

Article

Metamorphosis and the Shang State: *Yi* 異 and the *Yi ding* 異 [fang 方] 鼎

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Abstract: Despite a long tradition of scholarship on Shang religion, a clear and comprehensive account of that religion has proven elusive. Many scholars have relied on written accounts from the much later Warring States and Han eras purporting to describe Shang beliefs and practices, and have been misled into describing the Shang religion as bureaucratically institutionalized and characterized by tension between inner court and outer court worship of ancestral and nature deities. Other scholars have generalized about the nature of divinity in Shang time and have recognized the position of the king who as one with Di was divine. Rather than act as an intermediary between the living and dead, the Shang king was divine and equivalent to Di. The present study follows research recognizing that the Shang king ruled over a state system which I label “institutionalized metamorphism”. By “institutionalized metamorphism” a belief is implied in the metamorphic power of the Shang king that allowed him identification with and to a certain extent control over numinous spirits.

Keywords: Shang religion; belief system; metamorphism (*yi*); *yiding* = tetrapod *ding*; *fangding* vessel; royal power symbols; Shang state; Kui deity

Despite a long tradition of scholarship on Shang religion, a clear and comprehensive account of that religion has proven elusive. Many scholars have relied on written accounts from much later Warring States and Han eras purporting to describe Shang beliefs and practices, and have been misled into describing Shang religion as bureaucratically institutionalized and characterized by tension between inner court and outer court worship of ancestral and nature deities (see e.g., [Shima 1958](#); [Akatsuka 1977](#); [Chang 1970](#); [Eno 2008](#); [Keightley 2000](#)). Nevertheless, many scholars have correctly observed that the Zhou concept of the “Mandate of Heaven” originated from the Shang belief in the power of the cosmological deity, Di, and that Zhou and later reverence for the power of ancestral spirits was based on rites of Shang origin ([Chen 1937](#); [Chang 1970](#); [Hu 1959](#); [Allan 2007](#)). Many of these arguments in turn may be based on inscriptional data but few take a holistic approach in combining written information with other related data. Few scholars rely on Shang period inscriptional data in combination with visual and archaeological material. In order to more fully understand belief in a Shang setting, particularly the belief in metamorphosis *yi* 異 and Shang rulership, certain visual data will be reviewed, as will the view that the king possessed the power of *yi* 異 as a divine ruler allied with Di, the high Cosmological Spirit of Shang.

The present study also follows research recognizing that the Shang king rules over a state system which I have labeled elsewhere “institutionalized metamorphism” ([Childs-Johnson 2008](#), p. 51). By “institutionalized metamorphism” a belief is implied in the metamorphic power of the Shang king that allowed him identification with and to a certain extent control over numinous spirits.

By metamorphism, the power of a human (i.e., the king) to spiritually identify with a divine power is implied¹.

1. Background for the Meaning of *Yi* 異 and *Yiding* 異鼎 in Shang and Western Zhou Time

The Shang king has been described as a shaman by many eminent late scholars, (see e.g., Chang 1983 and Chen 1937). As outlined by the English historian Robert Hutton in 2001 (Hutton 2001), the best definition of “shamanism” is one which refers to “the indigenous religions of Siberia and neighboring parts of Asia,” where the term originated (Paper 1995, p. 51) and where shamanic practice is ongoing. Although shamanism is a well-defined entity in the northern areas of China and Mongolia, and may also be in historic ancient China, there is no term for shaman or shamanism in Shang script that may unambiguously be understood as “shaman”. It is preferred here to identify the terms that do exist in the context of contemporary belief systems as a prolegomena to the study of ancient Chinese “religion”.² The most expedient pieces of data for belief systems in the Shang period are documented in art and script of this time.

The profound belief in the power of spirit metamorphosis, or *yi* 異, as known in bone inscriptions and in artistic representations of Shang date, continue during the subsequent Western Zhou period, and in the latter context signify what appears to be a smooth transition in terms of common belief in metamorphic power from one early Sinitic kingdom to another. The binding adhesive for this transition is the continued use during the Western Zhou for the *hewen* term *yiding* 異鼎 (= *fangding* 方鼎) to signify the ruler’s power to rule as a divinity in the company of Di (later Tian) (Childs-Johnson 2008, 2013). *Hewen* refers to a binome, a combination of two graphs into one word. As reviewed below, the evidence for this continuity is documented by new inscriptional and archaeological data. The term *yiding*, identifiable as a *fangding* or square/rectangular (hereafter simplified to rectangular) *ding* with four legs, is not only documented by Shang period data but by what is entirely new, a Western Zhou period inscription and vessel from Dahezun, Shanxi.

During Shang time, oracle bone terms, such as *yi* 異 “to spiritually transform,” and *bin* 賓 “to identify with a spirit(s)” document the royal prerogative of the Shang king (Childs-Johnson 2008). The primary artistic image and its variations on ritual bronzes and related Shang art document the same belief, the right of the king who may identify with Di and other divine spirits. This substratum of belief in metamorphic royal power is invested not only in the living king but in dead kings and Di. The realm that the Shang king oversees may thus be described as “a state of institutionalized metamorphism”. The King ruled at the center 中商 (Shang at the Center) over a cosmological *sifang* 四方 or four equal parts that extended outward in axial directions. The king was divine, one with Di, and one with *sifang*. His control was Machiavellian and peripatetic, relying on image, inspections, and tribute, and in particular on the spirit world, divination, and rites. In addition, it is noteworthy that the Shang royal ancestral cult grew out of a well-established cult of exorcism Da Yu 大禦, that became codified into a ritual program known as *zhoujisi* 周祭祀, or cyclical sacrificial rites (Childs-Johnson forthcoming). Although these rites were eventually terminated during the Western Zhou period, belief in the divinity of the ruler, and specifically his identification with Di (later Tian) remained steadfast in the politico-religious practice of Zhou rulership.

¹ For other comparable terms to describe the king’s identification with the divine, see Hu, who uses *pei* 配 Di “One Who Accompanies Di” (Hu[1944] 1973, chu: 329); Paper, who uses “Incorporator of the Dead” (Paper 1995, pp. 113–14); Song and Yang who refer to the equation of ruler, man and spirits as one and the same 人神一合 (Song 2005, pp. 90, 98–99; Yang 1992, pp. 9–10)).

² For a comprehensive review of the issues and terms associated with “shamanism” see Jordan Paper, whose study (1995), *The Spirits are Drunk* should be required reading for any student of Chinese religion, and in particular for clarification of terminology related to shamanism in and outside China.

The royal symbol of metamorphic power, *yi* 異, to be spirit-empowered, dominates Shang period art. The image is primarily a semi-human invested with wild animal attributes but to date may be specifically ascribed to only one mythic spirit power, Kui 夔, the legendary founder of the Shang kingdom (see Figure 1 below).

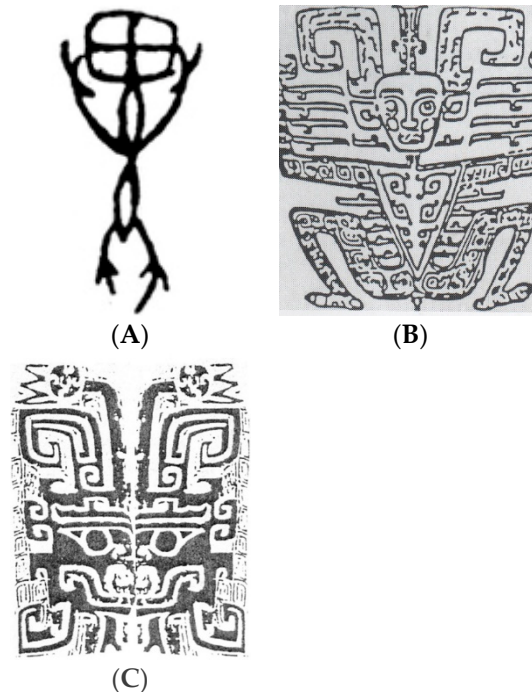


Figure 1. Masked semi-human figures with arms raised. (A) *Yi* 異 graph; (B) Displayed *yi* image, probably Kui; (C) Simplified displayed *yi* image.

The significance of these *yi* or metamorphic power images is directly allied with the king's cosmological power to rule, as revealed in a related term, *yiding* 異鼎 (異鼎), the *hewen* (two graphs joined into one graph) known in a variety of early inscriptional contexts including Shang and pre-conquest Western Zhou divinatory inscriptions and Western Zhou bronze vessel inscriptions. As will be analyzed below, these inscriptional contexts corroborate that *yiding* refers specifically to the tetrapod *fangding*, and secondly to a *fangding* with *yi* spirit power, the basis of a king's power to rule in Shang time and apparently also in Western Zhou time. The types of data that exhibit a continuation of Shang belief in these symbolic attributes are both archaeological and paleographic, depending on extant or excavated *fangding* and their inscriptions. As will become clear, royal *fangding* and *yiding* were one and the same vessel.

2. Early through Late Western Zhou Inscriptional Evidence for *Yiding*

As recently analyzed by Wang Ziyang, several graphs cited in the inscriptions on ritual bronzes from the newly discovered burial M1017 at Dahekou cemetery in Yicheng, Shanxi ("Excavation of No. 1017 Tomb of the Western Zhou Dynasty Graveyard in Dahekou, Shanxi," *Kaogu xuebao* 2018.1) have sparked lively debate about the function of the ritual bronze vessel and its inscription.

(<http://www.xianqin.org/blog/archives/9917.html?from=timeline&isappinstalled=02018>).*

One in particular is the middle Western Zhou, Ba Bo (Duke of Ba) *fanggui* 霸伯方簋 (read here as Ba Bo (Duke of Ba) *yi* (*fang*)*ding* 霸伯異鼎) (see Figure 2). The inscription reads:

“In the first month the King carried out meat sacrifice [at] Di 氏, [at the time of] Da Qin 大奏 (a Great Performance?). The King awarded Duke of Ba 10 strings of cowries which the Duke of Ba used to make a precious B (name of a vessel). May sons and grandsons forever treasure it 唯正月王 祭 [jiang 將 = 劉] 于 氏, 大奏。王賜霸伯貝十朋。霸伯用作室 B, 其万年 孫子 = 其永寶。”

* I would like to thank Professor Han Ding 韩鼎 for bringing this article by Wang Ziyang to my attention.



B is the name of the vessel, written , as a rubbing, and , as a photograph (Wang 2018; Shanxi 2018). The graph is composed of three components, *jin* 金, *ge* 戈, and *xing* 行, of which *ge* is allegedly the sound element and *jin* and *xing* the signifier elements. Although Wang reads the graph as *yi*, not *ge* or *jin* 钺 (see Wang: footnote 11), and although 钺 may be documented by various textual references of Han date, such as the *Er Ya* 尔雅, *Hanyu Dazidian* 汉语大字典, *Suoyin* 索隐, and others, alongside their commentaries, the graph is clearly a corruption of the word *yi* 翼/異 in classical texts and Zhou inscriptions, as analyzed by Yachu Zhang (1992)³. Zhang's interpretation is in turn supported by references to 異 in the *Mozi*, as translated by Sun Yirang 孙詒让 (Sun 2001), and quoted in (Wang 2018: text and notes 23–4). 钺 is a corrupt loan graph for the word *yi* 翼(異), the same *yi* found in earlier Western Zhou and Shang inscriptions.



Figure 2. Front and side views Duke of Ba *fanggui*. Reproduced after Shanxi (Kaogu xuebao) 2018.1.

Wang provides other obvious evidence that the graph B 钺 = 翼/異 does not refer to a *gui* ritual vessel as used in the archaeological report to label this two-handled rectangular bronze. Typologically, the vessel shape has nothing in common with the bronze *gui* vessel type; it is square (or rectangular; *fang* 方 is used for both rectangular and square shapes) with four sides in two parts, an upper basin and lower foot in addition to two side loop handles (Figure 2). None of the latter features characterize *gui* basins; inscribed and self-named *gui* vessels are more typically circular with a circular foot and a pair of opposing handles (a few exceptions include Kai Hou *gui* 楷侯簋 (Wu 2012 *Mingtu* 5129) and the Ya Chou *gui* (Wu 2012 *Mingtu* 3670 亚醜簋). For this and other reasons the vessel is not a *gui*.

Comparisons with the Duke of Ba vessel include three more or less contemporary ones dating to the middle and late phases of the Western Zhou through the Spring and Autumn periods (see Figure 3). All are similar in shape and may be used to date the Duke of Ba bronze: the Li Zhen *fangli*, an animal-footed *fangli*, and a *fangliding* from the Zhuangbai cache in Shaanxi (see Figure 3). These three vessels are not only similar in shape, date, and decor, but in function. The lower bellies of

³ Zhang's study is "Names for Yin and Zhou Bronze Ding Vessels, a Research Proposal", *Guwenzi Yanjiu* vol. 18, p. 284.

the four bronzes are hollow for purposes of heating the contents in the basin above. Three of the vessels have supporting legs in the form of birds or dragons; the latter are decorative attachments typifying the whimsical direction of decor during the middle phase of the Western Zhou period (see e.g., [Childs-Johnson and Major forthcoming](#)). The Dahezun vessel (Figure 2) typologically is easily read as a degenerate version of the three rectangular basins with four fanciful legs. The decor and legs of the Dahezun bronze, however, have been stripped away due to the simplification of the more artistic versions just discussed. The Duke of Ba bronze nonetheless retains their shape, with an upper body that is slightly rounded at its corners and the lower body that is rectangular.

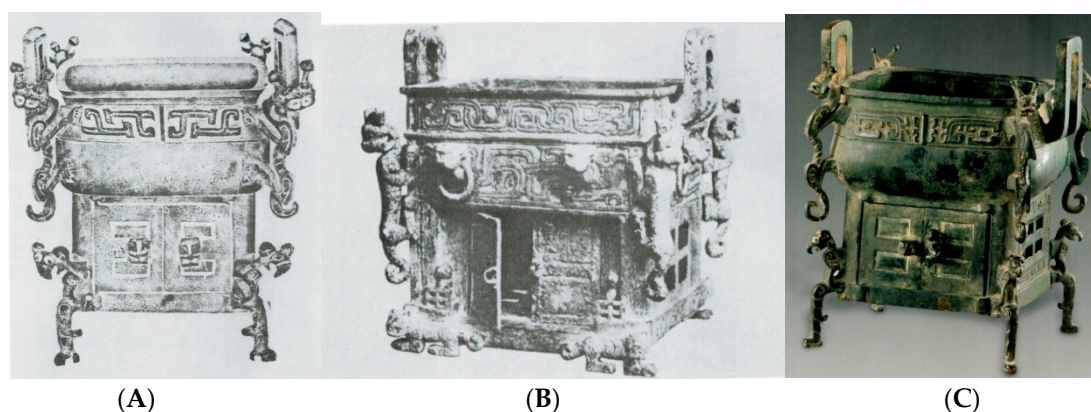


Figure 3. Three examples of the *fangding* (*yiding*, also called *fangli*) of late Western Zhou date: (A,B) Li Zhen *fangli* 季真方鬲 and (B) Animal-footed *fangli*. Reproduced from *Shang Zhou Yiqi Tongkao*, xia: 97–98; (C) Human guarding gate *fangding*. Reproduced from ([Zhouyuan 2016](#)): color plate 64.

Further comparisons indicate that these whimsical versions of tetrapod belong to the category of rectangular *ding* or *fangding* that are four-sided and four-legged. The inscription of the third bronze, excavated from the Zhuangbai cache in Zhouyuan, Shaanxi, is self-inscribed with the *hewen* 鬲, transcribed 鬲 *li* (金 signifier + 鬲 sound/鬲). *Li* 鬲[鼎] and *ding* 鼎 words are based on the *ding* vessel signifier. The two, *li* and *ding* are often interchangeable in function in that both are specifically designed for ritual meat sacrifices. The bronze vessel name *li* furthermore is rarely used for the name of the vessel (whether tripod or tetrapod) in ritual bronze vessel inscriptions. Various names for sacrifices involving the *ding* vessel, in addition, more frequently employ the graph for *ding* than for *li* (e.g., 鼎, 鬲, 鼎) whether the bronze vessel is a *li* or *ding* in shape. *Ding* is more typically used to name both tripod and tetrapod in inscriptions. Thus, it is apparent that this middle phase version of vessel during the Western Zhou is a *ding* with four legs.

One of the prototypes and earlier versions of this middle period Western Zhou tetrapod rectangular *ding* is inscribed with the name of the vessel, *fangding* 方鼎, meaning rectangular (or square) shaped four-legged *ding* (see Figure 4). Although this self-inscribed name is extremely rare during the Western Zhou period (and more typical of Han period texts), it is another piece of evidence that the four-legged rectangular bronze is a *ding* and the shape with four legs and four sides is the rectangular version of the *ding*. It may also be noted at this point that the *fangding* graph is typically characterized

by a pair of multiple short prongs on its legs 𠂔 as opposed to the more standardized graph for *ding* vessel that has only four or less prongs 𠂔 (Li 1965, p. 2333).

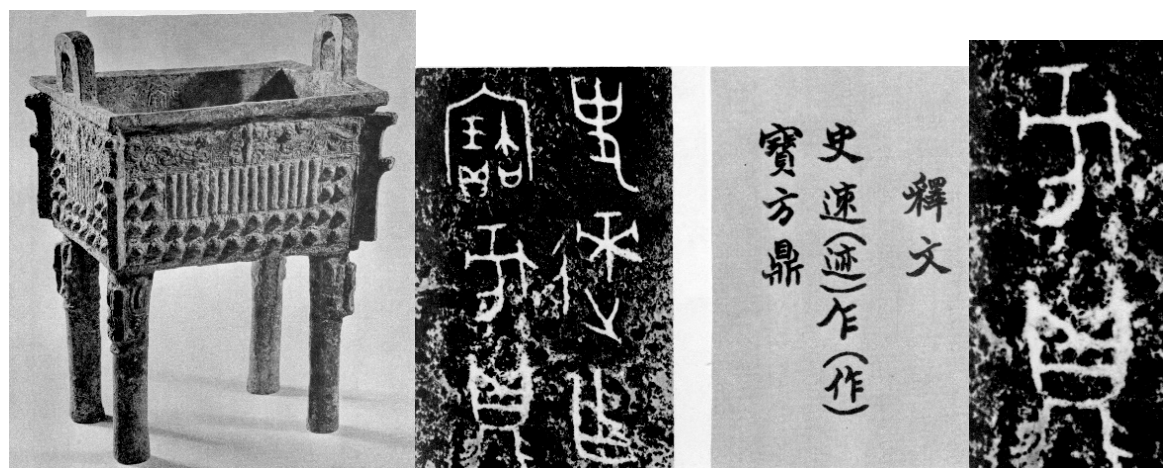


Figure 4. One of a pair of Shi Yi fangding. Shaanxi volume: Figure 154, page 135.

Bronze cast *ding* functioned as vessels used in flesh or meat sacrifices from Shang through Zhou periods. Corroborative data are plentiful. One such sacrificial piece of data appears in the Duke of Ba inscription itself. This graph, written 𠄎 [劉] is comprised of the meat 肉 and knife 刀 radicals, in addition to the generic *dou* 豆 for a vessel used in sacrifice. The sacrificial term is a reduction of the

Shang bone inscriptional terms 𠄎 and 𠄎 (將+鼎), and another *hewen* yet different from *yiding*. The latter is similarly composed of meat 肉 and knife 刀 radicals, in addition to a vessel, in this Shang case, the *ding* 鼎 vessel radical or the 俎 graph for meat cutting board. Both are variations of cut flesh offered in *ding* vessels, transcribed (將+鼎), (Childs-Johnson 2013). The evidence from this vessel inscription thus agrees with the typical function of this vessel as one used in meat and flesh sacrifices.

Thus far, it is clear that the rectangular *ding* are used in meat sacrifices, are self-named (with some variation, such as *liding* for *ding*), that 釤 was a corruption of the term *yi* 異, and that tetrapod rectangular *ding* are known archaeologically from early through late Western Zhou time. These tetrapod square *ding* are nonetheless special when they are self-named *yiding* 異鼎 (異鼎). Two additional groups of inscriptions of early Western Zhou date use the *hewen yiding*: one includes a set of four or more commissioned by a scribe named Da (probably of Shang origin and heritage) (see Figures 5 and 6). Scribe Da of Zuo cast a set of medium size tetrapod *fangding* in honor of a commemorative occasion that the scribe witnessed- the casting by the Duke (probably Duke of Zhou, also known as Da Bao, Grand Protector) of *yiding* honoring the founding Western Zhou kings, Cheng and Wu. The inscriptions and *fangding*, belonging to Zuoce Da 作册大 are illustrated below:



Figure 5. Four identical Zuoce Da small tetrapod *ding* preserved at the Royal Palace Museum, Taiwan (two in the top row), Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (lower left), and the Hermitage Foundation Museum, Norfolk, Virginia (lower right). Sources: Ku-kung 1958 vol. 2: pls. 62–63 (top row); Pope 1967 vol. 1: pl. 195 (lower right); and courtesy of the Hermitage Museum and Gardens, Sloane Collection, Norfolk, Virginia, 50-G-11 (lower left).



Figure 6. Inscriptions on two vessels (from a set of medium-scale Zuoce Da tetrapod bronze *ding* with *hewen* “*yiding*”), Western Zhou period, ca 11th century BCE. Sources: Freer Gallery rubbing (left) from Pope 1967 vol. 1: pl. 34; rights courtesy of the Hermitage Museum and Gardens, Sloane Collection, Norfolk, Virginia, 50-G-11.

The inscriptions read as follows:

When the Duke came to cast [in honor of] King Cheng and King Wu an *yiding* 異鼎 (異鼎), in the fourth month, second quarter of the month, *jichou* day, the Duke awarded Zuoce Da (Scribe Da of Zuo) a white horse. Da extolled the August Heavenly Governor Da Bao’s (Great

Protector's) grace [and] made for what he witnessed what must have been large-scale glossy tetrapod *ding* cast for Kings Cheng and Wu⁴.

In a second early Western Zhou bronze vessel inscription identified as the Tian Wang *gui* 天亡簋 (see Figure 7), *yiding* again appears to be used in reference to a major royal occasion and display of royal power. In this case Tian Wang, evidently a royal house member, witnessed and assisted King Wu in celebrating a major series of events, including the performance of the Great Feng Drum rite and a sail in the moated *piyong*, followed by sacrifice in the Tianshi (Hall of Tian/Heaven) and several further days of feasting and drumming (*yihai* to *dingchou* day). During what must have been a majestic display of power and spirit control, King Wu not only witnesses the descent of King Wen's spirit but his plea that the spirit of King Wen accept King Wu's kingship and termination of the royal rites of Yin (Shang). The spirit of King Wen descends and decrees to Tian Wang: "[Tian] Wang has obtained the *yiding* (spirit empowered tetrapod *ding*(s)) and thereby restored the royal title 纣?"⁵ Many scholars simply do not translate the graph that follows 得, "to restore". The lower part of this graph is the *ding* 鼎graph. The upper part is indistinct yet was clearly marked by an additional element, here interpreted to be *yi* 異, as used in the *hewen* term *yiding*. Given the context of the inscription and the graphic representation of the *ding* vessel, translation of *yiding* 異鼎 is appropriate. 王降亡得異鼎復纣⁶.



On the *yihai* day King [Wu] held the Great Feng Drum ceremony. The King ascended the boat and sailed on all three sides (within the moated *piyong*). The King [Wu] sacrificed in the Hall of Heaven (Tianshi), thus [the spirits of Tian and King Wen] descended. [I] Tian Wang assisted the King, [then] in carrying out the Yi (Yin/Grand) rite to his glorious father, King Wen, and Xi-drum-playing rite to Shang Di (God on High). King Wen watches over (us) on High. May [you, spirit of King Wen] greatly illuminate King (Wu) to be supervisor [on earth]; may [you] greatly accept the King as your heir; may [you] enable [him] to terminate the sacrifices (*si*) to the Yi (Yin) Kings. On the day *dingchou*, the King held a *Xiang*-banquet and a grand Yi-meat platter rite. The [spirit of] King [Wen] descended [decreeing] 'Wang [of Tian Wang] [you] have obtained the *yiding* (spirit-empowered tetrapod *ding*) [and] restored 纣 (纣?).' I was praised for my meritorious deeds [and] reverently extoll the King's graciousness [and inscribed it] on this sacrificial *gui* bronze vessel.

乙亥王又大豐。王凡三方。王祀于天室降。天亡又(佑)王。衣(殷)祀于王不顯考文王。事喜上帝。文王監才上，不顯王作X，不肆王作廢(R)，不克乞衣(殷)王祀。丁丑王鄉(饗)大宜。王降亡得異鼎(hewen)復纣(S)。惟朕又(有)慶。每揚王休于尊簋。⁷²

Figure 7. Tian Wang *gui* inscription and translation (right) and a detail showing the use of “得異(得異鼎)復纣” (“*de yiding fu 纣*”) or “obtaining the *yiding* and restoring [the royal] title (?)” on the left.

⁴ The tetrapod *ding* cast by Da, Scribe of Zuo (Zuoce Da) are medium to small in size and should not be confused with what were much larger, probably monumental tetrapod *ding* cast in honor of the Zhou kings, Cheng and Wu.

⁵ I follow yet revise Hwang's translation of this inscription, pages 286–89, as quoted in Childs-Johnson 2008, pp. 74–6.

⁶ For other translations of this inscription in English see Goldin and Cook (pages 14–15). There is no evidence to translate the *ding* graph as *jue*, the tripod beaker as proposed by D. Pankenier in Goldin and Cook, eds. My translation in large part depends on the translation and context presented by Hwang Ming-Chong (Hwang 1996, pp. 286–89).

The purpose of holding a grand Xiang feast and Yi meat platter offering is to attract the dead king's spirit's descension. This happens and (Tian) Wang obtains the *yiding* to restore X_禘—the title to the current ruling king (King Wu). The graph 禘, although difficult to translate probably means something close to “royal title”, as suggested by Hwang.

A similar context of recovering royal *ding* bronzes is repeated in the “Shi Fu 世俘 (Great Capture)” chapter of the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 (*Lost Book of Zhou*), dating to the early Western Zhou period:

On the *xinhai* (day 48) [the Zhou] presented the captured royal *ding* [flesh and meat offering bronze vessels) of the Yin [Shang] kings. King Wu then with spirit-empowered awesomeness (*yi*) displayed his *gui* jade insignia and codice(?), in announcing (this achievement) to Shang Di (Cosmological Power on High) in the Heavenly Temple[...]

辛亥，薦俘殷王鼎。武王乃異矢珪，矢憲，告天宗上帝。

Reproduced after (Hwang 1996, p. 146; Huang et al. 1995).

3. Shang Period Evidence for *Yiding*

Clearly the *ding* and more specifically the tetrapod *fangding* were all-important symbols of royal spirit power. As analyzed in an earlier article, “The Big Ding and “China” Power” (Childs-Johnson 2013), and in the book, *The Meaning of the Graph Yi 異 and Its Implications for Shang Belief and Art* (Childs-Johnson 2008), *yi* appears in Shang period oracle bone divinations with the same meaning as in the Western Zhou inscriptions. Yet, certain aspects are clearer in the context of the king's role as ruler. Not only does *yi* as used in the binome *yiding* refer to a tetrapod *ding* but to a symbolically, metamorphically empowered tetrapod square *ding* (see Figure 8). The *hewen yiding* is not just a reference to a tetrapod *ding* but to a royally empowered tetrapod *ding* that guaranteed the king the royal right to rule as dictator over the *sifang* kingdom of Shang at the Center.

The *hewen yiding* 異鼎 (異鼎), combines two graphs, *yi* 異 at the top and *ding* 鼎 at the bottom. In bone divinations *yi* serves variously but always in connection with power of Shang Di (Cosmological Spirit on High), dead king spirits, such as Fu Yi or others, and the ruling king (Childs-Johnson 2008).

The last bone inscription is all-important since specific spirits and individuals are named (Figure 8C,D). Although the *hewen* appears elsewhere yet often without context in bone inscriptions (Childs-Johnson 2008), here the divinatory inscriptions match the content of the bronze inscriptions. The *yiding* is only associated with kings and their dead predecessor spirits. Since the king and royal dead spirits were believed to be divine, the bestowal of an *yiding* from spirit Father Yi on the ruling king, Wu Ding, is significant as a symbol of continued divine rulership (see Childs-Johnson 2013). In the Heji 2274 inscription, although the two graphs are not written as a *hewen* (as an adjectival modifier of the *ding*), *yi* is used verbally, “to spirit empower” from one dead king spirit Fu Yi to another, the living king Wu Ding. The two other divinations of Western Zhou origin are also significant in concerning whether the subject, understood as the king, should “*shou yiding*” receive or be bestowed with the spirit empowered *ding* (*yiding*)” and whether the understood subject, the king (Western Zhou ruler) “should invoke a spirit(s) with the newly [cast] *yiding*”. Western Zhou kings evidently followed Shang precedent for an initial period after their conquest before reverting to their preference for honoring their own founding kings, King Wen, King Cheng, and King Wu with ancestral rites. The addition of the *fu* 父 father radical to the side of the *ding* in the *yiding hewen* in the Heji 2274 inscription may be interpreted as a signifier of the *fu* father generation of the Shang royal lineage, a symbolic reference to the maintenance of Shang royal power. For other uses of *yi* 異 in bone inscriptions see Childs-Johnson 2008.

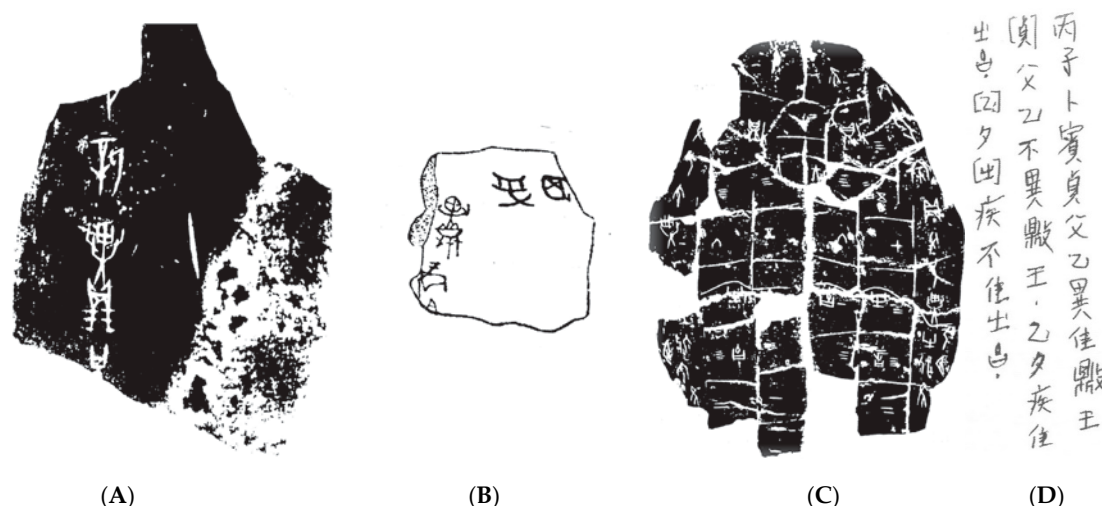


Figure 8. (A–D) The *heaven yiding* “^異鼎” graph in late Shang and pre-Conquest Zhou bone inscriptions from Xiaotun, Anyang, Henan, and Zhouyuan, Shaanxi. Sources: (Heji 1978–1982, 1999) 31000 (left); (Wang 1984): Figure 14, H11:87 (center); (Heji 1978–1982, 1999); no. 2274 and Figure 8 Childs-Johnson 2008, p. 8: Figure 8C, p. 58 (right). (A) [...] 卜新鼎(異鼎)), 祝 The bone was cracked: should [X] invoke X spirit with the new *yiding*? (B) [...] should perhaps [X] receive/bestow the *yiding* 其受鼎(異鼎) [...]? (C,D) Crack-making on the *bingzi* day Bin divined: If Fu Yi (26th King) [Xiao Yi in the Shang king list] causes spirit empowerment (metamorphosis) will it mean bestowing the power of the tetrapod bronze *ding* vessel(s) 鼎(異鼎) upon the King [his eldest son]? Doubly auspicious. Doubly auspicious. If Fu Yi (Father Yi) does not cause spirit empowerment will it mean not bestowing the tetrapod *ding*(s) upon the King?

What is significant is that *yi* 異, *yiding* 鼎(異鼎), and related cognates, *wei* 畏(威), *weiyi* 畏異, and *gui* 鬼 in Shang bone inscriptions take their meaning from the same root, 田, spirit power or spirit mask.⁷

Although *wei* is not generously represented in bone inscriptions, its identity and appearance undoubtedly led directly to the frequent use of *wei* and *weiyi* in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions⁸. As identified by Karlgren, *wei* 畏 (no. 573) is pronounced *iwer/jwei* and *gui* is pronounced *kwei/kjwei* (Karlgren: no. 569). “*Gui* 鬼 means spirit, ghost, demon (Shi) ... and [t]he graph is a drawing.” The *wei* 畏 “graph shows a demon (see no 569a–c above [*gui* 鬼]) holding an object of which is uncertain.” Yi (Karlgren no 954), pronounced “giag/i/yi”, shows a “[...]graph of a human figure with raised hands and a head like that of a demon (see Karlgren no 569 above)”. The three graphs are based on a similar graphic for mask, and thus the three *yi* 異, *gui* 鬼 and *wei* 畏 are cognates.

Although in my 1995 and later articles on metamorphism I did not advance my hypotheses as far as claiming that *gui* 鬼 ancestral daemon spirits were one and the same as one who possesses daemonic power or *yi*, metamorphic power, this is almost certainly the case during the Shang era. Daemonic powers can go both ways, positively and negatively. The signifier 田 (mask morpheme) shared between oracle bone graphs for *gui*, *wei*, and *yi* may be traced to a mask and its underlying

⁷ See Childs-Johnson 1995 note 17 and page 86 where it is stated “[...] the Han term for spirit 類 [魁] qi, can be traced to and identified as a phonetic loan for the mask radical in this verb of invocation [𠂔] and in the graph for *guitou* ghost[...]”. See also the section titled “The Equivalence of *Guitou* (ghost head) and *Qitou* (masked invoker)” on pages 88–90.

⁸ For the cognate *wei*, see in the same article (Childs-Johnson 1995, the section titled “The Cognate *Wei* 畏 Meaning Supernatural Majesty,” pp. 90–91.).

connotations of fear and awe, from Shang through to Han time (Childs-Johnson 1995). Although what westerners view as a mask may be skewed by the abundant examples from pre-literate societies in Mongolia stretching across Siberia and into North America, early China clearly entertained this physical and religious concept. As maintained, the remnant examples of wood sculptures of tigers and related daemonic images carved in wood that overlay the tops of several of the royal tombs at Xibeigang were undoubtedly involved in some type of exorcistic and spirit identity context at the time of death, perhaps presided over by the living (successive) king (Childs-Johnson 2013).

The pictorial data from Late Neolithic Jade Age China strongly supports what must have been a widespread use of the mask and its imagery to identify with the spirit realm (see, for example, Fang Xiangming's opinion that the excavated Lingjitan jade diagrammatic cosmological plaque and tortoise were designed together to form a mask on the corpse of the deceased, Fang 2013, pp. 8–10). Certainly the turquoise and jade inlaid shroud covering the burial of an Erlitou aristocrat corpse makes a similar suggestion of transformational power. Perhaps the cosmological images of semi-human animal zoomorphs served as “helpers” in the sense as once postulated by K.C. Chang (1983). Although these symbols do not appear to be “helpers” in the “shamanic sense,” they were power symbols with which the king identified and advertised his right as a divinity on earth.

Relevant to our current argument is the evidence that *yiding* and *yi* are specifically associated with royal power in Shang bone inscriptions. The subjects of *yi* are in all cases limited to dead rulers, Di (the Cosmological Power on High), and the living ruler (see Figure above with inscriptions). The king was a living apotheosis of the daemonic realm of Di and dead rulers of the Shang lineage. Although we cannot call the king a mediator, as one may in identifying the powers of shamans in Siberian and related cultures, the king was clearly the pivot of spirit control during the Shang era. The major symbol of this power is the investment of the Shang king with the *yiding* or tetrapod *fangding*. The most telling inscription appears in Figure 8C above where it is queried whether the dead king spirit, Fu Yi (father of Wu Ding) would or would not bestow the power of the *yiding* on his son, the next in line to be king.

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