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# 万象中国

# CHINA BOUQUET

## 第二册

## Book 2

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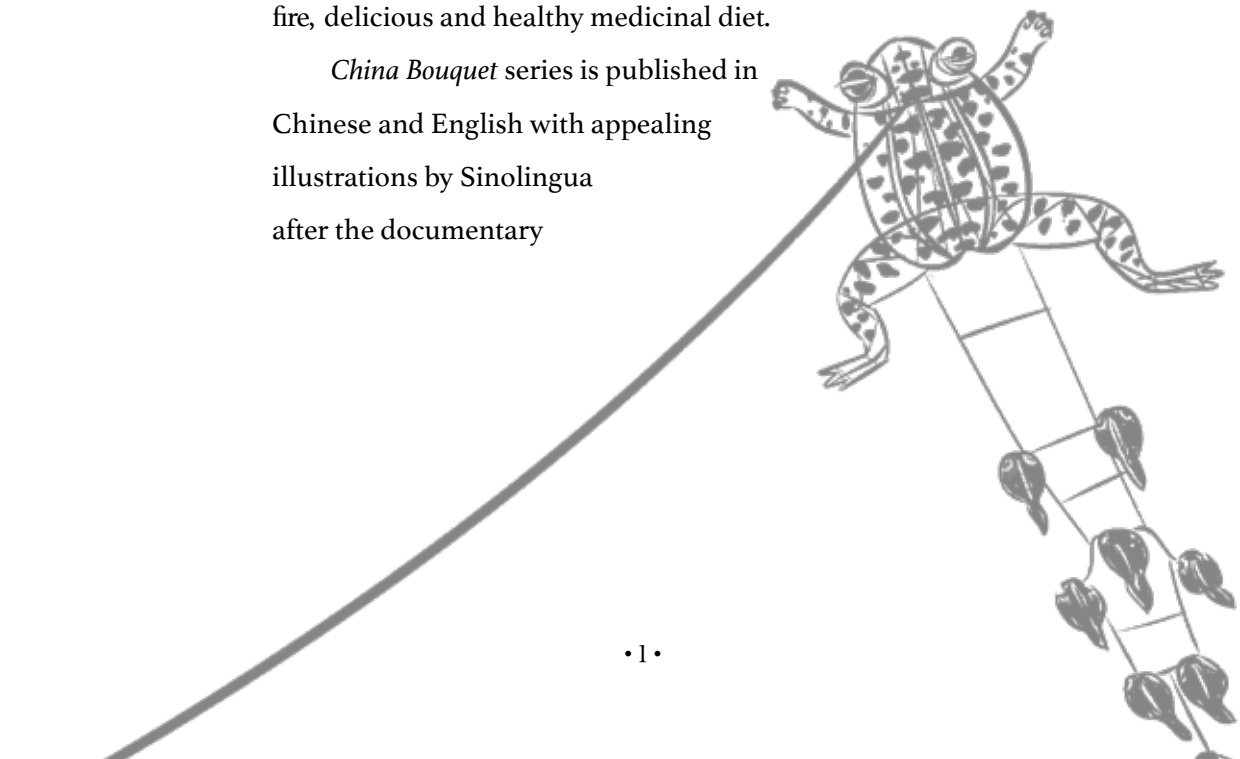
# Preface

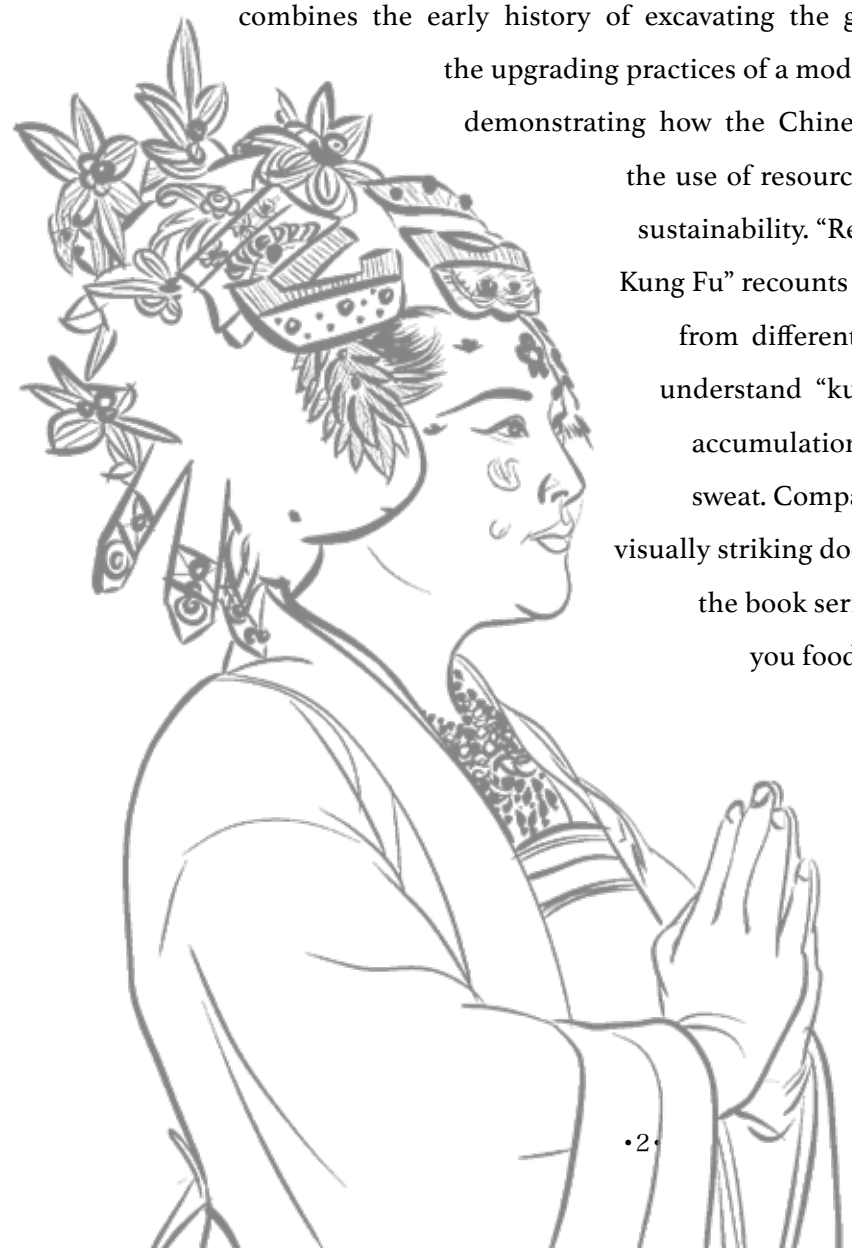
Culture, a key to enlightening one's mind, is crucial in promoting the exchanges between people worldwide. The short documentary series entitled *China Bouquet*, filmed by art.china.cn, an affiliate of china.org.cn, is a compilation of a multitude of short stories with a focus on Chinese culture. It presents the common but typical experiences of people from all walks of life to international readers.

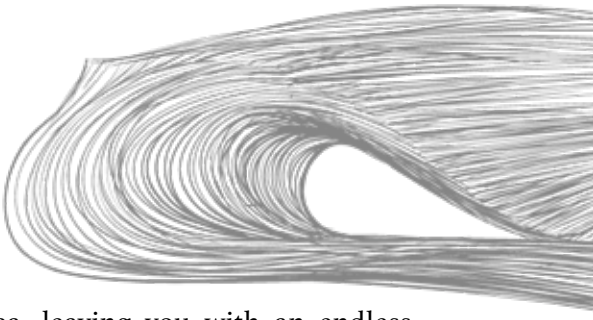
*China Bouquet* is the epitome of Chinese culture, encompassing history, scenery, and culinary flavors and personages in their respective fields, such as the Liangzhu Cultural Ruins dating back over 5,000 years ago, quadrangle courtyard houses, China's tea drinks, purple clay pots favored by global tea drinkers, resurgent traditional makeup, mysterious women's scripts, the cooking method with a perfect blend of water and fire, delicious and healthy medicinal diet.

*China Bouquet* series is published in Chinese and English with appealing illustrations by Sinolingua after the documentary



is offered online. The book series delves into Chinese values, cultural sense, and ethics behind each story. For example, "The Oldest Scent in China" depicts how Chinese people rely on natural forces to brew Yellow Rice Wine with dexterity. "Mega Rice Paper" shows how workers did their utmost to produce an 11-meter-long and 3.3-meter-wide "Mega Rice Paper". "New Scenes at Yungang" combines the early history of excavating the grottoes with the upgrading practices of a modern city, fully demonstrating how the Chinese maximize the use of resources to achieve sustainability. "Redefinition of Kung Fu" recounts how workers from different walks of life understand "kung fu"— the accumulation of time and sweat. Compared with the visually striking documentaries, the book series will bring you food for thought,





as if you were savoring green tea, leaving you with an endless aftertaste.

The series encompasses various stories, ranging from history to contemporary Chinese people's lives, through which the audiences can appreciate the unique aesthetics, philosophical thought, and ethics among Chinese to better understand Chinese people's code of conduct and life principles. Thanks to the effort of Sinolingua, the audiences can read the stories while watching the documentaries by scanning the QR code at the end of each story. This will enable international friends to know about China via one more type of media.

Xu Bocheng, Editor-in-Chief of art.china.cn from china.org.cn,
Chief Director of the Documentary *China Bouquet*
May 26, 2024

# 前言

文化如同一把开启心灵的钥匙，在世界各国人民交往过程中发挥着重要的作用。由中国网艺术中国拍摄的系列微纪录片“万象中国”聚焦中国文化，撷取具有代表性的元素，以小观大，通过一个个短小生动的故事向外国朋友介绍中国的各行各业，人生百态。

从5000年前的良渚遗址到今天仍烟火气十足的四合院，从中国人独特的饮茶品味到深受全球茶友喜爱的紫砂壶，从再度流行的传统妆容到一直神秘流传的女书，从巧妙调和了水与火的烹饪方式到既美味又有保健功效的药膳……“万象中国”系列纪录片从历史、风物、风味、人物等多个方面为观众呈现了一场中国文化的音画盛宴。

“万象中国”纪录片播出后，它的同名系列书由华语教学出版社以中英对照、图文并茂的形式出版。纸质图书重在发掘每一个故事背后中国人的价值观、文化内涵和精神品质。例如：《酒中深味》讲述中国人巧妙利用自然之力酿造黄酒的过程；《超级宣纸》讲述中国造纸工匠精益求精复原制作“三丈三超级宣纸”技艺的场景；《云冈新景观》将石窟开凿之初与今天城市更新的故事进行串联，体现中国人“物尽其用”的可持续发展思想；《功夫之道》则讲述了来自不同行业的劳动者对“功夫”的理解——时间与汗水的积累。相较于具有强烈视觉冲击效果的纪录片，纸质图书呈现出的是令人

回味无穷的另一种传播效果，犹如一壶淡雅飘香的绿茶，清新、绵长。

“万象中国”将视角从历史深处回归当下中国人的日常生活，用讲故事的方式娓娓道来，观众和读者可以从中品味出中国人独特的审美情趣、哲学思想和道德观念，进而理解中国人的行为方式和处事原则。感谢华语教学出版社将传统出版与微纪录片巧妙融合，让读者在阅读的同时，还可以扫描每个故事结尾处的二维码收看该期微纪录片，让世界各国的朋友增加一个多媒介了解中国的窗口。

中国网艺术中国主编、纪录片“万象中国”总导演　许柏成

2024.5.26

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# Women's Mysterious Script

Women have used the Women's Four-Character Classics to teach girls how to be intelligent and behave well. Women's songs have reverberated across the mountains in Jiangyong County, Jiangzhou City, Hunan Province, brimming with various emotions for hundreds of years. Their lyrics are inscribed on folding fans, handkerchiefs, and waistbands with a special type of script. It is quite astonishing that this script is exclusive to women. What secrets hide in this script?

In Jiangyong's history, there was a practice where young girls would find friends of similar ages to bond as sisters, known as *laotong*. They exchanged messages in *Nüshu*, akin to how good friends today might exchange diaries. When they married, their friends would sing *Nüshu* ballads. In the film *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, the characters Lily and Snow Flower, portrayed by Chinese actress Li Bingbing and South Korean actress Gianna Jun, respectively, are a pair of sworn sisters, also called *laotong*, during the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911). Their intertwined

destinies and mutual attachment can be seen as a representation of that historical period.

*Nüshu* was like a holy book for women, passed from mother to daughter and sister to sister. However, when a woman passed away, her writings would be burned, resulting in few documents being handed down through the generations. The earliest evidence of *Nüshu* is a bronze coin dating back to the period of the Taiping Movement (1851-1864), a peasant uprising in southern China. Inscribed on the back of this coin were the words "all the women in the world are sisters" in *Nüshu*, a script that represented the social ideal of progressive women at that time. Zhao Liming, a 76-year-old expert specializing in *Nüshu* and a professor in the Chinese Department at Tsinghua University, has devoted her lifetime to studying it. She deduced that the reason why the coin from that time was inscribed with *Nüshu* scripts was that some women who used *Nüshu* joined the force of the Taiping Movement as it passed through Hunan Province and proceeded to Nanjing.

Jiangyong is located on the border between Hunan and Guangxi, a small and remote town hidden in the mountains. Due to its harsh

living conditions, in ancient times, the central government limited its involvement to setting up official agencies to manage affairs or exiling ministers. Since Jiangyong was far from the central government's location, this provided ideal conditions for the birth of *Nüshu*.

Jiangyong is where the Yao ethnic group is concentrated. This ethnic group in Jiangyong evolved from a matriarchal society. The Yao females are hardworking, audacious, and imbued with wisdom and creativity. Unlike the mainstream male-dominant culture in other places, females have a certain say and social status, which provides the cultural environment for the birth of *Nüshu*.

The geographical and cultural conditions facilitate the birth of *Nüshu*.

*Nüshu*, created by females, is solely used and passed down by them. In ancient times, women were not allowed to go to school. To depict their daily lives and express their inner feelings, the women in Hunan villages created this special script, *Nüshu*, drawing insights from Chinese characters, fully displaying their charm and wisdom.

The Chinese character, an ideographic writing system based on

pictographs, is one of the oldest writing systems in the world. *Nüshu* evolved from Chinese characters. Unlike the ideographic writing of Chinese characters, *Nüshu* is a monosyllabic phonetic script pronounced in the Jiangyong local dialect, using about 500 characters to express the content fully.

The basic strokes of *Nüshu* are dots, vertical strokes, oblique strokes, and arcs. The pattern of *Nüshu* resembles that of the character 多, with the top right part higher than the lower left. The script is italicized,

resembling a rhombus. It is as tender as a soft willow swaying in the breeze, brimming with femininity. It is even nicknamed "long-feet script" or "mosquito-pattern script" by local women.

Most of *Nüshu* consists of poetic works that can be chanted. They are mostly seven-character verses, while only a few are five-character ones. The verses rhyme in every other line. They are often a mix of elegant and colloquial language, with exceptions in the character count and rhyme scheme.

*Nüshu* serves two main functions. First, it acts as a channel for females to express their inner emotions. Most *Nüshu* works feature women's inner feelings, such as the sufferings inflicted upon ancient women or their pent-up sadness and depression. Therefore, *Nüshu's* work is also called "bitter literature". In ancient times, men were allowed to venture out for business. At the same time, women could only find solace in their sworn sisters, sharing feelings, venting out emotions, and providing mutual relief via *Nüshu*. *Nüshu* offered females the chance to communicate with each other and share feelings and thoughts with their sisters to ease loneliness and find comfort in their minds.

Second, it serves as a means of expressing their daily lives. In ancient times, the women in Jiangyong were only allowed to do needlework and housework at home; therefore, they had more spare time. During their free time, they created *Nüshu*, which could be written on paper and folding fans to read for entertainment. This was a way of depicting their lives. During festivals or on their sisters' wedding days, they would gather to read *Nüshu*, sharing their lives and feelings.

Jiangyong women used their own script to tell stories, comfort each other, express sorrow, and give praise. They created a spiritual utopia for women.

In the 1950s, Zhou Shuoyi, a researcher in Jiangyong, discovered *Nüshu* while working in the local cultural center. This marked the beginning of the academia's focus on *Nüshu*. In 1982, Zhou included *Nüshu* in *The Chronicle of Cultural Relics in Jiangyong*, where it was named "long-feet mosquito-pattern character". Subsequently, Zhou collected a plethora of raw materials related to *Nüshu* locally. The *Collection of China's* Nüshu, compiled by Zhao Liming and annotated by Zhou Shuoyi, was published in 1992. Ji Xianlin, a well-known scholar

in China, wrote a preface to the book, "When they were subjected to the suppression of theocracy, monarchy, clan and husband, leading lives akin to enslaved people, how could they learn? Almost all of them were illiterate and were deprived of the right to have their own names. However, they were not livestock but humans. They had thoughts and feelings, with a strong consciousness and the ability to distinguish right from wrong. They were eager to convey feelings and reveal their sorrows. But, since they knew nothing about characters, they had to create scripts with unique talent. They were like seedlings pressed beneath a big rock, yet they managed to find their way to see the light and the sun through tenacious efforts."

In 2004, Zhou Youguang, a well-known linguist in China, wrote a recommendation for *Nüshu* in its bid to be included in the World Intangible Cultural Heritage List: "*Nüshu* is like a wild rose hidden deep in the mountains of Chinese culture. It remained unknown to the public for a long time. Cultural explorers discovered the script only when it was on the brink of withering."

Tao Aimin, an artist whose work focuses on female themes, first

learned about *Nüshu* in 2008. She felt she had discovered a new world and was eager to inject elements of this inspiration into her art. She traveled thousands of miles deep into the mountains to learn *Nüshu* from Hu Meiyue, one of the few inheritors. Hearing Hu's chanting, Tao said, "I think she experiences a kind of release to express herself freely when she speaks or sings in *Nüshu*. As all her feelings are conveyed through singing and narrating, she acquires a kind of freedom."

Afterward, she integrated *Nüshu* into her installation artworks. She collected several thousand washboards and created the artwork titled *Nüshu* by using the rubbing and traditional thread-binding method. She has a unique understanding of *Nüshu*, stating, "It has a special form, displaying softness and verve. Its pointed and oblique script style appears to point to the sky, emitting a unique scream. Each script seems to represent an individual spirit seeking freedom. It adds mystery to my work, *Nüshu*, making it reserved and profound. This work showcases a specific type of illegible visual language."

*Nüshu* is the only female-specific script in the world, known as the "miracle in the history of Chinese characters". This is because China

has a diversified and inclusive writing system. *Nüshu* is the result of the fusion of Confucian culture and ethnic minority customs.

# 女书之谜

“四字女经，教尔聪明，娘边做女，莫出闺门。”数百年来，湖南省江州市江永县的大山中回荡着女性的歌声，歌声唱出了她们生命中的各种情感。这些歌谣用一种特殊的文字写在折扇上、手帕上、腰带上……令人震惊的是，这些文字只在女性中间流传。这到底是怎样一种文字呢？

在古时候的江永，女孩子们从小就会找一个年龄相仿的女性朋友结拜成姐妹，称为“老同”。她们通过女书进行秘密交流和互动。在她们出嫁的时候，好友们则会唱着女书歌谣相送。电影《雪花与秘扇》中李冰冰和全智贤扮演的百合与雪花正是清代一对结拜的“老同”，她们彼此命运的连结和相互的情感牵绊可以说是对那段历史的某种再现。

女书，如同属于女人的《圣经》，母传女，姐传妹，人死书焚，因此流传下来的文献资料很少。现存最早的女书物证是

太平天国运动时期的一枚铜币，上面用女书刻着“天下妇女，姊妹一家”。76岁的女书研究专家、清华大学中文系教授赵丽明和女书打了大半辈子交道。她推测，太平天国运动的起义队伍途经湖南时，有使用女书的女性加入并一同抵达南京，才会在当时的铜币上留下女书字样。

江永地处湖南、广西两省交界处，是一座藏匿于崇山峻岭间的偏远小县。这里生存环境恶劣，古时历代中央政府除在这里设立官府办事和流放罪臣之外，几乎没有任何涉足。正因如此，江永县这样远离中央政权的偏僻之地才为女书的诞生提供了地理土壤。

江永是少数民族瑶族的聚居地。江永瑶族原本由母系氏族社会演化而来，瑶族女性有着瑶族人民特有的勤劳、勇敢、智慧和创造力。江永偏离主流的男权文化，女性具有一定的话语权和社会地位，这是女书诞生的文化环境。

在这种特殊的地理环境与文化环境下，诞生了女书这种独特的文字。

女书，由女性发明、女性使用、女性传承。古时候，女性不能进学堂。而潇水之滨、湖南乡村的女子为了表达自己的个人生活，宣泄内心的情感，大胆借鉴汉字，并运用她们的魅力和智慧创造了女书这种特殊的文字。

汉字是世界上最古老的文字之一，是以象形为基础的表意文字。女书由汉字演化而来，与汉字不同的是，女书是单音节的表音文字，记录的是江永当地方言，约500个字就可以完整

地表述她们想表达的内容。

女书的基本笔画是点、竖、斜、弧。女书字的外形呈“多”字式体势，右上高左下低，字形为斜体和菱形，清秀如弱柳扶风，有着女性的温柔气质，当地的妇女把它叫作“长脚文”或“蚊形字”。

女书大都是能唱的诗体作品，女书作品多为七言韵文，少数为五言韵文，隔句押韵，用语雅俗夹杂，字数与韵脚也常有例外。

女书的作用主要有两种。首先，它是女性宣泄内心的情感的渠道。女书中最多的就是表达以女性内心情感为主的抒情题材，如讲述古代妇女的苦难遭遇和内心的悲苦压抑，因此女书文学又被称为“苦情文学”。在古代，男子可以出门闯天下，而女子只能结拜姐妹，通过女书交流情感，宣泄情绪，互相慰藉。正是女书，给了这些女性相互交流的机会，将心中所感所想与自己的姐妹分享，以此来安抚自己孤独的心灵，寻求精神的满足。其次，它是女性表达个人生活的手段。古时候，江永妇女只能在家做女红和家务。因此，她们有着更多可以自由支配的时间。在闲暇时，她们创造出了女书这种特殊的文字媒介，用来读纸读扇，互娱互乐，是表达个人日常生活的一种手段。在节日里，尤其是姐妹出嫁的日子里，大家聚在一起唱读女书，交流生活，倾诉情感。

江永女性用自己的文字倾诉并得到慰藉，唱出悲苦、相互赞美，构建了一个女性特有的精神王国。

20世纪50年代，江永本地研究者周硕沂在县文化馆工作时

发现女书文字，这成为学界关注女书的起点。1982年，周硕沂将女书以“长脚蚊字”之名写进《江永文物志》中。后来，周硕沂在当地收集了许多女书原始材料。1992年，由他译注、赵丽明主编的《中国女书集成》出版。季羡林为该书写了序言:“她们在神权、君权、族权、夫权的四重压迫下，过着奴隶般的生活。哪里还谈得上什么学习呢？她们几乎统统是文盲，连起一个名字的权利都被剥夺，但是她们也是人，并不是牲畜。她们有思想，有感情，能知觉，善辨识。她们也想把这些感情表露出来，把自己的痛苦倾吐出来；但又苦于没有文字的工具，于是就运用自己独特的才识，自己创造文字。宛如一棵被压在大石头下的根苗，曲曲折折，艰苦努力，终于爬了出来，见到了天光，见到了太阳。”

2004年，周有光为女书申请世界遗产名录写下这样的推荐语：“女书，是中国文化深山里的一朵野玫瑰，它长期躲避了世俗眼光，直到它即将萎谢的最后时刻，才被文化探索者发现。”

2008年，一直以女性题材进行创作的艺术家陶艾民第一次知道了女书。她仿佛发现了新的天地，急切地想把这种灵感注入自己的艺术创作。于是，她不远千里来到大山深处，跟随女书传承人胡美月学习女书。在听了胡美月的吟唱后，她说:“我在想，她在唱女书的时候能得到一种倾诉、一种释放，把自己的故事都唱出来、说出来。这就是一种通向自由的境界。”

后来，她将女书运用到她的装置艺术上。她收集了上千个搓衣板，用拓印和传统线装书结合的形式创作了一件题为《女书》的作品。对于女书，她有着一独一无二的理解，她说:“它的特有形式，阴柔中暗藏着锐气，尖而斜的字体仿佛将矛头指向天空，发出另类的声音。它是一个个独立而向往自由的灵魂，它为我的《女书》增添了神秘气息，既含蓄而又深邃，呈现的完全是一种不可阅读的视觉语言。”

女书，是世界上唯一的女性专用文字，被誉为“中国文字史上的奇迹”。这得益于中国拥有多元包容的文字系统。女书是儒家文化和少数民族文化融合的产物。

SCAN FOR A VIDEO

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