



SESSION VII: PERIODIZATION

21. HSÜ CHIN-HSIUNG [James C. H. Hsu] (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto)  
AN EPIGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICAL STAGES IN ANCIENT CHINESE  
HISTORY

ABSTRACT:

Since the end of the Warring States period (221 B.C.), the traditional history of China has always been said to have begun with the "Three August Sovereigns" and the "Five Emperors." The stages in Chinese civilization were thus personified and ancient society was conceived of as having been ruled by an uninterrupted line of emperors. This early period of Chinese history may be divided into three periods, each of which may be typified by one oracle-graph.

The first period is the era of the legendary personages. This is before the period of the Yellow Emperor and may be represented by the oracle-bone graph for "sage." The second period is the era of the emperors who created social institutions, an era which may be represented by the oracle-bone graph for "jade pendant." The final period is the era of authentic dynastic history, covering the Hsia, Shang, and Chou dynasties. This period may be represented by the oracle-bone graph for "king."

The oracle-bone character for "sage" is a pictograph of a man with extremely keen hearing. This implies exceptional physical or mental capabilities which would enable that person to bring great benefits to the community. This period of the sage saw the invention and development of a series of technological skills and tools which improved the standard of living of the community, but the stage had still not been reached when the social system necessary for political organization could come into being; that is to say, society had not yet reached the stage of true civilization.

The oracle-bone graph for "jade pendant" or "yellow" is a pictograph of a jade pendant worn at the waist. The graph is also used to refer to the Yellow Emperor, who, it is said, was the first ruler to have a royal court. Various social institutions in China are thought to have originated during his reign. The most important of these were the regulations establishing the dress that each social class should wear. The jade waist pendant was the distinctive dress

## Periodization

ornament of the nobility -- a symbol of leisure and non-violence which set the aristocracy apart from the labouring class. According to legend, such dress codes were established after the Yellow Emperor had conquered Emperor Yen and unified China, thereby stressing the advent of an era of peace. Such regulations reflect the reality of class divisions that first existed during the reign of the Yellow Emperor.

The oracle-bone graph for "king" is a pictograph of a royal crown decorated with tall feathers. During the Hsia dynasty and afterwards it was also used as the title of the chief political figure. The function of the hat decorated with tall, upright feathers was to make the commander easily identifiable in battle, reflecting the fact that an agricultural society had to compete for the available natural resources by fighting. Large-scale battles occurred frequently and it was essential to have a single commander. Warfare strengthened authority and hastened the organization of the state.

Although the tall, feathered hat was originally part of the equipment of a military commander, eventually it became the visible symbol of the ruler and the state. With the passage of time people's knowledge of the world and society constantly increased and as this happened they realized that the history of man must have extended very far back into the past. Although later generations did embellish the history of earlier periods in China, these people of later times with their greater experience understood that many popular legends probably contained in essence many basic truths about earlier society, and, therefore, these embellishments were by no means total fabrications. The people of the Warring States period thought that human history extended back less than 10,000 years. The people of Shang times, on the other hand, could only remember the period of their immediate ancestors, who had been forced to move constantly to escape from the floods.

### DISCUSSION:

Virginia Kane said she did not know what Hsü Chin-hsiung's methodology was and asked him for an explanation. Hsü read his twenty chapter headings. He said he had used many materials, from the classics, anthropology, archaeology, etc., to explain traditional Chinese culture; these materials had been grouped around explanations of ancient Chinese characters as mnemonic devices. He felt the characters were excellent educational and illustrative tools, and as increase in student enrollment had shown over the last three years, the students in his class had appreciated his approach. This was his reason for presenting his paper at this conference. Kane said she had doubts about the pedagogical value of his explanations.

Chang Kwang-yuan humorously asserted that Hsü's explanation of the character sheng was too one-sidedly based on the ear element only; the mouth ought not to be overlooked as a criterion for leadership: only he who can also communicate his hearings to the people is wise. Hsü Chin-hsiung took this as a serious argument and said he did not believe rhetoric and persuasion to have been very important in primitive society, at any rate much less so than activities such as hunting and (later) performing sacrifice, where a good ear would be of great use.




Virginia Kane said this was an illustration of one of Hsu's major methodological flaws: to use historiographic stereotypes in order to illustrate the "meaning" of characters. She argued, for instance, that the character sheng could just as well be explained in terms of "the sage to whose voice others listen."



Ken-ichi Takashima asserted Hsü's approach had nothing to do with the language. Language should be distinguished from writing and even more so from the historiographical interpretation thereof. He suggested that Hsü base his work on the solid foundations of Paul L-M. Serruy's work.

22. JEAN A. LEFEUVRE (Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies)

SOME REMARKS ON THE GRAPH  AND THE CHARACTER SI 

ABSTRACT:

The graph  in the Shang oracle inscriptions, transcribed  or , until now, among the best authorities, remains the object of different interpretations. Some common translations are: a rhinoceros, a unicorned si having the appearance of an ox, an ox of the si species, a si (without explanation), a coveted game animal, a wild animal of the central plain, etc. The aim of this short paper is to determine to what extent some clarification can be made.

Starting the investigation with Jiabian 3939, it seems that this "big animal's skull," like the other deer skulls discovered nearby, was considered a hunting trophy. Consequently, the recorded text was inscribed on that trophy, that is on the skull of the animal so skillfully caught. After a careful examination, the paleontologists declared that the "big animal's skull" was the skull of a buffalo. Taking these facts into consideration, we made a new examination of the graph  and its variants, of the character cast in the bottom of the Niu fang-ding (HPKM1004), of the head from the small stone bovine (shi niu  of M5), of the pronunciation of the character at a later time, of the Shang oracular texts, and of the main ancient texts, starting with the pre-Qin period and going on until