

3.1 THE DISCOVERY OF THE SHANG DYNASTY

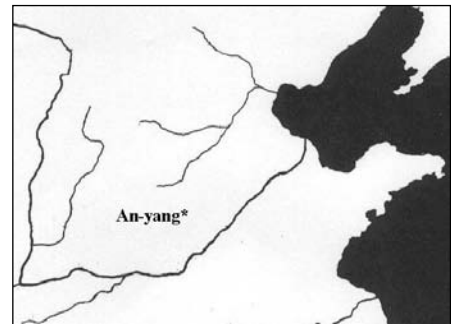
A dramatic beginning

In 1899, China was in chaos. Four years earlier, it had been stunned by Japan, which had virtually annihilated the Chinese navy in a single day, aided by their Chinese opponents, whose first cannon shot of the war landed squarely on their own commanding admiral. The political uproar that followed this unmasking of China's weakness had led to a program of ambitious reform, adopted by a young emperor who daringly gave power to a party of radically progressive Confucians. But the leaders of that party were killed or driven into exile by a coup led by the aging Empress Dowager, and the young emperor was banished to an island prison within the imperial palace grounds in Beijing, where he awaited his eventual death by poison.

In the midst of this turmoil, Wang Yirong, a mid-level official who had recently come out of a period of filial retirement in honor of his mother's death, arrived in Beijing seeking to revive his career and help pull his country out of its desperate trials. Wang was well known as a scholar of ancient script and antiquities, but prior to his mother's death he had become a political activist as well, raising troops in his home region to help strengthen China against its wealth of foreign adversaries. Upon his arrival in Beijing, Wang secured an appointment as libationer at the Imperial Academy, and he was seeking to use this scholarly position as a means of conveying his patriotic ideas to the Empress Dowager. Then he suddenly fell ill with malaria.

It was through Wang Yirong's illness that the history of the Shang Dynasty was discovered.

Earlier that year, a small waterway near the city of Anyang called the River Huan had flooded. The flood had worn away portions of the riverbank near the little village of Xiaotun, and when the peasantry went to clean up the damage, they found that a quantity of old buried bones had been laid bare. It was not unusual for old bones to turn up in this area, and over the years local people had come to believe that these bones had magic medicinal properties. Upon occasion, some of these bones had been observed to have mysterious symbols carved in them, and though no one could understand just what they were, these inscribed bones were known to work wonders on a fever if ground up and added to more standard prescriptions. They became known as "dragon bones," this name reflecting their auspicious properties.



An enterprising merchant named Fan Weiqing had discovered that the reputation of these bones from eastern Shanxi Province had spread widely, and he had speculated that it would be profitable to transport them to distant places for sale to the local apothecaries. By cultivating his contacts with local farmers, Fan had become the foremost dealer in the magic bones, but he was always careful to conceal from potential competitors the source of his goods. Now, in 1899, the

flood near Xiaotun yielded his biggest shipment of merchandise ever, and he hurried his goods to Beijing for sale.

As Wang Yirong's fever grew worse, he decided to send a member of his household to consult an apothecary and purchase the appropriate medicine. Among the items that the apothecary prescribed was a packet of Dr. Fan's Fresh Dragon Bones, ready for grinding. On the day that the bones were delivered, Wang was enjoying the company of a house guest, Liu E, a reform-minded Confucian official of great energy who was, like Wang, a fine antiquarian scholar (and the most famous Chinese novelist of his day). When Wang and Liu spotted these bones, they were instantly struck by the resemblance between the carved signs on them and some of the ancient script forms they both had studied in the past. Although they could not decipher the etchings they were convinced that they were Chinese characters, and of a form so ancient that they had never before been recorded.

Not long afterwards, however, China's political turmoil erupted again. Desperate for some way to avenge herself against the "foreign devils," Western and Japanese, who were tormenting China, the Empress Dowager called for help to a group of mystical warriors, known as the Boxers. The Boxers were skilled in the arts of war, and because they possessed certain magical arts of latter-day Daoism, they were invulnerable to bullets or other weapons. This feature, and their fanatical hatred of foreigners, led the Empress Dowager secretly to summon them to Beijing to drive the foreign legations out of Northern China and restore China's glory. When the government's plan became evident, Wang Yirong rushed to the palace and waited until he had a chance to plead with the Empress Dowager to adopt saner tactics, but his words were wasted.

In 1900 the Boxers stormed the foreign settlements in Beijing and quickly laid siege to the lightly armed diplomatic compounds. The trapped diplomats quickly sent out word of their plight, and before many days had passed Western troops arrived in Beijing. It turned out that in the Boxer creed, the part about invulnerability to bullets was mistaken. As the Boxers were being mown down like grass in the streets of Beijing, the Empress Dowager hastily departed on a long-delayed tour of China's western provinces. In shame and frustration at this macabre outcome, Wang Yirong took his own life.

In this way, the dragon bones came into the sole possession of Liu E. Liu was an influential man of considerable wealth and erudition, and he committed himself to finding the source of the bones. He traced them back to Fan Weiqing, but there he met the obstacle of the monopolist's fear of competition. Fan refused to tell him where the bones came from. In time he relented and did tell Liu, but he was careful to lie. Liu found himself wandering fruitlessly in sections of Shanxi far distant from Anyang.

Commercial instincts finally triumphed. Liu E offered money to any who would deliver bones to him, and as word of this spread, it eventually reached the ears of the peasants of Xiaotun. Liu at last found himself inundated with inscribed bones – many inscribed as recently as the night before sale. As his scholarly eye began to pick out the genuine samples from the forgeries, the clues to their source at Anyang began to emerge.

The temporary disappearance of the Shang

It was not until 1910 that scholars finally arrived at the village of Xiaotun in search of inscribed bones. Although Liu E collected thousands of bone fragments and began the systematic recording and study of their inscriptions, he died in 1909 without ever having pinpointed their source. He had, however, excited a host of young scholars who were anxious to begin work on the puzzle of the bones, and once they knew where to find them, they made massive buying expeditions to the Anyang area, enriching many poor families and carrying away with them thousands of bone fragments, many less than an inch in length.

Liu's disciples were interested only in the writing on the bones, and did not think to ask what more might exist at the Xiaotun site. Archaeology had not yet been introduced as a science in China, and there was no notion that valuable information about the past could be recovered by systematically digging in the ground. Moreover, this first wave of scholars arrived on the eve of China's nationalist revolution, and for the next decade and a half, China was immersed in civil wars that made travel for scholarly purposes nearly impossible.

Oddly enough, although these scholars had in their hands the first solid data ever collected on the Shang Dynasty, during the years of civil war, other scholars began, for the first time, to question the historicity of the Shang.

During the first years after the 1911 Republican Revolution, the intellectual class of China reacted violently against the Confucian ideas of the past, and the influence of Western scholarship swept through all currents of thought. Critical history seemed to many intellectuals to offer great promise for loosening the hold of old Confucian attitudes. Scholars quickly learned to detect the factual baselessness of the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun, and in the 1920s they began to question the historicity of the Xia and Shang Dynasties. The annals of these eras appeared in the *Shiji*, the earliest and apparently most reliable of the great Chinese histories, but the accounts there merely consisted of a barren list of kings with tales interspersed that in many ways resembled little more than a projection of Zhou Dynasty stories into the distant past.

At Beijing University, two new schools of ancient Chinese studies emerged simultaneously. One was devoted to the deciphering of the bones of Xiaotun – who knew what their writings recorded? The other was devoted to the debunking of the legendary past, including the existence of the Shang. Scholars worked on both these projects simultaneously, without awareness of the contradiction.

The traditional account of the Shang Dynasty

Before going further in this description of the development of Shang studies, let's take a look at what traditional China had believed about the Shang. One of the basic features of the process of discovery we are describing here is that everything scholars eventually learned about the Shang was initially understood in terms of how it corresponded with, or failed to correspond with the traditional account. The most elegant statement of that account appears in the *Shiji*, so it makes sense to look at that account before we consider the evidence uncovered by archaeology.

In the following pages you will find a translation of the *Shiji* annals of the Shang. We will use it as a baseline for our inquiry into Shang history.

Note that throughout the *Shiji* account, the Shang Dynasty is generally referred to as the “Yin,” rather than as the “Shang.” The Shang Dynasty is the only period in Chinese history for which there exist two entirely independent names. Although different scholars have their own theories as to why this is so, there is no consensus as to the reason. The two most common theories are that the capital area of the Shang was called Yin, and that the alternative name derives from this. The second theory is that “Yin” was a name given to the defeated Shang people by the Zhou, denoting something like “the conquered.” Neither of these theories is completely satisfactory; however, we will tentatively adopt the first. Regardless of what explanation we may offer, the simple fact is that in translating from Chinese texts, we shall preserve whichever name the original text uses, so you will need to recognize both names. In all other cases, we will always employ the dynastic name Shang.

Where it seems helpful, I have added to the names of the Shang kings superscript letters (for pre-dynastic leaders) and numbers (for kings who ruled after the conquest of the Xia). For example, the founder of the lineage that ultimately became the family which held the throne during the Shang – the family known as the Zi clan – was a man known as Xie. He is the first leader of the Shang line, but it was many generations before his descendants became kings of an entity known as Shang, so he is designated as Xie^a, the superscript ^a indicating that he was the first of the pre-dynastic Shang leaders. His thirteenth generation successor, a man known as Tian-yi¹, Tang¹, or Tang the Successful¹, was the person who established the political entity of the Shang, and his own Zi clan as its ruling family. The superscript ¹ indicates he was the first of the Shang kings.*

A chart of the royal succession according to this *Shiji* account can be found in reading 3.4: “Shang Kingship and Shang Kinship.”

*Tang can also be referred to with an ⁿ superscript, since he was initially the fourteenth pre-dynastic leader of the Zi lineage. Among the Shang king lists we also find heirs who did not seem to succeed to the throne, such as Tang's eldest son, Tai-*ding*, who died young, and who is designated as Tai-*ding*^{1a}. (Note that italicized elements of royal names indicate the use of sexagenary designators, discussed reading 3.2.)

Ancestral Annals of the Yin [Shang]

The founder of the Zi lineage: Xie

Xie of Yin was the son of Jiandi, a woman of the Song nomad tribe who became the second consort of the Emperor Ku. Once, when Jiandi was bathing with two other women, a dark bird flew past and dropped an egg down to them. Jiandi retrieved it and swallowed it whole. Accordingly, she became pregnant with Xie.

When Xie grew up, he assisted Yu in taming the great flood. Thereupon, Emperor Shun charged Xie with the following orders: “The hundred clans do not cleave to one another and the five ranks are not in accord. Assume the office of Governor of Conduct and attentively spread the five teachings, whose essential lesson is broad tolerance. Then Shun bestowed upon Xie a patrician estate in Shang and the surname Zi.

Xie lived during the age of Yao, Shun, and the Great Yu. His achievements shone forth from the hundred clans, and they were at peace.

The pre-dynastic Shang

When Xie^a died, his son Zhaoming^b (Brilliant Light) succeeded him. When Zhaoming died, his son Xiangtu^c (The Surveyor) succeeded him. When Xiangtu died, his son Changruo^d (The Flourishing) succeeded him. When Changruo died, his son Caoyu^e succeeded him. When Caoyu died, his son Ming^f (The Dark) succeeded him. When Ming died, his son Zhen^g (The Stirring) succeeded him. When Zhen died, his son Wei^h (The Obscure) succeeded him. When Wei died, his son Bao-*ding*ⁱ succeeded him. When Bao-*ding* died, his son Bao-*yi*^j succeeded him. When Bao-*yi* died, his son Bao-*bing*^k succeeded him. When Bao-*bing* died, his son Zhu-*ren*^l succeeded him. When Zhu-*ren* died, his son Zhu-*gui*^m succeeded him. When Zhu-*gui* died, his son Tian-*yi*^{n/1} succeeded him. This was Tang the Successful¹.

While it anticipates what we will learn later, it is worth noting that once scholars were able to read them, they found that the Shang oracle records draw a sharp distinction in the treatment of these pre-dynastic ancestors. The eighth in line, Wei, is known in the oracle texts as Shang-*jia*, and he is the earliest ancestor to whom sacrifices are offered on a regular schedule, comparable to later royal ancestors. His powers are very broad, and he and Tian-*yi* – Tang, the first dynastic ancestor – seem to be pictured as the human ancestors with greatest influence over the world of living things. While pre-dynastic ancestors before Wei (Shang-*jia*) may be (and probably are) referenced occasionally in the oracle texts, there is no scholarly consensus on that point, and their roles are minor.

Tang the Successful

From the time of Xie to the time of Tang, the capital of the tribe had moved eight times. Tang was the first of his line to make Bo his residence, living there in accord with the former kings. He composed the “Announcement of the Lord on High.”

These are the circumstances of Tang’s campaigns against the patrician lords. The Lord of Ge had stopped making sacrifices and Tang launched an attack against him. Tang said, “I have a saying: ‘When people look in the water they see their forms; when they look upon the people they see whether there is order.’”

Yi Yin said, “How bright! When words can be heard the Dao can go forth. In ruling a state and nurturing the people as one’s children, the royal offices should be filled with good men. Be diligent! Be diligent!” Tang said, “If you are unable to be attentive to your mandate, I will inflict capital punishment upon you and there shall be no pardon!”

Yi Yin

Yi Yin was named Eheng. Initially, Eheng wished to seek position with Tang, but had no means of doing so. So he went to serve as a member of the wedding processional for a concubine of the Xin tribe. He served as cook of the meats served in the ceremonial tripod and through pleasing Tang by means of delicate flavors he was able to lead him towards the kingly Dao.

Some say that Yi Yin was a hermit and that Tang sent men to invite him to court. Only after five visits was Yi Yin at last willing to associate with Tang and lay forth to him the affairs of the Unthroned King and the Nine Pivots. Tang raised him up and entrusted him with the affairs of the state.

Yi Yin left Tang and went to the Xia, but he detested the Xia and returned to the city of Po. He entered the city through the north gate and there encountered the Ru Jiu and the Ru Fang, whereupon he composed “Ru Jiu and Ru Fang.”

The virtue of Tang

Tang once went out and saw that nets had been spread in all four directions around the wastelands. His liturgist explained: “Animals coming from all four directions of the world will be caught in my nets!”

Tang said, “Ah, you give them no escape!” He ordered that the nets be removed in three directions.

The liturgist then said, “Let those who wish to go left, go left; let those who wish to go right, go right. Those who do not accord with their destiny shall be caught in my net.”

When the patrician lords hear of this they said, “The virtue of Tang is complete indeed! It reaches even to the birds and beasts.”

The conquest of the Xia

The conquest of the Xia introduces a narrative type that becomes the model for later dynastic transition stories. The key element is the evil character of the last ruler of the fallen dynasty, in this case Jie.

At this time, Jie, the king of the Xia, was brutal in his government and wildly licentious. Among the feudal lords, the clan of the Kunwu rebelled. Tang raised an army and led the feudal lords. Yi Yin followed beside Tang. Tang grasped an axe and with his own hand slew Kunwu. Then he set out to attack Jie.

Tang said, “Come you masses of people, come! Hark to my words, all of you! I am but a small child, and I dare not raise a rebellion. But the Xia have committed many crimes. I have listened to your words as you said so. I hold the Lord on High in awe; I dare not fail to be upright! Now the Xia have committed many crimes, and the Mandate of Heaven is that they shall be exterminated!

“Now you people, you have said, ‘Our ruler does not feel for us; he casts aside our seasonal work and is cruel in his governance.’ You have said, ‘These crimes! What should be done?’ The king of the Xia has obstructed the labor of the people and stolen from the cities of the Xia. You people have all become recalcitrant and unharmonious. You say, ‘When will this sun be extinguished? We are willing to die with you, that you shall die!’ When the character of Xia is like this, I cannot but act!

“Join with me in exacting upon the Xia the punishment of Heaven and I shall attend to you all with great gifts. If you are not unfaithful, I shall not betray my words to you. But if you do not accord with the words of our oath, then I shall wipe out you and your clans without clemency!”

These words he spoke to the leaders of the armies, and this became the “Oath of Tang.” Thereupon Tang said, “I am full ready for battle!” And so he was called King Wu – the Martial King.

Jie was defeated on the Wastes of the Song and fled to Mingtiao, where the armies of the Xia were thoroughly routed. Tang then attacked the Thrice-Fierce tribe and captured its riches and jewels. For this, The Elder Yi and the Elder Zhong composed “Exemplary Treasures.”

Post-conquest events

Once Tang had conquered the Xia, he intended to remove to another place its state altar, but this was not agreed to, and he composed “The Altar of Xia.”

Yi Yin made his report and the patrician lords all submitted. Then Tang ascended to the throne of the Son of Heaven and brought peace to all within the seas.

Tang returned to Taijuan and Zhong Hui made a report to him there. The Mandate of the Xia was officially revoked. Tang then returned to Bo and composed the “Announcement of Tang.”

In the third month the king went to the eastern suburb and there he reported to the patrician lords and the assembled leaders. “Let none of you fail to work on behalf of the people. Labor hard at your affairs. Should I have cause to inflict the punishment of death upon you, you shall have no cause to complain against me.

“Of old, the Emperor Yu and Gaoyao labored long abroad and achieved much for the people. The people were content then. In the east, they created the Yangzi, in the north the River Ji, in the west the Yellow River, in the south the River Huai. Once these four channels had been dredged the people had lands where they could live. Then Prince Millet broadcast the seeds and the people raised the many crops of grain. All the high officers achieved much for the people, hence their descendants were all established in hereditary office.

“Of old, Chi You and the patrician lords raised confusion amongst the hundred clans. The Lord on High would not bestow anything upon them and thus they came before the court of judgment. The former kings have said, we cannot fail to be diligent!

“If you do not accord with the Dao, you shall not retain your estates. You shall have no cause to complain against me.”

The “Announcement of Tang” is a chapter in the classic *Book of Documents*. Other titles cited in this account also refer to chapters in that text, most no longer extant. Most scholars believe that chapters in the *Book of Documents* ascribed to pre-Zhou authors were fabrications of the Eastern Zhou period.

Thus did he charge the feudal lords. Then Yi Yin composed “All With a Single Virtue,” and Gao Shan composed “Bright in His Residence.”

Then Tang changed the calendar days of the new moon and the month beginnings and altered the color of the dynastic robes of ceremony in order to exalt white. He held his court after full sunrise.

The *Bamboo Annals*, an alternative historical record which dates from the Classical era or shortly thereafter, records that for the first six years of Tang’s reign there was a great

drought. After the first few years, all music, singing, and dancing were forbidden, but it was not until the king himself went to the Mulberry Forest to pray that the drought ended. The tale of Tang's prayer, in which he was said to offer himself to Heaven as a sacrificial victim, is recorded in a variety of texts, including the *Analects*.

The successor kings of the Shang

When Tang died, his heir Tai-*ding*^{1a} had already died without ascending the throne. So his younger brother Wai-*bing*² was crowned as the Emperor Wai-*bing*. Emperor Wai-*bing* had sat upon the throne for three years when he died. His younger brother Zhong-*ren* received the throne: this was the Emperor Zhong-*ren*³. He had sat upon the throne for four years when he died, and Yi Yin then enthroned the son of Tai-*ding* Tai-*jia*⁴. Tai-*jia* was the eldest son of Tang's eldest son and he was known as the Emperor Tai-*jia*.

During the first year of Emperor Tai-*jia*'s reign, Yi Yin composed "The Lessons of Yi," "Laying Forth the Mandate," and "Going Forth to Rule."

The reign of Tai-*jia*⁴ and the regency of Yi Yin

After Emperor Tai-*jia* had occupied the throne for three years he was still unenlightened and practicing brutality. He did not emulate the model of Tang; his character was chaotic. Thereupon Yi Yin exiled him to the Tonggong. For three years, Yi Yin acted as regent, administering the government and holding court of the patrician lords.

Once Emperor Tai-*jia* had lived in Tonggong for three years, he came to regret his transgressions and lay the blame upon himself. He turned towards goodness and upon his doing so, Yi Yin went to receive Emperor Tai-*jia* and return to him the government. Once Emperor Tai-*jia* cultivated his character in this way the patrician lords all returned their allegiance to the Yin and the hundred clans were brought peace thereby. Yi Yin saw this to be praiseworthy, and accordingly he composed "The Lessons of Tai-*jia*" in three sections, celebrating Tai-*jia* and referring to him as the "Great Ancestor."

The *Bamboo Annals* gives a starkly different account of this: "Yi Yin exiled Tai-*jia* to Tong and took the throne himself. After seven years, the king stole forth from Tong and killed Yi Yin. Then a great fog covered the world for three days, so the king ordered that Yi Yin's sons, Yi Zhi and Yi Fen, should be restored with their father's lands and household to divide between them." Commentators suspect this to be a later insertion in the text.

The successors of the "Great Ancestor," Tai-*jia*

When the "Great Ancestor" died, his son Wo-*ding*⁵ took the throne. It was during the reign of Emperor Wo-*ding* that Yi Yin died. Once Yi Yin was interred at Bo, Gao Shan recounted the deeds of Yi Yin by composing "Wo-*ding*."

When *Wo-ding* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother *Tai-geng*⁶. When the Emperor *Tai-geng* died, he was succeeded by his son, Emperor *Xiao-jia*⁷. When Emperor *Xiao-jia* died, he was succeeded by his brother *Yong-ji*⁸. This was the Emperor *Yong-ji*. At this time, the Dao of the Yin fell into decline, and some among the patrician lords ceased to assemble at court.

Yi Zhi counsels *Tai-wu*⁹

When Emperor *Yung-ji* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother *Tai-wu*⁹. This was Emperor *Tai-wu*. Emperor *Tai-wu* appointed Yi Zhi as prime minister. At this time, a mulberry and a paper mulberry sprang up at the capital of Bo, growing together from the ground to a girth of two hands round in a single morning. This omen through Emperor *Tai-wu* into a fright, and he questioned Yi Zhi. Yi Zhi replied, “Your servant has heard that ill omens cannot overcome virtue. Are there failings in your majesty’s governance? Let your majesty perfect his virtue.” *Tai-wu* followed his counsel and the tree of ill omen shriveled at the root and died.

Yi Zhi spoke with praise of Shaman Xian, who regulated the household of the king with merit. Accordingly he composed “The Order of Xian” and “*Tai-wu*.” Emperor *Tai-wu* praised Yi Zhi at the ancestral temple and said that he would no longer behave towards him as though he were merely a minister. Yi Zhi declined this honor and composed “The Original Mandate.” Thus the Yin was revived and the patrician lords returned their allegiance. For this reason the emperor was called “Middle Ancestor.”

The successors of the “Middle Ancestor,” *Tai-wu*

When “Middle Ancestor” died, he was succeeded by his son, Emperor *Zhong-ding*¹⁰. Emperor *Zhong-ding* moved the capital to Ao. Later, *Hedan-jia*¹² settled at Xiang and *Zu-yi* moved the capital to Geng.

When Emperor *Zhong-ding* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother *Wai-ren*¹¹. This was Emperor *Wai-ren*. The texts of *Zhong-ding* are lost and cannot be supplied. When Emperor *Wai-ren* died, his son *Hedan-jia*¹² succeeded him. This was Emperor *Hedan-jia*. During the time of *Hedan-jia*, the Yin once again was in decline.

When Emperor *Hedan-jia* died, he was succeeded by his son Emperor *Zu-yi*¹³. Once Emperor *Zu-yi* was enthroned, the Yin revived and Shaman Xian came to office.

When *Zu-yi* died, his son Emperor *Zu-xin*¹⁴ succeeded him. When Emperor *Zu-xin* died, his younger brother *Wo-jia*¹⁵ succeeded him. This was the Emperor *Wo-jia*. When the Emperor *Wo-jia* died, the son of *Wo-jia*’s elder brother *Zu-xin*¹⁴ succeeded him as Emperor *Zu-ding*¹⁶. When Emperor *Zu-ding* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother, the son of *Wo-jia*¹⁵, *Nan-geng*¹⁷. This was Emperor *Nan-geng*. When Emperor *Nan-geng* died, he was succeeded by the son of

Emperor Zu-*ding*¹⁶, Yang-*jia*¹⁸. This was Emperor Yang-*jia*. During the time of Emperor Yang-*jia*, the Yin declined.

From the time of Zhong-*ding*, the ruling clan trunk line had been discarded and the sons of cadet branches had succeeded to the throne. Brothers had upon occasion contended for the succession, and this had continued for nine reigns. At this time, none of the patrician lords continued to come to court.

The reign of Pan-*geng*¹⁹

When Emperor Yang-*jia* died, his younger brother Pan-*geng*¹⁹ succeeded him. This was Emperor Pan-*geng*. At the time of Emperor Pan-*geng* the Yin had already moved north of the Yellow River. Pan-*geng* removed the capital to the south of the river and restored the former city of Tang the Successful. Hence the Yin had five times moved its capital and had no fixed abode.

The people of Yin were resentful and complained to one another, not wishing to follow their king. Pan-*geng* thereupon explained to the patrician lords and great ministers, saying, “Of old, our high ruler Tang the Successful brought peace to the world along with your ancestors. Their example is worthy of cultivating. If we discard it and are not diligent, how can we achieve virtue?”

Subsequently, he crossed south of the Yellow River and rebuilt Bo. There he revived the policies of Tang the Successful. Only then were the hundred clans able to obtain peace, and the Dao of Yin was revived. The patrician lords came to court again, because they revered the virtue of Tang the Successful.

The successors to Pan-*geng*

When Emperor Pan-*geng* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother, Emperor Xiao-*xin*²⁰. When Emperor Xiao-*xin* reigned, the Yin were again in decline. The hundred clans longed for Pan-*geng*, and thus “Pan-*geng*,” in three sections, was composed.

When Emperor Xiao-*xin* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother Xiao-*yi*²¹. When Emperor Xiao-*yi* died, he was succeeded by his son, Emperor Wu-*ding*²².

The reign of Wu-*ding*²²

When Emperor Wu-*ding* took the throne, he longed to revive the government of Pan-*geng*, but he had not yet found an able assistant. For three years he did not speak, and he left decisions in the hands of the assistant minister in order to observe the tone of the state.

One night, Wu-*ding* dreamed that he had found a sage by the name of Yue, and later he searched throughout the ranks of his ministers and officials for the man, but this sage was not among

them. Then he ordered the many artisans to go search throughout the wilds for the man, and they found Yue living in the steep defiles of Fu. Yue was serving as a convict supervisor overseeing the construction of works in that distant place.

Yue was presented to *Wu-ding* who said, “This is he.” Then he held conversations with him and indeed, Yue was a sage. *Wu-ding* appointed him prime minister and the state of Yin was well ordered. Accordingly, he gave Yue the surname of Fu, after the place where he had been found.

Once *Wu-ding* sacrificed to Tang the Successful, and the next day a rooster flew onto the handle of a tripod steamer and crowed. *Wu-ding* was afraid. But *Zu-ji* said, “Let your majesty have no fear, but place cultivation of good government foremost.” *Zu-ji* then instructed the king, “Heaven oversees what is below and takes righteousness as its constant principle. It bestows lifespans that are long and those that are short, but Heaven does not shorten the lifespans of people and cut them down before their time. There are those whose character is inadequate and who do not acknowledge their crimes; to these people Heaven sends an order to correct their character, but if they do not, what can be done about them? Alas! That your majesty has succeeded to the care of the people is entirely a matter of Heaven continuing its Mandate. Continue with regular sacrifices and do not let your ritual ceremonies depart from the Dao.” Accordingly, *Wu-ding* cultivated good government and acted with virtue. All under Heaven were delighted, and the Dao of Yin revived once again.

The *Bamboo Annals* records that *Wu-ding* initiated sacrifices to *Shang-jia* Wei, whom several late texts identify as the teacher of Xie, founder of the Shang lineage. Although his name takes the form of a Shang king, commentary tradition takes *Zu-ji* to be a sage minister to the king.

The successors of *Wu-ding*

When *Wu-ding* died, his son Emperor *Zu-geng*²³ succeeded him. *Zu-ji* praised *Wu-ding* for taking the omen of the rooster as an occasion for virtue and composed “The Great Sacrifice for the High Ancestor” and “Lessons.”

When Emperor *Zu-geng* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother *Zu-jia*²⁴. This was Emperor *Jia*. Emperor *Jia* was licentious and chaotic and the Yin once again fell into decline.

When Emperor *Jia* died, he was succeeded by his son Emperor *Lin-xin*²⁵. When Emperor *Lin-xin* died, he was succeeded by his younger brother *Geng-ding*²⁶. This was Emperor *Geng-ding*. When Emperor *Geng-ding* died, his son *Wu-yi*²⁷ succeeded him. Once again, the Yin people quit Po and moved north of the Yellow River.

Emperor *Wu-yi* lacked the Dao. He had an idol made and he called it the Heavenly Spirit. He played games of chance with it, ordering someone to move the idol as if it were a person. When the Heavenly Spirit did not win, the king had him disgraced and killed. He had a leather bag made

and filled it with blood. Then hanging it up, he shot arrows at it and called this “Shooting at Heaven.” One day, Wu-*yi* went hunting in the lands between the Yellow River and the River Wei. There, a ferocious thunderclap shook Wu-*yi* until he was dead.

Wu-*yi*'s son Emperor Tai-*ding*²⁸ succeeded him. When Emperor Tai-*ding* died, his son Emperor *Yi*²⁹ succeeded him. When the Emperor *Yi* ruled, the Yin sank further into decay.

The eldest son of Emperor *Yi* was named Weizi Qi. Qi's mother was of lowly position, and he was not eligible to succeed to the throne. The Emperor *Yi* had a younger son named *Xin*. *Xin*'s mother was the emperor's principal consort and *Xin* was thus the heir apparent.

When Emperor *Yi* died, his son *Xin*³⁰ succeeded him. This was the Emperor *Xin*, known to the world as Zhòu.

(*Shiji* 3.91-105)

* * *

What they found at Xiaotun

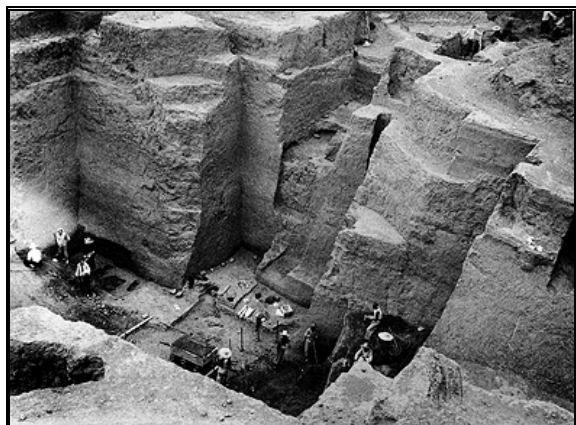
In the 1920s, the *Shiji* story of the Shang Dynasty seemed to the newly critical young historians of China to be filled with improbabilities. Xie's miraculous birth suspiciously resembled the birth of Prince Millet, the founder of the Zhou line. The account of Tang the Successful's conquest of the wicked Jie seemed to be no more than a recycling to an earlier time frame of the story of the conquest of Zhòu, the last Shang king, by the founders of the Zhou Dynasty. The regency of Yi Yin resembled the role of the Duke of Zhou. The long lists of featureless Shang kings, who seem to do little more than move their capitals, appeared to be only unimaginative filler highlighting the few passages of ethical drama that are the literary core of the Shang annals. Surely, the entire notion of a dynasty predating the Zhou was a fictional one, a tale fabricated during the middle years of the Zhou to give pedigree to the theory of the Mandate of Heaven and to provide the Zhou founders with a moral tale to explain precisely why their descendants deserved to rule.

In 1928, just after the close of the civil wars that had for over a decade hampered further exploration of the Anyang area, a group of young scholars trained in the "new" science of archaeology traveled to the village of Xiaotun to see where the dragon bones had come from, and decide whether it would be fruitful to test their skills in excavations at neighboring sites. Casual digging near Xiaotun convinced them that the supply of dragon bones had not been exhausted, and they began what became a nine-year archaeological dig that ended permanently all speculation that the Shang Dynasty was a fictional construct.

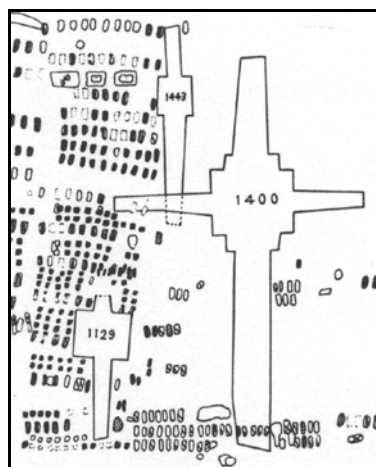
Soon after they began work, the Xiaotun archaeological team began to uncover ruined foundations of great antiquity. Their density was consistent with a city of substantial size. Then, among the foundations, floor plans of enormous dimensions were discovered, the ruins of great palaces or ceremonial structures. There could be no doubt: Xiaotun was the site of an ancient city of royal scale.

When archaeologists crossed north of the River Huan, their findings were even more surprising. There they uncovered huge cruciform tombs with subterranean chambers up to forty feet deep and fifty feet on a side – tomb excavations the size of a large four-storey building. The floors and ramps of these graves were littered with skeletal remains of dogs and sheep, of horses whose bones lay beside chariot to which they had clearly been yoked at the time of their burial. And these remains were not limited to animals. Side chambers of these palatial tombs were stocked with human skeletons, many decapitated with their heads buried together in a group apart from their bodies. In many cases the central chambers of these tombs had long since been looted, and the grave masters' remains were no longer in evidence. But other graves were still intact, and some of these were filled with enormous caches of richly ornamented ritual vessels of bronze, jades, and other luxury goods which lay packed around the central corpse. The archaeologists had found the cemetery of the kings and queens of the Shang.

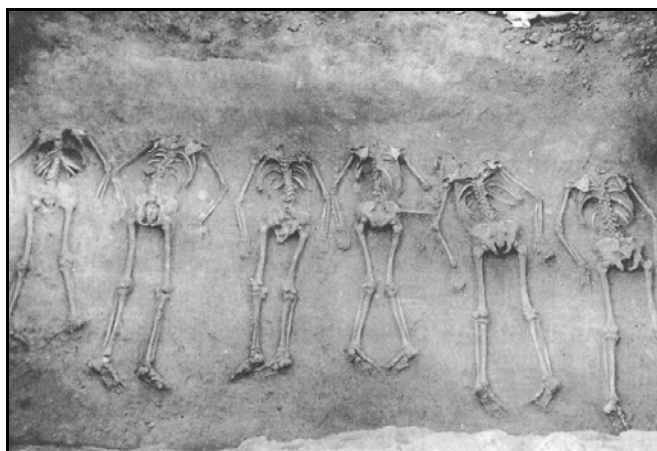
The village of Xiaotun had, as Liu E and his followers had guessed, been built over the ruins of the last capital of the Shang Dynasty.



Excavation of a Shang royal tomb



Cruciform royal tombs amid small graves



Skeletal remains of beheaded victims found in Shang royal tombs

LIST OF KEY NAMES AND TERMS

Anyang	Xiaotun	Xia Dynasty
Xie	Jie	Tang the Successful
Yi Yin		

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why had scholars begun to question the historicity of the Shang about the time the oracle texts were discovered?
2. What are the signal accomplishments of the great figures of the Shang, according to the *Shiji* account: Xie, Tang, and Yi Yin?
3. In the *Shiji* account, which of the later Shang kings are portrayed in adequate detail to emerge with some individuality of character? List the Shang kings whom you take to be “major” members of the royal line.

Sources and Further Readings

The most comprehensive English language account of oracle bones and the study of them is David Keightley’s *Sources of Shang History* (Berkeley: 1977). Although it is exceptionally technical, because it is very thoroughly illustrated and covers a wide range of topics it can be fun to page through even for the non-specialist. For the discovery of the Shang, the best source is the introductory chapter of K.C. Chang’s *Shang Civilization* (Yale, 1980), and a great deal of the information concerning the “discovery” of the Shang in this reading has been based on Chang’s book and the sources cited in it. A fully annotated translation of the *Shiji* text appears in William Nienhauser, et al., *The Grand Scribe’s Records* (Bloomington: 1995), vol. 1.

Illustrations are from *Xibeigang 1001-hao damu* [Large tomb 1001 at Xibeigang] (Taipei: 1962).