Idiomatic Acceptability and Graphic Identification in Bronze Inscriptions of the Spring and Autumn Period

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Abstract:
According to the Report on the Spring and Autumn bronze inscriptions discovered in 1983 in Henan province, the character bao 寶 ‘treasure; precious’ is found written consecutively after the adverb yong 永 ‘always’, giving ze yong bao bao 則永寶寶. The presence of this unusual juxtaposition of two bao 寶 is puzzling because such a phrasal structure has never been encountered in any other bronze inscriptions. The Report did not deal with this dubious structure, or justify the identification of the two characters as bao bao 寶寶 (hereafter referred to as X and Y), not to mention any verification of its idiomatic acceptability. After a thorough check of relevant bronze rubbings, it became clear that the Report’s graphic identification of X and Y is not valid and that neither of them has anything to do with the character bao 寶. The new reading proposed here is based on graphic identifications and semantic analyses, buttressed with evidence from some similar idiomatic expressions found in Chinese bronze inscriptions of the same period.

1. Introduction
While doing research in 1998 on variant paleographs for the character bao 寶 ‘treasure; precious’, I learnt of the existence of inscriptions on bronze vessels excavated in Henan in 1983 from the tombs of the Lord Meng of Huang (黃君孟) and his consort, Meng Ji 孟姬. Archaeologists estimate that these two tombs were built shortly before the fall of the Huang state in 648 B.C. These bronze inscriptions tersely describe dedications comprised of a recurrent phrase of good wishes: ze yong 則永, followed by two controversial characters [ ], occasionally written with slight graphic differences. To facilitate the discussion, I hereafter label these two characters as X and Y. The authors of the 1984 excavation Report identified them as bao bao 寶寶

1 The tombs were located at the Baoxiang Temple (寶相寺) in the Guangshan 光山 county in Henan 河南, about 20 km from the ancient site of the Huang state; see Henan (1984). For references of the inscriptions from these tombs, see Appendix 1.

2 This date is uncertain (see Falkenhausen, 1999: 509). I would also like to thank Prof. Lothar von Falkenhausen, as well as an anonymous reviewer, for their comments on the initial version of this paper.
rendered the entire phrase as *ze yong bao bao* without specifying the meaning of the expression. However, I notice that such a duplication of *bao* has hitherto never been documented in bronze inscriptions. The singularity of this duplication, together with some other graphic peculiarities related to these two characters, casts serious doubts on the validity of the Report’s identification.

According to traditional practice in bronze inscriptions, the duplication of a character is indicated by two short horizontal strokes, probably a deformed *er* ‘two’, at the right lower corner of the character to be duplicated. For example, *zi zi sun sun* ‘sons and grandsons’ is written as [囗囗], and this is exactly what is observed in Lord Meng’s bronze inscriptions where all occurrences of *zi zi sun sun* are abridged by means of the diacritic sign [囗]. So it is strange that this duplication rule was applied to one case (子孫) but not to the case in hand (寶) within the same inscription. Graphically speaking, the Report’s identification of both X and Y as *bao* or as its variants is also questionable. The five most characteristic variants of *bao* which I have so far encountered, [囗囗] [囗囗] [囗囗] [囗囗] [囗囗], do not contain the graphic component *shi* ‘altar’, and only the following elements are found: *mian* ‘shelter’, *bei* ‘shell’, *yu* ‘jade’, together with the three graphs representing three different kinds of wine-vessels, *fou* *fu* *you*.

These abnormalities in the Report’s analysis alerted me of a possible error in its identification of X and Y, and I felt that a thorough review of the case was imperative.

2. **Initial observation: the graph X is not the character *bao***

In view of a strong consistency in the repeated use of the expression *則永 X Y* in the bronze inscriptions in honour of the Lord of Huang and his consort, I have decided to use those better preserved forms of X and Y on the two *hu* vases belonging to the latter for my analyses to avoid any distraction of some insignificant graphic variations (for comparison see Appendix 2).

Unlike Y [囗囗], X [囗囗] is written without the component ‘shelter’ on its top. What is even more noticeable is the contrast between the components to the right of X and Y:

 Moreover the authors of the Report had no comment on the syntactic relationship between X and Y, nor on the eventual interpretation of such a duplication. As for this diacritic sign, I shall discuss it in a more detailed article in preparation.

4 See *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* (hereafter abbreviated as *Jicheng*) vol. 7, #3994 (早周, early Zhou period); 16, #10008 (春秋, Spring and Autumn period), #10055 (早周, early Zhou period) and #10218 (晩周, late Zhou period); 1, #42 (楚公 *鼎*, middle Zhou period). See also Maréchal (2001: 233).
in X, the component is the graph gu 古 ‘ancient’, i.e., with a cross on top, whereas in
Y, it is the graph fou 鼎 ‘ceramic vase’, i.e., with an arrow-like form instead.\(^5\)

With X identified as hu 祐 and clearly distinguished from Y, a duplication of bao 祥 in the expression is out of question.\(^6\) Consequently, it should be read as 則永祐 Y, with the graph Y yet to be deciphered.

Following the chronological development of my study, I now introduce the two
articles by Li Xueqin (1985) and Liu Xiang (1988) respectively.\(^7\) I mention them at this
juncture because it was only at this stage of my study on X and Y that I learnt of the
existence of their papers which have direct bearing on the topic. However, my
unawareness of their work did not handicap the first stage of my study, but rather
provided me with an occasion to develop my own line of thought.

3. Two other paleographers’ identification of X and Y in the bronze
inscriptions dealing with Meng and his consort

Li (1985) already expressed exactly the same doubts about the Report’s
identification of X and Y; he did not consider them as two identical graphs in all the
bronze inscriptions of the Meng couple. Moreover, he too, read X on Meng’s consort
hu 壺 vases as hu 祐. However, our commonality in interpretation stops there. For
me, the expressions 則永 X Y in the husband’s inscriptions and those in the consort’s
are identical, for Li, on the contrary, they are different. Li (1985: 49) identified X Y in
the husband’s inscriptions as bao yong 祥用. It has to be noted that there are only
three inscriptions belonging to Lord Meng of Huang where X and Y are legible. As far
as X is concerned, in two of these three cases, the upper part of the component on the
left under the element ‘shelter’ (Jicheng 16, #9963, #10104) is in the form of an arrow
with a little horizontal stroke , giving fou 鼎. Apparently Li used the
presence of this fou 鼎 as a phonological argument for justifying his reading of X as
bao 祥 and yet his analysis cannot be applied to the third case (Jicheng 4, #2497)

\(^5\) See Jicheng 16, #9963, #9664. It is a pity that many of these inscriptions are not quite legible.
However, under careful scrutiny, some of them do present such traces of distinction between X and Y
(see Jicheng 4, #2497; 15, #9445; 16, #10 254).

\(^6\) Before I engaged in this study, I had already expressed my doubt in a paper (Maréchal, 1998) in which
I proposed to identify X as hu 祐 rather than bao 祥. The meaning of hu 祐 will be discussed later in
this paper.

\(^7\) It was on reading Luo (1997: 27) that I learnt of the existence of these two articles. But it was not an
easy task to locate them because Luo did not provide either date or place of their publication. See also
note 9 further down.
where this component *fou* 叨 is replaced by *gu* 吠. As for Y, Li considered that there is a graphic component in the form of two *chong* 虫 ‘worm’, with one on top of the other, [ Crudely]. He then argued that this form of Y shared some strong phonological resemblance with *rong* 融, and since *rong* 融 and *yong* 用 ‘to use’, too, belonged to related rhyming categories, he eventually interpreted Y as *yong* 用 ‘to use’. Unfortunately I fail to identify in the inscriptions the graph with the two ‘worms’ superimposed, and thus I feel there is a missing link in his analysis.9

As for the X and Y in the consort’s inscriptions, Li (1985: 49) identified them respectively as *hu* 祜 and *bao* 宝, resulting in the reading of *ze yong hu bao* 則永祐宝. Being conscious of the oddity of the presence of *hu* 祜 in the resulting expression, Li felt obliged to justify his identification of that character. He first stated that *hu* 祜 should be re-read as *ju* 居 ‘to inhabit, to lodge’ and then rendered the meaning of this second reading *ju* 居 as *cang* 藏 ‘to hide’. The aim of these two successive shifts in the reading of X was to allow him to assert that the meaning of the expression is close, or even equivalent, to that of an idiomatic expression *yong bao yong* 永寶用 ‘forever treasure and use (this object in bronze)’ (“`祷’讀為‘居’，訓為藏，句意仍與‘永寶用’相同”). Unfortunately he did not elaborate this chain of interpretations on phonosemantic grounds. As far as this paper is concerned, it is clear that the initial reading of X is *hu* 祜, but other interpretative differences between us surface in the final phase of the identification of X and Y in the entire expression.

Meanwhile Liu Xiang (1988) was also working on the same subject.9 Liu

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9 Here I only summarize Li’s idea as expounded in his article. His original statement is as follows:

“兩字結構不同，前者從‘ bestellen *fou* 叨，自當讀為‘寶’；後一字則從雨‘虫’，系 吠’。按《說文》‘融’字從‘口’省聲，金文及銘書於減雨‘虫’。從雨聲觀點看，銘文此字音近於‘融’。‘融’和‘用’聲母同，讀在冬、東二部，又極相近。因此，銘文此字讀為‘用’，‘用’是眾所周知的金文習語。”

9 In spite of the fact that his article was published three years after Li’s paper, Liu might have been working on the inscriptions at the same time as Li, if not earlier, because Li (1985: 52) acknowledged Liu for providing him with general information about the excavation site. It might be the case that it was out of respect for his master that Liu deliberately avoided mentioning Li’s article so as not to make their disagreement explicit.

I would like to thank Prof. Yau Shun-chiu for his precious comments on the early draft of this paper, his help in rendering it into English and locating Li’s article. I am also very grateful to Prof. Ken-ichi Takashima for his overall remarks and suggestions which enable me to produce this final version.

As for Liu’s article, it was Prof. Dong Kun of the Chinese Linguistic Research Centre in Beijing who, in March 2001, provided me a copy together with a note, telling me the sad news of the author’s death in 1999.
considered that the expression $X \ Y$ is identical in inscriptions respectively in honour of the couple, a viewpoint which I share with him, but with which Li disagreed.\textsuperscript{10} Liu first arrived at the conclusion that $X$ and $Y$ in all the inscriptions should be identified as $hu\ bao$ 祜寶, an identification which both Liu and Li agreed on as far as the inscriptions in honour of the husband are concerned. Liu (1988: 93) was also conscious of the fact that such an expression had not been documented elsewhere, and for justification, he suggested that if read as $yong\ hu\ bao$ 永祜福, its meaning would find echo in an existent set phrase: $yong\ hu\ fu$ ("一辭互相印証，意思是接近的"). Although Liu’s identification does not sound more convincing than Li’s, his semantic interpretation of the expression seems more reasonable.\textsuperscript{11} The remaining issue now is the identification of $Y$ which Li, Liu and the authors of the Report all agreed to be $bao$ 寶.

4. Arguments for my identifications of $X$ and $Y$ as 祜 and 福

As in the case of $X$, $Y$ is written either with or without the component ‘shelter’ 築, and only the presence of the components $fou$ 寶 and $shi$ 祀 is consistent. In general, $shi$ 祀 as a semantic component suggests a ritual or supernatural colour or has a connotation of certain traditional beliefs, as still witnessed in such present-day characters as $li$ 禮 ‘rite’, $zhu$ 祝 ‘to pray’, $ji$ 祭 ‘sacrifice’, $shen$ 神 ‘spirit’ or $sui$ 崇 ‘evil spirit’. If $Y$ is a variant of $bao$ 寶 as proposed in the Report, it would imply that the component $shi$ 祀 is a new graphic addition. However from Shang through Zhou down to the Spring and Autumn period, $shi$ 祀 rarely functions as a distinctive feature.

\textsuperscript{10} Liu (1988: 93) was heedful to the slight graphic variations among the $X$ in the inscriptions in honour of the husband and arrived at the conclusion that there was a graphic error in $X$, that is, with $fou$ 寶 as phonetic indicator instead of $gu$ 古, the correct one, as written in two of the $X$ items ("永寶寶"的第一個‘寶’字寫成從示亻聲，實為古字從示古聲的筆誤"). On re-reading his article, I am convinced that he was close to obtaining a full and correct explanation.

\textsuperscript{11} However, their interpretations of these two characters have been adopted in several recent publications, for example Zeng (1997) and Liu (2001). I have also noticed that the two bronzes from the Huang couple’s tombs exhibited in Hong Kong (2002) carried the following captions:

- 黃子作黃甫（夫）人行器，則永祜寶靈冬（終）靈復 “Huang Zi made this vessel for Huangfuren to take on her journey. This will remain a precious and spiritual item for eternity” [sic]
- 黃子作黃甫（夫）人孟姬行器，則永寶寶 “Huang Zi made this vessel for Huangfuren, Meng Ji, to take on her journey, and this will remain a precious item for eternity” [sic].

The former is an interpretation close to that of Li and Liu, and the latter is an adaptation of the Report’s identification (see Catalogue of the exhibition Origins of Chinese Civilization—Cultural Relics from Henan Province, 2002: 224, 226).
in variant forms of characters that have a supernatural significance. So far I have only encountered two graphs where the component shi 是 was added in bronze inscriptions: hu 複 'to appeal to spirits' [⿰匀][⿰匀] (令方彝, early Zhou period, Jicheng 16, #9901) and ling 灵 'spirit' [⿰靈] (庚壜, Late Spring and Autumn period, Jicheng 15, #9733).  

As Y is composed of shi 是, its identification as bao 宝 is therefore very doubtful as it does not share the kind of supernatural connotation necessary to acquire this particular element.

As a counter proposal, I suggest that Y is a variant form of fu 福 ‘blessings’. The presence of the component shi 是 marks a significant step in the identification process of Y. Originally, fu 福 was a ritual term, and its lexical background sheds light on the rationale of shi 是 as its semantic basis, and provides an interesting hint in identifying Y as fu 福. From then on, the two apparently unusual components in Y, mian 宅 ‘shelter’ and fou 富 have yet to be clarified. The component ‘shelter’ does not constitute an obstacle in my identification of Y because a few variants of fu 福 with ‘shelter’ [⿰宅] have already been located in bronze inscriptions of the middle Zhou period (see 稟, Jicheng 10, #5411). The last problem to address is the component fou 富 in Y, as compared with fu 福, its usual corresponding element in fu 福. In fact, in terms of referent-object, fou 富, as a component in Y (fu 福), belongs to the same kind of recipients as those of fu 福 or you 西, as they are all pictographs representing wine-vessels for ritual ceremonies. In addition, the latter two, fu 福 and you 西, are already found as alternative elements in the composition of fu 福 in bronze inscriptions of the late Spring and Autumn period:  and  (see 曾子屬籀, Jicheng 9, #5411).

By the time of the Warring States, shi 是 then often functions as a distinctive feature in variant forms of characters that have a supernatural significance. For example, the character [⿰⿰⿰⿰] composed of shi 是 and gui 鬼 is considered in the Shuowen jiezi as the ‘ancient script form’ (guwen 古文) of gui 鬼, and Sun (1992: 382) identified two cases of this compound form in oracle-bone inscriptions. However Ye (1966: 4. 25) contended that the graphs identified by Sun might not be used in the sense of gui 鬼 but rather in the sense of zhu 祝 ‘to pray’, and Xu (1993: 30) listed it as an item with “unknown meaning” (yi bu ming 義不明). This variant form [⿰⿰⿰⿰] surfaces again in bronze inscriptions during the Warring States period (see 稅, Jicheng 8, #4190) and Zhang (2001) approved its reading as gui 鬼.

Paleographers are not unanimous in the identification of fu 福 in JGW (see Yu, 1996: t. 2, pp. 1072-1078). My reading of fu 福 here is based on a later source as found in Zhou li 周禮 and its many annotations (quoted in Yu, 1996: t. 2, p. 1072) which indicates that the ritual aspect of fu 福 is related to meat offering.
It seems likely that this referent-object fou 出 was used both for its symbolic value as an alternative to the other two components fu 福 and you 西 in the course of the graphic evolution of fu 福. The fou 出 in Y therefore can be regarded as a replacement for the other two corresponding components in the more usual forms of fu 福 [fu14]. It has to be noted that fu 福, you 西 and fou 出 as alternative components in fu 福 is not an isolated case because the same alternatives are observed among the variants of bao 寶 as quoted at the beginning of this paper.

So far my identification of X and Y are strictly based on graphic grounds, without resorting to any prior knowledge of a possible correspondence. Such a procedure avoids the risk of prejudicially forcing unjustified readings of characters into an existent expression. By now, my findings are ready to be subject to checking against tao yu 套語 ‘traditional formulae’, a verifying step considered as determinant by Chinese scholars in paleographic identifications.

In the final analysis, my identification of X and Y renders the expression as ze yong.
hu fu 則永福 ‘let blessings be everlasting and great.’

This is supported by several instances of the phrase 永福 from other bronze inscriptions around Meng’s time listed in the Qingtongqi mingwen jiansuo (Zhou, et al., 1995: 1.24; see also Appendix 3). Apparently the expression is peculiar to that period in regions near the border between Henan and Hubei, and its limited appearance with only seven examples documented in bronze inscriptions is much less frequent than that of yong bao yong 永寶用, for example. Interestingly, five out of these seven examples are found on bronzes from the Zeng state 曾國, a nearby polity of Huang. In view of their good neighbourliness, it is revealing for the present study to compare the bronze inscriptions from Zeng and Huang. Bronze inscriptions from that region indicate that the two states were on good terms, and their ties were strengthened by intermarriage, and some bronzes were offered reciprocally as dowries (see Li, 1984: 142). Confirmation of the usage of this expression in Zeng’s bronze inscriptions lends extra weight to my identification.

As early as 1947, Yang Shuda discussed the phrase ze yong hu fu 則永福 in a

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17 Ze yong hu fu 則永福 can be considered as a set phrase expressing a wish, comparable to ‘God bless you’ in English. For a detailed analysis of this set phrase, see further down in this paper.

18 A similar kind of peculiarity around this has been noted by Mattos (1997: 120) in the states of Chu and Qin. His explanation is that “It was the house of Zhou, after all, that set a precedent for formulaic writing of this sort; and it seems likely that as the feudal states drifted away from the influence of their Zhou teachers, they nonetheless followed suit by creating their own schools of composition which also prized formulaic writing, especially in the case of inscribed texts.”

19 The references of the seven inscriptions of the Spring and Autumn period mentioned here are: 曾予伯鉞鼎, Jicheng 4, #2450; 伯翟鼎 Jicheng 9, #4526, 曾子履鼎 Jicheng 9, #4528.1 and 2, #4529.1 and 2, 師仲父蔭簋 Jicheng 9, #4544. In three of these seven inscriptions, the phrase yong hu fu 永福 is not preceded by ze 則 (for the gloss of this character, see the last paragraph of this section).

20 The Huang state is located to the west of the Huan district in today’s Henan province, whereas the Zeng state is somewhere between Henan and Hubei, see Li (1984: 135).

21 Zhang Yachu in his Index of Jicheng published in July 2001 also read 則永XY as 則永福 in most of the cases quoted. Naturally he could not provide us with explanations for his readings in a reference book of this kind. I should thank Prof. Zhao Cheng for informing me recently about this monumental publication.
notice regarding a Zeng bronze inscription. He argued on phonological grounds that \textit{ze} should be read as \textit{zai}. For him it is clear that \textit{ze} is not a functional item, otherwise he could have rendered it as \textit{jiu} ‘then’—a gloss normally provided for \textit{ze} in dictionaries (see Cui, 1994: 35). As for \textit{hu}, his interpretation is ambiguous. He first claimed that the character could be read as \textit{fu} and more precisely in the sense of \textit{da fu} ‘great blessings’ according to Jia Yi 賈誼 (201-169 B.C.), author of the \textit{Xinshu 新書}. However, he immediately added that according to some other sources, \textit{hu} could be semantically and phonetically identified with a later graphic form \textit{hu} as in \textit{yong shou hu fu} 永受胡福 ‘forever receive great blessings.’ But functionally speaking, this \textit{hu} written either in the form 祜 or 胡, is an adjective, meaning ‘great’, and is therefore not synonymous with the nominal \textit{fu} ‘blessings’. This is based on the fact that \textit{fu} in bronze inscriptions is often preceded by adjectives of similar meaning, for example \textit{da fu} 大福, \textit{neng fu} 能福, \textit{duo fu} 多福, \textit{hou fu} 厚福, \textit{wan fu} 萬福, \textit{pin fu} 頻福 or \textit{feng fu} 豐福, all expressing a common idea of ‘many blessings’ or ‘great blessings’. Consequently, I translate the inscription as: ‘let blessings be everlasting and great.’

\textbf{Epilogue}

I would like to add a final remark on the component \textit{fou} in \textit{Y}, a question already raised in this paper. Out of the fourteen legible \textit{ze yong X Y} from the bronze inscriptions in honour of the Meng couple, twelve of their \textit{X} and \textit{Y} are either both written with their most visible or salient component ‘shelter’ on top (in ten inscriptions) or both without (in two of them). With such a high percentage (about 86\%) of the cases being this way, it is difficult to explain away the partial similarities between their graphic forms as a mere coincidence, and I suspect that they were deliberately used for calligraphic or aesthetic reasons. In the same way, the choice of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Here is Yang’s original text:}
  \begin{quote}
  ‘余按古音則與載同，則永祐福即載永祐福。祐載訓為福，祜佑同義周文，義自可通。然見子逝書禮篇云：’祜，大福也’然則永祐福蓋謂大福也。儀禮士冠禮冠祝禱云：’眉壽萬年，永受胡福’胡福亦謂大福也。周書説法解及廣雅诠释一並云：’胡，大也。’祐佑同胡從古聲，並有大義，銘文之’則永祐福’，即儀禮之’永受胡福’也。鄭注士冠禮云：’胡猶誰也，遠也，遠無窮。’遠與大義亦相近，惟經既云永受，不必復言無窮之福，胡仍以訓大為較切矣。’ (Yang, 1997: 130).’
  \end{quote}
  \item \textit{Though \textit{X} and \textit{Y} are now identified as \textit{hu fu} 祜福, for the convenience of the discussion, I continue to refer to them as \textit{X} and \textit{Y}.}
  \item \textit{In the two remaining cases, contrary to \textit{Y}, \textit{X} is written without the roof-top.}
\end{itemize}
fou 福 in Y was also related to the presence of gu 古 in the immediately preceding graph hu 禰 and the two components might have provided the scribes with an opportunity for an exercise in aesthetics or calligraphic innovation. It is well-known that while the Zhou dynasty was waning, various states felt free to develop their own cultural creativities with strong local features, including their styles of writing. It is therefore not surprising to find scribes would occasionally take the liberty to modify the composition of certain characters to satisfy their artistic desire. The fact that the First Emperor of Qin started standardizing the writing system soon after unification clearly demonstrated the impact of important diversification in graphic forms. It is in this perspective that I venture to propose that the two consecutive characters X and Y, i.e., hu fu 禰福 in the inscriptions, constitute one of the earliest examples of graphic modifications involving two successive characters with an aesthetic intention and appeal. Moreover, the scribes’ creativeness might be further encouraged by a recent tendency of having the inscriptions more directly exposed to the viewers, that is, instead of deep in the bottom or on the curved surface inside a vessel, they are made on the external surface of the bronzes, a feature that became more and more prominent during the Spring and Autumn period. To drive home this point, I would like to draw the readers’ attention to two other variants of fu 福 on two bronzes with unknown

25 The idea here is supported by remarks scattered in related literature, for example in Gu, et al. (2001: 408), we read:

“During the Spring and Autumn period, the art of Chinese calligraphy began to develop. At that time, writing was no long purely a means of communication, but already consciously regarded as an art, with its decorative function on relief.” (“春秋時代是中國書法藝術開始發展的時期，這一時期文字已不限於書寫的功能，有意識地把文字作為藝術品，突出其裝飾性”)

26 Mattos (1997: 121) writes:

“...during the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods we find inscriptions increasingly being placed on the exterior surfaces of bronze vessels. During the Western Zhou period, inscriptions normally had been placed rather inconspicuously on the interior surfaces of vessels, suggesting that they were not intended for others’ casual perusal. It would appear, however, that as time passed inscriptions were meant more for human than spiritual consumption.”

My hypothesis therefore offers a specific case in support of his general observation.
provenance, having been excavated before the advent of modern archaeology.²⁷

The first variant of this *fu* 福 is inscribed at the bottom left of a *gui*, dated back to the end of Western Zhou (see Appendix 4) (*Jicheng* 7, #3925; see also Chen, 1989: 87). Under the component ‘shelter’, the two elements *shi* 示 and *bei* 貝 are written on the left, and *yu* 玉 on the right, plus a hardly legible element underneath. However, the resemblance between this variant of *fu* and the character *bao* 寶 at the bottom right in the same inscription is striking. The presence of the two unexpected components ‘shell’ and ‘jade’ in this *fu* 福 variant curiously reminds us of the graphic composition of *bao* 寶 to its right.

The same kind of graphic resemblance is observed in an inscription where another variant form of *fu* 福 is inscribed side by side with *zun* 尊 on a *ding* 鼎 dated to the middle of Western Zhou (*Jicheng* 4, #2280; Chou, 1974: 1.76) (see Appendix 5). This variant is composed of the element ‘shelter’ on top with *yu* 玉, *you* 西 and *shi* 示 below. Its component *you* 西 seems to echo the character *zun* 尊 containing the same *you* 西, inscribed just by its side. I have the feeling that the choice of a common component might not be a coincidence, but perhaps a graphic play, or at least out of some sort of calligraphic consideration.²⁸

In the light of these two preceding variants of *fu* 福, it is not impossible that a similar phenomenon is being reproduced in the variant form of *Y* in the inscription from the tombs of the Lord Meng of Huang and his consort. The choice of

²⁷ I would like to thank Prof. Li Xueqin for his prompt reply soon after reading the preliminary version of this paper presented at the Vancouver Conference. In his letter, he draws my attention to the absence in *Jinwen zhu lu jianmu* (Sun, 1981) of the first inscription which I quoted from *Jicheng* 7, #3925. His remark seems to imply that it is insufficient to remind the reader that the inscription is of “unknown provenance.” In this inscription, he finds the forms of the characters *yong* 用, *ming* 眾 and *shou* 受, strange. Though I agree with him that the forms of these three characters are peculiar, I am rather reluctant to affirm that these forms are not traceable in other inscriptions. For example, I can at least confirm that this same form of *yong* 用 is attested in others bronze inscriptions (see Rong, 1994). In sum, Prof. Li’s remark boils down to a highly learned dispute between the compilers of the two authoritative works of reference. I therefore decide to leave the question of this inscription’s authenticity to other scholars and maintain for the time being the inclusion of this inscription in my paper. Moreover, I do not think that my arguments will be weakened even if this inscription eventually turns out to be fake.

²⁸ Both Prof. Yau Shun-chiu and Prof. Lothar von Falkenhausen advise me to conduct a follow-up study on this graphic aesthetic dimension of Chinese writing. Yau has the impression that this kind of calligraphic innovation, if confirmed, resembles the use of internal rhymes in poetry. Some similar cases in other bronze inscriptions reinforce my conviction that these graphic peculiarities should not be dismissed without further investigation.
fou 邤 in the following two variant forms of fu 福 in the inscriptions. It is for this reason that I think there is a certain relationship between the choice of a less familiar, if not completely new component, to replace the usual one and the intention to create graphic similarities. However, such calligraphic or aesthetic considerations are effected at the expense of graphic consistency. The resulting variants might create difficulties or even confusion in their identification as experienced by the authors of the Report.

References:


Yang Shuda 楊樹達 (1997 [1959]). Jiweiju jinwen shuo 積微居金文說 [Jiweiju’s


Appendix 1:

The following reference numbers for the bronze inscriptions in honour of Huang Jun Meng 黃君孟 are from the *Jicheng* 集成. According to the Report, there are 11 inscriptions belonging to him, but only 8 of them are found in the *Jicheng*:

*Jicheng* 4, #2497 (黃君孟鼎)
*Jicheng* 9, #4686 (黄君孟豆; editors’ remark: two identical inscriptions on two *dou* were found in the same tomb. Only one of them is registered here “備注：同墓出同鉦豆兩件，現僅銘其一”)
*Jicheng* 15, #9636 (黃君孟壺)
*Jicheng* 16, #9963 (黃君孟簠); #10104 (黃君孟盤); #10230 (黃君孟匜)
*Jicheng* 17, #11199 (黃君孟戈)

The following reference numbers for the bronze inscriptions in honour of the consort of Huang Jun Meng (Meng Ji 孟姬) are from the *Jicheng*. According to the Report, there are 14 inscriptions belonging to her. However the *Jicheng* notes that there are two more whose inscriptions have not yet been catalogued (著錄：未見).

*Jicheng* 3, #624 (黃子簠); #687 (黃子簠)
*Jicheng* 5, #2566 (黃子鼎); #2567 (黃子鼎)
*Jicheng* 9, #4687 (黃子豆; editors’ remark: two identical inscriptions on two *dou* were found in the same tomb. Only one of them is registered here “備注：同墓出同鉦豆兩件，現僅銘其一”)
*Jicheng* 15, #9445 (黃子盉); #9663 (黃子盉); #9664 (黃子盉) [未見]
*Jicheng* 16, #9966 (黃子簠); #9987 (黃子簠); #10122 (黃子簋); #10254 (黃子匜) [未見]; #10355 (黃子器座)
Appendix 2:

Jicheng 15, #9663 (黃子壺)

Jicheng 15, #9664 (黃子壺)

Jicheng 16, #10230 (黃君孟匜)

Jicheng 16, #10254 (黃子匜)
Jicheng 15, #9445 (黄子盉)

Jicheng 16, #10122 (黄子盤)

Jicheng 16, #10104 (黄君盂盤)

Jicheng 4, #2497 (黄君孟鼎)

Jicheng 16, #9963 (黄君盂盤)
Appendix 3:

Appendix 4:

Appendix 5:

*Jicheng 9, #4528 (曾子尾簋)*

*Jicheng 7, #3925 (命父譔簋)*

*Jicheng 4, #2280 (父鼎)*