshun Museum (2231 pieces); and Tianjin Museum (1769 pieces). Their source origins and collecting processes were clearly recorded, the procedure of collecting was conformed to standards, and the archival records are clear to access. Identification by experts shows that all these bone inscriptions are authentic and have multiple values for cultural relics, ancient documents, and historical study.

6555 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. All of them were excavated from Yin Ruins from 1973 to 2004, and were published in three books: *Xiaotun nandi jiagu* 小屯南地甲骨(Beijing, 1980), *Yinxu huayuanzhuang dongdi jiagu* 殷墟花园庄东地甲骨(Kunming, 2003), and *Yinxu xiaotun cunzhong cunnan jiagu* 殷墟小屯村中村南甲骨(Kunming, 2012).

2024 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1940s and were handed down from generations. They were previously kept by Wang Xiongdong 王杏东, Zang Hengfu 臧恒甫, Luo Fuyi 罗福颐, Luo Fubao 罗福葆, Luo Shouxun 罗守巽, Xu Zongyuan 徐宗元, Shao Bojiong 邵伯纲, Chen Kanru 陈侃如, Yi Junshi 易均室, Ye Yusen 叶玉森, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, Gu Chengyun 顾承运, Wang Xiantang 王献唐, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Rong Geng 容庚, Gu Tiefu 顾铁符, Jiang Chufeng 蒋楚凤, Kangsheng 康生, Jianshou Tang 戡寿堂, Guo Ruoyu 郭若愚, Zhou Boding 周伯鼎, Fang Zengshou 方曾寿, Xu Fang 徐坊, Mrs. Calvin Mateer Britain from Britain, antique shops or bookstores in Liu Li Chang 琉璃厂, such as Qing Yun Tang 庆云堂, Yun Gu Zhai 韵古斋, Zhen Huan Ge 振寰阁, Fu Jin Shu She 富晋书社, and other shops in Beijing and Tianjin. These bones were handed down by several times of presentation and donation, sale and resale, national distribution, store purchasing, and at last flowed into the hand of Institute of History Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. These bones have been published in two books: *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(Beijing, 1997-1982) and *Zhong guo shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo cang jiagu ji* 中国社会科学院历史研究所藏甲骨集(Shanghai, 2011).

34783 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in China National Library. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1940s and handed down from generations. They were previously kept by Liu Tizhi 刘体智, Meng Dingsheng 孟定生, Luo Zhenyu 罗振玉, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, Luo Bozhao 罗伯昭, Zhang Renli 张仁蠡, Zhang Heng 张珩, Xu Bingchang 徐炳昶, Guo Ruoyu 郭若愚, He Sui 何遂, Zeng Yigong 曾毅公, Shao Bojiong 邵伯纲, Qing Yun Tang 庆云堂, Tong Gu Zhai 通古斋 and Cui Ya Tang 粹雅堂. They were transferred into this museum around 1958, and some of them were allocated by China Ministry of Culture. These bones are published in these following books: *Shanzhai suocang jiagu taben* 善斋所藏甲骨拓本(1953, Beijing),

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*Zhanhou jingjin xinhuo jiagu ji* 战后京津新获甲骨集(Shanghai, 1954), *Yinqi cuibian* 殷契粹编(Tokyo, 1937), *Yinqi shiduo* 殷契拾掇(Shanghai, 1951&1953), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(1997-1982, Beijing), *Jiaguwen heji bubian* 甲骨文合集补编(Beijing, 1999).

22463 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Beijing Palace Museum. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1940s and were handed down from generations. They were previously kept by James M. Menzies 明义士, Xie Boshu 谢伯爰, Ma Heng 马衡, Luo Zhenyu 罗振玉, Yu Xingwu 于省吾, Jia Jingyan 贾敬颜, Chen Fulu 陈伏卢, Ni Yushu 倪玉书, Yun Gu Zhai 韵古斋, Xue Gui Ji 薛贵记, Tong Gu Zhai 通古斋. They were transferred into Palace Museum around 1970. They were published in these following books: *Yinxu shuqi xubian* 殷虚书契续编(Beijing, 1933), *Yinqi yicun* 殷契佚存(Nanjing, 1933), *Buci tongzuan* 卜辞通纂(Tokyo, 1933), *Yinqi shiduo erbian* 殷契拾掇二编(Shanghai, 1953), *Zhanhou nanbei suojian jiagu lu* 战后南北所见甲骨录(Beijing, 1951), *Yinxu buci houbian* 殷虚卜辞后编(Taipei, 1972), *Xieshi hulu cang yinxu yiwen* 谢氏瓠庐藏殷墟遗文(Tokyo, 1979), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(1997-1982, Beijing).

2980 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Peking University Library. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1940s and were handed down from generations. They were previously kept by Former Guo Xue department of Peking University 前北大国学门, Former Yanjing University 前燕京大学, Huo Baolu 霍保禄, Xu Fang 徐枋, Luo Fuyi 罗福颐( this part was previously kept by Duanfang[端方]), Qing Yun Tang 庆云堂(this part was previously kept by Yuan Jia studio of Xie Wusheng[元嘉造像室谢午生]), Zhang Renli 张仁蠡 and 久下司. They were transferred to Peking university in 1950s, and were published in these following books: *Yinqi buci* 殷契卜辞(Beijing, 1933), *Yinxu shuqi xubian* 殷虚书契续编(Beijing, 1933), *Yinqi yicun* 殷契佚存(Nanjing, 1933), *Zhanhou pingjin xinhuo jiagu ji* 战后平津新获甲骨集(Jinan, 1946), *Zhanhou nanbei suojian jiagu lu* 战后南北所见甲骨录(Beijing, 1951), *Jiagu xucun* 甲骨续存(Shanghai, 1955), *Beijing daxue guoxuemen cang yinxu wenzi* 北京大学国学门藏殷虚文字(Taipei, 1972), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(1997-1982, Beijing), *Beijing daxue zhencang jiagu wenzi* 北京大学珍藏甲骨文字(Shanghai, 2008).

1755 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Tsinghua University Library. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1940s and were handed down from generations. They were previously kept by Yu Xingwu 于省吾, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, Tong Gu Zhai 通古斋, Yuan Xingji 原兴记, Fu Dayou 傅大卣. They were transferred into Tsinghua University Library in 1960s, and were published in these following books: *Shuangjianyi guqiwu tulu* 双剑谿古器物图录, *Zhanhou pingjin xinhuo jiagu ji* 战后平津新获甲骨集(Jinan, 1946), *Jiagu xucun* 甲骨续存(Shanghai, 1955), *Zhanhou ninghu xinhuo jiagu ji* 战后宁沪新获甲骨集(Beijing, 1951), *Zhanhou jingjin xinhuo jiagu ji* 战后京津新获甲骨集(Beijing, 1954), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(1997-1982, Beijing).

4905 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Shanghai Museum. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1940s and were handed down from generations. They were previously kept by Wang Yirng 王懿荣, Liu Tiejun 刘铁云, Luo Zhenyu 罗振玉, Jian Shou Tang 戡寿堂, Former Shanghai city Museum 前上海市博物馆, Former Auguste Comte Institute 前孔德研究所, Zhen Huang 振寰阁, Long Yusheng 龙榆生, Hu Jixuan 胡吉宣, Pan Jingzheng 潘景郑, Chen Qicheng 陈器成, Fu Gaoshun 傅高顺. They were transferred into Shanghai Museum before 1970, and were published in these following books: *Jianshoutang yinxu wenzi kaoshi* 戡寿堂殷虚文字考释(Shanghai, 1917), *Jianshoutang yinxu wenzi buzheng* 戡寿堂所藏殷虚文字补正, *Yunjian zhukongyang cang jianshoutang yinxu wenzi jiuta* 云间朱孔阳藏戡寿堂殷虚文字旧拓(Beijing, 2009), *Yinqi zhiyi* 殷契摭佚(Beijing, 1941), *Yinqi zhiyi xubian* 殷契摭佚续编(Beijing, 1950), *Zhanhou nanbei suojian jiagu lu* 战后南北所见甲骨录(Beijing, 1951), *Jiagu xucun* 甲骨续存(Shanghai, 1955), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(1997-1982, Beijing), *Shanghai bowuguan cang jiagu wenzi* 上海博物馆藏甲骨文字(Shanghai, 2009).

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2870 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Nanjing Museum. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1920s and handed down from generations. They were previously kept by Liu Tiejun 刘铁云, James M. Menzies 明义士, Jiang You 蒋友, Fang Gang 方冈, Hu Xiaoshi 胡小石, Former Jiang Su Provincial Museum 前江苏省博物馆. They were transferred into Nanjing Museum after 1950s, and were published in these following books: *Yinxu buci* 殷虚卜辞(Shanghai, 1917), *Jiagu xucun* 甲骨续存(Shanghai, 1955), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(Beijing, 1997-1982).

10518 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Shandong Museum. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1920s and handed down from generations. They were previously kept by James M. Menzies 明义士, Luo Zhenyu 罗振玉, Bergen 柏根氏, Former Qilu University 原齐鲁大学, Former Shangdong Library 原山东图书馆, and were later transferred to Shandong Provincial Museum. They were published in these following books: *Bergen Collection of the Inscribed Oracle Bone* 柏根氏旧藏甲骨文字(Jinan, 1935), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(Beijing, 1997-1982), *Shandongsheng bo wuguan zhencang jiagu mota ji* 山东省博物馆珍藏甲骨墨拓集(Jinan, 1998).

2231 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Lvshun Museum. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1920s. They were previously kept by Luo Zhenyu 罗振玉, 岩间德也, and were later transferred to Lvshun Museum. They were published in these following books: *Jiagu xucun* 甲骨续存(Shanghai, 1955), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(Beijing, 1997-1982), *Lvshun bowuguan cang jiagu* 旅顺博物馆藏甲骨 (unpublished).

1769 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions are kept in Tianjin Museum. All of them were found in Yin Ruins before 1920s. They were previously kept by Wang Yirong 王懿荣, Wang Xiang 王襄, Wang Fuchong 王福重, Chen Banghuai 陈邦怀, Fang Ruo 方若, Wei Zhi 魏智, Xu Baoci 徐宝祠, Li Henian 李鹤年 (previously owned by Meng Dingsheng[孟定生]). They were transferred into Tianjin Museum in 1970s. They were published in these following books: *Fushi yinqi zhengwen* 簠室殷契征文(Tianjin, 1925), *Yinxu shuq xubian* 殷虚书契续编(Beijing, 1933), *Yinqi yicun* 殷契佚存(Nanjing, 1933), *Jiaguwen lingshi* 甲骨文零拾(Tianjin, 1959), *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集(Beijing, 1997-1982).

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### 3.4 History/provenance

*Describe what you know of the history of the collection or document. Your knowledge may not be complete, but give the best description you can.*

Oracle bone inscriptions were excavated from the late Shang capital Yin Ruins, which had long been vanished away from historical accounts. Oracle bone inscriptions were records of the natural environments, astronomical phenomena and climate atmosphere, species of animals and plants, natural resources, economic activities, man-land relationship and human activities of late Shang dynasty, in the region of Capital Yin and its surrounding areas from B.C.1400 to the middle of B.C.1100, which helps to solve the mystery of historical geography of Shang dynasty. The first finding of oracle bone inscriptions has aroused 15 excavations by Archaeology Group of the Research Institute of History and Language of the Central Academy from 1928 to 1937, and the excavations by Institute of Archaeology Chinese Academy of Social Sciences from 1950 till nowadays. These excavations not only presented us a long-lost Shang capital, but also promoted the birth and development of modern Chinese Archaeology. The important status of Yin Shang civilization in the world civilization was established as well. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006, in the 30<sup>th</sup> World Cultural Heritage Conference held in Vilnius Lithuania, Yin Ruins was elected into the Chronology of Recognition of

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World Heritages.

#### 4.0 Legal information

##### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details) (申报项目的所有人)

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Name	Address
He Yu(何玉)	Tsinghua University Library
Chen Xiaoliang (陈晓亮)	Nanjing Museum
Wang Zhenzhong (王震中)	Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Yu Qin (于芹)	Shandong Museum
Ding Meng (丁孟)	Beijing Palace Museum
Chen Kelun (陈克伦)	Shanghai Museum
Wang Yingxia (王迎霞)	Tianjin Museum
Wang Zhenfen (王振芬)	Lvshun Museum
Chen Hongyan (陈红彦)	China National Library
Tang Jigen (唐际根)	Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Zhao Hui (赵辉)	Peking University

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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
8610-85195827	8610-65276131	<a href="mailto:zhhsonga@163.com">zhhsonga@163.com</a>

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##### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner) (申报项目的监管人)

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Name	Address
Song Xinchao	83, Beiheyuan Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing, China National Heritage Board

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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
8610-56792009		xichs@sach.gov.cn

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##### 4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

According to *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics* 中华人民共和国文物法, *Chinese Cultural Relics Ranking Standard* 文物藏品定级标准 and *Standards of China National Preservation Center for Ancient Books*, Yin Oracle Bone Inscriptions were identified as the first-class historical relic of China, and were listed into the fourth *Catalogue of National Precious Ancient Documents Directory* 国家珍贵古籍名录 in 2013.

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#### 4.4 Accessibility

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Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed.

Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Add: 27, Wangfujing Dajie, 100710, Beijing, China.

Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Add: 5, Jianguomen Neidajie, 100732, Beijing, China.

China National Library. Add: 33, Zhongguancun Dajie, 100081, Beijing, China.

Beijing Palace Museum. Add: 4, Jingshan Qianjie, Dongcheng District, 100009, Beijing, China.

Peking University Library. Add: 5, Yiheyuan Road, Haidian District, 100871, Beijing, China.

Tsinghua University Library. Add: 1, Qinghuayuan, Haidian District, 100084, Beijing, China.

Shanghai Museum. Add: 201, Renmin Dadao, Huangpu District, 200003, Shanghai, China.

Nanjing Museum. Add: 321, Zhongshan East Road, 210016, Nanjing, China.

Shandong Provincial Museum. Add: 14, Jing Shiyi Road, Lixia District, 250014, Jinan, China.

Lvshun Museum. Add: Liening Road, Lvshunkou District, 116041, Dalian, China.

Tianjin Museum. Add: 4, Guanghua Road, Hedong District, 300170, Tianjin, China.

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

*Encouraging accessibility is a basic objective of MoW. Accordingly, digitization for access purposes is encouraged and you should comment on whether this has been done or is planned. You should also note if there are legal or cultural factors that restrict access.*

Due to the physical particularity of oracle bone inscriptions, it is impossible to put all of them on public exhibition. As for the bone collections kept in museums, some are on display; most are merely saved in storehouses and can only be accessed for reasonable application. As for the bone collections kept in archeological, research and educational institutions, visitors can make contact with the institutes, and apply for inspection or usage of these bones based on scientific research, teaching and other non-commercial public purposes. For the benefit of conservation, research, inheritance and application, these bone collections have already been digitized and made rubbings with special methods. Many specialized bibliographic books and references of oracle bone inscriptions have been published. A special portal has been established to post newly research papers and forward academic information about oracle bone inscriptions since 2005. The website is <http://www.xianqin.org/>. Visitors can subscribe newly messages and get free review as easy as possible.

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#### 4.5 Copyright status

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Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining*

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*whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

Oracle bone inscriptions shall be owned by the state. They are respectively kept in 11 institutes, that are Institute of Archaeology Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of History Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China National Library, Beijing Palace Museum, Peking University Library, Tsinghua University Library, Shanghai Museum, Nanjing Museum, Shandong Provincial Museum, Lvshun Museum and Tianjin Museum. The copyright respectively belongs to their keeping institute.

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## **5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria**

### **5.1 Authenticity.**

*Is the documentary heritage what it appears to be? Have identity and provenance been reliably established?*

Oracle bone inscriptions were found in 1899 in Anyang, Henan, China. They were the valuable documents of late Shang dynasty, dating to more than 3000 years ago. About 150,000 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions have been found since 1899, and they are scattering in more than 100 institutes all over the world. Among the 11 collections nominated this time, only one collection was obtained by archeological exhumation. Other 10 collections were handed down from generations, among which, some were contributed by individual collectors, some were allocated by the nation, and some were bought from curio stores. The source origins and collecting processes of these oracle bone collections were clearly recorded, the procedure of collecting was conformed to standards, and the archival records are clear to access. Identification by experts shows that all these bone inscriptions are authentic and have multiple values for cultural relics, ancient documents, and historical study.

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### **5.2 World significance**

*Is the heritage unique and irreplaceable? Would its disappearance constitute and harmful impoverishment of the heritage of humanity? Has it created great impact over time and/or within a particular cultural area of the world? Has it had great influence (positive or negative) on the course of history?*

Oracle bone inscriptions are unique ancient Chinese writing materials dating from 3000 years ago. They were excavated from Yin Ruins in Anyang, Henan province. The inscriptions were mostly inscribed on tortoise shells and animal bones. They were mainly divination records and historic records of state events and royal families of later Shang dynasty. They were also the earliest systematical classical literatures of China. Oracle bone inscriptions, along with Dunhuang paper documents dating from South and North Dynasty to Tang and Song Dynasty, Western Region Bamboo strip documents dating from Han to Jin dynasty, and Archives of Ming and Qing dynasties kept in Imperial Cabinet Repository of Qing dynasty, were praised as the Four Great Discoveries of Archival Source in Modern Academic History from at the turn of the 20th century. They all had great and far-reaching effects on historical research. As the famous Chinese scholar Wang Guowei said, "Besides the traditional paper documents, we generation are lucky enough to have these new materials excavated from underground. Using these excavated materials, we are able to supplement the traditional paper documents, and to prove which part of these documents were real or false records. This double-evidence

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method, that is using simultaneously excavated materials and traditional paper documents to do historical research, can only be obtained by this time.” Comparing with the rare, discontinuous records provided by traditional paper documents, oracle bone inscriptions can provide us with richer and original records of Shang dynasty. They are the first-hand and credible materials to make research on ancient Chinese history and culture, and early Chinese states and society structures, which greatly cover the shortage of traditional paper documents.

Oracle bone inscriptions have irreplaceable values in ancient writing and classical literature heritage. They can be compared with the Clay tablets cuneiforms which were invented by Sumerian about 5,500 years ago and later were inherited by ancient Babylonia in Mesopotamia, the Ancient Egypt hieroglyphs of holy Papyrus which were inherited by monk cursive writings, the Mayan alphabets and the Indian seal characters used around B.C.2000, and were one of the five world classical ancient characters, one of the dazzling pearls in the treasure-house of world ancient cultures. Oracle bone inscriptions pushed the credible Chinese ancient history forward to 3000 years ago, and made the once lost Shang kingdom reappear into our eyes.

Since their discovery in 1899, the number of oracle bone inscriptions has been up to about 150,000 pieces. They were scattered all over the world. There are more than 90,000 pieces in China, and more than 30,000 pieces in Taiwan. 7,999 pieces in Japan. 7,407 pieces in Canada. 3,141 pieces in Britain. 1,860 pieces in USA. 851 pieces in Germany. 200 in Russia. 111 in Sweden. 69 in Switzerland. 59 in France. 28 in Singapore. 10 in Netherlands. 10 in New Zealand. 7 in Belgium. 7 in South Korean. These 14 countries totally have 21,758 pieces. Oracle bone inscriptions have aroused great interests of world scholars. In the past 110 years, about 3900 scholars from China, Japan, USA, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Russia, Hungary, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, etc., have made research on oracle bone inscriptions. Publications on this subject sums up to 16,000 species. Study on oracle bone inscriptions has become an international famous school.

But unfortunately, since their discovery, these oracle bones have been endangered by surface crushing and character wearing down, and so strengthened protection and research is urgently needed. Otherwise, human or natural factors may create time regret that “the time of excavating is the time of wracking”, which will bring great loss to the research of world civilization process and early states and social modes in North-East Asia region.

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### **5.3 Comparative criteria:**

***Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)***

#### **1 Time**

*Is the document evocative of its time (which may have been a time of crisis, or significant social or cultural change)? Does it represent a new discovery? Or is it the “first of its kind”?*

As early as Spring and Autumn period, Confucius had signed with deep emotion that the history of Shang dynasty dating from B.C.1600 to the middle of B.C.1100, “couldn’t be fully verified by ancient documents”. Apart from the shortage of historical materials, modern scholars’ suspicion on ancient history and the veracity of traditional paper documents also caused too much historical blanks and mysteries. The system of Ancient Chinese History based on traditional paper documents has been hedged around with many doubts. Oracle bone inscriptions were inscribed by late Shang people from 3000 years ago, dating from B.C.1300 to B.C.1046, from King Pangeng’ moving capital to Yin till King Di Xin’ reign, which period of time involved totally 8 generations, 12 kings and 273 years. These excavated ancient written documents

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recorded the human activities of late Shang dynasty within its Yin capital and its political territory in the middle and lower reaches of Yellow River, revealed the political, economical and cultural evolution process in the period of historical change from Shang declination to its perdition by Western Zhou people, and proved that the Shang dynasty which had been considered as legend for thousands of years was real history, and the Royal Genealogy of Shang dynasty recorded in Yin Ben Ji, Shi Ji(史记·殷本纪) by Chinese historian Sima Qian was true, not made-up. Through oracle bone inscriptions, we can truly understand the state and society system of Shang dynasty, and reconstruct the history of late Shang dynasty.

## **2 Place**

*Does the document contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture? For example, was the location itself an important influence on the events or phenomena represented by the document? Does it describe physical environments, cities or institutions that have since vanished?*

Oracle bone inscriptions were excavated from the late Shang capital Yin Ruins, which had long been vanished away from historical accounts. Oracle bone inscriptions were records of the natural environments, astronomical phenomena and climate atmosphere, species of animals and plants, natural resources, economic activities, man-land relationship and human activities of late Shang dynasty, in the region of Capital Yin and its surrounding areas from B.C.1400 to the middle of B.C.1100, which helps to solve the mystery of historical geography of Shang dynasty. The first finding of oracle bone inscriptions has aroused 15 excavations by Archaeology Group of the Research Institute of History and Language of the Central Academy from 1928 to 1937, and the excavations by Institute of Archaeology Chinese Academy of Social Sciences from 1950 till nowadays. These excavations not only presented us a long-lost Shang capital, but also promoted the birth and development of modern Chinese Archaeology. The important status of Yin Shang civilization in the world civilization was established as well. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006, in the 30<sup>th</sup> World Cultural Heritage Conference held in Vilnius Lithuania, Yin Ruins was elected into the Chronology of Recognition of World Heritages.

## **3 People**

*Does the cultural context of the document's creation reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development? Or does it capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression? Does it illustrate the lives of prominent individuals in the above fields?*

Oracle bone inscriptions were made by special groups of people in Yin Capital, including Shang Kings, noble ladies, royal family members, diviners, noblemen, sorcerers and local officials from different regions. They wrote down their mode of thinking, faith pursuit and daily activities by this special form of divination inscriptions or chronicle inscriptions inscribed on tortoise shells and animal bones. There were a large number of names recorded in divination inscriptions and chronicle inscriptions, such as names of persons, gods, ancestors, noble families, tribal chiefs, lords of regional states and diplomatic envoys, which filled in the vacancies of history books and proved that the Shang dynasty was not legendary but trustworthy historical

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record. Oracle bone inscriptions also makes it possible to study the mythical and legendary figures of Shang dynasty, to compose brief biography of Shang remote and near ancestors, of Shang kings and their consorts, and to reveal the characteristics of the imperial succession system and patriarchal family system reflected by linear and collateral ancestor lineages, the political background of royal affairs and official activities, persons' thoughts and emotional expressions in important events, the relationship between Shang kings and their feudal lords and vassal states, the responsibility of the bureaucracy and officials, the class structure of dignitaries, civilians and slaves in social life, the hierarchical relationship between managers of national economy and handicraft workers, the religious beliefs and thinking patterns of different ethnic groups, military attachés and military organizations in wars, the identity and social status of human sacrifices in funerals and sacrifices, and their relationship with the occupant of the tombs.

#### **4 Subject and theme**

*Does the subject matter of the document represent particular historical or intellectual developments in the natural, social and human sciences? Or in politics, ideology, sport or the arts?*

Oracle bone inscriptions were the products of divination culture. Noble persons in Yin capital of late Shang dynasty from B.C.1400 to B.C.1100 used tortoise shells and animal bones to make divination. After the divination, they inscribed the process and results on the bones. There were also some chronicle inscriptions. Divination inscriptions and chronicle inscriptions were the most direct and most important first-hand materials to make research on ancient Chinese characters and Shang history. The subjects of oracle bone inscriptions involved many aspects, such as natural ecology, astronomical phenomena, climatic disasters, hunting and farming, construction and official appointment, diplomacy and warfare, and the daily activities of noble class in the Yin Capital, such as the basic necessities of life, illness and death, marriage, dreams, emotion pursuits, religion, sacrificial worship, diet banquet, etc.. These excavated writing materials were best materials to study the early state and social development, cultural heritage and historical evolution. They were also the important materials to study the earliest structure of Chinese characters and the earliest form of Chinese language grammar, which had peculiar cultural values and important historical values.

Oracle bone inscriptions had many records about ancient weather phenomena, such as winds, frosts, rains and snows, floods and droughts, plague of insects, meteoric showers and even 5 times of eclipses happening about B.C.1200, which were important materials to study ancient climate and astronomy in China. There were records about wild animals and plants, as well as hunting wild elephants, which can be used to study the natural ecology and changes of geographical environments in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. In oracle bone inscriptions, a year was divided into two seasons, spring and autumn. Shang people used a unique lunisolar calendar, which was a combination of lunar calendar and solar calendar. The lunar calendar was used to number the month, and the solar calendar was used to number the year. There were 12 months in an average year and 13 months in a leap year. The leap month was put in the middle of a year or in the end of a year, to moderate the relationship between the solar year and the lunar month. The religious beliefs could be divided into three large systems, that were, the belief in top layer of God, the belief in middle layer of natural gods, and the belief in low layer of ghost world. The sacrificial ceremonies to ancestors and ancestress were most grand, and could be divided into four types, special sacrifice, temporary sacrifice, associated sacrifice and cycled sacrifice. There were nine types of main food crops, including millet, sorghum (sticky millet), glutinous millet, barley, Lai (wheat), rice, beans and Chinese sorghum. To pray for

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good harvests, Shang people practiced special sacrificial ceremonies to natural gods and ancestral gods, such as sacrificing the wind god to calming down the bad wind, sacrificing the rain god for stopping floods, or burning wizards to removing drought disasters, or eliminating locust plague.

The political boundary reflected by oracle bone inscriptions can generally divide into two parts: *Wang Ji District* 王畿区 and *Districts of Hou, Dian and Fang Guo* 侯甸方国区. Accordingly, the official system can be divided into two parts: Inner Administration Officers and Outer State Officers. Shang king was the supreme ruler, after him the highest imperial officials, and then the bureaucratic group who were responsible to provide consultations for the king and deal with relevant routine work. The diviner group provided references for the king on religious decisions, and influenced political decisions by spiritual powers. There were more than 700 local ethics or regional organizations, which were led and controlled by patriarchs, through which we could analyze the class stratification, government structure and form of state management in Shang dynasty. There was a “Wu Xing” system (five-penalty system) of Mo 墨 (branding the face), Yi 劓 (cutting off the nose), Er 刖 (cutting off the ears), Yue 剕 (cutting off the foots) and Zhuo 劓 (cutting off the genitals) reflected by oracle bone inscriptions. There were more than 160 regional states around Shang boundary, some of which were friends, some were enemies, and some were alternatively friends and enemies. There were plenty records of military conquering and political engagement in oracle bone inscriptions. The armed force constituting system can be divided into three parts: the royal army in *Wang Ji District*, the regional armies in *Districts of Hou, Dian and Fang Guo*, and the nonpermanent army constituted by army and farming integration principle.

There were plenty names of buildings in oracle bone inscriptions. The architectures of social institutions were the combination of residence, worship and administration. Palaces and animal farms supplemented to each other, which was the beginning of later combination of royal palaces and imperial gardens.

There were more than 50 kinds of diseases reflected by oracle bone inscriptions. Classified by modern medicine branches, these diseases could be divided into medical department, surgical department, department of stomatology, dental department, ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology, division of respiratory disease, gastroenterology department, ophthalmology department, orthopedics department, brain department, neurology department, oncology department, pediatrics department, gynecology department, department of infectious diseases, etc.. Besides, there were also records concerning the treatment of diseases, medication, acupuncture, etc..

There were more than 20 kinds of musical instruments recorded in oracle bone inscriptions, more than 10 types of sacrificial music, and different sorts of martial dances and civil dances. There were divisions between Duo Wan 多万 and abundant dancing officials. All these aspects manifested the developed state of musical instruments, music and dance in Shang dynasty.

Otherwise, through oracle bone inscriptions, it's credible to reconstruct the long-vanished Shang royal family structure, their succession system, marriage system, family and relatives, system of patriarchal clans and ancestral temples, the relationship between kingship and religious authority, the diviner officials and divination system, land ownership and socioeconomic structure, transportation and so on.

## 5 Form and style

*Does the document have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value? Or is it a typical exemplar of a type of presentation, custom or medium? Is it an example of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format?*

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The noble people in Yin Capital usually made divinations to predict the feasibility of daily activities or the fortunes and misfortunes. The flat scapula bones of cattle, abdominal parts of tortoise shells and sometimes mollusk shells were used for divination. Before divination, shells and bones should be prepared at first. The process of preparing bones were as follows: slicing 削, sawing 锯, cutting 切, filing 错, shaving 刮, grinding 磨, perforating 穿孔, and then drilling 钻 and chiseling 凿. The prepared shells and bones could be used for divination. Fires were put in the drilled holes and then cracks appeared on the opposite side. By analyzing the cracks and their unique directions the priests interpreted the holy answers as positive or negative. After that, characters in certain form or structure would be inscribed around cracks to record the divination matters and verifications. Sometimes, the surface of the bone or the characters on them would be smeared with red or black paints. Used bones would be stored in a certain manner or be buried together. All these processes were managed by special persons. Special research had been made to verify the types of pigments smeared on bones and characters. The red pigment was proved to be the mineral pigment cinnabar (mercuric sulfide) , and the black pigment was proved to be the plant-derived pigment carbon ink. Two American scholars had published papers on this issue. Please note A. A. Benedetti-Pichler: *Microchemical Analysis of Pigments Used in the Fossae of the Incisions of Chinese Oracle Bones (Industrial and Engineering Chemistry Analytical, Vol.ix, no.3, 1937)*, and Roswell S. Britton: *Oracle-Bone Color Pigments (Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies vol.ii, no.1, 1937)*.

The form or structure of oracle bone inscriptions is called *wenli* 文例, which refers in particular to the form and arrangement of lines when inscribing characters on the bone, and the features of character inscribing style. There were mainly four patterns of inscriptions: firstly, paired divination of positive and negative inquiries, different inquiries on one issue and repeated inquiries on one issue; secondly, the system of *xibu* 习卜, that is to make inquiries following previous events; thirdly, the system of *buyong sangu* 卜用三骨, that is to use three bones for one inquiry; fourthly, simultaneously using grass divination and bone divination for inquiry and cross-references. There was also an organizational system of official diviners, that is the *sanbu*-system 三卜制(three-diviner system) of *yuanbu* 元卜, *zuobu* 左卜 and *youbu* 右卜.

Oracle bone scripts were a form of ideographical writing, which had close relationship with modern Chinese characters and were the prototype of modern Chinese characters. The six Chinese Character-building principles *liushu* 六书, which consisted of *xiangxing* 象形(Pictogram of form), *zhishi* 指事 (Pictogram of action or state), *huiyi* 会意(suggestive compounds), *xingsheng* 形声(combination of meaning and sound), *zhuanzhu* 转注(mutual explanatory characters,) and *jiajie* 假借(phonetic loan characters), had already existed in the oracle bone scripts. Oracle bone scripts were inherited by *Jinwen* 金文(bronze scripts), *Zhou characters* 籀文 and *Dazhuan* 大篆(great seal scripts) of Zhou and Qin dynasties, going through *Xiaozhuan* 小篆(small seal scripts), *Lishu* 隶书(clerical scripts) and *Zhangcao* 章草(cursive clerical scripts) of Qin and Han dynasties, to *Kaishu* 楷书(standard scripts), *Xingshu* 行书(semi-cursive scripts) and *Caoshu* 草书(cursive scripts) since Jin and Tang dynasties. The whole process displayed the unique charm of the lineal succession of Chinese characters through the ages, and oracle bone scripts were the only surviving ancient character system in the world.

Oracle bone inscriptions can be divided into five periods according to the characteristics of scripts. The large scripts in the first period were neat, with bold and vigorous strokes, and full of power and grandeur, while the small scripts in the first period were beautiful and elegant. The scripts in the second period were neat, dignified, gentle, solemn and quite. The scripts in the third period were dispirited and careless. The scripts in the fourth period were crude and steep. The scripts in the fifth period were regular and serious, the

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large scripts sublime and bold, the small scripts smooth and refined. The formative art of oracle bone scripts had some virtues of Chinese calligraphy, such as high starting point, corresponding with standards and having variations, which heralded and generated the aftertime calligraphy, and were the origin and pioneer of Chinese calligraphy. The inscribing technique, graphic structure and arrangement style, which were the three most important factors of oracle bone script calligraphy, showed a precocious characteristic, and directly and indirectly influenced the aftertime calligraphy. Oracle bone scripts reflected the aesthetic principles of being peaceful and discreet, the common mentality of balance between weak and strong power and ordered rhythms of Chinese people, which had a profound influence on Chinese society and culture.

The language of oracle bone inscriptions was the origin of Chinese language. The graphic structure and the grammatical structure of modern Chinese language were derived from that of oracle bone inscriptions. There were about 4400 individual scripts in oracle bone inscriptions. About 2400 individual scripts can be recognized, read or identified, of which about 1400 can correspond with modern Chinese characters, and other 2000, which were mainly names of persons, places or sacrifices, haven't yet been recognized or read, but the meaning and the part of speech can be figured out according to their context. Oracle bone inscriptions show that early in Shang dynasty, Chinese language had a strong and mature system of language, vocabulary, sentence and grammar. The nouns, pronouns, verbs, prepositions, numerals, and some quantifiers, adverbs, conjunctions, auxiliary words, adjectives, adverbs, modal particles and interrogatives, had already existed in oracle bone inscriptions. Oracle bone inscriptions had a systematic phonetic system, and were the important origin of the branch of Sino-Tibetan languages. The discovery of oracle bone inscriptions makes it achievable to intensively study the blurred early characteristics of original form of Chinese linguistics and Chinese grammar.

#### **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:**

*Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or revered for its association with significant people and events?*

*(Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/ spiritual/ community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance.)*

Oracle bone inscriptions are the common historical and cultural heritage of mankind, bearing fertile scientific, historic and artistic values. They are information banks marking the long history of Eastern Asia, and provide valuable scientific evidences for modern people to reestablish the ancient history of Eastern Asia. Yinxu archeology in Anyang region, which has been aroused by the discovery of oracle bone inscriptions, makes a long-sleeping ancient kingdom reappear into our eyes after more than 3000 years. The culture of this ancient kingdom has continued into our generation, taken a new look, shown a far-reaching influence on modern life, and aspired the pride, self-esteem and confidence of modern Chinese people. As the original source of Chinese characters, oracle bone inscriptions have gradually walked from the mysterious academic hall into the civil society along with the popularization of the knowledge on them. The calligraphy of oracle bone characters also opens a new window for traditional Chinese calligraphy, and becomes an important aspect of the spiritual heritages under people's attention, guardian and inheritance.

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## 6.0 Contextual information

### 6.1 Rarity

Oracle bone inscriptions were mainly inscribed or written on tortoise shells and cattle scapulas, with a small portion on cattle ribs, cattle taluses, pig scapulas, deer skulls, buffalo bones, tiger bones, elephant scapulas, human skulls or other bones. They were mostly inscribed by bronze gravers or jade gravers, and only 80 pieces were written by brush with red or black ink. The biological features of the bones and the instinct characteristics of the original inscribing style, made it possible that oracle bone inscriptions were buried underground for 3000 years but not corrupted or disappeared, and reappeared after 3000 years. Undoubtedly, each piece was most valuable, and was the unique remains of ancient culture. Oracle bone inscriptions were the oldest systemic sources of ancient Chinese characters and ancient Chinese language, and were the oldest Chinese written documents, and were the most direct and most valuable first-hand historical materials to make research on the history of Shang dynasty, and could give an irreplaceable promotion on the research of archaeology, paleography, ancient Chinese language, and ancient history of sciences and technology.

### 6.2 Integrity

Oracle bone inscriptions were ancient documents inscribed on tortoise shells and animal bones. Most of them were records of divination. Complete tortoise shells had different sizes. The size of tortoise shell was the sign of rank, power and status. Shang kings usually used large-sized tortoises tribute by various places, while ordinary noblemen used small-sized tortoises from the adjacent areas of Anyang. The largest ventral shell was 44cm long, 35cm wide, and had 204 holes on the back (see Heji14659). In 1943, Wu Xianwen 伍献文 verified that this tortoise was the same specie of the type now in Malaya, according to the book Catalogue of Tortoises written by British scholar Gray and kept in British Museum. In 1978, American scholar Mr. James F. Berry made a research on this bone and verified that it belonged to the specie *Geochylene* (Testude) *Emys* now living in Burma and Indonesia. The ordinary tortoises were 27-34cm long. The first longest inscription inscribed on one complete tortoise shell was Heji974(《合集》974), with 404 characters and 71 pieces of inscriptions on both sides, belonging to the first period King Wuding time. The second longest inscription was one tortoise shell kept in Lvshun Museum, with 270 characters and 32 pieces of inscriptions, belonging to the fifth period. The sizes of cattle scapulas were different as well. The largest one was Heji33747(《合集》33747), kept in Beijing National Library. It was a right shoulder blade, 42cm long, 24cm wide, with 218 characters and 36 pieces of inscriptions on both sides, belonging to the fourth period Wuyi and Wending period. Smaller ones were about 32cm long and 18cm wide. The size of cattle scapulas was related with the age, height and specie of cattle. The scapulas of yellow cattle were long and narrow, while the ones of buffaloes were wide and large. The scapula inscribed with the most characters was Heji27042(《合集》27042), with 376 characters, 42 pieces of inscriptions, belonging to the third period King Kangding period.

Of the oracle bone inscriptions obtained from scientific excavation, Some were unearthed by bulk from intentionally buried pits. Bones unearthed from different pits belonged to different groups or periods, which could be used to do periodization and identify if they were king's inscriptions or non-king's

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inscriptions.

The complete form of a piece of oracle bone inscription includes four parts: “preface” xuci, 叙辞, “charge” mingci, 命辞, prognostication zhanci, 占辞 and “verification” yanci, 验辞. A preface records the date of the divination and the name of the diviner. A charge records the subject matter, which is the main part of the inscription. A prognostication records the forecast of “lucky” or “unlucky” according to the cracks on the bone, which is the result of divination. A verification records what had actually happened. Most divinations only had the preface and the charge. Most oracle bones were excavated in fragments, and were endangered with damage and pulverization in the process of spreading and collecting. Fortunately, broken inscriptions could be complemented according to buci tongwenlib 卜辞同文例 (similar wording or language structures of different pieces of inscriptions), and so their meanings could be figured out completely.

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