Working for His Majesty

Research Notes on Labor Mobilization in Late Shang China (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.), as Seen in the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions, with Particular Attention to Handicraft Industries, Agriculture, Warfare, Hunting, Construction, and the Shang’s Legacies

David N. Keightley

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Shou you you 受虫又
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Egyptian, by contrast, ultimately gave rise to all historically known scripts of the modern world, save those of East Asia. . . . China is, in other words, one of only two civilizations in the history of mankind to have invented ex nihilo a script that has endured down to the present day, and thus to have influenced the course of human history in regard to the most fundamental feature of historical civilization itself, the use of writing. (Boltz 1999:123)

The present work deals with the Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.) in North China, the first to leave written records, and its efforts—evidently with great success—which focused on the artisan corps, labor mobilization, farming, warfare, hunting, building, leadership, and culture that made it all possible. My introduction to the subject of Shang labor mobilization—apart from the obligatory graduate student brush with Karl August Wittfogel’s work—came about quite accidentally in a Tokyo 東京 bookstore in mid-December 1967. My wife, Vannie, and I* had just spent two-plus years in Taipei 臺北 and were then spending six weeks in Japan before I returned to Columbia University to write my dissertation on labor mobilization in the Eastern Zhou 東周 (770–221 B.C.). When I asked what the bookstores had on ancient China, one of the clerks showed me Shima Kunio’s 島邦男 concordance, Inkyo bokuji sōrui 殷墟卜辭綜類 (A comprehensive compilation of divinations from the waste of Yin), whose first edition had been published in November 1967. I was not then working in the Shang. I didn’t read oracle-bone inscriptions. So I merely flipped it open, glanced at the first page, and moved on to other volumes.

The memory of that first page, however, remained lodged in my mind. I had evidently had the good sense to realize that it transcribed a series of inscriptions that dealt with the “raising” of men. Indeed, had I been able to read the first inscription that Shima transcribed (presented below at inscription number [52AB]) I would have found: “In the present season,
His Majesty should raise men, five thousand (of them), and march to regulate the Tufang, (for We) will receive abundant assistance.” Almost a year passed. I thought I should write a preface on the Shang background. The moment I began to study the oracle-bone inscriptions I realized they contained a mine of information. And before I knew it, the focus of my dissertation was shifting from the Eastern Zhou to the Shang and Western Zhou (1045–771 B.C.) (Keightley 1969). I immediately contacted the Tokyo bookstore and ordered a copy of Shima’s invaluable concordance, which arrived in New York in October 1968, and which opened up the Shang inscriptions to me, as it did to all scholars, in ways that permitted Shang history to be studied in a systematic way.

To Chao Lin 趙林, a student of the Academia Sinica in 1968, who first guided my early steps in the oracle bones, I owe a substantial debt. My first publication (Keightley 1969a) was a review of Shima Kunio’s contribution, and I dedicated my first book (Keightley 1978) to him.1 Since I was largely self-taught in oracle-bone studies, I suspect that I might never have been encouraged to focus on labor mobilization in the Shang had I not both stumbled across Shima’s volume in that Tokyo bookstore, and had I not flipped it open to that crucial first page. As the Shang would have appreciated, luck, or perhaps ancestral guidance, plays a role.

I have devoted works to the study of the sources (Keightley 1978, 1994, 1999b, 1999e); the origins of Chinese civilization (1983, 1987a); the Shang environment (1999a); the Shang in general (1999b, 2000); Shang religion (1978a, 1984, 1985, 1998, 2004) and divination (1988, 1999d, 2001, 2006a, 2008); the origins of Chinese writing (1989a, 2006); comparisons with the Greeks (1993); and numerous reviews (e.g., 1973, 1982, 1982a, 1990, 1997). (I cite only works that bear upon the present endeavor.) But I have kept my 1969 dissertation—never before published—much in mind over the intervening forty-plus years. My dissertation focused in part on the activities of the zhong 眾 and ren 人; they still play a central role in the pages that follow. But I had subsequently found it necessary to treat the dependent laborers of Shang in their full administrative and cultural context.2 I had translated 102 Shang oracle bones in the dissertation; the present work has 341 of them, often with several charges on the bone or shell (I estimate about 535 charges).

This book deals with oracle-bone inscriptions of the Late Shang dynasty, covering the period from Wu Ding 武丁 (ca. ?–1189 B.C.) to Di Xin 帝辛 (ca. 1086–1045 B.C.). Wu Ding presumably reigned for more than twenty years (Keightley 1978:175–76), but we do not have a firm grip on the year

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Notes about the Sources, Citation, and Transcription Conventions

One copy of the oracle-bone script and its modern transcription may be found in Yao Xiaosui 姚孝遂 and Xiao Ding 肖丁, eds., *Yinxu jiagu keci moshi zongji* 殷墟甲骨刻辭摹釋總集 (1988), abbreviated as MZ (reviewed by Keightley 1997:507–08).


In addition to the *Heji*, which contains 41,956 oracle-bone inscriptions, Peng Bangjiong 彭邦炯 et al., *Jiaguwen Heji: Bubian* 甲骨文合集: 補編 (1999), contains 13,450 more pieces; I will cite this as *Hebu* 合補.1 I also refer to Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎 and Shen Jianhua 沈建華, *Jiaguwen xiaoshi zongji* 甲骨文校釋總集 (2006; abbreviated as JGXS) and to varied computer databases, in particular CHANT (Chinese Ancient Texts) (and see Shen Jianhua and Cao Jinyan 2001). All of these must be considered.2

I also cite Hsü Chin-hsiung, *Oracle Bones from the White and Other Collections* (1979) and *Xiaotun nandi jiagu* 小屯南地甲骨 (1980, 1983) (reviewed in Keightley 1990:51–59), both of which appear in MZ and Yao Xiaosui and Xiao Ding, eds., *Yinxu jiagu keci leizuan* 殷墟甲骨刻辭類纂 (abbreviated as Y; reviewed in Keightley 1997:507–13). I also cite, but rarely, a variety of other collections in Bibliography A.

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1. “Since the first discovery of oracle bone inscriptions in 1899, more than 160,000 inscribed pieces have been unearthed” (Lu Liancheng and Yan Wenming 2005:166).

A substantial portion of the book is devoted to “Inscription Glosses” (Appendix 1) and “Glossary of Shang Terms and Phrases” (Appendix 2). The meaning of the Shang words is by no means always clear—our first Chinese dictionaries, the Er Ya 尔雅 and Shuowen jiezi 說文解字, have been dated to a millennium or more later—and scholars have frequently disagreed about their interpretation (see Serruys 1974:12–13). The “Glosses” and “Glossary” provide an introduction to the interpretative issues and alert the reader to the uncertain nature of some of the readings that I have adopted. They are intended to be honest accounts of my thinking, rather than assertive refutation of the thought of others. They leave grounds for disagreement and invite readers to form their own conclusions.

A word should be said about the periodization. Archaeologically, I assign the finds from Erlitou 二里頭 and Yanshi 偃師 to the pre-Shang period; I assign Erligang 二里崗 and Zhengzhou 鄭州 to the Early Shang; I assign Huanbei 洪北 to the Middle Shang; and I assign Xiaotun 小屯 (or Anyang 安陽) to the Late Shang.

I divide the finds from the sites into “Yinxu I” (Pan Geng 盤庚 [ca. 1300 B.C.], Xiao Xin 小辛, Xiao Yi 小乙, and early Wu Ding 武丁); “Yinxu II” (late Wu Ding, Zu Geng 祖庚, Zu Jia 祖甲); “Yinxu III” (Lin Xin 麟辛 to Wen Wu Ding 文武丁); and “Yinxu IV” (Di Yi 帝乙 and Di Xin 帝辛 [to 1045 B.C.]). For the oracle-bone inscriptions, I use the five-period dating of Dong Zuobin (1945), dating the periods from Period “I” (Wu Ding)—the diviner Bin 賓, Que 鵆, etc.—till Period “V” (Di Xin). But I do not follow Dong in seeing the re-emergence of the “Old School” in Period IV, a dating that was also followed by Heji. I place, rather, the Shi 𠂤-group and Li 歷-group in the two Periods of I and II. Among other problems,
The social conditions and cultural dimensions of work in early China were deeply involved in the genesis of its elite dynastic culture. Neolithic men and women in China probably worked harder, and were less handsomely rewarded, than their hunter-gatherer forebears.

The prehistoric cultures that developed in China from ca. 8000 to 2000 B.C. are traditionally described as “Neolithic,” meaning that farming was the main method of subsistence for a community, there was sedentism rather than seasonal mobility, and people relied upon pottery vessels for the preparation and consumption of food, as well as on ground stone tools. (Underhill and Habu 2006:122)

At the same time, a division of labor was occurring along gender lines as early as the sixth millennium B.C., a division that was associated with the general decline in the social and economic status of women and children. As early as the Neolithic, the ability to enjoy and display the labor of others contributed to social status, and this ability was increasingly demonstrated by the appearance of tools, more finely made and polished than mere utility would require, whose function as grave goods was to delineate enduring status (Keightley 1999:7–10). That some of the earliest victims of human sacrifice were buried with their tools and alongside their masters further testifies to the way in which dependent labor relations in this life were expected to continue in the next. It may also be suggested that the ancestors were exalted by the living in both the Neolithic and Bronze Ages because the living could, wittingly or unwittingly, put them to use. The dead, in this culture, were not simply grieved; they were put to work.

The trends involving the differentiation of sex and status and the symbolization of authority by means of emblematic work tools continued to develop in the Bronze Age.⁠¹ This survey of dependent labor in Late Shang

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considers the zhong 众, the ren 人, the officers who led them, the nature of their mobilizations, and their roles in agriculture, warfare, hunting, and construction (see chs. 12–15). Study of the handicraft industries, also directed by the royal house, confirms that the Shang elites presided over a sophisticated and complex economy. An examination of who the state laborers were leads to the hypothesis that skilled handicraft production was in the hands of occupational lineages (see ch. 8). Where no legal concept of individual rights existed, furthermore, it is more useful to characterize Shang labor in terms of degrees of dependency and privilege than in terms of slavery and freedom (see pp. 53ff.).

Some work and service practices in Late Shang China appear to have been, in part, highly ritualized. Warfare, to take one example of state service, involved a series of formalized, religiously sanctioned procedures. Study of the diviners’ work schedules increasingly indicates that the ritualists at the royal Shang court had created a highly ordered situation in which sacrifices and announcements to the ancestors were divined and performed according to a strictly controlled schedule and in strictly controlled places (see, e.g., Keightley 2004:20–26).

There was an acceptance of the responsibility, shared generally by the king’s subjects and diffused downward through the patrimonial and patriarchal political and social system, to serve the king and lineage heads; the word shi 事, it is worth recalling, meant both “work” and “service” in Zhou 周 texts. The Shang kings’ service ethic helps to explain the strength of the state-service ethic of later times. These cultural expectations do much to explain the remarkable successes of early Chinese culture and its political institutions.

Efficient labor conscription in early China was both a sign of, and precondition for, a strong state; it made power possible and it made power desirable. The way in which Late Shang divination and kingship were linked is nowhere better demonstrated than in the mobilization and employment of the dynasty’s manpower. Labor conscripts were the fundamental source of state power in ancient China. They served in armies, built city walls and temple-palaces, excavated tombs, hauled supplies, dug ditches, cleared and farmed the land in part, and worked at the sundry tasks of production and manufacture that their lord required.5

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4. “The Late Shang state probably controlled at most much of Henan and some parts of Hebei, Shandong, and Shanxi, all within the North China macroregion” (Thorp 2006:237).
Groups of highly skilled artisans labored in the workshops of Middle and Late Shang.

“Specialized production” has been defined at its most essential level as “the production of substantial quantities of goods and services well beyond local or personal need, and whose production is generally organized, standardized and carried out by persons freed in part from subsistence pursuits.”¹

The excavation of vast numbers of articles in bone, stone, shell, and jade, often intricately carved; of high-grade pottery; of patterned textiles; of ornate ritual bronzes; of light, elegant chariots and ornamental horse trappings; of a wide range of axes, halberds, arrowheads, bows, and other stone, bone, and bronze weapons and tools—all these finds indicate the existence not only of a skilled artisan corps serving the needs of the ruling elite but also of an efficient central management. A survey of the Late Shang handicraft industries will suggest the range of activities that the dynastic elites supported and coordinated.²

Bone Working

The Shang period was the golden age of Chinese bone working.³ Far more arrowheads were made of bone than of bronze or stone, and although bone

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¹ Flad (2004:30), citing Arnold and Munns 1994:475 (italics added). See too Barbieri-Low (in press): “Full time, attached craft specialization is one feature shared by all the centralized, hierarchal social formations known as complex or state-level societies to anthropologists and political scientists and as civilizations to historians and art historians.”

² The following paragraphs represent an updated and considerably revised version of Keightley 1969:40–57. I attempt only a sketch; the archaeology of the Anyang site is extensive and rich. On the study of Shang archaeology in general, see Hu Houxuan 1955a; Li Chi 1977; Wang Wei 1999; Wilkinson 2000:341–55.

The Artisan Corps

The Status of the Artisans

The archaeological data indicate the existence of groups of highly skilled artisans, clustered around the royal house and ruling class. Their residences and workshops appear to have been of higher quality than the pit dwellings of other members of the society, and their high degree of technical skill must also have set them above the common people.\(^1\) Presumably, the artisans or craftsmen were organized in such a way—either as occupational corporations, clans, or village units (see ch. 8)—that their skills could be handed on without loss. The archaeological evidence also suggests that some of the artisanate was at least semi-literate, another sign of high, “official,” status (see p. 25).

The status of the artisans was varied. As Li Liu has noted (2003:8), the traditional view in which “a sharp distinction” existed between consumers and producers of prestige goods, represented by elite patrons and commoner artisans who were categorized as attached craftsmen (Costin 1991; Earle 1987), . . . has been challenged in recent years.

In the Neolithic, at least, she proposes (Li Liu 2003:14) that it may have been the same elite groups who held the cosmological knowledge, had access to the raw material, and controlled the production and distribution of finished products.

The increasing specialization and even industrialization of Late Shang manufacturing, however, together with the increasing stratification of Bronze

The oracle-bone inscriptions refer to the dependent laborers of Late Shang as the zhong 羣 or ren 人 (see Glossary for zhongren).1 If treated as descriptive, generic terms, they could be translated as “the many” and “the men.” But zhong, at least, served as a status term that designated a particular, and not especially numerous, class of people in Late Shang society. And it is not clear that zhong in the Shang yet had the sense of “many” (see Glossary for zhong). I prefer, accordingly, to leave zhong untranslated. The zhong in this view was not simply a social category but a Shang administrative rubric, “the zhong.” Raising the zhong (as in [68A], [70]–[72]) was comparable, say, to raising “the Archers” (as in [73AB] and [74]).

The Shang word ren 人, “man” or “person,” was a generic term that could be applied to a variety of statuses.2 The king might use ren of himself, as in the phrase yu yi ren 余一人亡禍, “I the one man will have nothing ominous” (Yingcang 1923);3 it might be linked to the zhong, as in the term zhongren 羣人 (see later);4 ren was used of men serving in the royal armies,5 of enemy invaders,6 and of captives in battle.7 Ren was also a collective term, as it was in later Chinese texts, used to refer to the people, or at least to the ren, of a certain place.8 For all these reasons, I translate ren as

1. The term zhong was not recorded in the Shang bronze inscriptions (Li Lingpu et al. 2001:438).
2. Chao Lin (1982:117–18; also Zhao Lin 1982:135–36) makes the same point. The ren人/仁-like behavior of Eastern Zhou—“to behave in a ren-like way”—was not yet in evidence (Gassmann 2000:359). The term min 民 was rarely, if ever, used in the oracle-bone inscriptions (S101.3; Y207.2; Sōran, no. 0462).
3. For other occurrences of the phrase, “I the one man,” see Heji 20328, 23721, 36181, 36514, 36966, 41028; Yingcang 1791. See also Hu Houxuan 1957; 1981; Li Xiangping 2003.
4. [25], [68AB], [79], [82], [231], [236].
5. [50], [229], [230], [242AB].
6. As in [322] and Heji 137b.
7. [39], [41AB], [179AB]. A few oracle bones, mainly from Period I, also refer to “prisoners” (yu 圃): Y1004.1; JGWD:1170–871; Wang Shenxing 1992:92–93; Sōran, no. 1257.
8. See, e.g., [29AB], [118], and the discussion at ch. 4, p. 61 below. Nylan (2001:154–55) gives the Zhou evolution of the terms for ren 人 and min 民.
Punishments, Human Sacrifice, and Accompanying-in-Death

Possible Punishments

The Late Shang inflicted a series of punishments and probably treated prisoners of war badly. Some of those were enemies of the Shang and were only incidentally a part of Shang “slave economy” or “dependent labor.” The Shang certainly did not divine about punishments a great deal and certainly did not inflict punishments on the zhong.

There was a particular punishment that involved, in the view of many scholars, amputating one of the feet (yue 跖). This is possible.

[30] 丁巳卜亘貞: 刎若

Making cracks on dingsi (day 54), Xuan divined: “There will be an amputation (?); it will be approved.” (I. Bin) (Heji 6001)

[31] 戊午卜永貞: 刎不蘊

Making cracks on wuwu (day 55), Yong divined: “There will be an amputation (?), but there will be no death (yun).” (I. Bin) (Xucun 1560)

The Verbs for “Mobilize”

The verb for mobilization was recorded in the bone inscriptions by two graphs: 共 (which I read as gong 共 [= gong 供]), “to give, present, supply, raise,” as in [47] and [50], and 登 (which I read as deng 登), “to make ascend, raise up” (as in [49] and [51]), a word that, in the sense of submitting or raising up the records of mobilization, was still being associated with raising men in the Zhouli (p. 4 above), both graphs being written with the two-hands element included. I use the English word “raise” (for gong) and “raise up” (for deng) to distinguish the two Shang terms, but the words were semantically and phonetically related (see Glossary entries for gong and deng), and the Shang used them interchangeably in contexts of mobilization, 1 as in:

[47] 癸巳卜殼貞: 共人呼伐兮方受[بارك]

Making cracks on guisi (day 30), Que divined: “(We should) raise (gong) men and call upon (hu) them to attack (fa) the Gongfang, (for We) will receive (abundant assistance [shou you you]).” (I. Bin) (*Heji 6173)

[48A] 己已卜殼貞: 使人于兮

[Making cracks on] jilisi . . . , Bin divined: “(We) will send the men to Cha.”

[48B] 己已卜殼貞: 登千呼見□

Making cracks on jisi (day 6), Que divined: “Raising up (deng) 1,000 (men), (we) call upon (hu) them to observe (?) . . . .” (I. Bin) (*Heji 7337)

1. See too the gloss to *Heji 7350f.
Wu Ding frequently mobilized the ren but he more rarely mobilized the zhong. Of the Period I inscriptions that refer to Wu Ding’s raising ren, some forty-five use the verb gong and forty-six use the verb deng (Y1.1–2.1). These ninety-some divinations include

[62A] 甲辰卜賓貞: 我人

Making cracks on jiachen (day 41), Bin divined: “We should raise (gong) men.”

[62B] 貞: 我勿人

“We should not raise men.”¹ (I. Bin) (Heji 9811f)

[63] 貞: 令在北人

Divined: “Order that at North Gong (one) raise men.” (I. Bin) (*Heji 7294f)²

[64] 貞: 呼在昧人

Divined: “Call out (hu) to raise (men) at Mei (?)”³ (I. Bin) (Heji 8070)

1. I assume that Wo 我 was a reference to the royal Shang; it seems unlikely that Wu Ding would have been divining about another group or officer, named Wo (Sōran, no. 1526), “raising men.” See too Zhou Hongxiang 1969:133, 147, n. 23.


The Occupational Lineages

Very few divinations about Shang state manufacturing have been found.\(^1\) The question of who the dynasty’s laborers were, therefore, can be answered only by a series of careful inferences drawn from the objects they made, from archaeological finds like workshops and tools, and from our understanding of Shang society in general. Guo Moruo, for instance, had proposed that the bronzes of Late Shang and early Zhou had been made by slave labor (see pp. 53–54 above). Another approach is based on the evidence of the so-called “lineage names” incised on the oracle bones, bronzes, and pottery of Shang. Some of these names suggest specific occupations, and Satō Taketoshi (1962:14–20, 321–24), following the research of Ding Shan and Shirakawa Shizuka, had proposed that skilled handicraft production was in the hands of occupational lineages (shokugyō shizoku 職業氏族).

It should be stressed that no precision is implied by the use of the word “lineages.” In the discussion that follows I use it simply to refer to a group of families bearing the same surname.\(^2\) That the divinations refer to numerous such lineage groups and to various single zu 族 lineages (Y986.1–87.1), with many of the lineage names also appearing as insignia at the end of Shang bronze inscriptions,\(^3\) indicates that the Shang king

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2. Kwang-chih Chang (1963:168; cf. 1968:243; 1977:284) had suggested that, in Shang times, “the families of the Royal House, the nobility, and some of the craftsmen were of the extended family type, probably patrilineal. . . . Beyond the family, unilinear lineages may have been prevalent among the nobility and some of the craftsmen; there were possibly ramagelike kin groups based on patrilineality and primogeniture.” “In tracing the distribution of individual emblems in bronze inscriptions, one finds that it did not follow political borders. The ju 矢 emblem, for example, occurs in bronzes known to have been unearthed in an area that stretches from Qishan [岐山] to Shandong and from Henan to Hunan” (Kwang-chih Chang 1980:253); see too Rao Zongyi 1985:302–03.
3. Hayashi (1968:34–43) identified 217 oracle-bone names—of Fang 方 countries, Hou 侯 and Bo 伯 rulers, and places and persons—which appear as lineage insignia on Shang and Western Zhou bronzes; the number has subsequently increased.
The numbers of men that the Late Shang rulers mobilized are significant, as they bear on social status, and as an indicator of considerable powers of recruitment. A good number of the mobilizations may simply be repeat divinations, but they still serve as an impressive reminder of the ability of the Shang state to raise its forces.

When the zhong were numbered at all, for example, they were only numbered as one hundred or less:

[80] 之日喪雉十又一
“... this day... lose (sang) [zhong?]... lose (zhi) 11 (zhong [?]).” (I. Bin) (*Heji 8659)

[81] 受眾百王弗悔
“... Shou, it should be the zhong, one hundred (of them), His Majesty will not have regret.” (III–IV. Nameless-Diviner) (Heji 26906)

By contrast, as we have already seen in [49]–[51], and [67], the ren were generally numbered in their thousands—in their 1,000, 3,000, 4,000, and

1. The Shang number system was fully developed, capable of recording relatively high numbers (Venture 2002:152, citing Djamouri 1994).
2. Heji 6639–43, for instance, are all divined on yiwei (day 32) and on scapulas.
4. Shou was also a place-name (Zhang Bingquan 1967:694; JGWD:457).
5. [48B] and Heji 7330 (scapulas), both using the deng 登 verb.
6. For additional charges that refer to raising 3,000 ren, see, e.g., Heji 6167, 6170–72, 6639, 6640, 6641–43, 6990 (shell), 7318–24, 7326, 7329, 39863; Yingcang 150 (shell), 558, 559, 657—all using the deng verb, and all, except as indicated, on scapula—and Heji 6173, 6174, also on scapulas, where the verb is missing. Heji 6185, on a scapula, also refers to 3,000 men, but as the object of a verb (Sōran, no. 3695) that may have meant “inspect.”
7. Heji 6175, on a scapula, refers to 4,000 men, but the verb is missing.
Work Schedule of the Diviners

The inscriptions, however, do throw some light on actual work schedules at the end of the second millennium B.C. The Li 力-group diviners, for example, practiced their scapulimancy in the temples of ritual units whose constituent ancestors had been given the temple name of a particular gan stem—jia, yi, bing, ding, and so on. This is demonstrated by the following sequence of postfaces (in italics) on a Li-group bone:

[94A] 甲寅貞: 其大禦王 自上甲 用白豕九 [中示 凡牛.] 在大甲宗卜

[On jiayin(?) (day 51?) divined: “(We) will (qi) perform a Great Exorcism (yu) for His Majesty (to the ancestors) from Shang Jia (P1) (on down); will sacrifice-in-blood-covenant (with the spirits) (meng) (?) white pigs (?), nine of them; [(to the) Middle Ancestors (Xia Shi) will cut up (and offer the blood of) (?) a cow.”] Cracked in the temple of Da Jia (K3).
The king was the prime source of authority in leading the zhong and ren (see Table 1 on p. 246ff.), at least in the oracle-bone inscriptions. Divinations about performance of “His Majesty’s affairs” (see the Glossary for gu 固) were reserved for the royal retainers; the term was not usually used to dignify the activities of the labor force itself. A study of the officers who were associated with the labor force shows they were frequently led by a named retainer or ally of the king. They might also be associated with some of the king’s official retinue, like the “Many Horse(-chariot officers)”: 

[106] 多馬弜令眾

“. . . the Many Horse(-chariot officers) (Ma) . . . should not order . . . the zhong. . . .” (I) (*Tunnan 4029)

[107A] 驚馬呼取王弗悔

“It should be the Horse(-chariot officers) that (we) call upon (hu) to take (qu) (the zhong?); His Majesty will have no regrets.”

[107B] 以眾王弗悔

“If (the Horse[-chariot officers]?) take the zhong, His Majesty will have no regrets.” (III. He) (Heji 26901)

It is plausible to suppose, on the basis of [106] and [107AB] (see too [117AB]), that the zhong might have served as the foot soldiers attached to the horse chariots led by the officers known as the Duo Ma or Ma.2

1. In only one case ([68A]) were the zhongren linked, through an officer, to His Majesty’s affairs.
2. See too Kolb 1991:36–42.
The Work: Agriculture

I turn now to a series of four chapters that describe the activities of the zhong, the ren, and the officers who led them in the strategic areas of agriculture, warfare, the hunt, and construction.

Many inhabitants of Shang China would have had little notion of the land that lay beyond their daily horizon. Travelling no further than their local fields and woods, many peasants would have felt themselves at the center of a small, familiar world that was intermittently and unpredictably invaded by external forces—like the king on hunt or campaign, marauding beasts, enemy raiders, voracious birds and insects, and, above all, the onslaus of wind, rain, drought, and flood—that entered, often abruptly and unpredictably, from one horizon, left their mark on a settlement, and then passed out of its ken.

The frequent peregrinations of the king and his entourage, by contrast, combined with the reports, tribute payments, court visits, marriage alliances, and so on made by his dependents, officers, and allies, indicate that the Shang court’s knowledge of a wider geography must have been extensive. The well over five hundred place-names that appear in the inscriptions (Song Zhenhao 1991:101) reveal Shang knowledge of a far-flung series of settlements and their human and spiritual inhabitants. But the basic peasant perception, that of the parochial inhabitant anxiously scrutinizing the surrounding borders, attempting to understand and control the irruptions of benevolent or hostile Powers that lurked beyond, may still be discerned in the diviner’s cosmological conceptions. (Keightley 2000:55)

The intention is not to provide a comprehensive account of these topics. I am concerned, rather, to demonstrate the ways in which the Shang elites mobilized and organized their main labor force in four important areas of dynastic activity, the ways in which these activities were endowed with their own ritual significance, and, finally, the ways in which the various activities involved were inter-related. It is significant that most of the labor force is stipulated for military purposes (Table 1). Presumably the peasant
The Work: Warfare

Leadership in Warfare

Military alliances were central to the operations and very existence of the Late Shang state whose more distant zones were ruled by leaders identified in the inscriptions as Hou 侯 ("Archer Lords" [?]) and Bo 伯 ("Patriarch" [?]; Boodberg 1979:217). The Hou were more likely than the Bo to appear as allies of the Shang, sending in tribute and assisting the king’s affairs; they received in return military assistance from the king and benefited from his divinations about their harvests (Keightley 1979–80:28). Numerous divinations about whether the king should ally with various leaders suggest the problematic and changeable nature of these alliances.1

[211] 癸丑卜亘貞: 王隹望乘比伐下危

Making cracks on guichou (day 50), Xuan divined: “It should be Wang Cheng (Wang Cheng) whom His Majesty joins with to attack the Xiawei.”2 (I. Bin) (Heji 811f)

With regard to ideology, the Shang dynasty was often cruel as it lorded over the lesser tribes. For example, the taotie 貳饕, the “animal mask,” perhaps linked to the ancestors, was chilling, at least to the modern viewer:

To some it is a monster—a fearsome image that would scare away evil forces. Others imagine a dragon—an animal whose vast powers had more positive associations. Some hypothesize that it reflects masks used in rituals. Others that it carries over the face-like imagery on neolithic jades from the Liangzhu [良渚] area. Still others see these images as hardly more than designs. By tracing the evolution of the taotie over the course of the Shang, it is possible to show how the vivid, highly animal-like images of late Shang evolved from thin line and dot designs of early Shang. Perhaps the taotie came simply to be associated with the Shang

1. Y61.1–64.1, 106.1–08.1, 911.2–14.1. See too n. 77 below.
2. Also see [303AB], divined on day 52.
The manpower mobilized by the king could also be used in hunting, an activity that was closely related both to military exercises—in which the prey to be taken on the field was animal rather than human—to land clearing, and to agriculture (see ch. 12).1 Some 4,500 of the oracle-bone inscriptions were devoted to the hunt, mainly in Periods III to V.2 As to the number of places listed in the oracle-bone inscriptions, they are over 150 listed by Chen Mengjia (1956:249–312) and 239 listed by Zhong Bosheng (1972, appendix [cited by Fiskesjö 2001:133, n. 416]). The same groups of conscripts or dependent laborers might have been involved in both warfare and hunting. The ability to command and deploy them effectively in one activity presumably bore fruit in the other.3

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3. Hawkes, O’Connell, and Jones (2001:695) suggest “that an important benefit a man earns for himself by hunting big animals is favorable audience attention that affects his social standing relative to other men.”
FIFTEEN

The Work: Construction

Wall Construction

Early evidence of communal labor mobilization can be discerned in the earthen walls that surrounded Neolithic and early Bronze Age fortifications; more than fifty such settlements have now been found—such as those at Haojiatai 郝家台, Pingliangtai 平粮台, and Wangchenggang 王城崗 (all in Henan). The enceintes were often surrounded by moats (Xiaoneng Yang 2004a:117). One of the first known piled-earth walled enceintes was in Li xian 澧縣 in Hunan; it formed an area 200 x 160 m, with the base at the foot of a wall as 6 m wide. It has been dated to 5540–5100 B.C.2 “Building such ramparts and platforms required an immense labor force and high-level management, which suggests that the operative organization exceeded a clan or family unit.”3


2. Xiaoneng Yang 2004a:99, 102, 138. The “exceptional size of the middle Yangzi sites suggests that the elite leaders of these communities were able to command the labor power of a considerable number of people” (Yates 1997:78).

3. Xiaoneng Yang 2000:174 (Yang Xiaoneng 2008:330); he cites Cao Bingwu 1996. See also
The Shang court was impregnated with ritual, the *li* of Shang.¹ For Rappaport, a practitioner of ritual

is not merely transmitting messages encoded in the liturgy, he is also participating in—becoming part of—the order to which his own body and breath give life.²

As Bell observes,

norms and values, on the one hand, become saturated with emotion, while the gross and basic emotions become ennobled through contact with social values. The irksomeness of moral constraint is transformed into the “love of virtue.”³

Ritual, Lukes argues,

helps to define as authoritative certain ways of seeing society: it serves to specify what in society is of special significance, it draws people’s attention to certain forms of relationships and activity.⁴

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¹ The word *li* does not appear in the oracle-bone materials from Xiaotun or the Zhouyuan 周原. For the Zhouyuan materials, see e.g. Rawson 1980:91–92; Wang Yuxin 1984 (with index of *kaishu* 楷書 forms, pp. 349–72); YXFX:163–64. Li Xueqin 1992:133–35 concludes that the date of the oracle bones started with Wen Wang 文王 and go down to Kang Wang 康王 and Zhao Wang 昭王. Wang Hui (1998) reviews three differing hypotheses; the oracle bones were (1) made by Zhou hands, mainly of the time of Wen Wang, some from Cheng Wang 成王; (2) not of Zhou date, but of the Shang royal house, divined by the Shang king in the Shang temple; only a small number were Zhou in origin; (3) made by the Shang king who divined these rituals, but that the recorders were Zhou people. Wang Hui (1998:20) concludes that they were made by the Zhou. See too Liu Liang 1999; Qiu Xigui 2000:68–69; Xiaoneng Yang 2000:193 (Yang Xiaoneng 2008:366–67); Cao Wei 2002; Thorp 2006:228–30, 244–49. For another example of the Zhouyuan bones, see Zhang Weilian and Duan Hongzhen 2008:60–61.


SEVENTEEN

The Role of Geopolitics and Culture

Ancestor Worship

What factors, then, in ancient China account for this routine and large-scale employment of human labor by a central, proto-bureaucratic Shang elite?1 Certainly the Shang were well placed, in terms of agriculture and resources, but Wittfogel’s vision of an agromanagerial despotism motivated by the need for large-scale water control works does not appear to fit the Shang evidence very well. The Shang had the manpower resources and technical skills to build fairly large-scale irrigation systems, but there is no evidence that they did so or that they needed to do so, for the North China Plain was, in terms of both temperature and rainfall, more hospitable to farming at the end of the second millennium B.C. than it is today.2 The Shang may have built city walls—at Erlitou, Zhengzhou, and Huanbei (see, e.g., Dong Qi 2006:56–57)—but the walls were a one-time operation and, once built, required only maintenance. The employment of labor was far more extensive and in tune with the values of the society as whole.3 I would suggest that other factors influenced the development of Shang labor mobilization even more significantly.

1. The paragraphs that follow are based, in part, upon Keightley 1969:346–55; see too Li Chi 1977:247–54. Renfrew (1972:30, 37, 485) argues that we abandon the hope “for an independent variable,” urging that we concentrate upon “feedback loops” and “the multiplier effect.” Bradley (1998:66) notes that “this does not oblige us to think in terms of cause and effect, for the relationship between these processes was surely a reciprocal one. What it does suggest is that Neolithic ideologies and Neolithic economies were subtly intertwined and that both emerged after a period of gradual change.” Xiaoneng Yang (2000:189–93 [Yang Xiaoneng 2008:361–66]; 2004a:133–34) asks a series of good questions, with references. See too Haas 1982:209–17; Song Xinchao 1991:15–19, 93–97; Zhang Guoshuo 1995; Keightley 2004a.


3. Sivin (1972:113, 114) refers to “style defining choices . . . that reflect the continuous influence of social values and priorities.”
EIGHTEEN

The Legacies

Shang traditions were still vital a millennium after the fall of the dynasty. The sixty days still followed the *ganzhi* 干支 system (Chen Mengjia 1956:236) and, perhaps, even the yearly calendar. The chariot was prized in both the Shang and Zhou. Shang rituals and burial practices were followed in the Zhou and beyond. The Shang enemies continue to appear as “names of the ruling class” of Zhou (Průšek 1971:57, n. 18). The states of Lu 鲁 and Song 宋 were regarded as repositories of Shang culture. The *Zhouli* 周禮 records the use of the *zhong* 錅 in the army, the hunt, and in corvée. Myths and legends about the Shang were preserved, some in the successor state of Song. If the particulars flourished in this way, so one may suppose did the ethos and worldview. Every idea, every pattern of thought, has its genealogy, and some of the mental habits central to Zhou, Qin, and Han culture can be traced back, as I have attempted to show, to the ideas and thought patterns of the Shang. “From a wealth and variety of literary evidence it is now recognised that divination and the consul-

6. See, e.g., Waterbury 1942:17–18; Allan 1991:25–56, esp. 39, 41. Confucius advocated riding in the state carriage of Yin 殷 (Lunyu 論語, 15.10). Both Wang Mang 王莽 and the Guang Wu 光武 emperor enfoeffed a Yin heir (Bielenstein 1967:36, 37). Sacrifices to Tang (K1), the dynasty founder, only ceased with the start of the Later Han (Shryock 1932:100). There are numerous references to Shang customs in *Liji* 礼记 and other classics. See Liu Fuqin 1955:1143.1–44.3; 1189.3–90.3.
Inscriptions discussed in this section are marked with an asterisk in the main text. They are listed alphabetically and numerically. Each inscription discussed in this section can be found in the main text by consulting the “Key to the Inscriptions Translated” (p. 483).

Heji 1. Chen Mengjia (1956:606) and S25.2 both supply the wang 王 at the start of [143]; MZ and Heshi do not. I believe, however, that the bottom right corner of the wang graph can be seen in the rubbing. Furthermore, it may be safely supplied on the basis of Heji 5, 王大令眾人曰 王, “. . . Que divined: ‘If His Majesty will greatly order the zhongren saying . . . ,’” engraved in a large calligraphic style and on a large scapula fragment similar to that of Heji 1.

Li Xueqin (1985:101), building on the arguments of Zhang Zhenglang 1983, has proposed that the xie 車 (see Glossary) in this inscription referred to the name of a wind, so that the charge meant [143]: “His Majesty’s great order to the zhongren says: ‘It is the season of the Xie 車 wind, the fields will receive a good harvest.’” (On Xi 車 as the name of the wind of the East Fang, see Heji 14295; e.g., Allan 1991:79–83; Keightley 2000:70–71; Aihe Wang 2000:35; Smith 2008:366–73.) Li notes that there are also charges of the form “受年”; this, he believes, indicates that the Shang recognized that when the Xie wind came at a certain season there would be a good crop. Li Xueqin (1985:99–101; 1989:104–110) and Aihe Wang (2000:29, 35–36, 50), among others, discuss the Four Winds and the Four Seasons. Such an interpretation cannot be excluded. Li Xueqin and Zhang Zhenglang (1983:1) punctuate by putting a comma before the tian of [143], thus 王大令眾人曰: 王, 田其受年, but I know of no comparable case in which a charge ended with 田其受年, “the fields will receive harvest.” Nor am I comfortable that “His Majesty’s great order” to the zhongren would, in this view, turn out not to be an order at all but a comment on the weather. I would also note that, according to the records for 1951–
Glossary of Shang Terms and Phrases

For many years, the standard (although increasingly dated) source for identifying Shang graphs had been Li Xiaoding’s JGWZ (introduced at Keightley 1977; 1978:60). Its reproduction of numerous scholarly discussions remains invaluable, and in this Glossary I generally avoid repeating what has already been discussed there. A more recent survey of scholarly opinion, which provides citations to a more extensive range of opinions, is Matsumaru and Takashima’s Sōran (reviewed at Keightley 1997:513–17), “interpreted by 471 scholars around the world in their publications from 1904 through 1988 (including a few that appeared in 1989).” I generally give only the main reference; subsidiary references can be consulted in the index: Sōran: 648–68, 686–718. JGWD, JGWJ, Ma Rusen 1993, and Yu Xingwu 1996 may also be consulted as a guide to many of the issues involved.

The entries herein address the usage of the words as they appear in certain inscriptions translated in this book; the entries are not intended to serve as a comprehensive account of all Shang uses of a word. The English translations offered are sometimes “functional,” in the sense that they are based on a contextual understanding of the words in question rather than precise philological analysis. The resulting imprecision, as evident, for example, in the “disaster” words—hai 坏 (= hai 害), huo 禍, jiu 咎, you 尤, zai 災 and 災—obscures our precise understanding of Shang theology (but see the Glossary entries).

The entries are arranged alphabetically (by modern pronunciation) and, when romanizations are identical, by the order of the traditional radicals. The first modern character in each entry generally represents the modern word(s), that in my view, best represents, graphically and semantically, the Shang word.

1. As Mickel (1976:63) noted, “very few persons have attempted to discern differences among the disaster graphs, and circular definitions . . . have been the rule.”
Abbreviations for the Oracle-Bone Collections and Other Reference Works

**Bingbian**

**Buci**

**Cuibian**

**Faguo**
Jean A. Lefeuvre. *Faguo suocang jiagu lu* 法國所藏甲骨錄; *Collections d’inscriptions oraculaires en France; Collections of Oracular Inscriptions in France*. Variétés sinologiques, n.s. 70. Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1985.

**Fuyin**
Wang Xiang 王襄. *Fushi Yinqi zhengwen* 篆室殷契徵文. Tianjin: Tianjin bowuguan, 1925.

**GSR**

**Hebian**

**Hebu**

**Heji**

**Heshi**

**Houbian**
Alphabetical order is by the letter-by-letter system. The “Herforth, Derek” entry comes before the “He Yanjie” entry, for example.

Ahern, Emily M.

Akatsuka Kiyoshi 赤塚忠

Allan, Sarah (see too Li Xueqin and Ailan)

Amano Motonosuke 天野元之助
1956  “Indai no nōgyō to sono shakai kōzō 殷代の農業とその社會構造.” *Shigaku kenkyū 史學研究* 62:1–16.
accompaniers-in-death: in Fiji, 75n47; number of instances of, 73, 76; racial mix of, 72–73; status of, 71, 76, 76n50; in the tomb of Fu Hao, 75; tombs with, 69n22, 76n50. See also human sacrifice
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ancestral tablets, 219, 304–05, 334, 365
animals: numerical records of, 231; wild and domesticated, 7–8, 199. See also cows; deer; dismembering; dogs; hunting; sheep