LECTURE 7
Discovery Oracle bone inscriptions, and Four Founding Scholars

1. Discovery of oracle bone inscriptions

«Zhu Shu Ji Nian» (竹書紀年) “From the time that PanGeng (般庚) moved the Yin capital to the time King Zhou (紂) perished (end of Shang Dynasty), for 273 years the capital was never moved again.”

1898, Wang, Yi-Rong (王懿榮) President of Peking University, committed suicide in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion Incidence): A salesman named Fang, brought hundred or so bones and turtle shells to Peking for sale. The honorable Wang Yi-Rong (Wen Min Gong) was exhilarating when he saw these inscribed bones. Together with Liu E, discovered oracle bone inscriptions and identified them as Shang artifacts. Liu, E (劉鶚): Wenmin was first to recognize the importance of these inscriptions; Liu collected and compiled them. Many inscriptions looked like pictures, but words such as Zu Ji (祖己), Zu Xin (祖辛) were recognizable; making it certain that these inscriptions belonged to Yin people. It is indeed incredible.

1903, Liu, E (1857-1909) published the first collection of oracle bone inscriptions entitled "Tie Yun Cang Gui (Oracle Bone Collection of Tie Yun)". He was also a famous novelist. His book, Lao Can You Ji, Travel Log of Old Can (老殘遊記), is considered one of greatest novels at the end of Qing Dynasty. He died in Xing Jiang Province during an exile. Fig. 1 shows students in Peking University with their professor in 19th century. Fig. 2 is the official portrait of Wang Yi-Rong. Fig. 3 is the picture of Liu E.

2. Contribution of four major scholars to oracle bone research

Luo, Zheng-Yu (羅振玉 Xue-Tang 雪堂, 1866-1940): (i) identified Xiao-tun, Henan as the site where all oracle bones were excavated; (ii) collected and published a large number of oracle bone inscriptions; (iii) identified the names of many Shang Kings from oracle bone inscriptions; (iv) deciphered more than 400 characters and proposed an effective method of deciphering. Fig. 4 is the official photo of Luo Zheng-Yu.

Fig. 5 shows a page from the Luo’s book << Notes of 50 days’ Dream and Trace>>. Fig. 6 shows the village of Xiao-tun in 1940s.
Addition Notes: Lo, Zheng-Yu was considered a traitor in the political sense because of his corporation with the Japanese. However, his contributions in the study of oracle bone were tremendous.

Wang, Guo-Wei (王國維 Guan-Tang, 1878-1927): (i) deciphered many important key characters; (ii) published a number of groundbreaking papers and books on Shang king list, Shang geography, Shang rituals; (iii) was the first to piece together broken oracle bones. Fig. 7s and 8 are photos of Wang Guo-Wei. Fig. 9 shows the first page of Wang's most famous paper. Wang, Guo-Wei committed suicide because he could not bear to witness to the downfall of Ching Dynasty. He was a very traditional scholar.

Dong Zuo-Bin (董作賓 Yen-Tang, 1895-1963): (i) directed 15 times major Shang archeological excavation between 1928 and 1937; (ii) discovered the names of diviners and proposed the use of the names of diviners to do oracle bones dating; (iii) reconstructed Shang calendar and proposed detailed Shang sacrificial ritual cycles. Fig. 10 is the photo of Dong in 60s. Fig. 11 shows Dong with his colleagues of Academia Sinica in 30s. Dong Zuo-bin transported most of the oracle bones excavated during the 15 major excavations to Taiwan. The study of oracle bone in Taiwan was established by him in National Taiwan University.

Guo Mo-Ruo (郭沫若 Ding-Tang, 1891-1978): (i) pioneered social anthropological studies of Shang using oracle bone documents, published 15 groundbreaking books within 14 years while being a political refugee in Japan; (ii) initiated geographic and mythological study using oracle bone data; (iii) made important epigraphical findings; (iv) initiated and directed the compilation of multivolumes “Jia Gu Wen He Ji” (Collections of Oracle Bone Inscriptions) Fig. 12 is the photo of Guo Mo-Ruo when he was the vice prime minister.
3. Other First and Second Generation Scholars: Sun Yi-Rang 孫詒讓 (Fig. 13), Tang Lan 唐蘭, Yu Xing-Wu 于省吾, Hu Hou-Xuan 胡厚宣, Yan Yi-Ping 嚴一萍, Jin Xiang-Heng 金祥恆 (Fig. 14). Jin Xiang-Heng was my professor in National Taiwan University.

4. Excavation of Yin Xu at the village Xiao Tun 小屯
Scientific excavation of Yin Xu, the last capital of Shang Dynasty, started in 1928 and ended in 1937 due to Sino-Japanes War. In 15 excavations during this time, over 30,000 pieces of oracle bones and shells were recovered. Archaeological excavation resumed after 1950. Fig. 15 is the map of Xiao Tun. Fig. 16 shows the excavation of Tomb #1002 at Xi-Bei Gang. Fig. 17 shows the excavation of an oracle bone storage pit. Fig. 18 shows that the whole pit was transported to research laboratory.

Fig. 19 is another oracle bone storage pit. Fig. 20 shows a human skeleton near the pit. Fig. 21 is top view of the tomb. Fig. 22 shows workers tried to recover oracle bones from the dirt. Fig. 23 is an oracle shoulder bone, Fig. 24 is oracle turtle shell.
帝陽甲崩，弟盤庚立，是為帝盤庚。帝盤庚之時，殷已在河北，盤庚渡河南，復居成湯之故居，遷五遷，無定處。殷民咨胥皆怨，不欲徙。盤庚乃告諭諸侯大臣曰：「昔高后成湯與爾之先祖俱定天下，法則可修。舍而弗勉，何以成德」乃遂涉河南，治亳，行湯之政，然後百姓由寧，殷道復興。諸侯來朝，以其遵成湯之德也。

竹書紀年：自盤庚徙殷，至紂之滅，二百七十三年，更不徙都。紂時稍大其邑，南距朝歌，北據邯鄲及沙丘，皆為離宮別館。