

Examining the authenticity of the collection of oracle bones inscription in Huan-Bao-Chai by linking special characters

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1. Preface

Recently, The Collection of Oracle Bones Inscription in Huan-Bao-Chai was published by Mr. Kuo chin-ping. The book contains 306 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions where were said to have been collected during many years and to make public announcement once together. The research and interpretations of them have been completed in 2007 by Kuo himself, too. Although the discovery dates of those inscriptions were obscure, many Shang culture specialists like Mr.李雪山, the head of Shang oracle bones and culture centre, Anyang normal college, Mr.焦智勤, Mr. 郭勝強 and Prof.王宇信 ,Prof. 楊升南 , both also the senior consultants of the centre, justified the authenticity of the inscriptions in the book. However, there is still dubiety.

To discuss the problem of ancient culture, we need to criticize strictly to every culture products that have no exact excavation data, in order to forbid any false materials mixing up into the real culture and influence the objective value of research. Concerning about the criticize ways of those oracle bone inscriptions without discovery dates, firstly, the owners reasonably had to check it in scientific methods themselves, at least showed out the description about the details of bones collection and the styles of drilled hollows and gouges on the reverse of turtles and bones. But, there is nothing any relative discussion could see in the book of Huan-Bao-Chai (abbreviated as HBC). From the identification of literal data, we use to criticize the Shang bones remained intact by the text transcriptions, the antithetical or contrastive charges relationship (Dui-Zhen), the divination inscriptions in a set, etc. Since most of the collection in HBC are fragmentary pieces and on each piece only about two or three words are shown, their authenticity can hardly be proved by the sentence structure or contents of the words. The article aims to investigate the forms and phrases of the only words by linking and matching different pieces of the bones, and try to build up some comparative result.

According to my personal research experience, the hand-writing date of different bones in the same ruins or same exploration ditch to be found always related closely, the charges inscriptions that occur on the different bones have also to be found the same content of divination or contextually related to each other, they can be considered approximately coeval. However, the sources of the oracle bones in HBC was so-called being collected by different times, places and people separately, thus, its inscriptions basically were not easy to have research in a whole set and those were impossible to be written by the same inscriber, too. But on the contrary, through the correlative analysis of the characters in those HBC oracle bones as below, we discover that some rare, seldom used and mistaken writing of words were discovered again and again in the book.

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How to explain reasonable for this strange situation? It maybe exist some special man-made meanings behind.

2. Discuss certain examples of special words linking from the oracle bone inscriptions in Huan-Bao-Chai


Though the correlation among the same characters or graphemes, we can connect the relationship among different bones or plastrons in the same excavated pit, and also connect some certain bones relation in the different pits. On the contrary, we can prove the sources of oracle bone inscriptions(abbreviated as OBI) from that so-called collected during many years and from different places through the comparative analysis about duplicate words, hand scripts, phrases, forms of sentences were actually by the same inscriber, moreover it can infer that those connective sources are probably faked inscriptions by nowadays people.






The collection in HBC contains just only 306 pieces of OBI, but we discover many special forms of inscriptions are duplicated. That sort of phenomenon seems not occasional, and the inscriber ought to be from the same one. For instance:


- a. The word 茲 as 𠄎 in H 29, 81, 104




Checking with The New OBI Dictionary by Prof. 劉釗, in vol 4, p.252, collected 39 forms of the character 茲, many of them are in the traditional shape as 𠄎, and only 3 examples from the Huang (黃) Diviner group inscriptions in Shang king Di Yi, Di Xin period written as 𠄎, but none of above has the form equal to the HBC. That scribe with long straight line only in front of two silks was discovered in only HBC , and were repeated three times in the book. Thus, the three particular characters were

certainly written by the same inscriber, in other words, we can conclude that the linking pieces of the bones H 29, H81, H104 were inscribed by the same people and in the same period of time.

- b. The word 寅 as  in H 20, 21, 91

Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 14, p.793, it contains 19 forms of the character 寅, basically written as , and only three forms from the Huang Diviner group inscriptions added as . Comparatively, the three words in HBC were belonging to this special kind of characters. They ought to be from one man's script. However, in H 20, we can find the word "king" written as , the structure in Period Two to Four of dating OBI by Mr. Dong zuo-bin(董作賓), and the same word "king" in H 21 as , belongs to the structure in Period Five. This two word-styles are of "king" inscribed in different time and people according to the famous article " Jiaguwen duandai yanjiuli" by Dong zuo-bin. So, the character  in HBC obviously was the word dated in the Period five, but why could it possible to show out in the earlier inscriptions Period Two to Four? It is another interesting point for us to consider.




- c. The word 蓺 as , in H 33, 50, 172


Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 7, p. 403 , it contains 32 forms of the character 蓺 , most of them are written as  and , and the constituent element 𠂔 was seldom written with two number of strokes. On the contrary, the three same form of word 蓺 in HBC were very special writing, those shape should definitely be inscribed by the same people. However, the diviner "史 " in H 33 was belongs to the type Period One the king Wu-Ding's diviner, but the word "king" written as  in H 50 should



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be defined into the type Period Two to Four. That is no doubt the contradictory problem of dating here again.



d. The word 羊 as , in H40, 42, 52, 281


Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 4, p.238, it contains 92 forms of the character 羊; in p.241, it contains 51 forms of the character 羴; in vol 10, p.541, it contains 16 forms of the character 羴; in vol 5, p.332, it contains 27 forms of the character 羴. Almost all the element structure “sheep” were inscribed as , only three words in 羴 and one word in 羴 were written as , both of this special strokes were belonged to the Huang Diviner group inscriptions(as Period Five in Dong’s dating). The strange character “” combined with two pairs of ears in one sheep head had obviously been a kind of wrong writing. So, the four words and elements of “sheep” in HBC were special examples, and should be written by the same people at the same period of time.







e. The word 子 as , in H4, 79


Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 14, p.786, it contains 32 forms of the character 子, and almost all of them were written as  and . There had only one form with the shape of “eight” in the lower part of the word that occurred from one piece of bone in the Huang Diviner group inscriptions. It was similar to the special character in HBC. So, the two special and rare writing of 子 in H 4 and H 79 could possibly be inscribed by the same people and at the same time.


f. The word 莢 as  in H 53, 263

Comparative with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 13, p.734, it contains 51 forms of the character 莢 as  and  , the form in HBC was mistaken the meaning of the upper element “口” to be the head of human body, so the script was totally incorrect graph, and let the structure lost the hands in both sides. The writer of H 53 and H 263 were absolutely misunderstood the original structure of the word 莢 , but it was occurred in the book twice. Thus, it seems no doubt that the inscriptions of H53 and H263 were by the same people.

f. The word 歲 as  , in H20, 74, 160


Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 2, p.86, it contains 35 forms of the character 歲 as  ,  ,  ,  . It has just only two particular piece also from the Huang Diviner group inscriptions that are similar to the form in HBC, but are still not totally matched, especially the writing style of constituent element “戈” . So, the three special writings 歲 in H 20, H 74, and H 160 ought to be inscribed by the same people. Besides, the word “king” in H20 was written as  (the Period Two to Four), in H74 was as  (the Period Five), so that was another contradictory problem in dating here.




g. The word 爭 as  , in H 176, 277

Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 4, p.254, it contains 32 forms of the character 爭, the structure were totally written the same shape as  . The original graph looks like a hand holding a farm tool to dig the cave, but the shape in HBC obviously are different, especially the element “hand” to

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face upper that yielding to hold the tool was definitely strange inscription. So, the same form of special style about the word “爭” in H176, H277 could be linking together and it expressed that both of this two pieces of bones had chance to be written by the same people.

- h. The word 亡 as , in H12, 13, 18, 21, 23, 24, 27, 36, 37, 39, 44, 46, 47, 61, 64, 68, 69, 76, 84, 92, 102, 109, 113, 117, 127, 131, 132, 133, 137, 147, 155, 160, 162


Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 12, p.699, it contains 41 forms of the character 亡. Almost all of this character were written as  and , just only one or two examples in the period of Huang Diviner group inscriptions written like , but this strange writing form appeared in the inscriptions of HBC normally. And the graph of this negative form maybe a good linking hint and matching evidence among those pieces of OBI in HBC.



In the above examples, we investigate that many special, rare, and even wrong structure of words in the inscriptions of HBC could be linking together, so many sources in HBC should be gathered in the same period of time and written by the same inscriber. So far, at least parts of the collection were possibly faked inscriptions that imitated the writing in real OBI of the Period Five.

3. Analysis certain special structure of inscriptions in HBC


We discover there have several particular and rare forms of words in the inscriptions of HBC, including omission of graphic units or elements, wrongful characters and contradictory combination of words. This kind of



abnormal and unreasonable construction ought not be the original writings, we doubt that it should be inscribed by nowadays people. For instance:


- a. The word 𦍋 as , in H104



The word 𦍋 in Shang scribe looks like  and , but the special form in H104 that omitted some part of strokes in element “cow” and “sheep” would not be found in Shang traditional scripts.


Checking with the commanding sentences in H104 as below:



- (1) 夷𦍋? 茲□。
(2) 𦍋?

The element “sheep” in the first form of the word 𦍋 is , and the second form is shortened as . The two sentences can also be found at HJ 37130 as below:

- (1) 夷𦍋? 茲用。
(2) 𦍋?

The writing form of two elements “sheep” at this two words 𦍋 are as  and . Obviously, this two special element of words are the same in H104 and HJ37130. Besides, the texts in this two commanding sentences are totally duplicated, too. So, the script of two pieces of inscriptions ought to have very close relationship.

- b. The word 𦍋 as , in H106

Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 3, p.151, it contains 8 forms of the character 𦍋 as  and , single pictograph, but only one shape as

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𠂔 in HJ31030 with wrong element at the bottom side like a shorten form of “sheep”, and it looks as the same structure to H106 unexpectedly.

The commanding sentence in H106 is as below:

𠂔𠂔𠂔𠂔, 王每?

and it can be found nearly the same sentence at HJ 31030 :

𠂔𠂔𠂔𠂔, 王其每? 大吉

Compare this two similar inscriptions, some strokes in the words 𠂔, 𠂔 and 每 have errors in writing at H106, but the shapes of words in HJ31030 are totally correct. It can prove that the inscriptions in H106 imitated the writing in HJ31030.

c. The word 祝 as 𠂔, in H83

Checking The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 1, p.12, it contains 29 forms of the character 祝 as 𠂔, 𠂔, 𠂔. The original graph looks like a human knee down in front of tablet and pray, the form exaggerate the element “mouth” upward that express to pray to heaven, but none of above have the shape showing with tongue outside the “mouth” like in H83. Besides, the commanding sentence in H83 is:

“pray to zu-yi with white pig”


“祝白彘于且乙?”



Examining all the using phrases of word 祝 in Shang inscriptions, there are only:

“pray to certain ancestor”


“祝某祖”, “祝某妣”


but not even one example used as: “pray with certain sacrifice” (祝某牲). So, testing no matter from the shape of form or from the using phrase, the inscription in H83 ought to be dubiety.

d. The word 𦰩 as , in H7






Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 10, p.583, it contains 29 forms of the character 𦰩 as , . The graph looks like two hands grasping in the middle of a farm product, it express the activity of sacrifice. Both hands in shape face inside, and there is no exception at all. But, what we check this form in H7 obviously an exceptional writing, both hands of the word face outside and lost the original meaning of grasping. The inscriber seems not quite sure about the structure of this form.


d. The word 陷 as , in H51



Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 7, p.423, it contains only one form of the character 陷 that belongs to the Shang Hua-yuan-zhuang Locus East inscriptions as . The graph means someone fall into a trap, and the writing of the element “man” form is similar to the part of word in H51, but the lower part looks like a underground cave is totally different to H51. The form in H51 was a wrong character that probably imitated the writing in Hua-yuan-zhuang inscriptions that digging out in 1991.


e. The word 牢 as , in H72


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Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 2, p.48, it contains 92 forms of the character 牢 as , , and in the shorten form as ,  in few examples, but there has never written like the form  in H72. It is obviously a wrong character in H72 that mixed the script of “cow” and “tree” together in the same structure.

f. The word 改 as , in H135

Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 3, p.199, it contains 28 forms of the character 改 as  and . The original graph means a hand with stick to hit a snake, and with few drops of blood in front of the snake. However, there has no exceptional example like the form in H135 that those drops of blood were written in two parallel lines.

g. The word 囊 as , in H49

Checking with The New OBI Dictionary, in vol 6, p.371, it contains only 3 forms of the character 囊 as , and it used as the name of a certain place. The form in H49 is obviously a wrong character that the mark inside the bag turn into a script of “child”. Such a character had never been seen before.

In the above examples, all of them are special and seldom form of words that appeared with wrong structure of writing. We suspect that those inscriptions are probably faked.

4. Conclusion

Through the compare word by word with normal character of OBI, we analyze that some special forms of words in HBC are suspected, especially the inscribed relation between H104 and HJ37130, H106 and HJ31030. It should be fake and written by nowadays people. On the other hand, many forms and structure of words by linking and matching different pieces of bones in HBC will demonstrate that the inscriptions were written by the same inscriber. In fact, we doubt that in HBC, the so-called “ collected during many years and from different places “ was not true. We conclude that at least part of HBC collection was faked.

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Discussion: Examining the Authenticity of the Collection of Oracle Bones Inscription In Huan-Bao- Chai by Linking Special Characters

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It is my personal honor to make a comment on paper of professor Chu, who is an outstanding senior in the research of Oracle Bones Inscription. However, I am worried that I do not perfectly understand and evaluate his masterpiece. Therefore, I have few questions to check if I understood him correctly.

1, It is worthwhile to consider the results of recent excavations.

2, Judging the reliability of the data from The Collection of Oracle Bones Inscription is the most basic and meaningful job that can contribute to the development of the research.



3, The control method that Prof. Chu used in this study, which is comparing the shape of the letters and comparing example sentences, has been proved objective and therefore guarantees the reliability of the result.

4, I fully agree with the views of Professor Chu. However, I would like you to teach me these three points that I didn't fully understand.

1) Whether there is any validity that was used for classification of Dong zuo-bin, but dated in the Period 5 and Period 2 to 4. There are various views on the timing classification. Professor Chu, Do you support the Which?

You used the classification of Dong zuo-bin 董作賓. There are various views on how to categorize the periods, such as period 2-4 and period 5. Which one do you support?

2) It is true that a victim can not come after 祝. But if you consider 白 髀 as the cause object, it is grammatically correct. Yang bong-bin 楊逢彬 watched as the 甲類 ritual verb Class B '祝'. That is not seen to have three object at the same time, they can have cause object.

3) In f of C, you quoted '羊', the abbreviation form of 牢. Then, can't  be considered as a combination of '  ' and '二'?