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A Review of
*The Oracle Bone Inscriptions
from Huayuanzhuang East*
by Adam Craig Schwartz

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A Review of
The Oracle Bone Inscriptions from Huayuanzhuang East:
Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by Adam Craig Schwartz

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ABSTRACT

While the book under review offers much interesting information on various aspects of the daily lives of the princely figures, including the king and queen, in late Shang China, it has numerous factual errors. In terms of the methodologies of reading oracle-bone inscriptions, no disciplined application of any particular persuasion seems discernible.

Key words: Oracle-bone inscriptions (OBI), non-royal divinatory inscriptions, royal divinatory inscriptions, English translation of OBI, synchronies

The Oracle Bone Inscriptions from Huayuanzhuang East: Translated with an Introduction and Commentary (Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Inc., 2019) is a revised version of Adam Craig Schwartz's Ph.D. dissertation, submitted in 2013 to the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. Based on a very early, though not the earliest, extant body of Chinese texts, specifically the group of non-royal divinatory inscriptions (*fēiwáng bǔcí* 非王卜辭), which is used contrastively with that of the more prevalent, royal divinatory inscriptions (*wáng bǔcí* 王卜辭), all datable to ca. thirteenth century – eleventh century B.C., Schwartz delves into scholarship on the oracle-bone inscriptions — abbreviated hereinafter as OBI — notwithstanding their ephemeral and biased nature,¹ in an all-out pursuit of knowledge about a single, perhaps the most contextually cohesive, collection of OBI unearthed to date.

Schwartz used as his main source a set of six-folio volumes entitled “*Yīnxū Huāyuánzhuāng* *dōngdì jiǎgǔ* 殷墟花園莊東地甲骨” (lit. the Oracle-Bones from Yīnxū Huāyuánzhuāng Locus East — henceforth abbreviated as “*HYZ*”), first discovered in 1991, catalogued (compiled) by the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and published by Yúnnán rénmin chūbǎnshè 雲南人民出版社 in 2003. Schwartz scrutinized this source and reconstructs sundry aspects of the daily lives of the social elite, the princely figures, the king and queen, and others that appear in the inscriptions within a relatively short span of time from the end of ca. thirteenth century to the beginning of the twelfth century B.C. He does so with an impressive degree of detail.

It took six years for Schwartz to turn his Ph.D. dissertation into this massive book (477 pages

¹ Every kind of divination may be characterized as fundamentally ephemeral: once a particular mantic act has served its useful purposes it becomes unimportant over time and eventually forgotten. The longest a particular divination was remembered and explicitly recorded known to me is 175 days (*HJ* 13753). The inscriptions made on the oracle bones were forgotten for more than three millennia and discovered at the very end of the nineteenth century.

The basic nature of oracle-bone inscriptions is biased in the sense that, as Keightley (2012: xiii) has put it, “... much of our knowledge is limited to what the diviners recorded, what topics they found it important to divine. We are presented, in short, with a ‘diviner’s eye’ view of the Shang situation; that limitation must always be kept in mind.” Schwartz now adds more than the diviner’s view as he explains the views of the protagonist, of his parents (King Wǔ Dīng 武丁, Queen Fù Hǎo 婦好), and others as reflected in the inscriptions.

with 600 footnotes), and the dissertation itself must have taken at least a few years to complete. One is impressed by Schwartz's familiarity with the state of the art in the field of OBI studies, especially in China. For a young scholar to have such mastery of the field is something that the present reviewer could not have imagined half a century ago.

The book consists of seven major parts:

1. Introduction to the *HYZ* OBI, which is divided into two, Part I: The Basics and Part II: People (70 pages);
2. Translation — the most substantial part, precluded by Conventions and Symbols (2 pages) — of the entire 560 pieces that contain 2,452 individual inscriptions (321 pages);
3. Appendix I: Raw Data for each inscribed piece — such as catalogue and excavation number, length and width of each oracle-bone piece, divination crack (carved or not), color (black or vermilion) used to fill the inscriptions, erasures, nature of material, and whether or not any work of rejoining broken pieces has been done (39 pages);
4. Appendix II: Parallel or related content, sets, and synchronies (22 pages);
5. Appendix III: The “Big Synchrony” (3 pages);
6. Bibliography (14 pages); and
7. Index (2 pages).

I have counted the number of pages in each of the seven major parts as they seem indicative of the extent to which Schwartz's interest lay in studying the *HYZ* inscriptions. Translation is, of course, the most important because it is synonymous with understanding what each inscription may have meant. The present reviewer's interest is the same, and so this review is concerned mainly with issues significant enough to influence the understanding of the inscriptions not only in the *HYZ* collection but in other collections.

I classified various hermeneutic issues as belonging to one of the following three categories:

1. substantial: those that questioned or challenged Schwartz's interpretations;
2. also substantial, but while related only indirectly to Schwartz's interpretations, they relate directly to mine; and

3. relatively minor, including some questions I have, but for which no clear answer can be provided, as well as lapses and typos.

For category (1) I prepared more than thirty notes, some quite lengthy. For category (2), I prepared three substantial notes. None of the observations in these two categories are included in this review due to their sheer length (altogether about 30,000 words). I intend to consider the larger questions these two categories raise in a later paper focusing on the philosophy of methodologies in reading OBI.

Here I offer a brief review highlighting some problems I have identified in category (3), both to address the book's characteristics and to offer a caution about relying on these translations.

A few general remarks on the seven major parts of the book are in order. A highlight is what Schwartz calls "synchrony," made possible by the relatively rich-in-context divinations represented in the *HYZ* collection.² As for (2), Translation, I examined it individually in the separate notes. In general, I found many of Schwartz's translations questionable (frequently unreliable), a few even incomprehensible. This is due mainly to his failing to procure the relevant bibliography and to acquire the technical finesse to grasp and assess some important issues in the literature written in English. As regards (7), Index, I felt that it is inadequate. Since the content is extremely rich, a subject index should have been fuller.

To sum up, *The Oracle Bone Inscriptions from Huayuanzhuang East* is a valuable book scholars may wish to consult. However, it is marred by numerous errors and requires much caution in dealing with various analyses presented in it. In terms of the methodologies of reading OBI, no disciplined application of any particular persuasion seems discernible.

² When working on the *BB* (*q.v.* Abbreviations), I used the term "contextual hierarchies" (Takashima 2010: I.12). This is similar to Schwartz's "synchronies." While the former is broader in its coverage, the latter seems a more specific rubric. What is generally lacking in OBI is the context in which each divination inscription can be placed. The fuller the context the more helpful it is for understanding. In a separate paper, tentatively called "Aspects of the Philosophy of Methodology in Reading Oracle-Bone Inscriptions," I wish to consider whether "contextual hierarchies" or "synchronies" can be regarded as a "methodology." I received the impression that Schwartz takes "synchronies" to be a kind of methodology of reading OBI, but I tend to think that it is not and intend to argue for such a view.

My notes from category (3) are exemplified in the following list of relatively “minor points,”³ including questions, lapses, and typos, for which short comments and/or corrections are provided.⁴ It is not, however, exhaustive of this category (see the last paragraph in n. 3).

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 6, n. 8: Din gyun	Improper breaking
p. 28, l. 7: “read a crack”	The word 占, being related to <i>zhān</i> /*tiam 瞻 ‘look at, gaze;’ <i>chān</i> /*threm 覘 ‘observe;’ advises “scan cracks”
p. 28 (4): 雨其至于夕 “Rain likely arrives by evening.”	Incorrect understanding of 于 (cf. Takashima 2018)

³ I use the term “minor points” with due respect to both Schwartz and the Shāng diviners and their entourage, who might have intended to convey meanings completely different from my interpretations. Having said this, there are some disturbing things I find in the book under review, especially translations of the original into English.

The single most surprising error is found at p. 44, n. 91: “... the graph 子 in this inscription was intended to be read as two words: read up in combination with Ren 壬 as Renzi 壬子, day 49/60; and read down as the subject, ‘our lord.’ As such, *yi* Renzi 翌壬子 would then be, ‘upcoming Renzi (day 49/60).’” Schwartz must have known that there is a strict paleographical distinction between 子 as the first of the twelve earthly branches, 𠄎, and that, as a word meaning “son; exalted title (addressee from the equal/inferior),” it is written 𠄎. The inscription is *HYZ* 108.5; the rubbing shows 𠄎, not 𠄎

The list given was prepared during my first reading of Schwartz’s book, and its contents are not complete. There are actually many other lapses and oversights in the book. To give but one example, at p. 88, n. 43, Schwartz mentions “Zhao Ping’an 2017,” but it is not found in his Bibliography.

⁴ The following notational convention is adopted hereunder: “p. 6,” e.g., refers to the page number “6”; “n. 8” refers to the note number; “l. 7” refers to the line number counting from the top of a page; “p. 28, (4)” refers to the page number “28,” and “(4)” refers to the example number; “l. -20” refers to the line number counting from the bottom of a page; all these are in reference to Schwartz 2019.

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 29, l. -20: “the use of the stative, non-modal negative 不..., and not 勿 or 毋 ... means that divination was being done <i>about the king</i> and not <i>for him</i> ”	Hard to understand the rationale
p. 35, (12): 往于舞 “Going to dance”	舞 should be a noun; same as 田, 溝, 河, 唐, 敦, 京, 黍, 粳, 阡, etc. So, 舞 in this context may well have meant “dancing place”
p. 35, (14)(16): 弗	弗 is translated as “is not going to be upset,” which is stative or eventive, but it negates an action and process, dynamic verb. This follows the theories on the grammatical use of the negatives put forward in Takashima 1996; 2020.
p. 35, (18): 丁亡戾 “His Highness will have no misfortune.”	This sounds like a prediction, but it should be apotropaic.
p. 36, (19): “until its end”; also on p. 138, 69.6	Meaning unclear
p. 38, n. 78, l. 3: twelve instance	Typo
p. 45, l. 8; l. -7: “Going to Xuan”	Incomprehensible
p. 50, l. 12: “ <i>xue</i> 學 also meant to instruct”	When 學 is used in the sense of “instruct,” the reading is <i>xiào</i> (later came to be written 教)

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 51, l. -2: "...g-d; ..."	Why is "god" spelt "g-d"?
p. 54, l. -3 & n. 127: "Di also occurs in isolation and in reference to the king's deceased father" for which <i>HJ</i> 35931 is cited	Checked <i>HJ</i> 35931 (see <i>HJSW</i>), but could not find 帝 used in isolation
p. 56, (28): "Praying, approach the ☐, coming to Shang Jia"	Incomprehensible; a similar problem associated with 于 in the first example quoted under "Day 50/60" on p. 46 (<i>HYZ</i> 195)
p. 59, l. 15: "a evident play"	Typo
p. 60, l. -7: "die suddenly"	How could 殄 (if the bone graph wrote this word) mean this?
p. 66, l. 12: (<i>duo gong</i> 多工)	Repeated
p. 73, l. -12: "about I understand"	Typo
p. 77, n. 6: Schuessler 2006	Should be 2007
p. 80, n. 17, l. -4: but it within	Typo
p. 84, n. 32, l. 3: ever was ever	Typo
p. 88, n. 42, l. 8: cracksequence	Typo

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 90, n. 56, l. 3; p. 191, 168.2: Likely will have tradeable horses	其 translated incorrectly; how do we know 賈馬 meant tradeable/marketable horses?
p. 91, n. 58: Following Serruys' rule...	Apart from the problem of Serruys' rule itself, one cannot apply it here: 其 is used in a dependent clause 7.6 paired with 7.7
p. 100, n. 79, l. 5: it quite straightforward	Typo
p. 101, n. 83, l. 3-5: "nominalized verb phrase" ... it confirms that least one ...	There is no nominalized verb phrase; also a typo ("at" missing) — "it confirms ..."; it does not
p. 102, n. 88: Translation offered for 338 (子往宜) "Our lord will go the viand-offering service"	Translation requires justification
p. 104, n. 92, l. -2: I use "about" not in the sense of ...	This note should have been put at its first occurrence (p. 29, example [9])
p. 105, 27.1; p. 109, 29.5: have (> add)	又 here is a <i>qùshēng</i> , not <i>shǎngshēng</i> , word; it doesn't mean "have" from which to get "add"
p. 108, n. 105: <i>chu</i> 琫; ... <i>you</i> 又 as the sound value	For 琫 the 廣韻 gives two 反切: 之六切 and 昌六切, the former gives " <i>shū</i> " (standard) and the latter " <i>chu</i> ." How could <i>you</i> 又 be the sound value? The 廣韻 gives 于救切 yielding <i>yòu</i>

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 111, n. 111: “282.3 confirms”	Should be “228.3”
p. 113, 37.1: ... bulls that are sacrificed (to) ...	Why passive for 歲 (> 劇)? Who conducts the 劇-ing? Ditto below (37.2)
p. 114, n. 118: phoentic	Typo
p. 121, n. 136: designed eradicate	Typo
p. 125, 50.4: “Should make an encounter.”	Incorrect understanding of 其邁. I suggest: “It will happen to encounter boars.”
p. 128, 53.18: “... His Highness who [does](it)”	Understanding of 作 as “do it” questionable; what does “it” refer to? 作 here should be taken as causative (Takashima 2009)
p. 129, n. 152: 禦往 as a verb compound meaning “exorcise”	How could it be a verb compound?
p. 131, n. 156: “... topic marker <i>wei</i> 唯 ...”	佳 (唯, 惟, 維) is not a topic marker; it is a copula
p. 141, 75.8: “something will be given”	How could 有畀子 mean as translated?
p. 155, 103.4: ... to end the day	Typo?
p. 162, n. 227: pictograph graph	“graph” redundant

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 165, 115.2: pen-raised pen-raised cows	Typo
p. 178, 142.3, 4: Pray about ...	Highly doubtful rendering
p. 181, n. 267: ... is occurs ...	Typo
p. 185, 154.2: "... is likely to first have ..."	Incorrect translation for 其先有伐
p. 194, n. 283: "... the negative <i>wang</i> 亡 'not have'."	亡 is not a negative; it is a verb with a negative meaning
p. 225, n. 338: "匕 as a phonetic complement [to 貝]."	匕 (OC *piʔ, *pih) and 貝 (OC *pops ?) belong to completely different rime groups
p. 230, n. 352: ... the animal is not the object of 彫	Why not? This is a blind belief without evidence or argument.
p. 236, 236.16: "Assuming Jia has fish,"	Need an explanation for this translation of 家其有魚
p. 246, 247.7: "Arrange the bound ones that our lord is not going to make his servitors."	A violation of the modification structure; also tense and aspect problem
p. 246, 247.10, 12: In 247.10 弗艱 is rendered "will not cause him any affliction," but in 247.12 the same expression is translated "Will not be afflicted (by it)."	Here the negative used is 弗 which negates action-process, dynamic verbs, not stative, eventive, passive verbs.

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 277, 286.21: “make prayer” for 作祝	What is the difference between 祝 ‘make prayer’ (without 作) and 作祝 ‘make prayer’? 作 here must be used as causative
p. 285, n. 447: “leads to me to read ...”	Typo
p. 291, 302+344.1: “[it being] directed to protect the hunt.”	How could “[佳]狩禦往” be translated as given?
p. 292, 304.3: “... add anything (> offer anything)” for 弼又(有)	又 interpreted as 有 has no such a meaning as “add anything”; “make offering” seems better
p. 299, n. 475: “Our lord’s shoulder exorcism will be sent off”	Incomprehensible
p. 301, n. 483: “ <i>si</i> 死 after the negative <i>fu</i> 弗 is to be read transitively, and that its object was the prepositioned verb phrase “having a pick up.”	有取 is rendered “having a pick up” (itself vague) used as the object of the supposed transitive verb 死 “put ... to death.” If 死 were a transitive verb, the object would be a living creature, not 有取, which should mean “what [she] took”)

Error/Query	Correction/Comment
p. 309, 345.5: 弗正 is translated “It will not be correct.”	The translation given is aspectually stative, eventive, and non-dynamic. But Schwartz’s understanding of the negative 弗 is to negate the transitive verbs (after Serruys). My interpretation of this negative has more to do with aspect and modality than the transitive-intransitive dichotomy (Takashima 1996). 弗正 should mean “X will not (be able to) (place>) usher ... (to) the correct (ritual) position.”
p. 322, n. 509: “𠄎 is a phonetic loan for <i>nie</i> 孽 ‘evil’; see 286.11.”	Checked 286.11, but there is nothing related to the phonetic loan mentioned. Cài Zhémào (2004: 168) has a different interpretation.
p. 330, 391.11: largetablets	Typo

ABBREVIATIONS OF ORACLE-BONE COLLECTIONS AND THEIR
STUDIES REFERRED TO IN THIS REVIEW

BB 丙編

Xiǎotún dì èrběn: Yīnxū wénzì: Bǐngbiān 小屯第二本—殷墟文字—丙編, 6 vols. Compiled by Chang Ping-ch'üan (Zhāng Bǐngquán) 張秉權. Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1957–1972.

HJ 合集

Jiǎgǔwén héjí 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. Hú Hòuxuān 胡厚宣, editor-in-chief. Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú 中華書局, 1978–1982.

HJSW 合集釋文

Jiǎgǔwén héjí shìwén 甲骨文合集釋文, 4 vols. Hú Hòuxuān 胡厚宣, editor-in-chief. Associate editors: Wáng Yǔxìn 王宇信, Yáng Shēngnán 楊升南, Mèng Shìkǎi 孟世凱, Xiè Jì 謝濟. Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú 中華書局, 1999.

HYZ 花園莊

Huāyuánzhuāng dōngdì jiǎgǔ 花園莊東地甲骨, 6 vols. Kunming: Yúnnán rénmin chūbǎnshè 雲南人民出版社, 2003.

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2009: “Shāngdài yǔyán zhōng dài ‘shǐ’zì hé ‘zuò’zì de shíyì jiégòu.” In *Hé Lèshì jìniàn wénjí*, pp. 67–90. Beijing: Yǔyán chūbǎnshè. 〈商代語言中帶“史”(使)字和“乍”(作)字的使役結構〉《何樂士紀念文集》, 67–90 頁. 北京: 語言出版社.

2010: *Studies of Fascicle Three of Inscriptions from the Yin Ruins*, Vol. I: General Notes, Text and Translations (殷墟文字丙編研究, 上冊: 解說·隸定·英譯) (translations up to plastron #259 by Paul L-M. Serruys 司禮儀); Vol. II: New Palaeographical and Philological Commentaries (殷

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