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Western Cultural Innovations in China, 1200 B.C.

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WESTERN CULTURAL INNOVATIONS IN CHINA, 1200 B.C.

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In a recent article on the history of the chariot in China, I attempted to show that a West Asian prototype was introduced to the Bronze Age Shang culture of the north China plain at about 1200 B.C.¹ I used archaeological evidence, both artifactual and figured, to suggest that the route of transmission lay across the broad plains of Central Asia and the south Siberian steppe, passing finally through the the grasslands and loess plateau of Mongolia, Ningxia and northern Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces, the area traditionally referred to as the Ordos. In the course of tracing this transmission of the chariot, I discovered several other innovations in the Shang culture of this time that seemed to be introduced from the same general direction. In this brief note I will simply mention, without attempting to provide complete substantiation, the most notable of these innovations, in the hope that this may stimulate consideration of the possibility that even in antiquity Chinese culture was greatly enriched through its contacts with the West.

The chariot's appearance in China at about 1200 B.C. during the latter part of King Wu Ding's reign (d. 1195 B.C.?)² came at a time that could reasonably be called the highpoint of the Shang dynasty. Preceded by a succession of weak and fractious kings, during which

¹ Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Historical Perspectives on the Introduction of the Chariot into China," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 48.1 (June 1988), 189-237.

² I have tentatively suggested this chronology for the reign of King Wu Ding, which differs somewhat from that given in my article "Historical Perspectives on the Introduction of the Chariot into China" (p. 192, n. 6), in a separate article: "Yueshi jishi keci yu Shang wang Wu Ding de niandai: yizhong chubu tuice" 月食記事刻辭與商王武丁的年代：一種初步推測, in Qingzhu Qian Cunxun xiansheng bashi sui lunwenji 慶祝錢存訓先生八十歲論文集, ed. Ma Tailai 馬泰來 (Hong Kong: 1989), in press.

time the dynasty's capital was moved at least four times, the final move being that to Anyang under King Pan Geng, Wu Ding's reign had begun under pressure from without as well as from within. The earliest oracle-bone inscriptions now extant, those of the Dui 𠄎 diviner-group, probably dating to the early or middle portion of Wu Ding's lengthy reign,³ portray a situation in which even the Shang capital was subject to attack by the fang 方-borderlands.

... 卜 𠄎 ... 乎 𠄎 方 殪 商

Crack on, Dui: "Call out to defend against the fang at Shang." (Houxia 41.6; I.Dui)⁴

... (子:) 巳 卜 王 貞 于 中 商 乎 𠄎 方

Crack on ..-si, the king divining: "At Central Shang call out to defend against the fang."

(Yicun 348; I.Dui)

Not only did Wu Ding survive this threat, however, but shortly thereafter he launched a major campaign of westward expansion. This campaign succeeded in pushing Shang hegemony as far west as and perhaps slightly beyond the Fen River valley of west-central Shanxi province. Although the Shang hegemony in this western region did not long outlast the life of Wu Ding, most of his allies west of the Taihang Mountain range being stripped away in the course of the often-mentioned but little appreciated Gongfang 𠄎方 War early in

³ For a brief introduction to this oracle-bone periodization, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Recent Approaches to Oracle-Bone Periodization: A Review," Early China 8 (1982-83), 1-13.

⁴ References to collections of oracle-bone inscriptions are given according to the abbreviations in David N. Keightley, Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1978), 229-31, with the exception that they have been uniformly rendered into pinyin romanization.

the next generation,⁵ I believe that it had extraordinarily important implications not only for Shang political history but, indeed, for all of Chinese culture.

For the Shang, who had theretofore been an eastern power, deriving their cultural traditions from the "Longshan" culture of eastern Henan and western Shandong, their western push into Shanxi opened a new window of communication with the peoples of the upper Yellow River valley, the Ordos region, who in turn had cultural associations with cultures farther west and north. Some communication between the Shang and south Siberian/Central Asian cultures has long been recognized in two artifacts that also made their first appearance in China about the time of King Wu Ding or, in archaeological terminology, Phase II of the Yinxu sequence: animal-headed (principally ram-heads) or ring-handled knives and a curious "bow-shaped implement" (gongxing qi 弓型器). Both of these artifacts are especially associated with chariot burials, the "bow-shaped implement," in particular, possibly playing some functional role in the driving of a chariot.⁶ Indeed, it would seem that the chariot, the "bow-shaped implement" and the animal-headed knife were imported as one integral unit.

With the northwestern animal-headed knife, we can also see other innovations that began

⁵ For a preliminary discussion of the results and implications of the Gongfang War, see Xia Hanyi 夏含夷 (Edward L. Shaughnessy), "Zaoqi Shang-Zhou guanxi ji qi dui Wu Ding yihou Yinshang wangshi shili fanwei de yiyi" 早期商周關係及其對武丁以後殷商王室勢力範圍的意義, Jiuzhou xuekan 九州學刊 2.1 (Autumn 1987), 19-32. A more detailed discussion of the chronological and geographical progress of the war is given in a paper entitled "The Life and Death of Fu Hao: With Comments on the Sequence of the Shang Campaigns Against Bafang, Tufang and Gongfang," which I presented to the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (San Francisco, 26 March 1988), and which I hope to publish in due course.

⁶ William Watson, Cultural Frontiers in Ancient East Asia, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U. Press, 1971), 61-66; Lin Yun, "A Reexamination of the Relationship between Bronzes of the Shang Culture and of the Northern Zone," in Studies of Shang Archaeology (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1986), 264-66.

to appear at this time and to trace their inspiration to foreign models. Previous to this time, knives of the North China Plains had been composed of two parts, a blade and a separate haft. Beginning with Yinxu Phase II, however, there are tentative Shang attempts to replicate the single-cast blade and haft that was a prominent feature of the foreign animal-headed knife. Although this technology was never fully exploited by the Shang, it is significant that it came to be the dominant knife-style of the Zhou, the more westerly people who eventually overthrew the Shang to establish the Zhou dynasty (1045-256 B.C.).⁷ This integrated haft-knife was not the only technological improvement in Shang weaponry. From the beginning of China's Bronze Age, the personal weapon par excellence had always been the ge or hacking-axe. In all examples of this weapon prior to and including Yinxu Phase I, the nei 內 or counterweight had been extremely flat. But starting with Phase II, the nei became much more pronounced, apparently influenced by a style of counter-weighted battle-axe with a distribution across Central Asia as far as Iran.⁸

Because by nature warfare usually entails intercourse between two different peoples, weapons tend to be the most readily transmissible of cultural features. But the inventory of foreign-inspired cultural innovations in Shang China at this time is by no means limited to weaponry. The discovery in 1975 of tomb M5 at Anyang, the so-called "Fu Hao-Tomb," contains considerable evidence of northwestern influence. This tomb, which is that of one of Wu Ding's principal consorts, probably dates to about 1195 B.C., and was the first important tomb at Yinxu to have been found undisturbed. In addition to examples of both

⁷ Lin, "A Reexamination," 255. For the 1045 B.C. beginning date of the Zhou dynasty, I rely on David S. Nivison, "The Dates of Western Chou," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 43.2 (December 1983), 481-580.

⁸ Lin, "A Reexamination," 260.

ram-headed knives and "bow-shaped implements," this tomb also contained four bronze mirrors, previously unknown to the Shang in any form, of a type extremely common in the Karasuk culture of the Lake Baikal region.⁹ The hundreds of carved jade objects found in the tomb almost certainly also attest to communication between Shang and this northwestern region, at least insofar as the jade quarry is concerned.¹⁰ And although the explosion of new bronze ornamentation evident in this tomb is probably not directly attributable to any foreign influence, I would suggest that the opening to the west must have provided a general catalyst for these innovations.

Cultural communication is perhaps most clearly attested through concrete archaeological evidence. But such artifactual imports are by no means the only or the most important features that can be transmitted from one culture to another. Intellectual influences and innovations can also be traced through judicious dating of epigraphic sources. In the case of Shang China, it is by now well established that the reign of Zu Jia (1183-1162 B.C.?), one of Wu Ding's two reigning sons and during whose reign the Shang western hegemony was definitively lost, was marked by a revision of cultic practice so dramatic that Dong Zuobin 董作賓 postulated the emergence of a "New School" of officialdom.¹¹ Eschewing the

⁹ Lin, "A Reexamination," 251-53.

¹⁰ For a preliminary discussion of the sources of Shang jade, see Xia Nai 夏鼐, Yinxu yuqi 殷虛玉器 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982), 1-7. Comparing the jades found in the "Fu Hao-tomb" with the "Hongshan" jades of Inner Mongolia, tentatively dated to the early second millennium B.C., it seems to me likely that Shang jades, or at least those that represent animal figures (particularly the dragon and the bird) are also stylistically indebted to northern influences; see Sun Shoudao 孫守道, "Sanxingtala Hongshan wenhua yulong kao" 三星他拉紅山文化玉器考, Wenwu 文物 1984.6, 7-10.

¹¹ For the classic statements of this radical change in Shang cult, see Dong Zuobin, Yinli pu 殷曆譜 (Nanqi, Sichuan: Guoli zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo zhuankan, 1945), Vol. I, 1.2b; and "Yinxu wenzi yibian xu" 殷虛文字乙編序, Zhongguo kaogu xuebao 中國考古學報 4 (1949), 11-20.

impromptu cult known to us from the Bin xx-group inscriptions of Wu Ding and Zu Geng's (r. 1194-1184 B.C.?) reigns, Zu Jia established a rigidly conservative ritual schedule. Again, this is probably not directly attributable to outside influence but was rather a reflection of the great constriction in the Shang kingdom. But other more particular features of intellectual innovation can be more clearly traced to Western influence.

The reign of Zu Jia also witnessed a radical change in calendrical practice, shifting from a year-end intercalation schedule to the more precise mid-year intercalation.¹² It seems to me unlikely that such an abrupt and radical change could have derived from an indigenous development. It is possible, moreover, that the concept of the seven-day week reached China at this time. Although never adopted by the Shang and destined within five hundred years to die out throughout China, a type of seven-day week does seem to have characterized the calendrical practice of the Zhou people, who at this time still inhabited the middle stretch of the Fen River valley; i.e., precisely the area across which the Shang contact with the Ordos was achieved.¹³ Another feature of Central Asian culture, perhaps the most

¹² See Dong Zuobin, Yinli pu, vol. II, 5.11b-12a; see too, Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, Yinxu buci zongshu 殷虛卜辭綜述 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1956), 220-23.

¹³ It is well known that the Zhou divided the lunar month into four terms, based on the phases of the moon, each roughly seven days in length. This calendrical practice is distinct from that of the Shang, who divided their month into three ten-day "weeks" (xun 旬). For the location of Zhou in the Fen River valley of Shanxi prior to their evacuation to Qishan in Shaanxi, see Qian Mu 錢穆, "Zhou chu dili kao" 周初地理考, Yanjing xuebao 燕京學報 10 (1931), 1955-2008, for traditional historical-geographical evidence; Chen Mengjia Yinxu buci zongshu, 281-83, for oracle-bone inscriptional evidence; and Zou Heng 鄒衡, Xia Shang Zhou kaoguxue lunwen ji 夏商周考古論文集 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 335-43, for archaeological evidence. For a synthesis of all of this evidence, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Historical Geography and the Extent of the Earliest Chinese Kingdoms," Asia Major (ns) 2.2 (1989), in press.

important of all, also seems to have been adopted at this time by the Zhou but not by the Shang. It is often remarked in intellectual histories of China that whereas the Shang believed in a supreme ancestor-deity named Di 帝, the Zhou believed instead in an amorphous heaven-deity, tian 天.¹⁴ Seen within the context of the massive infusion of western culture at this time and also recognizing the geographic location of Zhou along the Ordos/Shang route of contact, it is perhaps not surprising that the Zhou "heaven" deity is strikingly similar to the heaven-deity of Mongolian and other Central Asian religions.¹⁵ Indeed, it is likely that the Zhou adopted even the name of this deity, the Chinese tian/tian being very close to the Mongolian tengri.¹⁶ Evidence, albeit circumstantial, that this cult of tian made its first appearance in China at about this time comes in the form of a legend concerning the Shang king Wu Yi (r. 1140-1119 B.C.?), grandson of Zu Jia. The Shiji 史記 recounts that Wu Yi, out of contempt for this foreign belief, filled a leather pouch with blood, hung it and shot it with an arrow, mockingly declaring that he had "shot heaven."¹⁷

In sum then, Phase II of the Yinxu archaeological sequence, spanning the latter half of the reign of Wu Ding and into the reigns of his sons Zu Geng and Zu Jia, can be seen to have been a period of great contact between the Shang culture of the Central China plain and the northwestern cultures of the Ordos plateau and beyond. Cultural innovations ranged from

¹⁴ See, e.g., Herrlee G. Creel, The Origins of Statecraft in China (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 493-506; Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn Linduff, Western Chou Civilization (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1988), 99-111.

¹⁵ Walther Heissig, The Religions of Mongolia, translated by Geoffrey Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 47-59.

¹⁶ This identification between Chinese tian and Mongolian tengri is suggested in Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, Kim bun hoshaku 金文補釋 Hakutsuru bijutskan shi 白鶴美術館誌 48 (1978), 184.

¹⁷ Shiji (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 3.104.

the technological to the artistic, from the scientific to the religious. But, with the severance of the Ordos route in the wake of the Gongfang War, the Shang court once again became isolated to the east of the Taihang Mountains. This in turn appears to have produced a period of stagnation and decline that resulted finally in the dynasty's defeat at the hands of the Zhou, who, I might add in closing, were, not coincidentally I think, their major western competitors.

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