

Oracle-Bone Inscriptions and Cultural Memory

Li Anzhu

Center for Foreign Literature and Culture of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China

ABSTRACT. *Oracle-bone inscriptions, as the earliest identifiable Chinese writing system, are a major evidence of Chinese civilization. The Zhenren groups (diviners) headed by the rulers of the Shang Dynasty practiced divination frequently for different reasons, whether important or trivial, so that rich oracle-bone inscriptions were produced. Oracle -bone inscriptions, as a ritual symbol, have played a significant role in strengthening memory of human, communicating with gods and spirits of the dead, ensuring administrative legitimacy and forming the early national cultural identity, so they're definitely worth exploring.*

KEYWORDS: *Oracle-bone inscriptions, Cultural memory, Ritual, Symbol*

1. Introduction

“Cultural memory” is an important theory put forward by Jan Assmann, a German scholar, and his wife in 1980s. In the view of the Assmanns, cultural memory is different from historical writing. Historical writing pursues objective reality, while cultural memory, which is separated from living things, is mainly constructed together by man’s life, language communication and collaboration between people. It is inherited by such highly symbolic cultural codes as the text system, the image system, and the ritual system. Therefore, cultural memory is more about the symbolic means and methods that carry traditions. It mainly discusses how culture is “made” with the help of media symbols, and how group actors build consensus and gain identity through memory.

In the meaning production of cultural memory, memory media is the bond and foundation, including written language, images, cultural relics, rituals and so on, among which the most important is written language, which is considered as the carrier of thought. Because of its immateriality, it can survive the passage of time, so that it has always been a favored memory medium. Jan Assmann divides history into three stages, according to the form of written language: oral inheritance stage (no writing), early stage of writing culture and developed stage of writing culture. Although the writing scratched on oracle bones is a mature writing system, it still belongs to the early stage of writing culture. It was produced in divination rituals

and has been a bond based on rituals. As one of the written languages, the most important media, how did oracle-bone inscriptions construct the cultural memory of the Shang Dynasty? What important role did it play in the process of building national identity and national consensus? How do literature form of oracle-bone inscriptions and the formation of characters convey historical experience and participate in cultural memory? These are the major questions we are exploring in this paper.

2. Record prayers as ritual symbols

According to Jan Assmann (1992/2004), although there were a large number of written works at the early stage of writing culture, it was still a ritual-based bond to a great extent. During the Shang Dynasty, writing hadn't not been used universally, and cultural memory was mainly accomplished by rituals. The basic element of rituals is symbol. Oracle-bone inscriptions, as a writing symbol, were used in rituals to build cultural memory together with such ritual activities as offering sacrifices, singing, dancing and chanting, and imitating etiquette and rules.

In China, the early writing was mainly produced in the sacred space related to gods, and appeared with the emergence of early countries. In the era of animism, the ancestors did not think about how to leave clues for future generations to understand their living conditions and state affairs, nor did they invent writing to record history. What they were more concerned about is communicating with Gods. People were in urgent need of a symbol system that could connect human beings with gods for faith, so writing came into being. In the minds of the ancients, the birth of writing was an earth-shattering sacred event with "grain rain poured down, ghosts crying at night" (He,1998,P571), and writing is a mysterious and awe-inspiring miracle. Therefore, the ancients regarded writing as the language of communicating with gods, which had psychic power.

Like writing, tortoise shells and animal bones, as the carrier of literature, are also the communication media between human beings and gods. In the thought of the ancestors, tortoise shells and animal bones are connected to the external material world in a certain way (Allan,1993/2010). They are empyreal. They can hear the voices of spirits in the heaven and nature. The impotent wizards can let them listen to the answer of Gods (Araki, 2003). Ever since the Neolithic age, there has been a custom of divination with tortoise shells, which was inherited by people of the Shang Dynasty. The width of the shoulder blade of an ox, and the tortoise shell also induced the diviners' desire to carve some symbols on it after divination (Zheng, 2014). There are burned cracks (namely, Zhaowen, which means forecasting cracks) on the bones and tortoise shells unearthed from Neolithic sites, but there are no inscriptions. These forecasting cracks may have been produced naturally in the process of being burned while offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors. The ancestors communicated with the gods through these forecasting cracks. In the Shang Dynasty, most of the forecasting cracks were man-made, which were used together with the inscriptions as records of divination (Qian,2002). The royal family of the Shang Dynasty began to consciously engrave writing symbols for divination. Oracle-bone

inscriptions and forecasting cracks explained each other. Through these symbols with pictographic functions, Gods conveyed their will to people, enabling people to obtain some power. Consequently, the writing symbols played a better role in connecting man and Gods. In the ancient society with backward productivity and underdeveloped science, people generally understood the world in a way of “spiritual perception”. They always believed that there is a supernatural force, and all external things have mysterious significance (Bruhl, 1930/1981). It is impossible for them to make a scientific judgment and explanation of the natural phenomena and social problems that occurred around them. Naturally, they could not distinguish these ritual symbols from the objects and facts. Instead, they always regarded those symbols as symbols of Gods’ will.

As we all know, oracle- bone inscriptions are the product of the ritual era and part of divination rites. Therefore, the significance and function of oracle- bone inscriptions are realized in rites, and they are more dependent on the mutual interpretation of other heterogeneous symbols, such as music, dance, ritual movements and so on. Any ritual is a symbol. In the ritual activities, what matter are not fire, animals, man, gods and other media themselves, but the symbolic meaning behind them. These symbols participate together to complete the entire ritual. According to the research of some scholars, the ancient Chinese divination used the point burning method. In the symbolic ritual used the point burned oracle bones, fire has sacred power and is a moving medium. People’s common understanding in the fire shows the symbolic world of witchcraft in which the divination bones are burned (Araki, 2003). Burn the tortoise shells and animal bones with fire, and tell fortune by the forecasting surfaces. In this way, people communicate with all kinds of “things” in nature and with other people who live together to construct a world of “story of things = dialogue” and form the symbolic etiquette of divination bones (Araki, 2003). Therefore, in order to obtain the desired results and to justify their intentional behaviors, the ancestors frequently carried out ritual and symbolic witchcraft divination activities. This behavior was rooted in the society’s cosmology and was accepted by the transcendental society.

Though the core of divination is interpretation, the procedures are also indispensable. People of the Shang Dynasty believed in etiquettes with connotations, and the divination rituals were very sacred in cultural belief. In the Shang Dynasty, the symbolic rituals of the divination bones became even more complex, and showed the ceremonial characteristics with strict divination procedures and exquisite divination methods. Literature records and archaeological discoveries show that before divination, a series of procedures were needed to get the tortoise shells and animal bones ready for use. The tortoises’ plastrons (undersides of tortoise shells) and the shoulder blades of oxen were scraped and polished, and then holes and grooves were drilled on them with professional chisels by “specially trained and skilled diviners” (Liu,1997). To be labor-saving and effective during divination and for the sake of Buzhao (divination signs) were just two of the reasons for painstakingly renovating and chiseling oracle bones, it was also an attempt to control the destiny and control the future of the universe. Naturally, it was also to resolve doubts (Rao, 2009). The diviners should first engrave the “Qianci (preface)”

on the tortoise shells or animal bones to explain the situation of divination, and then engrave “Mingci (charge)”, that is, questions to be answered. Then, the “Zhenren” or “Buren” (diviners) began to burn the oracle bones so that straight or horizontal cracks were seen, that is, “Zhao (sign)”. The diviner or the ruler himself would tell fortune according to the way the bone cracked and predict what may happen. The judgment that is “Zhanci (prognostication)” would be engraved next to the cracks. And this would bring divination to an end. However, the oracle bones must be carefully preserved, because after divination, what is the result of the event, and whether the “Zhàncí (prognostication)” judged from the forecasting cracks is accurate or not, what happened next must be recorded on the oracle bones, that is, the “Yanci (verification)”. It can be said that oracle- bone inscriptions are the products inscribed in person by witches for divination and judgment (Liao, 2008). With a complete format, each oracle inscription is a narration of “presence”. People of the Shang Dynasty made artificial forecasting cracks to correspond with narrative suggestions (Allan, 1993/2010). Oracle inscriptions recorded the questions that diviners asked gods, the answers from Gods, and whether the divination was accurate or not. Most of these contents were related to divination and sacrifice, which were communication between man and gods. Divination is to pray for miracles, while offering sacrifices is for blessing. Both are praying, so oracle- bone inscriptions can be regarded as “praying records”. Heji 11497: “Divined on Dinghai, Que tested: On the next Gengyin, (we would perform) the Offering-ritual to Da Geng.”(‘合集’11497:”丁亥卜, 般贞: 翌庚寅侑于大庚.”) Heji14211:”Divined on Wuxu, Zheng tested: The Supreme Di (God) would damage this settlement.”(‘合集’14211:”戊戌卜, 争贞: 帝咎兹邑.”) In rituals for divination or sacrifice, the prayers were not only speaking, but also “doing things with words”. It is a kind of pious language expression that people ask for help from Gods when they communicate with Gods. Consequently, the symbols in the rituals have the power of act. Speech and act are inseparable. The function of “doing things with words” is realized here.

Oracle-bone inscriptions, as a magic instrument to connect man and Gods in the Shang Dynasty, have recorded the worship and prayers of the rulers to their ancestors and natural gods, as well as their communication process. People of the Shang Dynasty engraved Zhao (sign) and divination statement on oracle bones and buried them in the ground to communicate with Gods and report divination, so as to win the trust of Gods and get blessed by Gods. The inscriptions on oracle bones were painted with red or black to make the inscriptions beautiful, clear and easy to distinguish, so that Gods can easily “see” and “understand”. The demand of people of the Shang Dynasty for records produced by the frequent sacrificial and divination activities endowed the oracle- bone inscriptions with value and significance. As a container that can survive the passage of time, oracle -bone inscriptions are attached to sacred activities and has carried the eternal memory of the nation. After the Shang Dynasty, the tradition of oracle- bone divination still existed, and the ancestors continued to write oracle- bone inscriptions. However, with the prosperity of rational thinking, the scale of inscriptions on oracle bones became smaller and smaller.

3. Strengthening identity as a symbol of royalty

According to Jan Assmann (1992/2014), cultural memory is inseparable from the environment, institutions and related personnel that support it. With the increasing of divination frequency, divination began to become a routine business. During the Shang Dynasty, “every ten days there must be a divination to ensure ‘no disaster during this period (旬无祸)’”. It was a routine business. From Pan Geng’s moving the capital to Yin to the fall of the Shang Dynasty during the reign of Emperor Xin, during 273 years, twelve emperors of eight generations divined more than once every ten days.” (Dong, 1955) Due to the complicated sacrificial activities and the complicated divination procedures, the Zhenren group, which specialized in offering sacrifices, divination and recording, and the preliminary social management organization, Wu (witchcraft), Bu (divination), Zhu (making congratulatory speech while offering sacrifices), Shi (history) etc., naturally appeared. As technical officials who monopolized the divination power and acted as the intermediary between the rulers and the ancestors, they participated in divination, presided over rituals, created characters, organized and sorted out a large amount of cultural information according to the Yin people’s primitive theocracy concept of valuing gods over human beings, recording divination results, so as to store memory and strengthen the royal power. At the same time, they were also text interpreters who had power discourse. They expressed power will by interpreting the divine symbols. These Wu (witchcraft), Bu (divination), Zhu (making congratulatory speech while offering sacrifices), Shi (history) and related institutions formed a special institutional environment of the integration of politics and religion in the Shang Dynasty, which ensured that the writing system was sacred and had sufficient power discourse.

The rulers are the top wizards of the wizard and historian class. In order to maintain the sanctity of their reign and monopolize the way to communicate with ghosts and gods in the spirits world to make it serve the royalty, the rulers of the Shang Dynasty often personally divined and presided over the sacrificial rites. In oracle- bone inscriptions, “WangZhen”, “Wang Buzhen” and “Wang Yuezhen” are all propositions issued by the rulers themselves.

In the first-period oracle inscriptions, the rulers judged and recorded all the divinations of other Zhenren (diviners), whether they were ominous or auspicious. In this period, the ominous inscriptions were not rare; but in the fifth period, ominous divinations were no longer recorded, and auspicious and highly auspicious divinations were only conducted by rulers themselves. In the inscriptions after the third periods, the number of signatures of Zhenren (diviners) was greatly reduced, and many of them had no signatures of Zhenren (diviners) inscribed on them. This is also to highlight the position of the rulers of the Shang Dynasty in divination. From these two points, we can see that in the evolution from the first period to the fifth period, the rulers’ will gradually dominated the divination, and the royalty began to be superior to the sanctity of divination (Wang, 1994). This marks that the oracle-bone inscriptions began to transform from the embodiment of Gods’ will to the carrier of “Ruler’s will”, and began to transit from the symbol of Gods to the symbol

of man. Ever since then, the oracle- bone inscriptions began to be used by man. The rulers' divination was not all decided by the tortoise shells and animal bones. Instead, "I (the ruler) will decide first" and then practice divination with the tortoise shells and animal bones. In other words, human planning came first (Rao, 2009). The rulers of the Shang Dynasty would decide first, and then divination was practiced with the tortoise shells and animal bones, which were interpreted in a way favorable for the rulers. This is not only a sign of man's awakening in front of Gods, but also means that oracle- bone inscriptions had become a control means used by the rulers of the Shang Dynasty to manage the country. Because, to control words is to control writing, to control memory, and to control society. The rulers of the Shang Dynasty tried hard to establish the inevitable connection between the words and the royal power, and disguised the use of Gods as God's will to justify their power. Consequently, the rulers of the Shang Dynasty gained the greatest power ever.

The rulers of the Shang Dynasty not only directly participated in the divination, but also interfered with the inscription of the divination results. There is a clear time span between the date of divination and the date of verification words recorded on some oracle bones, such as in Heji 14002: "divination on Jia Shen, Que (the diviner), For whether Fu Hao (the ruler's consort) would give birth safely. What the ruler divined said: delivery at Ding, auspicious. Delivery at Geng, especially auspicious. Delivery at Jiayin thirty-one days later. Inauspicious, a baby girl delivered." ('合集'14002:"甲申卜,設貞:婦好媯,嘉.王占曰:其惟丁媯,嘉.其惟庚媯,弘吉.三旬又一日,甲寅媯,不嘉,惟女.") The divination results were engraved on the bones or tortoise shells a few days after the divination for the purpose of confirming what was previously forecasted in divination (Keightley, 1978). However, not all oracle bones used for divination were engraved with characters. Archaeological findings show that a large number of oracle bones have no inscriptions, and only a few have divination contents inscribed on them (Liu, 1997), and the oracle bones with inscriptions basically belonged to the rulers of the Shang Dynasty and the high-ranked nobles who were closely related to them. This was also to show the rightness and sanctity of divination. The divination results were controlled by the rulers. To obey the divination results is to obey the Gods and the rulers. In this way, the sanctity was not only shown to the contemporary subjects, but also to the descendants and subjects of later generations. After the divination, for the mystery and sacredness of divination, oracle bones were deliberately stored and buried. According to the archaeological excavation of the Yin Ruins, even the oracle bones that were used by the rulers on their hunting tours or during the wars, were brought back for unified treatment without being disclosed (Wang & Yang, 1999). A large number of oracle- bone inscriptions are also the unique proof of supreme power of Gods given to the rulers.

Offering sacrifices to ancestors can be found frequently in the oracle- bone inscriptions. In the Shang Dynasty, gods were ancestors and ancestors were gods. There was no clear division between the two beyond the natural scope. The ancestors for people of the Shang Dynasty fall into two categories, one is Wang Hai and the "Great ancestors" before him, and the other is the ancestors after Wang Hai. The sacrificial rites of ancestors in the oracle- bone inscriptions also fall into two

categories: Xuanji (the sacrificial rites for selected ancestors) and Zhouji (the sacrificial rites for all ancestors). In the later period of Shang Dynasty, the sacrificial chronicle of all the rulers of Shang Dynasty was gradually constructed from the system of sacrificial rites for all ancestors. In fact, the sacrificial chronicle of all the rulers of Shang Dynasty reflects the political status of the sacrificial givers in the group of the rulers, and the blood relationship and kinship with the current ruler of the Shang Dynasty. The lineage of the rulers of the Shang Dynasty was established through the repeated confirmation of the sacrificial chronicle. The orthodoxy of the royal family was continued, and the ruling order and authority were established, which constituted the orthodoxy of power discourse. Ancestors are of exemplary significance to later generations. They used oracle -bone inscriptions to warn their descendants that this is the ruler who appears as a wizard asks his sacred ancestors what to do or report, and what he has achieved on earth for the sake of his ancestors. Only those who remember their ancestors can find help from heaven and build a strong nation with their ancestors who are buried underground. For the ancestors, the individual life and collective life also follow the example of ancestors. Imitating the ancestors and offering tribute to them are memorizing activities. Only by constantly recalling can the ancestors not be disconnected from the past, and the main form of recalling is to reproduce the past with the help of rituals. The monopoly of right for rituals by the rulers of the Shang Dynasty to provide a source of “legitimacy” for their current power constructed the common “identity” of the nation, and fundamentally solved the problem of original ethnic identity. When the oracle- bone inscriptions are put on the coat of “tortoise shells, ancestors, gods” and connected together, they become great epics, in which legitimacy and sacredness are all involved (Zheng, 2014). Behind the cultural memory is such a power logic. The rulers of the Shang Dynasty created a continuity from the past to the present and then to the future by controlling writing and monopolizing the power to offer sacrifices and practice divinations.

In order to distinguish history from memory, Assmann divides memory into functional memory and storage memory. The former is also known as the memory of being inhabited by man. It selectively builds bridges between the past, the present and the future through group, institutional or individual carriers to disseminate the values needed to construct identity and behavior norms, and mainly provide identity for the group and legitimacy for the present. From the above analysis, we can see that oracle -bone inscriptions, as the medium of memory, realized functional memory by participating in divination rituals and constructing sacrificial chronicle, and gradually became a tool to condense the centripetal force of ethnic groups and a control means for the rulers of the Shang Dynasty to manage the state. In the frequent sacrificial divination activities, solemn rituals show people’s beliefs, such as offering sacrifices to ancestors, recalling the political and military achievements of the former rulers, praying for the future generations to win battles. The rituals make this group remember the knowledge that can strengthen their identity, let the participants recall the relevant significance of ethnic identity and unified campaign. The common sympathetic feelings of group members are internalized into individual actions and the legitimacy of governance is recognized through group identity. And legitimacy is the primary demand of political memory. It is in these activities that the

group awakens the sleeping history, revives the cultural memory and obtains the identity.






(3) Constructing images as writing symbols

With the disintegration of the dynasty, the buried oracle bones were buried deep in the ground, and the memories they carried were also sealed up by history. Until the end of the 19th century, the oracle bones reappeared. The oracle bones and the symbols on them became an effective way to arouse memory. The symbols engraved on the oracle bones were immaterial. They were comparable with thoughts and were important media to activate thoughts. The existence of oracle- bone inscriptions shows the dialectic property of time. As a carrier, it has partly retained the living state and ideology of our ancestors. Therefore, oracle- bone inscriptions are the clue to understand the culture of Shang dynasties directly, and also the basis for communicating with them across time and space. Deep observation of oracle bones can produce a real sense of communication with the ancestors. The interpretation of oracle -bone inscriptions can realize the reunion between this time and that time, the encounter between the present and the history, and the connection and communication between ancient and modern times. The meaning of oracle- bone inscriptions is hidden in the irresistible historical torrent, but the oracle- bone inscriptions loaded with the weight of time will visualize the struggle and alliance of time (Shen, 2020). It constructs cultural memory and shape thinking mode through the visualized image symbols. These symbols are the images or abstract descriptions of the real world, with graphic and decorative features, and their configuration implies the way of recording experience by writing media.

As a mature writing system, the origin of oracle-bone inscriptions is “pictograph”, which “draws a kind of figurative symbols according to the shape of objective things to express the meaning of words in a language.”(Gao, 1995, P47) Generally speaking, we can judge the meaning and pronunciation of a symbol according to what it represents. Oracle- bone inscriptions are much like the pictures. They directly refer to the world and show the world. They are poetic characters. Oracle -bone inscriptions directly transfer the objective world into the symbol world, and express meaning by means of symbolic graphics (glyphs), which is a representational ideographic symbol. For the concrete and perceptible foreign objects in nature and society, oracle- bone inscriptions follow Lvy Bruhl’s so-called “mental image- concept” system to take the image by simulating and to form the pictogram by comparing. Abstract concepts can also be presented through the complex relationship between foreign objects by oracle- bone inscriptions. It can be seen that no matter the concrete objects or abstract concepts, oracle- bone inscriptions represent or compare people’s concepts with the combination of representational symbols and graphics. This kind of combination has fuzzy directivity and can express a series of meanings. New symbols and symbol combinations can emerge in endlessly. Therefore, oracle- bone inscriptions have a certain openness, and this openness is based on the graphic performance of oracle-bone inscriptions, because even if we do not understand the relationship between a pictographic symbol and the word it belongs to and its phoneme, we can at least see what the pictographic symbol itself represents. Generally speaking, we can judge the

meaning and pronunciation of a symbol according to what it represents. Because of its openness, oracle- bone inscriptions can accept new pictographic symbols, so the graphic features and ornamental features can also be preserved, which conforms to the core of memory art, namely visual association. Therefore, the oracle- bone inscriptions record and express experience mainly by visualization and poetic way, and the system structure is relatively stable. The thinking presented is non-verbal, which is a visual, silent and contemplative way of thinking.

Oracle- bone inscriptions are a complex writing system, which is not only the expression of language, but also the expression of the surrounding world. On the one hand, the components of oracle- bone inscriptions express the meaning and pronunciation of language as linguistic symbols, on the other hand, they reflect the world as pictures. For characters of oracle-bone inscriptions, in the process of being grasped by the reader's consciousness, the original independent and objective glyph will lead to the generation of image schema about a specific thing or a certain kind of event, and this image schema is an important means to understand the meaning of the characters. When facing these writing symbols, it is like facing the sun, moon, stars, mountains, trees and even all human beings and objects. Even if you don't know their pronunciation, you can get the meaning by seeing the shape. You can also feel the leap of life and the philosophical thinking of the universe in the lifelike representational symbols.

For example, the graph 象(elephant) depicts vividly an elephant, with its characteristic long prehensile trunk. The fact that elephants appeared in oracle- bone inscriptions shows that the climate and landscape of central China at that time was subtropical. The graph  depicts a front view of man standing. It is used as syssemantograph for 大(big) . The graph 羌(qiang) depicts a man with a ram horn top. It refers to the people of Qiang Fang (羌方), an enemy state of the Shang and a major source of human victims. The graph 即(ji,reach) depicts a person kneeling in front of a food utensil, meaning 'to take a meal', hence also implying 'to approach' or 'to arrive at some place'. An alternative interpretation is that ji (即) is a ceremony for inviting ancestors or spirits for meal. The graph 既(ji) depicts a person finished eating. The modern character ji (既) means 'already/since/finished'. So, the distinctive characteristic of Oracle- bone inscriptions that they express the meaning by shape makes them intuitive, and transcending time and space.

The ideographic nature and integration of graphics and text enable the oracle-bone inscriptions to be recognized and read as soon as they are written. No matter how the years change, they can still be read. Therefore, the suggestive power of oracle-bone inscriptions as a metaphor of memory can be seen, "its metaphor is not only fixed in the form of words, but also implies the permanent readability and controllability of the content that has been memorized." (Aleida Assmanns, 1999/2016, P169) Moreover, the increasing number of hieroglyphs that intuitively depict the rich material world are also derivative. From this connection, it derives another association, that is, pictographic characters are like a graphic encyclopedia,

loading the whole world into its own picture album. Because of its visibility and derivative, oracle- bone inscriptions have the prerequisite for constructing cultural memory, that is, non-continuous presence doesn't mean non- continuous absence, but a "changing relationship between multiple presence and multiple absence". (Aleida Assmanns, 1999/2016, P169)

Therefore, oracle- bone inscriptions "are not only an immortal media, but also the support of memory. It is not only the medium of memory, but also its metaphor." (Aleida Assmanns, 1999/2016, P206) Words, as a kind of memory medium, will ensure their eternal life through continuous readability. The interpretation of oracle-bone inscriptions has begun ever since they were excavated. With the efforts of generations of oracle-bone scholars, oracle- bone inscriptions can be basically understood now. Therefore, the image and cultural connotation of the universe in the Shang dynasties can also be transferred from potential to surface.

4. Conclusions

Assmann believes that the existence of a state requires its peoples to form a common collective and the concept of political identity through its written language. As ritual symbols, oracle- bone inscriptions record the devout worship of ancestors in divination and sacrifice activities. The participants obtained their identity and ethnic identity in the solemn worship rituals. The wizard and historian class who mastered writing at that time became a privileged class. They monopolized writing and broke off the way to heaven. In this process, oracle- bone inscriptions changed from the embodiment of Gods' will to the carrier of "ruler's will", symbolizing the supreme royalty. The ruling class controlled the society and justified power by monopolizing writing. Thus, as a memory medium, oracle- bone inscriptions gave full play to its functional memory characteristics. However, besides ritual symbols and symbols of royalty, they are writing symbols in essence. In the writing system of oracle- bone inscriptions, their pictographic foundation gives them stability and openness. Political sovereignty provides them with a stabilizer of memory in the usual sense. Therefore, the path to cultural survival can be found from the written texts.

References

- [1] (German)Aleida Assmanns (2016). *Memory Space: Form and Change of Cultural Memory*. (Pan Lu, Trans.). Beijing: Peking University Press. (Original work published 1999).
- [2] (Japan) Araki, Hiroko (2003). *The Symbolic Meaning of Divination Bones*, (Song Zhenhao & Wang Yuxin, eds.). *Proceedings of International Symposium Commemorating 100th Anniversary of Discovery of Oracle- Bone Inscriptions in Yin Ruins*, Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Publishing House.
- [3] D.N.Keightley(1978). *Sources of Shang History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.45-46.
- [4] Dong Zuobin (1955). *Fifty Years of Oracle Bone Studies*. Taiwan: Art and

- Culture Press, pp.129-130.
- [5] Gao Ming (1995). *Chinese Ancient Philology Theory*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- [6] He Ning (1998). *Anthology of Huainanzi*. Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House.
- [7] (German) Jan Assmann (2004). *A Society with and without Writing*. (Wang Xiaobing, Trans.). *Journal of Ocean University of China (SOCIAL SCIENCE EDITION)*, 2004(6). (Original work published 1992)
- [8] (German) Jan Assmann (2014). *On cultural memory*. (Jin Shoufu, Trans.). *History and Thought. Volume 1: Cultural Memory and Historicism*. (Chen Xin & Peng Gang, Edts.). P14. Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press. (original work published 1992)
- [9] Liao Mingchun (2008). *A New Interpretation of Hexagram Qian in the Book of Changes*. *Social Science Front*, no.3, pp.37-46.
- [10] Liu Yiman (1997). *The Unearthed Oracle Bones of Yin Ruins in Anyang and Related Issues*. *Archaeology*, pp.5-6.
- [11] (France) Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1981). *Primitive mentality*. (Ding You, Trans.). Shanghai: The Commercial Press. (1930)
- [12] Qian Cunxun (2002). *Books in Bamboo and Silk*. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Press.
- [13] Rao Zongyi (2009). *Divination: Six-Digit Hexagram Images in Oracle Bone Inscriptions*. *Rao Zongyi's Academic Works in the 20th Century (Volume II: Oracle Bone Collection)*. Beijing: Renmin University Press, pp.844-845.
- [14] Rao Zongyi (2009). *A General Study on Diviners in the Yin Dynasty*. *Rao Zongyi's Academic Works in the 20th Century (Volume II: Oracle Bone Collection)*. Beijing: Renmin University Press, pp.843-844.
- [15] (America) Sarah Allan (2010). *The Shape of Turtle: Myth, Art and Cosmos in Early China*. (Wang Tao, Trans.). Beijing: Commercial Press. (Original work published 1993).
- [16] Shen Wenjing (2020). *Constructing Cultural Memory: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Writing Symbols*. *Journal of Tianjin International Studies University*, no.3, pp.78-79.
- [17] Wang Yuxin & Yang Shengnan eds, (1999). *One Hundred Years of Oracle Bone Studies (P201-203)*. Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Publishing House.
- [18] Wang Zhenzhong. (1994). *A Comparative Study on Origin of Chinese Civilization*. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House, pp. 345- 355.