

To Explore the War Goal in the War Culture Based on the Words Used in the Bronze Inscriptions in the Zhou Dynasty

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Abstract

Sacrificing and fighting are two the most important things to one country in the early time. And fighting continued the political activity. The fighting bronze inscriptions in the Zhou Dynasty have provided so many materials to us to investigate all aspects of war culture. This paper will disclose the war goal and the primitive humanism emerging based on the words used in the bronze inscriptions in the Zhou Dynasty. We believe that the war goal focused on the political aim and economic plundering.

Keywords: the bronze inscriptions, Zhou Dynasty, war culture, war goal, plunder politics

1. Introduction

The early Chinese believed that two things were the most important for one country to survive. One was sacrificing to the gods and ancestors. The other was fighting. As we know, fighting continued the political activity. The bronze inscriptions in the Zhou Dynasty are of rich language material about war. In contrast to the oracle-bone inscriptions in the Shang Dynasty, these language materials are much systematic and complete. They so it has provided so many materials for us to investigate all aspects of war culture. This paper will discuss the war goal and the early emerging humanism.

In the Shang dynasty, people had lived on the semi-plundering economy based upon investigating the oracle-bone inscriptions. The economy is the base of society, and war serves for this economic foundation, so seemingly we can define this activity as semi-plundering war. The war goal is very practical fighting for the enemies' property, the land and the persons to be used for sacrificing to the gods and ancestors. Up to the Zhou dynasty, the war goal for plundering decreased step by step, and the war goal tended to variety. Firstly, the most important goal was to protect the regime and rulers. The claiming for the regime security and life security were written down in the bronze inscriptions in the Zhou dynasty. Secondly, we can also see the bronze inscriptions are about plundering in the Zhou dynasty.

1.1 About the Word 'Dianbao'

Its 'Dian' in the oracle-bone inscriptions was made up of two parts. One was 'container', and the other was 'household utensil' which was used to fix the container.

Dong Zuobin (1945, p. 38) and Chen Chusheng (2004, p. 487) considered that 'Dian' means 'to make something firm and stable'. The Yugong chapter of Shangshu said:

(Chinese pinyin) Dian gaoshan dachuan.

Its word-to-word translation: establish the mountain big river.

Its idiomatic translation: one had established the mountain and dredged the big river.

Kongzhu said that 'Dian' means 'to establish'.

Xingwei section of Daya chapter in Shijing said:

(Chinese pinyin) huo xian huo zuo, xi jue dian jia.

Its word-to-word translation: either offer sth up to god or present something with all respect, wash container Jue

settle down container Jia.

Its idiomatic translation: Either offering something up to god or presenting something with all respect, Washing container Jue and settle down the container Jia.

In the oracle-bone, the character figure of ‘bao’ is like an adult using his hands embracing one child on his back. Tang Lan (1981, pp. 44-45) and Rao Zongyi (1959, p. 498) said that ‘bao’ means ‘to protect’ and ‘to keep guard’.

Zhaogao chapter of Shangshu said:

(Chinese pinyin) bao shou wang wei ming ming de.

Its word-to-word translation: protect accept the king majestic order excellent merits.

Its idiomatic translation: one should protect the king’s majestic order and accept his excellent merits.

And Junshi chapter of Shangshu said:

(Chinese pinyin) bao yi you yin.

Its word-to-word translation: safeguard and administer the Yin dynasty.

Its idiomatic translation: One should safeguard and administer the Yin dynasty.

There is a word ‘dianbao’ in the inscriptions of Shuxiangfuyu Gui. The inscriptions said:

(Chinese pinyin) yong zanzao dianbao wo bang wo jia.

Its word-to-word translation: and continue protect my country my family.

Its idiomatic translation: you should continue to protect my country and my family.

1.2 About the Word ‘Hanyu’

There was a word ‘hanyu’ in the bronze inscriptions of Maogong Ding. The inscriptions said: (Chinese pinyin) Yi nai zu hanyu wang shen.

Its word-to-word translation: lead you families protect the king body.

Its idiomatic translation: you should lead your families to protect the king.

In the Chinese passing-on documents, we can see some material about this word ‘hanyu’. Yangzhu section of Liezi said:

(Chinese pinyin) renzhe, zhuaya buzuyi gong shouwei, jifu buzuyi zi hanyu.

Its word-to-word translation: person, talons and fangs not enough to be used for keep guard, skin not enough to be used for resist the attack.

Its idiomatic translation: To person, talons and fangs were not enough to be used for keeping guard, and the skin was not enough to be used for resist the attack from outside.

And Pengmengzhuan section of Houhanshu said:

(Chinese pinyin) xing zhi laoshan, ren guo xiangshuai yi bingnu hanyu.

Its word-to-word translation: walk to mountain Lao, people really each other use weapons bows arrows protect.

Its idiomatic translation: When people walked to the mountain Lao, they really used weapons, bows and arrows to protect each other.

1.3 About the Word ‘Zheng’

In the oracle-bone, its character figure of ‘zheng’ is made up of two parts: one is a square and the other is toe. Sun Yirang (1927) considered that ‘zheng’ has two items of meanings. One is ‘to walk’, and the other is ‘to go on a punitive expedition’. Luo Zhenyu (1927) believed that ‘zheng’ means ‘to go on a punitive expedition’. Wang Guowei (1917) considered that ‘to walk’ is original meaning of ‘zheng’, and ‘to go on a punitive expedition’ is its extending meaning. Wu Qichang (1959) believed that ‘zheng’ means ‘to move toward a predetermined area’.

a. (Chinese pinyin) Shiqi zhongpu bu cong wang zhengyu Fang. (shiqiding, jicheng 5.2809)

Its word-to-word translation: Shiqi many servants cannot follow the king fight against Fang. (shiqiding, jicheng 5.2809)

Its idiomatic translation: Many servants of Shiqi’s could not follow the king to fight against Fang. (shiqiding, jicheng 5.2809)

b. (Chinese pinyin) wei jiuyue Hongshu cong Wangyuan zheng Chujing.(hongshugui, jicheng 7.3950)

Its word-to-word translation: in September Hongshu follow Wangyuan fight against Chujing. (hongshugui, jicheng 7.3950)

Its idiomatic translation: Hongshu had followed Wangyuan to fight against the local state Chujing. (hongshugui, jicheng 7.3950)

c. (Chinese pinyin) wei shiyousannian zhengyue chuji renyin, wang zheng Nanyi. (wuqigui, jicheng 8.4225)

Its word-to-word translation: at 13th year in January a quarter month renyin day the king fight against Nanyi

Its idiomatic translation: The king had fought against the local state Nanyi on renyin day in a quarter of January in 13th year of the king taking office.

1.4 About the Word 'Fa'

In the oracle-bone, its character figure of 'fa' is like using dagger-axe to attack someone at his neck. Zhang Bingquan (1957-1972, pp. 14-15) believed that 'fa' is like using dagger-axe to cut one's neck. Luo Kun (1982, pp. 120-128) considered that the original meanings of 'fa' only indicated 'to cut one's head'. Guo Moruo (1965) believed that 'fa' means 'attack one using dagger-axe' and the dagger-axe must touch one's body in the character figure. Chen Mengjia (1988, p. 281) considered that 'fa' in the oracle-bone inscriptions may mean 'to kill person to sacrifice to the gods and ancestors'. Li Xiaoding (2004, pp. 2661-2662) believed that 'fa mou fang' in the oracle-bone inscriptions meant 'to go and fight against some local state'. Wu Shiqian (1982, pp. 77-82) considered that 'fa' in the oracle-bone inscriptions related to 'kill person'.

a. (Chinese pinyin) Huaiyi ganfa neiguo. (ludongyou, jicheng 10.5419)

Its word-to-word translation: Huaiyi attack native country. (ludongyou, jicheng 10.5419)

Its idiomatic translation: The local state presumptuously attacked the native country. (ludongyou, jicheng 10.5419)

b. (Chinese pinyin) yi wei Ehou Yufang shuai Nanhuaiyi Dongyi guangfa Nanguo Dongguo. (Yuding, jicheng 5.2833)

Its word-to-word translation: prince E Yufang head Nanhuaiyi Dongyi on a large scale attack Nanguo Dongguo. (Yuding, jicheng 5.2833)

Its idiomatic translation: The local prince E named Yufang lead Nanhuaiyi and Dongyi to attack Nanguo and Dongguo territory on a large scale. (Yuding, jicheng 5.2833)

c. (Chinese pinyin) yong Xianyun fangxing guang fa jingshi. (Duoyouding, jicheng 5.2835)

Its word-to-word translation: Xianyun presumptuously launch war on a large scale against the capital of a country. (Duoyouding, jicheng 5.2835)

Its idiomatic translation: and the local state Xianyun presumptuously launched war to attack the capital of the country on a large scale. (Duoyouding, jicheng 5.2835)

1.5 About the Word 'Fu'

In the oracle-bone, its character figure of 'fu' consisted of two parts. One was 'to be infant', and the other was 'hand'. There was a character made up of three parts: infant, hand and human being. Luo Zhenyu (1927, pp. 299-301) considered that this two-part character and the character consisted of three parts differentiated from the time. They were the same Chinese character at different time.

a. (Chinese pinyin) fu ren wan sanqian bashiyi ren, fu ma...pi, fu che sa liang, fu niu sanbaiwushiwu. (Xiaoyuding, jicheng 5.2839)

Its word-to-word translation: capture person 13,810 capture horse...capture war chariot 30, capture cattle 355. (Xiaoyuding, jicheng 5.2839)

Its idiomatic translation: 13,810 persons, ...horses, 30 war chariots and 355 cattle were captured in this battle. (Xiaoyuding, jicheng 5.2839)

b. (Chinese pinyin) fu rong che bai sheng shiyouqi sheng. (Duoyouding, jicheng 5.2835)

Its word-to-word translation: capture enemy war chariot 117. (Duoyouding, jicheng 5.2835)

Its idiomatic translation: 117 war chariots from enemies were captured in this battle. (Duoyouding, jicheng 5.2835)

c. (Chinese pinyin) fu rong fu ren bai you shi you si ren. (Donggui, jicheng 8.4322)

Its word-to-word translation: capture enemy 114. (Donggui, jicheng 8.4322)

Its idiomatic translation: 114 enemies were captured in this battle. (Donggui, jicheng 8.4322)

1.6 About the Word 'Huo'

In the oracle-bone, its character figure of 'huo' consisted of two section. One was 'bird', and the other was 'hand'. Luo Zhenyu (1927) considered that the character figure of 'huo' meant 'the captured bird hold by hand'. Sun Haibo (1992, p. 407) believed that the character consisted of 'bird' and 'hand' was the same character made up of 'grass', 'dog', 'bird' and 'hand' which emerged lately. Qu Wanli (1981, p. 439) considered that the two discussed characters only differentiated from the time. The simple character figure was much earlier than the complicate character.

a. (Chinese pinyin) huo guo siqianbabai...er guo. (Xiaoyuding, jicheng 5.2839)

Its word-to-word translation: seize enemy 48...2.

Its idiomatic translation: 48...2 enemies were seized in this battle. (Xiaoyuding, jicheng 5.2839)

b. (Chinese pinyin) xiu huo jue jun Yufang. (Yuding, jicheng 5.2833)

Its word-to-word translation: honor, seize their monarch Yufang. (Yuding, jicheng 5.2833)

Its idiomatic translation: It was our honor to seize their monarch Yufang. (Yuding, jicheng 5.2833)

c. (Chinese pinyin) bi ke jue di huo guo bai. (Donggui, jicheng 8.4322)

Its word-to-word translation: make conquer that enemy, seize enemy 100. (Donggui, jicheng 8.4322)

Its idiomatic translation: we conquered that enemies at last and seized 100 enemies. (Donggui, jicheng 8.4322)

1.7 About the Word 'Qu'

In the oracle-bone, its character figure of 'qu' was like 'using the hand to seize the ear'. Shang Chengzuo (1933) considered that the character figure of 'qu' was made up of two parts. One was 'hand', and the other was 'ear'. It meant 'using hand to capture the ear of enemies'. The Dasima section of Xiaguan chapter in Zhouli said:

a. (Chinese pinyin) Dashou gong zhi, xiaoshou si zhi, huozhe qu zuo er.

Its word-to-word translation: big animal shared by all people small animal owned by oneself, hunter can obtain the left ear.

Its idiomatic translation: Big animals were shared by all people and small animals were owned by the hunter. The hunter can obtain the left ear of the big animals.

b. (Chinese pinyin) zheng fan tang yuan cai, qu jue ji jin. (Jingjiangding, jicheng 5.2826)

Its word-to-word translation: attack fan, tang, yuan and cai, obtain their good bronze. (Jingjiangding, jicheng 5.2826)

Its idiomatic translation: we attacked fan, tang, yuan and cai, obtaining their good bronze. (Jingjiangding, jicheng 5.2826)

2. Conclusion

The war goal one: protect the king and his family. In the Shang dynasty, the main war goal never focused on fighting against the slaves. At that time, the slaves cannot have power to fight against the slave-owners, so the slaves' rebels cannot pose real threat on the slave-owners' regime. In the oracle-bone inscriptions, we do not see some language material about writing the slaves challenging the central slave regime. Contrast this with the main way to object the slave-owner is 'going away'. But up to the Zhou dynasty, following the feudal peasants' organization improving, they wanted to challenge the feudal central regime, putting down the central and establishing new central government. So we can see some language material about writing the king asking the local feudal princes and warriors to protect themselves and their families. The feudal governor believed that the whole country belonged to him and his families, so protecting him is to protect the country. So this is the most important war goal in the Zhou dynasty.

The war goal two: fight against the internal rebels. In the Zhou dynasty, the whole country was made up of many local feudal states. The feudal princes were in charge of these feudal states. The feudal princes and the king always have near relation. They were generally the king's sons or brothers. The country kept firm and stable based on this family relation. So, if they launch war against each other, one side had the king fought against the internal rebels, and putting down the rebels, safeguarding the authority of the central government. The other side is the local feudal princes wanted to overthrow the central government and establishing new regime.

To the central government, this war ideology and war mode did not come from the Shang dynasty, and it was a symbol of political power which indicated the central government and the king still had power to rule the whole country. So this kind of internal war against the local feudal princes was a request that a country can exist legally and rationally. So we can say this kind of war against the internal rebel was seemingly a purely political activity.

To the local feudal princes, this kind of war against the central government and the king was a political war, and the war goal was capturing the regime and becoming the highest-leading-position ruler.

The war goal three: fight against the external rebels from the remote far aliens, and plundering the property of the enemies. It was obvious that robbing the properties of the enemies was still one main war goal during this period. In the Xizhou dynasty, the central government is rather powerful, firm and stable. The rulers wished the central government to be the heart and that the local feudal princes must obey the king, and become submissive to the heart. At last, the remote far aliens must roll around this political heart, cannot rebel. If they cannot obey the king and the central government, and not be submissive to the heart, and even rebel, at this time, the remote alien became the king and the central government's enemies. The king and the central government will launch war against them, and during this time, they will plunder lands, persons, war chariots, rare metals, money (bei), livestock, and so on.

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