

Old Chinese as an Inflectional Language: With Evidence from the Personal Pronoun System¹

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Abstract

This paper reviews the nature of Old Chinese (OC) by exploring the morpho-syntactic feature of the personal pronoun system. It carried out a statistic analysis of the frequency of 吾, 我, 予, 余, 朕, 印, 台; 爾, 汝; 彼, 其, 之 being used as person pronouns. The findings reveal that 吾 never appears in an accusative position; 予 never appears in a genitive position; An order of preference as regards case function of 我 runs from nominative, to accusative, genitive, down to dative. 其 conveys an accusative or a genitive, but never denotes a nominative. 之 denotes a generic third person or non-person and often marries up with 吾. This might suffice to draw the conclusion that OC was probably an inflectional language in the pre-Qin period.

Keywords: Old Chinese, Inflectional language, Personal pronoun system

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1. Introduction

Among the world civilisation system, Chinese is one of the few languages that have continued uninterruptedly from ancient times to the modern era. The language, throughout its long history, has, however, undergone a long-term evolution. From the warring states period (551 BC to 479 BC) till the unification of Qin (221 BC), it consisted of a monosyllabic root, to which affixes were attached (Sagart 1999), and postpositions were often seen. Later, during the unification under the Qin and Han dynasties, the standard language and philosophical theories were established; linguistic diversity gradually declined. Since the Han Dynasty, a transformation towards disyllabic word roots occurred, with nominal compounds, verb compounds and particle compounds emerging. Serial verb construction eventually appeared in the Late Han Dynasty. Modern Chinese is deemed to be an isolating language because tense, aspect, voice and modality are conveyed via particles or by word order. Apart from lexicon, phonetics and phonology transitions, the personal pronoun system has also come a long way from the ancient era. An immediate example that springs to mind is 吾 ‘I, we’, which appeared in Late Zhou. It is subjective and is often used as a singular, first person pronoun. Apart from 吾, 我 wǒ, 予 yǔ, 余 yú, 朕² zhèn, 台 tá, 印 yìn are also employed to indicate the first person. Additionally, there are a few humbles, i.e. 妾 qiè, 奴才 nú-cai, 臣 chén, 老朽 lǎo-xiǔ, 奴家 nú-jiā, 杂家 zá-jiā. The co-existence of such diverse first person pronouns during the same period needs further attention. They cannot be brought about by distinct dialects. A possible explanation might come from the differing case functions that each pronoun bears. The following illustration is taken from Mencius, whereby 吾 wu ‘I, we’ indicates genitive, whilst 我 wo ‘I’ denotes accusative.

(1) 願 夫 子 輔 吾 志, 明 以 教 我³.

Yuan fuzi fu **wu** zhi ming yi jiao **wo**

Wish Master, assist **my.GEN** intention clearly to teach **me.ACC**

‘I wish you, my Master, to assist my intentions; teach me clearly.’

(Mencius)

The distinction of case functions between 吾 wu ‘I, we’ and 我 wo ‘I’ is further detected in Mo Zi, a representative work of Mohism, c.f. (2).

(2) 吾 知 子 之 所 以 距 我, 吾 不 言.

Wu zhi zi zhi suo yi ju **wo**, **wu** bu yan

I.NOM know you. HON GEN means to defense **me.ACC** **I.NOM** NEG say

² It has been acknowledged that 朕 zhèn was a dialect of the south, denoting a first person pronoun. After the unification of the Qin Empire (221BC), it came to be used by the emperor only. This paper only tackles 朕 being used as a first person pronoun.

³ In the illustrations, the first line is original Chinese, the second line is ‘pinyin’ for the characters, i.e. the pronunciation; the third line is English gloss and the fourth line is English translation.

‘I know how you would defense me, but I won’t say.’

(Mo Zi)

In (2), 吾 is in the nominative position while 我 is in accusative. These are preliminary illustrations that inspire us to investigate the personal pronoun system of Old Chinese (OC) in more depth.

The nature of OC has attracted the attention of many domestic and overseas linguists. One figure who has contributed a great deal to the historical study of Chinese has been Bernhard Karlgren, whose reconstruction of the language of the Qieyun rhyme dictionary of A.D. (1915–26) led to the discovery of the relations between morphology and syntax in OC. One of Karlgren’s influential proposals is that Chinese is an inflectional language. This view is challenged by Graham (1973), who rejected the analogy of the Indo-European case system after exploring the evolution of the Chinese pronoun system. Other remarkable works in this field are Chou Fakao (1961, *Historical Grammar of Ancient Chinese*), Wang Li (1989, *A History of the Chinese Language*) and Lu Zhiwei (1957 *The Formation of Chinese*). Most domestic linguists acknowledge the existence of first and second person pronouns; however, regarding the third person pronoun, views vary. One group considers that a third person pronoun does exist in OC. This view is advanced by Chou (1961), Ma (1898), Wang (1958). A different view was provided by Gao (1948), Lü (1942), who argue that OC does not have a real third person pronoun. A third position is held by Yao (2010), who proposes that a third person pronoun does exist in OC, but that it is distinct from that in Modern Chinese. This paper carries out a statistic analysis of the frequency of 彼, 其, 之 being employed as a third person pronoun, in an effort to reach a better answer to the question of whether a third person pronoun does exist in OC.

The personal pronoun system is only a small part of the Chinese language, but it could reflect an important issue, i.e. OC might originally have been an inflectional language. This paper revises the nature of OC by exploring the morpho-syntactic feature of the personal pronoun system in OC. It particularly sheds light on: the first person pronoun: 吾, 我, 予, 余, 朕, 印, 台; the second person pronoun: 爾, 汝; and the third person pronoun: 彼, 其, 之. Furthermore, the vocabulary of Chinese has undergone a long-term grammaticalisation, e.g. 其 qí in early inscriptions was used as a modal predicate, meaning ‘might, will, probably, likely’. In Odes (1100BC–AD600), it was employed for conveying the third person, singular. This inspires us to ponder whether it is possible to trace the development of the relevant modal verbs or nouns, to see how they started to be considered as person pronouns.

We wanted to enquire into whether OC is an inflectional language. A thorough frequency analysis could provide clearer insights into the preference as regards case function of person pronouns. The data are predominantly drawn from the corpus, the Chinese Text Project (<http://ctext.org/>). The scope of investigation is confined to the period 1300 BC to the first few centuries AD; 10 works in total are targeted, which include three types of sources: (i) six various thoughts: 儒家 Confucian (論語 Analects [772BC – 221BC], 孟子 Mencius [475BC – 221BC], 荀子 Xun Zi [475BC – 221BC]); 墨家 Mohism (墨子 Mo Zi [772BC – 221BC]); 道家 Taoism (莊子 Zhuang Zi [475BC – AD9]); 法家 Legalism (管子 Guan Zi

[475BC – AD220]); 兵家 military strategy (孫子兵法 *Military Science of Sun Zi* [515BC–512BC]); (ii) two documents: 尚書 (*Shang Shu: The Classic of History* [772BC – 476BC]), 周易 (*The Book of Change* [1046BC – 771BC]); and (iii) one poem: 詩經 *Odes* (1046BC – 771BC).

The paper is organised as follows: Section 1 gives a brief introduction to the personal pronoun family in OC and draws on previous work that has tackled the same issue in the past. Sections 2, 3, and 4 are devoted to case functions that each first person, second person and third person pronoun conveys. Moreover, it searches for trends in the transition from nouns to person pronouns. Section 5 highlights the results and concludes the paper.

2. First Person Pronouns

This section begins by considering 我 and whether it habitually appears in a certain case position.

2.1 ‘我’

我 was first detected in Oracle. Its official appearance should be the Shang dynasty. Moreover, 我 in OC is pronounced [ŋai].

2.1.1 我 as nominative

A common option of 我 is to appear in the nominative. The following illustration derives from the Analects: 我 appears in the subject position.

(3) 爾 愛 其 羊, 我 愛 其 禮

er ai qi yang, **wo** ai qi li

you like PARTgoat **I.NOM** like PART ceremony

‘You like goats; I like ceremony.’

(Analects)

This function is further detected in Guan Zi, a representative work of legalism, as illustrated in (4):

(4) 民 惡 貧 賤, 我 富 貴 之.

Min wu pin jian, **wo** fu gui zhi

People dislike poorness base **I.NOM** enrich honour them.ACC

‘If people dislike poorness, I shall make them rich.’

(Guan Zi)

Moreover, as nominative, 我 is likely to correspond to the second person pronoun 爾. This perhaps has to do with the close phonetic relation of the two, i.e. 我 and 爾 share the same

tail vowel: 我 [ai]; 爾 [ei].

2.1.2 我 as Accusative

The following illustration is from *Odes*: 我 appears in an accusative position:

(5) 既 見 君子, 不 我 遐棄.

Ji jian junzi bu wo xiaqi

already see lord NEG **me.ACC** cast

‘I have seen my lord; He has not cast me away.’

(*Odes*)

In (5), the object 我 comes first, followed by the negation word 不; the transitive verb comes at the end. In *Odes*, 我, as nominative, appears about 178 times.

This function is further seen outside *Odes*. In *Zhuang Zi*, a representative work of Taoism, 68 instances are detected.

(6) 魏 王 貽 我 大 瓠 之 種.

Wei wang yi wo da hu zhi zhong

Wei King present **me.ACC** big calabash GEN seed

‘The king of Wei sent me some seeds of a large calabash.’

(*Zhuang Zi*)

2.1.3 我 as Genitive

The following illustration is taken from *Analects*: 我 is in the genitive.

(7) 三 人 行, 必 有 我 師 焉

san ren xing, bi you wo shi yan

three person walk must there be **my.GEN** teacher EXCL

‘When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers.’

(*Analects*)

In *Odes*, 我 appears in the genitive 45 times.

(8) 薄 污 我 私, 薄 澣 我 衣.

Bo wu wo si bo huan wo yi

PREF clean my underwear PREF rinse **my.GEN** robes

‘I will wash my private clothes clean, and I will rinse my robes.’

(Odes)

It is also detected in Mo Zi, as in (9).

(9) 虎 食 我 夫, 今 虎 食 我 子...

Hu shi wo fu, jin hu shi wo zi

Tiger eat my husband now tiger eat my child

‘The tiger ate my husband, and now it ate my child...’

(Mencius)

2.1.4 我 as Dative

我 may also appear in the dative. This use is not as frequent as the accusative and genitive, but it can be detected in all selected pre-Qin works. In a verbal clause, 我 follows prepositions 於, 為 and forms [VP + PREP + 我].

(10) 孟 孫 問 孝 於 我

Meng-sun wen xiao **yu** **wo**

Meng-sun ask filial piety to **me.DAT**

‘Meng-sun asked me what filial piety was.’

(Analects)

(11) 善 為 我 辭 焉

shan wei **wo** ci yan

politely for **me.DAT** decline EXCL

‘Decline (the offer) for me politely.’

(Analects)

Table 1 summarises the frequency of 我 in nominative, accusative, genitive and dative case positions in pre-Qin period works.

Table 1. The frequency of 我 appearing in different case positions⁴

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	37	12	1	12
孟子 Mencius	Warring State	68	31	22	28
詩經 Odes	Zhou	133	178	202	24
周易 Book of Changes	Spring and Autumn	7	10	0	1
尚書 The Classic of History	Spring and Autumn	156	68	76	11
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	65	30	1	9
孫子兵法 Military Science of Sun Zi	Spring and Autumn	16	3	0	2
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	187	68	0	16
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	186	49	4	8
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	88	46	0	12

吾

In OC, 吾 is pronounced [ŋaŋ]. It means ‘one’, like ‘man’ in German. It is not detected in Odes. It emerged much later than 我 did, probably during the Later Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century to 771 BC). In the Book of Changes, 吾 has only one type, two tokens. The extensive employment of 吾 took place in the Late Spring and Autumn to Warring State period, as confirmed by an analysis of Zhuang Zi (398 instances), Guan Zi (171 instances).

⁴ The nominative of 我 includes the situation whereby 我 appears in an object clause, e.g. 雖曰我得之，失之矣。

More importantly, after the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317 – AD 420), the oral use of 吾 declines, but it remains an important pronoun in literary Chinese. The complete loss of 吾, as Wang (1958) assumes, probably happened in the Middle Chinese period.

2.2.1 吾 as Nominative

In Analects, the nominative use of 吾 occurs frequently.

(12) 吾 十有五 而 志 于 學.

wu shi you wu er zhi yu xue

I.NOM fifteen CONJ mind on learning

‘At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning.’

(Analects)

It should be noted that 吾 never appears in the accusative case position. The role of the accusative is taken by 我.

(13) 今者 吾 喪 我.

Jinzhe wu sang wo

Now I.NOM lost me.ACC. REFL

‘I had just now lost myself.’

(Zhuang Zi)

The illustrations of 吾 in the accusative position are probably due to incorrect copying by the descendants.

2.2.2 吾 as Genitive

In the Spring and Autumn period, the genitive function of 吾 had yet to develop, as confirmed by the zero instances in Odes and the Book of Change. In the Warring period, 吾 starts to denote genitive, as seen in Xun Zi, Mencius, Zhuang Zi, Mo Zi, Guan Zi. The following data is drawn from Military Science of Sun Zi, which uses 吾 in the genitive:

(14) 將 聽 吾 計, 用 之 必 勝.

Jiang ting wu ji, yong zhi bi sheng

General hearken my.GEN counsel act on it.PRON.ACC must.ADV conquer

‘The general that hearkens to my counsel and acts upon it, will conquer.’

(Military Science of Sun Zi)

At this stage, it is appropriate to suggest that the nominative use of 吾 appeared first;

its genitive is derived from nominative, at least about 300 years later, but is rarely used. Table 2 provides a summary of the case function of 吾.

Table 2. The frequency of 吾 appearing in different case positions⁵

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	109	0	2	1
孟子 Mencius	Warring State	76	0	19	0
詩經 Odes	Zhou	0	0	0	0
周易 Book of Changes	Spring and Autumn	2	0	0	0
尚書 The Classic of History	Spring and Autumn	1	0	1	0
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	65	0	14	0
孫子兵法 Military Science of Sun Zi	Spring and Autumn	27	0	4	0
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	398	1	31	0
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	159	2	48	0
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	171	1	63	0

It seems that 吾, in the nominative, occurs more frequently than 我. However, 我 covers a wider case function, which causes it to finally replace 吾 in Modern Chinese.

⁵ The accusative tokens found in Zhuang Zi, Mo Zi and Guan Zi are probably due to the incorrect copy by the descendants.

2.3 予

予 is not frequently used in OC. We detected 23 instances in Analects, 44 instances in Mencius, and 70 instances in Zhuang Zi. Hong (1996) points out that 予 and 余 are self-abasing first person pronouns. An exploration of the distinction between the two is necessary. We shall return to this point very shortly. But first, we take a look at 予's case functions.

2.3.1 予 in the Nominative

In our database, 予 is mostly used in the nominative. (15) provides an illustration.

(15) 予 無 所 用 天 下 為。

Yu wu suo yong tianxia wei

I.NOM NEG have benefit country do

'I will have nothing to do with the throne.'

(Zhuang Zi)

2.3.2 予 in the Accusative

In Odes, 予 is extensively employed in the accusative.

(16) 訊 予 不 顧， 顛 倒 思 予。

Xun yu bu gu, diandao si yu

admonish I.NOM NEG care overthrown think of **me.ACC**.

'I admonish him, but he will not regard me; when he is overthrown, he will think of me.'

(Odes)

In (16), the first 予 is in the nominative position but is inverted, i.e. it appears after the verb 訊. The second 予 plays an accusative role.

The following data present a further picture, illustrating that 予 is an indirect object of the verb 授.

(17) 堯 授 舜， 舜 授 予⁶。

Yao shou Shun, Shun shou yu

Yao give Shun, Shun give **me.ACC**

'He gave his sovereignty to Shun, and Shun gave his to me.'

⁶ It should be noted that in Modern Chinese, 授 and 予 has formed a compound verb '授予', meaning 'award'. We consider this is due to the full lexicalisation that occurred after Han Dynasty. A diachronic investigation to 授予 is necessary. But in this paper, we shall not tackle it further.

(Zhuang Zi)

This function, i.e. the dative benefic semantic role, occurs with a very high frequency and comes to resemble modern German. Moreover, it is also found in other person pronouns, which will be introduced shortly.

2.3.3 予 in the Dative

予 can also be in the dative, although this is rare. A typical example is (18):

(18) 乃 今 得 之, 為 予 大 用.

Nai jin de zhi, wei **yu** da yong

And now have it for **me. DAT** great use

‘Now I have learned it, it has been of the greatest use to me.’

(Zhuang Zi)

It seems almost impossible for 予 to appear in the genitive. We found one token in *the Classic of History*: 非予罪, 時惟天命 ‘(Your present non-employment) is no fault of mine – it is by the decree of Heaven’. The frequency of 予 appearing in the nominative, accusative and dative cases are given in Table 3:

Table 3. The frequency of 予 appearing in different case positions

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	22	4	2	7
孟子 Mencius	Warring State	34	3	0	5
詩經 Odes	Zhou	88	40	0	1
周易 Book of Changes	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
尚書 The Classic of History	Spring and Autumn	131	36	1	6
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	4	4	0	1
孫子兵法	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0

<i>Military Science of Sun Zi</i>	Autumn				
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	65	10	0	9
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	13	12	0	0
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	2	21	3	10

Moreover, a closer look at the combination of personal pronouns reveals that 予 tends to correspond to the second person pronoun 爾, as in (19).

(19) 予 惟 率 肆 矜 爾.

Yu wei shuai si jin er

LNOM only follow and pity you

‘I thereby follow (the ancient example), and have pity on you.’

(The Classic of History)

2.4 余 yú

It seems that 余 is not a favoured first person pronoun during the pre-Qin period. In Mencius, 余 is found only carrying out an accusative function.

(20) 洚水 警 余.

Hong shui jing **yu**

Flood warn **me.ACC**

‘The waters in their wild course warned me.’

(Mencius)

Some scholar argues that 余 can switch to 予 freely. This does not seem to be the case. 余 is more frequently used in inscriptions during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, whilst 予 is more likely to appear in official documents. The complete decline of 余 and 予 is assumed to be after the Six Dynasties (AD 229 – AD 589). A summary of 余’s case function in pre-Qin works is given in Table 4.

Table 4. The frequency of 余 appearing in different case positions

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	0	0	0	0
孟子 Mencius	Warring State	0	1	0	0
詩經 Odes	Zhou	1	0	0	0
周易 Book of Changes	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
尚書 The Classic of History	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	0	0	0	0
孫子兵法 Military Science of Sun Zi	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	6	3	0	0
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	1	0	0	0
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	0	0	0	0

First person pronouns also include 朕 zhen, 印 yin, 台 tai. 朕 only existed during the period from the Zhou Dynasty to the middle of Warring State period; 印 and 台 are only detected during the Zhou Dynasty. In *the Classic of History* and *Odes*, 朕, 印 and 台 appear about 61 times, six times and five times, respectively. Moreover, 臣 chen, 妾 qie, 臣妾 chen-qie, 妾身 qie-shen, 奴家 nu-jia, 咱家 za-jia, 哀家 ai-jia are used orally, referring to a person who is talking at the time or to a scribe.

2.5 Summary

This section has highlighted the case functions of the most frequently-used first person

pronouns. The results can be summarised as follows.

(a) Phonetically, 我 and 吾 share a same consonant, i.e. 我 [ŋai]; 吾 [ŋaŋ]. On this basis, Chinese linguist Wang (1958) suggests that the two are a homologous pair.

(b) Syntactically, 吾 never appears in the accusative position; 予 never appears in the genitive position. But the two often appear in the nominative. 我, by contrast, is relatively flexible: it is detected in four case positions. However, an order is seen in regard to how frequently each position appears, i.e. running from nominative (most frequent), to accusative, genitive, down to dative (least frequent). 我 and 吾, both as first person pronouns, differ from each other in that 吾 only refers to oneself (the utterer), has no relation to others (the hearer). As a result, it only bears nominative and genitive case function (c.f. Section 2.1.1 and 2.1.3); whilst 我, used as a first person pronoun, is often relative to other person pronouns (Zhao 四书笺义). This might explain the frequent appearance of 我 in the dative position (c.f. Section 2.1.4). The pronouns, along with their salient functions, are given in Table 5.

Table 5. First person pronouns, along with their salient function

First person pronoun	Salient function
我	Nominative, accusative and genitive
吾	Nominative
予	Nominative and accusative
余	Nominative and accusative

(c) Semantically, in terms of subjectivity, 吾 seems to be mostly characterised as objective, while 我 is inter-subjective. 予/余 are most subjective among all the first person pronouns, but they are often involved in emotions, as confirmed by the extensive use in poetry, e.g. *Odes*: 非余心之所急 ‘(This) is not what I am hurrying for’.

(d) In addition, a closer look at the combination of first person pronouns and second person pronouns reveals that 吾 must correspond to 若⁷, as phonetically they share the same tail vowel, i.e. 吾[a], 若[ak]. 予 is likely to marry up with 爾. Table 6 summarises the correspondence between first and second person pronouns.

⁷ Note that 若 in *Mo Zi 13* (772BC – 221BC), is grammaticalised and used as a preposition, corresponding to English ‘than’, as illustrated in ‘莫若我多’.

Table 6. Correspondence between first and second person pronouns⁸

	我	吾	予
爾	△	△	○
汝 (女)	○	○	△
若	×	○	×

3. Second Person Pronoun

Having painted a picture of the first person pronoun, this section moves on to the second person pronoun. Since the central point of this paper is how the personal pronoun system may reflect the nature of OC, it is appropriate to take an overall look at the second person pronoun family. According to Chinese historical linguists Hu and Zhang (2010), the second person pronoun presents the following picture.

- (i) In the Shang Dynasty, 汝 and 乃 denote the second person singular; 尔 indicates the second person plural.
- (ii) In the West Zhou Dynasty, 汝, 乃, 尔, 若 indicate the singular and plural; 而, 戎 convey the singular.
- (iii) In the Spring and Autumn period, 汝, 尔 indicate the singular as well as the plural, 乃 and 而 convey the singular.
- (iv) In the Warring State period, 汝, 若, 尔 indicate the singular as well as the plural, 乃 and 而 convey the singular.
- (v) From the Qin Dynasty to the Early Han Dynasty: 汝, 若 indicate singular and plural; 尔, 乃 and 而 convey the singular.

3.1 汝(女)

女 was originally a noun, meaning ‘woman’, as confirmed by the large number of instances in Odes (1046BC – 771BC). In Odes, 汝 is not found. 汝 is not found in Zhou Yi, another work written in 1046BC – 771BC, either. Moreover, in Analects (772BC – 221BC), 汝 is not detected. The character 汝, first appeared around 600 BC⁹, indicating a river’s name. In the Classic of History (772BC – 476BC), 汝, as a second person pronoun, is detected 157 times.

⁸ ○: match very well; △: possible but not frequently; ×: cannot match.

⁹ This is confirmed in Mo Zi 7: 南為江、漢、淮、汝, 東流之 (‘In the south he completed the Yangtze, Han, Huai, and Ru Rivers. These ran eastward’).

Moreover, in the Classic of History, 女 is used as a meaningful noun. This might suggest that 汝 appeared later than 女, by about 255 years. (22) provides an illustration of 女 in which it is used as a meaningful noun.

(22) 窈窕 淑 女, 君子 好 逑.

Yao tiao shu nv jun zi hao qiu

Pretty slender pure lady gentlemen like pursue

‘Gentlemen like to pursue pretty and slender ladies.’

(Odes)

It should be further noted that 女 in the West Zhou Dynasty was half grammaticalised, as confirmed by its simultaneous use as a meaningful noun and second person pronoun in the *Odes*.

(23) 女 as meaningful noun

女 子 善 懷.

Nv zi shan huai

Women HON thoughts have

‘I might, as a woman, have many thoughts.’

(Odes)

(24) 女 as 2nd personal pronoun

有 女 佻 離.

You nv pi li

There be women part leave

‘There is a woman forced to leave (her husband).’

(Odes)

It was not until the Mencius Period (475 BC- 221 BC) that 汝 first appeared (only three instance). However, this time, the grammaticalisation was not yet complete, as confirmed by the co-existence of a meaningful noun and second person pronoun. That is, the grammaticalisation of 女 lasts about a half century, but is not yet complete. About 297 years later, in the Analects Period, the bi-usage of noun and personal pronoun started to break down. Gramaticalisation is finally complete, with 女 indicating the second person pronoun.

This is confirmed in Mencius and Xun Zi (475BC – 221BC), where 女 no longer indicates a second person pronoun, but conveys ‘female’. 汝 completely replaces 女. Moreover, in *the Military Science of Sun Zi* (515BC – 512BC), written in the Spring period, 女 only indicates female but 汝 has not appeared. In Zhuang Zi (475 BC – AD 9) as well as Guan Zi (475 BC – AD 220), 女 only indicates female, with 汝 indicating the second person pronoun. In early times, it seems that 汝 only indicated the nominative and accusative. Its genitive function developed quite late, perhaps during the Han Dynasty, as confirmed in Zhuang Zi, where the genitive use is found 18 times.

The development of 汝’s function can be described as follows.

(25) Nominative use → accusative use → dative use → genitive use

At this stage, we might assume that 女, being a meaningful noun as well as a second person pronoun, starts as far back as the West Zhou period and continues into the Spring period. It is during the Warring period that 女 is degrammaticalised and only has the meaning ‘woman’. Meanwhile, 汝 appeared to denote the second person pronoun. The transition of 女 is described as follows.

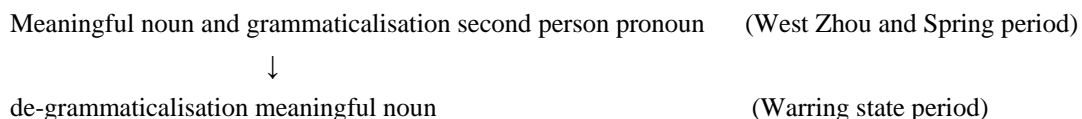


Figure 1. The trend of 女

From the database, we notice that 汝(女) is not as extensively employed as 爾 in the pre-Qin periods: its use is limited to the nominative and quite a few instances of the accusative function. This might explain why 爾 lasts into Modern Chinese whilst 女 disappears as early as the Warring States period and 汝 disappears in Middle Chinese.

With the grammatical development of 汝 explained, the following sections proceed to look into its case function.

3.1.1 汝(女) as Nominative

First of all, 汝(女) may occur in the nominative.

(26) 女 為 君子 儒。
 Nv wei junzi ru

You.NOM become superior man scholar

‘You become a scholar after the style of the superior man?’

(Analects)

This function is also detected in Zhuang Zi.

(27) 汝 知 之 乎?

Ru zhi zhi hu

You.NOM understand PRON EXCL

‘How should you understand it?’

(Zhuang Zi)

3.1.2 汝(女) as Accusative

汝 is rarely found in the accusative position. In Mo Zi, we only found two instances.

(28) 予... 必 使 汝 堪 之.

Yu.. bi shi ru kan zhi

We ...surely let you.ACC. destroy him

‘We will surely send you and let you destroy him.’

(Mo Zi)

3.1.3 汝(女) as Dative Benefit Semantic Role

In the following illustration, 汝 is an indirect object of the verb 資. We refer to this usage as the dative benefit semantic role. It somewhat resembles Modern German and seems to be a quite favoured use of second person pronouns in OC. We shall return to it in Section 3.2.4.

(29) 堯 何以 資 汝?

Yao he yi zi **ru**

Yao how to award **you.ACC**

‘What benefit have you received from Yao?’

(Zhuang Zi)

In addition, 女 may refer to a woman in general, as seen in *Odes*, e.g. 士與女 (ladies and gentlemen), appearing for four times; or bride, wife, e.g. 維虺維蛇, 女子之祥(‘The cobras and [other] serpents, Are the auspicious intimations of daughters’).

A summary of 汝(女)’s case function in pre-Qin works is given in Table 7.

Table 7. The frequency of 汝(女) appearing in different case positions

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	10	2	0	3

孟子 Mencius	Warring State	2	0	1	0
詩經 <i>Odes</i>	Zhou	20	12	0	7
周易 <i>Book of Changes</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
尚書 <i>The Classic of History</i>	Spring and Autumn	106	42	0	9
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	7	3	0	0
孫子兵法 <i>Military Science of Sun Zi</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	37	18	18	16
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	0	0	0	3
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	0	0	0	1

It is further observed that 女 prefers to correspond to a first person pronoun 予. An illustration comes from the Analects.

(30) 維 予 與 女.

Wei yu yu nv

only you.NOM and I.NOM

‘There are only I and you.’

(Analects)

In Guan Zi, we found 汝 appearing with 吾 and 若 once, e.g. 吾不欲與汝及若.

3.2 ‘爾’

爾 is perhaps the oldest second person pronoun. It is extensively employed in the nominative, dative and genitive. The data have shown that 爾 seldom corresponds to 我 (only one instance in our database, i.e. 往迎爾相, 成我宗事); it is seen more frequently paired with

予.

3.2.1 爾 as Nominative

Nominative use may not have the largest applicability of all functions, but it is an important role of 爾. A typical example would be (31).

(31) 爾 愛 其 羊, 我 愛 其 禮

er ai qi yang, wo ai qi li

you.NOM like that goat I.NOM like that ceremony

‘You like goats; I like ceremony.’

(Analects)

3.2.2 爾 as Accusative

The following illustration displays a subject-object-verb word order, whereby 爾 is in the accusative position, and the transitive verb 思 ‘think of’ comes at the end.

(32) 豈 不 爾 思?

Qi bu er si

How NEG you.ACC think

‘Do I not think of you?’

(Analects)

3.2.3 爾 as Genitive

The genitive function is largely observed.

(33) 由 射 於 百 步 之 外 也, 其 至, 爾 力 也

You shoot PREP hundred pace PART out EXCL, that reach, your.GEN strength EXCL

As shoot PREP hundred pace PART out EXCL, that reach, your.GEN strength EXCL

其 中, 非 爾 力 也.

qi zhong, fei er li ye

that hit NEG your.GEN strength EXCL

‘As in the case of shooting at a mark a hundred paces distant. That you reach it is owing to your strength, but that you hit the mark is not owing to your strength.’

(Mencius)

3.2.4 爾 in Dative Benefic Semantic Role

In the following illustration, 爾 fulfills a dative benefic semantic role. We categorise this function under the dative group.

(34) 宁 爾 也

ning er ye

Peace **you.DAT** EXCL

‘It is for the sake of giving you peace.’

(Mencius)

3.2.5 爾 As Dative

In the following illustrations, 爾 appears after the prepositions 及 and 與.

(35) 及 爾 偕 老.

Ji er xie lao

With **you.DAT** grow old

‘I was to grow old with you.’

(Odes)

This use is also found in Analects.

(36) 來! 予 與 爾 言.

Lai, yu yu er yan

Come, I.NOM with **you.DAT** speak

‘Come, let me speak with you.’

(Analects)

A significant distinction between 爾 and 汝 lies in the fact that 爾 is often seen in a contrastive sentence, e.g. 爾愛其羊, 我愛其禮. We summarise the frequency with which 爾 appears in different case positions in Table 8.

Table 8. The frequency of 爾 appearing in different case positions

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	11	2	1	4
孟子 Mencius	Warring State	9	2	2	3
詩經 Odes	Zhou	17	64	89	7
周易 Book of Changes	Spring and Autumn	0	2	1	2
尚書 The Classic of History	Spring and Autumn	97	22	64	5
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	0	3	3	0
孫子兵法 Military Science of Sun Zi	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	3	0	3	0
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	1	0	5	0
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	0	0	1	5

The salient function of the second person pronouns discussed so far are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9. Second person pronouns, along with their salient function

Second person pronoun	Salient function
爾	Genitive and accusative

女	Nominative
汝	Nominative and accusative

4. Third Person Pronouns

This section turns to third person pronouns. The discussion starts from 彼. Before getting started, it is worthwhile briefly touching upon the grammaticalisation process of 彼. In the Zhou Dynasty, 彼 was a non-proximal demonstrative, as confirmed in *Odes* and the *Change of Book* (1046 BC – 771BC). This original function continues into the Spring period. Essentially, 彼 may indicate singular, e.g. 彼有取爾也 ‘What is to be approved in that expression is simply this’ (Analects), as well as plural, e.g. 如枉道而從彼 ‘If I were to bend my principles and follow those princes’ (Analects). The function of the third personal pronoun in Analects is detected once only. In Mencius, the pronoun use occurs about 37 times, mostly indicating nominative. This suffices to show that 彼 starts getting grammaticalised in the Later Spring period. In *the Military Science of Sun Zi* (515 BC–512BC), the use of the personal pronoun is not detected yet. In *the Classic of History*, 彼 appears four times: twice as a non-proximal demonstrative, and the rest as third person pronoun uses, i.e. one for singular, genitive and one for plural, nominative. It is important to note that by the time of the Warring States period, 彼 has not been fully grammaticalised, as in Zhuang Zi we find it only used as demonstrative, both singular and plural. No use of a personal pronoun is detected at all. Given this, we can assume that it was in 475 BC or later (the Warring State period) that 彼 started to become a person pronoun, with the non-proximal demonstrative function declining. We must bear in mind that 彼, when used as a third person pronoun, can indicate both singular and plural.

4.1 彼

4.1.1 彼 as Nominative

Most of the instances reflect the nominative function, as exemplified by (37).

(37) 若 彼 知 之， 乃 是 離 之。

Ruo **bi** zhi zhi, nai shi li zhi

If **them.NOM** know it, then surely leave it

‘If they knew (that they were returning to their root), they would be (consciously) leaving it.’

(Zhuang Zi)

4.1.2 彼 as Accusative

The accusative use of 彼 is very rare: only once in Analects, seven times in Mencius, twice in Xun Zi, 10 times in Mo Zi, and 11 times in Guan Zi. An illustration is given in (38):

(38) 我 丈夫 也, 吾 何 畏 彼 哉?

Wo zhangfu ye, wu he wei **bi** zai

I. NOM man EXCL I why afraid of **them PART**

‘I am a man. Why should I stand in awe of them?’

(Mencius)

Intriguingly, in (38), the first person pronouns 我 and 吾 appear together as nominative. This inspires us to ponder how the two are distinguished from each other. A possible explanation might be as follows: 我 tends to emphasise the utterer, involving an emotion, denoting ‘a special I’, c.f. (38: 我丈夫也 ‘I am a man!’). Further evidence comes from the extensive use of 我 in *Odes*, i.e. 133 instances as nominative, 178 instances as accusative, 202 instances as genitive and 24 instances as dative. On the other hand, 吾 is not employed in *Odes* at all. Incorporating this, we can possibly draw a conclusion here: 我 is subjective whilst 吾 seems objective.

4.1.3 彼 as Genitive

彼 occasionally is employed as genitive, as in (39).

(39) 載 來 見 彼 王.

Zai lai jian **bi** wang

Drive come see **his.GEN** Majesty

‘They came to see his Majesty.’

(Mo Zi)

It is essential to note that 彼, as a third person pronoun, never appears in a dative position. A summary of 彼’s case function in pre-Qin works is given in Table 10.

Table 10. The frequency of 彼 appearing in different case positions

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	0	1	0	0

孟子 Mencius	Warring State	21	7	2	0
詩經 <i>Odes</i>	Zhou	0	0	0	0
周易 <i>Book of Changes</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
尚書 <i>The Classic of History</i>	Spring and Autumn	1	0	1	0
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	66	2	4	0
孫子兵法 <i>Military Science of Sun Zi</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	0	0	0
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	0	0	0	0
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	25	10	2	0
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	45	11	4	0

Perhaps it is appropriate to mention that in Modern Japanese 彼 is also a third person pronoun, indicating masculine singular. The reason for this may be found 1200 years ago. Before the development of the purely phonetic script ‘hiragana’ (in the late 800s AD), the Japanese language employed Chinese characters to represent, on paper, vernacular Japanese. Japan does not have as many as ethnicities as China does and thus the language, as well as its culture (including Confucian thought), seems to have been well-preserved until today.

4.2 其

其 has a variety of faces, i.e. it can be a verb, a pronoun, an adverb, a demonstrative and a particle. This paper only focuses on its use as a third person pronoun. As a pronoun, it may convey an accusative or a genitive, but never denotes a nominative. More importantly, the demonstrative and pronoun functions co-exist in the pre-Qin period. Furthermore, 其 can indicate both singular and plural. In the following sections, the discussion focuses on the pronoun function of 其.

4.2.1 其 as Genitive

When indicating a third person pronoun, 其 is mostly employed in the genitive position. An

illustration is given in (40).

(40) 以 其 兄 之 子 妻 之。

Yi qi xiong zhi zi qi zhi

PREP **his.GEN** elder brother GEN daughter wife. TRAN him.ACC

‘(He) gave him the daughter of his own elder brother to wife.’

(Analects)

4.2.3 其 as Accusative

An accusative use of 其 is exemplified by (41).

(41) 愛 之 欲 其 生， 惡 之 欲 其 死。

Ai zhi yu qi sheng, wu zhi yu qi si

Love man wish **him.ACC** live hate man wish **him.ACC** die

‘You love a man and wish him to live; you hate him and wish him to die.’

(Analects)

其, as a personal pronoun, may also indicate a non-person. We may contend that third person pronouns in OC do not make a distinction between non-person and person orientations. The following illustration is taken from Analects, where 其 is employed to indicate a third non-person.

(42) 驥 不 稱 其 力， 稱 其 德 也。

Ji bu cheng qi li, cheng qi de ye

Horse NEG call **its.GEN** strength, call **its.GEN** quality EXCL

‘A horse is called a Ji, not because of its strength, but because of its other good qualities.’

(Analects)

The mix functions of third person and non-person of 其 declined in Modern Chinese. 其 nowadays only conveys third person singular. While 它 ta ‘it’, is employed as a third person non-personal pronoun. The case function of 其 is summarised in Table 11.

Table 11. The frequency of 其 appearing in different case positions¹⁰

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
		ve	e		

¹⁰ The counting includes singular and plural.

論語 <i>Analects</i>	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	0	5	78	0
孟子 <i>Mencius</i>	Warring State	0	7	67	0
詩經 <i>Odes</i>	Zhou	0	13	134	2
周易 <i>Book of Changes</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	9	61	0
尚書 <i>The Classic of History</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	4	34	0
荀子 <i>Xun Zi</i>	Warring State	0	6	65	0
孫子兵法 <i>Military Science of Sun Zi</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	15	44	0
莊子 <i>Zhuang Zi</i>	Warring State	0	4	56	0
墨子 <i>Mo Zi</i>	Warring State	0	12	113	0
管子 <i>Guan Zi</i>	Warring State	0	14	156	0

4.3 之

Another important third person pronoun in OC is 之 *zhi*, which is the most preferred pronoun. It is rather reflective, as it may be both a singular and plural third person pronoun. Apart from a person, it can further convey a non-person, such as things, time, or place.

4.3.1 之 as Accusative

之 as accusative has two variations: [Verb + 之] and [Verb + 之 + COMP¹¹]. The two variations are illustrated in (43).

- (43) a. 學 而 時 習 之, 不 亦 說 乎?
 Xue er shi xi **zhi**, bu yi yue hu

¹¹ COMP: complement

Learn and constant revise **it.ACC**, NEG also pleasant EXCL

‘Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?’

(Analects)

b. 使 之 居 於 王 所.

Shi **zhi** ju yu wang suo

Make **him.ACC** live POST King place

‘You have got him placed in attendance on the king.’

(Mencius)

In (43), the noun 居 is a causative verb, meaning ‘place somebody’ and the object 之 comes before the it. It should also be noted that in OC, postpositions are mostly employed, which resembles Modern Japanese. On the other hand, Modern Chinese prefers prepositions.

4.3.2 之 as Genitive

之 is further extensively employed as genitive.

(44) 箕 子 為 之 奴.

Ji zi wei **zhi** nu

Ji Viscount be **Zhou.GEN** slave

‘The Viscount of Ji became a slave to Zhou.’

(Analects)

之 here does not explicitly refer to whom, but from the context, we can find the extra information is Zhou.

4.3.3 之 as Dative

The following illustration presents the [PREP + 之 + Verb] pattern.

(45) 孔 子 與 之 坐 而 問 焉.

Kongzi yu **zhi** zuo er wen yan

Confucius with **him.DAT** sit and question EXCL

‘Confucius sat with him, and questioned him.’

(Analects)

A summary of 之’s case function is given in Table 12.

Table 12. The frequency of 之 appearing in different case positions

Resource	Period	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
論語 Analects	Spring and Autumn – Warring State	0	213	76	37
孟子 Mencius	Warring State	0	548	404	56
詩經 <i>Odes</i>	Zhou	0	571	374	5
周易 <i>Book of Changes</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	243	234	4
尚書 <i>The Classic of History</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	86	81	5
荀子 Xun Zi	Warring State	0	814	869	140
孫子兵法 <i>Military Science of Sun Zi</i>	Spring and Autumn	0	99	92	10
莊子 Zhuang Zi	Warring State	0	1060	1040	57
墨子 Mo Zi	Warring State	0	825	1171	10
管子 Guan Zi	Warring State	0	1221	1546	55

彼 emphasises the individuality of a third person, therefore it tends to correspond to 我, which also emphasises the first person. On the other hand, 之 denotes a generic third person or non-person and often marries up with 吾. Table 13 summarises third person pronouns, along with their salient functions, and correspondences with first person pronouns.

Table 13. Third person pronouns, along with their salient functions

First person pronoun	Salient function	Correspondence with first person pronouns
彼	Nominative	我
其/厥	Genitive	Unknown
之	Accusative	吾
伊/渠	Dative	Unknown

4.4 Other Third Person Pronouns

There is another third person pronoun, i.e. 厥. It is rarely employed and only appears once in *the Classic of History* and *Odes*. 厥 only indicates genitive, plural. An illustration is given in (46).

(46) 羲和廢厥職，酒荒于厥邑。

Xi He fei jue zhi, jiu huang yu jie yi

Xi He neglect their duty, drink abandon POST their city

‘(At this time) the Xi and He had neglected the duties of their office, and were abandoned to drink in their (private) cities.’

(The Classic of History)

厥 is considered a variant Chinese character of 其, although it is often used for the plural.

It is worthy of mention that in the Late Han Dynasty, another three third person pronouns emerged: namely, 他 ta, 渠 qu, 伊 yi. 他 actually arose in OC. But it was a demonstrator, not a personal pronoun, c.f. 王顾左右而言他: ‘The king looked to the right and left, and spoke of other matters’ (Mencius). It was in Middle Chinese that 他 began to indicate person. In the Late Northern and Southern Dynasties, the grammaticalisation of 他 was almost completed. During the Tang Dynasty, 他 is fully grammaticalised and all functions that 彼, 其, 之 have converged, e.g. 還它馬, 赦汝死罪. ‘If you give him back his horse, I shall remit your death punishment.’ (Book of the Later Han). 渠 qu appeared in Middle Chinese, and was originally a third person pronoun, e.g. 女婿昨來, 必是渠所竊. ‘How did the son-in-law get this? He must steal it from others.’ (Records of the Three Kingdoms).

5. Summary

This paper has reviewed the nature of OC by exploring the morpho-syntactic feature of the personal pronoun system in OC. It carried out a statistic analysis of the frequency of 吾, 我, 予, 余, 朕, 印, 台; 爾, 汝; 彼, 其, 之 being used as person pronouns. The findings reveal that 吾 never appears in an accusative position; 予 never appears in a genitive position; but the two often appear in the nominative. 我, by contrast, is relatively reflexible: it is detected in four case positions. But an order of preference as regards case function is seen, i.e. running from nominative, to accusative, genitive, down to dative. 爾 and 汝 are distinct from each other in that 爾 is more likely to appear in contrastive sentences. 其, as a pronoun, may convey an accusative or a genitive, but never denotes a nominative. Another third person pronoun 厥 is considered a variant Chinese character of 其, but only indicates genitive, plural. 彼 emphasises the individuality of a third person, therefore it tends to correspond to 我, which also emphasises the first person. On the other hand, 之 denotes a generic third person or non-person and often marries up with 吾. Tables 14-22 provide a summary of first, second and third person pronouns in different case positions¹².

Table 14. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Analects

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
First person pronoun				
我	60%	19%	2%	19%
吾	97%	0	2%	1%
余	0	0	0	0
予	63%	11%	6%	20%
Second person pronoun				
爾	61%	11%	6%	22%

¹² The percentages in the table are rounded to the nearest integer.

汝	67%	13%	0	20%
Third person pronoun				
彼	0	100%	0	0
其	0	6%	94%	0
之	0	65%	23%	11%

Table 15. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Mencius

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Fist person pronoun				
我	46%	21%	15%	19%
吾	80%	0	20%	0
余	0	100%	0	0
予	81%	7%	0	12%
Second person pronoun				
爾	56%	13%	13%	19%
汝	67%	0	33%	0
Third person pronoun				

彼	70%	23%	7%	0
其	0	9%	91%	0
之	0	54%	40%	6%

Table 16. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Odes

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Fist person pronoun				
我	25%	33%	38%	4%
吾	0	0	0	0
余	100%	0	0	0
予	63%	29%	0	1%
Second person pronoun				
爾	10%	36%	50%	4%
汝	51%	31%	0	18%
Third person pronoun				
彼	0	0	0	0

其	0	9%	90%	1%
之	0	60%	39%	1%

Table 17. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Book of Changes

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Fist person pronoun				
我	39%	56%	0	5%
吾	100%	0	0	0
余	0	0	0	0
予	0	0	0	0
Second person pronoun				
爾	0	40%	20%	40%
汝	0	0	0	0
Third person pronoun				
彼	0	0	0	0
其	0	13%	87%	0

之	0	51%	49%	0
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Table 18. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: The Classic of History

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
First person pronoun				
我	50%	22%	24%	4%
吾	50%	0	50%	0
余	0	0	0	0
予	75%	21%	1%	3%
Second person pronoun				
爾	52%	12%	34%	3%
汝	67%	27%	0	6%
Third person pronoun				
彼	50%	0	50%	0
其	0	11%	89%	0
之	0	50%	47%	3%

Table 19. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Xun Zi

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
First person pronoun				
我	62%	29%	1%	8%
吾	82%	0	18%	0
余	0	0	0	0
予	44%	44%	0	1%
Second person pronoun				
爾	0	50%	50%	0
汝	70%	30%	0	0
Third person pronoun				
彼	92%	3%	5%	0
其	0	8%	92%	0
之	0	45%	48%	7%

Table 20. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Military Science of Sun Zi

Person	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
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pronoun				
Fist person pronoun				
我	76%	14%	0	10%
吾	87%	0	13%	0
余	0	0	0	0
予	0	0	0	0
Second person pronoun				
爾	0	0	0	0
汝	0	0	0	0
Third person pronoun				
彼	0	0	0	0
其	0	25%	75%	0
之	0	49%	46%	5%

Table 21. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Zhuang Zi

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Fist person pronoun				

我	69%	25%	0	6%
吾	93%	0	7%	0
余	67%	33%	0	0
予	77%	12%	0	11%
Second person pronoun				
爾	50%	0	50%	0
汝	42%	20%	20%	18%
Third person pronoun				
彼	0	0	0	0
其	0	7%	93%	0
之	0	49%	48%	3%

Table 22. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Mo Zi

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Fist person pronoun				
我	75%	20%	2%	3%

吾	76%	1%	23%	0
余	100%	0	0	0
予	52%	48%	0	0
Second person pronoun				
爾	17%	0	83%	0
汝	0	0	0	100%
Third person pronoun				
彼	68%	27%	5	0
其	0	10%	90%	0
之	0	41%	58%	0

Table 23. A summary of person pronouns in different case positions: Guan Zi

Person pronoun	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Fist person pronoun				
我	60%	32%	0	8%
吾	73%	0	27%	0

余	0	0	0	0
予	6%	58%	8%	28%
Second person pronoun				
爾	0	0	17%	83%
汝	0	0	0	100%
Third person pronoun				
彼	75%	18%	7%	0
其	0	8%	92%	0
之	0	43%	55%	2%

A summary of salient case functions of the most frequently-used first, second and third person pronouns is given below¹³.

我: NOM > ACC > GEN > DAT

吾: NOM > GEN ACC: ×; DAT: ×

余: NOM; ACC GEN: ×; DAT: ×

予: NOM > ACC GEN: almost ×; DAT: almost ×

爾: NOM > GEN > ACC > DAT

汝: NOM > ACC > DAT GEN: ×

彼: NOM; GEN > ACC DAT: ×

其: GEN > ACC NOM: ×; DAT: ×

¹³ NOM: nominative, ACC: accusative, GEN: genitive, DAT: dative. >: The former is more salient than the latter.

之: ACC; GEN

NOM: ×;

DAT: almost ×

Pulling these diverse case functions of person pronouns together, we cannot but contend that OC was probably an inflectional language.

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Glosses

ACC	accusative
ADV	adverb
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
EXCL	exclamation
GER	gerund
NEG	negative
NOM	nominative
PASS	passive
PART	particle
PLUR	plural
POST	postposition
PREF	prefix
PREP	preposition
PRON	pronoun
REFL	reflexive
TRAN	transitive

Corpus

論語	<i>Analects</i> [772BC – 221BC]
孟子	<i>Mencius</i> [475BC – 221BC]
荀子	<i>Xun Zi</i> [475BC – 221BC]
墨子	<i>Mohism</i> [772BC – 221BC]
莊子	<i>Zhuang Zi</i> [475BC - AD9]
管子	<i>Guan Zi</i> [475BC – AD220]
孫子兵法	<i>Military Science of Sun Zi</i> [515BC-512BC]
尚書	<i>The Classic of History</i> [772BC – 476BC]

周易 *The Book of Change* [1046BC – 771BC]

詩經 *Odes* [515BC-512BC]

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Dictionaries

康熙字典 kāng xī Dictionary

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