

# The Place of Yi Yin in the Shang Pantheon

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TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER J. FOSTER

In her book *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*, Sarah Allan discusses the figure of Yi Yin 伊尹: “Yi Yin, the founding minister of Tang and the regent of Tang’s grandson Tai Jia according to the traditional texts, receives sacrifices and influences natural phenomena in the same manner as the ancestors of the Shang kings, though he has no cyclical name and was clearly not an ancestor.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, when analyzing the relationship between Yi Yin and Tai Jia 太甲, she notes that the “Yin benji” 殷本紀 chapter of the *Shiji* 史記 describes Yi Yin as voluntarily returning the rule back to Tai Jia. Yet, in the *Guben zhushu jinian* 古本竹書紀年, Yi Yin did not bestow the rule on Tai Jia, rather Tai Jia killed Yi Yin. Allan remarks: “I do not see why the account of Yi Yin and Tai Jia’s struggle in the *Guben Zhushu Jinian* need . . . be taken as more historical than other early accounts.”<sup>2</sup> She thus questions the reliability of the *Guben zhushu jinian* on this event. Allan points out that when Yi Yin replaces Tai Jia, this “is a confirmation of the right of virtue over heredity,” but he ultimately returns the rule back to Tai Jia “[because of] Tai Jia’s right by heredity,” and, in doing so, “he

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voluntarily subordinates his power and right to rule by virtue to the heir's hereditary right to the throne.”<sup>3</sup>

Although our historical records offer differing accounts of Yi Yin's heritage and how he became Cheng Tang's 成湯 assistant, it is clear that he did not belong to the Shang 商 royal family through lineal descent. The *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 chapter “Benwei” 本味 narrates a myth about Yi Yin's birth, claiming that one day a daughter of Youshen 有侁 was out picking mulberries and found the infant Yi Yin in a hollow mulberry tree. This was because “his mother resided by Yi River” 其母居伊水之上, and, when the town flooded, her body transformed into a hollow mulberry tree.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Yi Yin's tribal name, Yi 伊, is taken from the Yi River 伊水, despite the fact that he was raised by the Youshen tribe. The word written *shen* 侁 in the name Youshen is sometimes also written as *shen* 莘. The “Benwei” chapter moreover claims that Yi Yin joined Cheng Tang when he came with Youshen as an attendant for her marriage to Tang; the “Yin benji” also claims this.<sup>5</sup> Thus, we know that the Youshen tribe was once connected to the Shang royal lineage through marriage. In light of this, Yi Yin belongs to the “Shang people” in the broader sense of this term (namely, as a clan group based on lineal descent but also including extra-lineal members who belonged to tribes attached to the clan via marriage and in other ways).

The appearance of Yi Yin in the Shang royal sacrificial records on late Shang oracle-bone inscriptions (hereafter OBI), show that the *Guben zhushu jinian* claim that Yi Yin was killed by Tai Jia is false. Scholars noticed this contradiction early on, and Allan is undoubtedly correct to question the historicity of the *Guben zhushu jinian* account.<sup>6</sup>

A proverb given in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, “Duke Xi” 僖公, year ten, states: “Spirits do not relish sacrifices from those not of their kind; and the people do not offer sacrifices to those not of their clan” (神不歆非類民不祀非族).<sup>7</sup> That this was indeed the guiding principle behind sacrificial practices in early China is substantiated by our extant data. Yet Yi Yin, who was neither a Shang ancestral king, nor even related to the Shang by lineal descent, still received sacrifices from Shang royalty. The reason for this must be because, as our historical records document, Yi Yin once aided Cheng Tang in defeating the Xia 夏; and he, moreover, helped rectify Tai Jia's behavior. Therefore, he was regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Shang dynasty. An anecdote about an official named Zhan Qin 展禽, recorded in the *Guoyu* 國語 “Lu yu, shang” 魯語上 is often raised to interpret this phenomenon, because it concerns a similar case where a nonblood relative received sacrifices.<sup>8</sup> At the time of Duke Xi of Lu 魯僖公, a seabird (named

Yuanju 爰居) perched outside the eastern gate of Lu for three days, and the minister Zang Wenzhong 臧文仲, who was in charge of the government then, directed people from the domain to offer sacrifices to it. Zhan Qin thought that this was improper, so he explained:

Sacrifices are important ceremonies (that order) the state. One must therefore be careful in establishing sacrifices, as they constitute a canon (of activities regulating) our state. Now, without reason, you have added to this canon (of sacrificial procedures), which is inappropriate for a good ruler. When the sage kings (first) established sacrifices, they sacrificed to those who brought order to the people, who died in service (to the realm), who labored to found our state, who were able to manage great disasters, and who guarded against great perils. Anything not of this sort was not included in our canon of sacrifices.

夫祀，國之大節也，故慎制祀以為國典，今無故而加典，非政之宜也。夫聖王之制祀也，法施於民則祀之，以死勤事則祀之，以勞定國則祀之。能禦大災則祀之，能捍大患則祀之。非是族也，不在祀典。

What this anecdote proves is that, during the Pre-Qin period, in addition to offering sacrifices to blood relatives, sacrifices could be made to figures who served the domain and its people in an extraordinary fashion. This rule is also recorded in the *Liji* 禮記 chapter “Jifa” 祭法, which will later be discussed further.

In fact, in addition to sacrificing to meritorious figures like the ancestral spirits and Yi Yin, the Shang also offered sacrifices to nature spirits, such as the Fang 方 (lit., regions) and Tu 土 (She 社; lit., altars of the soil), as well as entities whom we have yet to fully identify, such as X 𠄎. As Yi Yin was a spirit not tied to the Shang royal clan via lineal descent, what do Shang OBI tell us about his sacrifices?

### Yi Yin’s Day-Name (*riming* 日名)

Among the extant divination inscriptions from Yinxu 殷墟, none from the Bin 賓 diviner group of Wu Ding’s reign include sacrifices to Yi Yin. The inscriptions that do mention Yi Yin belong to a nonroyal set of OBI (*fei wang buci* 非王卜辭), specifically, Yi 1 (乙一), dated to approximately the

mid-Wu Ding 武丁 reign, and Li 1 (歷一), dated to the late Wu Ding reign.<sup>9</sup> It therefore appears that the absence of Yi Yin in Bin group inscriptions was not necessarily because Yi Yin was precluded from sacrifices during Wu Ding's reign, or that Yi Yin was only belatedly incorporated into sacrificial ceremonies. Rather, this absence may relate to the institutional roles performed by the Bin diviner group; for instance, they may not have overseen matters in which Yi Yin was supplicated via divination.

An analysis of inscriptions with content related to Yi Yin sacrifices reveals that these sacrifices mostly fell on *ding* 丁 days. Consider, for instance:<sup>10</sup>

Crack-making on a . . . *mao* day by Zi, on the coming *ding* day we will perform the *rong*-rite with four *lao*-sacrifices . . . Yi Yin.

卯子卜，來丁酉四牢. . . 伊尹 (HJ 21573, Yi 1, fig. 1.1:1)

Crack-making on a *guichou* day by Zi, on the coming *ding* day we will perform the *rong*-rite, Yi Yin arrives.

癸丑子卜，來丁酉，伊尹至 (HJ 21574, Yi 1, fig. 1.1:2)

Crack-making on a *xinbai* day, Yi Yin arrives, use one ox.

辛亥卜，至伊尹用一牛 (HJ 21575, fig. 1.1:3)

Crack-making on a *yisi* day . . . Yi Yin . . . on the *dingwei* day . . . use this.

乙巳卜，. . . 伊尹 . . . 于丁未 . . . 茲用 (HJ 32792, Li 1)

On the coming day *dinghai* offer a *sui*-rite to Yi . . .

于來日丁亥又歲伊 . . . (HJ 32795, Li 1, fig. 1.1:4)

On a *guihai* day, it was divined: Should we offer a report to Yi Yin, let us on this present *dingmao* day perform the *rong*-rite with three oxen. Use this.

癸亥貞，其又于伊尹，夷今丁卯酉三牛，茲用 (TN 1122 partial, Li 2)

Crack-making on a *jiazi* day, offer (sacrifices) to Yi Yin, (on the) *dingmao* day.

甲子卜, 又于伊尹, 丁卯 (HJ 32785, Li 1, figure 1.1:5)

Crack-making on a *yisi* day . . . Yi Yin . . . on the *dingwei* day.

乙巳卜 . . . 伊尹 . . . 于丁未 (HJ 32793, Li 2)

To Yi, let it be the *dingyou* day.

于伊, 夷丁酉 (HJ 32550, Li 2, figure 1.1:6)

On the coming *dinghai* day, offer the *sui*-rite to Yi.

于來丁亥又歲伊 (HJ 32746, Li 2, fig. 1.1:7)








			
1. HJ 21573	2. HJ 21574	3. HJ 21575	
			
4. HJ 32796	5. HJ 32785	6. HJ 32550	7. HJ 32746

Figure 1.1. Oracle-Bone Inscriptions on Sacrificing to Yi Yin on *Ding* Days (1). Source: Guo Moruo 郭沫若, ed., Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, comp., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1978–1982).

In OBI that divine about sacrificial matters, the day on which the divination occurred is not necessarily the same day on which a given spirit should receive sacrifices. The inscriptions listed here, however, clearly divine whether Yi Yin should be sacrificed to on *ding* days.<sup>11</sup> The name Yi 伊 (with only a single character) has long been regarded as an abbreviation for Yi Yin. Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 suspects: “When the character *yi* 伊 appears in this way, it stands for the two characters *yi yin* 伊尹.” This is quite likely the case.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars have also noted the following set of inscriptions:<sup>13</sup>

On a *jiayin* day, it was divined: Yi (receives) *sui*-rites, coinciding with a Bao Ding day.

On a *jiayin* day it was divined: Yi (receives) *sui*-rites, coinciding with a Da Ding day.

甲寅貞，伊歲，蕞（遘）報丁日

甲寅貞，伊歲，蕞（遘）大丁日 (TN 1110, Li 2, fig. 1.2:1)

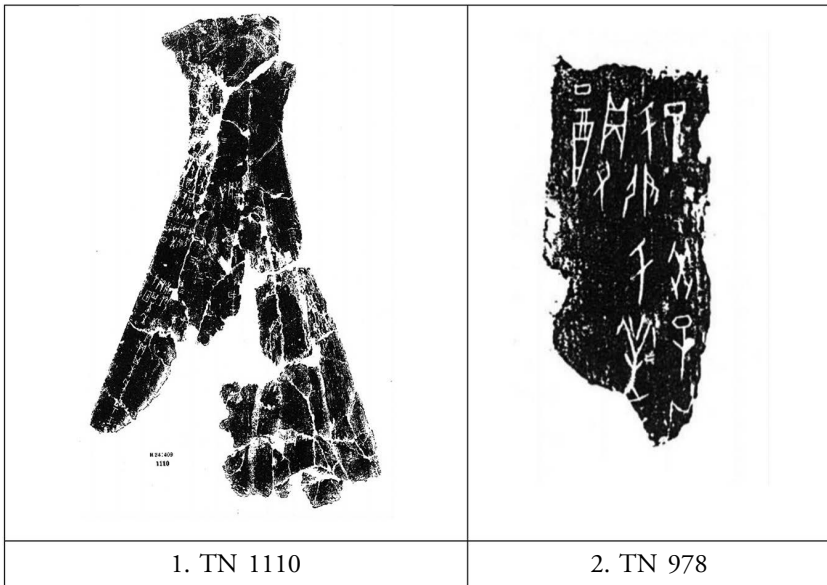


Figure 1.2. Oracle-Bone Inscriptions on Sacrificing to Yi Yin on *Ding* Days (2).  
 Source: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所, ed., *Xiaotun nandi jiagu* 小屯南地甲骨, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980–1983).

The days on which *sui*-rites were performed for Yi Yin fall on the same day when sacrifices were offered to Bao Ding 報丁 and Da Ding 大丁, which were clearly also *ding* days.

From the previously listed oracle-bone inscriptions, we may surmise that, by the late Shang period, the Shang kings mainly believed that sacrifices to Yi Yin ought to be conducted on *ding* days. Examples from other inscriptions show that, when the recipient of sacrifices is a human spirit, the day they receive sacrifices corresponds to what is then their “day-name” (*riming* 日名). If this holds true for Yi Yin as well, then it is possible that his day-name was Ding. In fact, in the following inscription, the name Yi Ding 伊丁 appears:

On a *dingyou* day it was divined: Offer (sacrifices) to Yi Ding.

丁酉貞，又于伊丁 (TN 978, Li.2, fig. 1.2:2)

The character *ding* 丁 in the name Yi Ding is read by some scholars as *beng* 禋, the name of a sacrifice,<sup>14</sup> but as HJ 32785 (quoted earlier) reveals, the grammar of this line allows for the name of the sacrifice’s recipient to follow after the phrase “offer (sacrifices) to” (*you yu* 又于). This would mean that the term Yi Ding 伊丁 is a name and that *ding* is potentially the day-name granted to Yi Yin. Of course, this inscription (TN 978) may also be read as: “On the *dingyou* day it was divined: Offer (sacrifices) to Yi, (on a) *ding* day.” In other words, it is feasible that a break is implied between the name Yi and the word *ding*. This reading also parallels the structure of HJ 32785, which says: “Offer (sacrifices) to Yi Yin, (on a) *dingmao* day.” If this is the case, TN 978 would then state that “on the *dingyou* day it was divined whether or not to offer (sacrifices) to Yi on a *ding* day.”<sup>15</sup> Note, however, that this divination took place on a *dingyou* day, a *ding* day already. Grammatically speaking, we would therefore expect the diviner to ask whether or not “today” (*jin ri* 今日) or a “coming *ding* day” (*lai ding* 來丁) was appropriate for the sacrifice, making the general question of “on a *ding* day” seem somewhat out of place in the context of this line.

Since Yi Yin appears to have been granted a day-name, sacrificing to him accords fully with Shang religious custom. He was incorporated into the sacrificial canon as a human spirit with the day-name of Ding. This also agrees with our previous discussion about Yi Yin’s heritage, as his tribe was originally part of the “Shang” clan group. Sacrifices to Yi Yin, therefore, rightfully belonged within the Shang cultural sphere.

Yi Yin in Relation to the Former Lords (*xiangong* 先公)  
and High Ancestors (*gaozu* 高祖)

Earlier scholarship on OBI and Shang history refers to Da Yi 大乙 (Cheng Tang) and the Shang rulers who followed after him as the “Former Kings” (*xianwang* 先王). The royal lineage for this period of Shang history is well known and is without major complications. The ancestors prior to Da Yi to whom the Shang kings sacrificed, as seen in OBI, are customarily called the “Former Lords” (*xiangong* 先公).<sup>16</sup> The Former Lords include six kings, from Shang Jia 上甲 to Shi Gui 示癸, who are thought to belong to the royal family through lineal descent. These six figures are included in the Zhou sacrificial calendar and received sacrificial offerings in the same fashion as Da Yi and the latter Former Kings.<sup>17</sup> The circumstances surrounding the Former Lords who came before Shang Jia are more complex, with Nao 夔 and Wang Hai 王亥 all regarded as “High Ancestors” (*gaozu* 高祖) by the Shang people; He 河 and Yue 嶽 enjoyed a similar status.<sup>18</sup> He (lit., “river”) and Yue (lit., “mountain”) were originally the names of nature spirits, but in OBI they are strongly anthropomorphized, a phenomenon common in ancient China.<sup>19</sup> Yi Yin once assisted Da Yi (Cheng Tang), so we might expect that sacrifices to Yi Yin would resemble those to the Former Kings; however, the OBI reveal that the status Yi Yin enjoyed in the Shang pantheon was more akin to that of the Former Lords and High Ancestors. For example:

Crack-making on the *guimao* day, offer a *hui*-prayer for rain  
to Shi Ren.

To Shang Jia offer a *hui*-prayer for rain.

Crack-making on the *guimao* day, let it be Yi who drinks.

癸卯卜，棗雨于示壬

于上甲棗雨

癸卯卜，亓伊畬 (HJ 32344 partial, Li 2, fig. 1.3:1)

(Crack-making) on the *guisi* day, offer (sacrifices) to Yi Yin with  
five oxen.

Crack-making on the *guisi* day, offer (sacrifices) to X, use this.

Crack-making on the *guisi* day, offer (sacrifices) to He, do not  
use this.

Crack-making on the *guisi* day, offer (sacrifices) to Wang Hai.



癸巳, 又于伊尹牛五  
 癸巳卜, 又于𠄎, 茲用  
 癸巳卜, 又于河, 不用  
 癸巳卜, 又于王亥 (HJ 34240 partial, Li 2, fig.1.3:2)

Crack-making on the *renzi* day, offer (sacrifices) to Yi Yin.  
 Crack-making on the *renzi* day, offer (sacrifices) to Yue.  
 . . . Should we . . . royal house.

壬子卜, 又于伊尹  
 壬子卜, 又于岳.  
 . . . 其 . . . 王家 (HJ 34192 partial, Li 2)

On the *bingyin* day, it was divined: Offer (sacrifices) to X, perform a *liao*-burning rite with minor slaves, splitting open an ox. Use this. It did not rain.

On the *bingyin* day, it was divined: Offer X *sui*-rite to Yi Yin with two *lao*-sacrifices.

丙寅貞, 又于𠄎, 燎小宰, 卯牛, 茲用. 不雨  
 丙寅貞, 又夕歲于伊尹二宰 (TN 1062 partial, Li 2)

On the *yisi* day, it was divined: Should we offer a *hui*-prayer for grain to Yi or perform an *yi*-rite?

On the *renzi* day, it was divined: Should we offer a *hui*-prayer for grain to He or perform a *liao*-burning rite with three minor slaves, drowning three?

乙巳貞, 其稔禾于伊, 宜  
 壬子貞, 其稔禾於河, 燎三小宰, 沈三 (TN 93 partial, Li 2, fig. 1.3:3)

In the previously listed inscriptions, diviners ask about which spirits they should sacrifice to when giving *hui*-prayers for rain and for growing grains but do not discuss the specific days these sacrifices should be held. Yi Yin features together with the Former Lords of the Shang in these divi-

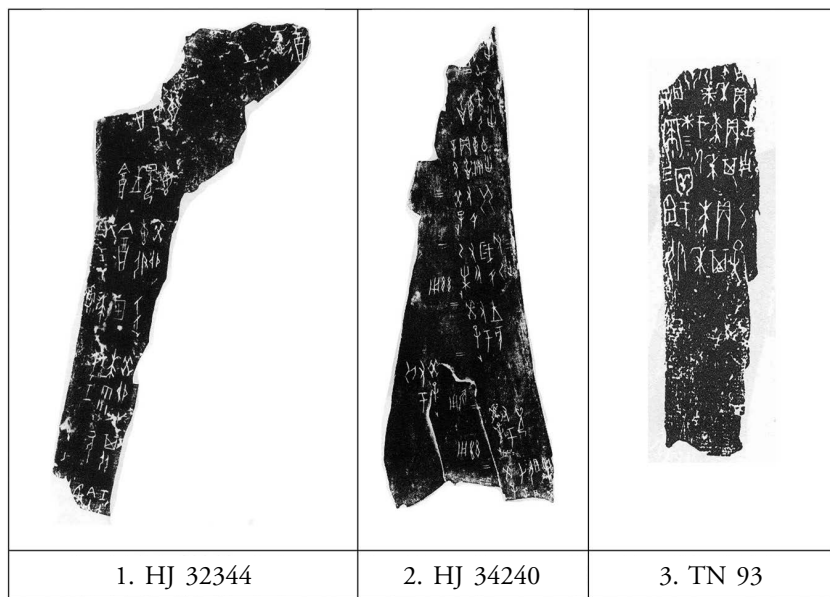


Figure 1.3. Oracle-Bone Inscriptions with *Hui*-Prayers for Rain and Grain Directed Jointly to Yi Yin and the Former Lords. *Source*: 1 and 2: Guo Moruo 郭沫若, ed., Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, comp., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1978–1982); 3: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所, ed., *Xiaotun nandi jiagu* 小屯南地甲骨, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980–1983).

nations. This does not imply that each spirit would have received sacrifices on the same day; it shows only that, in the minds of the Shang people when supplicating their ancestors for aid, Yi Yin possessed similar powers to those held by these Former Lords.

The appellation Yi Shi 伊奭 is also seen in these oracle-bone inscriptions:

On the *bingyin* day, it was divined: Let us on the *dingmao* day perform a *rong*-rite to X.

On the *bingyin* day, it was divined: On the *gengwu* day perform a *rong*-rite to X.

On the *dingmao* day, it was divined: On the *gengwu* day perform a *rong*-rite and *liao*-burning rite to X.

On the *gengwu* day, perform a *liao*-burning rite to Yue, following which it will rain.

On the *renshen* day, it was divined: Offer a *hui*-prayer for grain to Nao.

On the *renshen* day, it was divined: Offer a *hui*-prayer for grain to He.

On the *renshen* day, perform a *gang*-rite to Yi Shi (or Yi's consort).

It will rain. Today it rained.

丙寅貞，庚丁卯酌于𠄎，  
 丙寅貞，于庚午酌于𠄎，  
 丁卯貞，于庚午酌寮于𠄎，  
 庚午燎于岳，又從才雨。  
 壬申貞，粢禾于夔。  
 壬申貞，粢禾于河。  
 壬申，剛（剛）于伊奭。  
 佳其雨。  
 今日雨。(HJ 33273, Li 2, fig. 1.4)

The name Huang Shi 黃奭 appears in the oracle-bone inscriptions as well, where Huang likely refers to Huang Yin 黃尹.<sup>20</sup> Opinions differ on how to interpret the character transcribed here as *shi* 奭.<sup>21</sup> Yet, whenever *shi* is found in a name other than that of Yi Shi or Huang Shi, it is always for a female consort of a Former Lord or Former King, and never for a male figure. Consorts of the Former Lords (and Former Kings), however, do not directly receive sacrificial offerings; nor are there divinations directed jointly to both them and the Former Lords. Therefore, if Yi Shi does ultimately refer to Yi Yin's consort, and she possesses the same powers as a Former Lord, then this must derive from the special status of Yi Yin. When inscriptions entreat Yi Yin to enact his powers, for the most part they do not also entreat those Former Kings who follow after the Former Lords. Thus, even though Yi Yin is of the same generation as Tang, he (and his consort, should Yi Shi in fact be female) occupied a special status in the Shang pantheon, akin to that of the spirits of the Former Lords. This was likely the result of the mythologization of Yi Yin's image among the Shang people, several genera-



Figure 1.4. Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Related to Yi Shi (HJ 33273). *Source:* Guo Moruo 郭沫若, ed., Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, comp., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1978–1982).

tions after Tang's rule. What this proves is that Yi Yin's elevated status was not just a construction of the Zhou but began with the Shang themselves.

### Yi Yin's Powers as a Spirit

Sarah Allan mentions, in the quotation given at the beginning of this chapter, how Yi Yin was able to influence natural phenomena. From our inscriptional evidence, this was indeed the case. See for instance the following inscriptions, relating to Yi Yin's powers as a spirit:

Do not offer a *hui*-prayer to Yi Yin, no rain.

弔禱于伊尹，亡（無）雨。（HJ 27656, Unnamed, fig. 1.5:1)

Yi Yin . . . provided a torrential rain.

伊尹 . . . 又 (有) 大雨. (HJ 27657, Unnamed)

Crack-making on the *guimao* day, offer a *hui*-prayer for rain to Shi Ren.

To Shang Jia offer a *hui*-prayer for rain.

Crack-making on the *guimao* day, let it be Yi who drinks.

Let it be at the settlement where the king drinks.

Let it be Yi who drinks.

癸卯卜，禱雨于示壬。

于上甲禱雨。

癸卯卜，夷伊畬。

夷邑王畬。

夷伊畬. (HJ 32344, Li 2)

On the *bingyin* day, it was divined: Perform a *liao*-burning rite with three minor slaves, splitting open an ox . . . to . . .

On the *bingyin* day, it was divined: Offer X *sui*-rite to Yi Yin with two minor slaves.

Crack-making on the *wuchen* day, this evening it will rain.

This evening it will not rain.

丙寅貞，燎三小宰，卯牛 . . . 于 . . .

丙寅貞，又夕歲于伊尹二宰

戊辰卜，及今夕雨

弗及今夕雨 (HJ 33273 partial, Li 2)

In the two previous sets of inscriptions, we can discern from the context of the consecutive lines that the purpose of allowing Yi Yin to drink 畬 and of offering a *sui*-rite 歲 to Yi Yin with two minor slaves was to bring about rain.

Crack-making on the *dingwei* day, Yi will bring harmful rains.

丁未卜，惟伊蚩雨 (HJ 32881, Li 2, fig. 1.5:2)

On the *yisi* day it was divined: Should we offer a *hui*-prayer for grain to Yi, perform an *yi*-rite.

On the *renzi* day it was divined: Should we offer a *hui*-prayer for grain to He, perform a *liao*-burning rite with three minor slaves, drowning three.

乙巳貞，其禱禾于伊，宜。

壬子貞，其禱禾于河，燎三小宰，沈三 (TN 93, Li.2, fig. 1.5:3)

It is Yi [Shi] who will pacify the winds.

. . . Yi [Shi] who will pacify the winds.

其寧風伊[禩]

. . . 寧風伊禩 (HJ 30259, Unnamed, fig. 1.5:4)

From these OBI, we find that Yi Yin can influence the weather and, in particular, is in charge of rains and pacifying winds. Since rainfall is obviously closely related to agricultural harvest, the Shang Kings “offer

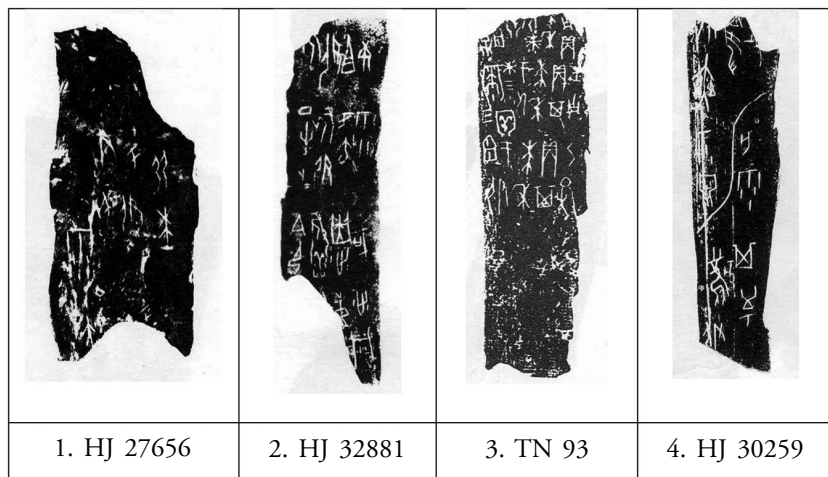


Figure 1.5. Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Related to Yi Yin’s Powers as a Spirit. *Source:* 1, 2, and 4: Guo Moruo 郭沫若, ed., Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, comp., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1978–1982); 3: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所, ed., *Xiaotun nandi jiagu* 小屯南地甲骨, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980–1983).

*hui*-prayers for grain” (*hui he* 禱禾) to Yi Yin, while the Former Lords also commonly received “*hui*-prayers for the harvest” (*hui nian* 禱年, namely *hui*-prayers for grain). Beyond having powers over natural phenomena, Yi Yin does not hold sway over human affairs, which is a power possessed by the spirits of the Shang High Ancestors. In other inscriptions, Shang kings submit *gai* 咎 requests or offer *hui* prayers to He and Wang Hai to aid them in defeating enemies; they also report on the king’s affairs to Wang Hai and Shang Jia; and they perform *yu* 禦 sacrifices to Shang Jia when the king requires help. At times, High Ancestor Nao and Wang Hai may even have brought about calamities for the king personally or the Shang state.<sup>22</sup> We do not see Yi Yin commanding any of these types of powers. Although Yi Yin was a human spirit, the Shang people modeled his image after that of a pure nature spirit, which is to say, they transformed him into a nature spirit, so that he had powers to rival those of Tu (She; the altars of soil) or X 虍. This is the reverse of what was seen before, with He and Yue.

Yi Yin was worshipped by the Shang people and received sacrifices from them for generations, because of his outstanding service in the founding of the Shang dynasty. Yet, as a spirit, his influence over the Shang people was primarily affected through powers over natural phenomena. This may be perhaps due to the fact that Yi Yin was not a lineal ancestor of the Shang kings. In the minds of the Shang kings, figures like Yi Yin were more properly classified as spirits who oversaw the entire Shang clan group, while the spirits of the High Ancestors, because of their inherited blood ties, ought to possess more formidable and expansive abilities to meddle in the royal human affairs and political domain.

It should be noted however that, among the OBI mentioning Yi Yin, there are a few rare examples that are directed jointly to both Yi Yin and the Former Kings. Because these inscriptions include only short, abbreviated sentences, their meaning is uncertain; therefore, we cannot ascertain whether they attest to Yi Yin’s possessing powers over human affairs:

Crack-making on the *guichou* day, offer (sacrifices) to Yi Yin.  
 Crack-making on the *dingsi* day, offer (sacrifices) to the Ten  
 Deities, Yi and the Nine.

癸丑卜，又于伊尹。

丁巳卜，又于十立，伊又九 (HJ 32786, Li 1)

Crack-making on the *guiyou* day, offer (sacrifices) to Yi and the Five Ancestors.

癸酉卜，又伊五示。(HJ 32722)

Crack-making on the *renxu* day, offer *sui*-rites to Yi and the Twenty-three Ancestors. Use this.

壬戌卜，又歲于伊廿示又三。茲用 (HJ 34123, Li.1)

These inscriptions discuss sacrifices to Yi Yin offered in conjunction with those given to various numbers of *shi* 示 (“altars, ancestors”) and are examples of the rite of “assembling the ancestral tablets” (*jihe shenzhu* 集合神主).<sup>23</sup> Scholars have argued that, in cases such as these, the ancestral tablets are for various Former Kings. But, as previously discussed, in the OBI we do not yet have divinations clearly entreating Yi Yin to use his powers alongside those of the Former Kings, only with the Former Lords and High Ancestors.

In the following inscriptions however, there is some indication that Yi Yin could appear in divinations directed jointly to the Former Kings:

Do not manage affairs, let it be X . . .

Do not call upon the Great Ancestors.

On the *gengchen* day, it was divined: On the *xinsi* day the king commands X.

On the *gengchen* day, it was divined: The king on the *dinghai* day commands X.

. . . X . . . Great . . .

弜立事，夷𠄎 . . .

弜禹大示

庚辰貞，辛巳王令𠄎。

庚辰貞，王于丁亥令𠄎。

. . . 𠄎 . . . 大 . . . (HJ 32849, Li 2)

On the *gengchen* day, it was divined: X selects the Great Ancestors.

On the *xinsi* day, it was divined: Select Yi and the Ancestors.

Do not select Yi and the Ancestors.



庚辰貞，𠄎以大示。

辛巳貞，以伊示。

弜以伊示. (HJ 32847, Li 2, figure 1.6:1)

On the *gengchen* day, it was divined: The king on the *dinghai* day commands X.

Let it be the Ancestral Father who is selected.

On the *xinsi* day, it was divined: Select Yi and the Ancestors.

Do not select Yi and the Ancestors.

庚辰貞，王于丁亥令𠄎。

𠄎父示以

辛巳貞，以伊示

弜以伊示. (HJ 32848, Li 2, figure 1.6:2)

This set of inscriptions first records divinations that occurred on the *gengchen* day. They inquire whether the king should command X 𠄎 to manage affairs on a *xinsi* day or on a *dinghai* day, and, moreover, whether that person should then call upon the *da shi* 大示 (Great Ancestors) and select *yi shi* 伊示 (Yi and the Ancestors, i.e., Yi Yin and other ancestors) for sacrifices, or if he should select *fu shi* 父示 (his Father Ancestor, or, perhaps

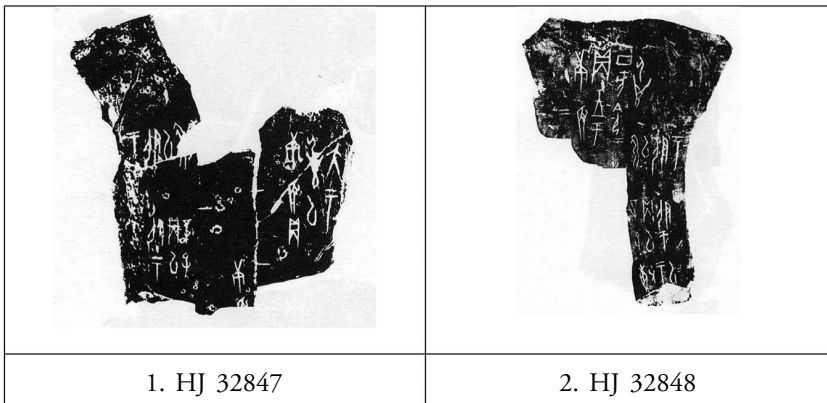


Figure 1.6. Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Directed Jointly to Yi Yin and the Former Kings. *Source:* Guo Moruo 郭沫若, ed., Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, comp., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1978–1982).

Father and Ancestors) for sacrifices instead. The meaning of the phrase *yi shi* 以示 is uncertain, but, judging from the context, it may involve X 𠄎 “selecting” which ancestral tablets to involve in the sacrifices.<sup>24</sup> Among those ancestral tablets that X 𠄎 could “select,” the “Great Ancestors” held the loftiest positions, while his “Father Ancestor” would refer to that Former King most recently connected to the current ruler. A pair of positive and negative charges follows suggesting uncertainty over whether Yi Yin should be selected. It is difficult to tell from the inscriptions what affairs, precisely, X 𠄎 was asked to manage, or what sort of aid he sought by selecting certain spirits for supplication. Thus, it remains uncertain whether Yi Yin possessed the power of a Former King to meddle in human affairs.

### The Procedures for Sacrificing to Yi Yin

Although Yi Yin was often the subject of divination and sacrifice along with the Former Lords in the Shang pantheon—and already treated like a “naturalized” human spirit—the procedures for offering him sacrifices differed from both. The sacrifices used for nature spirits, like Tu (Soil) and Fang (Regions), and for the spirits of the Former Lords, like He, Nao, and Wang Hai (which were perhaps part of the lineage rites), include most importantly the *liao* 燎-burning rite, followed by the *rong* 𠄎 𠄎 rite, the *you* 卣 rite, and perhaps also the X 卣 rite, and the *mao* 卯 rite. Yi Yin, however, was never offered a *liao*-burning rite. For this sacrifice, firewood is piled together and set ablaze, and an animal is then cast into the fire, with the smoke rising up to the spirits for their gratification. The Warring States period *Zhou li* 周禮 record for “Da Zongbo” 大宗伯 notes that the *yin*-burning rite (*yinsi* 禋祀) was offered in sacrifice to the heavenly spirits.<sup>25</sup> The Shang did not sacrifice to Heaven 天, nor did they sacrifice to Shangdi 上帝, but they used the *liao*-burning rite to sacrifice to the Former Lords and High Ancestors (and also to Former Kings), which suggests that they thought these spirits were active in the sky and could receive sacrifices there, shedding light on Shang beliefs about where the ancestral spirits resided. That Yi Yin’s spirit did not receive *liao*-burning rites, may be because, according to Shang religious beliefs, Yi Yin was not located in the same place as the Shang High Ancestors and Former Kings.

The Shang often sacrificed to the spirits of the High Ancestors, such as Nao, Wang Hai, He, and Yue, on a *xin* 辛 day. This was not necessarily their day-name but only the specific day on which sacrifices to these spirits were established. The word *xin* 辛 in our classical sources was associated with

autumn harvests, and one of the main reasons for sacrificing to the spirits of the High Ancestors was to pray for a bountiful harvest.<sup>26</sup> The reason for sacrificing to Yi Yin, in fact, was mainly to pray for good weather, in order to obtain a bountiful harvest. Yet the day Yi Yin was usually sacrificed to differs from that of the Former Lords, as it was not on a *xin* day but on a *ding* 丁 day. Yi Yin, moreover, was likely also granted a day-name. Thus, it appears, from the perspective of the sacrificial calendar, that in the Shang pantheon, important differences still remained between Yi Yin and both the Former Lords and High Ancestors.

In summary, through an analysis of how Yi Yin was offered sacrifices, it appears that because Yi Yin was classified as an extra-lineage spirit in the Shang sacrificial canon and not related to the Shang royal family via blood ties, he therefore was still distinguished from the Shang High Ancestors.

## Conclusions

Based on the previous discussion, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The sacrificial records to Yi Yin on the Yinxu OBI prove that Yi Yin assisted Cheng Tang and served meritoriously as a subject of the Shang dynasty. It also shows that the account in the *Guben zhushu jinian*, claiming that Yi Yin was killed by Tai Jia, has no historical basis.
2. The inscriptions mention that sacrifices to Yi Yin were often conducted on *ding* 丁 days, revealing that Yi Yin, as a human spirit, quite possibly had a day-name of Ding.
3. Although Yi Yin was a contemporary of Cheng Tang, he often appears in divinations about “offering *hui*-prayers for rain” or “offering *hui*-prayers for the harvest” that were directed jointly toward him and the Shang High Ancestors. This shows that Yi Yin held a lofty status among the Shang pantheon, through a process of deification that began in the generations following his service to Cheng Tang but before the Zhou era.
4. According to the extant OBI, Yi Yin’s powers as a spirit primarily concerned natural phenomena. In sacrificing to

Yi Yin, the Shang people mainly sought his aid in bringing about bountiful harvests with good weather. Yi Yin thus provides an example of how human spirits were also deified into nature spirits.

5. We do not yet have proof among the OBI that Yi Yin, as a spirit, was also able to meddle in human affairs. Moreover, there are differences between how and when Yi Yin and the spirits of the High Ancestors received sacrifices. Thus, even though Yi Yin possessed powers over natural phenomena, which were similar or the same as those held by the High Ancestors, yet, in the Shang pantheon, he still occupied a different place than the spirits of the High Ancestors or Former Kings, quite possibly because he was not related to the royal family by blood.

This analysis of Yi Yin's place in the Shang pantheon allows us to better understand how spirits were classified in Shang religious thought. There appear to be two major types of spirits, based on whether they held lineal descent from the royal family. The first type included the High Ancestors, Former Lords, and Former Kings, who were all part of the Shang clan with blood ties to the Shang kings. These spirits received sacrifices according to the sacrificial canon for members of the Shang house and royal family. The other type is like Yi Yin. These spirits did not have blood ties to the royal family, but they were common objects of devotion to the clan group, which constituted a number of different tribal lineages, of which the Shang people were but one. Spirits of this type, like Yi Yin, would have received sacrifices from both their specific lineage members as well as from those outside their lineage. That Yi Yin was eligible for inclusion among the Shang sacrificial canon (as understood through the OBI) therefore does not overturn the maxim: "Spirits do not relish sacrifices from those not of their kind; and the people do not offer sacrifices to those not of their clan" (神不歆非類; 民不祀非族) (*Zuo zhuan*, Duke Xi, year ten). Rather, as outlined earlier, there are multiple different layers to what constitutes one's "kind" and "clan."

## Notes

1. Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981), 79.