

The Meaning of “YOU Worship ” in the Oracle-Bone Inscription

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Abstract

“You worship (侑祭)” is a ritual practiced during the Shang Dynasty. The debate over whether the meaning of You worship is equivalent to that reported in historical documents remains ongoing. The definition of “you (侑)” provided in pre-Qin classics is the act of urging somebody to eat; here, somebody refers to “Shi (尸),” disguised ancestors. Offering sacrificial feasts to ancestors is an extensive worship procedure. An official leads the disguised ancestors (Shi) to certain locations and urges them to eat and drink. Then, the master of the house serves the Shi a glass of wine to drink, and the Shi invites the master to drink as a form of feedback. After the feast, people collect the sacrificial items and give them to the Shi. However, these worship procedures are not consistent with those recorded in the Oracle Script. In the Oracle Script, “Shi” refers to a tribe that used sacrifice to worship their ancestors, and “You” does not mean feedback. Regarding the opinions of Wang Guowei, the meaning of “You (侑),” “You (右),” and “You (宥)” can refer to “urging to eat,” “accompanying,” and “feedback” depend on different contexts. Thus, the “You” worship of the Oracle-Bone Inscription means urging ancestors to eat.

Keywords

“You worship ” “Shi (disguised ancestors)” urging somebody to eat
Offering sacrificial feasts to ancestors sacrifice