The Graph ☐ for the Word “Time” in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions

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1. Introduction

It is a standard interpretation among jiaguwen 甲骨文 specialists to interpret the graph ☐ (日) as expressing the words “sun” and “day.” For example, the determiner phrases 出曰 ‘rising sun’ and 入曰 ‘setting sun’ contain 日 used in the former sense, whereas 今日 ‘present day’ and 之曰 ‘that day’ have the same 日 used in the latter sense. It goes without saying that many languages in the world have this sort of polysemy. Japanese word hi ひ, for instance, means “fire”, as well as “sun” and “day.”¹ This paper proposes that in jiaguwen the graph ☐ (曰) also stands for the word shi 時 ‘time’ in certain specific contexts. This is in addition to “sun” and “day” mentioned above. Thus the trisemic Japanese hi is matched with the trisemic Chinese ri, though they depart in the sense of “fire” in Japanese and “time” in Shang Chinese.

The pronunciation of “sun” and that of “day” must have been identical in earlier historical periods as it is in modern times. The Old Chinese (abbreviated hereinafter as OC) as reconstructed by Li Fang-kuei (1971) and by William Baxter (1992) show the

¹ This is a revised version of the paper originally presented at the International Conference on the Processing of and Research on Historical Chinese Characters (中國歷史漢字整理與研究國際學術研討會) held at East China Normal University 華東師範大學 in Shanghai, 12-14 December, 2003. I wish to thank all those who commented on the paper at the conference or on other occasions, including Huang Dekuan 黃德寬, Yu Suisheng 喻遂生, Li Lingpu 李玲璞, Christian Schwermann, Françoise Bottéro, and Zev Handel.

¹ The common etymon linking the three words could well be “heat,” although Horii (1988:208) thinks that it is related to what he calls abstract-concept word hiru ‘daytime’ in which the syllable hi, according to Horii, indicates the passage of time. This is possible and might eventually be shown to have a similar etymological parallel with the Chinese word shi/*dj* (category “B”). Horii also raises the possibility that it is related to Korean hae (<*pi*) ‘sun’. Unfortunately, more reliable etymologies such as Yoshida (1976) does not deal with this etymology.
same form: *njit (脂部入聲; 中古泥母). The word 時, however, belongs to a different rhyme group, 韻母, being 之部陰聲; moreover, the initial, 聲母, is different as it is 中古禪母. Li’s OC reconstruction is *dj’ag(ṣ) and Baxter’s *dj’i(ʔ). It thus appears that we have here a good example of the same graph having the polyphonic function. The graph 日, in short, is not only polysemic/homonymous but also polyphonic. Of etymological interest here is that the proto-Japanese is presumed to have felt the heat of fire, sun, and day as a common meaning in all three words (cf. fn. 1), but they refer to at least two things and are thus polysemic. In contrast, the proto-Chinese saw some common etymon (yet to be specified), bridging “sun” and “day” but not, as one might at first sight be led to think, “time.” However, on a deeper level this may not be right. It is because both “sun” and “day” can conceivably be thought of as objects that “move” on the axis of time. This is a semantic observation but, the motion of going or moving, 之 zhi/*tjag (Li’s) or *tji (Baxter’s), hence my use of “move” in the previous sentence. The pictograph of “sun” or “day” must have been sufficient to trigger the association with the word “time” and that is perhaps aided by the salient feature of “sun” and “day,” namely, that they “go” or “move,” rather than the assumed “heat” etymon in Japanese.

2. Graph 壬 in the Zhongshan Wang Cuo fanghu 中山王 隨方壺 inscription and its related issues

Paleographical reference works such as Gao Ming (1980:494), He Linyi (1998:47), and Xu Zhongshu (1980:257) give the graph 壬 found in the Zhongshan wang fanghu 中山王方壺 inscription, one of the three main Zhongshan King Cuo 中山王 隨 bronze inscriptions (ca. 310 BC), as the earliest form of the word 時. Let us first examine the graph used in a fuller context:

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臘庫，矣 學，若言。明 矢止于壺，而時觀焉。
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The above quoted portion is a linearized original inscription with direct transcriptions underneath each character. The following is an interpretative transcription in modern Chinese characters, followed by my translation:

(1) 鳴呼，允哉，若言。明策之于壺，而時觀焉。
Ah, how indeed true these sayings are! I have (thus) clearly inscribed all these upon this **hu** vase, so that [you can] observe them on appropriate occasions.

It would appear that the top element of this bronze graph, modern 之, is used as the phonetic determinative, indicating that the graph 日 is to be read like *dj/*ngwi or *dj/*ngw/, rather than *njit. The *Shuo wen* (7a, p. 137) entry for 時 reads: 時四時也. 从日寺聲 ‘shi means four seasons; it consists of 日 and 寺 as phonetic.’ But, as mentioned in fn. 3, the entry continues as follows: 古文時. 从之曰. The first part of this quotation has no ambiguity in its meaning (是 the *guwen* form of 時), but in the formula “从 XY” the Y element is different from the often found formula 从 X Y 聲 or 从 X 聲 from Y (the *huiyi* 會意 formula), raising some uncertainties as to what

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2 The syntactic inversion is observed in 夫之若言 ‘how indeed true these sayings are!’, obviously for emphatic purposes. 允 允 is inscribed 亀 with the female radical here at the bottom, rather than human element in the modern, although its significance is unclear. 尊 嶽 is inscribed with a “double” phonetic seemingly serving an adornment function: 亀. That is, the element 在 would have been sufficient, but they added 覑 on top of it. The word 覑 若 is clearly used in the sense of “such,” and the determiner phrase 覑 若 你 refers to a preceding paragraph that begins with 夫古聖王務在得賢 and ends with 允哉. For the benefit of the reader I quote the paragraph with a translation: 夫古聖王務在得賢, 其即得民, 故辭禮敬, 則賢人至, 博愛深, 則賢人親, 作蔽中, 則庶民附 ‘The effort invested by those ancient sage kings was directed to securing the wise (in the government), and only after that, to securing people (to work in concert with them). Thus, if your speech and ritual behavior are deferential, men of wisdom will come (to you), and if your care and affection (for the people) are deep, the wise will be very supportive, and if corvée and taxes are moderate, the common people will not leave you’.

3 It is possible that this refers to the occasion of ancestral sacrifices. The word 時 時 ‘time’, inscribed here as 亀, the quasi-direct transcription being 亀 — actually the top element should be 之, not 止, but since I have no such a font, let this graph stand temporarily for the correct one. The *guwen* 古文 form is 時 listed in the *SW* (7a, p. 137), and the word it represented is 時 which commonly means “four seasons” in the classics but also “opportune time” or “time appropriate for some particular occasion or to do something.” In the mind of the Zhongshan king it must here refer to the time when this sacrificial **hu** vase be used, as he wished, for conducting ancestral sacrifices. Here in this sentence 時 is used as adverb. It should be added that in terms of historical palaeography the *SW* *guwen* form 時 is not accurate because the top element 亀 (**you** 有) is in my view (Takashima 2005:18) a stylized form of 牛 *ngwi/*ngwj], and the top element of 亀 is zhi 之, not you 亀.
functional role can be assigned to Y in “从 XY.” Thus Wang Yun 王筠 (說文解字句讀, ap. 說文解字詁林 ab. SWGL, 7.2891) writes “从之聲也” (it consists of 之 used as phonetic). There are specialists who follow this interpretation (e.g., Katō Jōken 1970:481, Tang Kejing 1997:902). This is a more “rationalized” interpretation than the impressionistic one that I have given in the beginning of this paragraph (viz., the 之 element is used as the phonetic determinative). While not substantiating that the formula “从 XY” may originally have been written unambiguously in the SW as 从 X Y 聲, Miller (1953:207-9) suggested that the 聲 was purposely edited out when the Song scholars — notably Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916-991) and his brother Xu Kai 徐鉇 (920-974), perhaps influenced by their predecessors or contemporaries — thought that the Y element could not have been phonetic. Boltz (1994:119, 154) has adduced a couple of examples to show that this may in fact have been the case. I have adopted this interpretation of the formula “从 XY” in this paper.

4 If this is correct, Xu Shen knew that 日 had a pronunciation of what eventually resulted in modern shi.5

3. Graph ☲ in Oracle-Bone Inscriptions and related issues

The use of ☲ as standing for the word 時 is a new claim, and we would like to support it here. Given below are some examples followed by my analysis:

(2) a. 辛亥卜, 翌日壬, 旦至食曰(=時)不[雨]。Tunan 624
Xinhai [day 48] divined: (On) the following day, ren [renzi day 49], (from) the sunrise to the meal time, it will not [rain]. Greatly auspicious.

b. 壬, 旦至食曰(=時)其雨。Ibid.

4 Apparently this is not always the case according Françoise Bottéro (private communication at the SCASSS, Upppsala, December, 2004). We look forward to her findings.

5 Although the rhymes of the word 時 and 實 are different (the former being 之部, and the latter 脂部入聲), they are related in an interesting way: Pulleyblank (1995:89) has noted that the pronoun 時 is related to 是, 實, and 實, occurring only in the pre-classical Chinese. His observation that 時 is a relatively emphatic form as opposed to 是 and 實 is generally correct in the light of the Zhongshan bronze inscriptions (Takashima 1996). This implies the existence of a morphological system of the demonstratives, but what is of interest here is that the Shuowen (7a) has the following entry: 日實也, 太陽之精 … ‘Ri means shi (solid); it is the essence of the great yang …’ Moreover, it is possible that the graphs 是 and 實 have the element 日 which may have served as the phonetic in these graphs. This may constitute yet another piece of evidence for the possibility that the graphic unit 日 itself was pronounced as shi/*djg(s). In analogy with the paronomastic definition Xu Shen frequently uses, we may put in such a way as *曰時也.
(On) the ren day [49], (from) the sunrise to the meal time, it may happen to rain. Auspicious.

c. 食日（時）至中日（時）不雨・吉 - Ibid.
(From) the meal time to noon, it will not rain. Auspicious.

d. 食日（時）至中日（時）其雨 - Ibid.
(From) the meal time to noon, it may happen to rain.

e. 中日（時）至登兮不雨・吉 - Ibid.
(From) noon to the late afternoon, it will not rain. Auspicious.

f. 中日（時）至【登兮】其雨 - Ibid.
(From) noon to the late afternoon, it may happen to rain.

From the set of inscriptions given above, we can tell that the diviner traversed a day from the daybreak to the late afternoon (or about the time the sun sets). The topic is rain, and the diviner put the charges in a typical duizhen 對貞 ‘a pair of testing statements’ consisting in this case of the negative and the positive.\(^6\) The phrase 食日 stands out, along with 中日 and 登兮.\(^7\) Chen Mengjia (1956:232) suggested that “大食” and “小食” referred to the times of breakfast (朝食) and supper (夕食), respectively. They can also be abbreviated as “食日” and further simply as “食”. Chen Mengjia’s deduction is based on several, though not exhaustive, examples (p. 231), and specialists generally have accepted his interpretation. However, he does not suggest that 日 stands for the

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\(^6\) The negative is with the non-active, stative and non-modal, negative bu 不 ‘it is/will/was not V’ (Takashima 1988; Iō and Takashima 1996:364-382), while the positive is modulated by the modal and aspectual particle qi 其 which I now render as “may happen to” (Takashima 2003; further rumination of Takashima 1994). Judging from the context, particularly the post-factum record (yanzi 驗辭) which has daji 大吉 ‘greatly auspicious’ or ji 吉 ‘auspicious’, the negative charges constitute the preferred alternative of the Shang (Serruys 1974:25-7).

\(^7\) We shall shortly discuss the phrase 中日 in the body of the paper. As for the phrase 登兮, it is a self-contained, binomial expression albeit somewhat unusual (could even be a borrowed word from some dialect or even foreign language). Although we remain ignorant of what words these two graphs really represent, we do know that this binomial expression refers to time, approximately twilight, judged on the basis of such examples as 2(e) and 2(f) cited above, combined with an inscription found in Cuibian 715 (Heji 28794): 登兮至昏不雨 ‘(from) late afternoon (or about the time of the sun set) to twilight it will not rain’. Xu Zhongshu (1988: 507) [following Guo Moruo 1937:715/98a] says that xì 兮 is 曦 ‘the color of the sun/sun ray’. While this is powerfully suggestive, their claim is difficult to accept on phonological grounds; namely, 兮 and 曦 belong to different rhyme groups in OC (the former in the 佳部, the latter 歌部) and, moreover, the initials are different in MC (the former 匣母, the latter 曉母). Therefore, I reject this interpretation, and the time phrase which 登兮 had nothing to do with the color of the sun or sun ray. It refers to a certain duration of time before昏 ‘twilight’, and that is the extent to which we can be certain.
word ‘time’, treating the phrase 食日 as a unit. This is analytically fuzzy, and the same comment can be applied to Chang Yuzhi (1998:13) and Li Xueqin (1997/1999: 20). Both of them have treated 食日 no differently from Chen Mengjia. We should like to be more rigorous in our analysis, claiming, in fact, that in Shang Chinese 食日 and 大食日 stand for the 食時 ‘meal time’ and 大食時 ‘(time of big eating:) time of breakfast’, respectively. And if Chen Mengjia’s judgment that the extreme abbreviation of the full determinative phrase 大食日 as 食 alone expresses the meaning “time of breakfast” is correct, what we have here is a minimal contrast of 食 and 小食 ‘(time of) small eating (= supper)’. That is, 食 by itself is a “default” expression for breakfast.

Before we give more examples to buttress this interpretation (section 5), let us further consider the problem of understanding the phrase 中日. Specialists generally take this phrase as meaning “mid day,” and this might not be an impossible interpretation. But I doubt if the modern rendition zhong ri is correct, though the general meaning — that it refers to about noon time — must be correct. This is because from examples (2c) to (2f), we see the progression of time from 食時 ‘meal time’ to 翌兮 ‘late afternoon’ and 中日 occurs in the middle. We could thus maintain the alternative interpretation of the graph 日 as standing for the word 時 in the phrase 中日. The graph 日 is not only polysemic/homonymous but also polyphonic as pointed out earlier (section 1) and, therefore, depending on context, the same graph can stand for words such as “sun”, “day” (both ri), as well as “time” (shi). And the expression 中日 can be construed as referring to the position of the sun in the middle of its traverse in the sky, as well as to any mid day in the interval of two given dates. But the crucial question is: how were they expressed in Shang Chinese? The tradition points to the greater possibility that the use of 日 in the expression 中日 also referred to time, rather than the sun or day (cf. also section 4). That is, on the surface “中日” in the Shang language must have been 中時 ‘time in the meridian’ in the case of examples from (2c) to (2f). This is parallel to our interpretation that 食日 and 大食日 stand for 食時 ‘(time of eating:) meal time’ and 大食時 ‘(time of big eating:) breakfast time’. However, if the context in which “中日” occurs is in the interval of two given dates, then “中日” must have been pronounced in OC form of modern zhong ri, rather than zhong shi, although I have not yet found any such context in OBI.

First, we must take issue with Chang Yuzhi (1998:137) who makes no distinction

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8 Li speculates that the expression 大食日 forms a phrase (猜想 “大食日”乃是一词, “大食”或称 “大食日”, 又省为 “食日”), which is non-commital at best, or plain wrong at worst, specifically judging, in his judgment that these phrases are unanalyzable. I think that “大食日” and “食日” can and must be analyzed; they are determinative phrases literally meaning “big-eating time” (i.e., breakfast) and “eating time” (i.e., breakfast).
between 中日 and 日中. She claims that the following inscriptions in which these two expressions occur are identical in meaning:

(3)  a. 中日其雨. \hspace{1cm} Heji 29790  
(Around) noon it may happen to rain.

b. 中日不雨. \hspace{1cm} Heji 28569  
(Around) noon it will not rain.

c. 日中有大雨. \hspace{1cm} Heji 29789  
It should be during the day that there will be much rain.

d. 暮于日中不雨. \hspace{1cm} Heji 29788  
(If) in the evening and (on to) during the day, \textit{(we) (go:)} leave thenceforth, it will not rain.

As indicated in the translations provided, (3a) and (3b) on the one hand and (3c) and (3d) on the other, are completely different in their reference to time. The word expressed by 日 in the former pair is 時 ‘time’, and in the latter pair it is 日 ‘day’. That they are different words has already been explained in section 1, and in terms of grammatical structure the relationship between 中日 and 日中 is very different: the former is an attributive, determiner noun phrase, and the latter consists of a “N + V” forming a noun phrase literally meaning “the-sun-being-in-the-middle,” translatable to “during the day.” For a piece of contemporary evidence, consider the fact that while there are a

9 The phrase 暮于日中 is here interpreted as “in the evening and during the day.” One might take it as meaning “the evening in/during the day.” I have excluded this possibility on the basis of the absence of the pattern “N1 + 于 + NP” in which N1 is incorporated or part of NP. Also, the particle 于 when used with a time word indicates “futurity.” For more on the conjunctive particle 于 used between two nouns, the reader is referred to Takashima (1984-85; 1996: 247-251), but translation I have provided is somewhat strange because the time sequence from 暮 ‘evening’ and 于日中 ‘(on to) during the day’ is consecutive only if 中日 be taken as the following day. While this is not entirely impossible, if considered together with example (3c) the diviner seems to have been concerned with the sortie activity on the same day, not on the following day. Of course, there may well have been a scribal error of putting the sequence incorrectly, and the correct sequence may have been 日于暮 ‘during the day and on to the evening’. Another possibility is to interpret 暮于日中 as “in the evening or in the daytime,” but it is hard to show that this was in fact what the diviner meant. In short, I do not know what the correct understanding of this phrase is.

10 The structural analysis of “N + V” forming an NP might be challenged, if we change “V” to “N,” i.e., “N + N.” If we do that, the phrase 日中 would be taken as meaning “middle of the day.” As far as the meaning is concerned, this is acceptable for it differs little from “during the day” as we have provided. But if we had such an expression as 日于中, the phrase here meaning “*top of the sun*” is very strange. The verbal interpretation of 上 ‘to rise’ would have been far
few examples of the 中日 phrase collocated with the 至 + (于) + X (where X is a time word such as 昏 ‘dusk’, 收兮 ‘late afternoon’, and昃 ‘[the sun in decline:] afternoon’),\textsuperscript{11} no such collocation is found with the 日中 phrase. The significance of this is that the 中日 phrase implies a stretch of time (daytime, while the sun is still in the sky), whereas the other terms such as 曰 ‘daybreak’, 昼 ‘early in the morning’, 朝 ‘morning’, 食日 or 大食日 (where 日 = 時 ‘time of big eating:) breakfast time’, 昼 (= 晝) ‘noon’, 中日 (= 時) ‘noon’, 戀 ‘afternoon’, 小食 (small eating:) supper’, 收兮 ‘late afternoon’, 昏 ‘dusk’, etc. refer to a time period shorter than the 日中 phrase. For yet another piece of evidence, consider the following set of inscriptions which show that 中日 is contrastively used with 戾:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(4)]
\begin{enumerate}
\item a. 中日其雨. \textit{Heji} 29910
\hspace{1em} (Around) noon it may happen to rain.
\item b. 王其省田昃不雨. \textit{Ibid.}
\hspace{1em} If His Majesty should inspect the field, it will not rain in the afternoon.
\item c. 昼其雨·吉. \textit{Ibid.}
\hspace{1em} It may happen to rain in the afternoon. Auspicious.
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

There are other inscriptions on this bone, but they are hard to discern. It is clear, however, that 中日 in (4a) and 昼 in (4b)-(4c) are in contrast. If 戾 refers to a certain duration of time, then 中日 must also be the same. On the basis of the inscriptions from (3a) to (3d), as well as from (4a) to (4c), it can be concluded that 中日 and 日中 mean different things, the former should be 中時 pronounced as something like \textit{njit} *dj\textit{gw} (Li’s OC) or \textit{njit} *k-lju ng (Baxter’s OC), and the meaning is “(around) noon time”; the latter should be 中日 pronounced something like \textit{njit} *nj\textit{gw} (Li’s reconstruction), or \textit{njit} *k-ljung (Baxter’s OC), and the meaning is “during the day.”

more cogent, and indeed “the sun rises” is what one would expect the phrase to have meant. On the other hand, *曰下, if we had such a phrase, could be taken as embodying the “N + N” structure (cp. the Zhou expression of 天下 ‘[all] under Heaven’), though the “N + V” structure in the sense of “the sun goes down” is also theoretically possible. Example (5) below has the phrase 中日 which means “equinox” and in this Shangshu, Yaodian, passage it refers to spring equinox. This meaning is derived from the analysis that 中 is an V, rather than an N, so that the “middle of the day” meaning derived from the “N + N” analysis is unlikely to be correct.

\textsuperscript{11} For example, \textit{Tuanan} 42, 624; \textit{Heji} 29793.
\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Song Zhenhao (1985, 199) for this interpretation. However, Song’s interpretation is problematical and may very well be wrong. See Liu Xueshun (2005:51-3) for further discussion.
4. Brief excursion into a few transmitted texts

Paying attention to the use of 中日 and 日中 in a few transmitted pre-Han texts, we find many uses of the latter expression, but we hardly find examples of the former one. To quote three representative examples of 日中:

(5) 日中星鳥，以殷仲春。*Shangshu*, Yaodian.
The day being in the medium (length [i.e., equal at day and at night]), and the asterism being in the Bird (*chunhuo* 蛍火 [i.e., appearing in the south at dusk]), (he) thereby determined the mid-spring.

(6) 日中為市，致天下之民，聚天下之貨，交易而退，各得其所。*Yijing*, Xici xia
(Shen Nong) had the markets open in the daytime, having had the people go there, gather goods of the countries, and after having them exchange the goods (he) had the people return home; each of them thus obtained what was (needed).

(7) 其君之戎，分為二廣，卒偏之兩。右廣初駕，數及日中，左則受之，以至于昏。*Zuo zhuan*, Xuangong 12.
“Its ruler’s soldiers was divided into two bodies of 15 each. To each of them were attached 100 men, and an additional complement of 25 men. The body on the right rode on chariots first, and kept on duty till mid-day, when that on the left took its place till dark.” Legge’s translation (1872: 318) modified.

The underlined portions in the translations above represent what corresponds to the meaning of each of the 日中 examples. While they mean different things in (5), (6), and (7), what is common to them all is the movement of the sun at or around the meridian, and in terms of constituency. 日中 consists of a N + V_stative structure (cf. fn. 10). In a striking contrast to such use of 日中, I have not found any example of 中日 in pre-Han transmitted texts. This militates against the interpretation of Chang Yuzhi (1998:137) who cite three examples of 日中 in such transmitted texts as *Yijing*, Xici

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13 It is interesting to find the use of 日中 in Sino-Japanese texts; for example, in the *Wakan Sansai zue* 和漢三才圖繪, an 18th-century encyclopedia by Terajima Ryōan 寺島良安 (middle of the Edo period), in which 日中 is defined as referring to the vernal and autumnal equinox. It is possible that Terajima knew of the same expression in the *Shangshu*, but to him the N + V structure is nothing strange as the Japanese syntax would have easily permitted such a structural interpretation as *hi wa chū ni shite… 日は中にして ‘the day being in the meridian…’*, and for that matter there is nothing strange about Chinese syntax in which N is followed by a stative V. This verbal interpretation of 中 is what I have adopted in fn.10.
xia (same as our example (6)), Guoyu, Luyu, and Liji, Tangong, claiming that there was no distinction between 日中 and 中日 when, in fact, no example of the latter is given. This claim is hard to accept.

It should be mentioned in passing that the expression 中時 is indeed used in the sense of “noon,” although the locus classicus does not go as far back as the pre-Han period. An example given in Morohashi Tetsuji’s 諸橋轍次 Dai Kanwa jiten 大漢和辭典 (1.300) is quoted below for reference:

(8) 若其有長短, 分在中時前後。Chenshu 陳書 (by 姚思廉 of Tang), Shen Zhu zhuan 沈洙傳

If there is the stretch of time, it is divided in pre- and post-meridian.

Although a thorough diachronic investigation of the expression 中時 is not attempted, the above example, coupled with some good examples of 日中 in (5) through (7), points to the fact that 中日 is a phantom expression, even though its literal rendition “mid day” seems to make sense. It has to be construed as 中時 literally meaning “meridian time” and, more commonly, “noon.” One might retort against this interpretation by asking why it matters at all. It matters because (1) we have “excavated” a new vocabulary item in Shang Chinese, (2) there is an appreciable difference in meaning between 日中 and 中時, and (3) the distinction can help explain more examples. The last point is important, and we will now turn our attention to it in the following section.

5. More examples of the graph 日 standing for the word 時 ‘time’

Given below are a few more examples in which the graph 日 is best taken to have expressed the word 時 ‘time’:

(9) a. 癸丑卜，貞句 [甲寅大] 食雨 [自北]。乙卯小食大啟。丙辰中日大雨自南。Heji 21021

Divining on the guichou day [50], tested: In the (following) 10-day week [there will be no mishaps]. [On the jiayin day (51) at the time of big eating (i.e., breakfast) it rained, [the rain having come from the north]. On the yimao day [52] [at the time of] small eating (i.e., supper) it all became clear. (Around) the mid-day (i.e., noon) on the bingchen day [53] it rained much, the rain having come from the south.

b. 大采日各雲自北。Ibid.
The Graph ⌼ for the Word “Time” in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions

... at the time of greater illumination (i.e., sometime in the morning)\textsuperscript{14} there arose the approaching clouds, having originated from the north.

In (9a), the expressions 大食 and 小食 should be considered as abbreviations of 大食日 and 小食日, respectively. These interpretations have already been suggested by Chen Mengjia (1956:232), but here I propose to read them as 大食時 ‘breakfast time’ and 小食時 ‘supper time’. Similarly, in (9b), the expression 大采日 should be read as 大采時 ‘time of greater illumination’. As noted by Chen Mengjia and others, this is in contrast to the expression 小采日, our 小采時 ‘time of lesser illumination’ referring to sometime after the 小食時 ‘supper time’, as in the following example:

(10) 王亥卜，貞旬 - 乙丑夕雨 - 丁卯明雨 - 戊小采日雨止，風 - 己明

Divining on the guihai day [60], tested: In the (following) 10-day week [there will be no mishaps]. [On the yichou day (2), in the evening, it rained. On the dingnao day [4], in the early morning it rained; at the time of lesser illumination on the wuchen] day [5] the rain stopped, but it became windy. On the ji[si] day [6] it cleared up in early morning.

This new interpretation of the graph ⌼ standing for the word 時 ‘time’ enables us to interpret the surface expression 大采日 as meaning 大采時 ‘time of greater illumination’ and the expression 小采日 as meaning 小采時 ‘time of lesser illumination’ which refers to sometime after the 小食時 ‘supper time’. These are considered as some additional examples of the ⌼ standing for the word 時.

Let us now examine a completely different interpretation from ours, the interpretation proposed by Li Xueqin (1999:65). Li first calls attention to the fact that Chen Mengjia (1956:231) has provided a dot under each character of the surface expressions 大采日 and 小采日, thereby indicating Chen’s view that these are to be treated as single expressions (一個詞). Li takes issue with this, asserting that ⌼ means “sun” in these expressions. He then provides example (10) above, arguing that ⌼ is an independent word and cannot be treated as a unit with 小采 (“日” 細是獨立的詞, 不能與 “小采” 連讀) because we have the expression “雨止” (rain stopped), and if the rain stopped, then the word ⌼ must have meant the “sun (came out).” This is incorrect; it is a step backward from Chen Mengjia’s intuitive understanding. The contextual meaning of example (10) seems to work nicely for Li’s interpretation, but it is only accidental. That is, the phrase 小采日 on the surface is really 小采時 and it

\textsuperscript{14} Since (9a) and (9b) are on the same piece of plastron (同版) on which both 大食 and 大采日 are used, they must refer to different periods of time in the morning.
has nothing to do with the sun being visible or invisible because it refers to the time of a day meaning “time of lesser illumination.” There are a few telling examples to show that this judgment is correct. Given below are just a couple of examples:

(11) 乙卯卜，殺貞今日王往于敦。之日 大采雨。王不往？
Heji 6710
Divining on the yimao day [52], Que tested: Today His Majesty should go to Dun. On that day,\(^{15}\) at the (time of) greater illumination, it rained. His Majesty did not go.

(12) 壬戌又雨。今日小采允大雨。
Heji 20397
On the renxu day [59], there was rain. Today, at the (time of) lesser illumination, it indeed rain much.

Thus, examples (11) and (12) show that the particular example provided by Li Xueqin (example (10)) is merely fortuitously supportive of his interpretation. Specialists will have no objection in taking the surface expressions 大采 and 小采 as abbreviations of 大采日 and 小采日. This is the same type of abbreviation as we have seen in example (9a) above; that is, 大食日 and 小食日 are equal to 大食 and 小食. It follows then that if 大食日 and 小食日 are 大食時 ‘breakfast time’ and 小食時 ‘supper time’, 大采日 and 小采日 should also be 大采時 ‘time of greater illumination’ and 小采時 ‘time of lesser illumination’, respectively. Therefore, these expressions have nothing to do with the sun being visible or invisible.

5. Conclusion

The graph 亀(日) which appears in the following expressions stands for the word shi 時 in the Shang inscriptions:

食日(=時) ‘meal time’
大食日(=時) ‘breakfast time’
小食日(=時) ‘supper time’
中日(=時) ‘time in the meridian, noon’
大采日(=時) ‘time of greater illumination’
小采日(=時) ‘time of lesser illumination’

\(^{15}\) Some specialists take 之日 as a single graph, but they are mistaken. 之日 is a common phrase meaning “that day”.

**Postscript (待考):**

We have provided here a few more examples, although tentative, in which the graph \( \text{日} \) may eventually be proved to express the word \( \text{時} \):

(13) \text{今日丁・塋 (社) 日 (時) 王其過亡 𣬍} \text{Heji 28754}

Today, on the \( \text{ding} \) day, at the time of \( \text{zhi} \)-sacrifice, His Majesty should go through (or pass by) \( [X] \): there shall be no disaster.

(14) \text{屯 (善) 日 (時) 不雨。} \text{Heji 24669}

At spring time it will not rain.

(15) \text{... 見 (冥) 日 (時) 不 ... 告。} \text{Heji 18076}

... at the (time when clouds) cover ... not ... announcement.

(16) \text{... 其 ... 吳曰 (時) ...} \text{Heji 11728r}

... at the time when the sun inclines (= in the afternoon) ...

(17) \text{... 燕 (宴) 日 (時) ...} \text{Kikkō 1.10.4}

... at the time of banquet ...

The examples cited above lack a fuller context to effectively test the theory that the graph \( \text{日} \) is used for the word \( \text{時} \). Of the above the most promising example would be (13). Here we know that the date is \( \text{ding} \) (今日丁 ‘today, the \( \text{ding} \) day’) and what follows this must be specifying a temporal division of that day. This is accomplished by the phrase “塋 (社) 日 (= 時)” designating a time period in exactly the same way as we have already seen (cf. Conclusion). There is not much scholarship available on the word \( \text{塋 (社)} \). The traditional dictionary definition for \( \text{zhi 社} \) is “blessing from gods”. Xu Zhongshu (1988:14) says that it is the name of a sacrifice (祭名), but how the sacrificial meaning would work in (13) is not very clear. The very example he provides for this meaning, given below, would support his claim if we understand it in the following way:

(18) \text{貞于乙日塋 (社) 由 (思) 王受又。} \text{Heji 27202 (= Jiabian 1343)}

Tested: (If) on the \( \text{yi} \) day, conduct \( \text{zhi} \)-sacrifice, would that His Majesty receive aid.

The interpretation of example (18) is problematic, and I have no confidence in the translation. If we take \( \text{乙日} ‘\text{yi day} as forming a temporal phrase with the particle \( \text{于} \) as we tentatively did in example (18), then \( \text{塋} \) must be a verb. But it is not entirely impossible to construe \( \text{于乙} \) as forming a temporal phrase as the use of \( \text{乙} \) alone designates a day. If so, we get \( \text{日塋} \) on the surface which, in turn, suggests that \( \text{日} \)
might be construed as 時 ‘time’. Then, the word order, 曰(時) 神(社) becomes interesting because it is the opposite of what appears in (13): 神(社) 曰(時). This could suggest a fundamental difference in linguistic structure, further giving rise to the possibility of dialect mixture or influence from a different language. While this possibility remains just that, a translation that would result from this analysis (i.e., ‘[If] on the yi day [we] timely conduct zhi-sacrifice, would that His Majesty receive aid’) becomes even more interesting. However, we need a lot more examples to investigate which possibility (if any one of the two here considered) is the right one. As for the fragmentary inscription of example (14), we cannot say much. However, the graph 屯 (屯) can be used to stand for the word chun 春 ‘spring’ as in the following inscription:

(19) 壬子卜… 貞今屯受年・九月。  Heji9652
Divining on the renzi day (49) … tested: In the present [immediately coming?] spring, (we) will harvest a (good) crop. Ninth month.

Since the epithet 今 “present” normally modifies a noun that denotes contemporaneity, this example is strange because the spring is at least a few months ahead of time as the divination was made in the ninth month. But if the graph 屯 does not stand for the word 春 (春) ‘spring’, it leaves us in the complete dark as to what it might have meant.

Concerning the expression 晩 (冥) 曰 (時) ‘at the (time when clouds) cover’ in 15, the context (Sōrui 107.2) is too meager to make any judgment. We merely record this for future reference. As for the surface appearance of 昼日, almost all the occurrences—some two dozen of them—have just the graph, which can transcribed as 昼 (modern 夜); however, here the graph 日 occurs after it. This would suggest that as a word ze 昼 cognate to 仄, meaning “to incline,” and as a noun it referred to the sun in its inclination toward disappearance on the horizon. Again, there are no other examples to build our case. Finally, on the surface, in the expression 燕日, it is standard practice to interpret the graph 燕 as standing for 宴 ‘banquet; to have a banquet’. It is possible to construe 燕日 as meaning “the day of banquet” just as 燕時 “the time of banquet.” We need a larger 燕 context, however, to tell which may have been the case.

Abbreviations

Sōran Kōkotsu moji jishaku sōran [甲骨文字字釋綜覽]. Compiled by Matsumaru

For a good possibility that in the Shang OBI there is evidence for dialect mixture, the reader is referred to Takashima and Yue (2000).


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論甲骨文之「日」字

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甲骨文之「日」字可以讀作 *ni/*ni 語意指「太陽」，或「一晝夜」。本文提出新的理論，認為此字除了這一讀法之外，在特定的語境中還可以讀作 *di/*dj，意思是「時間」或「時候」。

關鍵詞：日 (sun)，天 (day)，時 (time)