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On the Shang period designation ‘Ding’ 丁

_Jiaguwen Heji_ 27455 (=_Yinxu buci zongshu_ 殷虚卜辞综述 23.11) is a divination record of considerable interest. When considered in light of the recent discovery of the prolific oracle-bone corpus from Huayuanzhuang¹ its importance is even more spectacular.

Within the recently published HYZ corpus, there is living man repeatedly called by the designation Ding 丁. Ding is recorded as having his own zu 族² (294.1), organizing a military expedition against the Shao territory (HYZ 275, 449), and leading rituals and sacrifices to royal ancestors such as Da Jia 大甲(34.4, 169.1) and his father Xiao Yi 小乙 (34, 37). He issues commands to the patron of the HYZ corpus Zi, one of which includes Fu Hao (475.9), as well as bestowing gifts to him such as servitors and millet (257, 416). These examples are sufficient to argue that this man is none other than the reigning king, Wu Ding.

There is an immediate problem to be addressed, however---How should we understand the designation Ding? Below is rubbing and transcription of HJ 27455:

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² K.C. Chang, _Shang Civilization_. Yale University Press, 1980, p. 164-165, says, “The oracle bone character for zu (wade-giles to pinyin) 族 has two elements, a flag above and an arrow below. Ding Shan’s interpretation, that it originally signified a military unit, is generally accepted. In ancient China the association of flags with military units is well known, and in oracle bone inscriptions zu are shown to be action units in military campaigns….But military action was only one of the functions of the zu..., and composition was apparently based on kinship.”
There is no consensus on the transcription offered above. For record (1), Hu Houxuan’s *Jiaguwen shiwen* omits the graph 王, transcribes 丁 as 日, and 穰 as 坚 (喪). In place of the graph 穰, Yao Xiaosui and Xiao Ding’s *Yinxu jiagu keci moshi zongji* reads 積. All stand in agreement as to the transcription of (2) and (3). The transcription offered above is taken from Lian Shaoming’s article
Although I agree with Lian’s transcription, I disagree with his explanation of ‘Wang Ding’ (‘Our Majesty, Ding’). He says ‘Wang Ding’ is referring to P. 1 king Wu Ding. Jiaguwen Heji fenzu fenlei zongbiao 甲骨文合集分組分類總表 registers 27455 as a Li-No Name transition type 历無名簡類 inscription. Since these inscriptions are for the most part dated in P.3, should we use Lian’s explanation ‘Wang Ding’ would have to be referring to someone deceased.

Rather, I think that ‘Fu Jia’ (Father Jia) refers to Kang Ding’s father, known from P.4 inscriptions onwards as ‘Grandfather Jia’, while ‘Bi Xin’ (Grandmother Xin) ought to be referring to Wu Ding’s spouse ‘Fu Hao’. Although Li-No Name transition type inscriptions can be as early as P.2 (the reigns of Wu Ding’s sons Zu Geng/Zu Jia) the reference to ‘Father Jia’ would rule out any possibility. Our view is strengthened by the Kang Ding 康丁 period inscriptions at HJ 27364, which offers cult to both ‘Father Jia’ and ‘Elder Brother Xin’ (Lin Xin 廩辛), and Zhuixin 609, (rejoined from HJ 28276 + 28278) which does the same to the ‘Young Majesty Father Ji 小王父己’ (Xiao Ji) and ‘Father Jia’. Once we know that 27455 is a Kang Ding period inscription, we must reconsider the designation ‘our Majesty Ding,’ which I would suggest reading as representing the living reigning king. Compare the record from HYZ cited below:

Chen Jian has already written an article\textsuperscript{4} substantiating the reading of the above as:

Gengyin day: (We) will perform a \textit{sui}-sacrifice\textsuperscript{5} (to) grandmother Geng (consisting of) a small penned sheep, (as well as) offering in a \textit{dou}-vessel millet received from Ding.

Comparing the two inscriptions at HJ 27455 and HYZ 416 we see that they are similar. HJ 27455.1 is inquiring about whether or not to offer “millet submitted from our Majesty, Ding” to Father Jia with the emphasis being on the recipient not the commodity. The day after \textit{guichou} is \textit{jiayin}---the divination is being enacted one day in advance, which would rule out any understanding of \textit{ding} 丁 recorded in the charge as a date notation. 27455.2 asks whether or not to wait and use the millet for grandmother Xin instead. Here, as in 27455.3, 王丁黍入 is abbreviated 王丁 but the meaning is no doubt the same. HYZ records a similar abbreviated writing:

\textbf{HYZ 29.1} 丙寅卜：其禦賈視馬于癸子，惠一伐、一牛、一鬯，署。用。

\textbf{HYZ 259.2}：辛巳卜：子惠賈視用逐，用。獲一鹿。

HYZ 29.1 records 賈視馬 ‘Trader Shi’s horses’ while HYZ 259.2 has only 賈視 “Trader Shi”. Lin Yun has already pointed out that the latter writing is simply an abbreviated writing of 賈視馬\textsuperscript{6}, which shows that it is possible to abbreviate 王丁黍 in this way.


\textsuperscript{5} \textit{sui}: Wu Qichang 吳其昌: “嵗者殷代祭名之一也。其原始之本義，乃斧鉞之象形也...斧鉞可以刑牲，故‘嵗’字引申之義為刑牲...凡刑為 也” (\textit{Yinxu shuqi jiegu} 殷墟書契解詁, Wuhan daxue chubanshe, rpt. 2008: 23-24).
Now let’s turn to the word ru 入. The *Shuowen* defines it as “納”, which is glossed in classical commentaries as jingong 进贡. Aside from occurrences as a place/lineage name (=Nei 内/芮), ru is used in Shang language as a verb. It is most commonly found in archival notations which record the origin and administrative processing of shells and bones sent in from subject lineages/localizations and earmarked for royal use.⁷ Within a royal divination charge 王卜辞, the verb ru can be used in an active voice:

HJ 23652[乙巳]卜疑贞：肩其入。王曰： “入。”允入。

(Yi inquiring: (We) anticipate that Jian will make a submission. Majesty said, “(He) will make a submission.” (He) really did make a submission.)

Yi 3318 王入于商。

(Our Majesty will enter into Shang.)

On fei wang buci 非王卜辭, oracular inscriptions patronized by some one other than the king, 入 is a high-frequency verb used in the below charges, inquiring what the main subject Zi will submit to Ding.

HYZ 38.4 壬卜：子其入廌八、牛于丁。

(Ren day divination: (We) anticipate that our Lord will submit a zhi-beast, and a bovine to Ding.)

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⁸《说文解字》廌：解豸，兽也，似山牛，一角; Rong Geng’s *Jinwenbian* 金文编 places this graph in 《马部》. For recent critique and discussion, see Bai Bing 白冰, *Qingtongqi mingwen yanjiu: Bai Chuanjing jinwen xue zhu zuo de chengjiu yu shushi* 青铜器铭文研究：百川静金文学著作的成就与疏失, Xuelin chubanshe 学林出版社, 2007:302-308.
HYZ 124.7 戊卜：子入二弓。

(Wu divination: Our Lord will submit two bows.)

HYZ 36.3 不其獸（狩），入商。在未（沬）。

(If (we) do not hunt, (then) (we) shall enter Shang. At Mei.

Although 入 is usually translated as “to enter”, or “to submit,” it is common for early Chinese verbs to possess a bi-directional function, i.e. 授受 (to give/to receive), 教学 (to teach/to learn), 享 (to offer sacrifices/to be given blessings); therefore, 入 “to submit” or “to place in” can also have the passive meaning of “to be taken in/placed in/brought in”.

HYZ 84.1 羌入，惠[妾]索用，若，侃。用。

(As the Qiang-prisoners have been taken in, it should be the bound female qie-servants who are used. May this be favored, and may it please (recipient unstated). It was used.

It is my opinion that HJ 27455 should be grouped as a fei wang inscription. Such inscriptions do exist from this period.9 However, still the most evident indicator is that hitherto the designation ding 丁 has only appeared on Zi-group inscriptions.

Translation of HJ 27455:

HJ 27455 translation: (1) Guichou day divination: As for the millet donated by our Majesty Ding, it shall be offered in a dou-vessel to Father Jia.

(2) To Grandmother Xin our Majesty Ding’s [millet] shall be offered in a dou-vessel.
(3) Guichou divination: (We) shall offer in a dou-vessel our Majesty Ding’s [millet] to Grandmother Xin, and split open a penned bovine.

An Expanded Conclusion:

That our Majesty *Ding* is referring to the living reigning king is of paramount importance. As the charge records the possibilities of offering *shu*-millet received from the king to royal ancestors, it is evident that the patron of HJ 27455 is a member of the royal lineage. In a recent article on this subject Qiu Xigui believes that *ding* 丁 ought to be read as *di* 帝. He argues that within the OBI all former kings of the direct line could be called by this designation, and so, the current reigning king as the head of the royal ancestral line could also be called it as well. Furthermore, Qiu continues by pointing out that the phenomenon of referring to the king as *di* should be related to the nomenclature and organization within a traditional lineage system which separates *di* 嫡 ‘the head male of the direct line’ and *shu* 庶 ‘the heads of branch lines’. He concludes that the reason the word *ding* is used to represent *di* is most probably to delineate it from the word *上帝*. 10

Although not unreasonable, Qiu’s argument has not gained wide acceptance. Adam Smith, for one, believes that it is mainly due to phonological incongruity. 11 Recently I have found evidence to support a new interpretation of the appellation *Ding*. The inscription on the rediscovered Ji Ji fangzun《季姬方尊》most notably the Period 3-4 bone inscriptions found at the Western Locus of Xiaotun in 1971; see Zhu Fenghan朱凤瀚, *Shang Zhou jiazu xingtai yanjiu*商周家族形态研究, Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2004.

Qiu Xigui裘錫圭, ""Hua Dong Zi buci” he “Zi zu buci” zhong zhi cheng Wu Ding de “Ding” keneng jiugai du wei "Di"", in *Huang Shengzhang xiansheng ba zhi huadan jinian wenji*黃盛璋先生八秩華誕紀年文集, Zhongguo jiaoyu wenhua chubanshe, 2005.

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《文物》2003.9; also see article by Li Xueqin, “Ji Ji fangzun yanjiu 季姬方尊研究,” in Zhongguo shi yanjiu 中國史研究, 2003.4.
Paleographically, the shape of the graph is said by Tang Lan to represent the pictograph of the 'head' of a metal nail or tack (modern: 钉子). The earliest graphic forms show a top profile: (Jia 2329) (Yi 9083), while later forms show a side profile (bamboo text, Warring States period, Baoshan 4), (seal, Warring States period state of Yan, Erhui 1688).

The Ji Ji fangzun records, "君命宰茀赐季姬臣于空桑。厥师夫曰丁。" Li Xueqin has already pointed out the relationship between the word ding 丁, zhang 長 and the Zhouli administrative title 閭胥. In the Zhouli 長, 師, 正, 胥 are all synonyms used to designate the 'leader' or 'head' of a group of people. What interests me the most here is the use of the word zheng 正 (章母耕部).

There have been many discussions concerning the the original meaning and composition of the graph zheng, which is derived from the components □ and 止. It is my opinion that ding is functioning as a phonetic-etymonic and zhi is a semantic classifier. In the OBI zheng has the following meanings: (1) The calendrical notation zheng yue 正月 “the first month of the year,” which most clearly preserves a meaning of zheng as "the top/first/leader (of the months/year); (2) in administrative titles: yu zheng 御正 (HYZ 37, 63), chen zheng 臣正 (see Zongshu, p.503). The use of zheng 'head/leader' in these titles is still seen in the the Zhouli administrative titles dangzheng 党正, jiuzheng 酒正, xuanzheng 設正, 校正.

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14 Li says, “其名 “丁” 之长即《周礼》的閭胥; op. cit.

马正，等。16 (3) In weather divinations concerning rain, or in the coda of divination charges where it functions as an adjective. Zhang Yujin glosses 正 in this context as dang 當 (modern adj. 正當)17, meaning "appropriate". In WS bamboo manuscripts dang 當 is written as shang 尚 "the highest". Both are cognates of tang 堂 which Tang Lan has already analyzed as being related semantically to gao 高 "high" and jing 京 "a raised structure".18 (4) As a verb meaning "to lead a military expedition".

When talking about compound uses combining the radical 丁, the Shang word tian 天 (真部) is of significant interest. Peter Boodberg said, “The dot on top of 大 in the old graphs for 天... is, in our belief, ‘phonetic-etymonic’ and stands for the archaic word now represented by dian 頭 ‘forehead,’ ‘top,’ the –ng variant of which is reflected in ding 頂 ‘top of the head’<tieng>.”19 This explanation can be verified by HJ 20975 (Shi 師-group) where 天 is written 夏 in the divination charge: 甲寅卜, 王貞: 弗疾朕 天. Yu Xingwu 于省吾 said, “天字上部●或即古丁字，也即人之顙頰之頦字的初文。前文的弗疾朕天，是占卜人之顙頰无疾病。天本为独体象形字。由于天体高广，无以为象，故用人之顙頰以表示至上之义，但天字上部以丁为顶，也表示着天字的音读。”20 Tian meaning ‘forehead’ or ‘top of the head’ can also be found in the classics: 周易睽 (六三): “其人天且鼻” (马融注: “黥鑿其額曰天).
As an extended meaning of ‘head/that which is the highest’, tian is synonymous with da/tai 大/太. In OBI, Da yi Shang 大邑商 “The Great City Shang” is also written Tian yi Shang 天邑商; and in both the OBI, and in the "Yin ben ji" 殷本紀 chapter of the Shiji 史記, the high Shang ancestor Da Yi 大乙 is written Tian Yi 天乙. Furthermore, the word tian 天 is related to yuan 元 “head”. In early writing, yuan 元 depicts a side profile of a man with ding as phonetic-eytmonic, while tian 天 is a frontal view--- these two graphs are allographs essentially signifying the same word. Traditional texts still preserve the meaning of yuan as ‘head’: 《左传·僖公 33》：“狄人归其元”.

The above discussion is adequate to show that ding 丁 can have the original meaning of "the top", with extended meanings being: first, leader, greatest, biggest, highest, appropriate, adequate, strong.

The above paleographic and lexical analysis can also be supported by archaeological evidence. The recent publication of the excavations at a large Eastern Zhou cemetery, right in the center of Luoyang, has provided fascinating glimpses into mortuary culture at that time. Amongst the jade facial decorations 面饰 found, several are topped with bi jade-circlets. There is no doubt that the placement of these circlets in the forehead/top of the head region carries with it a specific meaning---that if following my train of thought--- ought to be an emblematic writing of the word 天.

That the king could be referred to by multiple designations is by no means strange. For an Old Kingdom Egyptian king had various designations (most of the them religious), and the two most commonly used in non-royal inscriptiveal material represented his position on the land: nswt ‘the sedge plant’---representing the king’s dominant sharehold of the commodity most commonly found in Upper Egypt; and ḫm ‘power’-- a pictograph of a club, which represents the king’s strength. In the OBI, wang 王 represents a man with

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military 'power' (early graphic form of an axe blade facing down); ding 丁, represents the 'highest of men'---the “(fore)head”.

Based on the above analysis, I suggest reading the Shang designation ding 丁 as “our Highness/Leader.”