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Shang dynasty's “nine generations chaos” and the reign of Wu Ding: towards a unilineal line of transmission of royal power*

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Abstract

This article explores the political crisis before Wu Ding. The accession of king Wu Ding to the throne was not a given but the result of a political move by his father Xiao Yi. It must be seen as one of the consequences of an earlier political crisis named the “nine generations chaos” by Sima Qian, during which an attempt to share royal power between two royal lines finally collapsed and led to a move by Pan Geng to a new capital. This new city has recently been discovered north of the Huai river. The political crisis of the time led Shang kings to try to implement a unilineal system of succession. Other steps, ritual in particular, were involved after the reign of the king Zu Jia, one of the reigning sons of Wu Ding, in order to ensure the primacy of the unilineal system of royal succession.

Keywords: Nine generations chaos; Shang dynasty; Shang lineages; Wu Ding; Royal succession; Political crisis

Introduction

The inscriptions and texts used in this article document some of the steps through which Shang kings established a direct line, father to son, of the transmission of royal power. These steps, observable in the inscriptions of the reign of Wu Ding 武丁 can be understood, I argue, as an answer to a series of political crises linked to the process of royal succession.

The Shang king Wu Ding was given, in the received texts, the title of High Ancestor (*Gaozong* 高宗).¹ His reign came after a series of royal successions named in the later *Shiji* 史記 as the “nine generations chaos” (九世亂).² This “nine generations chaos” was characterized by a transmission of royal power not in a direct line father-to-son, but through an adelphic, brother-to-brother system. Those brothers were sons of the same

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¹ The dates of Wu Ding's reign (GZ 1273–1213 BCE, TDC 1250–1192 BCE) are given according to table B.1, in Roderick Campbell, *Violence, Kinship and the Early Chinese State, The Shang and their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 272. Campbell gives two absolute dates, the first according to the *Guben Zhushu jinian* 古本竹書紀年 (GZ), the second according to the *Three Dynasties Chronology Project* 夏商周斷代工程 (TDC). The dates given are only for broad reference.

² *Shiji*, “Yin benji” 殷本紀 (Zhonghua ed. 1985), 3. 101.

father, but from different mothers. I argue in this paper that this led, through a reworking of royal power succession, to a situation where two royal lineages alternated royal power between them.³ I analyse this in terms of political crisis that had lasting effects on later reigns.

It reignited when Xiao Yi 小乙, the last reigning king of four brothers, Yang Jia 陽甲 the elder, Pan Geng 盤庚, Xiao Xin 小辛, and Xiao Yi himself, left the royal power to his own son, Wu Ding: as Cai Zhemaο 蔡哲茂 remarked, the successor of Xiao Yi should have been a son of Yang Jia. The circumstances surrounding Wu Ding's accession to royal power bear witness to this enduring tension among the members of the royal lineage.

Historical sources allude to difficulties at the beginning of his career, when his father, Xiao Yi, ordered him to leave Shang-controlled territory. Archaeological information available since the discovery of the Shang city Huanbei 洹北, immediately north of Anyang, in 1999, add weight to what received sources only alluded to: the start of the reign of Wu Ding was a very dynamic process. In this paper, I argue that part of this process was linked with intra-lineage problems inherited from the previous “nine generations chaos”.

It led Wu Ding to implement a policy of recruiting new allies, even from outside the Shang clan, through multiple matrimonial alliances; one of these, with the Lady Jing 婦姘, who was not part of the Shang clan, is particularly significant. The establishment of a powerbase through marriage was only one part of the measures needed for the stabilization of the Shang polity. Wu Ding took the initiative to name one of his sons a direct successor, when he bestowed him the title of young king, or king in waiting 小王. This initiative was repeated in subsequent reigns.

Wu Ding also implemented a series of ritual experiments, initiating one of the first attempts to identify, among all the royal ancestors, a principal line of royal succession. This attempt failed but, after his reign, his successors benefitted from the ritual roadmap that he first designed.

The aim of my article is to understand the origin of the political situation at the beginning of the reign of Wu Ding. One specific marker given to a limited number of ancestors in the inscriptions of this and subsequent periods is germane to this question. I interpret this marker in the context of political instabilities brought about by the polygamous alliances of the Shang kings and the subsequent difficulties for a king in choosing an heir.

I. The “nine generation chaos” and the crisis of the two sub-lineages

a. *The Shiji testimony*

Sima Qian gives the following interpretation of this period:

自中丁以來，廢適而更立諸弟子，弟子或爭相代立，比九世亂，於是諸侯莫朝。

From the reign of Zhong Ding on, the (principle of the) main succession line has been abandoned and the sons of younger brothers became kings, those sons of younger brothers fought with each other and there was disorder during those nine generations [of kings] and the territorial lords did not come to royal court.⁴

³ I use here James L. Watson's definition from “Chinese kinship reconsidered: anthropological perspectives on historical research”, *China Quarterly*, 92, 1982, 594: “A lineage is a *corporate group* which celebrate *ritual unity* and is based on *demonstrated descent* from a common ancestor” (author's italics).

⁴ *Shiji*, “Yin benji”, 3. 101.

The nine generations mentioned by the *Shiji* are the following kings:

- (1) Zhong Ding 仲丁(中丁) → (2) **B** Wai Ren 外壬 (Bu Ren 卜壬) → (3) **B** He Dan Jia 河
 亶甲 (Jian Jia 筧甲) → (4) **S** Zu Yi 祖乙(祖乙) → (5) **S** Zu Xin 祖辛(祖辛) → (6) **B**
 Wo Jia 沃甲 (Qiang Jia 羌甲) → (7) **BS** Zu Ding 祖丁(祖丁/son of Zu Xin 祖辛) →
 (8) **FBS** Nan Geng 南庚 (南庚, son of Wo Jia 沃甲) → (9) *cousin second degree* Yang
 Jia 陽甲 (Hu Jia 虎甲/son of Zu Ding 祖丁).⁵

Sima Qian gives only one reason for the disorder: the struggle for royal power, provoked by the abandonment of “the (principle of the) main succession line” (*di 適*), the succession of a king by the elder son of the principal wife. *Di* is used in received sources, not in Shang documents. Moreover, the rule it designates did not apply in the royal succession of the Shang dynasty, as the well-documented example of the succession of Wu Ding shows: he was succeeded by two of his sons, Zu Geng 祖庚 and Zu Jia 祖甲.⁶ Nevertheless, the historical reliability of the *Shiji* should not be over-doubted, for two reasons:

- This list of ancestors in the *Shiji* corresponds almost exactly to the list of royal ancestors reconstituted from the *Zhouji* 周祭, a series of cyclical sacrifices presented briefly below.
- Shang oracular inscriptions confirm that the transmission of the royal power was not a straightforward process.⁷

What Shang oracular inscriptions provide, particularly those given by the *Zhouji* 周祭, is the mention of spouses of the kings.⁸ This element gives a clearer picture of intra-lineage relationships.

b. The oracular evidence

The *Zhouji* is the name given by Chinese scholars to a series of sacrifices organized in a cycle, discovered first by Dong Zuobin 董作賓 in 1945.⁹ This cycle is composed of a series of five types of sacrifice, dedicated to Shang non-royal and royal ancestors, and was first implemented during the reign of the king Zu Jia 祖甲, son of Wu Ding (GZ 1202–1169 BCE, TDC 1191–1148 BCE).¹⁰ The cycles, after an interruption, have been continued until the end of the Shang dynasty.¹¹ Oracular inscriptions from those cycles provide the names of the spouses of the kings belonging to the “nine generations chaos”:

⁵ In this list, I first give the numeral corresponding to the order of succession in the *Shiji*, followed either by **S** (for son), **B** (for brother), **BS** (for brother’s son) or **FBS** (for father’s brother’s son = nephew) indicating the type of kinship relation between a king and his predecessor. The list is given in the *Shiji*, “Yin benji”, 3.100–1.

⁶ The cyclical sacrifices mention another of his sons, Zu Ji 祖己, the “young king”, who died before Wu Ding.

⁷ Another element confirms the validity of the *Shiji*’s testimony: it notes that the Shang people moved from capital to capital, as verified through archaeological discoveries. I will show below that those archaeological data allow in certain cases to correct Sima Qian and indirectly give weight to some of what is suggested by some texts of late provenience.

⁸ The *Shiji* presents the Shang kings’ genealogy strictly from the male (agnatic) perspective; there is no mention of spouses.

⁹ The first description and study of this cycle was presented in his *Yinli pu* 殷曆譜, published in 1945.

¹⁰ Cf. table B.1, Campbell, *Violence, Kinship and the Early Chinese State*, 269–75. The cyclical sacrifices have been analysed by Chang Yuzhi 常玉芝 in what remains an authoritative work, *Shangdai zhouji zhidu* 商代周祭制度 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1987), quoted below as *Zhouji*.

¹¹ After the reign of Zu Jia, other iterations of the cyclical ceremonies have been observed in the oracular inscriptions belonging to later reigns, those of Wen Ding 文丁, Di Yi 帝乙, and Di Xin 帝辛. There are differences between the cycles of Zu Jia and those after his reign, such as the duration of the cycles, mainly because the

- Zhong Ding 中丁 has two spouses, Bi Ji 中丁奭妣己 and Bi Gui 中丁奭妣癸;¹²
- Zu Yi 祖乙 is associated with two spouses, Bi Ji 祖乙奭妣己 and Bi Geng 祖乙奭妣庚;
- Zu Xin 祖辛 has only one spouse, Bi Jia 祖辛奭妣甲;
- Qiang Jia 羌甲 is given one spouse;¹³
- Zu Ding 祖丁 is associated with two spouses, Bi Ji 祖丁奭妣己 and Bi Geng 祖丁奭妣庚.¹⁴

The last king, Yang Jia 陽甲, has no recorded spouse.

This sequence is exactly the same in the *Shiji* and in the reconstituted list from the cyclical sacrifices: Zhong Ding was succeeded by his brother, Bu Ren 卜壬; royal power then went to the two sons of Zhong Ding, first Jian Jia 玃甲 and after Zu Yi 祖乙.¹⁵ Therefore, Jian Jia had succeeded his father's brother (FB). Zu Yi was succeeded by two of his sons, first Zu Xin 祖辛 and after, Qiang Jia 羌甲. The royal power went then to the only recorded son of Zu Xin, Zu Ding 祖丁, who also succeeded his father's brother (FB). After Zu Ding, the royal power went to Nan Geng 南庚, the only recorded son of Qiang Jia. Nan Geng therefore succeeded his father's brother's son (FBS), Zu Ding, to whom he was a paternal cousin.¹⁶ In this sequence, the mention of

number of ancestors was augmented. Those differences (analysed in detail in *Zhouji*, 12–20, 22–3) are not germane to this article.

¹² In the inscriptions of the cyclical sacrifices, as well as in other inscriptions mentioning ancestors, the names are composed of a kinship term, such as *father* *fu* 父, *mother* *mu* 母, *brother* *xiong* 兄 and, at the level EGO+2 and above (male) ancestor *zu* 祖 and (female) ancestor *bi* 妣; those kinship terms are paired with a heavenly stem character. The kinship terms in Shang inscriptions are classificatory and not descriptive: all kin at the same generational level are given the same kinship term. In the cycles, spouses are systematically noted according to the pattern X (name of a male ancestor) *shi* 奭 Y (name of the spouse). This is to avoid problems of homonymy. Since the names of ancestors are mentioned in religious context (for example in inscriptions related to sacrifices), I use the term “hyeronym” (sacred name) as a general appellation.

¹³ The spouse of Qiang Jia, Bi Geng 羌甲奭妣庚, was not honoured after the first implementation of the cycles during the reign of Zu Jia. The proof of her presence in the cycles of Zu Jia's reign is given by the inscription 合集 23325, period 2, group 出2.

¹⁴ The number of spouses of Zu Ding 祖丁 mentioned in the cyclical sacrifices is in dispute. Zheng Huisheng 鄭慧生 (“Cong Shangdai wu di qie zhidu shuo ta de shengmu ru ji fa” 從商代無嫡妾制度說到它的生母入祀法, in *Jiaguwenxian jicheng* 甲骨文獻集成, Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 and Duan Zhihong 段志洪 (eds) (Chengdu: Sichuan Daxue ed., 2001), 40 volumes, a compendium of articles from 1899 to 1999, quoted below as *Jiaguwenxian*, t. x, t. 20, 482–3, originally published in *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰綫 4, 1984) gives four spouses to Zu Ding: Bi Jia 妣甲, Bi Geng 妣庚, Bi Yi 妣乙 and Bi Gui 妣癸, but there is no trace of Bi Yi in the oracular inscriptions. Wu Junde (cf. *Yinxu buci xianwang chengwei zonglun* 殷卜辭先王稱謂綜論, Taipei: Liren, 2010, hereafter quoted as *Xianwang*, 119–24) also gives him four spouses. Yan Yiping 嚴一萍 believed (cf. “Guanyushi si Zu Ding” 關於釋四祖丁 in *Zhongguo wenzi* new series 中國文字 新 3, 1981, 253) that he had five spouses. It would of course not be impossible for two spouses to have given birth to four sons (for example, two each, three and one or even none and four), but if the correspondence in the cycles between Wu Ding's three recorded spouses and his three sons is an indication, the number of spouses for Zu Ding should be four, corresponding to his four sons.

¹⁵ The *Shiji* makes He Dan Jia 河亶甲 (Jian Jia 玃甲) the father of Zu Yi 祖乙 while oracular inscriptions make him the son of Zhong Ding 中丁. Oracular inscriptions in the sacrificial cycles indicate that sacrifices to He Dan Jia/Jian Jia 河亶甲/玃甲 were offered before those to Zu Yi 祖乙, but during the same period of ten days. See *Zhouji*, 110. In the *Shiji*, Zhong Ding 仲丁 (= 中丁) is followed by two brothers, Wai Ren 外壬 (= Bu Ren 卜壬) and He Dan Jia, but in the cyclical sacrifices Zhong Ding is accompanied by two spouses, Bi Ji and Bi Gui (妣己、癸). Therefore, Zhong Ding was succeeded by his brother Wai Ren, the royal power later being transmitted to two sons of Zhong Ding, He Dan Jia and Zu Yi. No royal spouse in the cyclical sacrifices is associated with He Dan Jia/Jian Jia 河亶甲/玃甲; it indicates that he could not have been the father of Zu Yi 祖乙.

¹⁶ This is made clear in the *Shiji* as well as the reconstituted list of ancestors in the cycles: Qiang Jia was the brother of Zu Xin; the son of Zu Xin, Zu Ding, succeeded him; and Nan Geng, the son of Qiang Jia became king after the death of Zu Ding.



Figure 1. The alternating nine kings and the succession of Yang Jia

kin relationship between alternating kings is not the most important information, as [Figure 1](#) shows.¹⁷

Zhong Ding 中丁 is accompanied by two spouses and has two sons; only one of them, Zu Yi 祖乙, is also recorded with two spouses and two sons. The number of spouses corresponds to the number of sons at the next generation.

For the reigns of Zu Xin and Qiang Jia, only one spouse and one son are mentioned. From the reign of Zu Yi 祖乙 to that of his two sons and grandsons, the constitution of two parallel lines of kings can be observed. Their ascension to royal power alternates: a king from one line is succeeded by a king from the other line. This appears clearly by taking into account the generation to which each king belongs.

The first royal line is:

Zu Yi 祖乙 → Zu Xin 祖辛 (son of Zu Yi) → Zu Ding 祖丁 (son of Zu Xin);

The second is:

Zu Yi 祖乙 → Qiang Jia 羌甲 (son of Zu Yi) → Nan Geng 南庚 (son of Qiang Jia).

These were two emerging royal unilineal lines of descent from the same ancestor, Zu Yi, mirroring one another, each composed of a “unit” comprised of grandfather, father and son.¹⁸ The royal power was passing from one line to another. The reason for such a

¹⁷ The superscript numbers represent the succession for this particular sequence. The number in parentheses corresponds to the number of spouses.

¹⁸ This was observed by Zhao Cheng in “Huayuanzhuang dongdi jiagu yiyi tansuo”, 花園莊東地甲骨意義探索, *Huayuanzhuang dongdi jiagu lunwenji* 花園莊東地甲骨論叢, Wang Jiansheng 王建生, Zhu Qixiang 朱歧祥 (eds) (Banqiao: Shenghuan, 2006), 51.

combination does not appear clearly either in the *Shiji* or in the oracular inscription. Was it the result of a “gentleman’s agreement” between the two lines? I think that the alternation between kings belonging to the two lines suggests such an arrangement. This agreement would then have been made to the detriment of the other sons of Zu Yi; it might also have been sealed with an exchange of women between the two lines, at least between Zu Xin and Qiang Jia.¹⁹

These two parallel royal lines are characterized by a patrilineal, unilineal line of descent, with the brothers Zu Xin and Qiang Jia each associated in the *Zhouji* with only one spouse, corresponding strictly to the number of their reigning offspring.

The agreement should have led, after the reign of Yang Jia 陽甲, to the succession of one of the sons of Nan Geng, that is why I have given the same succession number (10) to two kings, Pan Geng 盤庚 and an X, son of Nan Geng.

Who was this prince X? In the many inscriptions dating from the long reign of Wu Ding, Cai Zhemao 蔡哲茂 noticed the presence of a Bing (pronunciation hypothetical) Father Ren 𠄎父壬, mentioned for example on the fragment 合集 1823正, group 賓 1.²⁰ A series of inscriptions mentions three ancestors: Qiang Jia 羌甲, Nan Geng 南庚 and this Father Bing Ren, presented as capable of inflicting harm on the king (害王). Based on the fact that Qiang Jia and Nan Geng are father and son, Cai Zhemao hypothesizes that those three ancestors belonged to the same lineage: the mention of Bing Father Ren would be suggestive of such a link. I agree that he was probably a son of Nan Geng.²¹

His hieronym, Bing Fu Ren (the character *bing* being interpreted by Cai Zhemao as the personal name of this individual), indicates that he belonged to the generation of Yang Jia, Pan Geng, Xiao Xin, and Xiao Yi.²² Referring to the above genealogical schema, Father Bing Ren was exactly at the position X would be vis-à-vis Wu Ding. It is therefore possible that Bing Father Ren is the son who should have succeeded the king Yang Jia. It is not surprising that inscriptions mentioning the royal line of Qiang Jia – Nan Geng – Bing Father Ren is in a context of the oracular testing of the harm done to Wu Ding himself: Wu Ding was indeed the heir of another line that, from Yang Jia on, excluded the other line from royal power.

Those elements allow us to understand why Sima Qian made the first reigning son of Zu Ding, Yang Jia, the last monarch belonging to what he called the “nine generations chaos”: Yang Jia should have been succeeded by a son of Nan Geng. The son of Nan

¹⁹ I will examine below the question of a preferred type of marriage (to the patrilineal parallel cousin marriage, i.e. marriage of EGO to the FBD – father brother daughter) for Shang nobility, in the context of Wu Ding marital alliances where such a marriage can be observed. According to this type of marriage, Zu Xin would have given one of his daughters to Nan Geng, the son of his brother and Qiang Jia would have given one of his daughters to the son of his brother, Zu Ding.

²⁰ Cf. “Wu Ding buci zhong Bing Fu Ren shenfen de tantao” 武丁卜辭中 𠄎父壬身份的探討, *Guwenzi yu Yin Shang shi* 古文字與殷商史, 3, 2012, 125–48.

²¹ Cai Zhemao (cf. “Wu Ding buci zhong Bing Fu Ren shenfen de tantao”, 135–9) links this Bing Father Ren to another person, alive, designated as Chief Bing (伯 𠄎 also named Bing 𠄎) who was engaged in different activities (for example, warfare) at the service of the king. Cai Zhemao also quotes (“Wu Ding buci zhong Bing Fu Ren shenfen de tantao”, 142–4) an inscription from Huayuanzhuang (H 290–3) in order to suggest that the prince of Huayuanzhuang, Zai/Zu Jia, offered sacrifices to Bing. Adam Craig Schwartz (“Huayuanzhuang East 1: A study and annotated translation of the oracle bone inscriptions”, PhD, University of Chicago, 2013, 504–05) interprets this sentence as the record of a feast offered to a person named Bing. It is not certain that it is the same person.

²² The term hieronym designates here the name given to a deceased relative. It is by no mean reserved to royalty or nobility but is employed throughout all the Shang social strata. It is composed of a marker of seniority and kinship (such as *xiong* 兄, elder brother, *fu* 父 father, *mu* 母 mother, *zu* 祖 male ancestor, or *bi* 妣 female ancestor). Since Wu Ding called his own father, Xiao Yi, and his paternal uncles by the same kinship term, *fu* 父 (father), it can be deduced that Bing Fu Ren was at the same generational level as Wu Ding’s father and uncles.

Geng who, according to what happened before (the alternation between the two lines of Zu Xin and Qiang Jia), should have acquired royal power after Yang Jia, did not. Sima Qian noted that 帝陽甲之時，殷衰 “In the time of the monarch Yang Jia, the Yin (Shang) became weak”.²³ I hypothesize that it is during his reign that the process of succession (alternation) was called into question. Even if the reasons for the turmoil do not appear clearly in the received sources, what happened after the reign of Yang Jia indicates that the intra-lineage accord came to an end: the successor of Yang Jia, Pan Geng, decided to move the capital.

c. Pan Geng 盤庚 and the moving of the Shang capital

During the reign of Pan Geng, the king who became king, possibly in lieu of one of the sons of Nan Geng, Bing Fu Ren, the Shang capital was moved. Two sources, the *Shiji* and three chapters of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (“Pan Geng” 盤庚 I, II, III) attribute the move directly to Pan Geng, who moved the capital from Xing 邢, set by Zu Yi 祖乙, to Bo 亳, the ancient capital of the first Shang king, Tang 湯.²⁴

Recent archaeological discoveries seem to confirm such a move. A walled site, Huanbei 洹北, situated north-west of the later Shang city of YinXu 殷墟, and north of the Huan river 洹河, was discovered in 1999; it is dated from middle Shang first and second phase.²⁵ A large consensus of scholars identifies Huanbei with the city of Pan Geng 盤庚, Xiao Xin 小辛, and Xiao Yi 小乙.²⁶

The move of the capital was motivated, as the “Pan Geng” II has it, by the necessity to “stabilize the polity” 安定厥邦.²⁷ The *Shiji* adds that Pan Geng established his capital on the site of the old city of Tang, the first king of the dynasty 復居成湯之故居. This passage

²³ Han Jianguo 韓江蘇, Jiang Linchang 江林昌, *Yin benji dingpu yu Shangshi renwu zheng* 《殷本紀》訂補與商史人物徵, *Shangdai shi* 商代史, t. 2, Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2010), quoted below as *Shang renwu*, 146, understands Yang Jia to be the king who put an end to the period of chaos by repossessing royal power from his paternal uncle, Nan Geng.

²⁴ Cf. *Shiji*, “Yin benji”, 3, 100–02, *Shangshu*, *Shisanjing zhushu* ed. 十三經注疏 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 1983 hereafter quoted as *SSJ*), 3, 168–70. Parts of those chapters are quoted in later Spring and Autumn and Warring States texts; cf. Cheng Yuanmin 程元敏, *Shangshu xueshi* 尚書學史 (Taipei: Wunan tushu, 2008), 14–15, 178, 218–9.

²⁵ Huanbei was occupied for over 100 years (c. 1400–1250 BC); cf. Pauline Sebillaud, “La distribution spatiale de l’habitat en Chine dans la plaine Centrale à la transition entre le Néolithique et l’âge du Bronze (env. 2500–1050 av. n. è.)”, PhD, EPHE, 2014, 179. This site, where study is ongoing, revealed that one palace compound (F1) occupied 6,300 m². Fan Yuzhou 范毓周, “Guanyu YinXu wenhua kaogu fenqi de jige wenti” 關於殷墟文化考古分期的幾個問題, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物, 4, 2010, 41–51, presents (table, p. 46) the correspondence of the archaeological sites in Anyang with the reigns of kings from Pan Geng to the end of the dynasty and the corresponding periods of oracular material. No oracular inscription in the sites south of the river belong to reigns pre-Wu Ding. Fan Yuzhou (pp. 48–9) also identifies Huanbei with the city founded by Pan Geng. The Huanbei discovery has helped archaeologists establish the existence of a middle Shang phase, after the Zhengzhou 鄭州/ Erligang 二裡崗 and before the last phase of the Shang dynasty (site of Anyang proper).

²⁶ See for example Yue Nan 岳南, *Kaogu Zhongguo ‘Shiji’ yiluo de 1220 nian lishi* 考古中國《史記》遺落的1200年歷史 (Taipei: Shangzhou, 2007), 248–51, Fan Yuzhou, “Guanyu YinXu wenhua kaogu fenqi de jige wenti”, 48, Roderick B. Campbell, *Archaeology of the Chinese Bronze Age: from Erlitou to Anyang* (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press Monographs, 2014), 110–2; Li Feng, *Early China A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81–2.

²⁷ According to Edward Shaughnessy, “Shang shu”, in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 378, the chapters “Pan Geng”, considered to be the earliest document of the *Shangshu*, were probably written in Zhou times to justify the removal of Shang people after the conquest, taking advantage of the resonance with Shang people of Pan Geng’s move. Nevertheless, such a justification would have made sense only if the move of the capital by Pan Geng had indeed been etched into Shang memory.

makes Pan Geng's move a foundation anew of the Shang monarchy. This foundation might have been necessitated because of the conflict of legitimacy between the two royal lines descended from Zu Yi: the moving of the capital would have then solved the tension arising when Pan Geng became king instead of one of the sons of Nan Geng.²⁸

Pan Geng's move of the capital might not have extinguished intra-lineage problems of succession, involving the four sons of the king Zu Ding 祖丁: Yang Jia 陽甲, Pan Geng 盤庚, Xiao Xin 小辛, and Xiao Yi 小乙, if Cai Zhemao 蔡哲茂 is to be followed: he hypothesized a crisis of succession involving Xiao Yi and his son Wu Ding 武丁.²⁹ In other words, he treated Wu Ding's accession to royal power as an anomaly.

II. The “anomalous” reign of king Wu Ding

According to the *Shiji*, Wu Ding succeeded his father, Xiao Yi 小乙, the last of the four brothers (Yang Jia 陽甲, Pan Geng 盤庚, Xiao Xin 小辛, and finally Xiao Yi), sons of Zu Ding. When Xiao Yi died, royal power should have been given to a son of the elder brother Yang Jia. It was not the case since it is the son of Xiao Yi, Wu Ding, who became king.

a. The nature of the crisis

Cai Zhemao hypothesized that Wu Ding, son of Xiao Yi, has been able to “bypass” the adelpic way of succession (the rule according to which a son of Yang Jia should have become king after the death of Xiao Yi) because the descendants of two previous kings, Qiang Jia 羌甲 and Nan Geng 南庚, offered him support. His work is all the more provocative since the *Shiji* does not mention any dynastic conflict for the reign of Wu Ding. Nevertheless, what is not in dispute in the genealogy of the Shang kings is the fact that, after the crisis of the nine generations of kings, four sons of the king Zu Ding became kings, one after the other.

A case in the *Shiji*, in the annals of the territorial house of the Wu 吳, the “Wu taibo shijia” 吳太伯世家, is presented by Cai Zhemao as a proximate historical illustration of an intra-lineage conflict between brothers.³⁰ Considering Shang information and reasoning by analogy, Cai Zhemao surmises that the rule would have been, in the case of the succession of several brothers, that royal power should be bestowed on the son of the elder brother after the end of the reign of the younger, last reigning brother.

To my knowledge, Cai Zhemao is the first to have questioned the ascension to royal power of the king Wu Ding by taking into account the possibility of a power struggle between royal sub-lineages. He has detected traces of this struggle in oracular inscriptions: several reconstituted inscriptions (dating from the reign of Wu Ding) mention three kings: Father Jia 父甲, Father Geng 父庚, and Father Xin 父辛, corresponding to

²⁸ The reason for the move has been a topic of dispute among scholars. According to *Shang renwu*, 149–50, the main reason was politics. Two other articles synthesize the causes evoked for Pan Geng's move, Liu Yifeng 劉義峰 《尚書·盤庚》與盤庚之政, *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊, 4, 2009, 5–8; and Koo Yung Hoi 具隆會 “Tan jiushi zhi luan yu Yinren lüqian wenti” 談九世之亂與殷人屢遷問題, *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊 2, 2013, 24–9. It is not possible given the present state of documentation to pinpoint an exact and unique cause for the move. It is probable that it was multifactorial. Nevertheless, the extant written sources, palaeographic and received, document one of those: the dynastic difficulties linked to the process of royal succession.

²⁹ Cf. “Wu Ding wangwei jicheng zhi mi – cong Yin buci de teshu xianxiang lai zuo tantao” 武丁王位繼承之謎——從殷卜辭的特殊現象來做探討, *Jiaguwen yu Yin Shang shi* 甲骨文與殷商史, 4, 2014, 10, n. 21.

³⁰ Cf. “Wu Ding wangwei jicheng zhi mi – cong Yin buci de teshu xianxiang lai zuo tantao”, 1–3. In this anecdote (*Shiji*, 31.1, 1449–51), the king Shou 壽 of the Wu 吳 polity had four sons but he wanted to establish his younger son who declined, so there was a succession between the other brothers, starting with the elder; the younger one still refused to be king even after the death of the remaining brother.

Yang Jia 陽甲, Pan Geng 盤庚, and Xiao Xin 小辛.³¹ In some inscriptions, there is the mention of “three Fathers”, 三父, a collective to whom sacrifices are offered. This collective is sometimes called *san jiefu* 三介父 “the three collateral fathers”.³² While in some inscriptions (where the two other recipients are named Father X (case of the 合集 903 group 賓 standard), Yang Jia is also named Father Jia 父甲, in others, he is called Yang Jia 陽甲. Cai Zhemao explains this phenomenon as a mark of disrespect, a result of the political struggle Wu Ding had engaged in against the male heirs of Yang Jia.³³ Therefore, in order to reinforce his own powerbase, Wu Ding then allied himself with the descendants of Qiang Jia.³⁴ I do not think this is the case, due to the fragment 合集 1823 正 analysed above showing that the Qiang Jia royal line was interpreted by Wu Ding as a source of possible harm.

Cai Zhemao’s questionable interpretation of the relationship between Wu Ding and the Qiang Jia royal line does not void his ingenious hypothesis: the reign of Wu Ding was, succession-wise, within the frame of adelphic succession, an anomaly. Other sources allude to the difficulties the monarch encountered before and at the beginning of his reign.

b. The debut of Wu Ding: a very dynamic process

Sima Qian’s *Shiji* mentions that Wu Ding, after the death of his father, was 思復興殷 “pondering on [the best way] to revive the fortune of the dynasty”.³⁵ Other received texts note that Xiao Yi, the father of Wu Ding, played a very important role in the circumstances leading to the reign of his son:

³¹ Cf. “Wu Ding wangwei jicheng zhi mi – cong Yin buci de teshu xianxiang lai zuo tantao”, 2–3. See for example 醉古 43= 合集 2130+ 乙補 1598, rubbing 1 p. 14, where the oracle is tasked to determine whether those three fathers are harming the king. The reconstituted inscriptions quoted by Cai Zhemao in this article come from Lin Hongming 林宏明, *Zuiguji: jiagu de zhuihe yu yanjiu* 醉古集: 甲骨的綴合與研究 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2011).

³² Cf. Chao Lin 趙林, *Yinqi shiqing: lun Shangdai de qinshu chengwei ji qinshu zuzhi zhidu* 殷契釋親: 論商代的親屬稱謂及親屬組織制度 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2011), quoted below as *Yinqi*, 141–2. Chao Lin adds that since then, it would be necessary to distinguish between the principal, direct, father-to-son line and the collateral line marked by the character *jie* 介, hence our translation. Cai Zhemao notes that in the inscriptions of the second period, those three fathers become the “three ancestors”, 三祖, as in 合集 32690 (group 歷 2). Cf. “Wu Ding wangwei jicheng zhi mi – cong Yin buci de teshu xianxiang lai zuo tantao”, 5. This inscription also mentions a sacrifice to Father Ding 父丁, that is to say Wu Ding. Another inscription presented by the author, 合集 32617, group 歷 2, notes the offering of the sacrifice *sui* 歲 to Xiao Yi 小乙. Group 歷 2 (cf. Huang Tianshu 黃天樹, *Yinxu wangbuci de fenlei yu duandai* 殷墟王卜辭的分類與斷代, Beijing: Kexue, 2007, mentioned hereafter as *Fenlei*), 189 sq.) dates mainly from the reign of the king Zu Geng.

³³ Cf. “Wu Ding wangwei jicheng zhi mi – cong Yin buci de teshu xianxiang lai zuo tantao”, 7. This explanation is dubious, even within the context of intra-lineage tensions. The use of the hieronym Yang Jia 陽甲 might have had other causes, such as the existence of a surname or even a moniker given to this individual while alive. The corresponding Shang character has been interpreted generally as *hu* 虎 (tiger) but also as *hui* 喙 (snout or mouth). According to Yu Xingwu 于省吾 ed., *Jiaguwenzi gulin* 甲骨文字詁林 t. 1–4 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1999), abbreviated below *Gulin*, t. 2, n. 1660, 1614, this character was also a verb related to hunting. Yang Jia would then have been nicknamed “the hunter of tigers”, hardly an insult for the Shang.

³⁴ Cf. “Wu Ding wangwei jicheng zhi mi – cong Yin buci de teshu xianxiang lai zuo tantao”, 10–11; he examines the status of Qiang Jia in inscriptions coming from the group 歷 (for example 醉古 247) and concludes, based on the fact that Qiang Jia received a greater number of penned ox in sacrifice than other great royal ancestors (such as Zhong Ding or Zu Xin), that this ancestor, while not counted among the direct line royal ancestors, benefitted from an elevated status. Nevertheless, the number of victims might also be indicative of the necessity to placate the recipient of the sacrifices.

³⁵ *Shiji*, “Yin benji”, 3. 102.

- chapter “Wu yi” 無逸 of the *Shangshu*: 其在高宗，時舊勞于外，爰暨小人。 “As for Gaozong (=Wu Ding), he began to live and toil outside, with the common people.”³⁶
- *Zhushu jinian*: 小乙：六年，命世子武丁居于河，學于甘盤。 “the sixth year [of his reign], the king Xiao Yi ordered his heir Wu Ding to live inside the Yellow river and to learn the ways of Gan Pan.”³⁷
- chapter “Yue ming” 說命下 of the *Shangshu*: 王曰：「來！汝說。台小子舊學于甘盤，既乃遷于荒野，入宅于河。 “The king [Wu Ding] said, ‘Come, O Yue. I, this child, a long time ago learned with Gan Pan. Afterwards I fled in the wild, and then I went to (the country) inside the Yellow river, and lived there’.”³⁸

Of course, two of those texts (chapters “Yue ming” and “Wu yi”) are very late in provenience. The chapter “Wu yi” in particular has another anecdote about Zu Jia, one of the reigning kings of Wu Ding, mentioning that 舊為小人 “he was at first one of the lower people”.³⁹ The reference to the “lower people” might only be a trope to show the virtue of the monarchs, able to sympathize with the difficulties of commoners.⁴⁰

The text from the *Zhushu jinian* only says that the king Xiao Yi, having designated Wu Ding as his heir, ordered him to go (presumably) outside the Shang capital – the rationale given for such a decision being to learn with a man who was probably an ally of Xiao Yi.⁴¹ While the chapter “Yue ming” cannot be considered a reliable historical testimony, it does mention the same Gan Pan.⁴²

There might have been another reason for Xiao Yi to send his son outside the Shang capital. If the probable intra-lineage tensions resulting from the “ejection” of the sons of Yang Jia from the succession are taken in account, Wu Ding would have become a target of another powerful royal lineage.⁴³ To become king and effectively exert royal power would have required a series of drastic measures. The discovery of the site of Huanbei provides an important clue to that.

The site of Anyang is characterized by the fact that, in the present state of documentation and after a century of digging, no material belonging to reigns prior to Wu Ding has

³⁶ *Shisanjing zhushu* ed. 十三經注疏 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 1983), hereafter quoted as *SSJ* ed., 16. 109. The antiquity of this chapter (cf. *Shangshu xueshi*, 282–3), according to Edward Shaughnessy’s article “Shang shu”, in Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts*, 379, is questionable.

³⁷ *Zhushu jinian*, 竹書紀年, *Pingjinqian cuishu* 平津館叢書 compendium (Taipei: Yiwen, 1967), v. 42, n. 19, quoted below as *JBZJ* ed., 2. 18b. Edward Shaughnessy has studied in depth the composition and details of the transmission of this text in *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 185–256. It does not conclude on the historical value of the text *per se* but shows clearly that the accusation of forgery is baseless. David Nivison, *The Riddle of the Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian jiemi* 竹書紀年解謎) (Taipei: Airiti Press, 2009) has examined extensively the question of absolute dates of Shang and Zhou dynasties based in part on the text of the *Zhushu jinian*.

³⁸ *SSJ* ed., 10.63; this chapter (cf. *Shangshu xueshi*, 220) belongs to the forged old text 偽古文尚書 and is probably a forgery due to the Eastern Jin dynasty 東晉 scholar and official Mei Ze 梅賾 (fourth century CE).

³⁹ *SSJ* 18.109

⁴⁰ In this chapter, the only Shang monarchs mentioned in this regard are Wu Ding and one of his sons, Zu Jia.

⁴¹ The authors of the *Shang renwu*, 154, interpret the mission given to Wu Ding as a preparation for tackling hostile polities, a move that would anyways require allies.

⁴² Yan Yiping 嚴一萍, *Yin Shang Shiji* 殷商史記 (t. 1–3) (Taipei: Yiwen, 1989), quoted below as *Yin shiji*, t. 1, 154 mentions one inscription, 合集 5566, period 1, group 賁 standard, recording the order given by the king Wu Ding to a *shuai* (military leader) Pan 𠄎(帥)般; Yan Yiping interprets the character *gan* 甘, a mistranscription of the character *shuai* 帥. There are more than 30 inscriptions mentioning this name.

⁴³ This information is given explicitly in the chapter “Yue ming” 說命下. While the information provided by this text is of very late provenience, composed of fragments of quoted early material, it is interesting to note that the mention of the flight of Wu Ding prior to his accession to royal power would be consistent with a situation of intra-lineage difficulties.

been found.⁴⁴ The site of Huanbei has been abandoned in the third stage, and the two palace compounds excavated (1 and 2) have been deliberately burnt (almost no material remains have been found above the burned foundations).⁴⁵

In other words, it is probable that the site of Anyang was founded by Wu Ding himself. It is surprising that no historical record makes mention of such a move, but move there was.⁴⁶ This move would have allowed Wu Ding to start with a “clean slate”, outside (literally) the tangled web of intra-lineage politics. Another way for Wu Ding to consolidate his power was his marital alliance with a non-Shang lineage, examined below.

The clean slate I have hypothesized was nevertheless only relative, since the move from Huanbei to Anyang proper (as the abandonment of Huanbei shows) suggests that at least a portion of the Shang people went with Wu Ding when he made the move to Anyang proper. He might, therefore, have had to cope with the sons of the previous kings when they were alive, but also after their deaths, as the oracular inscriptions of his reign show (posthumously they are known as the *xiong* 兄, the elder brothers, twelve of them being mentioned). Since the term *xiong* is classificatory, it designated his own brothers (from the same father, but from other spouses of his father) and cousins, that is to say male children of the brothers of his father.⁴⁷ Some of those “brothers” could have accessed royal power by virtue of their being sons of kings, for example the sons of Yang Jia.

Wu Ding had to offer sacrifices not only to dead members of the royal lineage, he had also to deal with those who were alive. The case of the war chief Que 雀 is the subject of a long and fascinating article by Zhang Weijie 張惟捷.⁴⁸ This Que was active during Wu Ding’s middle reign period.⁴⁹ Zhang Weijie noticed (pp. 714–22) that he was sometimes ordered to perform rain-making sacrifices dedicated to the deities of mountains and rivers, usually reserved to the king. For the author (pp. 750–55), Que was not called “Zi” (prince), because he has acquired a great deal of power and autonomy.⁵⁰ Que, as the inscription 合集 6946 (period 1, group 寶 standard) shows, had command over the royal host (*wangzu* 王族), and other chiefs of noble houses reported to him (*gao* 告). In light of this evidence, Zhang Weijie (p. 755) makes the hypothesis that Que was a half-brother of Wu Ding himself, born of a different mother.⁵¹ I think he might also have been a son of one of the paternal uncles of Wu Ding.

⁴⁴ See Yue Nan, *Kaogu Zhongguo “Shiji” yiluo de 1220 nian lishi*, 251.

⁴⁵ See Z. Jing, T. Jigen, G. Rapp and J. Stoltman, “Recent discoveries and some thoughts on early urbanization at Anyang”, in Anne P. Underhill (ed.), *A Companion to Chinese Archaeology* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2013), 349–50.

⁴⁶ There is a curious passage in the *Shiji* (3.102) saying that 殷已都河北，盤庚渡河南，“The Shang had their capital situated north of the river, Pan Geng crossed south”. The site of Huanbei is situated north of the Huan river 洹河 while the new capital was established south of it. This mention in the *Shiji* is a sober but very accurate description of what the archaeological data show. Why was such a move attributed to Pan Geng and not Wu Ding? The answer is unknown as yet, but the description is too close to the archaeological data to be a coincidence. Archaeological maps do not reveal any other river north of the site of Huanbei. It is possible that information was garbled through the lengthy process of transmission of the texts Sima Qian consulted.

⁴⁷ Chao Lin (*Yinqi*, 34–5), in the light of the numerous inscriptions dedicating sacrifices to *xiong* (elder brother) 兄 X, concluded that primogeniture was not a rule, at least in the case of royal succession.

⁴⁸ Cf “Yin Shang Wu Ding shiqi renwu ‘Que’ shiji yanjiu”, 殷商武丁時期人物「雀」史跡研究 in *Zhongyang yanjiu suo lishi yuyan yanjiu suo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊, 85/4, 2014, 679–767. See also “Zailun Yinxu buci zhong de ‘duozi’ yu ‘duosheng’,” 115–6.

⁴⁹ Cf “Yin Shang Wu Ding shiqi renwu ‘Que’ shiji yanjiu”, 686.

⁵⁰ The existence of vessels bearing the character *que* as a house/clan name, dating from the last period of the Shang dynasty, is proof that Que was indeed the origin of this house, which still existed at the very end of the Shang dynasty. See “Yin Shang Wu Ding shiqi renwu ‘Que’ shiji yanjiu”, 732–5.

⁵¹ For Edward L. Shaughnessy (“Extra-lineage cult in the Shang dynasty – a surrejoinder”, *Jiaguwenxian* t. 20, 500–02, originally published in *Early China* 11–12, 1985–87), Que was not part of the Shang royal lineage.

Que's tasks show that he was a major helper in royal undertakings. Zhang (p. 756) rightly emphasizes the exalted status of Que, attributing it to his blood relationship to the king and his military prowess; he also suspects another set of hidden reasons: a "tradeoff" for royal succession. In other words, Wu Ding had to "compensate" at least one of his (classificatory) brothers in order to reign. This compensation associated Que to the ritual and military exercise of royal power, thus "neutralizing" a possible rival.

Wu Ding also relied on multiple marital alliances to consolidate his power. One of the important spouses of Wu Ding was Lady Jing 婦姁. Her case is significant, since this woman came from outside the Shang clan.⁵²

c. The case of Lady Jing 婦姁 and the marital alliances of Wu Ding

Lady Jing, Fu Jing 婦姁, was one of the three spouses of Wu Ding mentioned in the later iterations of the cyclical sacrifices. Her hieronym was Bi Wu 妣戊 Lady Jing; she died at the end of Wu Ding's reign.⁵³

This Lady Jing is mentioned in many inscriptions dating from the reign of Wu Ding.⁵⁴ The king, as was the case for Lady Hao 婦好, another important spouse of Wu Ding, divined her pregnancy.⁵⁵ She was involved in many important affairs, such as agriculture and war.⁵⁶

This spouse came from *Jing* 井 territory: her name is composed of the character 井 to which the character *nü* 女 (woman) has been added.⁵⁷ This territory, situated west of Shang-controlled territory, is attested in the oracular inscriptions of Wu Ding; most inscriptions present it as an ally.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, he was the beneficiary of sacrifices of protection (*yu* 禦, exorcism against malevolent entities) offered to Father Yi (合集 413, period 1, group 賓 3, *Fenlei*, 104, end of Wu Ding's reign), and Mother Geng (合集 13892, two inscriptions, period 1, group 賓 3), that is to say the father and mother of Wu Ding. Those inscriptions show that there was a strong connection between this individual and the Shang royal lineage and therefore support Zhang Weijie's hypothesis.

⁵² I mean that this woman did not belong to any of the Shang lineages composing the Shang cultural entity: her lineage did not belong to the same ancestors as the Shang. One important inscription presented below is a clear indication of that.

⁵³ Wang Ning 王寧 ("Wu Ding taizi Xiaoji xiangguan wenti bianxi" 武丁太子孝己相關問題辨析, published March 2014 in *Guoxue* 國學, online edition, <http://www.guoxue.com/?p=18670>, consulted 16 February 2020) mentions the inscription H 395 of the Huayuanzhuang 花園莊 corpus, recording a sacrifice offered to a Mother Wu (Mu Wu 母戊); Wang identifies this Mother Wu as the deceased Lady Jing. Given the fact that most ancestors honoured by the prince of Huayuanzhuang are known as royal ancestors in the other Anyang inscriptions, this identification is plausible. Huang Tianshu 黃天樹, "Jianlun 'Huadong zilei' buci de shidai" 簡論 "花東子類" 卜辭的時代 in *Guwenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究, 36, 2006, 23–9, dates those inscriptions from Wu Ding's reign. See also "Jianlun 'Huadong zilei' buci de shidai" 簡論 "花東子類" 卜辭的時代 in *Huang Tianshu guwen lunji* 黃天樹古文字論集 (Beijing: Xuefan 學苑, 2006), 149–57.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Shang renwu*, 330–8.

⁵⁵ Li Min 李民 and Zhu Zhen 朱楨 ("Zu Yi qian Xing yu buci Jingfang" 祖乙遷邢與卜辭井方, *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao*, *zhexue shehui kexue xuebao* 鄭州大學學報, 哲學社會科學報, 6, 1989, 17) are wrong when they say that there are more divinations about Lady Jing delivering a child than there are about Lady Hao: the *Heji* compendium shows clearly that this is the other way around.

⁵⁶ According to "Zu Yi qian Xing yu buci Jingfang", 17, the tasks given to this spouse were mainly religious in nature and not military. Only two inscriptions, 合集 6584 and 6585 正 (both period 1, group 賓 1) mention a military role for Lady Jing, ordered to attack the territory of the Long people 龍方. She was also involved in campaigns against another non-Shang territory; cf. *Shang renwu*, 336–7.

⁵⁷ There are numerous inscriptions where her name is mentioned as Fu Jing, the character *jing* not being accompanied by the character *nü*; ex. 合集 8165 正, period 1, group 賓 standard.

⁵⁸ See Sun Bingbing 孫並冰 and Lin Huan 林歡, *Shangdai dili yu fangguo* 商代地理與方國 *Shangdai shi* 商代史 t. 10, Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2010), quoted below as *Shang dili*, 310–13. There is for example one instance of rebellion in this territory in the bronze inscription of the Yin Guang fangding 尹光

Was Lady Jing kin-related to the king Wu Ding? Meng Shikai 孟世凱 and Zhu Zhen 朱楨 both answer in the negative: Lady Jing was a woman from an allied (most of the time) territory.⁵⁹ Roderick Campbell, while positing that “Shang kings took wives from closely affiliated lineages” as a kind of endogamous alliance between “high-ranking Shang clans”, adds that some spouses came from allied territories.⁶⁰ The alliance with Lady Jing and her lineage was therefore highly significant.

The distant, non-kin relationship between the Jing territory and the Shang can be illustrated by the inscription 合集 1339, period 1, group 賓 1:

癸卯卜賓貞井方于唐宗彘

The day guimao cracks, Bin tested the oracular proposition: [let the] people of Jing [present] a wild boar in the temple of Tang (The Victorious = Da Yi 大乙).

There is no sacrifice mentioned in the inscription, hence our supplying the term “present”. From this inscription and the absence of sacrifice offered to Da Yi, it is possible to deduce the absence of any previous blood ties between the people of Jing and the Shang king. The alliance with the non-Shang lineage from the Jing territory bears witness to the contacts the Shang dynasty established with non-Shang people. Archaeology confirms the reality of those contacts.

The comparison between the structures and the material dug in the sites of Huanbei and Anyang gives clues to the changes the Shang dynasty underwent immediately after the abandonment of Huanbei, the city founded by Pan Geng. The two cities have developed according to two different models, Huanbei being walled and Anyang not.⁶¹ What is more significant is the fact that the Wu Ding phase of Anyang suggests “a high degree of heterogeneity of material culture and population”, with lots of imports of objects “totally different from those typical ‘Shang’ traditions”, that is to say material from earlier phases of Shang dynasty.⁶² From those observations, it is easy to deduce that the reign of Wu Ding saw a phase of growing cultural contacts with non-Shang entities. The marriage with Lady Jing is just one example of that.

方鼎 (*Sandai compendium* 三代 4. 10.2); according to the authors, the territory would be in the Shanxi and does not correspond to the Xing 邢 Shang capital, which is in Hebei 河北. There is another example of hostilities between the Shang and the Jing territory 井方. See, for example, in Zhao Cheng 趙誠 (ed.), *Jiaguwen jianming cidian* 甲骨文簡明詞典, abbreviated *Jianming* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988, 140), 合集 33044, period 1, group 歷 2, 己巳貞: 執井方 “The day jisi, test: subjugate the Jing territory”. Inscriptions of the group 歷 2 dating mainly from the reign of Zu Geng (cf. *Fenlei*, 195), show hostilities started after the reign of Wu Ding. Therefore, Li Min 李民 and Zhu Zhen 朱楨 (“Zu Yi qian Xing yu buci Jingfang”, 16–7) say incorrectly that the Jing territory was always allied to the Shang.

⁵⁹ Cf. Meng Shikai 孟世凱, “Fu Jing yu Jingfang” 婦姘與井方, *Jiaguwenxian*, t. 28, 292–6, originally published in *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊, 3, 1994; Zhu Zhen 朱楨, “Jinguo zuizao shu Yin Shang – shuo Fu Hao, Fu Jing” 巾幗最早屬殷商——說婦好、婦井, *Jiaguwenxian*, t.21, 84, originally published in *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊, 2, 1990.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Violence, Kinship and the Early Chinese State*, 167. See also 168–9, table 5.1; for the author, this table suggests that “the Late Shang kings generally took wives from areas securely within the ambit of royal power. This might help to explain why only around 20% of the Fu names seem to correlate with places”. Those spouses (for example Lady Long 婦龍, Lady Zhou 婦周, Lady Zhu 婦壹) came from hostile territory during Wu Ding’s reign, their territories being located to the north and west of Shang. See also the table in Chen Jianmin 陳建敏, “Buci zhufu de shenfen ji qi xiangguan wenti” 卜辭諸婦的身份及其相關問題, *Jiaguwenxian*, t. 25, 18–9, originally published in *Shilin* 史林, 2, 1986.

⁶¹ According to Jing et al., “Recent discoveries and some thoughts on early urbanization at Anyang”, 360, Huanbei was built in a “top-down” process, while “Yinxu was seemingly much more self-organized (bottom-up local processes)”.

⁶² Cf. Jing et al., “Recent discoveries and some thoughts on early urbanization at Anyang”, 361.

The link between Lady Jing and her territory of origin was so strong that an inscription, 屯南 4023, period 3, group 無名, after the reign of Zu Jia, mentions a sacrifice to a Bi Wu Jing 妣戊姁.⁶³ To the normal hieronym was added the character designating the territory of origin, even after her death and a timespan of a minimum of two generations.

In light of tensions arising within the Shang royal lineages, it would have made sense for the young Wu Ding to make powerful allies outside of those lineages; one of those alliances was then sealed through a marriage with Lady Jing.

One of the conditions of this alliance was probably to ensure that the fruit of this union would be given a special status and the attribution of the title of “young king” or king in waiting 小王 to a prince son of Lady Jing is a clear indication of that.⁶⁴ While the naming of an heir by Wu Ding cannot be regarded as institutional, since it is the only recorded instance in oracular inscriptions, it had the double advantage of potentially avoiding the pitfalls of adelphic succession and the entanglements of Shang intra-lineages’ rivalries.⁶⁵ It might also have been a source of tensions. That is why Wu Ding also pursued throughout his reign a multi-pronged strategy of alliances, manifested through:

1. the impressive number of spouses of Wu Ding recorded in inscriptions dating from his reign; and
2. his marriage to Lady Hao, daughter of Yang Jia 陽甲.

On the first point, the inscriptions dating from the reign of Wu Ding mention numerous spouses, some (a dozen or so) belonging to Shang nobles. While the exact number of spouses of Wu Ding varies according to the different tallies, it is clear that the king was not monogamous.⁶⁶ Only a very limited number of spouses came from non-Shang polities (case of Lady Jing). This means that Wu Ding, through this network of alliances,

⁶³ This inscription is mentioned by Chang Yuzhi (*Zhouji*, 105, n. 1) erroneously as 合集 4033; for the dating of this inscription, see Liu Fenghua 劉鳳華, “Yinxu cunnan xilie jiagu buci de zhengli yu yanjiu” 殷墟村南系列甲骨卜辭的整理與研究, PhD, University of Zhengzhou, 2007, quoted below as *Xilie*, 38. The term *bi* 妣 being applied to all female ancestors from level EGO+2 on corresponds to a kinship term given after the reign of Zu Jia.

⁶⁴ This son’s hieronym is Zu Ji 祖己. The inscription 合集 21546, period 1 group 子: 己丑子卜貞小王 田夫 “The day jichou, the prince made the cracks and tested: the young king (personal name X, not deciphered yet) goes hunting to Fu (name of a place)” gives his personal name. The young king died before the end of Wu Ding’s reign as the inscription 合集 39809, period 1, group dui 自 small characters shows: ... 出小王己 卣 “... offering one bull to the young king Ji by the sacrifice you”. The inscription also shows that the young king was indeed Zu Ji. The identification of Lady Jing as his mother is made through elimination: in the cyclical sacrifices post-Zu Jia, Wu Ding is accompanied by three spouses, Bi Xin 妣辛 = Mother Xin 母辛 = Lady Hao 婦好, Bi Gui 武丁爽妣癸 = Mother Gui 母癸 (her living name remains unidentified), and Bi Wu 武丁爽妣戊 = Mother Wu 母戊 = Lady Jing 婦姁. I will show below that Lady Hao was the mother of Zu Jia. Yan Yiping (in *Yin shiji*, t. 1, 175), based on the inscription 合集 2580, period 1, group 賓 standard, has identified Mu Gui 母癸 as the mother of Zu Geng. Therefore, the mother of the young king must have been Lady Jing/Mother Wu 母戊. Another clue is the complete absence of sacrifices offered to Mu Wu in the inscriptions of the reigns of Zu Geng and Zu Jia. The alliance between the king Wu Ding and the Jing territory seems (cf. above, n. 58) to have entered a difficult period after his reign. It is possible that the death of the young king led to a reassessment of this alliance.

⁶⁵ The presence of Zu Ji in the *Zhouji* of all periods shows that he was considered a legitimate king, even if he never reigned.

⁶⁶ Chao Lin (cf. *Yinqi*, 108, 151–70) provides such a list of spouses, and attributes to him more than one hundred. Zheng Huisheng 鄭慧生 (“Cong Shangdai wu di qie zhidu shuo ta de shengmu ru ji fa” 從商代無嫡妾制度說到它的生母入祀法, originally published in *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰綫, 4, 1984, *Jiaguwenxian* t. 20, 482–3) mentions a tally by Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, giving 64 spouses to this king. Many of them (according to the inscriptions) bore children for the king. Song Zhenhao (*Shang lisu*, 413) gives him only eight official spouses but his criteria for such a limited number of spouses are not clear.

associated to him a large number of Shang-related lineages, constituting thus an important part of his powerbase.⁶⁷

The second point is linked to the information available through the recently discovered Huayuanzhuang 花園莊 inscriptions. The prince of Huayuanzhuang was the young son of Wu Ding, the future king Zu Jia.⁶⁸ Due to the abundance of mentions of Lady Hao in Huayuanzhuang's corpus and the fact that this lady was one of the honoured spouses of the king Wu Ding, it is plausible that she was the mother of the prince.⁶⁹

An ancestor, designated as Zu Jia 祖甲, was the third most mentioned in Huayuanzhuang's inscriptions. From the context of those inscriptions, it can be inferred that Zu Jia/Yang Jia 祖甲/陽甲 was the father of Lady Hao.⁷⁰ Since he was the first reigning paternal uncle of Wu Ding, what was the reason for his importance? I infer that Wu Ding, taking as a wife Lady Hao, that is to say a parallel paternal cousin (FBD), established through her an alliance with the lineage of Yang Jia, whose son should have been the successor to the royal power after the death of Xiao Yi.⁷¹ This marital alliance would have extinguished, so to speak, one source of discord inside the Shang royal lineages.⁷²

Marital alliances were a tool to establish a powerbase, but Wu Ding also needed to reshape the Shang polity through a series of ritual processes.

III. The organization of the royal ancestral cult during the reign of Wu Ding

We do not have access to palaeographic documents dating from before the reign of Wu Ding. Nevertheless, since this monarch left the site of Huanbei to establish a new capital, it would not be surprising if such a move also entailed a reworking of whatever ritual system existed before. Some oracular inscriptions dating from Wu Ding's reign show that this reworking was taking place.

Certain ancestors were given a pre-eminent place; this is the case for the ancestor Shang Jia 上甲.

⁶⁷ While outside the purview of this article, two other elements must be noted: 1. Demographic augmentation of the population (cf. Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪, *Shangdai shi lungang* 商代史論綱, *Shangdai shi* 商代史 Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 ed., vol. 1, 91, 134, particularly 135 for the fastest evaluated population growth during the reign of Wu Ding); 2. During his reign, Wu Ding engaged in many military expeditions. See Luo Kun 羅琨, *Shangdai zhanzheng yu junzhi* 商代戰爭與軍制, *Shangdai shi* 商代史 Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 ed., vol. 9 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue 中國社會科學, 2010), 118–25 for the timing of Wu Ding's campaigns).

⁶⁸ This identification was first proposed by Yao Xuan 姚萱 in "Yinxu Huayuanzhuang dongdi jiagu buci de chubu yanjiu" 殷墟花園莊東地甲骨卜辭的初步研究, PhD thesis, 2005, 40–43. It is based on a place mentioned frequently in the Huayuanzhuang inscription, written 𠄎, which was the powerbase of the prince. Dong Zuobin (in "Jiagu duandai yanjiu li", 甲骨斷代研究例, article published in 1933, republished in *Dong Zuobin xiansheng quanji* 董作賓先生全集, vol. 1, Taipei: Yiwen, 1977, 427–9) interpreted the character 𠄎 as an archaic form for Zai 載, the personal name of the king Zu Jia as given in the *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年. A prince of this name, son of Wu Ding, is documented in the Anyang royal inscriptions.

⁶⁹ There is another clue, the abundance of inscriptions (59) with sacrifices dedicated to Mu Xin 母辛 (hieronym of Lady Hao used at the level EGO-1) in the inscriptions from the reign Zu Jia.

⁷⁰ For this identification, see Yao Xuan in *Yinxu Huayuanzhuang dongdi jiagu buci de chubu yanjiu*, 47; see also Liu Huan 劉桓, "Yinxu buci zhong de 'duoyu' wenti" 殷墟卜辭中的“多毓”問題, *Kaogu* 考古 n. 5, 2010, 64. The two most frequently mentioned ancestors are the paternal grandparents of the prince, father and mother of Wu Ding.

⁷¹ There are other clues to the existence during the Shang dynasty of a system of preferred marriage with the paternal cousin. On that point, see Chao Lin, *Yinqi*, 255–9, 295–6. Those clues come essentially from the analysis of kinship terminologies. It makes Wu Ding's marital alliance with Lady Jing all the more significant and highly political.

⁷² "One" and not "the". The later iterations of the cyclical sacrifices show that Wu Ding was succeeded by two sons, Zu Geng and Zu Jia, with another son (the young king) also honoured in a place that acknowledges at the same time his status as a son of Wu Ding and his royal footing. Those three sons were sons of different mothers.

a. The choice of the great ancestor Shang Jia

Received sources mention Shang Jia as a most important ancestor for the Shang dynasty:

- *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年: 武丁十二年, 報祀上甲微。 “The twelfth year [of his reign, the king Wu Ding] offered sacrifices of gratitude to Shang Jia Wei.”⁷³
- *Guoyu* 國語: 上甲微, 能帥契者也, 商人報焉 “Shang Jia Wei, he was the one who could lead [Shang lineages] to bond with each other, the Shang expressed thus their gratitude to him.”⁷⁴

The second text uses the term *shuaiqi* 帥契 that I have translated as “leading the bond”. The character *qi* 契 is indeed used in later Zhou sources as designating a bond or a contract. Since the royal lineages have been through a series of crises of succession, one immediately before the reign of Wu Ding, it seems that Shang Jia has been given pre-eminence in order to provide the Shang with a great, unifying ancestor. This pre-eminence was even more obvious during the reign of Zu Jia, as the inscriptions of the *Zhouji* show: he was honoured at the beginning of each type of ceremony included in the cyclical sacrifices (all periods), using the formula “(sacrifice X offered to) Shang Jia and all his descendants” 自上甲至于多毓. This formula was already employed during the reign of Wu Ding as the inscription 合集 10111 (group 賓 3) shows:

癸亥卜, 古貞: 癸年自囿 (上甲) 至于多毓。九月。

The day *guihai* cracks, Gu tested the oracular proposition, praying for the harvest (by offering sacrifices) to Shang Jia and his numerous descendants (made in) the ninth month.

This ancestor was not accompanied by any spouse. Therefore, he “avoided” the entanglements of Shang royal succession: the lack of spouses “neutralized” in this ancestor any entanglements with lineage-based politics.⁷⁵ Indeed, the crisis immediately before the reign of Wu Ding was linked to the four sons of the king Zu Ding 祖丁 who had four spouses: each son was by a different mother.⁷⁶

There is a further example of the ritual work done during the reign of Wu Ding, pertaining to the specific status of Shang Jia. Chao Lin quotes the example of the following sentences from the inscription 合集 34047 (period 1–2, group 歷 1):⁷⁷

- 己丑卜在小宗升歲自大乙 “The day *jichou* cracks, in the little temple, offering the sacrifices *sheng* and *sui* (decapitation with an axe) to the [royal ancestors] starting with Da Yi/(Tang)”;⁷⁸
- ...亥卜在大宗又升伐三羌十小宰自[上]甲 “The day ... *hai* cracks, in the great temple, offering by the sacrifices *you* and *sheng* three decapitated individuals of the Qiang people and ten young penned sheep to the [ancestors] starting with Shang Jia”.⁷⁹

⁷³ JBZJ, 2. 19 a.

⁷⁴ “Luyu shang” 魯語上, *Sibu congkan* ed. 四部叢刊, 4–9.

⁷⁵ The *Shang renwu*, 156, links those texts precisely to the necessity to consolidate and unify the higher lineages of the Shang clan.

⁷⁶ In the cycle, none of the first mentioned ancestors (Shang Jia 上甲, Bao Yi 報乙, Bao Bing 報丙, Bao Ding 報丁) is accompanied by a spouse. The arrangement of those four first ancestors obeyed probably to the same logic: no spouse meant no division of lineages.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Yinqi*, 431–3.

⁷⁸ Another inscription, 補編 10371, mentioned in *Xilie*, 152, also associates Tang (as the head of a series of royal ancestors) to the little temple.

⁷⁹ Another inscription, 合集 34044 正 (period 1–2, group 歷1) also presents the same ancestor Shang Jia 上甲 as the first ancestor of the series honoured in the great temple.

According to Chao Lin, the little temple was a place where the tablets of the kings could be placed for specific ceremonies dedicated to them. The ancestor mentioned as the first of the series was often Tang 湯, the first king according to received sources. By contrast, the first of the ancestors in the “great temple” was Shang Jia, who also became the head ancestor of the cyclical sacrifices implemented during the reign of Zu Jia son of Wu Ding.

Those inscriptions indicate that there were attempts to separate non-royal from royal ancestors at the end of Wu Ding’s reign, before the inception of the more sophisticated system of the cyclical sacrifices, implemented after his reign.⁸⁰ In any case, it is significant that the temple containing the first (non-royal) ancestors and all the ancestors following him has been named the “great temple” in contrast to the other “small temple” containing “only” the royal ancestors.

The mention of temples is not the only domain where ritual experimentations took place during the reign of Wu Ding. Inscriptions of this reign mention sets of characters such as *dashi* 大示 “great tablet”, *xiaoshi* 小示 “lesser ancestral tablet”, and *xiashi* 下示 “secondary ancestral tablet”; there is also the association of *shi* (示 tablet) with a numeral, six, seven, ten...⁸¹ This type of regrouping is linked with the order of the royal succession, but since this order chronologically fluctuated and thus redefined, *a posteriori*, those categories of *da shi* 大示 and *xiao shi* 小示 must be seen only as an attempt to “work out” different classifications and not as indicative of the existence of iron-clad rules. Those attempts are documented during the reign of Wu Ding and the subsequent reign of Zu Geng.⁸² Their importance cannot be overlooked: it prepared the implementation of a rule of unilineal transmission of royal power from father to son.⁸³ This rule might have been implemented after the reign of Wu Ding but for the death of the “young king” which happened before his father’s demise. Instead, two of the other sons of the king

⁸⁰ In the received sources, the first Shang ancestor who was called a king (*wang*) was Tang; Shang Jia is acknowledged as a great ancestor but not a king. An inscription, 合集 34046 (period 1–2, group 歷 1), indicates that the classification between the great temple and the little temple was not always clear cut: the ancestor Shang Jia 上甲 is at the head of several other royal ancestors but this series is honoured in the little temple. The sample is insufficient to reach definite conclusions (the *compendium Heji* contains only ten inscriptions mentioning either the great or the little temple). For later periods, there are incomplete inscriptions, mentioning only the great temple, such as 合集 30376, period 3–4, group 無名, with mention of a divination effected in the great temple, or 合集 30377, 30378 (same period, same group, mentioning only the great temple) but without mention of the honoured royal ancestors.

⁸¹ While this last type of inscription is interpreted as an *ad hoc* arrangement of ancestral tablets according to non-systematic necessities of the cult, the “great” and “lesser” tablets have been understood (see for example Chao Lin in *Yinqi*, p. 66) to represent ancestors according to their classification in direct and indirect lines of succession, by reference to the Zhou system of direct/indirect (*zhi* 直/*pang* 旁 *xi* 系) line. It is also the perspective used by Chang Yuzhi, “Buci ‘dashi’ zai yi” 卜辭“大示”所指再議, *Jiaguwen yu Yin Shangshi* 甲骨文與殷商史 new edition, 1, 2008, 49–56. See also Chang Yuzhi, *Shangdai zongjiao jisi* 商代宗教祭祀, in *Shangdai shi* 商代史, Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 (ed.), t.8 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue 中國社會科學, 2010), mentioned below as *Shang jisi*, 360–98. Unfortunately, the dating of many inscriptions in the text of the *Shang jisi* is faulty: inscriptions belonging to the first and second period are placed in the fourth (example, 合集 32384, which belongs to the 歷 2 group). A synthesis of the question (Hu Huiping 胡輝平, “Yin buci zhong ‘dashi’ wenti zai yanjiu” “殷卜辭中“大示”問題再研究”, *Kaogu*, 3, 2010, 71–9) shows to the contrary that the categories of *da shi* 大示 (great tablet) and *xiao shi* 小示 (lesser tablet) are more amenable to an explanation based on the regrouping of ancestral tablets for a given circumstance; it would therefore be unwise, as L. Vandermeersch (in *Wangdao ou la voie royale: Recherches sur l’esprit des institutions de la Chine archaïque. t.1 structures culturelles et structures familiales*, Paris: EFEO, 1977, quoted below as *Wangdao* t. 1, 136) remarked, to conflate those Shang ritual mentions with the later Zhou system.

⁸² Li Shuangfen 李雙芬 (in “Cong xuan ji dao Zhouji – binglun Shangdai houqi wangquan de hefaxing jiangou”, 從選祭到周祭 — 兼論商代後期王權的合法性建構, *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊, 2, 2015, 15–7) provides a list of the different types of tablet arrangements in periods 1 to 5. The majority of those belong to the reign of Wu Ding and Zu Geng.

⁸³ Cf. *Yinqi*, 23–4.

succeeded him: Zu Geng, followed by Zu Jia. The implementation of the rule took place only after the reign of Kang Ding 康丁, one of the sons of Zu Jia.

The two sons of Wu Ding, who effectively became kings after him, came from a different mother; I surmise that the identity and the status of those mothers, royal spouses, had a tremendous importance. Under the reign of Wu Ding, the mention of a specific marker bears witness to the importance of those spouses in the process of giving birth to a unilineal line of succession. This marker was also employed in the inscriptions after his reign.

b. Who are my ancestors: a question of markers

The inscriptions of the reign of Wu Ding mention a specific marker of lineage, analysed first by Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 and more recently by Liu Huan 劉桓. Liu Huan interprets the character of the marker (usually transcribed as *yu* 毓, to give birth to or to raise) as *zhou* 冑 (designating in Zhou-era texts the posterity of kings).⁸⁴ In the inscriptions of the cyclical sacrifices, there is mention of the *duo yu/zhou* 多毓/冑, the “numerous descendants”, in formulas type: ... 自上甲至于多毓/冑 “[sacrifice X offered to] Shang Jia and his numerous descendants”. This designated the entire group of the most important ancestors, all descendants of the one who was the first ancestor, Shang Jia 上甲. It so indicated that this group was regarded as a whole, under the common reference of Shang Jia. When the character *yu/zhou* was applied to a singular royal ancestor, singling him or her out, the general meaning of the character changed. It became a specific marker and, to understand what was then at stake, one must examine in detail the chronology of the relevant inscriptions, the nature of the ancestors receiving the marker, and the characteristics of the reigns under which the marker has been attributed.

c. The marker yu/zhou as an identifier of direct line of descent

The marker *yu/zhou* appears in a context where kinship terms were classificatory and not descriptive. In other words, the same term was applied to all the individuals of the same sex in the same generation. I present here the essential results of Qiu Xigui and Liu Huan, adding generational precisions for each reign.

As Liu Huan noted (p. 65), only royal ancestors who in the sacrificial cycles were accompanied by spouses were given this quality. It is also the case for royal spouses, with a nuance: not all spouses of those kings received this marker. During the reign of Wu Ding 武丁, and in the present stage of the documentation, no male ancestor received the marker individually. The individual marker *yu/zhou* was attributed only to Bi Ji 妣己 (*yu/zhou* Bi Ji 毓/冑妣己), one of the spouses of Zu Ding 祖丁.⁸⁵ This ancestor had four sons succeeding him: Yang Jia, Pan Geng, Xiao Xin, and Xiao Yi. Zu Ding had more than one spouse but only Bi Ji was called *yu/zhou* Bi Ji (毓/冑) 妣己. Through this marker, Wu Ding distinguished among the spouses of Zu Ding the one from whom his own lineage

⁸⁴ “Yinxu buci zhong de ‘duoyu’ wenti” 殷墟卜辭中的“多毓”問題, in *Kaogu* 考古, 5 2010, 61–8. Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭’s work is the article “Lun Yinxu buci ‘duoyu’ zhi ‘yu’” 「論殷墟卜辭“多毓”之“毓”」, *Jiaguwenxian* t. 21, 159–61, originally published in *Zhongguo Shang wenhua guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwen ji* 中國商文化國際學術討論會論文集, Zhongguo dabaike, 1998. The transcription *yu* is more commonly used in OBI studies; I give systematically both transcriptions (*yu/zhou*).

⁸⁵ This spouse is mentioned with the marker in only one inscription; Liu Huan and Qiu Xigui use the inscription 粹 397 (corresponding to 合集 279, period 1, group 賓 3 (cf. “Lun Yinxu buci ‘duoyu’ zhi ‘yu’”, 160). The inscription mentions also a Gao Bi Ji 高妣己 and a Bi Geng 妣庚, spouses of Zu Yi 祖乙, and it is this inscription that led Qiu Xigui to interpret *yu/zhou* as a marker of generation: Zu Yi was the father of Zu Xin 祖辛 and Qiang Jia 羌甲, heads of the two competing lineages analysed above. I surmise that this Gao Bi Ji was probably the mother of the lineage initiated by Zu Xin and thus given the marker *gao* 高, “the high ancestress Bi Ji”.

emerged: Liu Huan concludes that this spouse was the mother of Xiao Yi, his own father. I concur: by attributing the marker, Wu Ding “singled out” his own grandmother. The marker was attributed at the level EGO+2.

The marker *yu/zhou* has also been attributed after Wu Ding, during a limited number of reigns, to the following ancestors and spouses:⁸⁶

- *yu/zhou* Zu Yi 毓/胄祖乙 = Xiao Yi 小乙, marker attributed to the level EGO+2 in the inscriptions of the second period (reigns of Zu Geng/Zu Jia);⁸⁷
- *yu/zhou* Zu Ding 毓/胄祖丁 = Wu Ding 武丁, marker attributed to the level EGO+2 in the inscriptions of the third period (reigns of Lin Xin 廩辛/Kang Ding 康丁, most probably Kang Ding);⁸⁸
- *yu/zhou* Fu Ding 毓/胄父丁 (*Xilie* p. 63, 屯南 629 + 647). Since those inscriptions are classified in the 歷無類 group (reign of Zu Jia 祖甲), this ancestor is Wu Ding 武丁. The marker is attributed at the level EGO+1.
- There is, in inscription 屯南 3186, a record of sacrifices offered to *yu/zhou* Zu Bi Geng 毓胄祖妣庚.⁸⁹ This inscription indeed mentions a royal spouse (Bi Geng), but the king is not identified: following the date of the inscription and the EGO+2 rule observed in most other cases, it should be Xiao Yi 小乙, the father of Wu Ding 武丁. The relevant portion of the inscription should be read 毓祖[乙][毓]妣庚. The celestial stem name of the king has been omitted as well as the second *yu/zhou*, the association of an ancestor with his spouse being enough to identify him with certainty. Therefore, it is either Zu Geng 祖庚 or Zu Jia 祖甲 who gave the marker *yu/zhou* to their grandmother, Bi Geng, the mother of their father Wu Ding 武丁.
- *yu/zhou* Bi Xin (毓/胄) 妣辛, marker attributed to the level EGO+2 in the inscriptions of the reign of Kang Ding 康丁.⁹⁰ Bi Xin, one of the spouses of Wu Ding 武丁, the famous Lady Hao 婦好, was one of the three spouses of Wu Ding honoured in the later iterations of the cyclical sacrifices.⁹¹ Based on the EGO+2 rule and since the inscriptions dates from the reign of Kang Ding, the marker *yu/zhou* identifies Lady Hao as the grandmother of Kang Ding and, indirectly, the mother of Zu Jia 祖甲, father of Kang Ding.

Liu Huan (p. 66) interprets correctly the role of the marker *yu/zhou* as a device through which a king identified his own direct line of descent. This line of descent was through male and female, but in Figure 2 I introduce a nuance with regard to the level at which the marker was given.

⁸⁶ The ancestors are presented in chronological order, from the oldest male ancestor.

⁸⁷ Cf. “Yinxu bucizhong de ‘duoyu’ wenti”, 65. According to Liu Huan, the majority of the inscriptions presented date from the reign of Zu Geng 祖庚.

⁸⁸ Cf. Liu Huan, “Yinxu bucizhong de ‘duoyu’ wenti”, 64.

⁸⁹ Cf. Liu Huan, “Yinxu bucizhong de ‘duoyu’ wenti”, 66. This inscription belongs to the group 歷無類 (cf. *Xilie*, 63, 66). This group is not identified in the *Fenlei* but from the name of the royal ancestors given in this group, the largest part of it dating from the reign of Zu Jia 祖甲.

⁹⁰ One of the inscriptions mentioning this spouse is 合集 27456 正. This inscription is classified in the group 何 1; this group (cf. *Fenlei*, 229) is in activity across periods 2 and 3. The only spouse corresponding to this hieronym, at that generational level (EGO +2 level), is one of Wu Ding’ spouses. Therefore, this inscription dates either from the reign of Lin Xin or Kang Ding 康丁. Since the number of inscriptions associated with the former is very limited, the latter is more probable.

⁹¹ In the sacrificial cycles, Wu Ding is associated with three spouses: Bi Xin 妣辛, Bi Gui 妣癸, and Bi Wu 妣戊.



Figure 2. The line Zu Ding – Wu Ding and the presence/absence of markers

The three kings, and their spouses who have received the marker *yu/zhou*, form a direct transmission line to the exclusion of other spouses.

During the reigns of Zu Geng 祖庚 and Zu Jia 祖甲, Xiao Yi 小乙, the father of Wu Ding, received the marker at the EGO+2 level. The reign of Zu Jia saw an exception to the rule: Zu Jia gave the marker to his own father. There are, to date, only two inscriptions with the association of the marker and “Father Ding” and constitute an anomaly only if the character *yu/zhou* is mainly a marker at the level EGO+2. I do not deny that in most cases it functions indeed as a seniority marker. Nevertheless, all of the existing cases and the two inscriptions of Xiaotun (屯南 629 + 647), dated from the reign of the son of Wu Ding (level EGO+1), show that it has another characteristic: it also distinguishes qualitatively between ancestors. Zu Jia also honoured specially the only spouse associated in the sacrificial cycles to Xiao Yi; Bi Geng.

During the reign of Kang Ding 康丁, two ancestors, Wu Ding and Bi Xin, received the marker. Both were honoured at the level EGO+2 and were husband and wife.

The different cases involving the marker given individually at the level EGO+2 can be classified thus:

- Individual spouse: Bi Ji.⁹²
- Ancestors identified as a couple: Xiao Yi and Bi Geng; Wu Ding and Bi Xin.
- Father: Wu Ding.

Are all these cases alike? Wu Ding was singled out by one of his sons, Zu Jia. According to the received sources, the reign of Zu Jia was marked by a crisis.⁹³ Following this crisis, I think that he had to reaffirm his legitimate status by recalling his direct link to his father. Wu Ding himself singled out Bi Ji, through whom he affirmed the legitimacy of his own father: Bi Ji was most probably the mother of Xiao Yi. As Cai Zhemaο showed, Wu Ding emerged victorious from a power struggle pitting himself against the descendants of several kings who were his paternal uncles.⁹⁴ Identifying the mother of his father, one of the four spouses of the king Zu Ding, allowed him to identify his own line of descent.

⁹² Liu Huan (“Yinxu buzhong de ‘duoyu’ wenti”, 66) mentions also a Bi Gui 妣癸. This spouse does not correspond to any royal spouse at the level EGO+2, that is to say (since the inscription mentioning her – 合集 1249, group 賓3 – dates from the reign of Wu Ding 武丁) the level of the grandfather of Wu Ding, Zu Ding 祖丁. Liu Huan says that she is one of the spouses of Zu Ding but it does not seem to be the case.

⁹³ The *Shiji*, “Yin benji”, 3. 103–4, describes his reign as chaotic. The canon of documents (*Shangshu* 尚書) presents him in a more favourable light; see the chapter “Wuyi” 無逸, SSJ 18.109. This late chapter suggests nevertheless that Zu Jia had to remove himself from the Shang court before becoming king. I will examine in detail the career of Zu Jia in another article.

⁹⁴ To wit, Yang Jia 陽甲, Pan Geng 盤庚 and Xiao Xin 小辛.

Wu Ding 武丁 — Bi Xin 妣辛^{毓/周}

Zu Jia

(Kang Ding)

Figure 3. The direct line Wu Ding – Kang Ding

Such a struggle also took place after his reign: his two sons, Zu Geng and Zu Jia, also singled out their grandparents, and the logic of such a move does seem to be linked to their own power struggle. At least during the reign of Zu Jia, under whom the first sacrificial cycle was implemented, the reference to Bi Geng, the spouse of Xiao Yi, would have been important: while in the list of male ancestors in this first cycle, Zu Geng, brother of Zu Jia, was the last king honoured, this Bi Geng was the last royal spouse mentioned in the cycles: none of Wu Ding's spouses were mentioned.

The next case, that of Bi Xin 妣辛 = Lady Hao 婦好, is quite straightforward: Kang Ding, by singling out both Wu Ding and Lady Hao, established the legitimacy of his own lineage. He was the successor of a direct line initiated with Wu Ding and Lady Hao. Therefore, his elder brothers, Zu Ji and Zu Geng, with their respective mothers Bi Wu and Bi Gui, were sidelined.

The marker *yu/zhou*, when considered qualitatively, is interpreted by Liu Huan as a marker of legitimacy. The ancestors receiving the marker, either at the level EGO+2 (in the majority of the cases) or EGO+1 (in the case of Wu Ding) were those whose son (or sons) succeeded them. The marker *yu/zhou* designated and distinguished kings who in the cyclical sacrifices were accompanied by a spouse, but also among those spouses and in the case where there was more than one spouse to a given king, only one of them. The example of Wu Ding and his three spouses honoured in the cycles is quite obvious: Kang Ding distinguished, among those spouses, the mother of his own father, Lady Hao, and therefore acknowledged the line from which he emerged directly. Therefore, I deduce that Kang Ding “constructed” (that is to say retrospectively) a direct line of transmission of royal power, as shown in Figure 3.

Hence, *yu/zhou* in fact functioned as an indicator of direct transmission of royal power, from father to son.

The singling out of one, and only one, royal spouse must be interpreted as a selective instrument that was necessitated by the existence of non-monogamous unions. Therefore, in cases where it was bestowed on one individual ancestor, I translate the expression *yu/zhou* as “the ancestor X, from whom I descend directly”. The *yu/zhou* method of singling out a direct line of descent, starting during the reign of Wu Ding, was paralleled with another one which is more complex to interpret but was probably linked to a “streamlining” of the royal lineage.

d. Agnatic and uterine descent

One marker, *duosheng* 多生, has been observed in inscriptions dating from the reigns of Zu Jia and Kang Ding.⁹⁵ For Chao Lin, the term *duosheng* 多生 would designate a child by

⁹⁵ See for example the inscription 合集 27650, period 3–4, group 無名, where it is opposed to another marker, *duozi* 多子, the numerous princes: 唯多生饗. 唯多子[饗] (last character missing and supplied through the

his/her maternal ancestry, the character *zi* 子 being used to connote the paternal ancestry.⁹⁶ According to Chao Lin, each member of the higher order lineage *Zi* had a double system of descent: agnatic and uterine, this last identity marked by the character *sheng*, 生 “born” (of a mother).⁹⁷ Chao Lin adds that, while there is an obvious contrast between *zi* and *sheng*, the quality of *zi*, as the author noted (*Yinqi* pp. 28–31), was not automatic and had to be conferred by the king. If this definition, according to which *sheng* denoted the uterine descent, can be accepted, was it necessarily applied to children whose mothers belonged to the royal sub-lineages but whose fathers did not? It might also be that the *sheng* 生 or the *duosheng* 多生 were children not conferred the title *zi* “prince” by the king. This operation was not necessarily directly linked to the constitution of a unilineal line of transmission but I take it as indicating at least that the intervention of the king, conferring a title or not, was essential to the process of royal succession.

The term *duosheng* 多生 was employed as a marker applied to living persons and was probably linked to a clearer distinction of pedigree within the royal lineage, since this title was different from the one given to the *duozi* 多子, the numerous princes. The other marker, *yu/zhou*, was clearly used to delineate a unilineal line of transmission of royal power from father to son, but it did not come to fruition immediately. The cyclical sacrifices implemented during the reign of Zu Jia did not sanction such a line: indeed, they illustrate all modes of succession, unilineal but also adelphic (brother to brother).

Conclusion

Numerous problems in the transmission of royal power in the Shang dynasty emerged from the practice of polygamous marital alliances. Those alliances were in part conditioned by the promise to male heads of the most powerful lineages (the wife-givers) that their grandsons or nephews would become kings. One of the results of this system of alliances was the adelphic rule: heirs to the king, benefitting from the help of the lineage of their mothers, became kings in succession. The potential (and real) instability of the royal transmission was provoked by the very instrument through which a given king established stability, but for his personal reign only. In other words, the adelphic system led to a vicious circle, since a son of a king had to, vis-à-vis his own brothers, establish his own powerbase by establishing as many marital alliances with powerful lineages as possible.

The king Wu Ding accessed royal power after a long period of instability concluded by the move of the capital from Huanbei to Anyang. This period was marked by the “nine

context). Chronologically speaking, the term *duozi* 多子 is present in inscriptions dating from the first period to the fourth period while the term *duosheng* is only present in inscriptions from the second period to the fourth.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Yinqi*, 213, 216–25. Two dictionaries understand the term in the same way: *Jiaguwenzi gulin* 甲骨文字詁林 t. 1–4, Yu Xingwu 于省吾 ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1999), abbreviated below *Gulin* t.1, n. 1381, 1309–26, especially pp. 1312–13, *Jianming*, 162–3. While there are (particularly in Shang bronzes) numerous signs interpreted as markers of lineage, it was not the equivalent of the later (Zhou times) system of names. On this topic, see David Sena, “Reproducing society: lineage and kinship in Western Zhou China” (PhD, University of Chicago, 2005, 7–10) discussing *xing* 姓, as what he calls a “conceptual category of names”, in the historical context of Spring and Autumn texts.

⁹⁷ Taking the case of the king Wu Ding, a king could marry any woman coming from a Shang sub-lineage, with of course the exception of his own blood sisters. Those blood sisters in turn would have to marry any man coming from a different sub-lineage. Then, from the point of view of the king = EGO, the children of those sisters would not be the sons and daughters (*zi* 子) of the king but relatives by blood and designated as 生, “born” (of a mother, relative of the king). This term of address would be used only because this uterine descent made the children part of the royal lineage; it would emphasize the uterine descent of those relatives vis-à-vis the king = EGO, in order to distinguish them from the members of the royal sub-lineage by ways of agnatic descent.

generations of chaos” during which the difficulties linked to the adelphic system gave birth to a configuration I have interpreted as an attempt to keep power alternating between the two lineages initiated by Zu Xin 祖辛 and Qiang Jia 羌甲. After the death of the son of Qiang Jia, Nan Geng 南庚, and the death of his immediate successor, Yang Jia 陽甲, royal power did not revert to a son of Nan Geng but to a brother of Yang Jia, Pan Geng 盤庚, who was succeeded by two other brothers, Xiao Xin 小辛 and Xiao Yi 小乙. When Xiao Yi gave his son Wu Ding royal power, he precipitated another crisis: within the logic of this implementation of the adelphic system, it should have been inherited by one of the sons of Yang Jia, the elder brother of Xiao Yi.

The long reign of Wu Ding was quite successful. One of the means he used to consolidate his reign was the establishment of a vast network of marital alliances with non-Shang (e.g. Lady Jing) and Shang lineages (the Lady Hao is one of the most prominent). He even tried to promote a direct line of transmission father-to-son (a system that had benefitted him when he succeeded his father Xiao Yi) through the institution of an official heir, the young king, son of a non-Shang woman, Lady Jing. Nevertheless, the implementation of the direct line way of transmission of royal power was quite an uneven process.

After the death of the young king, Wu Ding was succeeded not by one son but by two: Zu Geng and Zu Jia. A passage of the *Zhushu jinian* suggests that Zu Jia had not been able to transmit the royal power to one son only:

二十七年，命王子囂、王子良。

The twenty-seventh year of his reign, he [Zu Jia] named the prince Xiao (= Kang Ding) and the prince Liang his heirs.⁹⁸

Zu Jia was probably doing what his father, Wu Ding, had done, with one difference. The text of the *Zhushu jinian* indicates that Zu Jia named two sons, contrary to Wu Ding who only designated one (the young king) as heir. If the pattern established before the reign of Zu Jia is followed, it means that those two sons were born of two different spouses. Nevertheless, the later iterations of the cyclical sacrifices only associate one spouse (Bi Wu 祖甲奭妣戊) to Zu Jia. This probably reflects the tendency of later reigns to favour a unilineal line of descent, with the elimination of the other spouses of Zu Jia and one of his reigning sons, Lin Xin.

The cyclical sacrifices first implemented during the reign of Zu Jia are a quasi-genealogical system which did not start with a king but a distant (mythical?) ancestor, Shang Jia 上甲. The examination of those cycles, the subtleties of their structure and evolution should benefit from what has been understood in this article of the difficulties and tensions in Shang royal lineages. I will endeavour to study it in detail in another article.

⁹⁸ JBZJ, 2. 21-a (reign of Zu Jia 祖甲). While the first name mentioned, Xiao 囂, corresponds to the king Kang Ding 康丁 (see JBZJ, 2. 22-a, *Yin shiji*, t. 1, p. 185), the second name, Liang 良, does not correspond to the recorded name of Lin Xin 廩辛, who is named, in the *Zhushu jinian*, Feng 馮. The king Lin Xin is only mentioned in oracular inscriptions by his hieronym, Brother Xin. The *Zhushu jinian* indicates that he reigned for only four years. The discrepancy in names cannot be easily explained. Is it possible that the prince Liang was another son of Zu Jia, dead before he could reign?