

STEPHEN L. FIELD

Who Told the Fortunes? The Speaker in Early Chinese Divination Records

In the formative stages of Chinese pyromancy, the cracks in cattle scapulae and turtle plastrons represented the answers to carefully formulated questions that diviners, on behalf of kings, put to the spirits.¹ Apparently, it was the gods or spirits who then communicated in reply, and the kings interpreted the divine language of the pyromantic cracks.² In this essay I look at various instances of divination from records existing in bone and bamboo in order to try to determine who was speaking. It is my hope that when we can distinguish who the narrator is in a divination text it is easier to determine what is being narrated and why. I use several primary records, the first dating to the reign of the Shang king Wu Ding (twelfth century BC), and the last record from the Qin dynasty (third century BC). To form my analysis, I make use of the fact that in this thousand-year record the character, 曰 *yue*, “to speak,” often precedes instances of divine speech, human speech and, eventually, the words of texts.

THE SPEAKER IN THE CRACKING-MAKING RECORD

Let us begin the analysis by taking a close look at pyromancy. A plastron from the period of king Wu Ding of the Shang dynasty reads as follows:³

I WOULD like to thank Sarah Allan and Constance Cook for reading early drafts of this essay. I also thank Henry Rosemont and David Keightley for their critique of later drafts. In addition, I would like to acknowledge John Kieschnick and the editorial staff of *Asia Major* for their helpful comments.

¹ Eventually, the divination statements were not questions about the future but “spells applied to the future.” See David Keightley, “Shang Divination and Metaphysics,” *Philosophy East and West* 38.3-4 (1988), p. 372.

² David Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.)* (Berkeley: California U.P., 2000), p. 101.

³ This quote combines the “positive, left side” and the “negative, right side” of a pair of complementary charges on a turtle plastron. For the original text, see Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, *Xiaotun dierben Yinxi wenzi, bingbian* 小屯第二本殷虛文字丙編 (Taipei, 1957–1972), fig. 235.1-2. See also David Keightley, *Sources of Shang History* (Berkeley: California U.P., 1978), p. 43, and Edward L. Shaughnessy, “The Composition of the *Zhouyi*” (Ph.D. diss.: Stanford U., 1983), p. 155.

己卯卜殼貞，雨 (不其雨)。王固曰：其雨，佳壬。壬午允雨。

Crack-making on *jimao*, Que divined:

It will rain. (It will not rain.)

The king, reading the cracks said: “It will rain; it will be a *ren* day.”

On *renwu* it really did rain.

In this text a diviner named Que conducts the crack-making ceremony with the charge, “It will (or will not) rain.” Then the king reads the resulting cracks and utters the prognostication, “It will rain.” The word 固 *zhan* in this passage depicts “speaking about the crack made in the bone,” and is usually followed by the redundant *yue*, “to speak.”⁴

Note that it is the king who conducts the prognostication, not the professional diviner. Since the king was a direct descendant of the spirits being consulted, it is natural to assume that the ancestral spirit was communicating to him or speaking through him. The process by which the king’s prognostication proceeded from the diviner’s charge is unclear from the bone record, but may be clarified somewhat if we take a look at an account of a Zhou dynasty bone-cracking ceremony recorded in *Zuozhuan*.⁵

In 563 BC, while the ruler of Wei was away on a military campaign, Huang’er of Zheng attacked the state of Wei. Sun Wenzhi, a lord of Wei, was considering whether to launch a counterattack.

Sun Wenzhi cracked a turtle-shell regarding pursuit, and then presented the crack to Ding Jiang. Lady Jiang asked him for the omen.

He said: 孫文子卜追之。獻兆於定姜，姜氏問繇。曰

兆如山陵	A crack like a mountain overhanging.
有夫出征	There was a chief who led a raid,
而喪其雄	Instead, ‘twas he who lost his braves.

In this passage the name of the diviner is not recorded, but his description of the crack and an accompanying 繇辭 *yaoci*, or omen text are. This three-line saying is rhymed in the original, which suggests to me that the diviner chose it from an oral repertoire, or retrieved it from some kind of diviner’s manual. In Chinese, the word *ling* 陵, in addition to meaning “height” or “mound” (as in burial mound), can also mean “to usurp, to oppress,”⁶ which is why I have translated it

⁴ Keightley, “Shang Divination and Metaphysics,” p. 41, n. 66.

⁵ Duke Xiang 10 (563 BC); see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong and London: 1861–72), vol. 5, *The Ch’un Ts’ew, with the Tso Chuen*, p. 447.

⁶ See entry no. 898 c–d in Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1957), p. 239. In *Zuozhuan* there are three instances of *ling* used to mean “usurp,” one instance meaning “over, above,” and seven instances where it

as “overhanging.” So the diviner, by his choice of words, implies that the mountain-shaped crack is oppressive, or symbolic of usurpation. The attached omen, about a raider who loses his warriors, is therefore directed at Huang’er, the usurper. Presumably, Sun Wenzhi requested a prognostication from lady Jiang, the mother of the Wei ruler, to determine the outcome of his counterattack.

Lady Jiang said, “The raider’s loss of braves is (what you will) gain from opposing the bandits.” 姜氏曰：征者喪雄，禦寇之利也。

In this bone-cracking ceremony, lady Jiang takes the place of the king in the Shang dynasty ritual. In the absence of the ruler, the mother was the most appropriate person to interpret the language of the ancestors. After she makes her prognostication, the *Zuozhuan* passage concludes with the following verification:

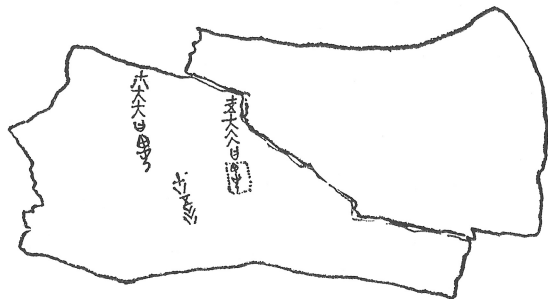
The great officers laid the plans, the people of Wei pursued them, and Sun Kuai captured Huang Er of Zheng at Hound Hill. 大夫圖之，衛人追之，孫蒯獲鄭皇耳于犬丘。

Although the Shang and Zhou crack-making rituals are separated by several centuries in time, they still maintain the same basic format of preface, charge, prognostication, and verification. As we will see later in the analysis, this format became the template for the texts of milfoil divination. Thus far in the analysis we can answer in the following manner the question posed in the title of this essay. In Shang scapulimancy, there were clearly two speakers: the ancestors whose intentions were revealed in the crack, and the king (or his surrogate) who communicated those intentions.

THE SPEAKER IN BONE RECORDS OF MILFOIL DIVINATION

My next example is a late-Shang-dynasty scapula unearthed in Sipanmo village at the Yinxu site in Anyang.

Late-Shang Sipanmo Scapula
After Kaogu (1989.7), p. 638.



means “to oppress.” There are only five passages where *ling* means “mound, height.” See Everard D. H. Fraser, *Index to the I Ching* (London: Oxford U.P., 1930), p. 398.

This bone contains three rows of inscribed numbers. Two of the number sets are followed by the word *yue*, “to say,” plus an additional character. The third number (in the middle) is inscribed upside down in relation to the others, and is not accompanied by other words. The number sets, according to Zhang Zhenglang, are the earliest records of milfoil divination.⁷

Scholars such as Tang Lan, Zhang Zhenglang, Rao Zongyi, Guan Xiechu, and Cao Dingyun have speculated as to the identification of the characters following instances of the word “to say.” For the left-most inscription, their speculations include 隗 *wei*, “lofty,” and 媿 *kui*, “shame”; for that on the right we have 魁 *kui*, “the chief,” and 畏 *wei*, “fear.”⁸ All the suggested transcriptions of the graphs share the “ghost” element, including 畏 *wei*, which in *jiaguwen* script depicts a *gui*-ghost holding an object of some kind.⁹ Such a linkage might gain further significance if we can discover clues in the numbers themselves.

Specific leads in fact are given to us, when the number sets are translated into their corresponding hexagrams from the received versions of the *Yijing*. It may seem anachronistic to discuss these number sets in terms of the hexagram structures as analyzed and discussed in such pre-Han or early-Han commentative writings as the Ten Wings. There is no evidence that the concept of *yin* and *yang*, not to mention the images that are commonly correlated with the eight trigrams (the three-line configurations that can be analyzed from any six-line hexagram), existed at this very early time, when the Sipanmo scapula was incised. What we can assume is that the Shang-era diviners did distinguish between even and odd numbers, and that three-digit number sets existed as well as six-digit numbers,¹⁰ and such a configuration was close to the early-Han style of trigrams and hexagrams.

The analysis of the Sipanmo inscriptions will begin with odd-even and trigram interplay. For the number on the far right: 757666 corresponds to Hexagram 12, “Pi 否,” and for the number on the far left: 787676 corresponds to Hexagram 64, “Wei 未濟.”

⁷ Zhang Zhenglang 張政娘, “Shishi Zhou chu qingtongqi mingwen zhong de Yi gua” 試釋周初青銅器銘文中的易卦, in *Kaogu xuebao* (1980.4), p. 404.

⁸ See Cao Dingyun 曹定云, “Yinxu Sipanmo Yi gua bugu yanjiu” 殷墟四盤磨易卦卜骨研究, *KG* (1989.7), p. 636. Also see Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, “Yindai Yi gua ji youguan zhanbu zhu wenti” 殷代易卦及有關占卜諸問題, *Wenshi* 20 (1984), p. 2.

⁹ See Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa*, nos. 569, 573.

¹⁰ Four-digit sets have also been discovered. In Zhang Zhenglang’s study, which brings together 32 number sets from bone and bronze records, only 7 were three-digit numbers, while 23 were composed of six digits. See Zhang, “Shishi Zhou chu,” p. 405.

*Hexagram 64**Hexagram 12*

Whereas Hexagram 12 is composed of three odd numbers above three even numbers, Hexagram 64 alternates one odd number

above one even number throughout the whole hexagram. These number sets are an interesting correlation. Hexagram 64 may be reduced to three pairs of numbers where an odd number always stands above an even number. Hexagram 12 may be reduced to two triples of numbers so that all odd numbers stand above even numbers. If this configuration of two hexagrams is visualized in such a manner, we might conclude that odd (or *yang*) always dominates even (or *yin*).¹¹ It seems improbable that they appeared together here by coincidence. In fact, connections are revealed by analyzing the hexagrams based on later correlative theories.

The configuration represented in Hexagram 64 was eventually to have special significance in yin-yang and *Yijing* theoretics. According to the *tuanzhuan* section of the Ten Wings, counting from the bottom, the first, third, and fifth positions in a hexagram – the odd, therefore yang lines – are considered superior, whereas the second, fourth, and sixth are considered inferior. When a solid line (that is, an odd number) occupies a superior position, or when a broken line (even number) occupies an inferior position, order and therefore good fortune are suggested. The opposite suggests disorder and misfortune.¹² In the case of Hexagram 64, each of the six positions is occupied by the improper line, that is, odd numbers always sit atop even numbers.¹³ So, from the standpoint of late-Warring States and early-Han cosmology, this hexagram represents great instability.

The same is true for Hexagram 12, when trigram imagery is taken into consideration. Pi is composed of the trigram for heaven over the

¹¹ It was conventional in the Han dynasty to number hexagram lines from the bottom up, rather than top down. Henry Rosemont (personal communication) wonders if the intended hexagrams on the scapula may actually be the reverse of those I have indicated. While this would not alter my argument, it would change the correlation from one of *yang* domination to one of *yin* domination.

¹² See Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching; or, Book of Changes*, trans. Cary F. Baynes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1967), pp. 326, 360–61.

¹³ The hexagram with the opposite configuration is no. 63, “Jiji 既濟,” whose every position is occupied by the proper line. It represents complete order.

trigram for earth. The natural movement of heaven is upwards, while that of earth is downwards; thus these two trigrams move in opposite directions, suggesting disunity.¹⁴ Hexagram 64 is composed of the trigram for fire over the trigram for water. Just as with 12, the natural movement of the top trigram (fire in this case) is upwards, while that of the bottom trigram (water) is downwards. Such movement in opposite directions also indicates disequilibrium. Therefore, Hexagrams 64 and 12 both represent disorder.¹⁵

With these correlations in mind, it seems even more unlikely that Hexagrams 12 and 64 appeared coincidentally on the Sipanmo scapula. They are both composed of “opposite” trigrams, those two pairs that occupy the “cardinal” directions implied in the so-called Fuxi configuration of the trigrams (heaven and earth in the south and north, fire and water in the east and west), also known as the *xiantian*, or “Prior Heaven,” configuration.¹⁶ All this would seem to imply that the diviners were aware of trigrams and their symbolic meanings.

The third set of numbers, 866587, corresponds to Hexagram 36, “Mingyi 明夷.” This hexagram is interesting mainly in how it relates to the other two hexagrams. Here are the three in the same order as the Sipanmo scapula, but with Hexagram 36 right side up:



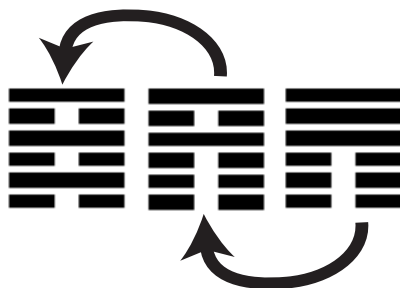
The lower trigram of Hexagram 12 (earth) is equivalent to the upper trigram of Hexagram 36. The lower trigram of Hexagram 36 (fire) is equivalent to the upper trigram of Hexagram 64. In other words, Hexagram 36 appears to connect Hexagram 12 to Hexagram 64. Its upside-down arrangement on the Sipanmo bone may indicate that the recorders wanted to bring attention to this relationship. As can be seen

¹⁴ The hexagram with the opposite configuration, the trigram for earth over the trigram for heaven, is hexagram no. 11, “Tai 泰,” or “Peace,” which is the ultimate symbol of unity in the *Yijing* system.

¹⁵ This interpretation is reflected in the hexagrams’ respective *guaci* 卦辭, or hexagram judgments, oracular-type formulas that accompany all hexagrams in the received *Yijing*. In hexagram no. 64 the *guaci* states that “nothing is beneficial 无攸利,” and in no. 12, “not beneficial for the *junzi* to determine 不利君子貞.”

¹⁶ See Wilhelm, *I Ching*, pp. 265–66.

in the following illustration, the juxtaposition of the upside-down set may indicate direction and movement. This kind of movement again is reminiscent of the “Fuxi configuration” of trigrams.



Let us now return to the characters that accompany the number sets on the Sipanmo bone. Grammatically speaking, the sentence, “X yue Y” can be read two different ways, depending on how *yue* is understood. The first is “X is called (or named) Y,” and the second is “X says Y.” In the context of the Sipanmo scapula, the second meaning can be further interpreted in at least three variant ways:

1. casting hexagram X, the diviner said “Y”;
2. “Y,” says hexagram X;
3. “Hexagram X,” says Diviner Y.

Zhang Zhenglang believes that the “ghost” words represent primordial hexagram names,¹⁷ so he would accept the “called/named” reading: “757666 is (the hexagram) named Fear.” Zhang Yachu, on the other hand, identifies the words as hexagram statements (卦辭 *guaci*).¹⁸ He bases his speculation on the similarity of the *yue* in these inscriptions to the *wang zhan yue* formula of oracle-bone inscriptions. On the Wu Ding plastron, the phrase *wang zhan yue* has the same relation to the actual crack as the word *yue* has to the numerical hexagrams inscribed on the Sipanmo scapula. On the plastron, the king is making a prognostication based on a divinatory crack. Presumably, Zhang Yachu would read the statement on the scapula as someone making a prognostication based on the hexagram derived from a divinatory event, as in the “says,” variant 1, reading. That is, “(After casting) 757666, (the diviner) said, ‘(It will be) fearful!’”

¹⁷ See Zhang “Shishi Zhou chu,” p. 405, and the translation by Jeffrey R. Ching et al., “Interpretation of the Divinatory Inscriptions on Early Chou Bronzes,” *EC* 6 (1980–81), p. 84.

¹⁸ Zhang Yachu 張亞初 and Liu Yu 劉雨, “Cong Shang Zhou bagua shuzi fuhao tan shifa de ji ge wenti” 從商周八卦數字符號談筮法的幾個問題, *KG* (1981.2), p. 158. See also the translation by Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Some Observations about Milfoil Divination Based on Shang and Zhou *bagua* Numerical Symbols,” in *EC* 7 (1981–82), p. 47.

But there are still other possibilities of interpretation. First, the “ghost” characters could be quotes from hexagram judgments that the diviner retrieves from his memory or takes from a divination manual (corresponding to a “says,” variant 2, reading). For example, “(Hexagram) 757666 says ‘Fearful!’” Second, based on the “ghost” components of the two logographs, perhaps they refer to a spirit or spirits, and the hexagrams represent their prognostications. The text could then be translated, “‘(Hexagram) 757666,’ says (spirit) Kui,” as per the “says,” variant 3, reading. Conversely, the ghost characters could be names of sacrifices, in the manner of the Baoshan divination texts (see below). Here the hexagrams could be understood as conjuring up in the mind of the diviner the proper exorcism for the divination situation (reading variant 1). That is, “(After casting hexagram) 757666 (the diviner) said ‘(perform the) Kui (sacrifice).’” Finally, the graphs could be the name of the diviner or shaman, and the hexagram would then represent what the diviner said (reading variant 3): “‘(I cast hexagram) 757666,’ said (diviner) Kui.”

On the other hand, the similarity of the two graphs leads me to think they are actually the same word written two different ways. Or, considering the proximity of the two graphs on the bone, perhaps they are two names for the same person – that is, two halves of a rhyming binome (Kui Kui or Kui Wei) in the tradition of 老考 Lao Kao or 皋陶 Gao Yao, as seen in the text of *Guicang*. To my mind there are just too many coincidences occurring on the Sipanmo scapula to believe that this inscription records a traditional divination event. It seems more likely that it records some kind of lesson or metaphysical teaching, reminiscent of chapters in the “Dazhuan” (“Great Commentary”) section of the *Yijing*’s Ten Wings.¹⁹ If that is the case, then Kui Kui may be a shaman-master whose lesson on “the disorder resulting when odd numbers (or yang) always dominate even numbers (or yin)” was recorded in bone by his students. The *yue* in the Sipanmo scapula might then be the precursor of its use in such statements as 子曰, or “the master said,” in later philosophical texts.

Summing up, we have seen how the speaker changed in the final centuries of the Shang dynasty when the divination method changed from crack-making to milfoil stalk-casting. It is no longer the king who speaks when communicating the meaning of the divine crack, but the spirit who bestows the hexagram, the diviner who casts it, or the diviner-sage who interprets it.

¹⁹ See Keightley, “Shang Divination and Metaphysics,” for a discussion of the metaphysical implications of complementarity as it existed in the late Shang.

A third example of *yue* occurs in another early milfoil divination, this scapula unearthed from an early-Zhou-dynasty site at Qishan:²⁰



Early-Zhou Qishan Scapula

After Kaogu (1981.2), p. 156.

It reads as follows:²¹

七六六七一八曰：其 ... 入王既魚。

766718 says: “Will ... send the king a gift of fish.”²²

When compared to the Sipanmo scapula, the length of this inscription limits the possibilities of meaning to the “says” reading. With the first variant, it could mean, “(After casting hexagram) 766718, (the diviner) said, ‘(They) will send the king a gift of fish.’” That would be the bone-cracking formula. The statement is certainly reminiscent of an oracle-bone injunction, because *qi* is commonly used there as a modal particle to indicate that a negative alternative “may” take place in the future. Another resemblance to oracle-bone language is the use of the verb *ru* to describe the delivery of tribute payment.

However, as in variant two, it could also mean that Y is a quote from Hexagram X. Quite likely it is not a person speaking here at all. Instead, it may have been a sentence taken from a divination manual. There are a couple of reasons to believe this may have been the case. First of all, if the traditional literary record can be believed, there is some evidence that divination manuals did exist as early as the reign of king Wu. From the “Jinteng” chapter of the *Shangshu*, we learn that when king Wu contracted a serious illness and was about to die, his brother Shu Dan, the duke of Zhou, first prayed to his ancestors using three turtles, all of which were favorable. Then,

²⁰ Fragment H11:85 from storage pit no. 11 in the western arm of a temple in Fengchu village, Qishan district, Shaanxi.

²¹ For the identification of these characters see Zhang “Shishi Zhou chu,” p. 404, and Zhang and Liu, “Cong Shang Zhou,” p. 158.

²² The ellipsis indicates that there may be missing words in the statement due to its fragmentary condition.

啓籊見書，乃并是吉。

He opened the bamboo tube and looked at the writings – they also indicated good fortune.²³

Although it does not specifically mention milfoil, from this reference we might assume a written divination manual was in existence at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty.²⁴

THE SPEAKER IN BAMBOO RECORDS OF MILFOIL DIVINATION

The possibility that the *yue* in the Qishan bone fragment marks a quotation from an unknown divination manual can be further substantiated by comparing that passage to an existing manual, the Qin-era bamboo text of *Guicang*, unearthed at Wangjiatai, Hubei, in 1993.²⁵ Each hexagram in the Qin version opens with the hexagram symbol (composed of ones and sixes), followed by the hexagram name. The hexagram name is then followed by the character *yue*, “to say,” confirming the use of that character to mean, “The hexagram says.” The text of the “Da zhuang 大壯” hexagram, number 53 in the Wangjiatai *Guicang*, is reproduced as follows:²⁶



大壯曰：昔者豐隆卜將雲雨，而支占困京。困京占之曰：吉。大山之雲降(降) ...

66 I I I I “Da zhuang” says: In antiquity, Feng Long divined about the coming clouds and rain, then had the stalks counted by Qun Jing. Qun Jing divined it, saying: “Auspicious.” Clouds of the great mountains descend. ...

Although the hexagram name and hexagram symbol are identical with its counterpart in the *Zhouyi*, the *guaci*, or hexagram statement, that follows bears no resemblance at all. In fact, it is much more reminiscent of the text of a bone-cracking ceremony, as the following comparison will illustrate.

²³ See Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong and London: 1861–72), vol. 3, *The Shoo King*, pp. 355–56.

²⁴ David Keightley envisions a “diviner’s notebook” existing as early as the late Shang (see Keightley, *Ancestral Landscape*, p. ix). According to him (personal communication), this collection of primary records, although not a manual, may have encouraged the development of such manuals.

²⁵ For the reconstituted text of the Wangjiatai *Guicang*, see Wang Mingqin 王明欽, “Wangjiatai Qin mu zhujian gai shu” 王家台秦墓竹簡概述, in Xing Wen 邢文, comp., *Proceedings of the International Conference on Newly Excavated Bamboo and Silk Texts* (Beijing: Beijing University Archaeology Department), forthcoming.

²⁶ The complete statement is reconstituted from the three incomplete bamboo slips: nos. 196, 320, and 408.

The text of the Wu Ding plastron opened with a preface that recorded:

1. the time in stem days;
2. the action of “crack-making”; and
3. the name of the diviner.

This was followed by

4. the charge or topic of divination; and
5. the prognostication.


The *guaci* text of the *Guicang* hexagram opens with:

1. the time word 昔者 *xizhe*, “anciently, once upon a time”;
2. the name of a famous figure from myth or legend;
3. the latter’s use of divination; and
4. the topic of the divination.

In the example reproduced here from the “Da zhuang” hexagram, the figure is Feng Long, the mythical god of clouds and thunder. Appropriately, the topic of divination is the manipulation of rain clouds, and the hexagram symbol for “Da zhuang” is composed of the trigram for thunder over the trigram for heaven.²⁷ The diviner in this text is an unknown ritualist named Qun Jing.²⁸ It is this individual who

5. voices the *yue* statement of prognostication.

The last example is a third- or fourth-century BC bamboo text buried in a Chu-era tomb in present-day Baoshan, Hubei province. It reads as follows:

陳乙以共命爲左尹 妣貞... 尙毋有咎?  占之: 恒貞吉, 少有憂於宮室. 以其故斂之... 五生占之曰: 吉.²⁹

Chen Yi, using the *gongming* method, divined for Vice Governor Tuo... “Shall there be no more misfortune?” 165866 > 166116.

²⁷ Other hexagram statements in this *Guicang* text also reflect the trigram imagery of their respective hexagram symbols. For example, the hexagram whose *guaci* describes the battle of Huang Di (the Yellow Emperor) and Yan Di (the Fiery Emperor) depicts “fire” under “heaven.” The hexagram that describes the rebel Chi You, who called down the clouds and rain, depicts doubled “water.”

²⁸ According to *Shuowen*, the *qun* is a round granary, whereas the *jing* is a square granary. It would follow that *qunjing* are granaries in general, or perhaps *qunjing* was the title of the official in charge of grain storage.

²⁹ Excerpted from bamboo slips nos. 228–29 in Kondo Hiroyuki 近藤浩之, “Baoshan Chu jian bushi jidao jilu yu Guodian Chu jian zhong de Yi” 包山楚簡卜筮祭禱記錄與郭店楚簡中的易, in Wuhan daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiuyuan 武漢大學中國文化研究院, ed., *Guodian Chu jian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 郭店楚簡國際學術研討會論文集 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 132.

Reading it (he said), “The long term prognostication is good, (but) there will be minor trouble in the household.” For this reason, (he) exorcised it. ... Wu Sheng divined it and said, “Good fortune.”

The structure of the Baoshan divination text is more complex than anything we have seen in this analysis, yet it, too, is reminiscent of the Wu Ding bone record. Baoshan records open with:

1. a formulaic temporal incantation describing year, month, and day.

Then follows, as in the example above,

2. the name of the diviner;
3. the method of divination; and
4. the topic of the divination, including the person for whom the divination is conducted.

Next come two number sets representing separate hexagrams, the relationship between which scholars have yet to ascertain. Following the number sets is

5. a prognostication,

presumably based on the hexagrams and conducted by the diviner. The prognostication is somewhat negative, which prompts a rite of exorcism with its list of sacrifices (not included in this example). Finally, concluding the record is a positive prognostication in a *yue* statement. Such a reversal of fortune, based as it is on a successful regimen of prayer and sacrifice, accomplishes a

6. verification statement, similar to those on early-Shang oracle bones.

After all, verifications for the most part were only recorded if they “confirmed the accuracy of the prognostication.”³⁰

In Shang divination texts, the charge is followed by the king’s reading of the crack and his subsequent *yue* prognostication. In the Baoshan divination texts, the charge is followed by a double ritual of stalk-casting conducted by an unknown diviner who prognosticates based on the two hexagrams. In the *Guicang* hexagram text, the charge is a record of divination sought in the distant past by a famous shaman. An unknown ritualist subsequently casts the milfoil stalks and makes a *yue* prognostication. The concluding statement in the Shang oracle-bone text is a statement of verification. The conclusion in the Baoshan text is a *yue* statement noting “the positive outcome of the divination,”³¹

³⁰ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, p. 44.

³¹ Constance A. Cook, “From Bone to Bamboo: Sacrificial Vessels and the Divination Event,” paper delivered at the panel “Bone, Bronze, and Bamboo: Divination and the New/Old *Guicang* Manual,” at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., 2002.

a kind of verification statement. In the Wangjiatai *Guicang*, several of the fifty-three hexagram texts conclude with rhymed verses commenting on the divination event. Following these verses, there are sometimes prognostication statements, such as “No advantage in going on a raid.”³² In the example reproduced above, all that is left of the concluding text of “Da zhuang” is the partial verse, “Clouds of the great mountains descend... .” Since the divination topic was the “impending rain,”³³ which the ritualist predicted would be auspicious, then the poetic comment depicting the clouds descending from the alpine heights is also a kind of verification.

CONCLUSION

Constance Cook has pointed out that the rhymed verses concluding *Guicang* hexagram statements are reminiscent of *Zhouyi* line statements. She also remarks that such chants or songs “hint at the actual use of Yi handbooks during the divination ritual.”³⁴ I concur with her judgment. We have seen how the character *yue* in its earliest use in oracle bone texts marked the prognostication of the king. In a later account of a bone-cracking ritual recorded in *Zuozhuan*, the *yue* marked the recitation of a rhymed omen text by a diviner, which was possibly gleaned from a divination manual. In the same account, the prognostication prompted by the omen text was voiced by the royal mother in the absence of the ruler. Next we turned to bone records of early milfoil divination events. There the *yue* marked possible shamanic commentary in the case of the Sipanmo scapula, and a quote from a divination text like the *Guicang* in the case of the Qishan scapula. Then we examined a milfoil divination event recorded on Baoshan bamboo slips. There the *yue* statement was again reminiscent of oracle-bone rituals, but in its function as verification rather than its role as prognostication. Finally, we moved on to the Qin-era *Guicang* that was recorded on bamboo slips. Here, *yue* clearly marked a quotation from an individual hexagram text. In the same record, it marked the prognostication of a shaman who assisted a mythical figure.

³² This line is from the received version of *Guicang* as redacted by Yan Kejun 嚴可均, “Gu yi” 古逸 (in *Quan shanggu sandai wen* 全上古三代文 15), p. 1b., and does not appear in the Wangjiatai bamboo text.

³³ See Shaughnessy’s translation of this hexagram text in, “The Wangjiatai *Guizang*: An Alternative to *Yijing* Divination,” forthcoming in *Orientalia Veneziana*.

³⁴ Constance A. Cook, “Omens and Myth: Thoughts on the *Guizang* Manuscript,” paper delivered at the International Conference on Newly Excavated Bamboo and Silk Texts, Beijing, 2000.

The point of the discussion has been to identify who is speaking the words of divination, because the knowledge of who is speaking is crucial to determining what is being spoken and why. When the king spoke, it was to communicate the wishes of his departed ancestor who influenced the crack in the bone or shell. At this stage in the evolution of the divinatory craft, the speaker was closest to the source of the oracle. The diviner, at one more remove from the oracle, acted not as the mouthpiece of the spirits, but as the narrator and interpreter of an oracular text: a hexagram, especially in its abstract numerical form, although similar to bone cracking, was traditionally accompanied by such a text.

The diviner's text may have been oral, and may have consisted of no more than a single word. But its very orality or brevity demanded interpretation, which may have reached the level of metaphysical speculation if the Sipanmo bone record is indeed a lesson from the diviner-sage. Eventually the divinatory text grew in length and complexity. When that point was reached, the human intermediary was no longer necessary, and the divinatory text could "speak" for itself.