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Was There a Xià Dynasty?

by

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Was There a Xià Dynasty?

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Preface

This paper began as what I thought would be a brief e-mail message to a few friends discussing various problems relating to the word *Xià* and their relevance for the historicity of the alleged Xià Dynasty. Little did I expect that it would develop into the rather substantial paper it has become. Although “Was There a Xià Dynasty?” was originally composed entirely in my e-mail system during a three-week period ending August 25, 2002 (hence the initial absence of Chinese characters, as they were unavailable to me in e-mail exchanges at the time [I’ve added a few essential ones for this version; I’ve also added some tone marks, which were not available to me either at the time of the original e-mail exchanges — though I have not been exhaustive in adding them everywhere, especially for the names of authors and for book and article titles, nor do I add them when quoting others who did not use them in what they originally wrote]), it has obviously grown far too long for that medium. For purposes of further discussion, I have decided to make it available in *Sino-Platonic Papers*.

I regret that I am more than a decade late in getting this paper out, but I believe that it still has value as a statement of the basic issues surrounding the historicity of the state of Xià and its name. Of course, it represents the state of the field mainly as it existed in August, 2002. Since, however, there have been no major advances in philology or archaeology pertaining to Xià, the situation remains essentially the same as it was ten years ago. I have, however, added a few representative examples of more recent work.

Note that this paper was written before the following two important dictionaries of Axel Schuessler had come out:

- *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2007.
- *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese: A Companion to Grammata Serica Recensa*. ABC Chinese Dictionary Series. Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2009.

Despite the fact that, in 2002, I did not have the benefit of Schuessler's dictionaries, I am pleased to report that the basic findings described herein comport well with those in Schuessler's published work.

In a very real sense, this paper is a work in progress. The chief purpose of the piece as it stands is to elicit discussion and further clarification.

——VHM

Abbreviations

ATB = A. Taeko Brooks

BA = *Bamboo Annals*

BI = Bronze Inscription

CC = *Chūnchyōu* / *Chunqiu*

DJ = *Dzwǒ Jwàn* / *Zuozhuan*

EAH = East Asian Heartland

EBB = E. Bruce Brooks

EC = Early China

LY = *Lunyu*

MT = Modern Tibetan

MZ = *Mo Zi*

OBI = Oracle Bone Inscription

OS = Old Sinitic

OSBI = Oracle Shell and Bone Inscription

VHM = Victor H. Mair

WS = Warring States

WSW = Warring States Workshop

WSWG = Warring States Working Group

WT = Written Tibetan

XSZ = Xià Shāng Zhōu

Was there a Xià Dynasty?

As part of a larger study on the role of northern peoples in the foundation of states in the East Asian Heartland (EAH) throughout history (see Victor H. Mair, "The North[west]ern Peoples and the Recurrent Origins of the 'Chinese' State," in Joshua A. Fogel, ed., *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 46–84, 205–217]), I have prepared a summary of what we currently know about the Xià.

I The graph for the word Xià has still not been securely identified on the Oracle Shell and Bone Inscriptions (OSBIs; they may also be called simply Oracle Bone Inscriptions [OBIs]). (For more recent paleographical evidence and discussions on this subject, see the notes by Matthew Anderson in the Addendum [section **XXXIII**] at the end of this paper.) David Keightley has kindly called my attention to the following remarks of Herrlee Glessner Creel in his *Studies in Early Chinese Culture. First Series* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938), p. 107:

In the opinion of many, perhaps of most Chinese scholars working in the oracle bone material, the character *hsia* has not been identified with any certainty in the Shang bone inscriptions. There is nothing which has even been held to be a reference to the Hsia state or dynasty on the oracle bones, but this is no evidence whatever against its existence. The bone inscriptions deal almost exclusively with questions of immediate practical action, whether to make war, whether to offer certain sacrifices and when, whether the gods will smile or frown on certain undertakings, etc. Unless there had been, at the time when the inscriptions were made, a contemporary state called Hsia, it is extremely unlikely that the name would have appeared on the oracle bones. Evidently there was not. But this can not be used as any kind of evidence against the previous existence of a Hsia state or even dynasty.

As Keightley has said in a private communication to me (August 7, 2002), the situation has not changed much since Creel wrote these words.

Fair enough, but it is worth noting that later dynasties *were* aware of their predecessors. Since the Shāng is supposed to have defeated the alleged Xià, one might think that there would at least be enough latent recognition of that fact that a graph for the fallen dynasty would have entered the lexicon — even if the alleged Xià were not a topic of current conversation in the twelfth century BC. And it bears repeating that the graph for Xià has not been found on the OSBIs at all. This suggests that the memory of a Xià Dynasty did not remain in the Shāng consciousness even in a residual manner, nor — apparently — was there a late Shāng etymon for Xià in any of its other senses. That is to say, Xià was not sufficiently a part of the late Shāng lexicon in any of its four main Zhōu and later senses (large, summer, variegated, epithet of the inhabitants of the EAH) to have warranted being recorded in a late Shāng graph.

The extent to which these four senses stand in a cognate relationship to each other, and whether any of these senses bear a cognate relationship to Xià as a putative dynastic title, will be taken up in succeeding paragraphs.

- II When the graph for Xià does appear (bronze inscriptions [BIs] and later), it comes to be used for several basic meanings:
 - a. large, grand
 - b. summer
 - c. variegated
 - d. dynastic name
 - e. epithet of the inhabitants of the EAH or the Central Plains (Zhōngyuán 中原).

- III It is difficult to say whether any or all of these meanings are related. Also, if any of them are related, it is hard to determine in what way they are related.

- IV There is currently no consensus on or convincing explanation for what the graph depicts.

Popular explanations of the graph as depicting a cicada are without paleographic or linguistic justification.

Efforts to find a graph that matches the Xià morpheme on the oracle bones have intensified in recent years. The motivation for such searches is spelled out explicitly by Cao

Dingyun, who begins his article entitled “Guwen ‘Xia’ zi kao — Xia chao cunzai de wenzi jianzheng (Study of the Ancient Writing of Xia — The Writing Witness of Xia Dynasty Existed [*sic*; i.e., A Study of the Ancient Graph for Xià: Paleographic Testimony for the Existence of the Xià Dynasty],” *Zhong Yuan [*sic*] wenwu* (Cultural Relics from central plains [*sic*]) 3 (cum. 73) (1995), 65–75 as follows:

We are the descendants of Huáxià 華夏 [see section **XXI**], the sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor. As for Xià among ancient forms of the script, we must [bùkěbù, i.e., cannot but] seek for it, we must investigate it, we must distinguish it. Ever since the Northern Sòng period, generation after generation of graphologists have continuously carried out analyses and adduced proofs concerning Xià in ancient forms of the script. Up till the present moment, however, this process remains inconclusive. People are by no means clear about the evolution of the graph for Xià. In particular, they still entertain doubts over whether or not a graph for Xià is found among the OSBIs. Given this situation, the author has for many years assiduously sought for it, until now he feels that he has finally perceived a clue [to the solution of the problem]. Therefore, I have put together [my findings] in this article and present them to the scholarly world for correction.

Cao’s conclusion starts with these words:

As everyone knows, the Xià Dynasty was the first dynasty in Chinese history. It is also the age when Chinese history formally entered civilization. Yet, with regard to the history of the Xià Dynasty, in the past it has all along been positioned in legend. No matter whether in archaeological articles or historical textbooks, they all [treat the Xià Dynasty as] a supposition, and precise proof [for the Xià Dynasty] in the script has not been obtained. One can see how great the difficulty of solving this problem is and, moreover, how weighty is its significance.

With such dubious premises as these, it is not surprising that Cao’s mission to discern the graph for Xià on the OSBIs fails. While denying all previous solutions to the problem of the absence of a graph for Xià on the OSBIs, Cao’s own attempt is vitiated by its forced nature and extraordinary complexity: 1. four basic (and quite different) variants of the graph, 2. two distinct semantic threads (the shape of a person of the central state [Zhōngguó] and a dancing figure), 3. a single (and highly disputable) occurrence of an OSBI graph (*Heji* 8984) that resembles none of Cao’s four presumed BI and later variants. Thus, we still find ourselves right where Creel said we were in 1938 (see section I). Despite the heightened urgency to discover written documentation for Xià, it has not been forthcoming.

- V The possibility that the basic meaning of the main etymon represented by the BI graph for Xià may be “large, grand” is enhanced by the two word-family-type graphs for shà (“large, tall building”) which use the Xià graph as their phonophore (厦, 廈). The Kangxi radicals for these two characters are 27 and 53.
- VI *Complication*: Whatever the graph depicts, it certainly does not look like a building! Rather, it seems to be some sort of person or creature (?). Judging from the earliest bronze forms, there appears to be a big head at the top with two filamentous projections hanging down on either side and a couple of other (longer and thinner) projections (also perhaps filamentous) hanging down at the bottom.
- VII *Further Complication*: Axel Schuessler tells me that there is no specific word for “summer” on the OSBIs, only spring and autumn, so there is no reason to expect that a specific graph for summer would need to have occurred on the OSBIs.
- VIII When Xià does appear later on the BIs with the meaning “summer,” it has a little sun radical in the top left corner. This indicates that the original BI graph for Xià has been borrowed for another meaning than that which it originally represented and is being used as a phonophore for a *homophonous* seasonal word. However, as people grew accustomed to the meaning “summer”

being associated with this phonophore, the sun radical dropped off. Consequently, the original graph now had to represent two words that were probably originally completely separate: the primary meaning of “large” and the newly acquired meaning of “summer.”

IX So far as I have been able to determine, Xià does not occur as a dynastic title in the BIs, almost certainly not in those of the Western Zhōu, and apparently not in those of the Eastern Zhōu either. The matter is of such great importance that I cite here the words of the late Gilbert Mattos (personal communication: August 22, 2002), an authority on Zhōu bronze inscriptions:

The graph identified as Xia occurs in relatively late bronze inscriptions dating mostly from the late Chunqiu and Warring States periods. In bronze inscriptions, it occurs used in three ways: 1. the name of a tribe mentioned in a fifth- or fourth-century BC bronze text; 2. “summer” in a Warring States bronze text; and 3. a place name in a Warring States bronze text. In other words, your suspicion about its being a late term is undoubtedly correct. *And, in the bronze texts at least, there are no cases where Xia is used in reference to an earlier dynasty.* [emphasis added]

This is in contrast to Shāng which, as David Keightley has affirmed, does occur as the name of the conquered ethnos in the Western Zhōu BIs, e.g., that on the *Li gui*. And Zhōu occurs scores of times as the name of the capital (or as Zhōuyuán [“Plains of Zhou”]). Shāng and Zhōu as dynastic titles are thus fundamentally different from Xià in that the graphs to write them are preserved in contemporaneous sources.

X I would like to propose that there is a reasonable way to extract the meaning of “large” from the earliest BI forms of Xià. Namely, I believe that the graph may depict a very large head with an enormously wide beard. This is actually much more evident in the seal forms of the character and in other old forms, where we can see the strands of a large beard hanging along the sides (cheeks?) beneath the head and a long part of the beard extending directly downward from the

very bottom (chin?). The graph thus conveys the sense of “large” because it shows a big head with a big beard.

(Representative early forms of the graph may be conveniently seen here:

[http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E5%A4%8F\)](http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E5%A4%8F)

XI While this interpretation of the graph may seem arbitrary, unprecedented, and even outlandish, there is actually strong linguistic evidence to support it. As pointed out to me by Wolfgang Behr and Axel Schuessler, and as I have subsequently found documented in the secondary scholarly literature, Xià (“great, large”) (Old Sinitic [OS] reconstruction **gragh* [Li Fang-kuei]; **gvra?h* [Schuessler, where “v” = schwa and the question mark should be understood as having no dot at the bottom]) appears to be cognate to Written Tibetan (WT) *rgya* (“great, wide, width, size”). See YU Min, “Han-Zang tongyuan zipu gao (A Draft of Cognate Words of Chinese and Tibetan),” *Minzu Yuwen* [Languages and Scripts of Nationalities], 1 (February, 1989), 61 of 56–77, 6; JEON Kwang-jie, *Han-Zangyu tongyuan ci zongtan* (Etymological Studies of Sino-Tibetan Cognate Words) (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1996), pp. 119–120, no. 14–68. Still more intriguingly, the same root also occurs in Tibetan words relating to beards. In this context, we may also note that the OS reconstruction of hú 胡/鬚 (“beard; bearded person”) is **’ga* (in Jerry Norman’s spelling system according to David Branner).

The basic meaning of WT *rgya* is “width, breadth, extent, size.” See Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*, rev. and ed. by Graham Sandberg and A. William Heyde (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Department, 1902), p. 304a; H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Special Reference to the Prevailing Dialects* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1934), pp. 104b–106a. By extension, *rgya* is also commonly used to signify China *and* India, since both were lands of great extent. Above all, the breadth and flatness of their central plains (those of the Yellow River and the Indus) would have impressed the people from the surrounding mountainous areas. This reminds me of the exclamation of Tanaka Kakuei, the first Japanese prime minister to visit China after World War II, when he looked out the

window of his airplane at the land below, “*Hiroi desu!* (How broad!),” a remark that is indelibly fixed in my mind.

Allowing for metathesis, Sinitic Xià (OS **gragh / *gvra?h*) and WT *rgya* are thus both phonetically and semantically (“wide, broad, large”) virtually identical. Furthermore, both were used as epithetic descriptors of extensive lands, Xià for the Central Plains of the EAH and *rgya* for the Indus Valley (i.e., India) and the Yellow River Valley (i.e., China). Xià (**gragh / *gvra?h*) and *rgya* are also both linked by their association with beards. For WT we have *rgya-wo*, *rgya-rog* (both meaning “beard”; Das, p. 305b, 307a; Jäschke, 106b) and *rgya-chan* (“bearded”; Jäschke, p. 105b). It is rather astonishing that WT *rgya-bo* signifies both “beard” and “a Chinese” (Jäschke, p. 106a; in MT, the term is usually *rgya-mi*). Colloquially, this same word is pronounced *gya-u* and means either “a beard” or “a person having a beard.” See C. A. Bell, *English-Tibetan Colloquial Dictionary* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1920), p. 39 (cf. Das, p. 305b). Evidently, then, there is a profound connection between “Chinese” of the EAH and bearded individuals in the Tibetan mind. [N.B.: I have often remarked upon how often beards are mentioned in the Qín laws as preserved in the manuscripts from Shuihudi, Yunmeng County, Hubei Province. Perhaps the “barbarous” northwestern Qín are responsible for this barbate legacy.]

The odd semantic complex of “beard,” “broad,” and “Central Plains” in both Sinitic and Tibetan not only vouches for their etymological relationship at a deep conceptual level, it serves as supporting evidence for the explanation of the graph used to write Xià that I proposed in section X. Judging from paleography and historical phonology, this distinctive Sino-Tibetan triplex must be at least three thousand years old, yet it reverberates to this day. In Modern Tibetan (MT), both Indian Communists and Chinese Communists are (*r*)*gya-gung*. And, perhaps taking us near to the heart of the earliest graphic form used to write Xià (**gragh / *gvra?h*), (*r*)*gya* in MT has the following extremely suggestive specialized signification: name of a hair style of Dobdo monks (characterized by a strip of hair extending to their cheeks like side burns). See Melvyn C. Goldstein, ed., *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 252a,c.

N.B.: Another important usage of *rgya* is with the meaning “seal” or “mark.” Although I am uncertain of its etymological relationship to the core meaning of “broad, wide,” my surmise is that it may have to do with the width of the seal / mark. Or perhaps this usage derives from a totally separate etymon which is unknown to me.

Comments by Elliot Sperling:

In all written records of the Tanguts (Xi Xia 西夏 [“Western Xia”]) the Chinese term *xia* in the name of the state is rendered as ‘Ga’, Sga, or something similar. I would also note that it is not simply that *Rgya* can be either China or India; it is that this dual meaning comes from the reduced abbreviations of the traditional references to both countries (Rgya-nag and Rgya-dkar). My sense is indeed that the implication of broad and breadth come into play as regards the use of *rgya* in reference to seals and beards.

Comments by Matthew Kapstein:

It is clear that many of the words that concern you are derived from the verb *rgya/rgyas* “to grow, develop, expand, blossom, open up.” It is this verb, as early Tibetan lexicographers clearly understood, that gives us the second syllable of *sangs-rgyas*, “buddha,” here chosen as a gloss for Skt. *vibuddha*, meaning “awakened, blossomed.” It is evident that *rgya* meaning “expanse” is related to the same verb. As for “beard,” this usage may be late, and probably originates as a euphemism, just as we sometimes use “growth” in English to refer to a young man’s beard. (It is also possible, however, that the noun *rgya* in the meaning “net,” which also surely relates to the sense “to spread out,” is the basis for a euphemistic association with the beard.) The notion that there is a particular association between the Chinese and beards in the “Tibetan mind” is doubtful. Consideration of the iconography makes this clear: though Shouxing (Mi-tshe-ring in Tib.), following Chinese conventions, has a beard, the Chan master Heshang Moheyan generally does not. On the other hand, many Indian divinities, adepts and royal figures are typically bearded. There is no regular connection between the Chinese and beards to be observed. It is

possible, too, that the word for a "hundred" *brgya* (sometimes *rgya* in old documents) is related to the same complex. But cf. *brgyad*, "eight." As for *rgya* in words meaning "seal, token, contract," I am not sure. It may be that "expand" here come to mean "to extend," i.e., one's seal is an extension of one's person and authority. But here I am just musing.

In some contexts it is clear that *rgya* is a shortened form of *rgyal* "to be victorious," most common in *rgyal-po* "king" and *rgyal-khams* "kingdom." No one, to my knowledge, has investigated whether *rgya* in the words for "India" and "China" may be in fact from *rgyal* rather than *rgya*. (Another question then is whether or not *rgyal* itself ultimately derives from *rgya*; some however have postulated an Indo-European loan [cf. "regal"], though this has been contested.)

See also my [MK's] discussion of Tib. "*de ga*" as a transcription of Ch. "*daxia*" in my "The Treaty Temple of the Turquoise Garden" in Matthew T. Kapstein, ed., *Buddhism Between Tibet and China* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), pp. 41–43, 70n99.

VHM: I believe that the etymological and paleographical evidence I have adduced above indicates that the "broad / beard" nexus for *rgya* is not late.

Comments by Nathan Hill:

In its unmodified form (i.e. *rgya* as opposed to *rgya nag* or *rgya gar*) the word *rgya* means 'China' and never 'India'. I think this makes sense because Tibet had links to China earlier than it did to India. (A Tibetan diplomatic envoy reached the Sui a few years before Tibet emerges into the historical period, cf. C. Beckwith's diss.) My own sense is that 'great black' and 'great white' might not be correct, but instead it is Rgya 'China', Rgya-gar 'White China = India', Rgya-nag 'black China = the China that is not India'. (N.B. the use of *gar* instead of *dkar* 'white' has never been satisfactorily explained, although it is probably correct).

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that *rgya* does mean 'great', e.g., *rgya-mtsho* 'ocean' versus *mtsho* 'lake'. (N.B. 'ocean' does not mean 'big lake' exactly, because a modifier would

usually come after a noun in Tibetan; instead you have to see this as a compound ‘the lake which is big’ or something like that).

I do not think I have ever seen *rgya* ‘beard’ in a text, although I am sure it is out there if Jäschke found it. *Rgya-wo* is totally weird, presumably a late respelling of *rgya-bo* after the VbV → VwV sound change and the ghw- → w- sound change that created the letter ‘w’ in the first place [gh = ‘ in Wylie transcription; this is a letter I have written more about than I had wished). The normal word for beard is *ag-tshom*, which itself has many problems. No inherited Tibetan word starts with a vowel, the *tshom* has some good TB cognates (e.g., Bur. *chaM* and several possible words in Chinese) but the vowel is wrong in Tibetan.

According to my own views on Tibetan historical phonology *rgya* should come from **rya* (Li’s law).

XII Beginning with the earliest attestation of the morpheme Xià in its BI and Seal Script forms, it would seem that the basic operative etymon signified “big beard,” a meaning that is directly reflected in the Sinitic character used to write it. By a process of abstraction, “(big-)beard(ed)” then came to be used in the sense of “big, large, great, broad” that was applied to the Central Plains (of the Yellow River Valley). This, in turn, developed into an epithet applied to the inhabitants and culture of the Central Plains. A parallel development from the abstract adjectival meaning yielded the more specialized connotation of “big building,” for which two slightly modified graphs were created.

XIII As for how the meaning of “variegated” (*Shu jing* 6.9) comes into the picture, it seems to be a cognate of the *other* word that got attached to the graph, i.e., the word meaning “summer.” That is to say, “summer” is the “variegated, blooming” period. The Sino-Tibetan (and Tibeto-Burman) etymology of this word has been preliminarily worked out in an exchange of messages among Wolfgang Behr, Guillaume Jacques, Marc Miyake, and Laurent Sagart lasting from November 23 to 30, 2000. Since I believe that the “summer” → “variegated, blooming” etymon is separate from the “(big-)bearded” → “large” → “Chinese” etymon, I shall not discuss it further here.

- XIV** Up to this point in our account of the evolution of the graph for Xià and its derivatives (i.e., up through the bronze inscriptional forms), there is no evidence that it was used to signify the name of a dynasty that is alleged to have preceded the Shang.
- XV** Although the graph for Xià as a seasonal word occurs numerous times in the *Chun qiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), there is no reference to a Xià Dynasty in that text. Texts of supposed Spring and Autumn date which mention Xià are problematic, and the agreed Warring States texts, where such mentions undoubtedly occur, some of which are discussed below, are as much as a millennium after the end of the supposed Xià Dynasty.
- XVI** The initial, hesitant adumbration of a Xià Dynasty that is alleged to have preceded the Shāng occurs in the Warring States and later texts where it is first desultorily mentioned. Even if we were to accept these texts as completely unproblematic, they date to as much as a millennium or more after the end of the supposed Xià Dynasty. As will be shown in sections **XVII** and **XVIII**, *all* of the earliest texts that do mention the alleged Xià Dynasty are fraught with various difficulties, particularly in those places where reference is made to specific states and rulers that are supposed to have preceded the Shāng.

——VHM

The following section and section **XIX** have been supplied by E. Bruce Brooks as documentation for the birth and growth of the idea of a Xià Dynasty in Warring States and later texts. An explanation of his dating system, abbreviation, romanization, citation, and other usages may be found at the following Web site: <http://www.umass.edu/wsp>, especially:

<http://www.umass.edu/wsp/reference/conventions/dates.html>

and

<http://www.umass.edu/wsp/reference/languages/chinese/romanization/index.html>.

and also in the Preface to *Warring States Papers*.

XVII (E. Bruce Brooks, 12 August 2002, updated 2 May 2013)

SYÀ 夏

It seems to me that there are really two questions: (1) is “Syà” 夏 mentioned as a polity in the texts (I leave out of consideration any other uses of the character), and if so, (2) is there a concept of a single linear rulership mandate, conferred by Heaven and thus in principle universal in scope, which was thought to have passed from Syà to Shāng to Jōu? A Yes answer to the first does not necessarily entail a Yes answer to the second.

1. Syà is not mentioned in the Shāng oracle bone inscriptions. That there was a previous state to which Shāng was at first subordinate, and which at some point it replaced as the dominant power in the area, is implied in the sacrificial list of Shāng kings (see the Royal Genealogy in Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, Table 1, p185f), which shows six rulers previous to Tāng 湯, who is usually regarded as the dynastic founder (Keightley’s “K1”). At least this much history may be said to be implicit in epigraphically known Shāng ritual practice. Beyond that, no Shāng text, and no Jōu text prior to 0771, provides evidence.
2. Syà as a state is not mentioned in the Chūn/Chyōu (CC) chronicle, which in our view is the only “text” (apart from some inscriptions) surviving from the 08c-06c. Nor is there in that text any mention or suggestion of a linear rulership mandate. Given the nature of the CC and what it normally includes, we would not expect such a mention, so its absence is not definitive for the question at issue, but as far as it goes, it does fail to attest the idea of Syà or the idea of a linear mandate in that period.
3. In the standard Warring States (WS) book texts, only the early Analects layers (LY 4–9 minus their interpolations; see *The Original Analects*, ad loc) really represents the 05c. There is no mention or indication in that material of a Syà state or of a single linear mandate. Such statements have been later interpolated, in two layers in LY 8 (the ruler Yǚ 禹 figures in those interpolations, as do Yáu and Shùn). The interpolations can be recognized because they are structurally intrusive. For the 05c, then, we have the impression that there was at the time no mention of Syà or of any supposed pre-Shāng rulers, but that the lack of such mention was later felt to be problematic, and was

remedied by interpolations in the early text layers. As to the probable date of those interpolations, our best guide is the first occurrence of these names in the uninterpolated layers of the text. For Yáu and Shùn, the likely date is the late 04th century (they are mentioned in passing, as proverbial good rulers, in LY 14:42, c0310). What we seem to have here is a late invented tradition being retrojected from the late 04c to the middle 05c. Then as far as the *Analects* Confucians are concerned, there is no provable knowledge of Syà or its mandate in the 05c, but there is an awareness of both, as part of a larger political myth, in the late 04c.

4. We find that Syà, and Yǔ as the first Syà ruler, first appear in disputation between the Micians and the Confucians of the Dzwǒ Jwàn, over the course of the 04th century. See now A Taeko Brooks, (1) “Heaven, *Li*, and the Formation of the *Zuozhuan*,” *Oriens Extremus* v44 (2003/2004) 51–100, which shows the Dzwǒ Jwàn formation process as spanning much of the 04th century, in parallel with the early and middle period of the Mician ethical triplets; and (2) “The Mician Ethical Chapters,” *Warring States Papers* v1 (2010) 100–118, which gives approximate dates of composition of these position papers. In sum, it seems that antiquity arguments were first used by the Confucians, who sought to document their previous (05c) interest in the Jōu Dynasty by composing, in the 04c, texts claiming to be of Jōu date. This practice was imitated by the Micians, who later sought to outflank the Confucians by using pre-Jōu models. The general tactic is expressed in the early 03c Lǔ Mician text MZ 48:4, 且子法周而未法夏也，子之古非古也, “Besides, you [Confucians] model yourselves on Jōu and not on Syà. Your ‘antiquity’ is not really ancient.” The Micians first cite what they call ancient sayings, beginning with MZ 18 (c0362); that “saying” can be found in our present Shū 38, the Jyǒu Gàu 酒誥, and this Confucian text, in some form, thus existed at that point. The first Mician citation of named texts is in MZ 12 (c0322). The texts are the Confucian legal tract Lǚ Syíng 呂刑 (Shū 55) attributed to the reign of a late Jōu king, and a Shù Lìng 術令 attributed to the “early Kings,” no longer extant, but with similarities to several of the “old script” 古文 Shū which (see Shaughnessy in Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 377) were forged, on the basis of quoted lines like this one, in the 04c. The points

of resemblance between the Mician quote of c0322 and these derivative "old script" Shū are to texts alleged to be from the time of Yǔ, so that this quote is from a purported Syà text. We here see the Micians producing their own Shū, in order to support their references to a Syà, not Jōu, antiquity. These controversialist 04c Mician documents are evidently worthless as evidence for a historical Syà, or for Yǔ as its first ruler. It is also relevant that the first datable reference to Syà in the Analects is LY 3:9 (c0342), where the *lack* of ritual documents for both Syà and Shāng is noted (as due to the absence of documentation in the successor states of Chǐ 杞 and Sòng 宋 (respectively)). This agnostic admission by the Confucians, plus the late date of the first Mician reference to a supposed Syà document, indicate that the reification of Syà as a ritually relevant precursor state is to be referred to the late 04c. Similarly, the astronomical reference which David Pankenier cites (in "Mozi and the Dates of Xia, Shang, and Zhou," EC 9–10 p176) as the earliest of the "mandate conjunctions" in preserved texts, are from MZ 19 (c0326), not the first but chronologically the third of the Mician "Against War" chapters.

5. Considering the rulers thought to antedate Syà and Shāng, such as Yáu and Shùn, we note first that they and Yǔ may belong to two lines of myth development: Yǔ is a culture hero who is later said to be the first Syà ruler, whereas Yáu and Shùn are emblems of meritocratic succession, where a ruler passes the throne to the most worthy successor. It is the Yǔ myth which figures slightly in the Shĭ, from which however Yáu and Shùn are entirely absent. The difference is likely to be doctrinal rather than chronological; both myths existed, in some form, in the 04c, and their development by one or another advocacy group depended on the ideology of that group. Eventually, these parallel developments were linearized, a phenomenon separately noted by Tswēi Shù 崔述 and by Gù Jyé-gāng 顧頡剛. Our study of the whole WS problem ab initio tends to confirm their finding, though with some differences of detail, including the idea that these traditions were probably parallel before they came to be linearized.
6. For the unresolved problem of the location of the supposed Syà, which includes the location or locations of the supposed Syà successor state Chǐ 杞, see Thorp in *Early China* v16 (1991). The identification of palace ruins at Àrlítóu 二里頭 with Syà has as

one of its premises that the Àrlītóu ruins imply a major polity, and that there can have been only one major polity earlier than Shāng. The latter premise is simply a statement of the linearity theory. It is contradicted by the wider findings of archaeology, which among other things attest high cultures, roughly contemporary with or slightly earlier than the Shāng, in different parts of what is now thought of as "China." Among theories developed to accommodate this fact, the "coastal culture" suggestion of Fù S̄-nyén 傅斯年 has been revisited by Julia Luo (Luo Chia-li), in her thesis "Coastal Culture and Religion in Early China: A Study Through Comparison with the Central Plain Region" (Indiana 1999). She shows that a wide range of archaeological evidence now exists to support Fù S̄-nyén's position, and suggests that some features of what eventually became Shāng culture were actually adopted from the contemporary and parallel "coastal" culture, which itself existed in more than one regional variant. Again, the archaeological reality seems to indicate parallel cultures rather than a linear succession of single dominant cultures.

7. The idea that Syà/Shāng/Jōu, despite changes of detail, form a ritual continuum, with an implied continuity of rulership under a single presiding Heaven, is what we call the linear theory. It asserts much more than a mere statement of consecutivity, in which each polity conquers the preceding one and replaces it as dominant in the area. The conquest view originally governed perceptions of Shāng and Jōu, and that view tended to emphasize the discontinuity of those traditions. When the linear theory arose, the relation had to be reconfigured as one of continuity. The discontinuity view is implicit in Shī 235, which (as Erwin Reifler pointed out in his *Monumenta Serica* article "Ever Think of Your Ancestor") originally bade the Shāng not to be mindful of their Shāng ancestors (無念爾祖), implying a contradiction between them and the now-dominant Jōu ancestors. The Jōu conquest in this view would have represented the victory of one Heaven over another. The commentaries understand this line as a command to the Shāng population to *always* be mindful of their Shāng ancestors. Reifler calls this a "pious Confucian fraud." We would add that the fraud was probably related to the 04c change in theory, which decreed that the Shāng and Jōu lineages were to be seen as ultimately compatible.

8. The Shī poems instanced by Hsu and Linduff (in *Western Chou Civilization*, p103), especially Shī 241, clearly attest a linear version of the three-dynasty theory. They conflict with Shī 235, which as originally written envisioned an incompatible Shāng and Jōu. They can only have been written later than Shī 235, at some time when the Syà linearity claim was being made and documented with false papers such as the Mician Shū documents. On present evidence, this would have been the late middle 04c. This of course is far from the standard view. But I think it follows from the weight and tendency of the other evidence that these poems are part of a theoretical reconceptualization of “Jōu” as a newly potent political concept in the 04c.

——EBB

XVIII (VHM, 13 August 2002) The *Zhu shu ji nian* (Bamboo Annals), in combination with astronomical phenomena and other information, has been used by David Nivison and David Pankenier to obtain absolute dates for the Xià Dynasty. Both of them, for example, agree that the alleged Xià Dynasty ended in 1555 BCE. Nivison (1994): “Xia has been mythicized, but Xia isn’t a myth. There really was a Xia Dynasty. And I seem to have the names and exact dates of its kings, every one of them.” Nivison also provides dates for Huang Di (Yellow Emperor) and other early rulers, but declares that the earliest of them are “not historical.” I leave Professor Nivison’s words to speak for themselves.

See also Nivison’s [The Key to the Chronology of the Three Dynasties: The “Modern Text” Bamboo Annals](#), *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 93 (January, 1999).

Considering that the most redoubtable Chinese scholars of the 18th–20th centuries, including Wang Guowei, held the *Bamboo Annals* (hereafter BA) to be fraudulent and had done much toward proving that at least parts of the text were not reliable, it would seem prudent not to leap to its unqualified defense.

After having remained above ground for four years, the BA was ostensibly buried in 296 BC and discovered around AD 280.

——VHM

XIX (E. Bruce Brooks, 14 August 2002, updated 2 May 2013)

BAMBOO ANNALS 竹書紀年

9. The Bamboo Annals, in our view, cannot be based on a chronicle of Ngwèi 魏 (the archaizing initial ng- is a convention meant to distinguish Mencius's Wèi, the Jin successor state, from the older and less powerful state of Wèi 衛), to mention no earlier document. Claims that many Spring and Autumn states kept chronicles, including some passages in the *Mencius* and several in MZ 31, do not predate the completion and dissemination of the Dzwǒ Jwàn, which popularized the Lǚ chronicle (the Chūn/Chyōu), and demonstrated how it might be made a potent vehicle for historical claims. Only if the Lǚ CC was a unique document are the Chí theorists likely to have made use of it for their concealed statecraft document [the Dzwǒ Jwàn] with its intimation that Chí has a future as the single dominant power. The BA can only have been undertaken by Ngwèi courtiers after the DJ became more widely known, which we put in the very late 04c, c0312. The BA was an imitation, not of the DJ, but of the certifying Lǚ chronicle at its core.
10. That the CC as politicized by the Dzwǒ Jwàn was intensely studied in Ngwèi can be shown by archaeology. Among the contents of the tomb of Ngwèi Syāng-wāng, besides the Bamboo Annals itself, as reported by the seemingly competent team of court scholars that was put in charge of the recovered texts in the 3rd century, were (a) a subsequently lost text called the Shī Chūn 師春, which was described as a collection of the Yì predictions extracted from the Dzwǒ Jwàn, and (b) a complete Yì text, said not to vary from the standard 3c version. It is exactly the DJ predictive material that still fascinates enthusiasts of that text. It would seem that the predictive aspect of the DJ had made a huge impression on the Ngwèi court. The Bamboo Annals, which as a pro-Jin and indeed pro-Ngwèi document was clearly composed in Ngwèi, was probably compiled on order of Syāng-wāng himself, as witness its having been buried with him, which suggests a personal text rather than a state chronicle (which would have needed to remain above ground in order to be continued, year by year).
11. We are fortunate to have a contemporary description of Ngwèi Syāng-wāng, and indeed a transcript of Mencius's brief and unsatisfactory interview with him, from the year 0319,

when he was still technically in mourning for his deceased father, Hwèi-wáng. He emerges in that piece as determined above all else to conquer the other states and become their sole ruler. This desire provides exactly the personal context in which the appearance of the DJ pro-Chí theory could have engendered a counterstatement on behalf of Ngwèi. That statement makes Ngwèi the linear heir and valid successor, not only of Jìn, but of Jōu before it, and of Shāng and Syà before that, and (depending on how one reads the evidence, which at this point becomes conflicting) of the Yellow Emperor before that. It is to be noted that we know from inscriptional evidence that rival Chí had also claimed descent from the Yellow Emperor, sometime in the 04c. If Ngwèi wanted to keep up its end of the rivalry, it would have needed to put forward some comparable claim. The BA takes the simplest path, by putting forward a competing claim to the same ancestor.

12. Among the most dubious features of the BA as a chronicle, besides the paucity of its entries for a major state such as Spring and Autumn Jìn, is the manifestly fraudulent nature of some of them. Many entries, for the early years of Jōu, consist of dating the composition of various parts of the Shī and Shū repertoires. One of the Shū documents in question is the Jìn Tǐng story of how Jōu-gūng secretly offered to sacrifice himself to preserve the life of his charge, the young Chǐng-wáng. In a paper presented to the WSWG 7 conference (October 1996), and now published in *Warring States Papers* v1 (2010) 84–92, David Nivison showed that this document must be of Warring States date, that is, no earlier than the 05c. It then follows that any early Jōu chronicle cannot have contained the background story of that document, let alone the composition of the document itself, since there was no such thing in early Jōu. Therefore the BA entry is not based on any earlier historical record. It can only be, at this and similar points, a contrivance of the 04c BA compilers.

13. In sum, at the end of the 04c there were several states which had advanced cultural claims that were the basis for possible political claims. These included (a) Chí, with its Yellow Emperor ancestry and its Dzwǒ Jwàn theory of Chí's inevitable triumph, prefigured inter alia in Yì predictions; (b) Lǚ, with its generally admitted Jōu heritage, and thus its ranking claim to revitalize the Jōu mandate at least in the eastern area, as is explicitly

stated in LY 17:4 (“If there were a ruler who would put me in power, could I [Confucius] not make a Jōu in the East?”); and (c) Sùng, with its generally admitted Shāng heritage, as developed and celebrated in the spurious Shāng Sùng poems which, as the Dzwǒ Jwàn quotation patterns show, were not accepted as part of the canon by Lǚ, but had been admitted as genuine by most other states. The BA, written on behalf of Jīn, has the effect of equaling or trumping all those claims, in a document which proceeds to combine the claims of all three states in a single lineage with Jīn, and later Ngwèi, as its valid inheritor. This theoretical utility of the BA in the political theory wars of the 04c, paralleling the well-known literal military battles of the same period, seems to us an entirely sufficient motive for its composition at that time. That its makers tinkered repeatedly with the “significant intervals” latent in it, as David Nivison has convincingly shown in his several studies of the text (e.g., “The Riddle of the Bamboo Annals,” 1995, most recently revised in 2009), gives us a window into its composition process and the thinking behind its design and redesign. It does not validate the BA as being in reality what it claims to be. That text’s value as independent testimony to the historical linearity of Syà and Shāng as preceding Jōu, or to anything of earlier date, thus seems to us to be zero. We consider that the BA is wholly intelligible as an artifact of the dynastic theory wars of the late 04c.

Placed at its correct moment in history, we find the BA to be an intensely valuable document, which testifies in detail to the Ngwèi variant of the mind of the times. It seems to us misconstrued if taken as evidence for the mind or deeds of remotely earlier times.

YÌ 易

14. Syà 夏 as a character does not occur, in any meaning, either in the Yì text or in the major standard commentaries. It is sometimes held that Syà “incidents” are alluded to in the images of the Yì. For example, Gāu Híng 高亨 interprets Yì 5:4 “emerging from the pit” and 38:4 “opposing the orphan, meeting the original man” (the latter line has textual variants which would eliminate the possible allusion) as referring to the Syà story told at

DJ Aī 1 (Legge p794) about a pregnant queen of Syà escaping to renew the dynastic line. Such Syà allusions (as distinct from "rise of Shāng" allusions) are open to doubt. The Yì explicitly alludes to Jōu and Shāng figures at several points, but not as unambiguously to Syà ones.

15. The Proto-Yì. The Jōu and Shāng allusions, and any more covert Syà allusions, may all be late additions to the Yì text, if my reconstruction of a proto-Yì pentagram text (following Naitô and others; see my papers at the Paris "Image" Conference of 2001 and at an AAS panel in 2002) proves to be sound. As far as can presently be determined, that proto-Yì consisted wholly of immediately referential images, and did not mention or allude to any historical figures at all. Our Yì would then be participating in the historicizing tendency which we have repeatedly observed in other 04c texts.

Evidence for an 04c reworking of the precursor proto-Yì into our present Yì includes these four points: (a) The transmission genealogy of the Yì, as given in the Shǐ Jì, reaches back only about that far, implying an entity that was first established in that period. (b) Gideon Shelach (in message #1666 to the WSW E-list, 24 July 2000) has noted that there are no representations of dragons as flying creatures in early periods, all such being terrestrial and largely aquatic, whereas "flying dragons appear as bronze decorations from about the fifth century BCE and descriptions of such creatures are found in texts of the late Warring States period." (See also his "The Dragon Ascends to Heaven, the Dragon Dives into the Abyss: Creation of the Chinese Dragon Symbol," *Oriental Art* 47:3 [2001] 29–40). The implication is that the flying dragon image in Yì 1:5 can have been visualized no earlier than the WS period, so that this defining image of the Yì text, and with it the system of the Yì as we now know it, cannot on this evidence predate that period. (c) More generally, the Yì text's mixture of archaizing words and Warring States grammatical constructions suggests a Warring States work masquerading as a more ancient one. (d) Finally, its images of conquering kings and its sacrificial emphasis are wholly appropriate to the 04c, the time when Confucianism (as attested by the middle chapters of the *Analects*) was taking on a pronounced ritual cast, and when in Chí (c0342), and shortly afterward in other states, the title "King" was being usurped by

sovereigns ambitious for world conquest. In that transformed world, the new Yì would have offered a very appropriate guide to decision-making. But precisely its closeness of fit with the middle Warring States period prevents our considering any Syà or other historical allusions it may contain as attesting anything but an 04c *conception* of a remote antiquity.

SHŪ 書

16. The “New Script” Shū (documents) of Purported Syà Date. We here ignore the canonical “old script” 古文 Shū as later forgeries and consider only the “new script” Shū purporting to come from the Syà Dynasty. There are two of these: Shū 6 (Yǚ Gùng 禹貢) and Shū 7 (Gān Shè 甘誓). See our partial survey, “The Earliest Attested Shū Texts” (WSWG Note 86, 15 Aug 95). The association of texts with periods was apparently somewhat fluid in the 04c. Thus, the Shùn Dyěn 舜典 (or a passage now in the Shùn Dyěn, Shū 2) is cited at DJ Syī 27 as from the “Syà Shū,” and at Wǚn 28 as from the “Yǚ Shū.” Of purported Shāng documents, only the first of the three parts of the Pán Gǚng 盤庚 is cited (at Yǐn 6, as from the “Shāng Shū”), and the Húng Fàn 洪範, now usually grouped with Jōu, is once cited (Wǚn 5, also as from the “Shāng Shū”).
17. Mician Citations. The Mician texts cite two purportedly pre-Shāng Shū. These are the Shù Lìng, the Mician name for what is probably now called the Dà Yǚ Mwò 大禹謨, cited in MZ 12 (c0322), and Shū 7, the Gān Shè 甘, in MZ 31 (c0298). Shū 3 is also quoted in the Dzwǒ Jwàn, which is by and large a Confucian text, so there is no doubt that a text existed which was accepted as genuine beyond the Mician school. Both Shū 3 and Shū 7 contain versions of the five-element (wǚ syíng 五行 theory, which on other grounds does not seem to be older in China than the 04c.
18. Sywǎndž 筍子. Whether from “new script” documents or from the Warring States precursors of the later forged “old script” documents, neither the Analects nor the Sywǎndž writings quote from Shū that are outside the range attested in the Dzwǒ Jwàn (final compilation date, c0312), and in addition, neither ventures beyond the Jōu dynasty sector of that inventory. The often-expressed preference in the Sywǎndž for the “ways of

the later Kings" undoubtedly reflects a tactical decision not to engage in this antiquity war, and to cede the pre-Jōu period to other controversialists, while explicitly focusing on the Jōu as more relevant to the present age (that is, the first half of the 03c).

19. The Mencius. The Mencian writings, on the other hand (for which see now E Bruce Brooks and A Taeko Brooks, "The Nature and Historical Context of the Mencius," in Alan K L Chan [ed], *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, Hawaii [2002] 242–281), cite traditions which are otherwise mentioned (as far as our preserved texts go) only in the Mician texts. The Mencians, who have many points of doctrinal compatibility with the Dzwǒ Jwàn group, were more closely engaged with the Mician philosophical challenge than either the Lǔ Confucians (whose text is the Analects) or the Sywǎndž school. It is in the context of this more accepting definition of what "Shū" were discussible that we should take the famous denial, in MC 7B3, that "it would be better to have no Shū than to have to believe everything that is in the Shū." The specific text attacked is the Wǔ Chǎng 武成 (Shū 31; this is now classed as an "old script" document, so that our version is a later forgery), a document not ostensibly of the Syà period but concerning the Jōu conquest of Shāng. This remark attests the doubt felt by some, even during the Warring States, about the authenticity of the texts cited in Warring States political debates, and a willingness to challenge them.
20. Probity. It may be added that writing is not attested in proto-China earlier than the reign of King Wǔ Dīng of Shāng. Wǔ Dīng, in Keightley's account, was the 21st Shāng sovereign (*Sources* p206). No text presuming to have been first recorded in writing from before that period can thus have the slightest credibility. As for the device of "oral transmission," sometimes urged by moderns, though not by ancients, in support of these texts, Walter Ong (*Orality and Literacy*, passim), though often cited in the opposite sense, concludes that the entire notion of a verbally fixed text is an artifact of the culture of writing, does not arise in a purely oral culture, and is at variance with the whole style of an oral culture. Furthermore, no plausible scenario has ever been proposed whereby a speech by a pre-Shāng ruler might have been memorized upon delivery and passed on in a fixed oral form for centuries, across one dynastic transition, until the invention of

writing. For these reasons, documents of fixed type attributed to Pán Gǔng (early Shāng) or to any earlier ruler of any dynasty, are intrinsically implausible. It can also be seen that, in the Shāng oracle bones generally, there is no interest in previous rulers beyond the ones sacrificed to as part of the Shāng dynastic lineage. There is thus no historical situation which might give color to a claim that Syà speeches, after a period of being frozen in oral form, were reduced to writing in Shāng. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Jōu: whatever interest the Jōu had in previous dynasties was essentially adversative rather than documentary. The only period of time to which the composition of these purportedly early Shū can be plausibly ascribed is the one beginning with the effective collapse of the Jōu in 0771, when the question of dynastic transition, and in particular the question of what power would succeed Jōu, first forcibly presented itself for solution. The question was answered by the universal state achieved by Chín in 0221. Within that span, from 0771 to 0221, a plausible attribution will require a motive or a compatible ambience in the current culture. The manifest use of purported early Shū in Warring States controversies in the 04c, the time when an earlier form of state was being replaced by an advanced bureaucratic state, and when increased state power made a universal state militarily practicable, gives a high degree of external relevance and also provides a convincing motive. We conclude that the first presumption for any supposed early document, and especially one purporting to derive from the time before the appearance of writing in the reign of Shāng Wǔ Dīng (that is, all purported Syà documents), is that, at earliest, it was composed for controversialist purposes during the 04th century.

To the extent that Syà is known from these documents, we must conclude that Syà is a figment of the 04th century political imagination.

—EBB

XX (VHM) The first systematic account of the Xià Dynasty is to be found in the “Xià jì (Annals of Xià)” of the *Shi jì* (Records of the Grand Scribe) by Sima Qian (145 – c. 86 BCE). It is noteworthy that this relatively late narrative is far more elaborate, detailed, and connected than any of the earlier accounts or mentions of the Xià in previous texts. That is to say, the elaboration of the Xià Dynasty starts from next to nothing during the Spring and Autumn period, begins to take on a shadowy outline during the Warring States period, and achieves full maturity during the Western Hàn period.

N.B.: In the following, syllables consisting of all capital numbers with a tonal number at the end are meant to stand in for Chinese characters. Although I have replaced most of these with regular type and tonal diacritics, I have preserved a few of them as a memory of the original medium in which this paper was initially composed.

XXI From the Warring States period on, Xià has been intimately linked with Huá (“flowery”) as ubiquitous epithets for the people of the Central Plains. This tight linkage would seem to speak for the “variegated” signification as being operative in the bisyllabic expression Huáxià because it matches the meaning of Huá quite well, hence “florescent [and] variegated.” Indeed, native philologists speak of Huá and Xià in this semantic context as being in a jiǎjiè (“phonetic loan”) or tōng (“interchangeable”) relationship with each other. Whether Xià in the expression Huáxià means “grand” or “variegated,” it clearly does NOT signify a dynasty that is supposed to have preceded the Shang. Huá and Xià (or Huáxià 華夏) are distinctive epithets, not dynastic titles.

XXII Other commonly encountered expressions connected with the peoples and cultures of the Central Plains from the Warring States period onward are Zhūxià (“the various / many Xià [grand / variegated ones]”) and, to a lesser extent, Zhūhuá (“the various / many Huá [florescent ones]”). These are cultural, not political, terms. It is obvious from the pluralizing prefix that Xià in the expression Zhūxià cannot possibly refer to a single dynasty.

- XXIII** Impressive remains have been excavated at Èrlītóu 二里頭 (one of several second millennium BCE candidates for the capital of the supposed Xià Dynasty) and other roughly contemporaneous sites, but we have no way of knowing for sure whether they belonged to an entity called Xià or to one of the other “10,000 states” that are said to have existed in antiquity. (K. C. Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], p. 71). Indeed, many archaeologists associate Èrlītóu with the Shāng rather than with the supposed Xià. See *Kaogu*, 4 (1984), 384; K. C. Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, fourth ed., rev. and enlgd.), pp. 315–316, with ample references reporting the views of others (Chang himself believed that Èrlītóu belonged to the supposed Xià Dynasty).
- XXIV** Sarah Allan, in “The Myth of the Xia Dynasty,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1984), pp. 242–256, argues that the idea of a Xià Dynasty is premised upon a Shāng myth about a previous people who were their inverse, and that this myth was historicized by the Zhōu to accord with their theory of a changing mandate of Heaven. Whether Allan’s thesis can be substantiated or not, it offers little comfort for those who subscribe to the actuality of a putative Xià Dynasty. For a harshly skeptical approach to the “euhemeristic and pseudo-historical interpretation” of legends about the founding of the Xià, see Henri Maspero, *China in Antiquity* (originally published as *La Chine antique* in 1927), tr. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), pp. 22–23.
- XXV** Even many Chinese archaeologists who do have faith in an alleged Xià Dynasty have abandoned the notion of a linear succession from Xià to Shāng. K. C. Chang, for example, proposed what he called “a horizontal view,” whereby the alleged Xià and the Shāng could, at least partially, have overlapped each other. See his “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, p. 72; K. C. Chang, “Sandai Archaeology and the Formation of States in Ancient China: Processual Aspects of the Origin of Chinese Civilization,” in David N. Keightley, ed., *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*

(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 495–521. In his *Shang Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 348–351, Chang goes even further and has not only the Xià and Shāng overlapping, but even all three of these presumed polities (i.e., Xià, Shāng, and Zhōu) coexisting between roughly 1400 and 1100 BCE.

XXVI The concept of Sāndài三代 (Xià, Shāng, Zhōu) as a sequential series of three successive dynasties inheriting the Mandate of Heaven one after another is invalidated as a historical reality by:

- a. the apparent archaeological overlapping of the three entities in question (whether these are coherent entities is *another* question);
- b. the impossibility of securely verifying the existence of the alleged Xià Dynasty during the first half of the second millennium BCE that has been demonstrated in this paper;
- c. the late occurrence of the concept of Sāndài itself (*Lunyu* 15.25, c. 305 BCE, see *The Original Analects*, p. 133; *Mencius* 3A2, 3A3, and 4A3, dating from the early to mid-third century BCE [courtesy of EBB]). There is no evidence for the concept of Sandai before the Warring States period.

At best, then, Sāndài may be understood as a metaphorical catch-all term indicating three approximate stages in the development of Chinese civilization: first half of the second millennium BCE, the second half of the second millennium BCE, and the first half of the first millennium BCE. It should not and, indeed, cannot legitimately be rendered as “Three Dynasties,” since the existence of the alleged Xià Dynasty has not been verified by any means available to the responsible historian. Rather, Sāndài — if it is to be retained at all — should be thought of as “Three Stages” or “Three Ages.”

XXVII Clearly, there were numerous settlements of various sizes and complexity in the EAH and beyond during the time of the early Shāng and in the preceding centuries. While these can be individually described and located, there has been no convincing case made for designating any pre-Shāng site(s) as definitely belonging to an alleged Xià Dynasty. In other words, given the

totality of the evidence, the confident identification of any archaeological site from the first half of the second millennium BCE as being the capital or a major city of the alleged Xià remains premature.

XXVIII By way of summary, one would suppose that — had there been an actual Xià Dynasty *called by that name* that existed before the Shāng Dynasty — the name would have filtered down through the written records of the late Shāng, the Western Zhōu, and the Spring and Autumn period. This is especially the case if, as K. C. Chang and others claim, the Xià, Shāng, and Zhōu coexisted. Yet we cannot find any evidence that the word Xià *in any of its various senses*, much less as the name of a dynasty or state, existed during the Shāng period. I have not even been able to ascertain that the word Xià occurs in the Western Zhōu BIs in any of its later senses. In any event, there is no evidence that it was employed during the Western Zhōu as the name of a dynasty that was supposed to have preceded the Shāng. Xià comes to be used as the name of an ancient dynasty only in Warring States texts, a good thousand years after the alleged Xià Dynasty was claimed to have been defeated by the Shāng. Simply as a linguistic factuality, how did the name of the alleged dynasty survive the gap from the middle of the second millennium BCE to the beginning, or perhaps even middle, of the first millennium BCE? What was the linguistic carrier of the name Xià from the middle of the second millennium BCE to the beginning or middle of the first millennium BCE? How did the morpheme for the name Xià survive those five to ten or more long centuries?

XXIX Hypothesis and Synopsis

If a clearly identifiable morpheme and carrier-graph for Xià as the name of a dynasty that supposedly preceded the Shāng did not exist during the pre-Shāng, Shāng, and Western Zhōu periods, and if the name of the Xià Dynasty was not associated with the graph used to write Xià during the Spring and Autumn period, how did the dynastic title arise during the Warring States period?

The answer is simple. As we have seen in sections **XX** and **XXI**, Xià was very much in evidence during the Warring States period as a ubiquitous epithet (*viz.*, “grand”) for the peoples

and cultures of the EAH or Central Plains (see also section **XI** for the derivation of this epithet). I submit that, during the “antiquity frenzy” (following EBB) of the late fifth century and fourth century BC, the constant epithet quite naturally was transformed into the name of an imagined dynasty that was thought to have preceded the Shāng. Once the notion that Xià (“grand”) was not just an epithet but the name of a “real” dynasty, it became powerful ammunition in the antiquity wars of the fourth and third centuries BCE. It was during these centuries that the backward projection of Xià (“grand”) as a “legitimate” predecessor of the Shāng developed from the mere germ of an idea into a full-fledged dynasty, complete with kings, capitals, reigns, a chronology, and everything else that pertains to a bona fide state in possession of the Heavenly Mandate to rule over the EAH. By the time of Sima Qian, alas, the Xià Dynasty had become a “fact of history.”

With the “Xià Dynasty” deeply embedded in the consciousness of political thinkers (and in the sub-consciousness of the populace who were inculcated by them) for the next two millennia, it was not until the latter part of the Manchu empire and during the Republican period that critical scholars began the painful process of dismantling the gigantic textual and psychological edifice that had been constructed on those shadowy Warring States foundations. Our task now is merely to continue their work until we reach solid bedrock, upon which future generations may build a more accurate and enduring monument to the past.

XXX Provisional Conclusion

There currently exists no convincing inscriptional, paleographic, or linguistic evidence for a Xià Dynasty that allegedly preceded the Shāng Dynasty. All mythological and historical evidence for a putative Xià Dynasty dates to the Warring States or later periods and is seriously compromised by various textual and political / ideological problems. No amount of archaeological evidence (traces of walls, palaces, halls, terraces, streets, etc.) will be sufficient to certify the existence of a Xià Dynasty that is supposed to have preceded the Shāng — unless:

1. it contains written materials
 - a. mentioning the Xià directly and / or

- b. corroborating the late (Warring States and after) textual claims of a Xià by referring to specific kings, cities, events, and so forth,

or

- 2. it is substantiated by new discoveries of primary materials from the Western Zhōu or Shāng that explicitly mention the Xià and / or its rulers, capitals, etc.

Considering the totality of the evidence presented here, it is highly unlikely that either of these eventualities will ever take place.

In the words of the ever-cautious Chinese scholar, *dàikǎo* — further investigation needs to be carried out before one can affirm with assurance that the Shāng Dynasty was preceded by a supposed Xià Dynasty. Since acceptance of the historicity of the alleged Xià Dynasty must be held in abeyance until confirmatory evidence is obtained, it follows that the notion of the supposed Sāndài (the “Three Dynasties”, i.e., Xià, Shāng, Zhōu) must also be placed in suspension as lacking authenticity.

Was there a Xià Dynasty? Not on present evidence.

——VHM

ADDENDA and APPENDICES

- XXXI** For a succinct account of the debate over the historicity of the Xià, with many up-to-date bibliographical references, see Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), pp. 678–79.
- XXXII** Thomas Bartlett has kindly summarized the work of Li LIU (whose books on the archeology of prehistoric China he edited several years ago) on the question of the relationship between Èrlītóu Culture and a putative Xià Dynasty:
1. My recollection... is that she does not make a definitive, simple identification of the archaeologically discovered Erlitou culture with the textually received Xia dynasty. In general, I believe she maintains that archaeology should be conducted as an independent and scientific discipline, without undue influence from textual traditions, and she recognizes that this is not yet the dominant approach in Chinese archaeology.
 2. As I remember, she thinks that the archaeologically defined characteristics of Erlitou Phase 2 permit the inference that it meets the requirements of a “state society,” according to the (Western) anthropological theory of state-level societies, which her writings (translated from English into Chinese) have successfully introduced into archaeological discussions in China. By that logic, as I understand the matter, Liu thinks that Erlitou could be understood to correspond to the native historiographic tradition that supports Xia’s existence. Of course, she recognizes that no evidence for the name Xia, nor any written remains at all, have been unearthed in any site datable to the period when it is supposed to have existed.
 3. Liu’s first book *State Formation in Early China*, by Li Liu and Xingcan Chen (Duckworth, 2003), chapter 2, “Searching for the Early State in China: Erlitou”, especially pp. 26–28, includes the passage, “Opinions are divided among scholars about the nature of Erlitou culture. The majority of archaeologists and historians in China agree that Erlitou culture represents a state-level society, and that the Erlitou site represents a capital city of the Xia or Shang dynasties, although they disagree

about the identity of the capital city, named in textual records, to which the Erlitou site corresponds. Many Western Sinologists and archaeologists, from a culturally external viewpoint and detached from textual tradition, have challenged all suggestions that there was a historic link between the Xia and Erlitou, and that Erlitou was a state-level society, as discussed in Chapter 1."

The discussion continues with an observation that the recent Xia–Shang–Zhou Chronology Project has provoked international controversy on the subject, leading to further comments on the question of modern political influence on Chinese archaeology, followed by the statement, "It is true, however, that knowledge of the development of early states in ancient China has appeared elusive to the Western world. The language barrier and the employment of different research orientations have been the major factors which make scholarly communication difficult between the East and the West. In addition, scholars from different backgrounds may employ different definitions of state-level social organization when they examine archaeological evidence from China, although many of them do not explicitly address the criteria that lead to their conclusions."

In the same book, chapter 5: "Erligang State Centralization: The Core," sub-section "Yanshi," pp. 89–91, includes the passage "Ceramic assemblages from the earliest occupation at the (Yanshi) site include both Erlitou and a transitional form, which is a stylistic stage between the Xiaqiyuan and Erligang types. Many Chinese archaeologists have viewed this phenomenon as the intrusion of a new material culture into this previously Erlitou-dominant region; this transition coincides with the textually recorded conquest of the Xia by the Shang people...."

Liu's third book, *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age*, by Li Liu and Xingcan Chen (Cambridge, 2012; Chen wrote chapter one; Liu wrote chapters two through eleven; Chen is her collaborator in China and deputy director of the Archaeology Institute at CASS), who also treats the matter. Chapter 8, "Formation of Early States in the Central Plain: Erlitou and Erligang," contrasts the Historiographical Approach and the Social-Archaeological Approach, pp. 256–259, including the summary comments (p. 259), "The social anthropological approach, which is favored by the present authors, shows great

potential in the study of early states.... This approach does not use historical records as blueprints for interpretations; however, the results arising from independent archaeological inquiry eventually may be compared with textual information.... We do not correlate Erlitou with the Xia dynasty; in this way, we acknowledge the controversial character of debates regarding Erlitou’s cultural identity. We are not ruling out the possibility, however, that Xia, either as a people or as a dynasty so named, may have existed in antiquity....”

In the same chapter, pp. 259–260, “The Erlitou culture dates to ca 1900–1500 BC, an era that partially overlaps with the dates traditionally ascribed to the Xia dynasty (ca 2070–1600 BC) (Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, 2000). Because the spatial and temporal distributions of this archaeological culture largely coincide with the late part of the Xia dynasty as described in ancient texts, most Chinese archaeologists strongly believe that there is a direct link between Erlitou and late Xia (Du, J., and Xu 2006) and that the earlier phase of Xia should be found in the archaeological cultures prior to Erlitou. This belief led to the investigation of the Xinzhai phase, which appears to be an intermediate period between the Neolithic Longshan culture and the Erlitou culture in this region. Consequently, Xinzhai and Erlitou have become the primary foci for pursuing the archaeological remains of the Xia dynasty.”

I think the citations above suffice to support my inference that Liu does not make a simple and direct identification of Erlitou with Xia.

XXXIII Addendum by Matthew Anderson, a specialist on oracle bone inscriptions:

Basically, the situation still seems to be the same as described in your paper above, with many different graphs identified as Xia and the full range of meanings you describe proposed. I think your ‘large’ / “big-bearded” idea fits with the evidence well—the Sino-Tibetan data is very interesting.

Other than continued results from the Xia–Shang–Zhou Chronology Project, a project about which I harbor certain reservations, and archaeological finds related to the Erlitou culture, which the XSZ Project proposes is identical with the Xia, I am not aware of much about the dynasty itself from the past ten years (but see the relevant portions of the two books by Li LIU, *State Formation in Early China* [2003, with Xingcan Chen] and *The Chinese Neolithic* [2005]).

It is entirely possible there was a Xia (I am sure I would have been skeptical about the existence of the Shang if Yinxu had never been discovered), but many, many things are entirely possible, and there is no evidence for the existence of the Xia (unless you count things written down a millennium or more after the fact). Your list of what would be necessary to prove its existence (section **XXX**) is a very useful thing to put out there.

I have not come across much about the dynasty from the past ten years which covers ground you have not already covered in the paper. I looked over the relevant passages of LIU’s books again, and they provide a good overview of the standard Chinese understanding of the Xia, but, again, seem to have nothing (relevant to the question at hand) that you haven’t already covered. There have (of course) been a number of articles published in Chinese over the past decade which discuss the Xia, but the ones I have read mostly seem just to be using the term as shorthand for something else. I found an interesting article called “Xià-Shāng-Xī Zhōu wénhuà duì qí xīfāng hé běifāng dìqū wénhuà shèntòu de fāngxiàngxìng yǔ céngjíxìng” 夏商西周文化對其西方和北方地區文化滲透的方向性與層級性 by Jiǎng Gāng 蔣剛 (*Kaogu* 2008.12), but it is really only interested in the interactions between various material cultures — “Xia” here simply means Erlitou culture, and nothing other than the terminology would change if you systematically replaced the word “Xia” with “Erlitou” (other than in the obligatory introduction that discusses how the Xia were China’s first dynasty, and a very brief passage that tries to connect archaeological sites with names from the *Bamboo Annals* and the *Zuo zhuan*). Other articles just use Xia as basically a time word. The article “Nánfāngshuǐ yízhǐ Xià hé Xī Zhōu shíqí yícún de chūbù rènshi” 南方水遺址夏和西周時期遺存的初步認識 by Duàn Tiān 段天和 Zhū Yǒnggāng 朱永剛 (*Kaogu* 2011.4), for example, uses the word “Xia” to describe what it calls a “proto-Shang” (先商) site belonging to the Xiajiadian 夏家店 culture (in Hebei). So “Xia” here has no meaning except, I suppose, the time period identified as “Xia” by the Xia–Shang–Zhou Chronology Project. Other than these kinds of references, I haven’t been able to track down anything new about the Xia.

It is difficult to identify a Shang graph used to write the word *xià*—I think it is still an open question whether the graph Jonathan Smith (see **XXXIV**) and others suggest writes *xià* does in fact do so (this is the graph that scholars have variously identified as 夏, 俊, 夔, 夔, etc.),

though I would not rule out the possibility. I generally transcribe the graph in question, which is clearly the name of a deity, as *kuí* 夔, but I have also used *náo* 夔; it has never been a graph I felt strongly about.

There is an OBI form structurally equivalent to 暋 (that is [日+頁] if the graph does not display correctly), which I think Liu Zhao has satisfactorily shown (Liu Zhao 劉釗, *Guwenzi gouxingxue* 古文字構形學 [2011] pp. 283–285) is the ancestral form of the late Western Zhou graphs e and f in the figure on p. 90 of Jonathan Smith’s dissertation (I think this may be the graph you mention in section VIII). Some representative examples can be seen in Heji 27134, 27722, and 30951, among many others. This graph then is also the ancestor of later graphs which certainly seem to write the word(s) *xià*, such as Warring States seals which use the equivalent form with the addition of a 又 or 止 element (this does not mean I am necessarily satisfied that this graph writes the word(s) “*xià*”, however, just that it is structurally the same as a graph which significantly later writes this word). This graph, which Liu Zhao argues should be read “Xià,” though, only appears as the personal name of a He group (≈period III) diviner in OBI, so once again I don’t think this is too useful here. (More about this can be found in Ji Xusheng’s 季旭昇 *Shuo wen xinzheng* 說文新證 (2002), pp. 467–468).

XXXIV Comments from Jonathan Smith, whose Ph.D. dissertation, “The Ethereal Band: Time, Cosmos and the Birth of Writing in China” (University of Pennsylvania, 2012), is partially relevant to our inquiry:

Chapter 2 (“The Ethereal Bandleader: Xià, <夏>, and an Astronomical Instantiation of Summer,” pp. 56–125) deals mostly with Xia 夏. I suggest (speculatively!) that the graph <夏> was first a rendering of an early, anthropomorphic asterism marking the general stellar location of the summer solstice of high antiquity. In my dissertation, I am uninterested in and agnostic towards the question of the “Xia” dynasty. However, given that I see Xia 夏 as a key component of early astronomical lore, I would naturally be more inclined to an interpretation in mythical terms.

VHM: Even if one of the characters in the OSBIs that is alleged to be *xià* actually is (though I

doubt that we will ever be sure of that), we are unlikely to be confident of its precise meaning. More importantly none of the OSBI graphs that have been alleged to be *xià* occurs in a context that allows us unmistakably to link it to a pre-Shāng dynasty of that name.

XXXV Postscript: My intention in this paper is not to diminish Chinese (pre)history, but to make our understanding of it as precise as possible with the limited means at our disposal.

—VHM

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None of the above named individuals nor anyone else, however, is to be held responsible for any statement or interpretation expressed by me in this piece.

——VHM

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