

Session II

Virginia Kane aroused some amusement among the participants by quoting Wang's paper as a corroboration for her proposal of a later dating of M5. She agreed that -- apart from M5 -- there was a relative scarcity of bronzes in the Middle Period of Late Shang. After M5, bronze styles would have undergone a dramatic change -- not toward conventionalization and standardization (pace Huber), and in no way declining, but in most aspects quite different from everything preceding it.

Hsü Chin-hsiung suggested that the 7000 cowrie shells found in M5 could provide a clue about its date. He claimed he was able to decide whether a cowrie shell was early or late from whether or not a hole had been bored through the shell, and whether or not this hole was polished. He had established a sequence of four stages, and his findings confirmed Kane's later date. Yang Xizhang questioned the value of Hsü's approach and declared that, since only a fraction of the cowrie shells discovered in M5 had been published, it seemed difficult to imagine how Hsu could have arrived at such daring conclusions. Kao Ch'ü-hsün was also skeptical, suggesting that Hsu was perhaps confusing the Shang cowries with phenomena to be observed in the Warring States period.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper tries to study the typology, terminology, and functions of the jades of the Shang dynasty by using an archaeological approach based mainly on archaeological materials from scientific excavations. This contrasts with the old method which relied upon questionable textual evidence and less well-documented jades in public and private collections. The main points of the paper are as follows:

(1) Ceremonial jades: Some jades of the Shang dynasty were ceremonial not practical objects, but the system of six jades called rui yu (auspicious jades) in the three Books of Rites is a fabrication devised by the Confucian scholars of the period of the late Zhou and early Han dynasties, who used what they could find of the surviving jade objects and customs of use and supplemented old texts and oral traditions with their own imaginations so as to make the system perfectly rational according to Confucian standards. In our excavations, we have not found a single case in which the jades were grouped in a set of six, nor have we found any evidence to verify the uses mentioned in the Books of Rites.

(2) Tools and weapons of jade: Some types of Shang jades followed Neolithic traditions of tool and weapon making: some were imitations of bronze weapons and tools of the Shang period; and some of them were incorrectly identified by Wu Tazheng as wan gui-tablets, yan gui-tablets, and ya zhong-tablets. Wu also misnamed the bi-disc with three sets of serrations as xuan-ji, which is supposed to be an astronomical instrument.

(3) Decorative jades: Some practical jade objects of the Shang dynasty were carved with decorations, but some carved jades were purely decorative, and may be called works of art. Some of them were wrongly identified by Wu Tazheng as the hu (tiger jade) and da huang (big arc-pendant) of the rui yu system. As a matter of fact, they are simply decorative jades of ornate pendants. Many slides were presented to illustrate this new jade typology.

DISCUSSION:

Kao Ch'ü-hsün asserted that many jade types in Shang have neolithic forerunners. The various forms of individual types may indeed have heterogeneous origins and were only lumped together by later classifiers. He quite agreed with Xia's systematic, scientific approach to jade classification; but perhaps, he suggested, one should abandon the traditional terminology altogether, rather than restricting it to a small number of types. It is true, of course, that the traditional appellations are suggestive of later perception of the jades. Xia Nai contended that there was some common-sense practicality in retaining a modified traditional terminology.

Chang Kwang-yuan mentioned an example where Xia Nai had rightly discarded a traditional form from his discussion of Shang jades: on phonological grounds, the terms yuan 環 and huan 環 should have been the same word in Early Archaic Chinese. They could not, therefore, have denoted different objects in Shang times.

Betty Tseng Ecke asked whether in Shang times, a jade bi 璧 symbolized Heaven and a zong 琮 symbolized Earth. Xia replied that these were concepts of the Warring States period, and that such systematizing tendencies were altogether alien to Shang thinking.

As to jade tools, Chang Kwang-yuan said they could not have actually been used, despite their hardness of 7°. His experiments with jade knives on oracle bones (hardness 3°) had had disastrous results with the jade simply chipping off. Therefore, jade weapons and tools could only have been used in rituals and Xia's category "weapons and tools" ought to be merged with the category "ceremonial objects." Xia Nai quite agreed that most jade weapons and tools were probably used ceremonially; typologically, however, they were imitating functionally useable implements in other materials. His

Session II

category of "ceremonial jades" only included such objects as could not be so derived. As a matter of fact, Xia said, jade knives could have been used on soft materials, as his own experiments had shown. On oracle bones, he agreed, their effect would have been comparable to that of a plastic knife.

Kao Ch'ü-hsün further suggested that the objects in Xia's category of "ornaments" probably had an apotropaic function, serving as charms or amulets. This would accord with the religious system of the Shang. Xia Nai agreed.

Virginia Kane was perplexed about the usage of the large jade blades even in ceremonies. They were so fragile and unmanageable, she explained, that any handling, even symbolical handling, seemed precarious. Of course, they would not have been made merely to be mortuary objects. Could they have been emblems -- e.g., in the case of harvesting knives, symbols of the tax-collecting authority of the nobility? Xia Nai replied that many ways of handling were possible; perhaps the blades were held with both hands, or placed on a tray during ceremonies. But he cautioned that we shall probably never have the kind of evidence that will allow us to actually reconstruct ritual events in Shang times.

David Keightley (University of California, Berkeley) raised the question whether the jade ornaments found in M5 were made to be worn by a woman (if so, this should bear on the possibility that the fu were male). Xia Nai and Zheng Zhenxiang replied that no sex-specific use of jades could be attested in Shang China.

Virginia Kane added that many of the jade objects from M5, e.g., figurines, which were unperforated, could never have been worn, and therefore seemed to her sculptural. Xia Nai noted that this question was addressed in his paper, adding that such figurines might have been used for display.

Ken-ichi Takashima (University of British Columbia) finally wondered whether any archaeological finds could corroborate the explanation of the graph peng 朋 (𠄎 in the oracle bones) as a couple of strings with jade disks tied together. Xia Nai said he had never seen any. Neither had Zheng Zhenxiang; some disk-shaped jade beads (formerly on strings) had been found, but never in the way suggested by the shape of the character peng. She believed this character to be derived from strings of cowrie shells.