A Preliminary Study of the Western Zhou Building Foundations at Yuntang in Fufeng, Shaanxi

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Keywords: Yuntang in Zhouyuan         Western Zhou building foundation         ancestral temple

From autumn 1999 through the year 2000, Zhouyuan Archaeological Team excavated a set of Western Zhou building foundations, which was well preserved and uniquely designed. It is significantly valuable for the research on the ritual system of the Western Zhou Dynasty. We here by try to make a preliminary study on its structure and function with reference of historical literature.

The remains of houses F1, F2, F3, F8 and the enclosing wall formed a complete building complex in which the F1 was the main hall at the north end of the central axis. F2 and F3 were set on the two sides of the central axis symmetrically. F8 is to the south of F1, and the enclosing wall was linking to its both sides. The east part of this complex was dug away by local residents but we still can reconstruct it based on the extant traces (Fig. 1). F5 is located to the west of this complex; from the stratigraphical relation, we know that it was built at the same time with the F1 complex, and from positions, we can get the conclusion that F5 and the F1 complex were designed and built as a unified set of buildings.

Unquestionably, F1 was the main hall of the whole complex. It was located in the central position with the largest platform and size. The first step of platform is 22 m in length, if we count its length between the outer edges of the first raises of the steps before the eastern and western gates; the full length of the platform is 23.43 m. The width of the intruding portions on eastern and western ends is 16.50 m, and the central portion, 13.10 m.

In total, 37 large column bases were found on the top of the platform, distributed in some given rule. From the columniation, we can roughly know the basic plan of this hall.

Bases Nos. 9–12, 15, 19, 22, 26–29, 17, 20, and 24 formed a spacious room, about 12 by 9 m. It was arranged in the center of the platform and should be the “Tang”-central chamber. A ring of smaller rooms were built around this central chamber, which should be “Shi”-common rooms.

“Tang” is named “Taishi 太室,” “Taishi 太室” or “Tianshi 天室” in bronze inscriptions. It is recorded in “Luo Gao 洛诰” (The Announcement Concerning Luo) of Shangshu 尚书 (Book of Documents) that “王入太室 (The King entered Taishi, and held the Guan Ceremony-poured out the libation on the ground),” “王格穆太室 (The King entered the Taishi of King Mu).” “Tang” was the center of the whole complex of ancestral temple and Hall of Enlight-
ened Rule and the location of holding ceremonies and banquets.

"Ying 檐." The bases Nos. 16 and 23 on the eastern and western sides of the central axis should be the two "Ying." In Yili Shigong 仪礼释宫 (The Commentary of Terms on Palaces and Temples Mentioned in the Ceremony and Ritual) written by Li Rugui 李如圭, we can find this record: “堂之上, 东西有楹 There are two Ying on the east and west of Tang.” The note for this sentence is ‘Ying’ is column. In the ancient times, the roofs are covered on walls built of tamped earth to make houses; only two columns were erected on ‘Tang.’ It was recorded in the chapter “Jixi Li” of Yili 仪礼·既夕礼 (the Rituals on the Eve of Funeral in the Ceremony and Ritual) that “正棺于两楹间, 用夷床… place the coffin right in the middle of the two Ying on Yichuang (platform)…” and in the chapter “Xiangshe Li” of Yili 仪礼·乡射礼 (The Archery Ceremony of Common Citizens in the Ceremony and Ritual) that “射自楹间 The archery is practiced between the two ‘Ying’.” The space between the two Ying and nearby floor was important place in the “Tang” where the host received the guests and held rituals and ceremonies.

"Xu 序.” The two side walls and nearby floor were “Xu.” It was explained by Xu Shen 许慎 in Shuowen 说文 (Explanation and Study of Principles of Composition of Characters) that “序, 东西墙也 Xu, the eastern and western walls.” It was said in Chaomiao Gongshi Kao 朝庙宫室考 (Notes on the Courts, Temples, and Palaces) that 堂上东西墙曰序, 序东为东夹室, 西为西夹室 The eastern and western walls on ‘Tang’ were called ‘Xu’; the chamber to the east of eastern Xu is eastern ‘Jiashi (flanking chamber)’ and to the west, western ‘Jiashi.’” In the chapter “Xiang Yinjiu Li” of Yili 仪礼·乡饮酒礼 (the Wine-Feasting Ceremony of Common Citizens), it is recorded that “主人坐奠爵于序..."
the host sits and holds the jue-wine vessel at the end of Xu.” Xu was mainly the places to display the ceremonial utensils.

"Shi 室" was built behind the “Tang.” Jiang Yong 江永 wrote in his Yili Shigong Zengzhu 仪礼释宫增注 (Enriched Commentary of Terms on Palaces and Temples Mentioned in the Ceremony and Ritual): “堂后室居中,左右有房 behind the ‘Tang,’ ‘Shi’ was in the middle and flanked by ‘Fang’ on both sides.” “Shi” was the place to set the memorial shrines of the worshipped ancestors.

“Fang 房” was explained in Shuowen as “房, 室 in the main hall and in the outer courts, the two side chambers of Shi.” The eastern Fang was also called Left Fang and the western Fang, Right Fang. It was recorded in the chapter “Dashe” of Yili 仪礼 - 大射 (The Archery of Officials) that “荐脯醢由左房 was served and the western Fang was the place where the food and meat pulp are served from the Left Fang,” and in the book Pindi 聘礼 (The Ceremony of Receiving Officials from other States) “君使卿皮弁还至于馆…, (宾) 退负右房而立 when the messenger of the host lord wearing leather headwear returned to the guesthouse, … (the guest official) walked backward until he leaned against the Right Fang.” From these records, we can infer that the eastern Fang was the place where the food was served and the western Fang was the place for the guests to rest.

“Jiashi 夹室” was also called “个 Ge.” In the book Shiming 释名 (Explanation of Names), “Fang” was explained as “房, 室 in the main hall and in the outer courts, the two side chambers of Shi.” The eastern Fang was also called Left Fang and the western Fang, Right Fang. It was recorded in the chapter “Zaji” of Yili 仪礼 - 杂记 (Miscellany) that “when the wife (of the Lord) comes, enter from Weimen 门 (The small gate of the court), and ascend from the Ce Jie.” Annotated as “Ce Jie, also called Pang Jie (Side Steps).”

Eastern and Western Xiang 厢. Also called eastern and western Tang. Guo Pu 郭璞 annotated the “Shi Gong” of Erya 尔雅 - 释宫 (The Explanations of the Terms of the Palace) (Literary Expositor) that “夹室前堂谓之厢, the Tang in front of the Jiashi were called ‘Xiang’.” In the chapter “Shigong” of Yili 仪礼 - 释官 (The Commentary of Terms on Palaces and Temples Mentioned in the Ceremony and Ritual), it was recorded that “夹室之右曰厢, 亦曰东西堂 the front of Jiashi was called ‘Xiang,’ or eastern and western ‘Tang.’” The sites of F2 and F3 just meet the positions of eastern and western ‘Tang’, and there were seemingly traces of steps to the eastern edge of F2 and western edge of F3. To have or not to have Xiang was related to the nature of the building. Also in the chapter “Shi Gong” of Erya (The Explanations of the Terms of the Palace) we can find that “室有东西厢曰庙, 无东西厢有室曰寝 the halls having eastern and western side chambers were called Miao 寝 (Temple), having no side chambers but rear chamber were called Qin (Sleeping chamber).”

Liu 廪. It was explained by Xu Shen in Shuowen that “屋檐滴水为宬, 其地谓之宬 the rain water dripping from the eave was named Liu, and the ground on which it dripped on was also called Liu.” This implies that “Liu” was the apron surrounding the tamped-earth platform. The apron around the platform of F1 was paved exquisitely with small pebbles. The fact that apron surrounded four sides of the platform implied that the roof of F1 was at least hipped roof, or even double-eaved hipped roof, but if it was exactly doubled eaved, is still waiting for more study.

Shu 塾. It was explained in the chapter “Shi Gong” of Erya that “门侧之堂谓之塾 the Tang flanking the gate was called Shu.” It was said in Chaomiao Gongshi Kao 朝庙宫室考 (Notes on the Courts, Temples, and Palaces) that “庙外为门…, 左右为塾, 塾有堂, 堂
Zhong Ting 中庭 (the Central Court). It was explained in Shuowen that “庭，宫中也 Ting, the name of the inside of Palace.” In Yuhai 玉海 (Jade Sea, a general classification book written by Wang Yinglin 1223–1296) it was commented that “堂下至门谓之庭 the area from the bottom of Tang to the Gate was called Ting.” Ting was the main place for entitling the subjects, paying awards and holding sacrificial rites. It was recorded in the chapter “Shi Sangli”的 reconstruction, in《仪礼·士丧礼》that “卜人先奠龟于西塾 the diviner paid offers to the turtle first in the western Shu,” which implied that Shu was also used as location of divination.

Zhong Chun zhi Yue 中春之月 (the middle month of the Spring Season) of the Yueling (Proceedings of Government in the Different Months) of Liji 礼记·月令·仲春之月 that “put their sleeping chambers and temples all in good repair.” The commentary of this sentence was “according to the system, Miao (temples) have eastern and western Xiang (side chambers) and the Xu (side walls) but Qin (Sleeping Chambers) had only Shi (the chamber behind Tang). Therefore, in the chapter “Shi Gong” of Erya it was said that “室有东西厢曰庙，无东西厢有室曰寝 the halls having eastern and western side chambers were called Miao (Temple), having no side chambers but rear chamber were called Qin (Sleeping Chamber).” Based on the shape and planning of the remains and the historical literatures, we inferred that F5 could be a Qin, where the King and noble people stay for leisure, resting, and dining.

II. Comparative Research and Deducing of the Properties of the Building Complex

1. The comparison with the reconstructions in ancient literatures

There were many ancient scholars who afforded different reconstruction plans of ritual architecture in the Zhou Dynasty, such as Mingtang, ancestral temples, Shishi 世室 and Qin. These reconstruction plans had many differences in the details but the general planning and the arrangements of the parts were almost in common, for example, the positions of Tang, Jia, Ting, and Shi. Among these plans, Dai Zhen戴震’s reconstruction, in our opinion, was the most reasonable and all-sided, and met the plan of the F1 complex we excavated (Fig. 2). Comparing Dai Zhen’s reconstruction with the F1 complex, we found that most parts of them have counterparts each other. Therefore, both the historical records and facts provided powerful evidence for our knowing the structure of Fi complex and confirming its nature.

2. The comparative research with Group A in Fengchu 凤雏 site and complex in Shaochen 召陈

Group A was an enclosing courtyard-shaped building group. Some scholars pointed out that it was ancestral temple; but we think that its structure and planning were much less similar to the records about ancestral temple in the ritual literatures than F1 Complex in Yuntang, and many parts did not tally with the historical records. As to the architectural complex in Shaochen, the extant excavation result was fragmental that we cannot judge the overall planning, so it is rather difficult for us to infer its nature. Referring to these two architec-
tural groups, we believe that the F1 complex in Yuntang was a more typical case of ancestral temple and can be regarded as the sample of ancestral temple of the Western Zhou Dynasty.

Some fragments and half-products of musical stone, pieces of large bronze ritual vessels and jade gui-tablets were discovered to the south of F1 complex and in the courtyard of F4. From the shape of the bronze pieces, we inferred that some bronze vessels were rather large, which proved our conclusion that they were ritual building groups. These fragments of ritual objects should be left by those people holding ritual activities in these buildings.

3. The comparative research with ancestral temple No. 1 of the Qin State in Majiazhuang

F1 complex in Yuntang resembled the ancestral No. 1 in Majiazhuang very much: both were enclosing 品-shaped courtyard complex; the gates with “Shu” of both were in the middle of the south side of the complex; the direction of both were north slightly by east; the remains of “Boshe 亳社 (the altar for offering sacrifices to the Kings of the Shang Dynasty, which was destroyed by the Zhou Dynasty)” were discovered between the north walls and the platform of northern halls of both. However, they had differences. The three halls in the complex of Majiazhuang were in the same size and planning but in the F1 complex of Yuntang, the structures of F2 and F3 were simpler and sizes were smaller than those of F1, showing clearly that they were subordinate buildings. The path in the courtyard of ancestral temple No. 1 in Majiazhuang linked the western and eastern halls, and many sacrificial pits were found in the courtyard; the path in the courtyard of F1 complex in Yuntang led to the Bin Steps and Zuo Steps of the main hall and no sacrificial pits were found in the courtyard, which met the records in the ritual literatures.

Through the analyses to all of the parts of the F1 complex, and the comparative researches with Group A in Fengchu site and ancestral temple No. 1 of the Qin State in Majiazhuang, we drew a preliminary conclusion that the remains of building groups excavated in Yuntang was ancestral temple. As to the rank of the host of this temple, the king of the Zhou Dynasty or noble people, is still waiting for more study.

III. Conclusion

1. The remains of architectural complexes F1 and F4 excavated in Yuntang was ancestral temple in the later stage of the Western Zhou Dynasty. As to the rank of the host of this temple—the king of the Zhou Dynasty or noble people—is still waiting for more study.

2. The shape and structure of Yuntang ancestral temple met tightly the results of the reconstruction researches on the ancestral temples of the Zhou Dynasty by the ancient scholars in the angle of historical documents. This meeting not only helped us to know deeply on this architectural complex, but also proved that the records in the ancient literatures were not groundless. This discovery is significant for the study on the ancient ritual system and the affirming of ancient literatures.

3. The F1 complex in Yuntang resembled the ancestral No. 1 in Majiazhuang very much and could be regarded as the origin of the ancestral temple system of Qin State. It was also high-ranked architecture rarely seen in the Three Dynasties (the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties) archaeology. From pottery and burial systems, we have found that the mainstream of Qin culture in the Western Zhou Dynasty and early stage of the Springs and Autumn period; now from the ritual architecture,
we proved that the main resource of Qin culture was Zhou culture.

References


Note: The original paper is published in Kaogu 2002.9: 27–35, with four illustrations, written by Xu Lianggao 徐良高 and Wang Wei 王巍. The present version, an abridgment from the original, is prepared by the author Wang Wei and English-translated by Ding Xiaolei 丁晓雷.