THE XIA-SHANG-ZHOU CHRONOLOGY PROJECT
EXCAVATIONS OF THE PROTO-ZHOU CULTURE IN FENGXI, SHAANXI

BY

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Abstract

The Fengxi area in Chang’an County, Shaanxi, is said to be where King Wen of the Zhou built the capital Fengjing. Archaeological survey and excavation indicate that this area is densely covered with rich sites of the Western Zhou period. Nevertheless, for a long time archaeologists could not identify any Proto-Zhou deposits. The 1967 excavation at Fengxi yielded several burials furnished with high-collared pouch-legged pottery li-vessels, as well as weapons of the Late Shang style. These burials were soon dated to the pre-dynastic Zhou, or Proto-Zhou, era. In 1997, as part of the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, more excavations were carried out at Fengxi, revealing features with an important set of stratigraphic relationships related to the issue of the location of the Proto-Zhou Culture. A late Proto-Zhou “ash pit” was superimposed by early Western Zhou cultural layers. A systematic study of the radiocarbon dates derived from the different levels of the pit and related features and cultural levels indicates that the date of the Zhou conquest of the Shang should be bracketed between 1050 BC and 1020 BC.

This paper discusses the material remains pertaining to the Proto-Zhou (or Xian Zhou 先周, or Predynastic Zhou) Culture discovered over the past five decades from sites in the Fengxi 淸西 area of Chang’an 長安 County, Shaanxi 陝西 Province. According to textual records, Fengxi was where King Wen 文王 of Zhou 周 “built a settlement in Feng 豐” (e.g., see “Wen Wang you sheng” 文王有聲 in the Da ya 大雅 [Greater encomia] section of the Shi jing 詩經). It is also known as Fengjing 豐京, or “Capital Feng.” Following leads from historical texts, we anticipated that the archaeology in the Fengxi area would yield the remains of what should be the Proto-Zhou Culture, that is, the material remains pertaining to the Zhou people before their conquest of the Shang 商.
Dynasty. In fact, after a series of archaeological excavations carried out in recent years, the Fengxi area has indeed yielded a great wealth of settlement and burial sites of the Zhou, as well as what we believe are Proto-Zhou Culture remains.

In the 1950s, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (since 1977, the Institute has fallen under the auspices of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) carried out a large-scale excavation in Fengxi (Fengxi 1962). Stratigraphic studies of the excavations have yielded a relative chronological sequence for the region, as follows:

1. Early Western Zhou settlement occupation
2. Western Zhou Phase I burials
3. Western Zhou Phase II burials
4. Western Zhou Phase III burials
5. Late Western Zhou settlement and Phase IV burials
6. Western Zhou Phase V burials

Typical cultural artifacts of these chronological phases are illustrated in Figures 1–4 with ceramics and bronzes from the Zhangjiapo 張家坡 site. Figure 1 shows the typical ceramics for the early settlement occupation with vessels recovered from Zhangjiapo house floors dated to the early Western Zhou period. Figure 2 shows the typical ceramics of the late occupation of the Zhangjiapo settlement, with ceramics from living floors dated to the late Western Zhou period. Figure 3 shows changes in ceramic morphology through time of five vessel types using materials from six burials dated from Phase I through Phase V. Figure 4 illustrates two bronze vessels from a Phase I burial (M178) at Zhangjiapo.

Stylistic analysis of the bronze vessels recovered from Phase I burials indicates that they should be dated to the approximate era of the reigns of King Cheng 成王 and King Kang 康王. Therefore, the early Western Zhou settlement occupation, which occurs before the Phase I burials, should be dated earlier than this time period and into the Proto-Zhou, or Predynastic Zhou, period. We expended some effort trying to identify Proto-Zhou cultural remains from this occupation. Clues from ceramic seriation were obtained. The lack of stratigraphic evidence, nevertheless, hampered the identification.

In 1967, we excavated a grave at Fengxi, now labeled 67SCCMM89 (Fengxi 1980). Figure 5 illustrates the plan of the burial and its ceramic offerings. The burial itself was a pit burial with coffin and chamber as receptacle. A human sacrifice was found on the secondary ledge, or ercengtai 二層台. One li 矛 hollow-legged tripod vessel and one guan 鬲

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1 Burials from Zhangjiapo have recently been published in a full report monograph; see Zhangjiapo 1999.