Ernest Smith’s Chinese Bones

The Columbia University Collection of Shang divination inscriptions, and evidence for scribal training at Anyang
“The Importance of Being Ernest’s”

Pedigree matters, even for “unprovenanced” objects.

The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me... I don’t actually know who I am by birth. I was... well, I was found.

Literacy acquisition

Literacy, and not just engraving skills, were being taught in the divination workshops at Anyang.
1867 – Founding of missionary school at Tongzhou 通州

- Boarding school for Chinese boys from Christian families, founded by the American Board Mission.
- 1889 – Establishment at Tongzhou of the North China College.
- The Rev. Chauncey Goodrich was on the faculty in the 1890s.
- 1900 – Burning of the Tongzhou College during Boxer Uprising.
王懿榮
(1845-1900)

HJ121 = Tie95.4
1911 – Foundation of Tsinghua College 清華學堂

- Founded with $10m of US Boxer Indemnity funds.
- Initially a preparatory school for students destined for education in the US.
- Ernest K. Smith was a founding member of the faculty at Tsinghua, where he taught English.
1919 – foundation of Yenching University 燕京大學

- An amalgamation of missionary schools, including the Tongzhou Union University.
- 1926, campus completed in the NW suburbs of Peking, adjacent to the Tsinghua campus.
Ernest K. Smith (1873-1954)

- 1914, marries Grace Goodrich (b. 1889 in Tongzhou)
- 1915-1916, furlough year at Teachers College and the Union Theological Seminary.
- 1929 resigns from Tsinghua, and begins teaching at the neighboring Yenching University campus.
1928 – First Scientific Excavations at Anyang

Excavations by the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica.

854 inscribed bone and shell fragments discovered in the 1\textsuperscript{st} season, 740 in the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and 3012 in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} (late 1929).
1928-1937

- 15 seasons of excavation at Anyang by the IHP.
- 1929-30, conflict with Henan Museum (director: 何日章) about control over the site.
- 1933, first publication of Smith’s bones: 62 items, in Shang Chengzuo (1933), preface by Dong Zuobin.
- 1937, excavations interrupted by war with Japan.
The “Big Extended Trench”

- The Daliankeng 大連坑 or “Big Extended Trench”, an excavators’ unit, dug in 1929 during the 3rd season of IHP excavations.
- Dense concentration of divination inscriptions.
- Many examples of “Period III” or “He Group” (何組) inscriptions, and also of remains of scribal training.
- Likely to have been the site of a ‘divination workshop’ that trained its own scribes.
IHP excavations

- “Daliankeng” (IHP 3)

- Henan museum pits
Ernest Ketcham Smith (1873-1954)

- 1935, Luther Carrington Goodrich, EKS’s brother-in-law, appointed Associate Prof. and Chairman of the Dept. of Chinese and Japanese at Columbia.
- 1937, Smith’s bones on loan to Columbia U.

You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn’t Ernest. It’s on your cards. Here is one of them. I’ll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else.
Ernest K. Smith (1873-1954)

- 1937, Japanese occupation of Beiping.
- 1941, Pearl Harbor, and the closure of Yenching University.
- 1943, all remaining American Yenching University faculty sent to Weixian internment camp, then repatriated by the end of the year.
USB 414

- Diviner He 何 and other named diviners of the He Group
- Dense, disorderly inscriptions characteristic of trainee scribes
- Clear examples of copying
Provenance of Smith's collection

- Smith’s collection is characterized by a large number of He Group inscriptions.
- Dong Zuobin finds that one of Smith’s pieces can be joined with a piece that he excavated in 1929 from the Big Extended Trench.

Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable.
Provenance of Smith's collection: Dong Zuobin’s proposal

"I was the first to excavate in the vicinity of the 'daliankeng', during the third season of work [1929]. Then the dispute for control with the Henan Museum began, and that work was stopped for three weeks. Subsequently I returned to the excavation of the 'daliankeng', recovering many examples of Period III shells and bones. Before this there had certainly not been anyone digging in this area. The items collected by the Museum were, in no time at all, stolen: a small box covered in green cloth containing inscribed shells and bones was lost. The matter passed through the hands of Xuan [Zhongxiang 軒仲湘?] and Qiu [who?]. The owner of the Wuzhou Hotel ran away for fear of being implicated, and the establishment was closed for investigation for months. Those are the facts, and a case is on file with the county administration where they can be checked. This is most likely the source of Smith's bones."

Dong Zuobin – preface to Shang Chengzuo (1933)
Dong Zuobin’s join
A total of seven joins can be made between EKS’s collection and items from the *da lian keng*. This can’t be just a coincidence.

What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.
USB 414/415 – hollows and cracks
Original record and student copy
Records and copies on USB 414
Original record and student copy

(R) "Cracking on day 30, He divining: tomorrow, day 31, perform procedure X to Father Day 1.

(L) "Cracking on day 10, He divining: tomorrow, day 31 … [etc.] "
Records and copies on USB 414
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