



SESSION VI: LANGUAGE AND EPIGRAPHY OF THE SHANG INSCRIPTIONS

18. PAUL L-M. SERRUYS (University of Washington)
 GRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION, SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION AND PHONOLOGICAL
 IMPLICATIONS IN THE ORACLE WRITING OF SHANG

ABSTRACT:

All translations or interpretations of the Shang oracular texts are ultimately founded on the way in which one understands the system of the early Chinese writing and its underlying principles. This writing system cannot be fully understood unless the study of the graphic structure of each writing unit is combined with that of all other factors that can be observed from the point of view of semantic content and phonology. A short discussion of these three aspects or factors in the writing system is intended to show that any graphic analysis from the very beginning needs to consider the word that is represented by the graphic unit and to determine it in meaning(s) and pronunciation(s), grammatical function(s), and its relationship with other words, whether cognates, synonyms or homonyms, liable to be used as loan units (段借字). The graphic analysis must not only explain the pictographic aspects of the graphs, but also determine the possible phonetic, semantic, or etymonic roles played by any of its constituent parts. In this respect, processes like polyphony, polysemy, graphic convergence and confusions, and loan graph substitutions all require vigorous scrutiny from the point of view of the phonology of the Shang language. Besides using information from later bronze texts, classics, and early dictionaries, it is important to let the Shang data speak for themselves.

These principles are applied in a study of some graphs, namely "sheep" 羊 and others in which 羊 appears as a constituent part. Three kinds of derivatives of "sheep" are considered:

(1) Graphs where 羊 functions as phonetic in its regular and prevalent reading. Among them 祥, usually explained as a proper noun for places or names, need not be a proper noun in every occurrence. As a common noun it can be explained in the sense of "pasture land" and seen as cognate with 養 (Shang form 教) "to feed," originally "to put on pasture" and further with the graphs 匿 and 洋.

The latter is shown in some texts to mean "to cook, cooked meat," identical with Shuo wen form 𦍋 (and other Shang forms of the type 𦍋 𦍋). The later meanings of 洋 "vast expanse (of water)" are probably related to 祥 "wide open pasture." A lengthy discussion is devoted to the identification of a graph 𦍋, transcribed as 𦍋 and explained as a variant of 羊, which through special detailing of the graphic element "eyes" has been applied to another word, related to "sheep," with the sense "stubborn, insistingly." Following up on a note of Chang Ping-ch'üan, 𦍋 is given the reading and meaning of 羴 (as used in Ch'u-tz'u). In this context, the graphs 祥, 善, 羴 (tribe), 姜, and 羴 are discussed as well.

(2) 羊 with unusual phonological reading. Here arguments are given which, though not in every part conclusive, point nevertheless to readings of 羊 different from the predominant type, but obsolescent and rare readings, viz. *mjir (𦍋), *mjid (美); *(z)djan (善), *sthjan (羴, 羴); *tsrhjan (羴), and *sjieng, sjien (羴).

(3) Finally some peripheral, still less sure cases are discussed, such as the graphs that combine 羊 with 目, or with 木 and 目. Among these, 羴 is to be distinguished from 相 (both personal names) but could be identical or closely related to 𦍋 (𦍋), used in Shang texts for "noon time (brightness)." Its relationship with the bronze family emblems 羴 remains a mere possibility, depending on how the latter is really to be explained. The graph 𦍋 is to be compared with other variants of 商 (𦍋, etc.) where the interchange 羊 / 辛 is paralleled in 羴, with 羊 as phonetic, but read as 辛 *sjien. The cases of 羴 (= 羴) and 羴 have been put here as examples of 羊 as constituent part in certain graphs with no phonetic, but a mere semantic role, their reading being determined in the first case by 又 (standing for 手), later replaced by 丑, in the second by 𦍋, 𦍋 *dwjan, twan, etc.

(4) This part discusses the readings of 羴 and 羴, 羴 and 羴, and proposes that they represent two words represented in writing by ho-wen graphs: 𦍋羊 lao yang, 𦍋牛 lao niu "pen fed sheep (or bovine)," and 𦍋羊 mou yang, 𦍋羊 pin-yang "male (or female) sheep." The Shang phrases 小羴, 大羴 cannot be equated with the later classical phrases 少羴 "small sacrifice (of sheep or pig)" and 大羴 "great sacrifice (of ox, sheep, and pig)." The connection and development from the Shang sacrificial terminology to

that of later 少牢 and 大牢 require at least two or three steps in changes of meaning and usage of the work 牢 .

DISCUSSION:

Paul L-M Serruys introduced his paper, ending with a strong plea to apply the rigid laws of historic phonology, semantic-historic analysis, and etymology to the archaic Chinese language.

David Keightley began by probing more deeply into the suggestion made by Itō Michiharu in his paper (see below), that there may be a correlation between linguistic and cultural changes. He asserted that Itō had been more sensitive to such changes, as far as they can be observed from oracle bones, than Serruys and Ken-ichi Takashima, who seemed to have made it their working hypothesis to assume that the Shang language was an undeveloping homogenous whole. Takashima defended himself by pointing to the abstract of his paper where he had mentioned the role of diachronic observations.

Keightley continued by positing that the changes observable in the language of the oracle inscriptions might be due to dialect differences between the several royal lineages who took turns in ascending the throne. Or would such a view, he wondered, make any attempts to trace linguistic developments in Archaic Chinese meaningless? Serruys replied that this was a complex question, which could only be solved when taking into account the social level of the speakers of the language in question (in normal life this is done automatically by the reader of any text). Now, the scribes who wrote down the oracle inscriptions were probably a specialized group within the nobility; and it is to be surmised that the Shang upper class had a standard language without perceptible dialect differences.

Serruys did not want to completely rule out the possibility that the slight differences in articulation between certain groups of scribes might have been dialectical. But he stressed that most of the observed differences were of a graphic, not of a grammatical kind. Main syntactical differences were mostly in the use of xuci 虚辞. Besides, there might have been instances of peculiar pronunciation, but these of course escape the reader of written materials.

David Pankenier remarked that Li Xueqin ("关于自组卜辞的一些句题", Guwenzi yanjiu 3[1980]:32-42) had discussed the emergence of xuci, the earliest of which seemed to have been interrogative. These had not been consistently used among the different diviners' groups. Pankenier wondered whether this was due to different linguistic conventions within these groups, or to differences in dialect. Serruys said he did not know, but would keep his eyes open for evidence.

Contance Cook wondered which if any of the local Chinese dialects known later from Zhou times would have been, previously, the official Shang language. Wang Guimin said that in his opinion, there were no dialects in Shang language, which was in fact a very unified medium of communication. Dialects only emerged in Zhou times as a result of a diversification process following the expansion of Chinese culture and language into the border areas, and the formation of local power centers.

Wang Guimin also expressed utmost admiration for Serruys's methodology and his achievements, whereupon Serruys modestly replied that these were but his personal interests. Wang said he was impressed with the usefulness of Serruys's three categories of graph analysis, especially with his stress on phonology. But one could not, he continued, use the phonological method too loosely. For instance, one must take into account the difference between the Shang and the Zhou language, where processes of differentiation (such as the emergence of a difference between mu 𠩺 and nü 女) can be observed alongside processes of convergence (several jiaguwen variants becoming united into one character). The wider the range of linguistic stages one includes in the phonological analysis of oracle-bone graphs, the more variables must be taken into account. On the other hand, if one did include bronze inscriptions in such an analysis (as Serruys had done), one might as well include the transmitted classical texts, which contain plentiful linguistic material not conserved in the inscriptions.

19. KEN-ICHI TAKASHIMA (University of British Columbia)
NOUN PHRASES IN THE ORACLE-BONE INSCRIPTIONS

ABSTRACT:

While nouns and noun phrases are only one aspect of the Shang language, they are an important constituent element which, together with a verb in a sentence, occur as topic, subject, direct or indirect object, or object of a particle. In order to have a better understanding of the inscriptional language as a whole, a good understanding of the noun phrases is desirable.

This paper undertakes to present a systematic account of noun phrases in the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions. The examples are taken from an entire corpus of inscriptions from Period I to Period V, paying no particular attention to diachronic developments. Some diachronic descriptions -- changes over time in construction and meaning -- are also cited in notes whenever they are considered relevant.

The main concern of the paper is two-fold: noun-phrase formations and elucidation of their intended meanings. A number of new