

24. CHANG TSUNG-TUNG (Universität Frankfurt)
TRANSLATION OF SOME ORACLE INSCRIPTIONS UNEARTHED AT THE PLAIN OF
ZHOU WITH A CONSIDERATION OF THEIR DATING AND ORIGIN

ABSTRACT:

On the basis of his annotated translation of two of the oracle bones (H11:1 and H11:84) excavated at Zhou yuan in 1977, the author contends that they are not records of Zhou but of Shang, which were brought into the heartland of the Zhou from Anyang, and not by the Zhou after their conquest of Shang, but somewhat earlier by the Shang themselves. The find is linked to Di Xin's campaign against Zhou and Wen Wang's subsequent captivity, both of which are recorded in early historical sources. A radiocarbon date of 1095 ± 90 B.C. is used to "date" the burning of the Zhou palace to the Shang attack, which is traditionally said to have taken place in the 23rd year of Di Xin's reign.

DISCUSSION:

Lin Yun welcomed Chang Tsung-tung's contribution to an issue still hotly debated within China, but remarked that any explanation of the Zhou yuan oracle bones must be preliminary at the current stage of research. In view of Chang's paper, Lin mainly had the following questions: (1) Why are the inscriptions so different from Shang material if they were made for a Shang king?, and (2) How is the presence of Middle Western Zhou pottery at the site to be explained, if the Shang king destroyed the palace and it was never rebuilt?

Furthermore, Lin noted, Chang Tsung-tung had confused C-14 dating and dendrochronology in his discussion of the dates of the Zhou yuan palace. The maximum one could say about the scientifically established dates was that they were not in obvious disagreement with Chang's theory.

Lastly, reacting to Chang's argument that it would have been pointless to carry uninscribed oracle bones from the Shang capital to Zhou yuan, Lin asserted that the bones are fragmentary and the characters small with large blanks in between; such pieces, when broken, yield largely blank fragments.

Chang Tsung-tung asked whether the writing on the Zhou yuan bones could not be explained in terms of Anyang variants, as perhaps the personal style of an individual engraver. Lin advised him to read the relevant article by Li Xueqin.

Edward Shaughnessy said he agreed that the bones found at Zhou yuan could not have come from the Shang capital, but he thought they had been produced by the Zhou people. He only indicated some of his reasons: (1) The King is referred to as yi wang 衣王, whereas

classical YinXu oracle bones always speak of the King only as wang 王. (2) There is a reference about attacking Shu in H11:68. Shu was an ally the Shang would not have attacked; but it could have been an enemy of the Zhou. (3) H11:84 refers to the ce 冊 sacrifice and to Zhou (that is, Zhou Danfu); Keightley had previously interpreted this as the Shang promising to sacrifice a Zhou leader, but it could also be taken to mean a sacrifice to Zhou Danfu. Ce, Shaughnessy argued, could take an indirect as well as a direct object. (4) The reference to a sacrifice to the Shang King Wenwu Di is not an indicator per se that Shang people were performing the sacrifice; rather, Zhou Wen Wang had married a Shang princess, and therefore, sacrifices to Shang ancestors may have been performed at his court. (5) Common sense alone dictates that the Zhou yuan bones should have been carved by the indigenous Zhou people.

Virginia Kane, furthermore remarked that the Zhou yuan oracle bones contained phrases distinctly Western Zhou in character. Besides, one piece referred to Hao 鎬, the capital built by Wu Wang.

Paul L-M. Serruys voiced some philological criticism about Chang Tsung-tung's translation of some of the bones. Firstly, Chang had equated yu 于 with the interrogative particle yu 與. Chinese linguists from Tang He through Wang Li, Chou Fa-kao, and Li Fang-kuei agreed that this was unacceptable. Secondly, zuo 左 (according to Li Xueqin in Guwenzi yan jiu 4:245-251) could mean "to be harmful," which would fit perfectly in the context of H11:84. This would reverse Chang Tsung-tung's reading of zuo 左 as zuo 佐, "to assist."